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Matthew Wale’s excellent book, *Making Entomologists: How Periodicals Shaped Scientific Communities in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, raises significant questions about the kinds of research we value, promote, and reward. The study of insects was frequently derided in the nineteenth century as “synonymous with everything futile and childish,” as two contemporaries put it, “the object of the undisguised pity and ridicule of the mass of mankind” (p. 35). And yet, as Wale brilliantly shows, entomology enabled a wide range of practitioners to engage in scientific work in this period and was driven by complex debates about the very nature of scientific participation. Not only that, but the detailed records of insect species left by nineteenth-century entomologists are now priceless documents for scientists seeking to understand and reverse a catastrophic decline in insect populations and its effects on global ecosystems. As a result, Wale is able, by his conclusion, to argue that “in addressing the pressing threats facing the natural world and humanity itself, a more radical reimagining of scientific communities—and the global community—is required” (p. 195). Questions about what should be studied go hand in hand with questions about who is doing the studying. These questions are far from settled.

Though *Making Entomologists* is focused on a seemingly narrow set of debates between a particular set of entomologists in the nineteenth century, it is rich with potential avenues for further research and resonates with questions that continue to haunt our twenty-first-century disciplines (as powerfully shaped as those disciplines have been by nineteenth-century predilections). The book is abuzz with urgent intellectual debates with implications in a wide variety of fields: on climate change, democratic participation in science, issues of gender and class, and the relationship between literary and natural-historical forms. It is therefore to be hoped that, despite the deep challenges Wale's entomologists faced in the nineteenth century—and that we continue to face in constructing healthy and vibrant academic communities now—the kind of scholarship both represented in and by this book (detailed, painstak-
The central insight of *Making Entomologists* draws on Benedict Anderson’s “imagined communities” to argue that periodical literature was a key medium from the 1820s to the 1880s for forging, contesting, and rebuilding communities of scientific practitioners. In particular, it argues for “the role of the periodical in widening participation in the making of scientific knowledge” (p. 90). The book is a catalog of machine makers, wool staplers, grocers, razor grinders, tobacconists, and mechanics, and it offers a nuanced record of the specific forms their multiple interactions with illustrious naturalists, reverends, professors, and gentlemen could take. (Wale also pays careful and welcome attention to women wherever he finds them, including Sarah Hutchinson and Eleanor Anne Ormerod, but he notes that much deeper research is still required in this area.)

The first chapter, “Observing,” documents the career of Edward Newman, originally a wool stapler and rope manufacturer who went on to found and edit *The Entomological Magazine* and the *Zoologist* as well as to regularly contribute to the *Magazine of Natural History*. Newman often wrote in disguise as a character named Rusticus, in what he called “a little humble English, and plain statements of facts”—or “containing no crack-jaw” (difficult words), critiquing those who leaned toward Latin phraseology and a more exclusive community of entomologists (pp. 37, 36). A particular pleasure here is Wale’s account of Newman’s “Colloquia Entomologica” in *The Entomological Magazine*, targeting the rival *Transactions of the Entomological Society* (which refused to publish his work). “Unfortunately for Newman, he had sorely misjudged his audience,” Wale writes. “The Colloquia’s humor relied heavily on the reader’s ability to decode entomological in-jokes and identity references to Newman’s peers” (p. 44). As a result, the *Transactions* derided its “miserable ... attempt at wit” and “ridiculous ... parade of learning” (p. 45). There is still much work to be done on humor in scientific writing, but Wale’s attention to jokes that nobody found funny is a rich resource for thinking about the construction of scientific communities and the making and breaking of scientific bridges.

In the second and third chapters, “Correspondence” and “Collecting,” Wale exhumes some fourteen thousand letters of the important entomologist Henry Tibbotts Stainton, who inherited fraudulently acquired wealth from his father and devoted his life to naturalist and philanthropic pursuits, editing a journal called *The Intelligencer*. Here, more comic misfires and tragic miscommunications abound: at one point, Stainton even produced a serialized fiction, “Young Barnes,” outlining the story of a selfish and unscrupulous collector who abused his networks and was ultimately excluded by the entomological community. The name of Barnes, Wale reveals, became a shorthand by which correspondents to *The Intelligencer* could refer to people who had conducted bad specimen exchanges or otherwise morally shady practices. Debates about gentlemanly character spilled through the pages of the magazine (one case actually went to court), with regular accusations made against those deemed to have sent poor specimens to their correspondents or to have failed to uphold their parts of any given bargain.

Periodicals became an important place in which to debate both the social and intellectual divisions at the heart of entomological practice, especially as a distinction between “mere” collectors and scientific entomologists interested in the classification of species began to divide the community in the 1860s. By 1861, Stainton had had enough: he discontinued *The Intelligencer* on the grounds that “a periodical viewed scientifically, is at any rate an evil: it is an evil because it is a periodical” (p. 137). In a desperate attempt to fill pages, editors could indulge in personal acrimony or print endless notices of specimens and “discov-
eries” that were not always worth the paper they were printed on.

Throughout, Wale maintains an excellent balance between telling these scurrilous and exciting stories of entomological in-fighting (of which there are several) and analyzing the community-building functions of periodicals. Since natural-historical observations are often seasonal, rhythmic, and repetitive, he notes, they are specifically suited to rapid, serial publication in which notices of discovery could quickly be broadcast. Similarly, the need to collate vast bodies of specialist, local knowledge could be usefully accomplished by readers sending in multiple small observations to contribute to an ongoing taxonomy of insect life. The first issue of *The Intelligencer* included an article titled “Why Do the Entomologists Want a Weekly Newspaper?” that suggested that the reason was to short-circuit the time-consuming nature of keeping up a wide network of correspondence by which to communicate a near-constant stream of discoveries: publication in a journal could quickly get the news out there at once. And as “a form inherently unfinalized,” periodical publication could also enable “last-minute corrections in light of ongoing discoveries ... keeping the reader in suspense as the scientific narrative unfolded” (pp. 77, 78). Later, Wale demonstrates that printed correspondence also permitted “practitioners to conceive of their activities in relation to others”—to build a mental picture of their intellectual communities—in ways that private correspondence did not (p. 93). Insightful parallels are drawn between how entomologists classified insects and how entomologists classified themselves. This meta-level analysis is what makes this study such a rich and timely study of the relationship between knowledge making and community building.

It is perhaps true that Wale could have pursued some of his bigger intellectual questions with greater urgency: questions about climate change, knowledge production, and problems of class and power (not to mention scale—insects are derided, in part, because they seem so small and insignificant and yet turn out to be so foundational). He might usefully have devoted a little more space to the far-reaching implications of his study than he does here. If we need “a radical reimagining of scientific communities,” for instance, there is no discussion here of what that might entail or what insights into that process this study of entomological community building might yield. But Wale has told original, nuanced, and exciting stories about little-understood scientific publications and made a serious contribution to an important body of work on nineteenth-century scientific periodicals and artisan scientific communities. As this painstaking study of the equally painstaking work of nineteenth-century entomologists beautifully demonstrates, it is so often from careful research, detailed attention, and fine-grained analysis that the biggest insights come to emerge. Wale’s contribution deserves much quicker recognition than many of his protagonists enjoyed.
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