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The New "Improved" Anatomy. [Review of  
*Anatomy of Wonder 4*, ed. Neil Barron, R.R. Bowker,  
1995]

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## BOOKS IN REVIEW

### A New, "Improved" Anatomy.

**Neil Barron, ed.** *Anatomy of Wonder 4: A Critical Guide to Science Fiction*. R.R. Bowker (800-521-8110), 1995. xxiv+912. Author/subjet index, title index, theme index. \$52.00.

This newest edition of Neil Barron's venerable *Anatomy of Wonder* is very different from the previous ones. And these differences go far beyond its new multi-colored, retro-art cover and its slightly larger typeface. Although this *Anatomy* continues to merit its reputation--with Clute and Nicholls' *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*--as being one of the "bibles" of modern sf scholarship, readers should nevertheless be fully aware of what this 4th edition contains and what it does not. In his Preface, Neil Barron writes:

*Anatomy of Wonder* is intended to assist readers, from the devoted fan to the casually curious, as well as to help librarians answer questions and build collections of the best, better, or historically important science fiction works in English. Teachers, from el-hi to college, can also benefit from the guide...which is even more strongly oriented to classroom use in this edition. (xi)

The key words here, which signal a substantial departure from the contents of the 3rd edition, are "librarians," "in English" and "even more strongly oriented to classroom use." Apparently, in order to make this *Anatomy* more marketable (and to clearly distinguish it from previous editions, especially among teachers and acquisition librarians in the US and the UK), a number of specific changes were made to its basic format.

The most obvious--and for some scholars, the most distressing--is the disappearance of the chapters devoted to foreign-language sf. Explaining the rationale for this editorial decision, Barron states:

Those familiar with the previous edition of *Anatomy of Wonder* will note the elimination of coverage of SF not translated into English, which occupied 206 pages in the third edition. There were several reasons for the exclusion of untranslated SF. The audience for this guide is almost entirely English-speaking, mostly readers in North America and the United Kingdom. Non-English SF is rarely found in libraries in these areas, even in the specialized collections... A final reason is essentially economic: to have included updated coverage of untranslated SF would have meant a book well over 1,000 pages in length and at a price few libraries or individuals could afford. (xiii)

In other words, hoping to enhance its sales potential, *Anatomy 4* has chosen to abandon its international focus in favor of the more profitable domestic English-language sf market. This is regrettable. In 1987, when justifying the inclusion of a lengthy discussion on foreign-language sf in the 3rd edition, Barron pointed out that "There is still a tendency to regard SF as a primarily Anglo-American phenomenon, an insular view that undermines balanced critical estimates" (Preface, viii). Today, this critical bias has not improved; indeed, it might even have worsened. So the elimination of this very important reference material from the 4th edition of *Anatomy* can only be understood as the deliberate sacrifice of scholarship for consumerism.

On the other hand, for librarians and for those of us who teach sf on a regular basis, it is encouraging to see the addition of so many excellent and highly useful chapters designed to facilitate purchasing decisions and to enrich sf instruction in the classroom. Included, for example, are a fine introductory essay by James Gunn on the history of sf teaching and scholarship from the 1950s until now, a new chapter on cyberpunk, a tabulation of sf writers keyed to ten "authoritative sources of more information about the authors and their books" (xii), chapters on sf poetry and sf comics, and--in my opinion, a most welcome addition--a 25-page *Theme Index*, arranged alphabetically and ranging from "Absurdist SF" to "Women in SF," listing a wide variety of sf works which touch upon each theme.

But it is the extensive 50+ page section simply titled *Listings* (in contrast to the more modest 23-page "Core Collection Checklist" in the 3rd edition) that highlights this 4th edition of *Anatomy*. It may also be both the most informative and the most controversial of this edition's many innovations. Therein one finds the following lists:

"Best Books" - These are classified into three general areas: sf fiction from each historical period (including novels, anthologies, sf poetry, and young adult sf); sf criticism (general reference works, books on sf history, on specific sf authors, on sf in film, TV, and radio, on sf illustration, and on sf magazines); and sf teaching materials (instructional guides, writing guides, and sf textbooks). Of course, as in most listings of this sort, such designations of "best" books--whether fictional or non-fictional--are very open to argument.

"Awards" - A chronological listing of sf works from 1952-1993 which won various awards (Hugo, Nebula, Campbell, Arthur C. Clarke, etc.) and a chronological listing of sf scholars from 1970-1994 who received various academic awards like the Pilgrim, Eaton, or IAFA.

"Series" - Novels belonging to a fictional series, listed by author.

"Translations" - This brief list identifies those available English translations of foreign-language sf (Verne, Lem, Strugatsky, et al.), arranged by national language, along with a short essay about the difficulties of translation itself. Woefully incomplete, this list reinforces the impression that *Anatomy 4* has abandoned all attempts to provide critical coverage of sf written in any language other than English. The editor even appears to openly admit this, suggesting that "Readers desiring to read SF in non-English languages should consult the third edition of *Anatomy of Wonder...the Encyclopedia of Science Fiction...the Survey of Science Fiction Literature...and the surveys that appear several times yearly in Locus*" (807). In other words, if this is what you readers are looking for, you had better go elsewhere.

"Organizations" - Those social organizations having sf as their main interest, arranged alphabetically, ranging from the Association of Science Fiction & Fantasy Artists to World SF, and including the name and address of the person to contact for each.

"Conventions" - The innumerable fan "cons," described in general fashion but (mercifully) not listed individually.

Yet another change appearing in *Anatomy of Wonder 4* involves the contributors themselves. The late Tom Clareson's article on "The Emergence of Science Fiction: The Beginnings Through 1915" remains, as does Brian Stableford's (slightly modified) essay on "Science Fiction Between the Wars: 1916-1939." But Joe De Bolt and John R. Pfeiffer's "The Early Modern Period: 1938-1963" and Brian Stableford's "The Modern Period: 1964-1986" have been respectively replaced by Paul Carter's "From the Golden Age to the Atomic Age: 1940-1963" and Michael M. Levy and Brian Stableford's "The New Wave, Cyberpunk, and Beyond: 1963-1994," and there is also a new essay by Steve Eng called "The Speculative Muse: An Introduction to Science Fiction Poetry." In other changes, Gary K. Wolfe has succeeded Neil Barron as the writer of the "History and Criticism" section, Michael Klossner has replaced Barron as author of an updated article on "Science Fiction in Film, Television, and Radio" (where sf in radio did not figure in the earlier editions), Walter Albert and Peter M. Coogan have joined Barron to discuss "Science Fiction Illustration" (with an additional essay on sf comics), Joe Sanders has replaced Hal Hall for "Science Fiction Magazines," Dennis M. Kratz rather than Muriel Becker now discusses "Teaching Science Fiction" (previously called "Teaching Materials"), and Randall W. Scott now covers "Research Library Collections of Science Fiction" instead of Hal Hall and Neil Barron. As Barron explains in the Preface to *Anatomy 4*:

New eyes mean new perceptions, and although many of the standard or outstanding works are critically reevaluated, hundreds of books are new to this edition, many of them published prior to the third edition. And whenever the earlier annotations could be improved or updated, this was done to make the guide as current, balanced, and useful as possible... (xi)

As a result of these many changes in contributors, there is much "new blood" in the pages of this edition of *Anatomy of Wonder*. And this is as it should be, especially since the stalwart Neil Barron has announced that he is retiring and will no longer serve as editor for future volumes of this highly-regarded (and highly labor-intensive) sf reference book.

Despite its disappointing and less-than-cursory treatment of international sf, this new "improved" *Anatomy of Wonder 4* must nevertheless be judged as one of the best critical texts available today for getting an accurate and up-to-date overview of the English-language sf field. For this reason, it is highly recommended for all librarians, researchers, teachers, and readers of the genre.

--**ABE**

[A response by Neil Barron appears in SFS 67 (November 1995).]