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James Bond with a feather duster

Kathleen Taylor

Angier proposes that what scientists do is worth a look even for people traumatized by school science lessons. These wary phobics, rather than scientists, are her target audience. But I would also recommend *The Canon* to professionals, and to the already interested public (a sizeable constituency, as not all school science teaching is bad), because this is a remarkable and delightful book.

Angier, an accomplished, Pulitzer Prize-winning science journalist, has clearly thought carefully about the 'why bother?' challenge to science communication. She notes but does not depend on the common arguments that the importance of science makes avoiding it unjustifiable; that future national prowess requires more scientists; or that a scientifically informed public may at last learn reason and decide to put astrologers and lotteries out of business. Instead, she eschews "civic need" for "neural greed", aiming to demonstrate that "the kinetic beauty of science" makes it fun, awe-inspiring and as much a source of delight as any of humanity's artistic achievements.

This claim, of course, is not new: witness Einstein, Richard Feynman, Richard Dawkins and many others. Angier's distinction lies in her exhilarating use of language. Unlike Bill Bryson's *A Short History of Nearly Everything* (Doubleday, 2003), *The Canon* does not rely on personalities to brighten up the prose, even when exploring traditionally difficult areas of physics and chemistry. Instead, anecdotes are well chosen, humanizing without patronizing the scientists involved. Angier has no need to name-drop; her writing style holds the reader's attention. (I can vouch for this, having almost missed my stop while reading her

book on the train.) For once the blurb — "playful, passionate" — is spot on: this is an astonishingly literary science book, much better written than most

Angier's gift for accessible explanation is outstanding. If any book can help the public learn to love science, this is it.