**NEW BOOKS, BRIEFLY NOTED**

16 February, 2009

The Anatomist: A True Story of Gray’s Anatomy, by Bill Hayes. New York: Ballantine Books, 2008.

It would be reasonable to expect that a book entitled The Anatomist: A True Story of Gray’s Anatomy, embellished with a photograph of Henry Gray on the cover, would be a biography of the author of this famous anatomy book and the story of its writing and publication. That was, at least, what I thought when I launched into the 226 pages of text of Bill Hayes’ book. Silly me.

The simple fact, for the medical historian, is that very little is known about Henry Gray. He was believed to have been born in 1827 in England, registered as a medical student in 1845 at London’s St. George’s Hospital, received the equivalent of an MD degree in 1848, and was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1852. He rose quickly through the ranks at St. George’s and was named post mortem examiner in 1848, Curator of the Anatomical Museum in 1852, and lecturer of anatomy in 1854. He published the first edition of his famous textbook Anatomy, Descriptive and Surgical, in 1858. Gray died in 1861, at the age of 34, of small pox which was contracted while treating his young nephew. Many of the illustrations for the 1st edition of the book were prepared by the physician/artist Henry Van Dyke Carter (1831-1897) who was briefly acknowledged in the first edition of the book. Carter spent most of his medical career as a physician and medical school instructor in British India.

While there is almost no primary source material available on Henry Gray, and little regarding the preparation of the book, Henry Van Dyke Carter’s diaries and correspondence are available in archives in England. Mr. Hayes has gone through this material and tells us what he knows of Carter’s life and work – but almost nothing in Carter’s diaries is actually devoted to the famous anatomy book.

What, therefore, exists to fill up the over 200 pages of Mr. Hayes’ book? It is largely autobiographical material in which Mr. Hayes describes his experience as a visiting anatomy student sitting in on the anatomy classes for the pharmacy, physical therapy, and medical students at the University of California at San Francisco. We are also regaled with stories of Mr. Hayes’ search for reference material, his own homosexuality, and the death of his long time partner.

Serious students of medical history will cringe at this book and be sorely disappointed by its content. Those, however, looking for several evenings of pleasant reading about instruction in gross anatomy, the dynamics of students working at the dissection table, some of the nuances of medical illustration, as well as those interested in a lengthy biographical essay on Henry Carter and his contributions to infectious disease control in India, will find this volume of interest.

Big Man On Campus: A University President Speaks Out On Higher Education by Steven Joel Trachtenberg; New York: A Touchstone Book published by Simon and Shuster, 2008.

Steven Trachtenberg grew up in Brooklyn, New York and received his B.A. degree from Columbia University, a JD from Yale, and an M.B.A. from Harvard. After he finished his law degree he worked as an assistant to Congressman John Grademas and then received his masters degree in public administration from Harvard. Upon a recommendation from Grademas, he was named as an assistant to Harold Howe II, US Commissioner of Education in the presidential administration of Lyndon Johnson. Trachtenberg moved, from this job, to become associate dean of the college of arts and sciences of Boston University and then president of the University of Hartford and George Washington University.

There is an extensive genre of “I used to be a college president and now I’m going to tell you what I learned about higher education“books. On my shelf I have the memoirs of the former president of Emory, William Chace (One Hundred Semesters), that of the former president of the University of Texas (A Primer for University Presidents), the current president of Yale, Richard Levin (The Work of the University), and the former president of Duke, Nanerl Keohane (Higher Ground). Trachtenberg’s book, like those of others, often relies heavily on his prior speeches and correspondence. Witty letters and after dinner speeches abound – generally portraying the author in the favorable light as he labors heroically to promote the best interest of the University of Hartford and George Washington University. There are also discourses regarding Mr. Trachtenberg’s views on academic tenure and promotion, mandatory retirement ages, college athletics, campus construction, curriculum, and student affairs.

Unlike many college presidents, Mr. Trachtenberg did not come up through the academic ranks. He does not hold a Ph.D., does not appear to have generated any significant body of traditional academic scholarship in the peer-reviewed literature in a scholarly discipline, nor does he cite any lengthy period of time as a classroom instructor, academic lecturer, journal editor, member of the faculty senate, grader of papers, or author of scholarly monographs – and it shows in his opinions of higher education.

There are times, when I read his book, that I thought Trachtenberg bordered on a love/hate relationship with the faculty. He seems somewhat between bemused and distressed about the amount of time professors spend in the classroom. He lavishes praise on the clinical care provided by the faculty and hospital of the George Washington University School of Medicine but I do not detect a similar high regard for basic biomedical or clinical research.

The author offers sound advice, based on years of experience, on building consensus, dealing with criticism, raising money, and dealing with the neighbors of an urban university.

In comparison with other “former university president memoirs” Mr. Trachtenberg’s book is more personal (we learn far more about his relationship with his parents and his children than in the other books I have read). The book is less deeply insightful than others (William Chace’s book, for example) and the excerpted speeches are not as deep and broad ranging as those of several other university presidents (Duke’s H. Keith Brodie, Keeping An Open Door, and Yale’s A. Bartlett Giamatti’s A Free and Ordered Space, for example). Nonetheless, Mr. Trachtenberg’s writing is brisk and often funny and the book will be of interest to those with a strong interest in the current state and future position of research – based universities.

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