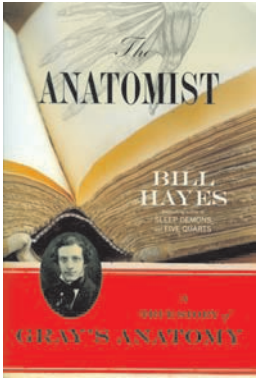
The other Gray's anatomist

The anatomist. A true story of Gray's anatomy. Bill Hayes. Melbourne: Scribe Publishing, 2008 (xix + 250 pp, $32.95). ISBN 978 1 921215 89 6.



THIS IS A TERRIFIC READ, even if the idea of slicing into a cadaver makes you queasy. Hayes is the author of two previous books, *Sleep demons*, an account of insomnia, and *Five quarts*, on blood. If *The anatomist* is anything to go by, then these earlier books are certainly worth reading (I've already ordered them). Hayes' book on blood is particularly poignant, as his long-term partner was HIV-positive and died shortly before the present book was completed.

To write *The anatomist*, Hayes undertook human dissection as an active observer in the medical school at the University of California in San Francisco. I got a bit lost with the student characters, but the anatomy side of things is vivid — I learned several tips even though I've been teaching the subject for over 30 years.

The account of Gray's life is sketchy, but that's because so little is known of the man. He died, horribly, of smallpox, aged only 34 (or 36 — even his birth date is uncertain). Much more interesting is the very detailed picture of Henry Vandyke Carter, Gray's impoverished yet gifted young colleague who did the illustrations for the book for a paltry one-off sum of 150 pounds (Gray received the same sum for every thousand copies sold — a deal that would eventually benefit four generations of his descendants). Hayes managed to unearth a huge cache of Carter's letters and diaries. The artist was a sombre man, perhaps even clinically depressed at times, but typically Victorian in his attitudes and self-criticism. He rose above the grind of illustrating *Gray's anatomy* and went on to a successful career as a doctor specialising in tropical diseases in India. Although I personally find his illustrations rather gloomy, they are still hugely informative.

The book is extremely well researched and has an excellent bibliography.

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