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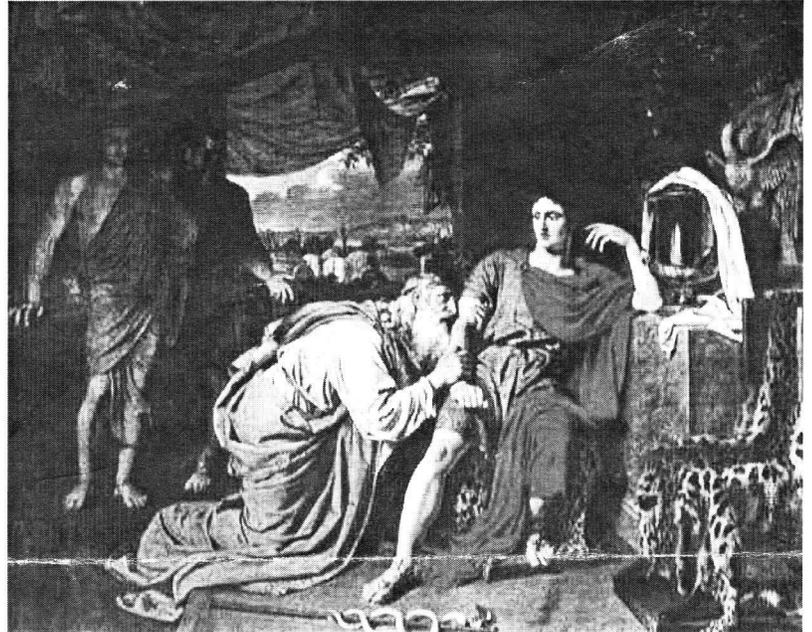
# THE ARMCHAIR CLASSICIST

Volume 9, Number 6, June 2006

Newsletter and Journal of The Northwest Classics Society

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## Letter from the President of the Northwest Classics Society

Once again, Steve Roth, we salute you with our gratitude, and esteem bordering on reverence, for the Summer Solstice party you hosted June 17. It was a great success—food, drink, fun, a view facing West and a dying sun on a very long Seattle day—and we raised \$175 from our raffle. And thanks to Ana Waisman for bringing all that fabulous Argentinian wine for raffle prizes, and to all the party-goers who brought prizes and bought tickets.



Here's a good idea for a future NCS regular event. Linda Hill sent this in:

Sunday afternoon at the movies.

Several members got together on Sunday, June 25th, to watch a classic movie on an even more classic theme, "Black Orpheus." Marcel Camus directed "Orfeo Negro" in Brazil in 1959. The tale of Orpheus and Eurydice is told against the backdrop of Carnival in Rio. The photography is gorgeous, and that with the nearly constant Samba rhythm in the background brought Carnival to life in a way that Ana Waisman (who has been there) assured us is authentic. We enjoyed identifying the characters

Alexander Ivanov (1806-1858), *Priam Asking Achilles to Return Hector's Body*, Oil on canvas, Moscow

and incidents of the myth, but the movie would be a wonderful experience even for someone who did not know the myth.

Roberta Leibovitz let us watch the movie in her office on the Ave, and it was a great venue: cushy seats, air conditioning (it was HOT that day, remember?) and a big screen projection system. We are already trying to decide what movie to watch next; with his Netflix membership, Karl Myers is a great resource. There is even some talk of starting up a monthly movie group. If you think you might be interested, let Roberta know.

Roberta's email is [r\\_leibovitz@hotmail.com](mailto:r_leibovitz@hotmail.com). Or see the recent NCS Membership Roster, or contact the NCS office.



## The Northwest Classics Society

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*The Armchair Classicist* is published 10 times per year by The Northwest Classics Society.

We welcome submissions—letters, brief notes, and essays—written by NCS members and others, for publication.

To receive *The Armchair Classicist* see the Sign-Up form on the last page, or contact the NCS office.

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### Mission Statement

There really is “nothing new under the sun.” The ideas that fermented in ancient Greece, Rome and the Middle East intoxicated later civilizations. We believe that there is nothing more important than indulging in these ideas.

To that end the Northwest Classics Society is dedicated to generating awareness of and promoting interest in Classical antiquity and its impact. We believe that the great writing of the past is key to the enjoyment of the present. We sponsor literature classes, writing seminars, lectures and many other events concerned with the venerable as well as the living language arts.

## Northwest Classics Society Members Information

**Memberships and Renewals:** see last page, or go to: <http://www.northwestclassics.org>, and click “Become a Member . . .”

Membership Rosters are mailed after March to NCS members only. No address or phone information will be shared with non-NCS members without permission. Inclusion in the NCS Roster is automatic, but members who do not wish to have their name and/or contact information listed should inform the NCS office before the end of March.

**Members, please keep contact information up to date.** Contact the NCS office with changes.

**Sponsoring NCS Events:** Any Northwest Classics Society member may propose to teach a class, facilitate a discussion group, or sponsor other types of gatherings. The NCS is able to cover some or all costs associated with many events. If a room is required, the NCS can provide assistance. Many events take place in a conference room at the University Christian Church 4731 15th Ave NE.

**Calendar of Events:** The NCS keeps a calendar of events both in the *Armchair Classicist* and on our web site. A proposed event must be confirmed by the NCS by the first day of the month in order to get in that month’s newsletter. To coordinate activities contact the NCS office.

**Submissions to the *Armchair Classicist*:** We welcome submissions sent in at any time to the *Armchair Classicist*. We accept writing about literature, history, archaeology, whatever might be interesting or novel. Book reviews and movie reviews, reviews of Museum visits or foreign travelogues are welcome. We accept submissions by email or regular mail (but manuscripts will not be returned). Editorial help is available, as are suggestions for topics. Please send to the NCS office: info@northwestclassics.org, or 2317 41 Ave. E., Seattle, WA 98112.

**Membership Building:** To give a NCS membership as a gift, send in to the NCS office the intended recipient’s name, address, email and phone (if available). Tell us when the gift should start, tell us the year the gift membership should end, and donate according to the guidelines for new members, see p. 12. Just before sending them the first newsletter, we will send an attractive letter to the recipient announcing the gift and naming the giver.

**Plus:** any NCS member who, in any 12 month period, gives two gift memberships or inspires two new members to sign up will receive a year of membership from the NCS, *gratis*.

# NCS Events

Tom Preston be doing an “event” on his book at the University Bookstore, July 11th, 7:00 p.m. (see p. 5 below).

## CLASSES and GROUPS

### Brief History of Philosophy in the West (EC class #2005)

#### Dates & Times:

**Section 1:** Thursdays, July 6 - August 10, 6:30 – 8 pm

**Section 2:** Tuesdays, July 11 - August 15, 6:30 – 8 pm

**Place:** UW Campus

**Course fee:** \$73

**Instructor:** Alan Rawn

**Section 1** will be a survey of ancient, medieval and Renaissance philosophy.

**Section 2** will be a survey of Enlightenment, German and modern philosophy.

In this class, we'll discuss only the best and most influential writers and immerse ourselves in the art of philosophy. Perhaps we'll discover what the good life is all about and what reality really is. Some lectures, much discussion and copious reading suggestions. 30% discount when both sections are taken together.

For more information, contact the NCS office (p. 2).

Contact the Experimental College directly for:

**REGISTRATION**—(206) 68-LEARN;

**Information**—(206) 543-4375;

Email—[asuwxpcl@u.washington.edu](mailto:asuwxpcl@u.washington.edu);

Web—<http://depts.washington.edu/asuwxpcl>

NCS Members receive \$10 off the course fee (paid to the instructor at the first class) when they pay a \$10 registration fee to the EC.

See more at the NCS website: [www.northwestclassics.org](http://www.northwestclassics.org)

## BOOK CLUB

The Book Club normally meets on the last Monday of every month, 6:30 in a conference room at the University Christian Church 4731 15th Ave NE. Contact the NCS office or Laura Matz, [lmatz@aol.com](mailto:lmatz@aol.com), for more information.

Here is a tentative schedule. Contact Laura to verify.

June 26: *Boudicca: The Warrior Queen*, by M J Trow.

July 31: *Love, Sex and Tragedy: How the Ancient World Shapes Our Lives*, by Simon Goldhill.

August: *The Jewish Wars*, by Josephus.

The Book Club meets the last Monday of every month at 6:30 pm at University Christian Church (4731 15th Ave NE) and everyone is invited to drop in any time.

## DISCUSSION GROUP

The NCS Discussion Group usually meets throughout the year. The location is a conference room at the University Christian Church, 4731 15th Ave NE. Contact the NCS office for more information.

## Etymology is Good for You

Tom Burton's *Words, Words, Words* 1995 is a pleasant read. For example:

**Lust** (a good old Anglo-Saxon word). Once this word meant simply “pleasure or delight.” The first quotation in the OED under this word quotes King Alfred in 888 saying Boethius said that Epicurus thought “lust” was the highest good. Alfred's use of “lust” shows how much this word has metamorphosed. For Epicurus thought that lust, in the modern sense, along with political ambition and religion, led to abject misery. Simple pleasure, the *summum bonum* of the good life, in contrast, was best achieved by discussing Epicurean philosophy in a garden. John Foxe in 1570 used the word “lust” in the simple sense of “desire,” saying “Men wholly geuen ouer to worldly studyes haue litle leysure, and lesse lust, either to heare Sermons or to read bookes.”

**Luxury** (fr Lat *lux*- “excess, extravagance” + *-ure* “result of” + *-ia* “state of”). In Shakespeare this word means more or less what “lust” today means. So Hamlet's father's ghost tells the lad not to let “the royal bed of Denmark be / A couch for luxury and damned incest” (1.5.82-3). An earlier usage is found in a quotation from 1450, “Leude touchinge and handelyng..makithe..folke falle into orible synne of luxurie.”



The Greek *polis* was bigger than a city, but smaller than a state, so is often translated “city-state.” “Man is a political animal” said Aristotle, meaning we need to live in a community. The transformation of this noble word into its modern usage is troubling. Blame Shakespeare:

Why, look you, I am whipped and scourged with rods,  
Nettled and stung with pismires, when I hear  
Of this vile politician Bolingbroke.

(*I Hen. IV* 1.3.237-9)

You also have your “metropolis” and “necropolis,” and your “police,” “policy,” and “policlinic” (not “polyclinic” [Grk *poly*- “many,”], “a clinic that treats all diseases”).

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## NCS Journal Book Club

This Issue: **Plato**, *The Republic*, Book 8

(Next Issue: **Plato**, *The Republic*, Book 9)

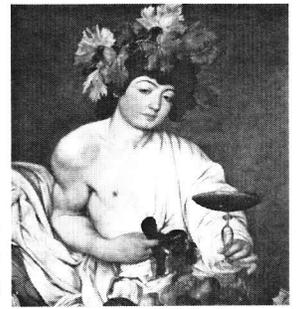
Book 7 of Plato's *Republic* ends with a flourish. After a rundown in that book on the education the leaders of his utopian "Kalipolis" will receive—arithmetic, plane geometry, solid geometry, astronomy, music, and finally dialectic—Socrates speaking for Plato states what will be necessary for a Kalipolis to be realized. First, he says, you must banish everyone in a community over the age of ten "to the countryside," and then bring up the remaining children in the manner described in *Republic*. Socrates, or the Socratic type, of course, would be the director of the whole operation. But surely such a plan represents an absurdity that not even the professional Platonist can fail to acknowledge. Even Plato himself, in his later *Laws*, considers it "unlikely" for his ideal community to ever become a reality (739a-e). The Nazis and Neo-Cons should have read more closely.

Nothing is lost by acknowledging this, for, as we've been saying all along, Plato intends his *Republic* to serve as a map of the mind of the philosopher. The reader understands that discussion of the character and training of the philosopher king running Kalipolis really applies to the king who rules over our own private kingdoms. Let reason and dialectic be the guide of everyone. But, if we were to find out that all along Plato thought his philosopher king ideal was in fact an *impossibility*, or at least, impossible to sustain for any time at all, we, the readers, would be distressed, not to mention a little cheesed off, having waded through acres of torrid sand only to discover that the shoreline is an ever receding mirage.

And this brings us to the notorious Book 8. Here Socrates sets out to describe five different types of constitutions and to observe the predominant moral character of each. Aristocracy, naturally, is best, and the citizens are united and happy (as has been made clear throughout the *Republic*). But, Socrates declares, even in a harmonious Kalipolis, discord will arise, eventually, and the resulting conflict will transform the ideal Aristocracy into a Timocracy—where people covet honors and recognition. From there, further conflicts cause the city to degrade by steps into Oligarchy, Democracy and finally Tyranny.

This is startling information. Plato doesn't say his aristocratic paradise *might* degrade, or will degrade *if* some one breaks faith and acts badly, but he says it will degrade. The cause for this degradation is even more startling, for the process will begin when

a member of Kalipolis' guardian class mistimes an act of procreation which will result in the generation of an inferior infant.



As Socrates has discussed (Book 5), copulation among the ruling class is to occur only at the direction of the guardians. But Socrates here early in Book 8 (545c - 546e) points out that—human nature being what it is—the guardians in charge of these couplings will occasionally mistime things and the resulting generations of children will be inferior to their parents. These offspring will neglect their duties in favor of personal ambition, and this process of generational degeneration will continue. Plato will not compromise in this: Aristocracy is doomed; Kalipolis will not stand. Perplexed by this unexpected information, we look closely at his explanation for *why* these mistimings occur. Some sort of complicated astrological reckoning underlies his reasoning.

Robin Waterfield in his edition of the *Republic* (Oxford World Classics, 1993) is helpful. Plato talks about an unspecified number of the "human creature" (546b), known from its context here as the "nuptial" number. Waterfield notes that even in antiquity there was no agreement as to what the actual number Plato had in mind was. But on his reading of the opaque text, Waterfield concludes that Plato meant his nuptial number to be  $(3 \times 4 \times 5)$  carried to the 4th power, which is 12,960,000. If correct, then Plato is saying that this is the number of "moments" in a human life. Now, a person who dies at age 70 lives for appx. 36,792,000 minutes. Each of his "moments" would then last appx. 2 minutes and 50 seconds. So, presumably, the beleaguered guardians in charge of procreation had to time matters so that each copulation culminated within a prescribed 2 minutes and 50 seconds window allotted for the long-lived. Given the fact that life expectancy in ancient Greece was well short of 70 years, the pressure was on for all concerned.

Of course, Plato is having a good joke on us with his nuptial number, but a bitter taste remains after the reader laughs. For now, in Book 8, it seems that Plato is getting around to telling us that Kalipolis will inevitably degrade, meaning that the ineffable mental joy of the Platonic philosopher will eventually succumb to his own tyrannical nightmares. And it gets worse in Book 9.

# Armchair Notes *and other Comments and Observations*

## Member News

*Laura Matz writes:* Tom Preston, M.D., one of our very own in the NCS, has recently published a book titled: *Patient-Directed Dying: A Call For Legalized Aid In Dying For The Terminally Ill*. It is a manifesto calling for mercy and reason in helping terminally ill patients die a peaceful death. It is a wonderful book. I was crying when I read about the author's Mother. It is such an important issue that unfortunately most of us sooner or later will have to deal with.

Tom is well versed in his subject matter as he is a retired physician and was a professor of medicine at the University of Washington for more than 20 years. He gives compelling reasons why aid in dying is not suicide when used by terminally ill patients, and why physicians who help them die are not assisting suicide. He shows why aid-in-dying is ethical and consistent with other current and legal medical practices, and debunks claims that legalized aid in dying would be abused for financial, social, or political reasons. See [tomprestonmd.com](http://tomprestonmd.com).

Tom will have a book reading and signing at the **University Book Store July 11th at 7:00 PM.**



by *Barbara Miller*

NCS Book Club members who read Tony Perrottet's book *Route 66 A.D.: On the Trail of Ancient Roman Tourists* last summer will recall that, in following in the footsteps of the ancient Romans who, he says, invented tourism, Perrottet recited the mantra "crowds are good—they are part of the authentic Roman tourist experience." I found myself reciting the same mantra as our tour group visited Ephesus, along with many other tour groups, including the passengers from at least two large cruise ships. Our guide said afterward that he had never seen it as crowded as it was that day. This made it difficult to find quiet shady spots in which to hear the talks about what we were seeing, but I couldn't help noticing as we made our way down the Embolos from the Gate of Heracles to the library that in fact the ancient city absorbed crowds remarkably well. Which shouldn't really be that surprising, given that the city and environs had a population of a quarter of a million and the theatre alone could seat 24,000. So the 1000 or so of us who were filling the public squares with our polyglot babble (I heard several varieties

of English, German, French, Italian, Russian, and Turkish—and those were just the languages that I could identify) were in fact working together to recreate something of what the experience must have been for visitors to the capital of Asia Minor under Pax Romana.

We reached the Troy national park in a sunny late afternoon, along with several busses full of exuberant schoolchildren on a field trip near the end of their school year. Aydin, our guide, is fairly skilled at shaking competing groups if it's at all possible, so we left the kids photographing each other in and around the model Trojan Horse and were able to tour the site in relative peace.

*Route 66 A.D.* had prepared me for the fact that the site of Troy doesn't offer much to see, especially of the "Homeric City". This can be attributed to the over-exuberant archaeological techniques of the past (dig a huge trench until you start to find really cool stuff that you can take away and show off) and the cautious techniques of the present (dig small squares, record extensively, and fill them up when you're done, being sure to leave a significant part of the site unexcavated so that there will be some left for the more advanced, and presumably less destructive, archaeological techniques of the future to study). From Troy VI we saw the corner of a citadel wall, a ramp leading into a gap in the wall, the ruins of the Greek Temple of Athena that was built on top of the ruins of one of the citadel towers, the distant Tumulus of Achilles and hills of the Isles of Tenedos (where the Greek fleet hid after leaving the Trojan Horse), the plain extending much further toward the Aegean Sea than it did in the world Homer described.

To make the site more vivid (and meaningful to non-classicists in the group), Aydin had showed us a couple of documentaries that had been made when the "Troy" movie was released. One was by National Geographic (Aydin had participated in the filming of this one) and focused on the "Gold of Priam" that had recently surfaced in Russia, as well as on Schliemann's excavations at Troy and Mycenae. The one that I found more interesting was made by the BBC and spent more time talking about the Hittite written records alluding to the relationship between that empire and the city of Wilusa, and how linguistics and the search for a water channel at Troy (described in the Hittite source) have strengthened

the evidence that Wilusa=Ilion=the current site at Hisarlik, and that the city was embattled at the end of the Bronze Age, which corresponds to the time Homer describes. One consequence of the defeat of Troy by the Mycenaeans, according to Aydin, was that Asia Minor was then opened to colonization by Greeks.

In short, I don't know just how much one can really learn about Troy by visiting it, compared with reading the literature about it. There undoubtedly are tours that focus much more closely on it than ours (in a month we saw the Hittite capital of Hattusa in central Anatolia, and some of the major ruins on the coast, most notably Perge, Aspendos, Myra, Ephesus, and Pergamum, as well as many more recent sights), and excavations continue each summer. There are artifacts in museums in Istanbul and in Europe as well. I recommend the book *Troy and Homer: Toward a Solution of an Old Mystery*, by Joachim Latacz (Oxford University Press 2003). For a scholarly book, this is very readable (translated from the German) and focuses specifically on the question of whether or not the Troy that Homer wrote about was located at the Hissarlik site.

As for the experience of traveling in Turkey, the question I have been asked more than any other is whether I felt safe there. I definitely did, I suppose in part because the tour format took care of a number of the everyday hassles of foreign travel, and, while we had surprisingly many opportunities to interact with Turks (we visited a school, had lunch in a home in a village, were given free time in marketplaces), we were still sheltered in many ways. (Selective information had something to do with it as well: one member of the group arrived too late to get the bus back to the hotel from Topkapi Palace in Istanbul and was terrified that she might be killed, because she had seen a film clip of a murder in Istanbul on CNN. Her answer to the question of whether she felt safe would be very different from mine.)

As for what Turks think of Americans, from the standpoint of professional guides, we are apparently the easiest nationality to guide, since we seem to understand better than others the process of being in a group, separating and being back at a certain time, etc. In some tourist areas (Antalya, in particular), we were more likely to be addressed in German than in English, because most of the non-Turkish visitors are Europeans on sun-and-fun holidays. The only thing like a political discussion that I had was in broken English (his) and even less Turkish (mine) with a student who was selling *yaprak* (which turned out to be grape leaves) in a village market. Without once

forming a complete English sentence the young man communicated to me "George W. Bush...not good... nuclear bombs...dangerous...Iran". Being even more linguistically challenged, I had a harder time trying to explain to him that we didn't support that policy and we thought it was dangerous too.

The antipathy felt by the western-leaning Turks (most notably Aydin and his wife, and Fikri, an 85-year-old friend of my father-in-law who was originally from Turkey, lived many years in the US, and has moved back there now) toward the increasingly traditional Islamic presence was easy to pick up. These westernized Turks absolutely do not want to go back to the way of the past, the older generation feeling that they worked so hard to modernize and the younger generation feeling that the new "bourgeois" fashion of high-fashion headscarves and modesty robes has nothing of the simple village ethic to it at all. The Ankara shooting at their Supreme Court happened the morning we left; we saw it in the English language Turkish newspapers on the plane but did not get a chance to talk to our sources about it.

Aydin leads small groups and even couples on tours that he can tailor to individual interest. We developed something of a bond with him (the fact that I was the only American in the group to have learned any Turkish helped here) and he is encouraging us to get a group together to visit his home area of Trabzon (Trebizond) on the Black Sea, and go to Eastern Turkey. This was probably the biggest eye-opener for me, since what I had read about tourism in Turkey had led me to believe that eastern Turkey, particularly southeastern, was essentially closed off to Westerners because of political tension with the Kurds. I don't know whether I will ever take Aydin up on his offer (my husband thinks we should), but it is interesting to know the possibility is there.



by Tom Preston

At an NCS bookclub one recent evening we discussed Aeschylus' *Oresteia*. This is one of my all-time favorites, for the beauty of the words in *Agamemnon*, and because it presents perhaps the greatest achievement of civilized people—the replacement of blood revenge with determination of justice by the greater society, through the mechanism of a court of the people.

About ten days prior to the discussion, I went through my email list and picked 12 lawyers out, and sent them (via email) a questionnaire, with three questions: (1) Do you know Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, or

are you familiar with it? (2) Did you hear of it at any time in law school? (3) Should it be taught in law school? I asked them to answer “yes,” “no,” or “don’t know.”

Answers: question (1) all replied, “NO,” except two (my identical twin brother, and a Superior Court

judge here) who said they thought it was Greek tragedy; question (2) all said “NO;” question (3) all said “DON’T KNOW.”

These results were disappointing, as I think the *Oresteia* represents society’s greatest legal advance. The concept hasn’t taken root in much of the world.

## The Anatomy of Andreas Vesalius by Alison Bickford

Alison Bickford is a student in the M.D./Ph.D. program at the Feinberg School of Medicine at Northwestern University. Her essay on Vesalius here is a shortened version of an essay that won the Alpha Omega Alpha Essay Competition. Her essay appeared in the Spring of 2006 edition of *Pharos* (69.2), journal of the AOA Honor Medical Society.

It’s hard to believe that skeletons can look so anguished. One mournfully contemplates a skull, one leans on a shovel and gazes wretchedly at the sky, and a third bends over his hands in sheer desolation. The muscled men appear slightly happier, though their muscles drip off their bones like Dali’s clocks and one hangs by a rope through his cheekbones.

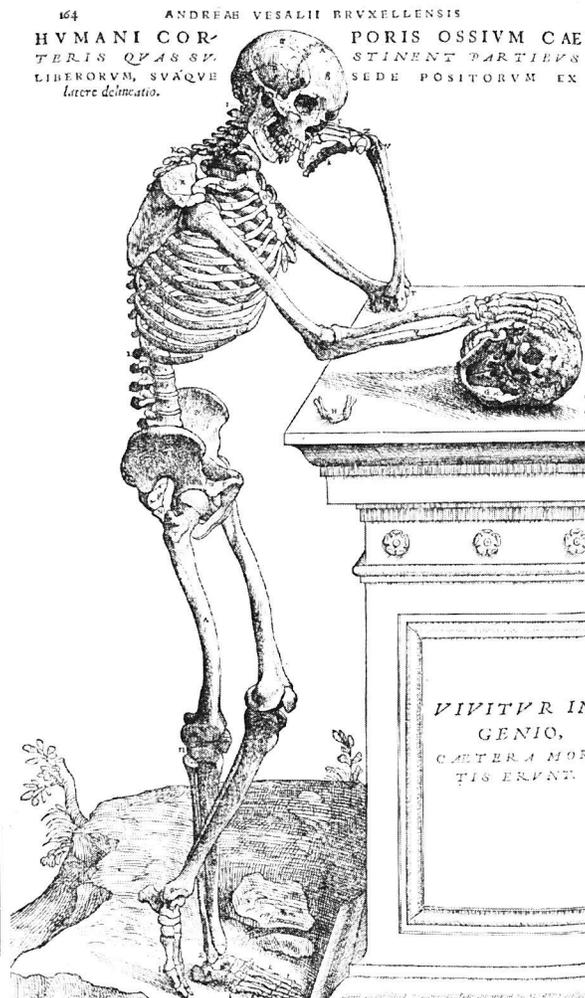
You’ve seen these pictures before. This is the work of Andreas Vesalius – or rather, one of the unknown artists who drew anatomical representations after his specifications. These are the anatomical illustrations of *De Humani Corporis Fabrica Libri Septum*, or “On the Fabric of the Human Body,” a stunning textbook of anatomy that won Vesalius one of the best-known names in medical history.

*De Humani Corporis Fabrica* (commonly called the *Fabrica*), is a rare combination of medi-

cine, science and art that made massive contributions to the world’s understanding of human anatomy, established illustration as crucial to the study of anatomy and emphasized the importance of observation in science. Published within a few months of Copernicus’s *De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium* in 1543, the *Fabrica* changed our understanding of the microcosmos of man as Copernicus revolutionized the science of the macrocosmos of the universe.

Written in the complicated humanist Latin of the Renaissance, the entire *Fabrica* of 1543 has never yet

been fully translated into any modern language except Russian. This is about to change. Dr. Malcolm Hast, Professor Emeritus of Otolaryngology at Northwestern University’s Feinberg School of Medicine and Dr. Daniel Garrison, Professor of Classics in Northwestern University’s Weinberg College of Arts and Science have now embarked on a full translation of Vesalius’ *Fabrica*. The translators are publishing the entire seven books both in print and online, complete with annotations, modern anatomical names, historical introductions to each chapter and translations of all substantive revisions in the 1555 *Fabrica*. The 272 illustrations have been restored and digitally smoothed to more precisely resemble the original woodcuttings. It is an astonishing undertaking – the first two books took eight years to



An Ossium from Vesalius’ *Fabrica*  
“Alas poor Yorick”

complete – funded fittingly by both the National Endowment of the Humanities and the National Institutes of Health.

One might think a translation like this would be purely historical, with little bearing on modern medicine. But Vesalius' contributions to the science of anatomy and the principles of science, along with the artistry and beauty of his illustrations, keep his work relevant even centuries after his death. He is the Shakespeare of anatomy, influencing our lives today with works created long ago in ways we cannot even imagine.

The *Fabrica* was a magnum opus, both artistically beautiful and scientifically ground breaking as the first comprehensive text of anatomy. Historically, however, Vesalian scholars tended to overestimate his academic contribution. They painted Vesalius as a heroic young visionary, breaking completely from traditional anatomy and fighting to proclaim the truth to rabid Galenists who condemned his work the way the church condemned that of Copernicus.

The truth is somewhat more prosaic. The humanist movement of the Renaissance was marked by a revival of interest in the classical literature and ideals of Greek and Roman culture. Vesalius, like his teachers, knew Latin and Greek and studied classical authors of philosophy and anatomy. Some of his most elegant writing simply paraphrases (or plagiarizes) these classical authors – including Galen, Aristotle and Cicero. He assumes his readers have read Galen as closely as he has, and though he condemns those who follow Galen blindly he refers to Galen as “the second leader of medicine after Hippocrates.” Throughout the *Fabrica* he follows Galen's teleological concept that the human body is ideally designed, a perfect instrument for carrying out the functions of the soul. Vesalius certainly clashed with some Galenists; in fact, his own Parisian teacher, Sylvius, protested against Vesalius, saying that Galen couldn't have been wrong – the human body had simply changed since Galen's day. But there is no doubt that Vesalius was, himself, a Galenist. He sought to expand upon, add to, and correct Galen, not condemn him.

Much of the modern glorified concept of Vesalius comes from his own writings. Vesalius was a shame-



Illustration on the title page of the *Fabrica* (1543 edition). Vesalius is in the center pointing to the cadaver

less self-promoter, casually mentioning his youthful age (he was 28 when he published the *Fabrica*) and neglecting to mention both his anatomical predecessors and the contemporaries who clearly influenced his work. He persistently informs his audience of his corrections to Galen while giving Galen less credit for what he has taken directly from his works. As a result, some scholars tended to overly praise Vesalius, leading to a scornful backlash from critics who noted the exaggeration.

Born in Brussels in 1514, Vesalius began his study of medicine in Paris and finished in Padua where he graduated with highest honors. Vesalius describes

his own anatomy classes in Paris in the *Fabrica*: A professor looked down on the dissection, reciting in Latin a Galenic description of animal anatomy, while a menial who understood no Latin simply hacked away at the body. “Less is presented to the spectators than a butcher in a stall could teach a physician,” Vesalius wrote. (One scholar points out, however, that Vesalius’ teacher Sylvius was an incredibly popular instructor, with hundreds of students at each dissection. It is unlikely he could have drawn such a crowd by simply reading Galen – possibly another instance of self-aggrandizing.)

As a young teacher in Padua Vesalius resolved to change the way anatomy was taught to medical students. He chose to work as both dissector and lec-

The choice of the dissecting theater for the title page is not merely to give readers a historical context. The theater itself also illustrates Vesalius’ theories of anatomy and the process of scientific research. Throughout his work, Vesalius insists that the only way one can learn anatomy is by observing actual anatomies. “Swear by nobody’s words,” he writes in Book 5, Chapter 13 of the *Fabrica*. He exhorts the reader to count the teeth, count the bones, and to believe nothing, not even Vesalius, until the reader has witnessed it himself. Though perhaps not fully realized within the *Fabrica*, this spirit of objectivity and emphasis on experience and observation is perhaps Vesalius’ greatest contribution to modern science, leading the way for the codification of the scientific method and future developments in research and medicine.

The woodcut illustrations in the *Fabrica* are detailed and stunning, some of the finest of the sixteenth century. Though the identity of the artists is unknown and debated among scholars, the quality of their art is without question, and they



Harmenszoon van Rijn Rembrandt, 1606 - 1669, *The Anatomy Lecture of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp* (1632), Oil on canvas, The Hague

clearly received a great deal of instruction on anatomy and design from the *Fabrica*’s author. But beyond the sheer skill of the intricate illustrations, what is perhaps most striking to the modern viewer is the seeming irreverence of the *Fabrica*’s pictures. Modern anatomy texts display concise, sterile depictions of body parts and organs. Illustrations may be artistic but they are not meant to be art: they are a medium to help the reader learn about the human body. Bodies in modern medical texts are inanimate: they don’t pose self-consciously, displaying their bodies to the viewers like the living corpses of the *Fabrica*.

Before the *Fabrica*, illustration was an incidental part of anatomy; since then, better and clearer illustrations have led to improved anatomical understanding. As artists work in anatomy, anatomy itself becomes art. Rembrandt’s *Anatomy Lesson of Nicholas Tulp* shows men clustered around a cadaver whose hand muscles are exposed. Few would argue that anatomy cannot be beautiful or used for artistic purposes. Da Vinci’s famous *Vitruvian Man* (or *Study of Proportions*) could even be called commercial art: today the image adorns posters, T-shirts and coffee cups.

Some scholars of medieval anatomy argue that Vesalius sought to distance his audience from the actual

turer, displaying each part as he discussed it. His proximity to the cadaver allowed him to make the new anatomical discoveries that led to his *Fabrica*. He made further pedagogical advances by hanging greatly detailed anatomical charts around the dissecting arena, seen today as copies in his student’s notebooks.

On the title page of the *Fabrica* [illustrated above], Vesalius gives a depiction of his teaching style. A roiling mob of men is gathered around the gaping abdomen of a female cadaver. No one seems to be paying attention. Spectators read, pray, talk and pickpocket. A naked man clings to a pillar. There’s a monkey on one side, a dog on the other – symbolic of the debts we owe animals for many anatomical and physiological advances. Vesalius, small and bearded, gestures towards the woman. A skeleton stands over her like a guardian angel with a miserable expression on its bony face.

violation of a cadaver by posing skeletons and muscle men like statues. Given the startlingly grotesque appearance of a rope trussed through a cadaver's zygomatic arches or the miserable expressions on his skeletons' faces, it seems unlikely that Vesalius was striving for distance. His artists were simply more trained in art than anatomy, and wished to make their work as beautiful and interesting as possible. His audience, primarily medical personnel who had seen dissections themselves, were unlikely to be concerned about the violation of a body. Although he intended the *Fabrica* to be a basic reference for clinicians, Vesalius presented his scientific discoveries in a way that would entertain and fascinate his audience: as art.

Ethical controversy is not new to anatomy. The idea that the body was merely a shell for the soul and that after death the body could be objectified and even mutilated did not arrive in Western thought until the works of Socrates and Plato in 400 BC. Their new attitude toward the dead took time to take hold, and both their contemporary Hippocrates and Plato's student Aristotle learned anatomy from animal dissection. Herophilus and Erasistratus were allowed dissection (and possibly vivisection) of criminals in 300 BC, but by the time of their deaths the spreading Roman influence had again outlawed anatomical investigation. Galen (practicing around 160 AD) was thus limited to animals (especially monkeys) and two human skeletons he found, yet his writings would more or less form the basis of medieval European and Islamic medicine until Vesalius.

Once we were comfortable with the idea of dissection, debate continued over whose bodies could be used for this purpose. By the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries executed criminals were commonly used for dissection, but a body shortage led to grave robbing by "resurrectionists" and even the famous anatomy murders by Burke and Hare. These murders

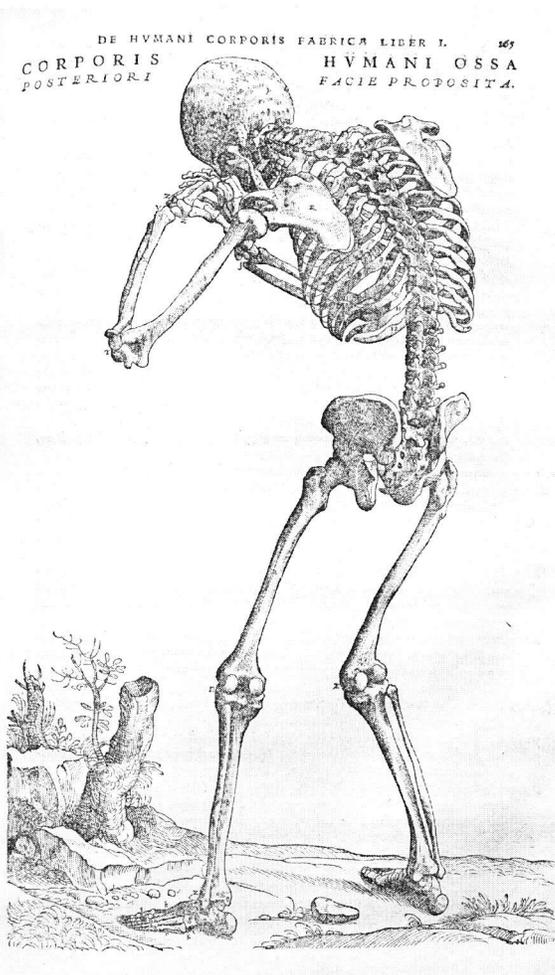
finally prompted politicians to pass the Anatomy Act of 1832, providing donated and unclaimed bodies to anatomists. Even the identity of the dissectors can lead to ethical dilemmas: controversy surrounds the Pernkopf anatomy atlas, published in 1943 by active members of the Nazi party, although there is no evidence that Holocaust victims were used as models.

Perhaps society will become accustomed to the use of cadavers for aesthetic purposes as we have to the use of cadavers for scientific purposes and to the use of anatomical illustrations as art. It is certain, however, that even this evolution of thought will continue to open up new areas of ethical concern and controversy.

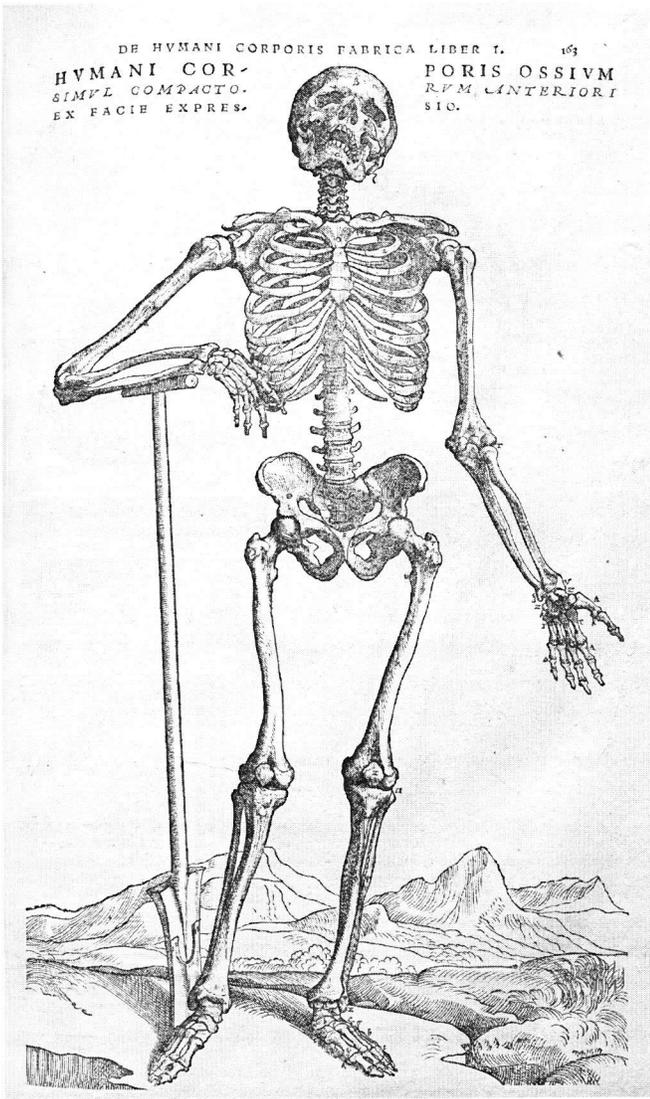
### The Vesalius Project

Dr. Malcolm Hast teamed up with Dr. Daniel Garrison, a professor of Classics at Northwestern University, who was enthusiastic about the translation. Together they began to translate everything in the *Fabrica* related to the larynx and hyoid bone – compiling pieces from various sections on the nerves, the bones, and the muscles. After Garrison translates from Vesalius' complicated Latin into English, Hast analyzes the translation to determine what Vesalius actually meant. "Vesalius didn't give names to some things," he says, "and he didn't have names for a lot of things. Vesalius says 'Now, when moving your leg, the third, fifth and eighth muscles will move. And in the thigh, the seventh and tenth muscles will move. I've got to figure out, what is he talking about?'"

With the exception of a Russian version published in 1950, this is the first time the 1543 *Fabrica* has ever been translated into a modern language in its entirety, complete with modern anatomical names and footnotes clarifying Vesalius' sources, his allusions to other people and events, and his anatomy. It is also the first time the revised 1555 edition of the *Fabrica* has been translated alongside the 1543 original. In his introduction to the new translation, classical



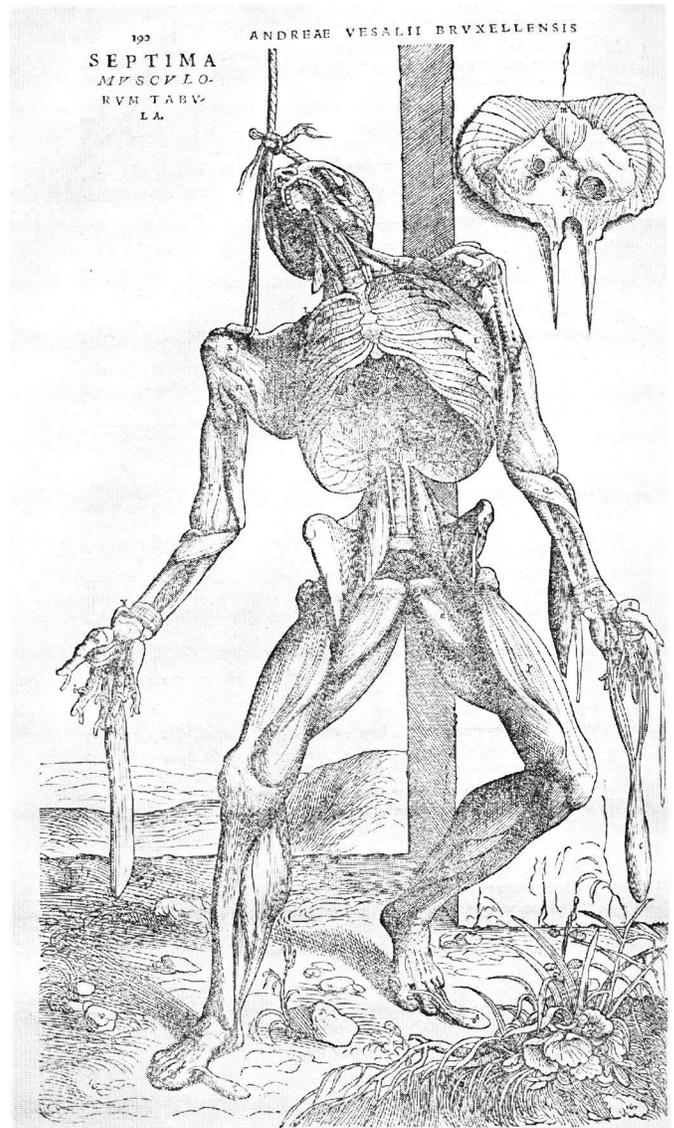
An Ossium from Vesalius' *Fabrica*



Above: An Ossium from Vesalius' *Fabrica*  
 Right: A Musclemann from the *Fabrica*

would have wanted them to: in small groups clustered around a cadaver. But students today simply cut and memorize, without expecting to discover something new or find flaws in *Grant's Dissector*. Some medical schools are phasing dissection out of the curriculum altogether, using prosected cadavers and computer programs to teach anatomy to their students. It is easy to feel that the study of gross human anatomy is dying, taking a rich and full history with it.

But beyond the cadaver, the world of anatomy is spreading out into studies of development, imaging, comparative anatomy, and neuroanatomy. Anatomists today study biomechanics, evolution, fossil records and anthropology. And behind all these new developments is Vesalius, reminding scientists of all fields to open their eyes and to believe nothing that they have not observed themselves – perhaps even encouraging them to present their discoveries creatively, enmeshed in beauty and art.



scholar Vivian Nutton writes, "The 1555 revision is a major contribution to anatomical understanding in its own right, and has been unduly neglected as a result of the very success of the 1543 edition." Vesalius changed entire paragraphs and pages in his revised text, making the Latin more fluid and the anatomy more accurate. He revamped his notions of female anatomy and his Galenic view of the heart and replaced incorrect illustrations of fetal dissections. The Vesalius project will finally allow scholars to see and study the extent of Vesalius' changes.

On March 19, 2003, the first book was finally available for viewing at [www.vesalius.northwestern.edu](http://www.vesalius.northwestern.edu). It is fitting that the translation of the book that focused so heavily on pedagogy and the importance of observation will finally be available to all readers and scholars on the internet.

Today, medical students learn anatomy as Vesalius

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