

Emotions and Surgery in Britain, 1793–1912

In this innovative analytical account of the place of emotion and embodiment in nineteenth-century British surgery, Michael Brown examines the changing emotional dynamics of surgical culture for both surgeons and patients from the pre-anaesthetic era through the introduction of anaesthesia and antiseptics techniques. Drawing on diverse archival and published sources, Brown explores how an emotional regime of Romantic sensibility, in which emotions played a central role in the practice and experience of surgery, was superseded by one of scientific modernity, in which the emotions of both patient and practitioner were increasingly marginalised. Demonstrating that the cultures of contemporary surgery and the emotional identities of its practitioners have their origins in the cultural and conceptual upheavals of the later nineteenth century, this book challenges us to question our perception of the pre-anaesthetic period as an era of bloody brutality and casual cruelty. This title is also available as open access.

MICHAEL BROWN is a historian at Lancaster University. He is co-editor of *Martial Masculinities: Experiencing and Imagining the Military in the Long Nineteenth Century* (2019) and author of *Performing Medicine: Medical Culture and Identity in Provincial England, c.1760–1850* (2011), as well as numerous articles on the history of medicine, war, gender, and emotion. Between 2016 and 2021 he was the Principal Investigator on the Wellcome Trust Investigator Award project Surgery & Emotion (108667/Z/15/Z).

Emotions and Surgery in Britain, 1793–1912

Michael Brown
Lancaster University



Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-108-83484-1 — Emotions and Surgery in Britain, 1793–1912
Michael Brown
Frontmatter
[More Information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA

477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia

314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre,
New Delhi – 110025, India

103 Penang Road, #05–06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781108834841

DOI: 10.1017/9781108877237

© Michael Brown 2023

This work is in copyright. It is subject to statutory exceptions and to the provisions of relevant licensing agreements; with the exception of the Creative Commons version the link for which is provided below, no reproduction of any part of this work may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

An online version of this work is published at doi.org/10.1017/9781108877237 under a Creative Commons Open Access license CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0 which permits re-use, distribution and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial purposes providing appropriate credit to the original work is given. You may not distribute derivative works without permission. To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0>

All versions of this work may contain content reproduced under license from third parties. Permission to reproduce this third-party content must be obtained from these third-parties directly. When citing this work, please include a reference to the DOI 10.1017/9781108877237

First published 2023

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Brown, Michael, 1977– author.

Title: Emotions and surgery in Britain, 1793–1912 / Michael Brown.

Description: Cambridge, United Kingdom ; New York, NY :

Cambridge University Press, 2022. | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2022023388 | ISBN 9781108834841 (hardback) |

ISBN 9781108877237 (ebook)

Subjects: MESH: General Surgery – history | Emotions | Surgeons – psychology |

History, 18th Century | History, 19th Century | History, 20th Century | United Kingdom |

BISAC: MEDICAL / History

Classification: LCC RD27.3.G5 | NLM WO 11 FA1 | DDC 617.0941–dc23/eng/20220819

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2022023388>

ISBN 978-1-108-83484-1 Hardback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-108-83484-1 — Emotions and Surgery in Britain, 1793–1912
Michael Brown
Frontmatter
[More Information](#)

For Joanne, my love and my life

Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	page viii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	ix
<i>Note on the Text</i>	xiii
<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	xiv
Introduction	1
1 Between Art and Artifice: Emotion and Performance in Romantic Surgery	19
2 Anxiety and Compassion: Emotional Intersubjectivity and the Romantic Surgical Relationship	65
3 The Patient’s Voice: Conscious and Unconscious Agency in Romantic Surgery	109
4 ‘Scenes of Cruelty and Blood’: Emotion, Melodrama, and the Politics of Romantic Surgical Reform	149
5 Quiescent Bodies: Utilitarianism and the Reconfiguration of Surgical Emotion	185
6 The ‘New World of Surgery’: Sepsis, Sentiment, and Scientific Modernity	237
Epilogue: New Pasts, New Futures	275
<i>Select Bibliography</i>	288
<i>Index</i>	302

Figures

1.1 Haptic hieroglyphics: Robert Liston's guide to incisions from his <i>Practical Surgery</i> (London: John Churchill, 1837), p. 17.	page 35
1.2 Robert Blemmel Schnebbelie, <i>A Lecture at the Hunterian Anatomy School, Great Windmill Street, London</i> , watercolour (1839).	36
1.3 'A surgical operation to remove a malignant tumour from a man's left breast and armpit in a Dublin drawing room', watercolour (1817).	43
1.4 Leiden anatomical theatre (1596), from Johannes van Meurs, <i>Athenae Batavae</i> (1625).	44
1.5 F. M. Harvey, <i>The Old Operating Theatre at The London Hospital, Demolished in 1889</i> (1889), oil on canvas.	45
1.6 Ernest Board, <i>Robert Liston Operating</i> (1912).	53
1.7 Mary Ann Griffiths, <i>The Lancet</i> 27:688 (5 November 1836), p. 237.	60
2.1 Thomas Rowlandson, <i>Amputation</i> (1793).	72
2.2 Elizabeth Lowe, painted by the Rev William Brown (1828).	96
2.3 Charles Bell, Gunshot wound of the left shoulder (1815).	98
3.1 'Poor Hoo Loo and His Tumour', <i>The Lancet</i> 16:398 (16 April 1831), p. 89.	147
5.1 Jeremy Bentham's 'Auto-Icon', housed in Thomas Southwood Smith's consulting room before being moved to University College London in 1850.	206
5.2 John Snow's Apparatus for the Inhalation of Ether and Chloroform, <i>The Lancet</i> 51:1276 (12 February 1848), p. 179.	230
6.1 'The Doll Episode' from J. R. Leeson, <i>Lister as I Knew Him</i> (1927).	269
6.2 Luke Fildes, <i>The Doctor</i> (1891).	270

Acknowledgements

This book has come into being in what might fairly be described as ‘interesting times’. I began work on it shortly after meeting someone who would very soon become my wife. We moved in together, and now share everything in our lives, including our research. This blessing has made the experience of researching and writing *Emotions and Surgery* all the more joyous. But there have been challenges too. Somewhat ironically, the writing of Chapter 5 coincided with my first ever experience of surgery under general anaesthetic. While this is not something I would care to repeat, I would like to thank the staff at Stoke Mandeville Hospital, particularly my surgeon, Aman Sethi, and my anaesthetist, Rich Kaye, for facilitating this enlightening perspective on surgery and emotion without my having to endure the pain, suffering, and anxiety that so many of those whose stories are featured in this book sadly did. To add to this, a not inconsiderable proportion of *Emotions and Surgery* has been written during the COVID-19 pandemic. Even as I type this, things are by no means over, and we face continued uncertainty about the duration and future severity of the pandemic. It might seem insensitive to even mention the relatively minor personal inconveniences caused by COVID-19 when so many people have lost their lives. In any case, my research was not as badly impacted as it might have been, largely because much of the relevant archival material had been compiled and processed before March 2020. Nonetheless, the anxieties produced by the pandemic, and the limitations it imposed, are baked into this book, albeit in ways so subtle and inconsequential that I hope no one will notice. Indeed, if anything, *Emotions and Surgery* and my research more generally have provided a valuable emotional and intellectual refuge from the frequently depressing world of politics and global affairs over the last five or so years.

As regards the genesis of this book, my first, and deepest, debt of gratitude is to the Wellcome Trust, which funded my Investigator Award project, *Surgery & Emotion* (108667/Z/15/Z). I am honoured that the Trust thought highly enough of my research plans to fund me, initially for four years, subsequently for five. Its support has provided me with an invaluable opportunity to undertake the research that I wanted to pursue and, ultimately, to write this book. Its

incredibly generous Open Access funding scheme also means that *Emotions and Surgery*, and all the other research outputs from the project, are available for anyone to read, free of charge; this is an incalculable privilege. But the Trust did not just fund me. One of the joys of being Principal Investigator on the Surgery & Emotion project has been working with an incredibly talented and personable team on a range of activities, from policy and publications to public engagement. I would like to thank Agnes Arnold-Forster, James Kennaway, Alison Moulds, David Saunders, and Lauren Ryall-Waite for all their hard work on the project and for making the last few years as enjoyable as they have been. It has been a pleasure to work with you all, and wonderful to see you go on to such great things.

For the last decade and more, I have had the great privilege of being based in what is currently the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Roehampton. Roehampton has been my academic home since before my first book was published and it is a pleasure to reflect on how much I have flourished there. While I was undertaking the initial research for the Surgery & Emotion project, I was less involved in the day-to-day activities of the School than before. Nonetheless, I always felt deeply connected to the School and proud to fly the flag for Roehampton at the various events I organised and participated in. I have come to resume my teaching and leadership duties at a difficult time for the sector in general, and the School in particular. However, I believe that there is no finer place in the country to teach and learn history, nor do I believe that anyone could be as blessed as I am with such friendly, supportive, capable, and committed colleagues, or such curious, engaged, and resourceful students.

A book like *Emotions and Surgery*, which draws heavily upon archival sources, would not have been possible were it not for the tireless work of librarians and archivists in accessioning, maintaining, and making accessible the requisite research materials. I am therefore hugely grateful to staff at a number of different libraries and archives, including the University of Roehampton Library, the British Library, the National Archives, the Wellcome Library, the National Library of Scotland, and the Library and Archive of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh. However, my greatest single vote of thanks must go to the staff of the Library of the Royal College of Surgeons of England, who, for several months in a row, handled my incessant requests for material with unceasing professionalism, efficiency, and good grace. I hope this book has done justice to the materials you work so hard to preserve for posterity.

I enjoy the great fortune of being part of a wider historical research community, and to count among my friends and colleagues those whose opinions and insights I value highly. Due to the pressures of the COVID-19 pandemic on everyone's workloads, I have been less inclined to pass my work to already overburdened colleagues than might otherwise have been the case. However,

I would like to thank those who have been kind enough to read all, or parts, of *Emotions and Surgery* before publication. These include Joanne Begiato, Ian Burney, John Collins, James Kennaway, Allister Neher, and Matthew Roberts. I would also like to thank the two anonymous reviewers of the initial proposal, and the sole reviewer of the final manuscript, for the remarkable speed, depth, and generosity of their readings. Beyond those who have read the manuscript, I would like to thank those colleagues and friends with whom I have discussed the project over the years, and who attended the various seminars and lectures I have given about my research. Your questions, comments, and reflections have helped to shape my thinking in profound ways. There are too many of you to name and it would be futile of me to try and recall the myriad influences on my work. However, I am especially grateful for the many stimulating and provocative conversations I have had with Chris Lawrence, my mentor from my days as a master's student and, in more recent years, a dear friend. My thoughts are with you and Jan in difficult times.

I am so glad that *Emotions and Surgery* has found its home at Cambridge University Press, and special thanks must go to the senior commissioning editor for the history of science and medicine, Lucy Rhymer. Lucy has been incredibly supportive of this book ever since I first pitched the idea for it at the Society for the Social History of Medicine annual conference at Liverpool in 2018. Together with Emily Plater and Natasha Whelan, she has eased its journey to production with consummate professionalism.

Writing a book, as anyone who has done it knows, requires emotional as much as academic resources. In this sense I am enormously fortunate to enjoy the love, support, and encouragement of my family. Thanks go to my brother, Andrew, and his family, and to my parents, Monika and Stephen. They have been my inspiration throughout life: intelligent, perceptive, generous, and unstintingly kind. They have supported me with unwavering enthusiasm throughout my career in academia, consoling me in difficult times and celebrating my achievements with love and pride. I only hope I can live up to their example.

Finally, I must acknowledge the incalculable emotional debt that I owe to my wife, Joanne, and my stepson, Gabriel. It was in 2015, when I was awarded the grant that led to this book, that I first met Joanne. I have many cherished memories of those early months, not the least of which involves the two of us, after my funding interview with the Wellcome Trust, sitting in the sunshine outside the Jeremy Bentham pub, little knowing what would follow or where it would lead. It is astonishing to me that so much life can be crammed into the time it takes to write a book. But so it has been. In those six years, Gabriel has grown from a boy into a man, and our life as a family has blossomed. Joanne is not only my friend, my lover, and my confidante, but also my editor, my critic, and my intellectual guide to the history of emotions. Anyone who has read

xii Acknowledgements

our respective works will be able to trace the story of our relationship through our acknowledgements. I can only beg their indulgence on this occasion and promise that the next book we write will be together and, as such, we will have to think of someone else to dedicate it to. Until that time, this book, as with everything else I have, is for her.

Note on the Text

Emotions and Surgery refers to a number of individuals who, like Charles Bell, Benjamin Brodie, or Astley Cooper, received knighthoods or baronetcies, or who, in the case of Joseph Lister, were made peers of the realm. However, for the sake of consistency and clarity, I have decided not to use the titles ‘Sir’ or ‘Lord’ in the text, given that this book covers the period both before and after these titles were bestowed.

For ease of identification, life dates are provided for named individuals at the first mention in the body text. I have tried to do this for as many people as possible, but clear identities, let alone life dates, have not been possible to establish for everyone mentioned.

This book makes extensive use of manuscript sources, such as letters, diaries, and casebooks, in which spelling and punctuation do not necessarily conform to modern standard practice. These are presented unaltered, and clarification is provided only in cases where confusion might otherwise result.

Abbreviations

CAS-C	Cumbria Archives Service, Carlisle
NA	National Archives, London
NLS	National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh
<i>ODNB</i>	<i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i>
RCSE	Royal College of Surgeons of England, London
RCSEd	Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh
WL	Wellcome Library, London