

Hrileena Ghosh, *John Keats' Medical Notebook: Text, Context, and Poems* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2020), 320pp. ISBN 978-1-789-62061-0; £85 (hb)

'THE POSITION OF THE HAND IN DISSECTING should be the same, as in writing or drawing; and the knife, held, like the pen' (*The London Dissector*, 1811). John Keats, as a medical student and surgeon's apprentice at Guy's Hospital (between October 1815 and March 1817), was thus advised to hold his surgeon's scalpel exactly as he held his poet's pen (p. 269). The hand that dissected rotting corpses, handled living bodies in crisis (such as pulling a bullet from a woman's neck, p. 169), and recorded anatomical details and physiological processes in his medical notebook, was the same 'living hand, now warm and capable' that scribbled poetry.¹ Hrileena Ghosh's book articulates how Keats' poetic creativity was—inescapably—enabled and enhanced on a practical level through his intricate, intimate knowledge of the physical human body—its fevers, its pulses, its nerves, its sensations. (His medical notebook reveals Keats' working physiological comprehension of all four: 'If there be in Fever a determination of Blood to the Head the Pulse will increase' [p. 46]; and 'Lectr 10. Physiology of the Nervous System. The 1st office is that of Sensation' [p. 32].)

Ghosh's book includes the first annotated transcription of Keats' medical notebook (pp. 19–86), taken from lectures on 'Anatomy, and the Operations of Surgery' by the pre-eminent surgeon of the period, Astley Cooper, at Guy's Hospital. 'The source from which Keats derived his medical notes has always been something of a puzzle', a conundrum that Ghosh solves (pp. 151–56). The only previous edition of Keats' medical notebook, Maurice Buxton Forman's from 1934, is not annotated—and, furthermore, it quietly smooths out some of the revealing oddities of the manuscript (that Keats wrote from both the front and back ends of the notebook, for instance [p. 10])—making Ghosh's expansively annotated edition, which takes care to indicate the distinctive arrangement of Keats' notes, welcome. Ghosh's careful explications help guide the reader through the sometimes obscure and complex medical material, while the provision of concise biographical detail and relevant intellectual context of the people mentioned is also helpful. Clear explanations of terminology are not only essential for non-medical literary scholars, the contextualisation of nineteenth-century medical vocabulary will surely be welcomed, too, by those with a knowledge of modern-day medicine.

The extensive contextualisation of Keats' time at Guy's Hospital, in the chapters that follow the annotated notebook, adds significantly to our understanding of Keats' intellectual environment.

So efficacious was the notorious, medically-themed attack in 'The Cockney School of Poetry IV'—which diagnosed Keats with debilitating metromania and mocked his medical background ('back to the shop Mr John, back to "plasters, pills, and ointment boxes", &c.')¹—that Keats' nineteenth-century admirers sought to expunge medical elements from their biographies and inter-

pretations of his poetry (pp. 239–41).² Such eschewing has perhaps contributed to traditional accounts of Keats, and understandings of his poetry (and indeed thinking), which characterise him as a poor, apathetic, or even uninterested medical student. Ghosh's book—which builds upon the recent scholarship of Nicholas Roe, John Barnard and Richard Marggraf Turley, as well as Donald Goellnicht—demonstrates conclusively that in fact the opposite was the case. The first chapter's analysis of the notebook, as a bibliographic artefact and working document, argues convincingly that Keats was an engaged, attentive and active student. Contrary to the assertions of earlier, influential critics, such as Walter Jackson Bate (who concluded that Keats' notes show that 'he was either completely indifferent or hopelessly confused' [p. 114]), Ghosh looks beyond the ostensibly chaotic appearance of Keats' notebook, reveals how carefully annotated and cross-referenced the notes actually were, and explains how they illustrate Keats' process of synthesising his learning (which operates as much in his poetry as his notebook).

Chapter 2, 'Guy's Hospital Poetry', considers Keats' poetic writing while he remained at Guy's, in an attempt to establish the relationship between 'Keats' two callings' (p. 119)—Keats as poet and as practising physician. It outlines what Keats' day-to-day life would have been like as a trainee surgeon and dresser: the duties, responsibilities and timetable. Ghosh shows that the role was incredibly hands-on. On 'taking-in day', for instance, a contemporary dresser records that one 'took charge of all the surgical cases, which were received at ten o'clock', including attending to 'all the accidents and cases of hernia', 'dressed hosts of out-patients, drew innumerable teeth, and performed countless venesections [blood lettings]' (p. 121).

Ghosh scrupulously dates Keats's poetic compositions during his time at Guy's (pp. 124–28) and charts his gravitation from the Mathew circle (his 'pre-Guy's poetic friends' [p. 128]), via his re-acquaintance with Charles Cowden Clarke, to his engagement with the Hunt circle ('Joining Hunt's Circle in autumn 1816 lent impetus to Keats' determination to leave his medical training and focus on poetry' [p. 140]). The chapter delineates Keats' afterlife (pp. 130–37), and so places into context the influential and none-too-flattering 1847 account by Henry Stephens, which remains the only first-hand description we have of Keats at Guy's. Stephens was Keats' fellow student and sometime housemate, and would go on to have a long medical career, including publishing treatises on hernias (1829) and cholera (1849). Stephens' report diminishes Keats' medical ambitions and emphasises his poetical 'Aspirations', painting Keats as an arrogant so-and-so who thought 'Medical Knowledge was beneath his attention': 'amongst mere Medical students, he would walk, & talk as one of the Gods might be supposed to do, when mingling with mortals'.³ Stephens recalled his 'surprise' at Keats having passed his licentiate examination first time, a reaction perhaps coloured by that fact that Stephens had not himself achieved this feat (p. 138). Ghosh argues that Stephens' diatribe against 'the Poet John Keats' (the pointed phrase Stephens used at both the opening and

closing of his letter)⁴—should be read against its own contemporary background of post-*Adonais* mythmaking (p. 137).

Ghosh is content to chronicle Keats' two occupations running in parallel, and to focus less on their coalescences. Apart from the intriguing observation that 'I stood tip-toe upon a little Hill' (which was written 'certainly while he was fulfilling his dresser's duties at Guy's') articulates a concern for the heath-giving effects of cooling air (pp. 147–48)—as, for example, in the lines

The breezes were ethereal, and pure,
And crept through half closed lattices to cure
The languid sick; it cool'd their fever'd sleep,
And soothed them into slumbers full and deep.
Soon they awoke clear eyed: nor burnt with thirsting,
Nor with hot fingers, nor with temples bursting:
And springing up, they met the wond'ring sight
Of their dear friends, nigh foolish with delight (ll. 221–28)


there is little textual engagement with the poetry itself. The information provided by Ghosh, however, will surely prove invaluable to scholars wishing to undertake such analysis themselves.

Chapter 3, 'Keats' Medical Milieu', will be enriching for readers seeking an account of the intellectual environment that flourished in London's teaching hospitals at the time that Keats was a student; including the Vitalism debates (pp. 162–66); the contention over John Brown's theories of excitability, and the likely rejection by surgeons of a Brunonian system that rendered local interventions—i.e. surgeries—pointless (pp. 166–69); and Cooper's insistence on the importance for medical students of dissecting human corpses ('Dissection alone affords a good practical kno[w]ledge of anatomy'—*The Lectures of Astley P. Cooper Esqr on Surgery*, manuscript qtd on p. 170). The account of the 'Physical Society of Guy's Hospital' and its up-to-date library is particularly illuminating (pp. 158–60).

Keats' medical notebook provides evidence not only of his intellectual development but also of his writerly process, notably his skill in fusing and distilling imagery. Ghosh draws this out particularly in chapter 4, 'Scholar and Poet', by comparing Keats' own concise notes with those of a contemporary, Joshua Waddington, who was a more prosaic notetaker. Waddington's wordy descriptions—for instance, 'Volition does not reside altogether in the Brain but in part in the Spinal Marrow; this is proved by taking off the Head of an Animal, & placing it upon its back, when it will be found to turn upon its Belly; but if you carry a wire down the Spinal Marrow, the animal will cease to have the power of turning itself' (p. 199)—slip easily from the mind when compared with Keats' memorable truncation of the same moment in Cooper's lecture—'Volition [...] does not reside entirely in the Brain but partly in ye spinal Marrow which is seen in the Behaviour of a Frog after having been guilloteened [*sic*]' (p. 35). The chapter articulates how Keats' concision—his 'well-condensed expression', in the words of Horace Smith, or his 'poetical

concentrations' as Leigh Hunt would later put it (p. 197)—was a technique that he developed and honed through the process of medical notetaking.

Ghosh contends persuasively that the way in which Keats' poetry conveys direct evocations of extreme emotional states through specific bodily description is an essential component of 'their enduring vitality' (p. 203); as, for example, in Saturn's 'old right hand [that] lay nerveless, listless, dead, | Unsceptred' in *Hyperion* (pp. 199–201). This physiology of emotion is interrogated more fully, and in specific relation to *Endymion*, in chapter 5, 'The Physiology of Passion'. Here Keats' hospital experience is shown to be reflected in Niobe's 'trembling knee | And frantic gape', which displays a 'Bedlam vision' to use Lord Byron's phrase (pp. 225–26). The depiction of sympathetic 'midnight spirit nurse' Peona, meanwhile, is revealed as congruous with contemporary medical textbooks on ethical conduct; such as, *The Hospital Pupil's Guide, Being Oracular Communications, Addressed to Students of the Medical Profession* (originally 1816), produced by Guy's Hospital, which advocated a similar tending to patients with 'benevolence of disposition and unwearied diligence' (pp. 228–32).

The reader is repeatedly assured that Keats' medical notebook strikingly prefigures aspects of his 'mature' poetry, yet when we arrive at chapter 6, 'The Only State for the Best Sort of Poetry'—which one might anticipate would be the culmination of this enticing line of enquiry (and after an excursion through 'The Biographical Angle' of the production of the 1820 volume, pp. 234–54)—comparatively little space is granted to the poems' exploration (pp. 254–68). This is prone to leave one—with 'A burning forehead, and a parching tongue' ('Ode on a Grecian Urn', l. 30)—wanting more. The analysis that is present is richly suggestive: 'Isabella's anatomically accurate account of the disintegration of Lorenzo's face (that eyelashes remain after eyeballs have rotted [p. 255]); Madeline's 'distracted attention' in 'The Eve of St Agnes' and the narrative voice's 'undistracted attention' in 'Ode to a Nightingale' provoking different kinds of 'waking dream or reverie', as discussed in contemporary medical textbooks such as John and Charles Bell's *The Anatomy and Physiology of the Human Body* (1802–04, pp. 256–60); and the paradox implicit within pharmacological *materia medica*, that deadly toxins and poisons—such as wolfsbane, nightshade, yew-berries, peonies—can be used to cure and restore, which informs Keats' understanding of the ambiguities of 'the melancholy fit' (l. 11) in 'Ode on Melancholy' (pp. 260–68). No doubt, given the obvious importance of this annotated edition and the wealth of contextualising medical material that Ghosh has assembled, further readings on the effects of Keats's medical training on his poetic imagination will spring from this work. As the author tantalisingly suggests, within the medico-poetical vein there is much in Keats' oeuvre that remains 'warm and still to be enjoy'd' ('Ode on a Grecian Urn', l. 26). 

NOTES

1. John Keats, 'This living hand, now warm and capable', in *The Poems of John Keats*, ed. by Jack Stillinger (London: Heinemann, 1978), p. 503 (l. 1).
2. 'Z' [John Gibson Lockhart], 'Cockney School of Poetry IV', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* (August 1818), 519–24 (p. 524).
3. Henry Stephens to George Felton Mathew, March[?] 1847, in *Keats Circle*, ed. by Hyder Edward Rollins, 2nd edn, 2 vols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969), II, 206–21 (pp. 208–09).
4. *Ibid.*, II, 206 and 214.

Octavia Cox
University of Oxford

<https://doi.org/10.18573/romtext.111>

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Date of acceptance: 27 September 2021.



Daisy Hay, *The Making of Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 2019), 128pp. ISBN 978-1-8512-4486-7; £12.99 (pb).

IT IS WELL KNOWN THAT THE LITERARY LEGEND *FRANKENSTEIN* was produced during the Genevan summer of 1816 when Mary Shelley was enjoying an evening of ghost stories with friends at Byron's house, the Villa Diodati. Daisy Hay's *The Making of Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* celebrates the two hundredth birthday of *Frankenstein* by tracing the journey of Mary Shelley's creation from her manuscripts to pop culture standby. It showcases five chapters, revealing the complex story of the novel's birth through an assemblage of objects and images which are mainly drawn from the collection of the Bodleian Library at Oxford. Hay takes a historical approach by tracing the inspiration of the story back to a heterogeneous mixture of things, the material bases which Mary appropriates for literary creation. Hay points out that Mary's novel writing is parallel to Frankenstein's construction of his creature—an assortment of body parts are purloined to form a new whole.

The opening chapter 'Time' gives us an investigation about the external things she internalised and incorporated into her imaginative visions. Hay presents how in *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley drew upon ghost stories she read including the anthology *Fantasmagoriana* (1812) and Coleridge's 'Christabel' (1816). She also drew on 'a visual grammar of Gothic monstrosity that developed in the second half of the eighteenth century', including paintings by artists Francisco de Goya and Henry Fuseli (p. 21). Hay argues that *Frankenstein* displays scientific ideas Mary percolated in her time. Three interconnected strands of influences on the science of *Frankenstein* are identified: Galvani's