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Anna Gasperini

As far back as 1989, Horace Montgomery defined the relationship established by the medical fraternity with the bodysnatchers during the nineteenth century "a Faustian bargain" (Montgomery 532). Studies regarding the black market for cadavers have progressed since this statement was made. Historians such as Lisa Rosner (2010) and Elizabeth T. Hurren (2012) discuss the trade in corpses involving doctors and bodysnatchers from a perspective that examines the behaviors and motives of both parties, following a tradition started by Ruth Richardson in 1987 with her critical reading of the 1832 Anatomy Act, *Death, Dissection and the Destitute*. This article contributes to the ongoing debate on the black market for cadavers, examining the topic from a literary perspective and considering two broadly famous body dealers of Victorian popular fiction: Sweeney Todd, the demon barber of J.M. Rymer's *The String of Pearls,*[1] and Anthony Tidkins, also known as The Resurrection Man, of G.W.M. Reynolds' *The Mysteries of London*.[2] These two narratives belong to the genre of the Penny Bloods,[3] lurid serialized fiction on sale at one penny per weekly issue that targeted the poorer strata of society, a group which was also the targeted victims of the black market for cadavers. Indeed, the cheap coffins of the poor, buried in shallow graves, were the ideal prey for the bodysnatchers who supplied the anatomy schools with "subjects" for dissection.

When considering Todd and Tidkins, these two villains stand out from the rest of their kind because they are not just bad: they are demons. They physically resemble demons, they act like demons, and they are defined as demons by the narrator and by other characters. The reason for such a marked difference between these two characters and other villains from Penny Bloods becomes clear if we consider the one thing that they have in common but that no other villain shares with them: Sweeney Todd and Anthony Tidkins trade in cadavers. These two characters were created in the mid-1840s, right in the middle of the period in which Parliament was trying to regulate the way that anatomy schools obtained bodies for dissection by the passing of laws that compelled the poor to give up their dead kin for dissection, in case they could not afford a funeral. It could be argued, then, that the production of this kind of narrative–showing cadavers, whether stolen or the result of murder, traded, processed and sold–is a reaction to the anxiety this situation created. Combining a close reading of the physical and moral features of the two characters with an examination of the historical context in which they were developed, this article investigates what exactly these demoniac characters represented and to what purpose. The ultimate goal is that of ascertaining whether these demoniac portraits supported or challenged the marked juxtaposition of Faustus and Mephistopheles, which, if Montgomery meant it as a metaphor in the 1980s, was a widely accepted concept in the nineteenth century.

In order to understand why this juxtaposition was widely accepted, it is necessary to examine the historical situation in which these narratives developed. In the decades that preceded their publication, three events happened that radically changed the experience of death and bereavement among the poor: the black market for cadavers, burkophobia, and the laws regulating anatomy. Since the sixteenth century, surgeons had been practicing dissection on the cadavers of hanged criminals; in 1745, however, dissection became the distinctive trait of the death sentence of murderers. The demographic explosion that occurred in England during the second half of the eighteenth century and the structural changes the medical profession and education underwent caused the number of medical students to increase considerably by the end of the eighteenth century (Hurren 78–79). At the same time, the knowledge of human anatomy became crucial to qualify as a surgeon. Consequently, more corpses were needed for dissection. The number of murderers was not sufficient to answer this demand (Hurren 80) and a clandestine market for cadavers arose, directed by a new, unofficial, category of professionals: the bodysnatchers. They were also known as "sack-'em-up men," resurrectionists and resurrection men–all their names explaining their activities: they were people who traded in cadavers. They broke into cemeteries by night to disinter freshly-buried corpses and sell them to the anatomy schools. They belonged to the lower class and were as much feared as they were hated, for not only did they hurt the feelings of the living by disturbing the sleep of the dead, but they were also believed to be burglars and thieves. So strong was the aversion towards the bodysnatchers that, when they were discovered, the reaction of the local population verged on riot. When the theft of two bodies was discovered in Greenwich in 1832, "the police had the utmost difficulty to prevent [the bodysnatchers] being sacrificed by the indignant multitude" ("Apprehension"). Moreover, sometimes thieves caught wandering at night with a cart declared themselves to be bodysnatchers to cover their activity. In this way, the bodysnatchers were gradually associated also with housebreaking and theft (Witness of A.B., bodysnatcher, 70, *Report from the Select Committee for Anatomy*, London 1828, hereafter referred to in the text as *RSCA*). In order to prevent bodysnatchers from robbing the graves, people started patrolling the cemeteries and more than one bodysnatcher was shot by the patrollers. The "business," as the bodysnatchers called it,[4] became more and more dangerous, which caused an increase in the price of the bodies and many hard feelings between the surgeons and the bodysnatchers.[5]

Consequently, after 1800, the medical community started discussing the possibility of finding legal sources of cadavers for dissection. In April 1828, Parliament appointed a Select Committee to investigate the means by which anatomy schools obtained subjects for dissection. Sir Astley Cooper, one of the most famous surgeons of England at the time, when examined by the Committee stated that the resurrectionists were "[t]he lowest dregs of degradation; … there is no crime they would not commit" (*RSCA* 17-18). Ironically, Sir Astley was one of the best customers of London's resurrectionists; however, his view was widely accepted and it seemed to find confirmation in the events that happened the following November: two men of Irish origin, William Burke and William Hare, were arrested in Edinburgh for the murder of Madgy Docherty, whose cadaver they tried to sell to Dr. Robert Knox for dissection. The method used to kill her, a particular means of suffocation that left no trace, was named "burking" after Burke, who was sentenced to death, while Hare had turned King's evidence. In his confession, Burke stated that he and Hare had killed in the same way about sixteen people in one year and sold them all to Dr. Knox. Knox, a talented surgeon, never took part in the trial, neither as an accused nor as a witness: for the whole duration of the trial, he behaved as if the whole matter was a personal attack on him (Rosner 148).

The Edinburgh "burkers" case provoked a wave of panic that contemporary newspapers labelled "burkophobia" (Richardson 194): whenever someone disappeared, another case of burking was suspected. This is probably why John Bishop and Thomas Williams were dubbed "the London burkers" when they were apprehended in 1831 for trying to sell a suspiciously fresh cadaver to a surgeon. Although they drowned their victims in a well in Bishop's backyard instead of suffocating them like Burke and Hare did, the similar *modus operandi* of attracting hapless people into their house, getting them drunk, and then killing them, with the purpose of selling the body as a subject for anatomy, gained them the name of burkers. Of course, when they sold their merchandise to the doctors, these four men did not introduce themselves as murderers, but they posed as bodysnatchers. The word "burker," then, became attached to the resurrectionists, adding much to their already negative reputation. The burkophobia wave alerted the wider public to the ongoing clandestine trade between the bodysnatchers and the surgeons, bringing all social classes under the umbrella of fear and, potentially, dissection, which until now had covered only the poor.[6] Burkophobia provided the final push for the reform that the medical fraternity and Parliament had been invoking for some time. In 1832, Parliament voted in the Anatomy Act, which compelled the poor to give up their dead relatives for dissection if they were unable to pay for their funeral. Two years later, Parliament also approved the Poor Law Amendment Act, which compelled the workhouses to hand over all unclaimed bodies for dissection. The fear of dissection fell back on the poorer class and order was restored, even though the black market for cadavers continued to exist.[7] Indeed, twenty-four years later, Parliament approved the Medical Act which, among other things, officially allowed the anatomists to purchase human material generated by the body trade for their lessons (Hurren 4). This set of events added feelings of fear, uncertainty, and injustice to the experience of bereavement for the poor. The reason for concern changed from having dead relative stolen by thieves to being compelled by the law to hand the dead over to undergo the very same fate from which they tried to protect them by patrolling the cemeteries. It was in this historical framework that the two demoniac body dealers Todd and Tidkins made their appearance.

Due to the audience they targeted, the narrative techniques used in the Bloods were quite basic; the chief means to define a character was through their physicality. These physical descriptions immediately gave an idea of what kind of character the reader was facing and villains would always give away their own true nature through some feature, usually set in the eyes. Mrs. Lovett, for instance, the pie-maker who uses Todd's dead customers as filling for her pies, has "a luring devil in her eyes" (31), as opposed to Johanna Oakley, the heroine of *The String of Pearls*, whose eyes are "of a deep and heavenly blue" (12). Anthony Tidkins and Sweeney Todd, however, are exceptions. The physical descriptions that introduce them do much more than simply reveal their characters; they put the reader on the lookout for danger from the beginning, making one thing clear: the characters described are not entirely human. Let us consider the description of Sweeney Todd first. The barber engages in a mutually beneficial relationship with his pie-maker neighbor: Todd murders his customers to rob them, dropping their bodies head first into the vaults between his barber shop and Mrs. Lovett's pie shop. In this way, he also provides her with the meat she needs to produce her pies. The narrator paints a highly detailed picture of the barber. From the very first lines, however, he lingers on quite unexpected details:

> The barber himself was a long, low-jointed, ill-put-together sort of fellow, with an immense mouth, and such huge hands and feet, that he was, in his way, quite a natural curiosity; and what was more wonderful, considering his trade, there never was such a head of hair as Sweeney Todd's. (4)

What is interesting about this description is the purposeful representation of a disproportionate character, immediately conveyed through the "ill-put-together" opening comment. Everything about Todd is out of proportion: he is "long," the mouth is "immense," his extremities are "huge," and his "head of hair" is such as to be wonderful. The description of this gaunt individual suggests that his physicality, as a "natural curiosity," would probably better fit in a freak show than in a barber shop. However, the mention of the "huge" hands and feet and the disproportionate mouth suggests danger: Todd is a freak, but one not to fool with. Big extremities imply threatening strength, and a big mouth implies a big appetite. To reinforce this uncanny picture, the narrator focuses on another detail sure to make an impression on the reader; that is, Todd's "disagreeable kind of unmirthful laugh" (4). The barber gives his "short," "sudden" and "hyena-like" laughter at unexpected moments, so that people "look … all around them … scarcely supposing it possible that it proceeded from mortal lips" (4). The resemblance to the call of the hyena, a scavenger, and the suggestion of a possible supernatural origin of the sound alert the readers. Finally, the narrator completes the description, adding almost carelessly that "Mr. Todd squinted a little to add to his charms" (4). As stated above, something odd in the gaze usually gives away the villains in the Penny Bloods; the eyes of Sweeney Todd, on top of the previous descriptions of his person, do not just give him away with their strange gaze: they are simply wrong.

The ogre-like look of Todd and the sense of something wrong about him is further reinforced when a joke made by his newly hired assistant, Tobias Ragg, about the possibility of being "made into veal pies at Lovett's in Bell Yard" (6) startles the barber: "Sweeney Todd rose from his seat; and opening his huge mouth, he looked at the boy for a minute or two in silence as if he fully intended swallowing him, but had not quite made up his mind where to begin" (6). The mouth on which so much emphasis was put at the beginning of the story appears again and in a way that suggests the action its "huge" proportions hint at: Todd opens his mouth and seems to be "fully" willing to swallow the boy. He looks more and more like an ogre, and this impression is made explicit in the following chapter:

> Sweeney Todd ... entered his own shop ... and folding his great gaunt-looking arms over his chest, he gave himself up to thought, and, if we might judge from the expression of his countenance, those thoughts were of pleasing anticipatory character, for now and then he gave such a grim sort of smile as might as well have sat upon the features of some ogre. (28)

Again, emphasis is put on Todd's huge extremities and something darker is suggested: he looks like an ogre, a man-eating giant, and it is his "pleasing and anticipatory" thoughts that make him look as such. This implies that the barber's monstrous appearance matches an equally monstrous inside. Indeed, the reader soon learns that Todd is never to be trusted: in his opening speech to his newly-hired assistant, Tobias, he threatens to cut his throat if he will ever speak about anything going on in the shop. In fact, as soon as the boy says a word too much about a mysteriously disappeared customer, the barber beats him savagely.

Let us now consider the Resurrection Man of *The Mysteries of London*. The narrator takes a mere few lines to introduce Anthony Tidkins to the reader, but in these few lines he chooses words that convey a feeling of danger:

> This individual was a very short, thin, cadaverous-looking man, with coal-black hair and whiskers, and dark, piercing eyes half concealed beneath shaggy brows of the deepest jet ... and when he spoke, he seemed as if he could not support the glance of the person whom he addressed. (70)

The first and foremost feature of the Resurrection Man is his "cadaverous" look, which will accompany him throughout the whole story. He is not simply thin or pale; he resembles a corpse. Furthermore, as in *The String of Pearls*, in *The Mysteries of London* the eyes are central in physical descriptions: good characters have beautiful eyes, while the first place where villains usually show their base nature is their gaze. Eliza Sydney, the heroine of *The Mysteries of London*, has "soft and intelligent" hazel eyes (19), while the expression of the two criminals in the abandoned house at the beginning of the story is "dogged, determined and ferocious" (4). The Resurrection Man, however, is an altogether different case: this character has piercing eyes, but he does not like people to look straight into them. His eyes can penetrate into other people's nature, but he does not want people to inquire about his own, and the reader wonders what he may wish to conceal.

In spite of his eagerness to avoid other people's eyes, the Resurrection Man is more straightforward than the barber about himself. Todd prefers people to think well enough of him in spite of his exterior; Anthony Tidkins instead, after exchanging a few words with Richard Markham, the hero, immediately introduces himself by his terrible nickname:

> "[I]f I can ever do you a service … you may reckon upon the Resurrection Man." "The Resurrection Man!" ejaculated Richard, appalled, in spite of himself, at this ominous title. "Yes–that's my name and profession … you may know me as Anthony Tidkins, the Resurrection Man." "And are you really –" began Richard, "A body-snatcher?" cried Anthony; "of course I am." (71)

This cadaverous-looking man identifies his name with his profession and wants other people to do the same. His purpose is that of making such an impression, between his physical aspect and his name, that his listener will not easily forget him.

As each narrative progresses, the portraits of Todd and Tidkins become increasingly murky as odd physical abilities start appearing beside the odd look. This progressive introduction of extraordinary abilities is accompanied by a change in diction that gradually makes the readers aware they are not facing common villains but they are, indeed, confronting demons. In chapters 7 and 8 of *The String of Pearls*, Sweeney Todd is chased twice, and in both cases, he manages to overcome his foes. The vocabulary used by the narrator emphasizes Todd's superior strength, which is described as "perfectly prodigious," and his blows are "great" and "herculean." Superhuman physical strength, matched by the brutal, sadistic violence showed by the barber since the very first chapter, is alarming indeed; however, it is not yet Todd's most disquieting trait.

In chapter 11, a disguised figure, which requires little imagination to identify as Todd, steals to the shoulders of an unhappy prisoner in the basement of Lovett's pie-shop so silently that "it is impossible to hear the slightest sound of his footsteps" (95). The figure carries a double-headed hammer, and the prisoner soon dies a most violent death. Besides the violence of the attack, what is really frightening in this scene is the utter impossibility on the part of the victim hearing his killer coming. The scene is repeated ten chapters later, when Todd creeps behind Tobias's shoulders while the boy is contemplating publicly accusing him of being a murderer:

> Sweeney Todd ... stole quietly from his place of concealment, and with so little noise, that Tobias could not have the least suspicion anyone was in the room but himself. … [H]e thus at length got completely behind the chair on which Tobias was sitting, and stood with folded arms, and such a hideous smile upon his face that they together formed no inept representation of the Mephistopheles of the German drama .... [He] stretched out his two brawny hands, and clutched Tobias by the head, which he turned round till the boy could see him, then said,- "Indeed, Tobias, and did it never strike you that Todd was not so easily to be overcome as you would wish him, eh, Tobias?" ... [W]ith his head so strangely twisted as to seem to threaten the destruction of his neck, [Tobias] glared in the triumphant and malignant countenance of his persecutor, as he would into that of the arch enemy of all mankind, which probably he now began to think the barber really was. (163)

This scene both summarizes and confirms everything uncanny that has been suggested about Todd until this point: Todd is represented as Mephistopheles. He stands behind the boy's shoulders like a malevolent spirit, and in Tobias's eyes he becomes "the arch-enemy of all mankind." At this point, the vocabulary describing Todd has altered significantly, turning the barber from "freakish monster" into "demon." For instance, some chapters earlier, Todd had decided to dispose of both the boy and of his business partner, Mrs. Lovett, and then, lost in these "pleasant reflections" he looks like "some fiend in human shape, who had just completed the destruction of a human soul" (142). The word "fiend" has ancient origins and its basic meaning of "enemy" is connected to the world of occult forces and magic, indicating a generic demon or evil spirit, the devil itself as the enemy of mankind, and, finally, a person of supernatural wickedness. Later on, during a conversation between the barber and Mrs. Lovett, the woman exclaims bitterly: "Oh. Todd, what an enemy you have been to me!" (264). The concept of "enemy" meaning "devil" seems to belong to Todd after his murderous nature is made explicit. Sweeney Todd's crimes, indeed, which consist not only in dealing in corpses, like a bodysnatcher, but also in killing people to supply a system aimed at dismembering the dead body, like a burker, make him as inimical to humankind as the devil, and dealing with him on a professional ground causes the loss of the soul.

The same dynamics occur in the *Mysteries of London* in what is probably the most famous episode of the whole work, the chapter titled "The Body-Snatchers." The Resurrection Man and his gang are meeting a doctor who needs a certain body that is buried in a church. While the Resurrection Man is looking for a way to get into the church, the gang enacts a special coded communication:

> [T]he Buffer threw himself flat upon his stomach, with his ear towards the ground. He remained in this position for some minutes, and then uttered a species of low growl as if he were answering some signal that caught his ears alone.
>
> "The skeleton-key won't open the side-door, the Resurrection Man says." (126)

The prone position of the Buffer, "flat upon his stomach" on the ground, with his ear touching the earth, like a snake slithering on the ground, puts him on a baser level with respect to other human beings, nearer to animals. Later in the narrative, in another episode of body-snatching, in order to convey how easily the bodysnatchers could move in the dark, the narrator explains that "[t]he eyes of these men had become so habituated to the obscurity of night, in consequence of the frequency with which they pursued their avocations during the darkness … that they were possessed of the visual acuteness generally ascribed to cats" (330). Their nocturnal behavior makes the bodysnatchers less human and contributes to bringing them nearer to beasts, making their sight as fine as that of cats. Therefore, the resurrectionist is perceived as a lower sort of creature who renounces his humanity in order to perform his task. This concept shows more than mere contempt towards the category: it implies a strong moral judgment. The cat-like sight and the exceptionally fine ear make the bodysnatcher a preternatural creature. In fact, the communication between the Buffer and the Resurrection Man strikes the surgeon as telepathic:

> [The doctor] could not altogether subdue certain feelings of horror ... The almost mute correspondence which those two men were enabled to carry on together–the methodical precision with which they performed their avocations–and the coolness they exhibited in undertaking a sacrilegious task, made a powerful impression upon his mind. He shuddered from head to foot:–his feelings of aversion were the same as he would have experienced had a loathsome reptile crawled over his naked flesh. (126)

The moral judgment emerges clearly from this passage. Since the bodysnatchers are closer to animals, it is possible for them to ignore the sense of sacrilege, which is difficult for a human being. Indeed, what impresses the doctor is the lack of religious feelings, the carelessness these men show towards the idea of doing something that may cost them the divine pardon. This animal-sacrilegious dimension is represented on a powerfully visual and tactile level by the "loathsome reptile crawling on his naked flesh." Besides reminding the prone, close-to-the-earth position of the Buffer, the "reptile," recalling the biblical Serpent, also works in the passage to reveal the demoniac nature of bodysnatchers: the three men are gifted with the superior senses of animals and feel at ease in the dark that common people usually shun, because the sacrilegious deed they perform in the darkness is a "vocation" for them. Indeed, both in the passage above and later, when their sight is compared to that of cats (330), their body-snatching activities are defined as "avocations." This term implies a determination to perform an action. Also, it is applied frequently to those who feel called to the church. Thus, the term creates a stark contrast: on the one side, it connects the deed of the bodysnatchers to religion; on the other, it emphasizes the scorn for religion their actions imply. The willfulness to commit sacrilege and the rejection of the most sacred human conventions concerning death, together with the consequent approach towards a beast-like wildness, remove the bodysnatchers from a human ground to an inhuman, demoniac one. The change reaches its acme when finally the tomb is identified and the gang starts working to snatch the body from the grave:

> It suddenly appeared to him as if he beheld those men for the first time. That continuation of regular and systematic movements–that silent perseverance ... at length assumed so singular character, that the surgeon felt as if he beheld three demons disinterring a doomed one to carry him off to hell! (126-127)

From this passage emerges the same dynamic observed in *The String of Pearls*: professional engagement with the body-dealing demon causes the loss of the soul. Indeed, the horror that strikes the surgeon while contemplating the bodysnatchers at work is directed, not towards the body the three men are desecrating, but actually towards himself. Once the coffin is open, the corpse is revealed to be that of a young maiden of sixteen. However, the male gender used in the quotation above –"three demons disinterring a doomed one to carry *him* off to hell"–indicates that the doctor is not concerned about the girl, but about himself: he feels that availing himself of the three demons' services is costing him his own soul. There is a difference here, though, between *The String of Pearls* and *The Mysteries of London*: when Tobias realizes he is dealing with a demon, he decides to fight him; the surgeon, instead, does not. The reason why the surgeon decides to go ahead, even though this means the sacrifice of his soul, is stated by the narrator at the beginning of the episode: it is his "thirst after science" that "had called into action the energies of the body-snatchers that night" (125). Like Faustus who summoned, not one, but three Mephistopheles to quench his thirst for knowledge, he is determined to achieve his goal no matter the cost.

It is possible to see, then, that the human shape of Todd and Tidkins is monstrous because it mirrors the demon inside. They look human, but actually they are *in*human, they renounced their humanity in order to gain something else: money. The Resurrection Man snatches cadavers for money, and Sweeney Todd murders his customers to rob them, and in both cases the corpse, and therefore the individual it was in life, is processed and annihilated.

We know that at the time in which the characters of Todd and Tidkins were conceived there were actually people who handled cadavers to sell them for money, but also other people who purchased these cadaver from them and processed them in a way that made them no longer recognizable as individuals. These people are only hinted at by Rymer, but they are explicitly mentioned by Reynolds: they are the surgeons.

As we have seen, the medical fraternity encouraged the idea that the bodysnatchers played the role of Mephistopheles in their business relationship. When the Select Committee for Anatomy examined Sir Astley Cooper, not only did he define the resurrectionists as "the lowest dregs of degradation," but he also stated that the anatomy teachers of London were "completely at the feet of the resurrection men" (*RSCA* 17) and that it was "very distressing to [the surgeons'] feelings," as "men of character and education," to be obliged to "employ very very faulty agents to obtain a desirable end" (*RSCA* 18). This murky portrait of the resurrectionists resembles that of Anthony Tidkins, while the doctors seem to be much affected by this relationship, in which they have been driven only by their desire to pursue higher goals. However, a true-life bodysnatcher, "A.B.," was heard by the Committee later on. He was asked if he thought a change in the law that made unclaimed corpses from the workhouses available to the doctors would be "the best protection to churchyards" and his answer was:

> Yes, to supply schools; because, if they get the subjects from the hospitals and our workhouses, they would not rob the grave. (*RSCA* 72)

The conflation of both the robbers and the surgeons by referring to both as "they" in this sentence produces a significant effect: *they*, the schools, would get the subjects, so *they*, the bodysnatchers, would stop robbing the graves. It is obvious that in the mind of A.B. the doctors were not as removed as they claimed to be from the action of robbing the graves. With his plain, matter-of-fact statement, the resurrectionist pointed out a simple truth; that is, it takes two parties to make a deal, just as it takes a Faustus to summon a Mephistopheles.

This is a point the two narratives examined also make. As we saw, the doctor of "The Body-Snatchers" episode is repelled by the "demons," but still he avails himself of their services: the demons are the "very faulty agents" that will allow him to reach "a desirable end." Likewise, Mrs. Lovett is tormented by the thought of what Todd helped her to achieve, but she never thinks of terminating their business relationship because her gain is more important to her. Actually, in *The String of Pearls* homicide is based on a simple principle of market demand similar to the one at the basis of the black market for cadavers. Since there is a constant demand for more pies, there is also a constant necessity for more cadavers. How the meat is obtained is irrelevant if compared to the "desirable end," the pies and, ultimately, Mrs. Lovett's gain.

The figure of Todd the barber is particularly meaningful within this context: when *The String of Pearls* was being issued, barely one century had elapsed from the separation of the profession of barber from that of surgeon in 1745.[8] Furthermore, the story itself takes place during the reign of George the Third, that is, between 1760 and 1820, which brings the events even closer to the period when the same person performed the profession of the barber and that of the surgeon. Therefore, *The String of Pearls* shows a figure that people associated with cutting–both hair and from a surgical point of view–who cuts people into pieces in a dark environment under the ground. To a Victorian reader such a picture recalled another image that awakened in them uncomfortable feelings beyond the immediate *frisson* produced by Lovett's pies:

> The dissecting room was underground and there was a museum of skeletons and hearts, livers, legs and lights upstairs; … And downstairs there were usually a dozen dead bodies, stolen from churchyards or bought on the sly ... besides a number of amputated limbs, such as heads, arms & legs, &c. in various stages of *scientific preparation* [sic] ... The dissecting room was not down stairs but down *ladder* [sic] …. [I]n one room were the

> operators, and in another room a sort of back kitchen with a water pipe and sink …. In this sink there was generally a body lying, and the water running upon it. (qtd. in Hurren 86)

The description above appeared in *The Penny Satirist* in November 1840 and was related by an art student who had been admitted within the walls of certain anatomy schools in London during the 1830s. Hurren's comment explains what kind of glimpse an external observer had of what she defines as "the dissection room drama" (Hurren 74). From the description emerges the basic problem of the study of anatomy in the nineteenth century, that is, secrecy. Hurren explains that, according to the student, the chief advantage of the underground location was that "medical students could attend day and night without being seen" (Hurren 86). Combined with horrid accounts, secrecy supported the idea that something odd went on in the dissection room, and that nothing good could be expected from people who purchased stolen corpses. Surgeons gave the impression of being cold-blooded enough to be capable of everything. Indeed, after secrecy, the lack of sensibility and empathy was another characteristic that did not favor the anatomists in the eyes of the people. The environment described by the art student sounds inimical to the peace of mind of any human being, and yet demonstrators and students of anatomy moved about it apparently without being touched by its crudeness. This attitude, which appeared disturbing to the external observer, was rooted in the philosophy at the basis of the training of a surgeon. In order to turn the student into a professional anatomist, two separate actions had to take place: firstly, it was necessary to de-sensitize the students; then, it was imperative to de-humanize the dead.

Lisa Rosner, in her case study examining the "Edinburgh homicides" involving Burke, Hare and Dr. Knox, explains that the teacher of anatomy must first of all fight the religious and superstitious beliefs that prevented the medical students to consider a cadaver only as an object of analysis. "[T]he work at hand required students to leave behind their religious beliefs in the sanctity of burial, and their superstitious fear of dead bodies" (Rosner 155), so when Dr. Knox purchased the cadavers for the winter lessons, he purchased subjects that were "nearly all anonymous" (Rosner 155). The very term "subject" marked the passage from identity and self in life ("he" or "she") to objectification in death ("it") because, as Rosner points out, the term put a distance between the body and its human origins. The transformation of the corpse from "person" to "anatomical subject" supported also the de-humanization of the cadaver in the eyes of the students. Rosner argues that "[p]erhaps the most successful operation Knox's anatomy classes performed was … the transformation of once living people into anonymous dissecting material, and the concomitant transformation of novice students … into proficient dissectors who could contemplate a dead body without a qualm or pang of conscience" (Rosner 167).

The world of anatomy, then, was surrounded by a mixed aura of sacrilege and savagery in the eyes of the external observers, who certainly did not receive the de-sensitizing training offered to the students of anatomy. In their mind a cadaver was still the person it was in life. Instead, the doctors, with their trained objectivity and their appalling practice of cutting people into pieces and then discarding them or exposing them in museums, were not perceived as human beings by the community outside the dissecting room. The resurrectionists, in turn, were considered the agents of this inhuman environment within the community, and therefore were all the more detestable. For the observer outside the dissection room, these people traded their humanity for a price, for a "desirable end": they were monsters; they were demons.

Sweeney Todd and the Resurrection Man can be defined as both the anatomy demons and the demons of anatomy. Considering the historical context of the study of anatomy, the breaking of religious and cultural taboos with regard to respecting the dead, overall dehumanized the surgeons and the bodysnatchers in the eyes of the wider community. In particular, that which was at the same time the target of the Penny Bloods and of the black market for cadavers. From the examination of the narratives within their historical background it emerges that inhumanity, which in reality was a moral quality attributed by the wider community to a group of individuals, was made explicit on the page through the representation of the demonic barber and resurrection man. The demon barber was a metaphor for the cold-blooded, goal-oriented efficiency of the surgeons dedicated to the "desirable end," but also for the inhuman market dynamics that moved the anatomy trade. The Resurrection Man, in turn, was an explicit representation of the demonic bodysnatcher, whom, by rejecting his respect for the dead, lost what made him a human being and in exchange was marked with demoniac features. As A.B. plainly ascribed to the anatomy schools—as much active in participation as the bodysnatchers in the grave-robbing activity—Sweeney Todd and the Resurrection Man were demoniac representations of both the agent and the instigator, charging Faustus with as much responsibility as the demon he evokes. It can be stated, therefore, that the representation of the demons in these narratives challenged the broadly accepted juxtaposition of Faustus and Mephistopheles, representing the two parties as equally blamable. The literature for the poor told the true feelings of its readers, who were as hostile to the idea that a body could be stolen as to the idea that someone would purchase it afterwards. The "Faustian" relationship illustrated by the medical fraternity, therefore, had no grasp on the mind of the poor. Since the debate on the need for legal sources of anatomical subjects was opened, the medical community always considered the poorer classes the best, indeed the only, possible source of bodies for dissection. It is not surprising, then, that the literature of the poor represented Faustus, not as a victim, but as one and the same with Mephistopheles.

Notes

1. J. M. Rymer's *The String of Pearls: A Romance* was published in *The People's Periodical and Family Library* edited by E. Lloyd between 1846 and 1847. All quotations are from the 2007 Oxford University Press edition edited by R.L. Mack, which uses the now-more-popular title *Sweeney Todd, the Demon Barber of Fleet Street*. I will refer to the text by its original title.
2. G. W. M. Reynolds' *The Mysteries of London*, vol. I. London: George Vickers, 1845.
3. The genre is also known, and probably better so, as "Penny Dreadfuls." Scholars make a distinction between the earlier, gorier productions, the "Penny Bloods" (1830-1860), and the later productions, the "Penny Dreadfuls" (from 1860 onwards), targeting a younger audience and focusing more on dashing adventures. For detailed information on this distinction, see James and Smith, *Penny Dreadfuls and Boys Adventure* (1998).
4. See *RSCA* (71-73).
5. In the *RSCA* (5), it is explained how the increasing risk of being shot or imprisoned made the bodysnatchers reckless: if a doctor refused to pay the increased fee, they would stop the supply (18). If opposed, that is, if bodies were obtained elsewhere, the bodysnatchers would break into anatomy theaters and spoil the cadavers for dissection (17) or leave tombs open on purpose in cemeteries to excite the population against the anatomists (5).
6. See Rosner (24).
7. See case *Rex versus Feist* discussed by Hurren (7-19).
8. The United Company of Barber-Surgeons, formed in 1540 by order of King Henry VIII (Hurren 325) split up in 1745. However, as Mack explains, this professional distinction may not have been clear in the popular mind, as "[m]edicine and surgery, on the one hand, and the activities of the barbers, on the other, only very slowly emerged as fully separate skills and identities" (Mack 87).

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