



Stephen Sondheim's

# **Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber Of Fleet Street**

**May 10–June 7**

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Pictured: Trisha Miller, *Argonautika* 2019, PHOTO BY CRAIG SCHWARTZ.

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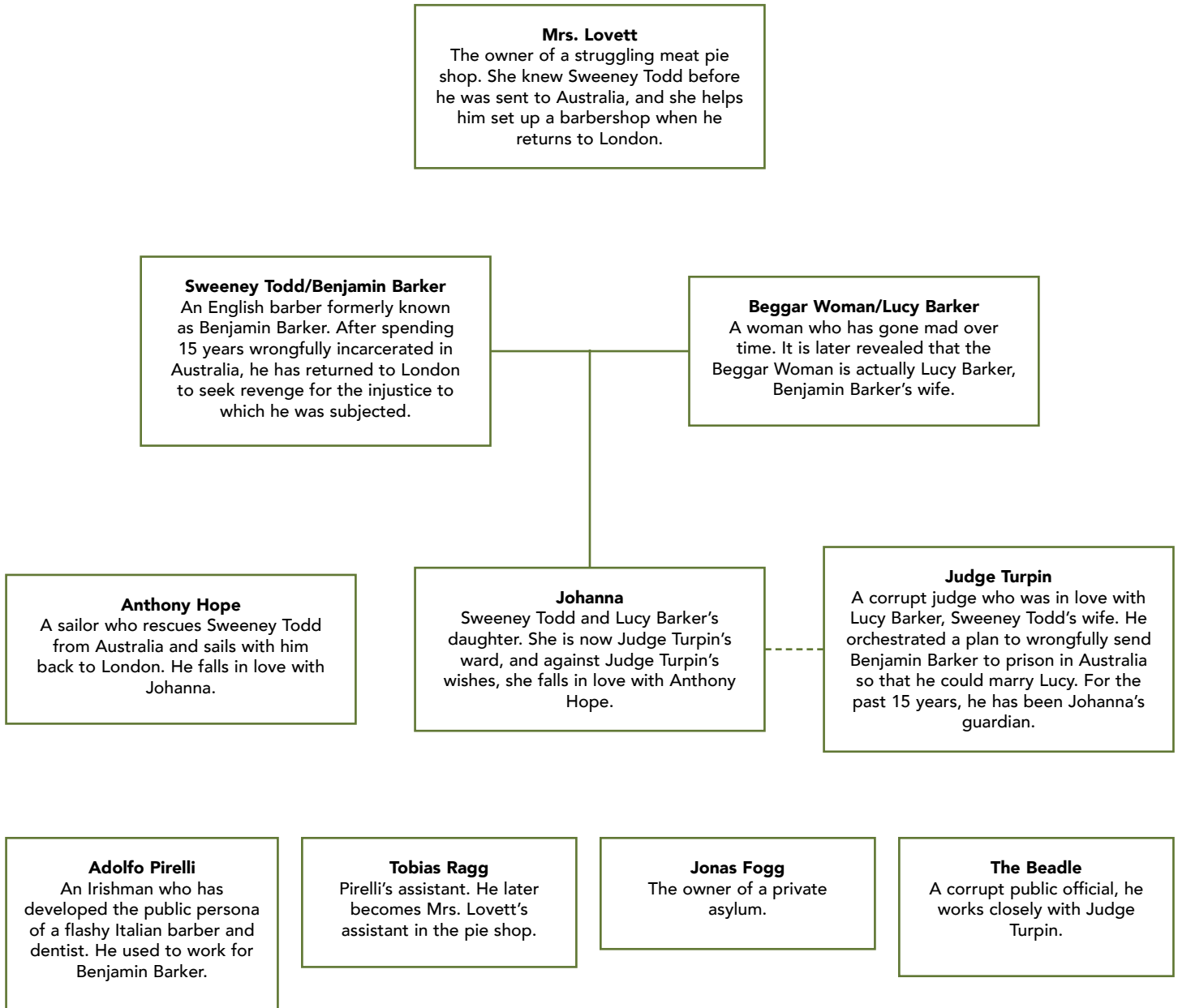
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# CHARACTER MAP



## SYNOPSIS

**After spending 15 years** wrongfully incarcerated in the British penal colony of Australia, Benjamin Barker, now known as Sweeney Todd, is finally returning to London. He is travelling with Anthony Hope, a young sailor. The two arrive in the city and are immediately confronted by a beggar woman asking for money. When she approaches Todd, she thinks she recognizes him. However, Todd quickly shoos her away.

Todd makes his way down Fleet Street to a struggling meat pie shop operated by Mrs. Lovett. Mrs. Lovett describes how she has a room for rent above her shop that no one wants to lease because of the room's history—there was a barber who ran his business out of the room, Mrs. Lovett tells Todd. The barber had a wife and a young daughter. However, Judge Turpin was in love with the barber's wife. Turpin had the barber sent to prison in Australia under false charges in order to give himself an opportunity to woo the barber's wife. After the barber was sent away, Judge Turpin invited the barber's wife to a masked ball, where he violated her. As she tells the story of the room's former tenants, Mrs. Lovett realizes that Todd is actually Benjamin Barker—the barber from the tale. Mrs. Lovett lets Todd know that not long after the incident at the masked ball, Lucy, Todd's wife, drank arsenic and died. After Lucy's death, Judge Turpin adopted Johanna, Todd's daughter, and has since been raising her as his ward. Hearing this, Todd vows to exact revenge on Turpin and his assistant, the Beadle, for the wrongs they have committed against him and his family. Mrs. Lovett fetches Todd's old razors and says that he can set up a business in the room above her pie shop.

Later, in the marketplace, hoping to attract business to his barbershop, Todd challenges Pirelli, a flashy Italian barber, to a shaving contest. It quickly becomes apparent that Todd is the better barber. The Beadle, an onlooker of the action and judge of the contest, is impressed with Todd's skill and promises to pay Todd a visit for a shave. This promise excites Todd—it presents an opportunity to take revenge.

While Todd anxiously awaits the Beadle's visit, Anthony arrives to tell Todd that he has fallen in love with Turpin's ward and plans to steal her away—completely unaware that the judge's ward is Todd's daughter. Not long after Anthony leaves, Pirelli and his assistant, Tobias, appear. Pirelli reveals that he knows Todd's true identity—he worked for Todd before he was sent to prison. Pirelli has come to blackmail Todd into working for him. However, before Pirelli's blackmail plan can come into effect, Todd kills him.

The scene shifts to Judge Turpin. Walking home from court with the Beadle, he reveals that he intends to marry Johanna. However, he describes to the Beadle that when he made his marriage proposal to Johanna, she seemed hesitant at the idea. The Beadle suggests to Turpin that he visit Sweeney Todd, as a good shave might make Johanna more interested in marrying Turpin.

In order to cover-up the murder of Pirelli, Todd and Mrs. Lovett exact a plan. They decide to bake Pirelli's body and the bodies of future barbershop customers into Mrs. Lovett's meat pies—after all, meat is expensive, and Todd, angry with all of humanity, has no qualms continuing to kill his patrons.

With the new meat pie recipe and a flood of patrons at Todd's barbershop, Mrs. Lovett's pie shop becomes incredibly popular. She even takes on Tobias to be her assistant. However, Tobias soon grows suspicious of Todd. Nervous about Tobias' suspicions, Mrs. Lovett locks Tobias in the bakehouse. While Tobias is in the bakehouse, the Beadle arrives at the shop, and Todd offers him a shave. During the shave, Todd slits the Beadle's throat and sends his body down a chute that leads directly to the bakehouse. Tobias, still in the bakehouse, sees the body and panics.

Before Todd addresses Tobias, Anthony and Johanna appear—they are on the run and on their way to elope. Anthony leaves Johanna in the barbershop while he goes to secure a coach to take them out of the city. Johanna, unsettled by the barbershop, hides in a trunk while Todd is out of the room. Not long after she does, the Beggar Woman wanders into the shop. Frustrated, Todd slits the Beggar Woman's throat and sends her body down the chute. As soon as the woman's body is gone, the Judge enters. Todd offers the Judge a shave, and finally slits his throat and sends him down the chute as well. Horrified, Johanna runs out of the room.

Todd, now able to deal with Tobias, goes to the bakehouse. However, when he is there, he gets a closer look at the Beggar Woman he killed only to realize that she is actually Lucy Barker, his wife. Todd realizes that Mrs. Lovett lied to him about his wife's death. Out of grief and anger, Todd kills Mrs. Lovett, pushing her into the oven. Tobias, witness to all this, finds one of Todd's razors and slits Todd's throat with it, ending the cycle of Sweeney Todd's revenge. ♦

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR: **GEORGE DIBDIN PITT**

**George Dibdin Pitt** was born on March 30, 1795 as George Cecil Pitt in northwest England to George Cecil Pitt senior and Sophia Pyne. He came from a well-known theatrical family, going all the way back to his great-grandmother, Ann Pitt, who was known for her numerous performances in Covent Garden.

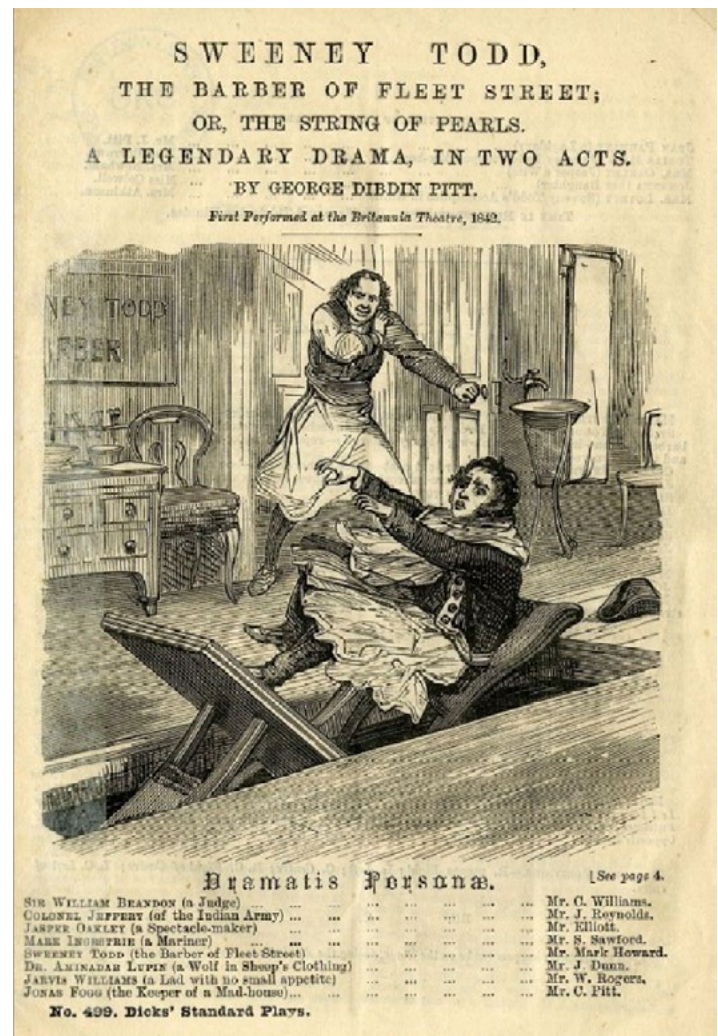
In 1801, the Pitt family moved to London, where George Cecil Pitt senior performed as a musician in Covent Garden and Sophia acted at the Haymarket. While there is no record of George Cecil Pitt junior attending school, he was quite well read—his plays are full of allusions to other works of literature and demonstrate a significant knowledge of history and geography.

When he was 15 years old, Pitt's uncle, Tom Dibdin, began to help Pitt land jobs as an actor at a regional theater company in Exeter. For reasons that are not entirely clear, Pitt changed his middle name from "Cecil" to "Dibdin" around this time—perhaps in gratitude to his uncle, perhaps to set himself apart from his father, or perhaps to capitalize on the Dibdin name which was a name much more well-known at the time. Eventually, Pitt began to perform at Tom Dibdin's own theater company in Surrey, a county which borders the Greater London area.

When he was 19 years old, Pitt married Sarah Humber, a lieutenant's daughter. A year after their marriage, they moved to Lancashire in northern England, where Pitt spent several years managing a touring theatrical circuit. In 1826, Pitt, his wife, and their four children returned to London where Pitt continued his career as a theatre artist. In the theatre, Pitt wore many hats—he acted, stage managed, and wrote. By 1839, Pitt had become the principal playwright for the City of London Theatre, where he also performed.

Pitt quickly became known for the vast number of popular melodramas he wrote. By 1842, nearly every minor theatre in London—including those in London's surrounding area—had produced at least one of Pitt's plays.

In 1844, Pitt took a position as the house dramatist and stage manager at the Britannia Saloon in Huxton, a very popular theatre in London's East End. There, Pitt began to churn out plays of all genres at a rate of one every two weeks. Many of Pitt's plays were adapted from popular novels, stories, and periodicals; and he continued to receive rave reviews for his work by the press. It was at Britannia Saloon in 1847 that Pitt's play, *The String of Pearls, or The Fiend of Fleet Street*, a play about a murderous barber who turns his victims into meat pies, was first performed. Pitt based his play off of a story titled *The String of Pearls: A Romance* that appeared in



Title page of *Sweeney Todd, The Barber of Fleet Street; Or, The String of Pearls* by George Dibdin Pitt.

1846 in *The People's Periodical*, a popular penny dreadful publication of the time that can be likened to tabloids today. While the exact authorship of the story is not entirely clear, Thomas Prest and James Rymer, popular penny dreadful journalists at the time, are believed to have written the story. Like the authorship of the penny dreadful story, it is also unclear as to whether the Sweeney Todd story is based at all in fact. It is the wide consensus that the story is a complete work of fiction. Nevertheless, George Dibdin Pitt is rumored to have advertised his adaptation as "based in fact."

Pitt was notorious for rewriting and changing his work over time—many of his plays went through numerous revisions even after they had been performed. *The String of Pearls, or The Fiend of Fleet Street* is no exception. This play changed considerably over the course of Pitt's life—and even after. In 1883, twenty-eight years after

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR: **GEORGE DIBDIN PITT** CONTINUED...

Pitt's death, *The String of Pearls* was first published under the name, *Sweeney Todd: The Barber of Fleet Street*.

While many of his plays were quite popular, Pitt's plays were often radical in their approach to class representation and in depicting strong female characters. Occasionally, his plays were deemed too radical and too sensational to be performed—from 1844 to 1851, four of Pitt's plays were denied licenses by the Lord Chamberlain's office for being too rebellious or too violent.

Shortly after his play *Love and Error; or Emmeline the Female Parricide* was denied a license to be performed in January 1851, Pitt ended his career as an in-house writer for Britannia. While records of Pitt's plays are incomplete, the last known play positively identified as Pitt's appeared in February 1851. Pitt's health had been on the decline, and by 1851, he was quite ill. Pitt died on February 16, 1855. ♦

Edited from:

Weltman, Sharon Aronofsky. "Introduction: George Dibdin Pitt's 1847 *Sweeney Todd*." *Nineteenth Century Theatre and Film*, vol. 38, no. 1, 2011, pp. 1–22., doi:10.7227/nctf.38.1.4.

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"Penny Dreadful." PBS, Public Broadcasting Service, [www.pbs.org/kqed/demonbarber/penny/index.html](http://www.pbs.org/kqed/demonbarber/penny/index.html).

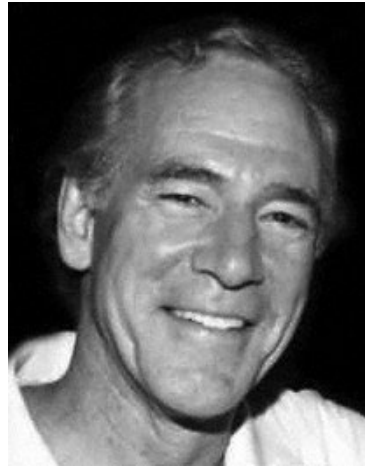
## ABOUT THE ADAPTORS



### CHRISTOPHER BOND

Christopher Bond is a British playwright and director. He was born in 1945 and is best known for his work adapting George Dibdin Pitt's work into the play, *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*. Bond's involvement with the Sweeney Todd story began in 1968 when he first wrote the play on which Stephen Sondheim based the musical version of the barber's story. In 1968, Bond was working as an actor at a repertory theater in central England. The theatre announced that *Sweeney Todd* would be in its upcoming season. However, after getting a hold of the script, the theatre decided that there were some considerable changes that needed to be made. In Bond's own words the script "didn't need doctoring, it needed a heart transplant." Bond was 23 at the time and took on the task of rewriting Pitt's play—and he did so in one week. He wrote the part of Tobias Ragg for himself and began rehearsals in that role one week after finishing his script. Bond's *Sweeney Todd, The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* was well received and was produced by a number of theaters in England. However, the play's life changed during the mid-seventies when Stephen Sondheim saw a production of it at the Theatre Royal in London and approached Bond about adapting the play into a musical. To date, Bond has directed four productions of the musical that emerged from his collaboration with Sondheim.

Since the success of *Sweeney Todd*, Bond has continued to write, adapting numerous classics for the stage. His adaptations include *Tale of Two Cities*, *Dracula*, and *Alice on the Underground*.



### HUGH WHEELER

Hugh Wheeler was born in 1912 in North London. A novelist, playwright, and screenwriter, he wrote the book for the musical *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*.

Wheeler, who grew up in England and attended London University, came to the United States a short time after graduating and began his career by writing mystery novels on the pseudonyms of Patrick Quentin and Q. Patrick. At first, he collaborated with a team of mystery writers to create his stories, however, he eventually began to write them on his own. After 20 years as a successful mystery novelist during which he wrote 30 books and saw four of them adapted into motion pictures, Wheeler wrote his first play, a comedy titled *Big Fish, Little Fish*, in 1961 and began to devote his energies to writing for the theatre.

In 1971, Stephen Sondheim began discussing his ideas for a romantic musical with director Hal Prince. Over the course of the conversation, they decided to contact Wheeler to join the creative team for the musical. The result of this collaboration was the 1973 musical, *A Little Night Music*. *A Little Night Music* won six Tony® Awards that year—one of which went to Wheeler for his work. The next year, Wheeler won his second Tony for his work on the book for the Leonard Bernstein musical, *Candide*, which became one of the most popular musicals of the decade. In 1979, Sondheim and Wheeler collaborated again—this time on *Sweeney Todd*. This collaboration led to a Broadway production that won eight Tony awards, including one for Wheeler.

Wheeler continued to write plays and books for musicals until his death on July 26, 1987.



## ABOUT THE **ADAPTORS** CONTINUED...



### STEPHEN SONDHEIM

Stephen Sondheim was born on March 22, 1930 in New York City. He is an American composer and lyricist whose compositional and lyrical styles set against dramatic and complex plotlines have made a significant impact on the American musical theatre landscape.

Growing up, Sondheim showed an early aptitude for music in his studies of both the piano and the organ. At 15, while attending George School in Pennsylvania, he wrote his first musical. While in Pennsylvania, Sondheim became close with Oscar Hammerstein II—of Rogers and Hammerstein fame. Hammerstein became Sondheim's mentor and encouraged him to study musical theatre. After high school, Sondheim attended Williams College in Williamstown, Massachusetts, where he studied music and wrote musicals on the side. When he graduated in 1950, he received the Hutchinson Prize for composition.

Sondheim made his first significant mark on Broadway in 1957 as the lyricist for Leonard Bernstein's wildly successful musical, *West Side Story*. From there, Sondheim's career in musical theatre took off. In 1959, Sondheim wrote lyrics for *Gypsy*, and in 1962, he wrote music and lyrics for *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*—a musical based on comedies by the Roman playwright, Plautus. This musical had an extremely successful Broadway run and won the Tony Award for best musical.

Sondheim soon began to exclusively work on projects in which he was able to write both music and lyrics. To date, Sondheim has won numerous Tony Awards for his work, including awards for *Company*, *Follies*, *A Little Night Music*, *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*, and *Into the Woods*. Additionally, he has won eight Grammys, a Pulitzer Prize, an Academy Award, and the 2015 Presidential Medal of Freedom.

Many critics agree that Sondheim's work had marked a break in the musical theatre form from the more traditional and sentimental comedies of the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century favoring examinations of more complicated, gritty, and messy yet utterly human experiences. ♦

Edited from:

Sondheim, Stephen, et al. *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*. Applause Libretto Library, 2000.

Hampton, Wilborn. "Hugh Wheeler, Award Winning Playwright." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 28 July 1987.

Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Stephen Sondheim." *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 2 July 2019, [www.britannica.com/biography/Stephen-Sondheim](http://www.britannica.com/biography/Stephen-Sondheim).

## HISTORY OF SWEENEY TODD: A TIMELINE

- 1795** George Dibdin Pitt is born on March 30 to George Cecil Pitt and Sophia Pyne.
- 1805** With the help of his uncle, Tom Dibdin, George Dibdin Pitt begins his career as an actor.
- 1825** A story about a murderous barber appears in *Tell-Tale Magazine*, a French publication, under the title "A Terrible Story of the Rue de la Harpe."
- 1844** Pitt becomes the house dramatist and stage manager at the Britannia Saloon in Huxton.
- 1846** *The People's Periodical*, a popular penny dreadful, publishes a story titled *The String of Pearls: A Romance* about a razor-wielding barber who turns his victims into meat pies.
- 1847** Pitt writes *The String of Pearls, or The Fiend of Fleet Street*. It is performed the same year at Britannia Saloon.
- 1848** The popularity of Pitt's play inspires dozens of others to write their own versions of the play. The story and these plays continue to be staged in British theatres for the remainder of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.
- 1851** Pitt leaves his position as the house dramatist at Britannia Saloon.
- 1855** Pitt dies on February 16.
- 1883** Pitt's play, *The String of Pearls, or The Fiend of Fleet Street* is first published under the name *Sweeney Todd: The Barber of Fleet Street*.
- 1936** *The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*, directed by George King, becomes the first film version of the Sweeney Todd story.
- 1959** The Royal Ballet Company produces a one-act ballet version of the story titled *Sweeney Todd* in London.
- 1968** Bond, working at The Victoria Theatre in central England, first encounters George Pitt's *Sweeney Todd* script. Bond rewrites the play and titles it *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*. The play has a successful run at the Victoria Theatre and begins to be performed at other theatres in England.
- 1973** Bond's play is produced by Theatre Royal Stratford East. Stephen Sondheim sees this production of the play and approaches Bond about turning the script into a musical. Sondheim recruits Henry Wheeler to write the book for the musical while he, himself, writes the music and lyrics.
- 1979** Sondheim and Wheeler's musical, *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*, opens on Broadway. The production is directed by Harold Prince and stars Angela Lansbury and Len Cariou. This production receives eight Tony Awards.
- 2001** *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* is performed in concert with the San Francisco Symphony. This production, starring George Hearn and Patti LuPone, is filmed and broadcast on PBS.
- 2007** The musical film, *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* directed by Tim Burton, premieres. The film stars Johnny Depp, Helena Bonham Carter, and Alan Rickman.

Edited from:

"A String O Pearls." PBS, Public Broadcasting Service, [www.pbs.org/kqed/demonbarber/play/index.html](http://www.pbs.org/kqed/demonbarber/play/index.html).

## CHANGE IN THE AIR: THE TRANSITION FROM THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION TO THE VICTORIAN ERA

**19<sup>th</sup> century England** was a time of great change. In the late 1700s and early 1800s, the country's social and political landscape was severely disrupted by the Industrial Revolution. As new technologies were developed to speed the process of mass-producing material goods, the gap between wealthy classes and working classes became increasingly pronounced.

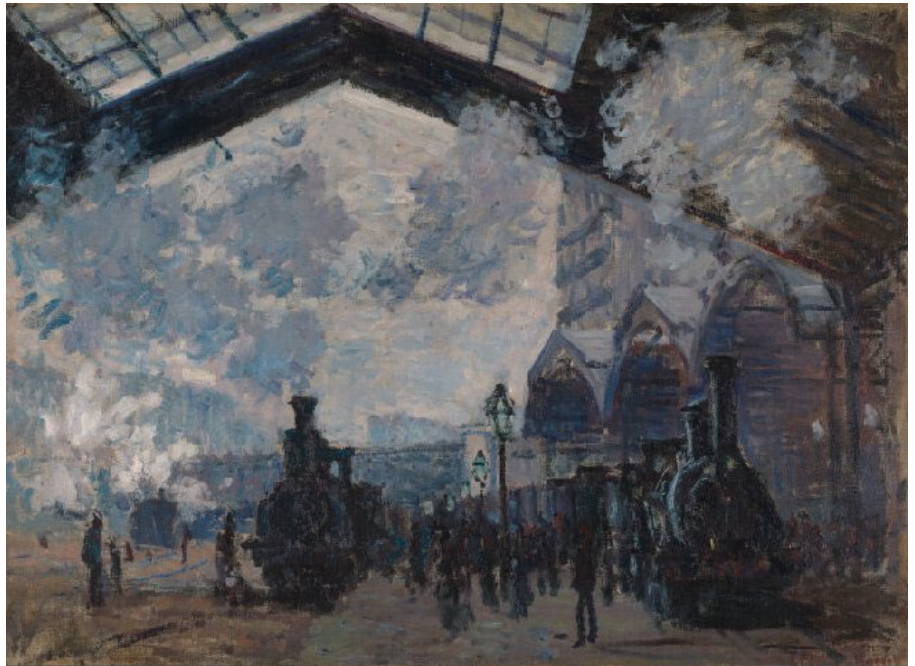
Until the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, most of the world's population lived in small, rural farming communities. There, families were responsible for producing their own food, clothing, furniture, and tools. However, around 1750, new technologies and manufacturing processes began to develop. The development of powered and specialized machinery meant that the production of goods became easier, cheaper, and faster.

This change in manufacturing gave way to a dramatic shift in the world's geographical, cultural, and economic landscape—a shift we still feel in contemporary society—known as the Industrial Revolution.

As industrialization grew in Europe, so did the demand for industrial workers. The prospect of well-paying, stable jobs prompted many families who had always lived in rural communities to move to city centers. Cities soon became more crowded than ever and were often unable to keep up with the influx of new workers arriving from the countryside. This resulted in inadequate, overcrowded housing and polluted, unsanitary living conditions for many in the working class.

The urbanization as a result of the Industrial Revolution became a topic of great contention. While the increased population sizes of urban centers were openly accepted by some, there were many who grew frustrated at the growing population sizes in cities. As social and political frustrations grew, so too did an interest in violence, sensationalism, and horror in entertainment as a means for the emotional release of industrialization-related frustrations.

In 1837, Queen Victoria ascended to the British throne, and ushered in what is known as the Victorian Era. This



"The Gare St-Lazare" by Claude Monet 1877.

### Moral Expectations

- Acting honestly
- Working hard
- Displaying propriety and politeness
- Practicing frugality
- Performing charitable acts for those less well-off
- Practicing sobriety

### Entertainment

- Scandal sheets (similar to today's tabloids)
- Sensational novels with plots concerning bigamy, murder, and adultery
- Celebrity gossip
- Theatrical productions with special effects depicting burning buildings, collapsing bridges, and simulated waterfalls
- The exhibition of human oddities ("Freak Shows")

era is marked by a further delineation of socio-economic classes and the development of a deeper concern for ethics and morality—or at least the appearance of morality. During this time, the entertainment industry began to bloom, and people of all classes flocked to sensational and spectacular displays for entertainment. Consumption of this type of entertainment—full of

## CHANGE IN THE AIR: THE TRANSITION FROM THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION TO THE VICTORIAN ERA CONTINUED...



"St. Paul's from the Surrey Side" by Charles François Daubigny.

gossip, grotesque tales, burlesque shows, and death-defying stunts—often directly contradicted the strict moral code.

The Victorian Era is an era of contradiction. On one hand, the desire to exhibit and practice morality dominated day-to-day interactions. On the other hand, the desire to consume flashy and gossip-filled entertainment led to a degree of corruption in Victorian society.

This is the historical backdrop of *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*. A tale originally published in a penny dreadful in 1846 and quickly adapted for the stage as a popular melodrama, the story is violent and dramatic—perfectly tailored for industrial and Victorian audiences. It also explores the tension and contradictions between morality and sensationalism that dominated society throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Judge Turpin represents the pinnacle of justice and morality, and yet

he continually makes corrupt rulings. Honesty and hard work did little to spare Benjamin Barker from being sent to prison in Australia. As the owner of a modest meat pie shop, Mrs. Lovett struggles to make ends meet until she begins to bake Sweeney Todd's murder victims into her pies. ♦

Edited from:

Editors, History.com. "Industrial Revolution." *History.com*, A&E Television Networks, 29 Oct. 2009,

[www.history.com/topics/industrial-revolution/industrial-revolution](http://www.history.com/topics/industrial-revolution/industrial-revolution).

"Victorian Era Morality Facts: Moral Behavior, Values, Ideals, Ethics." *Victorian Era Life in England. Victorians Society & Daily Life*, [www.victorian-era.org/victorian-era-morality.html](http://www.victorian-era.org/victorian-era-morality.html).

Sweet, Matthew. "History - British History in Depth: Sex, Drugs and Music Hall." *BBC*, BBC, 17 Feb. 2011, [www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/victorians/pleasure\\_01.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/victorians/pleasure_01.shtml).

"Violence as Entertainment." *Sweeney Todd The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*, [sweeneytodd.web.unc.edu/violence-as-entertainment/](http://sweeneytodd.web.unc.edu/violence-as-entertainment/).

## PRETTY WOMEN: THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY ENGLAND

“Pretty women...Fascinating...Sipping coffee, dancing...Pretty women are a wonder. Pretty women. Sitting in the window or standing on the stair, something in them cheers the air.”

—Sweeney Todd, “Pretty Women”

During the Victorian period, men and women’s roles became more sharply defined than at any other time in British history. In earlier centuries, it was typical for women to work alongside men in maintaining farms and family businesses. However, with the advent of the Industrial Revolution and the influx of urbanization, men increasingly commuted to their place of work—factories, shops, and offices. When men commuted to work, women were left at home to attend to domestic duties.

Essentially, during the Victorian era, men and women now inhabited what was thought of as “separate spheres.” The ideology behind the separation of these spheres stemmed from what Victorians considered to be the “natural” characteristics of men and women. That is, women were considered physically weaker yet morally superior to men which meant that they were best suited for the domestic sphere, where they would not have to perform as much physical work and could ensure that proper morals were passed along to their children. Men, on the other hand, were seen as physically stronger, more intellectual, and less virtuous than women. This suited them well for the public sphere.

However, with industrialization and increased work opportunities for men, a new, larger middle class began to emerge in British society, and this middle class increasingly began to turn to domestic workers such as servants and hired housekeepers to attend to household work. This shift in the domestic duties in expectations led to new expectations of what women should do and how they should behave within the domestic realm of society.

Instead of participating in the housework themselves, middle-class women were expected to be good wives. This meant learning skills such as playing the piano, needlework, and dancing. In Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*, Caroline Bingley describes the skills she thinks are necessary for young ladies to possess:

“A Woman must have a thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing, and modern languages...; and besides all this, she must possess a certain something in her air and manner of walking, the tone of her voice, her address and expressions...”



Image from *La Belle Assemblée* or *Bell's Court and Fashionable Magazine* circa 1821.

## PRETTY WOMEN: THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY ENGLAND CONTINUED...

The expectation that respectable middle-class women stay away from the grunt work of the domestic sphere was also dictated by changes in fashion in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. By the 1830s, many women began to wear crinoline skirts—huge bell-shaped skirts that made it virtually impossible to do physical house work.

The complex and restricting nature of these social expectations did not sit well with all women.

Charlotte Brontë, a prominent poet and writer during the time, voiced her frustration with the limited rights of women during this period through the mouthpiece of Jane Eyre, the titular heroine of one of her novels:

“Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags.”

In *Sweeney Todd*, we see Johanna and Mrs. Lovett struggle to conform to the social expectations of the time. In their duet, “Pretty Women,” Judge Turpin and Sweeney Todd express the view that women are meant to be pretty, obedient, and virtuous. So, when Johanna defies Judge Turpin’s demands that she stay in the house, hidden from view, and that she marry him, he has her institutionalized in an asylum.

Mrs. Lovett, on the other hand, as a member of the lower-class is not held to the same social expectations as Johanna. Nevertheless, because she is of a lower socio-economic class and does not embody what it means to be a respectable woman in industrial and Victorian society, Todd consistently overlooks her. Neither woman in the play has full agency—they are both held to a double standard. ♦

Edited from:

Hughes, Kathryn. “Gender Roles in the 19th Century.” *The British Library*, The British Library, 13 Feb. 2014, [www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/gender-roles-in-the-19th-century](http://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/gender-roles-in-the-19th-century).



Image from *The Ladies' Monthly Magazine* circa 1852.

## THE GREAT DIVIDE: SOCIAL INEQUALITY IN INDUSTRIAL AND VICTORIAN ENGLAND

In the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Industrial Revolution led to a significant change in the social, political, economic, geographical, and cultural landscape of England. Until the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, England was primarily a rural, agrarian society. However, once advancements in technology paved the way for the mass production of material goods, there was massive increase in urban populations—farmers, agriculture workers, and other members of rural communities began to move to city centers in hopes of securing industrial jobs. While the Industrial Revolution was instrumental in the way of providing stable employment to mass numbers of factory workers and in creating a large middle socio-economic class, it also led to increasing levels of social inequality, particularly in urban cities.

As members of rural communities began to move to cities for industrial jobs and as the populations in cities began to increase beyond capacity, the crime rate increased. This increase was the result of three major factors that dominated the urban landscape: poverty, unemployment, and overcrowding. Factory jobs had no job security and no social security. If a factory worker was injured on the job or laid off, he had little opportunity to replace his lost income. Additionally, although industrialization paved the way for the creation of many new jobs, many cities and factories could not support the sheer amount of people looking for employment. This led to increased levels of competition among workers for jobs and resources as well as more concentrated levels of poverty.

Overpopulation and overcrowding, however, was probably the biggest of concerns stemming from industrialization, as it led to not only unemployment and poverty but also the potential for poor living conditions and the ever-present potential for famine. Thomas Malthus, an economic theorist of the time, theorized that if left unchecked, the population of cities would completely surpass agricultural production and lead to mass famine. In an attempt to control the population size and prevent families from growing too large, industrial working wages were kept low—there was a belief that if a particular generation experienced too much economic security, they would marry earlier and have larger families.

This systemic control of the working class' earnings limited potential for social mobility for members of the working class. Essentially, it kept the wealthy upper and middle classes rich and the working classes poor.

### Social Inequality in *Sweeney Todd*

“The history of the world, my love, is those below serving those up above.”—Sweeney Todd in “A Little Priest”

In *Sweeney Todd*, the tension between the upper class and the working class is constantly present. Members of the working class, both Todd and Mrs. Lovett have been subject to the social inequities of 19<sup>th</sup> century England. In managing a meat pie shop, Mrs. Lovett struggles to bring in enough customers to offset the costs of the shop's operations. Throughout the musical, Mrs. Lovett refers to how expensive it is to buy meat to use in her pies. “Times is hard. Times is hard,” Mrs. Lovett laments when she describes how she heard that another meat pie shop has resulted to killing feral cats to use as meat in their pies.

Todd, on the other hand, has experienced the inequality that was typical when a member of the working class came into conflict with a member of the upper and middle classes. When Judge Turpin falls in love with Lucy Barker, Todd's wife, he uses the power of his position and social status to send Todd to prison in Australia under false charges. Despite Todd's innocence, the limited power his social status afforded him was not enough to fight Judge Turpin's corrupt decision.

To combat the social inequality rampant in their world, Mrs. Lovett and Todd reframe and repurpose the enterprising and industrial attitude that dominated society in 19<sup>th</sup> century England to fit their specific needs. In deciding to establish a business in which Todd kills the patrons of his barbershop so that Mrs. Lovett can use those patrons as meat in her pies, Todd and Mrs. Lovett embrace the cutthroat-ness of industrial England—literally. In doing so, their businesses begin to flourish, and they amass more power and influence in their community. Mrs. Lovett and Todd's business scheme highlights the desperation that prevailed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and illustrates an absurdly extreme way to mitigate that desperation. ♦

Edited from:

Fitzgerald, Richard D. “The Social Impact of the Industrial Revolution.” *Science and Its Times: Understanding the Social Significance of Scientific Discovery*, Encyclopedia.com, 2019.

## MELODRAMA AND MUSICALS

### Melodrama

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, melodramas became the most prominent and popular form of theatre in Europe, and specifically, in England. Melodramas were exciting, sensational tales of grand gestures, heightened plotlines, and moral absolutes. The term “melodrama” comes from the Greek words “melos”—which means “song”—and “dram”—which means “drama” or “to act.” As “music dramas,” melodramas employed songs and music to underscore the action or to highlight a character’s emotional state. What is more, prominent characters in melodramas typically had their own signature music or theme song that would play to signify the character’s entrance into a scene.

The worlds and characters in 19<sup>th</sup> century melodramas were simplistic. Unlike modern drama where playwrights delve into the complexities of human nature and where the line between good and evil is not entirely clear, melodrama characters simply represent absolute good or absolute evil. With no exception, the good heroic character is rewarded, and the evil villain is punished in the end of a melodrama. In this sense, all melodramas end with happiness and relief as the heroes prosper and the villains suffer.

Melodramatic playwrights often employed this simplistic good-versus-evil plot structure to examine and reflect the social issues of the time. Interestingly enough, the heroic, innocent characters in 19<sup>th</sup> century melodramas tended to be of the lower working class while the villainous characters tended to occupy positions of power and wealth. In this sense, melodrama was used as an implicit tool to highlight the immorality of the class structure.

Beyond simplistic plot structures, melodramas feature one-dimensional characters that are often romanticized. Characterization in melodrama went even as far as employing the external features of a character to reflect his or her internal state and morality—this meant that heroes were portrayed as beautiful whereas villains were portrayed as ugly.

Regardless of the subject matter of a melodrama—whether it be gloomy, violent, or tragic—nearly all melodramas feature scenes of low comedy and cheap humor.



Advertising card for *The Streets of London*, Princess Theatre, coloured ink on paper, published by Concanen, Lee & Siebe, London, 1864.

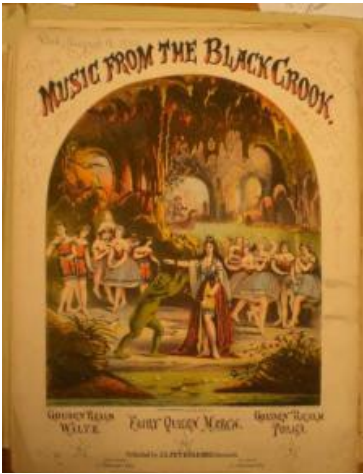
### Musical Theater

While music has been featured in theatrical productions since age of Greek tragedies, modern western musical theater is heavily steeped in the tradition of melodrama and vaudeville. In the 1866, *The Black Crook* became what many consider to be the first American musical. This musical emerged when there was a fire at the Academy of Music in New York, leaving a Parisian ballet company that was set to perform there out of a performance space. Just as the ballet company was in search of a performance space, two producers from Niblo’s Garden, another New York theater, were looking for something to make their production of the melodrama, *The Black Crook*—a fantastical story about black magic and fairies—pop. So, the ballet company was integrated into the production, and *The Black Crook* had a very successful run. While the production did not necessarily conform to what we would identify as musical theater standards today—it was a six-hour show with an incomprehensible plot—it sparked the musical comedy movement. By the 1870s, musical comedies began to appear on Broadway. However, these productions were often filled with musical numbers that made little sense in the context of productions’ plotlines. Nevertheless, this type of theater steadily grew in popularity throughout the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In the 1920s and 1930s, musical theater entered a “Golden Age” when composer Jerome Kern and lyricist Guy Bolton teamed up to write musicals together. Their works featured sophisticated, well-placed songs that contributed to the overall plots of the productions. Richard Rogers and Oscar Hammerstein soon stepped onto the scene to contribute to the evolution of musical



## MELODRAMA AND MUSICALS CONTINUED...



Cover of the music book for The Black Crook, circa 1866, from the Library of Congress.

theater, creating classic musicals such as *Oklahoma*, *Carousel*, and *Cinderella*. Musical theater experienced another change when Stephen Sondheim began to compose and write lyrics for productions. In his musicals, Sondheim began to explore more complex narratives with more complex characters. ♦

Edited from:

Hamadi, Lutfi. "The Main Dramatic Features of Melodrama: A Dramatic Study of Maria Martin and Sweeney Todd And Their Traces In Modern Soap Operas." *European Scientific Journal*, 2017.

Green, John, and Hank Green. *Broadway Book Musicals: Crash Course Theater #50*. Performance by Mike Rugnetta, YouTube, PBS Digital Studios, 1 Mar. 2019, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=4kxzD4ASi0I](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4kxzD4ASi0I).

Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopædia. "Musical." *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., [www.britannica.com/art/musical](https://www.britannica.com/art/musical).

## THE EVOLUTION OF THE SWEENEY TODD STORY FROM MELODRAMA TO MUSICAL

When George Dibdin Pitt's melodrama, *The String of Pearls, or the Fiend of Fleet Street*, first premiered at the Britannia Saloon in East London, it was a hit. It gave audiences everything that they had come to expect from melodramas at the time: violence, special effects, spectacle, and a clear-cut conflict between good and evil. In his play, Pitt portrayed Todd as a single-minded, razor-wielding villain. The plot was simple and reductive—easy for audience members at the time to grasp. In fact, Christopher Bond, who adapted Pitt's melodrama into a modern play in 1968, describes Pitt's script as "crude, repetitive, and simplistic [featuring] hardly any plot and less character development." While Bond rewrote Pitt's work, deciding that the original melodrama needed to be revamped if it were to be successful in a contemporary production, traces of the story's melodramatic history are present in his work.

When Stephen Sondheim and Hugh Wheeler worked together to adapt Bond's work into a musical, the melodramatic roots of the Sweeney Todd story came further into view. As melodrama is essentially a predecessor to musical theater, in placing *Sweeney Todd* into a musical context, Sondheim and Wheeler pay homage to the play's history. The music in the piece highlights the dramatic themes of the work in a manner similar to how signature music and theme songs would highlight character relationships and actions in melodramas. What is more, despite the overarching dark and tragic atmosphere of *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*, the musical features distinct moments of comedy much like traditional melodramas. Even though the world of the musical is one of sadness, anger, and desperation, songs such as "A Little Priest," are full of dark and sardonic humor.

While the musical version of *Sweeney Todd* honors the melodramatic history of the story, it does diverge from some melodramatic traditions. The characters of the musical are decidedly multidimensional and the plot much more complex than they were in Pitt's original work. Sweeney Todd is at once both heroic and villainous and the plot is a story of ambiguous morality. The musical is not the story of a singular "good guy" against a singular "bad guy." What is more, the musical does not feature an ending that is decidedly happy—the dark hero dies in the end. In revamping the characters and plot, Bond, Sondheim, and Wheeler appeal to the modern tradition of theatre to present morally ambiguous, complex characters against intricate plots. ♦

## THEMES

“Attend the tale of Sweeney Todd. He served a dark and vengeful god.”

—Sweeney Todd and Company in “Prologue”

### REVENGE

From the first moments of the prologue, we learn that revenge will drive the action in the musical. Sweeney Todd, having been wrongfully sent to prison in Australia, has returned to London ready to take revenge against the Beadle and Judge Turpin for robbing him of 15 years of his life. Once Todd learns that the Turpin’s vile actions led Lucy Barker to commit suicide and that Turpin has been raising Johanna as his own, his desire for revenge reaches new heights so that everything Todd does throughout the remainder of the play is fueled by his need to avenge the wrongs that have been committed against him and those he loves most.

In fact, the promise of exacting revenge on Judge Turpin is so appealing to Todd that he equates vengeance with salvation—that is, he believes that he will be saved or rescued from the pain he has endured over the past 15 years once he has taken revenge. After narrowly missing an opportunity to kill Turpin, we see Todd compare vengeance and salvation:

“Come and visit your good friend Sweeney—! You, sir, too, sir—Welcome to the grave! I will have vengeance, I will have salvation! [...] and I *will* get him back even as he gloats. In the meantime I’ll practice on less honorable throats. And my Lucy lies in ashes and I’ll never see my girl again, but the work awaits, I’m alive at last and I’m full of joy!”—Sweeney Todd in “Epiphany”

Beyond being Todd’s self-proclaimed key to salvation, the prospect of revenge becomes a source of joy for Todd—a reason to live, even if that reason stems from taking life away from others.

In this sense, Todd’s desire for revenge and to right the wrongs of the past becomes incredibly strong—so strong, in fact, that it blinds him from the present. As he anxiously awaits Judge Turpin’s arrival near the end of Act 2, Todd notices that a beggar woman, who has been lurking around the meat pie shop and shouting absurdities throughout the musical, has snuck into his barbershop. Frustrated with the distraction she presents, Todd slits her throat and sends her down the chute to

the bakehouse without a second thought. However, after Todd has killed the judge, he goes down to the bakehouse where, in the light of the oven, he sees that the beggar woman is actually his wife, Lucy Barker. In the moment of realization, the Company sings the following line:

“Sweeney wished the world away, Sweeney’s weeping for yesterday.”—Company in “Epilogue”

Todd’s unquenchable desire for revenge blinds him from truth, reality, and the present moment to such an extent that he, himself, destroys exactly what he so desperately wanted to avenge.

### LOVE AND DESIRE

“’Tis true, sir, love can still inspire the blood to pound the heart leap higher”—Judge Turpin in “Pretty Women”

Love and desire are the framework of the tale of Sweeney Todd—that is, the Sweeney Todd story both begins and ends because of love and desire. Before the musical itself begins, desire has already set the stage for the musical’s events. Fifteen years prior to the beginning of the musical, Judge Turpin’s infatuation with Lucy Barker, Sweeney Todd’s wife, drives him to utilize his power and reputation as a champion for justice to wrongfully send Todd to prison in Australia. Turpin does this so that he can have an opportunity to be with Lucy. However, Turpin’s motives are not based in love as much as they are based in lust and desire. We learn as much when we hear Mrs. Lovett describe how Judge Turpin mistreated Lucy in Todd’s absence.

When Todd returns from exile, his love for his wife and his daughter and the prospect of having a family once more (coupled with his desire to exact revenge on Judge Turpin and the Beadle) lead him back to London—a city of which he is otherwise not particularly fond. Although Todd’s desire for revenge evolves into something greater, it is Todd’s love for his wife and for his daughter that initially drive him to create a plan to avenge the wrongs they have endured at the hand of Judge Turpin.

While Turpin’s lust and desire drive many of his actions, and love and a desire for revenge drive Todd’s actions, other characters have different relationships with love and desire. Mrs. Lovett’s love for Sweeney Todd drives her to lie about the death of Lucy Barker. In lying, Mrs. Lovett creates space for the possibility of marrying Todd. Alternatively, it is love and desire that prompt Johanna to break free from her captivity in Judge Turpin’s home. When she and Anthony first lock eyes, it is love at

## THEMES CONTINUED...

first sight. The love Anthony and Johanna share drives their plan to elope against Judge Turpin's wishes. For Johanna and Anthony, love is the key to freedom and independence.

### FREEDOM AND CAPTIVITY

Throughout the musical, we consistently see characters struggle to break free from limiting or restricting circumstances. Johanna, unable to leave Judge Turpin's home, longs to be free to explore the world outside her window. When she sees a peddler selling song birds in cages from her window, she implores the birds to teach her how to find music and beauty even within the confines of her captivity:

"My cage has many rooms, damask and dark. Nothing there sings. Not even my lark. Larks never will, you know, when they're captive. Teach me to be more adaptive."

As a world-travelling sailor, Anthony gives Johanna the opportunity to escape her present circumstance—and Johanna jumps at the opportunity, despite the consequences she faces of disobeying her guardian, Judge Turpin.

Todd, having recently been freed from prison in Australia, comes back to London hoping to find full freedom and relief in avenging the injustices that led to his wrongful imprisonment. However, in crafting a plan for revenge, Todd is never fully able to embrace his new freedom—that is, in constantly plotting revenge, Todd is unable to escape from the hold of the past. All of his actions are directed at righting past wrongs. In this way, Todd is captive to the past even though he is physically free.

Mrs. Lovett also struggles with the concept of freedom and captivity in a different sense. As a member of the working class, Mrs. Lovett is held captive by her socio-economic status. She is captive to a vicious cycle of poverty: without enough money to purchase quality ingredients for her meat pies, she cannot make meat pies that are good enough to attract customers, and without customers, she cannot make enough money to purchase quality ingredients. What is more, without money, she cannot easily support her own basic needs. So, when the opportunity to reinvent her meat pie recipe at a low monetary (but high moral) price presents itself, Mrs. Lovett jumps at the prospect of being able to break out of the cycle.

### MADNESS

Over the course of the musical, Sweeney Todd's desire for revenge becomes so all-consuming that it ultimately leads him to a state of madness. Before long, Todd's desire for revenge turns into a desire for general carnage—that is, he becomes unable to separate his craving to right past wrongs from a visceral desire to kill indiscriminately. This shift in Todd occurs after he narrowly misses his opportunity to kill Judge Turpin. After Turpin leaves Todd's barbershop, Todd launches into the song, "Epiphany":

"They all deserve to die! Tell you why, Mrs. Lovett, tell you why: because in all of the whole human race, Mrs. Lovett, there are two kinds of men and only two. There's the one staying put in his proper place and the one with his foot in the other one's face—Look at me, Mrs. Lovett, look at you!"—Sweeney Todd in "Epiphany"

In this song, not only do Todd's words indicate that he has started a descent into madness, so does the underscoring music. Jarring and discordant notes accentuate the mad and chaotic nature of Todd's language and thought processes.

As Todd begins to act increasingly mad, the world around him also appears to descend into a state of chaos. As the musical nears its end, the inmates at Fogg's Asylum begin to sing:

"City on fire! Rats in the streets and the lunatics yelling at the moon! It's the end of the world! Yes!"

The city's state of disarray and chaos highlights and heightens the chaotic end to the musical—an end filled with death, destruction, and despair. ♦

## PRE-SHOW PREPARATION: **RESEARCH**

### Purpose:

These research prompts will help students develop an understanding of the social and historical contexts of Hugh Wheeler and Stephen Sondheim's *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*.

### Prepare:

To prepare for seeing *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*, have students break into small groups to research the following topics either in their groups or individually. When they are ready, have students present their findings to the class.

#### The Industrial Revolution:

- Origins of the Industrial Revolution
- Cottage industries
- Key inventors and inventions
- The factory system
- Urbanization
- Working-class life
- Social norms and morals
- The role of women at the time
- Prominent philosophers and their ideologies

#### The Victorian Era:

- Queen Victoria
- Victorian social structure
- Social norms and morals
- Education system
- Forms of entertainment
- Gender roles and expectations
- Prominent literary figures

#### Melodrama:

- Origins of the movement
- Prominent melodrama writers
- Common characteristics of melodramas

#### Musical Theater:

- Origins of the theatrical form
- The Black Crook
- The "Golden Age" of musical theater
- Prominent figures in the "Golden Age" of musical theater

#### George Dibdin Pitt:

- His childhood
- His career in the theater
- His work
- His legacy

#### Christopher Bond:

- His theatrical career
- His other works

#### Hugh Wheeler:

- His childhood
- His education
- His musical theater partnerships
- His other works
- His legacy

#### Stephen Sondheim:

- His childhood
- His education
- His musical theater partnerships
- His other works
- His legacy

## PRE-SHOW PREPARATION: **ACTIVITIES**

### Purpose:

These activities will prompt students to think critically about the themes and ideas in *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* and engage with the narrative.

**MELODRAMA MIXTAPE:** In this activity, students will have the opportunity to explore the role music plays in narratives by developing a well-thought-out playlist of songs that encapsulates the tone and action of the *Sweeney Todd* story.

- Provide students with some background on melodrama—its origins, history, and characteristics.
- Have students read George Dibdin Pitt’s *The String of Pearls or, The Fiend of Fleet Street*—the original melodrama version of the Sweeney Todd story first performed in 1847. This script can be found online at <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.7227/NCTF.38.1.7>
- Facilitate a class-wide discussion about the core themes in the work, and list the themes discussed for all students to see.
- Have students break into small groups to discuss where they have seen themes and characters similar to those in Pitt’s work in other novels, news stories, films, music, paintings, etc.
- In groups, ask students to create a “mixtape” for the work. To do this, instruct students to pick one song for each scene in the melodrama that they believe aligns with the overall tone, theme, and action of the scene.
- After selecting songs, have students compile the lyrics for each of their songs.
- When ready, have each group present their mixtapes to the class by distributing the lyrics to their selected songs and playing brief sound clips of their songs.
- After the presentations, open up a class-wide conversation about the process of creating the mixtapes and what new insights to the story they gained from creating and listening to their peers’ mixtapes.

**SPECTRUM:** In this activity, students will have the opportunity to explore where they stand on various issues or themes related to those present in *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*.

- Set up the space so that one end of the space represents “strongly agree” and the other represents “strongly disagree.” The entire space represents a spectrum of opinions between the two extremes with the center point representing a “neutral” opinion.
- Read out a list of statements related to the themes in *Sweeney Todd*.
- Examples:
  - Revenge can never be justified.
  - Secrecy can be good.
  - The justice system is always right.
  - Good and bad are relative terms
  - Disobedience is never justifiable.
  - Ambition can be blinding.
- After each statement, allow students to place themselves in the space according to how they feel about the statement.
- Discussion: How was doing this activity? Were there any surprises? Did you ever find yourself in a corner by yourself? How did that feel?

## PRE-SHOW PREPARATION: **ACTIVITIES** CONTINUED...

**REVENGE REIMAGINED:** In this activity, students will have the opportunity to explore how revenge manifests by creating a visual representation of their understanding of revenge.

- Facilitate a class-wide discussion about revenge.
  - What is the definition of revenge?
  - What is the psychology of revenge?
  - What are some images that come to mind when you think of revenge?
- After the discussion, instruct students to create an image of how they each view revenge. This image can be hand-drawn, a collage or collection of printed images, or a combination collage-drawing.
- In creating their images, ask students to incorporate any images they believe are iconic to revenge.
- Allow students to present their work to the class.

**SECRET ALLIES AND ENEMIES:** This activity will help students explore secrecy and complex character relationships through physicalization.

- Have students walk in the space as themselves. As they walk, instruct them to silently pick a person in the group who is their enemy. The students should not let anyone know who their enemy is. As they walk throughout the space, their goal is to stay as far away from their enemy as possible.
- After a moment, have students silently select a different person in the group to be their ally. Again, students should not let anyone know who their ally is. Their goal now, is to keep their ally in between them and their enemy at all times while staying as far away from their enemy as possible, and while not letting anyone know who their enemy is or who their ally is.
- Advanced level: Have students silently pick a third person in the group to be their role model. Students should follow this person as closely as they can, without letting them know that they are their role model. While following their role model, students should also try to keep their ally in between them and their enemy while staying as far from their enemy as possible.
- Discussion: How was this activity? Was it easy? Was it difficult? What was easy or difficult about it? How did it feel to keep those secrets? Were you successful at keeping who your enemy, ally, and role model were secret?

## ESSAY QUESTIONS

1. In his work, *Poetics*, the Greek philosopher Aristotle outlines the basic characteristics of a tragic dramatic hero. The characteristics are as follows:
  - a. The character should be essentially good.
  - b. The character must have a “fatal flaw” or make a serious error in their judgement. This fatal flaw, called *hamartia*, leads the character to their ultimate downfall.
  - c. The character must have excessive pride, or *hubris*.
  - d. The character must experience a total reversal of their fortune. This reversal is known as a *peripeteia*, and usually occurs near the end of play.
  - e. The character must discover or recognize that the reversal of their fortune was brought on by their own actions. This discovery is called *anagnorisis*.
  - f. The character’s fate as a result of their error in judgement must be greater than is deserved.

Aristotle also described the tragic villain as a character whose downfall inspires neither pity nor fear from audience members.

Is Sweeney Todd a tragic hero or a villain? Consider Aristotle’s characteristics of a tragic hero and his definition of the tragic villain as you formulate your argument. Be sure to use evidence from the text to support your stance.

2. In a thesis-driven essay, compare and contrast Mrs. Lovett and Johanna. Consider how both women adhere to or diverge from 19<sup>th</sup> century European expectations of women as well as how they interact with other characters in the play. Use textual evidence to support your argument.
3. Analyze the role disguise plays in the narrative of *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*. Use evidence from the text to support your claim.
4. In melodrama, music was used to signify the entrance of specific characters into the scene and to underscore the action of the play. In a well-developed essay, characterize how Sondheim’s score relates to or diverges from the tradition of music in melodrama.



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### BOOKS:

Bond, Christopher G. *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*. S. French, 1974.

Pitt, George Dibdin, and Marvin Kaye. *Sweeney Todd, The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*. Wildside Press/Marvin Kaye's Nth Dimension Books, 2002.

Sondheim, Stephen, et al. *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*. Applause Libretto Library, 2000.

### MUSICAL ALBUMS:

Sondheim, Stephen, et al. *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street (Original Broadway Cast Recording)*, BMG Music.

### ARTICLES:

Hamadi, Lutfi. "The Main Dramatic Features of Melodrama: A Dramatic Study of Maria Martin and Sweeney Todd And Their Traces In Modern Soap Operas." *European Scientific Journal*, 2017.

Jones, John Bush. "From Melodrama to Tragedy: The Transformation of Sweeney Todd." *New England Theatre Journal*, 1991.

Philips, David. "Crime, Law and Punishment in the Industrial Revolution." *The Industrial Revolution and British Society*, 1993, pp. 156–182.

Taylor, Millie. "Integration and Distance in Musical Theatre: the Case of Sweeney Todd." *Contemporary Theatre Review*, vol. 19, no. 1, 2009, pp. 74–86.

### FILMS:

*Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* (1936) directed by George King

*Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* (2007) directed by Tim Burton

*Six* by Sondheim (2013) directed by James Lapine, Autumn de Wilde, and Todd Haynes

### ONLINE RESOURCES:

*The String of Pearls* full text of the original penny dreadful story available with Project Gutenberg:  
<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/59828/59828-h/59828-h.htm>

Coal, Steam, and the Industrial Revolution: Crash Course World History:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zhL5DCizj5c>

Broadway Book Musicals: Crash Course Theatre #50:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4kxzD4ASiol>

Gender in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Britain: <https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/videos/gender-in-19th-century-britain>

From Score to Stage: The Unraveling of Sweeney Todd:  
<https://www.fromscoretostage.com/single-post/2018/02/03/The-Unraveling-of-Sweeney-Todd>

## ABOUT THEATRE ARTS: **KEY THEATRICAL TERMS**

Today, movies and television take audiences away from what was once the number one form of amusement: going to the theatre. But attending a live theatrical performance is still one of the most thrilling and active forms of entertainment.

In a theatre, observers are catapulted into the action, especially at an intimate venue like *A Noise Within*, whose thrust stage reaches out into the audience and whose actors can see, hear, and feel the response of the crowd.

Although playhouses in the past could sometimes be rowdy, participating in the performance by giving respect and attention to the actors is the most appropriate behavior at a theatrical performance today. Shouting out (or even whispering) can be heard throughout the auditorium, as can rustling paper or ringing phones.

After this *A Noise Within* performance, you will have the opportunity to discuss the play's content and style with the performing artists and directors. You may wish to remind students to observe the performance carefully or to compile questions ahead of time so they are prepared to participate in the discussion.

**blocking:** The instructions a director gives actors that tell them how and where to move in relation to each other or to the set in a particular scene.

**character:** The personality or part portrayed by an actor on stage.

**conflict:** The opposition of people or forces which causes the play's rising action.

**dramatic irony:** A dramatic technique used by a writer in which a character is unaware of something the audience knows.

**genre:** Literally, "kind" or "type." In literary terms, genre refers to the main types of literary form, principally comedy and tragedy. It can also refer to forms that are more specific to a given historical era, such as the revenge tragedy, or to more specific sub-genres of tragedy and comedy such as the comedy of manners, farce or social drama.

**motivation:** The situation or mood which initiates an action. Actors often look for their "motivation" when they try to dissect how a character thinks or acts.

**props:** Items carried on stage by an actor to represent objects mentioned in or implied by the script. Sometimes the props are actual, sometimes they are manufactured in the theatre shop.

**proscenium stage:** There is usually a front curtain on a proscenium stage. The audience views the play from the front through a "frame" called the proscenium arch. In this scenario, all audience members have the same view of the actors.

**set:** The physical world created on stage in which the action of the play takes place.

**setting:** The environment in which a play takes place. It may include the historical period as well as the physical space.

**stage areas:** The stage is divided into areas to help the director to note where action will take place. Upstage is the area furthest from the audience. Downstage is the area closest to the audience. Center stage defines the middle of the playing space. Stage left is the actor's left as he faces the audience. Stage right is the actor's right as he faces the audience.

**theme:** The overarching message or main idea of a literary or dramatic work. A recurring idea in a play or story.

**thrust stage:** A stage that juts out into the audience seating area so that patrons are seated on three sides. In this scenario, audience members see the play from varying viewpoints. *A Noise Within* features a thrust stage.

## ABOUT **A NOISE WITHIN**

**A NOISE WITHIN** A Noise Within produces classic theatre as an essential means to enrich our community by embracing universal human experiences, expanding personal awareness, and challenging individual perspectives. Our company of resident and guest artists performing in rotating repertory immerses student and general audiences in timeless, epic stories in an intimate setting.

Our most successful art asks our community to question beliefs, focus on relationships, and develop self-awareness. Southern California audiences of all ages and backgrounds build community together while engaging with this most visceral and primal of storytelling techniques. ANW's production of classic theatre includes all plays we believe will be part of our cultural legacy. We interpret these stories through the work of a professional resident company—a group of artists whose work is critical to their community—based on the belief that trust among artists and between artists and audience can only be built through an honest and continuing dialogue. Our plays will be performed in rotating repertory, sometimes simultaneously in multiple spaces, and buttressed by meaningful supporting programs to create a symphonic theatrical experience for artists and audience.

In its 27-year history, A Noise Within has garnered over 500 awards and commendations, including the Los Angeles Drama Critics' Circle's revered Polly Warfield Award for Excellence and the coveted Margaret Hartford Award for Sustained Excellence.

More than 45,000 individuals attend productions at a Noise Within annually. In addition, the theatre draws over 18,000 student participants to its Education Program. Students benefit from in-classroom workshops, conservatory training, subsidized tickets to matinee and evening performances, post-performance discussions with artists, and free standards-based study guides.

### Study Guides

A Noise Within creates study guides in alignment with core reading, listening, speaking, and performing arts standards to help educators prepare their students for their visit to our theatre. Study guides are available at no extra cost to download through our website: [www.anoisewithin.org](http://www.anoisewithin.org). The information and activities outlined in these guides are designed to work in compliance with the California VAPA standards, The Common Core, and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Skills.

Study guides include background information on the plays and playwrights, historical context, textual analysis, in-depth discussion of A Noise Within's artistic interpretation of the work, statements from directors and designers, as well as discussion points and suggested classroom activities. Guides from past seasons are also available to download from the website.

### Study Guide Credits

Alicia Green	.....	<i>Education Director and Editor</i>
Rebecca Wilson	.....	<i>Education Manager and Editor</i>
Rachael McNamara	.....	<i>Author</i>
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