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# *'It's Man Devouring Man, My Dear': Studying The Musical Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber Of Fleet Street As Multimedia Adaptation*

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'IT'S MAN DEVOURING MAN, MY DEAR':  
STUDYING THE MUSICAL SWEENEY TODD: THE DEMON  
BARBER OF FLEET STREET AS MULTIMEDIA ADAPTATION

BY  
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Thesis submitted for the degree of Master of Arts  
Durham University

Department of Music

2019

## **Abstract**

Described by John Kander as a ‘theater of adaptations’, works of commercial musical theatre are predominantly products of cross-media adaptation.<sup>1</sup> Film, theatre, television, literature, and visual art: musical theatre takes inspiration and narrative from broad sources.

Within current musical theatre scholarship, the musical’s status as a product of cross-media adaptation is acknowledged but has to-date received little focused investigation. Of the published studies that do discuss musical theatre adaptation, many adopt a fidelity-based model of comparative analysis. Studies of this type often, either explicitly or implicitly, treat the musical as an imitation of its source material; faithfulness to the original text is used as a measure of its success as a work of musical theatre. Within this context the process of adaptation is represented in simple terms in which replication of the source is viewed as the musical’s goal.

In this thesis I study the musical *Sweeney Todd: the Demon Barber of Fleet Street* as an example of multimedia adaptation. I investigate the process of cross-media adaptation undertaken to transform the hypotext –Bond’s *Sweeney Todd* – into the hypertext– the musical. To do so I apply Nicholas Cook’s theory of musical multimedia as an analytical framework and draw on semiotic, narratological and musicological analysis techniques.<sup>2</sup> I consider how the meaning, specifically the

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<sup>1</sup> John Kander, “Musical Theater Has Always Been a Theater of Adaptations,” in *Playwrights, Lyricists, Composers, on Theater*, ed. Otis L. Guernsey Jr. (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1964), p. 145.

<sup>2</sup> Nicholas Cook, *Analysing Musical Multimedia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

socio-economic critique, of the originary text are adapted into the musical theatre art form.

Employing a combination of analytical perspectives, I argue that *Sweeney Todd* can be understood as a complex multimedia product in which each constituent medium is responding to the source material in a distinct fashion and by analysing each in isolation a fuller understanding of the overall work can be formed.

## **Contents**

Introduction -----	1
Chapter One - Literature Review: The State of the Art-----	4
Chapter Two - Methodology: -----	30
Chapter Three – Hypotext: -----	39
Chapter Four: Hypertext -----	101
Conclusion -----	148
Bibliography -----	150

## **Introduction**

Works of commercial musical theatre are, in the majority of cases, products of cross-media adaptation. Drawing on literature, theatre, film, opera, and in recent years, reality television and social media, the musical theatre art form takes inspiration from a diverse range of sources and media.

From the musical's beginnings in the 18<sup>th</sup> century as a fusion of theatrical traditions to the 21<sup>st</sup> century's film-to-musical adaptation boom, adaptation has become a recognised and inextricable component of the musical theatre form.<sup>1</sup> Though regarded by some critics as symptomatic of the musical's commercialism and a result of limited creativity, products of cross-media adaptation account for many of the most recognisable, profitable and critically successful works of the art form.<sup>2</sup> Such works include *Oklahoma!*, *Les Misérables*, *The Phantom of the Opera*, *The Producers* and *Hamilton*.

Within current musical theatre scholarship, the musical's status as a product of cross-media adaptation is acknowledged but has to-date received little focused investigation. Of the published studies that do discuss musical theatre adaptation, many adopt a fidelity-based model of comparative analysis. Studies of this type often, either explicitly or implicitly, treats the musical as an imitation of its source material; with faithfulness to the original text used as a measure of its success as a work of musical theatre. Within this context the process of

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

adaptation is represented in simple terms in which replication of the source is viewed as the musical's goal.

Geoffrey Block's study, 'From Screen to Stage: *A Little Night Music* and *Passion*', is an illustrative example of this approach.<sup>3</sup> Block considers two Sondheim shows, each of which is an adaptation of a film. Block describes Sondheim's purpose as to 'make the films sing'.<sup>4</sup> Block argues that Sondheim's treatment of the source material is an 'imaginative transfer' of the films on which they are based. Block identifies how the musicals alter narrative and theorises that Sondheim's music 'captures' dramatic features of the original material.<sup>5</sup>

Studying musical theatre adaptation from this perspective has three closely connected limitations that together portray the musical theatre adaptation process in simplified terms. Firstly, this approach has a tendency to depict musical theatre as a secondary or sub-art, the value of which is dictated by its ability to copy other works of art that often exist in forms afforded more cultural prestige.

Secondly, by not considering the musical on its own aesthetic and conventional terms, this perspective increases the likelihood of producing a study that is restricted to solely identifying points of similarity and difference. Though such observations are interesting and a key part of an adaptation study, they account for only part of the adaptation process.

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<sup>3</sup> Geoffrey Block, 'From Screen To Stage: *A Little Night Music* and *Passion*' in *The Oxford Handbook of Sondheim Studies*, ed. by Robert Gordon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 258–277.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 263.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 273.

Thirdly, this approach homogenises the multimedia nature of the musical theatre form by portraying the musical's response to source material as a monophonic message. This is an oversimplification within this context; the musical theatre form communicates in polyphonic terms, with each constituent medium contributing information simultaneously in a complex framework of multimedia.

In this thesis I study the musical *Sweeney Todd: the Demon Barber of Fleet Street* as an example of multimedia adaptation. I investigate the process of cross-media adaptation undertaken to transform the hypotext –Bond's *Sweeney Todd* – into the hypertext– the musical. To do so I apply Nicholas Cook's theory of musical multimedia as an analytical framework and draw on semiotic, narratological and musicological analysis techniques.<sup>6</sup> I consider how the meaning, specifically the socio-economic critique, of the originary text are adapted into the musical theatre art form.

I employ a combination of analytical perspectives to demonstrate the complexity of musical theatre adaptation. I argue that *Sweeney Todd* can be understood as a multifaceted intertextual web of media forms. To structure this enquiry, I study the musical as three distinct components, book, lyrics and music and consider how each respond to Bond's text first in isolation and then in combination.

To contextualise this discussion what follows is a review of the salient literature that form the current parameters of musical theatre and Sondheim studies scholarship.

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<sup>6</sup> Nicholas Cook, *Analyzing Musical Multimedia*, (UK, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

## **Chapter One – Literature Review: The State of the Art**

Reflecting the interdisciplinary nature of the musical theatre art form, scholars from multiple fields have contributed to a lively academic discourse regarding the musical. Within this landscape, academics have considered musical theatre from formal, historical, socio-political and cultural perspectives. This body of scholarship is diverse and increasing in scope and popularity.

To fulfil the aim of this thesis – to consider the musical *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* as a product of multimedia adaptation - it has been necessary to consult a diverse range of academic scholarship. What follows is a survey of the salient scholarship that has been consulted to complete this project. Taken together, these texts make up the current academic landscape in which this research topic sits.

To reflect the breadth of scholarship consulted, the following literature review is divided into four sections: musical theatre studies, Sondheim studies, adaptation studies and multimedia.

### **Musical Theatre Studies**

Academic attitudes toward the musical have undergone a gradual change over the past century. Scholars of musicological and wider musico-dramatic studies have largely progressed beyond viewpoints steeped in derision, to develop the 'burgeoning field of musical theatre scholarship'.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth A. Wells, *West Side Story: Cultural Perspectives on an American Musical* (Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2011), p. 3.

The once held view of the musical theatre art form as a ‘plebeian, ephemeral, unliterary kind of performance theatre that defies serious analysis’ has become antiquated.<sup>2</sup> Works of musical theatre such as *Oklahoma!*, considered ‘sentimental and vacuous’ by influential academic Eric Bentley in 1946, have been reevaluated by later academics as ‘milestone[s] in the musical theatre’.<sup>3</sup>

As interest and respect for the field have developed, publications on the subject have become more frequent and the range of research focuses has grown.

The publications that I have chosen to discuss here demonstrate four dominant trends or types of musical theatre scholarship and have had a direct bearing on my research: a) histories, b) music analysis, c) theatre studies, d) socio-economics. For each of these trends I will critically appraise a key contribution to the field that has had a discernible influence on my research.

## History

Investigations into the historical development of the musical theatre are many and include publications authored by Andrew Lamb<sup>4</sup>, Gerald Bordman<sup>5</sup> and Stanley Green.<sup>6</sup> Of the various theatre historians, Ethan Mordden is regarded as an authority on the American musical.<sup>7</sup> Mordden’s output provides a wealth of contextual information on the subject. Mordden covers musical theatre’s origins, development, styles, trends and the importance of various works and artists.

Mordden’s first publication, *Better Foot Forward*, is less rigorously researched

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<sup>2</sup> Foster Hirsch, *Harold Prince and the American Musical Theater* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 5.

<sup>3</sup> Joseph P. Swain, *The Broadway Musical: A Critical and Musical Survey*, 2nd ed. (Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 1990), p. 107.

<sup>4</sup> Andrew Lamb, *150 Years of Popular Musical Theatre* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

<sup>5</sup> Gerald Bordman, *American Musical Theatre a Chronicle* (New York: Oxford University Press USA, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> Stanley Green, *Broadway Musicals, Show-by-Show* (New Jersey: Applause Theatre Book Publishers, 2014).

<sup>7</sup> Richard Moody, Review of Ethan Mordden, *The American Theatre by Ethan Mordden* (1967), *American Literature*, 54 (1982), 303-304.

than the scholar's subsequent publications. Mordden's first book consisted primarily of anecdotes rather than rigorous research. However, with the exception of *Better Foot Forward*, Mordden's studies, in rigour and overall quality, are superior to similar historical writings on the subject.

*Anything Goes: A History of American Musical Theatre* is Mordden's most accomplished publication and contains essential contextual information that has informed this research project. This survey contains unique observations and insights and considers the significance and influence of examples of the art form that have been neglected by other musical theatre historians, such as Offenbach's *Tales of Hoffman*.<sup>8</sup> Mordden's choice of case studies and areas of enquiry are refreshing and original. For example, Mordden discusses the less familiar, yet still significant, musicals and figures of the tradition, such as the works of G. M. Cohen and the influence of little known publisher Max Dreyfus on the works of Jerome Kern and Richard Rodgers.<sup>9</sup>

Though this source has proven indispensable to the development of my research, *Anything Goes: A History of American Musical Theatre* has a significant structural shortcoming that requires brief discussion. Mordden structures this book by dividing the development of musical theatre into four specific 'ages'. One assumes that this has been done to allow the reader to more easily digest the book's contents. However, as Mordden does not discuss the method behind this structure, the result is one of over simplification. As historian Katherine K. Preston has suggested, the genesis of musical theatre is complex and though one

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<sup>8</sup> Ethan Mordden, *Anything Goes: A History of American Musical Theatre* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

can trace the significance of genres, figures, events and works on the form's continued development, the assumption of codification as a result of chronology is restrictive.<sup>10</sup> Grouping musicals and practitioners into the categories of 'First Age', 'Second Age' and so on, airbrushes the early history of the musical's origin, which Preston has described as a 'chaotic mess'.<sup>11</sup>

The structure that Mordden employs may be misleading in its simplicity, but the research contained within the structure is sound and provides much needed contextual information.

## **Musicology**

Musicological scholarship regarding the musical theatre is indebted to the work of Joseph P. Swain – specifically his book *The Broadway Musical: A Critical Survey*, first published in 1990 and then republished in expanded form in 2002.<sup>12</sup> Before Swain, studies of the musical had been undertaken almost exclusively by literary or theatre scholars, capable of insight regarding drama and libretto but unable to support their arguments with effective musical analysis.<sup>13</sup> Authors such as Stephen Banfield had undertaken musicological research on specific composers, for example Stephen Sondheim, in *Sondheim's Broadway Musicals*; however a musicological study of the development of Broadway music, as a genre, through the analysis of key works had not been attempted.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Katherine K. Preston, 'American Musical Theatre Before the Twentieth Century', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Musical*, ed. by William Everett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 1-28 (p. 3).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>12</sup> Joseph P. Swain, *The Broadway Musical: A Critical and Musical Survey*, 2nd ed. (Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 1990)

<sup>13</sup> Eugene K. J. Bristow and Kevin Butler, 'Company, about face! The Show that Revolutionized the American Musical', *American Music*, 5 (1987), 241-254.

<sup>14</sup> Stephen Banfield, *Sondheim's Broadway Musicals* (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1993).

Swain's focus is broad. The author surveys the musical theatre art form by applying formal score analysis to a range of musicals from across the history and stylistic spectrum of the form. In Swain's first edition, the author looks at 16 works; in the expanded 2002 edition, this number rises to 20 and includes works written between 1990 and 2000.

The case studies that Swain chooses are diverse and include popular and influential works such as *Oklahoma!*, *West Side Story* and *Sweeney Todd* as well as more obscure works, including *Camelot* and *The Most Happy Fella*. This variation is largely responsible for the success of this book. Swain charts the major developments of the musical theatre through these examples, and illustrates the musical's gradual transformation into an art form that 'integrates the elements of the musical theater into a credible drama'.<sup>15</sup> Though one could argue that Swain's use of 'integration' as the measure of a musical's credibility is confining, it does not taint the author's analysis, which is an effective application of formal music analysis to the musical theatre repertoire.

Swain's treatment of Sondheim's *Sweeney Todd* is one of the book's most successful chapters. Specifically Swain's insight into the motivic relationships and non-functional harmony that characterise *Sweeney Todd's* score.<sup>16</sup> Though he re-treads ground that Banfield has covered, Swain focuses a great deal on the connection between motif and characterisation and by doing so produces unique readings of the musical material.

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<sup>15</sup> Swain, p. 18.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 353.

Though influential and pioneering in this field, Swain's dogmatic application of Joseph Kerman's methodology does have limitations. In the book's introduction Swain cites Joseph Kerman's, *Opera as Drama*<sup>17</sup>, as the core inspiration for this volume.<sup>18</sup> Swain's study is, in essence, an application of Kerman's methods to the repertoire of musical theatre. Kerman's work has served many musicologists as a model; however, Swain doesn't consider whether the musical theatre art form is well served by such an approach.<sup>19</sup> Musical theatre is a popular art form and its music shares more features with popular music than it does classical music. Musical theatre scores are invariably composites of popular music genres; and cast-recording albums are commodities that, like popular music albums, are expected to sell many copies. Swain's approach ignores what Phillip Tagg terms 'paramusical parameters'. Such 'parameters' include audience, venue and images; significant sources of information for the analysts of popular music, that could have been valuable contributions to this study.<sup>20</sup>

Swain places formal musical analysis over any other means of enquiry as his main tool in this study.<sup>21</sup> Effective analysis is drawn but little is done to interpret this analysis in a way that is consistent with the qualities of the art form. For example when Swain analyses *Sweeney Todd*, there is little attention paid to the interaction between lyric and music. Studies that have applied similar techniques to popular music genres, such as Edward Macan's study of progressive rock, *Rocking the Classics: English Progressive Rock and the Counterculture*, have demonstrated how such methods can be successful. However, where Macan and

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<sup>17</sup> Joseph Kerman, *Opera as Drama: Fiftieth Anniversary Addition* (California: University of California Press, 2006).

<sup>18</sup> Swain, p. vii.

<sup>19</sup> Scott McMillin, *The Musical as Drama* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2014), p. 4.

<sup>20</sup> Phillip Tagg, *Music's Meanings* (New York: Mass Media Music Scholar's Press, 2013), p. 22.

<sup>21</sup> Swain, p. 6.

others blend traditional techniques with ideas and approaches associated with the study of popular music, such as semiotics and multimedia, Swain focuses exclusively on replicating the methods of *Opera as Drama*.

In addition, regularly Swain voices his own belief in opera's superiority over musical theatre. The most striking and condescending example of this occurs in the work's introduction; Swain uses a quote from Francis Fergusson to describe the achievements of the musical as 'the limited perfection of the minor dramatic genres' and goes on to say 'The achievements are simpler and the expectations smaller'.<sup>22</sup>

Irrespective of these criticisms, Swain's analysis is nevertheless accomplished and has been highly influential on the development of musicological investigations of musical theatre; notable academics such as Raymond Knapp and Steve Swayne have cited Swain's work as influential and Swayne's study demonstrates how musical theatre scores can stand up to rigorous traditional music analysis.

### **Theatre Studies**

Musical theatre is often studied as a product divested from the process of creation. Academics commonly study the scores, scripts or recordings that aim to capture a musical's initial performance. What is considered less by academics is the process of musical theatre creation. Understanding how musicals have progressed from initial conception to final form is a highly effective way of

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

appreciating the context of musical theatre creation where creative aspirations and commercial pressures combine.<sup>23</sup>

Of the small number of academic studies that consider the development of specific musical theatre examples, Geoffrey Block's *Enchanted Evenings* is the most complete.<sup>24</sup> First published in 1997, and then republished in expanded form in 2009, Block's study concerns the creation of a number of works in the repertoire, including, the output of Rodgers and Hammerstein, Gershwin and Bernstein. Block consults a great number of primary sources, accounts and contemporary reviews. Combining these sources with original analysis, Block's study adds to the scholarship's understanding of musical theatre creation and reception.

Where Block's book is most effective is in its use of primary sources. The author has consulted original manuscripts, rehearsal materials and interviews with practitioners and cast members. What elevates this project beyond journalism is Block's dedication to using these sources to deconstruct chosen examples of musical theatre. In his study of *Carousel*, Block refers to Rodgers' original manuscript and its various stages of development as a tool to understand the relationship between the musical and its source material. After initial publication, the methods of Block's text have been employed by other academics, notably Sondheim scholar Joanne Gordon. Gordon's book, *Art Isn't Easy: The*

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<sup>23</sup> Stacy Wolf, *Changed for Good: A Feminist History of the Broadway Musical* (New York: Oxford University Press USA, 2011), p. 12.

<sup>24</sup> Geoffrey Block, *Enchanted Evenings: The Broadway Musical from 'Show Boat' to Sondheim and Lloyd Webber*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press USA, 2009).

*Theater of Stephen Sondheim*, applies similar methodology to Block's but focuses exclusively on Sondheim's output.<sup>25</sup>

Block's ability to fuse insightful interpretations, factual information and anecdotal accounts has proven influential on my research. Though some of Block's claims have been made by others before him, it is the author's style and rigorous method that demonstrates how this aspect of the scholarship can be more than a narrative account but an insightful analytical tool.

### **Socio-Economics**

The musical theatre art form has attracted attention from academics concerned with the musical's cultural status and its interaction with and representation of social groups and economics.<sup>26</sup> Topics so far investigated include: personal identity,<sup>27</sup> national identity,<sup>28</sup> sexuality<sup>29</sup> and gender.<sup>30</sup> Investigating musical theatre from these perspectives has proven highly successful largely due to the musical's reflexive relationship with society and increasingly politicised subject matter.<sup>31</sup> The amount of studies of this kind is growing and their effectiveness increasing.

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<sup>25</sup> Joanne Gordon, *Art Isn't Easy The Theater of Stephen Sondheim* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1992).

<sup>26</sup> Paul Filmer, Val Rimmer and Dave Walsh, 'Oklahoma!: ideology and politics in the vernacular tradition of the American musical', *Popular Music*, 18 (1999), 281 -295.

<sup>27</sup> John Bush Jones, *Our Musicals, Ourselves: A Social History of the American Musical Theater* (New England: Brandeis University Press, 2004).

<sup>28</sup> Raymond Knapp, 'Assassins, Oklahoma! and the 'shifting fringe of dark around the camp-fire'', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 16 (2004), 77-101.

<sup>29</sup> Judith A Peraino, *Listening to the Sirens: Musical Technologies of Queer Identity from Homer to Hedwig* (California: University of California Press, 2005).

<sup>30</sup> Stacy Ellen Wolf, *A Problem Like Maria: Gender and Sexuality in the American Musical* (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 2002).

<sup>31</sup> Jones, p. x.

Of the projects undertaken in this area, Raymond Knapp's two-volume study *The American Musical* is one of the most accomplished and most influential on this research.<sup>32</sup> As a combination of score analysis, theatre criticism and socio-political research, Knapp's methodology is robust and well suited to a study of this repertoire. Consequently Knapp's work has had a direct bearing on the methods used in this research project.

Knapp discusses various themes in the context of the American musical theatre tradition, with a particular focus on 'national identity' and 'the performance of personal identity'. Throughout this book, Knapp investigates the musical theatre's reflective relationship with American society and its representation of marginalised societal groups.<sup>33</sup> Knapp's systematic discussion of the musical in relation to thematic subgroups, such as 'mythologies', 'race and ethnicity' and 'exoticism' is rigorous and immensely useful. Knapp successfully employs a methodology of his own devising based on a blend of theoretical processes well suited to musicological study and the study of audience reception.

There are, however, a number of confusing digressions in Knapp's book that are under substantiated. The author reaches, at times, for strained conclusions, which stand out due to their contrast with the wealth of well-supported arguments that can be found in the book. An example of this can be found in Knapp's discussion of *Sweeney Todd*. After deftly discussing the interaction of various musical genres in the work's score, Knapp turns his attention to

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<sup>32</sup> Raymond Knapp, *The American Musical and the Formation of National Identity* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2006).

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

Sondheim's personal life. Knapp takes time to draw parallels between the musical's narrative and Sondheim's experiences to tread the often explored ground of Sondheim as outsider. This material is unsupported by evidence or sources that have not been cited before by other commentators to suggest the same points; this digression seems particularly out of place in the chapter's otherwise thought-provoking criticism.<sup>34</sup>

What makes this addition to the scholarship so valuable is its well considered matching of method to purpose and subject. Knapp has created an analytical framework that exceeds those utilised by academics undertaking similar projects such as Stacy Ellen Wolf<sup>35</sup> and Grace Barnes.<sup>36</sup> Knapp's method deftly incorporates socio-cultural data and observations with music analysis and drama analysis.

## **Summary**

The field has grown significantly over the last three decades in both size and credibility. Musical theatre scholarship is like its subject, highly interdisciplinary, popular and varied in quality. My research builds proudly on the work of these influential academics, and its topic has been informed by their research

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<sup>34</sup> Raymond Knapp, *The American Musical and the Performance of Personal Identity* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2006): p. 331.

<sup>35</sup> Wolf, *A Problem Like Maria: Gender and Sexuality in the American Musical*.

<sup>36</sup> Grace Barnes, *Her Turn on Stage: The Role of Women in Musical Theatre* (New York: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2015).

## Sondheim Studies

Stephen Sondheim's reputation as an iconoclastic intellectual and experimental practitioner of the American musical theatre is attested widely amongst the academic community and the theatre-going public at large.<sup>37</sup> Critics such as Michael Billington have hailed Sondheim as 'the greatest living American composer'<sup>38</sup> whilst Stephen Banfield has summarised America's national feelings toward the composer as 'a cultural property to be proud of'.<sup>39</sup> More so than any other Broadway composer, Sondheim's work has been embraced and studied significantly in the scholarship.<sup>40</sup>

The academic attention afforded to 'the most influential figure in the entire history of the [musical theatre] form' has steadily increased and become recognised as the field of Sondheim Studies.<sup>41</sup> Scholars from various disciplines, including theatre studies<sup>42</sup>, cultural studies<sup>43</sup>, performance studies<sup>44</sup>, linguistics<sup>45</sup>, literature and popular musicology have undertaken important research into Sondheim's output.<sup>46</sup> The diverse areas of enquiry and methodologies that have been employed to appraise this repertoire have produced a rich bank of publications on the subject. At present there exist fine

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<sup>37</sup> Gordon, *Art Isn't Easy: The Theatre of Stephen Sondheim*, p. 3.

<sup>38</sup> Michael Billington, quoted in Banfield, p. 1.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Robert Gordon, 'Introduction', in *The Oxford Handbook of Sondheim Studies*, ed. by Robert Gordon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 1-9 (p. 2).

<sup>41</sup> Jackson R. Bryer and Richard Allan Davison, *The Art of the American Musical: Conversations with the Creators* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2005), p. xi.

<sup>42</sup> Kimball King, *Modern Dramatists: A Casebook of Major British, Irish, and American Playwrights* (London: Routledge, 1998).

<sup>43</sup> Raymond Knapp, 'Sondheim's America; America's Sondheim', in *The Oxford Handbook of Sondheim Studies*, ed. by Robert Gordon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 432-450 (p. 432).

<sup>44</sup> Matt Wolf, 'Sondheim on the London Stage', in *The Oxford Handbook of Sondheim Studies*, ed. by Robert Gordon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 214-223 (p. 214).

<sup>45</sup> Thomas P. Adler, 'The Sung and the Said: Literary Value in the Musical Dramas of Stephen Sondheim', in *Reading Stephen Sondheim: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. by Sandor Goodhart (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 2000), pp. 36-46 (p. 37).

<sup>46</sup> Marc Bauch, *The American Musical: A Literary Study within the Context of American Drama and American Theater with References to Selected American Musicals* (Marburg: Tectum Verlag, 2003).

discussions and analyses of Sondheim's music and his lyrics as well as illuminating applications of literary criticism and theatre studies principles to the repertoire.

As well as the field's scholarly publications, research into Sondheim's oeuvre is aided greatly by biographical accounts of the composer's life, journalistic discussions of his shows, many interviews and Sondheim's own publications. Though these works are not scholarly they are of essential importance to the study of this subject. Specifically Sondheim's book *Hat Box: The Collected Lyrics of Stephen Sondheim*<sup>47</sup> and Crag Zadan's book *Sondheim & Co.* have been referenced widely in the field's scholarship and have proven highly useful to this research topic.<sup>48</sup>

The following discussion of the field's literature has been divided into three sections, **music, literary criticism and theatre studies** and **Sondheim's publications and journalistic sources**. I have employed a selective approach here, focusing on only seminal examples in each section. The examples chosen have been highly influential on this project and are representative of trends in this area of scholarship.

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<sup>47</sup> Stephen Sondheim, *Hat Box: The Collected Lyrics of Stephen Sondheim* (New York: Virgin Books, 2011).

<sup>48</sup> Craig Zadan, *Sondheim & Co.* (London: Nick Hern Books, 1990).

## Music

Musicological studies of Sondheim's works are surprisingly few. A point neatly illustrated by the recently published *Oxford Handbook of Sondheim Studies*, which has twenty-eight contributors, of which only four are musicologists.<sup>49</sup> The majority of Sondheim-related scholarship either focuses on more literary aspects of Sondheim's works or quotes at length the analysis of a small pool of musicological investigations. Though figures such as Geoffrey Block,<sup>50</sup> Joseph P. Swain<sup>51</sup> and Raymond Knapp have written on examples or aspects of Sondheim's theatre these have formed parts of larger surveys considering the development of American musical theatre as a whole.<sup>52</sup>

Of the musicologists who have written on the music of Sondheim's theatre, three have made significant and unique contributions to the field in the form of substantial publications. Stephen Banfield's *Sondheim's Broadway Musicals*,<sup>53</sup> Steve Swayne's *How Sondheim Found his Sound*<sup>54</sup> and Mark Horowitz's *Sondheim on Music* are each of high quality and rigour, unique in their purposes and methods and deliver refreshing insight into Sondheim's music and his creative process.<sup>55</sup> By consulting this trinity in combination one is afforded a robust and detailed introduction to Sondheim's music through formal analysis, an account of his developing musical style and detailed interviews with the composer. Though each of these books has its limitations they are recognised as accomplished musicological pillars of this field.

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<sup>49</sup> *The Oxford Handbook of Sondheim Studies*, ed. by Robert Gordon.

<sup>50</sup> Block.

<sup>51</sup> Swain.

<sup>52</sup> Knapp, *The American Musical and the Performance of Personal Identity*.

<sup>53</sup> Banfield.

<sup>54</sup> Steve Swayne, *How Sondheim Found His Sound* (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 2007).

<sup>55</sup> Mark Eden Horowitz, *Sondheim on Music: Minor Details and Major Decisions* (Toronto: Scarecrow Press, 2010).

Stephen Banfield is regarded as a pioneering scholar in the field of Sondheim Studies.<sup>56</sup> Banfield's analysis of this repertoire has since its first publication been corroborated and quoted by academics such as Lois Kivesto<sup>57</sup> and Sandor Goodhart.<sup>58</sup> For ten years, Banfield's *Sondheim's Broadway Musicals* was the sole substantial musicological publication to focus on Sondheim. For this reason and its overall rigour, Banfield's analysis has been widely interpreted by scholars from many disciplines and demonstrates the viability of Sondheim's music as a candidate for substantial musicological study.

Banfield's purpose in, *Sondheim's Broadway Musicals*, is to 'talk about the [Sondheim's] music as music'.<sup>59</sup> To this end, the author applies analytical processes to every major musical written by Sondheim before 1992, as well as providing a detailed introductory chapter containing valuable contextual information. Banfield's analysis is rigorous and consistently thought provoking and his examples illuminating. The discussion of *Sunday in the Park with George*, in Chapter 11, is demonstrative of the successes of Banfield's work.<sup>60</sup> Banfield argues in this chapter that the show's music is a direct response to the pointillist painting technique originated by the show's eponymous main character. Given that the first half of this work depicts the laborious creation of Georges Seurat's masterwork *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of la Grande Jatte* the act of transmedialisation that Banfield suggests here is interesting particularly in

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<sup>56</sup> Geoffrey Block, Review of Stephen Banfield, *Sondheim's Broadway Musicals* (1993), *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, 121 (1996), 124-131, (p. 130).

<sup>57</sup> Lois Kivesto, 'Comedy Tonight! A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum', in *Stephen Sondheim: A Casebook*, ed. by Joanne Gordon (Abingdon: Garland Publishing Inc., 1997), p. 37.

<sup>58</sup> Goodhart, p. 16.

<sup>59</sup> Banfield, p. 1.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 343.

relation to the topic of my research. Banfield's ability to combine rigorous musical analysis with theatrical insight is the core strength and unique feature of this study.

Where Banfield focused his research on the musical make up of Sondheim's shows, Swayne takes as his focus the development of Sondheim's style – tracing his music through the composer's early inspirations.<sup>61</sup> Swayne's method is fascinating – after reading of Sondheim's interest in Prokofiev and his appreciation of the Neoclassicists, one can easily recognise such influences in his musicals, particularly *A Little Night Music* and *Passion*.

Swayne's work takes a different approach to that of Banfield. Rather than close formal analysis of each musical's scores, Swayne, using as his guide Sondheim's broad personal collection of records and albums, investigates the composer's unique musical style. Swayne aims to disprove the notion that Sondheim's later shows are illustrative of a developed and more accomplished style, than those of his earlier period. Swayne argues that the Neoclassical and Romantic inspired musical language of Sondheim's more mature shows such as *Into the Woods* is present in his earlier compositions also.<sup>62</sup> To illustrate this point, Swayne chooses a number of styles and genres, well liked by Sondheim, and attempts to trace their presence in the composer's scores. Swayne's method is Banfield's in retrograde. Swayne's point of departure is hypothetical stylistic influence, which he then traces to the scores, Banfield begins with the score.

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<sup>61</sup> Swayne.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

Swayne's book is perhaps best utilised as a reference source for the many allusions, pastiche numbers and references that are characteristic of a Sondheim score. Though taking Sondheim's record collection as the source of his enquiry is perhaps not the most sound and rigorous departure point for the analysis of style; Swayne's analytical methodology is a useful one. The author's ability to employ both functional analysis and semiotic principles is a viable model for future studies concerned with similar topics in this field. Reading Swayne one becomes aware of Sondheim's awareness of classical and jazz music repertoires and their presence in the composer's scores. One is invited to consider the imitative and often referential quality of Sondheim's scores in further detail. The topic of this present research topic is adaption in musical theatre; consequently understanding how Sondheim has adapted conventions and stylistic qualities of other repertoires and musical genres is extremely useful.

Mark Horowitz's *Sondheim on Music* is an invaluable addition to the musicology of Sondheim studies.<sup>63</sup> *Sondheim on Music* combines original musical analysis carried out by the book's author and detailed interviews with Sondheim himself. Though Horowitz's analysis is accomplished and original, it is the interviews with Sondheim that further lead this work to be considered indispensable and unique within the scholarship.

Recorded over three days in 1997, the interviews included in this book are more detailed and more musicological in focus than any others that have so far been

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<sup>63</sup> Horowitz.

recorded. Sondheim discusses in detail aspects of his shows and his artistic processes and decisions.

The book follows a simple structure. Horowitz after consulting the original manuscripts of each Sondheim show shares a selection of his observations with the composer. Sondheim and Horowitz then discuss these observations and then each work as a whole. There is a great deal to be learned from this book. It becomes possible to view Sondheim's works in stages of their development. One such example of this comes with the discussion of *Sweeney Todd*.<sup>64</sup> We learn that Sondheim originally intended the musical to be an opera, however after setting the first five minutes of the source material, Sondheim had composed twenty-five minutes of music; at this point Sondheim employed the assistance of dramatist Hugh Wheeler and committed to the musical form rather than opera.<sup>65</sup> This anecdote proves the significance of collaboration in the creation of musical theatre and the musical sophistication that Sondheim believed the source material deserved, a sophistication, which remains in the musical's finished score.

Horowitz's use of primary sources is notable. At present Sondheim's original manuscripts remain his. Though he has committed to donating the scores to the Library of Congress in Washington DC, this has yet to happen.<sup>66</sup> The sketches and excerpts reproduced in this book, taken directly from the original manuscripts are the only access that the scholarship currently has to these sources. This, in

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 125.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> William Everett, *The Musical: A Research and Information Guide* (London: Routledge, 2011), p. 241.

combination with Sondheim's candid responses to Horowitz's well-chosen questions, ensures that this book contains a wealth of important information.

Though the musicological writings on this repertoire are small in number their quality is high and their results pivotal to the field of Sondheim Studies.

### **Literary Criticism/Theatre Studies**

A significant proportion of the scholarly writing in this field has applied literary criticism and theatre studies analysis techniques to analyse the theatre of Sondheim's work. The purposes and methods of these studies have varied widely, and include investigations into representations of gender,<sup>67</sup> sexuality<sup>68</sup> and societal structures<sup>69</sup> and the study of developing theatrical forms.<sup>70</sup> By applying analytical methods associated with literary and theatre studies, scholars are able to rigorously appraise the theatre component of the musical theatre art form. This is essential to the developing critical understanding of this repertoire. The interdisciplinary nature of the musical theatre is such that instructive discussions of plot, character, theme and dramatic structure are not self contained, they have an influence on the interpretation of the analysis of music and other aspects of the art form. I have included the work of Joanne Gordon and a casebook compiling a number of thought provoking articles, in this literature review. These demonstrate the ability that theatre criticism and literary criticism has to further scholarly discussions of Sondheim's theatre.

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<sup>67</sup> Stacy Ellen Wolf, 'Keeping Company with Sondheim's Women', in *The Oxford Handbook of Sondheim Studies*, ed. by Robert Gordon (UK, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 365-383.

<sup>68</sup> Scott F. Stoddart, 'Queer Sondheim' in *The Oxford Handbook of Sondheim Studies*, ed. by Robert Gordon (UK, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 416-431.

<sup>69</sup> Knapp, *Sondheim's America; America's Sondheim*.

<sup>70</sup> Scott Miller, 'Assassins and the Concept Musical', in *Stephen Sondheim A Casebook*, ed. by Joanne Gordon (New York: Garland Publishing Inc. 1997), pp. 187-204.

The work of Joanne Gordon is an important contribution to this field and is a prime example of scholarship of this type. Gordon's book, *Art Isn't Easy: the Theater of Stephen Sondheim*, is the author's most substantial publication and is exclusively focused on the work of Sondheim.<sup>71</sup> Gordon has also edited a volume of articles written about Sondheim's theatre, *Stephen Sondheim A Casebook*, which contains contributions by a range of academics including Thomas P. Adler, S.F Stoddart and Sandor Goodhart.<sup>72</sup>

*Gordon's Art Isn't Easy: The Theater of Stephen Sondheim* fulfils two primary objectives, each of which is valuable to a scholar of Sondheim Studies. Gordon compiles pertinent biographical and contextual information, many critics' responses and anecdotes concerning the creation and performance of each of Sondheim's shows. Gordon also carries out her own theatrical analysis, working chronologically through Sondheim's output. Gordon bases her research on a combination of her professional experiences as a theatrical director and on rigorous close study of the works. Chapters focusing on *Sweeney Todd* and *Sunday in the Park with George* are perhaps the most accomplished of this volume. In these chapters Gordon utilises Stanislavskian concepts such as the system of acting and method acting to deconstruct character relations and plot.<sup>73</sup> The analysis is strong here due to its originality. Though Stanislavski's methods have been used for decades to deconstruct theatre they had not before Gordon been applied to musical theatre – the results are effective.

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<sup>71</sup> Gordon, *Art Isn't Easy*.

<sup>72</sup> *Stephen Sondheim A Casebook*, ed. by Joanne Gordon.

<sup>73</sup> Gordon, *Art Isn't Easy*, p. 207.

There is a tendency in Gordon's work to focus at length on summaries of points and opinions that have been explored at length in other publications, such as Zadan's *Sondheim & Co.*<sup>74</sup> This can become lengthy and derivative. Gordon's own critical analysis is the highlight of this volume. Gordon demonstrates the successes of applying theatre studies techniques to Sondheim's musical theatre. This has influenced my project directly and as a result I have consulted the work of influential theatre critics Eric Bentley<sup>75</sup> and Francis Fergusson, amongst others.<sup>76</sup>

*Stephen Sondheim: A Casebook* is an excellent source that demonstrates the diversity of perspectives and points of enquiry in this field. Gordon's describes the aim of this volume as '...the insights provided by these essays will give the reader a more profound respect, understanding and love of Sondheim's work'.<sup>77</sup> Articles in this volume apply a diverse range of critical perspectives to study many aspects of Sondheim's theatre, including: representations of gender,<sup>78</sup> psychoanalysis,<sup>79</sup> theatrical form,<sup>80</sup> the use of chorus<sup>81</sup> and illusion.<sup>82</sup> Edward Bonahue, Jr., describing the approach of his contribution to this volume, 'Portraits of the Artist: Sunday in the Park with George as "Postmodern Drama"' writes, 'We must bring to the serious musical the same kind of careful critical

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<sup>74</sup> Zadan.

<sup>75</sup> Eric Bentley, *The Life of the Drama* (New York: Applause Theatre Books, 1964).

<sup>76</sup> Francis Fergusson, *The Idea of a Theatre: A Study of Ten Plays: The Art of Drama in Changing Perspectives* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1949).

<sup>77</sup> Gordon, *Stephen Sondheim A Casebook*, p. 8.

<sup>78</sup> Laura Hanson, 'Broadway Babies Images of Women in the Musical of Stephen Sondheim', in *Stephen Sondheim A Casebook*, ed. by Joanne Gordon (New York: Garland Publishing Inc. 1997), pp. 13–34.

<sup>79</sup> Judith Schlesinger, 'Psychology, Evil, and Sweeney Todd or, "Don't I Know You Mister?"', in *Stephen Sondheim A Casebook*, ed. by Joanne Gordon (New York: Garland Publishing Inc. 1997), pp. 125–142.

<sup>80</sup> Scott Miller, 'Assassins and the Concept Musical', in *Stephen Sondheim A Casebook*, ed. by Joanne Gordon (New York: Garland Publishing Inc. 1997), pp. 187–204.

<sup>81</sup> Barbara Means Fraser, 'Revisiting Greece The Sondheim Chorus', in *Stephen Sondheim A Casebook*, Joanne Gordon (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1997), pp. 223–250.

<sup>82</sup> Leonard Fleischer, 'The Art of Illusion in Pacific Overture', in *Stephen Sondheim A Casebook*, ed. by Joanne Gordon (New York: Garland Publishing Inc. 1997), pp. 223–250.

techniques as we do other drama, we must ask the same difficult questions, and we must be willing to criticize as well as praise'. Bonahue aptly describes the purpose and the success of this volume. Though some of the contributions are more original than others, they each, through an application of critical techniques answer sophisticated questions. This volume demonstrates the ability that dramatic analysis has to deepen our critical appreciation of musical theatre and how Sondheim's work in particular can be analysed in this manner.

There have been many other publications, books and articles that have approached Sondheim's theatre from this perspective. *Reading Stephen Sondheim: A Collection of Critical Essays* edited by Sandor Goodhart is a noteworthy example, in which respected academics such as Thomas P. Adler consider major dramatic themes of Sondheim's theatre such as religion, marriage and death.<sup>83</sup>

### **Sondheim's Writings/Journalistic Publications**

Biographies, lengthy interviews, surveys, accounts by performers, directors and collaborators and two books authored by Sondheim himself have so far been published. Though most of these sources cover similar ground, a selection are essential to a scholar of this field; this includes a detailed biography written by Meryle Secrest,<sup>84</sup> a book of interviews conducted by Craig Zadan<sup>85</sup> and an annotated collection of lyrics, arranged and annotated by Sondheim.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Goodhart.

<sup>84</sup> Meryle Secrest, *Stephen Sondheim: A Life* (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 1998).

<sup>85</sup> Zadan.

<sup>86</sup> Sondheim, *Hat Box: The Collected Lyrics of Stephen Sondheim*.

Craig Zadan's book, *Sondheim & Co.*, is an essential reference point for academics hoping to further understand Sondheim's process of musical theatre creation.<sup>87</sup> Zadan's book comprises a number of interviews conducted with Sondheim and many of his collaborators, such as George Furth, Hal Prince and James Lapine. Zadan combines these interviews with a wealth of well-researched contextual information concerning Sondheim's shows, from conception to reception. The focus of Zadan's book is Sondheim's career. This alone makes this book unique, as similar publications such as Ethan Mordden's *On Sondheim: An Opinionated Guide*, revisit well-known biographical details from Sondheim's life, rather than focusing on critical enquiry.<sup>88</sup>

What makes Zadan's book such an indispensable addition to this field are its interviews. Zadan discusses each of Sondheim's musicals in turn, interviewing as he does, Sondheim and his most prominent collaborators. Zadan is able as a result to demonstrate the collaborative nature of musical theatre production far more faithfully than any other writer on the subject. Zadan's book is the most complete account of the process of creating musical theatre. The book provides many examples of Sondheim and his collaborators working to overcome various challenges: dramatic, practical and critical. Each section reveals a great deal about the creation of each musical and through interviews Sondheim demonstrates his creative process. By reading *Sondheim & Co.* one is able to appreciate Sondheim's approach to composition and lyric writing as a process grown out of character, drama and theatrical theme.

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<sup>87</sup> Zadan.

<sup>88</sup> Ethan Mordden, *On Sondheim: An Opinionated Guide* (New York: Oxford University Press USA, 2016).

In addition to providing information about Sondheim's craft, Zadan's interview of Sondheim's regular collaborators is an indispensable addition to this field and has been valuable in completing this project. Interviews with practitioners such as Hugh Wheeler, the book writer for *Sweeney Todd*, are hard to find. Zadan's inclusion of these figures is a welcome challenge to the tendency to overlook the contributions of Sondheim's collaborators.

Sondheim has written two books, which combine together to form *Hat Box: The Collected Lyrics of Stephen Sondheim*.<sup>89</sup> In this collection Sondheim appraises his lyric writing career. Sondheim discusses the lyrics he has written for each of the major musicals as well as those written for film scores and amateur productions. In addition to these discussions, the book includes excerpts from Sondheim's notebooks that show the evolution of certain passages. In great detail, Sondheim shares the many tenets of his methods. Rhythm, rhyme, structure, imagery, character and dialect are all explored in detail. Each of Sondheim's most quoted maxims, such as 'content dictates form' and 'less is more' is explored.<sup>90</sup> To a scholar interested in Sondheim's lyric writing techniques and his role as dramatist there is no franker account. In the collection, Sondheim writes 'when I write a score I inhabit the characters the way an actor would' this is one example of the thought provoking revelations that are included in these books.<sup>91</sup> Sondheim has described himself as a 'playwright in song'; this collection elucidates this description.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Sondheim, *Hat Box: The Collected Lyrics of Stephen Sondheim*.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xx.

<sup>92</sup> Horowitz, p. 25.

In a candid fashion, Sondheim discusses examples of his lyric writing that have fallen short of his standards and beliefs. One such passage comes from *West Side Story*. Sondheim, rather than employing regular strophic structures and rhyme schemes adapts lyrics to suit character. Sondheim reserves true rhymes for characters of intelligence, cunning or manipulation and pays significant attention to the suitability of vocabulary. Sondheim reviews Maria's lyrics in the song 'I Feel Pretty' as not 'in keeping with the way Maria and the rest of the girls expressed themselves' and goes on to suggest that the passage brings him embarrassment in performance.<sup>93</sup> This is one of a number of critical self-reflections that Sondheim includes in this book, which simultaneously attests to the rigour of his lyric writing method and the unbiased scrutiny he's willing to apply to his output.

Sondheim's collection is a well-written and detailed discussion of his creative process. The text demonstrates the various processes that Sondheim employs to achieve his art. In combination with Zadan's *Sondheim & Co.* one forms an appreciation of Sondheim's intellectualism, demanding standards and sophistication.

As well as these texts Meryle Secrest has contributed a rigorous and detailed biography of Sondheim's life.<sup>94</sup> In producing the biography Secrest interviewed Sondheim at length. As a result the significance and originality of the biography is unrivalled by similar publications such as Martin Gottfried's, *Sondheim*.<sup>95</sup> In

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<sup>93</sup> Sondheim, *Hat Box: The Collected Lyrics of Stephen Sondheim*, p. 48.

<sup>94</sup> Secrest.

<sup>95</sup> Martin Gottfried, *Sondheim* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1993).

the biography *Secret* explores, with Sondheim's permission and assistance, the composer's childhood, relationship with Oscar Hammerstein II, sexuality and relationships with key collaborators such as Hal Prince, amongst many other topics. Where Zadan's book focuses on Sondheim's career, *Secret* concentrates on his personal life. The information that *Secret* reveals is helpful for scholars attempting interpretative analysis of Sondheim's works. Knowing more about the composer's life and beliefs, for those scholars concerned with an extrinsic study of the works, has the potential to add significance to characters, events and themes.

### **Summary**

Sondheim Studies is a growing field, with academics from many diverse disciplines contributing to the developing understanding and study of Sondheim's works. The field reflects the interdisciplinary nature of the art form with scholars studying the various aspects of musical theatre, its audiences, components and creators, and the relationship between them.

This thesis is indebted to the academics discussed above and is a response to the areas of Sondheim's output that has not currently been considered in significant depth. This research project attempts to apply theories and critical approaches such as semiotic, narratological and multimedia analysis techniques that have not yet been applied to Sondheim's work. These techniques facilitate the discussion of Sondheim's output as multimedia adaptation, an element of Sondheim's theatre that has received very little scholarly investigation.

## **Chapter Two – Methodology**

### **From Theatre to Musical Theatre**

As Katja Krebs argues in *Translation and Adaptation in Theatre and Film*, studying adaptation requires an analyst to adapt, and adopt, a wide range of perspectives and analytical tools.<sup>1</sup> It is necessary to study the basis of the adaptation -the hypotext- and the product of the adaptation –the hypertext. In the case of musical theatre the complexity of this undertaking is intensified; the hypotext is remediated across multiple forms of media, including music, drama, dance, and stage design, which combine in performance to form the overall hypertext.

In an attempt to accommodate the inherent challenges involved in the study of musical theatre adaptation, I have devised a methodology that combines analysis methods and perspectives from multiple disciplines. The project combines an analysis of C.G. Bond’s text and an analysis of the musical.

Each analysis follows the same structure by segmenting each respective text into three categories: narrative, character and dialogue. Following the influence of Nicholas Cook’s theory of musical multimedia, the analysis of the musical further segments the text into three of its composite media: book, lyrics and music. In doing so I intend to consider how each element of the musical transforms the source.

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<sup>1</sup> Katja Krebs, *Translation and Adaptation in Theatre and Film (Routledge Advances in Theatre & Performance Studies)* (Oxford, Routledge Press, 2013), p. 2.

## **Methodology**

The multimedia analysis provided in this chapter has been undertaken to explore the process and the product of musical theatre adaptation. Prompted by Sondheim, Hal Prince and Hugh Wheeler who have each cited the socio-economic oppression of the source material as a core part of their adaptation strategy, the analysis focuses specifically on the musical's transformation of the socio-economic critique established in Bond's text.

### **Step One - The Hypotext: C.G. Bond's Play**

A core component of the research method is an analysis of the musical's source material, C.G. Bond's play. To analyse Bond's text, I employ a combination of narratological and semiotic analysis techniques endorsed by the theatre semioticians, Elaine Aston and George Savona in *Theatre as a Sign System: A Semiotics of Text and Performance*.<sup>2</sup>

I have chosen to consult this field of scholarship as it offers robust models through which one can study character functions and narrative structures. From the field, I have consulted the narrative grammar analysis of Thomas Pavel to produce a study of Bond's narrative as a series of character moves. This perspective provides two main salient benefits in relation to the aims of this project. Firstly, by applying a semiotic method one can look beyond stylistic and aesthetic points to expose the basic semiotic blueprint of an analysis object, regardless of medium.<sup>3</sup> This makes it possible to comparatively discuss the

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<sup>2</sup> Elaine Aston and George Savona, *Theatre as a Sign System: A Semiotics of Text and Performance* (Oxford, Routledge Press, 1991).

<sup>3</sup> Marcel Danesi, *Understanding Media Semiotics* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), p. 40.

encoded meaning of multiple texts of different media. In practice, one can discuss the symbols and signs of two texts, and the meanings that they denote, rather than comparing representational features of differing media that each employ a unique stylistic and formal vocabulary.<sup>4</sup> As a result once step one is complete, and I have identified the symbols and signs of C.G. Bond's text, I can explore if and how the media of Sondheim's musical presents the same symbols and signs.

Secondly, Aston and Savona's method acknowledges that the theatrical sign-system is multifaceted and that dialogue is one part of the system. As such the full script of a dramatic text is subject to analysis, including scene structure and stage directions. These features are considered as 'semiotically charged' with each providing semiotic information and meaning.<sup>5</sup> This is an important distinction; all comprehensible features of a dramatic text contain meaning and where possible, should be considered. In relation to Sondheim's theatre this is significant, as the composer has stated in interviews that during the adaptation process when creating music and lyric he consults not just the dialogue of the original source but the staging, character speech register and performance directions, features that are discernible in Sondheim's output.<sup>6</sup>

This analysis of C.G. Bond's text is structured in accordance with Aston and Savona's method. As such it divides the text into dramatic shape, character, dialogue and stage direction.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Aston and Savona. *Theatre as a Sign System*

<sup>6</sup> Mark Eden Horowitz, *Sondheim on Music: Minor Details and Major Decisions* (Plymouth: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2010), p.148.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

Each of these categories is then exposed to semiotic techniques that are largely informed by Peirce's *Theory of Signs*, and the widely-known tripartite sign structure: sign, object and interpretant.<sup>8</sup> For example when studying the dramatic shape of the text, its scene divisions and act structure, one considers the signifying function that these features fulfil. From this perspective one can consider the increased pace of the text's second act, produced as a result of scenes becoming shorter as the plot progresses and an increase in rapid dialogue, to be fulfilling a signifying function. This line of enquiry is developed when one considers Bond's intention to update the melodrama for contemporary tastes, a point he makes in the forward to the acting edition of his text.<sup>9</sup> From this perspective the increased rapidity of the second act scenes can perhaps be appreciated as an employment of thriller film genre conventions, where rapid shot editing is used to increase excitement and impact. The signifying function here then is one of hybridisation where the conventions of a more popular form are combined with theatrical presentation to appeal to popular tastes. This is one example of how the semiotic perspective encourages one to look further than description.

The outcomes of the first step of this thesis will directly feature in the analysis of Sondheim's musical, allowing comparisons between source material and product of adaptation.

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<sup>8</sup> T. L. Short, *Peirce's Theory of Signs* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

<sup>9</sup> C.G. Bond, *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street (Acting Edition)* (UK, London: Samuel French Ltd, 2010): vi.

The analysis of Bond's play will be based on *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street (Acting Edition)* published by Samuel French Ltd.<sup>10</sup> There is currently no video recording of a production of this play. In the future, should such a recording be released, a multimedia analysis of the work would make an interesting addition to the scholarship and would have the potential to allow for a new perspective on the relationship between the work and the musical.

### **Step Two – The Hypertext: The Musical**

After studying the hypotext, the thesis moves on to consider the hypertext: the musical. A multimedia art form, musical theatre incorporates music, dance, speech and design, often simultaneously, as unique modes of expression that together produce meaning.<sup>11</sup> The role of each of the media, and the association between them, varies amongst the repertoire. In some works the intermedia relationship is complimentary and in others it is competitive.<sup>12</sup> Within musicals these dynamics can be fluid. For example some scenes may feature underscore that is congruent with stage action; in other scenes the score may directly contradict the stage action for deliberate effect.

The musical is treated in this project as a work of multimedia and consequently separates the analysis object into its composite media. The discussion of each medium is structured by the three categories used to study C.G. Bond's play. By applying this structure I aim to enable comparison and to keep analysis of each medium focused.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Scott McMillin, *The Musical as Drama* (USA: New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 2014), p. 3.

<sup>12</sup> Millie Taylor, *Musical Theatre, Realism and Entertainment* (Oxford, Routledge Press, 2012), p. 68.

As Cook argues, by deconstructing a work of multimedia it becomes possible to consider the independent meaning and significance of each constituent medium. As a result it is then possible to consider the way in which meaning is negotiated and mediated amongst each medium and to consider intermedia relationships.<sup>13</sup> Following this method, the thesis studies the musical's book, lyrics and music. Considering how each medium responds to Bond's text, this analysis utilises analysis techniques suited to each medium.

### **Book**

The first medium to be studied is the musical's book. Here I apply the same semiotic and narratological techniques applied to C.G. Bond's play; specifically this includes Thomas Pavel's Move Grammar and narratological concepts of character function and dialogue mode.

A close reading of the musical's book will reveal the basic formal similarities and differences between source material and musical. The isolated analysis of the musical's book will include a discussion of theatrical genre and will consider how the musical appropriates the formal structure of the original play. To undertake this analysis I shall consult the aforementioned *Sweeney Todd Vocal Score* which contains the work's full script, including stage directions.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Stephen Sondheim. *Sweeney Todd Vocal Score*.

## Lyrics

*Sweeney Todd* tells the majority of its narrative via song and lyric. Investigating Sondheim's lyrics is an essential component of understanding the musical as a product of adaptation. This analysis will be structured in accordance with themes, such as character vocabulary, lyric structure and use of repetition.

There are many instances within the work where Sondheim utilises direct quotations from C.G. Bond's original play. These will be considered in this section of analysis but not in a superficial, 'spot-the-quote' manner. Discussions of these quotes will focus on the significance of their translation into the new context of musical theatre, exploring how they function within the musical and what their use may suggest about Sondheim's approach to musical theatre adaptation.

Sondheim, in collaboration with publisher Knopf, has released an annotated collection of his entire lyric output. The comments Sondheim makes regarding *Sweeney Todd* in this collection are an indispensable resource.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Stephen Sondheim. *Finishing the Hat: Collected Lyrics (1954-1981) with Attendant Comments, Principles, Heresies, Grudges, Whines and Anecdotes* (USA, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010).

## Intermedia Relationships

Within musical theatre scholarship, there is a dominant discourse that focuses on the influence and attributes of the 'integrated musical'.<sup>16</sup> Particularly within historical surveys of the musical's development, integration is depicted as a formal ideal toward which the musical has sought to aspire.<sup>17</sup> Summaries of this kind, such as Thomas L. Riis and Ann Sears' chapter in the *Cambridge Companion to the Musical*, frame the musical's development according to the dichotomy of pre and post-*Oklahoma!*.<sup>18</sup>

Within this scholarship, Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!*, which premiered in 1943, is credited as a watershed moment that encouraged practitioners to move from the 'doldrums of the 1930's revue' to 'calculating the balance of forces and combining all elements to evoke a deep emotional response from a large and diverse audience'.<sup>19</sup> This discourse has prompted many academics to consider integration as the post-*Oklahoma!* musical theatre's key characteristic and to chart the sophistication of musical texts in relation their ability to integrate media in the service of narrative.<sup>20</sup>

The significance of Rodgers and Hammerstein and the convention of integration are undeniable. Sondheim, Bernstein and Lloyd-Webber as well as many academics have each asserted the importance of their influence.<sup>21</sup> The majority

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<sup>16</sup> Millie Taylor and Dominic Symonds, *Studying Musical Theatre: Theory and Practice* (Basingstone: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 11.

<sup>17</sup> Scott McMillin, *The Musical as Drama* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2014), p. 11.

<sup>18</sup> Thomas L. Riis and Ann Sears, 'The Successors of Rodgers and Hammerstein from the 1940s to the 1960s' in *The Cambridge Companion to the Musical*, ed. by William Everett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017) pp. 185-202

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 162.

<sup>20</sup> Stacy Wolf, *Changed for Good: A Feminist History of the Broadway Musical* (New York: Oxford University Press USA, 2011), p. 11.

<sup>21</sup> Citron, p. 30.

of musicals have followed a version of the integration model, which has proven both popular and artistically robust. However, scholarship that reiterates the binary distinction between pre and post-*Oklahoma!* musical theatre, organises musicals into integrated musical and non-integrated musicals. As Wolf argues, this systematisation of the form engenders a limited study of the intermedia relationships within a work of musical theatre. Wolf terms this systematisation as the 'historiographical hegemony of integration'.<sup>22</sup>

By organising the analysis according to separate media, I hope to provide an alternative viewpoint that does not aim to disprove or discredit the validity of integration theory but offers a different way consider the musical's media and their ability to be, at least temporarily autonomous.

After considering each of the media listed above, I shall argue that the musical rather than being a clear-cut example of the integrated musical theatre form, utilises its composite media to establish moments of contrast between media. By exploiting these moments at points of dramatic significance, the musical presents a unique depiction of the socio-economic critique advanced by Bond.

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<sup>22</sup> Wolf, *Changed for Good*, p. 9.

## **Chapter Three - The Hypotext**

### **C.G. Bond's Modern Melodrama: A Revisionist Adaptation**

Demonstrative of a trend termed by Kalaga, Kubisz and Mydla as 'cultural recycling', works of commercial musical theatre are frequently products of multimedia adaptation.<sup>1</sup> Due to pejorative notions of cultural status, this feature of the form is consistently typified as symptomatic of 'commercialism' and 'populism'.<sup>2</sup> Consequently this key element of the musical theatre form has received little scholarly attention, as have the legitimate research questions that this area of enquiry prompts.

In this chapter I begin to apply the methodology discussed in the previous chapter. The focus here is the hypo-text on which Sondheim and his collaborators based their musical: C.G. Bond's *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*. The aim of this chapter is to provide an analysis of Bond's text. The analysis offered in this chapter will be referred to throughout the remainder of the thesis to discuss the process of adaptation undertaken to create the musical.

The rationale that underpins this chapter is informed by the writings of adaptation scholars Linda and Michael Hutcheon who identify that 'Every adapter is both an interpreter of a previous work and a creator of a new one'.<sup>3</sup>

Though this may seem a truism, this matter of fact perspective emphasises two

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<sup>1</sup> Wojciech Kalaga, Marzena Kubisz and Jacek Mydla, *A Culture of Recycling/Recycling Culture?* (Bern: Peter Lang International Academic Publishers, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Jessica Sternfield and Elizabeth L. Wollman, 'After the "Golden Age"', in *The Oxford Handbook of the American Musical*, ed. by Raymond Knapp, Mitchell Morris and Stacy Wolf (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 111-124 (p. 114).

<sup>3</sup> Linda Hutcheon and Michael Hutcheon, 'Adaptation and Opera', in *The Oxford Handbook of Adaptation Studies*, ed. by Thomas M. Leitch (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 305-324 (p. 308).

principles that are upheld within this chapter: to recognise the importance of the hypo-text in a moment of adaptation and to regard the relationship between hypo and hyper-texts as one of repetition with variation rather than mimicry or appropriation.

With Hutcheon's perspective as an epistemic backdrop, I argue that Bond's text is a revisionist adaptation of the Sweeney Todd character that emphasises the socio-economic critique subtly implied in previous depictions of the character.<sup>4</sup> Utilising a combination of semiotic and narratological analysis techniques, I shall argue and demonstrate that Bond utilises conventions of the Elizabethan revenge tragedy to achieve this revisionism as a means of realising the playwright's stated aim of 'making the melodrama acceptable to modern audiences'<sup>5</sup> The analysis techniques employed include: Thomas Pavel's move grammar<sup>6</sup> and Keir Elam's theatre semiotics.<sup>7</sup>

I will demonstrate that Bond juxtaposes conventions associated the Victorian melodrama and the Elizabethan revenge tragedy in three elements of the text: plot, character and dialogue. I will argue that these juxtapositions, whilst fulfilling Bond's aim to update Todd's story, support the socio-economic thrust of the play whilst exploiting and subverting expected narrative elements.

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<sup>4</sup> Robert Stam, 'Revisionist Adaptation: Transtextuality, Cross-Cultural Dialogism, and Performative Infidelities', in *The Oxford Handbook of Adaptation Studies*, ed. by Thomas M. Leitch (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 239-250.

<sup>5</sup> C.G. Bond, *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* (New York: Samuel French, 1974), p. vi.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Pavel, *The Poetics of Plot: The Case of English Renaissance Drama* (Minnesota: University Of Minnesota Press, 1985).

<sup>7</sup> Keir Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* (London: Routledge, 1980).

To facilitate this discussion, this chapter also functions as a selective introduction to the Sweeney Todd character and includes a discussion of Todd's origins and frequent appearances as a melodrama villain, influential appearances in cultural texts, and recurring narrative elements that have become standardised parts of the Sweeney Todd mythos through frequent use across various media products.

This chapter is the first stage of a multistage process; as shall be argued later in the thesis, the revisionism undertaken by Bond in the hypo-text as well as the specific textual features covered here will be important elements in the adaptation process undertaken to create the musical and its composite media.

### **Sweeney Todd: Before Bond**

Sweeney Todd is a literary product of Victorian England. Like other enduring characters of the period such as Dracula and Mr Hyde, Todd exemplified the period's fascination with crime, vice, deviancy and the double life.<sup>8</sup> Todd was first introduced to British readers in the serialised novel *The String of Pearls: A Romance* in 1847.<sup>9</sup> Created by an uncredited author, *The String of Pearls* was distributed in chapters via the weekly penny paper, *The People's Periodical and Family Library*. Known as a 'penny dreadful', the *People's Periodical* had a reputation amongst the period's literati as a 'vulgar mix of household hints and highly coloured fiction'.<sup>10</sup> However, the publication was highly popular among

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<sup>8</sup> Judith Flanders, *The Invention of Murder: How the Victorians Revelled in Death and Detection and Created Modern Crime* (London: Harper Press, 2011), p. 357.

<sup>9</sup> Anonymous, *Sweeney Todd or The String of Pearls* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 2010).

<sup>10</sup> Deborah Wynne, *The Sensation Novel and the Victorian Family Magazine* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), p. 15.

the working-class with over ninety thousand readers purchasing a copy each week.<sup>11</sup>

*The String of Pearls* was a tale made in the same sensationalist mode as stories included in earlier publications of the People's Periodical. The story included elements that had proven popular in previous stories published in the Periodical, and more broadly, the general taste of the many readers of 'penny dreadful' fiction. As Rosalind Crone writes in her study of Victorian popular culture, 'The String of Pearls serves as a useful example of that great quantity of violent... fiction, which flooded popular print culture between 1830 and 1860'.<sup>12</sup> The story's plot of violence, murder and cannibalism appealed to the popular imagination in what Crone describes as a 'culture of violence'.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore the periodical's publisher Edward Lloyd capitalised on the Victorian taste for sensationalism by marketing the story as 'based on true events'.<sup>14</sup>

The combination of a lurid story and a supposed real-life basis resulted in *The String of Pearls* becoming one of the most popular examples of 'penny dreadful fiction' during the Victorian Period.<sup>15</sup> It is within this context that the prolific dramatist George Dibdin Pitt created the first theatrical version of Sweeney Todd in 1847, which he adapted from the published chapters of the 'penny dreadful'. Responding to the popularity of the Sweeney Todd character, Pitt began his

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<sup>11</sup> Robert L. Mack, *The Wonderful and Surprising History of Sweeney Todd: The Life and Times of an Urban Legend* (London: Continuum Books, 2007), p. 144.

<sup>12</sup> Rosalind Crone, *Violent Victorians: Popular Entertainment in Nineteenth-Century London* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), p. 163.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Beth Kalikoff, *Murder and Moral Decay in Victorian Popular Literature* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 1986), p. 24.

<sup>15</sup> Kevin A. Morrison, *Companion to Victorian Popular Fiction* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2018), p. 241.

adaptation before the concluding chapters of the *String of Pearls* had been released and in doing so made alterations to the plot, characters and dialogue.

George Dibdin Pitt was a prolific playwright who, according to his obituary, written in 1855, created '700 melo-dramas, farces, and extravaganzas' during his career.<sup>16</sup> Though 250 of Pitt's plays have survived into the modern era, it is his dramatization of *Sweeney Todd* that was most popular in his lifetime and the work for which he is remembered today.

Pitt chose to adapt *The String of Pearls* into a melodrama; in order to do so, Pitt made a number of changes to the original story. Pitt's melodrama, including the changes made to create it, have become a touchstone of the *Todd* story influencing the many adaptations that have followed it. Eclipsing the popularity of *The String of Pearls*, Pitt's play, titled *Sweeney Todd: the Fiend of Fleet Street*, canonised elements of the *Sweeney* story whilst forever connecting the character to the tradition of melodrama. Pitt's melodrama, which was revived consistently after its first staging at the Britannia theatre in 1847, was published in 1883 and has functioned as a documented source for many adaptations of *Sweeney* across diverse media.

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<sup>16</sup> Sharon Aronofsky Weltman, 'Introduction: George Dibdin Pitt's 1847 *Sweeney Todd*', *Nineteenth Century Theatre and Film*, 38 (2011), 1-22 (p. 1).

The original playbill from the premiere performance of Pitt's play read:

'THE FIRST NIGHT OF ANOTHER NEW PIECE (from the Pen of DIBDIN PITT) called The STRING OF PEARLS! . . . from the much admired Tale of that name (founded on fact) in "Lloyd's People's Periodical." For Dramatic effect and to adapt the Story to general taste, some alterations have been judiciously made, enhancing its interest.'<sup>17</sup>

The playbill is suggestive of Pitt's adaptation process. Through 'dramatic effect' and 'general taste' Pitt aimed to 'enchanc[e] the interest' of the source material for the Britannia Theatre's audience. The combination of the Britannia Theatre's status as 'one of London's minor "bloodbath" theaters famous for its horrifying melodramas' and Pitt's many previous works written and marketed as melodramas suggests that the general taste that Pitt was aiming to appeal to would have expected a melodrama in the mode of the those associated with both the theatre and the playwright.<sup>18</sup>

To transform the source material into melodrama, Pitt makes alterations to the overall plot and characters. Pitt rewrites the characters of the novel to conform to melodrama character archetypes, condenses the plot to emphasise the struggle between good and evil, adds music and tableaux and increases the violence. Furthermore, Pitt introduces elements to the story that would come to be present in many future adaptation of the Todd character: Sweeney uses a razor as a murder weapon and the incarceration of the heroine character into a corrupt 'madhouse'.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>18</sup> Daniel C Gerould, *Melodrama* (New York: New York Literary Forum, 1980), p. 43.

Pitt's play presents a distilled version of the narrative of *The String of Pearls* and is composed of a main plot that focuses on Todd and Mrs Lovett and a subplot that focuses on the heroine Johanna Oakley.<sup>19</sup> The majority of the text follows Todd and his vicious pursuit of wealth. Written in accordance with the Victorian melodrama villain archetype, Todd commits reprehensible acts without remorse and manipulates innocent characters. Todd, a barber, murders his customers to steal their belongings. Todd's neighbour, Mrs. Lovett, fulfils the 'helper' role by assisting Todd in the disposal of his deceased patrons via human meat pies, which she sells to the unsuspecting public. Todd and Lovett, engaged in a business relationship, conspire throughout the text to outwit the authorities and the hero, Mark Ingestrie. Ingestrie, Johanna Oakley's fiancé, acts as the text's hero. After almost becoming one of Todd's victims, Ingestrie, commits to uncover the horrors of Todd's barbershop and Mrs Lovett's bakehouse. Ingestrie eventually succeeds, leading Todd to murder Mrs Lovett before being apprehended by the authorities.

In the foreword to the Samuel French acting Edition of Bond's *Sweeney Todd: the Demon Barber of Fleet Street*, Bond writes of having 'borrowed' from 'Pitt's original melodrama'.<sup>20</sup> Bond is one of a long lineage of writers and artists who have turned to Pitt's text as inspiration for new interpretations of Sweeney Todd. Before Bond, the most widely available and well-known version of Sweeney Todd was released as a black-and-white film in 1936.<sup>21</sup> The film, directed by George King, was written by Frederick Hayward and starred Tod Slaughter.

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<sup>19</sup> George Dibdin Pitt, *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* (Maryland: Wildside Press, 2004).

<sup>20</sup> Bond, p. vi.

<sup>21</sup> Gyllie Phillips, 'Cannibals and Capital: George King's Sweeney Todd (1936) and Representations of Class, Empire and Wealth', *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, 15 (2018), 571-588 (p. 572).

Slaughter was the most famous performer of melodrama villains in the early 1900s. The film follows Pitt's version of *The String of Pearls* plot almost verbatim and used much of Pitt's dialogue.<sup>22</sup>

Although not the first appearance of Todd, Pitt's text is the credited ur-text for the many subsequent adaptations of the character, which include six melodramas, two silent movies, a ballet, and two radio dramas, all of which perpetuated the plot, characterisation and melodramatic mode of Pitt's text.<sup>23</sup>

### **Bond's Sweeney Todd: A Modern Melodrama, A Revisionist Adaptation**

In the small number of interviews that C.G. Bond has given about his text, *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*, the playwright has consistently discussed his intention to modernise the melodrama. In the forward to the Samuel French Acting Edition of the play, Bond describes this intention as 'making the melodrama acceptable to modern audiences.'<sup>24</sup>

Writing the text, in Britain, during the 1960s, Bond's intention was prompted by a context in which a mood of apathy had developed among audiences regarding the melodrama genre.<sup>25</sup> Where the melodrama had in the 19<sup>th</sup> century proven to be one of the most dominant forms of theatrical entertainment inspiring a 'mode of expression' that influenced literature and other art forms. As the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

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<sup>22</sup> *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*, dir. by George King (The Best of British Collection, 2006) DVD recording.

<sup>23</sup> Mack, p. xvii.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Mack, p. 204.

progressed the genre became increasingly unpopular.<sup>26</sup> No longer regarded with widespread attention, melodramas continued to be performed but they were marketed as theatrical curios at which audiences were encouraged to boo, hiss and 'laugh at the naivety of our forebears.'<sup>27</sup>

It was in this context that Bond accepted a role in what was to be a historically accurate staging of Pitt's original melodrama. In 1965, after an initial rehearsal, Bond was struck by what he regarded to be a piece of theatre that was unsuitable for contemporary tastes. In particular, Bond believed that the structure of Pitt's melodrama, a series of set pieces and comedic slapstick and the lack of motivation for the lead character would elicit condescension from an audience rather than appreciation.<sup>28</sup>

In response to these observations, Bond requested that he adapt Pitt's text with the initial intention of small-scale change to increase, what he believed to be, the suitability of the original text for contemporary performance. This process began with small changes to characterisation and structure in a draft that largely retained Pitt's dialogue and plot.<sup>29</sup> However, as the adaptation process continued, the scope of the alterations expanded. Stock characters such as the villain Todd and his helper Mrs. Lovett were given complex motivation for their actions. The four-acts of Pitt's melodrama were replaced with a more cohesive two-act structure. The cast was scaled down from eighteen to twelve. The

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<sup>26</sup> Simon Trussler, *The Cambridge Illustrated History of British Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 275.

<sup>27</sup> Bond, p. vi.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Mack, p. 204.

implied social criticism of the industrial revolution present in Pitt's original text as Todd and Lovett mechanised murder for profit was emphasised.

As a narrative model, Bond embraced another historical theatre genre, which, unlike the melodrama, was experiencing a surge in popularity in London during this time: Elizabethan revenge tragedy.<sup>30</sup> In contrast to melodrama's fortunes, the revenge tragedy was experiencing a renaissance that saw many of the genre's seminal texts including, *The Spanish Tragedy* and *The Revenger's Tragedy* receive high profile revivals at the Royal Shakespeare Company.

In interviews and writings, Bond has acknowledged the influence of Revenge Tragedy texts and their position within a process of 'cultural borrowing'.<sup>31</sup> Specifically Bond writes '...I have cast my net wider than anyone else in "borrowing" from other authors...'<sup>32</sup> Bond goes on to cite the influence of *The Revenger's Tragedy* and *The Spanish Tragedy* as specific exemplars, the influence of which can be seen throughout Bond's text, most notably in the revenge-based plot that motivates the action of the play and the text's general depiction of social tension.

The semiotician Robert Stam defines 'revisionist adaptations' as texts that 'transform and revitalise their source texts through provocative changes in locale, epoch casting, genre, perspective, performance modes, or production

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<sup>30</sup> Beatrix Hesse, *The English Crime Play in the Twentieth Century* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2015), p. 22.

<sup>31</sup> Craig M. McGill, 'Sweeney Todd: Hypertextuality, Intermediality and Adaptation', *Journal of Adaptation in Film and Performance*, 7 (2014), 41-63 (p. 23).

<sup>32</sup> Bond, p. vi.

processes.<sup>33</sup> Stam's definition of 'revisionist adaptation' and his conceptualisation of the process as one in which latent elements of an original text are foregrounded through strategies of adaptation is applicable to Bond's text. Todd still murders his customers and uses a trick barber chair; Mrs. Lovett still makes pies out of his victims; a heroic sailor still pursues a young love interest. However, through the use of overt revenge tragedy conventions, each of these narrative elements is recontextualised as part of a revenge tragedy narrative.

The remainder of this chapter is structured in accordance with Aston and Savona's methods of semiotic theatre analysis and divides Bond's script into three component parts: narrative, character and dialogue.<sup>34</sup> I will demonstrate how in each of these categories Bond utilises conventions from the revenge tragedy genre, and I will argue that it is through this systematic use of revenge tragedy signifiers that Bond creates a revisionist adaptation of the Todd character; an adaptation that emphasises a socio-economic critique that will become a core part of the adaptation strategy employed by Sondheim and his collaborators in the creation of the musical.

### **Narrative - Story and Narrative Discourse**

In the Director's Note of the published edition of Bond's text, Maxwell Shaw writes: 'In all earlier versions of the play, the central character of Sweeney Todd has always been written and portrayed as a homicidal maniac, murdering his

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<sup>33</sup> Robert Stam, 'Revisionist Adaptation: Transtextuality, Cross-Cultural Dialogism, and Performative Infidelities', in *The Oxford Handbook of Adaptation Studies*, ed. by Thomas M. Leitch (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 239-250.

<sup>34</sup> Elaine Aston and George Savona, *Theatre as Sign-System: A Semiotics of Text and Performance* (London: Routledge, 1991), p.10.

customers in order to rob them, and forcing others, through fear, to share in his crimes, but there has never been any explanation or justification for this.’<sup>35</sup> In this quote, Shaw alludes to an aspect of Bond’s revisionist approach to adapting Todd for a ‘modern audience’: establishing ‘explanation’ and ‘justification’.

Bond’s text presents a new interpretation of the characters, narrative and themes of the well-known melodrama. Bond incorporates long-established features of the well-known melodrama but in a new narrative context. To use Shaw’s lexicon, narrative events including murder, manipulation and cannibalism are ‘explained’ and ‘justified’ as part of a narrative that is closely modelled on revenge tragedy exemplars.

Recontextualised within the milieu of revenge tragedy narrative, familiar components of the Sweeney Todd story are separated from recognisable, established functions. Characters, that have consistently fulfilled specific roles in previous depictions, contradict expectations; Todd becomes a revenger, an antihero, rather than a melodrama villain. Similarly, narrative events such as Todd’s murders and Mrs. Lovett’s pies are reevaluated as products of a revenge quest; crimes that were once presented as evidence of the characters’ villainy are transformed into sanctioned steps toward personal justice.

Bond’s narrative combines these instances of recontextualisation with new narrative events informed by revenge tragedy convention. Todd, like Kyd’s revenger Hieronimo, fails in his first attempt at vengeance and consequently

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<sup>35</sup> Bond, p. ix.

develops a blood lust that exceeds his original mission.<sup>36</sup> Mrs. Lovett, like Shakespeare's Titus, serves human-meat pies to unsuspecting diners.<sup>37</sup> Judge Turpin, like Middleton's Duke, abuses the status of his position for sexual gratification.<sup>38</sup>

The influence of revenge tragedy narrative is observable in both the events of Bond's text and the way these events are presented. Narratologists, responding to the work of Russian Formalists such as Vladimir Propp, posit that narratives are made up of two basic components: story (fabula) and narrative discourse (sjuzet).<sup>39</sup> Though academics use various terms to refer to these concepts, which include 'action' and 'plot', the definitions for the concepts are largely consistent and helpful in analysing Bond's text.

Throughout this chapter I will use the terms 'story', 'narrative discourse' and 'narrative' to refer to the following concepts; the subsequent definitions are taken from H. Porter Abbott's *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*.<sup>40</sup> Story denotes 'an event or sequence of events' within the text. Narrative discourse 'is those events as represented' and refers to the structure of the story; this includes the chronology of the story as communicated to the spectator. Narrative refers to the overall 'representation of events, consisting of story and narrative discourse.'<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Linda Woodbridge, *English Revenge Drama: Money, Resistance, Equality* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 239.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>39</sup> Wolf Schmid, *Narratology: An Introduction* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), p. 179.

<sup>40</sup> H. Porter Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 16.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

In this taxonomy, Bond's narrative is understood as having two components: story and narrative discourse. Applying this distinction facilitates a systematic analysis of the bilateral influence of revenge tragedy on Bond's narrative. Both the narrative's story and dramatic discourse are shaped by the influence of revenge tragedy; Bond incorporates these influences to create a narrative that is closely modelled on revenge tragedy conventions.

### **A Brief Introduction to Move Grammar**

To demonstrate similarities between Bond's narrative and those of revenge tragedy exemplars, I have utilised Thomas Pavel's method of narrative analysis, expounded in *The Poetics of Plot*.<sup>42</sup> Informed by linguistic theory, Pavel's method, utilises 'narrative trees' to represent both the story and narrative discourse of a given text. The purpose of this method is to uncover the narrative structure of the analysis object. To do this, Pavel interprets narrative as a series of 'moves' instigated by individual characters or groups.

By representing narratives as a tree, this method resists the narratological tendency of treating story and narrative discourse as discrete components.<sup>43</sup> Narrative trees include story and narrative discourse information in the same graphic and facilitate the discussion of the relationship between both components.

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<sup>42</sup> Pavel, *The Poetics of Plot*.

<sup>43</sup> Jonathan Culler, 'Story and Discourse in the Analysis of Narrative', in *Narrative Theory: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies*, ed. by Mieke Bal (Oxford: Routledge, 2004), pp. 117-131 (p. 117).

Pavel's narrative grammar is a particularly useful tool in the analysis of Bond's text and its connection with the Elizabethan revenge tragedy genre. In *Poetics of Plot*, the largest and most detailed implementation of the method, Pavel applies narrative grammar analysis to a large selection of Elizabethan tragedies. Within this study, Pavel dedicates a chapter to the revenge tragedy. In this discussion Pavel produces structural analyses of four revenge tragedies. Based on this analysis, Pavel concludes that there are structural similarities within the genre as well as story similarities. Following this, Pavel provides a model of what he defines as a 'typical solution-orientated revenge tragedy narrative'.<sup>44</sup>

Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* is one of the four revenge tragedies studied by Pavel; Kyd's play is one of the named primary influences on Bond's text. Pavel's analysis of *The Spanish Tragedy* as well as the 'solution-orientated revenge tragedy narrative' model are reproduced in this chapter. In combination with my own plot grammar analysis of Bond's text, these analyses allow me to show points of similarity and difference between Bond and his revenge tragedy exemplars.

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid, p. 124.

# Move Grammar - Bond's Sweeney Todd

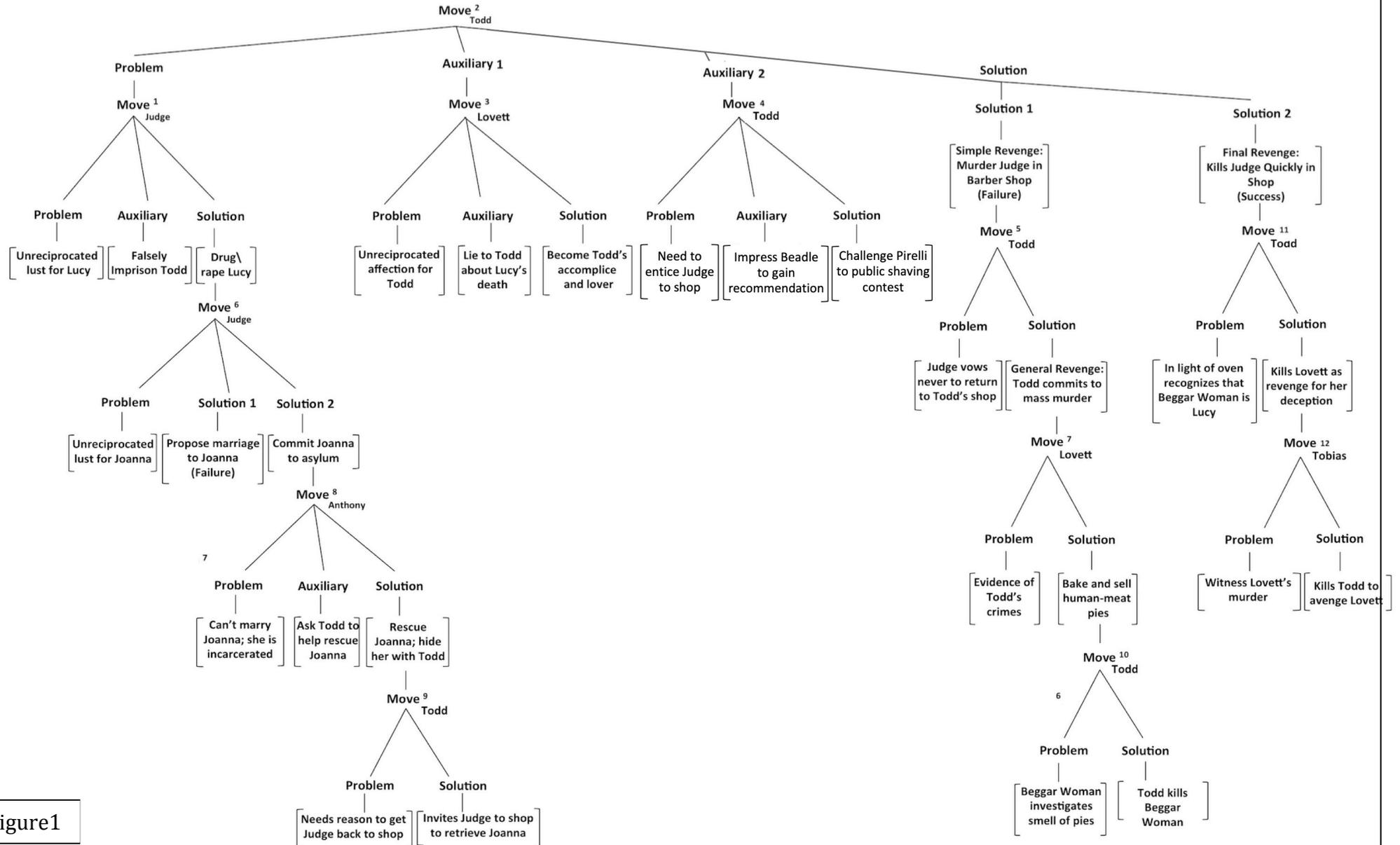
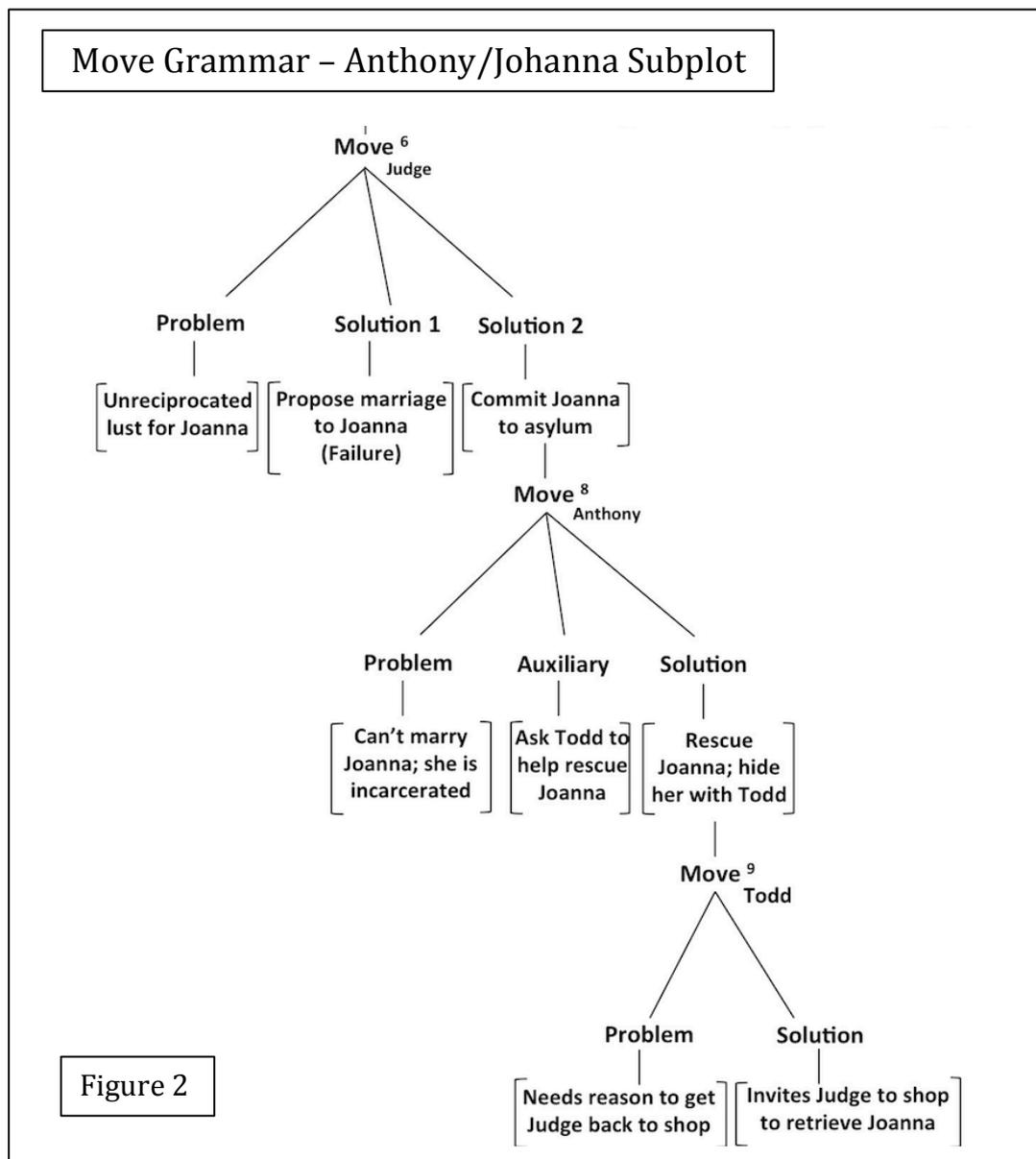


Figure 1

Figure one represents the narrative of Bond's text as a narrative tree made up a series of character Moves. Pavel defines Moves as the essential events of a text's story. To be considered a Move, the event must, either directly or indirectly, have an effect on the progression and conclusion of the text's narrative. The tree contains all of the story events that are required for the story to reach its conclusion. Events that do not contribute to the progression of the story, such as the shaving contest between Todd and Pirelli in Act I Scene Three, are not included in the tree.

All moves contain a Problem and a Solution; each are explained in narrative terms using a simple sentence in parentheses. Moves may also contain an Auxiliary, which is a prerequisite condition required to achieve the desired Solution. The character enacting each Move is shown below the Move's label. The number in the Move's label denotes the order in which the spectator witnesses the Move. Each Move is linked to other Moves; the lines between Moves show the nature of each link.

Figure two is an excerpt from figure one and shows Move<sup>8</sup> as an example. Move<sup>8</sup> is enacted by Anthony. Anthony has fallen in love with Johanna and intends to marry her. In order to achieve this Anthony must overcome the Problem of her incarceration. Anthony's Solution is to rescue Johanna from her imprisonment; to do this he will need Todd's help as an Auxiliary. Anthony's problem is caused by the Solution of Move<sup>6</sup>. Move<sup>8</sup>'s Solution makes the Solution of Move<sup>10</sup> possible.



## Interpreting Bond's Move Grammar

Figure 1 shows both the story and the narrative discourse of Bond's text. From the narrative tree it is possible to draw three primary points of similarity between this text and the conventions of revenge tragedy narrative. Firstly, all events within the story are connected to Todd's pursuit of revenge either as a cause of the revenge quest or as a product of achieving its Solution. Secondly, Todd's pursuit of revenge is a three-step process that includes a failed attempt at vengeance; this failure corresponds with Todd drastically expanding the focus of his mission. Thirdly, in the pursuit of revenge, the brutality of Todd's crimes increases and eventually overtakes the severity of the Judge's original transgression.

Pavel's analysis of revenge tragedy identifies each of these narrative features as recurring components of Elizabethan revenge tragedy. In works of Kyd, Marlow and Shakespeare, Pavel demonstrates the prevalence of these narrative components, terming them 'plot styles of a genre'.<sup>45</sup> Figure 3 is a reproduction of Pavel's narrative analysis of Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*. A comparison between figure one and three demonstrates the narrative similarities between Bond's text and Kyd's.

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<sup>45</sup> Pavel, p. 126.

# Move Grammar – The Spanish Tragedy

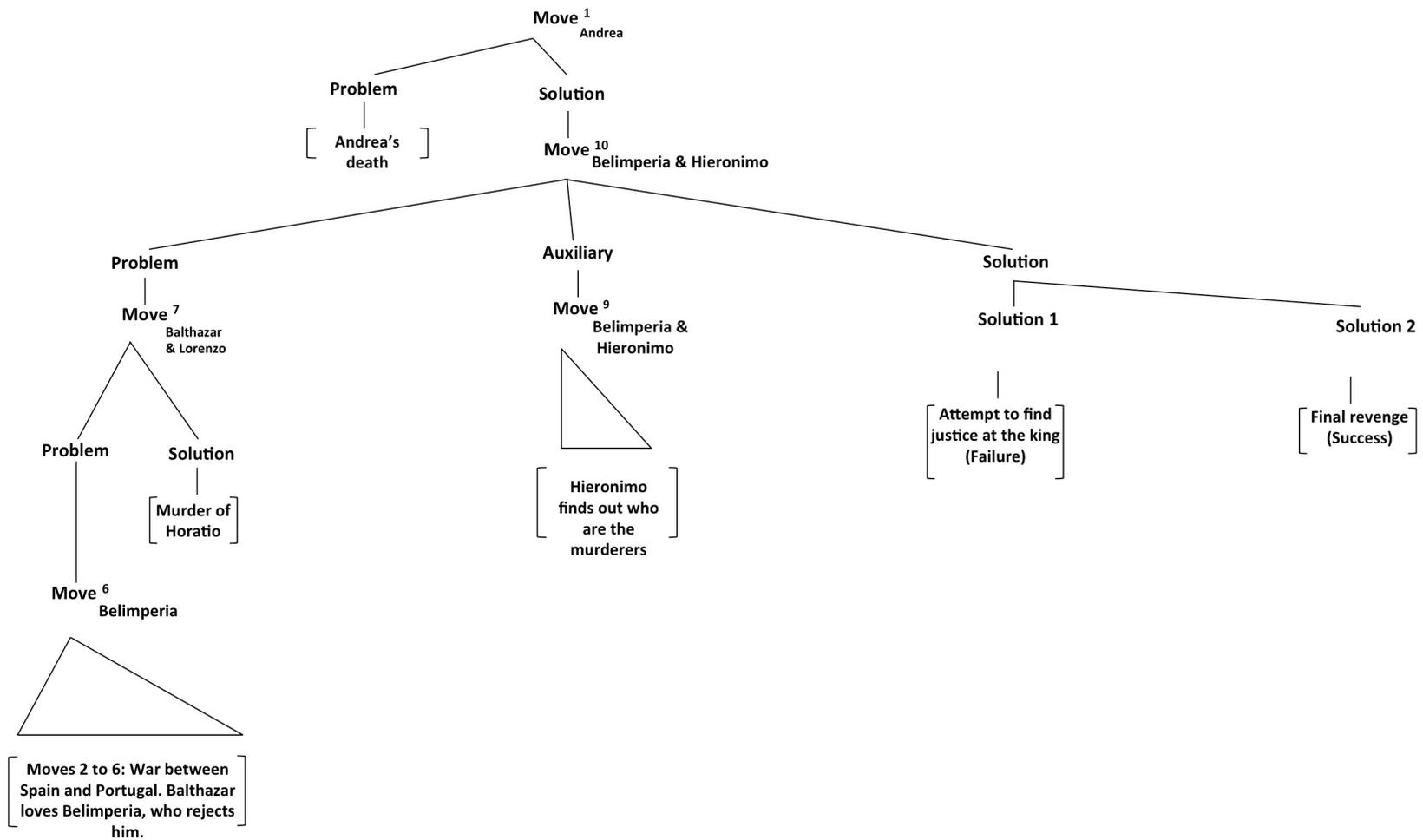


Figure 3

Within Bond's text, Move<sup>2</sup> resides at the apex of the narrative tree. This position demonstrates the all-encompassing function of this Move within the text's Move<sup>2</sup> is Todd's revenge quest. After fifteen years of false imprisonment, and by the corrupt Judge Turpin, Todd returns to London to reunite with his wife to seek revenge. The other Moves in the text are directly connected to Move<sup>2</sup> on the second tier of the narrative tree shows those most immediately connected to Move<sup>2</sup>. The Solution of Move<sup>1</sup> - the means by which the Judge satisfies his lust for Todd's wife Lucy - is the Problem that must be solved in Move<sup>2</sup>. Move<sup>3</sup>, in which Mrs. Lovett lies to Todd about Lucy's death, is made possible by Todd's search for his wife and daughter. Move<sup>9</sup> and Move<sup>12</sup> are responses to the respective failure and success of Solution<sup>1</sup> and Solution<sup>2</sup>.

Less directly, other moves stem from both the Problem and Solutions of Move<sup>2</sup>. This can be seen in the subplot between Anthony, Johanna and the Judge. Following the tree downward from Move<sup>2</sup> shows the development of this subplot. After raping Lucy, the Judge adopts Todd's daughter Johanna. Five years later the Judge begins to feel the familiar lustful feelings. After a failed marriage proposal, the Judge incarcerates Johanna. This Solution presents a Problem for Anthony, who after recently meeting Johanna, intended to marry her. Anthony's rescue of Johanna leads to Move<sup>9</sup>, in which Todd uses Johanna to lure the Judge back to his shop. The subplot is a product of the Problem of Move<sup>2</sup> and its culmination plays an essential role in the success of Todd's second attempt at revenge against the Judge, shown in Solution<sup>2</sup>.

The final position of each of the main characters is also dictated by the outcomes of Move<sup>1</sup>. Mrs Lovett dies because of the deceit she engineers in the Move's Auxiliary. Todd takes his revenge against the Judge, the creator of the Move's Problem. Anthony, due to Todd's help, is able to rescue Johanna and propose marriage. Todd, thinking her to be a Beggar Woman, kills his wife Lucy to avoid her discovering the results of his revenge plot. In the play's final scene, Todd is killed by Tobias to avenge Mrs. Lovett's murder.

The narrative of the *Spanish Tragedy* follows a similar move structure though Kyd introduces the spectator to Hieronimo and Belimperia's revenge plot later into his text. Whereas as in Bond, Todd's revenge plot is Move<sup>2</sup>, in Kyd the revenge plot is Move<sup>10</sup>. Although the spectator doesn't register the plot until later, the Move structure of the narrative follows the same pattern.

Like Todd's revenge plot, Hieronimo's plot exists at the top of the narrative tree; like Todd's plot too the text's other Moves are all closely connected to this central Move. The Solution to Balthazar rejected desire for Belimperia becomes the problem that Hieronimo intends to solve with Move<sup>10</sup>. To achieve his revenge, Hieronimo must find out more information about the acts of the play's villain. Like Todd, Hieronimo fails at his first attempt at revenge and ultimately succeeds with the second.

In both texts, the revenge quest move is at the centre of the narrative structure with all other moves connected to it; each of these moves contribute to either the Problem, Auxiliary or Solution of the central revenge quest move. The successful

Solution to both revenge quest Moves dictates the final position of each of the main characters. In addition to the large-scale structural similarities between the two texts, the revenge-quest moves themselves share the same basic structure.

Move<sup>10</sup> of Figure 3 and Move<sup>1</sup> of figure 1 show each text's revenge quest move. Both Moves share the same structure: to overcome the Problem of the villain's injustice, the Revenger gathers information via an Auxiliary, fails in an initial attempt at revenge in Solution<sup>1</sup> and succeeds in a second attempt at revenge in Solution<sup>2</sup>. This structure is an example of what Pavel terms a 'solution orientated narrative' and is a recurring structure within the revenge tragedy genre.<sup>46</sup>

Within this structure, the pursuit of revenge consists of a series of Solutions instigated by the revenger. The outcome of at least one of these Solutions is invariably failure. In most instances, the revenger's failure results from his inability to achieve retribution through the appropriate, institutional channels. The failed solution consistently leads to the escalation of the revenger's blood lust, a development that Pavel terms a shift from 'simple revenge' to 'general revenge'.<sup>47</sup> Variations of the 'solution-orientated structure' occur throughout the revenge tragedy genre. Examples include three of the revenge tragedies most frequently revived during the genre's return to popularity in London during the 1960s and 1970s: Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*, Middleton's *The Revenger's Tragedy* and Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid, p. 124.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, p. 89.

<sup>48</sup> Wendy Griswold, *Renaissance Revivals: City Comedy and Revenge Tragedy in the London Theatre, 1576-1980* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 163.

The 'solution-orientated structure' facilitates two of the revenge tragedy genre's consistent thematic concerns: the corruptible effect of revenge on an individual and the tension between social order and personal justice. Specifically it is the failed Solution or Solutions of this structure that provide the dramatic situation in which these themes are explored. The failure of Hieronimo's first Solution (Solution<sup>1</sup>, Figure 3) demonstrates this function and the recurrent representation of these themes within this genre.

The tension between social and personal justice is represented in the conditions of Hieronimo's failure; he fails by insight because he is unable to appeal to the socially acceptable justice system. Through a combination of Hieronimo's inability to present a clear case and the court's implied corruption, justice is not enforced by the state. Griswold argues that representations of the state as ineffective or corrupt are responses to socio-political concerns. Specifically Griswold describes an Elizabethan culture of suspicion regarding centralised state control.<sup>49</sup>

Hieronimo is forced to seek justice through personal rather than official means.

The corrupting influence of personal revenge on the individual is explored by Hieronimo's response to failure: the pursuit and eventual success of Solution<sup>2</sup>. Unable to achieve the 'simple revenge' he sought at the court, Hieronimo's focus changes, as his bloodlust increases, to a 'general revenge'. The 'general revenge' is achieved via personal justice. Hieronimo's pursuit of personal justice includes the creation of a complex revenge plot that results in the death of many characters, including innocents. The initial transgression that prompted

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid, p. 90.

Hieronimo to seek revenge is outweighed by the destruction caused by Hieronimo in the name of revenge. Griswold defines this portrayal of personal revenge as a 'recurring pattern' within the revenge tragedy canon. Griswold writes: 'The revenger, though he may begin with a just cause, is altered and corrupted by his pursuit of revenge.'<sup>50</sup> Revenge tragedy heroes achieve their vengeance but the cost is high and frequently results in their death.

This is the pattern that recurs throughout the revenge tragedy genre, in Bond's cited exemplars, and in many other texts, including: *Titus Andronicus*, *Antonio's Revenge* and *The Jew of Malta*.<sup>51</sup> The treatment of the revenge theme portrays the decadences of personal justice as a response to the failure of state justice.

Invariably at the conclusion of each text, with the demise of the revenger, comes a reassertion of institutional justice. In some instances this is made possible by the deaths of corrupt members of the court.

Bond utilises the same 'solution-orientated' move structure to organise Todd's revenge quest. Like Hieronimo, Todd is presented with an opportunity to enact a 'simple revenge', but is unsuccessful; Todd's response escalates his intentions as he commits to a more 'general revenge'. Moves<sup>5, 7</sup> and <sup>10</sup> illustrate the growing depravity of Todd's crimes, which ultimately lead to a second Solution in which Todd is finally successful.

Structurally, from the perspective of move grammar, Todd's revenge quest is identical to Hieronimo's quest; both follow the basic structure consistently used

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid, p. 164.

<sup>51</sup> Pavel, p. 124.

within the revenge tragedy genre. The narrative discourse of the revenge quest Move is congruent across these examples. Bond uses the structure, like his Elizabethan exemplars, to explore the worsening effect of revenge on the revenger's morality and the relationship between personal and state justice. Though Bond uses the same structural grammar as revenge tragedy dramatists, the depiction of revenge within his text contrasts with conventional depictions.

Bond's text, like Kyd's, presents a critical portrayal of the revenger's context; the conditions of Todd's first solution and the cause of his failure are, like Hieronimo's, informed by social and political factors. Utilising the same setting as Diddin Pitt, Bond's Sweeney is set earlier in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Bond portrays the social and political context of this time period as inherently prejudicial and establishes each character's position within this context as partly culpable for their actions: Mrs. Lovett's human meat pies are a product of economic hardship; Judge Turpin exploits the unchallenged corruption of the law courts in pursuit of lust; and Todd's revenge quest is made necessary by the inequality of the state's legal system. To return to Shaw's terms, this is what provides the majority of the 'explanation' and 'justification' for Todd's actions.

### **Character: Narrative Domains and Suspense**

As demonstrated in Figure 2, six characters directly initiate the advancement and eventual conclusion of the text's narrative. Each of these characters is responsible for the instigation of at least one Move; each Move either leads to another or concludes the text. These characters adhere to Pavel's definition of a

'main character'.<sup>52</sup> To keep the following discussion focused I will concentrate on five of these main characters: Todd, Mrs. Lovett, Judge Turpin, Anthony and Johanna. By referring to Figure 1, I shall consider each character and their narrative function in relation to melodrama and revenge tragedy genre conventions. Furthermore I shall argue that Bond utilises these conventions, along with what Pavel terms epistemic suspense, to emphasise the socio-economic conditions in which Todd's revenge quest is made possible.

Bond's text combines signifiers from the revenge tragedy genre with signifiers from the Victorian melodrama. In both of these genres codified character types exist. In the case of Victorian stage melodrama, character types include, amongst many others, the hero, heroine and villain.<sup>53</sup> In all examples of Elizabethan revenge tragedy there exists a revenger and, the subject of his revenge, a villain. Through consistent use across many texts within each genre, these character types have consistently fulfilled general narrative functions.<sup>54</sup>

The term stock-character is regularly used to describe the characters of Victorian melodrama. Christine Gledhill argues that the term represents an over simplification of melodrama characterisation. Citing as examples the studies of Michael Booth and Gilbert B. Cross, Gledhill argues that this perspective is one of 'condescension' that does not adequately convey the function of characters

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<sup>52</sup> Pavel, p. 44.

<sup>53</sup> Carolyn Williams, 'Melodrama', in *The Cambridge History of Victorian Literature*, ed. by Kate Flint (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 193-219 (p. 206).

<sup>54</sup> Matthew Buckley, 'Early English Melodrama', in *The Cambridge Companion to English Melodrama*, ed. by Carolyn Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 13-30 (p. 14).

within the genre; Gledhill suggests that descriptions such as 'lacking psychology' or 'one dimensional' reveal an attitude of general belittlement.<sup>55</sup>

Gledhill posits that melodrama characters are better understood as archetypes that serve a deliberate symbolising function within a dramatic world of binary forces. Viewed from this perspective Dibdin Pitt's original melodrama, in which Todd gleefully murders for profit and the hero, Mark Ingestrie, works to stop him, becomes a metaphoric struggle between the forces of good and evil. Jim Davis continues this line of thought.<sup>56</sup> Davis suggests that it is the 'lack of depth' pejoratively acknowledged by critics of the melodrama that allow the characters to fulfil allegoric functions. In reference to Dibdin Pitt's text, Davis writes: 'Todd himself assumes metaphorical and allegorical power in Pitt's play precisely because he is under-motivated as a character, standing rather as an abstract for the greed, inhumanity and cruelty...'<sup>57</sup>

Characters like Todd and Ingestrie are established as fundamental opposites that fulfil allegoric functions as representations of general forces. To maintain their ability to act as cyphers these characters exist in a state of stasis; the villains are presented as unjustifiably evil and the heroes as unreservedly heroic. The characters do not undergo change during the plots; their moralistic position is a constant as is the spectators' response, which remains supportive in the case of the hero and disapproving in the case of the villain. The conflict of the melodrama derives from the clash between opposing characters; rather than

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<sup>55</sup> Christine Gledhill, 'Domestic Melodrama', in *The Cambridge Companion to English Melodrama*, ed. by Williams, pp. 61-77 (p. 73).

<sup>56</sup> Jim Davis, 'Afterword: The Cannibalisation of Sweeney Todd', *Nineteenth Century Theatre and Film*, 38 (2011), 86-91.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, p. 90.

depicting interior conflict, the conflict, which is emblematic of moral conflict, is externalised through characters and their encounters.

In Bond's text two of the text's main characters conform to melodrama character types: Anthony and Johanna. Anthony fits the hero character type. Anthony is a consistently virtuous presence within the text. In contrast to all the other main characters, Anthony is frequently and unconditionally kind and optimistic. Early in the character's introduction, during Act I Scene One, Anthony shows kindness toward the Beggar Woman, directly contrasting Todd's vicious treatment of the beggar immediately before. Anthony objects to the mis-treatment of inmates at Fog's Mental Asylum during Act II Scene Eight. Anthony's full name, Anthony Hope, is an overt signifier of the character's nature. Joanne Gordon posits that it is possible to specify further Anthony's character type. Anthony's occupation as a sailor, a fact that is enforced multiple times within the text and emphasised in the character's costume, aligns him with the Jack Tar character type.<sup>58</sup> The hero of many nautical melodramas, the Jack Tar, represented patriotism and honesty whilst 'forcefully uphold[ing] traditional family values'.<sup>59</sup>

Anthony's narrative domain, *Move*<sup>8</sup>, is initiated in pursuit of Johanna, the text's heroine. After meeting Johanna, by chance, whilst walking the streets of London, Anthony falls in love with the heroine. After meeting her 'tyrannical guardian' and seeing, from a distance, the oppressive life that Johanna leads, Anthony

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<sup>58</sup> Joanne Gordon, *Art Isn't Easy: The Achievement of Stephen Sondheim* (Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1990), p. 216.

<sup>59</sup> Ankhi Mukherjee, 'Nautical Melodrama', in *The Cambridge Companion to English Melodrama*, ed. by Williams, pp. 47-60 (p. 48).

resolves to free her from the Judge's captivity.<sup>60</sup> Move<sup>8</sup> shows the initiation of Anthony's attempt at rescuing Johanna. Anthony's narrative domain is in keeping with Katherine Newey's description of the melodrama hero as '...brave, courageous, and honest, particularly in relation to the heroine's honour'.<sup>61</sup> Anthony's entire narrative domain is focused on the preservation of Johanna's honour by rescuing her from the lascivious Judge Turpin.

Johanna is presented in accordance with the heroine character type. A figure of virtue and innocence, Johanna is consistently under threat during the text.

Johanna is lusted after by Judge Turpin, intimidated by the asylum warden Jonas Fogg and almost murdered by Todd during the text's penultimate scene. To use Carolyn Williams' definition of the heroine, Johanna is 'Desired by many, preyed upon by many, [and] she suffers extravagantly.'<sup>62</sup> Williams argues that whilst the villain propels melodrama plots, the heroine is the genre's 'focal point'.<sup>63</sup> This is true of Johanna who, as an object of desire, propels much of the text's narrative.

Though the character has no narrative domain – she does not initiate a Move within the narrative's move grammar – Johanna fulfils narrative functions; Johanna motivates the action of the text's villain (Move<sup>6</sup>) and hero (Move<sup>7</sup>) whilst enabling the successful completion of Todd's revenge quest (Move<sup>8</sup>).

As Williams argues the melodrama heroine is a complex character type that can be used to critique or reinforce societal attitudes towards gender. Johanna

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<sup>60</sup> Bond, p. 15.

<sup>61</sup> Katherine Newey, 'Melodrama and Gender', in *The Cambridge Companion to English Melodrama*, ed. by Williams, pp. 149-162 (p. 153).

<sup>62</sup> Williams, 'Melodrama', in *The Cambridge History of Victorian Literature*, ed. by Kate Flint, pp. 193-219 (p. 204).

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

evinces what Williams terms 'the heroine's... flagrant expressive power'.<sup>64</sup>

Though she is victimised consistently in the text, Johanna demonstrates strength, bravery and intelligence. Johanna refuses the Judge, maintains dignity whilst incarcerated and is one of only a small number of characters to deduce the Judge's true villainy.

Johanna and Anthony primarily occupy the text's subplot. As hero and heroine, their story is one of romance and hope; though they face significant obstacles, through fortitude, they are fundamentally successful. Anthony and Johanna are the moral constants within Bond's text; like the melodrama character types on which they are based they do not experience moments of moral conflict. Where Todd undergoes significant change, progressing from concerned husband to serial killer, Anthony and Johanna enter the text as optimistic and romantic and conclude the text in same manner, unshaken by the events of the narrative; the characters are solely focused on attaining romance. This level of monopathy is observable throughout the text but is of particular note during Act II Scene Ten. After being rescued from Fogg's 'madhouse' in the previous scene, Johanna delivers her first line of Act II. 'Why must we wait? I fear that this delay will hurt our purpose.' Johanna is referring to her union with Anthony. After a lengthy incarceration in the 'horrific 'madhouse', a place referred to by Anthony as 'that hellish place', Johanna demonstrates no alteration to her character or to her intended purpose; her first thought after rescue is to continue to pursue the romance she sought in Act I. At the text's culmination, Anthony proposes marriage to Johanna, which she happily accepts. In the context of the final scene,

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

set within Mrs. Lovett's notorious bakehouse, surrounded by multiple dead bodies, this gesture contributes the only element that may be interpreted as a 'happy ending'. The hopeful conclusion of the subplot, which reinforces the triumph of good over evil, is customary of the melodrama and contrasts with the conclusion and nihilistic tone of the text's main plot.

The occupants of the main plot are Todd, Judge Turpin and Mrs Lovett. Todd and Judge Turpin are written in accordance with character types found in the Elizabethan revenge tragedy: the revenger and the villain. As Griswold argues, both character types fulfil consistent functions within the revenge tragedy canon, like the character types of melodrama; these character types have developed a set of codified functions and attributes.<sup>65</sup>

Judge Turpin fulfils the role of the revenge tragedy villain. Like villains such as Balthazar and The Duke, Turpin, abuses his position as a member of an elite group to wrong the revenger. As is customary in the genre, the revenger, Todd, occupies a less privileged social position and as a result of the character's corrupt environment is unable to challenge the villain in a state-sanctioned manner. *Move*<sup>1</sup> demonstrates Turpin's transgression. The actions of the revenge tragedy villain are not dissimilar to the actions of the melodrama villain: they commit reprehensible acts to achieve gratification. However the revenge tragedy villain has a limited repertoire of misdeeds, all predicated on extreme violence. These misdeeds can include adultery and incest but more frequently consist of the rape or murder of a revenger's loved one. The revenge tragedy depicts these

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<sup>65</sup> Griswold, p. 119.

acts on stage often through a pantomimic dumb show in which the villain's depravity is visualised; this is also the case in Bond's text.

In keeping with the narrative function of revenge tragedy villains, Turpin's act of violence prompts the text's narrative. Acting as the Problem of the text's overarching Move, Turpin necessitates Todd's revenge quest. Where Johanna propels the plot as an object of desire, Turpin pushes the plot forward as an obstacle that must be overcome in both the main plot and sub plot. Turpin is irredeemable and although he delivers a lengthy soliloquy regarding the stifling religious repression he experiences as a 'devout man' the sincerity of this moment is swiftly dwarfed by his attempt to marry Johanna.

With the exception of this unreliable soliloquy, Turpin's actions are presented as beyond justification. There are two reasons as to why this is the case, both are a product of the revenge tragedy format. Firstly, the text is experienced primarily from the perspective of Todd; this is Todd's story and consequently the spectator discovers narrative information, in most instances, at the same time as the text's anti-hero. Secondly, the revenge tragedy requires the spectator to sympathise, at least initially, with the revenger. Charry argues that the sensation of 'rooting for' a revenger is part of the genre's appeal in that it sanctions the spectator's morbid compliance with the revenger's quest.<sup>66</sup> By portraying Turpin as the ultimate evil, as the indefensible catalyst of the drama, Todd's actions are by relation understandable.

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<sup>66</sup> Brinda Charry, *The Arden Guide to Renaissance Drama: An Introduction with Primary Sources* (Bloomsbury: London, 2017), p. 177.

Todd undergoes extensive transformation from earlier depictions of the character. Todd had been associated with the melodrama villain type for over a century. In this capacity Todd conformed to the archetypical melodrama villain mode. The 1936 filmed melodrama, based on Pitt's original play, is one of the most vivid and widely available depictions of this character type.<sup>67</sup> Todd sought greed at all costs and existed solely to achieve his ambition of wealth. In pursuit of this goal, Todd committed terrible acts of violence and intimidation with delight. Bellowing catchphrases, sniggering and 'mugging to the audience', Todd was a dynamic character that audiences enjoyed watching because his actions were sensational, shocking and without justification.

Bond's Todd is a revision of the character that is based on Elizabethan revengers such as Hieronimo and Titus. In this text, for the first time in the character's long history, Todd is given a form of motivation more complex and relatable than greed or lust: vengeance. As was demonstrated earlier in this chapter, all of Todd's actions are connected to the Judge's transgression (Move1). Todd, though committing many of the same villainous acts as his earlier versions including murder and cannibalism, is doing so as a revenger not a melodrama villain.

Through this act of genre recontextualisation Bond is able to establish a sense of sympathy and empathy for Todd which is built on two recurring themes of the revenge tragedy canon: socio-economic tension and the cost of revenge.

Linda Woodbridge writes, 'Revengers turn vigilante when tyrants deny them justice, or higher status figures block access to the courts.'<sup>68</sup> The Elizabethan revenger is a character caught in a prejudicial context. Traditionally this has

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<sup>67</sup> Mack, p. 232.

<sup>68</sup> Linda Woodbridge, *English Revenge Drama: Money, Resistance, Equality* p. 106.

taken the form of a royal court. In such scenarios as *The Spanish Tragedy* or *the Revengers Tragedy*, it is established, as a result of corruption, that official channels of retribution are unavailable to the revenger. Following this convention, Todd's revenge quest is presented as the only available route through which the character can achieve justice. The state's authority is consistently asserted as a malignant force; the Beadle is corrupt, police officers protect the wealthy and the wealthy exploit the poor. The symbolic figure of justice, the Judge, is the cause of the narrative's violent trajectory.

Todd is faced with an insurmountable task: to achieve retribution in the context of a dramatic world that is heaped in hypocrisy and corruption. In response to this challenge, Todd's actions steadily worsen until they surpass the severity and barbarism of the Judge's initiating transgression. In keeping with the revenge tragedy genre, Todd experiences an increasing decline into immoral activity and the spectator's sympathy for the character is frequently challenged.

To maximise the spectator's sympathetic connection with Todd, Bond employs what Pavel terms 'epistemic suspense' a technique that was popular within the revenge tragedy canon and frequently used in conjunction with revenger character.<sup>69</sup>

Pavel suggests that there are two forms of suspense within a dramatic text: narrative and epistemic. Narrative suspense occurs when the spectator is unaware of the outcome of a specific Move. The majority of theatre texts, and narratives in general, operate in this way. The spectator's interest is maintained

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<sup>69</sup> Pavel, p. 110.

throughout the drama as information is slowly revealed and situations are established, the outcomes of which are unknown. In instances where the spectator knows all the information that the character knows, the outcome of the Move is not certain until it is shown. Pavel writes, Narrative suspense is simply the ignorance of the outcome of a given move.<sup>70</sup> Epistemic suspense occurs when the spectator both does not know the outcome of a given Move but also does not receive the information required to fully understand the Move in its entirety before the outcome is shared. Clarifying the difference in the modes, Pavel writes, "Take the case of deception. If the spectator knows that actor X intends to deceive actor Y, and waits to see if X will succeed in doing it, the work employs mere narrative suspense. If, however, the spectator does not know that X has treacherous intentions, the success of X's scheme against Y will constitute for the spectator a major surprise."<sup>71</sup>

In the case of narrative suspense, the spectator knows more than the character; the spectator knows that X intends to deceive Y, though they don't know the outcome. In the case of epistemic suspense, the spectator and the character share the same amount of information and consequently experience the progression of the plot –X's deception- together in real time; both the spectator and the character share the epistemic suspense. It is through the introduction of this epistemic perspective that Bond's contributes significantly to the transformation of Todd from the melodrama villain to the Elizabethan revenger.

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

Bond uses this technique to maximise the spectator's connection and empathy with Todd, reinforcing him as the central character of the narrative and positioning his struggle for revenge as a symptom of circumstance rather than unmotivated barbarism. It is through Todd's perspective that the spectator experiences the progression of the plot. As Todd discovers information regarding his wife and child so too does the spectator; as Pirelli reveals his true identity to Todd and subsequently attempts to blackmail Todd, the spectator shares the discovery. Pavel argues that this unity of perspective fosters a connection between the spectator and the character that establishes 'a complicity between the audience and the character, a complicity which eliminates the repulsion that acts of that character would otherwise inspire.'<sup>72</sup> Michael Alexander argues that the spectator's complicity in the revenger's acts is required in order for the tragic element of the revenge tragedy to appropriately function.<sup>73</sup> Without this level of identification with the revenger, the character's ultimate downfall lacks its emotional and moral weight. Through the perspective of epistemic suspense, the spectator witnesses Todd and Lovett develop their vicious enterprise and a sense of complicity is established; this allows Bond to generate much of the text's dark humour but also encourages the spectator to question their willingness to collude in these actions.

In the text's dramatic world, enterprise and capitalism is valorised as the wealthy freely exploit the poor. In this context, to root for Todd and Lovett, who are presented as likeable and wronged becomes rational they are surviving in an

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Michael Alexander, *Reading Shakespeare* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2012), p. 145.

unfair system. Epistemic suspense increases the spectator's ability to understand, though perhaps not approve, of Todd and Lovett's actions.

The most significant instance of epistemic suspense in Bond's text occurs during Move<sup>3</sup> that takes place in Act I Scene Two. Todd, searching for his wife and daughter, visits his former neighbour, Mrs Lovett. Lovett acts as the Auxiliary of this Move; she appears friendly and willing to help. It is in this scene that Mrs Lovett informs Todd of Lucy's rape and subsequent suicide. This is the moment that prompts Todd to declare vengeance; from this point Todd is committed to path of violence and death. Todd, and the spectator do not know that Mrs Lovett is in fact lying during this exchange and that Lucy did not die after her suicide attempt but is now living as the Beggar Woman that Todd met in an earlier scene but did not recognise. Todd spends the rest of the text in pursuit of a revenge that was not wholly necessary. This fact is revealed during the text's final scene – Act II Scene Eleven, at which point Todd has murdered the Beggar Woman and finally recognises her as his wife. In this scene, the anguish that Todd feels as he discovers the truth is felt with maximum intensity by the spectator as a result of the epistemic suspense employed throughout the text; though Bond includes hints throughout the text as to the Beggar Woman's true identity they are subtle and easily missed.

The revelation of Act II Scene Eleven is an unexpected narrative event primarily because Mrs Lovett is the only main character of the text that does not follow a character type from either the melodrama or revenge tragedy genre. In a number of respects, Lovett resembles the helper/accomplice character type; Mrs Lovett

facilitates Todd's revenge mission without question: she returns the razors that eventually become murder weapons, allows Todd to return to his former shop without fee and helps with luring the Judge and Beadle to the shop. However Lovett becomes more than a mere accomplice; this manifests in two respects.

Firstly, Lovett clearly demonstrates a romantic interest in Todd. This is first introduced during Act I Scene Two as Lovett says of Todd 'He was a lovely man, he was, a real man.'<sup>74</sup> Lovett's interest in Todd develops into a physical relationship between Act I and II. Act II Scene Four depicts the intimacy between the two characters, an intimacy which is played out whilst Lovett is preparing a batch of her 'special' pie filling.<sup>75</sup> Bond introduces another recurring theme of the revenge tragedy through this relationship: the connection between love and death. Todd and Lovett's romantic relationship develops as the depravity of Todd's crimes increases; as more murder is committed the two characters become more romantically connected.

Mrs Lovett also defies the helper character type through her narrative domain. As Figure 1 shows, Lovett is a much more active participant than typical helper characters; Lovett fulfils a crucial role in the unfolding narrative and is responsible for many of the pivotal story events. Specifically, in two instances, Lovett's actions profoundly determine the trajectory of the narrative. By lying to Todd during the Auxiliary of Move<sup>3</sup> Lovett directly makes possible all subsequent Moves to do with Todd's revenge quest; without this misinformation, Todd's pursuit of revenge is unnecessary. In this instance, Lovett's affection for

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<sup>74</sup> Bond, p. 5.

<sup>75</sup> Bond, p. 46.

Todd produces the deceit, which intensifies Todd's rage and prompts his mission. As well as a catalyst for the development of Todd's revenge quest, Lovett is also responsible for introducing the cannibalism to the narrative. During Move<sup>7</sup> after the murder of Pirelli, Lovett suggests that she and Todd dispose of the body through the produce of her pie shop. Lovett's suggestion is prompted by 'the price of meat' and is a product of her resourceful and entrepreneurial spirit and the economic hardship of the time, however the suggestion catalyses Todd continued descent into depravity. As with Move<sup>3</sup>, Lovett's actions in Move<sup>7</sup> are responsible for the subsequent Moves and the ultimate conclusion of the text.

Lovett, like Todd, has undergone a revisionist adaptation in Bond's text. During this revisionism, Bond has altered the typical representation of the character as Todd's willing helper and has produced a version of the character with her own agenda and ability to manipulate other characters to secure her ambitions.

Lovett aims to be prosperous and married to Todd, a fantasy that she shares in Act II Scene Four. Lovett has motivation and is willing to exploit Todd's trust to achieve her goals; this development is unlike earlier version of the character and does not resonate with an overt character type. Consequently, when Lovett's lie is uncovered during the text's final scene, the spectator is unprepared for the betrayal.

In the case of the other main characters their connection with well-known character types conditions a set of expectations. Each character: Todd the revenger, the Judge the villain, Anthony the hero and Johanna the heroine,

conform to these established expectations. However Lovett has no clear model, and therefore her actions are unpredictable on the basis of general functions. In the final scene, the impact of the reveal of the Beggar Women's true identity is emphasised by the spectator's inability to utilise convention-based expectations in the case of Lovett and the epistemic suspense that has been afforded to Todd throughout the text.

Bond's characters demonstrate a mixture of influences from both the revenge tragedy and melodrama genres. By combining characters from both traditions, Bond is able to transform characters such as Todd and Lovett into revisionist adaptations of their former uses that emphasise the effect of socio-economic hardship, whilst juxtaposing them with characters that are in keeping with the melodrama tradition from which the characters originate.

## **Dialogue**

Aston and Savona describe the role of dialogue within a dramatic text as 'to establish character, space and action.' The authors go on, '...traditionally the function of dialogue is to create the 'reality of the dramatic universe.'<sup>76</sup>

This section considers Bond's dialogue; like the previous sections, the focus here is Bond's revision of the Sweeney Todd material and the emphasis of socio-economic critique through the exploitation of genre signifiers.<sup>77</sup> Similar to the previous two analysis categories – narrative and character – the text's dialogue is a combination of conventions and genre signifiers, which are utilised for

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<sup>76</sup> Elaine Aston and George Savona, p. 52.

<sup>77</sup> Bond, p. vi.

deliberate effect. Following the recommendation of theatre semiotician, Eli Rozik, who argues that the study of dramatic dialogue can be a vast and overwhelming undertaking, the following discussion focuses on Bond's use of dialogue modes and revenge tragedy influenced violations.<sup>78</sup> Each of these elements contributes to the genre hybridity of Bond's text and become important features in the cross-media adaptation undertaken to create the musical.

The approach taken in this discussion is influenced by theatre semiotics, specifically the writings of Keir Elam.<sup>79</sup> Building on the discussion of theatre semiotics introduced in the methodology chapter, what follows is a focused introduction to the semiotic perspective on dramatic dialogue.

### **A Semiotic Perspective**

The semiotic perspective adopted by Elam, and later shared by Aston and Savona recognises theatre as a multimedia sign system composed of a series of iconic, indexical and denotative signs.<sup>80</sup> Within this framework, dialogue or language, exists as one strand of information. In performance, dialogue –the linguistic strand- combines with visual and aural strands to create the complete theatre experience. Within this polysemic system each composite medium, including language, gesture and music, conveys part of the theatre text's overall meaning. The spectator receives this information simultaneously through live performance.

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<sup>78</sup> Eli Rozik, *Generating Theatre Meaning* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2009), p. 96.

<sup>79</sup> Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*.

<sup>80</sup> Elam, p. 12.

Elam argues that the function of language within the theatre sign system differs from text to text according to convention; certain theatre genres rely on linguistic communication whilst others privilege visual communication. To illustrate this point, Elam contrasts the role of dialogue within the gestural genre of physical theatre and the 'poetic' genre of Elizabethan theatre.<sup>81</sup>

Bond's text is composed of a series of turn-taking dialogic exchanges, soliloquies and monologues. This form of dramatic discourse is highly prevalent throughout western theatre traditions with most theatre texts following a permutation of this structure. Elam theorises that dramatic discourse in this context fulfils stylistic, referential and proairetic functions.

In its proairetic function, dialogue is used to construct the dramatic action of a text's narrative. This is primarily communicated to the spectator via the verbal interaction between characters. Through speech-acts such as commands or requests and reported offstage action, the proairetic dimension maintains the forward momentum of dramatic narrative. The stylistic dimension develops as a result of recurring or emphasised syntactic, rhetorical, rhythmic and illocutionary material. Style in this sense can refer to two distinct concepts: the overall style of verbal communication throughout the text and a more individualised style of speech for specific characters. Once a stylistic context is developed within a text, both in the general and focused sense, a series of expectations is created for the spectator; the playwright is able to exploit style to subvert, to disorientate or to create oppositional rhetorical forces within the text. Concepts of convention and the stylistic function of dialogue are closely

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<sup>81</sup> Keir Elam, 'Language in the Theater', *Substance*, 6 (1978), 139-161 (p. 151).

linked. The referential dimension is referred to as the 'world-building' function of dramatic dialogue and encompasses the creation and maintenance of the fictional world of the dramatic text.<sup>82</sup> In this function dialogue establishes place, character and setting. This is achieved by the use of consistent, specific and identifiable referents; this includes, amongst many others: location names, character names and dialect.

In performance these general functions of dramatic dialogue occur simultaneously. The excerpt below demonstrates how Bond employs these functions in Act I Scene Two of the text.

**TODD:** A pie – yes. And some ale.

**MRS LOVETT:** Mind you, you can't hardly blame them. There's no denying these are the most tasteless pies in London. I should know, I make 'em. Ugh! What's that? But can you wonder, with meat the price it is? I mean I never thought I'd see the day when grown men and good cooks, too, would dribble over a dead dog like it was a round of beef.

**Todd:** I hardly wonder your trade's bad if you talk like this to all your customers.<sup>83</sup>

In proairetic terms, this conversation introduces the economic difficulties of Mrs Lovett's pie shop and the socio-economic conditions of the text's world, both of these factors will come to directly effect the progression of the narrative.

Although this scene takes place early in first act of the play, the style of the

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<sup>82</sup> Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* p. 112.

<sup>83</sup> Bond, p. 4.

dialogue is beginning to be created. The passage demonstrates the beginnings of what will develop to be a more perceptible contrast between the two characters' styles of communication. Mrs Lovett speaks in a rapid, tangential manner, which is arranged in a rag-tag rhythmic style; contrastingly Todd is reserved and mannered with much of his later dialogue being written in iambic pentameter.

The tension between these styles becomes more marked as the text progresses. The passage also contains both simple and complex examples of the referential function. Mrs Lovett establishes the geographical location of the text by referring directly to London. In a more complex instance, the status of meat within the text's fictional world is established as a point of debate; with the 'acceptable' sources proving to be costly for many. Mrs Lovett confirms that the socio-economic difficulty faced by her neighbours has caused them to consider 'dead dogs' as an alternative to 'a round of beef'. This is the first of many referents incorporated into the text, which problematize the status of meat within the fictional world. The recurring discussion of meat throughout the text forms the basis of what becomes Mrs Lovett's eventual rationalisation of her suggestion of commercialised and wholesale cannibalisation.

In this brief example, Elam's three functions of dramatic dialogue are perceptible in simple form. Though these functions do not account for the entire spectrum of the linguistic medium and its means of communication within the theatre sign system they illustrate the three primary functions of dialogue, which are present in most forms of theatrical dialogue. Bond makes use of each of these functions to revise the Sweeney Todd story by embracing idioms of the revenge tragedy

genre popular at the time with his audience. The following discussion builds on this theoretical conceptualisation to consider Bond's use of dialogue mode to emphasise dramatic theme and character.

### **Mode and Convention**

Theatre semioticians, such as Frischer-Lichte, theorise that dramatic dialogue is written in two general modes: 'verse and prose'.<sup>84</sup> Each mode is characterized by a predominance of either written or spoken linguistic features. Dialogue written in the verse mode incorporates linguistic techniques such as rhyme, rhythmic metre and complex imagery. In contrast, the prose mode is typified by the dominant use of linguistic elements which denote 'real-life' spoken communication; dialogue written in this mode is modelled on 'everyday' speech patterns, and though structured and deliberate, minimises the artifice of the language through its real-life basis.<sup>85</sup>

Though certain theatre genres such as the lyric dramas of the neoromantics and the naturalist dramas of Henrik Ibsen make use exclusively of one of the modes, in practice, the verse and prose modes are not mutually exclusive; they can be combined in theatre texts to produce dramatic effects. The nature of this combination is variable but there has developed, through repeated uses of the modes in specific contexts, a series of connotations associated with each mode. Aston and Savona argue that these connotations have become established as a result of consistent uses of the modes within the influential historic genres of tragedy and comedy.

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<sup>84</sup> Fischer-Lichte, 'The Dramatic Dialogue-Oral or Literary Communication?' p. 137.

<sup>85</sup> Aston and Savona, p. 52.

The verse mode is the prominent mode of expression within classical examples of tragedy.<sup>86</sup> In the classical sense, tragedy presents a dramatic world populated by noble figures who are experiencing grand philosophical struggles.<sup>87</sup> The verse mode is the language of the kings, heroes and heroines and reflects their status in its stylised grandeur. The 'elevated', performative nature of this language befits the moral debate that is integral to the tragedy genre; by foregrounding the linguistic strand of the theatre sign system, the verse mode encourages the spectator to focus on the philosophical discussion contained within the dialogue. The influential tragedies of Sophocles, Aeschylus and Euripides follow this scheme and are written entirely in forms of verse.

Conversely, classical comedy was less restricted to the verse mode and incorporated the prose mode; this is plausibly in response to the more diverse social status of the *dramatis personae* and thematic focus. Where classical tragedy depicted the noble, classical comedy contained less stately figures and concerned issues of general societal life rather than metaphysical conflict.<sup>88</sup> In this context, dialogue, often incorporating colloquial expression, explored societal systems and demonstrated this through 'commonplace' and recognisable exchanges between characters. The prose mode, based on non-theatrical conversation, is an expedient means through which the dramatist can present recognisable social behaviour and subsequently scrutinise or parody contemporary life.<sup>89</sup> In these works the verse mode continued to be used but

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<sup>86</sup> Fischer-Lichte, 'The Dramatic Dialogue-Oral or Literary Communication?' p. 139.

<sup>87</sup> J. Michael Walton, *The Greek Sense of Theatre: Tragedy Reviewed* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 8.

<sup>88</sup> David Konstan, 'Defining the Genre', in *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Comedy*, ed. by Martin Revermann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 27-42 (p. 30).

<sup>89</sup> Richard Graff, 'Prose versus Poetry in Early Greek Theories of Style', *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric*, 23 (2005), 303-335 (p. 314).

often for satirical effect to parody tragic theatre forms and to caricature noble and pompous figures.<sup>90</sup>

Aston and Savona, following Elam, argue that dramatists continue to follow the dialogue mode conventions of the classical tragedy and comedy; they argue that this allows dramatists to exploit the linguistic features of each mode and convention-based associations.<sup>91</sup> This argument is predicated on the assumption that the spectator is a member of the socio-cultural context in which the conventions operate and is therefore equipped to recognise them. The degree to which this argument is effective can be debated in relation to specific texts as dramatists are not homogenous and experiment with dialogue modes in diverse ways. However, in the context of Bond's text, the argument is applicable.

Bond exploits the linguistic features and cultural associations of each mode as part of a revisionist strategy to 'update the melodrama' through revenge tragedy signifiers and to emphasise the text's socio-economic critique. Bond's text employs both the verse and prose mode and alternates between the two according to two prime factors: the dramatic situation and theme, and the character reciting the dialogue. In each instance, the use of mode is a significant feature of the text's dialogue that contributes to its meaning.

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<sup>90</sup> Aston and Savona, p. 56.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

## **Mode and Dramatic Theme**

The text's revenge tragedy inspired narrative, in which Todd seeks revenge in a corrupt social system, evokes two of the prime thematic concerns of Elizabethan revenge tragedy: the connection between love and revenge and the tension between the individual and the state.<sup>92</sup> Bond's use of dialogue modes emphasises the text's treatment of these themes by alternating in response to dramatic situations that overtly contribute to the text's thematic discourse; this occurs both within dialogue exchanges between characters and within character soliloquies. In both instances, influenced by the revenge tragedy's use of dialogue modes, Bond utilises the verse mode to emphasise lines of dialogue that occur at moments of extreme emotion whilst directly pertaining to the thematic material.

The text is primarily composed of turn taking dialogue exchanges. In this system, scenes primarily comprise conversations between characters; this dialogue is largely written in the prose mode. However, verse mode dialogue is used to foreground moments of thematic and dramatic significance. This is achieved in two distinct ways: 1) by casting speeches or soliloquies concerned with dramatic themes fully in the verse mode, and 2) by allowing character to abruptly swap to the verse mode from the prose mode for emphasis.

Abruptly transitioning from the prose mode to the verse mode occurs throughout the text at times of extreme emotion and moments of thematic significance. In such instances the switch to the verse mode is brief and

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<sup>92</sup> Griswold, p. 207.

establishes a contrast between the two dialogue modes that emphasises the verse mode dialogue.

An illustrative example of abrupt shifting comes in Act I Scene Two.

**MRS LOVETT:** The Judge came looking for her when he heard as how your wife was dead. He weren't happy about it, you see, after he'd got what he wanted.

**TODD:** He shall pay dearly.  
This do I vow,  
This heart shall be as stone.  
These hands of mine shall drip with guilty blood:  
This face strike cowards dead as look on it.  
I will be revenged.

**MRS LOVETT:** But how can yer be? He's a judge, the other's a beadle, and you're a poor penniless escaped convict, running from the law.<sup>93</sup>

In this exchange, Mrs Lovett's dialogue exists in the prose mode; the lines contain no poetic imagery and are not structured in a regular rhythmic metre. Todd's line occupies the verse mode; it is declamatory, contains personification and simile, and follows an iambic metre made up of alternating stressed and unstressed syllables. This is the first use of the verse mode in the text and it corresponds with the first mention of revenge. The connection between revenge and the verse mode continues to be stressed as Todd makes similar declarations throughout the text.

By switching modes, Todd's lines become differentiated within the scene's dialogue. In a scene that is predominantly written in the prose mode, this moment of verse mode dialogue is unusual and therefore prominent;

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<sup>93</sup> Bond, p. 7.

consequently this line occupies a foregrounded position within the theatre sign system. The spectator's attention is concentrated on this dialogue and the treatment of the revenge theme that it presents. Bond exploits this technique to emphasise the progression of Todd's main quest. During each part of the text's primary narrative Move -the Problem, Auxiliary and Solution- Todd delivers a short number of lines written in the verse mode. In each instance the lines are brief but they summarise the status of Todd's quest and emphasise the character's current relationship with the revenge theme.<sup>94</sup>

More frequently the verse mode is used during soliloquies and speeches. Todd, the Judge, Anthony and Johanna each deliver a sizable soliloquy. For each character this is a moment of introspection in which they divulge their perspective regarding the text's narrative. Each soliloquy is concerned, in a general sense, with either love or revenge.

Johanna's soliloquy begins at the beginning of Act I Scene Six.

**Johanna:** He will not come.  
The Judge was right,  
He did but trifle with me.  
Why then did he return each day to look for me?  
That sure is proof!  
And yet it's also proof that love's a fickle flower  
To blossom but a week and then be gone.<sup>95</sup>

This excerpt from Johanna's soliloquy demonstrates the style of these passages. Written in iambic pentameter, the soliloquy follows the pattern of unstressed and stressed syllables. Whilst it concerns Johanna's reaction to the dramatic

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<sup>94</sup> Bond, p. 40.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid, p. 26.

situation it also considers, in a broader sense, love and its effects. Johanna expresses her angst through metaphors likening love to a 'fickle flower'.<sup>96</sup>

Heavily influenced by revenge tragedy convention, each soliloquy occupies the verse mode and incorporates rhythmic patterns and poetic language.

Responding to moments of extreme emotion prompted by one of the text's main themes, Bond's use of soliloquy, in style and content, follows the influence of the playwright's cited exemplars. One of the most well known examples of such a model can be found in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

**Hamlet:** Oh, that this too, too sullied flesh would melt,  
Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew,  
Or that the Everlasting had not fixed  
His canon 'gainst self-slaughter! O God, God!<sup>97</sup>

This passage is taken from Act I Scene Two. Hamlet, caught in existential crisis, is considering one of the text's central thematic concerns: mortality. The influence of such passages on Bond's text is clear in metre and poetic vocabulary but also in oratory function.

Aston and Savona argue that the verse mode creates dialogue that is 'elevated above natural speech'.<sup>98</sup> Where the majority of the text's dialogue is imitative of conversation, the soliloquy is by contrast highly performative and self-reflexively elaborate; they exist as something other, outside of the dominant prose mode.

The nature of the soliloquy as an introspective study delivered by a character in

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid. p. 26.

<sup>97</sup> William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 115.

<sup>98</sup> Aston and Savona, p. 58.

isolation further compounds this sense of otherness in a dramatic context that is primarily composed of turn-taking dialogue between characters. In performance, the soliloquies halt the progression of the plot to allow a character to convey their perspective or thoughts regarding a narrative event which has happened or which they are preparing to experience.

In linguistic content and in dramatic function, the soliloquy is an oratory episode in which the dialogue is the dominant meaning-making component; consequently, the exploration of theme which each soliloquy presents is emphasised. Utilising the dialogue modes to explore dramatic theme in this fashion is informed by revenge tragedy convention and facilitates a treatment of dramatic theme that is more nuanced than earlier depictions of the Todd character.

The verse mode is also utilised when characters deliver speeches. A speech in this text is delivered with similar declamation as a soliloquy but it is heard by the other characters on stage. Such an instance occurs during the text's first scene. During this passage, the spectator is introduced to the verse mode for the first time; this primes the audience to anticipate this mode of speech and it begins the process of connecting moments of thematic significance – love and revenge – with the mode.

Through the juxtaposition of dialogue modes, Bond augments the portrayal of dominant revenge tragedy themes contributing to the larger genre hybridity Bond employs to retell the Sweeney Todd story.

## **Mode and Character**

In addition to dramatic theme, Bond's use of dialogue modes is informed by character and in turn contributes to characterisation. Each member of the *dramatis personae* communicates in a style of speech that is influenced by their social status. By exploiting the dialogue modes and their conventions, Bond contributes to the portrayal and critique of the text's socio-economic context.

The text's *dramatis personae* is made up of characters that occupy various positions in the Victorian class-system. Bond emphasises the social status of each main character by persistently identifying either their occupation or lack of occupation. Throughout the text, Beadle Bamford is referred to as 'the Beadle', and Anthony is referred to as 'the sailor'. Mrs Lovett is rarely away from her pie shop; Todd shaves multiple customers; Tobias sells goods to a crowd in two separate scenes. This is most pronounced in the case of Judge Turpin who is referred to by every main character as 'the Judge', is depicted at court in Act I Scene Seven and is never given a forename.

The repetition of the characters' professions acts as a form of synecdoche, a short hand, through which Bond efficiently signifies the social status of each main character. Through this synecdoche, Bond engages with an aspect of Victorian society often discussed and presented in media and academia: the class system of the era. Reflecting the 'social and political turmoil' of the text's Industrial Revolution setting, Bond uses the synecdoche technique to reinforce

the social standing of each of his characters in relation to the social system of Victorian England.<sup>99</sup>

The social structure of the Victorian class-system was complex and consisted of many layers, the membership of which was predicated on economic resources and employment status.<sup>100</sup> As historian Robert Q. Gray explains, within the general terms of upper and lower class there existed a wide range of experience and resource; Gray describes this diversity as 'stratification and cultural difference.'<sup>101</sup>

Within this system characters such as Todd and Lovett, skilled workers who own their own businesses would have been considered artisans and consequently occupied a higher standing within the strata of the working class than Tobias, a shop boy who also occupied the same general social grouping but lower in the hierarchy. Similarly, the middle-class grouping is multi-layered and complex. The social standing and economic resource available to Judge Turpin outweigh those of the Beadle's in a system of complex stratification.<sup>102</sup> The Beggar Woman, homeless and penniless occupies a position at the lowest end of the Victorian class system.

By reiterating the employment status of each character, Bond encourages the spectator to associate employment with character and in doing so establishes societal groupings within the text. The social system presented in Bond's text,

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<sup>99</sup> Alexandra Köhler, *Social Class of the Mid-Victorian Period and Its Values* (Munich: Grin Verlag, 2008), p. 3.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, p. 4.

<sup>101</sup> Robert Q. Gray, 'The Labour Aristocracy in Victorian Class Structure', in *The Social Analysis of Class Structure*, ed. by Frank Parkin (London: Routledge, 1974), pp. 19-36 (p. 19).

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

perhaps for the sake of efficiency or subtlety, is far simpler than the stratified reality of the age's class system.

In Bond's text the characters conform to one of three general groups: working class, middle class and the poor. Figure 4 shows these groupings and the characters' occupations.

<b>Bond's Characters and Social Status</b>		
<b>Character</b>	<b>Employment Status</b>	<b>Social Grouping</b>
Todd	Barber	Working Class
Mrs Lovett	Baker	Working Class
Tobias	Shop boy/tonic seller	Working Class
Judge Turpin	Judge	Middle Class
Beadle Bamford	Beadle	Middle Class
The Beggar Woman/Lucy	Beggar	The Poor

**Figure 4**

As Frank Parkin argues, in reality, the terms, working class, middle class and the poor represent large groups within which there is a large variation of experiences and resources. Though the diversity of the class system is vast, the version presented by Bond's text is far simpler and stands as a generalised portrayal of the era that emphasises divisions between the classes rather than within each grouping. Lovett's shop, infested by cockroaches in Act I, contrasts pointedly with the palatial interior of Judge's home. In performance, Johanna's stylish and clean costume contrasts with the grimy appearance of the Beggar

Woman. The Beadle and Judge's ornate conversations contrast with the relative straight forwardness of Todd and Anthony's.

To further emphasise these class divisions, Bond follows the influence of classic comedy and tragedy, utilising dialogue modes to emphasise the contrast between social groupings.<sup>103</sup> As the lower class characters of the classical comedy communicated primarily through the prose mode so too do the majority of Bond's working class and poor characters. Though Todd and Anthony, at moments of thematic importance or during speeches, occupy the verse mode, the common mode of conversation among this group is the prose mode. Mrs Lovett's dialogue is emblematic of this approach and demonstrates the most extreme and consistent use of the prose mode.

**Mrs Lovett:** Have you, dear? Oh, I am sorry. I'll be done in a jiffy. But waste, not want not! And these black puddings are selling very well, you know. There that'll do it.<sup>104</sup>

This excerpt is taken from Act II Scene Four. Mrs Lovett's dialogue fully occupies the prose mode; she at no point in the text utilises the verse mode. Lovett's mode of speech is colloquial; featuring limited use of literary devices, this dialogue aims to replicate the everyday language of the spectator. Based on the 'rag-tag' rhythms of East End London speech, Lovett's dialogue is rhythmically free and does not follow a noticeable metre. This is the pattern followed closely by other

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<sup>103</sup> Aston and Savona, p. 58.

<sup>104</sup> Bond, p. 46.

working class/poor characters such as Tobias and The Beggar Woman who also communicate solely through the prose mode.

In contrast, the Judge and the Beadle communicate primarily through the verse mode. Again their modes of expression are mixed; they also utilise the prose mode, but their speech dominantly occupies the verse mode.

**Judge Turpin:** It well becomes the sacred office that I hold to temper justice with a show of mercy – but in this case I cannot. The vilest of voluptuaries, a ravisher, a cutpurse, and a pimp: only one sentence can serve your turn.<sup>105</sup>

This excerpt is taken from Act I Scene Seven. In keeping with the tragedy's use of the verse mode, large portions of the characters' dialogue follows a form of iambic pentameter, incorporates linguistic devices such as metaphor, simile and alliteration.

By applying the dialogue modes in this manner Bond establishes two styles of dialogue expression that are each connected to the general character social groups. Consequently the dichotomy between the social classes manifests within their mode of speech. As accents are often regarded as indicators of wealth within the real world, within Bond's fictional world, the verse and prose mode are similarly charged. More than just indicators of wealth or status, however, as Aston and Savona argue, by juxtaposing the modes in this overt and consistent

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<sup>105</sup> Bond, p. 29.

fashion, Bond foregrounds their existence within the theatre sign system. By doing so, the modes themselves and their associations, in addition to the literal meaning of the words spoken, are exploited and radicalised as a part of Bond's revisionist depiction of social hypocrisy.

The Judge and the Beadle speaking in a dialogue mode associated with nobility and heroism can be interpreted as a symptom of the characters' hypocrisy and manipulative insincerity. Both the Judge and the Beadle are corrupt public figures with significant power. Like the villains of the revenge tragedy canon, they are oppressive entities that attempt to utilise their influence to avoid the consequences of their crimes. The verse mode when used outside of the expected context of soliloquy or extreme emotion, by its nature as a dense linguistic mode, can encourage the spectator to acknowledge the artifice of the dialogue.

Consequently a degree of separation is established between the characters of the Judge and the Beadle; characters that communicate not through a dialogue mode that is natural and everyday but ornate.

By contrast, the prose mode dialogue of the working class and poor characters, as shown in the example taken from Act II Scene Four, elicits intimacy and empathy from the spectator. Their approximation of everyday speech, though designed to emulate the speech of the 19<sup>th</sup> is recognisable as natural. The dialogue is less measured and creates the impression of spontaneity.

Consequently when the characters express their perspectives and emotions they appear sincere. When member of this group utilise the verse mode, as Todd does multiple times when considering revenge or within a soliloquy, they are

sanctioned as a symptom of extreme emotion; the character's state of mind and the mode are aligned in their verbosity. However the Judge and the Beadle occupy the verse mode as the norm without the narrative or thematic justification exercised by the working class or poor characters, they consequently occupy the mode for stylistic rather than emotional purposes.

By aligning character groups with the specific dialogue modes, Bond establishes connections between status and mode of speech. Through the exploitation of convention and marked contrast, Bond utilises the modes to reinforce tension between the character groups whilst ensuring that the spectator views the lower class characters as the sincere heroes of the text.

## **Conclusion**

Since the character's first appearance as an archetypical villain of Penny Dreadful fiction, Sweeney Todd has captured the imagination of countless storytellers and artists. The popularity of the Todd character along with elements of the story in which he was first introduced have remained prominent within the zeitgeist of western culture for over one-hundred-and-fifty years.<sup>106</sup> Interpreted across diverse media including theatre, film, opera, ballet and television, Todd, his accomplice Mrs Lovett and their nefarious acts have entertained generations of spectators. Featuring the universal themes of greed and fear and the powerful ability to transform the mundane –shaving and baking- into the horrific, Todd's story has developed a mythic quality, which has undergone reinvention according to artistic intentions and emerging cultural

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<sup>106</sup> Mack, p. xvi.

tastes.<sup>107</sup> Among the many interpretations of Todd, C.G. Bond's *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* presents a depiction of the character that is a unique departure from established conventions.

The product of a revisionist adaptation, Bond's treatment of the Todd source material deviates from the melodrama origins and associations of the character. Bond's text provides a reinterpretation of Todd as a vehicle for social critique.<sup>108</sup> This act of revisionism is achieved through the strategic implementation of genre signifiers from the revenge tragedy genre, which was experiencing a resurgence of popularity in Britain during the mid 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Bond incorporates the influence of exemplars such as *The Spanish Tragedy*, to foreground the implied socio-economic critique inherent in earlier depictions of the character; this approach is observable in the narrative, character and dialogue of Bond's text.

Bond's narrative is closely modelled on the Solution-orientated plots of the revenge tragedy genre. In keeping with genre convention, the revenge quest, in structure and content, depicts the damaging effect of revenge on the revenger's morality and the corrupt social conditions in which personal revenge is necessary. Bond furthers this revisionism by reinterpreting the characters of the source material through the exploitation of stock character types. In Bond's text, Todd becomes a revenger and Judge Turpin is presented as the irredeemable villain. Bond combines character types with the evocation of epistemic suspense to condition the spectator's response to characters and to emphasise the empathetic and complicit connection between the spectator and Todd the

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Bond, p. vi.

revenger. Bond's utilisation of dialogue modes continues the act of revision by establishing two distinct modes of communication that correspond to characters' social status. To emphasise the tension between the text's social classes and to foreground dramatic theme Bond utilises dialogue modes consistently in conjunction with specific characters.

In each of the analysis categories, Bond incorporates conventions of revenge tragedy to establish a new context for the Todd story; in this context the expected and familiar elements of the Todd tale are revised in relation to revenge tragedy conventions. In each category Bond utilises these conventions to adapt the melodrama for contemporary performance whilst furthering the text's socio-economic critique.

The analysis provided in this chapter is the first step of the multimedia analysis of Sondheim, Wheeler and Prince's musical *Sweeney Todd*. Throughout the remainder of this thesis, I shall refer back to this analysis to facilitate a discussion of the adaptation process undertaken to create the musical.

## **Chapter Four - The Hypertext**

### **Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street: From Modern Melodrama to Musical Thriller**

During the summer of 1973, whilst overseeing the West End revival of *Gypsy*, Stephen Sondheim attended a performance of C.G. Bond's *Sweeney Todd: the Demon Barber of Fleet Street*.<sup>1</sup> As a life-long admirer of classic horror cinema and Grand Guignol theatre, Sondheim was impressed by Bond's text. Describing his reaction to the production, Sondheim writes, 'It had a combination of charm and creepiness... it was still a melodrama, but also a legend. It was elegantly written... it struck me as a piece that sings.'<sup>2</sup> Inspired to create a musical based on the text, Sondheim secured the rights to adapt Bond's work into a piece of musical theatre.

Sondheim approached long-time collaborator, producer and director Hal Prince, with this ambition. Though initially uncertain of the text's suitability to the Broadway stage, Prince, based on their previous work, agreed to collaborate with Sondheim on the project.<sup>3</sup> After a period in which the pair continued to work on other projects, Sondheim and Prince began work on their adaptation of Bond's text in 1976.<sup>4</sup> To achieve this act of multi-media adaptation, Prince assembled a team of theatre professionals that included the writer Hugh

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Citron, *Sondheim & Lloyd-Webber* (Milwaukee: Applause Theatre and Cinema Books, 2014), p. 237.

<sup>2</sup> Stephen Sondheim, in Carol Ilson, *Harold Prince: A Director's Journey* (New York: Limelight Editions, 2004), p. 282.

<sup>3</sup> Craig Zadan, *Sondheim & Co.* (London: Nick Hern Books, 1990), p. 245.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

Wheeler and the stage designer Eugene Lee. After two years of collaboration the musical opened at the Uris Theatre, Broadway, on March 1<sup>st</sup> 1979.<sup>5</sup>

Recognising the multimedia nature of the musical theatre art form, Chapter Four considers the musical as a product of multi-media adaptation. Combining the methodological recommendations of Nicholas Cook's theory of musical multimedia<sup>6</sup>, the conceptualisation of the adaptation process provided by Linda Hutcheon and medium specific analysis techniques, I have structured this analysis according to three of the text's dominant composite media: book, music and lyrics.<sup>7</sup> Drawing on the analysis of the hypotext provided in the previous chapter, in Chapter Four I isolate each medium to consider how each adapts the thematic focus of the hypotext. By applying Aston and Savona's analysis categories, I shall demonstrate the adaptation strategy of each medium in response to the narrative, character and dialogue of Bond's text.<sup>8</sup>

The purpose of this analysis is not to evaluate the musical based on what many contemporary scholars have argued to be the hampering concepts of fidelity criticism.<sup>9</sup> Instead, the aim is to consider how the creators of this specific work of musical theatre approach the process of cross-media adaptation. This discussion is aided by many interviews in which Sondheim, Prince and their collaborators

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Nicholas Cook, *Analysing Musical Multimedia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>7</sup> Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2012).

<sup>8</sup> Elaine Aston and George Savona, *Theatre as a Sign System: A Semiotics of Text and Performance* (Oxford: Routledge Press, 1991).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

have discussed their creative intentions and have specifically identified the socio-political critique of Bond's text as a prime concern within the hypertext.<sup>10</sup>

Taking the practitioners' stated aims as a starting point, the following discussion focuses on the musical's treatment of the source text's social thematic concern, as demonstrated with the analysis categories discussed in Chapter Two. The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate how each three of the text's dominant media respond to the hypotext.

### **Adaptation Studies**

In response to the frequency of adaptation within contemporary culture, adaptation scholars have developed a diverse body of theory to inform the systematic study of adaptations and adaptation processes.<sup>11</sup> Over the past two decades, the field has significantly grown from its initial focus on the fidelity of book-to-film adaptations, to encompass the study of multiple media and multiple perspectives and research focuses. This body of work has proven to be influential on the approach employed in this thesis; specifically the conceptualisation of adaptation theorised by Linda Hutcheon.<sup>12</sup> To contextualise the analysis contained within this chapter, what follows is a discussion of two the salient concepts of adaptation studies and a brief introduction to Hutcheon's theory.

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<sup>10</sup> Zadan, p. 245.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas M. Leitch, 'Introduction', in *The Oxford Handbook of Adaptation Studies*, ed. by Thomas M. Leitch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 1-22 (p. 7).

<sup>12</sup> Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2013).

Recognising adaptation studies as a distinct field of study is a relatively new occurrence. Histories of the field, such as that provided by Yvonne Griggs, argue that the acknowledgment of adaptation studies as a discipline has developed during the past two decades as articles, books, journals and conferences have focused on the topic.<sup>13</sup> Griggs traces a line of development from traditional branches of aesthetics such as literature and theatre criticism, to this development. Griggs acknowledges that mankind's proclivity to 'repeat stories with variation' has been a focus of philosophers and academics for centuries but argues that the publication of George Bluestone's study, *Novels into Film*, represents a watershed moment in the creation of a distinct field of adaptation criticism.<sup>14</sup>

The significance of Bluestone's text, Griggs claims, was the author's innovative conceptualisation of adaptation. In contrast with the contemporary academic zeitgeist, Bluestone argued that adaptation is best understood as both a process and a product. Bluestone's seemingly straightforward argument greatly expanded the scope of adaptation study by challenging the widely employed fidelity-based models of analysis.<sup>15</sup>

Taking a statement by Jean Paul Sartre, in which the philosopher described a film as a 'less faithful commentary' of a book, Bluestone argues that the use of fidelity as an exclusive means of assessing the success of an adaptation is inherently limiting. The fidelity-based studies that Bluestone addresses are primarily

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<sup>13</sup> Yvonne Griggs, *The Bloomsbury Introduction to Adaptation Studies: Adapting the Canon in Film, TV, Novels and Popular Culture* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016), p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> George Bluestone, *Novels into Film: The Metamorphosis of Fiction into Cinema* (California: University of California Press, 1966).

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

descriptive, comparative analyses that focus on the similarities between a hypo and hypertext.<sup>16</sup> In such studies, the author utilises fidelity as an evaluative tool using phrases such as ‘the film is true to the spirit of the book’. Bluestone argues that such an approach has two core limitations.<sup>17</sup>

Firstly, by adopting fidelity or faithfulness as an analytical model, scholars are encouraged to privilege the hypotext and to judge the hypertext in relation to it, rather than on its own terms. In instances of popular culture adaptations, such as cinema based on classic literature, this has the potential to intensify debates regarding cultural status.<sup>18</sup> This perspective regards adaptation as a process of replication; the adapter’s aim is to mimic the hypotext as closely as possible. Consequently, fidelity-based studies consider the alterations made to adapt a hypotext as deviations that detract from the adaptation’s success rather than interesting creative variations.<sup>19</sup>

The second limitation of fidelity criticism is its tendency to simplify or to avoid the topic of media specificity.<sup>20</sup> Media specificity pertains to the specific attributes of a given medium; this includes form, content and mode of expression. Media communicate via a range of means; some are shared across different media and some are unique to a specific medium. When a book is turned into a musical, for example, the adaptation process requires an act of cross-media transformation. In such instances, the hypo and hypertext both

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Julie Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2016), p. 11.

<sup>19</sup> Simone Murray, *The Adaptation Industry: The Cultural Economy of Contemporary Literary Adaptation* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2012), p. 10.

<sup>20</sup> Jorgen Bruhn, Anne Gjelsvik and Erik Frisvold Hanssen, “There and Back Again’: New challenged and new direction in adaptation studies” in *Adaptation Studies: New Challenges, New Directions*, ed. by Jorgen Bruhn, Anne Gjelsvik and Erik Frisvold Hanssen (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), pp. 1-16 (p. 5).

function according to the distinct rules of organisation and the conventions of their respective media.

Responding to these limitations, Bluestone characterises adaptation as a ‘mutational process’ in which a hypertext transforms elements of a hypotext according to socio-cultural, artistic and medium specific factors.<sup>21</sup> In Bluestone’s framework, an adaptation may be ‘faithful’ to its source material, or it may make significant alterations; in both cases the adaptation’s success as a media product is not evaluated based solely on fidelity. Bluestone advocates that similarity and difference is a core part of the study of an adaptation that is the nature of the process, however these are starting points for a more robust discussion. The hypertext presents a new version of the hypotext rather than a replication.<sup>22</sup>

The influence of Bluestone’s writings on the development of adaptation theories has been argued by many prolific figures of adaptation studies including, Hutcheon,<sup>23</sup> Elliott<sup>24</sup> and Johnson.<sup>25</sup> Following Bluestone’s text, the output of the field has continued to provide alternative conceptualisations and perspectives regarding adaptation. Informed by Bluestone’s approach, scholars have continued to question the effectiveness of fidelity-based models whilst developing new approaches to the study of adaptation. According to Bruhn, Gjelsvik and Hanssen the field has developed according to four ‘theoretical and analytical clusters’: expanding scope to include new media, considering

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<sup>21</sup> Bluestone, p. 5.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Hutcheon, p. xv.

<sup>24</sup> Kamilla Elliott, *Rethinking the Novel/Film Debate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 11.

<sup>25</sup> David T. Johnson, ‘Adaptation and Fidelity’ in *The Oxford Handbook of Adaptation Studies*, ed. by Thomas M. Leitch (Oxford: oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 87-100 (p. 88).

adaptation as a multilevel rather than one-to-one process, adaptation as a two-way dialogic exchange between hypo and hypertext, and adaptations as a barometer of socio-cultural context.<sup>26</sup>

By perusing analysis models not based on fidelity, Bluestone expanded the field of adaptation studies. Following this influence, Linda Hutcheon's book length study, *A Theory of Adaptation*, provides a conceptualisation of adaptation that addresses the issues inherent in fidelity-criticism by treating the hypertext as 'repetition with variation' whilst acknowledging media specificity.<sup>27</sup>

Hutcheon argues that all adaptations contain a fundamental tension between repetition and variation. Hutcheon illustrates this point through the metaphor of linguistic translation. Like translations, adaptations transform a source from one state into another. The process reconciles the intention to communicate the fundamental meaning of the source with the necessity to employ the attributes of a new form. In addition, adaptations also incorporate the artistic interpretation of the adapter and, in the context of cross-media adaptation, must consider the expectations of the reception context.<sup>28</sup>

Directly challenging fidelity, Hutcheon argues that adaptations maintain a complex relationship with their hypotexts. The nature of this relationship varies from adaptation to adaptation; some texts prioritise the repetition of the hypotext's meaning and features and others focus on innovation. Hutcheon

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<sup>26</sup> Bruhn, Gjelsvik and Hanssen, p. 4.

<sup>27</sup>Hutcheon, p. 7.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

argues that this tension, and particularly the alterations and additions that adaptations make to their source texts, represent one of the core elements of study available in the analysis of an adaptation.<sup>29</sup>

Within this framework, Hutcheon recommends that the analyst acknowledges both elements of this tension, the similarities and the differences, and how they conform to the requirements of the hypertext's new medium. To achieve this in a rigorous fashion, Hutcheon argues that it is necessary to utilise analysis methods that facilitate the fundamental attributes of each text's medium.<sup>30</sup>

### **Conceptualising the Musical: The Media of Sweeney Todd**

A musical is a multimedia text; music, language, drama, dance and other media combine together to produce a complex and multifaceted product. In this multimedia context, media combine in various ways to elicit various effects. Music can provide an interpretation of a character, which can be supported by the content of lyrics. Contrastingly, lyrics and music can deliberately contradict each other for dramatic effect. The multimedia landscape of a musical is a variable context in which meaning is constantly constituted in accordance with the interaction of its composite media. As a hybrid of multiple theatre genres, the multimedia nature of musical theatre is symptomatic of the form's varied antecedents; regarded as having developed from diverse traditions such as operetta and burlesque.

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. xxiv.

The dominant scholarly discourse, within which musical theatre studies sit, emphasises the role of formal integration within musical theatre. By approaching a work such as *Sweeney Todd* through the perspective of integration, one is encouraged to consider the musical as a monopathic product in which each medium combines, unilaterally in a seamless way, all communicating a complimentary reading of the dramatic situation.

In *The Oxford Handbook of The American Musical*, Block demonstrates this perspective through what he calls the six 'principles of integration'. Among the 'principles', Block describes the role of the orchestra. Block writes 'the orchestra, through accompaniment and underscoring, parallels, complements, or advances the action.'<sup>31</sup> As Scott Mcmillan argues, such a conceptualisation does not allow for other forms of media relationships such as contest and complementation, which are relationships that are predicated on a medium's ability to carry distinct messages, which can alter the meaning of the overall text.<sup>32</sup>

The approach adopted in this thesis treats musical theatre as multimedia. Inspired by McMillian's approach and Nicholas Cook's conceptualisation of multimedia which informed McMillain's approach, this chapter argues that the musical's media, including the linguistic medium –the book and the lyrics- and the music medium are sites of semiotic significance that communicate distinct messages. Furthermore, the overall meaning of a work of musical theatre is communicated to the spectator through live performance; the spectator receives

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<sup>31</sup> Geoffrey Block, 'Integration', in *The Oxford Handbook of the American Musical*, ed. by Raymond Knapp, Mitchell Morris and Stacy Wolf (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 97-110 (p. 100).

<sup>32</sup> McMillin, p. 11.

each strand of the musical text simultaneously. The relationship between the media, along with their content contributes to the musical's meaning.<sup>33</sup>

Following McMillian's argument, this chapter divides the musical into three of its component media: book, lyrics and music. Taking each in turn, I consider how each medium transforms Bond's narrative, characters and dialogue using the semiotic and narratological analysis of the previous chapter. Before commencing with the analysis, the chapter first introduces Cook's conceptualisations of musical multimedia, which has informed the approach of this material.

### **An Introduction to Musical Multimedia – Nick Cook: Metaphor Model and Media Relationships**

During the musical *Sweeney Todd*, Todd's psychological journey from revenger to serial killer caused by rage and despair is externalised in the song "Epiphany".

During the conclusion of this song Todd sings, 'I'm full of joy'.<sup>34</sup> This lyric contradicts with the despair and mania of the earlier portions of the song in which Todd mourns the death of his wife and turns his violent energy towards the audience. This level of contrast is compounded by a moment of media contest.

The musical accompaniment that sits below this lyric provides an alterative reading of this moment, which invites the spectator to question the sincerity of the lyric. Harmonically, the accompaniment contains significant dissonance. By imposing a cluster chord on top of the D minor chord, the stability of the sound is

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<sup>33</sup> McMillin, p. 11.

<sup>34</sup> Stephen Sondheim, *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* (New York: Hal Leonard, 1979), p. 179.

undermined. In addition, the accompaniment contradicts the finality of Todd's line by continuing and providing a second chord, a semitone lower; this creates a lack of resolution which contrasts with Todd's declamatory lyric. The lyric suggests that Todd has arrived at a conclusion; he has decided to follow a new purpose and is declaring his acceptance and certainty; the music is unresolved and leaves the spectator with a sense of tension and uncertainty. The two media contrast in this moment.

Although a simple example, the conclusion to "Epiphany" illustrates the musical's ability to employ media to create a complex reading of a dramatic situation, a reading that utilises the dynamic between media as a means of communication. This example demonstrates an approach toward the analysis of musical theatre that acknowledges three primary points: 1) the musical is a work of multimedia, 2) the relationships between a musical's media are variable, sometimes they are complimentary sometimes they are contrasting, and, 3) each media is capable of responding to a hypotext uniquely and that in performance these strands combine, to provide the musical's complete adaptation of a hypotext. As spectators of live performance, the audience reconcile each media into a total product, with each, in terms of content and intermedia relationships, generating the meaning of the musical text.

Nicholas Cook's theory of musical multimedia, outlined in the book *Analyzing Musical Multimedia*, provides the epistemological backdrop and tools to consider each of these points of multimedia texts. Cook's theory, drawing on the literary metaphor as a model to consider cross media relationships, presents a

conceptualisation of multimedia that is outlined through the study of television commercials and then, later in the book, applied to case studies, including *Disney's Fantasia* and Madonna's video *Material Girl*, among other examples. Cook's work provides a framework for the study of multimedia. Within this framework, Cook's conceptualisation of meaning within multimedia texts has had a direct bearing on the approach applied in this thesis. Considering meaning, Cook outlines a model of multimedia based on literary metaphors which he dubs the metaphor model. The metaphor model and the media relationships that Cook bases on the model have directly influenced the approach taken in this thesis.

Cook puts forward a framework of multimedia based on a set of core definitions and concepts. The initial idea Cook tackles is the concept of meaning creation within a multimedia text. Cook begins by arguing '...instead of talking about meaning as something that the music has, we should be talking about it as something that the music does (and has done to it) within a given context.'<sup>35</sup> Though music is mentioned here, the principal, as Cook also argues, is applicable to other media within a multimedia text.

Cook's theorisation of meaning creation is based on the idea that media communicate in distinct ways: music is often abstract, able of communicating a general feeling but struggles to generate nuance; imagery can be iconoclastic, it can accurately depict something specific, an object, place or person. Cook argues that each medium is specific in its attributes and the means by which it communicates meaning. Accepting the existence of unique features – of media

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<sup>35</sup> Cook, p. 9.

specificity – leads Cook to conceptualise multimedia as predicated on the concept of ‘enabling similarity.’<sup>36</sup> Cook explains this by comparing multimedia to a literary metaphor. Using Cook’s example of love and war: love can be described using the metaphor of war. Love can be argued to be like war as it can take casualties, it can cause pain and suffering. Through this enabling similarity, a serviceable metaphor can be established: love is war. Without an enabling similarity this metaphor would be ineffective and perhaps incomprehensible. In the case of this metaphor, the similarity allows attribute transfer between both parts of the metaphor to take place. Love takes on the attributes of war: battles, death, trauma, pain, loss, and competition.

Cook argues that this conceptualisation is true for multimedia. In the context of Sweeney Todd this could be illustrated in the use of the Dies Irae, a musical motif that will be discussed later in this chapter. Sondheim uses evocations of the Dies Irae throughout the musical’s score. A medieval chant associated with death: the Dies Irae carries many centuries of cultural association. A clear quote of the Dies Irae is heard in the opening organ prelude of the musical. In this moment, the original stage directions describe a gravedigger coming to the stage to prepare a grave. The associations of the music combine with the presence of a gravedigger through the enabling similarity of death. In doing so, attributes of the Dies Irae transfer to the gravedigger. The function of the Dies Irae in religious ceremonies transfers a sense of ritual, mourning and spirituality to the gravedigger.

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid, p. 70.

Cook clarifies this as ‘the meaning... does not lie in the enabling similarity; it lies in what the similarity it enables, which is to say, the transfer of attributes from one term of the metaphor to the other.’<sup>37</sup> Cook continues by arguing that this process leads to a new representation of a dramatic moment that is produced due to the combination of each medium’s reading; Cook describes this as ‘Rather than simply representing or reproducing an existing meaning, it participates in the creation of a new one.’<sup>38</sup>

After establishing the metaphor model, Cook goes on to introduce three main categories of media relationships. These relationships occur frequently in multimedia texts and can be observed in musical theatre; they are: conformance, contest and complementation.

In the context of musical theatre, media conformance accounts for media relationships that are based on congruent depictions of dramatic moments. In the case of *Sweeney Todd*, such a moment occurs during Johanna’s Act I song “Green Finch and Linnet Bird”. Johanna, describing herself as a caged bird singing lyrics such as ‘my cage has many rooms’, sings a melody featuring ornate, ‘bird-like’ trills. The musical accompaniment during these moments is heavily repetitive, based on a sequence of repeated quaver chords. This repetition sonically contributes to the depiction of captivity, which corroborates the lyric line and melody.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

Media contest accounts for media relationships founded on contradiction and opposition. This could be music that is romantic with a soft lilting melody that is delivered with warmth and passion, which is combined with a lyric that seemingly contradicts this sentiment. Such a moment occurs in *Sweeney Todd* during the song "My Friends". During this moment, Todd sings a delicate slowly rising melody that is tonal and slowly moving upwards in a majestic pattern. This music uses attributes associated with romantic music, it's soft and gentle. During this song, Todd sings to his razors with language of affection; Todd refers to his razors as 'friends' and 'faithful'. The language matches the music, partly, the focus of the song is Todd's future murder weapons and the warmth he is feeling towards them is tinged with darkness as he sings of 'dripping rubies' and taking revenge. The power of this scene comes from attribute transfer. The romance of the music influences the reading of Todd's unhealthy connection with his razors. In turn, the darkness of the lyric complicates the reading of the 'romantic' music, perhaps suggesting a desperate attempt to connect with an inanimate object due to the death of his wife and loss of his daughter. The complex depiction of this dramatic situation is made possible by media relationship that is based on contest.

The third category of media relationship defined by Cook is termed 'complementation'. This form of relationship exists between the two extremes of conformance and contest. This is less well defined than the other two categories but accounts for a range of other relationship types that can not be organised into one of the other two discussed categories.

By identifying discrete forms of media relationships, and suggesting the metaphor as a model for understanding multimedia, Cook's framework encourages analysts to consider multimedia as a complex set of media dynamics. This perspective enriches the study of multimedia not as a static set of relationships but as a variable context in which meaning is generated.

### **Book**

Of the multiple components of a work of musical theatre, the importance of the book, also known as the libretto, is often overlooked by the spectator.<sup>39</sup>

Dramatists who fulfil the role of book-writer primarily exist in relative obscurity, while composers, lyricists, directors and producers become household names.<sup>40</sup>

In response to commercial necessity, musicals are marketed and subsequently known in accordance with the 'big-name-talent' attached to the project.<sup>41</sup>

Though less acknowledged, a musical's book fulfils important structural and communicative functions.

In the early stages of the process, Stephen Sondheim envisioned this adaptation as a through-composed, fully sung opera. Working directly from Bond's script, Sondheim began to musicalise the text's opening scene. Over the course of a number of months, working alone, Sondheim produced twenty minutes of musical material along with lyrics.<sup>42</sup> This output covered only the first six pages of Bond's seventy-seven page script. By Sondheim's own admission, the

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<sup>39</sup> Lehman Engel, *Words with Music: Creating the Broadway Musical Libretto* (New York: Applause Theatre & Cinema Books, 2006), p. 382.

<sup>40</sup> Ian C. Bradley, *You've Got to Have a Dream: The Message of the Musical* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), p. 114.

<sup>41</sup> Bernard Rossen and Ernest Harburg, *The Broadway Musical: Collaboration in Commerce and Art*, (New York: New York University Press, 1993), p. 6.

<sup>42</sup> Stephen Sondheim, *Hat Box: The Collected Lyrics of Stephen Sondheim* (New York: Virgin Books, 2011), p. 332.

composer-lyricist, was unable to implement the editing processes required to adapt a straight-theatre text into a concise and efficient work of musical theatre.<sup>43</sup> Based on this experience, Hal Prince advised that Sondheim work with the dramatist Hugh Wheeler. Wheeler, working from Bond's text, would produce the musical's book from which Sondheim would create music and lyrics.

The challenge that Sondheim faced before Hugh Wheeler began working on the project illustrates two functions required by the musical's book. The first was to transform the narrative, characters and dialogue of the hypotext in order to meet the form and content requirements of the musical theatre form. This involved, among many other adjustments, maintaining a concise narrative by removing inessential material. The second function was to provide a basis, which the wider production team, including the composer/lyricist, would follow to inform their respective contributions.

Wheeler's approach was to emphasise the tragedy elements of Bond's text so as to foreground the socio-economic critique that was generated by Bond's use of revenge tragedy convention. To intensify the social critique, Wheeler implements a number of Brechtian alienation techniques that contribute to the musical's unique treatment of the hypotext. Wheeler's book combines these techniques with musical theatre conventions to transform the hypotext.

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

## Narrative

On initial inspection, it appears that Wheeler's book, in both structure and content, presents a largely unchanged version of the hypotext's narrative. Returning to the methodology of Thomas Pavel's move grammar, Wheeler directly utilises the Move structure of the hypotext.<sup>44</sup> Following the same solution-orientated narrative, Todd's revenge quest is the prime focus of the hypertext and it depicts the same revenge-tragedy-inspired progression from simple revenge to general revenge. Each of the numbered Moves included in the analysis provided in the previous chapter remain in Wheeler's book. However, Wheeler's book, through the introduction of a framing device, alters the presentation of the narrative, which has a profound effect on the book's meaning and consequently, the meaning of the entire text.

After a short overture, the musical begins with "The Ballad of Sweeney Todd". In this song, the full company, with the exception of Todd and Lovett, occupy the stage. In a didactic address, the chorus invite the spectator to 'Attend the tale of Sweeney Todd'.<sup>45</sup> As the song progresses, the chorus continue to describe elements of the narrative that the musical will present as well as the titular character. The chorus' lyrics establish the location of the musical, allude to the violence of the plot and build suspense for Todd's eventual appearance.

By opening in this fashion, the musical is placed within a narrative frame. This structure, whilst not changing the contents of the hypotext's narrative, has an

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<sup>44</sup> Thomas Pavel, *The Poetics of Plot: The Case of English Renaissance Drama* (Minnesota: University Of Minnesota Press, 1985).

<sup>45</sup> Sondheim, *Sweeney Todd*, p. 4.

effect on the spectator. As Abbott argues, 'framing narratives can play critically important roles in the interpretation of the narratives they frame.'<sup>46</sup> The framing technique is sustained throughout the musical. The chorus deliver a reprise of "The Ballad" at multiple points that correspond with a significant event within the narrative; a reprise of "The Ballad" concludes the musical. In each instance, following the convention of the Greek chorus, the musical's chorus comment on the developing narrative, directly addressing the spectator.

Through the implementation of this narrative frame, Wheeler transforms the hypotext's narrative and thematic discourse. The narrative frame produces a sense of metatheatricality. Through this technique, Wheeler encourages the spectator to focus on the narrative's social critique whilst representing that critique in an interesting way.

The frame communicates to the spectator that the narrative of the musical is a 'tale'. Through this act of metatheatricality, the musical's status as an artistic construct is emphasised. Discussing the effects of metatheatricality, Chiara Thumiger writes, 'openly declaring the fictional nature of the theatrical experience... invites the audience to question their identification with the staged events rather than abandoning themselves to them.'<sup>47</sup>

By describing Todd's narrative as a 'tale', and by divulging elements of that tale, the spectator is reminded of the fictional nature of the narrative. Rather than experiencing the narrative through the lens of immediacy, the frame creates a

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<sup>46</sup> H. Porter Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 28.

<sup>47</sup> Chiara Thumiger, 'On ancient and modern (meta)theatres: definitions and practices', *Materiali e Discussioni per L'analisi dei Testi Classici*, 63 (2000), 9-58 (p. 39).

sense of distance between the spectator, the narrative and the character. In doing so the spectator is encouraged to focus on the allegorical nature of Todd's character and the wider narrative in which he is presented. This is a prime tenet of Brecht's Epic Theatre, which aimed to encourage logical rather than emotional responses to drama so as to foreground the medium's treatment of political issues.<sup>48</sup>

Whether intentional or accidental, the similarity between the Ballad's lyrics and the title of Beatrix Potter's novella *The Tale of Mr. Tod*, further emphasises the artificiality of the frame to spectators familiar with the Potter's writing. One of the many entries in the popular *Peter Rabbit* series, the novella is not based on the Sweeney Todd character, and is instead inspired by Uncle Remus Stories and Aesop's Fables.<sup>49</sup> Though a different Tod, Potter's text explores sinister themes similar to some of the material associated with the Sweeney Todd character, including attempted murder, adventure and kidnap. The plot follows a badger's predatory kidnap of unsuspecting bunnies, his attempt to cook and eat them, and their eventual successful rescue thanks to Peter Rabbit and the bunny's uncle.<sup>50</sup>

Though Sondheim has not confirmed an intentional borrowing or referencing of Potter's text, for an audience member familiar with the novella, the distancing effect of acknowledging the theatrical frame with this phrase is further enhanced. For such a spectator, an additional layer of metatheatricality is present. Through this act of referencing, the sinister plot of Potter's novella

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<sup>48</sup> Manfred Pfister, *The Theory and Analysis of Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 69.

<sup>49</sup> Celia Catlett Anderson, 'The Ancient Lineage of Beatrix Potter's Mr. Tod', *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 1980 (1980), 84-90 (p.85).

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, p. 88.

becomes a point of association, priming the spectator to expect similarities whilst reinforcing the artifice of the frame.

Consequently, the frame imbues the book with a pointed metonymic function. Particularly effective in scenes of emotional intensity, the frame continually reminds the spectator of the musical's artificiality by repeating a version of the reprise at various points within the musical. An illustrative example comes at the conclusion of the song "My Friends". Todd after being reunited with his razors delivers the line 'My right arm is complete again!'<sup>51</sup> This is a moment of empowerment for Todd, in which the tool of his previous life as a law-abiding barber is ironically co-opted as a weapon, which he intends to use to exact revenge on the corrupt Judge. This line is immediately followed by a reprise of "The Ballad" in which the chorus sing 'Lift your razor high, Sweeney. Hear it singing, yes. Sink it in the rosy skin of righteousness.'<sup>52</sup> The Ballad causes the drama to pause before moving onto the next narrative event. During this pause, the spectator, aided by the commentary of the chorus, is invited to consider the significance of the dramatic moment.

Embracing this form of Brechtian presentation and the high level of didacticism that it generates is arguably the book's most significant departure from the hypotext. Though the narrative events remain unaltered from Bond's text, this frame encourages the spectator to interpret this material on a more epic scale than the hypotext suggests. Sondheim, discussing musical theatre adaptations in

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<sup>51</sup> Sondheim, *Sweeney Todd*, p. 57.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

his book, *Finishing the Hat*, introduces what he refers to as a 'why? musical.' Sondheim describes this as "a perfectly respectable show, based on a perfectly respectable source, that has no reason for being."<sup>53</sup> Sondheim further explains that avoiding 'why? musicals' requires space within the source material to reinterpret elements of the source in a fashion that is achievable in the musical theatre form. Using Sondheim's definition, *Sweeney Todd* avoids 'why? musical' status due, in part, to the book's framing device and Brechtian alienation techniques.

The utilisation of alienation techniques within musical theatre adaptation is not uncommon. Popular works such as: *The Threepenny Opera*, *Cabaret*, and *Hamilton* utilise these techniques in various forms and to achieve various effects. In each instance their introduction alters the presentation of the source material to create unique interpretations of their respective hypotexts. These techniques allow, among other outcomes, the ability for characters, often choruses, to provide commentary on the action of the narrative in a way that is expected of the musical theatre form. Such self-aware commentary can often be regarded as out of place in other media but is a rich device within the musical theatre form.

The power of "The Ballad" as a narrative frame can be ascertained by briefly considering Tim Burton's 2007 film based on the musical. Burton, considering the didacticism of "The Ballad" as too 'theatrical', removed the opening and

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<sup>53</sup> Sondheim, *Finishing the Hat*, p. 26.

recurring ballad sections and in doing so removed the framing device in toto.<sup>54</sup> In doing so, Burton's version of the tale follows the immediacy of Bond's original script: events happen as though reported directly to the audience. The result is that the narrative takes on a more personal dimension. Due to media specificity and spectator expectations, this omission, in conjunction with more naturalistic acting styles, suits the film media and results in a piece that reflects thriller and horror convention rather than melodrama. In Burton's *Todd* the allegorical allusions suggested by the characters and narrative being presented as a 'tale' is suggested via alternative means. With visual effects and the camera at his disposal, Burton uses imagery to foreground juxtapositions of class. The musical's book foregrounds the portrayal of class division and socio-economic contrast, in part through the narrative frame created by "The Ballad".

In addition to the metatheatrical dimension, the book's narrative frame also suggests an interesting depiction of Todd's story and the revenge theme. By book-ending the narrative with versions of "The Ballad", the narrative structure of the text presents the story as though recurring and universal, an idea which is corroborated by the staging of the original production and the song's lyrics.

In both the opening and closing ballad, Todd's entry follows the chorus repeatedly singing 'Sweeney' in increasing intensity and volume.<sup>55</sup> After the chorus reach a climactic discordant chord, Todd enters and joins the song. In the original production, Todd slowly rose from an onstage grave in time with the

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<sup>54</sup> Ian Sapiro, "You Will Know That She is Our Annie": Comparing Three Adaptations of a Broadway Classic' in *The Oxford Handbook of Musical Theatre Screen Adaptations*, ed. by Dominic McHugh (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), pp. 472 - 494 (p.481).

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

chord whilst the chorus gathered around him. The effect was as though Todd had been reanimated, called from beyond the grave to perform the story. In the closing number the same moment is recreated; this time Todd finishes the number by returning to the grave.<sup>56</sup> The opening and closing of the frame provide a structure within which the narrative takes place. The frame ending as an inverse of the way the frame opened, suggests that the text's depiction of oppression is cyclical; within this context Todd is positioned as a symbol of the effects of oppression. The allegoric dimension of Todd is corroborated by the lyrics of the song. In the closing reprise, the chorus suggest that the 'real-world' is populated with Todds as they didactically, sing 'Sweeney waits in the parlor hall, Sweeney leans on the office wall.'<sup>57</sup> This idea is further emphasised by Todd referring to himself in the third person; in doing so referencing the status of Todd as a fictional character.

### **Character and Dialogue**

Demonstrated by studying the DVD release of *Sweeney Todd*, filmed in 1982, 120 minutes of the musical's 141 minute run time features music and/or lyrics.<sup>58</sup> The music, along with lyrics create much of the musical's characterisation, however, Wheeler's book provides essential character information through dialogue, that informs the musical's depiction of the hypotext's characters.

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<sup>56</sup> Raymond Knapp, *The American Musical and the Performance of Personal Identity* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 337.

<sup>57</sup> Sondheim, *Sweeney Todd*, p. 369.

<sup>58</sup> *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*, dir. by Terry Hughes and Hal Prince (USA, Warner Home Video, 2008). – These statistics have been gathered by closely watching the video recording of the musical, adding together the duration of scenes without music and lyrics and then deducting this figure from the total running time of the DVD.

The musical utilises all of the hypotext's main characters. In a general sense, the majority of the main characters are portrayed in accordance with their appearance in the hypotext. Wheeler's book incorporates the same stock character archetypes of Bond's text. Todd is the revenger; Mrs Lovett is the comedic, effervescent, manipulator; Anthony and Johanna are the optimistic lovers; Judge Turpin is the irredeemable villain. However, due to the musical's dominant music content, Wheeler is required to compress the linguistic representation of the characters into compact dialogue; this exists as either concise language dominated scenes or mixed media scenes in which dialogue is interspersed with music.

The division between the modes of speech and song in *Sweeney Todd* is variable. In the final scene of Act I, in which Todd and Lovett humorously explore the idea of cannibalisation in the song "A Little Priest", the two modes are interweaved. Lovett begins singing after a musical cue. Lovett sings 'Seems a downright shame'. To which Todd responds in speech, 'Shame?' Todd then joins Lovett in singing the song's introduction and first chorus; Todd and Lovett then return to the speech mode and exchange a small number of lines, before returning again to the song mode. The song continues to follow a pattern of alternation between speech and song. In other scenes, song and speech are clearly demarcated and exploited for dramatic effect.<sup>59</sup> At the close of "Poor Thing", a song in which Lovett informs Todd of his wife's sexual abuse, Todd, enraged, abruptly shouts 'Would no one have mercy on her?' Todd's line of spoken dialogue occurs immediately after the song's music ceases and creates a contrast between the

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<sup>59</sup> Sondheim, *Sweeney Todd*, p. 183.

modes of song and speech.<sup>60</sup> The abrupt shift signifies Todd's extreme emotion and inability to listen to any more of Lovett's descriptions.

It is in the dialogue-dominated scenes that Wheeler's adaptation strategy is most observable. The dialogue fulfils the same narrative function as Bond's dialogue, but due to the quick pace of the musical and quantity of music, this is achieved in a more concise form. The scene which immediately follows "Poor Thing" illustrates this point. During this scene, Todd reacts to the news of the Judge's transgression by declaring 'I will have my revenge'. In Wheeler's book this scene progresses rapidly and is comprised of fifteen exchanges.<sup>61</sup> The comparable scene in the hypotext comprises twenty-seven exchanges.<sup>62</sup>

Each text reveals Todd's true identity during this scene; the way in which they do so reveals the degree to which Wheeler compresses the dialogue. In the hypotext, Todd also bellows 'Would no one have mercy on her?' In the musical this reaction confirms to Mrs Lovett Todd's true identity. In the hypotext, Mrs Lovett does not make the same revelation; this doesn't occur until Todd divulges his true identity in the following exchange:

**Todd:** Then I will have no mercy either. None.

**Mrs Lovett:** Here, you are in a state.

You've hardly touched your pie.

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>62</sup> C.G. Bond, *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street (Acting Edition)* (London: Samuel French Ltd, 2010), p. 7.

**Todd:** I am that poor unfortunate woman's husband.<sup>63</sup>

In Wheeler's script the same moment is more expedient:

**Todd:** Would no one have mercy on her?

**Mrs Lovett:** So it is you... Benjamin Barker.<sup>64</sup>

Compressing dialogue in this fashion occurs throughout Wheeler's book including, the final scene of Act I, the Judge's return towards the close of Act II and Tobias' lines during the final scene. Whilst fulfilling a practical purpose in keeping the narrative moving at a quick pace, this compression has an effect on characterisation.

In the above example, by recognising Todd before he reveals himself, the musical version of Lovett demonstrates shrewdness in a subtle way that is not present in the hypotext. In addition, by recognising Todd after fifteen years and whilst he's in disguise, the book alludes to Lovett's infatuation with the barber; this is compounded later in the scene by Lovett revealing that she kept Todd's razors 'In case you came home some day and needed 'em.'<sup>65</sup> Taken as one, this small moment establishes key elements of Lovett's character, elements that were present in the hypotext but took a larger amount of dialogue to communicate.

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Sondheim, *Sweeney Todd*, p. 51.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

## **Summary**

Through the incorporation of a narrative frame and the expediency of character dialogue, Wheeler adapts the hypotext into the book medium. Wheeler's adaptation incorporates and emphasises the social message of the hypotext through didacticism and the metonymic function of the narrative frame. The book shares the same narrative structure as the hypotext but contains the narrative within this frame and consequently prompts the spectator foreground the social message. Through the need to ensure that the musical's scripted scenes maintain a quick pace, Wheeler produces dialogue which in style is similar to the hypotext but which pursues dramatic purpose with efficiency. In creating new dialogue, opportunities to alter characterisation occur and are taken.

## **Lyrics**

Stephen Sondheim is one of a small group of musical theatre practitioners that write both music and lyrics. Although some critics, and some scholars have questioned the lack of 'hummable melodies' within Sondheim's music output, there is a consistent esteem afforded to the quality and effectiveness of Sondheim's lyrics.<sup>66</sup>

Sondheim's approach to lyric writing is informed by a set of documented principles. In a two-volume collection of his lyric output, Sondheim has discussed in detail the approach he adopts when writing lyrics.<sup>67</sup> A number of these principles have become often quoted maxims, which are now synonymous with

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<sup>66</sup> Steve Swayne, *How Sondheim Found His Sound* (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 2007), p. 42.

<sup>67</sup> Sondheim, *Hat Box*, p. xix.

the composer/lyricist. Among them is 'content dictates form', 'less is more' and 'god is in the details'.<sup>68</sup> As well as these maxims, Sondheim has discussed in detail his use of techniques such as rhyme and his approach to characterisation. The following discussion will refer to Sondheim's stated lyric writing processes to consider how Sondheim transforms the hypotext into the medium of musical theatre lyrics.

### **Narrative**

Where Wheeler's book adapted the dialogue of the hypotext through compression, Sondheim's score expands upon the narrative moments of the hypotext. Each of the hypotext's narrative Moves is transformed into song. In doing so, Sondheim elongates the portrayal of key narrative events allowing for an expanded exploration of the causes, consequences and significance of these narrative moments.

The introduction of song affords works of musical theatre the opportunity to explore dramatic moments, including character choices, crises and extreme emotional outbursts, at greater length and detail than other media forms. A core part of all musical theatre adaptation strategies is 'finding the songs'.<sup>69</sup> In this part of the adaptation process composers, working with book writers, ascertain the moments in the hypotext that prompt exploration and representation in song. Each composer and lyricist approaches this task in specific ways, however there are popular trends within the musical theatre canon that have become codified elements of the genre. Such recurring song types include, the I want

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., xv.

<sup>69</sup> Aaron Frankel, *Writing The Broadway Musical* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2009), p. 6.

song, the 11 o'clock number, and the comic list song. Each of these song types recur throughout the musical theatre canon and in the process of adaptation, composers and lyricists consider their source material in light of these recognisable and popular song types.

The lyrics of the hypertext demonstrate the linguistic expansion undertaken by Sondheim; an event that existed as one or two lines in the source material is transformed into a three-minute, multiple verse song; or moments that were implied in the hypotext are invented in the musical through song. Through the protracted resource of song lyrics, Sondheim creates a unique treatment of the hypotext's narrative.

Narrative Moves that suggest an affinity with popular song types or suggest the idea for such treatment become the basis for songs that conform, or at least suggest, these forms. Anthony's domain – the love subplot Moves over which he presides – become the basis for a rousing I want song: "Johanna". The coming together or maniacal anger and Mrs Lovett's astute practicality – the moment which Lovett light heartedly suggests cannibalism as a means of body disposal – is the inspiration for the comic list song: "A Little Priest."

Figure 5 shows each of the Moves and the revenge plot Solutions of Bond's hypotext; the figure shows that each have been adapted into songs in the hypertext. The musical's score is larger, including more songs and music than shown in the figure, but the table illustrates this aspect of the connection between the source material's narrative and Sondheim's score.

## Hypotext's Moves and Revenge Solutions in the Hypertext's Score

Move/Solution	Move Description	Song
1	The Judge lusts for Lucy; falsely imprisons Todd, rapes Lucy.	"Poor Thing"
2	Todd escapes imprisonment, returns to London in search of Lucy and Johanna	"The Barber And His Wife"
3	Mrs Lovett recognised Todd, based on long held love for Todd she lies about Lucy's death.	"Poor Thing"
4	Todd needs to entice the Judge to shop, challenges Pirelli's to shaving contest to prove his skill.	"The Contest"
5	After being interrupted by Anthony, Todd is enraged by the Judge's vow never to return to the barbershop. Todd commits to general revenge: mass murder.	"Epiphany"
6	After resolving to commit mass murder, Mrs Lovett suggests that bodies are disposed of via meat pies.	"A Little Priest"
7	Johanna refuses the Judge's advances; angered by hearing of Anthony's love for Johanna, the Judge incarcerates Johanna in Fogg's Asylum.	"Johanna Quartet"
8	Anthony seeks Todd's help to rescue Johanna.	"Wigmaker Sequence"
9	Todd uses his involvement in Johanna's rescue to lure the Judge back to the barbershop.	"The Letter"
10	The Beggar Women suspects foul play and investigates the barbershop – she is then murdered by Todd.	"City on Fire" and "Searching (Part II)"
11	Todd recognises the Beggar Woman in light of the bakehouse oven.	"Final Scene (Part I)"
12	Todd cradles Lucy's body. Tobias after witnessing Mrs Lovett's murder avenges her death by killing Todd.	"Final Scene (Part II)"
Revenge Move Solution 1	Simple revenge: the Judge visits the barbershop	"Pretty Women"
Revenge Move Solution 2	Final revenge: the Judge returns after reading Todd's letter.	"The Judge's Return"

**Figure 5**

Sondheim's approach is in keeping with Hutcheon's description of adaptation as 'repetition with variation'.<sup>70</sup> The lyrics present the same scenario of the hypotext but through a different linguistic treatment. The lyrics adhere to the narrative Move structure but create an interpretation of the narrative that is expanded. In a way that is similar to the effect of the book's use of narrative frame, the expansion of the lyrics allows Sondheim to emphasise the thematic significance of narrative events.

The musical, like the hypotext, primarily depicts Todd's revenge quest and utilises the narrative signifiers of this genre. Beginning with Todd's return to London and concluding with his death, the musical is Todd's story. All the other characters and their narrative Moves occur in relation to Todd's revenge quest. The often-discussed features of the story such as cannibalism and murder are products of Todd's mission. The Problem, Auxiliary and Solutions of Todd's revenge quest are each present within the musical. As shown in Figure 5, each part of the revenge quest Move, including its Solutions is transformed into a song.

The lyrics in each of these instances represent moments of expansion and when compared to the hypotext reveal the lyric's contribution to the portrayal of the narrative.

Todd's first attempt at revenge -Solution 1- fails as he is interrupted by Anthony. After demanding that Anthony leave, an enraged Todd shares with Mrs Lovett

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<sup>70</sup> Hutcheon, p. 4.

his new nihilistic intention to expand the scope of his revenge by murdering any customer who visits his shop. In narrative terms this is a turning point. As Todd's anger overtakes his humanity, he becomes a remorseless serial killer. The conventional revenge-tragedy decent into depravity is beginning to deepen. This moment depicts both of the core thematic focus of the hypotext: the corrupting influence of revenge and the dehumanising effect of socio-economic oppression. Todd, maddened by his failure, resolves to seek solace in mass murder. The hypotext's portrayal of this pivotal moment is as follows:

**Todd:** Escaped! Curse Judge! Curse sailor – curse myself ! When comes a second chance my poor Johanna!

**Mrs Lovett:** Here, what's up? Judge Turpin's just run through the shop like the devil himself was after him.

**Todd:** He was, but he ran too slow.

**Mrs Lovett:** And no sooner had I got me breath back when the other gentleman came roaring through, tearing his hair and sobbing fit to burst hisself.

**Todd:** Poor Anthony.

**Mrs Lovett:** You haven't been found out already?

**Todd:** No, no nothing like that.

**Mrs Lovett:** Well, that's a mercy.

**Todd:** A second chance may come. It must, it shall! Until it does, I'll pass the time in practice on less honoured throats.

**Mrs Lovett:** I don't understand you. You let that judge escape one minute, and the next you're on about slicing up any Tom, Dick or Harry. This revenge business don't half blow hot and cold, it don't.

**Todd:** Revenge? Oh, no! The work's its own reward. For now I find I have a taste for blood, and all the world's my meat.<sup>71</sup>

The scene progresses at a rapid pace. Todd's anger is clear, however, he demonstrates a degree of rational thought; he is concerned with Anthony and he reassures Lovett that he's not been caught. The decision that 'all the world's my meat' is reached at the end of the exchange but it is after these moments of rationality and the justification of this escalation is kept brief.

Sondheim's treatment of this narrative Move expands this moment through the song "Epiphany". After a very rapid dialogue exchange between Todd and Mrs Lovett, Todd launches into one of the score's most dynamic songs. Sondheim has described Epiphany as a schizophrenic episode. The song follows an episodic structure that alternates between contrasting melodic and harmonic profiles. In chugging, march-like passages, Todd espouses his new philosophy: 'We all deserve to die'.<sup>72</sup> In lyrical, cantabile sections, Todd mourns his wife and the loss of his daughter: 'I'll never see my girl again'. Based on the anger, grief and violence depicted in the song, Todd concludes by asserting, 'The work waits. I'm alive at last. And I'm full of joy.'<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Bond, p. 35.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 174.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 179.

The lyrics of this song express the fragmentation of Todd's mind and in doing so provides a level of justification for the development from simple to general revenge that is not emphasised in the hypotext. In addition, the lyrics clearly establish the broadening of Todd's revenge quest as a response to the character's disillusionment with his socio-economic context. Todd recognises that his 'epiphany' is motivated by both his personal suffering and the inherent prejudice of London. Todd sings: '

**Todd:** 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 kind 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.'

Through the form of lyrics, Sondheim creates a scene in which Todd's motivations are expressed in detail and the revenge quest's connection with social injustice is emphasised. This is one example of the expansionist effect of Sondheim's lyrics. In conjunction with other narrative Moves, similar expansions are undertaken. One such example occurs during the song A Little Priest; Lovett suggests cannibalising Todd's victims and the duo explore the prospect through a lengthy, four-verse song.

## Character and Dialogue

One of Sondheim's many collaborators, the writer Arthur Laurents has said of Sondheim, 'Steve writes a lyric that could only be sung by the character for which it was designed...'<sup>74</sup> Corroborating Laurents' statement, Sondheim utilises much of the commentary provided in his published lyric anthology to discuss the connection between character and lyrics. Among Sondheim's maxims, character represents part of the 'content' to which the maxim 'content dictates form' refers. As Sondheim writes, 'They are lyrics in a dramatic situation on a stage in terms of character.'<sup>75</sup>

Sondheim's approach to lyric writing is renowned both within the fan base of musical theatre and the practitioners who create new works. Sondheim's character centred approach is multifaceted. Sondheim writes lyrics that are a continuation and contribute to characterisation. A consequence of this is that Sondheim's songs are rarely stand-alone commercial successes. A Sondheim lyric is a response to a very specific dramatic moment, delivered by a specific dramatic voice.

Lyrics within *Sweeney Todd* are required to establish and develop characterisation. In this capacity, Sondheim's lyrics communicate to the spectator a vast amount of character information including motivation, personality and social status. The lyric writing techniques that Sondheim employs to depict character are many, however two approaches in particular

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<sup>74</sup> Arthur Laurents quoted in Thomas P. Adler, 'The Sung and the Said: Literary Value in the Musical Dramas of Stephen Sondheim', in *Reading Stephen Sondheim: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. by Sandor Goodhart (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 2000), pp. 36-46 (p. 37).

<sup>75</sup> Thomas P. Adler, p. 37.

contribute pointedly to create a response to the hypotext's socio-economic thematic discourse.

The hypotext's characters existed as noticeable character archetypes. Bond incorporated genre signifiers in both the dialogue and characterisation of the hypotext to emphasise the distinction between the melodrama-based and revenge tragedy-based characters. Exploiting the division between the 'low-art' character types of the melodrama and the 'high-art' character types of the revenge tragedy, Bond utilised this distinction to assist in the portrayal of class and social division. The use of juxtaposed dialogue modes contributed to this distinction. Sondheim's lyrics also engage with the issue of class and through vocabulary choice and rhyme scheme evoke social position.

Each of the musical's characters communicates in a way that reflects their position with the class system of the Victorian setting. Through a comparison between lyrics delivered by the Beggar Woman and Johanna, the stark difference in both vocabulary and rhyme scheme is discernible.

Johanna and The Beggar Woman occupy two contrasting positions at each extreme of the Victorian class system. Though imprisoned and resentful, Johanna has experienced the education and economic privileges afforded to her as Judge Turpin's ward. Conversely, The Beggar Woman exists at the lowest point of the social spectrum. Homeless, destitute and desperate: The Beggar Woman has become a prostitute. Ironically, both Johanna and The Beggar Woman have been

displaced from their original working class position by the exploitative and wealthy Judge Turpin.

The Beggar Woman, as she initially appears, is a minor character. Although clues are given as to her true identity, throughout most of the musical, the Beggar Woman appears as a comic relief character whose vulgarity shocks whilst reminding the spectator of the unkind social conditions of the setting. The Beggar Woman has a small number of spoken lines but she primarily communicates through song. In a way that is similar to Todd's lyrics in "Epiphany", The Beggar Woman primarily communicates through two general lyrical modes that correspond with two separate musical themes. The Beggar Woman appears multiple times during the musical singing a version of her original musical material four times before eventually being killed by Todd in Act II. At each appearance – "The Barber and His Wife", "Johanna", "Wait" and "City on Fire" - the Beggar Woman's lyrics alternate between a lilting, sustained cry for 'Alms' and a rapid, jerky switch to salacious slang terms. In the Beggar Woman's first appearance this dichotomy is established. She first sings:

**Beggar Woman:** Alms, alms for a miserable woman. On a miserable chilly morning. Thank you sir, thank you...

After Anthony gives her a donation, the mode abruptly changes:

**Beggar Woman:** Ow' would you like a little muff dear, a little jig jig, a little bounce around the bush. Wouldn't you like to push me parsley? You looks to me dear like you got plenty there to push.<sup>76</sup>

The Beggar Woman then quickly reverts to the previous, 'Alms Alms', lyric. This moment establishes two things about the character. Firstly, the rapid switch in expressive mode confirms the characters' mania and the stressed and repeated use of colloquialism, though primarily invented by Sondheim, augments the character as a member of the lower class. The distinction between the two forms of lyric replicates the narrative function of the lyrics also. When singing 'alms, alms' the Beggar Woman is begging for money; to increase her chances of being successful she is polite, she thanks Anthony and refers to him as sir. By not containing a driving sense of rhythm the 'alms, alms' sections encourage passer-by's to stop and listen to the slow pace of the lyric. The contrast between the lyrics of this section and the following section is compounded by their immediate proximity as well as the contrasting rhythm and vocabulary of the two passages.

In particular contrast to the Beggar Woman's second style of lyric, Johanna's lyrics, as shown in the song "Green Finch and Linnet Bird" contrast with the Beggar Woman's vocabulary and rhyme scheme. Sondheim has discussed on many occasions what he regards to be a connection between pronounced rhyme schemes and the intelligence or status of characters.<sup>77</sup> Another example of 'content dictates form'; Johanna, as an educated member of the elite, communicates via lyrics that make prominent use of rhyme. This prominence is

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<sup>76</sup> Sondheim, *Sweeney Todd*, p. 23.

<sup>77</sup> Sondheim, *Hat Box*, p. xxv.

clear in the song's second verse:

**Johanna:** Outside the sky waits, beckoning, beckoning, just beyond the bars. How can you remain, staring at the rain, maddened by the stars? How is it you sing anything? How is it you sing?<sup>78</sup>

Johanna's lyrics feature a heavy use of rhyme; this is both within the line –inner rhyme- and at the end of lines. The effect is similar to the hypotext's use of the verse mode; Johanna communicates in an ornate form of language that invites the spectator's attention through its pronounced, intricate and enjoyable use of rhyme. Sondheim argues that rhyme used in this way creates a learned tone. This tone, plus the use of poetic devices such as metaphor and rhetorical questions portray the status of Johanna in direct contrast to the status of the Beggar Woman. The juxtaposition between the characters is accentuated when the Beggar Woman later enters the scene; she again sings her ragtag rhythmic lyrics to make vulgar advances. In content and in form, the lyrics of the two characters are oppositional as too are their social statuses.

Vocabulary and the pronounced treatment of rhyme are used by Sondheim across all the characters to establish oppositional representations of social position and to explore characterisation. This is not restricted to The Beggar Woman and Johanna; they serve as useful examples of a more widely adopted technique.

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<sup>78</sup> Sondheim, *Sweeney Todd*, p. 62.

## Music

Sondheim's score has been described as many things. At the time of the musical's premier in 1979, critics applied labels such as operatic and filmic whilst identifying influences stemming from the music hall tradition.<sup>79</sup> Scholars too have debated the score. Steve Swayne,<sup>80</sup> Stephen Banfield<sup>81</sup> and Stephen Citron have carried out detailed analyses of the work with each focusing on a different aspect of the music.<sup>82</sup> Banfield produces a thorough analysis of the score's motivic writing. Swayne considers the influence of diverse musical genres on the piece. Citron approaches the score from the perspective of character. The multifaceted nature of the scholarship that has considered this score and the consistent question of cultural status that it prompts among critics is, I argue, a symptom of the score's eclectic mix of musical genres.

The aim of this chapter is to consider how the socio-economic critique of the hypotext is transformed via processes of cross-media adaptation. Either through song or underscore, music is a near continuous presence within the piece. Communicating information regarding character and narrative whilst establishing tone, the music fulfils multiple functions within this context. To focus the following discussion, I will explore Sondheim's use of motif, which has a powerful effect on the musical's overall treatment of the hypotext's thematic discourse.

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<sup>79</sup> Robert L. Mack, *The Wonderful and Surprising History of Sweeney Todd: The Life and Times of an Urban Legend* (London: Continuum Books, 2007).

<sup>80</sup> Steve Swayne, *How Sondheim Found His Sound* (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 2007).

<sup>81</sup> Stephen Banfield, *Sondheim's Broadway Musicals* (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1993).

<sup>82</sup> Stephen Citron, *Sondheim & Lloyd-Webber* (Milwaukee: Applause Theatre and Cinema Books, 2014).

## **Narrative – Through Leitmotif**

As has already been established, the musical utilises a narrative that closely follows the plot and story of the hypotext. Though subtle alterations are made to ensure that the narrative is suited to the sensibilities of the musical's contemporary musical theatre audience, the Move structure of the musical and the hypotext are identical. The key narrative events that render the hypotext a revenge-tragedy are all present in the musical; as was discussed in the previous section, each Move is explored in the hypertext through an accompanying song.

The musical processes that Sondheim utilises are intricate and heavily thematic. Sondheim has, in ironic instances of 'reverse-cultural-snobbery' voiced his dislike of opera.<sup>83</sup> Consequently, the composer's approach to motif writing has been attributed by Swayne, others and the composer himself, to the influence of film music, specifically Bernard Herrmann's score for the 1945 film *Hangover Square*.<sup>84</sup> Following this influence, Sondheim establishes a set of leitmotifs that are consistently associated with characters or concepts. The motifs, though distinct in their sound and purpose are mostly generated from various permutations of the Dies Irae liturgical chant; a modal phrase associated with death. Much has already been written on this feature of Sondheim's score; Banfield in particular presents a detailed discussion of this technique. Consequently my discussion will repeat some of Banfield's findings. My focus here is the use of the Dies Irae generated motifs in the representation of narrative. The use of leitmotifs fulfils dramatic and structural functions.

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<sup>83</sup> Mark Eden Horowitz, *Sondheim on Music: Minor Details and Major Decisions* (Plymouth: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2010), p.148.

<sup>84</sup> Swayne, p. 131.

Structurally, by generating at least fourteen musical ideas from the Dies Irae, Sondheim fuses the score with a sense of stylistic continuity.

Dies Irae



The above excerpt demonstrates the melodic content of the Dies Irae. The musical's opening, "The Ballad of Sweeney Todd" is based on the intervallic content of Dies Irae and although the phrase is not included in the song without transformation, it informs the opening ostinato and the lyric line is informed by the intervallic pattern.

Opening Ostinato – "Ballad of Sweeney Todd"



The first three notes of the ostinato – G#, A, G#, are based on an inversion of the three opening notes of the Dies Irae. The notes follow the same interval pattern but inverted, with the second note rising a semitone rather than falling a semitone. The F# base note provides the fourth note of Sondheim's transposed Dies Irae. Where the original chant begins on an F natural, Sondheim's version is transposed and inverts his version of the Dies Irae to begin with G#, A, G# and F#. The base note, via octave displacement, in conjunction with the first three

notes of the ostinato, combine to provide the first four notes of the transposed Dies Irae.

Sondheim's segments the Dies Irae to produce miniature motifs based on the chant. The ostinato's opening four notes are one example of this. In conjunction, the counter melody, played in the right hand provides a further treatment of the Dies Irae. The repeated C# in the right hand and then the E and left hand D in bar eight to produce another treatment of Dies Irae material, another inversion. Here the intervallic steps of the first four notes of the original chant – semitone down, semitone up, minor third down, becomes semitone up, semitone down, minor third up. Where the chant begins F, E, F, D, this treatment of the melody is transposed to C#, D, C#, E.

The melody sung here is also closely modelled on the Dies Irae, much more clearly than the accompaniment figure. The relationship between the first two notes differs from the Dies Irae as Sondheim lowers the pitch of the first note by two whole steps, however, beginning with G# the intervallic relationships between the remaining notes in this phrase follow the same pattern as the Dies Irae. When played together this small passage is densely packed with material based on the Dies Irae.

An evocation of the Dies Irae manifests in many of the musical's main themes and songs, this includes, the opening notes of "Worst Pies in London" and the accompaniment figure of "My Friends". Banfield identifies fourteen instances

whereby the Dies Irae undergoes transformation and is included as part of thematic material.<sup>85</sup>

By utilising the Dies Irae as the basis for widespread thematic material, Sondheim creates a musical context for the musical, in which songs feel connected to those that have come before but in ways that are less overt than reprises. Through this technique Sondheim creates a musical style for the piece, a sound world that enables Sondheim to draw on a diverse range of musical genres in the score without creating a feeling of disconnectedness. “The Worst Pies in London” is a good example of this.

During this song, Todd meets his former neighbour for the first time since escaping from prison. In search of information he seeks out Mrs Lovett. In tone and function, the song contrasts starkly with the material that has come before it. In the previous scene, Todd sang of his anguish and feelings of impending doom. In this scene, the chatterbox Mrs Lovett serves Todd a pie. A symptom of her tangential thought process, during this song Mrs. Lovett covers topics including her neighbours, the price of meat, her status as a widow and her increasing tiredness, all while killing multiple insects.

This moment is a theatrical tour de force that blends action, lyric and music to introduce the spectator to Mrs Lovett. The song doesn't last long, but Sondheim squeezes as many lyrics as possible into this moment. Musically, the song also contrasts with the material that has come before. Where the previous scene

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<sup>85</sup> Banfield, p. 300.

features music of intense pathos and yearning, this scene is full of energy. Where the previous scene was composed of elongated arpeggiated chords, this scene is frenetic and the music is percussive and driven forward in time with Lovett's baking. The two scenes however share elements of the Dies Irae a musical link which established both songs as part of one complimentary musical score. There are many such instances of the Dies Irae being used in this fashion.

The music's use of theme also serves a dramatic and narrative function. The melodies that characters sing are encoded with dramatic significance. Each subsequent use of a theme that has already been established when placed into a new narrative context is a shorthand through which Sondheim can cue the emotions of its previous use and build emotional responses which can be elicited later.

### **Conclusion**

Through book, lyrics and music, the musical, Sweeney Todd transforms the narrative, dialogue and characters of Bond's text into the context of musical theatre. In doing so, the practitioners emphasise the socio-economic critique present in the hypotext. This is achieved through contributions made by all three media, as well as performance elements that have not been discussed in this thesis.

In performance, the media combine to create a complex adaptation of Bond's text. The book evokes Brechtian techniques of alienation to emphasise social division. The lyrics through the use of rhyme and poetic imagery allude to stark

social divisions. The music, through motifs provides structural cohesion and an exploration of character.

The musical offers a new interpretation of the hypotext that repeats elements but always with variation.

## **Conclusion**

The contemporary musical, like the musicals that came before, rely on practices of adaptation. For many reasons, some commercial and some practical, musicals based on adaptations outnumber 'original' musicals enormously. Rather than a symptom of increasing commercialism, or artistic laziness, the need to retell stories, to share what has excited and moved us is a universal impulse. The musical has been exercising that impulse since its inception.

This thesis comprised an attempt at combining the perspective of adaptation studies with the practice of multimedia theory. Focusing on the musical *Sweeney Todd*, I investigated the work as a hypertext, a product of cross-media adaptation. To enable a thorough discussion, I presented a dual analysis, first of Bond's text and then of the musical. Through comparison, I argued that Sondheim and Wheeler transformed the thematic focus of Bond's text, the socio-economic critique of Todd's London, into their respective media.

By using semiotic and narratological theories to analyse C.G Bond's text, I demonstrated that Bond created a hybrid text that combined revenge tragedy and melodrama conventions revise Todd as a revenger and to provide justification for his actions as he struggles in a corrupt system.

Maintaining a multimedia perspective, I regarded the musical as a collection of media each of which was able to communicate information to the spectator and which did so in a unique way for that medium. Through this investigation I considered Sondheim's music, Wheeler's book and Sondheim's lyrics' The aim

was to treat each of these media as unique entities and to understand how and what each communicate in response to the hypotext.

Moving forward, the study of multimedia adaptation would benefit from further study particularly in two areas. Dividing the musical into its component parts was highly informative, but the musical exists as a multimedia product in performance. Therefore, it must be acknowledged, that in the theatre media combine and the nature of this combination has an effect on the interpretation of spectators in response to the musical as a whole. Secondly it would be of great benefit to the field, if a scholar could observe in real time the adaptation process by documenting a the creation of a musical based on a source text.

Through this thesis I aimed to address a significant gap within the current musical theatre and Sondheim studies scholarship. Many acknowledge the musical's reliance on adaptation, but as a process and in most cases as a product this has not received lengthy investigations. This thesis provides a study of musical theatre adaptation and it demonstrates how practitioners through different media can explore the same theme and contribute differing perspectives through the adaptation process.

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