Top Class Theatre Studies

Amira Susskind monologue transcript

*Sweeney Todd, The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*, music and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim, book by Hugh Wheeler, from an adaptation by Christopher Bond.

Prescribed edition: Applause Theatre Book Publishers, New York, 1991. ISBN 978-1-557-83-066-1  
Monologue script from Act 1, pp.37-41

Spit it out, dear. Go on. On the floor. There's worse things than that down there.

Up there? Oh, no one will go near it. People think it's haunted. You see — years ago, something happened up there. Something… not very nice.

[Sings]  
There was a barber and his wife, and he was beautiful.   
A proper artist with a knife, and they transported him for life.   
And he was beautiful...

Barker, his name was — Benjamin Barker. Foolishness!

[Sings]  
He had this wife, you see,   
Pretty little thing.   
Silly little nit.   
Had her chance for the moon on a string —   
Poor thing.   
Poor thing.

There were these two, you see,   
Wanted her like mad, one of 'em a Judge, t'other one his Beadle.   
Every day they'd nudge and they'd wheedle.   
But she wouldn't budge from her needle.   
Too bad.   
Pure thing.

So they merely shipped the poor bugger off south, they did,   
Leaving her with nothing but grief and a year-old kid.   
Did she use her head even then? Oh no, God forbid!   
Poor fool.   
Oh but there was worse yet to come — poor thing.

Johanna, that was the baby's name… Pretty little Johanna…   
My my, you do like a good story now, don't you?

[Sings]  
Well, Beadle calls on her, all polite,   
Poor thing, poor thing.   
The Judge, he tells her, is all contrite,   
He blames himself for her dreadful plight,   
She must go straight to his house tonight!   
Poor fool, poor thing.

Of course, when she goes there, poor dear, poor thing,   
They're havin' this ball all in masks.   
There's no one she knows there, poor dear, poor thing.   
She wanders tormented, and drinks, poor thing.   
The Judge has repented, she thinks, poor thing.   
"Oh, where is Judge Turpin?" she asks.   
He was there, all right — only not so contrite!   
She wasn't no match for such craft, you see,   
And everyone thought it so droll.   
They figured she had to be daft, you see,   
So all of 'em stood there and laughed, you see.   
Poor soul! Poor thing!

So it is you — Benjamin Barker. So changed! Good God, what did they do to you down in bloody Australia or wherever?

Your wife? She poisoned herself. Arsenic from the apothecary on the corner. I tried to stop her but she wouldn't listen to me.

You daughter Johanna? Judge Turpin’s got her. Even he had a conscience tucked away, I suppose. Adopted her like his own. You could say it was good luck for her…almost.

You're going to — “get 'em”? You? A bleeding little nobody of a runaway convict? [laughs] Don't make me laugh. You'll never get His 'igh and Mightiness! Nor the Beadle neither. Not in a million years.

You got any money? Listen to me! You got any money? Then how you supposed to live even? You poor thing! You poor thing!

Wait! Well you see? It don't have to be the sewers or the plague hospital. When they come for the little girl, I hid 'em. I thought, who knows? Maybe the poor silly blighter'll be back again someday and need 'em. Cracked in the head, now wasn't I? Times as bad as they are, I could have got five, maybe ten quid for 'em, any day.

But you see? You can be a barber again. My, them handles is chased silver, ain't they?

[Interpretation Statement]

In my interpretation of Mrs Lovett from the musical Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street by Stephen Sondheim, I have retained the original context of 1846, London. My inclusion of a set piece that resembles Mrs Lovett's bourgeois pie shop, reflects the character's low social standing in Victorian England. Similarly, my costume, hair and makeup further contribute to the cohesion of the character’s social status as well as providing contrast to her improved state later in the play, when her shop becomes successful.

Furthermore, my use of a wooden countertop adheres to the play's setting and allowed me to acknowledge the stage directions prior to the prescribed monologue, that indicates Mrs Lovett finishes “one of the crusts with a flourish”. The chair placed downstage centre acknowledges the presence of Sweeney within the specified scene as he has just been seated. The chair also gives Lovett a point of focus as she relays the story contained within the song “Poor Thing” and established and maintained an actor audience relationship due to the panel’s ability to see my facial expressions when directly kneeling in front of Sweeney.

I have acknowledged the musical theatre style of the play through my use of a backing track and a presentational style of acting. Mrs Lovett’s age and bawdy demeanour were exemplified through my use of a wide gait and an undignified stance. My incorporation of a cockney accent highlights the character’s context as, in this time in history, the influx of Irish migrants influenced the dialect of the region, and ‘Irish Cockney’ was created and spoken by commoners.

During the instrumental section of the song, I acknowledge the stage directions that imply that her “narration is acted out” by members of the ensemble, through my use of a fixed gaze that places the scenes at a distance and serves to rather portray these events occurring in her mind’s eye.

Through the direction of my monologue, I chose to focus on Emphasis as an Element of Theatre Composition, primarily to underpin the character's motivation at this stage in the musical. For example, my use of eye focus on the razor case emphasised the important role the razors play as a catalyst for the subsequent action of the play.

Thank you