Top Class Theatre Studies

Tom Liszukiewicz 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.

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Monologue script from Act 1, pp.37-41

[Bell tolls]

I beg your indulgence boy, my mind is far from easy. For in these once familiar streets I feel the chill of ghostly shadows everywhere. Forgive me.

Farewell, Anthony. – What is it? No!

[Sings]  
There's a hole in the world like a great black pit  
And the vermin of the world inhabit it  
And its morals aren't worth what a pig can spit  
And it goes by the name of London...  
At the top of the hole sit a privileged few  
Making mock of the vermin in the lower zoo  
Turning beauty to filth and greed...  
I too have sailed the world and seen its wonders,  
For the cruelty of men is as wondrous as Peru  
But there's no place like London!  
  
There was a barber and his wife,  
And she was beautiful.  
A foolish barber and his wife.  
She was his reason and his life,  
And she was beautiful,  
And she was virtuous,  
And he was... naive.  
  
There was another man who saw  
That she was beautiful.  
A pious vulture of the law,  
Who, with a gesture of his claw,  
Removed the barber from his plate,  
Then there was nothing but to wait,  
And she would fall,  
So soft,  
So young,  
So lost  
And oh so beautiful!  
  
Oh, that was many years ago...  
I doubt if anyone would know...

Now leave me Anthony, I beg of you. There’s somewhere I must go, something I must find out. Now, and alone. If you want you may well find me around Fleet Street…I wouldn’t wonder.

[Sings]  
There's a hole in the world like a great black pit  
And it's filled with people who are filled with shit  
And the vermin of the world inhabit it...

Would no one have mercy on her? Not Barker! Not Barker! Todd, now! Sweeny Todd! Where is she? Where is my wife? Where is Lucy?

And my daughter? He? Judge Turpin.

Fifteen years sweating in a living hell on a trumped-up charge! Fifteen years dreaming that perhaps I might come home to a loving wife and child. Let them quake in their boots – Judge Turpin and the Beadle! For their hour has come. No money. I’ll live if I have to sweat in the sewers or in the plague hospital I’ll live - and I’ll have them!

Silver… yes.

[Sings]

These are my friends.   
See how they glisten.   
See this one shine.   
How he smiles, in the light.   
My Friends, my faithful friends.   
Speak to me friends.   
Whisper, I’ll listen.   
I know, I know, you’ve been locked out of sight all these years.   
Like me, my friends.   
Well I’ve come home to find you waiting.   
Home, and we’re together, and we’ll do wonders.   
Won’t we?

You there my friend, come let me hold you.   
Now with a sigh, you grow warm, in my hand.   
My friends, my clever friends.   
Rest now my friends, soon I’ll unfold you.   
Soon you’ll know splendours you never have dreamed all your days.   
My lucky friends.   
‘Til now your shine was merely silver.   
Friends, you shall drip rubies.  
You’ll soon drip precious, rubies.

My right arm is complete again.

[Interpretation Statement]

Adapted from the macabre subject matter of the British melodrama, Sweeney Todd humanises the folk legend of this deranged barber within the Industrial revolution in 1846, channelling Sondheim’s bleak view of the world. Having not committed a crime at this point in the play, I emphasise the middle-class loving family man in Todd, robbed of life by the upper-class, in the hope for provoking the audience to feel empathetic.

I employ the composition element of variation throughout the monologue, as Todd pursues his desire for perfect narrative closure. Here, I use expressive skills to highlight the six key stages of emotion: fear, bitterness, anger, poignancy, confidence and revelation.

Through the playscript’s theatrical style of Musical Theatre, a heightened emotional state is expressed through my presentational acting style, exaggerated facial expressions and gestures, emphasised in the ending climax.

I allude to the dagger scene from Shakespeare’s Macbeth, with Todd’s razors appearing as a vision in his head, mimicking the same obsession and blinded vengeance, which I have enhanced through a trance-like sound design and the shining light within the razor case, representing this metaphorical enlightenment.

In reducing the instrumental score of “my friends” to the simple piano melody, I aim to highlight this isolated and romantic, yet disturbing, revelation. The red chair, an ‘ominous presence’ throughout the piece, becomes symbolic of his newfound bloodlust and revenge, ultimately leading to his demise at the end of the play.