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Tallulah Thornton-Lawrence 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

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

What, up there? Oh, no one will go near it. People…they 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, but 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.
Ah, but there was worse yet to come — poor thing.

Johanna, that was the child’s name… Pretty little Johanna…
My, you do like a good story, 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 come straight to his house tonight!
Poor thing, poor thing.

Of course, when she goes there, poor thing, 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 there in bloody Australia or wherever?

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

And your 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.

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

Have you got any money? Listen to me! Have you got any money? Then how you going to live even? Oh, you poor thing! Poor thing!

Wait! 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. [laughs] Cracked in the head, wasn't I? Times as bad as they are, I could have got five, maybe ten quid for 'em, any day.

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

[Interpretation Statement]

My interpretation of Mrs Lovett from Sweeney Todd, by Stephen Sondheim and Hugh Wheeler, employed the theatre styles of musical theatre, tragic opera and gothic horror. As a director, I applied cohesion by keeping the set, costume and accent within the context of ‘Nineteenth Century London’.

I wore a long black skirt with a dirty white shirt and apron, consistent with my dramaturgy into the attire of working women in the 1800s, and juxtaposed these items with a purple corset, which symbolised the upper class society to which Mrs Lovett aspires. As an actor I employed a Cockney accent, to indicate that Lovett originates from the working class demographic of Fleet Street.

I used motion through manipulating the props of the pie dough and the teatowel. The twisting of the dough in the style of a Laban movement press conveyed Lucy’s powerlessness, exemplified when Mrs Lovett kneads all three balls of dough into the one, representing how Lucy became Judge Turpin’s plaything. This image of Lucy also enhanced the gothic horror damsel in distress archetype.

I used the black tea towel to symbolise Judge Turpin’s power, for example transforming the prop into a mask to represent how the party guests are blinded by Turpin’s high status. The use of an implement associated with cleanliness also drew focus to Turpin’s dirty, twisted actions. Mrs Lovett’s cut finger at the end foreshadowed the murder and cannibalism in the musical, and the unseen razors symbolised how ultimately Sweeney will hurt and kill Mrs Lovett as a result of self-obsession and pathological hatred, continuing themes highlighted in Sondheim’s operetta.

I varied the line ‘poor thing, from a condescending tone when looking at Sweeney to a harsher vocal tone when performing to the audience. This displayed Mrs Lovett’s crass enthusiasm for retelling the tragic tale, while also conveying that my displayed sympathy is primarily to gain Sweeney’s approval. This exaggerated characterisation was also cohesive with one of my chosen theatres style of opera.  I employed the musical theatre convention of dance to explain the story of Lucy, and the contrast of the refined ballroom motions versus the crude action of hitching my skirt ridiculed Lucy’s prudery and showed my own bawdy desires.

Finally, I used a stripped back piano track to create an intimate relationship with the audience, with brief moments of violin to symbolise upper class society when Lucy attends the ball.