Stephen Sondheim:

Identity Construction in the Context of Postmodernism

Master's Thesis by Julian Fernandez

November 2021

University of Birmingham

Department of Drama and Theatre Studies

Supervisor: Dr David Pattie

Acknowledgements

Throughout the writing of this thesis, I have received a great deal of support and inspiration.

Firstly, I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr David Pattie, who showed a lot of interest in my topic and actively engaged with me throughout the writing process. David and I spent a lot of time talking, discussing, philosophising and laughing. His expertise and insight were invaluable in guiding me towards formulating my argument. Your constructive feedback helped me focus, reflect on and re-evaluate my work, sharpening my critical faculties.

I want to thank my first ever theatre director, Teddy Davies, who introduced me to Stephen Sondheim, by casting me in *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum.* I also want to thank my former lecturer Daisy Prince in New York City, who helped me appreciate American musical theatre on a deeper, more meaningful level.

Thank you to Ashleigh and Lyle, who share my passion for musical theatre and discussed my argument with me at length.

I want to thank my parents, especially my father, who passed away a few weeks after starting my Master's Degree. You pushed me in all my endeavours, always inspiring me to do my best. I miss you.

And, most importantly: Thank you to Stephen Sondheim, whose work makes me (and so many others) feel validated, human and alive.

Abstract

Musical theatre lyricist and composer Stephen Sondheim pioneered the sophisticated characterisation of emotional complexity in the second half of the 20th Century. His work embodies the postmodern perspective, which views identity as a fluid, multi-faceted construct, disconnected from totalising homogenous structures. It is against this background that my thesis aims to investigate Sondheim's methods of identity construction. In my analysis I will discuss key songs and self-revelatory moments in the musicals *Company*, *A Little Night Music*, *Sweeney Todd- the Demon Barber of Fleet Street* and *Into the Woods*, focusing on lyrical and musical characterisation, while considering the performative and constructive layers of identity. My results show that Sondheim sets himself musical, structural and stylistic limitations with the sole purpose of breaking them. Thus, he allows his characters to develop beyond their pre-determined narratives and constructing their identities in the process.

Table of Contents

Introduction

"Content dictates form. Less is more. God is in the details. All in the service of clarity, without which nothing else matters." (Sondheim, 2010: XV)

Over the past decade, the question of identity and its role in western society has become a topic of rapidly growing importance. Phrases such as "I identify as…" form standard part of our social discourse. McLaughlin (2016:66) argues that identity is structured through knowledge and language and comprises societal building blocks, such as race, gender, sexuality, class, religion, etc. Thus, identity is formed in a social environment, posing the question: what is natural, what is performed? In this thesis I aim to show how Sondheim forms and develops identities in four of his works. Each chapter will provide a resumé of the respective musical's conception, style and historical context, followed by an in-depth analysis of key songs, through which I will explore various approaches of identity construction against the backdrop of the postmodernist movement.

The musicals I will discuss are Company (1970), A Little Night Music (1973), Sweeney Todd - the Demon Barber of Fleet Street (1979) and Into the Woods (1987).[1]

In the next section I will provide a brief overview of postmodernism in musical theatre, relating to Sondheim's approach, followed by first thoughts on the topic of identity and how the four musicals relate to the argument.

To fully grasp the importance of identity in these shows, one should place Sondheim's work in conversation with its cultural moment. With the exhaustion of the Rodgers and Hammerstein aesthetic of the integrated musical and its ideological world view by the 1960s, Sondheim challenged its concept of naive escapism.[2] Gordon (1992:3) explains that escapism is not a necessary component of musical theatre, as Sondheim "faced the sterile disillusion of the seventies by confronting the typical Broadway musical audience of tired businessmen and their wives with the very problems they had fled to the theatre to escape".[3] Rodgers and Hammerstein had developed a formula that almost guaranteed success but did not align with the emerging development of postmodernism.

---

[1] In most cases, I shall henceforth be referring to *Sweeney Todd - the Demon Barber of Fleet Street* as simply "*Sweeney Todd".*

[2] With musicals such as *Oklahoma!* (1943) and *Carousel* (1945), Rodgers and Hammerstein had established the *integrated musical.* The duo achieved integration by weaving the texture of song, dance and plot closely together (Gordon, 1992:2).

[3] I will be treating "the audience" as an integral active part of the performance throughout my thesis. I realise that every audience is different- while one is reactive, the other is not. Thus, I aim to look at the potential of the effects that Sondheim draws from the audience.

Finding a universal definition of postmodernism would probably go against its very concept, which resists definitive definitions, McLaughlin (2014:26) writes. Bertens (1997:3) calls it a “many-headed monster”, while Teampau (2018:88) says “postmodernism is what it is not”. Lyotard (1984:xxiv) defines postmodern as “incredulity toward metanarratives”- a departure from the grand stories a culture tells itself. He argues that postmodernism no longer allows the totalising of identity into homogenous structures. Rather than the self being anchored in a solid identity formed by it’s background and social disposition, from a postmodern perspective, identity is a process - fluid and malleable, dependant upon where the self is historically and culturally, characterised by fragmentation, discontinuity and the dissolution of boundaries between inner and outer worlds (Dunn, 1998:64). This eliminates the possibility of coherent, social theorising.

Kaye (1994:23) argues that postmodernism in art exhibits human instabilities, fostering differences and disagreements, disrupting the move toward stability. Sondheim highlights contemporary human conflicts, by placing them into the contexts of melodramas and fairytales, exploring the idea that the messiness of the human predicament is here to stay (Bauman, 1993:33).

The complexity of postmodern identity lies in the individual’s freedom to construct and define the self by means of personal motivation. The tension becomes evident in the fact that the environment is gifted the same liberty to change, inevitably labelling the identity construct with an expiry date. This forces a constant transformation and, considering Lyotard’s definition above, leads to a society in which social beings are constructed of small narratives, fragments, none more valid than the next. The characters in Sondheim’s musical express the desire to fit their identities into a world teeming with makeshift possibilities, where nothing is guaranteed- least of all, a happy ending- which, according to Francis (2014:352), implies an unrealistic stasis, as the human mind is too complex to remain in that state, constantly moving forward with new objectives.

Sondheim’s characters’ processes of identification lie in the internalisation of the subject. Thus, songs no longer aim to propel the plot (if there is one) forward but act as commentaries (e.g. “The Ladies Who Lunch”), reflections (e.g. “Send in the Clowns”) and processes (e.g. “Epiphany” or “I Know Things Now”). In the postmodern context, this does not develop the grand narrative, but the personal one. Their choices are linked directly to their identity in that moment in time, revealing how postmodernism turns away from the belief that history progresses irreversibly in one direction (Burkholder, Grout & Palisca, 2006:959).

The notion of performative identity is the process of identification conflicting with one’s personal underlying reality. While the process of identification moves in one direction, the performance moves in another. This creates distance between the characters’ self and their own expectations. Sondheim links this idea to the postmodern device of self-referentiality. McLaughlin (2016:4) writes that self-referentiality is the most seminal characteristic of postmodern art: art pointing at itself pointing at the world. It challenges the modern premise of realism, inviting the audience to

engage art in other ways than empathising with the characters. Sweeney Todd, for example, presents a play within a play, in which the chorus points directly to the audience. Furthermore, the protagonist, who tries to cover his murders, blurs the lines between what is real and what is not, when he addresses the audience directly. The characters in Into the Woods perform their identities as expected, but once they are made aware of the fairy tale structure they are part of, it breaks down, laying bare their individual struggles of identity construction.

In the postmodern context, each of the aforementioned musicals explore different angles of identity construction within communal or social systems, while seemingly fighting against the theatrical, social or narrative construct they are being forced into:

In *Company*, Robert, on his 35th birthday, begins to question the meaning of his existence. He defines himself completely through his many superficial relationships, which seem to fade into the backdrop of the hustling and bustling anonymity of New York City. The musical is told in vignettes, representing several moments happening in Robert's mind simultaneously, as he reflects on his choices and tries to figure out who he is. The show examines the struggles of identification in a world that views identity as a commodity. Robert moves through different versions of himself so as to avoid a narrative from ever really crystallising. *Company* is an appropriate starting point for the discussion- not only for being Sondheim's first truly postmodern musical in content and style, but also for clearly reflecting the postmodern social struggle with the "true" self and the need for personal unity and consistency.

The discussion moves to *A Little Night Music*, which gives context to the notion of community, in the form of social class and hierarchy. The show is set in Sweden around 1900 and revolves around an upper class patchwork family and their servants. While, in the city, their respective desires remain unspoken and their behaviour confined within the expectations of their social class, the characters break out of their well-constructed identities and social structures, abandon all expectation and re-configure in the augmented reality of the countryside. Sondheim contrasts the Viennese Operetta style against the postmodern insecurities of identity construction. Identities are pastiched, as the characters perform the roles they are expected to play in the construct they are born into. A disharmony of contrasting fantasies and irreconcilable things they believe about their own identity, governs the characters' sense of identity. It is precisely this clash that drives the narrative of the show.

In contrast, the identities of the characters in *Sweeney Todd* could not be more clear. This is owed partly to Sondheim's decision to tell the story as a Victorian *melodrama*, magnifying the character's emotions, intensions and thus, their identities. *Sweeney Todd* is the tale of a distraught barber, who, after having lived in exile, returns to London, seeking revenge on those who did him wrong. His desperation becomes obsession and thus, with the aid of the enamoured pie-maker Mrs. Lovett, directs his anger towards society and starts off on a killing-spree, turning

his victims into meat pies. The leading characters live outside of community, which catapults them into a bond that brings out the worst in each other. Both their identities are heavily influenced by a corrupt(ed) society and while one tries to be part of it, the other wants to destroy it. The discussion investigates how identity is anchored in the internal states of the protagonist, while, in the postmodern context, being the result of externally mediated forms of signification in the antagonist.

The analysis then reverts back to the importance of community in identity construction in *Into the Woods*. The show deals with the process of coming-of-age, illustrating the two contrasting desires of breaking away from the familiar, while longing to restore a sense of wholeness and unity. At the beginning, the fairy tale characters are not only oblivious to the fact that they are in a story, but also to their community. Each wanders eagerly into the woods aiming to fulfil their dream of a happy ending. After their wishes come true, “happily ever after” starts to disintegrate into a whole new set of resulting problems, as the characters learn that their wishes have consequences on others. Sondheim develops the dynamics between identity and narrative in an intertextual fairy tale world that reflects the fluid and fragmented breeding ground of the postmodern society.

Concerning the literature on Sondheim, the three primary authors I will be referencing are Raymond Knapp, Joanne Gordon and Robert McLaughlin, as their analyses focus on performance, characterisation and identity in the postmodern context. I also refer to Sandor Goodhart’s edited collection of critical essays, as well as the music-theoretical analyses of Stephen Banfield, where applicable.

It is important to mention that Sondheim’s success can be accredited to his various collaborations with book writers, such as George Furth and Hugh Wheeler, as well as directors, such as Hal Prince and James Lapine. For simplicity, I will refer to the material as Sondheim’s work, being well-aware of the collaborative effort. After all, *no one is alone*.

Chapter 1: “Company”

Company (1970), with music and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim, a book by George Furth, under the direction of Harold Prince, premiered at the Alvin Theatre on Broadway on the 26th of April 1970. Story-driven musicals had shaped the expectations of mid-twentieth-century Broadway audiences, who went to the theatre to watch narratives unfold and characters develop on stage. In shows such as *Annie Get Your Gun* (1946), *Kiss Me, Kate* (1948) and *The Sound of Music* (1959), a protagonist would guide the viewer through the narrative structure of exposition, conflict, climax and resolution, developing along the way. They presented stylised characters whose identities existed very much in a stylised world that audiences *had* to buy into to become part of the voyeuristic journey. Rodgers and Hammerstein’s 1947 musical *Allegro* (on which Sondheim assisted) had already indicated a departure from the *integrated musical* (e.g. by using its performers in deliberately unnatural ways and breaking the fourth wall). Mordden (2016:67) suggests that *Allegro* could have influenced *Company* a few decades later. Thus, the form that grew from the central theme of relationships and their value in society, combined the constant changes of tone and style characteristic of a revue with the cohesive narrative tension of the integrated musical. The result was a show where the audience was not merely the observer but became part of the conversation, as viewers are confronted with a world they know and characters they recognise. In my analysis of *Company* I will investigate how, without the aid of the aforementioned traditional narrative, Sondheim constructs Robert’s identity, in the context of the postmodern zeitgeist: relationships are not governed by conflicting circumstances, but rather by the conflict inherent in the characters.

Sondheim (2010:165) explains the notion of this musical play as follows:

“A man with no emotional commitments reassesses his life on his thirty-fifth birthday reviewing his relationships with his married acquaintances and his girlfriends. That is the entire plot.”

Although there is no identifiable storyline, Sondheim (2010:166) argues that the show takes place not over a period of time, but in an instant in his mind. A collection of scenes, taking place in-between, demonstrate Robert’s observations about his married friends, his girlfriends and himself, tying the show together and thus eliminating the need for a chronological, linear plot. Sondheim adds that as per his knowledge, prior to *Company*, there had not yet been a plotless musical that dealt with only one set of characters from start to finish.[4]

[4] Musicologist Joseph Swain (2002:19) writes that the musical comedy (before the integrated musical) was constructed from the traditions of vaudeville and burlesque, combined with some of the procedures of European operetta. Thus, it was little more than “a succession of songs, comedy routines and dance numbers that often had nothing to do with the progression of a story”.

"The contradictory aspect of the experiment, the story without a plot, caused both enthusiasm and dismay", Sondheim (2010:166) recalls, as audiences were waiting for a story to unfold, for something to *happen* (which undoubtedly is the causal nature of a traditional storyline). Critics tried to define this new amalgam of old forms, by giving it the umbrella term *concept musical* (Sondheim, 2010:166). Banfield (1993:147) argues that the term *concept musical* has to do with *director's theatre*, implying

> "a kind of Wagnerian Gesamtkunstwerk with music, lyrics, book, set, choreography, lighting, costumes and direction contributing to an integrated thematic whole whose elements are beholden to each other for style and content rather than to expectation based on their separate or corporate conventions". [5]

[Figure 1. This image shows the Original Broadway Cast of *Company* and Boris Aronson's set design downloaded from https://www.theatermania.com/broadway/news/take-a-first-look-at-prince-of-broadway-in-japan_74661.html in October 2021]

[5] Richard Gilman (2005:58) defines the term *director's theatre* as: "Director's theatre, in its most specific meaning, refers to a body of stage work created by directors who owe at least as much to the visual arts, dance and music as to traditional drama. More broadly, the phrase refers to a tendency (…) for directors who stage other people's plays to take liberties with texts, especially of classics, to place their own contribution on par with the dramatist's and sometimes beyond."

Company fits this description firstly, because the creatives worked closely to ensure that timing and mood would be part of a unified whole and, secondly, the material allows the director to decide what the show is *about,* reflected in the various disciplines and elements of production.[6]

The *concept musical* also takes the form of vignettes, Banfield (1993:48) explains, relegating narrative or plot. These vignettes give the audience multiple perspectives on a subject, much like a cubist painting. Approaching a coherently packaged topic from different angles simultaneously allowed Sondheim to freely explore the subject and would inspire later works, such as *Follies* (1971) or *Passion* (1994).[7] Banfield adds that this questioned the importance of character development and structural closure in musical plays. And therein lies the rub. *Company* is told through a series of separate vignettes*.* The play dramatises the postmodern dilemma of finding meaning in a culture where "inherited certainties have been discredited, and traditional narratives have failed" (McLaughlin, 2016:66).

Company derives from eleven short one-act plays, written by George Furth in the late 1960s. Most of the plays centred around two people in a relationship, i.e. marriage, love affair, close friendship, etc. - joined by an outsider (friend, ex-lover, acquaintance), who serves as a catalyst for the action. While merging unrelated scenes into a unified evening seemed nearly impossible, Sondheim and Prince could not resist the artistic challenge. Thus, the roles of the different *outsiders* combined into one single person: Robert. The central theme examines the challenge of maintaining relationships in an increasingly de-personalised society. Gordon (1992:39) explains that *Company* investigates "the malaise of an age, the incapacitating fears of a generation fleeing the painful choices of commitment".

The protagonist, Robert, is the camera through which we see the world. This notion infuses the show with (observational) commentary told at a dry remove from beginning to end. One could argue that *Company* was the first Broadway musical, whose defining quality was neither satire nor sentiment but irony, with which Sondheim (2010:166) agrees. Di Martino (2014:590) explains irony as "the central mode of consciousness of postmodernism". Its "attitude of disenchantment" toward the totalising narratives that validate Western culture is one of the main approaches used to represent the world, while reminding us of "art's own status of cultural artifice and potential instrument of power". The challenge with Robert, who, according to the composer, has often

---

[6] The creators of a new show have the luxury of being more flexible and spontaneous in the give-and-take dynamics of their respective disciplines. For example, in the opening number, Sondheim extended the word "love" over several bars to ensure that the ensemble could arrive at their marks on time to perform their choreography. To accommodate this, Sondheim had to work closely with choreographer Bob Avian and set designer Boris Aronson (Fig.1) to ensure that the set's structural elements would allow the singing cast to move to their marks quickly enough (Gordon, 1992:44).

[7] *Follies* deconstructs time and space entirely and lives in a world of memories and fantasies, while *Passion* is epistolary in style, framing its material through the writing and narration of letters.

been accused by the show's critics of being a cypher, a void at the heart of the piece, is that he, despite his final song ("Being Alive"), never becomes sufficiently alive. Seeing that Robert acts as a direct *and* indirect commentator, who does not seem to take anything too seriously, it is not easy to empathise with him, unlike the protagonists in previous integrated musicals.[8]

The score brought about a further challenge. When scoring a show, the composer provides his characters with a musical language- a theme that generally develops along with the characters. The show had no plot to advance and its protagonist had no motivating narrative to follow- thus, the songs had to take on a different role than usual. Sondheim decided upon a "quasi-Brechtian" approach, in which "songs either *commented on* the action or *were* the action - but never *part* of the action" (Sondheim, 2010:167). All the songs would deal either with marriage or New York City, the two themes holding the score together.

[Figure 2. This image shows Raùl Esparza and company in John Doyle's 2006 Broadway Revival of *Company*. Image downloaded from https://artsbeat.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/10/15/sondheim-working-on-a-revised-version-of-company/ in July 2021]

Both, relationship and social environment, are inherent in the shaping of one's identity in postmodernity and can thus be categorised as follows:

[8] Robert's commentary is direct, because he actively comments; the way his friends are depicted is an indirect commentary.

1. Identity in the semi-anonymous society of a big city (*Company, Another Hundred People*) and the people it creates (*The Ladies Who Lunch*)
2. Identity within the "constraints" of a relationship (e.g. *The Little Things We Together, Sorry Grateful*) as well as the formula "relationship equals identity" (e.g., *Being Alive*)

Since Robert acts merely as a sounding board for most of his friends, I will henceforth structure my analysis under the presumption that all the characters are depicted through the protagonist's eyes, allowing me to examine the clues that reflect onto his character and identity.

Before analysing the songs, it should be helpful to examine *Company*'s performative context. As theatre is a performative medium, the actors' and the directors' choices concerning the interpretation, make up a significant part of forming the identity of the characters and completing the picture that the written material can only contribute to partially (albeit a substantial amount).[9] The 2006 Broadway revival, directed by John Doyle and starring Raúl Esparza as Robert, magnifies the abstract nature of *Company* (Fig. 2). Robert appears on an almost empty stage in a pool of light. The whole show takes places in something reminiscent of an other-world museum of memories. We are guests in an exhibition of Robert's thoughts, focused on his identity and (stagnant) growth. The whole ensemble is on stage throughout, observant, making the commentary more immediate and impulsive.

Robert appears to a symphony of traffic sounds and a busy signal, a kind of Leitmotiv, a recurring musical theme we encounter throughout the show (a more in-depth definition of the Leitmotiv will follow in Chapter 3). After all, *Company* breathes the frantic city life in the teeming isolation of Manhattan (Gordon, 1992: 38); a place in which everyone is dependent on themselves. John Doyle translated this directly to the stage, having the cast all play an instrument in the reduced orchestration, thus a*ccompany*ing each other. The tension builds to a climax (while never leaving us until the show ends), as we focus on our bemused hero Robert. He is about to embark on an inward exploration of romantic scepticism and marriage: an "oppressive state in which an inadequate individual is yoked forever to another less than perfect individual" (Gordon, 1992:38).

Surrounding Robert are his doting and devoted married friends, "united in a conspiracy to lure him into the world of married bliss" (Gordon, 1992:38). Included are three of his girlfriends, whose encounters with Robert emphasise that his struggles for human warmth are neither entirely successful nor complete failures. Critics have argued that the characters of *Company* are too one-dimensional and shallow; John Simon (1970) said: "These some-anonymous people are not only underdeveloped, they are not even truly representative of our society." Versluys (2007:89) argues that the postmodern process of identification links both the personal and the collective (social).

---

[9] I find myself in the unfortunate disposition of not having had the chance to have seen the original Broadway production of Company and will thus reference, where performativity is concerned, the 2006 Broadway revival, directed by John Doyle.

Thus, one could argue that presenting fully-rounded characters would go against the postmodern notion of placing the process of identification in the communal context. These characters are aspects of Robert's worldview and thus as much part of his development as he is. Robert's identity is almost wholly defined by the people around him. They are what Robert chooses to see and exploring them any further would have conflicted with their being presented primarily in vignettes. Olsen (2000:47) argues that by 1970, only a handful of shows had attempted to portray some aspect of contemporary life, and now, suddenly, the audience was watching a play in which they saw both themselves, people they knew or people they probably tried to avoid at cocktail parties- all without the glossy masque of a fantasy story or historical pastiche.

"Company"

The first point of access into the dynamics between identity and society is the opening (and title) number, "Company". We open on Robert's surprise 35th birthday party. It is unclear whether everyone is in the same location, although the characters indirectly talk to each other. The opening number establishes a feeling for the relationship between Robert and his friends.[10] A failed attempt to blow out his birthday candles leads into the opening number, telling the audience what the evening will be about (Gordon, 1992:43). The song begins with Robert's friends impatiently repeating his name. The rhythms evoke the impatient ringing of a telephone signal. In seeking his attention, Robert's friends give him several names throughout, all diminutives: Bob, Bobby, Robby, etc. Gordon (1992:43) justifies this as a need for his friends to keep him in infantile dependence. They resemble parent figures who seem to know who they are and what their purpose in life is. The calls crystallise into the first clear attempts to contact the aloof bachelor.

> Bobby, we've been trying to call you…
> Bobby, I've got something to tell you…
> Bobby, we've been trying to reach you all day…
> Bobby, there was something we wanted to say. (p.8-10) [11]

The attempts to entangle Robert grow into an insistent ostinato, drowning him in invitations, resulting in over-lapping, contrapuntal voices, indicating the feverish activity of the middle class. Gordon (1992:44) argues that all of this socialising reflects the busyness of Manhattan and a somewhat desperate charge against isolation, an attempt to ignore the seclusion of the anonymous city - art pointing at itself pointing to the audience, who have come to the theatre to escape. And so, Robert's friends implore him to join in a host of activities that fill every day of the week:

---

[10] The John Doyle revival had all its performers surround the minimalistic stage, tenaciously bearing witness and adding a distinct layer of emotional tension to the performances centre stage. The 2011 Lonny Price revival went the more glamorous route, which gave the friends a somewhat Stepford Wives character.

[11] I will be referencing lyrics from the libretto *Company- A musical Comedy,* 1996, published by the Theatre Communications Group. This script is an amalgamation of several reworked productions. Unless prevalent to a specific character discussion, I will not be indicating character names in ensemble numbers.

> Bobby, there's a concert on Tuesday
> Hank and Mary get into town tomorrow
> How about some Scrabble on Sunday?
> Bob, we're having people in Saturday night…
> Whatcha doing Thursday?
> Time we got together, is Wednesday all right?
> Eight o'clock on Monday. (p.11-13)

The random order of the events creates a sense of confusion and anxiety. Finally, the overlapping voices culminate in the first unified expression of desire and invitation. The use of the imperative indicates expectation and that this routine has become somewhat of a ritual.

> Bobby come on over for dinner!
> We'll be so glad to see you! (p.13)

The friends continue:

> Bobby come on over for dinner!
> Just be the three of us,
> Only the three of us!
> We looooooooove you! (p.13)

The threesome is Robert's chosen lifestyle. It is the closest he can get to being "in" a married relationship without the constraints of commitment. Robert is a listener and reactor, who gets to examine these marriages from a close distance (Olsen, 200:50). That Robert may come across to us as "cold" or "empty" lies in the mystery around him and our innate desire to project on to him. His constant running inner monologue eventually earns him his final moment. One character even likens Robert to the Seagram Building (Fig. 3): impenetrable without x-ray vision. Similarly to how this famous postmodern landmark is featured in New York City, Robert is featured in his circle of friends. While being highly visible and present, all knowledge of his inner workings is deflected by the reflection of the outside world.

An empty "love" echoing hollowly against the sounding board Robert, is the perennial emotional state, Gordon (1992:44) explains. The word extends over several bars, which epitomises the glib hollowness of Robert's companions. Finally, Robert shares his experience as he picks up the frantic, syncopated rhythm:

> Phone rings, door chimes, in comes company!
> No strings, good times, room hums, company!
> Late nights, quick bites, party games,
> Deep talks, long walks, telephone calls,
> thoughts shared, souls bared, private names,
> all those photos up on the walls
> "With love" …. (p.13)

[Figure 3. This image shows the Seagram Building in New York City, designed by Mies van der Rohe and Philip Johnson in 1958. Image downloaded from https://www.skyscrapercenter.com/building/seagram-building/3529 in July 2021]

Short phrases, tight internal rhymes and the lively jazz rhythms illustrate Robert's feverish social whirls, brief encounters and lack of involvement. The monosyllabic style intensifies the staccato quality of hurried city life (Gordon, 1992:45). Robert's time is filled with unending activity, stuck in a cycle of never-ending, pointless ventures. He sums up his life in a conversation with April:

> "… I've always lived in my apartment, but I'm never really in it. I just seem to pass through my living room from my bedroom to go to the bathroom to get out again." (p.85)

Robert continues:

> With love filling the days,
> With love seventy ways,
> "To Bobby with love" (p.13)

The word "love" gets accentuated once again- this time carried by a sweeping romantic melody. The palpable insincerity shows Robert's distant relation to the word's meaning. Suddenly, at the mention of his friends, the rhythm returns to the staccato, hurried style.

> From all those
> Good and crazy people, my friends,
> These good and crazy people, my
> Married friends! (p.13-14)

Accentuated textually and musically, the word “married” gives us a clearer picture of Robert’s social environment. Robert mocks his friend with the use of the superlative “Good, crazy, married”.

> And that’s what it’s all about, isn’t it?
> That’s what it’s really about,
> Really about! (p.14)

These lines are both question and statement. On the one hand, it shows Robert’s ambivalence about love, friends and marriage. The repetition of “really about” seems like a desperate cry for an answer. At the same time, he tells the audience that *that* is what the show is “really about”, literally.

The song reverts to the interwoven calls from Robert’s friends. However, this time, they are not inviting him to join in on any activities but instead call on him for favours, a desire to talk, advise or express an eagerness to coddle him. Rather than simply listening to these voices, Robert interacts with them, desperately trying to accommodate everyone:

> Angel, will you do me a favour?
> *Name it, Sarah.*
> Listen, pal, I’d like your opinion
> *Try me, Peter…*
> Bobby, there’s a problem, I need your
> advice.
> *Amy, can I call you tomorrow?* (p.16-18)

Eventually, Robert fights through the messages, but does not get a word in:

> Harry…. David…Kathy, I -
> April…Marta…Listen, People (p.18)

This culminates in yet another unified dinner invitation, followed by a reprise of how Robert experiences the world. This time his friends over-power him, stripping him of any real control, dominating his life. The song approaches the climax, as Robert and his friends start overlapping. While the husbands fervently repeat the question, “isn’t it”, the wives settle on the word “love” (p. 19). Robert desperately declares his love for each one of his mates, “You I love and you I love and you I love… (p.20). The climax is reached in the almost forceful repetition of the word “Company” in this musical triptych:

> Lots of Company!
> Years of Company!
> Love is Company! (p.20)

The meaning of the title “Company” has several layers, all of which are suggested in the opening number. On a physical level, it means the opposite of being alone, which is shown by the relentless calls and invitations, all the while being reinforced by the small, close-ensemble style of the show. Ironically, within all this commotion, nobody manages to make a single meaningful connection, leaving us with an uncanny sense of loneliness. This reflects the postmodern dilemma that, while being connected to the whole world, both loneliness and company seem to be a problem. Thus, the title song introduces the theme of the show and the situation without driving the narrative forward. Instead, the play expands the world of the busy signal from the microcosm of Robert’s life to the macrocosm of New York City, the metaphorical social Petri dish of the show. We focus on Robert’s perception of marriage, as we are introduced to Harry and Sarah.

“The Little Things You Do Together”

“The Little Things You do Together” is sung by Joanne and the group of friends. Joanne’s songs, “Little Things” and “Ladies who Lunch”, both articulate key ideas and emotions, setting the tone of the show (Wolf, 2014:368). Harry and Sarah battle for marital supremacy on the living room carpet, while Joanne, the dry cynic, appears behind them and sings her sarcastic commentary. Using the singer outside of the scene, observing and commenting on the action, is a technique quite different to the familiar presentational mode of the American musical theatre. Joanne acts as a bridge between the audience and the scene, making us part of the group and inviting us into the conversation. This forces the viewer to engage in other ways than simply empathising with the characters (McLaughlin, 2016:4). Gordon (192:50) quotes Sondheim in an interview with Paul Kresh:

> “In Company, the songs are really outside the scenes rather than part of them. You can’t guess so well in advance when the dialogue is building to the musical cue…Rodgers and Hammerstein took stories that appealed to them, generally sentimental stories, and the very sentimentality of the content dictated the form they chose. But Company… is not sentimental. It needed a form to suit its cooler, drier attitude. “

Most of the songs interrupt the action and intrude into the fourth-wall illusion of the vignettes, clarifying the focal issues and thus informing and defining Robert’s world (Gordon, 1992:50). Joanne takes on the role of Robert’s older sister, or perhaps a cynical version of Robert’s future self. It becomes clear early on that she has a special standing in the group, removed from the action, commenting on the folly of her friends - and eventually, her own. She is a pragmatist and realist with no pretensions or illusions and, despite being married herself, still supports commitment. Sondheim questions the quality of contemporary relationships in this list song and catalogues an array of trivial and not-so-trivial, joyful activities that shape marriage and keep it intact.

It's the little things you do together,
Do together,
Do together,
That make perfect relationships.
The hobbies you pursue together,
Savings you accrue together,
Looks you misconstrue together,
That make marriage a joy. (p.26)

Joanne's repetition of the word "little" highlights her mocking superiority, while rhyming the penultimate word. The ongoing use of the word "together" emphasises the bond or "inescapable claustrophobia" that comes with marriage (Gordon, 1992:51). The togetherness becomes more and more pervasive:

The concerts you enjoy together,
Neighbours you annoy together,
Children you destroy together, (p.28)

The last line starts an increasing trend of irony, as the "perfect relationships" are deconstructed in a series of satire. They are defined by the activities that husbands and wives perform together. Still, much of the humour of the activities comes from the fact that they suggest people in conflict rather than collaboration (McLaughlin, 2016:74).

It's things like using force together,
Shouting till you're hoarse together,
Getting a divorce together,
That make perfect relationships. (p.28)

Making the point repeatedly with the same irony renders the lyrics not only monotonous but also condescending, Sondheim (2010:175) explains. He points out that the incessant rhyming gives the song an irritating quality, which heightens the triviality and is accentuated by the group joining in:

It's not talk of God and the decade ahead that
Allows you to get through the worst.
It's "I do" and "you don't" and "nobody said that"
And "who brought the subject up first?"
It's the little things,
The little things, the little things, the little things. (p.29)

It is the insignificant things that make "marriage a joy" and not the things that "actually matter". Considering the notion that we are experiencing these characters through Robert's eyes, the friends and their issues are presented in a heightened, sarcastic way. The song humorously acknowledges the need for relationships, and while Robert's friends may not live happily-ever-

after-lives, there is affection and fun (Gordon, 1992:52). These representations shape his point of view on marriage and make his identity clearer, by telling us what he is against. Just like postmodernism is easier defined by what it is not, so Robert's identity is revealed by removing layer by layer.

"Sorry-Grateful"

Affection is also the central theme in the next song, "Sorry-Grateful", a gentle and romantic ballad, in which Harry tries to explain the contradictory qualities of marriage. It is probably the only truly romantic song in the show that is not sarcastic or cynical. Robert asks Harry if he ever regrets getting married, to which he replies:

> You're always sorry,
> You're always grateful,
> You're always wondering what might have been.
> Then she walks in.
>
> And still you're sorry,
> And still you're grateful,
> And still you wonder and still you doubt,
> And she goes out. (p.32)

This honest portrayal of ambivalence is reflected in all of aspects of Robert's relationships: his friendships, romances and New York City. This ambivalence is made clear in the imagery of Harry's wife walking in and out, popping in and out of his mind. His affection for her may grow and fade but will always remain. Harry's honesty shows a maturity that Robert lacks, acknowledging that marriage always comes with a dose of doubt. Enigmatic epigrams reveal the irreconcilable ambiguities of relationships (Gordon, 1992:53) :

> Everything's different,
> Nothing's changed,
> Only maybe slightly
> rearranged. (p.33)

Although he is still the same, his situation has changed, and so has the way he performs his identity. Harry struggles to convey the elusive, relative quality of matrimony and thus finds himself in a grey area with some shadow and some light. Robert, who relies on absolutes, cannot relate. He is stuck with the unrealistic expectation of an ideal mate. The other husbands join in, reiterating the question of identity:

> You always are what you always were,
> Which has nothing to do with,
> All to do with her. (p.34)

This very reflective moment makes clear the contradiction of dependence and independence: one remains who one has always been- despite the different context of a relationship. The use of the words “always” and “still” suggests both perpetuity and existence in the present. The impersonal pronoun “you” suggests universality and thus aims at truths affecting all personal relationships that encompass an emotional involvement (Adams, 1980:140)

> Good things get better,
> Bad get worse.
> Wait, I think I meant that in reverse. (p.34)

This paradox implies that the moment one feels love for someone, the emotional reactions are heightened in both ways and simultaneously demand compromise. The husbands try to convince Robert that there are no absolutes and that marriage is an acceptance of uncertainty and instability, while being the only way to penetrate the isolation of the ego. This is a very specifically postmodern take on marriage as it accepts the notions of individualism and fluidity as important pillars in human relationships.

“Another Hundred People”

After joining Robert on his inconclusive investigation of the marital relationships of his friends, the composer throws us back into the hustle and bustle of the anonymous world outside. Sung by Marta, “Another Hundred People” is a poignant song about the people who come to New York looking for something, getting swept up in several activities, all the while facing the difficulty of connecting with others (McLaughlin, 2016:70). Wolf (2014:372) argues that “Another Hundred People” describes what it is like to be alone in New York City, both stimulating and exciting, as well as alienating and lonely. It is one of the only two songs in the show that do not deal directly with marital relationships; however, it shows the parallels between Robert’s dogged isolation and the loneliness of the city (Gordon, 1992:58).

The “Bobby Baby” theme is embedded in the accompaniment throughout the song, linking it to Robert’s situation. Similarly to the “Bobby Baby” theme, “Another Hundred People” is cyclical. It is sung through two and a half times, complementing the cyclical life of the city (McLaughlin, 2016:70) against an agitated rhythmic accompaniment painting the teeming, bustling crowds of New York (Gordon, 1992:58). This onomatopoeic accompaniment evokes a sense of arrival with no destination. “Another Hundred People” opens the scene and intersperses spoken dialogue with all three of Robert’s girlfriends. Marta sings:

> Another hundred people just got off
> of the train,
> And came up through the ground,
> While another hundred people just
> got off of the bus,
> And are looking around

At another hundred people who got
off of the plane,
And are looking at us,
Who got off of the train,
And the plane, and the bus,
Maybe yesterday. (p.50)

The lyrics describe what one sees when coming up Manhattan's subway. A strong sense of movement gives the perception that it is not so much about *coming and going* but rather a constant *arriving*. The increase of people arriving creates the confusing imaginary blur of anonymity (Wolf, 2014:372). Although the song is not intertextual, Sondheim provides a subject familiar to his audience: the world outside the theatre.

It's a city of strangers
Some come to work, some to play
A City of strangers
Some come to stare, some to stay
And every day
The ones who stay (p.50)

There is a tonal shift from the energetic driving power of the first part to a minor tonality and feeling of despair, insecurity and "forbidding insularity" (Gordon, 1992:52). It then shifts back to a more optimistic sound. The seemingly endless activities available are also impersonal (McLaughlin, 2016:71).

Can find each other in the crowded
streets
and the guarded parks
By the rusty fountains and the dusty
trees with the battered barks
And they walk together past the
postered walls
with the crude remarks. (p.51)

Sondheim reveals a wasteland of urban decay in a series of images, describing the rotting metropolitan's ugly decrepitude and incipient violence (Gordon, 1992:59): the streets are "crowded", the parks "guarded", the fountains "rusty", and the trees are "dusty with battered barks". Lovers stroll down a shady lane, past the graffiti, as strangers utter "crude remarks". Robert's thoughts become clearer: just as marriage reveals itself as the only way to survive despite all its inadequacies, so Manhattan displays itself, despite its harsh ugliness and impersonality, as the "place to be". The disdain that the inhabitants of Manhattan feel for anywhere other than New York is constantly reiterated in the show:

"He was born in New York- so nothing really interested him." (p.52)

In Manhattan, “marriage” is the only way to survive.

The song is interrupted, introducing April, a flight attendant. April explains to Robert why she moved to New York. Every line she utters is ditzier than the next, reinforcing the cliché of the simple-minded stewardess. She describes herself as “dumb” and “boring” (p.51), reflecting Robert’s honest opinion of her. However, things turn when he asks her what were to happen if she or her roommate got married. Without missing a beat, she answers, “Get a bigger place, I guess.” (p.52). Perhaps she is a little more forward-thinking than she seems at first glance and, unlike Robert, not bound to convention when anticipating future family models (Wolf, 2014:373). Marta continues to describe the experience of someone living in Manhattan:

> And they meet at parties through the
> friends-of-friends,
> Who they never know.
> "Will you pick me up, or do I meet
> you there,
> Or shall we let it go?
> Did you get my message? 'Cause I
> looked in vain
> Can we see each other Tuesday if it
> Doesn't rain?
> Look, I'll call you in the morning,
> or my service'll explain… (p.52)

While “Company” demonstrates the lack of connection in a world that seems hyper-connected, here, too, despite the countless party invitations, anonymity, indecisiveness and unreliability dominate the lives of Robert and his friends. Sondheim personifies the mailbox as an intermediary, relaying messages to make communication more manageable and less personal. Still, in the crowded city, communication fails, revealing that anonymity and self-alienation has become part of the postmodern identity.

The next intermittent scene introduces Kathy, who is probably the most mature of Robert’s friends. Her acceptance of reality and decision to leave New York to get married create a direct contrast to Robert’s romantic yearnings:

> Kathy
> *… I’m getting married*
>
> Robert
> *What?*
>
> Kathy
> *Some people still get married; you know.*

Robert
Do you love him?

Kathy
I'll be a good wife. I want real things: a husband, a family. I think there's a time to come to New York and a time to leave. (p.54)

Kathy's reply to Robert's question, "Do you love him?" shows that she has accepted not only her reality but also a role in society, giving herself a reason to live beyond the confines of Manhattan- something that Robert seems to be yearning for increasingly.

Robert's question seems insincere. Kathy admits that she wants to construct a new life and reality for herself, in which she has a purpose. Her statement is cut-throat, suggesting that nobody should want to spend their entire life in New York. For Robert, this means that there is a time to be single, experimental and frivolous- and a time to settle down. Kathy implies that, had Robert proposed, she would have said yes- making her "the one that got away".

After the final repetition of the cycle, we meet Marta, the singer of "Another Hundred People" and the ultimate single girl, who has come to New York to live out her *Sex and the City* fantasy.[12] She proclaims New York City as "the place to be" and calls herself "the beat of the city" (p.55). Marta ultimately buys into the hype around Manhattan and expresses enthusiasm and naiveté, which she attempts to disguise beneath a veneer of shiny sophistication (Gordon, 1992:60). As she lays out her position, we learn that Marta "the singer" reveals more ambivalence about New York than Marta "the speaker". On the one hand, the song toggles between effervescence and despair- a general commentary on a single girl's life in the city, summarising the experiences of Robert's girlfriends. On the other hand, the music may have allowed Marta to access deeper, mixed feelings about the city that she won't share in speech- after all, in self-conscious performance, the performer takes the unconscious and invisible aspect of identity construction to the foreground for examination (McLaughlin, 2016:6). This adds a layer to her that neither Robert nor the audience can truly access or explain (Wolf, 2014:373); and identifies the postmodern struggle of ambivalence, while simultaneously questioning the importance of its transparency. Transparency implies acceptance and while Marta is honest about her ambiguities, she is not aware of their ramifications in her future.

---

[12] The American television series "Sex and the City" by Darren Star aired from 1998- 2004 and is set in New York City. Doudaki (2012:5) explains that the show results from the postmodern era's pledge of unlimited freedom for identity reconstruction. One particular theme of the television show's storyline is the idea of coming to New York to "find oneself". It thus mirrors *Company*'s theme of identity performance and creation within the chaotic contradictions of a big city.

[Figure 4. This image shows Elaine Stritch singing "The Ladies Who Lunch" in the orignal Broadway production of Company. Image downloaded from: https://www.broadwaybox.com/daily-scoop/hot-clip-of-the-day-heres-to-stritch-in-the-company-documentary/ in July 2021.]

"The Ladies Who Lunch"

Now that we have experienced Robert in the context of his social circle and learned about living within the mechanism of Manhattan in "Another Hundred People", Joanne reappears. Seemingly the only character in the show with a distinct sense of awareness, in "The Ladies Who Lunch", she pins a critique against society, without being able (or willing) to escape it herself. In a "brutal half sung, half-spoken Bossa Nova [Joanne] enunciates the fury of a rich impotent woman" (Wolf, 2014:377). The character of Joanne was based on and created by Broadway veteran Elaine Stritch (Fig. 4).

Joanne exudes the typical mean-girl sophisticate. She poses a bit of a conundrum, as she and Robert are an improbable mix. It is difficult to come up with a real reason why Robert should be friends with a much older couple, let alone *this* couple in particular. Furthermore, Robert, who does not care very much for being analysed, would have probably been put off very early on by Joanne, who is "as invasive as a colonoscopy" (Mordden, 2016:73). Her show-stopping solo "The Ladies Who Lunch" almost lives outside the show, as it neither directly relates to Robert nor his friends in any way. Gordon (1992:68) argues that it may not reveal much about Robert, but that it "does lay bare the wasted lives of married middle-class matrons and serves to shatter any illusions Robert may still cling to". Joanne sees a lot of herself in him, and the fact that she is much older than him and of the opposite sex, forces him to meet her at eye level without patronising her. After a boozy conversation with Robert, Joanne "proposes a toast" (p.106).

> Here's to the ladies who lunch…
> Everybody laugh.
> Lounging in their caftans and planning a brunch
> On their own behalf.
> Off to the gym,

then to a fitting,
Claiming they're fat.
And looking grim
'cause they've been sitting
Choosing a hat-
Does anyone still wear a hat?
I'll drink to that. (p.106)

Gordon (1992:68) explains that aggressive, loud and irresistible Joanne smokes and drinks too much and, in a devastating attack, assaults the stereotype she has become. She adds that the rigidly tight structure of the song controls and heightens the fury of Joanne's character, as she spits out contempt for herself and her class. The first few lines are saturated with soft "L" sounds, suggesting the loose-tongued effects of Joanne's "liquid diet". Inner rhymes, such as "laugh/ caftans/behalf", intensify the sense of (self-) loathing, and with each sarcastic description of her friends, Joanne reveals another facet of her own echoing emptiness. Wolf (2014:376) analyses:

> "Joanne sees that men, even lazy, mediocre, and not very smart men, have access to power and influence, yet this song is not specifically about men or about marriage, but enacts the toll a wealthy passivity and small variety of few choices takes on women's psyches, leading them to trivial event planning and obsessing about their bodies."

Joanne continues:

Here's to the girls who stay smart-
Aren't they a gas?
Rushing to their classes in optical art
Wishing it would pass
Another long exhausting day
Another thousand dollars
A matinee, a Pinter play
Perhaps a piece of Mahler's-
I'll drink to that. (p.106)

"The girls who stay smart" exposes Joanne's contempt by denying these "girls" adult status; girls, fashionable but bored by the complexity of modern art, pursuing art appreciation only to avoid the emptiness of their existence. Joanne ruthlessly catalogues pretentious dilettantes and lonely housewives, who find their meaning in the decadence of a life filled with indulgence (Gordon, 1992:68).

Here's to the girls who play wife-
Aren't they too much?
Keeping house but clutching a copy of *Life*
Just to keep in touch. (p.107)

Once again, Joanne viciously dismisses the *act* of housewifery in “the girls who play wife”. She makes it clear that it is a mere role, which stands in direct contrast to the character of Kathy, who has accepted to play precisely that role. “Clutching a copy of Life” sounds like “Clinging to Life”, which emphasises the sense of survival. Joanne then focuses on herself:

> And here's to the girls who just watch-
> Aren't they the best?
> When they get depressed, it's a bottle of Scotch
> Plus a little jest. (p.107)

Tired from having pursued this lifestyle, Joanne opts to “just watch”. The description becomes a self-revelation, while her growing bitterness intensifies her harsh feelings about herself. She compares herself to the living dead, anaesthetised by all the effects of alcohol. The optimism of “Another Hundred People” becomes a numbing excess as the same word “another” is repeated in this song (Gordon, 1002:69):

> Another chance to disapprove
> Another brilliant zinger
> Another reason not to move
> Another vodka stinger-
> Aaaahh! - I’ll drink to that. (p.107)

Joanne concludes:

> A toast to that invincible bunch,
> The dinosaurs surviving the crunch-
> Let's hear it for the ladies who lunch!
> Everybody rise! Rise!
> Rise! Rise! Rise! Rise! Rise! Rise!
> Rise! (p.108)

Usually shouted at the end, the crassly repeated command “Rise” celebrates the toast that Joanne is making and suggests a society of nameless, faceless zombies rising from the ground.

Modern musicals frequently make use of a narrative device towards the end, known (amongst other terms) as the “wise old man song” (e.g., The Wizard in *Wicked* (2003) and Joe in *Waitress* (2015)). The song gives a supporting role (usually a wise older man) a chance to pass his sage advice to the protagonist, pushing the hero towards a choice that will determine their outcome. In a way, “The Ladies Who Lunch” fits this template in a dark and cynical way. Joanne propositions Robert to have an affair with her.

> Joanne
> *I’ll take care of you. (p.110)*

Robert
But who will I take care of? (p.111)

This realisation propels Robert into the completely new mindset he had been approaching slowly all along. Joanne compels Robert's self-realisation at the cost of his unhesitating, unthinking rejection of her but inspires change at the same time: "I just heard a door open that's been shut for a very long time." (p.111). Wolf (2014:377) identifies this as a plot device, where the older, desexualised woman becomes the necessary pawn to enable (fuel) a man's emotional growth. While this moment is highly sexualised, it also pushes Robert away from his patterns. This development is sudden, unpredictable and necessary. "The Ladies Who Lunch" summarises the postmodern struggle of constructing and performing identity in society, mirroring Robert's (failed) attempts at understanding himself truly.

"Being Alive"

In a postmodern context, narrative is seen as imprisoning, as it constructs limits and boundaries (McLaughlin, 2016:66). Thus, Robert's thoughts culminate in the final song, bringing the development of his identity to what can only be described as a temporary conclusion. Compelled by Joanne into finding his truth, Robert reaches the sincerest statement of his goal- the endpoint that will provide structure and meaning for his life story (McLaughlin, 2016:78). This results in a rather monotonous song with the sole message that "marriage is wonderful" (Sondheim 2010:196).[13] In his opinion, the entire show can be summed up in this quote by Chekhov: "If you're afraid of loneliness, don't marry". "Being Alive" attests to Sondheim's notion that *Company* shows that to be emotionally committed to somebody is very difficult, but to be alone is impossible. To commit is to live; to not commit is to be dead (Secrest, 1998:189). Thus, Robert arrives at a more mature conclusion about relationships, allowing himself a forward-moving narrative that, up until now, he has resisted. Once again, the interlaced spoken voices of his friends appeal to him, helping him break through this moment of crisis, enabling the song to move from complaint to prayer.

Robert's reply to Joanne "But who will I take care of" (p.111) shows his desire for a life story that contains another's story (McLaughlin, 2016:78). Robert begins by listing his criticisms of marriage, giving us a summary of his observations so far:

Someone to hold you too close
Someone to hurt you too deep
Someone to sit in your chair
And ruin your sleep (p.114)

---

[13] The final number presented a problem for Sondheim, because originally, the show was to end unresolved with a more cynical song. However, after several re-writes, director Hal Prince still thought the ending too much of a "downer", and thus, Sondheim wrote a number that expressed more optimism. In his notes, Sondheim (2010:196) argues that Robert had not properly earned a positive song stripped of irony.

With the encouragement of his friends, he gradually moves closer to acknowledging his need. Prose interruptions reveal his friends' insights into the compromise of marriage, encouraging Robert to abandon his unrealistic ideals and embrace imperfect reality (Gordon, 1992:73).

> …Someone to know you too well…
> …Someone you have to let in…
> …Someone who, like it or not
> Will want you to share…
> …Someone to force you to care…
> …Someone to make you come through…(p115)

These lines show a struggle to accept vulnerability - a fear of "being" without ever arriving at one's own identity. The recurring request of Robert's birthday party guests, that he accept dependence and grow up, encourages him to "make a wish and *want* something" (p.116) and let Robert break free of his inhibitions and over-protective mates (Gordon, 1992:73).

> Somebody hold me too close
> Somebody hurt me too deep
> Somebody sit in my chair
> And ruin my sleep
> And make me aware
> Of being alive
> Being alive (p.116)

In John Doyle's 2006 revival, this is the first time that Robert accompanies himself on the piano. It seems as though he has finally learned to accompany himself, no longer depending on his friends accompanying him. The impersonal "someone" and "you" turn into "somebody" and "me", respectively, becoming more specific and affirmative. This also indicates a change of heart, as the negative fear of compromise becomes a positive desire for redemption in self-loss (Banfield, 1993:172). "Somebody" is not just a vague and unrealistic person that supports his indecision and avoidance - "somebody" is a necessary element for his ability to live. And so, Robert's complaints about marriage become virtues, leading to his final realisation that the meaning of life comes not from the endpoint or a completed narrative structure but from being immersed in the process of living (McLaughlin, 2016:76). Hence the importance of the verb "being" as a continuous action. It is not about completing a structure, but about Robert's ability to have a relationship with another person, to be forced beyond skimming life's surface and making him experience life's richness (McLaughlin, 2016:77).

> Somebody crowd me with love
> Somebody force me to care
> Somebody let come through
> I'll always be there
> As frightened as you

To help us survive
Being alive
Being alive
Being alive (p.116)

Gordon (1992:73) argues that the use of words such as “crowd” and “force” highlights that this change will never come easily to Robert and that some coercion will be necessary. He demonstrates his commitment to being involved by changing “who’ll always be there” to “*I’ll* always be there”, and, for the first time in the show, he uses the word “love” sincerely, without any ironic undertone. Robert understands that life is frightening, because it is an unfinished process. Its meaning is unclear to us, because it is incomplete. He can now acknowledge the fear and still move on. This realisation embodies the postmodern concept of narrative: it does not need to be a finished story, as a plot need not have an endpoint. McLaughlin (2016:78) explains that its meaning must lie in the depth and the indeterminacy of the now. He writes that Robert knows an intimate relationship with another person can help him discover this kind of meaning. Immersed in time, Robert understands marriage (or at least companionship) as the enfolding of another’s in-process narrative into his own, without knowing where it may lead.

Sondheim wrote *Company* in 1969, a time that saw the idea of traditional marriage breaking down, a time driven by the sexual freedom of the 1960s. A text that originally deals with relationships seen through the eyes of an outsider, becomes a story about Robert *seeing* these less-than-ideal relationships and weighing them up against his own life. Sondheim infuses the notion of personal commitment with a strong sense of threatening ambivalence. Throughout the piece we experience the glorification of relationships between people (and their environment) with a continuous undercurrent of its faults and imperfections. Sondheim does not reveal one side of the coin without showing us the other.

Sondheim manages to show us who Robert really is, by making the musical about him, rather than about the relationships. Stuck between two worlds, Robert senses that something is missing in his life. Any attempts to change this and connect with others fail, because he is unwilling to leave the world of the busy signal behind him. Sondheim constructs the other characters through Robert’s eyes, revealing that they, too, suffer from an ambivalence they have come to accept. Robert questions whether marriage is the answer to the problem of how to function in society, for marriage provides a human connection, denied by the world of the busy signal. However, this connection comes with a different kind of self-identity problem. In the song “Not Getting Married Today”, Amy sings “We’ll both be losing our identities” (p.60). McLaughlin (1991:31) argues that while marriage comes with the benefit of human contact, it also means the end of one’s identity as an individual. Thus, to escape the confines of marriage, Robert’s friends try to engage in his world vicariously.

Sondheim evokes the constant presence of society's ambivalence and search for identity in the layering of thoughts and cyclical structures. This becomes especially clear in the aggressive overlapping of voices and cyclical compositions of the songs. Furthermore, romantic melodies are used ironically more than sincerely and musical imagery creates points of association for Robert. The score, which seems somewhat rigid and aloof at times, breathes angst, nervousness, aggressiveness and longing. Each layer of this *Gesamtkunstwerk* reveals a new construct of honest questions and statements. This reflects Sondheim's process of constructing Robert almost entirely from the external impressions of his friends and New York City. The same inward movement is apparent in the "plot's" development, as Robert is left onstage alone, ignored by the surrounding party guests. They seem to have lost their vicarious connection to the life of society. While Robert's situation seems unchanged, he may find his answers in the quiet solitude of his revelations.

I challenge the critique about Robert's pale character. Sondheim uses the instrument of removed commentary to connect the audience to his character. Throughout the show, in all songs previously discussed, we have been privy to Robert's perception of his social environment. And just as we learn who Robert is by watching him observe his friends, Sondheim invites us to reflect onto Robert, making us part of the identification process. Robert is what the viewer makes of him and hence, he becomes an identity construct of the audience.

Robert embodies the angst of a society too afraid of concentrating on one particular individual, a society seduced by superficiality and empty activities. It comes as no surprise to me that the musical has changed several times since its conception to adapt to current audiences. The latest gender-switching revival shows that the themes are bound to neither gender nor time and that to many of us, Robert's identity is universal.[14] He represents a "keep in touch" society attempting to construct an identity in a world of "another hundred people and another hundred people and another hundred people". While *Company* deals with someone trying to bring order into chaos, *A Little Night Music* involves a group of people trying to break free from the structures into which they are tied.

[14] Marianne Elliot directed the original West End gender-swapped production of *Company* in 2018, which transferred to Broadway in 2022.

Chapter 2: “A Little Night Music”

In the previous chapter, I explored how Sondheim constructed Robert’s identity in the busy, anonymous city. By observing his friends and their relationships, Robert reveals fragments that culminate in his ultimate expression of desire. *A Little Night Music* (1973) provides several contrasting elements to *Company*: Plotless *Company* presented a world of freedom, while simultaneously questioning the autonomous individual. *A Little Night Music* displays a restricted, tightly structured hierarchic society, in which identities are pre-defined in a world of rules, regulations and expectations. However, in this complex narrative, the autonomous individual is celebrated. In this discussion I will investigate how Sondheim constructs the identities of characters unable to break out and express themselves. This forces them to perform their identities based on their expectations of one another (performative identity). It is in moments of self-revelatory expression of desire and reflection that their true identities are formed (constructed identity). But first I will provide an overview of the musical’s conception and operetta style, putting the following analysis into a focused context.

When considering the title of Sondheim and Prince’s third collaboration, *A Little Night Music,* one cannot ignore an allusion to *W.A. Mozart K. 525* (1787).[15] The Mozartean sex-comedy is pastiched - in postmodern terms, being paid homage to - beginning with the dramatis personae: the lovers, a count and a mischievous maid - all engaging in a mix and match game of sexual chess; “waltzing” through their lives, contained within their strict hierarchical boundaries.[16] All the characters in *A Little Night Music* seem very much aware of their function in society but have no real grasp of their true desires. “Subjects are less able to locate their identities in pre-given categories and ascribed roles” (Ott, 2003:57), and thus, performative identity stands in their way of fulfilment. While, at first glance, the narrative appears traditional, it lends itself to be examined as a postmodern shift from conventions. As the characters strive to move towards stability and the layers are peeled off, the subjects are turned inside out (McLaughlin, 2016:4).

The musical *A Little Night Music* opened at the Schubert Theatre on Broadway on the 25th of February, 1973. Stephen Sondheim composed music and lyrics to a book by Hugh Wheeler. Harold Prince directed the show based on Ingmar Bergman’s 1955 film *Smiles of a Summer Night*. Sondheim, once again, describes the notion best:

> “The Place and time: a town in Sweden at the turn of the twentieth century. Fredrik Egerman, a prosperous, widowed lawyer in his early forties with a twenty-year old son, Henrik, has been married for almost a year to an eighteen-year old girl, Anne, whom he has known since she

---

[15] W.A. Mozart’s “Eine Kleine Nachtmusik” was composed in 1787 and is one of his better-known works. While the title’s meaning translates to “A little Serenade”, it directly translates to “ A little night music”.

[16] The Mozartean sex-comedy is a genre in which comedy is motivated by love affairs, sexual intention and erotica manipulation.

> was a child. Due to her shyness, he has not been able to consummate the marriage. Desiree Armfeldt, an actress and his ex-lover, arrives in town to appear in a play. When she and Fredrik meet again, the old flame is rekindled, but she has a married lover, Count Carl-Magnus Malcolm, whose wife Charlotte's sister once went to school with Anne. Romantic complications ensue during a weekend party at the country estate of Madame Armfeldt, Desiree's imperious, wealthy ex-courtesan of a mother, involving also Desiree's teenage daughter, Fredrika, and Petra, the Egerman's flirtatious maid, to whom Henrik and Frid, Madame Armfeldt's butler, are both attracted." (Sondheim 2010: 251)

Following their decision to bring a romantic musical to stage- something "flowing and operetta-like", Sondheim and Prince acquired the rights to Ingmar Bergman's film *Smiles of a Summer Night.* Sondheim describes it as a "subtle story, one in which the apparent tragedy is comically averted but the submerged one not" (Sondheim, 2010:251). Wheeler's simple, linear book adaptation gave Sondheim the chance to show off musically, contrasting the "light fluffy" comedy style with mystery and darkness. Hal Prince described it as "whipped cream with knives", wherein Sondheim was more interested in the knives than the whipped cream (Sondheim, 2010:252).

Sondheim created the notion of a score of waltz variations that would supply a structural thread "to help cohere a disparate group of songs" and characters. Thus, the meter became part of the show's theme. Since waltzes alone would be too monotonous, Sondheim employed variations on the basic three-beat meter (polonaises, mazurkas, sarabands and gigues) and of double meters subdivided into six or twelve beats, which could supply plenty of variety- enough, to avoid repetitiousness (Sondheim, 2010:253). This gives the score a sense of unity and saturates the entire musical play with a specific stylistic identity. Sondheim sets for himself a goal of restriction, thus quite literally underscoring the plight of his characters.

In many ways, *A Little Night Music* seems designed to be the "end piece" of the Viennese operetta tradition in America.[17] Knapp (2006:50) explains that the musical serves "the pinnacle of the European tradition, while ignoring the American tradition in between". He adds that Mozart's sex comedies very much inspired the Viennese operetta.[18] Here, a configuration of mismatched couples makes the audience anticipate an inevitably natural alignment, which they are oblivious to

---

[17] Gordon (1992:125) describes the traditional world of romantic operetta as a wonderland of sentimental escapism, in which overly elegant and stilted characters communicate in a stylised speech unique to their make-believe milieu. She adds to the list "gorgeous costumes, handsome decor, beautiful people secluded in a realm far removed from the humdrum nasality of the daily grind, lovers' misunderstandings, jealousies, duels, disguises and the obligatory happy ending- which are all blended together into one romantic entity by a richly melodic score".

[18] In his comic opera, *Cosi Fan Tutte* (1790), Mozart showed just how human the pieces in a sexual game of chess could be made to seem through their music and proved how disturbing the result could be for an audience to watch. (Knapp, 2006:50)

and against which they sometimes even fight. Although the audience is made intensely aware of the neat inevitable outcome, the postmodern notion of uncertainty allows for any possible ending. The human need to protest against it results in a sudden change in mindset, similarly to *Company*. Operettas emphasise less the resistance and pain but more so the human nature to behave like pawns in a sexual game of chess. The music is used as a vehicle to argue that there is no alternative and that one ought to be satisfied, whatever the resulting pain.

A Little Night Music amalgamates a modernist musical temperament with operetta from the perspective of the American musical tradition, while grounding the piece in the conventions of the musical comedy of Broadway (Knapp, 2006:56). One could thus argue that *A Little Night Music* is a form of postmodern pastiche, which usually comes alive through the juxtaposition of opposing styles (Banfield, 1993:214).[19] The juxtaposition of styles (which is the main feature of the second act of both *Follies* (1971) and *Pacific Overtures* (1976)) is self-referential, as art points at itself directly. Sondheim elevates this typical postmodern trope by replacing juxtaposition with integration. Furthermore, instead of imitating, he sustains the waltz style from beginning to end, steeping the entire show in the musical tradition of Viennese operetta and heightening it. By working securely within the generic Broadway conventions, "Sondheim puts the audience in the presence of an operetta sensibility that has somehow survived the evolution into modernism and is now reaching back for that lost world through the dissonant haze that has evolved around it" (Knapp, 2005:56). Sondheim explores the theatrical implications of this chosen form, enhancing the "sense of fin-de-siècle unease in the score through sudden key shifts and expressive dissonances, reminiscent of the emotional tensions heard in the music of Ravel and Richard Strauss, while evoking a strong sense of flirtatious, mysterious, comical and sexual dances" (Gordon, 1992:125).

The importance of the discussion on the operatic tendencies of *A Little Night Music* lies in the identity crises that the main characters are facing. In *this* world, there is a self-conscious awareness of the myths of romance, which distinguishes it from traditional operetta, Gordon (1992:126) argues. Just like in Company the characters' ambivalence about themselves and their objectives is laid bare. They are performing their parts and intermittently made aware of their performances, slowly becoming aware of the fact that this stands in the way of their development and fulfilment of their true desires. While focusing on the social masks and theatrical disguises in

[19] The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines the term *pastiche* as a literary, artistic, musical, or architectural work that *imitates* the style of previous work.

the twilit world of late-nineteenth-century Sweden, Sondheim lets his characters skate on the surface of emotion (Gordon, 1992:124) before breaking through bit by bit. [20]

[Figure 5. This image shows the original Broadway company of A Little Night Music in Boris Aronson's set. Image downloaded from: https://lecinemadreams.blogspot.com/2012/12/a-little-night-music-1977.html in October 2021.]

McLaughlin (2016:19) writes that the characters live in a world of expectations that they are trying to escape- a world in which their identities are governed by compelling mini-narratives and fantasies, encapsulating a desire or wish. These existential troubles and conflicts with others arise from each of them balancing two contradictory fantasies, while trying to convince themselves of the different things they express *about* their identities. The irreconcilability of these fantasies motivates the characters' troubles and brings about the actions of the show.

Bearing this in mind, I will focus on three musicalised situations, where the tension between performative and constructed identity is made clear through the expression of desire and reflection.

1. Identity in the expression of desire ("Now-Later -Soon")
2. Identity in reflecting on the choices one has made ("Send in the Clowns")
3. Identity in the expression of desire and the reflection thereof ("The Miller's Son")

---

[20] Sondheim explores the notions of illusion and disguise both in musical and lyrical suggestion and creates a fantasy world through which he emphasises its unreality. McLaughlin (2016:101) explains that since the show is set in a milieu familiar and accessible to neither the writers nor directors, it had to be approached in a strictly craftsmanlike way. He writes that Boris Aronson's scenic design (Fig. 5) suggested that all the action takes place in a magical forest, reminiscent of "A Midsummer Night's Dream", where the rules by which reality functions in the city break down and other realities become possible.

"Now-Later-Soon"

The first song performed by any of the principal characters is "Now-Later-Soon". Sexual tensions in the dialogue catapult the Egermans into a trio of separate soliloquies, sung by Fredrik, Henrik and Anne, respectively. Unaware of each other's desires, they lay bare their conflicting urges, never coming close to solving any of their problems. Gordon (1992:129) explains that essentially, they all desire a release of sexual tension, but their timetables are radically different: *now*, *later* and *soon*. As the characters explore their confused longings, it becomes clear that they do not understand these longings themselves. The audience immediately become part of the conversation and, in postmodern fashion, are encouraged to develop their own unique relationship with the characters.

Gordon adds that Sondheim illustrates all his character's conflicts through musical implication, connotative resonance and well-placed silence. At the same time, he presents three different (musical) temperaments: Fredrik - intellectual, logical and ruminative; Henrik- melancholic, woeful and dramatic; and Anne: sanguine, sweet, and sensual.[21] All three characters are forced into perpetual anticipation by themselves and by their circumstances.

Middle-aged Fredrik, whose continual sexual advances are declined by his significantly younger virginal wife Anne, is the first to contemplate his situation. The lawyer's sexual longings are expressed with his logical legal mind and a perturbing awareness of the remarkable age gap between him and his wife. Sondheim employs an intricate interplay of form, content, style and character, as he judiciously develops this monologue to the point of absurdity. Scholarly vocabulary, sprinkled with ponderous legal wording, puns, rhymes and verbal virtuosity, reveal both Fredrik's education and his lack of insight (Gordon, 1992:130). As Anne babbles incessantly in the background, he contemplates his seduction strategy:

> Now, as the sweet imbecilities
> Tumble so lavishly
> Onto her lap…
>
> Now, there are two possibilities:
> A, I could ravish her,
> B, I could nap. (p.11)

Fredrik feels his age and having awaited consummation for so long, he wants fulfilment "now". Repeated throughout the song, this word, with all its urgency, launches his meandering thoughts into a frenzy (Gordon, 1992:130). As his flirtatious "sweet imbecilities" are left unnoticed, he invites two alternatives, which require his further analytical attention:

---

[21] The number *three* is ubiquitous in this show: the story centres around the *three* smiles, as well as *three* generations of a family; the musical metre is in *3/4* or a derivative thereof; even when duets are sung, they usually revolve around a *third* person.

Say it's the ravishment, then we see
The option
That follows, of course:

A, the deployment of charm, or B,
The adoption
Of physical force… (p.11)

Since "good old-fashioned" charm has not inspired Anne to sleep with him, Fredrik dissects option B, which would involve the use of physical force. Knowing that he would never resort to it, his calculations confirm that it would end in disaster anyway.

I trip on my trouser
Leg crossing the room...
Her hair getting tangled,
Her stays getting snapped,
My nerves would be jangled,
My energy sapped… (p.12)

Supplementing this witty structure is the character's own vanity and uncomfortable awareness of his age. Fredrik's brainstorming of worst-case scenarios shows us his low self-confidence and the ultimate fear of sexual rejection. Arguably, this obsessive over-analysing could derive from a desire to distract himself while playing up the absurdity of the situation in his mind. Tip-toeing around the issue prolongs its inevitable outcome. He continues and concludes:

Removing her clothing
Would take me all day,
And her subsequent loathing
Would turn me away,
Which eliminates B
And which leaves us with A. (p.12)

Circulating, Fredrik seeks out further possibilities. Insecurities about his physical appearance creep in as he yet again reminds himself of his age. He has learned to perform the part of the "pragmatic lawyer" and that of the "old man". Thus his identity seems to be comprised only of his profession and his age. The character of Kathy in *Company* finds herself in a similar dilemma. She identifies herself completely with the expectation of being a "good wife", feeling the pressure to fulfil the norms of the society and its ideals, to which she has subscribed. The difference here is that Kathy arrives at this point after actively exhausting all possibilities known to her in search of an independent narrative. Fredrik knows nothing else and relies on the passing of time to provide him with solutions.

A, I could put on my nightshirt or sit
Disarmingly,
B, in the nude.

That might be effective;
My body's all right--
But not in perspective
And not in the light. (p12-13)

Fredrik becomes aware not only of Anne's vulnerability but of his own as well. Words and intellectuality are the only weapons at his disposal, but he is well aware that he cannot reach Anne with either. He thus resorts to an absurd plan sure to fail:

Perhaps I could read.
In view of her penchant
For something romantic,
De Sade is to trenchant
And Dickens too frantic,
And Stendhal would ruin
The plan of attack,
As there isn't much blue in
"The Red and the Black." (p.13)

Fredrik, the intellectual, escapes into a world that he knowingly cannot ever share with Anne- in which reading fiction to her could lead her into a frenzy. So he removes himself further from a solution. He is neither an empathic nor a compassionate person and performs his identity not only to the audience (although it would be the first to see through the facade) but also to himself. He leaves his most genuine desire unspoken and dances around the issue with great ease.

Bow
Though I must
To adjust
My original plan,
How
Shall I sleep
Half as deep
As I usually can,
When now I still want and/or love you,
Now as always,
Now,
Anne? (p.14)

Fredrik eventually accepts a further delay in his sexual endeavours and happily settles for a nap, demonstrating his middle-aged lack of youthful passion. "As his thoughts draw to a relaxed conclusion, the rhyme scheme builds to an anticipation of his wife's name, but the final declaration is affectionate rather than fervent" (Gordon, 1992: 131). The accompaniment moves from a driving ostinato to a romantic legato, carrying elongated notes in the melody, as he falls asleep.

After a brief exchange between Henrik and the lusty maid Petra, who laughingly dismisses his clumsy advances with the tantalising promise of “later”, Henrik is provoked into an anguished, frustrated plea for attention and release. Henrik is a theology student in hopes of becoming a priest, but his sexual frustrations keep him on edge. Accompanying himself on the cello, he dejectedly contemplates his life to the melancholy sounds of his instrument. The cello is not merely an accompaniment but turns this soliloquy into a chamber duet, highlighting his solitude. By painting a character who sees himself almost exclusively in terms of other people’s cavalier dismissals, Sondheim conveys Henrik’s incapacitating insecurity (Gordon, 1992:131).

> Later...
> When is later?
> All you ever hear is "Later, Henrik, Henrik, later.”
> "Yes, we know, Henrik,
> Oh, Henrik, Everyone agrees, Henrik, Please, Henrik!” (p.15)

Once again, the preoccupation with time is stated right at the onset. The word “later” appears four times in the first three lines of the song, while the name “Henrik” appears six times in the first four lines. Performing the part of a scolded child, he cannot break out or develop into adulthood and voice his ambition due to his petrifying inhibitions:

> You have a thought you're fairly bursting with,
> A personal discovery or problem, and it's
> "What's your rush, Henrik?
> Shush, Henrik!
> Goodness, how you gush, Henrik!
> Hush, Henrik!” (p.15)

The lyrics include mostly inner rhymes, intensifying the palpable inner turmoil Henrik is experiencing. The only times the rhymes are placed at the end of a line is when he makes a clear statement.

> Short and *boring*,
> Yes, he's hardly worth *ignoring*. (p.16)
>
> and
>
> As I've often *stated*,
> It's intolerable being *tolerated*. (p.16)

Unlike his intellectual father, Henrik’s thought process revolves entirely around his perception of what other people think of him. His cautious attempts to express himself are sorted until he sings out the high, painful “for God’s sake” (p.16), accompanied by a choleric cello cadenza, but sinks back, anticipating yet another delay. Gordon (1992:131) writes that the meandering of Henrik’s mind, the barely suppressed frustration and the veneer of sanctimoniousness are conveyed in the

intricate lyric structure. She adds that against the painful mumbling of the young man, the cello's mellow voice acts both as a restraint and an expression of his romantic longings. Two lines, though set apart from one another, take us to the core of Henrik's pain:

> Though I've been born, I've never been!…
> Doesn't anything begin? (p.16)

Sondheim sympathises with the character by concluding with this gentle yearning for his life to finally "begin". Perhaps April's forward-thinking world views regarding patch-work families in *Company* find resonance in the Egerman constellation. Although archaic in theory, the reality of this family's dynamic is different. The postmodern disillusionment of the traditional family as a narrative structure encourages the notion of growing up independently. While Henrik desperately wants to move from childhood to adulthood, Anne (his stepmother of equal age) refuses to embrace adulthood altogether. Both characters display a desire for their narrative to move forward on their own terms, detached from traditional milestones, such as education and marriage.

The focus shifts to Anne. While her husband demands immediate fulfilment and her stepson protests undesired delay, Anne seeks only to procrastinate, "Soon". Then, as her husband soundly naps, she expresses her insecurities "safely" in the most melodic of soliloquies.

> Soon, I promise,
> Soon, I won't shy away,
> Dear old—
> *(she bites her lip)* (p.16)

Light, lovely and frivolous, Anne enjoys romantic titillation, but lyrics and melody halt suddenly when the irksome realisation of her husband's age intrudes her thoughts (Gordon, 1992:132). Her sentimental musings regain momentum, and the melodic line starts building once more, never reaching a climax, however.

> Soon, I want to.
> Soon, whatever you say.
> Even now,
> When you're close and we touch,
> And you're kissing my brow,
> I don't mind it too much. (p.17)

The last line shows the most enthusiastic response to her husband's attempts that Anne can bring up, "I don't mind it too much." Yet, while her lack of passion towards him is clear to the audience, she is unaware of it. Suddenly, rhythm, melody and lyrics become more charmingly brisk and break the former tranquillity.

And you'll have to admit I'm endearing,
I help keep things humming, I'm not domineering--
What's one small shortcoming?

For a moment, it appears that Anne breaks from her performance by pointing at her own identity. She reflects on her character and realises that while she may be a coquette, she is also very much aware that her insecurities may be the source of her frigidity (Gordon, 1992:132).

And think of how I adore you,
Think of how much you love me.
If I were perfect for you,
Wouldn't you tire of me (p.17)

A build from “I adore you” to “I love you” seems inevitable but instead, Anne sings “you love me”. When it comes to love, she chooses passivity. A subconscious wall separates her from her husband emotionally and thus intimately as well. The last two lines of this section could arguably be a nod to Gwendolen in Oscar Wilde’s comedy *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895), in which she states:

“Oh, I hope I am not [perfect]. It would leave no room for development, and I intend to develop in many directions.” (Wilde, 1895:16) [22]

In a brief comparison between Gwendolen and Anne, one could argue that both women are trying to keep control of their respective situations for fear of becoming uninteresting to others. This forces their actions to become performative, as there is a conscious avoidance of acting out of instinct. However, Anne’s comment may also imply a desperate search for an excuse. Perhaps, surprisingly, Anne’s bidding on the indefinite is endorsed as the “right” response to poorly managed passion. Thus, hers is the most songlike of the three soliloquies, while also the most spontaneous in effect, changing rhythmic style and key several times as a symbol of impulsive femininity (Knapp, 2006:58). She concludes:

Soon,
All too soon,
Dear old— (p.17)

Saved by the sound of Henrik’s cello, she scolds him for making a noise, further aggravating his frustrations, as she stands before him in a negligee, appearing “half-innocent, half-coquettish” (p. 17). When she returns to her bedroom, their two voices combine and express their discordant yet harmonious fears and longings. The duet is joined by Fredrik, as in an intricate polyphony, they express their desires, “each song revealing more than the lyric broadly states” (Gordon, 1992:132).

---

[22] Interestingly enough, similarly to the musical under discussion, the characters in *Importance of Being Earnest* are also sent into a mix-and-match frenzy when they arrive in the countryside.

Banfield (1993:232) identifies the three soliloquies as a Tarantella in 6/8, a Sarabande in 3/2 and Hemiola Waltz in 3/4, respectively. He writes that when the three songs are combined in the trio, our pleasure lies as much in hearing the combination of juxtaposing rhythms, as in the intervallic counterpoint. Banfield (1993:237) explains that the common factor is the quarter note: Henrik's 3/2 reinforces Anne's hemiola, while "a second, conflicting level of hemiola is avoided, by augmenting Fredrik's patter rhythm into continuous quarter notes", which is appropriate, as his state of tiredness could easily have a slowed and fuddled effect on his thoughts and articulation. He adds that there is even somewhat of a lyric corollary to this rhythmic interplay when the characters steal each other's title words.

ANNE:	**HENRIK:**	**FREDRIK:**
Even **Now,** When you're close	Maybe **Soon, soon**	Maybe. **Later.** (p.18)

These then develop into:

ANNE:	**HENRIK:**	**FREDRIK:**
And Think of how I adore you, Think of how Much you love me. If I were perfect For you, Wouldn't you tire Of me **Later**? We will, **Later**.	Come to me **Now,** **Now,** **Now,** **Now,** Come to me **Soon**. If I'm Dead, I can Wait.	Come to me **Soon,** **Soon,** **Soon,** **Soon,** Come to me **Soon,** Straight to me, never mind. (p.19)

Once again, the Egermans swap their titles, revealing more about their character's subtext and motivation: Anne's promised submission cannot hide her lack of sexual enthusiasm "later"; Henrik's life of procrastination disguises his passionate intensity "now"; and Fredrik's repetition of the word "soon" reveals his true lack of urgency (Gordon 1992:133). Anne seems able to manage what Henrik and Fredrik cannot. Thus, when the songs combine, hers is the only one that emerges almost unchanged, intact and assured, while Hendrik's lament blends into its changing moods and Fredrik's reverie of "now" drifts in and out of focus at a much slower pace, partially incoherent and more graphic in its sexual imagery (Knapp, 2006:58). The lyrics and melodies blend and highlight clearly expressed keywords, through Sondheim's careful composition of

sound. Rhymes sung in unison (e.g. “Later/Wait/Straight”) act as anchor points and bring the three singers back together. In the concluding phrases, each character reverts to their original plea, but Fredrik has the last word.

ANNE:	**HENRIK:**	**FREDRIK:**
Soon.		
	Later…	**Now**, as Always,
Soon.		Now, *(He does a kiss)* Desirée. (p.19)

The final word, which sounds clearly without any harmonic distortion, is Fredrik’s yearning whine, not for his wife Anne but Desirée. This forces the action forward and adds a further dimension of complexity to the network of characters. Furthermore, Henrik may still hope to pursue his incestuous longings. Somehow, the trio acts like a game of Roulette, in which the characters challenge who they think they are and who they want to be. It is a lyrical overture to the confusion that lies ahead.

“Send in the Clowns”

“Send in the Clowns” is sung by Desirée halfway through the second act and is the first song in the show in which a character shows some form of (momentary) arrival and honest reflection on their past choices. At the climax of the emotional storyline between the central characters Fredrik and Desirée, the two engage in a conversation in which the actress briefly discards all the artifice and gives voice to her genuine regret and true longing for a life with Fredrik. However, he turns his back on the reality of her love and chooses the doomed fantasy of a life with young Anne.

Comparing the source material “Smiles of a Summer Night” with “A Little Night Music”, the most noteworthy change is that in the original, Desirée and Fredrik have a four-year-old son, also called Fredrik. In the musical, the two have a thirteen-year-old daughter (introducing a third articulate female link to the generational Armfeldt chain), Fredrika. She is revealed to Fredrik at a much later stage in the story. Hence, their relationship in the musical is much longer ago than in the film. Block (2014:262) argues that this change makes the love affair seem more distant and less convincing than the comparatively shorter time frame employed in the film, where the emotions are still relatively “fresh”. However, the distance also emphasises the character’s inability to move on and makes them seem stuck and slightly more pathetic. This creates an apt breeding ground for them to reflect on a decade of missed opportunities.

Similarly to *Company*, for which “The Ladies who Lunch” was written specifically with Elaine Stritch in mind, Desirée’s honest, poignant and emotional response “Send in the Clowns” was written to suit actress Glynis Johns’ voice specifically. Sondheim (2010:278) reports that, while Johns was a fine actress with an excellent feel for light comedy, she was a weak singer, who

could not sustain notes, and whose voice had quite a breathy quality. The song disguised her weakness by making it the most prominent part, using short phrases and a limited range of just over an octave. By crafting a number specific to the performer's voice and energy, the result promises a more personal, honest performance.

"Send in the Clowns" is the only song that found a life outside of the show and moved into popular culture, with recordings by the likes of Judy Collins (1975) and Frank Sinatra (1973), through whom the song became world-famous. Neither melody nor harmony is particularly intricate, giving no chance of distraction and leaving enough room for sincere simplicity and clarity. In preparation for writing this song, Sondheim composed a few pages of interior monologue discussing Desirée's densely-packed thoughts and feelings, Horowitz (2005:15) explains. He adds that she desperately tries to make Fredrik understand that he has made a mistake by marrying Anne and that it be much more sensible for them to be reunited. Thus, the song is not just ruminative but also communicative: it is sung by one character to another, because the singer has an agenda. Even at her most vulnerable, Desirée seems unable to escape the "performance" truly. Horowitz (2005:16) concludes:

> "Desirée is making a serious attempt to make clear to Fredrik that she finally believes they belong together and regrets that it appears not to be. For once she is being as honest and straightforward as she knows how to be, but at the same time she knows that even honesty and laying oneself bare has a certain manipulative quality. (…) This self-awareness adds to the layers and the bittersweet quality of the songs; ultimately, it's one of the reasons she realises that the *clowns* are *here."*

Isn't it rich?
Are we a pair?
Me here at last on the ground,
You in mid-air,
Where are the clowns? (p.98)

The first two questions gesture upwards in the music, showing that the prosody of the song makes it ideal for a natural vocal performance. Horowitz (2005:16) claims that the highest note in the phrase is anticipated by the previous note, making the question rhetorical. On the other hand, one could also argue that the statement-like rhythm supports the rhetorical quality and thus strips the question of its purpose. "Me here at last on the ground" remains very much in the realm of a third melodically and therefore literally remains grounded. "You in mid-air" introduces a device known as *Luftpause* (air break) after the word "in". At this point, two notes are separated in suspense from their consequents. The rhythmic and melodic anticipation, as the voice slips to the same note an octave lower, thus failing to move to its expected destination (Banfield, 1992:245), exemplifies that things do not necessarily go as one expects them to go. The word "you" hangs almost in the middle of the octave, quasi "mid-air". The verse ends with another rhetorical

question: “Where are the Clowns?”, illustrating that the singer has again assigned parts to the characters in this “farce”.

> One who keeps tearing around,
> One who can't move, (p.98)

In his song performance masterclass at the South Ball Show in 1984, Sondheim explains that the line “The one who keeps tearing around” is Desirée, who explains that what she has done with her life is to sweep in and out of rooms. The “One who can’t move” is Fredrik. He cannot move, because he is caught up in a dream of marrying a young girl. The song is rich in theatre imagery- one might imagine characters on a stage, while listening to it. Gordon (1992:148) describes Desirée as “an actress who has bungled her most important role” and whose pain hides beneath a cloak of self-deprecating humour, unable to cover the emotional depth of her longing. Gordon calls this a synthesis of the twin muses of pathos and farce. Finally, Desirée stands down and takes on the responsibility of having waited too long.

> Don't you love farce?
> My fault, I fear.
> I thought that you'd want what I want-
> Sorry, my dear.
> But where are the clowns?
> Quick, send in the clowns.
> Don't bother, they're here. (p.99)

At first, the line “Don’t you love farce” seems like a somewhat clumsy lyric, due to the use of double consonants between “love” and “farce”. This forces the performer into a *Luftpause*. The effect is that of a little “one-two jab”, Sondheim explains. Desirée is digging at Fredrik, and at the same time, she is digging at herself. The situation becomes more ironic, slowly building to the bitterness of the last line, “don’t bother, they’re here”, which is probably the most ironic moment. Desirée is deciding and accepting that it is all over. Fredrik apologises and then leaves her alone. She continues and concludes:

> Isn't it rich?
> Isn't it queer?
> Losing my timing this late in my career
> But where are the clowns?
> There ought to be clowns
> Well, maybe next year (p.99)

The words “timing” and “career” reference her life as an actress, but could easily enough be replaced by “heart” and “life”, showing once again, how Desirée struggles to separate herself from the performance. Although there is no change musically in the song’s final line, the words “maybe” and “next” ring in the hope of improvement in the future. She reveals herself *to* herself ,

as she realises that she has been performing her identity all along and that it has gotten her nowhere. This clearly echoes the postmodern notion of bringing attention to the performance *as* a performance. Both "Send in the Clowns" and "The Ladies who Lunch" are performative songs, suffused with irony ("Isn't it bliss" / "I'll drink to that"). They are both self-revelatory reflections expressed through the filter of the identities that Desirée and Joanne have adopted. They comment on themselves and the performative behaviour of others. Thus, they live outside of the narrative.

"The Miller's Son"

The final solo in *A Little Night Music* is not sung by any of the principal characters but by Petra the maid. This choice echoes Bergman's film, in which the servants have the final word (Fig. 6). Building on the self-revelatory "Send in the Clowns", this demonstrates awareness that the unfolding plot has been a performance with an audience: Petra. After Anne confesses her love for Henrik and the two "drop down on the ground and start to make passionate love" (p.101), Petra and Frid, the manservant, re-appear after a lusty roll in the hay. While the sexually satiated Frid is still asleep, Petra glorifies a life of ease and immediate gratification through song.

[Figure 6. This image shows a scene from Ingmar Bergman's 1955 film Smiles of a Summer Night, with Harriet Andersson as Petra and Åke Fridell as Frid. Image downloaded from: https://www.criterion.com/current/posts/1844-smiles-of-a-summer-night-midsummer-merry-go-round in October 2021.]

Once again, Sondheim poses a conundrum concerning his *11 o'clock number*, traditionally reserved for a showstopper or large solo by one of the leads. "The Miller's Son" is a commentary (similarly to equally out-of-character "The Ladies Who Lunch" in *Company*) and fulfils the role of an *I Want s*ong (similarly to Robert's final solo "Being Alive" in *Company*), which usually lets the protagonist articulate their desires at the beginning of a show. It also functions dramaturgically to establish a character. This number is Petra's only solo and a valedictory number at that. It is the only song to be belted, and its length is far in excess of the importance of her character. In

contrast to the complex, inhibited, troubled and wealthy women, Petra knows precisely what she wants (Gordon, 1992:149):

> I shall marry the miller's son
> Pin my hat on a nice piece of property
> Friday nights, for a bit of fun
> We'll go dancing
> Meanwhile (p.101)

While Petra prizes financial security, stuffy materialism alone is not her main creed. She accepts the inevitable value and necessity of domesticity but is bent on actively pursuing a life of sensual abandon first (Gordon, 1992:149). McLaughlin (2016:103) argues that the emphasis in her song is not on the fantasies or desire to do something but on the "meanwhile"- the interval between now and whatever is to come. He explains that she sings about the fantasy fulfilled being likely to become mundane and disappointing but that the journey to fulfilment can and *should* be full of excitement.

> It's a wink and a wiggle
> And a diggle in the grass
> And I'll trip the light fandango
> A pinch and a diddle
> In the middle of what passes by (…)
>
> In the meanwhile
> There are mouths to be kissed
> Before mouths to be fed
> And a lot in between
> In the meanwhile
> And a girl ought to celebrate what passes by. (p.101)

Petra is aware of the rapid passing of time toward inevitable death and intends on rejoicing as best as she can in everything that happens until time stops (McLaughlin, 2016:103). While the postmodern idea of uncertainty brought with it a sense of unease in *Company*, Petra accepts it as part of life. Her priorities are clear and Sondheim issues them in the ordering of his lines "There are mouths to be kissed/Before mouths to be fed". Petra conveys her chosen lifestyle in a rapid "electric fusion of lyric and rhythmic pace" (Gordon, 1992:149). The combination of strong rhymes and poetic density of the lines create an impression of carefree exhilaration.

> It's a very short road
> From the pinch and the punch
> To the paunch and the pouch and the pension
> It's a very short road
> To the ten thousandth lunch
> And the belch and the grouch and the sigh (p.101)

The alliteration on the plosive “p” energises Sondheim’s lines, as the high-spirited maid contemplates the decline from sexual excess to domestic torpor (Gordon, 1992:149).

> Or I shall marry the business man
> Five fat babies and lots of security
> Friday nights, if we think we can
> We'll go dancing
> Meanwhile (p.102)
>
> Or I shall marry the Prince of Wales
> Pearls and servants and dressing for festivals
> Friday nights with him all in tails
> We'll have dancing
> Meanwhile (p.102)

Although Petra has upgraded her future husband to a “business man” and later even the “Prince of Wales”, who may give her a life of security and luxury, Friday nights are reserved for fun and dance. This is her priority, because she is aware of the moments passing by. “Marriage” is set to a mournful, slow tune in the aeolian mode, which then turns into a spirited dance, the only double meter passage in the entire score (Swain, 2014:313). Sondheim highlights the postmodern notion of independence by juxtaposing musical styles. “The inevitable life of sober security, the inescapable decline from frivolity to dusty age, grasping at the joys of the present are reiterated in various ways in each verse”, while the parallel structure of each stanza reinforces the character’s definite choices (Gordon, 1992:150).

Furthermore, Gordon argues that in the absence of a traditional *11 o’clock number*, the accusation that this song, with its density and complexity of the poetic image and rhyme, carry too heavy a structural burden on the vivacious maid may be justified. Petra indirectly critiques the hypocrisy of her employers, possibly making the song a bit too clever for this particular maid. However, the images Sondheim uses and the sentiments he expresses, are suitable to her character. The song concludes on a triumphant note:

> There are mouths to be kissed
> Before mouths to be fed
> And there's many a tryst
> And there's many a bed
> There's a lot I'll have missed
> But I'll not have been dead when I die! (p.102)

The fact that the final solo belongs to the maid might seem a surprise to the theatregoer, but it is, in fact, an appropriate device employed by Sondheim. By expressing the final commentary, Petra links the audience to the characters, revealing herself as the ubiquitous all-seeing eye. Very strong parallels can be drawn to the maids in Mozart’s comic operas, e.g. Susanna in *Le Nozze die*

Figaro (1786) and Despina in *Cosi Fan Tutte* (1790). Down-to-earth and quick-witted, these characters exist within the action but can wink at the audience at any given point, demonstrating the unique ability to have a firm grip of reality and see things clearly.

Petra showcases a devastating awareness of the inevitability of her death and understands that everything is temporary (McLaughlin, 2016:105). She has made peace with this idea, as she says to Frid, “I’m just passing through” (p.96). The song expresses a sense of confidence, cemented by a stage direction that Sondheim himself suggested. Sondheim instructed the original actress D. Jamie Bartlett to smile after the final line, “And I shall marry the Miller’s son” (Kowalke, 2014). He told her that she knew exactly whom she would marry and that *that* smile would give it away. The number garnered huge applause, and the stage direction “she smiles” has been included in the official script ever since. The enigmatic smile also tells us that the clever maid intuitively understands what the neurotic Egerman trio did not in “Now-Later-Soon”. In every verse, Petra expresses that real living is to be done in the momentary embraces of one man after another and the enjoyment of dance. The point is not social criticism. It is merely the vehicle for her articulation. Petra re-iterates Robert’s desire to “be alive” on one’s own terms. Sondheim makes her the mistress of the show: live life fully now, for later comes soon enough for everyone, even the clown (Kowalke). And thus, “The Miller’s Son” summarises the show.

McLaughlin (2016:104) argues that “The Miller’s Son” expresses the root of the characters’ follies: the desire for identity-providing fantasies and completed narrative structures for happily ever afters. However, the search for one’s self lies in the process of moving time rather than the product at the end of one’s life.

As the night comes to a close, the characters find their happy endings. Although Sondheim makes no indication that these are permanent, everyone is one step closer to finding their truth. Henrik, who felt stuck in his adolescence, caught between his religious training and his “sinful” impulses, is validated by Anne, who realises the guidance she seeks is not to be found in her partner but in her own longing; Desirée and Fredrik, both equally agonised, recognise that they have let their lives pass them by and do not until the very end fully believe in the possibility of their personal redemption through a future together (Knapp, 2006:54); and Petra, whose fertile mind and passionate spirit imagine more possibilities than really exist for her but who lives in the momentary dynamic of “anything is possible if you accept who you are”.

Finally, the characters gracefully accept their roles within this game and all the couples properly align. Their choice to change and to break away from their path prompts the structure to fall, as Madame Armfeldt, who has watched the entire “farce” with exaggerated disapproval, dies. Three becomes two. This implies that happiness is a momentary state in an ever-changing world.

The complexities of *A Little Night Music* are manyfold. It is clear that Sondheim is stimulated by the darkness of the material. While at first glance the plot seems light, Sondheim’s music and

lyrics reveal the complexities of each character, by defining their actions and embodying their truths. The characters are very direct about their frustrations, but Sondheim manages to withstand the darker thematic innuendo of the text, by infusing his score with the romantic, lighthearted frivolity of the waltz. This fusion allows him to retain the fanciful operatic world, while reinforcing the implications of contemporary social reality. Furthermore this aligns with the notions of performative and constructed identities.

He adds that *A Little Night Music* lightheartedly joins *Company* in questioning the idea of the autonomous self. While this may apply to *Company* and the greater part of this show, the characters display a very strong sense of autonomy in their choices that carry them out of the performance. Whether or not this sense of independence is an illusion (identity performance), governed by factors that form our environment, I will investigate in the following chapter in Sondheim and Prince's next collaboration, *Sweeney Todd - the Demon Barber of Fleet Street*.

Chapter 3: Sweeney Todd - the Demon Barber of Fleet Street

Both *Company* and *A Little Night Music* explore Sondheim's approach to constructing identities, taking into account how postmodernism challenges the concept of the autonomous individual. Djité (2006:6) defines identity as the everyday word for people's sense of who they are. Versluys (2007:92) opines that identity does not exist outside of an individual, but is actively constructed by that individual, mostly constituted through the process of social interaction. The previous chapters have shown that identity performance results from expectations that go against inherent desires. McLaughlin (2016:6) argues that identity construction *creates* expectation and involves implied narratives, assumptions about behaviour, appearance and other factors, such as gender, sexuality, class, race, ethnicity, religion, profession, etc. Thus, one could argue that any identity constructs within set structures always carry with them a performative aspect and that the characters are victims of their environment.

Sweeney Todd- the Demon Barber of Fleet Street (1979) exemplifies this notion in a narrative that draws from both fantasy and a strong awareness of modern capitalistic society. The musical opened on Broadway at the Uris Theatre (now Gershwin Theatre) on 1 March 1979. With music and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim and a book by Hugh Wheeler, the show was directed by Hal Prince. The musical is based on Christopher Bond's 1973 play of the same title. The legend of Sweeney Todd existed before Bond's re-working of the famous character of the early nineteenth-century tradition of macabre stories, often called "penny dreadfuls". Sondheim, who had watched the Bond play in London in 1973, was immediately inspired to write a musical horror story (Sondheim, 2010:32). The notion is as follows:

> "England in 1849. Sweeney Todd, a barber unjustly convicted and sent to an Australian prison, escapes and returns to London, determined to avenge himself on Judge Turpin, the man who convicted him. He allies himself with Mrs Lovett, but his plans to kill the Judge go awry and in his frustration he sets out to avenge himself on the world." (Sondheim, 2010:331)

Sondheim omits Sweeney's gruesome modus operandi, by which he and Mrs Lovett turn people into meat pies. This reflects how their creative way of doing away with people has little to do with their identity constructs.

McLaughlin (2016:119) calls *Sweeney Todd* a "hybrid musical", considering the different approaches that Sondheim and Prince took to the subject matter. For Sondheim, the play is about what happens when a person becomes obsessed with revenge. He writes: "Sweeney Todd is about obsession, and when a person is totally obsessed everything else becomes irrelevant. In this sense Sweeney is detached - the only thing from which he is not detached, is his obsession" (Sondheim, 1980:12). Prince believes that it is a story about how society makes you impotent, how that impotence leads to rage and how that rage leads to murder. To show the

breakdown of society, Prince and Sondheim had to show society in action. Thus, Sondheim not only referenced it, but soaked it into the score (McLaughlin, 2016:120).

A remarkable postmodern aspect of *Sweeney Todd* is that Sondheim uses and honours several contrasting theatrical styles and devices to bring the show and its characters to life: musical underscoring, *melodrama*, *music hall* and *Leitmotiv*. Before diving into the song analyses, I will discuss these elements, as they are vital in bringing Sondheim's method into a context. This hybridity later becomes clear in the show's subject matter as well. This will set up this chapter's investigation of how Sondheim constructs identity by pairing up two contrasting characters that belong in two different shows, stylistically and narratively: Sweeney Todd and Mrs Lovett.

Aiming to strengthen the audience's psychological connection to the narrative, Sondheim turned to the film scores of Bernard Herrmann, who had scored several Hitchcock films.[23] He relied on a steady stream of moody, churning background music- "ceaseless underscoring that would keep an audience in suspense and maybe even scare the hell out of them" (Sondheim, 2010:332). When pressed to define the genre of the show, Sondheim describes it as a "movie for the stage" (Sondheim, 2010:332). The libretto and vocal score cover designate the term "musical thriller", which Taylor (2015:337) defines as a suspenseful narrative in which sex and violence play a part. Banfield (1993:281) argues that a thriller relies heavily on an intellectually satisfying plot and a suspenseful atmosphere, created by the setting and usually by the music. One effect of the musical underscore is that the audience never gets a chance to rest.

Sweeney Todd embodies all these elements and transposing this familiar form to the live stage forms an active relationship between the audience and the performance. It becomes more real. However, this realism is distorted through the lens of *melodrama*. Williams (2012:193f.) defines *melodrama* as a widely acknowledged dramatic genre, consisting of a combination of music and drama, during which audiences experience "periods of suspenseful absorption pierced by intensified moments of shock, terror or sentiment". She adds that the elaborate melodramatic spectacle tells a highly compressed plot (often driven by the villain's actions) with an improbably happy ending. Gordon (1992:208) writes that the term derives from the Greek words for *song* and *drama,* as sounds and music underscore and comment on the dramatic action on stage, one of its essential characteristics. The contemporary theatregoer associates the term "melodrama" with "sentimental excess, violent action and gratuitous villainy", while being something "larger than life - in emotion, in subject and in complication of the plot" (Sondheim, 1980:3).

Initially, audiences would gladly scoff at the naivety of the dramatic forbears (Gordon, 1992:207), and it is not unusual for successful melodramas to contain elements of sociopolitical comment,

---

[23] Bernard Hermann's (1911-1975) scored Hitchcock films, such as *The Trouble With Harry* (1955) and *Psycho* (1960). In the 1930's he also scored several melodramas for orchestra and narration, including *The City of Brass* (1934) and *Cynara* (1935).

such as the injustices between the rich and the poor, classism and sexism. By working off the text by Bond, however, Sondheim re-creates this world of melodramatic excess, allowing him to "hold up a distorting mirror to the horrors of modern life" (Knapp, 2006:333). Furthermore, Sondheim intends to unsettle and disturb through the melodramatic form, which provides a fitting structure through which he can explore "the pervasiveness of individual violence and social culpability in contemporary life" (Gordon, 1992:209). Thus, although the nineteenth-century ambience is established and acknowledged, Sondheim, as in *A Little Night Music*, does not confine himself to it.

[Figure 7. This image shows Eugene Lee's set for the original Broadway production of *Sweeney Todd*. Image downloaded from: https://yalealumnimagazine.com/articles/4424-eugene-lee in October 2021.]

While Sondheim aimed to create a passionately funny and passionately intense musical thriller with romantic ballads and comic songs that tend towards a music hall tradition, Prince moved the show toward the Romantic (Hirsch, 1989:123). He set the whole show in the confined space of a Victorian factory, covered by a gritty glass ceiling (Fig. 7), which would diffuse any form of sunlight- thus separating the people from the sun. Hirsch (1989:120) writes that this represented the "incursions of the Industrial Revolution on the poetry within people", constantly diminishing the characters with the towering scale of the workplace. Setting the narrative against a backdrop of a seemingly never-ending saturated Dickensian vision of factories belching waste along the Thames (figuratively and literally), the cold oppression of the vast factory interior signalled a society lost in toil and exploitation. Theatrical extravagance (e.g. a large set, overwhelming in relation to the performers; grotesque make-up) aroused the audience's awareness of its own "insensitivity and inurement to aggression" (Gordon, 1992:209). This is a testament to the postmodern device of making the subject matter its own dramatic style through larger than life

performances, sets, exaggerated costumes and make-up design. As Prince told the first West End cast during rehearsals: “Usually less is more, but for Sweeney less is bore, we are going with more is more.”[24]

Sweeney’s desires are for completion, justice and revenge, while Mrs Lovett represents the consumer capitalism that arose from the Victorian industrial age. The tension between these two notions of desire and their relation to completion provides the context for the play’s development of its ideas. Sondheim illustrates this by basing the two main characters in two different theatrical forms. Sweeney is born from the tradition of macabre stories, or “Penny Dreadfuls” and Victorian *melodrama*. Mrs Lovett’s character is steeped in the Victorian tradition of British *music hall*, which, comparable to American Vaudeville, was an entertainment form for the working class. A variety of sketches, dances, comedians and songs aimed to serve as momentary escapism. The risqué nature of the song and dance routines were advertised for young and old, thus creating a communal area of fun, frivolity and enjoyment (Gerard, 2013:492).[25] Both Sweeney and Mrs Lovett stay true to their respective forms until the end.

Bond’s play provided Sondheim and Prince with an ideal template to work from, since the characters that Bond created are “large but real”, as he describes, placing them in “situations that, given a mad world not unlike our own, are believable” (Bond, 1974:v). The parallels created between Sweeney’s excesses and contemporary society gave Sondheim the key to creating characters, who would live in, but never be contained to the limitations of the melodramatic form (again, as we have previously seen in *A Little Night Music*). Knapp (2006:336) explains that although the dominant consciousness is Sweeney’s, it does not constitute the whole world entirely, but sets the tone and merges with “reality” to such an extent that we cannot separate the two.

Each character is identified by a Leitmotiv (leading motive)- a musical theme. A Leitmotiv is a musical association to a specific character or event established (usually by the orchestra) at the first mention or appearance of the subject. It then reoccurs during subsequent appearances and repetitions (Burkholder, Grout & Palisca, 2006:694). Although the Leitmotiv has been used in music since the 16th Century, Richard Wagner (1813-1883) is more specifically associated with this musical storytelling device. Richard Wagner’s “larger-than-life” *Gesamtkunstwerke* (*Der Ring*, *Tristan und Isolde*, *Der Tannhäuser*) also display very strong melodramatic elements. James Smith (1973:48) identifies that most great operas built upon the most successful melodramas of their day, employing formulas and attitudes such as grandiose or repentant suffering, last-minute salvation, family conflicts, personal triumph, etc. It is thus not surprising that *Sweeney Todd* is still considered “operatic” by many (Zalman, 2019:58).

---

[24] *The South Bank Show* documented the rehearsal process in 1980.

[25] Typical song examples include “After the Ball” by Charles K. Harris (1891) and “Daisy Bell” by Harry Dacre (1892).

Each song grows out of that particular theme and evolves as the characters develop (Gordon, 1992:216). This device is vital for following the psychological narrative of the characters and their motivations. Knapp (2006:335) writes that the underscoring lays bare "the sensibilities of a single mind or worldview and the world itself". He continues: " Within this kind of texture, Leitmotivs seem to represent, from one perspective, the emergence of individual thoughts and feelings within a flow of consciousness, and from the other, the deep connection of objects we perceive directly to the world's essence, itself invisible, except through such manifestations". By musically underscoring his characters, Sondheim invites us not only to glance at their identities but lets us submerge ourselves in them completely. These motifs tell the audience exactly how they are supposed to feel, arguably questioning their autonomy as well.

"Prologue"

Sondheim establishes the world through Sweeney's eyes. Thus, similar to his method with Robert in *Company*, Sweeney's identity is mirrored in Sondheim's portrayal of London. Even though the chorus narrates the story, when the opening prologue conjures up Sweeney from his grave, it does so by re-creating the world in *his* image - an image that is above all a musical one, sustained through an incessant flow of Leitmotiv-saturated music (Knapp, 2006:337). The audience immediately become part of Sweeney's world. The first line establishes the tone and thematic significance of the piece, as it is sung by a low voice against a soft threatening rumble in the accompaniment, creating a sense of menace that characterises the musical:

Attend the tale of Sweeney Todd. (p.1.)

Sondheim (2010:333) remarks that the use of the word "attend", which means "to listen to", is just archaic enough to tell the audience that they are about to witness a period piece. The word "tale" suggests that the audience not take the story realistically but as a fable, opening it up to the bizarrerie of events about to occur and unfold like a folktale. He adds that the alliteration "t" of the first line (AABA) "in its very formality gives the line a sinister feeling, especially with the sepulchral accompaniment underneath it". Sondheim argues that even though the audience may not be consciously aware of such specific details, they still affect them.

McLaughlin (2016:121) emphasises that the storytelling aspect of the play gains importance, especially when drawing parallels to the use of narrative and time in *Company* and *A Little Night Music*. In both cases, the narratives imply a connection to time's arrow - a movement toward death- and thus a desire for a completed epistemological structure. However, there is a strong awareness that a completed narrative can only exist outside of time. Burgass (2000:180) suggests that postmodern fiction tends to "favour relative time over subjective time and to question the very possibility of objective time and measurement". While this was especially true in *Company* and the second act of *A Little Night Music*, in *Sweeney Todd*, time seems to exist mainly in the

past, with which Sweeney is obsessed. The future is no longer important to him. Mrs Lovett, on the other hand, lives entirely in the future, as her present desires are constantly deferred.

As the chorus introduces the play, Sondheim builds a light crescendo but drops it again with unresolved dissonance, repeatedly lifting the audience into a mounting tension (Gordon, 1992:213). We immediately get a sense of who Sweeney is. The constant expectation of something about to happen anticipates the protagonist's eventual manic explosion. The tight rhyme scheme and unadorned vocabulary remain faithful to the period and milieu Sondheim has chosen (Gordon, 1992:213):

> He kept a shop in London Town
> Of fancy clients and good renown
> And what if none of their souls were saved?
> They went to their maker impeccably shaved
> By Sweeney
> By Sweeney Todd
> The demon barber of Fleet Street (p.1)

This parable relates to the extraordinary career of the Demon Barber. Right from the start, Sondheim introduces the "Dies Irae", the high point of the Catholic funeral mass. Accompanying Sweeney on his journey, it provides a thematically musical clue to the significance of Sweeney's actions.[26] It is the first of many Leitmotivs assigned to the various characters (Gordon, 1992:213). The Dies Irae relates to the story of Sweeney specifically, as this medieval chant carries with it the widely recognised message of doom and eternal judgment, underscoring Sweeney's dark and tragic character. The chorus calls out:

> Swing your razor side, Sweeney
> Hold it to the skies
> Freely flows the blood of those who moralise! (p.2)

The internal rhymes, binding alliteration and assonance are significant elements in the construction of images of corrupt and fearful souls finally confronted by the impartial judge. It is important to note that Sondheim does not equate the murderous Sweeney with the godly judge persecuting the evils of a corrupt world. Instead, he aims to depict Sweeney as "the towering figure whose passionate anger is an understandable response to the injustice to which he has been subjected", Gordon (1992:214) writes. She adds that driven by his intense pain and all-consuming devotion to revenge, the barber "transcends the merely mortal and becomes a distorted deity". This is suggested in the narration:

> Back of his smile, under his word,

[26] Used in the Roman liturgy, the "Dies Irae", the "Day of Wrath" describes God's final judgment of the souls before entering heaven or eternal hell. It consists of four notes and two minor intervals: the first being a minor second and the second a minor third.

> Sweeney heard music that nobody heard.
> Sweeney pondered and Sweeney planned,
> Like a perfect machine, ‘e planned.
> Sweeney was smooth, Sweeney was subtle.
> Sweeney would blink, and rats would scuttle. (p.3)

The “music that nobody heard” not only alludes to Sondheim’s characteristic underscoring but could also be interpreted as “thoughts that nobody thought”. Sweeney lives outside of society while, simultaneously, very much being a product of it. Compared to a “perfect machine”, he is cold, efficient and unforgiving- just like the corrupt system into which he was born.

The chorus summons Sweeney in a desperate cry, and so he appears as though from his grave. The accompaniment highlights the frantic turbulence of his emotions amidst the mechanical clatter of the industrial age. And so, Sweeney himself calls upon the audience to attend his tale, drawing them into his version of the events. Thus, the prologue, which is entirely Sondheim’s creation, provides the context of time, setting and the major themes while establishing the story as a theatricalised fable (Gordon, 1992:215). Interestingly, the chorus reduces Sweeney to a representation of the archetypal villain from the beginning. This “black and white” way of looking at things becomes blurred when empathy starts to antagonise morality in the course of the show. We then hear a bell tune reminiscent of a distorted Big Ben chime, which becomes the Leitmotiv for Sweeney’s association to London, beckoning the first song, “No place like London” (Knapp, 2006:337).

“No Place Like London”

The story begins as the young sailor Anthony serenades the city of London after returning from his adventures around the world:

> Anthony:
> I have sailed the world
> Beheld its wonders
> From the Dardanelles
> To the mountains of Peru
> But there's no place like London (…)
> No, there's no pl-
>
> Sweeney:
> No, there's no place like London (p.8.)

Mood and intention transform immediately, as Sweeney interrupts the sailor and takes over the narrative, pushing himself into the centre of the story and modulating from a major to a minor key. Anthony views London with wondrous excitement and youthful enthusiasm, quickly overwhelmed by Sweeney’s reveal of his misanthropic vision of the city, a place of deplorable depravity (Knapp, 2006:337-338). This becomes clear in the inner monologue of the song:

There's a hole in the world
Like a great black pit
And the vermin of the world
Inhabit it
And it's morals aren't worth
What a pig can spit
And it goes by the name of London…

(…)

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! (pp.8-9)

Sweeney spits out these barely sung words in disgust, reassuring the audience that he is no stranger to London. Married to the Dies Irae theme, Sweeney's obsession with the terror and trouble of his world induces apocalyptic reverberations. While these feelings, at first, may seem unbalanced, his inversions of Anthony's happiness are immediately justified (Gordon, 1992:217):

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! (pp.9-10)

Sondheim's gentle melody expresses Sweeney's unbearable longing for a peaceful, seemingly unattainable life. The simple tale, the quiet bliss of the past and the purity of the feelings are emphasised in the repetition of the ideal qualities he has invested with his wife, Lucy, "And she was beautiful". Furthermore, the repetitions and simple phrases contribute to his total commitment to his lost marriage, Taylor (215:339) writes. The lyric and melody are suddenly interrupted, echoing how Sweeney's life and happiness were interrupted. Thus, Sweeney painfully

seeks to describe his former self in a mezzo piano musical style, lyrical, not very dissonant, and rubato. Taylor adds that (once again) “this gives Sweeney the opportunity to draw the audience to him, explain his motives and to connect with his voice, his loving emotion, his righteous indignation and the beautiful melody”. McLaughlin (2016:122) identifies that the word “naive” goes against the melodic expectation, as it is set to a surprisingly low note, demonstrating Sweeney’s descent into misery. Sweeney blames his loss on the corruption of human institutions, a “vulture of the law / with a gesture of his claw”. McLaughlin explains that in Sweeney’s world all hope of a decent and virtuous society is lost because of people’s cruelty, selfishness and hypocrisy. Sweeney recollects the events that brought upon his demise, such as his wife’s seduction, which he describes in a series of accelerated phrases, reaching a climax with his reaffirmation of her beauty.

Anthony interrupts Sweeney’s reverie, asking whether Lucy succumbed, but Sweeney reacts inconclusively, “Oh that was many years ago…/I doubt if anyone would know” (p.11). As their ways part, Sweeney falls back into the intense criticism of the world he is returning to, reasserting:

> 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… (p.11)

He believes in transcendent ideals and desires narrative closure. However, postmodernism resists narrative closure and thus, the audience shares Sweeney’s despair. His bitterness derives from disappointment that the legal, religious and human systems do not live up to the ideals they represent and thus desires justice. Fuelled by these desires, his motivations are sincere: he has been wronged and those who have wronged him need to be taken to trial. We begin to see the London dictated by Sweeney’s past. As his narrative is most probably an unreliable source, the audience’s indulgence is required.

“Worst Pies in London”

Although the first ten minutes of the show are gloomy and dark, Sondheim has no intention of sustaining the mood, and so we are introduced to Sweeney’s partner in crime. As Gordon (1992:219) writes: “the bleakness of Todd’s London is shattered by the ebullient entrance of Mrs Lovett, as the rhythmic pattern alters from a somber monotony to a bright, vigorous lustiness”. The title phrase “The worst pies in London” is set to a significant musical phrase. This waltz motif will establish Mrs Lovett’s affinity for the music of the nineteenth century London music hall.

Lovett’s zany humour counterbalances Sweeney’s relentless cynicism, bringing the lightheartedness that makes the narrative bearable. Sondheim (2010:339) writes that this song

perfectly represents one of his main mantras, “content dictates form”, as this character’s humorous introduction is structured and executed with split-second precision. Every single phrase is emphasised by a hearty gesture. It is unusual for a composer to add stage directions into his lyrics, but here, Sondheim manages to show us exactly who Mrs Lovett is from the beginning, physicality and all. “Sondheim captures this hyperkinetic energy by punctuating her song with specific business”; thus “rhythms are broken and syncopated as she pounds her dough, flicks away dust and pounces on the occasional crawling pest” (Gordon, 1992:219). Sondheim utilises every beat, every breath, every grunt and pause in the continual rattle of this musical monologue:

> Did you come here for a pie, sir?
> *(Todd grunts)*
> *(Mrs Lovett flicks some dust from a pie)*
> Do forgive me, if me head's a little vague
> *(Spoken)* Ugh!
> *(Plucks something off a pie)*
> *(Spoken)* What is that?
> *(Sung)* But you'd think we had the plague
> *(Drops it on the floor)*
> *(Stomps on it)*
> from the way that people
> *(Flicks at something on the counter)* keep a-voiding
> *(Spots it moving)*
> *(Spoken)* No, you don't!
> *(Smacks it with her hand)* (pp.12-13)

The audience immediately becomes part of her situation, struggles and perversely practical way of dealing with things. “Mrs Lovett is a chatterbox and a glitteringly disorganised one at that”, Sondheim (2010:339) explains. He adds that she switches moods mid-thought and thoughts mid-subject, cheery one moment complaining the next. She can instantaneously alternate her attention between pie and customer, no matter what the consequence. Her chattering causes her to seem irritating but harmless, which makes the eventual revelation of her villainy surprising. Sondheim (2010:339) elaborates on Mrs Lovett’s introduction: “The mercurial, eruptive quality of her scatterbrained chatter calls for an irregular song form, something that feels closer to rapid recitative than to song.”

Characters, such as Kathy in *Company* or Fredrik in *A Little Night Music,* accept their less-than-ideal situations as a means to an end. It highlights the acute postmodern sensitivity towards social conditioning. Similarly, Mrs Lovett is fully aware that her business has no realistic future, but her optimism never seems to fade. This awareness infuses her later tactics with that extra bit of menace. The pragmatic Mrs Lovett is more in control of her choices than the impulsive Sweeney. Thus, arguably, she is the true villain of the story. In a way, one could draw parallels to Petra in *A Little Night Music*, who is socially most restricted. Unlike her superiors though, she is

uncorseted and in charge. Mrs Lovett then concludes her song and summarises her and many others' predicament with "Times is hard" (p.15), which, according to Gordon (1992:220), has a deliberately Dickensian ring. Sondheim (2010:339) remarks that ending on an un-rhymed word highlights Mrs Lovett's confused character.

"Poor Thing"

Mrs Lovett leads Sweeney into the empty room above her pie shop, which he and his wife once occupied. He asks her about the previous tenant. Suspecting the true identity of her customer (whom she remembers as Benjamin Barker), she discloses to him in graphic detail her version of the events:

> 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… (p.15)

There is a distinct clue as to Mrs Lovett's motives, which are essential to the drama's unfolding and the audience's perception of the character. Although her account begins the same way as Sweeney's does, she immediately discloses her perspective. Where Sweeney sang "And she was beautiful" (p.10), Mrs Lovett sings "And *he* was beautiful". Arguably, assuming she has recognised Sweeney, her aims are to seduce him. This speculation is reinforced as she continues:

> He had this wife, y'see,
> Pretty little thing,
> Silly little nit,
> Had her chance for the moon on a string-
> Poor thing. Poor thing. (p.15)
> (…)
> Of course when she goes there,
> Poor thing, poor thing,
> They're 'avin' 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! (p.17)

Mrs Lovett describes Lucy as a "pretty little thing" and a "silly little nit", suggesting vulnerability and weakness, someone not to be taken too seriously. Sondheim's use of the word "little" suggests triviality, similarly to "The Little Things We Do Together" in *Company*. As she reveals to Sweeney the gruesome truth of what happened to Lucy after Sweeney went away, one cannot

help but recognise a sense of joy and delight in Mrs Lovett's numerous repetitions of the phrase "poor thing", heartlessly devaluing its meaning (Gordon, 1992:223).

Once again, content dictates form. Mrs Lovett is chattering away, as she did before, only this time she does so with a specific purpose in mind. Thinking that she has recognised Sweeney, she is driving him into a fury of remembrance. This is underscored by the calculated regularity of the rhythm and rhyme, which drive Todd to the breaking point. Sweeney screams out in agony, and thus, Mrs Lovett's suspicions are confirmed. She declares, "So it is you- Benjamin Barker" (p.18). She informs him that his wife swallowed poison and his daughter is now a ward of Judge Turpin. As Sweeney's world comes crashing down, he recognises definite cause for vengeance. Being the realist she is, Mrs Lovett responds with pragmatic practicality, "You got any money?" (p.18). Demonstrating her affection for him, she has saved his razors to remember him, hoping for his return.

"My friends"

Since Sweeney has been denied a happily-ever-after reunion with his family, he immediately latches on to another conclusion to his story: "let them quake in their boots - Judge Turpin and the Beadle - for their hour has come" (p.18). McLaughlin (2016:123) explains that Sweeney "now imagines an ending resulting from his bypassing corrupt human systems of justice and personally achieving perfect justice". He argues that all of Sweeney's desires are unattainable in the world in which he lives. These desires are end-based, longing to complete the narrative, but difficult to accommodate in a capitalist society focused on desires with deferred ends. As Sweeney reunites with his beloved instruments, Sondheim inverts the four opening notes of the Dies Irae and develops a love song that Sweeney sings to his blades, his instruments of death (Gordon, 1992:223).

A steady, strict hypnotic, trance-like rhythm gives this serenade a ceremonial feeling, as Sweeney lifts the razors out of their case and holds them high, singing:

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, friend.
Whisper, I'll listen.
I know, I know
You've been locked out of sight
All these years!
Like me, my friend!
Well, I've come home

To find you waiting!
Home,
And we're together...
And we'll do wonders...
Won't we…? (pp. 19-20

In this dedication to his blades his passion for revenge becomes explicit. The soft, haunting melody line almost implies a sexual consummation, and thus, the manic wheels start turning (Gordon, 1992:224). This unsettling love song is disguised in a crazed kind of peace and a rich, lifting melody that opens up the possibility for the drama to unfold. Mrs Lovett joins in, turning the serenade into a duet, although her lines seem more like interjections.

Todd:	*Lovett:*
You there, my friend,	I'm your friend too, Mr. Todd.
Come, let me hold you.	If you only knew, Mr. Todd.
Now, with a sigh,	Ooh, Mr. Todd,
You grow warm	You're warm
In my hand…	In my hand...
My friend,	You've come home...
My clever friend…	Always had a fondness for you,
	I did. (p.20)

Mrs Lovett voices her aspirations during Sweeney's ardent serenade. The song has become "an expression of two people who desire disparate things, but are totally at one with each other" (Gordon, 1992:224). While Sweeney fixates on the razors and how they feel in his hand, Mrs Lovett reveals her attraction to the barber. What could easily be implied in the subtext is brought to the surface as Mrs Lovett exposes herself to the audience. She makes her motives clear right from the beginning, leaving the spectators with the choice to empathise with her going forth. Sondheim brings her subtext to the fore and invites the audience to believe her. Patsalidis (2014) explains that the postmodern audience is part of the storytelling, as the work gains meaning through their act of being there. Sondheim (2005) goes as far as calling the audience "collaborators"- an interesting point, considering that his shows require active listeners and thinkers, to come alive. The words the Sweeney and Mrs Lovett sing in unison reveal their complementary ambitions (we previously saw this in "Now-Later-Soon" in *A Little Night Music*), while the divergent objectives come alive as their words and worlds divide. He is in love with the thought of vengeance and death, as she lustfully eyes him and longs for the opportunity to build a home together.

Todd:	*Lovett:*
Rest now, my friends.	Never you fear, Mr. Todd.
Soon I'll unfold you.	You can move in here
Soon you'll know splendours	Mr. Todd. Splendours
You never have dreamed	You never have dreamed
All your days,	All your days

Till now your shine
Was merely silver.
Friends,
You shall drip rubies,
You'll soon drip precious
Rubies…
Will be yours!
I'm your friend,
And you're mine!
Don't they shine beautiful?
Silver's good enough for me,
Mr. T… (pp.20-21)

Sweeney sees beauty in these murderous images, comparing drops of blood to rubies. However, Mrs Lovett's desires are more materialistic "Silver's good enough for me". After Sweeney finishes singing, the music continues building to a climax, as Todd raises his razor into the air for the sudden interruption of silence and the spoken line "At last! My right arm is complete again!" (p. 21). Taylor (2015:340) opines that this ritual signifies his own dehumanisation and that he has now aligned his identity with his weapon. It has become part of who he is. She adds that "the combination of beautiful music, slow, lyrical singing, and the understanding generated through the lyrics gives audiences the opportunity to empathise with Todd and so the complexity of his character begins to be revealed".

"Wait"

After having aroused the Beadle's interest, Sweeney's anticipation of receiving the Judge as a client grows as he anxiously paces around his room. Knowing very well that Sweeney is plotting to murder Judge Turpin, Mrs Lovett tries to domesticate the problem by suggesting ways to make the room look more pleasing "…we'll find some nice little knickknacks" (p.51). This highlights the interplay between two very contrasting motives. She presses Sweeney to "wait" and not pounce on his victim the moment he walks through the door. As "wait" is also the first word of her entrance song "The Worst Pies in London", Sondheim develops this theme further. As Sweeney paces his confined room like a bloodthirsty tiger in a cage, Mrs Lovett continues her interior decor brainstorm:

I've been thinkin' flowers,
Maybe daisies,
To brighten up the room!
Don't you think some flowers,
Pretty daisies,
Might relieve the gloom?

Ah, wait, love, wait. (p.52)

Similar to a lullaby, this song acts soothingly on Sweeney's all-consuming passion. Mrs Lovett does not justify (or pacify) Sweeney's murderous intention in any way and concerns herself only with ways to brighten up the room. Her all-encompassing approval of his plans highlights her corruption.

"Pretty Women" / "Epiphany"

The murderous tension builds when Judge Turpin finally arrives in Sweeney's parlour. Heeding Mrs Lovett's advice, instead of murdering him straight away, Sweeney lulls the Judge into a false sense of security, calmly whistling along to the Judge's jolly hum. The double layers of "appearance and reality, between demeanour and inner desire, are exposed in the lilt of the murderer's song" (Gordon, 1992:232). And thus, the foreboding Dies Irae re-appears, as Sweeney strokes his gleaming weapon, accompanied by his rallying words:

> Now then, my friend
> Now to your purpose
> Patience, enjoy it
> Revenge can't be taken in haste (p.74)

The Judge confesses to Sweeney that his bride-to-be is none other than his daughter, Joanna. This makes Sweeney almost lose control as the accompaniment bursts into a piercing crescendo. However, Sweeney controls himself by returning to his tribute to women, and the two men sing together.

About to slit the Judge's throat, Sweeney is interrupted by Anthony, who bursts in, revealing his plan to kidnap Joanna and marry her. The furious Judge leaves behind a desperate Sweeney, who has missed his chance to avenge himself. Gordon (1992:233) explains that so far, "Sweeney's motives have been clear and his intentions specific", but now, as "his tolerance for pain and frustration finally cracks, he slips over into a state of monumental madness". There is a clear shift from personal to universal vengeance, as he no longer seeks to find justice only for his personal cause, but assigns himself to the divine cause of persecuting all of humanity. Thus, the looming implications of the Dies Irae finally come to fruition in Sweeney's mighty wrath.

This sequence is titled "Epiphany", emphasising the dynamics between the divine and mortal. Knapp (2006:339) writes that part of what makes "Epiphany" so scary is the way it cascades chaotically through its various stages, as will become apparent in the following discussion. Finally, Sweeney shouts in blind rage:

> I had him!
> His throat was bare
> Beneath my hand- (p.78)

Taylor (2015:346) identifies the "Nemesis Motif", which occurs as Sweeney is horror-struck at what has happened. This motif already appeared when Sweeney sang "No Place Like London". Sweeney recollects his excremental vision of the world with even more venom and rage.

> There's a hole in the world
> Like a great black pit
> And the vermin of the world

Inhabit it (p.78)

In the opening sequence, these words led to Sweeney's ironic repetition of the title phrase "No place like London", but here they lead to a foreboding motive even more directly derived from the Big Ben chime, to which Sweeney intones the resolute "But not for long" (p.79) (Knapp, 2006:339). The energetic pulse of the lyric expresses his fury, as he finds release in his life's purpose, which he explains with unwavering conviction:

They all deserve to die.
Tell you why, Mrs Lovett,
Tell you why:
Because in all of the whole human race, Mrs Lovett,
There are two kinds of men and only two.
There's the one who stays put
In his proper place
And the one with his foot
In the other one's face. (p.79)

"They all deserve to die" is described by Mordden (2003:229) as "the sound of a mind unhinged yet working out a logic all its own". Gordon (1992:234) identifies Sweeney's belief that capitalism depends on oppression, which only death can relieve. McLaughlin (2016:127) argues that Sweeney "submerges into the capitalist notion of desire, vowing to act on this desire for revenge while deferring its fulfilment". Simply put, his vengeance is no longer specifically motivated or directed, as his plans become broadly philosophical when he aims his revenge towards the greater powers of the social system.

Because the lives of the wicked should be-
(Slashes at the air)
Made brief.
For the rest of us, death
Will be a relief-
We all deserve to die! (p.79)

Even this frantic resolve is not enough to prevent his world from falling apart completely, "as his thirst for revenge caves into, then merges with his realisation that Joanna and Lucy are to be withheld from him forever" (Knapp, 2006:339). Mood and drive take charge suddenly, and Sweeney falls into a painful melodic cry as he realises:

And I'll never see Johanna,
No I'll never hug my girl to me-
FINISHED!! (p.79)

Sweeney pushes himself through these particularly anguished moments, recalling Joanna at first and later Lucy: "And my Lucy lies in ashes" (p.80), and in between, commanding vengeance

(Knapp, 2006:335). The memory of his grief penetrates his staccato, machine-like drive and the splintering of Sweeney's personality is underscored by the abrupt changes in music, mood and lyrics (Gordon, 1992:235). The alternation between lamentation and loathing reflect how the two emotions fuel each other. Sweeney's identity lives within this dichotomy. The alternation between fixed rhythmic, rhymed sections and free-flowing unrhymed passages represent Todd's organised determination to be a Sword of Justice, as well as his disorganised grief, respectively (Sondheim, 2010:335). The stage direction dictates:

> *(Turns on the audience)*
>
> Alright! You sir,
> How about a shave?
> *(slashes twice)*

"Sweeney's revenge is transformed into transcendental fury and the assertion of universal guilt" (Gordon, 1992:234), thus aiming to cleanse the world of its corruption and firing his reason for existence. He directs his aggression towards the audience, breaking the fourth wall. This not only symbolises his emotional explosivity and rage but also catches the spectators off-guard, immediately drawing them further into the show. This event is tied to the postmodern construct of art pointing at itself, (quite literally) pointing at the world. Furthermore, the lines between performers are blurred. Sondheim (2010:355) explains this choice: "I thought a schizophrenic breakdown would be more spectacular for the actor and give more variety to the song (…) in the middle of which he could break the fourth wall and make direct contact with the world outside the stage, a truly mad gesture". The social and hierarchical structures we have seen in *Company* and *A Little Night Music*, are levelled entirely. Life and death, vengeance and salvation are pinned against one another, emphasising Sweeney's universal cry for redemption:

> I will have vengeance.
> I will have salvation! (p.80)

Sweeney's melodic roar is supported by the underlying pounding engine theme, emphasising the destruction of the human spirit by the forces of the industrial revolution (Gordon, 1992:335). Although the lyric "I'm full of joy!" ends the solo triumphantly, the melodic line denies this bravado using an unresolved final note.

> I'm alive at last
> And I'm full of joy! (pp. 80-81)

Sondheim (2010:335) believes that the crux of Bond's play lies precisely in "Epiphany", as a man is transformed instantaneously from someone who kills only for specific and justifiable reasons into a mass murderer. The transformation of a traditional serial killer, from a a greedy mercenary into an ordinary working-class man, whose life is invaded and destroyed by the powers of a

malevolent social system, would appeal more to the sensibilities of a contemporary audience; a man who represents those, who, without money or influence, are caught in the grasps of those who abuse their power through the guise of justice. Gordon (1992:209) adds that his mission changes into "monomaniacal carnage for its own sake" only once Sweeney realises his lack of power.

Taylor (2015:341) quotes Joseph Marchesani, who equates Sweeney's three stages of transformation to French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan's registers: the imaginary, the symbolic and the real. The first point of transformation is when Sweeney is transformed into a criminal by the court's false conviction, removing his naive identity; the second transformation occurs when Sweeney fails to kill the Judge, sending him towards a metamorphosis into the world's avenger; this, in turn, transforms Sweeney into a psychotic murderer "and his symbolic register is subsumed by his imaginary one". At this point Sweeney sings "Epiphany", which, as Schlesinger (2016:132) points out, in the Bible, is the moment where the Magi recognises Jesus. Similarly, Sweeney recognises a god, but this one is dark and delusional. This engrossing tour de force could have easily concluded the first act were it not for Mrs Lovett, who sets the wheels in motion for a sinister scheme that marries the couple by means of their plans: revenge and profit.

"A Little Priest"

The musical does not intend to express a purely tragic vision, so equal weight is given to Mrs Lovett's black comic vision (Gordon, 1992:235). The pie-maker has observed Sweeney's passionate outburst and reminds him that before he is to go on his killing spree, they ought to get rid of Pirelli's body.[27] She comes up with a lucrative plan, turning Sweeney's bloodthirst into her own practical needs:

> Seems an awful waste…
> Such a nice plump frame
> Wot's-his-name
> Has…
> Had…
> Has… (p.82)

Mrs Lovett's inspiring entrepreneurship takes a turn as she puts her practicality to "good" use and suggests keeping Pirelli's corpse for business ventures. Carefully approaching Sweeney with her idea, she indiscreetly hints at her plan. The humour of her changing tenses (has, had , has, get, got) and the laborious effect of rhymes in the following lines (lift, thrift, gift, drift) not only underline how she is trying to get her point across but also serve to camouflage the macabre quality of her suggestion (Gordon, 1992:236)

---

[27] In an earlier scene, Pirelli confronts Sweeney, threatening to expose his true identity. Thus, Sweeney kills him and hides his body in a trunk.

Business needs a lift-
Debts to be erased-
Think of it as thrift,
As a gift…
If you get my drift… (p.82)
(…)

I mean,
With the price of meat what it is,
When you get it,
If you get it-

Todd
(Becoming aware)
Ah!

Lovett
Good, you got it. (p.82)

The moment Sweeney catches on to Mrs Lovett's cruel idea, his stern melancholy turns into a brief moment of sardonic euphoria, enough to enjoy the delicious irony of her suggestion (Knapp, 2006:340). This change is driven by an excited tempo.

Todd
Mrs Lovett, how I've lived
Without you all these years, I'll never know!
How delectable!
Also undetectable!

How choice!
How rare!

Lovett
Think about it!
Lots of other gentlemen'll
Soon be comin' for a shave,
Won't they?
Think of
All them
Pies! (p.83)

As Mrs Lovett throws in her interjections, Sweeney's bizarre punning gives us a glimpse of his maniacal world. The manic wit of the number is introduced through the double entendres of "delectable", "choice", and "rare". At the same time, Mrs Lovett spells out her plan and directly associates "Lots of (…) gentlemen" with "All them Pies". Sweeney delightedly warms to the notion more and more, as exciting possibilities seem to open up:

For what's the sound of the world out there?…
Those crunching noises pervading the air?
…It's man devouring man, my dear,
And who are we
To deny it in here? (p.8)

The corruption, torment and horror he has witnessed in all his experiences have finally found a form of release and expression. Gordon (1992:337) remarks that "the exploitation and abuse at

the core of this society is given a concrete form in Mrs Lovett's plan, as the perversion of the social contract and the breakdown of all fellow feeling is fittingly symbolised by the capitalistic cannibalism she proposes". The duo (Fig. 8) then enter into a raucous comic routine in which they gleefully try to top each other, imagining the different tastes, flavours and textures of their prospective human pie fillings.

[Figure 8. This image shows Angela Lansbury as Mrs Lovett and Len Cariou as Sweeney Todd in the original Broadway production of *Sweeney Todd*. Image downloaded from: https://www.playbill.com/gallery/photo-special-attend-the-tale-of-sweeney-todd-the-many-faces-of-the-demon-barber-of-fleet-street-com-330399?slide=31 in October 2021.]

Lovett
It's priest. Have a little priest.

Todd
Is it really good?

Lovett
Sir, it's too good, at least!
Then again, they don't commit sins of the flesh,
So it's pretty fresh.

Todd
Awful, lot of fat.

Lovett
Only where it sat.

Todd
Haven't you got poet, or something like that?

Lovett
No, y'see, the trouble with poet is

How do you know it's deceased?
Try the priest!

Todd
(Tasting it)
Heavenly. (pp.84-85)

Despite the dark undercurrent and malevolent motivation underlying all the jokes, the song's lively beat seduces characters and audience into complicity and mayhem (Gordon 1992:238). In the tradition of music hall, Mrs Lovett delivers risqué teases accompanied by a comic vamp:

Since marine doesn't appeal to you, how about rear admiral?

Todd
Too salty. I prefer general.

Lovett
With or without his privates? "With" is extra. (p.88)

While she gets carried away in her jubilant fantasies of feeding the people to their neighbours, Sweeney stays focused on the plan's relevancy:

Todd
The history of the world, my love —

Lovett
Save a lot of graves,
Do a lot of relatives favors!

Todd
Is those below serving those up above!

Lovett
Ev'rybody shaves,
So there should be plenty of flavors!

Todd
How gratifying for once to know

Both:
That those above will serve those down below! (p.86)

Sweeney never loses track of his motivation and original cause. Thus, his frenzied humour takes a turn when he exclaims:

I'll come again when you
Have Judge on the menu… (p.89)

This sudden specificity, considering his rage, brings upon a feeling of realistic threat. This no longer seems like a fantasy but an actual plan set in motion. And so the number concludes with Sweeney's reassertion of the intention to blindly punish all who approach him.

> *Todd:*
> We'll not discriminate great from small!
> No, we'll serve anyone-
> Meaning anyone-
>
> *Both:*
> And to anyone
> At all! (p.90)

Gordon (1992:239) writes that the reverse love duet brings about a response of laughter and then an after-reaction of great unease, similarly to what Sondheim achieves in *Company*. The most disturbing dimension of this number is that it presents the first real human connection in the show, the first meshing of sensibilities within what passes for a genuine community in musical terms- and as long for this musical gesture, we embrace it wholeheartedly at the cost of being implicated in the crimes (Knapp, 2006:340). Where in *Company* the unease was brought upon by the tension built up in seeing oneself in the characters, here, the song, which by it's comic nature releases tension, thematically does the opposite: building to a climax, forcing the audience into complicity.

Just as the interplay of themes like pity and fear, humour and horror fuel one another, so do their representatives, Sweeney and Mrs Lovett: the driver and the facilitator (Mordden, 2016:108). Schlesinger (2000:125) defines their relationship as the shared paranoid disorder "Folie a deux" (craziness of two): "two people bound by mutual madness, sharing a skewed view of the universe and bolstering each other's distortions, warbling happily about pies made out of people".

"Johanna"

The beginning of Act 2 welcomes a booming pie business, as well as the arrival of Sweeney's new death-machine: a barber chair that catapults his victims directly into the basement, ready for dispatch. "I have another friend" (p.100), Sweeney says, clearly directing his love only to murderous instruments.

As the young sailor Anthony wanders the streets of London, searching for his beloved Johanna, he sings out her name in love and hope. Sweeney joins in serenading his daughter, as the two men share a dreamlike duet of love and longing (Gordon, 1992:241). Then, calmly singing, Sweeney absent-mindedly slits the throat of an unsuspecting customer and sends him into the underground. He seems in no way affected by this action, having reached a state of resigned detachment. Killing is no longer motivated by his passionate rage but by the necessity of his existence. Instead of singing about reunification, Sweeney sings of parting and farewell. He has made peace with the fact that he has wholly abandoned human affection in order to survive:

And if you're beautiful, what then,
With yellow hair, like wheat?
I think we shall not meet again-
(He slashes the customer's throat)
My little dove, my sweet
Johanna…

(…)

Goodbye, Johanna.
You're gone, and yet you're mine.
I'm fine, Johanna,
I'm fine.
(He pulls the lever and the customer disappears down the chute)
(pp.108-109)

The stark contrast between mood and action may induce a sense of dread, but Sweeney's calmness and vocal gentility dampen this effect. The loving core of his character is reflected here, turning this moment into a rather tragic one. The inability to access that love (or any other emotion for that matter) is expressed in the efficiency of his dispatch, Gordon (1992:242) says. She adds that Sweeney seems to have lost any particular motive. He expresses his need for generalised revenge in "a song of lost love and innocence, poignant and beautiful both in melody and lyric simplicity".

If only angels could prevail
We'd be the way we were,
Johanna…
Wake up, Johanna!
Another bright red day!
We learn, Johanna,
To say
Goodbye… (pp.111-112)

Sweeney rests assured that only divine intervention can restore his humanity but lacks the faith that this could ever happen. He claims to put the past behind him while conjuring an ideal version of her that he insists on believing (McLaughlin, 2016:125). He reveals his obsession with ideals, demanding that his romanticised vision of Johanna be frozen to exist eternally outside of time "you stay, Johanna- / The way I've dreamed you are" (pp. 109-110). Amid of all this madness he shows a moment of self-reflection and awareness, distancing himself from his own identity, which reveals the tragic nature of this moment. McLaughlin (2016:124-125) argues that the song acts as a transition moment for Sweeney - "his family, which has provided the main motivation for his narrative of achieving justice, is becoming remote, less real, more idealised and his revenge, represented here by the anonymous men he is murdering, is becoming more abstract".

"By the Sea"

While Sweeney spirals down a hole of brooding depression, Mrs Lovett delights in her commercial success. Frightfully unaware of her partner's preoccupation and showing a remarkable lack of compassion, she approaches the delicate subject of their romantic relationship. Bouncing her flirtations off her careless and largely unresponsive partner, she expresses her desires in the form of a seaside fantasy. The urge to escape the grim and gloomy world of the city is found in many popular Victorian songs, especially in the music hall tradition (Gordon, 1992:243), making the form familiar and the lyric pattern almost recognisable. Such songs include "I do like to be beside the Seaside" by John Glover-Kind (1908) or "Let's all go down the Strand" by Harry Castling and C.W. Murphy (1910).

It becomes evident that this is *her* dream, *her* vision, based entirely on *her* terms, leaving no room for her love interest to get a word in edgeways. The tone, lyrics and music completely match up with her personality. Thus her simple dream of domestic bliss in a little seaside cottage with Sweeney is expressed to a bright and jaunty rhythm as if prancing along a promenade.

> By the sea, in our nest
> We could share our kippers
> With the odd-paying guest
> From the weekend trippers
> Have a nice, sunny suite
> For the guests to rest in
> Now and then, you could do the guest in-
> By the sea.
> Married nice and proper,
> By the sea-
> Bring along your chopper
> To the seaside,
> Hoo! Hoo!
> By the beautiful sea (p.119)

The wittiness of her character and carefree state of economic bliss are made clear in the rhyming patterns, such as "kippered, kip, kippers, straight, Straits, slipping, slippers". These patterns delight the ear as well as the intellect, Gordon (1992:244) writes. Mrs Lovett longs for a respectable life of domesticity. Her dreams of being accepted by society are directly linked to her amorality. She happily accommodates Sweeney's need to murder, "Now and then, you could do the guest in", knowing very well that he secures her comfort and security. This imbalance is made clear in the rhyme "proper/chopper", which emphasises the absurdity of her moral system and strong opportunism. Mc Laughlin (2016:213) writes that "this is not to say that she does not love Sweeney in her way, but it is also a love that is subordinated by attaining security, wealth and status". After all, Mrs Lovett associates the seaside with money when she mentions her "rich Aunt Nettie" (p.127), whom she used to visit.

She paints a picture of their married life, her version of a home and family, while being as much about acquiring the signs of middle-class social status as about love (McLaughlin, 2016:214). Getting married would eliminate any negative social stigma. McLaughlin adds that where Sweeney is obsessed with attaining justice for things done in the past, Mrs Lovett is focused on the future and attaining more wealth. An end to these desires, however, judging by Sweeney's view of society, will always be deferred. Her narrative will never find an ending, while Sweeney's narrative seems to have ended a long time ago.

"The Finale"

As the story unfolds and races toward a climactic ending, in an attempt to get her out of the way before the Judge arrives, Sweeney slits the Beggar Woman's throat and shoves her body down the chute, unaware that she is his wife, Lucy. At this moment, Sweeney's vengeance/salvation theme from "Epiphany" sounds demonstratively. This time Sweeney murders the Judge. Then, expressing his sense of release, he lays down his murderous instruments and softly sings:

> Rest now, my friend,
> Rest now, forever.
> Sleep now the untroubled
> Sleep of the angels (p.147)

The Dies Irae sounds again, pointing towards ultimate doom. The final confrontation does not come in the form of civil justice or authority but develops between Sweeney and Mrs Lovett. The pie-maker confesses that Lucy had not died at all. Knowingly, she kept Sweeney in the dark. She tries to justify her deception by declaring her love for him and assuring him that she'd be "twice the wife [Lucy] was" (p.150). As she recites the truth to Sweeney, he keens in the background, slowly rises, his lamentation ceasing- "he smiles and, to the Waltz that first cemented their macabre relationship" (Gordon, 1992:248), sings:

> Mrs Lovett,
> You're a bloody wonder,
> Eminently practical and yet
> Appropriate as always.
> As you've said repeatedly,
> There's little point in dwelling on the past. (pp.150-151)

Sweeney charms his betrayer into a false sense of security, as he did with his victims. Mrs Lovett relaxes into her familiar ease, delightedly babbling her song of seaside fantasies. Sweeney manoeuvres her towards the oven and, in a surprising move, pushes her into the flames. None of this brings Sweeney any of the much-desired release, as he holds the body of his dead wife. Mrs Lovett's young apprentice Toby creeps up behind him, picks up Sweeney's razor and slits the barber's throat. He does not resist, finally understanding both what has been done to him and what he has done to others. As Sweeney accepts his death, so does the audience. This is not the arbitrary death of melodrama but the necessary death of tragedy. And thus, in his final moments,

Sweeney achieves the status of a tragic hero (Gordon, 19092:249). There is a postmodern element here, in that Sweeney's death, which seems final, does not bring with it the expected narrative closure. Sweeney has become both victim *and* assailant, protagonist *and* antagonist. Furthermore, Sweeney and Mrs Lovett have set in motion an enterprise that is likely to continue under their symbolic child Toby, regardless of their motives.

The chorus re-appears, and the cast is resurrected, reminding us that this was merely a tale. This time it is Toby who sings "Attend the tale of Sweeney Todd", but now the incitement "attend" includes the admonition of "heed", urging us to learn from the tale (Knapp, 2006:341). The greater part of the prologue is repeated, indicating a cyclical working of the world, as the symbolic finger points at the audience.

> Sweeney wishes the world away
> Sweeney's weeping for yesterday,
> Hugging the blade, waiting for years,
> Hearing the music that nobody hears (p.155)

The audience has now heard "the music that nobody heard": "the music that defines Sweeney's world, the music of revenge lust, the music that keeps the past alive and holds sway over the present (Knapp, 2006:341). The finale warns us that Sweeney may be right beside us, that he lives around and within anyone who hears his music, "Sweeney waits in the parlour hall/ Sweeney leans on the office wall/ Isn't that Sweeney there beside you?" (p.155).

The melodramatic foundation of the musical leaves a lot of potential to ridicule the source material. However, Sondheim decided to show us a protagonist motivated by passion and led astray by injustice. He avoided turning Sweeney into a champion of the underclass, ridding the world of the "bad guys". Instead, Sweeney makes no distinctions among his victims, whereby they become both ultimate commodities and ultimate consumers (Knapp, 2006:333). This precise idea arguably applies to *Company* and *A Little Night Music* as well. In both shows the characters buy into a world of which they are also victims.

The lines between "good", "evil", "right", "wrong" are blurred, and thus this moral show does not preach morality. Instead, Sondheim invites us into the workings of Sweeney's identity by use of underscoring, leading to a sudden awakening on Sweeney's part, pulling us further into his world and reasserting his domination over the world's tone. Providing access to Sweeney's inner life, the music fuses and expresses *his* sense of the world above all else, Knapp (2006:337) explains. The dominant malevolent presence cannot die at the end, as it is so deeply intertwined with the world we have come to know. Even after his death Sweeney's ongoing music asserts that the world has fully become *his* world. McLaughlin (2016:132) writes that the narrative resists closure but instead circles back on itself as "Sweeney becomes both antagonist and protagonist, the object and agent of revenge, the motivation of his own weird, perverted crusade for justice".

There are two points of interest one could add to Lacan's stages of transformation. Firstly, the moment Sweeney subtly "gets it" in "A little Priest", linking his lustful vengeance with a brief stint of joy and secondly, when he recognises the beggar woman, whom he has just killed, to be his wife, Lucy. Finally, as the narrative resists closure, he holds his dead wife in his arms, admitting that he is still "naive" (p.151).

Sweeney dramatises the dark implications of tragic revenge, while Mrs Lovett's amoral exploitation of his murderous rage is nestled in the comic tones of black comedy and burlesque (Knapp, 2006:333). Thus, the comedy deflects brutality, mitigating the pessimism and exposing "the perversity in the distorted mirror of her crazy pragmatism" (Gordon, 1992:253). Sondheim marries the comic and tragic elements in a way that both can coexist with their full integrity. The humour distances the horror of the story but does not trivialise it. Arguably, the Victorian ethical concepts and the immoral behaviour of the time and the world presented may very well reflect the contemporary complacency and brutality of modern society. Thus, the postmodern "dramatic strategy of the show provides a simple and effective means to blend melodrama with farce" (Knapp, 206:333). These are Sondheim's favourite forms of theatre, as they are obverse sides of the same coin, creating a pattern of first "scaring the hell" out of the audience and then rescuing the situation by making them laugh (Secrest, 1998:190).

While Sweeney's identity grows from the desire of a completed narrative (the *melodrama*), Mrs Lovett's identity is steeped in the perpetual desires of the very society Sweeney is rebelling against (the *music hall*). Thus, "the play calls into question the reliance on completed narrative structure as a means of organising knowledge and warns of the dangers of generating desires for infinitely deferred goals", McLaughlin (2016:133) states. He adds that the means of understanding identity and making sense of the world are more likely to warp whatever truth might be available to us. Gordon (1992:249) writes that unlike *melodrama*, *Sweeney Todd* "lacks the unambiguous idealistic certainty". Mordden (2016:106) expands on the comparison to more politically-minded (moral) plays, claiming that their perspective is legalistic, while Sweeney Todd is humanistic. The political works see catastrophe in the very existence of power structures, while Sondheim's *Sweeney Todd* sees it in the nature of man.

The argument of identity construction goes further, when linking it to postmodern theatre. Postmodernism aims to break down the boundaries set by conventional story-book characters. Limitations to the development of identities continuously weaken, creating characters beyond these traditional boundaries (as seen in Rodgers and Hammerstein shows, for example). Sondheim develops this idea stylistically and thematically, allowing the characters' development to extend into the world of the audience. The effect was that audiences no longer came to the theatre to forget the world outside, but instead were intensely reminded of it, as seen especially in *Company*. Relating to *Sweeney Todd*, specifically, the audience gets forced into ambivalence, as

they become part of Sweeney's target. This ambivalence has been very apparent in previous protagonists, but now includes the audience. Sondheim shows us a world, not unlike our own, cannibalising society - a world that ultimately strips us of our power over our own narrative. The film-like quality of Sondheim's score lures the audience into sharing Sweeney's point of view. The Dies Irae theme elevates Sweeney's character close to divinity, almost conquering all moral principles, while Mrs Lovett's musical stylings remind us lightheartedly that, at times, we find cruelty and violence appealing.

The following show, *Into the Woods*, establishes identities that are entirely linked to their narratives. In the final discussion I will explore what happens to these identities, once their narratives disintegrate.

Chapter 4: Into the Woods

The previous chapter explored how Sondheim constructed identities by contrasting juxtaposing motives and narratives. *Sweeney Todd* makes clear how these narratives are built from desires, a central theme in *Into the Woods* (1987). However, it is only when desire disintegrates and thus, narrative structure falls, that identities form. After providing an overview of the conception, style and use of narrative, I will explore how Sondheim constructs identities in the momentary absence of narrative, the "in-between". I will also take into account the role of community in identity formation.

Into the Woods marks Sondheim's second collaboration with writer/director James Lapine. This multi-faceted exploration of fairy tales, the human condition and loss of innocence has found steady resonance in the Sondheim canon since its Broadway premiere on November 5th, 1987, at the Martin Beck (now Al Hirschfeld) Theatre and is still performed regularly today.[28] Stephen Sondheim composed the show's music and lyrics, while James Lapine acted as author and director.

The Narrator announces the familiar words "Once upon a time-" (p.3.), propelling the audience directly into the story, highlighting the intertextual nature of the show. Sondheim makes clear immediately that this is going to be a fairy tale, based on the traditional fairy tale structure. The sudden, explosive first chord prepares the audience for a show full of surprises. Similar to the first words uttered in *Sweeney Todd*, "Attend the tale" (p.1), the narrator reveals the familiar world unfolding, most probably having grown up listening to tales like *Cinderella*, *Little Red Riding Hood*, *Jack and the Beanstalk*, etc. These characters, while following their dreams, stray from the path, explore the world and provide the material for this layered musical. However, its revisionist approach to their tales enters new territory with a complex re-evaluation, investigating what turning dreams and wishes into reality means for an individual, as well as for their community (Jubin, 2018:2). *Sweeney Todd* follows a similar revisionist line, where the originally two-dimensional protagonist is given a context where specific motivations back his actions. This postmodern story-telling device will be explained further later.

Sondheim and Lapine had planned to write a "quest"-musical along the lines of *The Wizard of Oz* but struggled to find a clear path through a realm of infinite plot possibilities.[29] He recounts that Lapine came up with the notion of inventing a fairy tale in the classic fairy tale tradition, which was to be musicalised and expanded into a full evening. The short nature of fairy tales with plots that

---

[28] Prior to its move to Broadway, *Into the Woods was* workshopped at Playwrights Horizons in Manhattan and debuted in San Diego at the Old Globe Theatre in 1986.

[29] The novel *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, written by L. Frank Baum was made famous through Victor Fleming's film version *The Wizard of Oz* in 1939.

turn on a dime presents few characters and even fewer complications (Sondheim, 2011:57). Lapine thus came up with a story that brought famous fairy tale characters together, whose lives would collide and intertwine in a common meeting ground. And hence the notion of *Into the Woods* was born:

> "In a folktale time and setting, a childless baker and his wife are told by a witch that they will be able to conceive if they can find and bring to her four objects: a cow as white as milk, a cape as red as blood, hair as yellow as corn and a slipper as pure as gold. In the course of their quest, the Baker and his Wife encounter Cinderella, Little Red Riding Hood and Jack (of 'Jack and the Beanstalk') and become part of their stories. At the end of the first act, they achieve their goal. The second act deals with the consequences of what they did to get there." (Sondheim, 2011:57)

Before analysing the songs, it should help to clear a path through the figurative thicket of the woods and generate an understanding of the role of narrative and its place in postmodern theatre. Next, I will investigate the themes and stylistic tools of *Into the Woods* before focusing on identity construction in Sondheim's *processing songs* and the *Finale.*[30]

The traditional narrative structure implies a series of events tied into a story through the organising principles of beginning, middle and end. Thus, narrative enables us to combine separate, disconnected moments and organise them into an epistemological structure. McLaughlin (2016:66) leans on Foucault's description of the "modern episteme", which he describes as "the fundamental structure by which knowledge is constructed in a particular era, consisting of origin, end and a cause-and-effect sequence that connects the two". This means that to know phenomena completely, they must have reached the end of their process and time must have stopped. While the phenomena are ongoing, their anticipated endings will likely differ from the actual result. Thus, in a postmodern context, traditional narrative seems somewhat imprisoning due to its limitations.

Applying this concept to the previously discussed musicals, one could argue that:

1. In *Company* there is no plot to inspire an anticipated ending. Instead, different parallel scenarios drive the protagonist to reach a conclusion. Thus, one could argue that narrative is not absent but simply non-linear.
2. In *A Little Night Music* the narrative is constructed to make the audience anticipate *an* outcome. This is partly owed to the familiar design based on the Mozartean sex comedy. The characters are oblivious to their follies, and the constellation of the result is uncertain until the end.

---

[30] I am using the term *processing song* to define songs in which characters undergo a mental transition by reflecting on an event that has just happened, which, through their own action, has changed their narrative.

3. In *Sweeney Todd* narrative is the most linear, while the chorus and the Dies Irae constantly foreshadow doom. How the characters reach their anticipated tragic ending is unknown, creating the needed tension to propel the plot forward.

In *Into the Woods* the tension of clear anticipation ("once upon a time") versus outcome ("happily ever after") drives the decisions the characters make in the hope of providing structure to their identities, and thus drives the narrative.

The postmodern angle on the show's narrative reveals its further postmodern qualities. One of the main elements is intertextuality: something familiar is taken and "turned inside out to reveal the unexpected layers and give them new relevance" (Jubin, 2018:5). Spohr et al. (1994:747) identify that while a logical dramaturgy drives plots in other works, here, it is "the stereotypical behaviour of fairy tale characters who do not always act rationally" at the mercy of desires that overpower sensible action. Thus, while the familiar fairy tale characters are determined to reach their anticipated goals, the psychological narrative counteracts their original narrative and throws them off the path, literally and figuratively. Sondheim used these well-known characters as archetypes, out of which he drew the complexities, giving them considerably more agency than in their respective fairy tales and turning them into relatable human personages confronted with making choices and dealing with their consequences.

The Narrator narrates the story in the first act, so the audience identifies him as an outside entity. He builds the bridge between spectators and characters and provides distance between them (as we have previously seen done in *Sweeney Todd* through the chorus). At this point he seems to control the narrative, but the second act challenges this idea. The characters are made aware of the Narrator and sacrifice him to the Giant in an attempt to save their lives. And so the show moves even further into the territory of postmodern story-telling, effectively announcing to the audience that from this point onward, "all bets are off, including the presumption that all fairy tales must end happily" (Jubin, 2018:36). Before his demise, the Narrator exclaims:

> "If you drag me into this mess, you'll never know how your story ends. You'll be lost!" (p.102)

Jubin points out that this murder leads to uncertainty for the characters as well as the audience. With the Narrator's death, the audience loses the narrative link between them and the fairy tale protagonists, thus involving the spectators in the events more directly. He explains that "the disorientation and moral confusion of the people [on stage] becomes *our* disorientation, which makes their moral decisions easier to relate to and easier to evaluate".

Postmodernism takes issue with the notion of "happily ever after", which is a central theme in the show- and so does Sondheim. In *Company*, he left the ending open; in *A Little Night Music* he

makes intensely aware that the ending is only a momentary state of bliss; and in *Sweeney Todd* the protagonist dies tragically. In *Into the Woods,* little dishonesties enable the characters to reach their happy endings by the end of the first Act (Sondheim, 2011:58). However, these transgressions have repercussions in the second Act, which deals with the "ever-after" effects, proving that the end of a narrative can only exist, once time has stopped.

Knapp (2006:151) proposes that "technically, a fairy tale is a clear demonstration of cause and effect, presenting actions and their consequences within a closed system in which the consequences will last 'ever after'". This proposes a few issues in plotting a story such as *Into the Woods*. When fairy tales are placed 'once upon a time in a far off kingdom', they impose an insulating distance between themselves and other tales. Knapp (2006:150) identifies that one story having the power to affect the outcome of another violates the integral nature of fairy tales. It was thus essential for the various tales depicted in *Into the Woods* not to tamper with each other's traditional core events, allowing the characters to follow their fairy tale trajectories. Lapine wrote his own story about a Baker and his Wife to weave the different fairy tales together and act as the catalyst for the events to unfold.

The woods, where so many stories take place, are the "all-purpose symbol of the unconscious, the womb, the past, the dark place where we face our trials and emerge wiser or destroyed" (Sondheim, 2011:58). The woods, comparable to the mysterious countryside in *A Little Night Music*, provide the setting for exploring themes that unite these disparate stories: the difficulties of achieving maturity, the complex relationships between parent and child and ultimately the necessity of recognising human interdependence (Gordon, 1992:301). Sondheim (2011:158) explains that he and Lapine drew much of the narrative development from Carl Jung's theory that fairy tales are an indication of the collective unconscious, thus making the themes universal. The "once upon a time" - basis will eventually be compromised by its adult venue and sensibilities, such as sexuality and responsibility, without trying to strip the archetypal characters from their (initial) child-based sensibilities. As the characters develop, so do the musical themes that Sondheim attributes to each of their stories.

Sondheim defines all characters by stylistic musical motifs (e.g. Cinderella sings in a light operatic soprano, while Jack and Little Red Riding Hood express themselves in simple folk tunes and childlike rhymes). Unlike in Sweeney Todd however, these are not character-, but narrative-driven, as Sondheim uses musical themes for different topics.[31] They derive from subjects, such as "Magic Beans" or a "Nice Prince". A "leitmotivic" approach, as seen in *Sweeney Todd,* would have probably been too limiting, considering the many interactions the characters have with each other. This approach allows the various characters to adopt specific melodic variations depending

[31] Banfield (1994:393) identifies three basic musical ideas which provide the basis upon which the whole score is founded: the rhythmic "journey" motif (made of of quarter notes); the "magic beans" motif (a melody consisting of five notes); and the chord that accompanies the witch's spell.

on what they are singing about or whose narrative they are propelling. Thus, motifs are used, repeated and transformed throughout the score.

> "What I'm trying to do with the score is to sprinkle it with ditties; I'm trying to do little sixteen-, thirty-two-, and eight-bar tunes almost cartoonish except in a sort of contemporary style. Morals, and travelling songs. And these little tunes start to go strange in the second act. You see, the first act is fast and funny and light and the second act is less goof and a bit darker, so I would like the score to reflect that." (Sondheim, qt. by Zadan, 1986: 356)

Orchestrator John Tunick explains that these short rhythmic and melodic fragments, carefully fitted in and partially reprised, imbue the score with a feeling of one continuous composition (Mankin, 1988:62), thus resembling a through-composed work. The libretto interweaves spoken and sung dialogue, allowing characters to express themselves as much in spoken word as in song.[32] The character's indecisiveness and fruitless attempts to solve or address their problems are expressed musically in Sondheim's melodies. They "swerve, advance, float and circle back like the very plots which they sing", avoiding the clarity of progression (Young, 2000:83). One could also see Sondheim and Lapine's approach to plotting and musical construction as a mosaic. This illustrates the postmodern idea of identity being individual *and* dependant on a complex network (a community).

The score is gentler and less suggestive than the ones previously discussed. The opening sequence constructs a rigid beat, which is felt throughout act one. While this beat is re-established in the opening of act two, it is less emphasised in the songs thereafter. Furthermore, the greater part of the act two score is written in the minor key. The characters no longer express themselves in a nursery-rhyme-like style, but blatantly lay bare their emotions. These elements reflect the deconstructed narrative.

Lapine proposed that each familiar folktale figure (Little Red Riding Hood, Jack and Cinderella) should have a musical soliloquy directed at the audience about their adventures. The creators quickly realised that it would be more interesting if they dealt with the meaning the characters associated with these adventures rather than simply re-telling them (Sondheim, 2011:69).[33] One could argue that these *processing songs* may be inappropriate in a farce, as they slow down the show's pace or stop it entirely. In this case, however, each song inspires the character to make a decision, propelling the plot forward. This resulted in a thematic idea, tying all five processing songs/sequences together: the experience of learning. In these numbers, the characters open up to reveal to us their dynamic inner life.

---

[32] This is unlike the traditional Rodgers and Hammerstein integrated musical, where characters start to sing only when their emotions are too strong to be expressed in dialogue.

[33] This too adds a postmodern quality to the narrative. Since we do not see what actually happened, the source is unreliable.

The songs I will be discussing are:

1. “I know things now”
2. “Giants in the Sky”
3. “On the Steps of the Palace”
4. “Moments in the Woods”
5. The Finale, comprised of “Last Midnight”, “No More”, “No One is Alone”, and “Children will listen” (This is more of a *processing sequence*, in which the characters reflect on their past and on how they need to shape their future)

“I know things now”

Sondheim (2011:69) defines Red Riding Hood’s (from now on referred to as ‘Red’) musical soliloquy “I know things now” as a signpost on the road of the story. The aspect of knowing something that one did not know before is re-iterated in each of the following processing songs, as “the words of the title recur and resonate in each of the other soliloquies about experience”. He adds that these culminate in the self-assessment of the Baker’s Wife in act two, who, contrary to the others, concludes that she prefers life the way it is (and ironically falls to her death immediately after). “I know things now” is the first song in which a character sums up their experience, breaking the fourth wall and providing a moral to their own story.

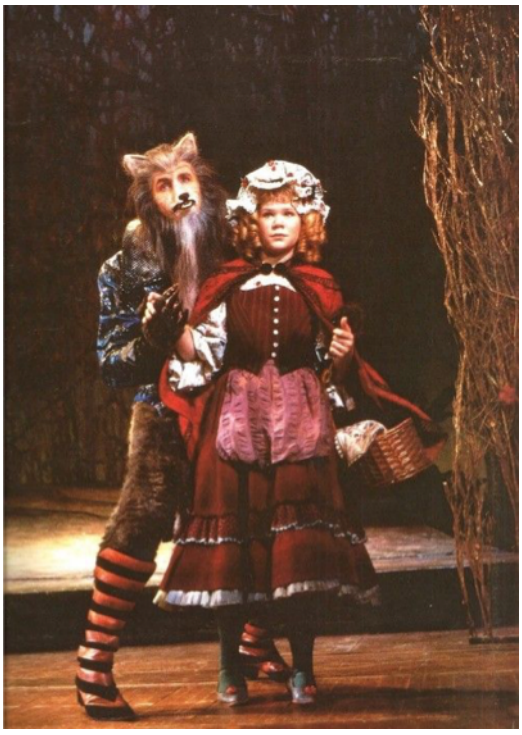
> Mother said,
> "Straight ahead"
> Not to delay
> or be mislead.
> I should have heeded
> Her advice…
>
> But he seemed so nice (p.34)

With a tune reminiscent of a nursery rhyme melody, the simple AABB rhyme scheme reinforces the mantra by which Red has learned to live. As she starts disregarding her mother’s rules, the last line moves away from the hop-skip sentiment, as does the rhyme scheme. Red moves away from her prescribed path, thus inviting the possibility for her own narrative.

> And he showed me things,
> Many beautiful things,
> That I hadn't thought to explore.
> They were off my path,
> So I never had dared.
> I had been so careful
> I never had cared.
> And he made me feel excited-
> Well, excited and scared. (p.35)

Although having been led astray by the Wolf (Fig. 9) to pick some beautiful flowers for her grandmother, Red does not use the word “flowers” in her account. Instead, she sings about “things”, suggesting that going off the path opened up her world to many more things than flowers. “I had been so careful, I never had cared” poses a fascinating argument, as her carelessness derives entirely from her care*fulness.* This implies that the structures that had been set in place for her- structures intended to keep her on the right path- diminished her awareness of the world and its challenges, lulling her into a false sense of security. “Excited and scared” clearly shows her ambivalence. The word “excited” is repeated and is thus the over-powering of the two emotions. The jolly, child-like tune provides insight into her youthful innocence and honest point of view. Still, it becomes interspersed with dissonant string slurs in the following passage, announcing malevolent energy.

When he said, "Come in!"
With that sickening grin,
How could I know what was in store?
Once his teeth were bared,
Though, I really got scared-
Well, excited and scared- (p.35)



[Figure 9. This image shows Danielle Ferland as Red and Robert Westenberg as the Wolf, in the original Broadway production of *Into the Woods*. Image downloaded from https://www.pinterest.com/pin/303430093615436671/ in October 2021.]

Remarkably, as the Wolf bares his teeth, Red remains excited in the face of death. This time, however, “scared”, which she repeats, trumps “excited”, echoing the sentiments of a new daunting experience. Knapp (2006:150) suggests that Red responds to the Wolf similarly to how

an innocent girl might respond to sexual advances from a stranger, “initially flattered, but eventually disgusted by the physical messiness of the act itself”. She continues:

> But he drew me close
> And he swallowed me down,
> Down a dark slimy path
> Where lie secrets that I never want to know,
> And when everything familiar
> Seemed to disappear forever,
> At the end of the path
> Was Granny once again. (p.35)

As her story becomes more dramatic, the accompaniment moves away from the nursery rhyme style. The rhyme disappears completely, as her innocence is struggling to stay intact, and all sense of safety disintegrates, accentuated by the tremolo of the strings. Her traumatic experience is intersected by a return to the familiar, her grandmother, giving her a momentary sense of safety. Once the two of them are saved by the Baker, Red recounts her lesson from these events.

> And I know things now,
> Many valuable things,
> That I hadn't known before:
> Do not put your faith
> In a cape and a hood-
> They will not protect you
> The way that they should-
> And take extra care with strangers,
> Even flowers have their dangers.
> And though scary is exciting,
> Nice is different than good. (p.35)

Red recognises that an increase in knowledge also means a loss of innocence. Unlike Knapp’s theory, Francis (2014:352) does not believe that Red was sexually abused when the Wolf ate her but sees a resemblance to how a child might displace their sexual anxieties in their dreams. This notion resonates with Knapp’s (2006:150) statement that Red, though entering adulthood, seems too simple-minded to deal with the fact that she has a sexual identity- something apparent in Jack as well: both characters display innocence, as well as a more mature or adult perspective on that innocence.

Red explains that putting one’s faith into the structures set in place is not always safe, emphasising that one carries the responsibility to be critical about new “nice” things. After all, “nice” and “good” are two different things. The distinction between “nice” and “good” is a recurring trope throughout the show, Knapp (2006:152) writes. For example, he points to the Prologue, in which Cinderella weighs her mother’s admonition to “be good” against her father’s admonition to “be nice” and thus wonders “why, if her goodness continues to go unrecognised and unrewarded, she should continue to be nice”.

Mother said be good,
Father said be nice,
(…)
What's the good of being good
If everyone is blind
Always leaving you behind (p.11)

Arguably, niceness may be enough to get the fairy tale characters through their respective fairy tale narratives - a means to an end (this sentiment has been lived by characters such as Kathy, Fredrik and Mrs Lovett). Seeing that they are now linked in a greater narrative structure, their influence on one another is much more significant. Being nice might have driven their original narrative, but it is not enough in a world where every choice has repercussions.

Red constructs her own mantra, at which point the closed rhyme scheme re-appears. However, "she is not sure whether she prefers this state of experience to her previous state of innocence", Banfield (1993:387) writes, ambivalent about "whether to live by the pleasure principle or the reality principle". Red concludes:

Now I know:
Don't be scared.
Granny is right,
Just be prepared
Isn't it nice to know a lot!
And a little bit not (p.36)

Red's soliloquy should be taken as a somewhat didactic account of what has happened, providing grounds for the dramatised difference between "nice" and "good" (Knapp, 20016:153). This processing song allows her to process the events in psychological terms, developing from her mother's instructions "Mother said/ Straight Ahead/ Not to delay/ Or be misled" towards her own realisations and conclusions. Instead of stopping the plot, this soliloquy results in her giving her red coat to the Baker, propelling the story forward.

"Giants in the Sky"

Scene 3 begins with Jack's soliloquy "Giants in the Sky", detailing his adventure climbing the beanstalk and telling us what happened once he arrived above the clouds. McLaughlin (2016: 170) describes this as a Lacanian progression. As children develop psychologically, Lacan (1901-1981) proposes that "they move from a sense of identity based in unity with their mother and environment to a more fragmented sense of self". When Jack moves away from his mother, fragments of his identity become clearer as he makes his first life-defining choice. He climbs the beanstalk, acting on his narrative to escape poverty, and in contrast to Red, who found a new world within, he finds a world outside the kingdom (Jubin, 2018:21).

When you're way up high
And you look below
At the world you've left
And the things you know,
Little more than a glance
Is enough to show
You just how small you are. (p.42)

As Jack climbs the beanstalk, he sees the world grow bigger, while he regresses in size. Jack has gained a new perspective, just like travel creates awareness that one's own environment represents only a tiny part of the whole planet (Jubin, 2018:22). He realises how little he knows and that this journey (just like Red's curiosity toward the flowers) opens up a whole new possible narrative for him.

Where the sky is lead
And the earth is stone,
You're free to do
Whatever pleases you, (p.43)

Exploring things you'd never dare
'Cause you don't care, (p.44)

Sondheim likens the sky to lead, which in its nature is a blueish-white lustrous metal, and the earth to stone, by Jack's standard probably a dull colour.[34] Freed from the familiar connections and thus seemingly freed from social constraints, Jack makes the false assumption that he is no longer bound by moral obligations, social codes, rules and laws, thus returning to a state of infancy (McLaughlin, 2016:170). The accompaniment is similar to that of Red, childlike and reminiscent of a nursery rhyme, building, as he arrives at the top and meets a giant for the first time:

When suddenly there's
A big, tall, terrible giant at the door,
A big, tall, terrible, lady giant sweepin' the floor. (p.44)

Bemused, bewildered and excited by the sight of the lady giant, the music becomes sweeping, magical and romantic, foreboding a possible intimacy with this fantastic creature. Although the Giant is "big, tall and terrible", the music suggests that Jack approaches her with affection rather than fear, a sentiment that the Giant returns:

And she gives you food
And she gives you rest
And she draws you close

[34] In the context of crystal healing, lead is said to have properties of improving ability to continue things, bring upon a success and perseverance in achieving one's goals. However, I can find no evidence that Sondheim intended to imply such a metaphor.

To her giant breast,
And you know things now that you never knew be-
fore,
Not 'til the sky. (p.44)

Jack repeats the word “and” several times, highlighting that the boy is experiencing one new thing after another. In a way, this idea compares Jack’s experiences in the fairy tale world to the real world. Fairy tale characters’ motivations are simple, “I want to go to the ball” / “I want to visit my grandmother”. But experiencing the world comes with the complexity of adding other people’s “simple” motivations to the story. This results in an experience similar to Jack’s: one thing happens, then another, then another, regardless of one’s own influence.

The friendly lady giant provides comfort, and thus, expanding on the Lacanian theory. McLaughlin (2016:170) opines that Jack has found a “mother substitute in the Giant, with whom he can recover the unified sense of identity that he has lost as he has grown toward adulthood”. The twofold meaning of “giant breast” may also imply his growing sexual awareness.

And you know she's big
But you don't feel small (p.43)

For the first time, Jack feels valued and taken seriously out of the context of his own home and the farm life, where his function dictates his value (at least to him). Then, suddenly, a jealous male giant appears, violently threatening to eat Jack. The trauma is echoed in the dramatic minor accompaniment, signifying a transformation on Jack’s part. A musical change in mood during the transformation process is a common trait amongst all four processing songs.

And your heart is lead
And your stomach stone
And you're really scared
Being all alone…

And it's then that you miss
All the things you've known
And the world you've left
And the little you own- (p.43)

The male giant disrupts the mother-infant relationship. In a Freudian Oedipus-like scenario, Jack is threatened by the substitute father and betrayed by the substitute mother, yanked from his sense of unity and is left “being all alone” (McLaughlin, 2016:170). Again, his persistent use of the word “and” suggests many new experiences for Jack, this time on a deeper, more emotional level. While his heart (“lead”) finds fulfilment in the sky, his stomach (“stone”) represents the bit of pragmatism he has, pulling him back to earth. The threatening male giant forces Jack to re-evaluate the life he has come to know, which may not be exciting, but at least it is safe (Jubin, 2018:22). He reacts to this threat and betrayal by moving forward narratively, grabbing whatever

valuables he can, propelled by his desire for wealth- the reason he climbed the beanstalk in the first place.

> You steal what you can and run!
> And you scramble down
> And you look below,
> And the world you know
> Begins to grow: (p.43)

The nursery-rhyme melody builds to a climax, and although he is *de*scending back to Earth, he rises to a new level of consciousness, recognising:

> The roof, the house and your mother at the door.
> The roof, the house and the world you never thought
> to explore.
> And you think of all the things you've seen,
> And you wish that you could live in between,
> And you're back again,
> Only different than before,
> After the sky. (p.44)

The sweeping romantic melody, associated with the lady giant, returns, emphasising that Jack's feelings towards his home have changed. The steady bass provides safety and stability. He is equally excited at the prospect of returning, as he was about discovering a new world. However, he realises that neither extreme is what he wants in the future. Jubin (2018:22) suggests that Jack's home has been revealed to him as small and limited, whereas the kingdom in the sky may offer riches but hides mortal (and moral) dangers. Therefore, a compromise, "to live in-between", would be ideal. Like Bobby in *Company,* Jack is undecided, trying to find a balanced departure from infancy or childhood. Nonetheless, Jack has changed forever, well aware that there is so much more beyond the finite part of the world he assumed there was. Jack ends the song with the same excited exclamation he made at the beginning to anyone who will listen: that there is a whole new life out there; awe-inspiring, frightening and marvellous at once (Jubin, 2018:22). Just like Red, Jack is excited and scared:

> There are giants in the sky!
> There are big, tall, terrible, awesome, scary, wonderful
> Giants in the sky! (p.44)

"On the Steps of the Palace"

Sondheim (2011:79) remarks that Cinderella is possibly the most widely known, universal fairy tale, seeing that the story exists virtually in every culture.[35] However, the version written down by

---

[35] e.g. *Adelita* in Mexico, *Yeh-Shen* in China, *Chinye* in Nigeria

the Brothers Grimm, *Aschenputtel*, is the one that shows the most correlation to Cinderella's journey in *Into the Woods*. Not only does she visit and escape the festival on three consecutive nights, but on the third night, the prince has the staircase spread with pitch, making her lose her golden slipper.

Sondheim (2011:79) and Lapine once again approached the character's choices from a human perspective: Why does she keep on escaping? Why is she so indecisive? What exactly is her problem? Cinderella feels like an imposter and desires to be loved for who she truly is, a desire that explains the universality of her story's appeal. Lapine's solution was that Cinderella does not lose her slipper, but deliberately leaves it behind, figuring that, should the Prince really wish to see her again, he would follow her clue. If Cinderella's repeated escape from the festival is an expression of indecision, it allows the creators to display that ambivalence at a deeper level (Knapp, 2006:152).

It is important to note that out of all the fairy tale characters, Cinderella is the one who utters the first and last line of the show, "I wish". Banfield (1993:387) argues that she is very much in the position of Robert in *Company,* whose birthday wishes punctuate the beginning and the end of the drama. Just like Robert, Cinderella cannot bring herself to make a decision for or against marriage. Unlike Robert, though, she comes up with a paradoxical way of solving this dilemma (Banfield, 1993:368).

As with the previous soliloquies, we do not witness the actual event, but are being told about it by a limping Cinderella.[36] She starts her rumination:

> He's a very smart Prince,
> He's a Prince who prepares.
> Knowing this time I'd run from him,
> He spread pitch on the stairs.
> I was caught unawares.
>
> And I thought: well, he cares-
> This is more than just malice.
> Better stop and take stock
> While you're standing here stuck
> On the steps of the palace. (p.62)

The first four lines are set to a musical theme familiar to the audience. Earlier in the show, when Cinderella meets the Baker's Wife in the forest, she tells her about the Prince. However,

---

[36] In the 2015 film version of the musical, directed by Rob Marshall, Cinderella sings this song as she is stuck on the steps. Pursued by the Prince, time stops and we become part of her momentary decision-making process. The interpretative difference is that in the film version, Cinderella does not have time to evaluate the choice she has made, while in the stage version, this decision lies in the past, having allowed her to reflect on it.

Cinderella's excitement is reserved, as the only impressive feature describing the Prince is that "well, he's tall" (p.38). Hearing a reprise of this musical "Nice Prince" theme informs us of Cinderella's insecurities regarding the Prince. He is "smart" and "prepared", but only a prince and little more, as she reinforces by repeating the word "Prince". When comparing her to the traditional fairy tale Cinderella (upon whom little personality is bestowed), the fact that she is escaping the Prince for the third time gives her a sense of empowerment. Knowing the background of her choice, she could be seen as a feminist, aware of her own power, raising the stakes of her narrative. On the other hand, the Prince, performing his identity to the very last cell of his body, persistently follows his instinctual duty, making him completely powerless. Sondheim has shown us this powerlessness before, especially in the narrative-driven *A Little Night Music* and S*weeney Todd.* When seen in the context of a community, perhaps a certain lack of autonomy is necessary for a society to progress as a whole. Ironically, Cinderella, who is trapped by her stepmother, is now quite literally trapped by the Prince as well, both of which resist her true identity. Sondheim rhymes the words "malice" and "palace", showing an unconscious association between the two. He links the words with the five alliterations "stops, stock, stuck, steps". The "st" emphasises Cinderella's sticky situation.

She weighs up her options:

> You think, what do you want?
> You think, make a decision. (p.62)
> (…)
> But then what if he knew
> Who you were when you know
> That you're not what he thinks
> That he wants? (p.63)
> (…)
> And then what if you are?
> What a Prince would envision? (p.63)
> (…)
> So then which do you pick:
> Where you're safe, out of sight,
> And yourself, but where everything's wrong?
> Or where everything's right
> And you know that you'll never belong? (p.63)

The use of the second person singular "you" (which Jack also uses) becomes most apparent here. Cinderella distances herself from this decision by attempting a pragmatic and analytical look at her situation. By using the word "you", she breaks the fourth wall, allowing spectators into her process, inviting them to reflect on the decision too. The decision-making process seemingly becomes a group effort, a trait commonly seen in postmodern theatre. The melody evokes a feeling of "either-or", alternating phrases with an upward and downward lilt. Jubin (2018:28) writes that Cinderella's fear that the Prince has a false impression of her (not unfounded, considering that she is attending the ball in what amounts to a disguise) is weighed up against her fear of

living a life amongst royalty, where she feels out of place. She can choose the life she has led so far, “safe” and “out of sight”, living a painful existence, or she can choose a life of luxury and comfort, all the while never feeling truly at home. At this moment, Cinderella questions her identity, aware her choice will determine her narrative and the rest of her life. As she weighs up her priorities based on her knowledge of the Prince and what she knows about herself, the link between how knowledge informs identity and identity informs narrative is made clear. There is a sense of urgency, supported by Sondheim’s use of “-ick” rhymes:

> And whichever you pick,
> Do it quick,
> 'Cause you're starting to stick
> To the steps of the palace. (p.64)

The music changes to an agitato, accompanying Cinderella’s transformation process. Sondheim removes the bass, leaving Cinderella’s thoughts hanging up in the air uncertainly. The slur into a minor emphasises the daunting possibilities ahead:

> It's your first big decision,
> The choice isn't easy to make.
> (…)
> But you have to be wary.
> There's a lot that's at stake,
> (…)
> Better run along home
> And avoid the collision.
> Even though they don't care,
> You'll be better off there (p.63)
>
> Where there's nothing to choose,
> So there's nothing to lose.
> So you pry up your shoes. (p.64)

It becomes apparent that making a momentous choice that could change her life is too much for Cinderella at this point. She is (literally) stuck “in-between”, and going home to a place where she carries no responsibilities seems to be the most attractive option. The rhyme “choose, lose, shoes” directs her thoughts toward her final decision (*choose* to *lose* the *shoes*), which is to postpone it and place the responsibility for whether or not a relationship will ensue on the Prince (most notably, away from her).

> Then from out of the blue,
> And without any guide,
> You know what your decision is,
> Which is not to decide.
> You'll leave him a clue:

For example, a shoe.
And then see what he'll do. (p.64)

A bright lift in the melody carries a slight variation on the original “either-or” theme we heard previously. This musical “light-bulb”- moment accompanies Cinderella’s sudden stroke of genius. By deliberately leaving the slipper as a clue, she avoids making a choice, acknowledging that *that* in itself is a choice as well. While until now her identity lived in the dynamic of “either-or”, it now crystallises out of her action. Ironically, one could argue that she has trapped herself in yet another situation, giving away the freedom to decide for herself.

Now it's he and not you
Who is stuck with a shoe,
In a stew, in the goo,
And you've learned something, too,
Something you never knew,
On the steps of the palace. (p.64)

The rhymes “not you, shoe, stew, goo” almost seem forced but reiterate the unsolved, messy situation she is leaving behind. Cinderella recognises that in that moment she has learned something new. Red, Jack and Cinderella have followed their “simple motivations”, and while this leads them to happiness, wealth and romance in the original source material, here, it leads them to the place “in-between”. Due to unforeseen circumstances, all three of them are standing at a crossroads, leading them to various kinds of endings, all of which are a little bit happy and a little bit not. In this case, the postmodern form of storytelling not only shocks the characters into an unforeseen conflict but involves the audience. As a result, we realise how “human” the fairy tale characters are.

“Moments in the Woods”

The Baker and his Wife represent a contemporary urban couple amid a medieval fantasia, “surrounded not only by their own anxieties, but by all the fairy tale figures they had grown up with and probably loathed”, so Sondheim (2011:92) describes. He explains that their contemporary nature is identified through their everyday concerns and attitudes, such as being “impatient, sarcastic, bickering and resigned, are all prototypical and contemporary, coated in a stilted fairy-tale vernacular amongst fantasy creatures, who are part of everyday life”. In contrast to the other characters, even their desires are urban: earning a living and having a baby- the latter catapulting them into the woods and the plot into motion. Perhaps it is for this reason that “Moments in the Woods” articulates a somewhat different approach to narrative. The song explores the dangers of narrative as vehicle for providing meaning.

When the Baker’s Wife runs into Cinderella’s Prince, she enjoys a pinch of her secret desire to marry royalty. When the Prince makes romantic advances toward her, she turns to the audience and says, “I’m in the wrong story” (p.109). Taking into account Sondheim’s description of the

baker couple, the Baker's Wife is not only in the wrong story, but in the wrong play, commenting on the failure of narrative- echoing the sentiments of *Company*. It is the only time in the evening, Sondheim adds, that a character, apart from the Narrator, delivers an aside directly to the audience, allowing them to identify with someone from their own time - art pointing at itself . After a brief, sexual liaison with the Prince, he asks the Baker's Wife to think of their chance encounter as nothing more than a moment divorced from any larger narrative. She reflects on the advantages of perceiving life not as a narrative (a row of linked events) but as a series of separate moments, each to be experienced and understood independently. And so her processing song begins:

> What was that?
> Was that me?
> Was that him?
> Did a prince really kiss me?
> And kiss me?
> And kiss me?
> And did I kiss him back?
> Was it wrong?
> Am I mad?
> Is that all?
> Does he miss me?
> Was he suddenly
> Getting bored with me? (p.111)

These first twelve lines sum up the event in a series of questions. The repetition of "kiss me" shows how the Baker's Wife's thoughts linger with the memory of her very passionate encounter- something she probably does not experience with the Baker (anymore). There is a sudden awakening from the trance with the shocking realisation of "Did I kiss him back?", followed by a series of questions that evaluate the situation from several aspects, ranging from moral ("Was it wrong") to entitled ("Does he miss me?") to outraged ("Was he suddenly getting bored with me?")

> Wake up! Stop dreaming.
> Stop prancing about the woods.
> It's not beseeming.
> What is it about the woods? (p.111)

Another change in energy occurs as she starts to rationalise the situation. The words "dreaming, prancing, beseeming" (ABA-rhyme) reflect on her dream of being married to a prince, as they almost seem to mock her. Without a rational answer for her behaviour, she blames it on the woods.

> *(Firm)*
> Back to life, back to sense,
> Back to child, back to husband,

No one lives in the woods
There are vows, there are ties,
There are needs, there are standards
There are shouldn't and shoulds.

These firm statements emphasise the Baker's Wife's attempts to reconcile what has just happened with the rest of her life, her duties and responsibilities as a wife and as a mother. A short fermata on the pause after the word "woods" allows her to fall back into her fantasy for a brief moment before catching herself out.

Why not both instead?
There's the answer, if you're clever
Have a child for warmth
And a baker for bread
And a prince for whatever
Never!
It's these woods

Gordon (1992:312) writes that the Baker's Wife "longs to combine the wondrous ardour of the Prince with the domesticity of a husband and child". Jubin (2018:39) echoes this and explains that what seems possible in the woods, like enjoying a romantic affair with a handsome prince, is inconceivable in her day to day existence. However, self-doubts make her question her choices. She wonders why she should content herself with a marriage that provides emotional support ("warmth") and financial stability ("bread") but lacks sexual exhilaration. The Baker's Wife shyly sums up the Prince's allure in a coy "whatever", not daring to put her frustrated sexual desires into words. Thus, "certain needs are so difficult to admit that she prefers not to articulate them clearly" (Jubin, 2018:40).

The woods are imbued with a powerful magical charge, representing a crisis-ridden "now" of lessened moral responsibility, Knapp (2006:160) writes, offering unexpected dangers and tremendous rewards. All possibilities are intensified by this empowering "nowness" and the eschewed views on the moral rules within this magical realm. The "now" dimension of the woods is made explicit here.

Was that him?
Yes, it was
Was that me?
No, it wasn't
Just a trick of the woods (p.112)

At first, to preserve her self-image, as well as her admiration for the man she has just slept with, the Baker's Wife insists that the Prince acted completely *in* character, while she acted completely *out* of it (Jubin, 2018:39). However, she is infatuated with the Prince's public image

and now refuses to conceive that the real Prince is no more than a “conceited playboy” rather than a fairy tale hero, whom she has dreamed of for years. Either way, the woods are to blame.

Must it all be either less or more?
Either plain or grand?
Is it always "or?"
Is it never "and?"
That's what woods are for
For those moments in the woods

The Baker’s wife echoes a similar sentiment to that of Anne in *A Little Night Music*. While Anne denying her feelings for the security of marriage resulted in the inability to express her sexuality, the Baker’s Wife takes for granted that a woman’s role as a wife and mother is distinct from her own sexual fulfilment (Hanson, 1997:22). Hence, she must choose between the comfort and security of married life and a liaison with a handsome prince. Hanson adds that the Baker’s Wife “relishes the moment for what it was and questions the limitations of life and society where once one chooses one’s path, there is no going back”. This questions the limitations of narrative and its flexibility. The Baker’s Wife resents the fact that once you have committed yourself, options become limited: “always ‘or,’ never ‘and’ ”. The woods are not for living, which means that in understanding the forest as the unconscious, our existence needs to be controlled by the conscious mind- its decisions and desires (Jubin, 2018:14 ff.). On the other hand, a life where every desire is stilled and every dream comes true would make it impossible to acknowledge and appreciate those events of joy and achievement.

Oh, if life were made of moments
Even now and then a bad one!
But if life were only moments
Then you'd never know you had one
(p.112)

The Baker’s Wife weighs up the importance of the psychological disjuncture between the nowness of moments in the woods and the ability of those moments to become vivid, lasting memories. The discrepancy of choosing between a life of safety and a life of romance lies in viewing life as a narrative or a series of disconnected moments. She quickly realises that the latter is impossible. McLaughlin (2016:175) writes that life events and specific moments derive their meaning from their relation to other life events. Thus, narrative structure as a way of organising and providing meaning for one’s life events is problematic for many reasons. But even the Baker’s wife is aware of the importance of a story. Similarly to Jack, the “in-between” is what seems most tempting for her, but at the same time, it is not an option. In an instant, the Wife’s problem has become the contemporary soap opera dilemma: adventure versus dependability, romance versus fidelity (Sondheim, 2011:92).

Just remembering you've had an "and"

When you're back to "or"
Makes the "or" mean more
Than it did before
Now I understand
And it's time to leave the woods (p.113)

The way in which one informs identity, directly relates to one's conception of reality at a particular moment (Ott, 2003:74). After enjoying this moment of lustful fulfilment, the Baker's Wife comes to accept it *as* a moment, as a closed mini-narrative that has reached an end. Her practical side grounds her back in reality and pulls her toward her responsibility. Fulk (1999:52) concludes that the Baker's Wife's affair with Cinderella's Prince frees her from the romantic desire of having a prince. She comes to realise that returning to her husband and their baby is a choice, which she now invests with significance because of the affair- "And it's time to leave the woods". However, immediately after the Baker's Wife chooses her old life, she falls to her death, a surprise that challenges the function of narrative and, in turn, raises the stakes for the remaining characters.

"*The Finale"*

As the show draws to a close, the deconstructed fairy tale narratives reveal the thematic layers that fuel the story. The final sequence, which is a processing *sequence* (as opposed to a *song*), consists of five numbers, which develop out of the traumatic experiences the remaining characters have endured. The songs ("Your fault", "Last Midnight", "No more", "No One is Alone", and "Children will listen") frame the climax and final moments of the show. Considering the fact that almost every remaining character has lost someone close to them, one can identify parallels to the Grief Cycle, developed by Kübler-Ross in 1969:

1. Denial:	"Your Fault"	The characters argue about whom to blame.
2. Pain and Guilt:	"Last Midnight"	The Witch confronts them about their choices.
3. Anger, bargaining:	"No More"	The Baker runs away to escape responsibility.
4. Depression:	"No One is Alone"	The characters realise the importance of community.
5. Acceptance:	"Children will listen"	After defeating the threat, the characters reflect on the moral of their story.

Framing the show's final sequence this way emphasises the palpable psychological trauma the characters are experiencing, and in dealing with the situation as a group, the need for community is highlighted. In a postmodern context, the narrative is unlikely to adhere to a specific psychological structure. However, since the characters in *Into the Woods* have deconstructed their narratives completely, they are likely yearning to organise their feelings. Similarly to the characters discussed in the previous chapters, they are coming to terms with the ambiguities and complexities of the world (Francis, 2014:356), while being left alone to forge a new path through the woods. A direct link exists to Robert in *Company*, who tries to solidify his self in a world he cannot grasp. In *A Little Night Music*, the characters desperately try to break free from their pre-

determined narrative, while Sweeney reconstructs his identity in an estranged environment-revenge being the sole constituent.

The remaining characters try to shift the blame for all that happened away from themselves, denying any responsibility and getting tangled up in a blame-game patter that summarises the show thus far and emphasises the absurd effects of every thought and action, beginning at the prologue. The Witch now faces complete loss of narrative structure and tries to turn their situation into a new larger, universal narrative, ending with the Giant destroying them all. She turns to the other characters, signalling the last midnight ever, an end of time and stoppage of time's arrow in "Last Midnight", a song that is full of apocalyptic imagery (McLaughlin, 2016:178)

> It's the last midnight.
> It's the last wish.
> It's the last midnight,
> Soon it will be boom-
> Squish! (…)
>
> Nothing but a vast midnight.
> Everybody smashed flat! (p.120)

In a poignant requiem, the Witch describes a world of devastation, pointing out the havoc wrought by selfishness and condemning the other characters' dithering in the face of the apocalypse (Gordon, 1992:314). McLaughlin (2016:179) writes that everyone simultaneously tries to remove themselves from the situation while refusing to follow the Witch's pragmatic advice to sacrifice Jack to the Giant and thus save the rest of them. She sneers at them:

> You're so nice.
> You're not good,
> You're not bad,
> You're just nice.
> I'm not good,
> I'm not nice,
> I'm just right.
> I'm the Witch.
> You're the world.

The Witch rejects the others in their lost and narrative-less state. 'Being nice' is not enough, "it is only possible in a world where all difficult moral choices have been ironed out, as they are in badly written stories" (Francis, 2014:357). In the first act, Red understood that "Nice is different than good" (p.35) - "nice" is pretending that nothing is wrong. And thus, the Witch adopts the role of the truth-teller. Francis adds that Sondheim highlights the fact that the villain often states the

uncomfortable truths that the heroes are all too nice to admit. The Witch berates the hypocritical and self-righteous behaviour of the others.

> I'm the hitch.
> I'm what no one believes,
> I'm the Witch.
> You're all liars and thieves,
> Like his father,
> Like his son will be, too-
> Oh, why bother?
> You'll just do what you do. (p.121)

“The Witch despairs over a seemingly unbreakable cycle of generations of morally compromised characters, who will always put their selfish interests first” (Jubin, 2018:42). Finally, with all hope lost ever to regain a meaningful narrative or to make sense of the past, the Witch chooses solitude:

> I'm leaving you alone.
> You can tend the garden, it's yours.
> Separate and alone,
> Everybody down on all fours. (p.122)
> (…)
> All right, Mother, when?
> Lost the beans again!
> Punish me the way you did then!
> Give me claws and a hunch
> Just away from this bunch (p.122)

In an act of desperation, she throws away her beans with no regard for consequence. Instead, she actively seeks the punishment that she had originally intended to reverse. She is thus, once again, punished by her mother with ugliness, regains her powers and, in a final spectacular demonstration, disappears into the ground.

While the remaining characters are left to fend for themselves, the Baker runs away. Francis (2014:357) identifies that the Baker has reached a state of total disillusionment and tries to escape responsibility. Being confronted with the reality of being alone, he bolts into the woods, but soon comes across the Mysterious Man, his father (played by the Narrator), who, it turns out, is “not completely dead” (p.123). Knapp (2006:155) writes that when his spirit goes on to live beyond his death near the end of the first act, this metaphor serves as a reminder that consequences live on past their actions and those who generated them- and as he later sings, “we die, but we don’t” (p. 124). Jubin (2018:43) adds that this reveals to the audience that the parents’ influence on their

children does not end with their death, but that the emotional bonds with their children, as well as the values they have instilled in them, remain alive in their consciousness and the construction of their own narrative for decades to come.

The complication of narrative as an organising structure for the relativity of life events resolves to a certain extent in the song “No More”. McLaughlin (2016:176) identifies three movements. The Baker sings the first movement. After learning of his wife’s death and fighting with the remaining characters he is at his lowest point. Just like the beans, the seeds for this song were planted in the first act, when the Baker looks forward to the endpoint, wishing to remove himself from the narrative complications altogether (McLaughlin, 2016:176):

> “And then we can go about our life. No more hunting about the woods for strange objects.
> No more witches and dimwitted boys and hungry little girls.” (p.46)

However, McLaughlin adds that in Act 2, the Baker begins to reject narrative and the possibility of meaning by telling stories. He wants nothing more than to escape responsibility. This is expressed in one of the most passionate moments of the show. Sondheim translates the Baker’s anguish into music and exposes all the ambiguity of emotional conflict, exemplified in the Baker’s cry (Gordon, 1992:312):

> No more riddles.
> No more jests.
> No more curses you can't undo,
> Left by fathers you never knew.
> No more quests.
> No more feelings.
> Time to shut the door.
> Just… No more. (p.123 f.)

The phrase “no more” is mentioned three times, followed by an intermittent line, before repeating twice. Finally, the third repetition of “no more” is placed at the end of the verse, after an ellipsis. This creates a sense of loss for words while bringing the core of the sentiment to a clear conclusion. There is an interesting observation to make here: The Baker does not use the words “stop” or “end”. “No more” implies that he still sees himself as part of the narrative and takes responsibility for it. Unlike the previous characters, the Baker realises that being “in-between” is not a place, but rather a direction. The use of the archaic world of the fairy tale in the language highlights the postmodern device of self-referentiality, while the Baker manages to explore contemporary urban grief and never letting go of the particular created milieu (a quality Sondheim has previously displayed in the stylised *A Little Night Music* and *Sweeney Todd)*.

In the second movement, McLaughlin (2016:176) writes, the Mysterious Man gently makes a case for using narrative as a way of creating meaning:

> *Mysterious Man*
> Running away, let's do it.
> Free from the ties that bind.
> No more despair, or burdens to bear,
> Out there in the yonder. (p.124)

At first, the Mysterious Man agrees that “running away” seems like an appealing idea. He evokes the sentiment we have previously been privy to with Jack, suggesting a sense of infantile freedom. However, he explains that this kind of freedom lacks a purpose and a meaning and that some sort of destination or narrative endpoint is necessary (McLaughlin, 2016:176):

> Have to take care:
> unless there's a 'where',
> You'll only be wandering blind.
> Just more questions,
> Different kind. (p.124)

[Figure 10. This image shows Tom Aldredge as the Mysterious Man and Chip Zien as the Baker during “No More”. Image downloaded from http://www.markrobinsonwrites.com/the-music-that-makes-me-dance/2016/9/23/broadway-musical-time-machine-looking-back-at-into-the-woods in October 2021.]

While the destination may not be significant, a contingent goal can provide structure and drive for our stories, giving us somewhere to go. The Mysterious Man explains that without such direction, we will always wander around lost in our present and past (Fig.10):

> Trouble is, son, the farther you run,
> The more you'll feel undefined.
> For what you have left undone, and more,
> What you've left behind. (p.124)
>
> Where are we to go?
> Where are we ever to go?
>
> (…)
> We disappoint,
> We disappear,
> We die but we don't. (p.124)

As in his first two lines, in which he echoes his son's dismay, he begins by pointing out the complications that arise from "running away". Not only is there a tendency for our actions to live on, but similarly, painful memories do not die (Knapp, 2016:55). The Baker remembers his infant son, whom he has "left behind" and thus fights the impulse to run away. This emphasises that parents are flawed and that their influence on their children is forever palpable to a certain degree. Jubin (2018:43) draws attention to the fact that children who try their best not to repeat their parents' mistakes later in life are in turn likely to be guilty of other mistakes- an important part of identity construction and writing their own narrative. Recognising their own shortcomings does not necessarily lead them to accept those of their parents.

> They disappoint
> In turn, fear.
> Forgive though, they won't… (p.123)

The importance of this fact and the necessary honour it must be paid are later echoed in the lines of "No One is Alone":

> *Baker, Cinderella:*
> People make mistakes.
>
> *Baker:*
> Fathers,
>
> *Cinderella:*
> Mothers,
> (…)

Honour their mistakes-

Baker:
Fight for their mistakes-

Cinderella:
Everybody makes-

Baker, Cinderella:
- one another's
Terrible mistakes (p.131)

The Mysterious Man clarifies that the fear of failure should not lead to a refusal to act or engage at all, emphasising that life in total isolation is impossible (Jubin, 2018:43). Robert comes to the same realisation at the end of *Company,* before accepting that every choice and mistake he has made forms part of his identity and, thus, his narrative. However, his narrative only starts propelling once he recognises his desire for companionship.

The final movement of "No More" shows the Baker by himself, as he comes to understand that the middle part of journeys and stories are not irrelevant things to be gotten through in order to reach and enjoy the end. McLaughlin (2916:177) points out that the Baker realises that the middle parts are the point and that the end is "not a necessary absolute that governs the journey or story preceding it". The end of the story is a structurally contingent component that brings order into the chaos, providing orientation- both within and outside of the narrative. In this case, the characters need to come to terms with the fact that we can never know exactly where we are going and thus cannot rely on a completely secure sense of structure in our lives. The message here is to "be alive", echoing the exact sentiment of Robert's final solo in *Company* and Petra's solo in *A Little Night Music*. Finally having recognised the importance of middles, the Baker decides to return to the others.

Baker:
…how do you ignore
All the witches,
all the curses,
All the wolves, all the lies,
the false hopes, the goodbyes,
The reverses,
All the wondering what even worse
is still in store? (p.125)

Knapp (2006:155) writes that the density of the song's elaborate verbal twists carries considerable dramatic resonance, reminding us of the importance of legacy, the role others play within our sense of legacy and the consequent responsibilities of adults and children.

The Baker returns to the group, who, rejecting the witch's apocalyptic narrative, ally to defeat the Giant. Drawing on the experiences of their first-act-narratives enables a "sense of community beyond family and a more sophisticated sense of connectedness", McLaughlin (2016:179) writes- adding that Cinderella begins by rejecting the desire to restore and repair lost families. She claims that the symptomatic aloneness is different from the despair the Witch had promised them.

> *Cinderella:*
> Mother cannot guide you.
> Now you're on your own.
> Only me beside you.
> Still, you're not alone.
> No one is alone, truly.
> No one is alone. (p.129)

Two aspects define this particular aloneness: Firstly, independence, which results from the loss of one's parental figures; secondly, the loss of a conceived narrative that might have provided direction and guidance at times of difficult decisions (McLaughlin, 2016:180). Cinderella emphasises:

> You decide alone. (p.129)
>
> Baker:
> Wrong things, right things…
> Who can say what's true? (p.130)
>
> Both:
> Witches can be right,
> Giants can be good.
> You decide what's right,
> You decide what's good. (p.131)

The Baker expresses that in the absence of absolutes, moral decisions must be made individually and situationally. Thus, the difficulties of decision-making in a state of aloneness will often be mitigated by the potential for new connections and new communities (McLaughlin, 2016:180). Jubin (2018:46) interprets that we should remember that what has been told to us in our youth may and should be questioned at times.

> Both:
> Someone is on your side.
>
> Jack, Red:
> *Our* side

Baker, Cinderella:
Our side-
Someone else is not.
While we're seeing our side-

Jack, Red:
Our side…

Baker, Cinderella:
Our side-

All:
Maybe we forgot:
They are not alone.
No one is alone. (p.131f.)

The interweaving lines emphasise the core of the lyrics. The characters start to understand that who we are and what we do is not a matter of “us vs. them” or “me vs. you”, but that we are all connected in a giant network of stronger, more direct and weaker, more indirect ties. This means that there is no real “our side” or “their side”, but that all moral decisions rely on a sense of social interdependence. While every individual has their own motives, each of their actions will not only affect themselves, but other people as well- sometimes people they did not have in mind (Jubin, 2018:46). The Baker and Cinderella sing:

You move just a finger,
Say the slightest word,
Something's bound to linger,
Be heard. (p.150)

“No one is alone” not only provides comfort for the lonely but brings about awareness of the power each of us holds and of our responsibility for our thoughts and actions- as they are sure to affect someone else because we are all connected to someone. While wishes are necessary for life, considering them in a social context is equally as important.

This sentiment is echoed and expanded in the reprise of the Witch’s song “Children will Listen”, which offers a conversion of her earlier rants “Children *should* Listen” in the first act (“Stay with Me”) and “Children *won’t* Listen” in the second act (“Lament”). She sings:

Witch:
Careful the things you say,
Children will listen.
Children will look to you
For which way to turn,
To learn what to be. (p. 136)

In the final sequence, narrative becomes the means by which the characters can make connections (Fig. 11). The Baker, uncertain of how to be a father to his infant son, is advised by the spirit of his dead wife: “Look, tell him the story/ Of how it all happened” (p.35). Beginning with the words “Once upon a time”, the words first uttered by the Narrator- the Baker passes on the story to his child (McLaughlin, 2016:182). Francis (2014:359) writes that, like the Narrator, the Baker is both storyteller and father. However, unlike the Narrator, he does not pretend to be outside the story while simultaneously entering it in disguise. The Baker starts to tell the tale hesitantly, feeling unsure of himself- but, Francis adds, it is by telling stories that we preserve our creativity and the truth as we see it. As seen in “No More”, narrative serves as a means of orientation in a chaotic world. Jubin (2018:45) sees this as an invitation to accept that life has no absolutes and that there is a time when we are forced to make our own decisions, with our contingent goals to guide us.

[Figure 11. This image shows the final sequence of *Into the Woods*. The magical forest has turned into an apocalyptical world. Image downloaded from https://www.marottaonmoney.com/no-one-is-alone-financial-lessons-from-into-the-woods/ in October 2021.]

Company:
Careful the wish you make
Wishes are children. (p.136)

Likening wishes to children refers back to the story of the Baker and his Wife, whose most fervent wish was to have a child, and to the fact that pursuing any dream (or even just talking about it) may have long-lasting repercussions and may even involve some loss (Jubin, 2018:47).

Careful the tale you tell
That is the spell
Children will listen (p.136)

These lines can be interpreted in several ways. On the one hand, they point out the fact that often our very words come back to haunt us (e.g. when we are being made aware of inconsistencies in our behaviour); on the other hand, the fact that children are trusting and because they love us, we have power over them, "burdens" us with the responsibility to be careful of how we instruct them (Jubin, 2018:48). Francis (2014:359) adds that children will not necessarily listen when you tell them what to do but when you tell them stories. They may listen when you do not want them to. They will listen to how you act and how you are. In this fairy tale the morals are primarily for the parents. "In assuming agency over their own lives, [the characters] must also assume responsibility for how they tell the tale, precisely because of the magic that such tales hold for children" (Knapp, 2006:162). Narratives do not provide any reliable information beyond their end, making them inherently irresponsible. Thus, storytelling is a moral act.

> *Company:*
> You can't just act,
> You have to listen,
> You can't just act,
> You have to think. (p.137)

McLaughlin (2016:182) writes that "the danger of narratives comes when our focus moves from narratives as a means (of understanding our lives and our actions in the world) to an end (a totalled structure that in effect supersedes reality for us) and explains that we slide easily into the latter sense of the narrative, emphasised by Cinderella's final words "I wish…" (p.138). Yet, as she did at the beginning, she once again invokes a narrative desire.

Into the Woods shows that life as we know it continues beyond the "happy ending" of our achievements with the unforeseen and inadvertent consequences arising from nearly any choice or action (Knapp, 2006:153). In bringing together several familiar fairy tales and saturating them in the human search for narrative and identity, the show explores their insularity and thus confronts the infinite complexity of human interaction and mutual responsibilities. Regardless of their original motives, by the end of the show, the characters from different fairytales have formed a new family. This highlights the importance of community in identity construction. Furthermore, the characters in *Into the Woods* do not mourn their loss of innocence but accept it as a necessary milestone in growing up. Suddenly, their simple unambiguous desires are measured up against the complexities of adult responsibility, revealing that adulthood is not so much about fulfilling one's dreams but more about embracing moral responsibility for oneself and one's community.

Sondheim moves further towards the core of human identity in showing that devising tales is how we learn about ourselves and our world. Identity is developed in our continuous striving to improve our own situation and society in general. Narrative does not equal truth but provides structure and certainty. This causes the characters to become more aware that the journey is never over, mainly, because one's path intersects with the paths of others (Jubin, 2018:50). *Into*

The woods demonstrates that a significant part of our identity is affected by our knowledge, developed by our choices or narrative, and is thus linked to those around us, interwoven in a complex net of human desires and predicaments. Somehow, *Into the Woods* is a fairy tale in itself. Instead of "good vs. evil", here, "good vs. nice" and the moral core of the story "careful the wish you make" is advice to be heeded by young and old. Similarly to *A Little Night Music,* narrative deconstruction and a blurring of space and time provide a realm for the characters to reconfigure themselves in the second half of the play. In some way, the second act of *Into the Woods* is a re-telling of *Company,* as the characters learn to "work past their despair of aloneness to an adult independence" (McLaughlin, 2016:181). They must provide meaning to their identity, and thus, to their narrative, in the form of a community based neither in family nor romantic relationships.

Conclusion

Stephen Sondheim's determination to portray the contemporary human being with all its quirks and complexities on stage can be regarded as a true innovation of the postmodern musical. This thesis explored Sondheim's methods of identity construction in four musicals, taking into account the postmodern movement and its influence on identification. Sondheim is a postmodernist in his own right. While he reflects the postmodern spirit, his work transcends the postmodern timeline. While the established "modernist" musical theatre form aimed to provide an escape for the viewer, Sondheim aims to challenge the spectator. Regardless of the narrative, the subject matter is linked to contemporary society, inviting the audience to be an active part of the identification process.

In *Company* Sondheim constructs identity in the absence of a plot. While narrative is a traditional vehicle for character development, Sondheim develops the protagonist Robert in a series of vignettes, representing a single moment in his mind. Sondheim draws on the postmodern notion that relationships are a vital part of the identification process. He evokes New York City and its people in Robert's sense, thus constructing his identity in the process of *seeing* his friends.

A Little Night Music stays true to the style of Viennese Operetta. Restricting himself to the "Waltz"- metre, Sondheim mirrors the restricted characters and their frustrations. Furthermore, it masks identity through performance. Thus, Sondheim constructs identities in the self-revelatory moments of the characters, when their performances break. Even though the characters align at the end, their future remains unknown, making the audience intently aware of time's arrow.

In *Sweeney Todd,* Sondheim creates the world in his protagonist's view; and similarly to *A Little Night Music*, he creates his characters in specific theatrical styles: Victorian *melodrama* (Sweeney) and *music hall* (Mrs Lovett). By pairing these two forms, which would usually belong in two different shows, Sondheim highlights their respective motivations. *Sweeney Todd* is intently postmodern, as it not only pastiches different art forms, but is also aware of itself as a play. It joins *Company* in inviting the audience to identify with the protagonists, regardless of their morality.

The final chapter explored identity construction through the deconstruction of narrative in *Into the Woods*. Well-known fairytale characters achieve their wishes by the end of Act One and are left to deal with their repercussions in Act Two. Sondheim constructs identities in the form of processing songs, in which the characters reflect on their experiences and choose how they will continue to live their lives. The characters become disillusioned and realise that their choices form their narratives and effect others.

Considering Sondheim's mantra at the beginning of the thesis ("Content dictates form. Less is more. God is in the details. All in the service of clarity, without which nothing else matters.") - it has become clear, what he means. Sondheim's characters justify each lyrical and musical choice. The complexities of his characters are not shown in complex orchestrations but are revealed in the simplicity of musical lines and lyrics. Regardless of the style, Sondheim adapts to his score, his true voice is heard most clearly in the self-revelatory moments. For it is the truth that Sondheim seeks to unlock - in the characters, as well as the audience. Sondheim shows us that we are not that different from one another. This is the essence of postmodernism. It identifies itself as art, holding up a mirror to the world watching it. We identify with the characters, as individuals and as a collective.

The most important aspect of identity construction in Sondheim's work is that he sets himself limits, only to cross them. He establishes rules that he intends to break. This has been evident in each of the musicals discussed. In doing so, Sondheim helps his characters escape their pre-determined forms as well, revealing a vulnerability that shows us the core of their identity. Sondheim's work is relevant today because it mirrors the many layers of ourselves we choose to show. Performative identity is as alive as ever on today's many social media platforms, identity can be customised as desired. Sondheim reminds us that we are not alone in a world, where many of us might feel like Robert in *Company*. As our society progresses and the search for clearer identity structures advances, Sondheim teaches us that the only way we will ever truly understand our identities and take command of our narratives is by *being alive*.

Word Count: 39 875

Bibliography

The Librettos:

Furth, G. & Sondheim, S. (1970) Company - a Musical Comedy. New York: Theatre Communications Group.

Lapine, J. & Sondheim, S. (1987) *Into the Woods.* New York: Theatre Communications Group.

Wheeler, H. & Sondheim, S. (1973) *A Little Night Music*. London: Nick Hern Books.

Wheeler, H. & Sondheim, S. (1991) *Sweeney Todd - The Demon Barber of Fleet Street.* London: Nick Hern Books.

Literature:

Banfield S. (1993) *Sondheim's Broadway Musicals.* Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.

Banfield, S. (2014) 'Sondheim's Genius', in Gordon, R (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Stephen Sondheim*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp.11-24.

Bauman Z. (1993) *Postmodern Ethics.* Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell.

Bertens, H. (1997) *International Postmodernism: theory and literary practice.* Amsterdam/ Philadelphia: John Benjamin's Publishing Company.

Bertens, H. (2003) *The Idea of the Postmodern: A history.* Routledge: New York.

Block, G. (2014) 'From Screen to Stage: A Little Night Music and Passion'. in Gordon, R (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Stephen Sondheim*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp.258-277.

Bond, C. (1974) *Sweeney Todd - the Demon Barber of Fleet Street.* London: Samuel French.

Burgass, C. (2000) A Brief Story of Postmodern Plot, *The Yearbook of English Studies, Vol. 30, Time and Narrative.* Modern Humanities Research Association. pp.177-186.

Burkholder, J., Grout, D. & Palisca, C. (2006) *A History of Western Classical Music, 7th ed.* London: Norton.

Di Martino, L. (2014) Postmodern Irony. Encyclopedia of Humor Studies. Thousand Oaks,: SAGE Publications.

Djité, P. (2006) Shifts in linguistic identities in a global world. *Language Problems & Language Planning* 30 (1): pp.1-20.

Doudaki, V. (2012) Sex and the City. *The Journal of International Communication.* 18(1): pp. 5-17.

Dunn, R. 1998) Identity Crisis: A Social Critique of Postmodernity. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Francis, B. (2014) 'Careful the Spell You Cast": Into the Woods and the Uses of Disenchantment'. in Gordon, R (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Stephen Sondheim*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp.350-364.

Gerard, S. (2013) The Great British Music Hall: Its Importance to British Culture and 'The Trivial'. *Culture Unbound: Journal of Current Cultural Research* 5: pp.487-514.

Gilman, R. (2005) *The Drama is Coming Now:The Theatre Criticism of Richard Gilman.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

Gordon, J. (1992) *Art Isn't Easy*. New York: Da Capo Press.

Gordon, R. (2014) 'Old Situations, new complications: Tradition and Experiment in A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum', in Gordon, R (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Stephen Sondheim*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 63-80.

Hanson, L. (1997) 'Broadway Babies: Images of Women in three Musicals of Sondheim', in Gordon, J. (ed.) *Stephen Sondheim- A Casebook.* London: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, pp.13-34.

Horowitz, M (2005) 'Send in the Clowns'. *Sondheim Review* .11 (3): pp.15-20.

Horowitz, M. (2019). *Sondheim on Music: Minor Details and Major Decisions.* London: Rowman & Littlefield.

Jubin, O. (2018) *Sondheim and Lapine's Into the Woods.* New York: Routledge.

Kaye, N. (1994) *Postmodernism and Performance*. London: The Macmillan Press LTD.

Knapp, R. (2016) *The American Musical and the Performance of Personal Identity.* Princeton : Princeton University Press.

Lundskaer-Nielsen, M. (2014) 'The Prince-Sondheim Legacy', in Gordon, R (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Stephen Sondheim*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp.97-116.

Lyotard, J. (1984) *Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Mankin, N. (1999) 'The PAJ Casebook #2 : Into the Woods'. *Performing Arts Journal* 1: pp. 46-66.

McLaughlin, R. (2014) 'Sondheim and Postmodernism', in Gordon, R (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Stephen Sondheim*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp.25-38.

McLaughlin, R. (2018) *Stephen Sondheim and The Reinvention of the American Musical.* Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.

Mordden, E. (2003) *One more Kiss: the broadway musical in the 1970s.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Mordden, E. (2015) *On Sondheim, an opinionated guide*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Olson, J. (2000) 'Company- 25 Years Later', in Gordon, J. (ed.) *Stephen Sondheim- A Casebook.* London: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, pp.47-68.

Ott, B. (2003) 'I'm Bart Simpson, who the hell are you? A Study in Postmodern Identity (Re) Construction'. *Journal of Popular Culture.* 37 (1): pp.56-82.

Patsalidis, S. (2013) *Audience Participation and Theatre's Role in the Age of Postmodernity*. Accessed on 13 June 2022, <https://www.critical-stages.org/9/audience-participation-and-the-theatres-role-in-the-age-of-post-postmodernity-greece/ >

Rizzo, F. (1997) ‘Sunday on a Campus with Sondheim’. *Sondheim Review.* 3 (4):p.4.

Secrest, M. (1998) *Stephen Sondheim: A Life.* New York: Knopf.

Simon, J. (1970) Futile Fugue. *New York Magazine,* p.56

Smith, J. (1973) *Melodrama.* London: Routledge.

Sondheim, S. (1980) ‘Larger than Life: reflections on Melodrama and Sweeney Todd’ in Gerould, D. (ed.) *Melodrama.* New York: New York Literary Forum, pp. 3-14-.

Sondheim, S. & Herbert, T. (1989) ‘Sondheim’s Technique’. *Contemporary Theatre Review*. 5(1): pp.199-214.

Sondheim, S. (2010) *Finishing The Hat*. New York: Knopf.

Sondheim, S. (2011) *Look, I made a hat*. New York: Knopf.

Spohr, M., Weihe, R. & Siedhoff, T. (1994) ‘ “Stephen Sondheim" in Pipers Enzyklopädie des Musiktheaters’, in Dachaus, C. (ed.) *Oper, Operette, Musical, Ballett. Band 5: Werke Puccini- Spontini.* Munich/Zurich: Piper, pp. 740-747.

Swain, J. (2002) *The Broadway Musical: A Critical and Musical Survey.* 2nd ed. Lanham: Scarecrow Press.

Swain, J. (2014) ‘A Little Night Music: The Cynical Operetta’, in Gordon, R (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Stephen Sondheim*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp.309-318.

Symonds, D. (2009) ‘Putting it Together and Finishing the Hat? Deconstructing the Art of Making Art’. *Contemporary Theatre Review.* 19(1): pp.101-112.

Taylor, M. (2009) Integration and Distance in Musical Theatre: the Case of Sweeney Todd, *Contemporary Theatre Review.* 19(1): pp.74-86.

Taylor,M. (2014) ‘Sweeney Todd: From Melodrama to Musical Tragedy’, in Gordon, R (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Stephen Sondheim*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp.335-349.

Teampău, Radu. (2018) Theatre Performance in Postmodernism. *Theatrical Colloquia 8,* pp. 187-205.

Verlsluys, E. (2007) ‘The Notion of Identity in Discourse Analysis: Some Discourse Analytical Re-marks’. *RASK: internationalt tidsskrift for sprog og kommunikation,* 2007(26): pp.89-99

Wilde, O. (1895) *The Importance of Being Earnest.* London: Samuel French.

Williams, C. (2012) ‘Melodrama’ , in Flint, K (ed.) *The Cambridge History of Victorian Literature*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 193-219.

Wolf, S. (2016) ‘Keeping Company with Sondheim’s Women’, in Gordon, R (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Stephen Sondheim*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp.365-383.

Young, K. (2000) ‘Every Day a little death- Sondheim’s Un-Musicalizing of Marriage, in Goodhart, S. (ed.) *Reading Stephen Sondheim - A Collection of Critical Essays.* New York: Garland, pp.77-88.

Zalman, P. (2019) Operatic Borrowing in Sondheim’s Sweeney Todd, *American Music.* 37 (1): pp.58-76.

Videos:

"Sweeney Todd - Scenes from the making of a musical". YouTube, uploaded by Musicals On Line, 13 April 2021, https://www.youtu.be/Eg4xChmJs78

"Sondheim teaches Send In The Clowns". YouTube, uploaded by AllanWo, 18 March 2007, https://www.youtu.be/8-VXXZLh2a0

"Stephen Sondheim, Academy Class of 2005, Full Interview". YouTube, uploaded by Academy of Achievement on 31 August 2016, https://yout.be/Tp1-IZZUVk

Images:

Figure 1. Beowulf Boritt. Dowloaded from https://www.theatermania.com/broadway/news/take-a-first-look-at-prince-of-broadway-in-japan_74661.html in October 2021.

Figure 2. Sara Krulwich. Dowloaded from https://artsbeat.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/10/15/sondheim-working-on-a-revised-version-of-company/ in June 2021.

Figure 3. Marshall Gerometta. Dowloaded from https://www.skyscrapercenter.com/building/seagram-building/3529 in June 2021.

Figure 4. Martha Swope. Dowloaded from https://www.broadwaybox.com/daily-scoop/hot-clip-of-the-day-heres-to-stritch-in-the-company-documentary/ in June 2021.

Figure 5. Photographer unknown. Downloaded from https://lecinemadreams.blogspot.com/2012/12/a-little-night-music-1977.html in October 2021.

Figure 6. Ingmar Bergman. Downloaded from https://www.criterion.com/current/posts/1844-smiles-of-a-summer-night-midsummer-merry-go-round in October 2021.

Figure 7. Martha Swope. Downloaded from https://yalealumnimagazine.com/articles/4424-eugene-lee in October 2021.

Figure 8. Photographer Unknown. Downloaded from https://www.playbill.com/gallery/photo-special-attend-the-tale-of-sweeney-todd-the-many-faces-of-the-demon-barber-of-fleet-street-com-330399?slide=31 in October 2021.

Figure 9. Photographer Unknown. Downloaded from https://www.pinterest.com/pin/303430093615436671/ in October 2021.

Figure 10. Photographer Unknown. Downloaded from http://www.markrobinsonwrites.com/the-music-that-makes-me-dance/2016/9/23/broadway-musical-time-machine-looking-back-at-into-the-woods in October 2021.

Figure 11. Photographer Unknown. Downloaded from https://www.marottaonmoney.com/no-one-is-alone-financial-lessons-from-into-the-woods/ in October 2021.