Sweeney Todd, The Demon Barber of Fleet Street was written by Stephen Sondheim and based off the book by Hugh Wheeler. The musical version was first performed in 1979 on Broadway. This musical thriller explores the division of the social classes and the corruption of the upper class through the characters of Sweeney Todd and Judge Turpin. This musicals approach to these themes is quite dark which I wanted to reflect in the costumes for the show. The costumes are all in dark, drab colors to show the characters view of the world, as well as the state of their lives. This show is a cacophony of horrors, from rape, to abuse of power, to murder and cannibalism.

Sweeney Todd, was wrongfully sent away by Judge Turpin so that he could take Sweeney’s wife Lucy. Turpin rapes Lucy and then takes her young daughter, Johannah, in as his ward. Turpin later starts to lust after Johannah as she grows older. At this point in the play Sweeney has returned to London and is after revenge. Sweeney and Mrs. Lovett will be dressed in reds, maroons and blacks to mark them as the murderers they become as well as set them apart from the rest of the lower class ensemble. These two build a business off of Sweeney killing his patrons so that Mrs. Lovett can feed hers.

The upper class characters of Judge Turpin and the Beadle are dressed in finer clothes but in a similar dark and drab color scheme. However the Beadle wears accents of scarlet red as the accomplice in Turpins greed. Turpin, to represent his greed has accents of green in his street clothes costume. I have placed the ladies in my rendering in green to also reflect the greed of the upper class. Over all my designs for this show are meant to represent the negative life these people have and their outlook on it. The accents of brighter colors is meant to showcase various characters as greedy or violent. These colors also stand to make them stand out from the rest of the ensemble.

Sweeney Todd/Benjamin Barker

I chose reds, maroons and blacks to mark him as the murderer he becomes as well as set him apart from the rest of the lower class ensemble in their more drab color pallet. Sweeney and Mrs. Lovett build a business off of him killing his patrons so that Mrs. Lovett can feed hers. His first costume is slightly more ragged and worn as he has just gotten off the boat after escaping imprisonment. This costume is also a representation of his broken spirit upon returning to London after his ordeal of being unjustly punished. The shirt in this costume is a flowy, thin fabric to highlight how thin and sickly he is after stepping of the boat. His second costume is nicer clothes due to his and Lovett’s business taking off. His vest is red and black stripes, pulling in the dark red to mark him as a killer. His clothes other than the red in his vest is all in black because of him being almost dead inside. Outside of his desire for revenge and to get Johannah back he is fairly detached. When Mrs. Lovett makes advances he is very distracted and does not seem to care.

Beggar Woman/Lucy Barker

Lucy Barker is the wife of Sweeney Todd who is unjustly sent away by Judge Turpin so that he could have Lucy himself. Her first outfit is a modest white dress as Sweeney, formerly known as Benjamin Barker, was a moderately well off barber. The dress is clean and shows that she is not of the lowest class. It is also in white both to represent her innocence and naivete when dealing with Turpin as well as her characters lack of depth. Lucy’s character has little definition as a person. She is raped by Turpin which leads her to poison herself and go insane. But we never get to know her as a person, she is used more as a plot device. Her next costume is after she has gone insane and she becomes a beggar woman. It is a ragged, dark dress and a shawl that hides her hair and shadows her face. The shawl is so that Sweeney doesn’t recognize her as his wife until the very end. But the entirety of this costume shows her as a homeless woman begging for money. This costume is a stark contrast to her crisp white dress of the younger Lucy.

Johanna Barker

Johanna is the daughter of Lucy and Benjamin Barker who is taken in by Judge Turpin, as his ward, when Lucy goes insane. He raises her as his own, cut off from the world. As she grows older and becomes a woman he begins to lust after her while she lusts for Anthony and the outside world. Her first costume is worn while she is still in Turpins home. It is a simple light blue muslin gown with few frills. The lighter color and the simple design of the dress represent her innocence and youth which is what Turpin is attracted too, as well as what he will allow her to wear. The dress is slightly lower cut and has short sleeves, showing more skin than her mother, Lucy, did. This is to convey her need for love and adventure, as is the dress being in color and not white. Her second costume is the sailor clothes she wears to disguise herself after escaping the asylum. These clothes are worn and too big for her small frame as these clothes were acquired for her by Anthony.

Anthony Hope

Anthony is a sailor returning to London and so I have dressed him period appropriate sailor garb. It is a simple dark jacket over a white shirt and white canvas pants. And as a sailor these clothes are not in pristine condition and are quite dirty and worn. He wore these clothes right off the ship and seeing as he is a simple sailor and not anyone with wealth these are the clothes he stays in. He also disguises himself as a wigmaker to rescue Johannah with the help of Sweeney. This part of his costume is just a nice cloak and hat to make him seem of a higher class that can be worn over his clothes. These costume pieces are flung off in his and Johanna's escape.

Nellie Lovett

Mrs. Lovett is a woman with questionable morals as she suggests cannibalism after supporting Sweeney in his mass murder plot. She is also shamelessly in love with Sweeney even though she knows that his wife still lives and lies to him about it. For these reasons I have placed her originally in a lower cut gown in dark reds and maroons. The dress being lower cut and her suggestive corset on top of the dress, as opposed to underneath, convey her lustful tendencies. This first dress is also a bit worn as she complains of the lack of customers and therefore lack of money. I have also given her a brown plaid fabric tied over her skirt. This brown fabric is a subtle reference to Sweeney’s line “there’s a hole in the world, like a great black pit and it’s filled with people who are filled with shit.” Sweeney is referring to the people who take advantage of others and step on everyone to get what they want regardless of the consequences. I put her in this brown plaid to connect her to those people because of her deception regarding Lucy’s existence to have Sweeney to herself. This misdeed leads to her death as Turpin and the Beadles misdeeds lead to their deaths. Her second costume is a fancier dress that she obtains after her business begins to thrive. This dress is still form fitting and lower cut to show that she is still in love with Sweeney and constantly vies for his attentions. However this dress is of slightly better quality than her first costume and is meant to represent the life she dreams of having. One where Sweeney and herself are happily married and own a prospering business. In Act II, scene ii she briefly wears a robe to stoke the fires. This robe is simple and white, but very flowy with dramatic long sleeves. I chose this style of robe for her because of her romantic streak. She daydreams of the idyllic life she will have with Sweeney and Tobias.

Tobias Ragg

Tobias is a poor boy that works for an abusive Pirelli. I based his costume off of period appropriate clothes for someone of his low social status. He wears a simple pair of trousers and a shirt. In addition to his work boots, his clothes are very worn and dirty. This is to show his lower status but also to provide a contrast between himself and Perelli. Pirelli wears expensive, ostentatious clothes which is a stark contrast to Tobias's more ragged, unkempt appearance

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Adolfo Pirelli

Pirelli is an Irishman pretending to be an Italian barber, whose talent is unequaled. He is actually quite bad at being a barber and uses this confidant persona to distract from this fact, as he is a talented con artist. His clothing is bright purple to set him apart from the rest of the casts dreary color pallet. This bright color makes him stand out and is also representative of his ostentatious persona. His clothes also have blue stripes on portions of the extremities to push his character further over the top.

Judge Turpin

Judge Turpin has three costumes. The first is simple a demon mask and cloak when he rapes Lucy. The demon mask adds an extra element of horror to what he is doing and the cloak is to hid his nakedness. His second costume is his judges robes which have not changed much since 1846. Finally he has his street clothes which are finer clothes to mark him as the upper class. I have also put him in a green vest to represent his greed. First he lusts after Lucy, another mans wife, then her daughter who he has raised as his daughter.

Beadle Bamford

The Beadles first costume is when he is an accomplice in Lucy’s rape. He is in formal wear for the ball where it occurs as well as a demon mask similar to what the rest of the party goers are wearing. His second costume is his street clothes that are made of fine materials and made very well to convey his upper class status. These clothes are historically accurate and are in drab colors to match the darker mood of the musical.

Male/Female Ensemble

The townspeople are dressed in period appropriate attire while also being ragged and worn down. Their clothes are also more drab then the main characters so that the main characters stand out amongst them. The lunatics in the asylum are also period appropriate with plain dingy white clothes that look more like sacks than clothes. The material is thick and stiff and resembles a burlap sack. The lords and ladies are dressed in period appropriate formal wear as Judge Turpin and the Beadle are, as well as demon masks to mark them for their horrible deed of allowing Lucy to be raped.