



Universidad
Zaragoza

Undergraduate Dissertation
Trabajo Fin de Grado

“There’s No Person Like Todd”: Burton’s Bleakest
Film Adaptation of *Sweeney Todd: The Demon
Barber of Fleet Street*

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Curso 2020/21

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1. Introduction

Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street tells the story of Benjamin Barker (Johnny Depp), a barber in London who is falsely accused of murder and forced into exile by a corrupt judge, Judge Turpin (Alan Rickman), whose intentions are to seduce Barker's wife, Lucy (Laura Michelle Kelly). Fifteen years later, the barber comes back under the name of Sweeney Todd to avenge this injustice. Mrs. Lovett (Helena Bonham Carter) becomes Todd's partner in crime in his plan for revenge and offers him the room above her pie shop to use it as a barber shop. There, Todd slits the throats of his clients, whose corpses will serve as meat for Mrs. Lovett's pies. In this way, they merge their businesses and wait for Judge Turpin to come and suffer the same fate.

Despite the apparent bleak subject-matter developed by the film, Burton's story is presented in the form of a musical, a genre that is usually associated with comedy. The film does not only challenge the conventions of the musical genre in this sense, but also some conventions within Burton's filmography. On the one hand, as Jeffrey A. Weinstock (2013) claims, "it is both aesthetically and thematically characteristic of Burton" (20). On the other, the film takes his fascination with blackness and obscurity to new depths. While other Burton films show signs of good-heartedness and reconciliation, this film "plays its Gothic straight, wholly devoid of Burton's characteristic humor and sentimentality" (Weinstock 20). This way, *Sweeney Todd* shows vitiated characters living in an equally corrupted environment, which leaves no room for hope of improvement.

In this dissertation, I will analyze how Burton's film adaptation of the namesake stage play contributes to the making of what can be considered his darkest and most evil creation: Todd and his story of revenge. Among Burton's changes to the original story, I will focus on the musical numbers, on the analysis of each main character, and on the

film's use of time and space. To further support this idea, I will also take a closer look at how the film differs from others of his own.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Burton's Recurrent Themes

Tim Burton has a singular vision that makes him remain in a league of his own. This is what Helena Bassil-Morozow (2013) precisely argues in her chapter “The Question of Style”. Burton might not be the typical artistic filmmaker or *auteur* and yet, he has recurrent identifiable themes in his own cinematic world. That is, even if each work is unique, there are similarities in his filmography. Jeffrey Weinstock (2013) studies the continuities in Burton's universe in *The Works of Tim Burton: Margins to Mainstream*, which covers recurrent figures and themes: the rejection of parental values, the Frankenstein myth, or the Artist-Hero.

In Burton's filmography, central characters tend to fit a similar mold, both physically and psychologically. In most cases, this translates into a dark-haired, pale, and thin male character whose main feature is his own artistry. This is what Dominic Lennard calls “The Artist-Hero”, a “highly imaginative character” (218). Apart from Edward (Johnny Depp) in *Edward Scissorhands* (1990), whose artistry stems from his scissor-blade hands, this would also be the case of Ed Bloom “senior” (Albert Finney) in *Big Fish* (2003), who is a creator of stories; of Victor (voiced by Johnny Depp) in *Corpse Bride* (2005), who is a gifted pianist; and of Jack Skellington (voiced by Danny Elfman and Chris Sarandon) in *The Nightmare Before Christmas* (1993), who is the creator of Halloween, to name but a few. At the same time, all these characters show a similar sad and melancholic countenance.

Moreover, all these “Artist-Heroes” are frequently presented in opposition to the society that surrounds them, as Lennard explains. For example, the protagonists stand against the Puritan community in *Sleepy Hollow* (1999), or a “cookie-cutter domesticity” (228) in *Edward Scissorhands*. Finally, another common characteristic among these male

central characters is that they are presented as a better love candidate than the male antagonist in the film. Some examples are Edward and Jim (Anthony Michael Hall) in *Edward Scissorhands*; Victor and Lord Barkis (voiced by Richard E. Grant) in *Corpse Bride*; Constable (Johnny Depp) and Glenn (Nicholas Hewetson) in *Sleepy Hollow*; Ed Bloom “junior” (Ewan McGregor) and Don Price (David Denard) in *Big Fish*.

Another recurrent motif in Burton’s filmography is the presence of two opposed worlds. The collision of both worlds in these films leads first to disaster and then to an eventual reconciliation, which is usually achieved by the central character, the Artist-Hero. For instance, *The Nightmare Before Christmas* shows “Halloween Town” and “Christmas Town”; *Corpse Bride* shows “the world of the living” and “the world of the dead”; in *Sleepy Hollow*, Constable travels from central New York to the village of Sleepy Hollow. The protagonist is usually able to escape from one to the other.

The usual protagonist in Burton’s films is not only an obsessed Artist-Hero entrusted with saving the world, but also mainly a male protagonist. Even when presented as candidates for the love of a female character, this female character is usually relegated to a secondary role. In other words, even when the decision would be hers to make, it is the two male characters who take center stage in the matter. More importantly, the female characters usually show no artistry or talent. They often work as “assistants” for the male character to achieve his goal. This not-very-feminist representation of women is embodied, for instance, by Katrina (Christina Ricci) as Constable’s helper in *Sleepy Hollow*, or by Sally (voiced by Catherine O’Hara) as Jack’s adviser in *The Nightmare Before Christmas*. Interestingly enough, both Katrina and Sally are first ignored, only to be proved right in the end. We could also read this as a turning of the tables, for the absence of the woman in the development of the action actually leads to chaos, and it is only when her advice is followed that the plan actually works.

Like women, children tend to be portrayed as helpers to the main protagonist in Burton's films. This the case of *Sleepy Hollow*, in which young Masbath (Marc Pickering) helps Constable to find the "Headless Horseman" (Christopher Walken). In addition, one recurring motif in Burton's work is the representation of the tension existing between children and their parents, who are usually presented as "disciplining forces of normalization that seek to straightjacket the child's imagination and sense of individuality" (Weinstock 17). For example, in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (2005), Willy Wonka (Johnny Depp) was not supported by his father when he was a child, as he did not believe in his dream. In general terms, however, children seem to play a more central role than women in Burton's filmography.

2.2. The Origins of the Legend of Sweeney Todd

As Sharon A. Weltman (2009) explains, *The String of Pearls: A Romance* (1846-47) was first published anonymously in the penny paper *The People's Periodical and Family Library*. This Victorian novel introduced Todd, an avaricious loner who robbed and "polished off" his customers. In this story, Todd wore his combs and scissors in his own hedge of hair. Mrs. Lovett also appeared in *The String of Pearls* as Todd's cannibal colleague, whose pie shop shared cellar space with the barber's shop. Besides, Johanna appears as a young heroine whose main goal is to find her missing sailor boyfriend, whom she fears Todd has killed. She, however, is not Todd's daughter in *The String of Pearls*. The story ends happily, for the magistrate catches the evil Todd and brings him to justice.

This Gothic story has counted on successful adaptations for over 163 years that have actually amended some of its plot flaws. For instance, an addition was made in George Dibdin Pitt's melodrama, which added the subtitle *The Fiend of Fleet Street* and also the suggestion that the story came from a real life legend. It was in 1936 that the musical play acquired its current title. As Weltman states, "This nineteenth-century

creation is here to stay” (304). As such, it has counted on countless film versions, including Cristopher Bond’s in 1973, Stephen Sondheim’s in 1979, and the latest, Burton’s, in 2007. Both stage and screen versions punish evil characters, but good does not triumph over evil as in *The String of Pearls*.

In this journey of adaptations, the figure of the evil barber travels from *The String of Pearls*, in which authorities serve genuine justice, to the stage musical, in which Todd avenges a personal injustice with mass murder, and finally to the latest film adaptation, in which the story line of the young lovers becomes secondary and even the savior characters end up being vitiated.

The undeniable success of *Sweeney Todd* suggests that the original Victorian tale still speaks to contemporary concerns. Burton has made use of a collective thirst for Gothic horror and, with the help of Sondheim’s brilliant musical numbers, “the film crosses over from Victorian pulp fiction to highbrow opera, and back to the mass culture of horror film, bridging the nineteenth and twenty-first centuries” (Weltman 308). In the following section, I will analyze how Burton’s changes to the story of Sweeney Todd, as well as the incorporation of some of his recurrent themes, are adapted in a bleaker way than his previous filmography, which results in a crueller protagonist and story.

3. *Sweeney Todd*: Burton's Most Evil Characters

3.1. A Musical Journey Through Todd's Character

We cannot credit Burton for the composition of the musical numbers, since, as explained above, the film is an adaptation of an already existing musical. However, we can appreciate the way Burton rearranges these musical numbers in order to make an even eviler characterization of Todd. As such, the changes that Burton makes to Sondheim's 1979 musical seem to result in a film focused on Todd's personal journey, so that we can closely appreciate his malice in his desires for vengeance. Burton's choice of which musical numbers are included in the film also help to offer a more obsessive version of Todd. Since Todd's main motivation and driving force is his obsession with killing Judge Turpin, those musical numbers that have nothing to do with that side of Todd are cut down or removed. For instance, there are six "Ballads of Sweeney Todd" in the stage musical which reflect upon which decision should Todd make next. These ballads would only have delayed Todd's successful revenge and would have slowed down the pace of his ongoing obsession. For him, the faster he kills Judge Turpin the better, and Burton seems to make sure that Todd is portrayed like that by focusing on those musical numbers that highlight that part of him. For instance, in "My Friends" Todd sings to his blades, showing how much time he had longed for this moment.

Even though there are no ballads so as not to delay Todd's plans, there is a subplot that does so: the story about his daughter Johanna (Jayne Wisener). At the beginning of the film, Todd arrives in London with the help of a sailor named Anthony (Jamie Campbell Bower), who later falls in love with Johanna, Todd's daughter. From the beginning, Todd is introduced, in contrast with Anthony, as a troubled character, as reflected in the song "No Place Like London", which both of them sing in the boat on their way to London. However, Anthony describes London as "unique" in the positive

sense of the word while Todd refers to its uniqueness in a pejorative way. That is, even though both characters claim that there is no place like London, Todd says it in a tone that suggests he considers London to be the most corrupted place in the world. When Todd was sent away, his wife Lucy was harassed and later raped by Judge Turpin, and she became a mad vagrant as a result. Judge Turpin kept their daughter Johanna as his ward. When Anthony meets Johanna, he plans to free her from Judge Turpin's custody. To Todd's misfortune, Anthony goes to his barber shop to tell him about his plan to free Johanna in the exact moment that Judge Turpin is there as well. This sends the judge away and Todd's plan to kill the judge is delayed. On the one hand, the lovers' plot postpones Todd's success because of this interrupting scene. On the other hand, the musical numbers that concern Johanna and Anthony are cut down, which moves the narrative of Todd's plan forward. In particular, the song "Johanna" appears in the film when Anthony is looking at Johanna sitting by her window, but no further musical scenes involving the couple appear in Burton's film version. In fact, the film does not show how they finally escape and does not even include a recognition scene between Johanna and her father, Todd, because those scenes would have meant recognizing a certain degree of tenderness on the part of Todd, and that is not an aspect the film wants to focus on. Like Todd, the story is also made bleaker by editing out the only musical numbers that could have brought some optimism to the story: the ones about Anthony and Johanna.

When Todd's plan fails momentarily, his world falls to pieces because revenge is everything he cares about. This weakening of Todd's spirits is best perceived in "Epiphany". As stated above, Burton shows a special interest in those musical numbers that focus on Todd's dark side, which is probably why the "Epiphany" song is not reduced in the film version; this number shows the exact moment in which Todd becomes even more determined to kill the judge. In fact, he seems determined to kill everyone and not

just Judge Turpin when he sings “We all deserve to die”. At the same time, this is the musical number that best exemplifies Burton’s mastery at adapting the stage play into the film. In the stage play, the actor playing Todd would turn to the audience as if he were threatening to kill them as well. Breaking the fourth wall in that way increases the self-consciousness in the scene, producing even a comic effect. Burton removes the comedy that the implausible breaking of the fourth wall would have produced if Todd had faced the camera. Instead, Todd turns to the pedestrians who, apparently, can neither see nor hear him, as portrayed in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Final scene of “Epiphany”: Todd and his blades against the world.

If Burton wanted the film to focus on Todd, it is but usual that he decided to keep this song in its entirety, for it is the only time that a song is not part of the diegetic world but seems to happen inside Todd’s mind: when the musical number ends, we see that Todd had never left the barber shop and everything had happened in his imagination. The fact that the rest of the characters cannot hear the song could also be related to the idea that, at this point in the film, they are also turning a deaf ear to his insanity. Such lack of awareness also applies to himself: he is so blinded by the idea of killing Judge Turpin that he cannot see beyond that. I believe this to be one of the best examples of how Burton makes use of the medium transfer so that the musical number depicts Todd’s worsening madness. From this scene onwards, it is not a question of settling scores with the corrupted

judge anymore but even innocent people can become victims of Todd, as he himself sings: “You, sir, anybody!” The “Epiphany” can be considered the turning point in Todd’s evolution because now that he has failed once the pressure is even greater, and he is becoming more and more obsessive.

The fact that there is a special focus on Todd’s character does not mean that we do not count on musical numbers to describe other important characters. While the lovers’ songs are practically left out, Mrs. Lovett sings almost as much as Todd does. We meet Mrs. Lovett at the same moment Todd does, when he enters her pie shop. In this scene, the song “The Worst Pies in London” introduces her character as an unstable woman but not in the dangerous way in which Todd was introduced: more as a chaotic but inoffensive figure. When Mrs. Lovett offers Todd the room above her pie shop, she tells him the story of the barber who used to work there many years before: Benjamin Barker. We could argue that this song, “There was a barber and his wife” might be the most neutral one in the film, for it serves as a way of providing the viewer with some context for Todd’s return. Nevertheless, as soon as the song finishes and Mrs. Lovett realizes that she is indeed talking to Barker himself, Todd asks her where Lucy is and she lies, suggesting she is dead. From the second she lays eyes on him, we can perceive that she is attracted to him. Then, it seems that as soon as she meets Mr. Todd, her previously inoffensive and rather quirky character becomes dangerous herself, for she is willing to lie and risk anything in order to please him. In this sense, even the characterization of Mrs. Lovett contributes to the characterization of Todd: he is such a vitiated figure that he drags everyone around him into the same black pit. We could not say that she was perfectly sane before meeting Mr. Todd, but her love for him blinds and corrupts her further.

Even if all the musical numbers, including Mrs. Lovett’s, have found their way into Burton’s film, most of these also include Mr. Todd in one way or another: she sings

to him, or they both sing together. Again, these songs also help to characterize Todd and his influence upon other characters like Mrs. Lovett. In the end, she becomes Todd's partner in crime, and, unlike other Burton films, *Sweeney Todd* shows a female character that is not only a "helper" but who actually sets the wheels in motion for the main narrative to start. Besides, she shows a certain degree of artistry in her profession, baking pies, even if these are, as she proudly claims, "The Worst Pies in London". Her characterization as the leader of the evil plan begins when Todd finds out that another barber in town, Mr. Pirelli (Sacha Baron Cohen), has recognized him from the past as Benjamin Barker, so Todd decides to simply kill him. Mrs. Lovett is not only not surprised by this murder but also provides with the solution for getting rid of the body: Todd can start killing more clients in his barber shop and Mrs. Lovett can use their humanflesh for baking the pies. However, she prevents Todd from killing the orphan that was under Mr. Pirelli's care, Toby (Ed Sanders), so she seems to be more good-hearted than Todd after all.

Mrs. Lovett might be portrayed as a more well-intentioned character than Todd, at least to a certain extent. Still, despite being the prime example of a villain, Todd manages to make the viewer feel for him. This phenomenon is explained by Kaitlin Budgell in *Sympathizing with the Monster: The Ability of Horror Films to Evoke Sympathy for Villains*. As she states, certain films are capable of inviting the audience to sympathize with the villains, no matter how twisted they prove to be. More importantly, "these films do this through the backstory of the perceived villain" (Budgell 11) by portraying a villain that was once a victim. In the case of Todd, the film makes use of the revenge plot to make us sympathize with him, including the musical numbers that tell his story: "No Place Like London", "My Friends", or "There was a barber and his wife". Besides, by portraying the victim of Todd's revenge as a villain himself (Judge Turpin),

the film confirms Budgell's assertion that "the violence carried out on them by the villain seems more acceptable" (12). This is when Lucy comes into play: Todd tricks the judge into coming again to his barber shop by convincing him that he has Johanna. However, Lucy comes into his barber shop as Judge Turpin is about to arrive for the second time. In order to prevent the plan from failing again, Todd kills her. Even though he succeeds in finally killing the judge, he has killed his own wife in the process without even knowing it, which makes us feel sorry for him.

The plan had been designed in "A Little Priest", when Todd and Mrs. Lovett choose their victims. This musical number is also one of the most comic and satirical ones of the film, which, following the previous line of reasoning, would seem surprising. Yet, the song suits the general satirical spirit of the film and it shows, in an ironic tone, how little importance these characters give to the idea of mass murder (in the end, they are singing about it) and, therefore, it depicts a dangerous insanity in both of them. They are even justifying their own evilness by claiming that "these are desperate times and desperate measures are called for", as if they could not help but make that decision.

In the song, they sing about whose throat Todd should slit next, showing no remorse but, in fact, using linguistic puns that make the scene as surrealistic as it could be. For instance, Todd sings: "Haven't you got poet, or something like that?" to which Mrs. Lovett replies: "No, y'see, the trouble with poet is 'Ow do you know it's deceased?". The satire in this scene derives from lyrics like that one, which shows that they believe they are entitled to decide who they want to cook into pies, as if cannibalism was not already bad enough. Another instance is when Lovett sings: "If you're British and loyal, you might enjoy Royal Marine! Anyway, it's clean. Though of course, it tastes of wherever it's been!". These rhymes depict Mrs. Lovett's twisted insanity, which does not look as dark and dangerous as Todd's in "Epiphany" but which has a rather witty touch.

As stated above, Mrs. Lovett's sanity before meeting Todd can obviously be questioned, but the same could be said about Todd: it is not Mrs. Lovett who turns Todd into a murderer, for he had already murdered Mr. Pirelli before the plan was engineered. This song also proves that Todd is manipulating her into thinking that they could have a romance: "Mrs. Lovett, how I've lived without you all these years, I'll never know!". In reality, he only appreciates her when she helps him with his plan, but she cannot see this. As the song reaches its end, Todd still shows that the only thing he cares about is killing the judge: "I'll come again when you have JUDGE on the menu!"

3.2. A Peculiar Female Villain

While Todd is depicted as a violent, revengeful character almost from the beginning, Mrs. Lovett's delusion increases as she spends more time with him. Her love for him runs parallel to his madness, and this prevents her from using her common sense and running away. They both become madder as the film advances, either for rage or for love. As it happened with the "Epiphany" song, there is a song that portrays the peak of Mrs. Lovett's insanity: "By the Sea". It also shares with "Epiphany" the fact that it has a more powerful effect in the film than in the stage play, for the *mise-en-scène* depicts Mrs. Lovett's daydreaming fantasies (Figure 2). In this musical number, we get to see the world as Mrs. Lovett would want it to be, that is, marrying Todd and living happily ever after together with Toby as their adopted child. This dream of a more conventional family life is, unlike Todd's violent vision in "Epiphany", one of the most colorful scenes of the film. The fact that Mrs. Lovett's vision in "By the Sea" shows brighter colors proves that, despite having come up with the plan herself, her main desire is actually to get away from this destructive and dysfunctional environment and have a "conventional" married life. Nevertheless, this musical number also shows how tone-deaf she is to reality, for, as the film makes clear,

that is nowhere close to happen. At the beginning of the song, she asks Todd if he wants to know what her dream is. Todd answers: “Yes, I do” in a tone that implies the exact opposite. Todd’s disregard of Mrs. Lovett’s desires is obvious for us but not for her.



Figure 2. Mrs. Lovett’s delusion comes to life in “By the Sea”.

As delusional as she is, her motherly relationship with Toby fosters our identification with her. This identification is further reinforced by the only apparently “good-hearted” musical number in the film: “Not While I’m Around”. The scene begins as Toby confirms his suspicions about the murder of Mr. Pirelli when he sees that Mrs. Lovett has Mr. Pirelli’s purse. Even though he tries to warn her in order to save her from Mr. Todd, she would not listen. The fact that they both sing the song, which says “Nothing’s gonna harm you, not while I’m around”, shows that they both have a protective feeling towards each other. It was Mrs. Lovett who first saved Toby when Todd intended to kill the child, and now it is Toby who is trying to protect her from Todd. Even if Mrs. Lovett has allowed Todd to kill a good part of London’s population, we are invited to feel for her because she saved Toby and continues to do so. But in *Sweeney Todd*, everyone is corrupted and no one is safe, to such an extent that even Mrs. Lovett turns on Toby, locking him in the room of the oven because he knows too much. In a way, it looks like both the musical number and the characters are vitiated. When Todd and Mrs. Lovett try to find Toby so that Todd can kill him, Mrs. Lovett sings the song again: “Toby, where

are you, love? Nothing's gonna harm you, darling, not while I'm around". The song becomes now an attempt to fool him into coming back and, therefore, the same lyrics acquire a threatening and scary undertone, for we know its meanings have changed. The motherly side of Mrs. Lovett, which was the only redeeming aspect of her personality, turns into the twisted qualities of a fairy-tale witch.

Budgell also explains that sympathy is more likely to be evoked when the character we feel sympathetic towards is threatened in some way, as is usual in the case of female villains (11). In this case, the film also encourages us to sympathize with Mrs. Lovett, for she ends up becoming another victim of Todd. We could argue that she has been the victim of his manipulation for the whole film because she is willing to do anything in her power to please him. Moreover, she becomes his victim in the literal sense of the word by the end of the film, when Todd discovers that it is his wife Lucy that he has killed and that, therefore, Mrs. Lovett had lied to him. In "The Final Sequence" song, they both play their roles until the very end: Todd begins to sing "A Little Priest" again so that Mrs. Lovett does not think he is about to murder her, and Mrs. Lovett pretends not to know while asking for his forgiveness. Yet, Todd throws her into the oven, reinforcing once again the conventions of the fairy-tale witch. The musical numbers included in "The Final Sequence", which are the songs that we have already heard during the film, show that these characters have not evolved or improved in any way, for they are still singing the same songs with the same mean-spirited purposes.

As stated above, the main characters are as vitiated as some of the songs are, in particular, "Not While I'm Around", which shows the sharpest contrast because it seemed to be one of the sweetest in the film. The same applies to Toby, who is the most innocent character in the story. Despite having a difficult past characterized by violence (Pirelli did not refrain himself from brutally beating him), he is depicted as a sweet angel-voiced

boy. The character of Toby fits Burton's usual representation of children as "assistants" to the hero and as limited or even abused by a parental figure, even if in this case both the hero and the abusive parental figure coincide. However, children are also depicted as untouchable figures in Burton's filmography, that is, as characters impossible to corrupt. In Toby's case, it is hard to decide whether Toby remains corrupted or not by the end of the film. As Weltman (2009: 308) states, this pure portrayal of Toby makes it even more tragic when we see him killing Todd to avenge Mrs. Lovett's death. Thus, on the one hand, we can claim that he ends up becoming a murderer himself. But on the other, he kills the source of evil, so he is also the one to restore order and stay faithful to his filial love towards Mrs. Lovett. Yet, it is hard to imagine Toby's future as unaffected by violence and chaos. This is also Weltman's stance, for she claims that a pure, innocent figure has been vitiated (308). Although Toby's future might be up for debate in the film, in Sondheim's stage play the curtain does not fall with Todd's death but with Toby in a straightjacket, symbolizing his descent into madness.

We may conclude that the musical numbers included in the film play an important role in characterizing both Todd and Mrs. Lovett as condemned to insanity, chaos and death. With the more optimistic musical numbers removed, the film shows its main characters quickly spiraling towards disaster. The repetition of these musical numbers during the "Final Sequence" song (which Burton keeps in its entirety even though it lasts for ten minutes) also give this overwhelming sense of tragedy, as if the characters had no escape from themselves or from each other. Burton manages to vitiate the only innocent scene/relationship in the film, the one existing between Mrs. Lovett and Toby, by transforming their song, "Not While I'm Around", into another evil musical number, blending with the rest of the songs present in the film. The same happens with Toby, who ends up submerged in the same spiral of violence in which the rest already are.

3.3. Plot Construction: Time and Space

The characterization of Todd as an evil-ridden artist is also achieved through plot construction. Both the use of time and space contribute to the idea that Todd is inevitably evil and destined to never turn to his former innocent self.

In terms of space, as mentioned above, we usually find two different worlds in Burton's filmography, two opposed screen spaces. In *Sweeney Todd*, this is not the case. The film is set in a London that is depicted as dark, dirty, and hopeless. Such description could also apply to Sweeney Todd himself. In fact, we may argue that Todd is an embodiment of the two different "Londons" we are shown during the film. That is, instead of presenting two simultaneous worlds, the film introduces a single space that has deteriorated over time, just like the main character has. As a result, and unlike what happens in other Burton films, in *Sweeney Todd* there is no escape or hope for the city or for Todd, since the alternative world presented lies in the past.

Thus, time is used in the film as a way of conveying this same hopelessness both through the deterioration of the setting and of Todd's character over time. The only way for the film to show a brighter and more optimistic London is through the use of flashbacks, which also show a younger, happier Todd. In these flashbacks, mise-en-scène also plays an important role. The flashbacks make use of warm lighting and colors (Figure 4) which sharply contrast with the overall palette of colors that predominate during the rest of the film (Figure 3), where the only warm color is the red of the blood, with the exception of Mrs. Lovett's dream sequence in "By the Sea". The fact that the past is presented as a cheerier time is not incidental; as mentioned above, in *Sweeney Todd* there is no alternative world where the protagonist can go back to. The joyful and idyllic vision of past London, and the delusional world of fantasy, in the case of Mrs. Lovett, are the only places/times to which the characters can escape, but the film makes clear that this is

not possible anymore. Like the city of London, both protagonists are doomed to corruption.



Figures 3 and 4. The color palette during the flashbacks (image on the right) shows a warmer variety of colors than the rest of the film.

Even Todd's change of name suggests an impossibility of salvation for him. When he returns to London, he is not Benjamin Barker anymore, but Sweeney Todd: "No. Not Barker. That man is dead. It's Todd now. Sweeney Todd, and he will have his revenge". Even though there are narrative reasons for this name change, it perfectly symbolizes his inner transformation as well. The sweet, naïve Benjamin Barker is dead, and the revengeful Sweeney Todd is here to stay. We can also perceive a sense of guilt in Todd when he does not want to be called Barker anymore. It is not only a question of not being discovered, but also a rejection of his former self. This interpretation could make the audience feel sympathy for Todd, for it suggests that he blames himself for what happened to his wife and daughter. His obsession with killing the judge might be explained if we consider that it was the only way for him to stop the self-flagellation. It is not until he manages to kill Judge Turpin that he calls himself Barker, which shows that he resented his foolishness in the past but now that he has made up for it, he makes amends with the name again. At this point, as we know, it is too late for him to become the sweet barber that he once was, as he has committed many murders and is about to die himself in the hands of Toby, but he seems to be at peace with his past identity.

3.4. The Artist-Hero, The True Artist

According to Dominic Lennard, Todd would fit into the definition of “The Artist-Hero”, for his main obsession revolves around his artistry as a barber and around his artistic tools: his blades. Todd also shares with Burton’s other “Artist-Heroes” the fact that he is presented in opposition to a brutalizing regime, in this case, the oppressive regime of class hierarchy. At this point in the film, Todd has made clear that London is a corrupted city where those in power can do as they please with those below, as they did to him. The status quo is about to be reversed because now they will be the ones to get away with crime. This is most clearly seen when Todd and Mrs. Lovett sing “A Little Priest”, claiming: “How gratifying for once to know that those above will serve those down below”.

Lennard also refers to the “True Artist” as another way in which Burton celebrates the figure of the artist. According to him, this is done through the introduction of another character who is presented as an inferior artist. Once again, this would constitute another similarity between Sweeney Todd’s character and other “Artist-Heroes” of Burton’s films. In *Sweeney Todd*, this inferior artist would be Pirelli, who used to work for Todd when Todd was Benjamin Barker. His inferiority as a barber is proved when Todd, in order to make himself known in London (so that the word of mouth would attract Judge Turpin to him) defies Pirelli to compete against him and show who offers the fastest shave. Todd beats him effortlessly and eventually, he kills him, which is an even more definitive defeat. Another characteristic of Lennard’s definition of the Artist-Hero is that he is also depicted as superior in comparison with another candidate in the love realm. In this respect, Todd could also be considered a better choice for Lucy than Judge Turpin, at least in the past.

Mainly, what differentiates Sweeney Todd from other Burton's Artist-Heroes is that his artistry stems from his rage and, as such, it does not seek reconciliation but revenge. If we compare Todd to Edward Scissorhands, also played by Johnny Depp, the contrast is clear. Even though there is a physical resemblance between both characters and despite the fact that, in a sense, both are "incomplete" without their artistic blades, Edward does not seek revenge despite being falsely accused of forcefully entering a house in the neighborhood. In fact, he keeps using his blades to prune other neighbors' gardens. In contrast, Todd is also falsely accused of murder, but his main motivation is not being a barber anymore (as it might have been fifteen years before) but to use his blades to avenge that injustice.

In short, although Todd complies with some of the characteristics that define Burton's main characters, his characterization goes beyond the Artist-Hero or the True Artist, being a tormented artist but in a much more twisted manner. As a result, Todd could be considered Burton's most evil creation, a character that has one very determined motivation: revenge, which will get everyone around him killed, including himself.

4. Conclusion

The analysis of Burton's adaptation of the stage musical enables us to understand how *Sweeney Todd* is such a bleak yet popular film. Enthusiasts of the stage musical might be disappointed with the amount of changes in the film. However, as Craig M. McGill argues in "*Sweeney Todd: Hypertextuality, Intermediality and Adaptation*" (2019), adaptations need to be analysed in relation to their source material without necessarily exploring fidelity (42). *Sweeney Todd* is a good example of this because, despite not being completely loyal to the original form, the audience still appreciates these changes, as they result in a film of reasonable duration.

In the choice of actors, as in the overall aesthetics of the film, *Sweeney Todd* perfectly complies with some of the conventions we expect from a Burton film. Yet, his choices when adapting the stage play are not only aimed at fitting the targeted medium, but also at focusing on the tragic parts of the story and the characters, in particular of Todd. On the one hand, the protagonist is a marginalized artist that physically resembles other protagonists in Burton's films. On the other, because Burton highlights those musical numbers that enable us to follow Todd's evolution, this protagonist is depicted as an increasingly dangerous character, a trait that other Burton's protagonists lack.

The female villain in the film also differs from other female characters in Burton's filmography. In particular, because she is as involved in the main plot as the male protagonist is and we follow her evolution and decadence as much as we follow Todd's. Burton makes a great use of *mise-en-scène* to depict these characters' state of mind, which invites us to root for Mrs. Lovett, together with her relationship with Toby. Toby's character also challenges the representation of children in Burton's films as untouchable, for he ends up being vitiated. Yet, the audience cannot know for sure whether Toby's future will be hopeless as well, although I am more inclined to think it will.

On the whole, the film makes it impossible to find the sense of stability that is achieved when the audience can rely on one character to solve the situation. That would be Burton's recurrent figure of the "Artist-Hero", but we cannot find that type of hero in Todd. Despite the hopelessness of the story, the general satirical tone characteristic of Burton makes it a surprisingly amusing film that managed to charm a mass audience.

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