SWEENEY TODD

The Demon Barber of Fleet Street

by C. G. Bond

SAMUEL FRENCH

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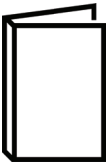
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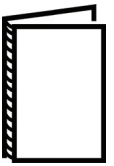
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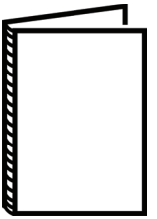
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AUTHOR'S NOTE

There have been at least six versions of *Sweeney Todd, the Demon Barber of Fleet Street* since George Dibdin-Pitt's original melodrama was first performed in 1847 at The Brittania, a London "Bloodbath" (a theatre devoted almost exclusively to melodramas). Nor was Pitt's play entirely original, he based it on a "penny dreadful", a newsheet containing sensational descriptions of depravity, violence and grotesque murder with a few lines of pious editorial humbug at the end – the mixture is still on sale every Sunday, just as dreadful but now it costs ten or eleven times the original penny. Where the "penny dreadful" got its "facts" from nobody knows, although there was a Jacobin barber in Paris during the French Revolution who achieved the difficult feat (under the prevailing circumstances) of shocking the public by perpetrating a series of bizarre murders upon his clients: but there the similarity ends: no trick chair, and no Mrs Lovett's meat pies, these belong to the "penny dreadful". All the versions of the play have contained the chair and the pies, and so does mine – I would hardly have the temerity to call my play Sweeney Todd if it didn't. However, I've cast my net wider than anyone else in "borrowing" from other authors: I make no apology for this, after all, as the man himself said: "A beggar may eat of a fish that hath fed of a worm that hath ate of a King". I have "borrowed" from, amongst others, *The Count of Monte Christo, The Revenger's Tragedy, The Spanish Tragedy,* the family greengrocer, and Shakespeare, as well as Dibdin-Pitt's original melodrama. My object has been to add to the chair and the pies an exciting story, characters that are large but real, and situations that, given a mad world not unlike our own, are believable. For these seem to me to be the ingredients that melodrama has lost in recent years; undoubtedly in its heyday during the last century melodrama involved people, entertained them, frightened, amused and moved them: nowadays the fashion is to "send them up", and ask the audience merely to laugh at the *naïveté* of their forbears. This seems to me a pity, and I have tried to add to the original idea of melodrama to make it more acceptable to a modern audience.

I enjoyed writing this *Sweeney Todd* and I hope you enjoy reading and/or performing it – because that is the key to making it work!

C. G. Bond

SWEENEY TODD

First presented by the Theatre Workshop at the Theatre Royal, Stratford, London, with the following cast of characters:

ANTHONY HOPE	Brian Protheroe
SWEENEY TODD	Brian Murphy
A BEGGAR WOMAN	Paola Dionisotti
MRS LOYETT, of the pie shop	Avis Bunnage
A BEADLE	Ken Hill
JUDGE TURPIN	Ron Hackett
TOBIAS RAGG	Tom Owen
A BALDING MAN	Trevor T. Smith
ALFREDO PIRELLI	John Lyons
JOHANNA	Lorna Heilbron
JONAS FOGG	Trevor T. Smith

The play directed by Maxwell Shaw
Setting by Tony Woollard
The action of the play passes in the City of London

Time – early nineteenth century

SWEENEY TODD
by the Director

The Majority of thriller/melodramas, of which Sweeney Todd has always been one of the best-known, were written and performed with the express purpose of providing audiences with the thrills, horror and shocks which they have always, traditionally, enjoyed. In recent years, however, the seemingly endless stream of horror films produced by, in some cases, very brilliant film-makers, have explored every conceivable means of doing this, and with far greater impact and realism than could ever be achieved in the theatre.

The theatre's answer to this has been to present plays of this type as an opportunity for the cast and director to indulge in a jolly romp, "hamming" the passion, and sending up the romance and pathos. Snarling, leering villains, behind-the-hand asides, posturing heroes and swooning heroines are all exaggerated to the extreme, and thus, in presenting a play in this way, one is merely inviting the audience to join in the fun and laugh at this comment on what is, in most cases, a rather superficial and crudely constructed play about one-dimensional characters with whom the audience must find great difficulty in identifying.

When I first read this version by C.G. Bond, I was immediately aware of the fact that he had written, not only an entirely new play based on the original idea, but one with a real plot, characters, genuine comedy situations and, above all, something to say. It struck me as a very positive comment on the fact that we have come to accept such things as violence, wholesale murder – and worse – as part of our everyday lives. The love scene between Todd and Mrs Lovett, played over a bowl containing "black-pudding-mix" (the ingredients are, of course, of human origin), is terrifying in its domestic normality, but are we really so very far away from this ourselves?

There was never any doubt in my mind about the style in which I would direct the play. The production, I decided, would be absolutely "straight". The sets, costumes and props must all be authentic, not least of which "The Chair" would have to be totally convincing. The cast would play for the truth of the situations, and leave the strength of the play – its drama, horror and comedy – to take care of itself. In the true style of melodrama, however, the actors would be encouraged to express their emotions freely

and fully, with truth, but without "over-acting". In all the earlier versions of this play, the central character of Sweeney Todd has always been written and portrayed as a homicidal maniac, murdering his customers in order to rob them, and forcing others, through fear, to share in his crimes, but there has never been any explanation or justification for this. In C. G. Bond's version, however, Todd starts out as a sympathetic character. An ordinary man whose initial motive is one of revenge for the wrongs committed against him and his family, but who soon succumbs to the fascination of holding the power of life or death in his hands. I decided, therefore, that Todd should be played as normally and sanely as possible within the context of the play, and this interpretation was responsible for emphasising the horror of the situation.

The response from the audiences was extraordinary. School children, locals, intellectuals and critics alike were unanimous in praising the fact that it was performed absolutely "straight", and that they were thus completely involved in the play from start to finish. Several parties of school children came back more than once to see the production, as did many members of the local community, and it was also interesting to note that there were sometimes parties of people who had come simply to have a good time hissing the villains and cheering the heroes, who would start off doing so indiscriminately, but after a while would become so involved in the play that their participation was completely spontaneous. To sit amongst an audience shouting out to the heroine, "Don't sit in the chair!" with genuine concern was, for me, a most exciting experience, but in fact, the production was not designed specifically for audience participation (although this is normally the policy of the theatre in which it was performed) and yet the response, as far as this aspect was concerned, was more positive than anything previously experienced.

Maxwell Shaw

ACT I

Scene One

Fleet Street. Night.

A lamplighter crosses, then a young couple. **A BEGGAR WOMAN** *follows.* **ANTHONY HOPE** *and* **SWEENEY TODD** *enter.*

ANTHONY I have sailed the world, beheld its fairest cities, seen the pyramids, the wonders of the east. Yet it is true – there *is* no place like home.

TODD None.

ANTHONY What's the matter?

TODD You are young. Life has been kind to you, and fortune smiles on your enterprises. May it always be so. My heart beats quicker, too, to find myself in London once again, but whether out of joy or fear I cannot say.

The **BEGGAR WOMAN** *approaches them.*

BEGGAR WOMAN Alms! *(She holds out her bowl)* Help a poor unfortunate woman. Mister?

ANTHONY *(giving her a coin)* Here, go in peace.

BEGGAR WOMAN God bless you! *(To* **TODD***)* And you, sir? Will you not have mercy on a...

TODD Be off with you. Leave us.

She stares at him. He turns away.

BEGGAR WOMAN Your – face! *(She tries to move round him)* There's something – I...

TODD I said be off! Deluded hag! *(He goes to strike her)*

The **BEGGAR WOMAN** *scuttles off.*

TODD *sees* **ANTHONY** *watching him. He recovers himself.*

ANTHONY My friend, I have honoured the promise I made you at the start of our long journey, and never once have I questioned you. But now my curiosity overwhelms me. Why do you hide your face? What can frighten you in a poor beggar like that?

TODD *(abstractedly)* I thought it impossible that anyone should recognise me.

ANTHONY She did not. She is mad. But why should you fear if she did?

TODD I owe my life to you, Anthony. Without you and your good ship I would be long dead, so perhaps I owe it to you to tell you the truth. I, too, have sailed across the world, but I have seen no wonders – unless the angry noonday sun, shrivelling a man's shadow to a smudge beneath his feet, be a wonder. Or the greed and cruelty that forces a man to fight his own brother to the death for a crust of bread. Such "wonders" as these I have seen – and worse that I will not relate, for you could not believe it. When you found me clinging to my makeshift raft, half mad with thirst, you found a man devoid of hope – an escaped prisoner whose desperation made him dare his captors and the elements to seek his freedom in the jaws of certain death.

ANTHONY What was your crime?

TODD My wife was beautiful.

ANTHONY Why, if that be a crime...

TODD A heinous one in this same town you call home. For here there are men who cannot look on beauty, and not defile it:

who scratch and tear at virtue's shining face with fumbling hands till they have made it ugly as their own. Two such men there were – two upright men – a beadle and a judge, who tried with every flattery, every temptation, to win my wife to their desires. But she, bright angel, would have none of them. So – then they worked their devilish practices. Falsely, I was charged with petty theft, arrested – by the beadle, and brought straight to court before that same judge, who, in accents grave, sentenced me to transportation for life, hoping that in my absence my good wife would fall.

ANTHONY And did she?

TODD No! *(Helplessly)* I do not know. That is what I hope to find out – here. My barber's shop was in the upper storey, but as you see – a barber's shop no more. Here, below, lives Mrs Lovett. I hope she will have news for me. Now leave me, Anthony, to learn my fate. I would not have you see me weep – whether for joy or sorrow.

ANTHONY I will. Shall we meet tomorrow?

TODD Yes. At St Dunstan's market place. At noon.

ANTHONY I will be there. Farewell. I'll pray for your good fortune.

ANTHONY *goes.*

TODD Farewell, my friend. A wife and daughter left behind in deadly peril, unprotected. What spite befell them? The answer lies within. Yet I must not be known to anyone I cannot trust. Well. I have no choice – my fate awaits me.

TODD *enters the pie shop.*

Music. The lights change.

Scene Two

MRS LOVETT*'s pie shop.*

TODD *enters.*

TODD *(calling)* Are you all asleep? Some food, here.

MRS LOVETT *enters.*

MRS LOVETT Are you a ghost?

TODD *starts for the door, fearing he has been recognised.*

Hey, don't go running out the minute you get in. I only took you for a ghost 'cos you're the first customer I've seen for a fortnight. Sit you down.

TODD *sits, warily.*

You'd think we had the plague, the way people avoid this shop. A pie, was it?

TODD A pie – yes. And some ale.

MRS LOVETT *(getting the pie)* Mind you, you can't hardly blame them. There's no denying these are the most tasteless pies in London. I should know, I make 'em. *(She puts the pie on the table, then flicks a bit of dirt off the crust)* Ugh! What's that? But can you wonder, with meat the price it is? I mean, I never thought I'd see the day when grown men and good cooks, too, would dribble over a dead dog like it was a round of beef. *(She goes for some ale)*

TODD I hardly wonder your trade's bad if you talk like this to all your customers.

MRS LOVETT *(bringing the jug and tankard to the table)* Well, sir, I speaks as finds, I do. And what I'm telling you is the plain and simple truth. Mind you, they do say necessity's the mother of invention. The other day, Tuesday it was, I was walking down Cheapside, and I saw a crowd of people

looking in a pie shop window. Well, I thought, I'd better have a look an' all. And there in the window, pretty as a picture, was a roasted cat all garnished round with little mice tied up to look like sausages. Beautiful it was. But how am I to catch mice, with me legs like what they are? Not to mention me wind. Oh, times is very hard.

TODD Yes. *(After a pause)* Don't the family that live above pay you any rent?

MRS LOVETT No, there's no one lives up there, sir. Been empty for years. There was a barber and his family that lived there once – ooh, a lovely man, he was, a *real* man, but he got transported across the seas. Mind you, he deserved it.

TODD Deserved it! What was his crime?

MRS LOVETT Foolishness. Mind you his wife didn't help much. She was a brainless creature. Two proper gentlemen took a fancy to her, you see, but she wouldn't have none of it, and her husband, poor fool, instead of fetching her one round the mouth and leaving his bed for a couple of nights – he encouraged these fancy notions in her. Well – daft, weren't it? I would have had him down here for a couple of nights – and more if he'd wanted. But no, he had to make a song and dance of it. Well, stands to reason, they shipped him off.

TODD What became of his wife? And were there no children?

MRS LOVETT There was a daughter, yes. Both cried themselves silly, they did, when he'd gone.

During **MRS LOVETT***'s narration of the following events a dumb show is performed of them. It opens with* **MRS TODD** *and* **JOHANNA** *weeping.* **BEADLE, JUDGE** *and Onlookers enter and join in as described.*

Then one day Beadle came to call on her – to try his luck, you see – but she wasn't having any. Then he says as how the Judge had repented of himself and wanted to try and help get her husband back. And she, poor soul believed him. Beadle said as how the Judge had taken to his bed in

a terrible state and would she come to the Inns of Court that night to see what could be done for her poor husband. Well, she went, but when she got there they was having this fancy dress ball, you see, all in masks, they was, and she didn't know what to do, couldn't find the Judge anywhere. But he found her soon enough, and he were in a terrible state all right – but it weren't with repentance or nothing like that. She tried to fight him off, but the Beadle helped like, and what could she do on her own? All of them at the ball just looked on, you see. Watched, like.

By this time **MRS TODD**, *surrounded by onlookers, is being raped by the* **JUDGE**. **SWEENEY TODD** *can bear it no longer.*

TODD Will no one have mercy on her?

The onlookers laugh as the dumb show dissolves.

Then I will have no mercy either. None.

MRS LOVETT Here, you are in a state. You've hardly touched your pie.

TODD *(seizing* **MRS LOVETT** *and forcing her to look closely at him)* I am that poor unfortunate woman's husband: that foolish barber so unjustly transported. Now tell me, woman, what became of my wife and daughter?

MRS LOVETT You *are* him! But how you've changed. You look as if you've shook hands with the devil and come back to tell it.

TODD Where is my wife? My Lucy?

MRS LOVETT Oh, sir...

TODD Where is she?

MRS LOVETT When she came back here she were in a pitiful state. Her hair was all across her face and her eyes were all wild like an animal's. She went straight up where Johanna was sleeping and woke her up. Then she gave the poor mite poison and took the rest herself.

SWEENEY TODD *falls to the ground.*

Oh now, don't distress yourself so. Yer can't bring 'em back that way, you know. *(Kneeling beside him)* There, there, you haven't changed much, have you? Still as soft as butter.

She cradles his head until he is somewhat recovered.

TODD Oh, you shall see a change in me. That husband, soft as butter, died on that same night. And in his place shall rise such a man to put the world to fright, and this I vow, I will not rest until my wife and daughter be avenged.

MRS LOVETT No, no, you didn't let me finish. It was just your wife that died.

TODD Johanna lives?

MRS LOVETT As surely as I do – and pretty as a picture, too. I revived the poor mite, sat up with her three nights when she couldn't take no nourishment down at all, but after that she got stronger and in next to no time she was good as new.

TODD *(making to search for her)* Where is she? Let me see her.

MRS LOVETT Oh, she's not here. I couldn't keep her.

TODD Where is she, then?

MRS LOVETT The Judge came looking for her when he heard as how your wife was dead. He weren't happy about it, you see, after he'd got what he wanted. Said he'd set her up in the world, and took her off of me – to be his ward, he said.

TODD He shall pay dearly. This do I vow, this heart shall be as stone. These hands of mine shall drip with guilty blood: this face strike cowards dead as look on it. I will be revenged.

MRS LOVETT But how can yer be? He's a judge, the other's a beadle, and you're a poor penniless escaped convict, running from the law. How can yer be revenged on 'em?

TODD Some way. Any way. I will have blood. But you are right, the plan I have in mind requires money. If only I had my razors I know where I might find some.

MRS LOVETT Oh, Mr...

TODD Todd, Sweeney Todd. The other man is dead.

MRS LOVETT Oh, all right, "Mr Todd". Here's a crumb of comfort for you. *(She goes and gets the razors in a box and brings them back to him)* I found your razors upstairs when I was clearing out – to pay for the funeral, like. But I thought I'd hang on to them. *(She makes up to him)* I remembered how you treasured them, you see, and I always had a fondness for you and hoped you might come back one day and... Well, never mind that for the present. But here they are, shining like they was new. I was offered a hundred pounds for them, I was, and in my position, well— *(She examines them lovingly)* I was tempted, but I didn't fall.

TODD *(taking a razor from the box)* My right hand is complete again.

MRS LOVETT Them handles is chased silver, ain't they?

TODD Silver – yes!

MRS LOVETT See how they shine.

TODD Aye, but before too long this blade will make its handle seem as dull as common lead. For from its edge shall drip inestimable rubies.

Scene Three

St Dunstan's Market Place.

TOBIAS RAGG *is discovered, together with shoppers, street vendors, the* **BEADLE**, *and the* **BEGGAR WOMAN.**

TOBIAS Gentlemen! Gentlemen! Your attention per-lease. Have you seen cripples throw away their crutches? Heard dumb men speak? Seen dead men rise from out the ground and caper round the town? Well? Have you? Have you seen life spring anew where once it was extinct? If you have seen these things, then go about your business. For I have nothing new to tell you. But if you would behold a miracle – here, in this very square, then stay and hearken. For I have seen death's dreadful tread averted, seen precious life burgeon from barren soil. I have seen this and touched it with these trembling hands. Here. On the top of my head.

SWEENEY TODD *enters during the final words of the above.*

(catching his breath and staring above the heads of the onlookers as if he has seen a ghost) O! My mother, mother. *(He stretches out his hands as if to touch someone)* Gone, gone. Your pardon, gentlemen, methought I saw my mother – oh, so pale, so pale – she who first suckled me and from whose breast I learnt that truth is golden and that liars go to hell, but 'tis impossible. Ah, gentlemen, when I was but a lad of seven years old, death rudely snatched her from me, and I, a lad who knew no other comfort but her yielding bosom, was thrust into the workhouse. This change was almost mortal to me. I wasted down to nothing, could not eat, nor sleep, scarce breathe...

BEADLE Now then, young feller, there's nothing wrong with the workhouse. I take an interest in the lads myself.

TOBIAS No, no, you miss my meaning, sir, The workhouse was a warm and happy place. It was my mother's death that made

me so ill. *(Searching for his lines again)* That it was that made me – er – was almost mortal to me. I wasted down to nothing, could not eat nor sleep, scarce breathe. And all my hair fell out. Upon my honour, it is true. I had no more hair on my head than an egg. Oh, I was in a terrible state. But, gentlemen, here is the miracle. A barber-surgeon found me in this wretched plight, and where all the kindness of the workhouse people failed – his ministrations saved me. He gave me a bottle of a substance rare as gold – Pirelli's Miracle Elixir – and rubbed it in with loving fingers thrice a day. Behold my head! There lies the miracle! New life grows there, new hope, new strength. Now who will take advantage of this miracle? Who needs new life? You, sir? And you?

Two **GENTLEMEN** *come forward, one with receding hair.*

For only tuppence you can be as me. Here, feel its strength…

While **TOBIAS** *is selling the hair restorer* **ANTHONY HOPE** *enters, looking for* **SWEENEY TODD.**

ANTHONY Ah, there you are, my friend. I'm sorry to have kept you waiting, but…

TODD Sssh! Listen, I may need your help. And the favour I ask may be a painful one.

ANTHONY You could not cause me pain today.

TODD Then I may count on you?

ANTHONY Of course.

TOBIAS Are you all done for the Pirelli's Miracle Elixir? Right. Then who will step inside and have a shave from the Prince of Barbers, the man who shaved the King of Naples before the Battle of Pistolero and to whom, you will recall, the King dedicated that glorious victory? Or who will have the raging toothache assuaged by the man who pulled a tooth out from a Medici princess's mouth so skilfully she thought he'd kissed her, so she swooned and asked for more? The