

Character Analysis Excerpt for *Sweeney Todd*

Character: Tobias Ragg, 14 years old

Dramaturgical Information:

Author: Stephen Sondheim (1930 - 2021) – American composer, songwriter, and lyricist; considered one of the most important, influential, and complex musical theatre creators of the 20th century; also known for *Into the Woods*, *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, *A Little Night Music*, and more; awarded eight Tony Awards, an Academy Award, eight Grammy Awards, and the Presidential Medal of Freedom, among others; wrote shows that addressed the “darker, more harrowing elements of the human experience”

Info: 1979 (Broadway premiere) – originated from a Victorian character of the same name, and based on the 1973 play *Sweeney Todd*; takes place in 1846, with occasional flashback scenes from 15 years prior

Synopsis: *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*, which takes place in London in 1846, focuses on Sweeney Todd, a barber formerly known as Benjamin Barker who was “transported for life” fifteen years prior, and Mrs. Lovett, an unsuccessful pie shop owner. When Mrs. Lovett discovers who Sweeney actually is, she returns his old razors to him, and the pair form an alliance of sorts in order to get revenge on the Judge who sent Sweeney away in an attempt to earn the affections of Sweeney’s wife (who the Judge later poisoned, raped, and supposedly killed). Meanwhile, Anthony, the young sailor who rescued Sweeney from the ocean, finds Johanna, a young girl locked in her house who sings beautifully, and he immediately falls in love. However, the Beggar Woman – an old, homeless woman who wanders the streets attempted to sell herself as a prostitute – informs him that Johanna is the Judge’s ward, and he won’t let anyone near her. This is proven true when Anthony tries to gift Johanna a bird, but the Judge and his Beadle furiously drive Anthony off.
“....”

Given circumstances of character: Tobias Ragg is an orphaned boy (typically played between 10 and 25 years old) from London, England. He makes money where he can, and serves as the assistant to Signor Adolfo Pirelli, an Irish conman posing as an Italian who sells urine as a “Miracle Elixir” for hair growth. Tobias has clearly not been shown much affection in his life, so he quickly latches onto Mrs. Lovett’s motherly affections after Pirelli “mysteriously disappears.” He is bold and charming but not very bright, and he’s loyal to a fault.

Relationship to other characters:

Sweeney Todd – Mrs. Lovett’s “neighbor”; Toby has a tumultuous and suspicious relationship with Sweeney because he fears that Sweeney will harm Mrs. Lovett, though he doesn’t realize that the two are already working together

- Mrs. Lovett – an older pie shop owner who serves as a mother figure to Toby; Toby moves in with her during the second Act to work in her pie shop, and the two grow very close, though Mrs. Lovett eventually turns on Toby in order to keep Sweeney's affections
- Anthony – a young sailor who is friend with Sweeney Todd; Tobias does not interact with Anthony until the final scene of the musical, but it is likely that Toby knows of him
- Johanna – Judge Turpin's adopted daughter, and Sweeney Todd's real daughter; Tobias does not interact with Johanna until the final scene of the musical, but it is likely that Toby knows of her, seeing as she is the daughter of Turpin and she often sings loudly out of her window
- Judge Turpin – the local judge, and Johanna's adopted father; Tobias does not interact with Johanna until the final scene of the musical, but it is likely that Toby knows of him
- Beadle Bamford – Judge Turpin's right-hand man; Tobias and the Beadle briefly interact when Pirelli and Sweeney have a shaving contest and the Beadle serves as the judge; Tobias likely has a bad reputation with the Beadle for supporting Pirelli's con
- Beggar Woman – though Tobias interacts very little with the Beggar Woman, he clearly knows of her, especially seeing as she is homeless like Tobias; during the second Act II, Toby shoos the Beggar Woman away from Mrs. Lovett's pie shop, and he recognizes her body during the final scene
- Adolfo Pirelli – Tobias' cruel master; he provides Tobias with food, shelter, and occasionally money, but he is physically abusive
- Jonas Fogg – the owner of the asylum; Tobias does not interact with him, and it is unclear whether Toby knows who he is or not

Character's Through-Action:

- Literal: Toby is working for various people and utilizing his skills as a salesman to keep himself alive.
- Ultimate Goal/Through-Action: Finding someone who will reciprocate his capacity for loyalty and affection.
- Principal Obstacle: Mrs. Lovett's obsession with Sweeney, and the fact that she ultimately chooses Sweeney over Toby.