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Sweeney Todd

Sweeney Todd was originally a musical that came to Broadway in 1979. It was a mixture of horror and comedy based off of the legend of a Victorian serial killer and is still known as one of London’s most infamous villains. It was then later adapted to the silver screen on December 3rd of 2007. It was produced and directed by Tim Burton who is famous for his dark but hauntingly beautiful movies. It of course would not have been a Tim Burton movie without the talented Johnny Depp as the lead, playing Sweeny Todd and Helena Bonham Carter as leading lady, Mrs. Lovett.

Remove summary:

The film is a story of the effects of a corrupt economic and social class system. Sweeney Todd is a middle class barber who was wrongfully sent to prison in Australia by Judge Turpin the towns authority, thus separating him from his wife and infant daughter. When Todd returns he discovers that the Judge has publically assaulted his wife with no reprocusions causing her to go “insane” and kill herself. This causes Todd to go on a murderous rampage in hopes of exacting his revenge on the Judge. To do this he reopens his barber shop and begins slitting patrons throats and letting his downstairs neighbor, Mrs. Lovett use the bodies for her meat pies in her shop. He is eventually successful in killing the judge but not before killing the town hag which he discovers too late is actually the wife he thought had killed herself. He is then killed by another character while sobbing over his dead wife’s body.

While this film has many underlying themes such as revenge and greed, one that stuck out to me was how the power of class separation can cause tragedy. Throughout the film the bitterness between social and economic classes can be seen through song. The first instance where we see Sweeney Todd’s bitterness towards the higher classes is literally within the first few minutes of the movie. The movie begins with him returning to London and the song “No Place Like London” begins. The lyrics “There’s a hole in the world like a great black pit….. At the top of the world sit a privileged few making mock of the vermin in the lower zoo. Turning beauty to filth and greed.” By this the character is saying that the world is a dark unfair place that is run by few privileged people in power who don’t care about the lower class. This is not the only song that is sung from Todd’s perspective that points out these views. In a later scene with Mrs. Lovett. They are deciding whether or not they should kill people to make meat pies. This dilemma is of course discussed in song. The name of this song is called “A little priest” throughout the song Helena Bonham Carter’s and Johnny Depp’s characters sing about how certain people may taste differently in comparison to their social status or occupation. For example, one line in the song says, “Here’s a politician, so oily it’s served with a doily.” By saying this the characters are implying that you cannot trust a politician because they are “oily” meaning they lie and are greedy. One of the songs sung by Mrs. Lovetts shows her perspective on how poor the economy is and how it has effected local businesses in the song Worst Pies in London. In this song she sings about another local pie shop called Miss Mooney’s Pie Shop and the rumors surrounding its ingredients. She points out that the neighborhood cats who live around Miss Mooney keep going missing, implying that she is putting them in her pies because she is so poor. The song ends with Mrs. Lovetts repeating “times is hard” at the end of the song. There is yet another song that comments on the unequalness of class power. After Todd discovers that the Judge has raped his wife and believing that she has killed herself as a result he sings the song Epiphany. One line in the song that I think really sums up the entire idea of this unequal shift of power is, “There are two kinds of men, and only two. There’s the one staying put in his proper place, and the one with his foot in the other ones face.” These lyrics are saying that the two kinds of men are men with economic or social power and the men without economic or social power. And that those with power abuse those without it.

One character that is often overlooked in this story is Mrs. Lovetts. She is often seen as a irrelevant character who had good intentions but was selfish with her feeling for Sweeney Todd. In an article on Sondhiem.com it is pointed out that her feelings toward Todd have nothing to do with love. Saying that,

“She is capitalism non-rampant, her criteria for behavior has nothing to do with ethics with ethics or morality. Her motives for helping Mr. Todd in his revenge plot are distinctly selfish; she acts out of greed, and a desire to put out her competition (Miss Mooney).”

In the movie all of her conversations with Sweeney are one sided and are mostly of her wishes of getting out of a low income part of town and to live comfortably by the sea and to be the envy of others. She doesn’t love him but loves the idea of a life filled with money and having him as an accessory. She wants to elevate her status by using Sweeney Todd and she confuses her want to be a “kept woman” with love.

The main villain in this movie is the Judge. The Judge represents all of the corrupt politics and evil in society. He is not held accountable for his actions but yet has the authority to to decide punishments for other peoples crimes. In the scene that introduces thejudges character in the movie. The scene is in the dark dreary courtroom where the judge is reading off a list of crimes that the accused who is not pictured in the scene is guilty of. The camera then pans onto a small child who is sobbing as he is unjustly sentenced to death. This Ridiculous sentence shows the character and nature of the Judge. A corrupt political system is timeless. According to the mintpressnews.com Oklahoma state representative Kevin Calvey introduced house bill 2206 that would prohibit Oklahomas district attourney’s from prosecuting state officials, granting that power exclusively to State Attorney General,. Making it nearly impossible to prosecute any crimes that are handled at a local level. The bill states;

“The Jurisdiction of a prosecution against a principal in the commission of a offesnse, when such principal is a state elected official state legislator, district court judicial officer or an appointee of a state board or state commission of the offensive is within the sole nd exclusive prosecutorial authority of the Attorney General of Oklahoma. Such an action must be filled in the county of residence of the state officer.”

This bill of course has had many oppposers Attorney David Prater explained “This bill creates a different class of citizens that would be protected from the normal prosecution process.”