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MUSICALS, MURDERS, AND MOTIVATION:
A VIEW ON THE AUDIENCE AND THEIR SUPPORT
TOWARDS MUSICAL MURDERERS THROUGH MASLOW

by

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B.A. Nova Southeastern University, 2019

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
in the Department of Theatre
in the College of Arts and Humanities
at the University of Central Florida
Orlando, Florida

Spring Term

2022

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ABSTRACT

Audiences relay morbid support towards the enjoyment of horrific entertainment. Such examples are the success and long-standing allure spectators hold towards musicals such as *Phantom of the Opera*, *Spring Awakening*, *Heathers*, and more. These are shows that include themes of death, darkness, and tragedy which are presented. Using Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Motivation, The Jungian Archetype of Shadow, and Catharsis I will show how audiences are supportive of protagonists who portray actions resulting in death, darkness, and murder despite the societal pressure to find such subject matter as offensive, vile, repugnant, or obscene. By referencing the characters found in *Sweeney Todd*, *Little Shop of Horrors*, and *A Gentleman's Guide to Love & Murder* and through deep analysis and study of these psychological ideas, I plan to show how spectators ultimately fulfill their own Maslowian and Shadowesque desires from witnessing such instances of horrific entertainment resulting in catharsis.

To all of those who have supported me throughout this journey, your words of inspiration, motivation, and endless love are sewn within every line of this document. Honestly, this Thesis could not have been completed without you.

To my parents, *Anthony*, and *Cecy Nunez* whose words of encouragement and push for tenacity ring in my ears, as well as all their aid and endless care, had it not been for you two I would not be here, to begin with. I love you!

To my friends, specifically *Katie*, *Tiffany*, and *Yoel* who always lent an ear when I needed one or when I was simply at my wit's end and needed a kind word. Thank you. In addition to instilling me with constant reassurance, praise, and confidence you never failed to leave a smile on my face when I most needed it.

To *Johnny* my special someone who has always supported me throughout this process no matter how hard it got, through all my tears and frustrations, you furiously reminded me how passionate I am about the work that I do and how special, and impactful my work is, and most importantly to never give up. You will never know how at ease your words put me through it all, and how much I needed to hear everything you said. I love you more and most.

Lastly, to those that this work will hopefully influence and in some way find solace in better understanding the role theatre plays in healing oneself, I lovingly dedicate this to you all.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the following people, without whom I would not have been able to complete this research and would not have made it through achieving this Graduate degree!

Daniel Gelbmann, who has been an ideal teacher, and mentor since my undergraduate days at Nova Southeastern University, as well as my external expert during my thesis process, offered advice and encouragement with a perfect blend of insight and humor. Dan has ALWAYS been there for me, and I am immensely grateful for my time working with him.

Jim Brown, who has believed in me since day one, and who highly encouraged me to research deeper into this notion which then became the basis for this paper, I thank you greatly. Working alongside you, whilst listening to your constant insight upon this topic, as well as the characters in reference, was undeniably the highlight of working towards my graduate degree.

Holly McDonald, whose constant praise, and kindness truly uplifted me and drove me during my hardest of days. Thank you for always believing in my abilities and talents!

Joseph Dambrosi, who helped me create the structure for the layout of this piece and advised me on how to successfully work towards obtaining my degree. Your wisdom and experience helped me more than you will ever know.

Dr. W. Steven Saunders, who assisted me with his references and knowledge towards the psychological aspects and their application towards theatre embedded within this work, and whose guidance truly assisted me in understanding the theories of Maslow and Jung as mentioned.

Ximena Gonzalez and *Lauren Argibay*, my inspiring colleagues, who have been my solace during my time at the University of Central Florida helping me throughout my education journey and teaching me what it truly meant to be a Knight.

Lastly, thank you to my committee chair *Christopher Niess*. Your assistance and feedback provided were sincerely appreciated throughout this written piece.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“To the ego, change is equivalent to danger or death. But when we deny this evolutionary call, it causes an inner pressure that must find an outlet, sometimes in destructive ways.”

- **Derek Rydall**

For humans, the need for security is essential to one’s survival. To reduce fear and anxiety, the individual requires safety, stability, structure, protection, love, belonging, respect, and order. The fulfillment of these specific needs allows a person a sense of comfort and balance. Abraham Maslow points out that although most humans have ensured these needs, the overall reminder of sense and security is still required to a high degree as most people fear the things for which they truly hold no precedent. (Maslow, 1970)

The things that drive us, are key to our survival as human beings. Our individual needs garner a purpose in our lives, motivating us to push through all hardships and overall keeping us alive. This notion is the basis of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs and can be demonstrated through a series of categorical needs. For starters, Maslow primarily focuses on those needs which are considered “basic” and mainly obtainable. That being food, water, oxygen, sex, and shelter.

Once these needs have been met, we as individuals transition into our needs for love and esteem. These belonging needs become prominent in our lives when psychological and safety needs have been met yet sit as a halfway point between love and esteem towards an individual’s notion of complete fulfillment within the Hierarchy of Needs. The desire to obtain these needs, though significant throughout our lives, and for that of the characters in reference, is not essential when in the face of long-term survival. Still, these needs are perhaps the most diverse of the

hierarchy, as they can impact and manifest themselves in a variety of ways and are overall the most sought after. Love, belonging, and esteem are often the terms used, followed by mutual respect, relations, and acceptance when focusing on one's psychological needs. Family, close friends, coworkers, classmates, lovers, and so forth all satisfy the overall desire for these needs as does one's sense and position within a certain group or space.

These needs are not simple to satisfy nor the easiest to obtain. With an ever-evolving civilization, people's social packs do not usually tend to stay together for long, and personal connections can change at a whim. With today's social media the need to 'belong' and feel 'admired' is placed on a pedestal for a wide majority of individuals. Life isn't always perfect and through the rough-cut and unglamorous portions of it we may go through as human beings there are always lessons to be learned, and knowledge to be derived from the situations we and others face day-to-day- again, life isn't simply just happily ever after. This becomes more apparent when the Maslow way of need fulfillment becomes tainted, through our psychological notion of Shadow (Our psyche's repressed intentions, and emotions) and we let these dire and rough-cut situations consume us and turn our aspirations into malice missions to appease ourselves. Missions can result in drastic and unforgivable actions.

I don't see this idea of gruesome acts, and murder in its entirety expressed often on the stage through Musicals, there is still a handful who do in part let us experience this psychological, tragic trope of horror. The performances do not end like that of a Disney film, but are more gritty, raw, and macabre. These demonstrate the true psychology of a human being, one that is littered with violence and obscurity. Currently in film, in contrast to Musical Theatre, we can see this idea of absolute horror concerning the human experience displayed often, and we can also

see this through other forms of media such as podcasts, television, and YouTube. Society is increasingly becoming more attached to stories, and scenarios involving gruesome acts of violence, such as murder and true crimes. In 2021 alone the genre of Horror and True Crime accounted for 77% of weekly media entertainment views for individuals ranging from ages 13 to 39 alone (YPulse Media Consumption Monitor). So, why do audiences ultimately engage with these horrific forms of entertainment despite the societal pressure to find such subject matter offensive, vile, repugnant, forbidden, or obscene? After all, society has conditioned us since birth to turn away from such horrific things, as showing any interest in such is seen as distasteful and rancid. Still, though we are aware that what we are looking at is wrong we are somehow compelled to just watch and stare. Through Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Motivation, the Jungian archetype of Shadow, and catharsis I will examine and explain why audiences are supportive of protagonists who portray these instances of horror, death, and darkness. Specifically, the title characters found in the three musicals, *Sweeney Todd*, *Little Shop of Horrors*, and *A Gentleman's Guide to Love & Murder*. These three characters, though vastly different, each stem from an oppressive society that has not only wronged them but has diminished their needs halting them from going forward and living a satisfying life. In addition to this, these three characters when faced with the notion of pursuing their needs innocently or criminally chose to do so with murderous and violent, intent which is emphasized through song. Ultimately, the goal of this study is to prove that the reason behind an audience's support for a perverse protagonist falls in line with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Through this healthy form of need fulfillment devised from witnessing such instances of darkness and horror, an audience can heal without repressing or acting out their own dark emotions.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Motivation

Maslow's idea on Motivation ultimately stems from his notion of personal needs. As often seen within the literature, performance needs are often the driving force and motivation found within a plot. Ironically, though the idea of obtaining a need is seen as a common trope, there is very little information to back up as to why this is a reoccurring theme. The peak of this structure of needs is one's self-actualization or self-fulfillment, which Maslow's work was dedicated to understanding. Maslow believed one must be fit to complete the tasks needed to obtain these needs to feel a sense of fulfillment (1970). If these needs are not met, an individual can resort to violent, aggravated behavior aimed at desperately obtaining whatever need has currently withheld them from climbing their hierarchy. From these ideas, Maslow created his now renowned Hierarchy of Needs regarding that which motivates an individual. Here, he explores beyond the basic concepts of air, food, water, sex, etc., and broadens these into five individualistic layers: physiological needs, safety needs, love, and belonging needs, esteem needs, and, of course, the need to self-actualize, in that corresponding order.

Considering our basic needs, Maslow describes the first two tiers of physiological and safety as needs ultimately introduced at birth, which then continue to follow us throughout our life. Things such as food, water, oxygen, security, shelter, and sex fall under this umbrella, as they are what our body needs to function like a well-oiled machine. Without these needs, the need for other needs is overall insufficient. (Maslow. 1970:17)

Psychological Needs encapsulate the following two tiers which are love and belonging and esteem. They are not considered essential when in the face of long-term survival, yet present the most diverse impact, as they can be received in a variety of ways through various sources. Through that of love and belonging these needs can be fulfilled through different types of relationships, not only that of lust or romance. With esteem, Maslow (1970) categorizes it through self-respect (The idea of knowing one can achieve and overcome challenges in life), and as well as dependent respect (The idea of others recognizing one's efforts and valuing such feats).

Maslow recounts the final tier in his Hierarchy as that of Self-fulfillment which touches base on his overarching goal of reaching self-actualization (one's desire to become everything they believe they are capable of). The idea of one's self-realization varies from person to person, yet according to Maslow (1970), the clear emergence of this desire stems from the collective structure of obtaining one physiological, safety, love, belonging, and esteem needs. As Maslow (1970: 22) puts it:

“What humans can be, they must be. They must be true to their nature.”

Yet, what makes self-actualization the hardest of these to achieve is not only the fact that all other needs must be satisfied, but rather the notion that an individual who does not obtain self-actualization will ultimately become 'disconnected' from their environment, and in some cases even themselves (Maslow.1970).

Carl Jung's Archetype The Shadow

When focusing on Carl Jung's Jungian Archetypes, it's hard not to immediately approach that of The Shadow uniquely. When compared to the other three Jungian Archetypes (anima/animus, persona, and self), which focus on establishing ourselves in a first-person perspective, the Shadow surely seems like that of an outlier as it is dependent upon others. As the Shadow represents an entirely numb side of our psyche in dealing with the darkness, we unconsciously harbor that is so obscene that our conscious ego purposely disassociates this idea from itself and the unconscious mind as well. Essentially, the brain tries its best to repress and hide this notion of Shadow into the depths of our minds so that we are unaware of its presence within our psyche.

Being the unknown dark side of our personalities, the Shadow is usually revealed through an individual's desperation in the form of intense negative emotion (Jung. 1996). This idea ultimately ties back into Maslow, as these negative emotions and desperation tie into individuals' needs of fitting into cultural norms and expectations (Psychological and Self-Fulfillment needs). If we believe Jung's theory and use what is known from Maslow's hierarchy of needs and motivation, there is a relation between people attempting to satisfy their needs all whilst in a way unraveling their shadows. A completion and relief that when achieved, will have them fit into the dynamic of what is seen as "normal".

This Archetype through Jung lends itself hand and hand with Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, and Motivation but in a contrasting sense. As with the Hierarchy of Needs, our minds assess what we need to survive, but with the Shadow our mind assesses how we obtain these needs to survive. Maslow's idea is ultimately driven by a survival mentality and one's

desperation for need fulfillment, whilst Jung's is driven by emotions such as jealousy, greed, and hate to obtain such needs. So, when the idea of Shadow is brought into play, the question of how far would one go to obtain their deepest and darkest desires are brought to light. When driven by greed, anger, hate, etc. would you cheat, lie, murder, or kill to meet your needs?

As Jung stated:

“The shadow personifies everything the subject refuses to acknowledge about himself and represents a tight passage, a narrow door, whose painful construction no one is spared who goes down to the deep well.”

- Jung (1996: *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*)

Overall, Maslow's idea behind his needs and Jung's of the shadow relate in theory as ways of motivation for us human beings to accommodate our lifestyles and general instincts, however, the main difference comes from the psychological notion of how to branch forward in approaching, such as stated previously. In retrospect, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Motivation works as what we as individuals assess as a means of survival, whereas Carl Jung's Shadow determines within our psyche how we approach this means of survival. Though any of Carl Jung's archetypes can be used as a means of survival, when influenced by injustice, greed, anger, hatred, and jealousy as the characters in reference are, it is easy to see how they steered towards accessing their needs through violence and death thanks to that of their inner Shadows.

CHAPTER 2: SUPPORTED STUDIES

Murderers – Why is our society drawn to them?

It is no secret that interest in morbid crime, particularly in serial killers, has become pervasive in popular culture. Famous killers such as Jack the Ripper, Jeffrey Dahmer, Ted Bundy, and Charles Manson have been immortalized in literature, comic books, television shows, and more for years on end. In Pennsylvania, there's even a man by the name of John Schwenk who has personally collected memorabilia and exchanged letters with killers from all over the region, even forming his museum recently to display to other horror enthusiasts his "murderabilia", which raised the question of "when does a fascination with crime go too far?" in a 2013 *US News* article. Even now, as we journey further along into new advances in spreading knowledge and data, crime documentaries such as the recent Netflix special *Crime Scene: The Vanishing at the Cecil Hotel*, draws in millions making it reach #1 status across the nation, whilst true crime podcasts such as *My Favorite Murder*, *Crime Junkie*, *Case File* and more dominate, the audio section of platforms such as Spotify and apple. With audiences spanning from every corner of the world assembling to engage in one genre through various aspects of media the question unravels itself- why is our society drawn to such content? Harold Schechter, an American true-crime writer who specializes in serial killers, defines this widespread interest in death, murder, and violent crimes as a type of "cultural hysteria".

Murders consist of 0.75% of all deaths alone in the United States, with an astounding 42% of the remaining murders unsolved according to the Center for Disease Control in 2019-2020. However, Serial killers are responsible for less than 1% of murders in the US each year, and no more than two dozen are "active" at any given time, estimates Scott Bonn, a sociologist and

criminologist at Drew University, Madison. In comparison to related deaths due to say arson (decreased 3.2% in 2019-2020), or armed robbery (decreased 12.5% in 2019-2020), the U.S. murder rate rose 30% between 2019 and 2020 – the largest single-year increase in more than a century according to the CDC and an article published by the FBI in September 2020. However, our fascination and need for knowledge about such horrific cases far exceed our concern regarding more pressing dangers. Why do we build such intrigue around these troubled individuals? Additionally, what has that fascination taught us about their motivations-or what about our own? Editor of *Real Crime*, James Hoare suggests that murderers:

“-represent something larger than life, something truly cartoonishly monstrous, like the horror stories you’re told as a child, everybody responds to the idea that there’s something nasty out there.”

Schechter even regales these tales of Horror as:

“-fairytale for grownups. There’s something in our psyche where we have this need to tell stories about being pursued by monsters.”

When we investigate the historical context of society's deep desire to engage in the macabre, it seems this frenzy is not newfound. Since the time of Jack, the Ripper in 1888, “normal” people have flocked to get a taste of butchers and their crimes no matter how atrocious or messy. One prime example is that of Ed Gein, a man who littered the inside of his secluded farmhouse with odd creations he handmade derived from the corpses of his deceased victims in Plainfield, Wisconsin 1957. Upon his arrest, many came from near and far to get a taste of this crime, flooding the crime scene in hopes of catching a piece of the action and physically witnessing where these horrific atrocities occurred. As horrendous and repulsive, Ed Gein’s

legacy continues as these crimes inspired famous horror characters and films such as Norman Bates from Alfred Hitchcock's 1960 classic *Psycho*, Leatherface from *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, and it is even believed Gein was the model for Buffalo Bill in *Silence of the Lambs*. Yet, what draws us to these tropes and specifically these criminals? This fascination that continues to riddle our modern 'horror' culture today? Do we even see them as criminals or do we celebrate them like such characters as Michael Myers from the *Halloween* franchise which still reigns as one of the most popular Halloween costumes to this day according to Party City and Spirit of Halloween?

Historian Dr. Shane McCorristine from the University of Leicester, believes this craze of getting close to criminals and perpetrators of horror is a way of experiencing death without falling victim to it, or in latent terms becoming a witness to death and thus exerting some control over it. Could our love of horror derive from a psychological need to exert violence, or to justify the difficulties and hardships we've experienced throughout our life?

Joe Coleman a collector like Schwenk who travels with his array of relics in the realm of the macabre known as the Odditorium, clarifies his fascination in a humanistic, moral induced way that seemingly relates to Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. He claims that he ultimately needs to give a voice to the voiceless (dependent respect/esteem) to deliver them their say, them being those who kill. Simply, he puts it that for him he feels compelled to empathize with the protagonists, to acknowledge their humanity alongside their malevolence. He wants to effectively recognize that:

“-there’s a part of them [killers] that’s in all of us, and there’s a part of all of us that’s in them. If we can’t find some compassion or empathy for the very worst of humanity, then what hope have any of us.”

Psychological Analysis- The Idea of Shadow in discussion with Dr. Steven Saunders

I reached out and spoke to Dr. W. Steven Saunders. He is a Florida Licensed Psychologist and the Executive Director of Central Florida Psychological Consultants. Additionally, Dr. Saunders has an undergraduate degree in Theatre and was quite taken with my viewpoint regarding this study. Upon our discussion, however, he continuously brought up this idea of “The Shadow” and how ultimately this theory led to a lot of psychological aspects of theatre (Such as Bertolt Brecht’s techniques in Epic Theatre, which observes this notion of actors keeping a distance between themselves and the characters they portray but recognizing and embodying such ideas as Krone, Mother, Jester, etc.) and additionally, those of a killer.

The archetype known as “The Shadow” is often described as the darker side of the psyche dealing with sex and life instincts, representing wildness, chaos, and the unknown. When compared to Maslow’s Hierarchy, it is interesting to notice how the Shadow affects those on the lower aspect of needs. Yet, as previously stated, we as personalities unknowingly repress these dark desires and feelings by feeding them unconsciously into our Shadow. Like the idea that observing dark matter in our society is wrong, our brains comparatively instill this notion into our minds by doing away with dark mental images and concealing them as they are seen as ‘immoral’. This idea of our psyches working to repress these feelings is essentially our mind’s way of adapting to what we see fit as ‘the norm’ and ‘morally correct. When tending to the

shadow we repress from others what we see as unacceptable and immoral, as well as keep contained our deepest and darkest desires. Additionally, one's shadow can be extremely intrusive, pushing us to push our problems onto other individuals, and constantly cycling within ourselves this irritating idea of "I am not like you", which is ironically prevalent within the performances referenced in this study. When we eventually look at Sweeney Todd, we'll notice he uses this method on Judge Turpin, Monty Navarro on the D'Ysquith Family, and Seymour Krelborn on Orin Scirvello. Our shadows, however, are also described by Jung as "complex creatures", creatures that can manifest themselves physically to a person during heightened scenarios. For instance, if profound enough one can visualize their shadow as an exotic, or demonic entity with which they can interact, and work. In the instance of *Little Shop of Horrors*, Audrey II is not a manifestation of Seymour's imagination, as Audrey herself can interact, with the creature. It is hard to dismiss the striking resemblances between the plant and the Shadow throughout the entirety of the musical. Even the notion of not working in harmony with one's Shadow is present with Audrey II as he ultimately allows the plant to completely manipulate his morals, driving him to pursue love and belonging through murdering those who have wronged him and the woman he loves. This ultimately results in Seymour being consumed by his darkness.

Looking deeper into this idea of the Shadow, the question remains on how this relates to the audience and their empathic connection to the characters who kill upon the stage. Under Robert A. Johnson, an American Jungian analyst and author, in his novel *Owning Your Own Shadow: Understanding the Dark Side of the Psyche* he highlights the notion of self-understanding and coming to terms with one's shadows and how to healthily honor and accept our shadow in day-to-day life. For Johnson, we all essentially have shadows, yet when we truly begin to understand

them and respect them, they can reveal themselves in the most unexpected forms and fashions- for instance, in the theatre.

For Dr. Saunders, this notion completely makes sense when you look upon this idea of the shadow and the idea of audience catharsis. As he puts it:

“Those who are hurting are drawn to the theatre because the theatre is a place of healing.” However, “-when we see a performance such as *Sweeney Todd*, we get this gratification of projection that sublimates these shadow impulses we cannot express. Same as with actors, they gain the gratification of acting out their Shadow through performance. This idea of healing by acting but reenacting is essentially a win. Essentially, audiences are encapsulating unhealed wounds through their needs and Shadows to heal cathartically.”

Looking at Jung’s archetype of the Shadow and Johnson’s notion of paying respect to it, we essentially must look through the perspective of an audience-character relationship, specifically one dealing with murder and mayhem. We must dive deeper to ask what comprises ‘morally sound thought’ and what constitutes moral ‘goodness’ within a society’s standards? The audience views the character as a window into their (referring to the character’s) world- a world where a character’s Shadow is free to roam. When one attends a performance, this is where they see themselves living for the next couple of hours, their escape from the norm provided there is a willing suspension of disbelief. Theatre is often relayed as a space for healing, and it somewhat is for many people. When we think of this along with the characters at hand, and of course, Maslow’s Hierarchy of needs, we get a stance on one's underlying motivations through their reaction to the events they are witnessing and what they take from it lesson-wise. So, when we take a microscope and finely comb through the notion of why an audience justifies the immoral

doings of these characters, we end up recognizing the piece less as a performance but rather as a discussion on humanity and people.

Art reflects the human experience and by looking at it from the lens of the dark side of the psyche we can fully explore our dark psyche in ways we usually are too afraid to do. From a psychological standpoint, we as human beings use the theatre and these characters to separate ourselves from our daily lives, and this construct of what is and isn't good is in a way blurred depending on how we respond to the material and the actions being presented before us. We become primitive with our psyche and act upon desires and needs we usually repress; through the characters, we see as a reflection of ourselves and our darkest aspirations on stage. When we form a comfortable relationship with our darkness as expressed by Johnson, we can respectively "justify these dark actions as a form of self-healing":

"In many cases, our shadow self is holding onto the desires of our inner child and just wants to be seen in the same way as our other parts. Shadow work helps us uncover these repressed feelings, thoughts, and memories so we can accept and heal our shadow, bringing it into the light. Integrating these parts back into our conscious life helps us to live more fully."

– Ben Johnson; MD, DO, NMD

The difference between this attraction from the horrific entertainment value of performance versus that of fulfillment and self-healing is our ability to recognize the humanistic characteristics found in the work which we are witnessing. When we watch something gruesome for fun, we're separating ourselves from the action and fully acknowledging our role as spectators, essentially believing these people are in these situations we are not a part of- our shadow in essence is contained. The line is drawn when we can find ourselves within these

scenarios and situations relating to the actions and characters at hand and putting ourselves in their metaphorical shoes. When we visualize a performance like this, our shadows can have a little bit of fun as we are not enacting them in any way to reveal themselves, but rather they get the chance to play with “what if” scenarios in our minds without the consequences of getting caught, which in a way relieves us and can come off as healing depending on the person.

Catharsis- An Audience Experience

Throughout the years, this idea has been theorized and observed many a time by practitioners, artists, and theorists, such as Aristotle, Boal, Shakespeare, etc. Catharsis is defined as the process of releasing and thereby providing relief from strong or repressed emotions (Oxford Dictionary. 2021). When we bring the idea of catharsis into the theatre, we witness an audience being confronted by their daily morality on stage and their struggles towards pursuing their needs as devised by Maslow. During a performance, spectators can sit and observe a plot develop, whilst a character reflects their own emotions all right before their eyes without their active participation, or consequences to serve. This empathetic link, no matter the situation or scenario, is devised between the actor and the audience whether it be consciously or unconsciously, and brings forth a reactionary emotion and something to be taken away once the action on stage concludes (Prasad. *A Background to the Study of English Literature*. 2000).

Whether it be a lesson, a political viewpoint, or simply to marinate in one’s thoughts with what was just witnessed, catharsis will always follow and engage an audience. In retrospect to Maslow and Jung’s theories and from what can be grasped in the face of such genres like horror, audiences support such actions like murder within a performance, as it's somewhat this universal human idea that simply doing away with one’s cause of oppression will immediately

solve one's issue, but will result in a long list of costs. For an audience, following this notion they simply get to go home and live their lives with no costs to pay for the crimes at hand.

Regarding the deeper meanings behind these performances', spectators are also left with lessons to be learned and perhaps ways to better engage with themselves and their environments.

Theatre arouses feelings connected with recognized problems. By presenting these on the stage, audiences can relive them passively, and instances of performative presentation allow them to resolve such struggles healthily. Meaning that the test within the performance provides audiences with the necessary action to overcome such problems.

With the idea of one's Shadow, we as individuals can revel in this fantasy of murder being a solution to a problem and justify a character's victory when they carry out this crime as we can relate to this feeling of exacting justice in a sense on our terms, no matter the case. These crimes must in some way draw justice in their sense, and if this is not properly done the action will seem unrealistic and runs the risk of alienating the audience by removing them from this contrived sense of purification and healing (Carlson. *Aristotle*. 2000). Ultimately, though catharsis is undeniably present, there is somewhat of a strange feeling when thinking upon the notion of things that we internally, yet unknowingly, want to do constantly when faced with our issues and personal flaws, not murder per se as displayed by the characters in reference but just doing something bad when we feel victimized. This schadenfreude approach we have to a character relieves us and heals us in a way with the notion of knowing blood will not be in our own hands and no consequences will come to an audience once the performance ends. We get a peek into a life that isn't ours, and through this voluntary mutual relationship shared between actor and audience we purge our shadow-like desires and come through the other side a 'healed' human being. This sense of catharsis overall pushes an audience, and in a way assists us in

viewing such tragedy through a moral lens and viewing ourselves in a more in-depth, yet entertaining approach.

CHAPTER 3: CHARACTER & AUDIENCE ANALYSIS – WHAT’S THE CONNECTION?

With all forms of fine art, a protagonist faces challenges and hardships to achieve a goal. Their drive throughout the entirety of a performance's plot is centered around obtaining this quintessential need in the name of achieving a higher purpose, whether it be for themselves or others. The characters of Sweeney Todd, Monty Navarro, and Seymour Krelborn, though different and unique in their ways, demonstrate this unnerving desire to succeed and accomplish their various needs. These characters are fictional, but their motives still reflect the human experience, specifically with the overall theme of oppression and the overarching will to obtain something- most notably love, belonging, and esteem. Like all human beings, each character is motivated by an individualistic want that fits a hierarchy of need and motivation. Using the research done by Abraham Maslow, it is noted that human beings are programmed to do what must be done to achieve the notion of securing every need within the hierarchy to live a “fulfilled” life. When we specifically focus on motivation, one’s behavior in achieving such queries garners more information from those who are psychologically disturbed in some format versus those of sound mind as expressed by Maslow (1970). This idea of course is prominent with these three characters at hand, as each one referenced in some format murders for the sake of achieving a life they feel they are so rightfully owed.

Let’s take an in-depth look into these three characters, look at their hierarchy of needs, and discuss why modern audiences may be drawn to them.

Seymour Krelborn – *Little Shop of Horrors*

Seymour Krelborn from *Little Shop of Horrors* is completely deprived of any affection or appreciation since birth. After all, he was orphaned as a child and raised as the local Floral Shop owner's employee rather than his adoptive son, still, this satisfies Seymour's safety need, as Mr. Mushnik provides Seymour with food, and shelter. Still, this sadly has led to Seymour leading a lackluster life where he allows others to belittle him and doesn't even attempt to better himself, because frankly, where he lives he has no means to do so. Now as an adult he still resides at the penny-less shop located in run-down Skid Row, working clumsily alongside the woman of his dreams who is dating a semi-sadist dentist. After stumbling upon a strange and unusual plant one day with a hunger for blood, Seymour's life takes a turn when this weed named Audrey II becomes a media sensation and begins to garner for him the life he's never had. Still, there is a price to pay that is unfortunately and grimly in the form of blood when the plant begins to hunger for more whilst promising the naïve botanist of riches, fame, and the chance to attain the love of his life, Seymour is driven to commit heinous acts to keep the plant alive. Manipulated by Audrey II, Seymour is sent to perform mutilation with the motive of impressing Audrey in hopes of gaining her love through his newfound wealth and success.

Here, we witness Maslow's Hierarchy of needs and motivation at play, as evident by Seymour's desperation for love, belonging, and esteem. The motivation to fulfill these needs is frantic, for Seymour, as through his background it is clear he has never had any form of affection or praise up until the point of Audrey II's popularity. Seymour's need for safety is fulfilled, as he's been given shelter and food in exchange for manual labor, still, he's grown up in an environment barren of anything remotely loving, and good (Ashman. *Little Shop of Horrors*).

Skid Row (Downtown.) 1982.). Due to this lack of affection, and acceptance, Seymour shows a lack of self-esteem. He demonstrates the need for self-respect as he constantly labels himself as a slob, a monster, and more, all the while struggling or not even attempting to defend himself at all. He also requires dependent respect as he commits these atrocities in Audrey's name because he needs her love and recognition to accept his self-worth. Even in the light of fame, Seymour doesn't recognize he's remarkable until Audrey says so- in fact, the plant wouldn't have been introduced into the story had it not been per Audrey's recommendation for Seymour to show it to Mushnik to exhibit it in the store display as a means of attracting more business.

When the opportunity lends itself in Seymour's favor through the sudden popularity of his unusual plant why wouldn't he take the chance to achieve all of his needs? Effortlessly, love, belonging, and esteem have been laid at his feet through his newfound fortune and fame. All his life he has been depleted of these needs, and now suddenly through this botanical discovery everyone loves and admires him and he is seen as a celebrity in his community. For Seymour, this comes at a cost. In the grand scheme of things, Seymour becomes the most selfless killer in pursuit of his needs, sacrificing his flesh and blood to gain what he so desperately desires. Even when met with the thought of killing the plant to end this tirade of death for which he feels immense guilt (Ashman. *Little Shop of Horrors*. The Meek Shall Inherit. 1982), he shuts it down immediately as it would cost him his greatest love, Audrey.

When Seymour commits his primary offense through assisting in Orin Scirvello's death, the lengths towards his descent into darkness due to his desperation towards acquiring these needs he lacks are unveiled and begin to quickly unravel. Though Seymour visits Orin intending to kill him with a pistol, ultimately, he does not go through with this plan. He feels guilt and fear

and refrains from the use of his pistol to kill. Yet, when Orin accidentally puts himself in peril during this confrontation and faces life or death Seymour turns to his darkness by choosing to let him perish rather than saving him, all in the name of his love Audrey. Again, we see Maslow's needs appear from this kill forth, Seymour continues to perform these acts all in the pursuit of gaining Audrey's love and acceptance. This reoccurring theme of committing a crime for the sake of fulfilling a need is not only recurrent with simply Seymour, but amongst the three characters referenced in this thesis.

This sudden turn towards darkness is formed through the manifestation of one's Shadow, a psychological disturbance that occurs when one is desperately attempting to fit themselves into a specific frame to appease themselves by appeasing others (One's personal sense of belonging, acceptance, respect). For Seymour, his desperation is the most prevalent of them all, as he only portrays two out of five of his needs. With this, his repressed feelings of jealousy, hate, greed, etc. can easily consume him more drastically at a more rapid rate. It can also be assumed that Audrey II works as a physical reflection of Seymour's shadow. Jung describes the Shadow as a "complex creature" (Jung. *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*.1991.), creatures that can manifest itself physically to a person during heightened scenarios. If one situation like Seymour's is profound enough, one can visualize their shadow as an exotic, or demonic entity with which they can interact and work alongside. Through evidence within the text and lyrical composition of *Little Shop of Horrors*, it is known that Audrey II isn't a figment of Seymour's imagination (Ashman. *Little Shop of Horrors*. Sominex. 1982), however, in a sense the plant does portray itself as an embodiment of Seymour's shadow through the actions it performs. Seymour is disgusted at his crimes, which he feeds to a creature representing all his hopes and dreams while also representing the worst of him and this side of himself for which he wishes to

never truly be revealed. Through Jungian theory, it makes sense that when not working healthily alongside this parallel of his shadow (rather allowing it to completely manipulate his morals, driving him to pursue love and belonging through murdering those who have wronged him and the woman he loves) Seymour is sadly consumed by his motivations, and pursuits.

Though a bittersweet thought, when knowing the outcome of *Little Shop of Horrors*, the idea of working an unprecedented amount towards one's goals only to falter by our ambitions isn't a new concept. This concept, as previously mentioned, is what ties audiences to the notion of Maslow and Jung within *Little Shop of Horrors*, by obtaining spectators' attention through one of the many forms of Catharsis. Through Aristotelean Catharsis, audiences are expected to relay aroused feelings attached to recognized problems (Hierarchy of Needs, Shadow) by witnessing such issues on the stage through a tragedy (Aristotle. *Poetics*.1705.) This tragic setup is based upon the display of a "heroic figure" (Seymour), the beginning of their fall from grace (Seymour using his needs as a motivation to kill, the introduction of shadow), the downward spiral that begins to form (Seymour continuing to 'kill' so he may continue to fulfill his needs), and lastly, their recognition of their fatal flaw and the attempted resolve (Seymour realizing he has always had Audrey's love and affection, yet both perishing from Seymour's actions). With this, Aristotle believed that by allowing the audience to relive these similar feelings, they engage in releasing any form of negativity attached to such through the process of purification and cleansing of such related bad memories. This sense of cleansing then results in a feeling of restoration and renewal for the audience. Since *Little Shop of Horrors* is a musical, it also uses music to heighten familiarity with the audience. Aristotle describes in his eighth installment of *Politics* that music has a mimetic characteristic that better relays the truth of day-to-day life and, as such, has an ethical influence on the soul. Music can affect one's emotions, and in addition to

healing, cause a sense of pleasure and security. Which, when tracing back to Maslow ties into our own need for safety and in a way belonging.

Monty D'Ysquith Navarro- A Gentleman's Guide to Love & Murder

Monty Navarro from *A Gentleman's Guide to Love & Murder* learns after his mother's passing that she hailed from the aristocratic D'Ysquith Family, but was ultimately ostracized when she fell for his father a poor, Spanish musician. Being a blood member of the royal family, Monty is technically ninth in line to acquire the throne. With this knowledge, Monty attempts to seek answers from his family, but is overall rejected and denounced. He is similarly refused by his love interest Sibella, whose materialistic needs garner higher importance to her over that of experiencing true love. Since Monty is poor and cannot provide a dowry Sibella simply rebuffs his efforts even when she too secretly harbors similar feelings. Driven by two forces in his life; his love for Sibella, and the need to justify his and his deceased mother's rightful titles. Unlike Seymour, Monty has a basis for understanding his need for love and belonging (Maslow.1970), as he grew up in a home in which he was deeply loved by both of his parents. The love Monty requires to fulfill his current need towards Sibella is completely new, as it is one of romance, and a feeling, unlike any Monty's ever encountered before. As he not only wishes to garner her affection, but he wishes to belong as the one she finds fit for marriage. Similarly, this same concept of being worthy, and fitting in works with Monty's need to be accepted by his royal family as outside of his parents, he seemingly has never had a true family to belong to or gain affection from. This lack of acceptance by both Sibella, and the D'Ysquith family lend itself towards Monty's need fulfillment as per Maslow and through the concept of Dependent Respect

as found within the need for Esteem. Through both parties, Monty craves this idea of acceptance and tokens it a high honor (Lutvak. *A Gentleman's Guide to Love & Murder*. Foolish to Think. 2014), yet the lack of meeting these needs ultimately obstructs him from moving further within the hierarchy of needs, as recounted by Abraham Maslow (1970), and lend themselves towards his murderous brigade. Monty isn't the vicious murdering type, he is smart and charismatic and concocts various schemes to kill the members without drawing any suspicion back to him. His murders, though gruesome, still garner empathy. Those who know Monty personally in the context of this musical want him to succeed and though they aren't aware of his murderous crusades, knowing he is inching closer to the throne they're supportive and even joyous for him, yet why is this?

Monty's charismatic charm and leverage in hosting this new sense of confidence as he pursues fulfilling his needs, not only displays his shadow at play similarly to that of Seymour's but highlights the manifestation of such in a more chilling and rather realistic way. Dr. Steven Saunders recounts through the article "*Why Are We Eternally Fascinated by Serial Killers?*" by the BBC Monty's Shadowesque feelings drive him to murder correspondingly to that of a serial killer. Rather than manifest itself as a reflective entity like Seymour, Monty's motives are driven differently because he has a basis for which to compare his current needs. Monty, unlike Seymour, has always had food, shelter, and experience in love. Monty's fulfillment of such needs previously was parentally guided as that was whom he had closest to him, yet since their passings, he now wishes to obtain this sense again through that of romantic, familial love and acceptance. However, when his pursuits are rejected, his demeanor turns fowl and when met with the same life or death opportunity as Seymour, Monty chooses death. He kills his cousin and moves one step closer to fulfilling the needs he not only wants, but ultimately needs to fulfill

in his entire hierarchy. Through murdering off his entire bloodline, Monty secures safety, love, respect, and ultimately self-actualization, as once he is Earl he has essentially fulfilled his birthright. The Shadow only comes to play because his constant rejections fuel hatred, jealousy, shame, and darkness within his psyche that ultimately push this grander and more atrocious mission (Lutvak. *A Gentleman's Guide to Love & Murder*. Foolish to Think Reprise. 2014).

Monty's demeanor and perverse performance are what ultimately draw catharsis from the audience just not in a theoretical way, but rather more psychological. This is where cathartic empathy and sympathy are presented and where Monty is most comparative to a serial killer with their victims. When discussing this thesis prior with Dr. Saunders, he relayed that a viewer's first real link to performance is between characters. Behind each of history's most infamous serial killers such as Ted Bundy, Richard Ramirez, Charles Manson, etc. the prospect of one single trait easily allowed them all to lure in their prey. Their character and personality. These aspects played into gaining one's trust or sympathy. The character Monty satisfies the audience's own needs of belonging by immediately referring his attention to the audience. After all, the entirety of *A Gentleman's Guide to Love & Murder* is him relaying his story to us directly while he awaits death. There the audience is not only made to feel sympathetic for his challenges, but we are forced to trust his word as he is the play's narrator. From the start, the audience forms a strong and intimate bond through the cathartic experience with the character, and the comedic murders that ensue all the while fulfilling the audience's Maslowian needs through mutual respect, attention, and belonging.

Sweeney Todd- Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street

Sweeney Todd from *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* began his life as Benjamin Barker, a naïve barber, forcefully removed from his perfect life by a jealous Judge Turpin. Upon returning to London many years later, he meets Mrs. Lovett, the pie shop owner residing in his former residence, who reconnects him to his past. This recollection reminds Todd of the needs he once experienced in the past, those of physiological fulfillment, security, respect, and most importantly the love of his family- all of which Judge Turpin has stripped Sweeney off, unjustly. Sweeney's sources of motivation all surround the idea of giving a corrupt man what rightfully is coming to him and regaining back those needs which were recklessly taken from him. Through this, he takes up his old profession of trimming hair. Going on a killing spree, while using the fresh corpses as meat for Lovett's pies, Todd works his way towards having the Judge appear in his shop for a shave. Through an aggressive appetite to exact revenge for the wrongs he has endured in his life, Todd essentially loses himself in his motive, eventually murdering whomever in his quest for justice.

Sweeney demonstrates a great contrast in his needs versus that of Monty and Seymour. As he maintains the most familiarity with nearly all five levels of the hierarchy, whilst Monty and Seymour don't even come close. He is also the only one to be as severely stripped of these and left to begin his entire life new and restart the process of fulfillment. Naturally, Todd is hateful and angry towards the man who has committed these wrongs, Judge Turpin. As the judge abused his power and, in turn, purposely destroyed Todd's life leaving him indisposed for the last several years and disconnected from that of which he once knew. Todd wants him to

recognize his wrong-doings and suffer and experience the great losses he has, as recounted when Todd tells the tale of Benjamin Barker to Mrs. Lovett and her recount of the events following Barker's absence (Sondheim. *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*. Poor Thing. 1979). This need for revenge not only coincides with Todd's main need for self-actualization, but also that of his strong sense of Shadow. Todd begins his quest back to London with the desire to exact his revenge on the Judge and kill him. With this need for vengeance, Todd's dark feelings are no longer repressed and he makes it known. He also wants to achieve all the goals he feels he so rightfully deserves since his life was unrightfully ripped from his grasp and attempts to make up for what he lost however possible. Maslow (1970) "*an individual who cannot self-actualize, will disassociate from their environment, and in some cases, even themselves*" almost as a psychotic break. This is demonstrated in the context of the show when Todd loses himself, blinded by this unwavering anger and the hate he holds. This burning hatred also fuels Todd's Shadow causing a concoction of unwavering chaos and danger to come. Ultimately, he relays this vast fury onto not only himself, the judge, and Mrs. Lovett, but towards everyone in London. Todd is blinded by his ambitions in every way and has lost his sense of morality. He NEEDS to kill the Judge; he NEEDS to feel what he felt long ago. This notion of killing the Judge and being reunited with the daughter he so tragically lost, will ultimately garner him all his deepest desires and fulfill him with a sense of completion (Sondheim. *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*. Epiphany. 1979.).

"But the work waits! I'm alive at last and I'm full of joy!"

- *Sweeney Todd; Epiphany*

Though Sweeney's attempts are gruesome and harbor the most darkness found throughout all of these characters, they explain the reasoning behind his ability to garner a cathartic experience with an audience. With the notion of *Shakespeare's Catharsis of Tragedy* (2015), the audience ultimately experiences emotional cleansing and purification through releasing emotional tension after witnessing an overwhelming vicarious experience. Like Aristotle's Catharsis, Shakespeare differs and relates to Sweeney due to the morbid, and deeply disturbing nature of its content. Catharsis in this sense is a kind of safety valve (Maslow.1970) where the audience is given free play to the emotions of pity, shame, and fear (Shadow. Jung. 1991) as we cannot do in real life, and this finally is followed by emotional relief and pleasure (Fulfillment, Maslow.1970). Blatantly speaking, we the audience support Sweeney's actions as we are allowed to play alongside our own repressed emotions, and desires in a safe space in which there are no resulting consequences. With this, we are relieved and sense an aura of fulfillment for the time being. This idea is reflected in Jim Brown's story of his students, and the tension they endured witnessing the events of the number 'Pretty Women' when watching *Sweeney Todd*. As his students yelled for Todd to go through with the murder chanting, "do it! Just do it!" as Sweeney rests his razor upon Judge Turpin's throat. Yet, what caused Brown's ultimate surprise during the moment was how rapidly the tension within the room was released as soon as Anthony ran in and foiled Todd's plan, and the backlash his students delivered following this scene. As if with this sudden interruption, they too were frustrated and upset as their own need to see this murder take place was not fulfilled like that of Sweeney. Through Maslow (1970) and Jung (1991), they were fulfilling their own dark needs in supporting and anticipating the murder of Judge Turpin as once he is deceased not only will the audience feel a sense of justice performed, but so will the title character in which we are observing. So, when

Anthony comes in and disturbs the actions at hand and Judge Turpin gets away from Sweeney's grasp alive, the audience is naturally rattled, as not only has their moment of relief and pleasure been removed, but so has that of Todd's.

CHAPTER 4: CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

“You’re an artist. That means you see the world in ways that other people don’t. It’s your gift to see the beauty and the horror in ordinary things. It doesn’t make you crazy, just different- there’s nothing wrong with being different.”

- **Cassandra Clare**

When we focus on audiences and why they support protagonists who portray instances of horror, death, and darkness, the answer ultimately stems back to Maslow and the overall notion of one's need fulfillment. Witnessing such instances of motive, we as individuals can heal through familiarity by witnessing one's pursuit of their needs performed in reflective light. We find the darkness within these plights by looking at the emotions of the characters and struggle to complete their needs through the lens of Jung's Shadow theory. For the characters of Seymour, Monty, and Sweeney we see characters that are written as motivated beings to fulfill their needs of survival but are littered with intense negative emotions stemming from an oppressed and unjust background. Though they commit what many consider the greatest immoral sin, from my research it seems we cannot help but support them in these instances as we too can relate to these characters' means of survival even if it results in death.

Through my research, I have found that the emotions and actions performed through violence can permeate the audience in a cathartic way. By witnessing such behavior, audiences might temporarily fulfill their own needs by exercising their ability to engage with their repressed emotions, causing a sensation of pleasure and healing. Therefore, audiences can support these characters, as they can parallel their dark desires and needs through their actions and engage with

such in a healthy space. It is our psychological human nature to empathize with those we can visualize ourselves reflected within. Whether the circumstances be grim or not, we recognize human behavior and support it when we too can justify the means to an extent. Not only is viewing these spectacles a matter of healing for the character at play, but additionally a way of healing for the individual who can exploit their desires and needs in such a role and feel a sense of relief and success for a temporary time.

The research behind this thesis stems from basic psychology, and though I am by no means a psychologist, I am still an actor, an educator, and an audience member. I believe this analysis of Maslow's Needs about audience and character can eventually lead itself towards something more, most notably in the realm of using the arts in a therapeutic light. Something I have come across since engaging in this research is that of the program De-Cruit which was founded by Stephan Wolfert, in which he and his team travel and assist veterans in treating trauma through the characters of other veterans found within Shakespearean plays as a way of helping them de-wire from war. This process of psychological healing by familiarizing one's own needs and repressed emotions is ultimately something I hope to work upon like that of De-Cruit, but in the realm of Arts Education. I strive to use these discoveries as a means of better understanding my students, especially those who suffer and struggle mentally and emotionally through performance, endowing them with the proper resources they will need to succeed not only within my class but outside as well. As an Arts Educator, I not only wish to teach my students the value of art, but to use the tools I am given through the arts as a means of helping to release the personal pains they may be experiencing and enduring. I, ultimately, wish to bring the lessons and moments of joy and laughter that even if temporary still leaves a lasting impression and a sense of peaceful catharsis.

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