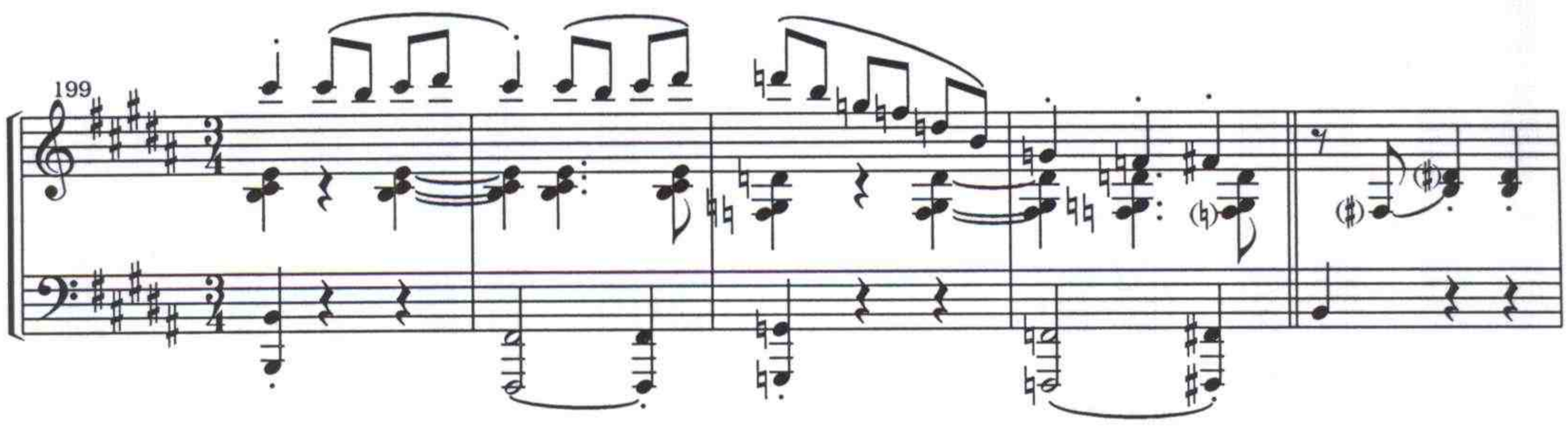Ex. 7.2

Humourous Denial of Upward Semitone Modulation
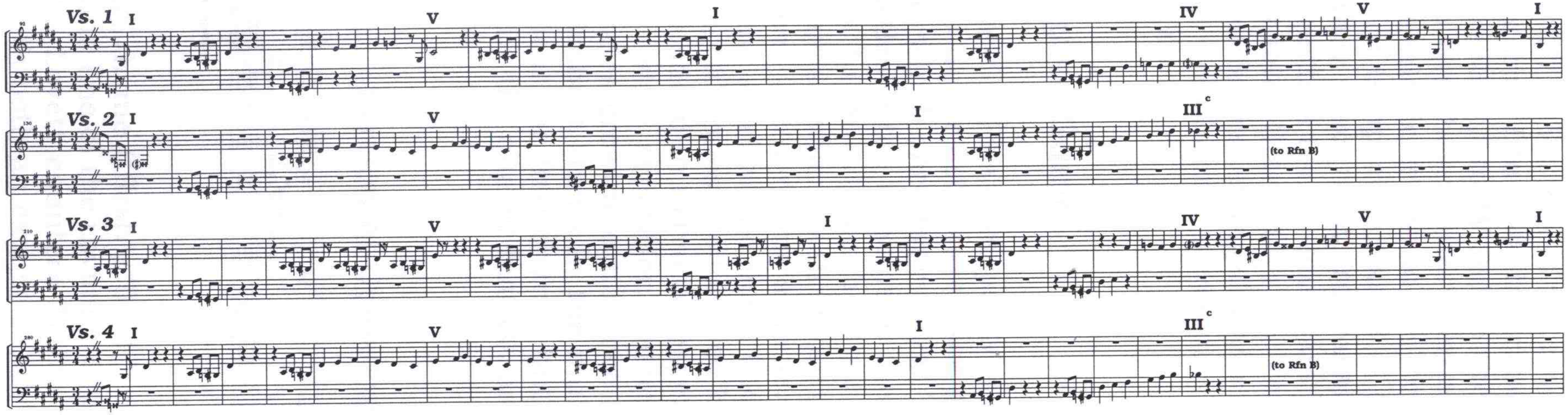


The third type of tonal changes are the tonal dislocations that are tonally non-functional but musico-dramatically functional. In the introduction, the tonality wanders from dislocation to dislocation, serving two purposes: a whirlwind of building exuberance matching the protagonists' growing excitement, yet each dislocation also represents a change of tact on the protagonists' part. For example, Mrs Lovett's building confidence allows her change to her approach from the indirect ("Business needs a lift... Debts to be erased... Think of it as thrift, as a gift... If you get my drift...?"), to the more direct ("I mean, with the price of meat what it is, When you get it, If you get it..."). The change is mirrored by a dislocation from the recently confirmed B major to the unprepared G major at bar 23. Similar changes of protagonists' tact explain the unprepared dislocations in bars 29 and 41.

Form in the main body of the song is far from regular; even the terms verse and refrain are used diffusely. Unlike their pedigree, lyrics always change between recurrences of verse and the two refrains, whilst the music to the former also varies considerably. Although verses 2 and 4 are similar, 1 and 3 are more distantly related, while the link between the two sets is even more remote (Ex. 7.3). The A refrains also exhibit developing variation, whereby A3 takes elements from both A1 and A2, and A4 is a more distant variation (Ex 7.4):

Ex. 7.3
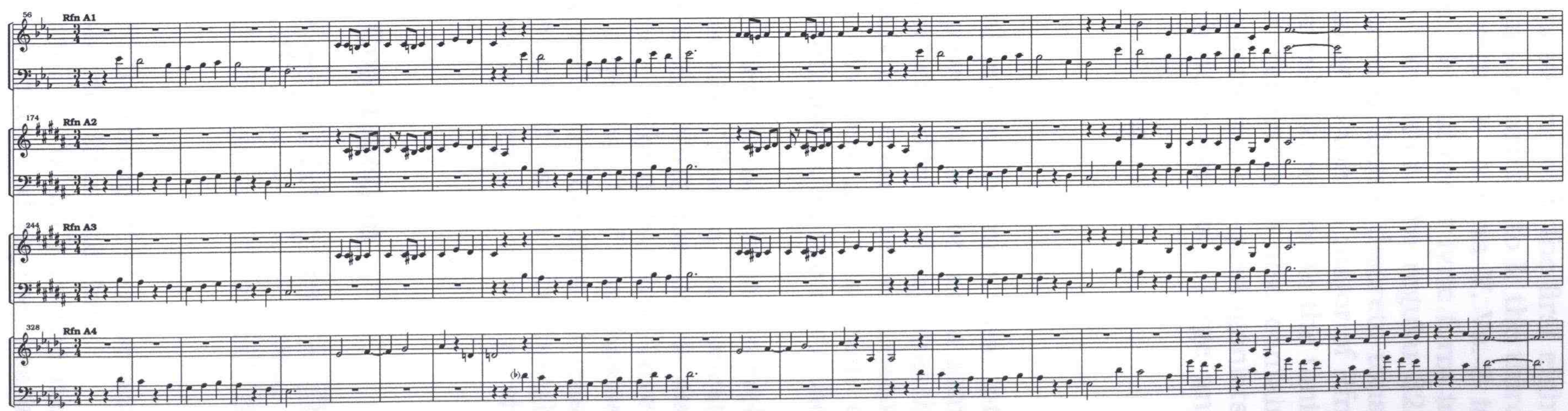
Differences between Verses

(note: V = mainly substitute dominant)



Ex. 7.4

Differences between Refrain "A"s



In ex. 7.3, Vs. 1 is of the most regular composition, with the first eight bars going from **I** to **V**,[18] the consequent eight bars returning to **I**, the third quarter travelling to **IV** before the final section returns to **I** via **V**. Vs. 3 is similar to the above pattern, except that, due to the different lyric form in Vs. 3, the middle return to the tonic occurs two bars later. The regular 32-bar pattern is upset in Vss. 2 & 4 because instead of being discrete tonal entities they effect the third-transition from B major to the E♭ major of Rfn. B; they are thus twenty-four bars long, with their middle return to the tonic four bars later than in Vs. 1. Verse and refrain recurrences also contain varied motifs and changed ordering of phrases between the protagonists, reflecting Sondheim's developing variation technique on both large and small scales.

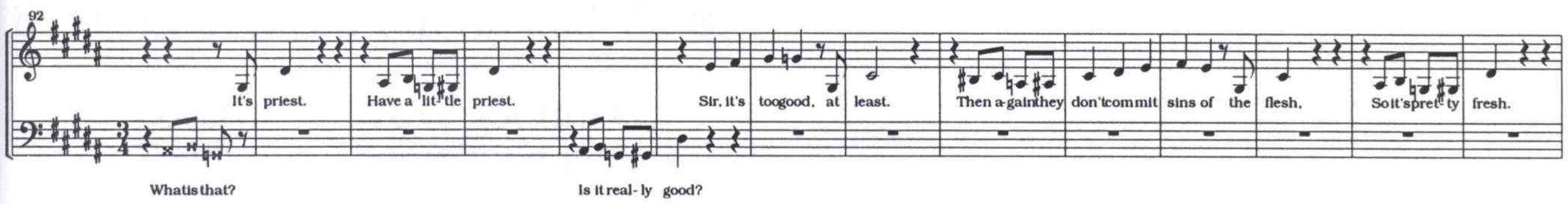
The Rhyme Game

Once Todd has grasped Mrs Lovett's idea of putting human meat into pies, he is under her control; she manifests this power in the form of a game of rhyme, which she always wins. The game is concerned with imagining the personalities of the humans in the pies. To amplify the character motivation of trying to outwit each other, the lyric is written as a stream of consciousness, whereby the more confident the protagonist is, the more they think ahead in the rhyme scheme.

At the start of the main body of the song there is no rhyme, merely repetition. "It's priest" is followed by the emphasisation "Have a little priest", seemingly added in nervous desperation. Todd's interjecting question is also matched with repetition rather than rhyme, although Mrs Lovett demonstrates growing confidence by adding the adjective "too" (emphasised by its downbeat status in the music). It is only with Mrs Lovett's "at least" that we hear the first rhyme; but this phrase is added as an afterthought (denoted by the quaver hiatus), as if she were making up the words as she sang them:

Ex. 7.5

Stream-of-Consciousness Lyric Construction



The next rhyme ("flesh"/"fresh") also seems an 'afterthought' too, because the second line of the rhyming-couplet is much shorter than the first.

Mrs Lovett counters Todd's criticism ("Awful lot of fat") in the next stanza with both an excuse ("Only where it sat") and an end-rhyme, beating Todd's rhyme challenge. He challenges her again with a trickier rhyme

[18] Where **V** is used above, it generally refers to a substitute dominant rather than pure **V**. Chromatic alteration and chord substitution is symptomatic of Sondheim's general idiom, but is particularly suited to "A Little Priest" because of its grotesque æsthetic.

problem: "poet". Mrs Lovett's reply is made up as she says it, starting by repeating "poet" (as if she cannot think of a rhyme), but then countering it by subverting a cliché into an internal rhyme. The key to this spontaneity is the comma between the two clauses, which is grammatically unnecessary but represents her considering how to complete the verse. Her ingenious decision is to find a rhyme for "priest" as the consequent of the internalisation of "poet"/"know it's": "deceased?".

In the first verse, Todd had always set up rhymes for Mrs Lovett, yet never rhymed himself. The second verse gives him the first opportunity. Mrs Lovett challenges him to rhyme "Lawyer's rather nice"; Todd's answer correctly end-rhymes with a bonus pun, "If it's for a price". But growing in confidence, Mrs Lovett then rhymes the end-rhyme a third time, and in the process adds both another internal rhyme of "follow"/"swallow" and her own satire on lawyers' integrity.

The game continues in similar fashion, with Mrs Lovett setting up rhymes of increasing complexity, and always winning:

Todd: Anything that's lean?
Lovett: Well, then, if you're British and loyal,
You might enjoy Royal
Marine.
Anyway, it's clean.
Though, of course, it tastes of wherever it's been.

Rfn B1:

Todd: Is that squire
On the fire?
Lovett: Mercy no, sir,
Look closer,
You'll notice it's grocer.
Todd: Looks thicker,
More like vicar.
Lovett: No, it has to be grocer – it's green.

This last line wittily disambiguates the playful duality of grocer being both a trade and a colloquially-adjectival form of "gross".

Building on the rhyme game, there is a more literal spoken rhyme battle in-between Rfn A2 and Vs. 3:
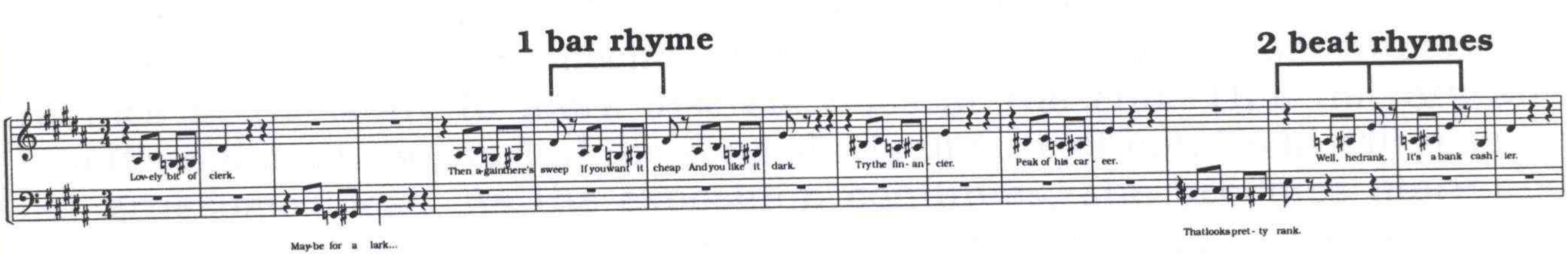
Lovett: We've got tinker.
Todd: Something pinker.
Lovett: Tailor?
Todd: Paler.
Lovett: Butler?
Todd: Subtler.
Lovett: Potter?
Todd: Hotter.
Lovett: Locksmith?

(Todd shrugs, defeated)

After this win, Mrs Lovett continues to score victories in Vs. 3, building yet faster rhyme schemes. Except for the one-bar rhyming interval in Rfn B1 ("Mercy no, sir, Look closer"), all previous rhymes have been at a minimum of two-bar intervals; in Vs. 3, Mrs Lovett goes into overdrive and rhymes firstly at one-bar intervals, and then at two-beat intervals:

Ex. 7.6

Rhyme Acceleration



Mrs Lovett wins because she can rhyme at two-beat intervals whilst Todd can only rhyme-retort at an interval of two bars.

Overall, the lyric thus displays a similar developing variation style to that of the music. But by considering the overall form of the main body of the song (see Ex. 7.1), the irregular construction of what otherwise could have been a simple verse/refrain music hall pastiche can also be said to exhibit developing variation on the large scale.

Sondheim's achievements in this song are multitudinous. On the highest dramatic level, he has created a first act climax that swings between opposing emotions in the highest melodramatic sense. "A Little Priest" gives this conclusion of the act an up-tempo feel expected of the genre, yet subverts it by blackening the 'happy' pretext and parodying music hall through gruesome harmony. The song balances "Epiphany" immediately prior by giving Mrs Lovett a *tour de force* number after Todd's solo outburst. She displays her growing control over Todd (an underlying thread of the whole work) by singing increasingly extended sections and setting up rhyme games which she always wins. Sondheim himself succeeds in making the lyric a realistic stream-of-consciousness for both protagonists, whereby they concoct the lyric as they go. Finally, the lyric is set to music in such natural speech rhythms and with a melodic contour so uncontrived that it is easy to forget that they are singing at all.[19]

But Sondheim's most important achievement is that he has written a song where the rhyme is continuously diagetic without the music being diagetic; ie. rhyme has unleashed itself from the conventions of the genre and become a dramatic tool.

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19 This is one cause of the unmelodic quality of much of Sondheim's music; lyric so tightly controls music that melody is never allowed to dominate words.

The Melopoetics

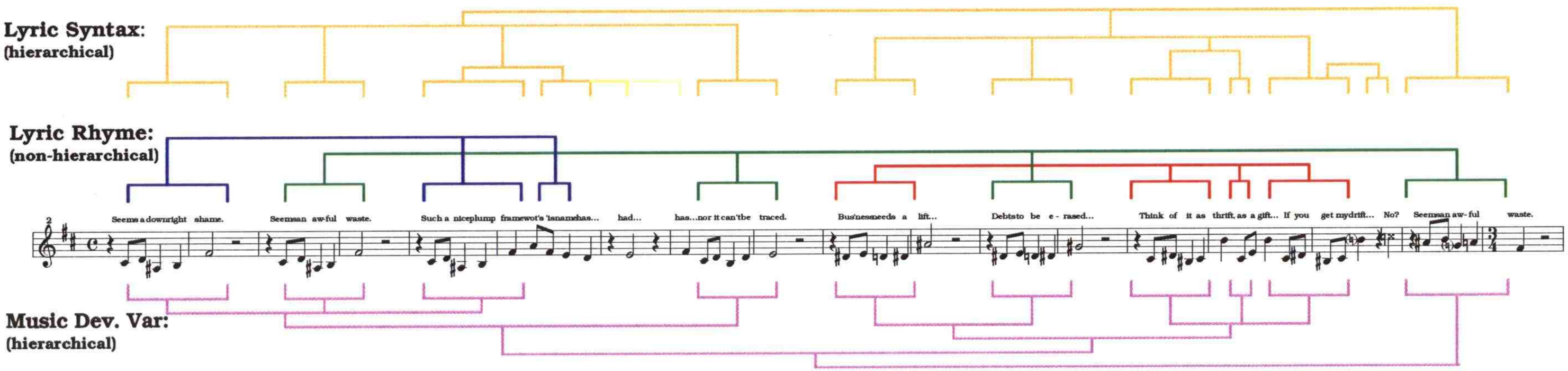
A modicum of melopoetical analysis of Stephen Sondheim's works has been carried out by Stephen Banfield and published as part of *Sondheim's Broadway Musicals*.[20] However, Banfield's coverage of the topic is necessarily brief in a book tackling broad analysis of Sondheim's works; he makes no mention of melopoetics in his treatment of "A Little Priest".

As displayed in Ex. 7.7, the rhyming of the the opening eighteen bars is dense and overlaps in specific arrangement; it develops from interlocked rhymes at the start to more discrete ones at the end. This mirrors Mrs Lovett's mind; at the start of the song she is unsure of how Todd will react to her gruesome ideas. As the exposition continues, she becomes more and more self-assertive, and consequently has a clearer rhyme scheme. As the lyric is also a stream of consciousness – with Mrs Lovett making it up as she proceeds – the more self-confident she is, the more she is able to think ahead, and consequently construct clearer rhyming. A similar journey is represented in the relation between lyric syntax and rhyme; developing confidence means increasing concordance between rhyme and syntactical structure. Notably, the final despairing return to "seems an awful waste" in the final phrase links both rhyme and syntax back to the start:

20 Stephen Banfield, *Sondheim's Broadway Musicals* (University of Michigan Press, 1993).

Ex. 7.7

Growing Structural Concordance in the Opening Eighteen



Comparison with the syntactical hierarchy of the music is not practical because of the music's reliance on a form so clearly defined by developing variation; this does make rhyme comparison between lyric and melody possible though. From ex. 7.7, it can be seen that the developing variation structure of the melody is similar to the syntactical structure of the lyric, so the comparisons in the above paragraph between lyric syntax and rhyme also apply between the melodic and lyric rhyme. Thus Mrs Lovett's growth of confidence is simultaneously represented in the rhyme, the lyric syntax and the musical developing variation.

Bar 7 contains a typical example of the internalisation of rhyme which characterises Sondheim's work. In a section where rhymes are carried through the entire eighteen bars, the rhyme "shame"/"frame"/"name" is 'disposed of' by internalising the last rhymed word within both a musical and lyrical phrase. The rhymed word thus ceases to be an end rhyme, and so its subsequent absence is not missed.:

Seems a downright shame.
Seems an awful waste.
Such a nice plump frame
Wot's-'is-name has...
had...
has...
Nor it can't be traced.
etc.

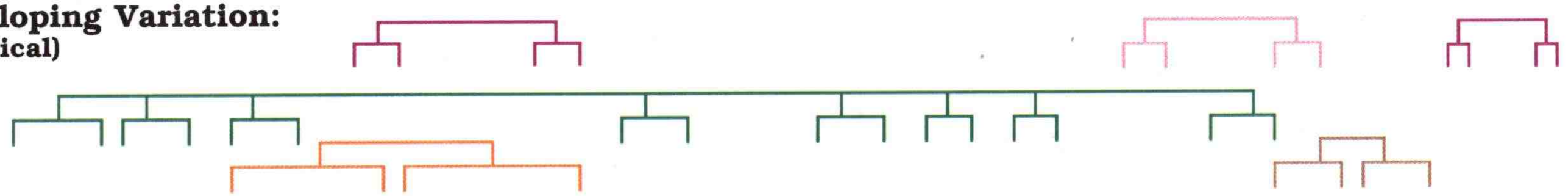
In the verses of the main body of the song, lyric rhyme and syntax are closely connected because most rhymes are end-rhymes. Rhyme thus becomes a cadential device. In ex. 7.8, the first verse is neatly tied-up at the end through the extension of cadential-rhyme: the opening rhyme (...ēst) being brought back in the penultimate phrase ("deceased"), setting up the final rhyme ("priest") – the same as in the first phrase. This cadential rhyme recapitulation is even more effective because "deceased" in the penultimate phrase disposes of the previous internalised rhyme in similar fashion to Mrs Lovett's opening sixteen bars:

The trouble with poet
Is, how do you know it's
Deceased?
Try the priest.

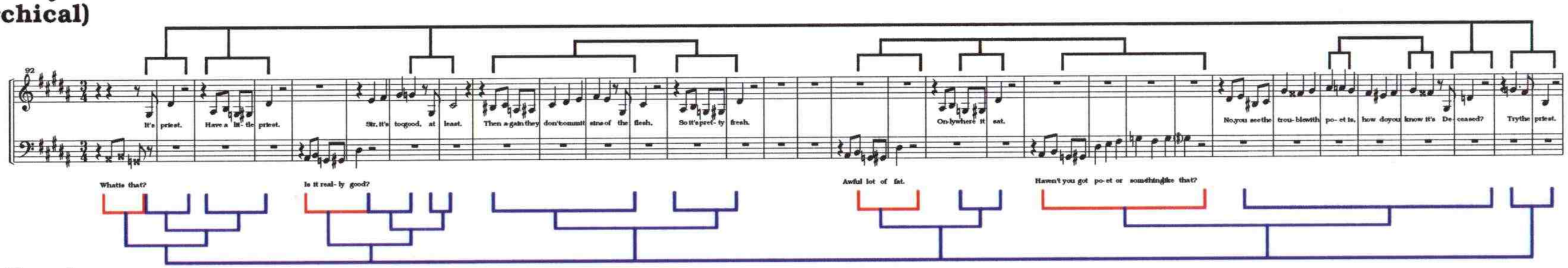
Ex. 7.8

Melopoetic Relationships in Verse 1

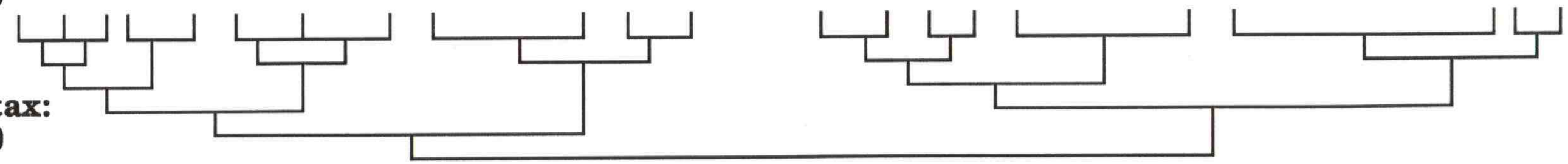
Music Developing Variation:
(non-hierarchical)



Lyric Rhyme:
(hierarchical)



Lyric Syntax:
(hierarchical)



Music Syntax:
(hierarchical)

By disposing of a local rhyme through the recapitulation of an earlier rhyme as a cadential device, it has made the "priest" rhyme more structurally significant than any other. Its return is thus on the highest hierarchical levels of both syntax and rhyme.

Comparing the diagrams of developing variation and musical syntax, we can see the extent of the former. Pervading the whole stanza is the key motif (green in the diagram) which runs in counterpoint against the phrase structure, acting as a linking device in an often discontinuous melodic line. The rising fifth anacrusis/downbeat (the developmental use of which is shown in purple) at the end of this key motif is also used as a cadential device, for it rounds off most phrases even after they have developed far away from the key motif. Sondheim's use of internal rhyme as demonstrated at the end of the stanza ("poet"/"know it's") is matched musically by a descending sequence (coloured buff). The allegiance between lyric and musical rhyme also extends to the disposal of the internal rhyme by the recapitulated "deceased"/"priest", because the rising fifth motif used a phrase-ending signifier was also used for "deceased" at the start of the stanza. Lyrical and musical motif are thus inseparable, the recapitulation existing on three levels: lyric idea, lyric rhyme and musical motif. One instance where Sondheim uses a musical sequence without a comparable internal lyric rhyme is in the middle of the first half (marked orange), although the musical rhyme is initially disguised through being split between the voices. This counterpoint between musical and lyrical rhyme propels the song forward.

That the lyrical and musical syntax should be fundamentally different on the highest level is a crucial definer of the song's musico-dramatic function. As mentioned above, the lyric is the product of the protagonists constructing the lyric as they proceed (represented by the highest level of the hierarchy linking six groups of lower ideas rather than hierarchical pairs as in the musical syntax). But aside from the occasionally discontinuous nature of the melodic line, the music possesses a tonal, metric and syntactic structure that could not be anything else apart from preconceived. In short, the lyric belongs to the protagonists whereas the music is the property of the performing convention. Thus the fact that the lyric is diagetic but the music is not is represented in the fundamental structure of the song.

Conclusion

A glance at the composer worklists included at the back of this thesis demonstrates how radically the genre's environment has changed. Whereas writing scores for three or four musicals each year in addition to songs for revues and Tin Pan Alley was considered the norm in the 1920s – when several hundred new musicals opened each year on Broadway – now a new work reaching Broadway is an event in itself. The cost of putting on works has soared. Ziegfield could afford to put chorus lines of over a hundred on the stage, still expecting to break even within a few months. Nowadays a new show tends to be just as spectacular as it was in the 1920s (one helicopter on stage equals one hundred chorus tap-dancing on top of a giant birthday cake), but the production will only break even if it runs for several years. Because of this, new shows rarely make it to Broadway unless by an established name like Andrew Lloyd Webber or Alain Boublil & Claude-Michel Schönberg. The consequence is a paucity of new material – and a Broadway dominated by revivals of past works, and blockbuster shows guaranteed to run for the best part of a decade. *Showboat* broke history when its original 1927 production ran for an unheard-of 575 performances, yet *Cats*, *Les Miserables* and *Phantom of the Opera* look set to run for ten times as many performances – until at least the next millennium on Broadway, the West End and several international stages.

Yet this downfall of the Broadway environment parallels a journey from naïvety to towards a total art work. Broadway songs have changed radically in both their content and form. Gone is the carefully-crafted thirty-two bar melody that soared for its own sake, and gone too is the love-lyric that wooed and wowed with a genuine humanity. What has replaced it, at least in the works of Sondheim, is a corpus of songs that are first and foremost musico-dramatically conceived compositions that exist solely within a larger musico-dramatic framework, whose lyrics and music make little sense without each other. In Sondheim, lyric and music have become inseparable for both performer, audience and musicologist. Perhaps even the term musicology seems inappropriate for such cross-discipline analysis.

But for all the stylistic abyss between Berlin's "Play a Simple Melody" and Sondheim's "A Little Priest" – textual, textural, the musico-dramatic function, harmonic complexity and large- and small-scale form, there is one constant: the melopoetic relationship. The thirty-two bar melody and lyric may have been replaced by a prose-like 'content-defining-form' construction, but similar melopoetics remain. All the songs in this thesis are constructed by setting-up melopoetic correlation between lyric and music – and then breaking the unanimity in structurally-significant places. Not all the examples work to this end in a uniform manner, for even the best songs here have their melopoetic weaknesses. Where a song has become a standard despite melopoetic problems, one art is generally subservient to the other; this explains the melodic memorability but the 'word-blindness' of "Smoke Gets In Your Eyes". To refine this further, "Broadway Song" = music, lyric and melopoetic relationship, in a ranking defined by each song. Kern

may have written an exemplary melody, but both Gershwin examples represented here are totally-collaborative songs, where lyric and music co-exist as equals.

Returning to Ira Gershwin's opening lyric-quote about letting the melody fit the rhyme (frontispiece), the sentiment is as much a parody of his own profession as it was of Gilbert & Sullivan's. Like all good parody, it reveals a great deal through its reflexivity. Words fitting the music and vice-versa is the common node from Berlin through to Sondheim. It is a genre which possesses a veneer of vernacular simplicity that hides deep structural complexity: *melopoetic* complexity.

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August 1995

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source: song taken from *90 Golden Years of Irving Berlin*, ed. Edward Lea Chappell, London. Year not cited. Song © 1914, Irving Berlin Ltd.

"The Man I Love" — Music: George Gershwin; Lyrics: Ira Gershwin
source: song taken from *The Best of George Gershwin*, intro. Edward Lea Chappell, London. Year not cited. Song © 1928, Harms Inc.

"Fascinating Rhythm" (*Lady, Be Good!*) — Music: George Gershwin; Lyrics: Ira Gershwin; Book: Guy Bolton & Fred Thompson
source: song taken from *The Best of George Gershwin*, intro. Edward Lea Chappell, London. Year not cited. Song © 1929, Harms Inc.

"Smoke Gets In Your Eyes": (*Roberta*) — Music: Jerome Kern; Book & Lyrics: Otto Harbach
source: song taken from *The Jerome Kern Songbook*, ed. Oscar Hammerstein, arr. Albert Sirmay. Simon & Schuster 1955. Song © 1933 Harms Inc.

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"If I Loved You": (*Carousel*) — Music: Richard Rodgers; Book & Lyrics: Oscar Hammerstein II
source: vocal score, ed. Albert Sirmay. T.B. Harms Co. © 1945 Williamson Music inc.

"Somewhere": (*West Side Story*) — Music: Leonard Bernstein; Lyrics: Stephen Sondheim; Book: Arthur Laurents
source: vocal score. Chappell, London. © 1959

"A Little Priest": (*Sweeney Todd*) — Music & Lyrics: Stephen Sondheim; Book: Hugh Wheeler
source: vocal score. ed. Frank Metis. Revelation Music Publishing Corp. & Rilting Music, Inc. © 1981 Tommy Valando.

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Glossary of Terms

Book: the libretto of a musical excluding conversion into lyrics.

Binary hierarchy: continuous syntactic division of musical/lyrical units into two. (ie. 32 bars = 2x16 bar phrases = 4x8 etc.)

Broadway: a street in New York where the majority of the city's theatres are that cultivate a vernacular style of musical theatre.

Character -journey: the sum of a character's transitions through a plot/individual song.

Cross-æsthetic: (clarification of Banfield's term "synæsthetic"), semantic meaning that is transferred from one stage art to another, e.g. including music, lyric, dialogue, lighting, set, choreography etc..

Diagetic: music that is heard/played/sung by the protagonists, not just the actors.

Event rhythm: the pace of events, appertaining to music, lyric and drama.

Feminine rhyme: penultimate rhyme (e.g. ...couldn't/...wouldn't)

Grammar: rules defining a common communication code, inc. music and lyric.

Integrated musical: where songs form part of and forward the plot; popular form from *Oklahoma* (1943) to *Gypsy* (1959).

Lyric-twist: a formal device whereby the sense of the lyric's title phrase is semantically reinterpreted or syntactically modified in the last line.

Melopoetic: grammatical relationships of music and lyric, including but not limited to the syntax and rhyme.

~ counterpoint: where lyric and music syntax and rhymes are in opposition.

~ dislocation: where lyric and music syntax and rhyme schemes oppose each other to negative effect.

Musical: an artistic entertainment centred on Broadway that combines aspects of opera, revue, pantomime, farce, music-hall and legitimate theatre in a vernacular musical and dramatic style.

Musical-rhyme: phrase-endings recognisably connected by simple musical development.

Masculine rhyme: final, monosyllabic rhyme. (e.g. ...<u>could</u>/...<u>would</u>)

Middle-eight: the **B** section in a thirty-two bar **AABA** form.

Musico-dramatic: drama as conveyed through the music and lyric together.

Object: part of a sentence towards which the verb is directed.

Quatrain: stanza of four lines.

Reflexivity: where an art work describes itself or its collaborators.

Routining: the arrangement of a song into a longer form, according to the needs of a particular production: possibly including dance sequences and/or chorus repetition.

Run-on line: a lyric line that spills-over syntactically into the next.

Sheet music: publication of an individual song, usually simplified or arranged.

Stanza: a group of lyric lines forming a discrete syntactical, metred and rhymed unit.

Stream segregation: the cognitive splitting of combined information from more than one source: essential for contrapuntal hearing.

Stream-of-Consciousness: a lyric where the character is making up the dramatic changes as they proceed, as in a soliloquy.

Subject: part of a sentence about which something is said.

Syntax: grammatical structure within a sentence.

Tin Pan Alley: 28th Street, New York (the centre of the early popular sheet music publishing industry); used to denote commercial popular sheet music composition.

Title-lyric: recurring lyric phrase chosen as song title.

Virtual Punctuation: lyric punctuation resulting from natural syntactic speech patterns rather than printed punctuation.

Broadway Stage-Work Lists

– only includes works composed exclusively or almost exclusively by the composer
– revues/follies not included
– shows that never made it to Broadway or the West End excluded

Irving Berlin:
(1888-1989)

(lyrics & music)

Watch Your Step	1914
Stop! Look! Listen!	1915
Yip-Yip-Yaphank	1918
The Cocoanuts	1925
Ziegfield Follies	1927
Face the Music	1932
As Thousands Cheer	1933
Louisiana Purchase	1940
This is the Army	1942
Annie Get Your Gun	1946
Miss Liberty	1949
Call Me Madam	1950
Mr President	1962

George Gershwin:
(1898-1937)

(lyrics by Ira Gershwin from *Lady, Be Good! onwards*)

La, La Lucille	1919
Morris Gest's Midnight Whirl	1919
Sweet Little Devil	1924
George White's Scandals	1924
Primrose	1924
Lady, Be Good!	1924
Tell Me More!	1925
Tip Toes	1925
Song of the Flame	1925
Oh, Kay!	1926
Strike Up The Band	1927/1930
Funny Face	1927
Rosalie	1928
Treasure Girl	1928
Show Girl	1929
Girl Crazy	1930
Of Thee I Sing	1931
Pardon My English	1933
Let 'em Eat Cake	1933
Porgy and Bess	1935

Jerome Kern: (1885-1945)	(lyrics by various)	
	The Red Petticoat	1912
	Oh, I Say!	1913
	Ninety in the Shade	1915
	Nobody Home	1915
	Very Good Eddie	1915
	Have a Heart	1917
	Love O' Mike	1917
	Oh, Boy!	1917
	Leave it to Jane	1917
	Oh Lady! Lady!!	1918
	Toot-Toot!	1918
	Rock-a-Bye Baby	1918
	Head Over Heels	1918
	She's a Good Fellow	1919
	The Night Boat	1920
	Sally	1920
	The Cabaret Girl	1921
	Good Morning Dearie	1921
	The Bunch and Judy	1922
	The Beauty Prize	1923
	The Stepping Stones	1923
	Sitting Pretty	1924
	Dear Sir	1924
	Sunny	1925
	The City Chap	1925
	Criss-Cross	1926
	Show Boat	1927
	Blue Eyes	1928
	Sweet Adeline	1929
	The Cat and the Fiddle	1931
	Music in the Air	1932
	Roberta	1933
	Three Sisters	1934
	Very Warm for May	1939
Cole Porter: (1891-1964)	(lyrics & music)	
	See America First	1916
	Greenwich Village Follies	1924
	Paris	1928
	Wake Up and Dream	1929
	Fifty Million Frenchmen	1929
	The New Yorkers	1930
	Gay Divorce	1932
	Nymph Errant	1933
	Anything Goes	1934
	Jubilee	1935
	Red, Hot and Blue!	1936

	Me and Juliet	1953
	Pipe Dream	1955
	Flower Drum Song	1958
	The Sound of Music	1959
	No Strings	1962
	Do I Hear A Waltz?	1965
	Two by Two	1970
	Rex	1976
	I Remember Mama	1979
Leonard Bernstein:	(lyrics by various, including Bernstein)	
(1918-1990)	*On the Town*	1944
	Peter Pan	1950
	Wonderful Town	1953
	Candide	1956/1974
	West Side Story	1957
	1600 Pennsylvania Avenue	1976
Stephen Sondheim:	(lyrics only)	
(1930-)	*West Side Story*	1957
	Gypsy	1959
	Do I Hear a Waltz?	1965
	(lyrics & music)	
	A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum	1962
	Anyone Can Whistle	1964
	Company	1970
	Follies	1971
	A Little Night Music	1973
	Pacific Overtures	1976
	Sweeney Todd	1979
	Merrily We Roll Along	1981
	Sunday in the Park with George	1984
	Into the Woods	1987
	Assassins	1991
	Passion	1994