

Wild Man

By Bob Wallbank

*A play based on
the Middle Irish romance
of Suibhne Geilt*

Characters:-

Sweeney

Eorann / Hag

Trickster

Cleric

The set is a neutral space, the only essential element of which needs to be a raised structure which can act as a tree, pole, perch, or mobile phone transmission mast. In the original production, a scaffold tower was used, together with three chairs which doubled as the settee. The performers need never leave the space.

Cleric and Trickster are referred to as he, but they are androgynous.

First performed by Scratch Theatre: May 2002 at Newtown's May Festival, then toured through Wales and the Borders June - October

Wild Man

The call

Eorann and Sweeney are pouring over a pile of car brochures on an expensive settee. Smoochy, the look of an Ad

Sweeney Should we buy the one with the global positioning system that drives you to your destination?

Eorann It would stop us arguing over the mapreading

Sweeney You can link it into your mobile, and it'll automatically redirect you round any hold-ups

Eorann This car costs more than we paid for our holiday house

Sweeney A car projects your image. We need a new car.

Trickster pokes his head up from behind the settee

Trickster You need lots of things

Sweeney Of course I need lots of things.

Eorann What?

Sweeney Ignore him, he shouldn't have entered yet

Eorann Right ho.

Trickster It's needing things that drives us onwards - Human nature...

Sweeney There's so much we need, and no time to buy it all

Slight pause as they pour over the brochures once more. Trickster pushes in and sits between them

Trickster Consume darlings consume. It's what you were born for...

Buy to live and live to buy
Help the world's economy

Eventually...

Sweeney Hell, let's go for the full works

- Trickster** She'd love you just as much without a new car
- Sweeney** Perhaps, but others wouldn't. Look, clear off! You've come on far too early
- Trickster** That's a matter of opinion
- Sweeney** It's a matter of reading the script
- Trickster** Which you've rewritten.
- Sweeney** I can do that. I'm a king
- Eorann** A captain of finance
- Trickster** Give me strength!
- Sweeney** Clear off!
- Eorann** His doctors think he could possibly have a heart murmur. Please don't stress him
- Sweeney** Heart murmur. Rubbish!
- Eorann** Sometimes I think he'll have a nervous breakdown – he works so hard

Trickster backs off during this domestic

- Sweeney** There's nothing wrong with my health. If I want to swear at this idiot who has appeared too early in the show I will.
- Eorann** I worry about you
- Sweeney** Well don't. You used to be in there with me. You were always the one who took the biggest risks. Buy! Buy! And Sell! Sell! In my ear morning noon and night. You and I rode side by side in our raids on the financial markets and we won we won we won. We always won, returning in the misty dawn weighed down with spoils whilst others slept. Now look at you.
- Eorann** I have the children to think about
- Sweeney** What's wrong with nannies?
- Eorann** There's entertaining and dinners
- Sweeney** Employ a PA.

Violent ringing of a little bell, off

Sweeney Now what the devil is it

Eorann He's at it again

Sweeney Who?

Eorann That bellringer bloke off the estate

Sweeney Him! He's nuts! I always said we'd have trouble when they built those cheap flats so close.

Trickster *(aside)* You mean there's four of us in this play! No expenses spared, ladies and gentlemen.

Eorann Bells are his religion I think

More ringing. Trickster peers off and Sweeney and Eorann try to settle down to the brochures again. After a moment, there is a particularly vigorous clanging

Sweeney Give me strength – can't I spend my money in peace?

Eorann He believes he's going to save the world – he's perfectly harmless

More ringing – louder

Sweeney Well he's harming me *(shouts out the window)* Oi you! Go and find the meaning of life somewhere else! *(pulls his head in, then sticks it out again)* And get out of my garden! *(pulls his head in)* Cheek! He's standing on our path!

Cleric enters still ringing bell

Cleric And what particular meaning would you like to your life, sir?

Sweeney I don't need any bloody meaning. I just need some quiet on a Sunday afternoon. Unlike you, I've important decisions to make

Cleric Ah

Sweeney Don't just say Ah in that pompous holier than thou way

Cleric But I am holier than thou. I've come to help you

Eorann No help today thankyou

Sweeney I've never needed help in my life.

Cleric I've come to save your soul

Trickster That's mine

Cleric My bells tell me you are straying from the righteous path

Sweeney Get out

Trickster Me or him?

Cleric rings his bell

Cleric I shall start

Sweeney Going

Cleric I need to find a point of contact with you. Tell me – what do you care most deeply about?

Cleric rings his bell

Eorann Me

Sweeney Me? I don't give a toss about anything

Trickster Except himself

Sweeney Except me

Cleric You need a purpose in life. By obeying the bells, you will come to know the truth. Have you ever thought of ringing bells?

Sweeney Only yours if you don't get out

Eorann You're getting stressed

Cleric I too was a lost soul till born again by bells. Suddenly a vision of the whole world opened out, and I knew for certain what was right and what was wrong

Cleric begins to ring his bell again

Sweeney Get out

Cleric I could leave you a leaflet on bell therapy

Sweeney Get out!

Sweeney rubs his chest

- Cleric** Stress is bad for the heart. You'll find that ringing bells is very relaxing
- Sweeney** I don't give a toss about my health, about you, about anything. When your number's up, your number's up – and just at the moment I'm young, it's a long way off and I don't–
- Trickster** give a toss. Very repetitive
- Sweeney** Stop finishing my sentences.
- Trickster** You need to improve your style, or your audience won't like it
- Sweeney** What audience?
- Trickster** *(to audience)* Really!
- Eorann** *(to Cleric)* if you don't mind, we're a bit busy buying a new car.
- Cleric** You've two new cars – I saw them in the drive
- Sweeney** They're over a year old. Get out
- Cleric leaves, ringing his bell, and sadly shaking his head*
- Trickster** Repetitive again
- Sweeney** I don't give a toss what you think
- Trickster** I'm saying nothing
- Eorann** Can we get back to the subject
- Sweeney** Buying a car
- Trickster** You're confusing your audience
- Sweeney** I am! What about you?
- Trickster** I'm dumb.
- Eorann** Where were we
- Sweeney** Sometimes I think I'm going mad.
- Eorann** I've calculated our disposable income over the next year

- Sweeney** I don't mean mad mad, I mean really mad – stark staring out of my tree
- Eorann** Putting aside living expenses of six thousand a month, there's a hundred and fifty grand left over once we've bought the car.
- Sweeney** Lunatics like him should be locked up
- Eorann** We need to prioritise the designer bathroom, the patio with sliding roof panels, upsizing the yacht...
- Sweeney** What use has he ever been to society – him and his bloody bells. What's he ever done for the country's Gross National Product?
- Eorann** He must have bought his bell somewhere
- Sweeney** What's that got to do with it?
- Eorann** Well it's consumption of a sort
- Sweeney** Ha!
- Trickster** Big people should spend big and little people spend little – each according to his ability – that's right isn't it? It doesn't matter so long as they all-
- Sweeney** Consume. If people stopped consuming, civilisation would go dark
- Eorann** So that's a 'yes' to the car is it?
- Violent ringing of bell outside*
- Sweeney** I don't believe it. He's back
- Eorann** Don't get worked up
- Sweeney** *(out the window)* Oi for the last time, get out of my sodding garden
- Cleric** *(off, shouting)* This is a particularly resonant site. Unlike any I have found. You are truly blessed to have such a holy place within the confines of your property.
- Violent ringing*
- Sweeney** He needs a shrink
- Eorann** Darling, your stress levels—

Cleric *(Off)* Here, in your very garden, the true meaning of the ordered life of bells will affect your soul, and save you from the eternal damnation of the unbeliever.

Sweeney I am – I'm going out of my tree – I know it – It's his fault

Cleric *(Off)* You will not mind if I bring my friends

Sweeney roars

Eorann Ignore him

Violent ringing of the bell

Leads into music underscoring – single note

Cleric Ding ding ding
Do you hear my little bell?
Ding dong ding
It will save you all from hell

Ding ding ding
Join this Cleric in his cell
Ding dong ding
As he weaves his magic spell

Ding ding ding
Do you hear my little bell?
Ding dong ding
In my church I talk of hell

Sweeney A noise
That annoys

Cleric Ding ding ding
Do you hear the little bell?
Ding dong ding
I can save you all from hell

Sweeney Noise noise
Horrible noise

Eorann Sweeney don't rise to him
You don't belong to him
Stay here in safety, he's out of our world

Sweeney Safety is all you think, safety is all your cares

Eorann Safety for you and me

Sweeney Safety was never there when I first courted you

Eorann Now we've a life to lose
Sweeney don't go to him

Cleric Ding ding ding
Do you hear the little bell?
Ding dong ding
I can save you all from hell

Sweeney You're religion

Cleric Is my life

Sweeney is rotten

Cleric No!

Sweeney an addled shell
All death, corruption, torment, hell

Cleric Our best invention!
Hell keeps princes in their place

Sweeney Take your church and hell and all
And sink it in the ocean.
For here I'll have no hell.

Cleric Here we'll have a church – just here
Where you can learn the rules of life.
I'll mark the corners with my holy water

Sweeney Like a little pissing dog

Cleric Take care before I damn you

Sweeney What! Damn me to religious hell!

Cleric I'll damn you to obey the rules
Ding ding ding
Do you hear my little bell?
Ding dong ding
It could save your soul from hell

Eorann Don't tempt his curses,
we don't understand him.
Stay here in safety,
in glorious safety a

King in your castle

Sweeney I rule this land

Eorann Leave him, he'll go away

Sweeney No, he'll not go away

Eorann King of Dal Araidhe
I beg you to stay

Sweeney What! stand whilst my land is despoiled
by a hell touting bell touting madman

Cleric Ding dong ding

Eorann King of Dal Araidhe
I beg you to stay

Eorann grabs at Sweeney to prevent him going after the Cleric, catching his waist band. His trousers split open, leaving him in boxer shorts with the remains of his trousers round his ankles. His shirt tails have feathers sewn to them

Sweeney Take your ding dong dings to another land,
for here I'll have no hell,
no orders, no rules
no ding dong dings, and
no! hell!

Sweeney takes the bell and hurls it upstage. The Cleric rushes to retrieve it. The Trickster laughs

Trickster He's wasted as a consumer

Eorann Darling, your trousers

Trickster He doesn't need them. Trousers are a drug – habitual. Men get withdrawal symptoms without them.

Cleric sticks his head through the window. Trickster barks like a dog

Cleric You have dented my bell. Luckily for you, it was caught by a passing dog and retrieved for me—

Trickster Woof woof!

Cleric —otherwise your punishment would be worse. May you be cursed to roam the country trouserless as you are now, totally disordered, searching for your true bells

Cleric dials into her mobile obviously, then leaves

Sweeney Out of my tree...

Sweeney's mobile rings

Sweeney Hello. *(pause)* Oh my God *(pause)* We must avoid a showdown with the shareholders at all costs – Yes of course I'll be there. *(pause)* Why did the bloody bank foreclose? No, there's no point on the phone. I'll come round.

Sweeney removes his mobile from his ear

Eorann Problems?

Sweeney A battle. But nothing worse than I have fought before. A hostile bid. There'll be blood let. I just have to make sure it is not mine

Eorann When?

Trickster *(aside)* You don't need to know – time's irrelevant. We only remember by the sequence of events.

Sweeney Help me don my armour

Eorann hands him a new pair of trousers, a jacket and a tie, helping him dress upstage

Trickster Which is just as well 'cause this show covers seven times seven years, and I doubt you have that long

Cleric enters ringing her bell. She also has a large book

Cleric Change of scene: I come to sprinkle holy water in the boardroom.

Trickster This is a religious company. They've discovered it helps sales,

Cleric Outwardly clean, holy and besuited

Trickster And inwardly who cares? As sales spin, it works out much cheaper than being ecologically aware

Sweeney enters speaking on his mobile, beautifully arrayed

Sweeney We shall fight it every inch of the way. Our strength is immense and the board are rock solid behind me...

Behind him, enters Eorann. She deliberately, in view adds a shawl to turn her into the Triple Goddess of birth, fruition and decay. She is the Hag in name only, and should not be witch like

Cleric He shall be mine eventually, you know

Trickster That's strange, I thought he was mine

Hag First, he shall be mine

Cleric Why do you want him, Hag?

Hag Because it pleases me. In the darkness of my mill I picked his thread at random from the dusty heap

Cleric You have no logic

Hag Marvellous

Sweeney *(into phone)* The time for compromise is past. They should have thought of that last week. We've got to annihilate them... I don't care if you think it's too small an issue to go into battle over. It's too late now. It's become a matter of principle as well as economic survival.

Trickster At a trade conference they were accused by a financial services company of not having sufficiently aggressive marketing policies in third world countries

Sweeney It was not immaterial. It was a deliberate slight against our chairman and it was not borne out by the facts...

Trickster Greed and arrogance did the rest. They set out to take over the offending company, bid and counter bid.

Sweeney Don't you worry, I am here – in the thick of it

Sweeney finishes with phone and shuts it forcefully

Cleric Bless you bless you for your war is righteous in the eyes of my bells

Sweeney Lunatic!

Cleric Your PR company have employed me as your caring image. With holy water from my bells I can save your shares from destruction

Cleric produces the bell the wrong way up, full of water, and sprinkles Sweeney with water. His red shirt stains dark like blood

Sweeney My shirt – you’ve pissed on my shirt

Sweeney grabs his bell and rips out its clapper and tears up the book

Trickster He won’t like that – it was his accounts book

Cleric I curse you to a living hell. When you hear the three wild shouts you’ll hate the company of men and fly amongst the branches like a bird, flapping your shirt, trouserless and friendless.

Trickster Fellow shareholders, I call upon Mr Sweeney to address this meeting. He will explain the company’s international marketing strategy

Sweeney Ladies and Gentlemen, we must fight this hostile bid to the death – it is a damaging irrelevance to our future plans. As you know, we are in the middle of remarketing this company. With a new corporate identity we can forge ahead into the brave new world of total global capitalism, where everything can be seen in terms of its true value.

Trickster You tell them

Sweeney You are either with us or against us. There can be no half measures. Western capitalism has proved the salvation of the world. We must grasp it with both hands and break into new markets where our values are as yet unknown. Truly, ladies and gentlemen we have a mission to hit the developing world, and drag them into the light.

Trickster Here we should have considerable applause from the audience. What? You don’t like it? I’m sure you would if it was your money at stake

Sweeney Can we allow this magnificent vision to be dented by a blip in the market – by the whims of a failing company putting in a hostile bid against us just to pre-empt our bid against them?

Trickster Cries of ‘no of course we can’t’, ‘Hear Hear!’ et cetera

Sweeney So I must urge you all to support our chairman and reject this bid. It is a battle we must win, in the name of civilisation, or we shall be utterly destroyed.

Trickster *(bored clapping)* Cheers of support

The Cleric leaps on a chair, restrained unsuccessfully by Sweeney

Cleric This man is an unbeliever, an anarchist. He has spurned our creed of respectability and order, and broken my bell. He has torn up our accounts book! He is no longer a company man!

Trickster *(mock horror)* No longer a company man...

Hag Shame! Shame!

Trickster Torn up the accounts book...

Cleric Resign!

Cleric, Hag & Trickster Resign! Resign! Resign!

Sweeney But I **am** your company man

Rattles off by rote-

It's their fault they're poor
It's their fault they're starving
They've rejected the one way
The only way
The good way
Our way
Globalisation-

Trickster Rules okay... *(Sweeney looks at him)*

Sweeney One day all the world will be like us!

Cleric Fifth Columnist! Snake in the Grass! Resign!

Cleric, Hag & Trickster Resign! Resign! Resign!

Trickster You've lost our money

Cleric, Hag & Trickster Resign! Resign! Resign!

Hag Corporate mismanagement

Cleric, Hag & Trickster Resign! Resign! Resign!

Cleric deliberately removes Sweeney's jacket and undoes his trousers

Cleric Fly Sweeney, fly! *(slowly and deliberately)* You will lose all the benefits of our society. You are cursed to naked madness

Sweeney slowly turns around, staring at his accusers and struck dumb.

Cleric, Hag & Trickster Resign! Resign! Resign!

Sweeney cowers to the ground, dropping his badges of office one after another – his mobile, organiser, briefcase, laptop. His suit and cards are stolen by Trickster. Stripped, he is wearing a tailed shirt with feathers and boxer shorts

The Journey

Sweeney slowly stands, then suddenly explodes, kicking over the chairs at random

Sweeney Bastards – two faced bastards. They were laughing at me. Stripped of everything how can I return? No car, no money, no reputation, no lifestyle. He who goes home is laughed at, pitied – and I will not be pitied. I loath them all... yet not Eorann – but what will she see in me now – half a man? I fly to wander like a binless baglady out across the world, filled with loathing for those places known to me and yearning for those I have yet to reach.

Music

Sweeney runs a circuit of the auditorium

Running, running, running on pavements too hard for my bare feet – open up my wings to fly across the bushy clefts of tower blocks and the roofoo valleys of the penthouses. Clinging to the chimney crags, I scoop birdcrumbs in my bare hands. I scabble up the icy windows of the corporate banks.

No longer human I must fly from everything I hold to be of worth, and hide my face where no-one will remember me. Better to have died than be stripped... of my position.

Here I shall go mad and hallucinate a different person. Here I shall sway in the cold gale, perched upon a mobile phone transmission mast.

Hag enters, removing her shawl to become Eorann. Sweeney watches from his perch, but they cannot see him

Eorann I knew he would leave me. He was bored with me. Better madness than losing him to someone else. I knew, when he drove to that meeting he would not be coming home.

Trickster and Cleric enter, whispering together, ignoring Eorann.

Trickster Who would have thought he had it in him? To make an exhibition of himself like that!

Cleric He must undergo treatment, and be made to see the error of his ways

Eorann Come back Sweeney. Who cares what others think.

Sweeney I do.

Cleric He'll conform in the end. They always do.

Trickster To live a life ruled by bells

Cleric He can't go far. They will trace him by his card withdrawals. He can't survive without money

Trickster waves the wallet he has palmed

Trickster He's lost his cards already

Cleric and Trickster exit laughing, arm in arm

Sweeney The man you seek
Sits on a howling mast
You shall not catch him
He will fly to the west

Trickster re-enters and settles down to watch. Sweeney swings madly around his pole

A jilted lover of the City,
Devotion addled into hate,
Seeks that which he hereto loathed
The wilderness

To escape from people
Is my one desire
To hollow out the depths
Where no-one goes

Trickster The secret clearing in the wood
Where nuthatch and the laughing woodpecker
Consume nothing but-
Grubs

Sweeney Your entrance?

Trickster Yes, this is my entrance,
Wild man of the woods

Sweeney Am I mad? Do I dream my flying?

Trickster This is real –

This is the dreamworld, the otherworld, your dreamtime
Fly with me to the far west
With only memories of what you were before,
Living a life out of time –
Mad Sweeney

Sweeney My feet leave no print upon the grass
Only by dewbrush
Can you trace my passing

Trickster Out across the stricken cornfields
Bleached by greed
Waiting for Parsifal to save the Fisher King
And make the wasteland bloom

Fly Sweeney fly.
Fly with the wild geese through the people of the world.
Fly to the otherworlds.

Sweeney Field and wood, bog and mountain
Never shall I find rest
But fly away from myself

Trickster The drained marsh, nitrogen green
The sheep hammered upland wood
Everywhere the print of man
Save fair Glen Bolcáin where the madmen roam
Living upon Watercress

Sweeney Howling, biting flies the wind to Glenn Bolcáin
Madmen geese whirl darkly as a man rips watercress beneath its
waters
The spring floats on rough rocks,
Green dripping.
Whiffling feathers drop the geese to land in safety in the foxfree
undergrowth

Trickster Damp bottomed on their island in the pool, the ticking clock within
them whispers Arctic Arctic Arctic Arctic
But the green man shovels watercress into his green mouth
He thinks not of goals, only travel
A man must eat a lot of watercress to stay alive,
Even a madman
By the spring he rants and raves, naked save for his imagined
feathers,

Sweeney The geese stir
Someone shot at them today

Trickster A sane farmer protecting his income in his field of winter wheat
This spring in the frantic ticking summer of the Arctic, a gander will
search out a younger mate
No time for sadness, only eggs

Sweeney The geese stir, settling deeper in the dusk
Their birdfriend shovels watercress, his barefeet slipping in the
shingle of the spring
He is not a cow, this madman: too much vegetation makes his
stomach bloat
Belching, he flies into a nearby oak, crash landing in a clatter of
broken twigs

Trickster An ungainly bird, serving his cold goddess in a tree

Sweeney The spring bubbles
The geese stir

Trickster In the heat of a radiator, the farmer watches television

The wild goose wants nothing. *(as a blessing)* Live as a wild goose,
eating grass.

Hag enters with her thread and distaff. Sweeney hides in tree

Hag Watercress, not grass. You should be accurate

Trickster Can't he eat grass as well – like a goose?

Hag Watercress is fiery, the food of poetry

Trickster You are his Muse?

Hag Yes, and I will have my way. He is chosen from the heap.
Deprivation breeds poetry. He is shocked. It is ideal.

Trickster You use him

Hag You're not using him, of course

Trickster I point the way – the rest he sees for himself

Hag Ha!

Trickster Watercress it is then.

Sweeney *(to himself)* Do I know you

Hag *(looking up)* Intimately *(to Trickster)* He was completely wasted in commerce

Hag exits

Trickster *(to Sweeney)* Watercress it is then.

Sweeney comes down from his tree

Sweeney Can I say something?

Trickster Why?

Sweeney It's just that, since you are discussing my diet, I wondered if I could be involved?

Trickster Why?

Sweeney I have to eat it

Trickster Would you prefer grass?

Sweeney Not really... I've nothing against watercress – It's all right as a garnish – but I'd never thought of it as the main course. Can I vary it occasionally?

Trickster By all means – Haws in season, sloes, the odd fungus. You'll be glad to go back to it. Cool hot watercress – Yum

Sweeney Hard is my life
Living wild
Perched in shuddering trees through winter storms
Or sweating sun

But harder still
Is the laughter of those who knew me when I was a man.

Trickster Pity's worse, as you yourself said.

Sweeney Loneliness—

Trickster Rubbish! Enjoy what you have! Trees and birds hold no grudge. They just are.

Trickster exits

Sweeney Having lost so much, I only have my life to lose, and that losing does not interest me. Perhaps this is freedom. I embrace life in the damp trees for it is so utterly different from what I have left, and holds no

memories of it. Days and years pass, but who cares. They have stopped searching for me – presumed me dead, for mad men of the woods do not exist in logical society. They are the stuff of myths and legends, and so become the property of the mad themselves.

A spatter of bitter raindrops keep me from remembering I was recently a man. I am nothing that I once was, for the mad die to their old self. I am beyond cold, but a misery of wet branches slap me in the wind – the cold, lamb-starving wind of the East.

I open my wings and glide downwind to the warm wet west where boats roll in a narrow cove, and fishermen's shacks cling, grass-roofed, to grassy cliffs. Here I perch on sea-rocks midst the wheeling whining seabirds, and boyishly remember ancient holidays amongst the speckled lobsterpots. Seaspray trickles from a rusty winch, and runs down broken cables to rejoin the incoming tide upon the slipway. Paint slopped dinghies drip on clumps of thrift and sea holly.

Up the stony path, across the chough-grass, lie the hidden valleys where deep trees cling, bird perches. Uncultivated, they push through old stone walls, dragging ivy up towards the light, returning everything to glorious wilderness. Here my madness can take root, for here is nothing of my former self, here the works of man are overthrown. Here, my loss is painless.

Vigorous ringing of Cleric's bell. He enters, followed by the Hag, in a shawl as an Irish countrywoman

Cleric Ding ding, ding ding, ding ding – it's time for a service – time to worship bells

Hag Too busy I am

Cleric It's man's work, but I'll let you watch

Hag Too busy

Cleric You shouldn't be working on a Bell Day

Hag Sure, someone's got to have the babies

Hag produces a baby from under her shawl

Cleric It's not allowed. My book is very clear on the subject

Hag Someone's got to beat the flax, someone's got to make your clothes.

Hag produces some flax and starts beating it

Cleric You could buy them

Hag Stopped me shopping on a Bell Day you have. *(aside)* Now there's a bad thing for consumers

Cleric You will go to hell if you don't join me

Hag It's you can go to hell as well

Cleric, affronted places his bell reverently on the stage and kneels before it. The Hag continues beating flax for a moment

Hag Hey you up there in that tree with the birdfeet. Come down and hold this baby, I've a mind to give birth to another one.

Sweeney falls out of his tree with surprise

Hag I was wondering when you'd be dropping in. Now would you be helping me with my work

Sweeney Beware, this is a Day of Bells, and all work is forbidden! He threatened you with hell!

Hag Is it mad you are?

Sweeney He sent me mad, and whether to hell or not, I do not know. I was in a valley wood just now, then suddenly—

Hag You are at Swim Two Birds on the Shannon with me

Sweeney I'm mad

Hag I was after thinking you were mad, flying in like that out of a tall tree.

Sweeney He threatened you with hell!

Hag He did he did, and all his kind. Now would you be holding this baby, the next one's knocking at the door.

Sweeney Do Clerics forbid the bringing forth of children on a Bell Day?

Hag They do, they do.

Hag produces another baby from under her shawl

Hag Ah, there we are: twins today it is. Now if you could just hold this second one as well, I'll be getting back to my flax.

- Sweeney** As you beat the flax, even so was I beaten into madness by my friends
- Hag** You must be mad Sweeney. By your feathers I should have guessed it. 'Tis a sure sign of a madman.
- Sweeney** Beware the wrath of the bells
- Hag** You'll be out of sorts from hunger. Is it watercress you're after? You'll find sweet bunches in the stream below my mill. The latrines have not been emptied this past hour, so it's fine you'll be.
- Sweeney** Surely it is forbidden to eat on bell day.
- Hag** It is, it is, unless you are a Cleric, but what would you be doing with not eating, and you so thin?
- Sweeney** Why torment me?
- Hag** Torment is it? Have you not had torment enough that you must turn preacher for the man who drove you mad? Here, stick some flax in your ears so you can't hear his bell.
- Sweeney** Who are you?
- Hag** The beginning, the middle and the end. There's my mill.
- Sweeney** Do I know you?
- Hag** Intimately
- Sweeney** I'll not serve you
- Hag** You cannot help but serve me. Hide in your trees – but you will still serve me. Kneel before his bells, but you will still serve me. Listen to him! Cling clang ding dang...
Sweeter to me is the deceitful cuckoo echoing across deep water
Than the cling clang of his bell
When he's finished that service there'll be another and another and another. Sure it saves him having to beat flax and have babies
- Sweeney** I shall to my trees and have none of any of you!
- Sweeney climbs back to his perch*
- Sweeney** Watching all Ireland in my madness, no strife I hear from melodious swans. Cruelty lies in mankind alone.

Belling stags above the rattling moorland – Sweetest of music! Lift my soul.

Hag Well I'd best be taking my babies and getting along. I've got to put these two down somewhere for I'll be having more before evening.

Hag kicks at Cleric and drags him to his feet with his bell

Hag Come along – Swim Two Birds is no longer needed for a madman's dream, and this stage must become somewhere else – bring your bell

As Hag exits, she turns back to the audience

Hag Pan your eyes across the glorious Irish Countryside – like a film it is, except we can't afford the video projection – down the Shannon, out across Galway Bay, over Arran to the lakes of Connemara, or down to Dingle and Mount Brandon, last stop before the Isles of Youth. Sweeney flies the circuit daily.

Hag exits

Music underscoring

Sweeney But always I return to Glen Bolcáin, – even madmen need a home. Fair Glen Bolcáin of the memory, where the watercress is sweeter, the trees leafier and the air clearer. Here I watch growth, birth and death, quietly, and I am part of it.

In the bright waters of Glen Bolcáin
I hear the chattering blue tit in the oak tree
Where islet rocks divide the singing stream

The spring green hazel, ripening to brown nuts
The sheltering holly where the blackbird nests
The tearing bramble, delighting me in autumn.
I can sometimes forgive the cold wind

Capture

Cleric sidles back on

Cleric *(aside)* I never meant it to be like this – seven years he's been flying about, or some such nonsense, and he's not suffering enough. That shamanising Trickster's filled his head with feeling for the wild world. He's clean forgotten the life he used to lead – so where's the hardship? I do believe he even enjoys the trees and the countryside. Not that he respects them. Look at the mess he makes of a tree when he lands in it. You can track him by the trail of broken branches.

Cleric settles down to wait, putting on a simple disguise by swapping his bowler for a trilby

Sweeney I can see you snoring by the wall, sneaking after me by day and night, waiting to drag me back. Who are you now, Cleric?

Cleric Loingseachan, your half-brother

Sweeney You always were a pompous fool, Loingseachan. You have nothing to tell me, even though you lie comfortably at night, whilst I sway in the trees. My leaps through the branches don't destroy as much as your blind living. I eat watercress not cheap wheat.

Cleric raises his eyebrows then settles down to snore. Hag enters with a crust of bread, dusty as the Hag-of-the-mill.

Hag But you don't say no to my bread do you, ground in my own mill, dusty amongst life's cobwebs. Come down little birdy cheep cheep cheep. Come on, come on there. Cheep cheep cheep, come on little birdy, come on.

Sweeney descends nervously, like a wild animal

Hag *(aside)* He's been coming down for bread for a long while now. Quite tame he is, providing you don't move too suddenly

Cleric stops snoring and watches as Sweeney silently takes the bread, then leaps back up to safety

Hag There, you like it really, don't you, you eater of watercress. You're not beyond prostituting your principles for a little bit of life's bread. You sold your soul to me and no-one even knew you'd done it.

Sweeney ignores her, turning his back on the audience to stuff the bread in his mouth. Cleric sidles up to Hag

Cleric Talking of prostitution...

Hag A subject in which you're well versed

Cleric Hell does sometimes have a day off—

Hag So you can ring your bells

Cleric I try not to boast...

Hag What do you want?

Cleric Your clothes

Hag That'll confuse the audience

Cleric And another piece of your bread

Hag You won't catch him, you know, he's mine, but I'll see you try, for a laugh

Hag removes her wraparound skirt, under which there is another identical one, and gives it to Cleric, together with her dusty shawl

Cleric Come on little birdy, cheep cheep cheep, here's some more bread for you, cheep cheep cheep. Come on little birdy, come on, come on.

Once again, Sweeney nervously descends towards the bread. Hag hides. As Sweeney reaches the bread, Cleric lunges, but Sweeney leaps clear and scrambles back to his perch

Sweeney Loingseachan... you are a pain, pitifully chasing me, denying me rest in the wildest of thickets. Take off that ridiculous dress. I will not go with you, and you will not catch me, to turn me back into a shadow of my former self.

Cleric I would but bring you to your wife, whose grief for you has never ended

Sweeney For her sake, not yours, I shall see her. Now clear off my stage, out of a madman's dream, and take off that absurd dress

Cleric exits, struggling with dress, and is crossed by Hag re-entering as Eorann

Sweeney Here I shall perch on the roofbeam of her hut

Eorann You!

Sweeney Do you remember our great love?

Eorann I remember the cars. They were quite good

Sweeney Quite good! They were the most expensive on the market

Eorann You never got the one with the GPS system. You pushed off and left me in the lurch

Sweeney The patio with a sliding roof?

Eorann You must be mad! You never got round to that, either.

- Sweeney** The speedboat?
- Eorann** Made me seasick. Look, it's most inconvenient you know. You're dead
- Sweeney** I am not
- Eorann** It took me years to have you declared officially dead and get our assets put in my name. I can't have you coming alive again – I'll have to deny it's you – we've spent all the money.
- Sweeney** We?
- Eorann** Well you hardly expected me to stay single did you. I used it to set up my partner in international finance. It's just like the old days – I am the inspiration for a great partnership, the muse to money
- Sweeney** Turncoat!
- Eorann** Vagrant!
- Sweeney** Tart!
- Eorann** *(drawing breath for the greatest insult possible)* Hippy!

Trickster runs on

- Trickster** Stop! Stop! This'll never do, the myth tells of true love. We must have a sonnet! Madman, dream again!

Sweeney clears his throat, drops to one knee, and declaims OTT
Music underscoring

- Sweeney** Bright Eorann, easy is your lovers' bed
Where nightly you cavort beneath the sheet;
Not so for me whose feathered birdfeet tread
The raging treetops in the winter's sleet.
Before this flying madness tipped my brain,
You swore you'd not survive a single day
If parted from your Sweeney. Now insane
I watch how princes do your words gainsay.
Beguiled by banquets in a lofty hall
You suffocate in silk-embroidered down.
Your friend forsaken, does his friends appal –
His feathers are too rough for your renown.
- Eorann** My Sweeney, your fierce love such fever brings
I'll drown in storms for you, not float with kings.

Cleric enters

Cleric He's mine, all mine

Sweeney leaps up onto his perch. Cleric puts on Loingseachan's hat

Hag We shall see

Hag exits

Sweeney I think I must be going mad

Cleric Not as mad as you will be soon. I have news for you – the worry of your disappearance has taken its toll – your father is dead

Sweeney My poor mother...

Cleric Is dead also

Sweeney What use is pity now

Cleric Dead is your brother

Sweeney Once, my brother and I were two halves of one life

Cleric You are now without your sister

Sweeney A sister loves though she be not loved

Cleric Your daughter's dead of grief for thee

Sweeney The heart's needle is an only daughter

Cleric Your son is dead, who used to call you 'Daddy'

Sweeney No crueller blow than this.

Cleric And your hound is dead

Sweeney I lose the will to be mad

Sweeney falls out of his tree, and Cleric leaps on him with a rope. He removes his Loingseachan trilby

Cleric Bless you my son

Trickster Do you do that often?

Cleric Oh yes, death works a treat. People always embrace my bells when they are plagued by death. There's no better way of getting business than catching people when they're down

Sweeney My poor poor family

Cleric They're all alive madman. It's time we rebuilt you as an acceptable person again. Look to the East, not the West. Look to logic, common sense and bells, not mad poetry and trees.

Cleric throws Sweeney to the floor and goes over to Trickster, conspiratorially

Cleric I need your help

Trickster You know me, I flow with the wind, disasters and triumphs are all the same. They just are, no more no less. But in the end, everything will come to me, so it matters not what happens on the way

Cleric Is that a yes?

Trickster I simply don't care

Cleric I want you to help me turn him into someone we can be proud of

Trickster *(cynically)* Oh yes, I'll do that all right.

Sweeney struggles in vain

Cleric He needs fattening up, cleaning and taming, but first we'd better start with plucking him

They pluck him and feathers fly. Sweeney screeches

Cleric He smells

Cleric produces deodorant spray and they coat Sweeney. Cleric hands Trickster a set of quiz cards. Trickster becomes more and more manic as he asks the questions: A crescendo.

Trickster The Cleric wants me to re-educate you into a real human being again, so let's see if we can please him, shall we? *(Reading)* What are the woods for?

Sweeney Woods

Trickster Apparently that's wrong, woods are for humans to use. What are birds for?

Sweeney Birds

Trickster Wrong, birds are for humans to use. What are animals for?

Sweeney Animals

Trickster Wrong, animals are for humans to use. What is water for?

Sweeney Water

Trickster Wrong, water is for humans to use. What is air for?

Sweeney Air

Trickster Wrong, air is for humans to use. What is the Earth for?

Sweeney Earth

Trickster Wrong, the Earth is for humans to use. What are gods for?

Sweeney Gods

Trickster Wrong, gods are for humans to use. What are humans for?

Sweeney To fly from

Trickster Wrong. Humans are for breeding and consuming. Without that the world would collapse

Cleric That wasn't a very good start – he should be desperate to return to our lovely society.

Trickster What do you expect? He's been living wild for seven years. You're the one who cursed him to it

Cleric I denied him the glories of humanity – he should be in despair for what he's lost. It's the Hag's fault. That witch tries to take over everything I do. She's poisoned his mind against his own race

Trickster There's an enemy in our midst

Cleric Civilisation is threatened

Trickster By evil beliefs

Cleric That are different to ours.

Trickster We've been outraged,

Cleric Fight the enemy

Trickster Which enemy
Cleric Any enemy
Trickster Let's have a panic
Cleric A witch hunt
Trickster Kill the madmen
Cleric Wherever they are
Trickster Burn the witches
Cleric Madmen everywhere
Trickster Panic panic
Cleric They're growing
Trickster Everywhere
Cleric Help help
Trickster Fight the madmen
Cleric Ding dong ding
Trickster A holy war
Cleric Civilisation is at stake
Trickster We are right
Cleric Ding dong ding
Trickster Dong ding dong
Cleric Fight them
Trickster Bomb them
Cleric Kill them
Trickster They don't believe in our beliefs
Cleric Our killing is justified

Trickster Our killing is right

Cleric If you're not with us—

Trickster You're against us

Cleric Shoot them

Trickster Bomb them

Cleric and Trickster break into an orgy of boyish shooting and bellringing

Cleric Save the world! Ding Ding Ding!

Sweeney There's a ringing in my ears... And I thought I was mad before...

Cleric He must be made decent – we must turn him into a decent citizen

Trickster produces a badly fitting suit, shirt and tie and they forcibly dress Sweeney in it

Cleric Conform, he must conform

Trickster Remember to always clean your shoes and press your shirt and smile sweetly when spoken to and not pick your nose and stand straight and work hard and venerate you elders and betters, and and—

Cleric And spend your money

Trickster And spend your money, but above all, remember to do as you're told

Cleric Stand over there, a monument to modern man

Cleric and Trickster push and pull him as if he were a manikin until they are satisfied with the effect. Then they tie him up

Cleric There, I don't think we've done a bad job

Trickster *(aside)* Better than you think

Cleric One more lost soul saved. I think we've earned a drink. Coming?

Sweeney There's a ringing in my ears

Cleric exits ringing bell. Trickster follows as in a processional, but as he leaves, he beckons on Hag, unseen by Cleric. She enters slowly

Hag Well it's a mess they've made of you. Let's hear some of your poetry to cheer you up

- Sweeney** I know none
- Hag** Come come, I only let him catch you to jerk you out of your comfortable watercress filled rut. You had lost your edge and were becoming an everyday madman. I couldn't have that.
- Sweeney** I am to be human again.
- Hag** Sure, it's strange to see you plucked, but they'll grow again
- Sweeney** I am to be human again
- Hag** Nothing as dreadful as that
- Sweeney** Who are you today, old woman?
- Hag** Who I always am, Loingseachan's wife's mother
- Sweeney** Not my wife? Not the woman at Swim Two Birds?
- Hag** I'm Eorann groaning beneath you, I'm giving birth to triplets by the stream, I'm cutting your thread in my dusty mill when you cease to please me
- Sweeney** Eorann, You have changed.
Gone your pretty face that snared me with your birdlime
Sticky now I serve your Art, glued to my freedom
Whilst you appear the Hag of winter, bare and sinewy amongst the soggy stumps, where bubbling water laughs at my subservience
- Hag** That's the spirit! Now let me hear about your famous exploits, how you leap around the mountains stark naked in a cloak of feathers
- Sweeney** Do not tempt me, I am to become human again
- Hag** Sure sure, but will you be telling me what it's like to fly like a bird
- Sweeney** You will betray me
- Hag** Betray you is it! It's true as the gods that you flew round all Ireland, and who can be betrayed with the truth. I've done a little flying myself, and it's fine it would be talking of it all
- Sweeney** If I were king once more
I'd punch your Hag face to trash
- Hag** Now you're talking like a human, and we can't have that. Let me take those shackles off

Hag unties the ropes

Hag Now tell me, wasn't all that leaping and jumping a grand way to see the country? Would you be making an old woman happy and show her one of the leaps you used to leap in the days of your feathers?

Sweeney I will not

Hag Then I'm thinking you're boasting, and it's nothing at all you leapt

Sweeney jumps and swings from the tree

Hag That's no leap to cross mountains. I could do that myself

She does. Sweeney jumps to the top of the tree

Hag You've a mouth on you like a sea cave. Shame on you if you can't do better than an old woman

Hag leaps up beside him. Sweeney jumps down, she jumps too. Sweeney leaps off through the auditorium, followed by Hag

Trickster and Cleric re-enter

Trickster (*dead pan*) Well isn't that a surprise. He didn't want to rejoin humanity after all

Cleric rings bell violently and runs off

Cleric Help! Help! Traitors! Madmen! Enemies of civilisation!

Trickster He took that badly

Escape

Sweeney leaps back onto the stage. He has lost his added clothes

Music underscoring

Sweeney Oh Alder, softly coloured, gentle tree
Thornless and calm you lie in the hedge

Trickster Broad Oak, thy swelling branches overtop the shadowed wood,
Pierced with shafts through dazzling leaves

Sweeney Sprouting from a copiced stump, the hazel of the thickets
Is fragrantly hung with feather-cupped nuts

Trickster Sharp blackthorn, sheep's bane on the craggy slopes,
You are purple with sloes
Prickles below and tender above

Sweeney Oh Ash tree, pale as terror
Shafts for spears your bones will make;
Last of all to welcome spring's warmth

Trickster Little dancing birch tree, singing in the summer breeze
Smooth are your limbs and jewelled your leaves

Sweeney Aspen, we are brothers, shivering in windy fear
Through you I hear the whispering raid

Trickster Thus the trees wait to fight their battles. Each new god propounds his
champion amongst them. Each tree leads for a time, then lies
forgotten with their felled god.

Sweeney keeps his distance

Sweeney You play games

Trickster Of course

Sweeney With me – all of you

Trickster Of course. Which of us do you prefer? The old gods of nature,
impassive through triumph and disaster, who just are? Or perhaps you
are in love with the goddess who bears you, nurtures you then cuts
you down to fertilise her ground? Or would you rather choose our
friend the monotheistic bellringer, who rules by control, and upon
whose ideals of unified power, civilisation now rests?

Sweeney None of you

Trickster Come come, you're spoilt for choice

Music underscoring

Sweeney Winding upward through twisted branches
The ivy bursts victorious to the sky
But I abjure the glinting sunshine
Cowering beneath twitching leaves

The silly woodcock's whining clatter
Stuns me like a devil from the pit
Now the blackbird with his fearsome 'ping'
Has stopped my breath and frozen frantic limbs

Nightmare wolves chase me through the branches
Till their hot breath snaps my heels
Hounds of the sky strain to catch me
As I flee on the stormwrack above the crags

Crystal frost embraces me on mountain tops
I lie on chilling shards, struck through with misery
Your gods show cold indifference to my naked soul

Trickster Oh, so you want your comforts do you? Then you'd better sell your soul to the bellringer and do as you're told

Hag enters the stage and slowly creeps round behind Sweeney

Sweeney I detest the arrogant trumpet of controlling words –
Sweeter the squeal of a badger set

The horn that pulls the hunt falls heavily upon my heart
I'd rather hear the bellowing stag, beyond the fortunes of the baying
pack
Where wild upon the untamed wind no beast shall feel the halter's
steely grip,
Or earthy ploughman lead a pliant slave

Trickster I thought so. I thought you'd rather be with me when it came down to it

Hag leaps onto Sweeney's back, hanging round his neck

Hag Traitor! You're mine! Who helped you escape the bellringer?—

Trickster Not difficult – our bellringer's remarkably stupid

Hag Who has given purpose to your pointless life?

Sweeney tries to shake her off, bucking bronco style, but she hangs on

Hag You can't throw me off – I'm your life

Trickster Your wife

Hag Wehey!
Off we go for the ride of your life

Trickster That depends on your taste in such things

Hag Faster! faster!

Sweeney *(echoing, out of breath)* Faster faster

Hag Faster! Faster!

Sweeney Oh!

Trickster Now truly she's into the swing

Hag Ha!

Sweeney Oh!

Hag Ha!

Sweeney Oh!

Trickster Through the furze and ripping briar
Up the mountain, in the mire
Under lake and over spire
He'll not quench her raging fire

Hag Ha!

Sweeney Oh!

Hag Ha!

Sweeney Oh!

Trickster Through the banks where money's laundered
Offices where wealth is squandered
Governments where truth has foundered
Without mercy he is hounded

Hag Ha!

Sweeney Oh!

Hag Ha!

Sweeney Oh!

Trickster West he flees, a piteous caitiff
Seeking out the soaring seacliff
And throws himself off

Sweeney leaps off the tower, leaving Hag behind

Sweeney Aaah

Trickster Just as well if you ask me. Well can you think of any other sensible words to rhyme with seacliff?

Sweeney You only exist in a madman's dream – all of you – you only exist because of me. I can stop you any time I want. All you gods and economies and consumer ideals and moralities and civilisations – you only exist if us madmen worship you.

Cleric enters with an AK47 and hands it to Sweeney

Hag You exist because I bore you

Hag jumps, and as she does so, Sweeney raises the automatic and shouts—

Sweeney Bang bang bang bang bang!

Hag falls in a heap, motionless, and Sweeney hands the AK47 back to Cleric, who exits.

Trickster Really! The lengths people go to just to avoid a ride!

Sweeney She was jealous and possessive.

Hag *(standing)* And alive!

Trickster That's the Hag for you – Resurrections 'R Us. You forget it is her speciality.

Sweeney flies up his tree. Hag watches him

Hag I can wait

Hag exits. Trickster settles down at the base of the tree and opens a bag of watercress, which he proceeds to eat.

Trickster Well well, that just leaves us again

Sweeney You're very persistent

Trickster This is your dream, don't blame me

Sweeney You're eating my watercress

Trickster I eat what I like

Sweeney It is all I have

Trickster Why should that concern me? Does nature worry about floods or droughts? Earthquakes happen, or they do not happen, the lamb is born to fine spring sun or an easterly blizzard. Some live and some die – they neither deserve it nor not deserve it – they do not ask why, it is simply how it is. Why then should you worry about your watercress? There will either be some for you or there will not.

Trickster finishes the watercress

Trickster And as it happens, on this occasion, there will not.

Sweeney Then I shall be hungry.

Trickster Live in the present. Maybe there will be some more when you wish to eat

Though you are cold
Though you are without watercress
You have heard the cry of the wild goose across the loch
Is that not enough?

Trickster climbs up to Sweeney

Sweeney It is enough for a wild man

Trickster Then it is enough for you or I. Only through deprivation, only through dying a bit can you understand the world around you.

Sweeney I spent my life cocooned from the world – the real world

Trickster Cocooned by money. Cocooned by tarmac from the mud, by radiators from the cold, by chemicals from starvation, by butchers from killing animals, and soldiers from killing people, by propaganda from the arrogant, shortsighted destruction of the world

Sweeney So you are a madman like myself

Trickster A wild man of the woods, talking with beasts and trees

Sweeney Wild man of the wild woods
Your wailing tumbles round the wilderness
Who has wronged you?
Who has stolen your mind?

Trickster People, who else?

Sweeney Are you really mad

Trickster Out of my tree.

You and I, frightened by people, can stand back to back, each the eyes of the other – then when the curlew whistles or the woodcock rises or the heron croaks, when branches break unseen – we can fly away together. Ready?

Sweeney Ready

Trickster and Sweeney sit back to back. There is a pause. Trickster twitches violently

Sweeney Aah! What was that?

Trickster There's something alive in the audience!

Sweeney Impossible!

They sit in silence for a few more seconds. This time Sweeney twitches and Trickster falls off his perch

Sweeney Sorry – a fly – on my nose

Sweeney drops down and they walk about back to back, starting at nothing.

Slapstick routine

Trickster Well, I must leave you now. The wild man of the woods must die

Sweeney Die! How must you die?

Trickster I must go to a waterfall near here, where a sudden gust of wind will blow me off the rocks and I shall drown

Sweeney You can't just do that!

Trickster Why not? It's simply how things are – have you learnt nothing? Besides, a bit of death and resurrection's nothing for a Shaman. I recommend it. It gives you a great feeling of renewal

Sweeney I've only just met you

Trickster Rubbish, we've been together for a year - tarra.

Trickster exits jauntily, shouting into the wings—

Trickster Come on darling, you're on

Hag enters, hurriedly adjusting her Eorann disguise

Eorann I thought he was never going to go – a year can seem a long time when you're waiting in the wings

Sweeney My desire comes with the wild duck on Mayday, a lightning flight, then chasing through the noisy reeds to tread my lover at the water's edge

Eorann slides away from his advances

Eorann *(unsure)* Coming for a drink?

Sweeney I will not go indoors, lest the mad bellringer traps me once again

Eorann If you're still nuts then piss off out the way. We're ashamed to have you around.

Sweeney When I think what I gave you! Houses and horses and cars and boats and clothes and jewellery and banquets and patios; a standing in society deserving of my income—

Eorann Our income actually. Look, are you coming for a drink or not?

Sweeney No

Eorann Then clear off. You're making the place all untidy with your feathers

Sweeney Only grief comes from loving women. Never expect sympathy

Eorann Never buy women

Sweeney There was a time when I lived in splendour, with everything I could want – yet I had nothing.

Eorann Now you perch in the trees and you still have nothing

Sweeney Nothing goes to nothing

Eorann And nothing you are to me.

Eorann exits

Music underscoring

Sweeney I fly westwards through the piercing snow
To dear Glen Bolcáin of the clear spring
Where the world is hard and beautiful,
Indifferent to suffering
But unspoilt by man

Sweeney climbs his tree

Here I have sufficient for my needs
And glean with mice amongst the autumn fruit
For blackberries, acorns, hazelnuts and sloes
Or pluck wild garlic or the winter cress
To keep me through the year

I live with animals and birds
And leave but little print upon the land
I order none, nor none to order me

Cleric bursts on. Single note underscoring

Cleric God of bells, god of bells
All powerful god of bells
Great Bell of Bells
Sweeney is no longer suffering!
He has defied us
He has defied order
He has defied our decent rules
He has defied civilisation!
He should be in hell
Send him to hell, damn you
He's happy!
He's getting away with it!

Cleric throws himself down on his knees in front of his bell, frantic

Cleric If others found out
Think what would happen
They might follow him
They might live like him
Society would collapse
Everything we stand for
Humans might disappear
Humans whom you built this world for
Humans the pinnacle of creation – gone!
An utter waste of evolution
You must not let him get away with it!

Trickster and Hag saunter on

Trickster I say old boy, take it easy

Hag Someone pinched your clappers?

Cleric Sweeney is no longer suffering. He is perfectly sane, sitting in that tree, eating watercress and living with the birds through storm and drought. He is enjoying himself!

Trickster What's your boss have to say about it?

Cleric kneels to his bell

Cleric He says... he says... he says turn him mad again, hunt him with dog heads and hobgoblins, whip him with branches, sting him with sleet, chase him till he goes insane through lack of sleep

Trickster Right ho. That's clear enough. You'd better fetch him down and we'll start

Cleric How?

Trickster Well you grab hold of the trunk, then put one hand above the other—

Cleric You're better at climbing trees

Trickster Oh no,

Cleric What if he won't come down when I get there?

Trickster Then you'd better make sure he doesn't push you off

Cleric You're not helpful

Trickster Why should I be?

Cleric I'm not going up

Trickster That's that then

Hag You can do what you like with him – he'll still be mine in the end

Trickster I wouldn't bet on it

Cleric He's nobody's whilst he's stuck up there

Trickster Then take a tip from the fox, and I'll show you how to bring a fat goose out of a tree.

*They start to walk around the base of the tree, looking up in a giddy manner.
Sweeney follows them with his head*

Trickster Sweeney

Cleric	Sweeney
Hag	Sweeney
Cleric	Resign! Resign!
Trickster	In your life – you have destroyed forests
Hag	Shattered families
Cleric	Lost money
Trickster	Dammed rivers
Hag	Starved children
Cleric	Lost money
Trickster	Poisoned fields
Hag	Started riots
Cleric	Lost money
Trickster	Drained marshes
Hag	Made poverty
Cleric	Lost money
Trickster	Caused floods
Hag	Started wars
Cleric	Lost money
Trickster	Spilt oil
Hag	Caused suffering
Cleric	Lost money
Trickster	Polluted lakes
Hag	Corrupted
Cleric	Lost money
Trickster	Caused extinction

Hag Spread disease

Cleric Lost money

Trickster And not cared a damn—

Hag Or a bell's clapper

Cleric You've lost money!

Trickster Sweeney

Hag Sweeney

Cleric Sweeney

Trickster Resign!

Hag Resign!

Cleric Resign!

Trickster Look at him going mad surely he's going mad into our clutches he'll
surely descend
Look at him

Hag Going mad

Cleric Surely he's

Trickster Going mad

Hag Into our

Cleric Clutches he'll

All three Surely descend

Trickster Look at him

Hag Going mad

Cleric Surely he's

Trickster Going mad

Hag Into our

Cleric Clutches he'll

All three Surely descend

They spin faster and faster round the tree continuing the chant until Sweeney, who has been following them with his eyes is so dizzy he falls out of the tree. They surround him and haul him to his feet

Sweeney It wasn't me – it was my company – it wasn't me – I couldn't stop them

Hag Ha!

Trickster That's what they all say

Music underscoring

Sweeney I go now to the sea cliffs
Life and death are here
Where the green river drops swiftly down the valley
Into the seal filled bay
Where the crab apple bends to the west wind
Growing through the boulders
Where hares lurk in sandy scrapes upon the deer cropped turf
And guillemot call from white ledges above the sea-surge
In the sharp spring sun by the rock-worn stream
I hear the call of the wild geese

Trickster Here is your quest. Do not be concerned with permanence. It is enough to have been.

Death

Change to single note underscoring

Cleric Enough of this claptrap. Will he do what I say and worship my bells

Trickster He'll do anything now

Hag He's anyone's

Cleric *(in his best bedside manner)* Worship these bells and follow the rules, and I shall promise you a tidy little grave somewhere. We might even write a treatise on your madness, to warn others against it. You'd like that, now wouldn't you.

Sweeney *(mechanically)* I'd like that

Trickster picks up Hag's cotton thread and distaff reels. The cotton runs from one reel to the other. Over the following, he holds it out taut to the Hag.

Cleric You'll worship bells

Sweeney Worship bells

Cleric And say you're sorry

Sweeney I'm sorry

Cleric And become an honest bankrupt so the system can catch up with you

Sweeney An honest bankrupt

Cleric Because a lot of people were very angry with you, you know

Sweeney Very angry

Cleric You were a naughty boy – you bucked the system

Sweeney Bucked the system

Cleric And you mustn't do that

Sweeney Mustn't do that

Cleric It's bad for business

Sweeney Business

Cleric And what's bad for business is bad for Western Civilisation

Sweeney Western Civilisation

Cleric And what's bad for Western Civilisation is bad for the world

Sweeney The world

Hag cuts the cotton

Trickster *(impassively)* Snip

Sweeney slumps to the ground. After a pause, Cleric bends down and examines him.

Cleric

Pneumonia. It's usually what finishes off all the old bagladys and vagrants on these cold nights. What beats me is why don't they come back into the system – accept what society has to offer? There's no need for them to do this.

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