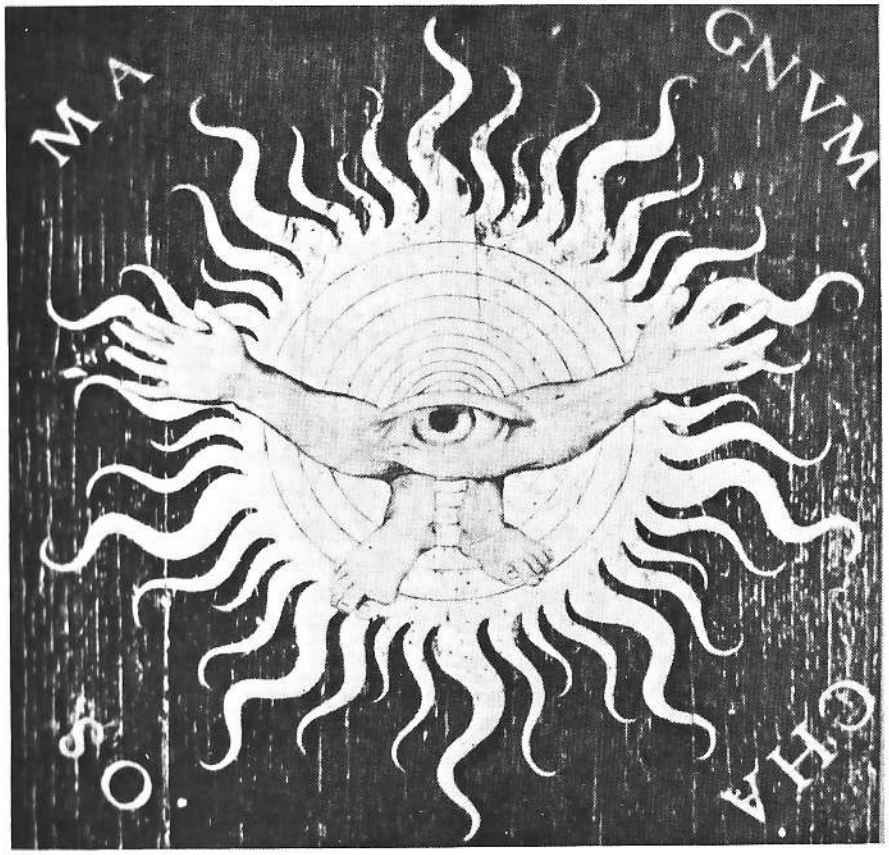


One of Lorenzo Lotto's designs in the choir stalls of Santa Maria Maggiore, Bergamo. The choirboy Donizetti would have known this well.

The hands represent the mercy and rigour of God, the blessing and the curse. The curse of the hand of God is a theme used in Lucia di Lammermoor.

LUCIA DI LAMMERMOOR

By JOHN ALLITT

'Truth may seem, but cannot be;
Beauty brag, but 'tis not she;
Truth and Beauty buried be.

To this urn let those repair
That are either true or fair
For these dead birds sigh a prayer.'

Shakespeare

'Se divisi fummo in terra
Ne congiunga il Nume in ciel.'

Cammarano - Donizetti

It has often been said that Donizetti composed better operas than Lucia di Lammermoor. Be that as it may, the fact remains that few operas in the annals of Western music have touched that region of the heart, which is too often abruptly spurned aside as sentimentality, with such directness and understanding.

The wound of Edgardo and Lucia is the price that all true lovers pay for their vision and ideal. The wound must be received and through death experience metamorphosis, as the greedy caterpillar dies into the form of a chrysalis, only to re-awaken as a butterfly. The story of the opera is concerned with the return to the urn (the chrysalis). Concerning the glorious resurrection butterfly, we are only permitted Edgardo's last visionary aria 'Tu che a Dio spiegasti l'ali'. The opera teaches that love's initiation requires the desire to die in the vision of Love's ideal, for without the basic quality of 'overcoming the world' there can be no true death or ascent or regaining of the Paradise Garden. Tolstoi, Flaubert and Balzac realized that with Lucia, the West had reached the end of an era. After Lucia (1835) the ideal of romantic love wained and was rapidly lost. The image of Womanhood had changed.

Donizetti was deeply sensitive to man's destruction of the Soul 'L'ira dei mortali', that hardness of heart obliterating the feminine, the receptive, the truly creative. Life is a strict duality of

choice. The polarities of Womanhood are Beatrice (Lucia) or Circe (Lucrezia). The lower is what it is, i.e. the matrix, gravity, generation, the abyss transforming men's hearts into the image of brute beasts. Life may only be saved from such a state through the sacrificial blood of innocent life and love of what is higher. Donizetti maintained that this pattern may be observed constantly repeating itself in every human relationship. The Cross was therefore for him not simply a remote historical event, but to be found at the heart of our own lives. Lucia is a study in the perpetual sacrifice pleaded once and for all, but which is continually working itself out in time in the lives of all men. Nowhere is this to be found so nakedly displayed as in the struggles of humans in their response to the vocation of love.

Lucia di Lammermoor stands as one of the finest examples of romanticism. In Italy, it may be compared to Manzoni's I promessi sposi (1827) as an example of the Gothic novel's influence over Italian sensibility. The Italians had remained open to the romantic experience. The mood was already known and expressions of it may be readily traced in the work of painters like Giorgione (La tempestà), Salvator Rosa (his engravings of dejected actors), Magnasco (his paintings of storms), the Guardi (their paintings of fantastic crumbling ruins), etc. The immediate problem for the Italians was not the recapturing of a lost ideal or the crude outline of 'Satanic mills' looming on the horizon, it was the search for a political identity. Hence, the risorgimento became the child of romanticism in Italy.

Italy had inherited a worn-out classicism with its pantheon of weary gods and their myths dutifully handed down from the renaissance. Classicism for the many had ceased to convey any meaning beyond the literal, only an elite sought for allegories and deeper meanings. It was so that the gothic novel appeared to persons like Donizetti as a new source of images, a new 'landscape' for the imagination to explore. In comparison, the old gods appeared as puppets of an exhausted classicism.[1] Donizetti never abandoned the language of myth and symbol. He simply translated perennial wisdom into images and stories acceptable to his times.

Manzoni wrote a religious novel with a new set of images. I promessi sposi, in comparison to Lucia di Lammermoor, remains literal, being content with the desscriptive. When Manzoni wishes to discuss his religious thought he has to bring a cardinal and a villain face to face in order to exchange ideas. The novel is 'historical', indeed Manzoni is at pains to present his story to the reader as historical fact.

Scott is likewise historical in his Waverley novels, but readily digresses into 'mysterious' episodes and local myths. Donizetti and Cammarano took one of the finest of Scott's novels and translated it into inspired poetic imagery. The contemporary poets Leopardi and Foscolo contributed to the mood they sought to create. The authors also felt out towards northern romanticism and found sympathy with minds like Novalis, Friedrich and Tieck as well as the English romantics. No longer does Donizetti view romanticism through the naive rosy lenses which produced Emilia di Liverpool (1824), but with the confidence of a matured artist. Lucia as a work of art has a life of its own, independent of its creator. Critics still rant concerning 'weak' and 'strong' moments in the work, but their criticisms recall the the thought of Croce and his futile search for 'pure' poetry. Lucia, when understood and properly listened to, is an integral whole. The convention of cutting scenes or reducing strettas or cabalettas soon appears as barbarous, for the music is one melodic entity just as the story depends on each scene to make its effect.

On reading Scott's novel, our admiration grows for composer and librettist. In no way did they seek to reproduce an artificial recreation like an epic film might seek to represent history, a famous novel or a play. They sought to pierce out what they considered to be the pearl from Scott's shell and set it in the genius of their own tradition. In many ways they may have appeared ruthless, like removing Lucy's parents or other characters. In the opera, Lucia's father is not mentioned; however, her mother dominates, from the tomb, her daughter's fate. The mother is understood by Donizetti as a cause of Lucia's instability of mind. Edgardo in the opera is shown struggling with the fate of his family, of which his dead father

is the epitome. The dead mother and father drive the two families onward in their frantic pursuit of destiny. It is thus that Edgardo and Lucia stand as archetypes of the seed of Adam, seeking through love to transcend fate.

Again, Scott's famous scene of the charging bull falling dead at the feet of Lucy (obviously impossible to stage) takes on new dimensions in the opera. The malicious Normano relates the event as happening when Lucia was on her way to visit her mother's tomb. Drawn by her mother (fate) Lucia is attached by a raging beast (the passions), she is saved by he who will become her lover. The foundation of their love is thus presented as the ideal, like St. George slaying the dragon and releasing the princess. This is their ideal beginning. The remainder of the opera traces the destruction of that ideal by 'the anger' lurking in the hearts of men.

The inner dimensions of the opera are now perhaps becoming clear. Lucia is the channel of light in the soul. The source of her light is the Intellect which she recognizes and loves according to her human limitations in her love for Edgardo. In this world both are as fragile as wheat amongst tares. Edgardo is the last heir to his family's lands. He is a lonely soul, upholding the romantic ideal to the end. He and Lucia are the leaven in the lump of dough; their willing death causes the dough to rise.

The authors have remained faithful to Scott's description of Lucy Ashton. It is her delicate image which pervades the whole opera: 'Her locks, which were of shadowy gold, divided on a brow of exquisite whiteness, like a gleam of broken and pallid sunshine upon a hill of snow. The expression of the countenance was in the last degree gentle, soft, timid, and feminine, and seemed rather to shrink from the most casual look of a stranger, than to court his admiration. Something there was of a Madonna cast, perhaps the result of delicate health, and of residence in a family where the dispositions of the inmates were fiercer, more active, and energetic than her own....

'Yet her passiveness of disposition was by no means owing to an indifferent or unfeeling mind. Left to the impulse of her own taste and feeling, Lucy Ashton was peculiarly accessible to those of

romantic cast. Her secret delight was in the old legendary tales of ardent devotion and unalterable affection, chequered as they so often are with strange adventures and supernatural horrors. This was her favoured fairy realm, and here she erected her aerial palaces. But it was only in secret that she laboured at this delusive, though delightful architecture....

'But in her exterior relations to things of this world, Lucy willingly received the ruling impulse from those around her. The alternative was, in general, too indifferent to her to render resistance desirable, and she willingly found a motive for decision in the opinion of her friends, which perhaps she might have sought for in vain in her own choice. Every reader must have observed in some family of his acquaintance, some individual of a temper soft and yielding, who, mixed with stronger and more ardent minds, is borne along by the will of others, with as little power of opposition as the flower which is flung into a running stream. It usually happens that such a compliant and easy disposition, which resigns itself without murmur to the guidance of others, becomes the darling of those to whose inclinations its own seemed to be offered, in ungrudging and ready sacrifice'.

The opera takes up the theme of those who use the innocent Lucia as their 'darling' and traces the way in which she was made a 'ready sacrifice'. A sacrifice can only be made out of '<u>l'ira dei mortali</u>', for without the curse of Cain there is no sin to expiate. The 'anger of mortals' is portrayed in particular through Normano, Enrico and Raimondo. Normano, Enrico's henchman, is possessed by evil. His purpose for existence, like Iago, is to plant tares in the hearts of men and eagerly watch their consequences. Enrico, Lucia's brother, has usurped Edgardo's lands of Ravenswood. He seeks power at any cost, even at the expense of his sister's happiness. Raimondo, Lucia's tutor, priest and confessor, is the person who through misusing his priestly office encourages Lucia to be a 'ready sacrifice'.

Raimondo Bidebent is a creation of the authors from the raw material of Scott's novel. Throughout the opera he is a key figure and appears in nearly every scene. Scott's Mr. Bide-the-Bent is transformed

into a new character vital to the purposes of the opera. In the novel Raymond Ravenswood is no other than the forefather who killed his spouse out of jealous and unwarranted anger, and cast her bleeding body into the 'gothic' spring, which was an essential image for Donizetti. The authors take up his name and create their character who becomes a symbol of the manner in which a family's fate re-incarnates itself, haunting, visiting and seeking satisfaction generations after. Raymond, the jealous slayer of innocent life through angry suspicion, in the opera becomes Raimondo the priest. In his role the destiny of Raymond haunts, seeking expiation through the self-oblation of an innocent life. Lucia fulfils and atones the force of destiny. Raimondo must be understood as a priest of the old order as yet unborn into the life of the Spirit. His religion is moral and practical expediency. He understands life in the light of the written contract, blessed and sealed by Church and State. He knows nothing of the glorious liberty of the Spirit. He dismisses Lucia's vows of love as invalid, for the only life he knows is lived in the chains of legality. He prepares his victim, is present at her consecration (the signing of the marriage contract, musically symbolized in the famous sextet), he sees her cursed by her confused lover, and no doubt blesses the marriage bed of the adulterous union of Arturo with Lucia. The false love enrages the elements. A violent storm shares in the horror of the marriage night. He it is who first reports Lucia's madness and is present at her lover's death. Raimondo is parallel in Blake's mythology to Urizen who eternally sacrifices Luvah. The Selfhood has within its formation Normano, Enrico and Raimondo. All three are operative in the formation of the ego. They vainly believe that they can find justification through the manipulation and sacrifice of Lucia.

When properly heard, the power of Lucia di Lammermoor is overwhelming. The first Lucia was heard in silence; only weeping could be heard other than the music. Today it has become an operatic show-piece, but one day it may again be heard from the silence of a still centre, free from the distractions of operatic hero or heroine worship, of likes and dislikes.

The dramatic layout of the opera is as follows:

Part One	(1. The grounds of Ravenswood (2. The Fountain Scene	La partenza (The Parting) Atto Unico
	(3. Enrico's apartments (4. The Great Hall of the Castle	Il contratto nuziale (The Marriage Contract)
		Act I
	(5. Wolf's Crag (6. The Banqueting Hall (7. The Tombs of Ravenswood	Act II

The opera begins with a short prelude which condenses many images into a short space of time. The music conveys awe, numbed grief, exile, and perhaps a landscape of rocks engulfed in a damp mist. It is worth noting from the outset that all the five preludes are of great beauty and economy. Donizetti compresses into a few fleeting bars of music a wide range of emotion and vision.

1. The Grounds of Ravenswood

Edgardo is the rightful heir of Ravenswood, but Enrico Ashton has usurped his land. The act has brought neither riches nor happiness to Enrico, rather a deep gall has penetrated his heart. He is conscious of Edgardo looking down on Ravenswood from Wolf's Crag, the last crumbling retreat to be held by his rival. Normano, who is in charge of the Lammermoor men-at-arms, is set on poisoning even more Enrico's sick heart. Like Iago he waits for the right moment to pour in his venom. He has discovered that Lucia and Edgardo are in love. The very sign of hope which might bring peace to the two families, Normano views with his twisted mind as vile. He would 'tear the veil' protecting the lovers (Cada il vel) and expose it to common glare and reduce it to obscenity. These are the poisons he pours into Enrico's sick heart.

The opening chorus 'Percorrete le spiagge vicine' ('Search the nearby shores') draws attention once more to Donizetti's and Cammarano's respect of Scott. In the novel the sea plays an important role. For example, Edgar, the Lord of Ravenswood dies in quicksand

as he rides to meet, in duel, Colonel Ashton. In the first two scenes, the image of the sea is ever-present, coming to a climax in the great love scene 'Veranno a te'.

Enrico considers his only hope of changing his fortunes is to marry Lucia with a rich Laird, but she will hear nothing of such a match. Raimondo says that the memory of her mother is still too close to her to permit her to entertain thoughts of love. (The mother in Scott's novel is the prime cause of the whole story). Normano seizes his chance, and pours in his poison 'Lucia d'amore avvampa' ('Lucia is aflame with love'), and a burning rage seizes Enrico 'Oh! rabbia che m'accendi'. His only thought is vengeance on Edgardo whom he considers has breached the code of honour.

'Cruda funesta smania' ('a crude and deadly frenzy') is composed in the key of G major, symbolizing the spiritual misuse of solar energy which becomes a consuming fire in the heart. There are many fine details such as the A minor (martian energies) harmonies underlining the word 'fremere' (to tremble). The authors make it clear that all hell has engulfed Enrico by appealing to a traditional symbol to be found in Dante. Enrico says he does not sense heat in his heart but extreme cold. A glacial flute trills (shivers) under the word 'gelare' (to freeze), and the harmonies move from C major to a diminished C sharp, portraying the ice-bound gravity that has made Enrico's heart captive.

All the words embellished by the flute throughout the score draw attention to the fate that engulfs the lovers causing Lucia's madness and Edgardo's suicide.

The word 'fulmine' (a thunderbolt) in the phrase 'Se ti colpisce un fulmine' - ('If you were struck by a thunderbolt'), is strengthened by the exclamation 'Ciel!' ('Heavens!') from Raimondo and Normano and underlined by a descent of the scale of E flat major by the orchestra, symbolizing not only the falling of the thunderbolt but the misdirection of the mercurial (the spirit) powers by Enrico.

The famous huntsman's chorus is brief, but it has immediate appeal. The men relate how when tired they rested in the crumbling hall of the Wolf's Crag. A forte followed by a piano draws the words 'ecco' and

'come' to our attention, thus setting the intermediate words in a frame, which relate how they recognized the pale face of a man in the gloom '.... tosto lo trascorre in silenzio un uom pallante'. The accompaniment to the words 'rapido destriero' depicts the horse galloping away in the distance taking the Master of Ravenswood from them. It is a detail generally overlooked by conductors. Lea Bossi[2] draws our attention again to the phrase, to note how Donizetti has formed the image with the dominant of the relative minor.

In Enrico's cabaletta 'La pietade in suo favore' Donizetti stresses the words 'io col sangue spegnero' ('I will quench with blood'), until they become a nightmare of energy. Performances which shorten this cabaletta completely spoil the effect Donizetti is seeking. The web of fate has already begun to draw in its victims. Enrico refuses to listen to Raimondo's warning that 'a cloud of horror is about to engulf the house of Ravenswood'.

2. The Fountain Scene

There is a marked contrast between the masculinity of the first scene and the femininity of this scene. The contrast is struck immediately by the 'harp prelude' and the stage setting. We are at the spring into which Raymond threw the mutilated body of his mistress. It is twilight, a gothic ruin stands menacing in the shadows and the reflections of the moon dance on the waters. The 'harp prelude' is modelled on Creusa's aria and scene in Mayr's Medea in Corinto. Donizetti's choice of instrument is related to traditional symbolism associated with musical instruments. The introduction is another stroke of Donizetti's genius and shows how deeply he had absorbed Scott's novel. It will be remembered that one of the first acquaintances the reader has with Miss Lucy Ashton is her father listening to his daughter playing her lute and singing the following words:

'Look not thou on beauty's charming, --
Sit thou still when kings are arming, --
Taste not when the wine-cup glistens, --
Speak not when the people listens, --
Stop thine ear against the singer, --

From the red gold keep thy finger, --
Vacant heart, and hand, and eye, --
Easy live and quiet die.'

The song provokes the following comment from her father: 'So, Lucy, does your musical philosopher teach you to condemn the world before you know it?'

Lucia, accompanied by her friend Alisa (who in the opera is simply a young friend) arrives at the spring and awaits the arrival of her lover. As she waits she sings her famous aria, 'Regnava nel silenzio' ('In the still silence').

Lucia is fascinated by the waters of the spring, though the environment horrifies her. The image of the spring and its haunting atmosphere become an ingredient of Lucia's madness later in the opera. Scott writes: 'All however agreed, that the spot was fatal to the Ravenswood family; and that to drink the waters of the well, or even approach its brinks, was as ominous to a descendant of that house, as for a Grahame to wear green, a Bruce to kill a spider, or a St. Clair to cross the Ord on a Monday.' The young girl not only feels the dread of that spot but relates that she has seen the ghost of the murdered girl which beckoned her and would speak to her. Donizetti's music leads its listeners to an awful contemplative hymn to the night, the shimmering waters, the pallid moon and the shade of the spring's naiad.

The flute draws our attention to words which relate back to the key image in each verse.

pallido	... (the moon)
(gemi) to fra l'aure udir si fè	... (the wind)
vedea	... (the ghost)
esamine	... (the lifeless form)
parea	... (the ghost beckoning)
(dile) guò	... (the ghost vanishes)
e l'onda pria si limpida di	... (the spring's waters reddening like blood)

The horns echo the darkness of the night and the pathetic movements of the spirit as it attempts to speak:

'Alta la notte e bruna/Qual di chi parla, muoversi'.

The harp returns to emphasize the words:

'Limpida di sangue rosseggiò'.

The image is again the clear waters turning to blood-red. There is an uncanny presentiment of sacrifice, the female lot and the ice-cold hold of fate.

Alisa sees bad omens and advices Lucia to abandon her 'terrifying' love. She sees days of bitter weeping ahead. Lucia answers:

'Egli è luce a'giorni miei/È conforto al mio penar', ('He is light to my life/He is healing to my sorrow')

and bursts into her beautiful cabaletta: 'Quando, rapito in estasi'. Her love not only brings her light, but opens heaven before her, transmuting her ardent passion into ecstasy. Again the flute draws attention to key words, whilst the harp and horns comment on:

'Si schiuda il ciel per me' - ('Heaven opens before me').

The scene has all the ingredients of romanticism, it is the essence of Scott's haunted fountain, it owes a lot to Donizetti's reading of Leopardi, it echoes a mood to be found in Chateaubriand[3] and Novalis. Figuratively, the opera as a whole encourages one to think of the landscapes of Donizetti's friend, Giovanni Carnevali (il Piccio). However, neither this scene nor any other in the opera becomes lost in sentiment and bad taste. The music, of course, is in the hands of the interpreters. The conductor should know how to link the orchestra to the words, shading and colouring where necessary, whilst a real Lucia will use all embellishments and graces in order to intensify the drama.

Now follows what must be one of the most tender love scenes in opera. Edgardo enters and breaks the news that he must leave for France. Before leaving Scotland he wishes to ask openly for Lucia's hand. Lucia strictly forbids him to do so, their love must remain secret due to her brother's insane jealousy. At this, passion ferments in Edgardo's heart. Did he not promise over his father's tomb to wage eternal

war against the Ashtons? But now his love for Lucia drives the flames of anger and revenge from his heart. The flute underlines:

'altro affetto, e l'ira tacque' ('another emotion and anger was silenced').

The manner in which Donizetti has portrayed Lucia calming Edgardo's emotional outburst is masterly. Gradually, Lucia enables him to banish all emotion from his heart except for love.

We have reached a key moment in the opera. Edgardo places a ring on Lucia's finger and both make a covenant of love. There can be no sacrifice without the breaking of a pledge. Sacrifice will bring forgiveness and a new state of equilibrium.

'In this moment, pledge yourself before heaven to be my eternal and faithful spouse. God hears us, God sees us, for the loving heart is both altar and Church. I join my fate to yours. I am your spouse'.

'And I am yours', answers Lucia.

According to the theology of Holy Matrimony, the Church joins and blesses husband and wife, but the sacrament is theirs to consummate. The vows of betrothal made by Edgardo and Lucia are made in the presence of the Spirit and are as truthful as any made before a priest. They have offered their love to eternity.

Edgardo promises to write from France. This small detail is an important fact for understanding the following scene.

Next follows the famous duet 'Verranno a te', in which the sea and the tears shed for love are identified, as they are in Il furioso. The sea as the mother of life from which Venus was born, is a universal symbol. Donizetti and Cammarano take the image further, identifying with the mother of life, the source not only of love, but of pain, suffering and fate as life's fortunes wax and wane beneath 'pallid moon'. The local spring haunted with its memories becomes identified and fused with the universal waters, over which love permeates in the breeze.

3. Enrico's Apartments (The first scene of Il contratto nuziale.)

The emotional force of the following scene is unrelenting. Enrico produces forged letters in order to prove that Edgardo has been unfaithful and broken his vows, and forces his sister into marriage with Arturo Bucklaw. Most beautiful and penetrating is Lucia's desperate plea, 'Soffriva nel pianto' ('I suffered in tears'). The horn introduction emphasizes that this is not only a plea but a prayer. In the concluding bars of this episode Lucia's heart breaks and her madness is anticipated as the flute dramatically underlines, 'quel core infedele ad altra si die' ('that unfaithful heart has given itself to another'). The full, vile fury of Enrico is poured out with the words 'Se tradirmi tu potrai' ('If you beatray me'). Already music hails Bucklaw's arrival and the servants are preparing the bridal bed, which Lucia recognizes as 'la tomba', ('the tomb'). According to the language of the soul all false loves are not a living, but a death.

Lucia is left alone. Raimondo enters and encourages her to follow her brother's wishes for his and their mother's sakes. He says that he has personally written to Edgardo but that he has not replied. Such silence clearly indicates his unfaithfulness.

The scene is nearly always cut in performance. Such barbarism not only ruins the symbolism of the opera but removes a scene in which the music speaks of Raimondo's irony and clerical indifference. 'But in her exterior relations to things of this world, Lucy willingly received the ruling impulse from those around her'. Raimondo recommends that she abandon herself to destiny. He dismisses her vows as invalid because they were not made in the presence of a priest - therefore they are invalid before God and His Church! Listen to the hypocrisy of his words, 'Offri, Lucia, te stessa; / e tanto sacrifizio / scritto nel ciel sarà..'. ('Offer, Lucia, yourself; such a sacrifice will be acceptable to Heaven'). Many critics dismiss the music as banal! Have they no ears to listen with?

Raimondo prepares his victim .... is it not expedient that Lucia offers herself for the good of all? The monstrosity, the outrage before Heaven and Earth,

Donizetti makes known with the words:

'Se la pietà degli uomini/A te non fia concessa/
V'è un Dio che tergere/Il pianto tuo saprà.'

('Though men's mercy/Has not been known to you,/
There is in Heaven a God/Who will know how to
dry your tears').

Note the play of words between Edgardo's words 'L'ira dei mortali' in the last scene and Raimondo's 'La pietà degli uomini'.

Lucia mutters:

'Guidami tu, tu reggimi/Son fuori di me stessa!'

('Direct me, support me,/I am beside myself!')

The 'ungrudging and ready sacrifice' has been prepared.

4. The Great Hall of the Castle

This is an outstanding scene with the sextet and final stretta 'consecrating' emotions like Michelangelo's serpentine line reaching upwards and defying the contrary pull of gravity. The hall is full of people waiting to receive Bucklaw. An economic introductory chorus leads to Bucklaw's beautiful short lines of greeting. Donizetti makes us feel that Bucklaw too is being pulled into a vortex of fate. As Enrico and Bucklaw await Lucia's arrival for the marriage contract ceremony, the strings weave a sinister melodic line around the voices. It is to return with increased urgency after the sextet. Lucia enters and is taken by her brother to the table to assent to the contract. Her words are, 'Io vado al sacrifizio' ('I go to the sacrifice'). As she signs there is a dramatic pause. The she exclaims; 'La mia condanna ho scritta' ('I have signed my own condemnation'). The lonely, pallid figure of Edgardo enters to claim his bride. A short horn prelude leads into the sextet. Raimondo just about keeps the peace; 'Rispettate in me, di Dio/La tremenda maestà' ('Respect in my office God's tremendous majesty'). Edgardo is shown Lucia's signature assenting to the marriage. He removes her ring of betrothal and crushes it beneath his feet. 'Hai tradito il cielo e amor' ('You have betrayed heaven and earth') he shouts at the hopelessly confounded Lucia and curses her, with the most

terrible of curses; 'Ah' di Dio la mano irata/Ti disperda'. ('Ah! may the Almighty's wrathful hand destroy you'). The stretta builds up in exhausting dance rhythms into a most powerful climax. Again this section should never be cut, even if it is difficult to sing and to maintain the necessary tension and crescendo.

5. Wolf's Crag

It is night. A thunderstorm is raging. Edgardo sits alone in his crumbling castle. The night is as horrible as his dark destiny, and he sees the order of nature inverted and the world disintegrating. (Parallels in painting may be thought of from John Martin to Turner). The elements participate in the horror of Lucia's marriage night. Donizetti means us to understand the outrage as a crucifixion and destruction of innocence by the forces of l'ira degli mortali. Her madness is born in this storm and matures in nature's return to stillness. It is the fearful Hand of the Lord: 'It is the Lord, that commandeth the waters: it is the glorious God, that maketh the thunder', (Psalm XXIX,5).

Enrico arrives, and after an exchange of insults, challenges Edgardo to a duel at dawn amidst the tombs of Ravenswood. When this scene is cut, as it usually is, the audience finds it hard to understand why Edgardo is suddenly found wandering in a cemetery. Every scene in the opera is necessary to the whole.

6. The Banqueting Hall

The wedding guests are celebrating whilst bride and bridegroom have retired to bed. The feasting is total and would seem to be going on into the early hours of the morning, when Raimondo stumbles down the staircase and commands silence and tells all the guests of the ghastly horrors of the night; Arturo lies brutally murdered whilst Lucia clutches a dagger, insane 'Dalle stanze ove Lucia' - ('From the rooms where Lucia ...'). The section concludes with a beautiful hymn-like chorus.

All is ready for the mad scene. First, two fundamental symbols must be discussed. Tradition has it that Lucia descends the staircase in her blood-stained night-dress. Donizetti would have appreciated the profound significance of this. Stairs are symbols of

communication from one degree to another, for example, they may represent the connection between Heaven and Earth, and are surrounded by a rich symbolism. They may recall the way from fear to joy, from repulsion to attraction, towards absolute reality. Stairs are concerned with death, love and salvation. Novelists have often used the image of stairs to great effect, haunting the mind in an uncanny way. For example, in the young hero's near disastrous ascent of stairs in R.L. Stevenson's Kidnapped. For Donizetti the image is fundamental because for him, Lucia's madness is the initiation from death into life - eternal life.

Secondly, the instruments chosen to portray the scene; the glass harmonica and the flute. The original score shows that Donizetti willed the glass harmonica together with the flute to aid create an eerie atmosphere. The instrument was often used in his times, especially in Austria. Perhaps we may detect again Mayr's influence. He later deleted the part, most likely because he could find no one to play the instrument in Naples at the time. There is no doubt that the re-introduction of this instrument immensely enhances the score.

The flute traditionally represents the wounded heart, through the purification of the soul. The sound evokes the ardent desire for salvation from 'this our vale of exile'. The following poem of Rūmī may serve to aid the reader to appreciate Donizetti's choice of the instrument.

'Harken to this Reed forlorn,
Breathing, even since 'twas torn
From its rushy bed, a strain
Of impassioned love and pain.

The secret of my song, though near
None can see and none can hear.
Oh, for a friend to know the sign
And mingle all his soul with mine!

'Twas the flame of love that fired me,
'Twas the wine of love inspired me,
Wouldst thou learn how lovers bleed,
Hearken, hearken to the Reed!'[4]

The masterful quality of the mad scene has been rarely appreciated. It is nearly always cut in per-

formance (totally ruining its significance and form), and dismissed as a coloratura show-piece.

Lucia relives in her troubled mind her ideal love and marriage. She attempts to banish all memories of horror which keep on coming to the surface of her mind.

There are 'seven' rungs or steps[5] in her insanity:

i) Lucia hears the sound of her lover's voice. The voice has descended into her heart 'Ah! quella voce m'è qui nel cor discesa'.

ii) The indwelling sound is short-lived. Lucia is seized with terror for she believes that she and Edgardo are beside the spring. The strings accompanying 'Un gelo mi serpeggia nel sen' ('An icy chill creeps in my spine'), should be played a ponticello, a small detail often overlooked. She hears the melody of 'Verrano a te'. The spirit of the spring drifts towards them and separates them. She is terrified.

iii) Lucia in her imagination rediscovers Edgardo and bids him hide with her at the foot of the altar. She hears the harmonies of the spheres. Lucia hears in her imagination the wedding hymn. The eerie melody passes through haunting harmonies. At this point follows the coloratura display in which voice and flute play with one another and fuse into oneness. The man who sees only 'phallic' symbolism at this profound moment has missed the whole significance of the scene. Lucia, through the lightness of her soul, is moving where she wills through the celestial heavens. Extreme taste is required by the singer. In Donizetti's manuscript there is here merely a simple cadenza. The vocal display has become over the years a tradition created by singers. There is ample evidence that Donizetti did not approve of vocal fireworks for the sake of display.

iv) Next Lucia visualizes the wedding celebrations and believes herself to be taking her marriage vows with Edgardo.

v) 'At last I am thine, at last thou art mine' she sings, and experiences in her mind the joys of marriage. Normano, now repentant, together with Raimondo and the chorus pleads for God's mercy. The effect is deeply moving. It is especially

annoying when these parts are cut so that the operatic star may hold the stage alone. Particularly beautiful is the last Pietà at the end of this sequence.

vi) Enrico enters and learns the horrible truth. Lucia returns to reality in her memories and remembers how she signed the marriage contract and how Edgardo tore the ring from her hand and crushed it and cursed her. In her disturbed mind she pleads with Edgardo, but discovers Bucklaw. She begs for forgiveness. This episode should never be cut.

vii) Lucia implores Edgardo not to leave her. There is nothing more to be done and Lucia resigns herself to her unhappy fate. However, she will become, in Heaven, Edgardo's angelic intercessor and wait for him to join her through the gates of death.

Donizetti deleted eight verses written by Cammarano preceding the words 'Spargi d'amaro pianto', in which Lucia recognizes the tomb opening before her; he re-adapted one line from these and inserted it at the end of the scene as Lucia's last words. They are: 'Ah! Ch'io spiri accanto a te' ('Ah! That I breathe next to you').

The scene does not end there, for in the original follows an all important brief scene. When a theatre has lost its head with applause, the scene would appear as an anticlimax. If, however, the scene could be retained and applause forbidden until after its conclusion, some might hear how the famous mad scene was intended to end in silence with a few extraordinary and beautiful pianissimo bars.

Enrico leaves the stage in distress. The audience knows why he does not appear at dawn in the tombs of Ravenswood in the next scene. Raimondo dismisses Normano to wander like Cain with the judgement of 'God's Hand' ever over him.

7. The Tombs of Ravenswood

Scott's ending to The Bride of Lammermoor provided Donizetti and Cammarano with a weak conclusion for an opera. Annecdotes tell us that Donizetti drafted the last scene, the mood of which is in keeping with the man and speaks of his own fate and tragedy. The

conclusion of the opera is inspired out of Foscolo's Dei sepolcri and Le ultime lettere di Jacopo Ortis, which was inspired by Goethe's Werther. Donizetti is seen at the heart of European romanticism.

Edgardo no longer feels anger. All he wishes is to fall on his sword and die. His words: 'Per me la vita/È orrendo peso!/L'universo intero/È un deserto per me ...' ('Life for me is a wretched burden, the whole universe is to me a desert') not only recall a mood Donizetti knew through his admiration of Leopardi's poetry, but are a paraphrase of virtually the last words Scott gave to the Master of Ravenswood: '... nothing hereafter in life will be well with me, and happiest is the hour that shall soonest close it!'

A procession of mourners enters and tells the unfortunate Edgardo of Lucia's fate. Tradition relates that this chorus is consciously based on a Kyrie by Mayr. If this is so, it is an example of how Donizetti fuses the sacred and the profane. Raimondo enters. Edgardo learns that Lucia is dying. He has but one desire and that is to join her in death. As he dies from his self-inflicted wounds he sings: 'Tu che a Dio spiegasti l'ali', ('Thou who spreadst thy wings to God'). Lucia has become his angelic intercessor as their souls ascend to heaven. (On a symbolic level, Edgardo's suicide is to be understood as the fallen intellect's death to self in order to rejoin the Beloved.)

Donizetti suggests that hidden within life's tragedy is the working of the Divine Will - it is in fact a Divine Comedy of the many masks of love. This is why we must respect the dust of our forefathers 'rispetta almen le ceneri' as relics of those who have struggled with fate and perhaps won the Crown of Life, for every life depends on the lives of others.

Raimondo and the chorus sing the concluding bars: 'Dio perdona, perdona tanto error', which may be loosley translated as 'God forgive, forgive us our trespasses.'

Lucia di Lammermoor finds echoes in the heart of any person who has sought eternity through earthly love. It has an ethos recalling a partially remembered liturgy celebrating a sacrifice and a death which haunts the remote corners of the mind. The work is the last appeal on any popular scale for the abiding image of Womanhood. Though apparently emotional in its presentation, the opera is essentially intellectual and depends for its proper interpretation on the tradition of romantic love. In no other composition did Donizetti so aptly record the nostalgia of an age which lost the contemplative dimensions of love. One recalls the lines of Dante:

'Donne, ch'avete intelletto d'amore
Io vo'con voi della mia donna dire;
Non perch'io creda sue laude finire,
Ma ragionar per isfogar la mente'.

('Ladies who have understanding of love,
I wish to speak with you of my lady;
Not that I think I can exhaust her praises,
But I want to speak to unburden my mind')[6]

NOTES 1971

1. After his first three operas (Il Pigmalione, Olimpiade and L'ira d'Achille) Donizetti forsook classical sources. The English impressario, Benjamin Lumley, proposed Circe to Donizetti as a subject for a London production, but nothing came of the project.

2. Lea Bossi - Donizetti - Brescia 1956.

3. Consider for example paintings like Girodet's The Funeral of Atala.

4. Text by R.A. Nicholson and inspired from the Mathnawi.

5. These have already been noticed by Lea Bossi.

6. Translation by Kenelm Foster and Patrick Boyde.