

Musical perspectives on Donizetti's melodrama *Lucia di Lammermoor*

Liviu IFTENE¹

Abstract: *Although constrained by the rigid theatrical conventions of the opera, Gaetano Donizetti, a versatile dramatist by excellence, is distinguished by his attempts to renew certain musical opera forms, contributing to a new belcanto stage. Donizetti has complied with the belcanto tradition in order to poetize vocal expression as his coevals Rossini and Bellini did, but he also managed to pay attention to the dramatic and psychological construction of the characters, guessing the direction of the musical genre of opera and anticipating the great Verdi psychological dramas. My scientific research is based on information related to sources of inspiration and data about artists who have performed the absolute premieres of Lucia di Lammermoor, and on examining the action and structure of this unique belcanto melodrama.*

Key-words: *Donizetti, Lucia di Lammermoor, italian melodramma, belcanto.*

1. Donizetti from buffo to serio opera

Donizetti is a composer who quickly alternates the theatrical formulas of his works. Here are some examples, starting with formulas which are attributed to the *serio* genre and heading towards the *buffo*: *dramma per musica, dramma tragico, dramma serio, dramma semiserio, melodramma, melodramma eroico, melodramma tragico, tragedia lirica, opera romantica, opera seria, opera semiseria, grand-opéra, azione tragico-sacra, scena drammatica, dramma giocoso, melodramma giocoso, melodramma comico, opera buffa, opéra comique, farsa*. The conclusion is as clear as possible, Donizetti is an example of composer who likes the idea of alternating theatrical genres. „I think since Mozart has not met any other composer who is able to balance with such ease between sweet and bitter, between tragic and comic” (Soare 2014, 97).

The current opera audience, in its vast majority consumer of Italian repertoire, associate the name of Gaetano Donizetti rather with the comic opera

¹ Transilvania University of Braşov, Faculty of Music, liviu.iftene@unitbv.ro

and that's because two of a three operas most often represented on the stage are *buffo* (*L'elisir d'amore* and *Don Pasquale*). Although, in the 19th century public perception was totally opposite, *donizettian opera seria* being the most appreciated. The arithmetic balance of Donizetti's masterpieces, proposes a different perspective. By studying the approximately 70 opera titles as a whole, we identify a quasi-balance in the serious – buffo ratio. That enters him in the line of composers who have turned their attention to comedy in their youth, and to drama after 1828. If we refer to the years of compositional maturity, we clearly distinguish the path of Donizettian opus to romantic tragedy. Achieving the greatest successes during his lifetime with the *opera seria*, some musicologists tend to label the Donizettian dramaturgical style as being prone to the species of tragedy.

The composer's refuge in the world of comedy, by cyclically returning to this genre, it provides him an artistic balance that gives him an oasis of tranquillity after the appreciable artistic effort required by the Italian melodrama, a genre to which he is entrusted especially during the period of compositional maturity. *Dramma in musica* was from the beginning a tender musical genre that managed to link "the poetic invention [...] by charm of music, by the concert of voices and instruments, by the beauty of singing, by the grace of dances and movements and even by the role that painting has in the perspective of sets or costumes" (Păun 2013, 10).

In Francesco Pastura's vision, the melodrama of the early 19th century has "a precise task, namely to make the characters to cry, to palpitate and die together with action: that is, to make them live on stage through singing and music – manifesting their soul life – but with the naturalness of expression" (Pastura 1968, 346). Contrary to appearances, Gioacchino Rossini is the first composer who shows timid attempts to overcome the barrier of the *opera buffa* and enter in the new world of *melodramma*. The one-act prank *Signor Bruschino* (1813) is compelling in this context. Rossini confesses to his impresario at the time that he had suddenly thrown himself "into the abyss of music, to explore its mysteries" (Sbîrcea 1964, 75).

Psychological subjects and paroxysmal dramatism increasingly attract Gaetano Donizetti from 1828. We find the theme of depression and suicide explored in the opera *Il Furioso all'isola di San Domingo* (1833), where the main character Cardenio (baritone) goes through suicide attempts, eager to find out the truth about his adulterous wife. Supporter to lyrical creation with dramatic effect, Donizetti moves towards the lyrical-tragic romance. It develops an attraction to human suffering, seeking librettos that transcend the idea of lyrical and pure love, and tend towards passionate, violent, traumatic love. He explores as many romantic themes as possible, trying to use their tragic action to produce the audience that disturbing emotion that impresses to tears. In total opposition to the abstraction and conventionalism, proposed by the pre-romantic literal currents, realistic subjects,

characterized by sensitivity, emotion and subjectivity, proposed by the romantic writers of the 19th century, promote lyricism as a defining feature of the era. The effects of these literary choices will also be found in the scores of romantic composers, who will restructure their music, proposing a new proportion of musical phrases, changes often and courageously at the level of rhythm, agogics, dynamic or tonality. By strengthening these elements, lyrical artistic creation and not only evolves towards a new ideology, that of a musical romanticism, an antagonistic direction to the moderate and academic paradigm promoted by the classical tradition.

2. Sources of Inspiration

The international career of the prolific Scottish writer Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832) places him in the top of the most widely read literary authors in Europe. Donizetti had the opportunity to meet the writer in person, on the occasion of an event held at the Royal Palace of Naples. Exploring his novels, the composer develops a special interest in the history of England and embarks on a new path of his dramatic-musical expression. Gaetano is not a singular case in terms of fascination of the romantic composers about Walter Scott's works. His creations situate him in "the top ten authors whose creations were immortalized in operas" (Emanoil 2008, 786). *The Bride of Lammermoor* (1819) novel has been used by many composers before Gaetano, the first one being Michele Carafa, with *Le nozze di Lammermoor*, the opera whose premiere took place in Paris in 1829, six years before Donizetti's *Lucia*.

The romantic expression of contradictory feelings, the weakness for passion in antithesis to duty for homeland or nation, the sacrifice of feelings, are just some of the elements that define the lyrical-romantic melodramas approached by Gaetano in the period of his compositional maturity. The creative incursions start with the series of works with a theme inspired by the life of the House of Tudor: *Il castello di Kenilworth* (1829), *Anna Bolena* (1830), *Maria Stuarda* (1834) and later on, *Roberto Devereux* (1837). This is the context where *Lucia di Lammermoor* (1835) appears, creation that presents itself to the public as a crowning of all previous works, a true piece of resistance of the series, given its perpetual success.

The text offered by Salvatore Cammarano, one of the first librettists of the romanticism, contains countless dramatic (delirium, murder, suicide) and musical opportunities for the composer, who, satisfied with the collaboration, will offer exclusivity to the librettist until leaving for France. The libretto does not accurately portray the characters and events of Sir Walter Scott's novel, *The Bride of Lammermoor*, preferring to simplify the conflict in favor of expressive melodramatic effects. Walter Scott's novel is inspired by a true story set in 1669

between the Darlymple and Rutherford families, renamed Ashton and Ravenswood in his opera. The subject respects the archetypal romantic model of interpersonal relationship, which implies the existence of an unacceptable love affair between a man and a woman, a story that will predictably end tragically, in this case by the death of both main characters. The fatal end, used to the detriment of the happy ending, is another novelty brought to the romanticism lyrical genre. The example will be masterfully used by Giuseppe Verdi in his most famous musical dramas.

We cannot fail to notice the similarities between the characters of *Lucia di Lammermoor* and those projected by Bellini in his opera *Il Pirata*. Donizetti seems to have studied with great interest the languid music and the dramatic situations that underlie Bellini's opera, using many of them. The most obvious one is found in the pattern of distribution of the main roles according to the vocal register. Thus, we have two heroes in love, Edgardo, respectively Gualtiero, roles destined for the tenor voice, two heroines involved in an impossible love story, Lucia and Imogene (sopranos), and two fearsome rivals, the antagonistic characters Enrico and Ernesto (baritones). Donizetti respects the Bellinian formula also for the secondary characters, using the bass voice for the Calvinist chaplain Raimondo, the mirror personage of the hermit Goffredo. It also includes the role of the heroine's confidante, Alisa (mezzo-soprano) in *Lucia* and Adele (soprano) in *Il Pirata*, and last but not least, integrates in the narrative the tenore secondo part, through the episodic appearance of Lord Arturo Bucklaw, Lieutenant Itulbo's correspondent. Bellini and Donizetti thus become co-authors of the musical-dramaturgical concept of the tenor – soprano – baritone love triangle. The conceptual scheme will be taken over by Giuseppe Verdi, and on this basis a good part of the future dramaturgical conflicts will arise, until the end of the 19th century.

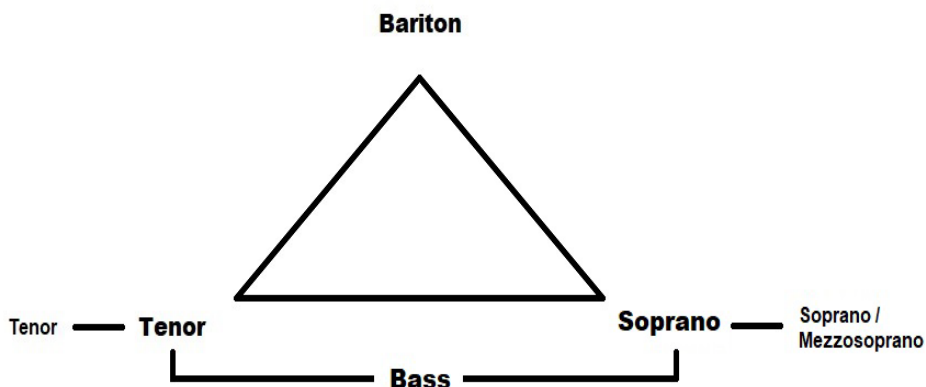


Fig. 1. The concept of the love triangle used by Gaetano Donizetti

Donizetti's mastery of sound construction in the opera *Lucia di Lammermoor* marks the genesis of the Italian romantic melodrama, along with Bellini's masterpiece *Il Pirata*. Led by Bellini, Gaetano fortifies his creation vulnerable point, the orchestration. The Italian musicologist Gaetano Cesari, witness of *Lucia* several performances on the stage of La Scala Theater in Milan, is one of the first voices that "favourably highlight the beauty and wisdom of the orchestration" (Donati-Petténi 1928, 194).

3. The absolute premiere and the French version

The absolute premiere of *Lucia* took place in Naples, on the stage of the *Teatro San Carlo*, on September 26, 1835, three days before premature death of Vincenzo Bellini. The success of the work marks for the musical genre of opera "the cornerstone of Italian romanticism" (Emanoil 2008, 787). Part of the success of the performance is due to the soprano Fanny Tacchinardi Persiani, who amazes the audience with her own vocal exhibitions. *Prima donna* achieves an impressive effect by reaching very high notes in the great scene of madness, musical section transposed down in the evening of the premiere (Batta and Neef 2000, 125). His stage partners were baritone Domenico Cosselli (Enrico) and bassist Carlo Ottolini Porto (Raimondo). The one who has the privilege of giving life to Edgardo character is the French tenor Gilbert Duprez (1806-1896), one of the great virtuosos of the 19th century.

In vogue in Paris, thanks to the new singing technique he learned in Italy, Duprez helped Gaetano to impose his own musical-theatrical vision in front of the French public. The tenor's recommendation weighed quite heavily in the lyrical theaters of Paris, so Donizetti repeatedly wrote to him, asking for his support: "... if *L'Assedio* fails, please, regarding *Lucia*, to throw a favorable word from time to time, because now you know my intentions". The Neapolitan staging of *L'Assedio di Calais* had no tenor in the cast, the main role being designed for alto voice. Donizetti explains his choice by saying that he has not found a voice that meets his requirements, but in the event of presenting the work on the Parisian stage he offers to revise the titular role for Duprez's vocality, to which he confesses in a servile way: "especially I wrote some arias that are dedicated to you" (Constantinescu 2013, 151). Finally, the Parisian debut of the Bergamo composer took place in 1839 with the opera *Lucia di Lammermoor*, presented to the audience of *Teatro de la Renaissance* after numerous revisions of text and music. Supporter of musical innovations, Donizetti sums up *Lucia's* composition to respect the musical-dramaturgical customs of the time, thus serving the public a stylistically

balanced work, and whose music manages to be "felt from the first moment by the Parisian audience, numb and cold. You electrified the dead; it's a miracle!" (Constantinescu 2013, 127). Librettists Alphonse Royer and Gustave Vaëz opted for a substantial restructuring of the action and characters of the original version, giving up the character Alisa, Lucia's confidante, reducing the role of chaplain Raimondo in favor of Arturo and replacing Normanno with Gilbert. *Lucie di Lammermoor*, including the second French revised version from 1846, circulated in parallel with the Italian version until the end of the 19th century.

4. Characters, synopsis, structure

Respecting the concept of the tenor - soprano - baritone love triangle, previously exposed, Donizetti in collaboration with the librettist Salvatore Cammarano generates the following list of characters.

Character	Vocal timbre	Role
Lord Enrico Ashton	baritone	The descendant of the Ashtons
Miss Lucia	soprano	Enrico's sister
Sir Edgardo di Ravenswood	tenor	The descendant of the Ravenswoods
Lord Arturo Buklaw	tenor	Lucia's fiancé
Raimondo Bidebent	bass	the mentor and confidant of Lucia
Alisa	mezzo	Lucia's confidant
Normanno	tenor	the captain of Enrico's warriors

Table 1. *Lucia di Lammermoor* characters

The subject takes place in the 16th century at south of Scotland, in the region of the hills named *Lammermuirs*. The etymology of the English word *Lammermuirs* (*Lammermoor*) comes from the fusion of the words *lamb* and *moor*, literally meaning "lamb's swamp". Donizetti and Cammarano propose to the work a different structure from the conventional division into successive acts, choosing the option of dividing it into two parts: *La partenza* (The leaving) and *Il contratto nuziale* (The nuptial contract).

The dramatic action of the play deals with the typical love story of the Renaissance, of the unfortunate fate of two young lovers who fight together

against destiny. Beginning with William Shakespeare and continuing with Sir Walter Scott, English writers constantly showed interest in the theme of impossible love, caused by the rivalry of powerful families. The source of the conflict between the Ravenswood and Ashton families is based on one of the oldest human sins, greed.

<i>Parte Prima (La partenza)</i>	<i>Atto unico</i>	<i>Preludio e coro d'introduzione Scena e cavatina (Enrico) Scena e cavatina (Lucia) Scena e duetto. Finale primo (Lucia, Edgardo)</i>
<i>Parte Seconda (Il contratto nuziale)</i>	<i>Atto primo</i>	<i>Scena (Enrico, Normano) Duetto (Lucia, Enrico) Scena ed aria (Raimondo) Finale secondo – Coro e cavatina (Arturo) Scena e quartetto nel Finale secondo (tutti) Seguito e stretta del Finale secondo (tutti)</i>
	<i>Atto secondo</i>	<i>Uragano, scena e duetto (Edgardo, Enrico) Coro Gran scena con cori (Raimondo) Scena ed aria (Lucia) Scena (Enrico, Raimondo, Normano) Aria finale (Edgardo)</i>

Table 2. *Lucia di Lammermoor* structure (Donizetti and Parenti 2011, VIII)

Part I – Single Act. The castle, which once belonged to the Ravenswood family, was usurped by the Ashton House, a lineage that resorted even to murder in order to reach its selfish purposes. Young Edgardo, the last descendant of the Ravenswood, becomes the obsessive target of Lord Enrico Ashton, when it's found out about Edgardo's relationship with Lucia, Enrico's younger sister. This connection risks to complicate the plans of Enrico, who out of the desire to restore the prestige of his family name, prepares for Lucia a matrimonial alliance with Lord Arturo Bucklaw, a royal house member. Lucia and Edgardo swear faith to each other, exchange rings and get engaged in secret.

Part II – Act I. Intercepting all of Edgardo's letters to Lucia, Enrico manages to convince his sister that she has been abandoned. Manipulated by her brother, she will give up on Edgardo, accepting the matrimonial alliance with Lord Arturo. The nuptial contract party is interrupted by the Edgardo rage who came to save his fiancée. Her signature on the wedding contract hits Edgardo deep in the soul, who before being expelled throws the ring in front of the one who betrayed him so cruelly, and curses her.

Part II – Act II. Enrico finds Edgardo retired to the Wolf Rock Tower and challenges him to a duel at dawn, by the tombs of the Ravenswood family. The party at the Ashton family castle is abruptly stopped by the news that Lucia has gone mad and stabbed Arturo to death. Surrounded by the graves of his ancestors, waiting for the imminent duel with Enrico, Edgardo mourning the cruel fate of his ancestors. Finding out from Raimondo about Lucia's terrible action, he decides to see her again, but the cold sound of the bell announces her death. Edgardo kills himself with a dagger, his last thoughts going to his “*bell’alma innamorata*” Lucia.

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