

The Semantics and Pragmatics of the character of Edgardo from Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*

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Abstract: *Lucia di Lammermoor* is a universal masterpiece that stylistically combines two contrasting vocal typologies, the lyricism of Italian *belcanto* and the dramatism of European romantic period. The movement of the opera's action, the internal culminations, but also the general soundtrack, all these elements of characterization rally to the *belcantist* aesthetics, but offer an extremely great romanticism opening. The scientific analysis of the main male character – Edgardo – is based on information related on the artist who has performed in premiere cast, on studying the character evolution in terms of vocal difficulty, and on the detailed musical analysis, especially of the final aria scene. Part of analytic data is based on my own scene experience.

Key-words: *belcanto* tenors, romantic tenors, Donizetti, Edgardo, Gilbert Duprez

1. Edgardo's analysis – music and dramaturgy aspects

Sir Edgardo di Ravenswood is the main positive character of the opera, which gets the role of the lover. Respecting the traditional customs of the time, Donizetti gives the rank of *primo uomo* to the tenor voice.

The singing technique approached by Gilbert Duprez around 1835 was based on the *canto di petto* style, practiced by the *baritenore* voices of the time, like Domenico Donzelli, a style that Gaetano Donizetti encouraged. Given that Duprez was initiated and sang at the beginning of his career as *haute-contre*, according to French tradition, we must not imagine his timbre as being overly dark. Duprez's musical past can explain us the unexpected appearance in Edgardo's score of the overtop high note E5 flat, at a minor third higher than the soprano's line, in the end of *Sulla tomba che rinserra* duet. Most likely performed by Duprez using *falsettone*,

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the passage of virtuosity is usually omitted in the current practice. The *falsettone* (reinforced falsetto) emission (Celletti 1991, 113), taken over by the first generations of belcanto tenors from *i castrati*, implies the amplification of *falsetto* sounds using the same mechanisms used in the modal register by exerting an additional force in the union of the intermembrane portions of the vocal cords.



Fig. 2. *Sulla tomba che rinserra* (*Lucia di Lammermoor*, Gaetano Donizetti)

Touched by Duprez's passionate singing style and enjoying the burning desire of the French tenors to experience Italian singing techniques, Donizetti sets the foundations of a new vocal style for the tenor voice. Reducing the coloratura passages, Gaetano sets the way for "real tessitura of the Romantic tenor, high, certainly, but not excessively high, passing it on later to Verdi" (Celletti 1991, 194). Duprez's new style of singing inspires Donizetti to compose the roles of Edgardo (*Lucia di Lammermoor*), Fernando (*La favorita*), Poliuto (*Les martyrs*) and Don Sebastiano (*Don Sebastiano*). In 1841, Gaetano wrote to his favorite tenor, referring to the operas *Lucia di Lammermoor* and *La favorita*: "I leave in your care these last two operas, which you have to deal with, because, apart from me, you are their second parent" (Constantinescu 2013, 136).

From a vocal-technical point of view, I would place the role of Edgardo, on a scale of difficulty from one to five, somewhere around the fourth step, i.e. very close to the border of the most demanding roles for the tenor voice. The vocal difficulty of the score, which requires many technical solutions, comes from the difficult combination between the slightly too high tessitura and the robust timbre imposed by the dramatism of the situations. In this context, the technical ability to

solve passage notes becomes in a pragmatic sense the true virtuosity proposed by Donizetti's writing. Choosing an eminently dramatic voice in approaching the role of Edgardo is a risky decision, because the high tessitura of the passage area and the high notes register can become a real ordeal for a baritenor voice. Although the dramatic nature outlines the evolution of the character, from a musical point of view, the belcanto repertoire for the tenor voice should not be foreign to the ideal performer. The prior approach of the lighter roles in Donizetti's creation is a valuable asset in solving the vocal problems that arose in the assimilation of Edgardo's part. In conclusion, from the perspective of vocal timbre, Edgardo's role suits a lyrical-spinto tenor voice, which can combine the characteristics of a brilliant and bright voice with the sounds of a robust and strong one in areas where musical dramatism demands it. Everything must be accompanied by the mastery of solving the passage area between the middle and high register.

With the exception of the unusual musical passages in the current practice (the musical section going up to *E5* flat, mentioned above and an alternative passage <<*oppure*>> that goes up to *C5* sharp in the cabaletta of the final aria), the necessary vocal range to approach the role is carried out in a wide interval of major 13th, starting with the note *D3* in the low register and rising sharply to the note *B4*. The low register of the tenor voice (*C3 – F3*) is almost non-existent in the writing for Edgardo, the composer preferring to use in most of the melodic lines the high middle register (*A3 – D4*), the passage area (*E4 – F4* sharp) and the high register (*G4 – B4*).

Vocal dosage is another essential skill in approaching the role of Edgardo. For maximum efficiency from this point of view, it is mandatory to have a structural knowledge of the scenes in which the character is involved, as well as their degree of difficulty. As we can see in the next analytical table, the stage participation of the character Edgardo is divided into four major moments. In the dramaturgical construction of the first act we can see the lack of a presentation aria (*aria di sortita*) of the character Edgardo, unlike the other main characters, Enrico and Lucia. The invention of the cavatina, often used as an entrance aria, is attributed to the composer Ferdinando Bertoni (Marek 2013, 61). At the urging of the librettist, who proposes to avoid the third area, Donizetti chooses to include Edgardo, a young man inexperienced in the intrigues of the court, in the narrative of the opera through the use of the musical form of the duet (*Sulla tomba che rinserra*). Always in antithesis to the soprano's ornate style, the tenor's virile declamation not only helps to shape the temper of the character in love with the "wrong" woman, but also stylistically anticipates the pathos and dignity of the typical Verdi's opera heroes, thus being a first step towards reality in music. By contrasting two

characters that manifest in their own style the characterological profile, Donizetti's melodic lines highlight the technical and expressive possibilities of Lucia and Edgardo. Their duet closes the first scene of the opera by singing their oath of love. The syllabic accents highlighted by the use of wide intervals, such as the octave jump in the first musical period of the phrase "*Verranno a te sull'aure*", are just some of the musical tricks that characterize the vocal lines of the two characters. The theme of love will be resumed as a reminder in the Lucia's scene of madness, the procedure of "parodic echo" being often used in Italian melodrama" (Sandu-Dediu 2010, 138).

Musical section		Structure	Characters	Difficulty 5 > 1
Part I Single act	<i>Scena e duetto Finale primo (Scene 4)</i>	Melodic recitative	Lucia Edgardo	4
		Duet		
Part II Act I	<i>Scena e quartetto nel Finale secondo (Scene 5)</i>	Quartet Sextet	Lucia Edgardo Enrico Raimondo Arturo Alisa Mixed choir	3
	<i>Seguito e stretta del Finale secondo</i>	Sextet		
Part II Act II	<i>Uragano, scena e duetto (Scene 1)</i>	Melodic recitative accompanied	Edgardo Enrico	3
		Duet		
Part II Act II	<i>Aria finale (Scene 7)</i>	Melodic recitative accompanied	Edgardo	5
		Cavatina		
		Melodic recitative accompanied Choir	Edgardo Raimondo Men choir	
		Cabaletta		

Table 3. *Edgardo's analytical table*

Gaetano Donizetti mainly presents an inclination towards group vocal moments, especially in sextet formation. The famous Donizettian sextet *Chi mi frena in tal momento?*, from the second act's ending, marks the second appearance of Edgardo. The great opera stage directors have always taken advantage of this specific peculiarity of Donizetti's, to create monumental vocal ensembles, imagining the most beautiful and innovative productions. Edgardo's unexpected arrival at the place of signing the wedding contract between Lucia and Arturo precedes the well-known sextet "in Larghetto, one of Donizetti's most brilliant musical creations, developed compositionally and emotionally, an exceptional moment by progressing to culmination". Romanian musicologist Grigore Constantinescu structurally describes this musical section in the following words: "The ensemble begins with a duo of male voices (Enrico and Edgardo), then transforms into a quartet by adding extreme voices (Lucia and Raimondo), it passes, after the middle of the section, to the sextet (in which enters Alisa and Arturo), to culminate with the parallelism of the choir, foundation of the final acute of the soprano" (Constantinescu 2013, 113). The success of this romantic musical ensemble is based on the masterful combination of three great ingredients: the soloistic vocal sextet, the mixed choir and the large orchestra. The role of using the extended vocal ensemble, through the participation of the mixt choir, is that to confirm through the sound explosion the tension of Edgardo, thus marking one of the culminating moments of the libretto. The opera manages to express in less than five minutes, the complex dramatic situation, each character having the opportunity to transpose in them melodic line, their own feelings, while submitting to the overall vision. The choral parts, either lavish or threatening, together with the orchestration skillfully correlated with the solo moments, are of great beauty and are organically integrated in the dramatic action. The harp, the oboe, the flute, the glass harmonica and especially the brass instruments become prominent means of orchestration throughout the opera. Edgardo's famous emotional recitation *Hai tradito il cielo e amor*, followed by his outburst of rage at Lucia, whom he curses in the short and difficult *arioso* – *Maledetto, maledetto sia l'istante*, composed especially for a syllabic and simple vocality, are pages of reference for any opera lover.

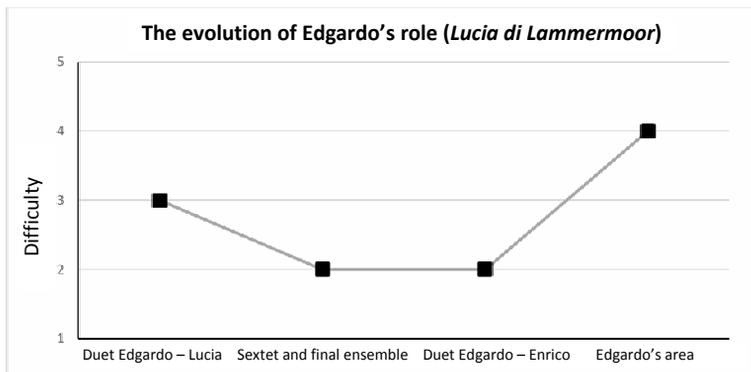


Fig. 2. Graphic table with the evolution of the role of Edgardo in terms of vocal-technical difficulty

The third stage participation of the analyzed character materializes in the duet with Enrico, the character who embodies Lucia's family in the opera, and especially Lady Margaret Douglas Ashton, the negative character in Walter Scott's novel. Analyzing the evolution of the degree of vocal difficulty of the character Edgardo we can see that this scene precedes the most difficult moment, the scene and the final aria of the opera. The duet with Enrico is a musical moment that must be treated with the utmost care, because inexperienced vocal soloists, feeling confident in the less vocally demanding part, tend to consume their energy unnecessarily at this moment, exaggerating the dramatic effects. The cost can be quite expensive, and the reprehensible results will stand out in the last scene of the opera, the real touchstone of the role.

2. Edgardo's final scene

With splendid dramatic and lyrical vocal sonority, the final scene of the opera is entrusted to the tenor voice, a deviation from the formalism of contemporary lyrical tragedies, in which the opera ends with *scena di follia*, a moment of virtuosity that belonged to the soprano. The heroine had the opportunity to display on this occasion the sum of all the vocality and expressive abilities. Donizetti

remains confident in his choice, enduring near the absolute premiere, together with the tenor Gilbert Duprez, the anger and protest of the soprano Fanny Tacchinardi Persiani. The composer's preference can also be interpreted as an attempt to fix the mistake made in the same year with the opera *Marino Faliero*, in which the character played by the tenor dies in the second act to the disappointment of fans of Giambattista Rubini, the interpret of the role of Fernando.

Lucia di Lammermoor is universally recognized as one of the greatest "preverdian" operas, and if we analyze the musical structure of the three main characters, we can easily see that only Edgardo's role surpasses the belcanto's mannerism, meeting the Verdian dramatic style. The antithesis of the musical writing in the final arias of the two main characters is the most speaking argument in favor of the mentioned theory, Donizetti choosing to express differently from an aesthetically-affective point of view two similar events. If for Lucia he chooses an idealistic rendering of the state of madness in the cabaletta *Spargi d'amaro pianto*, bringing to the top means of belcanto (chromatisms, coloring ornaments, high notes) to the detriment of the dramatic veracity of the stage action, Edgardo has a totally opposite treatment. His death is real, depressing, and true. "After the dagger blow, there are no vocal variations, but only a song interrupted by the sigh of passing away" (Constantinescu 2013, 114), process taken over by Verdi in the scenes of his dying heroes (*la voce gli manca*).

Lucia di Lammermoor becomes the "scale opera" that balances the relationship between idealism and realism in the lyrical genre, and Donizetti "the great administrator", the composer who manages to incorporate in his work the past and the present, the belcanto and the romanticism, the virtuosity and the dramatic expressiveness.

In the final scene of the opera, Gaetano uses his main way of artistic expression in the *opera seria*, namely the dramatic aria. The dynamic palette of nuances but also the vocal timbre are two of the elements highlighted in a tense sound context, created by the gloomy sound of brass instruments. Although the character of Walter Scott (Edgar) riding to the place of the duel ends in the moving sands of Scotland, Donizetti together with the librettist Salvatore Cammarano choose the gloomy atmosphere of the Ravenswood family cemetery for the final scene of the opera.

The accompanied melodic recitative of Edgardo's aria, *Tombe degli avi miei*, is well integrated in the tense context of the dramatic implication, the orchestral thematic exposition entrusted to the brass contributing to the rendering of the feeling of loneliness and depression. To express the pathetic, deeply dramatic

feelings of the Donizettian hero, the recitative accompanied by the orchestra proves to be the right choice. The strong melodic impulse from the beginning of the scene, formed by the dialogue between the string family and the horn match, creates a memorable, recognizable moment. Edgardo's melodic discourse in recitative is sometimes calm, sometimes rhythmic, often interrupted by orchestral attacks that either punctuate the harmonic plan or describe the hero's gloomy thoughts, semantically amplifying the text of the libretto. Donizetti masterfully manages to attribute dramatic value to the tonalities and their succession. Through melody, the recitative receives expressive valences and closely follows the psychological state of the character.

The image displays three musical staves, numbered 1, 2, and 3, each showing a recitative cadence. Staff 1 is from G. Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*, featuring the text "fo del la mor. tol" with the instruction "a piacere" above. Staff 2 is from G. Verdi's *Rigoletto*, featuring the text "pianto del lami. a di. let. . . . ta." with a "3" below. Staff 3 is from G. Verdi's *La Traviata*, featuring the text "scordo ne' gaudi suo. i tut. to il pas. sa. . . . to." The musical notation includes various notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

Fig. 3. The cadence of the recitative in various musical fragments:

1. G. Donizetti – *Lucia di Lammermoor* – *Tombe degli avi miei* (Edgardo)
2. G. Verdi – *Rigoletto* – *Ella mi fu rapita* (Duca di Mantova)
3. G. Verdi – *La Traviata* – *Lunge da lei* (Alfredo)

The clear construction of the exposed musical motifs culminates in the cadence of the recitative, specific to the Donizettian style by using the acute register, a rather bold choice for the moment before the aria. The tenor's voice rises up to *B4* flat, after which the phrase descends into a legato of expression and prepares the new key using a short delay in solving, a musical matrix taken over and later used by Giuseppe Verdi, as it can be seen in the last musical example.

Characteristics		Recitative	Cavatina	Cabaletta
Pitch	Key	<i>E flat major</i>	<i>D major</i>	<i>D major</i>
	Vocal range	<i>F – B4</i>	<i>F – B4</i>	<i>F – B4</i>
Duration	Tempo	<i>A libitum Larghetto Allegro Larghetto</i>	<i>Larghetto Poco più animato</i>	<i>Moderato Allegro Moderato Più Allegro</i>
	Measure	$\frac{4}{4}$	$\frac{3}{4}$	$\frac{4}{4}$
	Note values	□ - □	□ - □.	□ - □
	Ornaments	lower triple appoggiatura	melodic cadence	Simple short superior appoggiaturas
Dynamics		<i>p – ff marcato</i>	<i>p – ff marcato, crescendo</i>	<i>p – ff marcato, staccato, crescendo, calando</i>
Timbre		<i>mesto</i> ²	<i>elegiaco con calore</i>	<i>scuotendosi</i> ³ <i>con voce fioca</i> legato of expression
Form		Melodic recitative accompanied	ABA'B'	ABA'

Table 2. *Analyze of Edgardo's final aria*

Due to the well-thought-out architectural structure of the recitative, the conflicting development is continuous and masterfully achieved, especially when moving to the *D major* key in *Fra poco a me ricovero* aria. Designed in the form of a double bipartite aria (ABA'B'), with ternary thematic motifs presented on a short text and in a slow tempo (*larghetto*), the aria outlines the dramatic expression more vocally than through nuances of harmony, thus highlighting the expressive valences of the voice. The varied replay of the two musical phrases, and the animated tempo from the last section of the aria, generate the cadential moment. Although at the base of the belcanto style, in such moments composers and performers resort to the use of scales and arpeggios, we can see in the Donizettian

² Sad, pained.³ Shook, scattered.

vocal style the initiation of a distinct approach to the tenor voice. To the detriment of the dense cadences in coloratura passages we notice the composer's inclination towards simple endings, an invitation given to the soloist to perform a high final note in *di petto* new style. The traditional cadence of Edgardo's aria, by inserting the note B4 natural in the phrase "*rispetta almen ceneri... ah! di chi moria, di chi moria per te*" speaks for itself.

The true virtuosity of the romantic belcanto consists in the difficult combination between the dramatic agility and the need for continuous expression, a connection that we can observe in Edgardo's cantilena *Tu che a Dio spogasti l'ali*. This part of the aria, built in the style of the slow cabaletta (Dean 1974, 128), the song starts from the emphasis of the words and goes towards the development of a simple and melancholic musical theme. The tempo of *moderato* is favorable to the exteriorization of feelings and promotes compliance of dramaturgical requirements. Gaetano remains partially faithful to the belcanto tradition by poetizing the vocal expression, but shows a continuous interest in the dramatic and psychological construction of male characters, by giving up the exaggerated ornamentation. This particularity, of Bellinian inspiration, based on truth, on psychological reality, imposes on the performer a revision of his acting skills.

The tenor's vocal touchstone consists in the vocal solving of the passage notes (E4 – F4 sharp) and of those in the high register (G4 – A4) from the musical phrase "*o bell'alma innamorata*". The chromatic climb in *crescendo* to A4 represents the final test of the singer, who must be conscious since the first note emitted on stage by the upward trend of the score difficulty. However, solving vocal problems does not end an artist's research, but only opens another labyrinthine path that he must follow in order to get the expressive virtuosity.

Edgardo's boundless pain resonates till on Romania lands. The first Romanian performance of *Lucia di Lammermoor* took place at Bucharest Opera House on September 28, 1885, half a century away from the date of the absolute premiere. The role of Edgardo was sing by the tenor Ion Dimitrescu (Cosma 2009, 89).

Poco più

ED. *giun-ga il Nu-me in ciel, o bell'alma inna-mo-ra-ta, bel.l'alma inna-mo-*

ED. *calando a tempo p creso.*
- ra-ta ne con-giun-ga il Nume in ciel, o bel.l'alma in-na-mo-

ED. *- ra-ta, bel.l'alma inna-mo-ra-ta, _____ ne con-giun-ga il Nu-me in*

Fig. 4. Musical fragment from the cabaletta *Tu che a Dio spiegasti l'ali*

Romanian writer Ion Luca Caragiale ironizes the popularity of Donizettian opera among the music lovers of Bucharest, writing in the theatrical chronicle of the newspaper *Voința națională* (*National Will*): "How many times *Lucia* was played in Bucharest, and how many times *Lucia* was played for us can no longer be counted: there's not a slum lady, there's not a street jerk who doesn't know the whole part by heart. And then, don't forget about the barrel organs, the barrel organs, the scourge of the capital of our young kingdom. On Saturday night, when I was going to the theater, a barrel organ was singing down the valley, at *Gambrinus*, the final aria, *Tu, che al ciel spiegasti...*, very slowly and mournfully. Look, now, as I write these lines... on my honor! A barrel organ has started playing a song in the yard – it's the same one: *Tu che al ciel...* (October 8, 1885)" (Constantinescu 2013, 219). Musicologist William Ashbrook subtly remarks Donizetti's genius hidden in this banal song, admiringly confessing: "no composer was more adept at distilling sadness from the combination of tenor voice and plain major-key harmonies, as in '*Tu che a Dio spiegasti l'ali*'" (Budden 1998).

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