

DONIZETTI

Lucia di Lammermoor

A Guide for Educators



The Metropolitan
Opera **HD**
LIVE

Lucia di Lammermoor

Murder, madness, and a blood-spattered bride: For more than 200 years, the spine-tingling story of *Lucia di Lammermoor* has left audiences shivering with delight. In 1819, Sir Walter Scott published a novel about an ill-fated maid from the Lammermoor hills. Loosely based on a real-life murder that scandalized 17th-century Scotland, Scott's novel was grisly, gory, and one of the most popular books of its day. Emotionally raw and irresistibly morbid, the story soon made its way across Europe; a Danish musical based on the novel even featured a libretto by Hans Christian Andersen! Yet it was Gaetano Donizetti and Salvatore Cammarano—two of Italy's brightest operatic stars—who in 1835 gave Lucia her immortal voice.

In Donizetti's hands, Lucia became a character at once tragic and terrifying, and he devised some of his most innovative and virtuosic music to portray her slide into insanity. He also crafted an unforgettable story of passion, vengeance, and familial loyalty in which heartbreaking drama blends seamlessly with breathtaking vocal acrobatics. The soprano called on to perform the title role takes on a challenge akin to giving an Oscar-winning performance while flying through the air on a trapeze, and this riveting combination of chills, thrills, and powerhouse virtuosity has made *Lucia di Lammermoor* one of the most popular operas of all time. (In fact, in 1883, *Lucia* was the second work ever performed by the newly opened Metropolitan Opera, and it has remained a beloved staple of the Met's repertoire ever since.)

Even divorced from its historical context, *Lucia di Lammermoor* is an operatic triumph. Yet a closer look reveals a work intricately linked to the intellectual trends of its day. Although both Scott's novel and Cammarano's libretto are set in the 17th century, the opera is best understood in light of the medical, technological, and musical advances that marked the 1800s. This guide thus invites students to delve into the 19th century, considering how Lucia's experiences reflect both the scientific developments and the social structures of the day. At the same time, it asks students to view Lucia's story through a more modern lens, drawing on their understanding of psychology, gender roles, and even urban legends to analyze, evaluate, and sympathize with this great opera and its heroine's plight.



DESSAY



CALLEJA



TÉZIER



YOUN

THE WORK

An opera in **three acts, sung in Italian**

Music by **Gaetano Donizetti**

Libretto by **Salvatore Cammarano**,
Based on ***The Bride of Lammermoor***
by **Sir Walter Scott**

First performed on **September 26, 1835**,
at the **Teatro di San Carlo, Naples**

PRODUCTION

Mary Zimmerman
Production

Daniel Ostling
Set Designer

Mara Blumenfeld
Costume Designer

T. J. Gerckens
Lighting Designer

Daniel Pelzig
Choreography

PERFORMANCE

The Met: Live in HD
Broadcast: March 19, 2011

Natalie Dessay
Lucia

Joseph Calleja
Edgardo

Ludovic Tézier
Enrico

Kwangchul Youn
Raimondo

Philip Webb
Normanno

Theodora Hanslowe
Alisa

Matthew Plenk
Arturo

Patrick Summers
Conductor

Production a gift of The Sybil B. Harrington
Endowment Fund

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Department of Education.

Opera in the Classroom

The Metropolitan Opera Educator Guides offer a creative, interdisciplinary introduction to opera. Designed to complement existing classroom curricula in music, the humanities, STEM fields, and the arts, these guides will help young viewers confidently engage with opera whether or not they have prior experience with the art form.

On the following pages, you'll find an array of materials designed to encourage critical thinking, deepen background knowledge, and empower students to engage with *Lucia di Lammermoor*'s story, music, and themes. These materials can be used in classrooms and/or via remote-learning platforms, and they can be mixed and matched to suit your students' individual academic needs.

Above all, this guide is intended to help students explore *Lucia di Lammermoor* through their own experiences and ideas. The diverse perspectives that your students bring to opera make the art form infinitely richer, and we hope that your students will experience opera as a space where their confidence can grow and their curiosity can flourish.

WHAT'S IN THIS GUIDE:

Philosophical Chairs: A series of questions that will introduce students to the opera's main themes while sparking their creativity and encouraging debate

Who's Who in *Lucia di Lammermoor*: An introduction to the opera's main characters and their roles in the plot

Synopsis: A complete opera synopsis for young readers

The Source: Information about the literary sources and/or historical events that inspired the opera

Timelines: One or more timelines connecting the opera to events in world history

Deep Dives: In-depth looks at various topics relating to the opera

Active Exploration: Interdisciplinary activities connecting the opera to topics in music, the humanities, STEM, and the arts

THROUGHOUT THE GUIDE, YOU'LL ALSO FIND:

Critical Inquiries: Questions and thought experiments designed to foster careful thinking

Fun Facts: Entertaining tidbits about *Lucia di Lammermoor*



FUN FACT

Donizetti's interest in British history reached beyond the borders of Scotland. Over the course of his career, he would write three operas about English queens: *Anna Bolena* (1830), about Anne Boleyn; *Maria Stuarda* (1835), about Mary Stuart; and *Roberto Devereux* (1837), about Elizabeth I.

Above: Sondra Radvanovsky in the Met's production of *Roberto Devereux*. KEN HOWARD / MET OPERA

CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS

This guide invites students to explore the opera through:

Poetry
Creative Writing
History
Literature
Psychology and Medicine
Music Theory
Composition
Critical Thinking
Social and Emotional Learning

Philosophical Chairs

Philosophical Chairs is an activity designed to foster critical thinking, active inquiry, and respectful dialogue among students. To play a game of Philosophical Chairs, participants agree or disagree with a series of statements, but the game doesn't end there. The most crucial element of the game is what happens next: Participants discuss their points of view and can switch sides if their opinions change during the discussion. (For more tips on using Philosophical Chairs in a classroom or via a remote-learning platform, see the activity description in your Google Classroom.)

Each topic statement is deliberately open-ended yet ties into a number of the themes present in *Lucia di Lammermoor*—including the confusion of conflicting loyalties, the cruel burden of familial strife, and the heartbreak of impossible love. As you and your students explore and learn about *Lucia di Lammermoor*, you can return to these statements: What do they have to do with the opera's story? How might these questions help us explore the opera's story, history, and themes?

THE STATEMENTS

- It's always up to you whom you marry.
- Vengeance may be justified.
- Ghosts (and/or other supernatural spirits) are real.
- Forgery doesn't hurt anyone.
- You have a moral obligation to do what is best for your family.
- You must honor your family's wishes.
- Heartbreak does not last forever—the heart will always heal.
- Everyone has only one true love.
- Love is eternal.
- Logic has no effect on love.



Keep in mind that the process of this activity is just as important as the statements themselves. Imagine a world in which everyone actively listens to one another and engages in respectful dialogue, honoring others and showing respect for the wide array of diverse ideas and opinions that others hold. Philosophical Chairs fosters exactly this kind of space, encouraging students to take what they've learned and change the global landscape for generations to come.

Who's Who in *Lucia di Lammermoor*

CHARACTER	PRONUNCIATION	VOICE TYPE	THE LOWDOWN
Lucia A Scottish noblewoman	loo-CHEE-yah	soprano	Viewed by her brother as little more than a pawn in a political game stretching back generations, Lucia is in fact a passionate young woman intent on living happily ever after with the man she loves. Unfortunately, her beloved Edgardo is her family's arch enemy, and when her brother forces her into a marriage of political convenience, the grief will drive her mad.
Edgardo A Scottish nobleman, the Lord of Ravenswood	ed-GAHR-doh	tenor	Edgardo loves Lucia, and she loves him. But Edgardo and Lucia's families have long been political enemies, which makes it impossible for them to make their love known.
Enrico Lord of Lammermoor, Lucia's brother	ehn-REE-koh	baritone	Desperate to save his family's fortune and reputation, Enrico is prepared to sell his sister to the highest bidder, regardless of the ultimate cost.
Arturo Lucia's fiancé	ahr-TOO-roh	tenor	Enrico's political ally, Arturo is the man Enrico wants Lucia to marry. Arturo has no idea that Lucia is in love with someone else, but by marrying her, he will seal his own bloody fate.
Raimondo A priest, Lucia's tutor	rye-MOHN-doh	bass	Despite his loyalty to Enrico, Raimondo feels sorry for Lucia and wants to help her. Yet his kindness is no match for Enrico's scheming.
Alisa Lucia's companion	ah-LEE-zah	mezzo-soprano	Lucia's friend and confidante, Alisa worries that Lucia's relationship with Edgardo will end in disaster.
Normanno Leader of Enrico's guards	nor-MAHN-no	tenor	Enrico's cruel sidekick, Normanno helps Enrico trick Lucia into believing Edgardo doesn't love her.



LUCIA



EDGARDO



ENRICO



ARTURO



RAIMONDO



ALISA



NORMANNO

PHOTOS: KEN HOWARD/MET OPERA

Synopsis

ACT I *Ravenswood Castle, Scotland.*

Watchmen search the gardens and forests surrounding Ravenswood Castle. They have heard that there is an intruder on the castle grounds, and they intend to find him. Ironically, the “intruder” is none other than Edgardo, Lord of Ravenswood, the last surviving member of the family that once owned the castle. Banished from his ancestral home when the Ashton family took over his land, Edgardo has secretly taken up residence in the ruins of an old tower on the Ravenswood property.

Since taking over the Ravenswood estate, however, the Ashton family has fallen on hard times. Desperate to restore his family’s wealth and influence, Lord Enrico Ashton plans to make his sister, Lucia, marry the wealthy Lord Arturo Bucklaw. Raimondo Bidebent, a kind priest who has always wished Lucia well, reminds Enrico that Lucia is still mourning her dead mother and thus cannot be expected to fall in love any time soon. Enrico’s friend Normanno, however, has a different opinion: He knows that Lucia goes every morning to meet a strange man on the castle grounds, and he suspects that the stranger is none other than Edgardo Ravenswood. When Normanno lets slip to Enrico that Lucia might be in love with Edgardo, Enrico angrily declares he’d rather see his sister dead than married to his mortal enemy.

Lucia and her friend Alisa come to a fountain in the gardens of the Ravenswood estate. This is the spot where Lucia and Edgardo always meet, but for Lucia, the fountain is also a source of fear. According to a local legend, a jealous man from the Ravenswood family once stabbed the woman he loved by the fountain, and Lucia thinks she has seen the murdered woman’s ghost in the water, which bubbled and turned blood-red when the ghost appeared. Alisa warns Lucia that this is a bad omen. Soon, Edgardo arrives. He tells Lucia that he must leave for France on a political mission, but he hopes to ask Enrico for her hand in marriage before he goes. Lucia begs him to keep their love a secret, since she knows how furious her brother would be if he knew. Promising always to be faithful to one another, Lucia and Edgardo exchange rings. Edgardo hurries away.

ACT II *Lucia’s wedding day.*

Many weeks have passed since Edgardo’s departure for France. Enrico has tried everything to convince Lucia to marry Arturo, but neither sweetness nor threats have worked. Every time Enrico brings up the subject, Lucia says she is already engaged to Edgardo. Secretly, however, Lucia wonders why Edgardo never writes to her. What she doesn’t realize



is that Enrico and Normanno have devised a wicked trick: They have stolen Edgardo's letters and replaced them with a fake letter breaking off Lucia and Edgardo's engagement. Raimondo, for his part, wants Lucia to be happy. But, believing that the false letter from Edgardo is real, he counsels Lucia to marry Arturo for her family's sake. Heartbroken, Lucia finally agrees.

A great trumpet fanfare announces Arturo's arrival at the castle, where a large crowd has gathered to greet him. Lucia, however, is nowhere to be seen. When she finally enters, Lucia seems frightened and distracted. Enrico tells her to sign the marriage contract immediately. With a shaky hand, she signs the paper—just as her beloved Edgardo rushes through the door! Enrico is shocked by his enemy's unexpected appearance, Edgardo is heartbroken by Lucia's marriage, and both men are furious at each other. The party descends into general chaos while Lucia, horrified that she has signed her life away at the very moment of Edgardo's return, sits all alone, lost in her own, sad world.

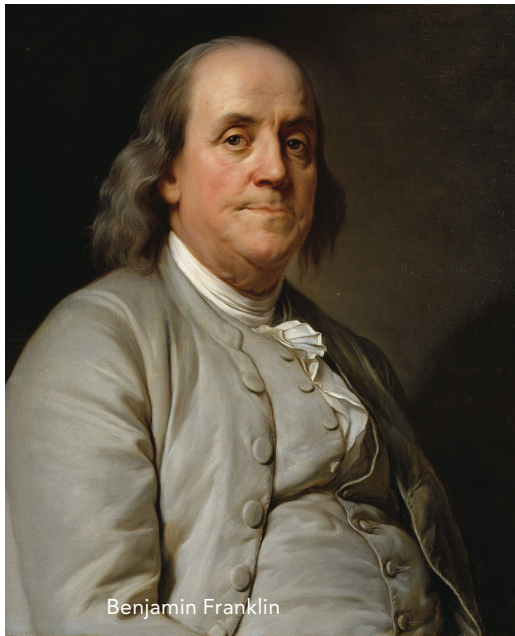
ACT III *That evening.*

As a storm rages outside, Enrico comes to the ruined tower to pay Edgardo a visit. The marriage contract is signed, and Lucia cannot back out of the wedding, but Enrico is still furious about his sister's love for his arch enemy. He has come to challenge Edgardo to a duel. The two men agree to meet the following morning in the Ravenswood cemetery.

Back at the castle, the guests celebrate Lucia and Arturo's wedding. Suddenly, Raimondo enters. He has terrifying news: He was walking through the upstairs hallway when he heard screams. He opened the door of Lucia's room and found Lucia clutching a dagger—and Arturo dead in a pool of blood. Lucia has clearly gone mad. As Raimondo finishes relating what he has seen, Lucia appears at the top of the stairs in her wedding gown. She is covered in blood, and she still carries the bloody dagger. Slowly, hesitantly, she descends the staircase toward the gathered guests. "Edgardo," she says, staring at the dagger with a ghoulish smile on her face, "Arturo is gone. Now I can be yours again!" In a fit of delirium, she acts out her wedding to Edgardo. The guests look on, horrified, as she tears her bloody veil to pieces and collapses at the foot of the stairs.

Edgardo waits at the Ravenswood cemetery for his fight with Enrico. He has lost his whole family, and now he has lost Lucia, as well. Standing among the tombs of his ancestors, Edgardo feels ready join them in death. A group of somber men arrive, lamenting the fate of a "poor girl." "Who is this poor girl?" Edgardo asks. "It is Lucia," they reply, "love has driven her mad." Raimondo arrives to tell Edgardo that Lucia has died. Edgardo can hardly believe his ears. Crazed with grief, he thinks he sees Lucia's ghost walking through the graveyard. Taking out his dagger, Edgardo drives it into his own heart.





Benjamin Franklin



An 18th-century glass harmonica
THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART. THE CROSBY BROWN
COLLECTION OF MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS, 1889

Deep Dive

MADLY IN LOVE

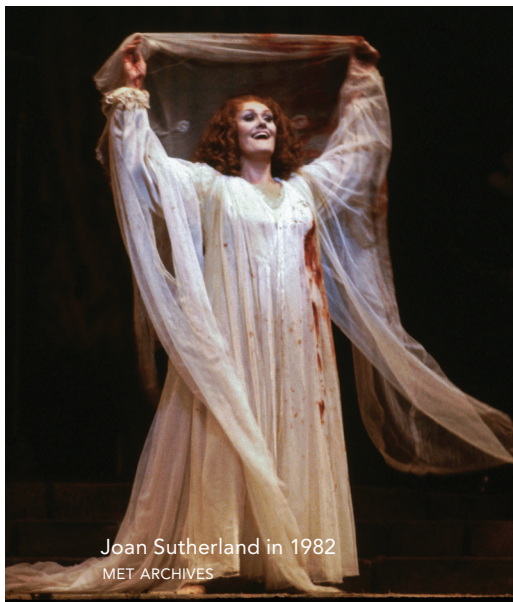
Lucia di Lammermoor's "mad scene" is one of the most famous moments in all of opera—and with good reason. It is a musical and emotional roller coaster, filled with fake blood, bizarre hallucinations, and stunning coloratura. Mad scenes (and the extraordinary displays of virtuosity they engender) have always been popular in opera. So what makes Lucia's madness so memorable?

In one of the first operas ever written, Claudio Monteverdi's *L'Orfeo* (1607), the Greek musician Orpheus goes mad with grief after his wife, Eurydice, is bitten by a snake and dies. *L'Orfeo* predates *Lucia di Lammermoor* by more than two centuries, yet the basic musical and dramatic elements of the mad scene were already evident in Monteverdi's work. Sharp contrasts of speed and volume mimicked unpredictable mood swings, agitated music in the orchestra represented the hero's turbulent mental state, and the death of a beloved (or love otherwise denied) would become the main catalyst for a character's breakdown. (Note that the "mad" in "mad scenes" always refers to insanity, never anger.) Operatic styles would evolve over time, yet these fundamental traits of the mad scene

remained the same.

For Donizetti, however, *Lucia*'s mad scene called for much more than the standard compositional tricks that were generally used in operas. His first innovation was to bring back a melody from the opera's Act I love duet, in which Lucia and Edgardo promise always to be faithful to one another. During the Act III mad scene, the orchestra plays this love theme as Lucia, crazed with grief, fantasizes that she is marrying Edgardo. By the end of the 19th century, the reprise of musical motifs would be common in opera, but in 1835, when Donizetti wrote *Lucia di Lammermoor*, it was a notable choice. Moreover, the libretto makes clear that no one besides Lucia can hear the "celestial sound" of the duet's melody, so the recurring melody is like an auditory hallucination.

Donizetti's second major innovation was the use of the "glass harmonica," an instrument based on the same acoustic principle as "playing" a wine glass. If you dip your finger in water and rub it around the rim of a crystal goblet, an eerie, ethereal sound will result. (The instrument as it is usually encountered today was invented in 1761 by Benjamin Franklin, who lined up



Joan Sutherland in 1982
MET ARCHIVES



Amelita Galli-Curci in 1915
MET ARCHIVES



Natalie Dessay in 2011
KEN HOWARD/MET OPERA

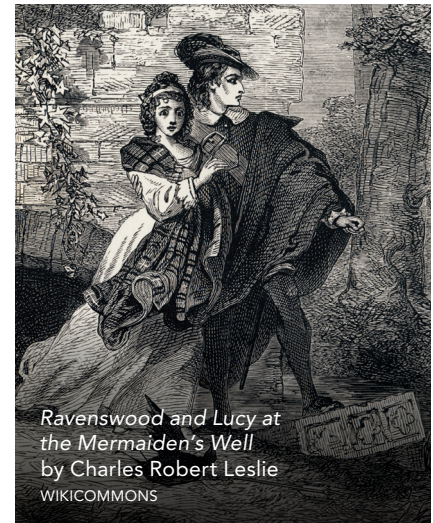
a series of concave glass discs on a spinning rod to stand in for the finicky goblets.) The glass harmonica gave *Lucia*'s mad scene a spooky, supernatural atmosphere, yet Donizetti's use of the instrument was likely based on more than just its ghostly timbre. In the 18th and 19th centuries, it was generally believed that glass harmonicas had a physiological effect on listeners. The Viennese doctor Anton Mesmer (from whose name we get the word "mesmerize") claimed that the glass harmonica's sound could cure illness. Other doctors believed that the instrument's vibrations could drive listeners—and especially women—crazy. It was thus the perfect instrument for Donizetti's delirious Lucia. Unfortunately, the musician scheduled to play the glass harmonica at *Lucia di Lammermoor*'s 1835 premiere quit a few days before the first performance, and Donizetti had to call in a flutist to play the lines. Today, opera companies can choose whether they want to use the flute or the glass harmonica to bring Lucia's mad scene to life.

ACTIVE EXPLORATION

Make your own glass harmonica: Begin by finding one or more wine glasses made from glass or crystal (crystal will work better). Add a little bit of water to the glass, and then dip your finger in the water and rub it along the rim of the glass. Vary the pressure and speed until you hear a clear, ringing sound. Once you get comfortable playing the wine glass, try changing the amount of water in the bowl of the goblet: Does the pitch get higher or lower when you add more water?



The Bride of Lammermoor by John Everett Millais
BRISTOL MUSEUM & ART GALLERY



Ravenswood and Lucy at the Mermaid's Well
by Charles Robert Leslie
WIKICOMMONS

The Source

THE NOVEL *THE BRIDE OF LAMMERMOOR* BY SIR WALTER SCOTT

On August 24, 1669, Janet Dalrymple, daughter of a Scottish nobleman, married Lord David Dunbar of Baldoon. The marriage had been orchestrated by Janet's mother, a domineering woman who saw the union as politically expedient for the Dalrymple family. Janet, however, was in love with a different man, a certain Lord Rutherford, and the arranged marriage drove her to the depths of despair. On the night of the wedding, Janet was found covered in blood and holding a knife over her grievously injured groom. Dunbar's wounds soon healed, but Janet never recovered from her psychotic episode; she died on September 12, 19 days after her ill-fated wedding.

The novelist Sir Walter Scott was born in 1771, more than a century after Janet Dalrymple's death, yet Janet's tragic tale was an integral part of his childhood. Scott's great aunt, Margaret Swinton, claimed to have known Janet's little brother, and the story was, in effect, a prized family possession. In 1819, Scott published *The Bride of Lammermoor*, a novel based on the Dalrymple incident. He changed the name of the main character from Janet to Lucy, cast her brother (rather than her mother) as the villain, adjusted the story so that the groom's wounds were mortal, and transposed the events to the hills of Lammermoor, in southern Scotland; the remaining details were essentially unchanged. The novel soon became wildly popular, both in Britain and abroad. Nevertheless, Scott's family always viewed the story as uniquely theirs, and Scott's mother took great pride in explaining to friends and acquaintances how the novel differed from her own version of the Dalrymple tale.



FUN FACT

Sir Walter Scott's oeuvre is full of characters dying tragic deaths, but it was Lucia's descent into madness and her subsequent demise that touched him most deeply. "Of all the murders that I have committed ...," he would remark late in his life, "there is none that went so much to my heart as the poor Bride of Lammermoor."

Above: Sir Walter Scott
by Sir John Watson Gordon



A View of Loch Lomond by Horatio McCulloch

CRITICAL INQUIRY

Can you think of any other stories (or movies, television shows, etc.) based in Scotland? Can you think of any countries or regions that seem as exotic today as Scotland seemed in the 19th century?

Deep Dive

A SCOTTISH FANTASY

For composers in 19th-century Italy, Scotland was an exotic and alluring realm. Tucked in the far northwest corner of Europe, home to wind-swept heaths and rocky shores, and boasting a history full of bloody civil wars, Scotland was a dramatic location par excellence. During the late 18th and early 19th centuries, translations of Scottish folk poetry had enchanted some of continental Europe's most prominent writers, including Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, the doyen of German verse. Romantic composers and writers were especially enamored with the odes of the medieval Celtic poet "Ossian" (no matter that the poems in question were actually written by one James Macpherson in the middle of the 18th century).

By the second decade of the 19th century, Europe's most beloved sources for Scottish stories were the novels and epic poems of Sir Walter Scott. This impact was felt particularly strongly in the realm of music, where composers in a variety of genres drew inspiration from Scott's writing. For instance, the German

composer Franz Schubert wrote songs with lyrics taken from several of Scott's works, including seven poems from Scott's epic poem *The Lady of the Lake*, and both the French composer Hector Berlioz and the German composer Carl Czerny wrote symphonic overtures inspired by Scott's stories. As for opera, the New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians counts nearly 100 19th-century operas inspired by Scott's writing, including Gioachino Rossini's *La Donna del Lago*, Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* and *Elizabetta al Castello di Kenilworth*, Vincenzo Bellini's *I Puritani*, and George Bizet's *La Jolie Fille de Perth*. Perhaps the oddest example of an opera based on Scott's novels was a Parisian pastiche of *Ivanhoe*, stitched together from pieces of Rossini's operas without the composer's permission. For his part, Scott found this last adaptation, at least, to be far from ideal. The story was "greatly mangled," the author commented in a scathing critique, and "the dialogue [was] in great part nonsense."

Timeline

THE COMPOSITION OF *LUCIA DI LAMMERMOOR*



Gaetano Donizetti

1797

Gaetano Donizetti is born in Bergamo, a city in northern Italy. Although his family is poor, with six children to support and no money for music lessons, the boy's talents are soon evident, and he receives a scholarship to study music at the cathedral of Santa Maria Maggiore.

1811

The music school at Santa Maria Maggiore puts on their annual play, *Il piccolo compositore di musica* ("The Little Music Composer"). Donizetti, only 14 years old, is cast in the lead role. His part includes the lines: "I have a vast mind, a quick talent, and ready imagination. I am a thunderbolt at composing."

1815

Donizetti travels to Bologna to continue his studies at the Liceo Filarmonico, one of the top music schools in northern Italy. He will return to Bergamo two years later.

1819

Sir Walter Scott completes his novel *The Bride of Lammermoor* in April. The book is published in June, and it will soon become one of the most popular books of the 19th century.

1822

Donizetti, not quite 25 years old, is invited by the impresario Domenico Barbaja to Naples. Barbaja is one of the most important producers of opera in Italy, and Naples is the operatic capital of the southern part of the peninsula. (In northern Italy, the preeminent city for opera is Milan.) Donizetti will reside in Naples for the next 16 years.

1827

Donizetti signs a new contract with Barbaja, committing himself to composing four new operas per year for the Neapolitan theaters. The following year, he is appointed director of the royal theaters of Naples, a position with considerable power and prestige. His Neapolitan obligations constitute a full-time job, yet Donizetti continues to write operas for the other major opera houses in Italy, as well.

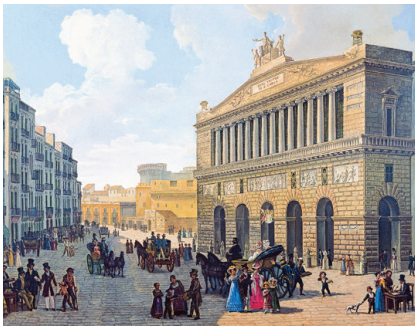


Sir Walter Scott
SCOTTISH NATIONAL GALLERY





Anne Boleyn
NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY



The Teatro di San Carlo in Naples in 1830



Fanny Tacchinardi Persiani as Lucia in the
London premiere in 1838

1830

Anna Bolena, Donizetti's opera about the doomed English queen Anne Boleyn, premieres in Milan. The opera is a tremendous hit, and when it is performed in Paris and London, it gives Donizetti his first taste of international fame.

1835

At the end of May, Donizetti writes to the Neapolitan theatrical censors asking them to approve an opera based on Scott's *The Bride of Lammermoor*. Donizetti completes the opera on July 6; from beginning to end, he has composed the work in fewer than six weeks, and he is eager to bring the new opera to the stage. Unfortunately, the Teatro di San Carlo is on the verge of bankruptcy. The soprano cast as Lucia threatens to go on strike until the singers are paid, and rehearsals for the new opera do not begin until the middle of August. After this bumpy beginning, *Lucia di Lammermoor* finally premieres on September 26. It is an instant hit.

This same year, Donizetti receives his first commission to write an opera for a theater outside Italy. In fact, the commission, for the Théâtre-Italien in Paris, comes from none other than Gioachino Rossini, one of the most famous composers in the world.

1837

Lucia di Lammermoor premieres in Paris, its first performance outside of Italy. The following year, it is performed in London. By the end of the decade, the opera will have been performed to thunderous acclaim on four continents.

1838

Following the tragic death of his wife and a series of disappointing professional setbacks in Italy, Donizetti moves to Paris. Nevertheless, his popularity in Italy continues to grow. Between 1838 and 1848, one out of every four operas performed in Italy is by Donizetti.

1841

On December 28, *Lucia di Lammermoor* is performed for the first time in the United States, in New Orleans; this first American performance is sung in a French translation. Two months later, on March 1, 1842, it is performed again in New Orleans, this time in Italian.



Bergamo, Italy
BBAACEHKO/WIKICOMMONS



Color lithograph of Vienna, 1900
LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, PRINTS AND PHOTOGRAPHS
DIVISION, PHOTOCHROM PRINTS COLLECTION



Luisa Tetrazzini in the title role of *Lucia di Lammermoor* in 1911 at the Met
MET OPERA ARCHIVES

1842

After living in Paris for four years, Donizetti is offered a position as music director at the court of Vienna. He is thrilled by the offer, which is wildly prestigious, comes with an enormous salary, and involves (as Donizetti himself will boast) “doing nothing.” Yet Donizetti is far from idle. He splits his residence between Vienna and Paris, makes regular voyages to Italy, and continues composing operas at a tremendous rate.

1846

Suffering from the illness that will ultimately end his life, Donizetti is confined to a hospital outside of Paris. The following year, his doctors will grant his request to be sent back to Bergamo.

1848

Donizetti dies in Bergamo on April 8. Despite Donizetti’s fame, the news of his death is overshadowed by a political uprising against the Austrians who rule northern Italy. He is buried in a local cemetery, but in 1875, his remains will be moved to Bergamo’s cathedral of Santa Maria Maggiore.

1883

On October 23, the Metropolitan Opera celebrates its grand opening. The very next night, the Met performs *Lucia di Lammermoor*. The opera has remained a beloved staple of the Met’s repertoire ever since.

FUN FACT

For almost two centuries, *Lucia di Lammermoor* has been an enduring staple of popular culture. In both Gustave Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* (1857) and Leo Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina* (1875–77), for instance, the heroines attend performances of Donizetti’s masterwork. In Howard Hawks’s 1932 movie *Scarface*, the titular gangster whistles a tune from *Lucia* before murdering his victims; the same tune is used as a mob boss’s ringtone in *The Departed* (2006). In Season 5 of *Law and Order: Criminal Intent*, a soprano goes onstage to sing *Lucia*’s famous mad scene only minutes after committing murder. And, in a more comic vein, excerpts from the opera have been featured in Laurel and Hardy’s *Squareheads of the Round Table*, the Bugs Bunny short *Long-Haired Hare*, and the 1946 cartoon *The Whale Who Wanted to Sing at the Met*.

Deep Dive

LOVE IN THE TIME OF HYSTERIA

By the time *Lucia di Lammermoor* premiered in 1835, mad scenes had been a staple of the operatic repertoire for more than 200 years. Some characters were driven mad by magic spells. Some were driven mad by the pain of unrequited love, the death of a lover, or love otherwise denied. During the bel canto era especially, women were typically driven mad “by grief”—a poetic designation, to be sure, but not a particularly satisfying psychological diagnosis. Lucia’s madness was different. As the scholar Mark A. Pottinger has demonstrated, a 19th-century viewer would have instantly diagnosed Lucia as a hysteric.

Since antiquity, the term “hysteria” has been applied to a wide variety of both physical and emotional ailments. What all these ailments have in common, however, was that they were diagnosed as hysteria only when they affected women. The word “hysteria” comes from the ancient Greek “hystera,” meaning “uterus,” and it was believed that the symptoms collected under hysteria’s umbrella were all caused by a misbehaving reproductive system. In some cases, the term was used to describe truly gynecological conditions, such as difficult labor or anemia associated with heavy menstruation. In other cases, the connection between a patient’s uterus and their disease was tenuous at best, and some notions—like the idea that a uterus could migrate throughout the body, causing a variety of medical complaints—are

understood by modern medicine to be entirely false.

By the early 19th century, “hysteria” had coalesced into a distinct set of physical and emotional symptoms, including shortness of breath, fever, and hallucinations, as well as sharp mood swings, anger, melancholy, and grief. Numerous medical treatises were published outlining hysteria’s causes and possible treatments, and large hospital wards were dedicated to “hysterical” women. Crucially, the various expressions of the disease were well known to the public at large, and audiences would have recognized Lucia’s symptoms—including her visions of the ghost in the fountain, her terror at her brother’s abuse, her confusion during her wedding to Arturo, and the homicidal rage and ecstatic hallucinations that follow—as the hallmarks of hysteria as it was understood in the 19th century.

Examining Lucia’s story through the lens of 19th-century medical thought offers a more complete understanding of the young woman’s tragic demise. At the same time, we may want to consider how Lucia’s symptoms would be understood today. Is she suffering from schizophrenia? Depression? The ongoing effects of her brother’s gaslighting and abuse? Similarly, we might ask ourselves how Lucia’s madness would manifest if the opera were set in the 21st century. What dramatic choices might a director make to reflect modern understandings of psychology? And, finally, does Lucia’s madness reflect a diagnosable form of mental illness, or might there be more sinister forces at play?



An 1893 picture depicting a woman with hysteria

CRITICAL INQUIRY

If you were Lucia’s therapist, what steps might you suggest she take to improve her mental health?



Active Exploration

The following activities will help familiarize your students with the plot of *Lucia di Lammermoor*, forge connections between a variety of classroom subjects, and encourage creative responses to the opera. They are designed to be accessible to a wide array of ages and experience levels.

LEGEND HAS IT ...

Invite your students to brainstorm some urban legends or myths they know. Ask them to embellish this story however they'd like, and then invite them to create a piece of art, music, or poetry inspired by their urban legend.

IT'S ALL MADNESS

To learn more about Lucia's descent into madness—and to identify what does (or doesn't) make the mad scene in *Lucia di Lammermoor* unique—introduce your students to a variety of mad scenes from other prominent works of literature and theater. Then, invite students to select a story, costuming, and instrumentation to create their own mad scenes.

ONE SONG, SIX VOICES

Teach students to sing the melodies of the famous sextet "Chi mi frena in tal momento" from Act II of *Lucia di Lammermoor*, and then invite them to perform it on Flipgrid as their favorite character from Donizetti's opera. (For tips on how to help students construct a six-part virtual ensemble, see the Google Classroom.)

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LUCIA DI LAMMERMOOR PRODUCTION PHOTOS: KEN HOWARD / MET OPERA



FUN FACT

Ludwig van Beethoven (above) considered writing an opera based on Sir Walter Scott's novel *Kenilworth*, but it never came to fruition.

COMMON CORE CONNECTIONS

These activities directly support the following ELA-Literacy Common Core Strands:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.7.9

Compare and contrast a fictional portrayal of a time, place, or character and a historical account of the same period as a means of understanding how authors of fiction use or alter history.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.6.11b

Recognize and illustrate social, historical, and cultural features in the presentation of literary texts.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.2

Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions