

**FROM LUCY TO LUCIA: WALTER SCOTT'S *THE BRIDE OF LAMMERMOOR* AS ADAPTED BY DONIZETTI**

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**ABSTRACT:** *The paper explores the treatment of major female characters in three versions of the narratives most famously known as Sir Walter Scott's *The Bride of Lammermoor*: the original incident on which the novel was based, the novel itself, and the opera, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, composed by Gaetano Donizetti. Because of the popularity of Donizetti's opera, a female character, Lucia, and Lucy in the novel version, is considered a central character in both narratives. However, the novel's plot focuses on the male protagonist, Edgar Ravenswood, and his revenge story. In a novel with remarkably few female characters, it is striking that Lady Ashton; holds arguably, the most power in the narratives, contrasting starkly with Lucy's relative feebleness. Through an examination of the respective narratives' different though intersecting treatments of women's desire, power, and madness, I argue that the opera's Lucia gains a different kind of power through Lady Ashton's madness.*

**KEYWORDS:** Walter scott, the bride of lammermoor, donizetti, madness, women's power

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**INTRODUCTION**

Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832), the Scottish author was one of the most famous writers of his day, and his literary works were popular all over Europe. His novel *The Bride of Lammermoor*, was published in 1819, and it quickly became one of his most highly regarded and popular novels during the nineteenth century. It was such a success that it spawned various theatrical and operatic adaptations one year after the novel was published, most famous of these was the opera, *Lucia di Lammermoor* by the composer Gaetano Donizetti (1797-1848), and the librettist Salvatore Cammarano. *Lucia* is still regularly performed all over the world and attracts large audiences. On the other hand, the popularity of Scott's novel did not last long. Why is this the case? How was the opera dramatised from Scott's novel and what sort of contents were extracted from it?

The original novel's story was based on an actual incident that Scott had heard from his great aunt Margaret Swinton. Scott narrated his story as it were a historical fact and blended the actual incident into his novel. There are several elements in the original novel that are absent from the actual incident and the opera.

This paper will focus on elements from the original novel that differentiate it from the contents of the opera and the actual incident, especially with regard to examining women's madness and desire. Among the three versions, one major difference is their main female characters. The original's protagonist based on the actual incident is a feeble female, however, the opera's prima donna has a strong presence. These

seemingly opposing characteristics would come to the attention of another female character in the original.

### **The Narratives: The Actual Incident and the Historical Novel**

Sir Walter Scott's *The Bride of Lammermoor* is set in the Lammermuir Hills of south-east Scotland, the novel retells a historical romance—a tragic love affair between young Lucy Ashton and her family's enemy, Edgar Ravenswood.

The two fall in love, but because of the relentless pressuring of her family, Lucy is forced to give up her engagement to Edgar and marry the man her family has chosen for her, David Dunbar. This state of affairs drives her insane, causing her to stab David after the wedding ceremony. Lucy succumbs to her wounds without regaining consciousness. Donizetti's opera also follows this outline.

According to Scott's introduction to the novel (the 'Magnum' edition of 1830), the author's story was inspired by an actual event that he had heard from his aunt. The model for Lucy Ashton was Janet Dalrymple, the daughter of a Scottish nobleman, James Dalrymple, 1<sup>st</sup> Viscount of Stair and his wife Margaret Ross of Balniel. Janet was madly in love with Archibald, the third Lord Rutherford (the model for Edgar Ravenswood), and she was secretly pledged to marry him.

Janet's mother, Margaret, discovered their engagement but insisted that her daughter should continue the match with Dunbar, who was favoured by her family. After initially threatening to refuse the proposal, Janet finally bowed to her parent's pressure and agreed to marry him. Scott writes about it as follows:

She [Janet's mother] particularly insisted on the Levitical law, which declares, that a woman shall be free of a vow which her parents dissent from. (Scott, 3)

While she insisted on these topics, the Lord Rutherford in vain conjured to declare her own opinion and feelings. She was totally overwhelmed by her mother, 'pale and motionless as a statue' (ibid.). Finally she bows to her mother's pressure to marry Dunbar, returned to her lover the piece of broken gold, which was the emblem of her troth. Rutherford burst into a tremendous passion on this and left the castle.

The broken-hearted bride finally married David Dunbar in a ceremony held on the 24<sup>th</sup> of August 1668. Soon after the couple had left the celebrations, during the wedding night, horrible screams were heard in the castle emanating from the bridal chamber. People ran to help and found the bridegroom Dunbar was stabbed and bleeding in a pool of his own blood on the threshold, with Janet crouching in a corner, her face wore a mad expression.

Janet died without regaining consciousness on the 12<sup>th</sup> of September 1669. David Dunbar recovered from his wounds. However, he did not live for long after the incident, meeting with a fatal injury after he fell from his horse, he died on the 28<sup>th</sup> of March 1682. Rutherford went abroad and never returned, dying in 1685.

Scott's novel follows this actual incident in a general sense, while the actual incident was said to have occurred sometime in the period between the end of the 1660s and 1685, Scott's novel is set in the period surrounding the Glorious Revolution of 1688 up until the 1707 Act of Union between England and Scotland.

Owing to this change of time period, the novel turns a tale of tragic love between a young couple into a story of tragedy involving families embroiled in a political power struggle. Donizetti's opera, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, follows Scott's plot closely, it describes the forbidden love of Lucia (Lucy), a daughter of the Ashton family and a young master, Edgardo (Edgar), who belongs to the Ravenswood family. Lucia is forced to make an undesirable marriage with Arturo Bucklaw for political reasons and goes mad, stabbing the bridegroom. 'Women's escape from the bondage of femininity into an empowering and violent madness was a popular theme in the nineteenth-century romantic opera. . .' (Showalter, 14)

This kind of madness' scene was very popular, and its focus remained on—Lucia. However, Scott's novel chooses to focus on Ravenswood's revenge story rather than Lucy's madness.

### ***The Bride of Lammermoor as a Tale of Revenge***

As Gottlieb has pointed out, *The Bride of Lammermoor* opens with the funeral of Ravenswood and concludes at the tomb of his son, Edgar (Gottlieb, 107). The story thus seems to revolve around the tragic fate of the Ravenswoods.

In Scott's novel, the ancient Ravenswood castle occupies a pass between Berwickshire and the Lothians, has played a conspicuous part both in times of internal discord and in times of foreign war before the seventeenth century. His estates were purchased by Sir William Ashton, the Lord Keeper. While the Ravenswoods have traditionally aligned themselves with Toryism, the Ashtons are a nouveau riche family who have aligned themselves with the more progressive Whig party, prospering in the aftermath of the Glorious Revolution in 1688. They then win the Ravenswood's estates through skilled lawyering. After numerous quarrels with his powerful adversary, Lord Ravenswood dies, a death that seems to have been hastened by his lengthy legal bid to recover his hereditary estate, his empty title is passed down to his son Edgar, commonly known as 'The master of Ravenswood'. Nothing is left of the old family estates except a solitary and ruinous tower on Wolf's Crag, a cliff overhanging the German Ocean, and an old faithful steward named Caleb Balderstone.

Sir William Ashton had gained possession of the Ravenswood estates unjustly, 'owing to his influence with the judges, as well as his superior knowledge of the law' (Boardman, 19). The wealth and possessions are that 'he would never have gained by force of arms' (Hollingworth, 96). Boardman describes Edgar's father's funeral as follows.

The Presbyterian church-judicatory of the bounds, considering the ceremony as a bravading insult upon their authority, had applied to the Lord Keeper, as the nearest privy-councillor, for a warrant to prevent its being carried into effect; so

that, when the clergyman had opened his prayer-book, an officer of the law, supported by some armed men, commanded him to be silent. An insult, which fired the whole assembly with indignation, was particularly and instantly resented by the only son of the deceased, Edgar, popularly called the Master of Ravenswood . . . (Scott, 32)

And at the end of the funeral, Edgar gave a speech in front of the crowd, saying ‘. . . Heaven do as much to me and more, if I requite not to this man and his house the ruin and disgrace he has brought on me and mine!’ (Scott, 33) which sounds his confession of ‘vengeance on Sir William Ashton and his family’ (Boardman, 19). Right from its beginning, the story tells of the discord between the Ashtons and the Ravenswoods, and in addition to that, makes suggestion about Edgar Ravenswood’s revenge.

Edgar allows his kinsman, the Marquis of A—, to send him overseas on a mysterious political mission, which is ‘presumably an early Jacobite plot’ (Gottlieb, 105) because the Jacobites were conspiring with Louis XIV in those days. Edgar himself also goes overseas, probably to France.

The times are not stable. As Ashton takes precautions against a possible resurgence of Jacobitism and Toryism, he encourages the affection between his daughter and Edgar, because it is ‘in the nature of an insurance policy for the estate’. (Hollingworth, 96). The Ashtons plan to gain respectability and political power by encouraging the match between their daughter Lucy and Edgar Ravenswood. When Edgar returns to Scotland, ‘the ephemeral Tory ascendancy that had temporarily empowered Marquis has passed’ (Gottlieb, 105).

Soon after this, Lucy signs a marriage contract with Bucklaw after being pressured by her manipulative mother, Lady Ashton. The story, thus, develops several intricate subplots: Edgar’s plans to restore the house of Stewart, Lucy’s wish to reconcile the Ashtons with the Ravenswoods, William Ashton’s desire to avoid the ejection by bringing Edgar over to his side, thus taking advantage of Lucy’s innocent love and Lady Ashton’s manipulation, which destroys everything.

### **Legend and Madness**

A tragic destiny envelops the Ravenswoods, as the inevitabilities of history, whose legends attach themselves to Edgar, decide his destiny. One is about old Sir Malise Ravenswood, his ancestor, who bore a strong resemblance to Edgar. Malise was believed to have uttered the family motto ‘I bide my time’ when he killed a hostile lord who had forcibly deprived him of his estates. Another legend is about the Mermaiden’s Well, which is an important place where Lucy and Edgar swore their love. However, at the same time, this is the ominous spot to which Edgar carried Lucy who had fainted with fright after her father William and she were pursued by a bull, which would probably have killed them. Edgar had shot it. According to his family’s tradition, one of the Lords of Ravenswood had long before, been accustomed to having secret meetings with a nymph at this Mermaiden’s Well, these meetings eventually bore tragic results. As Nicola Halmi points out that Lucy is explicitly identified with the fountain nymph Naiad whose love for an earlier laird of Ravenswood proved fatal (Halmi, par. 8)

Therefore, Edgar's ancestor's secret love with the nymph shares a close relationship to Edgar's own love for Lucy and the predictable legend acts like a dark shadow.

As they rose to leave the fountain, an arrow flew over their heads, and struck a raven perched on a branch above them. The bird falls dead at Lucy's feet, and when young Henry Ashton, Lucy's brother who had shot the arrow, comes up to them, Ravenswood tells him that all ravens are considered to be under the protection of his family and that to kill one in their presence is a sign of ill-luck.

In Donizetti's opera, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, the Mermaiden's Well is also an important place where Lucia confesses her love for Edgardo and her fear of the legend of the well. This legend seems to foreshadow Lucia's madness, as Halmi comments:

When Lucia enters the hall of the wedding feast in her blood-stained white gown, the flute (or glass harmonica, the instrument for which Donizetti originally wrote the part) plays a distorted version of the melody of *Regnava nel silenzio*, with which Lucia reported to Alisa her frightening vision at the fountain in Act 1, Scene 2. (Halmi, par. 12)

Thus, the Ravenswoods's inauspicious legends correspond with Lucia's current situation both in the opera and the novel.

These two females'—Lucia in the opera and Lucy in the original story—madnesses appear to be identical but, at the same time different. Lucy is tormented by disappointment after she signs the marriage contract, she feels a deep feeling of hopelessness towards the wedding with Bucklaw. After she stabs her bridegroom, she loses her ability to speak completely and her madness is then passed over, in silence, as being an absence of reason.

Here they found the unfortunate girl, seated, or rather couched like a hare upon its form—her head—gear dishevelled; her night-clothes torn and dabbled with blood,—her eyes glazed, and her features convulsed into a wild paroxysm of insanity. When she saw herself discovered, she gibbered, made mouths, and pointed at them with her bloody fingers, with the frantic gestures of an exulting demoniac. (Scott, 337-8)

As Halmi points out, 'more importantly the perpetrator is silent' (Halmi, par. 5), she makes gestures but is not able to utter a single word coherently. On the other hand, the opera's Lucia cannot remain silent. Lucia's madness 'is consists in her creation of subjective reality (her wedding to Edgardo) that is consistent in itself—and more particularly, consistent with her desire. . . .' (Halmi, par. 10).

Catherine Clément referred to Donizetti's Lucia and Bellini's Elvira, two madwomen that 'while their coloratura passages frolic in the intoxicated happiness of song, their words are still there, along with their senses, which they have not lost' (Clément, 88). Lucia's madness is a process of self-release and her voice gives her an overwhelming presence.



## CONCLUSION

Hollingworth stated that ‘parallels with Shakespearean tragedy are almost inevitable in discussing *The Bride of Lammermoor*’ (Hollingworth, 95). The plot is suggestive of *Romeo and Juliet*. The two young people fall in love, however, because they belong to antagonistic families, their love is doomed and causes their mutual destruction. The narrative features a moody and tormented young man who is ‘presented in the literary mode of *Hamlet*’ (Klein, 1019) a man who feels disenfranchised by his father’s political allegiance and subsequent downfall. Hollingworth again points out ‘The melancholy Master of Ravenswood, dressed in black, is a potent reminder of *Hamlet*’ (Hollingworth, 95). Critic Lee Edwards states ‘we can imagine Hamlet’s story without Ophelia, but Ophelia literally has no story without Hamlet’ (Edwards, 36). When we look at *The Bride of Lammermoor* from this angle, we can imagine Edgar’s story without Lucy, but Lucy has no story without Edgar Ravenswood. After all, this story revolves around the revenge of the Ravenswoods.

As mentioned above, Lucia in Donizetti’s opera becomes insane because of her desire, however, Lucy in Scott’s original novel, goes mad because she lost what she had long desired. As Merryn Williams points out, ‘some (*The Bride of Lammermoor*) are built around a woman’s weakness’ (Williams, 54). This may be the case because Lucy is treated as a victim who is caught up in a power struggle. However, there is another woman who does not appear in Donizetti’s *Lucia*. She is Lady Ashton herself, ‘manipulative mother’ (Edwards, Gavin, 170). In contrast to Lucy’s case, when we consider Lady Ashton, this story is not built around a woman’s weakness. Rather, her strong desire and pursuit of wealth and social status comes to the forefront and shows us an extremely strong womanliness.

In Scott’s story, the male characters are summarily dispatched. For example, William Ashton’s eldest son, Colonel Douglas ‘was slain in a duel in Flanders’ and Henry, his younger son, dies unmarried. Ravenswood’s manservant Caleb and all of his relatives also disappear without explanation. Only Lady Ashton lives to a ripe old age. Scott wrote about her as follows: ‘Lady Ashton lived to the verge of extreme old age, the only survivor of the group of unhappy person, whose misfortunes were owing to her implacability’ (Scott, 348). Opening with a male character’s funeral and concluding with a tomb, the novel leaves readers with the sense of a female’s overwhelming evil presence.

Jerome Mitchell mentioned that Lady Ashton does not appear in the opera. He states, ‘since her haughty personality completely dominates the main course of events in Scott’s story, this one omission by Cammarano results in the opera differing very markedly in complexion from the novel’ (Mitchell, 6). Lady Ashton’s demonic power is, instead, adopted into Lucia’s madness with sense, Enrico, Lucia’s older brother, partly takes on Lady Ashton’s role from the novel. Therefore, it can be said that both in Scott’s novel and Donizetti’s opera provide strong descriptions of female characters whose madness is based on their desire.

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