

## ‘Ghost Writing’

### An Exploration of Presence and Absence in *Lucia di Lammermoor*

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#### Introduction

When Salvatore Cammarano was adapting Walter Scott’s *The Bride of Lammermoor* (1819) for Donizetti’s new opera *Lucia di Lammermoor* in 1835, the librettist altered the novel in a number of ways.<sup>1</sup> For example, minor protagonists such as Caleb Balderston (Edgar Ravenswood’s faithful servant), Ailsie Gourlay (a witch all in but name) and Cragengelt (the Jacobite who challenges Edgar) were removed. Also, events and motivations associated with the heroine’s parents (Lord and Lady Ashton) and brothers (Sholto and Henry) were compressed into those of a single character, ‘Enrico Ashton’. However, the most striking alteration was the deletion of the villainess, Lady Ashton, who throughout the original novel is the prime mover in Lucy’s fatal story.

At one level, those subtractions may seem simply to fall within the usual realm of the adapter’s “surgical art” (Abbott 2002: 108), a supposedly inevitable process in media changes such as those from novel to opera which involve compression of the plot. However, the ‘absence’ of Lady Ashton on the stage in *Lucia di Lammermoor* is much more significant than that. For one thing, accounting for her absence invites us to explore more deeply the phenomenon of ‘opera-as-adaptation’ and the processes involved ‘Adaptation studies’ (as opposed to the related issues of ‘intertextuality’) are relatively underdeveloped, especially in musicology.<sup>2</sup> This is not the place to adumbrate a full theory of adaptation in opera, but a few observations may help to place the observations in this article into some kind of wider context.

At first glance Donizetti’s opera may seem simply to be a case of what we might call ‘scale adaptation’ - a précis of the novel that involves a selective shortening of the action without significant changes of motivation and consequence. However, when scale changes (by reduction or expansion)

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<sup>1</sup>The libretto was first published as: (Cammarano 1835).

<sup>2</sup>Recent general work in the field includes: (Sanders 2005); (Hutcheon 2006/2012); (MacArthur, Wilkinson, and Zaiontz 2009); and (Bruhn, Gjelsvik, and Hanssen, 2013).

are accompanied by genre or medium changes the adaptations are never simple. That is because different media favour certain types of vivid presentation and eschew others, and although various subplots are erased in Donizetti's opera when compared with the novel, other events come into their own. In Walter Scott's version, for example, Lucy's famous mad scene is over in two or three pages (Scott 1819/1991: 337-339) and takes up a couple of minutes of the reader's time, whereas in the opera it can last twenty minutes or more (as it does in versions recordings by Joan Sutherland and Maria Callas, for example) – and this in spite of the fact that it takes much longer to read the 350-page novel than it does to listen to the opera. Different media offer different kinds of access to elements of essentially the same story, and a performance art such as opera provides the chance for musical sounds, action and staging to make many kinds of reference simultaneously. Moreover, performance, through the use of a human agent (the performer), also provides a very concrete route by which to empathise with a character and participate in his or her emotions – not just to acquaint ourselves with them by description as it were. This means that the kinds of scenes that take on a symbolic or iconic status within the plot will differ according to the medium, irrespective of the process of compression or expansion that takes place in the transfer from one genre to another, or their functions within the overall needs of the plot. Therefore changes or conflation of characters, and alterations in the foregrounding of events (or even in the events themselves) do not mean that there is *ipso facto* a fundamental 'hermeneutic adaptation' or change of purpose (as there might be in the case of parody, for example) between the two media. We should be aware of thinking of the opera as perpetrating a completely different set of aims and consequences from the novel.<sup>3</sup>

Of course, the absence of Lady Ashton in the opera did not go unnoticed – at least by some British critics. For example, Henry Chorley wrote (1862: I, 157-158):

"Lucia" would generally be named as Donizetti's best opera. I am not able to share in the admiration it has excited. Never, assuredly, was a story so full of suggestion for music as Scott's "Bride of Lammermoor," tamed into such insipid nothingness, even by an Italian librettist, as this. The supernatural tone of the legend entirely taken away;—the dance on the bridal night, with its ghastly interruption, replaced by a sickly scene of madness, such as occur by scores in every southern serious opera;—the funeral, with its one superfluous mourner and unbidden guest, abolished, to make room for the long final scene so cherished by tenors;—the character of *Lady Ashton*, affording such admirable material for contrast, obliterated— here are so many injuries to one of the most moving tragic tales existing in any literature.—It would be a good deed to arrange Scott's novel anew—and anew to set it.

This criticism of Donizetti's opera at first seems right: Lady Ashton does not appear on stage in the opera, and indeed she is dead before it begins. However, in some studies of the opera, her removal by the librettist Cammarano has been justified as a positive act, one that lends a sharp focus to the action and thus allowing it "to concentrate on the love story between Edgar and Lucy" (Mitchell 1977: 144).

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<sup>3</sup> Linda Hutcheon's *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006/2012) based upon her exhaustive survey of examples from different media divides adaptation into the following three types: (1) forms seemingly faithful to the original but which prove to be either a "theoretical ideal" or a "practical impossibility" (e.g. translations/ transcriptions in music); (2) condensations and bowdlerisations; and (3) Continuum (retelling and revisions) (171). My (tentatively suggested) adaptation categories – scale, medium, genre, and hermeneutic – operate rather differently, and allow (I hope) for complex interactions and varied consequences.

Also, by providing that focus, some believe that that allowed Donizetti to bring about changes in “the dramatic and musical language of Italian opera” (Gossett 1985: [vii]). Those recent remarks seem to suggest that that we should view the opera as a drastic ‘hermeneutic adaptation’, one that changed the motivations and purposes of the novel and made the relationship between Lucy and her lover a new focus as though it had never been the central crucible of narrative interaction in the novel (even though it had).

In fact these two opposing views – one deploring the absence of Lady Ashton, the other welcoming it – may arise from a different kind of misunderstanding, the mistake of drawing too brutal a distinction between presence and absence in an opera that is, after all, pervaded by dark family histories (the plot has much in common with Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*), haunting melodies, and mysterious ghosts. This paper will discuss three aspects of presence and absence in relation to Donizetti’s opera: first, how they are negotiated in relation to Lady Ashton; second, how the ambiguity between them is vital for the portrayal of the ghosts in the plot; and third, how the operation of Lucy’s character relies on a complex mix of apparently absent but obliquely present attributes. It will soon become clear that presence and absence do not form a mutually exclusive dichotomy; rather there is inescapable interplay between the two. The operation of presence-through-absence offers a valuable hermeneutic window on causes and motivations in such literary, musical and dramatic works – and especially on those in Donizetti’s opera. In the end, this discussion will open up the possibility that the opera is not in fact a hermeneutic transformation of Scott’s novel. However, we should begin by trying to understand a little more clearly what Chorley was complaining about, and we shall begin with Lady Ashton’s role in the novel.

### The Presence and Absence of Lady Ashton in Scott’s Novel

In the novel, Lady Ashton is an imperious character with “strong powers and violent passions” (Scott 1819/1991: 29), but without much love or affection for her daughter Lucy.<sup>4</sup> Her family belongs to the powerful, land-owning Douglas clan that, in the past, had actually intermarried with the Ravenswood family. This initially makes her opposition to Lucy’s marriage to Edgar Ravenswood puzzling, but it emerges that there are three reasons it. First, in recent times there has been much enmity between the families and the Ashtons managed to dispossess the Ravenswoods of their land and castle. Second, the Ashtons, none-the-less, are short of money, and Lucy needs to make a ‘good match’ in financial terms, and Edgar cannot provide this because his family is now poor. And third, there is a rival suitor, Bucklaw, who is rich and owns lands in which there is a vacant seat for Parliament, and Lady Ashton wishes her favourite son Sholto to be able to take up that seat. These factors explain Lady Ashton’s

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<sup>4</sup> Appendix 1 summarises Lady Ashton’s appearances in the novel.

implacable opposition to the Lucy-Edgar marriage. She resorts to tampering with the correspondence between them, and when Edgar appears unannounced just after Lucy signs her marital contract with Bucklaw, it is Lady Ashton who tears the golden love-token from her daughter's neck, given to her by Edgar (Scott 1819/1991: 328). The scene is vividly depicted in a well-known painting by W. P. Frith (cf. Altick 1985: xviii).<sup>5</sup>

In the novel it is Lady Ashton who is portrayed as the prime mover in all the disasters that befall the families. Indeed, at the end of the book we are told: "Lady Ashton lived to the verge of extreme old age, the only survivor of the group of unhappy persons whose misfortunes were owing to her implacability" (Scott 1819/1991: 348). How could such a motivating female force be omitted from operatic and dramatic works based on Scott's novel? The answer, of course, is that she could not be entirely, and in fact several theatrical and operatic adaptations of Scott's novel do indeed retain Lady Ashton as a living character on the stage.

### Lady Ashton on the Stage

One example of this 'physical presence' approach can be seen in John Calcraft's stage-play adaptation, *The Bride of Lammermoor: A Drama* (1823) which starred the famous Scottish actress Harriet Siddons as Lucy. Lady Ashton accompanied her daughter in the action, though the balance of power between them was softened slightly compared with the novel – Lucy is strong enough to challenge her mother occasionally and in her mad frenzy even manages to make her mother feel remorse (Calcraft 1823: esp. 61; cf. White 1927: 76-79).<sup>6</sup> Some slightly later Continental dramatisations seem to have found the cruelty of Lady Ashton towards her own daughter rather difficult to accept and Victor Ducange's French version, *La Fiancée de Lammermoor* (1828), for example, made the Lady Ashton character the stepmother of Lucy, a move which tends to align the drama with the sentimentality and cruelty of a fairy story.<sup>7</sup>

By the time Donizetti and Cammarano were working on their *Lucia*, Scott's novel was well known to the Italians through a translation by Gaetana Barbieri (1824). They were also familiar with the plot through a stage play written by Ferdinando Livini (1828), although this was largely a translation from Ducange's French dramatization, portraying Lady Ashton as Lucy's 'matrigna' [evil stepmother].<sup>8</sup> Moreover, there were a number of musico-dramatic adaptations which pre-dated Donizetti's attempt (see: Appendix 2). Amongst them, I will focus upon Carafa/Balocchi's *Le nozze di Lammermoor*

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<sup>5</sup>For an anecdote concerning the forgery of this painting, see: (Frith 1887/2006: 158).

<sup>6</sup>For a history of dramatic adaptations of *The Bride of Lammermoor*, see: (Bolton 1992: 267-334).

<sup>7</sup>The drama was premiered at Porte Sainte Martin, Paris on 25 May 1828.

<sup>8</sup>Italy's reception of *The Bride of Lammermoor* does not seem to have been fully explored so far – it is rather regretful that Murray Pittock's anthology (2006) does not contain a dedicated chapter to the subject. Other translations into Italian prior to Donizetti's adaptation include: (C[ampiglio] 1828) and (Sormani 1829).

(1829). This is not only because Carafa's music for *Le nozze* survives in full but also because this work retains Lady Ashton as live character within the plot in keeping with the original novel.

Balocchi's libretto (1829) is perhaps one of the most faithful to Scott's original story. The major deviation occurs in the final scene where Lucia takes poison before proceeding to the forced marriage, rather than stabbing her bridegroom and going insane (Act II, Scene 17) (Balocchi 1829: 54). Lady Ashton's formidable presence is clearly portrayed and the composer Carafa gives this contralto several important numbers. These include: (1) a grandiose entrance aria accompanied with the chorus, "Fu dei prodi all' alta gloria" (Act I, Scene 15); (2) a duet with Lord Ashton comparable in length and importance to that between Lucia and Edgardo, "Tu vuoi che di mia vita" (I, 17); and (3) another duet with Lucia "D'aspro destin fremente" (II, 12). Of particular interest is the duet with Lucia where each character pours out not only her public frustrations but also her private reflections. Lucia reveals her inner determination to remain faithful to Edgardo while pretending to succumb to her mother's manipulations, and Lady Ashton celebrates her victory, offering at the same time caring words of support to Lucia. Interestingly, in this opera by Carafa Lady Ashton is not particularly 'evil'<sup>9</sup> – in fact she is quite maternal. She simply believes that her plan is best for her "amata figlia" (beloved daughter), and in the duet with Lucia just mentioned, repeatedly sings to Lucia "in the end you will be grateful for my tender zeal"<sup>10</sup> (Balocchi 1829: 46). Her music conforms to, and reinforces, this characterisation. In that duet, for example, her florid passages interfere obsessively with her daughter's lyrical melodic contours but remain harmonious, and at times completely united with them.

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<sup>9</sup> For the musical portrayal of evil characters see: (Bernhart 2009).

<sup>10</sup> "Grata/al mio tenero zelo/ sarai".

Lucia  
s'ap pres - sa il reo, il reo mo - men to, Più scam - po\_a me, a me non

Lady Ashton  
e vin - to il reo ci - mem - to, a me do - cil s'ar - ren - de, s'ap - pres - sa il bel mo - men - to Fia pa - go il mio de

re - sta, Ah che mo - rir, mo - rir, mi - se - to non reg -

sir è vin - to il reo ci - men - to a me do - cil s'ar - ren - de, s'ap - pres - sa il bel mo

go al mio mar - tir, non reg - go al mio mar - tir, non reg - go al mio mar - tir.

men - to, fia pa - go il mio de - sir, fia pa - go il mio de - sir, fia pa - go il mio de - sir.

*Musical Example 1: Michele Cafara, Le nozze di Lammermoor (Act II, Scene 12).*

In the premiere of the opera, the mother and the daughter were played by the contralto Rosmonda Pisaroni (1793-1872) and the soprano Henriette Sontag (1806-1854) respectively. Pisaroni was noted not only for her magnificent vocal techniques but also for her unattractive physical appearance<sup>11</sup> – it is certain that her portrayal of Lady Ashton left a lasting impression, particularly since she was placed

<sup>11</sup> See, for a 19<sup>th</sup>-century comment upon her appearance: (Rosselli 1995: 68).

alongside Sontag, a known beauty. That strong visual contrast seems to have contributed a type of dramaturgical counterweight to the harmonious emotions between them.

Other solutions to retaining Lady Ashton's causal role were of course possible. For example, her governing wishes could be made known and conveyed by others, or her views could be attributed to other characters, or her responsibility for the downfall of Lucy and Edgar could be diluted by a range of other causes and reasons. What is interesting is that all of these various examples of presence-through-absence were already embedded in the novel since Lady Ashton spends a good deal of the time away from the action on business in London and Edinburgh (Scott 1819/1991: Chapters XV-XXI). The remarks of Chorley and others in fact make the mistake of assuming that, in contrast to the Donizetti opera, the presence of Lady Ashton in Walter Scott's novel, and her role as the prime mover of events, is unambiguous and exclusive. An obvious demonstration that this is not true is that, during her long absences, similar views to hers are asserted or conveyed by Lord Ashton, by the witch-like character Alice, by the Reverend Bide-the-bent, a Presbyterian clergyman (who becomes Raimondo in Donizetti's opera), and by Lucy's brothers. Not surprisingly, therefore, her presence is still felt in the Donizetti opera even though she is dead before its story begins, as we shall now discover.

### Lady Ashton off the Stage: Donizetti/Cammarano's opera

From his correspondence it seems that Donizetti himself chose the Lucia story for his new work.<sup>12</sup> Although it is not recorded how the composer and the librettist decided to eliminate the overt presence of Lady Ashton, Cammarano admits in the preface to the first published libretto that, although he is indebted to Walter Scott for the setting and general plot of *the Bride of Lammermoor*, he did not simply follow the novel but boldly changed the story by removing some important characters as well as altering the circumstances in which Edgar dies (Cammarano 1835: 3).<sup>13</sup> His argument was that he wanted to give the story its own "forma drammatica (dramatic form)", but his motivations and literary decisions seem to have had more complex consequences than that singular agenda might suggest.

After all, Lady Ashton as a motivational force does survive in the opera not only in the sense that her dynastic views act as a prohibition on the behaviour of Lucy, but also because her recent death and her implied importance to Lucy are significantly invoked as reasons for her daughter's

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<sup>12</sup> See: Donizetti's letter to Antonio Santocelli dated 29 May 1835 (Zavadini 1948: 373-374).

<sup>13</sup> "*La promessa sposa di Lammermoor*, storico romanzo dell'Ariosto scozzese, mi parve subbietto più che altro acconcio per le scene, : però non deggio tacere , che nel dargli la forma drammatica, sotto di cui oso presentarlo, mi si opposero non pochi ostacoli, per superare i quali fu mestieri allontanarmi più che non pensava dalle tracce di Walter-Scott. Spero quindi, che l'aver tolto dal novero de' miei personaggi taluno, di quelli che pur sono fra i principali del romanzo, e la morte del Sere di Rayenswood diversamente da me condotta (per tacere di altre men.rivelanti modificazioni ) spero che tutto questo non mi venga imputato come a stolta temerità; avendomi soltanto a ciò indotto i limiti troppo angusti delle severe leggi drammatiche".

melancholic mood and erratic behaviour. This supposed quality of their relationship is suggested in many ways. In the opening scene, for example, Normanno – the captain of the guard for the Ashton family – explains that she had recently been walking along a “lonely path in the park where her mother is buried” (Part I, Act I, Scene 2) (Cammarano 1835: 6).<sup>14</sup> Moreover, when Enrico attempts to justify to Arturo the unhappy paleness of Lucia who is about to sign the marriage contract, he exclaims “la madre estinta” (deceased mother) which initiates some sombre processional music that gives the cue for Lucia’s entrance in despair (Part II, Act I, Scene 4) (Cammarano 1835: 21). Furthermore the music pre-echoes that which introduces Lucia’s mad scene later in the opera, and suggests that her relationship with her mother was (at least subliminally) a factor in her collapse into insanity.

Andante

Henry

Pian - ge la ma dre e - stin - ta! Ec-co il tuo spo - so.

*fp*

*Musical Example 2: Enrico’s phrase “Madre estinta!” and the subsequent processional music from Gaetano Donizetti, Lucia di Lammermoor (Part II, Act I, Scene 4)<sup>15</sup>*

Donizetti made Enrico repeat the phrase “madre estinta” twice to emphasise its importance, even though the words occur only once in the libretto.

It is also significant that it is implied that Lady Ashton’s standards and values are important to Lucy. When the priest Raimondo wants to persuade Lucia to yield to her brother’s order to marry Arturo (who is equivalent to Bucklaw in the novel), he alludes to her mother in a way that he believes will have an effect on Lucia’s self respect and sense of duty. He says: “otherwise because of you, your dead mother will tremble with horror in her grave”<sup>16</sup> (Part II, Act I, Scene 3) (Cammarano 1835: 19). The music in this scene consists of a subtle but persistent staccato triplet-figure on the strings – a kind of palpitation as if to represent emotional disturbance and perhaps the evocation of some unsettled, ominous spirit.

<sup>14</sup> “Ella sen gia cola del parco/ Nel solingo vial, dove la madre/ Giace sepolta”. This paper follows the original scene division as found in (Cammarano 1835). When setting the text to music, Donizetti altered some portion of Cammarano’s work (for this, see: Black 1984:235-237), but the phrases I discuss in this paper found their way into the music.

<sup>15</sup> For all the musical examples in this paper taken from Donizetti’s *Lucia*, I have consulted Donizetti’s autograph (I-Bgc, Cassa forte 6/12) and a mid-19<sup>th</sup>-century neat copy of the work which seems to be related to the premiere (I-Nc, Segnatura 26.5.20-21). It should be noted that Donizetti originally composed two scenas for Lucia (“Regnava nel silenzio” and the mad scene) in keys semi-tone/one higher than in those now customarily sung. My musical examples are in the original keys.

<sup>16</sup> “O la madre, nell’ avello fremerà per te d’orror”.

Raimondo

O la ma- dre, o la ma- dre nell' a- vel - lo. fre- me - rà, fre- me-rà per te d'or-ror.

Vn I

Vn II

Vla

VC

CB

*Musical Example 3: Raimondo's reference to Lady Ashton (Donizetti, Lucia, II, I, 3)*

It seems, then, that in so far as the barriers to the love between Lucia and Edgardo are financial, dynastic and worldly, then they find a presence in the opera through the continual evocation of the mother and the force of her attitudes. There are, however, other ingredients in the story that resist the Lucy-Edgar union – supernatural and psychological ones – which raise their own issues of presence and absence. We shall turn next to supernatural elements and their treatment in the opera.

### The Role of Ghosts

Donizetti's opera was not the first to feature ghosts since various kinds of apparition had appeared in works since at least Luigi Rossi's *Orfeo* of 1647.<sup>17</sup> However, although many of these earlier ghosts – including most famously the Commendatore in Mozart's *Don Giovanni* – had 'otherworldly qualities' (for example, they were pallid or white and walked awkwardly), they otherwise conversed and participated in the action like ordinary human beings. In other words, they were not gothic ghosts, and this new musical type presented Cammarano and Donizetti with some special problems. For example, how were they going to indicate their apparent presence and effect without giving them words to sing? And how were they going to suggest their effect on the mind of a real character without the benefit of describing specific actions or events perpetrated by the ghosts?

Lucia herself, from the moment she appears first on the stage, is actively preoccupied not by her deceased mother (who never appears as a ghost) but by a more sinister figure: a female ghost whom she encountered at a fountain in the castle garden of Lammermoor. As Lucia tells us in her first

<sup>17</sup> Rossi's *Orfeo*, based upon the libretto by Francesco Buti contains a scene where the ghost of Euridice haunts Aristeo (Act III, Scene 3). The opera was premiered in Paris.

entrance aria “Regnava nel silenzio” (Part I, Act I, Scene 4), the ghost is a girl who was murdered by an ancestor of Edgardo Ravenswood. This is a slight adaptation of the exact circumstance in the novel where the girl was not directly murdered by the ancestor, but rather, because she was an ‘other-worldly’ sprite, her detention after a certain hour by that ancestor led to her disappearance forever into the waters of the fountain which then turned blood red. As Walter Scott then tells us: thereafter “that spot was fatal to the Ravenswood family” and “to drink of the waters of the well, or even approach its brink” was “ominous” (Scott 1819/1991: 57-59).

This well was the very place where Lucia was holding her secret meetings with Edgardo, and she tells the story of the dead girl at her first entrance with the aria just mentioned. Donizetti faces several dilemmas here. He must give some initial indication of Lucia’s personality, but he must also outline the dark ‘curse’ on the place – and, by implication, the mysterious prohibition on the burgeoning relationship between Lucia and Edgardo. The result is somewhat odd, and has proved to be problematic in many performances.<sup>18</sup> Lucia is introduced by ethereal (or, perhaps, ‘heavenly’) music in the major key played on harp. This opening melody is related to that of the cabaletta “Quando rapito in estasi” which Lucia will sing later in the scene when, excited, she is about to see Edgardo.

4b: Incipit of Lucia's Cabaletta

4a: Lucia's entry music by the harp

<sup>18</sup> Many sopranos introduced into this ‘fountain scene’ a variety of replacement arias. In particular, at least by 1837 Fanny Tacchinardi-Persiani (who created the title role at the premiere) replaced “Regnava nel silenzio” with “Perchè non ho del vento” from the same composer’s *Rosmonda d’Inghilterra*. When the composer revised the opera for the Théâtre Renaissance in Paris in 1839, he officially sanctioned “Perchè...” with a French translation as the replacement of “Regnava...”. And Rosmonda’s aria found its way into the publication of *Lucie de Lammermoor*. See: (Poriss 2001: 2).

*Musical Example 4: (4a) Lucia's entry music by the harp compared to (4b) an incipit of her cabaletta "Quando rapito in estasi" (Donizetti, Lucia I, I, 4)*

The overall impression of both passages is in keeping with Scott's description of Lucia as "an angel descended on earth" (Scott 1819/1991: 195), though we shall return to Lucia's ambivalent character shortly. The recitative that she sings at her first entry then explains that she trembles at the sight of the fountain because of the past events that happened there. The music of the recitative is mildly unsettled (there are a couple of diminished chords), but contains no great vocal flourishes. We then reach the *Larghetto* section based on four, four-line stanzas of *settenari*. It is these four-line stanzas that the story of the girl and her ghost is unfolded. But the style is somewhat in the manner of a strophic ballad – objective and slightly matter-of-fact. There is no special effect or pause when Lucia describes the girl's "gemito" (groan) as she is dying; rather the whole has the air of an almost dream-like incantation as though dispassionately describing something comfortably familiar inside her head. There are two mini cadenzas, one as she describes the ghost at the "margine" (edge) of the pool (marked *presto* and *forte*), and another for the phrase "di sangue rosseggiò" (it became red with blood) (marked with a slight crescendo up from *piano*).

Of course, many performers do their best to turn these fleeting increases in intensity into histrionic displays, but those passing 'extremes' should be seen in the context of the whole narrative, thirty bars of which are marked *piano* out of a total of thirty six. In spite of the efforts of performers this narration is certainly not of the breathless, excitable, 'gothic horror' type.

Flute in the orchestra

**a**

Lucia

**1**

(1) Re - gna - va nel - si - len - zio (2) Al - ta la not - te e bru - na (3) Col - pia la fon - te un pal - li - do (4) Rag - gio - di - te - tra lu - na

**b**

**2**

(5) Quan - do un som - mes - so ge - mi - to (6) Fra l'au - re u - dir si fe' (7) Ed ec - co, ec - co su - quel mar - gi - ne.

(Coprendosi colle mani il volto)

**c**

**3**

(8) L'om - bra mo - strar - si, l'om - bra mo - strar - si a me, ah! (9) Qual di che par - la, muo - ver - si (10) Il lab - bro su - o ve - de a,

**c'**

**4**

(11) E con la ma - no e - sa - ni - me (12) Chia - mar - mi a sè - pa - re - a; (13) Stet - te un mo - men - to im - mo - bi - le, (14) Poi rat - ta di - le guò -

**a''**

(15) E l'on - da pria - si lim - pi - da (16) Di san - gue ros - seg giò, si pria si lim - pi da, di san - gue ros - seg

**Allegro**

giò, si pria si lim - pi - da, ah il ros - seg gio!

[Numbers in brackets indicates: poetic lines; boxed numbers: stanzas; and boxed alphabet letters: Musical structure.]

### Musical Example 5: Lucia's ghost-story aria with its flute part (Donizetti, Lucia, I, I, 4)

On the other hand, Donizetti takes the trouble to underline the quiet presence of the ghost in two interesting ways. First, there is the ghostly, wordless ‘voice’ in the melodic line of the flute which sketchily shadows that of Lucia and links her to it – a device in a more persistent and haunting manner, he resurrects in the mad scene at the end of the opera.

*Musical Example 6: Lucia and her ghostly Doppelgänger (flute) in the mad scene (Donizetti, Lucia, II, II, 5)*

This is the section which culminates in the famous ‘flute cadenza’.<sup>19</sup> Alterations in the autograph score tell us that Donizetti originally wanted the glass harmonica to accompany Lucia’s mad utterance. That instrument was strongly associated with phantasmagoria, and popular entertainment in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Thomas 2012: 96), and its use would have underpinned for the audience Donizetti’s attempts to indicate the presence of something absent.

Also earlier in the mad scene it is again the flute which joins the singer in a fragmentary reminiscence of her last happy memory with Edgardo, which is symbolised musically by a recapture of their duet melody “Verranno a te” (Part I, Act I, Scene 5). It is this moment that is interrupted by Lucia’s frantic cry “that horrible ghost is rising up and driving us apart” (Part II, Act II, Scene 5) (Cammarano 1835: 32),<sup>20</sup> as she now openly admits to the presence of the ghost who attempts forcibly to separate them.

<sup>19</sup> For the origins and an early history of Lucia’s flute cadenza, see: (Matsumoto 2011).

<sup>20</sup> “Ahime!..sorge il tremendo/ Fantasma e ne separa!...”.

The "Verranno a te" theme (Part I, Act I, Scene 5)

Flute  
*pp legato*

Lucia  
Ve - ran - no a me sull' au - re i tuoi so - spi - ri ar - den - ti,

Edgardo  
Ve - ran - no a te sull' au - re i tuoi so - spi - ri ar - den - ti,

The "Verranno a te" theme interrupted by the appearance of the ghost (Part II, Act II, Scene 5)

Lucia  
10

Flute  
*p dolce*

Lucia  
mè! sor - ge il tre - men - do fan - ta - sma e ne se - pa - ra!

20

Musical Example 7: The 'Verranno a te' Theme and the appearance of the ghost

Aside from these melodic devices Donizetti has another method to give presence to the ghost in the quiet, ballade-like narration of Act I – the use of dynamics (Ex. 5 above). The cadenza that mentions the ghost at the edge of the pool *crescendos* up from *forte* thus giving it the greatest ‘sonic presence’ in the narrative and a much louder effect than the later cadenza that mentions the blood-red pool. Moreover, after the ‘ghost cadenza’ Donizetti inserts the only stage direction in this whole section:<sup>21</sup> Lucia “coprendosi colle mani il volto (hides her face in her hands)”, and the clear implication is that she is covering her eyes so as not to catch the very real presence of the ghostly girl.

It is interesting to note that this ghostly female spirit haunting Lucia and striving to separate her from Edgardo shares significant attributes with Lady Ashton and seems to elide with her motivations as a driving force in the opera. Curiously, also, in the novel Lady Ashton is sometimes described in ‘otherworldly’ terms: she is a “predominating spirit” (Scott 1819/1991: 164) and, upon her

<sup>21</sup> Since Cammarano put no stage direction for this aria in the libretto (See: 1835: 9-10), this indication (found in Donizetti’s autograph on f.32<sup>r</sup>) seems to have been Donizetti’s own idea.

unannounced return home, she is likened to an “apparition” and a “spectre” (Scott 1819/1991: 231). Thus, the identity of the ghost who haunts Lucia until her death, stands midway between representing the girl murdered by her ancestor and those aspects of Lady Ashton that haunt and thwart her dreams and desires in everyday life. Thus in Donizetti’s opera *Lady Ashton* is ‘present’ through ‘absence’, and this contributes to the eerie depth of the supposed love story, whose prevailing ‘Gothic’ aura is strongly present in the original romance despite Walter Scott’s rather critical attitude towards so-called ‘Gothic’ literature as such (Williams 1968: 84-93). What we should not do is to lay all the causes of misfortune in this story at the door of Lady Ashton or the ghostly, murdered girl. The ‘heavenly’ and ‘innocent’ Lucy herself has a hinterland of suggested ambiguity and culpability, where her complex attributes come into play and then fade with disconcerting effects.<sup>22</sup> Now is the point at which to examine those present-yet-absent attributes.

#### Lucy’s character

Even in the novel there are hints that Lucy herself may have played a role in bringing about her own downfall, especially in view of her insistent contacts with Edgar. In Chapter XX of the novel, a raven (obviously a symbol for the Ravenswood family) is killed and Lucy is covered with its blood (Scott 1819/1991: 209), suggesting that she will bring about Edgar’s demise. Furthermore, although Lucy is frequently described as sweet and angel-like, there are hints in the novel that she had a more complex character. At one point she is teased for having had often sat with “handsome young gentlemen ... twenty times” and had “a hundred sweethearts” (Scott 1819/1991: 210-211). We also learn that “under a semblance of extreme indifference”, Lucy “nourished the germ of those passions which sometimes spring up in one night... and astonish the observer by their unexpected ardour and intensity” (Scott 1819/1991: 42).

This inner strength is not so very far from that of her mother (some aspects of Lucy’s behaviour are what we might now refer to as ‘passive aggressive’), and the mother-daughter resemblance is, on one famous occasion, accidentally exposed by Lord Ashton who, in a rather Freudian manner, presents Lucy as “his wife, Lady Ashton” (Scott 1819/1991: 235). In the end, Lucy is not simply docile and oppressed – not only her simple despair but her dark anger leads her to kill her newly-wed husband, and even her retreat into insanity may be seen as an act of defiance, a move to put herself beyond apology, remorse or sympathy.

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<sup>22</sup> Lucy’s not only innocuous traits have been discussed previously in terms of the “ambivalence” of the characterisation in *The Bride of Lammermoor* (Shaw 1983: 214-226) and of “the female (particularly “mother”) as a source of persecution” (Hilliard 2010: 231-233).

Oddly enough this dangerous detachment is revealed in the one significant musical scene in the novel – a scene that, curiously, is omitted from the opera. In Chapter III, Lucy is heard playing on the lute, and the words she sings seem to reflect her inner removal from life (Scott 1819/1991: 39):

Look not thou on beauty's charming,  
Sit thou still while kings are arming,  
...  
Stop thine ear against the singer,  
From the red gold keep thy finger,  
Vacant heart, and hand, and eye,  
Easy live and quiet die.

The sentiments here at a deeper level remain obscure and ominous. Is the “red gold” a portent of the marriage ring soiled by blood? Why is the heart vacant? – is she unable to love? And is Lucy herself the singer, or is it some other presence that must not be listened to, that needs to be made ‘silent’? It is as if, to adopt a term from Derrida’s *Specters of Marx* (1993/1994: 191, n.13), Lucy herself is some kind of “corporeal ghost”, perhaps a shade of that poor sprite who died by the pool generations ago, but lingers on in a real body, both present and absent at the same time. By omitting this significant musical scene Cammarano and Donizetti removed lines that might be seen as central to Lucy’s character, and were in any case destined to become well known by being cited elsewhere in literature, by being set to music, and by appearing in anthologies of poetry.<sup>23</sup>

### The Story and the Story-Teller

The analysis present in this paper has largely been based on a close reading of the texts of the novel and of the opera. But that approach has its weaknesses in relation to a tale such as this. First, to sense ghostly voices we cannot take the route of searching for concrete evidence. As Derrida says, the valid existence of such a “ghostly voice” is not to be “proved” but to be “perceived” (Derrida 1972/1981: 216-217). We must open ourselves to be a witness to it, since only our experience offers something ‘irreplaceable’ and can properly attest that some ‘thing’ has been presented to us (Derrida 2000: 190). The writing down (in words or music) of the ‘evidence-for-presence’ is at best, in the Derridean sense, only a ‘supplement’ to the experience itself in that it both elaborates an explanation of the experience, and yet is at the same time a non-essential addendum to it, a non-substitution for it. Lucy’s reticence shows that she herself understood this, that such experiences were a matter of sensibility rather than sense or description. Walter Scott tells us (1819/1991: 40):

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<sup>23</sup> It is these words that were set to music by Henry Bishop, *Look not thou on beauty's charming: Canzonet from the Bride of Lammermoor* ([c.1820]), though the British Library Catalogue curiously gives the publication date “c1815”, four years before Scott’s novel was published. The poem reappears in E. M. Forster’s novel *A Room with a View* (1908), Chapter 18, where it is sung by another Lucy, Lucy Honeychurch. It is also contained in (Quiller-Couch 1900/1943: 638-639) amongst other collections of verse. It is to be hoped for the sake of Walter Scott that the title of this last refers to poetry in English rather than to the nationality of the poets.

Left to the impulse of her own taste and feelings, Lucy Ashton was peculiarly accessible to those of a romantic cast. Her secret delight was in the old legendary tales of ardent devotion and unalterable affection, chequered as they so often are with strange adventures and supernatural horrors. This was her favoured fairy realm, and there she erected her aerial palaces. But it was only in secret that she laboured at this delusive, though delightful architecture.

In other words present within her there seemed to be a wish to be at one with that absent ethereal realm, and the unification of that particular presence and absence led to the death of her and her identity.

The second weakness of a text-based approach to a ghostly tale is that we do not value such things for the story they tell so much as for the way in which the story is told. And the way in which the story is told is down not only to Cammarano and Donizetti but also to the performers of opera. They are ‘supplements’ and ‘spectres’ of a different kind who inhabit the plot in surprising and unpredictable ways. But that is another story.

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