LUCIA DI LAMMERMOOR
An in-depth guide by Stu Lewis
INTRODUCTION

In Gustave Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* (1857), Western literature’s prototypical “Desperate Housewives” narrative, Charles and Emma Bovary travel to Rouen to attend the opera, and they attend a performance of *Lucia di Lammermoor*. Perhaps Flaubert chose this opera because it would appeal to Emma’s romantic nature, suggesting parallels between her life and that of the heroine: both women forced into unhappy marriages. But the reason could have been simpler—that given the popularity of this opera, someone who dropped in at the opera house on a given night would be likely to see *Lucia*.

If there is one work that could be said to represent opera with a capital O, it is *Lucia di Lammermoor*. *Lucia* is a story of forbidden love, deceit, treachery, violence, family hatred, and suicide, culminating in the mother of all mad scenes. It features a heroic yet tragic tenor, villainous baritones and basses, a soprano with plenty of opportunity to show off her brilliant high notes and trills and every other trick she learned in the conservatory, and, to top it off, a mysterious ghost haunting the Scottish Highlands. This is not to say that Donizetti employed clichés, but rather that what was fresh and original in Donizetti’s hands became clichés in the works of lesser composers.

As Emma Bovary watched the opera, “She filled her heart with the melodious laments as they slowly floated up to her accompanied by the strains of the double basses, like the cries of a castaway in the tumult of a storm. She recognized all the ecstasy and anguish that had once nearly brought on her death. Lucia’s voice seemed only the echo of her own heart, and the illusion that was now holding her in its spell seemed a part of her own life. But no one on earth had ever loved her with such a love.”

*Lucia* is clearly an old-fashioned opera, and for many years it was looked down upon by audiences whose musical tastes were fashioned by the music and theories of Richard Wagner. The music of Donizetti is not as complex as that of Wagner, or of the later Italian composers such as Verdi and Puccini, or even of Mozart, who preceded him. But opera is not an intellectual exercise. In place of sophistication, we can find in *Lucia di Lammermoor* a direct statement of raw emotion that reaches out to us over the centuries.

THE CHARACTERS

**Enrico** (en-REE-co), baritone; Lord of Lammermoor

**Lucia** (loo-CHEE-ah), soprano; Enrico’s sister
Edgardo (ed-GAR-do), tenor; Master of Ravenswood
Arturo Bucklaw, tenor; a nobleman
Raimondo (rye-MAN-do), bass; Chaplain of Lammermoor
Alisa (ah-LEE-sa), mezzo-soprano; companion to Lucia
Normanno (nor-MAH-no), tenor; captain of the guard

THE STORY

ACT I, Scene 1: The Ravenswood estate

In contrast with earlier practice, in which an overture was frequently used to allow audiences to settle into their seats, Donizetti gets us into the story immediately with a brief prelude, dominated by the horns, which establishes the somber mood of the narrative. Normanno enters with a troop of armed men, who sing a martial-style chorus indicating that they are in search of some unnamed evil (we later learn they are looking for Edgardo). Normanno remains behind as the men exit. Enrico and Raimondo enter. When Normanno observes that Enrico appears troubled, he responds that his house is in decline, and he is distressed both by the fact that Edgardo, his enemy, may be ready to profit from his difficulties, and his sister Lucia’s refusal to enter into a marriage which would provide the connections to reestablish the Ashtons’ good fortune. Raimondo suggests that Lucia needs more time to get over the death of her mother, but Normanno sees another motive. A stranger had recently saved her life when she was threatened by a charging bull, and she has secretly been meeting with him ever since. Furthermore, the stranger is believed to be none other than Edgardo.

In the aria “Cruda, funesta smania,” Enrico expresses his distress at the news. To make things worse, the chorus returns and informs the men that they have spotted Edgardo riding through their estate, but that he has escaped. Raimondo urges restraint, but Enrico swears that only revenge will make him happy (“La pietade in suo favore”), and the chorus chimes in with words of encouragement.

ACT I, Scene 2: A park, near a fountain

Lucia enters, with her companion and maid, Alisa. To provide a musical contrast with the macho mood of the previous scene, Donizetti introduces the women with a tender harp solo. Lucia has come for a rendezvous with Edgardo. She tells Alisa that it was at this fountain that one of the Ravenswood ancestors killed his lover and threw her into the water. Lucia, in fact, has seen the woman’s ghost.

Lucia’s aria, which follows, is one of the great soprano showpieces in the bel canto style.
repertoire, with multiple opportunities for a display of vocal talent. In accordance with the operatic convention of the time, it is divided into two sections, one slow (“Regnava nel silenzio”) and one fast (called a cabaletta), “Quando, rapido in estasi”. She describes the vision of the ghost. Alisa sees it as a sign that her love for Edgardo is doomed, but Lucia describes the depth of her passion. This section is sung twice; first to establish the melody, and a second time to allow for a series of variations on the melody, often improvised by the singer herself. (Jazz fans no doubt are familiar with this structure.)

Edgardo enters. He tells her that he had to see her this night because he is about to travel to France on a political mission. He tells her that he wishes to approach Enrico to ask for her hand in marriage despite the ancient enmity between their houses, which had led to the death of his father and the appropriation of most of his lands by the Ashtons.

In the duet “Sula tomba” (actually an extended scene), Edgardo tells Lucia that he has sworn eternal warfare against the Ashtons, but he has abandoned that oath because of his love for her. Knowing her brother’s feelings, she urges him to keep the relationship secret, but she agrees to an exchange of rings as a token of their “marriage.” (In a footnote to the text, the librettist notes that such a marriage contract would have been binding according to the custom of the time, though in those times in place of a ring a coin would have been broken in two, with each participant retaining a half.) This scene, in which Donizetti skillfully develops the story through a series of memorable melodies, demonstrates the advances that he had made in the art of dramatic musical narrative.

ACT II, Scene 1: Enrico’s apartment

Enrico and Normanno are on stage. Enrico has already made plans for Lucia’s wedding to Arturo Bucklaw. Normanno assures him that he has intercepted Edgardo’s correspondence and forged some documents to persuade Lucia that Edgardo no longer loves her.

Normanno leaves and Lucia enters. A stage direction indicates that her manner should indicate the early stages of her madness. Enrico tries to convince her to marry Arturo, and when she tells him that she has pledged her love to Edgardo, he shows her the forged document. He implores her to agree to the marriage, saying his very life depends on it, due to the shifting tides of Scottish politics. (Note: the time frame of the opera is somewhat earlier than that of the novel, which took place after Scotland had already merged with England.) Throughout their confrontation, Donizetti skillfully mixes dramatic dialogue (too elaborate to be called recitative) with brief melodies, such as Lucia’s plaintive “Suffriva nel pianto.” The scene ends with an up-tempo duet, concluding with a spectacular high note for the soprano.
Raimondo enters and continues to apply pressure, but unlike Enrico and Normanno, he appears to be sincere in his belief that the marriage between Lucia and Arturo would be the best thing for the family. In their duet there is a genuine feeling of tenderness, and when he asks Lucia for a *sacrifizio* (sacrifice), we are reminded of the Germont-Violetta confrontation in Verdi’s *La traviata*, which almost certainly was modeled on this scene.

**Act II, Scene 2: A reception hall on the Ashton estate**

In a brief, festive chorus, the wedding guests celebrate the impending union, and Arturo, who is unaware of Lucia’s objections, rejoices that he will be able to help the Ashtons. Knowing that Lucia will appear to be in a bad mood, Enrico assures him that it is because she is still in mourning for her mother. Arturo happily signs the wedding contract, and Lucia reluctantly signs, saying under her breath that she is signing her own death warrant. As soon as the signing is finished, Edgardo rushes in, and Lucia momentarily faints.

The famed sextet, which follows, begins as a duet between Edgardo and Enrico, the former expressing his dismay at the proceedings and his concern for Lucia, the latter trying to restrain his anger out of a similar concern. The other voices enter as Lucia awakens, only to say that she had hoped death would take her, while Raimondo and Alisa, accompanied by the chorus, express their fears for Lucia’s life.

Following this peaceful interlude, Enrico and Arturo threaten Edgardo’s life, but Raimondo counsels them that God abhors needless violence. Edgardo demands to see the wedding contract, and when Lucia admits that she has signed it, he angrily takes off his ring and throws it at her. The ensemble which follows is, in effect, a continuation of the sextet, as the men of the house force Edgardo to leave. Supported by Raimondo, Lucia collapses.

**ACT III, Scene 1: Edgardo’s Castle at Wolf’s Crag**

In the lonely castle, which is all that remains of the Ravenswood estate, Edgardo sits alone as a storm rages. Enrico enters and challenges Edgardo to a duel to avenge the insult his family suffered when Edgardo interrupted the wedding. Edgardo eagerly accepts, and the two sing a duet in unison signaling their joint desire for a violent settlement of their feud.

**ACT III, Scene 2: The hall at the Ashton estate**

The wedding festivities are still in full swing. Raimondo rushes onstage with the shocking news that Lucia has completely lost her senses and killed her bridegroom.

Lucia enters, hair disheveled, dressed in white, appearing, in the words of the stage directions, more like a ghost than a living person. She sings ecstatically of her impending wedding, imagining in her madness that it is Edgardo, not Arturo, whom she
is marrying. In the background we hear music reminiscent of her meeting with Edgardo, as she recalls their relationship. As the aria draws to a close, her notes are echoed by the flute, creating an eerie other-worldly sound. Once more she sings music from the earlier love duet. Enrico enters and assails her for her actions, but Raimondo points out that she has lost her reason. Lucia continues her reverie, concluding with her wish to be united with Edgardo in heaven.

**ACT III, Scene 3: A cemetery adjacent to Wolf’s Crag**

Edgardo is alone. He has decided that he cannot live without Lucia, and he says that he will allow himself to be killed in his impending duel (“Tombe degli avi miei”). The chorus of wedding guests enter and inform him that Lucia is near death (but for some reason omitting Arturo’s murder). He is about to run off to see her one last time when Raimondo comes in to tell him that it is too late. Expressing his hope to be united with her in heaven, Edgardo stabs himself as the horrified crowd looks on, and Raimondo prays to God to forgive him.

**LUCIA: NOVEL AND OPERA**

When Cammarano and Donizetti changed the title of the opera from *The Bride of Lammermoor* to *Lucia di Lammermoor*, they did more than simply follow the well-known Italian custom of Italianizing the characters’ names (think of Rodolfo and Marcello in *La bohème*). The change from a title indicating the protagonist’s function (bride) to one indicating her name represents a major shift in the emphasis of the story. For whereas the focus in Scott’s novel was on the way that the sweep of history affects people’s everyday lives, the opera is primarily the story of two individuals.

Some of the changes that Cammarano made from the novel may have been motivated by the desire to reduce the number of characters. In the opera, Lucia is mourning the loss of her parents, whereas in the novel both parents are very much alive. Others were apparently made to heighten the sense of tragedy and condense the action. In the novel, Bucklaw (Arturo) survives his wounds. Also, Edgar does not commit suicide but rather drowns in quicksand on the way to a duel with Lucy’s brother.

The novel is set in 1710, shortly after Scotland was formally unified with England. Ravenswood is an ancient feudal house in decline and, contrary to the impression given by the opera, would not have represented a physical threat to the Ashtons. In the novel Edgar is generally referred to by name but as the “Master of Ravenswood,” indicating his connection to the old order.

While Edgar and Lucy have sometimes been compared to Romeo and Juliet, the comparison seems more apt when describing the opera than in describing the book, for
even as he longs for Lucy, Edgar wonders if he is betraying his ancestry by courting her. Lucy herself is extremely passive, possessing none of the personality of her operatic counterpart, leading the reader to wonder at Edgar's fascination with her.

Eliminating the parents from the story represents a major change in character motivation. In the novel, Lucy's father actually favors the union of Edgar and Lucy, partly out of gratitude for saving his and Lucy's lives and partly because he genuinely likes the young man.

A more significant reason is related to the novel's historical setting. Ashton had wrestled Ravenswood's estate from him by legal machinations, and he feared that now that Scotland was part of England, the British courts might look more favorably on Edgar's claim: “It would resolve into an equitable claim, and be decided, perhaps, upon the broad principles of justice, which were not so favorable to [Ashton] as those of strict law.” A union between the Ravenswood and Ashton families would make that claim a moot point. The marriage, however, is thwarted by Lucy's mother, who is from a prestigious family and fears that marrying with the Ravenswoods would be a social disgrace.

Removing the social context was emblematic of the Romantic era, of which Donizetti was one of the pioneers. In the words of critic Joseph Kestner, “The Romantic Movement emphasized individual states of consciousness and motivation, often as a component of Byronic egotism.” Edgardo and Lucia, unlike Edgar and Lucy, are two people in love, not simply the product of their times. Perhaps Maria Callas, who was largely responsible for reviving interest in this opera in the past century, said it best: “These literary works are the springboard, but what really matters is what the composer does with them. There is nothing Scottish about the way Donizetti interprets Lucia. She becomes a universal character.”

**DONIZETTI**

If a measure of an opera composer's significance is the number of operas that are part of the “standard repertoire,” then Gaetano Donizetti is undoubtedly one of the leading such composers of all time, one of a handful to have three or more works in that category (the others being Mozart, Verdi, Wagner, Puccini, Richard Strauss, and possibly Rossini, and Britten). Though he was once considered the weak link among the big three bel canto composers, Donizetti's fame has grown during the last half-century. At least four operas—*The Elixir of Love*, *Daughter of the Regiment*, *Don Pasquale*, and *Lucia di Lammermoor*—have solid places in the repertoire. Interest in several other works has grown, attributable to a great extent to Beverly Sills, whose recording of the “three queen” operas—*Anna Bolena*, *Maria Stuarda*, and *Roberto Deveraux*—has
helped advance the popularity of these works and others. More recently, Prairie Village
native Joyce DiDonato has helped popularize these operas.

Donizetti was born on November 29, 1797 into an impoverished family in Bergamo,
Italy. Fortunately, the music director of a local church, Johannes Simon Mayr, had
undertaken the task of raising money for a free music school (partly out of a desire to
provide singers for the church choir), and when the school opened in 1806, Donizetti
was a member of the first class. At the time, Mayr was a well-known opera composer,
though today he is remembered primarily as Donizetti’s mentor. Like most great
composers, Donizetti exhibited his musical skill at an early age, and it was not long
before he went off to the conservatory to further develop his talents. Bologna had more
to offer than music, and the handsome young man soon became quite a hit with the
ladies. Biographers generally believe that it was at this time that the young musician
contracted syphilis, a disease that lay dormant for a period of time but eventually
caused him to have numerous bouts with poor health and led to his mental collapse and
early death.

In 1816, at the age of 19, Donizetti completed the first of his 70 operas, Il Pigmalione. It
was not until 1822, however, that the world first began to take note of his work with the
success of the now-forgotten opera seria, Zoraide di Granata.

In 1828 he married Virginia Vasselli over the objections of his parents, and in a series of
tragic events that were later mirrored in the life of Verdi, the couple lost three children in
infancy. Virginia died during a cholera epidemic after nine years of marriage, though
some biographers have speculated that her death and those of the children may have
been precipitated by Donizetti’s dormant syphilis infection.

The early 1830s were pivotal in Donizetti’s career. In 1830 he collaborated with Felipe
Romani on Anna Bolena, the first opera to achieve any lasting success. Two years later
the pair came out with L’elisir d’amore (The Elixir of Love), which was an instant hit.
The opera was written at break-neck speed, and Donizetti took no more than six weeks
to compose the music. He claimed it took two weeks, but he was known at times to
have exaggerated the speed at which he worked.

In November 1834 he signed a contract with the Royal Theatres of Naples to compose
three operas, with subjects to be chosen by the company. The following spring, after a
considerable delay which caused him to have to compose under terrible time pressure,
the company put him in touch with librettist Salvatore Cammarano, and the two began
to work on Lucia di Lammermoor, which had its premiere on September 26, 1835.

Several operas had already been written on the same subject, but all except Donizetti’s
have essentially been forgotten. The opera was an instant hit. Wrote Donizetti, “Every
piece was listened to with religious silence and hailed by spontaneous cheers.”
Throughout the remainder of Donizetti’s lifetime, it remained the single most popular Italian opera.

The death of his wife in 1837 and his own declining health caused him to fall into deep depression, but fortunately he was able to fight through it, perhaps using music as a form of therapy. He soon moved to Paris and composed a number of operas in French for the various opera companies there, most notably *La Favorite* and *La Fille du Regiment*, both in 1840. Paris also housed a company devoted to Italian opera, and it was there that *Don Pasquale* was first produced in 1847. Many critics consider this work, with its brilliant ensembles, to be Donizetti’s comic masterpiece.

During the 1840s he moved between Paris and Vienna, but by the middle of the decade his illness began to affect his brain, and he sank into paranoia, delusional behavior, and paralysis. He was at first institutionalized in Paris, though his relatives eventually arranged for him to be transported home, where he died on April 8, 1848.

**CAMMARANO**

Salvatore Cammarano, the man who wrote the libretto (words) for *Lucia di Lammermoor*, was born in Naples on March 19, 1801. As a young man he enjoyed an active career in the theater, initially as a writer of spoken plays. In his early 30s, he secured the position of stage director at the Royal Theatres in Naples, which gave him the opportunity to hone his skills as a writer for the stage. His earliest work in opera consisted of revising the works of others, but he soon turned to libretto-writing on his own.

His early attempts at such writing went nowhere, but in 1835 he achieved his first mega-hit with *Lucia di Lammermoor*, and from that point on he became one of Italy’s most sought-after librettists. He would have additional collaborations with Donizetti, most notably *Roberto Devereux* and *Poliuto*, and he had several collaborative ventures with other leading composers of the day such as Mercadante and Pacini (not to be confused with Puccini), composers whose works are largely ignored today. More significant were his four collaborations with the young Giuseppe Verdi, including *Il Trovatore* and *Luisa Miller*. He had also begun a libretto for *King Lear*, but Verdi never followed through with the music.

The composers with whom Cammarano worked showed great respect for his skill and rarely demanded extensive revisions, as they frequently asked of other librettists. Though he never created a libretto from whole cloth, preferring to adapt existing stories, his knowledge of stagecraft enabled him to breathe new life into old tales.

Cammarano died in Naples on July 17, 1852.
DONIZETTI AND BEL CANTO

The era in which Donizetti composed his major works is generally known as the bel canto era, though the term itself came into being years later, when Rossini lamented that the bel canto tradition no longer existed. Along with Bellini and Rossini, Donizetti is regarded as one of the “big three” bel canto composers. Meaning literally “beautiful singing,” the term is generally associated, in the words of music historian Owen Jander, with “a naturally beautiful voice that was even in tone throughout its full range, careful training that encouraged effortless delivery of highly florid music, and a mastery of style that could not be taught, but only assimilated from listening to the best Italian exponents.”

One important component of bel canto is the coloratura style, the sort of vocal acrobatics which have made superstars of so many sopranos throughout the ages. The legendary Maria Callas, in fact, was instrumental in reviving bel canto music after it had fallen out of vogue early in the 20th century.

During the bel canto era, the importance of set pieces, such as arias and duets, increased, leading to the term “numbers operas”—operas in which individual sections could be identified as independent units. Since the conventions of Italian opera called for continuous music, recitatives, a sort of sung speech, were used to replace spoken dialogue and tie the various numbers together.

One feature of bel canto singing is the latitude that singers have to improvise, especially when a melody is repeated. Donizetti frequently created roles for specific singers, and he wrote only the bare bones of the melody, expecting them to devise their own variations. This appears to have been the case with Lucia. Donizetti knew that the title role would be sung by Fanny Persiani, the leading coloratura singer of her generation, and he left plenty of room for her to improvise. (Of course variations could be overdone. It was reported that one singer performed a Rossini aria for the composer and made so many alterations that the composer wryly commented, “That was a beautiful aria. Who wrote it?”)

One of Donizetti’s most significant innovations was the development of the dramatic tenor as the leading man. The role of Edgardo in Lucia was written for the French tenor Duprez, a singer with a remarkably powerful voice, and the music Donizetti composed for him took advantage of that power to explore the romantic possibilities of this voice type. While Verdi and Puccini developed this voice type even further, the tendency to identify romantic heroes with the tenor voice can be traced back to Donizetti.

While, with the exception of Lucia, Donizetti is best remembered for his comic works, he was influential in the development of the romantic opera as an alternative to the stiff opera seria of the previous generation. Lucia, in fact, began the vogue for operas with
tragic endings that dominated the Italian opera scene for nearly a century afterward.

But despite these advances in drama, Donizetti never lost sight of the fact that it was melody that most appealed to his audiences. He remarked, “If you want to know if a certain piece of music is good, play the melody without the accompaniment.” Known as a “singer’s composer,” he believed that the voice, rather than the orchestra, was the most important component in opera, and, like many other Italians, he believed in the supremacy of melody, which even in his lifetime was coming under attack: “The German student says: ‘Ah, here there is too much rhythm! Ah! Here there is too much melody!…But I will not ever say, however, as various people do, that that which is regularly rhythmical, is not sublime.” Today’s composers and critics, many of whom sneeringly brand as “retro” any opera that includes hummable melodies and set pieces, might well pay attention to this credo, for it has enabled Donizetti’s operas to continue to delight audiences to the present day.

SIR WALTER SCOTT

Walter Scott was born in Edinburgh, Scotland on August 15, 1771. An early bout with polio left him permanently lame in his right leg, and as part of his rehabilitation process, he was sent to live with his grandparents in rural Scotland, where he acquired his love of native Scottish culture.

Influenced by the old Scottish ballads (and pseudo-antiquities) which were sweeping European culture at the time, he first tried his hand at poetry. Scotland appears to have occupied the same place in the European imagination of his day that the American South does in ours (as in the novels of William Faulkner and Flannery O’Connor), a place not completely given over to modern civilization, where old ancestral customs are still followed, and belief in the supernatural seems plausible. Consider Shakespeare’s Macbeth, a play dominated by witchcraft.

Later, when failed business ventures put him in financial straits, he turned to the more commercial area of fiction. Scott’s first novel, Waverly, was an instant success. Set in 1745, it described, through the eyes of fictional characters, the Scottish rebellion against British rule. This was followed by several other Scottish novels, which collectively are known today as the “Waverly novels.” Among these was The Bride of Lammermoor, the inspiration for Cammarano and Donizetti’s opera.

Though difficult to read today because of their formal style and heavy use of Scottish dialect, the Waverly novels are of great importance to the history of the modern historical novel. Scott is considered to be the father of this type of novel, in which fictional characters are placed against the background of historical events, thereby
giving history a human face. This form of storytelling has remained popular into our own time: consider how much of our image of the Civil War has been formed by Gone With the Wind. Following the Waverly novels, Scott went on to explore other periods of British history, most notably medieval times in what remains his most popular novel, Ivanhoe.

The principal focus of the Waverly novels are the conflicts caused by the union of Scotland and England, through which Scotland was brought from feudal to modern times. In the words of literary critic Robert Gordon, though he realized that change was inevitable, “he sympathized with the rebels as the possessors of virtues no longer fashionable—feudal loyalty, personal heroism, chivalric flamboyance.”

While Donizetti’s Lucia di Lammermoor is by far the most popular operatic adaptation of a work by Scott, there have been several dozen others, including one by Donizetti based on Kenilworth.

Three other major composers have also been inspired by Scott’s works: Rossini (The Lady of the Lake), Bizet (The Fair Maid of Perth), and Arthur Sullivan (Ivanhoe). Sullivan, best known for the operettas he composed with Gilbert, had hoped this opera would earn him respect as a “serious” composer. Ironically, opera companies have generally ignored this work while elevating his “light” pieces to the status of classics. In one of the great “what ifs” of opera history, comparable to Verdi’s unwritten King Lear and Puccini’s brief consideration of Phantom of the Opera—Beethoven considered and rejected Scott’s Kenilworth as the subject of an opera.

Scott died on September 21, 1832, three years before the premiere of Lucia di Lammermoor.

**MAD ABOUT YOU**

Perhaps the one aspect of this opera which has most appealed to the many sopranos who have assumed the role of the Lucia is the famous “mad scene” in the final act. It is in such scenes that great sopranos have an opportunity to show off their vocal and acting skills.

While the mad scene from Lucia is probably the most famous, such scenes have been a part of opera almost from its beginnings. The mad scene itself may date back to Shakespeare’s Hamlet, and several Baroque operas featured episodes of insanity. The earliest operatic incarnations of the type of mad scene that appears in Lucia may have come in settings of the story of a woman named Nina, by Dalyrac in 1786 and Paisiello in 1789. The mad scene in this opera contained a number of features which later were to become standard in such scenes: the woman driven mad when deprived of the
opportunity to be with her true love; the white gown, the disheveled hair, the slow walk.

Perhaps the most prominent mad scene prior to this opera was in Bellini’s *Il Pirata* (1827). Donizetti had already made previous use of a mad scene in *Anna Bolena* (1830). Verdi, in *Macbeth*, created a more subdued form of mad scene in Lady Macbeth’s sleepwalking scene. Other prominent mad scenes, all involving women, occur in Bizet’s *La Jolie Fille de Perth*, Meyerbeer’s *Dinorah*, and Thomas’s *Hamlet*.

Though the classic mad scene is largely a product of the 19th century, obsessive female characters can also be found in the 20th century, among them Elektra and Salome in the operas of Strauss.

Men also are seen as victims of mental instability, as in Berg’s *Wozzeck*. In the final act of *The Ballad of Baby Doe*, Horace Tabor wanders onto the stage of the opera house he built years before, and is beset by hallucinations from his earlier years. And Stravinsky’s *The Rake’s Progress* concludes in a mental institution, where Tom Rakewell has become totally immersed in an illusory world.

Given our society’s increased interest in the workings of the human mind, it would seem that we have not yet encountered the last of the operatic mad scene.

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