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Scour the grounds . . . the sprawling ruins of the tower . . .
 tear away the veil of this terrible mystery.

(Act I, Normanno)¹

The Scottish Setting

In early nineteenth-century Italy, Scotland was often depicted in opera as a distant sea-swept land filled with mystery and ancient tales, a picturesque setting for popular works such as Johann Simon Mayr's *Ginevra di Scozia* (1801) and Rossini's *La donna del Lago* (1819). Scotland was also a well-used location by Cammarano, the librettist of *Lucia*, especially when problems with the Neapolitan theatrical censors arose. For example, in an effort to defuse the political elements within the French play *Le proscrit* ['The Outcast'] (1839) when turning it into the Italian opera *Il proscritto* (1842, with music by Saverio Mercadente), Cammarano changed the action from France (around the time of Napoleon's defeat) to Scotland in the 1650s and the time of Lord Oliver Cromwell (1599–1658). As John Black speculates, 'perhaps this was considered so far-flung and outlandish a country that any degree of treason could be perpetuated without threatening the security of the Bourbon occupancy of the throne or the moral welfare of the people'.² Fortunately, for *Lucia*, which is set in Scotland, no geographical changes were requested by the Neapolitan censors. The only alteration required of the original text was the change of Raimondo's profession from a Presbyterian minister to a 'tutor and confidant', presumably because the censors did not wish to see a member of the Church of Scotland depicted on an Italian stage.³

The historical setting of the opera was a different matter. Part of a collection of historical novels that highlight Scottish rural life in

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the late 1600s and early 1700s, *The Bride of Lammermoor* is set during the time of the Treaty of Union (1707), when Scotland and England became one state, the United Kingdom of Great Britain. Although Walter Scott's historical setting has little to do with the actual action within the novel, the book is framed by the setting nonetheless, so much so that at the start of the book, the Ravenswood clan is stripped of its lordship and lands after supporting the deposed King James VII (1688), the last Catholic monarch of England, Scotland and Ireland. The Scottish throne thus went to the Protestant William of Orange (William III) and Mary II, Queen Regent, who were supported by the Ashton clan. As the Ravenswood estate came up for sale, Sir Ashton purchased the land and took control of the castle and all its contents. He even tried to prevent Edgar Ravenswood, the last surviving member of the Ravenswood clan, from burying his father in the family crypt. Hence, the bitter conflict that ensues when Edgar (Edgaro) and Lucy Ashton (Lucia) become lovers.

Cammarano's libretto is set at the end of the sixteenth century, a whole century before the action of Scott's novel.⁴ If we are to take Cammarano's historical backdrop at face value, then the opera takes place during the time of Mary, Queen of Scots, or Mary Stuart (1542–87) the daughter of James V of Scotland. When James died, Mary inherited the throne before her first birthday. Ruled by regents until she was old enough to claim the Scottish throne, Mary was sent to France, her mother's birthplace, where she was raised a Catholic and married Francis II, King of France. When Francis II died in 1560, Mary returned to Scotland a year later to claim the throne. Scotland had become decidedly Protestant in her absence, breaking with the Roman Catholic Church. Mary was eventually forced to abdicate the throne in 1567 and sought refuge with her cousin Queen Elizabeth I. Suspecting her of treason, Elizabeth had Mary beheaded in 1587.

Following her death, Mary Stuart was a popular subject among European Catholics, with books and plays appearing soon after her death.⁵ She was viewed by many as a martyr of the faith – the legitimate ruler of England and Scotland owing to Henry VIII's break with the Catholic Church to marry Anne Boleyn, the mother of Elizabeth I. Mary Stuart was also the subject of a number of

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operas throughout the nineteenth century, especially in Italy, where Donizetti even set a version of the tale that premiered at La Scala on 30 December 1835 as *Maria Stuarda*, just a few months after the premiere of *Lucia*.⁶ Although it did not achieve great success in the nineteenth century, Donizetti's opera on the Scottish queen is a familiar work among opera fans today, who often refer to it as one of the three 'Tudor Queens' of Donizetti, which also includes *Anna Bolena* (1830), second wife of Henry VIII, and *Roberto Devereux* (1837), lover of Queen Elizabeth I.

Serving neither as a mistaken translation nor a mere coincidence, I believe the historical backdrop to *Lucia* was intentionally set by Cammarano to the time of Mary Stuart. There are two examples in the libretto that support this conclusion, namely in Act I, scene 5, as Edgardo mentions to Lucia that he has a political mission in France to secure Scotland's future, and in Act II, scene 2, as Enrico voices his frustrations to Lucia that if Mary ascends the throne, it would be disastrous for the Ashton family.⁷ The implication here is that the Ravenswood family is Catholic (in compliance with the Scott original) and a supporter of Mary's reign, while the Ashton family is Protestant and a supporter of a Scotland independent of continental influences. (Note that Raimondo, Peter Bide-the-Bent in Scott's novel, is a Presbyterian minister who serves the Ashton clan.) In addition, situating Edgardo as the only supporter of Mary in the opera helps to endear him to Catholic audiences. His departure from Lucia at the end of Act I to take up his mission in France is thus better understood and perhaps excused owing to its importance to Scotland's future and the Catholic cause. And coupled with the fact that he remains the last surviving Ravenswood – living in a broken-down tower on his former family estate – Edgardo's departure highlights a sympathetic connection to Mary Stuart and her fight for legitimacy.

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The gothic, as a literary genre or style of writing, was richly defined in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, representing a varied response to the irrational, unseen and

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superstitious elements within nature and the human soul.⁸ Matthew Gregory Lewis's gothic novel *The Monk* (1796), for example, presents an understanding of human moral truth that is attained through supernatural horror and extreme sexual desire, all set within the context of the Spanish Inquisition in the fifteenth century.⁹ Ann Radcliffe, the famous author of many gothic novels in her day (e.g., *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, 1794 or *The Italian*, 1796) often sought to rationalize the terror-filled elements in her works by revealing the cruelty of Catholic institutions or of wanton men.¹⁰ Although first arising in the British Isles and then spreading throughout Europe, the gothic came slowly to Italy owing much to the fact that 'in the absence of a unified nation and in a context of linguistic de-territorialisation, literate élites [e.g., Alessandro Manzoni] conceptualise[d] Italianness as the unmediated legacy of Classical tradition in the name of "reason"'.¹¹ One of the consequences of such a position, as the Italian literary scholar Fabio Camilletti argues (quoting Manzoni), 'is the unappealable refusal ... of the "irrational" and "superstitious" drives of the "Northern" cultures ... [which] Italian literature should irrevocably reject [and] find an "Italian way" to literary modernity based, instead, on rationalism, aesthetic measure and avoidance of excess'.¹² However, despite the lack of a true gothic tradition in Italy, the country still remained the setting of many gothic novels, owing to its strong connection to the Classicism of the past and the Catholic Church, which was viewed by gothic writers in Northern Europe as an institution filled with cruel and ancient mysteries. In fact, gothic writers strengthened the stereotype of Italy as a violent and backward environment by 'creating and exploiting what would soon become the typical gothic paraphernalia, made of ruined castles, ghosts, dark forest, sentimental heroines, wicked villains and the dramatic landscapes of the Alps and Apennines'.¹³ Thus, although the gothic was not prevalent in Italian writing in the first half of the nineteenth century, the gothic was still known to many Italians owing to the proximity between the fictional Italy of the past and the real Italy of the present in the work of gothic writers. Indeed, the very notion of the gothic is one that appears to focus on the liminal space between the irrational and the rational, the performative and the real, making Italy a ripe

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space in the early nineteenth century for the reception of the gothic in opera.¹⁴

Although it was never performed during the composer's lifetime, Donizetti's first attempt at the horror-filled conventions of the gothic was the opera *Gabriella di Vergy* (1826), from a libretto written by Andrea Leone Tottola and based on a late eighteenth-century French play of the same name.¹⁵ The opera is set in France during the time of the Crusades, where false love, imprisonment, murder, madness and a blood-soaked heart ripped from a lover's chest all make an appearance. The use of violent medieval settings and various horrific plot elements was somewhat new to Italian opera librettos in the 1820s (e.g., Rossini's *Matilde di Shabran*, 1821) and thus created the opportunity for composers like Donizetti to experiment with the loosening of conventional forms and musical gestures in their works for the stage.¹⁶ This was certainly the case with *Lucia*, where one finds several gothic elements that serve to haunt Lucia and thus become a powerful resource in relaying the dramatic potential of Donizetti's music (see Chapter 3 for a discussion of the score in relation to the sound of the gothic).

In keeping with the gothic elements in *The Bride of Lammermoor*, Scott indicates in the introduction to the novel that the story of Lucy Ashton was based on a tale he heard as a child about Janet Dalrymple (d. 1669), the daughter of James, First Viscount of Stair and Dame Margaret Ross, who apparently practiced witchcraft.¹⁷ In spite of her secret engagement to a Lord Rutherford, 'who was not acceptable to them either on account of his political principles or his want of fortune' (ix), Janet Dalrymple was forced by her mother to marry a David Dunbar of Baldoon (in Southeast Scotland). On the night of Janet's wedding to David, she stabbed him and was quickly taken away and deemed insane. David survived but Janet died some weeks later.¹⁸

Scott expanded the story of Janet Dalrymple and filled it with much of the gothic machinery that appeared in British novels since the late-eighteenth century, including a persecuted heroine, a brooding lover, an ancient castle, prophecies of death and foreboding, three witches, a ghost and a fountain that bears a legend of a murdered watery nymph (see Figure 1.1).¹⁹ Many of these same

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FROM C. R. LESLIE, R.A.

RAVENSWOOD AND LUCY AT THE MERMAIDEN'S WELL.

As they arose to leave the fountain which had been the witness of their mutual engagement, an arrow whistled through the air, and struck a raven perched on the sere branch of an old oak.—PAGE 193.

Figure 1.1 Charles Robert Leslie, ‘Ravenswood and Lucy at the Mermaid’s Well’, illus., in Walter Scott, *The Bride of Lammermoor* (Edinburgh: Adam & Charles Black, 1886), 193.

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plot elements appear in Cammarano's libretto, where they all coalesce around a so-called Siren Fountain, which makes its first appearance in Act I, scene 4; the stage setting is as follows:

A park. At the back of the stage, a side of a castle with a passable small door. At the front of the stage is the so-called 'Siren Fountain', which was once covered by a beautiful structure, decorated with architectural ornaments of a Gothic character, but it is now surrounded by the remnants of that construction. The top has fallen in, the sides are all ruined and the spring that gushes out from under the ground has opened a gap between the stones and the rubble, creating a small stream. It is dusk. The moon rises.²⁰

The fountain has an auspicious history within the novel (chapter 5) for it is the location where a member of the Ravenswood clan (Raymond Ravenswood) fell in love with a young watery nymph, a naiad, who would appear every Friday to greet him. After spending the day together, the woman would depart at the sound of a bell from a nearby hermitage that would toll at the start of vespers. In his attempt to retain the mysterious woman and to determine her true intentions, Raymond conspired to have the bell toll a half hour later. When the next Friday came, she appeared and greeted Raymond as before. Later, as she began to perceive shadows growing on the ground and the sun nearly set, the naiad shrieked and ripped herself from Raymond's arms and dove down into the fountain. As Raymond looked to find her, a pool of blood appeared in the water, evidence to Raymond that she had died a gruesome death.

In an effort to memorialize her, Raymond adorned the fountain with symbols of sirens and built a protection around the fountain to secure it from harm. Filled with grief and remorse, Raymond later sought death in battle. From this point on in the telling of the tale, Scott writes, 'the house of Ravenswood was supposed to have dated its decay'.²¹ However, as Scott further explains, which is a true sign of the gothic, where the perception of truth and fiction are deliberately confused in the telling and retelling of the tale, the supernatural origins of the fountain were eventually explained away by some who believed Raymond fell into a jealous rage and killed his lover who he suspected of betrayal. And yet, according to Scott:

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All agreed that the spot was fatal to the Ravenswood family; and that to drink of the waters of the well, or even approach its brink, was as ominous to a descendant of that house as for a Grahame to wear green, a Bruce to kill a spider, or a St. Clair to cross the Ord on a Monday.²²

In the novel, when Edgar rescues Lucy from the wild bull near his ancient home, he brings her to the fountain so she may gather her wits and catch her breath. And it is here, of course, that he and Lucy fall in love and later declare themselves husband and wife. The fountain, therefore, similar to its appearance in the opera, has a clear ominous connection to the past, bringing forth an ancient legend in order to make it relevant to the present-day lives of the characters in our story, a sure sign of the gothic.

Returning to the opera and picking up from where Scott's legend ends, the scene at the fountain has Lucia and Alisa looking for Edgardo. While scanning the area, Lucia sees the fountain and tells Alisa that at this very spot she saw the ghost of a dead woman, murdered by a jealous lover, a member of the Ravenswood clan:

At dead of night,
 in the silent darkness,
 as a pale beam of eerie moonlight
 fell upon the fountain,
 a low groan was heard on the breeze,
 and there on the verge, ah!
 the spectre appeared to me . . . Ah!

I saw her lips move
 as if she were speaking,
 and with her lifeless hand
 she seemed to beckon me to come;
 for a moment she stood motionless,
 then suddenly vanished,
 and the waters, so clear before,
 were reddened with blood.²³

Lucia is the only one who has seen the ghost and thus is the first and only individual to speak of its existence. Alisa, the only other character in the opera who knows of Lucia's vision, believes that Lucia's ghost is a sign, a supernatural omen or a warning that her relationship with Edgardo is doomed. Nonetheless, Lucia's vision of a woman murdered by the hand of a jealous lover (and

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a Ravenswood lover at that) makes Lucia even more desperate to place her hope in Edgardo, who, she believes, will save her from a similar fate.

In contrast to the opera, the ghost in the novel is that of ‘Old Alice’, a blind former servant of the Ravenswood clan who has the ability to see the future.²⁴ Earlier in the book, Alice warns both Lucy (Lucia) and Edgar (Edgardo) that their relationship will fail (chapter 19). When Alice later dies (presumably from old age), her ghost appears to Edgar at the same fountain where he and Lucy were engaged (chapter 23). And, similar to the ghost story in *Lucia*, when the ghost appears, she motions with a raised hand, a possible warning, but does not speak before disappearing. Not knowing if what he saw was real, Edgar rushes off to see if Alice is still alive. When he arrives at her cottage, he sees Alice’s dead body attended by three witches. This is the last we read of the ghost in the novel. The same can be said for the opera, for the ghost never truly ‘appears’ on stage, only within the mind of Lucia (in both Acts I and III). Whether the ghost is real or not is never questioned by Lucia or Alisa but understood and accepted as a possible reality within their gothic environment. And yet, although the ghost does not have any lines in the original libretto, nor is it discussed in reviews of the opera from the first half of the nineteenth century, in modern productions of *Lucia* it is customary to have the ghost mimed on stage to remind the audience of what Lucia is seeing. For example, the opera director Mary Zimmerman’s 2007 popular production of *Lucia* at The Metropolitan Opera has the ghost appear twice on stage as a blue-lit, pale-faced visitor who motions to Lucia.²⁵

Cammarano’s libretto also retains Scott’s original curse of divine retribution when a solemn vow is broken. In chapter 20 of Scott’s novel, Edgar and Lucy exchange two halves of a broken coin, a symbol of their union. In Act I of the opera, Cammarano has the couple exchange rings, which he explains in the published libretto with the following note:

During the period in which this story is set, it was a general belief in Scotland that whoever broke a ceremoniously sworn vow was liable to divine punishment, which would be carried out almost at the same time as the breaking of the vow.

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For this reason, lovers' oaths were not things to be taken lightly at the time; they had at least the significance of a wedding. The most common of these ceremonies was that the lovers broke a coin in two and each kept one half. That has, however, been substituted here for an exchange of rings as it is more suitable for the scene.²⁶

The fact that Cammarano felt the need to include this note is indicative of his desire to stay true to Scott's original text but also, and more importantly, to have the audience register the significance of the curse to the plot.

Twice in the libretto we are reminded of the curse. The first time is at the end of Act I, when the lovers say their goodbyes, which prompts Edgardo to remind Lucia that 'we are now bound by Heaven' (see Example 1.1). We see in the orchestral score that the majority of the orchestra is silenced as the brass and woodwinds (trumpets, horns and bassoons) alone accompany Edgardo's fateful reminder, which when combined with a syllabic vocal line set to a high G4, gives the curse a strong foreboding sonic presence. The implication is that if they break their vows, they will invite God's wrath.

The second time the curse appears is in Act II, when Lucia tells Raimondo that she cannot marry Lord Bucklaw because of her vow to Edgardo. Raimondo rebuffs this claim by reminding Lucia that 'neither Heaven nor the world recognizes wedding vows that God's minister does not bless'.²⁷ In the next scene, when Lucia does sign the nuptial agreement to marry Lord Bucklaw, she proclaims, 'I have signed my death warrant', an acknowledgement perhaps of the curse itself. This fear is quickly realized by the arrival of Edgardo, who, after verifying Lucia's signature on the marriage contract, pronounces the curse: 'Heaven and love you have now betrayed . . . may the angry hand of God destroy you.'²⁸ Musically, Edgardo's words are set in the high register of the voice; the climax of the phrase (A4) is on the words 'cursed' [maledetto] (see Example 1.2). Accompanied once again by brass and woodwinds, the curse takes on a truly gothic presence here. In fact, in Donizetti's letter to Ricordi, he was surprised by the audience's immediate reaction to it (sung by Gilbert Duprez) in the midst of an ensemble number, which is further evidence of the