

"Chi mi frena in tal momento?" (sextet) from Donizetti's Lucia di Lammermoor, 1835

Notes & translation copyright © 2023 Dianne L. Durante
DianneDuranteWriter.com

Situation: Although her brother Enrico has betrothed her to wealthy Arturo, Lucia Ashton is in love with, and secretly engaged to, Edgardo Ravenswood. Alas, most of the Ravenswoods and Ashtons hate each other. When Edgardo leaves for France, Enrico shows Lucia a forged letter that persuades her Edgardo is unfaithful. Her tutor and chaplain, Father Raimondo, urges that for the good of the family, she renounce Edgardo and marry Arturo.

A moment after Lucia and Arturo sign the marriage contract, Edgardo enters, and, infuriated, begins "Chi me frena in tal momento?" ("Who'll restrain me in such a moment?") It turns into a sextet with Enrico, Lucia, Arturo, Raimondo, and a chorus led by Alisa (Lucia's best friend). Edgardo storms out. Lucia goes mad, kills Arturo, and dies. Edgardo kills himself. Horrible story with beautiful music.

The libretto, by Salvatore Cammarano, is based on Sir Walter Scott's 1819 novel *The Bride of Lammermoor*. That novel was so popular that by 1835, three libretti had already been written based on it.

The score is by Gaetano Donizetti: his 46th of about 75 operas. Shortly before the premiere of *Lucia*, Rossini had retired and Bellini had died, leaving Donizetti the reigning master of Italian opera. Today *Lucia* is the most frequently performed of his operas. Its most famous bits are this sextet and Lucia's mad scene.

YouTube:

- Joan Sutherland & Alfredo Kraus, 1982 at Metropolitan Opera: <https://youtu.be/9wXXVJWU-Ks> (same with Spanish subtitles: <https://youtu.be/c6fvg-zaVvg>)

Although I've listed the parts of the sextet separately, several people are always singing at once. How to sort them out:

- Lucia is a soprano: the highest female voice
- Alisa is a mezzo-soprano, somewhat lower than Lucia
- Raimondo is a bass, the lowest male voice
- Enrico is a baritone, somewhat higher than Raimondo
- Edgardo and Arturo are both tenors, the highest male voices

Sorting them another way, on the Sutherland & Kraus video:

- Edgardo and Enrico begin singing at 0:26; Edgardo is on the right
- Lucia is on camera singing at 1:17, with Raimondo on the right. Alisa (on the left) can be seen at 2:26.
- Arturo appears at 2:35 – he's between the two groups, and doesn't get much camera time in this particular video.

Each character sings his or her lines in the sextet several times. Notice how particular words are repeated in each character's lines, with slightly different context and meaning. I've underlined the repeated words in the Italian version on the following page.

The sextet has been frequently recorded and used:

- The melody was used by the Three Stooges in their short films *Micro-Phonies* and *Squareheads of the Round Table*, sung in the latter with the lyrics "Oh, Elaine, can you come out tonight...."
- In Howard Hawks' gangster classic *Scarface* (1932), Tony Camonte (Paul Muni) whistles "Chi mi frena?" in the film's [opening sequence](#) (at 3:15), as he guns down a gang boss he has been assigned to protect.
- Sung by Willie, the Operatic Whale in the 1946 Disney short [The Whale Who Wanted To Sing At The Met](#) (at 7:45 – 3 of 6 voices)
- *The Departed*, 2006: Jack Nicholson is shown at a performance of *Lucia* when the sextet is being performed. His cell phone later rings with this melody.

<p>EDGARDO (a tenor; Lucia's beloved) Chi mi <u>frena</u> in tal momento? Chi <u>tronco</u> dell'ira il <u>corso</u>? Il suo duolo, il suo spavento Son la prova di un rimorso! <u>Ma, qual rosa inaridita,</u> <u>Ella sta tra morte e vita!</u> ... Io son vinto ... son <u>commosso</u>! T'amo ingrata, t'amo <u>ancor</u>!</p> <p>EDGARDO Who'll restrain me at such a moment? Who'll cut short the course of my wrath? Her grief, her fear Are proof of her remorse! And yet, how like a parched rose She stands between life and death. I am overcome. I'm touched! I love you, ungrateful one, I love you still!</p>	<p>ENRICO (a baritone; Lucia's brother) Chi <u>raffrena</u> il mio furore, E la man che al brando <u>corse</u>? Della misera in favore Nel mio petto un grido sorse! E mio sangue! L'ho tradita! <u>Ella sta fra morte e vita</u> ... Ah! Che spegnere <u>non posso</u>, I rimorsi del <u>mio cor</u>!</p> <p>ENRICO What restrains my anger And the hand that races to my sword? A cry of pity rises In my breast! She is my family! I betrayed her! She stands between life and death... Oh! I cannot quench The remorse I feel!</p>	<p>LUCIA (a soprano) Io sperai che a me la vita <u>Tronca</u> avesse il mio <u>spavento</u>, Ma la morte non m'aita... Vivo ancor per mio tormento! Da' miei lumi cadde il <u>velo</u>, Mi tradi la terra e il Cielo! Vorrei piangere e <u>non posso</u>. M'abbandona il pianto <u>ancor</u>!</p> <p>LUCIA I hoped that this terror Would have cut short my life, But death does not help me, And I live on to be tormented! The veil has fallen from my eyes. Earth and heaven have both abandoned me! I want to weep, but cannot. Even my tears have left me!</p>
<p>RAIMONDO (a bass, Lucia's chaplain) Qual terribile <u>momento</u>! <u>Piu formar non so parole</u>; <u>Densa nube di spavento</u> <u>Par che copra i rai del sole!</u> <u>Come rosa inaridita</u> <u>Ella sta fra morte e vita</u>; <u>Chi per lei non e commosso</u> <u>Ha di tigre in petto il cor!</u></p> <p>RAIMONDO What a terrible moment! I can't even form a word; A dense cloud of terror Covers the sun's rays. Like a parched rose She stands between life and death. Anyone not touched by her Has the heart of a tiger in his breast!</p>	<p>ARTURO (a tenor, Lucia's husband) Qual terribile <u>momento</u>! <u>Piu formar non so parole</u>; <u>Denso velo di spavento</u> <u>Par che copra i rai del sole!</u> <u>Come rosa inaridita</u> <u>Ella sta fra morte e vita</u>; <u>Chi per lei non e commosso</u> <u>Ha di tigre in petto il cor!</u></p> <p>ARTURO What a terrible moment! I can't even form a word; A dense veil of terror Covers the sun's rays. Like a parched rose She stands between life and death. Anyone not touched by her Has the heart of a tiger in his breast!</p>	<p>ALISA (a mezzo-soprano, Lucia's friend, with Chorus)</p> <p><u>Come rosa inaridita</u> <u>Ella sta fra morte e vita</u>; <u>Chi per lei non e commosso</u> <u>Ha di tigre in petto il cor!</u></p> <p>ALISA & CHORUS Like a parched rose She stands between life and death. Anyone not touched by her Has the heart of a tiger in his breast!</p>