

死生学応用倫理

Death & Life Studies and Practical Ethics

English Lecture Series No.18

東京大学大学院人文社会系研究科

Graduate School of Humanities and Sociology

‘The Death Song’: Voice, Absence and Afterlife on the Operatic Stage
– the case of *Lucia di Lammermoor* –

Speaker : Dr Naomi Matsumoto
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Time : 04 November 2025 (Tuesday) 17:30-19:00

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Abstract

This presentation explores the representation of death on the operatic stage, examining how such portrayals reveal broader cultural and aesthetic meanings of death. While love and death are central *topoi* in opera, the direct depiction of death has been notably underexplored in scholarly literature. During the early years of the genre, Horatian theories of theatre discouraged the explicit depiction of violent or fatal acts, a constraint that faded by the nineteenth century. This shift allowed for more overt portrayals of death emerged as exemplified in works such as Verdi's *La Traviata* (1852) and Bizet's *Carmen* (1875). Among these 19th-century works, we will focus especially on Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* (1835). Following the opera's iconic 'mad scene', the heroine's death is announced but never fully explained. This ambiguous death transforms Lucia's mad scene into a 'death song', a moment where her voice, immortalised, becomes a haunting echo of her existence, transcending her physical absence. Through this analysis, the paper explores the nuanced relationship between life and death on the operatic stage, highlighting the dynamics of presence v. absence and revealing how the ghostly remnants of a voice in the face of death offer a potent metaphor for loss and transcendence.

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