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Abstract*: Entrances, Set Pieces, and Exits: Reflections on the Structure of Verdi's *Otello*

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One of the problems raised by *Otello* (1887) concerns the difficulty of establishing a set of historically sensitive structural procedures by which we might understand its long- and short-range architecture. The principal issue -- to what extent are the traditional operatic genres still in force here? -- has been much discussed recently from a variety of standpoints. The view presented in this paper is that *Otello* marks the moment when generic concerns may be considered to have yielded to more individualized, *ad hoc* procedures -- when the analytical appeal to the primacy of the *primo ottocento* conventions can no longer be counted on to provide the most crucial information on which to ground an operatic hermeneutics. This conclusion receives at least partial support from critics of the late 1880's, who nearly unanimously saw along with the final dissolution of the conventions a new type of opera emerging in *Otello*, a type associated with its new generic designation, *dramma lirico*.

While certain fragmentary contours of the old structures may certainly be found in *Otello* (that is, certain generic aspects do linger as memories, but usually as memories of things irretrievably lost), their claim to centrality is overturned in favor of what often seems to be a radically more flexible, less prescriptive, three-phase (or three-zone) model: a set-piece core surrounded on the one side by a freely composed entrance and on the other by a freely composed exit. The model proposed here is both heuristically effective and historically derivable from certain deformations of the conventions found in Verdi's preceding operas.

Otello may be considered a chain of such three-zone units. Two portions of the score are analyzed in relation to the model: the post-Duel exit and subsequent entrance to the Love Duet in Act I; and the exit from the Act III Desdemona/Otello Duet and the entire subsequent unit, including Otello's "Dio! mi potevi scagliar."