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ENG 523

Week 8: *Othello*

7 November, 2017

OTHELLO

O my fair warrior!
...It gives me wonder great as my content
To see you here before me. O my soul's joy!
...for, I fear,
... Amen to that, sweet powers!

(from 2.1.177-193)

DESDEMONA

Alas, my lord, what do you mean by that?
...And yet I fear you; for you are fatal then
...why I should fear I know not,
Since guiltiness I know not; but yet I feel I
fear.

(from 5.2.24-42)

For this week's exercise, I wanted to capture the tension that plagued Othello's relationship with Desdemona. Even before things begin to go awry, the interactions between the two characters are fraught with a sense of foreboding. To emphasize this sense of uneasiness, I bent the sound of my chosen lines by suturing sections of dialogue together: 2.1.177-193, where the two make sweeping proclamations of love after Othello's return, and 5.2.24-42, the couple's exchange leading up to Desdemona's death. While the tones of these two sections differ greatly, there are eerie parallels between the two. The conversation in the second act, while full of lush, almost saccharine language, contains a vocabulary of the unnatural and excessive: "forbid," "cannot speak enough," "too much of joy" and the numerous references to death do not outwardly appear to be concerning. However, when juxtaposing pieces of this interaction with Othello's confrontation of his wife in Act V, these words take on a far more menacing quality.

Though written using a strict meter, the musical transcription is not meant to be exact. Despite the precisely timed entrances and rhythms of the automated recording, the notation serves more as how I pictured the different lines interacting with each other. Othello's speech from Act II is full of optimism, certainty, and praise for Desdemona. Desdemona's lines from Act V, in contrast, are extremely unnerving. As a result, most of Othello's melody is in a major

key; with “for, I fear” being the only fragment that departs from this. Desdemona’s melody is more jagged and not as predictable as Othello’s smoother line that is easier on the ear. Her expressions of concern act as interjections, interrupting Othello’s Act II speech until the two overlap with “for, I fear” and “for you are fatal then.” Desdemona’s sense of security declines even further, emphasized by a certain degree of repetition: the melody “why I should fear I know not” is repeated an octave down by “since guiltiness I know not” to underscore her uncertainty.