Titus Andronicus, I discovered, is an early and particularly bloody Shakespearean tragedy. Titus's beautiful daughter Lavinia is kidnapped and brutally raped. The perpetrators mercilessly slice out her tongue and chop off her hands, so she can't identify them or reveal what happened. Lavinia's secret remains sealed inside of her, so poor Titus, her father, can only guess at the truth. Horrible, no doubt, but what's the connection with K. 331?

It turns out that like innocent Lavinia, Mozart's innocent little tune has also been carved up, by musical analysts in search of its secret, yet each with a conflicting account of the truth. Schenker, for instance, interprets the first four bars shown above as an interrupted 5-line from E prolonged to a rapid structural descent through D-C♯-B in bar 4. E-D-C♯ on the afterbeats of bars 1-3 comprise a motion to an inner voice embellished by lower thirds on the downbeats composing out the headtone E over tonic harmony. Others disagree, however, and see the initial E-D-C♯ in bars 1-3 not as a prolongation of E, but as the true structural descent from 5 down to 3, with the D at the end of the phrase representing an upper neighbor to the prolonged C♯ before passing to 2.

A third faction contends that this simple passage really unfolds a 3-line from C♯ on the downbeat of bar 1 instead of a 5-line from E. The initial C♯-B-A descent in bars 1-3 moves to an inner voice, but here the structural downbeats are embellished by upper thirds on the afterbeats prolonging C♯ to bar 4. Still another contingent claims that the B over dominant harmony in bar 2 is a prolonged lower neighbor returning to a structural C♯ in bar 4, instead of passing down to A within a tonic prolongation.

All in all, some of our best analysts have torn this tiny tune asunder, note by note, to reveal its secret—but they don't agree. And like the hapless Lavinia, lacking fingers to point or tongue to speak, Mozart's innocent little melody can't just tell us the truth. Like Lavinia, its mystery remains locked inside. And like Titus, we can only wonder.
Besides learning a bit of the bard though, I also learned a bit about Carl—and about music too. I decided that in the end, he cares more about music than he does about discovering “the truth.” Carl sympathizes with music’s analytic fate, even at his own hand, as if it were a person like Lavinia. He probes the notes, but only to embrace them more. Maybe that’s what Carl means when he says he’s deeply interested in Schenker, but more interested in Mozart. And maybe that’s what Schenker himself means when he calls tones creatures with a life of their own. To analyze music, yes, but never to chop out her tongue.

I’ve learned more about music from Carl than anyone else, and this above all. Carl, like so few of us, has what Martin Buber calls an I-Thou relationship with art. Music for him is a Thou instead of an It. Analysis is a love affair, not a dissection. Carl wants to engage music as an end in itself, not as a means to the truth. He cradles each piece in his hands like a butterfly, admiring the intricacy of its wings, only to let it flutter away again, honoring the mystery of flight.

Perhaps like Lavinia, music’s secret always remains best unknown, so that like Titus, we are always left wondering. I have a vision of Carl walking with Shakespeare across a field of butterflies, pondering Schenker’s remark—“where there is no wonder, there can be no art.”

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