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# **CARL ORFF'S *CARMINA BURANA*: A CONCEPTUAL AND ETHICAL ANALYSIS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper addresses the moral and ethical implications of Carl Orff's masterpiece *Carmina Burana*. I begin with a brief introduction, framing the paper and providing some general background about the piece's importance. I then delve into discussions about the original writers of the *Carmina* text as well as some possible philosophical influence that these writers could have had on Orff. Next I present some information on Nazi Germany (in which Orff lived) including the philosophical basis of their cultural policy and some historical theories that explain the phenomenon of Nazi eugenics. I include a summary of my research regarding Orff's connection to the Nazi party as well as some historical information on Orff and the *Carmina*. A thematic plot analysis of the piece follows and then I conclude with some comments about the information as a whole. Throughout the study of all of the aspects I come to the conclusion that Orff's piece is layered with meaning, and is a fascinating study on the inner psyche of oppression and cynicism. The piece itself reflects many of the external factors acting upon it, but it stands on its own as a philosophical piece of art. Orff creates his own ethical system that is shaped around what appears to be a supremely hopeless worldview. I show the connections found in the piece to these external factors while examining Orff's own ideas.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Research usually consists of a person or group of persons investigating a singular phenomenon while weaving together threads of data to create the fabric of a new idea. The

research presented here does exactly the opposite, which is quite typical in the artistic world. Art is a science like none other. It speaks about the human soul so profoundly that even the artist himself cannot comprehend completely what is woven into his creation. Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana* is a particularly pertinent example of this complexity. It has so many threads woven into its fabric that scholars, musicians, and concert-goers are still puzzling over its origins more than eighty years after its premiere. When researching something which has had a massive moral, philosophical, and cultural impact on the world as the *Carmina*, one cannot simply piece together scraps of information into a scholarly quilt. Instead one must hold a microscope over the many threads that hold it together and examine their very fibers. Composed amid the tumultuous years of the Nazi reign in Germany, the *Carmina* is a source of endless curiosity and skepticism (Orff himself was suspected of being a Nazi sympathizer or even party member). While there is no certainty about Orff's intentions in composing his masterpiece, I will attempt to break down its many parts and examine the factors and influences surrounding it to shed more light on what could possibly have been his mindset when writing this piece. What I am doing here is creating a patchwork quilt built from scraps; a quilt in which the finished project is not something brand new at all but instead is a collection of preexisting thought that creates a compelling whole.

You would be hard-pressed to find a piece of music or literature that has rocked, scandalized and delighted society like the *Carmina Burana*. Its blatant allusions to lust, drunkenness, love, and spiritual longing have enticed audiences for centuries. The libretto (text) for the work was written by many hands in many regions in 12<sup>th</sup> century Europe, giving birth to a widespread literary and philosophical revolution. The actual text of the manuscript for the *Carmina*, which contains more than 200 poems and verses which were compiled into a singular volume by Catholic monks, was stored away in the Bavarian monastery of Bueron and dropped out of history for several centuries. Carl Orff, inspired by the scandalous nature and beautiful cadence of the poems, brought them back to the forefront of creative thought when he chose it as the libretto for his 1948 stylistic cantata, thus bridging the artistic gap between the modern era and the breakthroughs of western literature in the Medieval Period. No other work has impacted the artistic world like the

*Carmina Burana*; it has tied together art and history as it weaves controversy into societies while at the same time revolutionizing art and creative thought.

## THE GOLIARDS AND THE ORIGINS OF THE TEXT

The origins of the *Carmina* are somewhat mysterious, as are the poets who composed them. The composers of the poems are a group of lyricists referred to as the “Goliards.” The name is derived from the Biblical story of David and the Philistine king Goliath. P.G. Walsh notes that the term “Goliath” originally came about through a debate between St. Bernard of Clairvaux and Peter of Abelard (a literary leader and philosopher of the time period). St. Bernard publically renounced Abelard’s literature and ideas, comparing them and their power over readers and listeners to the monstrous (and seemingly indestructible) figure of Goliath (a symbol for evil and oppression in the Old Testament). Abelard (who is believed to have possibly contributed some of his own verses to the *Carmina*) publically criticized St. Bernard’s Cistercian Order of monks, referred to as the “Gray Monks,” and created a series of satirical verses aimed at them. This style of tongue-in-cheek writing unexpectedly appealed to readers and inspired the creation of a sect of vagrant wanderers who traveled throughout Europe, spreading the new brand of satirical, romantic and moralizing literature, much like Abelard’s. The movement is often compared to the hippie movement of the 60’s, and they gladly took on the name and nefarious connotation of Goliards (p. xv). The most recognized feature of this group was their sophisticated renderings of Latin verse. It is easy to focus on the group’s offensive material, but further study reveals these crass writers as master satirists of the state of Medieval Era society and the decay of leadership in the Catholic Church and moral society in Europe as a whole in the thirteenth century (Classen, 2009). The movement and large bulk of work resulting from the group sowed controversy in Medieval Era society, as the writers became more and more outspoken about their secular themes in an apparent attempt to warp and evolve the sacred “high art” of poetry and music.

These works have been hailed and studied as literary master works, but Orff did not haphazardly choose this manuscript to draw text based solely on its reputation. Extensive

study of the meter and rhyme of many of the poems shows that these pieces were more than likely meant to be sung. The problem with deciphering twelfth century composition is that vocal parts were transcribed on separate manuscripts. Composers also relied on themselves and their companions' ability to memorize lyrics and melodies in order to perform and spread their works. These factors make it hard to tell if the text held in Munich today is all that was recorded or if there was in fact musical lines ever written for the texts (Stevens, 1961). Some of the pieces seem too complex and wordy to have been songs, while others actually have neumes (the ancient form of musical notation most associated with Gregorian chant music) scribbled in above the words. While some of the poems appear to have been written out with much care and thought, others have been hurriedly scribbled down as if from memory (Walsh, 1993). The scribbled characters and the lack of staves (musical staff on which musical notation rests) with the neumes (Stevens, 1961) combine to make performance of the original musical works near impossible.

## ANALYSIS OF GOLIARD PHILOSOPHY

A study of the history of the text helps us to better understand the depth of the *Carmina* as it combines groundbreaking literary history and music, but to better answer the question of the philosophy Orff presents in his work we must delve briefly into the philosophy of the original writers. To do this I will speak of the ideologies of two of the most infamous characters involved in the Goliard movement: Peter Abelard himself and the controversial Archpoet.

“‘And thereafter,’ said Abelard, ‘I made no new songs of the mysteries of philosophy, but of Love’s secrets only’” (Waddell, 1934). Abelard, a Medieval scholar, writer and clergy member, is a hinge character in the history of twelfth century Europe. His unorthodox ideas of theology and philosophy make him the concentration of much scholarship. His intellectual might trounced some of the greatest philosophical minds of the era and his public disputes drew attention to his ideas from the public (Shapiro, 1964). As evidenced in his statement above, Abelard formed many of his ideas around the framework of love; in fact one could say that he was obsessed with the concept of love and eventually with love’s distortion into lust. His stormy romance with a woman named Heloise could be a catalyst behind the transformation. Underlying his work one can get the sense that he is feverishly

trying to moralize sinful behavior; trying to shed his guilty conscious. The final consequence of this work was denouncement by the Church as heretic and “an injunction against any further teaching” (Shapiro). Even so, his body of writing seems to have inspired many of the scholars and writers who comprised the Goliards and appears to be a connecting thread between many of the verses in the *Carmina*..

Shapiro's book *Medieval Philosophy* concisely lays out Abelard's teachings on ethics and morality. Abelard proposes that sin is a natural consequence of the defect of the human mind; that we are weak and that God expects our sinful behavior. In fact our sin is the main conductor of grace into our lives. He then defines sin according to the intention of the sinner. “We punish facts rather than faults.” (Shapiro, 1964) Abelard wants to draw a line between the actions of a sin and the circumstances surrounding the action of the sin. To him, a true mortal sin (a sin that is committed with full knowledge of the wrongness of the action) is only present when the intentions of the act are based on ill will. God alone can decipher the intentions behind our actions. There is “no sin save that against conscience” (Shapiro). This philosophy is apparent in the shocking words of the Goliard manuscripts. The writers could “guiltlessly” engage their minds in scenarios of moral turpitude. The verses are able to speak so profoundly of the dark corners of the soul where lust and a multitude of other sins dwell, and it is the helpless, nearly manic, spirit of Abelard himself that is kept alive in the sense of helplessness that is written in between the lines of the poetry.

Now we proceed to our discussion of the Archpoet. Helen Waddell eloquently writes about the life and impact of the mysterious figure of the Archpoet in her book *The Wandering Scholars*. No actual name is associated with the alias Archpoet, though he did inherit the titles of Primas and Goliard as well. The Archpoet is said to have contributed a substantial body of work left behind by the Goliards; he is in fact considered the embodiment of the entire movement. It was his influence that infused a particularly irreverent and scathing brand of satire into their arsenal. He is believed to have been a poor wanderer who often sold scraps of his own clothing or to compose a few verses for a patron or storeowner in order to buy bread to eat. He is believed to have traveled through Europe, with the Plague nipping at his heels (Waddell).

His satire and irreverence added a new element to Abelard's relativistic moral teachings. The Archpoet, through his actions and words, encouraged dissent among the scholars. He set the bar for irreverence and intellectual rebellion in the twelfth century. There was no room for obedience to authority in the Archpoet's worldview, and though he is believed to have spent some of his life in a cloistered society of monks, he constantly attacked the authority of the Church and European high society. He championed satire as a choice weapon to combat the society and beliefs he didn't support. Intellect was a weapon to him and life was a means to receive pleasure (Waddell). Shades of the Archpoet can be found in the many drinking songs and distorted liturgical texts found in the *Carmina*. While Abelard believed in and feared God, the Archpoet revered the written word and scoffs at the idea of an omnipotent power. While Abelard showed bitterness towards Church leadership, he still has his roots in Catholic theology as a monk and teacher. In contrast the Archpoet is completely irreverent and shows outright contempt for organized religion, and this influence could be evidenced in the verses that directly parody ecclesiastical hymns. His mysterious character is glamorized by those who study him now, but when one reads his work, one can sense a quiet desperation oozing out of the phrases on the page.

## **ANALYSIS OF NAZISM AND SOCIALIST NATIONALISM PHILOSOPHY**

Since Carl Orff thrived under the Nazi regime, and is in fact suspected of being an outright supporter, it is necessary to also consider some of the philosophy that permeated German society during this period of time. Nazism (and Fascism for that matter) falls under the umbrella of Socialism. Nazism was also largely formulated around cultural politics. In fact Walter Benjamin wrote essays defining fascism during the days of its reign in Germany, describing it as "the situation of politics [rendered] aesthetic." (Bahr, 1995) Hitler's administration tended toward a socialistic form of nationalism to explain their tactics of "cleansing" Germany from perceived cultural blemishes. They used Germany's rich history of visual, musical and literary art as a means to justify their lofty vision of German nationalism. In order to shed a better light on the political philosophy of Nazism, we will take a look at two points of view: that of historian Ehrhard Bahr and popular modern philosopher and unapologetic Nazi sympathizer Martin Heidegger.

First we will address the philosophy of Heidegger as discussed in Julian Young's text *Heidegger Philosophy Nazism*. Heidegger was once considered a master of modern philosophy, but his support for the Nazi party has cast a skeptic shadow over all his work. He found fame in his meditations of the concept of *volk* (or people). This concept simply states that humanity is to be considered as one natural organism. This concept (taken quite literally) was a fundamental part of the philosophy of Nazism and took on a Darwinian hue. The organisms that were formed from a group of people were in constant competition, the stronger obviously pushing others into decline. The Third Reich policies were built around identifying and propelling the strongest "cells" into the forefront of society and eliminating the undesired "weaker" cells in order to strengthen the organism as a whole. Once the organism was at its peak strength it could begin to systematically absorb other frailer organisms (namely other European nations). (Young, 1998)

The concept of *volk* is appealing on many levels: spiritual, cultural, economic, and political. Heidegger claimed that since God's grand creation is nature and He dictates natural order, that the philosophy of *volk* is essentially driven by divine intervention. It is God's will that the powerful arise and the weak decline because that is how He created nature. (Young) In this light it is easy to see the natural ethical implications of Nazi policy.

How that policy was implemented through political means is a necessary piece in this discussion, a piece that is discussed with some depth by Ehrhard Bahr in a piece of his writing found in the book *National Socialist Cultural Policy*. Bahr describes Nazi cultural politics with two terms: intentionalism vs. functionalism. He opens his argument with a supremely relevant quote from writer Peter Reichels: Hitler understood aestheticization in real, though superficial, terms as 'beautification of life', as production of a pseudo-reality which was supposed to influence the perception as well as the image of reality of millions and concede to them visually and symbolically what was denied to them in reality (5).

Cultural policy was the vehicle that Hitler chose to achieve his ends of altering the reality of German citizens. The Nazi regime formulated a series of biomedical principles to legitimize their worldview, referring to these worldviews as "the German norm" (Bahr, 1995). "...Anything deviating from this norm was to be 'removed' like a cancer from the fictitious body of a German people..." (Bahr).



According to Bahr, the ideologies of intentionalism and functionalism are used by historians to put the tragedy of Nazi control on culture and the eventual extermination of many Jewish people and other unwanted sects of the German population into context. Intentionalists claim that Nazi policy was applied to the overall ideology of the party after 1933. Hitler is seen as the main perpetrator in this view. His centrality and influence directly lead to the phenomenon of “cultural cleansing” and the horrific events of the Holocaust. This is the traditional view adopted by many historians and political scholars. Functionalists see a different means to the same end. They see a logical progression from the beginning of the Nazi party and the early implementations of their policy to the destructive end. According to this view there are clearly racist and destructive overtones in the beginning stages of the party that blossomed into discriminatory policies and eventually to the notorious and brutal extermination of the concentration camps. This view looks at all the agencies and departments of the Nazi party as equal culprits in the eventual genocide and that these factors actually limited the role of a central member of the party. (Bahr)

This whole argument has drastic moral implications. Was the barbarism of the Nazi party based on the psychosis of one man or (even more alarming) the direct goal of a group of individuals working together to implement policies to usher in the death of millions of innocent lives? A general observation based on both Bahr and Heidegger's discussions is that there is a direct and distinct difference between the National Socialist worldview and that of the Goliards. Nationalist Socialism champions a singular leading body that upholds what is perceived to be a social/cultural norm or preference. The Goliards were founded around a spirit of resistance and relativism. They created their own set of ethical standards and resisted the policy of governing bodies. Nationalist Socialism worked to solidify individuals as a communal whole around a singular ideology (in the case of the Nazi party through propaganda and cultural policy). The Goliards aimed at fragmentation based on irreverence and intellectualism. Nationalist Socialism worked to limit creativity in art whereas the Goliards used art as their primary vehicle for advancing their views. Nationalist Socialism thrives on the ideas of the few and suffers when individuals search for deep personal meaning in their teachings. Goliardic teachings are brash, dabbling in relativism (individualistic meaning) that refuses to take in to consideration other points of view.

The apparent contradictions make these two philosophical bodies an unlikely pair of influences, but when he decided to create his *Carmina Burana*, Orff placed himself directly in between these two ideologies. This surely contributes to the controversy that shrouds the piece and the man. We must now move to an analysis of the character of Carl Orff and the actual text and music of the *Carmina*.

## CARL ORFF AND NAZI GERMANY

Carl Orff is a perplexing character in music and cultural history. He is the cause of much scholarly and ethical debate and his character is still scrutinized. Orff is considered a genius by some and a pioneer in music, education, and theory. By others he is known as a bigot, a Fascist anti-Semite whose continued popularity is a disgrace to Germany and survivors of the Holocaust.

Orff's place in musical history was cemented for revolutionizing the state of modern music education (especially for elementary-aged students) by introducing new instruments, teaching tools and strategies for instruction in music classrooms. He is often overlooked as a composer, but his work setting the *Carmina* to music for chorus and orchestra has reached legendary status (though many don't realize it was Orff who composed it). Though Orff is not now considered one of the most pivotal twentieth century composers now, he was wildly popular in Germany and other areas of Western Europe in the 1930's and 40's, and at the time his work was considered to be very important. Not much is known about his personal life during this time, which raises some suspicion about Orff's involvement in the Nazi party. While Orff championed himself as a heroic dissenter of the Nazi regime there is substantial evidence and personal accounts that suggest the opposite, including his widespread popularity among Nazi administrators and subsequent professional success during the Nazi reign (as well as Nazi party funding). He insisted that the *Carmina* was composed in direct opposition to the Third Reich and that he aimed to resurrect the rebellious nature of the Goliards by using their verses to undermine the oppressive government, but the fact that the work even existed, and in fact flourished, during the Nazi reign is damning evidence for the composer.

Barbara Russano Hanning describes the Nazi's policy on music in her text, *Concise History of Western Music*. "The Nazis' requirements for music were mostly expressed in

negatives: music must not be dissonant, atonal, twelve-tone, 'chaotic', intellectual, Jewish, jazz-influenced, or left wing, which excluded all modernist and most modern music." (Hanning, 2006). Basically the Nazi party allowed music that exuded the "national German pride", masculine music, music that could become the soundtrack to a flourishing world power, music that would evidence the superiority of the German race to the whole world, colorful music that would mask the hideous actions taking place off the radio and behind the scenes at the concert halls. Orff's piece seems to do anything but this. He draws on many Renaissance and modern techniques and dissonances. One could argue that the majority of the piece is in fact very "chaotic", but it did debut and receive substantial funding and airplay on Nazi-run radio programs (Kater, 2000). Michael Kater even writes that Hitler himself heard and liked the piece (2000). How did Orff dupe the entire Nazi administration, or is there in fact an undercurrent of Fascism found throughout the piece? In order to clarify this matter we must discuss the history of Orff's relationship with the Nazi party.

Writer and musical historian Michael H. Kater writes extensively about Carl Orff's affiliation with the Nazi party and how that relates to the *Carmina Burana*. Party officials investigating the piece pre-debut were initially put off by the pseudo-late-Renaissance style Orff preferred (as one of his primary influences was one of the Renaissance era's chief composers, the Italian Claudio Monteverdi), not to mention the nonconformist and explicitly sexual themes woven into the lyrics. The Nazi's bigoted view of sex and negative feelings towards free thinking artists clashed with the Goliardic ideology presented in the verses. Orff persisted through some serious scrutiny and subsequent trepidation at the hands of the Third Reich Propaganda Committee and further scrutiny from other high-seated officials. Not only were the lyrics called into question, but heavy use of text in Latin and Medieval French did not support the Socialist Nationalism that the party wanted to promote in German and Austrian art. Only a small portion of the songs are in German. Orff used influence from some friends within the party to see the piece through production and its premiere in Frankfurt in June 1937. The piece faltered at first due to continued skepticism and some unfavorable reviews, but experienced widespread success later that year (Kater).

Orff was acclaimed by the Nazi party after the success of the *Carmina* and worked on commissioned and noncommissioned pieces feverishly directly prior to and during World War Two, thus emerging as an apparently shining example of German patriotism and Socialist ideals (Kater, 2000). He even took part in one of the most frowned-upon projects in music history, a rewrite of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. It was commissioned by the Third Reich Propaganda and High Art Committee in order to supersede Felix Mendelssohn's popular version, who incidentally was Jewish. Orff was lavished with awards, praised and funded through the Nazi government, and was able to compose in ways that were usually suppressed by administrators within the party including an oratorio that is thought to have mocked Hitler outright and other works that alluded to revolution against the ruling regime. After the war, Orff was blacklisted by the Allied forces as a possible Nazi sympathizer, but (likely with the help of friends and admirers in the investigation committee) was mysteriously acquitted of charges and suspicion overnight (Kater).



Figure 1 the Wheel of Fortune (*Athena Review*)

Orff's involvement with the party very well may have been a survival tactic, but the outcome of that ambiguity could shed a new light on his work. Some musicologists and historians have identified certain "Fascist qualities" within some of his work (Kater), i.e.

booming full-chorus movements throughout the *Carmina* (a common characteristic of compositions found in the propaganda supporting socialist nationalism's goal of a national unity). Regardless, Orff labeled himself a threat to the Nazi party; a resistor because of his belief in a European solidarity, which he states as the reason for the tutti (full-chorus) passages and multiple languages (Kater). Orff also asserts an ominous concept throughout the entire work: a person need not strive to take control of their own lives because some greater force has a tighter hold on one's fortunes. This concept is hard to interpret. This idea coupled with the optimistic sections of the piece could indicate ignorant bliss, which is a common characteristic of propaganda. This could also be reframed if it could be determined that this statement was directed towards the party leaders. To decide if Orff's piece is conformist propaganda or was written to reflect the philosophy of the Goliardic poets who acted as his librettists, one has to delve deeper into the rich content of the *Carmina*.

## ORFF'S CARMINA BURANA

Orff's *Carmina Burana* has been categorized as a scenic cantata. "A cantata (literally "sung", derived from the Italian word "cantare") is a vocal composition with an instrumental accompaniment, typically in several movements, often involving a choir." (Kennedy, 2006). Orff conceived the idea for the work after stumbling upon an illustration of the mystic "Wheel of Fortune" found on the *Carmina* manuscript, which is pictured here. The stage performance enacted this entire epic plot for the audience. To Orff, the action on stage was of equal importance with the music (hence the designation 'scenic' cantata). The staging transcends ballet choreography. It brings character to the sometimes disturbing sometimes alluring themes of Orff's piece. The music, movements, costumes and sets were all meticulously coordinated in order to present all of the themes vividly and colorfully. His work with different artistic mediums within the piece also accentuated his recurring theme of universality. (Being as most modern performances of the piece don't incorporate the staged portion the plot has for the most part been disregarded).

The text Orff chose to use in the piece reflects medieval peoples' fascination with pagan spiritual figures. A chief character in his piece is the pagan goddess Fortuna, whom he

referred to as the “Imperatrix Mundi.” Her image is found in depiction of the Wheel of Fortune, sitting in the center, controlling its movement. She embodies this concept of chance, which is favorable to man one minute and unfavorable the next. The widely-recognized first movement describes this ominous figure, acting as the driving, uncontrollable force in the lives of men. She spins the Wheel and carelessly chooses paths for them with no allegiances or tendencies towards good or evil (Sebesta, 1996). The movement is full of angst and desperation, the chorus feverishly proclaims their fear of the goddess and her precarious grasp on their lives. The whole work expresses a perceived helplessness of the human race, and one could claim that it also alludes to unification through it. The goddess Venus also makes an appearance towards the middle of the piece as a counterpart to Fortuna. There is reason to believe that the spring time section contrasts with the first movement in which Fortuna seems to be the ultimate influence in the lives of men. This new section is playful and carefree, depicting a heart racing out of control. Venus’s character seems softer, gentler, more alluring; the stuff of raw emotional impulse. Her control is more persuasive but more subtle throughout the piece.

The *Carmina* is divided into four sections with a reprise of the first movement at the end of the piece. All the movements personify different segments of the “Wheel”. Each section is drastically different, seemingly unconnected, but with Orff’s orchestration and some of the overarching themes that hover over the action of the text, the piece becomes an epic tale that speaks of love, loss, jubilation and desperation. Judith Lynn Sebesta’s translation of and notes based on the original text in her book *Carmina Burana: Cantiones Profanane* contributed greatly to my summarization of the plot below.

The first section consists of the first two movements, which assert the authority of Fortuna and cast a dark note on the rest of the piece. The text bemoans Fortuna’s fickle nature, declaring “To Fortunes blows I bare my back” (Sebesta). The music, always ominous and shaded with darkness, is fickle as well; one minute soft the next booming, in one section block chords stamp as if depicting many feet marching and in a later section the strings and brass break into frantic melismas (sections of many running notes). The second movement references Fortuna’s assertion over history when it ends with the line “On her wheel’s axle clearly; seen the message: Hecuba [the wife of Priam, King of Troy] WAS queen.” (Sebesta). Overall one is left quite unsettled after the first four minutes of the piece, feeling

as hopeless as the melancholic poet who first scratched out this text and the composer who must have agonized over the words as he scribbled out the notation to accompany them.

The second section, often referred to as the “Springtime Section”, contains a small but famous body of German poetry found in the original manuscript entitled “Auf Dem Anger”, translated “on the lawn” (Sebesta). The first minutes of the section are mystical, with barren orchestration and a simple full-chorus voicing. The text is magical, describing the movements of two more mythical figures, Flora (floral goddess) and Phoebus (the sun god) as they “embrace” and bid farewell to the bitterness of winter and welcome in spring. “Topsy Spring with beaming smile lifts and toast while defeated Winter limps off-field” (Sebesta). A similarly haunting baritone voice solo follows. The passage sounds like a set of lips morphing from a stagnant frown to a sly grin. “So men’s hearts awaken to Love reborn, As the baby archer [cupid] desires...My presence is not absent in your thoughts (Whoever loves in such a way is like one broke upon the wheel.)” (Sebesta). Even as the sweetness of spring begins to creep into the orchestration, one must never forget the threat of Fortuna’s cruel cranking of the wheel.

But forget one seemingly does. The next movement shocks with its joyfulness as the chorus explores the possibility of escaping from the jurisdiction of Fortune. Venus (the goddess of love) makes an appearance in this part of the piece as well as Paris (a prince of Troy). Paris was popular in the Goliard movement as his affair and marriage to Helen was the ultimate tale of love to the poets. These movements are characterized by their carefree melodies and singing string parts. The percussion and brass calm and the keys change from dark forceful minors into light airy majors. The chorus doesn’t seem to be shouting in desperation any longer but singing for joy instead. Happiness dominates the chords and lyrics. The response to Venus’ beckons results in eight movements that personify the beginning stages of love. There is a sense of innocence and naïveté as the chorus surveys the beautiful scenery. Attention quickly turns from the environment to their companions. The lyrics and accompaniment interact in a trifling manner towards the end of the “Auf Dem Anger” section. The eighth movement is shown in its original manuscript on page ten as an example of this uplifting section of the piece. You can see how Orff allows the parts to interact independently rather than utilizing the driving block chords that characterize the first two movements. “This *Carmen* [chapter or section] originally came from a Passion

play and was sung by Mary Magdalene, generally identified as the harlot who begged forgiveness from Jesus..." (Sebesta). Orff uses much softer dynamics and higher tessituras to show flirtatiousness, as if all the anxiety of the first few movements has dissipated. How dangerous the forgetfulness of a fickle people is.

This section reaches a climax, and Orff begins to subtly undermine Venus's governance with a shifting accompaniment, neither joyful nor sad in character. The ninth movement acts as a pivot point. The orchestration slows down the fast pace of the previous movements, but then the chorus enters and pushes the tempo once again to its original feverish pace. The overall character remains uplifting, but there is a sense of loss of control; the carefree nature of the music begins to dissipate; becoming a fog that is quickly being pushed away by a portentous breeze before a storm breaks. The last two movements exert the last shreds of carefree spring.

The eleventh movement launches the next section of the piece "In Taberna". Fortuna exposes her trick; the chorus has never been free of her wheel. She turns it mercilessly. One can almost hear the cracking of spines of the wheel, the agonized moans of her victims. Some of the most scandalous poetry is found in these movements, as well as some of the most infamous movements of the entire work. The eleventh movement is considered the Archpoet's most famous poem (Sebesta). It rages and shrieks. "Consumed with rage I yet compress my crescent anger; in discontent beyond redress I decline soul's deliverance." (Sebesta) This section encompasses four movements which culminate in a booming climax at the end of the fourteenth movement.

The next section comes as a relief from the agonized sighs of the soloists and chorus as the orchestra's smooth texture acts as the calming hand of Venus, brushing the ash off of the shoulders of the tortured souls described in the previous segment. She holds them in a comforting embrace throughout the fifteen lullaby-esque *Carmen*.

This section deals entirely with love, referring to the vast number of love songs included in the original *Carmina* manuscript. It is also the most intimate section. Movements fifteen through eighteen deal with the beginning stages of love, picking up where the "Auf Dem Anger" left off. Soloists serenade the audience, playing the role of young lovers exploring their feelings. The nineteenth movement pivots once again and love turns to lust. The



lovers find themselves in a secluded space and consummate their relationship. The twenty-first movement is a barren arrangement in which the soprano soloist fights an interior battle between modesty and "Love's subjection" declaring at the end of the movement "To that sweet slavery I go" (Sebesta). (Thus implying that she has cast aside purity in favor of her companions' lustful desire.)

The orchestra erupts in a warped version of the theme from the spring time section. What was once joyful is torturous. The beautiful flowers rot and thistles prick the skin of the lovers. There is no relief anymore as the heavy chords become barren once more and the soprano sings a stirring recitative (a musical device with barren accompaniment and melodic lines designed to sound like speaking) declaring "My sweetest love, I give myself to you" (Sebesta). The chorus enters once again with a hymn mocking the *Ave Maria*, which is the Latin text of the often-prayed Catholic prayer "Hail, Mary". However instead of Mary, they hail Helen of Troy (wife of Paris) and Blanzifor (heroine in a popular romance tale) (Sebesta), who are also two shining beacons of admiration for the Goliards. They sing the praises of Venus, who they believe has rewarded them for their submission to their impulse, but the orchestration becomes destructive once more as the smiling face of Venus morphs into the hideous countenance of Fortuna. Orff chose to end the piece with a reprise of the first movement, bringing the chorus full-circle (which may mean that they have been twisted around a full turn of the wheel). The ending is bleak; leaving the listener uncomfortable and disconcerted. This bareness sheds much light on Orff's emotions towards this piece, perhaps even towards life in general.

## CONCLUSIONS

Now that we have the scraps for our "quilt" I will endeavor to pull some threads through them in order to patch them together as a whole. We have seen the history of the Goliard poets and scholars, as they are the original authors of the text. We have briefly examined some moral/ethical philosophy and attitudes to come out of key members of that group. We looked at some of the ideologies that Nazism was founded upon through the eyes of scholars and modern German philosopher Martin Heidegger; we also examined Carl Orff and his relationship with the Nazi party. Finally we delved into the plot and moral overtones found in Orff's musical arrangement of the *Carmina Burana*. I cannot make a

conclusive statement about his intentions in writing the piece. As I mentioned before, art is beautiful in that each person who takes it in has a different impression. I have found that this piece is a fascinating study of the mind in an oppressed situation. The piece has so many layers, and we are missing one of its important aspects if we disregard the philosophy so beautifully woven into it. In light of this conclusion, I will now add a few comments in an attempt to thread these scraps together.

Abelard's influence actually sparked the intellectual conflagration known as the Goliard movement. His moral teachings are woven into the texture of the poems, so he cannot be dismissed as an undercurrent anywhere that the text is found. Orff's piece is no exception. Abelard looked at the external factors working on humanity as a chief cause of sin. Orff's music speaks almost exclusively about the external factors on the human experience, actually suggesting the non-existence of free will altogether. Orff gives no credit whatsoever to the internal consciousness. His philosophy also aligns with Abelard in that there is a focus on helplessness without any focus at all on the implications of the actions the various characters.

Actually Orff's treatment of the text doesn't take in to account the moral situation of the characters at all. One could argue that the dark resolution of the music could imply the immoral nature of the actions spoken about in the text, though I believe the context refers more clearly to the overall dominance of Fortuna as well as reflecting Orff's own cynical view on life. It seems that he is preoccupied, almost to the point of paranoia, with the depth of negativity and the shallowness of positivity and optimism. This makes sense from the vantage point of a citizen living in a suppressive socialist country.

Orff also agrees with Abelard on the prevalence of love, but contradicts Abelard's views on its value. Love appears throughout the piece; in fact there is an entire section dedicated to it. It is so agreeable to the characters that it interrupts the drudgery of living under the rule of a dictating presence like Fortuna's. But Abelard's beliefs in a deep, fulfilling love contradicts Orff's implications. Orff's springtime section drips with honey-dipped new-found love, but the section proves shallow, artificial, a mask for Fortuna to don when playing her games. The final section claims that love is in fact a "slavery", and in the end the lovers seem to have received some kind of a spiritual lobotomy. The soprano's final solo depicts a character who submits to Fortuna's crank of the wheel in order to feel just a

bit of joy, even if it is only a delusion. Abelard defended love because he believed in its depth, that it was worthwhile. Orff mocks it and uses it as a vehicle for pain in his piece.

The poetry of the Archpoet is most definitely present in the piece. Many of the verses involving drinking and debauchery are more than likely influenced or directly written by him. The middle section deals almost exclusively with these concepts. The Archpoet is also credited with a substantial body of anger-soaked poetry, which is featured in the third section. The rage is originally directed at medieval authority, whether it be Church officials or aristocracy. Orff expresses that rage more than likely at chance's dominance. (After all this mood only appears once Fortuna enters back into the text after the Springtime section.) The listener can hear the frustration of a man who feels he's had all control taken away from him in the tortured, desperate chords in the middle of the piece. I believe, based on implications found in this piece that Orff identifies with the Archpoet more than any of the other characters influencing his work.

As for the driving force behind Nazi morality, the *volk* concept, there is little evidence of Orff's support of this concept in his piece from my point of view. His piece as a whole depicts humanity as a whole, not various organisms vying for power; in fact, the whole human race is powerless. The whole system of existence is too random, too hectic in Orff's world to accommodate this concept. Hitler has no power to "cleanse" any organism; in fact he is Fortuna's pawn. In Orff's world Fortuna is simply using Hitler to drag humanity on its face at the bottom of the wheel.

But one could ask the question: is Fortuna possibly a symbol for the Nazi party, and if so is it supporting it or opposing it? There is weight in that question. It is a question that is so hefty that no certain conclusion can be drawn here, only inferences made. In terms of intentionalism and functionalism, it is hard to apply either of these in a pure form to the circumstance of humanity according to Carl Orff. Fortuna's policy imposed on humanity is not an intentional one because it is not planned. It is random. Fortuna is apathetic in the truest meaning of the word. She has no set ends in mind; she spins her wheel for amusement alone. Functionalism also loses its relevance because there is no logical sequence of events here. Orff's transitions between movements and sections don't imply a logical shift. Orff shows his compositional genius here. The movements musically make sense. There is a general shift of mood that is unpredictable and interesting but the hectic,

scattered undertones remain intact. The wheel is arbitrary and Orff's music keeps this in mind. It is truly a game of chance. There is no connection between cause and effect, therefore functionalism is rendered ineffective.

So if Orff was using Fortuna as a symbol for the Third Reich, he would contradict historians about the method of policy implementation. But that leaves the question of Orff's attitude towards the Nazi party. If Orff supports the party it is surely by presenting the complete dominance of Fortuna. Why oppose the party? They have your fate in their all-powerful hands. They control your love. They even have the ability to take the dawn of spring time and make it dreary. Propaganda usually presents optimism, but Orff could have been ingeniously using pessimism as a manipulative tool. Any medium of hopefulness you may enlist towards resistance is a façade, so remain on the wheel and take any artificial comfort you are apportioned if you want to thrive. This could be seen in Orff's actions. He may not have agreed with the party but threw his support at it and took what he could get from it because he saw no light in the darkness. If he believed and supported the party from the start this piece could be a candid threat. The fact that he used modern techniques could just be Orff altering something that was considered anti-fascist and in fact making it material for a Nazi anthem.

That is one stance an informed listener could take. Orff could also be using symbolism to expose the evil of the party. Fortuna is viewed as something to be feared, but she has no concept of organization. She is playing with others like toys. This could be a blanket statement about Nazi policy. They are bending the lives of the German people for enjoyment. They are hungry with power but have no idea how to use it. Fortuna could even represent Hitler and the wheel the party, as if to say that politics is the tool with which Hitler is using as a torture device. Maybe through presenting love as an artificial thing Orff is exposing Nazi propaganda as a fake consolation. Don't take their offerings. They are not made out of love. In the end one cannot prosper under this administration.

It is intriguing study to analyze this material in light of some of the findings presented in this discussion, but a definite conclusion cannot be drawn here, thus the metaphor of the patchwork quilt. Such is the beauty of art. Ultimately we can conclude that Orff presents a bleak view in his piece, which undoubtedly reflected his environment. Only Orff can honestly answer the question of whether his masterpiece supported or resisted the Nazi

party, and since his actions and words are so non-committal, there is no clearly recorded answer to this question. In the end this piece is a master work that spans many fields. Not only is it creatively effective, but its moral and philosophical implications leave the listener puzzling, which makes Orff's *Carmina Burana* a modern triumph that is destined to stand the test of time by entertaining and posing the same questions discussed throughout this dialogue.



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