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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Masculine Redemption in Carl Orff's *Catulli Carmina* (1943)

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Abstract

This article argues that Carl Orff's *Catulli Carmina* – a five-movement cantata comprising a selection of Catullus' Latin poems framed by neo-Latin text written by Orff himself – occupies an ambiguous space within the cultural environment of National Socialism, especially in portraying ideals of contemporary masculinity. In its overt theatrical displays of male and female sexuality, *Catulli Carmina* invites association with the perceived 'decadence' of pre-war cabaret in France and Germany's Weimar Republic. Yet, through tendentious selection and ordering of the poems, Orff's cantata also 'corrects' Catullus' emblematic triviality and erotic abjection in an era which prized productive masculinity as a symbol of the good health of the nation. Orff's motivations in engaging with Roman culture were very different from Nazism's own fetishising of Greco-Roman antiquity, yet in this chapter Catullus provides a surprising case study for demonstrating how Orff's artistic values were often 'compatible' with those of the Nazi regime.

Keywords: Orff; Catullus; opera; masculinity; National Socialism; classical reception; Latin

> 'What could better support the Nazi claim that the Germans, precisely in their Aryan neo-paganism, were the true heirs of Greco-Roman ("Western") culture than Orff's animalistic settings of Greek and Latin poets?'[1]
>
> Richard Taruskin

Taruskin's typically punchy provocation mostly misses the point. It was the life-affirming youthful vigour of Orff's compositions that appealed to the Nazis, not their Latinity. Nonetheless, the misleading assumptions about

[1] Originally published as 'Orff's Musical and Moral Failings' in *The New York Times* (6 May 2001) in anticipation of a symposium sponsored by the American Symphony Orchestra titled 'After *Carmina Burana*: A Historical Perspective', which was paired with a performance of Orff's *Catulli Carmina*. The article is later reprinted as 'Can We Give Poor Orff a Pass at Last?' in Taruskin (2008) 161–7.

'classical reception' in the Third Reich which underpin this question are common enough to make it an important starting point for discussion of Carl Orff's *Catulli Carmina* – a 1943 cantata in which Orff sets twelve poems by Catullus to a riotous fusion of music and dance. As we will see, *Catulli Carmina* does reveal an affinity between elements of Orff's artistic practice and the cultural ideologies of National Socialism.[2] But it will prove less relevant than one might expect that both Orff and Nazi ideology drew inspiration from the ancient Greco-Roman world. Even here, what affinity there is between fascist appropriation of the ancient past and Orff's engagement with classical literature is much more complex than simplistic parallelism. In the 2010s a surge of scholarship[3] examining the place of the classical Greco-Roman world within twentieth-century fascist ideologies has made it clear that it was the athletes and idealising art of ancient Greece (rather than Rome) which provided inspiration for the cultural and social life of Germany's 'reborn' *Volk*.[4] Animalistic setting or not, there would seem little about Catullus – that infamously indolent un-man of the ancient world whose effete lifestyle epitomised the decadence of the once-great Roman republic[5] – which would commend itself to the fascist struggle against perceived cultural degeneracy. Orff's decision to set Catullus's Roman poetry in its original Latin language (and adding framing movements with his own Latin text)[6] also earned him no particular favours with the Nazi regime, which was encouraging new German-centred (and especially German-language) compositions for the theatrical and operatic stage.[7] (Even the enormously successful *Carmina Burana* was initially viewed with official suspicion because of its predominantly Latin text and similar erotic focus,[8] but it at least had the *völkisch* excuse that its Latin poems were written by German monks). Orff's decidedly heteronormative Catullus does accord loosely with the ideological suppression of homosexuality under the Third

[2] Taruskin is careful (and correct) to concede that it was unlikely Orff's intention that his music be seen in this light, but his article argues that this is immaterial given the capacity of Orff's music to 'channel' fascist and other objectionable content: Taruskin (2008) esp. 164–5.

[3] See esp. the broad survey of new scholarship collated in Roche and Demetriou (2018).

[4] Roche (2018a) esp. 8–11.

[5] Esp. Johnson (2009) 2–7.

[6] On imperfections in Orff's own Latin composition, and the 'unclassical' way in which he sets Latin to music, see Stachon (2017). On the repurposing of Latin teaching to support the teaching of German in the Nazi era, see Roche (2018b).

[7] Consequently, a remarkable 170 new German operas were written between 1933 and 1944: Levi (1996) 161. Because such works were both regarded and encouraged as 'high art' or escapist entertainment, and because they tended not to engage with contemporary realities, opera as an art form was not overtly politicised or much affected by censorship during the Nazi era: Levi (1996) 161–2, Griffin (1996) 22. The situation was very different for spoken-word theatre, and especially for plays set in the present day: these were considered vital both in representing and ushering in the fascist 'new age', and so '[e]very play was to uphold the professed ideological models and principles': Panse (1996) 145; see too Griffin (1996) 19–25.

[8] Orff's publisher for *Carmina Burana* warned Orff that the cantata's material was 'provocative': Kater (2000) 123. Several regime-aligned theatre directors, as well as Nazi officials connected with both Alfred Rosenberg and Joseph Goebbels, initially objected to the piece on the basis of its central focus on Eros: Kater (1997) 190.

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Reich;[9] there is certainly no Juventius in *Catulli Carmina*, nor any homosocial banter about anal sex. But the exuberantly sexualised (indeed orgiastic) frame Orff gives to his Catullan drama does not offer an easy fit with fascist denunciation of liberal attitudes to sex and sexuality in the Weimar Republic,[10] nor with the promotion of 'clean' sexual ethics under the Third Reich,[11] and concurrent attempts to desexualise the naked body in the public eye.[12]

Nonetheless, we should not regard Orff's cantata as completely disconnected from its cultural context.[13] This article does not claim that Orff is following or even directly responding to Nazi ideology, but through a study of *Catulli Carmina* it shows how – by his own admission – Orff's artistic values were often 'compatible' with those of the regime, even if his objectives were very different. Indeed, it is this compatibility that saw Orff become one of Germany's leading state-sponsored composers despite consistently embedding in his music the kind of sensuous material that Nazi propaganda condemned. In *Catulli Carmina* we see, for instance, a parallel between Orff's aesthetic worldview and the National Socialist cultural agenda in the way each sought 'eternal' value out of the distant symbols of the ancient world – though the motivation of Orff's self-proclaimed spiritual humanism is clearly distinct from the 'palingenetic ultranationalism'[14] lying behind the Nazi belief in Germany's Aryan descent from the ancient Greeks. For Orff, this approach to what he (and the Nazis) saw as transcendent values of antiquity is connected with his embrace of 'total theatre' – a totalising fusion of music, dance and word, itself derived from Orff's view of Greek drama – as the ideal medium for performing truths about the human condition. Here too there is an affinity with the ritualised performativity of the Third Reich. For Orff the stage was a microcosm of the world; under the National Socialists, the world itself became a stage for the massed performance of the regime's values, not least the display of corporate masculine vigour.[15]

These broad parallels provide frames for the following discussion, where they are useful in throwing light on the cultural resonances of *Catulli Carmina*. (It is worth repeating that I do not claim or engage with discussion claiming that Orff or his art is 'fascist' as a result.)[16] I begin with a brief

[9] On the tension between Nazi promotion of homosocial masculinity and its fear of male homosexuality, see Mosse (1996) 172, Heineman (2002) 33–42.

[10] Kater (2000) 123.

[11] E.g., Heineman (2002) 32.

[12] Nakedness in natural settings and for exercise was promoted as 'healthy', and as a cure for the degeneracy of modern city life: Wildmann (2018) 71–3. Representations of male nudity in art also proliferated, where the naked body (drawing on Greek models) symbolised proper spirit and ethical qualities: Mosse (1996) 168–74, Wildmann (2018) 70. 'Non-symbolic' representations of nudity were discouraged.

[13] A tendency within pro-Orffian criticism – to regard (his) musical art as 'innocent' and 'pure': see e.g., Taruskin (2008) 163–4.

[14] Griffin (1996) 13; the fascist emphasis is on 'living out 'eternal' values in a new society'.

[15] On fascist theatricality, see e.g., Griffin (1996) 19–27, Berghaus (1996) 49–66.

[16] Such discussion usually makes an association between Orff's vast percussive soundscape and the monumental choreography of Nazi rallies; or argues that Orff's simple melodies and repetitive rhythms encourage a lack of reflective thought in their listener, and so are well-suited to transmit

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overview of the history and content of *Catulli Carmina* – this is useful, given that the cantata is not well known. Taking as a frame a cultural era that valorises youthful vitality as an eternal quality, I then explore the way that *Catulli Carmina* abstracts Catullus from his ancient setting in order to present the Catullan 'narrative' as exemplary for Orff's belief that desire is a guiding principle of human existence.[17] Finally, the symbolic focus within the Third Reich on a rejuvenated sense of performative masculinity allows me to draw attention to the rather more surprising way that Orff redeems the manly autonomy of his Catullus. There are some unexpected similarities between the 'new man' of National Socialism, whose productive masculinity symbolises the good health of the reborn nation, and the new Catullus of *Catulli Carmina*, who ends the cantata by rejecting Lesbia and so the 'disease' of unrequited desire.

In all of this I keep one eye on *Catulli Carmina* from a classicist's perspective. Strikingly, this viewpoint is almost entirely absent from scholarship on the cantata.[18] In some instances this is understandable – as, for example, with primarily musicological studies.[19] Other instances are more problematic. Much scholarship on Orff and his music is implicated either in defending or attacking Orff's character and legacy;[20] most of what interpretive scholarship there is on *Catulli Carmina* has been written by 'supporters' of Orff, who tend to amplify uncritically Orff's own assertion that his cantata is a transparent representation of a timeless and eternal quality in Catullus' poetry – the assertion that Orff's Catullus *is* Catullus.[21] By contrast, the following study emphasises how much Orff alters the classical Catullus as he adapts the poetry for presentation on stage in 1943.

Catulli Carmina

Most of our information about the development of *Catulli Carmina* comes from Orff himself through his 1979 'autobiography' titled *Dokumentation*.[22] Orff

'propaganda': see e.g., Taruskin (2008) 164–6 and the survey of Orffian criticism at Kater (2000) 113–14. But what exactly comprises 'fascist music' proves very difficult to define: Tregear (1999), Potter (2006) and (2007). For what it is worth, I suspect that Kater (2000) 119–21 is likely close to the mark in depicting an Orff who disliked the 'cultural banalities' of Nazism and who was largely uninterested in politics – but also an Orff who was happy to 'look the other way' during the atrocities of the Nazi era, and who recognised that at least some of his artistic objectives (for instance, in musical pedagogy and in championing German *Volksmusik*) were 'compatible' with those of the regime.

[17] Orff (1979) 92.

[18] A notable exception is Stachon (2017) and (2020).

[19] Here there is a prominent exception in Oade (2017) – a D.Phil thesis forthcoming as a monograph with Oxford University Press. Oade is both a classicist and a musicologist, and her study of lyricism in Catullus' poetry and its musical reception is an excellent demonstration of the value of bringing multiple interpretive frames to bear.

[20] See Oade (2017) 125–6 for a succinct summary of the challenge in engaging with Orffian scholarship.

[21] Stachon (2020) 17.

[22] As with much of Orff's historical record, details within this autobiography must be treated with some caution. Orff's biographer Michael Kater describes *Dokumentation* not unreasonably as

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writes that the initial concept for the piece came when he discovered the famous poem *odi et amo* (Catull. 85) among a bundle of tourist brochures while on holiday at Lake Garda in August 1930.[23] This moment of inspiration led to a creative burst back in Germany, soon resulting in an initial cycle of Catullus settings for unaccompanied choir, with a second cycle following in 1932.[24] A decade later, in 1941, Orff found himself in need of a companion piece for his widely successful *Carmina Burana*. Recalling a dramatic potential he saw in the first of his two original Catullus settings, Orff developed what had been a cycle of choral songs into a fully staged narrative piece involving dancers and an orchestra as well as an expanded range of singers.[25] The resulting theatrical *Catulli Carmina*, which Orff now framed in Roman terms as *ludi scaenici* ('stage shows'), received its first performance in Leipzig in 1943.

The cantata

Orff's *Catulli Carmina* contains five movements. Three central acts present Orff's settings of twelve of Catullus's poems in full. Around these, Orff adds an opening 'praelusio' and closing 'exodium', with Latin text written by the composer himself. The praelusio introduces a three-part chorus: a group of young men (Juuenes), a group of young women (Juuenculae), and a group of nine old men (Senes). The central Catullan drama has solo vocal parts for Catullus and Lesbia, who are portrayed on-stage by dancers. There are also dancing (not singing) roles for Caelius, Ipsitilla, and Ameana, as well as a miscellaneous crowd of 'lovers and courtesans' (Amatores et meretrices). The praelusio and exodium feature accompaniment by a percussive orchestra. The central Catullan drama features an *a cappella* chorus in place of instrumental accompaniment (Orff's performance directions[26] at the beginning of Act 1 explicitly position this chorus not on stage but alongside the instruments: *coro nel orchestra*).[27]

'a multivolumed memoire interspersed with documents and comments from [Orff's] acolytes also designed to spread various truths, half-truths, and falsehoods': Kater (2000) 139.

[23] Orff (1979) 7. Orffian scholarship regularly assumes that this anecdote records Orff's first encounter with the poetry of Catullus, even though the same passage suggests that Orff (self-proclaimed as a keen student of Latin at school) already knew of Catullus in some detail. It is more probable that this chance encounter with a Catullan poem first gave rise to the idea of setting the poetry to music.

[24] The first cycle comprised seven poems (Catull. 85, 5, 3, 51, 41, 8, 87+75), and three poems in the second cycle (Catull. 46, 101, 31).

[25] See Orff (1979) 91–2 for Orff's own summary of his 'expansion and dramatisation' of the original Catullus compositions.

[26] For clarity, references to Orff's stage and performance directions will appear in italics. Quotations from the cantata's lyrics will appear in Roman font with quotation marks. Characters in Orff's cantata (e.g., the Senes, Juuenes, the Amatores et meretrices) will appear in Roman font.

[27] As discussed below, the chorus for the inner drama has three distinct roles: *accompaniment*, where it amplifies the solo voice of Catullus; *narration*, where it directs and comments on the action in the manner of a 'Greek chorus'; and (I argue) *character*, where it displays a capacity to employ Catullan discourse independently of Catullus himself.

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Praelusio

The opening movement introduces a key opposition between the eternal and the ephemeral. Beginning with a percussive bang, the dancing chorus of young men and women chant 'Forever!' in Greek ('eis aiona!'). The young people then enrage the old men with descriptions of the sexual attentions they intend to give to each other ('o tuae mammulae … ', 'o tua mentula … ' – 'O your breasts', 'O your penis', etc.). In response, the old men insist that nothing lasts forever ('nihil durare potest tempore perpetuo'). To make the point that desire is fleeting, the old men exhort the young men and women to witness the songs of Catullus ('audite ac uidete: Catulli Carmina'). Orff thus frames the Catullan text as a play-within-a-play.

Act 1

The inner drama begins with a new chorus performing a choral setting of *odi et amo* (Catull. 85). Orff then brings Catullus on stage (*Catullus ad columnam*) as a solo tenor voice emerges from the chorus to sing *uiuamus, mea Lesbia, atque amemus* (Catull. 5), so setting the transience of mortal life and love against the elemental and eternal oppositions of sun and moon, night and day. Lesbia enters, and Catullus responds to the sight of her with poem 51 (*ille me par esse deo uidetur*). Coming in the middle of the act, this poem looks backwards to poem 5 in its contrast of celestial-divine authority with human frailty, and forwards to the next poem by foreshadowing a link between desire and jealousy. Orff has Catullus fall asleep before poem 51 ends, the final stanza of which is sung by the chorus; Lesbia immediately leaves him and consorts with other lovers, including Caelius Rufus. Catullus awakes and the tenor soloist declaims poem 58 (*Caeli, Lesbia nostra, Lesbia illa*) in horrified staccato: Catullus acknowledges sharing Lesbia at first with one other man ('Lesbia nostra', 'Our Lesbia') – then, by the poem's end, with all other Romans ('glubit Remi nepotes', 'she pleasures the descendants of Remus'). Act 1 ends with poem 70 (*nulli se dicit mulier mea nubere quam mihi*): Orff has Catullus and the chorus reprise an elemental theme from the beginning of the act, but now it is the wind and rapid water of the natural world that signals transience, while an eternal opposition rises in the human realm, between women's speech and actions. As Act 1 concludes, the watching chorus of old men signal their approval: 'placet … optime!'

Act 2

The second act opposes fantasy and reality, faithfulness and infidelity. Set at night, Orff sets Catullus asleep in the street outside Lesbia's house; as Catullus dreams, he sees himself inside enjoying Lesbia's embrace – a scene performed on-stage by Lesbia and another dancer in Catullus' place. The chorus sing poem 109 (*iucundum, mea uita, mihi proponis amorem*) in which Catullus prays that Lesbia's promises to him might be true, and their love everlasting. The soundscape is serene and untroubled; the chorus sings *pianissimo*, with the Catullan text accompanied by hummed chords. The departure of the

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dream-scene from its narrative 'reality' allows Orff to signal that the significance of what we are witnessing is similarly not confined to any one period of cultural time. Lesbia sings not in Latin but in Italian as she caresses her lover – ('dormi ancora', 'keep sleeping'). Lesbia's vocal line departs from Orff's emblematic fusion of neo-primitivism and modernist *ostinato* by presenting, instead, a lyrical interlude that recalls the coloratura manner of both baroque and *bel canto* opera.[28] But suddenly the sleeping Catullus realises the male figure in Lesbia's embrace is not him but Caelius: Catullus awakes and despairs. The onrush of narrative 'reality' is marked by the return of Orffian musical orthodoxy: the chorus performs poem 73 (*desine de quoquam quicquam bene velle mereri*) in a declamatory *fortissimo*, decrying that there is no faith to be found anywhere, especially in that man who once called Catullus his one and only friend. Act 2 ends as did Act 1, with the applause of the watching old men: 'placet ... optime!'

Act 3

The final act returns to the central theme of desire from Act 1. Orff signals this reprise by bringing Catullus back to his initial position on stage (*Catullus ad columnam*), and by having the chorus repeat their setting of *odi et amo*. In Act 3 the focus falls with closural effect on unreciprocated desire. First an aroused Catullus writes an urgent letter of seduction to Ipsitilla, who has appeared in a window (the tenor soloist croons the text of poem 32: *amabo, mea dulcis Ipsitilla*), but Ipsitilla is not interested. Catullus' appeal does bring out Ameana, however, whom Catullus rejects in turn: she is unattractive and too expensive (here the chorus literally laughs at the seemingly unintended result of Catullus' letter, then sings poem 41: *Ameana, puella defututa*). A gathering crowd on stage signals the approaching climax of the drama. Moving through the throng Catullus searches for Lesbia as the chorus advise him to cease desiring a woman who has ceased to desire him (poem 8: *miser Catulle, desinas ineptire*). Lesbia enters with Caelius. She cries 'Catullus!' and he 'Lesbia!' – but in the drama's final act Catullus rejects her. The act closes with the chorus performing a fusion of poems 87 (*nulla potest mulier tantum se dicere amatam*) and 75 (*huc est mens deducta tua, mea Lesbia, culpa*) as Lesbia flees indoors. This closing performance reprises the drama's main themes: the destructive impasse between faithfulness and infidelity (87), and the debilitating bind of simultaneous desire and disgust (75).

Exodium

The closing movement is a brief reprise of the ecstatic revelry of the praelusio. The young lovers, who for some time have ceased caring about the spectacle in front of them (*diu iam non curantes spectaculum*), resume their repeated cries of 'Forever!' to the raucous accompaniment of Orff's percussive orchestra. Contrary

[28] Oade (2017) 161–2.

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to the expectation of the Senes, the Juuenes and Juuenculae have found nothing in the Catullan drama to dissuade them from pursuing a life driven by desire.

Orff's Universalising Reception of Catullus

Superficially, Orff's belief that in Catullus' poetry we find a poet reflecting his own authentic experiences,[29] and his accommodation of the poems into a narrative arc, places *Catulli Carmina* broadly within a 'biographical' reception of Catullus (and other Roman personal poets) that was dominant especially in the nineteenth century. Yet Orff's selection, arrangement, and musical setting of Catullus' poems actually resists historical or chronological essentialism. While the central three acts of *Catulli Carmina* do portray an overall journey from love-at-first-sight to a final break-up, the narrative movement is non-linear, with each act a self-contained story that moves broadly from happiness to sadness. In effect, Orff structures the inner Catullan drama as a threefold thematic meditation on the opposition of (and transition between) desire and despair; here Orff clearly situates the poem *odi et amo* (Catull. 85, which is performed twice in the piece) as a programmatic leitmotif.

Rather than perform a historical narrative, Orff seeks to present what he regards as a universal truth represented in the Catullan texts. Here we see Orff's 'humanist' interest in the concept of *theatrum mundi* (or *Welttheater*) in action as, in Orff's practice, theatrical performance becomes a totalising fusion of music, movement, and speech that aims to both exemplify and to allegorise the human condition.[30] Accordingly, for Orff the value of the characters of *Catulli Carmina* lies not in their historical personality but in their paradigmatic quality.[31] As Stephanie Oade points out, Orff's translation of Catullus' personal poetry into a drama (and especially into a drama-within-a-drama) already has the effect of reducing the 'authority' of the text's lyric voice. Rather than a text in which the subjective interpretation of one ancient individual shapes a world for us, in Orff's dramatic setting we observe a 'fictional'[32] Catullus in a timeless story scripted by an omnipotent other – in this case Orff himself, or perhaps the Senes of the praelusio who, in staging the inner Catullan drama, stand in as an ambiguous surrogate for Orff within the cantata as a whole. In a similar vein, Orff's spare stage set conspicuously avoids suggesting a 'Roman' context (or indeed any definitive context)[33] for the poems. Even the use of the Latin language – which would seem an inescapable marker of the poem's ancient setting – becomes in Orff's hands another transhistorical vehicle.[34] Orff strips

[29] 'Nahezu alle Gedichte Catulls sind Spiegelungen eigener Erlebnisse': Orff (1979) 8.

[30] See e.g., Strunz (1990) 25–7.

[31] Thomas (1990) 64: 'Aus dem biographischen Ich ist durch die doppelte Distanz von Dichtung und Musik ein paradigmatisches Ich geworden.'

[32] Oade (2017) 159.

[33] Strunz (1990) 30–1. Orff's *Dokumentation* reproduces a fascinating series of concept sketches and performance photographs from productions of *Catulli Carmina* up to 1971; consistently staging with only occasional hints of a 'classical' context is notable throughout.

[34] Liess (1966) 36 suggests that, as part of his humanist vision, Orff regarded ancient languages as a vehicle for conveying 'permanent values' into the present. Müller (2015) 47 claims that Orff

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the language of any ancient authenticity (such as its quantitative metre) and presents it as inseparable from music itself: a melodic series of sounds and rhythms.[35]

If the fraught contradictions of poem 85's loving and hating serve as a leitmotif for the inner drama, it is the wholehearted embrace of life and love in poem 5 that shapes the cantata as a whole. Orff even quotes two lines from poem 5 as an epigraph on the first page of the score:[36] *rumoresque senum seueriorum / omnes unius aestimemus assis* ('let us value the opinions of strict old men at a single penny', Catull. 2–3). Most obviously this quotation signals the origin of Orff's austere chorus of Senes in the praelusio.[37] But we also find the ideological antagonism between youth and age that drives the praelusio and leads to the performance of the inner Catullan drama; and possibly we suspect authorial allegiance with the attitudes of the young lovers.[38] These lines also provide the prompt for the cantata's conclusion: when the chorus of young lovers resume their revelry in the exodium, they duly perform their indifference to the opinions of the cantata's old men. Throw in the rapid accumulation of kisses in the praelusio when the Juvenculae sing 'basia me, basia me, basia me …' (cf. *da mi basia mille, deinde centum…*, Catull. 5.7), and it is not far-fetched to regard *Catulli Carmina* as Orff's imaginative realisation of a dramatic potential implicit in Catullus' original poem.

The use of poem 5 as a programmatic anthem creates one of the most striking aspects of *Catulli Carmina*: the massed, communal heroizing of the Catullan amatory lifestyle. The ending of the cantata makes clear what is hinted in Orff's epigraphic quotation – that the revelry of the young lovers beginning in the praelusio is essentially a pre-performance of *uiuamus atque amemus* ('let us live and love') as a generational credo. Rather than a spur to change the way they live, the young lovers in the cantata's frame respond to the passionate intensity of the inset Catullan drama as affirmation of a way of life that they already lead. Notwithstanding Orff's claim that his original Latin text for the praelusio is based on Plautus,[39] verbal borrowing from well-known poems in the Catullan corpus – repetitions of key words like *molliculus* (16.4), *cupidus* (70.3), *basia* (5.7, 13), *basiare* and *mordere* (8.18) – inescapably characterise the young lovers as Catullan in spirit.[40] More significantly, when Orff has such a

avoids the metrical rhythms of Catullus' texts in preference for the language's 'natural' accents, yet it is worth noting that Orff's approach to Latin's accents is idiosyncratic and certainly not 'Roman'.

[35] Thomas (1980) 35, Strunz (1990) 26. Orff himself comments that Catullus's poetry struck him as 'preformed music': 'Die Gedichte sprangen mich an wie vorgeformte Musik' [Orff (1979) 7]. Oade (2017) 178 comments that in the central acts the chorus effectively supplants the orchestra, so implicating the chorus' Catullan text in the role of musical accompaniment.

[36] Or as a 'motto': Strunz (1990) 32.

[37] Thomas (1990) 63, Strunz (1990) 32, Stachon (2020) 13–14.

[38] But cf. Stachon (2020) 21, arguing that Orff also seeks 'to confuse his critics about his own intentions' in the piece as a whole by placing the anti-Catullan message in the mouths of the 'old, and therefore presumably wise, men'.

[39] Orff (1979) 92. See Stachon (2020) 17 n. 16 for a summary of the various influences (including Pompeiian graffiti) on Orff's Latin in the praelusio.

[40] E.g., Oade (2017) 172: 'It is through such burlesque Catullan language that Orff is able to integrate the outer Orffian plot with the inner Catullan poetry.'

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tightly choreographed chorus of lovers declaim their erotic discourse in the first-person singular ('mea manus', 'tui sum', 'basia me', and so on) at the outset of the piece he establishes a multiplication of individual episodes of Catullan desire. The subjective Catullan experience of desire is made dramatically corporate, even before Catullus himself comes on stage (a point to which I return in closing).

This pre-figuring of Catullan discourse in the praelusio anticipates the way Orff sets the actual text of Catullus' poems at the centre of the drama. At the beginning of the inner drama (after the chorus perform *odi et amo*, to which we return in just a moment), Catullus enters alone and moves to a column in the very middle of the stage. Performing alone in this central position, Catullus' first song is the emblematic poem 5, sung in a confident and declamatory manner by a solo tenor voice emerging from the chorus. Orff's symbolic isolation of the figure of Catullus on stage, and the first use of a single unaccompanied voice declaiming the text, seemingly dramatizes the subjective individuality for which Catullan poetry was prized. But after performing three lines of the poem, Orff's setting suddenly changes. The massed voices of the chorus return in unison to 'echo' the opening lines just sung by the solo voice, so reprising the singular Catullan statement 'uiuamus atque amemus' but now as a script capable of communal performance. This sudden shift from singular to plural effectively enacts the transition we have already seen realised in the praelusio in the 'Catullan' revelry of the young lovers. Alternatively, to put it the other way, the manner in which the orgiastic praelusio programmatically evokes the erotic excess embodied in poem 5 (with its hundreds and thousands of kisses) finds a parallel in the opening sequence of the central drama when a chorus literally performs the opening lines of poem 5 as a massed Catullan ensemble.[41] This slippage between the inner and outer sections of the cantata further offers a compelling frame for interpreting another seeming anomaly in Orff's dramatization of the Catullan narrative. As we have seen, the inner drama actually begins with a performance of poem 85: *odi et amo* – a programmatic statement of the Catullan condition par excellence. But in Orff's *Catulli Carmina*, poem 85 is not performed by 'Catullus' but by the voices of the chorus before Catullus enters the stage.[42] Yet this makes sense within an Orffian worldview that grants universal relevance to the omnipotence of Amor, for which the poems of Catullus stand as an exemplum. Once Catullus comes on stage, Orff will demonstrate our communal capacity to follow a Catullan script. But the praelusio has already shown that we can initiate Catullan performance in our own right – and so there is sense in setting the program for a Catullan parable with a choral performance of poem 85.[43] For Orff the erotic tensions in this poem are fundamentally human before they come to be articulated by Catullus himself.

[41] Cf. Oade (2017) 178: 'the choral expropriation of personal pronouns (e.g., *da mi basia mille*) allows it to become a choral version of the Catullus character'.

[42] See Oade (2017) 179.

[43] Cf. Oade (2017) 180: in setting the program this chorus shows that it 'knows more than the audience and more than the characters, and has a hand in guiding the proceedings'.

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Catulli Carmina and Fascist Masculinity

The Catullus whom Orff rediscovered on the shore of Lake Garda is not an obvious figure to adopt as heroic role-model for riotous communal celebration. Quite apart from the personal and 'private' character of much of his erotic verse, in his Lesbia cycle Catullus is essentially a figure of *in*action. In the complete edition of Catullus' poetry that he obtained immediately upon his return to Germany, Orff would have met a Catullan character who is static, hopelessly and repeatedly trapped between the opposing forces of desire and disgust.[44] As a 'lover' Catullus has the lyric virtues of emotional insight and intellectual clarity, but these qualities only allow him to articulate poignantly that he knows he cannot do what he must to free himself from the emasculating dominance of Amor. Even the uncountable kisses in poem 5, which Orff seemingly translates into the exuberant sexual excess of his praelusio, are interrogated within Catullus' own poetry precisely as evidence of his emasculation.[45] Perhaps Catullus does offer potential as a figurehead in the context of performing a critique of orthodox (Roman) masculinity – but this seems very much not what is at stake in Orff's cantata, and would have resulted in precisely the kind of counter-cultural, degenerate art which might have attracted the attention of the Third Reich's cultural censors in 1943.[46]

Nonetheless, it is a glance at the heightened abstraction of masculinity in National Socialist ideology in the 1930s that helps to throw light on the way Orff reframes Catullus' poetry such that Catullan discourse emerges as an unlikely (albeit imperfect) reflection of (some) mainstream cultural norms. A form of transcendent manliness is well-known as a central symbol in the fascist regimes of both Germany and Italy. What is significant in the present context is the role given to a reinvigorated masculinity in a broader cultural struggle against decline: 'The hallmark of the fascist mentality' writes Roger Griffin, 'is the sense [...] of being engaged in the frontline of a battle to overcome degeneration through the creation of a rejuvenated national community, an event presaged by the appearance of a new 'man' embodying the qualities of the redeemed nation'.[47] Under a broader fascist narrative of national rebirth, the 'new' man reframed the features of conventional masculinity with 'an

[44] In broad strokes this is the Catullus which Orff presents in his original two settings of Catullan poems for choir dating from the early 1930s. Oade (2017) 127–57 (esp. 153–7) demonstrates that these earlier settings retain the features of a lyric cycle: each poem is set as an independent and self-contained 'song' with its own engagement with time and space; there is no overt 'narrative', but the cycle as a whole is unified by tonal and thematic interactions between the songs. In this context, the voices in Orff's choir lack any narrative or character role; the transformation into choral performance serves instead to magnify the original lyric voice and to enhance its 'eternal' quality.

[45] Oade (2017) 141.

[46] As notionally a 'historical drama', in principle Orff's libretto would have been expected to represent events in the past as stepping stones towards the establishment of the Third Reich: Panse (1996) 145. In practice, censorship was not usually exercised in the case of historical operas: Levi (1996) 261–2.

[47] Griffin (1996) 13; also Mosse (1996) 155: 'the importance of manliness as a national symbol played a vital role in all fascist regimes'.

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aggressive and uncompromising cast as an essential tool in the struggle for dominance'.[48] This struggle played out both in liberating masculinity from, and in guarding the nation against, the perceived decay of the modern era. The good health of the (re)new(ed) man counteracted cultural sickness – for the Nazi regime, this sickness was especially evident in 'degenerate' cultural phenomena such as liberalism, Marxism, Jewishness, and homosexuality.

Little of this seems to have had direct influence on Orff. Reference to conventional masculinity reminds us that there was in fact little new about this fascist 'new man', who shared key traits such as strength, courage, and self-discipline with most other normative masculinities.[49] Similarly, the promotion of outdoor, pseudo-military physical activity as a way of combatting the perceived decay of urban life is found in cultural moments well outside this period and location (from Horace's *robustus puer* in *Odes* 3.2 to Baden-Powell's Scout Movement in England). Orff's interest in a vigorous masculinity almost certainly reflects own particular humanist interest, rather than the effect of Nazi propaganda. But this means we find here an instance of the compatibility between Orff's artistic aims and his cultural moment: there will prove an opportune (though, of course, imperfect) resemblance between the National Socialist narrative of 'normative' masculinity as a cure for cultural sickness in 1930s Germany, and the way Orff liberates his Catullus from the debilitating (and 'diseased')[50] effects of desire both in *Catulli Carmina*, and in the traditional collection of poems from which the cantata is derived. We can explore this in three contexts. First of all, Orff's narrative use of the chorus in the inner Catullan drama allows him to simplify the infamously complex nature of Catullus' lyric persona. In its conventional setting, the identity of the Catullan lyric lover 'fragments' into three or more distinct voices, revealing an erotic psyche beset by internal contradictions;[51] it is the impasse between these conflicting inner states which underpins the aimlessness and inaction of the Catullan lover as a whole. Orff's radical intervention is to remove one of these voices from the character Catullus – the moralising and analytical 'masculine' voice, especially common in the Lesbia poems[52] – and assign it to the chorus instead, which then offers normative ethical commentary on

[48] Mosse (1996) 180. Cf. Kühne (2018) for intersectional discussion which emphasises the variety of lived (rather than idealised) masculinities in fascist Germany.

[49] Some specific features of the new man (such as camaraderie and self-sacrifice) idealise qualities attributed to soldiers in the First World War. Other ethical qualities such as honesty and loyalty build on the perceived 'noble and immortal' virtues of the ancient Greek world in particular: see e.g., Wildmann (2018) 70; the National Socialist 'new man' adopted a Greek model – a young Adonis whose beautiful body symbolised both corporal and ethical strength: Mosse (1996) 160; or an Olympian athlete whose broad education included both intellectual and physical training: Roche (2018a) 8–9; see also Mosse (1996) 168–9. On the symbolic linking of Germany and ancient Greece in the 1936 Berlin Olympics, see Wildmann (2018).

[50] Catullus does in fact refer to (unrequited) desire as a 'foul disease' which he hopes to lay aside to recover his health (*ipse ualere opto et taetrum hunc deponere morbum*: Catull. 76.25). Orff does not use this poem, though he does set the preceding poem 75 which treats similar themes but more briefly.

[51] See esp. Greene (1995).

[52] Greene (1999) 13.

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the action (loosely drawing on the precedent of the chorus in ancient Greek drama). A useful example comes early in Act 1. Reacting to Lesbia's initial appearance, Catullus gives a solo performance of poem 51 to voice his subjective experience of the disabling effects of desire, and the lover's loss of capacity to make sense of the world (*omnis / eripit sensus mihi*, Catull. 51.5–6). The final stanza of this poem suddenly introduces a new 'objective' voice which addresses Catullus directly with the observation that such times of leisure are ruinous for him (*otium, Catulle, tibi molestum est*, Catull. 51.13). In a conventional context this second voice also belongs to Catullus,[53] who makes this 'love' poem finally about knowing the irreconcilable tension between indolent *otium* and Roman expectations of public masculine performance.[54] But Orff gives this final stanza to the chorus. Orffian Catullus is freed from the enervating condition of self-critique; meanwhile in the mouths of the chorus the poem's closing lines become not critique but commentary with the crucial potential to goad Catullus into action.

A second point is that Orff's arrangement of Catullus' poems does more than simply accommodate a broad narrative for the inner movements of the cantata. Orff's new ordering profoundly affects the ironic capacity of certain poems to undermine the authority of the 'traditional' Catullan persona in the eyes of the audience. This enhances the capacity of Orff's narrative to present Catullus pivoting 'manfully' away from indolent victimhood in the cantata as whole. For instance, in conventional order poem 109 is the 'final' Lesbia poem. In this short epigram Catullus prays that Lesbia's promise of everlasting love might be true, and that he and Lesbia might enjoy an eternal bond of sacred friendship. In a traditional linear reading this poem abounds in irony. A reader has known since the very early poems that Lesbia will not abide by the promises Catullus tells us she has made; the note of wishful optimism on which the Lesbia cycle ends is therefore deluded, but it is a delusion of which only the reader is truly aware. By contrast, in *Catulli Carmina* Orff moves poem 109 to the dream sequence that opens Act 2. Here Orff chooses to expose the delusional aspect of the poem by having Catullus realise that Lesbia is lavishing her attention on Caelius in his place. No longer the pitiable object of his readers' greater knowledge, Orff's comparatively enabled Catullus moves into action. Poem 8 offers a similar example, and a second moment when Orff assigns Catullus' 'masculine voice' entirely to the chorus. In this poem Catullus – faced with awareness that Lesbia no longer desires him – exhorts himself to cease his ineptness, to gain control of his emotions, to harden his resolve: *to be a man*, in other words. But, as Ellen Greene has demonstrated, the apparent closural intent of the poem is undermined by the fracturing of Catullus' persona into three distinct and conflicting identities.[55] Poem 8

[53] Assuming, of course, the modern consensus is correct in assuming that this stanza does belong to poem 51: for a classic statement of the arguments for and against, see Fredricksmeyer (1965). It would be interesting to know Orff's knowledge of this issue, especially given late-nineteenth-century scholarship was the most strident in arguing that the final stanza of poem 51 is a misplaced fragment.

[54] Greene (1999) 12–15.

[55] Greene (1995).

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functions instead as an early programmatic poem for Catullus' ongoing inability to control himself: the Catullan speaker's obsessive return to Lesbia foreshadows Catullus' repeated failure in the poetry that follows to escape Lesbia's thrall.[56] But Orff removes the poem's instability by giving the poem entirely to the chorus, where the poem's distinct voices easily coalesce. He also moves the poem to the cantata's final act where it sets up a climactic encounter between the former lovers. In this position poem 8 no longer has ironic force. Rather than draw attention to what will be repeated manly failure, the choral exhortation 'endure and be firm' (*perfer, obdura*: Catull. 8.11) narrates the imminent moment when Orff's Catullus reclaims masculine strength and autonomy.

This brings us to the third point. The subtle changes Orff brings to the dynamics of Catullus' poetry enable the third act to present an active Catullus with an erotic independence which is unrecognisable in the conventional collection. The act opens with a repeat choral performance of poem 85; then Catullus delivers an erotic proposition to Ipsitilla and rejection to Ameana. These two poems have no direct relationship with the 'Lesbia cycle', but Orff creates a connection by using them to show Catullus actively seeking (and choosing to decline) sex elsewhere in response to Lesbia's infidelity in Acts 1 and 2. The significant development is that Orffian Catullus thus escapes the immobility usually inherent in *odi et amo*; rather than lingering in static torment, Orffian Catullus is galvanised into expressions of sexual agency by the pain of rejection as performed by the chorus at the beginning of the act. But the most remarkable moment comes at the act's end. The climactic moment of Orff's inner Catullan drama is the break-up of the principal relationship. But, in Orff, it is the newly emancipated Catullus who rejects Lesbia – rather than the other way around: *Lesbia conspecto Catullo exclamat: Catulle! Catullus prosiliens: Lesbia! repellit eam. Lesbia desperans in casam fugit.* ('Upon seeing Catullus, Lesbia exclaims 'Catullus!' Catullus leaps forward – 'Lesbia!' – and spurns her. In desperation Lesbia flees inside.').

Conclusion

Orff makes it clear that the framing audience of young lovers have stopped watching the inner Catullan drama well before it comes to an end (*diu iam non curantes spectaculum*). Is this simply a lack of interest? Youthful disrespect, or impatience to resume their erotic games? One answer is, of course, that the youthful chorus has been pre-scripted to act this way. Inasmuch as the Catullan parable represents the tendentious chatter of the cantata's censorious Senes (*rumoresque senum seueriorum*), we have known since the beginning that the lovers were destined to ignore it (*omnes unius aestimemus assis*). But we are better placed now to understand why. It turns out that the old men, who had mocked displays of youthful idealism ('o res ridicula!') in the praelusio, are themselves the cantata's fools. The Senes stage a performance of *Catulli Carmina* in the belief that this will demonstrate the ephemerality of love.

[56] For seminal discussion of Catull. 8 as 'false closure', see Fowler (1989) 98–9.

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But Orff has set them up to fail: the performance of Orff's own *Catulli Carmina* is testament to his belief that Catullus's poetry proves in fact that the pleasures and pains of desire are timeless and immutable.[57] To this end the slippage from solo to corporate voice in the central three acts shows us that the experience and discourse of desire is communal and universal; Orff's young lovers stop watching near the end because they already know this to be true. Their massed cries of 'Forever!' in the framing movements foreshadow the 'truth' in the inner Catullan parable just as much as Catullus's poetry gives rise to the 'forever' program in the first place.

In the end, it is the energetic throng of lovers – and its counterpart in the central drama, the corporate Catullan chorus – more than Catullus himself which holds the key to Orff's *Catulli Carmina*. For Orff himself, these massed voices realise the principle of transcendent desire as a kind of active and enabling life-force. Paradoxically, and not unlike the reinvention of an original active masculinity under the Third Reich, Orff's exuberant chorus derives from an ancient model in Catullus and yet also rediscovers in Catullus a primal vigour and power – precisely the idealised (masculine) qualities which the inner chorus guide Catullus himself towards recuperating. But in two senses it is also this communal aspect of Orff's cantata (rather than its 'Roman' content) which likely appealed to (or appeased) the cultural minders of National Socialism, especially given that sexually explicit content was concealed in untranslated Latin and could more easily be overlooked.[58] In keeping with the zeitgeist, Orff certainly celebrates youthful vitality in *Catulli Carmina* – but in doing so he also presents desire not as an individual and subjective experience but instead as something choreographed and corporate, regimented and spectacular.[59] From a classicist's perspective, the most vivid evidence of the way Orff reframes Catullus as a figure in charge of his erotic experience (rather than a victim of it) comes in Orff's adaptation of the paradigmatic *odi et amo* of Catull. 85.1. Traditionally the impasse in this poem between love and hatred is never resolved within the Catullan corpus; the point is it cannot be resolved. But Orff does resolve it. The text of the poem ends on the image of Catullus' excruciating emotional torture with the word *excrucior* (Catull. 85.2) – a climactic moment which Orff duly sets with a sustained and sharply dissonant sequence of chords, notionally D-minor but riven with clashing semitone clusters. Then Orff adds an ecstatic sigh 'Ah!' to the end of Catullus's poem and dispels the tension with a sweet G-major resolution. In the cantata's narrative the liberation of Catullus from amatory enslavement is yet to occur, but from this moment at the beginning of Act 1 we know it is coming.

[57] Orff himself describes the cantata 'einer szenischen Parabel von der Allgewalt des Eros' ('a scenic parable about the omnipotence of Eros'): Orff (1979) 92.

[58] Only since the 1980s have unexpurgated translations of Orff's Latin text been included in published versions of the *libretto*.

[59] For the distinctively German fascist focus on a new 'massed' masculinity, see Mosse (1996) 164; for massed performance as a fundamental part of the German fascist aesthetic, see Griffin (1996) 19–27, Berghaus (1996) 49–66.

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