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The *Carmina Burana*: A Mirror of Latin and Vernacular Literary Traditions from a Cultural-Historical Perspective: Transgression is the Name of the Game

Albrecht Classen

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Abstract The Carmina Burana have too easily fallen into stifling categories of interpretation, treating them as exclusively poems by students, by learned scholars, or by minstrels who demand our respect. In reality, as this paper illustrates, they represent a very dense corpus of songs in Latin and in a mixtures of Latin and Middle High German in which highly educated intellects reflect upon the wide range of everyday themes, interests, concerns, and desires common at that time, including sexuality, drinking, entertainment, and music. But at closer analysis we also discover a plethora of critical songs in which the loss of ethics, morality, and social norms both at court and in the church are sardonically attacked and ridiculed. Although the poets usually resort to the norms and models of ancient-classical and medieval courtly poetry, they regularly transgress those and present drastically opposite perspectives. In this process they also reveal the extent to which they actually closely interacted with vernacular literature. Laughter is often the name of the game, but it is not simply light and untroubled comic that finds expression here. This article demonstrates the extent to which the poets of the Carmina Burana actually interacted in a very intensive fashion with the learned literary traditions and the standard ideals of courtly love, undermining the common pretenses of a peaceful, harmonious, and honorable courtly society and of a reputable clergy.

Keywords Carmina Burana · Transgression · Social criticism · Drinking · Sexual violence · Eroticism · Court criticism · Popular culture · Interaction with courtly literature

A. Classen (✉)
Department of German Studies, The University of Arizona, 301 Learning Services Building, 1512 E. First Street, Tucson, AZ 85721, USA
e-mail: aclassen@email.arizona.edu

The famous collection of Latin and macaronic poetry known as *Carmina Burana* has attracted much attention over the last two hundred years of scholarship, and yet many of the texts/lyrics remain inexplicably understudied or are simply ignored, if we disregard the various commentaries by individual editors.[1] This is not quite uncommon in medieval scholarship, however, because larger anthologies or collections of poems present unusual challenges, and unless we pay particular attention to specific songs, the bulk of texts and melodies remains mostly obscured.[2] It is easier to talk about the *Carmina Burana* at large, to analyze the general tone and the range of themes represented here, than to enter a thorough discussion of individual songs or groups of songs as reflections of cultural, social, and mental-historical aspects. Scholars have long observed the poets' tremendous interest in playing with the mixture of Latin and Middle High German, a phenomenon commonly identified as *barbarolexis*, or "plurilingualism."[3] Then the unusually deft and irreverent themes of drinking, gambling, and sexuality have also been noted many times.[4] Further, individual songs have regularly been the object of meticulous analysis regarding imagery, meter, rhyme scheme, and vocabulary, for instance.[5]

But a careful analysis of the entire collection, especially of those sections dedicated to love making, drinking, and gambling, allows also to discover the true extent to which the *Carmina Burana* were the product of a significant rapprochement of the learned Latin culture and vernacular courtly and other poetry. For instance, one of the stanzas in "Hiemali Tempore" (no. 203, stanza 4) operates with the following literary allusion:

Vns seit uon Lutringen Helfrich,
wie zwene rechen lobelich
ze saemine bechomen:
Erekke unde ovch her Dieterich;
si waren beide uraislich,
da uon si schaden namen.
als uinster was der tan,
da si an ander funden.
her Dietrich rait mit mannes chraft
den walt also unchunden.
Ereke der chom dar gegan;
er lie da heime rosse uil; daz was niht wolgetan.[6]

[Helferich of Lorraine tells us how two praiseworthy warriors met, Erec [Ecke] and Lord Dietrich; they were both terrifying, which caused them

[1] *Carmina Burana*, ed. Hilka und Schumann (1930), *Vagabond Verse*, trans. Zeydel (1966), Parlett (1986); *The Love Songs of the Carmina Burana*, trans. Blodgett and Swanson (1987).

[2] This is the very same issue with late-medieval songbooks, see Classen (2001a, b 2007).

[3] Sayce (1992) offers, above all, an in-depth analysis of the influence on the *Carmina Burana* by Romance (Italian) and Middle High German poetry and music.

[4] Klopsch (1983, pp. 153–189).

[5] See, for example, Jackson (1980, pp. 44–60), Wetherbee (2000, pp. 95–125).

[6] Quoted from *Carmina Burana*, ed. Vollmer (1987, no. 203, stanza 4, p. 648).

> damage. The forest, where they encountered each other, was dark. Lord Dietrich traversed the unknown forest on horseback, displaying manly strength. Erec [Ecke] arrived there on foot; he left the horses at home; this was not well done.]

Although scholars have occasionally commented on this song and this specific stanza, especially with respect to the surviving melody,[7] the larger, cultural, significance of this citation has remained mostly unexplored. The present example will serve as an excellent base for further investigations of the larger literary-historical context which served as the crucial foil of and for the *Carmina Burana*. The reference itself is very clear and would not need much further elaborations because the poet alluded to the anonymous *Eckenlied*, from which he has cited the sixth stanza. This epic poem, which was predicated on the accomplishments of the mythical figure Dietrich, has come down to us in at least seven manuscripts ranging in date from the first half of the thirteenth to the turn of the fifteenth century, and also in at least twelve prints from 1491 to ca. 1590. The earliest documentation confirming the existence of this poem proves to be the one isolated stanza contained in *Carmina Burana*, the manuscript of which is housed today in the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich, Clm 4660, dating from ca. 1230.[8] Nevertheless, research has been mostly content with stating this bare fact in passing, ignoring, or not deeming it worth, to explore the wider implications of this fascinating phenomenon of the inclusion of this stanza in the anthology of Latin and Middle High German poetry, not to forget the presence of a number of texts by contemporary vernacular poets.[9]

The facts about this rich song collection are, of course, more or less clear, although some of the attributions remain doubtful or elusive.[10] There are, in particular, 47 German stanzas, ten of which are ascribed by name to specific authors or can be identified as their creations: Otto von Botenlauben (or Niuniu) (*CB* 48a); Dietmar von Aist (*CB* 113a), Reinmar der Alte (*CB* 143a, 147a, 166a), Heinrich von Morungen (*CB* 150a), Walther von der Vogelweide (*CB* 151a, 169a, 211a), and Neidhart (*CB* 168a). Volker Mertens also points out the stanza 203a with its account of the hostile clash of the two warriors Dietrich and Ecke, confirming the opinion voiced by others before him that the Munich manuscript of the *Carmina Burana* represents one of the oldest manuscripts containing secular Middle High German poetry.[11] Considering the impressive popularity of the *Eckenlied*, of which even the chronicler Jans Enikel reports (second half of the thirteenth century) and which is also cited in Ottokar's *Reimchronik* (ca. 1390) and in Heinrich Wittenwiler's *Ring*

[7] Brunner (1970, pp. 149–178).

[8] Knapp (1996, pp. 129–140), argues for the Augustinian convent near Brixen, Tyrol, as the most likely location where the manuscript was compiled in the early thirteenth century.

[9] Heinzle (1999, p. 109). See also Wachinger (1984), Haustein (1990). For an edition of the epic poem, see *Das Eckenlied* (1999), especially vol. 1, IX.

[10] Vollmann, in his commentary, confirms some of those allusions, in other cases he does not even consider the option that some of the song contained in the *CB* might represent a variant of or a quote from a Middle High German poem; instead then he only acknowledges the classical Roman tradition to be at play here.

[11] Mertens (1983), Bernt (1978), Schaller (1983).

(ca. 1400), so altogether almost two hundred years later, the evidence of the *Carmina Burana* stands out because of its early date and the curious, perhaps chance, inclusion of just one stanza—probably borrowed from an orally circulating short version of the *Eckenlied*.[12]

One of the most interesting poems in the section dominated by the theme of erotic love and sexuality, "Ich was ein chint so wolgetan" (*CB* 185), has been convincingly identified as a parody of Walther von der Vogelweide's *Under der linden* (L. 39, 11).[13] Hubert Heinen emphasizes that Walther's masterpiece seems to have enjoyed fairly little interest among his audience, considering that it has survived only in two manuscripts. But the parody in the *Carmina Burana* confirms that the theme developed in Walther's song proved to be appealing and irritating at the same time.[14] Whereas the latter has a female voice describe with great delicacy and love the meeting with her boyfriend outside of society, a situation which is charming and delightful in every sense—*locus amoenus*—particularly because of the utopian nature of this song,[15] the situation in "Ich was ein chint so wolgetan" differs remarkably. For Heinen, the difference rests in the explicit rape that happens here, although he still emphasizes that the "accursed linden tree, especially, gives the lie to the apparent callousness with which the poet (/performer) takes leave of the maltreated girl."[16]

The macaronic song apparently draws on the commonly projected situation in medieval lyric poetry in which young women present themselves to potential male wooers and pride themselves for their female beauty: "do brist mich div werlt al" (I, 3; the entire world praised me). But perhaps the poet had a prostitute in mind, since he has her say: "omnibus placebam" (1, 4; I pleased everyone). However, she herself refers to her fear of being deflowered by him (2, 4), but the subsequent context does not necessarily prevent us from identifying her in this light. To be sure, there is a certain degree of violence, as she underscores herself full of lament: "multum uiolenter" (4, 4; very violently), and yet the entire song does not seem to express any concern with her suffering. Although the woman mostly dominates the entire song, describing what happened to her, at times the man is also given a chance to comment on his wishes: "'ludum faciamus!'" (7, 4; let us play).[17] Curiously, when he has already begun to touch her body, he still seems timid and insecure, until he finally announces his specific intentions to sleep with her (8). However, instead of characterizing the scene as what it seems to be in unmistakable terms—rape—the narrator only drops the highly ambiguous line: "ludus compleatur" (10, 4; the game was completed).

[12] Haustein (1990, pp. 99–101).

[13] von der Vogelweide (1996, no. 16).

[14] Heinen (1989); Sayce (1982, pp. 260–261), only comments on the borrowing from Walther's song, without examining the cultural implication of this song, that is, without taking into account the debate and exchange between the German and the Latin text, both corresponding to each other in a public discourse on gender relationships.

[15] Contrary to many modernist opinions, medieval literature also knew the concept of the utopia, see Tomasek (1985); En quête d'Utopies (2005).

[16] Heinen (1989, p. 69).

[17] Classen (1989, pp. 7–42).

This focus on the notion of 'game' is detectable in many other songs, especially within the category of drinking songs and love songs, and it allows the audience to stand back and feel entertained, even if, which is quite often the case, the theme centers on sexuality in private and in public. Even though the poet refers to and plays with the model provided by Walther, the traditional sense of courtly love is radically rejected and basically replaced by crude sexuality. The man does no longer ask his lady for her love; instead he takes it rudely, upon which she can only lament in the refrain with the following words: "Hoy et oe!/maledicantur thylie/iuxta uiam posite!" (1, 5–7; oh dear, cursed may be the linden trees positioned next to the road). The parody, however, only works if the poet relies on a literary model well known among his audience. In other words, the love discourse that has been practiced at the German courts, especially influenced by the contributions offered by Walther von der Vogelweide, must have been so well established by that time that the deliberate mocking makes good sense.[18]

Both this song and the preceding one, "Virgo Quedam nobilis" (no. 184), explicitly explore the topic of rape, an issue that was intensively discussed and elaborated on by members of the Church, legal scholars, and philosophers, particularly during the high Middle Ages.[19] Here, however, the severe implications, the criminal nature of rape, are entirely occluded in favor of a facetious tone of voice, playful use of onomatopoeia, and a very deliberate exploration of male desires as the only decisive criteria relevant in this case which strongly serves to incite erotic fantasy and to present in learned fashion the sexual dreams of most participants in the male audience. Although a female voice relates the events, the true intention easily proves to be the graphic description of the sexual act, a grass seduction scene which richly draws on the tradition of the pastourella and innovates it here within a learned, partly Latin context. The playful utilization of the siege metaphor—"er rante mir in daz purgelin" (9, 3; he ran into my little castle)—which was fully employed only a few decades later by Jean de Meun in his part of the *Roman de la rose*, then the reference to the usual hunting weapons—"chocher unde den bogen" (10, 1; the quiver and the bow)—and the concluding formula, "ludus compleatur" (10, 4), all contribute to evoke courtly, chivalric, hence secular culture, the world of the aristocracy, but also, if not primarily, masculine society that saw its identity confirmed here through these sexual images of conquest.

As much as we are wont to identify the rise of courtly love poetry, especially of Occitan *troubadouor* poetry and Middle High German *Minnesang*, with the development of new ethics and social ideals determining the relationship between men and women in the aristocratic sphere in a highly refined manner and style congruent with their social status,[20] some of the poets of the *Carmina Burana* seem to defy these very ideals and principles and undermine in a sarcastic, ironic, or burlesque fashion the concept of courtly love per se. As some of the texts indicate at times, women primarily served for men's sexual desires. In fact, in these two poems

[18] Bayless (1996) refers several times to concrete examples of parody within the *Carmina Burana*, but not with regard to the poem discussed here.

[19] Gravdal (1991); Saunders (2001); Payer (2009, pp. 169–191).

[20] Schultz (2006, p. 160): "Courtly love is, among other things, the love of courtliness."

we are almost reminded of the parodies and satires so powerfully developed by Neidhart, basically as a deliberate travesty of the ideals of courtly love.[21]

At the same time, in many other instances the concept of love seems highly traditional again, if we would then not also observe, almost by surprise, the extent to which sexuality dawns behind even the most modest allusions. For example, in "Pre Amoris tedios" (no. 175) we seem to deal with the same imagery and sentiments as in the common *Minnelied*. The lover is hit by an arrow shot by the god Amor (1, 1–3); he suffers from shipwreck (1, 4–5), and he appeals to his beloved to listen to his wooing. But the lover formulates his desires rather directly: "me amantem respice/ non tardanti mora!" (2, 4-5; accept me as your lover, do not hesitate at all). His metaphors circumscribing his feelings of love are more intense and direct than we would normally expect from courtly love poetry, connecting the man's desperation with the imminent danger of death: "cor erit fauilla" (3, 5; my heart will turn to ashes). Moreover, his physical recovery is intimately tied into physical pleasures that he requests from her: "adhuc in hac cella/me egenum eripe/de feruenti procella!" (5, 3–5; rescue me, who is so helpless, right here in this little room, from this ferocious storm). He basically tries to force her into lovemaking, the only remedy that he can hope for, but he still obeys the traditional norms of courtly love, insisting on reticence as one of the highest requirements for the couple (6).

Wherever we turn, the love discourse reveals its thoroughly duplicitous nature of maintaining, on the one hand, the pretense of refined manners and esoteric courtly language within a highly civilized society, and, on the other, alluding to the real purpose of the song, which always culminates in more or less explicit requests for a sexual encounter. This finds extraordinarily hilarious expression in a two-line poem, "Non est in medico semper, releuretur ut eger;/Interdum docta plus ualet arte manus" (no. 176; It is not always the medical doctor's achievement when the sick person recovers. At times the caring hand might do more than the learned art). We do not have to impose anything into these verses or read between the lines and can simply trust the poet's insistence that caring and love might also bring about someone's health. Within the context of the other poems, however, and sensitized to the underlying erotic meaning of most of the contributions to this anthology, there is nothing to prevent us from reading the 'caring hand' in a sexual framework. Similarly, in "Stetit puella" (no. 177), we are initially struck by the poetic, synaesthetic beauty of the poem with its references to a young girl standing next to a tree ("bi einem bovme," 3, 1). She wears a red shirt which has the curious tendency to rustle whenever someone touches it. We might wonder why such a shirt would make this noise, until we turn to the second stanza where we are introduced to the next clue because her face is beaming like a rose, and her lips blossom: "et os eius floruit" (2, 4; her mouth flowers). The third stanza seems to maintain the traditionally serene tone of voice of love poetry, insofar as she is said to write her love into a leaf. But then we are suddenly confronted with the full truth: "dar chom Venus also fram;/caritatem magnam,/hohe minne/bot si ir manne" (3, 3–6; Venus

[21] Müller (1989, pp. 73–88), offers numerous examples from the earliest time of courtly love poetry (Guillaume IX) to the end of the Middle Ages (Oswald von Wolkenstein) where the focus rests on explicit eroticism and sexual allusions. He calls these types of songs, drawing on older, French research, "contre-textes." For further illustrations of this phenomenon, see Classen and Dinzelbacher (2010).

arrived immediately; she offered great love, high love, to her man). As much as the poet pretended to present nothing but a delightful, unassuming love poem, in the background we sense deep commotions, ardent passion, and the first experience of sexuality.[22]

Despite the deliberate employment of such highly charged terms as "hohe minne,"[23] the combination of erotic elements—her rustling shirt, her glowing face, the burning lips, the arrival of Venus, and finally the mentioning of her male lover—suddenly transforms the elusive, almost idyllic, imagery into an unmistakable literary manifesto of a (first) sexual experience. We face a supreme example of sexual innuendo, which is constituted, as Siegfried Christoph now explains, when there is "a reasonable degree of certainty that a sexual context is attested…," when concrete words supporting the sexual allusion are present, leading to the verifiable interpretation of a sexual act having occurred, and when we can recognize "a potential contrast between primary and secondary meanings which is relevant to a given context …"[24]

In the *Carmina Burana* we come across the entire gamut of love songs, some of which only toy with the idea of courtly love, then some which offer rather explicit references to the sexual desires, and others, finally, that turn to the most brutal and graphic images and themes within that large topic, sexual violence and rape. Whoever the poets might have been, or the compiler/s, the composition of the anthology demonstrates a clear interest in exposing the pretenses of traditional love discourse by way of contrasting a rather normative poem about a man's wooing his beloved with a poem about the sexual fulfillment, even if only imagined.

Let us look at two examples to illustrate this point further. In "Sol solis in stellifero" (no. 182) natural images closely interact with the lovers' feelings and worries. The narrative voice compares the brilliance of the sun with his beloved lady whose beauty outshines that of all other ladies. The refrain does not simply reiterate this; instead the singer invites his audience to enter the (military) service of Venus: "nunc militetis Veneri!" (1, 6). Next he emphasizes his passionate love and her extraordinary beauty, and then explains further how much he is willing to obey her orders with all his might. The song concludes with a traditional projection of the beautiful spring meadow where flowers, grass, clover, and leaves grow in competition with each other. However, even here, the final refrain underscores that those who want to gain happiness in love must demonstrate courage and intelligence (6, 6).

The following poem, "Si Puer cum puellula" (no. 183) presents a remarkably different situation insofar as here the two lovers are imagined to spend time together in a private room and have already turned to sexual pleasures, as the refrain indicates: "Felix coniunctio/amore succrescente, pari remedio/propulso procul tedio!" (1, 3–5; Delightful union when love is growing by means of the same medication that keeps away any disinclination). The third stanza finally reveals that this poem falls into the category of the dawn song, since the female voice warns her

[22] Dronke (2000, pp. 37–39).

[23] Ehrismann et al. (1995, pp. 136–147).

[24] Christoph (2008, pp. 283–284).

lover: "Ich sich den morgensterne brehen" (3, 1; I see the morning star come forward), and then recommends to him: "nu, helt, la dich niht gerne sehen!" (3, 2; my hero, avoid being detected).[25]

But in some of the love poems we also sense an alarmingly dramatic development of the amorous feeling, threatening the male lover in his very existence. The deep tension and existential crisis becomes most visible in "Longa Spes et dubia" (no. 163) where the young man laments deeply that the sting of love could kill him:

Inopino saucius
hesito stupore,
stulto carpor anxius
animi furore,
amens amans amplius
obligor amore,
nec tamen mestum pello dolorem (7th stanza)
[Overpowered by unexpected affectedness
I am standing stiffly,
filled with fear
I feel the foolish fury in my heart,
crazily in love, I get caught
ever more in love,
yet, I do not push away this painful sorrow.]

Shortly after this powerful endeavor to explore the psychological dimension of love, the poem "OB Amoris pressuram" (no. 164) at first dabbles with traditional images of love wooing and the erotic glorification of the mistress. Her beauty finds no match, not even in nature, whether it concerns her face or her whole appearance (stanzas 3 and 4). Nevertheless, once the narrator has completed this cycle of praise, he suddenly lets drop all pretenses and reveals what he truly desires from her: "sed et istis iocundius: / locus sub ueste tectus! / in hoc declinat melius / non obliquus, sed rectus" (4, 4–7; But there is something even more joyful, there is a place which her dress covers. There it is easier to declinate [words] not bending, but straight up). The sexual, almost pornographic allusion leaves nothing to doubt, though the sexual image is cast in grammatical terms, probably rather typical of the learned nature of the entire collection produced by university teachers and students, goliards, and clerics.[26]

Boldly drawing on imagery borrowed from the Latin classroom, the poet then emphasizes how much he would be motivated to run through the entire declination, not ignoring even one case, just because of his intense sexual passion. However, he would neglect both past and present (5, 4–5); instead all his passion would be dedicated to achieve the desired goal instantly, the coitus: "sed ad laboris meritum/ magis accelerarem" (5, 6–7; I would rush ever more to the rewards of the labor).

[25] Hatto (1965), Sigal (1996).

[26] Vollmann only remarks in his commentary that this description of the coitus in grammatical terms constitutes not a real act but only wishful thinking and fantasy, p. 1169.

Surprisingly, the last stanza then turns away again from the drastic physical and offers insight into the enormously spiritual and artistic power resulting from a joyful sexual encounter, and this, perhaps not unexpectedly, formulated in Middle High German again: "Ih wolde gerne singen / der werlde vroede bringen, / moehte mir an ir gelingen, / der ih diene alle mine tage" (6, 1–3; I would like to sing and bring joy to the world if I could achieve my goal with her whom I serve all my days). For Wachinger this constitutes "freche Sexualgrammatik" (outrageous sexual grammar), but he does not examine any further the cultural-historical context or the implications of this open erotic discourse.[27]

As much as many other poems seem to highlight mostly the esoteric or, in stark contrast, the purely sexual component, the narrative development of "OB Amoris pressuram" might capture best the characteristic and strategic goals of the entire section of love songs. The poets sing about love not only because they want to ventilate their feelings and to extol their ladies' physical beauty. Ultimately, they concretely desire to achieve sexual satisfaction and request from their ladies to sleep with them. At the same time, we discover many different poetic genres re-enacted here, which underscores the highly literary nature of the anthology at large. This also explains why some songs take us into the extreme opposite and experiment with clear allusions to rape, the radical contrast to the refinements of courtly love.

Ultimately, then, this section of the *Carmina Burana* demonstrates the operative breadth of courtly ideals which concern such diverse matters as beauty, singing, wooing, hoping, dreaming, request for sex, physical violence, seduction, and yet also admiration. Previous approaches to the issue at stake, trying to discriminate, on the one hand, between the highly esoteric, modest, mostly aestheticizing songs in the *Minnesangs Frühling* and elsewhere—see, for instance, the *Cambridge Songs*—and, on the other, the deft, unabashed, often rather sexual songs in the *Carmina Burana*, have remarkably ignored the poignantly erotic imagery also employed by the poets in the former collection. Stefan Zeyen has been able to demonstrate convincingly the extent to which unmistakably sexual allusions can also be found in seemingly delicate, polite, and bashful courtly love poetry, especially because he extends his research well into the thirteenth century, that is, he moves very closely into the time period when these mixed Latin-German poems were created or still enjoyed their popularity.[28] It might well be, as he suggests, that the introduction of the theme of the "Hohe Minne" (lofty love) by around 1200 somewhat obscured the previous interest in the theme of sexuality, as we can observe it in the genres of the 'woman's song' and the 'exchange' (Wechsel). However, as Zeyen also emphasizes, by ca. 1220, at the latest with the appearance of Neidhart's songs,[29] strongly parodic, satirical, and especially blatantly erotic songs with little inhibition to talk openly about sexual matters resurfaced and offer a contrastive foil for the more courtly songs.[30]

[27] Wachinger (1984, p. 21). He offers the rather lame explanation for the existence of this poem/song in the *Carmina Burana* as a contrafacture; hence the similarities of certain melodies (*Töne*) could have motivated the collector to add this song to his collection.

[28] Zeyen (1996).

[29] Neidhart-Lieder (2007).

[30] Zeyen (1996, pp. 223–224).

The same phenomenon can be observed in French medieval poetry, as Pierre Bec already recognized, "Car s'il est bien évident que l'on écrit toujours *avec* sa culture, on écrit aussi spontanément *contre* elle, dans le sens culture de l'idéologie dominante, et contre elle, en conformité avec un code littéraire donné mais aussi en rupture avec lui."[31] Significantly, if we were to take into consideration art-historical evidence, such as manuscript illuminations depicting the sin of copulation (outside of wedlock and without the intention to create progeny), we would come across very parallel phenomena, a striking openness and frankness toward sexuality, but intimately tied in with a sense of transgression and sinfulness, though each context might differ slightly.[32] Altogether, the entire corpus of love songs in the *Carmina Burana* operates on a very playful level, deliberately adapting and yet deviating from the canonical courtly love discourse.[33]

Let us turn from here to the other, equally famous section of drinking and gambling songs. It begins with an almost classical poem ("O Curas hominum," no. 187) attacking the vices of the court where only those can maintain a position who command over plenty of money on their own. Poor people do not stand a chance to survive in that cold, backbiting, and vicious climate of the court because everyone is only concerned with gaining the highest profit possible: "omnimoda ad commoda / omnium mens una" (2, 6–7; everyone is agreed on making profit in every possible way). No one who lacks money or wealth would be tolerated at the court, where the rich are getting richer, according to the proverb "'habenti dabitur'" (2, 10; those who have / own are given [more]). Worse even, law and justice have become corrupt because money counts as the only relevant criteria in all cases: "explicas decreta/ad libitum, si sonitum / dederit moneta. / plenis ere sacculis / pena rei diluitur" (3, 5–9; the decrees are interpreted at random when the money dropped into the chest can be heard. With bags filled with money the penalty for the guilty one is accomplished). The poets of this and many other songs in this section observe most critically the devastating power of a 'capitalistic' mentality and sharply attack their society for having fallen prey to purely materialistic values.

Significantly, this poem was also recorded in the Oxford manuscript Bodleian Library, Add. A 44 from the first quarter of the thirteenth century; hence it seems to be closely associated with the contemporary literature of courtly criticism by such major intellectuals as John of Salisbury (ca. 1120–1180), Walter Map, and Giraldus Cambrensis (ca. 1146–ca. 1223).[34] Of course, court criticism had become almost something like a literary pastime for clerical authors since the tenth century, as C. Stephen Jaeger has amply demonstrated.[35] However, this poem, along with numerous others composed since the early thirteenth century, targets money, above all, as the root of all evil of the entire courtly society.[36] As Walter Map says in his *De nugis curialum* (ca. 1180–1182; *Courtiers' Trifles*), "The one who cheats his

[31] Bec (1984, p. 8). Now see also Eckhardt (2005).

[32] Camille (1997).

[33] Classen (2004, pp. 11, 17, 30).

[34] Vollmann, commentary, p. 1211.

[35] Jaeger (1985, pp. 54–66).

[36] Classen (2000, 2001a, b); see also the contributions to *Geld im Mittelalter* (2005).

master to treat a fellow-servant, gains their praise and is approved as a faithful comrade. He who has lied successfully goes and laughs among his fellows, to think he has got round the master."[37] Pope Innocence III (1160/61–1216) accused the Archbishop of Cologne, Adolf von Altena (ca. 1157–1220), of corruption because he had switched his loyalty to Philipp of Swabia (1177–1208) in the competition for the German royal throne. Caesarius of Heisterbach (ca. 1180–ca. 1240) lamented about the deep impact of money on people's ethics and morality.[38] In chapter 57, he has a monk warn his audience, "Avarice is an insatiable and unworthy desire for glory, or for anything else in the world. Love-of-money is a name also given to this vice, but a distinction should be made between the two names, because avarice is an immoderate craving for the possession of all kinds of things, while love-of money is that which lets loose the particular appetite for amassing wealth."[39] Caesarius then provides numerous examples of people who defrauded others, were guilty of avarice, thus signalled the extent to which money determined the relationship among people of his time.

There would be many other contemporary statements that we could allude to in order to confirm that money had become a major topic for conservative critics already in the twelfth century, and all of these issues do actually find extraordinary reflections in the *Carmina Burana* as well. Historians have pointed out how much the circulation of money increased exponentially in the first half of the thirteenth century, exactly at the same time as the poems in our collection were created and then compiled.[40]

The criticism, however, was not only directed against the monetary corruption, but against all kinds of vices typical of people in a power center, such as lying, flattery, vying for offices, and deception. Precisely in the same manner as Walter Map, the poet of "Aristipe, Quamuis sero" (no. 189) advises his listener: "dicas uale curiis / et abeas" (4b, 5–6; say good-bye to the courts and leave). But this is not all. The poets obviously enjoyed outdoing each other in lambasting the vices of the courtly world, sharply criticizing those who undermine the ethical and moral values. In "Sunt detractores inimicis deteriores" (no. 190) the narrative voice warns the listener about those who backstab their enemies and spread false rumors. In "Si quis displiceat prauis, non sollicitetur" (no. 192) the audience is given the recommendation to look up only to those who uphold the highest norms of courtly society, and to stay away from others who are cumulatively identified as "prauis" (dat. plural).

Beyond that, however, this entire section of poems in the *Carmina Burana* is dedicated primarily to the vices of gambling and heavy drinking, either alone or, which is the norm, in company where everyone is joining, irrespective of his/her social status, gender, or age. The poets seem to delight in probing the various consequences of excessive and opprobrious behavior, so when we hear that all gamblers are only interested in committing "fraudes et rapina" (no. 195, 6a, 2;

[37] Map (1983, p. 17).

[38] Kamp (2005, pp. 94–98).

[39] Caesarius of Heisterbach (1929), Book IV: *Of Temptations*, 254; see also http://history.hanover.edu/courses/excerpts/260ch2.html (last accessed on Nov. 24, 2009).

[40] Spufford (1988), Sprenger (1991, pp. 61–64).

deception and robbery). Then, however, we are also informed about the horrifying outcome of having given oneself over to gambling, for instance, meaning that the unlucky one can even lose the shirt on his/her own back (no. 195, 7–8b).

Surprisingly, within the same poem the subject then abruptly switches from gambling and devastating losses to the enjoyment of wine, and this as well in excess. In a hilarious fashion, the poet goes so far as to demonstrates in a linguistic manner the effects of the alcohol which brings out considerable skills in remembering phrases from other languages, as one of the stanzas confirm where French words are followed by words in Middle High German, and these in turn by a clause in Latin, then again by a statement in Middle High German, concluding with a line in Latin:

"Deu sal, misir, bescher de uin!" (French – Middle High German)
tunc eum osculamur. (Latin)
wir enahten niht uf den Rin, (Middle High German)
sed Bacho famulamur. (stanza 13a) (Latin)
["I greet you in the name of God, bring the wine!"
then we kiss him.
We do not care about the Rhine, (synecdoche for water)
instead we are servants of Bacchus.][41]

Such quirky mixture of languages will be one of the hallmarks of late-medieval poetry, if we think, for instance, of Oswald von Wolkenstein,[42] yet it is already highly developed in a burlesque context within the *Carmina Burana*. The anonymous poet succeeded to capture the lively atmosphere in a medieval tavern where students, and perhaps also their teachers, have assembled and drink more wine than would be appropriate. Nevertheless, the ominous allusion to the northerly wind of whom no one is thinking (13, 3–4), evokes the actual danger that awaits the drunkards outside at a later hour. But, basically as a metaphor of ordinary people's behavior and life, no one wants to think ahead; instead they continue to consume their wine and gamble away all their money, not preparing themselves for the arrival of death and later the Day of Judgment.

As the fulminating fifth stanza in "In taberna quando sumus" (no. 196) powerfully brings to light, for the poets of the *Carmina Burana* and their intended audience the tavern developed into a locale where representatives of all social classes and genders assemble and enjoy their time over wine, whether knights or clerics, farm hands or farm maids, whether the illiterate or the alchemist, whether the poor or the sick, whether the young boy or the senile old man: "bibunt centum, bibunt mille" (6, 8; hundreds, nay, thousands are drinking).

There are many more examples of this type of song and the specific theme of a rousing drinking party in the tavern. Surprisingly, if we scan medieval literature at large, we hardly find anything parallel to this phenomenon, since heavy drinking and partying involving practically everyone finds no treatment in heroic poetry, in courtly romances, in ordinary courtly love poetry, and not even in *fabliaux*, *mæren*,

[41] For further analysis of this linguistic feature, see Kühne (2000).

[42] Beatie (1967), Wachinger (1977), Classen (1996).

or *novelli*. Even late-medieval poetry and literature, whether we think of jest narratives, Shrovetide plays, or prose novels do not include such crude, and yet also hilarious and entertaining themes, although it would be erroneous to assume that hence the poets of the *Carmina Burana* only projected wishful thinking and intended, perhaps, nothing else but to provoke the authorities, especially the teachers in the Cathedral schools and the superiors in the Church hierarchy.[43]

Scholarship has not been able to fathom fully how to interpret and explain the curious phenomenon of these drastic, bizarre, at times even outlandish drinking songs. How do they fit into the broader cultural context, being performed in Latin and some vernacular/s? What are we to make of the entire set-up of the *Carmina Burana* considering the often rather explicitly sexual language in the love songs, some of which basically idealize rape of a woman? Max Manitius had only pointed out the anonymity of most of the songs contained in the manuscript, being the result of the poets' concern to preserve their freedom and independence to write and say whatever they liked. For Manitius, these are poems created at a time when the authors were still students and did not have look out for political, ethical, or moral constraints associated with any clerical position.[44] But it would no longer be sufficient to explain the often rather provocative and irritating statements in the *Carmina Burana* as "the last utterance of a doomed order…. The wandering clerks, degraded to the level of the jongleurs, became notorious even among them for looseness of living and foulness of speech…," as Helen Waddell famously formulated it.[45] Dennis M. Kratz avers that we encounter in the *Carmina Burana* something like a "literary encyclopedia," considering the wide range of genres, motifs, and themes.[46] These various opinions certainly contain more than only a kernel of truth, yet they do not satisfy our probing question what these songs really reflect in their deft and irreverent approach to all kinds of aspects determining courtly life and everyday situations during the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries.

As song no. 197 ("Dum Domus lapidea") illustrates, the poets commonly reflect upon the newly discovered and developed urban space, where they assemble in the local tavern and enjoy drinking and gambling together.[47] Together with the narrative voice and the person who is addressed in the song we are looking around the marketplace and then focus on the pub where many other drinkers have already assembled. Both wine and delicious food are served, and people enjoy their company, although even here the danger looms in the background that the players might lose all their money (1, 9–10). With the help of the alcohol the company of revelers is invited to put all worries aside and to enjoy life to the fullest extent

[43] We know a lot about the different types of alcoholic drinks consumed in the Middle Ages, see Schubert (2006, pp. 169–237), Unger (2004). But there are no good studies on such wild drinking parties as described in the *Carmina Burana*.

[44] Manitius (1931, pp. 964–965).

[45] Waddell (1929, p. 208).

[46] Kratz (1994, p. 213).

[47] See the contributions to *Über Bürger, Stadt und städtische Literatur im Spätmittelalter* (1980); see also the studies combined in *Urban Space in the Middle Ages* (2009).

possible, although many problems apparently loom large on the horizon: "qui curarum tempestatem/sedat et meroris" (3, 2–3; He [the drinker] commands the storm of worries to settle down and to put all concerns aside). But the poem carefully conceals those warning signals, without completely ignoring them, and pretends, in the development of the subsequent stanzas, that complete drunkenness would be alright since the drinking fellows would come to the rescue of the one who would have lost control over him- or herself.

Of course, in a number of cases these drinking songs contain no other idea or message but that excessive drinking belongs to some of the greatest joys in life. But "Bache, Bene uenies gratus et optatus" (no. 200), for instance, with its ominous allusions to the conquest of Jerusalem by the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar in 597 B.C.E. according to II Kings xxiv.1–16: "Ierusalem et regalis Babilon ditatur" (3, 2). In a facetious manner, the poet implies numerous tensions between the genders that are temporarily overcome in the stage of alcoholic stupor (10). In the subsequent poem, "Tu das, Bache, loqui, tu comprimis ora loquaecis" (no. 201) the humorous verses indicate, in a similar fashion, where people feel shortcomings limiting their abilities to operate, such as lack of eloquence. Moreover, once people are drunk, they care little about previous peace treatises and turn to violence, or enemies suddenly join hands (3), which clearly signals the fear of political and military unrest, and also the degree to which medieval society was troubled by internal, or domestic, violence, which all becomes exacerbated and amplified through the heavy consumption of wine.[48] Here as well the poet addresses some of the issues we have heard of before, and which would find constant responses throughout the entire Middle Ages, such as greed, poverty, ignorance, and lack of consideration. Above all, as we notice at the end, the composer expresses his worries that too many people do no longer care about their ancestors and their heirs: "Quisque suorum posteriorum siue priorum" (10, 1); hence they lose all memory and thus neglect to work on the essential bonds that hold society together and provide the crucial framework for the individual to live a meaningful life both on a horizontal and a vertical tangential.[49]

The *Carmina Burana* actually prove to be enormously rich in reflections upon all kinds of cultural-historical aspects, not only revelry in taverns, gambling, and fighting, but also upon the chess game, hence upon ordinary entertainment commonly pursued by members of the middle class and the clergy, such as nos. 208, 209, and 210.[50] Then we are informed about basic models of a good behavior determined by moderation, deliberately staying away from excesses in eating and drinking (no. 212). "Sperne lucrum! uersat mentes insana cupido" (no. 213), which originates from late antiquity and has been preserved in numerous manuscripts since the ninth century, offers fundamental didactic advise to disregard foolish desire for extraordinary profit, greed, deception and cheating, to control one's temper and

[48] For a further discussion of this systemic problem in medieval society, see the contributions to *Violence in Medieval Courtly Literature* (2004).

[49] Carruthers (1990), Coleman (1992).

[50] The significance of chess as a major icon of medieval feudal society has long been recognized, see *Chess and Allegory in the Middle Ages* (2005). See also the contributions to *Chess in the Middle Ages* (2010).

avoid getting into a rage. More interestingly, in a clearly deliberate contradistinction to many of the previous poems, here we are explicitly warned about the dangers of gambling which normally makes most people lose all their money. Righteous people eagerly embrace peace, which can be achieved if one willingly accepts the possibility of losing out in some conditions, such as games and gambling. Ultimately, though not rejecting gambling altogether, the poet admonishes his audience to display tolerance and to stay away from wrath: "iraque cesset!" (12).

Not surprisingly, in "MVNDVS Est in uarium sepe uariatus" (no. 226) the narrative voice bitterly laments about the moral and ethical decay that has befallen the world. The old and honorable customs have disappeared, giving way to evil behavior (2). Generosity does no longer exist, which threatens to destroy all and everything: "Mundus ergo labitur, nullus hunc sustentat" (5, 1; Hence the world is stumbling, and no one is there to support it). The closing section of the *Carmina Burana* then turns to religious teachings, partly through a play, partly through Biblically inspired poems.

We could continue for a long time to examine individual songs, themes, motifs, questions pertaining to melodies, contrafacture, and other elements, which previous scholars have done on numerous occasions.[51] But let us take stock of our findings and try to reach a more global cultural-historical understanding of the so-called *Sitz im Leben* of the *Carmina Burana* as a collection of songs and even plays composed in Latin and, at times, Middle High German. As David Parlett correctly observed, "Outside a specialized readership *Carmina Burana* is probably best known as the title of a popular work for chorus and orchestra by Carl Orff," hence only as the lyric for twentieth-century music (Frankfurt a. M., 1937, to be precise).[52] Often there is a danger for medieval works that we pay the less attention to them in scholarly detail the more they are known and cherished today. Certainly, we have good editions and translations of the *Carmina Burana* available, and this in numerous languages, whether French, Spanish, English, German, Hungarian, Russian, or Japanese, many of them accompanied by good commentaries and introductions.[53] Nevertheless, we still face the huge task of examining and analyzing the full content, the literary-historical context, the specific messages, the playful allusions to sexuality, the didactic advice, the moral and ethical teachings, and many other aspects so relevant in most recent Medieval Studies at large. The cultural-historical dimension, as reflected in these often mixed-language poems / songs, deeply colored by laughter in the narrative background, proves to be most relevant because the discourse contained in the texts reveals numerous major aspects of great concern for the composers and their audiences. Both in the major sections with love songs and the drinking songs respectively humor and laughter create a highly deceptive screen, making us believe that we are dealing with nothing but light and entertaining poetry, created rather quickly and carelessly.[54] But satire,

[51] Daub (2006), Lea (1999), März (1996), Peterson (1994), Traill (1994).

[52] Parlett, (trans., 9).

[53] See, for instance, the introduction by Bischoff, *Carmina Burana* (1967, 1970), Lehtonen (1995).

[54] For a comprehensive discussion of laughter in, for, and by a social community, see the contributions to *Lachgemeinschaften* (2005).

irony, and good sense of humor require a high level of skills, especially if we consider the rich variety of parodies, adaptations of classical and medieval texts and melodies, and the sophisticated employment of meter, rhyme schemes, and rhythm throughout.[55]

However, here I have not concentrated on the formal aspects, which would also require a thorough musicological analysis. Instead, the examination has revealed numerous strategies to transgress the standard protocols of courtly society and to undermine the usually esoteric tone of voice in the common Latin and Middle High German love poems of that time. Of course, there are many highly abstract erotic poems included in the *Carmina Burana*, but these are dexterously and surreptitiously matched, or paired, with texts where the pursuit of love suddenly erupts into violence and force. Then there are the poems where there is not the least attempt to cast a veil over the crude desire for sexual satisfaction. But even in those cases the poetic quality does not fall below any major standards. We basically have to read these poems as the other side of the coin of the same phenomenon; hence as provocations, deliberate irritations, as transgressive strategies to expose the entire gamut of aspects relevant and determinant in the discourse of love.

The corpus of drinking songs does not simply collapse into a group of texts of low-grade poetic effusions. Behind the obvious screen of inciting fellow revelers to join the drinking party and to get as much intoxicated as possible we quickly notice numerous allusions and references to every-day problems, concerns, troubles, and worries. These pertain to money, poverty, justice, the legal system, the constraints of hierarchical society, and the individual's helpless suffering from the strikes of Fortune. As these poems often express, the fundamental concern pertained to the effort to drown out fear, sorrow, vexation, and deep trouble. Of course, drinking in company has always been an easy way out of dealing head-on, rationally, and realistically with the actual questions in the social reality. The poets in the *Carmina Burana* cannot be identified as psychologically motivated composers, which they might have been, except that we would not have any way to determine that. But their works reveal much more of the pervasive problems and issues at stake already at the end of the twelfth century than we might have assumed heretofore. In other words, this anthology, like many contemporary texts, emerges as an important mirror of the history of mentality and the cultural-historical parameters of high medieval courtly society and the world of clerics.[56]

Remarkably, the first section of poems focusing on moral and satirical topics hence does not simply stand all by itself without any connection to the next two sections (love and drinking). Instead, already here we learn of bitter complaints about the negative effects of money, of warnings about the dangerous consequences of envy and jealousy, and of philosophical teachings about the impact of unpredictable Fortuna, such as in no. 17: "O Fortuna, velud luna", probably best known until today particularly through the music by Carl Orff. In other words, for a full understanding of the complete anthology we cannot be content with studying

[55] Wetherbee (2000).

[56] For the theoretical underpinnings of this approach, which I have not explicitly employed in this study, though I have been deeply informed by it, see *Europäische Mentalitätsgeschichte* (2008).

only individual poems, or with analyzing melodies and rhyme schemes, as important as this research certainly proves to be. On the contrary, just as in the case of contemporary and late-medieval song collections and miscellany manuscripts, we have to take into consideration the overall design, the interconnectedness of individual songs to all others, and the deliberately contrastive, if not contradictory, operations carried out in each song either by the individual poets themselves or by the organizing collector in order to profile the complexity, ambivalence, and profound challenges of and in human life, powerfully, insightfully, and yet also facetiously and satirically cast in love and drinking songs.

Although the *Carmina Burana* at first sight seem to appeal to the broadly uncultured and lay audience, considering the general content determined by eroticism and the treatment of drinking and gambling, both the predominant use of Latin and the rich web of literary allusions and the sophisticated play with traditional genres and motifs underscore the anthology's primary appeal to a highly cultured group of recipients, whether learned clerics, university students and teachers, or goliards and minstrels.[57] Most likely, we can recognize in this collection, precisely because of the rich diversity of genres, themes, and motifs, not to forget the linguistic playfulness, a remarkable forerunner of numerous late-medieval song collections that were produced, for instance, at the court of the Archbishop Pilgrim II of Salzburg (The Monk of Salzburg) and the Duke Albrecht III of Austria in Vienna.[58] Of course, there are the easily recognizable elements of the dance song, of public entertainment, in the tavern or at court, and maybe even in the village. However, to associate parts or the whole of the *Carmina Burana* in one way or the other with the rural space, hence to downplay the enormous literary and musical sophistication by identifying these songs as plainly intended for the Horatian "delectare" without the "prodesse," seriously and unduly blocks our hermeneutic potentials in grasping the subtle, often ironic and satirical strategies contained in these songs.[59] The interpolation of Middle High German courtly love poetry (*Minnesang*) into the Latin songs also underscores, without any doubt, the highly sophisticated quality of this anthology of songs, although many of these do not refrain from addressing often rather drastically graphic, erotic, even sexual topics.[60]

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[57] Knapp (1996) argues in favor of Neustift near Brixen as the most likely place of origin of the manuscript because, among many other reasons, of the highly developed intellectual and cultural community of monks there.

[58] Schneider (2008).

[59] Dronke (1968; 1996, pp. 193–194), offers this reading for one song, but he also suggests that many of the refrains in Middle High German would support his interpretation along those lines (189).

[60] Edwards (2000, pp. 41–70).

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