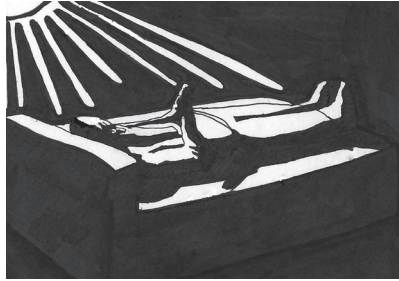


Ramon Llull and the rhetoric of prayer.
A brief commentary

ROBERT D. HUGHES

(Centre de Documentació Ramon Llull, Universitat de Barcelona)



INTRODUCTION

Rhetoric can be defined in three ways: as the art (or practice) of discursive persuasion; the teaching of that art, and the theory thereof. Likewise, what I here call Llull's 'art of prayer and contemplation' has practical, pedagogical and theoretical goals.¹ In fact, these three aims are frequently fulfilled within the very same text.² Barbara H. Jaye has asserted that "[the] *sine qua non* of the *artes orandi* is that these works are not only concerned with 'how to' pray but treat prayer as a systematic activity requiring conscious verbal strategies". In what follows, I conjecture that Ramon Llull's *Llibre de contemplació* (1273-74?; hereafter *LC*) satisfies both such latter requirements.³

PRAYER AS EPIDEICTIC RHETORIC

Towards the middle of *LC*, Ramon Llull begins Distinction XXVIII, chapter 149 ("Com hom cogita en la divinal essència"), a Distinction covering the

1. Quintilian (1821: 350). In his *De institutione oratoria*, II, 15, 34, Quintilian defines rhetoric as the first of these, thus: "scientia bene dicendi". Cf. Reboul (1990 [1984]: 6-8).

2. For the use of rhetoric in Llull's oeuvre, cf. Johnston (1996); and Badia (2013: 79-91).

3. *LC*, ORL II-VIII (1906-1914).

‘spiritual sense’ of cogitation, with one of his customary exclamatory invocations.⁴ This invocation – an *exordium*/salutation – can be read, and most probably was so, as a short prayer of praise (“Deus, qui es gran sobre totes vertuts e es honrat en tots honraments!”).⁵ This prayer thus consists of a distinct sentential unit, lacking a main verb, the identification of whose addressee (“Deus”) – here invoked using the second-person singular (“qui es [...] e es [...]”), i.e. the familiar form – is followed by two quasi-parallel definitory clauses (“qui es gran sobre totes vertuts e es honrat en tots honraments!”) connected by a conjunction (“e”).

This sentence precedes what may likewise be taken to constitute a minor prayer of contrition (i.e. showing compunction), namely, “Con vos, Sènyer, sias alt sobre les excellents altèes, e nosaltres peccadors siam baxats per obres de peccat en est mon tenebrós [...]”.⁶ This second prayer – a statement of facts or *narratio* – begins with the subordinating conjunction “con” (“com” in modern Catalan; “since” in modern English), an easily overlooked though frequently occurring term in Lullian syntactical practice, which, here as elsewhere, is made to carry considerable causal and explanatory force.⁷ From the above, we learn that it is precisely because God is “more-than-lofty” (i.e. an Anselmian maximum, viz., *aliquid quo nihil maius cogitari possit*) and “we sinners”, conversely, “more-than-fallen” (i.e. a corresponding minimum) that the author is impelled to assume and fulfil his appointed role and mission, as these are made clear in the clauses – not to mention, the sentences, sections, chapters, Distinctions and Books dividing the text – which follow this immediate sentence.⁸ The same, of course, applies to all preceding clauses, sentences, sections, etc.; thus, the process (at this mid-point of *LC* I have selected) is both analeptic and proleptic.

I justify my focus upon this particular chapter of *LC* and upon brief sections therein by reference to Lull’s own recommendations regarding the four

4. *LC*, Dist. XXVIII, chs. 149–168 in Lull (1910: 293–418). For the structure of *LC* in its entirety and the religious symbolism thereof, see Lull (1906a: 3–6).

5. William of Auvergne discusses the rhetorical *exordium* in chs. 3, 4 and 5 of William of Auvergne (2013: 37–51).

6. For compunction, cf. n. 13 below.

7. William of Auvergne discusses the rhetorical *narratio* in ch. 6 of William of Auvergne (2013: 53–61).

8. Anselm (1946: I, 101).

‘methods of contemplation’ present in this text: evidence of systematic intent if not indeed “conscious verbal strategies”. Among other things, Llull specifically categorises *LC* as an “art and method” of contemplation (“Qui vol aver art e manera per la qual sapia contemplar en aquest llibre e per aquest llibre”) and attributes thereto the capacity to render its reader a “bell parlar e dictador e enamorat”.⁹ In chapter 366 of *LC*, Llull, in fact, identifies his potential readership as being hermits, religious or laypeople who do not wish to tire themselves in their cell, room or at a lengthy Mass.¹⁰

A stark contrast is immediately established between the initial prayer (itself an early example of the use in Llull’s works of “brief forms”), which maintains the notion of God’s superlative greatness, excellence and loftiness, and its ensuing counterpart, which, though continuing with the theme of God’s superlativeness, soon descends to a consideration of fallen – and actively falling – man: man’s “obres de peccat” are ongoing; his initial fall, implicit.¹¹ The medieval reader would have been acutely aware that what was being signalled here was the existence of a gaping chasm (and, in Lullian terms, an increasing lack of concordance) between the ultimate object of this chapter (and of the work as a totality), namely, God, and mankind; a chasm made only wider – and darker (“en est mon tenebrós”) – by sin; a chasm within which both the writing subject (‘the author’) and the reading public were deeply situated, in the widening of which they were involved, and for which latter they were deserving of blame.

FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT: A PERSONAL
AND COLLECTIVE RESPONSE VIA COGITATION UPON GOD

Of course, by implication, any reference to darkness – darkness being an absence or privation conventionally constituting one extreme of an oppositional pairing – alludes to its contrary, namely, light. As regards this latter theme there are many celebrated Biblical precedents (e.g. Ps 4:6; Gen 1:4; Gen 1:16; 1 Jn 1:5; Eph 5:13-14), not to mention the theology of light and theories of divine illumination subsequently developed by St Augustine (e.g. *In Epist. I*,

9. Cf. Llull (1914: 636-638; here, 636; 628).

10. Llull (1914: 638).

11. For the use of “brief forms” in Ramon Llull, cf. Badia, Santanach and Soler (2016: 46, 56, 137-48, 157 and 290); as well as Taylor and Coroleu (eds.) (2017: ix-xi; 1-25; and 52-54).

4) and St Thomas Aquinas (e.g. *ScG*, IV, 13 and *ST*, I, 43, 5 *ad* 3), for example, sources with which Ramon Llull (the so-called *Doctor illuminatus*) would have been familiar.¹²

As previously stated, Llull includes himself among the “nosaltres peccadors [qui] siam baxats per obres de peccat”. However, in tracing the descent effected by sin, is quick to offer the possibility of an ensuing and sanatory – albeit mandatory – ascent from its shadowy realms. The (partial) remedy to the above-described situation is evoked as a personal response thereto on the part of the author. This response encompasses the elevation of his mind to consideration of the Divine and a comprehensive rejection of the world in respect of its negative aspects, a situation wherein the world’s “vana gloria”, associated with darkness, is implicitly contrasted with the true glory of heavenly beatitude, associated with light.

That the response is personal should come as no surprise, given that the work as a whole is one both *of* and *on* contemplation, information which is overtly communicated. More covertly, however, exists the underlying desideratum that the method of contemplation the author describes might function as instruction for a collectivity: the aggregation of individual contemplatives who might follow and adhere to the pedagogical course it presents.

The foregoing remedial procedure is activated by Llull, initially, via the turning of his mind to God and, subsequently, in the process of writing the text of *LC* itself.¹³ In so doing, he ascribes to himself the lowly epithets of God’s servant and subject (“lo vostre servidor e l vostre subject”) – though as speaking subject he acts as a placeholder for any practitioner of his particular method of contemplation – a servant and subject, that is, who raises his thoughts (“sa cogitacio”) to God, the “you” (“vos”) to whom the dialogue is directed and to whom the thoughts are transmitted.¹⁴ Llull explicitly intends that such

12. Augustine (1902: 198off.); Aquinas (1930: 50) and Aquinas (1888: 450), both of which latter instances emphasise the deeply Christological nature of illumination; cf. Whidden III (2014, 13–15, esp. text and notes at nn. 7 and 10), who reads “illuminationem” for “instructionem” in *ad* 2.

13. Cf. Hugh of St Victor (1854: 979A): “Devotio est pius et humilis affectus in Deum, qui ex compunctione generatur” and “[d]evotio igitur est conversio in Deum pio et humili affectu”. Hugh notably classified his *De modo orandi* as an *ars*; cf. William of Auvergne (2013: 5).

14. Cf. Ps 36:7; William of Auvergne discusses subjection to God in ch. 37 of William of Auvergne (2013: 261–263).

thoughts should stand in communion with God and be focused upon Him (“per tal que [sa cogitacio] sia ab vos e en vos”) rather than concern and preoccupy themselves with the vanities of this world (“la vana gloria mundana”). Interestingly, here a displacement occurs wherein the protagonism attaching to the initiating subject is ascribed to the thoughts themselves, rather than to the writer-as-contemplative or contemplative-as-writer, thereby emphasising the overall tone – and importance – of thoughtful intellectual activity.

Neither for Llull himself, however, nor for medieval theologians in general, was man singlehandedly capable of either initiating or fulfilling his restoration (or ‘recreation’) in God without the assistance of divine grace, signal-ly represented as this is in the Incarnation, death and Resurrection of Christ. Later in *LC*, Llull, in fact, devotes an entire chapter to the necessity of God’s assistance in prayer and contemplation, as well as in the practice of virtue and avoidance of vice, crucially linking such assistance to the acceptance, by affirmation, of the Incarnation of Christ.¹⁵

In sum, Llull has suggested that it is precisely the yawning gulf in metaphysical and moral status between God and (sinful) man that has propelled him to raise his thoughts to God in a form of willing and active *fuga mundi*. In so doing, however, he invokes a preliminary requirement, namely, the acknowledgement of his – or one’s – own lowly status as servant and subject before God. This act of self-abasement, not only typical of penitential literature but also characteristic of Llull’s own writing, serves to ground the posture with respect to the divinity that not only the writer must adopt, but also the contemplative into which he hopes to convert his reader and the human person him- or herself. The tendency towards self-abasement and self-inculcation in Llull, though a common literary trope, is present in *LC* from the outset.¹⁶ It is profound enough to prevent the author from even attaching his name to the work, preferring instead to attribute and render the latter to God.¹⁷ In this, we note a complete overlapping of literary and devotional aims.

15. Cf. Llull (1914: 273, 274, 276-77), namely, *LC*, Book V, ch. 338, esp. §§ 1, 3, 11, 12, respectively.

16. Cf. Llull (1906a: 5, 6). Self-inculcation in prayer dates back at least as far as Origen’s *De oratione* (321-250 CE); cf. William of Auvergne (2013: 4).

17. Llull (1906a: 6): “esta obra [...] atriboesch e do a vos [...] Senyor Deus”.

A BI-DIRECTIONAL, CHRISTOCENTRIC RHETORIC

The foregoing section is written in simple, fluent and mellifluous prose. Like the totality of *LC*, it constitutes a direct apostrophe to God (addressed throughout the text as “Deus”, “Sènyer” and “vos”, the familiar form here emphasizing the degree of personal connection between the two parties), although the relationship of the speaker thereto – and, just as importantly, of the group to which he belongs (“nosaltres peccadors”) – is conceived in both antithetical terms and clauses. Notable also is the presence within the first section of at least two instances of *captatio benevolentiae*, both having the same nominal and nominated addressee (“Deus”, “Sènyer”).

These instances can be found in the opening invocation (“Deus, qui es gran sobre totes vertuts e es honrat en tots honraments!”) – which, however heartfelt, is designed to attract God’s goodwill towards the speaker/writer by highlighting the latter’s recognition of the former’s supreme nobility and excellence – as well as in the clauses extending from “e nosaltres peccadors... tramet la a vos”. In these latter, a descent takes place from the “excellents altès” of the divinity via the “siam baxats per obres de peccat” to the necessary and underlying humility found in the expression “lo vostre servidor e l vostre sots-mès”, following which the reference to “cogitacio” offers the possibility of an ascending return to the divinity via contemplation. Accordingly, however, the expression of humility and dutifulness uttered by this self-characterising and self-confessed sinner must likewise be directed towards a human audience. This audience has been made privy to the contents of the author’s dialogue with God. Their goodwill is thus also required in order to complete the process of reading the words on the page; following the author’s lines of thought with regard to cogitation upon and contemplation of God’s essence; and converting the literary representation of a recommended method of contemplation into practice in their own daily lives.

In the above passage, I have called God “the nominal and nominated addressee” (of prayer and contemplation via cogitation) in order to indicate the co-presence of an obvious, albeit auxiliary, position offered in the text to that other addressee (of the ‘art’ or method of intellectual prayer and contemplation), that is to say, the reader. In human terms, the attitude of humility struck by the references to servitude, subjection and sinfulness serves a rhetorical purpose with respect to Lull’s readership, of course, though nonetheless also

signals the self-critical instrumentality of rhetoric itself.¹⁸ Conversely, in terms of the Divine, the adoption of this same attitude ministers, *a fortiori*, to both a theological and an eschatological finality.

The aforementioned antithesis (i.e. between a superelevated God and a deeply debased humanity operating at a level well below that expected of it) consists in precisely that which the servant and subject (to which two corresponding terms belong, namely, “Lord” and “King”) is beholden to reduce or resolve as best s/he can, in an effort to gain access to the “mon lluminós” of cogitation upon the divine essence, this “mon lluminós” being the implicit counterpart of the “mon tenebrós” brought low by sin. In mundane and literal terms, at least, we should recall, a servant performs duties within a household (a domestic environment), while a subject fulfils his or her duties within a realm or kingdom (a political setting). Such elements of domesticity and political reality serve to embed – and illuminate – the nature of the divine-human relationship within – and by reference to – the everyday lives of those whose existence is framed, as here, by the prevailing medieval feudal structures, while at the same time reinforcing the primary spiritual (i.e. devotional, Christological and eschatological) sense of such elements.¹⁹

The opening section, therefore, with its glancing reference to “cogitacio”, a technical term of contemplative mysticism, and its ostensibly artless references to greatness, virtues, honours, loftiness, etc., introduces certain of the (here, polysemic) terms which inform the more detailed account given in § 2, not to mention certain of those already crucial in *LC* and later to assume enormous significance within Llull’s Art itself. “Greatness” is the second of Llull’s “Virtues”, “Qualities” or “Dignities”, namely, the co-essential and convertible attributes of God (and principles of Llull’s Art). I have argued elsewhere that the term “Honours” is to be equated precisely with such “Virtues”.²⁰ The terms are here polysemic insofar as they still retain their literal sense. As was common in the medieval period, Llull telescopes the fourfold senses of Scripture or *quadriga* into the two broader categories of the sensory (or literal) and the intellectual (or spiritual), extolling the latter and censuring the former.

In this second section, contemplation and cogitation find themselves intimately associated in terms of their object (*viz.* God’s nobility and virtue), while

18. For which latter, see Reboul (1990 [1984]: 122).

19. God’s dominion or “Lordship” (*senyoria*) is treated in Llull (1906b: 41-56).

20. Llull (2016: 99, n. 18 and 534).

the concerns or preoccupations (“ocupada”) to be shunned – an echo of those invoked in the preceding section (“no sia ocupada ni enpatxada”) – are firmly identified as being those in respect of “sensory matters” (“nulla cosa sensual”). We should note that on various occasions Llull attributes specifically to Christ’s Incarnation the fact that a person is better able to suppress or mortify his or her sensory nature (“per raó del vostre aveniment se segueix que tot hom pot millor mortificar la natura de la potencia sensitiva”), which ordinarily would lead to loving him- or herself before his or her neighbour, than if there had been no Incarnation, Crucifixion or Death.²¹ He insists, however, that Christ’s Incarnation and Passion do not recreate a person’s sensory nature in this world; not until the Day of Judgement, he states, will it be enacted upon all who have faith in Christ’s Incarnation.²²

The opening sentence of the section (as quoted above), though seemingly straightforward, gains a good part of its expository force, as does the entire section, from the rhetorical devices employed therein. In fact, within its brief invocation we find no less than four such, namely, apostrophe (“Deus” / “Sènnyer”); polyptoton or transplacement (“honrat” / “honraments”; continued in the long second sentence by “alt” / “altès” and “peccadors” / “peccat”); anaphora (“totes” / “tots”), and (inexact) parallelism (“gran sobre totes veritats” / “honrat en tots honraments”). Indeed, the passage moves on in the following sentence to use the reiterative and amplificatory plesionymy of “no sia ocupada ni enpatxada [sa cogitacio] en la vana gloria mundana”, a plesionymy whereby the duality of terms offered presents an at least notional brake to the momentum of the sentence provided by the anticipatory pairing of “ab vos e en vos”. It is towards just such a goal that the contemplative’s thought has already been progressing via the impetus afforded by the verbs of movement “levar” and “trametre”, which impetus has been initiated, in part, by Llull’s sense of magnanimity (another rhetorical feature) towards – and inclusion within – the group of “peccadors” (i.e. humanity) whose spiritual distance from God provides the initial stimulus for his contemplative project itself. I say ‘notional brake’ for the reason that the negativity of the suggested impediments to prayerful thought is itself negated, leaving the contemplative’s “cogitacio” free to pursue its designated goal.

21. Llull (1906a: 278-279).

22. Llull (1911: 205-206). Ch. 150, the following chapter in the same work, is entitled “Com hom cogita en la gloriosa humanitat de nostre Senyor Jhesu Christ”, in Llull (1911: 298-304).

CONCLUSION

In concluding, I would like to suggest that Llull, rather than drawing upon the medieval *artes dictaminis, praedicandi* or *poeticae* (as he would elsewhere in his oeuvre), may in fact be articulating, as well as implementing, his own *ars orandi et contemplandi* in a way which employs a definition of prayer broader than petitionary such and one inclusive of meditation (*cogitacio*) and mystical contemplation.²³ We should recall in this respect that *LC* was written not long after the publication of William of Auvergne's *Rhetorica divina* (1240), a work which applied Ciceronian rhetorical principles to the 'art of prayer', and which itself followed upon the slightly earlier *De modo orandi* (1128-38) by Hugh of St Victor.²⁴ In closing, it should be noted that William enumerates seven 'perfections' of prayer, of which resemblance to a secular oration is but one, while Hugh classifies prayer into *supplicatio, postulatio* and *insinuatio*.²⁵

ABBREVIATIONS

In Epist. = St Augustine, *In Epistolam Iohannis ad Parthos tractatus decem*
PL = *Patrologia Latina*
ScG = *Summa contra gentiles*
ST = *Summa theologiae*

BIBLIOGRAPHY

ANSELM, Saint (1946). *Proslogion* in *S. Anselmi Cantuariensis Archiepiscopi Opera omnia*, vol. I, ed. Francis Salesius Schmitt, Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson & Son, pp. 97-122.

23. Cf. William of Auvergne (2013: 2-3; 8).

24. My concluding suggestions, it should be noted, are diametrically opposed to those in regard of *LC* made by Jaye in Briscoe and Jaye (1992: 100).

25. Hugh of St Victor (1854: 979C-981D; here 979C): "Supplicatio est sine determinatione petitionis humilis et devota precatio. Postulatio est determinatae petitioni incerta narratio. Insinuatio est sine petitione per solam narrationem, voluntatis facta significatio". Cf. William of Auvergne (2013: 1, 5); and Jaye in Briscoe and Jaye (1992: 91-92).

- AQUINAS, Saint Thomas (1888). *Summa theologiae*, I^a, q. 1-49 cum commentariis Caietani, in *Sancti Thomae de Aquino Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P. M. edita*, here t. IV, Rome.
- AQUINAS, Saint Thomas (1930). *Summa contra gentiles*, IV cum commentariis Ferrariensis, in *Sancti Thomae de Aquino Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P. M. edita*, here t. XV, Rome.
- AUGUSTINE, Saint (1902). In *Epistolam Johannis ad Parthos tractatus decem*, ed. Migne, *PL* 35: 1977-2062.
- BADIA, Lola (2013). "Nova retòrica i pràctica d'escritura en Ramon Llull", *Quaderns d'Italìa*, 18, pp. 79-91.
- BADIA, Lola, SANTANACH, Joan & SOLER, Albert (2016). *Ramon Llull as a Vernacular Writer: Communicating a New Kind of Knowledge*, trans. Robert D. Hughes, London: Tamesis.
- BRISCOE, Marianne G. & JAYE, Barbara H. (1992). *Artes praedicandi and Artes orandi*, Turnhout: Brepols (Typologie des sources du Moyen Âge occidental, fasc. 61).
- HUGH OF ST VICTOR (1854). *De modo orandi*, ed. Migne, *PL* 176:0977-0988A.
- JOHNSTON, Mark D. (1996). *The Evangelical Rhetoric of Ramon Llull. Lay Learning and Piety in the Christian West around 1300*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- LLULL, Ramon (1906a, 1906b, 1910, 1911, 1914). *Llibre de contemplació*, vols. II, III, IV, VI and VIII, respectively, ed. M. Obrador y Bennassar, Miquel Ferrà and Salvador Galmés, Palma: Comissió Editora Lulliana.
- LLULL, Ramon (2016). *Romance of Evast and Blaquerna*, Albert Soler and Joan Santanach (introd.); Robert D. Hughes (trans. and notes), Barcelona - Woodbridge: Barcino - Tamesis.
- QUINTILIAN [Marcus Fabius Quintilianus] (1821). *De institutione oratoria*, vol. I, ed. Jean Joseph François Dussault and Georg Ludwig Spalding, Paris: Nicholas Eligijs Lemaire.
- REBOUL, Olivier (1990 [1984]). *La rhétorique*, 3rd edition, Paris: Presses universitaires de France (Que sais-je?).
- TAYLOR, Barry & COROLEU, Alejandro (eds.) (2017). *Brief Forms in Medieval and Renaissance Hispanic Literature*, Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- WHIDDEN III, David L. (2014). *Christ the Light: The Theology of Light and Illumination in Thomas Aquinas*, Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press (Emerging Scholars).
- WILLIAM OF AUVERGNE (2013). *Rhetorica divina, seu ars oratoria eloquentiae divinae*, introduction, text, translation, and notes by Roland J. Teske, S. J., Leuven: Peeters (Dallas Medieval Texts and Translations 17).