

Introduction: Lull among the Disciplines

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In his plaintive “Cant de Ramon” (ca. 1300), Ramon Llull lamented his rejection by the world at large: “Gran res hai del món cercat, / mant bon eximpli hai donat: / poc són conegut e amat” (ed. Alòs-Moner, 31). 2016 marks, to the best of our knowledge, the seven-hundredth anniversary of Ramon Llull’s death, and when scholarly commemorations of such anniversaries are not purely celebratory – as in the many upcoming events commemorating the four hundred years since the deaths of Cervantes and Shakespeare – they often seek to inspire renewed or belated interest in understudied historical figures. Llull’s lament seems to call for just such a recuperation, and yet, while he has not attained the global fame of Cervantes or Shakespeare, he is justly celebrated in the Catalan-speaking world and has become a well-known figure in medieval studies; a steady stream of high-quality scholarship has been dedicated to him for decades, and his works continue to be edited and translated for both scholarly and popular audiences. Rather than merely honoring Llull or rescuing him from an obscurity lamented in life but unrealized in death, then, this special issue seeks to explore what I take to be both a key motivator of ongoing interest in Llull’s thought and an essential element of his relevance to our particular intellectual moment: his profoundly ecumenical and synthetic approach to inquiry and argument (that is, in contemporary parlance, his interdisciplinarity).

It has often been stated – correctly, in my view – that all of Llull’s writings are united in their missionary purpose and in their reliance on Llull’s Art to achieve that purpose (cf. Antonio Cortijo Ocaña’s introduction to his recent edition and translation of Llull’s *Book of the Order of Chivalry*, 3). By virtue of the Art’s ambition as a universal language, however, this singular focus produced works across a variety of literary, theo-philosophical, and scientific genres. In some ways, this multifaceted approach reflects the broader realities of education and intellectual activity in the Middle Ages, which is why some level of interdisciplinarity has long been an expectation of, rather than an innovation in, medieval studies. Llull’s project nonetheless stands out in that it has retained the ability to surprise, to confound expectations, and to complicate debates both medieval and modern. His writings are at once single-minded and difficult to categorize; he anticipates certain styles of contemporary thought without sharing their intellectual, political, or moral ends; his Art is an object of persistent fascination whose appeal as an actual discursive mode remains resolutely locked in the past. In other words, while many scholars seek to understand Llull and his texts on their own historical terms, the strangeness of Llull’s attempt to speak invitingly and persuasively about anything and everything has become an effective intellectual spur, propelling previously stagnant discussions forward in unexpected ways. In what remains of this brief introduction, then, I will touch on three areas that have been or could be invigorated by Lullian studies: theory of language and signification, the many problems of interconfessional relations in the medieval West, and lay devotion and its poetics.

As Llull scholars know, the divine dignities and the theory of correlatives derived therefrom are not merely the grounds for considering the Art to be a universal language. Rather, they provide a basis for concrete Lullian arguments about Christian doctrine and for

compositional practices across a wide variety of genres. Furthermore, they provide a link between cosmology and signification that, if it draws on other mystical theories of language such as those found in Kabbalah or in pseudo-Dionysius, remains notable in the extent to which it is spelled out, diagrammed, explicated, and exemplified. If, that is, it is an example of the ontotheology characteristic of Western metaphysics, as Eusebi Colomer has argued (57), it is one of the richest examples we have. To the extent that Lull's "superrealism" "tends to conflate the content of understanding or expression with the actual concept or word itself" (Johnston, 34), it is the diametric opposite of twentieth-century structuralist and post-structuralist semiotics based on the work of Ferdinand de Saussure, which, indeed, often presents itself as an anti-metaphysical polemic and has become the common sense of many academic disciplines, particularly in North America. Nevertheless, taken together, Lull's massive written output is one of history's definitive articulations of a (created) world in which nothing is outside of language or, perhaps, in which language is inside of everything (on this point, see Berlin, 377-80). As the consequences of this worldview are worked out not only for logic and rhetoric, but also more broadly for education, literature, politics, and theology, Lull's thought becomes a fascinating foil for, and counterpoint to, dominant modern trends in continental thought, literary theory, and philology – that is, in *filosofia i lletres* on both sides of the Atlantic.

Nowhere is this clearer than in the debates surrounding interconfessional relations in medieval Iberia. As Ryan Szpiech has recently argued, these debates, coalescing around the term *convivencia*, have for decades sprung not so much from disagreements about historical reality as from "methodological rivalries" between interpretive and empiricist factions (136). And, as Szpiech goes on to explain, these rivalries can be seen as different reactions to the consequences of European nationalism, and Spanish nationalism in particular, in the twentieth century (149-51). In this context, Lull stands out as a salutary figure both for the complexity of his apologetics and for the geographical breadth his works bring to the discussion. In the first case, Lull's eschewal of scriptural authority and willingness – not to say eagerness – to study and borrow from other religious traditions, with his concomitant commitment to language study, have made him a seductive figure for rosier depictions of Iberia's multiconfessional past. At the same time, considering the overall purpose of his intellectual project, Lull embodies the distance there was and can continue to be between a desire to understand and communicate, on the one hand, and modern notions of tolerance, on the other. In the second case, Lull's Mallorcan origins and use of Catalan broaden the picture and complicate the politics surrounding the *convivencia* debate, and Lullian studies have been something of a precursor for the contemporary turn to the Mediterranean as a geographical, historical, and even conceptual framework that allows for communication and collaboration among disciplines. But Lull's own difficulties in navigating the Mediterranean world, despite his prodigious intellect and illuminated zeal, demonstrate the need to approach difference of all kinds with care and humility as well as interest.

Finally, it is worth recalling that despite his aristocratic origins and sporadic successes in lobbying political and ecclesiastical elites, and despite his determination to insert himself and his Art into the theological and political controversies of the day, Lull remained something of an outsider to the formal hierarchies in which power was concentrated during his lifetime; the Parisian rejections of his Art are the paradigmatic examples of this. It is therefore remarkable how deeply which Lull's thought informed both monastic and lay devotion in the centuries after his death, especially in the Iberian context (cf. Robinson,

180-81). And although later iterations of what might be called Lullian devotion were not always faithful to the Art's complexity (and often included esoteric elements not found in Lull's own writings), they reflect the particular fascination that Lull's poetics provokes. Drawing on mystical discourse and troubadour conventions, Lull was endlessly inventive in his textual production, a poetic model of difference and repetition. The Art's linguistic ambition was universal, that is, not only in its reliance on terms and concepts acceptable across religious lines, but in its confection of romance, lyric, dialogue, biography, encyclopedia, and treatise. Lull's texts and tables, along with the other visual representations they inspired (as in the well-known *Breviculum* of Thomas Le Myésier), thus constitute a privileged field for investigating lay engagement with Christianity's theological and affective complexity.

The studies included in this special issue approach Lull's syncretic ambition from the contemporary reality of academic specialization, but it has been our goal to foreground the variety of disciplinary and critical perspectives manifested in the most recent approaches to Lull's thought. Thus, the critics assembled here touch on questions of rhetoric and beauty in both intellectual and art history; reading as translation (in its multiple meanings) and contemplation; Lull's relationship with secular philosophy (on this topic, see also my forthcoming chapter on Lull and his contemporaries), the mechanical arts, and the maritime world writ large; and the ultimate questions of life (as posed in the genre of autobiography) and death. Seven hundred years after his own death, Lull retains both his fascination and his status as a relative outsider, and it is this combination, the multiple institutional, disciplinary, philosophical, spiritual, and linguistic lines crossed in his writings, that assures his relevance as both an object of study as such and a bulwark against intellectual complacency in medieval studies and beyond. Whether Lull was recognized and loved as a result of the many travels that came to an end in 1316, his writings continue to circulate, providing a *bon exempli* in Lull's sense of that word, that is, particular in their narrative but encoding in their language a limitlessness inviting, if not imitation, discussion and debate by all.

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