

A BACKGROUND TO THE *DESCONHORT*,
TREE OF SCIENCE, AND *APOSTROPHE*¹

Anthony Bonner

In 1295, when he was sixty-two or -three, Ramon Llull suffered a crisis, about which he spoke with remarkable candor in the poem entitled *Lo Desconhort*, or *The Discouragement*.² His discouragement seems to have come from the fact that, whereas the balance of his first fifteen years of activity had been largely positive, the *Vita coetanea* recounts the six years preceding the *Desconhort* as a series of setbacks. First was the frustrating teaching experience in Paris in 1289, in which his Art and the correlative language it employed seems to have been rejected by university scholars. Then came the psychological crisis of Genoa, accompanied by hallucinations and doubts about his own salvation. This was followed by his first missionary voyage to North Africa, which, after what seemed like an initial possibility of success, ended in failure.³ He returned to Naples to find himself involved in the political embroglio surrounding the brief papacy of Celestine V, a pope in whom many people, including probably Llull himself, had placed hopes of being able to achieve more genuinely Christian goals. But such hopes were not to be realized, for as the *Vita coetanea* tells us how:

Some time later, Pope Celestine V was succeeded by Pope Boniface VIII, whom Ramon entreated with all his might to have some useful things done for the Christian faith. And even though he suffered considerable anguish following the pope from one place to another, not for a single moment did he desist in his attempts, assuming the pope doubtless would deign to listen to him, since he was not petitioning for his own benefit or for some prebend, but rather for the public good of the Catholic faith. At last, however, seeing

¹ The following abbreviations are used in this article:

MOG = *Raymundi Lulli Opera omnia*, ed. I. Salzinger, 8 vols. (Mainz, 1721-42; repr. Frankfurt, 1965)

NEORL = *Nova Edició de les obres de Ramon Llull* (Palma, 1991 ff.)

ORL = *Obres de Ramon Llull, edició original* (Palma, 1906-50)

OE = Ramon Llull, *Obres Essencials*, 2 vols. (Barcelona, 1957-60)

ROL = *Raimundi Lulli Opera Latina* (Palma & Turnhout, 1959 ff.)

SL = *Studia Lulliana* (Palma, 1991 ff.; successor to *EL*)

SW = *Selected Words of Ramon Llull*, ed. A. Bonner, 2 vols (Princeton, 1985).

² See the critical edition (with French translation and notes) by Amédée Pagès in *Annales du Midi* 50 (Toulouse, 1938), preferable to the edition of Salvador Galmés in *ORL* XIX (1936), 217-254. Also useful is the edition (with Italian translation and notes) by Mario Ruffini, *Ramon Llull, Lo desconort - Raimondo Lullo, Lo sconforto*, "Il Melagrano", 111-113 (Florence: Fussi, 1953). References will be to stanzas of the Pagès text.

³ These three events occupy pars. 19-30 of the *Vita coetanea*. See *ROL* VIII, 283-293, and *SW* I, 28-37, and moreover they are the *only* events recounted for those years.

he could obtain nothing from the pope, Ramon made his way to the city of Genoa...⁴

As is clear from the *Desconhort*, it was this lack of results that brought on his "discouragement". The poem in fact opens with a little invocation complaining about the papacy:

Aquest es lo *Desconort* que Mestre Ramon Luyt feu en sa vellesa con viu que lo
Papa ne los altres senyors del mon no volgueren metre horde en convertir
los infaels, segons que ell los requeri moltes e diverses vegades.

Later in the poem he says that even greater outrages will be done to God if the Curia does nothing to prevent it. But as it is now,

Lo Papa e ls cardenals no·m prenen mantinent,
Ans ho van allongant, don ay gran marriment
Tan que no·n pusch aver negun consolament;
Car ço qu'eu los present mostra tot clarament
L'ordonament del mon qui·s pot far molt breument;
E no·u tenon a re, ans s'en fan gaubament,
Com s'eu fos home fat qui parlàs foylament;
Per que de aytals homens ay desesperament.⁵

This bitterness about being put off by the Curia ("o van allongant") and about being mocked ("s'en fan gaubament") as if he were an idiot who spoke foolishly, is paliated by the idea that perhaps the hermit—Llull's interlocuter in the poem—could spend enough time in the Curia to persuade the Church to carry out what Llull feels is its appointed mission.⁶ But even there he ends on a bitter note. After suggesting that the hermit could make himself into a *joculator Dei* in the Curia, singing Llull's *Cent noms*, he ends saying that he personally doesn't want to do it,

⁴ ROL VIII, 294; SWI, 38.

⁵ St. 47. The beginning, with its warning about the great outrages that will be done to God, goes on to say: "Encara que no veg far nuyl hordonament, / Con lo temps sia prop." Would this be an eschatological allusion, comparable to that of the *Liber de fine*, where Llull begins by saying the world is in a bad state which seems only to be getting worse (ROL IX, 250), and then tells Pope and cardinals: "Incipite pro Deu, incipite! Nam mors venit, et mille anni sunt iam praeteriti seu elapsi, in quibus melius negotium isto inceptum no fuit." (*ib.* 254)? This passage is quoted and its eschatological implications discussed in Pamela May Beattie, *Evangelization, Reform and Eschatology: Mission and Crusade in the Thought of Ramon Llull* (thesis for the University of Toronto, 1995), p. 139.

⁶ St. 59.

for fear of their scorning the books God made him compose.⁷ In spite of this, he ends the poem with an appeal to the papacy,

Car si per lo Papa lo fayt sera stablit
Et que li cardenal hi agon consentit,
Poran esser del mon tot li mal departit.⁸

Clearly the papacy holds the key to the spiritual well-being of the world, which is why both the anguish and hope of the poem is principally directed to Pope and cardinals.

If the Curia is the principal cause for his “discouragement”, it is not the only one. He also complains that his books are unappreciated (here we find the famous phrase about people reading them like a cat scooting over hot coals),⁹ that many (as we have already seen) consider him foolish (*fat* in Catalan),¹⁰ and that he can find no one to help him.¹¹ He also tells us how he has been working thirty years for the cause of converting infidels and reforming Christian society, during which time he has paid five visits to the papal Curia, and attended three general chapters of the Dominicans and three of the Franciscans.¹² Shortly after writing this poem, he must have begun the *Arbre de ciència* or *Tree of Science* in Rome,¹³ where we find remarkable parallels with the poem. In the prologue to the *Tree of Science* he not only refers six times to his discouragement (using the same word, *desconhort*, in Catalan), but even pictures himself sitting beneath a beautiful tree “singing his discouragement”, as if he were intoning that very poem.¹⁴ Then, except for not mentioning pope and cardinals (for reasons we will explain in a moment), he sets out all the other complaints we just mentioned: having worked for thirty years, his books being unappreciated, his being considered foolish, and his being unable to find collaborators.¹⁵ In addition, both works are based on a dialogue of a clearly

⁷ The last two lines of St. 59: "Mas no-u ay de consell, per ço que menyspresar / no faés los meus libres que Deus m'a fayts trobar."

⁸ St. 69.

⁹ St. 22.

¹⁰ Sts. 7, 16 & 47.

¹¹ Sts. 16 & 35. In stanza 55 he speaks with unusual bitterness about the person (unnamed) who destroyed ("ha afoylat") the monastery of Miramar.

¹² Sts. 3 and 14.

¹³ It was begun September 29, 1295, and finished April 1, 1296 in Rome.

¹⁴ Notice how the poem claims to be written to be sung: "Deus, ab vostra virtut, començ est *Desconort*, / Lo qual fas en xantan per ço que m'en conort." Furthermore, two of the manuscripts containing the poem have a colophon which says that it is to be "sung to the tune of Berart".

autobiographical “Ramon” with a hermit in the poem and with a monk in the *Tree of Science*.¹⁶

These similarities in works so obviously different in genre and aim, although interesting, are perhaps more significant when set in the context of Llull's career. Until this point in his life, he had not only expressed few complaints or criticisms, but more important he had offered his readers almost no autobiographical information whatsoever, outside of a few topics of Christian literature, such his misspent youth, his conversion (only presented in a very general way, as an attempt to reform his ways and dedicate his life to Christ), and his being “blameworthy, despicable, poor, sinful, scorned by others, unworthy of having my name affixed to this book or any other.”¹⁷ He seemed busy deflecting attention away from his unworthy self to whatever book he was producing or to the system – his Art – that he was explaining, and as a result followers who only knew him through his written works would have been almost totally ignorant of any biographical details concerning his life. Now, quite suddenly, in addition to the information given above, we find out from the *Desconhort* that his conversion was due to a five-fold vision of the crucified Christ,¹⁸ that he had abandoned a wife, children and property,¹⁹ that he had been connected with the monastery of Miramar,²⁰ and – most important – he considered the Art to be a divine gift.²¹ These, of course, are all traits well-known to us from the *Vita coetanea*, but that was not written till 1311; before the *Desconhort* of sixteen years earlier, his contemporaries, I repeat, would have known practically nothing about him.

Now if Llull has suddenly decided to put his complaints down on paper (as opposed, let's say, to just grumbling to friends), and if he has also decided to

¹⁵ "E car som desconhortat, car no pusc aportar a fi ço que tant he desirat e en què he treballat trenta anys ha passats, e encara, car mos libres són poc presats, ans vos dic que molts hòmens me tenen per fat." Pròleg, *OE I*, 555 The complaint about finding no one to help him comes later, in the “leaves” of the *Arbre imperial*, *ib.* 669-670.

¹⁶ The monk of the *Tree of Science* dialogues with Ramon in the general prologue and in the final epilogue, and asks him for clarifications in the *Arbre exemplifical*. All this in addition to brief reappearances at the very end of the *Arbre elemental* and in the leaves of the *Arbre imperial* (where he's given the name of Guillem, but only, apparently, in some of the Catalan Mss.). In the *Arbre questionnal* we encounter a hermit, but more as a purely a literary device just to have a fictional character doing the questioning.

¹⁷ This is from the *Book of the Gentile and the Three Wise Men* (*NEORL II*, 5; *SWI I*, 110). I have treated this theme in great detail in an article called *Ramon Llull: autor, autoritat i il·luminat* to appear in the *Actes del XIè Col·loqui Internacional de Llengua i Literatura Catalanes*.

¹⁸ Sts. 2 & 12.

¹⁹ Sts. 14 & 18.

²⁰ St. 55.

²¹ There is a certain emphasis on this point in the *Desconhort*, where it is mentioned four times: sts. 8, 10, 35 & 59.

present himself autobiographically in society, as it were, it would not be unreasonable to assume he is doing so for a purpose, and that the purpose was not unconnected with the furthering of his missionary and reforming aims. Perhaps if we look more closely at the *Desconhort* and the *Tree of Science*, we can find out what his purpose was. Or purposes, because I think we can distinguish four.

We find a clue to the first purpose in the *Desconhort*, when the hermit suggests that maybe part of Llull's troubles come from his being unknown. After pointing out that a hidden treasure is neither desired nor wanted, he asks him how people can be expected to believe him when they have no idea what he does or does not do. "Make yourself and your knowledge known," he says, "if you don't want your message to be lost."²²

It's as if until this moment in his life Llull had tried to rely simply on the contents of his writings for their propagation, and finally now allowed himself to be persuaded that people insisted on knowing what justification he had for saying what he did. To put it in more medieval terms, people needed to believe in the *auctoritas* of an *auctor*, and, above all, required assurance that his Art was not the casual, aberrant invention of some unknown character, but was a divine gift bestowed on a concrete personage. And it was important for people to know that the carrying out of the responsibility inherent in this gift had involved many hardships and difficulties.²³ To make credible his Art, he had decided that he had to make credible the person on whom it had been bestowed.²⁴

His second purpose can be inferred from a passage in the *Desconhort* where the hermit suggests Llull should make himself known. He says "your knowledge is not noticed... You should show what you know, so that your Art and knowledge could be of help to you... Make it so that your knowledge be well known!"²⁵ What better vehicle for making his knowledge known than the vast *Tree of Science*? It is

²² The whole of Stanza 21 is worth quoting for its presentation of both the problem and the solution.

Ramon, per aventura vos no sots conegut
 Et per ço podets esser en lo fayt descebut,
 Car nuyl tresor qui sia en terra abscondut
 No cové ges que sia desirat ni volgut.
 Hon, si vostre saber no es aperçebut,
 Co-us pensats que per ço ne siats cresegut?
 Mas mostrats que sabets, per ço que vos ajud
 Vostra Art e sauber; car hom desconegut
 No ha per ignorar honrament ni vertut.
 Et si vos, mon amich, amats d'omens salut
 Et de Déu honrament, e no sia perdut,
 Fayts que vostre saber sia be conegut.

²³ This was, of course, a typically Christian model.

²⁴ See the article cited in n. above for a fuller treatment of this theme.

²⁵ St. 21 (see n. above).

the second longest work Llull wrote,²⁶ and the one which systematically covers the greatest range of knowledge. To write a work that is “general to all sciences”, as he says in the Prologue,²⁷ he must show not only how all knowledge is organized, but mainly, as we hope to show here, how it is all interrelated, and in the process, to create an encyclopedia of a most unusual nature. If Llull's need was, to put it in modern terms, to impress people, and especially those in high places, perhaps a work of this nature could do it.

But to accomplish this aim, it had to have one requisite, which was Llull's third purpose. This was to explain himself without using the mechanisms of the Art, which people clearly found too difficult and off-putting. The monk states this, almost to the point of over-insistence, in the Prologue to the *Tree of Science*. There he asks Llull to write a book “general to all science, which would be easy to understand, and by means of which one could understand his General Art... which was too difficult to understand.” Notice how the word “understand” (*entendre*) appears three times in this sentence.²⁸ Clearly the Art was another stumbling-block, and a major one. Llull's only choice, therefore, was to write a work that would display all the structures implied by the Art, without using the alphabet and figures which made it so forbidding, but which at the same time could be used to explain the Art. And if the Art was essentially relational, he could show how the world which it had been developed to explain was also relational.²⁹ This was perhaps his greatest challenge, and the one that ended making the *Tree of Science* the unique work it is.

²⁶ Its approximately 400,000 words make it second only to the *Book of Contemplation* with nearly a million words. The only works that come close to the *Tree of Science* are the *Ars inventioa veritatis*, *Lectura super Artem inventivam et Tabulam generalem*, and *Liber de praedicatione*, with about 250,000 words each. See SWI, 53 n. 2 for further statistics.

²⁷ See the following note.

²⁸ In the original it appears five times. In the following quote I have underlined the words having to do with difficulties (or ease) of understanding, to show the insistent nature of the passage. “Molt plac al monge quan hac trobat Ramon, al qual dix que ell l'havia cercat longament, per ço que-l pregàs que faés un libre general a totes ciències qui *leugerament* se pogués *entendre*, e per lo qual hom pogués *entendre* la sua Art general que feta havia, car *trop era subtil a entendre*. E encara, que les altres ciències que han fetes los antics savis qui són passats, són així *greus d'entendre e requiren tan long temps a apendre, que a penes ne pot hom venir a neguna fi*. E encara, *molts són los dubtes* que los uns savis han contra los altres. Per què ell lo pregava que faés un libre general qui ajudàs a *entendre* les altres ciències; car *enteniment confús* porta gran perill e privació de gran devoció a honrar Déu e amar e servir, e a procurar salut a son proïsme.” *Arbre de ciència*, Pròleg, OE I, 555.

²⁹ I have tried to explain this aspect of Llull's system in “Ramon Llull: relació, acció, combinatòria i lògica moderna”, *SL* 34 (1994), pp. 51-74. For its application to the *Tree of Science*, see the forthcoming paper referred to in n. below.

His fourth purpose can be inferred from the surprising fact that pope and cardinals, so railed against in the *Desconhort*, are not mentioned in the *Tree of Science* until the very end of the work,³⁰ where Llull addresses a supplication

al sant pare apostoli e a sos companyons, que aquest *Arbre* deguen pendre en grat e ell corregir si hi ha neguna error, e ell aprovar e multiplicar; car molt de bé se'n poria seguir segons que apar en lo seu procés.³¹

He then confides to the monk, in a passage very reminiscent of one we have already cited from the poem,³² that he would like to find some holy person to present it to the Pope and cardinals. So it would indeed seem that both the *Desconhort* and the *Tree of Science* were written for the Curia, the first to present an *auctor* and the reasons why he should be worth listening to, and the second to show the range, validity, and *auctoritas* of his knowledge.

To this could be added the curious fact of the relationship between the *Tree of Science* and the Art, of which it is, as Llull explains in the prologue, an expanded explanation and exemplification.³³ As can be seen from the chart in the Appendix, trees I-VI, IX-X, and XIV correspond to the nine subjects of the Art, to which has been added one, VII, on social and political theory, and no less than four, VIII, XI-XIII on the Church and Christian theology.³⁴ This means that the material of the Art, which is usually presented as religiously neutral—to make it usable as an apologetic tool when addressing nonbelievers—has here been expanded to include the principle topics of Christianity, including the Catholic Church itself. So in addition to being doubtfully classifiable as an encyclopedia,³⁵ this distribution, added to the information we have seen in the colophon, makes it a work which could be described as directed towards Church and Curia.

But Llull knew that, aside from problems of whether or not people considered him foolish (*fat*), whether they read his books, etc., there was one serious theological stumbling-block to the Church's acceptance of his aims, and that was his attempts to prove the Articles of the Faith. In the *Desconhort* the hermit states flatly that such an endeavor does not seem to be possible, and that this might

³⁰ Or at least as a group to whom Llull is speaking directly; the *Arbre* apostolical is *about* them and how the Church should be ordered.

³¹ OE I, 1040.

³² See the text preceding n. above.

³³ See the text preceding n. above.

³⁴ Not counting, of course, the last two trees, XV-XVI, which treat in the form of *exempla* and questions all the topics of the previous trees.

³⁵ On this point, see the two-part paper presented by Lola Badia and myself at the recent congress in Freiburg on the *Arbor scientiae* to be published soon.

be the principal cause of his rejection by the papacy.³⁶ The resultant problem of faith vs. reason is, significantly, the problem discussed at greatest length in the *Desconhort*.³⁷ Llull therefore, rather than trying to pretend it doesn't exist, or to try to skate around it claiming it is a problem whose importance has been exaggerated, realizes he has to hit it head on, and especially when dealing with the Church hierarchy. This is surely why the Articles of Faith are proved so insistently in the *Tree of Science*, and why they are first proved in the flowers precisely of the *Arbre apostolical*. After that, the two articles most necessary to prove with Muslims and Jews, but at the same time most problematic as to the possibility of doing so, those concerning the Incarnation and the Trinity, are proved again in the flowers of the *Arbre de Jesucrist* and of the *Arbre divinal* respectively. These three sections occupy respectively 5%, 4.5% and 2%, or a total of 11.5% of the entire work, thus constituting the longest single subsection.³⁸

Also noteworthy is the similarity between the proofs presented here in the *Arbre apostolical* and those presented in a work written immediately afterwards and also in Rome, the *Book of the articles of Faith*.³⁹ It is similarly dedicated to the Pope and cardinals, but now, at least in its Latin version, it bears an introductory encomium to Boniface VIII, the *Apostrophe ad summum Pontificem*, which has wound up giving the entire work an alternate title.⁴⁰ With this opening paean we have come a long way from the complaints of the *Desconhort*. And indeed, in these two works, with the *Tree of Science* in between, we can follow the path Llull tried to take from rejection to attempted acceptance.

And facing once again the problem of proving the articles of faith, in the *Liber de articulis fidei* he explains his position in a more technical and less literary way than in the *Desconhort*.⁴¹ The Latin version ends with a further exhortation to

³⁶ St. 23.

³⁷ The discussion occupies sts. 23-26.

³⁸ Of the edition in *OE I*, they occupy respectively pp. 687-710, 751-772, and 789-797, that is 24, 22, and 9 pages out of the total of 485 of this edition.

³⁹ See *NEORL III*, 5, for these similarities. It is curious that the proofs presented in the *Arbre apostolical* are approximately the same length as the entire *Liber de articulis fidei*.

⁴⁰ The sequence of texts in which this work is found should perhaps be explained. Llull seems to have originally written it in Catalan, the critical edition of which has now appeared in *NEORL III*, edited by Antoni Joan Pons. Llull then had it translated into Latin, "emperó no letra a letra, mas sen a sen, per ço que cascun ne romanga en sa virtut en sa rectoricha; e aquell qui es en latí e presentat al senyor Papa e als senyors cardenals soplicam que-l trameten als infeels per homens entenents e qui sapien los lenguatges d'aquells," (see *NEORL III*, 8 & 70). Llull then appended to it the introductory 16-line *Apostrophe*, which, whether written or merely commissioned by him, appears in all the earliest mss. In *MOG IV*, Int. ix, Salzinger printed his own literal Latin translation of the Catalan text, followed by the *Apostrophe* and the freer medieval translation. For further accretions and translations see no. III.24 in the catalogue of works in *SW*, as well as Pons's introduction to his edition in *NEORL III*.

⁴¹ See *NEORL III*, 70-71, and *MOG IV*, ix, 56-57 (560-1).

the Pope and cardinals, thereby closing the cycle of Llull's efforts to approach Boniface VIII during the years 1295-6.

Lastly, it should perhaps be pointed out that this *Book of the Articles of Faith*, in spite of its relative neglect in modern times, was historically one of the most widely read of Llull's works. It is preserved in some thirty manuscripts and it appeared in ten editions between 1504 and 1729, including the four editions of Zetzner's famous anthology. So whatever success he may or may not have had with Boniface VIII, the work in which he most directly addressed to the Curia the problem of proofs of the Articles of Faith, did in fact achieve a considerable success in many other circles.

The trees of the *Arbre de ciència*:

(followed by letters corresponding to the subjects of the Art)

I. elemental (**I**)

II. vegetable (**H**)

III. sensual (**G**)

IV. imaginative (**F**)

V. human (**E**)

VI. moral (**K**)

VII. imperial

VIII. apostolical

IX. celestial (**D**)

X. angelical (**C**)

XI. eviternal

XII. maternal

XIII. Jesus Christ

XIV. divine (**B**)

XV. exemplifical

XVI. questional.

The alphabet of the Art

	Figure A	Figure T	Questions	Subjects	Virtues	Vices
B	bonitas	differentia	utrum?	Deus	justitia	avaritia
C	magnitudo	concordantia	quid?	angelus	prudentia	gula
D	duratio	contrarietas	de quo?	caelum	fortitudo	luxuria
E	potests	principium	quare?	homo	temperantia	superbia
F	sapientia	medium	quantum?	imaginatio	fides	accidia
G	voluntas	finis	quale?	sensitiva	spes	invidia
H	virtus	majoritas	quando?	vegetativa	caritas	ira
I	veritas	aequalitas	ubi?	elementativa	patientia	mendacium
K	gloria	minoritas	quo modo? cum quo?	instrumentativa	pietas	inconstantia