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***Ramon Llull's Rethorica nova 2.7 and Proverbis d'ensenyament 175-225: An Example of Lullian Compilatio***  
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RAMON LLULL'S *RETHORICA NOVA* 2.7 AND  
*PROVERBIS D'ENSENYAMENT* 175-225:  
AN EXAMPLE OF LULLIAN *COMPILATIO*

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ABSTRACT

Modern scholars studying the oeuvre of Ramon Llull have labored for over a century to establish the chronology and filiation of his more than three hundred separate writings, in order to establish their discrete sequence and relationships as "sources" to one another. For some of his works, this labor has proven simply futile: Llull's habit of recycling his own material, expressed in the idiosyncratic vocabulary of his Great Universal Art, and in several languages (Arabic, Catalan, Latin) makes it impossible to determine which versions of his material are "original." A small, but illustrative, example of this problem are section 2.7 from his Latin *Rethorica nova* and items 175-225 from his *Proverbis d'ensenyament*. Comparison of these texts suggests that each is simply a Lullian exercise of *compilatio*, the recycling of material that in fact organizes his entire oeuvre, and that we should recognize this tactic of composition as pervasive and fundamental to all his writings.

Two intractable problems continue to trouble—and probably always will—scholars studying the work of Ramon Llull. The first is his handling of sources: it is maddeningly difficult to determine what Llull knew and where he learned it. The second is his language of composition: Llull produced versions of some works in multiple languages—Arabic, Catalan, and Latin—but his original language of composition and his role in subsequent translations are not always obvious. A pair of parallel sections from Llull's *Rethorica nova* and *Proverbis d'ensenyament* perfectly illustrate these two problems. In attempting to elucidate the complicated questions of source and language posed by these passages, we can certainly draw some guidance from the example of David Viera's many studies of medieval Iberian literature. His wide-ranging scholarship is especially noteworthy for its comparative scope, and particularly for its meticulous attention to questions of filiation among diverse authors, texts, and traditions. Contemporary scholarship on Llull remains desperately in need of this same attention, especially in order to understand the processes of *compilatio* that Llull so often employed in texts such as his *Rethorica nova* and *Proverbis d'ensenyament*.

The problem of understanding Llull's sources is as broad as his oeuvre. Although many of the concepts, propositions, and stories

found in his work are well-known commonplaces, Llull almost never cites authorities, preferring instead to base all his argumentation on so-called *rationes necessariae* ("necessary reasons") which he believed any rational person would understand. This preference for "necessary reasons" over *auctoritates* of course suited the larger purpose of his life-long project, which was to create a Universal Art of Knowledge acceptable to believers of any faith. The only source or authority that Llull routinely cites is himself: he frequently and explicitly recycles his own material, offering the same arguments, *exempla*, or commentaries in different writings.

Llull also seeks, wherever possible, to recast commonplace concepts in the deliberately limited terminology of his own Universal Art, with the result that many of his arguments seem redundant if not tautological. Even more distressing for the modern scholar, Llull's insistent use of his own idiosyncratic vocabulary to expound received doctrines often renders them almost unrecognizable.

Llull virtually always revises his material in this way, whether writing in Catalan or Latin. (Unfortunately, none of the Arabic versions of his works have survived.) For those texts that exist in both languages, it can be impossible to determine which version Llull wrote first, unless he explicitly tells us, because each seems to be simply a literal translation of the other. Of course, we assume that Llull himself was responsible for the Catalan versions of his texts, although in a very few cases this is not absolutely clear: his disciples evidently composed the Catalan versions of several works, perhaps even before his death in 1316. There is also no reason to doubt (as some early modern scholars did) that Llull usually wrote the Latin versions of his own works. His Latin style is very consistently, and painfully, simple. Thanks to this characteristic, it is easy to conclude that, in the case of some of his texts, a prologue or other sections are the work of skilled ghost-writers, perhaps drawn from Llull's small circle of admirers. Late in his life Llull also mentions his use of amanuenses and translators to assist him with his work (Hillgarth 138-49).

Now, both of these general problems—Llull's handling of source material and his language of composition—arise when we consider the relationship between section 2.7 of the *Rethorica nova* and the final lines of his *Proverbis d'ensenyament*.

The *Rethorica nova* represents Llull's effort to provide a comprehensive manual of eloquence, based on the principles of his own Universal Art as well as on the medieval trivium and Christian ethics. It survives only in a Latin version. This text's colophon states that he composed it in 1301 on the island of Cyprus, during a missionary journey to the Eastern Mediterranean:

ISTUM TRACTATUM COMPILAVIT  
MAGISTER RAIMUNDUS CATALANUS  
SECUNDUM VULGAREM STILUM

IN INSULA CYPRI, IN MONASTERIO SANCTI JOHANNIS CHRYSOSTOMI  
ANNO DOMINI MILLESIMO TRECENTESIMO PRIMO, IN MENSE SEPTEMBRIS.  
SED EIUDEM DOMINI ANNO MILLESIMO TRECENTESIMO PRIMO  
FUIT IN LATINUM TRANSLATUS  
IN IANUA, GLORIOSA ITALIAE CIVITATE .  
(ed. Batalla 218)

The *vulgarem stilum* is presumably Catalan and Llull himself likewise the redactor of the Latin version subsequently created at Genoa in 1303. There is some reason to believe, as I have argued elsewhere (ed. Johnston xviii), that Llull might have begun working on this treatise well before 1301.

The text's prologue explains that Llull had wished to write such a treatise for a long time, but that other projects had delayed its realization. Also, the *Rethorica nova* lacks reference to several doctrines—especially his proposal that speech is a “sixth sense” called *affatus*—that Llull routinely included in his other writings after 1300 (Johnston “Affatus”). The most recent editors of the *Rethorica nova* consider the lack of references to *affatus* insignificant, arguing that mention of his unusual proposal “implica un punt de vista innecessari en una obra que dona per suposada la generació dels mots” (ed. Batalla 50). Nonetheless, Llull does link eloquence and *affatus* elsewhere, as in Chapter 262 of his *Proverbis de Ramon*, which declares that “Affar e parlar se convertexen” (“*affatus* and speaking are interchangeable”; ORL 14: 287). Even without mention of *affatus*, the *Rethorica nova* is wide-ranging in scope: its four major sections bear the titles “Order” (*Ordo*), “Beauty” (*Pulchritudo*), “Knowledge” (*Scientia*), and “Love” (*Caritas*). Under these headings, Llull organizes a miscellany of doctrines and precepts drawn from grammar, rhetoric, logic, and ethics, with several sections of sample proverbs and *exempla*, recommended as ornaments of speech.

As noted in my 1994 edition and translation of the *Rethorica nova*, Llull's list of fifty sample proverbs (section 2.7) also appear as the final fifty lines of his Catalan verse work the *Proverbis d'ensenyament*. The latter text is a collection of rhymed ethical precepts, similar to innumerable other works of sententious moral advice from throughout the Middle Ages.

Llull himself composed two very lengthy proverb collections—the *Proverbis de Ramon* and the *Mil proverbis*—and the *Proverbis d'ensenyament* are essentially an epitome of these longer works. Llull's title specifically recalls the Occitan genre of instructional poetry called



*ensenhaments*, like the two poems composed by his Pyrennean contemporary, Amanieu de Sescàs (Johnston, "Gender as Conduct").

As it happens, the unique manuscript of the *Proverbis d'ensenyament* (Milan, Bibliotheca Ambrosiana D 465 inf., ff. 339-44) does not actually include these fifty lines. They come instead from another Lullian manuscript (Milan, Bibliotheca Ambrosiana O 87 sup., ff. 63-64), where they appear as an untitled fragment. The text's modern editor, Salvador Galmés, appended this fragment to the *Proverbis d'ensenyament*, based on similarities of content and style (ORL 14:xii). This editorial decision was not capricious: of all Llull's verse works in Catalan, the *Proverbis d'ensenyament* most closely match, in content and form, the fragment from Ambrosiana MS O 87. Nonetheless, the *Proverbis d'ensenyament*, unlike the *Rethorica nova* and most of Llull's writings, bears no date. It could perhaps be the text mentioned in a letter that Llull wrote to king James of Aragon in 1309, seeking royal patronage, and sending a book "de proverbis" ("of proverbs") as a gift to accompany his request. The letter suggests that the king will appreciate the book's value from scanning its "rubricas et proressum" ("rubrics and organization") and recognize its value for educating royal children (Rubió, *Documents* 1:41; Hillgarth 69). However, the surviving Catalan text of the *Proverbis d'ensenyament* lacks rubrication and there is no apparent order among its proverbs, so it seems unlikely that this text is the one mentioned in Llull's letter.

In any case, section 2.7 of the *Rethorica nova* and lines 175-225 from the *Proverbis d'ensenyament* offer us two versions of the same material, one in Latin from 1303, the other in Catalan and undated. The two versions correspond line by line. Since the colophon of the *Rethorica nova* states that Llull wrote the Catalan version first, it is naturally tempting to imagine that this version somehow constitutes the "source" of the Latin text. In the latest edition of the *Rethorica nova*, the text's editors question whether the lines from the *Proverbis d'ensenyament* derive directly from the original Catalan version of the *Rethorica nova*. However, rather than explore the implications of this question, they remain content to treat these verses as a "singular testimoni en català d'un fragment" of the treatise on rhetoric, even while noting the very different nature and purpose of the proverb collection (89-90).

Comparing the style of the two passages offers one basis for assessing their respective affiliation, especially if we focus on the verse form of the *Proverbis d'ensenyament*. Llull wrote several dozen works in verse, typically following the style and form of the Occitan troubadour lyric, which still dominated Catalan poetic production in his era. Few modern scholars consider Llull a great poet, perhaps because his prose works are so extraordinarily rich and developed.

Salvador Galmés, introducing the *Proverbis d'ensenyament*, called their style "mediocre," and characterized the work as one of many brief, popularizing treatises that Llull produced, in this case perhaps merely as an exercise in "entreteniment literari" (ORL 14: xii). In form, the proverbs are octosyllabic couplets, though with occasional lapses in versification; they employ the consonantal rhyme of tonic final syllables that Llull used often in his didactic poetry. Comparing these couplets to the Latin text of the *Rethorica nova*, we can clearly see that the latter makes some effort to imitate the verse form of the Catalan proverbs.

Almost all of the Latin proverbs are written as couplets. Some of them even appear to have the same number of syllables in each line and to rhyme. Especially obvious are the few that try to rhyme in Latin the same words rhymed in Catalan, such as proverbs 183 and 195:

183. L ome qui ama gran honor,  
treballa molt son servidor.  
(ORL 14:387)  
Homo, qui nimium affectat honorem,  
nimis fatigat suum servitorem.  
(ed. Batalla 154)
195. No t vulles fortment penedir  
pus gran mal no te n pot venir.  
(ORL 14:387)  
Ne velis nimis de aliquo poenitere,  
si magnum malum tibi inde non valeat evenire.  
(ed. Batalla 156)

Here, the Latin version of proverb 183 attempts to rhyme "honorem" and "servitorem," corresponding to the Catalan "honor" and "servidor." Proverb 195 rhymes "poenitere" and "evenire" in Latin as an exact parallel to the Catalan "penedir" and "venir."

Elsewhere, the Latin version rhymes words of similar meaning, though not etymologically related to the Catalan, as in proverb 193:

193. Tal encalça que ha paor,  
e cell qui fug la ha major.  
(ORL 14:387)  
Multotiens ille qui insequitur habet timorem,  
sed qui fugit habet maiorem.  
(ed. Batalla 156)

Here the Latin rhymes "timorem" and "maorem" as a parallel to the Catalan "paor" and "major."

In other instances, the Latin rhymes completely different words, as in proverb 182:

182. No vulles esser tan honrat  
que te n faces tenir per fat.

(ORL 14:387)

Non tantum desideres honorari,  
quod possis inde fatuus reputari.

(ed. Batalla 154)

For this proverb, the Latin uses "honorari" and "reputari," where the Catalan has "honrat" and "tenir per fat."

However, in many more cases, the Latin version of a proverb offers lines that end with the same syllable, but without creating rhyme, as in proverbs 192 and 200:

192. No vulles null hom tant loar  
que no ho poguesses provar.

(ORL 14:387)

Ne tantum aliquem laudare velis,  
quod eius laudes probare non possis.

(ed. Batalla 156)

200. De hom qui sovent es irat  
no vulles esser trop privat.

(ORL 14:388)

Nimis iracundi hominis  
ne sis nimis familiaris.

(ed. Batalla 156)

In these instances, the Latin text seeks rather awkwardly to rhyme "velis" with "possis" and "hominis" with "familiaris," although the rhyme words in the Catalan version are completely different.

The same efforts to emulate the rhyme of the Catalan text are apparent in many other couplets from the Latin version. Only eight of the Latin proverbs have no evident attempt at rhyme. From such a comparison it is easy to conclude that the more perfectly versified Catalan proverbs are the original version of this material, and that the imperfectly versified Latin proverbs are adaptations from the Catalan.

This conclusion returns us once again to the questions of chronology and filiation between these two texts. The most immediate is the question of dating: if we accept that section 2.7 of the original Catalan version of the *Rethorica nova* is the "source" of the fifty lines in the *Proverbis d'ensenyament*, then we must reject the date of 1309 usually assigned to the *Proverbis d'ensenyament* (Bonner 1286). After all, how can a text composed in 1309 (the Catalan *Proverbis d'ensenyament*) be the "source" of a text written in 1303 (the Latin *Rethorica nova*)? One easy answer is simply to reject Salvador Galmés's editorial decision to include these fifty Catalan verses in the text of the *Proverbis d'ensenyament*. That is, we could consider the



fragment from MS Ambrosiana O 87 superius as the lone surviving scrap of the original Catalan text of the *Rethorica nova* (composed in 1301 if not earlier) and dismiss its similarity to the *Proverbis d'ensenyament* (created in 1309) as mere coincidence. Another easy answer is to reject dating the *Proverbis d'ensenyament* to around 1309. After all, the text itself bears no date and, as suggested already, it is doubtful that the letter to king James in 1309 actually names this particular work. We could easily imagine that Llull in fact wrote the *Proverbis d'ensenyament* much earlier, and simply borrowed a section of it to illustrate the use of proverbs in the original Catalan version of his *Rethorica nova*, a tactic of self-plagiarism that is, as we know, ubiquitous in his oeuvre.

Each of these simple answers in fact illustrates elements of more complex relationships that exist among all of Llull's writings. The problematic filiation of section 2.7 from the *Rethorica nova* and lines 175-225 from the *Proverbis d'ensenyament* illustrates how difficult it is to organize Llull's oeuvre according to categories of individual "texts" or even according to language of composition. When Llull himself speaks of his "Great Universal Art," he refers to its entire system, rather than to its redaction in any one particular text. His constant revision of this system, and application of its methods to particular topics in specialized treatises, constitute one vast discourse, which he did not regard as discrete, separate documents. He refers frequently in these writings to their process of composition as exercises in *inventio* and *compilatio*. The colophon to the *Rethorica nova*, for example, states simply that Master Ramon the Catalan "compilavit" ("compiled") this treatise.

In recent years, scholars of medieval learning and literature have devoted considerable attention to understanding medieval techniques of *compilatio* and how medieval practices of composition relied on strategies of invention, collation, glossing, commentary, or paraphrase that are certainly alien to such modern distinctions as "creative writing," or, in the academic realm, "sources" and "original research" (Lusignan, Mikhailova, Minnis, Zimmerman). Almost none of this recent scholarship has yet influenced the study of Llull's work. However, the evidence of his activity as a medieval *compiler* is everywhere in his writings. The Catalan and Latin passages of proverbs analyzed in this essay are superlative examples of this activity, in several respects. First, the body of information that they offer is not original, and deliberately so. The value of these moral proverbs is precisely their expression of commonplace truths. Llull introduces them in the *Rethorica nova* with their conventional definition as "sermo brevis magnam in se sententiam continens" or "a brief statement containing a great idea" (ed. Batalla 152). Second, these "great ideas" admit expression in many variations, as



Llull's own collections of proverbs amply demonstrate. Within the *Proverbis d'ensenyament*, we find several versions of such general principles as "think before acting," "listen rather than speak," or "be careful of the company you keep." If we compare the proverbs from his other Catalan and Latin texts, we find dozens, if not hundreds, of similar precepts. Llull's collections of proverbs arguably illustrate better than any other of his works the larger organizational relationships that exist throughout his oeuvre: rather than discrete and separate "texts" that stand as chronologically distinct "sources" to one another, his writings form one great *compilatio* that he manipulated throughout his long career, deploying the contents of this copious material in particular texts, in particular languages, at particular times. Llull did not produce his work in neatly separate texts, and we should stop trying to understand them in this way. Analyzing Llull's oeuvre as a massive exercise in *compilatio* is admittedly not easy. It requires the kind of patient, careful, and especially comprehensive approach that David Viera has exemplified so well in his work. The *compilatio* inherent in the discourse of Ramon Llull's Universal Art simply requires and deserves much more careful attention to the internal logic and of its contents and external contexts of its discourse than recent scholarship has been willing to pursue.

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