

Ramon Llull: A Logic of Invention

In a passage from Ramon Llull's *Arbre qüestional* [The Tree of Questions] a disciple asks the master the following question:

“*Question*: Why do people die?

Answer: The bottle breaks and the wine gushes out.”¹

During a conference held in 1997 in Freiburg, Germany, dedicated to Ramon Llull's *Arbre de ciència* [The Tree of Knowledge], a group of philosophers that specialise in medieval logic and semantics wrestled with just this type of argumentation, whose conclusions provide little or no knowledge of the type the question was seeking in the first place. One of the drumbeat themes in the long tradition of studies on the work and ideas of Majorca-born Ramon Llull (1232–1316), who produced some 300 works in Catalan, Latin, and Arabic, has been Llull's so-called rationalism, which is replete with eccentric responses like the one cited above. Admittedly, Llull, who was in some instances disparagingly branded *phantasticus*, had a highly idiosyncratic view of what constituted logic, how it should be applied in man's spiritual life, and above all its polemico-apologetic use in infidel territory. The aforementioned criticism has also been fueled by a certain romantic idea that holds that the entirety of the philosophical superstructure of Llull's work is overshadowed by his poetico-mystical output, which is presumed to be of greater cultural import. However, Llull's work cannot be assessed by dividing it into, on the one hand, his vernacular writings, which founded Catalan literature, and on the other, Llull's treatises in Latin and presumably in Arabic on theology, medicine, law, geometry, and the like. Indeed, reading Llull's literary works or novels such as *Blanquerna* (1283) and *Llibre de meravelles* (1288) can be a wholly unsatisfactory experience without a thorough knowledge of the intricate combinatorial logic that underlies his oeuvre. Llull, whose genuine formative underpinnings lie in his direct knowledge of the “religions of the book” (the Bible and Koran), regarded his work as the outgrowth of divine illumination. The intelligible content of this revelation, whose external embodiment was a book of divine revelation (“unum librum, meliorem de

¹ “Home per què mor?—Trenca l'ampolla e ix lo vi della.” Ramon Llull, *Obres essencials* (Barcelona, 1957–1960), vol. 1, p. 854:50. The translation is mine.