

Ramon Llull

The Book of the Lover and the Beloved

Excerpts

HOW THE HERMIT BLAQUERNA CAME TO WRITE THE BOOK OF THE LOVER AND THE BELOVED

It happened one day that the hermit, who was in Rome, as we said before, (1) went to visit the other hermits and recluses living there, and found that they had many temptations regarding certain things because they did not know how to live in the manner best fitting their state. So he thought he would go to Blaquerne and ask him to make a book about the life of a hermit, so that through this book he would know how to keep the other hermits in contemplation and devotion. One day when Blaquerne was in prayer the hermit came to his cell and asked him to write the above-mentioned book. Blaquerne thought a long time about the manner in which he would make the book, and the matter he would put into it.

Thinking in this way he decided to give himself over to the worship and contemplation of God, so that in prayer God might show him the manner and matter to be used in the book. While Blaquerne was thus worshipping and weeping, (2) and when God had made his soul rise to the furthest limit of its strength in contemplation of him, Blaquerne felt himself overwhelmed by the great fervor and devotion he had, and he thought to himself that the force of love is overwhelming when the lover loves the beloved very intensely. Therefore Blaquerne decided to make a book, the Book of the Lover and the Beloved, in which the lover would be a faithful and devout Christian and the beloved would be God.

While Blaquerne was thinking in this way, he remembered that once, when he was pope, a Saracen (3) had told him that the Saracens had certain religious men, among whom the most highly considered were those called "sufis," and that these men had words of love and brief examples which aroused great devotion in men. These are words which require exposition, and by their exposition the understanding rises up higher, and carries the will with it, increasing its devotion. Now when Blaquerne had heard this idea, he decided to make the book in the above-mentioned manner, and he told the hermit to return to Rome, and that in a short time he would send him, through the deacon, the Book of the Lover and the Beloved, and with this book he would be able to increase fervor and devotion in the hermits, whom he wished to inspire with a love of God.

PROLOGUE

Blaquerne was in prayer, and he thought about the manner in which he contemplated God and his virtues, and when he finished his prayers he wrote down the manner in which he had contemplated God. And he did this every day, bringing new reasoning to his prayers, so that he could compose The Book of the Lover and the Beloved in many different manners, and that these would be brief, so that in a short time the soul could reflect on many of them.

And with God's blessing, Blaquerna began the book, which he divided into as many verses as there are days in the year. And each verse suffices for an entire day of contemplation of God, according to the art of the Book of Contemplation.(4)

HERE BEGIN THE MORAL METAPHORS (5)

1. The lover asked his beloved if there remained anything in him still to be loved. And the beloved answered that he still had to love that by which his own love could be increased.

2. The paths along which the lover seeks his beloved are long, peril filled with worries, sighs, and tears, and lit up by love. (6)

3. Many lovers gathered together to love one beloved who filled them with love. Each held as his own his beloved and his pleasant thoughts which caused tribulations that were sweet to bear.

4. The lover wept, and said: "When will darkness leave the world, and the paths to hell cease to exist? When will water, which always flows downward, change its nature and flow upward? And when will the innocent outnumber the guilty?"

5. Ah! When will the lover boast of dying for his beloved? And when will the beloved see the lover languishing for love of him? (7)

6. The lover said to the beloved, "You who fill the sun with radiance, fill my heart with love." The beloved replied, "Without plenitude of love, your eyes would not be in tears, nor would you have come to this place to see the one who loves you."

7. The beloved tested his lover to see if his love was perfect, asking him what was the difference between the presence and absence of his beloved. The lover replied, "As ignorance and forgetfulness differ from knowledge and remembrance."

8. The beloved asked the lover, "Can you remember any way in which I have rewarded you for wanting to love me?" "Yes," he answered, "by making, no distinction between the pains and pleasures you accord me."

9. "Tell me, lover," said the beloved, "will you still be patient if I double your suffering?" "Yes, as long as you also double my love."

10. The beloved asked the lover, "Do you know yet what love is?" He answered, "If I knew not what love was, would I know what suffering, sorrow and pain were?" (8)

11. The lover was asked, "Why do you not answer your beloved who is calling you?" He replied, "I brave great dangers in order to reach him, and I already speak to him in desiring his honors."

12. "Foolish lover, why do you destroy your body, spend all your money, abandon the delights of this world, and go about scorned by people?" He answered, "In order to honor the perfections of my beloved, who is unloved and dishonored by more men than honor and love him."

13. "Tell us, fool of love! What is better seen – the beloved in the lover, or the lover in the beloved? He answered, saying that the beloved can be recognized by love, and the lover by sighs and tears, pain and grief.

14. The lover was looking for someone who could tell his beloved of the hardships he underwent for love's sake, and of how he was dying. And he found his beloved, who was reading a book in which was written all the suffering love made him endure for his beloved, and all the pleasure he had from this love.

15. Our Lady brought her Son to the lover so he might kiss his feet, (9) and so that in his book he might write about the virtues of Our Lady.

16. "Tell us, O singing bird, have you put yourself in the care of my beloved so that he may protect you from lack of love, and increase your love?" The bird replied, "And who is it who makes me sing, if not the lord of love, for whom lack of love is a dishonor?"

17. Love has made its home between fear and hope, where it lives on its thoughts but dies from forgetfulness when its foundations are laid upon worldly pleasures.

18. A question arose between the eyes and memory of the lover. His eyes claimed it was better to see the beloved than to remember him, but

83. The lover was asked about the love of the beloved. He answered that his beloved's love was the influence (27) of infinite goodness, eternity, power, wisdom, charity, and perfection, which is the influence that the beloved has on the lover. (28)

84. "Tell us, fool, what do you mean by a marvel?" He answered, "To love things absent more than things present, and to love visible, corruptible things more than invisible, incorruptible ones."

85. The lover went in search of his beloved, and came upon a man who was dying without love. And he said it was a great shame for a man to have to die any sort of death without love. So he asked the dying man, "Tell me, why are you dying without love?" And he answered, "Because it is without love that I have lived."

86. The lover asked his beloved which was greater, love or loving. The beloved answered that in created beings love was the tree and loving the fruit, and the trials and suffering were the flowers and leaves, but that in God love and loving were one and the same thing, without any trials or suffering.

87. An excess of thoughts caused the lover suffering and sorrow, and he begged his beloved to send him a book describing his features, in the hope that this would provide some help. The beloved sent the book to his lover, and the lover's trials and suffering were doubled.

88. The lover was sick with love, and a doctor came to see him. The doctor increased his suffering and his thoughts, and then the lover was healed.

89. Love and the lover drew apart, and yet were both joyful in the beloved. The beloved appeared before them. The lover wept, and love vanished as the lover fainted. But the beloved revived his lover by reminding him of his features.

90. The lover said to the beloved, "Many are the paths by which you come to my heart, and reveal yourself to my eyes, and my words name you by many names, but the love by which you both mortify and give life to me is one, and one alone." (29)

91. The beloved revealed himself to his lover clothed in new crimson robes. He held out his arms so he could embrace him, he lowered his head so he could kiss him, and he remained on high so he could always be found. (30)

92. The beloved left his lover, and the lover sought him with memory and understanding, so that he could love him. The lover found his beloved, and asked him where he had been. He answered, "In the absence of your memory, and in the ignorance of your understanding."

93. "Tell us, fool, are you ashamed when people see you weeping for your beloved?" He answered that shame without sin was a defect of love not knowing how to love.

94. The beloved planted yearnings, sighs, virtues, and love in the lover's heart. The lover watered the seeds with weeping and with tears.

95. The beloved planted trials, tribulations, and suffering in the lover's body. The lover healed his body with hope, devotion, patience, and consolations. (31)

96. On a great feast-day the beloved held court for a group of honorable barons, offering a great banquet and many gifts. The lover came to this court and the beloved said to him, "Who asked you to come to my court?" The lover replied, "Necessity and love impelled me to come so I could behold your beauty and bearing." (32)

97. The lover was asked to whom he belonged. He answered, "To love." "What are you made of?" "Of love." "Who gave birth to you?" "Love." "Where were you born?" "In love." "Who brought you up?" "Love." "How do you live?" "By love." "What is your name?" "Love." "Where do you come from?" "From love." "Where are you going?" "To love." "Where are you now?" "In love." "Have you anything other than love?" "Ycs, I have faults and wrongs against my beloved." "Is there pardon in your beloved?" The lover said that in his beloved were mercy and justice, and that he

therefore lived between fear and hope. (33)

98. The beloved left the lover, and the lover sought him in his thought and asked people about him in the language of love.

99. The lover found his beloved, who was held in contempt by people, and he told him what great wrong was being done to his honor. The beloved answered that his dishonor was due to a lack of fervent and devoted lovers. The lover wept, and his sorrows were increased. But the beloved consoled him by revealing his beauties to him. (34)

100. The light of the beloved's room lit up that of the lover, dispelling its darkness and filling it with joys, sorrows, and thoughts. And the lover chased all things from his room to provide space for his beloved.

101. The lover was asked what sign his beloved placed on his banner. He answered, "That of a dead man." He was asked why he chose such a sign. He answered, "Because he was a man who died on the cross, and because all those who boast of being his lovers should follow in his steps."

102. The beloved came to stay at the lover's lodgings, and the steward demanded payment from him. But the lover said that his beloved was to be lodged without charge.

103. Memory and Will joined together and climbed the mountain to the beloved, so that Understanding might be exalted and love greatly increased in loving the beloved.

104. Sighs and tears are daily messengers between the lover and the beloved, so that between them there may be pleasure, companionship, friendship, and goodwill.

105. The lover longed for his beloved, so he sent him his thoughts, that they might return from his beloved with the happiness which had been his for so long.

106. The beloved rewarded his lover with tears, sighs, griefs, thoughts and sorrows, and the lover served his beloved for this reward. (35)

107. The lover begged his beloved to give him bounty, peace, and honor in this world, and the beloved revealed his features to the lover's memory and understanding, and gave himself as object to his will.

108. The lover was asked what he thought honor was. He replied that it was understanding and loving his beloved. He was then asked what dishonor was. He replied that it was forgetting and ceasing to love his beloved.

109. "Love tormented me until I told him you were present in my torments. Love then lessened my suffering, and you, as a reward, increased love, which doubled my torments

110. "On the path of love I met with another lover who was silent. Pale and thin, suffering and weeping, he reproached love, and made accusations against him. Love excused himself with loyalty, hope, patience, devotion, fortitude, temperance, and happiness. I therefore reproached the lover for crying out against love when love had given him such wonderful gifts."

111. The lover sang, and said, "O, what great unhappiness is love! O, what great happiness is loving my beloved, who loves his lovers with infinite, eternal love, perfect and complete in every way."

112. The lover was walking in a foreign land, where he thought he would find his beloved, when he was attacked on the road by two lions. The lover feared death, for he wanted to live in order to serve his beloved. He sent his memory to his beloved, so that love would be with him during his passage, and help him withstand death. While the lover was remembering his beloved, the lions came up to him humbly and licked the tears from his weeping eyes, and kissed his hands and feet. And the lover continued in peace in search of his beloved. (36)

113. The lover wandered over mountains and valleys, but could find no place to escape from the prison in which love held captive his body, thoughts, and all his desires and joys.

114. While the lover was wandering in this troubled way, he came upon a hermit

asleep near a lovely spring. The lover awakened the hermit, and asked him if he had seen his beloved in his dreams. The hermit answered that his thoughts were held captive in love's prison equally whether he was awake or asleep. The lover was very pleased to have found a fellow prisoner, and they both wept, for the beloved had few such lovers. (37)

115. There is nothing in the beloved that does not cause the lover anxiety and sorrow. And there is nothing in the lover over which the beloved has no dominion, and in which he does not rejoice. Therefore the love of the beloved consists of action, and the love of the lover, of suffering and passion.

116. A bird was singing on a branch, saying "I will give a new thought to the lover, who will give me two." (38) The bird gave the new thought to the lover, and the lover gave two to the bird to lessen his torments. But the lover felt his pains of love increase.

117. The lover and the beloved met, and their greetings, embraces, kisses, weeping, and tears bore witness to their meeting. The beloved asked the lover how he was, and the lover felt confused in the presence of his beloved. (39)

118. The lover and the beloved quarreled, and their loves made peace between them. And the question arose: which love gave most of itself?

119. The lover loved all those who feared his beloved, and feared all those who did not fear him. It was therefore a question as to which was greater in the lover, love or fear.

120. The lover strove to follow his beloved, and he came to a path with a fierce lion who killed anyone passing by indolently and without devotion. (40)

121. The lover said, "He who does not fear my beloved should fear all things. But he who does fear my beloved should be bold and daring in all things. "

122. The lover was asked what he meant by "occasion." He answered that occasion was the chance to experience pleasure in penance, understanding in conscience, hope in patience, health in abstinence, consolation in remembrance, love in diligence, loyalty in shame, riches in poverty, peace in obedience, and strife in malevolence. (41)

123. Love lit up the cloud placed between the lover and the beloved, and made it as bright and shining as the moon by night, the morning star at dawn, the sun by day, and understanding in the will. And it is through this shining cloud that the lover and beloved speak to each other. (42)

124. The lover was asked, "What is the greatest darkness?" He answered, "The absence of my beloved." "And what is the brightest light?" He answered, "The presence of my beloved." (43)

125. The stamp of the beloved is on the lover, who for love's sake suffers tribulations, sighs, tears, and troubled thoughts, and is held in contempt by the people.

126. The lover wrote the following words, "Let my beloved be joyful, for to him I send my thoughts, for him my eyes do weep, and without the pains of love I can neither live, nor feel, nor see, nor hear, nor smell."

127. "Ah, Understanding and Will! Bark and awaken the large dogs who are asleep, forgetting my beloved. Weep, O eyes! Sigh, O heart! And Memory – remember the dishonor of my beloved at the hands of those he so honored." (44)

128. "The enmity between the people and my beloved increases. My beloved promises gifts and rewards, and threatens with justice and wisdom, but memory and will scorn his promises and threats."

129. The beloved drew near to the lover to comfort and console him for the suffering he endured and for the tears he shed. And the nearer the beloved came, the more the lover suffered and wept out of pity for the dishonor done to his beloved.

130. With pen of love, water of tears, and on paper of suffering, the lover wrote letters to his beloved, telling him that devotion was late in coming, that love was dying, and that sin and error were ever increasing his enemies.

131. The loves of the lover and beloved were bound with bonds of memory, understanding, and will, so that lover and beloved might not be parted. And the cord which bound them together was woven of thoughts and yearnings, sighs and tears.

132. The lover lay in a bed of love. His sheets were made of joys, his coverlet of sorrows, and his pillow of tears. And the question was whether the cloth of the pillow was the same as that of the sheets, or as that of the coverlet. (45)

133. The beloved dressed his lover in a tunic, vest, and cape. He made him a hat of love, a shirt of thoughts, stockings of tribulations, and a garland of tears.

134. The beloved begged his lover not to forget him. The lover said he could not forget him since he could not be without knowledge of him..

135. The beloved asked to be praised and defended in the places' where men most feared to praise him. The lover asked to be provided with sufficient love, and the beloved answered that for love of him he had become incarnate and had died on the cross. (41)

136. The lover asked his dear beloved to show him how he could make him known, loved, and praised by the people. The beloved filled his lover with devotion, patience, charity, tribulations, thoughts, and tears. And boldness to praise his beloved came into the lover's heart. In his mouth were praises of his beloved, and in his will contempt for the reproaches of the people who judge falsely.

137. The lover spoke to the people in these words: "He who truly remembers my beloved, in this remembering forgets all else. And he who forgets all else in remembering his beloved, his beloved defends in all ways, and to him he gives a part of all things."

138. The lover was asked what gave birth to love, what it lived on, and why it died. He answered that love was born of remembering, lived on understanding, and died through forgetting.

139. The lover forgot all that existed below the sovereign sky, so that his understanding might rise up higher towards an understanding of the beloved, whom his will desired to contemplate and make known.

140. The lover went into battle to honor his beloved, and he took with him faith, hope, charity, justice, prudence, fortitude, and temperance, to enable him to defeat the enemies of his beloved. And the lover would have been defeated, had his beloved not helped him to make known his perfections.

141. The lover desired to pass on to the final goal of his love for the beloved, but other goals blocked his passage. (47) Therefore his longing thoughts and desires caused the lover sadness and grief.

142. The perfections of his beloved filled the lover with pride and joy, but too many thoughts and reflections caused him suffering. And the question arose – which did he feel more strongly, the joys or the sorrows?

143. The lover was sent by his beloved as a messenger to Christian princes and unbelievers to show them the Art and principles by which they could know and love the beloved. (48)

144. If you see a lover dressed in fine clothes, honored for his haughtiness, fat with food and sleep, know that in that man you see damnation and torments. But if you see a poorly dressed lover, scorned by men, pale and thin from fasting and keeping vigil, know that in him you see salvation and everlasting blessedness.

145. The lover complained and his heart cried out from the heat of love within him. The lover died; the beloved wept for him, and gave him the comfort of patience, hope, and reward. (49)

146. The lover wept for what he had lost, and no one could comfort him, for his losses could not be regained.

Notes

(1) Two chapters before, Lull described urban hermits "living in the walls," presumably in cells hollowed out in the ruins.

(2) See n. 6 below.

(3) See the Book of the Gentile, Bk. IV, n. 1, for an explanation of this term which for Lull's contemporaries simply meant "Muslim."

(4) The vast work written before the development of the Art; not to be confused with the Art of Contemplation which follows the Book of the Lover and the Beloved in Bla-querna.

(5) In addition to its usual meaning, "moral" in the Middle Ages could also mean "figurative, symbolic, requiring interpretation."

(6) For medieval mystics, tears were a gift of God; in the Art of Contemplation, Ch. 107, Blaquerna states that "it is inappropriate to contemplate on a high level without weeping."

(7) Many printed sources following the lead of one ms, which has the paragraph sign erased, join this versicle to the previous one.

(8) Only Galmes's ENC edition (see no. 2 on p. 184 above) and Albert Soler's forthcoming edition have the question; all other editions and translations, instead of "would I," have "I would" (the Latin version here even adds a "therefore"). Since medieval scribes don't use question marks, one can only tell by meaning or syntax which is intended; in this case the question seems to agree better with Lull's concept of love.

(9) The original is in the singular, "his foot."

(27) Here in the etymological sense of "inflowing."

(28) The best manuscripts combine this versicle with the previous one.

(29) Indirect speech in the original.

(30) The "crimson robes" refer to the blood of the crucified Christ.

(31) The best mss join this to the previous versicle.

(32) *Tes faysons e tos capteniments*; the phrase is a commonplace of Provençal love poetry. In v. 89 above, *faysons* was translated as "features."

(33) "Justice," one of God's attributes, refers mainly to that of the Last Judgment and hence it is paired with "fear," while the other attribute, "mercy," is paired with "hope."

(34) The best mss join this versicle to the previous one.

(35) *Pensaments*, here translated as "thoughts," is a word much repeated in the Book of the Lover and the Beloved. It does not refer to thoughts in a purely intellectual sense, but rather those accompanied by emotion, usually of sorrow, such as those concerning Christ's suffering, the lack of honor paid to God by the ungrateful, etc.

(36) This miracle – the only one Lull recounts in the Book of the Lover and the Beloved – reminds one of the Suli "charismas" and of the legends about St. Francis recounted in the Fioretti.

(37) All the medieval sources except one join this versicle to the preceding one.

(38) Indirect speech in the original.

(39) As Erica Lorenz points out, this "confusion" is a Sufi motif, one of the stages in the mystic ascent.

(40) Cf. 1 Kings 13:24 and I Peter 5:8.

(41) "Occasion" is defined in the Proverbs of Ramon, ch. 165, no. 2, as "the instrument of cause and effect." It is therefore equivalent to "ground," "circumstance," or "opportunity."

(42) See the discussion of this versicle on p. 178 of the introduction above.

(43) Indirect speech in original.

(44) One critic suggests that the dogs who should be watching their Christian flock are the pope, the kings, and by extension the whole church hierarchy. This might also be

a reference to the Dominicans, who, in a medieval pun became the *Domini canes*, "the dogs of the Lord, whose task it was to guard the Christian flock against the wolves of heresy.

(45) That is to say, were they tears of joy or of sorrow? Castro, *The Structure of Spanish History*, pp. 310-11 says that in neither Saint Augustine nor Saint Bernard is there anything comparable to Llull's style – so similar here to that of the Sufis – which infuses the most commonplace reality (sheets, coverlets, pillows) with poetic and symbolic intention. The following versicle continues in the same vein.

(46) All the medieval sources join this versicle to the previous one, even though they don't seem to belong together.

(47) As Sala-Molins points out in his anthology, Llull is here playing on the double meaning of "passage" – the normal one and that into the next life. This refers to Llull's original goal of death through martyrdom, and the other goals man has in serving his beloved on earth, making for a conflict.

(48) See the introduction, p. 182 above.

(49) The Old Spanish translation has "eternal reward," which is undoubtedly what Llull meant here.