BLANQUERNA AND *THE PILGRIM'S PROGRESS* COMPARED

I

The following remarks are intended more as a tribute than as a critical assessment: it is hoped to show that one can have an admiration for both writers and that their novels belong together as representing the use of profane imaginative forms for the same exalted purpose. Llull and Bunyan are, in fact, brethern (although neither would identify himself with the particular theological tenets of the other), for the Dominican-Franciscan and the Puritan-Baptist show how illusory are the divisions of time, place and cultural traditions, when one is considering the ideas and ideals of the religious visionary.[1] The great Majorcan gave up his restless dissipation for a life of equally restless travel and study as a religious, while the tinker of Bedfordshire and former Cromwellian soldier renounced the peace and comfort of his humble trade for a life of imprisonment, suffering and ceaseless energy as preacher and writer, only to die, like Llull, worn out, and, in his own way, a martyr (indeed, Bunyan is well deserving of the name of Blessed if such were a Protestant custom). The court poet of Palma and Montpellier became the teacher, scholar and voluminous writer-propagandist, while the reader of romances found his rich imagination fully employed in sermons and allegories, fantasies and exhortations. Both men tell of their spiritual development (in the *Libre de contemplació* and in *Grace Abounding*), and each of them found that his most mature literary achievement drew much strength and inspiration from experience of the world he had given up but never forgotten. With such obvious parallels in their lives, it would be very easy to overargue a similarity that is, however, all the more striking for the contradictions

1. Acknowledgement is made for help in the general preparation of this article to E. A. PEER's *Ramon Lull, a Biography* (London 1929); and to HENRI TALON's *John Bunyan, the Man and his Works*, English trans. by BARBARA WALL (London 1951). The last-named work has been hailed as a very important and comprehensive critical study of the subject.

of time and place that might seem at first glance to nullify it. In fact, the most significant parallel between the mediaeval mystic and the Protestant visionary (and the two types of Christian have often been compared) is that fact which bursts the bonds of historical categories, namely their conversion to a religious life: both Llull, who spent his life crusading for the orthodoxy of Roman Christianity, and Bunyan, for whom the Papacy was just another name for paganism and the moral Babylon, held that the true essence of faith and experience was illuminative, not intellectual and institutional. Bunyan was a rebel even among Puritans (with their Calvinistic equivalent of the *Summa*), not to mention Anglicans, just as Llull's ardent Franciscanism made him an embarrassment to popes, cardinals and kings, who shared the non-mystic's discomfort when confronted with the unassailable because unarguable evidence of the seer.[2]

It is surely rare in our literary history to find two such men of God so felicitously and forcefully transmitting their experiences and beliefs in the very literary form that at all periods of its flowering has laid itself open to the charge of frivolity, for even the greatest novelist, Cervantes, and his greatest disciple, Dostoyevsky, basically tell nothing more than a prose tale and tell it in the vernacular of their day. (Homer and Virgil, Dante or Shakespeare, cannot be accused of resting on such plebeian foundations). Both Llull and Bunyan wrote in the language and the manner of the popular romancer, but they wrote with a difference: the «pla catalanesc» and the plain man's English of the seventeenth century became the instruments of the *Libre de Evast e de Aloma e de Blanquerna son fill,* and of the «little book» that tells of the «race of saints... their journey, and the way to glory». Both books were romances «puestos a lo divino», the one written

> «per intenció que los hòmens agen de amar, entendre, recordar e servir a vós com a ver Déu, senyor e creador que sou de totes coses» ;[3]

and the other (after Bunyan has defended his right to use the «dark and cloudy» metaphors and allegories so suspected by a long line of Reformed theologians) meant to

2. The parallel of the conversion is more precisely significant in that in both cases the dramatic change of life acted as a release for talents, intellectual and imaginative, that might otherwise have remained dormant. Thus Llull the Franciscan busied himself in compiling a corpus of scholarly and practical theology that any Dominican would have been proud of; while Bunyan turned himself to study and writing much in the manner of the more instructed and intellectual Calvinist.

3. Reference is to the ed. of SALVADOR GALMÉS, which is vols. L-LI and LVIII-LIX of *ENC* (Barcelona 1935 and 1947, respectively).

«..... make a traveller of thee,
If by its counsel thou wilt ruled be;
It will direct thee to the Holy Land,
If thou wilt its directions understand:
Yea, it will make the slothful active be;
The blind also delightful things to see.»[4]

Such august aims are beyond even the unspoken pretentions of a Flaubert or a Proust, for Llull and Bunyan created a new novel which was to include the height and the depth of spiritual reality and which was to serve as a vehicle for beatitude instead of the sublunar adventures of unaided man.

II

Both *Blanquerna* and *The Pilgrim's Progress* spread their doctrine over frames that have long symbolised human existence and effort. For Llull it is the contrast and interplay between town and country: the city-state (that is, any one of the Mediterranean centres frequented by the Majorcan) recalls the great pagan Roman heritage and also the Augustinian *City*,[5] while the wilderness comes to mean final mystical splendour (in the *Libre d'Amic e Amat*); Bunyan sets his man on a moral journey that has suggested itself to poets since Homer and that had a long history as an imaginative garment for Christian truths since early mediaeval times. While Llull, the city dweller, sets some of his most vivid scenes in the European street with its tumultuous life, since the city as a whole is life in this world, good and bad, and stands off against the desert, where experience tends to be seen as allegory (e. g. in Book I), Bunyan, on the other hand, is the small townsman, almost the countryman, who hates the city and compensates by creating his ideal city and envisages his allegorical pilgrimage in a countryside as balmy as summer in his native shire. Blanquerna leaves the city for the greater spiritual purity of the open places; Christian flees the world (the City of Destruction), passes through the torments of its microcosm at Vanity Fair, and proceeds towards the Puritan's version of Augustine's *civitas*, the Coelestial City. Blanquerna leaves his devout parents and Natana behind in his

4. The ed. of Bunyan used is that published by Faber and Faber Ltd., with illustrations by Edward Ardizzone (London 1947).

5. No attempt is made in this article to examine the Augustinianism of Llull in any systematic way. Some help has been derived from H. WIERUSZOWSKI's essay *Ramon Lull et l'idée de la cité de Dieu*, «Miscel·lània lul·liana» (Barcelona 1935), 403-415, much of which could also be used to interpret Bunyan, since his novel, too, is highly 'social'.

city, thus renouncing his chances of a rich family inheritance and a good marriage:

> «Tant de temps stegueren Evast e Aloma e tots los altres en aquell loch on Blanquerna hac pres cumiat, sguardant Blanquerna dementre que se·n anava, que Blanquerna fo dintre la forest. E Aloma dix: —A lassa, cativa! Perdut he de veer lo meu fill Blanquerna, lo qual per nuyll temps no veuré en esta present vida —. Ab grans plors e dolors se·n retornaren Evast e Aloma e tots los altres a la çiutat, parlant de Blanquerna e de la gran devoció que Déus li havia donada sobre tots los altres hòmens que ells veeren hanc null temps de lur vida.»[6]

Christian must perforce abandon his wife and family in the hope that they will (as they do) later follow him; indeed the Second Part of Bunyan's novel tells of the pilgrimage of Christiana and her children, whom she eventually sees married to other «saints» on the way:

> «Now he had not run far from his own door, but his wife and children, perceiving it, began to cry after him to return; but the man put his fingers to his ears, and ran on, crying, Life! Life! Eternal Life! So he looked not behind him, but fled towards the middle of the plain.»[7]

Thus, in a human situation so essentially similar in both cases, the monastic and the Puritan concepts of holiness are contrasted. The real difference, of course, can only be properly grasped by stripping the allegory of Bunyan of its literalness and seeing that Christian is putting his faith before even his family, not that he is deserting them, whereas this last is precisely what Blanquerna is doing. The mediaeval religious might flee his world, but the Puritan lived in it as an exile and fought to convert it (and Christian does pick up converts on the way and his family follows him). Blanquerna was not satisfied with the partial holiness of the life led by his parents but must leave the world (that is, society), with its good and its evil, to God, while he goes to seek Him undisturbed by his fellows; for Christian the world is damned but salvation can only be achieved by living in it and feverishly working to improve it and make it godly, too. How ironic that the modern «subjective» individualist should seek to live in society while the mediaeval man, with his reputed «collective» theories about society, should prefer solitudes as a means to salvation! Thus the movement in *Blanquerna* is from city to wilderness, back to the city (including the Eternal City and the Papacy), and finally

6. *Blanquerna*, I, 90-91.
7. *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 17-18.

back to the ultimate state of grace in the wilderness; *The Pilgrim's Progress* moves from the bad city through the country (and the wilderness) to the good city.

III

Looked at in more detail the books again present a similarity at times elusive and a divergence of scheme that often appears to underline their affinity. The first steps of Blanquerna and Christian after their departure from home and the arrival at their first resting-point bear striking resemblances: the hermit is beset by fear of wild beasts and is strengthened by prayer until he arrives at the Palace of the Ten Commandments, where he is refreshed and given further justification; similarly, Christian meets his dangers as the tempters Obstinate and Pliable, then the Slough of Despond and, finally, Mr. Worldly Wiseman, before reaching the Gate and the inner comfort of the Interpreter's House where he puts on the armour of faith and courage. From here on the likeness is more evident in the rhythm and the undulations of the story as the full structure unfolds itself: Blanquerna rises eventually from hermit to abbot, from bishop to pope, and lastly to the very Franciscan paradox of the greatest eminence in the eyes of God by utter surrender of all offices and honours for the hardship and solitude of the wilderness. Each of these stages in Blanquerna's pilgrimage is followed by the trials of his particular charge at the time and of how they are shared by his willing helpers who hold the correspondingly subordinate duties of monks, canons and cardinals. When this scheme of interlocking parts is fully articulated the dimensions of Llull's work become evident. On the other hand, Bunyan's scheme was more modest just as the subject of that scheme moved along one main path instead of being the artery of confluent streams. Christian undergoes dangers which are also meant to test steadfastness: they appear in the deceptively dissimilar sequence of the Arbor, the Lions before the Lodge, Apollyon and the Valley of the Shadow, Vanity Fair, Doubting Castle and Giant Despair, the Inchanted Ground, to mention the chief cases. This terrible series of obstacles is offset at long intervals by tokens of hope and reward, as when the pilgrim comes upon the Interpreter's House, the Lodge, the River of God, the Delectable Mountains, the Country of Beulah and, finally, the reward is given in full measure when he reaches the last river and the Coelestial City. One can see, therefore, that *Blanquerna* has the basic crescendo of the frame-story, while *The Pilgrim's Progress* has the pattern of a pure romance, even of a romance of chivalry; in other words, Llull builds a recognisable structure stone upon stone

until the tower is reached, whereas Bunyan weaves a tapestry with its darknesses and lights and the entire scheme is not really grasped until most of its theme has been unfolded. It may be put yet otherwise: *Blanquerna* follows a single-theme plan up to the middle of Book II, at which point the main story begins to sprout sub-plots, which slow the general tempo but increase the scope and take in most of the major aspects of Christian doctrine. This is done by the organic *exempla* which illustrate the Seven Mortal Sins and Virtues, the versicles of the *Ave Maria* and the *Gloria,* the Beatitudes and the Art of Contemplation. Holding all these elements, major and minor, together is the most external of the rings or bonds of meaning, namely the symbolism of the five books:

> «A significança de les cinch naffres les quals nostre senyor Déu Jesu Crist prengué en l'arbre de la vera creu, per rembre lo seu poble de la servitut del diable y captivitat en què estava, volem departir aquest libre en cinch libres...»[8]

As is known, the next inner ring is revealed in the general title of each book, which stands for each one of the five «estaments de gents a les quals és bo tenir aquest llibre». Within this last is the next major signification already referred to, that of the church hierarchy. *Blanquerna* may be said to give something like a mediaeval synthesis of God's design for society, from prince to beggar, and to have a special care to expound the details of monastic ideals; it rises jubilantly to its periodic climaxes and revelations and gives a total picture of God-given joy and successful endeavour, or, as an authority on the subject expresses it:

> «Escrito diríase en unos momentos de optimista confianza, nunca resulta seco o teórico, siempre palpita»,[9]

surely a triumph that can attend only the greatest works of beatitude. *The Pilgrim's Progress* is altogether more simple in design, and yet this simplicity of ground-plan is precisely what allows Bunyan to achieve his sensitive penetration, chiefly at the level of allegory, of each and every episode and character that make up his sacred romance. The latter is externally antiphonal, since Part I and Part II correspond to Christian and Christiana, the male and the female, that is, the two widest divisions of humanity and yet the two through which can be suggested the finest nuances of experience and reality, which is precisely what Bunyan ma-

8. *Blanquerna,* I, 17.

9. Cf. J. Rubió i Balaguer in his admirable article on Catalan literature, in *Historia general de las literaturas hispánicas,* I (Barcelona 1949), 694.

nages to do by setting off the initial harshness of the first pilgrimage against the relative passivity and peacefulness of the second.[10] It may be held that the man prepared a way for the woman or that his first high courage inspired her to her gentler resolution. Bunyan's book speaks for humanity in its own way, since modern man, it seems, must seek his God on his own and frequently denies himself the comforting community sense of his early forbear. The English classic, however, bears traces of the frame-story tradition, which is seen when Christian and Christiana in turn are shown the animated allegorical scenes (the best remembered being that of the Muck-raker) in the Interpreter's House. Still, Bunyan's main achievement is to have utilised the subtleties of allegorism and the potentialities of dramatic dialogue in order to infuse the well-established romance with new meanings and an invigorating high purpose. The structure of both books, then, may be summed up: *Blanquerna* is symphonic with its broad-spaced and sweeping rhythm, while *The Pilgrim's Progress* is more like a single-motif composition moving through climaxes and deeps to its final coda-like burst of rapture.

IV

As for characterization, both Llull and Bunyan more than satisfy this favourite requirement of a successful novel. In keeping with the ascetic and optimistic tone of the whole book, the figures of *Blanquerna* are idealizations or symbols of different kinds of goodness and endeavour (it can be held that the key-word of the work is *caritat*, that most difficult of all virtues to practice). Llull's creative genius clothes and animates his spokesmen and, in the case of the major characters, he endows them with greater uniqueness by the use of such queer and unidentifiable names as Blanquerna, Evast, Aloma and Natana.[11] Bunyan also wrote a novel of struggle and endeavour, but he preferred the character-creating device of allegory. Instead of placing life-size saints in a familiar and easily recognizable background, he creates a perfectly acceptable bundle of human qualities synthesized in the name of Christian, and he sets him (and his wife and children) in a now frightening, now delightful dream-

10. H. TALON, *op. cit.*, 158-166, makes a sensitive comparison of the two parts of Bunyan's novel.

11. Cf. J. RUBIÓ I BALAGUER, *op. cit.*, 694: «Salen en él nombres de ciudades, de reinos y de santos en contraste con los exóticos y aun inexplicados del protagonista Blanquerna o Blaquerna, de sus padres Evast y Aloma y de la doncella Tana que aquéllos habían deseado que fuese su esposa».

world (it is a dream in two senses: the author gives it out as his own dream, and it is also the psychic projection of man's experience on the plane of moral belief). Our two authors also display a peculiar talent for the creation of minor characters. Blanquerna and his few equals move in the major key, but it is in the minor that we meet with those unforgettable little people who crowd whole areas of the canvas; one thinks particularly of the scenes in Book III, in the chapter «De persecució», where the fearless, almost cheeky canon (with his nickname of *lo foll*) rouses to a high fury the proud and unteachable archdeacon, or where he exposes the sharp practice of the tradesmen and even scolds the king himself in his own court. Here and elsewhere in the numerous sections of *exempla,* Llull succeeds wonderfully in bringing alive a scene of striking movement and vivacity, and he does so by creating the contrasting figures in his disputes as organic to the whole scene. It would be fruitless to isolate one of the rebel canons or the fanatical monks or their victims, since, as in all stories in which it is the story that is uppermost, each character exists because of the other and all of them for the story and the story for them. Bunyan, on the other hand, with the greater self-consciousness of the Baroque, creates characters who insert themselves into the story, but who could and do remain in the memory as creatures apart: among the minor figures, Ignorance («here therefore they met with a very brisk lad, that came out of that country...») and Madam Bubble, the bawd («Well I repulsed her twice, but she put by my repulse, and smiled»), are etched in with very keen perception and owe their independence from the main stream of the narrative to their allegorical or semi-allegorical nature. It might be added that Bunyan's people come to life very largely through his use of dialogue, which increases as the book progresses. Whereas Llull enjoys disputation and, of course, exposition, Bunyan, being less lettered and, in this, perhaps better served by his artistic instincts, brings to life a chattering and arguing set of people of any age and any society (special mention might be made of such differing characters as the delightful rogue Mr. By-Ends and the grave knight Great-Heart). Llull serves the tastes of his own century for sermonizing and the love of direct tales of action and aim, and, thus, presents us with his own dramatic trueness and truthfulness of portrayal and analysis. Bunyan not only satisfied his own age with his humour, pathos and self-examination, but has also served generations of readers in the English-speaking world by writing a truly modern novel of character and situation.

V

A comparative analysis of the language of the two books would be a fruitful study but is outside the scope of these remarks: suffice it to say that here also Llull and Bunyan are in the same intimate relationship as in the other points looked at above. Llull suits his style to his subject and its development: he achieves an amazing effect of stylistic unobtrusiveness and paratactical flow in the rise and fall of the narrative and comes to terms with the linguistic or terminological pedantries of mediaeval philosophical exposition. Bunyan, again, is more self-conscious, and reflects the more «literary» tastes of his age, although his distinctive style is a very happy blend of the manly rhetoric of the English Bible and the rich intimacies of the spoken English of his day.

Other topics would provide legitimate bases of comparison, but this essay may be drawn to a close with a mere mention of each author's social awareness. Llull, as has been pointed out, writes in the all-embracing manner of the mediaeval *Weltbild*, and thus he takes all classes to task for backsliding and the sins of pride and arrogance and luxury. Bunyan, whose social provenance stamped itself on him and his fellows of the left-wing of Puritanism, is the social reformer in the more modern sense, and, therefore, the more mordant critic of certain classes (as, for instance, the judge in Vanity Fair, while the latter itself may be taken as his own bitter comment on wealth and money). Llull's wide experience as courtier and traveller went into his *Blanquerna* as did Bunyan's painful, recent memories of his own imprisonment and sufferings into *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

This analysis does not pretend to have done more than isolate certain of the qualities and features of these two books as representatives of the «religious novel», if such a sub-genre be admitted. Llull and Bunyan meet across the centuries (a full four of them) and over the chasm of the Reformation, and bear witness to a common experiment and achievement. Romance, *exempla*, allegory and Christian doctrine in its several compartments, went to make up the new form, and if the mixture was not always successful (chiefly in certain passages where both writers err on the side of excessive exposition), the general result is that of setting the varied theme of Christianity within the limits of profane fiction. It is surely an unexpected justification of our most unrealiable and most easily corruptible literary form that in the hands of these two great men (not only great writers) it helped to lift a total vision of man and God and society

to a level more naturally belonging to the epos. (It is hardly necessary to add that this feat, so rare in fiction, is by no means unconnected with the declaredly didactic or rather evangelical aim of each work.) Conversely, it might be held that Llull's and Bunyan's conception of literary realism was so comprehensive that the mediaeval richness of the one and the warm Puritanism of the other (so different from the harsh brand of Puritanism's Black Legend) can only gain in stature when set off against our latter-day definitions and use of this realism and its forms.

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