

JÓZEF IJSEWIJN  
(LEUVEN)

## VIVES AND POETRY

As a scholar and writer the Spanish humanist Vives is important in many fields: philology, philosophy, psychology, education etc. As a thinker he fostered ideas at least as original and bold as those of his respected master Erasmus; if it is true that Erasmus nowadays enjoys greater fame, this is certainly due to one book — The Praise of Folly — and to his involvement in the religious controversies of his time, whereas Vives — a modest man of Jewish descent and living in virtual exile —, always kept carefully clear of theological squabbles and disputes and never wrote a work which could appeal to the public at large such as *Stultitia* or, for that matter, the Utopia of his friend Thomas More.

At first sight the topic „Vives and Poetry” may seem a bit strange, since Vives was not a poet at all. But poetry is a basic concern to every humanist worthy of the name. Moreover, Vives himself apparently attached great importance to the various paedagogical and moral implications of reading and writing classical poetry. Especially the moral problem, which was as old as christianity itself, was never absent from his mind and thought and emerges over and again in several of his works written at different stages of his life. To mention only the most important writings in this respect, the following deserve particular attention.

- 1518, at the beginning of his scholarly career: An introductory course on Virgil's Georgics.
- New Year's day 1519: The *Genethliacon Jesu Christi*.
- 1520: A lecture on Truth and Falsehood: *Veritas fucata* (I). About the same time a dialogue called *Sapiens*, printed Jan. 1523.
- 1522: An allegorical essay *Veritas fucata* (II) *sive de licentia poetica*.
- 1523: His treatise on the education of women.
- 1531: His great work on scholarship and higher education, namely *De Disciplinis* including *De Causis Corruptarum Artium*.
- 1532: *De Ratione dicendi*, a treatise on style, the third book of which contains an important chapter on Poetics (*De Poeticis*).
- 1537, only a few years before his death: a course on Virgil's Bucolics.

Fifteenth and early sixteenth-century humanists used to call themselves in Latin either poeta or orator or both [poeta et orator]; this clearly shows how fundamental classical poetry was in their work and aspirations. It may be recalled here that the young Erasmus did not style himself „theologus”, but rather „poeta” or „poeta et theologus”, and even in his mature years he maintained a favourable bias and an inclination towards poetry. It may also be remembered that many a stern theologian or lawyer in his youthful years wrote and published Latin verse, „carmina iuvenilia” and the like, not seldom in the erotic strain: e.g. the elegies for Cynthia written by Enea Silvio Piccolomini, the future pope Pius II, when he still was a student at Siena; or the love lyrics of Théodore de Bèze, which still were popular in the eighteenth century.

Vives's position in this respect is different and a little ambiguous or confusing. For one thing he never wrote poetry of any consequence although he was capable of composing Latin verses. Though it must be conceded that in this respect he did not differ from other leading humanists such as Lorenzo Vallo or his French friend Guillaume Budé. More significant, however, is the fact that Vives usually defends himself against being called a poet and expressly demanded to be considered a philosopher. In the prefatory letter to one of his earlier works, viz. his course on Virgil's Georgics, he explains that it is not absurd for a philosopher — i.e. for himself — to relax from time to time from his more serious work by desists such as Lorenzo Valla or his French friend Guillaume Budé. More so since he is an Aristotelian philosopher; and did not the founder of this school write an *Ars Poetica* and explain Homer to his pupil Alexander of Macedonia?

At this point it should be noted that, much as Vives may have introduced himself as a philosopher (and indeed was a zealous student of philosophy), he certainly visited the relaxing Muses assiduously. It is clear from every page of his works that he had read a tremendous amount of Greek and Latin poetry. Furthermore, he often chose poets as the subject of his teaching, even to such an extent that in a letter to his friend Craneveld, dated August 10th, 1522, he could state that his fame was born, in fact, from poetry: „mea carmine fama plane nata est”. Now since he never wrote more than a few lines of verse and never published a „carmen” or „carmina” these words can only apply to his courses on Latin poets and to their success among the students.

Why then was Vives so anxious not to be called a poet rather than to boast of it as most of his fellow-humanists did? I believe this can be explained by means of Vives's delicate social and academic position. In order to understand his particular situation, we have to take a closer look at his student years in Paris and his early years in the Southern Netherlands, where he first arrived in 1512 and established himself among the Spanish community in Bruges. This period is rather neglected, if not skipped over

almost completely by modern students of Vives, yet it was of crucial importance to his education and, therefore, to his later career. In an article published in „*Humanistica Lovaniensia*”<sup>1</sup>. I have reconsidered the scanty evidence available for that period of Vives’s life and I will use the results of that reconsideration in what follows.

In Paris Vives had spent a couple of years studying philosophy under such late scholastic masters as the Spaniard Gaspar Lax of Sarinena and the Fleming Jan Dullaert of Ghent. Like many other literarily gifted young students Vives clearly soon tired, not of philosophy itself — the value of which he was wise enough to discern and which he was to love all his life long — but of the silly trifles and rubbish which filled so many late scholastic courses in philosophy as well as theology. This is the origin of his early invective „*In Pseudodialecticos*” (Louvain, February 1519) and of the sneer in his dialogue *Sapiens*: „I now see that it is perfectly true what I used to say my friends: The Parisian philosophers have the whole philosophy between their teeth, lips and tongue, but none in their mind”<sup>2</sup>.

In his Paris years Vives already was clearly enticed by the magic spell of Classical poetry, propagated at that time in the French capital by Italian and also the first homebred humanists. It was the time Faustus Andrelinus (+1518), Hieronymus Aleander, Robert Gaguin (+1405) were famous names on the banks of the Seine, to which young students from many countries flocked to learn the new art of Latin poetry: among them not only Vives, but i.a. the Scot James Foullis of Edinburgh, the Walloon Remaclus Arduenna from Florennes, the Fleming Eligius Eucharius from Ghent, etc.

It is most unfortunate that circumstantial and precise information on Vives’s whereabouts, friendships and experiences in the Paris years before 1512 is almost entirely lacking. All we can do is make guesses with more or less certainty on the basis of later information. Thus we know for sure that by 1514, when he paid his second visit to Paris, Vives was on friendly terms with Salmon Macrin, a young Neo-Latin poet who later earned the nickname the „French Horace”. We can deduce the existence of this friendship from a laudatory epigram by Macrin which was printed in Vives’s first published booklet, his „*Triumphus Christi*”, which appeared in Paris in 1514 during the summer. Now it may well be that this friendship, based on a mutual interest in a humanist literature in the service of Christian faith and life, dated back to the earlier years of Vives’s and Macrin’s student days. I even suspect, though I cannot prove it, that the two young men met each other during the Greek lectures of Hieronymus Aleander in 1509/10. We know that at least Macrin attended these lectures. For Vives, who later certainly knew Aleander personally, it must remain a guess, but in my opinion a reasonable guess, since it could explain where Vives acqui-

<sup>1</sup> „*Humanistica Lovaniensia*”, 26 (1977), 82-100.

<sup>2</sup> Mayansius edition, vol. IV, p. 26. See also vol. V, pp. 77-78 („*Somnium*”, written in 1520).

red the sound knowledge of Greek which he displays and which he can hardly have acquired in Flanders around 1512-15 or in Spain before his move to Paris.

The friendship with a poetically minded fellow student is of course an interesting fact. But there is more. In the end even Vives's master Dullaert, so it seems, became disenchanted and disillusioned with scholastic barrenness. It is true that this man had instilled in his disciples the maxim „The worse grammarian you are, the better dialectician you will be” which is clearly an anti-humanist attitude. On the other hand there is a remarkable testimony of Vives in his long letter „In Pseudo-dialecticos”, in which he says that he had heard his revered master Dullaert and Lax complaining with the greatest sadness that they had spent so many years on such vain and idle matter (I, p. 28). To this we must add that in 1512, a year before he died, Dullaert edited the „Poetica Astronomica” of Pseudo-Hyginus, a kind of encyclopaedia which is extremely useful — thus the long-winded title-advertisement — to explain innumerable passages in the poets. More significantly still, a poem was added at the end of this edition which is clearly addressed to the humanists of that time: It says among other things: Buy this book then, all of you who want to worship the learned Sisters or to know the heavenly bodies. Read it, you who want to study the Roman poets; read it, you who want to become a good „rhetor” (one could say „humanist”).

It is a great pity that the author of these verses did not sign his work. Was it Dullaert himself, one of his students, or a ghost-writer in the printing-office?

Vives surely discussed the problem of scholasticism versus poetry and humanism with his master. He even seems to have been on intimate terms with him, and it is not impossible that he accompanied Dullaert when the latter returned from Paris to Ghent in 1512. Vives, then, will have continued on to Bruges, where he could find shelter and support in the local Spanish community. In any case after Dullaert's death in 1513 Vives was asked by his fellow-students in Paris to write a kind of in-memoriam in the form of a short biographical sketch, and in it he shows a certain topographical knowledge of Ghent which suggests that he had seen the town.

I have dwelt somewhat longer on Dullaert because it may shed some light on the dark years of Vives's education, but also because of Dullaert's impact on the young man. In fact as a beginning scholar Vives followed in Dullaert's footsteps: for his first scholarly publication, which came off the press in Paris on March 31, 1514, Vives made a new edition of Hyginus's „Poetica Astronomica”. He wanted to use it for a series of lectures, which he planned for his 1514 sojourn in Paris.

It is quite obvious that Hyginus's *Poetica* is not a philosophical text, but one which appealed directly to humanist literary interests. And so are the other Classical texts which Vives commented on during next years,

viz. Virgil's *Georgics*, Cicero's „*Somnium Scipionis*” (a highly poetical prose text), Cicero's „*Cato Maior de Senectute*”, etc. Nor should one forget that in his own „*Somnium*” (1520), a kind of prelude to the text of Cicero's *Somnium*, Vives depicts the great mediaeval philosophers and lawyers — Ockham, Duns Scotus, Petrus Hispanus, Bartholus, Baldus and the like — as the cherished companions of Father Sleep. To be sure, this is a humorous passage, but nevertheless it reveals Vives's state of mind.

Why, then, he was so cautious to call himself „philosophus”, not „poeta”, or if he did, only with the addition of „sanus”. The reason, I think, is not only his real interest in philosophy, but also, and perhaps even more, his situation at Louvain, where he arrived some time after his Paris sojourn of 1514 and definitely not before, as has been asserted by Daxhelet and many scholars who follow him.

What, then, was Vives's position at Louvain? First, I would like to point out that he never was a professor at the university as can be read over and again in modern biographies of Vives. He simply could not be a member of the academic staff for the good reasons that 1. he never received a regular academic degree, 2. nor even registered at the university. Vives came to Louvain clearly by the way of the Brussels Court, where in 1516 he was employed a couple of times in diplomatic contacts thanks to his skill as a Latin orator, and first and foremost as a tutor to sons of important courtiers, among them the families Van Bergen and de Croy. In his quality of Latin praceptor he accompanied his pupils when they were sent to the university and there he privately taught them Latin. In this way he explained Virgil's *Georgics* to the young Antoon van Bergen in 1518. In this way too he quite naturally came into contact with the small circle of Louvain humanists, headed by Erasmus and professor Hadrianus Barlandus, who both also happened to be well introduced at the Court in Brussels. These contacts, however, inevitably put Vives on the side of the „*viri trilingues*” and „*poetae*”, who were anything but favoured, nay constantly suspected and often harshly treated by the academic authorities, the powerful theological faculty and many members of the faculties of canon and civil law. These were the difficult years of the battle for the foundation and organisation of the Collegium Trilingue Lovaniense. Although permission to establish such a College was finally granted in 1517, its troubles were by no means over and several times in the first years of its existence courses were forbidden by the suspicious or envious academic authorities. Moreover humanists were still considered a danger to the faith and the Church, or at least their activity was stigmatized as a waste of time. In this context let us recall the experience of another Louvain humanist, Martin Dorpius, who a few years before Vives arrived on the banks of the Dijle. Dorpius had enthusiastically engaged upon a career of teaching Latin as a full-blown humanist, writing Latin verses and for the first time at Louvain giving life to a Classical Theatre, where he staged Plautus

with the students of the Arts Faculty and himself wrote a new text for the missing fifth act of the *Aulularia*. At this point he received a visit from one of the most powerful professors in divinity, Joannes Briardus, who kindly but firmly — so Dorpius tells us — urged him to stop such nonsense and devote all his time to serious matters namely theology. So, what could I do, Dorpius continues in a letter to his friend Paludanus; nobody of course can refuse anything to such a kind master!

We no longer need explain any more why Vives had good reason not to proclaim too loudly his own sympathy for the „poetae” at Louvain. There can be no doubt that the same Briardus kept a watchful eye on the other humanists and on the young foreigner from Valentia in particular. So, when Vives enjoyed a certain fame as a humanist teacher of poetry — Barlandus testifies that he awoke the sleeping Muses at Louvain in 1517 — the young Spaniard decided to soothe the powerful master by offering him a specimen of his work. He therefore presented him on New Year's day 1519 with his „Genethliacon Jesu Christi” or Christ's birth-song, a kind of Christmas carol so to say. The dedicatory letter is extremely instructive. He first explains that he is sending as a present some flowers he collected in the field of Christian religion, for he did not think it decent and in agreement with his conscience to occupy himself with prophane literature during Christmastime. So he first decided to write a birthday-song in verse, but then it turned out that he lacked the skill to compose such a work — which is perfectly untrue, since he could write verses very well, but it might suggest to Briard that he rarely practised that art. So he finally wrote it in prose, but for the end, which consists of three short poems, two in hexameters and one in Sapphic lyrics. These verses were to prove to Briard that Vives was a „sanus poeta”, i.e. a morally sound poet, not one of those lewd humanists.

Apart from soothing Briard, Vives certainly had another intention when he sent this present. About this time he began to apply to the academic authorities for permission to teach in public in the Universiteitshal (the University building) as a private lecturer. It was therefore essential for him to keep the influential theologians at ease concerning his work and intentions. Even so, the grant of this permission lingered on for more than a year and the discussions in the Academic Council culminated in that ridiculous meeting of March 1520 when the rector and all his colleagues burst out laughing when they heard that Vives wanted to read publicly on Cicero's *Dream of Scipio*. Obviously nobody there had even the slightest idea of what the *Somnium* really was, one of the most beautiful Classical prose texts. This fact shows that by 1520 humanism was really nowhere in the leading academic circles of the University and at the same time it illustrates how isolated and lonely such men as Vives must have been in that academic world. Stressing his quality as a philosopher therefore, was a means of breaking through this isolation and an attempt to be taken se-

riously as a scholar. It was safer to brandish the banner of Aristotle than that of Virgil.

During these early years at Louvain, i.e. from about 1518 to 1523, Vives was thinking constantly of rhetoric and poetry, wavering between the purest humanist enthusiasm on the one hand („Veritas Fucata sive de Licentia poetica”), and petty moralistic disapproval on the other.

In his introduction to the *Georgics* (1518) we see Vives as an enthusiast reader of Classical poetry, who bestows lavish praise not only on Virgil, but also on Homer, Theocritus and last but not least, on modern Politianus as the author of a poetical introduction to the *Georgics* called „Rusticus”. The Florentine is the finest author of Vives’s time (‘politissimus auctor, quem nostra aetas vidit’) and the delight of the Muses: „deliciae musarum Latinarum”. As to Virgil, Vives feels that his verses are full of an „admirabilis vis docendi, delectandi ac movendi”; they have a marvellous power to instruct, to give pleasure and to move. Furthermore his works are almost perfect examples of the three Classical styles: the low style in the *Eclogues*, the medium in the *Georgics* and the grand style in the *Eneid* which is even better than Homer. To put it in one word: Virgil is a poetical genius. In this lecture written to stimulate the intellectual appetite of his young pupil Van Bergen, not a single line of criticism against poetry in general or Virgil in particular can be found. It is a classical example of pure humanist admiration for an ancient text and also for its modern imitator.

When, however, one turns from this praise of Virgil to the first *Veritas Fucata*, written one or at most two years later and published in the same comprehensive volume of „*Opuscula varia*” (Louvain 1520), it is hard to believe one is reading the same author and one wonders whose formidable shadow is looming behind the formerly enthusiastic praeceptor and thrust him into this complete turnabout. Was it still Briard, shortly before his death on 8 January 1520, or simply the general atmosphere at Louvain? In any case, the tenor of this essay is to me as enigmatic and psychologically difficult to explain as that fierce attack on the Jews Vives wrote at the end of his life, even though he was himself of Jewish descent and had lost his father in the cruel persecution of the Spanish Inquisition. Perhaps we cannot exactly imagine the full impact of a sixteenth-century theological faculty on the life of men within the immediate reach of its power and authority. But let us turn now to the first „*Veritas Fucata*”.

The overall composition is rather awkward, as is the wording in a few passages, unless the text in Maiansius’s edition of the „*Opera Omnia*” is not correct, as I am inclined to believe. It falls into two main parts, after an initial startling statement that a sudden change has taken place in the lecture-room, nay in the college: in fact, until recently and for many years int resounded with heathen names, Jove, Juno, Hercules, Cupid, Venus and

other such vile names, but now only the names of Christ and Mary are heard. We will see further on what the implications of this statement are.

In the first part Vives engages upon a rather confused allegorical story about Veritas or Truth, a noble daughter of God, and Mendacium or Lie, a monster neither male nor female engendered by the Devil. Then enters man, who at a certain point is also qualified as a Devil's child. In any case he likes Mendacium more but is ordered by God to worship Veritas. This dilemma is solved by means of a compromise. He worships Veritas, but not in her pure and bright splendour, which he cannot bear, but he envelops her or counterfeits her by means of Lies, notwithstanding Truth's sharp protest. Thus Veritas Fucata came into being.

The second part is a long speech by Truth. It is better writing than the first — Vives in these years much enjoyed writing fictitious orations — and it is here that we are really baffled by the contents.

Veritas first loudly proclaims her divine origin and the pureness of her mind. When God created man, He wanted her to be a part of man's mind or intellect. But later generations, under the Devil's influence, liked „fucus” or counterfeit more than the simple naked Truth. However, man is never more like God than when he speaks the truth, never more like the prince of darkness than when he lies.

At this point Veritas suddenly approvingly quotes St. Jerome who says that the poet's poems are the Devil's food, at least the works of these poets who taught themselves lies and others as well. One such is the blind and insane Homer, who so thoroughly enjoyed lying that he chose Ulysses as his hero. Therefore — and now Veritas addresses the College students directly, forgetting the whole allegorical casting — you no longer can see the truth; you are no longer the true descendants of your fathers, who in this college always sought the pure and simple truth. Now Veritas becomes even more explicit: Who brought you in here, she asks. This evil has been introduced by „poetastri”, who as a „Porcus Troianus”, a Trojan pig full of silly stories moved in here and expelled the philosophers on whose behalf the college was built.

Now this and the initial statement quoted above are very plain allusions to and attacks on the humanist literary activities in Barlandus's College. In fact the „Porcus Troianus” instead of the common „Equus Troianus”, the Trojan horse, does not make sense until one realises that Barlandus's College, one of the four of the Arts Faculty whose programme traditionally mainly consisted of philosophy, was called „Pedagogie Het Varken”, in Latin „Paedagogium Porci” because of its emblem, which can still be seen today in the common room of Pope's College, which was built near the now no longer existent Pig College.

Such an attack on Barlandus and his humanist work at the Pig, is the last thing we would expect from Vives. Yet he wrote it and allowed it to be published.



In the final part of her speech Veritas/Vives exhorts the students to expel those vain „poetistae” from their college and to act as Plato prescribes happy states to do. Veritas concludes with a final scoffing at Fucus and Mendacium, both useless and pernicious beings, and with an urgent appeal to part with all counterfeit and to love from now on the pure Truth.

This strange opusculum takes the reader aback. Such an anti-humanistic pamphlet is altogether unexpected from a man who is supposed to be one of the cornerstones of early sixteenth — century humanism in Brabant and who beyond any doubt spent most of his time reading and studying the Classics. The number and the wide range of his quotations from Roman poets alone prove that he was a voracious reader of all the available texts from the fragments of Ennius to the works of Claudian and Boethius. So one has to conclude that Vives wrote this under strong moral pressure, and one cannot help thinking of that surely ironical passage in his own „Somnium” written about the same time: „Everywhere in the world reign fear, evil intent, misery, envy etc. Not so at Louvain, from which envy, deceit and obstinacy stay far away, and where all is full of love and friendship” (V, p. 65). The continuous clashes between the „viri trilingues” and the „magistri nostri” tell quite a different story. And in these years of the raging Lutheran storm the ‘magistri’ were particularly sensitive and, as one can read in Eustachus of Zichem, gave humanism the guilt of the Reformation disputes.

The undated „Sapientis Inquisitio” seems to belong to the same period, although its setting is not Louvain but Paris. We know, however, that in May 1519 Vives paid a visit to his old friends in the French capital. The „Sapiens” is a dialogue between Vives, his old master Gaspar Lax and the famous Nicholas Bérault, who in 1514 had published a course on Politianus’s „Rusticus”, the poem Vives praised so highly in his own course on Virgil, as I mentioned above. The purpose of the dialogue is to find a wise man among the professors of the University; therefore, Vives and his friends successively ask a grammarian, a poeta, a dialectician etc. to speak about their art. The poet drags out a long mythological exposé as a summary of the „poetarum sacra theologia”. Whereupon Lax wearily concludes: „What is more wain than a poet. Let us hope that these studies will soon dwindle lest this mighty plague spreads too far. Nothing true you will find in it, but merely profane things and a mixture of human and divine. So, do away with this devil’s relative — viz. the poet — who cannot speak unless he lies”.

Did Vives regret these statements after a while? Or did a humanist friend point out to him that he had indeed exaggerated? We do not know, yet we cannot but notice that two years later his opinion had changed again. The second „Veritas Fucata” is written in a quite different tone and goes very far indeed towards a rehabilitation of poetry.

The work is a dialogue between Vives and his friend Vergara, who

most of the time is speaking. The full title is: „The Counterfeit Truth or on poetical abuse, how far poets are allowed to part from Truth”. Putting the problem in this way is remarkable in itself, since in the previous work there was no question at all of abandoning Truth. A further striking difference is that Mendacium as the opposite of Veritas is replaced by another hermaphrodite being Falsus. Mendacium itself is reduced to a minor companion of mister Falsus. The latter does not like his name very much and prefers to be called Fucus. This is significant since it soon appears that in this dialogue Falsus stands for Fiction rather than Falsehood.

The central point on which the debate focuses is to know how Truth and Fiction can be reconciled in literature and especially in poetry. So, we are not facing here and indiscriminate rejection of poetry and fiction, but rather a level-headed review of the moral and aesthetic implications of literature. Homer is no longer a black beast although he belongs to the camp of the Falsiani. But he acts as the worthy head of an official mission sent by Falsus to Veritas, the result of which is a common agreement in ten points. It is necessary to list here these points in order to make clear the gap separating Veritas I from Veritas II:

1. Poets must not invent fiction themselves, since in that way they will be liars. But they can use freely all that can be counterfeited — and here there are no restrictions at all — by „Fama Publica”, which can be gossip, popular stories, etc.

2. All what happened before the first Olympic games were held, i.e. thirty years before the foundation of Rome, remains in the dark and therefore fiction is allowed for that age. The only restriction is that one should not alter versions of the facts consecrated by great authors. Thus Virgil was justified in telling the story of Dido, since that happened before the Olympic era and Ennius (in fact Naevius — Vives confuses the two poets) already had told the story.

This, I believe, is the only passage where Vives does not strongly disapprove of love-stories.

3. As far as more recent history is concerned, Truth should prevail, although limited embellishments can be made. Here Virgil earns much praise for books VI and VIII of the Eneid, as do the historical epics of Lucan and Silius Italicus.

4. It is allowed to mix fiction and history, if the fiction remains restricted to pre-Olympic matters.

5. Given the great importance of good morals, authors can use fiction for the purpose of fostering decent life and for this reason invent fables, comedies and dialogues.

6. It will always be permitted to counterfeit Truth by means of enigmas, metaphors and other rhetorical devices.

7. As far as art and educational matters are concerned, Truth must be

kept entirely pure, except that the use of metaphorical language is permitted.

8. Counterfeit of Truth must always be handled in a likely, coherent and decent way: *verisimile* — *constantia* — *decorum*.

9. If someone wants to follow *Falsus* just for fun — and *Falsus* ought not to be wanting for companions — this is possible, if only he is a really skillfull writer. He will obtain the Milesian citizenship, talk in a pleasant way and live with Lucian, Apuleius and the Roman emperor Clodius Albinus.

Now this is unheard of in *Vives* before as well as after. He always abhors novelists such as Boccaccio and Poggio or vernacular writers on similar themes, who here receive official recognition. *Vives* goes even further under this ninth point and allows the bawdy poet Aristides to be in honour and stay. Here however, he adds, the Christians and the philosophers interrupted the debating parties and demanded that before long Catullus' law be abolished officially. By Catullus' law *Vives* understands the four famous verses in which the poet of Verona asserts that a good poet should be chaste, but not his verses.

10. All who practise counterfeit under other conditions than these will be banished by both Truth and Fiction and ejected from all schools.

Compared to what we have heard before, this agreement between *Veritas* and *Fucus* is surprisingly broad-minded and *Vives* is justified in asking at the end of the dialogue what more the poets could desire. In fact in *Veritas II* he made greater concessions to poetry and literature than he himself was really willing to make, as one can learn from his later works. Again the question arises under whose influence he wrote this tract: was it an attempt at reconcile some humanist friends who must have been hurt by the first *Veritas fucata*? We shall probably never know, unless new letters or similar documents turn up. It is, however, quite remarkable that *Vives* never had a second edition of either of these *Veritas*-pamphlets published, although he reissued most of his works once or more. It seems as if he wanted to forget them as soon as possible.

I think we can best trace *Vives's* real ideas on poets and poetry in his major works on education which display true consistency of opinion and even great similarity in wording. These works are „On the education of women” (1523), „On higher education” (1531) and „On Style” (1532). In reviewing these works I will deal first with *Vives's* personal relationship to poetry and then discuss his ideas on poetry within a Christian community in general.

To begin with the first point, there can be no doubt that *Vives* was really sensitive to the formal beauty of Classical Latin verse. This is apparent from his lectures on the *Georgics* and *Eclogues* of Virgil as well as from several other passages in his works such as the first lines of chapter 4 in the second book of „*De causis corruptarum artium*” or the long cri-

tical review of ancient and modern Latin literature in book 3 of „De Tradendis disciplinis”. On the other hand he shares the deep contempt of many humanists for mediaeval forms of Latin poetry such as rhyming and non-quantitative verse, leonine hexameters etc. This attitude is surprising since in the first book of „De Causis” he wrote a very outspoken passage against the weight of authority and tradition in literary matters, and there he passes strictures on the Poetical Arts of Aristotle, Horace and Vida for simply having codified existing rules and having followed practice („usus”) as a master even there where traditional use is no master at all. On the basis of this page of really independent thinking one would expect a more open approach towards non-Classical forms of poetry, but this just did not succeed and humanist dogmas proved to be stronger than a personal evaluation.

In matters of content Vives was a man who never read for mere pleasure but always for eminently practical purposes: scholarly information, education, moral edification. Again and again he underlines what a ghastly waste of time it is to read novels and love poems and he expressly quotes apart from Ovid and the Roman elegists such popular mediaeval stories as Amadis de Gualle, Lancelot of Denmark, The Knights of the Round Table, Orlando Furioso etc. The passage on novelists in the second „Veritas fucata” cited above is an absolutely isolated case. In his Book on Style he dismisses the „fabulae licentiosae” or novels as rubbish and not worth dealing with in such a treatise. For Vives’s obvious incapacity to relax by reading something lighter than learned or pious books, I find a typical story in the dedication letter to his Meditation on Psalm 101, written in 1517, when he was about 25 years old. One evening alone in a hotel at Cambrai, he says, he could find nothing but a French book, possibly a novel or similar work. In any case he could not find delight in it and, therefore, he decided to write something himself, namely a meditation on a penitential psalm.

Taking into consideration this state of mind, one can easily understand the general rules of reading and literary studies which Vives wanted applied in the educational curriculum of women and children as well as in the life of Christian people. These rules can be summarized in this one sentence from „De Causis Corruptarum Artium”: „quodsi omnino poeta is demum est, qui mendacia versu concelebrat, valeat poesis!” i.e. If a poet is nothing but a man who is putting lies to verse, then get on with poetry! One notices here the return of the term „mendacia”, the key-word of Veritas I, virtually dropped in Veritas II.

As a matter of fact, Vives’s standpoint concerning poetry in his major works, in 1523 as well as ten years later, is entirely moral, not literary or aesthetic: poetry is fine on the condition that it is pious and/or useful, i.e. when it sings the praises of God (not of the pagan gods!), of Christian faith and virtues, or when it stigmatizes vice and wickedness. In this context

it is interesting to observe that Vives finds greater merits, as far as contents are concerned, in the contemporary vernacular théâtre than in ancient comedy; even the author of the *Celestina*, otherwise contemptible, must be praised because the luscious bawd and her companions meet with a bad end.

Poetry is equally to be recommended when it teaches useful subjects in the field of moral or natural sciences, e.g. Virgil on agriculture, Aratus on astronomy and other didactic authors.

On the other hand Vives has not one good word for any other subject. He strongly condemns, of course, erotic poetry, but mythological poems too, such as the story of the Argonauts or others on the pagan gods which are of no use to Christian life and often quite noxious. Such books, Vives argues, should never be given in the hands of children and women lest their virtue be endangered. At most these texts must be kept in libraries in case a scholar needs them for consultation — a kind of „enfer” section so to say — but Vives would not regret it if they were lost: so many better writings perished in the course of the centuries. Furthermore Vives advises pruning the morally objectionable passages: nobody will complain and it is even to the advantage of the poets concerned. It is like pulling out weeds in the garden in order to save the vegetables and flowers. This advice, as we all know, has been followed by many schoolbook makers. The Horace I read in school was still a pruned Horace, every trace of love-making with girls carefully eliminated or rewritten.

A last point in Vives' arguments is that it is of no use trying to save poets such as Homer by means of an allegorical or philosophical interpretation of their false stories. Here Vives agrees with Seneca saying that such interpretations are absurd since one can find anything in any text if only you look hard enough. As a modern example of such erroneous aberration Vives cites Christophorus Landinus of Florence, who asserted that Virgil was a perfect philosopher and a Christian to boot.

Here, of course, we can heartily support Vives's views. But, once again, a surprise lurks behind the corner! When we look at his notes to the *Eclues* of Virgil, a course he taught at Breda for lady Mencia de Mendoza, we find a most startling allegorical interpretation: the dead shepherd Daphnis or the child to be born to Pollio are explained as poetical veils of Christ. Vives admits, though, that Virgil most probably was not himself aware that he was writing veiled prophecies concerning the Messiah, but this is only so because Virgil misunderstood his source, namely the Sibylline messages. Vives, clearly against his own theory, here clings to an old patristic and mediaeval tradition of Virgilian „interpretatio christiana” and also remains in accordance with early humanist bucolic custom: Petrarch's and Boccaccio's eclogues, to cite only two names, are clusters of inextricably obscure allegory.



I do not want to end this talk on Vives and poetry with a general conclusion on Vives as a literary critic. For all I have said a parallel discussion of Vives and rhetoric must first be made. Equally important, I feel, is a critical and annotated edition of his works that would provide a more reliable text than Mayansius, with information on Vives's sources and other indispensable references. Such an edition could be the basis of a careful revision of Vives's life and the growth of his ideas. A reconsideration of the evidence for only a few early years (1512-17) has led me to the conclusion that commonly held views can be completely wrong, mostly because they are based on an erroneous interpretation of Latin documents.