Wifely Duty in Disaster: Juan Luis Vives and Lucan, *Pharsalia,* Book 8[1]

Edward V. GEORGE

Carlos Noreña, in his landmark book on the expatriate Spanish humanist Juan Luis Vives, refers to Lucan only once.[2] He cites evidence that Vives regards a string of Christian poets (Sidonius, Paulinus, Juvencus, etc.) as competitive "in many places" with any of their classical counterparts; and then he observes that this curious judgment "fits well with his [Vives'] preference for Lucanus over Vergil and Horace."

The reader might readily share Noreña's bemusement at both these decisions by Vives. After all, harsh and merited assessments of the *Pharsalia* are common in our own day, and go back to Lucan's own century. In this paper I intend to suggest two reasons for Vives' affinity for Lucan, and then to apply the observation to a remarkable problem case, in which Vives employs the same Lucanian passage in two places to amplify two contradictory positions.

[1] I use the following abbreviations. Ahl = Frederick Ahl, *Lucan: An Introduction* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1976). Mayer = R. Mayer, ed., *Lucan, Civil War VIII* (Warminster, Eng: Aris & Phillips, 1981). Noreña = Carlos Noreña, *Juan Luis Vives* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1970). *VOO = Ioannis Ludovici Vivis Valentini Opera Omnia*, ed. Gregorius Majansius (Valencia: Montfort, 1782ff.). 8v. Cited by volume and page number, with punctuation and orthography adapted. Translations of Vives are my own. For Lucan I use *M. Annaei Lucani de bello civili*, ed. D.R. Shackleton Bailey (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1988). Translations of Lucan are from Lucan's *Civil War,* translated by P. F. Widdows (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1988). Citations of the *Pompeius fugiens* are by paragraph from the edition of E.V. George and Constant Matheeuseen in J. L. Vives, *Early Writings*, ed. C. Matheeussen et al. (Leiden: Brill, 1987), pp. 107-47.

[2] Noreña, p. 180, n. 11.

First, let us see Vives' principal critical comment on Lucan, occurring in the instructions to William Mountjoy for the education of his son Charles:

> *Vergilius ponitur primus merito mea sententia propter gravitatem et sententias. Huic Horatius iungitur carmine excultus ... Silius multum habet diligentiae. Ex Latinis tragicis solus ad nostram aetatem pervenit Seneca. Sed omnes et verborum maiestate, et argumentorum viribus, et sententiarum pondere ac numero vincit meo quidem iudicio Lucanus.*
>
> Vergil is justly ranked first in my reckoning, for his seriousness and his maxims. Horace is coupled with him; his poetry is polished ... Silius is a very careful worker. Of the Latin tragedians Seneca alone has come down to us. But it is my firm opinion that for the solemnity of his words, the force of his argument, and the value and frequency of his maxims Lucan takes the prize.[3]

Whom, then, does Vives prefer: Vergil or Lucan? He might be simply contradicting himself, which in such a short space would be surprising. Alternatively, we can take him to mean that while it is reasonable for Vergil to rank first in others' estimation for his *gravitatem* and his *sententias* (note the passive *ponitur*, with no explicit agent), Lucan is the actual winner (*vincit,* active) in Vives' own mind, on the grounds enumerated. In any event, observers ordinarily base Vives' esteem for Lucan on his critical remarks alone,[4] without turning (as we shall do here) to his actual use of Lucan in his writings.

Two characteristics of Vives' work make a kinship with Lucan reasonable. The first is Vives' practice of recreating historical events in a dramatic, imaginatively compelling manner, a pursuit which gives us among other works his *Pompeius fugiens* (1519) and *Declamationes Sullanae* (1520), declamatory pieces featuring ancient historical characters as speakers. The *Pharsalia*, a historical epic famous (or infamous) for its

[3] *VOO* 1, p. 276.

[4] See for example Heinz-Dieter Leidig's sole allusion to Vives in *Das Historiengedicht in der englischen Literaturtheorie: Die Rezeption von Lucans* Pharsalia *von der Renaissance bis zum Ausgang des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1975), p. 68, n. 5.

many speeches and for the rhetorical exaggerations emanating from the poet's own persona, likewise plies the territory of oratory and history as well as poetry.

The second characteristic is Vives' capacity for a pessimistic outlook, a view of life as a struggle and a trial. Lucan, preoccupied with the horrors of war and the disaster of the Republican hero Pompey, for whom he exhibits profound sympathy,[5] creates a melancholy atmosphere to which Vives responds wholeheartedly in composing the *Pompeius fugiens.*

Among Vives' uses of Lucan is a pair of references to *Pharsalia* 8.50-108, which narrates the lament of the doomed Pompey's wife Cornelia and his response to her after the battle of Pharsalia. Vives recalls the episode first in the *Pompeius fugiens*, and resorts to it once again in the *De institutione feminae Christianae* of 1523. His two allusions to this scene clash so harshly with each other as to call for close examination.

In the Lucanian passage the defeated Pompey reunites with his distraught spouse, whom he tries to console as she revives after fainting:

50-65a Cornelia sees Pompey's boat approaching and collapses in a deathlike swoon.
65b-85 Pompey revives and admonishes her.
86-105a Cornelia replies, accepting responsibilty for the debacle because of the curse which she believes she brought into the marriage.
105b-108 She falls back into his arms; Pompey's iron heart relents, and he weeps.

The *Pompeius fugiens* is a soliloquy by Pompey himself after the loss to Caesar, pondering the speed and distance of his fall. Save for a brief allusion to Juvenal, the *Pharsalia* is the

[5] Though we find sympathy here, modern Lucan scholars have noted considerable variety, and inconsistency, in Lucan's attitudes toward Pompey. The doomed warrior in Lucan's portrayal has variously been seen as excessively attached to the past, separated from his men in his nostalgia for past glory, protagonist in the power struggle with Caesar, and leader of the fading republican oligarchy. For further details see Vincent Hunink, *M. Annaeus Lucanus, Bellum Civile Book III: A Commentary* (Amsterdam, 1992), pp. 30-31.

only classical poetic source for the declamation, which however resorts to a list of historical models such as Plutarch, Valerius Maximus and Livy. Vives employs several speeches from the *Pharsalia*, notably a revision of Cordus' plea for a simple burial of his master (*Phars.* 8.729-42; cf. *Pompeius fugiens* 30). While developing this long declamatory object lesson in the risks of trusting fortune, when Vives turns to the epic passage under discussion he takes a creative leap. In Lucan we find the briefest of responses to Cornelia's *mea culpa*; Pompey breaks into tears (105b-108):

> *sic fata iterumque refusa*
> *coniugis in gremium cunctorum lumina solvit*
> *in lacrimas. Duri flectuntur pectora Magni,*
> *siccaque Thessalia confudit lumina Lesbos.*

> As she finished, / Once again she collapsed in his arms, and everyone present / Started to weep for her plight, stern-hearted Pompey among them: / Lesbos dimmed with tears those eyes that were dry at Pharsalia.

The Lesbians step forward to offer Pompey their sympathy and hospitality, which he accepts with fulsome praise for their loyalty and scant attention to Cornelia's grief. The narrative resumes.

Vives' Pompey, however, steps in at the point of Cornelia's distress, insists that she is wrong to shoulder the blame for his fall, and grieves that the disaster will wound her tender nature more severely than his own:

> *O mea Cornelia, ... quid tu de diis ipsis male merita es, ut huius tantae calamitatis fieres particeps? Nata in gente ac familia Scipionum, matrimonio in opulentissimam Crassi domum adducta, nunc patria, domo, penatibus ... relictis, exsul exsulem, profuga profugum, misera miserum sequi cogere. Quae te iniqua et invida sors, quis tam improbus fallaxque genius Pompeio Magno adulatoria et fallaci specie honoris coniunxit? Quis non tibi gratulabatur coniunctam esse te matrimonio illi viro ...? Miserum me, quam immutata sunt omnia! Nunc praestaret aut te Crassi viduam semper mansisse, aut uxorem esse alicui ex turba equitum Romanorum. Heu me,*

Cornelia mea, quanto me maior tui sollicitudo urget quam mei! Vir enim ego sum, in quem adversi casus non tam valent; tu femina, et talis femina, genere clarissimo, casta, verecunda, pudica, pulcherrima, non modo iniuriae obnoxia sed oblata; quae, cum sis eiusmodi moribus, etiam minima iniuria tibi gravissima erit. Hei quam verum illud est: quo fuisti propior ignem, eo citius vehementiusque accensa es!

O my Cornelia ... how have you deserved such evil treatment from the gods themselves as to make you a party to this overwhelming disaster! Born to the clan and family of the Scipios, led as a bride to the lavish house of Crassus, you are now constrained to leave your country, home, hearth ... and follow me, an exile after an exile, a fugitive with a fugitive, a derelict with a derelict. What unfair and malevolent destiny, what evil and deceiving spirit, joined you with Pompey the Great in the flattering and false guise of an honor? Who did not offer congratulations for your union in matrimony with this man ...? Oh me, what a complete overthrow of everything! Now you would be better off having remained Crassus' widow forever, or being the wife of someone from the rabble of Roman knights! Woe is me, Cornelia, how much greater is my anguish for you than for myself! For I am a man, upon whom adversity does not have such a severe impact; but you, a woman and the kind of woman that you are, daughter of a most noble family, chaste, modest, demure, most fair, are not merely subject to harm but its victim; and the habits of your life will render the slightest offense deeply grievous to you. Ah, how true it is that the closer you have been to the fire the more quickly and terribly you are burned! (*Pompeius fugiens* 6)

The reader finds it easy to admire and share Pompey's helpless compassion for Cornelia. One might even think of Hector in *Iliad* 6 fatalistically rehearsing what will become of Andromache. Poor Cornelia, who would have been better off a widow or a common footsoldier's wife, will now be the target of the troops' coarse humor, and probably of Caesar's lustful advances as well—this last grim prospect an echo of Cornelia's own fears in Lucan (*Pharsalia* 8.661).

Vives' second use of the episode, by contrast to the first, is not a creative expansion, but an appeal to Lucan's sentiments unaltered as to an authoritative source. It is also a far cry from

the consolatory tone of the *Pompeius fugiens* adaptation. The treatise *De institutione feminae Christianae*, *On the Education of a Christian Woman*, a manual for the benefit of Catherine of Aragon's daughter Mary, evokes Lucan on three occasions.[6] The most striking occurs as Vives discusses the reasons a woman should love her husband (*VOO* 4, pp. 192-93). There we find a detailed paraphrase of the stern Pompeian admonitions found at *Phars.* 8.72-85:

VIVES	LUCAN
Mea Cornelia uxor, rerum omnium mihi carissima, miror te feminam isto genere natam sic primo fortunae prostratam ictu;	*Nobile cur robur fortunae vulnere primo / femina tantorum titulis insignis avorum, / frangis?*
nunc tibi aperta est via ad immortalem gloriam,	*Habes aditum mansurae in saecula famae. /*
nam materia laudis in femineo sexu non est eloquentia, non respondere consulentibus de iure, non bellum gerere,	*Laudis in hoc sexu non legum cura nec arma, /*
unica tantum est, si maritum habeas miserum;	*unica materia est coniunx miser. Erige mentem, / et tua cum fatis pietas decertet et ipsum / quod sum victus ama.*
quem si amaris, si colueris, si nihil miseria offensa ita ut maritum decet tractaris, omnia te saecula cum ingenti laude celebrabunt; maiori tibi fuerit gloriae, quod victum Pompeium amasti, quam quod principem populi Romani, ducem senatus, imperatorem regum;	*Nunc sum tibi gloria maior, / a me quod fasces et quod pia turba senatus / tantaque discessit regum manus; incipe Magnum / sola sequi.*
haec enim facile est cuilibet etiam stultae ac improbae uxori diligere, amplecti vero miserum, id demum est optimae.	*Deformis adhuc vivente marito / summus et augeri vetitus dolor: ultima debet / esse fides lugere virum.*

[6] Vives makes Lucan's own wife Polla Argentaria a model of conjugal assistance (*VOO* 4, p. 81), and *Phars.* 7.810-11 is cited in the assertion that for a deceased spouse, as for Pompey in the epic, a simple funeral is sufficient (ibid., p. 285). In addition, Vives' *De officio mariti* of 1529, a companion piece to the *De institutione feminae Christianae*, paraphrases *Phars.* 8.104, in which Cornelia sorrowfully admits she is a *paelex* (adulterer) before the dead Julia, Pompey's previous wife (*VOO* 4, pp. 352-53). Vives is expressing his aversion to second marriages at the moment, so again harsh treatment of Cornelia is in order.

Quocirca hoc ipsum, quod victus sum, debes diligere tamquam materiam virtutis tuae, nam si quid tu, me vivo, defles et desideras, certe illud ipsum quod periit ostendis fuisse carum, non me qui adhuc supersum.

Tu nulla tulisti / bello damna meo; vivit post proelia Magnus / sed fortuna perit. Quod defles, illud amasti. [amasti? Shackleton Bailey]

Cornelia my wife, dearest thing of all to me, it is astonishing to see you, daughter of such a family, felled in this way by fortune's first blow;

Why do you falter now, at the first reversal of fortune, / You a woman whose line of brave and illustrious forebears / Should give her strength?

now the path to undying glory lies open to you,

Undying fame is yours to be taken. /

for the female sex's foundation of fame is not eloquence, not consultation at law, nor pursuit of war,

Neither in war nor in peace are the great approaches to glory / Open to women:

but solely the chance that your spouse might plunge into wretchedness.

Their fame derives from the fall of a husband, / Nothing else. So, courage! and let your strength of affection / Struggle with destiny,

If you love, if you cherish him, if you asbsorb the sting of misery and treat him as a husband deserves, the ages will memorialize you with mighty praise; they will glorify you more because you loved the beaten Pompey than because you loved the ruler of Rome, the leader of the Senate, the commander of kings.

and precisely because of my downfall / Love me the more! Today I bring you a title to honor / Greater than any before; with the pomp of office behind me, / Now that the loyal ranks of the Senate and all my attendant / Train of kings have deserted me, now is your time and the chance for / You to support me alone.

For any foolish or wicked wife can easily be fond of these things, but the ultimate mark of a good mate is to embrace her man in misery.

To be plunged in the ultimate depths of / Grief while your husband lives is unbecoming. A wife should / Save her final devotion until the season of mourning.

On this account you ought to be in love with the very fact that I have lost, since this is the stuff of your own virtue; for if you weep and pine while I am yet alive, then you are admitting that your real fondness was for those things that are gone, not for me who have survived them.

This defeat of mine has brought no loss to you: Magnus / Lives on after the battle — the only thing that has gone is / Greatness. That you loved, and that is the loss that you weep for.

"Pompey's words astonish us with their obtuseness," says Ahl; "this speech ... is unlikely to fall upon sympathetic ears nowadays," adds Mayer.[7] Vives, on the contrary, finds it quite practical. He has just argued that a woman should not love a

[7] Ahl, p. 175; Mayer, p. 92.

handsome man for his looks or a rich one for his money, else her love will cease if her husband ever becomes poor or ugly. A learned man will provide advice, a good man exemplary conduct; but should he fall victim to ill fortune, it is time to consult the model of Pompey ("good and prudent beyond a doubt") and his speech to Cornelia.[8] At this point Vives launches into the cited paraphrase. It is all the more arresting since, among the numerous literary references in the *De institutione*, it is the only instance of a meticulous line-by-line recasting of an extended classical passage. This is a moment when Vives finds himself in harmony with Lucan on a matter of weight; indeed, disaster as the precondition for real feminine glory is a recurrent theme in the *De institutione*.

And the care Vives has expended produces a commentary which in one respect enriches recent studies of the same passage. Mayer focuses on Cornelia's nobility, Ahl on the egotism of Pompey.[9] Vives' close paraphrase, which provides an equivalent to everything in Lucan except the words *erige mentem / et tua cum fatis pietas decertet*, is at least as true to the original as Ahl and Mayer. In stressing the gnomic *sententia* that immortal glory is within *any* woman's reach when her mate encounters catastrophe, Vives justifiably emphasizes an overlooked dimension of Lucan's art. His praise, mentioned earlier, of the value and frequency of Lucan's *sententiae* is confirmed here, and happens also to echo Quintilian's judgment that the poet is *sententiis clarissimus*, "held in high renown for his *sententiae*."[10]

The *Pompeius fugiens* and the *De institutione feminae Christianae*, then, illustrate Vives' attraction for Lucan's poetic casting of historical events and his pessimistic sense of human experience. But how are we to judge his inconsistency in the two uses of Pharsalia 8.50-108? One way might be to observe the roles which he is adopting in the two works. In the first his

[8] "Si [maritus eius] sit infortunatus, illa debet in primis animo occurrere Cnei Pompeii, magni sine dubio et prudentis viri, ad Corneliam uxorem oratio quam versibus Lucanus prosecutus est." (*VOO* 4, p. 192.)

[9] Mayer, pp. 92-94; Ahl, p. 176.

[10] Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, 10.1.90.

business is empathy. In following the ground rules of declamation he diminishes, even obliterates, the distance between himself and the persona of his speaker. The sentiments are those one would expect Pompey to have. In penetrating the heart of the pitiable loser, Vives finds him capable of perceiving the echo of his own pain in his wife's heart. Thus the moment of the Lucanian passage which engages Vives is that of Pompey's tears at 8.105. The *Pompeius fugiens*, in fact, could be read effectively as a speech inserted into Lucan's narrative at that very moment.

In the *De institutione*, by contrast, Vives' business is to establish both his own authority as a director of feminine education, and fathers' and prospective spouses' authority as guides for their women. To achieve the proper dominant stature, he must exaggerate rather than diminish the distance between himself and the women who are his ultimate topic. Here, what draws his eye in Lucan's scene is the dimension of discipline, crystallized in the moment when Pompey chides his wife and discourages her tears. In the stance Vives assumes this time, empathy is out of place.

The observations offered here also provide a comparative glimpse of Vives' activity before and after the onset of a series of misfortunes that affected him between 1521 and 1523, especially the death in early 1521 of his pupil and patron Cardinal William Croy and the ensuing psychological and fiscal turmoil.[11] In his literary pursuits prior to 1523, particularly his exercises in various creative genres like declamation, dialogue, and Menippean journey-narrative, Vives had developed a range of talents, notably skill at adopting a variety of *personae.* In the *Pompeius fugiens* we see a pre-1523 instance of a scenario type found commonly in the *De institutione*: a woman is caught between the desire for happiness and the reality of distress. Invariably in the *De institutione*, such situations call for patient feminine endurance, even at the heroic level, and even when she is the wronged party, with a minimum of empathy on the

[11] Cf. Noreña, p. 70.

part of the preceptor-author. In the earlier *Pompeius fugiens* we hear a note of compassion quite missing from the *De institutione*. Perhaps Vives was cultivating, in his inventive earlier humanistic works, capacities for empathy which were later somehow stifled. Perhaps his adopted duties of a discursive preceptor of women preclude, in more profound ways than we have recognized, the free play of emotion available to the younger *lusor* who amuses himself while trying on masks in virtuous revivification of ancient tales and events. The *De institutione* may be showing us, in the use of Lucan, a clue to a regrettable loss in Vives' earlier literary exuberance. Perhaps it was unfortunate that Vives' earlier genre experiments were by and large laid aside between 1523 and 1538, though they then resurfaced in the last two years of his life. Perusal of the Vivesian corpus rouses curiosity regarding such matters. A necessary prerequisite to their satisfactory exploration is the growth of a body of scholarship which will take the hitherto generally neglected direction of considering Vives' works as literary creations. This paper is meant as a small step on that path, and a sample of what may be gained by following it.[12]

[12] This paper benefited from comments received during its presentation at the April 1991 Kentucky Foreign Language Conference, and from leisure time provided by a Texas Tech University Faculty Development Leave. I also wish to thank Vincent Hunink for reading the manuscript and making several valuable observations. Travel funds provided by the National Endowment for the Humanities, as well as the Program for Cooperation between Spain's Ministry of Culture and United States Universities, enabled me to meet Dr. Hunink at the Katholieke Universiteit Nijmegen, Netherlands.