Recent scholarship has made sufficiently clear the decisive impact of Erasmianism upon the Henrician settlement, and the leading role which Juan Luis Vives played within that movement. But even the best informed accounts of Henry VIII's personal and domestic life tend to leave out Vives' intense involvement in the events which led to the Royal divorce in 1529. Thus, e.g., John Scarisbrick's book *Henry VIII* (Berkeley, 1968), an extraordinary accomplishment in many respects, fails to give an adequate characterization of Vives' role. The author mentions Vives only on three different occasions: first, as one of the Humanists who deplored the senselessness of war (p. 22); second, as the author of a "long-winded but competent book on Catherine's behalf" (sic!, p. 166); and, finally as one of Catherine's attorneys (p. 215). To make things worse, Scarisbrick gives Vives' first name in Italian ("Ludovico") and does not mention his Spanish nationality.

The first significant fact is that Vives was the only subject of Charles V in England capable of helping the cause of Catherine. The others - the Spanish Ambassador, the confessor, and the cook of the Queen - were for different but obvious reasons, out of the game. Vives, on the other hand, had won in a few years the respect and admiration of the most powerful men in England. Thomas More and Vives were intimate friends since 1520. In More's household Vives had become acquainted with such men as Thomas Linacre, Cuthbert Tunstall, John Fisher, William Latimer, and Lord Mountjoy. Even Wolsey had succumbed, at first, to Vives' personal magnetism. In March, 1523, the Cardinal had selected him to teach rhetoric at Corpus Christi College, Oxford. The success of Vives' teaching made him a powerful reformer of English education. The King himself had generously patronized Vives' career: in 1522, by warmly accepting the dedication of Vives' *Commentaries* on Saint Augustine's *Civitas Dei*; in the winter of 1523, by breaking a long tradition of the royal family and entering the city of Oxford to listen to Vives' lectures; and finally, in 1524, by granting to the Spanish scholar a royal pension of twenty pounds a year.

From Henry's point of view, however, the most delicate aspect of Vives' position was the cordial friendship between the lonely Spanish Queen and the warm-hearted Spanish scholar. Already in 1521 Catherine had extended her royal patronage to Vives, at that time a professor at Louvain. In 1522 Vives had dedicated to the Queen his moral tract *De institutione feminae Christianae*, and one year later the educational treatise *De ratione studii puerilis*, a program for the instruction of Princess Mary. At Henry's invitation, Vives spent the Christmas season at Windsor with the royal family. As Vives' private correspondence abundantly proves, his conversations with the Queen were spirited, intimate, and frequent.

The tragedy of the divorce severely tested the character of all the people directly involved. Although Henry never doubted whose side Vives would take in the case, he tried as long as he could to avoid the antagonism of the Spaniard, whom he sincerely admired. For a long time Vives' personal relations with the King were much better than his general situation in the Kingdom. In February, 1526, Wolsey made sure that Vives could not regain his professorship at Oxford. Although Vives had never enjoyed the job - from which he was frequently absent - the graceless manner of Wolsey's maneuvering was a clear signal of warning. About this time Vives wrote to a friend that he was "sailing against the stream," and shortly

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thereafter he wrote that he was standing on a slippery path without safety from one day to the next. Nonetheless, Vives still enjoyed the confidence of the King. When, in June, 1525, Vives announced his decision to visit his relatives in Bruges, the King approached him with two personal requests: the first that he buy in London a copy of Erasmus' *Adagia*, the second that he write a reply to Luther's letter of September, 1525, in which Henry was described as a victim of the Roman Episcopate in England. Catherine, on the other hand, begged Vives to return to England in the winter to become the preceptor of Princess Mary. Afraid that Vives' young wife, Margaret, might resist this plan, the Queen herself tried to persuade her to join her husband in Greenwich under her royal protection. Vives never allowed the journey of his wife because he knew well that, before long, the Queen would need much more help than she could extend to anyone in the realm. When Vives returned to London in October, he found that Catherine's situation had considerably worsened. From that moment on, the events took a faster pace. In January, 1528, Vives wrote to a friend that he was being closely watched by Wolsey's agents.

A few days later, Vives made a daring but false move. At the request of Catherine he asked the Spanish Ambassador to inform the Pope of her predicament. Wolsey could not tolerate such abuse: both Vives and the Ambassador were placed under strict house confinement. What Vives later used to call, with some exaggeration, "custodia mea Britannica," lasted for 38 days, from February 28 to April 1, 1528. During this time Vives was ordered by Wolsey to write two documents: the first, a confession of his private conversations with Catherine; the second a theoretical discussion of Catherine's marriage with Henry.

The first document, entirely written by Vives' hand, is still preserved in the Record Office. Although the memoir is an authentic writing of considerable significance, Scarisbrick does not even mention it. In noble and dignified language, Vives complained about the violation of his "humanum ius" by being forced to reveal the secret of his conversations with the Queen; but, since there was nothing in those conversations either partner should be ashamed of, he was ready to comply with Wolsey's order. It was true that Catherine had found him, "her countryman," a person to whom she could confide her problems. The Queen's main suffering was at the idea of losing Henry, "a man she loved more than herself."

Vives candidly admitted that at the request of the Queen, "sanctissima matrona," he had contacted the Spanish Ambassador about the possibility of informing the Pope of Her Majesty's case.

The second document is described by Scarisbrick as "a long-winded but competent book, the title of which he gives in a footnote — without further information — as *Confutatio s Apologia, etc.* (sic!). Unfortunately, this line — the only one the author dedicates to Vives in the whole book — is far from being critically sound. From a letter of Vives to the King three years later (January, 1531), we know for certain that Vives wrote an *opusculum*. Two months later his name was explicitly omitted from the list of Royal Pensioners. The trial of Bishop Fisher informs us that, circa 1529, "a booke which is prynted and borne without certayn auctor or father" was widely known in England, and that the name of Vives — together with that of Cornelius Agrippa and Antony Pulleio — was mentioned as one of its possible authors. On the other hand, it is also a fact that a document of this kind has never been published under the name of Vives in any of the editions of his books. The document Scarisbrick refers to is a rare memoir preserved in the British Museum, the style of which seems much closer to Vives' own style than another document attributed to Vi
by some of his classical biographers. Nevertheless, the *Confutatio* presents serious problems. The writing is dedicated to John Chapuys, who never visited England until 1529, one year after Vives’ exile from the Island. Furthermore, Bishop Fisher confessed during his trial that, in his opinion, the author of the anonymous *libellus* was not Vives, but Agrippa. Chapuys himself was persuaded in 1531 that Vives had done enough for the cause of Catherine by writing his treatise *De institutione feminae Christianae*. Finally, the document examines the replies of several Universities to the legal question of the divorce, replies which Vives professes to ignore in his letter to Henry VIII, March 1531. The authenticity of this document is therefore far from settled, in spite of Scarisbrick’s concise and self-assured footnote. One thing is certain: Vives wrote a short treatise on the royal marriage and sent it to Henry in 1531.

During Vives’ arrest, the King gave another proof of his unwavering respect for the Spanish scholar. From a letter of Sir John Russell to Wolsey, we know that the King had inquired about Vives’ fate, that he was satisfied with the “gentle way” Wolsey had proceeded thus far, and that he had obtained a copy of Vives’ confession regarding which he deeply resented. Vives’ complaint about the violation of his human rights. The Queen also proved, once again, her profound attachment to Vives. When Vives was released, under the promise never to set foot in the Court, the noble Queen sent him a secret message urging him to leave England immediately, a recommendation which Vives was happy to follow without delay.

In November, 1528, Henry VIII granted Catherine the help of two Flemish advocates and of one attorney of her own choice to assist her in the examination of her marriage by Cardinal Campeggio. Scarisbrick mentions Vives’ name as one of Catherine’s attorneys (p. 215), but fails to make clear that the appointment of Vives was the explicit desire of the Queen, and that Vives was the only Spaniard at Court Henry VIII had not excluded by name from such a position. Vives’ cool judgment at that moment was to advise the Queen to desist from offering any defense, which he considered a total waste of time and a part of Henry’s sinister game. Catherine interpreted Vives’ advice — which she would later follow — as a surrender and a mark of cowardice. A few days later Vives left England, never to return again.

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Notes


2 Cranevelt, 80, vv. 4-10.

4 Adams, pp. 190-203, 221, 236.

5 Allen, IV, 1222, v. 17: "Pecunia Reginae me hoc usque alui, et alo."

6 Cranevelt, 90, vv. 26-39.

7 Wolsey tried unsuccessfully to secure the services of Erasmus (Allen, VI, 1682, v. 2) and of Goclenius (Cranevelt, 95, introd., c-j).

8 Cranevelt, 185, v. 22: "In rebus meis navigo hic nonihil adverso flumine."

9 Henry de Vocht, "Vives' Visits to England," pp. 24-26, reproduces the original Latin reply of Vives to Henry. Vives had been unable to find Erasmus' book in London, but found it in Flanders. Vives' pamphlet against Luther was never published.

10 Cranevelt, 252, vv. 11-15. Catherine sent a present to Margarete as a proof of her royal affection.

11 Cranevelt, 251, vv. 5-15; 252, v. 15; 254, vv. 1-19.


14 Mayans, VII, 134-135.

15 Brewer, Letters and Papers, V, 325.

16 Mayans, VII, 134-135: "Sciscitaris Academiarium sententiam de loco Levitici: 'Frater non duet uxor et fratris.' Quid respondeant eruditi, nescio; quid respondeo oporpetat, scio."

17 Brewer, Letters and Papers, IV, 3943.

18 Mayans, VII, 148: Vives reports to Vergara the anecdote of the secret messenger. As for Vives' eager departure from England, see Cranevelt, 261, v. 29: "Id quod feci, hoc præsertim tempore, non invitus."

19 Cranevelt, 261, b. Also, Brewer, Letters and Papers, IV, 4875.

20 Vives wrote to Vergara: "The Queen was furious at me because I would not comply with her wishes right away." See Mayans, VII, 149.