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A call for sobriety: sixteenth-century educationalists and humanist conviviality

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Michel Jeanneret's *A Feast of Words. Banquets and Table Talk in the Renaissance* (1987; English translation published in 1991) highlighted the celebration by Renaissance humanists of food and drink as catalysts of intellectual exchange. The author convincingly argued that Renaissance banquets served as a paradigm for the humanist body of ideas, and thus became an important setting for works of literature and erudition. This article investigates whether the use of banquets in humanist culture is also reflected in the didactic writings of the age. It focuses on the school dialogues of Desiderius Erasmus (1466?–1536) and Juan Luis Vives (1492/3–1540), which proved to be enormously popular and were – according to a 1582 preface – read in “well-nigh every school” in England and continental Europe. The article illustrates how Erasmus and Vives, especially when addressing an audience of young school boys, aimed to organize a controlled satisfaction of bodily appetites, stimulating the interchange of ideas, whilst avoiding gluttony and intoxication, which are as detrimental for intellectual exchange as they are for the individual's physical and spiritual well-being. The humanists' condemnation of excess was thus connected with their analysis of the human condition and their preoccupation that every child should realize his or her full potential as a human being. The key element in this was considered to be education, which trained children to rise above their animal instincts and desires, and prepared them to participate in society as responsible adults.

Keywords: School dialogues; Renaissance humanism; Erasmus; Vives; food; drink

Food and drink, studied as elements important for our understanding of the society and culture in which they are consumed, have attracted growing scholarly interest in recent years. Numerous researchers from all over the world have focused on themes as diverse as the etiquette and rituals surrounding eating and drinking, the social and political implications of dearth, the manufacture of food stuffs and beverages, or religious and gender issues connected with production and consumption.¹ Most of this recent work builds on groundbreaking contributions dating from the 1980s. The study of sixteenth-century food and drink cultures, for instance, still

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¹See, e.g., the designated journals *Food, Culture and Society* (first published in 1997) and *The Social History of Alcohol and Drugs* (first issue 2007) or the recent six-volume set *A Cultural History of Food*, edited by Fabio Parasecoli and Peter Scholliers (Oxford: Berg, 2011).

takes its cue from Michel Jeanneret's *A Feast of Words. Banquets and Table Talk in the Renaissance*. This important book argued that the major themes of the time, namely "the great debate about nature and culture, [and] the realization of the individual's full potential through the simultaneous development of both body and mind", were exemplified in the special codes designed for Renaissance banquets.² Jeanneret convincingly illustrated that Renaissance humanist discourse influenced the ceremonies and manners of eating and drinking during the sixteenth century, as well as their representation in literature and their regularization in a growing number of conduct manuals. The present article tests this analysis by focusing on the presence of food and drink in the didactic writings of two of the most influential humanists from the first half of the sixteenth century – namely: Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466?–1536) and the Valencian Juan Luis Vives (1492/3–1540).³

Food and drink in humanist thought

Jeanneret's study highlighted the humanist celebration of food and drink as catalysts of intellectual exchange. The aim of the host of a banquet was to make guests flirt with, but not succumb to, intoxication, and to organize a controlled satisfaction of bodily appetites which stimulated and enhanced the interchange of ideas around the dinner table. The key word here is "controlled", as Renaissance authors were all too aware of the dangers of overindulgence. As a result, they not only reveled in exuberant descriptions of luxurious feasts⁴, but also wrote moralistic works, offering a normative ideal and professing the salutary effects of a healthy diet or even abstinence. The main concern was – to paraphrase Thomas à Kempis (1379/80–1471) – that "when the belly is full to bursting with food and drink, debauchery knocks at the door".⁵ This connection of excessive eating and drinking with all sorts of unacceptable behavior, especially of a sexual nature, was already present in ancient, biblical and medieval sources⁶, and is abundantly illustrated in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century art. These exuber-

²Michel Jeanneret, *Des mets et des mots. Banquets et propos de table à la Renaissance* (Paris: Corti, 1987), translated by Jeremy Whiteley and Emma Hughes as *A Feast of Words. Banquets and Table Talk in the Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991). The quote is found on p. 3.

³Unless otherwise indicated, all texts of Erasmus in this essay are quoted from the critical editions in the *Opera Omnia Desiderii Erasmi Roterodami* series (henceforth: ASD) and the English translations in the University of Toronto Press edition of the *Collected Works of Erasmus* (henceforth: CWE). In the absence of a modern critical edition of the text, I quote the dialogues of Vives from the first volume of the so-called Mayans-edition: *Joannis Ludovici Vivis Valentini Opera omnia ... A Gregorio Majansio*, 8 vols. (Valentiae Edetanorum: in officina Benedicti Monfort, 1782-1790; henceforth: Mayans) with slightly modernized spelling and punctuation; and the English translation of the same by Foster Watson, *Tudor School-Boy Life: The Dialogues of Juan Luis Vives* (London: J. M. Dent & Company, 1908; henceforth: Watson), sometimes with minor changes. Other translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

⁴A short overview of "Food in literature and related food genres" is provided by Ken Albala, *Food in Early Modern Europe* (Westport – London: Greenwood Press, 2003), 231–244.

⁵Quoted in Herman Pleij, *Dreaming of Cockaigne. Medieval Fantasies of the Perfect Life*, trad. Diane Webb (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 372.

⁶A survey is found in the source collection *Alcohol in Western Society from Antiquity to 1800. A Chronological History* (Santa Barbara – Denver – Oxford: ABC-Clio Information Services, 1985), edited by Gregory A. Austin.

ant scenes of debauchery, such as the *Allegory of Intemperance* by Hieronymus Bosch (c. 1450–1516) or the representation of *Gluttony* by Pieter Breughel the Elder (c. 1525–1569), must certainly have appealed to the imagination of the viewer, but may also have acted as compensatory fantasies containing moral directives. Other examples – such as *The Drunkard*, a woodcut added to the *Dance of Death* of Hans Holbein the Younger (1497/8–1543) which shows a man vomiting on the floor, while Death forces another to drink and the onlookers continue to enjoy what is placed on the table⁷ – illustrate the degrading and possibly fatal effects of dipsomania more directly.

The humanists' condemnation of gluttony is connected with their analysis of the human condition and their preoccupation that man should realize his full potential. The basic assumption is that man is made – not born – human.⁸ A remarkable illustration of this is found in *The Book of the Wise Man* (*Liber de sapiente*) of the French humanist Charles de Bovelles (1479–1567?). The central tenet in Bovelles' thought is that “the wise man is he who has made himself human” (*sapiens est qui se fecit hominem*), thus reaching the highest possible position on Earth.⁹ He argued that there are four levels of existence: being, living, feeling, and understanding. In nature, these levels are represented by inanimate objects (e.g. stones), plants and trees (alive without sensation), animals (alive with sensation), and man (who is, lives, feels, and thinks). This division corresponds with four types of men: the slug-gard, the glutton, the wanton person, and the scholar or wise man – the latter being the only one to really and truly fulfill his destiny as a human being and to unite all four levels of existence in one person. The glutton is thus condemned as an incomplete creature, who is no better than plants and trees, since his sole purpose in life is to provide in his own maintenance:

The glutton is like a plant. Gluttony, or the irrepressible desire to feed the body, causes man to fall from the first place – which is his own – to the third place and makes him very similar to plants, which, although they are demonstrably void of all sensation and pleasure, still exercise the duties of nourishment.¹⁰

⁷It is unclear whether Holbein himself was responsible for this particular woodcut. Cf. *The Dance of Death* by Hans Holbein. With an introduction and notes by James M. Clark (London: Phaidon Press, 1947), 31.

⁸Cf. Erasmus, *A Declamation on the Subject of Early Liberal Education for Children*, ASD I-2, 31: “homines, mihi crede, non nascuntur, sed finguntur” – “man certainly is not born, but made man” (CWE 26, 304).

⁹For Bovelles and his *Book of the Wise Man*, see especially Joseph M. Victor, *Charles de Bovelles 1479–1553. An Intellectual Biography* (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1978); Pierre Magnard, “L'idéal du sage dans le *De Sapiente* de Charles de Bovelles,” in *Charles de Bovelles et son cinquième centenaire 1479–1979. Actes du colloque international tenu à Noyon les 14–15–16 septembre 1979* (Paris: Guy Trédaniel, 1982), 101–108; and Charles de Bovelles, *Le livre du sage. Introduction, nouvelle traduction et notes par Pierre Magnard* (Paris: J. Vrin, 2010).

¹⁰“Gulosus ut planta. Gula sive corporee alimonie irrepressa aviditas hunc a primo proprio loco deiecit in tertium plantisque persimilem efficit, que licet totius sensationis et voluptatis probentur expertes, officia tamen alimentatationis exercent.” Latin text quoted from the edition by Raymond Klibansky printed in Ernst Cassirer, *Individuum und Kosmos in der Philosophie der Renaissance* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1994; reprint of the 1927 edition), 305. A facsimile edition of a collection of Bovelles' works published in Paris in 1510, where the relevant passage appears on fol. 119v, was printed in 1970 (Stuttgart – Bad Cannstatt: Friedrich Frommann Verlag).

The all-important factor – at least according to humanist moralists – in realizing our full potential as human beings is education.¹¹ Children need to be trained to rise above their animal instincts and their desires, so that they learn to live life more fully and are prepared to participate in society as responsible adults. This conviction is illustrated in the following dialogue between a father and his son about the importance of schooling, written by Juan Luis Vives:

Father: Is thy Roscio [i.e. his son's dog] here an animal or a man?

Boy: An animal, as I think.

Father: What have you in you, why you should be a man and not he? You eat, drink, sleep, walk, run, play. So he does all these things also.

Boy: But I am a man.

Father: How do you know this? What have you now, more than a dog? But there is this difference that he cannot become a man. You can, if you will.

Boy: I beg of you, my father, bring this about as soon as possible.

Father: It will be done if you go where animals go, to come back men.

Boy: I will go, father, with all the pleasure in the world! But where is it?

Father: In the school.¹²

Perhaps the most influential formulation of this principle, however, is found in the conduct manual *On Good Manners for Boys* (*De civilitate morum puerilium*) by Erasmus, which was first published in 1530 and remained in constant use until the

¹¹E.g. Erasmus, *A Declamation on the Subject of Early Liberal Education for Children*, ASD I-2, 24: “non sit homo, qui literarum expertus est” – “a man without education has no humanity at all” (CWE 26, 298).

¹²Vives, *Morning Greetings*, Watson, 7–8 & Mayans I, 286: “*Pater:* Hic tuus Ruscio est belua an homo? *Puer:* Belua, ut credo. *Pater:* Quid tu habes cur sis homo, non ille? Tu edis, bibis, dormis, ambulas, cursitas, lusitas: haec ille omnia. *Puer:* Atqui ego sum homo. *Pater:* Quomodo id cognoscis? Quid tu nunc habes plus quam canis? Sed hoc interest, quod ille non potest homo fieri: tu potes, si vis. *Puer:* Obsecro mi pater, effice id primo quoque tempore. *Pater:* Fiet, si eas quo eunt beluae, redeunt homines. *Puer:* Ibo pater multo libentissime. Sed ubi id est? *Pater:* In ludo litterario.” For the role of education in becoming human, see also Vives’ dialogue *Escorting to School*, Watson, 10 & Mayans I, 287: “*Father:* I bring you this boy of mine for you to make of him a man from the beast. *Philoponus* [i.e. the teacher]: This shall be my earnest endeavour. He shall become a man from a beast, a fruitful and good creature out of a useless one.” – “*Pater:* Hunc filiolium meum ad te adduco, ut ex belua hominem facias. *Philoponus:* Dabo in eam rem operam sedulam. Fiet, revertetur ex pecude homo, ex nequam frugi et bonus.”

eighteenth century.¹³ In this work, Erasmus introduces his concept of *civilitas*, which – according to Norbert Elias in his classic account of the process of civilization¹⁴ – “was henceforth fixed in the consciousness of people with the special sense it received from [this] treatise”. The etymology of the word (*civilitas* – being a citizen, from *civis* – citizen) indicates that it affects the whole of society: not only the individual, but the whole community is served if everyone is educated to control their animal instincts and natural appetites. Such an education fosters authentic nobility, which is not defined by blood but by behavior. Good manners are therefore essential, since they are the outward sign of moral rectitude and an integral part of being human. In a chapter specifically devoted to banquets, Erasmus explains that civility extends to moderate eating and drinking, and good table manners.¹⁵ For instance, he instructs children to wash themselves and trim their nails before they sit down at the table; to use a knife, a fork or a spoon; to wipe their fingers and mouth with a napkin or cloth; to avoid drinking or speaking with their mouth full; and to leave the table as soon as it seems that the banquet might slip into debauchery. At all times, children must be taught to practice constraint, since eating too much dulls the mind and alcohol threatens a boy’s moral and physical health. They are thus instructed how to behave when they have grown up and become more active participants in humanist banquets. As a result, these banquets will be characterized by moderation: pleasure and joyfulness will be welcomed, but excess and boorish behavior will not be tolerated.¹⁶ For Erasmus, the most important elements of a banquet are the exchange of ideas between like-minded friends and the stilling of hunger and thirst.¹⁷

Other educational treatises written by Erasmus, such as his *Antibarbari* (1520), illustrate the widespread rejection of the medieval program of study (with its emphasis on logic, metaphysics and natural science) during the sixteenth century. In

¹³For the influence of *On Good Manners of Boys*, see, for instance, the introduction in CWE 25, lvii–lviii; Jeanneret, *A Feast of Words*, 40–43; and Dilwyn Knox, “Erasmus’ *De Civilitate* and the Religious Origins of Civility in Protestant Europe,” *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 86 (1995): 7–55.

¹⁴First published in 1939 as *Über den Prozess der Zivilization*. I have used Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process. Vol. 1: The History of Manners*, trad. Edmund Jephcott (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978), where the quote is found on p. 54. For more recent studies (of more limited scope) offering a critical evaluation of Elias’ analysis, see Anna Bryson, *From Courtesy to Civility. Changing Codes of Conduct in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998) and John Gillingham, “From *civilitas* to civility: Codes of manners in medieval and early modern England,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society (Sixth Series)*, 12 (2002): 267–289.

¹⁵Cf. Franz Bierlaire, “Erasmus, la table et les manières de table,” in *Pratiques et discours alimentaires à la Renaissance*, ed. Jean-Claude Margolin – Robert Sauzet (Paris: G.-P. Maisonneuve et Larose, 1982), 147–160.

¹⁶Cf. Erasmus, *On Good Manners of Boys*: “In conviviis adsit hilaritas, absit petulantia” – “At banquets there should be joviality but no wantonness” (CWE 25, 280). In the absence of a modern critical edition of the Latin text, I quote from Joannes Clericus (ed.), *Desiderii Erasmi Roterodami Opera Omnia in decem tomos distincta*, 10 vols. (Lugduni Batavorum: Petrus Vander Aa, 1703–1706; facsimile printed in 1961 by Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, Hildesheim), I, 1038.

¹⁷See for this aspect also Erasmus’ letter to Haio Cammingha (d. 1558), in which he explains that banqueters should show constraint and pay more attention to conversation than to what comes on the table, edited as nr. 2073 in P. S. Allen (ed.), *Opus epistolarum Des. Erasmi Roterodami*, 12 volumes (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1906–1958).

its stead, humanists promoted what they considered to be “practical learning”, namely the so-called *studia humanitatis*, a cluster of subjects deemed essential for an individual to become truly human.¹⁸ They argued that it is the ability to speak and the aptitude to distinguish right from wrong that set man apart from animal. The educational program should therefore focus on eloquence and virtue, teaching pupils rhetorical skills as well as social values through the study of grammar, rhetoric, poetry (taught as a special application of rhetoric), history (taught as a sort of applied ethics), and moral philosophy. This concern for grammatical and moral formation is reflected in the core curriculum of Renaissance schools. English schoolboys, for instance, would read Cato’s *Distichs* and the comedies of Terence¹⁹ – two sets of texts useful, to paraphrase Erasmus’ judgment, for the teacher who wanted to safeguard his charges from barbarisms in their language as well as in their behavior.²⁰ Apart from creating schoolbooks based on the afore-mentioned classical texts, Renaissance educationalists would also produce their own teaching materials, for instance in the genre of the school dialogue, considered to be an ideal vehicle for grammatical and moral training. Convinced that Latin is best learned through the practice of listening and speaking (rather than through the memorization of grammatical rules), and certain that ethics are best taught by presenting examples of moral rectitude which are worthy of emulation, humanist authors would create little didactic scenes written in a relatively simple language and containing a moral lesson.²¹ These dialogues were read, studied, analyzed, or even performed by pupils, and provided a series of models after which they might fashion their conversational Latin as well as their lives. As the school dialogues were meant to engage pupils by appealing to their interests and by presenting a (frequently amusing) slice of real life, they paint an interesting picture of the period in which they were produced.

¹⁸See, amongst many other studies of Renaissance education, Wayne A. Rebhorn, “Erasmian Education and the *Convivium religiosum*,” *Studies in Philology* 69-2 (1972): 131–149; Charles G. Nauert, *Humanism and the Culture of Renaissance Europe*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), especially 8–24; and Anthony Grafton – Lisa Jardine, *From Humanism to the Humanities. Education and the Liberal Arts in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986).

¹⁹See, especially, the still valuable works by Foster Watson, *The English Grammar Schools to 1660. Their Curriculum and Practice* (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1968, reprint of the 1908 edition) and T. W. Baldwin, *William Shakspeare’s Small Latine and Lesse Greeke*, 2 volumes (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1944).

²⁰Dedicatory epistle of the *Opuscula aliquot* (1514) by Erasmus to John de Neve: “ut habeas quod tuis praelegi cures alumnis, quos nulla neque litterarum neque morum barbarie sinis infici” (Allen 298) – “to give you something to read with those pupils of yours whom you guard from any taint of barbarism in education or in character” (CWE 3, 4). See for this use of Terence also Knox, “Erasmus’ *De Civilitate* and the Religious Origins of Civility in Protestant Europe,” 17.

²¹For the genre of *colloquia scholastica*, see L. Massebieau, *Les colloques scolaires du seizième siècle et leurs auteurs (1480–1570)* (Genève: Slatkine reprints, 1968, reprint of the 1878 edition); Peter Mack, “The Dialogue in English Education of the Sixteenth Century,” in *Le Dialogue au temps de la Renaissance*, ed. Marie-Thérèse Jones-Davies (Paris: Jean Touzot, 1984), 189–209; Jozef IJsewijn and Dirk Sacré, *Companion to Neo-Latin Studies. Part II: Literary, Linguistic, Philological and Editorial Questions* (Leuven: Leuven niversity Press, 1998), 229–231 (with bibliography); and Nicola McLelland, “Dialogue and German Language Learning in the Renaissance,” in *Printed Voices. The Renaissance Culture of Dialogue*, ed. Dorothea Heitsch and Jean-François Vallée (Toronto – Buffalo – London: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 206–225.

Two of the most influential collections in this genre, namely Erasmus' *Colloquies* and Vives' *Dialogues*, frequently discuss the consumption of food and drink, admitting that they might be essential for the survival of man, but at the same time should never come into conflict with good manners, ethical behavior and personal development.²²

Eating and drinking in the *Colloquies* of Erasmus

The first version of Erasmus' *Colloquies*, printed in 1518, was in essence a collection of phrases and idioms, entitled *Formulas for Familiar Conversation* (*Familiarium colloquiorum formulae*). The anthology provided standard expressions to be appropriated by the pupils (who would thus improve their spoken and written Latin), but was also meant – as the title page of several editions between 1522 and 1526 indicated – to instill some life lessons, as they were “not only useful to refine the language of schoolboys, but also to prepare them for life” (*non tantum ad linguam puerilem expoliendam utile, verum etiam ad vitam instituendam*).²³ The *Colloquies* therefore contained – especially as the collection was further rewritten and expanded during Erasmus' lifetime – moral directives and critical reflections on sixteenth-century religious and social mores. What started as a modest manual to improve the colloquial Latin of schoolboys thus grew into a highly polemical mirror of the age, destined for an audience of young and old alike. It exercised a vast and long-lasting influence: despite opposition from the religious orders (who felt offended by their portrayal in the dialogues) and ecclesiastical officials (who put the work on the *Index of Prohibited Books*, where it remained until the end of the nineteenth century), Erasmus' dialogues enjoyed a tremendous success and were reprinted, annotated and translated for centuries.²⁴

Banquets serve as the setting for six of Erasmus' colloquies: *The Profane Feast*, *The Godly Feast*, *The Poetic Feast*, *The Fabulous Feast*, *A Feast of Many Courses*, and *The Sober Feast*.²⁵ Moreover, several other dialogues refer in passing to eating and drinking²⁶, or are almost completely devoted to food- and drink-related sub-

²²I am fully aware that, in order to do complete justice to these texts, one should take into account the interaction of different voices and pay more attention to the different personas used by Erasmus and Vives in their dialogues (see, e.g., Peter Burke, “The Renaissance Dialogue,” *Renaissance Studies* 3–1 (1989): 1–12, at pp. 1–2). However, such an analysis goes beyond the scope of this contribution, and I maintain that it is still fair to conclude that the characters prescribing moderation in the dialogues express the “true opinion” of their creators.

²³Lawrence V. Ryan, “Art and Artifice in Erasmus' *Convivium Profanum*,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 31–1 (1978): 1–16, at p. 2. See also CWE 39, xxxix–xl.

²⁴See the introduction in CWE 39, especially xxxi–xxxix, and Franz Bierlaire, *Érasme et ses colloques: le livre d'une vie* (Genève: Droz, 1977). For a general study of Erasmus' *Colloquies*, see Franz Bierlaire, *Les Colloques d'Érasme: réforme des études, réforme des mœurs et réforme de l'Église au XVIe siècle* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1978). For the inclusion in the *Index of Prohibited Books*, see J. M. De Bujanda (dir.), *Index des livres interdits*, 11 vols. (Sherbrooke – Genève: Centre d'Études de la Renaissance – Librairie Droz, 1985–2002).

²⁵This set of colloquies is discussed as a whole in Lawrence V. Ryan, “*Erasmii Convivia*: The Banquet Colloquies of Erasmus,” *Medievalia et Humanistica* n.s. 8 (1977): 201–215.

²⁶For example in the dialogue entitled *Rash Vows*, where Erasmus indicates that foolish promises are made under the influence of alcohol.

jects, such as *Inns*, *A Fish Diet*, or *The Epicurean*. In these colloquies, Erasmus condemns stinginess as well as the tampering with wine and food, and repeats some of the standard topics of banquet literature, for example that wine loosens the tongue and is essential for the production of good poetry. It quickly becomes clear, however, that the same call for self-control which is formulated in *On Good Manners for Boys* permeates the *Colloquies* as well. The author argues that wine, despite its good qualities, should be enjoyed in moderation and that hangovers should not be blamed on the drink itself, but on the person who was foolish enough to overstep his boundaries. Erasmus rejects all forms of excess and wastefulness, abhors drunkenness, and resents the inappropriate behavior it instigates. Instead, he promotes *The Poetic Feast*, which is – to use his own words – the “sort of feast scholars should have: frugal but gay and mirthful; seasoned with learned stories; without quarrels, bickering, or slander”.²⁷ The participants of such a banquet care little for what comes on the table and, instead, derive their pleasure from throwing lines of poetry back and forth, and discussing exegetical and philological problems. Another colloquy, entitled *The Fabulous Feast*, perhaps offers a more attractive alternative: people who join in are not expected to share their learning, but all kinds of amusing stories. The host only pays for the food; the wine is paid for by those who are unwilling or unable to contribute a tale.

In several passages, Erasmus offers a noteworthy discussion of the hypocrisy of the Church when it comes to food and drink. He denounces the gluttony and drunkenness common amongst priests, monks, or even nuns, and cannot understand why there are such strict rules concerning unimportant details (such as the dress-code of the clergy) on the one hand, and complete tolerance when it comes to misbehavior fueled by alcohol on the other. Erasmus furthermore sees little point in the prohibition of meat on fast days, especially since it inspires the rich to feast on exquisite dishes of fish instead and hurts those who have no access to fresh fish or cannot stand it. Interpreted this way, fasting fails to serve its true purpose, namely to discipline the lustful flesh and submit it to the spirit. Rather than the current petty dietary rules, Erasmus propagates a general moderation, inspired by true piety. Erasmus’ dislike of certain dietary rules also seems to have been inspired by health concerns. As he said, tradition and experience teach us that certain dishes or drinks – especially when enjoyed beyond moderation – threaten the consumer’s physical as well as spiritual wellbeing. The problem, however, is that it remains unclear which foodstuff can be trusted and which not, as various doctors and other authorities do not seem to agree. The issue is further complicated by the fact that some physicians conspire against the public’s health for personal gain.

Food and drink in the *Dialogues of Vives*

The Latin school dialogues of Juan Luis Vives, first published under the title *Exercises in Latin Language* (*Linguae Latinae Exercitatio*), rival Erasmus’ *Colloquies* in popularity. Bibliographic research by Enrique González González and Víctor Gutiérrez Rodríguez unearthed no less than 601 editions and translations, published during four and a half centuries in more than eighty different cities in Europe, Asia,

²⁷Erasmus, *The Usefulness of the Colloquies*, CWE 40, 1102 & ASD I-3, 745–746: “In *Convivio poetico* doceo, cuiusmodi debeat esse convivium inter studiosos, parcum sed festivum et hilare, conditum literatis fabulis, sine rixis, sine obtrectatione, sine turpiloquio”.

and the New World – making it the most widely diffused of Vives’ works.²⁸ Being less polemical, especially concerning sixteenth-century religious mores, and dealing less – as a contemporary critique of Erasmus’ *Colloquies* complained – with “vomiting, belching, and various wines and foods”, they were also more easily accepted as teaching materials for young boys.²⁹

In his dedication to Philip, the twelve-year-old son and heir of Emperor Charles V and the future King Philip II (1527–1598), Vives explains that his dialogues are intended not only to provide Latin instruction but also to form the mind and offer moral training:

Very great are the uses of the Latin language both for speaking and thinking rightly ... It has seemed well to dedicate it to thee, Boy-Prince, both because of thy father’s goodwill to me, in the highest degree, and also because I shall deserve well of my country, that is, Spain, if I should help in the forming of sound morals in thy mind. For our country’s health is centered in thy soundness and wisdom.³⁰

Vives’ *Dialogues* frequently refer in passing to eating and drinking – for instance in the description of the contents of a school boy’s lunchbox or the reference to the festivities surrounding a promotion to master.³¹ More importantly, five (out of twenty-five) dialogues are particularly devoted to the topic, as Vives instructs us about school meals (dialogue nr. 7: *Refectio scholastica*), the kitchen (nr. 15: *Culina*), the dining-room (nr. 16: *Triclinium*), the banquet (nr. 17: *Convivium*) and drunkenness (nr. 18: *Ebrietas*). These chapters inform us about the diet of the age, the preparation of food, the cooking implements, the setting of the table, the various qualities of wines from different countries, and much more. Vives also offers some elementary rules of hygiene and conduct, similar to the ones found in Erasmus’ *Colloquies* and *On Good Manners for Boys*³², and advises moderation for hosts and guests alike. Hosts should not exaggerate, since people who wish to impress with the richness of their food and tableware are in fact trapped in a never-ending quest to keep up appearances. Guests should also show constraint, because overindul-

²⁸Enrique González González – Víctor Gutiérrez Rodríguez (ed.), *Los diálogos de Vives y la imprenta. Fortuna de un manual escolar renacentista (1539–1994)* (Valencia: Institució Alfons el Magnànim, 1999). General studies of Vives’ school dialogues are found in Francisco Calero, *Los diálogos (Linguae Latinae Exercitatio) de Juan Luis Vives* (Valencia: Ayuntamiento de Valencia, 1994) and Dirk Sacré, “*Exercitatio Linguae Latinae* (1538–1539). Les colloques scolaires de Vivès,” in *Il sapere delle parole: Studi sul dialogo latino e italiano del Rinascimento*, ed. Walter Geerts – Annick Paternoster – Franco Pignatti (Roma: Bulzoni, 2001), 7–22.

²⁹Knox, “Erasmus’ *De Civilitate* and the Religious Origins of Civility in Protestant Europe,” 12. The complaint about Erasmus’ *Colloquies*, which I quote from Knox, is made by the German educationalist Johannes Sturm (1507–1589). Nineteenth-century critics, such as Karl Georg von Raumer (1783–1865), were equally surprised that a book as “immoral” as Erasmus’ could be used for the edification of children (cf. Elias, *The Civilizing Process. Vol. 1: The History of Manners*, 169–174).

³⁰Vives, *Dedication*, Mayans I, 280: “*Latinae linguae permagnae sunt et ad loquendum et ad recte sentiendum utilitates ... tibi Principi puero visum est dicare, quum propter patris tui benevolentiam erga me summam, tum quod in animo tuo ad rectos mores formando, optime de Hispania, hoc est, patria mea merebor, cuius salus sita est in tua probitate ac sapientia.*”

³¹Respectively in the dialogues entitled *Morning Greetings* and *Journey on Horseback*.

³²For example in the dialogue *School Meals*, in which diners are advised to wash their hands and faces before and after and to use clean napkins during the meal.

gence is punished with either sleepiness or insomnia and a hangover.³³ The amount anyone eats or drinks should therefore be determined by hunger and thirst, not by appetite. The author frequently invokes a physiological reason for his advice, such as the necessity to finish a meal with a cold course to avoid the vapors from rising³⁴, but equally often undermines his reference to medicine by questioning, just as Erasmus did before him, the integrity of its practitioners, as in the following example about surf and turf:

Simonides: Bah! fish and meat at the same sitting! To mix earth and sea. This is forbidden by physicians.

Scopas: Nay, rather physicians are pleased by it.

Simonides: I think it is because it is profitable to them.

Scopas: Why, then, do the physicians forbid it?

Simonides: I have made a mistake. I ought to have said that it is prohibited by the art of medicine, not by physicians.³⁵

It is clear that Vives supports the Erasmian call for moderation and appropriate table manners, but this does not imply that he forbids all appealing foodstuff. For example, fruit can still be enjoyed because of its taste, despite the fact that it is assumed to be unhealthy.³⁶ Wine – which Vives, according to tradition, connects with poetic inspiration³⁷ – is even so important that its production needs to be protected, also because dealers who tamper with it destroy the health of their customers:

Polaemon: They do worse to wine who add chalk, sulphur, honey, alum, and other more noisome things than which nothing is more pernicious to one's body. Against such people the state ought to proceed as against robbers or assassins. For thence are incredible kinds of diseases and especially gout.

³³See the dialogues *The Dining-room* and *Drunkenness*.

³⁴Vives, *The Banquet*, Mayans I, 357: "Frigida enim oportet esse in convivio postrema, quae pondere suo cibos ad imum ventriculum detrudant et vapores caput impetentes cohibeant" – "it behoves us to have colder food at the end of a meal, which by its weight may thrust down the other food to the bottom of the stomach, and may restrain the vapours from escaping to the head" (Watson, 145).

³⁵Vives, *The Banquet*, Watson, 143 & Mayans I, 356: "*Simonides*: Vah, pisces cum carnibus in eadem mensa? Mare miscetur terrae: hoc vetant medici. *Scopas*: Immo hoc placet medicis. *Simonides*: Credo, quia illis utile. *Scopas*: Cur ergo vetant medici? *Simonides*: Erravi, a medicina prohiberi dictum oportuit, non a medicis."

³⁶Vives, *The Banquet*, Mayans I, 352: "Ego condono illis [fructibus] nocumentum propter oblectamentum" – "I forgive fruits their harmfulness on account of their pleasantness of taste" (Watson, 137).

³⁷Vives, *Students' Chatter*, Mayans I, 303: "*Graculus*: Scilicet non solum vinum exhilarat, sed vini mentio et recordatio. *Nugo*: Vinosos utique: mea nihil refert, qui aquam bibo. *Graculus*: Nunquam facies bonum carmen." – *Graculus*: "For not only does the drinking of wine cheer people up, but also the mention and recollection of wine." *Nugo*: "At any rate for wine-drinkers. It matters nothing to me, for I drink water." *Graculus*: "Then you will never write a good poem." (Watson, 42)

Crito: By conspiracy with physicians they can do this. They both share the profit.³⁸

Despite this defense of wine, Vives nevertheless warns against drinking too much of it, just as he takes a stand against strong beer, which “muddles the mind too much and makes the body too fat”.³⁹ Similar to what we found in Bovelles’ *Book of the Wise Man*, Vives’ analysis of human nature implies a great personal responsibility as it lies within our own will to behave like plants (devoid of sensations), animals (subjected to passions as anger, lust, or envy), humans (i.e. as social and morally responsible beings), or even angels (surpassing human nature through the force of intellect) or god-like creatures (participating in immortality, wisdom, and prudence). Drunkenness and gluttony should therefore be avoided at all costs, because they imply a degrading loss of rationality and turn man into something worse than an animal, since animals are at least governed by natural desires:

Food and drink must be measured by the natural desire of hunger and thirst, not by gluttony, and not by beast-like lust of stuffing the body. What can be more loathsome to be said than that a man wages war on his own body by eating and drinking, which strip him of his humanity, and hand him over to the beasts, or make him even, as it were, a log of wood.⁴⁰

Banquets: good or bad?

The themes of food and drink are naturally connected with the art of the banquet, which is – especially since the work of Jeanneret – considered to act, both in literature and in reality, as a paradigm for humanist culture. Banquets provided a context in which the use of food and drink was encouraged because it served to harmonize body and mind: while the body was strengthened by eating and drinking, the mind was stimulated through intelligent discourse with fellow diners. An appealing example of this is, for instance, found in Erasmus’ *The*

³⁸Vives, *The Banquet*, Watson, 140 & Mayans, I, 354: “*Polaemon*: Peius agunt qui iniiciunt calcem, sulphur, mel, alumen et alia dictu tetiora, quibus nihil est corporibus perniciosius, in quos publice deberet animadverti, ut in latrones aut sicarios: inde sunt enim incredibilia morborum genera et potissimum arthretica. *Crito*: Ex conspiratione cum medicis id agunt, ut utrique rem augeant.”

³⁹Vives, *The Banquet*, Watson, 141 & Mayans I, 355: “nimium incrassant spiritus et reddunt obesum corpus”.

⁴⁰Vives, *The Precepts of Education*, Watson, 240 & Mayans I, 407: “Cibum et potum metiendum naturali desiderio famis aut sitis, non gulositate aut pecuina libidine infarciendi corporis. Quid potest dici tetrius, quam hominem ea ingerere in suum corpus edendo et bibendo, quae exuant illum humana conditione, transferant in belluinam aut etiam in stipitem?”. See also Vives, *Drunkenness*, Mayans I, 364: “*Abstemi*us: Siti iam exstincta, nulla superest voluptas, quae tota sita est in satisfaciendo desideriis naturalibus: ita ut tormenti sit genus sine siti bibere, aut sine fame edere. *Tricongius*: Putas nos, Abstemi, ad voluptatem potare, aut quod sit iucundum? *Abstemi*us: Tanto ergo estis peiores bestiis, quae aviditatibus naturalibus aguntur; vos neque illuc ducit ratio et retrahit natura.” – *Abstemi*us: “If thirst has been quenched, no pleasure remains. For this consists only in the satisfaction of natural needs. So it is a kind of torment to go on drinking when there is no thirst, or to eat when there is no hunger.” *Tricongius*: “Don’t you think, then, Abstemi, that we drink for pleasure or because it is pleasant?” *Abstemi*us: “Then you are so much worse than beasts, who are controlled by natural desires, whilst reason does not govern you, nor nature exercise a control over you.” (Watson, 157).

Poetic Feast. However, we should not conclude from this that Erasmus, or Renaissance humanists in general, advocated endless indulgence, and certainly not in their educational writings aimed at young school boys. The aim was to organize, in imitation of the idealized symposia known from ancient literature, a controlled satisfaction of bodily appetites; not to provide an opportunity for gluttony and intoxication, which were considered to be as detrimental for intellectual exchange as they were for the physical and spiritual wellbeing of the offender. The humanists' condemnation of excess was thus connected with their analysis of human nature: in order to realize a child's full potential, it must adapt to society and live according to reason, focusing on "the regulation of instinctual life".⁴¹ This conviction – already expressed in Greco-Roman sources as well as in medieval religious writings or courtesy books⁴² – led to a call for civility and moderation, exemplified by ideal humanist conviviality, attractively depicted, for instance, in Erasmus' *Colloquies*. In the latter, it is linked to the author's criticism of contemporary culture: whilst discussing food and drink, Erasmus touched upon some of the religious controversies of his time and took a stand against, for example, hypocritical fasting and the gluttony and dipsomania of clergymen. He similarly did not mince his words in his condemnation of culinary advice from physicians, whom he, generally speaking, dismissed as frauds more concerned about financial gain than about the wellbeing of their patients.

Some of the less controversial themes, such as the self-interested deceit by quacks, return in the school dialogues of Vives, which have received a lot less attention in modern scholarship on Renaissance ideas about food and drink despite the fact that their publication and reception history shows that they rivaled Erasmus' *Colloquies* in popularity and influence. Vives clearly supports the Erasmian position concerning the need for temperance and appropriate table manners, but does seem to go one step further as far as conviviality is concerned. Particularly revealing in this context is his dialogue entitled *The Banquet*, which – contrary to Erasmus' *The Poetic Feast* – does not act as a celebration of intellectual discourse around the dinner table. Instead, it offers a rather depressing scene, since one of the characters closes the gathering with a moralistic speech in lieu of the expected expression of gratitude for the host:

Democritus: We take hence to our homes bodies made heavy by these things, minds oppressed and sunk in food and drinks, so that we cannot duly perform any human duty. Do you yourself point out what thanks we owe you.

Scopas: Are these the thanks you have for me? Thus you pay back so splendid a meal!

Polaemon: Clearly it is so – for what greater benefit is there than becoming wiser? You send us home evidently beasts. We wish to leave you at home a man, so that you may know how to consult your own health and that of others and to live conformably

⁴¹Elias, *The Civilizing Process. Vol. 1: The History of Manners*, 171.

⁴²Cf. Elias, *The Civilizing Process. Vol. 1: The History of Manners*, 60-84; Dilwyn Knox, "Disciplina: The Monastic and Clerical Origins of European Civility," in *Renaissance Society and Culture. Essays in Honor of Eugene F. Rice, Jr.*, ed. John Monfasani – Ronald G. Musto (New York: Italica Press, 1991), 107-135; and *idem*, "Erasmus' *De Civilitate* and the Religious Origins of Civility in Protestant Europe," *passim*.

to the desires of Nature, not following fancies caught up from folly. Farewell and learn wisdom.⁴³

Vives seems to draw another, altogether negative conclusion. He casts food and drink aside as possible catalysts of intellectual exchange, focusing on their negative aspects which reduce men to animals (or worse). As a result, Vives – who, just like Erasmus, is considered to be a standard-bearer of humanist culture – rejects what is considered to be one of its main symbolic acts, namely banqueting, and instead qualifies it as a symbol of excess and depravity. His work thus acts as a reminder that not all humanist educationalists dreamt of a revival of the civilized symposia as practiced by the (idealized) ancient Greeks and Romans, but rather saw the practice abolished in favor of an even more temperate, and perhaps austere, lifestyle, marked by moderation in the interest of health, reason and morality.

Notes on contributor

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⁴³Vives, *The Banquet*, Watson, 149 & Mayans I, 359–360: “*Democritus*: Referimus hinc domum gravata corpora, referimus animos obrutos ac demersos cibis et potionibus, ut nullo hominis officio rite possimus fungi. Tu ipse iudicato, ecquam tibi gratiam debemus. *Scopas*: Haecine est gratia, quam habetis? Sic rependitis prandium tam opiparum? *Polaemon*: Ita plane, quod enim maius beneficium quam ut fias sapientior? Tu nos domum remittis plane bruta, nos te domi tuae volumus hominem relinquere, ut scias consulere tuae ac alienae valetudini et secundum naturae desideria vivere, non iuxta corruptas ab stultitia opiniones. Vale, et sape.”