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Katherine of Aragon: A “Pioneer of Women’s Education”?  
Humanism and Women’s Education in Early Sixteenth Century England.

A thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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in

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Leanne Croon Hickman

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Abstract
In 1548, Eaton School headmaster Nicolas Udall stated that “it was now a common thing to see young virgins so trained in the study of good letters, that they willingly set all other vain pastimes at naught, for learning sake.”¹ What led to English women becoming educated enough to garner such an observation? The purpose of this study is to consider the changing attitudes towards the education of women that began with a proliferation of works written on the subject, by humanist scholars in 1520s England. It will be shown that during the 1520s a burgeoning number of works featuring theories on female learning were produced primarily in reaction to the need to educate Princess Mary as the only heir to the throne. As the driving force behind the writing of many of these works, Katherine of Aragon has been called “a pioneer of female education in England”. It will be considered whether this label is accurate and what other influences affected female education. This research will also provide an overview on the effects of these flourishing views on female education and how women were showing their learning in practice through iconography, book ownership and the writing activities that women engaged in.

¹ George Ballard, Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain, Who Have Been Celebrated for Their Writings or Skill in the Learned Languages, Arts and Sciences (Oxford, Printed by W, Jackson, for the author, 1752), accessed 20 February 2014, http://archive.org/details/memoirsofseveral00ball., p.128
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**A Note on Transcriptions**

Middle English spelling has been used when these primary sources have been available.
Some minor changes have been used when Middle English abbreviations appear in
sources, and these have been typed in full for clarity. Similarly, although I have spelt
Katherine’s name with a K, as this is how she herself spelled her name, I have used the
spelling shown in quotes as they are.