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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

Master of Arts

in

History

At Massey University, Manawatu
New Zealand

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2016

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

Acknowledgements

When you are a working mother, writing a thesis becomes very much a collaborative effort. I would like to thank my supervisor Karen Jillings of Massey University, for her support, advice and coffee dates. I would also like to thank IPU NZ Tertiary Institute, for their support both with funding and research leave. I would like to acknowledge the British Library for providing on Public Domain, a vast range of images through their Catalogue of Illuminated Manuscripts website. Their only stipulation was that links must be provided so everyone can locate and enjoy the images. Especially, I would like to thank Ben, Ella, Sam and my parents Keitha and Tim, for your unconditional love and the constant reminders of what is important. Love you, lots.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1 Introduction	7
Chapter 2 Humanist Philosophy and Women	17
Humanism and Women in France	30
Humanism and Women in Spain	33
Humanism and Women in England	36
Chapter 3 Primary Writing on Women's Education	44
Primary Sources featuring Theories of Female Education	47
Course books written specifically for Princess Mary	67
Chapter 4 Evidence for the Education of Women after the 1520s	73
Female Literacy in Sixteenth-Century Iconography	74
Influences on the Education of Girls	83
Women Reading	91
Women Writing	95
Women's Education for Business	109
Chapter 5 Conclusion	115

List of Illustrations

- Figure 1: Woman teaching girls how to read. From a prayer book with an alphabet and texts for beginning readers. C.1445 Harley 3828 f. 47v. c.1445. Public Domain. Courtesy of the British Library.
<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/record.asp?MSID=4410> 28
- Figure 2: Timeline depicting the number of works written in the 1520s that feature theories and practice of women's education 46
- Figure 3: Here begynneth the boke of the cyte of the ladyes. By Christine de Pizan, translated into English by Bryan Ansley 1521. Folger MS STC 7271, Used by permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License. 53
- Figure 4: First page of Precatio Dominca depicting Margaret More Roper at her writing desk. Used with kind permission. ©British Library Board 63
- Figure 5: Saint Katherine reading, in Anne Boleyn's Book of Hours. Public Domain, Courtesy of The British Library. Source:
<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IIIID=8799> 75
- Figure 6: Mary Magdalene reading, in Anne Boleyn's Book of Hours. Public Domain. Courtesy of The British Library. Source:
<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IIIID=8798> 76
- Figure 7: Virgin Mary with Saint Katherine and Saint Barbara, Ambrosius Benson c. 1530/32. Public Domain. Source:
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ambrosius_Benson_-_La_Vierge_et_l'Enfant_entre_sainte_Catherine_et_Barbe_%28Louvre%29.jpg?uselang=en-gb 76
- Figure 8: Mary Magdalene Reading, Piero Cosimo. C 1500-1510. Public Domain. Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Piero_di_Cosimo_-_Sainte_Marie_Madeleine.jpg?uselang=en-gb 78
- Figure 9: Mary Magdalene reading. Master of the Female Half-lengths, c. 1530. Previously thought to depict Lady Jane Grey. By Lucas De Heere. Public Domain. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lady_Jane_Grey_De_Heere.jpg?uselang=en-gb 78
- Figure 10: The Sybil Persia, Ambrosius Benson c. 1530. Public Domain. Source:
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Benson_Persian_Sibyl.jpg?uselang=en-gb 80
- Figure 11: Lady as Mary Magdalene at a writing desk. Master of the Female Half-lengths, c.1530. Public Domain. Source:
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:A_lady_writing_at_a_desk.jpg 82
- Figure 12: A young woman writing. NG622, Jan Sander van Hessem, c.1530. Used with permission under scholarly waiver. © The National Gallery, London. 83

- Figure 13: Anne Boleyn to Thomas Boleyn, letter in French. Used with permission. © Master and Fellows of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. 89
- Figure 14: Anne Boleyn's Book of Hours featuring a love note to Henry VIII. Public Domain. Courtesy of The British Library.
<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IID=2609>. 101
- Figure 15: Lady Jane Grey's Prayerbook, featuring a letter written by Lady Jane Grey to Sir John Bridges. Public Domain. Courtesy of The British Library.
<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IID=19927> 102
- Figure 16: Page from the Devonshire Manuscript featuring the bottom four lines written by Mary Shelton and includes her signature. "The Devonshire Manuscript facsimile 22v LDev034 LDev035 LDev036" by DMSEG - Own work. Licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0 via Wikimedia Commons -
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Devonshire_Manuscript_facsimile_22v_LDev034_LDev035_LDev036.jpg#/media/File:The_Devonshire_Manuscript_facsimile_22v_LDev034_LDev035_LDev036.jpg 105
- Figure 17: Page from the Devonshire Manuscript featuring the top pencil poem by Margaret Douglas, Middle ink by Mary Shelton and bottom ink by Margaret Douglas. 108
- Figure 18: Sabine Johnson to John Johnson, 1551. Public Record. Courtesy of The National Archives, London 112

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.

Chapter 1 Introduction

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.”² 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 the humanist scholars in 1520s England. Katherine of Aragon will be used as a focus to evaluate if she encouraged humanist thought on education in England and whether that led to an acceptance of her later interest in women’s education after the birth of her daughter in 1516. Also, could this interest in her daughter’s education lead to Katherine accurately being considered a “pioneer of female education in England”? The theories on female learning considered by the early humanist scholars in Europe will be explained as the precedence to the later acquisition of these theories in England. Katherine’s early life in Spain will be used as a case study to show how her early education and the influence of her mother, Isabella of Castile, shaped her later interest and influence on English humanist scholars in England. It will be shown that in 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. This research will 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 writing activities. It will be shown that Katherine of Aragon played an important role in the process of bringing the theories of women’s education into the public arena. However, there were other important influencing factors. Thomas More’s famous education of his daughters was crucial. Other influences include the increase in published books and the rise of the professional middle class and the corresponding need for women to be educated for business.

² 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.

In 1986, Maria Dowling wrote *Humanism and Henry VIII*, in which she provided a detailed account of the rise of humanism in England and enthusiastically portrayed Katherine of Aragon as one of the key figures in supporting educational institutions and humanist scholars. She also claimed that, “in championing women’s studies for [Princess] Mary’s sake, Katherine [of Aragon] became a pioneer of female education in England”.³ This claim is based on Katherine commissioning famous Spanish humanist Juan Luis Vives to write a conduct book for women, to use as a guide for the education of Princess Mary. In this book, women were shown to be capable of learning albeit within the private, domestic sphere. In fact, it asserted that it was important to educate women as a way to keep their minds occupied and reduce wayward thoughts. This was quite a shift from previous thought on women’s ability or desirability to learn. In 1912, Foster Watson regarded Vives’ book as the beginning of an “Age of Aragon”, due to there being several works on women’s education dedicated to Katherine between 1523 and 1538.⁴ In 1992, Betty Travitsky admitted that this claim was rather overenthusiastic; however, she agreed that Katherine’s influence on England’s humanist scholars was significant.⁵ Since the 1980s there has been some scholarship on Vives’ book and its impact. However, there has been little in-depth investigation as to what influence Katherine had on the humanist scholars that encouraged them to write about women’s learning and whether women became more educated as a result.

It is the intention of this research to revisit many of the claims suggested by Dowling’s book and to investigate if they still hold true under modern scrutiny. It will be shown how Katherine’s early education in the more liberal humanist environment of Spain

³ Maria Dowling, *Humanism in the Age of Henry VIII*. (London; Dover, N.H. : Croom Helm, 1986.), p.223.

⁴ Foster Watson, *Vives and the Renaissance Education of Women*, New York: Longmans, 1912, accessed 8 April 2014, http://brittlebooks.library.illinois.edu/brittlebooks_open/Books2009-06/watfor0001vivand/watfor0001vivand.pdf, p. 4.

⁵ Betty S. Travitsky, ‘Reprinting Tudor History: The Case of Catherine of Aragon’, *Renaissance Quarterly*, no. 1 (1997), p.165.

enabled her to become an influential and popular patron of humanist learning in the more conservative England. There is no recent in-depth scholarship regarding the number of works produced just in the decade of the 1520s, featuring theories on female learning. Scholars have tended to focus mainly on Juan Luis Vives' book *The Instruction of a Christen Woman* (sic), and yet this study will identify a total of eleven works, produced in the 1520s, that considered whether female learning was appropriate and the form such education should take. Dowling did not discuss how far reaching the theories of women's capacity to learn were mirrored in female's lives, or whether women were actually becoming more educated than previously. Was education provided for women only within the court? The nobility? Or, did it extend into the middle classes? Were women becoming more literate and what is the evidence that shows this? There has been some focused study on some of the topics covered in this thesis, particularly in journal articles and recent general biographies of Katherine of Aragon. This thesis will form a more complete study on the effects of the humanist movement on women's education in England, Katherine of Aragon's influence, and the realities of women's education for the female population of Henry VIII's England.

David Cressy's comprehensive study of literacy rates in England asserted that in 1500, 99% of women were illiterate compared with 90% of men. By 1600 the rates had improved to 92% of women being illiterate compared with 70% of men.⁶ The great improvement of the literacy of men was likely the result of greater access to education for the middling classes thanks to the formation of grammar schools. At face value, the improvement of women appears small by comparison. Indeed, Cressy contends that "women were almost universally unable to sign their own names for most of the sixteenth and seventeenth century."⁷ However, the method by which the data was collected is particularly problematic for the study of literacy rates of women, as only signatures on legal documents were examined. Women, particularly upper class women, rarely were involved in legal affairs and therefore their signatures are absent. Margaret Ferguson

⁶ David Cressy, *Literacy and the Social Order: Reading and Writing in Tudor and Stuart England*. (Cambridge [Eng.]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980.), p. 177.

⁷ *ibid*, p.145.

agrees that “women and lower class men had little access to the kinds of property transactions used as the main source of signed documents before 1642.” Danielle Clarke also agrees that “the standard form of measurement (the ability to sign one’s name) cannot make any useful differentiation between reading and writing ability, and is based upon a sample of heads of household, and this inevitably leads to an underestimate of female literacy.”⁸

In 1976, Joan Kelly-Gadol posed the question, “Did Women Have a Renaissance?” This enormously influential and often quoted study looked at how women continued to have no public voice, were absent from politics and were very much the chattel of their husbands. Therefore, her conclusion was no.⁹ Eales similarly agreed that “the low proportion of printed works written by women in the Tudor and Stuart period reinforces Joan Kelly’s claim that a formal humanist education was largely restricted to elite families in the period.”¹⁰ Valerie Wayne asked “why did Renaissance women write so little and why did they so often treat religious subjects when they addressed an audience beyond their family circle?”¹¹ She points towards Juan Luis Vives’ very limited views on women writing, but again this is with reference to published works by women. These assertions are based on the fact that theories of women’s education continued to place women firmly in the home and that woman must be chaste, silent, humble and apologetic concerning any intelligence they possessed. However, the standard that these scholars put on a “Renaissance Woman” is unnecessarily high. Taking a leap to women as published authors from women as virtual illiterates is unrealistic. It was not a dramatic

⁸ Danielle Clarke, *The Politics of Early Modern Women’s Writing*, Longman Medieval and Renaissance Library (Harlow, England; New York: Longman, 2001), p.24.

⁹ Joan Kelly-Gadol. *Did Women Have a Renaissance?* accessed 1 February 2016, http://isites.harvard.edu/fs/docs/icb.topic205827.files/October_22/Kelly_Did_Women_Have_a_Renaissance.pdf.

¹⁰ Jackie Eales, ‘To Booke and Pen: Women, Education and Literacy in Tudor and Stuart England.’, *Historian*, no. 119 (September 2013), p.26.

¹¹ Valerie Wayne, ‘Some Sad Sentence: Vives’ Instruction of a Christian Woman’, in *Silent but for the Word: Tudor Women as Patrons, Translators, and Writers of Religious Works*. (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1985). p.15.

revolution in the academic advancement of women, but rather it was a subtle shift in the beliefs of women's capacity to learn. Although women did not have access to formal education there is convincing evidence that their reading and writing literacy improved markedly from their medieval predecessors. It is the contention of this study that the theories presented by the humanist scholars in 1520s England are the starting point of this subtle shift.

Chapter two, 'Humanist Philosophy and Women', will begin by tracing the theories of female learning back to the very beginning with the writings of Plato and Aristotle. As humanist theory based itself on classical literature, these sources were a key influence on later humanist scholars. Plato presented positive theories on the education of elite women that they later echoed. However, Aristotle was much more entrenched in the theories that women were weak and inferior beings that had no other role than to be a wife and mother. For the humanist scholars this often led to contradictory advice for the learning of women. In fourteenth-century Italy an interest in female exemplars was presented by the fascinating biographies of women written by Giovanni Boccaccio. This work greatly influenced later humanist scholars when considering female learning. In particular, Christine de Pisan's *City of the Ladies* used many of the female biographies to show strong, successful women. The overriding themes in these early works showed that intelligent, educated women only become so if they were also moral, chaste and intensely pious. These themes flourished in the works of the sixteenth-century humanists.

Female learning in practice in fifteenth-century Europe will be shown by a number of powerful, educated European women with a particular focus on Anne of France and Isabella of Castile. Anne of France's fascinating advice to her daughter in her work *Lessons for my Daughter* will be investigated. Also, as a case study to show the education of princesses in a European court, the experience of Katherine of Aragon's early life in humanist Spain will be explored. Isabella of Castile provided an education for her daughters that would later cause scholars to comment on their intelligence. It will be argued that after the birth of Princess Mary, Isabella's interest in her daughter's education and her patronage of humanist scholars in Spain was echoed in the court of Katherine of Aragon in England. It will also be argued that, unlike her husband,

Katherine was fully confident in her daughter's ability to rule England as Queen, as her mother had been a Queen Regnant in her own right.

Katherine's interest in the humanist scholars and educational institutions, during her time as Queen of England, will be discussed. It was common for queens to act as patrons of religious and educational institutions and support scholars. However, Katherine was more than just a figurehead. She took an active interest by regularly visiting these institutions. She was also shown to be genuinely interested in supporting humanist scholars, frequently engaging in long discussions with them. Scholars such as Desiderus Erasmus, Juan Luis Vives and Thomas More found a reliable patron in Katherine of Aragon. She possessed real influence over these scholars by her support and interest. Therefore, when it became evident that Mary may be her only child, she engaged these scholars for advice and support in educating her. It will be shown in the following chapter that this interest in educating Mary allowed for written works on women's education to be produced.

A chronology of the works that engage with the theories on female education in England will be presented in 'Primary Writing on Women's Education'. This chapter will provide an overview of eleven such works written during the 1520s alone. A prominent feature of these works is dedications to Katherine of Aragon, at a time when dedications were only just starting to feature in books. In these works, the justification for educating women was for the primary purpose of creating better wives and mothers. These theories continued to place women firmly in the home. However, the theories of the humanist scholars were the most progressive that women had ever had. More importantly, these works were published, often in English, and therefore publicly available. They asserted that women were as capable of learning as men, but they were more prone to yield to temptations and therefore their learning must be strictly controlled. As their learning was not for any political or professional purpose, women were advised to base their learning only on religious and moral literature. Also featured in the chronology of works were specific course book for Princess Mary's lessons, including a book for Latin lessons and another book for lessons in the more popular court language

of French. Again, these were published and therefore women who could afford these books had access to the education of a princess.

The final chapter, 'Evidence for the Education of Women after the 1520s' considers the ways that women in England were showing their education and the ways society was allowing them to. This section begins by investigating the evidence for the shift in attitudes for female learning, which can be observed in the iconography of popular art. Images of female saints reading were increasingly shown as individual portraits in women's prayer books. In the 1530s, an astonishing number of paintings were produced, showing women in domestic environments reading or writing. This important primary source has not been explored before in relation to female education. Yet, it shows that the belief in women's capacity to learn had spread widely enough to reach the Renaissance artists. The use of Mary Magdalene reading and writing in many of the images show a redeemed sinner that was much more accessible to the everyday woman and suggests the activities she engaged in were therefore exalted. Images of females reading their devotional texts encouraged women's religious education. However, showing women writing is harder to place as an acceptable devotional activity and therefore, surprisingly, the image depicts a woman with a high level of literacy, perhaps transcribing or even writing a letter, portraying these activities as acceptable.

How women became educated is difficult to establish due to its informality. Clarke accurately reflected the attitudes to women's education when she explained, "women's education was not pragmatic, and often reflected the interests of their families more than any cultural norms."¹² If a girl had highly educated humanist scholars for parents, there was a good chance they would then provide a high level of education for their daughter. The example of Thomas More's "school" where he provided a comprehensive education for his daughters in the early 1520s, inspired other families in England to do the same. For wealthy families a cultured education in the European courts became a way to

¹² Clarke, *The Politics of Early Modern Women's Writing.*, p.21.

improve desirable marriage prospects. Even among the lower gentry, an education in basic literacy and book-keeping was becoming common place as it was seen as increasingly necessary for the efficient running of a household. So the pragmatic nature of women's education is a crucial motivation for female learning. There were also social pressures with the examples of the educated royal women that created an environment where an intelligent, educated, pious woman was fashionable in courtly circles. Indeed, with religious reform came a new insistence that encouraged women's reading as all people should have access to the Word of God and that spiritual guidance should start as early as possible.¹³ As such, women's education flourished in areas that often conformed within the boundaries that the humanist scholars set, although they sometimes pushed those boundaries.

Reading was encouraged in the humanist sources as a way to improve women's morality and piety. With the introduction of the printing press in the 1480s, books were becoming more readily available and cheaper. The importance women placed on books is shown by their specific mentions in their wills. Often women would bequeath their favourite religious book to another woman to encourage their religious education. Also, evidence that the humanist works on women's education were being used for a girl's lessons is found in the library of Lord John Lumley of Northamptonshire, where a number of these works are featured. It is known that the girls of this household were highly educated and these are likely to be among the books they used for their lessons.

Margaret Ezell argued that "if all that is known is a list of women who published works, we do not really know who the women writers were or how and why they wrote."¹⁴ Using letters, notes and manuscript writing, it becomes possible to uncover who these women were and develop a picture of their everyday lives. Letter writing activities by women increased markedly in the sixteenth century and this underlines their improved writing literacy. It also gives a unique insight into their lives and activities. This was viewed as a private activity and therefore acceptable to the humanist scholars.

¹³ Ibid, p.32.

¹⁴Margaret W. Ferguson, 'Renaissance Concepts of the "Women Writer"', in *Women and Literature in Britain, 1500-1700*. (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996, 1996). p.160.

Increasingly, women were expected to write certain letters themselves rather than rely on a scribe. Also, in their personal prayer books there are often notes or annotations written by women, further showing their ability to write for leisure. The unique example of the Devonshire Manuscript shows women working alongside men on a communal project based on transcribing favoured courtly love poetry. For the first time, entries into such a manuscript have been positively identified by scholars as being made by women. This shows that women knew, understood and could engage with these verses. These examples show that many women were actively writing regularly in their daily lives, albeit within the private domain of their homes.

Alison Sim contended that “a sixteenth century woman was often very well educated indeed, but educated in the practical skills she would need to run a house and home.”¹⁵ Increasingly, however, for many middle class and merchant wives, education was not just for the home but also for running businesses. Women in these classes had even less access to education and yet they possessed more impetus than upper class women to be educated in the skills required to help their husband run their businesses. The education of these women is rarely commented on by contemporaries, as their work was seen as part of their dutiful wifely activities. But the motivation to understand the business was of the utmost importance, particularly if the husband couldn’t run the business for any reason. It would be essential for the wife to be able to take over or risk great financial struggles.

To return to the original question: “was Katherine of Aragon a pioneer of female education in England?” The answer is that she was certainly an important part of the process. There is no doubt that the education of Princess Mary provided the motivation to implement the theories of female education that were already available in Europe. Thomas More also played an integral role in promoting both theories and practice of female education in the educational methods he adopted for his own daughters. Also the timing of these theories was crucial for the advancement of female education. The

¹⁵ Alison Sim, *The Tudor Housewife*. (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Sutton; Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1996), p. 43.

invention of the printing press meant that the humanist works could be published and publicly available and therefore it became possible for women to learn how to have the same education as a princess. Also, other reading material became widely available, providing the motivation for everyone to be able to read. The rise of the professional middle class added new expectations for women to be educated in the skills for running a business. Overall, women's education required a purpose to ensure the motivation of her parents, husband and herself to learn. That purpose could be simply because the royal daughters were educated. Where the royal family led, others would follow.

Chapter 2 Humanist Philosophy and Women

To understand the context that encouraged scholars to consider women's education, it is necessary to explore the rise of humanism in Europe. Humanism as an intellectual movement is notoriously difficult to define. It spread through several countries, permeated cultures and even transcended religious change. Additionally, the role of women within the new learning model began to be considered from the beginning of the history of humanism itself. Humanism had its roots in the classical works. Similarly, the role of women in humanism was also found in the classical sources. Although Aristotle flinched from the idea of an educated woman, his teacher Plato asserted that ruling class women were as capable of being educated as men, an idea that permeated later works. The fourteenth century Italian, Petrarch is often considered the "father of humanism", but it was his friend Boccaccio who wrote the first biographical work solely on famous secular women. This work inspired the classical examples of women that future humanist scholars would use to justify the necessary behaviours expected of women. In 1405, Christine de Pizan's *City of the Ladies* provided a defence of women's roles in society and presented female role models in a remarkably positive way. These new theories on women's societal roles paved the way for a rise in educated ruling women in medieval Europe, which they, in turn, passed on to their daughters. It is these theories that were adopted and flourished in the courts of Italy, France and Spain. With example of the formidable queen Isabella of Castile, the humanist theories of Europe travelled with her daughter, Katherine of Aragon, to England.

Humanism began in Italy in the fourteenth century and spread throughout Europe before finally arriving in England about a century later. It began as a backlash against the rigid, conservative scholastic thought of the medieval period. To break free from these constrictive monastic ideologies, scholars delved back into the classical literature searching for practical answers. The required answers became less about understanding God's will and more about living a good, moral and pious life. Woolfson described humanism as "an educational and rhetorical programme, a vision about learning and what

learning should be, a method for intellectual and scholarly exploration and discovery, a powerful and immensely flexible vehicle for the expression of many things, all of this predicated on a partially recoverable ancient world.”¹⁶ Retha Warnicke explained that English humanists believed that the “ancient civilisation of Rome and Greece had developed a moral wisdom compatible with that of Christianity, these scholars encouraged the study of classical languages and literature.”¹⁷ Humanism essentially became an academic movement and based itself in new educational programmes particularly in universities. The scholars rediscovered the original classical sources of Cicero, Homer, Virgil and Pliny and the writings of the early Church Fathers such as St Augustine and St Jerome to show practical ways to teach men to be good citizens in public service roles. Therefore, there came to be a greater emphasis on teaching Latin and Greek in the universities to enable students to read the original sources and also an emphasis on rhetoric to express their wisdom to others as public role models. Similarly, the scholars believed that the learning of Latin should begin at an early age and grammar schools for boys began to emerge. They would begin their learning from about the age of seven, with a heavy emphasis on Latin being the language of the scholars and also, increasingly, the international language of diplomacy and politics.

Humanism can be traced back to the fourteenth-century Italian writer and poet Petrarch. He was a prolific writer and modelled much of his work on the rediscovered writings of Cicero. This rediscovery of the classical works underpins our understanding of humanism and Petrarch became the first humanist of the Italian Renaissance.¹⁸ Humanism helped to further Italian cultural interests that were already flourishing. Humanism continued to flourish in Italy, predominately due to Latin being still regularly taught and used, unlike the rest of Europe where the language had been largely lost

¹⁶ Jonathan Woolfson, *Reassessing Tudor Humanism*. (New York: Palgrave, 2002). p.3.

¹⁷ Retha M. Warnicke, *Women of the English Renaissance and Reformation*., Contributions in Women’s Studies: No. 38 (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1983). p.16.

¹⁸ Humanist Texts, *Petrarch*, accessed 12 February 2016, <http://www.humanistictexts.org/petrarch.htm>.

except in monastic circles. As humanism spread Latin became the language of the learned scholar, as this had been the language of classical antiquity.

A revolutionary idea that becomes a theme in humanist sources when writing about women, is that ruling class women are as capable as men of being educated. This theme is repeated by high profile scholars such as Boccaccio, Leonardo Bruni, Thomas More and Juan Luis Vives. The foundation for this idea can be traced back to Plato. Although Plato was clear that women are weaker than men, he was also clear that they were just as capable of education. In the “Republic”, Plato explained: “If ... the male and female sex appear to differ in their fitness for any art or pursuit, we should say that such pursuit or art ought to be assigned to one or the other of them; but if the difference consists only in woman bearing and men begetting children, this does not amount to proof that a woman differs from a man in respect of the sort of education she should receive; and we shall therefore continue to maintain that our guardians and their wives ought to have the same pursuits.”¹⁹ He went on to say: “men and women alike possess the qualities which make a guardian; they differ only in their comparative strength or weakness ... The same education which makes a man a good guardian will make a woman a good guardian, for the original nature is be the same.”²⁰ The guardians that Plato referred to were the ruling elite. Late medieval and early modern humanist writings echo this idea that education is the domain of the nobility and upper classes.

Although Plato extolled the possibilities of education for women, his pupil Aristotle reverted to the entrenched theory that women were weaker in both nature body. Essentially the role of women in Aristotlean thought was simply to bear children. He believed that women were essentially a subspecies compared to men. He explained that: “courage of a man is shown in commanding, of a woman in obeying ...silence is a

¹⁹ Plato, ‘The Republic’, trans. Benjamin Jowett, 370BC, accessed 12 October 2015, <http://pinkmonkey.com/dl/library1/republic.pdf>. p.142.

²⁰ Ibid, p.144.

woman's glory."²¹ However, he did admit that women must have some intelligence as the early educators of their children. "Women and children must be trained by education with an eye to the constitution, if the virtues of either of them are supposed to make any difference in the virtues of the state. And they must make a difference; for the children grow up to be citizens, and half the free persons in a state are women."²² This suggests that even for the conservative Aristotle, women had an important role to play in the raising of future contributing members of society. However, he was clear that women's role was subservient and any role they had in their children's education was based in the private sphere of the home.

The opposing theories of Plato and Aristotle help to explain the often contradictory theories when humanist scholars wrote about women. On one hand, humanists often accepted that women were capable of education. But there were strict provisos. Their education must be strictly controlled because of their weak minds. Any education they complete must be for the sole purpose of enhancing their roles as wives and mothers. It must enhance their morality and virtue and help to protect their chastity. Education must prevent them from following any kind of immoral path. For this reason, their education must be based in religious study and morality works. Their education must not result in any kind of public role or public voice. Essentially, women must keep any education private, within the home. Many of the positive examples of classically educated women were also either virgins or known for their chastity. Any great achievement is often due their intense piety, as it must surely be a blessing from God. This is seen in many of the examples in the female biographies of Boccaccio.

The history of the role of women in humanist writings can also be traced right back to the beginning of humanist history. The most important influence on later humanist

²¹ E.T. Howe, *Education and Women in the Early Modern Hispanic World*, Women and Gender in the Early Modern World Series (Ashgate Publishing Company, 2008), p.3.

²² *Ibid*, p.3.

writings on women was the works of Petrarch's colleague and friend, Giovanni Boccaccio and in particular his collection of 104 biographies women called *De Claris Mulieribus* (*Concerning Famous Women*). Written in the 1350s, the 100-plus known manuscript copies of this work prove that it was popular and famous. Virginia Brown stated that "so large a number of codices shows... that it was among the most popular works in the last age of the manuscript book; the relative obscurity in which the book now lies is a post-Renaissance phenomenon."²³ Boccaccio's work was the first biographical work based solely on women. The women he chose to present were not Biblical figures (apart from the first biography of Eve), but rather women from classical history and legend. He explained in his preface that he wanted to write this work as there had been many works written on famous men. Indeed, his friend Petrarch was at that time writing a large work on famous men called *De Viris Illustribus*. Boccaccio lamented that similar attention has been neglected towards women even though, as he said, some women have assuredly acted "with as much strength and valour" as men.²⁴ He explained that great deeds performed by women could be considered even more remarkable due to their frail bodies and sluggish minds. He said, "how much more should women be extolled ... if they have acquired a manly spirit and if with keen intelligence and remarkable fortitude they have dared to undertake and have accomplished even the most difficult of deeds."²⁵ This is a remarkably liberal position to take. Boccaccio had a keen interest in showing the lives of the great virtuous women as examples to be imitated. However, in accordance with contemporary medieval thinking, he also presented immoral and detestable women in his biographies as cautionary tales of women who have fallen into disrepute. However, there were examples of fallen women who had redeemed themselves by some kind of virtuous deed. The women who featured in the biographies featured regularly in later humanist writings, most famously in Christine de Pisan's *Book of the City of the Ladies*, and Juan Luis Vives' *Instruction of a Christian Women*, both of which were translated into English in the 1520s.

²³ Giovanni Boccaccio, *Famous Women*, trans. Virginia Brown (Harvard University Press, 2003), p. xii.

²⁴ Giovanni Boccaccio, *Concerning Famous Women.*, trans. Guido A. Guarino (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1963). p. xxxvii.

²⁵ *Ibid*, p, xxxvii.

Interestingly, Boccaccio dedicated his work to a noble lady rather than a queen: Andrea Acciaiuoli, Countess of Altavilla, who was the sister of Niccolo Acciaiuoli, the grand seneschal of the Kingdom of Naples. The Acciaiuoli family were a powerful, wealthy Florentine banking family. Apparently, Boccaccio “was on friendly terms with Niccolo Acciaiuoli, who invited him to the court of Naples. However, his feelings changed because of the cold welcome he received.”²⁶ Boccaccio explained his decision to dedicate his work to the countess rather than the queen:

“After carefully considering many other women, I finally rededicated my work to you instead of that illustrious queen, and not undeservedly. For when I mediated on your gentle and renowned character, great honesty, lofty womanly dignity, and elegance of speech, and when I considered the generosity of your soul and the powers of your intellect, in which far surpass the endowments of womankind ... I felt you should be set equal to the worthiest of men even among the ancients. Since through your many splendid deed in our times you are a shining example of ancient virtue, I should like to present you this little book.”²⁷

He went on to show his expectation that Andrea would support the book and encourage its production for public consumption. He clearly believed that her support would ensure the book’s acceptance:

“If you deem it worthy, most excellent lady, you will give this book courage to appear in public. Under your auspices it will go forth, I believe, safe from the insults of malicious people, and it will make your name and those of the other illustrious women glorious on the lips of men. As you cannot be present everywhere, this book will make you and your virtues known to our age and will render your eternal posterity.”²⁸

²⁶ *ibid*, p. xxxiv fn. 2.

²⁷ *ibid*, p. xxxiii.

²⁸ *ibid*, p. xxxv.

The biographies themselves are short entertaining reads. Although they were written in Latin, the work was quickly translated into several European languages, although not into English until the 1540s. As would become the theme in later humanist writings, Boccaccio identified the ideal women as one who is either a virgin or chaste, an ideal of the good wife or mother and an example of high morals and virtue. Within this framework there was an acceptance of intelligence and even in some cases, education for women. Two examples of women that were known for great intelligence were the Sybils, or classical women who could read the future. Interestingly, Boccaccio portrayed these women positively in a time where such women could be accused of sorcery. The explanation for their gifts was that they were virgins and therefore had a purity which was worthy of being blessed by God. This aligned them with famous medieval religious mystics, some of whom were active around this period. Of the Sybil Erythraea or Eriphilia, Boccaccio explained: “The power of her intellect was so great, and she was so deserving in God’s eyes because of her prayers and devotion, that through great studies, and not without divine gift, if what we read about her is true, she gained the skill to write about the future with such clarity that it seems to be the Gospel rather than fortune-telling.”²⁹ Boccaccio also importantly pointed out that she remained a virgin throughout her life, which gave her a position of authority as an exceptional woman. Of the Sybil Amalthea or Deiphobe, Boccaccio said: “I certainly believe that it was because of the merits of her virginity that she received the light of prophecy, through which she wrote about and predicted many future events.”³⁰ Therefore, not only was this woman telling the future, she was also writing her visions down.

In two fascinating examples Boccaccio described two women who gave illiterate communities a written language. Of Isis, Queen and Goddess of Egypt, he explained that she founded a community and taught the unskilled people farming. She instituted laws and “even more marvellous for a woman, she called on powers of her intellect and found letters suitable for the language of men of that country. She then showed them how to

²⁹ Ibid, p. 42.

³⁰ Ibid, p.50.

place them together to those who were ready to learn.”³¹ Another woman who provided literacy to a community was Nicostrata or Carmenta. Known as a prophetess similar to the Sybil, “her intellect was so versatile that with great study she even learned the art of foretelling the future.”³²

“With all her power of intellect, she decided to give that people its own letters completely different from those of other nations. God did not turn his eyes from this enterprise. Through his grace it happened that she found new symbols suitable for the Italic language ... She taught how they should be put together being satisfied with sixteen letters ... This invention seemed so marvellous that foolish men believed she was a goddess and not a woman.”³³

“It is also believed that she first invented grammar, which, as time went by, the ancients amplified.”³⁴ To name a woman as the figure who introduced language and grammar to a society is extraordinary. It is amusing that Boccaccio said that men assumed she must be a goddess to achieve such a feat. But he insisted she was a human woman, therefore showing her as someone that was exceptional but also accessible to the readers.

The most influential proponent in the defence of female education, including their right to be educated, was undoubtedly Christine de Pizan. Christine developed a love of learning in the court of France, and absorbed the available Renaissance literature. She wrote prolifically in the French vernacular for a court audience. In 1405 Christine de Pizan wrote *Le Livre de la Cité des Dames* or *The Book of City of the Ladies*. She penned the work as a direct reaction against the insulting tirade against women and womanly behaviour in the medieval French works *The Romance of the Rose* by Jean de Meun and the French translation of Matheolus’ *Lamentations*. The content of *The Book of the City of the Ladies* book will be described later, but it is clear that she took her examples directly from Boccaccio and revised his descriptions for her own purposes. She used

³¹ Ibid, p.19.

³² Ibid, p.52.

³³ Ibid, p.53.

³⁴ Ibid, p. 54.

about three quarters of the biographies from Boccaccio and provided a defence of women as well as a conduct book for women about how they should live pious, chaste but purposeful lives. Most importantly, she gave female education a starring role. This new sense of purpose can be seen reflected in the rise of strong ruling women in the Renaissance courts of Europe. Christine's book became well-known in the great royal libraries of Europe and was also known to exist in its French form in royal libraries of England.³⁵ Indeed, William Caxton printed English translations of some of Christine's other books in the late fifteenth century, although *The Book of City of the Ladies* was not translated until 1521.

More will be written about Juan Luis Vives' book later when reviewing the humanist works regarding women available in England in the 1520s. However, the point here is that Boccaccio's biographies undoubtedly influenced his work and the works of other humanist scholars when searching for classical examples of women relevant to whatever they were writing. In Vives' book *The Instruction of a Christen Woman* he described at least twenty-nine of the women that feature in the biographies of Boccaccio. When writing about Hortensia, Boccaccio explained that when women in her city were burdened with particularly heavy taxes and when no man would help, "Hortensia alone with firm spirit dared to take up the women's cause before the triumvirs. And she pleaded so and with such inexhaustible eloquence that to the great admiration of the audience it seemed that she changed her sex and was [her father] come back to life again ... They thought that although silence in public is a praiseworthy quality in a woman, when the occasion requires it a properly prepared speech should be praised."³⁶ Two hundred years later, of the same woman Vives explained that she "dyd so resemble her father's eloquence, that she made an oration unto the judges of the cyte for the women:

³⁵Cristina Malcolmson, 'Christine de Pizan's City of the Ladies', in *Debating Gender in Early Modern England, 1500-1700.*, Early Modern Cultural Studies (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002)., p. 18. Malcolmson shows that Anthony Woodville and Richard, Duke of York – Edward IV father likely had manuscript copies of wrote '*Le Livre de la Cité des Dames*' in the royal libraries of England.

³⁶ *Ibid*, p. 185.

which oration the successors of that tyme dyd rede, nat onely as a laude and preyse of womens eloquence but also to lerne counnung of hit, as wel as of Cicero or Demosthenes orations.”³⁷ Similarly of Zenobia, Queen of Palmyra Boccaccio praised how “she learned Greed under the philosopher Loginus. With this training, she read with great care and committed to memory all the Latin and Greek, and barbarian histories. This was not all, for some believed she made a summary of them. In addition to her own language, she knew Egyptian and Syrian, and her children were ordered to speak Latin.”³⁸ Vives more simply explained: “Zenobia the quene of Palmyra, was lerned both in latyn and greke, and wrote an historie.”³⁹ Vives used Boccaccio as an important source for his classical examples of the appropriate women for his arguments.

The humanist sources for women in Italy not only looked at why women should be educated, but there is also evidence of a potential programme of study. Written around 1405, Italian humanist Leonardo Bruni composed a treatise in the form of a letter dedicated to Baptista di Montefeltro, daughter of the Count of Urbino and wife of Galeazzo Malatesta. Leonardo Bruni was well known for translating many classical Greek works into Latin and composing a history of the Florentine people. He also wrote biographies of Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio in Italian, thereby fostering a growing humanistic interest in Italian poetry.⁴⁰ In this treatise he showed his fascination with educated women, in particular Baptista Malatesta. He recognised that she was already well educated and suggested a further programme of study suitable for her interests and more importantly suitable for a woman. He also explained what he knew of her learning to date. “I am led to address this Tractate to you, Illustrious Lady, by the high repute which attaches to your name in the field of learning; and I offer it, partly as an expression of my homage to distinction already attained, partly as an encouragement to further

³⁷ Juan Luis Vives, *The Instruction of a Christen Woman*, ed. Virginia Walcott Beauchamp, First Edition (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), p.21.

³⁸ Boccaccio, *Concerning Famous Women.*, p. 228.

³⁹ Vives, p. 21.

⁴⁰ ‘Leonardo Bruni | Italian Scholar | Britannica.com’, accessed 23 February 2016, <http://www.britannica.com/biography/Leonardo-Bruni>.

effort.”⁴¹ He went on to give the usual classical example of learned women. “Cornelia, the daughter of Scipio, whose epistles survived for centuries as models of style; Sappho, the poetess, held in so great honour for the exuberance of her poetic arts; Aspasia, whose learning and eloquence made her not unworthy of the intimacy of Socrates.”⁴² He explained that in classical times learning in women was not uncommon, unlike Bruni’s time where learning for both men and women has declined. “For they lived in days when learning was no rare attainment, and therefore they enjoyed no unique renown. Whilst, alas, upon such times are we fallen that a learned man seems well-nigh a portent, and erudition in a woman is a thing utterly unknown.”⁴³ Bruni recommended a move away from rigid medieval scholasticism that bases itself in theological jargon that few can follow, and for everyone to embrace the much more practical humanist educational theory. He explained:

“True learning, I say: not a mere acquaintance with that vulgar, threadbare jargon which satisfies those who devote themselves to Theology: but sound learning in its proper and legitimate sense, viz., the knowledge of realities – Facts and Principles – united to a perfect familiarity with letter and the art of expression. Now this combination we find in Lactantius, in Augustine, or in Jerome; each of them at once a great theologian and profoundly versed in literature. But turn from them to their successors of today: how we must blush for their ignorance of the whole field of Letters!⁴⁴

He was clear that the most important subject in humanist learning revolved around the study of Latin. Bruni gave a list of sources to be used and emphasised that attention must continue to be focused on Latin grammar. For Baptista’s education he suggested studying the Christian writers first including Lactantius, Augustine, Jerome, Ambrose and Cyprian. He also recommended classical authors such as Cicero, Vergil, Livy and Sallust. He recommended careful education in writing, not merely the formation of

⁴¹ Leonardo Bruni, ‘De Studiis et Litteris’, *De Studiis et Litteris*, accessed 23 October 2015, <https://history.hanover.edu/texts/bruni.html>. One page

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

letters but the “subject of diphthongs, and of the syllabic divisions of words; the accepted usages in the writings of each letter, singly and in cursive script, and the whole field of abbreviations.”⁴⁵ Bruni also outlined what women should not be educated in. He explained that arithmetic, geometry and astrology were of no use. He also insisted that rhetoric was not a fitting subject for a woman. “To her neither the intricacies of debate nor the oratorical artifices of action and delivery are of the least practical use, if indeed they are not positively unbecoming. Rhetoric in all its forms – public discussion, forensic argument, logical fence, and the like – lies absolutely outside the province of woman.”⁴⁶

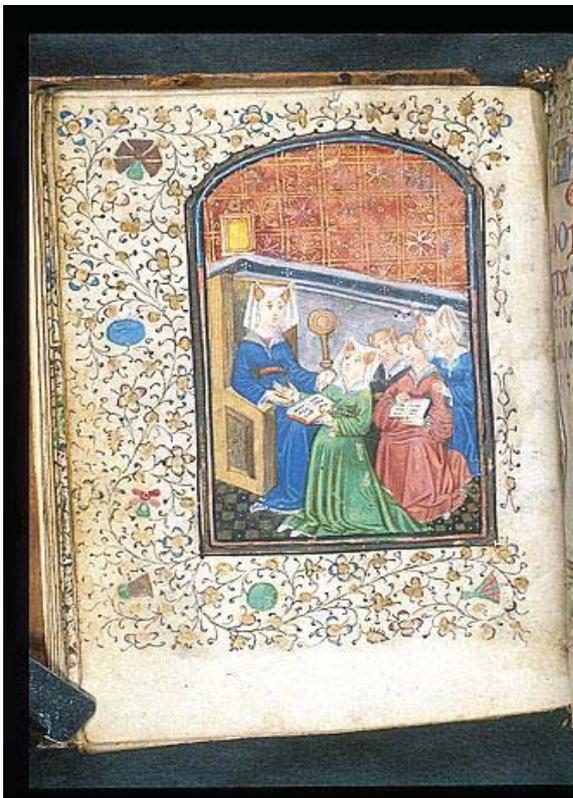


Figure 1: Woman teaching girls how to read. From a prayer book with an alphabet and texts for beginning readers, c.1445.

Bruni explained that education for women must be based on religion and morality, a view that became a regular theme in humanist writings. He noted that “in the first place

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

she has before her, as a subject peculiarly her own, the whole field of religion and morals. The literature of the Church will thus claim her earnest study.” He went on to suggest “morals, indeed, have been treated by the noblest intellects of Greece and Rome ... Let religion and morals, therefore, hold the first place in the education of a Christian lady.”⁴⁷ He recommended the study of history as a place to find examples of morality. He included the reading Livy, Sallust and Curtius and even Julius Caesar, “the style of whose Commentaries, so elegant and so limpid, entitles them to our warm admiration.”⁴⁸ He also agreed that a study of poetry would be useful, “because many important truths upon matters of daily life are suggested or illustrated.”⁴⁹ However, the appropriate poets must be carefully selected and some were not suitable for a woman as their themes were deemed immoral. He believed Vergil, Seneca and Statius were to be trusted.

Humanism began to spread throughout Western Europe. In the courts of Spain, France and Italy, humanist learning became a sign of power in the ruling elite. As well as noblemen and kings becoming more educated than ever before, their queens also took up the mantle of humanism by ensuring their children received a comprehensive humanist education to prepare them for political life. What is clear is that the daughters also benefitted by such an education, which although less comprehensive than the son’s, was much more detailed than any education afforded girls previously. The influence of the Italian scholars writing on women can be seen in many of these examples. Born in 1418 in Verona, Italy, unusually for the time Isotta Nogarola received a comprehensive humanist education under the tutelage of excellent humanist tutors. An apt student, she became fluent in Latin and became renowned as an exceptional example of learning in a woman. Her work is mostly known through her correspondence with established humanist scholars, a common method to gain recognition of an emerging scholar’s own work. Often the responses to these letters were negative. The idea of an educated woman continued to be uncomfortable for most and Isotta struggled to be recognized for

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

her work rather than her sex. As the century progressed a series of powerful educated female rulers emerged in Europe. Ippolita Maria Sforza, Isabella d'Este, Louise of Savoy, Anne of France, Margurite of Navarre all supported humanism in their courts and were powerful, intelligent forces in their own right.

Humanism and Women in France

For a time, Anne of France, acting as regent for her young brother (1483-1491), was the most powerful person in the country and yet she is little known to history. Little is known about how she came to be well-educated, but she possessed the admiration of her father Louis XI to the extent that when he died, the thirteen-year-old dauphin was entrusted into her care. For the next five years she became responsible for the governance of France although she did not have the title of regent.⁵⁰ Anne of France was diplomatically and politically savvy and later gained for her husband the duchy of Bourbon. As the mother to one child, a daughter, she also provided education to other upper-class girls in her realm. “There were no ladies or daughters of great houses in her time who did not receive lessons from her, the house of Bourbon being one of the greatest and most splendid in Christendom,”⁵¹ wrote Pierre de Brantome, whose grandmother was one of the daughters that benefited from Anne’s guidance.⁵² Around the turn of the fifteenth-century, Anne wrote a fascinating book to her daughter entitled *Lessons for My Daughter*, advising how her young daughter should conduct herself, both personally and politically. Sharon L. Janssen argued convincingly that the work was likely composed around 1497/98 and therefore when Suzanne was about seven years old.⁵³ Anne followed the humanist formula of seeking classical and religious examples for her work. She possessed a vast library from where to draw her sources – a library

⁵⁰ Anne of France, *Anne of France: Lessons for My Daughter (Library of Medieval Women)*, trans. Sharon L Jansen (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2015). p.4.

⁵¹ *ibid*, p. 5.

⁵² *ibid*, p. 6.

⁵³ *ibid*, p. 10.

which featured works by Boccaccio and Christine de Pizan's *The Book of the City of Ladies*, a work that is "often suggested as a model for Anne of France's lessons".⁵⁴

In *Lessons for my Daughter*, Anne showed enormous concern with Suzanne's conduct and that she must be beyond reproach. This advice was essential for women as any hint of improper activities could irreparably damage her reputation and therefore her marriage prospects. She recommended: "for the greatest certainty in such situations, I advise you to avoid all private meetings, no matter how pleasant they are, because as you have seen, many an honest beginning comes to a dishonest and harmful end. And even when it seems all is for the best, you must also fear the foolish and irresponsible opinions others often express to the prejudice of women at their expense."⁵⁵

One way to maintain a woman's conduct was to show intense piety and Anne's focus on this permeated throughout her lessons. She warned of making God angry and to be sure to conduct herself with honour and humility at all times. She advised her daughter to take care to occupy her mind with good works of devotion. She suggested the reading of Saint Louis and Saint Peter of Luxembourg, and also the reading of "philosophers and ancient sages, whose teachings should be a true rule and example for you. Such reading is an honest occupation and a pleasing pastime."⁵⁶ Although this is the only time that Anne hinted at Suzanne's literacy education, the advice she provided shows that she must have gained a high level of learning.

Anne not only advised Suzanne on her piety and conduct, she also provided the tools to negotiate the highly political sphere of the court – whichever court she ultimately lived in after marriage. Among Anne's advice is a fascinating explanation on how to speak to various visitors. A mainstay in medieval tradition was that women should not speak but be silent. Anne addressed this carefully by explaining as a royal woman it was often necessary to speak: "Therefore, my very dear daughter, although your natural condition is

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* p. 11.

⁵⁵ *ibid*, p. 40.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p. 28.

to speak little, you should always make an effort to speak and respond courteously to those with whom you will conduct business.”⁵⁷ She went on to explain the topics she could converse about:

“To the devout, speak about morals and about those things that are profitable to the soul; to the wise, speak moderately about honourable subjects. To help the young and joyous avoid melancholy and pass the time, you should sometimes arrange for new and charming stories to be told or for pleasing words that will make them smile and enjoy themselves. To the householder, talk about household management. You should also honour those from foreign land ... asking them about the customs. Laws and habits of their land.”⁵⁸

This advice is fascinating as it suggests Suzanne has been provided with a sound education to be able to negotiate any conversation topic that arises and also identify the topics that different personalities would likely be comfortable discussing.

Anne hints at the kind of education Suzanne should provide for her own future children by noting that they should have a sound grounding in religion. She did not appear to differentiate between boys and girls, although she did make one special mention of daughters.

“Thus you must always take great care because seeing your children poorly trained is very painful. On the other hand, there is no greater joy in the world to a father and mother than to have wise and well-taught children. Be unstinting in your efforts; teach them as well as you can, and make sure they learn as much as they can, given their limits as children. They should first learn the articles of faith, the Ten Commandments, the nature of sin, and the Seven Deadly sins; teach them how to confess, how to conduct themselves in church and during sermons, and how they must welcome their Creator in great reverence and with humility ... Make sure that your child will not follow a bad example, and point out the great

⁵⁷ *ibid*, p.51.

⁵⁸ *ibid*, p. 51.

good and honor that come from being humble and truthful. Daughters are a heavy responsibility – when they are young, you must watch over them carefully.”⁵⁹

One of the most surprising pieces of advice that Anne gave her daughter was what she should do with the governance of her realm if her husband died or went away to war. In this she referred to widowed women although clearly still addressing Suzanne: “When it comes to the government of their land and affairs, they must depend only on themselves, when it comes to sovereignty they must not cede power to anyone.” Anne had acquired the duchy of Bourbon which would be inherited by her daughter. Anne seemed concerned that Suzanne must not relinquish control to anyone if her husband dies. Although Anne did not describe Suzanne’s specific course of study, apart from reading advice, she must have provided her with the skills to manage her lands as Anne adroitly had done herself. This unique book of advice from a mother to a daughter was later echoed in the court of England with Katherine of Aragon commissioning a book of advice for her daughter.

Humanism and Women in Spain

Unlike the lack of evidence for the specific education Anne provided Suzanne, there is much more information to show the education of the princesses of Spain. As a princess, Katherine of Aragon’s mother Isabella of Castile was taught within the conventional structure common for royal girls. She was taught reading and writing, but only in the vernacular. Predominantly her education consisted of the traditional learning expected of women with the usual focus on domestic skills such as needlepoint, embroidery, spinning and weaving. There is no doubt that she learned to read and write in Castilian but not Latin. It was universally acknowledged that a prince would be educated to govern territory, whereas a princess needed to focus on her conduct and the example she would set for others. Even the Italian humanists, who advocated the education of women, still

⁵⁹ *ibid*, p. 60.

advised that: “a women destined to rule not to study so hard that she neglected her husband or the running of her household.”⁶⁰ It was not until years later that Isabella regretted her lack of more education in literacy and law and in particular Latin. Her nature was such that she was determined to fulfil the role of a reigning queen regnant with all the political and diplomatic skills that such a position required. Therefore, she undertook to learn Latin as an adult, which she acknowledged was not as successful as if she had learned it as a child.

Isabella is well known to have possessed an extensive library where the children’s reading material was carefully chosen. Her library shows Isabella’s breadth of interests including “prayer books, moral treatises and devotional readings as well as standard works on government, law and history. Also present are the basic texts of Latin grammar and translations of such classical authors as Aristotle, Cicero, Livy, Virgil, Sallust, and Seneca. Practical volumes of courtesy literature, treatises on hunting and games, and specific conduct books for women including the *Treasure of the City Ladies* of Christine de Pisan.”⁶¹ This particular work will be featured in this study, as a key source in the chronology of books written or translated in England that feature theories on women’s education. However, the best example of the art of governance coupled with balancing the roles of a wife and mother came from their Isabella herself, and her girls were able to learn by observing her example.

Isabella became a key patron and sponsor of humanist scholars in Spain, in particular educational texts including grammar books for both Castilian and Latin, which were “especially aimed at instructing the ladies at her court”⁶². Isabella requested that the famous humanist Antonio de Nebrija translate his Latin grammar into Spanish so that, as he said in his preface, “religious women and young unmarried women could learn some

⁶⁰ Howe, p.34.

⁶¹ *ibid*, p. 35.

⁶² *ibid*, p. 43.

Latin without having to rely on male teachers.”⁶³ This new focus on subjects beyond (but still including) the domestic skills for women influenced women in her realm to pursue this kind of study. One famous example of a highly educated Spanish woman that was present at the Spanish court and rumoured to be Isabella’s Latin tutor was Beatriz de Galindo. She was praised as a “women of great intelligence, who possessed much erudition and was noted for her [knowledge] of the Latin language.”⁶⁴ She was also remarkably known to have lectured at Salamanca University. This was the kind of environment where Isabella encouraged the education of women that Katherine of Aragon grew up in and conducted her learning.

When it came time for Isabella to choose how her children were to be educated, she was determined that her daughters would receive a well-rounded education that would suitably prepare them for their likely roles as future queens. Although this was not as comprehensive as her son’s education, it was still undertaken with an unusual level of care and attention. Isabella engaged the best humanist scholars at her disposal to teach her daughters subjects such as Latin, theology, history, selected classical literature and music. Their tutors included the famous Italian humanist scholar brothers Alessandro and Antonio Geraldini. Katherine learned Latin well enough to hold a conversation in the language. Strangely, the English queen Elizabeth of York recommended that Katherine learn French but she did not learn English until well after she arrived in England. When corresponding with her betrothed in England, Katherine wrote to Arthur in Latin. Her letters at this time have been commented on: “in Ciceronian elegance, Katherine is not inferior to her literary rival.”⁶⁵ Katherine and her sisters’ education was extensive but still did not ignore the domestic skills thought essential for a woman’s learning such as embroidery, sewing, weaving, hawking, riding and dancing. This

⁶³ Juan Luis Vives, *The Education of a Christian Woman: A Sixteenth-Century Manual*, trans. Charles Fantazzi (University of Chicago Press, 2007). p.24.

⁶⁴ Howe, *Education and Women in the Early Modern Hispanic World*. P. 45.

⁶⁵ Maria Dowling, *Humanism in the Age of Henry VIII*. (London; Dover, N.H.: Croom Helm, 1986), p. 17.

comprehensive education is later echoed in Katherine's approach to the education of Princess Mary.

Humanism and Women in England

The experience that Katherine brought with her to England was that queens were capable of engaging in political discussions and that it was possible for a queen to rule in her own right, as her mother did albeit with a king for a husband also. It was also reasonable for women to have, at the very least, a basic education. Her father-in-law knew of her studious nature as shortly after her marriage to Prince Arthur in November 1501, he became aware that she was somewhat homesick. To help to lift her mood he introduced her to the new library he had built at Richmond Palace. Here Henry VII was able to show Katherine "books that were sage and merry and also right cunning, both in Latin and in English."⁶⁶ After the death of Arthur in April 1502, Katherine was a virtual exile stuck in England while negotiations raged between Henry VII and her parents over her future. It was not until Henry VII died on the 21st April 1509, that his seventeen-year old son took matters into his own hands and married Katherine on 11th June 1509, when she was twenty-three.

The young Henry delighted in his intelligent educated older wife and often sought her advice on matters of state. As the second son he was educated alongside his sisters and he also had a very active and intelligent grandmother in Margaret Beaufort. Therefore, Henry was not opposed to intelligent, educated women. As Giles Tremlett pointed out, Katherine could "sew his shirts but also discuss how to make war on France."⁶⁷ Henry trusted his Spanish wife to the extent that she acted for a time as Henry's ambassador to

⁶⁶ Giles Tremlett, *Catherine of Aragon: The Spanish Queen of Henry VIII* (New York: Walker Books, 2010). p. 93.

⁶⁷ *ibid*, p.163.

Spain. Indeed, it was her father, Ferdinand who suggested to Henry that if he had “any doubts about Spanish matters ... he could always negotiate directly with a personal representative who should be given ‘all faith and credence, as if they were myself.’”⁶⁸ He was referring, of course to his daughter Katherine. In 1513, Henry appointed Katherine Regent of England when the king went to war in France. It was during this time that Katherine was forced to send an army to fight the Scots. The campaign was remarked on by Peter Martyr in Spain: “Queen Catherine, in imitation of her mother Isabel and imbued by the spirit of her father ... made a splendid oration to the English captains, told them to be ready to defend their territory, that the Lord smiled upon those who stood in defence of their own, and they should remember English courage excelled that of all other nations.”⁶⁹ The battle at Flodden was a victory for Katherine and England, which included the death of the king of Scotland, James IV. This strong, intelligent version of the Queen of England often gets lost in modern sources behind the shadow of the divorce. But it must be remembered she was an active participant in the governance of England for over twenty years, longer than that of Henry’s other five wives combined.

Katherine was an enthusiastic supporter of the humanist scholars and educational institutions, which was shown by her patronage of, and her regular visits to them. There was some precedence in England for female royal patronage of scholars and universities. Henry VIII’s grandmother, Margaret Beaufort was well known for her support and patronage of these scholars. Particularly unusual for a woman at the time, she also translated several devotional texts. It was said at the time by her friend, John Fisher that:

“She was of singular wisdom far passing the common rate of women, she was good in remembrance and of holding memory ... right studious she was in books which she had in great number both in English and French, and for her exercise and for the profit of other she did translate divers matters of devotion out of

⁶⁸ *ibid*, p. 158.

⁶⁹ *ibid*, 196.

French into English. Full often she complained that in her youth she had not given her to the understanding of Latin. “⁷⁰

However, Margaret never specifically raised the notion of education for women. Initially, neither did Katherine. The English universities and their new emphasis on humanist scholarship, found an active supporter in their queen. Whereas Henry’s support could be unreliable, once her support was gained Katherine was a generous patron. Katherine’s almoner Robert Bekensaw was also the president of Queen’s College in Cambridge. In Queen Katherine the “college found ... an active protector of their rights and studies.”⁷¹ The new learning found a place to flourish in the newly established St John’s College, which was opened in 1516. Henry’s grandmother Margaret Beaufort had long planned the college, but she left no provision for it in her will. John Fisher worked tirelessly to attempt to attain funding for the college. However, Henry VIII balked at the idea of spending money on the venture – until Katherine stepped in. She interceded with the king and even pardoned the college of a debt “of £50 due unto her for the mortising of the lordship of Riddiswell”.⁷² Similarly, Katherine took an active interest in Thomas Wolsey’s foundation of Cardinal College in Oxford. In revealing Wolsey’s plans to the king and queen Bishop Longland writes to Wolsey:

“I have delivered your token to the Kings Highnes with your humble commendacions unto hym, with your lyke thankes for his highe and favorable gudnes shewid in futherans and setting forth your moste godly purpose concernynge your College ... his Highnes dydd soo rejoice at the said fundacion and Colledge for whiche ye have maad hym and the Queen participants... I went with the lords to the Quenes chamber, where the Kinge came with the Quene towards wher I stood, and said to the Quene these words, ‘Madame My Lorde of Lincoln kan shewe of my lord Cardinalls Colledge at Oxford, and what lernynge ther is and shalbe, and what lernyd men in the same,’ and so the Kinge departed;

⁷⁰ Dowling, *Humanism in the Age of Henry VIII*. p. 220.

⁷¹ Ibid. p. 23.

⁷² Ibid., p. 25.

and I shewid to the Quene ... what greate shuld come of the same ... And her grace was marvelous glad and joyous to hier of this your notable fundacion and Colledge, speaking grett honor of the same.”⁷³

This enthusiastic support of the growth of the new humanist learning in English universities was underlined by Katherine’s visits to them. Katherine was a friend of Corpus Christi College in Oxford and the college’s first president John Claimond. She would visit him in his college lodgings while Henry went hunting nearby.⁷⁴ Similarly, she also frequently visited the abbey at Syon on the west side of London of the river Thames. Syon Abbey was renowned as a place of spiritual learning and a regular meeting place of scholars.

English and European humanist scholars in the early 1500s travelled regularly. They connected through visitations and also through vast amounts of correspondence. They read each other’s works and passed them on to others. New scholars could gain introductions to universities and even the royal court through more senior scholars. Thomas More had been a mainstay at the English court since Henry’s childhood. He was the first English humanist scholar to come into Katherine’s acquaintance. He was present at her weddings to both Arthur and Henry and although it is unclear how well she knew his daughters, she is likely to have known of his extraordinary education of them, which will be described later. Strickland suggested that “Katherine delighted in the conversation of a lively cast; she often invited Sir Thomas More to her private suppers with the king, and took utmost pleasure in her society.”⁷⁵

⁷³ Henry Ellis, *Original Letters, Illustrative of English History: ser.1-3* (London: Harding, Triphook and Leonard, 1825), accessed 17 July 2014, <http://archive.org/details/originallettersi01elliuft.p.181>.

⁷⁴ ‘History of Corpus Christi College’, *Corpus Christi College Oxford*, accessed 6 June 2014, <http://www.ccc.ox.ac.uk/History/>.

⁷⁵ Agnes Strickland, *The Lives of the Queens of England from the Norman Conquest*, (London: Longman, Green, 1861), p. 518.

The famous Dutch humanist Desiderus Erasmus held an important place in ensuring humanism became a driving force in England. He visited England at the end of the 1400s where he forged important relationships with English scholars such as Thomas More, John Colet and his former pupil, William Blount, Lord Mountjoy.⁷⁶ It was then that he met an eight-year old Prince Henry. He went on to live in England between 1511 and 1514 and lectured at Cambridge University. He advised Henry that to be a great king it was important not just to win wars but also to be educated and show the world that the English court was a court of intellectuals. Erasmus was so well respected by the king and queen that Katherine wanted him to be her Latin tutor; however, he could not be lured back to England. “The Queen has tried to get me to be her preceptor; and everyone knows that if I cared to live even a few months at Court, I might heap as many benefices as I likes. But I allow nothing to interfere with my leisure and studious labours.”⁷⁷ However, Erasmus was fascinated by Henry’s studious wife: “As for the Queen, not only is she prodigiously learned for one of her sex, but no less respected for her piety than for her knowledge ... The Queen loves literature, which she has studied with good result since her childhood.”⁷⁸ Although he chose not to return to England, he still held the English court in high regard as a place of intellectuals. He described Henry as “the wisest of contemporary princes and a great lover of literature.”⁷⁹ Erasmus believed that the English court had become a place of high learning, writing that “your court is a model of Christian instruction, frequented by persons of the very highest erudition, so that there is no university that could not be jealous of it.”⁸⁰ Of course this may be mere flattery of a scholar to his potential patron. But Erasmus also extolled the virtues of the English court in correspondence to other people in Europe. He wrote to Bombasius: “You know ...

⁷⁶ Lord Mountjoy studied under Erasmus in Paris and would, in 1512 until 1533, be chamberlain to Queen Katherine.

⁷⁷Desiderius Erasmus, *The Epistles of Erasmus: From His Earliest Letters to His Fifty-First Year Arranged in Order of Time: English Translations from the Early Correspondence, with a Commentary Confirming the Chronological Arrangement and Supplying Further Biographical Matter* (London; New York; Bombay: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1901), accessed 05 August 2014 <http://archive.org/details/01919866.1692.emory.edu>. p.145.

⁷⁸ *ibid*, p.108.

⁷⁹ Marek Smoluk, ‘The English Royal Court Through the Eyes of Erasmus.’, *ANGLIJOS KARALIŠKASIS DVARAS ERAZMO AKIMIS*. 16, no. 21/A (2 October 2009): 105–11. p.107.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, p.108.

how adverse I have always been from the courts of princes; it is a life which I can only regard as gilded in misery under a mask of splendour; but I would gladly give move to a court like that, if only I could grow young again ... The men who have the most influence [with Henry and Katherine] are those who excel in the humanities and in integrity as wisdom.”⁸¹

When accompanying Henry to the famous diplomatic meeting with the French king Francis I at the Field of the Cloth of Gold in 1520, Thomas More met Spanish humanist scholar Juan Luis Vives. Due to his admiration of the scholar’s work, Thomas More recommended to Katherine of Aragon that he was a worthy scholar to sponsor. Katherine agreed to grant her Spanish compatriot a small pension in 1521, two years before his first visit to England. To further extend the English royal patronage, Vives strove to gain King Henry’s approval by dedicating a work on Augustine to him. Apparently impressed, Henry VIII invited him to come to England and make it his “scholarly home”.⁸² Vives went on to become a popular lecturer at Oxford, “where the King and Queen went to hear him.”⁸³ His elite students included Nicholas Udall, Edward Wotton, Richard Pate, John Heliars and Reginald Pole.⁸⁴ Additionally, Vives also often accompanied the Queen to the “learned monastery at Syon.”⁸⁵ Vives continued to have close ties to Thomas More in England. More invited Vives to stay in his home. For a month Vives would have observed the results of the extraordinary education of his daughters. The impact of More’s daughters on Vives’ later writing on female education is evident in his dedication to them, which will be described in the next section.

Both Henry and Katherine continued to be active supporters of the humanist scholars and often both commented on books presented to them. One example is a book written by Erasmus, which Vives presented to the king and queen in 1524. In a letter to Erasmus,

⁸¹ Ibid, p. 20.

⁸² Vives, *The Instruction of a Christen Woman*. p. xxiii.

⁸³ Dowling, *Humanism in the Age of Henry VIII*.p. 149.

⁸⁴ Vives, *The Instruction of a Christen Woman*. pg. xxvi.

⁸⁵ Ibid p. 149.

Vives explained how the book was received: “[Your] book *De Libero Arbitrio* was yesterday given to the King, who read a few pages, seemed pleased, and said he should read it through. He pointed out to [me] a passage ... which he said delighted him much. The Queen also is much pleased. She desired [me] to salute [you] for her, and says that she thanks him for having treated the subject with so much moderation.”⁸⁶ This is a fascinating example which shows that both the king and the queen took a personal interest in the works of the great Erasmus as well as other humanist scholars.

When it came time to decide how Princess Mary should be educated, it was Juan Luis Vives to whom Katherine turned for help in designing a course of study. Later she would also seek the aid of Erasmus. Other humanist scholars also contributed to Mary’s education in various ways. However, none of this would have been possible if the king disapproved. It was Henry who approved Mary’s tutors. After all, presenting an intelligent, accomplished daughter to international dignitaries made him look good, particularly when he was hoping to arrange a political match with her. In 1527, during a banquet to celebrate a peace treaty with France and the arrangement of marriage between Mary and the son of the French king, Mary danced and played the virginal, and also “conversed in a number of languages, including Latin and French, and presented the company with a hand written essay.”⁸⁷ But it was Katherine who took a personal interest in the form that Mary’s education took. Her 1525 letter suggests that Katherine had previously taught Mary some Latin herself, but by that time Mary was installed in Wales and taught by a tutor. Katherine could only ask for updates on her daughter’s education. It is clear, is that Katherine continued to take a personal and active interest in Mary’s learning.

⁸⁶ J S Brewer, ed., ‘828. Vives to Erasmus, 13 November, 1524’, in *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, Volume 4, 1524-1530* (London, 1875), British History Online <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/letters-papers-hen8/vol4/pp356-372>. Hereafter called L & P.

⁸⁷ Milton Waldman, *The Lady Mary: A Biography of Mary Tudor, 1516-1558* (London: Collins, 1973)., p. 44.

“As for your writing in Latin, I am glad that ye shall change from me to master Federston, for that shall do you much good to learn by him to write right, but yet sometimes I would be glad when ye do write to master Federston of your own inditing, when he hath read it, that I may see it, for it shall be a great comfort to me to see you keep your Latin and fair writing and all; and so I pray you to recommend me to my lady of Salisbury. At Osborne, this Friday night.”⁸⁸

In conclusion, the humanist theories that arose from the classical sources and considered by the European humanist scholars, considerably affected the courts of Western Europe. No longer was military might the sign of a powerful country, educated royalty in a court of intellectuals began to be seen as essential. The writings on female learning led to powerful educated ruling women appearing on courts throughout Europe. One such woman Isabella of Castile, educated her daughters in a comprehensive way to ensure their abilities as useful and influential queens. This became evident when Katherine of Aragon became queen of England and supported and patronised humanist scholarship in her realm. With the birth of Mary, female learning became of key importance, and in the following chapter, the flourishing theories evident in the surprising number of works written on women’s education is explored.

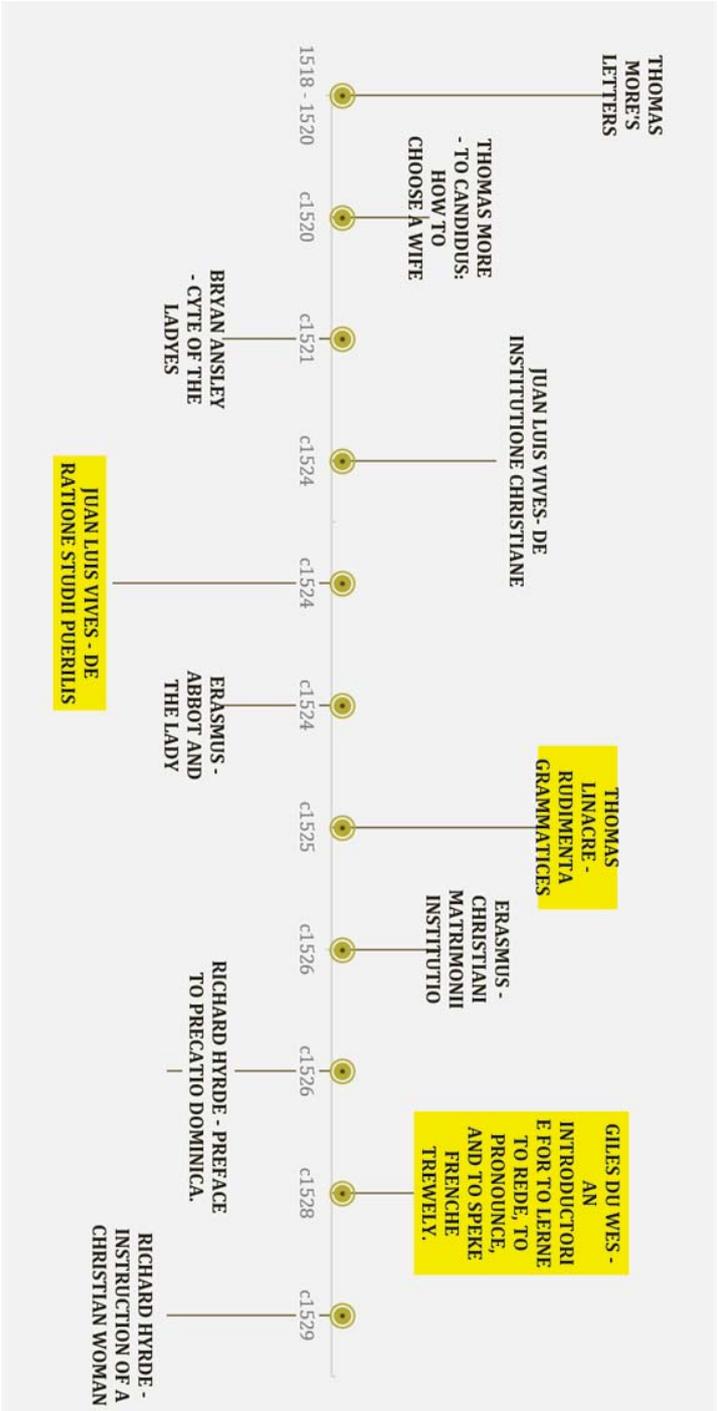
⁸⁸ L & P, No. 1519 Katharine of Arragon (*sic*) to [the Princess Mary], 27 July 1525.

Chapter 3 Primary Writing on Women's Education

The 1520s marked a remarkable proliferation of the writing on the subject of the education of women, predominantly by contemporary humanist scholars. Humanist writings on women's education in England can be seen, initially from 1520 in the form of epigrams written by Thomas More. At about the same time, he wrote letters to his children and their tutors regarding their education. The intense interest he took in the education of his children often centred on his daughter Margaret, whom he regarded as the ablest student of his household. In his letters the methods that he provided for his children's, education, both boys and girls, were outlined. In 1521, the first ever English translation of Christine de Pizan's book *The Boke of the Cyte of Ladyes* came off the presses and featured long tracts on the potential of women in many aspects of their lives, including their ability to learn. In 1522 Juan Luis Vives began to write *De Institutione Foeminae Christianae* which, although commissioned for the moral education of Princess Mary, was designed as a conduct book for all upper class women. This work remained very much within the conservative framework of women in the home as wives and mothers, rather than a proscribed course of study for a potential queen. However, Vives did express enlightened theories on the education for women, specifically that women were just as capable of learning as men and it was advisable for women to become literate to further enhance their domestic roles. The theories of More and Vives became so popular that they inspired other scholars to insert these theories into their works, such as Erasmus' *The Abbot and the Learned Lady* (1524) and *Chrisitani Matrimonii Institutio* (1526). In 1526, Margaret More Roper translated into English Erasmus' *Precatio Dominica*, his commentary on the Lord's Prayer. Although translating later became a reasonable occupation for women, at this time it was still viewed with reservation, especially the translation of such an important religious subject as the Pater Noster. Richard Hyrde, a humanist scholar, a student of her father Thomas More, and possibly Margaret's tutor, wrote the preface to Margaret's work. This became the first of two vehement declarations of the appropriateness of education for women that Hyrde wrote. This second preface appeared in his own 1529 translation of Vives book, published under the title *The Instruction of a Christen Woman* and was similarly more radical than Vives

own enlightened views on the education of women. These works of the 1520s inspired similar works to be written later in the century and also inspired an increase in the literacy of women, which will be explored later.

Primary Sources in the 1520s Featuring Theories on Female Education



*Highlighted books are course books written specifically for Princess Mary's lessons

Figure 2: Timeline depicting the number of works written in the 1520s that feature theories and practice of women's education

Primary Sources featuring Theories of Female Education

1518 – 1522 Thomas More's Letters

Thomas More (1478-1535) epitomized what it meant to be an English Renaissance humanist. He was intensely Catholic, a renowned scholar, lawyer and councillor to Henry VIII. As was common amongst humanist scholars, More prolifically wrote letters, many of which were later published. Through these letters we know that he developed an extraordinary school in his house for his son and three daughters, and also some of the children in his circle of family and friends. Although he rarely taught them himself because of his busy career, he engaged tutors for the children and it is in a letter from More to the tutor William Gonell in 1518 that he justified the advisability of educating girls:

“... renown for learning, when it is not united with a good life is nothing else that splendid and notorious infamy: This would be specially the case in a woman. Since erudition in woman is a new thing and a reproach to the sloth of men, many will gladly assail it, and impute to literature what is really a fault of nature, thinking from the vices of the learned to get their own ignorance esteemed as virtue. On the other hand, if a woman (and this I desire and hope with you as their teacher for all my daughters) to eminent virtue should add an outwork of even moderate skill in literature, I think she will have more real profit than if she had obtained the riches of Croesus and the beauty of Helen. I do not say this because of the glory which will be hers ... but because the reward of wisdom is too solid to be lost like riches or to decay like beauty, since it depends on the intimate conscious of what is right, not on the talk of men, that which nothing is more foolish or mischievous.”

He went on to explore the extraordinary theory that was first suggested by Plato and was subsequently repeated by some of his humanist contemporaries, that both men and women have equal abilities to learn:

“Nor do I think the harvest will be much affected whether it is a man or a woman who sows the field. They both have the same human nature, which reason differentiates from that of beasts; both, therefore, are equally suited for those studies by which reason is perfected, and becomes fruitful like a ploughed land on which the seed of good lessons has been sown. If it be true that the soil of women’s brain be bad, and apter to bear bracken than corn, by which saying many keep women from study, I think, on the contrary, that a woman’s wit is on that account all the more diligently to be cultivated, that nature’s defect may be redressed by industry. This was the opinion of the ancients, of those who were most prudent as well as most holy ... Do you, my learned Gunnell, have the kindness to see that my daughters thoroughly learn these works of those holy men.”

Finally, his most surprising comment was that two of his daughters were more advanced students than his son: “If you will teach something of this sort, in addition to their lesson in Sallust – to Margaret and Elizabeth, as being more advanced than John and Cecily – you will bind me and them still more to you.”⁸⁹

More often wrote to his children to help guide their study, clearly showing he continued to personally oversee their education and decided their course of study. In his 1521 letter he discussed one of the extraordinary subjects his children were learning – astronomy, which was not part of any child’s, normal curriculum, boys or girls, although interestingly, it was a passion of Henry VIII’s:

“If I did not love you so much I should be really envious of your happiness in having so many and such excellent tutors. But I think you have no longer need of Mr Nicholas, since you have learnt whatever he had to teach you about astronomy. I hear you are so far advanced in that science that you can not only point out the polar-star or the dog-star, or any of the constellation, but are also

⁸⁹ Thomas More, ‘Mores Letter to His Children’s Tutor, William Gonell, 2 May 1518’, accessed 8 August 2014, <http://www.thomasmorestudies.org/docs/More%20to%20Will%20Gonell.pdf>.

able – which requires a skilful and profound astrologer – among all those heavenly bodies, to distinguish the sun from the moon!”⁹⁰

In More’s next letter to his children he told them that the letters they wrote to him provide excellent practice for their Latin, particularly their ability to translate from Latin from English. Latin was usually only taught to boys in the emerging grammar schools, but in his household school More ensured that his daughters also received Latin education:

“Nothing can come from your workshop, however rude or unfinished, that will not give me more pleasure than the most accurate thing another can write. So much does my affection for you recommend whatever you write to me. Indeed, without any recommendation, your letters are capable of pleasing by their own merits, their wit and pure Latinity... It will be no harm, if you write the whole in English, for then you will have much less trouble in turning it into Latin; not having to look for the matter, your mind will be intent only on the language.”⁹¹

More’s extraordinary education of his daughters, and other girls that attended his school, became widely known by his fellow humanist scholars and provided the precedent and inspiration for future contemporary scholarship on the subject of female learning. Evidence that More’s school was well known comes from several sources, most notably the influential Dutch humanist scholar and close friend of More’s, Desiderus Erasmus.

“It was not always believed that letters are of value to the virtue and general reputation of women. I myself once held this opinion: but More completely converted me. Two things are of the greatest peril to the virtue of young women, idleness and lascivious games, and the love of letters prevents both. ... I do not necessarily reject the advice of those who would provide for their daughter’s virtue through handiwork. Yet there is nothing that more occupies the attention

⁹⁰ Thomas More, ‘More to Children 1521’, accessed 8 August 2014, <http://www.thomasmorestudies.org/docs/More%20to%20Children%201521.pdf>.

⁹¹ Thomas More, ‘More to Children 1522’, accessed 8 August 2014, <http://www.thomasmorestudies.org/docs/More%20to%20Children%201522.pdf>.

than study... I threw this out to More, would he not be more tormented by the thought of losing those daughters on whom he had spent so much labor in their instruction? He answered immediately, "If something happens that cannot be avoided, I should prefer that they die learned rather than unlearned."⁹²

In Erasmus' undated letter to John Faber, he described More and his family: "There [More] converses affably with his family ... You would say that in that place was Plato's academy ... I should rather call it a schools or university, of Christian religion. For there is none therein who does not study the branches of a liberal education."⁹³

Similarly, Juan Luis Vives also commended Thomas More on his learned daughters as ideal examples of female learning. Of Thomas More's daughters he said: "thyre father nat content only to have them good and very chast, wolde also they shyld be wel lerned: supposing that by that meane they shudde be more truely and surely chaste."⁹⁴

There is no doubt that More's education of his daughters became a great talking point in its uniqueness. This educational model became of particular interest when the problem arose of how to educate a girl who may be the next ruling monarch of England. It is this problem that encouraged scholars to publish books on the subject of women's education.

⁹² J. K. Sowards, 'Erasmus and the Education of Women.', *Sixteenth Century Journal* 13, no. 4 (1982). p.84.

⁹³ Watson, 'Vives and the Renaissance Education of Women'. p.175.

⁹⁴ *ibid*, p. 22.

1520 – Thomas More – *To Candidus: How to Choose a Wife*

In 1516, Thomas More wrote various Latin epigrams in the *Epigrammata*. A collection of Latin epigrams, several of which related to women, it was not until the later publication of a 1520 edition that Thomas More added those discussed here. This was a period where the school in his house was well entrenched. In one such epigram, *To Candidus: How to Choose a Wife*, he explained to men the advantage of having an intelligent, educated wife. Although he described many of the usual conventional qualities such as modesty and virtue and the importance of being a mother of excellent character, he then went on to give extraordinary emphasis to intelligence and education. Also, when More said that her education should come from “the best of ancient works”, he was clearly recommending a humanist education for women so she could understand the classical sources. This would suggest that she should learn Latin. He said that: “she must be either educated or capable of being educated.”⁹⁵

“Happy is the woman whose education permits her to derive from the best of ancient works the principles which confer a blessing on life. Armed with this learning, she would not yield to pride in prosperity, nor to grief in distress – even though misfortune strike her down. For this reason, your lifetime companion will be ever agreeable, never a trouble or a burden. If she is well instructed herself, then some day she will teach your little grandsons, at an early age, to read.

You will be glad to leave the company of men and to seek repose in the bosom of your accomplished wife, while she tends to your comfort ... Then you will be glad to spend days and nights in pleasant and intelligent conversation, listening to the sweet words which ever most charmingly flow from her honeyed mouth.⁹⁶

He explained that an educated wife could give her husband comfort from the stresses of his day with her intellectual conversation.

⁹⁵ Pamela Joseph Benson, *The Invention of the Renaissance Woman: The Challenge of Female Independence in the Literature and Thought of Italy and England*. (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992)., p. 159.

⁹⁶ A. D. Cousins, ‘Humanism, Female Education, and Myth: Erasmus, Vives, and More’s “To Candidus”’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 2004, edsjr., p. 227.

“By her comments she would restrain you if ever vain success should exalt you and would comfort you if grievous sorrow should cast you down. When she speaks, it will be difficult to choose between her perfect power of expression and her thoughtful understanding of all kinds of affairs.”⁹⁷

In the epigram, Thomas More gave ancient classical examples of learned women including Cornelia, the mother of the two Gracchi, who used her persuasive speech to educate her sons.⁹⁸ Indeed, in his epigram on the coronation of Henry VIII More compared Katherine of Aragon to Cornelia by saying “the well-spoken Cornelia would yield to her in eloquence”.⁹⁹ More believed that education for women enhanced their virtue and made them better wives and mothers. This emphasis on virtue is described in the conclusion of the poem:

“If nature has denied the gift of beauty to a girl ... if she has this inborn gift of virtue, she would be in my eyes fairer than the swan. If elusive fortune has denied her a dowry ... if she has this inborn gift of virtue, she would be in my eyes richer, Croesus, than you.”¹⁰⁰

In these poems, Thomas More introduced the justification for education for women. This was the only work of More's to be published in his lifetime that featured his theories on female education. He explained that education was necessary for the accepted role of the mother as the early childhood educator to her children. He also insisted that a humanist education for women enhanced her role as a wife. For More, education for women was seen as essential, as it would make them better wives and mothers. Packaging these new and quite radical ideas into domestic and private confines coupled with feminine morality and virtue, made them palatable and acceptable.

⁹⁷ Benson, p. 160.

⁹⁸ *ibid*, p.160.

⁹⁹ *ibid*, p.161.

¹⁰⁰ Lee Cullen Khanna, 'Images of Women in Thomas More's Poetry', *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*, 1978, edsjsr., p.84.

1521 Bryan Ansley – English Translation of Christine de Pizan – *The Boke of the Cyte of Ladies*

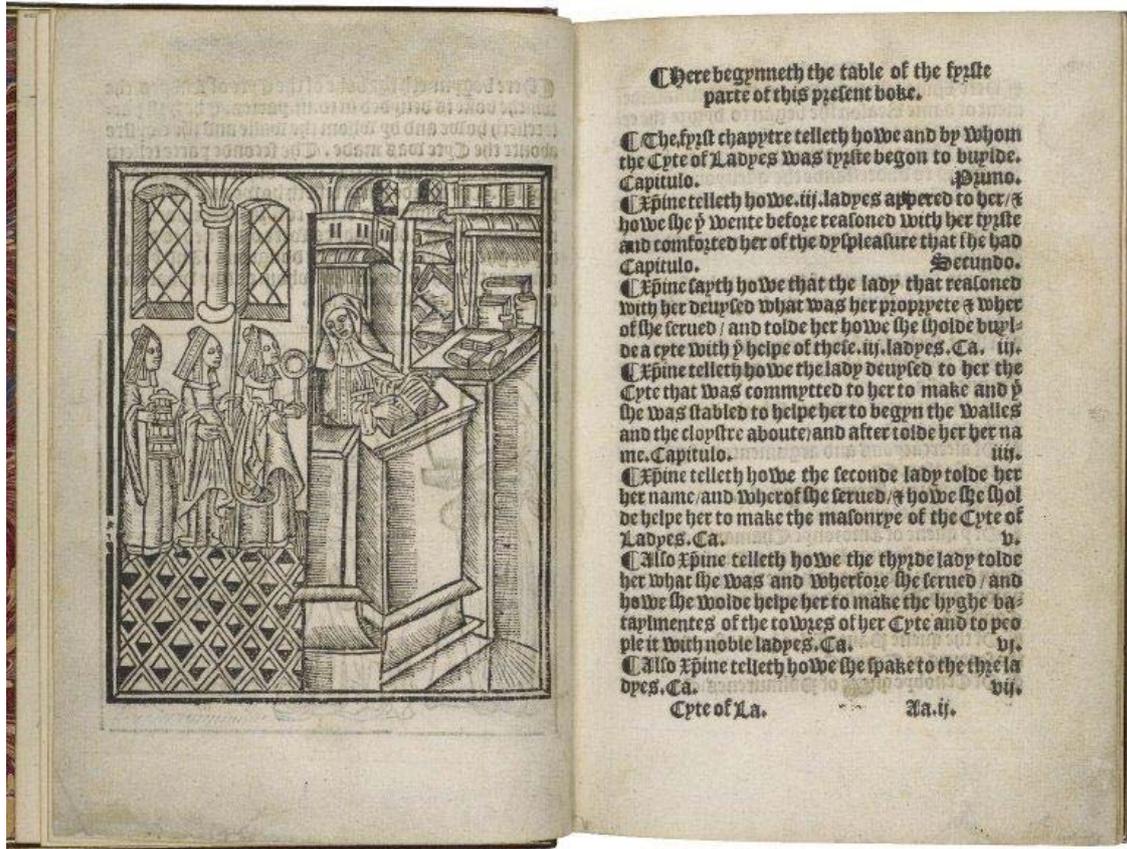


Figure 3: Here begynneth the boke of the cyte of the ladies. By Christine de Pizan, translated into English by Bryan Ansley 1521

Little scholarship has been undertaken on the fact that Christine de Pizan's book *Le Livre de la Cité des Dames* was translated into English as *The Boke of the Cyte of Ladies* in 1521 by Brian Ansley and printed by Henry Pepwell. The scholarship generally revolves around the fact that Christine is not named as the original author and that the book implies that Ansley is the author. Regardless, the content is a faithful translation of Christine de Pizan's book, including the assertion that women have the ability to learn as effectively as men, if only they are given the opportunity. This is the earliest printed work in English that directly engaged with how and why women should be educated.

However, this book was already present in its French manuscript form in the libraries of the royalty and nobility of England. Therefore, what prompted this work to be translated into English at this time, therefore making it available to the wider public?

Christine de Pizan wrote '*Le Livre de la Cité des Dames*' in 1405. She wrote it as a reaction against the insulting tirade against women and womanly behaviour in the medieval French works *The Romance of the Rose* by Jean de Meun and the French translation of Matheolus' *Lamentations*. In her book Christine uses allegory to create an image of a city built by women where they assert positive roles in all aspects of society. She tells us she has a dream in which she is visited by female figures representing Reason, Rectitude and Justice. They advise her on the great attributes of women using classical examples inspired by Boccaccio's writings in *De mulieribus claris*. On the subject of female learning, Christine is clear: all women, not only those of the noble classes have the capacity to achieve great feats.

Although the 1521 English translation of Christine's book *The Booke of the Cyte of Ladyes* omits naming her as the author, the content is a faithful translation of the French original. The circumstances of how or why it came to be translated is unclear. It is unknown if it was a royal commission, but it is likely that it was translated at this time because Princess Mary was the sole heir, and possibly with the hope that it would please King Henry. Bryan Ansley was a member of Henry VIII's household and held the role of the yeoman of the cellar. Therefore, he was a reasonably high-ranking member of the royal household, possibly looking to climb the social ladder by translating this book.

Although the English translation did not name Christine as the author, the translation did include her name throughout the book (abbreviated as 'xtine') as the main voice in the work and also showed the figures she spoke to as feminine. It is difficult to know if it was widely understood in England that a woman wrote the original book; however, many people would have been acquainted with her French version, which was readily available in England. Also, there is evidence in the printed 1521 translation held in the British Library that at least some people knew the English translation was written by her, as there

is a marginal note beside one of the many references to Christine which explains that this was “the author’s name w[hich] was a wooma[n].”¹⁰¹

Christine’s views on the education of women were defined in the form of an argument presented by the allegorical figure of Reason: “I say to the agayne and doubt never to the contrary that yf it were the custome to put the lytel maydens to the scole and ... were made to lerne the scyences as they do the man children that they sholde lerne as parfytely and they shold be as wel entred in to the subtyltes of all the artes and scyences as they be.” She went on to say that the only reason women were not more learned is because they had fewer opportunities to experience life than men did as they were generally confined to their homes. “It is for that they haunce not so many dyvers places ne so many dyvers thynges but they holde them within theyr houses and it suffyseth them to do theyr busynesse and there is nothyng that techeth a creature reasonable so moche as dothe the experience of many dyvers thynges.” She provided classical examples of women of “right grete connyng and of grete understandyng I shall tell the and to our purpose that I tolde the of the understandyng of women that have as shape wytte to lerne as men have.”¹⁰²

This English translation appeared at a time where there was an increase in the attention on female education. With the publication of *The Boke of the Cyte of Ladies* there began a “series [of works] that promoted the education of women, and indirectly the legitimacy of female monarchs.”¹⁰³ Accordingly, the book also implied “that a female ruler can fulfil the duties of the office, and that she will need active defence against misogynist detractors.”¹⁰⁴ Apparently the general public was not quite ready for such a feminine point of view as this book was only printed once and not reprinted again suggesting there was a lack of demand. However, it is a crucial addition to the early

¹⁰¹ Susan Groag Bell, *The Lost Tapestries of the City of Ladies: Christine de Pizan’s Renaissance Legacy*, First Edition edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004). p. 153.

¹⁰² Christine de Pizan, *Here Begynneth the Boke of the Cyte of Ladyes*, trans. Brian Anslay, 1521, accessed 05 August 2014, <http://eebo.chadwyck.com>.

¹⁰³ Malcolmson, ‘Christine de Pizan’s City of the Ladies’.p. 20

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, p. 21.

chronology of the works written with reference to female education and intelligence in the 1520s, as it marks the beginning of a published campaign that attempted to re-examine a woman's role in society and the place of education and intelligence which previously had been dismissed as unnecessary or even creating a path to immorality.

1524 - Juan Luis Vives – *De Institutione Foeminae Christianae*

In 1522 Juan Luis Vives began writing his work *De Institutione Foeminae Christianae*, published two years later. It is usually assumed that Katherine of Aragon commissioned this book, although there is some debate about this as there is no direct evidence of the commission, only that it was dedicated to her. In his introduction to the translation of the original Latin version of Vives' book, Charles Fantazzi explained that Katherine's tutor Alessandro Geraldini wrote a book on female education entitled *De eruditione nobelium pullarum (On the Education of Well-born Girls)*. The book has not survived but Fantazzi suggested this book was the inspiration for Katherine to commission Vives' book for Princess Mary's moral education.¹⁰⁵ Also, as will be shown in the next work, there is solid evidence that she also commissioned a similar book from Erasmus. Vives' book has gained much attention from scholars, as it was enormously popular. It was printed and reprinted in English over nine times during the course of the century.¹⁰⁶ It was also translated into several other European languages.

In general, Vives' book *De Institutione Foeminae Christianae* was within the conservative framework of what was considered suitable for a woman to live her life. It is a conduct book that focuses more on morality, rather than an academic course of study. Therefore, it was written not just for Princess Mary but also for the moral education of all upper-class women. It advised that a woman must be pious and protect her all-important

¹⁰⁵ Vives, *The Education of a Christian Woman*.

¹⁰⁶ Travitsky, p, 164. Travitsky identifies 1529, 1531, 1541, 1547, 1557 and 1567, as the years of reprinting of Vives book by printer Thomas Berthlett and in 1585 by Robert Waldegrave and 1592 by John Danter.

chastity. She must also be a supportive wife and mother and not engage in any kind of public speaking or professional role. There were long tracts describing how women should conduct themselves in the various stages of their lives. Although much of the extensive book was conservative in its approach, there were occasional statements that were surprisingly liberal, particularly regarding the education of women. He used Katherine of Aragon and her sisters, and also Thomas More's daughters, as examples of how female learning could be complementary to a chaste and virtuous domestic life, publically emphasising how these women were examples to be emulated. It was important that they were not just queens but also noble women and therefore more accessible examples to the upper-class female reader: "There hat bene seen in our tyme the foure daughters of queen Isabel, of whom I spake a lytle before that were wel learned all."¹⁰⁷ Of More's daughters he said: "thyre father nat content only to have them good and very chast, wolde also they shyld be wel lerned: supposing that by that meane they shudde be more truely and surely chaste."¹⁰⁸ He went on to explain how education was a worthy pastime to ensure the mind did not wander into immoral thoughts. "For the study of lernyng is suche a thing that it occupieth ones mynde holly, and lyfteth hit up unto the knowledge of moste goodly matters: and pluketh hit from the remembraunce of suche thynges as be foule. And if any suche thought come in to theyr mynde, eyther the myne, well fortified with the precepts of good lvyng, avoydeth them away, orels hit gyveth none hede unto those thynges, that be vyle and foule."¹⁰⁹

Vives insisted that he had never met an educated woman who was also immoral. "We shall fynde no lerned woman that ever was yll: where I coude brynge forth an hundred good, as Cornelia, the mother of Gracchus, whiche was an example of al goodnes and chastite, and taught her children her owne selfe"¹¹⁰ "Cleobula was so given to learnynge and philosophie, that she clerely despised all pleasure of the body, and lyved perpetually

¹⁰⁷ Vives, *The Instruction of a Christen Woman*. p. 22.

¹⁰⁸ *ibid*, p. 22.

¹⁰⁹ *ibid*, p. 22.

¹¹⁰ *ibid* p.20.

a mayde.”¹¹¹ Vives always linked his classical examples of learned women to those who could also be shown to be chaste and virtuous. At this time chastity was becoming as equally a desirable state as virginity and for women it was the most important virtue and should be protected at all costs. Vives explained “that chastite is as the quene of vertues in a woman ...” and he went on to explain that demureness, frugality, diligence in the house, devotion and meekness closely followed as suitable virtues for women.¹¹² He also showed that learning was a useful way to keep a woman’s mind occupied and keep her away from immoral pastimes such as dancing: “And the mynde, set upon lernynge and wisdome, shall nat only abhorre from foule lust ... But also they shall leave all suche light and tryfyng pleasures ... A woman sayth Plutarche, given unto lernyng wyll never delyte in daunsynge.”¹¹³

Vives remained conservative in his approach to this work and whenever he touched on the subject of women’s education he always tempered it within the confines of the home, emphasising that education must be used to enhance their roles of a wife and mother. He recommended that women should continue their reading of works of religion and moral classics. About writing, Vives was even more limited. His expectation was that they must only copy passages from their religious literature and not “verses or tryflyng songes.”¹¹⁴ Vives’ specific views on reading and writing will be detailed further in the following sections. It is this combination of the conservative approach with small doses of liberal thinking that made this work acceptable and popular. However, even raising the theory that education was actually beneficial for women, was new and created a platform where literacy in upper-class women began to become acceptable.

¹¹¹ *ibid*, p.20.

¹¹² *ibid*, p.53.

¹¹³ *ibid*, p.22.

¹¹⁴ *ibid* p.23.

1524 – Erasmus – *The Abbot and the Learned Lady*

As previously mentioned, Desiderius Erasmus admired Thomas More's daughters for their education and Margaret More was the likely inspiration in this next piece of writing. In his *Colloquies*, published in 1524, Erasmus described an extraordinary dialogue between an abbot called Antronius and a lady called Magdalia. The dialogue was a reaction against Erasmus' perceived excesses of monasticism and he cast the lady in the role of the moral dictator. In the preface Erasmus explained that: "A certain Abbot paying a visit to a Lady, finds her reading Greek and Latin authors. A dispute arises whence pleasantness of life proceeds: ... Not from external enjoyments, but from the study of wisdom. An ignorant abbot will by no means have his monks to be learned; nor he himself so much as a single book in his closet. Pious women in old times gave their minds to study of the Scriptures but monks that hate learning, gave themselves up to luxury, idleness, and hunting, are provoke[e]d to apply themselves to other kinds of study more becoming their profession."¹¹⁵ We see the abbot Antronius supporting leisurely activities such as drinking and hunting, and condemning the Magdalia for the number of books in her house. What was even more alarming for him, was that the books were not only in French, but also in Greek and Latin. He explained that it was suitable for a woman to read French books for leisure but the other books showed that she was reading to learn and it was unladylike for a woman to be intelligent.¹¹⁶ He went on to explain that reading Greek and Latin could endanger a woman's chastity. Magdalia laughingly replied that French books were as bad if not worse. He also asserted that "books destroy women's brains, who have little enough themselves"¹¹⁷ and that he would not want a

¹¹⁵ Desiderius Erasmus, *The Colloquies of Desiderius Erasmus Concerning Men, Manners and Things*, ed. E. (Edwin) Johnson, trans. N. (Nathan) Bailey (London: Gibbings & company, limited, 1900), accessed 24 October 2014, <http://archive.org/details/colloquiesofdesi02eras./>, p. 114 – note: punctuation and capitalisation have been reproduced as shown in this work.

¹¹⁶ *ibid*, p. 114-115.

¹¹⁷ *ibid* p. 118.

“learned wife”.¹¹⁸ Magdalia listed reasons for female learning such as assisting with running a household and raising children. She also believed that “both endears [my husband] to me and me to him”¹¹⁹ and her husband “heartily approve[d]” of her spending her time reading books. She went on to cite contemporary learned women of Europe. “There are the [More daughters] in England and the [Pirckheimer and Blaurer ladies] in Germany. So that unless you take care of yourselves it will come to pass, that we [women] shall be Divinity-Professors in the schools, and preach in the churches and take possession of your Mitres.”¹²⁰ Clearly, this dialogue was designed as an attempt to shake up the clerics and extoll them to give up their excesses for fear of losing their authority. The suggestion that this authority may be lost to women perhaps provided the appropriate shock factor. But it also showed Erasmus’ growing respect for the learning and the intelligence of the women in his acquaintance.

1526 – Erasmus - *Christiani Matrimonii Institutio (The Institution of Christian Matrimony)*

In 1526, Erasmus wrote a lengthy book on marriage entitled *Christiani Matrimonii Institutio (The Institution of Christian Matrimony)*. The book itself explained the essential importance of chastity in women within a Christian marriage and less about female education before marriage. However, it is included here as an example of a book that Katherine of Aragon undoubtedly commissioned shortly after the release of Vives’ book, as the following letters show. It shows that Katherine was asking various humanist scholars in her acquaintance to write books that may have helped with the moral education of her daughter. The book took Erasmus two years to write and was a bulky 300 pages long. The following letter from Erasmus to Thomas Lupset, dated 1525, showed that Queen Katherine, through her chamberlain Lord William Mountjoy, had commissioned Erasmus to write this book. He also mentioned his awareness of Vives’ book:

¹¹⁸ *ibid*, p. 119.

¹¹⁹ *ibid*, p. 119.

¹²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 120.

“A person of high rank [Mountjoy] asked me to produce something for your illustrious queen on the obligations of marriage. They say she was much taken by the book which I published comparing a virgin with a matyr [Virginis er matyris comparatio]. Vives dedicated to her his ‘Virgin, Wife and Widow.’ So I am surprised she is looking for something more. Nevertheless I shall fall in with her wishes.”¹²¹

He also described how Katherine commissioned this work in a letter to Michel Boudet in March 1526: “I had begun to write the precepts of marriage, which was commissioned by the queen of England, a woman as pious as she is learned.”¹²²

Erasmus apologised for his tardiness in writing his work in this letter to Katherine of Aragon written in July 1526:

“It is now more than two years, illustrious queen, since I promised Master William Mountjoy, chamberlain of your court, that I would write something on the institution of Christian marriage. Although I never lacked the will to fulfil my promise, I was constantly interrupted and prevented from performing my task ... I shall be surprised, therefore, if you are not offended by the flat disjointed character of the piece ... The valiant qualities of your mother Isabella, the former queen of Spain, were celebrated throughout the world. Her spotless character was truly the sweet savour of God in every place. Your qualities are known to us from closer at hand; ... We expect no less perfection in your daughter Mary. For what should we not expect from a girl who is born of the most devout of parents and brought up under the care of such a mother.”¹²³

¹²¹ Desiderius Erasmus, *The Correspondence of Erasmus: Letters 1535-1657, January-December 1525*, trans. Alexander Dalzell, Collected Works for Erasmus (Toronto [Ont.]: University of Toronto Press, 1994), accessed 24 October 2014., p. 308.

¹²² Desiderius Erasmus, *The Correspondence of Erasmus: Letters 1658 to 1801; January 1526-March 1527*, trans. Alexander Dalzell, Collected Works of Erasmus (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), accessed 24 October 2014., p.81.

¹²³ *ibid*, p. 258.

A year later William, Lord Mountjoy wrote to Erasmus explaining that the queen was pleased with the book. “But be well assured that our glorious queen is favourably impressed with your Institution of Christian Marriage. She is most grateful to you for this devoted act of yours, and you will learn amply of her good will towards you from the servant to whom I myself have made it known in some detail.”¹²⁴

These letters show the process of patronage, with Erasmus’ old student, Lord Mountjoy acting as an intermediary with the queen in the capacity of her chamberlain. They are particularly useful, as we do not have letters regarding the commissioning of Vives’ book and they show Katherine as an active participant in ensuring these books were written.

As discussed, the book itself was predominantly about the legal and moral position of women in marriage. This is in contrast to Vives’ book, which considered every stage of a woman’s life. Therefore, there was less engagement with the subject of education for women, as it was assumed that any education would have to be completed before marriage. However, he did complain about the previous kinds of fashionable education girls received, which in itself, he believed, led to immorality. Therefore, the subjects that girls should learn clearly required a rethink:

“In the morning make-up and hair-do, then to church to see and be seen, then breakfast, then gossip. After this lunch. Then trifling little stories, Here and there girls will sit down, and men will throw themselves on their laps – which offends no one, indeed is greatly praised as polite conduct ... Common sense dictates that girls be instructed in letters, for nothing is more conducive to a good mind or more useful to the preservation of virtue.”¹²⁵

In much of the book Erasmus echoed the sentiments of Vives on the subject of marriage and the importance of chastity, but engaged much less with a possible

¹²⁴ Desirus Erasmus, *Correspondence of Erasmus: Letters 1802 to 1925; March - December 1527*, trans. Charles Fantazzi, *Correspondence of Erasmus* (Toronto [Ont.]: University of Toronto Press, Scholarly Publishing Division, 2010), accessed 24 October 2014, p. 108.

¹²⁵ Sowards, ‘Erasmus and the Education of Women.’, p. 86.

programme of study for women. However, as we have seen from his letters and his dialogue with *The Abbot and the Learned Lady* there is no doubt that Erasmus believed that education for women enhanced their roles as wives as mothers rather than detracted from these. Also, if used in the correct way education was another tool to protect women's all-important chastity.

1526 - Richard Hyrde – Preface to Margaret More Roper's *Precatio Dominica*

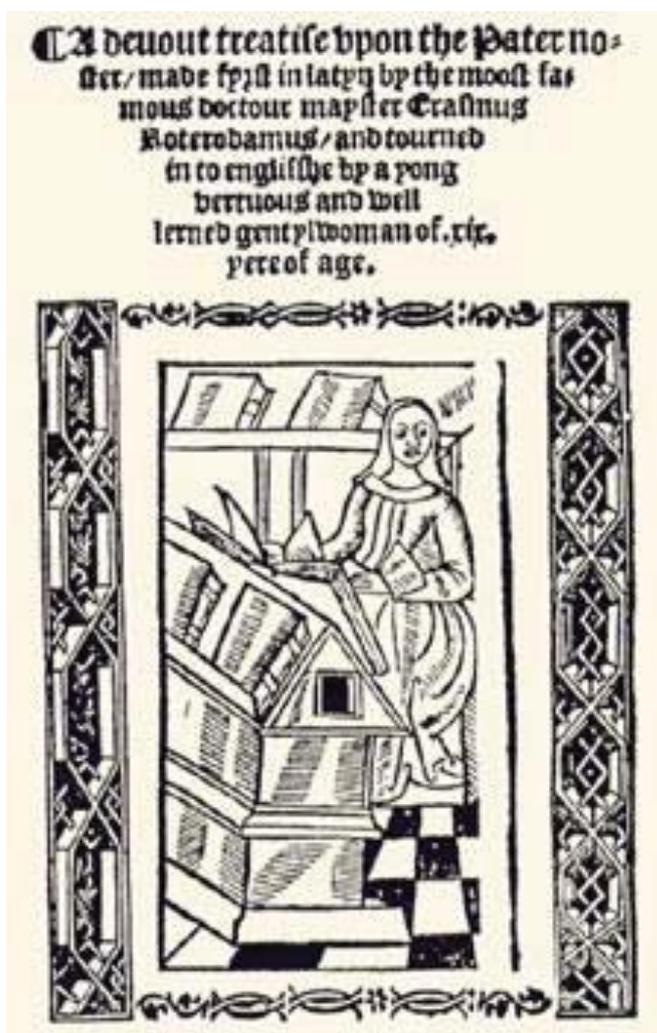


Figure 4: First page of *Precatio Dominica* depicting Margaret More Roper at her writing desk.

In 1526, Margaret More Roper published a translation of Erasmus' *Precatio Dominica*. The original work, written in Latin, was Erasmus' commentary on the Pater Noster. Although translations became an accepted pastime for women later in the century, at this stage it was still unusual for a woman to write anything, let alone have it published. Therefore, for Margaret to undertake a translation on a subject of such religious importance, was shocking and quite brave. However, she approached Cardinal Wolsey for his approval of the work, which he gave, as evidenced by the image of a cardinal's hat on the first page of the book. Margaret did not put her name on the book, perhaps as a show of modesty. However, she wrote on the first page: "A devout treatise upon the Pater Noster made first in latyn by the moost famous doctour mayster Erasmus Roterdamus and tourned in to Englishe by a yong vertuous and well lerned gentywoman of xix [19] yere of age."¹²⁶ One of Thomas Moore's protégés, and possibly one of the tutors to the More children, humanist scholar Richard Hyrde, wrote a lengthy preface to the translation, which extolled the virtues of a learned woman, epitomized by Margaret herself. As was becoming a common theme in works that addressed educated women, he showed how the ability to read could compliment the womanly roles of wife and mother. He did not just want women to read English and French, but surprisingly he recommended the reading of Greek and Latin to enhance women's (and men's) religious understanding.

"And the latyn and the greke tonge I se nat but there is as lytell hurt in them as in bokes of Englishe and Frenche which men bothe rede them selfe for the proper pastymes that be written in them and for the witty and craftie conveyance of the makynge: And also can beare well ynoughe that women rede them if they wyll never so moche whiche commodities be farre better handeled in the latyn and greke than any other langage: and in them be many holy doctors writings so devout and effectuous that who soever redeth

¹²⁶ Desiderius d Erasmus, *A Deuoute Treatise Vpon the Pater Noster.*, ed. Richard Hyrde, trans. Margaret Roper, Early English Books, 1475-1640 / 37:06 ([Imprinted at London: In fletestrete, in the house of Thomas Berthelet nere to the Cundite, at the signe of Lucrece, 1526), accessed 12 July 2014, <http://eebo.chadwyck.com>., image 1.

them muste nedes be eyther moche better or less yvell whiche every good body bothe man and woman wyll rede and folowe rather than other.”¹²⁷

He echoed Vives’ sentiment that he had never heard of an educated woman who was also immoral:

“I never herde tell nor reed of any woman well lerned that ever was (as plenteous and yvell tonges be) spotted or infamed as vicious. But on the otherside many by their lernyng taken such encrease of goodnesse th[at] many may beare them wytnesse of their vertue of whiche the sorte I coulde reherse a great nombre of bothe old tyme and late.” [image 5]

He extolled the virtues of Margaret More Roper as an example of an educated woman who also possesses the suitable qualities of a good and humble wife, and that her husband enjoyed having such a wife.

“That with her virtuous worshypfull wife and well lerned husbände she hath by the occasion of her lernynge and his delyte therin such especiall conforte pleasure and pastyme as were nat well possible for one unlerned couple eyther to take togyder or to conceive in their myndes what pleasure is therin.”¹²⁸

Richard Hyrde made it abundantly clear that an educated woman was a better wife and education should be viewed as an added virtue rather than something to be viewed with suspicion.

1529 - Richard Hyrde – Translation of Vives’ *The Instruction of a Christian Woman*

Richard Hyrde continued to be one of the strongest proponents of women’s education. In Margaret More Roper’s translation, Hyrde wrote extensively about the advantages of allowing women to have some learning, including in Greek and Latin. But in the preface of his English translation of Juan Luis Vives’ book *De Institutione Foeminae Christianae*

¹²⁷ Ibid., image 4.

¹²⁸ Ibid., image 5.

(in English: *Instruction of a Christen Women*), he went one step further and wrote a vehement condemnation of the lack of support for the education of women. In his radical preface he complained how:

“moche I marvelled, as I often do, of the unreasonable oversight of men, whiche never cease to complayne of womens conditions. And yet havying the education and order of them in theyr owne handis, not only do litell diligence to teache them and bring them up better, but also purposely withdrawe them fro learning, by whiche the might have occasion to waxe better by them selfe. But since this faute is to far gone and over largely spreadde, to be shortly remedied. I thought as least the wyse for my parte hit wolde do well to translate this boke in to our englishe tonge for the commodite and profit of our owne countre.”¹²⁹

He claimed that Katherine of Aragon was responsible for raising the status of the education of women in England. He mentioned that he showed his translation to Thomas More for editing and says it was Thomas More who praised Katherine for her support of women’s education: “[Thomas More] nat onely for the matter it selfe was very gladd thereof [about the translation], but also for that (as he shewed me) he perceived that hit shulde be to your noble majestie for the gracious zele that ye beare to the virtuous education of the woman kynde of this realme.”¹³⁰ This quote suggested, for the first time, that Katherine was an active proponent of women’s education in England. This is undoubtedly in reference to her influence in commissioning this book and her active interest in ensuring the education of Princess Mary. Thomas More and, by association, Richard Hyrde clearly held the view that it was because of the personal interest of Katherine of Aragon that the issue of the education of women had been brought into the public sphere and the resulting emphasis on the advantages of education for women.

¹²⁹ Vives, *The Instruction of a Christen Woman.*, p.6.

¹³⁰ *ibid*, p. 6.

Course books written specifically for Princess Mary

1524 – Juan Luis Vives – *De Ratione Studii Puerilis*

While the theories on how and why to educate women swirled, the practical application of these theories were also considered. Specific course books on various subjects were produced for the education of Princess Mary. These books were also published and therefore publicly available. In conjunction with his conduct book, Vives also devised a course of study for Princess Mary which he called *De Ratione Studii Puerilis*. In this work he wrote two letters, which outlined two slightly different plans of study. One was for Princess Mary and the other was for Lord Mountjoy's son. Some scholars have suggested that Vives personally tutored the Princess. However, he made it clear in his preface that he had only suggested a course of study and that Princess Mary's own tutors would devise how the curriculum would actually be taught. Also, he made it clear that it was Katherine of Aragon that insisted he write this plan.

“To the Lady Catherine (Queen of England) ... You have ordered me to write this brief plan of study according to which thy daughter Mary may be educated by her tutor. Gladly have I obeyed thee as I would in far greater matter, were I able. And since thou hast chosen as her teacher, a man above all learned and honest, as was fit, I was content to point out details, as with a finger. He will explain the rest of the matters. Those questions which I thought either obscurely treated or omitted by writers on the art of grammar I have noted somewhat copiously. I pray Christ that this plan of teaching may effectively help thy daughter to her erudition and virtue. Farewell and know my mind most devoted Majesty. Oxford. Nones of October, 1523.”¹³¹

Vives had specific ideas on the types of subjects Mary should be learning and in the letter he directly addressed the Princess. The structure of the plan for her study was based in ensuring morality. He explained that if she read something interesting she should write it down as then the information would be retained in her memory. Also, he

¹³¹ Watson, 'Vives and the Renaissance Education of Women', p.137.

asserted that “whilst we are writing, the mind is diverted from the thought of frivolous or improper objects.”¹³² He outlined the importance of a thorough grounding in the learning of Latin. He carefully described how she should learn to read, write and be able to fluently converse in the language. He recommended reading the classical writers such as Cicero, Seneca and Plutarch and also the church fathers such as Jerome, Augustine and Ambrosius. These writers offered the appropriate examples of virtue and morality expected of the princess. He mentioned reading the dialogues of Plato, particularly those which concerned the government of the state. This showed that this education was for a princess who may be a reigning queen one day. He also recommended the works of Erasmus and Thomas More’s *Utopia*.¹³³ Vives advised that this letter was intended as a guide to Mary’s studies, and how her daily lessons were to be structured by her tutors according her personal proficiency and interests. For the first time a course of study for the education of a girl was published and publicly available. However, it was only available to those who knew Latin as it was not translated into English.

1525 - Thomas Linacre – *Rudimenta Grammatices*

Physician to Henry VIII from 1509, Thomas Linacre held a prominent position at court. Previously, he had been engaged as tutor to Prince Arthur and is known to have been proficient in both Latin and the less common Greek. He had travelled to Italy where he studied the new learning and shared his new knowledge with the scholars back in England. By the time he was engaged as tutor to Princess Mary he was a sickly old man and felt he was unable to work as the Princess’s physician, but would be able to teach her Latin, especially as she appeared to have a talent for the language. Linacre wrote *Rudimenta Grammatices* in 1525 as a course book for Mary’s Latin lessons. It was written in English apart from the Latin preface. Therefore, this book would have been more accessible to a wider audience who wanted to learn Latin. Primarily the work described the various points of Latin grammar using easy to follow instructions. The book was later used to teach boys in grammar schools, but as shown in the later Latin

¹³² *Ibid.*, p.141.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

translation by George Buchanan there was an understanding that this book, along with Vives' study outline for girls, was being used for the education of girls.

Thomas Linacre explained in his preface his thoughts on how he could be of best use to Princess Mary:

“... that having been appointed by the king to take care of the health of the Princess, and not being able, on account of his own increasing infirmities, to perform the duties of a physician, he bethought himself how he could be of most use to his illustrious charge. He saw in the Princess a most favourable disposition towards the cultivation of letters, and he therefore devoted himself to the perfection of this treatise on the *Rudiments of the Latin Grammar*, which might aid her Highness in her studies.”¹³⁴

A respected Scottish humanist scholar, George Buchanan translated into Latin and published Thomas Linacre's work in 1536 while teaching in Paris. Interestingly, along with this translation he followed it with Juan Luis Vives' *De Ratione Studii Puerlis* [For a Girl]. He explained in the preface:

“Since now this little book [the *Rudimenta Grammatices*] has been brought to a close, it seemed to me that it would not be in conflict with its subject-matter if I were to add a word to the letter of Luis Vives which he wrote for the *de Ratione Studii*, not with the view of filling up vacant pages so much as not to seem to have imitated bad doctors, who very often will prescribe drugs to their patients, but entirely omit to give them any ground for using them. For he who looks in all things for a reason, as for a goal know more things are of most value, and which things have been furnished him to now use or purpose. Besides, as [this] little book has been prepared for the daughter, so the letter to the mother was sent

¹³⁴ Thomas Joseph Pettigrew, *Medical Portrait Gallery: Biographical Memoirs of the Most Celebrated Physicians, Surgeons, Etc*, 1840, 1 July 2015. <https://play.google.com/books/reader>., p. 155, footnote 3.

showing how the daughter was to be brought up, in which you have the judgment of most learned man ... Farewell and enjoy.”¹³⁵

This provides fascinating evidence that *Rudumenta Grammatices* was considered a book that could be used to teach girls Latin. It shows that there was an expectation that the teachers would be their mothers. Therefore, Buchanan felt it necessary also to provide a more general guide on how to structure a girl’s education by including Vives’ work. This shows that there was a belief that some women were following the example of the education of the princess for their own daughters.

c.1528 - Giles Du Wes - *An Introductory for to Lerne to Rede, to Pronounce, and to Speke Frenche trewely*

Giles Du Wes was the court librarian in the reigns of both Henry VII and Henry VIII and also acted as the French tutor to both Princes Arthur and Henry. In 1527 he was appointed French tutor to Princess Mary. It is believed that shortly after this appointment he wrote and published his French grammar book for her use. Entitled *An Introductory for to Lerne to Rede, to Pronounce, and to Speke Frenche trewely*, the introductory page read: “An introductory to lerne to rede, to pronounce, and to speke Frenche trewly, compiled for the right high excellent, a most vertuous lady, the lady Mary of England, daughter to our most gracious soverayne lorde kynge Henry the eyghte.”¹³⁶ His preface includes a dedication: “For the honour of Mary God daughter to saynt Marye virgin and mother Jesu Christe have these verses ben written.”¹³⁷

The book was divided into two sections. The first section had two parts. The first part explained parts of speech and pronunciation. The second part taught various French grammar points. The second section was a collection of letters and conversations

¹³⁵ Watson, ‘Vives and the Renaissance Education of Women’, p. 149.

¹³⁶ Giles Du Wes, *An Introductory for to Lerne to Rede, to Pronounce, and to Speake Frenche Trewly* (Printed at London: By Nicolas Bourman for Iohn Reyms in Poules churchyarde at the signe of the George, 1540), <http://eebo.chadwyck.com>., Image 1.

¹³⁷ Ibid. Image 2.

detailing both real and imagined situations. This part gives us a glimpse into Mary's character and her life. There are conversations between Mary and messengers from her father at court, and also messengers from European royalty. There is also a proverb to Mary from the Lady of Maltravers, which explained that if she became proficient in French she would be the pride of both her father and of Jesus. Each French line was followed by the English translation. "To the ende that ye may can at the commynge of your father speake frenche in suche wyse that Jesu be therof worshypped and the noble kynge contented and that it."¹³⁸

Often it appeared that her French tutor was unwell and sent her verses and writing to continue to practice her French by way of translations. In the book he told us that he was struggling with gout, but that the princess must still continue with her studies: "Here foloweth certaine verses, send to the noble lady Mary for to lerne that her schole maister beyng sycke."¹³⁹

The fact that this book was written for Princess Mary and used her dialogues for her lessons gave the work a feminine voice that would have appealed to the education of other upper class women. Also, it was written in both English and French providing an easy-to-follow lesson guide for the study of this fashionable court language. There is no doubt that this book was produced primarily for female study of the French language.

In conclusion, this chronology of the works featuring female education shows the level of engagement in the topic by the humanist scholars in 1520s England. No other scholarship has presented a similar chronology before and yet female education was clearly a 'hot topic' for discussion at this time. The works conventionally continued to place women in the home as wives and mothers, and yet they stated that women can and should be educated as it would enhance their domestic roles. Learning for a woman was seen primarily as being for the purposes of protecting her morality and chastity, and she ought not to have had a public voice or access to professions. The scholars scorned the

¹³⁸ Ibid. Image 77.

¹³⁹ Ibid. Image 103.

types of education women had had previously and recommended a grounding in religious and moral literature. The influence of Katherine of Aragon permeated many of the works. But it was the scholars themselves who presented their often surprising theories. Thomas More, Erasmus and Juan Luis Vives were particularly key in advocating their views on the possibilities, and potential, of educating women.

Chapter 4 Evidence for the Education of Women after the 1520s

In the humanist works presented in the previous section, the scholars showed that a woman was as capable of learning as a man, but that she required guidance to ensure that her education protected her chastity, enhanced her piety and also prepared her more completely for her domestic role. Rather than leading her down a path to immorality, the scholars showed that, if strictly controlled, reading and writing were excellent ways to keep a woman's mind occupied. In this section, the methods by which women began to show their education is explored. The emergence of iconography depicting female saints reading and writing shows that the shift in attitudes towards female literacy was becoming so entrenched that it even permeated the art world. As there was no form of structured education for girls, it can be difficult to gauge just how important education was in their lives. But Miriam Balmuth believed that "by the year 1540, the idea of a broad classical education, moving beyond the religious focus of the past, had become accepted for the upper-class women, and through most of the century many such women did indeed become learned."¹⁴⁰ Evidence for this claim is somewhat scattered, but can be brought together to show that indeed an educated woman was becoming someone to be admired and literacy was actually becoming fashionable for upper-class women. Many women had been able to read at least in a limited way for some time. However, the diverse subject matter of books becoming available show that reading literacy was spreading beyond the basic religious scripts.

Writing was a different matter entirely. Before this period, female writing literacy was often limited to mere signatures following a letter written by a scribe. However, there is a marked increase in letter writing activities by women, in their own hand, from the 1520s onwards. Personal writing by women, rather than relying on scribes, became a way to show their noble status as distinguished from the illiterate peasant. The evidence

¹⁴⁰ Miriam Balmuth, 'Female Education in 16th and 17th Century England: Influences, Attitudes, and Trends', *Canadian Women's Studies* 9, no. 3 and 4, accessed 10 February 2014, <http://cws.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/cws/article/viewFile/11719/10802>. p. 18.

of letters and notes in their prayer books shows that women were writing regularly. Also, as shown by the remarkable instance of men and women working together on a communal work in the Devonshire Manuscript, the literacy of women and their active participation in poetic literacy circles can be observed. There is also evidence of women becoming educated in the lower classes. With the rise of the professional middle class and the merchant class, women were becoming active in business as supports to their husbands. It became crucial for a woman to understand her husband's business to ensure a continuity of trade if her husband was unable to run the business for any reason. In this case, education in the skills necessary to run the business became key to ensure the survival of the family, particularly if the unthinkable happened and the husband died.

Female Literacy in Sixteenth-Century Iconography

The influence of the humanist theories on female education can be seen beyond the written medium as it began to appear in art. Images of women with books appeared in paintings occasionally, but in the early sixteenth century there came to be a far greater number of individual portraits of women physically reading rather than just holding a book. This reflected the humanist belief in devotional reading as a vital part of a women's education and indicated that it was sufficiently widespread to influence the artists of the day. Individual portraits of female saintly images reading began to emerge as popular subjects of the artists. In Anne Boleyn's Book of Hours, six female saints were depicted as individual portraits and they were all reading. The saints depicted were Anne, Mary Magdalene (figure 6), Katherine (figure 5), Barbara, Margaret and Elthedreda. The humanist scholars described these saints mostly because of their piety and virginity and often their martyrdom, but in the case of Saint Katherine and Mary Magdalene their learning was also mentioned. Of Saint Katherine of Alexandria, Christine de Pizan explained how "at the age of eighteen [she found herself to be] the heiress of her father and governed herself and her inheritance nobly ... A well-lettered woman, versed in the various branches of knowledge, she proceeded to prove on the basis of philosophical arguments that there is but one God, Creator of all things, and He alone

should be worshipped and no other.”¹⁴¹ More simply, Vives described Saint Katherine as a woman “whiche overcame in disputations the greatest and most exercised philosophers.”¹⁴² Of Mary Magdalene, he said she “sate at the fote of our lorde and herde his worde, dyd nat only use the contemplation of hevenly thynges, but she dyd that whether she redde, or herde, or prayed ... Therefore, on the holy day let her either rede, or pray, whan she is alone: and on the working dayes lykewyse, orels let her worke.”¹⁴³ For Vives the act of devotional contemplation was not enough; he expected women to pray and read extensively to express their piety. Ambrosius Benson, painting in the early 1530s, produced a stunning painting showing the Virgin Mary with Christ above the Saints Katherine and Barbara reading. The message was clear: reading was a vital devotional activity and the expectation was that women should not just memorise occasional passages but should read, learn and follow the Word of God.

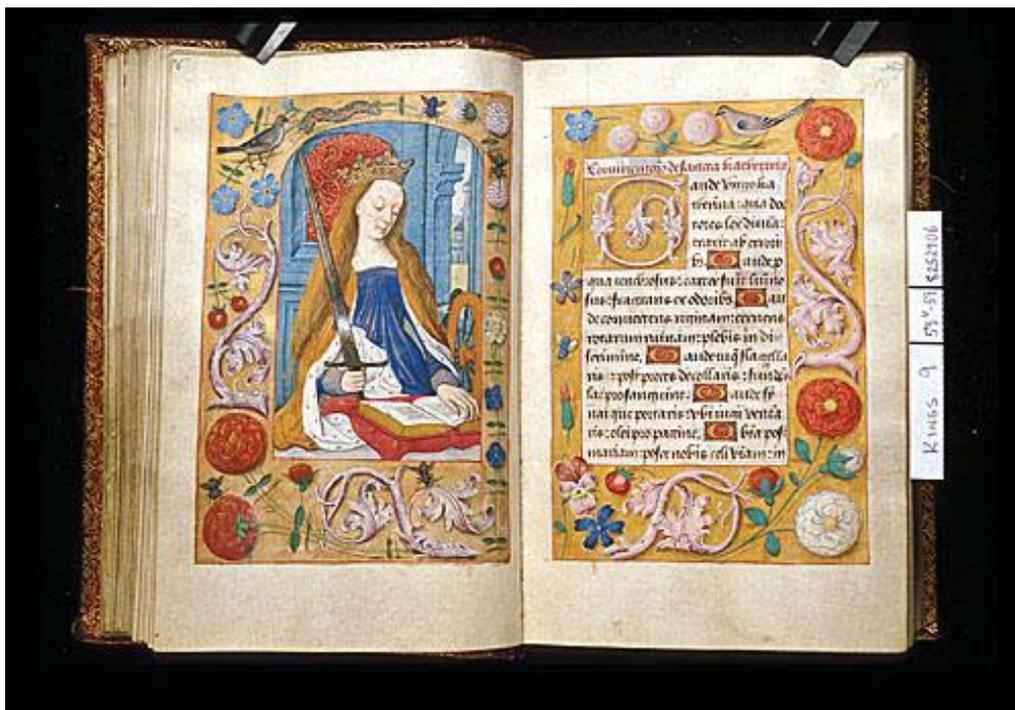


Figure 5: Saint Katherine reading, in Anne Boleyn's Book of Hours.

¹⁴¹ Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies.*, trans. Earl Jeffrey Richards (New York: Persea Books, c1982., 1982)., p. 219.

¹⁴² Vives, *The Instruction of a Christen Woman.*, p.21.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 49.



Figure 6: Mary Magdalene reading, in Anne Boleyn's Book of Hours.



Figure 7: Virgin Mary with Saint Katherine and Saint Barbara, Ambrosius Benson c. 1530/32.

In the early sixteenth century Mary Magdalene, in particular, began to appear regularly in images as a woman reading, in contemporary clothing and domestic situations. Italian painter Piero de Cosimo first painted Mary Magdalene (figure 8) in this way between 1500 and 1510, then Flemish artists The Master of the Female Half Lengths, The Master of the Parrot, Adriaen Isenbrandt and Ambrosius Benson all produced such paintings in the 1530s. Mary Magdalene became a popular subject as a redeemed sinner as opposed to the increasingly unattainable figure of the Virgin Mary. Mary Magdalene appealed to the everyday worshipper and placing her in domestic spaces meant that she sinned and was forgiven in a world similar to their own.¹⁴⁴ The paintings also show that when women read their devotional texts, it was a normal everyday activity that was also saintly. One of the paintings of Mary Magdalene reading was previously thought to depict Lady Jane Grey and now resides at Althorp Estate. However, the composition is clearly from the workshop of The Master of the Female Half Lengths and the presence of the ointment jar shows the image to be Mary Magdalene (figure 9). Although we do not know exactly when the Althorp Portrait arrived in England, the workshop produced over one hundred surviving works in all.¹⁴⁵ Therefore, it seems likely at least some of them were purchased by English patrons.

¹⁴⁴ Amy M. Morris and Michelle A. Erhardt, *Mary Magdalene: Iconographic Studies From the Middle Ages to the Baroque*, Studies in Religion and the Arts (Boston: Brill, 2012), accessed 18 October 2015, <http://ezproxy.massey.ac.nz/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=503900&site=eds-live&scope=site.>, p. 18.

¹⁴⁵ Sotheby's, 'Master of the Female Half-Lengths: A Lady at a Writing Desk', Sotheby's, accessed 17 July 2015, <http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2014/old-master-british-paintings-evening-l14033/lot.1.html>.



Figure 8: Mary Magdalene Reading, Piero Cosimo. C 1500-1510



Figure 9: Mary Magdalene reading. Master of the Female Half-lengths, c. 1530. Previously thought to depict Lady Jane Grey by the artist Lucas De Heere.

Interestingly, images of females reading were not always biblical figures. Sometimes they were figures of classical antiquity. In the 1530s Ambrosius Benson painted the Sybil Persia reading a book (figure 10). Boccaccio described the women known as Sybils as ten in number and that they also knew the decisions of the gods, Sios meaning ‘God’ and byle meaning ‘mind’.¹⁴⁶ He explained that the Sybils were renowned for their intellect and skill in writing about their visions. Christine de Pizan similarly wrote: “Formost young among the ladies of sovereign dignity are the wise sybils, most filled with wisdom, who, just as the most credible of authors note in their manuals, were ten in number.” She noted that the first Sybil came from Persia and therefore was named after her place of origin.¹⁴⁷ The Sybils were described as comprehensively describing their prophesies in writing, including Alburnia who wrote “the most clearly about Jesus Christ.”¹⁴⁸ Of most importance for Vives was that the Sybils were virgins and therefore the fact they were also prophetesses meant their skills came from a place of purity.¹⁴⁹ With these descriptions in mind, a painting of Persia reading, again in contemporary dress can be viewed in a similar light to the Mary Magdalene pictures. The Sybils, though undoubtedly saintly, pure women, were intellegent and literate women outside of the religious female exemplars and therefore represented another accessible figure showing women reading, underlining this as an acceptable pastime as long as the reading was appropriate.

¹⁴⁶ Boccaccio, *Concerning Famous Women.*, p. 41.

¹⁴⁷ de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies.*, p.100.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

¹⁴⁹ Vives, *The Instruction of a Christen Woman.*, p.20.



Figure 10: The Sybil Persia, Ambrosius Benson c. 1530.

The workshop of The Master of the Female Half Lengths took this one step further with images of Mary Magdalene writing. These images from the 1530s could be viewed as revolutionary, as they show Mary Magdalene in the act of writing with all the necessary tools surrounding her (figure 11), suggesting this was a regular activity. What she was writing is unknown and much more difficult to place as a devotional activity. But the implication is that the woman in the image *could* write and do so well enough to fill a page. Therefore, for these Flemish artists, the notion of a woman writing was acceptable enough that they believed patrons would be prepared to pay for such images. The image of Mary Magdalene writing met with enough widespread approval that at least seventeen variations on this theme survive from the Master of the Female Half Length's

workshop.¹⁵⁰ We do have a tantalising piece of evidence that potentially places one of the paintings in England. The 1558 inventory of Sir John Cope of Canons Ashby in Northamptonshire (whose relatives traded with Flanders) specifically listed the unusual painting of Mary Magdalene writing, therefore indicating it to be possibly one of the Master's images.¹⁵¹ Jan Sanders van Hemessen's image of a woman writing (figure 12) is even more compelling as it is not identifiably Mary Magdalene. There is no ointment jar present and the light around her head is not a halo. There is less detail in her environment but she is still placed in contemporary clothes. Therefore, the suggestion is that the sitter was a contemporary upper class woman and the fact she is writing again hints that it was a normal everyday activity. If considered collectively with the writings of the humanist scholars, the images of women reading and writing showed a new acceptance, even promotion, of female literacy in England and Europe.

¹⁵⁰ Sotheby's, 'Master of the Female Half Lengths: A Lady at a Writing Desk'.

¹⁵¹Susan Foister, 'Paintings and Other Works of Art in Sixteenth-Century English Inventories', *The Burlington Magazine* 123, no. 938 (1981)., p.276.



Figure 11: Lady as Mary Magdalene at a writing desk. Master of the Female Half Lengths, c.1530.



Figure 12: A young woman writing. NG622, Jan Sander van Hessem, c.1530.

Influences on the Education of Girls

In *Instruction of a Christen Woman*, Vives wrote carefully about the benefits of educating girls and the form that education should take. He explained that girls should engage in the “study of wysdome: the whiche dothe enstruct their manners, and enfurme thyr lyvyng, and teacheth them the waye of good and holy lyfe ... Whan she shalbe taught to rede, let those bokes be taken in hande, that may teche good manners. And whan she shall lerne to write, let nat her example be voyde verses, nor wanton or tryflyng songs: but some sad sentence, prudent and chaste, taken out of holy scripture, or the sayenges of philosopher: which by often writing she may fasten better in her memory.”¹⁵²

¹⁵² Vives, *The Instruction of a Christen Woman.*, p. 23.

Vives' plan for a girl's study was solely for the purpose of protecting her chastity and enhancing her role as a future wife and mother. He insisted that her learning must be kept private and silent. In this he cited St Paul: "Let your women holde theyr tongues in congregation: nor they be nat allowed to speke but to be subjecte as the lawe biddeth. If they wolde lerne any thyng, lette them aske theyr husbandes at home."¹⁵³ He conceded that women may teach their own young children; however, they were not to teach professionally: "... Let her lerne for her selfe alone and her yonge children or her sisters in our lord. For it neither becometh a woman to rule a schole, nor to live among men."¹⁵⁴

The very early education of children was traditionally the role of the mother up to the age of about seven when upper-class boys and some girls were sent to other upper-class homes for their continued education. In some communities this early education was conducted in the home of an educated wife. Known as petty schools or dame schools, the children would attend for a small fee and learn the rudiments of reading and writing. Increasingly in the sixteenth century, boys were being sent to grammar schools. This meant that education was removed from homes and into institutions and therefore girls had even less access to lessons which they may have otherwise been allowed to join in with the boys. However, there is evidence that many women were somehow becoming literate enough to be able to engage in pastimes that required a reasonable proficiency in reading and writing.

When Thomas More created a school in his home and educated his children – both boys and girls – in a surprisingly comprehensive way, he became an inspiration for other like-minded parents. In the early 1520s, Lady Maud Parr, lady-in-waiting to Katherine of Aragon, created a school of her own in her house, hiring the most respected tutors available. The students consisted of her son William and her daughters, the future queen, Katherine and her sister Anne. They were also joined by various cousins. When conducting marriage negotiations on Maud Parr's behalf, Lord Dacre recommended sending the prospective bridegroom to the Parr home for his education. He wrote to the

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.23.

boy's father Lord Scrope that he "...does not think he could marry to so good a stock as Lady Parr's considering her wisdom, and the wise stocks of the Grenes whence she is come, and of the Parrs of Kendall. For all wise men, when they marry their children look to the wisdom of the blood they marry with ... Thinks it would be well, ... that his son should live with Lady Parr for the next three years ... He would learn there as well as any other place as well norture as French and other language."¹⁵⁵ This is a fascinating letter as it shows that there was a great respect for Maud Parr and the type of education she offered in her home. Lord Dacre appeared to have no issues with recommending Lord Scrope's son be educated in the home of a widowed woman, as her intelligence was well known. Due to her well-established school, unusually, her son William continued to be educated at home until he was twelve.¹⁵⁶ Anne Parr would later reflect that the school her mother ran was modelled on the education Thomas More provided both boys and girls in his home.¹⁵⁷ For Maud Parr, the main purpose of education for her daughters was to improve their marriage prospects. However, this education would also inspire Katherine to ensure the education of her stepdaughters, first Margaret Latimer from her second marriage, and later Elizabeth Tudor. Her careful and loving attention to these girls was captured in Margaret Latimer's tribute to Katherine Parr in her will of 1545: "I am never able to render her grace sufficient thanks for the godly education and tender love and bountiful goodness which I have ever more found in her highness."¹⁵⁸

One of the exciting discoveries of this study is the comprehensive library catalogue of the books belonging to Lord John Lumley, husband of Lady Jane Lumley. Jane's father Hugh FitzAlan, the powerful Earl of Arundel collected many books including the confiscated books of Thomas Cranmer. However, he personally owned at least 400 works. Although his son Henry was educated at the court of Edward IV, Jane, Mary and his stepson John Ratcliffe were educated at home and gained reputations for their

¹⁵⁵ L&P, No. 3649, Dacre to Lord Scrope, 17 December 1523.

¹⁵⁶ Linda Porter, *Katherine the Queen: The Remarkable Life of Katherine Parr, the Last Wife of Henry VIII*, First Edition edition (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2010), p.32.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 32.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid. p. 60.

classical learning,¹⁵⁹ bearing striking similarities to the education of the daughters of Thomas More. Lady Jane Lumley's particular talent for classical languages would later be shown, as she would go on to become a renowned translator of Greek and Latin. On the Earl's death the library passed to his daughter and son-in-law.

In the catalogue of Lord Lumley's library there are entries that describe Jane's lessons. One entry described: "Exercises in Greek and Latin of the Lord Matravers, the lord and ladie Lumley, done when theie were younge, Of their owne hande wrytinge, bownde together, manuscript."¹⁶⁰ In another entry the lessons are described as: "Exercises and translations out of Greek into Latin and otherwise of Marie Duchess of Suffolk, Jane ladiie Lumley and Sir John Ratclif when they were younge of their own hande wrytinge bownde up together. Manuscript."¹⁶¹ Evidence of the humanist sources used for the children's education found in the Lumley Library will be explored later in this chapter.

Other aristocratic children were sent away to aristocratic families in Europe for their education. This allowed them to learn European languages, in particular the fashionable court language of French. As discussed earlier, female educational theories already permeated Europe much earlier than England. Therefore, when Anne Boleyn was sent to the court of Margaret of Austria in 1514 she discovered a thriving intellectual environment that was often frequented by respected humanist scholars such as Erasmus. In a letter written in French to her father Thomas Boleyn the same year, Anne described the challenges of learning to write in the language (figure 13). The 'Semmonet' whom she mentioned was the tutor in Margaret's court.

"Sir, – I understand by your letter that you desire that I shall be a worthy woman when I come to the Court and you inform me that the Queen will take the trouble to converse with me, which rejoices me much to think of talking with a person so wise and worthy. This will make me have greater desire to continue to speak

¹⁵⁹John Alcock, Anthony; Jayne, Sears Reynolds, British Museum, ed., *The Lumley Library; the Catalogue of 1609*. (Trustees of the British Museum, 1956)., p. 4.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid. Cat: 1743, p. 206.

¹⁶¹ Ibid. Cat: 1753, p. 207.

French well and also spell, especially because you have so enjoined it on me, and with my own hand I inform you that I will observe it the best I can. Sir, I beg you to excuse me if my letter is badly written, for I assure you that the orthography is from my own understanding alone, while the others were only written by my hand, and Semmonet tells me the letter but waits so that I may do it myself, for fear that it shall not be known unless I acquaint you, and I pray you that the light of [?] may not be allowed to drive away the will which you say you have to help me, for it seems to me that you are sure [??] you can, if you please, make me a declaration of your word, and concerning me be certain that there shall be neither [??] nor ingratitude which might check or efface my affection, which is determined to [?] as much unless it shall please you to order me, and I promise you that my love is based on such great strength that it will never grow less, and I will make an end to my [?] after having commended myself right humbly to your good grace.

Written at [?Veure] by Your very humble and very obedient daughter, Anna de Boullan.”¹⁶²

This rare letter from the Anne Boleyn’s early years provides a unique insight into the lessons of an English noble girl in a European court. She was being taught for the purposes of gaining a court position for the Queen of France, who at this time was Henry’s sister Mary. Therefore, her desire to learn French was greatly enhanced. Anne’s beautiful script depicted her exceptional writing proficiency. As a noble girl of around eleven years old, this letter shows the strength of the educational opportunities for women in the European courts, which were still developing in England. This early education would later make for a fascinating, intelligent queen with progressive ideas. Having a succession of well-educated, high profile women in England would further cement the notion that the educated woman was a fashionable woman. Other girls from noble

¹⁶² Claire Ridgeway, ‘Anne Boleyn’s Education and Her Time at Margaret of Austria’s Court’, *The Anne Boleyn Files*, 8 August 2014, Retrieved: 1 March 2016 <http://www.theanneboleynfiles.com/anne-boleyn-court-margaret-austria/>.

families were also sent to be educated in Europe. For Lady Lisle the education of her daughters was essential to enable them to gain places at the English queen's court and also to make them a more attractive marriage option for wealthy courtiers. Educated in the households of French nobility, Mary and Anne Bassett learned to read and write in French, although they would correspond with their mother in either English or French, showing they were accomplished in both languages. In a letter from Mary Bassett to her mother Lady Lisle, she explained to her mother her concerns over the salary of her tutor: that she "has paid only 10 sous to the schoolmaster that teaches [me] to read and to write."¹⁶³ Therefore, the girls were provided with a tutor for their literacy lessons in the household.

¹⁶³ L&P No 466, Mary Bassett to Lady Lisle, 13 March 1536.

9
 21
 Monseigneur je receu par vee lettre que a vos ordres que
 vous eussiez fame qu'on vendra a la cour et me
 vendra que la bone vendra la poix de de l'esse
 a vous moy de que me Royz l'un fait de qu'on se par
 a vous luy persone tant sage et amict de la me fera
 a vous plus grande amoy de continuer a parler bone
 fransois et ouy offert espere que moy pour que me
 tant tant commandé et de me moy bone a vesty
 que les gardes la moy que je pour un assy je vous
 supple de luy et mala et mala et septa car je vous
 assure que et otographe de monant vendra si la
 la one les autres ne fait faire que est de maner
 et finonnet me dit la lettre mes de maner fait je
 la fire moy me de pour que bone ne face finon
 que je vous mande et vous pay que le l'homme de
 me me liberte de separe la boullante que dit de
 de me edore car sile me semble qu'on est en bone
 la on bone pour si bone plot me bone de de casy
 de de parole et de moy car separe qu'on me
 enffie de pour ne diry gratitude que sile on pass
 ne et faze moy a vosses que de de libere de
 bone tant finon que vous plus un command
 et vous promit que moy amour et boullant par
 luy si grant fessette que la nara tant pour
 de sans de minuer et force sily amoy pour me
 a que me tant commandé bone humillement
 a de bone grace et sile a vous de
 Je suis tres humble et tres foy
 fille de la boullante

Figure 13: Anne Boleyn to Thomas Boleyn, letter in French, 1514.

Women becoming learned in such subjects as classical languages, and being sent to European courts, was the domain of only a few wealthy families. However, even education at the level of the lower gentry in more functional subjects such as reading and writing in the vernacular, and basic accounting, were being viewed as necessities for the daily functions of a skilled housewife. Elizabeth Hardwick's education in the 1530s consisted of lessons in writing, reading, casting accounts, and religion, an education which was typical of the lesser gentry.¹⁶⁴ James Daybell explained that her writing proficiency suggests a competence that is in stark contrast to earlier generations.¹⁶⁵ As the century continued, the notion that an education in reading and writing complimented the housewife role became more commonplace. Jane Tutoft wrote to Nathaniel Bacon to discuss her daughter education in his household: "let her lern to wryt & rede & to cast account & to wash & to bru & to backe & to dres meat & to drink & so I trust she shal pro a great good huswyf."¹⁶⁶ Although the evidence to show day-to-day lessons is scarce due to its informality, the evidence to show that they were becoming increasingly literate is easier to come by. Eton School headmaster Nicolas Udall certainly thought so when he 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."¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁴ James Daybell, *Women Letter-Writers in Tudor England*, 1 edition (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006)., p. 2.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid. p.2.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid. p. 13.

¹⁶⁷ Ballard, G, *Memoirs of Several Great Ladies of Great Britain, Who Have Been Celebrated for their Writings or Skill in the Learned Languages Arts and Sciences*, Oxford: W. Jackson, 1752, p. 128, Retrieved from Internet Archive, <http://www.archive.org/stream/memoirsofseveral00ball#page/124/mode/2up>, 20 February, 2014.

Women Reading

Due to the increase of published books following the introduction of the printing press to England in 1476, and the corresponding introduction of paper, books became much more widely available and less expensive. Alison Plowden agreed that “there’s no doubt that literacy among women in general was on the increase. The numbers of cookery books, books on household management, needlework and related feminine subjects as well as books of advice and pious exhortation to wives which were now coming off the presses, indicated there must be a worthwhile market for them.”¹⁶⁸ Often the books being produced conformed to the literature thought appropriate for wives and their duties in the home. But the most important books, according to the women themselves, were their religious literature as shown by their wills. The people they chose to bequeath these books to, were often other women. However, there was also some concern about some of their potential reading material. At a time when chivalric romances were also becoming popular the scholars considered that women’s reading must be restricted to protect their chastity.

Since medieval times, upper-class women had been required to be able to read portions of their religious literature. However, memorizing a few lines from the Bible does not suggest any particular level of reading proficiency. The range of reading literature that became available in the sixteenth century indicates that to be able to read these books, reading literacy must have improved. Juan Luis Vives was clearly concerned that women were reading a much greater range of literature than he was comfortable with. In *The Instruction of a Christen Woman*, Vives provided long tracts of what a woman should not read. He was particularly concerned with books on subjects such as chivalric romances, about which he commented: “what a madness is hit of folks, to have pleasure in these bokes? Also there is no wytte in them, but a few words of wonton luste: whiche be spoken to move her mynde with, whom they love, if it chauce

¹⁶⁸ The National Archives PROB 11/27/144, ‘Will of Elizabeth (nee Scrope) Beaumont de Vere, Countess of Oxford, 1537’, accessed 2 January 2015, http://www.oxford-shakespeare.com/Probate/PROB_11-27_ff_84-6.pdf. p. 38.

she be stedfast.”¹⁶⁹ He went on to say “a chaste mynde, that is occupied with thynkyng on armour, and turnay, and mannes valiaunce ... drynketh poison in her hert.”¹⁷⁰ Although the list of authors to be avoided was long, what a woman should read was a much shorter list. As expected he recommended reading the Bible and also the writings of the Church Fathers such as Augustine and Gregory. The classical works of Plato, Cicero and Seneca were deemed to be suitable for women. He said that: “[Women] shal fynde in suche bokes as are worthy to be red, all thynges more wytty, and ful of greater pleasure, and more sure to truste unto: whiche shal both profite the life, and marvaylously delite the mynde. Therefore on holy dayes contynally, and sometyme on working dayes, lette her rede or here suche as shal lyfte up the mynde to god, and set hit in a christen quietness, and make the lyvyng better.”¹⁷¹ The careful selection of Vives’ recommendations for appropriate literature for women, was an indication that women were indeed reading books at this time. His list of the kinds of books to avoid was also an indication that he knew that women had access to these works and that some were most likely reading them.

Wills are a valuable place to find evidence of the growing importance that women were placing on books. In her extensive study of wills, Barbara Harris discovered that of fifty aristocratic wills containing book bequests, thirty-seven (seventy-four percent) of the testators left at least one English book to a woman and twenty-five of these testators were themselves women.¹⁷² This evidence shows that it was unusual specifically to bequeath books in a will. However, where books were bequeathed at this time, they were often done so by women to women. The 1530 will of Katherine Styles shows the testator’s wish to bequeath a humanist book to her god-daughter, suggesting that she viewed this book as being particularly useful or important to the girl. Katherine described the book simply “as a booke whiche was doctour Gunthorpes with clasps of

¹⁶⁹ Vives, *The Instruction of a Christen Woman*. p. 25.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid. p. 24.

¹⁷¹ Ibid. p. 27.

¹⁷² Barbara J. Harris, *English Aristocratic Women, 1450-1550: Marriage and Family, Property and Careers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002). p. 36.

silver.”¹⁷³ “The gift of a book from one woman to another hints that the older woman Katherine wished to encourage another young woman in her reading.”¹⁷⁴ The previous owner of the book, Dr John Gunthorpe, was an important English humanist scholar educated at Cambridge who had connections with the royal court there.¹⁷⁵ Therefore, although we do not know the exact nature of the book it is significant it came from him, as it shows not only that women believed books to be important but also that women were engaging with humanist works. Elizabeth Hardwick’s household inventory detailed several books exhibiting her ability to read and also hinting at her ability to write, a skill she would have learned in her childhood in the 1530s. “My Ladies books viz: Calvin uppon Jobe, covered with russet velvet, the resolution, Salomans proverbs, a booke of meditations, too other books Covered with velvet, as well as ‘a little deske to write on guilded,”¹⁷⁶

Generally, the works bequeathed in women’s wills were of a religious nature, which is consistent with the reading material recommended by the humanist scholars. In her 1537 will, Elizabeth Beaumont De Vere, the Countess of Oxford, bequeathed “to the Lady Surrey ... a book of gold having divers leaves of gold with the Salutation of Our Lady at the beginning.” She also bequeathed to her sister-in-law, Lady Anne Vere, a “book of gold of the value of 100s with the picture of the Crucifix and the Salutation of Our Lady, to be newly made.”¹⁷⁷ Similarly, in the 1541 will of Dame Elizabeth Audley she bequeathed to “Dame Grace Bedingfield a nun’s(?) book with clasps of silver and gilt

¹⁷³ Elisabeth Salter, *Six Renaissance Men and Women: Innovation, Biography and Cultural Creativity in Tudor England, c.1450-1560*. (Aldershot, England; Burlington, VT : Ashgate, 2007)., p. 122.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 123.

¹⁷⁵ ibid, p. 123.

¹⁷⁶ Daybell, *Women Letter-Writers in Tudor England.*, p.2 fn.3.

¹⁷⁷ The National Archives PROB 11/27/144, ‘Will of Elizabeth (nee Scrope) Beaumont de Vere, Countess of Oxford, 1537’. Retrieved 2 February 2015, http://www.oxford-shakespeare.com/Probate/PROB_11-27_ff_84-6.pdf, p.8.

and to my Lady Alice Burgh another like book.”¹⁷⁸ In 1546 Mary Kingston bequeathed to the Princess Mary her “thick book of prayers covered in gold” and also a “book covered with purple velvet” to her sister.¹⁷⁹ Also in her later 1548 updated will Mary Kingston added that she would bequeath “to Elizabeth Ryther my little book of gold with a prayer to the Sacrament.”¹⁸⁰ The bequests of religious books from woman to woman, shows the importance they placed on ensuring their favourite religious book found its way to another female reader to aid their religious education.

In the extraordinary Lumley Library Catalogue, there are vast numbers of works on theology, history, philosophy, law and medicine. Also, many of the works written by the humanist scholars discussed in the previous section feature in the library, suggesting they formed part of the children’s education. The list below shows the books present in the Lumley Library that have been discussed in the previous sections.¹⁸¹

- 1233: Boccaccio, *De Claris Mulieribus* (1539).
- 1655: Christine de Pizan, *City of the Ladies* is not present; however, her *Book of the Feat of Armies and Chivalry* (1489) is listed, suggesting her works were known.
- 2236: Thomas More, *Epigrammata* (1520).
- 323: Erasmus, *Christiani Matrimonii Institutio* (1526).

¹⁷⁸ The National Archives PROB 11/29/21, ‘Will of Elizabeth (nee Chedworth) Blake Audley, 1541’, Retrieved, 2 February 2015, http://www.oxford-shakespeare.com/Probate/PROB_11-29_f_3.pdf. p.7.

¹⁷⁹ The National Archive PROB 11/32/320, ‘The Will of Mary (nee Scrope) Jerningham Kingston, 1546’, Retrieved, 1 February 2015, http://www.oxford-shakespeare.com/Probate/PROB_11-32_ff_168-9.pdf. p. 6.

¹⁸⁰ *ibid*, p.8.

¹⁸¹ The number at the beginning of each entry is the catalogue number which are in numerical order in the catalogue for ease of locating, and the number at the end is the date of publishing.

- 2018: Juan Luis Vives, *Opera duobus tomis*. Most of Vives' works are in these two volumes published in 1555, including *De Institutione Christiane Foeminae*, *De Ratione Studii Puerilis* and *Satellinum*.¹⁸²
- 1924a: Thomas Linacre, *Rudimenta Grammatices*, translated by George Buchanan (1533). This is the same version that also includes Juan Luis Vives' *De Ratione Studii Puerilis*.

This is one of the few sources where evidence can be found that places the works of the humanist scholars, which featured the theories on female education, in a domestic library in England. More importantly, it is known that the females of the household were highly educated and therefore these works were most likely used for their education.

Women Writing

As discussed, Juan Luis Vives' theories on women writing were very limited. However, the writing of women in the sixteenth century show they were not just copying religious passages but that they were exploring other writing mediums. Evidence of letters, notes and poems show that writing was becoming a regular pastime for many women and as the century continued, evidence shows that writing literacy was on the increase.

Many of the ways that women were negotiating their lives can be seen in their letters. Also, this is a crucial literary form that shows women were becoming increasingly literate. There is, however, one main problem with this. How do we know the women themselves were writing the letters and not dictating to a scribe? Norman Davis, who completed an exhaustive review of earlier fifteenth-century manuscripts, showed that

¹⁸² Juan Luis Vives, *Io. Lodovici Vivis... Opera, in duos distincta tomos...* ([au v̄ de la p. 978] apud Nicolaum Episcopium juniorem, 1555). *De Ratione Studii Perilis* is found at the very beginning of volume one of this compendium, giving it an interesting prominence.

these were almost always dictated.¹⁸³ However, by the end of the sixteenth century it became more accepted for a woman to write her own letters if possible. In his excellent article on women's correspondence, James Daybell concluded that in the sixteenth century "emphasis appears to have been placed on personal literacy, especially by the upper classes. Individuals were expected to pen correspondence themselves, rather than relying on amanuenses for scribal activity."¹⁸⁴

Daybell asserted that "the sixteenth century [was] a period of significant female literary production and comparative advances in women's education and literacy."¹⁸⁵ This observation is backed up by Mary Everett Wood, when in 1845 she embarked on the ambitious project of translating or transcribing letters written by women starting in 1103 and, as she describes in the preface to volume 1, she intended to continue through to the end of the reign of Elizabeth I.¹⁸⁶ As she researched her project Wood described the lack of letters prior to the sixteenth century and that as a result she was forced to include letters that seemed of little scholarly interest. However, from the sixteenth century onwards the difficulty shifted from too few letters, to too many.¹⁸⁷ She described how she found it necessary to stop before the reign of Elizabeth to enable her to include as many historically important letters as possible from previous years.¹⁸⁸ Spread across three volumes, only the first forty-six letters are from 1103 to 1500, the next two and a half volumes only extend to 1558. This is clear evidence of the extensive letter writing activities by women that had begun in the early sixteenth century.

¹⁸³ Warnicke, *Women of the English Renaissance and Reformation.*, p. 11.

¹⁸⁴ James Daybell, 'Interpreting Letters and Reading Script: Evidence for Female Education and Literacy in Tudor England', *History of Education* 34, no. 6 (1 November 2005), p.699.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 699.

¹⁸⁶ Mary Anne Everett Wood, *Letters of Royal and Illustrious Ladies of Great Britain, from the Commencement of the Twelfth Century to the Close of the Reign of Queen Mary;* (London, H. Colburn, 1846), accessed 12 February, 2014, <http://archive.org/details/lettersroyaland00greegoog.p.viii>.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. v.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. viii.

James Daybell showed that although sometimes women did not write their own letters, it should not be assumed that this means they could not.¹⁸⁹ Helen Baron agreed that there were times where women used scribes to write their letters and other times when they were expected to pen their correspondence themselves. She suggests it “may have been a matter of etiquette to write [letters such as requests for favours] personally rather than employ a scribe.¹⁹⁰ For many women, there appeared to be situations where it was preferable to write letters themselves and times where it was reasonable to relinquish the information to a secretary. From 1540 to 1603, out of 650 female letter-writers studied, only secretarial letters survive for approximately twenty three percent.¹⁹¹ All indications point towards women increasingly penning their own correspondence as the century wore on. “The number of women for whom there is evidence of their actually writing letters rose from 50 per cent in the 1540s to some 79 per cent by the end of the sixteenth century.”¹⁹² The roots of this shift are undoubtedly found in the writings of the humanists and the feminine examples of a succession of educated queens and learned noble women.

Occasionally in letters women tell us that they are writing the letters themselves, usually in a suitably modest manner. In 1528 Anne Boleyn explained to Cardinal Wolsey, “My Lord, in my most humble wise I desire you to pardon me that I am so bold to trouble you with my simple and rude writing...”¹⁹³ When Lady Catherine Daubney wrote to Cromwell in 1534 to complain about her difficult marriage, she wanted her concerns kept private so she told Cromwell that she has written the letter herself: “Master secretary that I have written here to you in my own hand, which is very ill, yet I have

¹⁸⁹ Daybell, *Women Letter-Writers in Tudor England.*, p. 92.

¹⁹⁰ Helen Baron, ‘Mary (Howard) Fitzroy’s Hand in the Devonshire Manuscript’, *The Review of English Studies*, no. 179 (1994): 318., p. 319.

¹⁹¹ Daybell, *Women Letter-Writers in Tudor England.*, p. 93.

¹⁹² *Ibid*, p. 95.

¹⁹³ L&P, No. 4360 Anne Boleyn to Wolsey, 11 June 1528.

done the best I can...”¹⁹⁴ However, some court women continued to use scribes to write their letters for them. In a letter to her mother Lady Lisle, Anne Bassett was forced to admit she was not writing her own letters because she was too busy with the queen. Her mother, herself a prolific letter writer, apparently had admonished her for this previously and therefore Anne was forced to explain herself. “And whereas you do write to me that I do not write nothing myself but mine own name; and, as for that, when I had haste to go up to the queen’s chamber, my man did write it which did write my letter.”¹⁹⁵ This shows that Anne’s mother clearly was disappointed in her daughter for not writing her letter herself and was putting pressure on her to do so. However, as Anne was educated amongst the French aristocracy, she did on occasion write to her mother in French.¹⁹⁶ Interestingly, Lady Lisle also similarly admonished her husband, when he was also not writing to her in his own hand: “I have written to you that you should write to me with you own hand, whereof two lines should be more comfort to me that a hundred of another man’s hand.”¹⁹⁷ Sometimes, penning their own correspondence could be a matter of life or death, especially when begging the king for his pardon. Mary Boleyn wrote to Thomas Cromwell after being banished from court for marrying without permission and also because the man was of a much lower status. In the letter Mary not only made it clear she had written herself but also that she has read law books that showed it was possible to gain a royal pardon.

“And so I pray you to report by me, and you shall find my writing true, in all points which I may please them in I shall be ready to obey them nearest my husband, whom I am most bound to; to whom I most heartily beseech you to be good unto, which, for my sake, is a poor banished man for an honest and godly cause. And seeing that I have read in old books that some, for as just causes, have by kings and queens been pardoned by the suit of good folks, I trust it shall be out chance, through your good help, to come to the same; as knoweth the (Lord) God,

¹⁹⁴ Wood, *Letters of Royal and Illustrious Ladies*, Vol II p.119.

¹⁹⁵ L&P, No. 229, Anne Basset to Lady Lisle 19 February 1540.

¹⁹⁶ Daybell, *Women Letter-Writers in Tudor England.*, p. 93.

¹⁹⁷ Wood, *Letters of Royal and Illustrious Ladies of Great Britain*, Vol II, p.132.

who send you health and heart's ease. Scribbled by her ill hand, who is your poor, humble suitor, always to command, Mary Stafford.”¹⁹⁸

Some women also knew that their writing was not particularly proficient. In 1536, Elizabeth, Duchess of Norfolk wrote to Cromwell: “I fear me that you cannot read my hand, it is so ill English. I pray you to send me word in writing if you can read my hand or not.”¹⁹⁹

Letter writing was not the only written form women engaged in on a day to day basis. They often wrote notes in various places, particularly in their personal prayer books such as their Books of Hours. Katherine Parr wrote a dedication to her much loved uncle in her father's Latin Book of Hours, which the children used as a Latin primer.²⁰⁰ She wrote: “Uncle, when you do on this look, I pray you remember who wrote in this book. Your loving niece, Katheryn Parr.”²⁰¹ In the court of Anne Boleyn, Mary Shelton got herself into trouble with the queen for writing verses in her prayer book. Chaplain William Latymer described Anne Boleyn severely chastising Mary Shelton for writing her secular poetry in her prayer book. He wrote: “...there was a booke of prayers whiche belonged to one of her maydes of honour called ... Mary Shelton presented unto her highneswhere in ware writton certeyne ydill poeses ... Whereupon the queen her majestie, calling her before her presence, wonderfull rebuked her that wold permitte suche wontone toyes in her book of prayers.”²⁰² However, Anne Boleyn's admonishments seem somewhat ironic since within her own *Book of Hours* there is a love note to Henry VIII to which he replied in another part of her book. Anne wrote in English: “Be daly prove you shalle me fynde to be to you bothe lovyng and kynde”

¹⁹⁸ Sarah Bryson, *Mary Boleyn the Unknown Sister, From Widowhood to William Stafford*, accessed 13 March 2026, <http://www.theanneboleynfiles.com/mary-boleyn-the-unknown-sister-from-widowhood-to-william-stafford-by-sarah-bryson/>.

¹⁹⁹ Wood, *Letters*, Vol II, p.222 and Daybell, *Women Letter-Writers*, p.97.

²⁰⁰ Porter, p. 28.

²⁰¹ *Ibid*, p.28.

²⁰² Paul G. Remley, ‘Mary Shelton and Her Tudor Literary Milieu’, in *Rethinking the Henrician Era: Essays on Early Tudor Texts and Contexts*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994). p. 44 and p. 65, note 19.

(figure 14), to which Henry replied in French: “Si silon mon affection la sufvenance sera en voz prieres ne seray gers oblie car vostre suis Henry R. a jammays” (“If you remember my love in your prayers as strongly as I adore you, I shall hardly be forgotten, for I am yours. Henry R. forever”).²⁰³ In a more sombre example, Lady Jane Grey was presented with a prayer book shortly before her execution by Sir John Bridges, the Lieutenant of the Tower. In the book she wrote letters to Bridges and also to her father. To Lord Bridges she wrote:

“Forasmuche as you haue desired so simple a woman to wrighte in so worthy a booke, gode mayster Lieufenante therefore I shalle as a frende desyre you, and as a christian require you, to call vpyon God, to encline youre harte to his laws, to quicken you in his waye, and not to take the worde of trowethe vtterlye oute of youre mouthe. Lyue styll to dye, that by deathe you may purchase eternall life; and remember howe the ende of Mathusael, whoe as we reade in the scriptures, was the longest liuer that was of a manne, died at the laste. For, as the Precher sayethe, there is a tyme to be borne, and a tyme to dye; and the daye of deathe is better than the daye of our birthe. Youres, as the Lorde knowethe, as a frende, Jane Duddeley”²⁰⁴

²⁰³ British Library Digitised Manuscripts, *Kings MS 9, f 66v and f 231v*. accessed 17 February 2016, <http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/record.asp?MSID=7991&CollID=19&NStart=9>.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid*, *Harley 2342, ff. 75v-75*, accessed 17 February 2016, <http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IllID=19927>, , and for a transcription of Jane’s letter to Bridges see: *Prayer Book Message to Sir John Bridges*, http://www.ladyjanegrey.info/?page_id=2415, Retrieved 17 February 2016.



Figure 14: Anne Boleyn's Book of Hours featuring a love note to Henry VIII.

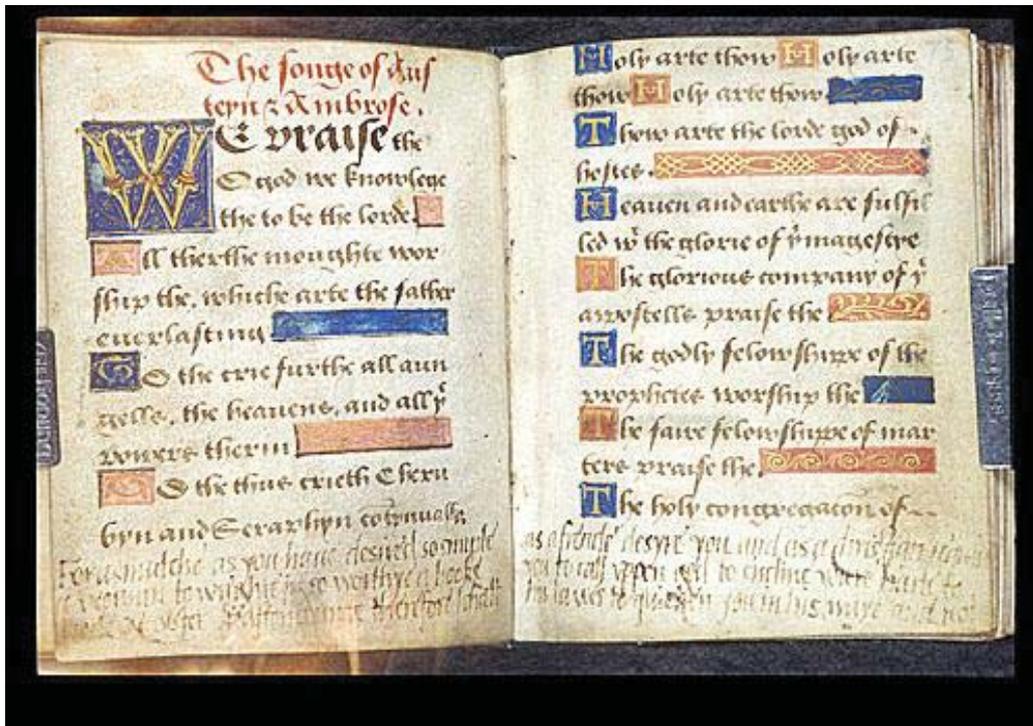


Figure 15: Lady Jane Grey's Prayer book, featuring a letter written by Lady Jane Grey to Sir John Bridges.

The Devonshire Manuscript represents an example of court women reading, collecting, transcribing and possibly composing poetry alongside men. A miscellany of poems, the Devonshire Manuscript includes 184 poems mainly attributed to Sir Thomas Wyatt, although he did not write them in the manuscript himself. It was compiled in the 1530s and early 1540s and there have been approximately nineteen different hands identified in its writing.²⁰⁵ Eight of the writers have been identified as likely to be professional scribes; the others were owners and acquaintances of the owners of the manuscript with varying degrees of writing proficiency. Surprisingly, three of the writers in the manuscript have been identified as women: Henry VIII's niece, Lady Margaret Douglas; Anne Boleyn's cousin, Mary Shelton; and Mary Howard Fitzroy, Duchess of

²⁰⁵ Elizabeth Heale, 'Women and the Courtly Love Lyric: The Devonshire MS (BL Additional 17492)', *The Modern Language Review*, 1995, edsjr.. p. 300 see also Remley, p. 47 who says there are at least a dozen contributors and according to some estimates there are more than twenty.

Richmond and the manuscript was actually owned by Margaret Douglas.²⁰⁶ The three female contributors were often present at court at similar times and it is likely that the manuscript passed between them for additions and editing. The manuscript provides a fascinating insight into the popularity of courtly love poetry, which shows noble women walking a dangerous tightrope between “wit and scandal, pastime and offence.”²⁰⁷ It is “remarkable for the precious insights it yields into women’s active participation and circulation of verse in the period, not merely as the idealized addresses of courtly verse but also as active readers and responders, collectors, copyists and contributors.”²⁰⁸ The female contributions to the courtly love poems in the Devonshire Manuscript seem at odds with the kind of devotional reading and writing recommended as worthy ways women could use their education. Vives dismissed books that featured “foule and filthy songes, that no good man can here without shame, nor no wyse man without displeasure. They that made suche songes seme to have non other purpose, but to corrupt the manner of younge folks: and they do none other wise than they that infecte the common welles with poyson.”²⁰⁹ There is evidence that some of the poems were sung in the court, so these verses are consistent with Vives’ concerns.

The entries into the Manuscript by Margaret Douglas and Mary Shelton are often alternating. This suggests they were using the poems as an enjoyable pastime. “In the early sixteenth century love poetry was still primarily a social form, enjoyed and exchanged as an opportunity to display wit and facility, and to contribute material perhaps for songs, perhaps for rumour and the innuendo of gossip.” The poems between the two women would echo each other in sentiment and they would at times adapt them. Mary Shelton signed her name three times in the manuscript, allowing for the rare attribution of a women in such a manuscript. The other women were identified by

²⁰⁶ Ibid, p.300 see also Baron, ‘Mary (Howard) Fitzroy’s Hand in the Devonshire Manuscript’, p. 328, Baron agrees that Margaret Douglas owned the volume in November 1537, and it went with her to Temple Newsome in early 1545.

²⁰⁷ Ibid, p. 298.

²⁰⁸ Elizabeth Heale, *The Devonshire Manuscript: A women’s Book of Courtly Poetry*.

²⁰⁹ Ibid, p.25.

comparing their writing with their letters. This particular poem in the last four lines of Figure 16 is unattributed but possibly Mary Shelton's own composition and bears her signature:

A wel I hawe at other lost

Not as my nowen I do protest

Bot wan I hawe mest

I shal regoys among the rest.²¹⁰

²¹⁰ 'The Devonshire Manuscript/ A_wel_I_hawe_at_other_lost' - Wikibooks, Open Books for an Open World', Retrieved 7 March 2016, https://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/The_Devonshire_Manuscript/A_wel_I_hawe_at_other_lost.

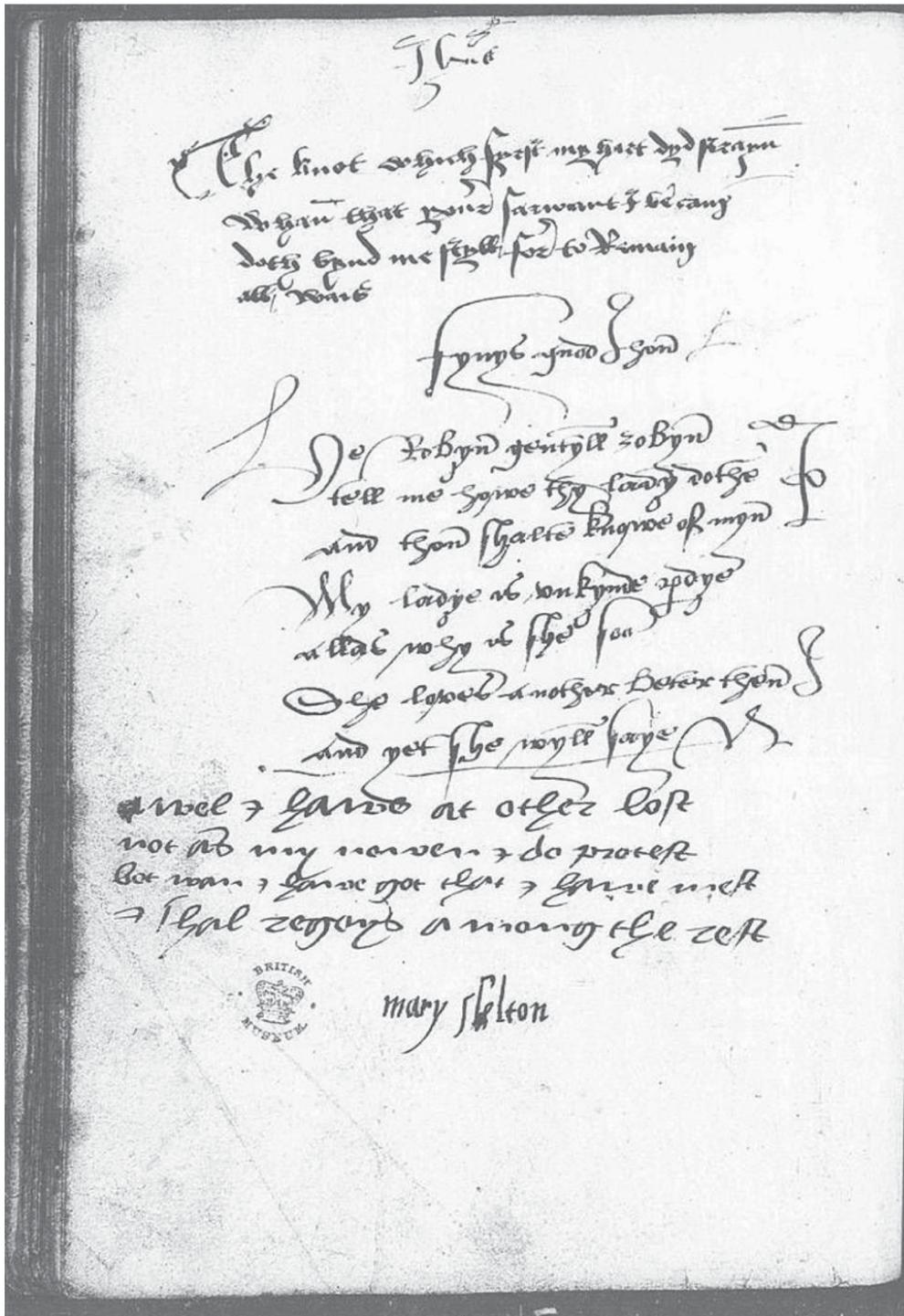


Figure 16: Page from the Devonshire Manuscript featuring the bottom four lines written by Mary Shelton and includes her signature.

However, the poems take on a serious note when in 1535 Margaret Douglas begins a romance with Thomas Howard. As Henry VIII's niece, Margaret became next in line to the throne when Mary and Elizabeth were removed from the succession. Therefore, Margaret's marriage became a key political tool. In 1536 Margaret became betrothed to Thomas, a binding agreement to marry. But, they did not have permission from the king. Henry was furious and threw them in the Tower of London. This period was particularly tense as Anne Boleyn had just been executed. In the Manuscript, several poems reflect this period of incarceration. Alison Weir has shown that it was possible for the Manuscript to have been smuggled into the Tower as Mary Shelton's brother was a groom porter.²¹¹ Thomas Howard may have entered his own poems at this time. But Margaret Douglas quickly became ill and was removed to Syon Abbey. Therefore, she may have dictated the poems to Mary Shelton and added them to the Manuscript later. Thomas Howard died of illness in the Tower in 1537.

As Figure 17 shows, Margaret wrote this poem in pencil which was begun on the previous page. The emotion of the words is evident when Margaret declared that her love for Thomas would not weaken even though she was banished from him. Also, she showed her defiance in declaring, "do what they wyll and do ther warst".

and tho that I be banest hym fro
 hes spech hes syght and company
 yt wyll I yn spyt of hes ffo
 hym love and kep my fantasy

do what they wyll and do ther warst
 ffor all they do ys wanety vanity

²¹¹ Alison Weir, *The Lost Tudor Princess: The Life of Lady Margaret Douglas* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2016), p. 64.

ffor a sunder my hart shall borst
 soworer then change my ffantasy.²¹²

The second poem written in ink in Mary Shelton's hand echoes similar themes as those of Margaret Douglas, showing her support of her friend. The third poem in ink is Margaret Douglas again describing her relationship with Thomas Howard in a similar vein to the pencil poem:

lo in thy *hat* hate thow hast be gone
 to rage and rayll and rekuer how
 and in thy rayge ffor~~th~~wit to run
 fforther then resen can alov
 but let them leve that lest to bow
 or *wit* thy words may so be wone
 ffor as ffor me I dare a woo
 to do agen as I hawe done.²¹³

These examples show that the entries into the Manuscript were not just for enjoyment, but were also used to reflect on the individual's emotions and the events surrounding them. It also shows an understanding and appreciation of secular verse and a level of literacy that allowed them to adapt, annotate and even possibly compose these poems.

²¹² 'The Devonshire Manuscript/my Hart Ys Set Not Remove - Wikibooks, Open Books for an Open World', Retrieved 7 March 2016, https://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/The_Devonshire_Manuscript/my_hart_ys_set_not_remove.

²¹³ 'The Devonshire Manuscript/lo in Thy Hat Thow Hast Be Gone - Wikibooks, Open Books for an Open World', accessed 7 March 2016, https://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/The_Devonshire_Manuscript/lo_in_thy_hat_thow_hast_be_gone.

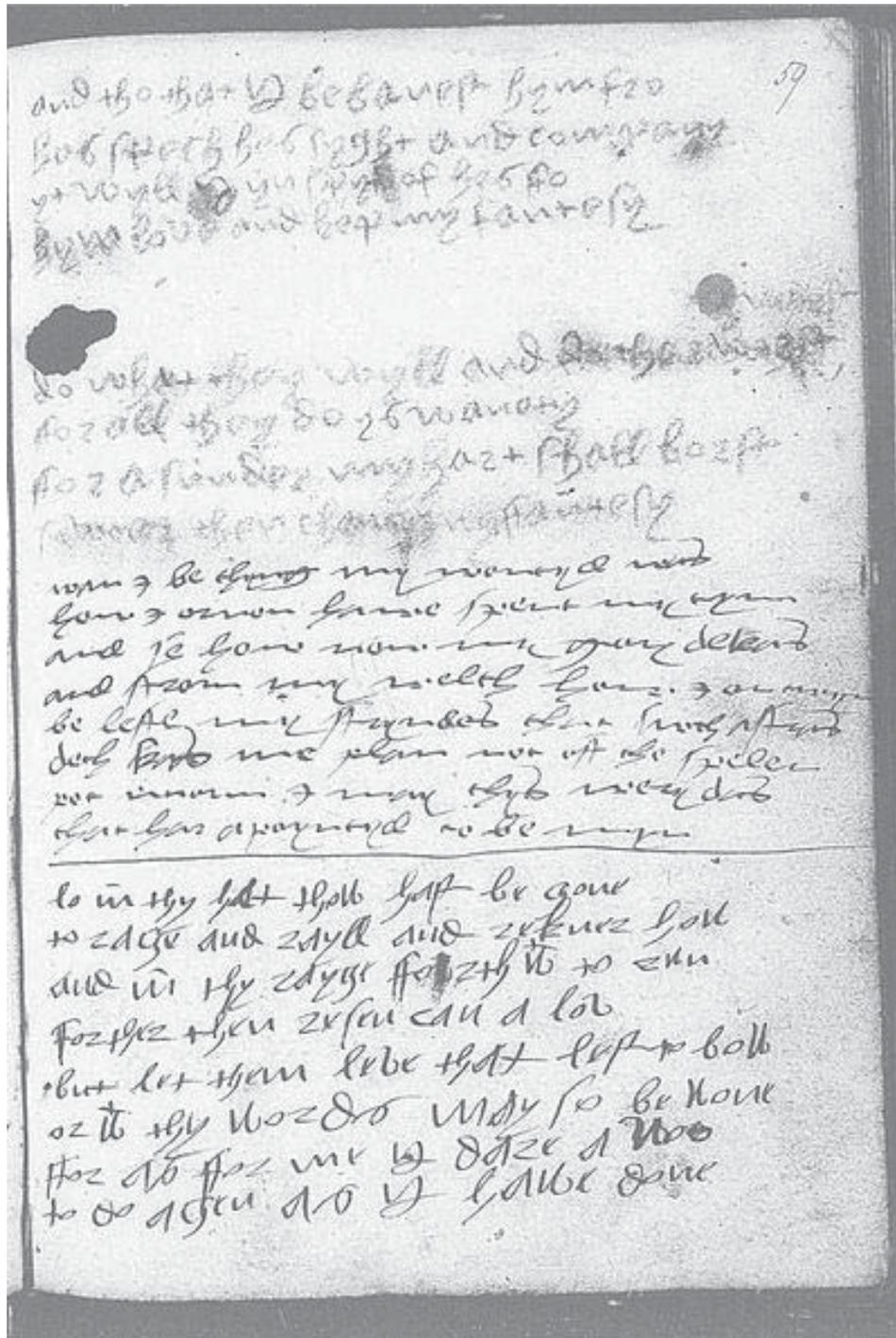


Figure 17: Page from the Devonshire Manuscript featuring the top pencil poem by Margaret Douglas, Middle ink by Mary Shelton and bottom ink by Margaret Douglas.

Women's Education for Business

While it is reasonable to imagine that royalty and the upper classes possessed the financial means to become educated, there is also evidence of literacy among the lower classes. When writing about women's education in the 1520s, the humanist scholars were undoubtedly targeting their writings at aristocratic and upper-class society as these were the most likely consumers. However, women in the merchant classes and the rising professional middle class would have had a unique reason to become more educated - to run a business. For these families a continuity of the business was vital for the survival of the family if the husband was away, incapacitated or had died. If the wife could not do this the family would become extremely vulnerable. For merchant families, the husband would often be travelling and the wife would either be required to run the merchant business in England or run any family estate businesses. Assisting the husband in his business ventures was not seen as an unusual role for women, but rather an expected part of her role a supportive wife, which is why these women were rarely commented on as being exceptional. Although we may not be able to uncover exactly how these women came to be educated, the way they could run their businesses shows that they learned what was necessary to do so. Therefore, their education, depending on what business they were involved in, must have consisted of a combination of reading, writing and book-keeping at the very least.

One such woman, and wife of a member of the Merchant-Tailors Company, was Elizabeth Lucar. We mainly know of her accomplishments through the extraordinary inscription on her tomb written by her husband Emanuel Lucar when she died in 1537. It tells us that she was proficient not only in the usual womanly pursuits of needlework and music but also arithmetic and languages. Merchants needed to be proficient in arithmetic and European languages due to their trading activities and the fact that Elizabeth was also proficient in these languages shows she must have had some use for them. Although England's queen was Spanish, this was certainly not a language regularly taught and therefore Elizabeth must have had a particular use for both Spanish and Italian. The

inscription notes: “Three manner hands could she write them faire all. To speake of Algorism, or accounts, in every fashion, of women, few like (I think) in all this nation ... Latine and Spanish and also Italian, she spake, writ, and read, with perfect utterance; And for the English, she the Garland wan, In Dame Prudence Schoole, by Graces Purveyance, which clothed her with virtues, from naked ignorance: Reading the scriptures to judge light from dark, Directing her Faith to Christ the only Mark. The said Elizabeth deceased the 29th day of October, An Dom 1537, of year not fully 27. This Stone and all hereon contained made at the cost of the Said Emmanuel, Merchant-Taylor.”²¹⁴

A prolific female writer whose letters have survived is Sabine Johnson. As a merchant’s wife, her husband regularly travelled to the Staple of Calais and she was left at their manor in Glapthorne, Northhamptonshire. On the estate the couple ran a successful sheep farm and wool trade which was largely managed by Sabine. Many of her letters to her husband showed the day to day running of this business as well as family affairs. Many of the letters showed her management of the wool business. On the 14th November 1545, Sabine explained to John that “the wool winders have finished, having wound 97 sacks and 10 todd, and packed 27 cloths. Their winding comes to 7l. 15s. 8d. and their packing to 27s., and I have given them 40s., [and I] gave them a reward of 12s.”²¹⁵ In 1955, Barbara Winchester provided this charming, if dated description of Sabine’s letters:

“Sabine’s letters are delightful to behold. She has quite a candid, open hand, but she can never quite manage to keep the lines straight on the paper, and so she always ends up higher of the right side than the left. Her spelling is all her own and, being a woman she naturally disregarded the logic and order so dear to the masculine mind. Love and cheeses are wonderfully mixed in her letters. John’s tuition, however and a few years on constant practice improved her writing out of all measure, although she never achieved Olivia’s ‘sweet Roman hand.’

Sometimes for fun she seems to have taken the pen away from him, when he was

²¹⁴ Ballard, *Memiors of Several Ladies of Great Britain.*, p.37

²¹⁵ L&P, No. 791, Sabyne Johnson to John Johnson, Glapthorn, 14 November 1545.

busy in the counting-house, and copied whole paragraphs or stray sentences into his precious letter-books.”²¹⁶

The image of Sabine’s letter in Figure 18 shows that although her writing may be difficult to decipher to the modern eye due to the script she used, what is shown in her writing is a regularity of the letter forms that comes from a hand well practiced in writing proficiency. It also disputes Winchester’s claim that she could not keep her lines straight and always finished higher on the right. This letter was from 18 January 1551/2 and the subject was similar to the letter described above from 1545 regarding the management of the estate, noting that she would send her husband some horses the following week. The letter described the price of wool and that some of his sheep are unsold.²¹⁷ Also in their letters the Johnsons mentioned other women in their acquaintance who managed businesses. Mrs Baynjam traded in wool, wine and herrings and also ran a boarding house in Calais. Jane Rawe ran a “private exchange business, travelling between Hazebrouck, London, Antwerp and Calais as the need arose.”²¹⁸

²¹⁶ Barbara Winchester, *Tudor Family Portrait*. London : Cape, 1955., p.68.

²¹⁷Sabine Johnson to John Johnson SP 46/7fo125, Retrieved 02 February 2016, <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C7703991>.

²¹⁸ Sim, *The Tudor Housewife.*, p.98.

1551 This is London the 19 of June
 I have my most humble commendation (beloved brother)
 my last word sent to Sir Robert Gray the 10 of my
 last is to be sent to London and arrived to
 ye 3 June & the day I have not yet in letter
 of the 10 of June in January & might most
 mult in London & necessity of amercement
 but the time now is not for me to be
 I pray you understand that all this is for
 redemption of lack of your most humble
 waded list of all for I have not yet for
 to my
 by plant a ship called the Swift of London
 Robert Gray and he should the day to take in
 for my & as it is written for the Swift
 every last of January I have written by the
 ladying of the Swift of London Edward
 as the Swift came aboard the last of
 other of light and goods as the Swift
 carry aboard my last of the frame
 ye may further assure the Swift
 might neither will not make no more
 order of frame for (as the Swift) in
 forward & for the Swift to be sent to
 you the time is past I do not see it
 the mult but I hope you do
 The ship of my last full laden tomorrow
 I do intend to send you no more
 might neither forward in a ship in
 as the Swift of London
 for & the first of June
 your loving brother
 Sir John Johnson

Figure 18: Sabine Johnson to John Johnson, 1551. Public Record. Courtesy of The National Archives, London

The death of a husband put their businesses and therefore their families in great jeopardy if the wife was unable to maintain it. Often the wife would sell the business shortly after the husband's death, but there are many examples of women successfully continuing the business. Sargent painter John Brown left his "workshop, tools, pattern books, and indentures of his apprentice to his wife, fellow painter Anne Gulliver"²¹⁹ in his will of 1532. Similarly, in 1550, "London goldsmith John Hylles, who ran a workshop with his wife Jane, left 20s to any apprentices who were bound to him at his demise, 'upon condyion that they do their dutie and serve to and with my wife during the termes of yeres, she be willing to have them.'"²²⁰

The fascinating example of Elizabeth Pickering highlights the role women often took in continuing businesses when their husbands died. On her husband's death in 1540 Elizabeth took over his printing business and published works in her own name for ten months. The apparently seamless nature of this transition shows that she knew the business well and understood how to run it. With the religious instability of the time, choosing material to print could be a precarious decision. Elizabeth's publishing choices showed care and understanding of these constraints. "In a period, when Henry VIII's stance on religious writings was far from trustworthy, she issued only non-polemical books of health [including an Herbal and Seynge of Urynes] and the kinds of law books her husband had specialized in: abridgements of the statutes, her two editions of the popular Fitzherbert, her book on local courts, and yet another edition of Magna Carta."²²¹ Although uncommon, Elizabeth was not unique in running a print shop. By the late sixteenth century, widows represented a tenth of all publishers.²²²

²¹⁹ Susan E. James, *Women's Voices in Tudor Wills, 1485-1603: Authority, Influence and Material Culture* (Routledge, 2016), p.119.

²²⁰ Ibid, p.119.

²²¹ Barbara Kreps, 'Elizabeth Pickering: The First Woman to Print Law Books in England and Relations within the Community of Tudor London's Printers and Lawyers', *Renaissance Quarterly*, no. 4 (2003), p. 1081.

²²² Sim, *The Tudor Housewife.*,p.98.

Education for sixteenth-century women was essentially practical. As recommended by the humanist, they were becoming educated in subjects that were necessary to enhance their roles as wives and mothers. For noble and upper class women this education may have been for the sole purpose of making them a more attractive marriage option or to obtain a court appointment. As Thomas More believed, an educated wife could be a comfort for a husband as she could talk to him about anything that concerned him. Education was also a way to keep a woman occupied and served as a distraction from immoral thoughts. The focus on religious works found in women's wills shows that the emphasis on devotional reading was consistent with the books women owned and bequeathed. The increase of writing activities that women engaged in, indicates that this was becoming an important feature of their day to day lives. According to the evidence, women were not just writing letters, but also notes in books and sharing poetry. For women in the lower classes, education took on a much more essential purpose. That of assisting her husband with his business and continuing it when he could not. A women supporting her husband's business interests or even running the business was not seen as unseemly, but as part of the women's role as a wife and home maker. The education required to fulfil the business requirements should not be underestimated.

Chapter 5 Conclusion

When Maria Dowling stated that “in championing women’s studies for [Princess] Mary’s sake, Katherine [of Aragon] became a pioneer of female education in England”,²²³ she had reasonable grounds for this surprising claim. The definition of a ‘pioneer’ is “a person who helps create or develop new ideas”.²²⁴ Katherine certainly helped to develop them because of the need to educate her daughter. The humanist theories on female education had only just reached England in Katherine’s time but had long circulated on the continent. The humanist scholars in Europe and England all knew each other, and often visited each other sharing ideas and scholarship. Before the need to educate Princess Mary, Thomas More was already considering the suitability of female education. The education he provided his daughters in his ‘school’ was well known by his humanist colleagues and some families even followed his example. In the works of Erasmus and Juan Luis Vives, the education of Thomas More’s daughters garnered special mention. Yet, it was the education of Princess Mary that provided the impetus to create an intensive conversation on female education. The burning question became: what was the most suitable education for a princess who may actually rule the country? The person who ensured this question was given the attention it required was Katherine of Aragon. She asked the best humanist scholars that she knew to compose works to aid in Princess Mary’s education. Indeed, eleven works featuring female education were produced during decade of the 1520s alone, predominantly because of Princess Mary’s education.

The works themselves required a considered approach from the humanist scholars. They knew that their writings would be published and therefore needed to essentially conform to conventional boundaries. With this in mind, the scholar’s approach was to

²²³ Dowling, *Humanism in the Age of Henry VIII.*, p.223

²²⁴ ‘Pioneer | Definition of Pioneer by Merriam-Webster’, accessed 26 April 2016, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/pioneer>.

form any educational advice for the sole purpose of enhancing the female roles of the wife and mother. Education must be private, based in the home, a woman must have no public voice, be barred from professions and enhance morality and protect the all-important chastity. But, importantly, there were new possibilities for female learning. The scholars believed that a woman was as capable of learning as a man and in fact it could be beneficial for preventing immorality. She must read much more than ever before, for within the pages of books there was guidance on religion and morality, for women were naturally more pious. She could even write as long as she was copying text or translating, not composing. The example of Katherine of Aragon and Thomas More's daughters showed that a woman could be educated, intelligent, pious, humble and a devoted wife and mother. Indeed, the ideal humanist woman.

The iconography in prayer books and Renaissance art showing females, usually female saints, reading and writing shows that the subtle shift in the theories that women were capable of learning permeated society enough to become a theme in the artworks. The examples shown in this study have not previously been connected with the works of the humanist scholars. And yet, the number of artworks featuring women, especially women as Mary Magdalene, reading and writing that were produced particularly in the 1530s is surely not a coincidence. For the first time women were being shown as individual portraits in the act of these literary activities. Whereas reading could be considered a devotional activity, writing can only be considered as a literary activity. Therefore, these images presenting women in domestic surroundings and dressed in contemporary clothing shows an acceptance of the literacy of women.

How women were educated in the early sixteenth century is unclear. The system of female education remained informal. However, there is no doubt that many women were becoming more literate than ever before. The rise of the reading literacy of women is evident in the increased production of books and book ownership of women in the early sixteenth century. In accordance with the advice of the humanist scholars for appropriate reading material, women often bequeathed their favourite religious books to other women to encourage their religious education. The number of humanist works featured in this

study that are found in the Lumley library, provides unique evidence that the works of the humanist scholars were actively used for the education of the girls of the household. These sisters went on to be known as scholars of classical languages in a similar way to the More sisters.

The writing activities of women increased markedly after the 1520s, showing that it was becoming expected that a woman should write her own letters. Other day-to-day writing activities of upper class women shows that for many it was a normal part of their lives. Whether writing notes, annotations in prayer books, or contributing poetry in a manuscript miscellany, women were writing for leisure as well as correspondence. For the rising professional middle classes and merchant classes, women were increasingly aiding their husbands with their businesses. Therefore, they somehow became educated. The education of these women tends to be overlooked as their learning was for the purpose of being a supportive wife and therefore considered a wifely duty. However, if a husband could no longer work the ability of a wife to continue the business would have been a matter of life or death for the family.

Therefore, Katherine of Aragon's reign signalled the beginning of a subtle shift in the belief in women's ability to learn. Thomas More undoubtedly contributed to this shift by his writings and the example of the education of his daughters. Yet it was the production and publication of the multiple works on women's education produced in the 1520s, predominantly for the education of Princess Mary, which brought these theories into the public sphere. The driving force ensuring these works were written was undoubtedly Katherine of Aragon. For the first time it was possible for the public to have access to the education of a princess. This signalled a new acceptance of the literacy of women and the evidence shows that women were increasingly learning to not just read, but also write. Women with the impetus, acceptance and resources to become educated, were doing so. Their education often reflected their practical needs or family interests. But undoubtedly a succession of educated royal women ensured that such education

continued to be accepted with the societal expectations throughout the rest of the sixteenth century.

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