

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

**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

Leanne Croon Hickman

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 Hessemessen, 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.