



UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI
DI PADOVA

Università degli Studi di Padova

Dipartimento di Studi Linguistici e Letterari

Corso di Laurea Triennale Interclasse in
Lingue, Letterature e Mediazione Culturale (LTLLM)
Classe LT-11

Tesina di Laurea

*Prayers or Meditations and The Lamentation of a Sinner: the Evolution of Katherine
Parr's Religious Position*

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Anno Accademico 2022 / 2023

TITLE:

Prayers or Meditations and *The Lamentation of a Sinner*: the Evolution of Katherine Parr’s Religious Position

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FOREWORD

Katherine Parr, the sixth and last wife of Henry VIII, was not only an influential queen, but also the first woman to publish a book under her own name in England.¹

During her time as queen, she was able to reunite Henry's family, not only by improving his relationship with his children, but most of all by convincing Henry VIII to reinstate Mary and Elizabeth in the line of succession. Their right to be heirs had been removed after the downfall of their mothers, but thanks to Katherine Parr they were entitled to inherit the throne again. She had a very strong bond with Elizabeth, which is shown by the numbers of letters and gifts that the two exchanged. Katherine was to Elizabeth the only motherly figure she ever had, and the queen deeply influenced her stepdaughter. This influence will also be a religious one, with its most important peak occurring during Elizabeth I's coronation, during which, the newly crowned queen kissed an English version of the Bible, an act of historical significance as she publicly displayed her religious orientation. It is believed that Katherine Parr had an influence on Elizabeth's education and religion. Elizabeth would also translate her stepmother's *Prayers or Meditations*, which give a hint of the possibility that Elizabeth could have been aware of Katherine's position and maybe even share it, which would explain her choosing to swear on an English version of the Gospel during her coronation. It is then understandable how significant their relationship was.²

In the first chapter I will introduce Katherine Parr's childhood and her experience during the Pilgrimage of Grace, an important historical event in which the conservative forces struggled to accept Henry VIII's separation from the church of Rome. In the second chapter, I will focus on and analyse Katherine's *Prayers or Meditations*. In the third chapter I will discuss and analyse Katherine's *The Lamentation of a Sinner* and compare it with *Prayers or*

¹Norton, Elizabeth, *Wife, Widow, Mother, Survivor, the Story of the Last Queen of Henry VIII*, Stroud: Amberley Publishing, 2011, p. 124.

²Rowse, A.L., "The Coronation of Queen Elizabeth", <https://www.historytoday.com/archive/coronation-queen-elizabeth> (accessed 9 March).

Meditations, as I believe some differences in the works highlight Katherine's religious shift. These two works: *Prayers or Meditations* and *The Lamentation of a Sinner*, both give a hint, if not proof, of her religious alignment with the reformers' ideals. Her writings not only prove how influential she was in her circle and among those who agreed with the reformation, but also what an erudite queen she was. Thus, exploring her works is essential to understand her thoughts and the influence she had on those around her.

I will then draw my conclusion and explain not only why I believe her works to be of extreme importance, but also why they help us understand the evolution of her religious position.

CHAPTER 1

1.1 Katherine Parr's childhood

Katherine Parr was born in 1512. She was the eldest daughter of Thomas Parr of Kendal and Matilda Green, also known as Maud Parr. Katherine's parents worked at the English court, with her mother being a lady-in-waiting for queen Catherine of Aragon, Henry VIII's first wife. Her father Thomas, although not in favour of king Henry VII, was intelligent enough to befriend his son Henry VIII who, after the death of his father, made him knight of Bath. Parr's friendship with Henry VIII was a strategic one, he had in fact become very indebted to the crown, with a sum that would have taken almost 60 years to pay back.³ Once Henry was crowned in 1509, he cancelled Parr's debt, allowing the Parris to live a rather comfortable life.

The education received in Parr's household was remarkable, as testified by the letter written by Thomas Dacre, second baron Dacre of Gilsland, regarding his grandson Henry Scrope, son and heir of lord Scrope of Bolton:⁴ "...remembering the wisdom of my said lady [Parr] ... I assure you he [Henry] might learn with her as well as in any place that I know, as well nurture, as French and other languages".⁵ This proves that Katherine received a good education; Maud Parr's attention towards education was appreciated in her family's circles. Although there is no proof, as not many specific details are known about Katherine's education, it is believed that she had a basic knowledge of Latin. During her years as queen, she exchanged many letters in Latin with remarkable figures such as Robert Ascham, an English scholar who would later become Elizabeth I's tutor, Thomas Smith, an English humanist and the Prince of Wales.⁶ It is hard to believe that an erudite subject would have addressed the queen in a language she did not know, or at least did not have the basic

³ James, Susan E., *Kateryn Parr*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999, p. 11.

⁴ Ridgway, Claire, "Catherine Parr by Sarah Bryson", <https://www.tudorsociety.com/catherine-parr-by-sarah-bryson/#comments> (accessed 2 March 2023).

⁵ Quoted in James, p. 11. Maud Parr entered negotiations with Lord Dacre to marry the latter's grandson, Henry Scrope, to Katherine Parr. In this letter, Lord Dacre describes the education that could be found in Maud Parr's household and is thus an important source that allows us to understand Katherine's education at home.

⁶ James, p. 11.

knowledge of. Therefore, it can be assumed that the queen learnt Latin during her early years of education under the surveillance of her mother.

Katherine's father died in 1517, leaving her mother with three young children to provide for. Maud could have chosen to marry again, but she did not. She chose instead to keep working as a lady-in-waiting for the queen. She changed the role of women within her household, which was a major example to Katherine.⁷

1.2 The Pilgrimage of Grace

In 1536 Henry VIII, under the advice of his minister Thomas Cromwell, sent out the first Act of Suppression which forced the closure of monasteries whose income was less than £200 a year; as a result of this act, buildings and money were confiscated by the Crown.⁸ The dissolution of monasteries enraged the north of England, which still held a large number of conservatives who were against the king's decision. The biggest rebellion started in Yorkshire and was led by Robert Aske, an English lawyer who soon gathered 30,000 armed men.⁹ Rebels in the north were already dissatisfied with the separation from the Church of Rome and the dissolution of monasteries was the last straw. They demanded that the king go back under papal rule, a request which King Henry VIII would have never agreed to.

This historical event directly touched Katherine's life, as John Neville, her second husband, also known as lord Latimer, was forced to join the rebellion and follow the rebels, leaving Katherine and his children alone at Snape Castle, their house in the north.¹⁰ The conduct of John Neville during his time with the rebels can be questionable: it is believed that

⁷ James, Susan, E., "Katherine [Kateryn, Catherine] [née Katherine Parr] (1512-1548) queen of England and Ireland, sixth consort of Henry VIII", <https://www.oxforddnb.com/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-4893> (accessed 12 February 2023).

⁸ Leonard, Amy E., "Female Religious Orders", in *A Companion to the Reformation World*, edited by Hsia, Po-chia R., Oxford: Blackwell, 2004, p. 245.

⁹ The Editors of Encyclopaedia, "Pilgrimage of Grace", <https://www.britannica.com/event/Pilgrimage-of-Grace> (accessed 14 February 2023).

¹⁰ Norton, p.48.

he had started to agree with the rebels and actively spread their aims and their ideals. Latimer's signature also appeared in official documents written by the rebels,¹¹ under the supervision of Robert Aske. This was of course considered an act of treason, which soon reached Cromwell and the king himself. Thanks to the duke of Norfolk, a military commander who refused to provide Cromwell with any proof of lord Latimer's treason, his life was spared. After the end of the Pilgrimage, the Latimers moved to the south, removing themselves from the dangers of the north. Lord Latimer's health got progressively worse, and he eventually died on 2 March 1534.

This event is significant, as it represents the rupture among Henry VIII's subjects, who did not always agree with their king and in this specific case were even ready to fight against his majesty for their religious beliefs. Therefore, it is evident how religion was a matter of importance at the time and how Henry's decisions were not always carried out without consequences. The events that occurred during the Pilgrimage of Grace may have left a permanent mark on Katherine who years later, in her *The Lamentation of a Sinner*, would write "It is much to be lamented: the schism, varieties, contentions, and disputations that have been, and are, in the world of Christian religion".¹²

1.3 Katherine Parr as queen of England

After her husband's death, Katherine followed her mother's footsteps and became lady-in-waiting for princess Mary. This choice would change her life. It is not known for sure when the widowed Henry VIII first noticed Katherine; what is known is that in February 1543 the king was visiting Mary's apartments several times a day.¹³ The king had of course an affection for his daughter, but we can believe that Mary Tudor was not the only reason for

¹¹ James, p. 78.

¹² Parr, Katherine, "The Lamentation of Sinner" in *Katherine Parr: Complete Works and Correspondence*, edited by Janel Mueller, London: The University of Chicago Press, 2014, p. 469. This is the edition that I used throughout my dissertation.

¹³ James, p. 90.

his frequent visits, but it was another person who sparked the king's interest: Katherine herself. The king's health had been progressively deteriorating because of the ulcer on his leg and Katherine, a mature woman who had been nursing her first two husbands, seemed to be a good choice for him. Henry VIII and Katherine Parr got married on 12 July 1543.

Katherine's family had connections among the reformers' circles¹⁴ and her marriage was incredibly important for them. First of all, a royal marriage would elevate the bride's family status, a fact that Katherine was aware of, as shown in a letter that she wrote to her brother William eight days after her marriage. Katherine writes that: "you being my natural brother, may rejoice with me in the goodness of God and of his majesty, as the person who by nature hath most cause of the same".¹⁵ In this short passage, by repeating "natural" and "by nature", Katherine stresses how her brother could rejoice knowing that her bloodline would benefit from this marriage. Secondly, a queen could try and influence the king on religious matters, a fact which had occurred before, when the king chose to break from the church of Rome in order to marry Anne Boleyn.¹⁶ I mentioned this event as I believe that the efforts Henry VIII took to marry a woman, proved how influential a female figure could be in the king's life and decisions. The king was also becoming more conservative during the last years of his reign, and a queen with reformist sympathies was seen as a possibility of preventing the king from going all the way back to conservatism.

What we mostly know of the dangers she encountered during her time as queen, is given to us by John Foxe, an English martyrologist and propagandist. As such, we cannot be certain of the credibility of his words, but I believe a passage from his *Acts and Monuments* deserves attention if compared to two passages from Katherine's *The Lamentation of a Sinner*. John Foxe explains how the queen was almost arrested due to her religious beliefs and

¹⁴ James, p. 115.

¹⁵ quoted in Parr, Katherine, *Katherine Parr: Complete Works and Correspondence*, London: The University of Chicago Press, 2014, p. 46.

¹⁶ Norton, Elizabeth, *Anne Boleyn in Her Own Words & the Words of Those Who Knew Her*, Stroud: Amberley, 2011, p.11.

how, thanks to a speech she made in front of the king, the charges were dropped.¹⁷ Even though we cannot verify the veridicity of this event, I would like to compare the two texts mentioned above: Foxe writes that the queen, when accused by the king to try and educate others on religious matters, answered:

Then hath your majesty very much mistaken me, who have ever been of the opinion, to think it very unseemly, and preposterous, for the woman to take upon her the office of an instructor of teacher to her lord and husband; but rather to learn of her husband, and to be taught by him. And whereas I have, with your majesty's leave, heretofore been bold to hold talk with your majesty, wherein sometimes in opinions there hath seemed some difference, I have not done it so much to maintain opinion, as I did it rather to minister talk, not only to the end your majesty might with less grief pass over this painful time of you infirmity, being attentive to our talk, and hoping that your majesty should reap some ease thereby; but also that I, hearing your majesty's learned discourse, might receive to myself some profit thereby: wherein, I assure your majesty, I have not missed any part of my desire in that behalf, always referring myself, in all such matters, unto your majesty, as by ordinance of nature it is convenient for me to do.¹⁸

Similarly, in *The Lamentation of a Sinner*, Katherine writes that “I have certainly no curious learning to defend this matter withal, but a simple zeal and earnest love to the truth”(459) but also that “if they be women married, they learn of St.Paul to be obedient to their husbands, and to keep silence in the congregation, and to learn of their husbands, at home”(481).

What is interesting about these passages are the resemblances:

“I have not missed any part of my desire in that behalf”. (Foxe)

“I have certainly no curious learning to defend this matter”. (Parr)

In both texts, it appears that Katherine seems to claim that she had no active interest in defending her religious position. In addition, if we believe this part of Foxe's story to be true, in both texts Katherine underlines that she did not want to teach, but rather to be taught by her husband:

“To learn and to be taught by him”. (Foxe)

“To learn of their husbands, at home”. (Parr)

¹⁷ Foxe, John, “The Story of Queen Katherine Parr, late Queen and Wife to King Henry the Eight: wherein appeareth in what Danger she was for the Gospel, by means of Stephen Gardiner, and others of his Conspiracy; and how gloriously she was preserved by her kind and loving Husband the King”, in *Acts and Monuments*, edited by Rev. Stephen Reed Cattley, London: L&G Seeley, 1838, p. 559.

¹⁸ Foxe, p. 560.

I found these similarities striking, as Foxe's account seems to be following the words that Katherine used firsthand in her work, thus inducing me to believe that, at least, part of his account is true.

On the other hand, Foxe published his *Acts and Monuments* in 1563, while Katherine published *The Lamentation of a Sinner* in 1547, thus Foxe may have written his accounts on Katherine's life based on her text and not on real events. We cannot know for sure, but citing Foxe's text is important, as he contributed to Katherine's religious image among her contemporaries. Therefore, as this source is not reliable, I will now try to understand Katherine's religious position based solely on her own words and works.

CHAPTER 2

PRAYERS OR MEDITATIONS

2.1 Introduction to the work

Katherine Parr's *Prayers or Meditations* was the first English book published by a woman under her own name in England.¹⁹ The book enjoyed incredible success, with thirteen editions published by the end of the sixteenth century.²⁰ The third edition, published on 6 November 1545, was titled *Prayers or Medytacions, wherein the mynd is stirred, patiently to suffre all afflictions here, to set at nought the vayne prosperitee of this worlde, and alwaie to longe for the everlastynge felicitie: Collected out of holy wookes by the most vertuous and gracious Princess Katherine quene of Englande, Fraunce, and Ireland*, and it was also known as "The Queen's Prayers".²¹ I believe it is important to note that *Prayers or Meditations* was not created from scratch by Katherine Parr's mind, but it is rather a revisitation of the translation of *Imitatio Christi*, whose author and translator are still being discussed, although some historians accredit the authorship to Thomas à Kempis,²² a Christian theologian from Germany,²³ and the translation to Richard Whitford, an English monk.²⁴ Citing the *Imitatio Christi* is important, as in order to understand Katherine Parr's religious evolution based on her books, we also need to understand the text she used as a basis for her work. *The Imitation of Christ* guides "the reader in directing attention towards Christ and away from worldly matters";²⁵ it tries to work as a guide for Christians and focuses

¹⁹ Norton, Elizabeth, *Wife, Widow, Mother, Survivor, the Story of the Last Queen of Henry VIII*, Stroud: Amberley Publishing, 2011, p. 124.

²⁰ Mueller, p. 369.

²¹ Mueller, p.369.

²² The Editors of Encyclopaedia, "Imitation of Christ", <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Imitation-of-Christ-devotional-book> (accessed 19 March 2023).

²³ Petruzzello, Melissa, "Thomas à Kempis", <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Thomas-a-Kempis> (accessed 19 March 2023).

²⁴ Rhodes, J. T., "Whitford, Richard", <https://www.oxforddnb.com/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-29308?rskey=MW5s4K> (accessed 19 March 2023).

²⁵ Cobb, Christopher, "Seeing "That of God" in Texts: Christian Practices for Training in Perception", *Christianity and Literature* 58 (2009), p. 246.

on the achievements one could reach by centring his/her thoughts on Christ.²⁶ We may look at the *Imitatio Christi* as if it were the root of *Prayers or Meditations*, a work which, as we will see, still abounds with Christian references. According to Agnes Strickland, after the publication of *Prayers or Meditations*, Katherine became “the admiration of most learned men in Europe and the intellectual model of the ladies of England”.²⁷

It is important to identify the religious context in which the book was published. As explained in the first chapter, the king was becoming more conservative during the last years of his reign, but he actually never took a specific position: he was not fully conservative, but at the same time he did not welcome all the reformers’ ideals. Therefore, he spent the last years of his life in this sort of middle way.²⁸ In 1543, the year in which Katherine and Henry VIII got married, the king published *The King’s Book*. In this book, he proved to have a middle religious position, asserting, for instance, that redemption and salvation could be reached only through repentance, good works and penitence,²⁹ an idea which was far from Luther, as the latter claimed that human beings were saved only thanks to their faith in Christ, as “Christians should be exhorted to be diligent in following Christ”,³⁰ and “thus be confident of entering into heaven”³¹. However, the king also wrote against the abuses of the pope and condemned the cult of images, which aligned with Luther’s convictions. The king himself was an example of uncertainty when it came to making a precise religious choice. *Prayers or Meditations* was thus written at a time, during which the king’s religious position was halfway between the Catholics and the reformers and one may wonder what this has to do

²⁶ The Editors of Encyclopaedia, “Imitation of Christ”,

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Imitation-of-Christ-devotional-book> (accessed 19 March 2023).

²⁷ quoted in Hoffman Jr, Fenno C., “Catherine Parr as a Woman of Letters”, *Huntington Library Quarterly* 23 (1960), p. 349.

²⁸ Bernard, G.W., *The King’s Reformation, Henry VIII and The Remaking of The English Church*, Bury: St Edmundsbury Press, 2005, p. 498.

²⁹ Bernard, p. 586.

³⁰ Becker, David, “95 Theses Martin Luther nailed on the church door at Wittenberg”, <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/luther95.txt> (accessed 4 May 2023), this is the thesis number 94.

³¹ Becker, David, “95 Theses Martin Luther nailed on the church door at Wittenberg”, <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/luther95.txt> (accessed 4 May 2023), this is the thesis number 95.

with Katherine Parr. To answer this question, I believe that the king's faith is incredibly important, as at that time believing in something different from the king's religion was dangerous, as it would have been considered heresy, a crime for which one could be punished with death. It is believed that eighty-one people had been sentenced to death on the charge of heresy under his reign.³² Thus, when writing about religion, one could not simply write openly about his or her beliefs, but had to write bearing in mind what the king considered to be acceptable, which often meant aligning with his own thoughts. *Prayers or Meditations* was published when the king was still alive and as a result, it needed his approval. As explained by Janel Mueller, "for Parr's project to stand a chance of approval from the monitoring king and archbishop, its first person voice would have to ring with the generic human accents of a pious Christian soul".³³ I believe that the fact that Elizabeth gave to Henry VIII a translation in three languages of Katherine's work, proves that the king had approved it. Elizabeth writes in the preface of her translation that

It was thought by me a most suitable thing that this work, which is most worthy because it was indeed an assemblage by a queen as subject matter for her king, be translated into other languages by me, your daughter.³⁴

Elizabeth's translation of Katherine's *Prayers or Meditations* and her subsequent use of her work as a gift to the king, proves that Katherine's text was not only held in great esteem, but also "a subject matter for her king".

In addition, Katherine's choice of "publishing it in an octavo form, made it inexpensive to buy and thus ensured a wide popular audience".³⁵ The queen gave importance to the accessibility of her works, making it not only economically more accessible, but also easier to understand: she wanted her readers to be able to understand her words. In fact, she

³² Simkin, John, "Tudor Heretics", <https://spartacus-educational.com/TUDheretics.htm> (accessed 2 April 2023).

³³ Mueller, Janel, "Devotion as Difference: Intertextuality in Queen Katherine Parr's *Prayers or Meditations*, 1545", *Huntington Library Quarterly* 53 (1990), p 174.

³⁴ Mueller, Janel, Scodel, Joshua, *Elizabeth I: Translations, 1544-1589*, London: The University Press of Chicago, 2009, p. 136.

³⁵ James, p. 215.

writes in an understandable, less erudite and easy way, allowing the reader to think about frequent Christian themes, such as unworthiness and the mercy of God, by themselves. This aspect is innovative, as Katherine's reader did not need a priest in order to talk to God, which for Catholics was the necessary mediator between God's words and the common people. In *Prayers or Meditations* the subject of the text is speaking directly to God without any mediator and, as we will see, Katherine will allow any reader to feel as if he or she were the subject of her text. I am going to analyse a modern edition of *Prayers or Meditations*, edited by Janel Mueller, who also presents another version of Katherine's work, the Kendal Autograph Fragment, which is a surviving incomplete version of Parr's text and is believed to have been written for one of the ladies of her court.³⁶ I am going to cite this manuscript during my analysis, as it is important, since there is one short passage which cannot be found in the other editions of *Prayers or Meditations*. This is the only striking difference that I found between the published version and the manuscript, as the religious contents of the two works are mostly identical. One of the hardest obstacles I faced, while doing my research, was the fact that there are not many sources about *Prayers or Meditations*. Nevertheless, I included the few sources that I was able to find in my analysis. Furthermore, I will analyse the text by going back and forth between Catholic and reformist passages and this choice is intentional, as I believe that not only it reflects how passages from the same text can belong to two different currents of thought, but the going back and forth also shows the uncertain state of Katherine's religious position in *Prayers or Meditations*.

³⁶ Mueller, p. 370.

2.1 AN ANALYSIS OF *PRAYERS OR MEDITATIONS*

To begin with, one of the most important elements that Katherine adds in her revisitation of the *Imitatio Christi*, is how universal she renders her book. Katherine, in fact, tries to degender the subjects of her text, thus giving females the same importance as men, and allowing everyone to feel themselves the subject of her *Prayers or Meditations*.

She does this when she refers to the subject of the text as “thy creature I am”,³⁷ “I am thy servant” (389). By starting her text with a degendering of the protagonist, or in other words, the person who is speaking to God, she is allowing every reader to have a conversation with the Creator. The text begins with these two nouns “creature” and “servant”, and then Parr proceeds to use the personal pronouns “me” and “I”. This is significant, as *Prayers or Meditations* begins by allowing any reader to feel empathy with the text, with no class or specific gender being addressed. Anyone can enter the category of creature and sinner. If readers can recognize themselves in those sinners or creatures, then it will be easier for them to see themselves in that “I” or “me”. By connecting these two nouns to the personal pronouns, Katherine takes the universal to the subjective, she takes the words addressed to God and allows them to be pronounced by any person. Janel Mueller highlights how, compared to Whitford’s *Imitatio Christi*, “Parr replaces dialogue with monologue - the “I”, “me”, and “my” of a soul whose psychology is no more than generically specified as faculties of heart, mind, and will”,³⁸ and how Parr is indeed “working towards a genuine inclusiveness for the affecting range of a humanly generic voice”.³⁹ This is significant, as it may be one of the first signs of the queen’s inclination towards the reformation. In one of his ninety-five theses, Luther claims that “the true treasures of the church, out of which the pope distributes

³⁷ Parr, Katherine, “Prayers or Meditations” in *Katherine Parr: Complete Works and Correspondence*, edited by Janel Mueller, London: The University of Chicago Press, 2014, p. 387. This is the edition that I used throughout my dissertation.

³⁸ Mueller, Janel, “Devotion as Difference: Intertextuality in Queen Katherine Parr’s Prayers or Meditations, 1545”, *Huntington Library Quarterly* 53 (1990), p. 177.

³⁹ Mueller, p. 174.

indulgences, are not sufficiently discussed or known among the people of Christ”.⁴⁰ Katherine Parr tries to make the matter known among the people of Christ, she tries to make them participate in the religious sphere. By degendering her text and making it accessible to the understandings of common people, I believe she took an open step that aligned with the reformers’ ideas.

On the other hand, as mentioned earlier, she maintains her husband’s midway religious position in this book. In many passages, Katherine writes about her state of confusion. She does that, for instance, when writing “Lorde, I still knowe unto the all myne unrighteousness, and I will confesse to thee all unstableness of my herte” (389), or when she writes “oftentymes it greveth me sore, and in maner confoundeth me, that I am so unstable” (389), and again when she says “I am nothing elles of myself but vanytie before the, an uncostante creature” (393). The repetition of the words “unstable” and “unstableness” highlights Katherine’s religious uncertainty. I believe that this is a hint to the fact that Katherine was still somehow divided between the two religious positions, a halfway which will only terminate in her *Lamentation of a Sinner*, as we will see in chapter three. Therefore, if on one side we witness a step forward towards the reformers, on the other we still see an attachment to Catholicism, a fact which is clearly visible in her use of saints.

The use of saints in this book is very important, as it proves an attachment that Katherine still felt for her early faith. Saints, in the orthodox Catholic tradition, could be invoked to provide aid to people⁴¹ and the church also used them as figures that could grant forgiveness by paying an indulgence. According to Luther, when talking about indulgences in his ninety-five theses, “indulgences are not the merit of Christ or saints”.⁴² The fact that

⁴⁰Becker, David, “95 Theses Martin Luther nailed on the church door at Wittenberg”, <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/luther95.txt> (accessed 24 March 2023), this is the thesis number 56.

⁴¹Petruzzello, Melissa, “Roman Catholic Saints”, <https://www.britannica.com/story/roman-catholic-saints-hallowed-from-the-other-side> (accessed 24 March).

⁴²Becker, David, “95 Theses Martin Luther nailed on the church door at Wittenberg”, <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/luther95.txt> (accessed 24 March 2023), this is the thesis number 58.

Luther specified this aspect about saints in his theses, makes me believe that the idea that saints could grant wishes or the remission of sins, was widely believed at the time. His denial of this function of saints is interesting, as Parr will also change her attitude towards saints later on in her *The Lamentation of a Sinner*. In *Prayers or Meditations* saints are still present throughout the text, with Katherine writing that “with thy blessed saynts be always present” (390) and “there, forever, to have the fruition of celestial delectations, accompanied with angels and blessed saints” (419). This second passage is contained in a separate prayer inserted at the end of *Prayers or Meditations*, entitled “A Prayer to Be Daily Said”. The fact that Katherine is citing “blessed saints” in a prayer she believed should have been said every day is relevant, as it highlights the importance that she still gave to saints. This becomes even more interesting if we consider that in her later work *The Lamentation of a Sinner* saints are nowhere to be found, with Katherine choosing to remove them completely.

An interesting aspect of The Kendal Fragment, which cannot be found in other editions, is the reference to Christ as the reader’s spouse. Katherine may have changed her text in order to match the receiver of her gift, which, as previously mentioned, may have been a lady from the court. Katherine writes that “O Lorde Jesu, most lovinge spouse” (391) and “thou maiste vouchesafe to visite me in suche wise as thou doest visite thy most faithfull lovers”(391). By referring to Christ as a spouse, Katherine intentionally restricts the sphere of her work: while in the published version of *Prayers or Meditations* Katherine focuses on degendering nouns and making her text universal, in this fragment Parr chooses to make it clear that the person speaking to God is a woman: a bride talking to Christ, her spouse.

After reading the way Katherine changed her text and how she purposefully referred to Christ as “most lovinge spouse”, I tried to understand where she could have come across the idea of Christ as a husband. I was struck to find that this other role of Christ was cited in the Bible itself, a book which Katherine was extremely familiar with. I thus believe that

Katherine may be referring to this passage of the Bible “Quia dominabitur tui qui fecit te” (Isaiah 54:5),⁴³ which translates to “For your Maker is your husband”.⁴⁴ By restricting the point of view to a female reader rather than the universal reader presented in the published version of the text, and by saying that “But I am a wretche, and of my selfe alway redy and prone to evell” (393), she goes back to the belief that women were weak and wretched creatures prone to fall in error, or as Katherine writes “prone to evell”. I find it interesting to see how Katherine, despite following a new set of ideas brought by the reformation, still seems to be attached to the idea that women were prone to fall in error, an idea which dated back to Eve’s downfall. Katherine was well aware of the guilt that was put upon Eve, as she also says “we outlaws, the children of Eve” (411). I think this is an interesting aspect, as on one hand, it contributes to show how Katherine’s mind at the time combined traditional notions with new religious ideas. On the other hand, it shows that despite the novelty of a woman writing and publishing a book under her own name, which may seem a step forward for women, she still shared the common thought that women were weak creatures. I say “common thought”, as this was what people believed in the sixteenth century. For us, nowadays, it is an old and mistaken thought to think of women as prone to evil, but during Katherine’s time this was an idea widely shared. I am underlying all of these small details, as I believe that they show how Katherine’s thoughts mixed old and new concepts: old, for instance, as far as gender roles were concerned, and new when it came to religion.

Another example of Katherine’s alignment with the reformers in *Prayers or Meditations*, is visible when she writes “when shall I be with Thee in Thy kingdom, that Thou hast ordained for Thine elect people from the beginning” (412), and “I ask of Thee to

⁴³ Biblia Sacra Vulgata, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah+54&version=VULGATE> (accessed 2 April). This is a Latin version of the Bible.

⁴⁴ New International Version - UK, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah+54&version=NIVUK> (accessed 27 March). This is a new international version of the Bible.

come to that rest, which is ordained for Thy chosen children” (414). The words “elect people” and “chosen children” are one of the most important passages of the text, as the concept that only the elected and chosen will be able to access God’s Kingdom is predominantly reformist. In Luther’s theses, in fact, he stresses the importance of having faith in order to ascend the kingdom of heaven.⁴⁵ At that time, the church would make people pay in order to allow them forgiveness for their sins and thus ascend in heaven. Luther affirms that “those indulgence preachers are in error who say that a man is absolved from every penalty and saved by papal indulgences”,⁴⁶ and most importantly that “Any true Christian, whether living or dead, participates in all the blessings of Christ and the church; and this is granted him by God, even without indulgence letters”.⁴⁷ According to Mueller, “Parr produces a direct appeal for justification in Reformist terms as the righteousness that inheres nowhere in the soul but is imputed to it by its Lord God”.⁴⁸ The fact that Katherine speaks about God’s elected people is a clear sign of her approval of Luther’s claim that salvation could be achieved only by true faith and not by paying in order to receive the remission of one’s sins. Therefore we can find again a further tendency towards the reformation, rather than Catholicism.

Two more passages deserve to be cited, as one may confirm the religious ambiguity we have been discussing, and the second one can be seen as Katherine’s moment of overcoming her middle position between the two religions: “For many times I am not there, where I stand or sit; but rather there, whither my thoughts carry me” (413), and most importantly, “it hath justly come upon me, because I have often sinned, and grievously offended thee” (409). In the first citation, Katherine explains how her mind is not usually

⁴⁵ Becker, David, “95 Theses Martin Luther nailed on the church door at Wittenberg”, <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/luther95.txt> (accessed 4 May 2023), this is a combination of thesis number 94 and thesis number 95, also mentioned above.

⁴⁶ Becker, David, “95 Theses Martin Luther nailed on the church door at Wittenberg”, <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/luther95.txt> (accessed 24 March 2023), this is the thesis number 21.

⁴⁷ Becker, David, “95 Theses Martin Luther nailed on the church door at Wittenberg”, <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/luther95.txt> (accessed 24 March 2023), this is the thesis number 37.

⁴⁸ Mueller, p. 378.

where it should be, which of course is open to interpretation, but in my view can be read in religious terms. I personally think that by saying “where I stand or sit”, Katherine may be drawing the reader’s attention to a geographical place. The fact that she uses the word “sit”, may not only mean the throne, but in a wider sense, the court. The English court in which Katherine was living, held a large number of Catholics holding high positions,⁴⁹ such as the Catholic bishop Wolsey, who as mentioned in the first chapter, is even believed to have conspired against her. Katherine was aware that her religious tendency towards the reformation was dangerous in a court in which the most powerful figures were Catholics. Katherine, in fact, writes: “O most glorious father, what shall I do anguyshe and trouble are on every side” (392), “Defend me from the counsels and cursing of evil tongues” (420), “How often have I ben dysapointed where I thought I shoulde have found friendship” (393), but most importantly,

But thou, good lorde, that haste the lordeshippe over all, and power of the sea, to asswage the rages and surges of the same, aryse and help me, destroie the power of myne enemyes, which alwaies make battaile agaynste me (393).

I believe that the fact that Katherine writes about her enemies in such a religious text, may imply that these were religious enemies or, in other words, the Catholic representatives living at court.

The passages I mentioned above, which go back and forth from traditional Catholic thoughts to reformist ones, show how Katherine was still ambiguous in *Prayers or Meditations*, with her claims shifting from one current of thought to the other. As I have said, Katherine published *Prayers or Meditations* while the king was still alive and in a geographical place where many representatives of the king’s inner circle were Catholic and thus, at that time, Katherine could not have taken the drastic position that she would later on take in *The Lamentation of a Sinner*. Even if she started writing her *Lamentations* while the

⁴⁹ Foxe, p. 554.

king was still alive, she only published it after his death. I believe that her choice of waiting before publishing her book was taken in order to make it safer for her. The ambiguity of her religious position disappeared, leaving place to a Katherine Parr that was now fully aware of her beliefs. After highlighting the middle position Katherine had in *Prayers or Meditations*, I will now introduce her second important work *The Lamentation of a Sinner*, a book in which Katherine leaves, citing her words, her “unstable” thoughts behind and publicly makes her religious position clear.

CHAPTER 3

THE LAMENTATION OF A SINNER

3.1 Introduction to the work

Henry VIII died on 28 January 1547. *The Lamentation of a Sinner* was published only ten months after the king's death. There is some evidence in the text, as also pointed out by Janel Mueller, that may set the time of the composition of the *Lamentations* while the king was still alive.⁵⁰ When referring to her husband, in fact, Parr uses the present tense. She did this, for instance, when she wrote "King Henry VIII, my most sovereign, favorable lord and husband" (468). In this passage Katherine still refers to Henry as her husband, therefore this induces me to believe that she had already begun her book while he was still alive. Her text differs greatly from her previous work *Prayers or Meditations*, which she published while the king was still alive. It is important to underline this, because with the king's death political and religious matters considerably changed.

Edward VI, Henry VIII's only male heir, was only nine when he ascended the throne, succeeding his father.⁵¹ Therefore, as he was too young to rule, the regency council decided to name Edward Seymour, the Duke of Somerset, protector of the king.⁵² The actions that Somerset took while being Lord Protector are crucial to understanding why Katherine Parr may have felt safe enough to publish a book which, as we will see, is very straightforward in showing her alignment with the reformers. In July 1547, in fact, Somerset took an important step towards the reformers' ideals, issuing the Injunctions in the king's name. This Injunctions stated that

⁵⁰ Mueller, p. 425.

⁵¹ Morrill, John S., "Edward VI King of England and Ireland", <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Edward-VI> (accessed 9 May 2023).

⁵² Hilliard, Nicholas, "Seymour, Edward, duke of Somerset", <https://www.oxforddnb.com/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-1012752> (accessed 11 May 2023).

The superstitious worship of images was condemned; no man was to be discouraged from reading the Bible; the sprinkling of holy water was forbidden; processions were abolished. The Homilies, issued in the same year, were to be read in all churches. Many of those homilies were uncontentious, but the Homily on Salvation set out in unequivocal terms the doctrine of justification by faith alone and thus aligned the English Church with the reformed confession of Europe.⁵³

The creation of a court order about homilies regarding salvation by faith alone is extremely important, as it openly aligned with the theses written by Luther, who, as previously mentioned, tried to spread the belief that faith only could save a soul. Another important act carried out during Seymour's protectorship was the repeal of the heresy acts and the censorship statutes, which resulted in the publication of many texts which had previously been censored.⁵⁴ Despite Seymour's changes, not all members of the court agreed with Luther and this is clearly visible by the figures of two bishops, Gardiner and Bonner, who were arrested for a time after protesting against the injunctions.⁵⁵ However, I believe that, although the religious orientation was not exclusively Protestant, since as mentioned above there were still some Catholics at court, these religious changes not only publicly opened the path to the acceptance of the reformation in England, but they also allowed Parr to feel safe enough to publish her *Lamentation of a Sinner*.

One of the most striking elements of her book is how autobiographical it is. Parr, a queen, publicly declares herself a sinner. By doing this she aligns with the humility topos, she puts herself on the same level as the most humble human beings, a position that Henry VIII never took. The queen was also supported by members of her reformist circle, as Susan E. James states: "it took the combined efforts of William Cecil, the Duchess of Suffolk and Kateryn's brother, William, then Earl of Essex, to convince the queen to allow her meditation to be made public".⁵⁶ William Cecil, first baron Burghley,⁵⁷ and the duchess of Suffolk,

⁵³ William, Penry, *The Later Tudors England 1547-1603*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 42.

⁵⁴ William, p. 43.

⁵⁵ William, p. 42.

⁵⁶ James, p. 234. "Meditation" in this case refers to the religious meditation in *The Lamentation of a Sinner* and not to *Prayers or Meditations*.

⁵⁷ Beckingsale, Bernard W., "William Cecil, 1st Baron Burghley", <https://www.britannica.com/biography/William-Cecil-1st-Baron-Burghley> (accessed 11 May).

Katherine Willoughby,⁵⁸ were part of Katherine Parr's reformist circle at court.⁵⁹ We cannot be sure of her statement, as no reference or source is provided in James' book about the need of others to convince the queen to publish her book; however, as the queen had already been in danger because of her religious views,⁶⁰ a first initial hesitation may have been possible. After reading her text, I posit that she knew precisely to whom her work was addressed and what her aim was. If she had any doubt before publishing it, she shows no signs of it in the text. On the contrary, the middle position Katherine had in *Prayers or Meditations* has been substituted by a determined, sometimes even aggressive Parr, who is now fully aware of her religious position and has no fear to discuss it. As we will see during the analysis, Katherine uses her mistakes to try and enlighten Catholics who still followed "a blind guide called ignorance" (449). She writes her thoughts as a stream of consciousness, referring to herself as a sinner, making the reader identify himself/herself with the sinner in the text. If a queen admits that she has indeed sinned, so can anyone. She tries to spread the message that being mistaken is acceptable, as long as one finds the right path. Katherine positions herself as the guide who can lead the "most gentle and Christian reader" (444) in the right direction.

3.2 AN ANALYSIS OF THE LAMENTATION OF A SINNER

The version of *The Lamentation of a Sinner* used for this analysis, opens with a prefatory letter written by William Cecil, one of the members of Katherine's reformist circle mentioned above, a part of which, I believe, deserves to be cited:

See and learn hereby what she hath done: then mayst learn thou practice, and amend what thou canst do. So shalt thou practice with ease, having a guide; and amend with profit, having a zeal. It is easier to see these than to learn. Begin at the easiest, to come to the harder. See thou her confession, that thou mayst learn her repentance; practice her perseverance, that thou mayst have like amendment; displease thyself in eschewing vice, that thou mayst please God in asking grace. Let not shame hinder thy confession, which hindered not the

⁵⁸ Wabuda, Susan, "Bertie [née Willoughby; other married name Brandon], Katherine, duchess of Suffolk", <https://www.oxforddnb.com/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-2273?rskey=oVBtB2&result=1> (accessed 11 May).

⁵⁹ Beckingsale and Wabuda explain how William Cecil and Katherine Willoughby were part of the reformist circle at court.

⁶⁰ Foxe, p. 554.

offense. Be thou sure, if we know our sins, God is faithful to forgive us, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (445).

William Cecil, in his letter prefacing the *Lamentation of a Sinner*, compares the queen to a guide for the Christian reader. He elevates the queen to an example that ought to be followed. Katherine identifies herself with “Everyman”, avoiding the pre-reformation dichotomy between Eve and Mary. As explained by Rebecca M. Moore, Katherine had to work hard in order to “conceptualize herself as woman, Queen, and author”.⁶¹

One of the key words in *The Lamentation of a Sinner* is the word “ignorance”. Katherine repeats it numerous times throughout the text. She does this, for instance, when she writes:

- (1) “I embraced ignorance as perfect knowledge; and knowledge seemed to me superfluous and vain” (448).
- (2) “I had a blind guide called Ignorance, who dimmed so mine eyes, that I could never perfectly get any sight of the fair, goodly, straight, and right ways of this doctrine” (449).

Katherine may be using the word ignorance as a metaphor for her early Christian faith. Ignorance as a blind guide, in fact, may be referring to Catholics who preached and taught her to follow a faith which she did not consider the true faith anymore. This seems to me to be connected to this passage found later on in the text

Now I will speak with great dolor and heaviness in my heart, of a sort of people which be in the world, that be called “professors of the Gospel”, [...] , I am afraid that some of them do build upon the sand, [...], they make not Christ their chiefest foundation, professing His doctrine of a sincere, pure, and zealous mind. But either for because they would be called “gospellers” to procure some credit, [...] , either to find out some carnal liberty, either to be contentious disputers, finders, or rebukers of other men’s faults, or else, finally to please and flatter the world: such gospellers are an offense and slander to the Word of God (475).

I cited the entire passage, as here Katherine starts to publicly show her thoughts on Catholics. She accuses Catholic “gospellers”⁶² of preaching only to obtain earthly pleasures, to obtain

⁶¹Moore, Rebecca M., “The Thundering Throne: Personality, Poetics, and Gender in the Court of King Henry VIII”, Graduate Theses and Dissertations, University of Arkansas, 2009, p. 78.

⁶² “Gospeler”, Merriam-Webster.com, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/gospeler> (accessed 7 June 2023). The term “gospellers” is used to represent religious figures who preach the gospel, or in other words, that

personal growth or “credit”. She also accuses them of being “finders” of others' faults in order to please “the world”, a word which I believe may refer to how “earthly” their interests were. In other words, Katherine accuses gossellers of being interested in mundane matters, rather than in “heavenly” ones. Officially, all representatives at court were Catholics, as being openly protestant was still not an option and life at court for someone who defied the Catholic doctrine was dangerous. Katherine saw it firsthand, when she almost lost her life because of Cardinal Wolsey who tried to turn the king against her.⁶³ Life at court was full of dangers, with its members ready to do anything in order to elevate their position.⁶⁴ Among these people we find members of the Privy Chambers, the ladies-in-waiting of the queen and of course, cardinals and members of the Church, who tried to please “the world”. If we read Katherine’s words through a reformist lens, we can then see that she considers these gossellers as “an offense and slander to the Word of God”. This is an important statement, which publicly marks her religious shift. She openly disagrees with the doctrine that had been predominant until Henry VIII’s death.

Katherine takes her disagreement further, condemning those gossellers more violently. She writes: “So many impugn this office and duty of true faith, because so many lack the true faith” (459) and the result of this, in her opinion is that “the blind leadeth the blind, and both fall into the ditch” (470). The tone, then, becomes even more aggressive, with Parr questioning them: “What charity, what discretion, what godliness, holiness or purity of life is amongst them? Be they not great avengers, foul gluttons, slanderers, backbiters, adulterers, fornicators, swearers and blasphemers?” (475). I believe that Katherine may be referring to the fact that, in her opinion, these gossellers lack the true faith and this results in their vile actions. How can the same people who are slanderers, adulterers and fornicators

preach about Christ’s life and his teachings. According to the Merriam Webster Dictionary, a gosseller is a person who reads or sings the liturgical gospel and a person who preaches or propounds the gospel.

⁶³ Foxe, p. 559.

⁶⁴ Crowther David, “Early Tudor Court”,

<https://thehistoryofengland.co.uk/resource/early-tudor-court/> (accessed 12 May).

be the guide whose aim is to bring people to salvation? In Katherine's opinion they cannot. One of the key words in the passage is "blasphemers". I can't help but think that there might be some irony in her choice of words. Until the death of Henry VIII, reformers were considered to be heretic, and the words of heretics were considered blasphemy.⁶⁵ Thus, until that time reformers were the heretical, the blasphemers. In her text, Katherine completely changes this. For her, the blasphemers are now the Catholics.

Another element that proves Katherine's religious alignment with the reformers, is her public comparison of the pope to the pharaoh. She writes: "I mean by this Pharaoh the Bishop of Rome, who hath been and is a greater persecutor of the Gospel and grace, a setter forth of all superstition and counterfeit holiness" (648). One may argue that in this case Katherine does not take a different step from the one that King Henry VIII took when he separated the Church of England from the Church of Rome, and that this does not prove her alignment with the Protestants. However, Katherine proceeds to specify that the pope brought "many souls to hell with his alchemy and counterfeit money, deceiving the poor souls under the mantle of holiness" (468). In this passage counterfeit money clearly refers to the indulgences the pope sold and against which Luther had previously fought. These indulgences were used as a remission of sins, but Katherine, now completely in alignment with the reformers, believes that one can reach salvation only through true faith. Therefore, if people thought they could go to heaven thanks to indulgences, they would soon be found wrong and in Parr's view, their soul would go to hell. Her statement is an open accusation of the Catholic doctrine of the pope.

The text may also be divided into two parts: a first section, in which Katherine recalls how she was still ignorant and not willing to listen, and a second one in which she realises her true faith. In the first part, Katherine writes "For I would not learn to know the Lord and

⁶⁵ Nash, David, "Blasphemy and Censorship. The Historical Importance of Passive and Active Models", *Revue Lisa* 1 (2013), pp. 1-28.

His ways, but loved darkness, better than light: yea, darkness seemed to me, light” (448), and “The lord did speak many pleasant and sweet words to me, and I would not hear” (448). I believe that here she is admitting the fact that she would not listen to the reformist cause. The use of the verb “would” is important, as here she is accusing her own will of preventing her from listening to the “pleasant and sweet” words of God. Katherine explains how during her time as a Catholic she had “more regard to the number of the walkers than the order of the walking” (449) and how she “worshipped visible idols and images made of men’s hands” (449). Katherine describes her past behaviour as “contrary to Christ, although I bore the name of a Christian”. This sentence is crucial. She does not openly cite being a Catholic, but what her “ignorant” self made her do, such as worshipping images made by men, which is part of the Catholic faith, an act that early Protestants condemned. As explained by Davis in his study of Protestant iconoclasm, early Protestants allowed the use of images only if they could be used as a support for those that could not read, but images were not allowed to be worshipped.⁶⁶ When Katherine says that she used to worship images and how far away from Christ she was, she openly admits that she does not align with the Catholics anymore, whose behaviour, in her opinion, is contrary to Christ.

In the second part, there is a key passage: Katherine describes her conversion. She, in fact, says “For then I began (and not before) to perceive and see mine own ignorance” (458). In this line Katherine centers her attention on the moment in which she realised that she was following a false doctrine, which she refers to as “ignorance”. Parr even explains how she feels after her conversion “I feel myself to come, as it were, in a new garment before God” (457). These two passages are important, as Katherine clearly states that she has changed her religious position. We do not have the uncertainty that Parr presented in *Prayers or*

⁶⁶D. Davis , “Destructive Defiance: Catholic and Protestant Iconoclasm in England, 1550-1585”, *Cromohs Virtual Seminars. Recent Historiographical Trends of the British Studies (17th-18th Centuries)*, 2006-2007, pp. 1-5.

Meditations. On the contrary, in her *Lamentations* she states exactly what her religious choice is.

As mentioned in the second chapter, in his theses Luther states that Christians can obtain salvation only through their faith.⁶⁷ In Parr's text she also highlights this conviction and we may see this as further evidence of Katherine's religious shift. She, in fact, writes:

Christ was my only Saviour and Redeemer; and the same doctrine to be all divine, holy, and heavenly, infused by grace into the hearts of the faithful. Which never can be attained by human doctrine (458).

In this passage Parr puts into contrast two doctrines: she refers to Christ's doctrine as divine, holy and heavenly. In other words, the true doctrine that should be followed is divine and it is not connected to any earthly matter. I believe Katherine's choice of words is specific and intentional, since, as we have seen, she knows precisely what she believes in. She does not have any faith in the human doctrine cited in the passage. It may be possible that Katherine uses the adjective "human", both as a synonym for earthly and as a metaphor for the doctrine preached by the "professors of the Gospel" previously mentioned, whom she criticises exactly for their earthly interests. Janel Mueller also underlines how Parr "heralds the onset of salvation through justifying faith, [...] , contrasted to a dead, human, historical faith and knowledge, consisting in belief that Jesus lived in such and such a historical place and time and said and did the things reported of Him".⁶⁸ Mueller, in her study, also makes an interesting connection between Parr's use of the word "heart" in "grace into the heart of the faithful" (458) and a study conducted by Barbara Lewalski, an American academic. Lewalski explains that "in Protestant representations of the heart, the special feature is that God acts powerfully upon the heart, [...] , the implication is that the renovation of the heart is entirely the work of grace".⁶⁹ I cited this passage quoted in Mueller's study as I believe that this is

⁶⁷ Becker, David, "95 Theses Martin Luther nailed on the church door at Wittenberg", <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/luther95.txt> (accessed 24 March 2023), this is the thesis number 37.

⁶⁸ Mueller, p. 427.

⁶⁹ Quoted in Mueller, p. 433.

further proof of Katherine's alignment with the reformers, as Katherine also uses the figure of the heart in connection with grace.

In conclusion, in *The Lamentation of a Sinner*, Katherine calls herself a sinner and explains how she has lived in ignorance as a Catholic, until she found the true faith, the Protestant one. She not only attacks Catholic gospellers, but also the pope himself. In the text Parr also explains how she feels disappointed for the world she lives in: "it is much to be lamented: the schism varieties, contentions, and disputations that have been, and are, in the world of Christian religion" (469), and ends her *Lamentations* with a warning:

If we do not redress and amend our living, according to the doctrine of the Gospel, we shall receive a terrible sentence of Christ, the Son of God, [...], wilful blindness and obstinate ignorance shall receive greater punishment (484).

Despite her disappointment, Katherine still sees hope for humankind. Christians need to follow the right, heavenly doctrine, the Protestant one, and leave the earthly and human Catholic doctrine behind, in the same way as she did.

CONCLUSION

After having analysed the two texts of Katherine Parr, I believe that there is striking evidence of how Katherine's religious orientation did change during the course of her life. In *Prayers or Meditations* we have a Parr that does not take a position and who is still doubtful about her religious orientation. She still cites angels, who are connected to the Catholic faith, but at the same time she writes about salvation by faith, which as I previously mentioned, is one of the key reformist elements in her *Lamentation of a Sinner*. In the *Lamentation of a Sinner* the word “unstable”, which is repeated many times in *Prayers or Meditations*, is not written, not even once. That is because Parr leaves her unstable position behind and uses *The Lamentation of a Sinner* as the point of arrival of her religion. Thanks to her texts, we can see that her conversion has been progressive, with doubts at first, a “realisation” in the middle, when she says: “For then I began (and not before)” (458), and finally a moment in which we may believe she finally converted to Protestantism, when she says she came “in a new Garment before God” (456). Parr in her later text becomes more certain of her beliefs and shows that she is not afraid to defend her ideas and accuse those that she considers to be wrong, such as the gossippers who, in her opinion, slander God's words (475). It is important to remember that her two texts were written in two different times: one that still held close the presence of an authoritative king and a different time, during which reformers had the power at court.

Through *Prayers or Meditations* and *The Lamentation of a Sinner* we can not only see how Katherine's religious position changes, but also how her self-awareness and confidence grow. By the end of her *Lamentations* we can see a strong woman who is not afraid to show her faith, thoughts and ideas anymore. She finally makes her position clear and prompts others to follow her example. She positions herself as a guide for the Catholic reader, she tries to enlighten others who are blinded by the words of the Catholics in power. Her

Lamentations, I believe, may be considered as a guide, written to make Catholics discover the rightful faith, “rightful”, of course, according to Parr’s beliefs.

Katherine’s texts are an example of what women can achieve if they put their heart and mind in it. She was not only able to survive through the hardships of her life, but she was also able to accomplish what no woman had accomplished before: publishing a book under her own name in England, and most importantly, a book about religion. Her works are of extraordinary importance, not only because they allow us to understand her religious evolution, but also historically, to understand the evolution of the reformation in England.

ITALIAN SUMMARY

Katherine Parr nasce nel 1512, figlia di Thomas Parr of Kendal e Maud Parr. Maud Parr, dopo la morte del marito, decide di non risposarsi e continua a lavorare come dama di corte per Caterina d'Aragona, prima moglie di Enrico VIII. Questo è un fatto importante, perché anche Katherine, alla morte del suo primo marito Lord Latimer, decide di seguire le orme della madre e andare a lavorare come dama di corte per la regina, nel suo caso per Mary Tudor, la figlia di Enrico VIII. Come spiega Susan James, si pensa che sia stato proprio durante questo periodo che il re abbia cominciato a sviluppare un interesse per Katherine che culminerà poi con il loro matrimonio il 12 Luglio 1543, evento che fa diventare Katherine regina d'Inghilterra e sesta e ultima moglie di Enrico VIII. Katherine non è solo una donna erudita, frutto della buona educazione ricevuta a casa dalla madre, ma è anche la prima donna a pubblicare un libro con il proprio nome in Inghilterra. Questo traguardo non è stato però raggiunto senza difficoltà.

Una delle poche fonti che ci è pervenuta e che ci parla della vita di Katherine a corte, è il *The Book of Martyrs* di John Foxe, il quale, ed è necessario sottolinearlo, è un propagandista. Di conseguenza, non possiamo essere sicuri della veridicità degli avvenimenti di cui scrive nel suo libro, ma ritengo interessante citarli, in quanto ci sono delle somiglianze tra ciò che scrive Foxe e ciò che scrive Katherine nel suo *The Lamentation of a Sinner*. Foxe racconta che la regina teneva spesso degli incontri nelle sue stanze per discutere di religione. In base alle parole di Foxe, la regina mostrava già nei suoi discorsi delle tendenze verso la riforma di Lutero, ma la sua posizione non era ancora esplicita. Foxe prosegue spiegando come i discorsi religiosi che la regina aveva iniziato ad intrattenere con il re avevano iniziato a spazientirlo. Secondo quanto dice Foxe, il re si sarebbe persino lamentato di dover arrivare

ad una tarda età ed essere istruito da una donna. Ciò permise alla corte di aprire una investigazione contro la regina che sarebbe culminata con un mandato di arresto. Infine, secondo quanto riportato da Foxe, la regina si sarebbe salvata grazie ad un discorso avuto con il re, nel quale, essendo stata preventivamente avvertita di ciò che stava accadendo, Katherine spiegò che non aveva mai avuto desiderio di istruire sua maestà, ma cercava solamente di distrarlo dal dolore che provava al ginocchio e che, con i suoi discorsi, ella voleva in realtà solo essere istruita da lui. Non sappiamo se ciò sia realmente accaduto, ma come spiegato precedentemente, ci sono passaggi molto simili tra il testo di Foxe e le parole usate da Katherine stessa nelle sue opere, come per esempio:

“I have not missed any part of my desire in that behalf”. (Foxe)

“I have certainly no curious learning to defend this matter”. (Parr)

Se prendiamo per vero il racconto di Foxe, allora possiamo scorgere una prima immagine della posizione religiosa di Katherine, posizione che rimarrà sempre ambigua fino alla morte di Enrico VIII.

La sua posizione nei confronti della religione, infatti, va di pari passo con gli avvenimenti storici che Katherine incontra nel corso della sua vita. La prima opera analizzata *Prayers or Meditations*, venne scritta e pubblicata mentre il re era ancora in vita. Questo è un fatto importante, perché era impensabile per una regina pubblicare qualcosa che andasse contro le opinioni del re. Enrico VIII, infatti, nel 1543 pubblica *The Kings's Book*, un libro dove dimostrò di avere una posizione religiosa ambigua, adottando canoni cattolici e protestanti: adottò canoni cattolici quando, per esempio, afferma che la salvezza può essere ottenuta tramite il pentimento, il lavoro e la penitenza, un'idea lontana da quella di Lutero, il

quale afferma che la salvezza si ottiene solo tramite la fede. D'altro canto, però, Enrico VIII condannava il culto delle immagini, azione che invece si allineava con i riformisti. Spiegare la posizione di Enrico VIII è importante, perché Katherine non avrebbe potuto prendere una posizione diversa da quella di suo marito. In *Prayers or Meditations*, infatti, Katherine si allineò con la posizione ambigua del re, si posizionò a metà strada tra la fede cattolica e quella protestante, esprimendo concetti che vanno dall'una all'altra fede. Parr, per esempio, utilizza ripetutamente le parole “unstable” e “unstableness”, che significano proprio instabilità, lo fa per esempio quando scrive:

“I will confesse to thee all unstableness of my herte” (389)

“Oftentymes it greveth me sore, and in maner confoundeth me, that I am so unstable” (389)

Si potrebbe pensare che in questi passaggi Katherine stia parlando della sua instabilità nei confronti di quale posizione religiosa prendere. Inoltre il concetto di instabilità presume un allontanamento dalla religione cattolica, altrimenti Katherine, a mio parere, non proverebbe questa confusione. Come detto in precedenza, però, ci troviamo in un momento in cui Parr oscilla tra le due fedi e un esempio del legame che lei ancora detiene con la religione cattolica è il suo utilizzo dei santi. In *Prayers or Meditations*, Parr fa ancora uso dei santi, figure che sono legate alla religione cattolica. Katherine rinuncerà totalmente all'utilizzo dei santi nella sua opera seguente, *The Lamentation of a Sinner*.

Un aspetto importante da sottolineare è l'idea che Katherine ha di salvezza. Abbiamo spiegato come Enrico VIII nel suo *King's Book* sostenga che la salvezza si ottenga attraverso lavoro e penitenza, legandosi quindi a una idea cattolica di salvezza. Katherine, attraverso un utilizzo quasi velato di tre parole, riesce a distaccarsi dall'opinione del marito. Ella infatti

scrive: “when shall I be with Thee in Thy kingdom, that Thou hast ordained for Thine elect people from the beginning” (412). Le parole chiavi di questo passaggio sono “thine elect people”. Qui abbiamo degli “eletti” del signore: la concezione che solo gli eletti e i prescelti possano ascendere in paradiso, è una idea riformista. Possiamo vedere quindi come nella stessa opera Parr oscilli tra idee riformiste e cattoliche. In *Prayers or Meditations* Katherine non prende posizione, ma si mantiene su una linea ambigua. La sua posizione cambierà drasticamente dopo la morte di Enrico VIII e troverà espressione nella sua opera *The Lamentation of a Sinner*.

Le sue *Lamentations* furono pubblicate il 5 novembre 1547, dieci mesi dopo la morte del re, evento che cambiò considerevolmente il contesto storico in cui Katherine viveva. Edoardo VI, ancora bambino alla morte del padre, venne affidato a un lord protettore. La carica venne affidata a Edward Seymour, il fratello della terza moglie di Enrico VIII, Jane Seymour. Questo cambiamento dei poteri a corte fu molto importante, in quanto Seymour portò avanti una serie di riforme che, a mio parere, fecero sentire Katherine al sicuro, tanto da convincerla a pubblicare la sua opera, che come abbiamo detto, prende una posizione religiosa ufficiale. Seymour, infatti, non solo eliminò la legge che condannava a morte i soggetti accusati di eresia, ma rimosse anche la censura. Il risultato fu una ondata di pubblicazioni di opere che fino ad allora non avevano potuto vedere la luce. Non sorprende, a mio parere, che in un clima più “tollerante”, Katherine abbia deciso di rendere la sua posizione religiosa pubblica.

Uno degli aspetti che a mia opinione comprovano come Parr abbia effettivamente cambiato la sua posizione religiosa rispetto a *Prayers or Meditations*, è visibile nel suo uso

del termine “ignorance”, ignoranza. “Ignorance” è infatti una parola chiave in quest’opera. Parr spiega infatti come abbia avuto una guida cieca chiamata ignoranza, che ha oscurato così tanto i suoi occhi, da non permetterle mai di vedere perfettamente la vera e giusta dottrina: “I had a blind guide called Ignorance, who dimmed so mine eyes, that I could never perfectly get any sight of the fair, goodly, straight, and right ways of this doctrine” (449). Muove inoltre un’aspra critica verso i sacerdoti cattolici che professavano una dottrina, a suo parere, solo allo scopo di ottenere piaceri terreni e crescita personale. La critica raggiunge il suo apice quando Katherine chiama questi “gospellers” blasfemi. È interessante notare come fino ad allora, erano stati i riformisti ad essere considerati blasfemi e, di conseguenza, eretici. Parr, accusando i preti cattolici di essere blasfemi, ribalta totalmente la situazione. Secondo lei sono infatti i cattolici a seguire una dottrina non giusta e a far allontanare i cristiani dalla retta via, dalla vera dottrina, quella protestante.

Un altro elemento che prova la sua presa di posizione riformista, è il suo rapporto con l’idea di salvezza ottenuta solamente grazie alla fede. I cattolici ritengono che la salvezza si possa ottenere grazie al lavoro, le indulgenze e la remissione dei peccati. I riformisti, invece, sostengono che l’entrata in paradiso sia assicurata solo dalla vera fede, dall’aver la grazia di Dio dentro il cuore. Katherine, nella sua opera, enfatizza questo concetto. Ella scrive infatti che la dottrina è divina, infusa dalla grazia nel cuore dei fedeli e che tale grazia non può essere ottenuta da una dottrina umana. Questa affermazione è di cruciale importanza, in quanto è uno dei pilastri dei riformisti. Accostandosi apertamente a Lutero, Katherine sta ufficialmente rendendo chiara la sua posizione, il suo pensiero. Parr presenta inoltre il momento della sua conversione. Spiega infatti di essere riuscita a vedere la sua “ignoranza” e

illustra come, dopo aver conseguito questa consapevolezza, sia riuscita a presentarsi davanti a Dio sotto nuove vesti.

In conclusione, le due opere mostrano come la posizione di Parr sia effettivamente cambiata da un'opera all'altra e quindi nel corso della sua vita. L'instabilità presente nella prima opera scompare totalmente in *The Lamentation of a Sinner*, come scompare anche ogni singolo riferimento alla religione cristiana cattolica, come per esempio i santi che invece erano presenti in *Prayers or Meditations*. Parr nella sua ultima opera critica fortemente i cattolici e li accusa non solo di essere blasfemi, ma di essere coloro che accecano le persone a causa dei loro falsi insegnamenti perseguiti al fine di ottenere scopi mondani. Katherine si pone come esempio da seguire, come la guida di cui il lettore ha bisogno. Ammette di aver vissuto nell'ignoranza, ma enfatizza anche come sia riuscita a vedere le cose chiaramente e come abbia finalmente intrapreso la strada della vera dottrina, quella che infonde salvezza grazie alla fede. Credo fortemente che le opere di Parr meritino più attenzione, non solo perché ci permettono di capire l'evoluzione del pensiero religioso dell'autrice, ma anche perché ci permettono di vedere il contesto storico e culturale nel quale la riforma protestante si è attuata. Katherine Parr ha dimostrato quanto una donna possa conseguire tramite impegno, determinazione e intelligenza. Non sono solo le sue opere a porsi come una guida per il lettore, ma la sua stessa storia di vita può essere una guida ed un esempio da seguire.

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