

Katherine Parr. *Katherine Parr: Complete Works and Correspondence*.

Ed. Janel Mueller. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011. x + 646 pp. \$65. ISBN: 978-0-226-64724-1.

In one thorough and compelling volume, Janel Mueller has drawn together the collected writings of Katherine Parr (1512–48), sixth wife of Henry VIII and the first woman to publish a work of prose in English under her own name. Mueller has collected correspondence both to and from Parr, anecdotal inscriptions, dedications and encomiums, a handwritten book of quotations used by the queen as a personal prayerbook, as well as Parr's own published works. These include a work of translation (*Psalms or Prayers*, 1544), a book of paraphrases (*Prayers or Meditations*, 1545), and an original composition (*Lamentation of a Sinner*, 1547). If Parr had accomplished nothing else in her lifetime, the publication of the first work of prose in the vernacular by an Englishwoman under her own name would have secured her a mention in the history books. Yet in this compilation of her writings, Mueller shows us not just the scholar and seeker after religious verities, but the developing writer, together with other revealed facets of the lover, wife, mother, and queen.

The first section of the book deals with the correspondence that circumscribed Parr's life. Primary materials with modernized grammar and spelling are divided into five parts and positioned as a contextual frame for the years of Parr's queenship and for the four literary works that follow in the succeeding sections. For the sheer value of their rarity, the sequence of love letters exchanged between the just-widowed Katherine and the secret lover she had waited years to marry, Sir Thomas Seymour, speaks to the depth and volatility of Katherine's private emotions. Tudor love letters are rare and this particular sequence of interactive ones gives eloquent voice to the upheavals at the Tudor court immediately following the death of Henry VIII.

Mueller follows the section on Parr's correspondence with both the original and modernized texts of her three published works and one handwritten prayerbook. Mueller also includes a careful exegesis of each text, its origins, and the way in which Parr either hewed closely to the original or altered it to suit her own personal agenda. Through the arc of her successive and successfully published religious works, we are able to follow Parr's growing understanding not only of her

own religious evolution, but of the vernacular revolution that she heralded, a revolution that would reach its apogee under her stepdaughter, Elizabeth I.

Mueller's patient exposition of Parr's collected writings demonstrates the growing tension between the queen's sense of herself as an independent being with a public voice as opposed to her culturally received sense of the proper context in which a woman is allowed to speak. Supported by the king's open approval during the first years of her marriage and her own belief that God had chosen her to be queen, Parr saw herself at once as a submissive child of God and wife of man but concordantly as an ardent soul whose voice speaks privately in its silence yet demands the public forum of publication. Mueller handles the idiosyncrasies of Parr's language with sensitivity, tracing the usage of various personalized word spellings like "conuenaunt," a variant of *covenant*, not only to Parr herself, but to the early writings of Princess Elizabeth, who was particularly close to her stepmother.

Mueller's important identification of Parr's handwriting in the reworked collection of religious excerpts found in the prayerbook, BL Harley 2342 — a private religious memorandum that Parr appears to have had with her on her death bed in 1548 and that her husband's ward, Lady Jane Grey, carried with her to the scaffold — sheds new light on the interrelationships of the Tudors, as does the discovery of the Elton Hall edition of *Prayers or Meditations*, which contains inscriptions to Parr from Henry VIII, and her stepdaughters Mary and Elizabeth. Mueller's work ends with a list of Parr's possessions taken from her jewel chest at Sudeley Castle and appropriated by the crown following the arrest of Sir Thomas Seymour for treason only months after his wife's death.

Mueller has added an exceptionally valuable book to the growing body of literature surrounding the life and works of Henry VIII's sixth queen. Parr's personal contributions to the working congruities of the English Reformation and Renaissance were undervalued for centuries but have finally found a growing list of historians who in reexamining those contributions have reset the historical record of the Tudor era.

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