ABSTRACT

STEPHEN ATECA. Temporary Edens: Nature as a Space for Female Community in Lanyer’s Salve Deus (Under the direction of Dr. Margaret Simon.)

As Aemlia Lanyer’s Salve Deus Rex Iudaorum has received significant critical attention over the past several decades, scholars have struggled to connect the three seemingly disparate parts: a series of lyrics in praise of noble women, a lengthy narrative re-telling of Christ’s passion, and most unusual, and a final country house poem followed by a brief prose qualification. While the entire volume is poetry, the poems are formally diverse and their organization is in certain ways unorthodox. In this paper, I connect the three parts by directing readers to the consistent presence of nature in the volume. To do so, I employ an ecofeminist framework and make use of Northrop Frye’s term “Green World.” The Salve Deus presents readers with four gardens: the mythic Edalyan Groves, the Biblical Eden and Gethsemane, and the contemporary Cooke-ham. Seeing the gardens as a system alters the way we interpret the text, revealing how the three sections work as a unit. In the dedicatory poetry, Lanyer sets up nature as an ideal location for female community. In the title poem, the prelapsarian Eden is revealed to be without gender or class hierarchy and thus the ideal location for female community. In Gethsemane, Christ’s arrest reveals that such spaces can be invaded in the postlapsarian world. At the same time, Christ’s sacrifice promises women a future permanent Eden. Eden and Gethsemane inform the reader’s understanding of Cooke-ham. While Cooke-ham initially appears to be an Eden-esque utopia, the Cliffords are forced out, just as Eve and Christ were forced out of their Gardens. Therefore, Gethsemane and Cooke-ham reveal the temporality of such spaces. At the same time, the text as a whole suggests that women should create temporary Edens of their own in order to achieve female community while waiting for the permanent Eden that Christ’s sacrifice promised.