



# England's Helicon: Fountains in Early Modern Literature and Culture

*Hester Lees-Jeffries*

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*England's Helicon* is about one of the most important features of early modern gardens: the fountain. It is also a detailed study of works by Philip Sidney, Edmund Spenser, and Ben Jonson, and of an influential Italian romance, the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*. Fountains were "strong points" in the iconography and structure of gardens, symbolically loaded and interpretatively dense, soliciting the most active engagement possible from those who encountered them. These qualities are registered and explored in their literary counterparts.

*England's Helicon* is not a simple motif study of fountains in English Renaissance literature: it is, rather, an investigation of how each might work; of how literary fountains both inform and are informed by real fountains in early modern literature and culture. While its main focus remains the literature of the late sixteenth century, *England's Helicon* recognizes that intertextuality and influence can be material as well as literary. It demonstrates that the "missing piece" needed to make sense of a passage in a play, a poem, or a prose romance could be a fountain, a conduit, a well, or a reflecting pool, in general or even in a specific, known garden; it also considers portraits, textiles, jewelry, and other artifacts depicting fountains.

Early modern English gardens and fountains are almost all lost, but to approach them through literary texts and objects is often to recover them in new ways. This is the double project that *England's Helicon* undertakes; in so doing, it offers a new model for the exploration of the interconnectedness of texts, images, objects and landscapes in early modern literature and culture.

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