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My conclusion may seem somewhat old. Teachers and universities should make choices oriented to their classroom objectives, not to technology. Student learning is the goal. Interaction, engagement, motivation, and visible progress are meaningful didactic strategies for attaining that goal. This list may seem obvious, but unfortunately it is not always the first thing we consider when we apply new methods to the classroom. The single question we need to keep in mind is how to make any new technology useful to motivate and engage students in their own learning experience. 

New Technologies, Old Approaches: Material Culture, Digital Modeling, and Spenser's Texts

Thomas Herron

East Carolina University

Many students are fascinated by the idea of European castles, even if they never get to visit one. Castles, like so many things medieval and Renaissance—including the role-playing game *Dungeons and Dragons*, *The Tudors* or *Wolf Hall* series, and anything *Lord of the Rings*—are great hooks to lure people into our early and often arcane periods of study. In real life, people (not ogres) lived in castles, and the recreative technologies of the web can allow us to connect early people's lives and imaginative literature with real (and imagined) places as never before. What might take days, a passport, and thousands of miles of difficult travel and bad airplane food to get to, can now be found immediately on the computer screen, in a virtual (if incomplete) form and with scholarly apparatus attached. Technology allows the worlds of the past to come alive in ways that can appeal to the scholar and student alike, who can explore these worlds repeatedly.

This paper explains select teaching features available on a new open-access website that focuses on the Irish career, works, and castle of the early modern English poet Edmund Spenser (1552?–99).

Directed and written by Thomas Herron and built by the University Multimedia Center at East Carolina University over a four-year period (2011–15), *Centering Spenser* is a multidisciplinary website focused on Spenser's colonial settlement in the Irish province of Munster and his associated writing.¹ The website contains extensive essays and analyses of Spenser's situation at Kilcolman Castle, County Cork (where he lived ca. 1588–99), as well as teaching resources, bibliographies, photographs, maps, diagrams, and computerized reconstructions. It features current and historical photographs, drawings and maps of the castle and its environs, and links to relevant other resources on the web.

Dramatically and carefully, *Centering Spenser* recreates Spenser's adopted castle visually in 3-D modeling based on extant ruins and previous archaeological excavations and surveys. The website contains many analytical readings of Spenser's literary passages with Ireland as a contextual focus, as well as sample teaching assignments on Spenser's poetry for students. The resources and visualization found on *Centering Spenser* benefit students and researchers of Irish archaeology and Spenser studies alike by tying these disciplines more firmly together.

One purpose of the website is to encourage students to connect Spenser's writings with the sites of their likely composition. Spenser's love poetry, *Amoretti and Epithalamion* (1595), is therefore featured frequently on the website, in

¹The website (<http://core.ecu.edu/umc/Munster/>) housed indefinitely in the University Multimedia Center at ECU, went online in January 2014 and is constantly updated. It is reviewed (twice) in the online publication *Spenser Review* 44, no. 2 (2014).

piecemeal fashion, as it relates to aspects of the poet's life in the castle. The website also mines Spenser's policy tract in prose, *A View of the Present State of*

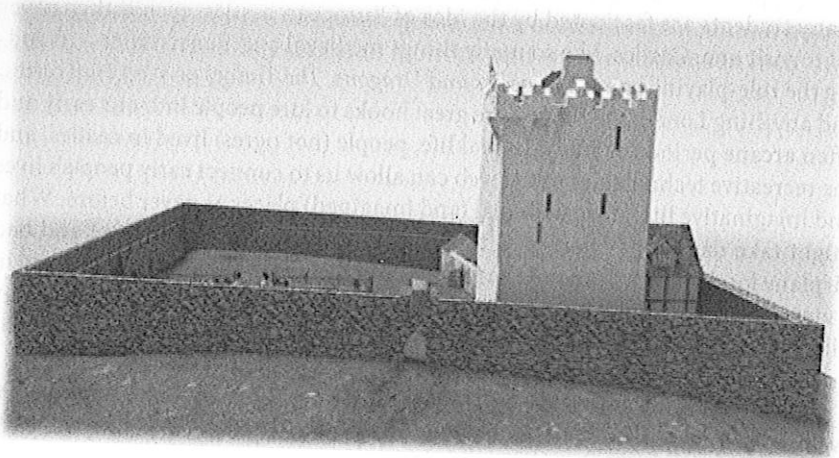


Figure 1. Kilcolman Castle, digitally reconstructed on the Centering Spenser website.

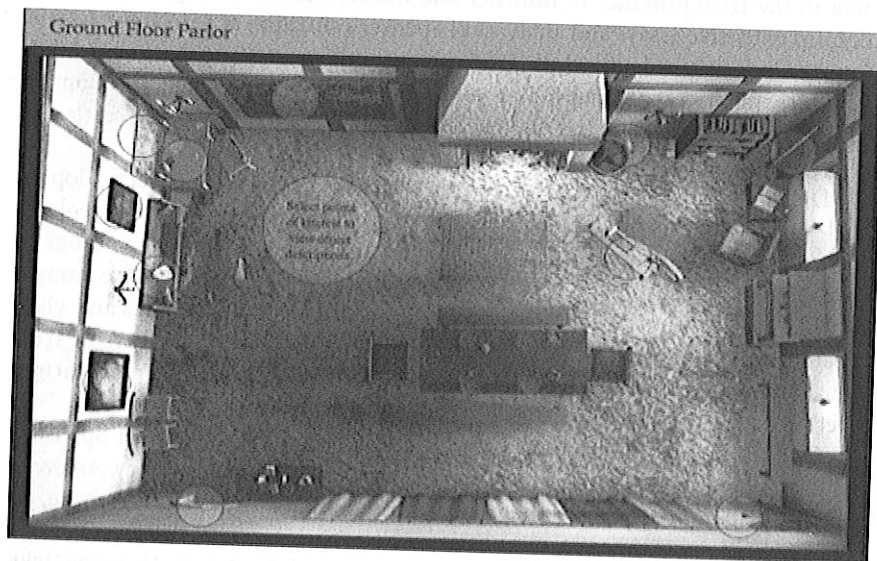


Figure 2. Interactive feature of Spenser's parlor from the Centering Spenser website. The lute, circled, is visible on the bench against the wall.

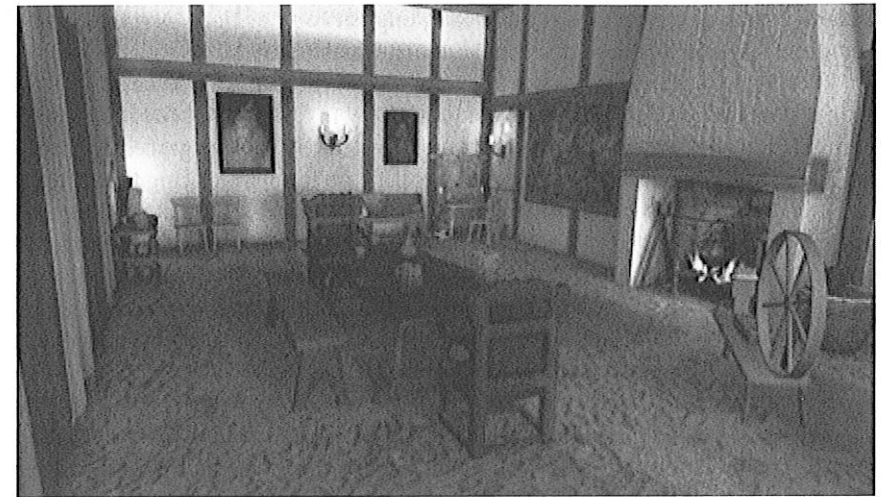


Figure 3. Digitally reconstructed parlor from the Centering Spenser website, in a still taken from an animated fly-through. The lute is on the bench at the back, partially hidden by a chair and beneath portraits of Queen Elizabeth I and Sir Walter Raleigh. A desk with letters and an estate map is on the right.

Ireland (ca. 1596), for information on Irish settlement, material objects, English and Irish culture, and for further connections with the poetry. The website thus not only gives insights into the Irish background and material in Spenser's writings, including *The Faerie Queene* (1590, 1596, 1609), but also explores facets of Spenser's colonial environs, the so-called Munster Plantation, using historical, geographical, and archaeological resources.

The heart of the website is a 3-D recreation of Kilcolman Castle shown in still shots, interactive diagrams, and animated fly-throughs. Visitors can pick the castle apart, explore it, and discover its many individual objects. The purpose is not simply to "wow" students but to introduce them to Ireland's late medieval material culture, and to give them an appreciation of the size and scale of Spenser's landed property and its defensive (and expansive) characteristics. Ireland was a land of opportunity for Spenser, not only a war-torn place of exile from court.

Certain details are meant to draw students into Spenser's world and the wider artistic and material culture of the Renaissance that might have been found there. For example, a lute is placed in Spenser's ground-floor parlor, which has interactive features. Dragging over and clicking on the instrument from a bird's-eye perspective opens an object description page dedicated to it (see Appendix). Students thereby read about lutes and, thanks to the website's ability to provide

an audio track, can listen to a minute-long English composition, "Mr. Dowland's Midnight," played by the professional lutenist Christopher Morrongiello.²

As noted on the website, a tuning key, possibly for a lute, was excavated from a ruined habitation layer probably contemporary to Spenser's occupation of the parlor. If not a lute, then similar instruments are likely to have graced Spenser's halls. The lute is a perfect and provocative test case for appreciating the complicated and hazy intersections of Spenser's material culture, colonial politics, and poetry. A section of the same object description titled "Literary Connections" references lutes and other instruments in Spenser's writings. Spenser, after all, wrote a poem about a lute, or at least we think he did: a short poem posthumously attributed to him, "Verses upon the Earles Lute," has both an English-Irish dedicatee (the future Earl of Cork) and orphic subject matter: "when the axe my life did end,/The Muses nine this voice did send" (see Appendix).³ Students can interpret the poem against the backdrop of English colonialism, including widespread forest clearance in Ireland, as analyzed on the website and further explored in works listed in the bibliography.

Questions that attempt to enrich our understanding of the poetry in relation to Spenser's life in Ireland are posed in the "Teaching Resources" section of the website. For example, when Spenser writes in Sonnet 65 that his love's "faith doth fearlesse dwell in brazen tower/ And spotlesse pleasure builds her sacred bowre," in a poem addressed to his bride-to-be Elizabeth Boyle in *Amoretti and Epithalamion* (1595), how might our reading of these lines change when we better understand what sort of tower and bower, in real life, he was wooing her into? The Teaching Resources section asks such questions (and others) regarding this particular sonnet, while highlighting its context in the sequence. The resource encourages further research into Spenser at Kilcolman on the website and asks loaded questions, such as "Why put the adjective 'spotlesse' in the last line?" and "How does our understanding of this poem change once we better understand Spenser's and Elizabeth's position in Ireland as Protestant, 'New English' newcomers?"

A teacher can selectively choose the most promising questions from a list of seventeen for the sonnet or ignore them entirely. The section also features *Amoretti* no. 75, "One Day I Wrote Her Name Upon the Strand," which is less politicized and was chosen because it is one of Spenser's best-known works. For that poem, the students can click on an audio file of an elegant reading (by Julian Lethbridge) and answer questions about it, including some attuned to the

²Robert Dowland, "Mr. Dowland's Midnight," in *Margaret Board Lute Book*, Royal Academy of Music, Robert Spenser Collection, MS 603, 26v. See also <http://lutesocietyofamerica.org/>.

³For a discussion of the vexed biographical characteristics (or none) of this poem, see David Lee Miller, "The Earl of Cork's Lute," in *Spenser's Life and the Subject of Biography*, ed. Judith Anderson, Donald Cheney, and David Richardson (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), 146-71.

audio reading and others concerned tangentially with Irish coastlines known as strands.

All in all, the website offers an immersive experience for teachers and students into Spenser's poetry, medieval castles and landscapes, and Ireland.

APPENDIX

Here is a sample "Object Description" (one of forty-four) on the *Centering Spenser* website, on the lute (ore.ecu.edu/umc/Munster/objects/P_lute.html):

Ground Floor Parlor

Lute



The lute was a popular Renaissance instrument similar to the modern-day guitar.

Eric Klingelhofer's excavations of Kilcolman in the mid-1990s uncovered a *tuning peg* for a lute or similar stringed instrument. The find was located in a stratification level that could be contemporary with Spenser's occupation of the site. Although its dating is uncertain, the peg may have been in use in Spenser's household there in the 1590s.

[A soundfile of "Mr. Dowland's Midnight" by the Elizabethan lutenist John Dowland (played by Christopher Morrongiello; reproduced with permissions).]

Literary Connections

A poem attributed to Spenser and published posthumously by James Ware in 1633, "Verses upon the said Earles Lute," is reported to have been carved upon the

lute of Richard Boyle, first Earl of Cork.⁴ Boyle was a cousin of Spenser's second wife, Elizabeth Boyle, who lived with Spenser at Kilcolman. Richard Boyle was involved in the English administration in Munster from the 1580s on, and he eventually purchased (in 1602) the Munster holdings of Sir Walter Raleigh, which helped Boyle to become fabulously wealthy and to buy his earldom from the British monarch, James I.

Spenser's poem *Verses upon the said Earles Lute* reads as follows:

Whilst vitall sapp did make me spring,
And leafe and bough did flourish brave,
I then was dumbe and could not sing,
Ne had the voice which now I have:
But when the axe my life did end,
The Muses nine this voice did send.

What does this tell us about Spenser's life as a poet and a planter? It indicates that the felling of trees is a necessary sacrifice that leads to the making of instruments, such as the lute, which create (or accompany) the "voice" of the "Muses nine." The nine Muses in classical tradition are the goddesses who inspire learning and the arts, including poetry and history. Spenser refers to the Muses often in his poetry and wrote a set of poems entitled *Tears of the Muses*, published in his *Complaints* volume (1591). But the poem does more than praise instruments; it identifies industrial activity on the land as the source of art. Boyle's lands were famous for their timber, and so Spenser connects tree cutting, which made things like lutes, with the inspiration of poets who earned their livelihood from the land (and who were, presumably, patronized by wealthy men such as Boyle).

The most famous of mythological poets was Orpheus, whose song in nature calmed the beasts and made the trees bend to hear him. Spenser's famous refrain to his wedding poem, "Epithalamion," celebrates how the "woods" around him in Munster "eccho" and "ring" to his song. In such a moment the bridegroom-poet, Spenser, is like Orpheus, who is able to charm the landscape and make it harmonize with, or echo, his song. By analogy, whoever played the Earl of Cork's lute would be in the position of Orpheus, making the woods (including the instrument which is fashioned out of wood) echo and harmonize with poetic song. Orpheus was himself torn apart by savage forces (by orgiastic maenads, or female celebrants of Bacchus) and his head and harp floated down a river. But the ideal concept of the power of his song lives on.⁵

⁴See also Andrew Hadfield, *Edmund Spenser: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 220, and Bruce Pattison, *Music and Poetry of the English Renaissance*, 2nd ed. (London: Methuen, 1970), 65–67, 142–44.

⁵See the reference to Orpheus's harp on a river in Spenser's *Ruines of Time*, 604–9, published in *Complaints* (1591), wherein the Orphic harp is that of Sir Philip Sidney. James Neil Brown, "Orpheus," in *The Spenser Encyclopedia*, ed. A. C. Hamilton (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 519–20.

Not all music was pleasant to Spenser's ears. Music could also be a luxurious distraction from more virtuous deeds. In the vainglorious House of Pride in *The Faerie Queene*, for example, a place ruled by the queen Lucifera, we witness a royal feast "in commune hall." Here we find

... many Minstrales maken melody,
To driue away the dull melancholy,
And many Bardes, that to the trembling chord
Can tune their timely voices cunningly,
And many Chroniclers, that can record
Old loues, and warres for Ladies doen by many a Lord. (FQ I.v.3.4–9)

One can imagine Spenser spending many a long day and evening at Kilcolman playing and listening to songs accompanied by lute, and/or listening to Irish "bards" (as Spenser's spokesman, Irenius, says he has done in the *View*, 72–75), and/or writing his own chronicle of "Fierce warres and faithfull loues," as he calls his historical epic, *The Faerie Queene* (FQ I.Proem.i.9). Such art was only worthwhile, however, if it led to virtuous action, including hard work on the land. ♀