Spenser's Use of Famine as a Weapon of War – Teacher Resources

By Susannah Ottaway, with assistance by Madeline Gartland (Carleton class of 2022).

This teaching resource accompanies the VR module of the same name, developed as part of the "Castles to Classrooms" NEH Grant (https://securegrants.neh.gov/publicquery/main.aspx?f=1&gn=HAA-271718-20)

Project led by Thomas Herron (East Carolina University). The VR module is based in part on the digital reconstruction of Edmund Spenser's Kilcolman Castle found on the *Centering Spenser: a digital resource for Kilcolman Castle* website, directed and designed by Thomas Herron and Laurie Godwin at ECU: http://core.ecu.edu/umc/Munster/

Introduction

The first thing to do for this module is to become familiar with the section of Spenser's *View of the State of Ireland* that details his suggestions for how to finally dismantle Irish rebellions against England. The entire treatise is available via CELT (Corpus of Electronic Texts: https://celt.ucc.ie/published/E500000-001/). This is free and easy to access, but my students find the language very challenging, so I prefer to use Hadfield and Maley's edited version of the text: Edmund Spenser, *A View of the State of Ireland* (1633), edited by Andrew Hadfield and Willy Maley (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000). The relevant section is on pp. 98-102 of this edition.

Here, I will quote the text that my students developed as a teaching resource for this section, including a lengthy quotation from Spenser's *View* on rebellion and famine. The full packet of materials that we developed is at http://core.ecu.edu/umc/Munster/teaching-View.html#famine.

> Irenaeus begins his discussion of the famine by explaining specific details of the plan. The famine will begin in winter, when life in Ireland is hardest (98). Because livestock give no milk during winter and the Irish are largely dependent on milk for sustenance, a winter famine will put the Irish in a hard place. They will be forced to kill their livestock for meat in order to survive once their stored food supplies and tillable land are destroyed. This will leave them without milk and without any hope for new calves to repopulate their herds in the spring and summer. *[Note that the Irish dependence on milk will be discussed in the second section of the module.]*
>
> When Eudoxus asks about how exactly this war will end, Irenaeus tells him that the English will have to do very little with their swords, because the famine will kill or weaken everyone for them. Irenaeus has seen famine in Ireland before, when the citizens of the plentiful country of Munster rose up against authority during the Desmond rebellion (1579-83) and were brought to complete "wretchednesse" (101). *[Note that the history of warfare and rebellions is covered in the other modules embedded in the castle tours.]* Irenaeus describes the Munster famine in a frequently quoted, particularly gruesome passage:

> Out of every corner of the woods and glynnes they came creeping forth upon their hands, for their legges could not beare them; they looked like anatomies of death, they spake like ghosts crying out of their graves; they did eate the dead carrions, happy where they could finde them, yea, and one another soone after, insomuch as the very carcasses they spared not to scrape out of their graves; and, if they found a plot of water-cresses or shamrocks, there they flocked as to a feast for the time, yet not able long to continue therewithal; that in short space there were none almost left, and a most populous and plentifull country suddainely left voyde of man and beast; yet sure in all that warre, there perished not many by the sword, but all by the extremitie of famine, which they themselves had wrought (*View* 101-102).

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss some of the specific details of Irenaeus's plan for causing a massive famine in Ireland. When and how will he induce this famine?
2. What tactics does Irenaeus (Spenser) use to make his plans to intentionally induce famine in Ireland seem less barbaric?
3. Irenaeus describes the Munster famine in vivid, disturbing detail. At the end of this depiction, he twists this event to be something that they brought upon themselves. What is his logic for blaming the victims for this carnage? How does this contribute to the portrayal of the Irish as a barbaric people in a beautiful land? How successful is he in "blaming the victim" here?

Section One: Kilcolman's Setting and the Cultural Meaning of Land and Vegetation

Spenser's text evokes specific elements of the landscape of Ireland, and these are both directly visible around Kilcolman, and highly symbolic of what Spenser perceives as degenerate elements of Irish culture. Let's take two points separately to parse the references more deeply: the reference to shamrocks, and the common description of the Irish landscape a dominated by woods and bogs.

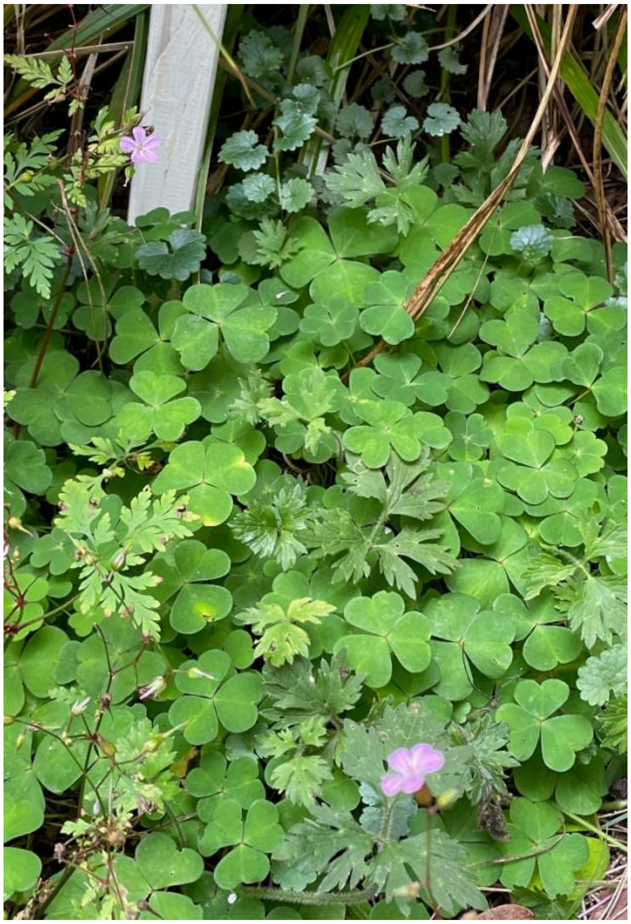
1. *Shamrocks*

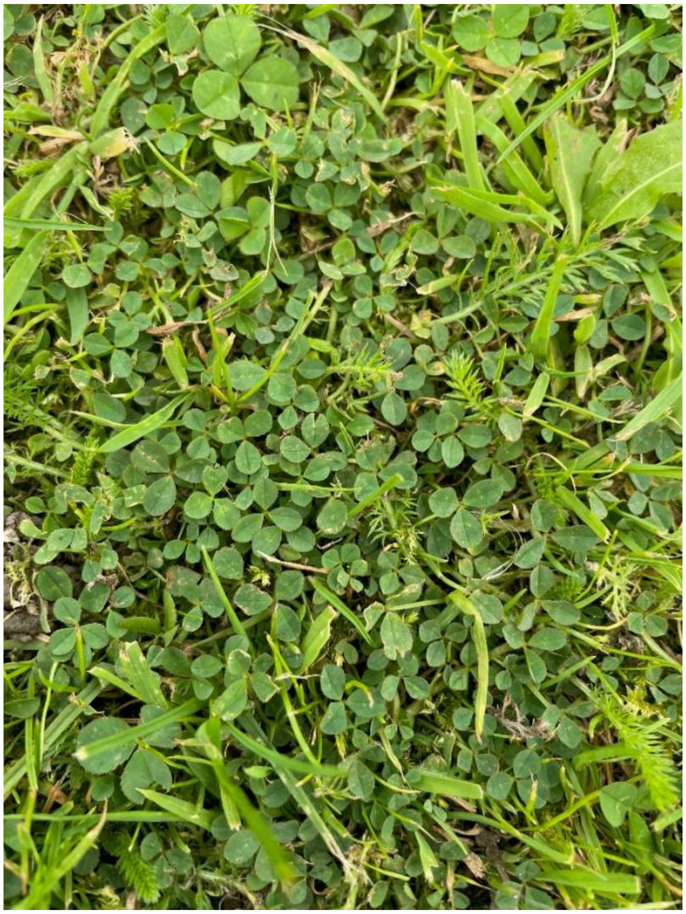
Spenser writes that if the starving Irish "found a plot of water-cresses or shamrocks, there they flocked as to a feast for the time…" The reference to shamrocks is especially interesting to students, who usually have a strong association of this vegetation as a symbol of modern Irish cultural nationalism. Digging into this reference forces us to think about how such a small bit of greenery can come to pack powerful and contradictory cultural meaning into something which was literally underfoot for Edmund Spenser and his contemporaries. I would suggest a lesson plan as follows.

> You can start by asking: "What is a shamrock?" This turns out to be a surprisingly difficult question to ask. Various shamrock-like things are visible all over the ground in Ireland, as my student research partner and I discovered while scouring the landscape

around Kilcolman (see images below). But actually identifying a “real” shamrock entails sorting out differences among several different clovers and similar plants like wood sorrel and black medick. The Wikipedia article on Shamrock has great material on the debates and discussions around what counts as a shamrock: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shamrock.

Here is my student Madeline Gartland’s photograph of wood sorrel (on the left), an edible herb that is ubiquitous in the area around Kilcolman, alongside her photo of trifolium (clover – on the right). Can you tell them apart? Why does it matter if we think about Irish people eating herbs, compared to eating a plant that we think of as a grass or hay? (Students should be able to quickly move to an understanding that we associate the latter with animals grazing.)





trifolium

Students can quickly discuss their current associations with shamrocks, which should prime them for engaging with other kinds of historical meanings of the plants.

This seemingly mundane topic of identifying a shamrock already brings up a number of themes that are helpful in triggering both the historical imagination and critical engagement with the meaning of food and its uses in the past. For starters, we have now insisted that the specific plants under your feet matter in historical references. Spenser's poetry is rife with references to nature, and we are used to considering these words as metaphors replete with symbolism, but we are less used to turning the same kind of intense gaze on words in historical treatises. Here, we can join the two lenses (literary and historical) while insisting that we pay close attention to the specific elements of the landscape in which Kilcolman sits.

The module gives you additional primary sources that make references to shamrocks similar to Spenser's. If you put the materials together, you should be able to see the ways in which Tudor colonizers like Spenser used the image of Irish people "feeding on" shamrocks in a way that connected such eating habits to animalistic or uncivilized behavior.

Spenser's near contemporary Edmund Campion, who wrote a *History of Ireland* shared (and was perhaps the source of) many of Spenser's characterizations of Irish food ways:

> "Shamrotes [sic], Water-cresses, Rootes, and other hearbes they feede upon: Oatemale and Butter they cramme together. They drinke Whey, Milke, and Beefe broth, Flesh they devour without bread, corne such as they have they keepe for their horses. In haste and hunger they squele out the blood of raw flesh, and aske no more dressing thereto, the rest boyleth in their stomackes with Aquavitae, which they swill in after such a surfeite, by quarts & pottles. Their kyne they let blood which growen to a jelly they bake and over-spread with Butter, and so eate it in lumpes."
>
> Source: Edmund Campion, *A History of Ireland* (1571) (Delmar, NY: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1977), p. 18. This version, consulted at the National Library of Ireland, is taken from Sir James Ware's *The Historie of Ireland* (Dublin, 1633) from the facsimile reproduction of a copy in the Folger Shakespeare Library.

The Tudor politician Andrew Trollope "wrote to Queen Elizabeth I's Secretary Francis Walsingham from Dublin, describing the Irish:

> 'And their fede is fleshe if they can stele any … and if they can get no stolen fleshe, they eate if they can get them, like [leek?] blades and a three-leved grasse, which they call shamrocks and for want thereof caryon, and grasse in the felds, with such butter as is to loughsome [sic] to discrybe; the best of them have seldom breade, and in the coomon [sic] sorte never loke after eny.'"
>
> *Source: Calendar of State Papers (*hereafter *CSP) relating to Ireland, 1574-85* (London: Longmans, 1867), 318, cited in L.A. Clarkson and E. Margaret

Crawford, *Feast and Famine: Food and Nutrition in Ireland 1500-1920* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 11.

Discussion Questions:

1. What associations do you have with shamrocks in our present-day context? How did these associations make their way into your thinking? What can such ideas help us to understand about the power of simple things like plants to create connections between people and places?
2. How are shamrocks depicted in the 16th century sources shown here? What other foods are connected to shamrocks by these writers?
3. How is shamrock-eating depicted by the authors; what adjectives are attached to Irish food, and how does that connect to broader attitudes towards the Irish people?

2. ***Bogs and Woods***

Another way in which the Irish landscape is connected to the uncivilized nature of the Irish people is through an emphasis on the "wildest" or least cultivated forms of land, like bogs and woods. Writers like Edmund Campion summed up this trope well in explaining that the Irish were hard to conquer because their rebels had "opportunityes of bogges and woods" (Campion, *A History of Ireland,* 137).

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "bog" as "A piece of wet spongy ground, consisting chiefly of decayed or decaying moss and other vegetable matter, too soft to bear the weight of any heavy body upon its surface; a morass or moss" (OED online, accessed via Carleton College Gould Library). Look at the way even the Oxford English Dictionary associates bogs with Irish wildness in the quotations it lists to demonstrate historical usage:

- *a*1552 J. Leland *De Rebus Brit. Collectanea* (1715) I. ii. 545 They..fledde alle, and levyng theyr Horses, tooke the Marresis, or Bogges.
- 1612 J. Speed *Theatre of Empire of Great Brit.* iv. iv. 143/1 Certaine..places [of Ireland]..which of their softnes are vsually tearmed Boghes.
- *a*1616 W. Shakespeare *Henry V* (1623) iii. vii. 56 They that ride so..fall into foule Boggs . View more context for this quotation
- 1631 in S. R. Gardiner *Rep. Cases Star Chamber & High Comm.* (1886) 34 The Country of Ireland is full of boggs on the ground and mists in the aire.

References to bogs abound in texts written by Ireland's early modern colonizers. The module on Spenser's *View* notes one prominent authority, Gerard Boate, who discusses bogs at great length in his book *The Natural History of IRELAND. Of the Situation, Shape and Greatness of Ireland*.

Boate believes that the proper thing to do with bogs is to drain them: "But this hath never been known to the Irish, or if it was, they never went about it, but to the contrary let daily more and more of their good land grow boggy through their carelessness, whereby also most of the bogs at first were caused." Boate is writing after the plantations of Ulster, so he contrasts the bogs of Spenser's times with the changes to the landscape introduced by the English:

- "But, as the Irish have been extreme careless in this, so the English, introducers of all good things in Ireland (for which that brutish nation from time to time hath rewarded them with unthankfulness, hatred, and envy, and lately with a horrible and bloody conspiracy [1641], tending to their utter destruction) have set their industry at work for to remedy it." (64)

The mix of disdain for the unreformed landscape mixes with distaste and distrust for the Irish people here, in Section iv "Of the grassy Bogs", which explains that while the bogs look dry and pleasant and are covered with grasses, people who go in unsuspecting can get mired down "for all or most bogs in Ireland having underneath a hard and firm gravel are not of an equal depth." Boate goes on: "But the deepest bogs are unpassable in the summer as well as in the winter, yet most of them have firm places, in narrow paths, and in some larger parcels; by the means whereof those, unto whom they are known, can cross them from one side to another, where others who are not used to them do not know in what part to set one step; in which nimble trick, called commonly treading of the bogs, most Irish are very expert, as having been trained up in it from their infancy." Firm places sometimes shake when walked on and then tremble, creating so-called "shaking bogs" or "quagmires." (61)

Source: *Gerard Boate's Natural History of Ireland,* ed. With an intro by Thomas E. Jordan (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2006)

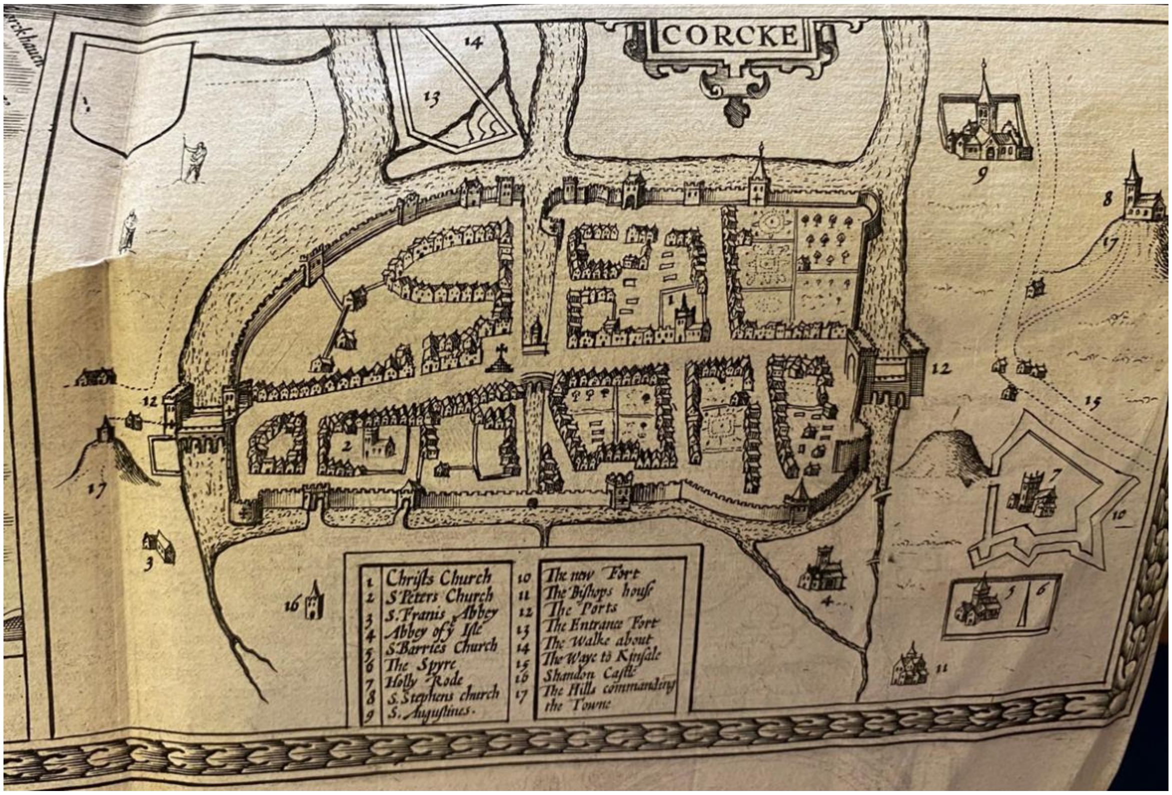
As we have already seen, like Boate, Campion also linked bogs with treacherous Irish. Importantly, the wildness of the Irish bog is specifically contrasted to the civilizing mission of the "New English" buildings, especially the castle. We can see links between this association of the castle (and other construction) with civility and the connections between culture and food that we made when looking down at the shamrocks. In both cases, the supposed intrinsic otherness of the Irish are highlighted, along with their tendency to "degenerate". Consider this quote from Campion, as he is telling the story of the efforts of one Ulsterman, Sir Robert Savage, a wealthy knight, to set up a castle with walls. He explains that when these efforts faltered, "But yet the vvante thereof, and such like, hath beene the decaye asvvell[sic] of the *Savages,* as of all the Englishe Gentlemen in Ulster, as the lacke of vvalled townes is also the principall occasion of the rudenesse and wildnesse in other partes of Ireland." Campion, 90-91.

Classroom Exercise

Read over the sources above, making note of all the ways in which bogs are represented. Then look at the map of Cork that was included with the *Pacata Hibernia* (discussed in both this module and the Nine Years War module). The text around the map includes a description of an English soldier pursuing Irish rebels near Cork, in the county of Munster. In this, we see yet again that the landscape is viewed as an impediment to England's efforts to quell Irish rebels: "to breake the heart of the Rebellion in Mounster… the difficulties that did incounter him [sic] n this businesse were many and great: … the Plaines so deepe and boggie, the Mountains so rough and craggie…” (Carew, *Pacata Hibernia*, 357)

Discussion Questions

1. What is wrong with bogs, according to these early modern writers? What do they symbolize about the Irish?
2. What elements of civility are evident on the map?
3. Can you connect representations of Irish wildness to specific ways in which England sought to conquer Ireland? What do comments on Ireland’s landscape reveal to us about the attitudes of English settlers like Edmund Spenser?


CORCKE
1 Chriſts Church
2 S Peters Church
3 S. Franis Abbey
4 Abbey of ẏ Iſle
5 S Barries Church
6 The Spyre
7 Holly Rode
8 S. Stephens church
9 S. Auguſtines.
10 The new Fort
11 The Biſhops houſe
12 The Ports
13 The Entrance Fort
14 The Walke about
15 The Waye to Kinſale
16 Shandon Caſtle
17 The Hills commanding the Towne

Summary of Landscape Section

This section of the teaching resources has sought to give tools for deepening students’ understandings of the ways in which the land and its uses came to bear certain message about the Irish to the English settlers like Spenser. Rather than thinking that such views were unique to the Tudor period, we want to note the power and durability of such tropes. After Spenser’s time, the “plantation” era accelerated English and Scottish settlement of Ireland under the Stuart kings.

Gerard Boate summed up changes to the landscape from the 1580s to 1640s: “But the English having settled themselves in the land, did by degrees greatly diminish the woods in all the places where they were masters, partly to deprive the thieves and rogues, who used to lurk in the woods in great numbers, of their refuge and starting-holes, and partly to gain the greater scope of profitable lands" (Boate, 67)

By the end of the seventeenth century, large swathes of Ireland, especially in the North, had been transformed into English settlement patterns. A primary source that captures English self-satisfaction with these changes is a short account of the state of Ireland in 1689, which recounts:

> Ireland hath been, and still is even by some Writers reputed a Barbarous and most Heathenish Place: And indeed I believe it was so once, and England also, but ... [now it is] a Place of most excellent Government and Piety, and much like that of England…." "In many places the Soil is so excellent, that it bears the most devouring Grain without manuring…There are indeed many large Mountains and Bogs, but now, by the industry of the English, made very good and fertile Land ... indued [sic] with great plenty of Fish, wild and tame Fowl, Horses, Cows, Oxen and Sheep, as large and good as any in *England*... The meer Irish are not really so Wild and Barbarous as generally reputed, nor indeed Tame and civilized in general as the English (3-5)
>
> > *Ireland's Lamentation: Being A Short but Perfect, Full and True Account of the Scituation, Nature, Constitution, and Product of IRELAND ... written by an English Protestant that lately narrowly escaped with his life from thence* (London: Printed by JD and sold by Rich. Janeway in Queen's-Head Court in Pater-Noster Row, 1689).

Students should be able to see the continuing tropes of Irish wildness alongside a sense that the English have made headway in their civilizing process. It should be noted, however, that the pamphlet was written while the Irish were still in the midst of fighting off William of Orange, who had become the King of England, Scotland and (nominally at this stage) Ireland in the aftermath of the "Glorious Revolution" of 1688. It is notable that 100 years after Spenser wrote his *View*, Ireland was once again thrown into violent warfare.

Section Two – Spenser’s view of Irish food and Irish degeneracy, tied to early modern views on bodies and medicine

This section of the module, which takes you from table to privy, seeks to deepen students’ understanding of cultural and medical assumptions about the body. While the previous module tried to increase engagement with the natural environment outside of the castle, this section shows how Spenser and his contemporaries connected the natural environment, consumption and human health.

The module uses a quotation from Campion to bring together these themes and help students to start connecting these ideas. Notice, again, how he moves from an observation on the environment, to the medical impact on humans, to the consumption of a specific food source to “cure” the problem caused by the environment:

> The Soyle is low and waterish, & includeth diverse little Ilands[sic], invironed with bogges and mauritius[sic]: Highest hilles have standing pooles in their toppe, Inhabitants (especially new come) are subject to distillations, rhymes and flixes[sic], for remedy whereof they use an ordinary drinks of Aquavitae, so qualified in the making, that it dryeth more, and inflameth lesse, then other hote [sic] confections. The aire is wholesome, not altogether so cleare and subtle as ours of England.” [“Mauritius” = marshes; “distillations” = catarrhs, a type of respiratory inflammation; “rhymes” = rheums, or fevers; “flixes” = fluxes, or dysentery; “Aquavitae” = a distilled liquor]

Source: Edmund Campion, *A History of Ireland* (1571) (Delmar, NY: Scholars’ Facsimiles & Reprints, 1977), p.9.

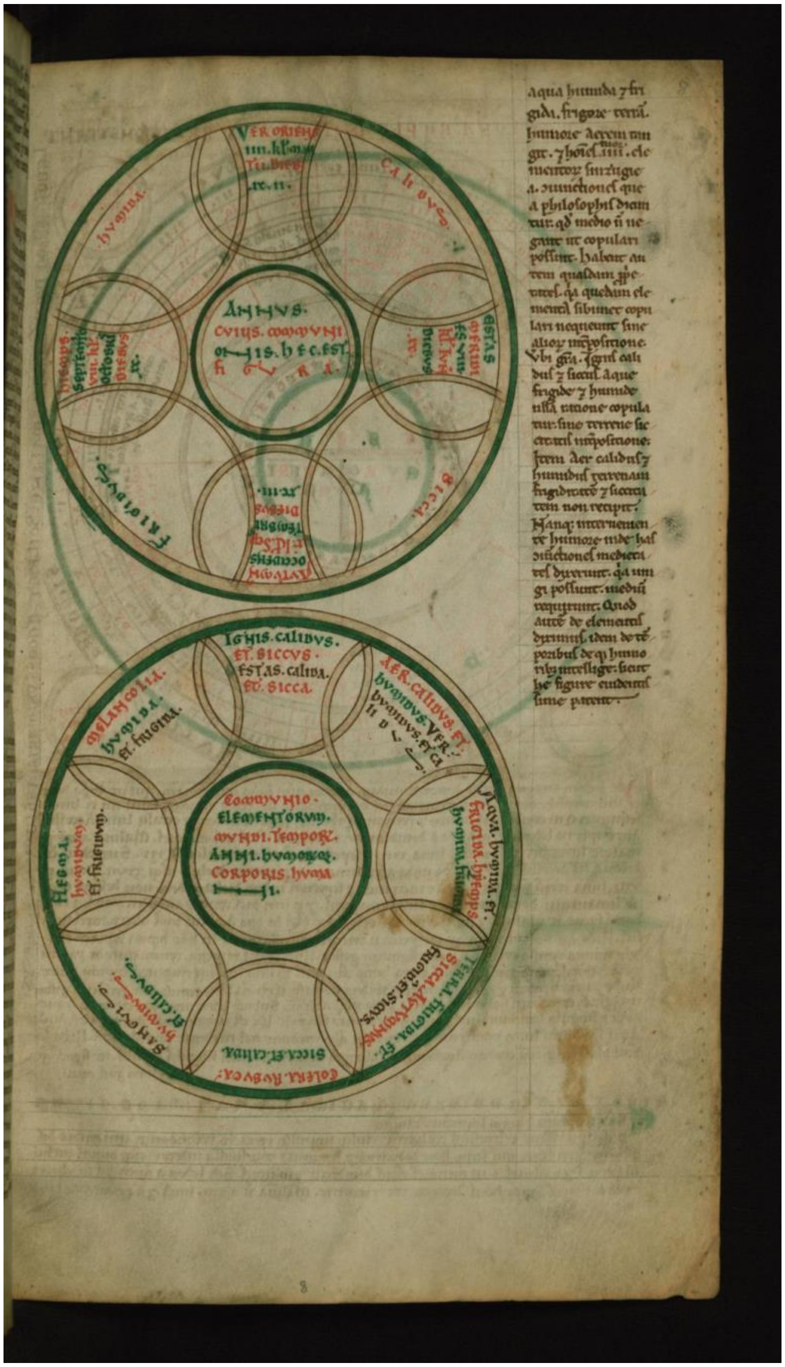
This section presents some great opportunities for students to engage in more interactive learning around humoral theories and medieval-early modern medicine. To check on students’ understanding and help to clarify these ideas, I also have found the following table helpful as a summation of the connections among elements, humors and people’s temperaments; it is adapted from Judy Kem, *Pathologies of Love: Medicine and the Woman Question in Early Modern France* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2019), pp. 2-4

Elements	Humors	Qualities	Personalities
Air	Blood	Hot/humid	Sanguine
Fire	Yellow Bile	Hot/dry	Choleric
Earth	Black Bile	Cold/dry	Melancholic
Water	Phlegm	Cold/humid	Phlegmatic

There are also some excellent, evocative visual images available on the internet. In particular:

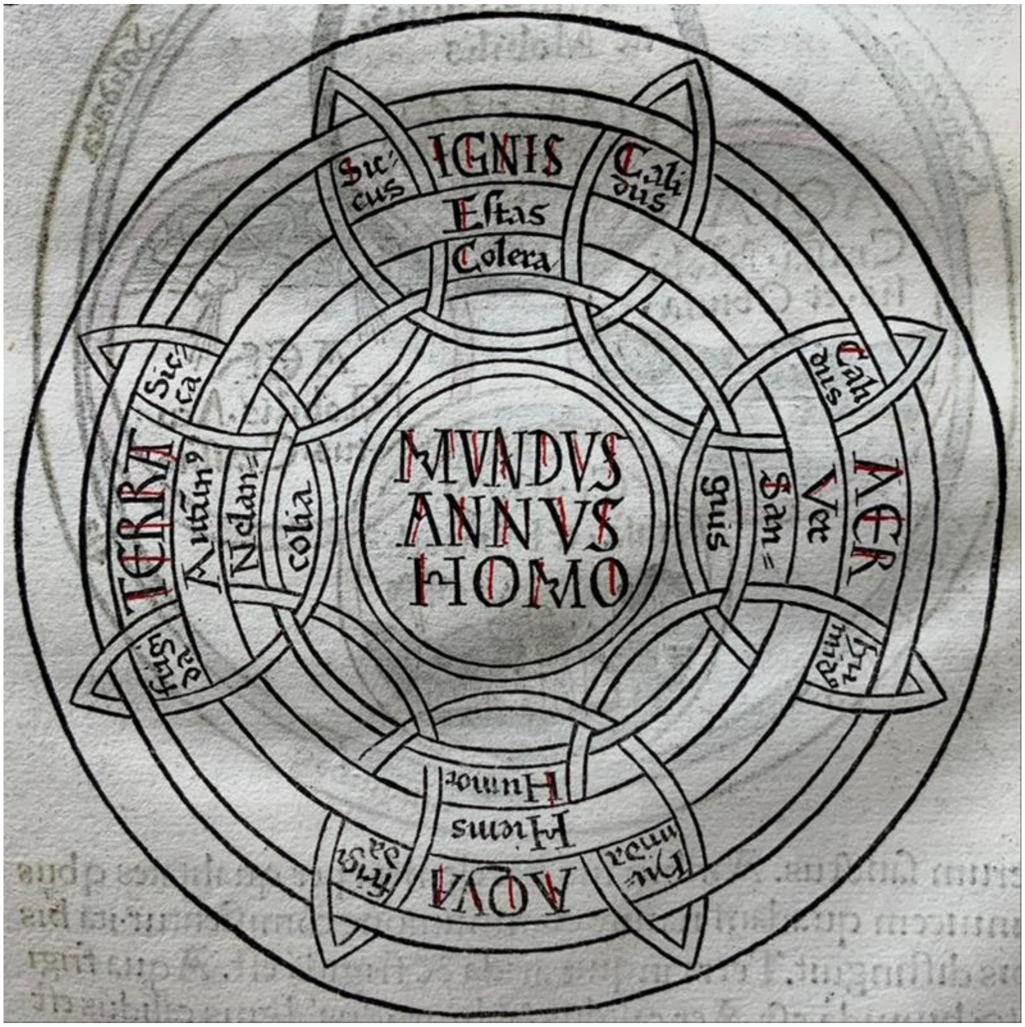
Diagrams of the harmony of the Year and Seasons, and the Harmony of the Elements, Seasons and Humors late 12th century English Manuscript – “this diagram illustrates the notion of the unity of time and space as expressed in the Spanish scholar Isidore of Seville's (d. 636 CE) scientific work, *De natura rerum* (*On the nature of things,* X). The bottom diagram illustrates the relationships among the four elements – Earth, Air, Fire, and Water – the four seasons, and the four bodily humors – phlegm, blood, yellow bile, and black bile -- as well as giving qualities associated with each. These relationships, first articulated by classical authorities and reprised in Isidore's *De natura rerum*, XI, iii, form the basis of medieval medicine.”

The Walters Art Museum - https://art.thewalters.org/detail/17792/diagrams-of-the-harmony-of-the-year-and-seasons-and-the-harmony-of-the-elements-seasons-and-humors-2/



Another great visual is at https://onlineexhibits.library.yale.edu/s/medicalastrology/media/15653

There is a helpful set of resources on this image at: https://onlineexhibits.library.yale.edu/s/medicalastrology/page/the-medical-astrologer-s-toolkit-part-ii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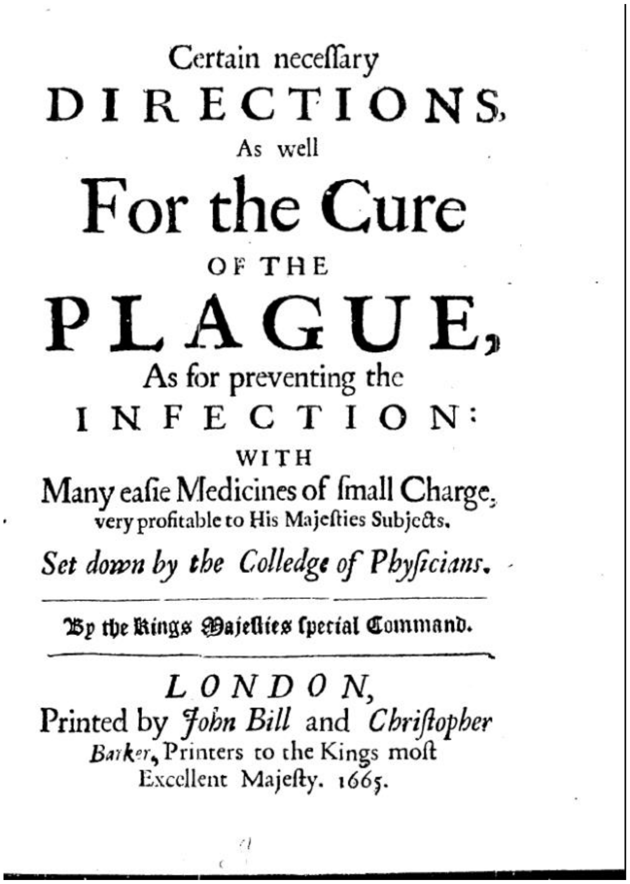
Once students have thoroughly explored the ideas associated with humoralism, they can deepen their understanding through an exercise such as this one, on diagnosing disease:

Classroom Exercises

Ask for a volunteer who is feeling a little under the weather to describe (or make up) a set of symptoms and have the students think about how their own physicians would likely create a diagnosis and propose a cure for the ailment. If you want to keep stricter control over things, a teacher could pretend to be the patient instead. Now turn to an early modern or medieval medical manual to show the students how ideas about humors manifested in medical texts.

1. *The Plague*

One great manual that always generates student interest was produced in the time of the Great Plague of London, a little later than Spenser's time.



Certain neceſſary
DIRECTIONS,
As well
For the Cure
OF THE
PLAGUE,
As for preventing the
INFECTION:
WITH
Many eaſie Medicines of ſmall Charge,
very profitable to His Majeſties Subjects.
Set down by the Colledge of Phyſicians.

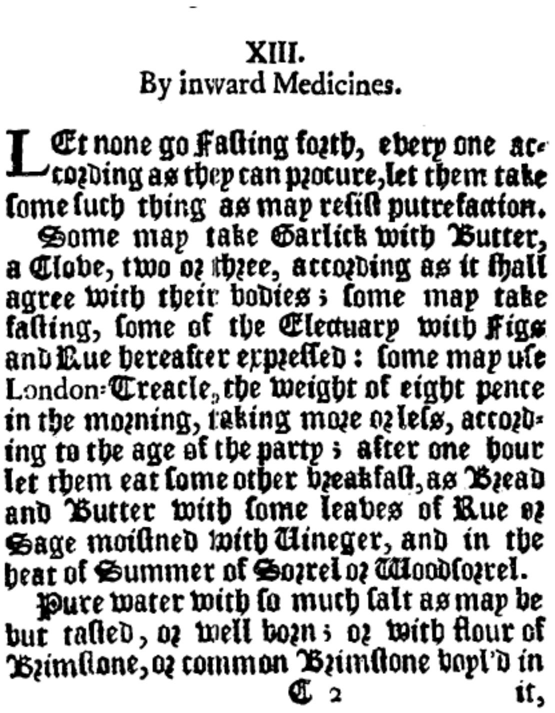
By the Kings Majeſties ſpecial Command.

LONDON,
Printed by *John Bill* and *Chriſtopher*
Barker, Printers to the Kings moſt
Excellent Majeſty. 1665.

The manual, produced by the Royal College of Physicians (so, the medical elite of the day, comparable to the United States' Centers for Disease Control), gives many ways to combat plague, including through adding smoke to the air. A particularly revealing section is on p. 11, "XIII. By inward Medicines" suggests things that people can ingest to prevent plague.

> Let none go Fasting forth, every one according as they can procure, let them take some such thing as may resist putrefaction. Some may take Garlick with Butter, a Clove, two or three, according as it shall agree with their bodies; some may take fasting, some of the Electuary with Figs and Rue hereafter expressed: some may use London Treacle, the weight of eight pence in the morning, taking more or less, according the other age of the party; after one hour let them eat some other breakfast, as Bread and Butter with some leaves of Rue or Sage moistened with Vinegar, and in the heat of Summer of Sorrel or Woodsorrel. Pure water with so much salt as may be but tasted, or well born; or with flour of Brimstone, or common Brimstone boyl'd in it, an ounce in three pints, to a quart; a draught being taken every morning, hath proved effectual and successful. *Certain Necessary Directions, as Well for the Cure of the Plague, as for Preventing the Infection: With Many Easie Medicines of Small Charge, Very Profitable to His Majesties Subjects* (London: John Bill and Barker, 1665), Early English Books Online, accessed via Carleton College Gould Library.

Brave students can take a stab at the original printing too!



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Pure water with ſo much ſalt as may be but taſted, or well born; or with flour of Brimſtone, or common Brimſtone boyl'd in

C 2 it,

Note: an electuary is a mix of herbs – something like a paste - taken as medicine; brimstone is sulfur, which was a widely used medical additive.

Questions to address to the manual:

- In what ways does food serve as a medicine?
- Why would different kinds of bodies, and different aged people, require different kinds of food/medicine, in the humoral system?
- Notice the use of wood sorrel here. Why is the consumption of shamrocks seen as barbaric, while the consumption of the nearly identical plant sorrel, is here prescribed by physicians and considered a medical remedy?

There are other super resources on the Great Plague that students can explore on the side, including websites on Samuel Pepys's diary, which was written then. (A recent blog post on "The Conversation" connects that diary to the present day: https://theconversation.com/diary-of-samuel-pepys-shows-how-life-under-the-bubonic-plague-mirrored-todays-pandemic-136222.)

2. *Humoral Imbalances*

Now, move to diagnose the patient, matching symptoms to humoral imbalance or environmental/personal conditions.

Students should be able to see that diagnosing a patient, and prescribing a remedy, requires them to think not just of what is causing the problem, but also of all facets of the patient's life. They are often surprised to think of sixteenth-century people practicing holistic medicine! Once they take account of the “patient’s” age, general temperament/humoral balance, environmental conditions, etc., they can move to rebalance the person’s humors to get them healthy. Feverish? They may have an overbalance of blood and need to be leeched, or at least cooled down with a damp towel.

One final primary source that can be fun to use to connect these ideas is *The Rarities of the World... First written in Spanish by Don Petrus Messie, afterwards translated into French, now into English*, by J.B. Gent. London: printed by B.A., 1651. There is a copy in the National Library of Ireland tucked inside a collection of pamphlets. In a discussion of why and how men need sleep (pp. 124-125) the author explains: "So that a man laying himself to sleep upon the right side an hour or two, the stomack spreads it self, and lies upon the liver..." a benefit of this is "That the moisture of the meat refresheth the liver, and with this refreshment the naturall heat takes force in the stomack to begin to make digestion..." The pamphlet goes on to explain, "These rules are necessary for those that are tender and weak. But for the healthfull and lusty, the best Rule is for him to observe and keep the custome that he hath always used." Chapter XXXIII goes on to explain "How it comes to passe that some live long, and other some but a short time. And what complexions liveth longest. Also, how that is to be understood where it is said the days of a man is numbred [sic]"

3. Consumption of food and drink

What people ate – and drank – in different historical periods can be revealing for many historical phenomena. One recent blog post at the Folger Shakespeare Library gives us a way to connect the history of consumption to military history as well: https://collation.folger.edu/2022/02/alcohol-armies-contested-sovereignty/. Thinking about bodies, consumption and medicine in this period is a way that students can connect their learning inside Kilcolman Castle with the major political and intellectual themes of early modern history. As the great economic and social historian Joan Thirsk has demonstrated, ideas regarding food, consumption and physical health were central to debates among those whom we would today consider forerunners of the Scientific Revolution:

> So the debate concerning food, health and medicine assumed a lively, serious tone in the second half of the sixteenth century. Physicians, chemists, alchemists and intellectuals all joined in. They argued about the merits of different medicines and the rules for a healthy life. Not a few of the men whom we would nowadays rank as pure scientists wrote books about food…” such books “greatly help us to get into the minds of contemporaries, and poke around among the innumerable bits of intellectual baggage that lay cluttered in the background of people’s opinions, explaining at least in part their food regimes.
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> J. Thirsk, *Food in Early Modern England, Phases, Fads, Fashions 1500-1760* (London: Hambledon, Continuum, 2007), 27.

Section Three – Thinking about the longer-term implications: race and colonization.

Connecting consumption to the history of medicine and bodies also provides an opportunity to think of the development of ideas regarding race in the sixteenth century. Students always raise the question of whether Spenser is “racist” towards the Irish in his *View of the State of Ireland*, so teaching the text provides an opportunity to address this topic. It’s helpful to start off by defining some terms and seeing how historians have addressed the topic.

Some historians think that modern “scientific” notions of race did not develop until the Enlightenment. For example, Eze holds that “Racism is possible only when a systematized body of scientific knowledge is available to justify assumptions of the superiority of one human group over another. Such a systematic underpinning of racism was fully developed in eighteenth-century France.” (Harvey Chisick, “On the Margins of the Enlightenment: Blacks and Jews” in The European Legacy 21, 2 (2016), 127-144, quote on 132, Citing Eze, *Race and Enlightenment,* 13) In *The Forging of Races: Race and Scripture in the Protestant Atlantic World, 1600–2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006), Colin Kidd argues that ‘Race was not a central organizing concept of intellectual life or political culture during the early modern era,’ urging that it be seen as occupying the same ‘ideological space’ as theology, insofar as it was deeply entangled with ‘the theological problems associated with the origins and distribution of mankind’ (54, 67, and 55). Kidd argues that the Christian emphasis on monogenesis, dominant throughout the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, tended to block modern racial divisions in emphasizing a view of ‘race as an accidental, epiphenomenal mask concealing the unitary Adamic origins of a single extended human family’ (26). Not until the rise of polygenesist theories, held by prominent thinkers such as the Enlightenment author Voltaire, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, does Kidd see modern notions of race.

Despite such caveats, however, most scholars recognize important developments in racialist thinking in the sixteenth century. Kim Hall defines racialism in a very helpful way that I will paraphrase here. It is a term coined by Kwame Anthony Appiah. Racialism holds notions of race rooted in the belief that it was possible to divide humans into small number of groups called ‘races’, which were seen to share fundamental, biologically heritable, moral and intellectual characteristics with each other that they did not share with members of any other race. Hall writes that racialism “suggests a way of talking about notions of human difference [difference as binaries] that have political and social effects and that are different from more institutionalized forms of racism” (Hall, *Things of Darkness*, 4). Most early modern scholars agree that ideas about difference in the sixteenth century increasingly tended towards racialism, and that there “was ‘something like race’” in the early modern period that approximated to racial distinctions that became normative in modernity.

This is not to say that such ideas were fixed, or that they encompassed all the characteristics of, for example, nineteenth-century notions of scientific racism. As Jean Feerick explains: "early modern racial identity [w]as alterable and conditional and [w]as deeply connected to social practices - mores, customs and culture." Early modern writers showed that "in the same way that plants [had] a risk of alteration" so too people exhibited "this potential for racial mutability". Both for plants and people "acts of culture are regarded as having the power to shape nature" even to the point where early modern racial ideologies showed a potential for "reversibility", that is of individuals' degenerating from a "higher" to a lesser racial category. (*Strangers in Blood*, pp. 29-30).

> We can see an example of this plant-like thinking regarding noble blood in the work of Edmund Campion, whose history of Ireland is quoted throughout this module. Campion's dedication to Sir Robert Dudley (in *A History of Ireland* (1571), where he uses a fascinating metaphor re: Dudley's worthiness (generosity, etc etc): "These are indeed the kirnels for the which the shell of your nobility seemeth faire and sightly; This is the sap, for whose preservation the barke of your noble tree is tendered." and further: 9 - "English gentlemen of longest continuance in Ireland are the race of those which at this day, either in great povertie or perill, doe keepe the properties of their auncestors lands in Ulster, being then companions to Courcy the conqueror and Earle of that part. (discussion of degeneracy, including those who are "meere Irish" or "waxing Irish"
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> Campion on degeneracy: 14-15 talks of degeneracy, and then: "It is further to bee knowne, that the simple Irish are utterly another people then our English in Ireland, whome they call despitefully *boddai Sassonis*, and *boddai Ghal*t, that is, English and Saxon churles, because of their English auncestors planted heere with the Conquest, and sithence with descent hath lasted now 400. yeares. Of this people therefore severally by themselves I must intreate. Yet none otherwise then as they stand unfiled [sic], and serve their accustomed humours, whome I joyne all such as either by living neere them, or by liking their trade are transformed into them."

Further readings on race in the Renaissance include:

Ian Campbell, *Renaissance Humanism and Ethnicity before Race: The Irish and the English in the Seventeenth-Century* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2013).

Jean Feerick, *Strangers in Blood: Relocating Race in the Renaissance* (Toronto, CA: University of Toronto, 2010).

Kim Hall, *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995, reissued 2018).

T. Herron, "Mixed Up: Race, Degeneration, and 'Old English' Politics in Spenser's Bower of Bliss and Castle Joyous." *Spenser Studies* 35 (2021), 69-105.