

Scholarly Horizons: University of Minnesota, Morris Undergraduate Journal

Volume 6 | Issue 1

Article 4

February 2019

Bodies, Blood, and Manure: The Rhetoric of Nutrient Cycling in Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* and *A View of the State of Ireland*

Bailey Kemp
University of Minnesota, Morris

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.morris.umn.edu/horizons>



Part of the [Literature in English, British Isles Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Kemp, Bailey (2019) "Bodies, Blood, and Manure: The Rhetoric of Nutrient Cycling in Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* and *A View of the State of Ireland*," *Scholarly Horizons: University of Minnesota, Morris Undergraduate Journal*. Vol. 6: Iss. 1, Article 4.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.morris.umn.edu/horizons/vol6/iss1/4>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at University of Minnesota Morris Digital Well. It has been accepted for inclusion in Scholarly Horizons: University of Minnesota, Morris Undergraduate Journal by an authorized editor of University of Minnesota Morris Digital Well. For more information, please contact skulann@morris.umn.edu.

Bailey Kemp

University of Minnesota, Morris

Bodies, Blood, and Manure: The Rhetoric of Nutrient Cycling
in Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* and *A View of the State of Ireland*

*“How ever gay their blossome or their blade
Doe flourish now, they into dust shall vade.
What wrong then is it, if that when they die,
They turne to that, whereof they first were made?”*

-Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene* (V.ii.40.4-7)

The law of conservation of mass states that matter cannot be created or destroyed – it can only change form. By this law, the atoms and compounds that make up a living body are the same atoms that composed bodies that lived millions of years ago. These atoms will continue on this never-ending journey, perpetually cycling through living and nonliving systems. Although phrases such as “conservation of mass” and “nutrient cycling” did not exist when Edmund Spenser was writing, similar ideas *were* present during Spenser’s time. From William Shakespeare’s poetry to husbandry manuals, written works from the early modern period explore topics such as the return of bodies to the earth after death, fertilizing soil with decaying plant and animal tissue, and the interdependence between the living and the nonliving (Eklund 2-3).

As the above quote from Book V of *The Faerie Queene* illustrates, these concepts also found their way into Spenser’s works. In this passage, the heroic knight Artegall declares that when someone dies, their material body returns to the earth “whereof they first were made” (V.ii.40.7). Clearly, Spenser was cognisant of the cycle bodily matter undergoes: plants grow from the soil, animals (humans included) eat the plants, animals and plants die, their decaying bodies return to the soil, and the cycle continues. Spenser’s rhetoric surrounding the interrelations between living beings and the surrounding environment may even be considered a

form of ecological understanding. Again, although the term “ecology” did not exist during Spenser’s time, the ideas that form the basis of this science were present throughout 16th-century English society. Therefore, the modern language of “ecology” – specifically the phrase “nutrient cycling” – provides a useful vocabulary with which to discuss Spenser’s works, especially when this language helps to illuminate a contradiction in Spenser’s logic.

In particular, these terms allow for new insight into two of Spenser’s most prominent texts: *The Faerie Queene*, an epic poem that follows the adventures of virtuous knights, and *A View of the State of Ireland*, a colonial dialogue between the characters Eudoxus and Irenius. Book V of *The Faerie Queene* is generally regarded as an allegorical companion to *A View*, as the knight’s quest in this book is to rescue the lady Eirena, an allegorical personification of Ireland. Throughout these texts, there is significant evidence that suggests Spenser’s awareness of the cyclical patterns that govern the natural world. In fact, Spenser’s motivations for colonizing Ireland are heavily based on his awareness of the rich soil that covers the landscape. While emphasizing the fertility of the Irish landscape serves to advance his colonial agenda, Spenser’s apparent ecological awareness also poses a paradox: the valuable soil is composed of exactly what Spenser wants to get rid of – the Irish. As I will argue, anxieties about the presence of Irish bodies in the soil seep into Spenser’s writing, exposing an irreconcilable flaw in his colonial rhetoric. Although Spenser’s goal is to excise the Irish and cultivate a new English society, “planting” the English in soil that is full of decomposing Irish bodies will only result in the cultivation of another Irish society.

To develop this argument, this essay will be divided into two parts. In the first section, I will discuss Spenser’s rhetoric surrounding the Irish landscape in *A View*, illustrating both his motivations for colonizing Ireland and the obstacles that stand in his way. I will also discuss the

forms of ecological understanding present during the early modern period, placing Spenser in the context of the English movement toward agricultural order. In the second part of this essay, I will show how anxieties about the presence of Irish bodies in the soil appear in Spenser's Book V of *The Faerie Queene*. Then, I will illustrate how Spenser's apparent ecological knowledge directly contradicts his colonial plan, thus exposing flaws in both the logic of *A View* and the allegory of *The Faerie Queene*.

I. Spenser's View of Ireland and Early Modern Soil Ecology

In *A View*, Spenser places significant emphasis on the various commodities associated with the Irish landscape, the most important being the fertile soil. In the opening lines, Eudoxus inquires to Irenius about why Ireland is not yet in English control: "But if that countrey of Ireland... be of so goodly and commodious a soyl... I wonder that no course is taken for the turning thereof to good uses, and reducing that nation to better government and civility" (11). Irenius responds: "there have bin divers good plottes devised ... but they say, it is the fatall destiny of that land, that no purposes whatsoever which are meant for her good, will prosper or take good effect" (11). This exchange sets the stage for a question/answer dialogue centered around the necessity of creating an English society in Ireland that will use the land in the proper way. As the opening lines illustrate, the fertile Irish soil offers a promising colonial opportunity, but there are obstacles that stand in the way of this resource being put "to good uses."

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the largest obstacle is the Irish people. In the following pages, Irenius provides a detailed explanation of everything wrong with the Irish and outlines a well-developed plan to exterminate them. While Irenius's plans are proposed with confidence, he nonetheless acknowledges – at the very beginning of *A View* – that previous attempts to colonize

Ireland have failed. He even declares that “it is the fatall destiny” of Ireland to remain out of English control. Later in the text, Irenius states that “great houses there bee of the English in Ireland... have degendred from their auncient dignities, and are now *growne* as Irish” (*View* 70, emphasis added). Through the voice of Irenius, Spenser explains that the reason previous colonization attempts have failed is because the English that are “planted” in Ireland simply “grow” to be Irish. As I will demonstrate, this may be due to the presence of Irish bodies in the soil, as Spenser’s works suggest an understanding of the cyclical relationship between decaying bodies and new growth. Here, the phrase “nutrient cycling” provides a useful framework to clarify exactly what I mean by “cyclical relationship.” In short, Irish bodies decay, Irish bodies become the soil, and new Irish bodies grow from the soil. As a result, the English that are “planted” in Irish soil grow to be Irish. And even further, the English colonizers that are sustained by the Irish plants and livestock grow to be Irish themselves, embodying the common phrase “you are what you eat.”

Placing Spenser in the context of 16th-century English society, it becomes clear that he was indeed aware of this cyclical pattern. In an article titled “Early Modern Ecology,” Julian Yates explains, “the [early modern] period was characterized by a concerted attempt to understand the interrelations between humans and the so-called natural world” (334). As Yates explains, Spenser was living during a time when new ideas about humanity’s impact on their surrounding environment – and vice versa – were circulating throughout society. In particular, early modern ecological knowledge is very apparent in the context of soil. In the introduction to a recently published book, *Ground-Work: English Renaissance Literature and Soil Science*, Hillary Eklund states, “we can conjure what a Renaissance soil science might have looked like from what early modern observers recorded . . . They knew, for instance, that with its

combination of minerals, organic matter, air, and water, soil is animal, vegetable, *and* mineral. It is the living *and* the dead, both flourishing and decaying” (5). As Eklund discusses, people living in the early modern period were aware that soil is not just unchanging dirt beneath their feet; they understood that life depends on soil, and soil itself is composed of what was once living. As the quote at the beginning of this essay illustrates, Spenser himself appears to have been aware of the very type of “flourish[ing]” and “vad[ing]” (V.ii.40.5) that Eklund describes, as Spenser declares that living bodies both come from the earth and will return to the earth after death.

Instances of this form of ecological knowledge are present throughout various genres of early modern English literature. For example, in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, Hamlet appears to have a keen awareness of this cyclical pattern: “Alexander died, Alexander was buried, Alexander returneth into dust, the dust is earth, of earth we make loam, and why of that loam whereto he was converted might they not stop a beer-barrel?” (qtd. in Eklund 2). In this quote, Hamlet expresses his anxiety about a noble human body being “converted” into the loam in a beer-barrel stopper, explicitly illustrating the knowledge that decaying bodies cycle back into the soil after death.

While this instance paints nutrient cycling in a rather negative light, another genre of early modern literature – husbandry manuals – illustrates a more positive viewpoint. Husbandry manuals are how-to handbooks for land management, and these manuals are “drenched with detailed and comprehensive material advice on how to create and manage a large farm: selecting land; draining and dressing it for arable use; constructing various household buildings ... and managing the chores of housewifery and husbandry that sustain the estate” (Wall 771). As Frances Dolan discusses, many of these manuals give suggestions for the best ways to produce a fertile plot of soil: by adding everything from rotten vegetables to animal manure and human

blood (25). Therefore, the idea of using dead and decaying matter to make something new and useful was present during the early modern period, exemplified in theories about what today would be called “composting.”

In fact, Spenser himself appears to be aware that decaying organic matter makes soil particularly good for cultivation. Throughout *A View*, Spenser utilizes the language of husbandry, advocating “to ditch and inclose [the] ground, to manure and husband it as good farmours use” (*View* 83). Considering his emphasis on manuring the landscape, Spenser was familiar with the ideas put forth in husbandry manuals. Spenser also discusses “the ill husbandrie of the Irish people” (87) and later declares, “The first thing therefore that wee are to draw these new tythed men into, ought to be husbandry” (149). With husbandry first on the list of ways to amend the Irish society, the importance of cultivating the landscape comes into sharp focus.

In particular, agriculture is a primary motivation for the English to colonize Ireland, and this motivation directly influences the vocabulary of Spenser’s works. As John Patrick Montaña discusses, the transformation of Ireland from wilderness to farmland was a vital aspect of the colonial strategy, as orderly enclosures and tilled landscape were indications of civility (120). Spenser utilizes the language of cultivation to discuss the economic benefits of cultivating the land as well as to advocate for the literal “plantation” of the English in Ireland. For example, throughout *A View*, Spenser advocates for the “planting” (21; 26; 114; 123 and more) of English people, English buildings, and English ideals throughout Ireland. Importantly, it was not just Spenser using this rhetoric. The language of “plantation” circulated throughout colonial discourse, providing the English with a way to justify their subjugation of Ireland on the basis of “improving” the landscape (Montaña 123). Therefore, Spenser’s emphasis on husbandry and “plantation” is a reflection of a more widespread – and more dangerous – colonial mindset.

Just how dangerous this mindset is becomes clear as the rhetoric of “plantation” even extends into Spenser’s suggestion for excising the Irish people. In *A View*, Eudoxus inquires about how to begin reforming Ireland (93), and Irenius responds:

Even by the sword; for all these evils must first be cut away by a strong hand, before any good can be planted, like as the corrupt branches and unwholesome boughs are first to be pruned, and the foule mosse cleansed and scraped away, before the tree can bring forth any good fruite. (93)

In this quote, the “good” to be “planted” is the English, and the “evils” are the Irish that prevent the English from adequately managing the land. Extending the planting metaphor even further, Spenser equates the Irish to “corrupt branches and unwholesome boughs” that must be removed before the full potential of the fertile Irish landscape can be realized. As this quote illustrates, the language of “plantation” functions to simultaneously advertise the economic opportunity of colonizing Ireland and to dehumanize the Irish that stand in the colonizers’ way.

Beyond desiring to colonize for agricultural benefits, it appears that Spenser and other English settlers felt they had a *responsibility* to colonize Ireland. As John Walters argues, the colonial ideology put forth in *A View* depends on the anthropocentric belief system that humans, especially the English, are superior to nature (153). Therefore, as Walters later discusses, the English have both the ability and the responsibility to control the landscape (153). As Andrew McRae explains, the English obsession with husbandry and a cultivated, orderly landscape was driven by “a sense of the moral duty to exploit more efficiently the riches of the natural world” (qtd. in Montaña 125). Therefore, by “planting” the English throughout Ireland, the colonizers would rescue the neglected landscape and use the land in the proper way: for English benefit.

The “moral duty” to colonize Ireland is further exemplified in *A View*. For example, when Irenius discusses the uncultivated land and lack of organized towns, he declares: “Thus was all that goodly countrey utterly wasted” (27). By regarding the land as “wasted” if it is not being used for agriculture, Irenius embodies the anthropocentric, or more specifically, Anglocentric, belief that the Irish landscape is *meant* for English use. Following this statement, Irenius catalogues some of the most valuable resources and “excellent commodities” that Ireland offers, such as the “goodly woods even fit for building of houses and ships” and “the soyle it selfe most fertile, fit to yeeld all kinde of fruit” (27). Eudoxus responds by lamenting for the “wasted” land: “Truly Iren... I doe much pity that sweet land, to be subject to so many evils as I see more and more to be layde upon her” (27). Clearly, Spenser’s concern is for the “sweet land” that needs rescuing from the “many evils” of the Irish culture. By framing the Irish landscape as a damsel in distress in need of rescue, Spenser appeals to the English cultural value of using the land as it *should* be used.

This damsel in distress rhetoric is more literally apparent in Book V of *The Faerie Queene*. In this book, Artegall’s quest is to rescue the lady Eirena, who is being held captive by the “strong tyrant” Grantorto (V.i.3.7). As Abraham Stoll explains, “Eirena” has been etymologically interpreted to refer to both “Ireland” and “peace,” or together, a peaceful Ireland (8n3). Furthermore, Grantorto is often regarded as an allegorical representation of the Irish, and his name translates literally to “great wrong” (Stoll 8n2). Considering this, Book V can be read as an allegorical call-to-action for the English to rescue the damsel in distress from the clutches of a villain, or in the real world, to rescue the misused Irish landscape from an uncivilized society. And as Spenser proposes in *A View*, the best way to save Eirena, or to save Ireland, is through the plantation of English settlers and the cultivation of the landscape.

II. The Body Problem

While plans for cultivating Ireland and developing a structured and orderly agricultural society are a large focus throughout *A View*, successful cultivation would not be possible if it were not for the rich soil that covers the Irish landscape. With this in mind, there is a contradiction in Spenser's works regarding why the Irish soil is so rich and "commodious" in the first place. Specifically, the fertile soil that is so valuable to Spenser has been enriched with decaying Irish bodies: plant, animal, and, yes, human. Put simply, Spenser's plan to eradicate the Irish from Ireland becomes a lot more complicated when the very people he wants to remove are literally part of the soil.

In fact, there is a particular aspect of the Irish landscape that may have allowed Spenser to be keenly aware of the Irish bodies in the soil: peat bogs. Peat bogs are formed from partially-decayed plant material piling up over long periods of time. This ecosystem covers a large area of the Irish landscape, and "turf-cutting," the harvesting of peat to be burned for heat and energy, has been a common practice in Ireland for centuries (Renou-Wilson 145). However, there have been several occasions when peat-cutters have dug up more than they bargained for. In the bogs of Northern Europe, including Ireland, strikingly well-preserved human corpses have been pulled from the earth. Termed "bog bodies," these corpses appear to evade the laws of time. The acidic and relatively oxygenless environment of peat can preserve bodies for centuries, including flesh, hair, and even stomach contents (Sanders 2). Today, many bog bodies are on display in museums, allowing a perhaps unsettling glimpse into the past. Although Spenser never mentions bog bodies explicitly, descriptions of these bodies were recorded as far back as 1700. For example, Charles Leigh, an English physician and naturalist, notes: "sometimes in mosses are found human bodies entire and uncorrupted ... These are the most remarkable in phaenomena I

have observ'd" (qtd. in Sanders 3). Although Spenser was writing a century earlier than Leigh, Spenser could have heard of well-preserved body parts being pulled from the earth, especially considering his estate at the Munster plantation was near a bog (Schwyzer 15). If Spenser was aware of these well-preserved corpses, the problem regarding the presence of Irish bodies in the landscape would have become far more apparent, as these corpses provide a direct and haunting reminder of what makes up the fertile and "commodious" Irish soil.

Therefore, even if Spenser's plan to remove the above-ground Irish succeeds, the Irish would still be present in the land. As Philip Schwyzer discusses, one of the most vital questions that all colonizers face is "How do you build a homeland . . . in alien soil, full of someone else's dead?" (1). In *The Faerie Queene*, then, "the problem that preoccupies [Spenser] is not so much how to get the wayward Irish into the earth, as how to get them out of it" (15). Stated otherwise, Spenser's proposal to excise the living Irish people is not sufficient to rid Ireland of their presence, and the decaying Irish bodies in the ground below his feet are what Spenser is truly concerned about.

In fact, anxieties about the presence of Irish bodies in the soil manifest in Spenser's writing. This is apparent in Book V of *The Faerie Queene*, specifically in the episode involving the villain Malengin. At the beginning of canto nine, the damsel Samient tells Arthur and Artegall of a horrific villain named Malengin who steals treasure and lives underground (V.ix.4-5). To catch Malengin, the knights set a trap using Samient as bait (V.ix.8-9). After Samient lures the villain out of his underground dwelling, Malengin's grotesque appearance is described:

Full dreadful wight he was, as ever went
Upon the earth, with hollow eyes deepe pent,
And long curld locks, that downe his shoulders shagged,

And on his backe an uncouth vestiment
Made of straunge stufte, but all to worne and ragged,
And underneath his breech was all to torne and jagged. (V.ix.10.4-9)

This passage is often interpreted to align with Spenser's descriptions of the Irish in *A View* (Stoll 121n2). However, while Malengin is indeed an allegorical representation of the Irish, this villain is not necessarily a *living* Irish person. Instead, Malengin's "hollow eyes," "shagged" hair, and "worne and ragged" clothing may be a depiction of a corpse, an image of the rotting flesh present in the Irish soil.

Malengin, however, is not the only corpse-like villain in Spenser's works. As Schwyzer points out, this type of depiction also occurs in Book II of *The Faerie Queene* when the knights Arthur and Guyon are attacked "by a horde of ragged villains . . . [that] appear not to be alive" (15). Schwyzer states: "with their tattered clothing, deformed flesh, and hollow eye sockets, they bear the marks of decomposition" (16). Therefore, the description of Malengin in Book V is not the first time that Spenser invokes images of decaying corpses in his villainous characters. The appearance of these grotesque and potentially-decomposing villains begs the question: is Spenser describing bog bodies? This is especially relevant as Spenser references the bog of Allen in the same scene in which the horde of corpse-like villains attack in Book II (Schwyzer 15-16). If Spenser was indeed aware of preserved human corpses being dug up from the bogs, these bodies may have provided him with the perfect image for villains in *The Faerie Queene*. But character inspiration aside, the horror that these preserved bodies would have evoked in Spenser may have resulted in anxieties implicitly written into his works, manifesting in characters such as Malengin.

The interpretation of Malengin as an already-dead body is further strengthened by the fact that Malengin lives underground. In particular, he dwells at “A dreadful depth, how deepe no man can tell; / But some doe say, it goeth downe to hell” (V.ix.6.4-5). Besides connecting to the obvious fact that corpses are buried underground, this description also serves to dehumanize Malengin. As “no man can tell” how far beneath the surface Malengin lives, it is clear that Malengin himself is not human. In fact, Malengin is a hellish beast, crawling out of the earth to “pillage” (V.ix.4.9) and “[rob] all that countrie there about” (V.ix.4.8). As an allegorical representation of the Irish, specifically the *dead* Irish, this villain reflects Spenser’s anxieties about the threat dead Irish bodies pose to his colonial plan.

Another detail that links Malengin to both the Irish and to the dead is Malengin’s association with the wailing cries of a woman. To lure Malengin out of the earth, the damsel Samient sits near Malengin’s underground dwelling, and “as she was directed” (V.ix.9.6), begins to “weepe and wayle, as if great grieffe had her affected” (V.ix.9.9). The knights are clearly aware that Malengin will respond to the wailing of a woman, and sure enough, he crawls right into their trap. In this episode, Spenser appears to be referencing the tradition of keening, an Irish custom in which women would literally wail for the dead (Eckerle 11). The English often associated this custom with “barbaric Irishness” (Eckerle 11), and in *A View*, Spenser himself condemns the Irish people’s “lamentations at their buryals, with dispairfull outcryes, and immoderate waylings” (61). Therefore, Malengin is even further linked to the Irish culture, specifically the aspects of the culture that Spenser attacks. By associating Malengin with the tradition of keening, Spenser further aligns Malengin with the “barbaric” Irish corpses that stand in the way of English colonization.

In fact, Malengin even exemplifies Spenser's anxieties about the cyclical pattern that bodily matter undergoes. After Malengin crawls out of his underground dwelling, the knights chase him over the landscape. During the chase, the villain shape-shifts – first into a fox, then into a bush, a bird, a hedgehog, and finally into a snake (V.ix.17-18). Although this shape-shifting is often interpreted to be an aspect of Malengin's trickery, this scene can also be read through an ecological lens. By transforming from decaying body to various animals and plants, Malengin exemplifies the cyclical pattern that is out of Spenser's control. That is, a decaying body literally transforms into other bodies. Therefore, the episode involving Malengin not only illustrates Spenser's knowledge of the cycling of bodily matter but also reflects Spenser's need to eradicate the Irish – those above *and* below the ground.

As illustrated throughout *The Faerie Queene*, killing those above the ground is the easy part. The problem, however, is how to get rid of the Irish bodies in the soil, and even further, to keep new bodies from becoming the soil after they are killed. To address this problem, Spenser appears to provide two possible solutions: smash the bodies to pieces or wash them away in the waterways. While these solutions may serve to ease Spenser's anxiety and temporarily cover up the flaws in his logic, they are not sufficient to solve the problem, and Spenser ultimately fails to rid the landscape of Irish bodies.

In the case of Malengin, Spenser uses the strategy of smashing the body to pieces. Indeed, when Malengin is killed (or perhaps, re-killed), his bones are ground to pieces “as small as sandy grayle [gravel]” (V.ix.19.4). Clearly, just “killing” this villain is not enough, but rather, the knights find it necessary to entirely *destroy* the corpse. As Schwyzer states, “the brutality with which the various villains are dispatched is often and sometimes shockingly in excess of what is required to terminate a life” (20). This excessive violence can also be seen when the

knights kill the villain Souldan, whose body is “Torne all to rags, and rent with many a wound, / That no whole peece of him was to be seene (V.viii.42.7-8). As this passage illustrates, Souldan is not simply killed, but his body is unrecognizably shattered to pieces. By smashing Malengin, Souldan, and other allegorically-Irish bodies to bits, Spenser is attempting to completely remove these bodies from existence.

Besides shattering the bodies into particulate pieces, Spenser uses another strategy to keep bodies from the land: dissolving them into the waterways. This is exemplified in the episode involving the villain Pollente. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the death of this villain, like Malengin’s and Souldan’s, is gruesomely violent. After cutting off Pollente’s head, Artegall throws his body into a river, and “His [Pollente’s] corps was carried down along the Lee, / Whose waters with his filthy bloud it stayned” (V.ii.19.1-2). In this passage, Spenser focuses on Pollente’s “filthy bloud,” emphasizing the barbaric nature of this body. As Cynthia Nazarian argues, washing away Pollente’s body functions to further dehumanize this villain, as any sympathy for this beheaded corpse is carried away by the river (344-345). Therefore, this episode exemplifies both Spenser’s dehumanization of the Irish and his desire to rid them from Ireland.

Throughout *The Faerie Queene*, Spenser uses flowing water to wash away other villainous bodies as well. For example, Pollente’s daughter Munera is tossed over the castle wall and into the water, “And there her drowned in the durty mud: / But the streame washt away her guilty blood” (V.ii.27.4-5). In the case of both Pollente and Munera, flowing waterways are used to remove the corpse from the land, washing away the bodies along with their “filthy” and “guilty blood.” In another episode, the female knight Britomart throws a body “Into the river, where he [the villain] drunke his deadly last” (V.vi.39.9). Yet another example can be seen in the death of the Egalitarian Giant as Talus, Artegall’s sidekick, “shouldered him [the Giant] from off

the higher ground, / And down the rock him throwing, in the sea him dround” (V.ii.49.8-9).

Clearly, Spenser found drowning to be a useful method by which to vanquish villains in the hopes of not only killing the villains but also keeping their bodies from the land.

That said, even though Spenser appears to provide two possible solutions to get rid of Irish bodies (i.e. smash them to pieces or wash them away), his solutions are not adequate. In fact, these solutions only reinforce the recycling of bodies into the earth. By dissolving the villainous bodies in the water or completely destroying the corpses on dry land, Spenser is only introducing new bodies into the landscape. And in the case of Malengin, grinding the body into dust is only expediting the process of decomposition.

In fact, Spenser appears to directly contradict himself in his very attempt to control the landscape. To exemplify this, I will turn again to the episode of *The Faerie Queene* involving the Egalitarian Giant. In this episode, Artegall stumbles across a giant who advocates for leveling the land. The sea is described to “Encroch uppon the land” (V.ii.37.5) and erode the shore, while the earth itself is increasing “By all that dying to it turned be” (V.ii.37.7). This disordered changing of the landscape drives the giant to declare that he will level the land and restore balance to the world (V.ii.38). However, Artegall counters the giant’s proclamation by discussing the inevitable cycling that the giant cannot counteract:

For whatsoever from one place doth fall,
Is with the tide unto an other brought:
For there is nothing lost, that may be found, if sought.
...
How ever gay their blossome or their blade
Doe flourish now, they into dust shall vade.

What wrong then is it, if that when they die,

They turne to that, whereof they first were made? (V.ii.39.7-9 to V.ii.40.4-7)

This passage demonstrates the ecological knowledge that makes it impossible for Spenser to eradicate the Irish from the landscape. Specifically, Spenser acknowledges that bodies return to the soil – or “dust” – after they die. He also acknowledges that new bodies are “made” of the very dust of previous bodies. Therefore, his solution of smashing the corpses to pieces still does not wipe them out of existence, as Spenser himself declares: “For there is nothing lost, that may be found, if sought.” Likewise, washing away the villainous bodies in the rivers is not sufficient to keep them from the landscape, “For whatsoever from one place doth fall, / Is with the tide unto an other brought.” Eventually, these bodies will simply end up washing back on shore, decaying into the landscape and starting the cycle anew.

Although Spenser appears confident in his ability to colonize Ireland, his own words can be used to expose flaws in his logic. In both *A View* and *The Faerie Queene*, Spenser exhibits a form of ecological knowledge, specifically regarding the concept of what we would today call “nutrient cycling.” Throughout *A View*, Spenser argues to excise the Irish and “plant” the English. However, Spenser appears to be aware of the flaws in his colonial plan, as anxieties about the presence of decaying Irish bodies in the landscape are visible throughout *The Faerie Queene*. While Spenser advocates to remove the Irish and grow the English, he fails to reconcile the problem that the Irish are literally embedded in the land itself. And ultimately, Spenser can never cultivate an English society out of a landscape composed of Irish bodies.

Works Cited

- Dolan, Frances E. "Compost/Composition." *Ground-Work: English Renaissance Literature and Soil Science*, edited by Hillary Eklund, Duquesne UP, 2017, pp. 21-39.
- Eckerle, Julie A. "Women representing Ireland in the seventeenth century: From English idyll to Irish nightmare." *Literature Compass*, vol. 15, no. 10, 2018, pp. 1-14. Wiley, doi.org/10.1111/lic3.12494.
- Eklund, Hillary. "Introduction: Toward a Renaissance Soil Science." *Ground-Work: English Renaissance Literature and Soil Science*, edited by Eklund, Duquesne UP, 2017, pp. 1-19.
- Montaño, John Patrick. "Cultural Conflict and the Landscape of Conquest in Early Modern Ireland." *Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, vol. 40, 2017, pp. 120-141. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26333463.
- Nazarian, Cynthia. "Sympathy Wounds, Rivers of Blood: The Politics of Fellow Feeling in Spenser's *Faerie Queene* and *A View of the State of Ireland*." *Modern Philology*, vol. 113, no. 3, 2016, pp. 331-352. EBSCOhost, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=mzh&AN=2016398247&site=ehost-live.
- Renou-Wilson, Florence. "Peatlands." *The Soils of Ireland*, edited by Rachel Creamer and Lilian O'Sullivan, Springer, 2018, pp. 141-152.
- Sanders, Karin. "Introduction: Remarkable Remains." *Bodies in the Bog and the Archeological Imagination*, by Sanders, The University of Chicago Press, 2009, pp. 1-22.

Schwyzler, Philip. "Exhumation and Ethnic Conflict: From St. Erkenwald to Spenser in Ireland."

Representations, vol. 95, no. 1, 2006, pp. 1-26. *JSTOR*,

www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/rep.2006.95.1.1.

Spenser, Edmund. *The Faerie Queene Book Five*. Edited by Abraham Stoll, Hackett Publishing Company, 2006.

---. *A View of the State of Ireland*. Edited by Andrew Hadfield and Willy Maley, Blackwell Publishers, 1997.

Stoll, Abraham, ed. *The Faerie Queene Book Five*. By Edmund Spenser, Hackett Publishing Company, 2006.

Wall, Wendy. "Renaissance National Husbandry: Gervase Markham and the Publication of England." *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, vol. 27, no. 3, 1996, pp. 767-785. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/2544017.

Walters, John. "Human, All Too Human: Spenser and the Dangers of Irish Civilization." *Spenser Studies: A Renaissance Poetry Annual*, vol. 30, 2015, pp. 152-165. *EBSCOhost*, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=mzh&AN=2018420234&site=ehost-live.

Yates, Julian. "Early Modern Ecology." *Edmund Spenser in Context*, edited by Andrew Escobedo, Cambridge UP, 2017, pp. 333-341.