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## Medievalism without Nostalgia: Guyon's Swoon and the English Reformation *Descensus ad Inferos*

The Cave of Mammon episode in Edmund Spenser's work *The Faerie Queene* mirrors Christ's descent into hell, following his death on the cross—the *descensus Christi ad inferos* of the Apostles' Creed, also known as the Harrowing of Hell.<sup>1</sup> By 1590, the *descensus* had long been the subject of intense controversy, a difficult and divisive theological issue. In traditional determinations of the *descensus*, Christ's is a literal descent, a glorious and triumphant event. But many English Protestants interpreted the *descensus* as a measure Christ's suffering and humiliation—not a glorious descent but, rather, an expression of the agony of *Christus patiens*. This essay offers a thorough survey of English theological approaches to the *descensus*, from the 1550s to the early 1590s, followed by a treatment of Spenser's innovative interpretation and his critical retrieval of key medieval approaches. Spenser's is a theological and poetic experiment, testing the limits of human temperance against overwhelming guile. Moreover, his is duly an instructive use of medieval materials—not a reparative or nostalgic longing for the English Middle Ages but rather a recovery of native English poetic resources to focus attention on being in the world, to reshape the contours of Protestant theological debate gone awry.

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In Book II, Canto vii of *The Faerie Queene*, Guyon descends into Mammon's Cave—Guyon, the knight “In whom great rule of Temp'raunce goodly doth appeare.”<sup>2</sup> Until Canto vi, Guyon traversed the world of Book II accompanied by a guide, the Palmer; now, in Canto vii, Guyon descends into the Cave without his faithful companion. He is directed, rather, by Mammon himself, who exposes “A darksome way . . . That deep descended through the hollow grownd,/ And was with dread and horror compassed arownd” (II.vii.20.7–9). Spenser is clear: this is *not* the road to hell, nor is Mammon Satan, however “hellish” his milieu, however “damned” the “soules” in his charge, who include both those of Tantalus and Pontius Pilate. The entrance to the Cave of Mammon is “next adioyning” to the “gate of Hell, which gaped wide”—distinct entrances to different regions of the underworld, even if separated only by “a litle stride” (II.vii.24.5–8). Guyon wanders the Cave of Mammon, the very “house of Richesse” (II.vii.24.9), for “three dayes of men” (II.vii.65.6), all the while subject to a series of “fatall Stygian lawes” (II.vii.27.9) governing his behavior. In fact, a monster stalks silently behind Guyon for the duration of his tenure in the Cave, waiting anxiously for the Knight to transgress the laws of the realm—that is, for Guyon to give in to the temptations of the House of Richesse. Yet Guyon resists the temptations of avarice, lust, and sleep and eventually, led by a reluctant Mammon, returns from the Cave to “liuing light” (II.vii.66.6).<sup>3</sup>

The sequence at once recalls similar descents, the subterranean adventures of Aeneas, Hercules, Orpheus, and others; in addition to a host of classical references, moreover, Guyon's descent into the Cave of Mammon recalls Christ's temptation in the wilderness depicted in full in Matthew 4 and Luke 4.<sup>4</sup> But the liturgical structure of the episode—Guyon's three-day sojourn through the Cave, subject to laws that are not his own, followed by a miraculous return to “liuing light”—also mirrors Christ's alleged descent into hell following his death on the cross: the *Descensus Christi ad inferos* of the Apostles' Creed or, as it was known to many late medieval and early modern readers, the Harrowing of Hell.<sup>5</sup> Christ's *Descensus* figured prominently in the Easter Liturgy, not only across a series of spectacular scenes during the final sequence of the religious drama but also at the heart of Roman orthodox theses on human redemption.<sup>6</sup> The event takes place between Christ's death on Good Friday and the Resurrection on Easter Sunday. Immediately after his death, Christ descends into hell, announcing his arrival at the gates, laying siege to the realm, and sending the harried devils into hysterics. In this sense, he “harrows” Hell, where “to harrow”

is at once “to break up, crush, or pulverize with a harrow” (an agricultural tool used for leveling or smoothing the surface of the soil), and “To harry,



Fig. 1. Detail from an unidentified French Devotional Manual, early sixteenth century. Private Collection of Anne Lake Prescott.

rob, spoil.”<sup>7</sup> With Hell harrowed, the righteous dead, from Adam to John the Baptist, proclaim his glory before departing with Christ. Here, and in his subsequent Resurrection, Christ overcomes death; the mysteries of the Passion and redemption take dramatic form as Christ liberates the blessed dead, saving those who would otherwise remain enthralled to Satan, sin, and death.

Altogether, the late medieval *Descensus* was depicted as a glorious event, as Christ’s triumph, drawing on traditional materials such as the late antique Gospel of Nicodemus, widely available in Middle English translation after the fourteenth century.<sup>8</sup> And although the *Descensus* is never

directly depicted in the canonical Gospels, it nevertheless stood as an article of faith, an important element of the Apostles' Creed with origins in Scripture—particularly Psalm 16:10 (or 15:10, in the Vulgate), “For thou wilt not leave my soule in the grave: neither wilt thou suffer thine holie one to se corruption”; and 1 Peter 3:18–19, “For Christ hath once suffred for sinnes, [the] just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, and was put to death concerning the flesh, but was quickened in the spirit. By the which he also went, & preached unto the spirites that were in prison.”<sup>9</sup> According to the Creed, Christ *descendit ad inferna*, “descended into hell,” where both *inferus* and *infernus* name a lower region or netherworld that theologians identified as hell.<sup>10</sup> The *Descensus* was also crucial to the Sarum Rite, in hymns proper to Holy Week: for instance, *Vexilla regis prodeunt; Pange, lingua*; and *Aurora lucis rutilat*.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, the *Descensus* appears in the “englyshe crede” given in *The Lay Folks Mass Book*: “vnder pounce pilat pyned he was, vs forto saue/ done on cros & deed he was, layde in his graue;/ Po soul of him went in-to helle, Po sothe to say.”<sup>12</sup> The local interpretation of the *Descensus* was fundamental to the late medieval liturgy as well as to lay devotional practices—“local” insofar as Christ really and literally descended to the place (*locus*), hell.<sup>13</sup>

By 1590, however, this orthodox interpretation of the *Descensus* had long been the subject of intense controversy. In the fifteenth century, Nicholas of Cusa (1401–1464) and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494) questioned the scope and meaning of the *Descensus*; their searching investigations inspired later humanist scholars such as Desiderius Erasmus (1466–1536) and Jacques Lefèvre d’Étaples (1455–1536), to challenge the orthodox interpretation even more. Erasmus identified the *Descensus* as a late and tenuous addition to the Creed, and denied it as an article of faith. Lefèvre d’Étaples explored the more figurative dimensions of the *Descensus*, suggesting, albeit carefully and tentatively, that the term really expressed the profundity of Christ’s suffering in hell on behalf of humanity—an approach pioneered by Cusa. In turn, first- and second-generation reformers contested traditional determinations of the *Descensus*. Martin Luther (1483–1546) named it as an article of faith, with both literal and figurative meaning, but also affirmed its status as a mystery, warning believers not to search for precise understandings of the *Descensus*. Martin Bucer (1491–1551) and Théodore de Bèze (1519–1605) identified the *Descensus* not as a local descent into hell but, rather, as Christ’s “descent” into the grave—that is, his burial—stripping the article of any meaning beyond Christ’s death, sacrifice enough for human salvation. And Jean Calvin (1509–1564) advanced what

was perhaps the most radical interpretation of the *Descensus*. For Calvin, it remained an article of faith—but the *Descensus* was not local. Christ does not descend, physically, to any underworld; his *Descensus* is, rather, his intense suffering, an agony that approaches despair insofar as Christ must experience the pain and abandonment relegated to humans under the law, due punishment for sin. Thus a wide variety of Continental scholars and theologians tested traditional determinations of the *Descensus*, as an article of faith, as a glorious and triumphant event, and as a local or physical descent into the inferno. Instead, the *Descensus* became increasingly associated with Christ's suffering and humiliation—not a glorious descent but, rather, an expression of the agony of *Christus patiens*.<sup>14</sup>

Thus, for Spenser and his generation, the *Descensus* had become a difficult and divisive theological issue. Spenser's interpretation of the event in Book II is, among other things, an attempt to reframe the matter, bearing key traces of the Elizabethan debates. But Spenser does not deliver an obvious or direct commentary on the *Descensus*. There are significant differences between Guyon and the descending Christ; while the Cave of Mammon sequence certainly recalls Christ's *Descensus ad inferos*, the analogy between Christ and Guyon deteriorates at the end of Canto vii, posing problems for any would-be typologist.<sup>15</sup> The episode, rather, reveals much about how and to what ends *The Faerie Queene* addresses Reformation concerns and controversies. Spenser is not a programmatic reformer, nor does *The Faerie Queene* merely register period controversies in easy confessional terms. It is rather a theological experiment, and here Spenser approaches a period controversy obliquely in an effort to reframe a debate that had by 1590 already devolved into a series of entrenched confessional positions. In other words, Spenser's substantive poetic engagement with theology shifts the terms of religious debate; sensitive to the opposing Elizabethan positions on the *Descensus*, Spenser poses analogous questions of faith, agency, and responsibility in the Cave of Mammon sequence—all in a poetic idiom that bears only an uncanny resemblance to Christ's own descent. Christ's is a triumphant encounter with Satan, culminating in the Resurrection. Guyon, however, does not emerge triumphant from the Cave. Instead, he feels faint and collapses. As Guyon's three days underground begin to wear on him, his "vitall powres gan wexe both weake and wan,/ For want of food, and sleepe, which two vpbeare,/ Like mightie pillours, this frayle life of man,/ That none withouten the same endure can" (II.vii.65.2–5). And here, at the beginning of Canto viii, as Guyon lays "in swowne" (II.viii.Argument.1), we encounter something truly anomalous in *The Faerie*

*Queene*: God intervenes directly in the events of the narrative, leading the Palmer to Guyon, the swooning charge of a child-like guardian angel.

Why does Guyon fall into a swoon? Patrick Cullen suggests that Guyon's swoon expresses "the weakness of Adamic man and the necessity for grace," a suitable answer in many respects.<sup>16</sup> In reverse, Paul J. Alpers affirms that "it is not enough to say that Guyon's faint moves us, as if by dialectic, to the expression of man's dependence on God"—that is, "What most impresses us at the end of the Cave of Mammon is the full and poised awareness that has been evident throughout": Guyon's virtuous resistance to Mammon, which does not fail and is not degraded in the swoon, by way of God's assistance.<sup>17</sup> For Cullen, the sequence expresses man's dependence on God's grace; for Alpers, the strength of virtue and the goodness of man, even under duress. But Spenser stages a detailed encounter between Guyon's ordeal and Christ's *Descensus* that exceeds the nature/grace paradigm. One cannot separate sacred and secular, supernatural and natural so easily. Instead, Spenser retrieves late medieval depictions of the *Descensus* to show the limitations of both nature *and* grace in a world without Christ.

Guyon's is an object lesson in guile and humiliation, one that reframes—and potentially changes—the doctrine of the *Descensus* itself. Moreover, Spenser punctuates this episode with a rare moment of direct divine intervention, an anomaly in a poem where God operates obscurely, if at all, across sundry scenes in a land of fairy replete with supernatural figures romantic and pagan. Spenser thus draws readers' attention to the necessity of grace and the symmetrical necessity of guile in Guyon's uncanny *Descensus*.

Indeed, Spenser contributes the language of "guile" to the *Descensus* debates. Spenser's is a creative theological recuperation of medieval terms, mining both the Gospel of Nicodemus and *Piers Plowman* for insight into the meaning of Christ's *Descensus* as well as its effect on human virtue. Although it can be traced back to late antiquity, the Gospel of Nicodemus rose to new prominence in the late Middle Ages, after "the emergence of the sentiment and the literature of affective piety, the effects of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 on the provision of popular, instructional writing, and finally changes in the doctrine of the Redemption, a subject with which the *Gospel* is intimately bound up."<sup>18</sup> Middle English translations and adaptations of the Latin Gospel of Nicodemus were particularly influential to the development of lay devotional materials and inextricable from what was, for many of Spenser's contemporaries, the most celebrated poetic achievement of the English Middle Ages: *Piers Plowman*, in which

Langland, against the reigning “workes of darckenes,” strove to “most christianlie enstructe the weake, and sharplye rebuke the obstynate blynde.”<sup>19</sup> For the poet Spenser, then, the Gospel of Nicodemus and William Langland serve as theological “authorities” like Jean Calvin or Robert Bellarmine (1542–1621)—perhaps more so, for the medieval works enable Spenser to approach the issue in subtle and dynamic terms that became increasingly foreign in English debates over the meaning of Christ’s *Descensus* at the end of the sixteenth century.<sup>20</sup>

Indeed, Spenser avoids routine confessional sources, evading the usual suspects in an increasingly polarized (and polarizing) Elizabethan debate. Instead, he turns to medieval sources in an effort to reclaim the flexibility and focus of native English poetry and to reshape the terms of the *Descensus* debate with an eye to “guile,” its import to human life, and the quotidian meaning of Christ’s humiliation. Guyon “Microchristus” is humbled, but his humiliation is grounded as much in his virtue as in his deviance; Guyon is temperate—Guyon is Temperance!—but Guyon also participates in a worldly economy of guile that complicates virtue and its agencies. Mapping the *Descensus* onto Guyon’s sojourn through Mammon’s Cave, Spenser does not address the controversy in familiar terms. He does not sound like a Catholic or a Protestant, circa 1590. Rather, Spenser develops his own Reformation idiom in conversation with key works from a medieval English archive, against the increasingly rigid confessional approaches threatening English consensus. Renewed attention to the Cave of Mammon episode with an eye to contemporary theological disputes challenges us to revise reigning assumptions about Spenser’s Protestantism as well as Protestant genres and traditions.<sup>21</sup> It duly licenses readers of historical literature to see poetry as a creative theological endeavor, probing controversies and testing orthodoxies in terms that are as productive as they are derivative of an emerging Reformation “tradition.”

I begin by tracing the *Descensus* across the English Reformation, as Christ’s descent into hell emerged as a controversial article of faith, debated by diverse Protestants and Catholics throughout Spenser’s life. In turn, I locate Spenser’s among the other interpretations of Christ’s descent into hell. But Spenser does not merely fold the Christic episode into Book II; his is a subtle commentary on the *Descensus* itself, investigating the article as well as the scope and tenor of Elizabethan debates concerning the *Descensus* as they came to a head in the 1590s. And, I argue, Spenser’s approach to the issue is decidedly different from all of his contemporaries, not only insofar as he relocates Christ’s *Descensus* in the Cave of Mammon but also in his

remarkable strategy, returning to earlier idioms to examine the limits of human agency in late medieval languages. The Cave of Mammon episode demonstrates how Spenser works, theologically—that is, in constructive, conceptual terms. Spenser retrieves medieval sources in order to inform and correct what was fast emerging as English orthodoxy; his is not a nostalgic revision of English Protestantism but, rather, an attempt to use medieval materials to reframe debates gone awry.



Fig. 2. German School, *The Harrowing of Hell*, c. 1600. Oil on panel, 78 1/4 x 52 1/4 inches (198.8 x 132.7 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, NC, USA. Museum purchase, 2000.12.1.

## THE DESCENSUS IN ENGLISH DEBATES

In a sermon preached before King Edward VI on 19 April 1549, Hugh Latimer (1487–1555) reeled over contemporary challenges to the traditional view of the *Descensus Christi ad inferos*: “Here is much ado! These new upstarting spirits say, ‘Christ never descended into hell, neither in body nor soul.’”<sup>22</sup> Against such cavils, Latimer affirms that Christ did descend to hell, *locally*—that is, his soul truly and physically descended to the place (*locus*), hell, to redeem and liberate the righteous who died on earth before his death on the cross. In many ways, for many believers, this traditional view endured the Reformation. Defenses of the late medieval *Descensus* are hardly rare across the sixteenth century. The Jesuit Cardinal Robert Bellarmine, for instance, emphasized the traditional interpretation of the *Descensus* in his *Disputationes De Controversiis Christianae Adversus Huius Temporis Haereticos* (1581–1593), the most exhaustive Jesuit confutation of Protestant positions. For Bellarmine, as for many late sixteenth-century Catholics, attacks on the traditional *Descensus* demonstrated the utter depravity of myriad Protestant positions. In response, Catholics emphasized the Christ’s local victory over Hell; this is the case, for instance, in the anonymous German altar painting *The Harrowing of Hell* (c. 1600) [fig. 2] in which a muscular *Christus triumphans* in mid-“Harrow” serves as the focal point in an elaborate pictorial defense of Tridentine Catholicism. Having broken the infernal gates, Christ stands poised in the foreground to lead the righteous from the *limbus patrum*; meanwhile, in the background, a priest celebrating the Mass raises the *hostia* above his head at the very moment when the substance of the bread is transubstantiated into the Body of Christ. The two doctrines are related by way of Christ’s triumph but also because both came under increased scrutiny across the Reformation.

But Tridentine Catholics were hardly the only defenders of the local *Descensus*. Elsewhere, traditional versions of the *Descensus* persisted, either exclusively or alongside other interpretations, by way of compromise. The Lutheran Formula of Concord (1580), for instance, allowed believers to adhere to the traditional *Descensus*, part of a larger effort to maintain unity and avoid unnecessary disagreement over the article. Similar defenses emerged in England, in English. In his *Catechism*, for instance, the Reformer Thomas Becon (1512/3–1567) outlined and endorsed the traditional orthodox interpretation of the *Descensus*, citing the chief Scriptural

*loci* before describing all of the elements of the “Harrowing of Hell”: the local descent, the battle with the devil, the destruction of the gates of hell, and how Christ “vanquished the infernal army, and utterly delivered us from everlasting damnation.”<sup>23</sup> Both Becon and Latimer affirm the traditional interpretation as they establish doctrine proper to a nascent Church of England. Latimer, moreover, even seems to entertain Reformed approaches to the *Descensus* that emphasize Christ’s extraordinary suffering while insisting nevertheless that the descent was local: “I perceive not what evil can come of it, in saying, that our Saviour Christ did not only in soul descend to hell, but also that he suffered in hell such pains as the damned spirits did suffer there.”<sup>24</sup> In this sense, Latimer’s 1549 interpretation—a local descent wherein Christ also suffers the pains of hell—is, like the later Lutheran Formula of Concord, an attempt to compromise. Latimer is reticent to fill out the details of the *Descensus*, in the interest of uniformity—“whether he suffered or wrestled with the spirits, or comforted Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, I will not desire to know,” and “If ye like not that which I have spoken of his suffering, let it go, I will not strive in it.”<sup>25</sup> But he ultimately asserts, without question, that Christ descended to hell locally, the benefit of which is our salvation.

But by the early 1550s, the orthodox position had become increasingly difficult to define, to say nothing of defend. English Reformers argued over degrees of specificity; some were content to leave the matter open and relatively ambiguous, asserting only that Christ “descended into hell,” while others thought the article of faith warranted further explanation. William Alley (1510/11–1570), then bishop of Exeter, attempted to address such divisions in an address prepared for the 1553 Convocation.<sup>26</sup> He testifies to the fact that, even by 1553, the doctrine had become controversial among diverse English preachers:

There have been in my diocese great invectives between the preachers, one against the other, and also partakers with them; some holding, that the going down of Christ his soul to hell was nothing else but the virtue and strength of Christ his death, to be made manifest and known to them that were dead before. Others say, that *descendit ad inferna*, is nothing else but that Christ did sustain upon the cross the infernal pains of hell, when he called, *Pater, quare me dereliquisti?* i.e. *Father, why hast thou forsaken me?* Finally, others preach, that this article is not contained in other symbols, neither in the symbol of Cyprian, or rather Rufine. And all these sayings they ground upon

Erasmus and the Germans, and especially the authority of Mr. Calvin and Mr. Bullinger. The contrary side bring for them the universal consent, and all the fathers of both churches, both of the Greeks and the Latins . . . which all, both Latins and Grecians, do plainly affirm, *quod anima Christi fuit vere per se in inferno*, i.e. that the soul of Christ was truly itself in hell; which they all with one universal consent have assertively written from time to time, by the space of 1100 years, not one of them varying from another.<sup>27</sup>

Alley's is an apposite summary of the debate over the meaning of the *Descensus*; he treats the *Descensus* in more detail in his massive work *The Poor Mans Librarie*, affirming "truly that the soule descended into hel, [as] the Apostolicke doctrine doth declare."<sup>28</sup> He focuses first on the diversity of opinions that recalls his earlier address to the synod: "Some do take *infernus* . . . for the grave; some for the state of the dead, some for horrible sorrow in mynd, some for hel it selfe," Alley claims, "So that this proverbe may be verified: *Quot capita, tot sensus*, how many heads, so many wittes" (II.71<sup>r</sup>). But the doctrine is not easily dismissed as "neither this article, nor any other conteyned in the symbole, commonly called *Symbolum Apostolorum*, should be lightye shaken of, but to be beleved as they stande there" (II.77<sup>r</sup>). In the end, Alley settles for an interpretation that is both conspicuous as ambiguous: "As for my part, I am fullye resolved, that this article is true: He descended into hell" (II.77<sup>r</sup>).

The meaning of the *Descensus* is equally ambiguous in the Thirty-Nine Articles. The clergy of the Church of England convened in 1562 to compose and consolidate the fundamental articles of faith and, in turn, the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion were ratified in 1571. Here, in Article III ("Of the going down of Christ into Hell"), we learn only that "As Christ died for us, and was buried, so also it to be believed that He went down into Hell"—an equivocal summary.<sup>29</sup> Thus there is no direct reference, in the ratified version of Article III, to any instance of *local* descent in Scripture. While there is an explicit nod to the local *Descensus* in the Easter Eve Epistle in the 1559 *Book of Common Prayer*, and the *Descensus* clause appears in the Apostles' Creed in the *Catechismus Parvus* printed by John Day in 1573, these retain the ambiguity of the Article.<sup>30</sup> Even Alexander Nowell's 1570 *Catechism*, translated by Thomas Norton, is ambiguous—claiming that Christ "in his soul severed from the body . . . descended into hell," but emphasizing how it is "the virtue and efficacy of his death" that brings hell to ruin, pain to the damned, and comfort for the faithful.<sup>31</sup> "Virtue" and "efficacy" serve as

key ambiguous words, tempering the local, literal interpretation, allowing for a broader figurative approach to the article. And there is no mention of any battle between Christ and the devils in these sources, no martial “harrowing” of hell. Even those orthodox sources that retain some nominal belief in the local *Descensus* are stripped of the spectacular elements of the medieval depictions. Moreover, in editing Cranmer’s initial version, the bishops left another matter ambiguous—namely, whether or not Christ’s descent resulted in the immediate liberation of the souls imprisoned in hell until his coming.<sup>32</sup> Thus, as the orthodox claims about the details of the event remained ambiguous, arguments over the scope and meaning of the *Descensus* persisted.

Following the establishment of the English College at Douai in 1561, and the increasing presence of Tridentine preaching and polemic, the *Descensus* became a doubly divisive issue, pitting English Protestants against Tridentine Catholics, particularly Jesuits, as well as one another. Diverse English divines understood the stakes for uniformity to be increasingly high. In a 1590 letter, for instance, clergyman Adam Hill (1548–1595) admonishes his Presbyterian opponent Alexander Hume on the grounds that “the Papists shall see your deceitfull handling of Gods word, [and] they will rejoice at it”; moreover, “you write against an opinion embraced in the Church of England always, and confirmed by our learned synod, and convocation in the Parliament.”<sup>33</sup> Yet interpretations of the *Descensus* proliferated. In *A Booke of Notes and Common Places* (1581), for instance, John Marbeck (1505–1585) lists several competing approaches to the *Descensus*, including the notion that “these words: *Christus descendit ad inferna*, is no distinct nor severall article of our Crede, but rather an exposition of the former clause, *et sepultus est*, he was buried.”<sup>34</sup> In other words, the descent into hell is synonymous with Christ’s burial, another way of expressing the internment of his dead body. Christopher Carlile (d.1588) endorses a similar position in his *Discourse, Concerning Two Divine Positions* (1582). Carlile publicly disputed the veracity of Christ’s local descent into hell relatively early, at a commencement exercise in Cambridge in 1552, arguing against both the Marian exile and Professor of Greek Sir John Cheke (1514–1557) and the divine Andrew Perne (1519–1589).<sup>35</sup> Carlile summarized the proceedings, recounting how he defended his skeptical opinion—Christ did not descend locally to hell but rather to the grave—and how Cheke eventually conceded that the resurrected Christ relieved the sorrow of “death,” not “hell” (\*vr). But Carlile’s 1582 work is also an exhaustive refutation of the Tridentine Catholic Richard Smyth’s

(1499/1500–1563) tract, published in Leuven in 1562—the *Refutatio luculenta crassae et exitiosae haeresis Johannis Calvini et Christop. Carlili Angli, qua astruunt Christum non descendisse ad inferos alios, quam ad infernum infirmum* [A Splendid Refutation of the Heresies of the Gross and Pernicious John Calvin and the Englishman Christopher Carlile, Who Allege that Christ Did Not Descend to Any Hell Other Than the Hell of Infirmit].<sup>36</sup> Carlile responded with a fictive dialogue (possibly composed of translations from Smyth's *Refutatio*) between Smyth and himself, where Carlile systematically refutes the veracity of traditional interpretations of the *Descensus ad inferos*. Smyth avers, "I have againste you long custome," to which Carlile replies, "Custome without Scripture is cause of error. . . . And where you alledge diverse Credes, to them I will answere, when you advouche them, I require Scripture" (1<sup>v</sup>–2<sup>r</sup>). Carlile first demonstrates, against Smyth, that the "soules of the faithfull before Christ went immediately to heaven," dismissing traditional accounts of the *limbus patrum*, of those blessed dead awaiting salvation in Christ in regions below (*inferos*). For Carlile, there is no such place, nor does Christ need to descend to save the blessed because they are already in heaven. Carlile devotes much of his work, across both dialogues, to confuting traditional accounts of the *limbus patrum* as well as of the *Descensus*. Put simply, he argues that there can be no *limbus patrum* because no faithful men, worthy of salvation, were ever punished in hell. They never even went there. Thus Christ's triumphant local descent would have been superfluous because the faithful never resided in hell: "Christ fetched out of hell neither the obedient nor disobedient" (69<sup>v</sup>). Gone is the glorious account of Christ's descent, the vestiges of which can even be found in Luther's 1532 Torgau Sermon. And Carlile follows this dismissal of the *limbus patrum*, in the second dialogue, with a thorough demonstration proving that "Christ descended not into hel nether in body, nor in soule" (27<sup>r</sup>). Carlile resists positing any interpretation of the article, dispatching the *Descensus* entirely.

Carlile recalls numerous specious *Descensus* stories—one, the 1382 *Belial* of Jacobus Palladinus de Theramo [Jacopo Palladini] (1349–1417), he calls "A mery fable"—and ridicules the notions that Christ entered the underworld and encountered demons who, in turn, accused him of "spoyling hell" (34<sup>v</sup>–35<sup>r</sup>, 36<sup>v</sup>).<sup>37</sup> Meanwhile, Carlile's fictive Smyth struggles to enumerate and organize the regions of hell (in a manner similar to Dante or, later, Bellarmine), twisting together Scholastic and Classical treatments in what seems an increasingly desperate attempt to justify an unjustifiable doctrine.<sup>38</sup> Carlile, in contrast, marshals ample evidence from the Fathers,

the primitive church, and medieval authors (particularly Reginald Pecock (c.1392–c.1459)). He also exploits humanist textual and linguistic strategies, assessing competing translations of Scripture against the original languages and even recalling Erasmus' *Explanatio Symboli Apostolorum* (1533), claiming that the very phrase *descendit ad inferos* was appended to the Creed surreptitiously—not by any “artificer, but some cobbler, or patcher, that placed it soo preposterously, that patched it soo undecently, that set it so disorderly, & in suche a place as it nether agreed with the sentence before nor after” (87<sup>r</sup>–87<sup>v</sup>). Carlile's account is much closer to Bucer's or Beza's than to Luther's or Calvin's. Christ did not descend into hell but, rather, into a grave. This is the true translation of *inferos*, clear and demonstrable from Scripture; it was only “Afterward [that] certain doctors ignorant in the Hebrue tongue, and phantasying the fables of Plato & of Latyne poets turned [the Hebrew word *Sheol* into] *Hades*, *infernum* or *inferos* or *orcum*, and the Englishe, hell. Whereof arose this pernicious heresy of Christes descending into hell” (140<sup>r</sup>).

Remarkably, Carlile affirms that he is able to prove this not only from Scripture but from the ancient poets as well: Homer, Sophocles, Euripides, Virgil, Ovid, and others.<sup>39</sup> Corroborating ancient texts with Scriptural terms, Carlile demonstrates that inadequate translations of Scripture have given readers the wrong impression. *Sheol* is the Scriptural term for a grave, not hell.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, the term *Nephes* cannot simply be translated as “soul”; it is never the immortal soul but rather “consisteth in senses, moving, and in affections, and [is] proper to the body, and dyeth with the body.”<sup>41</sup> It is only in this sense that the “soul” of Christ descended into hell, that is, into the grave. The immortal soul of Christ never descended into hell. This would become the common terrain for virtually every English argument about the *Descensus* after Carlile: the correct interpretations of *sheol* and *nephes*. And here, Carlile's fictive interlocutor Smyth sits quietly for the last third of the work, taking in his lesson. The book ends with an emended Creed in rhyme, without any mention of the *Descensus* whatsoever.<sup>42</sup>

John Northbrooke (fl. 1567–1589), the preacher at St. Mary Redcliffe in Bristol, endorsed another view; he begins his *Spiritus est Vicarius Christi in Terra* (1571) with an extended meditation on the *Descensus*, a broadly figurative interpretation that denied any local descent for the sake of those imprisoned.<sup>43</sup> Any apparent reference to the *Descensus* in Scripture is in fact a record of Christ's true death and burial. Scripture simply requires a more informed and faithful audience. But Northbrooke, inspired by Calvin, fills out this interpretation by affirming that Christ “descended to

hell” in his human agony, where “all his sufferynge, that he suffered afterwarde in bodie and soule, for our synnes, was his goyng into hell” (E1<sup>v</sup>–E2<sup>r</sup>). Christ, facing the wrath of the Father and the punishment of sin, truly felt forsaken. And on this Northbrooke is clear, that “there can bee imagined, no more dreadfull bottomelesse depth, then for one to feele hymself forsaken and estraunged from God, and not to bee hearde when he calleth upon hym: even as if God hymself had conspired his destruction” (E1<sup>v</sup>–E2<sup>r</sup>). Here Northbrooke quotes Calvin’s interpretation of Christ’s *Descensus* verbatim from the 1559 *Institutio Christianae Religionis*, in which Christ himself felt how all human beings deserved to feel, under the law: “as if God himself had plotted your ruin,” or conspired against you [*conspirasset*].<sup>44</sup> Northbrooke’s is perhaps the most thorough endorsement of Calvin’s position on the *Descensus* across the English debates—even more so than that of William Perkins (1558–1602). Faithful to Calvin’s exegesis, he emphasizes the affective component of the *Descensus*, drawing attention to Christ’s alienation from God, approaching despair, suffered on the cross—that is, Christ’s quotation of Psalm 22: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me” (Matthew 27:46).<sup>45</sup>

Northbrooke’s interpretation of the *Descensus* is the chief topic in *Spiritus est Vicarius Christi in Terra*.<sup>46</sup> This emphasis on the *Descensus* is not unique. Bellarmine himself was so preoccupied with the issue that it ranks among the first, most urgent heresies addressed in *De Controversiis*. But Northbrooke and Bellarmine are distinct insofar as they both articulate their positions clearly and abhor the ambiguities that mark most of the English debates—precisely the sorts of ambiguities and subtleties that one finds in William Whitaker’s (1547/8–1595) refutation of Bellarmine and Thomas Stapleton (1535–1598) in his *Disputatio de Sacra Scriptura Contra Huius Temporis Papistas* (1588). Whitaker emphasizes how difficult it is to prove the *Descensus*, demonstrating how even Tridentine theologians are unsure whether or not one can gather proof of the *Descensus* from Scripture [*posse omnino ex Scripturis colligi*]; although Bellarmine claims to be able to do so, it is with some difficulty [*Bellarminus dicit posse, sed difficulter*].<sup>47</sup> The interpretive morass is clear to Whitaker, who claims derisively, “there are nearly infinite opinions concerning the reasons for the descent” [*Praeterea, infinitae pene opiniones sunt, de causis descensus*].<sup>48</sup> He is reluctant to affirm anything about the *Descensus* from Scripture or Christian antiquity. He approves Augustine’s tentative admission that the Father “had not yet discovered what advantage Christ’s descent conferred upon the just men of old time” and cautiously concludes: “It is not . . . necessary that we should

believe that Christ descended in this way [that is, *locally*] into hell; nor can Christ's descent into hell in this sense be proved either with ease or with difficulty from scripture."<sup>49</sup> Whitaker, *contra* controversialists such as Bellarmine and Northbrooke, traffics in ambiguities.

Gregory Martin (1542–1582), the English Catholic who translated the Vulgate into English between 1578 and 1580 at Douai, offered an insightful analysis of the English debates insofar as he divided his opponents into two camps, "puritan Calvinists" and "grosser Calvinists," according to their degree of precision with respect to the *Descensus*.<sup>50</sup> The "puritan Calvinists" articulated their position clearly, however heretical their opinions, however faulty their translations of Scripture—for instance, Northbrooke or Carlile. Those "grosser Calvinists," on the other hand, advocated ambiguous formulations of the doctrine, reluctant to articulate their interpretations clearly or to see them realized in doctrine. Martin accused William Fulke (1536/7–1589), Whitaker, and divines stretching back to Latimer of "grosser Calvinism" insofar as they detested the traditional interpretations of the *Descensus* but nevertheless seemed to accept ambiguous orthodox statements. Puritans such as Northbrooke bristled at the ambiguities of the Thirty-Nine Articles, the *Book of Common Prayer*, and related documents. And William Fulke, in response to Martin, was more than willing to reprimand Latimer: "Master Latimer's error of Christ suffering torments in hell, after his death, is justly reprehended."<sup>51</sup> Fulke's admonition of Latimer shows how far the debate had come in just over thirty years.

#### THE 1590S

Arguments over the meaning of the *Descensus* became increasingly bitter and personal among English Protestants toward the end of the 1580s and into the 1590s. For instance, the clergyman Adam Hill (1548–1595) published *The Defence of the Article: Christ Descended into Hell* in 1592—an attempt to restore doctrinal unity to the "many sectes in our Church as we now have, to the great dishonor of God, the joye of our endlesse adversaries the Papists, and the bitter greefe of all the good Ministers of this Land."<sup>52</sup> Hill almost immediately admonishes the likes of Carlile and Northbrooke for denying a literal, local *Descensus*; once again, the argument turns on the correct translation and interpretation of *sheol* and *nephes*.<sup>53</sup> But Hill

attacks the Scottish grammarian Alexander Hume directly, recounting an earlier sermon of Hume's in detail before reproaching him for its content. Hume answered him directly in *A Rejoynder to Doctor Hil Concerning the Descense of Christ into Hell* (1593/4), noting that the Hebrew and Greek terms for "hell" "doth signify the torments of the soule"; Hume does not deny Christ's "*triumphing over hell*" but emphasizes how "I have oftentimes read the name of hell joined with shame and ignominy, but to this day I never heard it joined with triumph and glory."<sup>54</sup> He thus pries Christ's triumph apart from his humiliating *Descensus*. He affirms his belief in the article "Christ descended into hell" but proceeds to show how "The Hebrew word *Sheol*, which the Greekes call *hades*, the *latines infernus*, and wee *hell*" could also mean "the grave, or common condition of all the dead"; "the place of torments, appointed for the punishment of the wicked"; or "the torments of hel, which by a Metonymicall hyperbole for amplifications sake, is manie times attributed to the sorrowes of this life."<sup>55</sup> In other words, Scripture can support two interpretations—that either Christ suffered immensely, this being his descent, or that he descended to the grave. What Scripture cannot support is the traditional version of the local *Descensus* championed by Hill.<sup>56</sup>

It was William Perkins, however, who produced the most influential English interpretation of the 1590s, in *An Exposition of the Symbole or Creed of the Apostles* (1595). Christ's extraordinary humiliation "is the condition of Christ the Mediatour," and it is only in this sense that one can understand the Passion accordingly, as a suffering that is unique to Christ and which "differs from all other sufferings of men whatsoever."<sup>57</sup> Christ was humiliated before Pilate, an inferior earthly prince, and executed. It is in this capacity that "Christ in his owne person accomplished the worke of redemption, and made a full and perfect satisfaction for us, as these words import, It is *finished*" (247). Moreover, Perkins insists that Christ truly feared death, and "did in soule apprehend the wrath of God due to man for sinne . . . [which] made him cry, *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*" And Christ did not merely suffer an ordinary corporeal death according to "the dissolution of nature" (254); this alone would not have warranted such a derelict cry from the cross. But Perkins is reluctant to claim that Christ truly suffered "the second death" of reprobation, that he was "wholly and everie way to be severed from all favour of God, and at the least for a time to be oppressed of the same death as the damned are" (254). Perkins is adamant that "this never befell Christ" but nevertheless claims he suffered it "in his owne apprehension or feeling":

Christ died the first death in that his bodie and soule were really and wholly severed, yet without suffering any corruption in his bodie, which is the effect and fruite of the same: and that withall he further suffered the extreame horrours and pangs of the second death, not dying the same death nor being forsaken of god, more then in his owne apprehension or feeling. For in the verie midst of his sufferings the father was well pleased with him. And this which I say doeth not any whit lessen the sufficiencie of the merite of Christ: for whereas hee suffered truly the verie wrath of God, and the verie torments of the damned in his soule, it is as much as if all the men in the world had died the second death, and had bin wholly cut off from God for ever and ever. (254)

Christ neither fears “first death” (“the dissolution of nature”) nor suffers this natural “first death” in the same way as other human beings. But what Christ does suffer approaches despair. Even if it is not despair itself, even if “in the verie midst of his sufferings the father was well pleased with him,” Christ *feels* forsaken. Perkins introduces a Calvinist distinction between true despair and the *mere feeling* of despair, explaining this distinction by pointing, however subtly, to the Trinitarian dimensions of this problem. The Son feels forsaken even though the Father never forsakes him. The difference between Persons in the Trinity is crucial. But the phenomenological problem persists: the conceptual difference between real despair and the feeling of despair is enormous, but the gap closes once one considers how despair is still experienced in “apprehension or feeling.”

But all of this occurs under the heading of the Passion and not the *Descensus*. Once he arrives at the *Descensus* proper, Perkins promptly and rigorously dispatches the local interpretation as well as the idea that “He descended into hell” is another manner of expressing Christ’s burial.<sup>58</sup> Moreover, he flirts with Calvin’s interpretation, approving the gist of this approach, recognizing its “warrant in Gods worde”—but even this interpretation is not conclusive, as the words *He suffered, died, and was buried* already refer to Christ’s agony, humiliation, and crucifixion; the *Descensus* clause which follows must refer to something other than Christ’s agony, lest the articles of the Creed become redundant. And thus Perkins affirms that *descendit ad inferna* registers the three days between Christ’s death and the Resurrection, “when he was dead and buried, he was held captive in the grave, and lay in bondage under death for the space of three daies” (302). The *Descensus* thus expresses how Christ was held captive by death, the

real nadir of his humiliation even beyond his extraordinary suffering. With its meaning in the Creed clear, Perkins proceeds to discover the effective meaning of the *Descensus* for humanity, the degree to which it serves our comfort: “For the sonne of God himselfe descended into hell, and death carried him captive, and triumphed over him in the grave, and therefore though God seeme to be our utter enemie, yet we must not despaire of his helpe” (303–304).

Perkins’s interpretation is inventive and, in the succeeding decades, features prominently in Puritan exegesis. Debates among English clergymen certainly continued into the seventeenth century—notably, in tracts by Henry Jacob (1562/3–1624), Thomas Bilson (1546/7–1616), Hugh Broughton (1549–1612), Richard Parkes (b. 1558/9), and Andrew Willet (1561/2–1621). Jacob affirms, in no uncertain terms, “That Christ suffered for us the wrath of God: which we may well terme *the paines of Hell, or Hellish sorrowes,*” but did not descend “properly” to hell in any literal way.<sup>59</sup> Jacob even commandeers the Thirty-Nine Articles, claiming that, upon careful consideration, Article III is actually a witness *against* Christ’s local, “proper” descent.<sup>60</sup> In turn, Bilson, then bishop of Winchester, counters Jacob’s treatise with a work of his own, arguing that “there are manie terrors and torments, which, without evident impietie, cannot be ascribed to the Sonne of God, as namely extreame Darknesse, Desperation, Confusion, utter separation, rejection and exclusion from the grace, favour, and kingdome of God.”<sup>61</sup> Parkes follows suit, affirming the Scriptural and Patristic authority for the local *Descensus*—an “Article of our Creede . . . universally received in the Church of God without contradiction”—and laments the fact that “Neither was there ever any question made thereof, untill this our last and worst age, wherein heresie and infidelity joyning their desperate forces together, labour mightily to subvert and overthrow al the grounds of Christian Religion.”<sup>62</sup>

#### ENTER SPENSER

Spenser’s own approach to the *Descensus* is a departure from the idioms of “this our last and worst age.” Like that of Perkins, his is an innovative interpretation, but Spenser relies far less on Scripture and preceding Reformation developments than on late medieval materials. His retrieval

of these materials, however, is neither reparative nor nostalgic; Spenser proceeds, rather, to remember foregone interpretations, to map the vicissitudes of orthodoxy, revisiting English medieval works in an effort to shift the terms of the contemporary discussion, not to affirm any traditional interpretation. As the English debates become increasingly rarified, for instance, we find fewer and fewer references to the primary medieval source on the *Descensus*: the popular apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus, a work still known in the sixteenth century, in print and manuscript. The work was certainly available. Spenser's contemporary, Thomas Earl—a minister of St. Mildred's, Breadstreet, in London—owned a manuscript copy which he apparently detested, as his comments in the margins reveal: "Behold goodlii christian Reader this nychodemus, no nychodemus; this ghospell, no ghospell; this unwritten verytii, no verytii / But a veritable lye, a lucyflerian fable, old wyves tale and detestable lye, unsavery salt for the downg hill, and to be tred on under fotte of men."<sup>63</sup> Print editions of the English Nicodemus appeared well into Henry VIII's reign—for example, versions published by Julian Notary (1507), Wynkyn de Worde (1509, 1511, 1512, 1518, and 1532), and John Scot (1529 and 1537)—and bore indelible influence on the religious drama that persisted well past the Reformation; moreover, poetic versions of Nicodemus survive in multiple manuscripts.<sup>64</sup> We encounter a descending *Christus triumphans* in the Middle English Gospel of Nicodemus in verse, where the divine voice (quoting Psalm 24) bids Satan "opin wide/ 3owre endles 3ates here,/ De king of blis now in sall glide."<sup>65</sup> Here Christ besieges Hell, to the surprise of Satan and his fellow denizens. The fiends hear the divine voice and behold a great light before they ask the intruder, confused,

what ertou schewes slike might  
and es so mekill in dedes  
and semes so litell in sight?  
sen Pou was man, on what manere  
was godhede in De hid?  
was Pou night ded? what dose Pou here?<sup>66</sup>

Theirs is a considerable confusion, unable to comprehend how Christ can be both human and divine, ignorant as to how a dead man can wield such power in their realm. And Satan and company are equally perplexed by Christ's ability to free the righteous from their unearthly prison; this seems, at first, like a violation of the ancient compact (established in Genesis 3:15)

subjecting sinful man to death and judgment under the law, and granting Satan sovereignty over the dead—where, as Paul claims in his Letter to the Romans, “the wages of sinne is death” (6:23). As Christ descends into hell and breaks open the gates barring in the blessed dead, the devils complain that “Pe sawles þat vs war sent/ has þou won heþin oway,/ þou has vs schamly schent/ And priued vs of oure pray.”<sup>67</sup> Christ is accused of trickery, of treating the devils unfairly. He has allegedly deprived them of their prey by guile, having “schamly schent” (that is, shamefully “wronged,” “harmed,” “disgraced,” “confounded,” or “ruined”) the legions of hell.<sup>68</sup> This is clear in the Towneley Harrowing of Hell play, where Sathanas accuses Christ of attempting to break or “legge the laws” down, quoting Job 7:9 which stipulates that “Who that ones commys hell within,/ He shall beuer owte, os clerkys knawes.”<sup>69</sup> And this is also the case in the York Harrowing of Hell play, where Sattan declares “All erthely men to me are thrall” to his fellow devils guarding the gates, and paraphrases Job 7:9 to Jesus, claiming “nowthir frende nor foo/ Shulde fynde reles in helle.”<sup>70</sup> Satan believes he has rights over the dead guaranteed by Scripture and that Christ’s is an attempt to violate those rights.

Virtually none of the aforementioned English Reformation debates mention this “Devils’ Rights” argument, its late antique or early medieval sources (from Origen to Anselm of Canterbury) or its spectacular late medieval redactions, all of which were so crucial to the traditional depictions of the *Descensus*, if not to exegeses of the event.<sup>71</sup> Even sixteenth-century advocates of the traditional approach—those that affirm Christ’s local descent and those that maintain degrees of ambiguity, allowing for such literal interpretations—eschew this perspective (the devils’) entirely. From Carlele to Calvin to Perkins, opponents of the traditional approach actively dismiss such “fables” as superstitious and misleading; the traditional idea that Christ descended really and locally to hell seems “nothing but a story [*fabula*]” as it “is childish [*puerile*] to enclose the souls of the dead in a prison.”<sup>72</sup> And by the 1570s the Gospel of Nicodemus is almost universally rejected or ignored; even Bellarmine avoids it in his treatment of the *Descensus*, opting for more canonical sources.<sup>73</sup> Spenser, however, embraces the fabulous and embeds his *Descensus* in a markedly fictitious milieu. Mammon (“wealth” personified, whose very name is “riches” in Hebrew and Aramaic) assumes jurisdiction over inhabitants of the Cave, as do the devils in hell in Nicodemus.<sup>74</sup> Mammon sets some tentative terms as early as Stanza 18, in a striking conditional phrase: “If then thee list my offred grace to vse, / Take what thou please of all this surplusage; / If thee list not, leaue haue thou to

refuse: / But thing refused, doe not afterward accuse" (II.vii.18.6–9). But Guyon defies Mammon on both accounts: he refuses *and* accuses, indicting Mammon for robbery. Spenser's Proudhon-before-Proudhon, Guyon recognizes that Mammon's hoard is a product of theft, his wealth taken "From rightfull owner by vnrighteous lott,/ Or that bloodguiltnesse or guile them blott" (II.vii.19.3–5).<sup>75</sup> "Guile" emerges as a key term here, as Guyon assesses Mammon's riches: "First got with guile, and then preseru'd with dread" (II.vii.12.3). Together with violence, guile stands as the source of Mammon's wealth, a wealth that is no less real for its "unrighteous" origins. Mammon exercises sovereignty in his Cave and, Spenser suggests, over the riches of the world, even if guile lies at the source.

As Guyon enters the Cave in Stanza 26 he is pursued by "An vgly feend, more fowle then dismall day" (II.vii.26.7)—a monstrous figure that stalks silently behind him, waiting for Guyon succumb to temptation:

Well hoped hee, ere long that hardy guest,  
 If euer couetous hand, or lustfull eye,  
 Or lips he layd on thing, that likte him best,  
 Or euer sleepe his eiestrings did vntye,  
 Should be his pray. And therefore still on hye  
 He ouer him did hold his cruell clawes,  
 Threatning with greedy gripe to doe him dye  
 And rend in peeces with his rauenous pawes,  
 If euer he transgrest that fatall *Stygian* lawes. (II.vii.27.1–9)

Spenser's signal repetition of "pray" [*prey*] here and in Stanzas 34 and 64 suggests that the "fatall" laws of the Cave serve as a snare—which is, not incidentally, the devils' perspective on the Law in the Middle English Gospel of Nicodemus, under which even the blessed dead are their "pray." But Spenser pushes this further, investigating the degree to which Guyon can be subject to these "*Stygian* lawes," especially since he believes that they are ostensibly founded on "bloddguiltnesse or guile." Given the terms of the poem, the force and authority of the "*Stygian* lawes" are vague, just as it is difficult to tell whether or not Guyon could have (or should have) refused to enter the Cave—as difficult and distracting as it is to ponder whether or not Christ might have refused his Passion.

For Spenser, whether or not Guyon could have (or should have) avoided the Cave is the wrong question in the wrong tense, particularly in a world governed by Mammon and marked indelibly with and by wealth. Refusing

Mammon's invitation is as impossible as avoiding the trappings of royalty once one is summoned to court or quitting one's job after taking on a high-interest loan to offset the burden of consumer debt—the kinds of impossible approaches to wealth that Spenser's generation assigned, however rashly, to nostalgic Franciscans and unreasonable Anabaptists. The fantasy, for the reader inclined to Guyon, is that Guyon might have abstracted himself from the wealth of the world and denied Mammon's invitation (just as the disenchanted courtier might fantasize about denying the Queen's invitation, or the worker, overwhelmed by debt, might still long to quit his job). But Mammon's agencies are more complicated than that, as is Guyon's entry into the Cave. It is not a simple matter of choice. Guyon's entry affirms a striking continuity between the Cave and the wealth of the world in general.

Richard Mallette offers keen insight into the ambiguity of the episode, where “We are not told his motivation for following Mammon, an act that is neither condemned nor commended by the poet.”<sup>76</sup> Indeed, Guyon only really consents to the extent that he “with wonder all the way/ Did feed his eyes, and fild his inner thought” (II.vii.24.3–4)—in other words, insofar as he experiences the world of the Cave, a subterranean world of riches, the allegorical expression of human lucre itself. After all, Jesus himself exhorts us to “Make you friends with the riches of iniquitie” (Luke 16:9)—that is, with Mammon; William Tyndale (1494–1536), in *The Parable of the Wycked Mammon* (1528), glosses this verse thus: “Christe prayseth not the unrighteous stuard . . . because of his unrighteousnes but because of his wisdom only in that he with unright so wisely providid for him selfe.”<sup>77</sup> Tyndale is clear—this Mammon, this “unrighteous stuarde” of the wealth of the world, is “an ensample unto us in hys wisdom and diligence only.”<sup>78</sup> But Tyndale duly recognizes Mammon's influence, his “wisdom and diligence,” similar to Spenser's “guile.” Mammon, like Satan, sin, and death, is a fact of the world, even the Faerie world, and Guyon cannot exactly refuse. At this point in the episode, Spenser foregrounds “guile” and its prominence in the worlds of Faerie and men alike. Here, in an allegory of the virtues, Spenser does not subject guile to morality, nor is it tied to any particular action or decision. Rather, we learn how uncomfortably close (and appropriate) “guile” is to “Guyon,” threatening to absorb the very name of the hero of Book II as another cognate in a political economy proper to Mammon.<sup>79</sup>

In some obvious ways, guile is aligned with the insidious forces of the poem. Where Duessa must “cloke her guile with sorrow and sad teene” (II.i.21.7), “guile” is a synonym for deceit or treachery.<sup>80</sup> But across Book

II, guile is also a way of being in the world, bound inextricably to fatigue and attention (similar to Error, particularly at the outset of Book I). Acrasia “beguiled” Sir Mordant, but her ability to do so is based on a vague condition: “For he was flesh” (II.i.52.5–6). And Spenser develops this striking definition of “guile” farther as the work progresses. Guyon retells the story of Amavia and Mordant and, “Whilost with delight of that he wisely spake, / Those gwestes beguyled, did beguyle their eyes / Of kindly sleepe, that did them ouertake” (II.ii.46.5–7). Guile takes a neutral color, as the agencies of the guests are complicated across the phrase by imprecise genitives. It is difficult to tell whether the guests are beguiled by sleep, thus overtaken by it, or beguiled *from* sleep, bereft of it, rapt in attention. Moreover, they may be beguiled of “kindly” sleep in particular, a restful slumber forestalled by delightful things “wisely spake.” And while Archimago is named “That conning Architect of cancred guyle” (II.i.1.1), and his initial plot is described as “a web of wicked guyle” (II.i.8.4)—in both cases, “guile” is qualified with an intensifying adjective.<sup>81</sup>

We find guile and fatigue collocated again in Canto viii, as Venus “Suffers her selfe through slepe beguild to bee” (II.viii.6.8), another complicated agency that rests on a Latin determination of “patience,” from *patior*: to suffer or endure, suspended between activity and passivity. Soon after, in Canto viii, the Palmer finds “his slow eies beguiled of their sight” (II.viii.9.2) once the guardian angel vanishes from Guyon’s side. The angel is certainly benevolent but nevertheless tests the Palmer’s capacity to perceive and understand the world. In like sense, Arthur worries that “some magicall/ Illusion . . . did beguile his sense” (II.xi.39.5–6) when he sees Maleger’s reanimated corpse rise in Canto xi. Guile is not necessarily evil but rather tied to attention and understanding, similar to Spenser’s use of the term “amazement” and its cognates. Guile is a fact of the flesh in the world, even the fabulous world of *The Faerie Queene*.

As such, both “guile” and “beguile” point to dimensions of experience, of attention, perception, and, indeed, temperance. But there is another key aspect of the term at stake in *The Faerie Queene*: the degree to which guile and the habits associated with it are circular, self-enclosed, and, in some cases, self-defeating. Guile poses difficult questions of agency. One can be beguiled by sleep, by narrative, by virtue of being “flesh,” but at the same time we encounter characters who suffer themselves “beguild to bee,” who are the agents of their own beguiling, even as passive agents. Guile points to a field of activity and passivity, one that complicates any easy assumptions about subjectivity, agency, or virtue in Book II. Nowhere is

this more apparent than in Canto vii, Stanza 64. Mammon offers Guyon a final temptation: food and rest to replenish his weary body:

All which he did, to doe him deadly fall,  
 In frayle intemperaunce through sinfull bayt,  
 To which if he inclyned had at all,  
 That dreadfull feend, which did behinde him wayt,  
 Would him haue rent in thousand peeces strayt:  
 But he was warie wise in all his way,  
 And well perceiued his deceitfull sleight,  
 Ne suffred lust his safetie to betray;  
 So goodly did beguile the Guyler of the pray.

This last phrase, common in depictions of the devil's undoing, has a conspicuous source. As Harold Weatherby notes in *Mirrors of Celestial Grace* (1994), this final line echoes the C-Text of *Piers Plowman*: "And gyle be bigyled thorw grace at Pe laste," in the "Harrowing of Hell" sequence in Passus XX.<sup>82</sup> Whether or not Spenser knew the C-Text, or at least sections of it, remains an open question.<sup>83</sup> But the B-Text was certainly available in several printed editions dating from 1550 and 1561.<sup>84</sup> In either case, *Piers Plowman*, particularly in its debts to the Middle English Gospel of Nicodemus, contains what is perhaps the most elaborate theological approach to Christ's descent into hell in medieval English poetry. When the devils accuse him of wresting control of hell by unlawful force, Langland's triumphant Christ answers this charge directly. Christ approaches hell as light and voice, calling *Attolite portas* (from Psalm 24:9), and an anxious Lucifer claims in response, in terms reminiscent of the Gospel of Nicodemus:

If he reue me of my ryght, he robbeth me bi mastrye  
 For by right and by reason, the renkes that ben here  
 Body and soule be mine, both good and euill  
 For him selfe saide, that syre is of heauen  
 If Adam eate the appel, all shoulde dye  
 And dwel wyth us deuels. (Cci')

Langland's Lucifer, like the devils of the dramatic accounts, claims to possess certain rights over the souls of the dead, rights accorded to him by the very word of God. If Christ is to deprive him of his quarry, it is not by

right but by “mastrye”—by force of strength. Passus XVIII of the B-Text of *Piers Plowman* incorporates all of the spectacular resources of the guild plays, including the frantic conversations among the besieged legions of hell. Diverging from the dramatic accounts, however, Langland’s devils themselves recognize the illegality of their claim and, by extension, the power of Christ. Lucifer may have possession over the souls of the dead, but his comrade Satan soon challenges this on the grounds that “thou gate hem with gyle,” that it was through “treason” and deception that men were goaded to sin, that “It is not graithlye gayten, there gyle is the rote” (Cci<sup>r</sup>). And a third interlocutor, Gobelyn, makes this all the more clear: “For God wil not be beguiled [quod] Gobelyn, ne iaped/ We haue no true title to hem, for bi treson were thei damned” (Cciv). The debate looks forward to Spenser’s Cave of Mammon in Canto vii, insofar as “guile” emerges as a key term, especially where Mammon’s hoard, acquired by “bloddguiltnesse or guile,” nevertheless holds a certain sway over events and perceptions in and beyond the world of Faerie.

As a basis for Guyon, Langland’s Christ neither exercises “mastrye” nor breaks the law of the Old Testament. Instead, he affirms that “the olde lawe graunteth,/ That gilers by begyled, and that is good reason,/ *Dentem pro dente, et oculum pro oculo*” (Ccii<sup>r</sup>). Thus he upholds the Old Law, given in Exodus 21:24—tooth for tooth, eye for eye, guile for guile; in the words of Mercy, “as throughe gyle, man was beguiled/ So shall grace that began, make a good sleyght./ *Ars ut artem falleret*” (Bbiii<sup>r</sup>). Mercy quotes directly from the hymn *Pange lingua*, sung between Sunday and Good Friday during Holy Week, celebrating Christ’s apparent “beguiling,” by art, the art of the destroyer who takes on many forms [*multiformis perditoris/ arte ut artem falleret*].<sup>85</sup> Langland is careful to assign the Latin *ars* to Christ and not, strictly speaking, “guile.” In *Piers Plowman*, Christ’s is not deception in any sinful or wicked sense but, rather, an apposite art or strategy. Christ participates in guile but the guile is not “his”—a crucial aspect of Langland’s interpretation of the *Descensus*. Where Lucifer deceived mankind in Eden, Christ took human form and confounded the devils’ abilities to discern his true nature. The devils do not know who or what Christ is: “the light bade unlocke, and Lucifer answered *Quis est iste?/ What lorde art thou*” (Cciv). And as Langland’s Christ enters hell with unexpected triumph, he passes judgment accordingly:

Thou Lucifer in lykenes of a luther edder  
Gatiste by gyle, tho that God loued

And in lykenes of a leode, that Lorde am of heauen  
 Graciously thy gyle haue quite, go gile agaynst gyle  
 And as Adam and all, throughe a tree dyed  
 Adam & al through a tree, shulde turne againe to life  
 And gile is gyled and in hys gyle fallen.  
*Et cecidit in foueam quam fecit.*<sup>86</sup>  
 Now begynneth thy gile, agayne the to turne,  
 And my grace to growe aye, greater and wyder.  
 The bitternes that [thou] hast brued, broke it thy selfe  
 Thou art doctor of death, drynke that thou madeste. (Ccii<sup>v</sup>)

Through repetition and alliteration Langland marks the importance of guile in the theology of the *Descensus*, and as “gile is gyled and in hys gyle fallen,” the poet turns from guile to grace. Again, Christ participates in guile but it is not “his,” just as Lucifer’s guile is self-defeating—“gyle agaynst gyle” ending in Lucifer’s demise: “doctor of death, drynke that thou madeste.” But Guile is also overcome [“quite”] by grace [“Graciously”], a distinct force that interrupts the world of guile. With this, readers proceed in liturgical time from the *Descensus* to the Resurrection. The righteous are freed from the bonds of death, an act Christ accomplished gloriously by his grace, a grace that will grow “greater and wyder” by virtue of his godly feat (however guileful, appearing “in lykenes of a leode,” or mere man) at the gates of hell.

The term “guile” in the depiction of the *Descensus* in *Piers Plowman* points to a long human history, from the guileful temptation of Adam and Eve to the Incarnation, where Christ by art (*Ars ut artem falleret*) confounds the very beguiler who established death in the world.<sup>87</sup> Christ uses art in a way that Lucifer finds “beguiling,” in the same way that figures across Book II of *The Faerie Queene* are confused, fatigued, amazed, or mistaken. While Lucifer is tricked by the incarnate Christ, walking the earth “in lykenes of a leode,” Christ’s humanity is thrown into sharp relief against the guile pervading the episode. As David Aers reminds us, “Conflicts over the representation of Christ’s humanity and the appropriate focus on the Passion, Crucifixion, and earthly body of Christ were issues of immediate experience in late medieval England.”<sup>88</sup> In his emphasis on guile and the Incarnation, Langland makes Christ’s *Descensus* a matter of immediate experience as well. In this sense Langland offers a striking alternative to the spectacular battles of the parish plays as well as the speculative and ambiguous terms of the Elizabethan arguments. Christ’s is a local descent

in *Piers Plowman*, but one that emphasizes the extent to which the *Descensus* is integral to human salvation, even in the most quotidian terms. In his poetic work Langland is less interested in addressing how Christ descended or where he descended to than he is in depicting why Christ descended, by what means humanity is saved, and what this means in daily life. After the *Descensus* the poet Will springs into action; here, at the outset of Passus XIX, he relates how he “waked, & wrote what I had dremed/ And dight me dearly, and dyd me to kyrke/ To here holy [the] masse, & to be housled after” (Ccciii<sup>v</sup>). At the beginning of Passus XVIII, Will “Waxt wery of [the] world, & willed eft to slepe” (Aaiv<sup>v</sup>)—a phenomenon that Will refers to elsewhere in the poem, as “anone I swoned after/ And lay longe in a love dreame” (Yii<sup>v</sup>-Yiii<sup>r</sup>). It is in this swoon that Will witnesses Christ’s *Descensus* and, in turn, to attend mass and receive the Eucharist. In other words, in *Piers Plowman* the *Descensus* rouses the poet from his swoon.

Spenser must have read both *Piers Plowman* and the Gospel of Nicodemus very carefully.<sup>89</sup> Although one sees the *Descensus* in *The Faerie Queene* as if through a veil, Spenser uses these late Medieval English sources to test the preoccupations of his contemporaries, from Latimer to Perkins. Returning to Canto vii, Stanza 64—and, in particular, the line “So goodly did beguile the Guyler of the pray”—it’s not that Guyon deceives Mammon, “the Guyler,” but rather that he participates in guile. The subject of the verb “beguile” is ambiguous, properly absent from the final line of the stanza; in place of an agent, we have the adjective “goodly,” emphasizing the quality of the guile rather than the character of the beguiler. This guile is not devious or illusory; Guyon, rather, attends to his own “safetie.” The temperate Guyon is as immersed in wealth and finery as Mammon, even if he is not inclined to it in the same way. In this sense his strategy, his attention, passes for guile and undoes it. According to Harry Berger, Jr., “Canto vii makes us ask ourselves what kind of excellence Guyon possesses, whether it is moral or premoral, what is wrong with it, how it needs completion.”<sup>90</sup> Berger reminds us that the Cave of Mammon is an important hinge on which Guyon’s development turns, not necessarily a defining moment but one where we watch temperance work under duress. But Guyon’s *Descensus* is more about wealth and temperance than about Guyon. He doesn’t lack anything here, for temperance is complete; the episode, rather, exposes a fact in the world, one that (surprisingly) is indifferent to morality, as indifferent as death in Christ’s *Descensus*, which can be overcome only through grace.<sup>91</sup> Spenser emphasizes the degree to which Guyon, as temperance, occupies a world that challenges his fortitude and over which he has little

control. Guile is the logic of this world and temperance, a political and theological virtue, is here inextricable from it. The Cave of Mammon is not fundamentally different from the world above, Faerie land, or the world populated by abstract allegorical concepts. Spenser calls into question the speculative theological approaches to the *Descensus* that continue to render hell in unduly supernatural terms. Theologians endorsing the local *Descensus* often assume that hell exists under a different set of conditions than those of the world. Spenser, however, locates his Cave of Mammon in the world, even in the world of Faerie. In this sense he is like his contemporary Hugh Broughton, who denied Christ's local descent into hell because "Wee beleve that Devils are yet in this world. . . . Wherefore it where most ridiculous to feigne a journey to Devils thether, where they were not."<sup>92</sup> *The Faerie Queene* presents its readers with an integrated plane of otherwise diverse *loci* and events, where the entrance to the Cave of Mammon exists beside the entrance to hell but where, nevertheless, these places are not substantially different than any other in the allegory. Guyon descends into the Cave in the same way Christ exists for death, as a human being. Without calling into question the existence or location of hell itself—a step too far, for Spenser—Guyon's episode recalibrates the terms of the debate over the *Descensus*.

"So goodly did beguile the Guyler of the pray." Guyon is not necessarily the agent of the phrase. Spenser, rather, transports the complicated agencies of the Christic *Descensus* in *Piers Plowman* and the Gospel of Nicodemus to the Cave of Mammon to expose the circular and, in this case, self-defeating qualities of guile. At the beginning of Stanza 63, Guyon stands reeling from his encounter with Pilate and, by all accounts, more traumatic encounter with the "Infinite moe" damned souls apparent to his senses. Mammon, in turn, offers him "fruite of gold"—the golden apples of the Garden of Proserpina, a deceptive oasis in an otherwise observably hellish landscape—and a seat on Proserpina's "silver stoole." Guyon rejects both offers. To the letter, he doesn't merely reject them—he is not even inclined towards them, as Spenser is keen to point out that "if he inclyned had at all" to either offer, the stalking fiend would promptly dispatch him. This is hardly a challenge for Guyon who, to this point in the Canto, shows no visible sign of fatigue. It is as if Mammon alerts him to the fact that he is hungry and tired. We readers learn of the three-day tenure in the Cave in Stanza 65 only *after* Mammon's offer: "now he has so long remained theare,/ That vitall powres gan wexe both weake and wan" (II.vii.65.1–2)—a phrase punctuated by an illuminating "now." Mammon "the Guyler" tempts Guyon as if Guyon

shared his depraved desires. This is no mere fruit, but “fruite of gold” with godly provenance; no mere stool, but a “siluer stoole” fit for “the Queene of hell” (I.iv.11.2); less a test of temperance than a matter of obvious association. Guyon shows no signs of fatigue when Mammon offers him fruit and rest—amenities that bear the trappings of wealth that Guyon has spent the better part of three days systematically spurning! Mammon tempts Guyon as if Guyon shared Mammon’s own preoccupations and proclivities, and it is in precisely this way that “goodly did beguile the Guyler of the pray.” Had Mammon offered simple nourishment and a piece of floor for a weary Guyon, would Temperance have prevailed? Would such a relatively modest offer even constitute a temptation?

Nevertheless, as Guyon rejects Mammon’s offer, we learn that “he was wary wise in all his way” (II.vii.64.6). His participation in guile is taxing, exhausting, as “wary wise” is not only an indication of his wariness but also his weariness, bound together in guile. Even the most obvious temptations in the Cave demand attention. By the end of the episode, the strain of his feat begins to show. Guyon is not glorious in *The Faerie Queene*, nor does he negotiate guile as adeptly as the *Christus triumphans* of *Piers Plowman* and the Gospel of Nicodemus. Langland strives to express the close proximity of the *Descensus* to the Passion. Spenser follows this to a point, but imports terms proper to the Elizabethan debates, reflecting long engagements with theologians from Cusa to Calvin. Guyon, like the Christ of the Reformation *Descensus*, is humiliated. He does not suffer extreme agony, like Christ on the cross or, in the Calvinist account, the desperate Christ of the *Descensus*, but the experience is humiliating nonetheless. The Cave of Mammon is overwhelming—even for Temperance, an embodied virtue, an allegory. Guyon enters the Cave in a manner that recalls Christ descending into hell in the medieval sources. Neither figure “harrows” hell, exactly. These are not violent events. Although Langland’s Christ first appears in the martial garb attributed to *Christus triumphans* in the late medieval parish plays—at the outset of Passus XVIII, we learn that “Thys Jesus of his gentry will iuste in Pierce armes/ In his helme & his herbergeon, *humana natura*” (Bbi<sup>r</sup>)—his is not merely a physical battle. Langland emphasizes guile and strategy. “Christ be not knowne here, for *consu[m]matu[m] deus*” (Bbi<sup>r</sup>)—that is, because of his death on the cross he is able to surprise the devils, his final words indicating to the forces of hell that there can be no triumphant descent, only the entry of another dead man. For Langland, the last words of the dying Christ sound the depths of his suffering and humiliation: “*Consu[m]matu[m] est, [quod] Christe, and comseth for to swonne/*

Pitiously and pale as a prisoner, doth the dieth/ The Lord of life & of light tho, laied his eies together” (Bbi<sup>v</sup>). Christ swoons: his last human act, if one can call a swoon an act. The swooner is actually suspended between activity and passivity, just as Spenser’s Guyon lies in a swoon only after “all his sences were with deadly fit opprest” (II.vii.66.9). Like Langland’s Christ, Guyon’s *Descensus* is a success. The guiler beguiled, Mammon leads Guyon back to the surface world. But while Langland’s *Christus triumphans* swoons immediately *before* he descends into hell, Guyon swoons once he returns to the surface:

So backe againe, him brought to liuing light.  
 But all so soone as his enfeebled spright,  
 Gan sucke this vitall ayre into his brest,  
 As ouercome with too exceeding might,  
 The life did flit away out of her nest,  
 And all his sences were with deadly fit opprest. (II.vii.66.4–9)

Guyon is “layd in swowne” only above ground, after the *Descensus*. There is another subtle comment on *Piers Plowman* here, as it is the *Descensus* episode in Passus XVIII that rouses Langland’s Will from slumber, his own swoon. In Canto vii, however, the limitations of even a triumphant human temperance are humiliating. Guyon rejects sleep and nourishment, “fruite of gold,” “siluer stoole” and “shadow coole” (II.vii.63.7–9) only to gasp and swoon in the midst of “liuing light” and “vitall ayre” (II.vii.66.4, 6).

Guyon does not lack any human ability; by all accounts he withstands the Cave of Mammon, even its arbitrary “*Stygian lawes*,” with great success. His is not a faulty temperance. Nor is it appropriate to say that Guyon lacks Christ’s ability to sustain death and hell, as neither applies to the Cave of Mammon. Guyon does not descend for his own salvation or the salvation of the damned souls housed there. Really, Guyon does not lack anything—he is, however, not divine like Christ. Even a “successful” descent into “hell” fails in comparison to the *Descensus* of Christ. Christ, *triumphans* or *patiens*, glorious or humiliated, local or figural, descended into hell under markedly different terms than every human being. When Guyon’s experience matches Christ’s, structurally and physically, he is overwhelmed. And if Guyon is Temperance personified, here we are reminded of the limitations of the flesh, even in moments of exceptional patience and constitution. Any encounter with Mammon is exhausting, wearying, especially one that corresponds, liturgically, to Christ’s own tenure in hell: “three

dayes of men.” But despite the differences between Guyon and Christ, Guyon’s temptation and participation in an economy of guile bears the weight of Christ’s encounter with death and Hell in *The Faerie Queene*. For Spenser, humiliation is inextricable from the *Descensus*, even in his *Descensus* episode. Christ’s swoon on the cross in *Piers Plowman* serves as a point of comparison; the human Guyon swoons at the opposite end of the *Descensus*, marking the differences between Guyon and Christ as well as between Christ’s humanity and Christ’s divinity. Spenser seems to recall Calvin’s comments on the *Descensus* in his 1559 *Institutio*, particularly on Christ’s exemplary weakness. “There is no cause that the weakenesse of Christ should make us afrayde” [*Non est igitur cur nos terreat infirmitas Christi*], he claims, as it is our task to

not perceyve in Christ an infirmitie cleane and free from all faulte and spot, bycause he kepte himselfe within the boundes of obedience. For whereas there can be founde no moderation in our corrupt nature, where al our affections do with troublesome violence exceede all measure, they doe wronge to measure the forme of God by that standard. But when man was in his uncorrupted state, then there was a moderation havynge force in all his affections, to restrayne excesse [*in cunctis eius affectibus viguit moderatio, quae excessum cohiberet*]. Wherby, he might well be that he was like unto us in sorrowe, dread, and fearefulnesse [*in dolore, metu et formidine*], & yet that by this marke he differed from us.<sup>93</sup>

Uncorrupted by sin, Christ feels differently, and swoons differently, than other men, even the avatar of Temperance. But, Spenser suggests, humiliation and weakness are still fundamental to the *Descensus*. Northbrooke and Hume insist on the strong “Puritan” Calvinist version of the event; however, Spenser seems to endorse a more moderate position, affirming that Christ’s descent—or any such “descent,” for that matter—is humiliating only to the extent that the one descending is human. Rather than tarry with speculative theses regarding the journey of Christ’s soul, or matters pertaining to translation (*sheol* and *nephes* and other key terms in Scripture related to the *Descensus*) which extend beyond his purview, Spenser is preoccupied with the weakness and guile that figure so prominently in *Piers Plowman* and the Gospel of Nicodemus. His approach is actually closest to that of Perkins; indeed, preceding Perkins’ *Exposition* by several years, *The Faerie Queene* is Spenser’s attempt to provide a solution to a divisive dispute.

Guyon's is a humiliating ordeal. The ostensibly virtuous knight swoons when he should emerge from the Cave triumphant. Instead, his senses are "opprest" and he falls to the ground, astounded. In his uncanny *Descensus* episode, Spenser conducts a theological experiment, testing the limits of human temperance against overwhelming guile. He not only restores these neglected aspects of Christ's *Descensus* to the conversation, exploiting native English resources from the late Middle Ages to inform Reformation debates; he also uses Guyon as a lever to pry apart, heuristically, Christ's human weakness from his divine personhood. In other words, he removes from Guyon precisely what makes Christ Christ. Notice, also, that there is virtually no mention of despair in Canto vii, save for Tantalus, who "daily dyde, yet neuer throughly dyen couth" (II.vii.58.9)—a description that recalls Despaire himself, who "could not doe him die,/ Till he should die his last, that is eternally" (I.ix.54.8–9).<sup>94</sup> Spenser avoids the subject here, forsaking those Reformers (particularly, Calvin) who suggest, however subtly, that Christ's descent into hell was in fact an expression of overwhelming grief approaching despair asymptotically. In place of despair, Spenser closes the *Descensus* sequence with an anomalous episode, at least in *The Faerie Queene*. Led by a divine voice, the Palmer locates Guyon as he "lay in traunce" (II.viii.3.6), guarded by an angel, an expression of "th'exceeding grace/ Of highest God, that loues his creatures so" (II.viii.1.5–6). The humiliation of the *Descensus* gives way to the singular grace of God. It is a unique moment in the poem as God intervenes directly in the affairs of the world, albeit a romantic world of abstract virtues and faeries. But the singularity of this event is offset by the humiliation of the previous one. The quotidian limits of the flesh, the indignity of the "senceless dream" (II.viii.4.9), are exposed in the light of God's grace. The fact that Spenser calls the swoon "senceless" is telling. Not only is Guyon beguiled of his senses, not only were "his sences . . . with deadly fit opprest" upon his return to "liuing light" but the swoon itself is revealed as "senceless"—nonsensical, impenetrable, difficult—once God intervenes. Indeed, the earliest entry for this particular definition of "senseless" in the *Oxford English Dictionary* belongs to *The Shepheardes Calender*, to the Epistle to Gabriel Harvey, where E.K. admonishes those who "straight way deeme to be sencelesse, and not at all to be understode" those things that they do not immediately understand.<sup>95</sup> Grace proceeds according to an entirely different logic than human virtue, and it is particularly distinct from guile. This is a wild moment in the poem, as God's grace threatens to reveal every endeavor, every virtue, every episode as "sencelesse." But here, punctuating the *Descensus* sequence, Spenser's is a subtle reminder

to his contemporaries, entangled in heated arguments over the contours of Christ's existence between his death and resurrection: the life of the flesh, even a scholarly one, even a virtuous one, is a humiliating one.

By the middle of the 1590s, most English interpretations of the *Descensus* fall into one of two basic categories: those that favor an ambiguous approach, allowing for a local interpretation, and that see Christ's as a glorious victory over hell—what is in theory the logic of the Elizabethan Settlement—and those that endorse Perkins's interpretation, who see Christ's as a humiliating ordeal, but who nevertheless deny anything as extreme as Calvin's position. There are still advocates of the "burial" interpretation and some, such as Hugh Broughton, advance idiosyncratic theses on the *Descensus* that offer new perspectives on the event. Few English theologians, and fewer poets, follow Spenser's lead in retrieving medieval materials in order to reconsider the stakes of the *Descensus* and its meaning in everyday life, to repurpose medieval materials to address contemporary concerns. Tridentine Catholic writers avoid retelling the old "Harrowing of Hell" stories as well, even when they subtly endorse them. One might say, with some certainty, that the late Elizabethan debates reach their apex in two Jacobean works: Hugh Broughton's *A Petition to the Lords, to examine the religion and carriage of D. Ban. Archb.* (1608) and *De Descensu Domini Nostri Iesu Christi ad Inferos* (1611), begun by Hugh Sanford (d.1607) and completed by Robert Parker (c.1564–1614). Broughton—neither Calvinist nor advocate for the traditional local interpretation—suggests that, in place of the *Descensus*, a better translation would see Christ "To go hence to God."<sup>96</sup> Broughton is eager to translate Scripture and the Creed accurately and to influence policy concerning authorized translations—a concrete political project in the decade that would deliver the 1611 Authorized Version of Scripture. Whereas Broughton's is a slight pamphlet, Sanford and Parker's work is a comprehensive guide to all existing writing on the *Descensus*, surveying key terms across Scripture as well as the myriad historical interpretations of the article. Both works imagine themselves as compendia and as fundamental departures from native English tradition. Sanford and Parker's text, preoccupied as it is with the shape of English orthodoxy, was neither written nor printed in England.<sup>97</sup> Nowhere in either work or in the future of the debate, among English Protestants, is there as concerted an attempt to frame the *Descensus* in English terms or to express, subtly, the quotidian meaning of Christ's humiliation as in Spenser's Cave of Mammon.

## NOTES

1. Thanks to David Aers, Jeff Dolven, William Oram, Anne Lake Prescott, Britt Rusert, and the two anonymous readers for *Spenser Studies* for their invaluable guidance on this piece.

2. Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A. C. Hamilton, Rev. 2nd ed., ed. Hiroshi Yamashita and Toshiyuki Suzuki (Harlow, England: Pearson Longman, 2007), 158 [Book II, Proem, Stanza 5, Line 9]. All further references appear by Book, Canto, Stanza, and Line/s.

3. See II.vii.27.2–4.

4. See Anne Lake Prescott, “Mammon,” *The Spenser Encyclopedia*, ed. A. C. Hamilton, et al. (Toronto and London: University of Toronto Press and Routledge, 1990), 451–52; Anthea Hume, *Edmund Spenser: Protestant Poet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 113; and David Scott Wilson-Okamura, *Virgil in the Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 143–90 (esp. 167–68). For exceptional introductions to the problem of Book II, Canto vii, particularly the swoon, see Harry Berger, Jr., *The Allegorical Temper: Vision and Reality in Book II of Spenser’s Faerie Queene* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), 3–64; and Paul J. Alpers, *The Poetry of The Faerie Queene* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 235–75.

5. Christopher Bond develops the comparison between the Cave of Mammon episode and the Harrowing of Hell at great length, exposing Spenser’s debts to the Middle English Gospel of Nicodemus, *Piers Plowman*, and the Harrowing of Hell mystery plays; drawing on spectacular medieval depictions of Christ’s *Descensus*, he emphasizes, with great ingenuity, the comic aspects of the scene, as Spenser proves “well capable of combining low humor with high theology.” Bond’s treatment of Mammon himself—“laughably overconfident in his ability to entrap Guyon”—is exemplary. Nevertheless, in his effort to demonstrate how Spenser is “the last great poet of the English Middle Ages,” Bond pays virtually no attention to the Elizabethan controversies over the *Descensus* and the ways that these disputes shaped Spenser’s approach to the traditional materials. Arguing that “Spenser was far from averse to incorporating Catholic elements in what is often regarded as a Protestant poem,” Bond assumes that only Catholics defended the traditional *Descensus*—which is clearly not the case. Moreover, Bond reads the episode as a testament to Guyon’s human virtue, where we discover “how crucial human nature is in the redemption of Adam’s fault.” I see Spenser’s use of the *Descensus* (and the particular Middle English terms at work there, namely *guile*) as an effort to complicate any easy assumptions about Guyon’s agency or virtue. See Christopher Bond, “Medieval Harrowings of Hell and Spenser’s House of Mammon,” *English Literary Renaissance* 37.2 (2007): 189–90, 181, 191, 192.

6. Karl Tamburr, *The Harrowing of Hell in Medieval England* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2007), 1–43; *The Middle-English Harrowing of Hell and Gospel of Nicodemus*, ed. William Henry Hulme (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co [for the Early English Text Society], 1907), vii–lxx; Ralph V. Turner, “*Descendit Ad Inferos*: Medieval Views on Christ’s Descent into Hell and the Salvation of the Ancient Just,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 27.2 (1966): 173–94.

7. “harrow, v.1” and “harrow, v.2,” *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

8. Early manuscripts of the Gospel of Nicodemus circulated in numerous languages (Greek, Latin, Coptic, and Syriac) between the second and the twelfth centuries; “Our earliest unambiguous evidence of a Latin translation of the Greek *Acts of Pilate*, known in the late medieval and modern West as the *Evangelium Nicodemi*, comes from a fifth-century manuscript.” See Zbigniew Izydorczyk, “The *Evangelium Nicodemi* in the Latin Middle Ages,” *The Medieval Gospel of Nicodemus: Texts, Intertexts, and Contexts in Western Europe*, ed. Zbigniew Izydorczyk (Tempe, Arizona: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1997), 44. Many early versions of Nicodemus do not include Christ’s *descensus ad inferos*—the center of the late Medieval Latin and English versions; early Greek manuscripts, for instance, omit this crucial sequence. See Zbigniew Izydorczyk and Jean-Daniel Dubois, “Nicodemus’s Gospel before and beyond the Medieval West,” *The Medieval Gospel of Nicodemus: Texts, Intertexts, and Contexts in Western Europe*, ed. Zbigniew Izydorczyk (Tempe, Arizona: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1997), 28.

9. See Jacques Lefèvre d’Étaples, *Quincuplex Psalterim: Fac-similé de l’édition de 1513* (Geneva: Droz, 1979), 20<sup>r</sup>: “*Quoniam non derelinques animam in inferno: nec dabis sanctum tuum videre corruptionem*” [Psalterium Romanum]; and *The Geneva Bible: 1560 Edition* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 2007), 237<sup>v</sup>, 109<sup>v</sup>. Throughout this study, I have silently expanded abbreviations in Latin, Greek, and English, and have changed “v”s to “u”s, “i”s to “j”s, etc. for the ease of the reader—except in Spenser’s poetry, where I retain the spelling and punctuation from the Hamilton edition, and in the Middle English quotations.

10. Scholarship on the meaning of the *descensus* in the early church as well as the provenance of the Creed is vast and contentious, and most of the works I treat here delve into these issues. For apt summaries of the controversy over the *descensus*, see Dewey D. Wallace, Jr., “Puritan and Anglican: The Interpretation of Christ’s Descent Into Hell in Elizabethan Theology,” *Archive for Reformation History* 69 (1978): 248–87; and Patricia Weightman Stewart, *The Descent Into Hell: An Elizabethan Controversy* (MA Thesis, University of British Columbia, 1984). The best introduction remains Johann Augustin Dietelmeier’s foundational study, *Historia Dogmatis de Descensu Christi ad Inferos Litteraria* (Nuremberg: Seitz et Zell, 1741).

11. Although the *Descensus* is absent from the Nicene Creed, which was read at virtually every High Mass according to Sarum use, it does appear indirectly in the

Missal, as in the service on Good Friday. See *The Sarum Missal Edited from Three Early Manuscripts*, ed. J. Wickham Legg (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1916), 114–15; *Expositio hymnorum secundum usum Sarum* ([London]: [Richardum Pynson], 1497), xxvi<sup>r</sup>, xxvii<sup>r</sup>, xxx<sup>r</sup>–xxx<sup>v</sup>. Available electronically through Early English Books Online; and *One Hundred Latin Hymns: Ambrose to Aquinas*, ed. and trans. Peter G. Walsh and Christopher Husch, *Dunbarton Oaks Medieval Library* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 96–103, 124–29.

12. *The Lay Folks Mass Book, or The Manner of Hearing Mass*, ed. Thomas Frederick Simmons, *Early English Text Society* 71 (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 20–21, lxvii, lxix. Simmons dates the manuscripts used to “about 1375” and “the middle of the fifteenth century.”

13. I use the exegetical term “local,” as it appeared in sixteenth-century debates concerning the *descensus*, rather than employing the more general allegorical term “literal” (which very rarely appears in the works I treat here). While competing Reformation and Counter-Reformation theses on allegory lie beyond the scope of the present essay, I hope that due attention to the precise terms of the *descensus* debates might nevertheless shed new light on method and exegesis among Spenser’s contemporaries, and thus set his own allegorical project into historical relief.

14. I discuss these changes and developments at length in my forthcoming “Jean Calvin and the Reformation *Descensus ad Inferos*,” a companion to this article. In the meantime, see Erasmus, “An Explanation of the Apostles’ Creed (*Explanatio symboli apostolorum sive catechismus*),” trans. Louis A. Perraud, ed. Laurel Carrington, *Collected Works of Erasmus* 70, ed. John W. O’Malley (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998); Pico della Mirandola, “Apologia Ioannis pici mirandulae concordiae comitis” [*Apologia tredecim quaestionum*], *Opera Ioannis Pici Mirandulae Comitum Concordiae littera[rum] principis*, ed. Jakob Wimpfeling (Strasbourg, 1504); d’Étaples, *Quincuplex Psalterium: Gallicum, Rhomanum, Hebraicum, vetus, conciliatum*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Henri Estienne, 1513); Luther, “Martin Luther’s Torgau Sermon on Christ’s Descent into Hell and the Resurrection,” trans. Robert Kolb, *Sources and Contexts of the Book of Concord*, ed. Robert Kolb and James A. Nestingen (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2001); Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, *The Library of Christian Classics* XX (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 508–13; and Robert Bellarmine, *Disputationes Roberti Bellarmini Politiani Societatis Iesu, De Controversiis Christianae Fidei, Adversus Huius Temporis Haereticos* (Ingolstadii, ex typographia D. Sartorii, 1592), I [*Prima Controversia Generalis*]: \*\*6<sup>r</sup>.

15. Patrick Cullen, “Guyon Microchristus: The Cave of Mammon Re-Examined,” *ELH* 37.2 (1970): 153–74; and Harold L. Weatherby, *Mirrors of Celestial Grace: Patristic Theology in Spenser’s Allegory* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 132–52.

16. Cullen, 169. Anthea Hume, on the contrary, denies any resemblance between Guyon and Christ in the Cave of Mammon sequence, but her sole basis

of comparison seems to be Christ's temptations in the desert in Matthew 4—the subject of John Milton's *Paradise Regained*. See Hume, *Edmund Spenser: Protestant Poet*, 116–18.

17. Alpers, *The Poetry of The Faerie Queene*, 275. Here Alpers also recognizes, albeit in passing, the similarity between the Canto and Christ's *descensus*.

18. C. W. Marx, "The Gospel of Nicodemus in Old English and Middle English," *The Medieval Gospel of Nicodemus: Texts, Intertexts, and Contexts in Western Europe*, ed. Zbigniew Izydorczyk (Tempe, Arizona: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1997), 217. See also Thomas N. Hall, "The *Euangelium Nichodemi* and *Vindicta saluatoris* in Anglo-Saxon England," *Two Old English Apocrypha and their Manuscript Source: "The Gospel of Nichodemus" and "The Avenging of the Saviour"*, ed. J. E. Cross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 56–57.

19. [William Langland], *The vision of Pierce Plowman, nowe the seconde tyme imprinted by Roberte Crowley dwellynge in Elye rentes in Holburne* (London: Robert Crowley, 1550), \*ii<sup>r</sup> ("The printer to the Reader") [ESTC: S122059].

20. Bond claims that "in a poem in which classical and Continental models receive the bulk of scholarly attention, this material [depicting the Harrowing of Hell] was also, through the conduits of Langland and the mystery cycles, a peculiarly English ingredient." As I demonstrate below, Spenser does indeed return to Middle English depictions of the *Descensus*—the stanzaic Gospel of Nicodemus, *Piers Plowman*—in order to shift the terms of the debate away from Christ's *local Descensus*. But medieval and early modern meditations on the *Descensus* are not "peculiarly English," and it is even possible to see Spenser's retrieval of the *Descensus* as a gesture toward Continental discussions—for instance, the Lutheran disputations around the *Concordia*. See Bond, 192.

21. John N. King, *Spenser's Poetry and the Reformation Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1990), 11–13.

22. Hugh Latimer, *Sermons by Hugh Latimer*, ed. George Elwes Corrie, *Parker Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1844), 233.

23. Thomas Becon, "A New Catechism, Set Forth Dialogue-Wise in Familiar Talk Between the Father and the Son," *The Catechism of Thomas Becon . . . With Other Pieces Written by Him in the Reign of King Edward the Sixth*, ed. John Ayre, *Parker Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1844), 33.

24. Latimer, 235, 234.

25. Latimer, 236.

26. John Strype, *Annals of the Reformation and Establishment of Religion, and Other Various Occurrences in the Church of England, during Queen Elizabeth's Happy Reign* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1824), Vol. I, Pt. 1.518–19; and *The Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England*, ed. Edgar C. S. Gibson, 2 Vols. (London: Methuen, 1897), I:160.

27. Strype, I,1.519.

28. Strype, I,1.519; and William Alley, *ITΩXOMYΣEION The Poor Mans Librarie* (London: John Day, 1565), II.71<sup>v</sup> [ESTC: S106822].

29. *Articles . . . for the avoyding of the diversities of opinions, and for the stablishyng of consent touchyng true religion* (London: Rycharde Jugge and John Cawood, 1571), 4 [ESTC: S92252]; *The Thirty-nine Articles*, ed. Gibson, I.159.

30. *The Book of Common Prayer: The Texts of 1549, 1559, and 1662*, ed. Brian Cummings (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 321; and *Catechismus parvus pueris primum Latine qui ediscatur, proponendus in Scholis* (London: John Day, 1573), Aiiii<sup>r</sup> [ESTC: S105637].

31. Alexander Nowell, *A Catechism Written in Latin by Alexander Nowell, Dean of St. Paul's: Together with the Same Catechism Translated into English by Thomas Norton*, ed. G. E. Corrie, *Parker Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1853), 43, 160. See also Ian Green, *The Christian's ABC: Catechisms and Catechizing in England c. 1530–1740* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 316–319.

32. *The Thirty-nine Articles*, ed. Gibson, I.159

33. Alexander Hume, *A Rejoynder to Doctor Hil Concerning the Descense of Christ into Hell* (Edinburgh: Robert Waldegrave, 1594), B5<sup>r</sup> [ESTC: S121138].

34. John Marbeck, *A Booke of Notes and Common Places*, (London: Thomas East, 1581), 185 [ESTC: S112020]. Some thousand pages later, Marbeck returns to the issue under the *locus* “Soule.”

35. Stephen Wright, “Carlile, Christopher (d. in or before 1588),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography: Online Edition*, ed. Lawrence Goldman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Christopher Carlile, *A Discourse, Concerning Two Divine Positions* (London: Roger Ward, 1582), Aiiii<sup>r</sup>–Aiiii<sup>v</sup>. [ESTC: S107537]

36. J. Andreas Löwe, *Richard Smyth and the Language of Orthodoxy: Re-Imagining Tudor Catholic Polemicism* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 13–77.

37. See also Walter Wilson Robson III, *Le Proces Belial A L'Encontre De Jhesus: A Critical Edition* (University of Kansas PhD dissertation, 1972).

38. Carlile, 101<sup>r</sup>–102<sup>r</sup>, 93<sup>r</sup>–96<sup>v</sup>.

39. Carlile, 140<sup>v</sup>.

40. Carlile, 132<sup>v</sup>–143<sup>r</sup>. Incidentally, *sheol* is accounted a type of hell—not a grave—in the contemporary *Oxford Companion to the Bible*; see Bo Reicke, “Hell,” *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, ed. Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 277–79.

41. Carlile, 144<sup>v</sup>, 146<sup>r</sup>. Rather than confirm or deny the veracity of Carlile’s translation, I point here to the persistence of the debate concerning Hebrew terms for “spirit” or “soul” well beyond the Reformation—Baruch Spinoza, for instance, entertains similar questions with respect to the Hebrew word *ruagh* in his *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (1670). See Baruch Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, ed. Jonathan Israel, trans. Michael Silverthorne and Jonathan Israel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 20.

42. Carlile, 174<sup>r</sup>.

43. John Northbrooke, *Spiritus est vicarius Christi in terra*. (London: John Kingston, 1571), B4<sup>r</sup>–B4<sup>v</sup> [ESTC: S120959].

44. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, *The Library of Christian Classics XX* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 516 [I alter the translation slightly here]; and “Institutio Christianae religionis,” *Joannis Calvini Opera Selecta III–V*, ed. Petrus Barth & Guilelmus Niesel, *Editio secunda emendata* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2011), III:496.

45. *The Geneva Bible*, 16<sup>v</sup>.

46. Northbrooke, 4<sup>v</sup>, 9<sup>v</sup>.

47. William Whitaker, *Disputatio de Sacra Scriptura Contra Huius Temporis Papistas, Inprimis Robertum Bellarminum Jesuitam, Pontificium in Collegio Romano, & Thomam Stapletonum, Regium in Schol Duacena Controversiarum Professorem* (Cambridge: Thomas Thomas, 1588), 402 [ESTC: S120046]; and William Whitaker, *A Disputation on Holy Scripture, Against the Papists, Especially Bellarmine and Stapleton*, trans. William Fitzgerald, *Parker Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1849), 536–37.

48. Whitaker, *Disputatio*, 403; Whitaker, *A Disputation*, 537 (I amend the translation here).

49. Whitaker, *Disputatio*, 403, 404; Whitaker, *A Disputation*, 537, 538.

50. William Fulke, *A Defence of the Sincere and True Translations of the Holy Scriptures into the English Tongue, Against the Cavils of Gregory Martin*, ed. Charles Henry Hartshorne, *Parker Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1843), 283.

51. Fulke, *Defence*, 284. Hartshorne’s annotation implies that Fulke admonished Latimer for a sermon on the Passion of Christ, wherein Latimer emphasized how Christ suffered in hell. Fulke reprehends Latimer because of his steadfast belief in the local descent, outlined above.

52. Adam Hill, *The Defence of the Article: Christ Descended into Hell. With Arguments Objected against the Truth of the Same Doctrine: Of One Alexander Humes* (London: William Ponsonbie, 1592), 24r [ESTC: S104102].

53. Hill, *The Defence of the Article*, 1<sup>r</sup>.

54. Hill, *The Defence of the Article*, 43<sup>v</sup>, 62<sup>v</sup>.

55. Hume, *Rejoynder*, B7<sup>v</sup>.

56. Hume, *Rejoynder*, B8<sup>v</sup>.

57. William Perkins, *An Exposition of the Symbole or Creed of the Apostles* (Cambridge: John Legatt, 1595), 173 [mistakenly given as “172”]–176 [ESTC: S120654].

58. Perkins, 297, 301.

59. Henry Jacob, *A Treatise of the Sufferings and Victory of Christ, in the Work of our Redemption* (Middelburg: Richard Schilders, 1598), A2<sup>r</sup>, 95, 155 [ESTC: S107530].

60. Jacob, 173.

61. Thomas Bilson, *The Effect of Certain Sermons Touching the Full Redemption of Mankind by the Death and Blood of Christ Jesus* (London: Peter Short for Walter Burre, 1599), A2v [ESTC: S102011]. See also Stewart, *The Descent Into Hell*, 57–71.

62. Richard Parkes, *A Briefe Answere Unto Certain Objections and Reasons Against the Descension of Christ into Hell* (Oxford: Joseph Barnes, 1604), A2<sup>r</sup>, 55–56 [ESTC: S114057].

63. *The Middle-English Harrowing of Hell and Gospel of Nicodemus*, lvi–lvii.

64. *The Middle-English Harrowing of Hell and Gospel of Nicodemus*, xv–xvii, lvii; Paul Whitfield White, *Drama and Religion in English Provincial Society, 1485–1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 1–42. See also Marx, “*The Gospel of Nicodemus* in Old English and Middle English,” 217–21, 255–56.

65. *The Middle-English Harrowing of Hell and Gospel of Nicodemus*, 108, 110 (Galba lines 1347–49). I quote the Middle English Gospel of Nicodemus in verse, from the Galba ms.

66. *The Middle-English Harrowing of Hell and Gospel of Nicodemus*, 112 (Galba lines 1425–31).

67. *The Middle-English Harrowing of Hell and Gospel of Nicodemus*, 112 (Galba lines 1437–40).

68. “shend, v.1,” *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (Oxford University Press, 2013), <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/177939> (accessed June 14, 2013).

69. “Harrowing of Hell,” *The Towneley Plays*, 331, 332.

70. “The Saddileres [The Harrowing of Hell],” *The York Plays: A Critical Edition of the York Corpus Christi Play as Recorded in British Library Additional MS 35290*, ed. Richard Beadle, Vol. I (Oxford: Oxford University Press for Early English Text Society, 2009), 358. Job 7:9, in the Vulgate Latin, is particularly meaningful here: “*qui descenderit ad inferos, non ascendet.*” This is given in the text of *Piers Plowman* as such: “Job the prophet patriarke, repungneth thi sawes: *Quia in inferno nulla est redemptio.*” Reformation bibles cease to translate the Hebrew this way; the 1560 Geneva Bible, for instance, renders the line “he that goeth downe to the grave, shal come up nomore.” See *The vision of Pierce Plowman*, Bbiii<sup>r</sup>; and *The Geneva Bible*, 224<sup>v</sup>.

71. C. W. Marx, *The Devil’s Rights and the Redemption in the Literature of Medieval England* (Rochester, New York: Boydell and Brewer, 1995), 7–27, 47–64, 80–113. For a sharp summary of this material, with reference to Spenser and the mystery plays, see Bond, 186–88.

72. Calvin, *Institutes*, 514; Calvin, *Institutio*, 494.

73. There is a curious edition of the Gospel of Nicodemus printed in both 1635 and 1646, a translation by John Warrin, purportedly from the Hebrew, Latin, and French editions; Warrin promises that there is “to be found nothing herein contradictory or repugnant to any of the rest [of the four principal Gospels], but such as may rather conduce to the augmentation of thy faith then otherwise.” However, the translator’s preface is also ambiguous: it is not “his meaning that any man should give such faithfull credence unto this History, as to the other Holy Gospels,” but the events in Nicodemus are also “not utterly to be rejected.” See *Nicodemus his gospel*, trans. John Warrin (Rouen, 1646), A2<sup>v</sup>–A3<sup>r</sup> [ETSC: R43482].

74. According to William Tyndale, “Mammon is an Ebrewre worde and signifyeth ryches or temporal goodes, and namely all superfluitie and all that is above

necessary.” See William Tyndale, *The Parable of the Wycked Mammon* (London: John Daye, 1547), cviii<sup>r</sup> [ESTC: S104878].

75. For a rich account of Mammon’s accumulation of wealth at the end of the sixteenth century, namely its ties to an emergent Atlantic political economy, see David Read, *Temperate Conquests: Spenser and the Spanish New World* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2000), 65–82.

76. Richard Mallette, *Spenser and the Discourses of Reformation England* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 72.

77. *The Geneva Bible*, 37<sup>r</sup>; and Tyndale, *The Parable of the Wycked Mammon*, Di<sup>r</sup>. In an important comment on Mammon in the Elizabethan liturgy, Anne Lake Prescott reminds us that, in the *Book of Common Prayer*, Jesus’ exhortation to make friends with Mammon immediately follows “the statement that God ‘wil not suffer you to be tempted above that you be able, but wil even give the yssue with the temtation, that ye may be able to beare it’ (I Cor 10–13).” See Prescott, “Mammon,” 451–52. Moreover, it is important to note that *The Parable of the Wycked Mammon* is a treatise on justification by faith, where Tyndale repeatedly emphasizes the “laboure” of life in the world, fundamentally unrighteous, made righteous only by God’s grace. The work bears the signal verse on its title page: “We holde that a man is justified by fayth, withoute the workes of the lawe” (Romans 3:28). This complicates human agency and, in a sense, reduces all human activity (independent of faith in Christ’s salvific office) to unrighteousness—which, in turn, also complicates any understanding of guile in the world.

78. Tyndale, *The Parable of the Wycked Mammon*, Di<sup>r</sup>.

79. “Guyon” thus recalls “guile” in the same way the name points to the river Gihon, the various Guys of chivalric romance, *guido* or “guide,” and “guyon” the rare synonym for “wrestler.” See Maurice Evans, “Guyon,” *The Spenser Encyclopedia*, ed. A. C. Hamilton, et. al. (Toronto, London: University of Toronto Press and Routledge, 1990), 343.

80. This is also the case in II.iv.25.1; II.v.5.7–8; and across Canto xii.

81. The same happens in II.xi.7.4.

82. Weatherby, 148; William Langland, *Piers Plowman: the C-Text*, ed. Derek Pearsall (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1994), 336 (Passus XX, line 392).

83. Simon Horobin, “Stephan Batman and His Manuscripts of *Piers Plowman*,” *Review of English Studies* 62.255 (2011): 358–72.

84. Sarah A. Kelen, *Langland’s Early Modern Identities* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 17–42; and John N. King, “Robert Crowley’s Editions of *Piers Plowman*: A Tudor Apocalypse,” *Modern Philology* 73.4 (1976): 342–52. Unless otherwise noted, all references to *Piers Plowman* are from Crowley’s second edition of the B-Text (1550).

85. Venantius Fortunatus, “Pange, lingua,” *One Hundred Latin Hymns: Ambrose to Aquinas*, ed. and trans. Peter G. Walsh and Christopher Husch, *Dunbarton Oaks Medieval Library* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 96 [my translation]. See also Weatherby 148–49.

86. And he has fallen into the pit he made (Psalm 7:16)

87. There is perhaps a deep affinity at stake here in Christian theologies of redemption regarding art's relationship to guile, a proximity that lies at the foundation of art and its discontents alike. For a related thesis see John Parker, *The Aesthetics of Antichrist: From Christian Drama to Christopher Marlowe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007).

88. David Aers, "The Humanity of Christ: Representations in Wycliffite Texts and *Piers Plowman*," David Aers and Lynn Staley, *The Powers of the Holy: Religion, Power, and Gender in Late Medieval English Culture* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 55.

89. For a different reading of Spenser and Langland apropos the *Descensus* see Bond, 178–82. Bond emphasizes Mammon's pride and Guyon's extraordinary virtue; I believe that Spenser remembers the Middle English *Descensus* to emphasize Guyon's guile, to complicate his virtue and agency, and to check the frustrating terms of the Elizabethan debates, preoccupied with the character of Christ's *Descensus* at the expense of the spiritual meaning of the episode. On Spenser and Langland see Judith H. Anderson, *The Growth of a Personal Voice: Piers Plowman and The Faerie Queene* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976). On Spenser's medievalism and pre-Reformation works see Andrew King, *The Faerie Queene and Middle English Romance: The Matter of Just Memory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 1–41.

90. Berger, *The Allegorical Temper*, 29.

91. Tyndale's *The Parable of the Wycked Mammon* is again relevant here, as a treatment of grace and justification by faith.

92. Hugh Broughton, *Declaration of generall corruption of Religion, Scripture and all learning; wrought by D. Bilson* (Middelburg: Richard Schilders, 1603), [1]<sup>v</sup> [ESTC: S106763].

93. Jean Calvin, *The Institution of Christian Religion*, trans. Thomas Norton (London: Reinolde Wolfe & Richarde Harison, 1561), Niv<sup>r</sup> (Folio 100<sup>r</sup>) [ESTC: S107154]; Calvin, *Institutio*, 497–98.

94. On despair in Spenser see Andrew Escobedo, "Despair and the Proportion of the Self," *Spenser Studies* XVII (2003): 75–90; and Beth Quitslund, "Despair and the Composition of the Self," *Spenser Studies* XVII (2003): 91–106.

95. Edmund Spenser, "The Shepheardes Calender," *The Shorter Poems*, ed. Richard A. McCabe (London: Penguin, 1999), 27; and "senseless, adj." *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (Oxford University Press, 2013).

96. Hugh Broughton, *A Petition to the Lords, to examine the religion and cariage of D. Ban. Archb.* (1608), 7, 10 [ESTC: S119310].

97. See Hugh Sanford and Robert Parker, *De Descensu Domini Nostri Iesu Christi ad Inferos, Libri Quatuor* (Amsterdam: Aegidius Thorpius [Giles Thorpe], 1611).