
The New Globalism: Transcultural Commerce, Global Systems Theory, and Spenser's Mammon

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Why global systems theory? Why apply it to the study of early modern literature? Why now? To answer these questions, it will help to consider, briefly, what has been happening in the world and what is happening in early modern studies. Since the end of the Cold War, neoliberal power and transnational neo-imperialism have enriched the 1% and intensified economic inequality across the globe.¹ The worldwide economic crisis of 2008–2009, the recent collapse of our fragile global economy in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the continuing struggle pitting plutocratic elites against the laboring commons, the growing popular awareness of how capitalist forms of consumption and profit-taking have wreaked havoc across the planet – these developments have forced intellectuals and scholars to consider more closely the ways that global systems under capitalism both link and divide the world.

Following the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of bipolar geopolitics, a worldwide political pattern gradually took hold: as neoliberal capitalism unfolded throughout the world, we witnessed the rise of a right-wing politics of alarmism, xenophobia, and austerity. We see this very clearly under leaders like Donald Trump, Vladimir Putin, Narendra Modi, Benjamin Netanyahu, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Jair Bolsonaro, Viktor Orbán, Andrzej Duda, Boris Johnson, and others. Even “moderate” or centrist figures like Justin Trudeau, Barack Obama, or Emmanuel Macron have pushed a neoliberal agenda that has served the interests of transnational plutocrats. In the United States after 9/11, a fear of foreigners has been encouraged in order to deflect attention from domestic sources of oppression. An overextended, profit-seeking militarism abroad has gone hand-in-hand with increased surveillance and militarized policing in the “homeland.”

Meanwhile, a pro-corporate, pro-Wall Street political program has dismantled the social safety net, intensifying the exploitation and disempowerment of working people. As we contend with the pandemic and its socioeconomic consequences, we see these fissures and fault lines becoming even more critically exacerbated.

Distracted, divided, and misinformed by the expanding digital mediascape, twenty-first-century America has drifted away from the progressive ideals and goals that depend upon a shared, participatory program of civic activism and governmental action intended to alleviate or minimize the social injustice produced by the capitalist class system. The idea that we are all citizens of the world, participating in an unfulfilled effort to achieve real, universal human progress, has faded from mainstream historical consciousness, though it remains the goal of an embattled left. But even as the larger historical narratives are forgotten (or reduced, for instance, to a simplistic and misconceived tale of American triumphalism), an awareness of contemporary global issues and linkages (ecological, diasporic, digital) has intensified everywhere. To employ a concrete example: the handheld digital device works to both seal off the individual from their surroundings, producing an alienating cocoon effect; and it offers a sense of connectedness to a matrix of information that stretches invisibly across the planet. This paradox of both transnational connectedness and localized isolation has informed, sometimes in subtle or unconscious ways, the attitude of scholars in the humanities.

At the risk of oversimplification, I want to focus here on two intellectual trends that have emerged in *early modern studies* – one tendency is local, the other global. On one hand, there has been a critical movement toward greater textual, cultural, and material particularity: de-emphasizing larger historical narratives or frameworks, many scholars have taken refuge in particular things. This broad tendency goes under a variety of names and subheadings: “thing theory,” “the archival turn,” materialities of the book, histories of the book, of the object, of the everyday, “the new materialism,” and even “the new boredom.”² Descending from Michel Foucault, Michel de Certeau, and Bruno Latour, a new critical paradigm has taken shape: we have witnessed the rise of a microhistoricism, an archaeology of local knowledge that traces the private life of objects, merges the human with the animal, and emphasizes the inextricable, agentic “entanglement” of objects and animals with the everyday lives of people in the past.³ This kind of work can be extremely productive, and it has brought forth rich new lines of research within the field of early modern cultural history and literary studies.⁴ But there is also a danger: pulling one’s head inside the hard, protective shell of “material culture” and withdrawing from any theoretical framework that would orient one’s scholarly method toward human history as a large-scale, long-term process – such a posture can often be politically debilitating. Specialization is, of course, a necessary aspect of all academic expertise, but the post-pandemic Capitalocene is no time for a critical practice that avoids large-scale questions of historical change, class struggle, or capitalist ideology.⁵ In pursuing their analyses of specific texts and material cultures, many scholars have disavowed the so-called totalizing narratives that are seen as unfashionable from a post-poststructuralist or new materialist point of view.⁶ In other words, their “micromaterialism” risks becoming microscopic without being microcosmic. At its best, a materialist criticism does succeed in placing micromaterial readings within a larger critique of ideology that engages with “big picture” historical narratives about class, gender, and race. But the risk is that it may dwindle into a petty antiquarianism, a flight from history-writ-large, and the end of politics. We peer down through a microhistorical lens to get a better look at the strange and fascinating creatures that crawl in the carpet, but in doing so we sometimes miss the larger design, the overarching historical process that links past to present and future.

Of all the early modern things or objects that have been lovingly recovered through the new material historicism, “the book” has been the most intensively fetishized of all. Obviously, there is an important place for scholarship that examines the physical forms and marks of the printing process and those left by the activities of readers (e.g., watermarks, bindings, marginalia). These archival investigations have real historical and political value. The evidentiary record of print serves to clarify and demystify the past, and, in many cases, archivists of the book have worked to refine our understanding of print history and the history of reading in ways that speak to long-term social and cultural processes. These historical reconstructions force us to awaken from the dream of the master text and to understand more fully the workings of the author function. Some scholars of book history have even deployed their findings in order to expose and debunk right-wing distortions and interpretations of texts like the US Constitution. While it often enables historical knowledge of one kind or another, the vogue for history of the book scholarship has also been the sign of a powerful nostalgia for the modern, printed book in a postmodern age of virtuality and digitization.⁷ The history of the book trend feeds off and encourages the notion of a Benjaminian aura surrounding the enarchived early modern rare book, even as electronic databases like *Early English Books On-Line* render the firsthand examination of such books dispensable for scholars who are not engaged in projects that require the physical handling of early printed books.⁸

At the same time that the history of the book and other forms of micromaterial historicism have flourished, there has been a very different (one might say opposing) tendency in post-9/11 early modern studies. Since the new century began, we have seen a growing initiative emerge within the field, a new globalism that reaches out beyond the borders of English culture to find connections with other cultures and to tell the story of how English culture changed and developed through interaction with other peoples in both the New and Old Worlds.⁹ There has been a resurgence of interest in English representations of other cultures, of cross-cultural exchange. These globalist scholars tend to frame their investigations and arguments within larger historical narratives about class, colonialism, and gender. I am thinking here of studies like John Archer’s *Old Worlds*, Valerie Forman’s *Tragicomic Redemptions*, Barbara Fuchs’s *Mimesis and Empire*, Ania Loomba’s *Shakespeare, Race, and Colonialism*, Mark Netzloff’s *Internal Empires*, Ayesha Ramachandran’s *The Worldmakers*, Coll Thrush’s *Indigenous London*, Su Fang Ng’s *Alexander the Great from Britain to Southeast Asia*, Ivo Kamps and Jyotsna Singh’s collection *Travel Knowledge*, and the essays in *Global Traffic* (edited by Barbara Sebek and Stephen Deng), to name only a few. Critics such as these are interested in the way that English culture changed as capitalism emerged, and they see English capitalism’s emergence as a phenomenon that is both domestic and global, part of a global system that connects England (and Britain) to the rest of the world. This kind of work is valid and important for a variety of reasons, including the present need to tell the tale of capitalism’s rise to worldwide dominance in an age when the power and pressure of an unsustainable global capitalism is pushing us ever closer to crisis. The work of cultural historians today can help to communicate, among specialists in our field and to a wider audience, the story of how the global economy developed and of how early capitalism emerged to support and redirect commercial and cultural energies. If capitalism is the engine that drives history, then perhaps we should not ignore its shaping role in relation to cultural production, including the production of literary texts.

Beginning with its founder, Immanuel Wallerstein, global systems theory (also known as world systems theory) has developed an empowering conceptualization of socioeconomic history that can be used to inform the narrative of British cultural history. Global systems theory has

changed and developed over the years and is by no means a homogenous school of thought. Theorists like Wallerstein, Andre Gunder Frank, Kenneth Pomeranz, Janet Abu-Lughod, and Samir Amin, have debated and disagreed with each other vigorously, but their debates, taken as a whole, offer a useful frame of reference for understanding the rise of capitalism, the beginnings of European colonialism in the New World, and the cultural changes that accompanied these developments.¹⁰ They also help us to see how early modern Europe was connected to other parts of the world. After reading global systems theory, we begin to see English literature not only within a Eurocentric, humanist tradition but within a much broader matrix of global flow and exchange – of goods, texts, people, and ideas. Obviously, this approach will be of much greater interest to scholars who want to connect specific texts to broader cultural transformations or channels of dissemination, but once we begin to think globally, even the most domestic-seeming texts and local issues are found to have transcultural elements. After all, no culture is sealed off, pure, or static, and if we look at early modern England, we find a textile-exporting and luxury-importing island with a rapidly developing maritime culture. London, the site of so much literary and theatrical activity, was a commercial port directly connected by the Thames River estuary to the open sea and thus to the world.

The last third of the sixteenth century witnessed a rapid expansion of English trade overseas. This commercial transformation wrought profound changes in English culture, including a much higher level of cross-cultural contact. As information and goods from abroad flooded in, London became more cosmopolitan, and its population of “strangers” and immigrants increased. The ideological conditions of the time were profoundly informed by these economic changes, and cultural production, in turn, had a shaping influence on economic behavior. Global systems theory makes clear that the tremendous commercial expansion of the late sixteenth century did not come about because of some “natural” Anglo-Saxon capitalist essence that was waiting to be actuated. England, Britain, and Western Europe did not comprise national or regional units of economic activity that could autonomously initiate or generate such an expansion; rather, they participated in a dynamical system through which they were linked to distant peoples, cultures, and commodities. And it was the organization of flow and exchange within that system as a whole that allowed for England’s changing economic circumstances.¹¹

The middle of the sixteenth century was a time of relative commercial isolation for England, in part because overseas trade was hampered by the internal struggle between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism. This economic seclusion began to change, however, during the second half of the sixteenth century, and by the early seventeenth century the English had “exchanged their passive, dependent role in Europe’s trading system for an active, independent role in the world” (Andrews, 8). The enduring tendency for silver to be valued more highly in Asia than in Europe shaped the commercial world of the late sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, and this economic activity helped to stimulate the rise of European capitalism.¹² In China, for instance, there was a strong demand for gold and silver. The tug of this “bimetallic flow” allowed for spices and luxury goods to travel west to Europe, while New World gold and silver were brought from the mines in the Americas to Europe and then moved on to Asia. According to economic historian Jan de Vries:

The fifteenth-century introduction [in China] of a silver currency and the imposition in the 1570s of the “single-whip” tax system (transforming various payments in kind to a single tax payable in silver) established the basis for China’s seemingly insatiable demand for silver. The

silver required to monetize the economy was enormous, and it became a moving target as population growth accelerated.

(96)

Wallerstein sees early modern China as a world empire and not as a world economy made up of multiple polities. The rise of capitalism, in Wallerstein's view, was, in part, an outcome of the protracted crisis of feudalism specific to Europe (c. 1290–1450). Wallerstein stresses the fact that Northwest Europe gained control over most of the world economy and presided over the development and spread of industrialization and, in time, the global capitalist economy, resulting in unequal development.

In response to Wallerstein, later work in global systems theory has often focused on China's important role in the world economy. There has been a welcome effort by Andre Gunder Frank, Kenneth Pomeranz, and others to counter a Eurocentric tendency in Wallerstein's work, and to stress the notion that the "great divergence" between the European economy and the rest of the world should be understood in terms of a worldwide, holistic system. These developments comprise a new global approach to history writing that differs from earlier forms of world history that were Eurocentric or even comparative. Insofar as scholars working on early modern texts continue to do historicist work that appeals to a broad vision of embeddedness in historical processes, this new global approach to history becomes an important framework for making sense of cultural history.

As I said earlier, many scholars working on early modern literature and culture have been demonstrating the ways in which English culture was going global in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This transformation has been revealed from many different angles. Lesley B. Cormack, in her study of what she calls "the English geographical community" (50), argues that "Geography provided a key to an imperialism that stressed the superiority of the English people and customs and the knowability, controllability, and inferiority of the wider world" (11). Scholars like Jonathan Gil Harris and Jean E. Howard point out the contradiction between xenophobia and cosmopolitanism that intensified during this period, as London adapted to a position in the changing matrix of global commerce.¹³ Walter Cohen and Crystal Bartolovich have written about how London was becoming a "world city" and how that worlding was expressed on the London stage.¹⁴ At a number of linked sites of textual production and consumption, from the English universities to the theaters and wharves of London, to the trade networks and diasporas that connected London to overseas markets, we see the beginnings of what we now call globalization. If I choose to make English culture the primary object of analysis here, this choice does not imply that England or Britain or Europe (whatever Europe might have been in 1600) are causally more significant in bringing about a new world order than other participants in the global system, like China or India or Persia.¹⁵ My analysis acknowledges the participation of London in a global network – an economic and transcultural system of catalytic dependencies and dynamical changes. Before the 1570s, English society was far less mobile and outgoing, but as English merchants, sailors, pirates, colonists, travelers, and diplomats began to circulate in unprecedented ways beyond the shores of the British Isles, literary production became more globally oriented as well. This global turn is seen in prose narrative, in the theater, in epic poetry, and in other genres. Early modern authors were stimulated by the new cross-cultural contact: from More's *Utopia* to Shakespeare's *Tempest* we can see clearly that many writers were inspired by this experience. I will try to demonstrate my point with reference to a single text, but one that is restlessly global – Spenser's *Faerie Queene*.

Spenser's romance epic hearkens back to the era of the Crusades and the literature produced at that time, when English knights traveled to the Middle East and participated in its economy. The European romance tradition of the Middle Ages, with its orientation toward the Holy Land, represented Christian–Muslim conflict as a struggle between Christian knights and their “saracen” or “paynim” foes. Spenser and other English authors of the late sixteenth century took up the thread of that tradition and refashioned it to weave new versions of romance narrative, and produce new transnational, and often cross-cultural, epic poems.

In *The Faerie Queene*, Spenser's imaginative geography encompasses Ireland, Europe, the East Indies, and the West Indies. Spenser's epic is oriented not only toward the English court, but also toward the known world, the colonial contact zone, and beyond. His patrons, including Raleigh and the Queen, were interested – and, literally, invested – in England's connections with the global system of the day. Spenser's allegorical heroes pursue their quests through Fairyland, and the exhausting labor that they undertake is compared to the poet's long-distance labor – both the heroic quest and the poet's task are figured as a journey by sea.

Perhaps the connection between poetic inspiration and global vision is most explicit in the proem to the second book of *The Faerie Queene*, which begins with these cantos:

Right well I wrote most mighty Sovereaine,
That all this famous antique history,
Of some th'abundance of an idle braine
Will judged be, and painted forgery,
Rather then matter of just memory,
Sith none, that breatheth living aire, does know,
Where is that happy land of Faery,
Which I so much do vaunt, yet no where show,
But vouch antiquities, which no body can know.

But let that man with better sence advize,
That of the world least part to us is red:
And dayly how through hardy enterprize,
Many great Regions are discovered,
Which to late age were never mentioned.
Who ever heard of th'Indian Peru?
Or who in venturous vessell measured
The Amazon huge river now found trew?
Or fruitfullest Virginia who did ever vew?

Yet all these were, when no man did them know;
Yet have from wisest ages hidden beene:
And later times things more unknowne shall show.
Why then should witlesse man so much misweene
That nothing is, but that which he hath seene?
What if within the Moones faire shining spheare?
What if in every other starre unseene
Of other worldes he happily should heare?
He wonder would much more: yet such to some appeare.

(Book 2, proem, 1–3)¹⁶

The three-part “world” (composed of Europe, Africa, and Asia) that was thought, since ancient times, to make up all of earthly creation was now to be understood as part of a much larger global system. “Hardy enterprize” (i.e., risky investment in long-distance voyages) was bringing new worlds into connection with the old ones.

In Book One, Spenser had already compared his epic narrative to “the long voyage” (1.12.42) of a sailing vessel, but the proem of Book Two goes further, asserting an analogy between imaginative capacity, textual production, and global “enterprize” or exploration. Fairyland, claims the poet, is just as real, perhaps more real, than “other worldes” that are yet “unknowne.” In part, this is merely a playful, ironic defense of fiction, poetry, and the imaginative arts; but these cantos also refer to a very real spatial, textual, and epistemological reorientation for Spenser and his audience when the poet declares, “of the world least part to us is red.” By the time that Spenser wrote, English readers had been exposed to an outpouring of new discovery narratives describing previously “unknowne” lands, peoples, cultures, customs, commodities, and artifacts. As this data proliferated, it was redistributed and reorganized in various textual forms. These texts circulated and came to inform English culture, and they brought into play a powerful new outlook or worldview. The experience of coming to know what had until that time been unknown about the rest of the world was suddenly an open-ended, continual process, one that could not rely on received wisdom. Spenser’s proem refers to the manner in which the new data was consumed as it was conveyed by the textual and oral reports from those who were engaged in the global enterprise of “discovering” and measuring those things “Which to late age were never mentioned.” Spenser suggests that any stubborn reliance on the old Eurocentrism, based in the geographic writings of the ancients (those of the “wisest ages”), is akin to the over-skeptical folly of a “witlesse” bumpkin who will only believe in “that which he hath seene.”

The proem’s allusions to Peru, the Amazon, Virginia, and to “unknowne” lands also indicate Spenser’s very real linkages to the global network through the patronage system of his day. Sir Walter Raleigh, who was himself the author of globally oriented texts like *The Discoverie of Guiana* (1595) and *The History of the World* (1614), was a participant in the “endlesse work” of discovery, and Spenser’s close ties to him are apparent in many sections of *The Faerie Queene*. As Spenser traveled together with Raleigh between Ireland and London in 1589, he may have read portions of *The Faerie Queene* to Raleigh, and the famous “Letter of the Authours” addressed to Raleigh indicates the role of Spenser’s patron as a privileged reader of the epic. As a member of Raleigh’s circle of clients, and as the leader of a short-lived colonial settlement in Munster, where Spenser’s holdings were adjacent to land owned by Raleigh, Spenser was a coparticipant with Raleigh in the English effort to strengthen and expand their colonies in Ireland.¹⁷ William Oram has argued that Spenser’s involvement in Ireland was an experience of alienation: “To give up England while continuing to write her national epic must have involved some sacrifice and uncertainty” (342), writes Oram. And while there is certainly some truth to this, we might also say that Spenser and his epic were not limited to the English national imagination, but were shaped in part by a global, transnational vision. Stephen Greenblatt’s chapter on Book Two of *The Faerie Queene* in *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* makes clear the connection between Guyon’s quest, the Irish colonial context, and the experience of English Protestant settlers in the New World. Spenser also participated together with Raleigh in the Elizabethan Protestant resistance to Roman Catholic power, and in his epic that struggle is represented as a global conflict. In fact, Raleigh himself once declared, “Whosoever commands the sea, commands the trade; whosoever commands the trade of the world commands the riches of the world, and consequently the world itself” (cited in Sherman, 93).

In Book Two of *The Faerie Queene*, Guyon and Arthur confront three exotic foes – Mammon, Maleager, and Acrasia – who represent the temptations and obstacles faced by those who venture forth from England to seek wealth and land amongst the “salvage” or “paynim” peoples of the earth. Temperance must contend, not only with domestic enticements, but also with the erotic pleasures offered by other cultures, and with the temptation of gold, the holy grail sought by Raleigh in Guiana and found by the Spanish in Peru. Guyon’s greatest trial takes place in canto seven of Book Two, in the Cave of Mammon. Here, Guyon is not tested in knightly combat, and though Mammon is annoyed that Guyon resists temptation, Mammon himself is never in danger of defeat. It is this episode that I would like to examine more closely, in terms of the global system and the circulation of precious metal that was such an important force in the worldwide movement of goods and peoples in the early modern period. Though silver was actually more important to the global economy, the more valuable metal, gold, was the most sought after by the British adventurers and privateers of Spenser’s day, and gold serves as a fetishized symbol for the extractive riches obtained and controlled by Spain through her overseas empire.

According to Raleigh’s *Discoverie of Guiana*, Spanish gold “indaungereth and disturbeth all the nations of Europe, it purchaseth intelligence, creepeth into Councils, and setteth bound loyalty at libertie, in the greatest Monarchies of Europe” (127–128). Despite this warning, in the same text Raleigh promises, “Where there is store of gold, it is in effect nedeles to remember other commodities for trade” (195). Gold becomes a primal signifier, the sign both of a profound corruption that knows no boundaries and, at the same time, of a transcendent value that can buy anything and everything. Just as Spain is both the enemy and the model for ambitious English subjects like Raleigh, gold is both the source of a tyrannical, ungodly power and the ultimate object of noble aspiration. For the virtuous adventurer, gold is merely a means to an end, and to love or desire gold for its own sake is sinful and irrational; however, the overdetermined significance of gold in the Cave of Mammon also refers to the allure of profit that motivates all sorts of economic activity.

In his discussion of “Guyon, Mammon’s Cave, and the New World Treasure,” David T. Read looks at the Cave of Mammon episode through the lens of English perspectives on the Spanish “hunger of gold.” Read points to early modern accounts of Spanish exploration that described the conquistadors’ desire for gold as something that “prevents or frustrates men from fulfilling their bodily needs” (217). Read quotes from Peter Martyr’s narrative, translated in Hakluyt: “the hunger of golde, dyd noo lesse encorage owr men to adventure these perels and labours then dyd the possessyng of the landes” (cited in Read 1990, 217). According to Read, this perverse tendency to put a figurative “hunger” for gold before the natural hunger of the body accounts for the physical collapse experienced by Guyon after he escapes the cave. At the same time, Read suggests that “the Cave of Mammon allegorizes the emerging mercantilism of a financially pressed nobility in the late sixteenth century” (Read, 212n). The colonial forms of conquest and overlordship that would presumably establish new limbs of the Spanish body politic were supplemented, and sometimes superseded, by a desire for gold that made the possession of land, and the expropriation of native labor, a mere means to control a supply of precious metal.

But to limit our analysis of gold in the Cave of Mammon to the events of Raleigh’s journey to Guiana, or to a contextualizing exploration of early modern goldmining, refining, and coining practices, would be to follow the pattern of the “new materialism” that focuses on the object without placing that object in relation to larger historical processes or ideological movements.¹⁸ Instead, I want to point out that Mammon’s power is described by Spenser in global terms. Mammon’s attempts to seduce Guyon suggest that gold is associated, not only with the Spanish

colonies, but with a global phenomenon, one which includes both Spain and England in its worldwide scope.

The figure of Mammon signified, in early modern economic and religious discourse, as a devil and a false god, and as a personification of wealth and worldly goods. The name “Mammon” is a Syriac word that appears twice in the Gospel, in Luke 16:9–13 and Matthew 6:24. The latter passage from the Sermon on the Mount is translated in the Geneva Bible as follows:

No man can serve two masters: for either he shall hate the one, and love the other, or else he shall leane to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and riches.

A marginal gloss to “riches” says, “This word is a Syrian word, and signifieth all things that belong to money.” “Riches” is a translation of the Syriac “mamonas,” and in the King James version, the word appears not as “riches” but as “Mammon.” The *OED* cites John Foxe’s *Actes and Monuments* (1563): “Thys wycked Mammon, the goodes of thys worlde, whyche is their God.” When Thomas Becon defines the enemies of humankind—the devil, the flesh, and the world – in his *Catechisme* (included in his 1564 *Worckes*), he identifies “the world” with Mammon:

All folowe the worlde, which both with his pleasures and richesse doothe so entangle menne in thys oure age, that he seemeth to raygne alone lyke a God. All folowe the worlde, even from the higheste to the lowest, from the kyyng to the subiecte ... They are all Mammonistes and world-linges.

(Becon, 415)

Spenser’s Mammon introduces himself as “God of the worlde and worldlings .../Great Mammon, greatest god below the skye” (2.7.8), a reference to this homiletic tradition, but Spenser’s allegory also allows for an understanding of Mammon as the spirit of the global transmission of wealth.

John Dee, in his *General and Rare Memorials Pertayning to the Perfect Arte of Navigation* (1577), also refers to Mammon as a personification of economic misbehavior. In that text, Dee lays out a program for global navigation, expansion, and trade to be based on the nationwide sponsorship of a royal navy that would maintain a secure environment for commercial expansion and venturing. According to Dee, such a national project would circulate and bring home wealth by means of foreign trade and the opening of new markets. Dee contrasts his project with an opposing form of economic behavior that he says is harming and holding back “the weal-Publik of England” (33). Because they do not engage in beneficial exchange, those who bring dearth to the commonwealth by their hoarding of wealth and speculation in commodities are called “Mammon’s dearlings” (33). Dee describes the “Carefull freend, and doting loue, of wicked Mammon” whose wealth and goods are “only, for his most Priuate Gaynes sake, to be Bagged, or Chested vp, for his Idoll, to behold or Delight in, As in his strength, and furniture: ready to mainteyn hym, in other wicked purposes” (33). Dee’s Mammon is the god worshipped by the hoarder, the encloser, the monopolist, and the primitive accumulator; so is Spenser’s Mammon, but Spenser supplements the traditional meaning of Mammon used by Dee. The Mammon of Spenser’s allegory embodies a paradox that links the local hoard or domestic accumulation to a global circulation system.

The opening stanzas of Book II, Canto 7, associate Guyon’s knightly quest with new world exploration: first Guyon is compared to a navigating pilot making his way across the sea and then to a European explorer arriving the New World, “he traveild through wide wastfull ground,/ That nought but desert wilderness shewed all around” (2.7.2). There, in a “gloomy glade,” the knight of Temperance encounters “An uncouth, salvage, and uncivile wight” whose “face with

smoke was tand” (2.7.3). Mammon is “Of grisly hew, and fowle ill favour’d sight” (2.7.3), and he wears a rusty “yron coate . . . enveloped with gold.” This coat appears “to have beene of old/A worke of rich entayle, and curious mould,/Woven with antickes and wild Imagery” (2.7.4). One possible reading of the figure of Mammon might interpret him as an Amerindian living in the forest and adorned in the ornate garb of a chieftain or shaman. He is counting a “masse of coyne” when Guyon stumbles upon him,

And round about him lay on every side
Great heapes of gold, that never could be spent:
Of which some were rude owre, not purifide
Of Mulcibers devouring element;
Some others were new driven, and distent
Into great Ingoes, and to wedges square;
Some in round plates withouten moniment;
But most were stampt, and in their metal bare
The antique shapes of kings and kesars straunge and rare.
(2.7.5)

Mammon’s gold is an inexhaustible resource: it “never could be spent” both in the sense that it is seemingly limitless in quantity and that it is being hoarded and kept out of circulation. It also takes many shapes and forms, its “bare” metal bearing the mark of the many different rulers who have tried to put it to use as both a symbol and a resource to enhance their worldly power. These royally minted coins form a kind of ruin, a nasty pile heaped in a foul dark place, a hoard that attests to the efforts of “kings and kesars” to stamp their identities on the world of matter. In a lifeless heap, these coins figure the wealth employed by the rulers of kingdoms and empires throughout the world, and their minting of a royal coinage that would assert identity and nation, now indiscriminately mingled together to form an international “masse.”

Guyon cannot imagine where Mammon can “safely hold/So huge a masse, and hide from heaven’s eye” (2.7.20), and he questions Mammon: “What art thou . . ./That here in desert hast thine habitaunce,/And these rich heapes of wealth doest hide apart/From the world’s eye, and from her right usaunce?” (2.7.7). Guyon’s desire to “see” and “know” the “secret place” that is the source of Mammon’s gold is what initially draws him into the cave. Guyon does not desire to possess the gold, but he wants knowledge of its origin, its production, and most importantly its global circulation.

They forward passe, ne Guyon yet spoke word,
Till that they came unto an yron dore,
Which to them opened of his owne accord,
And shewd of riches such exceeding store,
As eye of man did never see before;
Ne ever could within one place be found,
Though all the wealth, which is, or was of yore,
Could gathered be through all the world around,
And that above were added to that under ground.
The charge thereof unto a covetous Spright
Commaunded was, who thereby did attend,

And warily awaited day and night,
 From other covetous feends it to defend,
 Who it to rob and ransacke did intend.
 Then Mammon turning to that warriour, said;
 Loe here the worldes blis, loe here the end,
 To which all men do ayme, rich to be made:
 Such grace now to be happy, is before thee laid.
 (2.7.31–32)

The so-called Cave of Mammon is compared to “an huge caue,” but it is really a vast mine, “hewne out of rocky clifte” (2.7.28). The gold in Mammon’s mine is the hellish equivalent of El Dorado, of what Raleigh called “El madre del oro (as the Spaniards term them) which is the mother of gold” – it is the great source of precious metal that Raleigh hoped to find in the hidden empire of Manoa, a hoard bigger than the Peruvian mother lode.

When offered these riches, Guyon refuses, declaring that he would rather “be Lord of those, that riches have,/Then them to have my selfe, and be their servile slave” (2.7.33). Through Guyon’s rejection of the mother lode fantasy, Spenser suggests that there is a higher power that is capable of commanding those who have wealth, a power that could operate without being tainted by desiring or possessing metal or coins in a direct way. Guyon’s refusal of Mammon’s gold invokes this fantasy of a feudal power that could function by means of mutual obligation rather than by participation in the marketplace and its values.¹⁹ But this social order was already passing away in Spenser’s day. Cicero’s aphorism, that “A limitless supply of money forms the sinews of war,” was increasingly valid. Money, supplied by bankers and creditors as well as taxpayers, was also needed to sustain a military and commercial capability that would be definitive of the modern state. Empire, colonies, military might, monarchical power itself – all these needed much more than what Quilligan calls “a feudal gift economy of service” in order to be viable (Quilligan 1983, 56). Already by the early sixteenth century, rulers like the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I were kept in thrall to bankers like the Fuggers.²⁰ Guyon can refuse the offer of wealth and the hand of ambition, but Europe’s early modern rulers could not.

Mammon’s snappy answers to Guyon’s stupid questions refer to a systemic, abstracted economic power – the ability to control markets and the circulation of commodities and money. Mammon himself is the spirit of primitive accumulation, the maker and breaker of kings, but he is at the same time the spirit of the global economy, generating and regulating the flow of precious metal:

God of the world and worldlings I me call,
 Great Mammon, greatest god below the skye,
 That of my plenty poure out unto all,
 And unto none my graces do envye:
 Riches, renowme, and principality,
 Honour, estate, and all this worldes good,
 For which men swinck and sweat incessantly,
 Fro me do flow into an ample flood,
 And in the hollow earth have their eternall brood.
 (2.7.7)

This stanza hints at the older myth about gold as something essential and sacred, a divine element with healing powers – the gold that was the goal of the alchemists’ holy experiments, a sign of plenty and divine bounty, given to those whom God favors. But the Cave of Mammon also represents gold as something unnatural. This is the other myth about obtaining gold, a metal that was said to generate in the womb of Mother Earth until miners extract it by violating and raping the earth.²¹ As Guyon puts it, “then gan a cursed hand the quiet wombe/Of his great Grandmother with steele to wound,/And the hid treasures in her sacred tombe,/with Sacriledge to dig” (2.7.17). When gold or other metals are not only mined but also coined and imprinted with the images of kings and queens, those sacred objects, stolen from the earth’s “sacred tombe,” are then made available to be worshipped as idols. Coining thus allows for mass idolatry and makes an idol of the monarch. Mammon’s gold is both “natural” commodity and social money, essential thing and arbitrary holder of value, feudal lucre and fungible capital. The positive signification of gold is no longer viable in Mammon’s money factory, and yet the new economic system will not allow the old aristocratic patronage system and its cultural codes to go on functioning. Thus arises Guyon’s dilemma: he cannot accept the corruptive gift of gold, but to see and know, and yet refrain, is to remain outside of the new global system of exchange that is so irresistibly attractive to courtiers, merchants and monarchs alike.

It is not merely *curiositas*, or even a conquistador-like colonial desire for gold that seems to motivate Guyon’s descent into the cave. Instead, it is a need to know how it is possible that such a hoard of gold can exist in one place, defying the forces of economic desire and exchange. Once Guyon descends into the cave, he observes but succeeds in resisting the temptation to touch or remove any of Mammon’s wealth. Having refused to accept any gold, Guyon returns to the surface of the earth and immediately collapses. This physical collapse suggests that the noble effort to remain free of Mammon’s taint will render the venturing hero powerless – or, at least, will leave him exhausted and dependent on the aid of others. Participation in the global economy is necessary in order to sustain heroic vigor and movement, and it is only the arbitrary arrival of Guyon’s guardian angel that saves him.

It is ironic that at the end of Canto seven the knight of Temperance can find no moderate course of action in the cave. He simply refuses to partake: he cannot adapt temperately to an unnatural existence in the underworld, where dead matter is worshipped, and as a result he faints away, loses consciousness. It takes the guardian angel, the Palmer, and Arthur together to protect Guyon until he revives. The rest of Book Two deals with the body and its senses, which must be ruled by reason. The threats and temptations faced by Guyon later, in the Bower of Bliss, have to do with physical pleasure and desire, and the violent repression of those temptations comes much easier to him – his refusal of temptation in the bower empowers his violent force, rather than sapping it. Guyon succeeds in destroying the Bower of Bliss, and his victory there over the sorceress Acrasia is complete. By contrast, after Guyon leaves the cave, Mammon remains unmolested to carry on his global reign.

In the Cave of Mammon episode, Spenser struggles to contain contradictory meanings. Why should Guyon’s virtuous, successful resistance of temptation lead to an allegorical “fall” – to his collapse and paralysis? In order to understand the allegorical significance of this mixed message, we might turn not to the theological explanations offered by earlier commentators like Paul Alpers, Frank Kermode, and Harry Berger but to the opposing concepts of local thing and global system that I have been discussing in this essay. Insofar as Guyon’s temptation in canto seven involves the presentation of a series of things or objects (including the objectified Philotime), he passes the test admirably and serves as a model of temperate abstinence. During his three-day

tour of the cave, Guyon rejects each offered gift, including the hand of Philotime, and refuses to become one of “Mammon’s dearlings.” And yet his stuttered refusal – “Me list not (said the Elfin knight) receive/Thing offred, till I know it well be got” (2.7.19) – is highly problematic because the “vain shewes” that Guyon scorns cannot be so easily separated from the “emprise” that he pursues. Guyon understands and articulates the traditional, proverbial and theological grounds for the rejection of Mammon worship: money is the root of all evil; the desire to accumulate worldly goods is sinful; in the Golden Age there was a premonetary society, later corrupted by the mining of golden coins; and so on. As Berger observes, “He should, with this knowledge, want nothing to do with Mammon” (19). And as Berger argues, Guyon’s curiosity and his willingness to let Mammon be his guide indicate the dangers of exceeding one’s “human finitude” (29). According to Berger, Spenser’s allegory of the cave shows how even a temperate Christian may fall prey to “concupiscence of the eyes” and thus be “tempted to make trial of his excellence by adhering to unnatural conditions, tempted to pleasure his soul by bruising his body” (27). What Berger and the others do not discuss is the unresolved tension between the condemnation of a hunger for gold and an English desire for golden colonies; between a residual feudal code of honor that rejects money as base and corruptive, and a desire to obtain the wealth and power generated by international trade under an emergent capitalist economy; and finally, between a system of aristocratic patronage and the new capitalist system based on credit, debt, and bills of exchange – a system that had no direct need for gold but relied instead upon invisible agreements.

Maureen Quilligan has argued, following Fredric Jameson and Richard Halpern, that Spenser’s romance-epic exhibits a formal, generic hybridity, one that is symptomatic of the overlapping of residual feudalism with emergent capitalism.²² And, in the Mammon episode, she sees a representation of primitive accumulation, especially in Mammon’s discussion of an economy that increasingly makes labor a commodity and money the measure of all things. Mammon chides Guyon,

... doest thou not weet,
That money can thy wants at will supply?
Sheilds, steeds, and armes, and all things for thee meet
It can purvay in twinckling of an eye;
And crownes and kingdoms to thee multiply.
Doe not I kings create, and throw the crowne
Sometimes to him, that low in dust doth ly?
And him that raignd, into his rowme thrust downe,
And whom I lust, do heape with glory and renowne?
(2.7.11)

Guyon rebuts Mammon’s claim by saying that when money makes kings and gains power, it does so in a “wrongfull” manner (2.7.13). Guyon then goes on to contrast the current era of money-lust with “The antique world” that he says existed before gold and silver were first mined and coveted. Mammon urges Guyon to leave this mythical past behind, and tells him, “Thou that doest live in later times, must wage/Thy workes for wealth, and life for gold engage” (2.7.18). Guyon never really succeeds in refuting Mammon’s claims for the power and efficacy of riches, but the knight of temperance does refuse all of Mammon’s offered gifts. Guyon is quite

capable of resisting the physical temptations of food and sleep in the underworld, yet he does not come away from Mammon's Cave unscathed. Guyon's debilitating "faint" is an indication that his decision to follow Mammon to the world below and his subsequent trial in the underworld did lead to a kind of fall from the comfortable sense of self-worth that Guyon had exhibited in the opening stanzas of Canto seven. And his collapse into unconsciousness is a serious problem at the beginning of the next canto when Cymocles and Pyrocles happen along and take him for dead as he lies helpless on the ground with only the unarmed Palmer to protect him until Arthur arrives. Mammon does not destroy Guyon, but the power of money, and the revelation of its secret sources, does take a toll on the hero of temperance. Guyon's curiosity, his desire to see and know the "secret place" (2.7.20) where wealth is produced, "the fountaine of the worldes good" (2.7.38), is a desire to see beyond the proffered golden gifts to an understanding of the global system through which wealth circulates.

The secret of monetary production and circulation had already become, in Spenser's day, not a secret knowledge of the location of El Dorado, and not even a knowledge of how to mine, smelt, and coin gold or silver – but rather, the secret of how a global system of merchant capital allows for shrewd speculators to grow rich while creating a restructured world-economy. What the allegory of Guyon demonstrates is that the refusal to participate in that global system of exchange, in the new economy of capital, may exhibit temperance, but to gaze upon the workings of Mammon and yet refuse to serve the power of Mammon will bring on a crisis and a vulnerability that can only be averted by divine intervention. "[L]eave have thou to refuse:/But thing refused, doe not afterward accuse" (2.7.18). Spenser cannot accommodate both God and Mammon, and so, confronted with two unacceptable choices, Spenser's narrative, like Guyon himself, simply faints away.

NOTES

1. Three indispensable recent accounts of the neoliberal economic system and its consequences are Wendy Brown, Chomsky, and Harvey.
2. On "thing theory," see the fall 2001 special issue of *Critical Inquiry*, edited by Bill Brown, and Bill Brown, *A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature* (2003). See also the essays in D. Miller, and, for a discussion of the "new materialism" in early modern studies, see Harris 2001 and the collection edited by Harris and Korda. "The New Boredom" is an ironic term first coined by David Scott Kastan in *Shakespeare after Theory* (18).
3. There is much to admire about the work of ecocritical scholars who declare themselves to be "posthumanists" or "new materialists." Clearly, it is a good thing to be raising awareness about the rootedness of human beings in a complex network of entangled objects (e.g., human, animal, plant, mineral) as we seek to remedy the global climate crisis. To show how the category of the human has been constructed in problematic ways is also a worthy intellectual and historical project. And at a certain level of philosophical or theoretical discourse, object-oriented ontology and actor-network theory have undoubtedly made valuable contributions to scholarly debate. Furthermore, the affiliated new materialist trend in literary studies has also offered many important new contributions to the field. Notwithstanding these positive developments and substantial achievements, recent critiques of object-oriented ontology and of the new materialism have exposed the tendency of this approach to engage in a questionable, quasi-religious mystification of matter and to deemphasize human agency in ways that distract from the central role of human agency per se (especially human economics and politics) in causing and (potentially) alleviating the climate emergency. For a range of recent critiques of the new materialism, detailing some of its political implications and limitations, see

- Battistoni, Lossin, Malm 78–118, Rekret, Tompkins, and Žižek.
4. Materialist criticism, including work on the history of the book, does chart out new scholarly territory and findings, and there are recent studies that masterfully bridge the gap between print or manuscript history, on the one hand, and broader historical frameworks that are conducive to political and ideological critique, on the other. A terrific example of this kind of politicized history of the material book is Miles Ogborn's *Indian Ink: Script and Print in the Making of the English East India Company*. This study is based in part on Ogborn's archival investigation of East India Company records, but Ogborn also examines non-Western texts, discusses "the ship as material space," and brings these elements together in a globally oriented argument that addresses the broad history of emergent capitalism and imperialism over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.
 5. Jason W. Moore has introduced the term "Capitalocene" (as opposed to "anthropocene") as an indicator of how the capitalist system has played the central role in bringing about a new age of climate crisis.
 6. The story of global capitalism can be narrated without recourse to rigid totalities or teleologies (whether Whiggish or traditional Marxist) and without reliance on oversimplifying essentialisms, but such a narration does require a willingness to make sense of world history in terms of long historical processes that link past and present. See Vitkus, "How the 1% Came to Rule the World".
 7. Witness the article on writing tablets by Stallybrass, Chartier, Mowery, and Wolfe; Lena Orlin on peepholes (177–189); or Gallagher and Greenblatt's communion wafer-munching mice (147). See also the essays in Bleichmar and Martin; Findlen; Fumerton; and Hunt.
 8. Cited in J. Hillis Miller, "Literary Study among the Ruins," on the crisis of relevancy.
 9. I first noted this "new globalism" in my introduction to the 2002 special issue of *The Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* on "Representations of Islam and the East".
 10. For a key portion of that debate, see the three reviews, by Amin, Arrighi, and Wallerstein, of Frank's *ReOrient in Review* 22 (1999). Other useful perspectives on world–global systems theory include Abu-Lughod, Amin, Blaut, and Polanyi.
 11. See my article "The Common Market of All the World," in *Global Traffic*, for further discussion of England's cultural and economic "outward thrust."
 12. See Jan de Vries (94).
 13. In her review of Harris's *Sick Economies*, Howard provides a concise description of the "insight" that she acknowledges in Harris's book: "even as early modern writers pathologized the foreign, they ratified the global, recognizing the necessity of foreign trade and the entanglement of England in an increasingly global economy. Economic cosmopolitanism and rhetorical (and often more than rhetorical) xenophobia were paradoxically parts of a single world view and helped to define the nation state as a bounded entity that nonetheless participated uneasily in international trade. Harris thus makes a complex contribution to ongoing discussions about England's transformation into a national entity and the role of both 'the foreign' and 'the global' in that transformation" (407).
 14. See the articles by Cohen (128–158) and Bartolovich.
 15. For some good examples of how historians are redefining "the modern world" in terms of the new global history, see Marks, Porter, and the collection edited by Parker and Bentley.
 16. Quotations from *The Faerie Queene* are taken from the 1596 edition of the poem. Following the usual practice, I have kept original spelling except for the early modern print forms of "u" and "v," which I have silently modernized.
 17. For more information on Spenser's relationship with Raleigh, see Herron, Bednarz, and the essays by Oram, Erickson, and Rudick in *Spenser Studies* 15 (2001).
 18. See Landreth (57–74) and Dawson for two readings of the Cave of Mammon episode that draw on object-oriented, new materialist thought. Dawson declares, "It isn't an accident that Spenser's complex allegorical poem appears at a moment when the modern world-system is just emerging and Christianity is in disarray. For Spenser's poem not only attempts to articulate a complex and fragile idea of world harmony amidst historical conflict, but it also brings out the paradoxes and contradictions that inhere in

- all notions of universality" (182). Dawson also suggests that allegorical texts like Spenser's epic exhibit their own agency in constructing our sense of the world under globalization. See David Hawkes's chapter on "Money as Metaphor" in *Shakespeare and Economic Theory* for a helpful critical survey of "materialist" work on Shakespeare, Spenser, and their contemporaries. Hawkes goes on, in his book, to offer a dialectic, Hegelian–Marxist corrective to the undialectical materialism that he sees in the scholarship of The New Economic Critics and in those whose materialism relies on Bruno Latour, Graham Harman, and Timothy Morton rather than Marx.
19. See Shannon Miller on Raleigh's claims that the English could create a paternalistic empire in the West Indies that would be unlike Spain's coercive empire.
 20. Jardine discusses in detail the negotiations between Jakob Fugger and the Habsburgs in chapter 6 of *Worldly Goods*.
 21. See Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature* (26–41).
 22. Maureen Quilligan observes that "what Spenser offers in the Mammon episode is the dark underside of money's world, the functions it performs that are usually hidden to the eye. Spenser's allegory takes as its province the usually hidden springs of human society, making manifest the latent contradictions of Elizabethan economic organization..." (Quilligan 1983, 55).

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