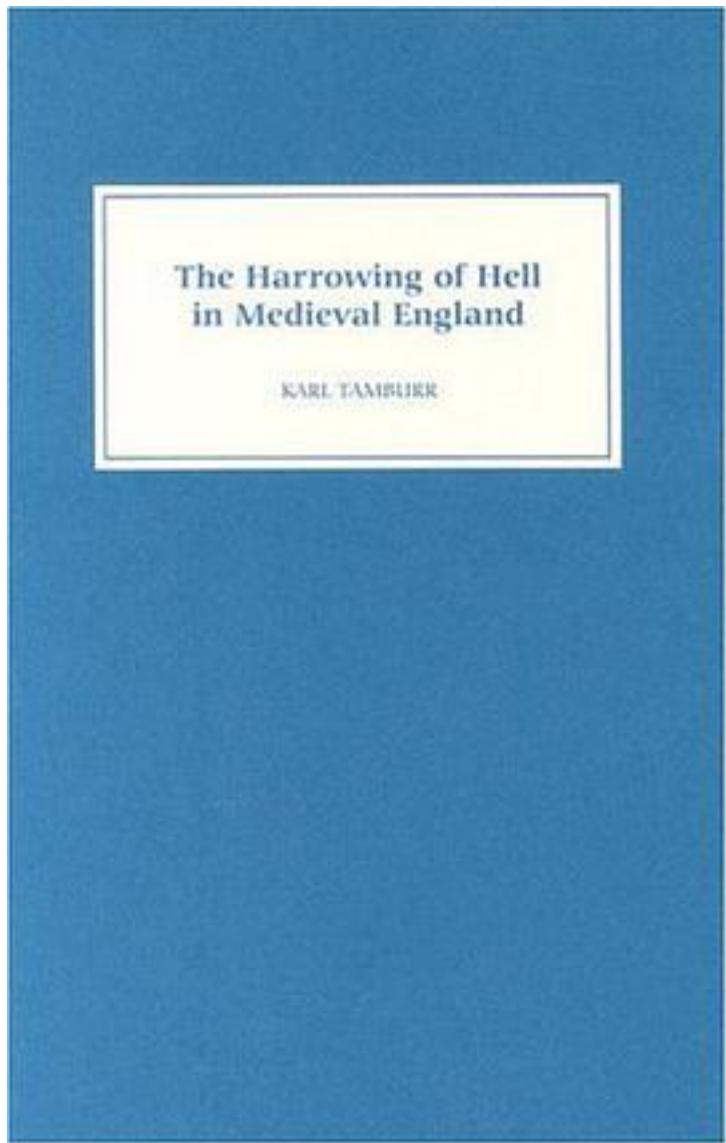


The Harrowing of Hell in Medieval England



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The liturgy and theology of the early Church as well as Apostles' Creed declared that Christ 'descended into hell', and it became a major subject of the literature, drama and visual arts of the middle ages. Its treatment in medieval England is the subject of this study. Each chapter concerns an important aspect in a particular era of literary history and generally begins by discussing a representative work of art to introduce the issues that follow. They begin by examining the Harrowing's place in the Church liturgy as a context for the poetry and drama derived from it, while later chapters focus on the enormous influence of the apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus as well as literary works that present an alternative version of the Descent. The final chapter reveals the decline of this tradition when many Reformation theologians and artists rejected the Harrowing as unorthodox. KARL TAMBURR is Professor of English at Sweet Briar College, central Virginia.

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