Henry Suso's *Horologium Sapientiae* in fifteenth-century France: images of reading and writing in Brussels Royal Library MS IV 111

Steven Rozenski Jr.

Online publication date: 27 October 2010
Henry Suso’s *Horologium Sapientiae* in fifteenth-century France: images of reading and writing in Brussels Royal Library MS IV 111

STEVEN ROZENSKI, JR.

*The book is tripartite and symbolizes me alone. The parchment that encloses it betokens my pure, white, and just humanity that suffered death for you. The words betoken my tremendous divinity that flows from hour to hour into your soul from my holy mouth. The sound of the words betokens my living spirit — and through it the truth is consummated.*

— Mechthild von Magdeburg (ca. 1210–1285), *Das fließende Licht der Gottheit*

*His presence is Enchantment —*

*You beg him not to go —*

*Old volumes shake their vellum heads*

*And Tantalize — just so —*

— Emily Dickinson (1830–1886), Poem 371

*Tot sunt codices de vitis et virtutibus magistraliter tractantes, tot sunt quaterni quaestiones subtilissimas et propositiones diversas pertractantes, ut prius vita brevis deficiat, quam omnia studere, sed neendum perlegere contingat.*

— Henry Suso, *Horologium Sapientiae* II.3

Henry Suso, despite the frustrated epigraph above, loved his books. The Swabian Dominican (ca. 1295–1366) was constantly immersed in textuality: reading contemplative and devotional texts, writing edifying vernacular and Latin treatises, and commissioning murals of scenes and sayings from the *Vita Patrum* (a popular collection of the lives of the early Egyptian desert fathers) to decorate the walls of his cell. Visual input — both pictorial and textual — was similarly central to his spiritual life; sharing stories, pictures, and texts was the lifeblood of the pastoral role he played in his community. It is no wonder, then, that Brussels Royal Library MS IV 111, the illuminated mid-fifteenth-century manuscript containing a French translation of Suso’s wildly popular devotional treatise, the *Horologium Sapientiae*, contains numerous representations of reading and writing, equating these activities as part and parcel of Suso’s well-noted imagistic and visionary devotional strategies. A close examination of the use of books and texts in the iconographic program of the manuscript reveals the illuminator’s sophisticated understanding of Suso’s concern with authority and textuality; the images of banderoles and scrolls represent a nuanced portrayal of the interaction between speech and writing in the practice of devotional reading.

The *Vita or Life of the Servant*, first described by Richard Kieckhefer as Suso’s auto-hagiography, contains the most detailed descriptions of the mystical and devotional practices engaged in by Suso and his devotees. Suso’s spiritual marriage to the Goddess Sapientia [Eternal Wisdom] is described in unambiguously textual terms: she presents herself only through sacred scripture and is most distinctly


2 – The critical edition is edited by Pius Künzle, *Horologium Sapientiae* (Freiburg, Switzerland: Universitätsverlag, 1977). See also Edmund Colledge’s English translation, *Wisdom’s Watch Upon the Hours* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1994). All quotations will be taken from Colledge’s edition and cited parenthetically by page number; the Latin quotation will be provided in the sidenotes with the corresponding page number from the Künzle edition. The most extensive work on Suso’s relationship to images is Jeffrey Hamburger’s magisterial *The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany* (New York: Zone Books, 1999), esp. pp. 197–278.
present to Suso when the Wisdom Books are being read at mealtime. He is able to see her, for instance, ‘as far as he was able to imagine her through the explanatory examples of scripture with his inner eyes’ (‘als verr er si in den usgeleiten bischaften der schrift mit den inren ogen gesehen mohte’, B 14).3 Seeing and reading properly is at the heart of his mystical marriage to Eternal Wisdom.

His relationship with Elsbeth Stagel, his ‘spiritual daughter’, is also intensely textual: he praises her compilation of a Schwesterbuch 4 and encourages her to confess to him by writing her sins on a wax tablet. One of his best-remembered acts of devotion (and certainly the one that earned him the most attention from scribes in the manuscript tradition) is the violent compression of image and text, artist and author, in the scarred tissue spelling out the divine monogram IHS that forms after he carves it into the flesh above his heart. This takes place both in the German Vita and the Latin Horologium (II.7).

Elsewhere, even the scarring of the flesh above his heart is seen as an inadequate textual relationship with Christ; Suso expresses a wish to gild his heart itself: ‘Owe herr, könd ich dich uf min herz gezeichen, könde ich dich in daz innigoste mins herzen und miner sele mit guldinen bûchstaben gesmelzen, daz du niemer in mir verrâtgest wurdst!’ [O Lord, would that I could carve you on my heart, would that I could melt you into the innermost parts of my heart and soul with golden letters so that you could never be separated from me! {Tobin: erased in me!}] (B 228). His English contemporary, Richard Rolle (1290–1349), although strikingly similar to Suso, was content simply to imagine the wounds of Christ’s body as a text without imitating the bloody act of inscription on his own flesh: ‘swete Ihesu, þi bodi is lijk a book wip rede enke: so is þi bodi al writen wip rede woundis’.5

Later on, Elsbeth Stagel imitates Suso’s authorship, albeit in a different medium: she embroiders the monogram in red silk on small pieces of cloth and shares them with others. By mimicking his authorship, she follows in his imitation of the suffering of Christ and his devotion to the Holy Name. But by changing the medium, she offers the reader a model of textual transmission — i.e., just as I shared this small monogram from Suso-the-exemplar with others, so you too might do the same with the bits of the Exemplar-text you find most useful or inspiring — that occludes the extremism of Suso’s bloody act.6 As Hamburger concludes, the ‘imitatio Christi’ is recast in ritualized, institutionalized forms, governed by texts and enacted through images . . . Suso’s example mediates between Stagel and Christ; she reproduces his practice, without reenacting it.7 Crucial to Suso’s concept of authorship in these passages, however, is that it is his example to be copied, not Christ’s.

The conflation of Suso’s textual and physical bodies is most profoundly displayed in a rubric found in most manuscripts that informs the reader that the Vita in a certain sense is Suso: ‘Hie vahet an daz erste tail dizz bučhes, daz da haisset der Stüse’ (B 7) (Here begins the first part of this book, which is called the Suso.) Suso’s identity with the text here brings the full audacity of the title of his collected vernacular works — The Exemplar — to the fore; just as Paul exhorted his followers to imitate his imitation of Christ,8 so too are we to follow the example of Suso and his text. As scribes copy the exemplar as precisely as possible, so the devout must follow The Exemplar and its life of Suso. Creating something of an Imitatio Christi halfway-house, Suso provides a textual and literary model for imitation that is neither as explicitly male as Christ in his humanity nor as feminine as the Virgin Mary or Suso’s beloved
Sapientia — a multivalent, oscillating approach to gender that can be seen to render his text more universally applicable to the devout en route to heavenly union with God.9

In Brussels Royal Library MS IV 111, we are lucky enough to have two scenes of the court of heaven: one appearing alongside a French translation of Suso’s Horologium Sapientiae, the other above a treatise on spiritual mendicancy by Jean Gerson (f. 199v).10 Although the half-page image accompanying Gerson’s text has a tiny detail of three angels singing the Gloria by reading from a neumed scroll (albeit with the word itself upside-down in relation to the angelic point of view), it is otherwise completely textless. The full-page illumination next to Suso’s text, however (f. 62r, figure 1), is chock-full of images of devotional and venerational reading — suggesting that, even nearly a century after Suso’s death, he was still associated with the kind of bookishness and textual concerns represented in the Middle High German texts discussed above. Although the study of words and images in this manuscript helps make a case for a particular perception of Suso and his relationship to books in fifteenth-century France, a much wider study of illuminations in other manuscripts of the Horologium Sapientiae and its vernacular translations would help us to understand better the predominant themes of Suso’s deep and broad pan-European fifteenth-century afterlife.

At the bottom-left and the top-left of Suso’s court of heaven are scenes of angels (one pair and one trio) singing the Sanctus from scrolls (here, the text is right-side up and does not bear neumes). Most immediately striking, however, are the pictures of the evangelists at work: John to the left of the throne (from our perspective) and Matthew on the right in almost comically miniature proportion when compared to Luke and Mark below and to the left and right, respectively. The evangelists to the right of the throne, Matthew and Mark, have written virtually no text whatsoever (Matthew in his scroll and Mark in his codex). On the left, however, John and Luke have made good progress — this motif perhaps aiming to express an ongoing, eternal nature of revelation as opposed to a unique historical event, thus bolstering Suso’s own claim for textual authority. If even the Evangelists, in this sense, have more still to write, then surely Suso’s own claim to literary exemplarity and authority is permissible.

Also significant is the predominance of scrolls among the evangelists: while the four Church Fathers on the middle-right are all absorbed in books, three of the four evangelists are engaged with scrolls. This manifests a departure from traditional iconography in which, following Durandus, the scroll ‘is held by the prophets and symbolic of the Old Law and the book as the symbol of the revealed New Law’.11 The overall representational system of the entire manuscript tends to adhere to the traditional symbolism which associates scrolls most closely with orality (namely, preaching, singing, and reading aloud) and books with more silent, contemplative reading. With this in mind, the illustrator may be pointing the reader toward an understanding of the gospel as a continuative process: just as on earth we need four gospels despite the one truth of Christ, so too in heaven the good news of Christ is virtually no text whatsoever (Matthew in his scroll and Mark in his codex). On the left, however, John and Luke have made good progress — this motif perhaps aiming to express an ongoing, eternal nature of revelation as opposed to a unique historical event, thus bolstering Suso’s own claim for textual authority. If even the Evangelists, in this sense, have more still to write, then surely Suso’s own claim to literary exemplarity and authority is permissible.

Also significant is the predominance of scrolls among the evangelists: while the four Church Fathers on the middle-right are all absorbed in books, three of the four evangelists are engaged with scrolls. This manifests a departure from traditional iconography in which, following Durandus, the scroll ‘is held by the prophets and symbolic of the Old Law and the book as the symbol of the revealed New Law’.11 The overall representational system of the entire manuscript tends to adhere to the traditional symbolism which associates scrolls most closely with orality (namely, preaching, singing, and reading aloud) and books with more silent, contemplative reading. With this in mind, the illustrator may be pointing the reader toward an understanding of the gospel as a continuative process: just as on earth we need four gospels despite the one truth of Christ, so too in heaven the good news of Christ is constantly experienced aurally as fresh and new (the aurality of the celestial environment is further heightened by a lute-playing angel in the lower right-hand corner of the page and the trio of angels, two on reed instruments, immediately to the right of the throne).12

Most surprising to my eye, however, is the sharpness of the illuminator’s imagination in portraying Luke as nearly complete in his task of composing

9 – For a recent study of the malleability of gender identity in mystical marriages — which includes a brief discussion of some of the images of Suso and Sapientia in the manuscript discussed here — see Carolyn Dickins Muir, ‘Bride or Bridegroom? Masculine Identity in Mystic Marriages’, in Holiness and Masculinity in the Middle Ages, eds. P.H. Cullum and Katherine J. Lewis (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2004), pp. 38–78.


12 – For a further exploration of the role of music in Suso’s devotional imagination, see my ‘The Visual, the Textual, and the Auditory in Henry Suso’s Vita or Life of the Servants’, Mystics Quarterly, XXXIV, no. 1–2 (January/April 2000), pp. 35–72.
what most closely resembles a banderole (typically symbolic of preaching, not written text) rather than a scroll. In a delightfully self-referential moment, the illuminator seems to play with the very idea of representing the spoken voice on a dead piece of parchment. Whatever annunciation Luke might be writing down, it is nearly ready to be handed off to one of the nearby angels, one of whom will in turn bring it down to the sublunary realm — in order to pose, presumably, for another manuscript illumination, perhaps of the Annunciation. The textual and the auditory are nowhere else in the manuscript more playfully confused than in this scene just below the throne of heaven.

And what a throne it is! Surrounded by cherubim, it radiates golden rays that permeate every level of the picture; God’s rewards, although not evenly distributed, are nevertheless intensely visible to every member of this court scene (this motif of complete access and limited, hierarchical distribution is also echoed in the School of Theology scene, to be discussed below). The Trinity is displayed with the Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son. Mary, with bared breasts and lily, is seated at the feet of the Trinity. However, considering the tremendous amount of veneration given to the Goddess Sapientia elsewhere in the illuminations (and her central role throughout Suso’s texts) — including her appearances with lilies — tempered by the rarity of depictions of the *Virgo Lactans* without a suckling Christ, it seems exceedingly possible that a conflated of the two figures might have been intended. The proximity of Sapientia/Mary to the Trinity invokes not only the prominence late-medieval devotion gave to the Virgin (creating countless images of what has been dubbed a ‘Quaternity’, particularly in scenes of the Coronation of the Virgin)14 but also reinforcing the notion of Mary’s orthodox role as *Theotokos*, the Mother of God.

The feature of this celestial throne most immediately relevant for our purposes, however, is the large, opened codex directly in the center of the Trinity. Located in the melded lap of the Father and the Son, being gestured to with one hand by both persons, and directly below the Holy Spirit, it is unmistakable that God as Logos is absolutely central to this artist’s understanding of Suso’s imagined heaven.15 Again, this bookish motif is not present whatsoever in the Court of Heaven miniature found above the text of Jean Gerson in this same manuscript, giving fairly unambiguous evidence that someone connected with the production of this manuscript’s pictorial program was keenly aware of Suso’s own concerns with texts and their proper reception.

Moving back to the very first illumination of the manuscript, we find Sapientia enthroned in majesty (f. 13r, figure 2). Here attention must be drawn to another remarkable feature of this manuscript: the survival of a fifteenth-century vernacular commentary on the iconography detailing precisely what one late-medieval reader recognized in these images (ff. 3r–11v). The expositor, likely a Dominican, was well-educated and astute: he provides glosses that go beyond Suso’s text in discussing Epicureanism and Suso’s self-comparison to Tantalus.16 For Sapientia enthroned in majesty, we are told very explicitly that the enthroned figure is ‘Sapientia in the image and likeness of a woman [en forme et figure de femme] representing Jesus’ (p. 134). The commentator has no problem describing the feminine figure of Sapientia in mimetic relationship to Christ using the classic phrasing of humanity’s relationship to God: image and similitude, *forme et figure*.17

Sapientia’s right hand holds a book, her left an orb symbolizing, the commentator tells us, ‘that through her and from her has emanated all knowledge and wisdom by which the world is governed and reconstituted [gouverneret et repare]’. Like the manuscript we are about to read, the book Sapientia holds is open to us, one page almost turned already — as though our reading of it were either inevitable and natural (i.e. turned by the wind itself) or divinely ordained (allowed to turn by Sapientia/Christ enthroned). Moving to the figure below and to the right, we find the armored, finely dressed aristocrat who likely commissioned the volume — although the commentary makes no mention of

---

14 – First remarked upon by C.G. Jung, Barbara Newman comments extensively on the repeated assertions by commentators and poets — reaching a crescendo in the mid-fifteenth century — that Mary was not a fourth addition to the Trinity, demonstrating how widespread belief in the divinity of the Mother of God must have been. See God and the Goddesses: Vision, Poetry, and Belief in the Middle Ages (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), pp. 254–73. For one of the earliest poetic assertions of her divinity, see Frauenlob’s Song of Songs: A Medieval German Poet and His Masterpiece, trans. and ed. Barbara Newman (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), pp. 120–2.


17 – For an extensive analysis of medieval devotion to the Goddess Sapientia, including a section on Suso that cites of some of the images in this manuscript, see Newman, God and the Goddesses, pp. 190–244.
him — kneeling before an open, page-turning book (even though his posture indicates that he is praying far more than he is reading or studying).

What is especially significant about this patron, however, is that his gaze is directed neither to the ostensible object of his study (the book) nor to the presumed subject of his prayers (Sapientia). Instead, he looks directly at the figure the commentator terms ‘the disciple’ — Henry Suso, the author of the devotional text we are about to read. By focusing on the pulpit rather than on the bookstand or the *Sede Sapientiae/Majestatis*, the illuminator draws us away from the text toward the perceived immediacy of the spoken word, the sermon, and its speaker. Even though we are about to read a book, this image says, the experience should be as immediate and enlivening as the delivery of a
The use of banderoles throughout the manuscript furthers this emphasis by highlighting the text’s dialogic features and encouraging reading aloud — the use of words within the images helping to make the reader’s experience more lively and auditory.19 As Roger Ellis remarks, the word-in-image ‘is a sign not of some abstract meaning, but of its concrete realization in speech. The word, therefore, inhabits another order of existence than the purely visual, and the viewer who reads it brings to life the scene where it occurs as almost nothing else could do’.20

Of course, as in so many illuminations, the sermon here takes the form of Latin text on a banderole which Suso points to with one hand even as he gestures to the source of this wisdom, enthroned Sapientia, with the other (the banderole is positioned above the heads of the friars, separating them from the Sede Sapientiae). Again, just as in the court of heaven scene, the illustrator makes a self-referential gesture regarding what can be considered ‘text’ and what ‘speech’ in the imaginative world of the miniature. These manuscript illuminations might hope to create a world contained on a page that the reader must imagine whole and self-sufficient, a supplement to the written text. Instead, in both of the miniatures examined thus far, the reader is drawn directly to the artifice of the illumination and the fraught relationship between text, speech, and image.

The commentator says that the Suso-figure, ‘author and composer of this Book, [is] standing in a pulpit, seemingly preaching to persons of different classes [comme preschant a divers estas du monde]’ (p. 134). The postures of the four figures beneath Suso indicate that even if the preaching is available to all, the physical (and presumably affective) reactions to it vary considerably. The sole fellow-Dominican in the quartet is prostrate in a position of repentance, his eyes focused on another book. Of the two Franciscans, one looks up toward Suso, touching his heart, while the other looks at the prostrate Dominican, ignoring another open book at his feet. What appears to be a secular priest wearing a fur stole holds his hands in the orans posture and looks at one of the Franciscans. The complexity of gazes and postures in this small vignette is difficult to interpret, but seems to indicate that even among clergy the attitudes toward Suso’s texts and sermons varied; it is also telling that none of the members of the quartet seem aware of Sapientia despite Suso’s gesturing hand — the author receives the lion’s share of readerly attention, heightening the exclusivity of his relationship with Eternal Wisdom and his role as exemplar.21

The kneeling knighthly patron (recalling the courtly figures and poetic rhetoric in some of Suso’s texts, not to mention Suso’s own aristocratic father) looks directly at Suso and his banderole. The patron kneeling alone cannot but capture the attention of the viewer as the most appropriately pious of the figures beneath Sapientia and Suso. This generous depiction of what one hopes was an equally generous patron is echoed in the direction of Sapientia’s gaze: she looks down toward the patron, her attention fixed firmly on the sponsor of this particular edition of the text which describes her own mystical marriage to Suso.

The miniature with the greatest concentration of book-images is found on f. 90v (figure 3). This, the School of Theology and the Seven Liberal Arts, helps us to understand precisely which books we ought to be reading — and with what intentions in mind. It differs, understandably, from Suso’s more complex vision: in the text he enters into a vast, ornately decorated golden sphere within which he finds two mansions, exploring each in turn. In the miniature, the reader replaces the Suso-character and visually explores the two houses;
the illustrator largely follows the detailed descriptions in Suso’s vision (although the Seven Liberal Arts are represented by groups of men in Suso’s text, but as singular women in this image), omitting such details of Suso’s vision as cannot easily be portrayed in a static painting.  

What is perhaps the smallest identifiable object on the entire page is also the most significant: the tiny ball which Sapientia holds in her right hand is described by the commentator as the proper aim of theological reflection (‘this ball is Holy Writ and teachings [la saincte escripture et doctrine de sapience]’).
about heaven which descend from heaven to earth). This tiny silver sphere is the source of all that mankind can hope to know about the divine realm; the authority of the book in Sapientia’s right hand is somehow ancillary to the ball’s role as a conduit between heavenly and earthly knowledge. Sapientia holds the book in her lap, but her eyes are focused firmly on the ball; the ownership of books and the possession of book-learning is trivial in comparison to this tiny kernel of divine truth.

Although this imagery draws from Suso’s text, its application differs dramatically: in the Horologium, the Servant sees a risible scene of a silver ball that had fallen from the sky amidst the scholars of the school ‘which by its beauty and costliness made all of them gaze on it in love and longing’ (p. 236).23 In this vivid scene, the ball represents the transience of scholarly celebrity rather than the fruits of eternal wisdom: indeed, in the Latin text a bystander reports, in the subjunctive, that the ball simply ‘significaret veritatem sacrae scripturae, lucidam et sonoram et incorruptibile (p. 522) [was supposed to signify the truth of Sacred Scripture, lucid and clear-sounding and incorruptible]’ (p. 237, my emphasis). Instead, it becomes a symbol of pride and conflict — Suso later calls it pugnae verborum, ‘wordy warfare’, echoing 1 Tim 6:4:

> when one outstanding teacher had it in his hand, and through this his fame resounded through the whole world, and his teachings shone brighter than all the others, like a rose without thorn and a cloudless sun, many, seeing this and envying it, tried in every way they might to snatch the ball from his hand. Now they threw sharp darts at him, and now hard stones, but it did not help them, for they were inflicting astonishing hurts on themselves, and wounding themselves with their own darts. When this ball bounced around them, those who were present were at pains, not indeed to grasp it for themselves, but rather to do all they could to knock it out of each other’s hands, and steal it away and advertise that someone else did not have it . . . And there were among them, it is shameful to say, astonishing arguments and uproars and contradictions about the ball, and in the minds of many who were listening this produced great boredom and distaste. For they derived no benefit from these things, but complained that they were at some sporting event or stupid show (p. 236–7). 24

The complexity and dynamism of this scene is, understandably, impossible to illustrate thoroughly in the half-folio the illuminator was given. In the miniature all of this movement and argument is reduced to two balls: one version is securely between Sapientia’s fingers, another statically sits unnoticed on the floor between two demons. And yet the commentator demonstrates an awareness of the source text, somewhat awkwardly conflating his reading of the image with his understanding of Suso’s description, remarking that ‘the Doctrine of Theological Truth is of itself sound and holy’ (p. 190) but that the orientation and motives of pupils to this truth is multiple and often inappropriately vain or worldly. From this, he moves quickly to the visual detail more faithfully recorded in the miniature, the worldly temptations the demons to the right offer vain scholars.

The scholars on the left and in the middle of the scene strive to learn divine knowledge selflessly and for the betterment of their souls (rather than for the gain of worldly honor) and are duly bathed in strands of gold emanating from Sapientia (the same beams that permeate the court of heaven in the image discussed above). Half of the scholars at the table in the middle do not even look toward Sapientia and her silver ball, but rather seem to engross

23 – ‘quae ex sua pulchritudine et pretiositate omnium in se aspectum provocabat, quae ab omnibus amabatur et desiderabatur’ (p. 522).

24 – ‘Hanc dum quidam inter ceteros et super ceteros doctor egregius in manu haberet, et ex hoc per totum mundum sonaret, eiusque doctrina singulariter, sicut rosa sine spina, et sol absque nube praeclarissime ruilaret; multi hoc videntes et invidentes, sibi pilam de manu auferre modis quibus poterant attentabant, et nunc sagittas acutas, nunc lapides duros iacientes, nihil proficiebant, sed mirum in modum in se ipsas affligebantur et propriis sagittis percutiebantur. Hac pilam inter eos currebat, studebant hi, qui aderant, non tam ipsam comprehendere, quam pro posse eam de manu alterius percutere et rapere, et ostendere quod alius ipsam non haberet . . . Fueruntque inter eos proh pudor mirabiles contentiones, clamores, et contrarietates de hac pilae. Haec autem taedium magnum ac duplicentiam in animo multorum audientium generabant. Nam per haec non tam proficiebant, quam gymnasio vel spectaculo vano se interesse dolebant’ (p. 522).
themselves in prayer (facing a bishop and four friars). Perhaps certain kinds of devotional piety were intended to be portrayed as relatively void of intellectual or bookish content; some of the devout, even within the School of Theology, may have been considered better suited to following episcopal and fraternal authority in their religious practice. The commentator mentions that they are ‘all attentive to her teachings, exalted in contemplation, and in love of her; they do not expect and they do not receive from the teaching any benefit except love of God and everlasting life’ (p. 190).

On the right of the scene, however, are those who are envious of the honor of others and ‘think they will usurp it, and overcome and confound it by arguments, ruses and cunning, they are the ones who are bereft of sound aims or intentions; they merely study to acquire the honors and vanities of the world’ and so ‘the devils offer them fur-lined hats, high-backed chairs with adornments; and for these objectives they undertake the study and work they do’ (p. 192). Comfortable seating and elegant clothing are not the only things the devils offer — the demon closest to Sapientia seems to be in the process of constructing bookshelves for the use of these vain scholars. The elegant cushions of the stalls contrast starkly with the more austere setting of the rest of the school (although it is similar to the backing of Sapientia’s throne). The devils’ position immediately beside the only door in the scene indicates the dangerous distractions to study and contemplation that can enter in if one’s studies are too worldly.

Below this scene of theological reflection upon Holy Writ is a depiction of purely secular and worldly knowledge — the Seven Liberal Arts, whose functional role, while useful and at times helpful, is ultimately to be considered insignificant when compared to that queen of the disciplines, theology. Here the textual materials are even more diverse: Musica on the far right has a small piece of a neumic scroll which seems to be affixed to the wall. The seductively-clad Arithmetica has a wax tablet and stylus in which she calculates her figures; Rhetorica is copying out a speech on a banderole (the conflation of the oral and the written, as in the depiction of Luke in the Court of Heaven, once again making an appearance). Astronomia has several volumes she consults even as she copies down her observations on a paper hanging halfway over the desk on which the majority of the books in the scene are placed. The ever-changing celestial bodies require a continual stream of data, both textual and experiential.

Logica and Geometria, as depicted here, are the farthest away from texts: the former gazing at a distant book on the table with two serpents twisted around her wrists, the latter concentrating on the arc of a compass with an unfurled scroll at her back for possible reference. Grammatica, unsurprisingly, is the most book-dependent; she is also the only one in the scene engaged in teaching. One student learns by reading a book in her lap, three others with their own books practice their lessons immediately beneath her.

The overall effect of this scene — books and scrolls scattered everywhere, both open and closed, a wax tablet and its malleability, specialized instruments for observing the heavens, and specialized notation systems for musical performance — is of a chaotic, tremendously overwhelming, perhaps even disorienting collection of worldly knowledge. One finds Suso’s frustration with textuality displayed more broadly elsewhere in the Horologium: Book II, chapter 3 opens by lamenting the contemporary multiplicity of texts and authorities. This essay’s Susonian epigraph is followed in the text by an exuberant rhetorical question: ‘Who could number all the works on logic,
the natural sciences, history, moral philosophy and divinity, all the treatises, the commentaries, old and new, handbooks of elements, anthologies, individual treatises and summas, with which the whole surface of the earth is overwhelmed as with an encroaching flood?26

The viewer’s gaze is directed to the center of the scene only to be pushed out again by the books pointed in every direction. This school is a tremendously exciting and invigorating place, to be sure, but also one filled with uncertainty and confusion. There is no center, no authority, and no transcendence in this scene — only a frenetic attempt to master the sublunary realm and its vicissitudes. The School of Theology, on the other hand, has golden rays that draw the viewer away from the periphery, from the demons, and from the outside world directly toward Sapientia and the contemplation of the simple, spherical source of all heavenly knowledge (considerably simplifying the dramatic depiction of the School in the Horologium while making the contrast between the two starker). Even books can lead astray; vision can be properly disciplined through theology alone.

Another miniature depicts a book being used in far more eschatological terms: ff. 46v and 47r (figures 4 and 5) show Suso in the midst of a shipwreck and, through this reminded of his immanent death, appearing before Christ in the tribunal Dei, the seat of judgment. At the very center of the judgment scene is a small circle below the feet of Christ with three tiny boats on a rough sea, perhaps flanked by a church and a castle (even under magnification, the precise details remain somewhat indistinct). This very self-conscious detail shows us the scene from which Suso has retreated: the journey from one imaginative world (the shipwreck scene itself a metaphor for the troubles Suso has constantly suffered on earth) to another, the artist reminding us of the conceptual connection between the two (as well as alluding to Christ’s calming of the seas in Mark 4:39–41).

Having gone from the allegorical worry of death at sea to an imaginative journey to the tribunal Dei, Suso is faced with two interlocutors between him and God-in-judgment. On the right, a devil hovers next to Suso in order to show him, the commentator tells us, a ‘book in which his sins are written’. On
This battle between Suso’s sins and his virtues is figured explicitly as a battle between oral and textual evidence. While the demon is alone with his textual evidence — and both his hands occupied in supporting the bulky volume — the angel imploringly gesticulates (and, presumably, exercises great rhetorical skill — although the absence of a banderole, such as the ones that both Rhetorica and Luke have embossed, is noteworthy) with the Virgin and other saints aiding him in his argument. The other devils are far more occupied, it seems, with punishing those surely damned (the shading of the sky from blue and starry to dark and stormy is especially well-executed). In the context of textuality and book-learning, however, it would seem that oral piety and intercessionary prayer trumps the written record of Suso’s misdeeds.\textsuperscript{27}

As mentioned earlier, Suso is constantly concerned with his own authority and role as an \textit{auctor}; unsurprisingly this worry also asserts itself in the iconography of this manuscript. In ff. 16v and 17r (figures 6 and 7) the reader is offered a facing-page pictorial account of Suso’s conversion to a more contemplative life as Sapientia’s lover. On the left side of the open codex we see the young Suso, dressed in aristocratic finery and surrounded by a garden of secular and worldly delights: several musical instruments (a stunning mechanical contrast to the forest of clocks among which Sapientia appeared

\textsuperscript{27} Rosemary Muir Wright writes of the varying uses of oral and textual testimony as manifested in the Douce Apocalypse, seeing an increased emphasis on seals, signs, and books over oral methods of testimony in eschatological record-keeping. ‘Sound in Pictured Silence. The Significance of Writing in the Illustration of the Douce Apocalypse’, \textit{Word & Image}, 7, no. 3 (July–September 1991), pp. 239–74.
just three pages earlier), a hawk on his left hand, and a pair of hounds — all within the cozy confines of a rose-trellis and a stream (within which another hound, beautifully drawn, cools off rather calmly).

Amidst all this earthly pleasure, Sapientia appears at the top right-hand of the small miniature. The familiar golden beams shine throughout the partial circle, but the only ones escaping its confines radiate directly onto young Suso: he has been especially chosen for this initial revelation. The only part of the image of Sapientia that extends beyond the horizon of the apparitional circle is the hand that holds the open book being presented to Suso. Whatever else is being revealed in this conversion scene, the text that Sapientia holds is the most imminent portion of her message. Her book serves as the intermediary device between heaven and earth that will allow Suso to contemplate her and share his contemplative experiences with others.

On the right side of the open codex (figure 7), we find a four-part illustration of Suso’s steps into the religious life of the Order of Preachers after this conversion experience — Sapientia guiding her new lover at every stage. For the first panel, Suso’s entry into the Dominican Order, the commentator
simply writes ‘he is in the chapter receiving the habit’ (p. 140) and explains that
the author of the text was a Dominican. Unmentioned, however, is the open
volume nearly as central to the image as the figure of Suso himself. Does this
serve synecdochically for Sapientia (in that representing her in this all-male
scene might draw attention away from the abbot)? Is it a book that Suso has
brought with him into the cloister or one belonging to the Order upon which
he will later meditate? The former possibility looks especially likely if one
considers the oblique reference in Book I, chapter 9: Suso offers the
commonplace that fear is the beginning of wisdom ‘for the first steps of those who walk to you, the first pages for those reading you’ (p. 150). Sapientia herself, here, is a book to be diligently read.

Whatever may be the situation of books in this first panel, the second leaves no doubt in the mind of the commentator about the absolute centrality of the text to Suso’s spiritual development. In this rather well-appointed cell, the commentator tells us that we find Suso ‘studying the Bible and especially the Books of Solomon and Wisdom, where, more than in all the other Books, he is taught to love wisdom’ (p. 140). Although the imagery seems to imply a direct inspiration from Sapientia to Suso, the Blackfriar copying down pithy statements as a dutiful amanuensis, the commentator sees the case very differently. ‘And what he found therein, he took to his heart; and to retain it in his memory, he wrote it down on small scrolls as Sapientia inspired him’ (pp. 140–2).

Copying biblical texts that are in some way chosen for him by Sapientia — as in Book II, chapter 3, where she tells Suso she will give him ‘some elements of spiritual living to serve as a kind of

28 – ‘Primus namque passus accedentium ad te, prima pagina te legentium’ (p. 449).
memorandum’ (p. 259)—serves primarily as a mnemonic device for the Swabian.30 Nevertheless, the state of his room seems to indicate a polyvalent attitude toward texts and scriptures. The table holding three of his books and two of his cedules is of the same design as that used by the Seven Liberal Arts, perhaps indicating a merely formulaic understanding of furniture—or, more likely given the apparent sophistication of this artist, some link between Suso’s grounding in trivium and quadrivium and his new-found biblical devotion. Perhaps theology and the liberal arts are not as inimical as the iconographic project and commentator’s interpretation of f. 90v might lead us to believe. Our eyes are drawn to three volumes above his bed along with two propped up against the base of the desk and two more left on the floor in the lower right-hand corner of the scene. Although not as textually cluttered as the seven liberal arts image, these arrangement of seven books and other writing materials is far more complicated than the commentator makes it out to be.

The bottom-left illustration on this page shows Suso in the refectory with his fellow Dominicans, hearing texts read aloud at mealtime. In the Vita he describes these encounters with holy texts—especially the books of Wisdom—as profoundly affective: ‘Wenn man di´ ze tisch laz, und er denne derley minnekosen horte dar ab lesen, so waz im vil wol ze mu˚te’ (B 12) ‘when these [texts] were read at table and he heard such expressions of love read from them, all was perfectly well in his mind’.32 In this image, however, we are given the added detail of Suso’s transcribing part of what he’s heard onto a tablet. Despite the immediacy of the oral and the contemporaneousness of the reading, transcription serves as a vital mnemonic tool for Suso. This scene also contains one of the only depictions in the manuscript of Sapientia without a book. The commentator tells us that ‘Sapientia holds in her right hand a sun which represents life, and in her left a crown and jewels’ (p. 142). Although the radiant golden beams of light are somewhat intercepted by the abbot, the vast majority illumine Suso and penetrate even the bread and wine he is about to eat. His privileged relationship with Sapientia in this image is primarily symbolic—the sun and the crown represent ‘longevity . . . and Glory and Riches’ (‘Longue Vie et . . . Gloire et Richesses’) (ibid.)—and visual (the golden beams falling predominantly on him) while his relationship with his fellow monks during the meal consists of listening and transcribing.

The final image in the polyptych displays Suso half-kneeling before his beloved Sapientia while she presents him with a cross (the lignum vitae and the crucifix symbolically interwoven in the wood of the cross). This final scene in Suso’s conversion process also helps us to understand his evangelizing mission: while all the other images take place firmly within the friary (after he leaves his pleasant garden), the left-hand side of this image shows the cloister garden. Now that Suso’s conversion to the Order of Preachers is complete, it is time for him to reenter the world to share the wisdom he has gained.

Accompanying the description of Suso’s most direct and affective vision of Sapientia—again inspired by scripture heard or recited33—we find her seated in a terebinth tree beside a dead stump (figure 7, f. 20v). Although in this image she presents a book, as is typically her wont, in the next scene she is nearly embracing Suso—and is bookless, the only text being a banderole carrying the words from Proverbs 23:26, pri[a]be fili cor tuum michi [et oculi tui vias meas custodiant]. The color of her robe also changes from a brilliant gold-hemmed

30 – ‘vitae spiritualis principia . . . quasi pro memoriali tradam’ (p. 541).
31 – For the interaction between words and images on the manuscript page as a mnemonic cue, see Michael Camille’s ‘The Book of Signs: Writing and Visual Difference in Gothic Manuscript Illumination’, Word & Image, 1, no. 2 (April–June 1985), pp. 133–48.
33 – In this case Ecclesiasticus 24:22, ‘ego quasi terebinthus extendi ramos meos et rami mei honoris et gratiae’.
white in the terebinth tree to an azure and crimson robe, seated on a luxurious throne, in this scene of passionate embrace between Suso and Sapientia.

The bottom two scenes represent Suso in the refectory, overcome by the words read at mealtime, and in his cell questioning Paul about Sapientia's true identity. At the meal, the words he hears read aloud (presumably from the books of wisdom he so admires) overwhelm to such a degree that (thus the commentator) 'he could not restrain himself . . . he struck the table with his finger and cried out Verum est, verum est' (p. 146). While Suso's outburst is represented by a banderole, the text the friar in the lectern reads remains stubbornly bookish. While both are described as oral phenomena, only Suso's loud exclamation receives its own space in the image; the words of the scripture seem almost secondary to Suso's reaction to them. He also carries a small tablet, similar to the one represented earlier when he describes his transcription of especially poignant passages during mealtime. Is he hearing the scripture read, rereading an earlier passage in his own private notebook, or some combination of the two? The impact of the text on both eyes and ears is intertwined here in a uniquely affective and powerful way.

Finally, his dutiful reading in his cell — through which he hopes to learn more about the true nature of his beloved — leads him to be granted a vision of Saint Paul and to be told by him, in a combination of 1 Cor. 1:24 and Col. 2:2–3 'Christus est, Dei virtus et Dei sapiencia etc.', in other words 'Our Lord Jesus Christ is the strength and wisdom of God who contains within Himself the complete treasure of wisdom and knowledge' (commentary, p. 147). Whereas most other banderoles in the miniatures begin somewhere near the mouths of the presumed speakers, Paul holds one end of his speech in his hand while the other sinuously makes its way to the floor of the cell. Suso's response-scroll is even more twisted, a loop obscuring a good deal of the message; despite his right hand making an interrogative gesture toward heaven, his left hand remains firmly on his Bible.

The multivalent resonances of spoken word and written text in this image reinforce the visionary quality of the apparition: Paul speaks, but from his hand, as though the written text of his epistles still outweighs the potential aural immediacy of his visionary presence. Despite the vision he is granted, Suso remains biblically committed — as though anything the Paul-apparition says will be instantly compared against and verified by the scriptures in his lap. The oral and the textual, the letter and the spirit, the sermon and the treatise, the epistle and the confession must be brought together in one pastoral and pedagogical program in order to follow Paul's evangelizing example.

Whether listening devoutly to sermons while kneeling in prayer in front of a book (as the aristocratic patron does in the first image) or focusing humbly on holy writ and divine Wisdom while seated in the school of theology, books, texts, and spoken words are linked in this series of illuminations as all legitimate routes to an equally bookish and textual heaven. Although the issue of bookishness both in Suso's texts and the other illuminated copies of the Horologium Sapientiae and its vernacular translations remains at present a desideratum (as does a critical edition of the French translation of the Horologium) this overview begins to demonstrate the long afterlife of Suso's thought and his consequent impact on manuscript illuminations — an influence so broad that even illuminators presumably unfamiliar with his German corpus nevertheless remained aware of the particular blend of scholarship and piety, book-learning and prayer that made Suso's works so uniquely popular in the late Middle Ages.

34 – This is indeed a central element of discernment as described centuries earlier by Richard of St. Victor (died 1173) in the Benjamin Maj or: he constantly emphasizes the importance of scriptural authorization for any system of thought: ‘Every truth that the authority of Scripture does not confirm is suspect to me’ [in Richard of St. Victor: The Twelve Patriarchs, The Mystical Ark, and Book Three of the Trinity, trans. Grover A. Zinn (Malwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1979), p. 138]. He repeats these assertions again and again in the text, highlighting that scripture and authority play a central role in authorizing any visionary experience: ‘I do not accept Christ without a witness nor can any probable showing be confirmed without the witness of Moses and Elijah, without the authority of Scripture’ (p. 139).

35 – For a very brief, largely dismissive overview of illuminations in other French Suso manuscripts, see Peter Rolfe Monks' Pictorial Programmes in Manuscripts of the French Version of Suso's Horologium Sapientiae, Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum, LVII (1987), pp. 31–43, as well as pp. 31–3 of his edition of the Brussels MS.