‘Your Ensaumple and Your Mirour’:
Hoccleve’s Amplification of the Imagery and Intimacy of
Henry Suso’s Ars Moriendi

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Thomas Hoccleve makes several changes to his source text in his early-fifteenth-century English verse translation of Dominican Henry Suso’s fourteenth-century Latin Ars Moriendi. Most noteworthy is the terminology surrounding the personification of Death: in Suso this alternates between imago and similitudo while Hoccleve refers simply to ‘th’ymage’. Hoccleve’s translation uses more homely and imagistic terms in order to force the reader into a closer affective identification with the figure of the dying man. This textually-produced intimacy furthers the larger social-rehabilitative project of the Series. Rather than a crude translation of Suso, Hoccleve’s text is a subtle, profound Middle English contribution to the Ars Moriendi genre.

The creation of mankind in the image and likeness (ad imaginem et similitudinem) of God in Genesis 1. 26–27 has proved a troublesome linguistic puzzle for generations of Biblical exegesets: why the doubled statement? How do images and likenesses differ, and how does this affect our relationship with God – or with linguistic and pictorial representation itself? The most common explanation, initiated in part by Irenaeus in the second century1 and developed in such works as Augustine’s De Trinitate,2 has been that the image of God in humans is the indestructible soul or mind that is created in God’s image and eternally resembles God; the likeness or similitudo to God is secondary and has been lost through the Fall.3 It can still be recovered, however, through the exercise of virtue and piety in this world; this is in turn made possible only to the degree in which the Incarnation

1 See Adversus Haereses, 5.16.2.
2 Augustine dedicates a large portion of the text to the analysis of the ways in which the human soul mirrors the Trinity in the mind’s threefold interaction of memory, reason, and will. See especially Book XIV for an explanation of how this cognitive triad interacts with his theory of vision laid out in Book XII of De Genesi Ad Litteram.
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and the work of the Holy Spirit can mend the wounded will and direct it towards that which it once enjoyed by nature.4

Henry Suso (c. 1295–1366, beatified 1831) ranks as one of the most popular devotional authors of the late middle ages. His peculiar blend of Neoplatonic apophaticism (learned at the feet of Meister Eckhart at the Dominican studium generale in Cologne) and constant emphasis on the suffering of Christ’s flesh (and his imaginative replications of those pains on his own body) proved tremendously popular to fourteenth- and fifteenth-century readers. In particular, the Horologium Sapientiae was copied and translated across Europe and survives in hundreds of manuscripts. The text was often excerpted; the Ars Moriendi section held particular appeal for clerk of the Privy Seal Thomas Hoccleve (1368–1426). Translating Suso’s treatise on the art of dying well as part of a larger series of poems aimed at rehabilitating what we might call his social ‘image’ after an alleged mental breakdown, Hoccleve’s Lerne to Die demonstrates an intricately patterned understanding of the language of images and their central role in helping us comprehend our relationships to God, ourselves, and each other.

The most frequently used allegory invoked to help illuminate the relationship between the original and its image in the soul or mind of lesser beings is that of a seal leaving its impression on warm wax. Dante, for instance, explains the divine image in the angelic orders of the Paradiso by recalling this metaphor (which stretches back ultimately to Aristotle):

the wax of [generated things, ‘le cose generate’] and that which molds it are not always in the same condition, and therefore under the ideal stamp it then shines now more, now less … If the wax were exactly worked, and the heavens at the height of their power, the light of the whole seal would be apparent. But nature


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always gives it defectively [‘la dà sempre scema’], working like the artist who in the practice of his art has a hand that trembles.5

The form of the seal remains imprinted on the wax (in varying degrees that depend both on the force of the impression and the receptiveness of the material) while remaining ontologically distinct from the seal itself. The strength of this metaphoric description of replication and imitation depends upon the theological valence of the term imago itself; indeed, for Augustine it is only by virtue of our creation in God’s image that we are able to participate in or understand Him at all.6 Similitudo, however, given its shattered post-lapsarian status, relies more on the incomplete and degraded similarities between God and man. Theological attention to similitude thus looks both forward to mankind’s ultimate perfectibility after death and the Last Judgement (e.g. ‘when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is’) and backward towards our initial Edenic sinlessness.

Meister Eckhart (c. 1260–1327) approaches this distinction in his commentary on Genesis by once again emphasizing the primacy of the imago in humanity’s – and Christ’s – relationship to God.8 He writes that it is precisely in sapientia, providentia, gubernatione, and praesidentia that the image of God is present within the structure of the human soul (wisdom, tellingly, is the first element of this list). He echoes Augustine’s De Trinitate by asserting further that it is ‘sola intellectualis natura perfectionum substantialium divinae essentiae’, 9 confirming again the central importance of the created intellect’s relationship to God through its having been created ad imaginem Dei. Considered christologically, the imago of God in the Son helps us to understand the absolute coexistence of the persons of the Trinity. In this instance, imago is in fact consubstantial with what it represents: ‘the image and its exemplar are not separately numbered as two substances, but

7 NRSV, 1 John 3. 2.

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the one is in the other’. Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225–1274), like Eckhart a student of Albertus Magnus (1193?–1280), confirms that *similitudo* is a secondary and weaker relationship with God in *Summa Theologiae* I q.35 a.1, writing that ‘image includes the idea of similitude … neither the similitude of species or of figure is enough for an image, which requires also the idea of origin’. A mere likeness between things, no matter how striking or convincing, nevertheless lacks the crucial component of procession and origin present in a theological definition of the divine imago.

The *Ars Moriendi* section of the *Horologium Sapientiae* by the Swabian Dominican Henry Suso plays with this distinction in an initially puzzling manner. This dialogue between a figure called ‘the Disciple’ and the Goddess of Wisdom, Sapientia, includes a transformation of the goddess into the image of a dying man in order that the Disciple might better understand the miseries of dying unprepared. The simulacrum ultimately dies in a tremendously image-laden and affectively direct passage before Sapientia returns to her original form to deliver the moral of the story, teaching the chastened Disciple how best to prepare himself for death. Whereas the earlier Middle High German version of this text (the *Büchlein der Ewigen Weisheit* or *Little Book of Eternal Wisdom*) refers to the character Sapientia assumes simply as the *unbereiten sterbenden menschen* (unprepared dying

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11 Translated by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province and accessed online at http://www.ccel.org/a/aquinas/summa/home.html. Aquinas also invokes a homely metaphor, one also present in one of Eckhart’s sermons, to prove his point in this passage: he notes that even though two eggs may be alike in color (and thus one a similitude of the other), one does not come out of the other; one is not born of the other, and thus they lack the relationship between original and copy that the term ‘image’ demands.


person), the Latin of the *Horologium Sapientiae* alternates between referring to the young man as *similitudo mortis* and *mortis imago*.

Jeffrey Hamburger’s *The Visual and the Visionary* provides an insightful analysis of the difficulties of images and the role of image-making in Suso’s works. At times, the Blackfriar seems committed to an Eckhartian apophaticism that completely rejects the ability of images to convey meaning about God, while at other moments his personal and pastoral reliance on images (not to mention the fascinating figures and illuminations in many of the manuscripts) demands that he treat them as useful and necessary paths to the divine. Hamburger concludes that in his Middle High German works, ‘Suso’s evident ambivalence toward images is more than a result of deep-seated misgivings combined with a practical awareness of their pastoral applications. Suso’s attitude is at times contradictory, even deliberately paradoxical’. From the miniatures in the manuscripts of the *Exemplar* and the wall paintings he commissioned for his cell to his vivid descriptions of heaven, hell, and purgatory, Suso’s relationship to images both linguistic and literal is always riddled with the coexistence of contraries. Suso himself acknowledges the ambiguity of the role of visions in his texts and their tricky and often tenuous representational link to actual experience; Frank Tobin summarizes: ‘perhaps we can do no better than to leave the matter hovering, as Suso does, between actual event and symbolic function’. Suso’s attitude towards images in his texts is constantly shifting between a self-conscious literariness and a presumption of divine revelation.


16 This confusion perhaps reaches its apex when Suso describes how he took his stylus and plunged it into his heart in order to carve *IHS* into his flesh. Although he claims lifelong modesty regarding the scars, nearly every manuscript representation of him shows the sacred monogram. Hamburger remarks in *The Visual and the Visionary* that ‘the monogram offers the archetypal example of text and image inextricably combined’ (p. 271) and that ‘more than a combination of text and image, the monogram carved on Suso’s chest represents the Word made flesh and, at the same time, Suso’s flesh transformed into the Word’ (p. 272).


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The Latin terminology Suso uses to describe the spectre of death in the *Ars Moriendi* provides yet another layer of complexity to our understanding of his use of images. Barbara Newman notes that the Middle High German *Little Book of Eternal Wisdom* already manifests a stylistic shift for Suso:

> by resorting to allegory, visions, and imaginary dialogues, he was making his thought more accessible than in his earlier speculative writing, which had led to accusations of heresy – and the lasting popularity of the later works proves that he was right.\(^{18}\)

Dialogue in particular plays a central role in the pedagogical program of the *Ars Moriendi*. The Disciple’s conversation with Sapientia and her subsequent simulacrum of death proves to be not only a useful pastoral tool, but also a powerful rhetorical device – the latter feature intensified still further in Hoccleve’s verse translation of the text. In rewriting his book into Latin, Suso also acknowledges the different audience it would receive by shifting his emphasis ‘from the visionary event (corporeal versus spiritual) to the reader’s interpretation of it (literal versus figurative)’ and encouraging this new audience to recognize that ‘the genesis of the individual vision narratives is unimportant; any one of them may or may not have taken place *ad litteram*, but the reader should in every case interpret the language figuratively’.\(^{19}\) Suso’s Latin reworking is, in this sense, more literary even as it is potentially less abstract. Writing for a more international audience (if, perforce, a better educated, more elite audience as well), Suso uses less precise, more general terms in the *Horologium Sapientiae*. Realizing the wider reach of Latin – beyond the loyal coterie of Dominicans one imagines his tracts and sermons being addressed to – Suso both simplifies some of his terminology and instructs the reader to understand his visions only as illustrative exempla.

Returning to the language of the *Ars Moriendi* and Suso’s alternation between *imago* and *similitudo*, we find the Disciple’s dialogue with Sapientia and Death at once more intensely visual in its detail and more strikingly allegorical in its depiction of the *Little Book of Eternal Wisdom*’s ‘unbereiten sterbenden menschen’. The Rhineland Dominican, well-schooled as he was, must have been too aware of the long-established distinction between *imago* and *similitudo* simply to treat the two as synonyms. The alternation of the two terms in his *Ars Moriendi* can perhaps best be seen as an attempt to anthropomorphize the spectre

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19 Newman, God and the Goddesses, p. 27.
of death into which Sapientia is transformed: just as we are made in the image and likeness of God, so too is this ghastly apparition of a young dying man the image and similitude of death itself. Bringing resonances of Old Testament Creation into this startling transformation would thus make the mortis imago a far more lifelike, striking, and penetrating image than the rather flat and generic Middle High German ‘unprepared dying man’.

Thomas Hoccleve’s translation of this chapter of Suso’s immensely popular Horologium Sapientiae rarely receives an appreciative reading, despite the text’s own effort to ‘reincorporate [Hoccleve] into a society of friendly readers’. This critical disapproval, dismissing him as a poetaster unable to convey the depth of thought or subtlety of expression of the original, begins with Benjamin P. Kurtz’s 1925 article ‘The Relation of Occleve’s Lerne to Dye to its Source’, which contains caustic observations comparing Hoccleve’s translation to the Latin original ranging from ‘a sententious and melancholy reflection on the brevity of this life may be sacrificed to an insipid rhyme’ to ‘the additions are so numerous that, even though some of them are poetically passable, the deleterious remainder infects the entire poem’. Similarly, Roger Lovatt concludes in 1982 that insular reception of the Horologium Sapientiae overall was merely a process

20 This shift in terminology can be seen both as clarifying and muddling: on the one hand, it may simply be an attempt to treat the different terms as synonyms to avoid any international confusion. On the other hand, however, it complicates the figure of Image/Death: is this apparition merely that of an ‘unprepared dying man’, as in the Middle High German text (in which case the standard Latin name for such a character in Ars Moriendi literature would be Moriens), or is he to be understood as the image of Death itself?


23 PMLA, XL (1925), pp. 252–75.


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of ‘the dilution and impoverishment of Suso’s distinctive message’. Elizabeth Westlake, writing a decade later, concludes that Kurtz’s estimation of Hoccleve is reasonably accurate.

More sympathetic readings can be found in Jerome Mitchell’s *Thomas Hoccleve: a Study in Early Fifteenth-Century English Poetic* and Rebecca A. C. Selman’s ‘Voices and Wisdom: a Study of Henry Suso’s *Horologium Sapientiae* in Some Late Medieval English Religious Texts’. The introduction to Roger Ellis’s recent edition, *My Compleinte* and Other Poems, offers a revealing overview of translation differences that appear in holograph and non-holograph manuscripts of *Lerne to Die*. James Simpson’s treatment of the text in *Reform and Cultural Revolution* offers a useful interpretation of the social and rehabilitative role images play – he writes that ‘images create societies around them, and so marginalized writers deploy them to initiate or reorganize their relations with readers’. Nevertheless, the significance of Hoccleve’s translation of Suso’s *similitudo mortis* and *mortis imago* as ‘th’ymage’ and the concomitant amplification and intensification of both the intimacy and the imagery of Suso’s text still remain to be investigated.


30 Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2001. All quotations of the *Lerne to Die* will be cited by line number from this edition.


32 Suso and Hoccleve certainly shared the aforementioned suspicion of and reliance on images in their religious writings: Ethan Knapp writes, for instance, that ‘Hoccleve is very much the heir of … the tradition, both theological and philosophical, for which the image was a necessary but suspect vehicle of cognition and meditation’ (*The Bureaucratic Muse: Thomas Hoccleve and the Literature of Late Medieval England* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), pp. 240–42).
The term *similitude* had entered the English language by the time Hoccleve set to translating Suso’s text: Chaucer uses it at least four times and it occurs both in Wycliffite treatises and the Wycliffite New Testament. Yet the term never appears in Hoccleve’s text; when Sapience introduces the Disciple to her transformation – after emphasizing that the potential of ‘sensible ensaumple’ (82) to stir the soul to action is far greater than the books of philosophers – she describes the figure she is about to become as ‘the liknesse and figure / Of a man dyynge’ (85–86) – Hoccleve’s rendering of *similitudinem hominis morientis* (528: 4–5). Just as Suso describes the Disciple’s gaze entering inward in order to understand the image that has been suggested to him by Sapientia, so too does the pupil of Hoccleve’s Sapience:

in his conceit bysyly soghte he,
And therwithal considere he gan and see
In himself put the figure and liknesse
Of a yong man of excellent fairnesse.

(88–91)

Both ‘conceit’ and ‘figure and liknesse’ here are renderings of *similitudo* in Suso’s text, indicating that Hoccleve may be aware of the varying resonances of *similitude*.
and within a few lines chooses instead to employ Germanic, Greek, and quasi-Latinate\textsuperscript{35} variations on Suso’s single Latin term.

The famous Chaucer portrait in Hoccleve’s \textit{Regiment of Princes} is described as a ‘liknesse’ (4995) of what residually remains in Hoccleve’s own mind as ‘the resemblance / Of him’ (4992–93).\textsuperscript{36} He immediately connects this portrait and its emotive and mnemonic impact on the reader to proper devotion for sacred images:

\begin{quote}
The ymages that in chirches been  
Maken folke thynke on God and on his seintes  
Whan the ymages they beholde and seen,  
Where ofte unsighte of hem causith restreyntes  
Of thoghtes goode. Whan a thyng depeynt is  
Or entaillid, if men take of it heede,  
Thoght of the likness it wole in hem breede.  
\end{quote}

(4999–5005)

Here, images are understood as ecclesiastical tools that help produce an interior likeness of what is depicted materially: seeing and thinking (or rather, reforming one’s thought) are inextricably connected. Most critically, however, the terms for religious and secular representations are kept distinct (i.e. the portrait is a \textit{likness}, religious icons are \textit{ymages}). This use of an image for recalling Chaucer, for making an absence textually present, also points to the centrality of images to Hoccleve’s mnemonics: Karen Smyth writes, following Mary Carruthers, that ‘memory can be used for recalling events … the memory can also make events extra-temporal, protracting, preserving, and re-creating a time in all times’.\textsuperscript{37} Likenesses present in the memory serve to recall and recreate the past even as they (in the case of the Chaucer portrait) remind us only of the absence which the likeness fills.

Whenever the spectre of death begins to speak, however, he is always introduced as ‘th’ymage’, whereas Suso’s text describes him as \textit{similitudo mortis, mortis imago}, and simply \textit{similitudo or imago}. Whereas Suso’s vacillation between varying terms for this simulacrum reinforces its humanness and echoes its relationship

\textsuperscript{35} \textit{OED}, s.v. \textit{conceit}: the term is a late-medieval back-formation from the verb \textit{conceive} by false analogy to \textit{deceive, deceipt or receive, receipt}.

\textsuperscript{36} ed. Charles R. Blyth (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1999). Citations are by line number.

\textsuperscript{37} ‘Reading Misreadings in Thomas Hoccleve’s \textit{Series’}, English Studies, 87.1 (February 2006), 3–22 (p. 8).

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to humankind’s creation in God’s image and likeness, Hoccleve’s insistence on repeating ‘th’ymage’ at the beginning of each speech overturns the humanization of the figure to a certain extent, while simultaneously forcing it into an even stronger, more vivid visuality. The more forceful presence of ‘th’ymage’ (rather than Suso’s weaker oscillation between similitude and image) aligns the Death-character who terrifies Hoccleve’s disciple into better preparing for his imminent death ever more closely to the concept of death itself; images, as discussed earlier, are born of the original, rather than merely representing them, within Suso’s text. In turn, this enhancement of the figure of death strengthens the dialogic element of the Ars Moriendi: although true wisdom in both texts comes through conversation, dialogue, and negotiation, the interlocutors of Hoccleve’s text are both more intensely visual and more intimately personal.38

In Hoccleve’s case, the Disciple’s conversation with Image also corresponds significantly not only to Simpson’s view of the socially rehabilitative role of images, but also to Ethan Knapp’s well-wrought thesis that ‘Hoccleve’s autobiography is actually born out of that most impersonal of textual traditions, the bureaucratic exchange of petition and response’.39 Knapp asserts that bureaucracy’s very attempt to erase subjectivity is intrinsically rooted in the formation of subjectivity as ‘a recognizable and separable literary topos’.40 The dialogue with the vanishing spectre of death reconstitutes the Disciple’s own solidity and works towards the rehabilitation of his social image (and by inevitable extension, the restoration of Hoccleve’s among his colleagues at the Privy Seal) and reconstitution as a sane, functioning subject (a process begun in the opening Dialogue of the Series).41

38 Jerome Mitchell’s analysis of Hoccleve’s translations demonstrates that this, by and large, obtains throughout his oeuvre: ‘Hoccleve’s free rendition of the brief complaint is more intense than the Latin’ (Thomas Hoccleve, p. 92); ‘the additional verbiage … makes Fellicula’s protestation that she can keep a secret more lifelike and therefore more convincing than the original Latin’ (op. cit., p. 95); ‘his lively, realistic direct discourse is one of his most important achievements’ (op. cit., p. 96).


40 The Bureaucratic Muse, p. 13.

As Simpson writes, the ‘redirection of the imagination’ in *Lerne to Die* is part of a strategy that requires a restitution of social relations ‘grounded in imaginative apprehension of another’s situation’; he concludes that ‘images are the surest ways of reconstructing social relations out of breakdown: experiencing the simplified, collateral relationships of images returns humans to the social world of real persons with a renewed confidence’. Seen in this light, the strengthening of the simulacrum of death as ‘th’ymage’ and the heightened visuality of its subsequent dissolution increases the possibility that a sympathetic reader will recognize the stability of the Disciple as he continues to be instructed by Sapience, and that the reader will extend that sympathy to the Hoccleve-character as well.

Both Hoccleve’s self-styled despair at being ignored by his colleagues at the Privy Seal and his eagerness to learn from Sapience through conversation reflect this dialogic backbone of social identity and theological reflection. Michel de Certeau uses the example of Anselm of Canterbury to demonstrate the beginnings of a recognition of the central role dialogue must play in the search for theological truth and the creation of subjectivity. Through prayer, *invocatio*, and *colloquium* Anselm’s voice as a theologian invokes the other interlocutors that are made present within his text and on which the authority and efficacy of the text itself depends:

> due to a reciprocity conceptually related to the confusion of tongues at Babel … we cannot understand ourselves unless we are understood … Nothing “Other” may speak to the soul unless there is a third party to listen to it.43

Indeed, many of Hoccleve’s amplifications of Suso’s text relate to feelings of social isolation and contempt for worldly relationships. In a vivid image not found in the original (and perhaps recalling the end of Chaucer’s *House of Fame*), Image declares that ‘worldly trust is as slipir as an eel’ (726); he similarly intensifies a list of worldly perils by adding the striking image of ‘greet greedynesse / In mukhepynge’ (586–87). Later on, Sapience claims that ‘ful fewe been þat so with hertes ere / Konne apparceyue th’instabilitee / Of the world’ (862–64), calling on a fairly uncommon sensory apparatus not present in Suso’s text (although mentioned in the prologue to Saint Benedict’s *Rule*) to perceive the uncertainty of worldly things. In another series of lines unique to Hoccleve, Image expresses his own self-loathing (‘Allas, why stood Y in myne owne light / So foule?’ [440–41]) before criticizing the dependability of others: ‘Y haue espyd the frendshipe is

42 *Reform and Cultural Revolution*, p. 431.
43 *The Mystic Fable*, p. 159.
ful streit / Of this world. It is mirour of deceit’ (454–55). Worldly friendship can only reflect deception and proves as ineffective a help as Hoccleve’s own reflection in the mirror of the Dialogue; neither can help him reaffirm his renewed sanity and mental stability. Later on in the text the Disciple offers another self-criticism also unique to Hoccleve’s text: ‘thogh Y be thikke wrappid in errour / See, beforne thee plat on the grownd Y lye’ (801–02): the rhyme of ‘errour’ with ‘sauueour’ coupled with the description of Image prostrate and encased in sin proves especially chilling.

Taken as a whole, these particular additions point towards a continuation of the aims of the Dialogue: the uneasy desire of the Hoccleve-figure to reclaim and redeem his reputation through language, dialogue, and writing – coupled with the awareness that writing alone can never entirely achieve this (making dialogue, even one as stylized as Lerne to Die, a crucial intermediary between text and world). Indeed, as Image comments on the abandonment that accompanies his death, he first accentuates his descent into purgatory; Hoccleve replaces Suso’s oculus mentis ad purgatorium, quo iam deductus sum [537: 4–5] with ‘To purgatorie Y shal as streight as lyne, / For myn offenses ther to suffre pyne’ [692–93] – stronger phrasing that omits any mention of the oculus mentis before commenting on the uselessness of prayers to free him: ‘Can yee portreye / Your wordes so gayly, and effect noon / Folwith, but al as deed is as a stoon?’ (712–14). This plangent cry, entirely Hoccleve’s inventive addition to Suso’s Ars Moriendi, links the very words of Image’s few faithful friends to his own stillness in death, the use of the term ‘portreye’, more common to the visual arts than the linguistic, emphasizing the failures of representation common to them both. The bleak deadness and inefficacy of even these gaily portrayed words seems to extend this sense of hopelessness to the ameliorative qualities of any discourse.

This theme of social isolation in Lerne to Die has been commented on previously (‘one might also see in Suso’s descriptions of the dying man deserted by his friends … a reflection on the poet’s own sense of isolation’), but the precise resonances of Hoccleve’s amplifications and additions in this vein remain unexamined. While the aforementioned ‘mirour of deceit’ rejects the stability of earthly ties, another image of mirrors that Hoccleve adds to Suso’s text serves to strengthen the affective bonds between the Disciple and Image. Just after expanding the audience from a private conversation to a general lecture in a curious

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gesture found in both texts (‘O alle yee þat heer been present’ [288], Eya Vos Omnes [530: 28–29] in Suso), Image tells the Disciple in a phrase unique to Hoccleve: ‘let me be your ensaumple and your mirour / Lest yee slippe into my plyt miserable’ (295–96). Image offers himself to the Disciple as an exemplar in the strongest possible terms; the impact of social isolation is dwarfed, one hopes, by the strength of the Disciple’s relationship to Image and Sapience.

Hoccleve’s vocabulary when dealing with cognitive processes and sensory apparatus (as evinced earlier by his use of ‘hertes ere’) also sheds light on his intensification of Suso’s Latin text. Image, for instance, counsels the Disciple: ‘this heuy plyt in which thow seest now me, / Reuolue ofte in thy mynde’ (591–92). This last phrase differs significantly from Suso’s ad memoriam iugiter reducas (535: 19) by figuring the mind’s activity in both careful reflection and turbulent rotation. In other instances he changes Suso’s oculos to ‘herte’ (613) or ‘myndes yen’ (821), bringing further intimacy and immediacy to his terminology of the senses by both varying the wording and moving the site of sensation to the interior (away from simply the eyes, for instance, and into both the metaphorical heart and the imaginative centre of perception itself in medieval psychology, the mind’s eye). The most significant change Hoccleve makes in relation to perception, however, is in his description of Image’s death. The dying spectre laments: ‘no lenger Y now see this worldes light. / Myn yen lost han hir office and might’ (664–65), a significant expansion of Suso’s lucem huius mundi amplius non video (536: 23–24) that amplifies the dying Image’s absolute abjection and the complete failure of his senses.

The most striking of Hoccleve’s additions relating to cognition, and certainly the moment in the Lerne to Die that contributes most to an autobiographical reading of this part of the Series, follows Image’s lament that ‘the worldes fauour cleene is fro me went. / Forsake Y am. Frendshiue Y can noon fynde’ (505–06). After this fairly standard Ars Moriendi topos, he complains further that ‘Ther is no wight þat to the indigent / Puttith his helpy hand’ (507–08) then wretchedly remarks ‘slipt out of mynde / I am’ (508–09, unique to Hoccleve). Whereas the anxieties in Suso’s text revolve principally around persecution, Hoccleve’s leitmotiv of abandonment and isolation is further elevated by this double remark: Image has both slipped out of the minds of his friends into disregard and slipped out of his own mind into madness.

It is only after Image’s death in the poem that Hoccleve once again properly renders Suso’s similitudo as ‘liknesse’: the Disciple is ‘in doute wher the soothe woneth – / That is to meene, if this be in liknesse / Or in deede, swich is my
mazidnesse’ (752–54). The exceptional realism of Image’s death leaves the Disciple in doubt regarding his own experience: was this death mere likeness (i.e., similitudo) or was it ‘actually’ performed? What would a performance ‘in deede’ in this context entail: the death of Image alone (coupled with the restoration of Sapience) or of both Image and Sapience? Image is ultimately able to fulfill himself as likeness (in terms of similarity to death) only through his own disappearance and dissolution. This also recalls the New Testament interpretation of similitude discussed at the beginning of this essay: our understanding of our own similitude tends to be forward-looking and focuses on our eventual return to a blessed state of resemblance to our creator. This is, to be certain, a straightforwardly literal interpretation of what it means to be truly like death – the perfection of likeness to death can only come about in the very destruction of its image – yet is nevertheless a significant terminological subtlety not found in Suso’s own constant alternation between imago and similitudo.45 We also might read in this an echo of the theological optimism seen in Romans 6. 5 – ‘si enim conplantati facti sumus similitudini mortis eius simul et resurrectionis erimus’ (‘for if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection’).

On a comparable level, Image relates numerous similes related to his own fragility, the inevitability of death, and the transience of worldly riches: ‘as a messager faste rennynge’ (200), ‘as a brid which in the eir þat fleeth’ (204), ‘as an arwe shot out of a bowe’ (211), ‘as fisshes been with hookes kaght’ (246), and ‘as þat briddes been take in a snare’ (247). Image uses simile, the representative mode of similitude, to prefigure his own ultimate death and dissolution: all these similes point towards his ultimate similitude with death even as they reinforce his vital present status as imago. Indeed, the text ends with a calming simile of movement and security far more vibrant than Suso’s, transforming his rather restrained description of a traveller in a port into:

Right as a marchant stondynge in a port
His ship þat charged is with marchandyse
To go to fer parties for confort
Of himself lookeþ þat in sauf wyse

45 Indeed, the above-mentioned Eckhart sermon on the image insists that ‘the image properly speaking exists only in what is living, intellectual, and uncreated’ (Teacher and Preacher, p. 237), ‘imago proprie est tantum in vivo intellectuali increato’ (Die deutschen und lateinischen Werke, IV, p. 427). The death of Image here resolves the paradox of having a living, talking imago of death itself.

Parergon 25.2 (2008)
Passe out, right so, if thou wurke as the wyse,
See to thy soule so, or thou hens weende,
That it may han the lyf that hath noon ende.

(911–17)

Even the acerbic Kurtz grudgingly admits that of Hoccleve’s additions to Suso’s text ‘a few are slightly stronger or more personal than the Latin’, although he sees it as almost unambiguously detrimental that ‘our simple and direct-minded poet has again and again brought into the lofty sentences of Suso phrases of personal revelation’. But it is exactly this heightened imagery and intimacy that makes Hoccleve’s dialogue such a powerful affective tool. Just as the Horologium Sapientiae is less opposed to the pastoral use of images than the earlier Middle High German Little Book of Eternal Wisdom (which is in turn far more lenient towards images than the writings of Meister Eckhart), so too is Hoccleve’s text exceptionally receptive and responsive to the power of images. If there is any dilution of Eckhartian apophaticism and speculative theology on its way through Suso and Hoccleve, there is also a concomitant increase in the importance and influence of images. Although critics such as Kurtz may lament this amplification of Suso’s imagery, the eternality of our own imago makes Image an exceptionally powerful interlocutor in Hoccleve’s uniquely moving dialogue.

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48 Jerome Mitchell concludes that ‘Kurtz’s unwillingness to see the poem in the context of other medieval translations leads him to the curious position of both damning the work and pointing out that it contains not a few clever touches’ (Thomas Hoccleve, p. 77).