THE VISUAL, THE TEXTUAL, AND THE AUDITORY IN HENRY SUSO’S VITA OR LIFE OF THE SERVANT

I heare that which makes al sounds musique, and all musique perfit.
John Donne, Devotions upon Emergent Occasions, Station 17

For M is Musick and therefore he is God.
Christopher Smart, Fragment C, Jubilate Agno

Gesang, wie du ihn lehrst, ist nicht Begehr, nicht Werbung um ein endlich noch Erreichtes; Gesang ist Dasein. Für den Gott ein Leichtes.
Rainer Maria Rilke, Die Sonette an Orpheus: Erster Teil, 3

From Saint Augustine’s famed tolle lege, tolle lege conversion experience in the Confessions to Simone Weil’s Christic rapture occasioned by her reciting Herbert’s Love III, the auditory has repeatedly served as the initial inspiration for and central pathway to Christian mystical experience.\(^1\) The influence of liturgical tradition, the enthusiasm of preachers from millennium to millennium, and the passion of generation upon generation of religious composers all attest to the profound significance of audition in evoking the presence of the divine.\(^2\) Despite the overwhelming emphasis on sight in the history of the contemplative tradition—reading Scripture, viewing devotional images, and ultimately receiving divinely-wrought visions—the ears, often prove to be just as potent and affective an organ as the eyes.\(^3\)

The affective potency of the auditory is especially true for the Dominican Henry Suso (c. 1295/6–1366, beatified 1831). A central figure in the history
of religious devotion in the later Middle Ages, Suso was active primarily in Constance and Ulm, but spent time early in his life at the studium generale in Cologne (where he likely studied with Meister Eckhart [c. 1260–1327/8]). He was especially involved in the pastoral care of Dominican nuns but his writings circulated widely throughout Europe in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. His signature accomplishment—and undoubtedly the source of a great deal of his popularity—was a fusion of Eckhartian speculative and apophatic theology with an emotive and affective mode of piety. Although the imitation of Christ was a crucial element of his devotional practice, even more fundamental was his spiritual relationship with Sapientia, the Goddess Wisdom.

Descriptions both of reading texts and viewing images come at crucial moments in Suso’s narrative accounts of mystical experience. Even more significant, however, is the impact of the auditory in his imaginative world: hearing scripture read and sung, hearing voices from heaven, or even simply hearing secular music inspires some of the most vibrant and detailed revelatory scenes in the text. The auditory often occupies a place of privilege vis-à-vis the visual: music and voice are frequently treated as both more powerful and more trustworthy than images, visions, or texts. Although Jeffrey Hamburger has analyzed the relationship between image and text in Suso’s works, the significance of the relationship of audition with reading and images remains to be explored. Particularly in Suso’s autohagiographical Vita (also referred to as the Life of the Servant), hearing clearly plays a central role in his imaginative and revelatory world.

It certainly cannot be denied that images and texts constantly provide Suso with an indispensable material pathway towards God: from his meditation on Job 7:1 to his commissioning a rendering of a series of scenes and sayings from the Vitae Patrum onto the walls of his cell, images and texts are critical to his representation of his spiritual development. Textual production is also central: in his pastoral role as confessor and advisor to Dominican nuns, he not only encourages their reading of various devotional materials, but also praises their own literary activities in compiling a Schwesternbuch that provides accounts of exemplary lives to be imitated. The convergence in Suso’s devotional life of these two spheres, text and
image, is most dramatically represented in his using a stylus to carve the divine monogram, IHS, onto his chest (and subsequently distributing knit replicas of the scar as devotional objects). As Suso’s act of devotion vividly illustrates, distinguishing image from text is nearly impossible: the two are often so conflated that it becomes difficult to demarcate the boundaries of “viewing” and “reading.”

Hearing, by contrast, is almost always clearly delineated. The experience of divine melodies and voices is especially prominent in the Vita. Suso also structurally mimics the prominence of the auditory in his other texts, through his reliance on dialogue as an aid to his readers’ comprehension: he explicitly states the importance of dialogic structure in the preface to the Büchlein der Ewigen Weisheit (Little Book of Eternal Wisdom): “die lère git er also vûr in vragwise, dar umb daz si dest begirlicher sie” (he [the author] presents the teaching in the form of questions [and answers], because that way it is the most desirable) (B 197). The statement helps to establish the pedagogical primacy of dialogue and orality in his works; conversation between Eternal Wisdom and the various figures that the author represents is the most desirable and accessible path to proper understanding. It may also instruct readers on the best use of the text: in an age in which silent devotional reading was becoming more and more prevalent, seeing a dialogue on the page would encourage readers to read the words aloud, either to themselves or to one another. Besides attempting to restore an aural immediacy to the text, it might also help prevent the spread of heretical misinterpretations—a constant preoccupation of Suso’s in the wake of Eckhart’s condemnation.13

ORALITY AND THE VERNACULAR

The prologue of the Little Book of Eternal Wisdom also contains curious musical imagery that highlights the significance of orality vis-à-vis textuality while also emphasizing the added importance of this distinction in vernacular texts:
Als unglich ist, der ein süzes seitenspil selber horti süzklich erklingen gegen dem, daz man da von allein hört sprechen, als ungelich sint dú wort, dú in der lutren gnade werdent enpfangen und usser einem lebenden herzen dur einen lebenden munt us fliezent gegen den selben worten, so sú an daz töt bermit komen, und sunderliche in tûtscher zungen. (B 199)

(Just as to hear for oneself the sweet sound of strings being played is unlike simply hearing someone talk about music, so too are words that are received in pure grace and flowing out of a living heart and a lively mouth unlike the same words coming on a dead parchment, and especially in the German tongue.)

Suso compares the raw immediacy of hearing secular music, and the dullness of someone simply recounting the sweetness that they have heard, to the directness of passionate speech and the dampening mediation of text and parchment. Whereas the Latin of the schools, monasteries, and ancient theological tradition might not seem so incongruent on the page, the “mother tongue” of quotidian life and conversation seems especially awkward to him when it is read silently or copied and recopied, flat and dead, from manuscript to manuscript. His brilliant rhetorical flourishes and constant borrowing of images from the courtly romance tradition might be seen as an attempt to mitigate this feeling of flattening in order to make the text all the more vibrantly present when it is being read.

The exuberance of his language and the constant invocation of divine speech and song might also encourage reading the text aloud (at a time when silent meditative reading was gaining ground). Reading aloud was an especially prominent concern for lay readers of vernacular texts: Saenger remarks that “many laymen who could read Latin liturgical texts only by pronouncing them aloud, phonetically, without understanding, read vernacular texts silently, with full comprehension.” While copying the texts of the Church Fathers had been a chief occupation of monks for centuries, writing treatises and sermons in the primarily spoken German
language was a comparatively recent phenomenon. Suso’s particular concern here seems to be that the immediate impact of vernacular orality would be dampened and dissipated once these texts were written down and read in solitude and silence. Despite all this, however, he seems convinced of the efficacy of his mother tongue: while his beloved teacher Meister Eckhart wrote extensively in both Middle High German and Latin, Suso chose the vernacular for all of his texts save the *Horologium Sapientiae* which, although wildly popular in Latin, was also quickly translated into several vernacular languages across Europe.\(^\text{15}\)

He continues to detail the rhetorical flattening that occurs in the process of writing by using one of his favorite motifs, floral imagery:

 wan so erkaltent su neiswe und verblichent als die abgebrochen rösen, wan dü lustlich wise, dü ob allen dingen menschlich herz rüret, dü erlöschet denne, und in der türri der türren herzen werdent sú denn enphangen. Es enwart nie kein seiten so süze: der in richtet uf ein türres schit, er erstumbet. Ein minnerichen zungen ein unminneriches herze enkan als wenig verstan, als ein tütscher einen walhen. (B 199)

(They somehow grow cold and blanch completely like plucked roses. That joyful art—that above all things moves the human heart—then fades away and is received in the dryness of dry hearts. There were never strings so sweet that did not grow dumb when stretched across a dry board. An unloving heart can understand a song of love just as little as a German can understand a foreigner.)

Just as a description of music can never hope to recreate the emotional impact of its performance, just as plucked roses fade and die, so too a manuscript cannot expect to compare to the directness of the oral performance of a sermon or the warmth of personal counsel—especially if written in the homely and immediate vernacular. One also sees in these passages further support of Suso’s frequent use of dialogue: while working in a medium
admittedly inferior to oral communication, Suso nevertheless does his best to make the text stimulating and desirable through the narrative structure that best imitates conversation and direct speech.

THE CONFLICT BETWEEN THE AUDITORY AND THE VISUAL

The interpretation of Suso’s use of visual terminology has always been fraught with complexities.16 His writings, the *Vita* in particular, demonstrate a marked ambiguity about the order or sequence of visual experience and visionary activity; the schemata he develops do not correspond neatly with the widely admired Augustinian tripartite division of corporeal, spiritual, and intellectual vision established in Book XII of *De Genesi ad Litteram*. Bernard McGinn notes this extraordinarily multivalent proliferation and the concomitant confusion that can occur, commenting on “the complicated array of [the *Vita*’s] imaginative showings: dream visions and waking experiences; visions given on earth and raptures described as taking place in heaven; showings presented as direct gifts from God and visualizations of spiritual truths that seem more the product of literary artifice.”17 This variegated assortment of revelations is partially explained, McGinn writes, by Alois Haas’s explanation that Suso’s visions and visualizations may be separated into a two-fold visionary program: some solidify Suso’s claims to authority and exemplarity, while others are visionary images used pedagogically to lead his readers towards God.

Suso himself spends a great deal of time explaining his use of images; it is in part the proliferation of these self-analytical moments, however, that makes the task of determining any unified attitude towards images and imaginative activity so challenging. The Dominican’s most thorough exposition of his understanding of cognition and his perspective towards the use of images is found near the end of the *Vita*. When Suso’s “spiritual daughter,” Elsbeth Stagel, asks about God’s whereabouts, the Suso-character responds by commanding her: “tū dú inren oren uf diner sele” (open the inner ears of your soul) (B 176). He then delves into Eckhartian apophaticism, affirming the God’s omnipresence by virtue of the natural
world’s “alliches wesen” (entire/total being) (B 177) before recognizing that a proper understanding of this can only be achieved partially in this lifetime—and even then only through the “oge únsers gemütes” (mind’s eye) or the “oge unser bekentnús” (eyes of our reason) (B 177).

Although his theoretical formulations often make an attempt to preserve the Augustinian three-fold hierarchy of vision, his texts manifest a far more ambiguous usage that offers no simple or certain categorizations, beyond those of bodily and non-bodily. That the latter is superior, however, Suso repeatedly makes clear: “halte dich luterlich von alien ingezognen bilden” (keep yourself free from all images coming from outside) (B 288); and, “ein ieklichú vision, so si ie vernünftiger und bildloser ist . . . so si ie edler ist” (every vision, the more intellectual and the more imageless it is . . . the more noble it is) (B 183). Although Suso strives towards an imageless perception of the divine and recognizes the ideal of an intellectual vision of God, he rarely achieves this in practice. The experience of heavenly music, however, often serves as a medium that can resolve this aporia of seeing an invisible God—an experience that is most fully explored in Suso’s Vita or Life of the Servant.

SINGING THE SELF: SUSO’S AUTOHAGIOGRAPHY

In the Vita we find an account of the development of Suso’s spiritual life and his relationship both to other Dominicans and to society as a whole. He discusses the genesis of the text with extreme humility, claiming that Elsbeth Stagel was covertly copying down the stories that he told her about his life and his visions, thus turning the ephemeral and oral into the preserved and written. He eventually discovers this clandestine transcription and commands her to burn the ill-begotten papers; half-way through a voice from heaven suddenly intercedes and demands that they stop. The surviving leaves, he claims, are the text we are left with. Perhaps to counter the deadness of the written text which he laments elsewhere—and to justify the textualization of what he claims he wishes could have remained oral and immediate—we are here given an account of a divinely-sanctioned preservation of the written text of his stories. The parchment
may be deadening, but the *Vita’s* conversational roots and its dramatic vignettes give it a voice of its own.

Later on in the *Vita*, his spiritual daughter transcribes another set of autobiographical stories Suso told her as encouragement in a time of adversity; this hidden manuscript is itself transformed into a source of revelatory, divine music. A fellow nun comes to Stagel one morning and remarks:

> eya, liebú swöster, waz hast du verborgens götliches wunders in diner lad? Lûg, mir waz hinaht vor in einem trome, daz ein junger himelscher knab stünde in diner lade, und hate der ein sisses seitenspil in sinen handen, daz man nemmet ein röböbli, und da machet er uf geischlich reyen, die waren als reislich, daz menlich dur von geischlichen lust und fröd nam (B 113-4)

(Dear sister, what hidden divine marvels do you have in that trunk of yours? Last night in a dream it seemed to me that a young heavenly boy stood in your trunk. He had a sweet stringed instrument in his hands—that which people call a rebec—and he made spiritual carols [*reyen*] on it that were so well-ornamented that many took spiritual pleasure and joy from them.)

Here, the concealed text cannot remain unnoticed—what is inappropriately shielded from sight can still be heard in a dream. The curious specificity that the boy is playing a rebec [röböbli]—a relatively recently-coined term, first used in English by Chaucer—helps to show just how clearly the music could be heard. The sweetness of Suso’s stories is such that even recording them on parchment cannot put an end to their musical immediacy.

Text and music working in concord lead Suso to the central theme of the *Vita*, his mystical marriage with Sapientia. Whereas Augustine was initially repulsed by the crude style of the Bible in comparison to the lofty
words of pagan rhetoricians, Suso unsurprisingly finds nothing to dislike in the Bible’s use of language:

Er hate von jugent uf ein minneriches herz. Nu erbütet sich dû ewig wisheit in der heiligen scrift als minneklich als ein lûtseligû minnerin, dû sich finlich uf machet, dar umb daz si menlich wol gevalle, und redet zartlich in fröwlichem bilde, daz si ellû herzen gen ir geneigen muge. (B 11-12)

(He had from his youth on a heart filled with love. Now eternal Wisdom presented herself in sacred Scripture as lovable as an agreeable beloved who gets herself up in finery so that she might please men, speaking softly, the very image of a woman, so that she might attract all hearts to her.)

Suso’s courtly reworking of Biblical rhetoric frames eternal Wisdom as a desirable woman. This seductively eroticized presentation of the Goddess Wisdom presents herself as the image of an earthly woman with the voice of scripture; her likeness to the secular is visual while her identification with biblical truth is principally aural. In this striking combination we can easily anticipate the pleasure Suso and his fellow Dominicans might have in unveiling this soft-spoken gem: the mysteries of scripture are akin to eternal Wisdom whispering gently to them in the dark.¹⁹

Hearing the Books of Wisdom read at mealtime sparks the first revelation in the Vita, one that is distinctly aural. We first learn that “[w]enn man dû ze tisch laz, und er denne derley minnekosen horte dar ab lesen, so waz im vil wol ze mute” (when these [texts] were read at table and he heard such expressions of love read from them, he felt great exhilaration) (B 12). After much torment considering his odds were he to court this hohû minnerin (lofty lover), she finally makes the decision for him, rather than waiting for him to make up his mind: “mornendes aber dar ze tisch gesass, so rûfte si us der wise Salomon und sprah also: Audi fili mi!” (one morning when he was sitting at table...she called to him in the manner of
Solomon and said, *Audi, fili mi* (B 12). Both the Latin command and the reference to Solomon reinforce the particularity of a scriptural community immersed in Latin orality -- despite Suso's love of the vernacular, it seems quite possible that his love affair with Sapientia takes place primarily in the oral Latin medium of cloister and liturgy. Wisdom goes on to confirm that whatever was restraining him before should be discarded and that he should make the attempt to take her as a lover. Especially significant here is that before Suso receives any visual apparition whatsoever he is first granted these exclusively aural revelations that stem from hearing the Bible read at mealtime.

In fact, visions are initially threatening, as they interfere with the auditory revelation that he receives. He relates that while listening to Wisdom's litany of the benefits which he will receive by taking her as his beloved, "widerzugen frömdú bilde" (strange images intruded) (B 13) and he is seized with doubt about his ability to love Wisdom, a beloved whom he has never seen. Once again audition is privileged: the divine counter-argument to these doubts is heard, not seen. It is "a divine thought" which *speaks* in response—"daz widersprach ein götlicher gedank" (B 13)—and reassuringly reminds him that suffering is a necessary part of all worthwhile love, both secular and sacred.

The courtship between Suso and Wisdom continues as she speaks to him and warns him of the "poisoned words" of all other lovers. Suso agrees and is so driven by desire that he is finally granted a sight of his beloved:

> Und als verr er si in den usgeleiten bischaften der schrift mit den inren ogen gesehen mohte, do zogte si sich ime also: si swepte höh ob ime in einem gewúlkten throne, si luhte als der morgensterne und schein als du spilndú sunne; irú krone waz ewikeit, ire wat waz selikeit, irú wort süzzekeit, ire umbfang alles lustes gnuhsamkeit. Si waz verr und nahe, höh und nider, si waz gegenwúrtig und doch verborgen. (B 14)
(And as far as he was able to imagine her through the explanatory examples of scripture with his inner eyes, she presented herself to him thus: She was suspended high above him on a throne of clouds. She was lit up like the morning star and shone as the glittering sun. Her crown was eternity, her clothing blessedness, her words sweetness, and her embrace the satisfaction of all desire. She was distant and near, high and low, she was present and yet hidden.)

Eternal Wisdom does not appear to Suso in quite the direct and unmediated vision he had been hoping for. Instead, his sight of her is figured as an internal act, imagined through the inner eyes and primarily constituted with scriptural and textual examples. The vision does little to support the importance of sight; instead this apparition is presented as far more mediated than the aural revelations he had previously received, none of which qualified his hearing as his sight is here (although he does see Wisdom through his *inren ogen* alone, which might be considered closer to the intellectual vision he prizes most highly). Although the description presented here is entirely visual, its impact is also diminished by the list of opposites Suso provides: “present and yet hidden” in particular points directly to the limitations of language and ekphrasis in adequately manifesting the divine. Similarly, “distant and near” and “high and low” force us to imagine either dizzying shifts in perception (if we take each in sequence) or an absolute omnipresence (if understood as simultaneous attributes): the former further destabilizes the mind’s eye, while the latter makes any attempt at visual differentiation impossible.

Wisdom continues to occupy Suso’s thoughts. After much prayer and contemplation he finds that “so trukte sich in sin sele neiswi der ursprunglich usfuss alles gütes, in’ dem er bevand geischlich allez, daz schön, lieplich und begirlich waz; daz waz alles da in unsprechlicher wise” (the original outflowing of everything good pressed itself somehow into his soul, and he found in it spiritually all that was beautiful, lovely and desirable; but it was all there in an unspeakable manner) (B 14-15). The source of goodness presses directly into his heart; Suso acknowledges the
tension that this might cause and treats it as something located within him in "an unspeakable / inexpressible way." Often depicted in manuscript miniatures with the figure of Divine Wisdom lodged in his heart, Suso here begins the process of finding this divine source of goodness within himself.

Once again, however, his awareness of Wisdom’s presence is sparked through audition:

Hie mite kom er in ein gewonheit, wenn er loblieder horte singen oder stizzu seitenspel erklingen oder von zitlichem lieb hort sagen ald singen, so wart im sin herz und müt geswintlich in gefürt mit einem abgescheiden inblick in sin lieplichostes lieb, von dem alles liep flüset. (B 15)

(With this he came into a custom, when he heard songs of praise being sung or sweet stringed instruments sounding, or speaking and singing about secular love, he was suddenly transported into his heart and mind with a detached in-looking on his loveliest love, from which all love flows.)

Any sound whatsoever relating to love, from secular to spiritual, throws Suso into an inward contemplation of his beloved. The love-smitten Blackfriar is able to convert nearly any pleasant auditory input into an overwhelming motivation to look inward at the beauty of Eternal Wisdom. Although he is able to moderate his vision properly—the inward-look (inblick) onto Wisdom is here described as detached (abgescheiden)—the aural seems to have an inescapable, direct, and immediate impact on Suso.

Similarly, in the Little Book of Eternal Wisdom, secular music again proves an appropriate accompaniment to Suso’s contemplation of the divine. As he prepares to write about suffering, Suso is approached by another vision and asked to play the psaltery. Although he hesitates, concerned about the propriety of playing something “ungeistlich” (non-religious), he
is told “daz ir begirliches psalterjen nit ungeistlich were” (that his desire for psaltery-songs was not irreligious) (B 253). Immediately, another young man appears, prepares a psaltery (curiously placing “zwen vedem über die seiten in krúzwis” [two threads over the strings in the shape of a cross] [B 254]), and places it into the Servant’s hands. Only then is he properly equipped to begin speaking of suffering—perhaps accompanying his own speech with this mystical psaltery. Once again, the aural aspect of the dialogue is intensified by a scene that takes great pains to detail exactly what sort of music and conversation is needed in Suso’s devotional project.

Another step the Suso takes in his growing relationship with God is to inscribe the name of Christ, IHS, upon his heart in an over-literal reading of Jeremiah 31:33. This certainly provides the most extraordinary and memorable example of the fusion between image and text that, initially, entirely occludes the aural: Suso takes his stylus and gouges IHS into the flesh above his heart so that the resultant scarring will forever remind him of his savior and inspire a select few to similar devotion. Jeffrey Hamburger remarks that “the monogram offers the archetypal example of text and image inextricably combined.” Hamburger goes on to note other instances—in manuscript illustrations which depict the monogram oversized, colored red, and dripping with blood—in which the divine name serves as both text and image. Hamburger concludes that the IHS inscribed into Suso’s body is “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.” This fusion offers a very tangible example of Michel de Certeau’s analysis of the unique qualities of mystical language: “‘mystics’ or ‘mystical’ applied to a noun denotes ‘as the mystics understand or use it.’” Further, he writes, “it plays the role of quotation marks. It turns the attention away from the thing being represented and focuses it on the way the word is being used, that is, on the sign-as-thing. It therefore opacifies the sign.” The monogram condenses the name of Christ; Suso’s textual scarring brings the reader’s focus dramatically, gruesomely, to the materiality of the sign. Music often functions in a similar, but even more opaque manner for Suso—almost to the point of utter extra-linguistic textlessness. Even hearing secular music
can provide the experience of divine rapture because it is the very melody itself that he finds so affective, not the text or what is signified by the text.\textsuperscript{25} Sounds (along with images) allow him momentarily to transcend language as he experiences divine presence.

Hamburger also notes that the repetition of text within accompanying manuscript illuminations creates a situation in which the text is very much secondary to the image. This in turn implies that the text itself is, in a sense, wholly derived from Suso’s visual experience.\textsuperscript{26} The primacy of the visual (i.e., if the image repeats the text within itself, then the text can be seen as a mere superfluous addition) leads Hamburger to conclude that “if in the \textit{Exemplar} we read and then we see, the picture reminds us that Suso first saw and then read.” He clarifies this further, adding that “by leaving his reader with an image, Suso rewrote his own text, identifying it as no more than a ‘transcript’ of spiritual sight. At a distance, we recognize that what he attempts is to remove the mediation of words, in effect, to recreate the immediacy of an encounter face to face.”\textsuperscript{27} What is noteworthy is that the text itself tends to figure this kind of face-to-face immediacy as an aural experience of divine sound or conversation: words, too, can be transmitted face to face. Images are depicted in much more ambiguous and threatening terms; trying to remove the mediation of the \textit{text} is more important to Suso than trying to remove the mediation of \textit{words}. Unmediated contact with the divine is most commonly represented in the \textit{Vita} as auditory and not visual. Suso first hears, and only subsequently sees or reads.

\textbf{HEARING THE LITURGY}

Suso also writes about the visions or \textit{inluhtend meinunge}\textsuperscript{28} that he receives while singing the Mass. He explains that

\begin{quote}
\textit{wenn ich dú selben lobrichú wort \textit{Sursum corda} sang in der messe, so geschah gemeinlich, daz min herz und sele zerflussen von götlichem jamer und begirde, die min herz uss im selb an der stunde verflögten; wan es erhuben sich}
\end{quote}
denne gewonlich drierley hoh uftragender meinungen. (B 27)

(when I sang these praise-rich words *Sursum corda* in the mass, it happened commonly that my heart and soul dissolved from mournful lust for God, and that my heart flew out of itself for a time; then normally three types of high uplifting visions were presented to me.)

As a result of singing the *Sursum corda*, Suso typically receives three enlightening and uplifting concepts from God (although he later clarifies that sometimes only one comes, at other times two). He first imagines every creature and plant on earth singing praise to God with *Sursum corda*—although he goes on to specify elsewhere that this is nevertheless a stringed (*seitenspiel*) melody. This curious nomenclature might be intended to emphasize the ultimately textless, divine archetype of the music over and above its creaturely incarnation; the mixture of plant- and animal-based materials in a medieval stringed instrument might also make *seitenspiel* a more universal term for this global performance of praise. Next, he sees all human hearts turning away from transitory human love and focusing on divine love; his final vision in this episode makes an appeal to all humankind to live in a state of detachment from themselves and from all other creatures. Going far beyond the standard topos of angels singing the *Sanctus*, the Blackfriar here imagines all of creation giving praise to God, raising their hearts in a very direct way. Music not only inspires this three-fold vision but also provides the central component of his imagining a natural theology of praise.

Not only is the reception of divine melody central to Suso’s autohagiographical program, the production of mellifluous sermons is also crucial for the Dominican. Another episode in the *Vita* draws attention both to its own literariness and sense of tradition as well as the importance of oral teaching in Suso’s pastoral activities. The Virgin comes and suckles the parched Suso as he falls asleep. That same night, however, the Lady also appears to a distant nun and informs her that this happened to Suso in exactly the same manner as it once happened to John Chrysostom.
Because of this mystical suckling, the Lady claims, "sin [Suso's] lere, dû von sinem munde get, vil begirlicher und lustlicher nu fürbaz wirt ze höreene denn vor" (his teaching, which comes from his mouth, will from now on become much more joyful and desirable to hear than before) (B 50). The invocation of the golden-mouthed saint in this context highlights the literary and mediated nature of the vision, emphasizing once more Suso's connection to the great patristic figures. Particularly important is the significance of Suso's mouth being blessed through contact with the virgin's breast; the gesture denotes the importance of preaching and oratorical brilliance in Suso's life.

Suso's experiences of divine presence are, over and over again, primarily auditory: he converses with Wisdom, he hears divine revelations, he rejoices in mystical song. At one point, as Suso is in the depths of despair while returning from a Dominican chapter in the Netherlands where he was accused of writing nothing but "heretical garbage" (kezerlichem unflat), he sees a vision:

\[\text{ein grössú schar dez himelschen ingesindes kemi zu im in die kamer im ze troste, und die himelschar vieng an ze singen einen himelschen reyen; daz erklang also süsseklich in sinen oren, daz ellú sin natur verwandlet ward. (B 69)}\]

(A great crowd of the heavenly court came to him in the room to console him and the heavenly host began to sing a heavenly carol [reyen]; it sounded so sweetly in his ears that his entire nature was transformed.)

Suso is initially consoled by this divine music, but suddenly feels self-conscious and inexplicably dour when a young man asks him to join in, reminding the Dominican that he knows these joyous songs well. Suso claims to be in too much anguish to sing along, being so miserable that he is only capable of a "leiden jamersang" (dirge of suffering") (B 69). His days of joyful singing are over; now he can only await the hour of his death. The young man responds emphatically:
Viriliter agite! Gehab dich wol, bis frölich, dir wirt nit! Du wirst noh ein sölich gesang bi dinen tagen tünde, da von got in siner ewikeit wirt gelopt und menig lidender mensch getröstet (B 69).

(Viriliter agite! Pull yourself together and be joyful: nothing will happen to you! You will yet make a song in your days such that God will be praised in his eternity; [that song] will console many suffering people.)

Heavenly apparitions often provide Suso with encouragement and useful predictions—especially regarding the afterlife. Here, at a point when Suso’s confidence in his authorial project is at its nadir—even fellow Dominicans are accusing him of heresy—this experience of heavenly music helps to emphasize his unique connection to heavenly matters. He is told, not that he will make images or texts that will inspire devotion in others, but rather that he will sing a song like that sung in heaven which will both praise God and console his fellow Christians.

Soon after this episode, Suso hears sweetly-spoken words that convince him that the time to fulfill the young man’s prediction has come. In the midst of a contemplation in which he was transported “in sich und über sich selb” (in himself and over/beyond himself) (B 90), he relates that

in entsunkenheit der sinnen ward in im süzeklich gesprochen also: ‘ich wil dir hut erzögen den hohen adel mins lidens, und wie ein lidender mensch sol sin liden in lobricher wise dem minneklichen gote wider uf tragen.’

(B 90)

(in the inward sunkenness of his senses it was sweetly spoken thus: “I want to show to you the high nobility of my suffering, and how a suffering man should bring up his sufferings to the loving God in a praiseworthy way.”)
Once again, Suso’s revelation takes the form of an inward speech rather than visual apparition. After this revelation, however, Suso notes that

von disen süzzen ingesprochen worten zerfloss im sin sele in sinem libe, und in der vergangenheit der sinnen von grundloser völli sines herzen do zerspreiten sich neiswi die arm siner sele in dü witen ende der weit in himeln und in erde, und danket und lobte got mit einr grundlosen herzklichen begirde und sprach also (B 90)

(from these sweet inwardly-spoken words his soul dissolved in his body, and in the rapture of the senses, out of the groundless fullness of his heart, the arms of the soul somehow spread themselves to the ends of the world in heaven and earth, and thanked and praised God with a groundless heart-full longing and spoke thus.)

Here we see that the impact of this divine speech is so tremendous that his soul is overwhelmed and dissolved. Suso utilizes curious phrasing, remarking that his soul dissolved into his body—perhaps consciously recalling the ambiguity of St. Paul’s vision—while it simultaneously gains spiritual, and vastly infinite, arms. He speaks to God:

‘herr, ich han dich unz her in minen gedihten gelopt mit allem dem, daz lustlich ald minneklich mag gesin in allen creaturen. Eya, aber nu so müss ich aber frölich uf brechen mit einem núwen reyen und selzenen lobe, daz ich nieme erkande, denne daz es mir nu bekant ist worden in dem lidene.’ (B 90)

(‘Lord, up till now I have praised you in my writings with everything that creatures can find desirable and lovely. Ah, but now I must joyfully break out with a new carol of unusual praise, that I have not yet known, but which is now known to me in this suffering.’)
Suso laments that his previous writings, despite his best efforts, have failed to provide adequate praise to God. His *nüwen reyen* will prove the more appropriate mode of praise: he acknowledges both its novelty and its strangeness.\(^{34}\)

Why a *nüwen reyen*? What will this new mode of expression add to his mystical project? Katherine Zieman offers a penetrating analysis of the specific superiority that song can have over words in the context of mystical experience. She frames this in terms of what she refers to as music’s “extragrammatical”\(^{35}\) meaning: “whereas the goal of grammatical reading is to overcome . . . linearity through reduction to the signified, that is, by stripping away the evanescent ‘chaff’ to isolate the eternal truth that constitutes the ‘fruit’ of an utterance, the essence of *canor* (melody) is made available to the auditor because of, rather than in spite of, the constraints of time, voice, and language; its meaning lies in the simultaneity of voices sounding together (*concentus*).”\(^{36}\) For Suso it seems that music can offer an iterable experience of the divine at once more universal and more immediate than that of text alone. Just as the communal performance of the Holy Office makes many voices sound as one—while also providing Suso the opportunity for individual visionary interludes—so too will his texts incorporate many voices and means of communication (image, text, music) in an attempt to jolt the reader into a closer affective relationship with God.

Although Suso himself describes this mixing (or “crossover”) of courtly and mystic, secular and divine as somewhat out-of-the-ordinary, it has many analogues.\(^{37}\) A massive codex from Colmar (now Bayerische Staatsbibliothek Cgm 4997), anthologizing the works of many Minnesänger, for instance, includes an anonymous twenty-four stanza *reyen* detailing the creation of the world. It is a song that would have delighted Suso.\(^{38}\) It begins:

Ich singen ewig summersang,  
wy got uss siner almechtigkeit  
furt einen reyen in die zit,
As both the song and the codex amply illustrate, the practice of blending secular dance music with sacred themes was evidently more popular than Suso himself imagined.

**MUSIC AND MARIAN DEVOTION**

The music that is revealed to Suso in dreams and visions continually plays a critical role in his spiritual development. In one dream vision he is led into a chapel where he hears a choir singing a service to honor martyrs. Confused, as it was not the feast day of any martyr, he suggests that they sing something else. He is instead commanded by this mystical choir to join in the singing. As he begins to comply,
Er warf die bleter dez messbüches, daz vor im lag, hin und her, und heti gern von den bihtern ald icht anders gesungen denn von den lidenden martrern; waz er warf und umb kerte, do stünd es alles vol von den martrern. Do er sah, daz es nit anders mohte sin, do sang er mit in und sin gesang sprach gar trurklich. (B 118)

(He turned the pages of the missal that lay before him, back and forth, and would have gladly sung of the confessors or anything except the suffering martyrs. Wherever he flipped, back and forth, there was on every page only [songs for] the martyrs. When he saw that it might not be otherwise, he sang along and in his song expressed himself very sadly.)

This intensely musical episode serves to prefigure the great suffering and persecution that Suso himself faces in the chapter to follow—a necessary component in his auto-hagiographical project. The dream integrates the beleaguered Dominican (via both a mystical choir and his own singing) into the company of martyrs; the missal’s unvarying contents reinforce the inevitability of Suso’s impending near-martyrdom and the untrustworthiness of texts. If he feels any discomfort or embarrassment about singing in an anticipatory service for himself and his own martyrdom, it is not evident.

Shortly before this scene, he describes making a floral wreath and using it to crown a statue of Mary; this humble act of devotion is followed by his seeing the heavens open and hearing

daz aller schönst gesang in dem himelschen hofe von dem fröhlichen ingesinde, daz ie gehöret ward. Sü sungen sunderlich ein gesang von unser frowen, daz sprach als recht süzeklich, daz es sin sele von grosser wollust zerfloste, und waz dem glich, daz man von ir singet an aller heiligen tage an der sequenci: *Illic regina virginum, transcendentis culmen ordinum* etc., und ist der sin dez gesanges, wie dú rein kúngin obswebt in
eren und wirdekeit allem himelschen her. Er hüb och uf und sang mit dem himelschen ingesinde, siner sele bleib do vil himlisches smakes und jamers na gote. (B 111)

(the most beautiful singing that was ever heard in the heavenly court by the joyful members of that court. Especially, they sang a song of our Lady that sounded so truly sweet that his soul from such exceptional pleasure dissolved; it was the same as the song that one sings to her on all holy days in the sequence: *Illic regina virginum transcendens culmen ordinum* etc. The song is about how the pure Queen is raised above all the heavenly host in honor and dignity. He joined in and sang with the heavenly court. The taste of heaven and longing for God stayed in his soul.)

Note how he offers the text of a sequence likely quite well-known to a contemporary reader, followed by a German précis; it is easy to imagine his readers, if reading silently, hearing the melody in their heads almost against their own wills. After Suso joins this heavenly community, the memory of the sweet taste of the music lingers long in his soul.

Suso goes on to describe a similar experience that occurred while he lingered in bed instead of adorning the statue of the Virgin with a crown of roses:

Also do es zit waz nah siner gewonheit und er uf solt stan, do waz im ze glicher wise, wie er were in einem himelschen kore, und da sang man den Magnificat gotes müter ze lobe. Do daz kam, do trat dú jungfrow dört her für und gebot dem brüder, daz er an viengi den vers: *O vernalis rosula*, daz sprichet: o du fines sumerliches röseli! (B 111)

(Then, when it was the time that he customarily should get up, he felt as if he were in a heavenly choir; they were
singing the *Magnificat* in order to praise God’s mother. When it was over, the Virgin came over to him and bade him to begin the verse *O vernalis rosula*, which means: “O you delicate little summer rose!”

His forgetfulness is corrected musically; his devotion to the Virgin, not being carried out physically, is instead performed in song. A crown of roses is supplanted by a song about a rose. The episode continues:

Er gedachte, waz si da mite meindi, und doch wolt er ir gehorsam sin und hüb an mit einem frölichen gemüte: *O vernalis rosula*, und zehand ire drie neis viere jungling des himelschen ingesindes daz in dem kore stünd, viengen an mit im ze singen, dar na dú ander schar ellú sament widerstritz, und rungen so wol gemütklich, daz es als süseklich erschal, als ob ellú seitenspil da erklungen; und den überschal mohte sin tödemlichu nature nit lenger liden, und kam wider zu im selben. (B 111-2)

(He wondered what she meant by this and yet he wanted to be obedient. He began to sing *O vernalis rosula* with a joyful countenance. Right away three or four youths of the heavenly court that stood in the choir began to sing with him. Then all the rest of the host joined in, all of them together. They sang so jovially that it sounded as sweet as if all the world’s stringed instruments were sounding there. His mortal nature could not endure these supernatural sounds any longer and he came to himself again.)

Once again, Suso hesitates before singing in a vision—here, it seems to be something like bashfulness before the Virgin that causes him to waver, rather than the sorrow that earlier prevented him from joining in the heavenly *reyen*. Bit by bit, the rest of the heavenly choir joins his lone voice; by the end of the episode the music is so overwhelmingly divine (and again curiously described in terms of stringed instruments rather
than voices) that he needs to return to the sublunary realm. Although the injunction against perception of the Godhead is usually figured in terms of sight (Exodus 33:20, John 1:18), here it seems that the divine voice is just as overpoweringly brilliant as the divine countenance.

VISUAL AND MUSICAL RELICS

In another vision, he is once again drawn into a mystical rapture in which the revelatory experience is centered on song:

Und do im in der betrahtunge die sinne neiswi entsunken, do duht in in einer gesiht, er wurdi gefüriet uf ein schön, grünen heide, und gie ein stoltzer himelscher jungling bi ime und fürte in an siner hand. Also erhûb der selb jungling in dez brûder sele ein lied, und daz erschal als frölich, daz es im alle sin sinne verflogte von überkraft des sussen gedönes. (B 139)

(And while he was in this contemplation his senses somehow dissolved. He seemed to be taken in a vision to a beautiful green heath; and a glorious heavenly young man walked by him and led him with his hand. Then this same young man began to sing a song in the friar’s soul, and it sounded so joyfully that all his senses flew away because of the overwhelming power of the sweet sounds.)

Although this episode begins with a few intensely visual descriptions, it quickly transforms into an account of divine song: the heavenly messenger is able to effect a second effacement of Suso’s senses (first entsunken, then verflogte) through the beauty, intensity, and intimacy of his song. The consequences of this mystical hearing are extreme, even for Suso:

und duhte in, daz sin herz als reht vol wurdi inbrünstiger minne und jamers na gote, daz daz herz ward varnd und wütende in dem libe, als ob es von übriger not zerbrechen
(It seemed to him that his heart was completely full of passionate love and longing for God, so that his heart started moving and raving madly within his body, as though it almost needed to burst, and he needed to lay his right hand on his heart in order to help himself, and his eyes became so full with tears that they overflowed. When the song was finished, a picture was presented to him so that he could learn the same song and that he might not forget it.)

The language here is some of Suso’s most powerful. The affective impact of this young man’s song is tremendous (indeed, when Suso returns to his senses, his hand is still placed protectively above his heart); he is provided with an image to aid him in remembering it after the vision is over. An image helps him to remember a melody—once again, the text seems secondary. Suso, despite being flown away from his dissolved senses, somehow manages to turn his gaze towards the picture:

(So he looked at it [the picture] and saw our lady pressing eternal Wisdom to her motherly heart as if it were her
child. The beginning of the song was written above the head of the little child with beautiful, well-flowered letters, and the writing was secret, so that no human could read it; only the people who had grasped it with great feeling could read it well. And the writing was thus: BELOVED OF MY HEART. This writing the Servant read with great skill.

The picture contains a Madonna and child surrounded by the vernacular text of this mystical song. The text is embellished with Suso’s beloved flowers and, unsurprisingly, he is able to read the main inscription quite clearly. That he transcribes it in the Vita demonstrates again the importance of the aural connection to the divine: despite the encoded secrecy of the image and the text, he feels comfortable both describing the picture’s main figures and writing down the words. The heavenly music that inspires the bulk of his emotive response, however, remains mysterious and absent; of the sensory experiences in this episode, only the song’s melody remains secret. The auditory experience of the divine may serve for Suso as a sensory medium that supersedes his apophatic suspicion of images.

Henry Suso experiences vision upon vision in his auto-hagiographical Vita. Although reading scripture and the Vitae Patrum can provide significant inspiration for him, and viewing images of the Goddess Wisdom and the Virgin can transport him to visionary realms, it is the auditory that evokes the most intense, intimate, and significant revelatory experiences of the text. Working in expressive modes accessible both to the musically literate (comprised primarily of the religious) and the larger secular population who appreciated love songs and folk dances, Suso is keen to utilize whatever comes to hand to help propagate his devotional programs. From the dialogic structure he relies on in his texts to his reliably vision-inducing performance of the Sursum corda at Mass, voices and song provide Suso with the most reliable and affective path to the experience of the divine.

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NOTES

1. Augustine’s attitude to music itself changed dramatically, however, over the course of his life; in Carthage he was wary of its seductive sensuality, yet he also recognized its extraordinary affective power—biblically sanctioned in the Psalms—both inside and outside the church. For a very helpful exposition of his shifting positions on music (and a comparison to the unambiguously positive love of Richard Rolle [c. 1300–1349]—a Yorkshire mystic with remarkable similarities to Suso—for the experience of divine canor), see Robert Boenig, “St. Augustine’s jubilus.” See also Bruce Holsinger, “Saint Augustine.”

2. For a useful anthology of texts containing reflections on the connection between religious experience and music from Plato to Karlheinz Stockhausen (and including short excerpts from Rolle’s Incendium Amoris and Suso’s Vita), see Joscelyn Godwin, Music.

3. For a succinct analysis of the importance of sensory experience in Christian mysticism, see Rosemary Drage Hale, “‘Taste and see.’” For a thorough, beautifully-illustrated account of attitudes towards the senses more generally in this period, see C.M. Woolgar, The Senses.

4. For an essay detailing Suso’s devotion to eternal Wisdom and contextualizing it within a larger framework of medieval Goddess worship, see Barbara Newman, “Devotional Wisdom” in God and the Goddesses. See also her Frauenlob’s Song of Songs for a superb translation of Frauenlob’s (d. 1318) Marienleich and a helpful introduction to his life and works situated within a broader context of devotion to divine women in the later Middle Ages (the edition also includes a CD of a performance of the poem by the early music ensemble Sequentia, directed by Barbara Thornton and Benjamin Bagby).
5. Richard Kieckhefer's seminal study cites Richard Rolle as another fourteenth-century mystic for whose religious life melody (canor) was absolutely critical; he also notes, however, that in "saints' lives, the sensation of music is not commonly used as a way of conveying the experience of rapture." See Unquiet Souls, 154.


7. For a study of the possible connection between Henry Suso's Horologium Sapientiae and the motets of French poet and composer Guillaume de Machaut (c. 1300–1377), see Anne Walters Robertson, "Machaut's Motets." Although actual material or explicit internal evidence for any connection between the two bodies of work is scant, Robertson creates several tables that compare similar content and ordering (among writers as disparate as Baldwin of Ford, Guigo de Ponte, and Richard of Saint Victor, as well as Machaut and Suso) to posit a link between "affective motet tenors" and "affective theology." I am grateful to Anna Zayaruznaya, of the Music Department at Harvard University, for bringing this book to my attention.

8. Despite the fixation of many scholars of medieval music on the theoretical principles of mathematic ratios that dominate scholastic discussion of music in the Middle Ages, a useful trend in contemporary musicology has tended to focus attention instead on what can be gleaned of the practice of music in the Middle Ages. For a helpful overview of fourteenth-century music and its relation to literature, see Nigel Wilkins, Music. References throughout this essay to late medieval English culture are not incidental: connections between fourteenth-century mystic Richard Rolle, for instance, and Suso abound to an almost uncanny extent (yet remain largely unexplored). For a detailed discussion of the centrality of canor to Rolle's thought, see Nicholas Watson, Richard Rolle. An insightful analysis of Rolle's overall use of sensory perception in
his devotional life can be found in Vincent Gillespie, “Mystic’s Foot.”

9. *Militia est vita hominis super terram*: Suso translates *militia* as *riterschaft* [knightly ordeal]. Although Christ is Suso’s most frequent exemplar, the desert fathers and Job also serve an important role in his spiritual self-fashioning. See John A. Alford, “The Scriptural Self,” and Peter Brown, “The Saint as Exemplar.”

10. On the importance of the Desert Fathers for Suso, see Ulla Williams, “Vatter ler mich.”

11. In doing so, of course, they mirror Suso’s own self-portrayal as an exemplar and auctor in the *Vita*; Jeffrey Hamburger writes, “*The Exemplar* translates Suso’s experience into textual form, but it also transforms the author into a living image that his audience can imitate by way of reflection . . . Suso represents himself as both a *speculum* and an *imago*: a mirror in which his readers will find Christ’s example faithfully reflected and, at the same time, an exemplary image or model that they themselves should reflect.” See *The Visual and the Visionary*, 235–6.

12. All quotations are from Heinrich Seuse. *Deutsche Schriften* and will be cited parenthetically within the text by page number. The superscript ‘e’ will be represented by an umlaut. All translations from the Middle High German (MHG) are mine, made in comparison to Frank Tobin’s translation in *Henry Suso*.

13. Paul Saenger argues that silent reading, by removing the possibility that a peer or superior may overhear, “fostered the milieu in which the new university and lay heresies of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries flourished.” See *Space Between Words*, 264.

15. There are more extant manuscripts in Dutch translation, for instance, than in the Latin original. For a complete listing of extant and lost manuscripts, fragments, medieval translations, and early printings of the *Horologium Sapientiae*, see Pius Künzle's critical edition of the text, 105–276.

16. The most thorough analysis of the literary and theological workSusō's multivalent visions perform is found in Alois Haas, "Seuses Visionen." See also Jeffrey Hamburger's exposition, in a broader theological context, of the role of images and vision in Susō's mystical and devotional project, "Speculations."


18. I have chosen to translate the difficult term *reyen* as *carol* on the suggestion of James Simpson. The term *reyen* in MHG principally refers to both the music and the dance accompanying it. Its only survival in New High German (NHG) refers to a traditional folkdance, the *Reigen* (although Carl Orff resuscitates the term—as *Reie*—in his famous setting of some of the *Carmina Burana*). Similarly, before the sixteenth-century, "carol" referred to a round-dance and the music that accompanied it—a meaning that persisted to the late nineteenth-century.

19. Sylvia Huot writes elegantly of the synaesthetic "fusion of lyricism and bookishness" that Richard de Fournival (1201–1260) employs in his *Bestiaire d'amours* to promote the mnemonic recreation of a beloved: "Sight and hearing, image and text, were originally presented as vehicles for the transmission of knowledge. Now they have become vehicles for the transmission of love. Memory is not only an intellectual but also an affective faculty, and the illustrated book is an instrument of seduction as well as instruction" (*From Song to Book*, 140). The influence of the erotic language of the Song of Songs on medieval devotion is also relevant: see Peter Dronke, "The Song of Songs"; Ann W. Astell, *The Song of Songs*; and, E. Ann Matter, *Voice of My Beloved*.
20. In particular, *verr und nahe* might be an echo of Marguerite Porete’s famous neologism *loingpres* in *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, whereas *hoh und nider* perhaps points towards the constantly varying height of Boethius’s Lady Philosophy.

21. David Freedberg, defining Suso’s sanguine reaction to the crucifixion as an empathetic device prompted by texts rather than an exemplary one which involved images, remarks “no wonder Heinrich Suso (d. 1366), upon contemplating the Passion of Christ, could be roused to such empathy that he felt impelled to carve Christ’s initials on his breast and nail a cross to his back. But Suso was a mystic, for whom concentration on texts alone was sufficient to generate this kind of reaction.” See *The Power of Images*, 173.


23. *The Visual and the Visionary*, 272. Indeed, between the prayers to be recited, the exempla to be copied, and the accounts of mystical song to be reflected upon, Suso’s manuscripts must have given the contemporary reader a remarkable fusion of the visual, the textual, and the auditory. Sylvia Huot writes, for instance, that her study of Old French lyric poetry was sparked by the realization that “medieval literature is at once more oral and more visual than a modern printed book.” See *From Song to Book*, 1.


25. This is not without patristic precedent: for Augustine, *jubilus*—an ecstatic expression of joy in the divine—is wordless. See John Stevens, *Words and Music*, 401-3.

26. Alois Haas, for instance, writes of the importance of the transparence of the relationship between Suso the *actio* as identical to Suso the *diener* or *actor*: “die Glaubwürdigkeit des Redenden hängt an der Durchsichtigkeit, die er zwischen seinem Text und seiner Existenz


28.  “Enlightening meanings” or “visions”—Tobin translates *meinunge* as “fantasies”—NHG *Meinung* retains only the sense of “opinion.”

29.  Katherine Zieman writes of the legitimizing role that liturgical music plays in Rolle’s use of *canor*, writing that it “is modeled on the experience of mediated divinity in the form of the angelic choir and necessarily entails a relationship to that mediating presence . . . With *canor* Rolle invokes the choir—the central body of monastic and collegiate communities. The choir for him embodies both institutional authority in general and authorized uses of language and letters in particular. It thus allowed him to situate ‘private,’ unsanctioned mystical enterprises in relation to ‘public’ ecclesiastical institutions.” See “The Perils of Canor.” The affective experience of music summed up in Rolle’s term *canor* echoes Suso in privileging melody over text: Zieman writes that while the liturgical and communal performance of song provides the necessary authority for Rolle’s reception of divine commands, “the text that the choir performs is largely irrelevant, subordinated to the ideal of communal singing.” See “Perils.”

30.  Suso’s musical interpretation of natural theology is not confined to this passage: in the *Little Book of Eternal Wisdom*, Suso even extends the language of praise to amphibians, writing “Minneklischer herre, nu lobent dich doch die fröschen in den graben, und mugent sú nit singen, so gewzent sú aber” (B 305) “Dearest Lord, even the frogs in the ditches praise you, and if they cannot sing, at least they croak.”
31. The significance of his Greek name is not lost on Suso—he translates it as “mit dem guldin munde” (B 50).

32. See Steven Rozenski Jr., “Von Aller Bilden Bildlosekeit.”

33. Suso consciously uses the famous Pauline phrasing of “in the body or out of the body, I know not” very early on in the second chapter of the Vita.

34. The MHG selzên (from which NHG selten: rare or infrequent) primarily means “strange” or “unusual.”

35. Bruce Holsinger refers to this phenomenon as music’s “extralinguistic immediacy.” See Music, Body, and Desire, 17.


37. On this phenomenon, see especially chapter 4 of Barbara Newman’s God and the Goddesses, 138–189; and, her essay “Love’s Arrows.” At the opening of the essay, she briefly discusses the history of scholarship on the idea of medieval “crossover,” detailing its fall from favor since the 1970s as “prevailing theoretical trends have encouraged scholars to maximize the ironic and self-serving aspects of medieval erotic culture, while minimizing its sublime and ‘ennobling’ aspects” (264). See also Hildegard Elisabeth Keller, My Secret.

38. For a facsimile of the entire manuscript in two volumes, see Die Kolmarer. For a more accessible edition of the most important songs it contains in plainsong notation, see Die Sangesweisen.

39. Die Sangesweisen der Kolmarer Handschrift, 114. Many thanks to Richard Kieckhefer and Ékkehard Simon for their comments on my translation. My gratitude extends to Nicholas Watson as well for many detailed comments on an earlier version of this essay. I also owe an enormous debt of gratitude to J. Scott Perkins, of the Eastman School of Music at the University of Rochester, for reading this essay and making several detailed suggestions
regarding medieval music and reyen—as well as answering countless questions about music and textuality more broadly.


41. Barbara Newman writes eloquently of the similar importance—and ineffability—of Marian music for Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179): “the Incarnation is the embodiment of music itself: Mary bears not only the Word but the song of God in her flesh ... Music, like fragrance, is immaterial substance; arising on earth it ascends to heaven, filling the air with its presence and luring the soul to praise.” See *Sister of Wisdom*, 180–181. See also her translation and edition of Hildegard’s *Symphonia*, which contains Marianne Richert Pfau’s insightful essay on the relationship between music and text in the cycle.

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