It is hard to say which matters more in the conduct of human life, fear of death or assurance of mercy, but it is easy to recognize that most of us need a good dose of both at one time or another. The monastic tradition, with its finely-tuned rhetoric of propulsion away from the transitory world, supplied plenty of the former, but late medieval culture, with its cults of saints and its Mariolatry, was heavily invested in the latter. These two currents intersect forcefully in death preparation practices, in which the individual needs the stimulus of fear to initiate movement, but craves the assurance of mercy. No text more acutely foregrounds the differing needs of its readers than Henry Suso’s *Horologium Sapientiae*, which was massively influential in late medieval devotional culture, but was creatively re-interpreted for its lay audience. In 1389, Jean de Souhaube, a Dominican monk, translated Suso’s Latin into French and that text, *L’Horloge de Sapience*, was the first of a flood of vernacular texts of Suso’s meditation that swept across Europe as it was translated into Dutch, German, Italian, Swedish, Danish, Polish, and Czech in the fifteenth century.

Three different Middle English prose translations, as well as Hoccleve’s unique verse translation, attest to a distinct sub-current of Suso’s transmission: the interest in Book II, Chapter 2, “De scientia utilissima homini mortali, quae est scire mori” (henceforth, “De Scientia”), which circulated independently from the larger text, appearing in devotional collections, many of them dedicated to death meditation and death preparation. Extracts from Suso’s *Horologium* under the titles *Trésor de Sapience* and *Doctrine de Sapience* circulate alongside the work of the famous sermonist and scholar Jean Gerson, who was, in turn, directly influential on the evolution of the official *ars moriendi* text sanctioned by the Church after the

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Council of Constance. By providing readers with a vivid and evocative scene of death, Suso’s text engaged them in a visualization of dying that was widely appropriated for use by individuals and communities of readers. This narrower channel of reception of the “Scientia” bothered Henry Lovatt, who saw in this pattern evidence of a “dilution and impoverishment of Suso’s distinctive message,” particularly in focusing on the grim, didactic message, which he finds “uncharacteristic of the more idiosyncratic, flamboyant flavour of the work as a whole.” Contrary to Lovatt’s assumption that the “De Scientia” attracted attention because it “coincided with devotional fashion,” the “De Scientia” appealed to a lay culture hungry for texts that prepared them for the crucial final moments of life, allowing an individual to prepare for this momentous transformation through a dynamic imaginative engagement with a mediating image of death. Indeed, what is most striking about the European reception of Suso’s “De Scientia” is how consistently translators and illustrators sought means to blunt the more severe, didactic warnings in Suso’s text, preferring instead to emphasize the possibility of a good death that counters the “bad death” Suso’s meditation describes. By re-making Suso’s *Imago Mortis* into distinctive images that mediate death for their readers and audiences, these illustrators sought visual means to affirm their social and artistic identities by injecting new details into Suso’s scene of death.

The vernacular reception of Suso’s text indicates a profound interest in the power of the image to stimulate response: while Latin texts of the *Horologium* are infrequently illustrated, more than half of the 63 French vernacular translations of the *Horloge de Sapience* include illustrations. These manuscripts include deluxe illustrations for powerful patrons like Marie, daughter of Jean, Duke of Berry, France’s most important manuscript patron in the early fifteenth century; she received an illuminated manuscript.