One of the opportunities offered by the quantities of English religious prose surviving from the period between 1370 and 1420 is that of seeing how many different ideological positions could be developed out of the core of themes, images, and anxieties common to that charged cultural moment. However violently some of these prose texts assert that there are only two such positions, orthodox and heretical, and however necessary it has been for scholars to use terms like these to build working models of the intellectual configurations and alliances that structured people's thinking, analysis of any single group of texts complicates this model, and an intensive comparative study of a single issue can undermine it altogether. Even if the range of possibility narrowed after 1400, as certain topics (such as disendowment and eucharistic theology) came to operate as boundary markers for groups determined to identify themselves as the true Church, intellectual individualism remained, to a greater extent than is often appreciated, a hallmark of the vernacular writing of the period. Reading through quantities of texts which seem to delight in taking even closely related ideas in a bewildering variety of directions, I am reminded of Raymond Williams's evocation of a more recent movement, the early twentieth-century avant-garde, which identified itself by means of a common core of slogans and antagonisms but was also incorrigibly various and self-contradictory. In the avant-garde, writes Williams, 'Schools and movements repeatedly succeeded each other, fused or more often fragmented in a proliferation of isms;' while 'individuals of marked singularity pursued their apparently and in some ways authentically autonomous projects, readily linked by the historian but often directly experienced as isolated and isolating.' In much the same way, at the end of the fourteenth century, the religious movements associated with the explosion of writing in the vernacular often seem characterized less by coherent systems of thought and expression than by the energy of their assertions, the shifts in their alignments, and the instability of their inner logics.

1 Politics of Modernism, 53.
This chapter follows one of many possible avenues into the febrile world of late fourteenth-century vernacular theology by analysing in detail the progress of an image—the image, in fact, of the image—through the vernacular and Latin oeuvre of a single, relatively well-documented individual, Walter Hilton. Hilton, a canon lawyer and secular priest who lived as a hermit for a period in the 1380s, but ended his days as an Augustinian canon at Thurgarton in Northamptonshire (where he died in 1396), has always been considered among the more conservative Middle English religious writers. There are good reasons for this. A product of what is often thought of as the cautious theological milieu of Cambridge, and perhaps an associate of Thomas Arundel in his days as bishop of Ely, Hilton wrote most of his dozen or so surviving works as a consciously orthodox exponent of a life of private devotion. These works implicitly or explicitly advocate obedience to the Church and religious superiors, political quietism, and doctrinal caution, all with a lucidity that earned Hilton the praise of conservative contemporaries such as Nicholas Love, and guaranteed two of his vernacular works, the Scale of Perfection and the epistle On Mixed Life, wide manuscript circulation and an early career in print. Modern Hilton studies have mainly been the preserve of Catholic and Anglo-Catholic scholars in search of the best in pre-Reformation English spirituality. It is understandable that these scholars have wanted to build on the air of traditionalism this picture evokes: exploring Hilton's roots in patristic and scholastic theology (Augustine, Gregory, Bernard, Aquinas); distinguishing him sharply from his quirkier near-contemporaries, especially Richard Rolle; and in general recreating him as an English prototype of that important Counter-Reformation figure, the 'spiritual director'.

Yet while Hilton was indeed the pro-establishment, anti-Lollard exponent of a spiritual life that balances reason and affect, penitence and mysticism, in a fashion that bespeaks his commitment to the conservative virtue of discretion, his career was intellectually bumpier, his alignments more complicated, than scholars allow. His writings and translations show him writing in a variety of modes and taking a range of theological positions that are not always easy to

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2 A brief outline of Hilton's career and works is provided in the App., below. For more detailed information, see Hilton, Scale of Perfection, trans. Clark and Dorward, an excellent resource.

3 See e.g. Knowles, English Mystical Tradition, 124: 'Hilton is in all things traditional and conservative'. Compare Lagorio and Sargent, 'English Mystical Writings', s. 3074, on Hilton's 'theological conservatism'.

4 On Hilton and Arundel, see Hughes, Pastors and Visionaries, 176–84, an interesting, if somewhat tendentious, reconstruction of Arundel's Ely and Cambridge 'circle'.

5 Love, Mirror of the Life of Christ, 134–44, describes Hilton as a 'worthi clerke and holi lyvere' and commends On Mixed Life. For MSS and early eds. of On Mixed Life and The Scale of Perfection, see Lagorio and Sargent, 'English Mystical Writings', 3430–5. The Scale also circulated in a Latin trans. by Thomas Fyshaker, perhaps a friend of Hilton's from Cambridge, on whom see Clark, 'Late Fourteenth Century Cambridge Theology'.

6 John Clerk's many important essays on Hilton, published in Downside Review, 95–103 (1977–8) are largely concerned with establishing his relationship to patristic tradition.
reconcile. For example, if the English translation of James of Milan’s *Stimulus amoris* (*The Prickynge of Love*) is his, it shows him far more interested in the possibilities of affective self-arousal through Passion meditation than one would guess from *Eight Chapters on Perfection*, his experimental translation of passages by a Cambridge colleague, the Spaniard Luis de Fontibus, or from *The Scale of Perfection*—and as we shall see, the two books of this, his most famous work, themselves develop different theological paradigms. He also shared many preoccupations with vernacular writers more radical than himself: the repudiation, despite his interest in sacramental theology, of formalism and its attendant hypocrisy; the determination, despite his defence of the religious orders, to build a model of the spiritual life applicable to everyone; the elevation of love, despite his categorization of the human as a rational animal, to an absolute standard for conduct and hermeneutic principle for study. More specifically, his thinking about the inner life evolved from an energetic body of imagery and ideas that in many respects belongs to the same thought-world as the Lollard radicalism he opposed.

In a word, much of Hilton’s early thought is iconoclastic: organized around a model of the fallen self as an idol, which sinners worship but the devout must topple from its pedestal and expel, so far as possible, from the temple of the soul (the *imago Dei*). In the *De adoratione imaginum* (*On the Worship of Images*), Hilton may have written a defence of images in scholastic mode, arguing for their validity and usefulness as books for the unlettered (although his authorship is unsure). This work offers unexceptionable examples of the arguments being mounted in favour of images by anti-radicals in the 1380s, even if it does share an air of passionless correctness with portions of another theoretical work certainly by Hilton, a defence of monasticism called *Epistola de utilitate et prerogativis religionis* (*A Letter on the Usefulness and Privileges of the

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7 Here I differ from Clark, who attributes to Hilton what seems to me an anachronistic precision and consistency, using theological considerations to establish the chronology and the canon of his works. See his ‘Problem of Walter Hilton’s Authorship’. On the other hand, theology has been helpful in settling the controversy over the authorship of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, which some mid-20th-cent. scholars attributed to Hilton. On this question, see Clark, ‘Cloud of Unknowing, Walter Hilton and St John of the Cross’; Minnis, ‘Cloud of Unknowing and Walter Hilton’s Scale of Perfection’.

8 Clark, ‘Walter Hilton and the *Stimulus Amoris*’, accepts the attribution, mostly on the basis of one, unusually careful MS rubric.

9 All these preoccupations can readily be noted within the pages of *Selection from English Wycliffite Writings*, ed. Hudson, but they are also found more widely, e.g. in the reformist treatise *Book for a Simple and Devout Woman*, and the group of works associated with it (brilliantly explored in Dickson’s groundbreaking ed. of the work). There is as yet no study of general reformist thinking in late 14th-cent. England (or agreement is to what ‘reformists’ meant), for all that the positions associated with the Lollards have been so extensively explored e.g., in Anne Hudson’s *Premature Reformation*. For discussions of reformist texts that do not fit the Lollard mould but are clearly inflected by the same contemporary situation, see my forthcoming article, ‘Andrew Wisse, Religious Reform, and the Late Middle Ages’.

10 One of five MSS of this work ascribes it to Hilton, another to the Dominican Thomas Palmer; Clark and Taylor, in their edn. Hilton, *Latin Writings*, i, 173–6, like earlier Hilton scholars, seem more confident of his authorship than the evidence quite warrants.
Religious Life. 11 But in other early works, Hilton's metaphoric use of the image of idol and its worship is satirical, as shocked at sin’s hold over the soul as any Lollard polemic is shocked at the perversion of the Church by the Antichrist.

Section I of this chapter thus concerns the earlier Hilton's uses of the image as a metaphor for evil inner states or hollow outward displays of virtue: first as these were developed in Latin (especially in his little-known early work, the De imagine peccati (On the Image of Sin)), then in Book I of The Scale of Perfection. Section II of the chapter traces how, in the epistle On Mixed Life and especially in Book II of the Scale, Hilton moved away from the language of spiritual iconoclasm towards a new metaphoric of light and dark and a new, more imageless, contemplative theology. This theology was influenced less by either set of positions in the debate over images than by a specific critique of Book I of the Scale in the newly written Cloud of Unknowing, a treatise to which Book II carefully responds. Hilton's debt to his milieu was profound. Most of his works were written in answer to appeals from individuals (lay, religious, or solitary) some of whose names we know, and evoke a circle of readers and writers finding their own solutions to common questions in dialogue with one another. In offering this thematic explication of his oeuvre in its context, I thus hope not only to address the specific themes of this volume—by illustrating some of the many uses to which the image of the image was put in late medieval England, despite the controversies surrounding the term—but also to illustrate the wider complexities that face us in exploring the vernacular religious culture of the period.12

1. THE IDOL OF SELF, THE IMAGE OF SIN

The De imagine peccati is a brief epistle written in answer to a letter from a hermit friend, while Hilton was himself living a solitary life, perhaps during the early 1380s; it survives in four manuscripts.13 The work is a gloomy meditation on the metaphor in its title, apparently suggested to Hilton by his friend's comment that he had found in his own soul nothing but an 'imaginem ... feditatis' ('an image of filth'): a phrase that plays sadly with the idea that humankind was made 'ad

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11 See Hilton, Latin Writings, i. 101-71. The Epistola does have a level of engagement with the issue it discusses, but the actual point it raises in defence of monasticism are surprisingly formal when they are not simply unconvincing. Much more powerful are Hilton's two works arguing that specific readers should not become monks: On Mixed Life, discussed below, and Epistola ad quendam secundo voce inueniendae voluntatis (Latin Writings, ii. 245-98). As these two works and Hilton's career suggest (from lawyer, to hermit, to Augustinian canon, rather than monk), he was never able to resolve his relationship with monasticism: some of his attitudes are, formally speaking, closer to Lollard suspicion of 'private religion' than he himself found comfortable.

12 This chapter builds on a body of current scholarship about late medieval English religious culture that is presently in a state of rapid change, all of it fundamentally indebted to Hudson, Premature Reformation. See esp. Atterbury, Power of the Holy Soulmate; Clinical Discourse; Watson, 'Censorship and Cultural Change'. For varied reflections on the status of the English vernacular, see many chapters of Wallace (ed.), Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature, and Wogan-Browne et al., Idea of the Vernacular.

13 Quotations are from Hilton, Latin Writings, i. 73-102; refs. are to line nos., and are given in the text.
imaginem et similitudinem Dei’ (‘in the image and likeness of God’) (ll. 2–3, 10; see Genesis 1: 26). The notion of an image of sin or filth is richly resonant, but is not commonplace; even John Clark, doyen of Hilton scholarship and editor of his Latin works (to whom this chapter is much indebted), offers few biblical, patristic, or scholastic analogues. Hilton associates the image of sin with the seven-headed beast in Revelation 13, which is often identified with the devil and the seven deadly sins. But it is important to note that this metaphor, which becomes pivotal to the theology of Book I of _The Scale of Perfection_, grew to fruition in the intimate environment of Hilton’s correspondence with his friend, as a deliberately extreme and perhaps original way of referring to the effects of the Fall on their souls.

Various associations cluster around the ‘imaginem...corruptionis’ (‘image of corruption’) as Hilton holds it up for inspection: it is the old nature Paul tells the Colossians to put away in favour of the new (Colossians 3: 9–10); it is, intriguingly, a return to the chaos that preceded creation (‘materia deformis’, ll. 8–15). But for most of the work, the image of sin is described as an idol, made from the human self, corrupting it from the image of God to that of the devil, and drawing its strength from ‘amor...inordinata’ (‘disorderly love’) (ll. 11–18, quoting Hosea 12: 8: ‘inveni idolum michi’ (‘I have found my idol’)). This idol, its head made of pride, its members of the other sins and corrupted human senses, is the source of all vice, demanding the worship of the same perverse soul who fashioned it and in whose temple it dwells (ll. 37, 18–21). The temple is Babylon, the idol the seven-headed beast on whom sits the ‘meretrix...Vana Gloria’ (‘the whore, Vainglory’), its worship a devilish parody of rapture ‘ad profundum inferni’ (‘to the depths of Hell’) (ll. 21, 48, 57–60). This idol is merely a ‘simulacrum, formam habens hominis...carenis vita et sensu’ (‘a simulacrum in human form, lacking life and sensation’), all its vigour amounting to nothing: ‘quia idolum nichil in mundo est’ (‘for an idol is nothing in the world’) (ll. 474–9; see Psalm 113 and 1 Corinthians 8: 4). Yet all creation, even God’s image, is darkened by this figure of evil, whom Hilton all but identifies with the Antichrist, and whose effects can never be rooted out in this life, any more than the tares sown by the enemy can be separated from the wheat (ll. 173). Even the life of solitude removes the occasion for sin, but not the brute fact of its habitation in the self. Indeed, in a moment of bitter self-criticism unique in the eremitic writing I know, the eremitic life itself is attacked as offering none of the respite of work or obedience to superiors that moderates the pressure

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14 Clark and Taylor cite only one instance of ‘imago peccati’, one of ‘imaginem diaboli’, both from Ambrose, neither especially likely as a source here (Ibid. ii. 336).
15 Clark and Taylor suggest a source in Augustine’s _Confessions_ (Ibid.).
16 All these topos about idols are common; many can be found in an orthodox work that tries to sort out the relation between idols and images, the English _Pseudo-Augustinian Soliloquies_. See the translator’s digression edited in Wogan-Browne et al., _Idea of the Vernacular_, pt. 3, excerpt 2, which draws on various sources, including _Travels of Sir John Mandeville_.

of the image of sin for others: "Quid ergo facimus, tu et ego... homines pigri et inutiles, tota die stantes ociosi?" ('What are we to do, then, you and I, useless and lazy men who spend the whole day idly standing by?') (I. 319–20; see Matthew 20: 3, 6).

In the harsh metaphorical environment of the De imagine, whose mode is so tenaciously hyperbolic that the work offers only sketchy solutions to the predicament it describes, every spiritual experience has its corrupt opposite, every claim to holiness exposes its own vanity. In an account of professional egotism that should send a shiver down every reader's spine, Hilton compares the workings of pride with the account of Paul's ascent into the third Heaven in 2 Corinthians, brilliantly inverting the positive treatment this passage usually receives in eremitic texts like Rolle's Liber de amore dei contra amatores mundi: 17


(For this person rapt by pride is not without the ability to see and contemplate. But what do you see? In fact you see nothing but yourself, set up like an idol in the highest place, lifted above everyone else, better sustained by virtue than others. You consider everyone else, good and bad, inferior to you, judging them, putting yourself first, saying to yourself: 'I am better than him, fuller of grace, knowing more truth than him. Since I am preferred and chosen before others in grace, I deserve to be honoured and praised by others, and that others know my worth—so that I can help them.' And in that time you say 'I am rich and need nothing,' you know not that you are base and wretched, poor, blind and naked (Revelation 3: 17).)

There is nothing to be done with this experience of self-worship except to root it out by violence:


17 See Contro amatores mundi, ch. 5.
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(What are we to do with this idol? Reduce it to nothingness! 'Destroy,' says the apostle, 'the body of sin' (Romans 6: 6). Cleanse the temple of God of every profanity of idols, with every unclean and abominable superstition, so that the dwelling-place of God can fittingly be rebuilt there. But how is this idol destroyed? Truly, by the power and virtue of the name of Jesus Christ! For by the invocation of his name the corporeal idols fashioned once in heathen climes were shattered to pieces; so how much more quickly spiritual idols can be destroyed by the eager invocation of his name! For the apostle says, 'Just as we wear the image of the man of earth (that is, the old Adam), so, too, we wear the image of the man of Heaven (that is, Christ)' (1 Corinthians 15: 49).

Yet although the work thus finally returns the reader to the knowledge that his true self is divine, not diabolical, that the idol is in him and of him but is not him ('Non dico te esse ydolum hoc, sed dico in te esse ydolum hoc secundum naturam carnalem' ('I don't mean that this idol is you, I only mean that it is in you according to your carnal nature', II. 494–5)), the force of the De imagine resides in its self-directed satire, its angry exposure of the pretensions of holy hermits, its chilling sense of the inbuilt ambiguity of a life professionally dedicated to virtue, in which good and bad impulses, holiness and spiritual pride, are scarcely distinguishable (II. 133–7). While there is not necessarily close common ground, in a narrowly intellectual sense, between this stance and early Lollard thought on images, private religion, or the nature of sin (even if Hilton does insist especially on the deadness of idols), there is at least a strange conjunction between Hilton's metaphor and Lollard polemic against images, the work's sense of the self as irretrievably corrupt and the Lollard belief that the same was true of the institutional Church. 18

Hilton's Latin works never return to this notion of the self as an idol. However, the Epistola de utilitate et prerogativis religionis, written partly against Lollard attacks on private religion, uses a related metaphor in a different way, telling the reader not to convert to the monastic life merely 'in ymagine, per habitum exteriorum' ('in appearance, by the outer habit') instead of doing so 'intus et extra' ('within and without'), and warning against the perils of being 'inane simulacrum ymaginem religiosi representans' ('an empty simulation, standing as an image of a religious person') (II. 835–40). 19 Here, as a direct result of the Lollard challenge (the 'dogmata hereticorum' ('the teachings of the heretics')), the word 'image' has acquired a new connotation, now implying a gap between appearance and reality—between 'ficcio' and 'verum et purum religionis' ('fiction

18 From many examples of Lollard anti-image rhetoric, see the following: 'Cristen men seyne...ynagis that represen pense and glorie of the worlde...hese false ymagis...bokis of heresye worthie to be destroyed, namely [especially] when tho layed papel honours him for God and seymis,...doe more honoure to hem then to God and Cristes body...Hit semes that this offlyinge to ymagis is a soile case of Anticriste and his clerisi...Certes, these ymagis of henselfe may do newher gode ne yvel to mennis soules, but thi myghten warme a mannis body in colde, if thi were sette upon a fire.' ('On the Twenty-Five Articles', Select English Works, ed. Arnold, iii. 462–3.)

19 See Hilton, Latin Writings, i. 101–73; refs. are to line nos. and are given in the text.
and the truth and purye of religion)—not the potential for identity it carries in the phrases 'image of sin' or 'image of God' in the De imagine peccati (I. 892, 892–7).

It is solely in this externalized sense that Book I of The Scale of Perfection, perhaps drawing directly on the Epistola, at first uses words associated with the image. The work opens with an appeal to the reader, apparently an anchoress who has lived as a nun, to be true to the state of life into which she is called. The emphasis on interiority here is typical of writings for solitaries, from Ancrene Wisse to Rolle's Form of Living, both of which Hilton probably knew. But the sharpness of the divide between inward reality and outward form expressed by the language of figuration, the sense that the public display of virtue threatens its private possession, self-consciously evokes the contemporary reformist preoccupation with hypocrisy:

Godly sister in Jesu Crist, I preye the that in the kallyng whilk Oure Lord has called the to his service thou holde the pryde, and stond stedefastly therinne, transtall bisly with all the myghtes of thi soule (by grace of Jesu Crist) for to fulfyll in soothfastnes of gode lyyung the state whilk thou has taken the to in liknes and in semyng. And as thou has forsaken the world as it were a ded man, turned to Oure Lord bodily in syght of men, ryght so that thi hert myght be as it were ded to all earthly loues and drede, turned holly to Oure Lord Jesu Crist. For wite thou wel, a bodily turning to God withouten the hert foluan is but a figure and a liknes of vertus, and no soothfastnes. Wherfor a wrenched man or woman is he or she that leves at the inward kepyng of hymself, and schapez hym withoutfor only a fourme and a liknes of holynes (as in habite, in speche, and in bodily werkes): beholdand othere membes dedes and demand her defautes, wenand hymself to be oght when he is right noght; and so biglyez hymself. 1. 1. (italics mine)21

Here several terms associated with the image ('liknes', 'semyng', 'figure', 'fourme', 'schapez', and 'bodily') threaten to turn into synonyms for 'soothfastnes of gode lyyung' supposed to characterize the professional religious. The term 'image' itself is not used, any more than 'idol' will be later; Hilton employs language more cautiously in English than Latin, and is sufficiently careful to avoid overt reference to controversial topics that one has to read between his lines. But the language of seeming still implicitly operates as a version of the reformist identification of images and private religion with hypocrisy. Much of the passage appears to concede the possibility that reformists are right; at certain points, indeed, it almost seems that for the reader to turn 'to Oure Lord bodily in syght of men' by

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20 See Watson, Ancrene Wisse, Religious Reform, and the Late Middle Ages.
21 Quotations from The Scale of Perfection are taken from the edition-in-progress by S. S. Hussey and Michael C. Sargent (drawing on the work of the late A. J. Bliss) to be published by the EETS. The ed. is based on Cambridge University Library MS Add. 6686 and London, British Library MS Harley 679. I am most grateful to the editors for giving me access to their work and allowing me to print excerpts. Because this ed. is in typescript, refs. to Scale are to bk. and ch. and appear in the text. Thomas H. Bestul's single-manuscript ed. (based on Lanwoth Palace MS 472) was published too late for me to be able to consult it. The most sophisticated translation is Hilton, Scale of Perfection, trans. Clark and Dorward.
becoming an anchoress is to create a presumption of hypocrisy from which only God's knowledge of her 'soothsaying' can free her. Yet not only is the deadness traditionally ascribed to the idol here translated into the holy deadness of the anchoress.\textsuperscript{22} The final sentence fights back, deploying a common attack on reformers who make free to judge the 'defautes' of others while failing to notice their own, but applying it here neither to the anchoress herself, nor directly to the reformers, but to any 'wretched man or woman'.\textsuperscript{23} This assertion that all are equally capable of sin deftly turns the charge of hypocrisy back on its makers, while using language to warn against the self-deception of all those, not merely professional religious, who manifest the 'liknes' of virtue without embracing its reality.

The implied link between images and seeming ramifications variously through the first half of Book I of the \textit{Scale}. It is used to define savourless scholarly knowledge as 'bot a figure and a schaduce of verrey contemplacion'; like the \textit{Cloud}-author, Hilton often associates formal learning and heresy (I. 4). It justifies Hilton's suspicion of visions, of the devotional imagination, and of a bodily understanding of spiritual experiences such as Rolle's celebrated 'fire of love'—even if this phrase is also used with approval, one of several signs of Rolle's underrated influence on Hilton (I. 10, 25–31).\textsuperscript{24} On the other hand, seeming can also imply latency, rather than hypocrisy: the word 'schaduce' can refer to the soul's premonitions of heavenly glory, and a 'token' be a sure sign of divine favour (I. 32, 35).

Language associated with the image is also periodically used in the first half of Book I in something closer to the sense it bears in the \textit{De imagine peccati}. But here its implications are different. In a passage about how the reader must not 'deme [judge] other men', she is instructed, rather, to 'worschippe al, and set hem in thi herre all aboue the as thi souereynes, and kест the [cast yourself] doun vnder herete, that thou be vilerst & lowest in thin own sight', as though making of

\textsuperscript{22} I owe this point to Jeremy Dimmick. The \textit{lucrum elementum} for the anchoritic life as death is pt. VI of \textit{Ancrene Writ}.

\textsuperscript{23} The question of how far ordinary Christians could reprove the sins of others is fundamental to the debate between reformist and devotionalist religion in late 15th-cent. England, even though it does not seem to have attracted much scholarly attention. Contrast, e.g., the stance taken in the reformist treatise \textit{Book of a Matheur}: 'And the deaul yit hath blend [blinded] louses of the world so muche that whanne Godis folk wolde underynne hem of [reprove them for] ther sines, the deaul hath taught hem to aswere bi Holi Writ... "Wolle not ye yuge" [Matt. 7: 1]... For Crist tuggede and cursede muche in this world, and toughte force yuge to destroye sinnen ther as hit is open ayen us his heites [taught people to pass judgement as to destroy sin where it is practiced openly against his commandment]'. (In this text's reformist affiliations, see Watson, 'Fashioning the Puritan Gentry-Woman'.)

\textsuperscript{24} Hilton is often numbered among Rolle's critics (most carefully in Sargent, 'Contemporary Criticism of Richard Rolle'), but this scholarly commonplace descends from the unease about Rolle felt by mid-20th-cent. Catholic scholars, more than from evidence. Book I of \textit{The Scale} cautions against reading Rolle as if he were talking about physical manifestations of fire, light, sweetness, and song. But Hilton takes the importance of Rolle's extroverted accounts of the ascent of God for granted, and is a close reader of Rolle's \textit{Emendata vitae} in particular. For Rolle's distinctive spiritual experiences, see Watson, \textit{Richard Rolle}, ch. 2.
fellow-humans the living images of the Trinity Lollards claimed as the only ones worthy of worship (I. 17–18). This exercise is the opposite of the worship of the self in the De imagine, but is still based upon it; even here, the image that is honoured, though not the Antichrist, is a false god, only deemed superior to the worshipper out of humility. By contrast, in a related discussion of how hypocrites and heretics set themselves up as judges, the self-criticism of the De imagine is turned outwards in satyre, as these seemingly holy sinners are said to lift ‘hemself upon henge in here on sight aboue all other, wenend [thinking] that thei lyuen bettere then othere,’ with idolatrous intent to ‘stelen as theues the worshippe and the thankyng fro God, and setten in hemselle’ (De imagine, 20, 11–12, 17–18).

Here, as earlier, there is a reciprocal relation between Hilton’s polemical defence of his spirituality from reformist attack and his pastoral use of heretics as negative exempla. Meekness, obedience, doctrinal caution, and the refusal to judge others are at once taken as hallmarks of the ‘sothfastnes’ to which the anchoress must aspire in a scrupulously private way and wielded by Hilton himself as paradoxical weapons in a public and highly judgmental clash of ideologies.

Yet all this is preliminary to the revival, later in the book, of a more theologically systematic version than anything Hilton had produced to date of the metaphor of the ‘image of sin’ from the De imagine peccati. The most distinctive proposal Book I of the Scale makes is of a contemplative exercise in which the meditator, armed with the holy name of Jesus (as Rolle claims he was armed), confronts the image of sin in herself, in an effort to ‘destrue it als mykel as thou may’—a possibility the De imagine peccati was almost wholly unable to imagine. By doing so, she hopes to ‘recouere’, not the image of the Trinity in its pristine dignity, but ‘a figure and a likenes of that dignité, that oure soule myght be reformed as it were in a schadwe by grace to the ymage of the Trinite whilk we hadden by kynde, and after schuln haue fully in blisse’ (I. 52, 45, my italics). In search of Jesus, the reader withdraws into herself. There

thou schalt fynde sumwhat—noght lesu whom thou sekez. What then? Sothly, ryght noght bot a merk [dark] ymage & a peynfult of thin oure soule, whilk has neihere light of knowyng ne felyng of loue ne likyng. This ymage (if thou behold it witterly [clearly]) is ai vmbilapped [surrounded] with blak slynkand clothes of synne: as pryde, enuye, ire, accidie, couete, gloomye, & lecherie. This is noght the ymage of lesu, bot it is an ymage of synne—as Seint Paulc calleth it, a bodie of synne and a bodie of dethe; this ymage & this blak schadue thou bernet about with the where thou gos. Out fro this spryingen mony grete stremes of synne & smale also: right as out of the ymage of lesu...bemes of godly light schulden stighe [rise] up into Heuen. (I. 52–3)

Whereas the image of sin in the De imagine peccati is constructed as a human body, this image is ‘like to no bodyly thyng’. ‘Sothly, it is Noght,’ an inner darkness and horror that can be experienced by anyone who, after withdrawing

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‘thi thought fro all bodly thynges’, then finds ‘ryght nought whereinne thi soule m[ay] resi’ (l. 53). Theologically, ‘this Noght is nothynge elles bot a lackynge of loue & of lyght, as synne is nought but a wantynge of gode’, Augustine’s privatio boni (‘privation of good’) and the De imaginis chaos of formlessness (l. 53). Historically, meditation on the ‘Noght’ bears some relation to the ascetic tradition of cultivated self-loathing in texts like Innocent III’s De miseria conditionis humanae, or the pseudo-Bernardine Meditationes piissime, and suggests that, for all his interest in Rolle, Hilton was unable to share his spiritual optimism. Experientially, the horror the ‘Noght’ represents is the meditator’s response to the chattering voices of desire that are what is left of human thought when memory, conscious rumination, and bodily sensation are shut out. The chapters in which Hilton discusses this image of sin, mostly by way of accounts of the seven deadly sins, play further variations, restoring to the image its mnemonic body and members, describing the chief sin, pride, as idolatrous self-worship, and reiterating the need to humble the self under the awareness of sinfulness the text propounds. But this depiction of the carnal self as negation of being and goodness, an image of a something that is a nothing, is the furthest extension of the complex metaphor Hilton developed in the De imaginis peccati, as well as of the unusually gloomy contemplative system it underpins. Here, as in most of his uses of the language of seeming, Hilton is much less aware of the positive connotations of the image than he is of the image’s sinister proximity to the metaphoric idol which must be exposed, toppled, expunged, for the self to be made pure.

II. THE CLOUD, THE NIGHT, AND THE INNER EYE

Between Book I of The Scale of Perfection and its sequel, Hilton’s sense of why and what he was writing shifted in two different, although related, ways. The first shift was in his sense of his audience. As is often pointed out, Book II of the Scale is the one work in which Hilton apparently wrote for a mixed lay and religious readership, and so set out to define contemplation in a way that made it available to the devout laity as well as religious professionals. Book I of the Scale distinguishes between active and contemplative lives (chs. 2–3), and the attack on the image of sin it describes is a spiritual exercise designed in the first instance for a solitary. The account of how the image of God is restored in Book II similarly distinguishes between ordinary Christians and perfect ones, but is addressed to both constituencies, admonishing all its readers not to settle for second best but to aim for a life of holiness.

This shift is prefigured by the treatise On Mixed Life, written to persuade an aristocratic layman not to become a monk but to understand that his spiritual responsibilities reside in the fulfilment of his secular duties. Here Hilton’s extension of the notion of ‘mixed life’ beyond the episcopacy and secular priesthood to include the aristocratic laity encourages the latter to aspire to
various contemplative states and adapts the notion of contemplation to include features of the active life. Not only is the alternation of active and contemplative modes said to benefit both; since the Church is Christ’s body, the pursuit of the active life through works of charity is pictured as a form of devotion to Christ’s humanity similar in kind to other devotional exercises. In yet another metaphorical adaptation of the idea of image veneration, Christ’s body, not only his head (the whole Church, mystically considered) is thus said to require veneration:

Thou art bisi to worschipe his heed and his face, and arai it faire and curiosel, but thou leuest his bodi, his armies, and his feete ragged and rente, and takest noo keep thereof. And ther thou worshipest hym nought. For it is velanye and no worshipe a man to be curiosel arrayed upon his heed with perre (jewellery) and precious stounes, and at his bodi be naked and bar as it were a beggere. Right so goosteli, it is no worshipe to God to crowne his heed and leue his bodi baare. (On Mixed Life, 265–72)²⁶

(Despite the ostentatiously orthodox use of the image of the image here, note that veneration Christ’s body and feet does not involve making them ‘faire and curiosel’ too—for example, by giving alms to the Church—but rather serving ‘chi sogetris and thin euen-Cristen’ who ‘are sumtyme yuel arated’; in practice, Hilton’s formulation is almost identical to the Lollard notion of worshipping the living image of the Trinity in other people (ll. 299–300)).²⁷ Yet attention to a life of prayerful action, in which a spark of the fire of love is kept alive in the soul, can lead to contemplation (ll. 394–471). ‘For, as Seynt Gregor seith, no man sodeynli is mad in grace, but fro lilil he bigynneth, and bi processe wexeth, untill he come to the moste’ (ll. 837–9): not only to the lowly spiritual exercise of meditation on Christ’s humanity but to a state in which God will open ‘oure goostli iye for to se and knowe more of him than we haue had tofore bi comone traualle’ (ll. 805–6). (This very cautious formulation reappears in more confident form near the end of Book II of the Scale.) Written under pressure from the intense interest in matters of faith felt by the laity and reformist attempts to direct that interest in ways of which Hilton disapproved, On Mixed Life provides a model of the mixed life as an act of image veneration (at least, of a kind), but is still concerned to point the reader beyond this act to purely spiritual experiences.

The other shift in Hilton’s thinking—a significant shift in his understanding of how the process of spiritual reformation should work—came about partly as a result of the interest taken in Book I of the Scale by the author of The Cloud of Unknowing. As Clark notes, there are three references in the Cloud to Book I of the Scale.²⁸ In two of these, the Scale, called ‘another book of another mans werk’, is cited as an authority: on reading, meditation, and prayer, and on the

³⁶ Quotations are from the edn. by S. C. Ogilvie Thomson; refs. are to line nos. and appear in the text.
³⁷ See n. 25, above.
²⁸ ‘Cloud of Unknowing, Walter Hilton and St John of the Cross’.
ambiguous status of spiritual 'comforts' (Cloud, 71. 15, 91. 19–23). 29 But in the third, the Cloud author is respectfully critical of the core of Hilton's contemplative system in Book I of the Scale, and specifically of the iconoclastic metaphor we have seen to underlie much of Hilton's thought. Initially, the Cloud-author's disagreement with Hilton appears to be only over the use of spatial metaphors:

Where another man wolde bid thee gader thi mightes & thi wirtes holiche [wholly] withinne thyself, & worshippe God there—thof al he sey ful wel & ful trewely, yet no man trewely & he be wel conseiued [understood]—yit for feerde [fear] of dissewe & bodely conceuyng of his wordes, me list not byd thee do so (121. 5–9).

If Hilton's 'Nought' is truly a nothingness, the Cloud argues in characteristic pseudo-Dionysian vein, it must also be 'noghwere': 'Loke than besily that thi goostly werk be noghwere bodily...and, thof al thi bodely wirtes kon fynde other nothing to fede hem on, for hem think it nought that thou dost, yet do on than [then put on] this Nought...trauytle besily in that Nought with a wakynyng desire to wilne to haue God, that [whome] no man may knowe' (121. 15–122. 2). Yet the disparity between the two texts is ultimately more profound than this. For the Cloud-author, the 'Nought' is not an image of sin at all, but an experience of the absolute gulf between humankind and God that is a prerequisite for spiritual union. Even though 'at the first tyyme that a soule lokith therapon, it schal fynde alle the speybal [individual] dedes of sinne that euere he did...peyntid therapon', as Hilton depicts the 'Nought', this eventually reveals itself as a misunderstanding: 'What is he that epleith it "Nought"? Sekidly [certainly] it is oure vter man, & not oure inner; oure inner man epleith it All', finding it now one thing, now another, but always experiencing it as 'a cloude of vnknowynge' that is bitwix hym & his God' (122. 19–22, 13–15; 123. 22–3). These chapters in the Cloud can be read in conjunction with an earlier one on 'ethe verte of meeknes' (ch. 13), which implicitly criticizes Hilton's instruction to see the self as an idol of sin, others as images of God. For the Cloud-author, self-abjction is 'inparite meeknes,' a mere preliminary to a 'parite meeknes' in which the soul is humbled, not by its sinfulness, but by its littleness with respect to God's majesty (40. 21–41. 13). Here, as in the discussion of the 'Nought', the iconoclastic cast of Hilton's thinking in the first book of the Scale is revealed as subtly confining the contemplative to the very carnality it attempts to combat. It is just his focus on sin as an image, located in or overlaying the soul and needing to be rooted out by penitential meditation, that (according to the Cloud-author) prevents Hilton from moving convincingly beyond the penitential in his analysis of the spiritual life.

The Cloud of Unknowing thus offers a brilliant reading of a problem in Book I of The Scale of Perfection: its failure to integrate the later chapters' account of the

29 Quotations are from the edn. by Phyllis Hodgson; refs. are to page and line nos. and appear in the text.
'image of sin' with its earlier survey of the types of contemplative experience, which (far from resembling anything the Cloud-author would endorse) are indebted to Rolle’s optimistic spirituality and do suggest the possibility of moving beyond this image. In Book II of the Scale, despite a group of early chapters that return to the soul ‘vmbilappid with this blak ymage of synne,’ Hilton responds to the challenge, rewriting his earlier account of the ‘Nowght’ in the light of the Cloud’s critique, and shifting ground in the process. First, the relationship between the ‘ymage of God’ and the ‘ymage of synne’ in the soul is specified as that between ‘resoun’ and ‘sensualite’, in a move that allows the soul’s rational power a certain autonomy from sin denied it in Book I of the Scale and the De imagine pectoris (11. 13). Then the inner darkness associated with the ‘ymage of synne’ in Book I is completely redefined. Now it has become ‘a gode nyght and a lighty mirknes’ between two days, the old day of carnal pleasure and the new one of spiritual insight. Like the Cloud’s version of the ‘Nowght’, this light is ‘sumyntyn pynful & sumyntyn...esy & confortable...pynful first, when a man is mikel foule’, but comfortable later on (II. 24). The ‘ymage of synne’, an impermeable barrier to spiritual ease in Hilton’s earlier works, is thus revealed as only a passing perception of one sort of truth that must be endured by the imperfect soul. In the process, the metaphor of the ‘merk ymage’ is elided with that of the apophatic cloud of unknowing, as Hilton adapts language from the Cloud to suit his new purposes. He is not hedged on his use of spatial referents for contemplation. He renames the ‘gode nyght’ a ‘riche Noght’, in order to talk about the way ‘a soule may thurgh grace be gedrid into iteself, & stande stille in itself frely & holy’ when it ‘thinkith...right noght’; later, he also defends his use of ‘withinne’ (II. 24, 33, my italics). Moreover, the good night/rich nought, full of presentiments of luminosity, differs from the cloud metaphor in one vital respect, that it is possible to see beyond it. Where The Cloud of Unknowing insists on God’s full ineffability, Hilton turns again to Rolle (this time to his experience ‘seeng into Heaven’) to justify his disagreement: ‘This maner knowynge of Ihesu’ (the slow attainment of the ‘perfit sight’ that is the day beyond the ‘gode nyght’), ‘as I undirstande, is the openyng of heuene to the ye of a clene soule, of the whilk holy men spoken of in here wiynge’ (II. 32). 30 This variation on the concept of spiritual sight allows Hilton to go on using the visual language his emphasis on apophasic contemplation demands. The ending of the Scale is all about what the soul sees as it contemplates Christ’s divinity, the Scriptures, the saved, and so on, described in terms that scrupulously avoid the language of seeming, since these are sights of ‘seachlasnesse’. But in many respects, the amalgam of Hilton’s earlier ‘merk ymage’, the metaphor of the cloud, and Rolle’s ‘openyng of heuene’ accomplished in Book II of the Scale represents a fundamental rethinking of Hilton’s earlier contemplative theology.

30 For ‘seeng into Heaven’, see Watson, Richard Rolle, ch. 2.
There are plenty of paradoxes and unanswered questions involved in this rethinking. Rolle and the Cloud-author make strange bedfellows with one another and with the more ascetic strain in Hilton's thinking. Taken as a whole, The Scale of Perfection is far from offering a consistent account of the contemplative life, partly because its sources are so various, partly because the shifts between the two books invite us to read Book I as simultaneously more specialized and less spiritually advanced than its sequel. Yet the mix of traditions found in Book II of the Scale does allow Hilton to forge a broad alliance against the common, Lollard enemy—in the process of forging what I have elsewhere suggested was the first self-conscious theologica anglicana—and to offer a model of religious living that can claim to be as ambitious and as relevant to Christian society as any reformist model. Indeed, one of the last allusions to the image of sin in the book (as a metaphor, here, for hypocrisy) forms part of Hilton's most detailed attack against those who aspire to the light of truth but are not willing to reach it through the night of self-examination. (The discussion is overtly aimed at false contemplatives, who tend to be associated by modern scholars with the so-called heresy of the Free Spirit; however, most of the language applies as well to the Lollards, and if the Free Spirit heresy is invoked, it is merely as a stalking-horse.) These people 'are not sisy for to entrein into hemself, alle other thinges outward left, & sleen alle wicked stirynges of synne that risen in her heres'. On the contrary, 'as tisie [as soon] as the han forsaken the world as it were outward in ilknes', they 'wene that thei lufe God perfitey'. As a result of this arrogant assumption, they proceed at once to 'prechen & rechen alle other men as if thei had recyed grace of vnhiristondyng & perfection of charitee thurgh special gifte of the Holy Gos'. Like simulacra of the contemplatives described by The Cloud of Unknowing, these people have access only to the devil's 'feyned' 'light of kunnyng [knowledge]', which they see between two clouds, 'the ouer cloude' of 'presumpcioun & heighenge of hiselme; the nether cloude' of 'doune puttynge & [a lowynge] of his euen-cristen'. Such hereticks lack any grasp of the need for slow, systematic inner reformation, any appreciation of the life of devotion:

Thei are so blynded with this feyned light that thei holden the heighnes of here owne hert [&] vnbuxumnes [disobedience] to the laghes of Holy Kirke as it were perfitt mcknes to the gospel & to the laghes of God. Thei wenent that the folwynge of here owne wil were fredam of spirit, & therfore thei bigynnen to reynen as blake crowdes water of erreurs & heresies, for the wurdes that thei schewen bi prechynyn soumthi al to [tend entirely towards] bacytynye & to stryfynge, & to disorde makyng, reprofynge of states [ranks] & of persons; & yet thei seien that al thi is charite & zele of rightwisnes. (II. 26)

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31 See id., 'Middle English Mystics', 556.
32 For the chimeral nature of this heresy, see Lerner, Heresy of the Free Spirit.
It is against these literalists—'heretikes' who 'mowne notouchyn the inly flour' of the spiritual sense of the Bible, since 'the pryuyte of Holy Writte is closed vnder key, seled with a signet of theses fyngur' (II. 43)—that Book II of the Scale gathers its devout textual community of 'duers men' who are authorities on true contemplation—the men whose analyses of the spiritual life 'are duers in schewyne of wordes' but 'alle in on sentence of sothfastnes' (II. 40).

I conclude very briefly by offering some general remarks about the significance of the material I gather here. Like the Cloud-author, and despite his commitment to the Church's traditions and practices, Hilton shared with his Lollard enemies a common fourteenth-century intellectual disdain for, and anxiety about, images and their veneration. In his early Latin writing, he conflates vanity with idol-worship, images-as-simulacra with hypocrisy, while in his English writing he often repeats these confusions, and is careful to point out the inferiority of any spiritual exercise—whether it involves physical images, corporeal meditation, or the imaginative and sensual faculties—in any way associated with the body. When he does use the image of the image in a positive sense, he slides away, so far as possible, from evoking the actual 'graven image' attacked by the Lollards; his images are abstract, indistinct, pulled towards the apophatic.

For Hilton, this disdain had much to do with his early commitment to an elite conception of the solitary life: a conception that carried over even to his latest works—in their construction around models of spiritual ascent from lower, more bodily, and more easily accessible modes of Christian living to higher, more rarefied ones. (The last chapters of the Scale are full of echoes of Rolle in his most eremitically triumphalist mode.) In his later incarnation as a contemplative theologian and Augustinian canon, Hilton did moderate his disdain and elitism, writing several vernacular works that competed successfully with their Lollard and reformist equivalents for the attention of lay, as well as clerical, readers, and finding a clear, if subordinate, role for the more sensual kinds of devotion. For reasons partly to do with his intellectual commitments, partly with his relative popularism and fierce desire to combat Lollardy, which he saw as indifferent to contemplative experience, he also rejected the Cloud-author's wholesale refusal of the visual, concluding the Scale with accounts of the purified soul's exploration of truth, in which the soul's intuitive knowledge of all it sees is still a version, however distant, of the seeing associated with images. None of this, however, altered his basic attitude to images and the sensual element in devotion: an attitude we find challenged by Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe, but commonly affirmed elsewhere. Hilton, all said and done, did not like them very much.

33 See Watson, 'Middle English Mystics'.
Appendix: Walter Hilton’s Life and Works

Life-records for Hilton survive from between 1371, when a papal mandate describes him as a bachelor of civil law and clerk in the diocese of Lincoln, and 1396, when manuscripts note that he died at Thurgarton, an Augustinian priory in Northamptonshire. An Ely consistory court register entry from 1375, concerning a case at Cambridge, refers to a Walter Hilton as bachelor of civil law and magister (of arts?); this is our sole direct evidence that he studied there. Elsewhere he is called an inceptor in canon law. Some of his own writings refer to him as a hermit, and one of these, the Epistola de utilitate et prerogativis religiosis, is datable to the early 1380s, since it concerns a decision its intended recipient, Adam Horsley, was making to become a Carthusian, which he did by 1386. This text shares material with the De imagine peccati, which also refers to Hilton as a hermit. We do not know when he stopped being a hermit or entered Thurgarton. Also related are the Epistola de lectione, intensione, oracione, meditacione, et aliis (written to help a priest newly reconverted to orthodoxy), and Book I of The Scale of Perfection. It could be significant that Book I of The Scale appears, with two expositions of psalms possibly by Hilton (Qui habitat and Bonus est), in the Vernon manuscript, a West Midlands production usually dated to the 1390s. The only other approximately datable work of Hilton’s is Eight Chapters on Perfection, manuscripts of which describe it as translated out of material ‘founden in Maister Louis de Fontibus booke at Cantebrigge’. Luis de Fontibus arrived in Cambridge in 1383 and in theory would not have been a master until 1391, so this is perhaps a late work. Undated works include: Epistola ad quemdam seculo remuniare voluntatem (written to a newly converted layman, perhaps the lawyer John Thorpe); its Middle English counterpart, On Mixed Life; Book II of The Scale (1390s); and possibly the De adoracioneimaginum, the Middle English Of Angels’ Song, and The Prickynge of Love, if any or all of these are his. There are also some fragmentary and lost writings.