

Devotional practice and emotional response to the Veronica in Middle English

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Signatum est super nos lumen vultus tui Domine. Dedisti laetitiam in corde meo. (Psalm 4:7)

Introduction¹

This present study was suggested by a project called *Veronica Route*², whose aim is to compile an online catalogue of the artistic and literary works concerning the Roman “Veronica”, i.e. the medieval relic preserved in St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome. This project, which consists primarily of iconographic research, tries to rediscover the lost traits of the medieval relic by comparing its copies and its main variants; *Veronica Route* includes more than five thousand works and is continuously being updated. Medieval *vernicles* (e.g. pilgrim badges) and other artifacts portraying Veronica and her veil are frequent items in the catalogue, witnessing the propagation of this devotion, which started to spread after the efforts of Pope Innocent III (who reigned between 1198 and 1216) to promote devotion to the Roman Veronica, giving rise to a liturgical veneration of the Holy Face of Christ which was soon to filter into the devotional practices of the laity. In fourteenth- and fifteenth-century England there was a significant production of vernacular texts, inspired by the Veronica legend and devotion to the Holy Face, which form the corpus on which this work is based.

The aim of this research is to investigate how the emotional and devotional drive of the Veronica theme was expressed in Middle English texts. After summarizing the development of the Veronica

legend in medieval England and after presenting a brief reconstruction of the etymology of the word *vernicle*, vernicles as objects of devotion are discussed, on the basis of Middle English texts. The theme of the Holy Face in Middle English prose and poetry and the presence of Veronica in popular piety is then taken into consideration. A brief commentary on the vocabulary used to express devotion and emotion concludes the paper.

The Veronica legend in medieval England

In Anglo-Saxon England the narration of the Veronica legend circulated as it is told in the Latin *Vindicta Salvatoris*, a later addition to the body of texts known as the *Pilate Cycle*.³ The apocryphal work commonly known today as the *Gospel of Nicodemus (Evangelium Nicodemi)*⁴ 'has been part of the living Christian culture for over a millennium and a half. Originally composed in Greek and well attested by the last quarter of the fourth century, it migrated quickly into other Christian vernaculars.'⁵ As a matter of fact, 'the first vernacular translation of *Evangelium Nicodemi* in medieval Europe, the one into Old English, was carried out in the early to mid-eleventh century.'⁶ The *Pilate Cycle* introduces Veronica as the woman afflicted with an issue of blood and healed by Christ (related in Matthew 9, 20-22 and Luke 8, 43-48). This text gained early popularity and was soon vernacularized. Veronica's association with the Instruments of the Passion was already present in Anglo-Saxon England, but it was only in the twelfth century that this theme became dominant in popular piety, perhaps due to the popularity of the *Gospel of Nicodemus*.

As Swan maintains, in the late Anglo-Saxon period

[...] saints' cults generated some of the most public, social and organised activities of the Christian Church in Anglo-Saxon England [...]. Closely tied to the cult of saints is that of relics: material objects believed to be either a part of the body of a saint, or a part of an associated object.⁷

Because of its popularity in England and early vernacularization there, mid-nineteenth-century scholars even suggested an insular origin for the

legend. As demonstrated by twentieth-century scholarship⁸, an eleventh-century version of the eighth-century Latin text of *Vindicta Salvatoris*, probably contains the first mention of Veronica in English:

And sum wyf wæs þolizende blodes fleusan huru xii winter, seo
wæs Veronix 3enemned⁹

[And there was a woman who had suffered from overflow of
blood for 12 winters (years); she was called Veronica]

In the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, Veronica is introduced in a similar way and is said to have gone to speak in favour of Jesus during his trial, although her witness was dismissed as being provided by a woman.¹⁰ After the fall of Jerusalem, the leprous emperor Tiberius (in other texts Vespasian) dispatches one Volosianus to fetch a disciple of Christ. When Volosianus then arrives in Palestine, he obtains the image of Christ from Veronica. The emperor sees the image, worships, is healed, believes and is baptized. In the narrative, Volosianus orders Veronica to hand him the image of Christ that she has with her:

Ic hate þe Veronix þæt ðu a3if me þa hali3nysse þa þu myd þe
hæfst¹¹

[I enjoin you, Veronica, that you give me the holiness (holy
image) that you have with you]

The Veronica legend gained popularity in Middle English, and was recorded for example in the late-fourteenth-century alliterative *Siege of Jerusalem*, which relates the healing power of this 'lykenesse of Crist', 'the kerchef that kevered [cured/redeemed] the sike' and the beginnings of its cult in Rome.¹² Another very popular text featuring the same episode is the *Legenda Aurea*, allegedly compiled by Jacobus de Voragine, Archbishop of Genoa, around 1275. In England it was the indirect source of many hagiographical works and was anglicized in the first decades of the fifteenth century in a text known as *Gilte Legende*¹³. The English version by William Caxton, first published in 1483, gained such great popularity that it was reprinted up to 1527, reaching its ninth edition. Thanks to this version, the full account of the narrative of the

Veronica legend was further popularized. It offers the following account of the image of the Holy Face:

[...] volusion fonde an old woman named veronica / whiche had be famylyer and deuoute with Ihesu Cryst he demaūded of her / where he myght fynde hym that he sought / She thenne escryed and sayd Alas [...] my lord and my maistre whan he wente prechyng / I absente me ofte from hym I dyde do paynte his ymage / For to haue alway wyth me his presence / by cause that the figure of his ymage shold gyue me somme solace / And thus as I bare a lynnen keuerchief in my bosome oure lord mette me / and demau[n]ded whyther I wente / and whan I had told hym whyther I wente and the cause / he demaunded my keuerchief / And anone he enprynted his face and figured it therin.¹⁴

In the centuries that followed the year 1000, Mary had become increasingly the centre for veneration and expressions of emotion, offering a possibility of identification, above all for her affliction during Christ's Passion: 'Marian lyrics and prayers, as well as visual representations, like the wooden statues so common in French parish churches, became available to lay people in local idioms and in familiar settings in the course of the late-twelfth and thirteenth centuries'.¹⁵ The growing devotion to Mary and her sufferings as a mother easily expanded to all aspects connected to the Passion; as Rubin states '[n]ew ways of experiencing Mary and the Passion were evolving in the vernacular usages'.¹⁶ From the Early Middle Ages, the cult of the Instruments of the Passion was at the basis of devotional focus, with a more personal and intense relationship between the individual Christian and God, which was to find its best-known expression in devotional practices from about the twelfth century. Women's devotion was particularly widespread and intense, and it was extended from Mary to other female figures in the Gospels, including Veronica in her 'motherly' role, with 'an intense devotion arcing from the Blessed Virgin to St. Veronica, both revered for how they carry Christ in "true" effigy: Mary bears the Child in her womb; Veronica bears the holy face on her cloth.'¹⁷ Through them women had '[...] the chance to create, through a deep concentration on the Passion, a devotional object - Christ - in

their own image, as someone bleeding, powerless and subject to others.”¹⁸ This vision of Christ’s helplessness and of Veronica’s piteous, instinctive, feminine gesture is well illustrated in this passage taken from the fifteenth-century anonymous English prose translation of Roger d’Argenteuil’s *Bible en François* (mid-thirteenth century):

Then þere went tofore oure Lord an holi woman callid Veronica, þat bare a couerchif [kerchief] to selle at the cheping [market]. And when she saugh oure Lord so foule brought and vilanously, she made gret sorow and wepid and toke him the couerchif and seid, “Iesu, . . . I am right sory of this martirdom þat thou suffrist without reson. But hold this couerchif and wipe away the swet and the blood from thi blissid visage.” And so he did. And therewithall sodeinly was the visage of oure Lord purtraied in the couerchif as like it had ben his said visage fleishly. And than oure Lord toke to Veronica hi. couerchif ageyn and bad hir that she shuld kepe it wele, for it shal hele many sekenessis.¹⁹

Perhaps the best known English example of this passionate participation is the fifteenth-century ‘autobiography’ of the Lynn burgess Margery Kempe, who would ‘lay in contemplacyon, sor [painfully] wepyng in hir [her] spirit [...] cryin, roryn [crying out loudly], and wepyn’.²⁰

In these narratives, Veronica is consistently presented as a woman who had been devoted to Christ and who had wiped his face on the *Via Dolorosa*. She is very conscious that her veil bearing Christ’s image would be a testimony of how the guiltless Son of God had been condemned to peerless suffering. This seems to be confirmed by Jesus himself:

“Veronyca, þi whipyng doth me ese.
My face is clene þat was blak to se.
I xal [shall] þem kepe from all mysese [suffering]
þat lokyn on þi kerchy and remembyr me.”²¹

Vernicles as objects of devotion

In the Middle Ages Veronica's veil (*vernicle*) was venerated as the visible, miraculous memorial of the Passion of Christ and hence of his saving work.²² As Veronica herself says in the *Golden Legend*: 'the figure of his ymage shold gyue me somme solace'.²³ And it is not only spiritual healing to be granted by its contemplation, but it could also heal the bodies, provided it was contemplated with devotion." The origin of the noun *vernicle* is illustrated in the *Siege of Jerusalem*:

The Vernycle after Veronik Waspasian hit called.
 Garde [watch] hit gayly agysen [richly decorated] in gold and in
 selvere.
 Yit is the visage in the vail [veil],as Veronik hym broght;
 The Romaynes hit holdeth at Rome, and for a relyk hit holden.²⁴

The mid-fourteenth-century noun *vernicle* - 'picture of the face of Christ' - derives from *veronicle*, Old French variant of *veronique*, indicating St. Veronica's cloth. With the propagation of devotion to the Stations of the Cross, the French proper name *Veronique* - a variant of the Greek name *Berenike* - was interpreted by folk-etymology as derived from Latin *vera* (true) + Greek *eikon* (image). The evolution of the word and its meanings is clearly illustrated in the *Middle English Dictionary (MED)*²⁵, in which the relevant entry lists five meanings of *vernicle*:

- (a) The cloth or kerchief, preserved as a relic at Rome, said to have belonged to a woman usu. identified as Veronica, upon which an image of the face of Christ had been impressed, veronica; also, the image on the veronica;
- (b) the altar at Rome dedicated to devotion of the veronica;
- (c) the stylized image of the veronica; a representation of the veronica on a chalice, seal, pilgrim's token, etc.;
- (d) ?a blemish or birthmark resembling a veil [prob. mistransl. of L *verruca* 'blemish'];
- (e) as surname.

Definitions (a), (b), and (c) are, of course, the ones pertinent to this study. Representations of the veronica met the needs of popular piety for visible objects to venerate.²⁶ In the Middle Ages pilgrim badges were probably the most sought-after souvenirs of pilgrimages, to be brought back home as signs of a successful ending to an often dangerous journey and as tangible tokens of devout religious practices. From the exotic shell of Compostela to the more familiar sword of Canterbury, it was possible to buy such badges at most Christian shrines. They were often treasured items, mentioned in wills or listed among precious or cherished properties. Vernicles were a very popular subject in medieval England, appearing on badges or rings. In the *Paston Letters* 'a gret sygnnet [seal] of goolde with the vernycle'²⁷ is mentioned while lead badges that had been used for memento or meditative purposes were often buried with the devotee.²⁸ They were also common subjects on paxes, allowing the faithful and the clergy to kiss Christ during the service. Indulgences were granted for prayers in devotion to vernicles, such as *Salve Sancta Facies*, whose English translation by John Audelay will be dealt with below.²⁹ They were also used for solemn vows, as in the *Alliterative Morte Darthur*³⁰

He [the Baron of little Britain] said, "I make myn avowe verreilly
to Cryste
And to þe haly vernacle þat voide [abandon] schall I neuere,
For radnesse [fear] of na Romayne [no emperor] þat regnes in
erthe,
Bot ay be redye in araye [in proper order] and at areste [ready for
battle] founden.
(lines 308-11)

Thereto make I myn avowe devottly to Cryste
And to the holy vernacle, vertuuous and noble,
(lines 347-8)

Vernicles, which must have been a common sight in fourteenth-century England, were even mentioned in portraits of fake devotion. The most popular example of a hypocritical use of this religious symbol is the one contained in the description of the Pardoner in Chaucer's *General*

Prologue.³¹ The description of this character, usually associated with the sin of *Avaritia*, commonly attributed to corrupt members of the clergy³², is an indirect criticism of the simoniac practice of the commercialization of indulgences. The Pardoner would probably be well provided with (fake) documents granting an indulgence (i.e. indulgence rolls), often featuring a drawing of Veronica's cloth, above all after Pope John XXII (1316-1334) had granted an indulgence of ten thousand days for a prayer to the Veronica. In the well-known *Ellesmere Chaucer* illumination, a vernicle is clearly reproduced on the Pardoner's hat, reflecting Chaucer's verbal description³³:

Dischevelee [with the hair hanging loose], save his cappe, he rood
 al bare.
 Swiche glarynge eyen [eyes] hadde he as an hare.
 A vernycle hadde he sowed upon his cappe.
 His wallet, biforn hym in his lappe,
 Bretful [brimful] of pardoun [indulgence rolls], comen from
 rome al hoot.
 (lines 683-7)

Perhaps less well-known is the description of another deadly sin, *Accidia*, in *Piers Plowman*:³⁴

Apparailled as a paynym [pagan] in pilgrymes wise.
 He bar a burdoun [pilgrim's staff] ybounde with a brood liste
 [stripe]
 In a withwynde [woodbine] wise ywounden aboute.
 A bolle [bowl] and a bagge he bar by his syde.
 An hundred of ampulles³⁵ on his hat seten,
 Signes of Synay and shelles of Galice,
 And many a crouch³⁶ on his cloke, and keyes of Rome,
 And the vernicle bifore, for men sholde knowe
 And se bi hise signes whom he sought hadde.
 (Passus V, 517-525)

The fake pilgrim here described wears symbols on his garments - 'And the vernicle before' - indicating he has visited the most renowned

shrines many times (Mount Sinai, with its Monastery, Rome, and Compostela) walking ‘ful wide in weet and in drye’ (V, 530) and claiming to have venerated ‘goode Seintes for my soule helthe’ (V, 531). It must be remembered that both Chaucer and ‘Langland’ lived in a period of crisis for the Church and that both may have been influenced – to different degrees – by John Wyclif, whose critique of a ‘blatantly corrupt church’ was probably shared by many educated contemporaries.³⁷

The Holy Face in Middle English prose and poetry

The contemplation of the Holy Face – especially in its representation in vernicles, which made it familiar and almost tangible – suggested expressions of mystical fervour in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century religious writing. The relationship between Veronica’s veil and devotion to the Holy Face is of course obvious: in manuscripts a drawing of Christ’s Face on Veronica’s cloth often appeared with the text of prayers, offering ‘a visual meditative site to accompany the verbal exercise’.³⁸ The Veronica image is designed to elicit affective response and participation in Christ’s pain and to bring consolation, comfort, but also contrition and repentance. It is an invitation to gaze on Christ: Richard Rolle prays to Christ while contemplating how he suffered shame and anguish and implores Christ to grant him to see his ‘blisful face in heuene’.³⁹

Relevant passages in the works of Rolle and Julian of Norwich are well-known. In Rolle’s emotional prayer to Christ, the author takes his inspiration from a representation of the face of Jesus (possibly a *veronica*, since images of the Holy Face frequently appeared not only on pilgrim medals but also in other artifacts, such as manuscripts) for moral considerations to be applied to the life of a Christian. Rolle’s prayer insists on the sweetness of Jesus and on his sufferings as they appear from the image:

SWete Ihesu, I zelde [give] þee þankingis for al þat schame &
 angusch þat þou suffridist whanne þei spitten in þi face, / in þat
 swete myrroure & bodili blis of heuene, upon which aungels &
 seintis haue deinte [delight] to loke. / Now, swete Ihesu, 3eue me

grace to haue most deinte inwardli to loke & þenke upon þat blissid face; / and, swete Ihesu, restore þe liknes of þi face in my soule þat foule synnes han faded [caused to fade]; / &, leue [dear] lord, lete me neuere haue likinge in þe face of synne in temptacioun, & graunte me grace neuere to assente to lust of synne; & zeue me grace to worschipe þee in ech creature; & lete me neuere haue pride of chere [aspect] of my face, ne lust to synne for semblaunt [deceptive appearance] of ony oþirs face; and, swete Ihesu, graunte me to se þi blissful face in heuene, amen. Pater noster. Et ne nos.⁴⁰

Julian of Norwich, introducing her second *shewing*, says

[...] I saw with bodily sight, in the face of the crucifix that henge before me in the which I behelde continually, a parte of His passion – despite spitting and sollowing [soiling], and buffetting and many langoryng [distressing] peynes, mo than I can tel, and often changing of colour.⁴¹

She explicitly refers to ‘a figure and likenes of our foule dede hame [flesh?], that our faire, bright blissid Lord bare for our sins’ (375-5), which made her think of the:

[...] holy vernacle of Rome which He hath portrayed [impressed] with His owne blissid face whan He was in His herd passion wilfully going to His deth and often chongyng of colour. Of the brownehede and blakehede, reulihede [sadness] and lenehede [leanness] of this image, many mervel how it might be, stondyng He portraied it with His blissid face, which is the faire hede of Heavyn, flowre of erth, and the fruite of the mayden wombe. Than how might this image be so discolouring and so fer fro faire?
(375-81)

Julian here introduces the theme of the changing colour of Christ’s face, implying that this is related to his likeness to man’s countenance, which is sometimes ‘darkened’ by sin:

I saw His swete face as it was drye and blodeles with pale deyeng [dyeing], and sithen [afterward] more pale, dede, langoring [languishing], and than turnid more dede into blew [bluish], and sithen more browne blew, as the flesh turnyd more depe dede. For His passion shewid to me most propirly in His blissid face, and namly in His lippis. There I saw these four colowres, tho that were aforne freshe, redy [red], and likyng to my sigte [sight]. This was a swemful [piteous] chonge to sene, this depe deyeng [intense colouring], and also the nose clange [?] and dryed [shriveled], to my sigte, and the swete body was brown and blak, al turnyd oute of faire lifely colowr of Hymselfe on to drye deyeng.
(589-97)

The Holy Face as source of inspiration and consolation is also invoked by the early fifteenth-century priest and poet, John the Blind Audelay, in his version⁴² of the hymn by Pope Innocent III from the year 1216, *Salve sancta facies nostri redemptoris* (see above):

Salve, I say, Holé Face of our Saveour,
 In the wyche schynth [shines] to us an hevenly fygure,
 An graceus on to se!
Salve, thou settis thi prynt on lynin cloth of witle [whitish] coloure,
 And betoke hit Veroneca fore love and gret honoure
 Upon here sudoré [sudarium]⁴³
 (1-6)

In Audelay's collected poems another work expresses a salutation to the Holy Face⁴⁴, again explicitly mentioning Veronica's *sudarium* carrying the image of Christ's face as traced on Veronica's veil and depicted in the original manuscript's sole large drawing (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Douce 302 (Audelay manuscript), fol. 27va):

O Jhesu, fore thi blesful *Face*,
 Thou betoke [gave] Veroneca bi grace
 Upon here sudaré;
 That Face be me consolacion,

And to the Fynd confusion,
 That day when I schal dye.
 (67-72)

The legend of Veronica, which stresses the healing power of the cloth and its image, contributed to its popularity in English medieval devotions; even viewing the image of the Vernicle was sometimes considered to grant pardon of sins:

Sepulcrum Christi
 And for the vernicle haue he may
 Fourty dayeyes eueryche day⁴⁵

The *Symbols of the Passion* (Royal MS. 17 A 27) is a short poem in honour of the vernicle, presented as a remedy for the sins committed with the mouth (namely slandering, taking false oaths, backbiting, and boasting of one's sins):

O vernacule, i honoure him and the,
 Pat þe made þorow his preuité [divine secret];
 Po cloth he set to his face,
 Þe prent laft þere þorow his grace,
 His moth, his nose, his ine [eyes] to,
 His berd, his here [hair] dide al so.
 Schilde me for al þat in my liue
 I haue singud [sinned] with wittus [senses] fiue,
 Namlich with mout of sclauduring [calumny],
 Fals othus and backbiting,
 And made boste with toung al so
 Of sinnus þat i haue do;
 Lord of heuen, for-ȝeue it me
 Þorow syht [sight] of þe figur þat i here se.⁴⁶

In the manuscript, which contains twenty-four colourful miniatures with leaf decoration of the symbols of the Passion, the opening lines of this excerpt are preceded by the miniature of two angels holding the cloth of Veronica (f. 72v).⁴⁷ Similar drawings were also commonly found on

indulgence rolls, with lyrics to go with each illustration.⁴⁸ Viewing these images of the vernicle was understood to grant pardon for sins.

Veronica and popular piety in Late Middle English: Mystery plays, pilgrims' guides, the *Golden Legend*

According to Sansterre, '[d]ans les derniers siècles du Moyen Âge, l'image du Christ appelée Veronica connut une extraordinaire vénération en Occident.'⁴⁹ Late mediaeval 'traditional religion' in England found one of its most characteristic expressions in religious drama, which was deeply embedded in and congruent with the intense spirituality of the age. As Davidson, puts it: 'the plays were designed to promote emotional involvement with the events being staged. Most intensely, the suffering and Crucifixion of Jesus were even to be *felt* as *necessary* for Salvation.'⁵⁰ No wonder the Veronica episode is to be found in both the *York plays* and in the N-Town Cycle.⁵¹ The veil with which Veronica cleansed Christ's face is referred to as 'this signe', whose contemplation will 'kepe from all mysese [suffering]':

VERONICA A, 3e synful pepyl, why fare þus?
 For swet and blood he may not se.
 Allas, holy prophete, Cryst Jhesus,
 Careful [sorrowful] is myn hert for the.
 And sche whypyth his face with here kerchy [kerchief].
 JESUS Veronyca, þi whipyng doth me ese.
 My face is clene þat was blak to se.
 I xal [shall] þem kepe from all mysese
 þat lokyn on þi kerchy and remembyr me.
 (Play 32, lines 40-8)

In the following excerpt from the *York Plays*, the act normally assigned to Veronica is transferred to the third Mary, one of the women at the tomb of Jesus on Easter Sunday. Jesus' face makes an imprint on the cloth, which becomes a sign [signe] – and a valued relic – of the Passion.

Maria 3

Allas, this is a cursed cas.
 He that alle hele [salvation] in his hande has
 Shall here be sakles [guiltless] slayne.
 A, lorde, beleue [stop] lete clense thy face-
 Behalde howe he hath schewed his grace,
 Howe he is moste of mayne [power]!
 This signe schalle bere witnesse
 Vnto all pepull playne,
 Howe Goddes sone here gilteles
 Is putte to pereles payne.
 (Play 34, lines 180-9)

Surprisingly enough, in *The Book of Margery Kempe*, the ‘dense account of Margery’s experiences in Rome does not mention the many relics, artefacts and indulgences that the Eternal City had to offer to the pious, such as the famous Veil of Veronica, referenced by Julian of Norwich from her cell in England.’⁵² As a matter of fact, the vernicle was one of the best-known and most revered relics and its ostension was attended by pilgrims because of the indulgences granted to the onlookers. Pilgrim guides to Rome never fail to mention this. Capgrave’s *Solace of Pilgrimes* (c. 1450) reads:

Whann so euyr þe uernacle is schewid iii Ml 3ere [years] is
 graunted to þe romanes. And to hem alle þat dwelle ouyr þe
 mowntis [mountains] ix Ml 3ere. And to þoo þat dwelle be
 pishalue [this part of] þe mowntis xii Ml 3ere.⁵³

The rhymed version of another popular fifteenth-century guide – *The Stacions of Rome* – is even more detailed:

Whon þe vernicle schewed is.
 Gret *pardoum* . forsoþe þer is . I.-wis
 Preo þousend 3er . as I. ow [you] telle
 To Men þat in . þe Cite dwelle.
 And men þat dwelle be sideward [nearby].
 Nyne þousend 3er . schall ben heore part.

And þou þat passest ouer þe séé.
 Twelue þousend 3er . is graunted to þe.
 And þerto . þow schalt winne more.
 Þe þridde part for-3iuenes . of al þi sore.
 In lentone [Lent] is . an holy grace.
 Vche [each] pardon is doubled . in þat place ⁵⁴

The healing, salvific power of Veronica's veil is also referred to in *Polychronicon*. In this history of the world originally written in Latin by Ranulf Higden (d. 1364) and translated into plain, narrative English prose a few years later by John Trevisa (d. 1402), the episode of Volusianus and Veronica is narrated as follows:

The forsaide Volusianus took aqueyntaunce and knowleche of a noblewomman þat heet [was called] Veronica, so þat he brouzte hir to Rome to the emperour wiþ here lynnyn cloþ, in þe whiche cloþ sche hadde þe prynte of þe liknesse of oure lordes face. Þe emperour byheld þis cloþ, and was hool anon. ⁵⁵

In Caxton's *Golden Legend* Veronica's answer to Volusian underlines the exclusively spiritual value of the relic, which can not be bought by gold or silver, but can only heal those who contemplate it devoutly and with 'grete affeccion':

And yf thy lord had beholden the fygure of Jhesu Chryst deuoutly / he shold be anon guarissed and heled / And Volusien axid is ther nether gold ne siluer that this fygure may be bought with / She answerd nay / but stroonge of corage / deuoute and of grete affeccion / I shal go with the / and shal bere it to themperour for to see it / and after I shal retorn hether agayn ⁵⁶

Conclusion

In a period that stretches for about two hundred years the language used by the various Middle English authors doesn't dramatically change. In the quotations discussed, the image of Jesus and his body is always associated with sweetness ('swete Ihesu', 'His swete face', 'the swete

body'), beauty and light ('our faire, bright blissid Lord') as opposed to unjust extreme suffering ('this martirdom þat thou suffrist without reason'), that causes his countenance to change colours because of 'spitting and sollowing [soiling], and buffetting and many langoryng [distressing] peynes', representing humanity's sins. Perhaps, the most significant association with the contemplation of Christ's suffering and the image of his face are the ones 'depicted' by the great Middle English mystic writers Richard Rolle and Julian of Norwich, in spite of their not explicitly mentioning the Veronica image. Rolle contemplates the 'schame & anguisch þat þou [Jesus] suffridist whanne þei spitten in þi face' and prays to Jesus 'to se þi [Christ's] blisful face in heuene'. Even more touching is Julian's contemplation of 'the face of the crucifix that henge before me in the which I behelde continually, a parte of His passion'.

According to Windeatt '[o]ne might say there are at least *three* Veronicas. First, there is Veronica's existence in narratives, her legend. Second, there is the material relic, in Rome. And thirdly, there is the tradition of replicating the relic.³⁷ Bearing this division in mind, the Middle English passages discussed in this paper can help readers understand how emotional devout reactions could be elicited by the narration of the Veronica episode and by the contemplation of 'veronicas' ('the holy vernicle, virtuous and noble').

In what is probably the first mention of Veronica herself in English, she is associated with suffering (in her case an illness associated with the female body). She is later described as 'sum wyf wæs þolizende [suffering from] blodes fleusan'. Later texts speak of her as 'an old woman named veronica', a 'noblewomman þat heet [was called] Veronica', 'an holi woman callid Veronica', who 'had be famylyer and deuoute with Ihesu Cryst'. When Veronica met Jesus 'so foule brought and vilanously, she made gret sorou and wepid and toke him the couerchif" and told him: 'Iesu, . . . I am right sory of this martirdom þat thou suffrist without reson. But hold this couerchif' because she wanted to wipe away 'the swet and the blood from [his] blissid visage.' Interestingly, the word *swet* (sweat) in all the texts considered is a homograph of *swet* (sweet). The lack of graphical distinction between the two words (typical of Middle English spelling) creates significant lexical contrasts.

The instinctive, 'motherly' reaction of Veronica ('Careful [sorrowful] is myn hert for the') eases Christ's suffering ('Veronyca, þi whipyng doth me ese./My face is clene þat was blak to se'). He is so grateful for this simple act of piety that he imprints his face on Veronica's cloth ('Þe prent laft þere þorow his grace') not only as a memorial of his suffering to be contemplated, but also as a healing relic. This is often mentioned in Middle English texts: Jesus says: 'I xal [shall] þem kepe from all mysese /þat lokyn on þi kerchy and remembyr me.' Provided the faithful 'beholden the fygure of Jhesu Chryst deuoutly', they are 'anon guarisshed and heled.' As a matter of fact, the fusion of text and image had a strong evocative, communicative power; devotion to the image, which had been initially cultivated in monastic circles, percolated into prayers and devotions of the laity and into literary texts, thus creating a continuum from liturgy to popular expressions.

Vernicles, tin badges, golden rings were not only objects of devotion, but also treasured souvenirs of the pilgrimage to Rome: according to the *Siege of Jerusalem*, Vespasian '[g]arde hit gayly agysen in gold and in selvere. / Yit is the visage in the vail, Veronyk hym broght; / The Romaynes hit holdeth at Rome, and for a relyk hit holden' (262-4). The Veronica - the 'Holy Vernicle at Rome, which He hath portrayed with His own blessed face' - was displayed in St. Peter's and granted great indulgences, for 'Whon þe vernicle schewed is./ Gret pardoun . forsoþe þer is', but it should be contemplated with genuine devotion. The pilgrim badges were, therefore, often proudly exhibited as proofs of the accomplished pilgrimage, as Langland and Chaucer say: 'the vernicle bifore, for men sholde knowe / And se bi hise signes whom he sought hadde'; 'A vernycle hadde he sowed upon his cappe.'

The Veronica was therefore an invitation to gaze on Christ, creating a desire to be like him and a longing for virtue; it was venerated as the visible, miraculous memorial of the Passion of Christ and hence of his saving work and contemplated as the sign that 'schalle bere witnesse / Vnto all pepull playne'.⁵⁸

Notes

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- 1 An initial version of this paper was presented by Amanda Murphy and the Maria Luisa Maggioni at *Emotion and Devotion in Medieval Europe The*

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- GCMS Summer Symposium*, Reading, 21 June 2018. M.L. Maggioni wishes to thank A. Murphy for her invaluable support.
- 2 *Veronica Route*, <https://veronicaroute.com/>
 - 3 Discussed by Barry Windeatt, “Vera Icon? The Variable Veronica of Medieval England” in *The European Fortune of the Roman Veronica in the Middle Ages*, ed. by A. Murphy, H. Kessler et al. (Turnhout, 2017), pp. 59-71. The material is translated in *B. Harris Cowper*, (ed.), *The Apocryphal Gospels and other Documents Relating to the History of Christ* (London, 1867).
 - 4 “The *Gospel* as it came to the hands of the Old English translator was already a combination of two separate pieces: the first the “Acts of Pilate” or “Gospel of Nicodemus”; the second, the “Descent into Hell.” The fusion of these two pieces into one *Gospel of Nicodemus* took place not later than 425. T. P. Allen (ed.), *A Critical Edition of the Old English ‘Gospel’ of Nicodemus*. Unpublished PhD dissertation (Rice University, 1968), p. 1. Available online <https://scholarship.rice.edu/bitstream/handle/1911/14416/6815601.PDF?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>
 - 5 A-C. Baudoin, Z. Izydorczyk, ‘The Acts of Pilate and the Evangelium Nicodemi in the Age of Manuscripts’, in *The Oldest Manuscript of the Acts of Pilate: A Collaborative Commentary on the Vienna Palimpsest*, ed. by Baudoin and Izydorczyk (2019), hal-02378821, pp. 13-21, (p. 14).
 - 6 Z. Izydorczyk, 2019, ‘Revised in Translation: Vernacular Legacies of the Evangelium Nicodemi’, in *The Oldest Manuscript of the Acts of Pilate*, pp. 43-50 (p. 45).
 - 7 M. Swan, ‘Remembering Veronica in Anglo Saxon England’, in *Writing Gender and Genre in Medieval Literature: Approaches to Old and Middle English Texts*, ed. by Elaine Treharne and Greg Walker (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 19-39. (p. 19).
 - 8 For an overview, see Zbigniew S. Izydorczyk, (ed.), *The Medieval Gospel of Nicodemus: Texts, Intertexts, and Contexts in Western Europe* (Tempe AZ, 1997).
 - 9 ‘*Legende von der Heiligen Veronica*’, in *Angelsächsische Homilien und Heiligenleben*, ed. by B. Assmann (Darmstadt, 1889), pp. 181-192 (p. 182). All translations are my own.
 - 10 ‘Item et mulier quaedam Veronica nomen a longe clamavit praesidi: Fluens sanguine eram ab annis duodecim et tetigi fimbriam vestimenti eius, et statim fluxus sanguini mei stetit. Dicunt Iudaei; Legem habemus mulierem ad testimonium non venire’, Allen 1968, p. 102.
 - 11 *Legende von der Heiligen Veronica*, p. 189

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- 12 *The Siege of Jerusalem*, ed. by Michael Livingstone (Kalamazoo MI, 2004), lines 249, 211.
- 13 *Gilte Legende*, ed. by Richard Hamer and Vida Russell, EETS OS315, 327, 328, 339 (Oxford, 2000, 2006, 2007, 2012). 4 vols.
- 14 Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda aurea sanctorum, sive, Lombardica historia*, trans. by William Caxton (London, 1483), f. XVIIv.
- 15 Miri Rubin, *Mother of God: A History of the Virgin Mary* (New Haven, 2009), p. 85.
- 16 Rubin, p. 102.
- 17 S. Fein, 'Mary to Veronica: John Audelay's Sequence of Salutations to God-Bearing Women', *Speculum* 86 (2011), pp. 964-1009 (p. 965).
- 18 Swan, p. 20.
- 19 P. Moe, (ed.), *The Middle English Prose Translation of Roger d'Argenteuil's Bible en François* (Heidelberg, 1977), p. 72.
- 20 Barry Windeatt, (ed.), *The Book of Margery Kempe* (Cambridge, 2004), p. 191.
- 21 'Play 32, Procession to Calvary; Crucifixion' in *The N-Town Plays*, ed. by Douglas Sugano (Kalamazoo, 2007), lines 45-8.
- 22 See U.M. Lang, 'Origins of the Liturgical Veneration of the Roman Veronica', in *The European Fortune of the Roman Veronica*, pp.144-157.
- 23 *Legenda aurea sanctorum*, f. XVIIv.
- 24 *Siege of Jerusalem*, lines 261-64.
- 25 The *MED* reconstructs the etymology of *vernicle* as 'OF *vernicle*, *veronicle*, vars. of *veronique*; cp. AL *vernicula*, *vernaculum*, vars. of *Veronica*'.
https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary?utf8=%E2%9C%93&search_field=hmf&q=vernicle
- 26 For a recent study on the Veronica Image of Christ in thirteenth-century England, see N. Morgan, 'Veronica' images and the office of the Holy Face in thirteenth-century England', in *The European Fortune of the Roman Veronica* pp. 84-99.
- 27 Quotation from the *MED*.
- 28 See D. Brunda, *Enseignes de Pelerinage et Enseignes Profanes* (Paris, 1996) and D. Webb, *Pilgrims and Pilgrimage in the Medieval West* (London, 1999).
- 29 *The incipit of Salve Sancta Facies* explains that the prayer carries an indulgence authorized by Boniface IV: '*Quicumque hanc salutacionem in honore Salvatoris per xx dies continuo devote dixerit, Bonifacius papa quartus concessit omnibus vere confessis et contritus plenam remissionem omnium peccatorum et hoc scriptum est apud Romani in ecclesia Sancti Petri coram altare salvatoris.*'

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- <http://manuscripts.org.uk/chd.dk/tutor/veronica.html>
- 30 V. Krishan, (ed.), *The Alliterative Morte Arthure: A Critical Edition* (New York, 1976).
- 31 *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by L. Benson and F. N. Robinson (Oxford, 1987).
- 32 The well-known *Incipit* of the Pardoner's *Prologue* quotes the Latin saying *Radix malorum est cupiditas*, ironically to be applied to the Pardoner himself.
- 33 San Marino, Huntington Library MS EL 26 C 9 (f. 138r). A reproduction is available at <https://hdl.huntington.org/digital/collection/p15150coll7/id/264>
- 34 W. Langland, *The Vision of Piers Plowman*, ed. by J.M. Dent and E.P. Dutton (London and New York, 1978).
- 35 Small flasks of consecrated water or oil commonly carried by pilgrims returning from a shrine.
- 36 Possibly miniatures of a pilgrim's staff or crosses, probably indicating the number of pilgrimages undertaken.
- 37 W. Kamowski, 'Chaucer and Wyclif: God's Miracles against the Clergy's Magic', *Chaucer Review* 37 (2002), 5.
- 38 John the Blind Audelay, *Poems and Carols* (Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Douce 302), ed. by Susanna Fein (Kalamazoo, 2009), <https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/fein-audelay-poems-and-carols-salutations>
- 39 C. Horstmann, (ed.), *Yorkshire writers: Richard Rolle of Hampole, an English father of the church and his followers* (London, 1895-1896), p. 95.
- 40 *Ibid.*
- 41 *The Shewings of Julian of Norwich*, ed. by Georgia Ronan Crampton (Kalamazoo, 1994), lines 346-9 <https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/the-shewings-of-julian-of-norwich-part-1>
- 42 John the Blind Audelay, *Poems and Carols*, W27.
- 43 A piece of linen used in Biblical times to wrap the head of a corpse before burial. Here: the cloth of St. Veronica, on which an image of Christ's face was believed to be imprinted.
- 44 John the Blind Audelay, *Poems and Carols*, W4.
- 45 *Legends of the Holy Rood; Symbols of the Passion and Cross Poems*, ed. by Richard Morris. (London, 1871), p. 192
- 46 *Legends of the Holy Rood*, pp. 171-172.
- 47 The image is reproduced in *Legends of the Holy Rood*, p. 170.
- 48 The relationship between images and indulgences is treated for example in F. Lewis, 'Rewarding Devotion: Indulgences and the Promotion of Images', *Studies in Church History*, 56 (2016), 179-194. For a general view on

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- English indulgences, see N. Vincent, 'Some Pardoner's Tales: the earliest English indulgences', *Transactions of the RHS*, 12 (2002), 23-58.
- 49 J-M, Sansterre, 2013, 'Variation d'une légende et genèse d'un culte entre la Jérusalem des origines, Rome et l'Occident : quelques jalons de l'histoire de Véronique et de la Veronica jusqu'à la fin du XIIIe siècle', in *Passages. Déplacements des hommes, circulation des textes et identités dans l'Occident médiéval*, ed. by J. Ducos and P. Henriot (2013), pp. 217-231 (p. 217). [In the last centuries of the Middle Ages, the image of Christ called Veronica enjoyed extraordinary veneration in the West].
- 50 C. Davidson, (ed.), *The York Corpus Christi Plays* (Kalamazoo, 2011) <https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/publication/davidson-the-york-corpus-christi-plays>
- 51 The earliest evidence for the existence of the cycle at York dates from the late 14th century; the only extant manuscript (British Library Add MS 35290) was made between 1463 and 1477. The *N-town Plays* appear to have belonged to a group of travelling players; the manuscript (British Library Cotton MS Vespasian D VIII) was put together by a scribe in the late 15th century.
- 52 E. Klafter, 'The feminine mystic: Margery Kempe's Pilgrimage to Rome as an *imitatio Birgittae*', in *Gender in Medieval Places, Spaces and Thresholds*, ed. by V. Blud, D. Heath and E. Klafter (London, 2019), p. 124.
- 53 John Capgrave, *Ye Solace of Pilgrimes*, ed. by C. A. Mills (London, 1911), p. 63.
- 54 F. J. Furnivall, *The Stacions of Rome*, EETS, o.s. 25 (1867), p. 3.
- 55 Ranulf Higden, *Polychronicon Ranulphi Higden maonachi Cestrensis; together with the English translations of John Trevisa and of an unknown writer of the fifteenth century*, ed. by Churchill Babington and Joseph Rawson Lumby (London, 1865-86), vol. 4, p. 323.
- 56 Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda aurea sanctorum, sive, Lombardica historia*, trans. by William Caxton (London, 1483), f. XVIIv.
- 57 Windeatt, 'Vera Icon?', p. 59.
- 58 See Lang, 'Origins of the Liturgical Veneration'.