Sally Holloway, 'Love, Custom & Consumption: Valentine's Day in England *c.* 1660–1830', *Cultural & Social History* (2020)

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Abstract: This article represents the first dedicated study of Valentine's Day in England over the long eighteenth century. It argues that the years from *c.* 1660 to 1830 were central to the refashioning of the celebration as a modern ritual. During this shift, older customs such as lotteries were superseded by new traditions such as the exchange of valentine cards, with the commercialisation of festivities fuelling a consequent boom in homemade cards. By charting how a folk tradition evolved with the rise of consumer society, the article illuminates how commercial culture can augment, challenge – and ultimately change – material practices of love.

Keywords: love, emotions, material culture, consumption, ritual

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On 14 February 1783, one individual in the 'large and populous' town of Manchester commemorated Valentine's Day by sending an ornate cut-paper valentine to a friend in Liverpool (Fig. 1). In the centre stand a shepherd and shepherdess in a wooded landscape, encircled by a flaming yellow sun, from which four cut-paper trees grow. These natural motifs evoke a pastoral ideal that represented a marked departure from the factories and cotton mills of industrial Manchester.[1] The shepherds together embody an innocent, honest and humble rural life that was uncorrupted by the excesses of civilized society. Above the couple hover birds, in reference to the belief – first espoused by the poet Geoffrey Chaucer and his contemporaries John Gower, Sir John Clanvowe and Oton de Grandson in the fourteenth century – that Valentine's Day marked the onset of spring and the moment when birds chose their mates.[2] The handwritten verses invoke another tradition, practiced since at least the early 1600s, of selecting valentines by lot:

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[1] Thanks to Katie Barclay, Joanne Begiato, Sarah Lloyd, and this journal's anonymous reviewers for sharing invaluable feedback on this article, and to participants in the workshop 'Romantic Rituals: "Making Love" in Europe *c.* 1600–Present' at the University of Adelaide in 2016. I am grateful to the many private collectors of valentines, Rebecca Virag at the Fitzwilliam Museum, James Arnold and Caroline Alexander at the Harris Museum, and Joanna Espin at the Postal Museum for generously sharing their time and expertise with me. James Ogden, *A Description of Manchester, From a Native of the Town* (Manchester, 1783), 3.

[2] Geoffrey Chaucer, *Parlement of Fouls* (1381–2), l. 309-10; Jack B. Oruch, 'St. Valentine, Chaucer, and Spring in February', *Speculum* 56.3 (1981): 534-65; Henry Ansgar Kelly, *Chaucer and the Cult of Saint Valentine*, Davis Medieval Texts and Studies, ed. James J. Murphy, Vol. 5 (California, 1986); Ronald Hutton, *The Stations of the Sun: A History of the Ritual Year in Britain* (Oxford and New York, 1996), 146; Steve Roud, *The English Year: A Month-by-Month Guide to the Nation's Customs and Festivals, from May Day to Mischief Night* (London, 2006), 54-5.

The lots were cast and you I knew
and fortune said it must be you
and if you take it in good Part
I shall be glad with all my heart.

Valentine cards provide valuable clues for historians about the languages and practices of romantic love. They also provide important and overlooked evidence of a society in flux, responding to the growth of commerce and industry through the invention of new traditions.[3]

Figure 1. Cut paper valentine with watercolour decoration and handwritten verse, sent from Manchester to Liverpool, 14 February 1783, Temperley Collection.

This article approaches love as a kind of practice, arguing that valentine cards represent a new way of practising love shaped by, and in response to, modern commercial culture. The article utilises valentine cards as part of the 'relevant equipment and material culture' of love, and the annual celebration of Valentine's Day one of the 'ephemeral doings' structuring and shaping romantic emotions.[4] As the

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[3] See *The Invention of Tradition* ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge, 1983).

[4] Joseph Rouse, 'Practice Theory' in *Handbook of the Philosophy of Science,* ed. Dob M. Gabbay, Paul Thagard, and John Woods, Vol. 15 of *Philosophy of Anthropology and Sociology* ed. Stephan Turner and

philosopher Robert C. Solomon writes, emotions 'do not just happen to us, but we are responsible for them. We practice them, cultivate them, and in many cases *choose* them, even if unconsciously'. In this sense, emotions such as love 'are to some extent our "doing", and not just something that happens to us'.[5] Analysing the ways in which people 'do' love through material objects enables us to access tacit beliefs and feelings about the self, other people, and wider society that may not be articulated in language. It also allows us to chart how understandings and experiences of love change between cultures and over time.[6] This article scrutinises a key moment of change in England, when practices of love were increasingly integrated into the consumer economy.

Valentine's Day has been little studied by historians of eighteenth-century England, appearing primarily in scholarship on literacy and the ritual year. In his analysis of literacy and popular culture, David Vincent argued that the celebration 'underwent a metamorphosis' over the eighteenth century, shifting from the exchange of gifts to letters and tokens, followed by printed messages by the century's close, bringing growing profits to both the Post Office and publishers.[7] Ronald Hutton has likewise presented the eighteenth century as a critical period, during which public rituals such as customary gifting and lotteries were gradually replaced by the individual selection of valentines in private, a custom which was 'starting to become popular' between 1780 and 1800.[8] Leigh Eric Schmidt has charted the long-term evolution of the celebration from the fourteenth to the nineteenth centuries, focusing primarily on its emergence as a 'modern American Holiday'. This process, he argues, provides 'an early exemplar of how an emergent consumer culture transformed traditional holidays'.[9] However, while the eighteenth century is repeatedly pinpointed as a crucial period in the development of the celebration, a dedicated study of Valentine's Day during these formative years remains to be written. This article presents the first detailed account of Valentine's Day in England over the long eighteenth century, using valentine cards as evidence of an important transformation in practices of love.

Mark Risiord (Amsterdam, 2006), 499, 536. Cf. Monique Scheer, 'Are Emotions a Kind of Practice (And is That What Makes Them Have a History)? A Bourdieuian Approach to Understanding Emotion', *History and Theory* 51 (2012): 193-220.

[5] Robert C. Solomon, *True to Our Feelings: What Our Emotions Are Really Telling Us* (Oxford, 2008), 190-1. Italics in original.

[6] On the practice of love through material culture during this period, see Sally Holloway, *The Game of Love in Georgian England: Courtship, Emotions, and Material Culture* (Oxford, 2019), Chs 3-4.

[7] David Vincent, *Literacy and Popular Culture: England 1750–1914* (Cambridge, 1993), 44.

[8] Hutton, *The Stations of the Sun*, 148-9.

[9] Leigh Eric Schmidt, 'The Fashioning of a Modern Holiday: St. Valentine's Day, 1840–1870', *Winterthur Portfolio* 28.4 (1993): 209-45, at 209.

Valentine cards pose a particular challenge as a form of evidence, since they are scattered individually across different record offices, museums, and private collections. More often than not, these are anonymous 'authorless' objects, divorced from the men and women who purchased, created, and exchanged them.[10] As such, valentine cards demand a particular connoisseurial knowledge of paper, printing techniques, the postal service, romantic language and iconography in order to date and interpret them accurately. This article adopts what the material culturist Bernard Herman has termed an 'object-driven approach' by using valentines as evidence of wider social, cultural, and emotional shifts, seeking to 'reconnect' valentines 'to their historical contexts' using a range of textual and material sources.[11] The article draws upon several hundred valentine cards in the collections of the Bodleian Library in Oxford, the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, the Harris Museum in Preston, The Postal Museum, Museum of London and Victoria & Albert Museum in London, plus local archives, auction houses and private collections. It uses supporting evidence from ballads, court cases, letters, memoirs, newspaper reports, periodicals, poems, plays and popular songs, in order to unravel the 'symbolically rich material fabric of social significance', and 'weave its encoded meanings back into the interpretive whole' of eighteenth-century society.[12]

This article is divided into three sections. It begins by setting out how and why Valentine's Day rituals evolved over the period from *c.* 1660 to 1830, precipitating the emergence of the valentine card. The second section outlines how the commercialisation of romantic culture created a sense of nostalgia for an idyllic past, fuelling the creation of handmade valentines and deliberately archaic modes of romantic expression.[13] The final section analyses the significance of the celebration in disrupting hierarchies of gender and class, and turning usual romantic practices on their head. The article reveals how this popular calendar custom survived and changed over the long eighteenth century, as practices of love were gradually integrated into the consumer economy.

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[10] In this way, valentines are typical of ephemera more broadly. See Kevin D. Murphy and Sally O'Driscoll, 'Introduction: "Fugitive Pieces" and "Gaudy Books": Textual, Historical, and Visual Interpretations of Ephemera in the Long Eighteenth Century' in *idem* (eds) *Studies in Ephemera: Text and Image in Eighteenth-Century Print* (Lewisburg, 2013), 1-30, at 2-6.

[11] Bernard Herman, *The Stolen House* (Charlottesville and London, 1992), 4-12.

[12] Herman, *The Stolen House*, 4-5.

[13] I use the term nostalgia here in the modern sense, to mean a 'sentimental longing *for* or regretful memory of a period of the past, esp. one in an individual's own lifetime; (also) sentimental imagining or evocation of a period of the past'. 'Nostalgia, *n.*', *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, accessed 16 Aug 2018 http://www.oed.com.oxfordbrookes.idm.oclc.org/view/Entry/128472?redirectedFrom=nostalgia.

INVENTING VALENTINE'S DAY: TRADITION & MODERNITY

The annual celebration of Valentine's Day was distinguished by a number of highly ritualised customs. Children paraded noisily from door to door crying out "good morrow to you, Valentine", soliciting either money or food.[14] Friends and family members met to draw valentines by lot and subsequently exchange gifts, a practice increasingly replaced in the second half of the eighteenth century by the exchange of handmade paper valentines such as true lovers knots and puzzle purses.[15] From the 1780s, individuals could purchase valentine writers for sixpence, a new genre collating short stories, songs, country dances, poems, riddles and dialogues about love and marriage to entertain and amuse.[16] By the 1790s, printed cards were manufactured and sold in shops for threepence each.[17] This article posits that these transformations were central to the emergence of 14 February as a modern celebration, underpinned by attacks on popular recreations, Enlightenment critiques of magic, credulity, and superstition, and the advancing commercialisation of leisure.

From at least the first quarter of the seventeenth century, groups of men and women assembled on the evening of 13 February to take part in valentine lotteries.[18] In Ben Jonson's comedy *A Tale of a Tub* (first performed in 1633), Mrs Awdrey Turfe draws Sir Hugh, Vicar of Pancras for her valentine, while Awdrey's parents are said to have drawn one another thirty years earlier.[19] The diarist Samuel Pepys (1633–1703)

[14] Thomas Rossell Potter, *The History and Antiquities of Charnwood Forest* (London, 1842), 87; Roud, *The English Year*, 58-9.

[15] For early handmade valentines see photocopy of true lovers knot from J.E. to a 'Fair Lady', 1729, 2M37/608, Hampshire Record Office, Winchester; Cut-paper card made by John Lovell for 'ES' and 'PHL', 1778, 161/133, Wiltshire and Swindon Archives, Chippenham; True lovers knot from John Thomas of Kempley Court to his future wife Elizabeth, Gloucestershire, *c.* 1780, E.767-1985, Victoria & Albert Museum, London (subsequently V&A); Puzzle purse unfolding from a red watercolour heart, *c.* 1790, OB1995.263, The Postal Museum, London (subsequently TPM); Pin-prick valentine depicting two birds holding a posy above the Altar of Love, *c.* 1790, OB1996.7, TPM; Pin-prick silhouette valentine of a bower covered in bees, *c.* 1790, OB1995.263, TPM.

[16] See *The Complete Valentine Writer: or, The Young Men and Maidens best Assistant* (London, *c.* 1780); *The New English Valentine Writer, or the High Road to Love; for Both Sexes* (London, *c.* 1784); *Every Lady's Own Valentine Writer, in Prose and Verse* (London, 1794); *The New and Complete Valentine-Writer for the Year 1805* (London, 1805); *Richardson's New Fashionable Lady's Valentine Writer or, Cupid's Festival of Love* (Derby, 1825).

[17] The first dated printed valentine card was published on 12 Jan 1797 by John Fairburn, 146 Minories, London, 1797, DA 2324, York Museums Trust (York Castle Museum); The trial of William Stephens for theft on 15 February 1827 valued 12 valentines at 3 shillings, or 3 pence each, t18270215-30, Old Bailey Online.

[18] Roud, *The English Year*, 55-7. As Hutton writes, by 'the mid-seventeenth century, it is plain that the tradition had become genuinely popular, if it had not always been so', *The Stations of the Sun*, 147.

[19] *The Works of Ben Jonson* (London, 1756), Vol. V, Act I, Scene I, p. 7.

regularly met with friends, family members, colleagues and neighbours to draw valentines, including his wife Elizabeth Pepys, neighbour Admiral William Penn, uncle William Wight, Surveyor of the Navy Sir William Batten, and William's wife Lady Elizabeth Batten.[20] This custom remained common until around the mid-eighteenth century: participants wrote their names upon pieces of paper, which were rolled up and put into a hat or apron 'and after that, every one draws a Name, which for the present is called their *Valentine*'.[21] Individuals would then construct poems like the example in Figure 2, using a set line of rhyming verse for each letter of a person's name. The poems were worn around men's hatbands for the ensuing days, and pinned to women's breasts. Couples often danced together, and the women were presented with love tokens such as garters, gloves, handkerchiefs, money, portrait miniatures and silk stockings. Festivities were not limited to Valentine's Day itself, but extended from Valentine's Eve on 13 February to Easter Day.[22]
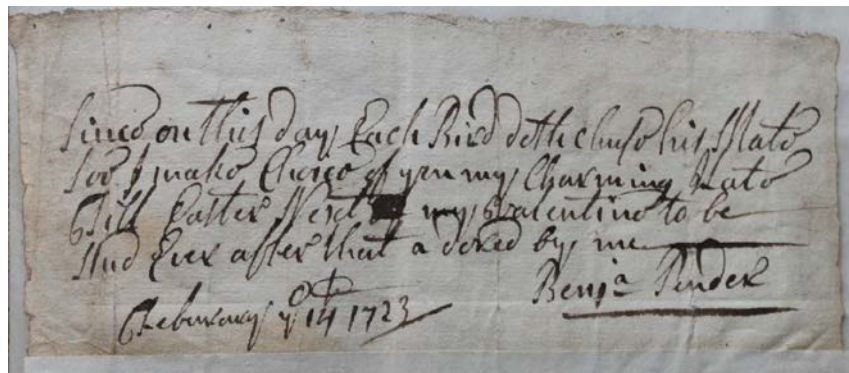

Figure 2. Valentine poem from Benjamin Pender to Kate created as part of a lottery, 14 February 1723, RP/2/81, Cornwall Record Office, Truro.

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[20] Henry B. Wheatley, ed., *The Diary of Samuel Pepys M.A. F.R.S. Clerk of the Acts and Secretary to the Admiralty* (London, 1893), entries for 13 February 1661, 14 February 1666, 16 February 1667 & 25 March 1668.

[21] Henry Bourne, *Antiquitates Vulgares; Or, The Antiquities of the Common People* (Newcastle, 1725), 174; *The Frighted West-Country Man's Garland* (London, *c.* 1705), 9-10; Cut-paper valentine with handwritten verse 'The 13th Day of Feb^ry, It was my Lot for to be merry, First I tos'd & then I Drew And fortune says it must be you', sold by Wigs on the Green http://www.wigsonthegreen.co.uk.

[22] Wheatley, ed., *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, 18 February 1661, 22 February 1661, 3 March 1663, 15 February 1666 & 14 February 1668; *The Journal of William Shellinks' Travels in England*, trans. and ed. Maurice Exwood and H. L. Lehmann (Camden Society, 5th ser. 1, 1993), February 1662, 73; Letter from Lady Chaworth to Mr Herbert, servant to her brother the Earl of Rutland, enclosing two pairs of gloves for the man who drew her as his valentine, HMC Rutland, 4 July 1691, 133; *British Apollo*, London, 18–23 February 1709, Issue 108; John Porter, *History of the Fylde of Lancashire* (Fleetwood, 1876), 97-8.

Members of the middling sort, gentry, and aristocracy recorded engaging in lotteries during the seventeenth century.[23] As the visiting Dutch artist William Shellinks (1627–78) noted in his journal, 'much to-do is made' about Valentine's Day 'by high and low and rich and poor'.[24] However, elite participation in these rituals was criticised by Puritans such as Dudley Lord North (1581–1666), who argued that:

> A Lady of wit and qualitie whom you well know, would never put her selfe to the chance of a Valentine, saying, that shee would never couple her selfe, but by choyce. The custome and charge of Valentines is not ill left, with many other such costly and idle customes, which by a tacit generall consent wee lay downe as obsolete.[25]

North's critique proved prophetic, with the steady withdrawal of men and women of 'qualitie' from lotteries, and an increasing emphasis on personal choice over chance in selecting a valentine. The growing importance of coupling the 'selfe' only 'by choyce' was facilitated by new understandings of individualism and self-identity, and the idealisation of marriage for love.[26] By the early eighteenth century, lotteries had become associated with the vulgar sorts, and were recorded by antiquaries such as Henry Bourne (1694–1733) who hoped to either 'wipe off…the Dust they have contracted, to clear them of Superstition', or abolish them altogether.[27]

Valentine's Day rituals were bound up with popular superstitions surrounding love and marriage. One superstition held that a person's valentine was the first stranger

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[23] See Pepys diary in notes 20 & 22 above; Letter from Mary Gaudy to her father Sir William Gaudy baronet requesting a lace handkerchief as a Valentine's Day gift, 25 March 1664, MC 1/16 386 x 5, Norfolk Record Office, Norwich; Letter from Roger Bradshaigh Jr baronet to Roger Kenyon hoping to send a gift to 'my cozen Copley', 27 March 1683, DDKE/acc. 7840 HMC/524, Lancashire Archives, Preston; Letters from Lady Mary Bertie to her niece Katherine Noel, 16 & 23 February 1671, in Historical Manuscripts Commission. Twelfth Report, Appendix, Part V, *The Manuscripts of His Grace the Duke of Rutland, K. G., Preserved at Belvoir Castle*, Vol. II (London, 1889), 22.
[24] *The Journal of William Shellinks' Travels*, 73.
[25] Dudley North, Baron North, *A Forest of Varieties* (London, 1645), 61. On Puritans renouncing rituals on Valentine's Eve also see Robert Law, *Memorialls: Or, The Memorable Things that Fell Out Within This Island of Brittain From 1638 to 1684* (Edinburgh, 1818), 191.
[26] Holloway, *The Game of Love*, 8-9, 168; See handmade cut-paper valentine sent from Thomas Groom to Ann Jebb, inscribed 'Some draw Valentines by lot, / And some draw them that they love not; / But I draw you whom I love best, / And chuse you out amongst the rest', described in *The Journal of the British Archaeological Association* (London, 1873), Vol. XXIX, 'On Epistolary Valentines', p. 94; On selfhood and individualism see Dror Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven and London, 2006) and Michael Mascuch, *The Origins of the Individualist Self: Autobiography and Self-Identity in England, 1591–1791* (Cambridge, 2013).
[27] Bourne, *Antiquitates Vulgares*, pp. x-xi, 174.

they saw on the morning of 14 February, whom they should greet with a kiss.[28] Glossaries of popular superstitions recorded individuals trying to predict their future spouse by placing a 'slice of the bride-cake, thrice drawn through the wedding ring', or in the north a piece of the 'groaning cheese' used during christenings, under a pillow. If an unmarried woman fasted on Midsummer eve and laid out bread, cheese, and ale on the table, it was reputed that 'the person whom she is afterwards to marry will come into the room, and drink to her by bowing'.[29] Fashionable periodicals such as *The Connoisseur* dismissed such customs as the 'idle superstitions of the vulgar'. It introduced them to its readership using an extract from Virgil's eighth eclogue, where shepherds perform love magic for Daphnis, the fabled inventor of pastoral poetry. The periodical ridiculed how a young woman in love could turn 'every trifling accident of her life into a good or bad omen'. It printed a satirical letter by a young woman fixated on magical rites, who pinned bay leaves to her pillow to dream of her sweetheart on Valentine's Eve, and boiled an egg, replacing the yolk with salt, before eating the entire egg, shell and all. This kind of 'amorous sorcery' was derided by antiquaries such as Francis Grose (1731–91) as a preoccupation of vulgar men and women far beyond the realms of polite society.[30]

These learned critiques of valentine rituals reflect what Peter Burke has termed 'the reform of popular culture' over the early modern period, where educated elites endeavoured to suppress 'unchristian' events such as fairs, carnivals and charivaris, and superstitions involving divining, folktales, fortune-telling, and magic. The customary celebrations characterising Valentine's Day, May Day, Halloween, and Twelfth Night firstly represented a theological danger to Christian society as profane pagan superstitions, and secondly a moral danger, as excuses for drunkenness, debauchery and sin.[31] As the curate Henry Bourne argued, popular rituals had either lost their true meaning 'through Folly and Superstition', or were 'a Scandal to Religion, and an

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28 William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Hamlet Prince of Denmark. As it is now Acted by Her Majesties Servants* (London, [1609] 1703), Act IV, Scene 1, 59; *Tale of a Tub*, Act III, Scene IV in *The Works of Ben Jonson*, 47; Wheatley, ed., *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, 14 February 1662; John Gay, *The Shepherd's Week: Thursday; or, The Spell*, l. 37-46 in G. C. Faber, *The Poetical Works of John Gay* (London, 1926), 44; 'The Sweets of Love, Or, Valentine Day', John Johnson Collection (subsequently JJC), Valentines Box 1, f. 56, Bodleian Library, Oxford (subsequently BLO); 'Valentine Day. A New Song', JJC, Valentines Box 1, f. 55, BLO; *The New Merry Companion: Or, Vocal Remembrancer* (Dublin, 1780?), Song CLXXXI, 175.

29 Francis Grose, *A Provincial Glossary* (London, 1787), 53.

30 *The Connoisseur*, No. 56, 20 February 1755, 48. For a similar shift in the ritual celebration of Halloween, see Nicholas Rogers, *Halloween: From Pagan Ritual to Party Night* (Oxford, 2002), 46.

31 Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, third edition (Ashgate, [1978] 2009), 290-7.

encouraging of Wickedness'. The 'common people' practising these rituals were seen to hold entirely superstitious opinions, which were 'either the Produce of Heathenism, or the Inventions of indolent Monks'.[32] The curate John Brand similarly argued that 'Christian, or rather Papal Rome, borrowed her Rites, Notions, and Ceremonies, in the most luxurious Abundance from ancient and Heathen Rome', with rituals such as valentine festivities 'stolen out of the Wings of the dying Eagle'.[33] The true Christian religion, on the other hand, was emphatically neither mysterious nor superstitious.[34]

Attacks by the established church were matched by Enlightenment critiques of a credulous populace lacking in reason and rationality, in thrall to ceremonies and creeds. As Roy Porter writes, the primary doctrine of Deism was 'religion for the rational, superstition for the simple'.[35] John Trenchard's *Natural History of Superstition* (1709) situated divination using lots (cleromancy) or dreams (oneiromancy) alongside 'Heathen Gods and Goddesses, Oracles and Prophets, Nimphs and Satyrs', as the delusions of minds disturbed by enthusiasm and fear.[36] Oneiromancy was rejected as 'an abuse of sense and reason', and the observation of omens and lucky days a 'stupid and foolish' practice. Given 'the present improvements of philosophy and learning', these practices could safely be associated with 'the dregs of mankind', 'the vulgar and illiterate', 'children and fools'.[37] The superstitious aspects of Valentine's Day certainly persisted longer in rural areas; in his poem 'The Village Curate', the curate James Hurdis (1763–1801) of Burwash in East Sussex described how maids on Valentine's morn would 'Start up, and turn their pillows, all agog / To know what happy swain the fates provide / A mate for life'.[38] Superstitions were particularly maintained among groups of children; in 1779, young girls in a small village in Kent celebrated by burning an effigy of a 'holly-boy' stolen from the boys, while the boys burned an 'ivy-girl', 'accompanied with loud huzzas, noise, and acclamation'.[39] Gradually, however, the celebration was evolving away from these superstitious communal rituals and toward a

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[32] Bourne, *Antiquitates Vulgares*, xvii.

[33] John Brand, preface to Bourne, *Antiquitates Vulgares*, v.

[34] John Toland, *Christianity not Mysterious, or, A Treatise Shewing that there is nothing in the Gospel contrary to reason, nor above it* (London, 1696); William Taswell, *The Church of England not Superstitious* (London, 1714).

[35] Roy Porter, *Enlightenment: Britain and the Creation of the Modern World* (London, 2000), 367-9.

[36] John Trenchard, *The Natural History of Superstition* (London, 1709), 10-11, 16-17.

[37] *Superstition Detected and Exposed* (*c.* 1762), 41–4.

[38] James Hurdis, *The Village Curate. A Poem*, second edition (London, 1790), 23.

[39] *Gentleman's Magazine*, 1779, vol. xlix, 137.

more private, individualised, and recognisably modern celebration, which coalesced around the valentine card.

In the final decade of the eighteenth century, Valentine's Day was integrated into the consumer economy, as booksellers, printers and stationers sold pre-made cards for around threepence, and valentine writers for sixpence apiece. Hence a custom that had previously been part of folk rituals was monetised and transformed into a commercial event, reflecting what J. H. Plumb termed the commercialisation of leisure in eighteenth-century England.[40] Valentine's Day, distinguished by the production of cards manufactured and sold as desirable consumer objects, formed part of a commercialised culture characterised by profitable entertainments such as art exhibitions, balls, the circus, concert series, pleasure gardens, and the theatre.[41] Valentine lotteries were also incorporated into the wider vogue for state lotteries, with one lottery drawn on 14 February 1810 offering £200,000 in monetary prizes. A newspaper advertisement for the lottery featured a promotional song encouraging young suitors to purchase tickets:

> A *Ticket* might thousands of reasons display,
> Why her hand she should give him on Valentine's Day […]
>   Valentine's Day,
>   What would you say,
> To get EIGHTY THOUSAND on Valentine's Day?[42]

Valentine's Day in eighteenth-century England was therefore open to criticism from moralists, philosophers, and churchmen on two fronts: firstly as a superstitious and sacrilegious pagan ritual, and second as part of the new consumer society. The former represents Valentine's Day in its more traditional form, as a folk ritual celebrated through lotteries, divination, and customary gifting, and the latter in its explicitly modern commercial incarnation, marked by the exchange of cards.

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40 J. H. Plumb, *The Commercialisation of Leisure in Eighteenth-Century England* (Reading, 1974).
41 See Hugh Cunningham, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution c. 1780–c. 1880* (London, 1980) and John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (New York, 1997). For Valentine's Day balls see advertisements in *The Times* on 14 February 1815, Issue 9444, and 13 February 1822, Issue 11479.
42 *The Bury and Norwich Post: Or, Suffolk, Norfolk, Essex, Cambridgeshire, and Ely Advertiser*, Bury Saint Edmunds, 31 January 1810, Issue 1440.

MAKING VALENTINES: COMMERCE & NOSTALGIA

The eighteenth century saw a profusion of new types of printed paper goods, including satirical prints, trade cards, writing papers, school pieces, and greetings cards. The first patent for embossed paper was granted in Birmingham in 1796, the earliest dated printed valentine sold in London in 1797, and lithographic printing invented in Bavaria in 1798, facilitating the transformation of Valentine's Day into a commercial celebration. The first mechanical papermaking machine to produce continual rolls of paper was invented in France in 1799, patented in England two years later, and perfected by the Dartford inventor Bryan Donkin (1768–1855), financed by the Fourdrinier brothers.[43] Some scholars date the modern production line to the continuous production of the late eighteenth century, where newly uniform objects were churned out systematically by machines.[44] Yet the commercialisation and mechanisation of paper is not the whole story; homemade valentines such as true lovers knots, cut-paper cards and puzzle purses increasingly replaced lotteries from the mid-eighteenth century, blossoming as a genre between *c.* 1790 and *c.* 1860. These cards were created by men and women across a broad class spectrum, from weavers to soldiers, schoolmasters, writers, and the landed gentry.[45] It is also highly likely that many of the several hundred surviving cards were created by plebeian couples, for whom corroborating textual evidence has not survived. This article presents the flourishing of handmade cards as a response to the perceived modernity of romantic culture and commercialised leisure, which precipitated the valorisation of handmade objects and self-consciously archaic languages of love.

The art critic Dore Ashton presents objects as 'signals to the imagination to begin its work', isolating a small but essential difference between 'the reveries inspired by the hand-fashioned object and those dependent on the object produced en masse by machines'. Following the Industrial Revolution, the latter were frequently conceptualised as an anonymous clamouring or flood of goods, which together

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[43] Holloway, *The Game of Love*, 108-16; Maureen Green, 'The Look of the Books' in *The History of Oxford University Press*, ed. Simon Eliot (Oxford University Press, 2013), Vol. II, 227-76, at 230.

[44] *The Everyday Life Reader* ed. Ben Highmore (London and New York, 2002), 6.

[45] Samuel Bamford, *Early Days* (London, 1849), 177-9; Acrostic valentine from the schoolmaster William Spencer to Harriet Holmes, 1811–14, E.1207–1925, V&A; Cut-paper valentine by John Lovell, 1778, 161/133, WSA; Valentine poem from Robert Rushbrook to Elizabeth Cobbold, 14 March 1809, HA231/3/1/16, Suffolk Record Office, Ipswich (subsequently SRO); Valentines by Elizabeth Cobbold, published in *Cliff's Valentines* (Ipswich, 1813); Hand-drawn valentine in papers of Mary Anne Lee Warner, 1828, BUL 7/20, 615 x 1, Norfolk Record Office, Norwich (subsequently NRO).

obscured individual voices.[46] The word 'handmade' accordingly changed in meaning; during the seventeenth century, a 'handmade' object was something artificial – made by man rather than nature. However, by the early nineteenth century, in the face of the increasing mechanisation of production, the term developed new connotations, to mean something made by humans, as opposed to machines.[47] The production and sale of printed valentine cards, and commercialisation of romantic culture more broadly, provided individuals with an occasion to reinvigorate older handicrafts, with the modern creating a sense of nostalgia and prompting a return to the traditional. In this way, commercial culture generates 'forms not dreamt of in the commercial imagination', with handmade valentines constituting one of the 'much expounded, unprefigured and exciting effects' of consumer capitalism.[48]

Handmade valentines frequently invoked a pastoral idyll by using deliberately outmoded language and celebrating the virtues of simple rural life. Puzzle purses created in the 1790s adopted the archaic language of heroic love – associated with troubadours and knights errant – which had fallen out of favour during courtship in the 1720s to be replaced with the language of sensibility.[49] Cards also referenced the innocence and happiness of humble life through shepherds, lambs, and country cottages, and the beauties of nature through blossoming flowers and singing birds.[50] As Frank Kermode asserts, the pastoral was essentially an urban product, created by poets living in cities and universities. Rather than a simple dichotomy between urban and rural, city and country, these ideas had a dialectical relationship, with each premised on the absence of the other.[51] The transformation of Valentine's Day into a

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[46] Dore Ashton, 'From Achilles' Shield to Junk' in *The Man-Made Object* ed. Gyorgy Kepes (New York, 1966), 192-207 at 192.

[47] 'Handmade, *adj.*', *OED Online*, accessed 14 February 2018, http://www.oed.com.oxfordbrookes.idm.oclc.org/view/Entry/83894?rskey=qazajY&result=1&isAdvanced=false.

[48] Paul Willis, with Simon Jones, Joyce Canaan and Geoff Hurd, *Common Culture: Symbolic Work at Play in the Everyday Cultures of the Young* (Milton Keynes, 1990), 19. On the commercialisation of romantic customs more broadly see Holloway, *The Game of Love*, Ch. 4.

[49] Holloway, *The Game of Love*, 34-5, 57, 67. See puzzle purse unfolding from a red watercolour heart, *c.* 1790, OB1995.263, TPM; handmade circular valentine sent from 'your Wellwishing Sinsere Lover JOHN' to Aylesbury, 1 March 1815, Harris Museum, Preston (subsequently HMP).

[50] Cut paper valentine sent from Manchester to Liverpool, 14 February 1783, Temperley Collection (subsequently TC); Cut-paper valentine of a bower covered in bees with poem about Flora, *c.* 1790, OB1996.92, TPM; Flower cage valentine depicting a country cottage, revealing three hand-painted mice when the cage is lifted, 1815–40, C424, Museum of London (subsequently MOL); Printed valentine of 'Love binding Innocence' in papers of Mary Ann Lee Warner, 1828, BUL 7/20/13, NRO.

[51] Frank Kermode, *English Pastoral Poetry from the Beginnings to Marvell* (London, 1952), 14; Michael McKeon, 'The Pastoral Revolution' in *Refiguring Revolutions: Aesthetics and Politics from the English Revolution to the Romantic Revolution* ed. Kevin Sharpe and Steven N. Zwicker (London, 1998), 267-90, at 268, 271; Susan Snyder, *Pastoral Process: Spenser, Marvell, Milton* (Stanford, 1998), 1-3.

commercial celebration, and efflorescence of handmade cards, can therefore be viewed as a product of industrial modernity. The pastoral was, as Thomas McFarland writes, a form of nostalgia, arising from the 'disjunction between the unsatisfactoriness of actual life and the euphoria of an ideal vision'.[52] The practice of love through the creation and exchange of handmade valentines is therefore rooted in a particular sentimental view of the world, set against a modern backdrop of commerce and industry. It ties in with the vogue for idealized cottage-door scenes such as George Morland's oil painting *Johnny Going to the Fair* (*c.* 1786–7), which was suggestively re-titled *Valentine's Day* when reissued as an engraving in the London publisher John Dean's series *The Progress of Love* in 1787.

The vogue for handmade valentines can also be linked to the revival of interest in chivalry, following the publication of Richard Hurd's *Letters on Chivalry and Romance* (1762), the English translation of J. B. de la Curne de Sainte-Palaye's *Mémoires sur la Chevalerie* (1784) and Sir Walter Scott's historical romances, especially *Ivanhoe* (1820).[53] Historians have argued that the vogue for medievalism in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was 'rooted in a nostalgia for the ordinary', and a yearning for ancient customs amidst the social and economic disruption of the Industrial Revolution.[54] One puzzle purse sent by a man *c.* 1790 is painted with ancient castles flying the Union Flag, and ships sailing through clouds, which can only be cleared by a promise of marriage. The poem worships the recipient as 'my blest Divine' and 'sweet turtle dove', typifying chivalry's veneration of women and power to inspire poetry.[55] In 1816, the Romantic poet John Keats wrote a poem for his friend Mary Frogley on Valentine's Day, musing 'Hadst thou liv'd in days of old'. The poem situates their relationship 'when chivalry / Lifted up her lance on high', imagining Mary as a gentle maiden, and John a chivalrous knight performing heroic deeds such as slaying dragons in order to prove his love. These handmade puzzles and poems deliberately situated relationships in a mythical 'days of old', with

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[52] Thomas McFarland, *Shakespeare's Pastoral Comedy* (Chapel Hill, 1972), 45.

[53] Michele Cohen, '"Manners Make the Man: Politeness, Chivalry, and the Construction of Masculinity, 1750–1830', *Journal of British Studies* 44 (2005), 312-29, at 314, 316. Also see Mark Girouard, *The Return to Camelot: Chivalry and the English Gentleman* (New Haven and London, 1981), 18-38.

[54] Alice Chandler, *A Dream of Order: The Medieval Ideal in Nineteenth-Century Literature* (London, 1971), 52-3; Norman Vance, *The Sinews of the Spirit: The Ideal of Christian Manliness in Victorian Literature and Religious Thought* (Cambridge, 1985), 19.

[55] Puzzle purse with watercolour vignettes and handwritten poems, TC. A similar poem features in puzzle purse unfolding from a red watercolour heart, *c.* 1790, OB1995.263, TPM. Also see rebus valentine painted with love's coat of arms, featuring a red heart below a chevron, above which sit two white doves in beds of myrtle, *c.* 1814, card 53, HMP.

Valentine's Day providing a convenient link with this idealised past. As Eric Hobsbawm writes, invented traditions typically 'attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past', as 'responses to novel situations which take the form of reference to old situations'.[56] The old situation, in this case, was an imagined age of chivalry.

Personally-made valentines were invested with additional emotional value as the sender had taken the time to create and perfect them with their own hands. As the handwritten inscription on one cut-paper card reads, 'My dear behold these verses right…with my own hands I did them write'.[57] Sara Ahmed has argued that 'To give value to things is to shape what is near us', being both 'moved by things', and in being moved, making things.[58] The card in Figure 3 was created by William Pitt of Chichester for his future wife Anna Maria Heath. It is dated 14 February 1808, increasing the sentimental value of the object by inscribing it as a valentine. The date also memorialises the early stages of their courtship, before their marriage by licence twelve years later. The pattern has been created by making hundreds of tiny pricks in the paper using a pin. The man in the centre is likely William himself, with tulips to his left, symbolising honesty, and a declaration of love, and pansies to his right, symbolising thought (from the French *pensée*).[59] His sweetheart's name 'Ann' is enclosed within a crown at the top. Beneath is a handwritten verse from the Restoration poet John Wilmot's 'Too Bright is My Goddess' (*c.* 1680):

Too br^t Is m. Godd^{ss} h^r temp^e t. weak
Retire Di^e im^{ge} I f^l m. h^t break
Help L^e I dis^{ve} in a rap^e o. charms
At ye tho^t of y^{se} joys I sh^d m^t in h^r arms.

The card utilises antiquated language from over a century earlier, something characteristic of handmade valentines, as nostalgic objects possessing high sentimental value. The heavily abbreviated and unattributed verse flatters Anna Maria by presuming her prior knowledge of the author.[60] The high emotional value of this fragile paper

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[56] Eric Hobsbawm, 'Introduction: Inventing Traditions' in *The Invention of Tradition*, 1-2.
[57] Paper valentine folded into four hearts, on which perch kissing birds, north Devon or Cornwall, undated (eighteenth century), TC.
[58] Sara Ahmed, 'Happy Objects' in *The Affect Theory Reader* ed. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Durham & London, 2010), 31-3.
[59] Beverley Seaton, *The Language of Flowers: A History* (Charlottesville, VA, 1995), 141, 196.
[60] Holloway, *The Game of Love*, 24, 43.

object is revealed by its pristine condition more than two hundred years after it was created.
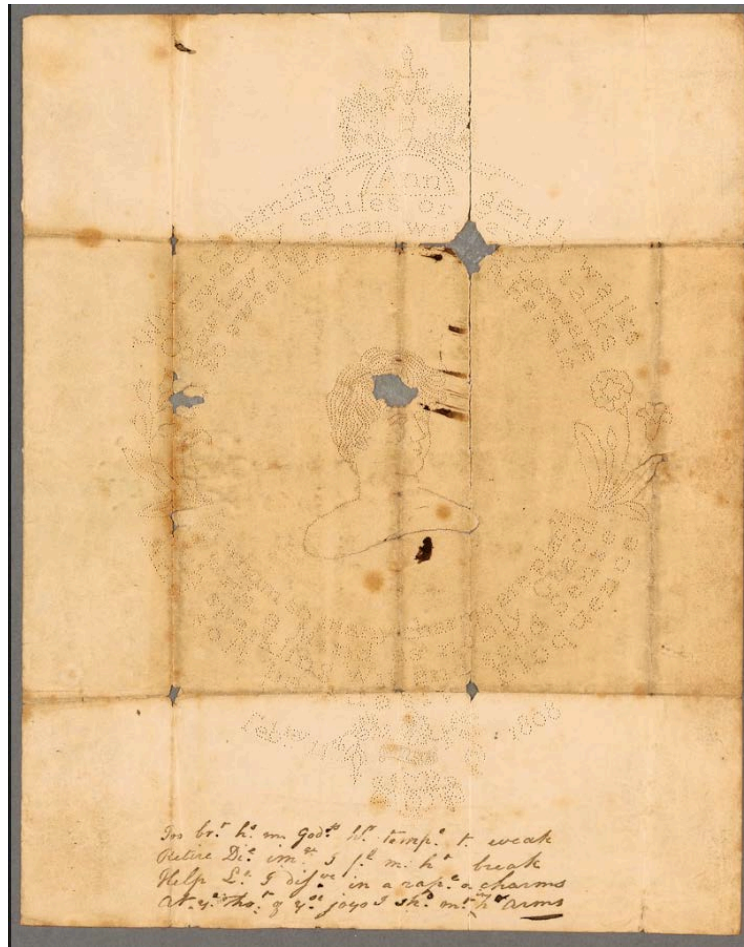

Figure 3. Pin prick valentine from William Pitt to Anna Maria Heath, Chichester, 1808, Add Mss 16,792, West Sussex Record Office, Chichester.

Paper cutting or scissor cutting (*scherenschnitte*) was a further new Valentine's Day tradition, which was also utilised to mark emotionally significant moments in the life cycle. Courting women popularly made intricate watch papers as gifts for their suitors, as handmade accompaniments to the popular consumer object, the pocket watch.[61] Between 1780 and 1800, the London hosier Richard Hall (1729–1801) created more than sixty white paper cut-outs, including a miniscule cut-paper mausoleum enveloped in flowers to mark the death of his first wife Eleanor in 1780. The paper featured a hand-drawn coffin, and is inscribed 'In Memory of E Hall' in ink. As David

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[61] Holloway, *The Game of Love*, 103. See for example watch paper with handwritten poem 'Forget me not', MED 328, TC, and watch paper designs painted in watercolour with pinprick borders, Cut Paper, Box 1, JJC.

Gauntlett writes, the act of making has a 'social dimension' that connects us with other people, while sharing our creations cements our connection to the world around us.[62] One handmade valentine created in 1801 is folded and cut in four sections to resemble a blooming white rose. Each petal contains an archaic handwritten verse, beginning 'The Valentine take not amiss, / your humble servant sent you this'.[63] The edges of each petal have been delicately scalloped and decorated with pinpricks, with painted leaves springing from each corner. In the centre are two blue and two yellow hearts, with pinprick and scalloped borders, the initials 'M A F', and date 1801.[64] These handmade ephemeral objects constitute a highly stylised means of emotional expression – governed by culturally and historically specific conventions, learned from others, and 'deployed creatively' by individuals.[65]

The mechanisation and standardisation of production has typically been presented as a negative development by historians, which possessed a 'destructive power' that destroyed local material culture and left 'no question of producing objects for the special requirements of the individual consumer, as had been traditional'.[66] However, since their advent in the seventeenth century, valentine poems, acrostics, and true lovers knots had always been created by hand. The invention of the commercial valentine therefore created an entirely new way for men and women to express their emotions using verses selected by printers and stationers. As the cultural theorist Paul Willis argues, commercial culture has 'supplied a much widened range of usable symbolic resources for the development and emancipation of everyday culture'. Consumption constitutes 'a kind of cultural production' as consumers 'do their own symbolic work…and create their own relationships to technical means of reproduction and transfer'.[67] While many printed valentine cards, like the example in Figure 4, were augmented by additional handwritten messages, a substantial number remained entirely anonymous, in the state in which they were purchased from retailers. We know that these cards were sent since they were folded, addressed and postmarked, notwithstanding the blank page inside. For some, a printed valentine could possess

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[62] David Gauntlett, *Making is Connecting: The Social Meaning of Creativity, from DIY and Knitting to YouTube and Web 2.0* (Cambridge, 2011), 2.

[63] For similar verses see folded heart-shaped valentine, *c.* 1750, X54/1, Cornwall Record Office, Truro; puzzle purse, *c.* 1820, HMU 1/1/3, East Sussex Record Office, Brighton.

[64] Cut-paper and watercolour valentine inscribed 'M. A. 1801 F', possibly made by Michael Andres, 1801, V&A, E.500-1967.

[65] Scheer, 'Are Emotions a Kind of Practice', 195.

[66] Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, 339.

[67] Willis, *Common Culture*, 18-20.

sufficient emotional meaning without further need for intervention. From *c.* 1790 until *c.* 1860, puzzle purses, pinprick and cut-paper valentines coexisted with printed cards, democratising the language of love for a brief period by providing additional verses, images and symbols for the mediation and communication of romantic emotions.

SENDING VALENTINES: THE WORLD TURNED UPSIDE DOWN?

For one day every year, Valentine's Day provided a brief opportunity for men and women to overturn hierarchies of gender and class, and in the longer term reinforce these norms. [68] In this sense, it resembled other popular rituals involving 'status reversals' such as the riotous behaviour of Whipping Toms in Leicester on Shrove Tuesday, individuals building dams to block the streets of Exeter on Lawless Day (Oak Apple Day), or 'guising' during the Twelve Days of Christmas, where young men and women swapped clothes or wore outfits split down the middle.[69] Anthropologists have outlined how such rituals of celebration communicated the 'major classifications and categories' regulating society 'both through ordering them and through disordering them'. [70] Disorderly behaviour on Valentine's Day enabled men and women 'to transcend, if only for a moment, those boundaries, social as well as sexual, that dominated ordinary life'. Should this behaviour have escaped the realms of festival, games, and play, it would have disrupted the social order, and the established routines that regulated the making of marriages.[71]

Comic valentines (also known as mocking or vulgar valentines) featured crude caricatures and insulting verse printed roughly on single sheets of thin paper. Such cards were not primarily sent by couples, but by members of the public, targeting nagging wives and emasculated husbands as a 'community comment on the nature of love and its acceptable limits'.[72] Leigh Eric Schmidt and Barry Shank have situated the growth of

[68] On carnival as a reversal of the everyday, or the 'world upside down', see Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, 267-80.
[69] Bob Bushaway, *By Rite: Custom, Ceremony and Community in England 1700–1800* (London, 1982), 179-80; Hutton, *The Stations of the Sun*, 95-6; Peter Borsay, '"All the town's a stage": Urban Ritual and Ceremony 1660–1800' in *The Transformation of English Provincial Towns 1600–1800*, ed. Peter Clark (London, 1984), 235, 242-3.
[70] Barbara Babcock, 'Too Many, Too Few: Ritual Modes of Signification', *Semiotica* 23.3–4 (1978): 291-302 at 296.
[71] John R. Gillis, *For Better, For Worse: British Marriages, 1600 to the Present* (New York and Oxford, 1985), 23.
[72] Annebella Pollen, '"The Valentine has fallen upon evil days": Mocking Victorian Valentines and the Ambivalent Laughter of the Carnivalesque', *Early Popular Visual Culture* 12.2 (2014): 127-73.

comic valentines among the commercialisation of romantic customs, arguing that mocking cards provided an attractive way for retailers to expand the celebration's profitability and commercial reach.[73] For Annebella Pollen, comic valentines represent a 'containment of carnival' by adapting older traditions of mockery and misrule and presenting them in a more modern form.[74] The earliest surviving comic valentine was printed between *c.* 1790 and 1815, and depicts an old woman with a haggard face being courted by over-refined man with spindly effeminate legs. The text reads:

> Madam I've found a Beau for you,
> So perfect match'd, I'm sure he'll do,
> For he like you does take delight.
> To make his form a very fright.[75]

Such cards policed the boundaries of femininity by mocking women who fell below contemporary ideals of youth or beauty. Other cards designed for female recipients came appliquéd with breeches – a symbol of masculine power and authority – and the motto 'Something I hope you'll <u>never</u> wear'.[76] Women equally sent mocking valentines, with one card sent to Thomas Williams Esq. of Oxford in 1814 depicting a foppish man above the printed verse 'if all men, were like thee – then, / I'd sooner die than marry'.[77] Comic valentines thus provided a means of lampooning old, unattractive or assertive women, and vain or effeminate men, as a way of policing gender identities through commercial culture.

Valentine cards also provided an effective outlet for mocking modern attitudes to love, marriage, and sexual morality. Between *c.* 1806 and *c.* 1822, the Ipswich writer and philanthropist Elizabeth Cobbold (1767–1824) revived the valentine lottery as a '*Jeu de Societé*' by throwing a party for sixty to eighty unmarried men and women on Valentine's Eve. At the party, gentlemen would draw cut-paper valentines from one basket, and ladies from another, as a 'unique and highly interesting amusement'.[78] Many of Cobbold's cards satirized romantic customs, cut to resemble 'Love's Riddle

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[73] Schmidt, 'The Fashioning of a Modern Holiday', 233; Barry Shank, *A Token of My Affection: Greeting Cards and American Business Culture* (New York, 2004), 42.
[74] Pollen, '"The Valentine has fallen upon evil days"', 19-20.
[75] Paper print design for a mocking valentine in black ink, *c.* 1790–1815, OB1997.17, TPM.
[76] Lace paper valentines with applied breeches, *c.* 1810-38, 34.170-196-7, MOL.
[77] Comic valentine in pencil and watercolour addressed to Thomas Williams Esq., *c.* 1814, OB1995.301, TPM.
[78] Cobbold, *Cliff's Valentines* (Ipswich, 1813), i-ii.

Book', and a 'Ridicule' (a small handbag, and pun about ridiculing a coxcomb). One extant card depicts a group of bellringers above a humorous verse describing a man who is 'fond of many belles'. It cautions, 'But oh beware! While prone to dangling / You don't create a little jangling'.[79] Following one of her parties in 1809, Cobbold received a poem from her friend Colonel Robert Rushbrook (1779–1845) lamenting the sexual immorality of fashionable society. Rushbrook saved particular scorn for Frederick, Duke of York, who had been engulfed in scandal for allegedly selling commissions through his mistress Mrs Clarke:

> I've exhausted your patience – so swear to be brief –
> What think you about the Commander in Chief?
> How charming it is that an impudent strumpet
> Thus loud his amours to the People sh[d] trumpet
> One cannot stop <u>young</u> mouths, nor yet can you gag <u>age</u>
> But all alike prate of the Field Marshall's Baggage –
> What a Devil incarnate! for what can be fowler
> Than to <u>coch</u> the Duke with the infamous Dowler.[80]

Rushbrook also disparaged groups such as the Society for the Suppression of Vice (est. 1802), 'With <u>Virtue</u> & <u>Justice</u> their only Inducement / They intend to destroy ev'ry place of amusement'.[81] Hence the celebration provided a type of 'safety-valve' where the populace could legitimately and openly mock attitudes to love, marriage, and sexual morality for one day each year.[82]

Making love was understood as a typically masculine pursuit, which was unseemly in women; popular maxims held that 'Of all the violent passions, that which least becomes a woman is love'. [83] As part of the inversion of usual behaviour, women could seize upon Valentine's Day to send bold declarations of love to men. Due to the risk to a woman's modesty and virtue, most of these cards were sent anonymously. Anonymous cards were representative of women's participation in civil society more

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[79] Cut-paper valentine by Elizabeth Cobbold depicting a group of bellringers, Ipswich, *c.* 1806–22, TC.
[80] William Dowler was Mary Anne Clarke's lover, and Assistant-Commissary of Stores. See David R. Fisher, 'The Duke of York Scandal, 1809',
http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/periods/hanoverians/duke-york-scandal-1809
[81] Valentine poem from Robert Rushbrook to Elizabeth Cobbold, 14 March 1809, HA231/3/1/16, SRO.
[82] Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, 283-4.
[83] *Maxims and Moral Reflections, By the Duke De La Rochefoucault* (Edinburgh, 1798), Maxim CCCCXL, 105. On the language of love as an important locus of power, see Nicole Eustace, *Passion is the Gale: Emotion, Power, and the Coming of the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, 2008), 130-1; Katie Barclay and Rosalind Carr, 'Women, Love and Power in Enlightenment Scotland', *Women's History Review* 27.2 (2018): 176-98, at 181; Barclay, *Love, Intimacy and Power: Marriage and Patriarchy in Scotland, 1650–1850* (Manchester, 2011), 91-2.

broadly, where women's published contributions to periodicals – particularly on typically masculine topics – were almost five times more likely than men's to be submitted under pseudonyms. Sometimes even a pseudonym could contravene conventions of modesty, with women preferring to remain strictly anonymous.[84] The Lancashire weaver and radical writer Samuel Bamford (1788–1872) remembered receiving an anonymous valentine as a schoolboy in the 1790s, which had 'jammed fast' the door to his family home. The card featured 'Cupids, and darts, and bars of love, and birds, and chains, and bleeding hearts, all cut out, and coloured'. It was passed around to the amusement of his family, until being seized by his aunt, who threatened to expose Samuel's admirer at Sunday School by identifying her handwriting. In a chivalrous move to protect his admirer, Samuel snuck into his aunt's room in order to destroy the valentine and 'put an end to all talk – whether feigned or in earnest – about its exposure in other places'.[85] Women commonly teased the recipients of cards to try and discover their identity, using handwritten verses such as 'My name is Jack ran[n] / find me out if you can' and 'Guess who I am and whence this came / For I will not reveal my name'.[86] Such teasing was part of women's playful subversion of romantic norms, which was made possible by their anonymity.

Enterprising manufacturers such as Dobbs & Co designed cards featuring imagery and verses targeted specifically at female consumers. One design from 1814 is hand-painted with a kneeling woman playing a lyre with a white dove hovering above her, symbolising tenderness, innocence and love. The poem reads, 'O haste ye little dove / Bear quickly bear these tender lines / To the dear youth I love'.[87] As in poems featured in valentine writers, these lines typically emphasised women's pure and tender hearts, with one poem about 'The Mind of a Maid' emphasising how 'My artless tongue shall still impart, / Unfeign'd the language of the heart'. Another pledged, 'harmless still is my design, 'Tis but to be your Valentine'.[88] Thus while Valentine's Day granted women access to the language of love, it was often a distinctly feminine version that underscored female tenderness and innocence. The printed valentine in Figure 4 was

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84 Shelley Costa, 'The "Ladies' Diary": Gender, Mathematics, and Civil Society in Early-Eighteenth-Century England', *Osiris* 17 (2002): 49-73, at 65-7, 69-70, and Chart 4.3.
85 Bamford, *Early Days*, 171-2.
86 John 'Sixteen String Jack' Rann (1750–74) was a famous highwayman executed in 1774. Hand-coloured lithograph valentine to Mr William Murray, London, *c.* 1825-35, E.427-1953, V&A, and anonymous love poem to Mr Rowland Jr of Lee, Kent, 1827, E.1536-1929, V&A.
87 *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase & Fable* ed. John Ayto (London, 2007), seventeenth edition, 411; Embossed watercolour valentine stamped 'Dobb's Patent', 1814, E.1534-1929, V&A.
88 *Every Lady's Own Valentine Writer* (1794), 9-10, 31.

sent from a young woman to a student at Eton, featuring an endless knot of love, and a chain of love held aloft by Venus and Cupid, which even Hercules cannot sever. Contrasting with these bold motifs, the reverse features a handwritten poem describing how she was 'to[o] Bashfull still to tell to you my mind', underscoring her hesitance in order to safeguard her modesty. [89] To some extent, then, Valentine's Day enabled women to take ownership of the language of love. Yet the continuing emphasis on female modesty, chastity, bashfulness and virtue suggests that the world had not been entirely turned upside down.

Figure 4. Hand-coloured printed valentine posted to James Darling at Eton College, 1812, PRSMG 2001.14, Harris Museum, Preston.

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[89] Hand-coloured printed valentine from 'J. D.' in Richmond to James Darling at Eton College, 1812, PRSMG 2001.14, HMP.

CONCLUSION

This article has endeavoured to show how valentine cards both illuminate the languages and idioms of love, and reveal wider patterns of social change. The gradual replacement of lotteries with personally selected valentines in the second half of the eighteenth century is demonstrative of growing literacy rates, rising individualism, and the glorification of marriage for love. The celebration became more a private domestic event than a festival shared by family and friends, with the public dimension persisting largely through the sending and receipt of comic valentines. As Ronald Hutton writes in his study of 'Merry England', Valentine's Day represented one of the 'private customs' like the exchange of New Year's gifts that was 'not affected by changes in religion' and could be shared by 'the whole political and social hierarchy of the land'.[90] The emergence of the printed valentine in the 1790s, consequent efflorescence of handmade cards, and invention of the comic valentine further reveal how traditional folk rituals responded to and evolved with the advancing commercialisation of leisure. Valentine's Day provides a case in point for Hugh Cunningham's assertion that 'recreations which were threatened in one form could evolve', to 'survive and even grow' in popularity.[91] The number of valentine cards sent each year grew exponentially, from 60,000 cards sent in 1804, to 80,000 the following year, and 200,000 by the 1830s.[92]

By 1831, Valentine's Day was firmly established as a day appointed by lovers 'for evincing their taste in selecting curiously bordered sheets of paper, and their genius in rhyming among the roses and Cupids which ornament them'.[93] The creation and sale of valentine cards thrived as a 'distinct and flourishing branch of trade', with stationers, perfumers and jewellers embracing the commercial opportunity.[94] The celebration maintained its power to disrupt the usual practices of romantic love: in Thomas Hardy's novel *Far From the Madding Crowd* (1874), Bathsheba Everdene causes chaos by sending an anonymous valentine card purchased from the local stationers to the austere Farmer Boldwood, sealed with the words 'MARRY ME' in wax. After identifying her

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[90] Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England: The Ritual Year 1400–1700* (Oxford, 1994), 245-6.

[91] Cunningham, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution*, 22.

[92] *The Times*, 15 February 1804, 5496; *The Ipswich Journal,* 23 February 1805; Vincent, *Literacy and Popular Culture*, note 77, 292.

[93] Paul Pry, 'Valentine's Day', *The National Magazine* 2.3 (1831), 305. The author is a reference to the titular character in John Poole's farce *Paul Pry* (1825), who habitually invaded other people's privacy, including by opening their letters. Cf. *Saint Valentine's Day. The Post Mistress*, London, 1839, 2010,7081.6454, British Museum.

[94] *The Illustrated London News*, 14 February 1874, 154.

handwriting, he travels to her farm to propose, misreading the card as '"a sort of prophetic instinct – the beginning of a feeling that you would like me"'.[95] Through these cards, we see a folk ritual evolving to meet the needs of a changing society, as ways of *doing* love were assimilated into the consumer economy, and sheets of paper were transformed into important signifiers of love, power, and modernity. These mutable ephemeral objects provide a valuable glimpse of how individuals navigated emotion and social change beyond text.

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[95] Thomas Hardy, *Far From the Madding Crowd* (London, 1874), 112-17, 131, 148-51.