A Middle English Poem on a Binding Fragment: an Early Valentine?

Abstract

On the parchment binding fragment which is now Cambridge, Trinity College, R.2.70 are twenty-seven lines of Middle English verse, copied the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century, and accompanied by an image of a pierced heart. Preceded by a couplet which may or may not form a part of what follows, the lines take the form of three rhyme royal stanzas with concluding four-line envoy. They constitute a lover's petition, addressed to 'Susan', asking for merciful treatment and offering compliments of a mostly conventional kind. The tone of the poem is difficult to assess, since at times it humorously mocks features of the late medieval courtly love lyric. Certain features identify it as a love epistle, however, signed off in covert terms by the sender in the envoy, and intended for delivery at some point towards the end of winter; and it is similar in a number of respects to surviving examples of poems associated with Valentine's day. The original function of the parchment on which the poem was written is unclear, but it is within the bounds of possibility that the decorated poem was copied onto a single small piece of parchment as a missive for delivery. It may thus constitute a very early example of a Valentine's day message.

Cambridge, Trinity College, R.2.70 (hereafter TCC, R.2.70), a binding fragment, preserves a Middle English lyric (transcribed below) which appears to be an otherwise unknown early example of a Valentine's day poem, addressed to 'Susan*e*'. The parchment fragment (measuring 270mm x 141)[i] was at some point cut down the

centre, probably when a split in the board beneath it was mended with some form of reinforcement. Having been glued back to the board over the reinforcement the two strips of parchment were later removed from the binding to which they were attached.[ii] Now that they are reunited in a transparent archival sleeve in their original form as one fragment, it is possible to read across them twenty-seven lines of Middle English verse, copied in a late fifteenth- or early sixteenth-century hand:[iii] first a couplet, whose relationship to what follows is unclear; then three rhyme royal stanzas, which take the form of a petition from a lover to a lady for 'redres of all*e* my sorowes smert'; and finally two more couplets which appear to form an envoy to the preceding stanzas. Below the lines is painted a red, bleeding heart pierced cross-wise by two red arrows, and surmounted by a green quatrefoil in whose separate leaflets some words have been copied. The initial letters of the rhyme royal stanzas and the envoy are elaborately extended to include small human faces, now only faintly visible, and in the right-hand margin of the right-hand strip are some elaborate calligraphic initials, including an 'S' and an 'A'[iv] (the recto of the fragment, showing text and illustration, is reproduced below).[v]

The date of the fragment's accession by Trinity College Library is not clear. It was not included in the catalogue of the library's medieval manuscripts made by M. R. James and published in 1901-2, and the earliest references to it in the library's records date from 1913, when W. W. Greg showed an interest in it. In July 1913, prior to his resignation from the librarianship of Trinity, Greg sent a postcard from Switzerland to his deputy concerning the fragment. He stated that he had been given it 'some time ago' by the Vice Master, William Aldis Wright (who had himself been Librarian of Trinity between 1863 and 1870). Aldis Wright believed that the fragment

had originally come from the library, and therefore Greg advised that it should not be considered a donation.[vi]

Whether the fragment began life as a single piece of parchment rather than part of a larger codex is also unclear. The verso is blank, which might mean that the fragment was originally part of the final leaf of a larger manuscript (or gathering), or alternatively might argue for its early existence as a single piece of parchment, designed for presentation in the manner of a letter or 'bill'. It may also have had a fairly long life as a pastedown. Greg's notes suggest that it was 'used in the binding of a book in which it has apparently been pasted against other manuscript matter, most likely some fourteenth century liturgical work, which has caused an off-set'. The off-set is still visible, in the form of carefully-spaced script which runs at right angles to the Middle English poem. There is nothing to indicate that the fragment did not start out as a small, independent piece of parchment used in the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century by a fairly practised scribe for the copying and embellishment of a love-poem.

As will be evident from the text supplied below, the tone of the love lyric is humorously uneven, perhaps deliberately poking fun at the platitudes of courtly love poetry. While its addressee, 'Susan*e*', is praised in conventional terms for her 'plesaunce', 'gentilnes', and 'curtesie', it turns out that she is also a 'lady of venerye': a mistress of hunting, but perhaps also of sexual activity.[vii] The sly suggestiveness of this phrase is developed in the lover's petition that she should hold him in her arms to keep him warm, offer him 'daliaunce',[viii] and should take her 'plesaunce' of his body. Some element of sexual suggestiveness may also play around the couplet preceding the rhyme royal stanzas; although it is hard to read and its relationship to the following lines is unclear, it makes reference to someone who 'wrought folye … w*ith*

a man priuely'. The final rhyme royal stanza returns to the need for secrecy ('kepe it secret and not disclose'), and the lover signs off in the concluding four lines with a cryptic puzzle which sounds as if it is meant to suggest his own name.

It is tempting to interpret this lyric as a petition conceived for a real 'Susan' by an admirer familiar with the tropes of late Middle English courtly verse who was sufficiently practised as a scribe to copy and ornament his poem and to draw at the end of it the conjoined motifs of quatrefoil and bleeding heart. In some respects, though, the poem reads rather more as an exercise in courtly pastiche, forged by the courtly admirer with an eye to humorous effect. Susan's reputation, for example, resounds 'throwe all*e* lumbardye' (Lombardy): an odd-seeming location in this context since references to Lombardy may for late medieval English readers have evoked stories of tyrants and tyranny rather than of alluring women.[ix] Furthermore, the 'Susan*e*' named in the poem may have some connection with the biblical Susanna rather than (or as well as) with any real female. The story of Susanna, who was spied on while bathing by lascivious elders who then tried to blackmail her into responding to their sexual advances, was reasonably well known, surviving in a late Middle English version, in alliterative verse, as 'The Pistill of Susan'.[x] In late medieval illustrated contexts it evidently had the same kind of erotic potential as the story of Bathsheba, seen bathing by King David.[xi] The addressee of the binding fragment's lyric may have been hailed as 'Susan*e* the secunde' with these associations of the biblical Susanna in mind.[xii]

Other possibly illuminating analogues to this lyric are the clutch of late Middle English courtly lyrics which include personal names. One survives in fragmentary form inscribed on a pillar in a church.[xiii] Others are found in manuscripts which clearly served unusually specific functions in family, household or otherwise

delimited local contexts, like the compilation made by the Cheshire gentleman Humphrey Newton, Oxford, Bodleian Library, Lat. misc. c. 66, which contains poems addressed to 'Elyn' or 'Elin', to 'Margeret' and to 'M'.[xiv] Some of the poems copied by Newton encode the names of addressees or senders in different forms of cryptic device, usually acrostic, and such puzzles seem to have enjoyed some favour: Charles of Orleans's personal manuscript of largely French poems, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, fr. 25458, includes a Middle English acrostic poem to Anne Molins,[xv] and in other fifteenth-century compilations, personal names are encoded in alphabet puzzles, puns or other forms of covert communication to be enjoyed by the coteries who formed the readers of these kinds of social verse.[xvi] Chaucer's poem 'To Rosemounde' may derive from a context of this kind; like the poem under discussion here, it cultivates a semi-humorous tone, and its reference to Rosamounde's beauty as outstanding across the whole 'mappemonde' might be compared to the praise of Susan's reputation 'throwe all*e* lumbardy*e*'.[xvii] The poem on this binding fragment takes its place alongside these examples as an instance of a kind of writing that enjoyed some currency.

The form of this poem – three (or possibly four) seven-line stanzas, with a four-line envoy – defines it as a *ballade*, originating in one of the French *formes fixes* popularized in English following their adoption by Chaucer and Gower in the late fourteenth century. The form was in widespread use in fifteenth-century English verse writing. Many *ballades*, like this one, are constructed as lovers' petitions, with the envoy offering an opportunity for the lover to 'sign off' in some way;[xviii] and a number are framed as 'bills' or 'epistles', as if for transmission in material form to their addressees.[xix] While the petition to Susan does not at any point define itself as a letter, its content and form suggest that like many late medieval love *ballades* it was

conceived as 'a written message, in verse',[xx] and it is possible that it began life as a single, carefully decorated sheet designed to be given to its addressee. If so, it is a very unusual survival, since most Middle English verse love epistles have been preserved in the context of manuscript compilations, whether as careful copies or as flyleaf additions (sometimes perhaps in draft form).[xxi]

One unusual and suggestive analogue to the petition to Susan is the love poem copied for Margery Paston by a family scribe in the context of a letter sent to her future husband, John Paston III, in February 1477.[xxii] Although these rough couplets are hardly in themselves a love epistle, their context in a letter which is mostly about love confers this status on them. The letter's date and salutation – Margery addresses it to 'Ryght reu*er*ent and wurschypfull and my ryght welebeloued Voluntyne' – also suggest that it is a Valentine's day gesture, in line with a custom apparently developed in England and France in the late fourteenth century which encouraged the writing and sending of love poems on a February date supposedly commemorating this saint.[xxiii] Such poems survive in ballade form among the works of Gower, for example, and in the English poems of Charles of Orleans.[xxiv] The poem to Susan does not make explicit reference to St Valentine, but its allusions to frosty weather (line 11) and to summer as a season expected in the future (line 13) do not preclude the possibility that it was conceived as a Valentine's day gesture. Its address to a named recipient, and its final cryptic signing off, are still recognizable as characteristic features of the Valentine's day message.

Written survivals of what has been called 'the courtly vogue of writing occasional poems for the saint's day'[xxv] are now, like Middle English love epistles, mostly preserved in the context of longer works or of manuscript anthologies. But they were presumably sometimes transmitted from person to person in more

ephemeral form on single sheets or scraps of parchment or paper, and it may be that

the poem to Susan is a relic of this practice: in other words, an early Valentine's day

card.[xxvi] The care with which the text has been decorated certainly seems to indicate

that the scribe regarded it as something more than an extended pen trial. The pierced

heart below the poem is carefully executed and coloured, and the quatrefoil which

surmounts it contains tiny letters[xxvii] which were presumably of some significance to

the whole design. Images of bleeding and/or pierced hearts occur with some

frequency in devotional contexts but are less common in secular ones.[xxviii] The image

of the four-leafed clover or quatrefoil again occurs in devotional or instructive

contexts, its significance in this regard elaborated for fifteenth-century English

readers in the poem known as *The Quatrefoil of Love.*[xxix] This motif also had a secular

currency, however. One of the poems in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawlinson C. 813,

an early sixteenth-century compilation which includes much social verse, describes

the symbolism of the quatrefoil for secular lovers, itemizing the correspondence of its

four leaves to the qualities of desire, humility, boldness, and kindness. Unusually, the

speaker is a woman, one who teasingly locates these qualities in an individual whose

name 'tell I ne can' (line 3).[xxx]

Poems of this kind may have been copied and delivered in the same way as

other forms of love token, such as the rings and brooches, often with amatory

inscriptions, which were commonly exchanged, not just between betrothed couples

but also between friends and lovers.[xxxi] In the case of rings, the short English or

French verses (poesies) which were often inscribed on the outside or more commonly

the inside surface meant that these objects eventually became known as 'posy

rings'.[xxxii] An example is an early fifteenth-century finger ring found at Godstow

Abbey (now London, British Museum, AF 1075) inscribed on the inside 'Most in

mynd and yn myn herrt /Lothest from you ferto departt'. On the outside, however, it is decorated with images of the Trinity, Virgin and Child and a male saint, and therefore reveals, in the same way as the Valentine missive, the interplay of religious imagery and secular verse.[xxxiii] Diana O'Hara's work on the giving of tokens in relation to the making of marriage in the sixteenth century emphasizes the flexibility and ambiguity surrounding this practice, but suggests that different gifts could be appropriate to different stages of a relationship, with some intended as preliminary gestures of affection and others as more contractual items.[xxxiv] Often gifts were used as a strategy to mark the progression, or promote the development, of a relationship.[xxxv] As a personal love message, the carefully composed and decorated Valentine poem on TCC, R.2.70 could be seen a means of expressing the hope for, or celebrating, an amorous liaison.[xxxvi] Although we cannot be certain that the poem on this piece of parchment ever changed hands in the form of a missive, it is arguably no less significant than the other kinds of material objects which remain as testimony to practices of social gift and exchange.[xxxvii]

The teasing obscurities of the poem preserved on the fragment which is now TCC, R.2.70 highlight the difficulties of interpreting social and coterie verse. As Greg noted, 'The interpretation of the poem is not easy & is not intended to be so'; the 'allusive and secret manner of the composition' stands in the way of making much sense of what the speaker is trying to say to his addressee. Even though some of its significance remains hidden, however, the poem constitutes useful evidence for the medieval English existence of the Valentine's day poem. Its survival as a fragment that might derive from a single piece of parchment raises the intriguing possibility that such poems were produced for personal delivery and not conceived simply as components of fictional correspondences and social games.

Text

TCC, R.2.70, recto

Susan*e* the secunde, patron of plesaunce	1
That call*e*d is so throwe all*e* lumbardye,	
Righ*te* demure of chere and of contenaunce,	
And in daunsyng, sport and curtesie,	
Wele demeand and lady of venerye:	5
Remembre y*our* s*er*vaunt that righ*te* true is;	
W*ith* that reward not disdayn*e* hym to kys.	

And of your*e* gentilnes se that he	
This frosty wedir be nat lost for colde,	
And that not defawte in you founde be;	10
So that in somer it may be said and tolde	
Ye kept him warm w*ith* yo*ur* armys folde,	
And w*ith* the chere that ye hym made	
Full*e* ofte ye made his hart righ*te* glade.	

Now*e* redres of all*e* my sorowes smert,	15
That righte true be w*ith*outen variaunce,	
I you biseche, w*ith* sore wounded hert;	
Me counforte throwe your*e* daliaunce,	
And of my body take your*e* plesaunce;	
And kepe it secret and not disclose	20
Whom*e* to be true I can suppose.	

By him that in forestes walketh*e* wyde	
Where noon*e* may passe w*ith* out his gyd,	
Nor ken*e* may in dale nor doun*e*	
But that he is other blake or broun*e*.	25

Explanatory notes

Manuscript contractions have been expanded and italicized according to conventional practice (some of the apparent contractions expanded here as final –e may be otiose flourishes). All punctuation and capitalization is editorial. Before the first line of the stanzas to 'Susan*e* the secunde' are two further lines, each damaged at the start. They seem to read '[…] had wrought ffolye / In hir […] w*ith* a man priuely' (Greg transcribed the second line as 'on hir gardeyne w*ith* a man priuely'). The word 'Jh*esu*' is also visible in the upper left-hand corner of the fragment, above these lines.

1 Greg noted that 'The first two lines clearly refer to Susanna of Babylon, the next two point less certainly to Susanna of Rome, a patron saint of Parma, the territory of which included Piacenza (Plaisaunce, with a play of words) in Lombardy'. While the associations of Susanna of Babylon might have been appropriate in the context of a sexually suggestive love poem (see above), it is harder to see the relevance of Susanna of Rome (a Christian martyr in the time of Diocletian, who died c. 295, and whose feast day is 11 August). At any rate, since the addressee of the poem is *Susane the secunde* there is no need to identify her specifically with either of these.

A variant form of the phrase *patroune of plaisaunce* is attested by the *MED* in the late fifteenth-century poem *The Assembly of Gods* (*NIMEV* 4005), at line 376: 'Dame Venus … Patronesse of pleasaunce, be namyd well she myght', a fact which may have some significance for the date of the TCC, R.2.70 poem. The earliest witness is Cambridge, Trinity College, R.3.19 (late fifteenth century), followed by editions printed in 1498, c. 1500 and c. 1505 (*STC* 17005-17007.5). The only other manuscript witness, in BL, Royal 18 D ii, seems to have been copied from one of these printed editions.

While the first letter of the third word is fairly certainly an 's', the reading *fecunde* is not out of the question: *fecunde* was used of courtly ladies and also of the Virgin. The citations in *MED* include John Lydgate's *Valentine to Our Lady*: 'Rachel was feyre, Lia was eke fecounde, And ryche also was þe qweene Candace' (line 29).

2 *lumbardye*: Lombardy.

5 *demeand*: behaved or mannered (*OED*); the attestations include Lydgate's *Temple of Glass* (line 1051).

7 This line is metrically awkward and the scribe added *to* above the line; the meaning seems to be 'when you reward him don't disdain to kiss him'.

11 This line suggests a winter date of composition and/or presentation. A worm-hole in the parchment has obscured parts of the letters in the final words of lines 11 and 12.

12 *defawte*: failure, absence.

18 *daliaunce*: intimate conversation.

19 The suggestion 'take your pleasure of my body' is unusually frank for a courtly love poem of this kind.

22-25 The cryptic envoy seems likely to encode a name: perhaps something along the lines of Darkwood, Greenwood, or Whitewood. Oliver Pickering suggests to us in correspondence that the lines may evoke 'some sort of green man figure', while Greg's notes point to a possible allusion to 'the ride of Cupid through forests etc., from Andreas Capellanus through Chaucer and others' (he attributes the suggestion to his friend Robert Steele, one of the editors of the English poems of Charles of Orleans for the Early English Text Society, published in 1941). What may have been a conventional association between lovers and forests is suggested in the late fifteenth-/early sixteenth-century lyric 'I must go walk the wood so wild' (Ringler, *Bibliography and Index*, TM 670). For a similarly cryptic verse envoy, headed

'Nomen auctoris', see the verse satire on John Baptist Grimaldi in A. H. Thomas and I. D. Thornley (eds), *The Great Chronicle of London* (London, 1938), 365 ('The maker of this legend, If any man lyst knowe / Axe ffor hym in Aylysbury, there doun In the vale / Myller of a wyndmyll, that standyth there ffull lowe …').

23 *gyd*: probably *MED* 1, one who guides, leads.

24 *kene*: this seems the correct reading, although at first sight the initial letter looks rather like an r- (hence *rene*: *MED renen*, to prepare, clear a way for). The likeliest meaning is *MED* 7, to go, come, journey, move.

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Endnotes

[i] These are maximum dimensions. The left hand strip is 70mm wide and the right hand strip is 71mm wide.

[ii] We are grateful to Edward Cheese, Book and Manuscript Conservator of the Fitzwilliam Museum and Trinity College Library, for inspecting the fragment and advising on its function in the binding to which it must once have been attached. He suggests that the fragment must have been the board-sheet of a Gothic binding. Marks on the fragment suggest that the binding from which it was removed had five sewing supports laced into the boards, two pairs of which have convergent lacing paths. The boards were probably of oak, although it is difficult to be certain of this given that the fragment has been thoroughly wetted, probably to remove it from the binding and allow the adhesive which held it in place to be scraped away.

[iii] The features of the hand are essentially secretary and are similar to those illustrated in plate 12 (ii) of M. B. Parkes, *English Cursive Book Hands 1250-1500* (Ilkley, 1979), dated as c. 1470. Our suggested dating of 'fifteenth or early sixteenth century' allows for the possibility that a scribe writing in the early sixteenth century would use a script learned a generation earlier. A late fifteenth-century date for the hand of the text on the binding fragment is consonant with Edward Cheese's assessment of the date of the binding of which it was part. We are very grateful to Dr Teresa Webber for her comments on the hand and to Dr Oliver Pickering for his comments on the dating of the hand and on other aspects of this fragment and the text it preserves.

[iv] Scribally-executed faces of this kind are not uncommon in manuscripts of this date. Some are identified in Kathleen Scott (general ed.), *An Index of Images in English Manuscripts from the Time of Chaucer to Henry VIII, c. 1380-c. 1509.* Volumes published thus far (all London) are *The Bodleian Library*, 3 vols (2000-2002), *New York City* (2007), *Cambridge, I* (2009), *Welsh Manuscripts and English Manuscripts in Wales* (2011), and *British Library, I* (2014). See in particular *Bodleian*, I, figs 18 and 19; *Cambridge*, I, fig 18 and *Welsh Manuscripts*, figs 13 and 25. An inscribed example survives in the church of Elsenham St Mary, Essex: see V. Pritchard, *English Medieval Graffiti* (Cambridge, 1967), 71. Dr Stephanie Downes of the University of Melbourne, who is currently researching depictions of human faces in margins and in majuscules, has drawn our attention to the rather similar scribally- executed faces in Oxford, Bodleian Library (hereafter Bodleian), Rawlinson A 338, fols 84v and 89v; we are grateful to Dr Downes for this information.

[v] The manuscript can also be viewed online (http://trin-sites-pub.trin.cam.ac.uk/james/viewpage.php?index=1331/accessed 6 Feb 2016).

[vi] The postcard is now kept with the manuscript. Notes on this fragment also form part of a handwritten catalogue made by Greg, deposited with the library in 1939 and now Cambridge, Trinity College, O.11.5. A later letter addressed to H. S. Bennett and dated 25 September 1944 states that Greg had compiled the notes during his time as Librarian and had intended to publish them as part of a descriptive catalogue of the manuscripts written in English to the year 1500, but had never brought this to completion. We refer at certain points in what follows to Greg's notes and his transcription of the poem.

[vii] See *Middle English Dictionary*, hereafter *MED*, *veneri(e)*, n.(1).

[viii] *MED daliaunce* n.3: amorous talk … sexual union.

[ix] Philippa Hardman, 'Chaucer's Tyrants of Lombardy', *Review of English Studies*, 31 (1980), 172-8.

[x] Julia Boffey and A. S. G. Edwards, *A New Index of Middle English Verse* (London, 2005), hereafter *NIMEV*, 3553. For discussion and bibliography see Lynn Staley, 'Susanna's Voice', in Robert W. Epstein and William Robins (eds), *Sacred and Profane in Late Medieval Literature: Essays in Honour of John V. Fleming*, (Toronto, 2010), 46-67.

[xi] OT Book of Daniel, chapter XIII (later removed to the Apocrypha); see Kathryn A. Smith, 'Inventing Marital Chastity: the Iconography of Susanna and the Elders in Early Christian Art', *Oxford Art Journal*, 16 (1993), 3-24; Diane Wolfthal, 'Sin or Sexual Pleasure? A Little-Known Nude Bather in a Flemish Book of Hours', in Sherry C. M. Lindquist (ed.), *The Meanings of Nudity in Medieval Art* (Farnham, 2012), 279-97, especially 285; and Mónica Ann Walker Vadillo, *Bathsheba in Late Medieval French Manuscript Illumination: Innocent Object of Desire or Agent of Sin?* (Lewiston, NY, 2008) 63-5.

[xii] Since the first letter of the word is not clear, both 'Susan*e* the secunde' and 'Susan*e* the fecunde' are possible readings.

[xiii] *NIMEV* 4206 (St John's Church, Duxford, Cambridgeshire; apparently referring to Lucy); cf. also the examples of inscriptions with names listed in Matthew Champion, *Medieval Graffiti* (London, 2015): 7 (All Saints, Litcham, Norfolk: Martyn Crossheart?); 181-2 (St Mary's Church, Lidgate, Suffolk; Lady Cateryne?); 229 (Great Bardfield, Essex; 'medieval rebus inscription').

[xiv] See Rossell Hope Robbins, 'The Poems of Humphrey Newton, Esquire, 1466-1536', *PMLA* 65 (1950), 249-81 and 272-4; Ralph Hanna, 'Humphrey Newton and Bodleian Library MS Lat. Misc. c. 66', *Medium Aevum*, 69 (2000), 279-91; and

Deborah Youngs, *Humphrey Newton (1466-1536): An Early Tudor Gentleman* (Woodbridge, 2008). Some of the names are encoded in acrostics (for example Brian, Elin, and Humphrey) while other poems are addressed to individuals identified only by their initials, such as 'M'. For further details see William A. Ringler, Jr., *Bibliography and Index of English Verse in Manuscript 1501-1558*, prepared and completed by Michael Rudick and Susan J. Ringler (London, 1992), entries TM 245 (Brian), TM 389 (Elin) and TM 390 (Elyn), TM 576 (Humfrey), TM 1020 (Margeret); TM 677 (M), TM 1064 (M). Other approximately contemporary poems addressed to named individuals include TM 1009 (to 'Mystrys Anne') and the version of *NIMEV* 724 in Manchester, Chetham's Library, Mun. E. 6. 10, adapted for address to 'Johan'; see Christine Carpenter, *The Armburgh Papers* (Woodbridge, 1998), 58 and 156-7.

[xv] *NIMEV* 158; see Mary-Jo Arn (ed.), *Fortunes Stabilnes: Charles of Orleans's English Book of Love. A Critical Edition*, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 138 (Binghamton, NY, 1994), 384.

[xvi] See, for example, *NIMEV* 735.5, 2479 and 3256. The role of social verse in these kinds of context is discussed by Deborah Youngs, 'Entertainment Networks, Reading Communities, and the Early Tudor Anthology: Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson C. 813', in Margaret Connolly and Raluca Radulescu (eds), *Insular Books: Vernacular Manuscript Miscellanies in Late Medieval Britain* (London, 2015), 231-46, and (in a court context) by Seth Lerer, *Courtly Letters in the Age of Henry VIII: Literary Culture and the Arts of Deceit* (Cambridge, 2006).

[xvii] L. D. Benson, ed., *The Riverside Chaucer* (Boston, 1987), 649. We are grateful to the journal's anonymous reader for this suggestion.

[xviii] The English ballades of Charles of Orleans (Arn, *Fortunes Stabilnes*) contain a number of examples; see also *NIMEV* 1510 and 2182.

[xix] Martin Camargo, *The Middle English Verse Love Epistle* (Tübingen, 1991).

[xx] Camargo, *Middle English Verse Love Epistle*, 107.

[xxi] Carpenter, *The Armburgh Papers*, 58, notes that the poems included on this parchment roll may have been drafts or copies of poems intended to serve the function of love letters. On these poems see also Ardis Butterfield, 'Why Medieval Lyric', *ELH*, 52 (2015), 319-43, especially 319-21.

[xxii] *NIMEV* 303; London, British Library (hereafter BL), Add. 43490, fol. 23 (on fol. 24 another letter sent to John by Margery in February 1477 addresses him as 'Ryght wurschypffull and welebelouyd Volentyne'). See N. Davis, ed., *Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century. Part 1*, revised by Richard Beadle and Colin Richmond, Early English Text Society, Supplementary Series 4 (Oxford, 2004), 662-3.

[xxiii] For exhaustive discussion of the origins of the medieval cult of St Valentine, and of surviving poems connected with Valentine's day, see Jack B. Oruch, 'St Valentine, Chaucer, and Spring in February', *Speculum*, 56 (1981), 534-65, and Henry Ansgar Kelly, *Chaucer and the Cult of St Valentine* (Leiden, 1986).

[xxiv] See G. C. Macaulay, ed., *The Complete Works of John Gower*, 3 vols (Oxford, 1899-1902), 1, 365-6, and Arn, ed., *Fortunes Stabilnes*, 224-5 and 342-3. Lydgate's 'Valentine to her that excelleth all' (*NIMEV* 3065), addressed to the Virgin and apparently offered to Queen Catherine, wife of Henry V, is an extended ballade.

[xxv] Oruch, 'St Valentine', 561.

[xxvi] Reference books dealing with the history of the Valentine card are vague on the earliest English survivals. Some suggest that the poems by Charles of Orleans and

Margery Paston discussed above are Valentine cards, and overlook that both form part of longer works (the Paston example is included in a letter, while Charles's Valentine poems form part of a longer lyrico-narrative sequence). The vogue for sending Valentine's cards seems to date from the eighteenth century; the earliest surviving printed card is from 1797. See Ruth Lee Webb, *The History of Valentines* (London, 1953), 109-10, and Frank Staff, *The Valentine and its Origins* (London, 1969), 13-7.

[xxvii] Greg read the words in the top leaf as 'I loue', and the letters in the left-hand leaf as 'true', and noted that the other words are 'now indecipherable'.

[xxviii] See the indexes to the individual volumes of Scott (general ed.), *Index of Images.* We are very grateful to Dr Kathleen Scott and Dr Holly James-Maddocks for their advice on these images. Particularly useful instances for comparison with TCC, R.2.70 can be found in BL, Egerton 1821, fol. 9r; BL, Sloane 1584, fol. 26v; BL, Burney 199, fol. 30v; BL, Harley 3415, fol. 2; TCC, O.3.10, fol. 7 and Bodleian, Lat. misc. c. 66, fol. 129v.

[xxix] See the indexes to the individual volumes of Scott (general ed.), *Index of Images.* The poem is *NIMEV* 1453; edited as *The Four Leaves of the Truelove* in Susanna Greer Fein, ed., *Moral Love Songs and Laments*, TEAMS (Kalamazoo, Michigan, 1998), 161-254.

[xxx] Ringler, *Bibliography*, TM 664, in eight rhyme royal stanzas. See Sharon L. Jansen and Kathleen H. Jordan, eds, *The Welles Anthology: MS Rawlinson C. 813*, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 75 (Binghamton, NY, 1991), 228-30.

[xxxi] Joan Evans, *English Posies and Posy Rings* (London, 1931), xi-xix.

[xxxii] Evans, *English Posies*, xv, describes the rhymed mottos that feature on these rings (usually two lines) as 'miniature poems'. See *MED* poesi(e) 1 (b) a verse and 2 (c) an acrostic.

[xxxiii] This ring and many of those catalogued by Evans can now be viewed in the online collections of the British Museum (http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=50844&partId=1&searchText=godstow&page=1/accessed 6 Feb 2016).

[xxxiv] Diana O'Hara, *Courtship and Constraint: Rethinking the Making of Marriage in Tudor England* (Manchester, 2000) especially chapter 2. O'Hara, *Courtship and Constraint*, 70, describes the exchange of letters as unusual and while surmising that the less literate could have employed professionals to write love letters, suggests that they are more likely to have been associated with those of higher social status and education.

[xxxv] O'Hara*, Courtship and Constraint*, 74-6.

[xxxvi] In a short essay on the V&A/Royal College of Art site, Sophie Cope writes about a fifteenth-century French ring with a 'flirtatious' inscription – 'you must be satisfied with just one glance' – arguing that the giving of this ring may have represented a love that could not be acted upon and as a means of 'representing and enabling' an amorous relationship (http://unmakingthings.rca.ac.uk/2014/you-must-be-satisfied-with-just-one-glancea-fifteenth-century-love-token/accessed 6 Feb 2016).

[xxxvii] For a list of excavated love gifts see Roberta Gilchrist, *Medieval Life: Archaeology and the Life Course* (Woodbridge, 2012), appendix 7, 265-6. She also describes the exchange of love gifts between young people to 'convey the promise of intimacy' and the prevalence of the heart used as a romantic symbol (109-12).