

The ARC Centre of Excellence for the History of Emotions  
Presents a Workshop on

## Romantic Rituals: 'Making Love' in Europe c. 1600-Present

4 July 2016

The University of Adelaide



**Bernger von Horheim in the Codex Manesse (early 14th century)**

and women to illicit love, romantic love within friendship, and romantic love as a religious connection to God.

**Convenors:** Katie Barclay (University of Adelaide) and Sally Holloway (Richmond, The American International University in London).

For registration details, please see website:

<http://www.historyofemotions.org.au/events/romantic-rituals-making-love-in-europe-c1100-1800/>

## Programme

8.45-9.15 Registration

9.15-9.30 Welcome

9.30-10.30 Keynote:

**Clara Tuite** (University of Melbourne), 'Following the Thunderclap: The Ritual Craze of Werther-Fever'

10.30-11 Tea & Coffee

11-1

**Katie Barclay** (University of Adelaide), 'Doing the Paperwork: the Emotional World of Wedding Certificates'

**Sarah Anne Bendall** (University of Sydney), 'Writing Love on the Body: The Busk and Romantic Love in Seventeenth and Eighteenth-Century England and France'

**Sally Holloway** (Richmond, The American International University in London), 'Courtship, Craft & Consumerism: Rediscovering Valentine's Day in Eighteenth-Century England'

**Angela Hesson** (University of Melbourne) 'Only a Lock of Hair'

1-2 Lunch

2-3.30

**Bronwyn Reddan** (University of Melbourne), 'Courting Desire in Seventeenth-Century French Fairy Tales'

**Mark Seymour** (University of Otago), 'Courting Bad Boys: "Making Love" at the Circus and Beyond in Nineteenth-Century Italy'

**Laura King** (University of Leeds) "'I 'fell in love' with her": Fathers' Perspectives on Love in Britain, c.1950s to the Present'

3.30-4 Tea

4-5 Group discussion: Love in Europe

5 Drinks

7 Dinner: The Belgian Beer Café, Adelaide

## Abstracts

**Clara Tuite** (University of Melbourne)

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### **Following the Thunderclap: The Ritual Craze of Werther-Fever**

This lecture explores the ritual craze of Werther-fever that tore over Europe following the publication of Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774), long celebrated as the first modern book to install an identificatory understanding of literature, and a foundational moment in the modern culture of romantic love that instils the energizing paradox of incommunicability at its heart.

Werther-fever spread the words (or "no words") through which to be speechless, and was transmitted by Werther look-alikes in blue coat and yellow vest, copycat romantic suicides, and a host of "female Werthers" who ventriloquized Werther to address their own Charlottes ("I feel but her, in all my burning brain," Anne Bannerman, *Sonnets from Werther*) in letters, effigies and printed texts.

Exploring the topos of incommunicability that Werther-fever communicated with such infectious speed and remarkable rhetorical efficiency, I examine the "vocation of a fetish" (Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse*) that follows the thunderclap (when love strikes), focusing on *Werther's* network of love tokens, fetishes and go-betweens — kissing canary, servant boy, the buttons on his jacket, pistol, and "every little thing she touched."

**Katie Barclay** (University of Adelaide)

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### **Doing the Paperwork: the Emotional World of Wedding Certificates**

The marriage certificates of the eighteenth-century Scottish lower orders were often small scraps of paper, where couples acknowledged their new marital status, and perhaps also affirmed their freedom to marry and any parental permission that had been received. Very occasionally, they might also contain the signatures of the minister or witnesses to the marriage ceremony. They were typically given to wives to hold, perhaps in recognition that it was women who were most vulnerable to desertion and who required the legal record of their marriage. From there, certificates might be carried on a woman's body, in her pocket, for the years of her life, or fall into a legal archive as her marriage became open to debate and contest in court. Sometimes they were lost with stories of dispossession also tales of the life and uses of such paperwork. This paper explores the emotional world of the marriage certificate, thinking about the role they played in not only affirming the legal existence of marriage but in determining the nature of the intimacies and connections that

marriage signified. It aims to take seriously objects – in this case the wedding certificate – as things that enable, contest and shape emotional worlds.

**Sarah Anne Bendall** (University of Sydney)

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### **Writing Love on the Body: The Busk and Romantic Love in Seventeenth and Eighteenth-century England and France**

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the busk – an independent and interchangeable long piece of wood, metal, whalebone or horn that was placed into a stitched channel between layers of fabric in the front of the bodies and stays (corsets) – was often elaborately decorated with common love motifs. Some bore love hearts and portraits, whilst others were engraved with lovers' initials, words or poetry, making them highly personalised accessories encoded with various significant meanings. Popular literature along with the inscriptions on busks themselves reveal that lovers saw the busk as a love token of affection. Usually men gifted busks to women during the act of courting, thus conscripting it into the complex social performance of courtship and marriage.

Emotional proclamations of love are often found in the pages of diaries, in letters, and in other common forms of personal inscription. But how do expressions of love change when engraved on objects that were worn close to the most desirable parts of the female body, objects that were both fetishized and charged with erotic connotations? This paper explores the production, materiality and ritual gifting of busks inscribed with romantic words and images, focusing upon the height of the busk's popularity in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England and France. It examines the way that these intimate items of dress articulated romantic love, and how their materiality can tell the historian about changing ideas of romantic love during these centuries.

**Sally Holloway** (Richmond, The American International University in London)

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### **Courtship, Craft & Consumerism: Rediscovering Valentine's Day in Eighteenth-Century England**

In eighteenth-century England, the fourteenth of February was celebrated as the day when birds chose their mates, conjuring images of blooming meadows, frolicking lambs, and the approach of spring. Visitors to England characterised Valentine's Day as an ancient celebration, 'when all living Nature inclines to couple'. Surviving folded, latticed, and embossed valentines in archives and museum collections provide unique but often overlooked evidence of the material culture of romantic love, and the evolution of romantic rituals over the eighteenth century.

Extant valentines provide rare evidence of men's domestic crafts, showcasing an impressive array of skills, including cut-paper work, silhouettes, ink sketches, and watercolour scenes. During the second half of the century, a gradual but uneven transition saw the production of valentines move away from these suitors and into the hands of professionals, as increasingly elaborate cards were designed by stationers and booksellers. Retailers utilised the latest techniques such as lithographic printing and lace-paper work to attract customers, providing lovers with fashionable new ways to formulate their emotions and declare their love. This paper explores the potential of Valentine's rituals to shed new light on eighteenth-century relationships, and the modernisation and commercialisation of romantic customs more broadly.

**Angela Hesson (University of Melbourne)**

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### **Only a Lock of Hair**

In 1857, John Everett Millais depicted a young woman engaged in the act of snipping a lock of her hair, her costume simple, her face contemplative. The painting is a small one, containing few clues as to its sitter's identity, yet the subject, and the varieties of feeling that it suggested, were immediately legible to its audience. While the image might be characterised as a prototypically Victorian one, the ritual depicted originated far earlier, and became, from the late seventeenth century, increasingly codified and increasingly complex.

Delicately slipping between emotional and corporeal realms, love tokens have always maintained a profound relationship to the body, often worn against it, sometimes fashioned from it. Hair jewellery, whether worn as a reminder of an absent loved one, or in memory of a deceased one, provided a literal sense of physical proximity to the object of affection. Likewise, lockets, eye miniatures, fragments of clothing, embellished coins and diverse other loved, touched objects, served as foci for private and public displays of feeling. Often transcending class and religious belief, these objects acted as mediators of emotion; distinct from dowries or contractual gifts, they symbolised intimacy, longing, and, in their intense corporeality, desire.

This paper will examine the evolution of love tokens in Europe from the seventeenth to the early nineteenth century, and the ways in which their production, distribution and use served to signify and regulate emotion. It will also consider the afterlives of these objects, and the extent to which later practices of collection and display might engender new meaning and resonance.

**Bronwyn Reddan** (University of Melbourne)

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### **Courting desire in seventeenth-century French fairy tales**

The revelation of love is a dramatic moment in the plot of fairy tales written by seventeenth-century French women including Catherine Bernard, Henriette-Julie de Murat and Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy. In their tales, a talking rosebush seduces a beautiful princess, a jilted sister persuades her sibling's fiancé to elope with her instead, and the body of a lovesick prince displays his passion for an unknown beauty. Whether a public declaration, an inadvertent disclosure or a private epistolary confession, the moment of revelation is an emotional performance designed to produce a reciprocal emotional response in the person to whom the declaration is directed. Drawing on J. L. Austin's speech act theory, this paper argues that declarations of love scripted by Bernard, Murat and d'Aulnoy are ritual performances designed to create intimacy between the courting couple. The creation of intimacy through declarations of passion rests on the assumption that a confession of romantic love will inspire the recipient of the declaration to feel the emotion they have inspired. Gender roles play a critical role in shaping the scripts of declaration in the *conteuses'* tales. Successful public declarations of love are invariably made by male heroes, while heroines who announce their romantic inclinations directly risk disappointment or ridicule. The safer path for heroines who wish to inspire romantic love is an oblique or disguised revelation of their affection.

**Mark Seymour** (University of Otago)

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### **Courting Bad Boys: 'Making Love' at the Circus and Beyond in Nineteenth-Century Italy**

This paper makes use of an unusual cache of secret love letters, supplemented by eyewitness accounts of flirtatious circus-goers, to explore the emotions and courting strategies of a handful of mostly anonymous women in remote parts of nineteenth-century Italy. The object of these women's desires was a handsome circus acrobat who toured the southern Italian provinces with his family troupe in the 1860s and 1870s – and, with the help of his wife, usefully archived his fan mail. The women's letters, which came to light only because the acrobat was ultimately arrested for murdering his lover's husband, reveal something of the feelings, strategies, and desires of the sort of everywoman who might not otherwise have had the chance for posterity to know about them. The paper explores the letters' intriguing material and linguistic forms, reflecting on the sorts of cultural templates that might have influenced the authors' notions of romantic love and their senses of amorous destiny. Ultimately, it also argues that the letters are genuinely suggestive of a seldom-documented arena of desire – one in which women, whose historical context

normally fettered them with rigid constraints about suitable husbands and female honour, gave free rein to emotions fuelled by sexual attraction.

**Laura King (University of Leeds)**

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**'I "fell in love" with her': Fathers' Perspectives on Love in Britain, c.1950s to the Present**

In their narratives of childbirth, many men highlight the extreme emotions they experience and some go as far as to suggest the moment they meet their new baby is akin to 'falling in love'. One man described his emotions when he first saw his prematurely born daughter as 'the love I felt washed over me like nothing before'. This paper will use original oral history interviews to explore men's attitudes to love in the context of the parent-child relationship.

The experience of having a child, and in particular meeting him or her for the first time, in many way parallels the experience and descriptions of 'falling in love' in a more romantic sense. From the retrospective moment of an interview in the 2010s, men called up romantic language to describe their emotions and embodied responses to their experience of the first few weeks of a child's life. This paper will place these accounts in the changing landscape of masculinity and emotions in twentieth-century Britain, as freer emotional expression became more possible within dominant constructions of masculinity. It will consider how men's emotional experience of having a child relate to women's, and consider this within a growing emphasis on emotional 'bonding' as part of the pregnancy and birth experience. Overall, it will analyse whether the framework of 'romance' can help us better understand subjective experiences of the transition to parenthood.