

GAME ON: MEDIEVAL PLAYERS AND THEIR TEXTS

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation addresses the social significance of parlour games as forms of cultural expression in medieval and early modern England and France by exploring how the convergence of textual materialities, players, and narratives manifested in interactive texts, board games, and playing cards. Medieval games, I argue, do not always fit neatly into traditional or modern theoretical game models, and modern blanket definitions of ‘game’—often stemming from the study of digital games—provide an anachronistic understanding of how medieval people imagined their games and game-worlds.

Chapter 1 explores what the idea of ‘game’ meant for medieval authors, readers, and players in what I call ‘game-texts’—literary texts that blurred the modern boundaries between what we would consider ‘game’ and ‘literature’ and whose mechanics are often thought to be outside the definition of ‘game.’ Chapter 2 examines how recreational mathematics puzzles and chess problems penned in manuscript collections operate as sites of pleasure, edification, and meditative playspaces in different social contexts from the gentry households to clerical cloisters. The mechanics, layout, narrative, and compilation of chess problems rendered them useful for learning the art and skill of the game in England. Chapter 3 traces the circulation, manuscript contexts, and afterlives of two game-text genres in England—the *demandes d’amour* and the fortune-telling string games—in order to understand how they functioned as places of engagement and entertainment for poets, scribes, and players. Chapter 4 illustrates how narrative and geography became driving forces for the development and rise of the modern thematic game in Early Modern Europe. This chapter charts how changing ideas of spatiality enabled tabletop games to shift from abstract structures enjoyed by players in the Middle Ages, in which game narratives take place off a board, to ludic objects that incorporated real-life elements in their design of fictional worlds—thereby fashioning spaces that could visually accommodate narrative on the board itself.

This dissertation places games into a more nuanced historical and cultural context, showing not only the varied methods by which medieval players enjoyed games but also how these ideas developed and changed over time.

PREFACE

This dissertation is an original intellectual product of the author, Serina Patterson.

Sections of Chapter 1 have been published in “Introduction: Setting Up the Board,” in *Games and Gaming in Medieval Literature*, edited by Serina Patterson (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015): 1-20 and “Demandes d’Amour,” in *The Encyclopedia of Medieval British Literature*, edited by Robert Rouse and Siân Echard (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, forthcoming 2017).

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For Jesse

Chapter 1

What is a Medieval Game?

Is there such a thing as a *medieval* game? If something is a game, then what makes it so? These questions encompass the chief inquiry and argument of this dissertation: games in the Middle Ages manifested as a popular form of entertainment, and this manifestation demonstrated a medieval notion of ‘game’ that was distinct from our modern understanding. The overt purpose of focusing on premodern games in this dissertation is not to dismiss the historical development that many games underwent since their invention in ancient Greece, Rome, and other early civilizations or diminish the significance of modern digital and tabletop games, but rather to re-examine in more detail the cultural development of games as complex and nuanced ludic space, thereby questioning and expanding our assumptions about what we consider a ‘game.’

Games in the Middle Ages present a compelling space to redraw the theoretical boundaries mapped by game studies scholars precisely because such boundaries were being reshaped and reformed by players and medieval game designers. Jean de Meun’s little-known fortune-telling manual, the *Dodechedron de fortune*, well illustrates this blurred boundary, for its design and mechanics raise questions about what we might deem to be a ‘game’ in the modern sense. First copied in 1356, the *Dodechedron* instructs its readers to choose a predefined question, cast a twelve-sided polyhedral die, and match their dice rolls to an answer that corresponds to one of the twelve houses of astrology. At first glance, this text may not seem like a game; indeed, by the mid-fourteenth century, people used similar methods of textual

prognostication which formed part of a larger longstanding tradition in divinatory practice.¹ For the *Dodechedron*, however, de Meun's purpose was not solely to create a system of divination, but to design a pleasurable, ludic experience for his readers. Questions covered typical matters of life, from asking whether the reader will be prosperous in labour to questioning the loyalties of a spouse, and the text cautions readers to take responses in a nonserious, lighthearted manner. Nevertheless, part of the fun is in whether the paired question and answer make sense or emerge as nonsensical. As the 1613 English translation addresses its readers: "Cast forth, my friend, the Dodechedront dye; / If he hit truth 'twill move thee to delight; / And if it chance that he doe tell a lye, / That is the sport, for thee to laugh out right: For but to sport, and not for truth, 'twas pend / To give content, and no man to offend."² Scholars have not yet discerned the popularity of the *Dodechedron* in the fourteenth century, but the fortune-telling text underwent several printings in 1556, and was subsequently reprinted in 1560 and 1576. In these later printings, the title changes to *Le plaisant jeu du dodechedron de fortune* [The Pleasant Game of the Dodecahedron of Fortune] or includes the word "jeux" [game] in the subtitle. The deliberate labelling of the text as a 'game' signals its purpose as a pleasurable pastime for premodern readers, but is this text in fact a *game*?

Sections of this chapter have been published in "Introduction: Setting Up the Board," in *Games and Gaming in Medieval Literature*, ed. Serina Patterson (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), 1-20 and "Demandes d'Amour," in *The Encyclopedia of Medieval British Literature*, eds. Robert Rouse and Siân Echard (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, forthcoming 2017).

¹ Willy Louis Braekman, "Fortune-Telling by the Casting of Dice: A Middle English Poem and Its Background," *Studia Neophilologica* 52 (1980): 3-29.

² Jean de Meun, *The dodechedron of fortune*, trans. Sir W. B. Knight (London, 1613), B1r. Early English Books Online. Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery. 2 Dec 2016

<http://gateway.proquest.com.ezproxy.library.ubc.ca/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:image:12992:7>.

Scholars within the emerging field of cultural game studies have largely neglected premodern games and argued that the creation and rise of video games designate a break from what Jesper Juul calls the “classic game model.” As Juul states, the “model is *classic* in the sense that it is the way games have *traditionally* been constructed. It is also a model that applies to at least a 5,000-year history of games. Although it is unusual to claim that any aspect of human culture has remained unchanged for millennia, there are strong arguments for this.”³ Perhaps as a consequence of this exclusive focus on modern digital games, game studies scholars have relegated medieval and premodern games to stasis in their form, function, and cultural meaning.⁴ In an effort to challenge this viewpoint, the essays collected in my contributed volume *Games and Gaming in Medieval Literature* illustrate that games in the Middle Ages not only appeared in diverse social settings—the Church, the court, the school, and the household—but were also used as potent metaphors to negotiate the boundaries between ludic spaces and ‘real life.’ Far from meaningless childish activities, games enabled authors and poets to discuss cultural issues to a variety of readers in genres ranging from motets and ecclesiastical documents to alliterative poetry and romance.⁵

This dissertation continues this investigation of the significance of medieval games by exploring medieval modes of gaming found in the convergence of textual materialities, players,

³ Jesper Juul, *Half-Real: Video Games between Real Rules and Fictional Worlds* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2005), 23.

⁴ Top journals in game studies, such as *Game Studies*, *Games and Culture*, *Loading...*, and *Simulation in Gaming* all focus solely on digital games, together with academic organizations like the *Digital Games Research Association* (diGRA). To date, there are no journals that encompass all game topics (digital and non-digital). In 2014, I co-founded the Game Cultures Society, which is a consortium of North American and European scholars pursuing the study and appreciation of games, play, and ludic activities as significant aspects of cultures from antiquity to the digital age.

⁵ Serina Patterson, ed. *Games and Gaming in Medieval Literature* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015).

and narratives that manifested in medieval culture through manuscripts, board games, and playing cards. By focusing on the spaces in which medieval games are found and the types of experiences they strive to elicit in their players and audiences, this dissertation unsettles the disciplinary limits that have traditionally been placed on the study premodern games and lays the groundwork for new ways in which to discuss this popular form of entertainment. In the following chapters, I aim to: create a framework for identifying and discussing medieval games; discuss the varied methods by which medieval players enjoyed parlour games and how these games—and indeed the idea of ‘game’—developed and changed over time; and demonstrate how the study of medieval and early modern games can broaden the discourse of game studies by placing premodern games into a more nuanced historical and cultural context.

Each chapter focuses on a different form of engagement with premodern games, beginning in Chapter 1 with a discussion of interactive literary games, a genre that has been neglected by both medievalists and game studies scholars because its manifestation as *text* omits the explicit markers of what we typically consider a ‘game’ (e.g., pieces, boards, competition, winners, and other elements). Chapter 2 explores the association between games and skill acquisition in medieval England by showing how game problems—recreational mathematics and chess problems—operate as sites of learning and meditative playspaces. The mechanics, layout, narrative, and compilation of chess problems rendered them particularly useful for learning the art and skill of the game. Chapter 3 traces the circulations, manuscript contexts, and afterlives of two game-text genres in England—the *demandes d’amour* and the fortune-telling string games—in order to understand how they functioned as sites of engagement and entertainment for poets, scribes, and players. While earlier chapters focus on medieval games and their cultural contexts, Chapter 4 provides the first-ever segue between medieval and modern games by charting how

narrative became a driving force for the development and rise of the thematic game in Early Modern Europe. Chapter 4 shows how changing ideas of spatiality enabled tabletop games to shift from abstract structures enjoyed by players in the Middle Ages, in which game narratives take place off a board, to ludic objects that incorporated real-life elements in their design of fictional worlds—thereby fashioning spaces that could visually accommodate narrative on the board itself.

* * *

Games in the Middle Ages were valuable commodities and important spaces for play among all levels of society. In a little-known Middle-Irish poem, presumably written between the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, a poet demonstrate the significance of recreational objects as ‘companions’ that help pass the time. The author, thought to be an amateur writer composing the work “to please himself,” writes the he has in his possession a book full of Gaelic stories, a book of arithmetic, a harp, a lyre, and a “ficheall” board—that is, a chequered board similar to that of chess which he also used for gambling.⁶ Unlike other forms of entertainment in the Middle Ages, games were valued as a pastime at all levels of society, though the materials and social contexts change depending on the specific players. The production of game pieces in the Middle Ages reflects this wide range of play among social classes: the famous Lewis and Charlemagne ivory chessmen are notable for their careful craftsmanship suitable for royalty and nobility, and Edward I’s wardrobe account for the years 1299-1300 lists a chess set made from

⁶ Osborn Bergin, ed., “Unpublished Irish Poems: XXIV: Consolations,” *An Irish Quarterly Review* 12.48 (1923): 597-99.

jasper and rock crystal and another from ivory.⁷ The importance of such recreational objects is also shown in the wills of the nobility, especially in the fifteenth-century. In her will from 1459, for instance, Joan Stevens of Bury bequeathed a chess set and backgammon board.⁸ Yet despite the evident popularity of chess among the noble élite, lower social orders could also purchase cheaper sets made of copper alloy (Figure 1.1).



Figure 1.1: Late Twelfth-Century Knight Chess piece from Derbyshire, Bassettlaw Museum⁹

⁷ Harold J. R. Murray, *A History of Chess* (Northampton: Benjamin Press, 1913), 449.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ “Chess Piece,” *Portable Antiquities Scheme*, last modified June 25 2012, accessed July 20 2012, <http://finds.org.uk/database/artefacts/record/id/76635>.

Though Colleen Schafroth observes that lower social orders were more likely to play dice or merels,¹⁰ a porter could enjoy chess as much as a king, or a noblewoman could delight in a game of fox and chickens as much as a choir boy.

Fidchell and chess fall squarely within the bounds of what game studies scholars would label a ‘classic’ game, following Juul’s definition quoted above (though, as I will show in Chapters 2 and 4, chess varied widely in its development throughout the Middle Ages). These are the types of games that historians, archaeologists, and scholars have studied and typically reference in their discussions of premodern games. This chapter challenges this notion of the ‘classic’ model by showing how games in the Middle Ages were viewed as fluid and porous objects that could serve the multiple purposes of the diverse array of players who enjoyed them. In the following pages, I examine how medieval literary games—that is, texts similar to the *Dodechedron* that were designed as social, interactive experiences for medieval audiences (what I herein call ‘game-texts’)—promote a different understanding of games through their use as game spaces by game designers, scribes, readers, and players. While game-texts are not a ubiquitous genre, they do appear in manuscripts and incunabula across Europe from the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries, especially in England, France, Germany, and Italy. If we focus our attention on game-texts such as questions of love, interactive dialogue, and fortune-telling poems—recreational texts that originated from both the medieval academy and the *fin’ amors* (refined love) tradition—then the context for examining such texts lies only in part within the text itself and must include the wider network of medieval cultural influences and textual

¹⁰ Colleen Schafroth, *The Art of Chess* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2002), 36.

contexts in order for us to gain a more complete picture of the game's cultural and scholarly value.¹¹

To date, medievalists have paid little attention to medieval game-texts, perhaps believing that they do not have much literary value. In his edition of one such game-text titled *Le Jeu d'Amour* (discussed below), Erik Kraemer notes that “[c]ompositions de circonstance, sans pretention, les textes qui ont conserve le jeux de société du moyen âge n’ont pas beaucoup de valeur littéraire” [Compositions of circumstance, without pretention, the texts that have retained these medieval parlour games do not have much literary value].¹² For the most part, previous studies of game-texts have simply indexed or transcribed them with little or no analysis, or have defined them as interchangeable or formulaic and focused primarily on a game's temporary suspension of reality.¹³ Recent critical studies note the cultural value of interactive game-texts, but do not place them into a wider cultural history of games.¹⁴ In transcribing the first edition of

¹¹ See, for instance, Emma Cayley's discussion of *demandes d'amour* in *Debate and Dialogue: Alain Chartier in his Cultural Context* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), 15-16.

¹² Erik Kraemer, *Le Jeu d'Amour: Jeu d'Aventure du Moyen age edite avec introduction, notes, et glossaire*, Commentationes Humanarum Litterarum 54 (Helsinki: Societas Scientiarum Fennica, 1975), 7.

¹³ Previous attention to interactive medieval games have focused on their transcription, with few critical analysis of the games themselves. See Margaret Felberg-Levitt's thorough edition of *les demandes* tradition for an overview of the genre and a complete listing of every *demandes* known: Margaret Felbert-Levitt, *Les Demandes d'Amour* (Montreal: Inedita & Rara, 1995); for other editions, see: James Woodrow Hassell, jr., ed. *Amorous Games: A Critical Edition of 'les Adevineaux amoureux* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1974); *Two Late Medieval Love Treatises: Heloise's 'Art d'Amour' and a Collection of 'Demandes d'Amour,'* ed. Leslie C. Brook. Medium Aevum Monographs (Oxford: Society for the Study of Medieval Language and Literature, 1993); Leslie C. Brook's "The 'Demandes d'Amour' of Wolfenbuttel Herzog August (Bibl. Guelf 84.7 Aug. 2)." *Studia Medievali* 34.1 (1993): 381-410.

¹⁴ Critical studies of interactive game-texts have tended to focus on one particular text or genre or employ the game-text as an example for a different purpose. See, for instance: Richard Firth Green, "*Le Roi Qui Ne Ment* and Aristocratic Courtship," in *Courtly Literature: Culture and Context*, edited by Keith Busby and Erik Kooper (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1990), 211-25; Ernest Hoepffner, "*Les Voeux du paon* et *les Demandes amoureuses*," *Archivum Romanicum* 4 (1920): 99-104; Ernest Langlois, "Le jeu du roi qui

the fifteenth-century Chaucerian dice-poem *The Chaunce of the Dyse*, Eleanor Hammond remarks that the poem is conventional because the poet “was still held by formulae” and thus “ha[d] no chance . . . to express himself.”¹⁵ This chapter aims to go beyond these initial observations and value judgements by exploring the social significance of medieval and early modern parlour games and interactivity created through their material playspaces.

Game-texts have also been omitted from notable historical indexes of games such as Harold Murray’s *A History of Board-Games other than Chess*, David Parlett’s *The Oxford History of Board Games*, Robert Bell’s *Board and Table Games from Many Civilizations*. These types of interactive literary games have also been deemed to be borderline cases or non-games by some game studies scholars and such literary experiences, often called ‘interactive fiction’, continue to straddle the border between game and literature.¹⁶ Medieval game-texts, I argue, do not always fit neatly into traditional or modern theoretical game models, and adopting a modern blanket definition of ‘game’—often stemming from the study of digital games—yields an

ne ment et le jeu du roi et de la reine,” *Romanische Forschungen* 23 (1902): 163-73; Betsy McCormick, “Remembering the Game: Debating the *Legend’s* Women,” in *The Legend of Good Women: Context and Reception*, edited by Carolyn P. Collette (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2006), 105-31; Nicola McDonald, “Games Medieval Women Play,” in *The Legend of Good Women: Context and Reception*, edited by Carolyn P. Collette (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2006), 176-97; Nicola McDonald, “Fragments of (Have Your) Desire: Brome Women at Play,” in *Medieval Domesticity: Home, Housing, and Household*, edited by P.J.P Goldberg and Maryanne Kowaleski (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 232-58; Allan J. Mitchell, *Ethics and Eventfulness in Middle English Literature* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), especially chapter 3; and John Stevens, *Music and Poetry in the Early Tudor Court* (London: Methuen, 1961). My edited collection is the first comprehensive examination of the relationship between games, literature, and culture and aimed to discuss the game-texts in their own right. See: Patterson, *Games and Gaming*, especially chapters 3,4, 5, and 9.

¹⁵ Eleanor P. Hammond, “The Chaunce of the Dice,” *Englische Studien* 59 (1925): 4.

¹⁶ Harold J. R. Murray, *A History of Board Games other than Chess* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), David Parlett, *The Oxford History of Board Games* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), and Robert Bell, *Board and Table Games from Many Civilizations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960). See Juul, *Half-Real*, 44 for a diagram of activities defined as games, borderline cases, and non-games.

anachronistic understanding of how medieval people imagined their games and game-worlds. This chapter will not attempt to construct a fully resolved definition of ‘medieval game’; rather, it reorients the theoretical boundaries imposed around our understanding of ‘game’ by investigating conceptual commonalities such as narrative, interactivity, player effort, rules, and lusory attitude to open avenues of investigation into medieval games and gaming.

Since game-texts unsettle the boundaries between ‘game’ and ‘literature’, their intersections between ‘game’ and ‘text’ present one way to explore—and test—previous assumptions about entertainment and recreation in premodern literature and culture. Critics and editors dismissed the early Middle English bird-debate *The Thrush and the Nightingale* (c. 1272-82), for instance, as a completely conventional poem with “no personal touches,”¹⁷ but fail to note that the text's purpose was not focused toward a literary rhetorical competition, as in the earlier *The Owl and the Nightingale* (c. 1250) found in manuscripts for a clergy interested in secular literature, but an oral one: the majuscules marking the dialogue for each speaker throughout the work denote that *The Thrush and the Nightingale* was designed for a household audience who wished to perform a debate in a hall, chamber, or garden by interacting with the text. Medieval manuscripts were often produced for a patron or circulated through a community of readers (though this was not always the case); it was not until the late fifteenth century through developments in printing, commercial book production, and the guild of Stationers (established c. 1403) that the demand for books spread beyond pockets of literary communities.¹⁸

¹⁷ Bruce Dickens and R.M. Wilson, eds. *Early Middle English Texts* (Cambridge: Bowes and Bowes, 1951), 71.

¹⁸I am thus using the term ‘textual community’ in a broader receptionist sense, more akin to the model deployed by Brian Stock than Martin Irvine, in that medieval texts and manuscripts not only generated cohesion through their circulation within existing social networks, but also enabled their reading audiences to actively participated in this transmission. Brian Stock, *Listening for the Text: On the Uses of*

As interactive literary objects, game-texts are akin to other performative texts in the Middle Ages which create contingent moments among readers in each iteration of their gameplay and performance. The texts, manuscripts, and reading communities in which these entertainments were found attest to the cultural tastes and trends of a broad social spectrum. It is these spaces of play between the ludic and the literary that this chapter takes as its focus, exposing contrived dichotomies and assumptions that have long plagued game scholarship to explore what the idea of ‘game’ held for authors and players of medieval literature and culture.

1.1 Defining Game

Any critical discussion of games and play in culture must invariably begin with Dutch medievalist and cultural historian Johan Huizinga’s groundbreaking work *Homo Ludens: The Play-Element in Culture*, which was the first investigation of play in culture and remains the initial touchstone in play and cultural game studies.¹⁹ Huizinga coined the term ‘magic circle’ in

the Past (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990). In his recent book on English literary communities, Ralph Hanna III considers London as a distinct community of readers in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Although London grew into a metropolis known for commercial book production in the early modern period, its status as a literary centre was equivalent to York, Bristol, Winchester, Worcester, and other sites of continual book production since it was neither a centre for administration until the 1340s nor city with a large university. London’s reputation as a ‘provincial’ locale, coupled with the lack of universities near the city, explain in part the scarcity in book production in London before 1380. *London Literature, 1300-1380* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 1-43. C. Paul Christianson also provides an early history of the book trade in London and Misery of Stationers in his valuable resource *A Directory of London Stationers and Book Artisans, 1300-1500* (New York: The Bibliographical Society of America, 1990). For an overview of textual communities in the later Middle Ages, see also: Ralph Hanna III, *Pursuing History: Middle English Manuscripts and their Texts* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 8-17 and Paul Zumthor, *Toward a Medieval Poetics*, trans. Philip Bennett (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1972), 13-24.

¹⁹ Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: The Play Element in Culture* (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1955).

his effort to explain how games create their own sense of reality with different rules that do not have meaning or significance in everyday affairs: “Inside the circle of the game the laws and customs of ordinary life no longer count. We are different and do things differently.”²⁰ The magic circle, at its most literal, is the physical place and time of a game (e.g., on a board or in a field). It is a way in which to ascribe meaning to cultural objects and circumstances. The “hallowed” spots for medieval games occur within both physical spaces (e.g., hall and garden) and material spaces (e.g., game board, manuscript, and text). As a binary concept, however, Huizinga’s magic circle has met with criticism in recent years as being too formalist, rigid, and idealistic in its conceptions of ‘game’ and ‘reality.’ Edward Castronova, in his book *Synthetic Worlds*, argues that games “cannot be sealed completely; people are crossing it all the time in both directions, carrying their behavioural assumptions and attitudes with them.”²¹ Indeed, the game/life dichotomy remains a topic of ongoing debate within the field of cultural game studies, especially in light of recent trends in the game industry, such as the use of augmented reality technology, persuasive games, and gamification—that is, the application of game elements (points, scores, turns, contests, badges) to nongame activities as a form of external motivation.²² More recently, videogame scholars have suggested moving beyond discussions of the magic

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

²¹ Edward Castronova, *Synthetic Worlds: The Business and Culture of Online Games* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 147.

²²In her recent article, game studies scholar Mia Consalvo critiques Huizinga’s ‘magic circle’ as a limiting, passé structuralist concept. She argues that games should instead be regarded as frames, showing the fluidity of experience in and outside of the play-space. “There is No Magic Circle,” *Games and Culture* 4.4 (2009): 408-17. See also: Jacques Ehrmann, “Homo Ludens Revisited,” *Yale French Studies* 41 (1968): 31–57; Eugen Fink, “The Oasis of Happiness: Toward an Ontology of Play,” *Yale French Studies* 41 (1968): 19–30; T. L. Taylor, *Play Between Worlds: Exploring Online Game Culture* (Cambridge, MA.: The MIT Press); Thomas Malaby, “Beyond Play: A New Approach to Games,” *Games and Culture* 2.2 (2007): 95–113. I discuss medieval and early modern game spaces in Chapter 4.

circle concept altogether in the study of games.²³ Nevertheless, Huizinga’s magic circle remains an enduring concept, and one currently underexplored in the context of medieval studies.

Approached from different disciplines—mathematics, economics, anthropology, psychology, sociology, computer science, languages and literatures, and others—and constituting a wide range of activities, games are easy to identify but difficult to concretely define. Indeed, each discipline seems to have its own definition of the term. In order to demonstrate how medieval game-texts differ from our modern understanding of games, it is first necessary to outline the definitions conceived by game studies scholars. The following chart includes ten influential modern definitions of game from game theorists and designers (Table 1.1, emphasis mine):

²³ See, for instance, Eric Zimmerman, “Jerked Around by the Magic Circle—Clearing the Air Ten Years Later,” *Gamasutra*, February 7, 2012, accessed January 12, 2013, http://www.gamasutra.com/view/feature/6696/jerked_around_by_the_magic_circle; and Darryl Woodford, “Abandoning the Magic Circle,” *dpwoodford.net*, 2008, accessed September 2, 2013, <http://www.dpwoodford.net/Papers/MCSeminar.pdf>.

Table 1.1: Definitions of ‘Game’ by Game Studies Scholars and Designers

CRITIC	DEFINITION
HUIZINGA (1938)	“[Play is] a free activity standing quite consciously outside “ordinary life” as being “not serious,” but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest , and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to the fixed rules and in an orderly manner. It promotes the formation of social groupings .” ²⁴
CAILLOIS (1958)	“Play is “an activity which is essentially: Free (voluntary), separate [in time and space], uncertain, unproductive , governed by rules, make-believe .” ²⁵
ELIOTT AVEDON AND BRIAN SUTTON-SMITH (1971)	“[As game is] an exercise of voluntary control systems in which there is an opposition between forces , confined by a procedure and rules in order to produce a disequibrial outcome .” ²⁶
BERNARD SUITS (1978)	“To play a game is to engage in activity directed towards bringing about a specific state of affairs , using only means permitted by rules , where the rules prohibit more efficient in favor of less efficient means, and where such rules are accepted just because they make possible such activity.” ²⁷
CHRIS CRAWFORD (1982)	“I perceive four common factors: representation [“a closed formal system that subjectively represents a subject of reality”], interaction, conflict , and safety [“the results of a game are always less harsh than the situation the game models”].” ²⁸
SID MEIER (2000)	“A game is a series of interesting choices .” ²⁹

²⁴ Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 13.

²⁵ Roger Caillois, *Man, Play, and Game*, trans. Meyer Barash (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1961), 10-11.

²⁶ E. M. Avedon and Brian Sutton-Smith, *Study of Games* (New York: Wiley, 1971), 7.

²⁷ Bernard Suits, *The Grasshopper: Games, Life, and Utopia* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1978; Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2005), 34.

²⁸ Chris Crawford, *The Art of Computer Game Design* (Berkeley: McGraw-Hill/Osborne Media, 1982), 7-14.

²⁹ Andrew Rollings and Dave Morris, *Game Architecture and Design* (Scottsdale, Arizona: Coriolis, 2000), 38.

SALEN AND ZIMMERMAN (2004)	“A game is a system in which players engage in an artificial conflict , defined by rules , that results in a quantifiable outcome .” ³⁰
THOMAS MALABY (2007)	“A game is a semi-bounded and socially legitimate domain of contrived contingency that generates interpretable outcomes .” ³¹
ESPEN AARSETH (2011)	“[Games are] facilitators that structure player behavior , and whose main purpose is enjoyment .” ³²

Table 1.1 Definitions of ‘Game’ by Game Studies Scholars and Designers

While each definition presents its own set of criteria—and illustrates the polysemous nature of ‘game’—certain characteristics of games remain consistent: *rules, autonomy and freedom, known outcomes, and goals within a feedback system.*

The *rule-based, formal system* determines player behavior by limiting methods for achieving a goal or solving a problem. Limiting actions enables players to creatively explore possibilities in support of achieving their desired outcome.

Games also include definite *known outcomes*. While Salen, Zimmerman, and Juul believe that outcomes must be quantifiable, Malaby instead defines a game’s outcomes as “interpretable,” which can include qualitative results that are known to the players. For most definitions, theorists note that players either know the outcome or know the type of outcome they could achieve by winning the game.

³⁰ Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman, *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), 80.

³¹ Malaby, “Beyond Play,” 106.

³² Espen Aarseth, “I Fought the Law: Transgressive Play and the Implied Player,” *Situated Play, Proceedings of DiGRA 2007 Conference* (2007): 130.

Games also require *autonomy* and *freedom of play*, within the accepted goals, rules, and system. Player autonomy ensures a safe space for surmounting challenges and handling conflict. In fact, conflict becomes one of the main criteria for Avedon, Sutton-Smith, Salen, Zimmerman, and Malaby. For Juul, “player effort” also implies competition.³³ The autonomy experienced by the player thus requires an opposition in order to be considered a game.

Finally, games include a *goal*, which is the specific outcome that players will strive to achieve (whether personal or shared). The goal not only generates a sense of purpose, but also reinforces participation and motivation through a *feedback system*.³⁴

Other criteria, such as Thomas Malaby’s “socially legitimate domain” and Espen Aarseth’s “enjoyment,” emphasize qualities that are common elements of games, but they do not necessarily need to apply to classify an activity as a game. Sid Meier offers such a broad definition that other activities, such as cooking, would have to be included as well. More implicitly, definitions of games by game designers, scholars, and critics often situate notions of player autonomy and cultural production squarely within the domain of modern history. In his theoretical discussion of play and game, Miguel Sicart interprets games as successors to the Bakhtinian carnivalesque space of subversion: “[g]ames are an example of carnivalesque behavior that leads to festive liberation in search [of] freedom, expression, and truth.”³⁵ Medievalists are, of course, well aware of this outmoded view of medieval spaces of laughter, play, and festivity.³⁶ Yet scholars continue to claim ideas of ‘game,’ ‘leisure,’ and

³³ Juul, *Half-Real*, 40.

³⁴ An edge case to this criterion would be the modern ‘sandbox’ simulation game like *Minecraft* where the goals of the game (e.g., survive) do not take precedence over the content-creation of the player.

³⁵ Miguel Sicart, *Play Matters* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2014), 11.

³⁶ Mikhail Bakhtin’s notion of the carnivalesque has often been ascribed to the Middle Ages as a point of comparison to the modern world, whether in terms of play or a past utopian space that was ‘lost’ in the

‘entertainment’ as concepts that are distinctly post-medieval. Following the fallacy of ascribing the modern concept of a work/recreation dichotomy to the medieval period,³⁷ social historian Peter Burke reasons that the concept of ‘leisure’ simply did not exist in the Middle Ages and was invented in the early sixteenth century.³⁸ Burke argues that leisure developed as an institutionalized time-space as working hours became well-defined, so people engaged in “non-utilitarian” leisure activities in times they were not working.³⁹ To rob the Middle Ages of playful spaces means discounting the *ways* in which players, designers, readers, and scribes understood games. It is not that people in the Middle Ages did not play games, but rather that the games they enjoyed upheld and reflected familiar cultural systems and were a significant aspect in the social fabric of those who played them. The idea of labour may have been defined differently (or not as sharply) for the nobility, but pastimes were often considered to be methods for occupying free time and involved active participation.⁴⁰ As abstract systems that were often used to allegorize social organization, rules of conduct, and inanimate agencies such as chance, medieval game-texts in particular share a novel relationship with literature that perturbs the seemingly core features of modern games outlined above (rules, known outcomes, autonomy, goals, feedback

early modern period, but remains a romantic notion that critics do not support with historical examples. See, for instance, Chris Humphrey, *The Politics of Carnival: Festive Misrule in Medieval England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), especially chapter 1 for an overview of critical approaches to the notion of misrule in medieval England.

³⁷ For historians and sociologists that conceptualize the temporal ‘rupture’ between pre-industrial and industrial societies regarding the notion of leisure, see: Joffre Dumazedier, *Toward a Society of Leisure*, trans. Stewart E. McClure (New York: Free Press, 1967); Michael Marrus, *The Emergence of Leisure* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974); and Jean Verdon, *Les loisirs en France au Moyen Age* (Paris: J. Tallandier, 1980), 9.

³⁸ Peter Burke, “The Invention of Leisure in Early Modern Europe,” *Past & Present* 146 (1995): 139.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 149.

⁴⁰ See my discussion of medieval leisure in “Introduction: Setting Up the Board,” in *Games and Gaming in Medieval Literature* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), 8-9.

loops). But before I turn to a discussion of medieval game-texts, it is first necessary to explore the etymological roots of ‘game’ and ‘play’ as they relate to the Middle Ages.

When is a game in the Middle Ages considered a *game* (as opposed to play, pilgrimage, love, and so on)? Can such boundaries exist? And, perhaps more importantly for the purposes of this chapter, how do we formulate a boundary between a game and a non-game in a literary context? The concepts of game and play changed considerably throughout the Middle Ages. The *Middle English Dictionary* defines both ‘game’ and ‘play’ as pleasurable activities that often include amusement, joy, merriment, jest, jokes, contests, fun, sport, and amorous play.⁴¹ In other analyses of games from the Middle Ages, the idea of ‘game’ becomes synonymous not only with the more generalized concept of ‘play,’ but also with other pastimes such as gardening, dancing, and parading pets.⁴² Huizinga observes that despite their seeming interchangeability, the words ‘game’ and ‘play’ possess a unique derivation in English compared to other European vernaculars; while most Romance languages contain a single word to express these concepts (derived from the Latin word *jocus*), English contains two words (derived from *ludus* and *plega*). In Middle French, for instance, the phrase “playing a game” translates as “jouer un jeu.”⁴³ In classical Latin, *jocus* originally signified joking or jesting, and the word’s meaning was eventually broadened to include all manner of ‘play.’⁴⁴ In early English texts, Laura Kendrick

⁴¹MED, *pleien*, s.v.; MED, *game*, s.v.; and MED, *gamen*, s.v.

⁴² Teresa McLean, *The English at Play in the Middle Ages* (Berks: Kensale Press, 1985), 89.

⁴³ Other derivatons of *jocus* in Romance languages include: *gioco* (Italian), *juego* (Spanish), *joc* (Rumanian), and *jogo* (Portuguese). See: Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 36. Laura Kendrick notes that Old English shows some evidence of the semantic structure, “playing a play,” but the language (for reasons unknown) did not adopt this structure long-term. “Games Medievalists Play: How to Make Earnest and Still Enjoy It,” *New Literary History* 40.1 (2009), 49–50.

⁴⁴ Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 36.

notes that scribes used the Old English *plega* to translate *ludus*, and *gamen* to translate *jocus*.⁴⁵ Originating from the Old Saxon *plegan*, meaning to expose oneself to danger, the Anglo-Saxon word *plega* and the verb *plegan* were associated with movement, exercise, and actions such as clapping, dancing, fighting, grasping, and other forms of physical activity.⁴⁶ In the *Canons of Edgar*, Wulfstan writes: “We lærað þæt preost ne beo hunta ne hafecere ne tæflere, ac plegge on his bocum swa his hade gebirað” [We advise that a priest should not be a hunter, hawker, or gambler, but play with his books so as to sustain his nature]—suggesting that not only were books considered to be playthings, but reading was also considered a worthwhile activity for priests.⁴⁷ *Gamen*, on the other hand, evolved to incorporate not just feelings of pleasure but also pastimes that produced positive emotions, including activities such as hawking, jousting, debating, sporting, playing board games, and other forms of recreation. Games, in essence, become the object of play (a deviation from the term found in modern notions of game).⁴⁸ By the late thirteenth century, *gamen* in England began to lose its earlier connotations and became more closely associated with strategy, rules, and *thing-ness* in a narrower sense. Nearing the end of the early Middle English bird-debate *The Owl and the Nightingale* (thirteenth century) for instance, the Nightingale states to the Owl, “Me þunc[þ] þat þu forleost þat game” [I think that you lost that game]—thereby attempting to declare herself the victor over her opponent.⁴⁹ Even when considered from a philological perspective, ideas of game and play are determined culturally. V.

⁴⁵ Kendrick, “Games Medievalists Play,” 43-61.

⁴⁶ Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 38.

⁴⁷ Wulfstan, *Canons of Edgar*, ed. Roger Fowler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), lxv.14.

⁴⁸ Philosopher Miguel Sicart writes that games “are part of the ecology of playthings and play contexts.” *Play Matters*, 4.

⁴⁹ *The Owl and the Nightingale*, ed. and trans. J. W. H. Atkins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), line 1649.

A. Kolve notes that “*ludus*, with its English equivalents play and game, became the ubiquitous generic term for vernacular drama” and argues that the word ‘play’ once had a dramatic root which is now divorced from our understanding of the term.⁵⁰

However, the etymology of ‘game’ provides only a general sense of how medieval authors understood and employed notions of the entertainment. Given the term’s fluidity throughout the Middle Ages, we might wonder whether such a definition would prove useful for exploring the many games found in/as medieval literature, especially in conjunction with the modern definitions of ‘game’ discussed above. Indeed, philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein chose the term ‘game’ to argue for the impossibility of such intrinsic definitions, believing that games can only be identified by “family resemblances.”⁵¹ In his encyclopedic treatise *The Oxford History of Board Games*, Parlett also writes that “[t]he word [game] is used for so many different activities that it is not worth insisting on any proposed definition. All in all, it is a slippery lexicological customer, with many friends and relations in a wide variety of fields.”⁵² Given the fluidity of terms, defining ‘game’ in the Middle Ages is at once frustratingly open and contained. Game-texts thus present us with candidate media objects for the study and destabilization of properties long thought to be essential for considering what makes something a game.

⁵⁰ V. A. Kolve, *The Play Called Corpus Christi* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1966), 12–13. Kolve continues his philological discussion, arguing that vernacular drama in the Middle Ages was often perceived as a game, which sets it apart from Latin liturgical drama (often called *ordo*, *processio*, and *repraesentatio*). In the same vein, Lawrence Clopper, in his discussion of medieval drama, remarks that “the word ‘play’ is historically and conceptually a philological subset of the word ‘game,’ not the other way around.” *Drama, Play, and Game: English Festive Culture in the Medieval and Early Modern Period* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 12.

⁵¹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (New York: MacMillan, 1953), 66–67.

⁵² Parlett, *The Oxford History of Board Games*, 1.

Before turning to a discussion of medieval game-texts, it is also important to keep in mind the potential perils of discussing medieval concepts in conjunction with modern models of games. Glending Olson cautions us on assuming a seamless understanding of play in the Middle Ages, which could be applied to the idea of games as well:

The idea of recreation is in one sense an attempt to fit play into an ethical framework. It invites consideration of the idea of play itself, which has been the topic of some well-known theoretical treatment, particularly Johan Huizinga's *Homo Ludens* . . . In some respects medieval views of play are *reasonably close to modern ones*, but in general they tend to treat the subject from an ethical perspective rather than a psychological, sociological, or anthropological one. I prefer to stay with medieval theorizing here, especially since its point of view . . . is more directly related to medieval literary claims and criticism than modern play and game theories" [emphasis mine].⁵³

We should note here Olsen's hesitance in subscribing to any modern theories of play in his study, lest he stray from medieval ideology and succumb to a false ahistoricism. For medieval players, games were not just a form of recreation, but one means by which they could understand their own moral nature within the social fabric of medieval society.⁵⁴ Following an ethical framework for studying recreation in the Middle Ages, Olsen reminds us that the acceptance of entertainment was heavily influenced by Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, which aided in "liberalizing view[s] of recreation...[on] ethical terms rather than explicitly Christian ones" and medieval pastimes should be viewed within this lens.⁵⁵ In *Ethics*, a text discovered in the twelfth century and adopted by scholars at Oxford, Aristotle discusses the appropriate relationship between "the desire for entertainment and virtuous behaviour by making the former an

⁵³ Glending Olson, *Literature as Recreation in the Later Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 100.

⁵⁴ Game Studies scholars have also recently illustrated how players are not passive receptacles, but rather understand games as ethical objects within a wider network of moral responsibilities. See, for instance, Miguel Sicart's *The Ethics of Computer Games* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2009) for a comprehensive analysis of the ways in which player's negotiate morality in their digital experiences.

⁵⁵ Olsen, *Literature as Recreation*, 94.

instrument of the latter.”⁵⁶ Even from this overtly ethical frame of reference, a compiler or scribe, whose manuscripts were destined for public recreation, would be *designing for a user experience*—an experience often rooted by an attempt to simultaneously moralize and entertain for a *specific* audience; for instance, the twenty-two *demandes* included in British Library MS Additional 46919, an early fourteenth-century friar's miscellany owned by the Franciscan preacher William Herbert, are featured alongside a number of didactic works such as the French manual *Art de Venerie* and are prefaced with Latin commentary.⁵⁷ Within such a pluralistic ethical and cultural framework, Huizinga's ‘magic circle’—as an “act apart” from the “ordinary world” —cannot always be so clearly delineated along strict boundaries for medieval games (just as the concept finds issues with the influences and consequences of play in videogames).⁵⁸ The ‘hallowed spots’ we find in recreational game-texts in the Middle Ages appear in the same places and manner that we might find other texts: in collections of similar items (as with the *demandes d'amour*), in anthologies like the Findern manuscript, or in miscellanies among other texts and documents significant to medieval life. The scribe-compilers were obviously not always following Aristotelian ethics, but their choices of textual and visual arrangement for entertainment existed within a larger cultural framework, which can only be expounded by analyzing these historical, physical, and material spaces.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 95. In her book on ethics and medieval enjoyment, Jessica Rosenfeld notes that few philosophical treatises praising enjoyment survived in the early Middle Ages; thus, “pleasure was either transformed or denied as a valid ethical goal” in subsequent ideologies, often filtered through critics of pleasure such as Cicero. *Ethics and Enjoyment in Late Medieval Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 21.

⁵⁷ See Chapter 3 for a discussion of this manuscript and the circulation of *demandes d'amour* in England.

⁵⁸ Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 10.

1.2 The Medieval Game-Text

Scholars have noted the game-like qualities of the earlier Anglo-Saxon riddles in the Exeter Codex, but there are relatively few extant representations of games in English manuscripts and texts prior to the 1170s.⁵⁹ The earliest known reference to chess in England occurs in the Latin ‘Winchester Poem’ (c. 1150), which outlines the rules for chess by describing the moves and positions of the chess pieces on the game board.⁶⁰ While game-texts could be viewed as stemming in part from intellectual influences such as the tradition of performing and circulating Latin *disputatio*, a rhetorical competition created for medieval university curricula in Paris and Oxford during the 1150s,⁶¹ their play and circulation are overwhelmingly found in the *fin’ amors* courtly tradition originating from the lyrics of the troubadours in twelfth century France. This tradition of love is perhaps a fitting trend for the introduction of the interactive game-text, for *fin’ amors* was not a reflection of actual behaviour among the aristocracy, but rather a stylized expression of love—a fiction that could be enjoyed through lyric poetry, romance, and literature or performed at court. First described as “courtly love” by Gaston Paris

⁵⁹ For discussions of the Exeter riddles as playful texts, see: John Niles, *Old English Poems and the Play of the Texts* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2006); Dieter Bitterli, *Say What I am Called: The Old English Riddles of the Exeter Book and the Anglo-Latin Riddle Tradition* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009); and Patrick Murphy, *Unriddling the Exeter Book* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011).

⁶⁰ See Chapter 2 for a discussion of the ‘Winchester Poem.’

⁶¹ For a more detailed analysis of the *disputatio* tradition, see: B. C. Bazàn, J. W. Wippel, G. Fransen, and D. Jacquart, *Les Questions disputées et les questions quodlibétiques dans les facultés de théologie, de droit et de médecine*, (Belgium: Brepols, 1985). For a description of the medieval university see: Hastings Rashdall, *The Universities of Europe in the Middle Ages*, 3 Volumes (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987); John Van Engen, ed., *Learning Institutionalized: Teaching in the Medieval University* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000).

in 1883, the cultural concept has long endured dispute and scrutiny among medievalists.⁶² Since the *fin' amors* tradition has been well documented by medievalists, my aim here is not to provide a comprehensive discussion of *fin' amors*, but rather to explore how game-texts became part of this tradition and, through this tradition, depart from our modern notions of 'game.' In *Courtly Love, the Love of Courtliness, and the History of Sexuality*, James Schultz describes the cultural tenor in which literary games first emerged: "[c]ourtly culture elaborated a class-specific ideal of social life that required certain self-restraint—at table, in speech, in response to insult or challenge—and promised distinction in return."⁶³ In twelfth-century France, this court culture developed new ways to display refinement and sophistication among the ruling elite, including debates of love, verbal sparring, and displays of skill (e.g., tournaments and chess). Love in the medieval literary imagination was not only a fiction enjoyed by the nobility, but also a mode of cultural production that could display this 'distinction' through social activity. As Richard Firth

⁶² The term *amour courtois* was popularized in 1883 by Gaston Paris in his article "Lancelot du Lac, II. Le Conte de la Charrette," *Romania* 12 (1883): 459-534. While the term has become widely adopted among medievalists, many scholars have criticized its ahistoricism and multi-variant definitions. C. S. Lewis argued that courtly love represented an idealization of sexual love, but described it as a social process created by landless knights rather than an exclusively literary mode. *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 11-14. In response to such claims, D.W. Robertson argues that 'courtly love' does not exist and chastises those who discuss it, believing that 'courtly love' impedes proper examination of medieval literature. "The Concept of Courtly Love as an Impediment to the Understanding of Medieval Texts," in *The Meaning of Courtly Love*, ed. F.X. Newman (Albany: SUNY Press, 1968), 1-18. In his influential study on the meaning of courtly love, Roger Boase identifies twelve approaches to defining 'courtly love' in the Middle Ages, one of which is through a ludic lens. See his chart comparing the various theories in *The Origins and Meaning of Courtly Love* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977), 27. More recently, James Schultz argues in favour of reinstating the term 'courtly love' by arguing that 'courtly love' more accurately reflects the discipline of courtliness in which it originally flourished. *Courtly Love, the Love of Courtliness, and the History of Sexuality* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), 159-72. In this chapter, I prefer to use the terms 'matters of love' and 'courtly literature' since they appear more factual.

⁶³ Schultz, *Courtly Love*, xvi.

Green writes, the “late medieval nobleman was not content merely to experience the ennobling power of love through the poet’s imagination, he had himself to play the lover, to join with his fellows in an elaborate game of romantic make-believe.”⁶⁴ For medieval audiences, to participate in *fin’ amors* was essentially to play. In the prologue to book four of the Middle English *Confessio Amantis*, the lover Amans lists actions he can perform in pursuit of his lover—a collection of social activities that John Stevens calls the “game of love”:⁶⁵

And whanne it falleth othergate,
So that hire like noght to daunce,
Bot on the dees to caste chaunce
Or axe of love som demaunde,
Or ells that hir list comaunde
To rede and here of Troilus.⁶⁶

John Gower describes here the ludic space for lovers (in this case, unrequited) at play, crafting cooperative activities like dancing, reading, or playing with dice or questions of love. The ‘game of love’ as described by Stevens is not quite a game in the modern sense (outlined earlier in this chapter), but rather a way in which to define all manner of social activities in the expression of love. While the term has long been adopted by medievalists to figuratively describe the activities associated with participating in the *fin’ amors* tradition, it comprises vague, arbitrary social rules that he does not explicitly define.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Richard Firth Green, *Poets and Princepleasers: Literature and the English Court in the Late Middle Ages* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), 115.

⁶⁵ Stevens, *Music and Poetry in the Early Tudor Court* (London: Methuen, 1961; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 154-202.

⁶⁶ John Gower, *The Confessio Amantis*, ed. Russell A. Peck. TEAMS: Medieval English Texts Series (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute, 2003), 2:4.2790-95.

⁶⁷ For instance, in his study of English court poetry, Richard Firth Green discusses ‘the game of love’ in terms of the type of stylized writings of court poets. Green, *Poets and Princepleasers*, 101-34.

In fact, Stevens's term as applied to medieval phenomena does not actually align with medieval uses of 'game of love.' Medieval players invoke the term more specifically for depicting games like *le Roi Qui Ne Ment*, showing that the medieval use of 'game' supports the idea that the term increased in specificity in the later Middle Ages. The pursuit of a lover as a 'game' to win their favour was nevertheless allegorized and game boards found in medieval marginalia signify this parallel between games and love. For instance, John Lydgate's *Reson and Sensuallyte* (c. 1407) is a translation and expansion of *Les Échecs Amoureux* that illustrates how games in literature can reflect both the allegorical potential of love and the materiality of chess. Following a string of encounters with mythological gods and goddess in the Garden of Pleasance, the narrator witnesses a game of chess played between *Deduit* (Pleasure) and a young lady. After the game results in a tie, the narrator subsequently begins a game with the lady in an effort to win her love. Like chess games in other romances, here the chess game acts as a performance of courtly behaviour. As the narrator claims, Venus had sent him to the garden to learn the art of chess so that he may be successful in love: "For he sholde haue exercise / Of this play in al[le] wyse, / That his tyme he nat lese, / Syth he ys her wher he may chese."⁶⁸ The concepts of 'game' and 'love' clearly shared a close relationship in the later Middle Ages, but I would caution against using the terms loosely in the descriptions of all social activities surrounding *fin' amors*. In this dissertation I will use 'game of love' when the game I am discussing is specifically related to matters of love, taking my cues from texts, manuscripts, and boards, and the more general term 'play' when discussing other social activities related to *fin' amors* tradition.

⁶⁸ John Lydgate, *Reson and Sensuallyte*, ed. Ernst Sieper, Early English Text Society (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, and Trübner, 1901), line 5941-44.

The first games of love to emerge and gain widespread popularity were the *demandes d'amour*, a literary genre composed in both verse and prose and comprising a series of questions and answers that deal with the ideologies, attitudes, and etiquette of *fin' amors*. While the *demandes d'amour* could be enjoyed in their own right as a form of courtly literature, they were primarily used as a social framework for debating matters of love and for highly stylized conversation, and provided a basis for aristocratic and gentry parlour games. In their ability to function as both a literary form and a social amusement for the leisured classes, the *demandes d'amour* focused on open-ended questions concerning the nature of love, the acquisition of love, the practice of loving, the effects of love, and the characteristics of an ideal lover; thus, they mirrored the formalization of love developed by the literary imagination of medieval France and later disseminated in England and elsewhere. Readers could use *demandes* for engaging in casual, sophisticated discussion about amorous topics that could test knowledge of *fin' amors* and linguistic proficiency as well as reflect personal status. The *demandes d'amour* also provided a model for teaching aspects of courtesy, morality, proper social conduct, and social refinement, reflecting the literary tastes of the French aristocracy.

As a genre with widespread popularity among the gentry and nobility between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries, the *demandes d'amour* are found in 25 manuscripts and 30 incunabula—including literary anthologies, didactic manuals, miscellanies, and printed collections—in France, England, and elsewhere. Collections of *demandes d'amour*, which comprised various lists of questions of love and their answers, first appeared in the early fourteenth century and likely sprung from the earlier rise of courtly debate literature and the ideals of *fin' amors* in the twelfth century. Adam de la Halle's first *jeu-parti*, for instance, asks the question: "if you were to enjoy the favours of a lady only ten times in your life, would you

take them immediately or wait for a long time?” —a question found in later collections of *demandes d’amour*. The modularity of *demandes d’amour* indicates their fluidity as a ludic form without ascribing specific static outcomes of the game or winning objectives—elements that Avedon, Sutton-Smith, Salen, and Zimmerman include in their definition of games. The *demandes d’amour* could thus be used for a variety of ludic activities, from leisurely reading among an audience to more structured forms such as the social question-and-answer game *Roi Qui Ne Ment* (discussed in more detail below).

Scholars have suggested the mutual influence of both the *demandes d’amour* and the *jeux-partis* on social debate. Alexander Klein and Eero Illvonen first noted that questions and answers resembling the *demandes d’amour* appeared in the twelfth-century game *juec d’amour* and may have been an antecedent to later *jeu*—a speculation also shared by Margaret Felberg-Levitt, the most recent editor of the *demandes d’amour*. However, Christa Schlumbohm posits instead that the *demandes d’amour* arose from the Provençal *joc-partit*, linking the *joc-partit* to social games at court. Similarly, Madeleine Lazard argues that the *demandes d’amour* derived from the *Le Roi Qui Ne Ment* game in the early thirteenth century. In contrast, Arthur Långfors observes that the *demandes d’amour* may be based on the *jeux-partis*. While the origins of the *demandes d’amour* are clearly difficult to trace with any certainty, they certainly influenced and were influenced by other debate genres and may have begun as an oral amusement that were later written down. Felberg-Levitt notes that the *demandes d’amour* may have been initially transmitted orally and later circulated in loose folios or unbound manuscripts for memorization earlier than the fourteenth century. The origins of early *demandes d’amour*, developed within the open structure of medieval debate, provided a foundation for creating more stylistic debates, questions of love, and amatory patterns of communication.

Precursors to the *demandes d'amour* collections are also inspired by the courts of Eleanor of Aquitaine and her daughter Marie the Countess of Champagne in twelfth-century France and, from the beginning, elicit a ludic, interactive experience that emphasizes an adaptable system for debating matters of love. In book two of Andreas Capellanus's Latin treatise on the art of refined love, *De Amore* (c. 1186–90), Capellanus identifies Eleanor and Marie among other court ladies in a section titled *De variis iudiciis amoris* (Various judgements on love). These “love judgements,” totaling 21 in all, encompassed various cases in love that a court of noble ladies and gentlemen discussed, debated, and resolved with one person designated as a judge. It is doubtful whether Capellanus's cases on love were actual witnesses of the questions and activities within the courts (and textual communities) of Eleanor or Marie, but his effort to situate this ludic playspace nevertheless indicates a popular trend within courtly culture. Building on the traditions of scholastic dialogue and debate, including classical fields of grammar, rhetoric, and dialectics, and the poetic *ensos*, *partimens*, and *cobla* exchanges of the troubadours—that is, forms of courtly debates on love in which noble ladies were expected to participate—Capellanus's “love judgments” present a structure for discussing matters of love and became a forerunner to later *demandes d'amour* wherein each question ends with a single answer (a structure that mirrors that question and answer pattern found in the *demandes d'amour* collections). Other twelfth-century French debate poetry also incorporated *demande*-like questions, including Jean de Condé's *Dit de l'amant hardi et de l'amant cremeteus*, and the *jeux-partis* of Thibaut de Navarre. Similarly, the French *clerc-chevalier* debates such as *Florence et Blanchefleur*, written in the twelfth century, focus on a central question: is it the clerk or knight who is the best at love? In these instances, questions and answers acted as points of contention and encouraged debate among the audience; the conventions of *fin' amors* could thus be

explored among a group of readers as a pleasurable pastime in the courts of France and the *demandes d'amour* could be used to elicit this experience, whether through a formal game or through playful debate (or both).

Courtly games adopting the *demandes d'amour* as a central aspect of gameplay echo the collective debating community of the French court and appear frequently in romances, debates, and other recreational literature.⁶⁹ One such game, *Le Roi Qui Ne Ment*, was enjoyed by the aristocracy and gained widespread popularity in northern France during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries as a courtly entertainment played alongside other debating games such as the popular *jeux-partis* and *tensons*. *Le Roi Qui Ne Ment* was played by both men and women, and, more important for our purposes, specific rules of the game varied widely depending on the region or particular group of players. One of the most common ways to play the game was that a player was typically chosen as the 'king' and he or she would ask each other player a question concerning love. A player was required to respond with sincerity and the 'king' could punish the player if he or she judged the answer unsuitable. After a round of answers the players could ask the 'king' a question.⁷⁰ A player was required to respond with sincerity and the 'king' could punish the player if he or she judged the answer unsuitable. The questions asked may have been personal in order to draw out amorous love interests, but the numerous *demandes d'amour*

⁶⁹ The Middle French romance *Le Chevalier Errant* (c. 1394-96) contains scenes that incorporate both *les demandes* and *Le Roi Qui Ne Ment*. See also: Richard Firth Green, "*Le Roi qui ne Ment*," 211-25.

⁷⁰ Alexander Klein's study of the *demandes d'amour* led him to conclude that the game had no fixed rules and could be played in a variety of ways. *Die altfranzösischen Minnefragen*, Marburger Beiträge zur romanischen Philologie (Marburg: Adolf Ebel, 1911), 231. In his analysis of the game's social function, Richard Firth Green explores the rules and parameters of *Le Roi Qui ne Ment* based on depictions of the game found in romances and *demandes* collections. Green, "*Le Roi qui ne Ment*," 211-26. For more information on *Le Roi Qui Ne Ment*, see also Ernest Langlois, "Le Jeu du Roi et le jeu du Roi et de la Reine," *Romanische Forschungen* 23 (1907): 163-73.

collections indicate that riddles and general questions of love were chiefly used to encourage courtly, polite conversation and verbal sparring through lengthy debate. While the game could have a definite winner (and losers), this was not always the case and the game could continue *ad infinitum* until the participants tired of the game—a notion that would be troubling for the modern definitions of game quoted above. This open, playful, and non-restrictive attitude toward medieval games is prevalent among numerous game-texts. As Emma Cayley remarks, the game of love in late medieval France “is played in a constant state of desire for continuation rather than completion; the end of the game (closure) is often deliberately deferred in order to perpetuate the game,” similar to narratives of courtly love in romance.⁷¹ The game also served a more significant social function: as Richard Firth Green notes, the purpose was to pair off couples and potential lovers, providing a certain degree of social and emotional intimacy. The rules and parameters of the game therefore varied depending on the audience’s desires while maintaining a loose, recognizable form for play.

Le Roi Qui Ne Ment was depicted in romances (such as the Dutch *Roman van Heinric en Margriete van Limborch*), fabliaux (*Le Sentier Batu*, where a queen is chosen instead of a king), and other medieval texts (notably Boccaccio’s *Filocolo*, book IV), which often describe the game in play. Players could draw inspiration and *demandes* from the large collections of *demandes d’amour* found in manuscripts; alternatively, the *demandes* could be, in part, recordings of past games. John Longuyon’s Alexandrian romance *Les Voeux du Paon* (The vows of the peacock) (1312), which he wrote for Thibaut de Bar, bishop of Liège, includes a lengthy depiction of the game played by five characters in the Chamber of Venus at the request of Cassamus: Betis, his younger sister Fesonas, his cousin Edea, Ydorus, and their prisoner-guest

⁷¹ Cayley, *Debate and Dialogue*, 12 (see chap. 1 n. 11).

Cassiel. Cassamus encourages this game in an effort to pair Edea and Cassiel.⁷² *Le Roi Qui Ne Ment* was also mentioned by other authors as a form of social activity to reflect the refinements of court culture. In *Le joli Buisson de Jonece*, Jean Froissart notes that a gathering of nobles played the game as a form of elite entertainment. Guillaume de Machaut depicts a group of courtiers playing the game in *Remède de fortune* and a gathering of nobles, including Charles, Duke of Normandy, playing *Le Roi Qui Ne Ment* in *Voir dit*. That the game was referenced continuously in literature is a testament to its popularity and significance as a space for role-playing *fin' amors* among friends and family.

Another game based on the *demandes d'amour*, called *Le Jeu aux Rois et aux Reines* (The game of kings and queens) has been suggested by scholars to be a parody of *Le Roi Qui Ne Ment*. Adam de la Halle's pastourelle *Le Jeu de Robin et Marion* (c. 1283) is among the first to mention the game, which is played in a similar fashion to *Le Roi Qui Ne Ment*. In the pastourelle, Adam de la Halle uses a *demande* to mock courtly etiquette by asking personal questions such as "Quel viande tu aimes miex?" (What meat do you like the best?). The game also includes the king's ability to request a forfeit. Robin, in his refusal to respond to a question Marion deems unsuitable, pays a forfeit demanded by the king: he must kiss Marion. In the *Tournoi de Chauvency* (1285), Jacques Bretel observes three question-and-answer games played by the aristocracy following the tournament of Chauvency, including *Le Roi Qui Ne Ment* and *Le Jeu aux Rois et aux Reines*, which he lists as separate games. Felberg-Levitt also suggests that *Le Roi Qui Ne Ment* and *Le Jeu aux Rois et aux Reines* may have been two completely separate games, though they have decidedly similar rules. While questions could be devised orally, collections of *demandes d'amour* may have also been consulted by players as inspiration or aid for such games

⁷² See Chapter 3 for a discussion of this scene in a fifteenth-century Middle English excerpt.

and other recreational activities. Indeed, different series of *demandes d'amour* collections list a wide variety of *demandes*, ranging from questions that incite lengthy discussion to questions that accompany one-word answers (or no answers at all). The extant utterances and model dialogues found in the *demandes d'amour* collections—questions that are often reiterated in textual depictions of *Le Roi Qui Ne Ment* and other question-and-answer games—nevertheless provide insight into the particulars of aristocratic courtliness and entertainment and show how the game's modularity could adapt to serve the interests of its audience.

The Middle French dice-poem *Le Jeu d'Amour* [the Game of Love] (c. 1300) also played with this code of love by producing a more structured interactive, non-linear literary experience in which players are directly inserted into the courtly rhetoric through dice rolls. Found in a single extant manuscript penned during the late thirteenth century, *Le Jeu d'Amour* was played in mixed company of aristocratic men and women. Courtly phrases such as “bonne amour fine,” and “bel ami” appear throughout its leaves: the scribe enhances this performance of the *fin' amors* ethos by literally transforming each page in the manuscript into an ornate gaming board, listing eight fortunes on a page enclosed in gold and blue medallions and organized by sum.⁷³ The design of *Le Jeu d'Amour* is visually elaborate and, given the prevalence of other courtly games in the late thirteenth century, the author's preoccupation with creating temporal instances of *dalliance* does not come as a surprise. Kenneth Varty conjectures that the game was played with four men and four women. Each player would cast two or three dice and match their roll to a medallion.⁷⁴ Upon further inspection, the manuscript contains four game sets ranging from a sum of three to eighteen, save the first set which begins at the sum of nine, and a sequential

⁷³ Kraemer, *Le Jeu d'Amour*, lines 154, 258, and 542.

⁷⁴ Kenneth Varty, review of *Le Jeu d'Amour*, by Erik Kraemer, *Modern Language Review* 72.3 (1977): 678.

single game of two dice on folios 3v, 7v, and 11v. The ability of readers to play *Le Jeu d'Amour* in any number of ways, ranging from a few people playing a single set (having four to choose from) to each player possessing their own set of pages, echoes the malleability of the *demandes d'amour*.⁷⁵ The game-poet utilizes the binomial triangle in order to organize his sums, but he applies no special meaning to any number, including his mention of “rafle” or the highest roll 6.6.6, which can contain a positive or negative fortune depending on the set (Table 1.2):

Good	Poor
Set #1 C'est bien jete, rafle moult grande, Il est fol qui sens vous demande, Car vous havez vostre estude Boute en l'amoureuse vie (181-4).	Set #2 Tu contrefes le papelart, Et s'as un droit cuer de renart Personne qui se fie en toy N'est pas bien avise, je croy (465-68).

Table 1.2: Comparison of Fortune 6.6.6 in *Le Jeu d'Amour*

In these two outcomes, the focus lies in revealing aspects about the player or players, including whether they will receive love or whether they are a deceiver in matters of love. In order to create opportunities for intimate tension, the author occasionally separates the outcomes in certain sums depending on whether the player was a man or woman, and dictates different actions a player can complete. One combination of 5.5.3, for instance, asks a fellow player to call the roller “folle I bee” if the player is a woman, and a roll of 5.5.4 of the same set allows, perhaps suggestively, a male player to embrace a fellow “friend.”⁷⁶ Other fortunes require

⁷⁵ To date, no scholar has examined how these texts function together (or even how the game is played).

⁷⁶ Kraemer, *Le Jeu d'Amour*, lines 134 and 146.

players to pay money to a pot and some rolls even required players to sit out, thereby showing that the game can have a potential winner if the players choose to turn *Le Jeu d'Amour* in to a gambling game.⁷⁷ Teresa McLean comments on this type of ludic atmosphere in noting that these forms of love games and romance were incredibly popular among women and created “conversation [that was] charged with possibly romantic significance.”⁷⁸ In that vein, the game-poet references popular literary couples from Arthurian romances, including Lancelot and Guinevere, though he evokes a general knowledge of the characters rather than a specific trait.⁷⁹ The game thus initiates discussion and debate, *dalliance*, and moments of courtly flirtation with fellow participants as they read and draw connections between a player and their fortunes; perhaps anticipating this readerly agency, the game-poet maintains minimal authorial presence, focusing instead on the reader’s overall ludic experience. As Kraemer observes, the game-poet mentions “vous” thirty-one times and “tu” one-hundred-eighteen times.⁸⁰ Through the use of the codex and probability, the game-poet creates the rules, actions, and future outcomes for the players, and the players in turn enjoy spontaneous play in matters of love from their own interpretations of the pages. Chance by casting dice is not figured as the primary agent in love, but as an implied, necessary factor for generating this amorous play. Although specific outcomes

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, lines 365-68.

⁷⁸ Teresa McLean, *The English at Play*, 93.

⁷⁹ For instance:

Onques Lancelot n’ama tant
 Genevre au gentil corps pleasant
 C’on vous aime de cuer parfait.
 Il m’est avis que c’est bien fait (Kraemer, *Le Jeu d'Amour*, 165-8)

This element is common in other dice-games as well. See also A. Bobrinski’s edition *Jeu d'Amour, Franzusskaja gadalnaja kniga 15 weka*. St. Petersburg, 1856 for a similar use of romance characters.

⁸⁰ Kraemer, *Le Jeu d'Amour*, 9.

are possible, they are rare among the fortunes; rather, the emphasis lies on immersing players in the *fin' amors* tradition in a similar fashion to the *demandes d'amour*. While the *demandes d'amour* collections focus on polite conversation and verbal sparring, *Le Jeu d'Amour* transforms each player into a potential lover themselves, and the suggestive outcomes denote a higher level of intimacy among the players. In both instances, the objective of the game is to participate in this fiction. The manuscript provides the feedback loop necessary to facilitate play, but the nuances of the text area are only revealed in the moments of play between the players and their relations. Although such a game shows evidence of rules and autonomy, its lack of competition and goals particular to the game would render it an edge case within the confines of many of the definitions of the modern game. *Le Jeu d'Amour* was nevertheless clearly understood and played as a game in medieval French social circles.

The appeal of courtly literature and games was in this access to specialized knowledge: a code of conduct only the most noble could seek to imitate, perform, and enjoy. From the rise in popularity of the *demandes d'amour* collections and games and the visually ornate pages of *Le Jeu d'Amour*, we can see that social courtly games in France provided not only a form of recreation, but also a status symbol presented visually on the page. Furthermore, these courtly games of love affirm the ethical and social conditions postulated by Stephen Jaeger, but their prevalence and appeal does not necessarily speak to a rise from primitivism: the courtesy, civility, and refinement exhibited in the *demandes* and *Le Jeu d'Amour* reinforces virtues and accomplishments in order to achieve an aesthetic that promotes status and reputation.⁸¹ From their invention and popularity among readers who wished to practice and participate in *luf-*

⁸¹ C. Stephen Jaeger, *The Origins of Courtliness: Civilizing Trends and the Foundation of Courtly Ideals, 939-1210* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 3-9.

talkyng, the *demandes d'amour* games and *Le Jeu d'Amour* reveal how players negotiated a fluid boundary between the terms 'game' and 'literature' and between 'game' and 'non-game.' While the *demandes d'amour* could be used as a literary device or narrative framework, they could just as easily lend themselves to courtly games dependent on stylized debate and performance. Similarly, *Le Jeu d'Amour*'s invocation of familiar literary figures and provocative gestures testifies to the desire to become immersed in *fin' amors*. The *demandes d'amour* are not referenced as games in themselves, but their capacity to *become* a game was certainly known to audiences. In this way, medieval game-texts reinforce the main tenet of games as formal systems (and are akin to medieval board games like chess and merels) at the same time they unsettle the criteria for modern games such as quantifiable goals and outcomes as posited by modern game studies scholars. *Le Jeu d'Amour* and *le Roi Qui Ne Ment* could potentially be played competitively—that is, players can win or lose the game—but a number of literary games remain deliberately variable in their form and content and are thereby able to be played either competitively or non-competitively.

Another feature of modern game definitions troubled by medieval literary ludic games is the assumption that all games include disequilibrium (Avedon and Sutton-Smith), quantifiable (Salen, Zimmerman, and Juul), or unproductive (Caillois) outcomes. In the fifteenth-century Chaucerian dice-poem *The Chaunce of the Dyse* (c. 1430-1450), the game-poet constructs a poem that deliberately depends on chance—the unknown—in order to create meaning for the players. While other game-texts such as *Ragman Rolle* equalize chance (e.g. every fortune has a 1/23 odds), *The Chaunce of the Dyse*, like *Le Jeu d'Amour*, employs dice as an active agent for distributing fortunes to the players. Players cast three dice and match their rolls to a corresponding stanza, a series of seven lines that assigns the player a specific character-portrait.

The game-poet also organizes *The Chaunce of the Dyse* by combination, descending from 6.6.6 to 1.1.1.⁸² While other dice-poems such as *Le Jeu D'Amour* employs probability as a simple mediating agent between the player and their fortune, *The Chaunce of the Dyse* instead uses these structures to denote symbolic relations. Fortune 6.6.6 requires one of the least probable rolls, and is considered the 'best' roll—often associated with Venus.⁸³ Following this precept, the poet not only dedicates the fortune to her, but also connects the player's disposition to Venus's exemplary ideal: "So youre mekenesse ageysn al vice is bote / Who pleylny knoweth youre condicioun / To yow may be made no comparisoun" (26-8). *The Chaunce of the Dyse* presents a deepened preoccupation with characters and character types, and uses mnemonic devices such as Venus's "Cokille" and "synamome" aroma to relate immediate experience to previous knowledge.⁸⁴ Not surprisingly, 1.1.1 reads "Pore is the caste and ryght such is the chaunce" (408), indicating the poor cast and, perhaps coincidentally, allowing the author to end the poem by "leu[ing] in woo" (413). In this way, this game-poet shows a clear working knowledge of both literary conventions and the conventions of recreational dicing games.

While the author also includes good and bad fortunes, the entertainment lay primarily in the discussions and dalliance within the text. The game-poet's addition of well-known Chaucerian characters, including Griselda and Troilus, and allusion to popular locations in London generate

⁸² Three six-sided dice have a total of 216 possible combinations and 56 sets of combinations. One cubic die has a 1/6 chance of displaying a specific number. As the rolls are order-independent according to basic combinatorics, the probability of receiving any given fortune ranges from 0.46% to 2.78%.

⁸³L. Barbe, "Dice," *Notes & Queries*. s5-IV (1878): 302.

⁸⁴ Hammond, "The Chance of the Dice," 22-25. Hereafter, line numbers for *The Chaunce of the Dyse* will be given in parentheses.

a relationship between author, player, and text that is markedly situated within fifteenth-century English literary culture.⁸⁵ Fortune forty-three reads, for instance:

Of olde stories / taken ye grete hede
That ye ne had moo bokes / is gret skathe
ffor your talent / ys gretely set to rede
Ye kan by rote / the wifes lyfe of Bathe
He might wel sey ful erlyche / and to rathe
Chosen he had / that machched with yow were
Sure of a shrewe / might he ben with oute fere (295-301).

In this particular fortune, the game-poet addresses a player not only well-read, but also well-acquainted with Chaucer's *Wife of Bath*. As Eleanor Hammond, the first editor of the text, writes: the game-poet "does change the formula, he does see more of his object, he is not attempting to instruct" but entertain.⁸⁶ For *The Chaunce of the Dyse*, the game-poet deliberately attempts to craft fortunes that could apply to both men and women, resulting in the creation of ambiguous character portraits. While Hammond contends that this ambiguity causes the game-poet to maintain a stiff, expressionless poetic form, the poet's ability to create such variability in outcome, as in fortune forty-three, shows considerable skill in medieval game design.⁸⁷ The reader's player agency in *The Chaunce of the Dyse* results not only from the spontaneous interplay of self and text—players matching the topically variable fortunes to their own predicaments—but also from the conversational dialogue between author and reader in the confirmation of moral virtue and *fin' amors* ethos. Accordingly, the author's recognizable use of structure, local and literary allusion, and temporal immediacy create a performative space that is rich in debate and innuendo typical of other games in the *fin' amors* tradition.

⁸⁵ J. Allan Mitchell explores the allusions to Chaucerian characters in *The Chaunce of the Dyse* and their relation to *Troilus and Criseyde*. See *Ethics and Eventfulness*, 61-68.

⁸⁶ Hammond, "The Chance of the Dice," 3.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

The game-poet, then, distinguishes *The Chaunce of the Dyse* in both form and content from other so-called ‘classic’ games. In this game-text, there is no declared ‘winner’; instead, the pleasure of playing the game comprises the audience’s interactions with the text itself. Unlike other contemporaneous dice-poems in France and Italy, such as Lorenzo Spirito’s *Libro della Ventura* [The Book of Chance] (c. 1482) and the *Dodechedron*, which both use elaborate tables and mechanisms reminiscent of philosophical divination practices to determine prognostications, *The Chaunce of the Dyse* game-poet creates a gaming system that is closer to popular gambling games. While gambling games such as *hazard* were a subject of continual sanction and criticism by the Church, courtly games of chance that mimicked such gambling games did not fall under such scrutiny since their outcomes did not include life-changing stakes.⁸⁸ Chaucer’s Pardoner associates the play of hazard with riots, taverns, parties, and betting, warning his fellow pilgrims of the dangers of gambling: “[h]azard is verrey mooder of lesynges, / And of deceite, and cursed forswerynges, / Blaspheme of Crist, manslaughter, and wast.”⁸⁹ The outcome not only becomes quantifiable, but also involves a higher emotional (and financial) investment as the gamester places a wager in order to achieve their future outcome. For the Pardoner, false outcomes become an enabler of immoral things to come:

Seven is my chaunce, and thyn is cynk and treye!”
 “By Goddes armes if thou falsely pleye,
 This daggere shal thurghout thyn herte go!” —

⁸⁸ Rhiannon Purdie, “Dice-games and the Blasphemy of Prediction,” in *Medieval Futures: Attitudes to the Future in the Middle Ages*, ed. J. A. Burrow and Ian P. Wei (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2000), 167-84. During the twenty-fourth year of Henry III, the Council of Worcester decreed that clergymen were prohibited from playing at dice or chess, see John Ashton, *The History of Gambling in England* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1968), 13. For a comprehensive study of gambling in France, see also Thomas M. Kavanagh, *Dice, Cards, and Wheels: A Different History of French Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005).

⁸⁹ Geoffrey Chaucer, *Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), lines VI.591-94.

This fruyt cometh of the bicched bones two,
Forsweryng, ire, falsnesse, homicide.⁹⁰

As Rhiannon Purdie remarks in her examination of dice-games, “[t]he crucial difference lies in whether or not something *is* at stake.”⁹¹ That the game-poet’s system in *The Chaunce of the Dyse* emphasizes simplicity in lieu of complex rituals or stakes is indicative of the game’s ludic space within high society. *The Chaunce of the Dyse* was thus an acceptable, and indeed prestigious, game that empowered aristocratic men and women to play within the space of love.

In his book *Convergence Culture*, media studies scholar Henry Jenkins observes that a “medium’s content may shift . . . its audience may change . . . and its social status may rise or fall . . . but once a medium establishes itself as satisfying some core human demand, it continues to function within the larger system of communication options.”⁹² Jenkins’s argument addresses the co-existence of analog and digital media in the twentieth century, but the idea of diffusion and fluidity of content across media can also be found with medieval game-texts like *le Roi Qui ne Ment*, *Jeu d’Amour* and *The Chaunce of the Dyse*, and, indeed, constitutes one of the properties of medieval game-texts that trouble our modern notion of games. For medieval readers, the jump from “axe of love som demaunde” to “rede and here of Troilus” may have just been a matter of turning the page—the text as a playful object does not change despite the varied presentation, content, and audiences. While game-texts could be experienced singularly and read as text, the convergence of game, text, and player brings the game as an object into existence. It

⁹⁰ Chaucer, *Riverside Chaucer*, lines 653-57.

⁹¹ Purdie, “Dice-games and the Blasphemy of Prediction,” 183. Clifford Geertz also touches on this in his study of Balinese culture; specifically, he observes that in gambling games with greater amounts of money, “much more is at stake than material gain: namely, esteem, honor, dignity, respect.” *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 433.

⁹² Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press), 14.

is this interactivity—formed through variable and ever-changing sequences—that renders the game-text a playful experience. Game studies scholar Eric Zimmerman contends that stories and games comprise two widely different *modus operandi*: “a story is the experience of a narrative,” while games are experience through play.⁹³ As we have seen, medieval game-texts blur this clear-cut distinction by creating interactive spaces that enable players to participate in the wider emergent narrative of *fin’ amors*. The narrative becomes the personas of the players, while the rules outline the form of play. As Zimmerman states: “it’s not a question of whether or not games are narrative, but instead how they are narrative . . . we need to ask how games can be narrative systems in ways that other media cannot.”⁹⁴ It is this interactivity that sets game-texts apart from the “‘idealizing impulses’ and distorting ‘receptions’” of texts.⁹⁵ For game-texts, agency comprises a series of negotiable, ever-changing elements: the poet, the scribe, the player(s), the game’s manuscript context, and its place in medieval culture. The fusion of literary and game traditions thereby produces a distinct form of entertainment.

The *demandes d’amour* games, *Le Jeu d’Amour*, and *The Chaunce of the Dyse* all craft games of love for their various literate audiences, predicated on the effort to create and encourage immersion within the *fin’ amors* or literary ethos enjoyed by the specific audiences who played them—a kind of “virtuality” between games and life that also appears in the game-oriented fifteenth-century Spanish *cancionero* poetry.⁹⁶ “Recreation,” as Olsen writes, “involves

⁹³ Eric Zimmerman, “Narrative, Interactivity, Play, and Games: Four Naughty Concepts in Need of a Discipline,” in *First Person: New Media as Story, Performance, and Game*, eds. Noah Wardrip-Fruin and Pat Harrigan (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2004), 161.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 161-62.

⁹⁵ Arthur Bahr and Alexandra Gillespie, “Medieval English Manuscripts: Form, Aesthetics, and the Literary Text,” *Chaucer Review* 47.4 (2013): 351.

⁹⁶ Juan Escourido, “Textual Games and Virtuality in Spanish *Cancionero* Poetry,” in *Games and Gaming in Medieval Literature*, ed. Serina Patterson (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), 187-208.

some kind of activity, some form of *ludus* which creates physical refreshment or mental *quies* through *delectatio*, thereby invigorating the psyche.”⁹⁷ Herein lies a key concept in the ways in which medieval audiences understood games: the “lusory attitude” as defined by philosopher Bernard Suits, is “the acceptance of constitutive rules just so the activity made possible by such acceptance can occur.”⁹⁸ The lusory attitude can also be prompted through the game’s signification as a playful object and ethical views and tastes of its players. For the game-texts discussed above, game-poets signal this lusory attitude through the literary content, visual aesthetics, and manuscript contexts. However, as we shall see in Chapter 3, medieval game-texts were often appropriated for pedagogical purposes and were regularly used as learning tools outside of gaming contexts. Therefore, typically playful markers such as the use of dice with a given poem may or may not encourage a lusory attitude.

Consider an anonymous Middle-English dice-poem found in four manuscripts dating from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.⁹⁹ While the game-poet of *Le Jeu d’Amour* clearly had a vision of the desired game and its probable outcomes, the anonymous dice-poem presents a more eclectic and general view of literary dice-playing. The poem’s fortunes seem more akin to the tradition of astragalomancy—that is, lots by dice—and prophecy.¹⁰⁰ As such, the majority of the fortunes caution the player to be wise, follow God’s will, and adhere to higher virtues such as

⁹⁷ Olsen, *Literature as Recreation*, 103.

⁹⁸ Suits, *The Grasshopper*, 54.

⁹⁹ Nicola McDonald has recently suggested naming this poem “Have Your Desire.” See “Fragments of (Have Your) Desire: Brome Women at Play,” 232-58.

¹⁰⁰ Reflecting on this observation, Braekman notes that the A-version of the poem, located in Aberdeen, Aberdeen University Library, MS. 123, completely diverges from the authoritative B-version, located in Boston, Boston Public Library, MS. 100. Since the A-version focuses more exclusively on matters of love, Braekman suggests that the original text is based from a dice-book for lovers and a book on general prophecy. “Fortune-Telling,” 17.

meeckness and steadfastness. The author of most of the poem even occasionally stands in as a surrogate counsellor for revealing the future and aiding the reader; in fortune 5.5.4 he states that:

Quines *and* cater you haues on ye disse,
I consayl ye be war *and* whysse,
Trast *in* no hertly thing [y]at may be,
For ye warld is noght bot vanite.¹⁰¹

This particular fortune concerns the foolishness of pursuing worldly things, and recalls to the reader a need to set his or her sights on God. The author is concerned not only with imparting a general knowledge of the future, but also reinforcing Christian moral practices. Chance in the Middle Ages, as Howard Patch has argued, often becomes subservient to divine providence in order to normalize previously conflicting ideas about future events.¹⁰² Building from this conventional medieval concept of chance, Thomas Cavanagh also writes that “[fortune’s] real function was to encourage the soul to choose the higher road of the spiritual life.”¹⁰³ In accordance with a Christian model of moral truth, chance in this particular dice-poem is not associated with the goddess Fortuna or romantic outcomes, but is interpreted as a state of luck governed by God’s providence. Fortune 6.6.3, for instance, asks the player to “cast a nother schaunssce / gyf you wilt yi seluen auaunsse,” and 4.4.2 foresees that the player will “hau ‘e’ god hape, go wher you go”—fortunes that reinforce a general state of goodwill.¹⁰⁴ Fortune 5.5.3 even goes so far as to combine elements of chance and divine providence to effect a player’s outcome: the author begin with “swinis *and* trai is thi schauce, / gode is mighty ye to auaunce” and then states how the player should put their trust in the virgin Mary.¹⁰⁵ Again reflecting this

¹⁰¹ Braekman, “Fortune-Telling,” lines 92-95.

¹⁰² Howard Patch, *The Goddess Fortuna in Mediaeval Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1927), 19.

¹⁰³ Thomas Kavanagh, *Dice, Cards, Wheels*, 15.

¹⁰⁴ Braekman, “Fortune-Telling,” lines 15-16 and 154.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, lines 93-96.

generalized, non-linear view of chance, the poet does not place varying weights on the numbers. Organized by combination from 6.6.6 to 1.1.1 and depicted by red or black dice (or, as in one manuscript, Arabic numerals), the outcomes and their subsequent fortunes seem to be equally randomized. 1.1.1, for example, is often regarded among gambling circles as the worst roll. Although the final outcome is not favourable, the poet does not hint at this gambling convention; instead he remarks that the player should pray hard in order to be redeemed.¹⁰⁶ While this use of prognostication would usually suggest that the poem was used for serious purposes, a certain number of fortunes do hint at playful matters of love, which were an addition from a different manuscript as noted by Braekman.¹⁰⁷ For the player, the scribes' amalgamation of generalized, prophetic fortunes and amorous love allows a freedom of interpretation as the poet(s) rarely invoke any specific desire. In this manner, the game could be played with serious intentions or it could be played as a ludic pastime. Whatever the reader's intention, the poets and scribes make clear that the moral agenda is the highest priority.

From the few interactive game-texts discussed in this chapter, the signification of the ludic function is often signaled through *ordinatio* and aesthetics, such as the placement of the *Chaunce of the Dyse* among other texts encouraging debates on matters of love in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Fairfax 16 and Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 638 (e.g., alongside *La Belle Dame Sans Mercy*) and its dice pictographs accompanying each stanza. Such position and visual markers cannot be construed with certainty as a ludic function, however; more often, the signal for play occurs either in the text itself, such as in the *demandes d'amour* collections, or through the audience's own purposes for using the text, such as the anonymous dice-poem which

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., lines 221-24.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., lines 3-29.

appears alongside decidedly non-ludic texts. When is a text then not a game? In the little-known Middle English prophetic poem “When Sunday goeth by D and C,” the reader casts dice much like the anonymous dice-poem. While the use of dice may at first glance suggest a ludic function, the purpose of the poem is political rather than personal. Found in at least fourteen manuscripts, the poem appears most often in miscellanies with other prophetic texts, many of which deal with the War of the Roses and England.¹⁰⁸ In Oxford, Bodleian Library Rawlinson D.1062, for instance, the poem appears on fol. 93v, sandwiched between “The Propheisies of Rymour, Beid, and Marlyng” (ff. 92-94) and a metrical prophecy about the future of England (ff. 119-120v).¹⁰⁹ In four manuscripts, “When Sunday goeth by D and C” is paired with another poem that reveals political prophecy via the stars.¹¹⁰ Although a number of variants depict the dice in-text via pictograph (see, for instance, London, British Library, MS Harley 559, fol. 39rv), the poem itself closely follows the tradition of prognostication and functions more like the texts with which it is paired. The poet designates six and one as the best and worst rolls, respectively: “Evermore schalle the {six} be the best cast on the dyce / Whan that {one} beryth up the {six} ynglond

¹⁰⁸ The extant manuscripts are: Cambridge, Cambridge University Library, MS ii.6.11; Cambridge, Trinity College, MS O.2.53; Dublin, Trinity College, MS 516; London, British Library, Cotton Cleopatra C.IV; London, British Library, MS Harley 559; London, British Library, MS Harley 7332; London, British Library, MS Sloane 2578; London, Public Records Office, MS SP 1/232; Oxford, Bodleian Library, Arch. Ee. B. 8; Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson D.1062; London, British Library, Cotton Rolls II 23;

¹⁰⁹ See also the contents of the sixteenth-century commonplace miscellany London, British Library, Lansdowne 762 that includes the poem: proverbs and gnomic verses; texts discussing anger and discord; a recipe for removing wine, water, and milk stains; three prophetic poems on the conquest of France; The First Scottish Prophecy; various animal prophecies; and poems against marriage. For more information about this manuscript, see: David Reed Parker, *The Commonplace Book in Tudor London: an Examination of BL MSS Egerton 1995, Harley 2252, Lansdowne 762, and Oxford Balliol College MS 354* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1998).

¹¹⁰ Cambridge, Trinity College O.2.53, f. 41r; London, British Library Cotton Cleopatra C.IV, f. 123v; London, British Library Harley 559, f. 39r; and London, British Library Lansdowne 762, f. 96r.

schal be as paradise.”¹¹¹ The prognostication of the poem concerns the general well-being and stability of England, as line 6 indicates with the prophecy of a new king to rule if the reader happens to throw a two: “Ye schal have a newe kyng at a new paarlament.”¹¹² Dice were used widely as prognostication tools in the Middle Ages and the combination of dice and poetry alone does not therefore suggest a ludic function.

Returning to the question of whether Jean de Meun’s *Le dodechedron de fortune* is in fact a medieval game, we can speculate that the text certainly served a ludic function not unlike the other nonlinear interactive texts discussed above and contains a number of elements found in other game-texts. The text focuses on the individual rather than the political, aligning more closely with other ludic texts, but does not emphasize any particular theme; instead, the text also maintains a fluidity in both content and purpose since the text could just as easily be used by a reader attempting to find answers to life’s difficult questions. Media and digital humanities scholars have often used premodern texts such as the prophetic Chinese *I Ching* as examples when explaining concepts in interactive electronic literature. The textual matrix in *Le dodechedron de fortune* also generates a plurality of possibilities that can be interpreted as ludic or non-ludic depending on the audience. In his discussion of cybertext readers, Aarseth notes that “you are constantly reminded of inaccessible strategies and paths not taken, voices not heard” when reading a non-linear text.¹¹³ This is also true of medieval game-texts, but not in a sense that the text formulates a linear narrative path through player choice; rather, the feedback loop in the manuscript or game creates a fictive (‘virtual’) reality that is unique to each game session.

¹¹¹ Dublin, Trinity College, Dublin 516, fol. 118, lines 1-2. The transcription is my own. Brackets represent pictograph of dice corresponding to the number.

¹¹² Dublin, Trinity College, Dublin 516, fol. 118, line 6.

¹¹³ Aarseth, *Cybertext*, 3.

“Cybertext,” Aarseth writes, “shifts the focus from the traditional threesome of author/sender, text/message, and reader/receiver to the cybernetic intercourse between the various participant(s).”¹¹⁴ These game-texts appear at first to be akin to the “choose-your-own-adventure” interactive fiction popularized in the 1980s, but they do not include the same assumptions that characterize the modern interactive fiction genre (e.g., partial knowledge and inputs). In his analysis of electronic interactive fiction, Nick Montfort, for instance, notes how the genre requires an “explicit challenge and a verbal literary work”—elements that are not always present in medieval game-texts.¹¹⁵ I highlight the concepts developed in interactive fiction criticism here because this genre is often considered a game, though the nature of interactive fiction as *game* is rarely discussed. Montfort notes how:

The typical interactive fiction game differs from a game like chess not only because the players in chess oppose each other but because in that game total information about the situation is always available to players. Not only is the state of the game (i.e., the situation of the IF world) known only in part in interactive fiction, but the workings of this world (and of the interface to it) are at first also only partly known.”¹¹⁶

If we were to define medieval game-texts under these criteria, however, they would not qualify as interactive fiction or a game, for they are not necessarily competitive (though games like *Le Roi Qui Ne Ment* can set up players in opposition) and the text is completely known to the players, whether they choose to read it linearly or nonlinearly. In this way, medieval game-texts do not easily fit into discussions of modern interactive fiction, yet they are more than the sum of

¹¹⁴ Aarseth, *Cybertext*, 22.

¹¹⁵ Nick Montfort, *Twisty Little Passages: An Approach to Interactive Fiction* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2005), 3.

¹¹⁶ Montfort, *Twisty Little Passages*, 34.

their parts: they present an interactive ludic experience in *potentia* on the page, thereby moving beyond the idea of playful linguistics theorized by Marie-Laure Ryan in *Narrative as Virtual Reality*.¹¹⁷

In *Twisty Little Passages: An Approach to Interactive Fiction*, Montfort notes that the “pleasure involved in interaction is not simply that of reading. Nor is it entirely alien from that of reading.”¹¹⁸ Medieval game-texts reveal a complex network of text, manuscript, poet, and audience that serves to create a ludic textual experience. These games function as both social and literary activities that encourage participation through the manuscript interface and interactive mechanics. While medieval audiences considered them as parlour games to be played *in* a social gathering, the texts nevertheless struggle to find coherence within modern definitions of *game* and its modern cousin *interactive fiction*. Indeed, they straddle the line between game/play, game/literature, and ludic/nonludic depending on a particular audience’s desires, lusory attitude, and cultural circumstances.¹¹⁹ More recent definitions, such as Thomas Malaby’s notion of *game* as a “semi-bounded and socially legitimate domain of contrived contingency that generates interpretable outcomes” perhaps offers the most relevance to a medieval game-text, but still falls

¹¹⁷ Marie-Laure Ryan designates three ways in which a text can be considered a game: literally (through fixed constraints such as poetic metre), metonymically (offering a problem for the reader to solve like a riddle or include a game mechanism), and metaphorically (participation in a verbal competition that involves skill where the text itself is not the ludic activity). While certain medieval game-texts embody some of these categories (e.g., the *Chaunce of the Dyse* could be considered metonymic since it uses dice), I would argue that none satisfy any category completely, for the ludic experience of the game-text is made up of a complex network of manuscript, text, poet, and player (e.g., its poetic form or use of dice). *Narrative as Virtual Reality: Immersion and Interactivity in Literature and Electronic Media* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 179-81.

¹¹⁸ Montfort, *Twisty Little Passages*, 3.

¹¹⁹ A modern equivalent that troubles definitions of games is the sandbox simulation genre where the goals of the game (whether personal or shared) rarely take priority over the activity of building and creativity (e.g., *MineCraft* and *SimCity*).

short in capturing the dual-purpose ludic or non-ludic experiences that these texts offered audiences. From this discussion of medieval game-texts, I propose the following features for identifying medieval games:

1. A **formal system** that can be either **open or closed**. Given the modularity and plurality of forms medieval literary games enjoyed as they circulated, games could include a plurality of formal rules, regional styles, and so on. Thus, the game still contains certain constraints, but the rules are often not static; rather, they can change based on the audience's tastes, region, language, and purpose—thereby creating derived types that are nevertheless still comprise an activity that is more structured than general 'play.'
2. **Outcomes** are not always known, quantifiable, or disequibrial (e.g. win/lose structure). Games do not always include a beginning, middle, and end, but are at the discretion of the players.
3. Games contain **negotiable consequences**: in Jesper Juul's words, "games are characterized by the fact that they can be assigned consequences on a per-play basis."¹²⁰ Games can thus be played with or without real-life consequences; this fluidity of interpretation reflects medieval ideas of games.
4. **Interactive participation** and player effort can be competitive or non-competitive. A game-text can elicit participation through literary modes. Contrary to many modern definitions, the concept of player effort in many medieval game-texts does not necessarily need to be challenging.
5. Games emphasize **social activities and serve a social function**. While modern games often include individuals versus non-human agents (e.g. playing tic-tac-toe against a

¹²⁰ Juul, *Half-Real*, 36.

computer), medieval literary games were inherently social and could be played either by one gender or in mixed company.

These criteria also align with other tabletop games enjoyed in the Middle Ages. On fol. 157v of London, British Library, MS Royal 13 A XVIII a backgammon board is etched in the space below the end of a travel route listing the towns one passes when travelling from London to Avignon via Amiens and Clermont-Ferrand (Figure 1.2).¹²¹

¹²¹ For an updated Latin transcription of the text, see Ulrich Schädler, “Das Spiel der Engländer. Backgammonspiele im Ms. Royal 13 A xviii der British Library,” in *Sport und Spiel bei den Germanen*, ed. Matthias Teichert (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014), 109-62.

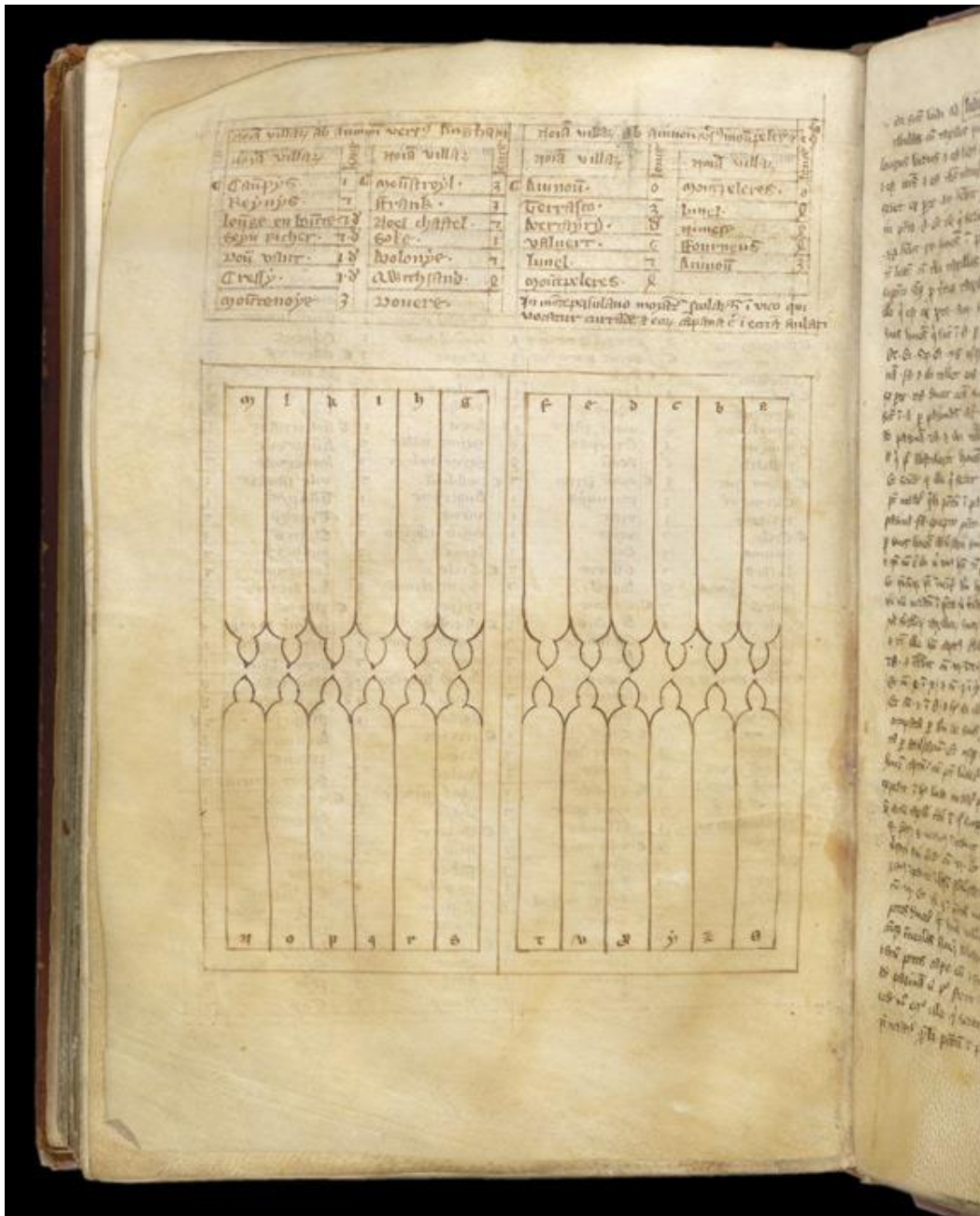


Figure 1.2: London, British Library, MS Royal 13 A XVIII, fol. 157v

Labeled “Ludi ad tabulas,” the following page includes a list of several games and their variant rules as well as five game problems in Latin that can be played with the board, showing how the game of backgammon could change depending on the region or players. The game board does

not signal a particular game, but rather acts as an empty vessel for a number of games, problems, and variants. Furthermore, while the travel route and list of games seem distinct, the game board image acts as a pictorial hinge, linking them together. Inked in the same hand as the travel route, the play spaces of the board follow an alphabetic numeric system for placing pieces (similar to the chess problems discussed in Chapter 2) and may have been used as a practice board in order to learn different games or solve game problems presented in the subsequent pages. More curious is the order of the games and problems, which begin with an English game (“Ludus Anglicorum”) and turn to French Games such as “Fayle” and “Ludus Lombardorum” [The Lombard Game] following the geographic route from London to Southern France outlined in the travel route. While evidence is scant, I posit that the texts enabled the traveller to play the various games and rules from different regions with fellow players of the area—an imaginary space that is also wholly connected to the geographical spaces mapped by the text. The game board also serves a dual purpose and could be used for formal games or problems with differing outcomes and negotiable consequences.

1.3 Conclusion

In this chapter I demonstrated how, in the words of Betsy McCormick, “[m]edieval games provide an earlier starting point and foundation for studying how games both affect and reveal culture: while the Middle Ages inherited games such as chess and backgammon from earlier periods, its players molded games into forms that are still recognizable today.”¹²²

¹²² Betsy McCormick, “Afterword,” in *Games and Gaming in Medieval Literature*, edited by Serina Patterson (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), 215.

Medieval game-texts operate through different means than modern games and other forms of recreation. As texts like *The Chaunce of the Dyse* and “Ludi ad tabulas” illustrate, medieval games are not simply static, mechanized systems. Modern definitions of games do not sufficiently take into account the cultural production and dissemination of medieval games and their relation to other forms of recreation (i.e. vernacular literature). Game-texts, as I have shown, trouble modern definitions of ‘game’ because they demonstrate how medieval texts and manuscripts could accommodate different types of entertainment and interactivity that we no longer associate with books and reading. Medieval audiences enjoyed a fluidity and openness in their play and design of games—a notion that I explore in further detail through an analysis of medieval game problems in the next chapter—and therefore offer the field of cultural game studies a more comprehensive development of the idea of ‘game.’

Chapter 2

Mind Games: Learning, Skill, and the Pleasures of the Problem

Could we look into the head of a chess player, we should see there a whole world of feelings, images, ideas, emotion, and passion. –Alfred Binet¹²³

It is better to follow out a plan consistently even if it isn't the best one than to play without a plan at all. The worst thing is to wander about aimlessly. –Grandmaster Alexander Kotov¹²⁴

In Hilary Mantel's award-winning historical novel *Wolf Hall* (2009), Thomas Cromwell's apprentice, Thomas Avery, smuggles in "Luca Pacioli's book of chess puzzles" to him while he is taken ill. Cromwell has quickly "done all the puzzles, and drawn out some of his own on blank pages at the back. His letters are brought and he reviews the latest round of disasters."¹²⁵ At first glance, the book of chess problems is likened to a trivial activity in a list of tasks: a pleasurable amusement to pass the time and relieve boredom while Cromwell, an avid chess player, regains his health. Yet the chess problems, on closer inspection, both become both a motif for the larger legal and political moves Cromwell plays in the court of Henry VIII as the king's chief minister and act as an activity that keeps his mind sharp in order to perform his job successfully. For

¹²³ Alfred Binet, *Psychologie des grands calculateurs et joueurs en echec* (Paris: Hachette, 1894), 33.

¹²⁴ Alexander Kotov, *Think Like a Grandmaster*, trans. Bernard Cafferty (London: Batsford, 1971), 137.

¹²⁵ Hilary Mantel, *Wolf Hall* (New York: Fourth Estate, 2009), 508.

Mantel's Cromwell, chess puzzles stand in as a method for solving problems when the political landscape of the Tudor court is not readily available.

A subtler detail in the scene is Mantel's specific attribution of chess problems to Fra Luca Bartolomeo de Pacioli (1446/7-1517), an Italian Franciscan friar, mathematician, and prominent figure in the development of early accounting practices. The text Mantel alludes to is a treatise on chess, titled *De Ludo Scacchorum* [On the Game of Chess], composed around 1500 by Pacioli and re-discovered by book historian Duilio Contin in Count Guglielmo Coronini's 22,000-volume private library in 2006.¹²⁶ Dedicated to the chess enthusiast Isabella d'Este, the manuscript includes one hundred chess problems that Franco Rocco speculates may have been designed and drawn by Leonardo da Vinci, Pacioli's friend, due to their adherence to the Golden Mean (a numeric ratio of approximately 1: 1.618).¹²⁷ Additionally, the collection includes an amalgamation of problems that use either medieval or modern rules, called "a la rabiosa" [the furious], which refers to the queen's new, more powerful movement.¹²⁸ Composed for both edification and entertainment, Pacioli's (and possibly da Vinci's) problems provide a rare glimpse into the game's transition to modern rules, a juxtaposition of rules that begin to appear in other manuscripts across Europe in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.¹²⁹ In *Wolf Hall*, Cromwell does not simply solve Pacioli's problems, but composes his own "on blank pages at the back" of the manuscript, indicating his prowess at chess and, more abstractly, his mastery of

¹²⁶ Attilio Bartoli Langeli and Enzo Mattesini date the manuscript between the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century.

¹²⁷ Franco Rocco, *Leonardo and Luca Pacioli, the Evidence: New Rules New Shapes in the Manuscript of Luca Pacioli about Chess* (Lexington: CreateSpace, 2013).

¹²⁸ See Mark Taylor "How Did the Queen Go Mad?" in *Chess in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Age: A Fundamental Thought Paradigm of the Premodern World*, ed. Daniel O'Sullivan (Boston: De Gruyter, 2012), 169-84.

¹²⁹ Murray, *A History of Chess*, 776-810 (see chap. 1 n. 7).

political strategy. Chess here stands in as a metaphor for emerging early modern politics: Cromwell's compositions are original, contributing to new ideas alongside Pacioli rather than copying older Arabic and Muslim problems. As a man rising in political stature from among the lower ranks of society, Cromwell is, in effect, also creating this new political game as much as he participates in it, pioneering new forms of political maneuverings in early modern England—that is, moves that mark a distinct shift from medieval to early modern practice. Just as the changing rules in chess mirror a continent in transition, Pacioli's and Cromwell's chess problems become a space to showcase skill of the game and, for Cromwell, to develop skills for problem-solving that he will later apply to other areas of his life.

This wider, more general application of games to non-game-related tasks—a hypothesis that considers whether playing games can not only improve cognitive abilities such as memory and attention, but also enable a transference of expertise to other tasks—is currently a prevailing area of research in the fields of cognitive psychology and neuroscience. “Can human thinking be studied using games?” ponders Pertti Saariluoma in his investigation of the thinking of chess players and the impact of chess on mental faculties.¹³⁰ Cognitive scientists Mark Blair, Jozef Pisk-Dubienski, and Alexander Lee, et al. at Simon Fraser University have also recently begun a large-scale study investigating how players become experts at a skill, using Blizzard Entertainment's action-strategy game *StarCraft II* as a controlled environment. Using a dataset

¹³⁰ Pertti Saariluoma, *Chess Players' Thinking: A Cognitive Psychological Approach* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 3. For study of tasks that chess players of various skill levels perceive, see also William Chase and Herbert Simon, “Perception in Chess,” *Cognitive Psychology* 4 (1973): 55-81.

of 3,305 players, aged 16-44, Blair has found cognitive-motor performance decreases after the age of 24 regardless of skill at the task.¹³¹ As Blair, et al. write:

[o]ne possible concern is that our finding of age-related decline in StarCraft 2 could be due to a speed accuracy trade-off: older players become slower in virtue of focusing on accurate movements or strategic planning. It is straightforward to imagine this kind of trade-off in a strategy game like chess, where one could improve one's decisions by spending more time exploring possible moves.¹³²

Players thus reveal how we as humans cultivate learning. In light of the recent rise of so-called 'brain training' digital applications, software, and exercises that claim to improve cognition, psychologist Eliot T. Berkman has also conducted a study showing that the brain can improve performance for a given task, but that cognitive improvement does not necessarily transfer to other environments.¹³³ Expertise at chess and *StarCraft II*, in other words, may not generalize to other problem-solving tasks that require strategic thinking. Conversely, neuroscientist Joaquin Anguera, et al. studying motor control in adults ages 60-85 found that playing video games could enhance multitasking ability and cognitive control, "highlight[ing] the robust plasticity of the prefrontal cognitive control system in the ageing brain."¹³⁴ Likewise, the Nintendo DS game *Brain Age: Train Your Brain in Minutes a Day!*, which is based on neurologist Ryuta Kawashima's *Train Your Brain: 60 Days to a Better Brain* and has sold over 33 million copies to

¹³¹ Joseph J. Thompson, Mark Blair, and Andrew J. Henrey, "Over the Hill at 24: Persistent Age-Related Cognitive-Motor Decline in Reaction Times in an Ecologically Valid Video Game Task Begins in Early Adulthood," *PLoS ONE* 9.4 (2014): n.p., accessed April 18th, 2014, <http://www.plosone.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0094215#pone.0094215-Chase1>.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Elliott T. Berkman, Lauren E. Kahn, and Junaid S. Merchant, "Training-Induced Changes in Inhibitory Control Network Activity," *The Journal of Neuroscience* 34.1 (2014): 149-57.

¹³⁴ J. A. Aguera, et al. "Video game training enhances cognitive control in older adults," *Nature: The International Weekly Journal of Science* 501.7465 (2013): 97.

date, includes puzzles, music, memory recall, Sudoku, and other exercises to improve cognition. Aimed at older players, *Brain Age* argues that completing these puzzles keeps certain regions of the brain active, thereby developing increased mental capacity. The game also includes charts that track the ‘age’ of your brain in human years based on the player’s performance and devises strategies for cognitive development.¹³⁵ Game studies scholar Jesper Juul remarks that games are “fundamentally a learning experience” in their ability to provide challenges for players, but, as psychologists and neuroscientists are currently debating, this ability to learn new skills can be potentially applicable both inside and outside the game.¹³⁶

Was there an association between games, learning, and skill acquisition in the Middle Ages, such as those suggested by Mantel? Were games thought of as useful for gaining knowledge and improving cognitive ability? How were games taught, given their many regional variations, and what role did narrative play in the composition of these problems? This chapter addresses these questions by continuing the discussion of games as fluid textual objects I began in Chapter 1 by examining one form in which knowledge and application of games circulated in manuscripts: problems. Game problems—that is, puzzles composed within a closed, logical system containing a definite solution—have long been enjoyed by players not only as recreational activities, but also as exercises to learn techniques to improve their skill at the game. As compositions found in manuscripts that negotiate the interplay between entertainment (the pleasure of the problem) and education (learning new skills), game problems present model cases

¹³⁵ While a number of neurologists have argued that *Brain Age* is effective for combatting dementia Alzheimer’s, others remain skeptical of its ability to improve increase a player’s cognition.

¹³⁶ Jesper Juul, *Half-Real*, 5 (see chap. 1 n. 3).

for examining how medieval players and readers thought of games as ways in which to gain knowledge, skill, and improve their lives.

Consider, for instance, problem seventy-three in Alfonso X's encyclopedic magnum opus, *Libro de los Juegos* [The Book of Games] (Figure 2.1):

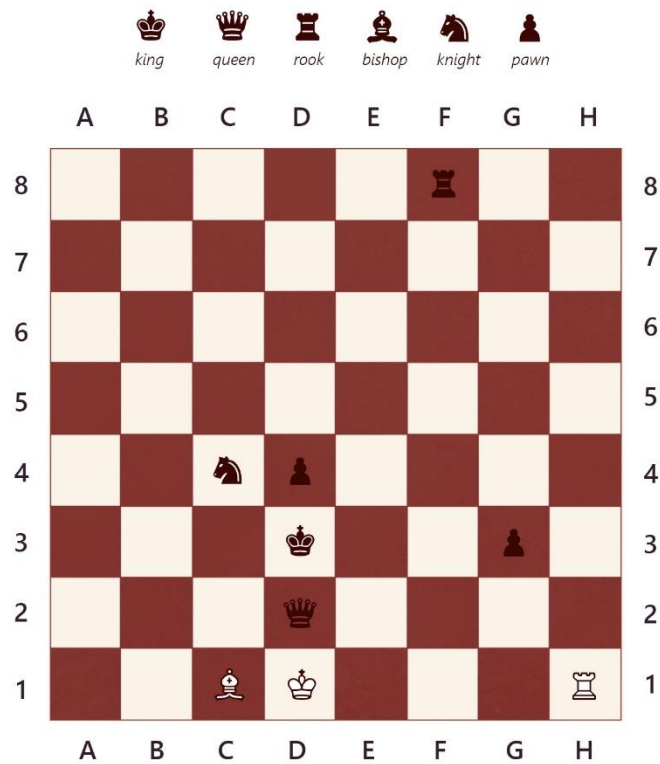


Figure 2.1: Problem 73, *Libros de los juegos*

Written around 1282, the text features problems and instructions for a variety of games played in the Spanish courts at the time, including chess, merels, tables, dice, and astronomical games.

This particular problem is not of Arabic origin, but rather part of a supplementary collection of fifteen problems composed in thirteenth-century Europe. The other eighty-eight problems are

derived from Arabic manuscripts. Problem seventy-three is a chess mate in three puzzle that is solved by checkmating with a black pawn—a move considered highly skilled, for the lowest valued piece wins against the highest valued piece (Figure 2.1).¹³⁷ While the problem promises to teach the player a coveted chess move, which would certainly showcase a player’s skill and, more importantly, one’s prestige, the problem is but one piece in Alfonso’s larger allegory for leading a balanced and virtuous life.¹³⁸

Chess problems, which I discuss in detail below, exemplify complex spaces for understanding the game. In Chaucer’s *The Book of the Duchess*, for instance, the Black Knight blames his defeat at a game of chess against Lady Fortune on his lack of skill, believing more practice with chess problems may have helped thwart the loss of his *ferse* (queen):

Ful craftier to pley she was
Than Athalus, that made the game
First of the ches, so was hys name.
But God wolde I had oones or twyes
Ykoud and knowe the jeupardy
That kowde the Grek Pictagores!
I should have pleyd the bet at ches
And kept my fers the bet therby.¹³⁹

Here the Black Knight believes that intellect and knowledge of the game is the chief, and only, factor in determining the outcome. Jenny Adams notes the Black Knight’s use of chess in this instance to gamble for Blanche’s life, and other literary critics have considered the game

¹³⁷ Solution: 1. Kc3; 2. Ktb2 +; 3. Pd3 m. See Murray, *A History of Chess*, 570-71 and Sonja Musser Golladay, “Los Libros de Acedrex Dados E Tablas: Historical, Artistic and Metaphysical Dimensions of Alfonso X’s ‘Book of Games,’” PhD Dissertation (University of Arizona, 2007), 307-09.

¹³⁸ Luis Vázquez de Parga, “Alfonso X el Sabio,” in *Libros del ajedrex, dados y tablas*, eds. Vicent García Editores, Valencia, and Ediciones Poniente (Madrid: Patrimonio Nacional, 1987), 13–28.

¹³⁹ Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Book of the Duchess*, *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd edn. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), lines 662-69.

metaphor as a deliberate rhetorical strategy or “confused” application of grief.¹⁴⁰ But the chess game also reveals a dual sense of loss: fortune proves to be a formidable, “[f]ul craftier” opponent who calls checkmate “in the myd poynt of the checker” (660)—often regarded in the Middle Ages as one of the most difficult tactics to checkmate an opponent. As the Black Knight states, “[m]yself I wolde have do the same, / Before God, hadde I ben as she; / She oghte the more excused be.” The chess problems act as a mnemonic device, whether to recall patterns or positions, but Chaucer paints the irony of the game in the problem: despite a foreseeable loss against Lady Fortune, the Black Knight nevertheless characterizes the *jeopardyes* as the key for securing victory.

Game problems in the later Middle Ages—such as the encyclopedic *jeu-parti* collections composed primarily for table games—gained occasional use as tools for increasing one’s skill at gaming, often for the purpose of winning wagers at court in addition to being pleasurable intellectual exercises. Despite the prevalence of game problem collections across Europe, including seven extant problem collections in later medieval England, scholars have paid little attention to the genre, with the exception of chess historian Harold Murray in his pioneering tour de force, *A History of Chess*. This chapter provides a fresh investigation of medieval game problems—namely recreational mathematics and chess problems—by addressing how these texts exemplify ideas of skill, mastery, and pleasure within different social contexts, from gentry

¹⁴⁰ Jenny Adams, “Pawn Takes Knight’s Queen: Playing with Chess in *The Book of the Duchess*,” *The Chaucer Review* 34 (1999): 132-34. Margaret Connolly, “Chaucer and Chess,” *The Chaucer Review* 29 (1994): 43. Connolly’s argument seems to be based partially on Franklin D. Cooley’s older article, which argues that the line “Thogh ye had lost the ferses twelve” should be omitted from future editions. Franklin D. Cooley, “Two Notes on the Chess Terms in *The Book of the Duchess*,” *Modern Language Notes* 63 (1948): 34-35. Guillemette Bolens and Paul B. Taylor, “The Game of Chess in Chaucer’s *Book of the Duchess*,” *The Chaucer Review* 32 (1998): 325.

households to clerical cloisters and abbeys. Game problems are more than simple exercises: they incorporate varying degrees of storytelling, aesthetics, layout, and compilation strategies in order to create interactive experiences for players, who use problems as supplements to learning the game or—similar to websites like *Lumosity*—as tools to sharpen mental faculties. As a result, game problems demonstrate how medieval games, like game-texts, could be used for multiple purposes depending on the needs of their players. The first section examines how mathematical problems, as the first type of problem in the Middle Ages used as tools for learning and skill acquisition, become intertwined with recreation and games. Building on Murray’s initial observations of chess problems, collections, and manuscripts, the second section traces the reception and compilation of chess problem collections in later medieval England. In both instances, game problems, which have their roots in medieval education, intersect with ideas of learning and cognition and display the fluidity and adaptability of medieval games.

2.1 Algebra is for Lovers

Problem solving is at the heart of all mathematics in medieval and modern educational curricula;¹⁴¹ it involves both a task and a motivated solver who must act in order to solve a problem. Problems demand active participation, requiring the solver to play along and initiate the experience. In order to be considered a mathematical problem, mathematical concepts and principles must be used in the derivation of an answer. While problems may appear as a word or visual problem, such a composition stands in to illustrate a technique or a mathematical concept.

¹⁴¹ See, for instance, Alan H. Schoenfeld, “Learning to Think Mathematically: Problem Solving, Metacognition, and Sense Making in Mathematics,” in *Handbook for research on Mathematics Teaching and Learning*, ed. D. Grouws (New York: MacMillan, 1992), 334-70.

Recreational mathematics, a branch of mathematics composed for entertainment that often describes unrealistic situations, highlights the enjoyment of problem-solving as a meaningful activity. Puzzles and problems adhere to specific rules and have set goals but they are, for the most part, not inherently competitive in nature. While modern game studies scholars separate games from puzzles, their aspects in the Middle Ages are closely linked and, using the framework I outlined in Chapter 1, could be considered game-like, especially for problems that appear in collections of *demandes d'amour* or among textual game boards.¹⁴² A solver completes the problem by discovering the solution, but does not necessarily lose if he or she cannot solve the puzzle. Game designer Chris Crawford elaborates that puzzles are static and unchanging while games are dynamic, but modern exceptions—such as the card game Solitaire and the adventure video game genre—do exist. For medieval games and game problems, each playthrough can have a number of divergent possibilities, while a modern crosswords or chess puzzles do not often change on the page with each interaction.¹⁴³ Mathematical problems can range from abstract puzzles to familiar, relatable situations in need of resolution. Due in part to their ability to intermingle algebra and storytelling, recreational problems can also reflect cultural ideas and values in their depictions of objects and issues or in the real-world application of a solver's approach.

The earliest recreational mathematical problems in Europe stemmed from algebraic exercises used to teach principles of algebra and other mathematical concepts and were not

¹⁴² For a discussion of the ontological difference between puzzles and games, see Veli-Matti Karhulahti, "Puzzle is not a Game! Basic Structures of Challenge," in *Proceedings of DiGRA 2013: DeFragging Game Studies*, DiGRA, accessed August 22, 2013, http://www.digra.org/wp-content/uploads/digital-library/paper_179.pdf.

¹⁴³ The distinction between games and puzzles is difficult to discern and thoroughly subjective. Crawford, *The Art of Computer Game Design*, 13 (see chap. 1 n. 28).

originally associated with other known games. The oldest known collection of recreational mathematical problems, the Latin treatise *Propositiones ad Acuendos Juvenes* [Problems to Sharpen the Young], was first composed in Anglo-Saxon England; written by Alcuin of York (c. 740-804), *Propositiones* exists in twelve extant manuscripts (the earliest manuscript dates from the late ninth century and others extend to the eighteenth century).¹⁴⁴ The fifty-three problems combine narrative and logic, wherein the end of the story reveals the solution. Problem eighteen, for instance, presents the reader with one of the first “river-crossing” problems, titled “The Problem of the Wolf, the Goat, and a Bunch of Cabbages”:

Homo quidam debebat ultra fluvium transferre lupum et capram et fasciculum cauli, et non potuit aliam navem invenire, nisi quae duos tantum ex ipsis ferre valebat. Praeceptum itaque ei fuerat, ut omnia haec ultra omnino illaesa transferret. Dicat, qui potest, quomodo eos illaesos transferre potuit.

Solutio: Simili namque tenore ducerem prius capram et dimitterem foris lupum et caulum. Tum deinde venirem lupumque transferrem, lupoque foras misso rursus capram navi receptam ultra reducerem, capramque foris missa caulum transveherem ultra, atque iterum remigassem, capramque assumptam ultra duxissem. Sicque faciente facta erit remigatio salubris absque voragine lacerationis.¹⁴⁵

[A certain man had to take a wolf, a goat, and a bunch of cabbages across a river. The only boat he could find could only take two of them at a time. But he had been ordered to transfer all of these to the other side undamaged. Say, he who is able, in what manner the man was able to cross the river with the goods intact?

Solution: I would take the goat and leave the wolf and the cabbage. Then I would return and take the wolf across the river. Having put the wolf on the other side I would take the goat back over. Having left that behind, I would take the cabbage across. I would then row across again, and having picked up the goat take it over once more. Thus, by doing all this rowing the man will become healthy, and without any lacerating catastrophe].

¹⁴⁴ Menso, Folkerts, ed., *Die älteste mathematische Aufgabensammlung in lateinischer Sprache: Die Alcuin zugeschriebenen: Propositiones ad Acuendos Juvenes* (Wien: Springer, 1978), 13–80, see esp. pp. 15-21 for a list of extant manuscripts that contain *Propositiones ad Acuendos Juvenes*. See also: John Hadley, “Problems to Sharpen the Young,” *The Mathematical Gazette* 76 (1992): 102-26.

¹⁴⁵ Folkerts, *Die älteste mathematische*, 54-55. All translations from Latin are my own.

While the problems are presented as recreational puzzles, Alcuin's writing and posing of the problem nevertheless attempts to help improve mental faculties. Alcuin also composed the first problems for children and desired stories, objects, and subjects that would be both familiar and delightful for retaining attention—a methodology that he could have certainly borrowed from texts such as Horace's influential *Ars Poetica* (19 BCE).¹⁴⁶ As Horace writes in his oft-quoted dictum, “aut prodesse uolunt aut delectare poetae / aut simul et iucunda et idonea dicere vitae” [poets aim either to benefit, or to amuse, or to utter words at once both pleasing and helpful to life].¹⁴⁷ For Horace, poets should aspire to teach and delight, rather than, to use St. Paul's imagery, separate the wheat from the chaff.¹⁴⁸ From their inception in medieval culture, mathematical problems, such as those composed by Alcuin, were often infused with a sense of pleasure for the ease of learning.

Alcuin's problems are not only often written as descriptive stories, but the themes he employs also relate to objects and events from everyday life, from ploughing fields to propositions of marriage. The object of the problems was, of course, to teach the reader mathematical principles or, at the very least, provide an interesting puzzle to pass the time, but

¹⁴⁶ D.A. Russell, “Ars Poetica,” in *Horace*, ed. C.D.N. Costa (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), 113-34 and 137.

¹⁴⁷ H. Rushton Fairclough, trans., “The Art of Poetry,” in *Horace: Satires, Epistles and Ars Poetica* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926), 478-79.

¹⁴⁸ By mingling pragmatism with pleasure with regard to poetry, Horace's doctrine continued to influence writers and educators well into the Early Modern period. As Robert Matz argues, Horace's marriage of profit and pleasure in relation to poetry “created a conflict over the value of labor or leisure, and an uncertainty about which activities constituted either” for early modern writers. *Defending Literature in Early Modern England: Renaissance Literary Theory in Social Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 1.

Alcuin's emphasis on everyday events also displays a certain practicality to the problems.

Problem twenty-one, for instance, asks the solver how many sheep can be put into a field:

Est campus, qui habet in longitudine pedes C C et in latitudine pedes C. Volo ibidem mittere oves, sic tamen, ut unaquaeque ovis habeat in longitudine pedes V et in latitudine pedes IV. Dicit, rogo, qui valet, quot oves ibidem locari possunt.

Solutio: Est campus, qui habet in longitudine pedes C C et in latitudine pedes C. Volo ibidem mittere oves, sic tamen, ut unaquaeque ovis habeat in longitudine pedes V et in latitudine pedes IV. Dicit, rogo, qui valet, quot oves ibidem locari possunt.¹⁴⁹

[There is a field with a length of 200 feet and a width of 100 feet. I want to place sheep in it so that each sheep has a space of five feet by four feet. How many sheep can be put in the field?

Solution: This field has the length of 200 feet and breadth of 100 feet. The number of fives in 200 is 40; dividing 100 by 4 the fourth part of 100 is 25. Since there are 40 fives and 24 fours, 1000 fills the quota. Therefore, this is the number of sheep that can be placed into the field].

The agricultural economic problem here reveals how, for many of the algebraic problems, solvers could apply them directly to their own real-world concerns, whether for increasing the efficiency of their operations or gaining profit.

Indeed, recreational mathematics problems originated from mercantile trade and many problem collections deal chiefly with finance, exchange, and other issues relevant to the lives of merchants. In his discussion of the rise of algebra in early medieval Italy, Jacques Sesiano notes that "Italy's merchants, trading intensely throughout the Mediterranean, had a pressing need for mathematics applied to commerce."¹⁵⁰ Typical problems for application included "sales, expenditures, and the hiring of workers."¹⁵¹ Leonardo of Pisa (famously known as Leonardo

¹⁴⁹ Folkerts, *Die älteste mathematische Aufgabensammlung*, 56-57.

¹⁵⁰ Jacques Sesiano, *An Introduction to the History of Algebra: Solving Equations from Mesopotamian Times to the Renaissance*, trans. Anna Pierrehumbert (Providence, Rhode Island: American Mathematical Society, 2009), 95.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 97.

Fibonacci) learned mathematics for commerce from his father, a merchant who often traveled for work to Bougie (Algeria); he later composed the *Liber Abaci* (1202), a treatise of fifteen chapters including numerous recreational mathematical problems, many of which were applicable to mercantile economics. The problem Fibonacci is perhaps most known for is a recreational mathematical problem involving the reproduction of rabbits.¹⁵² While Fibonacci's rabbit problem began as a recreational exercise, it nevertheless mirrors real-world phenomena and has more recently found utility in computational and biological algorithms.¹⁵³ For modern instructional design in education, David Jonassen argues that mathematical problems encountered by students are not engaging due to their abstraction and cannot be extrapolated to real-world concerns.¹⁵⁴ Conversely, the educational, economic, and mercantile origins of mathematical exercises and recreational mathematics in the Middle Ages reveal a much more nuanced interplay between problems and life: real-world concerns and familiar objects influence the composition and

¹⁵² The "Fibonacci Sequence" asks the solver how many pairs of rabbits will result after one year from a single pair of rabbits shut inside a field using the following conditions: [1] the interval between two generations, the gestation time, and the time to reach adulthood are all one month; [2] rabbits mate immediately after giving birth to offspring; [3] each litter comprises a pair of rabbits (one male, one female); and [4] no rabbit escapes or dies during the year. The solution follows a sequence ($F_x = F_{x-1} + F_{x-2}$). At the end of the n th month, the number of the pairs of rabbits is equal to the number of new pairs of rabbits. For the first month, then, the first pair mates, so there is still only one pair. At the end of the second month, the female rabbits gives birth to a new pair, so there are now two rabbit pairs in the field. At the end of the third month, the first pair produces another set of offspring, so there are now three pairs in the field. At the end of the fourth month, both the first and second pairs produce offspring, so five pairs of rabbits exist in the field. Thus, the number of pairs at the end of the year is 377 (F_{14}).

¹⁵³ The Fibonacci sequence has, for instance, helped us reveal rhythmic patterns in nature such as the shape of pine cones from conifer trees. See Alfred Brousseau, "Fibonacci Statistics in Conifers," *Fibonacci Quarterly* 7.5 (1969): 525-32.

¹⁵⁴ David H. Jonassen, "Toward a Design Theory of Problem Solving," *Educational Technology Research and Development* 48.4 (2000): 63.

narrative descriptions of these puzzles at the same time the mathematical mechanics at play prove useful for real-world issues.

Mathematical problems, due to their usefulness for solving everyday concerns and playfulness, also find applicability among women educating their children and governing households. In the Carolingian *Liber Manualis* (841-43), a handbook written by the Duchess Dhuoda to her son William to help guide his social advancement and moral behavior, she devotes book nine to computations, numerology, and mathematics, drawing her inspiration and sources from computing manuals, and cites Augustine's *Tractates on the Gospel of John* on Biblical numerology such as the "double birth" and "double death."¹⁵⁵ Dhuoda was an avid reader and had access to mathematical books. She also likely had a rudimentary understanding of mathematics and computation. As the only book written by a woman to survive the Carolingian period, *Liber Manualis* thus sheds rare insight into the education and knowledge of noble women.

Women were often not only educators, but also household managers in charge of stock, farming, revenue, servants, and entertaining guests.¹⁵⁶ Christine de Pizan, in her fifteenth-century conduct manual dedicated to Princess Margaret of Burgundy, *Le tresor de la cité des dames de degré en degré* [The Treasure of the City of Ladies, also known as The Book of the Three Virtues] (1405), discusses the various household responsibilities and tasks required in order to be

¹⁵⁵ Marcelle Thiebaux, Introduction to *Liber Manualis: Handbook for her Warrior Son*, by Dhuoda (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 10.

¹⁵⁶ Joanna H. Drell, "Aristocratic Economies: Women and Family," in *The Oxford Handbook of Women and Gender in Medieval Europe*, eds. Judith M. Bennett and Ruth Mazzo Karras (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 327-42.

effective managers, which often included the need to be proficient in mathematics.¹⁵⁷ In another household book from fourteenth-century Paris written by an aging husband to his teenage wife, *Le Menagier de Paris* [The Goodman of Paris], section three (now lost in all extant manuscripts) was dedicated to parlour games for indoor entertainment, including dice, chess, riddles, and mathematical games. Christine Rose argues that this conduct book shapes the identity and role of women from a male perspective: “His book of keeping house is also a book about keeping women—in their place.”¹⁵⁸ Nevertheless, the household management and games sections indicate how women assumed responsibility for governance and entertainment.

If algebraic problems exhibit aspects of pleasure and edification and could be used recreationally, then what is their relation to medieval games? In two fifteenth-century incunabula printed by Colard Mansion of Bruges, a friend of William Caxton, a collection of recreational mathematical problems is preserved among a larger miscellany of *demandes d’amours*, titled *Les Adevineaux amoureux*.¹⁵⁹ As James Hassell, Jr. notes, much of the content for *Les Adevineaux amoureux* was drawn from multiple oral and written sources and compiled in Northern France or Belgium sometime around 1470.¹⁶⁰ The *demandes d’amours*, which are questions and answers of love used in games like *Le Roi Qui Ne Ment* (discussed in more detail in Chapters 1 and 3), were played among a mixed group of players and served as a social context

¹⁵⁷ Christine de Pizan, *A Medieval Woman’s Mirror of Honor: The Treasury of the City of Ladies*, ed. Madeleine Pelner Cosman, trans. Charity Cannon Willard (Tenafly, NJ: Bard Hill Press, 1989).

¹⁵⁸ Christine M. Rose, “What Every Goodwoman Wants: The Parameters of Desire in *Le Menagier De Paris / The Goodman of Paris*,” *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia: International Review of English Studies* 38 (2002): 397.

¹⁵⁹ Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Rés. Ye. 93 and Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Rés. Ye. 186. The accepted dates are c. 1479. See James Woodrow Hassell, Jr. “Introduction,” in *Amorous Games: A Critical Edition of Les Adevineaux Amoureux* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1974), xvii.

¹⁶⁰ Hassell, *Amorous Games*, xxviii.

for intimate conversation. As questions that illuminate cultural values and relatable situations through discussion and role-play, the *demandes* reflect interests and concerns found within spaces of dalliance, much like the sections reserved for games as one way to amuse guests in *Le Menagier de Paris*. Question 220 asks, for instance, to calculate the number of dinner guests seated at the table:

Compaignons estoient assis au disner; illec survint ung aultre qui leur dist: “Dieu gard la compagnie et feussies ung cent.” Et l’un des compaignons respondi: “Nous ne sommes point cent, maiz se nous estions encoires autant que nous sommes, et la moittie de autant, et le quart de autant, et toy avecques, adont serions nous cent ne plus ne moins.” Or est a savoir quell nombre ilz seoient au disner.¹⁶¹

[Companions are seated at dinner; they see another that says to them: “God guard these companions and make them one hundred.” And one of the dinner guests responded: “We are not at all a hundred, but we are twice as we seem, half of what we are, and a quarter, and also you included, and we are neither more nor less than this.” How many guests are seated at dinner?]

None of the recreational mathematical problems concern matters of love directly, but they do contribute to a culture of polite society and good household management. For the above question, the composer provides the algebraic equation in order to solve the problem: $2x + x/2 + x/4 + 1 = 100$, which, when solved, reveals that there are 36 guests present at dinner.¹⁶² While the mathematical problems could be considered educational on their own, their insertion in the *demandes* collection—as problems added without any visual differentiation from other *demandes*—suggests that their primary purpose in *Les Adevineaux amoureux* was for leisure rather than learning. Like other *demandes* in the collection, the algebraic problems could be asked within a social parlour game among house guests, family, or friends. Similarly, other mathematical problems in the collection focus on themes of feasting, wedding gifts, travel, and

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 55. The translation is my own.

¹⁶² To solve: $11x + 4 = 400$, $x = 36$. Therefore, there are 36 guests present at the meal.

the division of estates. Five problems (214, 215, 220, 223, and 226) among the 40 mathematical *demandes* explicitly focus on supper, for instance.

Earlier *demandes* in *Les Adevineaux amoureux* focus on questions of love, and the mathematical problems add a sense of realism to the collection. Question 75, for example, asks what is the best virtue a man or woman in this world could possess other than loyalty (answer: a prudent manner and temperament) and Question 38 asks the player, “Sire, je vous demande quelle chose est amours” [Sir, I ask you what is love?].¹⁶³ In *Les Adevineaux amoureux*, the compiler organized the miscellany by grouping different types of questions together, including a series of prose questions of love between a *Damoiselle* and *Chevalier* (fols. 1v-13v), riddles (fols. 14r-21r), “venditions en amours,” which are connected to *Evangiles des quenouilles* (a collection of popular superstitions) (fols. 21v-23v), and mathematical problems (fols. 24r-27v). An early modern manuscript, Chantilly, Musée Condé, MS 654 (1572), instead places the problem collection between questions of love (fols. 45v-58v).

While the problems found in Alcuin’s *Propositiones* display a variety of fictitious and real-life concerns, the mathematical problems in *Les Adevineaux amoureux* correspond more directly to issues relating to elite entertainment and household management like those found or alluded to in other domestic advice manuals—showing again how algebraic problems could be used simultaneously as forms of entertainment and as tools applicable to, or at least familiar with, real-world issues. Medievalists do not yet know the origin of the mathematical problem group in the *demandes* collection, but the problems seem derived, in part, from mercantile exercises similar to those composed by Fibonacci; three problems depict wine merchants (217,

¹⁶³ Hassell, *Amorous Games*, 22 and 14.

229, and 230), one asks the solver to divide casks of fish among merchants (234), and another deals with the purchase of horses (232). Still others discuss the exchange of animals (219), capital gains (246), and dealings at a tavern (224). The insertion of a recreational mathematical problem group into a collection of *demandes* therefore does not recycle or appropriate the genre, but rather illustrates how easily the genre could suit a variety of entertainments and social classes. Mathematical exercises were not only used in university curricula and the apprenticeship of merchants, but also enjoyed by noble and gentle men and women as ways in which to pass the time as a social amusement and form of edification, including in good household management, which reflects the values and lifestyles of the gentry and nobility.

Recreational mathematics, the earliest problems to appear in medieval England, thus move between spaces of learning and play and—as we have seen above—was adapted for either educational or leisurely pursuits. While recreational mathematics problems are not games in themselves, compilers could adapt them as questions to be used in courtly games such as those played with the *demandes d'amours*. The next section of this chapter explores more closely the relationship between skill acquisition, cognition, and storytelling in medieval chess problems—the most popular type of game problem in medieval Europe.

2.2 Sites of Learning

“That due knowledge of any subject not perfectly simple in itself implies exact knowledge of its elements or parts is a truism remarkably appropriate to chess,” begins chessmaster James Mason (1849-1905) in his widely influential treatise *The Art of Chess* (1895); “now to form just ideas of the parts or elements of which chess consists, it is necessary to

consider them each separately at first, and not to confound them all into one view, so that, as it were, we cannot see the wood for the trees.”¹⁶⁴ A number of chess masters composed chess books in the nineteenth century, but Mason’s *The Art of Chess* was one of the first handbooks to provide a general overview and methodology for learning the game. For Mason, learning chess was more than simply memorizing solutions to problems. He devised an approach for teaching chess to beginners that met with lasting appeal and remained popular well into the twentieth century: “having mastered the parts ... a correct method will enable us to trace their connections and interactions, until we may eventually perceive them working together according to that controlling principle of unity in diversity which is the last to be discovered in the actual game.”¹⁶⁵ Mason breaks down the game into sections comprising problems focusing on a different aspects of the game—endings, combinations, and openings—beginning with the endgame since it has the fewest pieces which makes it easier to learn how pieces move and work together. Mason also gradually increments the quantity and variety of pieces on the board, moving from pawns (the simplest pieces) to the Queen (the most complicated piece), and presents not only the correct sequence of moves for the outcome, but also a reasoning behind the strategy.

Mason’s teaching philosophy in *The Art of Chess* implies that students must go beyond memory and mimicry in order to learn the game. Chess is such a complex logic system that numerous theories for skill acquisition have been developed over the past two hundred years that combine ideas of learning, cognitive processing, and the mind. Psychologist Alfred Cleveland’s model of skill acquisition in chess similarly includes the player’s development of “positional

¹⁶⁴ James Mason, *The Art of Chess* (New York: Dover, 1958), 3.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

sense,” wherein players gain awareness of the meaning and value of each piece for different situations.¹⁶⁶ Still others suggest that learning (and exceling) at chess involves pattern recognition or the use of knowledge of chess to search for alternative situations to given positions on the board.¹⁶⁷ Chess is a ‘perfect’ strategy game: all pertinent information is displayed to each player and there are no chance moves. While chess may at first appear simple in design, with sixty-four chequered squares, thirty-two pieces, two opponents, and one winner, the number of variations—which contains between 10^{43} – 10^{50} positions and 10^{123} possible chess game variations in the modern game—makes this finite game highly complex.¹⁶⁸ While the medieval game had a smaller number of variations, the fusion of simplicity and multifariousness still presented a challenge for medieval players who wished to master chess.¹⁶⁹ As mentioned above, cognitive psychologists have long studied whether chess, as a task environment, can illustrate human thinking processes and show how related behavioural models are transferable to other situations. In the words of Saariluoma, “when we better understand selective thinking in chess, we can certainly be able to develop theories that describe selective thinking in other task environments as well.”¹⁷⁰ Chess, as the “drosophila of cognitive science,” reveals not only how

¹⁶⁶ Alfred A. Cleveland, “The Psychology of Chess and of Learning to Play it,” *Journal of Psychology* 18.3 (1907): 269-308.

¹⁶⁷ See Saariluoma, *Chess Players’ Thinking*, 30-31.

¹⁶⁸ In his seminal work on chess, Claude Shannon determined the lower bound for the number of chess positions was estimated to be 10^{43} (now called the “Shannon Number”) using the formula: $64! / 32!(8)^2(2!)^6$. His conclusions, however, did not omit illegal moves. Building on Shannon’s formula, Victor Allis calculated the upper bound of game-tree complexities to be 10^{52} . Allis also estimated that the possible number of game variations to be 10^{123} , which is more than the number of atoms in the universe. Claude Shannon, “Programming a Computer for Playing Chess,” *Philosophical Magazine* 41 (1950): 256-75 and Victor Allis, “Searching for Solutions in Games and Artificial Intelligence,” PhD diss (University of Limburg, 1994).

¹⁶⁹ Scholars have yet to calculate the number of variations in the various medieval assizes.

¹⁷⁰ Saariluoma, *Chess Players’ Thinking*, 17.

we as humans acquire knowledge, but also what differentiates novices from masters in the game and in other areas of expertise.¹⁷¹

Mason's methodology for teaching the game marks a watershed moment in teaching chess. Before the nineteenth century, teaching chess from manuals often consisted of an explanation of rules, such as Charles Cotton's widely influential *The Compleat Gamester* (1674), or a series of problems (or both).¹⁷² How did medieval players learn the skill of the game? Were there strategies for teaching chess to novices and, if so, how did they differ from later epistemological approaches? Were medieval chess problems adapted for non-game related tasks? This section examines the strategies and methods by which teachers, composers, and scribe-compilers taught the popular game of chess to players in medieval England, including ecclesiastics, the gentry, and university students, in order to understand how medieval players learned the game and how this education differs from our modern notions of chess and skill acquisition.

While game studies scholars paint an image of the static nature board games before the invention and dissemination of video games, chess in the Middle Ages was in fact a game in transition. Originating in northern India, chess traveled to Spain and Italy sometime before 1000CE and entered a long period of experimentation—in pieces, rules, and material representation—throughout medieval Europe. Our modern rules did not come into play until about 1475, when the Bishop changed from a leaping to a fluid piece (and extended his movement to the edges of the board) and the Queen adopted the powers of the Rook and Bishop,

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 3.

¹⁷² Charles Cotton, *The Compleat Gamester*, ed. Thomas E. Marston (Barre, MA: Imprint Society, 1970), 42-59.

thus becoming the most powerful piece in the game.¹⁷³ We can view this transition toward the modern game through the problem collections that included both medieval and modern rules, much like Pacioli's problems in *De Ludo Scacchorum* discussed at the beginning of this chapter.

Known as *locus partitus* (Latin), *jeu-parti* (Old French), and *jupertie* (Middle English), the medieval chess problem was originally inherited from earlier Indian and Arabic manuscripts, wherein solutions to chess problems (also called *manṣūbāt*) were “highly esteemed” among players as intellectual puzzles.¹⁷⁴ Pioneering chess historian Harold Murray found over 1600 *manṣūbāt*, many of which are concerned with techniques for the endgame: “In its origin the *manṣūbā* was nothing more than the termination of an actual game played over the board which was deemed worthy of preservation by the players or their contemporaries because of the brilliance, the difficulty, or other special feature in play.”¹⁷⁵ As chess problems spread outwards in the thirteenth century from Italy and France, the two main centres of problem composition and compilation, the *jeupartie* and other game problems became more generally known as “a position in a game ... in which the chance of winning or losing hang in the balance.”¹⁷⁶

Learning chess from manuscripts did not, however, begin with the circulation of problems. The earliest reference to chess in Europe occurs in the “Einsiedeln Verses” in Switzerland (997CE), though the game was likely known before this first recorded allusion.

¹⁷³ See Taylor, “How Did the Queen Go Mad?,” 169-84 and Marilyn Yalom, *Birth of the Chess Queen: A History* (New York: HarperCollins, 2014), 191-226 for discussions of the queen piece's change in movement on the board.

¹⁷⁴ Murray, *A History of Chess*, 281. Translated from Arabic, the term *manṣūbāt* (sing. *manṣūba*) means “arrangement” or “position” and is derived from the passive participle of *naṣaba*, meaning “to erect,” “set up,” or “arrange.” Ibid., 266.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 270.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 566.

Historian Richard Eales speculates that the introduction of mathematics to school curricula was accompanied by chess problems, which acted as exercises to teach practical knowledge.¹⁷⁷ As Daniel O’Sullivan posits, “the notion of two oppositional forces locked into a battle with well-established rules that call for implementing social strategies might very well have struck the imagination of more than one Scholastic thinker.”¹⁷⁸ Chess reached England by the late eleventh century, but it did not gain popularity until the twelfth century. The earliest playing pieces, found in Gloucester and Winchester, date between 1075-1125CE and are sculpted from deer antlers in an abstract Eastern style.¹⁷⁹ All known chess pieces excavated in England date from the post-Anglo-Norman conquest and may have followed the reintroduction of *tabula* (backgammon) in the eleventh century.¹⁸⁰

Recorded rules for chess circulated at first in clerical texts, such as the *Versis de Scaccis* in southern Germany and the Latin ‘Winchester Poem’ in Winchester, England. The earliest references to chess show not merely curiosity, but interest in learning the game. The ‘Winchester Poem,’ found in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Cat. Bibl. Cod. 58, p. 110 (mid-twelfth c.), describes each piece and its corresponding movements on the board. For example, the author

¹⁷⁷ Richard Eales, *Chess: the History of a Game* (New York: Facts on File, 1985), 42-48. See also Murray, *A History of Chess*, 405.

¹⁷⁸ Daniel O’Sullivan, “Introduction: ‘Le beau jeu notable,’” in *Chess in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Age: A Fundamental Thought Paradigm of the Premodern World*, ed. Daniel O’Sullivan (Boston: De Gruyter, 2012), 3.

¹⁷⁹ T. G. Hassall and J. Rhodes, “Excavations at the new Market Hall, Gloucester 1966-7,” in *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucester Archaeological Society* 93.15 (1974): 100 and Martin Biddle, *Object and Economy in Medieval Winchester* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), 704. Other chess pieces found in England from the eleventh to the fifteenth centuries were created from chalk, whalebone, wood, and, most notably, jet. For a table of pieces and their materials, see Ian D. Riddler, “Anglo-Norman Chess,” in *New Approaches to Board Games Research*, International Institute for Asian Studies Working Paper 3, ed. Alexander de Voogt (Leiden, 1995), 104.

¹⁸⁰Riddler, “Anglo-Norman Chess,” 103.

describes the pawn as: “Unusquisque pracedentes assequantur pedites. / Tunc incipient pedestres praelium committere / Neque verti retro queant, sed directe properent / Quod repererint incautum, per transversum feriant.” [Each pawn proceeds on foot. / Then they begin to engage in a battle of infantry / And do not recoil, but directly they can hasten / In order to strike a guard diagonally].¹⁸¹ The rules for chess were often regional (called assizes), and players could change their methods of play on a whim. In England, two assizes called the *short assize* and the *long assize* were common forms of play, the latter of which was used in chess problems.¹⁸² O’Sullivan argues that when chess was relatively unknown to audiences, the transmitted allegories and rules of chess remained necessarily “textually cumbersome.”¹⁸³ As chess increased in prominence and popularity, “poets could dispense with tedious explanations and create dynamic allegories capable of conveying meaning more subtly and economically.”¹⁸⁴ As clerical texts and curricula relied increasingly on the written word, manuscripts began to act as a method for recording and circulating rules to games. Earlier Anglo-Saxon games, such as Hnefatafl, are mentioned rarely in Anglo-Saxon literature, as their rules were disseminated orally among players. Conversely,

¹⁸¹ Murray, *History of Chess*, 514-15, lines 15-18. The translation is my own.

¹⁸² In medieval chess, the movement of the pieces favours leaping as opposed to gliding, which is found in the modern game. The differences in movement for the *long assize* are as follows: the King can leap to a third square on his first move as long as he cannot be checked by his opponent. He cannot leap over an enemy’s piece or capture a piece by leaping to it. He cannot leap out of check. After the first move, he can only move one square in any direction. A pawn can move two squares in its initial move and can capture another pawn, called *en passant*. The Queen and promoted pawn have the same first move. A ‘Bare King’ (the opponent only has the King piece left on the board) is not necessarily considered a win. See Murray, *A History of Chess*, 464-68.

¹⁸³ Daniel O’Sullivan, “Changing the Rules in and of Medieval Chess Allegories,” in *Chess in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Age: A Fundamental Thought Paradigm of the Premodern World*, ed. Daniel O’Sullivan (Boston: De Gruyter, 2012), 201.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 201.

chess allegories describing basic rules begin to appear across Europe soon after the game's inception and rise in popularity.¹⁸⁵

Chess did not remain an intellectual activity solely of the clergy, however. As the game gained popularity among the nobility and gentry, chess became an essential part of a noble child's upbringing as it was thought to instill good moral character, tactical skill, and courtly values. Petrus Alfonsi, Henry I's physician, writes in his twelfth-century treatise *Disciplina Clericalis*, that the seven knightly skills include, "riding, swimming, archery, boxing, hawking, chess, and verse-writing."¹⁸⁶ In her analysis of Chretien de Troyes' *Perceval* and the Didot *Perceval*, Jenny Adams similarly observes that chess operates as a site for Perceval's personal and intellectual development and can be linked to the growing emphasis on education in the thirteenth century.¹⁸⁷ The knowledge and education of chess among secular players was gained primarily through tutors and by "imitating their elders," but the recorded rules and chess problems show evidence of their use of books to learn the game as well.¹⁸⁸ Such an education is often reflected in medieval romance, where authors describe knights such as Tristram and Lancelot as accomplished chess players. By the sixteenth century, chess and other pastimes had become a well-established form of entertainment in household gardens and chambers across England. In *The Booke Named the Governour* (1531), Sir Thomas Elyot praises chess as a suitable game for governing members of the nobility and gentry:

¹⁸⁵ See especially Murray, *A History of Chess*, 496-528.

¹⁸⁶ Eberhard Hermes, ed., *The "Disciplina Clericalis" of Petrus Alfonsi*, trans. P. R. Quarrie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 115.

¹⁸⁷ Jenny Adams, "Medieval Chess, Perceval's Education, and a Dialectic of Misogyny," in *Chess in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Age: A Fundamental Thought Paradigm of the Premodern World*, ed. Daniel O'Sullivan (Boston: De Gruyter, 2012), 111-34.

¹⁸⁸ Eales, *Chess*, 53.

The chesse, of all games wherin is no bodily exercise, is mooste to be commended; for therein is right subtile engine, wherby the wytte is made more sharpe and remembrance quickened. And it is the more commendable and also commodiouse if the players haue radde the moralization of the chesse, and whan they playe do thinke upon hit; whiche bokes be in englisshe. But they be very scarce, by cause fewe men do seeke in plaies for vertue or wisdom.¹⁸⁹

Elyot devoted sections of his educational handbook to pastimes deemed proper for his audience, including not only hunting, dancing, and physical sports, but also board games considered “honest exercises” comprising methods for finding “moche solace, and also study commodiouse; as deuising a bataile, or contention betwene vertue and vice, or other like pleasaunt and honest inuention”—a sentiment occasionally at odds with ecclesiastical writings.¹⁹⁰ For Elyot, sanctioned games—chess, tables, and cards—instill desired values, contribute to one’s health, and provide another social outlet as a rest from labour. Chess, in particular, improves the mind and teaches moral behavior. Notably, in the passage quoted above, Elyot also ties the experience of chess to the lessons taught in Jacobus de Cessolis’ thirteenth-century allegory, *Liber de moribus hominum et officiis nobilium super ludo scacchorum* [Book of the Morals of Men and the Duties of nobles—or the Book of Chess], and is likely referencing Caxton’s translation *The Game and Playe of the Chesse*.¹⁹¹ While he does not address chess problems directly, Elyot nevertheless associates chess with the development of improved memory and cognitive abilities. Chess, Elyot argues, has the potential to improve one’s character, both mentally and morally. Setting up the board, as it were, was both a recreational and spiritual matter that could incite

¹⁸⁹ Sir Thomas Elyot, *The Boke Named the Governour*, ed. Henry Herbert Stephen Croft (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, and Company, 1883), 1:284-85.

¹⁹⁰ For a survey of attitudes toward board games by the Church, see Robert Bubczyk, “‘Ludus inhonestus et illicitus?’ Chess, Games, and the Church in Medieval Europe,” in *Games and Gaming in Medieval Literature*, ed. Serina Patterson (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), 23-43.

¹⁹¹ For a detailed discussion of Cessolis’ *Liber*, see Chapter 4.

either virtue or vice, but either way the ability to play chess was an important skill for the social élite.

Historical documents, material artifacts, and literary references may reveal opinions and evidence of gameplay, but they fail to show in detail how the game might have been taught in every case, especially when the specific rules of the game could be changed so easily depending on the audience or locale. Problems recorded on rolls and in manuscripts reveal another way in which players learned chess in the Middle Ages. The Anglo-Norman, Latin, and Middle English chess problem manuscripts show evidence of an increased interest in mastering chess as the manuscripts operate as sites of learning for players. As I will demonstrate, the problems also act as cognitive exercises for learning skills such as problem-solving and logic, and could be adapted to other academic subjects such as astronomy and mathematics. Moreover, chess problems reveal that board games were not considered static objects by medieval composers, compilers, and players, but rather dynamic, malleable textual playspaces. Chess problems were not only valued differently from modern games in terms of their composition, but were also used for different purposes by the players and readers who enjoyed them.

Murray remarks that chess problems found in England “are generally of a very elementary and simple type,” dismissing them as “unsophisticate[d]” exercises for a minority audience of chess players.¹⁹² Richard Eales similarly downplays the significance of chess problems, stating that problem manuscripts show that “the general standard of play was not high,” since they “rarely showed signs of technical advance on the eastern [Muslim] prototypes.”¹⁹³ Yet a closer glance at medieval chess problems found in England indicates an

¹⁹² Murray, *A History of Chess*, 607 and 565.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 69.

organizational and compositional strategy for teaching chess to the clergy, English gentry, and students that merits further scrutiny. Seven surviving manuscripts in England, which date from c. 1248 to c. 1470, include a total 183 problems, 106 of which are variant. Problem collections also range from as few as two problems to as many as fifty-five and, and, as a co-occurrence matrix shows (Table 2.1), a number of problems appear in multiple manuscripts, suggesting a shared network of collections or problem collections that stem from completely separate sources.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹⁴ The manuscripts are: London, British Library, Cotton, MS Cleopatra B IX; Cambridge, Trinity College, MS O.2.45; London, British Library, MS Sloane 3281; London, British Library, King's Library, MS 13 A.XVIII; London, Royal College of Arms, Roll 20/26; New Haven, Yale University, MS Porter; Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 344.

	MS O.2.45 (c. 1248)	MS Cleopatra B IX (c. 1273)	MS Sloane 3281 (early 14th c.)	MS Royal 13 A XVIII (14th c.)	Roll 20/26, dorse (14th c.)	MS Porter (c. 1450)	MS Ashmole 344 (c. 1470)
Number of Problems in each Manuscript	2	18	11	55	14	40	41
MS O.2.45 (c. 1248)		2	0	0	0	1	1
MS Cleopatra B IX (c. 1273)	2		0	14	7	2	3
MS Sloane 3281 (early 14th c.)	0	0		0	0	0	0
MS Royal 13 A XVIII (14th c.)	0	14	0		11	12	16
Roll 20/26, dorse (14th c.)	0	7	0	11		1	3
MS Porter (c. 1450)	1	2	0	12	1		28
MS Ashmole 344 (c. 1470)	1	3	0	16	3	28	

Table 2.1: Co-Occurrence Matrix of Chess Problem Collections in England, c. 1273-1470

Murray speculates that four of the seven extant chess problem collections in England were derived from a single Latin source (MS Cleopatra B IX, MS Royal 13 A XVIII, MS Porter, and MS Ashmole 344),¹⁹⁵ but the low survival rate of early manuscripts, the wide variation of problems among these manuscripts, and the variations in *ordinatio*, even among manuscripts that share a large number of problems, indicate that there were most likely several now-lost problem collections in circulation.¹⁹⁶ MS Cleopatra B IX, one of the earliest collection of problems in England, and MS Ashmole 344, the latest problem collection in England, share only three problems between their collections, for instance (see Table 2.1). Chess problems in England may not have been overly popular among players, but their composition as an aesthetic puzzle and cognitive exercise reveals how the mechanics, texts, layout, and *ordinatio* render them useful as pedagogical tools for learning the art and skill of chess in England—characteristics that also show how medieval composers, compilers, and players thought of their game spaces. This study therefore reconsiders Murray’s initial study of chess problems in order to lend long-overdue attention to the genre and provides a starting point for further research in the history and cultural understanding of chess and other games in the Middle Ages.

2.2.1 Warm Ups and Cool Downs: Early Problems in England

Just as the first recorded rules appeared in clerical manuscripts, members of the clergy were also among the first players to copy game problems in England despite the suspicious attitude ecclesiastics held toward chess and other games in the later Middle Ages.¹⁹⁷ The first

¹⁹⁵ Murray was unaware of Roll 20/26, which also shares a large number of its problems with Murray’s so-called ‘Anglo-Norman’ group.

¹⁹⁶ Murray, *A History of Chess*, 579.

¹⁹⁷ See Bubczyk, “Ludus inhonestus et illicitus?,” 23-43.

extant problems appear in Cambridge, Trinity College, MS O.2.45, a mid thirteenth-century trilingual miscellany penned and compiled at Cerne Abbey in Dorset, England (c. 1248). Two chess problems appear at the top of fol. 2r followed by a fourteen-line Latin poem commonly titled “Carmina Ludi Scachorum” [The Song about How to Play Chess]. Although MS O.2.45 comprises a diverse array of texts, including mathematical puzzles, satires, treatises on mathematics and astronomy, tracts on the computus, prayers, and prose tales, the scribes devised an intentional organizational schema for the first three pages of the manuscript: each leaf contains visual, interactive texts and activities that focus on contemplating the afterlife, enjoying earthly pleasures, and sharpening mental faculties, respectively. These introductory texts may have not only prepared the reader for the other academic and devotional texts in the manuscript—effectively serving as warm-up exercises—but also offered a respite from reading and studying.¹⁹⁸ Before I turn to a discussion of the two chess problems, it is necessary to first outline the items on the first two leaves in order to gauge the scribe’s plan for the interactive texts and inclusion of the problems.

On fol. 1r, the scribes begin the miscellany with a labyrinth composed of an eleven-ringed circuit through a circle (Figure 2.2).

¹⁹⁸ The manuscript’s missing quires, which include texts on medicine and astronomy and a lapidary, now comprise sections of London, British Library, Egerton 843. Montague Rhodes James, *The Western Manuscripts in the Library of Trinity College, Cambridge: A Descriptive Catalogue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1902), 3:150-60.



Figure 2.2 MS O.2.45, fol. 1r, Labyrinth

Unlike mazes, which consist of a series of forking paths and dead ends, a labyrinth is a unicursal winding path that leads to the centre of the circle—a centre that, as the final destination on the path, sometimes represented heaven or Jerusalem. The four-fold symmetry along the path as the reader's eye moves from each area of the circle shares its construction with several Roman and Anglo-Saxon labyrinths, and the spread of the eleven-circuit design in France, including its

construction on the pavement floor of Chartres Cathedral in 1201, attests to its significance as a religious symbol in the Middle Ages.¹⁹⁹

The development and popularity of the medieval labyrinth also reflects the image's continued representation as a symbol of devotion and faith. A number of labyrinths, such as those found at Amiens and Reims, were designed as paths for personal meditation.²⁰⁰ The image of the labyrinth in this particular manuscript supports this notion as well. A Latin riddle appears above the labyrinth, signaling its potency as an icon of spiritual reflection: "Hon hic introeas nisi que sint hec tria dicas: / Quod facit & num fit . facit & fit . non facit & fit" [Upon entering here, but what are the three things you declare: whether what he does is done, what he does is done, and what he does is not done].²⁰¹ The riddle provides a guide for the reader with which to use the labyrinth; while the three things stated ("hec tria dicas") could highlight the reader's actions in general, the labyrinth may have also highlighted how one's actions could lead to one of three locations after death: purgatory, heaven, or hell. While the manuscript pages do not convey the same kind of performative, physical experience as walking along actual paved labyrinths (which can measure 10-40 feet in diameter), it still enables the reader's mind to focus on a specific

¹⁹⁹ Between 863 and 871CE Otfred, a monk from Weissenburg, modified the classical seven-circuit labyrinth pattern by adding four extra circuits, creating the more complex eleven-circuit labyrinth design known as the "medieval labyrinth." His drawing in the end leaf of his Book of Gospels became a base for the development of a number of later thirteenth and fourteenth century labyrinths found in cathedrals and churches across Europe. See Wolfgang Haubrichs, *Ordo als Form, Strkturstudien zur Zahlenkomposition bei Otfred von Weissenburg und in karolingischer Literatur* (Tübingen: M. Niemeyer, 1968), 285-93.

²⁰⁰ David McCullough, *The Unending Mystery: A Journey through Labyrinths and Mazes* (New York: Random House, 2004), 70-77. For more information about medieval labyrinths and mazes, see also: William Henry Matthews, *Mazes and Labyrinths: A General Account of their History and Developments* (New York: Longmans, 1922) and DeAnna Dare Evans, "Labyrinths in Medieval Churches: An Investigation of Form and Function," MA Thesis (University of Arizona, 1992).

²⁰¹ Cambridge, Trinity College, MS O.2.45, fol 1r.

space: the singular path directs the eye (and possibly a finger) and the time passed in this meditative activity furthers the embodied practice.²⁰² The aesthetic, bounded space thus becomes a tool with which to gain spiritual insight and contemplate the path of the soul through life.

The second image on the leaf depicts the spiritual journey more explicitly as another visual exercise, portraying a “Spheara Pythagorae” that consists of a map of the heavens and a path from vite (“life”) to mortis (“death”) (Figure 2.3).



Figure 2.3: MS O.2.45, fol. 1r, “Spheara Pythagorae”

²⁰² Interestingly, clinical psychologists and therapists have used medieval labyrinth designs for counseling and therapy sessions. See, for instance, Michelle Bigard, “Walking the Labyrinth: An Innovative Approach to Counseling Center Outreach,” *Journal of College Counseling* 12.2 (2009): 137-48 and Ingrid D. Bloos and Thomas O’Connor, “Ancient and Medieval Labyrinth and Contemporary Narrative Therapy: How Do They Fit?,” *Pastoral Psychology* 50 (2002): 219-30.

The labyrinth, coupled with the “Spheara Pythagorae,” thus provides a physical space for such meditation on the afterlife. While they differ from the chess problems, the riddle, labyrinth, and “Spheara Pythagorae” nevertheless underscore a different kind of problem: salvation after death. The problems are “solved” by leading a pure Christian life. The images are therefore intended to provide a site for exploring matters of the soul that can then be plumbed further by engaging with the other spiritual texts in the manuscript.

The next leaf, fol. 1v, turns to another matter entirely: that of the leisurely board game (Figure 2.4):

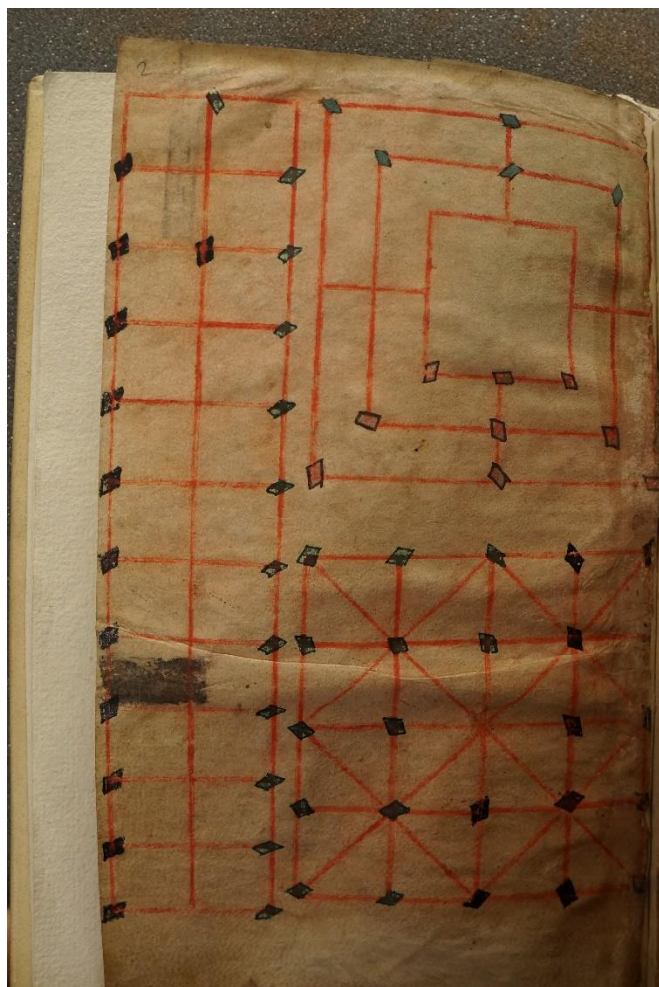


Figure 2.4: MS O.2.45, fol.1v, Game boards

That these images appear alongside a labyrinth and “Spheara Pythagorae” reveals a close relationship between mind and soul: the first images provide spiritual nourishment while the later problems provide intellectual and pleasurable stimulation. Clergymen often criticized board games as activities that encouraged idleness, addiction, gambling, and other sins, but there is no indication in MS O.2.45 that the scribes or compilers exhibited such criticism. In fact, despite bans from the Church, board games continued to be played in abbeys and monasteries throughout the Middle Ages.²⁰³ With no instructions or text to accompany the three game boards in MS O.2.45, the page may have been a model for the creation of game boards or intended as a portable collection of games that would have already been familiar to the players (or, at least, the owner of the manuscript). The games could be played by a reader and another player, much like the game boards and interactive game-texts discussed in Chapters 1 and 3. The game facing the top right of the page is merels (from the Latin *merellus* [game piece]), which is closely related to the game Tic-Tac-Toe (also called Noughts and Crosses) and maintained widespread popularity across medieval Europe as a game for the social élite.²⁰⁴ Together with chess and tables, merels formed the triumvirate of the most well-known and played board games in medieval Europe. Game historian David Parlett notes that “[i]t was the Norman French version of this name [*Marelle*] that accompanied the larger varieties of the game reaching England in the wake of

²⁰³ Bubczyk, “Ludus inhonestus et illicitus?,” 23-43.

²⁰⁴ The aim of the game is to arrange three or more pieces in a vertical, horizontal, or diagonal line on a board and capture the opponent’s pieces. In the first phase, each player takes turns placing pieces on the board, and after the pieces have been placed players move pieces onto unoccupied spaces. After each successful line, he or she can capture an enemy’s piece. A player wins if he or she leaves the opponent with no moves or the opponent only has two pieces left. Alfonso X also includes a variant of the game using three cubic dice in *Libros de los juegos*. A die cast during the first phase of the game with throws of 6, 5, 4; 6, 3, 3; 5, 2, 2; or 4, 1, 1 could break an enemy line and capture a piece. If a line was formed with the charging piece, the opponent would lose two pieces from the board. After all pieces have been placed on the board, the game continues without the use of dice.

William the Conqueror,” yet all forms of the game enjoyed popularity in medieval England.²⁰⁵ The game board in MS O.2.45 depicts the earlier variant of Nine Men’s Morris in England, with a triple mill of twenty-four points without any diagonal lines.²⁰⁶ Each player begins with nine pieces in this case and can only create vertical or horizontal lines. While the merels board in MS O.2.45 is a unique textual witness, investigations at ecclesiastical sites in England reveal that others enjoyed the game: various merels boards have been found carved into cloister seats at the cathedrals of Norwich, Canterbury, Gloucester, Chester, Durham, Chichester, Lincoln, Salisbury, and Westminster Abbey, which suggest possibly play by builders or even the clergy.²⁰⁷

The game board on the bottom right of the page is alquerque, a positional strategy game and antecedent of English draughts. Players begin by placing twelve pieces onto the two rows closest to them and the two rightmost spaces in the centre of the board. The scribe clarifies this positioning by using green and red ink on each side of the board, though the four pieces placed in the centre row are reversed (see Figure 2.4). In this game, which was classified as a “war game” by Harold Murray, the player’s piece can jump over an opponent’s piece to capture it, and multiple captures are allowed by jumping over successive pieces.²⁰⁸ Unlike merels, alquerque

²⁰⁵ Parlett, *The Oxford History of Board-Games*, 109 (see chap. 1 n. 16).

²⁰⁶ See: Murray, *A History of Board-Games*, 37-45 (see chap. 1 n. 16). Other popular variants of the game included Three Men’s Morris, Six Men’s Morris, and Twelve Men’s Morris.

²⁰⁷ Bell, *Board and Table Games*, 92 (see chap. 1 n. 16).

²⁰⁸ Players must capture a piece if it is possible to do so, or else his or her gaming piece is removed from the board. A player wins the game by capturing all of the opponent’s pieces or the other player cannot move. Murray speculates that the Moors introduced the game to Spain. Murray, *A History of Board-Games*, 65-66. See also Parlett, *The Oxford History of Board-Games*, 243-44 and Bell, *Board and Table Games*, 47-48.

was not widely played in Europe,²⁰⁹ though a game board has also been found etched into the cloisters at Norwich Cathedral, indicating that the game was played on occasion in England.²¹⁰ The vast majority of game board carvings at English monasteries, cathedrals, and abbeys are found in the secular and novice cloisters and quarters, though, as Henry Spence-Jones notes, some of the games may have been etched by builders.²¹¹

The last game board on the leftmost side of the page has been much more difficult to identify. In contrast to the two quadrilateral games, this game uses a 2 x 11 squared board with twenty-four points coloured red and green (presumably indicating twelve gaming pieces for each player) placed along the outer edge of the board. The game appears to have started with a red piece moved to the centre point of the third row and a green piece moved to the centre point of the first row (see figure 2.4). Historian Peter Michaelsen conjectures that the game was a chase game played with dice, and was possibly an early version of the Danish game *daldøs*.²¹² The game board appearing in MS O.2.45 is the only extant example of this game in Europe outside

²⁰⁹ Alfonso X includes alquerque in *Libros de los juegos*, calling it *alquerque de doze*, and classifies a variant of the game as Nine Men's Morris [*alquerque de nueve*]. Parlett, *The Oxford History of Board Games*, 243.

²¹⁰ Murray, *A History of Board-Games*, 66.

²¹¹ Henry Donald Maurice Spence-Jones, *The Secrets of a Great Cathedral* (London: J. M. Dent, 1914), 137-38. The game of Fox and Geese also sometimes accompanied Merels. In the North Alley at Gloucester Cathedral, for instance, a Nine Men's Morris board and two variants of Fox and Geese boards are carved into a stone bench. As Henri Jean Louis Joseph Massé observes, the gameboards "are almost exclusively confined to the novices' alley, the only others now to be seen in the cloister being unfinished 'Nine men's morris' board in the south alley, and one or two crossed squares in the west alley." *The Cathedral Church of Gloucester: A Description of its Fabric and a Brief History of the Episcopal See*, 2nd ed. (London: George Bell, 1900), 108. See also: Peter Hampson Ditchfield, *The Cathedrals of Great Britain: Their History and Architecture* (London: J. M. Dent, 1916), 203 and 351.

²¹² Peter Michaelsen, "Daldøs: An almost forgotten dice board game," *Board Game Studies* 4 (2001): 21-31.

Scandinavia, and may have been adapted from Arabic or Norwegian versions of the game.²¹³

Franz Rosenthal notes that a version of *daldøs* was known in the Near East by 1300CE, but the game depicted in MS O.2.45 places the game in Europe nearly half a century earlier.²¹⁴

While game boards also appear on benches, steps, and cloisters more frequently than manuscript leaves, the games appearing in MS O.2.45 show evidence of the use of manuscripts for interactive activities beyond reading—another surface for learning and leisure. That they are not accompanied by rules is also telling: while the rules to *merels* and *alquerque* were certainly played on these board layouts, there may have been other rules in circulation as well. The textual game boards therefore do not necessarily signal or dictate the rules of the game. While this may be suggest that game boards betray signs of signification, I argue that the boards become an open structure ripe for play depending on the immediate needs of their audiences. The game boards could be played by a small group of clergy playing together huddled around the manuscript, or perhaps by two monks who wish to use the game as a moral vehicle to reflect on earthly pleasure. Scholars do not have direct access to such experiences, of course, but we can speculate on the ways in which such games may have been used and understood based on their compilation and readership.

That the chess problems and rules appear together on the page opposite the game boards indicate a clear proximal relationship to leisurely play. The inclusion of the poem of chess rules, which appears in four other extant manuscripts including MS Cleopatra B IX, suggests that chess was a new, unfamiliar game that readers may not have been as acquainted with as they were with other games in the manuscript. The scribal adaptations in the manuscripts copied in England

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 25-27.

²¹⁴ Franz Rosenthal. *Gambling in Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 1974), 44-45.

further attest to a clarification of the rules; while variants of the poem found in France and Germany devote one or two lines to the movements of each piece, ending with “Rex loca circa se clipeo defendit et ense” [the King defends the places around him with shield and sword], the two versions in England extend the line in order to explain the conditions for ending the game:

Si scaces regem, regalem perdere sedem

Cogitur, et totus sit rex de sede remotus.

Dic regi scaccum; si semita non patet illi,

Matus erit factus nusquam latuisse coactus.

Miles et alphinus, rex, roc, regina, pedinus,

Et inter scaccos alphinus inutilis astat.

[If the king loses his royal seat

Declined, then the king is completely removed from his throne.

Says the king of chess; If the path is not clear to him,

Checkmate will remain hidden by constraints.

Knight and Bishop, King, Rook, Queen, and Pawn

And even among them the bishop of chess stands helpless].

The goal is to find a way to dethrone the enemy king, a path that is at first “latuisse” [hidden] until pieces are moved and strategies are put into play. While the rules familiarize readers with the game, the omission of a chessboard upon which to play suggests that readers may have had access to a physical board. Furthermore, in addition to teaching chess, the poem may have also been conceived as a supplement for solving the chess problems directly above it on the same page.

The two chess problems in MS O.2.45 also appear together as problem 19 and 20 in MS Cleopatra B IX (Figure 2.5); the two problems in MS Cleopatra B IX were also inserted in a

different hand and clearly were not part of the sources for the original collection (discussed below).

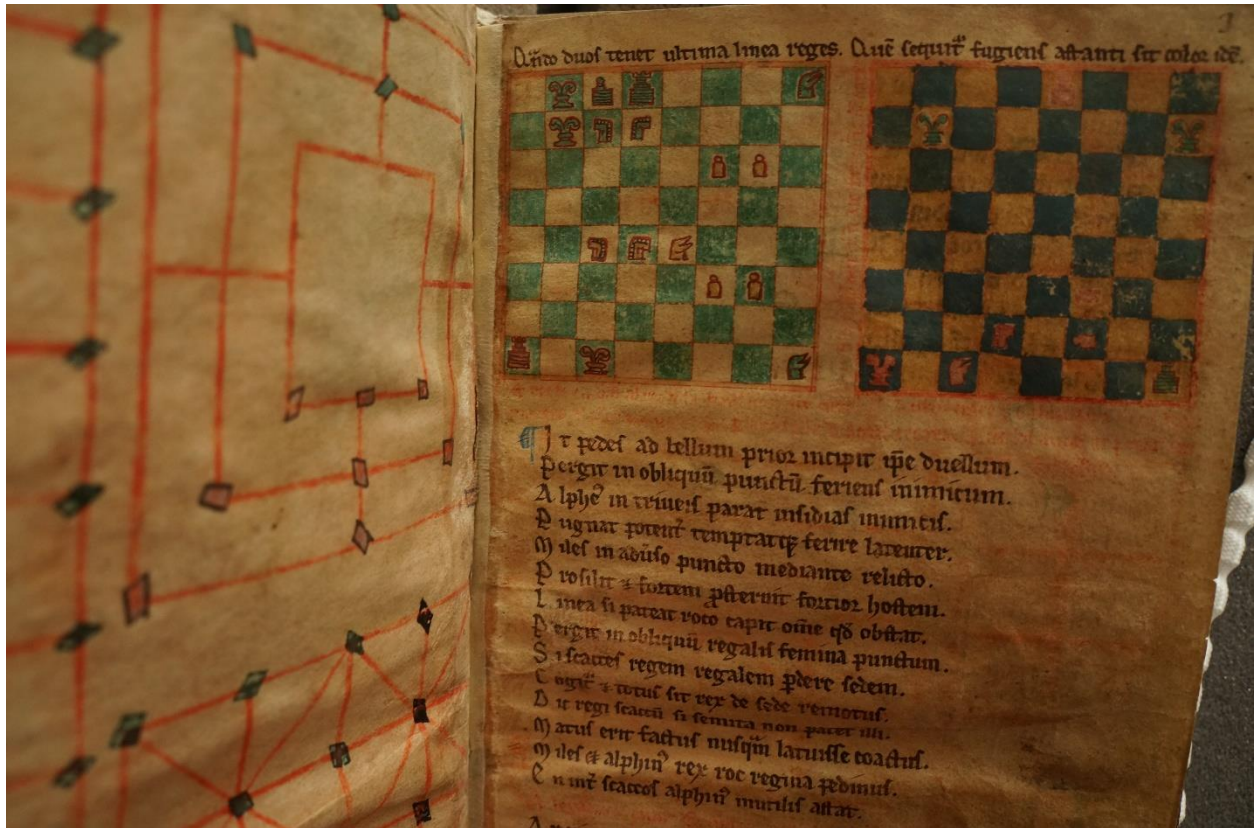


Figure 2.5: MS O.2.45, fol 2r, chess problems

The fact that scribes copied these two problems as a pair in two thirteenth-century manuscripts with their accompanying Latin titles suggests that the problems may have circulated in other now-lost Latin collections. The first problem in MS O.2.45 (problem 19 in MS Cleopatra B IX)

is a chase problem in which a check occurs in all moves (Figure 2.6).²¹⁵ The Latin title is thus fitting: “Quem sequitur fugiens astanti sit color dem” [What follows is (to remain) standing by fleeing the same colour]. The text below the two problems is faded, but it is the same as the Latin and Anglo-Norman text in MS Cleopatra B IX. This problem asks the solver to “matera en le point ou sun roc esta” [checkmate at the place where the rook is positioned] in fifteen moves.

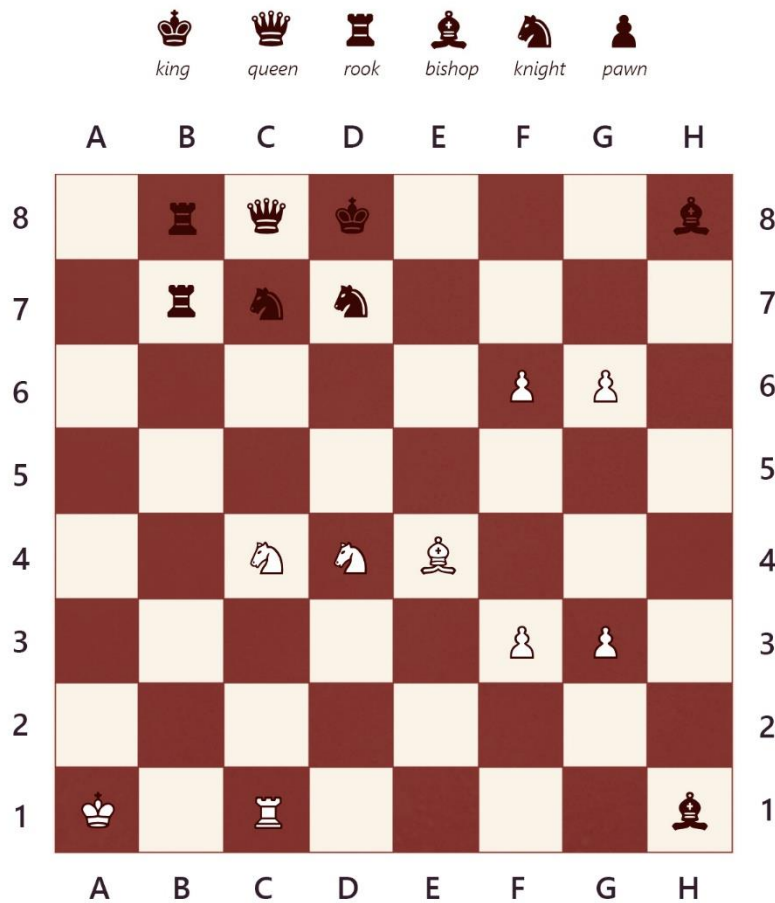


Figure 2.6: MS O.2.45, fol. 2r, Problem 1

²¹⁵ Solution: 1 Ktc6 +; 2 Ktd6 +; 3 Pg7 +; 7 Kte7 +; 5 Pg8 = Q; 6 Ktf7 +; 7 Pg4 +; 8 Ktf5 +; 9 Ktg5 +; 10 Rc2 +; 11 Kth3 +; 12 Ktg3 +; 13 Re2 +; 14 Ktf2 +; 15 Rc2 m. Murray notes that the condition mate on c1 truncates the move 5 Rh2 m. Murray, *A History of Chess*, 588.

The second chess problem constitutes one version of the Dilaram problem and differs from problem 20 in MS Cleopatra B IX by appearing sideways and mirrored (Figure 2.7).

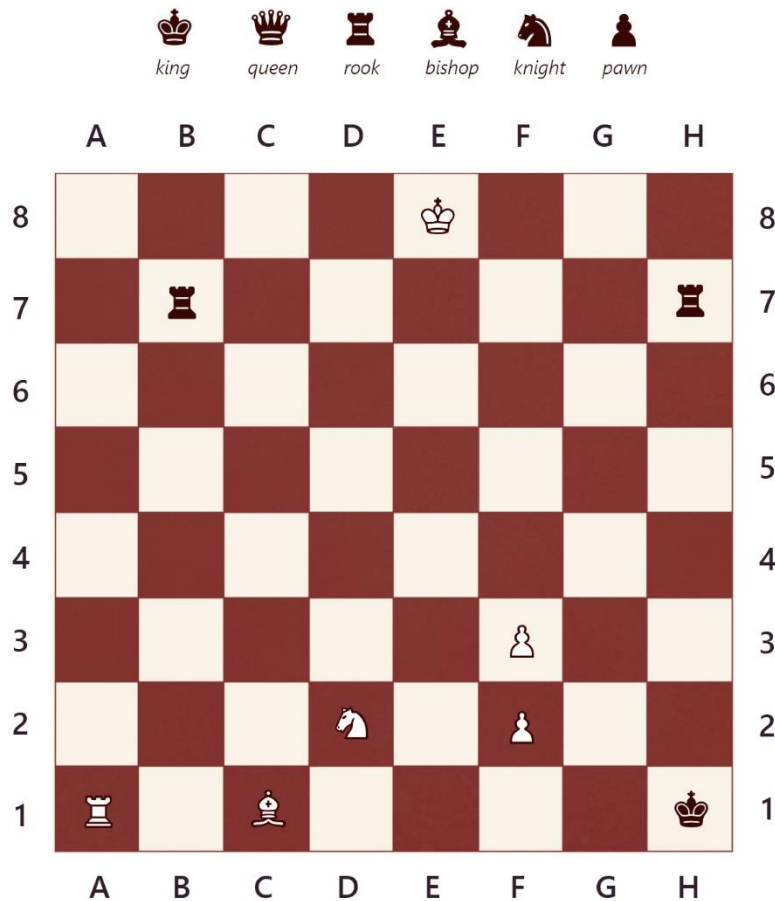


Figure 2.7: MS O.2.45, fol. 2r, Problem 2

The Dilaram problem is based on the story of a nobleman with several wives—and, like recreational mathematics problems, shows the close relationship between problems and storytelling. In a chess game, he wagered his favourite wife, whom he called Dilaram [heart's

ease], and was quickly losing the game. When the game arrived at the problem's positioning, Dilaram saw a way for her husband to win the game.²¹⁶ While the problem found in MS O.2.45 originates from the Arabic puzzle, it is devoid of the narrative. Instead, a writer inserts a lesson in love, perhaps as an echo of the original tale: "Qui non dat quando amat. Non accipit omne quod optat" [He who does not give when he loves does not receive all that he desires]. Taken together, the two problems in MS O.2.45 provide a brief glimpse into the strategy of chess. Unlike other collections in England, the inclusion of the two problems by the scribes was not to provide an overview for a beginner or showcase a variety of techniques; their utility as a pedagogical tool for teaching chess in this instance is limited. What then is the relation between these two problems? They could have been the only problems on hand, of course, but a Persian manuscript, MS Berlin Orient. 4^o 124, also pairs them on two loose leaves inserted into the manuscript. This instance, coupled with the pairing of the problems in MS Cleopatra B IX, suggests that these two problems ostensibly circulated together outside large problem collections.²¹⁷

If, as Martha Rust notes, books are "auxiliary of the reader's imagination," then the images and texts among the first few leaves of MS O.2.45 offer a sensual experience rooted in meditation and thought.²¹⁸ In this instance, Stephen Nichols and Siegfried Wenzel's term "materialist philology" proves useful, for it calls attention to the locality and agency afforded manuscripts: "far from being a transparent or neutral vehicle," they note, "the codex can have a

²¹⁶ See Murray, *A History of Chess*, 311-12. Alfonso X also included three variations of the Dilaram problem in *Libros de los juegos*, see Golladay, "Los Libros de Acedrex Dados E Tablas," 275-77.

²¹⁷ See Murray, *A History of Chess*, 588.

²¹⁸ Martha Dana Rust, *Imaginary Worlds in Medieval Books: Exploring the Manuscript Matrix* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 5.

typological identity that affects the way we read and understand the texts it represents.”²¹⁹ For the texts on fols. 1-2r of MS O.2.45, abstract thought is tied to the concrete images on the page. The interplay among the images, as a reader moves from devotional texts and drawings of recreational game boards to game problems that sharpen the mind before moving onto pedagogical texts, therefore elicits a virtual dimension that requires reader interaction in order to render them meaningful.²²⁰

That these interactive texts appear at the beginning of the manuscript, possibly for ease of access (though they could have circulated as separate leaves before becoming bounded), suggests that they may have been used as meditative spaces for other academic texts in the miscellany. In his treatise on education, *Didascalicon* (c. 1128), Hugh of St. Victor notes that “[t]hose who work at learning must be equipped at the same time with aptitude and with memory, for these two are so closely tied together in every study and discipline that if one of them is lacking, the other cannot lead anyone to perfection Aptitude gathers wisdom, memory preserves it.”²²¹ His methodology for learning requires that students read and meditate using books, thereby contrasting the “order” of reading linearly to grasp concepts with the freer act of meditation,

²¹⁹ Stephen G. Nichols and Siegfried Wenzel, Introduction to *The Whole Book: Cultural Perspectives on the Medieval Miscellany* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 1-2. In their seminal work on medieval manuscripts, Mary and Richard Rouse also discuss the importance of approaching the study of manuscript holistically: “[t]o study any one element in isolation—the ruling, or the layout, or the form of the letters and the script, or the words of the text itself—without the others is to cut apart what was both conceived and perceived as a unit. Each of the three, the material base, the script or image, and the text, is a changing or evolving thing, a product of a compromise between traditional norms and the contemporary needs of an audience.” *Authentic Witnesses: Approaches to Medieval Texts and Manuscripts* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), 2.

²²⁰ For other examples of this type of textual virtual phenomenon in the Middle Ages, see also, Escourido, “Textual Games and Virtuality,” 187-208 (see chap. 1 n. 96).

²²¹ Hugh of St. Victor, *The Didascalicon of Hugh of Saint Victor: A Medieval Guide to the Arts*, trans. Jerome Taylor (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), 3.7.

which enables students to think beyond the text.²²² For chess problems, the desire to answer the puzzle correctly (as with the recreational mathematical problems) or to increase one's aptitude at the game takes place within this meditative playspace. The chess problems in MS O.2.45 are presented as, in the words of Hugh of St. Victor, "sustained thought along planned lines," enabling the player to consider possibilities within known rules and bounded space.²²³ These spaces for play contrast with the astronomical and mathematical texts that follow, which necessitate a more structured approach to learning. Like other medieval pedagogical games like *Rithmomachia* and *Ludus Astronomorum*, these chess problems reflect a meditative epistemology that goes beyond rote learning found in other medieval educational practices. As Mary Carruthers notes, "[*m*]editatio is only free within bounds, like play having both agreed limits and umpires."²²⁴ The chess problems in MS O.2.45 act as another form of recreation, a method for illustrating the ways in which pieces move, and the collocation of rules and game boards also suggests that their inclusion in the manuscript furnished readers with cognitive exercises that could hone thinking and problem-solving skills—warm-up exercises that increased proficiency with systematic learning, cultivated visualization skills, and increased concentration.

The only extant collection of Latin problems in England appears in MS Sloane 3281 (early 14th c.) and was extracted from Nicolas de Nicolai's larger problem collection *Bonus Socius* circulating on the Continent (c. 1275).²²⁵ Perhaps as a result of their manifestation among

²²² Ibid., 3.6-10.

²²³ Ibid., 3.10

²²⁴ Mary Carruthers, *The Experience of Beauty in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 20.

²²⁵ *Bonus Socius* was compiled in thirteenth-century Lombardy and gained wide popularity in France and Italy; seven manuscripts of French production have survived and include approximately 194 chess problems, 34-48 tables problems, and 24 merels problems. Murray, *A History of Chess*, 618-28. See also: Harold J. R. Murray, "110," in *Catalogue of Manuscripts and Early Printed Books from the Libraries of*

the larger collections, the eleven chess problems in MS Sloane 3281 do not appear in any other extant problem collections circulated in England (see Table 2.1). MS Sloane 3281 is a miscellany containing treatises on mathematics, astronomy, astrology, physiognomy, chiromancy, medicine, and dream theory. The problem collection is copied carelessly on fols. 81r-82v in a fourteenth-century hand; the problems follow a treatise on astrology and precede prognostications about the weather and recipes copied in French by two different hands. The chess problems are arranged in an order that differs from those found in *Bonus Socius* and in the contemporary collection *Civis Bononiae* [Citizen of Bologna] (c. 1300), with no conceivable organizational structure (Table 2.2).

Problem Number in MS Sloane 3281	Problem Number in <i>Bonus Socius</i>	Problem Number in <i>Civis Bononiae</i>
1	12	7
2	16	11
3	1	32
4	54	84
5	45	43
6	108	136
7	118	149
8	29	22
9	9	35
10	18	13
11	62	53

Table 2.2: Problem Correspondence between MS Sloane 3281 and *Bonus Socius*

The scribe leaves each problem unfinished with only partial information, opting to fill in only one set of colour pieces on an uncoloured chequered board for each puzzle (two problems where

William Morris, Richard Bennett, Bertram Fourth Earl of Ashburnham, and other Sources, ed. J. Piermont Morgan (London: Chiswick, 1906), 170-72.

only white pieces were copied and nine problems where only black pieces were copied). The problems in MS Sloane 3281 also lack answers, but some of the problems include special notation indicating moves to reach a solution.²²⁶ The letters noting incremental moves for solving the problem demonstrate one way to teach chess to novices. While the problem collection in MS Sloane 3281 is entirely unusable since the problems remain unfinished, it nevertheless shows a set of problems that may have been intended to teach chess to students, novices, or ecclesiastics and, like MS O.2.45, act as a space in which to practice problem-solving and cognitive skills that would have been helpful for reading other texts in the miscellany.

2.2.2 Teaching Chess in Medieval England

While composers and compilers borrow a number of chess problems from the earlier *jeu-parti* collections, their chess problem treatises circulating in England from the late thirteenth to fifteenth centuries demonstrate a deliberate effort to educate readers and players through a combination of composition, text, and problem layout in the manuscripts. As Murray puts it, chess problems changed to reflect “the art of combination by which the player directs the attack of a number of pieces towards a single point.”²²⁷ Combinations in medieval chess were much harder to execute than the modern game due to the limited mobility of the pieces; the Rook, for instance, often became the primary piece for checkmates because it was also the strongest piece (and, incidentally, the only gliding piece on the board in a medieval game). As a result, combinations that involve mates by weaker pieces, such as pawns and *ferses*, immediately reveal

²²⁶ For notation in chess, see Murray, *A History of Chess*, 469.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 564.

a highly skilled player—especially, as we shall see, if they could mate on a specific square or section of the board.

The eighteen chess problems found on fols. 4r-8v in MS Cleopatra B IX (c. 1273) demonstrate a discernible shift in the ways in which problem collections were conceived and structured in medieval England.²²⁸ Addressing “Seignors” [Lords] who “les gius de eschés amez” [love the games of chess], the compiler explains in his introduction that he created a treatise to help players better their game.²²⁹ Working through chess problems, argues the compiler, was the best approach to improve a player’s skill: “Grant veisie i ad, m’est avis, / E mult si purra l’en amender / Ki a tuz les eschés voldra juer” [Great skill will be gained in my opinion / And much of this book is to better oneself / For all the chess you wish to play].²³⁰ The compiler promises the player that his book will boost “aseurement” [confidence] and ability to “Juer purra plus afeitement” [play with more courteous decorum]—the positing of reassurances that are also often found in modern how-to handbooks that seek to improve a reader’s character or solve an issue.²³¹ The player can thus gain confidence with the privacy of this treatise by learning the game “Ki ne fust assis a l’eschekier / U l’om peust les traiz juer” [When you are not sitting at the checkerboard / Where someone can judge your moves].²³² A modern notion of chess is that it is, in the words of anthropologist and chess enthusiast Robert Desjarlais, a “purely

²²⁸ There is a missing bifolium between fols. 5r and 6r, which may have contained problems found in Roll 20/26. See Tony Hunt, *Les Gius Partiz des Eschez: Two Anglo-Norman Chess Treatises* (London: Anglo-Norman Text Society, 1985), 3.

²²⁹ Hunt, *Les Gius Partiz des Eschez*, “First Treatise,” lines 1-2. The translations are my own. I have modernized some spelling for clarity. Murray also transcribes selections of the text in *A History of Chess*, 583.

²³⁰ Hunt, *Les Gius Partiz des Eschez*, “First Treatise,” lines 8-10.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, lines 17-18.

²³² *Ibid.*, lines 37-38.

mental activity, conducted in a bodiless, wordless domain by solitary thinkers who grapple with each other in a space of pure thought.”²³³ In contrast, medieval chess was not only an intellectual game, but it was also fundamentally a social game, one which contained literal stakes (i.e., gambling) and social stakes (i.e., the need to maintain one’s social reputation). Often played in gardens, in taverns, and at court, chess was a “spectator sport,” with crowds of friends, acquaintances, and others cheering and betting on their favoured player. In New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS G.24, for instance, the illuminator adds an audience in the miniature displaying the chess game between Fesonas and Cassiel the Baudrain in John de Longuyon’s widely popular Middle French romance *Le Voeux du Paon* (c. 1312).²³⁴ Miniatures in Alfonso X’s *Libros de los juegos* also often include spectators watching a game.²³⁵ The players were not only expected to play well, but to save face among their peers; in MS Cleopatra B IX, the compiler offers his player a safer space upon which to practice and improve his skills at the game for this purpose. In this way, chess problems might at first glance seem appear to be a solitary exercise pitting the composer against the solver, but it also serves a more general social function in the attempt to improve the player’s skill at the game as a performance of social rank among peers.

The intended patron of this treatise, who requested the problems (according to the compiler) did not desire an assortment of problems in Latin, such as those in MS Sloane 3281,

²³³ Robert Desjarlais, *Counterplay: An Anthropologist at the Chessboard* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 8.

²³⁴ Pierpont Morgan Library, New York, MS G.24, ff. 1r-141v, 1350.

²³⁵ Mary Louis Trivison notes that women in the *Libros de los juegos* appear primarily as audience members of a game in the second treatise, for instance. “The Medieval Woman: Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Leisure,”

Romance Quarterly 33.3 (1986): 377-83.

but rather wished to have the problems translated and rendered “en romans” [into the vernacular], presumably for the purpose of reflecting his social status.²³⁶ As mentioned earlier, one’s skill at chess was a marker of prestige for the gentry and nobility, and the compiler suggests that the player keep the problems a secret lest they circulate too widely and the positional knowledge become too well known among his friends. The manuscript was penned and compiled in an academic miscellany at Abbotsbury Abbey in Dorset. Entered in a neat hand, the problems appear in their own quire and may have circulated separately before becoming bound in the manuscript. Another scribe later entered two problems on fol. 10r (the same two problems in MS O.2.45) and a four-player chess board was drawn on fol. 9r with illegible text, indicating again a close relationship between learning and leisurely spaces within miscellanies focused primarily on education.²³⁷ For the player(s) and compiler of this problem collection, however, chess is an amalgamation of skill and courtesy, of poetry and intellect. Literary critic William Wimsatt also observed the relation between composing problems and poetry, remarking that “the chess problem far outdoes the poem” with regard to structure and complexity.²³⁸

While the collection does not show overt organization, it nonetheless includes a gamut of self-mates, exercises, conditional mates, ordinary mates, and end-game problems. As Hunt observes, the compiler expanded and emended the text to his preferences by “criticiz[ing] a number of chess pieces with bishops and abbots and clerks” and “criticiz[ing] lack of generosity in the upper ranks of society.”²³⁹ The compiler narrates the first problem through a situational and methodological context in order to establish an interpretive lens for solving the subsequent

²³⁶ Hunt, *Les Gius Partiz des Eschez*, “First Treatise,” lines 29-32.

²³⁷ See Murray, *A History of Chess*, 342-43.

²³⁸ W. K. Wimsatt, “How to Composes Chess Problems, and Why,” *Yale French Studies* 41 (1968): 78.

²³⁹ Hunt, *Les Gius Partiz des Eschez*, 2.

problems (Figure 2.8), showing again the association between chess problems and storytelling as a key component of the experience.²⁴⁰

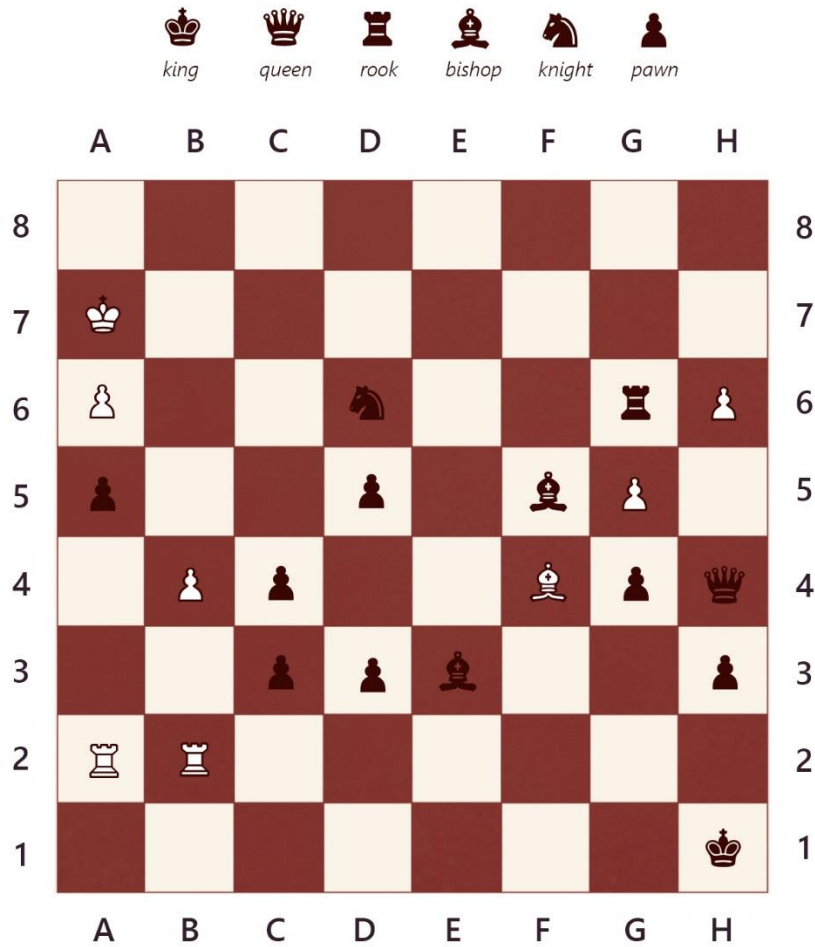


Figure 2.8: MS Cleopatra B IX, fol. 4r, Problem 1

Unlike other problems in the collection and elsewhere, this problem becomes part of a larger narrative: two lords are learning chess and decide to make a wager to decide the better player

²⁴⁰ Solution: 1 Bc5 +, Kb8; 2 Rg8 +; 3 Rc8 +; 4 Rc6 +; 5 Pd4 +; 6 Re6 +; 7 Re3 +; 8 Qg3 +; 9 Be3 m.

among them. One player wagers “sa fille, s'il nel pout mater” [his maiden if his opponent mated him].²⁴¹ Fearful for the outcome of the game, the maiden finds an educated and skilled knight who reveals that she can be spared in nine moves based on the present state of the board (thus yielding the problem). The compiler then guides the reader through each move by stating which piece should move next until “al neofime vient avant li cornuz” [with the ninth move they come in front of the bishop] and “icist cornu corne la menée” [here sounds the blast of the hooked horn].²⁴² The pun on the term “cornuz” as the last piece to move dovetails with the “corne,” or blast of a hunting horn signaling a kill and, in this case, a win. Like *The Book of the Duchess*, the compiler pairs two aristocratic activities, chess and hunting—two pursuits that required skill and could be rewarded with high esteem from peers. The first problem acts as a means by which to train the reader in how to read and think through a given problem, and subsequent problems include solutions in prose (without any special notation). In the first problem, the chess board is not just a place to teach the reader about solving problems, but a visualized space to craft a narrative of the events taking place on the board—a literary aspect certainly lacking in teaching modern players how to play chess. Here the pieces represent more than their movements and combinatory play, but can also become motifs for reflecting courtly virtue.

The emphasis of the problems in MS Cleopatra B IX lies in finding the combinatorial interplay of the pieces and developing analytical skills for best utilizing specific pieces. Problem 7, for instance, focuses on pawn promotion to a *ferse* and Problem 11 comprises an exercise focusing on the movement of the bishop (Figure 2.9 and 2.10).

²⁴¹ Hunt, *Les Gius Partiz des Eschez*, “First Treatise,” line 62.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, lines 111 and 114.

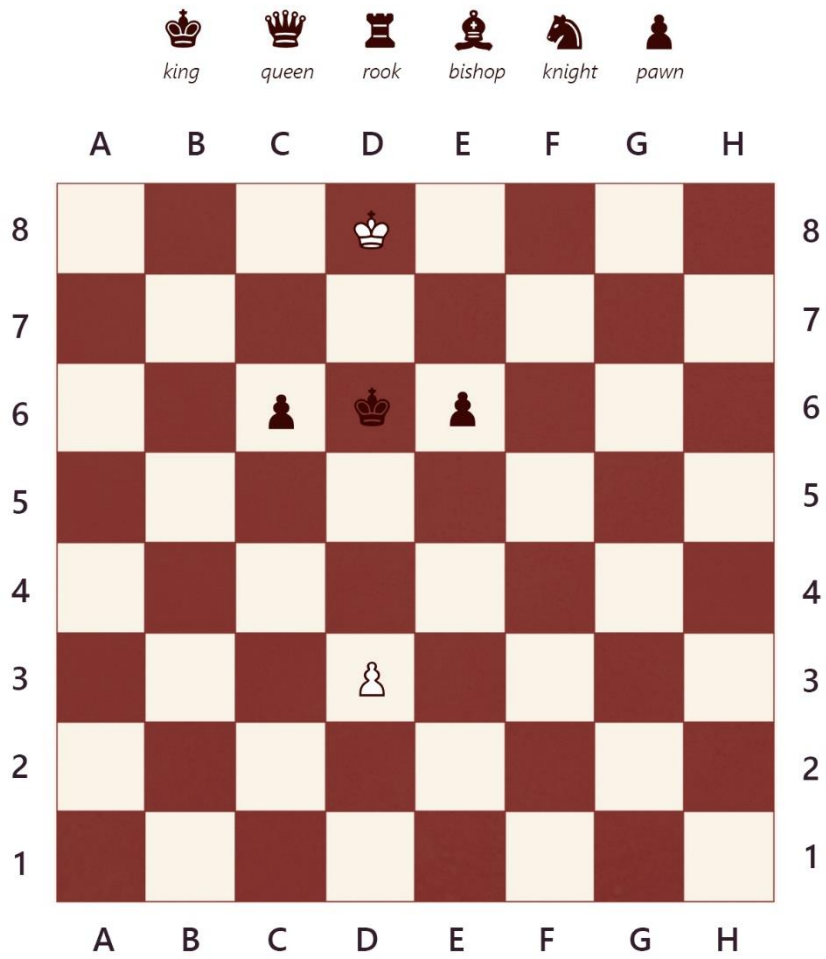


Figure 2.9: MS Cleopatra B IX, fol. 6r, Problem 7

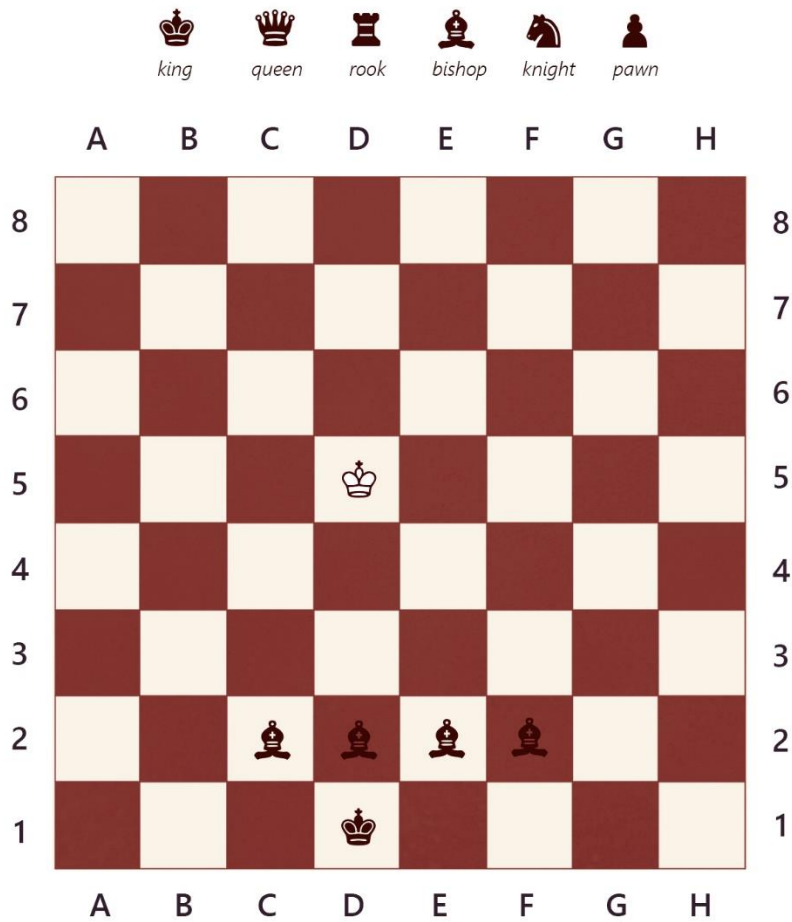


Figure 2.10: MS Cleopatra B IX, fol. 7r, Problem 11

Already in MS Cleopatra B IX there is a sense of teaching the player offensive and defensive moves and the movement and values of each piece. The collections in England, Tony Hunt notes, show prominence for problems focusing on single pieces.²⁴³ In his study of earlier Arabic and Muslim *manṣūbāt*, Murray notes that Muslim problems frequently displayed boards in which opponents were of “equal force, and [showed] that the winner’s advantage should be reduced to

²⁴³ Hunt, *Les Gius Partiz des Eschez*, 1.

nothing more than the possession of the first move.”²⁴⁴ In Arabic problem collections, conditional problems were non-existent. The conditional problems, such as Problem 14 (Figure 2.11), suggest a need to develop a situational sense within constraints, familiarize oneself with movements and pieces, and highlight highly valuable checkmates (e.g. performing a checkmate in the middle of the board).

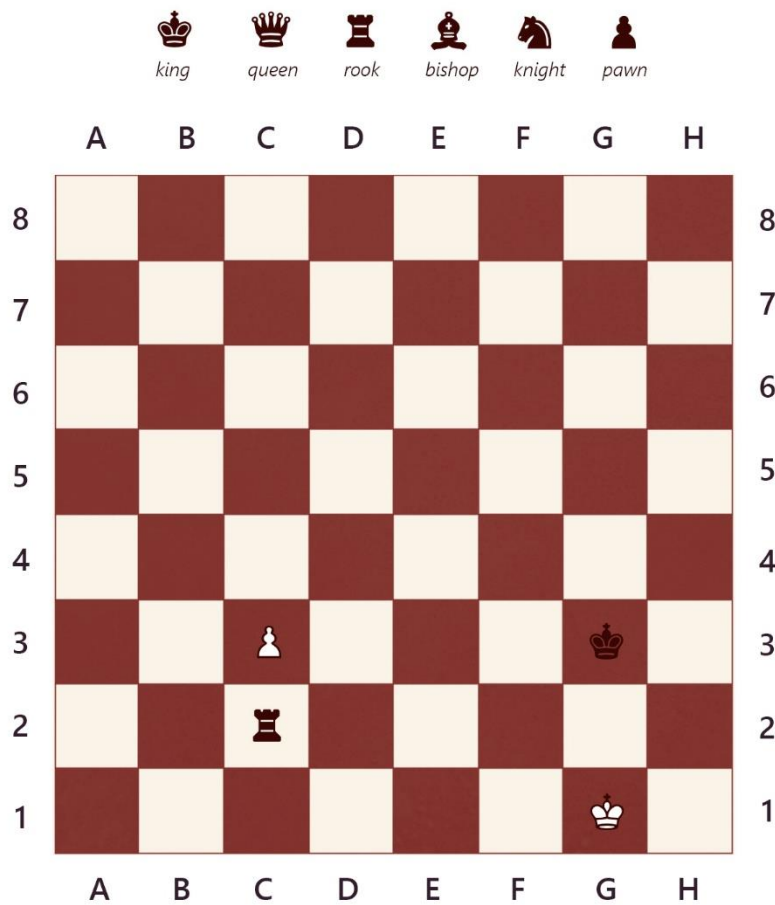


Figure 2.11: MS Cleopatra B IX, fol. 7v, Problem 14

²⁴⁴ Murray, *A History of Chess*, 277.

The chess problems in MS Cleopatra B IX were clearly designed as the pedagogical tool of choice for improving a player's skill at the game, but a number of problems in medieval collections show evidence of showcasing unsound problems (that is, problems with multiple answers or illegal moves). How do we explain medieval problems that use illegal moves and odd movements? How do they help the chess novice improve his or her game? For modern chess problems, composers often arrange the pieces as a snapshot that could hypothetically occur in an actual game. The genre has evolved aesthetically as chess became a more prominent game for leisure and, later, professional competition. Consider, for instance, a chess problem first published in a 1932 issue of *Il Problema* (Figure 2.12).²⁴⁵

²⁴⁵ J. Manskopf, *Il Problema Rivista Mensile Internazionale del Problema di Scacchi* (1932); *Gameknot*, accessed March 20, 2013, <https://gameknot.com/comment.pl?t=2&k=10282>.

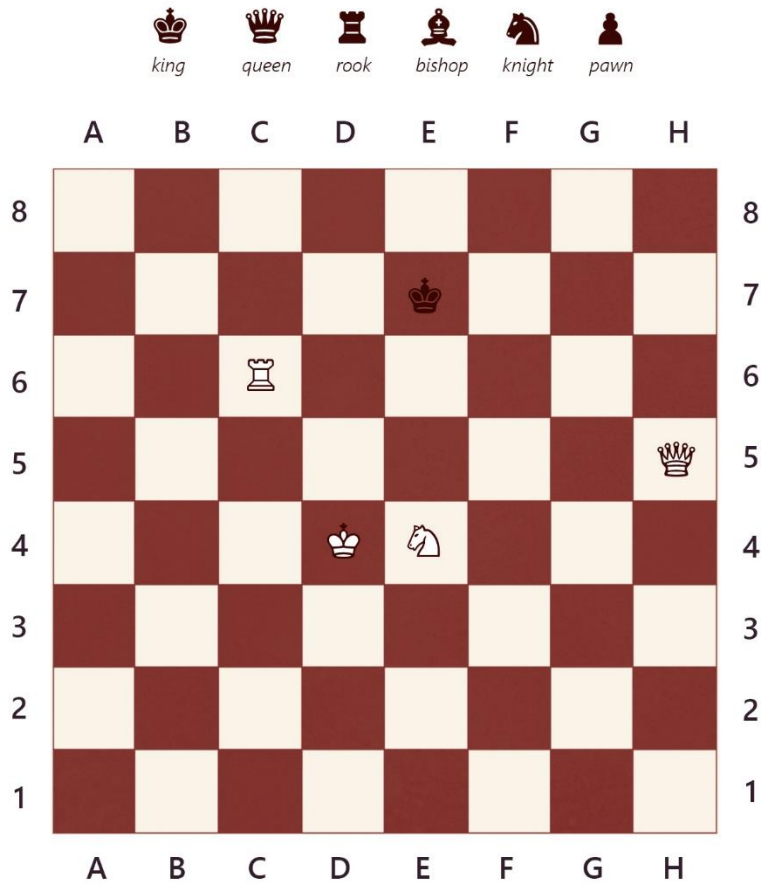


Figure 2.12: Problem from *Il Problema*, 1932

While it is not a difficult puzzle to solve—a mate in two moves using the knight and queen—the beauty of the composition stems from the fact that the solution is legal and works in all iterations. No matter where the king moves, no matter what scenario is played out, he is always mated. To a novice of chess, this puzzle may look overwhelming or inconceivable. Appreciating the aesthetics of the chess problem requires developing an eye for the skill in composition and the craft of playing the game. Modern chess players often evaluate the beauty of chess problems with a specific set of conventional criteria:

1. **Economical:** Modern chess problem stress the importance of economy. There are no extraneous moves or pieces on the board. Everything on the board has a purpose.
2. **Legal:** Chess composers and players often deem problems that fall within the legal rules as superior because they could potentially be used, inspired, or encountered within a game. They, thus, have a certain practicality beyond the problem itself.
3. **Key Move:** Typically, the first move must be the only move that will eventually lead to a mate. Therefore, it must be unique in some way. Helpmates are often exempted since, by their nature, they often have more than one method to solving a problem.
4. **Thematic:** The problem illustrates a particular idea or set of ideas.
5. **Puzzle Factor:** Occasionally, the solution is an unlikely move, such as sacrificing a powerful piece or promoting a pawn to a knight instead of a queen.

Chess problems show the imagination and depth of thought of the composers. For modern players of chess, the beauty of a game problem lies in the harmonious (and sometimes paradoxical) moves of game pieces as a source of art, inspiration, and, of course, learning. “A problem” remarks Wimsatt, “is a limited but very precise drama.”²⁴⁶

If, as chess Grandmaster Garry Kasparov states, modern “chess problems are full of paradoxes and original ideas,” then medieval chess problems could be characterized instead as approachable and adaptable.²⁴⁷ The art of chess—that skill in gameplay can be beautiful—also carries significance for medieval readers and players. Modern conventions for determining problem aesthetics were not necessarily the focus of medieval problem composers, however. Problem 15 in MS Cleopatra B IX places the bishop on an illegal square, yet the compiler praises

²⁴⁶ Wimsatt, “How to Compose,” 73.

²⁴⁷ Garry Kasparov, *Kasparov Teaches Chess* (London: Batsford, 1984), 116.

the problem as “bel” [fine] and “avenant” [fitting]; he notes, in particular, that the bishop on the board is a “prodhom” [worthy man] for enacting checkmate by capturing the rook—the most powerful piece in a medieval game (Figure 2.13).²⁴⁸

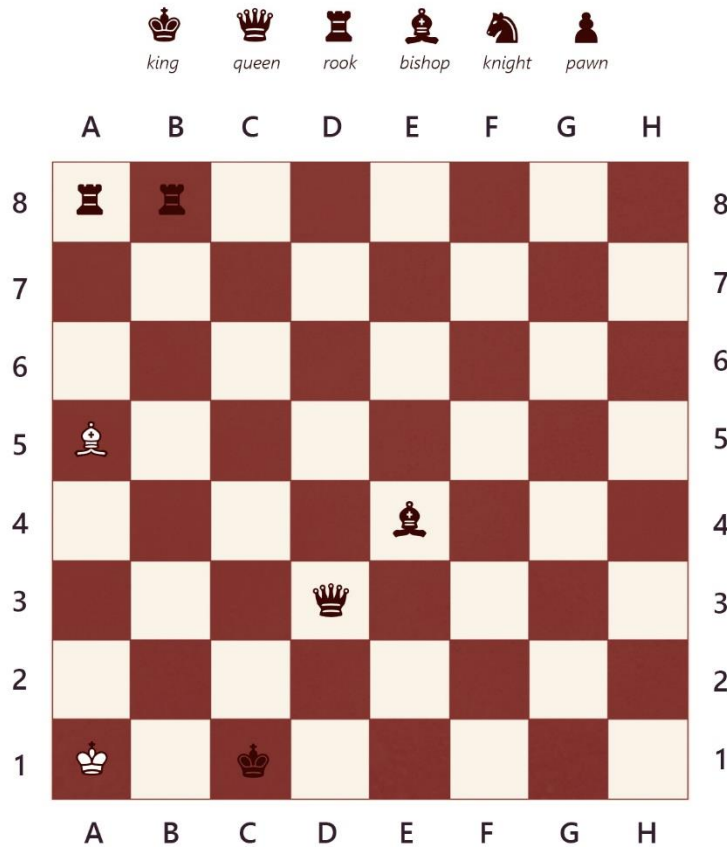


Figure 2.13: MS Cleopatra B IX, fol. 8r, Problem 15

Problems with illegal moves and pieces are often included in collections in order to focus on learning specific movements and illuminating combinatory patterns. Medieval chess, much like other games in the Middle Ages I have discussed, was fluid and ever-changing; and, as Wimsatt

²⁴⁸ Hunt, *Les Gius Partiz des Eschez*, “First Treatise,” lines 331 and 337.

notes, medieval problems displayed fewer instances of realism and game-like positions.²⁴⁹

Although the game was frequently played with particular assizes, the board itself was a place for experimentation and imagination. Games such as English draughts and Courier's chess emerged from modifying the board sizes and rules of chess, and chess problem composition retained this spirit of play. As problems circulated, compilers sought to improve solutions and amplify problems according to their own interests and expertise. Problem 1 in MS Cleopatra B IX appears in four of the six other chess treatises in England (Figure 2.8), but each compiler modified the problem in order to provide a better experience for his readers. Roll 20/26 and MS Ashmole 344, for instance, both display variations that tighten up the problem, enabling the solver to omit a step in his or her solution.

As we have already seen, the aesthetics of chess problem composition in the Middle Ages manifest as scribes and composers weave together illumination, storytelling, and composition. It is within the convergence of these different aspects within the manuscript that signals the intended audience—features that could all be considered skillful artistic endeavors in their own right. For MS Cleopatra B IX, the compiler not only rendered some of the problems into verse, but the illuminator also portrayed ornate chess boards, alternating yellow and clear chequered squares, red and clear, and black and clear on various boards. He also occasionally framed the game boards with red, yellow, brown or black borders, and each problem begins with alternate red and blue majuscules. Other collections rubricate each problem to highlight the problem's overall theme and narrative. The beauty of chess is thus perpetuated through an “ever-shifting tangle of neural networks, bodies, social relations, perception, memory, times, spectators, [and]

²⁴⁹ Wimsatt, “How to Compose,” 70-72.

history,” which are manifested through the transmission, compilation, and scribal practices that render chess problems as beautiful objects of leisure and study.²⁵⁰

For medieval chess problem compilers, this holistic intermingling of different aspects suggests a form of “combinatory play,” in which “two or more ideas, feelings, sensory experiences, images, sounds, words, or objects” are manipulated through conscious and unconscious cognitive processes.²⁵¹ Play and non-standard thinking are integral to the larger concept of aesthetics—a notion that Mary Carruthers explores in her book *The Experience of Beauty in the Middle Ages*—and enable the brain to wander through different combinations and patterns. In the early fourteenth-century MS Royal 13 A XVIII another compiler expanded and re-envisioned the problem collection found in MS Cleopatra B IX, including a total of fifty-five illuminated Anglo-Norman chess problems which appear alongside a Latin treatise on tables in the same hand.²⁵² The two game treatises in MS Royal 13 A XVIII were entered as the last two items originally bound in the manuscript. In addition to copying selections of the introduction and verse narratives for the problems, this compiler also re-arranged the problems, indicating that the organization of problems was becoming a key element in teaching the reader the art of playing chess. Like MS Cleopatra B IX, the introduction requests that the reader not disclose any of the chess problems for fear that their publication will lead to wide circulation and thus losing the essence of the strategy. Basing his analysis on the author’s caution, Murray infers that chess problems were not well known, but the number of extant manuscripts in England and elsewhere, coupled with Chaucer’s references, indicates that chess players at least had knowledge of such

²⁵⁰ Desjarlais, *Counterplay*, 8.

²⁵¹ Victoria Stevens, “Think without Thinking: The Implications of Combinatory Play and the Creative Process for Neuroaesthetics,” *American Journal of Play* 7.1 (2014): 99.

²⁵² See Chapter 1 for a discussion of the treatise on the game of tables in MS Royal 13 A XVIII.

collections.²⁵³ The introduction also reveals that even the ‘beginner medieval guide to chess’ was not only a coveted commodity, but also deemed a strategic gain at one’s game.

The compiler of the problems in MS Royal 13 A XVIII organizes the problems in a manner that sets the flow and sequence for a reader of the gentry to learn moves, strategy, and gameplay—a positional sense to apply to actual games. The problems are simple, much to the chagrin of Murray and Eales, because the point of the problem collection was to introduce strategies for a novice. The first nine problems focus primarily on learning how specific pieces move—namely, the Knight, *ferse*, and Bishop—and often set within an overarching backdrop of romance. The first problem is essentially a mathematical puzzle, famously called ‘The Knight’s Tour,’ in which a knight must travel around the board in a specific sequence in order to land on each square once.²⁵⁴ As it is the only piece on the board, the player need not concern him or herself with rules or other pieces, and the composer provides one possible answer through a series of digits. The player and reader, possibly a knight himself, focuses on gaining familiarity with not only the ways in which knights can move, but also the board—i.e., he is taking the knight’s tour. The problems arranged here are not a random assortment, but rather arranged to accommodate the reader’s skill level and prestige. Beginning with the ‘Knight’s Tour’ thus provides a visual marker of the game’s adherence to courtly values, possibly a reflection of the reader’s social standing, and a clever way to introduce the chessboard to a new player.

The other introductory problems continue in the same fashion, focusing on the moves of the knight: a half-board problem and a knight-only problem follow the ‘Knight’s Tour’ and all three are rubricated as “Guy de Chivaler” [Game of the Knight] (Figure 2.14).

²⁵³ Murray, *A History of Chess*, 582.

²⁵⁴ For more information on the ‘Knight’s Tour’ problem in Muslim and Indian manuscripts, see Murray, *A History of Chess*, 335-38.

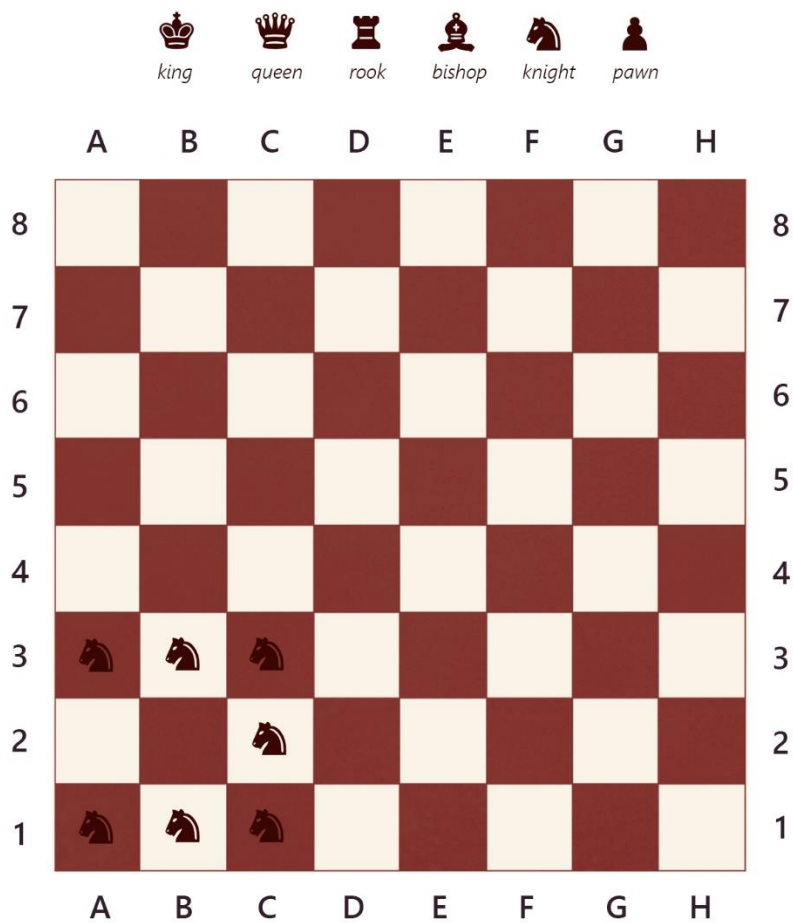


Figure 2.14: MS Royal 13 A XVIII, fol. 161v, Problem 3

Two problems focusing on the movement of the *ferse* piece immediately succeed those of the knight. The first, titled “Le Guy de Dames” [The Game of Ladies], contains sixteen *ferses* that are exempted from capture and must surround the king (who can be placed anywhere on the board at the beginning). The composer deems this problem suitable for the role of women because it is not by a forced mate that the king submits, but by collective pressure from the group: “E a dreyn par force li materés, / Kar un soul poynt ne remeyndra. / U le rey reposa porra”

[And at last by force they will mate him. When no place on the board remains, the King can rest].²⁵⁵ Visually, the board resembles a court of ladies separated into four groups as if they were conversing on a chequered floor at court (Figure 2.15).

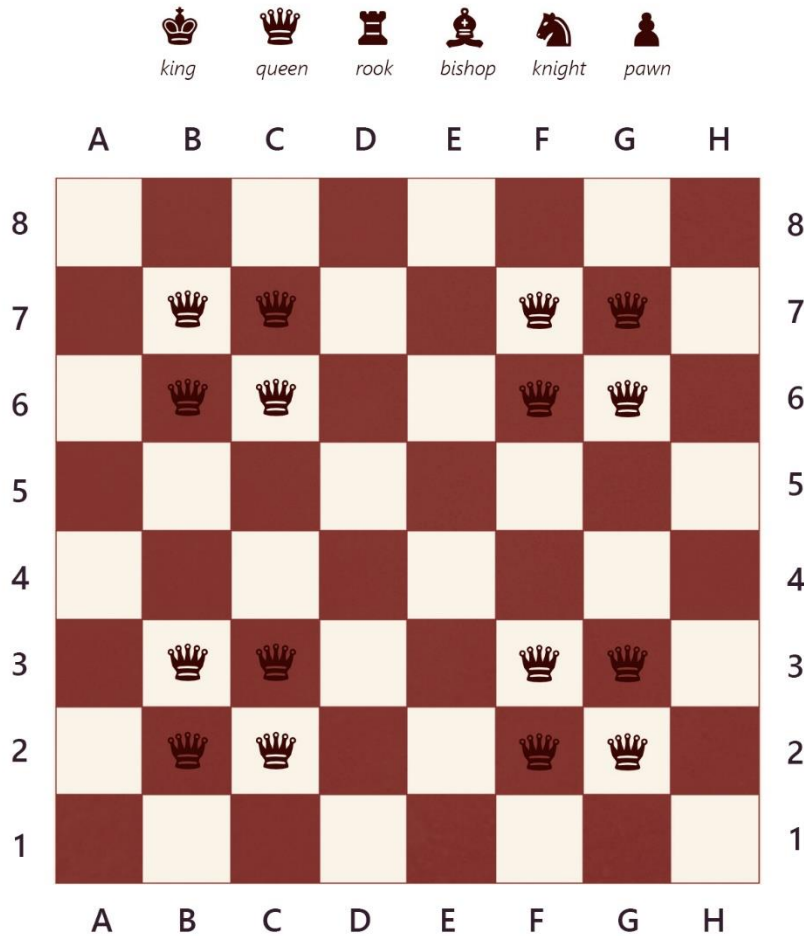


Figure 2.15: MS Royal 13 A XVIII, fol. 161v, Problem 4

In allegories of medieval chess, the *ferse* piece is often portrayed as a loyal piece that remains by the King’s side, protecting him from danger. Jacobus de Cessolis, for instance, describes the Queen as “sage, chaste et de bien honeste gent nee, curieuse de ses enfants norrir” [docile,

²⁵⁵ Hunt, *Les Gius Partiz des Eschez*, “Second Treatise,” lines 82-84.

chaste, descended from an honest family, and focused on the upbringing of her children.”²⁵⁶ Marilyn Yalom points out that Cessolis’ depiction of chess queens as wives and mothers undermines the political power of queens and other women and may “have been due to anxieties about female power in general.”²⁵⁷ In the widely popular fourteenth-century story collection *Gesta Romanorum* [Deeds of the Romans], the queen is similarly portrayed as a chaste and disciplined woman who “must proceed from the square of one virtue to that of another.”²⁵⁸ Here the virtues of chastity and temperance are downplayed in favour of women’s governance. The compiler ends the problem stating “Ke nul fierce pris i seyt” [That any renowned Queen rules]—a testament to women’s sovereignty in matters of love.²⁵⁹ The problems are represented as courtly scenarios, which echo the first three problems focusing on the knight. By overturning the queen’s typical role and disallowing a traditional mate in this particular problem, the composer presents a more genteel representation of a woman’s power: neither party is mated, but the ladies can win through collective cunning.

The second *ferse*-only problem, a variant of MS Cleopatra B IX Problem 5, adds an extra level of complexity by focusing on pawn promotion for sixteen *ferses* (Figure 2.16).

²⁵⁶ Jacobus de Cessolis, *Le Jeu des Eschaz Moralisé*, trans. Jean Ferron (1347), *Classiques français du Moyen Age*, ed. Alain Collet (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1999), 2.2, lines 31-32.

²⁵⁷ Yalom, *Birth of the Chess Queen*, 70.

²⁵⁸ Cited in Eberhard Hermes, ed. and trans., *The Disciplina Clericalis of Petrus Alfonsi*, trans. P.R. Quarrie (Zürich: Artemis Verlags-AG, 1970; London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), 15.

²⁵⁹ Hunt, *Les Gius Partiz des Eschez*, “Second Treatise,” line 86.

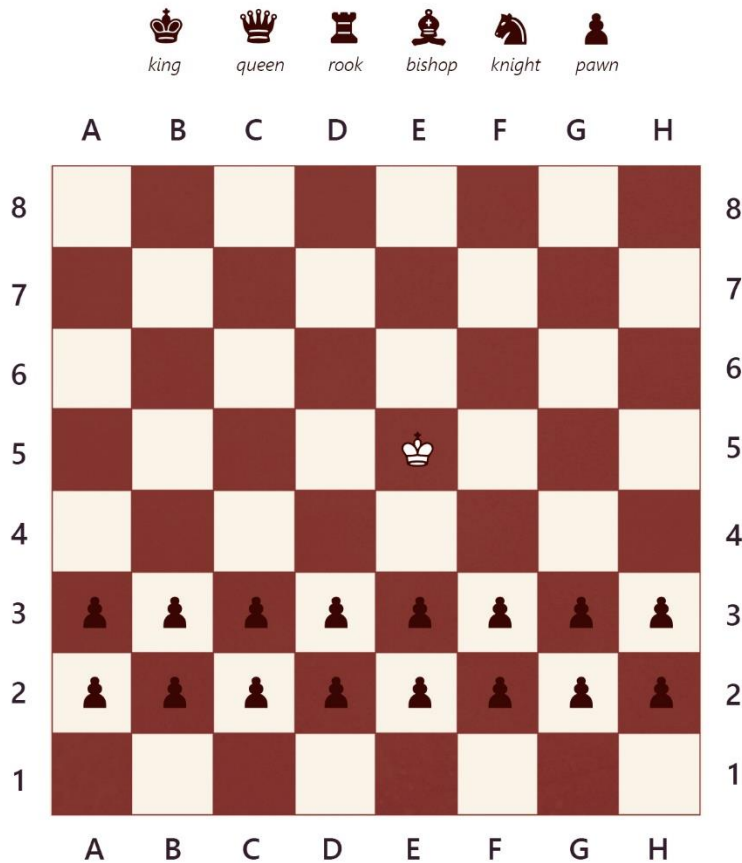


Figure 2.16: MS Royal 13 A XVIII, fol. 161v, Problem 5

Again, the noble maidens proceed to chase the king around the board in order to become a queen and mate him: “Les damoiseles me unt requis / Ke lour guy ne seyt oblis, / E pur l’amour qe a eus ay / Lour guy en ceste escrit mettray” [The maidens demanded of me / That their game not be forgotten / And for love they say / That their game be included in this treatise].²⁶⁰ The compiler notes that the pawns are all women “de pris” [of high esteem] who are then promoted to *ferse* and can pursue the King as a potential mate.²⁶¹ The sexual connotation is not lost on the

²⁶⁰ Hunt, *Les Gius Partiz des Eschez*, “Second Treatise,” lines 87-90.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, line 92.

compiler, for their tireless pursuit of the King is to wed and bed him: the first *ferse* to capture the King “en sa warde” [in his stronghold] receives “E tut solonc sa volenté” [And all therewith that she desires].²⁶² The *ferses* do not display unfettered freedom, but instead remain bound to their restricted angular movement and courting of the King. This lustfulness complements the earlier problem and similarly contrasts more popular depictions of the *ferse* as a chaste woman bound by responsibility to her husband and children. In both problems, women emerge as eligible pieces that, while certainly not powerful on their own—since the King can “[l]egerement” [easily] mate them—nevertheless dominate the board and force the King into submission.²⁶³

The *ferse* problems also complement the movements of the knight problems described earlier. The first three chess problems depict the Knight as a man of high social status who navigates the lone chessboard. The second problem showcases the Knight as a conqueror of each other piece on the board. The Knight and *ferse* are certainly not the simplest pieces on the board to grasp in regards to their individual movement, but their prominent positions in the collection, occurring before problems focusing exclusively on the Bishop, King and Rook, reveal at once an overt scheme for teaching chess and an underlying narrative of characters that reappear and indeed thread throughout many of the later problems. The compiler’s aim is to increase one’s knowledge of chess, and the problems are overwhelmingly in favour of demonstrating piece combinations and movements. Problems 10, 11, and 12 feature three self-mate problems, and then move onto combinations of pieces that were first introduced as single-piece exercises; Problems 13-18, for instance, all showcase conditional mates with a Bare King. Problem 17, for

²⁶² Ibid., lines 111 and 113.

²⁶³ Ibid., line 123.

example, showcases a “point estaunge” [strange point] problem, wherein the King is mated in the top left-hand corner of the board (Figure 2.17).²⁶⁴

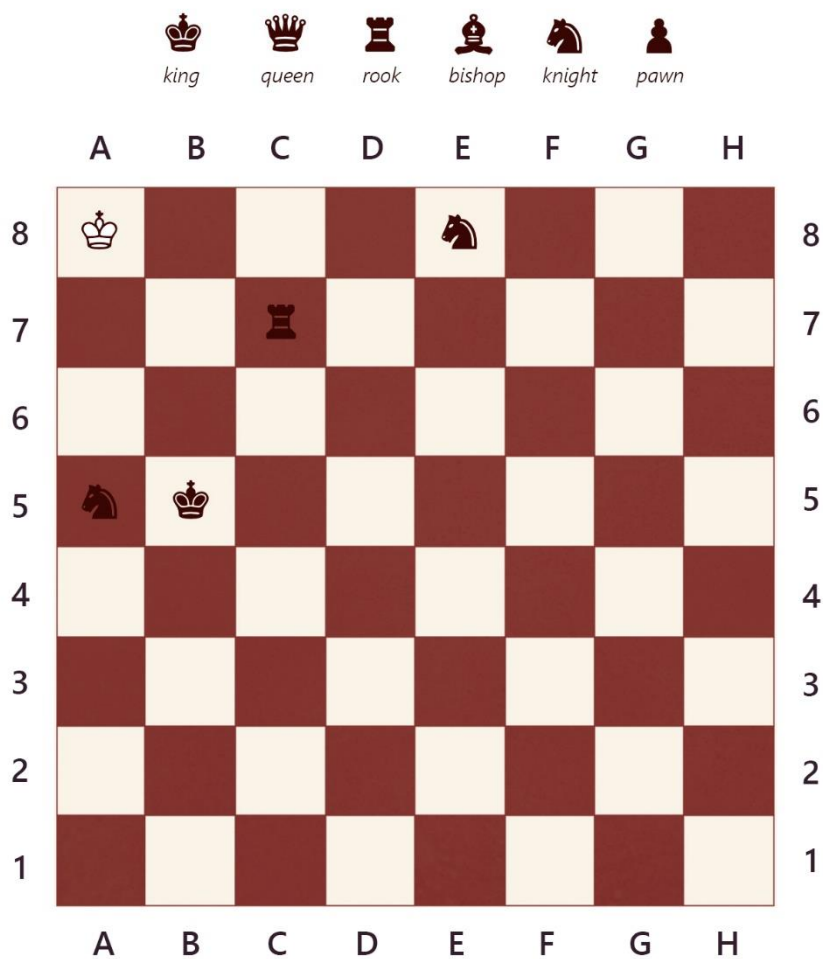


Figure 2.17: MS Royal 13 A XVIII, fol. 164r, Problem 17

Black plays first with one rook and two knights and, as the compiler notes, the player can mate the King with either gaming piece in three moves.²⁶⁵ The compiler’s inclusion of this problem

²⁶⁴ Solution: 1 Rc8 +; 2 Ktc6 +; 3 Ktd6 m.

²⁶⁵ Hunt, *Les Gius Partiz des Eschez*, “Second Treatise,” lines 440-48.

goes one step further, however. A mate by the Rook is easily attainable, but the compiler wished to reveal to the novice player a mate by the Knight—deemed a more valuable checkmate since knights are weaker pieces. As the compiler notes:

Mes sachez ke en diverse maner
Ou le roc vus li poez mater,
Mes entre mil à peyne un serra.
Ke ou le chivaler le mater savera.
E pur ceo ke il ne serreyt en ubliaunce.
Le mat escrit ay pur remembraunce.²⁶⁶
[Then know in what diverse fashion
Where you can use the Rook to checkmate,
But within a thousand difficult [possibilities] there is one [move]
Where we know the means by which the Knight can checkmate.
And because of this it should not be forgotten.
The checkmate is recorded here for recollection].

Again, the compiler hopes to help the player develop a positional sense and determine what moves on the board are deemed superior. Here the beauty of the medieval chess problem lies in part from the use of particular game pieces in challenging, less obvious combinations since these positional strategies are more difficult to achieve. A mate with a Knight rather than a Rook in the “point estrange” not only exhibits a more astute knowledge of chess, but also portrays the Knight as the victor of the board. A similar trade-off occurs in Problem 24 wherein the Rook and Pawn check the King so that the Knight performs checkmate (Figure 2.18):²⁶⁷

²⁶⁶ Ibid., 449-54.

²⁶⁷ The problem is a mate in III. Solution: 1 Re8 +; 2 Pd7 +; 3 Kte6 m.

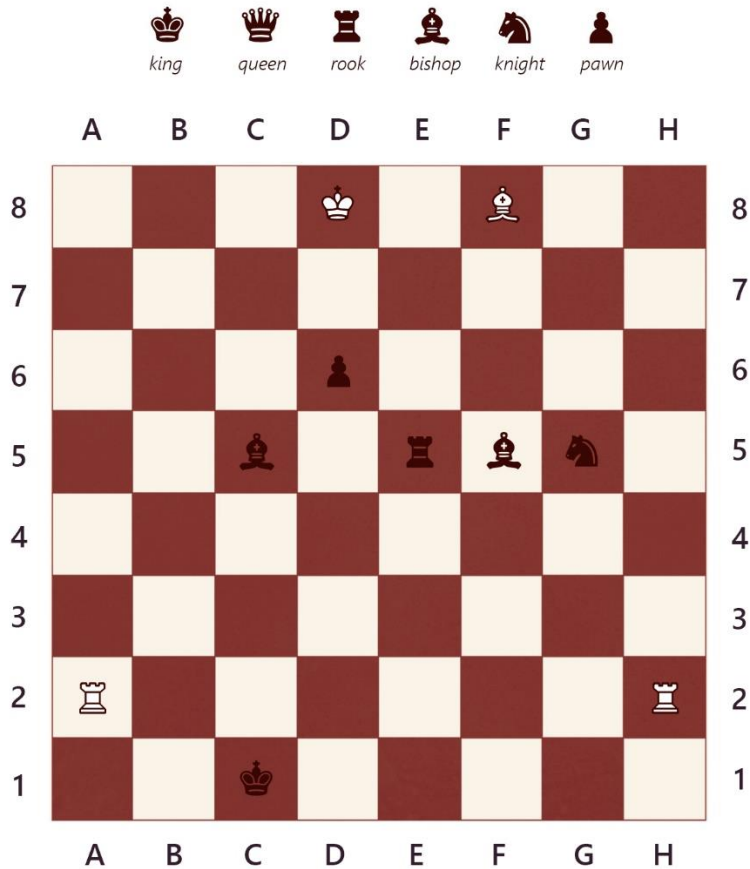


Figure 2.18: MS Royal 13 A XVIII, fol. 166r, Problem 24

Unlike earlier Anglo-Norman chess collections, the problems in MS Royal 13 A XVIII display a sense of practicality as the compiler moves the reader from basic piece movements into more complex combinatory set-ups. Additionally, the compilation of the chess problems also indicate the importance of storytelling in the edification of the reader. While not all collections include narratives with their problems, the narratives found in the problems I have discussed thus far demonstrate that the board and pieces are not only easily rendered into a narrative for reflecting the social status of the reader, but can also act as mnemonic devices for learning the game.

The proximity of the Knight and *ferse* in the introduction of the collection also prepares the player for recognizing patterns, thereby setting the stage for the pursuits by the pieces in the more challenging problems that follow. Later problems in the manuscript often juxtapose mates by the Knight and *ferse*. Problems 26 and 27, two conditional problems, include a checkmate from the Knight and *ferse*, respectively. In other problems, the two pieces take to chasing the King around the board together; Problem 30, titled “La Chase de Ferce et de Chivaler” [The Chase of the Lady and the Knight], provides an example wherein the *ferse* and Knight cannot mate the King no matter what sequence or variation the player decides to play. This problem is preceded by another chase problem instigated by the Knight (Figure 2.19 and 2.20).

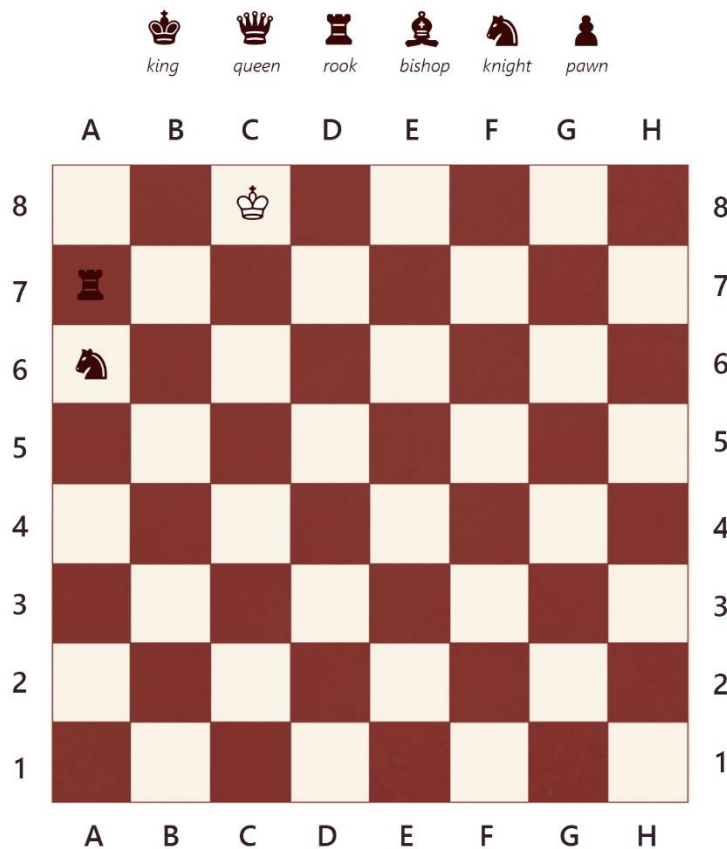


Figure 2.19: MS Royal 13 A XVIII, Problem 29

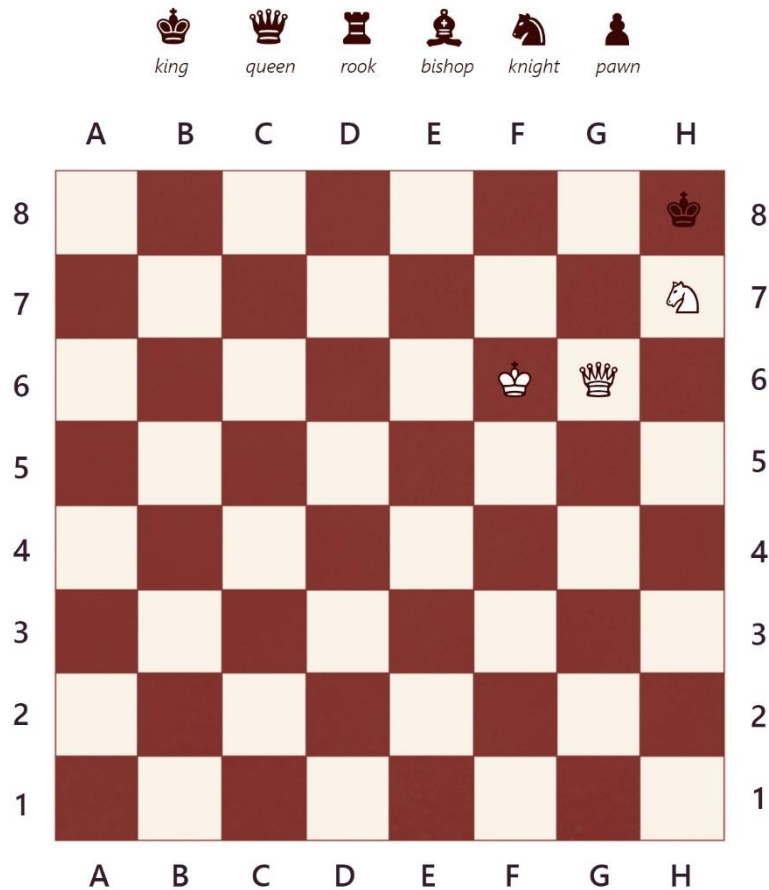


Figure 2.20: MS Royal 13 A XVIII, Problem 30

Chess was often a motif for signaling matters of love in medieval romances and on love tokens such as caskets and mirrors. The most common images depict two lovers playing a game of chess; additionally, one's skill at the game represented one's skill at love. For the nobility and gentry, social and courtly games were not simply defined by their mechanics, but rather regarded as cultural artifacts that could bear close relation to other entertainment, including literature. In John Lydgate's *Reson and Sensuallyte* (c. 1407), a translation and expansion of *Les Échecs Amoureux*, the narrator begins a game with the lady in the Garden of Plesance in an effort to win her love. In this case, the chess game acts as both a performance of courtly behaviour and a

metaphor representing the larger figurative ‘game of love.’ As the narrator claims, Venus has sent him to the garden to learn the art of chess so that he may be successful in love: “For he sholde haue exercise / Of this play in al[le] wyse, / That his tyme he nat lese, / Syth he ys her wher he may chese.”²⁶⁸ Each piece also signifies a different desirable attribute, such as “jeunesse” [youth] (A6), “patience” [patience] (F2), and “doux regard” [sweet looks] (C7), which reflects the traits of the player.²⁶⁹

For the chess collection in MS Royal 13 A XVIII, the chessboard and its pieces represent another visual space in which to enact scenes of courtly love, and the compiler builds on this idea through his organization of the problems by type and gaming piece. Problems 43-50 and 52-53 reveal an overwhelming focus on the *ferse* piece. In Problem 47, titled “Le Guy de Dames et de Damoyceles” [The Game of Ladies and Maidens], the compiler depicts the *ferses* as noble ladies that “scevent lour mester” [know their craft] by which to “succurrer et conseilier” [help and counsel] the two maidens positioned “simple e coye” [innocent and tranquil] on the board.²⁷⁰ The object of this problem is to force mate of the White King using a combination of *ferses* and pawns. Thus far, the theme of love manifests in the description and combinations of pieces in various problems. For Problem 47, however, the compiler provides a clear association of the problems with Romance, noting how the ladies, in their knowledgeable watch over the maidens, are similar to Branwen, the attendant of Isolde whose mishap with a love potion meant for King Mark of Cornwall caused Isolde and Tristram to fall in love. As the compiler writes, Isolde would have been in a terrible situation “Si ne fust par Brengueyn eydé” [If Branwen did not aid

²⁶⁸ Lydgate, *Reson and Sensuallyte*, 5941-44 (see chap. 1 n. 68).

²⁶⁹ See Paris, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Fr. 9197, fol. 437r.

²⁷⁰ Hunt, *Les Gius Partiz des Eschez*, “Second Treatise,” lines 1360-62.

her].²⁷¹ As I discussed in Chapter 1, storytelling is a critical component of medieval game culture along with its material objects, game-texts, and activities. The arrangement and personas in MS Royal 13 A XVIII, which frequently marries the movement of the pieces with ideas of romance and love, also display a penchant for symbolism; they were not simply understood as aesthetic or material objects, but also as spaces designated for cultural expression and representation.

The final chess problem collection I want to discuss in this chapter, MS Ashmole 344 (c. 1470) is also a significant problem collection because it contrasts sharply with the other extant collections found in England in terms of its compilation and presentation. The collection appears in a little-known miscellany focused exclusively on game manuals and possibly compiled by John Argentine, the first owner of the manuscript.²⁷² Each of the four game treatises is written in a different fifteenth-century hand in a small quarto, and the progression from chess problems to the complicated mathematical games *Rithmomachia* and *Ludus Astronomorum* indicates their significance within an educational and pedagogical context; chess could be considered a pastime for students or mental exercises, while *Rithmomachia* and *Ludus Astronomorum* could be used to teach mathematics and Ptolemaic astrology.²⁷³

Problems recorded in Middle English are exceptionally rare, but there was at least one known collection of chess problems circulating in fifteenth-century England, sixteen of which were translated from the Anglo-Norman chess problems found in MS Royal 13 A XVIII into MS

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, line 1375.

²⁷² John Argentine writes his signature on the last page, fol. 83r as ‘Questo libro e mio Zovanno Argentine.’ The other books in his library share the same signature. The collection of books in his library suggest that Argentine was interested in early humanism. See “The Library of John Argentine,” *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society* 2.3 (1956): 210-212.

²⁷³ See Ann E. Moyer, *The Philosophers’ Game: Rithmomachia in Medieval and Renaissance Europe* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2001).

Ashmole 344. Fourteen of the Middle English problems located in Ashmole 344 also appear in MS Porter, another extant Middle English chess collection (see Table 2.1). According to Murray, both MS Ashmole 344 and MS Porter are written in a Northern dialect, and “there is good reason to believe that an older English text lies behind them.”²⁷⁴ MS Ashmole 344 features one chess problem per page and, in order to draw boards in a uniform manner, the scribe pricked the lines for each board, leaving them unchequered. He used red and black ink with text to demarcate individual pieces (Figure 2.21).

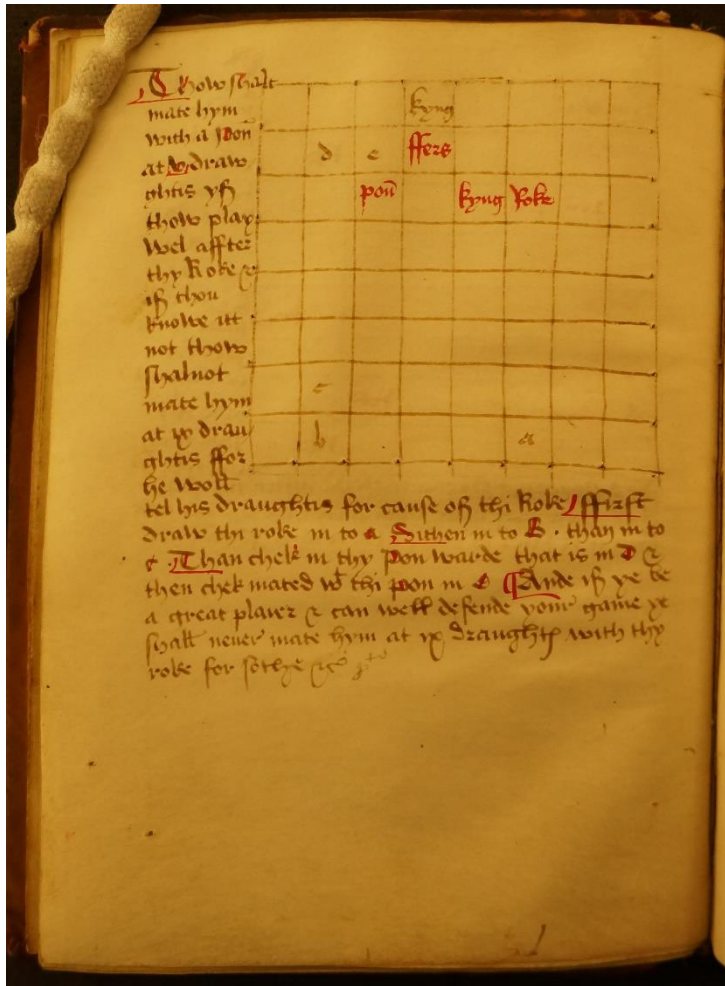


Figure 2.21: MS Ashmole 344, fol.

20v, Problem 36 Image

²⁷⁴ Murray, *A History of Chess*, 601.

While the forty-one problems in MS Ashmole 344 do seem to belong to Murray's so-called Anglo-Norman group circulating in England, the compiler, in contrast to that of MS Royal 13 A XVIII, employs a different strategy for increasing the reader's skill at chess by guiding the player through the problems themselves using special notation, explaining why they are correct, and providing evaluations of the problems with an eye for identifying skillful moves. In Problem 36 (Figure 2.22), for instance, the composer not only describes a sequence of moves to solve the problem, but notes how the problem could be solved in two ways: either in five moves with a pawn or in nine moves with a rook:

Thow shalt mate hym with a Pon at v draughtis yf thow play wel affter thy Roke & if thou knowe itt not thow shal not mate hym at ix draughtis ffor he woll tel his draughtis for cause of thi Roke. Ffirst draw thi roke in to A [F1]. Sithen in to B [B1] than in to C [B2]. Than chek in thy pon warde that is in D [B7] & then chek mated w[ith] thi pon in D [reads as E, C7]."²⁷⁵

²⁷⁵ MS Ashmole 344, fol.

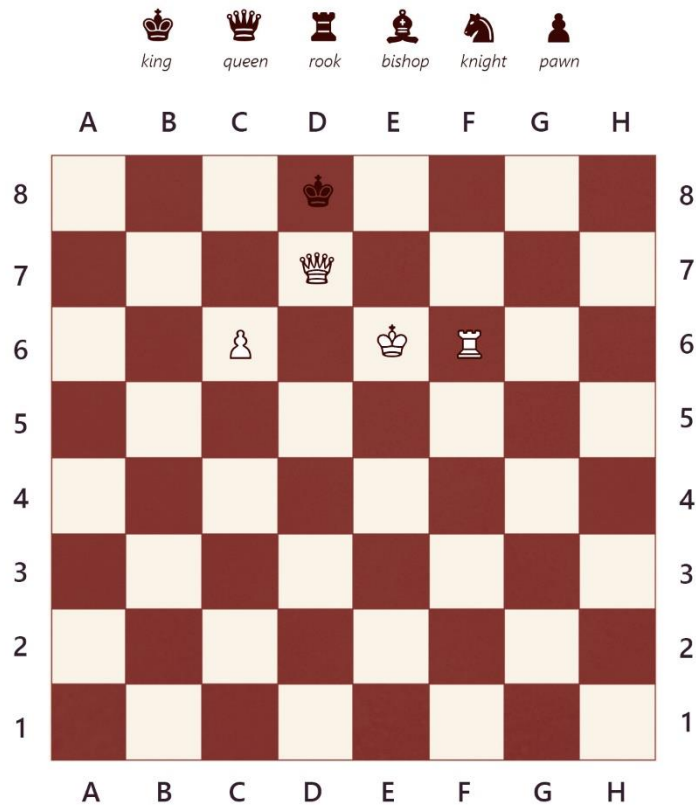


Figure 2.22: MS Ashmole 344, fol 20v, Problem 36

While this is a conditional problem, the compiler’s differentiation attempts to show the player how to gain mastery of the game, and then adds, “Ande if ye be a great plaier & can well defende your game ye shall never mate hym at ix draughtis with thy roke for sothe.”²⁷⁶ Skill at the game therefore includes a sense of economy (using five moves instead of nine), and clever use of pieces: a lowly pawn, one of the weakest pieces in the medieval game and often considered a farmer, maiden, or merchant in chess allegories, is the piece to checkmate the king. But the fact that the pawn also trumps the rook in a more economical strategy attests to the skill and cleverness of the player. In order to guide the player, the composer also describes *specifically*

²⁷⁶ MS Ashmole 344, fol. 20v. See also Murray, *A History of Chess*, 606.

how this superior strategy is accomplished, a deviation from some of the earlier Anglo-Norman group problems, which often offer only occasional or indirect solutions in prose after descriptions of the problems. Here the answer is the focus of the problem, and the compiler displays an effort to differentiate great moves from good moves.

Written in prose devoid of any literary flair, the problems are composed as simple endgames (focusing heavily on wins with a rook), with an emphasis on legal moves—much like the problems we see in chess manuals today. The compiler also includes revised problems, presumably as better combinations were found. In Problem 2, for instance, the compiler alters the board positions in order to shorten the solution by one move. His skill in composition, however, is not without fault. In problem 34, the compiler claims that “this is a faier Juppertie for thow leses thy booth Rokes or thou mate hym the blake king.”²⁷⁷ Yet this is actually an unsound problem and he overlooks: 1 Re7 +; 2 Pf7 m. His attempt at evaluating and highlighting an arguably superior set of moves for the player—that is, losing both rooks and still managing a mate—causes him to perhaps overlook the obvious direct mate in two moves (though that might of course be the point). While his oversight may seem to undermine his knowledge and skill of the game, the emphasis here on the way in which the king is mated may speak to a medieval aesthetic of chess: that economy is not necessarily a beautiful way to win the game.

2.3 Conclusion

Given the skill required to master certain games like chess, game problems in the Middle Ages shared a strong affinity with education and learning. Chessmasters used problems to improve their skills, such as Charles d’Orléans’ notes found in his personal copy of *Bonus*

²⁷⁷ MS Asmole 344, fol. 19v. See also Murray, *A History of Chess*, 606.

Socius, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, MS Latin 10286, but problems could also be employed to sharpen mental faculties for other purposes.²⁷⁸ Problems for tables and merels also often appear alongside chess problems in game manuscripts, and recreational mathematics problems arise as tools for teaching, household management, and entertainment. Games were likely often taught orally, but recording rules and problems in manuscript nevertheless aided in teaching and circulating games (or, using the manuscript itself as a game board).

This chapter demonstrated not only how the variability of compilation, aesthetics, and valuation of medieval game problems in medieval England differ from modern chess problems, but also how game problems reveal a different understanding of games in the Middle Ages. For the compilers, the rules of chess assizes were often only a starting point, as the focus on teaching the reader a technique or concept outweighed the need to maintain a legal, economical board. More importantly, the chess board transforms into a narrativized, privileged space in which to reflect a player's own social identity and courtly values—an association that reveals the close textual relationships between game playing and storytelling.

While medieval authors and transcribers focused their energies, for the most part, on maintaining traditions rather than creating novel problems, the combinatorial play in recreational mathematical problems and chess problems—though narrative and adaptation—indicates that gaming elements could intermingle both learning and leisure. Psychologist Victoria Stevens argues that if individuals play in a world of imaginative possibilities—like the combinatorial possibilities prompted by chess problems—“he or she can move beyond the bonds and bounds of reality and transform objects assumed to mean only one thing . . . this creates a path for figuring

²⁷⁸ Notably, the game problems are also paired with Jacobus de Cessoles' *Liber*. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, MS Latin 10286.

out how to make that new reality actual.”²⁷⁹ The contemplation of recreational problems in the Middle Ages often remains within the bounds of *meditatio*, but the composition and solving of problems nevertheless promotes non-standard and critical thinking among readers and players.

This association between games and learning—that games (and, more generally, pleasurable activity) can teach or be used for teaching—continues well into the modern period, a topic I explore in more detail in Chapter 4. The examples of mathematical and chess problems I have discussed in this chapter do not by any means represent the entirety of puzzles in the Middle Ages. Play—and indeed gameplay—is not simply a space for mindless fun; as this chapter has shown, game and mathematical problems were also used for learning, meditating, management, promoting thinking, and showcasing a player’s social status. Problems not only helped learners gain skill and mastery of games and concepts, but their compositions also exemplified the complexity and beauty of this neglected genre.

²⁷⁹ Stevens, “Think without Thinking,” 107.

Chapter 3

Readers and their Games in Medieval England

On December 24, 1459, Norfolk gentrywoman Margaret Paston, faced with governing a house in mourning over the Christmas holidays, had sent a letter to her husband updating him on the festivities.²⁸⁰

Plese it yov to wete that I sent yovr eldest svnne to my Lady Morlee to haue knolage qwat *sportys* were husyd in here hows in Kyrstmesse next folloyng aftyr the deceysse of my Lord, here husband. And sche seyde that þere were non dysgysnyggys nere harpyng nere lvyng nere syngyn, nere non lowde dysportys, but pleyng at the tabyllys *and* schesse *and* cardys, sweche dysportys sche gave here folkys leve to play, and non odyr.²⁸¹

[Please it you to wait that I sent your eldest son to my Lady Morley to have knowledge of what sports were used in her house in Christmas next following after the decease of my

Sections of this chapter have been published previously as: “Sexy, Naughty, and Lucky in Love: Playing *Ragemon le Bon* in English Gentry Households,” in *Games and Gaming in Medieval Literature*, ed. Serina Patterson (New York: Palgrave, 2015), 79-102. I also wish to thank Cynthia Rogers for her helpful comments on earlier drafts of this chapter.

²⁸⁰ Editors John Fenn and James Gairdner attribute the letter to Margery Paston. Gairdner had dated the letter to 1484, arguing that Margaret Paston died that year and her children would have been old enough to run errands. Family genealogy alone would prove this argument unsound, since Margery only had one son and both the 7th Baroness Lady Morley and her husband died in 1476. While another possible date for the letter may be December 24, 1489, in which Margery could have sent her son to visit the 8th Baroness Lady Morley and recent widow, Elizabeth de la Pole (c. 1468 and died between Dec 24th-31st 1489), Norman Davis notes that the index to the manuscript remarks that the epistolary forms are closer to Margaret’s letters and the reference to Caister suggests the year 1459. As Davis notes, “[i]t seems most likely that the letter was written on the eve of the first Christmas after Sir John Fastolf’s death in that year, when John Paston, as one of the executioners and claimant to the property, might well have been in Caister.” *Paston Letters and Papers*, ed. Norman Davis, Early English Text Society (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 1:257.

²⁸¹ Davis, *Paston Letters and Papers*, 1:257.

Lord, her husband; and she said that there were neither guisings, nor harping, nor luting, nor singing, nor any loud disports, but playing at the tables, and chess, and cards. Such disports she gave her folks leave to play and none other.]

Margaret's concern with good governance provides a rare glimpse into the management, place, and play of games in a fifteenth-century gentry household. For Margaret, table games are an activity that, unlike carols, instruments, and other "lowed dysportys", offer a quiet and relaxing way to partake in the merriment of the holiday—and an appropriate way to please others. A penchant for chess, tables, cards, and other parlour games was not uncommon in late-medieval aristocratic and gentry circles, especially at Christmas time.²⁸² The gentry, in particular, cultivated a fondness for board games, in part because the pieces could be handcrafted as luxury objects and therefore viewed as "mark[s] of distinction" that could visually display their wealth and status—objects like chess problem discussed in Chapter 2 that were similar to secular love literature and carefully copied in expensive, bespoke manuscripts.²⁸³ For both the gentry and the nobility, ownership and skill at table and parlour games contributed to a sense of social superiority.

²⁸² Christmas in the Middle Ages was full of amusements, carols, and game-playing. While games such as cards were often banned among the lower classes, they were allowed to be played at Christmas. See Jean-Michel Mehl, "Games in their Seasons," in *Custom, Culture, and Community in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. Thomas Pettitt and Leif Sondergard (Odense: Odense University Press, 1994), 71-83. Cards, which were likely brought over from Northern France by English soldiers in the early fifteenth century, became a notable Christmas activity, especially among the nobility. See Catharine Perry Hargrave, *A History of Playing Cards and a Bibliography of Cards and Gaming* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1930; New York: Dover, 1966), 169.

²⁸³ Nicholas Orme, "Education and Recreation," in *Gentry Culture in Late Medieval England*, ed. Raluca Radulescu and Alison Truelove (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 76.

The presence of games as aristocratic objects of leisure stretches as far back as seventh-century Anglo-Saxon England and typifies elite culture throughout the Middle Ages.²⁸⁴ From as early as the twelfth century, gameplay increasingly becomes a class marker of prestige among the developing gentry, including knights, civil servants, and landowners. Card games had also quickly gained popularity in fifteenth-century England, especially for gambling;²⁸⁵ due to their portability, courtly aesthetics, and use for gambling, card games also garnered favour among the gentry as popular pastimes—in fact, a tapestry displaying “jentilwomen pleying at the cardes” also appears in John Fastolf’s draft indenture of items bequeathed to John Paston on 6 June 1462.²⁸⁶ Margaret’s attention to the proper etiquette regarding pastimes moreover reflects an effort to imitate those above her station; specifically, in the case of the letter above, Alianore Lovell, the 7th Baroness Morley (1442-76). As Deborah Youngs observes, these complex class interactions between the gentry and the nobility were a customary aspect of cultural diffusion in later medieval England.²⁸⁷ Games, for Margaret, were a social responsibility, another aspect that

²⁸⁴ The Lyminge Archaeological Project uncovered a seventh-century Anglo-Saxon gaming piece at a Royal Hall excavation in Lyminge, Kent. Anglo-Saxon gaming pieces are typically found at burial sites, particularly of the male elite; this is the first Anglo-Saxon piece discovered in a hall setting and may have been used in the games *tabula* (an early form of backgammon) or *latrunculi*. See Gabor Thomas and Alexandra Knox, “Lyminge Excavations 2013: Interim Report on the University of Reading excavations at Lyminge, Kent,” The Lyminge Archaeological Project, *University of Reading*, accessed July 17, 2014, http://www.reading.ac.uk/web/FILES/archaeology/Lyminge_2013_interim.pdf.

²⁸⁵ See Chapter 4 for an in-depth discussion of late medieval and early modern playing cards.

²⁸⁶ Davis, *Paston Letters*, 111. Card games first appeared in Europe in the fourteenth century and grew in popularity in the fifteenth century due to their mobility, ease-of-use, and numerous games. Early playing cards are also difficult to track down since their ephemeral, inexpensive condition caused them to deteriorate. For more on the history of cards, see: Catharine Perry Hargrave, *A History of Playing Cards*; David Parlett, *The Oxford Guide to Card Games* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990); and Helen Farley, *Cultural History of Tarot: From Entertainment to Esotericism* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009).

²⁸⁷ Deborah Youngs, “Cultural Networks,” in *Gentry Culture in Late Medieval England*, ed. Raluca Radulescu and Alison Truelove (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 119-33. For earlier

reflects good household management.²⁸⁸ Similarly, in *The Governor* (1531), a treatise dedicated to Henry VIII that intended to educate governing members of noble and gentry bodies, Sir Thomas Elyot categorizes tables and cards as acceptable pastimes for relaxation in aristocratic households.²⁸⁹ Lady Morley's and Margaret's management of household revelries thereby denotes a special place games could occupy in the Middle Ages: while some holiday activities are deemed inappropriate, the household could still enjoy Christmas merriments through gameplay.

Margaret's letter, then, provides us with a snapshot of the types of games that might have been available to members of a gentry household—and who may have played them. Medieval society, on the whole, presents an understudied period to explore the ways in which games, as formal systems, model human experience. Perhaps more than any other material object, parlour games—their rules, their occasional gaming pieces, their *meanings*—are understood primarily through the ways in which players engage with them. Game scholars Laura Ermi and Frans Mäyrä have gone so far as to assert that interactivity—that is, a reciprocal transfer of information between a player and an object through a player's active input—is the most important criteria for defining a gaming experience: “the essence of a game is rooted in its interactive nature, and there is no game without the player.”²⁹⁰ This method of conceptualizing one of these games marks a

discussions of emulation among the gentry and aristocratic culture, see also Georges Duby, “The Diffusion of Cultural Patterns in Feudal Society,” *Past & Present* 39 (1968): 3-10.

²⁸⁸ For another discussion of women, games, and household governance, see Chapter 2.

²⁸⁹ Nicholas Orme has also argued that *The Governor* focuses on medieval ideals for good governance, see Orme, *From Childhood to Chivalry: the Education of the English Kings and Aristocracy, 1066-1530* (London: Methuen, 1984), 224-31. Servants and laborers also had the opportunity to play games during Christmas.

²⁹⁰ Laura Ermi and Frans Mäyrä, “Fundamental components of the gameplay experience: analysing immersion,” in *Proceedings of Digra 2005*, 2005.

divergence from the study of gameplay as aesthetic experience, which focuses on the action of gameplay: “the game is not characterized by the player as subject, but by the play itself.”²⁹¹ In recent years, this relationship between player-agents and game-structures has sparked new scholarly debates in regards to our understanding of agency in gaming situations, or, in Jesper Juul’s words, the new conflict “between those who study players and those who study games.”²⁹² Not surprisingly, player-centric approaches have focused primarily on digital and contemporary games.²⁹³ Jaakko Stenros and Annika Waern argue that game research, which has typically studied games as fixed structures and ignored player agency, should view games as activities and enacted experiences wherein “players are able to perform and discuss how games are enacted.”²⁹⁴ This methodological strategy works well for studying player habits with contemporary and digital games, but, for obvious reasons, runs into issues when dealing with non-digital, and in our case medieval, games and their players.

Games in the Middle Ages, as we have already witnessed, are more akin to an unstable fluidity across Europe by which players formulate new rules, boards, or experiences. Consider, for example, the plentiful regional assizes developed in France, England, and elsewhere for chess, tables, hazard, and other games.²⁹⁵ Chapter 2 discussed the assortment of players who

²⁹¹ Katja Kwastek, “Opus Ludens—Towards an Aesthetics of Interactivity,” in *Interface Cultures: Artistic Aspects of Interaction*, ed. Christa Sommerer, Laurent Mignonneau, and Dorothee King (Piskataway, NJ: Transaction, 2008), 156-57.

²⁹² Jesper Juul, “Five Years of the Ludologist,” *The Ludologist*, accessed August 22, 2013, <http://www.jesperjuul.net/ludologist/five-years-of-the-ludologist>.

²⁹³ For recent explorations of this issue, see: Jaakko Stenros and Annika Waern, “Games as Activity: Correcting the Digital Fallacy,” in *Videogame Studies: Concepts, Cultures and Communication*, ed. Monica Evans (Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press, 1-11 and Bryan Behrenshausen, “The Active Audience, Again: Player-Centric Game Studies and the Problem of Binarism,” *New Media & Society* 15 (2013), 872-89.

²⁹⁴ Stenros and Waern, “Games as Activity,” 15.

²⁹⁵ See Chapter 2 for an extended discussion of regional assizes.

owned, and likely enjoyed, chess, arithmetic, and other games by the problems found in their manuscripts. But how can we further discern the types of ludic experiences that medieval audiences desired in their gameplay? Do they differ in gameplay and expectation from our own modern games? What role did games play in shaping cultural identity among the gentry, nobility, and others? While premodern scholars cannot readily observe “actual instances of play,” manuscripts and early books, I argue, can nevertheless stand in to facilitate our understanding of these experiences.²⁹⁶ In the pages that follow, I will shift the discussion from characteristics of medieval games to address in more detail the relationship that medieval readers and players had with games that functioned *as* literature in manuscripts and household books (or what I call ‘game-texts’). In Chapter 1 I introduced game-texts as a distinct genre rooted in secular love literature and debate that not only encourage active engagement from an audience (as social activities), but also intermingle game mechanics and textuality—a mingling which produces a ‘textual object’ and offers experiences that have been largely ignored by both game scholars and literary critics. This chapter extends this discussion, beginning with an overview of interactivity in medieval manuscripts before examining the circulation of two types of game-texts enjoyed in later medieval England among an assortment of readers, from the nobility to preachers: question-and-answer games that were first introduced in Chapter 1 (the *demandes d’amour*) and fortune-telling games that use string to reveal fortunes. By exploring the relationship between these game-texts, their manuscripts, and their intended audiences, this chapter charts the transmission and social evolution of these forms of entertainment from France to England in order to more fully understand how they operated as sites of engagement and entertainment for poets, scribes, and players.

²⁹⁶ Stenros and Waern, “Games as Activity,” 12.

3.1 Readers as Players

Margaret's description of acceptable forms of play bears witness to the transmission and popularity that table games enjoyed in late medieval English gentry culture. But the Pastons were not only players of table games; John II's inventory of books, recorded between 1475 and 1479, lists William Caxton's translation *A Game and Playe of Chesse* (c. 1474) and a variety of debate poetry, including a copy of *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, alongside romances, statutes, didactic texts, and other material.²⁹⁷ The Pastons' interest in games—both literal and allegorical—is not unusual in fifteenth-century gentry households.

For modern game studies scholars, the acts of 'reading' and 'game playing' connote activities that differ in their degree of agency. In his comparison of games to other media, game designer and creator of the *Sims* Will Wright distinguishes narrative (as a primarily linear entertainment) from games: "interactive works demand that the player has the ability to act; to affect the situation; to make a difference at every possible turn."²⁹⁸ Yet the performative space in which recreational literature was enjoyed in the Middle Ages does not often make such a distinction. In fact, oral—rather than visual—delivery was the favoured mode of consumption among readers, and several texts show markers of this interaction between reader and text.²⁹⁹

Readers also engaged in the retelling and transmission of works. As I discussed in Chapter 1, the participatory and performative nature inclusive in the textual transmission of

²⁹⁷ Davis, *Paston Letters*, 517.

²⁹⁸ Will Wright, forward to *Creating Emotion in Games*, by David Freeman (Indianapolis: New Riders, 2004), xxxiii.

²⁹⁹ See Joyce Coleman, *Public Reading and the Reading Public in Late Medieval England and France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); and M. T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record, England 1066-1307*, 2nd ed. (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1979; Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003), 267-72.

vernacular medieval works shows how recreation was often characterized by spaces for playing within a social, communal environment. We need only to look at fifteenth-century Chaucerian manuscript production to illustrate this tendency toward active participation and adaptation for a specific audience: faced with an assortment of stories for Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* and Chaucer's unfinished framework to unify them—that is, four tales for each pilgrim—the scribe-compiler of Northumberland MS 455 reorganizes the tales in such a way that the pilgrims complete the trip to the shrine of Saint Thomas Becket, adding in *The Canterbury Interlude* and *The Tale of Beryn* as the pivotal turning point that affirms their time in Canterbury. As Andrew Higl notes, Chaucerian readers “added, subtracted, and moved tales to various locations within a textual space as if they were not merely reading about an incomplete game but participating in one.”³⁰⁰ This sentiment can also be applied to the impromptu production of Hunterian Library MS 197 in the years 1475-76: desiring a copy of *The Canterbury Tales* for their own amusement, Geoffrey Spirleng and his son Thomas copied Chaucer's popular work by borrowing two exemplar manuscripts from other local households, Cambridge University Library, MS Mm 2.5 and a variant of Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson poet. 223. Daniel Mosser speculates that Geoffrey obtained MS Mm 2.5 from William Boleyn, as it marked with “Wyllyam Boleyn” in the upper right-hand margin of fol. 190r.³⁰¹ Due to the effort required to capture the entirety of both exemplars, Geoffrey and Thomas's manuscript results in tales ending up in various

³⁰⁰ Andrew Higl, *Playing the Canterbury Tales* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2012), 16.

³⁰¹ Daniel W. Mosser, “Mm: Cambridge, Cambridge University Library, MS Mm.2.5,” in *A Digital Catalogue of the Pre-1500 Manuscripts and Incunables of the Canterbury Tales* (Birmingham: Scholarly Digital Editions), CD-ROM.

positions, with two versions of “The Shipman’s Tale” and “Prioress’ Tale” and the need to add “The Clerk’s Tale” and “Canon Yeoman’s Tale” after the *Retraction*.³⁰²

It is not my intention here to suggest that the participative modes of reading enjoyed in the Middle Ages are themselves games or game-like experiences, though such arguments have been put forth in recent years;³⁰³ rather, considering the active ways in which medieval readers engaged with their texts, the difference between the medieval practices of reading and gaming—especially for literary games—as recreational activities could be fluid. In *The Book of the Duchess*, for instance, Chaucer portrays the narrator’s insomnia as the motivating influence behind a desire to pass the time, and references three possible activities available in his chamber to help relieve his sleeplessness “that wil not be mot need be left”: playing chess, playing tables, and reading a story.³⁰⁴ The narrator turns to the Ovidian tale of Ceyx and Alcione, a tale found in a miscellany the narrator has on hand, and it becomes the recreational option of choice. As the narrator states, “For me thoghte it better play / Then playe either at ches or tables” (50-51). For the narrator, ‘play’ suggests a pastime that does not aim to provide a sense of pleasure, but rather relief—a medieval sentiment that Glending Olsen observes in his book *Literature as Recreation in the Later Middle Ages*.³⁰⁵ Play becomes synonymous with what we today might describe as a form of therapy, and these idle pastimes suddenly encompass a

³⁰² In a rubricated note on fol. 102v, Geoffrey writes, ““Be it remembred that | the tale o the Clerk o Oxenford and the ta// | le o the Chanons yoman folwen immediat// | li in the next leef,” see Mosser, *A Digital Catalogue*, CD-ROM.

³⁰³ Kimberly Bell and Julie Couch have recently argued that the romance genre is infused with game-like devices or unfolds like a game that is played by reading audiences. “Romancing the Game: Genre Play in *King Horn* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*” (presentation, 50th International Medieval Congress, Kalamazoo, MI, May 14-17, 2015).

³⁰⁴ Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Book of the Duchess*, 42.4

³⁰⁵ Olsen, *Literature as Recreation*, especially chapter 1 on medical justifications for indulging in texts as pleasurable, therapeutic entertainment (see chap. 1 n. 53).

deliberate function outside of their usual social or intellectual purposes. While all three play-objects can be represented or allegorized, Ovid's tale stands in as the closest remedy in the narrator's search for a cure, or for new knowledge within a textual space. Chess, on the other hand, re-emerges later as a game blending chance and skill between the Black Knight and Lady Fortune—a game that also presupposes a search for a cure (Blanche's life), and has much more serious consequences. In the beginning of the dream-vision, the narrator interprets chess, tables, and books in a much more fluid manner: as an associative assemblage of activities that can aid personal welfare.

Another example of this interwoven mode of activity occurs in recreational texts that could serve the dual function of narrative and gameplay that I introduced in the first chapter. In *The Demaundes off Love* (1487), a branch of prose *demandes d'amour* translated into Middle English and found in London, British Library, MS Additional 60577 (fols. 95r-107v), readers may have delighted in the eighty-eight questions and answers on matters of love, which are presented as a sequential and cohesive dialogue of the courtly game *Le Roi Qui Ne Ment* [The King Who Cannot Lie]. Willy Louis Braekman speculates that the courtly banter may have “once formed part of a real game,”³⁰⁶ and the simulated conversation could act as a mnemonic reference for aiding or sparking gameplay.³⁰⁷ The compiler divides the questions and answers into two sections: in the first section, the ‘good Madame’ addresses the gentleman with questions; in the second section, the roles are reversed—a common format in Middle French *demandes*

³⁰⁶ Willy Louis Braekman, “Introduction,” in *The ‘Demaundes off Love,’ SCRIPTA: Mediaeval and Renaissance Texts and Studies* (Brussels: Omirel, 1982), 14.

³⁰⁷ This question-and-answer conversational format also appears in other *demandes* collections, in which a ‘sire’ asks a question and a ‘dame’ responds. See Hassell, *Amorous Games* (see chap. 1 n. 13).

collections. Question seventy-nine, for instance, appears as a dialogue between the man and the woman:

[M]adame, wheder hadde ye lever: be ryche or ellys bei kunnyng?
Fayr sir, I hade lever be kunnyng than ryche.
Madame, be what resone?
Fayre sir, if I were storede with kunnyng and ther with vse good condicions I shuld haue good ynoughe.³⁰⁸

The questions manifest as a simulation of the game in play, but players could also use the text as a gaming aid or an answer key, which may provide inspiration for questions or answers. A number of themes flow from one question to another, suggesting a form of ‘playback.’ question forty-six asks the man why a lover feels jealous if he knows “þe wyll and þe value of his loue” and continues past the cross-over into section two (comprising a total of nine questions on jealousy from either side). Section two begins:

[N]ow, madame, if hit shulde not displease your ladyship, I wolde require [you] þen, be the virtue of this game, to assoyle me certeyne questyons and demaundis.
Fayr syr, seythe on your plesur.
Madame, I praye you be the strengthe of the game and of þe reaume, where non shulde sey but trouthe, telle me certeynlye, wheþer women be as jalousie as men?
Fayre sir, I wene yea, and lyghtlyer shulde be jelouse than mene, opon that the whiche me semethe, and trouthe hit is, as that I truste.³⁰⁹

The gentleman proceeds to follow the answer by questioning why women possess greater jealousy. The conversational flow and spatial division between the two parties creates a layer of seemingly conflicted relations between the two players and, more abstractly, highlights apparent differences in courtliness between men and women. Yet this conflict may appear illusory; the last question, for instance, brings the issue of gender to the forefront:

[N]ow to you, fayre sir, I aske and seye, whether lastethe loue lenger in þe mane or in the woman?

³⁰⁸ Braekman, *The ‘Demaundes off Love,’* 69.

³⁰⁹ Braekman, *The ‘Demaundes off Love,’* 51.

Madame, in þe mane by nature hit shulde laste lenger. But nowe a dayes mene be so diverse and so variable that I suppose the loue lastethe lenger in þe woman. And yet it is a gayne the right of nature.³¹⁰

Despite the conflict between the gentleman and lady the poet does not announce a clear winner; rather, each party represents one aspect of the same game—the aesthetics of courtly conversation—and bears resemblance to the *beau parler* discussed by the Dieu d'Amour in *Le Roman de la Rose*.³¹¹ As the gentleman's answer in the last question makes clear, matters of love vary between gender but are, ultimately, up to the individual. Game-texts in manuscripts, like *The Demaundes Off Love*, therefore demand an extra level of engagement for reader-players. The dialogue between the sexes in *The Demaundes off Love* also suggests that the game was still played by—or at least perceived as—a mixed gender group of participants in fifteenth-century England. This built-in incentive to interact with the text in a ludic fashion—to elicit responses in actual gameplay—sets these interactive texts apart from other non-ludic texts, such as prognostications and recipes (though a number of medieval game-texts do draw from these traditions).³¹² Game-texts thus require a system of interpretation to render them meaningful—a system that contains or describes the interactive participation, social activities, and negotiable consequences of its players—and a feedback loop within the manuscript apparatus. Such texts could, of course, simply be read as texts, but their interactive nature encourages their use as social games.

³¹⁰ Ibid., 75.

³¹¹ Dieu d'Amour teaches the lover of courtly conversation, using Gauvain and Keu as an example and counter-example of proper speech. See Armand Strubel, ed. and trans., *Le Roman de la Rose* (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1984), lines 2085-122.

³¹² See Chapter 1 for a discussion of this 'ludic attitude.'

3.2 Questioning Love

Le Roi Qui Ne Ment, a courtly game originating in the courtly circles of France that I discussed in Chapter 1, was designed for the noble élite that gained widespread popularity in Northern France during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries—a courtly entertainment played alongside other debating games such as the popular *jeux-partis* and *tensons*.³¹³ On the Continent, the appearance of the game in texts and manuscripts reveals the significance of *Le Roi Qui Ne Ment* and the *demandes d’amour* as love catechisms for practicing courtly refinement and polite behaviour, as argued by Alexander Klein, and as a ludic space to indulge in physical and emotional intimacy among courtly and aristocratic players. The extant utterances and model dialogues found in the *demandes d’amour* collections—questions that are often reiterated in textual depictions of *Le Roi Qui Ne Ment*—provide insight into the particularities of aristocratic courtliness and entertainment. Unlike other pastimes depicted in medieval texts, the *demandes* often attempt to recreate these ludic spaces. Green also acknowledges this sense of realism, stating that “to read these collections of *demandes d’amour* is to learn something of the actuality of aristocratic courtship.”³¹⁴ There is a prevailing assumption by Green and Klein that the appearance of *Le Roi Qui Ne Ment* and the *demandes d’amour* in manuscripts immediately suggest a ludic, courtly enterprise for élite players. The lavishly illustrated episode of the game on fols. 120r-121v in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS 264 certainly supports this assumption,

³¹³ See Daniel O’Sullivan’s “Words with Friends, Courtly Edition: the *jeux-partis* of Thibaut de Champagne,” in *Games and Gaming in Medieval Literature*, ed. Serina Patterson (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015): 61-78 for an illuminating exploration of Artesian appropriation of Thibaut’s *jeux-partis* in late thirteenth-century Arras. See also Felberg-Levitt, *Les Demandes D’Amours* (see chap. 1 n. 13).

³¹⁴ Green, “*Le Roi Qui Ne Ment*,” 221.

given its reflection of social cohesion and community through amorous conversation among nobles (Figure 3.1).³¹⁵



Figure 3.1: Miniature of *Le Roi Qui Ne Ment*, Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS 264, fol. 121r

³¹⁵ Additionally, a chess match between two lovers appears on the *bas-de-page* of fol. 121v, which not only foreshadows the chess match between Cassiel and Fesonas, but also reinforces the game as a courtly, noble pastime.

The miniature not only depicts one way in which the game could be played, but also reflects themes of *courtoisie* and refinement. In his study of MS Bodley 264, Mark Cruse notes that the “textual descriptions are complemented by the painted architectural frames and backgrounds of the miniatures, which act as extratextual indicators of courtly place and time . . . Through these visual features, Bodley 264 becomes a courtly place in its own right.”³¹⁶ The representation of the players portray the “formation of community,” which reflects a performative space for courtly conversation.³¹⁷ Additionally, the jousts painted on the *bas-de-page* are, according to Cruse, a pictorialization of a textual metaphor: “These [jousting] scenes seem directly inspired by comments about the effects of love made by the two knights [playing the game] in the text on this folio.”³¹⁸ But what happens when these games were disseminated outside their courtly circles in France? Is there an afterlife to the *demandes d’amour*? What could such instances tell us about the interpretation and *mouvance* of medieval games for players?

3.2.1 Appropriating *les demandes d’amour* in England

The multifarious appearances of *demandes d’amour* collections and *Le Roi Qui Ne Ment* scenes in at least five manuscripts in England, dating from the early fourteenth to the early sixteenth centuries, indicate their appeal to a broader English audience for different purposes.³¹⁹

³¹⁶ Mark Cruse, *Illuminating the Roman d’Alexandre: Oxford, Bodleian Library MS 264* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: D. S. Brewer, 2011), 20.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 27.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 35.

³¹⁹ London, British Library, MS Additional 60577; London, British Library, MS Additional 46919; London, British Library MS Royal F II; Cambridge, Cambridge University Library, MS Ff 1.6 [The Findern Anthology]; and London, Westminster Abbey MS CA 21. Due to space, I will omit discussion of Westminster Abbey MS CA 21 in this chapter due to length, but the manuscript contains eighty-seven prose and verse *demandes d’amour* alongside Christine de Pizan’s *Epistre au Dieu d’Amours*, poems by Charles d’Orléans, lyrics, and other recreational texts. MS CA 21 was copied in France in the early

The principal scribe of MS Additional 60577, in which *the Demaundes off Love* is found, was a monk of St Swithun's Priory at Winchester.³²⁰ Produced after 1477, the manuscript's early owners were also both monks at St Swithun's Priory: "Iohannes Brynston," who was ordained Deacon on 22 December 1520 and later became a friar, eventually sold the manuscript to John Buryton. John Buryton's name appears on fols. 1r and 225v and at the end of the pastedown. Buryton was a sacrist at St Swithun's Priory, and his computus roll of 1536-37 is also extant.³²¹ Edward Wilson surmises that the scribe may have been a schoolmaster before he became a monk and wished to preserve aspects of his former life or, alternatively, taught at the almonry school in Winchester, since a number of items in the manuscript are of pedagogical interest;³²² an address to a schoolmaster appears on fol. 1r, a schoolboy's lament on fol. 93r, a primer on fol. 120r appear alongside other moral and religious material.³²³ The leaf immediately preceding *The Demaundes off Love* shows a hand practicing the letters of the alphabet and below a practice title of *The Demaundes off Love*, "amor vincit omnia" [love conquers all]. While at first glance recreational game-text *The Demaundes off Love* seems at odds with the other material in the manuscript, the texts contained within the manuscript could have been used for both edification and entertainment. Themes of love and courtliness appear elsewhere in the manuscript, including

fifteenth century, but traveled to England over the course of the century. For a brief list of its contents, see also Paul Meyer, "Notice d'un recueil manuscrit de poésies françaises du XIII^e au XV^e siècle, appartenant à Westmonster Abbey," *Bulletin de la Société des Anciens Textes Français* 1 (1875): 25-36.

³²⁰ Edward Wilson, Introduction to *The Winchester Anthology: A Facsimile of British Library Additional Manuscript 60577* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1981), 9.

³²¹ G. W. Kitchin and F. T. Madge, "The Computus Roll of John Buriton, Sacristan of St. Swithun's, A. D. 1536-37," in *Documents Relating to the Foundation of the Chapter of Winchester A. D. 1541-1547* (London, 1889), 13-31. For more information on the ownership of MS Additional 60577, see Wilson, "Introduction," 10-13.

³²² Wilson, Introduction, 13-14.

³²³ For a complete list of content, Wilson, Introduction, 17-36.

secular love songs on fol. 108r and fols. 115v-116v. Notably, *The Demaundes off Love* was translated from a French *demandes d'amour* collection in circulation and the scribe also copies a short assortment of poetic *demandes* on fols. 80v-81r—one of only two French items in the entire anthology (see item 1 in the appendix). Unlike *The Demaundes off Love*, this collection is not a dialogue but rather a series of questions. Question four asks, “Je vous demand[e] quelle est la clef / Qui le chastell peult deffermer” [I ask you, what is the key that can lock in the castle?]”³²⁴ The question is a double entendre: the key and castle imagery could also conjure the consummation of marriage. Most of the questions refer to matters of love and similarly evoke racy and bawdy imagery. Question five asks, for example: “Nommes la sale et le manoire / Ou leu peult premier joye avoir” [Can you name the room or manor where you can have your first joy?]. There are no answers supplied here, which is atypical of *demandes d'amour* collections; the list of questions provides instead possible aids for a game, short sentences for practicing letters, or debates of moral casuistry.

In the early fourteenth century, another scribe had a similar application of the *demandes d'amour* for educational purposes. Twenty-two Anglo-Norman *demandes d'amour* appear on fols. 15r-v in British Library MS Additional 46919 (c. 1300-1333), a friar's miscellany copied and owned by the Franciscan preacher William Herebert of Hereford. The questions are penned alongside a number of didactic works in Anglo-Norman, Latin, and Middle English, such as treatises on falconry, instructional manuals, and the French manual *Art de Venerie*, and are prefaced with Latin commentary, suggesting that these courtly questions of love may have been used to help English students learn French and, as Margaret Felberg-Levitt writes, “the essence

³²⁴ MS Additional 60577, fol. 80v. All translations are my own. For a complete transcription of this collection, please see Appendix 1.

of ideal human love” as a moralistic enterprise.³²⁵ Alongside texts typical of personal and household books, such as culinary and medicinal recipes, the manuscript also includes a range of preaching material such as sermons, sermon notes, annotations, and Herebert’s own sermons, so another possible use for Herebert’s *demandes d’amour* collection might have been to provide questions of love to help punctuate sermons, a strategy similar to Jacob de Cessolis’ and Odo de Cheriton’s use of chess in their sermons. For MS Additional 60577 and MS Additional 46919, the *demandes d’amour* seem to promote an educational use for the collections, even as they promote matters of love.

But the *demandes d’amour* were not only (re)appropriated for sermons and pedagogical material in England. The collection of 107 French *demandes* found in London, British Library, MS Royal F II (fols. 188r-210r)—notably among the largest extant collection of *demandes d’amour*—was clearly intended for both learning and leisure. Compiled in London for Edward IV but left unfinished after his death in 1483, the *demandes d’amour* section is bookended by Pseudo-Heloise’s “Les epistres de labesse Heloys du Paraclit” (fols. 137r-187v) and a French conduct book for princes (fols. 210v-248v). This lavish manuscript also contains 166 poems by Charles d’Orléans from his captivity in England (1415-1440). Ornate, decorative frontispieces accompany each text: Charles d’Orléans’ collection of poems begins with an illuminate image of a lady Jeunesse introducing the author to Bel Accueil and Lady Plaisance in the Court of Love; the “Les epistres” frontispiece displays an abbess (Heloise) and a pupil, who are seated and accompanied by a group of listening ladies; and in the conduct book’s frontispiece the prince is reading a roll to an audience of priests and gentlemen and in the background the prince is

³²⁵ Felberg-Levitt, *Les Demandes d’Amour*, 40.

displayed kneeling before an altar during mass.³²⁶ The frontispiece of the *demandes d'amour* collection features a game played at the gates of the Castle of Love among three courtly ladies and a courtier (Figure 3.2).



Figure 3.2: The Castle of Love,
London, British Library, MS Royal F
II, fol. 188r

³²⁶ Christopher de Hamel observes that most English manuscripts were not as ornately illuminated as the French or Italian romances, and most aristocratic books were composed in French (even those published in Italy or England). Among the eighty-five manuscripts that make up all or part of *The Canterbury Tales* only the Ellesmere manuscript is lavishly illustrated. *A History of Illuminated Manuscripts* (London: Phaidon Press, 1986; 2010), 157-59.

The texts included in the manuscript are likely intended to provide the king with a proper education: his religious and political duties, his knowledge of moral virtue, his cultured taste, and his courtly behaviour and etiquette. The illuminated scenes and diverse array of texts certainly exemplify the epitome of leisurely luxury, which span from moralizing tracts to love-related casuistry, and reveal a great deal about the literary tastes of late fifteenth-century English courts. Additionally, Michel-André Bossy observes that the full-page illumination borders are full of dynastic and political insignia, with a clear connection to the War of the Roses, and more importantly “heraldic emblems from the House of Tudor, as if to prompt the beholder to interpret the texts from a current standpoint, to recast them in terms of Henry VII’s accession to the throne and his aims as a monarch.”³²⁷ The illuminated borders of the *demandes d’amour* collection display how later illuminators adapted the manuscript for Henry VII: a Tudor rose appears on the bottom-left corner and, similar to the frontispiece for Charles d’Orléans’ poetry, the royal arms of Henry VII’s wife Elizabeth of York, daughter of Edward IV, appear alongside the motto ‘Dieu et mon droit’ (‘God and my right’)—she is, thus, included in texts discussing, illuminating, and creating through play sites of love.³²⁸

Appearing within this complex political and manuscript matrix, the *demandes d’amour* do more than provide a fleeting leisurely activity for princes in matters of love. The collection in

³²⁷ Michel-André Bossy, “Charles d’Orléans and the War of the Roses: Yorkist and Tudor Implications of British Library MS Royal 16 F ii,” in *Shaping Courtliness in Medieval France: Essays in Honor of Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner*, ed. Daniel O’Sullivan and Laurie Shepard (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2013), 61.

³²⁸ The emphasis placed on the image rather than the texts illustrates a trend in the illumination of expensive, bespoke manuscripts. As Leila Avrin writes, “[b]y the late fifteenth-century, text and illustrations are separated more than ever before. The illusionistic picture overwhelms the text.” *Scribes, Script, and Books: The Book Arts from the Antiquity to the Renaissance* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1991), 258.

MS Royal 16 F II is a variant of the two collections found in MS Additional 60577 (poetry and prose). Although the direct copytext is no longer extant, the variations between the collections in both manuscripts is negligible. The scribe of MS 60577 does not merge the collections, however, which appear in different quires and languages, so the scribe of MS Royal 16 F II may have either found them paired in the copytext or merged them in the manuscript in order to maintain a consistent organizational strategy. Furthermore, in his edition of the *demandes d'amour* of MS Royal 16 F II, Klein concludes that the prose questions were derived from lost exemplars of the two texts that are preserved in Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, MS 757 (late 14th c., fols. 264r-265r) and Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, MS 1130 (late 15th c., fols. 142r-146v).³²⁹ By the time *the demandes d'amour* are copied into MS Royal 16 F II, then, they have already been enjoyed by a diverse array of readers for different purposes. For the scribe, this amalgamation of learning and leisure is made explicit through his rubricated responses—a feature omitted in MS Additional 60577 and other “Chastel d’amours” *demandes* collections.³³⁰ The eighteen poetic *demandes d'amour*, which introduce the collection, are each accompanied by an answer (alternating red and blue), which provides a seemingly definitive response and helps guide the interpretation of the question. For question five (quoted above), the scribe pens the answer: “en bel acueil” [in a lovely welcome], perhaps in an attempt to thwart any hint of the question’s imaginable sexual innuendo. The answer to question nine, perhaps more than the other responses, illuminates the inclusion of the *demandes* in MS Royal 16 F II: “Qui fait amours long temps durer. / Et enforcer et embracer? [What causes love to endure for a long time,

³²⁹ Klein, *Die altfranzösischen*, 64-89.

³³⁰ See Arthur Långfors, *Les Incipit des poèmes français: antérieurs au XVI^e siècle* (Paris: Champion, 1917), 1:108 for a list of “Chastel d’amours” manuscripts.

enforced and embraced?], to which the rubric answers: “Courtoysie.”³³¹ By providing answers to the poetic *demandes d’amour*, the scribe, in effect, changes the game. While the *demandes d’amour* could still elicit discussion and debate, the answers provided signify that an authoritative answer *is* possible and without further discussion or dialogue; thus, the questions act as pseudo-riddles meant for learning courtly refinement, and the prose dialogue of *demandes d’amour* between the lady and gentleman provides a detailed model simulation for playful courtship and courtliness.

The production and dissemination of these bespoke game-texts—their themes, rules, gameplay, and proximal relations with other texts in the manuscripts—is therefore greatly influenced by their intended audiences. But as texts that appealed to a wide range of readers, from princes and aristocrats to the lesser gentry and friars, and were used for a variety of purposes, the *demandes d’amour* in England complicate—and indeed challenge—the concept of a homogenous “textual community” of readers/players. For Brian Stock, medieval texts and manuscripts generated cohesion through their circulation within existing social networks, a dissemination of ideas through consensus and shared literacy.³³² As Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, et al. have pointed out, however, the “use of the vernacular exposes the gaps in supposedly united

³³¹ MS Royal 16 F II, fol. 188v.

³³² See Stock, *Listening for the Text*, 108-12 (see chap. 1 n. 18). Brian Stock also notes that literacy in the Middle Ages promoted social groupings and human communities, such as heretics and reformers. Textual communities thus incorporated new uses for orality surrounding the literature: as Stock notes, “interaction by word of mouth could take place as a superstructure of an agreed meaning, the textual foundation of behaviour having been entirely internalized,” *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 88-92. In contrast, Martin Irvine interprets ‘textual community’ as a semiotic concept, defining it through the social function of texts—their received canonicity and interpretive commentary that often accompanies texts. See “Medieval Textuality and the Archaeology of Textual Culture,” in *Speaking Two Languages: Traditional Disciplines and Contemporary Theory in Medieval Studies*, ed. Allen Frantzen (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 184.

communities by demonstrating the crucial nonunitary meaning of texts now opened up to diverse constituencies and therefore capable of generating divergent readings.”³³³ Therefore, it is difficult to tease out *what classes played what game* when game-texts such as the *demandes d’amour* emerge in manuscripts intended for widely different audiences, from princes to friars. If we return to MS Additional 60577 for a moment, Braekman acknowledges that the manuscript may have been used in a school, but treats *The Demaundes off Love* as proof that this particular game-text not only circulated among the gentry and middling-classes, but was actively adopted in order to emulate the nobility.³³⁴ The stratified manifestation of the text (and other *demandes d’amour* collections) across a diverse array of manuscripts, however, suggests a different story: the introduction and circulation of the *demandes d’amour* in England reveal a more ad hoc progression of adoption and the purpose (or, purposes) are not always clear from the text alone. The features of the manuscript—marginalia, illuminations, textual variants, layout, organization, textual proximities, fascicules (or ‘booklets’), and other elements of a manuscript’s composition—aid in determining the scribe’s intended purpose and the text’s actual audience, a ‘materialist philology’ as it were.³³⁵ For the scribe of MS Additional 60577, and the subsequent owners who penned notas and manicules along the margins of the text, *The Demaundes off Love* may have served as a valuable pedagogical tool *and* social game-text.

³³³ Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, Nicholas Watson, Andrew Taylor, and Ruth Evans, eds. *The Idea of the Vernacular: An Anthology of Middle English Literary Theory, 1280-1520* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 115.

³³⁴ Braekman, Introduction, 8 and 13.

³³⁵ Nichols, *The Whole Book*, 1-2 (see chap. 2 n. 219). See Chapter 2 for a definition of this term.

3.2.2 The *demandes d'amour* and the English Gentry

In our analysis thus far, the circulation of the *demandes d'amour* in England reveals an appropriation of the game for educational purposes, though they were still used, to a lesser extent, as recreational activities. But there was one group of individuals in England who played with the *demandes d'amour*—and other game-texts, as we shall see—primarily for leisure: the gentry. At the beginning of this chapter, I highlighted Margaret Paston's letter to her husband regarding 'proper' Christmas entertainment (and games) in a gentry household during a time of mourning, but any discussion of gentry culture in medieval England must avoid the trap of assuming a homogenous social structure. The English gentry, Peter Coss argues, formed in the mid-thirteenth century "in an accelerating process" from lesser nobles who owned property and often exerted political influence locally and regionally as public authorities,³³⁶ thus comprising the governing body of rural England. More recently, Raluca Radulescu and Alison Truelove have ventured beyond literal accounts of land ownership and status to argue that the gentry were "an amorphous, ever-fluctuating group of individuals."³³⁷ The recreational activities often associated with the aristocracy—including dancing, hunting, jousting, music, sports, and of course, table and parlour games—were subject to personal taste and accessibility in a gentry household. In England, the chamber, rather than the hall, became the locus of recreation as members of the house entertained guests or friends in small-group activities such as reading,

³³⁶ Peter Coss, *The Origins of the English Gentry* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 11.

³³⁷ Raluca Radulescu and Alison Truelove, Introduction to *Gentry Culture in Late Medieval England*, ed. Raluca Radulescu and Alison Truelove (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 1.

playing games, and participating in other gentle pastimes. Larger households may have had a separate dining parlour designed specifically for entertainment.³³⁸

One particular depiction of *Le Roi Qui Ne Ment* appears as an excerpt of *Les Voeux du Paon* on fols. 142r-53v in Cambridge, CUL Ff 1.6 (The “Findern” Anthology), a manuscript that was produced, owned, and read by multiple lesser gentry families in provincial households around Findern, Derbyshire during the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.³³⁹ The anthology may have been for private use among the families that “encourage[d] experimentation by amateur poets”—experimentations that have resulted in numerous lyrics that are unique to the manuscript and—as Sarah McNamer argues—may have composed, or at least chosen, by women;³⁴⁰ in fact, the manuscript’s recurring conscious interest in female issues in its texts and compilation have led scholars to suggest that it was intended for a primarily female reading audience. In his study of the Findern manuscript’s readers, Ashby Kinch argues that the arrangement of texts “reflect a consistent interest in, and concern with, female lament and agency, particularly male imposition on female decision-making . . . the compilers seem to be

³³⁸ M. Dominica Legge, *Anglo-Norman Literature and its Background* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 3.

³³⁹ The Findern MS was among the first manuscripts to be published as a facsimile. See Richard Beadle and A. E. B. Owen, eds., *The Findern Manuscript: Cambridge University Library MS Ff. 1.6* (London: Scholar, 1977). For extensive examinations of the manuscript’s production and development, see also: Rossel Hope Robbins, “The Findern Manuscript,” *PMLA* 69 (1954): 610-42; Kate Harris, “The Origins and Make-Up of Cambridge University Library MS ff. 1.6,” *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society* 8.3 (1983): 299-333; and Ralph Hanna III “The Production of Cambridge University Library Ms. Ff. 1.6,” *Studies in Bibliography* 40 (1987): 62-70. Most scholars agree that the manuscript was copied in separate fascicles and bound at a later date. Harris alternatively suggests that the manuscript may have been bound together earlier and developed “in the manner of an album, a loose-leaf album” as different individuals made entries. “The Origins,” 318.

³⁴⁰ Sarah McNamer, “Female Authors, Provincial Setting: The Re-Versing of Courtly Love in the Findern Manuscript,” *Viator* 22 (1991): 284.

deeply reflecting on both the limits and possibilities of female response to male authority.”³⁴¹ At first glance, then, the inclusion of *Le Roi Qui Ne Ment* seems unsurprising, even conventional, in its preoccupation with courtly relationships and questions of love; and, perhaps as a result, much of the scholarship on the Findern MS concerns the seemingly more tantalizing texts in the manuscript, including Chaucer’s *Parliament of Fowls*, extracts from Gower’s *Confessio Amantis*, Thomas Hoccleve’s *Letter of Cupid*, the Middle English romance *Sir Degrevant*, and Richard Roos’ translation of *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, among others. But if we were to simply read *Le Roi Qui Ne Ment*’s inclusion in the anthology as a courtly text intended to provide readers with a frivolous ludic pastime or showcase how members of these gentry families “conducted their lives mindful of the need to project to others their perceived superiority” in their inclusion of a courtly game,³⁴² then we would miss the fact that this version of *Le Roi Qui Ne Ment* was adapted in England specifically to address gentry—and, I would argue, female—concerns.

For an anthology that appears, in the words of Ralph Hanna, as though scribal copying was “a sort of social game” among over forty hands, the inclusion of an *actual* game seems to mirror the organic, unstructured process and ludic attitudes inherent in the chosen texts.³⁴³ Ethel Seaton’s work on the Findern MS has been largely discredited by recent scholars, but she nevertheless presents a romantic image of the manuscript as it may have been produced: as she writes, the Findern MS was “added to casually, and probably lain about on window-seats, and suffered in consequence, especially from scribblers.”³⁴⁴ Unlike the other collections of *demandes d’amour* circulating in England, this particular excerpt is one of the only extant translations of

³⁴¹ Ashby Kinch, “‘To thence what was in hir wille:’ a female reading context for the Findern anthology,” *Neophilologus* 91 (2007): 733.

³⁴² Radulescu, “Editor’s Introduction,” 14.

³⁴³ Hanna, “The Production,” 64.

³⁴⁴ Ethel Seaton, *Sir Richard Roos, c. 1410-1482: Lancastrian Poet* (London: Hart-Davis, 1961), 85.

Longuyon's romance into Middle English;³⁴⁵ here it manifests as an embedded game sequence in narrative form. Notably, the part of the romance that is translated and included in the Findern MS is almost exclusively the portrayal of a *Le Roi Qui Ne Ment* game extracted from *Les Voeux du Paon*, and has been used by scholars as a clear indicator of the manuscript's ludic and recreational nature.³⁴⁶ The Findern MS is playful, indeed. And, as Eleanor Hammond, Kate Harris, and Kara Doyle have highlighted, the anthology shares a close affinity in its contents with the so-called 'Oxford Group'—MS Fairfax 16, Bodley 638, and MS Tanner 346—which makes the *Le Roi Qui Ne Ment* excerpt a curious inclusion in the manuscript rather than the widely circulated Middle English game-text *Ragman Rolle* (discussed below) or the Chaucerian game-text *Chaunce of the Dyse*, both of which are found in MS Fairfax 16 and MS Bodley 638. While neither *Ragman Rolle* nor *Chaunce of the Dyse*—which circulated almost exclusively in gentry miscellanies and households books—may have been available for copying or were, perhaps, lost among the missing quires of the manuscript, I would argue that the decision to include *Le Roi Qui Ne Ment* offers readers of the Findern MS a way in which to appropriate a known courtly game for their own purposes that was wholly separate from the two game-texts intended for an urban London audience. “[T]hese women,” writes Kinch, “imagined themselves integrally involved in the cultivated sense of social cohesion invoked in the literature they

³⁴⁵ *Le Roi Qui Ne Ment* section was also included in the Middle Scots translation of the Middle French *Fuerre de Gadres* and *Les Voeux du Paon*, titled *The Buik of Alexander* (mistakenly attributed to the Scottish poet John Barbour), which also departs from the version found in the Findern MS. A unique witness of *The Buik of Alexander* survives as a book printed by Alexander Arbuthnot in Edinburgh (c. 1580). See: R.L. Graeme Ritchie. *The Buik of Alexander*, STS (new series) (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1921-29), especially vols. 12, 17, 21, 25.

³⁴⁶ See, for instance, Kara A. Doyle, “Thisbe Out of Context: Chaucer's Female Readers and the Findern Manuscript,” *The Chaucer Review* 40.3 (2006): 238.

copied: ‘Gyff hem heven forto see/that lovet gamen and gle/And gestic to fede’ (fol. 109v).”³⁴⁷

Games provide a space for social intimacy unlike other forms of entertainment. *Ragman Rolle* and *Chance of the Dyse* both encourage an intimate, participative gamespace among their readers in London, but the *Le Roi Qui Ne Ment* excerpt—a game lifted out of its original courtly and cultural context in France—befits a very different reading/play experience, one that subverts (or at least, intermingles with) the courtly *fin’ amors* in order to conform to the themes of female governance that are prevalent in the rest of the manuscript.

Briefly, *Le Roi Qui Ne Ment* excerpt appears as a “main text” in its own booklet, quire O, penned by Scribe 38—the only item in the manuscript by this scribe. A “filler” lyric, possibly composed by a female reader, on the vagaries of fortune was added later by Scribe 39 in the space following the text (fol. 178r).³⁴⁸ The *Le Roi Qui Ne Ment* excerpt was likely commissioned around the same time as the other main items and bound together with the other gatherings at a later date.³⁴⁹ The English scribe freely adapted the work, thereby accumulating 195 additional lines of text. Karl Roßkopf, the excerpt’s only editor to date, remarks that Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, MS franç. 1554 is the closest version among the roughly forty-three manuscripts that include *Les Voeux du Paon*, but is not a direct source.³⁵⁰ In her illuminating

³⁴⁷ Kinch, “To thenke what was hir wille,” 731.

³⁴⁸ See McNamer, “Female Authors,” 290 and 293 for a brief discussion of this lyric.

³⁴⁹ Based on a copying error on fol. 171r, Harris observes that *Le Roi Qui Ne Ment* excerpt was copied page for page using a now-lost exemplar in a “professional practice.” “The Origins,” 309. The scribe corrects a number of mistakes in his text; on fol. 172r, for instance, his eye slips and he fuses lines 306 and 308, omitting line 307 altogether. Noticing his error, the scribe attempts to correct his mistake by adding in line 307 and then decides to start the stanza fresh on the next page, crossing out the imperfect lines. Two kinds of stock were used to produce Quire O: Stock 4 (also shared by D, E, and K) and stock 13 (unique to Quire O).

³⁵⁰ Karl Roßkopf, ed. *Editio princeps des mittelenglischen Cassamus (Alexanderfragmentes) der Universitätsbibliothek Cambridge* (Erlangen: K.B. Hof- und Universitätsbuchdruckerei von Junge & Sohn, 1911), 15-17. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS 264 is also very similar, with a difference of five

study of *Les Voeux du Paon*, H  l  ne Bellon-M  guelle argues that Longuyon alters the *Roman d'Alexandre* cycle by transforming the bitter feuds and horrors of war into events spurring playfulness among a courtly leisure society. This evocation of *l'esprit ludique* is typified in the game scenes in the romance—namely, the chess match and *Le Roi Qui Ne Ment*—which not only influences all other events in the narrative, but also lends a sense of courtliness. The *Le Roi Qui Ne Ment* episode becomes a way in which to embody displays of courtesy and courtly behaviour that would have resonated with fourteenth-century French aristocratic audiences.³⁵¹ The additions, omissions, and emendations in the Middle English excerpt, I argue, change the work's meaning to emphasize obedience and devotion in relationships—concerns that are also reflected in other texts included in the Findern MS. In *Les Voeux du Paon*, five characters play *Le Roi Qui Ne Ment* in the Chamber of Venus at the request of Cassamus: Betis, his younger sister Fesonas, his cousin Edea, Ydorus, and their prisoner-guest Cassiel. Cassamus encourages this type of entertainment for their prisoner of war, partially in an effort to pair Edea and Cassiel. As Green notes, *Le Roi Qui Ne Ment* may have been played as a way to facilitate courtship, and the game in *Les Voeux du Paon* certainly supports his case: both Betis/Ydorus and Cassiel/Edea marry later in the narrative.³⁵² In the Findern MS, however, this sense of courtly playfulness is revalorized in the context of gentry relationship concerns, and such marriages are never indicated or explicated in the excerpt. An audience familiar with the romance would have been aware of

lines, and I will be using this manuscript to make my comparisons between the Old French *Les Voeux du Paon* and the *Roi Qui Ne Ment* excerpt in the Findern MS.

³⁵¹ See especially Helene Bellon-Meguelle's discussion of *Le Roi Qui Ne Ment* and matters of love on pages 379-83 and pastimes on pages 423-64, *Du Temple de Mars    la Chambre de V  nus: la beau jeu courtois dans les Voeux du Paon de Jacques de Longuyon* (Paris: Honor   Champion, 2008).

³⁵² Green, "Le Roi Qui Ne Ment," 212-13.

the relationships, but in the excerpt the focus remains on the game. Immediately after Betis is elected 'king', he commands his 'subjects' to comply with his rule:

Hys astat vp-on hym to take tho gan he sped
And to hem aside: "Loke ȝe now alle, take hede
That my commaundementes ȝe trewely obbeye."
"ȝis," they seyde alle wyth-owte drede,
"That ȝe commaunde vs, þe trowþe shul we seye."³⁵³

This passage is an extension of one line in *Les Voeux du Paon*: "Puis si a demande que bien soit entendus" [Then he requested that he will be heard].³⁵⁴ More than an embellishment, the adaptation in the Findern MS brings the rules of the game to a literal extreme: here Betis is not simply a player, but assumes the position of a male authority on love, one that must be obeyed and followed. This theme of obedience is drawn out in other additions as well. Betis' question to Ydorus is translated as: "Fair maide Ydore, sey me now as swythe/As towechyng to my-self, w[h]o hat[h] ȝowe longe obbeyde!"³⁵⁵ The English scribe also extends Ydorus' response in order to draw out her duty of servitude for a future lover (i.e. Betis) (Table 3.1).

³⁵³ Roßkopf, *Editio princeps*, lines 28-32.

³⁵⁴ Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, MS franç 1554, fol. 29r. Other versions in French are similar to MS 1554. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 264 states, for instance, "Et li rois demanda quil soit bien entendus" (fol. 120r). All transcriptions from Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, MS franç 1554 and MS Bodley 264 are my own.

³⁵⁵ Roßkopf, *Editio princeps*, lines 103-04.

MS Bodley 264	MS Ff 1.6 (Findern)
<p>Bele dame Idorus dirons nous ensement O il te moie part te vous ne sai comment He tous cuers enseignies tounor parfaitement Confortes vostre ami dun seul otroiement Sire dist la pucele ie nai nul pensement Que ia deuiegne amie en parler seulement Quant ien ferai le ton chiert si tresfrancement Quanoec le ton tonrai cuer et cors et talent Ja ne me maintenrai vers amors fausement³⁵⁶</p>	<p>“Fair maide Ydore, sey me now as swythe As towechyng to my-self, w[h]o hat[h] 3owe longe obbeyde! Swete herte, yn loue taw3t so parfethly, Comforte yowr loue with a sely graunt!” “Sere,” saide this maide, “I telle yow trewly As towechyng this mater, I may make avaunt, To be-come a louer 3it was I neuere obbeysaunt In thow3t ne yn wyl, that dar I wel saye. And to whom I graunte, I shal make a conuenaunt Hym trewly to loue and lowly obbeye; For w[h]an I make that graunt, it shal be do frely, That wyth that graunt I 3eue herte and body yn fere; Shal I neuere to my loue gouerne vntrew[e]ly, But wyth body and herte make hym good chere, And hym yk therto yn the best manere. Thus shall I me gouerne, what þat euere he be; And that hym list teche I wyl gladly lere; For fully hym to plesse, I wyl obbeye me.³⁵⁷</p>

Table 3.1: Translation of *Le Voeux du Paon* into Middle English in the Findern Anthology

Such a response departs from other depictions of women’s governance in the Findern MS. In *The Parliament of Fowls*, for instance, the female formel eagle has the freedom and power to choose her own lover in the game of *fin* ‘amors’. In other instances of the courtly love ethos, it is often the male suitor declaring his unfailing commitment to his potential lover. As Kara Doyle articulates, other texts in the Findern MS aim to highlight how a women should “weight and respond to the claims of devotion and service offered by a courtly suitor.”³⁵⁸ In the *Le Roi Qui Ne Ment* excerpt, the manner in which the female players respond is, for the scribe, to show obedience to their lover. Ydorus’ answer conforms to gender norms. In Ydorus’ final question to

³⁵⁶ MS Bodley 264, fol. 120v.

³⁵⁷ Roßkopf, *Editio princeps*, lines 103-20.

³⁵⁸ Doyle, “Thisbe Out of Context,” 241.

Betis, in which she asks “w[h]iche iij thyngis haue most suffysaunce, / To make trewe loueres sytte on the w[h]el a-boue,” is presented in the Middle English translation by a compliant Ydorus to “my lord, my gouernour” the king: “‘Sere’ she seyde, ‘I stonde in gret errour / Of iij thynges of loue; therfore wolde I be / Enformed sekirly of yow that be my kynge.’”³⁵⁹ She thus takes the position of a student, and Betis’ answer (also greatly extended in the translation) reinforces his position as the authority on matters of love, in which “Al the coreccioun to yow I recommaunde.”³⁶⁰ In a text that is, essentially, a literal depiction of the game of love, the scribe’s recurring emphasis on female submission and servitude intensifies the dissonance between matters of love and the realities of marriage, which, for the gentry, were often local and arranged by families. Gentry women in Derbyshire and elsewhere in England were responsible for preserving the estate for future generations, and the vows of marriage also signified compliance to a husband and household. In both Margaret Paston’s and Margery Brews’ letters to their husbands, they occasionally address them as “my rytȝ wurschipful mayster.”³⁶¹ Furthermore, Margery Brews signs her letters to her husband, John Paston III, as “Be yowre seruaunt and bedewoman.”³⁶² McNamer considers these terms of address “statements of literal truth,” and, in the context of a game on courtship, the addition and reiteration of female servitude in the *Le Roi Qui Ne Ment* excerpt exemplifies this relational hierarchy between husband and wife. Agnes Stonor extends this quality of female devotion even further:

Right worshipfull Maister, y hertly comaund me unto you with alle suche servise as y can

³⁵⁹ Roßkopf, *Editio princeps*, lines 404-05, 392, and 397-99.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 441.

³⁶¹ Davis, *Paston Letters*, 233-37, 295, and 663-69.

³⁶² *Ibid.*, 663-69.

or may: thonking you of youre kyndenesse shewed unto me, so pore a woman as y am,
and unto your Maystershup owndeserved.”³⁶³

In this light, *Le Roi Qui Ne Ment* is not included simply, in the word of Doyle, to “evoke this atmosphere of playful flirtation and debate.” While the game retains a sense of pleasure, the scribal adaptations promoting female obedience punctuate the courtly game with marriage roles that would have been legible to female readers.³⁶⁴

It is perhaps no accident that the *Le Roi Qui Ne Ment* excerpt appears in the Findern MS immediately after Roos’s translation of Alain Chartier’s *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, a text lauded for its ability to spark debate among its readers regarding love.³⁶⁵ For the Belle Dame, *fin amors* should be treated as trifling courtly play: she refuses the male courtier’s advances in all instances, thereby avoiding submission to the lover’s male gaze. She not only retains her sense of independence, but also warns women of the false words of men:

Ye trewe lovers, thus I beseche you alle:
Suche aventours, fle heim in every wise,
And as people defamed ye heim calle;
For they, trewly, doo you gret prejudice.
Refuse hath mad, for al sich flateryse,
His castellis stronge, stuffed with ordenaunce,
For they have made longe tyme, by thaire office,
The hole countré of Love in obeissaunce.³⁶⁶

Juxtaposed together, whether by the original compilers or a later antiquarian binding the manuscript, the Belle Dame’s skepticism of the courtly love object informs the adapted game of

³⁶³ Charles Lethbridge Kingsford, ed. *The Stonor Letters and Papers 1290-1483*, vol. 29 (London: Offices of the Society, 1919), 100.

³⁶⁴ Doyle, “Thisbe Out of Context,” 233.

³⁶⁵ See Emma Cayley, “Collaborative Communities: The Manuscript Context of Alain Chartier’s *Belle Dame Sans Mercy*,” *Medium Ævum* 71 (2002): 226-40.

³⁶⁶ Dana M. Symons, ed., “La Belle Dame Sans Mercy,” *Chaucerian Dream Visions and Complaints*, TEAMS Middle English Texts Series (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute, 2004), lines 813-20.

Le Roi Qui Ne Ment. While the seemingly courtly game may ostensibly appear at odds with the Belle Dame's final verdict on *fin 'amors*, its additions and extensions render the formal game as a critique of its own artifice. In Betis' first question, directed at Edea, the aim of the game is to draw out personal, intimate details through the personification of love: "Tel me, yf euere 3e felte vp-on yow ryse / The sorwes of loue & euelys þat hym doth sue!"³⁶⁷ This question is not telling on its own, and indeed the questions found in this episode of *Le Roi Qui Ne Ment* appear elsewhere in other *demandes d'amour* collections, but her coy response, "hym that I loue, shal I not refuse" immediately establishes her as a love-object worth pursuing, and, unsurprisingly, Cassiel is instantly smitten by her beauty:

Here blod ther wyth stere her bewte gan to sprynge;
 She semed fayrer a gret del than before.
 Bawdryn here beheld; he thow[3]te so fayr a thyng
 Hadde he neuer seen seth ferst that he was bore.
 Here bewte his herte wyth loue hath smet so sore,
 That his desir ys fully hir to serue.
 His loue to here en-cresyth so more & more,
 That he hir seruaunt muste be tyl that he sterue.³⁶⁸

Again the scribe extends the original Old French to focus on the Cassiel's promise of devotion, but here the thoughts of service are presented in a more conventional fashion. For Cassiel, Edea becomes the love-object—a clear contrast to La Belle Dame's behaviour. His gaze is not only found at the beginning of the game, but also concludes it. There is an overview of the scene as it reaches an end, "dyportes and plays & al maner gladnesse / Among these lusty folkes entrecomvned be,"³⁶⁹ but it is also connected to Cassiel's gaze:

³⁶⁷ Roßkopf, *Editio princeps*, lines 39-40.

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, lines 57-64. This is an extension of three lines: "Li Baudrains lesgarda si fu au cuer ferus / Damors et de biaute qui li corurent sus / Et force ce desir qui si est embatus" MS Bodley 264, fol. 120v.

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, lines 447-48.

Summe meryly ta[l]kyng & summe holden hem coye.
In suche a maner presoun sum folke, I trowe, wold be,
As ys this ilke Bawdrayn, þat hath before hys eye
A merour ful of plesaunce, w[h]er-of right glad is he.
For no man shal hym lette þer-yn right wel to prie;
And ther-yn may he se the shap so wommanly³⁷⁰

Among the larger backdrop of texts focusing on female agency, *Le Roi Qui Ne Ment* presents a troubling text: in a game that adheres to the rules of *fin* ‘amors, the female devotion and objectification emphasized by the English scribe reveals the limits of female choice. As Kinch notes, “the compilers seem to be deeply reflecting on both the limits and possibilities of female response to male authority and imposition.”³⁷¹ This sentiment appears elsewhere in the manuscript as well. In a sixteenth-century lyric added on fol. 56r by Scribe 11, for instance, a speaker writes, “ffor euery daye / they wait ether pray / wher-so they may, / and make butt game.”³⁷² The figurative ‘game of love’ may take place in the Chamber of Venus, but is ruled by the authority of men. The inclusion of *Le Roi Qui Ne Ment* in the Findern MS, then, appears to be unmasking the bounds of female agency in the marital ‘game of love:’ a tension between “confirming” and “resisting” gender norms in courtly narratives.³⁷³

This position is further reinforced by the ad hoc frame of war in the excerpt, for the *Le Roi Qui Ne Ment* excerpt seems conscious of its place within the larger context of warfare.³⁷⁴ The excerpt begins by Cassamus’ commands to Ydorus and Betis to entertain their prisoner of

³⁷⁰ Ibid., lines 454-59.

³⁷¹ Kinch, “To thenke what was in hir wille,” 733.

³⁷² See also McNamer, “Female Authors,” 304.

³⁷³ Kinch, “To thenke what was in hir wille,” 733.

³⁷⁴ While Henry Bradshaw believed a lost bifolium had begun *Le Roi Qui Ne Ment* excerpt, Derek Pearsall has argued that the extract is complete. Derek Pearsall, “The English Romance in the Fifteenth Century,” *Essays and Studies* 29 (1976), 71n1.

war: “do hym chere, & wyth that maide of pris, / That ys faire Ede, make hym aqweynted be.”

As I have mentioned, the main purpose of this episode is political: pair Edea and Cassiel, an enemy and captive of Cassamus’ side. As Cruse remarks, the episode in *Les Voeux du Paon* offered “a ludic and amorous parallel to the warfare that rages outside the palace and city walls.”³⁷⁵ The game itself takes place in a woman’s ludic space, in which “these fresh[e] ladyes & these lordes ben sette / On kussyns of silk to-gedir to and to, / Spekyng of loue & other thyngges mo.”³⁷⁶ But combat is never far from their thoughts: after Ydorus replies to Betis’ question, she turns the conversation to war and, more importantly, playfully vows to love Betis should he return from war with Clarus.³⁷⁷ Notably, the excerpt does not end with the game or Cassiel’s gazing at Edea. Rather, it turns to Clarus’ camp and his strategies for warfare. While the young folks are playing *Le Roi Qui Ne Ment*, Clarus is complaining “of the grette slawtre, and of the grette affray / [That] he and his men hadde yn the hom coming.”³⁷⁸ When he hears that his cousin Cassiel has been captured, he dissuades Marcien from launching an attack on the city, noting that Cassiel is likely at play with the young women and not in any real danger.³⁷⁹ The concluding line in the excerpt highlights the nobility of Clarus’ four sons, all knights who have just returned from hunting: “Men seyde of these iiij was a noble sy3te.”³⁸⁰ Why conclude here? This stanza does not end a section in *Les Voeux du Paon*, which continues to describe the qualities of the knights and plans for warfare. Rather, framing the game sequence within the larger events of war reflects the separation and uncertainty of combat—and demonstrates again

³⁷⁵ Mark Cruse, *Illuminating the Roman d’Alexandre*, 28.

³⁷⁶ Roßkopf, *Editio princeps*, lines 11-13.

³⁷⁷ See Roßkopf, *Editio princeps*, lines 121-30.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, lines 469-70.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, lines 496-504.

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, line 567.

the active, participative method of selecting and editing by the Findern MS's scribes and compilers. While war is still presented in a ludic atmosphere, feelings of separation from a lover appears immediately following the excerpt in the lyric "A Woman's Lament Against Fortune." Possibly from the point of view of a woman spurred by real-life circumstances, the lyric describes the hardship one experiences at the separation of a loved one: "And thynke what sorowe is the departing / Of *two* trewe hertis louyng faithfully; / For partyng is the most soroughfull thynge / To my entent, that euer yet knewe I."³⁸¹ In her plea to Fortune, the female speaker seems at first glance to be participating in the social play of love, but, as McNamer observes, this particular lyric insists on showing "the continuing pain of separation"—a pain that differs from the pain of unrequited love and sorrowful longing often found in courtly love lyrics. While the lyric's juxtaposition with the excerpt may be coincidental (if the composer merely found some empty space in the manuscript), the themes of love and loss nevertheless resonate in both texts—and evidence of similar juxtapositions of lyric and canonical texts can be found elsewhere in the manuscript.³⁸² Husbands of gentry women often had to travel for great lengths of time for warfare or work. If the primary purpose of the *Le Roi Qui Ne Ment* excerpt was to provide rules or a mnemonic for the game or encourage debate, as with other *demandes d'amour* collections, then it would have been reasonable to end the excerpt after the game episode. The apposition of *Le Roi Qui Ne Ment* and depictions of war therefore indicates more than simply a courtly game within a chivalrous setting. While its original context denotes a game of leisure for elite readers, the scribe's selective editing of the *Le Roi Qui Ne Ment* excerpt in the Findern MS

³⁸¹ McNamer, "Female Authors," 310.

³⁸² For a comprehensive discussion of the Findern anthology in the *fin' amors* tradition, see Cynthia Rogers, "'Make thereof a game:' The Findern Manuscript's Lyrics and their Late Medieval Textual Community," PhD diss (Indiana University, 2015).

reflects not only the adaptation of a French courtly game in the context of a female provincial gentry readership, but also offer a complex reading of female identity, one that is able to reinforce or counter other behavioural identities offered by other texts in the manuscript. The game *Le Roi Qui Ne Ment* may have been played by the readers of the Findern MS in Derbyshire, but the inclusion of the text also offers a different kind of ludic experience: participation in debating the role and agency of women.

From the manuscript evidence, the *demandes d'amour* were clearly not as popular as a game in England, but their appropriation demonstrates how these game-texts could move fluidly and easily into different manuscript contexts for different purposes. The *demandes d'amour* were used by individuals across the social strata in question-and-answer, dialogue, and narrative form and were used as a playable text in the sixteenth century as well. Highlighting the (re)discovery of the 'active audience' concept in game studies, a concept already well-known to medievalists, Bryan Behrenshausen illuminates what he sees as a fallacious structure-player binaristic understanding of games that has resulted from a traditionally formalist approach to game studies: "[m]odels of a gaming situation couched in logics of relations between readers and texts cannot completely account for the complex, multifaceted operations of power crisscrossing this particular situation, whose domains entail juridical, protocological, infrastructural, racial, geopolitical, algorithmic, cultural, and economic."³⁸³ *Le Roi Qui Ne Ment* excerpt works because it is able to perform at multiple levels of meaning: as a game, as an exploration of gender normativity, as a narrative, and as a debate among other texts, among other things. The Old French game *Le Roi Qui Ne Ment*, for English readers, is not taken at face-value and instead played according to multiple influences imposed on the text. While we must account for the

³⁸³ Bryan Behrenshausen, "The Active Audience, Again," 874.

various cultural, social, material, and political processes that makeup this gaming situation—and, of course, texts—it is therefore not enough to reduce the player to one body among many within a larger assemblage of influential entities. As Taylor remarks, “players do not just consume. Or act as passive audience members of, the game but instead are active co-creators in producing it as a meaningful experience and artifact.”³⁸⁴ Devaluing the role of the player not only potentially relegates the idea of ‘player’ to an ideal or abstraction, but also fails to take into account the distinct *modus operandi* of gameplay: player agency between players and other game elements. And it is this interaction—the connection between a player and their game—that renders the experience significant. For medieval game-texts in particular, this convergence occurs primarily through a player’s engagement with a manuscript. The next section of this chapter focuses on another game-text that was also adapted from Northern France, but still circulated primarily as a game enjoyed by the gentry in England: the fortune-telling game *Ragemon le Bon*.

3.3 Tracing Ragemon

The pivotal role that the provincial gentry household played in the transmission of vernacular literature in England has been well established by scholars.³⁸⁵ Games sit at the nexus of narrative and the material world and, as a result, share a close relationship with manuscripts in the Middle Ages. As I discussed in Chapter 1, their occasional cultural expression as *text* sometimes masks their wider associations as participative, interactive entertainment. Literary

³⁸⁴ T. L. Taylor, *Play Between Worlds: Exploring Online Game Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 133.

³⁸⁵ Peter Coss, “Aspects of Cultural Diffusion in Medieval England: The Early Romances, Local Society and Robin Hood,” *Past & Present* 108 (1985): 44–45 .

scholars tend to stress the importance of recreational literature in gentry households, but the gentry could enjoy literature within a larger constellation of amusements, including chess and game problems. As I have shown, such activities often shared a closer relationship with literature than has previously been thought. Like modern interactive fiction that combines game elements with narrative, game-texts move fluidly between media we frequently delimit as either ‘literature’ or ‘game.’ For medieval audiences, who enjoyed the oral performance of recreational literature alongside other entertainments, the boundaries were not so clearly fixed.

In this section, I chart the transmission and social evolution of the heretofore little-discussed Anglo-Norman game-text *Ragemon le Bon* to more fully understand how it operated as a site of engagement and entertainment both for poets and gentry audiences and blurs the theoretical boundaries between ‘game’ and literature.³⁸⁶ Situated in Quire 22 of Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Digby 86 (fols. 157r-164v)—a thirteenth-century trilingual quire that includes *Les Miracles de Saint Nicholas* [the Miracles of Saint Nicholas], Marian prayers, and the Middle English lyric on the transience of worldly goods, “Worldes Blis”—*Ragemon le Bon* is an amorous game of chance that consists of fifty stanzas each revealing a player’s fortune, often about matters of love. Found in manuscripts over a 300 year period, *Ragemon le Bon* surfaces in various guises in manuscripts for gentry audiences in England, including its incorporation into Anglo-Norman clerical texts and Middle English Chaucerian games; attesting to its chameleon-like nature, the game-text moves from provincial households of the emerging

³⁸⁶ See also: Arthur Långfors, *Un Jeu de société au moyen âge, Ragemon le Bon*, *Annales Academiae Scientiarum Fennicae*, Ser. B, 15, No. 2 (Helsinki, 1920-21); John Frankis, “The Social Context of Vernacular Writing in Thirteenth Century England: The Evidence of the Manuscripts,” in *Thirteenth Century England I: Proceedings of the Newcastle Upon Tyne Conference 1985*, eds. Peter R. Coss and S. D. Lloyd (New Hampshire: Boydell, 1985), 175-184; and Peter Coss, *The Foundations of Gentry Life: the Multons of Frampton and their World 1270-1370* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 245-48.

gentry to networks of urban players in London. While it would likely be fallacious to consider this game-text as a reliable reproduction of *actual* courtly or social behavior, the projections and characters arising from *Ragemon le Bon*—and its subsequent play in gentry households—provide an arena for exploring the attitudes and spaces afforded for play. Studying these game-texts also provides insight into “how the gentry saw themselves, [and] if possible how others saw them, bearing in mind that identities are multiple and changeable.”³⁸⁷ The enduring play of *Ragemon le Bon* and its successors thereby offers further understanding into how the transmission of games could fluidly move between spaces as diverse as play and piety, and more generally between what we deem ‘game’ and ‘literature,’ repurposed according to the needs and desires of its players.

The first surviving witness of *Ragemon le Bon* appears in the diocese of Worcestershire, England during the later thirteenth century; a unique witness of the game appears in England on fols. 162r-163v in MS Digby 86 (ca. 1372-82), a commonplace miscellany tied to known gentry households. The manuscript was likely copied by its first owner, Richard II de Grimhill, a member of the lesser gentry who had ties to families in royal courtly circles, including the Beauchamps of Warwick.³⁸⁸ Richard de Grimhill was not a knight, but, rather, a legal attendant and land owner, and was one of three Worcestershire men “sent out as justices to examine infringements of the Magna Carta.”³⁸⁹ The other family names that appear in MS Digby 86, the Underhills and the Pendocks, are also related to Richard through marriage and as

³⁸⁷ Christine Carpenter, “Gentry and Community in Medieval England,” *The Journal of British Studies* 33.4 (1994): 379.

³⁸⁸ Judith Tschann and Malcom Parkes, Introduction to *Facsimile of Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Digby 86*, Early English Text Society (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), lvii.

³⁸⁹ Coss, *The Foundations of Gentry Life*, 233.

beneficiaries.³⁹⁰ In the early fourteenth century, MS Digby 86 passed from Richard to Amice, his daughter, who in turn married Simon Underhill. Throughout this history, MS Digby 86 persisted as a personal object whose readers continually added marginalia, notes, pen trials for wills and documents, and other content.³⁹¹ Through this ongoing process, MS Digby 86—and by extension *Ragemon le Bon*—became a personal item and social text passed down among a community of readers.

Ragemon le Bon appears in the manuscript without instruction or any indication of its ludic, interactive nature. All early courtly games of chance, as far as we know, included a mixed company of players (both men and women); only later in the fifteenth century did some of them develop into strictly women's games.³⁹² Players may have played *Ragemon le Bon* in a number of different ways: players might have copied stanzas onto pieces of parchment with a seal and string attached, since “Ragman Rolls” (rolls of deeds on parchment) likely inspired the mechanics of the game.³⁹³ Alternatively, players may have chosen a fortune at random from the manuscript by attaching a string to the margin or by using their fingers to point to a fortune. This divination mechanism differs from other medieval literary games such as *Chaunce of the Dyse*, which uses three dice instead of string to dispense fortunes to players.³⁹⁴ Good fortunes typically depict riches, favorable character traits, success in love, courtly behavior, eloquence, and fame, while misfortunes highlight the player's fickleness, folly, gluttony, danger, pain, or other foibles.

³⁹⁰ Miller, “The Early History of Bodleian MS Digby 86,” 42.

³⁹¹ For a detailed description of later hands and additions, see Miller, “The Early History,” 23-56.

³⁹² See Nicola McDonald's examination of fifteenth-century women's games, including *Ragman Rolle*: McDonald, “Games Medieval Women Play,” 176-97 (see chap. 1 n. 14).

³⁹³ “Ragman Roll” was also the document used by the Scottish gentry and nobility to swear allegiance to King Edward I between 1291-92.

³⁹⁴ See Chapter 1 for a discussion of divination, probability, and fortune-telling games.

Through this nonlinear, interactive reading/play experience, the collection of character-defining fortunes given to players would generate an emergent story that could change with each new iteration of gameplay; as a precursor to our modern role-playing games, medieval players became protagonists immersed in the game's imaginary world at the same time that they may have enjoyed the display of etiquette and social mannerisms afforded, and indeed, encouraged, by these games.

The origins of *Ragemon le Bon* as a parlour entertainment begin on the Continent. Amorous textual games of chance such as *Le Jeu d'Aventure* [the Game of Chance] (ca. 1278) and *Le Jeu d'Amour* [The Game of Love] (MS ca. 1400) both arose in Northern France during the late thirteenth century, possibly influenced by earlier courtly question-and-answer and debate games.³⁹⁵ While *Le Jeu d'Aventure* employs string and *Le Jeu d'Amour* uses dice for its divination mechanism, both game-texts emphasize courtly behavior—or deviation from it—in their fortunes, enabling players to engage in “mock courtship” similar to *Le Roi Qui Ne Ment* discussed above.³⁹⁶ By receiving random stanzas, players could insert themselves directly into the courtly rhetoric.

Le Jeu d'Aventure, which shares the same mechanics as *Ragemon le Bon*, appears on fols. 259v-60v in Paris, BnF, fonds français 837, a celebrated collection of fabliaux and other literary entertainments copied in a Northern Francien hand. For the most part, fortunes in *Le Jeu d'Aventure* emphasize desirable and undesirable character descriptions emanating from courtly social conduct. An example of this can be seen in fortune nine of *Le Jeu d'Aventure*, which describes the ideal characteristics of a courtly lady:

³⁹⁵ The *Archives de littérature du Moyen Âge* titles the work “Les gens d’aventure,” but will I use modernized spelling throughout.

³⁹⁶ Green, ““*Le Roi qui ne ment*,” 211-25.

Envoisiez, cortois et jolis
Serez, et bien parlanz toz dis,
Et amerez chiens et oisiaus,
Et mult aurez de vos aviaus.³⁹⁷

[You are fun-loving, courteous and pretty, and an excellent speaker with your words. You love dogs and birds and will have much of your desire]³⁹⁸

The fortune reinforces desirable attributes, including beauty, eloquence, and a fondness for pets, and illustrates how players could imagine themselves in this fictive world of courtly dalliance. For male players, receiving these fortunes could provide a humorous subversion of gender normativity. The aim of the fortunes was not simply to describe a player's character, but, rather, to draw out innuendo and playful courtship, much like modern party games such as "Truth or Dare" and "I Never," which also operate on the basis of truth-telling to reveal new aspects of players and craft moments of embarrassment and dalliance. Fortune six, for instance, suggests that the male player has a love interest: "Grant joie aurez de vostre amie, / Quar ele ert cortoise et jolie. / Si l'amerez et ele vous / Toz jors léaument par amors" [Great joy you have of your friend, for she is courteous and pretty. If you love her and she you, everyday you will love each other loyally in love],³⁹⁹ which could lead to further discussions of this hypothetical lady. Aristocratic audiences could cultivate the courtly codes of behavior exemplified in *Le Jeu d'Aventure* through, in David Burnley's words, "the enjoyment of leisure" that provides privileged access to

³⁹⁷ Achille Jubinal, ed., "Geus d'Aventures," in *Jongleurs et trouvères* (Paris: J. Albert Merklein, 1835), lines 33-36.

³⁹⁸ All translations of *Le Jeu d'Aventure* are my own.

³⁹⁹ Jubinal, "Geus d'Aventures," lines 21-24.

specialized knowledge—we can recall here Oiseuse (literally, ‘Leisure’) from *Roman de la Rose*, who guards the garden of courtliness.⁴⁰⁰

Other fortunes in *Le Jeu d’Aventure* foresee the player becoming a profitable merchant, facing extreme poverty, or losing his or her reputation if they do not roll a five or a six while gambling.⁴⁰¹ The most appalling fortunes insult the player by accentuating loathsome traits or skills, delineating the player a “borderes” [boaster] or “chat uslé” [howling cat]. Other fortunes, such as number twenty-five, caution the player to change their ways or else suffer dire consequences: “Ades seras-tu truferiaus, / Uns borderes, uns lécheriaus; / Sages cuides estre et cortois, / Et si ne sez vaillant .ij. nois” [Right now you are a scofferous braggart and a glutton; Live with wise thoughts and courtesy, or you will not be valiant for ten nights.]⁴⁰² But arguably, the worst fortune occurs at the end of the collection in stanza thirty-four; unlike other fortunes, it is juxtaposed with a moral lesson in the last fortune—notably the only one in the collection:

Volentiers alez au bordel,
Et où l'en jue au tremere,
Et gaaigniez mult à envis;
Por ce estesrvous trop chétis.⁴⁰³

[You desire to go to a brothel, where you play at gambling and win considerably again and again; For that you are unduly wretched.]

⁴⁰⁰ David Burnley, *Courtliness and Literature in Medieval England* (New York: Longman, 1998), 53. While courtly activities were not often thought of as “useful accomplishments” for men and women, the plethora of descriptions of courtly ladies reading stories of Troy, playing chess, sewing, feeding a pet, and playing musical instruments indicate a need to illustrate external symbols of courtly refinement.

⁴⁰¹ Jubinal, “Geus d’Aventures,” line 50, lines 19-20, lines 1-4. While gambling was widespread across medieval Europe, ecclesiastics frequently condemned it and Kings wrote laws and decrees to ban it. Gamblers most often used dice-games due to the element of chance to quickly impact one’s life through wins and losses. Ecclesiastics and lawmakers also considered gambling a sin in all forms because it often led to greed, addiction, idleness, and other poor habits. See Purdie, “Dice-games,” 167-84 (see chap 1 n. 76). See also Bubezyk, “Ludus inhonestus et illicitus?,” 23-43 (see chap 2 n. 190).

⁴⁰² Jubinal, “Geus d’Aventures,” lines 97-100.

⁴⁰³ *Ibid.*, lines 133-36.

Onques n'amastes fausseté,
Mes toz jors bien et léauté,
Et ne vous esmaiez de rien ,
Qu'encore aurez assez de bien.⁴⁰⁴

[Never fancy falseness but live with goodness and integrity every day. Do this and you will not fear anything. Again you will have plenty of virtue.]

Fortune thirty-four is the only stanza to combine both a socially immoral locale and the evils of gambling. For the poet, all forms of gambling, whether wins or losses, constitute a wretched act. Thus, even a good gambler is a despicable individual. Perhaps in response to this despicable behavior, the last fortune does not ascribe a laudable personality trait to the player—unlike all the other good fortunes—but, rather, points to virtue only as an aspiration.

Although *Le Jeu d'Aventure*'s thirty-five stanzas do not directly mirror those of *Ragemon le Bon*, they do share a number of phrases and themes, suggesting that both poems either derived from an earlier copy that had circulated in Northern France and passed to England, or used common stock phrases from variant games that a 'game designer' poet could easily manipulate. In *Ragemon le Bon*, for instance, fortune two reads:

Vous fausez trop sovent vos dis,
Touz jours irrez de mal en pis:
Ore vous repentez come sage,
Ou vous averez la male rage.⁴⁰⁵

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid., lines 137-40.

⁴⁰⁵ Thomas Wright, ed. "A Game of Chance," in *Anecdota literaria: a collection of short poems in English, Latin, and French, illustrative of the literature and history of England in the thirteenth century* (London: John Russell Smith, 1844), lines 5-8. Subsequent citations will be references parenthetically in-text.

[You often unreasonably falsify your words. Every day goes from bad to worse: now you should repent as one who is wise or you will have violent pain.]⁴⁰⁶

The first two lines also appear in stanza seventeen of *Le Jeu d'Aventure* as:

Vous faussez trop sovent voz dis;
Toz jors alez de mal en pis.
Votz parole est trop volage:
Si vous en tient l'en mains à sage.⁴⁰⁷

[You often unreasonably falsify your words. Every day goes from bad to worse. Your word is too fickle: unless you remain in the hands of the wise.]

Both stanzas share the phrasing and the theme of a false tongue, but *Ragemon le Bon* differs in its emphasis on repentance and the risk of experiencing acute physical pain; the term ‘male rage’ appears elsewhere in thirteenth-century poetry in England as a description of violence, though the term ‘rage’ was also associated with toothaches. Given the description of the player’s false words, the source of pain might also spring from the mouth.⁴⁰⁸ Due to the modularity afforded by

⁴⁰⁶ All translations of *Ragemon le Bon* are my own.

⁴⁰⁷ Jubinal, “Geus d’Aventures,” lines 65-68.

⁴⁰⁸ In a thirteenth-century Anglo-Norman political lyric concerning King Edward I, the poet writes, “Nostre rays Edward ait la male rage! [May our King Edward suffer the male rage].” In the Anglo-Norman fabliau *Le Chevalier à la Corbeille* [the Knight of the Basket], found uniquely in MS Harley 2253, fols. 115v-117r, the lady uses the term ‘male rage’ to wish the death of a peeping old crone (line 80, fol. 116r). According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the term ‘rage’ became associated with toothaches around 1352, though the association may have occurred much earlier. The use of the term in Middle English appears in *Terms of Association* as “A rage of tethe,” located in Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, MS Brogyntyn 2.1 (olim Porkington 10) (c. 1450) and Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawlinson D.328 (c. 1475). In 1538, the Flemish composer Thomas Crecquillon uses the phrase ‘male rage’ in his song “Alix avoit aux dents la male rage” [Alice has a violent toothache], wherein Alice’s beloved promises to cure her toothache by inducing heartache in its stead. See: “rage, n.” *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed September 2011, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/157438?rskey=r1IB1v&result=1&isAdvanced=false> and Stefano Eramo, “Classical Music and the Teeth,” *Journal of the History of Dentistry* 60.3 (2012): 36-37.

game-poems such as *Ragemon le Bon* and *Le Jeu d'Aventure*, game poets could adapt the game to incorporate regional tastes for the audience.

The use of string or parchment to draw fortunes therefore does not provide a full understanding of the game: the game's cultural meaning—and enjoyment—is also dependent upon its ability to craft a ludic textual fortune for the players. Cultural game studies scholars have downplayed the importance of narrative in games, arguing that mechanics make a game enjoyable and the content simply provides an aesthetic exterior (a user interface) in which to interact with the game's mechanics.⁴⁰⁹ In *Ragemon le Bon* and *Le Jeu d'Aventure*, however, emergent narrative becomes a critical point of cultural signification. Both games deploy the same mechanics, but their differing content suggests that they are not, in effect, the same game.

3.3.1 *Ragemon le Bon* and the Fabliau Tradition

While *Le Jeu d'Aventure*'s fortunes stem from the realm of courtly romance for an aristocratic audience, *Ragemon le Bon*'s poet, I argue, plants his game-text squarely within the genre of fabliaux for gentry players: popular tales that are noted for their erotic, bawdy comic traits and end with an explicit (and often mock serious) moral. The scribe-compiler situated *Ragemon le Bon* close to the earliest extant Middle English fabliau *Dame Sirith* (fols. 165r-168r), in which the young clerk Wilkin seduces Marjeri, a merchant's wife, through the trickery of Dame Sirith. "These often scandalous works," Howard Bloch writes, "are filled with the celebration of bodily appetites: sexual, economic, and gastronomic, and, yes, even a human need

⁴⁰⁹ Game designer Raph Koster argues that fiction in games are "convenient metaphors" that wraps the patterns underlying games. *A Theory of Fun for Game Design* (Arizona: Paraglyph, 2005), 80-86.

for laughter.”⁴¹⁰ Take, for instance, *Ragemon le Bon*’s thirty-fifth fortune, which portrays a male player’s rakish sexual conduct:

Jolifs estes et amorous,
Mout fotez en nuiz, en jours;
Jà si lede ne troverez,
Que volounters ne la fouterez (140-44).

[You are spirited and amorous. You fuck often night and day. No matter how ugly you find a woman you will fuck her willingly.]

This fortune is book-ended by a fortune calling out a disdainful male speaker on the one hand and a player who will be granted income, palfreys, stallions, and weapons of great renown on the other. The verb ‘foter’ (literally, ‘to fuck’) appears multiple times in *Ragemon le Bon*, along with references to cheating, love affairs, and the baring of backsides to lovers. *Le Jeu d’Aventure* does not make any reference to such activities. In fact, the word ‘courtesy’ only appears five times in *Ragemon le Bon*’s fifty fortunes, though a number of fortunes do highlight aristocratic values. *Ragemon le Bon*’s eleventh fortune appears to be a re-written version of stanza twenty-one in *Le Jeu d’Aventure*, which effectively subverts a theoretically positive blessing of childbirth with accusations of whorishness:

Bele fame aurez-vous assez,
Se vous de li estes amez;
Grant plenté d'enfans avez,
Ne jà ne moutéplierez.⁴¹¹

[Lovely lady will you have enough that you are well loved. You will have a great abundance of children and will always multiply.]

In *Ragemon le Bon*, stanza eleven reads:

⁴¹⁰ R. Howard Bloch, introduction to *The Fabliaux*, trans. Nathaniel E. Dubin (New York: Liveright, 2013), xxi.

⁴¹¹ Jubinal, “Geus d’Aventures,” lines 137-40.

Bele femme et pute avez,
La si ben ne vous garderez;
Enfaunz plusours avez,
Mès jà un soul ne engendrez (84-87).

[Lovely lady, embodying whoreishness, indeed you do not heed virtue; you will have plenty of children, but never produce a soul.]

Whereas the abundance of children promised in *le Jeu d'Aventure* secures a strong family lineage, the whore will only produce “soulless” bastards due to her lustful behavior, which hinders her family’s future. Another example of this fabliau-like text occurs in two fortunes that offer differing views on courtship; a player’s loyalty to his lover in *Le Jeu d'Aventure*’s sixth fortune (quoted above) is entirely absent in *Ragemon le Bon*’s fourth and sixth fortunes, which emphasize carnal pleasure:

Grant joie avez de vostre amie:
Deu vous tenge longe vie!
Touz jours serez mout vaillaunt,
E voustre amie atretaunt (13-16).

[You have great affection for your friend: God will grant you a long life! Every day you will have a great deal of bravery and your friend will attend to you.]

De vostre amie joie avez
Quant entre vos braz la tendrez:
Mès poi la goie vous durra,
Kar ele vous enginera (21-24).

[You have great affection for your friend when she tenderly enters your arms: but the joy that you two have will not endure because she will deceive you.]

In this way, *Ragemon le Bon* positions portrayals of courtly refinement alongside burlesque outcomes, associating itself more closely with the scandalous actions often found in the manuscript’s *lais* and *fabliaux*: in fortune six, for instance, the woman portrayed in the vignette

becomes a vehicle for deception, much like Dame Sirith. *Ragemon le Bon* thus provides its readers with a social game situated within a popular genre that still emphasizes status, even as it diverges from its origins on the Continent.

With a few exceptions, many of the extant Anglo-Norman fabliau appear in MS Digby 86 and MS Harley 2253, both of which were gentry manuscripts.⁴¹² Two of the fabliaux found in MS 837 also appear in MS Digby 86, namely *Les Quatre Sohais Saint Martin* [The Four Wishes of Saint Martin] (fols. 113r-13v) and an excerpt of *Le Blasme des femmes* [The Reproach of Women] (fols. 113v-14r). Together with works that focus on edification or entertainment, including *La Complainte de Jerusalem* [The Complaint of Jerusalem] by Huon de Saint-Quentin (fols. 103v-105r), Robert Biket's *Le Lai du Cor* [The Lai of the Horn] (fols. 105r-109v), "Le Fablel del gelous" [The Fabliau of the Jealous Man] (fols. 109v-110r), *La Prière Nostre Dame* by Thibaut d'Amiens (fols. 110r-111r), and *La Bestournee* (fols. 111r-112v), this sequence and amalgamation of texts fashions an intertextual debate that Keith Busby observes is "an alternation of the frivolous and the serious, the spiritual and the secular, which creates humor by juxtaposition and *Stimmungsbrechung*"—the breaking of a mood through a *sic-et-non* arrangement of materials.⁴¹³

The poet of *Ragemon le Bon* also arranges the fortunes in a *sic-et-non* structure by weaving together vulgar and devout predictions. In this way, *Ragemon le Bon* offers a text that

⁴¹² N. R. Her, ed., *Facsimile of British Museum MS. Harley 2253* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965). Ian and Roy Percy, eds. *Eighteen Anglo-Norman Fabliaux*, Plain Texts Series 14 (London: Anglo-Norman Text Society, 2000). Notably, the editors do not include *Ragemon le Bon* in their survey of Anglo-Norman fabliaux.

⁴¹³ Keith Busby, "Esprit gaulois for the English: The Humour of the Anglo-Norman fabliau," in *The Old French Fabliaux: Essays on Comedy and Context*, eds. Kristin L. Burr, John F. Moran, and Norris J. Lacy (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2007), 162.

imitates the structures and organization of other recreational texts found in MS Digby 86. We can see a clear juxtaposition between sexuality and piety in fortunes thirteen and fourteen, for instance:

La damaisele ki vous prendra
Mout sovent vout gabela,
Kar ele fra verrement
Sovent foutre de la gent (49-52).

[The lady that you take will frequently mock you because she will truthfully fuck other men often.]

Vous servirez la fiz Marie
Touz les jours de vostre vie;
Asez aerez ben et honour,
Taunt cum servirez toun seingnur (53-56).

[You serve the Virgin Mary all of the days of your life; you will have plenty of good fortune and honor, because you often serve your husband.]

Fortune thirteen, addressed to a male player, exemplifies the uncouth, sexually deviant woman—a motif found in fabliaux and anti-woman texts. Fortune fourteen, on the other hand, promises good fortune to the female player as a reward for her obedience to her husband and for her devotion to Mary. The game-text presented to the reader comprises two alternate modes of interaction: the playfully ergodic, and the morally linear—though both can overlap and influence each other. If *Ragemon le Bon* displays a scandalous sexuality in comparison to *Le Jeu d’Aventure*, it also displays a stronger disposition toward repentance and spirituality. Fortune forty-nine remarks that God will grant the player a long life due to his or her courtesy (198-99), and fortune one notes that God will grant the player “grant honour, / E grant joie et grant vigour” [great honor, great joy, and great vigor] (1-2). Fortune nine indicts the player with four sins:

“Iveresse et glotonnie, / E coveitise, et lecherie, / Ces quatre serount assis / Mout ferm en vostre quer toudis [drunkenness and gluttony, jealousy and lechery: these four sins are seated and firmly fixed in your twisted heart] (33-36). Interspersed with offensive, libidinous fortunes, then, *Ragemon le Bon* also incorporates discussions of God’s will more strongly than does *Le Jeu d’Aventure*, which only mentions “Dieu” twice. For the *Ragemon* poet, God is the true agent of fortune.

When players draw the fortunes at random, the contrasting representations of women and men encourage discussions of social conduct and gender, much like the anti-woman debates found in the manuscript’s earlier *sic-et-non* organization and texts. In a much-discussed Anglo-Norman section in the manuscript (fols. 65r-112v), the scribe-compiler combines three French verses—*Les Quatre Souhais*, an excerpt from *Les Blasme des Femmes*, and an excerpt from *Le Chastie-Musart* [The Punished Bawd]—to craft a singularly misogynistic dialogue around the terrible nature of women. The fabliau that begins this dialogue prefaces the other two in a ludic context, so when *les Blasme des Femmes* is inserted without warning, it occurs as a follow-up discussion of the wife’s shrewishness in squandering four wishes granted to her husband by Saint Martin. In this way, the scribe-compiler seeks to juxtapose multiple dialogues for discussion and reflection.⁴¹⁴ In the Middle English bird-debate *The Thrush and the Nightingale*, the apposition of pro- and anti-woman speakers indicates again a trend toward performing divergent points of view. After the four initial stanzas, the entire text, save for a few narrative embellishments, is composed of dialogue. The readers (or performers) participating in these *sic-et-non* discussions are “expected to understand by the way the book is put together that the world is not simply pro

⁴¹⁴ *Les Blasme des Femmes* is also reproduced as a singular text in MS Harley 2253 (fol. 111r) and is coupled with *Des Trois Femmes*, *Le Dit des Femmes*, and Nicolas Bozon’s *De la Femme et de la Pie*.

or con, but pro *and* con.”⁴¹⁵ In *Ragemon le Bon*, then, the sexual fortunes, or woman-as-*plaything*, promised through mock prognostication are thus offset by the *sic-et-non* structure established by the mixed collection of fortunes and the mixed company of players. Dictated by random chance, an exposition of a player’s supposed prostitution or piety hangs upon the whims of fortune. In effect, the players can then safely stage a ludic performance as the types of obscene, excessive, and bawdy characters found elsewhere in the manuscript’s fabliaux, together with characters promoting good behavior, governance, and devotion.

The nature of women is a popular topic in MS Digby 86 and, as we have witnessed in the fortunes above, forms a core theme throughout *Ragemon le Bon*. Fortunes for women appear throughout the game-text, and eight fortunes addressed to female players are added at the end of the game. Couched with misogynistic nuances, the game-text contrasts fortunes depicting deplorable character traits, such as the revelation that the player is a “baudestrote” (female pimp) (192), with honorable characteristics, including courtesy, beauty, and honour. Fortune forty-three praises the lady as “bloundette, doucette estes, et bele” [demur, docile, you are, and beautiful] before praising the man who can bed her and later boast of the coupling (169-72). It is not enough, however, to observe that many of the fortunes depict women as projections of male desire; in Jacques Lacan’s well-known seminar “Courtly Love as Anamorphosis,” he presents courtly love as a process of sublimation by elevating a woman from the realities of the everyday to an ideal, a *Thing*: she embodies an inaccessible Lady-Object, viewable only in a distorted manner.⁴¹⁶ In *Ragemon le Bon*, the unabashed carnality of a number of fortunes provides for the

⁴¹⁵ Carter Revard, “‘Gilote et Johane:’ An Interlude in B. L. MS Harley 2253,” *Studies in Philology* 79.2 (1982): 132.

⁴¹⁶ Jacques Lacan, “Courtly Love as Anamorphosis,” in *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959-60*, The Seminars of Jacques Lacan, ed. Jacques Alain Miller, trans. Dennis Porter (New York: Norton, 1992), 7:139-55.

players a means of discussing, and occasionally mocking, this seemingly inaccessible idealism or “‘black hole’ around which the subject’s desire is structured”—and bound up with such enjoyment that the game creates a *jouissance* of sorts.⁴¹⁷ In fortune thirty-two, the poet imagines a future sexual encounter for a player: “Meuz amerez od une pucele, / En verger ou en praele, / Pur toucher sur la mamele, / Que le jeu de la frestele” [You will love a whore, in orchard or in meadow, for touching on her breast begins the game of the flute] (128-31). The sexual imagery in this vignette displays satirical overtones, again characterizing the players as the rakes and whores typical of fabliaux. For fortune thirty-two, the recipient is sexy, naughty, and ‘lucky in love.’ But it is the game’s interactive and emergent narrative that reveals the matrix of possibilities inherent in the fortunes. Imagine, if you will, a series of potential consequences for a player drawing fortune thirty-two: a female player may blush, a wife may look at her ‘rakish’ husband disdainfully, a young man may play up the lusty character in response to another’s fortune, or a player may respond in protest against his or her fortune. This, of course, is speculation, but I wish to make it clear that these fortunes are not meant to be read in isolation; rather, *Ragemon le Bon* encourages provocation and intrigue: its fortunes seem clearly intended to spur laughter and reflection, protest and delight.

What, then, do all of these fortunes say about their players? *Ragemon le Bon*’s preoccupation with sexualized bodies and uncouth behaviour, set against a contrasting moral didacticism and aristocratic attributes, proffers a mode of entertainment rooted in literary realism; as an interactive fabliau, the game is positioned not only as a satire of courtly conduct, but also as a means through which players could instill values within their own social context. The game-text, in other words, provides a safe space for transgressing societal norms, not to

⁴¹⁷ Slavoj Žižek, *The Metastases of Enjoyment: On Women and Causality* (New York: Verso, 1994), 94.

practice courtly virtue, such as in the games *le Roi Qui Ne Ment* or *Le Jeu d'Aventure*, but, rather, to indulge in what may be considered a Bakhtinian “carnavalesque” game world. I should note that the “carnavalesque” play space created in *Ragemon le Bon* does not adhere to the modern interpretation of Bahktinian games as sites of freedom and liberation, but rather the medieval understanding that cultural norms could be subverted within the fabliau tradition.⁴¹⁸ Family members, friends, and other guests of the household may have enjoyed the game in the chamber or parlour in small groups of three to six players, as I mentioned earlier. This notion of the medieval home as a “locus of domesticity,” as discussed by Jeremy Goldberg and Maryanne Kowaleski, was “an ideological construct that invested much greater cultural significance in the physical structure as a stage for playing out a range of social and gender relations.”⁴¹⁹ *Ragemon le Bon*, and other games played in the gentry home, also provide a place to perform and to play with gender and social roles, much like the adapted *Le Roi Qui Ne Ment* excerpt in the Findern MS.

3.3.2 Other Ragmans

Whether or not *Ragemon le Bon* circulated in France is currently unknown. The transmission of *Ragemon le Bon* and its succeeding text the Chaucerian *Ragman Rolle* (early fifteenth century) in England attests to the presence of a sustained lay readership for more than three hundred years. A variant of the game appears in Cambridge, Trinity College, MS B.14.39

⁴¹⁸ See Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1941). Bakhtin also notes how carnivalesque humor is “reflected in the *fabliaux*” genre in particular, 5.

⁴¹⁹ P. J. P. Goldberg and Maryanne Kowaleski, “Introduction. Medieval Domesticity: Home, Housing and Household,” in *Medieval Domesticity: Home, Housing and Household in Medieval England*, eds. Maryanne Kowaleski and P. J. P. Goldberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 9.

(ca. 1255-60), a large trilingual manuscript containing over 140 items including a large collection of Middle English devotional verse; the poet recycled the game-text as two Anglo-Norman verse games on 73r and 82v, which bear a close resemblance to a number of the fortunes found in *Ragemon le Bon* and *Le Jeu d'Aventure*. Departing from the *fin' amors* and fabliau traditions, the poet focuses instead on Christian themes. The first fortune appears as an adapted version of fortune two in *Ragemon le Bon* and fortune 17 in *Le Jeu d'Aventure*:

Ky ke e faus sovent en diz
Tut jurs irat de mal en piz
Deu la durat male rage
Si vus ne resperatit del utrage.

[That (You) unreasonably falsify your words, every day goes from bad to worse. God will give you *male rage*, if you do not recover from offence.]⁴²⁰

Similarly, fortune two manifests as an altered warning against gambling incited by fortune twenty-three in *Le Jeu d'Aventure*:

Hasard [ne] riches vus pose
Mez tut faudiz ben dire le [c]hose
Lescet vius e dez quariez
Vou vous nature et en povertiez.

[Hazard has not made you rich for a long time, but you must say well of the thing: leave the four-sided die or else you will be in a state of poverty.]⁴²¹

Riches serez, bien dire l'ose ,
Mès en la fin, à la parclose,
Li geus des tables et des dez
Vous chaceront à povretez.

⁴²⁰ Fol. 73r, lines 1-4. I am currently preparing an edition of the game sermons. This translation is my own.

⁴²¹ Fol. 73r, lines 5-8.

[You are rich, but in the end, at the conclusion, with games of tables and dice you chase at poverty.]⁴²²

In this game-text, the well-to-do gambler foolishly losing his fortune is exchanged for a player-portrait attempting to foolishly become rich by playing Hazard. This intermingling of both *Ragemon le Bon* and *Le Jeu d’Aventure* in the game-text therefore indicates that both texts, and possibly numerous variants, were accessible in England.

Entered by Scribe E, the two religious game-texts illustrate a clear use for ludic entertainments in providing interesting material to lay church-goers and clergy, and the fortunes are noticeably more devout in style. The first instance on fol. 73r appears in a quire mostly composed by scribe E and dedicated to sermon material. The poet, however, has adapted the game to clerical aims. In fortune five, for instance, the author compels the player:

Lesset tute ribaudies
E p[er]ches e vilaynies
Car la joye por dura
Mes u peuie grant sera

[Leave all your ribauldries, sins and villanies, and you will receive great joy.]⁴²³

Two Middle English works surround the second sermon: a lyric praising the Virgin Mary and a meditation on the passion of Christ. John Scahill argues that English content is present in the manuscript because it was “the preferred language for oral delivery.”⁴²⁴ That the game-texts are entered alongside English works both denotes an organizational scheme based on theme—rather than on language—and suggests that they were similarly meant to be read aloud, perhaps as part

⁴²² Jubinal, “Geus d’Aventures,” lines 89-92.

⁴²³ Fol. 73r.

⁴²⁴ John Scahill, “Trilingualism in Middle English Miscellanies: Language and Literature,” *The Yearbook of English Studies* 33 (2003): 20.

of a sermon or religious gathering.⁴²⁵ Karl Reichl notes that priests may have also used Trinity B.14.39 as a preaching book, and John Frankis has more recently identified the manuscript as a tool used by clerics for teaching the laity.⁴²⁶ Other popular works were also converted to homilies in the manuscript (e.g., Robert of Gretham's *Miroir*), again suggesting an effort to appeal to the laity with familiar, ludic texts.⁴²⁷

In the Chaucerian game-poem *Ragman Rolle*, the poet eschews the types of vulgarities found in *Ragemon le Bon* in favor of a more courtly ladies' social game; beginning with a set of instructions to "draw with a stryng" blessed by "Kynge Ragman," the twenty-three fortunes reveal, for the most part, favorable character portraits—describing women of a certain 'kynde'—and focus on the ladies' social behaviors and virtue. Fortune three begins, for instance, with the portrait of a traditional courtly lady: "Your colour fresshe, your Percyng eyen gray, / Your shap and your womanly governaunce."⁴²⁸ Fortune nine accuses the player of a loose tongue that will "hurte and offende" many men, while fortune thirteen praises the lady's "joly and light" complexion and skill at dancing.⁴²⁹ *Ragman Rolle* therefore indicates the game-poet's conscious

⁴²⁵ Ralph Hanna III, "Miscelleneity and Vernacularity: Conditions of Literary Production in Late Medieval England," in *The Whole Book: Cultural Perspectives on the Medieval Miscellany*, eds. Stephen G. Nichols and Siegfried Wenzel (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 46-47. See also Julia Boffey and John J. Thompson, "Anthologies and Miscellanies: Production and Choice of Texts," in *Book Production and Publishing in Britain, 1375-1475*, eds. Jeremy Griffiths and Derek Pearsall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989; repr. 2007), 257-69.

⁴²⁶ Karl Reichl has produced the only edition of the manuscript, including a detailed description of its contents, *Religiöse Dichtung im englischen Hochmittelalter* (München: Fink, 1973) and John Frankis, "The Social Context of Vernacular Writing," 182.

⁴²⁷ Scahill, "Trilingualism," 22n13.

⁴²⁸ Thomas Wright, ed., "Ragman Rolle," in *Anecdota literaria: a collection of short poems in English, Latin, and French, illustrative of the literature and history of England in the thirteenth century* (London: John Russell Smith, 1844), lines 41-42.

⁴²⁹ Wright, "Ragman Rolle," lines 100-104 and 131-33.

effort to modernize and sophisticate the game to bring it in line with the then-current literary trends by lengthening each fortune to eight-line stanzas in iambic pentameter, alluding to classical gods such as Mercury and Bacchus, and explicitly personifying Lady Fortune as an agent of chance. *Ragman Rolle* resonates with the English literary mode of love poetry in late medieval England, situated alongside such works as Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls*, John Clanvowe's *The Book of Cupid* (or, *The Cuckoo and the Nightingale*), Thomas Hoccleve's *The Letter of Cupid*, and John Lydgate's *The Complaint of the Black Knight*.

Ragman Rolle appears in two fifteenth-century anthologies, Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Fairfax 16 (ca. 1450) and Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 638 (ca. 1475-1500), but unlike other miscellanies studied here, both manuscripts arose from commercial book production in London.⁴³⁰ John Gower certainly knew of the popularity of a certain Ragman game, noting that “me drawe Of Rageman upon the chance” in his *Confessio Amantis* (ca. 1390), and his allusion to the game suggests that *Ragemon le Bon* or another lost version of the game may have been circulating in London in the late fourteenth century.⁴³¹ John Norton-Smith notes that MS Fairfax 16 was a bespoke manuscript for an individual from the “landed gentry,” composed of individual booklets that were later bound together.⁴³² Much of the manuscript's contents comprise material from the *fin' amors* tradition. Most investigations of the manuscript note the themes of love that tie the manuscript together, but the structure of MS Fairfax 16 also seems

⁴³⁰ See Carol Meale, “Book Production and Social Status,” in *Book Production and Publishing in Britain, 1375-1475*, eds. Jeremy Griffiths and Derek Pearsall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989; repr. 2007), 201-38. See also A. S. G. Edwards and Derek Pearsall, “The Manuscripts of the Major English Poetic Texts,” in *Book Production and Publishing in Britain, 1375-1475*, eds. Jeremy Griffiths and Derek Pearsall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989; repr. 2007), 260-63.

⁴³¹ Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, 1:8.2378-9 (see chap 1 n. 56).

⁴³² John Norton-Smith, ed., Introduction to *Bodleian Library MS Fairfax 16* (London: Scolar Press, 1979), p. vii.

determined to promote interactive elements of courtly recreation and experience. Booklet I, in particular, provides an arrangement of texts encouraging debate, role-play, and discussion, including Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls* and Clanvowe's *The Book of Cupid*. Teresa Tinkle argues that the manuscript emphasizes themes of Cupid, love, and courtly experience for a decidedly male audience as forms of "masculine socialization"—for male readers who fashion themselves as "lovers and poets"—but the presence of *Ragman Rolle*, together with texts that consider concerns of women, suggest that there was likely a female audience in mind as well.⁴³³ Games, of course, represented a significant recreational activity both for men and women of the gentry and it is unsurprising that Booklet I should reproduce a large number of ludic texts such as Richard Roos's translation of *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* and Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*—texts that scholars such as Betsy McCormick and Nicola McDonald have argued are, in fact, game-like.⁴³⁴ The scribe pairs *Ragman Rolle* with *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*—notably, a pairing not unlike the juxtaposition of *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* and *Le Roi Qui Ne Ment* in the Findern MS—suggesting that readers can either play at discovering their own feminine attributes or discuss the character of Roos's cruel mistress in the game of love. Just as *Ragemon le Bon* depicts its players within a fabliau-like world, so do *Ragman Rolle* and *Chaunce of the Dyse* situate their players within a realm of English courtly dalliance.

Fortune eleven from *Ragman Rolle* is preserved at the bottom of fol. 263v in a fifteenth-century household miscellany, London, British Library, Additional 36983 (ca. 1442), immediately after the Middle English *An ABC of Aristotle* (fol. 263r-v) and preceding the Middle

⁴³³ Teresa Tinkle, "The Imagined Chaucerian Community of Bodleian MS Fairfax 16," in *Chaucer and the Challenges of Medievalism: Studies in Honor of H. A. Kelly*, eds. Donka Minkova and Theresa Tinkle (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), 162 and 157.

⁴³⁴ McDonald, "Games Medieval Women Play," 176-97; McCormick, "Remembering the Game," 105-31 (see chap 1 n 14).

English romance *Ipotis* on fols. 264r-268r; the folio 262r-263v seems to be an insert written by Scribe 5 in a Bastard Anglicana hand (his only contribution to the manuscript), with the *Ragman Rolle* excerpt appearing at the end of the leaf.⁴³⁵ The scribe does not make clear his intentions for the fortune's inclusion, though it may have been repurposed to highlight the Virgin Mary's positive attributes. Alternatively, the excerpt may have been the result of a player's fortune that they had wished to record:

Who couthe suche a woman counterffete
That on alle ffollys hathe counpassion
Upon the ryche for thayre yeffte Grete
On the pouer for thayre gode condicion
On bisschops for thayre absolucion
Prste and clerke for thay can syng swete
On knyghte & squyers for theyre renoun
On yomen & Gromes for thay can stiffly schate [hold their post]
En . V . O. Y⁴³⁶

Situated alongside Chaucer's minor poems, the *Speculum Guy of Warwick*, the *Cursor Mundi*, *The Pricke of Conscience*, and other devotional texts, MS Additional 36983, like MS Digby 86 and MS Harley 2253, was devised to suit the needs of a specific household and audience. This reconfiguration of *Ragman Rolle*, then, remind us of the fluidity that texts could exhibit as audiences actively engaged in the creation and dissemination of content, "whether for private reading or group listening."⁴³⁷ The excerpt could thus act as a prompt for prioritizing time both for devotion *and* play, and, like the religious game-texts in MS Trinity B.14.39, illustrates how

⁴³⁵ Gisela Guddat-Figge, *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Middle English Romances* (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1976), 166.

⁴³⁶ London, British Library, MS Additional 36983, fols. 262r-63v.

⁴³⁷ Rust, *Imaginary Worlds*, 10 (see chap. 2 n. 218)

readers and poets could use popular ludic pastimes to reflect on deeper spiritual issues, just as people today use lyrics and out-of-context phrases to create online memes.

Although no extant printed copies of *Ragman Rolle* exist, copiers' marks in MS Bodley 638 suggest that it was among the key texts handpicked for printing and the primary copy-text for Wynkyn de Worde's early sixteenth-century edition of *Ragman Rolle*. In the nineteenth century, William Carew Hazlitt recorded an envoy to a now-lost printed edition of de Worde's *Ragman Rolle*:

Go lytyl rolle where thou arte bought or solde
Amonge fayre women behaue the manerly:
Without rewarde of any fee or golde,
Saye as it is touchynge trouthe hardely: & c.

[E]nprynted at London in the Fletestrete at the [Sygn]e of the Sonne by Wynkyn de Worde.⁴³⁸

MS Bodley 638 also served as a copy-text for de Worde's now-lost edition of *Chaunce of the Dyse*, Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls*, and John Lydgate's *Complaint of a Lover's Life*. In her study of MS Bodley 638 as a printers' copy, Mary Erler notes that the manuscript was in circulation for at least five years in publishing houses, beginning around 1526, and was also used for Richard Pynson's edition of *The Parliament of Fowls*.⁴³⁹ As a printed text, *Ragman Rolle*, having endured for over 300 years as a parlour game for gentry audiences, becomes entangled with the emerging commercial book trade. The envoy marks *Ragman Rolle* as a desired commodity for gentle ladies, and its attempt to forego "fee or golde" denotes a not-so-subtle irony given the text's adherence to virtue: *Ragman Rolle* would certainly not fetch a high price, but, being a game now marketed to players, de Worde would likely desire compensation for it.

⁴³⁸ William Carew Hazlitt, *Bibliographical Collections and Notes 1867-76*, 495.

⁴³⁹ Mary C. Erler, 'Printers' Copy: MS Bodley 638 and the *Parliament of Fowls*,' *The Chaucer Review* 33.3 (1999): 224.

De Worde's edition, as Alexandra Gillespie writes, "conflates the object of the game with a commerce in books."⁴⁴⁰ This process of commercialization highlights an important turning point in the production and dissemination of games in Europe. Gaming pieces, such as pawns and portable boards, were historically produced by craftsmen alongside other items.⁴⁴¹ De Worde's printer's shop, along with the transmission and commoditization of other games in England, marks the first step toward a wider distribution of games and, later, the foundation for game manufacturers and designers in England (a topic I discuss further in Chapter 4).⁴⁴² Games of luxury, once played by the gentry and urban elite, had transitioned into objects of entertainment that were now marketable to an increasingly diverse social spectrum of consumers.

3.4 Conclusion

The study of entertainment in the Middle Ages reveals a great deal about the various spaces allocated for play—that is, pastimes that manifest as material, oral, and textual places and objects. The culture of the gentry in England, which was often socially ambivalent and "pervaded by a sense of insecurity," adopted pastimes such as *Ragemon le Bon*, debates on matters of love, and table games perhaps to "convince others of their worthiness."⁴⁴³ While they could emulate games once played by French ladies of the upper-classes, they seemed just as pleased to be labelled "whores" and "rakes"—a seeming contradiction that nonetheless pivots

⁴⁴⁰ Alexandra Gillespie, *Print Culture and the Medieval Author: Chaucer, Lydgate, and their Books 1474-1557* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 117.

⁴⁴¹ See, for instance, the craftsmanship of the walrus-carved Lewis chessmen. James Robinson, *The Lewis Chessmen*, British Museum Objects in Focus (London: British Museum Press, 2004), 57-63.

⁴⁴² In 1628, a group of playing card producers in London rallied together and, with the Charles I's support, founded the Worshipful Company of Makers of Playing Cards by royal charter. See Chapter 4 for an in-depth discussion of early modern playing cards.

⁴⁴³ Radulescu and Truelove, "Editor's Introduction," 14.

around a sense of pleasure in assuming various identities and roles. The gentry were not the only class to enjoy such games, however. In England poets, compilers, and readers also adapted games to explore their own interests and issues, and game-texts were often appropriated to teach moral and spiritual lessons. As for the technological restrictions a medieval manuscript can afford, a compiler, scribe, or ‘game designer’ poet, whose games were destined for recreation in a household and community, would be *designing for a player experience*—an experience rooted in familiar literary genres and imaginary worlds. From their origins as aristocratic games in Northern France, *Ragemon le Bon*, *Le Roi Qui Ne Ment*, and their various manifestations indicate not only an enduring household interest in this form of entertainment, but also a progression of the game-text’s *mouvance* as it circulated among and between pockets of gentry networks and beyond; the game-text’s open structure pushes its variance beyond the stylistic and compilatory to additionally reflect the interests, tastes, and pleasures of particular reading communities.

Ragemon le Bon and its variants, as I have argued, are not simply texts but modular objects that were repurposed, refashioned, reimagined, and replayed throughout the later Middle Ages. It is their fluidity as forms of entertainment—as activities that encourage *dalliance* and elicit participation—that enabled these games to inhabit different textual spaces. While they may be considered edge cases within the modern definition of games as posited by game studies scholars, game-texts like the *demandes d’amour* and *Ragemon le Bon* nevertheless show that medieval players considered them games and ludic experiences. When game-texts such as *Ragemon le Bon*, *les demandes d’amour*, and the other literary games are viewed as idiosyncratic texts by medievalists and game studies scholars, they easily succumb to neglect, with little acknowledgment of their perceived cultural value. When considered together, however, these game-texts reveal a revealing landscape of literary entertainment; medieval audiences did not

simply enjoy hearing, reading, discussing, and debating their fabliaux, romance, and courtly narratives: they wanted to be immersed *in* them.

Chapter 4

Geography, Narrative, and the Rise of the Thematic Game

The very point of the map [is] to present us not with the world we can *see*, but to point *toward* a world we might *know*.⁴⁴⁴

“Win the game and you win the world!” proclaims a 1987 television commercial voice-over for *Risk*, a turn-based strategy board game designed by filmmaker Albert Lamorisse and released in 1957 as *La Conquête du Monde* [The Conquest of the World].⁴⁴⁵ The most popular version of the game, purchased by Parker Brothers and released in 1959 under the title *Risk: The Continental Game*, requires two to six players to compete for a visual map of the world by forging alliances with other players, defeating opponents, and sweeping across continents with personal armies. Although *Risk*’s game board exemplifies a simplistic likeness of the Earth, with forty-two territories representing various geographical regions and countries (e.g. “Western Canada” and “China”), its reconceptualization of geography depicts an imagined world with

Sections of this chapter have been published previously in *Playthings in Early Modernity: Party Games, World Games, Mind Games*, ed. Allison Levy (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2017).

⁴⁴⁴ Denis Wood, *The Power of Maps* (New York: The Guildford Press, 1992), 12.

⁴⁴⁵ “Risk Board Game Commercial,” *TV Obscurities*, April 2, 2009, accessed November 10 2014 <http://www.tvobscurities.com/2009/04/risk-board-game-commercial>.

which to envisage alternate histories and outcomes. The world of *Risk*, in other words, takes our own geographical boundaries as a point of departure, for the territories and transit lanes it maps globally do not correspond to real-world national borders and terrain, even at the beginning of the game.⁴⁴⁶

Game designers have a notable history of using maps in the creation of fictional worlds, whether based on a fantastical realm, like that of the Victorian board game *The Prince's Quest* (1890), or on our own world, as in the modern video game series *Port Royale* (2002–2012), which takes place in the seventeenth century Caribbean. Certainly by the 1950s, the use of geography, maps, and fictional worlds as primary spaces for cultivating engaging experiences based on narrative themes was a well-established phenomenon in the board game industry.⁴⁴⁷ More than a background aesthetic, maps and geography in modern board games such as *Uncle Wiggily* (1916), *The Wizard of Oz* (1921), *Diplomacy* (1959), and *Carcassonne* (2000) have, as in *Risk*, become key components of gameplay; players must conquer a map, race to a finish line, or explore an unknown world. In *Ticket to Ride* (2004), for example, players attempt to connect their train routes to specific secret destinations on a large map of North America, or, in the case of the game's first expansion, Europe.⁴⁴⁸ Maps and cartography have also been essential components of a player's experience in digital games. For early mass-market video games such

⁴⁴⁶ Countries like Brazil are highlighted as distinct territories while other countries, like Chile, are not present in the game at all but rather under the territory labeled "Argentina." Canada comprises four territories, while the six territories that divide Africa are a combination of region and country (North Africa, Egypt, East Africa, Congo, South Africa, and Madagascar).

⁴⁴⁷ Other contemporaneous games, including *Tactics* (1954) and *Stratego* (1961), deploy political and military game spaces through the use of geography and topological terrain, and influenced later board games such as *Axis and Allies* (1981), *The Settlers of Catan* (1995) and video games such as *Europa Universalis* (2000), and Sid Meier's series *Civilization* (1991-2017).

⁴⁴⁸ *Ticket to Ride*, Alan R. Moon (Days of Wonder, 2004) and *Ticket to Ride: Europe*, Alan R. Moon (Days of Wonder, 2005).

as *The Legend of Zelda* (1986) and *The Secret of Monkey Island* (1990), the “function of maps,” writes Thomas Rowland, “revolutionized gameplay” since players could orient themselves visually, track progress, and explore imaginary worlds.⁴⁴⁹ These cartographic elements enable players to play through the game’s narrative at the same time they chart the player’s progress through the game. In immersive three-dimensional worlds such as the massively multiplayer online games *World of Warcraft* (2004-present) and *Lord of the Rings Online* (2007-present), maps not only designate a player’s location in the world but also adhere to the cartographical principles of scale and proportion. Maps and other visual markings, whether on a board or screen, often concretely and unambiguously represent imaginary worlds in games, even if some of the gameplay takes place externally through the use of tokens or a player’s imagination.

In an illuminating study on the creation of secondary worlds—that is, fictional places that differ from our own world (the “Primary World”) in some significant way and comprise the background setting in literature, film, and other media—media studies scholar Mark Wolf notes that despite the long history of fictional worlds in literature, beginning in classical antiquity, “few board games propose an imaginary world as a setting for game events,” with the exception of tabletop role-playing games such as *Dungeons & Dragons* (1974).⁴⁵⁰ For Wolf, games like

⁴⁴⁹ Thomas Rowland, “We Will Travel by Map: Maps as Narrative Spaces in Video Games and Medieval Texts,” in *Digital Gaming Re-Imagines the Middle Ages*, ed. Daniel Kline (New York: Routledge, 2014), 190. Rowland argues that modern video game maps often function like medieval *mappamundi*, depicting maps as narrative spaces that do not always correspond to proper measurements. For video game maps, traveling through the map “tracks our progress through the narrative . . . [t]he map, then, serves as a space in which narrative experience is organized and undertaken, the space and action inseparably and intrinsically tied.” “We Will Travel,” 199.

⁴⁵⁰ Players can use optional tabletop or virtual maps in *Dungeons & Dragons* to accommodate gameplay in detailed fantasy worlds such as Eberron and Faerûn (Forgotten Realms), for instance, although visual maps and markers are not required for gameplay. Mark J. P. Wolf, *Building Imaginary Worlds: The Theory and History of Subcreation* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 71 and 139.

Risk are not considered imaginary (or *as* imaginary), possibly due to their likeness to our own world, high degree of abstraction, and lack of detail: to “qualify something as a secondary world, then, requires a *fictional* place (that is, one that does not actually appear in the Primary World)” and is “not simply geographical but *experiential*.”⁴⁵¹ But to overlook games like *Risk* as imaginary, fictional worlds highlights a preconception when determining which games and other media constitute imaginary worlds in the first place, especially given a game’s sense of immersion into that world or, at least, the presentation of an alternative world in its depiction of fictional history and events. How did tabletop and digital games come to occupy a visual, imagined space represented and communicated by topography, maps, and physical spaces? What cultural conditions gave rise to the “thematic” game—a game that depicts a central theme through its aesthetic, rules, mechanics, and narrative? For modern tabletop and digital games, geography and a sense of *place* play a key role in the design and play of the game; but, as we shall discover, this affinity with cartography and topography was not always present and has developed over time.

Historians of cartography have long understood the power of maps to convey stories, politics, propaganda, and cultural ideologies, and this projection is notably reflected in early modern games. As game historian Jon Peterson writes, in premodern Germany and elsewhere the “invention of wargames depended on recent improvements to maps, which were . . . only loosely anchored to the grid of longitude and latitude.”⁴⁵² In previous chapters, I have discussed how medieval games trouble modern definitions of ‘game’ through their fluidity across multiple manuscripts, textual *mouvance*, appropriation of material, and multipurpose design. Medieval

⁴⁵¹ Wolf, *Building Imaginary Worlds*, 25.

⁴⁵² Jon Peterson, *Playing the World: A History of Simulating Wars, People, and Fantastic Adventures from Chess to Role-Playing Games* (San Diego, CA: Unreason Press, 2012), 218.

game-texts, in particular, blur concepts such as ‘game’ and ‘literature.’ In the following pages, I shift the discussion from an examination of medieval notions of ‘game’ to chart the first-ever historical development between medieval and modern games. This chapter emends Wolf’s near exclusion of games as imaginary worlds and broadens the critical discourse on game history and culture by examining how a progressively refined system of geography, changing ideas of spatiality, and the regulation of international trade enabled tabletop games to shift from abstract structures enjoyed by players in the Middle Ages, in which game narratives take place off the board, to ludic objects that incorporated real-life elements in their design of fictional worlds—thereby fashioning spaces that could accommodate narrative visually on the board itself. This chapter asks: if medieval games broaden the modern definitions of ‘game,’ then how do we arrive at our present understanding of games (and especially games that encompass imaginary worlds)? How, in other words, do we move from chess to *Risk*?

The focus on early modern tabletop games in the following pages moves the discussion of premodern games from the use of games found in medieval manuscripts and game boards for learning or leisure to the emergence of narrative moments arising from players’ interactions with game objects through a game’s mechanics and visual aesthetic. While medieval literary games like *Ragemon le Bon* fashion a playful, intimate atmosphere with which to immerse oneself within narrative conventions and genres, imaginary worlds, as Wolf puts it, “are realms of possibility, a mix of familiar and unfamiliar, permutations of wish, dread, and dream, and other kinds of existence that can make us more aware of the circumstances and conditions of the actual world we inhabit”—a sentiment that, as we shall see, can be extended to tabletop games as well.⁴⁵³ The rise of what Donald Smith calls the “cartographic imagination” in sixteenth-century

⁴⁵³ Wolf, *Building Imaginary Worlds*, 17.

Europe, coupled with a growing demand for novel entertainments, not only spurred new ways of crafting and visualizing topographical game worlds but also set the initial parameters of the familiar large-scale commercial production and distribution of games in later centuries.⁴⁵⁴ By analyzing tabletop games—that is, playing cards and board games—and their intersection with geography in early modern England, Italy, and France—places that set the course for the development of the modern game—this chapter charts the emergence of games as commercial commodities and precursors to the representation of real and fictional worlds on gaming objects.

4.1 Medieval Game Spaces

Most gameplay is an intrinsically spatial activity. Whether a player moves pieces around a game board as in *Sorry!* (1929), manipulates pieces on a two-dimensional grid such as in the video game *Tetris* (1984), or catches someone in an outdoor game of *Hide-and-Go-Seek*, the game must take place in a visible, defined space. Huizinga observed this phenomenon in his seminal study of play, *Homo Ludens: The Play-Element in Culture*. He defines play, in part, as an activity limited by locality that takes place within a confined space:

All play moves and has its being within a playground marked off beforehand either materially or ideally, deliberately or a matter of course. Just as there is no formal difference between play and ritual, so the ‘consecrated spot’ cannot be formally distinguished from the play-ground. The arena, the card-table, the magic circle, the temple, the stage, the screen, the tennis court, the court of justice, etc., are all in form and function play-grounds, i.e. forbidden spots isolated, hedged round, hallowed, within

⁴⁵⁴ Donald K. Smith, *The Cartographic Imagination in Early Modern England* (Burlington, VY: Ashgate, 2008), 10.

which special rules obtain. All are temporary worlds within the ordinary world, dedicated to the performance of an act apart.⁴⁵⁵

For Huizinga, these ordered spaces—also called “magic circles”—constitute imagined, ordered worlds set against the uncertainty of “ordinary life.”⁴⁵⁶ Yi-Fu Tuan attributes *place* to locations created by human experiences, while *space* has no social connotations whatsoever.⁴⁵⁷ Meaning ascribed to a given *space* yields a *place*; *places* signify human intent, much like the spaces found on a game board. In their *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals*, game scholars Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman build upon Huizinga’s magic circle, arguing that the ‘magic circle’ is “a special place in time and space created by a game . . . To play a game means entering into a magic circle, or perhaps creating one when the game begins.”⁴⁵⁸ Tabletop and outdoor games *fill* physical spaces (e.g. a soccer field). Spaces and places in virtual games are understood through the game’s user interface and mechanics. “In sports or board games,” as game studies scholar Jesper Juul observes, “*the game space* is a subset of the space of the world: The space in which the game takes place is a subset of the larger world, and a magic circle delineates the bounds of the game.”⁴⁵⁹ Games spaces, which I have previously discussed elsewhere, are ways “in which to ascribe meaning to cultural objects and circumstances.”⁴⁶⁰ Huizinga’s game/life dichotomy is too

⁴⁵⁵ Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 10 (see chap. 1 n. 19).

⁴⁵⁶ Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 11-12. As Huizinga argues, “[i]nside the circle of the game the laws and customs of ordinary life no longer count. We are different and do things differently,” *Homo Ludens*, 12.

⁴⁵⁷ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1977). For a similar argument, see also David Seamon and Jacob Sowers, “Place and Placelessness, Edward Relph,” in *Key Texts in Human Geography*, eds. P. Hubbard, R. Kitchen, and G. Vallentine (London: Sage, 2008), 43-51.

⁴⁵⁸ Salen, *Rules of Play*, 95 (see chap. 1 n. 30).

⁴⁵⁹ Juul, *Half-Real*, 164 (see chap 1 n. 3).

⁴⁶⁰ Patterson, “Introduction: Setting Up the Board,” in *Games and Gaming in Medieval Literature*, ed. Serina Patterson (New York: Palgrave MacMillan), 10.

rigid a definition to encapsulate the complexities of play, for it does not reflect negotiable consequences and effects that could arise from playing a game (e.g. losing money at gambling).⁴⁶¹ Nonetheless, his definition highlights the need for physical spaces in order to play a game.

In previous chapters, I have detailed the ways in which medieval games intersect with manuscripts, manifesting as textual objects such as chess problems or game-texts. This chapter explores the development of premodern games on other game objects: playing cards and board games. In order to examine how maps and geography influenced games in early modern Europe, it is also necessary to first discuss how players conceived the spatiality of tabletop games in the Middle Ages. Games in the Middle Ages were largely abstract affairs, wherein boards displayed simple shapes that represent relations between the pieces. The three most popular board games in the Middle Ages—chess; *tabula* (an early form of backgammon); and merels (also known as Nine-Men’s Morris)—were not medieval inventions, but rather entered Europe sometime between 900CE-1100CE.⁴⁶² While all three games underwent experimentation and change as players tested new rules and modes of material representation, the boards themselves remained relatively unchanged, save for the specific colours and materials used in their design and construction of the board. Chess, arguably the most popular board game in medieval Europe, underwent developments of representation by modifying the simple, abstract Islamic pieces to gaming pieces that reflected social roles in medieval society. Yet despite changes to the gaming pieces, the board’s own developments remained conservative in nature. The Indian game *chaturanga* shares the same 8 x 8 board (a rectangular board subdivided into sixty-four

⁴⁶¹ For a detailed discussion of the relationship between games and life, see Chapter 5.

⁴⁶² See Murray, *A History of Chess* (see chap. 2 n. 7)

chequered or unchequered squares) as its descendent chess. A number of games created in the Middle Ages, such as checkers (English draughts) and *Les Jeu de Dames* [the Game of Ladies] use the chessboard, likely due to its familiarity and availability. The creators of Courier Chess, a strategy board game developed in twelfth-century Germany, extended the chess board to twelve rows in order to increase the number of playing pieces on each side: twelve pawns, a king, a man (counsellor), a queen, a *schleich* (a smuggler or fool), two couriers, two bishops, two knights and two rooks.⁴⁶³ *Tafl* (table or board) games—one of the most popular families of games in Europe before chess—were also played on chequered or latticed boards and consisted of two armies of unequal power (a ratio of 2:1). The size of the board varied depending on the game [e.g., *Hnefatafl* (The King’s Table) was played on an 11 x 11 or 13 x 13 board], and later games adapted the chequered board. *Fox and Geese*, a variant of the game *Halatafl* (the [fox’s] tail), adapted the board to form a cross-shaped board comprising five squares and nine positions for a total of thirty-three positions. Whether board games entered medieval Europe from elsewhere or were invented by medieval players, and whether they had dozens or hundreds of places, they all share a similar abstract representation of the game space.

While at first glance the abstract medieval game boards might suggest that medieval games lacked an imagined space, the fictional elements in medieval games manifested through other means. The writers and compilers of game-texts such as the fifteenth-century Middle English Chaucerian poems *Chaunce of the Dyse* and *Ragman Rolle* crafted emergent narrative experiences, much like our modern role-playing games, by depicting the traits and outcomes of players.⁴⁶⁴ In *Ragemon le Bon*, for instance, an unwitting player may suddenly become a rake or

⁴⁶³ Murray, *A History of Chess*, 483.

⁴⁶⁴ See Chapters 1 and 3 for further discussions of medieval interactive narrative games.

whore should he or she pick the wrong piece of string, thereby revealing an undesirable fortune.⁴⁶⁵ For board games, reflections of medieval culture manifested primarily through representational gaming pieces on the board and narratives off the board. Chess pieces, which track movements and positions on the board, not only changed in the Middle Ages to reflect positions in medieval society (e.g. the advisor in *chaturanga* became the *fers* [queen]), but also shifted visually from abstract Islamic shapes and pieces to models in the likeness of individuals and occupations they represented. For instance, a knight gaming piece might sit atop a horse, as in the Lewis chessmen set and the thirteenth-century copper alloy chess piece found in Derbyshire, England.⁴⁶⁶ Board games could thus both occupy and represent various cultural spaces in medieval society by exhibiting privileged, courtly spaces—as in the game of chess depicted in Évrart de Conty’s *Les Eschéz d’Amours* [The Chess of Love] (c. 1400)—or the kind of rabbleroising ribaldry depicted in the Middle English romance *The Tale of Beryn* (15th c.).

Themes of love and war could also be potentially played out during a game, and medieval chess problems occasionally hinted at such narratives taking place on the board.⁴⁶⁷ But the most obvious examples of imagined medieval game spaces and storytelling occurred in chess allegories. I have discussed medieval chess in Chapter 2, but would like to return to chess for a moment in order to highlight another deployment of the game as it relates to the creation of game worlds. Through allegory, chess could reflect moral agendas and vagaries of medieval life. The

⁴⁶⁵ See Chapter 3 for an in-depth discussion of the transmission, textual history, and ludic nature of *Ragemon le Bon*. See also my chapter “Sexy, Naughty, and Lucky in Love: *Ragemon le Bon* in English Gentry Households,” in *Games and Gaming in Medieval Literature*, ed. Serina Patterson (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), 79-102.

⁴⁶⁶ “Chess Piece,” *Portable Antiquities Scheme*, last modified June 25 2012, accessed July 20 2012, <http://finds.org.uk/database/artefacts/record/id/76635>. For more information on the craftsmanship of the walrus-carved Lewis chessmen, see: Robinson, *The Lewis Chessmen*, 57-63 (see chap. 3 n. 441).

⁴⁶⁷ See Chapter 2 for a discussion of narratives embedded in medieval chess problems.

most popular medieval chess morality—with more than 250 extant copies—is the Genoese Dominican friar Jacobus de Cessolis’s thirteenth-century sociopolitical chess allegory *Liber de moribus hominum et officiis nobilium super ludo scacchorum* [Book of the morals of men and the duties of nobles—or, the Book of Chess] (late 13th c.).⁴⁶⁸ In an effort to illustrate the hierarchies and roles of medieval society, Cessolis discusses the responsibilities of each chess piece, the rules of chess, and, notably, ascribes a different role to each pawn (e.g. innkeeper). Jenny Adams notes that “in breaking with the state-as-body model, the chess allegory imagined a more diverse social order organized primarily around associational and professional ties.”⁴⁶⁹ For Cessolis, medieval subjects were no longer “imagined as parts of a biological organism,” but rather “independent bodies in the form of pieces bound to the state by rules rather than biology.”⁴⁷⁰ Rules, enacted within the spaces of medieval society, were the glue that bound communities together—an outlook easily exemplified on the chessboard. While Cessolis notes that the chessboard in his Latin sermon represents Babylon, the board’s abstract chequered aesthetic enables the allegory to apply more widely to medieval societies in general. Cessolis’ *Liber*, which was translated into several languages across Europe, attests to a potent allegorization of the world, which clearly resonated with medieval communities and readers.

Cessolis’ *Liber* diverged and expanded from earlier chess moralities which also used the board and gaming pieces as metaphors for social hierarchies. One of the earliest recorded uses of

⁴⁶⁸ For a French edition, see Jacobus de Cessolis, *Le Jeu des Eschaz Moralisé* (see chap. 2 n. 256). Jenny Adams has edited Caxton’s version: *The Game and Playe of the Chesse*, TEAMS: Middle English Text Series (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2009). For a detailed discussion of Cessolis’ *Liber* as an allegory for civic order, see also Jenny Adams, *Power Play: The Literature and Politics of Chess in the Late Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 15-56.

⁴⁶⁹ Adams, Introduction to *The Game and Playe of the Chesse*, 4.

⁴⁷⁰ Adams, *Power Play*, 19-20.

the chessboard as a reflection of the world occurs in a little-known thirteenth-century Latin chess morality text, *Quaedam moralitas de scaccario* (c. 1250, called “The Innocent Morality” by game historian Harold Murray).⁴⁷¹ Found in at least fifteen extant manuscripts spanning from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries, the allegory begins with a clear depiction of the game board-as-life metaphor:

Mundus iste totus quoddam scaccarium est, cuius unus punctus albus est alius vero niger propter duplicem statum vite et mortis, gratie et culpe. Familia autem huius scaccarii sunt homines huius mundi, qui de uno sacculo materno extrahuntur, et collocantur in diversis locis huius mundi, et singuli habent diversa nomina. Primus enim rex est, alter regina, tertius rocus, quartus miles, quintus alphinus, sextus pedinus.

[This whole world is a kind of chessboard, of which one square is white but another black on account of the twofold state of life and death, of grace and sin. Moreover, the pieces of this chessboard are the people of this world, who are drawn out of one bag—a mother’s womb—and are positioned in various places of this world, and every single one has a different name. For the first is the king, the second the queen, the third the rook, the fourth the knight, the fifth the bishop, the sixth the pawn].⁴⁷²

⁴⁷¹ Murray, *A History of Chess*, 530-34. See also Lynn Thorndike, “All the World’s a Chess-board,” *Speculum* 6.3 (1931): 461-65.

⁴⁷² *Mundus* is found in London, British Library, MS Harley 2253, fol. 135v-136r. English translations are from Susanna Fein, ed., “All the World’s a Chess Board,” in *The Complete Harley 2253*, Middle English Text Series (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2015), 3:279-81.

Like Cessolis, the anonymous author of *Quaedam*, initially considered to by scholars to be Pope Innocent III (1198-1213) or John of Wales (a late thirteenth-century Franciscan friar),⁴⁷³ equates each chess piece to a specific social role within medieval society, each of which is considered crucial to a functioning community. The “world” in this instance is not a reflection of the earth’s physical geography, but rather the social fabric of civic life. Everyone has a role to play in the world, but after death each individual, according to his or her station, is placed in reverse-ranking order: “Sic fere quique maiores in transitu huius seculi inferius collocantur, scilicet, in inferno sepeliuntur, pauperes in sinum Habrahe deportantur” [In this way almost all those who are greater during the passage through this world are placed lower, which is to say, they are buried in hell, whereas the poor are carried off into the lap of Abraham].⁴⁷⁴ Although subsequent stanzas outline the rules of the game with descriptions and allowed movements for each piece, a format similar to other early medieval chess poems, the author’s purpose here is to highlight the corrupt behaviour associated with each role. Viewing oblique movements on the board—such as those made by the *fers* [queen], *alfin* [bishop], and knight—as a sign of depravity, the poet reveals how each piece (save the righteous king and rook) is inherently fraudulent. The *fers*, which can move one square diagonally, displays how “avarissimum sit genus mulierum, nichil capit—nisi mere detur ex gratia—nisi rapina et iniusticia” [womankind is most greedy, it takes nothing—unless it be given purely as a favor—if not by seizure and injustice].⁴⁷⁵ However, most of the sinful

⁴⁷³ Murray dismisses both Pope Innocent and John of Wales as authors of the allegory, though he speculates that the *Quaedam* could have been an early work by John of Wales which was altered by later scribes. Kristin Juel has more recently attributed the poem to John of Wales. See Murray, *A History of Chess*, 532 and Kristin Juel, “Defeating the Devil at Chess: A Struggle between Virtue and Vice in *Le Jeu des esches de la dame moralisé*,” in *Chess in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Age: A Fundamental Thought Paradigm of the Premodern World*, ed. Daniel O’Sullivan (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 87.

⁴⁷⁴ Fein, “All the World’s a Chess Board,” 280.

⁴⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 280.

characteristics attributed to each piece by the author concern high taxation, exchange of funds, and the acquisition of worldly goods or favour. The knight, for instance, “set tertium punctum obliquant cum tallagia et exactiones iniustas extorquent a subditis [move[s] aside a third square when they extort unjust taxes and expulsions from their subjects,” while he accuses bishops and other high-ranking ecclesiastical officials of paying their way into power, essentially becoming “promotores et Diaboli procurators” [promoters and agents of the Devil].⁴⁷⁶ Adams observes that in the *Quaedam* “the act of play exposes our inherently corrupt practices” and “mankind’s tendency toward social disorder.”⁴⁷⁷ While at first glance the game resembles an organized society, by learning the game the reader/player also opens him or herself up to earthly temptations. The allegory ends by emphasizing the game of chess as one of the devil’s tools: if a player loses the game (of life), the devil escorts his or her soul to hell. Games in the Middle Ages are often criticized as frivolous pursuits—especially pastimes popular among the aristocracy like hunting and chess—but here the soul-saving message is broad and applied generally to the populace;⁴⁷⁸ for the author, winning the “game” ultimately means to reject its worldly appeal and instead seek salvation through God’s forgiveness. Often paired with John of Wales’ thirteenth-century *Communiloquium*, a comprehensive manual for preachers that discusses the relationship between various social groups and their communities,⁴⁷⁹ *Quaedam* thus provides,

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁷ Adams, *Power Play*, 44.

⁴⁷⁸ In the Middle English alliterative poem *Somer Suneday*, for instance, the poet critiques the idle pastimes of the English aristocracy and, by employing the Wheel-of-Fortune game, urges the audience to rid themselves of earthly pleasures and focus instead on winning the game of (after)life—that is, the arrival into heaven. Kimberly Bell, “‘Rounes to Rede’: Ludic Reading Games in the Alliterative Wheel of Fortune Poem *Somer Suneday*,” in *Games and Gaming in Medieval Literature*, edited by Serina Patterson (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), 169-86.

⁴⁷⁹ Susanna Fein speculates that the inclusion of *Mundus* in MS Harley 2253 could indicate that John of Wales was an influence on the Ludlow scribe. Similar to the *Mundus* author, John also criticizes the legal

through chess, a cautionary tale for those who stray from virtuous behaviour in a treacherous, uncertain world.

The metaphor of chess as a microcosm of the world is further developed in *Le Jeu des esches de la dame moralisé* [the Chess Game of the Moral Lady], a little-known Middle French religious chess allegory influenced by Cessolis' *Liber* and dating from at least the fourteenth century. As the narrator notes, "Le monde ressemble proprement a une tablier qui est de diverses couleurs [the world properly resembles a game board that is diverse in colour]," and each letter of the Middle French word "world"—M-U-N-D-E—represents a different undesirable trait about the world (e.g. "M" represents "miserable"), described at length as facets that lead the pious astray.⁴⁸⁰ The allegory shifts to describe a chess match between a Lady and the devil in order to win her soul. The devil's black chess pieces each represent sins (e.g. his two bishops represent *volupté* [voluptuousness] and *ypocrisie* [hypocrisy]), while the Lady's white pieces stand in for virtuous traits (e.g. her two rooks represent *patience* [patience] and *loyauté* [loyalty]). Chapters describe each move of the game played on the board, which are interpreted allegorically with Biblical and Classical examples "in order to demonstrate the power of a particular sin or virtue."⁴⁸¹ Set in the "world," the game thus comprises, like *Mundus*, a tale warning readers to guard themselves against such sinful behaviour with the power of their own virtuousness: the game

system and high taxation. See "Art. 109, Mundus iste totus quoddam scaccarium est: Introduction," in *The Complete Harley 2253 Manuscript*, 7.

⁴⁸⁰ London, British Library, MS Additional 15820, fols. 2v-3r. *Le Jeu des esches de la dame moralisé* is only found in MS Additional 15820, fols. 1r-61r, and is the first medieval chess allegory to use modern rules. Written on vellum by a single scribe, *Le Jeu* comprises the entire manuscript and is little known to scholars. For discussions of the text, see Murray, *A History of Chess*, 558 and 780-81; Harold J. R. Murray, "An Early Work of Modern Chess," *The British Chess Magazine* 29 (1909): 283-87; Östen Södergard, "Petit poème allégorique sur les échecs," *Studia Neophilologica* 23 (1950-51): 127-36; and Juel, "Defeating the Devil," 87-108.

⁴⁸¹ Juel, "Defeating the Devil," 90.

ends in sixteen moves when the Lady declares checkmate with her pawn, *amour de Dieu* [love of God]—notably also the first piece she moved to begin the game—and thus bookends the match with God’s love.⁴⁸²

In all three chess allegories the game board-as-world metaphor reflects an individual’s sociopolitical role or the fight to redeem one’s soul. As a scribe added to the end of the chess allegory in the miscellany *Destructorium vitiorum* (finished in c. 1429), “play the game of life warily, for your opponent is full of subtlety, and take abundant thought over your moves, for the stake is your soul.”⁴⁸³ While the material game board becomes a site for earthly pleasure and vice, the conflict chess creates between two opposing players through its multitude of pieces—and the strategies to overcome one’s enemy—renders the game a potent way to perceive the structures and struggles of the world. Yet whether medieval games are played on an abstract board or in a manuscript, neither medium discloses these fictional narratives based on the board or manuscript alone. Indeed, the game boards themselves do not reveal the rules, play, or strategy of the game and without documented rules it is impossible to discern how such games might have been played, as in the unknown game board found in Cambridge, Trinity College, MS O.2.45, fol. 1v—a possible early version of the Danish game *daldøs*.⁴⁸⁴ Scribes occasionally reveal the ludic nature of game-texts such as *The Chaunce of the Dyse* with images of dice appearing alongside their corresponding stanza, while other game-texts are virtually indistinguishable from the other texts in the manuscript, as in the case of *Ragemon le Bon* in

⁴⁸² Juel observes that the author associates “[g]ood chess play” with “virtuous behavior”: “it empowers the reader to do good and gives one specific instructions for how to avoid sin” in the world.” “Defeating the Devil,” 107.

⁴⁸³ Murray, *A History of Chess*, 534.

⁴⁸⁴ Michaelsen, “*Daldøs*,” 21-31 (see chap. 2 n. 212). See Chapter 2 for a discussion of this manuscript and game.

Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Digby 86.⁴⁸⁵ Abstract medieval games like chess, which depend on the strategic combination and position of pieces on the board, could embody aspects of imaginary worlds as writers projected narratives and themes onto game objects and mechanics, but they clearly differ from later commercial games where the game board acts as a discernable fictional, physical place [e.g. the visualized mansion floor plan in Parker Brothers' *Clue* (1949)].

Game Historian David Parlett also observes a distinction between what he considers abstract games and proprietary games, noting that two understandings of the term 'board game' exist: "positional" (games that rely on the positions of the pieces relative to one another on a surface) and "thematic" (commercial games that are representational, thematic, and performative in their subject matter and often reflect real-life places and activities).⁴⁸⁶ Nevertheless, clear differences between positional and thematic games are difficult to discern; as Parlett remarks, "no hard and fast distinction can be drawn between abstract and representational as a classification of games. How representational a game is depends on the level at which it is being played and the extent of its player's imagination."⁴⁸⁷ Board games like *Risk* and *Clue* can fall under Parlett's "thematic" category, for their objectives are recognizable as real-world motivations and settings (e.g. to determine who murdered the owner of the mansion, Mr. Boddy, in *Clue*), while chess, Pachisi, Go, and backgammon all sit unequivocally in the "positional" game camp. Yet geography often plays a key role in the formation of a game world, wherein players can engage with the board or playing cards. While some game scholars and designers contend that board games are fundamentally about rules with a thematic layer added [e.g., pleasing aesthetics added to a modest linear race game like Milton Bradley's *Candy Land*

⁴⁸⁵ See Chapter 2 for a detailed discussion of *Ragemon le Bon*.

⁴⁸⁶ Parlett, *The Oxford History of Board Games*, 5 (see chap. 1 n. 13).

⁴⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

(1949)], this thematic layering nevertheless adds to a player's experience and feeling of engagement. In many cases, the game's rules and fiction are so intertwined that one cannot be prioritized or teased out from the other, such as in Chaosium's cooperative adventure game *Arkham Horror* (1987), wherein players assume the role of investigators to defeat alien creatures and save the world in H. P. Lovecraft's fictional city Arkham, Massachusetts.⁴⁸⁸ Yet a player need not necessarily agree with a game author's intended rendering of the fictional world represented in the game: "the player," notes Juul, "is aware that it is optional to imagine the fictional world of the game."⁴⁸⁹

Harold Murray and Richard C. Bell, two other prominent scholars in the classification of board games, omit thematic games from their catalogues and indexes altogether. In his influential *A History of Board-Games other than Chess*, Murray's overarching goals were primarily historical and anthropological as he sought to provide a comprehensive catalogue of games played throughout history around the world. For Murray, positional games, which have evolved over long periods of time, were of more critical importance than newer, modern games which he deemed to be ephemeral and lacking substance; his dismissal of all modern commercial games as "race-games" that "exhibit no new features of aim or rule" and have a relatively short life-span, however, entirely misses the rich historical developments of "thematic" games, including their influence on new game mechanics and genres and their impact on society and culture in general.⁴⁹⁰ Thematic games also reflect cultural symbols, tropes, and icons visually on the board, creating an experience for players that often mirrors culturally relevant topics and interests, whether or not they are more than a simple race game. If we return to *Candy Land* for a

⁴⁸⁸ *Arkham Horror*, Charlie Krank, Richard Launius, Sandy Petersen, Lynn Willis (Chaosium, 1987).

⁴⁸⁹ Juul, *Half-Real*, 141.

⁴⁹⁰ Murray, Preface to *A History of Board-Games*, v.

moment, the game was developed in the 1940s to help bring relief to children recovering from polio, and deploys a brightly candy-coloured theme and aesthetic to craft an imaginary escape from illness in a polio ward—a notable and societally useful purpose.⁴⁹¹ Omitting thematic games from a discussion of game history endorses a false critical hierarchy, setting “positional” games as somehow more worthy of attention despite both the inclusion of simplistic positional games with predictable outcomes (e.g., the merels game *Tic-Tac-Toe*) and the dismissal of the overwhelming long-term commercial and cultural impact of thematic tabletop games like Parker Brothers’ famous economic tour de force, *Monopoly* (1935).

Parlett notes that proprietary games first appeared in the eighteenth century and gained sway in the nineteenth century under commercial producers such as McLoughlin Brothers, Milton Bradley, Parker Brothers, and Ravensburger, but this observation—and other histories of tabletop games—does not account for the circumstances that gave rise to this popularity in the development, enjoyment, and commercialization of games.⁴⁹² What earlier cultural movements and moments prompted the invention and production of thematic games? In early modern Europe—long before the so-called “Golden Age” of tabletop games in America (1880-1913)⁴⁹³—there is evidence to suggest that games began to shift from abstract, positional game

⁴⁹¹ As Samira Kawash notes, “play in Candy Land is a therapeutic intervention that separates children from their bodies both to protect them from their bodies’ vulnerabilities and to form their bodies and desires into the proper paths.” “Polio Comes Home: Pleasures and Paralysis in Candy Land,” *American Journal of Play* (2010): 186. Games are not simply for child’s play, but can also reveal ideas and philosophies regarding a manner in which cultures understand and shape the concepts of ‘play’ and ‘childhood.’

⁴⁹² Parlett, *The Oxford History of Board Games*, 345. For an example of the significance of thematic games and their makers, see for instance Philip E. Orbanes, *The Game Makers: The Story of Parker Brothers from Tiddledy Winks to Trivial Pursuit* (Boston: MA: Harvard Business School Press, 2004).

⁴⁹³ Prolific tabletop game collector Alex G. Malloy notes that the “Golden Age” of American games began in the 1870s with the rise of Parker Brothers and McLoughlin Brothers and ended in 1920 when McLoughlin Brothers, once the leading American game manufacturer, were strapped for cash and sold its

boards, in which worlds are imagined through allegories and other narratives outside the game like Cessolis' *Liber*, to commercially-produced games that included representations of real-world places, activities and, later, entirely fictional thematic worlds.⁴⁹⁴ It is my contention that games in the early modern period did not simply shift to exhibit thematic, visual imaginary worlds, however; instead, the very notion of a “thematic” game arose due to the changing ideas of spatiality and geography in the sixteenth century—and, in particular, the nascent ‘discovery’ of our own world.

4.2 Discovering the World

If games are spatially oriented, then an intermingling of games with geography would seem to be a natural result. Indeed, the ubiquity of modern maps, which represent actual places scaled and proportioned down using digital technology and scientific measurements, presents to us an ordered, structured apparatus with which to orient ourselves in the world. But this understanding of space, born in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries with the rise of accurate cartography as the prevailing form of geographic representation and Western Europe's rediscovery and translation of Ptolemy's *Geographia* into Latin, is certainly not the only way to represent the world.⁴⁹⁵ For mapmakers in the Middle Ages, the creation of a map was largely a

entire game line to Milton Bradley. *American Games: Comprehensive Collector's Guide* (Iola, WI: Antique Trader Books, 2000), 12.

⁴⁹⁴ Juul provides an alternative classification of games based on the levels of meaning and fiction applied to the game: abstract games, iconic games, incoherent world games, coherent world games, and staged games. See Juul, *Half-Real*, 131-32.

⁴⁹⁵ While Ptolemy's *Almagest* circulated widely in twelfth-century Europe and had early theories regarding cartography, *Geographia*, which most likely reached England in the latter half of the fifteenth century, was among the most influential texts for ushering in new ways of thinking about the world. *Geographia*, written in Alexandria in the second century CE, was first translated by the Greek monk Planudes from a copy found in Constantinople in 1295 and later translated into Latin in Florence (c.

narrative rather than navigational endeavor; the function of medieval maps was varied, but *mappaemundi* overwhelmingly focused on relaying a narrative of Christian history and the harmonious order of creation. As Robert Rouse remarks, the “medieval spatial imagination was primarily noncartographic”: not only were medieval maps unknown to the general populace, but their purpose was also primarily ideological in nature, with no conception of scale, proportion, orientation, or geographic representation.⁴⁹⁶ In his study of cartography in medieval Europe, P. D. A. Harvey notes that the “idea of drawing a casual sketch map to show some topographical relationship—the way from one place to another, the layout of fields, the sequence of houses in a street—was one that seldom occurred to people in the Middle Ages.”⁴⁹⁷ Medieval ideas of spatiality depended on textual, rather than spatial, information: the medieval world, as Rouse observes, “is textually represented as a series of sequentially related individual places, with little or no interest in establishing a sense of realistic distance between them.”⁴⁹⁸ This sentiment can also be observed in medieval romances such as *Sir Isumbras*, which locates the narrative in ill-defined places across a broader landscape, and *Guy of Warwick*, which references specific locations as key points in the plot as a narratological itinerary of sorts.⁴⁹⁹ With the exception of maps made by a few mapmakers such as Matthew Paris (ca. 1200–1259), knowledge of the

1409), a translation which quickly circulated to other areas of Europe. See Catherine Delano-Smith and Roger J. P. Kain, *English Maps: A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 30-48.

⁴⁹⁶ Robert Allen Rouse, “What Lies Between? Thinking through Medieval Narrative Spatiality,” in *Literary Cartographies: Spatiality, Representation, and Narrative*, ed. Robert T. Tally, jr. (New York: Palgrave, 2014), 16.

⁴⁹⁷ P. D. A. Harvey, “Local and Regional Cartography in Medieval Europe,” in *The History of Cartography*, eds. J. B. Harley and David Woodward (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 1:283.

⁴⁹⁸ Rouse, “What Lies Between?,” 18.

⁴⁹⁹ Robert Allen Rouse, “Walking (between) the Lines: Romance as Itinerary Map,” in *Medieval Romance, Medieval Contexts*, eds. Michael Cichon and Rhiannon Purdie (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2011), 135-48.

physical world in the Middle Ages was almost exclusively local and regional: individuals likely could not easily visualize their town, landscape, or nation beyond their own first-hand experience. Medieval games, as we have seen, thus exhibited a similar relationship toward the idea of space as a porous, abstract, and narratological concept.

Geography in the later Middle Ages underwent drastic changes due in large part to improvements on Ptolemy's principles, the development of meridians and parallels, the invention of better tools for naval navigation, and a reduction in the production cost of printed maps.⁵⁰⁰ Ptolemy's *Geographia* likely reached the British Isles by 1482 and was continuously revised to include "new projections, new maps, [and] new ways of looking at the world."⁵⁰¹ While early editions were primarily text-based, printings after 1508 included maps and became a definite guide for mapping discoveries in the New World. Sixteenth-century Europe fashioned a new spatial awareness of the world such that, in the words of Monica Matei-Chesnoiu:

the new possibility of imaginatively inserting the viewer into a representation of space offered a perspective that allowed people on the ground a holistic approach to the world that would not otherwise be possible. It allowed them to conceive of their surroundings, the world, the town, and the landscape, in wide-ranging ways, which may have gone beyond the possibilities of physical reality, but which stayed well within the *bounds of imagination*.⁵⁰²

While Harvey contends that sixteenth-century cartographers developed a sense of "mapmindedness," Smith goes further to argue that "the new techniques of surveying and

⁵⁰⁰ See especially Norman Thrower, *Maps and Civilization: Cartography in Culture and Society* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), 58-75.

⁵⁰¹ John Short, *The World through Maps: A History of Cartography* (Toronto: Firefly Books, 2003), 103.

⁵⁰² Monica Matei-Chesnoiu, *Re-Imagining Western European Geography in English Renaissance Drama* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 14, emphasis mine.

mapping produced a fundamental shift in the way space was imagined,” suggesting that this new spatial thinking had broader epistemological effects than previously thought.⁵⁰³ With the adoption of new ways to imagine and reason about physical space, cartographical maps and techniques became a key social and cultural construction that could not only scientifically help people navigate the world, but also make “statements about the world” through the selection and exclusion of cartographical features.⁵⁰⁴ Maps, which were once a rare phenomenon, began appearing in plays, books, political pamphlets, poetry, and elsewhere as authors, playwrights, cartographers, and surveyors gained an interest in discourses that combined human intent and the natural world. For perhaps the first time, maps and geographical texts could provide a fuller awareness of one’s surroundings and new ways of viewing one’s world—both locally and abroad. As Donald Smith remarks, “cartographic accuracy began to carry with it a concomitant sense of perceived space, a sense of an implicitly physical volume that could be imaginatively inhabited.”⁵⁰⁵

Cartographers in England continued to produce maps in manuscript form during the sixteenth century, while printed maps were predominantly imported from the Continent.⁵⁰⁶ Foreign lands were discovered, explored, and mapped, thanks to expeditions like those conducted by Sir Walter Raleigh and Sir Francis Drake, yet the most significant developments in English mapmaking remained local and within England’s borders. George Lily produced one of the earliest engraved maps of England in 1546, but it was Christopher Saxton—a mapmaker and surveyor—who established a methodology for cartographic practices through instrumental

⁵⁰³ Smith, *The Cartographic Imagination*, 10.

⁵⁰⁴ Wood, *The Power of Maps*, 2.

⁵⁰⁵ Smith, *The Cartographic Imagination*, 8.

⁵⁰⁶ Delano-Smith, *English Maps*, 50.

surveys of the land, which remained influential well into the eighteenth century. While he began as an estate surveyor, mapping local and regional land boundaries on commission, Saxton was approached in 1573 by Elizabeth I's Secretary of State, William Cecil (later named the First Baron Lord Burghley), to survey and map the counties of England and Wales. Saxton completed the first English county map in 1574 (county Norfolk), and thirty-four county maps were successively surveyed and printed on copper plates until completion in 1578. In 1579, the individual county maps were collected into the first national atlas, entitled *Atlas of the Counties of England and Wales*, which created a broader cultural awareness of England as a nation. As John Short notes, "Saxton's work was not just a technical accomplishment. The mapping was uniquely connected to political ends."⁵⁰⁷ Like Henry VIII's interest in maps for planning national defense in the 1530s,⁵⁰⁸ Saxton's county maps "reflect[ed] turbulent times" as tensions rose between Elizabeth I and Philip II, the King of Spain; the maps outlined and affirmed England's borders, presenting each county in a similar visual style, though, as Catherine Delano-Smith and Roger Kain point out, there was "an underlying lack of uniformity from map to map."⁵⁰⁹ Saxton's atlas was revised, updated, and reprinted frequently throughout Elizabethan and Stuart England, and cartographers such as William Smith and John Norden later sought to correct some of the shortcomings in Saxton's work. As Thrower observes, "Saxton's maps, which were derived from instrumental surveys, were soon emulated and became the basis of such cartography for a century and a half."⁵¹⁰ Saxton's maps created a new national consciousness, a

⁵⁰⁷ Short, *The World through Maps*, 112.

⁵⁰⁸ Delano-Smith and Kain, *English Maps*, 56.

⁵⁰⁹ Delano-Smith and Kain, *English Maps*, 70.

⁵¹⁰ Thrower, *Maps and Civilization*, 90.

political identity that was informed not only by England's contours and topography, but also England's identity as the head of a burgeoning empire.

This profound cultural shift from medieval notions of geography and spatiality to early modern mapmaking paved the way for introducing geography into games, and one of the first examples of this shift appear in a seemingly unlikely place: playing cards. With the rise of printing and engraving, playing cards became more widely accessible and portable, thereby assuming a new level of popularity rivalling that of the older chess, merels, and tables game objects in Elizabethan England. A pack of fifty-two geographical playing cards and eight introduction cards—the first known example of its kind in early modern Europe—appear in 1590 at the same time demand for national and regional maps was increasing and making them a marketable commodity.⁵¹¹ The geographical cards, which feature a map of each English and Welsh county, reveal a direct link to Saxton's atlas. Likely designed by William Bowes,⁵¹² the geographical cards were produced by Augustine Ryther, a map engraver, printer, and prominent figure in the rise of map engraving and printing in Elizabethan England.⁵¹³ Ryther was one of at

⁵¹¹ Bowes, William, [Geographical playing cards of England and Wales], engraved by Augustine Ryther, London, 1590. London, British Museum, 64 cards. For earlier discussions of the cards, see: Arthur M. Hind, "An Elizabethan Pack of Playing-Cards," *British Museum Quarterly* 8 (1938-39): 2-4 and Sylvia Mann and David Kingsley, "Playing cards depicting maps of the British Isles, and the other English and Welsh counties," *Map Collectors' Series* 87 (1972): 3-35. A translation of the county descriptions appears in Arthur M. Hind, *Engraving in England in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries, Part I: The Tudor Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952), 182-86.

⁵¹² The identity of the author has been long debated among scholars. The imprint on the first card reads, "W. B. inuent, 1590." In their study of the playing cards, Sylvia Mann and David Kingsley found that a certain 'William Bowes' was connected to another set of playing cards produced in 1605. Mann and Kingsley, "Playing cards depicting maps," 3-35.

⁵¹³ Ryther was the first map engraver to be recognized internationally. A member of the Grocers' Company, Ryther had founded a distinguished school of instrument makers. He also worked on engravings in the Waghenaer atlas and had published his own atlas, *Expeditionis Hispanorum in Angliam vera description* (1590), which focused on the successes of the Armada victory. He was also likely the

least six engravers—and the only Englishman—employed by Saxton to work on the atlas, and was responsible for engraving at least four of Saxton’s county maps.⁵¹⁴ His work with Saxton’s maps and the Agas London map (1588) may have influenced his visual depiction of the fifty-two counties each displayed on a card in the set, plus the map of London on the fourth introductory card (Figure 4.1), and these may have even have been copied from Saxton’s general map of England and Wales.

engraver of Saxton’s 1583 wall map, the Ralph Agas wall map at Oxford (1588), and the John Hamond map at Cambridge (1592). D. F. McKenzie and John Barbard, eds, *The Book in Britain, The Cambridge History of the Book* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 4:234. See also, Elizabeth Baigent, “Ryther, Augustine (d. 1593)”, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

⁵¹⁴ Delano-Smith, *English Maps*, 66-69. Ryther may have also accepted an editing role after 1576. See: Peter Barber, “Mapmaking in England, ca. 1470-1650,” in *The History of Cartography: Cartography in the European Renaissance*, ed. David Woodward, vol 3 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 1629.



Figure 4.1: William Bowes, Introductory Card 4: *London*, from a deck of geographical playing cards of England and Wales engraved by Augustine Ryther (London, 1590).

London, British Museum.

The geographical playing cards departed from the Court card design originating in Rouen, France (that is, spade, club, diamond, and heart suits), which became the archetype used for producing playing card sets in England and remains the most prominent set design today.

By featuring figures at court in addition to suited numbered cards,⁵¹⁵ Bowes split the English counties into four directions (North, South, East, and West) based on their geographical orientation. In this way, four cardinal points not only represented the four card suits, but also created a set design that was distinctly English and separate from all other card designs circulating on the Continent. Bowes's deck collectively reveals a single theme at work: geography. Each county card is numbered I to XIII in each suit (arranged from the smallest to largest regions), with a brief description and image of the county and letters signifying important buildings and locations in the area. Ryther was also an instrument maker, and three instruments cartographers used to create their maps—a pair of calipers, a ruler, and a compass—appear in the bottom left and top right of the inner frame on every county card, underlining the skills and technologies required to produce accurate measurements, dimensions, and representational images of each county. Icons, such as the spades, clubs, hearts, and diamonds characteristic of the Rouen design, are omitted in favour of distinguishing suits using abstract patterns framing the county, the description of the region in England and Wales, and the coloured borders around the inner frame and county image: East (yellow inner border/green county border); South (red inner border/yellow county border); West (green inner border/yellow county border); and North (yellow inner border/red county border).⁵¹⁶

⁵¹⁵ For more information on the development of playing cards in England, see Hargrave, *A History of Playing Cards*, 169-222 (see chap. 3 n. 282).

⁵¹⁶ This colour scheme is based on the cards acquired by the British Museum in 1938. Another set of this deck, acquired by the British Museum in 2014, displays different colour patterns, but a similar pattern scheme.

Bowes's geographical playing cards go beyond a mere depiction of counties, however. The top text on each card lists quantifiable measurements of each county, while the bottom text presents a short chorographical description and orientation to other adjacent counties. The card featuring Middlesex (Figure 4.2), for instance, reads as:



Figure 4.2: William Bowes, Middlesex, from a deck of geographical playing cards of England and Wales engraved by Augustine Ryther (London, 1590). London, British Museum.

MIDDLESEX the 2 of th[e] East hath Miles

In Quantitie sup[er]ficiall 125. In Circuite 81.

In Length from Barkeshire to Essex 21.

In Bredth from Kent to Hartfordshire 14.

[Inner panel with image of the county]

MIDDLESEX a very sweete & fine ayer:

Fertile soile, & full of stately buildinges.

Hauinge Essex East, Buckinghamshire West

Hartfordshire North, the Thames and Sur[rey] South.⁵¹⁷

The collocation of cartographical information, visual image of the county, and chorographical description for each county provides both a quick flashcard-like overview and, in Wood's words, "a reality that exceeds our vision."⁵¹⁸ The maps displayed on each playing card are too small and impractical to be used as a navigational tool, and there are few visual topographical features, such as rivers, lakes, mountains, hills, and forests, displayed on the small maps. As mentioned earlier, buildings are represented via a letter symbol, but no images of roadways or other human structures appear on the maps. With limited information portrayed on the landscape, the minimal maps still highlighted the most significant distinguishing features that each county had to offer through an intermingling of both natural and manufactured regions.

The text reflects this effort to showcase the best aspects of each county: the surveying measurements quantify the contours and shapes of each county, imparting a numeric order on the landscape, while the pastoral descriptions portray an idyllic narrative of an abundant, productive

⁵¹⁷ The transcription of the 1590 playing cards is my own.

⁵¹⁸ Wood, *The Power of Maps*, 4.

England by stressing key topographical features and commercial commodities. Middlesex's "very sweete & fine ayer" complements its "fertile soile," for instance, just as Flinte's "plesaunt hills" and fertile soil create "great plenty of barley." Likewise, Hartfordshire enjoys "plesante meadows and pastures," Oxfordshire is "pleasaunt for hawking," with "plenty of fowle and fishe," and Pembrokeshire in the southwest of Wales contains "plenty of wheat, seafishe, and wine to sell."⁵¹⁹ The chorographical descriptions occasionally mention more densely populated areas, which are also keyed on the maps with a letter. Norfolk boasts a "large, welthy, and very populous" landscape "full of corn, sheep, and worsted commodities," while Cheshire is "full of nobilitye and gent[ry]."⁵²⁰ Lincolnshire claims to have "plenty of corne, fruite, and cattel: / Numbers of townes, rivers, with store of fishe."⁵²¹ A number of the descriptions of the counties on Bowes's cards may have been adapted from William Camden's widely influential *Britannia* (1586), a Latin prose chorographical description of England that, as Lesley Cormack remarks, "defined and stabilized the genre of local history" by bringing "together the study of all aspects of human habitation: history, locale, linguistics, genealogy, and etymology."⁵²² Bowes's geographical playing cards offers a chorographical *Britannia* in miniature: Camden's depiction of Middlesex includes the sentence "[s]umma coeli temperie et soli indulgentia, aedibus et vicis magnificis undique nitida, plurimaque sunt ubique memoranda" [for aire passing temprat, and for soile fertile, with sumpteous houses and prety townes on all sides pleasantly beautified, and every where offereth to the view many things memorable], which forms a part of the introduction to a larger chorographical account of the county—and is most likely the sentence truncated and

⁵¹⁹ Bowes, [Middlesex], [Hartfordshire], [Oxfordshire], and [Pembrokeshire].

⁵²⁰ Bowes, [Norfolk], [Cheshire].

⁵²¹ Bowes, [Lincolnshire].

⁵²² Lesley B. Cormack, *Charting an Empire: Geography at the English Universities, 1580-1620* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 177.

translated for Bowes's card. While Camden continued to expand on the histories and descriptions of each county, publishing a third edition in 1590 and seventh edition in 1607, the playing cards, with limited physical space on the card, included only the highlights of each locale. Middlesex's entry in *Britannia*, like the other county descriptions, reads as a collection of local histories, commercial exports, topographical survey data, poetry, depictions of cities, and other collected information. For Bowes's playing cards, the choices of abridged phrases is telling: the summation of features for each county showcase a fully idealized England—a nation poised for greatness.

Other Elizabethan maps and chorographies similarly provided localized descriptions of “contemporary places, things, and cultural practices accurately,” which contributed to propagating a growing national awareness. Contemporaneous projects in England were already in development at the time of their publication, including Norden's own unfinished pocket-sized account of England's counties in his chorographical *Speculum Britanniae* [Mirror of Britain] (1593), which was also inspired by William Camden's *Britannia* (1586) and devised as a series of surveyed county maps accompanied by textual descriptions.⁵²³ This mélange of cartographic information, natural history, and genre, and its mapping of the English and Welsh landscape onto playing cards, captures the porous relationship between politics, commerce, and game spaces. Similar to chess, where a player can dominate the board to seize the king, or to the anonymous *Quaedam* or *Cessolis' Liber*, where authors use games for sociopolitical aims, here the dominion over topographical space, a wholly cultural, commercial, and political enterprise, is rendered onto a playful, and indeed controversial, playing card object. The sense of order and organization displayed on each county card as imposed by the numerical distances, images of surveying tools,

⁵²³ Barbara Shapiro, *A Culture of Fact: England: 1550-1720* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 64.

and descriptions, “giv[es] a new measurable dimension to the visible world . . . and opens great potential for the development of readers’ imaginative capacity.”⁵²⁴ But at the same time, these collections of facts together with chorographical descriptions reflect an imaginary place to inhabit: the geographical playing cards point the player not to a world he or she can see, but rather, as the epitaph at the beginning of this chapter states, “a world we might *know*.”⁵²⁵

In early modern Europe, games—through their use of maps and geography—acted as another tool with which to fashion a “national and local patriotism” among players while at the same time encourage learning, recreation, and gameplay.⁵²⁶ Indeed, the geographical deck’s eight introductory cards further attest to this form of overt nation-building, including cards outlining key rulers who shaped the land (Card 1), the English court at parliament (Card 5), England’s history of conquerors (Card 6), and London’s status as an emerging metropolis “for store of welth, of people, and of power” (Card 4 and 8).⁵²⁷ With transparent allusions to England’s wars with Spain and Ireland, the deck of playing cards aimed to position England as triumphant both at home and abroad. The last two introductory cards continue this national narrative of England and its people, positioning England as a powerful nation within a wider ‘global’ consciousness. Card seven begins by situating England topographically in the world, “FROM Irishe West from Germanys on y East / From Frenches South, their seas do us deuide” and, similar to the county cards, boasting of England’s abundant resources, commodities, and exports to other nations (sheep, grain, iron, tin, copper, and so on). Card seven ends by praising the English navy and ability to undergo foreign trade:

⁵²⁴ Matei-Chesnoiu, *Re-Imagining Western European Geography*, 21.

⁵²⁵ Wood, *The Power of Maps*, 12.

⁵²⁶ Shapiro, *A Culture of Fact*, 67.

⁵²⁷ Bowes, [Map of London].

Why home commodities do they disdayne
To prosper ships, for forraine store they send
What shipe like ours, for merchau[n]dise & war
For Marriners, what land affords like store
Few ships or none. Hath traueled so farr,
About the world they went, and who did more.⁵²⁸

The last introductory card turns again to London. While the fourth introductory card provided a topographical overview with a crude map of the burgeoning city, the last card affirms London's place as an urban center, place of international trade, and locus of English rule. The card mentions well-known places in the city that would likely have been familiar to the player, including the Guildhall, Leadenhall, Christchurch, the Ludgate and Newgate prisons, the Tower Bridge, and the Tower of London. Due to its explosive population growth, "LO London now, with Paris may compare;"⁵²⁹ in 1550 London's population was approximately 120,000 people, but by 1600 the population had reached 200,000, making it the largest city in early modern Europe.⁵³⁰ In his analysis of London's metropolis in early modern England, J. A. Sharpe notes that "the image of a socially mobile, fluid, and in large measure cosmopolitan London . . . raise[d] the questions of how far any sense of 'community' . . . was present in the capital."⁵³¹ Henri Lefebvre further explains this historical shift in terms of a movement from rural space (absolute space) to city space (abstract space), defining absolute space as a natural site (such as a

⁵²⁸ Bowes [English Trade].

⁵²⁹ Bowes, [London].

⁵³⁰ J. A. Sharpe, *Early Modern England: A Social History 1550-1760*, 2nd ed. (New York: Arnold, 1997), 84.

⁵³¹ Sharpe, *Early Modern England*, 88.

river) that is conquered by political forces.⁵³² Abstract space grew from absolute space; its tendency toward homogeneity, commercialism, and commodities replaced the communal ambiance of villages and towns. Thus, it promoted a new kind of space that epitomized centers of wealth and power—the defining elements of any large urban center.⁵³³

Like Camden's *Britannia*, Bowes's playing cards provide a collective image "of the antiquity of Britain and the inevitability of its development as an autonomous nation" and orient readers and players spatially by producing and contributing to a topographical awareness in relation to the world.⁵³⁴ The third introductory card, much like the layout of the county cards, displays numeric sums of England's widths and lengths: "THVS much in Miles whole Engla[n]d it contain[n]es . 34866 / Thus much in Miles will reach about in rownde : 1890 / Hir Length from Lisard point to Barwick strai[n]s . 334 / Twixt Douer Holyhead the bredth is founde . 250."⁵³⁵ The subsequent text ties the features of each county together, placing England as a formidable nation "AMO[N]GST good neighbors."⁵³⁶ Bowes's cards are as much as reflection of England's real physical boundaries as its fiction, creating an idealized image of Elizabethan England that not only is characterized by idyllic landscapes and an abundance of resources, but also reaps the fruits of its land for trade, vanquishes enemies, and explores new frontiers—a narrative Michael Drayton would later respond to in his chorographical magnum opus *Poly-Olbion* (1612). Richard Helgerson, in his *Forms of Nationhood: The Elizabethan Writing of England*, examines the political exigencies of map patronage and production, arguing that

⁵³² Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1991), 48.

⁵³³ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 49.

⁵³⁴ Cormack, *Charting an Empire*, 177.

⁵³⁵ Bowes, [England].

⁵³⁶ Bowes, [England].

Elizabethan cartography and chorography “had an inescapable part in creating the cultural entity they pretended only to represent . . . They thus made themselves. They are the prototypes of what might be called the *novus homo chorographicus*—new chorographical man.”⁵³⁷ In Bowes’s pack of geographical cards, all counties are presented as a collective whole, a unification of the land. The wielder of the cards could not only hold in his or her hand a visual representation of the entire country, but also identify—very quickly, by flipping through the deck—their own sense of place in England. Maps, as Thrower notes, “raised questions about the earth and its inhabitants . . . on a more practical plane they promoted commerce in every sense of the word.”⁵³⁸ But even as the cards represent real, physical space, by virtue of their imaginative promulgation of England’s abundance and supremacy, they also present a manifestation of an envisioned world: a realm of “possibility, a mix of familiar and unfamiliar, permutations of wish, dread, and dream, and other kinds of existence that can make us more aware of the circumstances and conditions of the actual world we inhabit”—or, a place similar to what Mark Wolf would call an “imaginary world.”⁵³⁹

4.3 Selling the World

The amalgamation of the political, the pedagogical, and the playful on Bowes’s geographical playing cards—which appear at least eighty-six years before bookseller and mapmaker Robert Morden’s highly detailed pack of geographical playing cards (1676), the second extant set of geographical cards in Europe—epitomizes England’s national identity

⁵³⁷ Richard Helgerson, *Forms of Nationhood: The Elizabethan Writing of England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 147.

⁵³⁸ Thrower, *Maps and Civilization*, 90.

⁵³⁹ Wolf, *Building Imaginary Worlds*, 17.

within (and as) an imaginary space. In this section, I would like to briefly highlight another, more subtle display of English patriotism latent in Bowes's playing cards, one that not only reflected the increasing commercialism of games, but also helped set a precedent for the regulation and trade of games and other goods in general: the domestic production of playing cards.

Playing cards were controversial material objects in premodern Europe. On the one hand, gentry and nobility enjoyed them as a sophisticated pastime; on the other, they encouraged gambling and lewd behavior. But the controversy surrounding playing cards was not only ethical in nature. Since the introduction of playing cards into England in the early fifteenth century, a great deal of the playing cards purchased in England were imported from elsewhere. As the production and distribution of cards increased, English card makers and merchants competed with foreign importers. The situation reached a critical breaking point in 1463 when Edward IV enacted the first statute that prohibited the importation of foreign playing cards by the request of English card makers.⁵⁴⁰ Viewed with suspicion born of both moral and mercantile anxieties, playing cards were objects perceived to be in need of containment and control.

Despite attempts to regulate the exchange and use of playing cards, cards continued to be imported to England throughout the sixteenth century, most often sporting the Rouen design. In her study of playing cards, game historian Catherine Hargrave remarks that "it is curious to see how from the very first cards made for export have conformed with the accepted idea of the country for which they were made."⁵⁴¹ Playing cards produced on the Continent, in their card

⁵⁴⁰ Hargrave, *A History of Playing Cards*, 169. Rulers and lawmakers have long attempted to regulate the play of games, especially for gambling purposes. Edward IV's ban on the importation of cards constitutes the earliest extant prohibition of importing foreign gaming objects into England. For more information on the regulation of games, see Bubczyk, "'Ludus inhonestus et illicitus?'" 95-107 (see chap. 2 n 67).

⁵⁴¹ Hargrave, *A History of Playing Cards*, 170.

and suit design, were fundamentally connected to their countries of origin (e.g., playing cards originating in Spain, France, and Italy all display different suit icons and designs). By the Elizabethan and Stuart periods in England, local artificers still struggled to compete with playing cards imported from France and other countries.

On June 13, 1571, Elizabeth I granted a twelve-year patent license to Ralph Bowes (notably, the brother of William Bowes) and Thomas Beddingfield Esquires to import, manufacture, and supply playing cards (both fifty-two card “French” decks and seventy-eight card Tarot decks) in England and license others to sell them, essentially creating a state-sanctioned monopoly on the product. The Queen extended the patent license in 1588 and 1589, believing that limiting the production, trade, and distribution of playing cards in England to the control of one organization would regulate the distribution of cards and the pastime of gambling. In the patent license released in 1588, the Queen states explicitly that Ralph Bowes and his affiliates are the only legal artificers of cards: “no other shall haue the making of playing Cards within this our Realme and other our Dominions . . . vpon paine of imprisonment.”⁵⁴² On January 12, 1590, Bowes entered the playing card patent into the Stationer’s Hall as a way of establishing copyright on cards: “to print these markes folowing, which are to bind up cards in, viz., a dozen m’ke. Item, a Sizian m’ke. Item, a Jew m’ke.”⁵⁴³ The patent and Bowes’s sets of printing blocks then passed to Edward Darcy (a Groom of the Chamber to Elizabeth I), and the

⁵⁴² Elizabeth I, Patent License for Raffe Bowes and Thomas Beddingfield (London: Thomas Purfote, 1588). STC 8171, Early English Books Online, accessed January 5, 2015, <http://eebo.chadwyck.com>.

⁵⁴³ Walter Dodge, “Playing Cards: Their Origin and Character,” *WHIST: A Monthly Journal Devoted to the Game* (1895): 121.

patent was renewed for another twenty-one years in return for paying the Queen an annual sum of 100 marks.⁵⁴⁴

On August 11, 1598, Thomas Allein, a haberdasher who operated in London, sold 180 gross of playing cards but refused to pay Darcy. Darcy sued Allein for violating his patent license and the matter went to court. On January 1, 1599 the King's Bench ruled that the grant on the monopoly of playing cards was void because it prevented those who were skilled in a trade from completing a job and, as a result, "leadeth to the impoverishing of divers Artificers."⁵⁴⁵ The monopoly also harmed buyers because a monopolist could raise the price of the product for self-gain with no intention of improving or even maintaining a product's quality. Playing cards, argued the plaintiff, were vanity items that wasted time: the Queen thus had the right to regulate the recreation of her people as a public good. The bench determined that the Queen was deceived and allowing a monopoly on playing cards would set a dangerous precedent for the trade of other goods. The case, famously called "The Cases of Monopolies," was the first statement that ruled monopolies harmful and became a landmark model for establishing the beginnings of antitrust, patent, and competition law. The Bench stated, as reported by Edward Coke, "That the Queen could not suppress the making of Cards within the Realm, no more than the making of Dice, Bowls, Balls, Hawks-hoods, Bells, Lewers, Dog-couples, and other like, which are works of labour and art, although they shall be for pleasure, recreation and pastime, and they cannot be suppressed if not by Parliament, nor a man restrained to use any trade but by Parliament."⁵⁴⁶

Other products intended for recreational purposes were not regulated through patent monopolies,

⁵⁴⁴ Sir Edward Coke, *Selected Writings of Sir Edward Coke*, ed. Steve Sheppard, vol. 1 (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2003), 395.

⁵⁴⁵ Coke, *Selected Writings*, 400.

⁵⁴⁶ Coke, *Selected Writings*, 402.

so artificers argued that they should be free to produce playing cards as well, and that no one should regulate play.

While the *Darcy v. Allein* case opened up the market to enable multiple artificers to manufacture and sell English-made playing cards, it didn't end the competition between domestic and foreign cards. In 1615, a group of English tradespeople petitioned James I to place limits on the importation of foreign cards because they were severely impacting their ability to sustain a living wage. Based on their pleas, the King required all foreign cards to be licensed, inspected, and tariffed on importation.⁵⁴⁷ While these new procedures attempted to limit the competition of playing cards from the Continent, they did not fully alleviate the issue. Gerard Malynes, in his economic treatise *Consuetudo, vel lex mercatoria, or The ancient law-merchant* (1622) notes that playing cards imported from France comprise a monopoly he deems "reasonable" due to its appeal among buyers as a trifling pleasure, together with starch, lute-strings, and tobacco.⁵⁴⁸ In 1628, another group of playing card producers in London rallied together and, with Charles I's support, founded the "Worshipful Company of Makers of Playing Cards" by royal charter in an effort to curb the importation of foreign cards and establish card making as a legitimate trade in England. Lews Roberts argues in *The Treasure of Traffike* (1641) that the importation of playing cards should be prohibited because England already manufactured the primary materials.⁵⁴⁹ The numbers of card makers in England began to increase, though the

⁵⁴⁷ James I, *Treatise for the Makers of Playing Cards* (London: Robert Baker, 1615). Society of Antiquaries. STC 8525. *Early English Books Online*, accessed January 6, 2015, <http://eebo.chadwyck.com>.

⁵⁴⁸ Gerard Malynes, *Consuetudo, vel lex mercatoria, or The ancient law-merchant* (London: Adam Islip, 1622). Oxford, Bodleian Library. STC 17222. *Early English Books Online*, accessed January 6, 2015, <http://eebo.chadwyck.com>.

⁵⁴⁹ Lews Roberts, *The Treasure of Traffike* (London: E. P., 1641). London, British Library. Wing R1602. *Early English Books Online*, accessed January 5, 2015, <http://eebo.chadwyck.com>.

Rouen court style remained a staple in English card design. On behalf of the Company's desires for greater control over the market, Charles I in 1638 and Charles II in 1684 placed further restraints on trade by prohibiting the importation of all foreign-made playing cards.⁵⁵⁰ A report on the rate of English imports and exports by ship in 1650 includes playing cards at four pounds⁵⁵¹, and a later report published in 1657 included playing cards at only two pounds.⁵⁵² The effort by English artificers was not only to add another profitable skill to their trade, but to produce quality *English*-made cards. The need to create a local market was economical as much as it was nationalistic in supporting English citizens, merchants, and tradespeople—and, of course, to keep gambling in check through continued registration and regulation.

From these petitions, grants, and licenses we see that playing cards were clearly a highly commoditized object, and the political and mercantile conflict that surrounded the regional production of playing cards, set against foreign imports, ushered in new models for the manufacture of cards and other commodities in England. If we return to William Bowes's geographical cards, his design was the first extant set of cards to display a completely distinct design set apart from the Rouen style in England (the design granted in his brother's patent license), and his deck was produced domestically in England by Ryther, independent of his brother's control. In their manufacture and circulation of playing cards, both brothers attempted

⁵⁵⁰ Charles I, *A Proclamation Concerning Playing-Cards and Dice* (London: Robert Baker, 1638). London, British Library. STC 9118. Early English Books Online, accessed January 6, 2015, <http://eebo.chadwyck.com>; and Charles II, *A Proclamation Prohibiting the Importation of Foreign Playing-Cards, and for Seizing such are or shall be Imported* (London, 1684). London, British Library. Wing C3538. Early English Books Online, accessed January 6, 2015, <http://eebo.chadwyck.com>.

⁵⁵¹ *An act for the redemption of captives* (1650). Folger Shakespeare Library. Wing E1119C. Early English Books Online, accessed January 5 2015, <http://eebo.chadwyck.com>.

⁵⁵² *A book of values of merchandize imported* (Edinburgh: Christopher Higgins, 1657). University of Glasgow Library. Wing 2682:07. Early English Books Online, accessed January 5, 2015, <http://eebo.chadwyck.com>.

to dominate the cultural (and in some cases economic) “game board”—a means of creating and securing national identities and foreign relations in fiction and in real life.

4.4 Playing the World

Throughout the early modern period, those in positions of power and influence in England sought to regulate the production and trade of playing cards as tabletop games began to enter commercial markets. From its first occurrence, the intersection between geography and game objects enabled games to display worlds beyond immediate recognition and capture a unifying, nationalistic image focused on political and global gain. The world was no longer only projected onto abstract game boards as a metaphor for civic life, but formed the rudiments of the object itself. Bowes’s geographical playing cards remained a novel amalgamation of a pocket-atlas and gaming object in Europe until well into the seventeenth century. The next appearance of geography on a game object would not occur for another fifty-four years when Henry le Gras designed and published a pack of geographical playing cards in Paris, titled “Le Jeu de Géographie” [The Game of Geography] (c. 1644). His aim was primarily educational in nature; the cards appear in a larger series of playing card sets devised by Cardinal Mazarin and organized by Jean Desmarests, a member of the Académie Française, to educate the young King Louis XIV.⁵⁵³ The cards were not concerned so much with solely praising France as garnering knowledge of the increasingly global world; each geographical card displayed a number and a suit from the Rouen set design that corresponds to a different region in the world (club/Americas,

⁵⁵³ In 1644, Jean Desmarests published a report of the games, titled, “Les Jeux des Cartes, des Roys de France, des Reines Renommées, de la Géographie, et des Fables, cy devant dediez à la Reine Régente, pour l’instruction du Roi.” See Hargrave, *A History of Playing Cards*, 58-60.

spade/Asia, hearts/Europe, and diamonds/Africa), an engraved full-length framed figure emblematic of the country, and a description of a country from the respective region, from China and Egypt to Brazil and Florida. le Gras's playing cards could be enjoyed for both edification and entertainment so Louis XIV and others could gain awareness of their place in the world.

Despite the invention of geographical playing cards, the most popular games played in sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century England and France continued to use non-geographical game boards and objects—many of which had continued to enjoy popularity as leisure activities since the Middle Ages. Charles Cotton's *The Compleat Gamester* (1674), a widely popular reference game book that was later replaced by Edmond Hoyle's work on card games in the mid-eighteenth century, includes lengthy descriptions of billiards, bowling, chess, backgammon, hazard (a dice game), horse racing, archery, cock-fighting, and numerous card games enjoyed by an emerging bourgeois group of merchants, industrialists, lower gentry, and others with disposable income.⁵⁵⁴ While a number of games highlighted in Cotton's treatise persisted as common pastimes well into the twenty-first century, there was another influential board game that had gained widespread popularity on the Continent and would significantly impact and forever change the commercial and thematic production of board games: *Giuoco dell'Oca* (famously called the *Game of the Goose* in English and *Le Jeu de l'Oie* in French). In the design and play of Bowes's and le Gras's packs of geographical playing cards, the cartographical aspect is not necessary to play card games. The geographical descriptions imprinted on the cards could project political ideologies and educational agendas, but the mechanics could largely remain separate from this knowledge. For the *Game of the Goose* and its variants, the designers, illustrators and engravers moved beyond static representation to inject real-world knowledge and

⁵⁵⁴ Cotton, *The Compleat Gamester* (see chap 2 n. 49).

imagery directly into the game's rules and onto the board. The visual history of the *Game of the Goose* shows evidence of an increase in objects that reflected and captured a player's sense of the world. The images and textual scenarios on the board illuminate an assortment of recognizable places, animals, figures, objects, situations, and cultural knowledge that are not only aesthetically tasteful for aristocratic audiences, but are also rendered meaningful through gameplay.

Giucoco dell'Oca (henceforth called the *Game of the Goose*) is a spiral race game invented sometime in sixteenth-century Italy under the reign of Francesco I de' Medici of Florence (1541-87), and becomes the model for future mass-market board games well into the twenty-first century—the kind of “simple” race games Murray dismisses in his treatise *A History of Board-Games other than Chess* (e.g., *Candy Land*, mentioned above, is a modern variant of the game).⁵⁵⁵ Using two dice and a token, each player begins at the first space on the outside of the singular spiral track and moves counterclockwise along the divided numbered spaces on the board in order to be the first player to reach the final space in the middle, numbered sixty-three in the original form of the game (see Figure 4.3).

⁵⁵⁵ The game was first mentioned when Francesco I de' Medici (1574-87) sent the game to the court of King Philip II of Spain as a gift sometime between 1574-87.

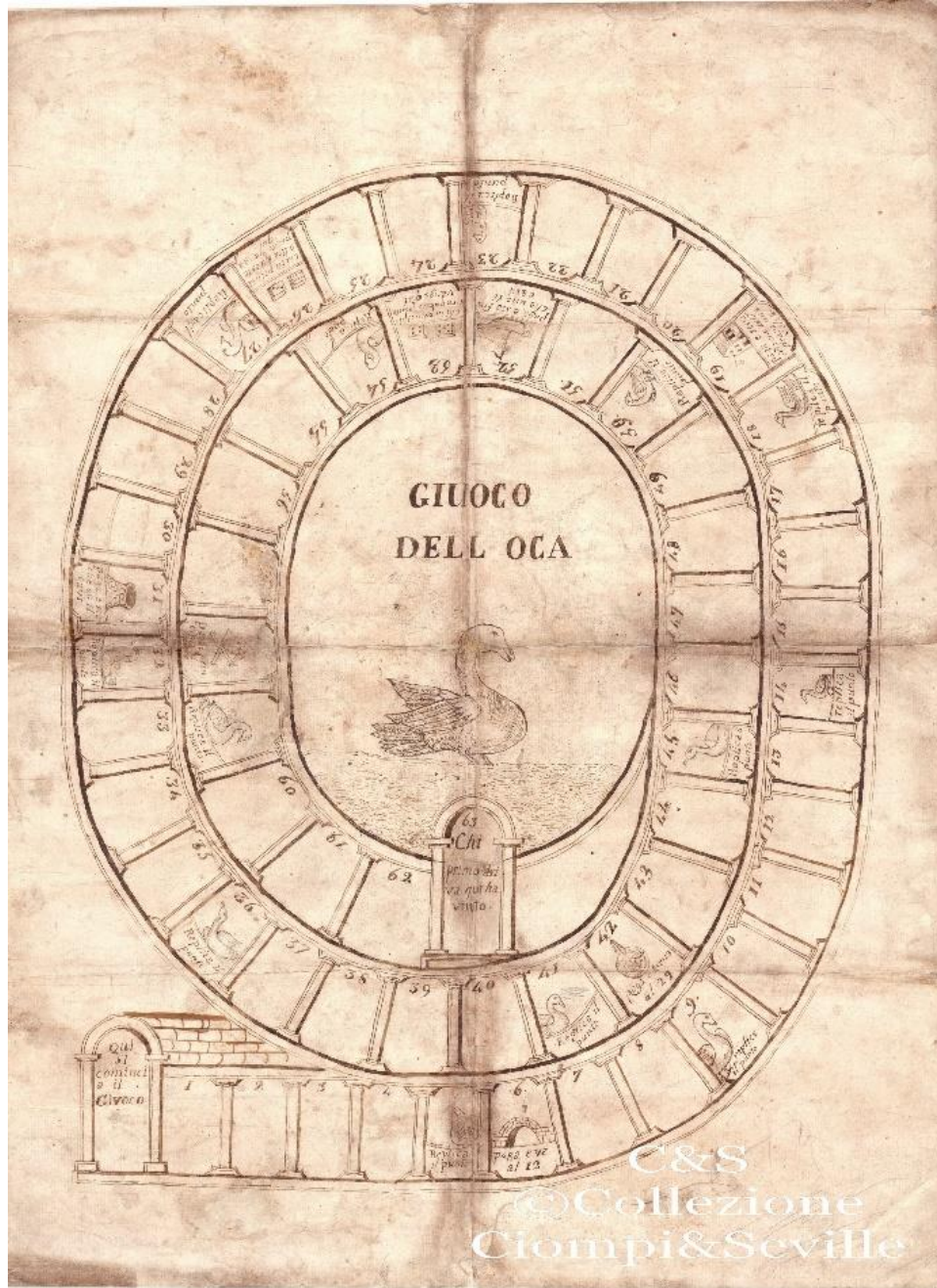


Figure 4.3: *Gioco Dell'Oca*, Anonymous, Italy (ca. 1550-90)⁵⁵⁶

⁵⁵⁶ From the collection of Luigi Ciompi and Adrian Seville, *Giochi dell'Oca e di percorso*, accessed January 15, 2015, <http://www.giochidelloca.it/scheda.php?id=2260>.

An overthrow would cause a player to count backwards from the winning space. Players cannot move freely or strategically, but are completely bound by chance to the roll of the dice.

The emphasis in a medieval board game was on how players strategically positioned pieces on the game board, whether the game had distinct rules governing each piece (as in chess) or not (as in merels). The abstract boards depict a marked, specialized space in which to play but any special meaning ascribed to specific areas was done in narratives and allegories outside of the game itself, such as in Évrart de Conty’s *Les Eschéz d’Amours* [The Chess of Love] where individual squares on the board represent various traits of the players. In the *Game of the Goose*, not only is special significance applied to individual spaces, but these areas are also fashioned from recognizable real-world places, subjects, and experiences: by rolling the dice, players have a chance to land on a goose, a bridge, an inn, a well, a maze, a prison, and the state of death. If a player lands on a goose—which symbolized good fortune—he or she can then move ahead the same amount displayed on the dice. Most interesting for our purposes, however, are the perilous spaces of the game (and one advantageous space), which denote various boons or penalties if a player happens to land on them (Table 4.1).

Table 4.1: Iconic spaces in *The Game of the Goose* (excluding goose spaces)

Numbered Space	Image	Boon / Penalty
6	Bridge	Move ahead to space 12 (in some variants the player must pay a “toll” to the pot to advance to space 12)
19	Inn	Lose two turns

31	Well	Wait until another player reaches this space and then exchange places
42	Maze or Labyrinth	Go back to space 39 (30 in French games)
52	Prison	Same mechanic as the well
58	Death	Go back to the beginning and start again

Table 4.1: Iconic spaces in *The Game of the Goose* (excluding goose spaces)

Each actionable space is not only tied to a specific setting, but also derives its meaning from the players’ understanding of the function of this space in the real world (e.g., the prison space forces a player to remain in place unable to move, while the bridge space enables a player to advance much more quickly along the board, much like a bridge affords ease of travel over difficult terrain in the real world). Such iconic markers depart from the numbered suits of playing cards, which may have symbolic meaning but have no bearing on the rules and outcomes of the game. Rooted in numerological theories of the Cabala—Jewish mystical theology adapted by Italian scholars in the later Middle Ages as a philosophical system for Christian use—the *Game of the Goose* epitomizes a metaphor for life, wherein players experience swift changes in fortune as they advance in linear fashion to the “grand climacteric” year of life (symbolically, age sixty-

three in the Cabbalistic tradition).⁵⁵⁷ The notion of the game's progress as representational of movement through the stages of life is confirmed by an Italian sonnet accompanying a highly ornate version of the game designed around 1650 by engraver and calligrapher Valerio Spada (1613-1688). As Adrian Seville summarizes, the poem—written by Antonio Malatesti in *La Sfinge, Ennemi* and published between 1640-44—describes a pilgrimage by the players as they “leave by a single gate (the first space) but do not travel together, though they are near each other. They are driven by the bones in whose eyes is fate (dice). The poem refers to the doubling when a bird (a goose space) is encountered, and to the perils of wine (the inn), of water (the well), of incarceration (the prison), of losing the way (the labyrinth) and of lying lifeless (death). Of the several pilgrims, only one will reach salvation (the winning space).”⁵⁵⁸ This notion of moving singularly toward the centre of a circle in the game echoes the movement in unicursal medieval labyrinth designs, which appeared on floors of churches and in manuscripts as a meditative exercise designed to promote contemplation of one's journey through life.⁵⁵⁹ In the *Game of the Goose* the space is segregated, with explicit meaning attached to specific sections and roll of the dice, but the space—with its movement through real-world settings toward the afterlife—retains a similar focus on reflecting upon the progress of the soul.

In addition to the meaningful sections on the board, the spiral shape of the track is also frequently depicted with imagery that would have been familiar to players, for many of the

⁵⁵⁷ Adrian Seville, “Tradition and Variation in the Game of the Goose,” *Giochi dell'Oca*, accessed June 12, 2015, http://www.giochidelloca.it/dettaglio_storia.php?id=35.

⁵⁵⁸ Phillippa Plock and Adrian Seville, “The Rothschild Collection of printed board games at Waddesdon Manor,” *Proceedings of the XIIIth Bard Game Studies Colloquium, Paris, April 14-17, 2010, Board Game Studies* (2012): 98-100.

⁵⁵⁹ While medieval labyrinths were not considered games, one manuscript (Cambridge, Trinity College, MS O.2.45) pairs a labyrinth with other game material at the beginning of the manuscript. See Chapter 2 for a detailed discussion of this labyrinth and its textual context in the manuscript.

earliest games display recognizable architectural and environmental elements in the design of the board. The game board in Figure 4.3, for instance, displays a series of architectural columns bordering the circular track, becoming in effect a path through a long, winding corridor. A large goose sits in the centre, awaiting the victor of the game. Other early game boards closely copied this architectural aesthetic. The board designed by Italian Altiero Gatti in 1588, for instance, depicts various monkey figures around a columned track leading to the middle of the board where two monkeys are etched playing a lyre and bagpipes in the company of a ring of merry monkey dancers.⁵⁶⁰ Another Italian game board designed by Pergio Ambrosio of Milan in ca. 1625 swaps columns for statues of lions, mermaids, and human figures, leading to a scene in the middle of the board where two hunters with spears trap a bewildered ostrich.⁵⁶¹ Other engravers and illustrators adorned the outer edges of the game board with mythological figures or scenes of life—a visual development also found on the edges of early modern maps.

Even in the early popularity of the *Game of the Goose*, experimentation with the aesthetics and rules of the board was not uncommon, and designers occasionally modified the spiral track to explore other means of representation and outcome. Spada, on his game board (mentioned above), etches intricate, ornate scenes of everyday life, which reflect aristocratic and court culture. Similarly, an Italian game board designed by Dal Buono Floriano between 1630-1647, called *Nuovo Gioco dell'Honore* [The New Game of Honour], departs from the circular track and iconic imagery in the original game by depicting his game board as a leisurely promenade through a garden. As players move along the linear path, they come across various

⁵⁶⁰ Altiero Gatti, *Novo (Il) Bello et Piacevole Gioco della Scimia* [The New Beautiful and Enjoyable Game of Apes], 1588. London, British Museum.

⁵⁶¹ Pergio Ambrosio, *Bello (Il) et Dilettevole Giuoco dell'Oca* [The Beautiful and Delectable Game of the Goose], Milan, c. 1625.

characters representing desirable traits such as patience (which enables players to advance further along the path) and undesirable traits such as envy (which causes players to move backward a numbers of squares). The last space opens up to a court representing the most significant trait of all—honour—which sits at the top of the board and towers above the rest. Like the *Game of the Goose*, the game becomes an exercise in contemplating how to live a just and civil life. Seville notes that such games, which were popular among the Italian aristocracy, could be “regarded as a moral diversion,” for a dice game that promoted a Christian pilgrimage was preferable to the numerous gambling dice games played throughout Italy.⁵⁶²

In addition to *Nuovo Gioco dell’Honore*, early game designers adapted the *Game of the Goose* to topics that would have been of interest to players. A Spanish adaption of the *Game of the Goose* board designed by Pieter de Jode in Antwerp around c. 1620 makes a connection between love and gameplay explicit in his name for the game, called “El Juego Real de Cupido, otramente llamado el Passa Tiempo de Amor” [The Royal Game of Cupid, otherwise called the Pastime of Love], and in his illustration of the board, where the spiral board resembles a coiled snake wearing a crown. Players move around the snake-track by landing on medallions depicting scenes of love, which lead to a fictional garden of love in the centre featuring couples dressed in contemporary Flemish fashion. As de Jode explains: “It is to be noted that this game is represented in the shape of a snake, because Love guised as a snake sneaks into the heart of those who possess it, and poisons them with its venom, and for several other attractive reasons, which the lack of space on this piece of paper does not allow to explain here.”⁵⁶³ In lieu of geese, de Jode places nine cupids on the board at every seventh square, noting that “this game is composed

⁵⁶² Plock, “The Rothschild Collection,” 100.

⁵⁶³ Pieter de Jode, *El Juego Real de Cupido, otramente llamado el Passa Tiempo de Amor* [The Royal Game of Cupid, otherwise called the Pastime of Love], Belgium, c.1620. London, British Library.

of the number seven multiplied nine times, of which the product gives sixty-three because Love is pleased by this number, being very perfect.”⁵⁶⁴ A player landing on a cupid must throw the dice and move forward until he or she lands on a space without a cupid. While the imagery and rules remain close to the original *Game of the Goose*, de Jode modifies the numeric and visual symbolism to correspond to the images of love. The bridge, for instance, becomes “la Puente del Amor” [the Bridge of Love]; the inn transforms into a throne of love; and the prison becomes a banquet, where players are held back from advancing due to the festivities. In addition to the rules in the original game, de Jode also adds numerological significance to the number seven (as the ‘perfect’ number) which he explains in the bottom-right of the board: the number seven is “favourable and privileged in this game, so the one who throws it, and reaches the throne, the well, the banquet, the labyrinth, the forest, or the tomb, shall pay nothing, shall not stay there nor go back, but shall only double his number until he is in a safe space.”⁵⁶⁵ De Jode’s snake design became a widely popular adaptation of the game, with extant versions found elsewhere in the Netherlands and France.⁵⁶⁶ Claes Jansz Visscher’s version of De Jode’s game, published between 1625-40 in Amsterdam, was copied and reissued until the nineteenth century, and had also become a popular pastime in England by the late seventeenth century, clearly resonating with its audiences throughout Europe.⁵⁶⁷

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁶ Marjolein Leesberg notes that the game became popular in the northern Netherlands because it intersected well with the lives and interests of urban upper class youth. In 1640, Charles Petit translated and republished the game in Paris, France. “El Juego Real de Cupido: a Spanish board game published in Antwerp, c. 1620,” *Delineavit et Sculpsit* 39 (2015): 23-43.

⁵⁶⁷ Visscher’s version was more economical: he omits any irrelevant visual elements on the board and de Jode’s lengthy explanations of numerological significance in favour of laying out the game’s rules. He also alters the central image; in lieu of elegant couples clad in Flemish garb, Visscher depicts a peasant couple dancing to music performed by a Cupid on kitchen tools. Visscher calls his game “Den boertigen

Depictions of love were common aesthetic elements for the game's variants—as it could reflect aspects of the *fin' amors* tradition—but the game also became a prime candidate for emulating travel across a landscape. In an anonymous board designed between 1550-1600, a designer adapted the board to seventy-six squares, each containing a different image and description. By displaying the imagery in each square relationally to one another, the game board simulates a journey through a mapped landscape—of countryside, sea, and villages—where players encounter different situations, including a pair of rabbits, soldiers at war, and kegs of alcohol. Players landing on the fifth square, for instance, meet a barbarian and are prompted to advance to the twenty-first square where a pilgrim directs them to a hospital on square twenty-seven (showing a nurse administering care to a row of bed-ridden patients). The designer of a version called “Nuovo et Piaccevole Gioco detto il Barone” [The Baron's New and Pleasant Game], develops the mechanics of forward and backwards motion found in the original game by adding new boons and penalties to a number of the squares. He maintains most of the original setting from the *Game of the Goose*, including the bridge (square 6), well (square 39), and maze (square 44). However, death is no longer the final destination (square seventy-three); rather, the game ends with a final encounter with “Capitano di Baroni” [Captain Baron], a rustic military figure who stands to greet the victor in the middle of the board. Here the game beckons its players to venture into a space that portrays recognizable images, but is in itself an imaginary place. Through emergent play, as players move from place to place on the game board, a series of events is strung together to form the rudiments of a narrative. How the winner's avatar meets the baron at the end is still wholly determined by the roll of the dice, but the board serves to

Hoff van Cupido” [The Peasant Garden of Love]. Such subversion of the court of love was popular among the Dutch aristocrats and merchants to which Visscher had aimed to market the game.

embellish this journey as one of peril and delight as players navigate nimbly and progressively through the countryside. These iconic pictorial elements—which ranged from farmland and exotic places to fantastic gardens and mythography—are not cartographical in themselves, but they nevertheless anchor “coordinates of fiction to the geohistorical world of reference”—markers and waypoints that, together, craft a coherent sense of place.⁵⁶⁸ Early modern game designers, publishers, and engravers thus exemplified the meaning of the game—whether it was a reflection of life’s journey, a game of love, or a military expedition—by capturing a player’s movement through these visualized, recognizable places (hills, fields, bridges, gardens, hospitals).

While the sundry variants of the early modern *Game of the Goose* are too numerous to describe in full here, the few examples I have discussed demonstrate that the game board could be easily manipulated and modified to reflect different settings and rules, creating proto-themed games that appealed to aristocratic audiences as a pleasurable, and potentially lucrative, pastime. As historian Guillaume Janneau waxes poetically, the *Game of the Goose* embodies the spirit of creativity, for it is a game that reflects:

une image de la vie que ce cheminement obstiné, hérissé d’obstacles et de dangers, coupé d’accidents et de coups de fortune, avec des retours en arrière, des chutes, des délivrances, des recommencements, et cette leçon de persévérance et même de résignation . . . L’émouvante présence d’un esprit, d’un auteur et d’un exécutant, s’y inscrit avec force. Elles n’ont rien d’une production industrielle et mécanique—du moins

⁵⁶⁸ Derek Shilling, “On and Off the Map: Literary Narrative as Critique of Cartographic Reason,” in *Literary Cartographies: Spatiality, Representation, Narrative*, ed. Robert T. Tally, jr. (New York: Palgrave, 2014): 215.

les anciennes. Elles ne sont pas les répétitions sempiternelles de modèles antérieurs.
Chaque jeu nouveau est positivement une création.

[a picture of life that stubborn path, strewn with obstacles and dangers, cut accidents and strokes of fortune, with flashbacks, falls, rescues, new beginnings, and this lesson in perseverance and even resignation . . . The moving presence of a spirit, a writer and a performer, registered it with force. They have nothing of an industrial and mechanical production—at least the old ones. They are not the endless repetitions of previous models. Each new game is a positive creation].⁵⁶⁹

Whereas medieval board games remained largely identical in their design and manufacture (any aesthetic embellishments around the board were meaningless to the actual gameplay), the *Game of the Goose* becomes a means of imagination and design, a novel entertainment that appealed to players in its capacity to reflect and simulate life, love, and virtue within the game itself. The casual encounters with barbarians and barons, to ‘happen upon’ them by chance (and to win the pot by chance), supersedes the strategic thinking found in medieval board games like chess or backgammon. Designers could realize their own amusing interpretations, creating new experiences for the literate aristocratic and merchant classes who could afford such entertainments. The game reached England by at least June 1597, when John Wolfe, Printer to the City of London, registered a printed sheet at the Stationer’s Hall under the title *The newe and most pleasant Game of the Goose*. English game designers, illustrators, and engravers remained largely faithful to the original Italian version of the game and would not start experimenting with

⁵⁶⁹ Guillaume Janneau, Preface to *Le Noble Jeu de l’oie en France, de 1640 à 1950*, edited by Henry-René (Paris: Gründ, 1950). The translation is my own.

themed versions until at least the mid-eighteenth century.⁵⁷⁰ Nevertheless, the flexibility and modularity found on the early boards of the *Game of the Goose* opened up other games to new modes of representation, which in turn paved the way for creating and depicting imaginary worlds.

The fondness for the game in France by printers, illustrators, and engravers took a different tack to that of their English counterparts. While the earliest printing of the *Game of the Goose* in France, published as a woodblock by Benoist Rigaud between 1597-1601 in Lyons, remained, for the most part, true to the original Italian version, French engravers were among the first designers to depart from the original template altogether.⁵⁷¹ If early designers of the *Game of the Goose* displayed a penchant for intermingling the movement of gamespaces with real-world imagery and familiar topics and settings, it was French game designers who took this development one step further, intermingling geography and the *Game of the Goose* more fully in order to create what we could deem the first themed games. These geographical board games were initially devised as pedagogical games that could supplement an aristocratic student's education. The earliest extant instance of this intermingling occurs in geographer Pierre Duval's map game *Le Jeu du Monde* [Game of the World] (1645, Figure 4.4).⁵⁷²

⁵⁷⁰ For a discussion of *The Game of the Goose* in England, see Adrian Seville and John Spear, "The Game of the Goose in England — a Tradition Lost," *The Ephemerist* 151 (2010): 8-14.

⁵⁷¹ Rigaud's woodblock printing, now housed at the Herzog-August Library, Wolfenbüttel, displays the typical French variant of the game: the labyrinth mechanics are changed (causing players to return to square 30 rather than 39), the squares without any special significance are left unmarked, the board is unadorned and sparse, and the game still represents a metaphor for life (with geese symbolizing fortune). For more information about this particular variant, see: Plock, "The Rothschild Collection" 97; Thierry Depaulis, "Sur la piste du jeu de l'oie," *Le Vieux Papier* 346 (1997): 563-65; and Manfred Zollinger, "Zwei unbekannte Regeln des Gänspiels," *Board Game Studies* 6 (2003): 61-84.

⁵⁷² Pierre Duval, *Jeu du Monde* [the Game of the World], Paris: Mariette, 1645. London, British Museum.

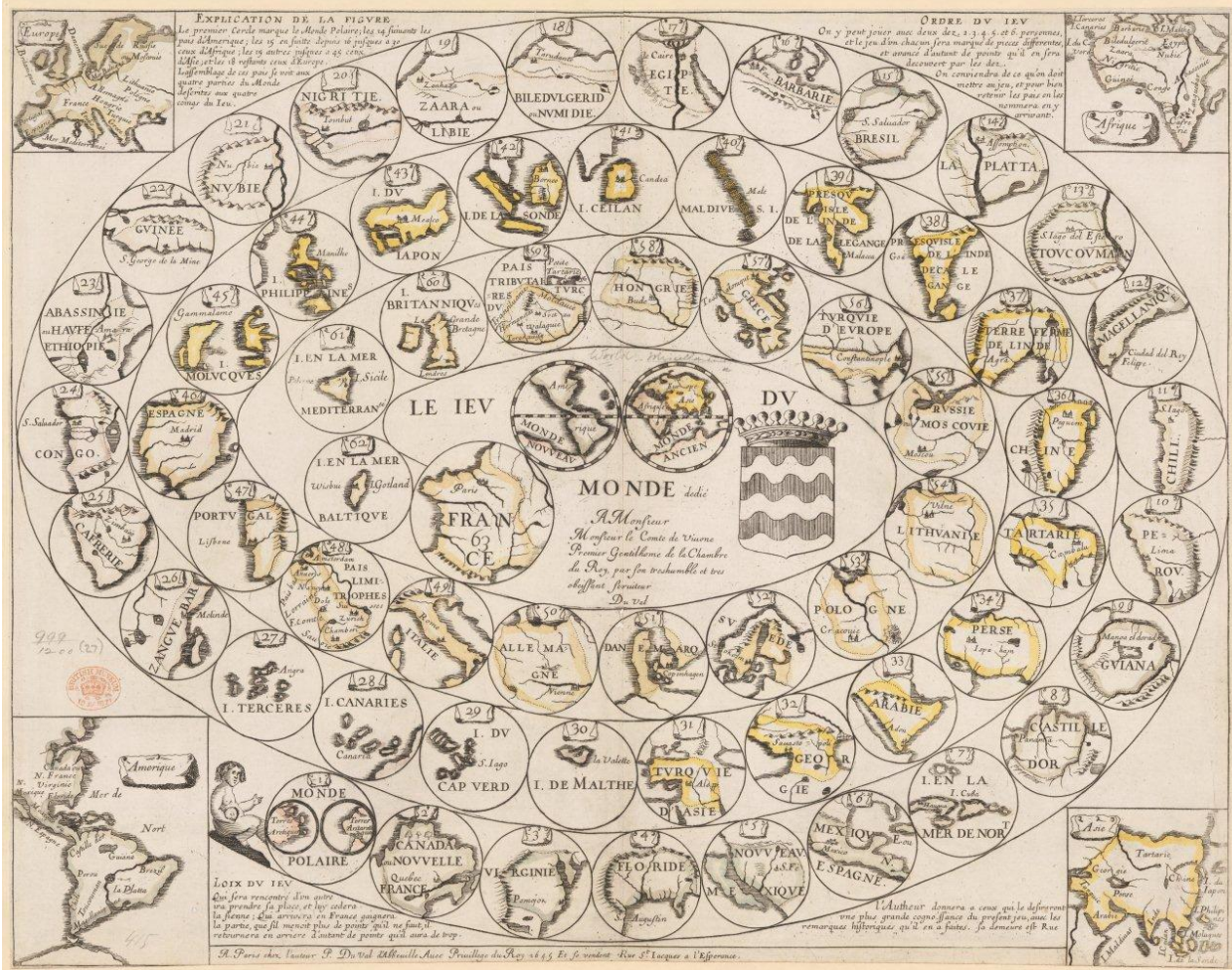


Figure 4.4: Pierre Duval, *Le Jeu du Monde*, Paris, 1645

Published by Mariette, *Le Jeu du Monde* closely resembles the spiral track of the *Game of the Goose*, encompassing sixty-three circles each displaying maps that represent a different county in microcosm. But that is where the similarities with the original game end. In his efforts to focus on educating his players, Duval omits any boons or penalties from landing on specific spaces; rather, two to six players take turns rolling two dice and moving their differently coloured markers around the path. When a player lands on a given space, he or she must recall the name of the country and recount it to the other players. If a player moves onto the space of another, they switch places, creating an ebb and flow of movement on the otherwise linear board. The

track is divided by the four regions of the world (America, Africa, Asia, and Europe), each of which is presented as a mini-map in the four corners of the board. The path begins on the furthest regions of the known world with the “Monde Polaire” [Polar World], then moves to fourteen locales in North and South America, including “Canada-Nouvelle” [New Canada], “Virginie” [Virginia], and “Perov” [Peru].⁵⁷³ From there, players move through fifteen African countries, fifteen countries in Asia, and seventeen countries in Europe until the winning player reaches France, the final circle in the middle—and largest space on the board. Such a position unabashedly highlights France as the centre of the world in terms of power and influence, and the selected regions and countries surrounding France serve to illuminate France’s imperial status in terms of territory, exploration, and conquest. Imagining the world becomes an exercise in spatialization; “ideas and texts,” writes D. K. Smith, become “subject to the same rules of organization and control that shape the understanding of the landscape.”⁵⁷⁴ Seville points out that Duval strove to preserve the Cabbalist number sixty-three as the winning space for a number of his games, perhaps as a way of maintaining ties to the original game;⁵⁷⁵ just as the *Game of the Goose* moves through stages of life until someone reaches the “climacteric age,” *Le Jeu du Monde* enables players to move through the world before reaching what Duval perceived as the greatest place of all: France. In *Le Jeu du Monde*, France becomes a stabilizing, permanent visual reference within an orderly game, a singular force that informs the entire playful experience. Players are ever mindful of its place of importance on the board as the final destination as well as

⁵⁷³ Pierre Duval, *Jeu du Monde*, London, 1634. British Museum. All translations of Duval’s geographical games are my own. Notably, California is mapped as an island and Australia is not featured at all.

⁵⁷⁴ Smith, *The Cartographic Imagination*, 11.

⁵⁷⁵ Adrian Seville, “The Geographical *Jeux de l’Oie* of Europe,” *Belgeo* 3-4 (2008): 430.

its ability to link to other locales near and far—a testament to France’s power to influence the most remote regions of the world.

While the board’s cartographical representation leans toward a scientific, geometric method of charting geographical places, the linear, mathematical movement from the outer reaches toward the perceived centre of European power situates players as figurative French explorers traversing the known world. In his exploration of the ways in which maps inspire the imaginary through their depictions of power and space, historian Christian Jacob notes how any “map bearing slightly lively colors and dotted with a few suggestive vignettes can strike the imagination: the geographical information imparted by the document and what it tells about remote areas are entirely blurred through the analogical vagaries of the imagination, the projection of dreams, desires, and reminisces of readings.”⁵⁷⁶ In *Le Jeu du Monde*, Duval has created a space at once pictorial and cartographical; movement around the board, constrained by the singular path and roll of the dice, nevertheless simulates navigation through world. As Monica Matei-Chesnoiu notes, “early modern notions of space, geography, and nationhood were shaped by the variety of texts existing at the time, which integrated—truthfully and honestly—the facts and fantasies about other nations.”⁵⁷⁷ A player’s gaze enables them to view the world-in-miniature, and the game essentially becomes a narrative space to explore current cartographical knowledge and limitations, boundaries and nation-building initiatives.

Appointed as Géographe Ordinaire du Roi in 1650 alongside his uncle and mentor cartographer Nicolas Sanson (1600-1667), Duval fashioned a number of other educational maps and games that pushed the boundaries of game design in order to teach players about the world.

⁵⁷⁶ Christian Jacob, *The Sovereign Map: Theoretical Approaches in Cartography throughout History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 328.

⁵⁷⁷ Matei-Chesnoiu, *Re-Imagining Western European Geography*, 8.

Using his template for *Le Jeu du Monde*, Duval crafted at least three other geographical games, including the *Jeu de France* [Game of France] (1659), the *Jeu des Francois et des Espangols pour la paix* [Game of the French and the Spanish for Peace] (1660), and the *Princes de l'Europe* [Princes of Europe] (1662).⁵⁷⁸ In the *Jeu de France*, published by Etienne Vouillement, Duval shifts his sights from depicting the wider world to exclusively representing France on a game board.⁵⁷⁹ In place of countries, he places maps of provinces in sixty-two circles around a spiral track, each featuring their respective cities, villages, rivers, mountains, and other topographical features. The track begins in Picardy and moves linearly to the centre of the board—a final sixty-third circle featuring a map of France and its provinces. As a further development from the *Jeu du Monde*, Duval ascribes special rules to certain spaces that occasionally reflect the culture of a given province, though these spaces differ from those occurring in the *Game of the Goose*. Players landing on Normandy (the sixth circle) must shout the Norman battle cry ‘Ha-Rou’ in order to call Raoul, the first Duke of the Country, to their aid and receive an agreed-upon stake from each other player. Other players landing at Touraine (circle twenty-three) lose two turns while they stroll around the beautiful avenues of Tours and enjoy fine dining. Poictou (circle twenty-five) diverts the player with hunting for two turns and Limosin (circle forty-nine) requires the player to buy horses at the fair of Chalus and pay a price to the game pool rather than the merchant. These special rules move beyond the simplistic advantages and disadvantages of the *Game of the Goose*; in addition to highlighting various cultural features of the region, these additional rules provide players with rich narrative moments that invite imaginative

⁵⁷⁸ Duval also designed a board game based on the French heraldry, called *Jeu du Blason* [Game of the Coat of Arms] (1662).

⁵⁷⁹ Adrian Seville provides an overview of the game in “*Le Jeu de France* — Pierre Duval’s Map Game,” *International Map Collectors Circle Newsletter* 21 (2005): 24-26.

scenarios into gameplay. Landing in Provence (circle fifty-eight), for instance, causes the player to embark on a ship from Marseilles with the intention of heading to Italy, but he or she will instead be taken to the Corsairs of Algiers and must pay a ransom to continue playing the game. As with literary geographies, wherein authors populate a story with references to places, here the players themselves become the characters immersed in the story; “the world,” in the words of Derek Shilling, “begins to coalesce alongside and around” them.⁵⁸⁰

Duval also adapts this game structure in the *Princes de l'Europe*. In place of provinces, Duval places sixty-three European countries and locales, with a map of Europe in the middle. Like his other games, this game is played for a stake which is agreed upon beforehand and placed in the middle of the board. The first player to land on France, the sixty-third circle, wins the game and the stake, including any additional lots, fines, payments, and contributions tossed into the pot. Maps of each country focus on key topographical features (mountains, hills, forests, rivers, and other bodies of water) and players must name the countries upon which they land as well as the names of the major towns and cities. Certain countries and places also have special rules that, in the words of Seville, “provide lessons in international relationships and perceptions of the period.”⁵⁸¹ A player landing in Sicily (circle twenty-two), for instance, is shipwrecked at the lighthouse of Messina, where the trials of Scylla and Charybdis took place, and must pay a fee to the pot. A number of rules are reminiscent of those found in the *Game of the Goose* but are adapted to the game. “Little Tartarie” (circle fifty-seven) bears close resemblance to the “death” square; an unwitting player landing on “Little Tartarie” pays a ransom to the pot in order to remain free of enslavement in Constantinople and then goes immediately to Spain (the first

⁵⁸⁰ Shilling, “On and Off the Map,” 215.

⁵⁸¹ Seville, “The Geographical *Jeux de l'Oie*,” 431.

circle) to begin the game again. Current events are also represented in the game. A player landing on Holland (circle six) must sail from Flushing to Dover, England in order to help with the marriage ceremony between the King of Great Britain and the Princess of Portugal—a description that refers to the marriage of Charles II of England and Catherine of Braganza on 23 April, 1662. In both the *Jeu de France* and *Princes de l'Europe*, it is not so much that their narrative scenarios are “mappable” (as in literary geography),⁵⁸² but rather that the world is re-imagined as a game through the use of maps and their corresponding portrayals of real locales. Duval’s mimesis of local and exotic regions on the game board does not depart significantly from what literary geographers would call the “zero-world” (the actual world), for he aims to reproduce up-to-date geographical and historical information about these places for his students. Yet, much like Bowes’s snapshot depictions of English counties, Duval’s deliberate selection of key cultural moments and topographical features nevertheless aim to promote a sense of patriotism and nationhood among his players. As Franco Moretti writes in *Graphs, Maps, Trees*, “You choose a unit—walks, lawsuits, luxury goods, whatever—find its occurrences, place them in space . . . or in other words: you *reduce* the text to a few elements, and *abstract* them from the narrative flow, and construct a new, *artificial* object.”⁵⁸³ While Moretti is concerned with mapping literary worlds in the stories of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century England, France, and Germany, this reduction of elements to their location is illustrated most vividly on the game board: it “rearranges [a place’s] components in a non-trivial way, and may bring some hidden patterns to surface” through its visual aesthetics and the players’ movements to various places

⁵⁸² Barbara Piatti and Lorenz Hurni, “Mapping the Ontologically Unreal: Counterfactual Spaces in Literature and Cartography,” *The Cartographic Journal* 46.4 (2009): 333-342.

⁵⁸³ Moretti, Franco. *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Model for Literary History* (New York: Verso, 2005), 53.

around the board.⁵⁸⁴ Duval's maps and descriptions are not simply a backdrop for a given narrative; here, the map *is* the game. Moreover, players who are familiar with various areas can compare their own experiences to those written by Duval, thereby creating a richer mental image of the world and their place within it. In doing so, players are not only able to view, learn, and assess significant boundaries, provinces, and places, but also participate in the cultural occurrences devised by the game.

Herein lies a notable difference between settings mapped out in literature and those defined by the rules and structures of a tabletop game. For Duval's games, places collectively drive the content, the rules, the *theme*—though remnants of the *Games of the Goose* linger in their appearance and arrangement. This mode of representation can also be found in his third game, *Jeu des Francois et des Espangols pour la paix*, which factors other pertinent information into the mechanics and aesthetics of the game (Figure 4.5).

⁵⁸⁴ Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees*, 54.

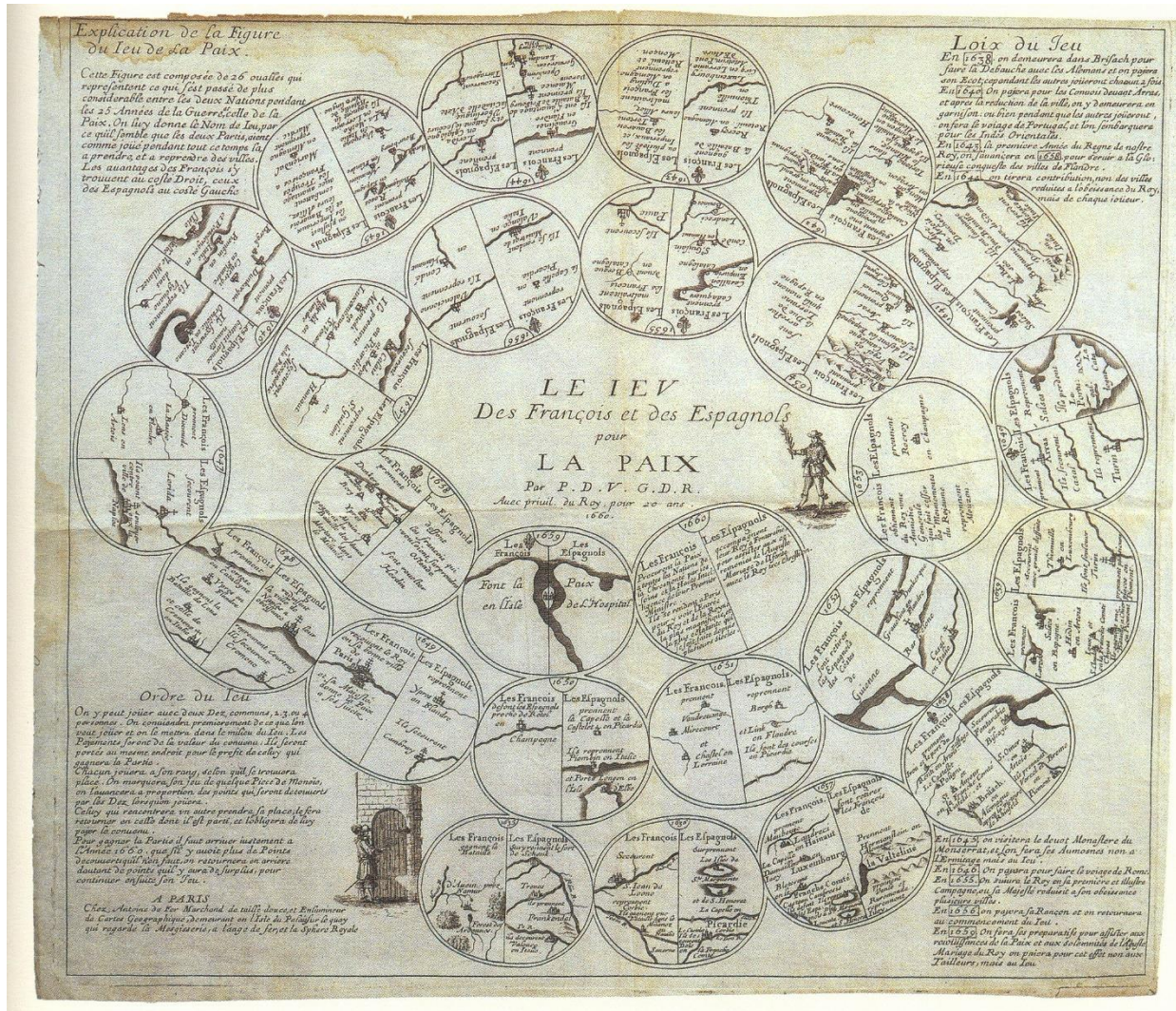


Figure 4.5: Pierre Duval, *Jeu des Francois et des Espangols pour la paix*, Paris, 1660.

Duval preserves the counterclockwise spiral track but significantly reduces the number of circles from the Cabbalistic number sixty-three to twenty-six, which each reflect a year of military conflict between France and Spain during the Franco-Spanish War (1635-1659), a war which was born out of the multinational Thirty Years' War (1618-1648). Similar to his other games, Duval illustrates the war geographically on the game board: the left side of each circle represents gains made by the French, while the right side displays gains made by the Spaniards. Played with two to four players for a stake, the *Jeu des Francois et des Espangols* ends when a player lands

on exactly the year 1660 (circle twenty-six), the year of the game’s publication and, more importantly, the year after the two nations signed the Treaty of the Pyreness on 5 November 1559, which formed a declaration of peace between the two countries. In this game, Duval moves beyond brief cultural moments and topographical highlights to craft the first known game that blends realism, historical knowledge, and geography. In addition to the maps of regions conquered by the French or Spaniards, Duval also includes descriptions of events that transpired on each side. On the first circle (year 1635), for instance, Duval writes, “Les François gagnent la bataille d’Aucin prez Namur Forest des Ardennes - Les Espagnols surprennent le fort de Schenk, ils prennent Frankendal, ils secourent Valence en Italie” [The French win the battle d’Aucin near the Namur Forest of Ardennes—The Spaniards surprise Fort Shenk, take Frankendal, and secure Valence in Italy].⁵⁸⁵ He also includes special rules for certain years, which loosely follow the mechanics adapted from the *Game of the Goose*. For the ninth circle, Duval remarks, “En 1643 la premiere Année du Regne de nostre Roy on s’avancera en 1658 pour servir a la Glorieuse conquete des villes de Flandre” [From 1643, the first year of the King, we advance to 1658 to serve in the glorious conquest of the cities of Flanders]. He also preserves the “death square”: any unlucky player landing on circle twenty-two must pay an agreed-upon ransom to the pot and return to the beginning of the game. Rooted in real-world conflict, *Jeu des Francois et des Espangols pour la paix* demonstrates a progression from the abstract *Game of the Goose* rules and its philosophies of life toward an emphasis on warfare and politics that would have been critical knowledge for his students. By gamifying topics that were already taught in schools—geography, history, war, and heraldry—these games participate visually and structurally in the

⁵⁸⁵ Pierre Duval, *Jeu des Francois et des Espangols pour la paix* [Game of the French and the Spanish for Peace], Paris, 1660.

process of nation-building for a new generation of citizens; through their use of maps and textuality, Duval's games celebrate France's victories in exploration, trade, conquest, and military conflict.

It is perhaps unsurprising that the first geographical game boards bear a striking resemblance to early modern maps, for many of the game designers and publishers were also geographers, cartographers, and engravers who were concerned with the physical representation of space. A number of the maps found in Dutch cartographer Joan Blaeu's (1596-1673) 600-map *Grand Atlas*, for instance, feature medallions and squares filled with mini-maps of cities, zodiac signs, indigenous peoples, and significant monuments and buildings that border the main map at the centre of the page.⁵⁸⁶ Blaeu's decorative edges work in tandem with the map to offer both a delightful and informative experience for his readers. For geographical games, the players' experience becomes an extension of the board's affordance as they move through its referential spaces and figurative ideologies. In 1662, the same year Duval published the *Jeu des Princes de l'Europe* and the *Jeu du Blason*, a game called *Le Jeu des Nations principales de la Terre Universelle* [The Game of Principal Nations around the World] was published in Paris. Presenting a cross-pollination between educational playing cards of the period and Duval's geographical board games, the anonymous game designer takes instead a proto-anthropological view of the world; in lieu of maps, he features a different nation in each game space with a description of its people. Like Duval, this designer begins on the outer regions of the world (starting in America) and moves toward France, the politically powerful centre. Two images of the world including lines of longitude and latitude in addition to the outline of continents appear

⁵⁸⁶ Short, *The World Through Maps*. 130-31. Notably, Blaeu's *Grand Atlas* (also entitled *Atlas Major*) was the largest atlas ever produced.

in the centre of the board. In 1675, Charles-François-Henry Desmartins, Engineer of the King and Commissioner of War, creates what he considers to be a “new” and updated *Nouveau Jeu de Geographie des Nations* [New Game of Geography of Nations], which features a circular map of France in the middle of the board surrounded by smaller circular maps of Denmark, Sweden, Switzerland, Italy, Spain, England, and Holland.⁵⁸⁷ In 1682 during the reign of Louis XIV, cartographer and engineer François Andréossy crafts the game *Le Jeu du Canal Royal* based on his instrumental work on the completion of the *Canal Royal en Languedoc* [Royal Canal in Languedoc]. This canal was later named the *Canal de las Doas Mars* and *Canal du Midi* since the 241 kilometre (150 miles) canal stretched across the length of Southern France from the Garonne River at the Atlantic Ocean to the Étang de Thau near the Mediterranean. Inspired by the geographical games based on the *Game of the Goose*, Andréossy notes in the preface that he aims to create a similar game that will teach all the names of the locations and locks along the canal so that is it commemorated as a significant achievement in French technological history.⁵⁸⁸

That Andréossy chose the medium of ‘game’ to relay the development of the Royal Canal to his audience is telling in a game’s import as a mnemonic, playful, and pedagogical tool. For these designers, games had the capacity to embody a different understanding of the world—ideologies, politics, and agendas might be instilled in a player or inscribed onto a space. As Eugen Fink remarks, “every re-simulated world is an imagined world through and through, when the imagination would not be fully productive and would assume the existing world. This assumption changes the whole tenor of the world, which then departs from the original

⁵⁸⁷ Charles-François-Henry Desmartins, *Nouveau Jeu de Geographie des Nations* [New Game of Geography of Nations], engraved by Pierre Brissart, Paris, 1675. Waddesdon, the Rothschild Collection.

⁵⁸⁸ The middle of the board also includes a map of the various waterways and towns along the canal, and a number of the game spaces feature detailed images of locks, bridges, and passes. The Royal Canal is among the oldest canals in Europe still in use today.

temporality to enter a time of the world of imagination.”⁵⁸⁹ In these early board games, geographic thought is embedded into a new notion of *space*—a Huizingian ‘magic circle’ as portrayed through gameplay—and functions to help players navigate their own ideas of patriotism, nationhood, international affairs, and their place in the world.

In addition to the depiction of macro-space in geographical games (e.g., the world), designers also represented particular places on the game board. In 1685, for instance, cartographer Jean-Baptiste Crépy designs his first of many games, called *L'école des Plaideurs* [Game of the College of Litigants], which takes place at a school (represented by the linear, circular track).⁵⁹⁰ Moreover, many early board game designers like Duval were mainly concerned with educating students, but these games are, of course, more than just a matter of representation; the game’s *modus operandi* as a model for depicting space, society, and culture has intrinsic value as a plaything, for both its materiality and abstraction can create an experience that is greater than the sum of its parts. “What is the contribution of the map [to a game]?” asks Christian Jacob in his study of imaginary maps; it “energizes and channels the imagination and daydreams by aiming them at fixed points, by imposing a direction, a general orientation, and by introducing a narrative dimension: the itinerary, the destination to be reached, the obstacles to be met, the traps to be avoided, and the possibility of encounter and interference of different actors.”⁵⁹¹ In these instances—in these moments of play—cultural production is expressed through the act of playing through the map as much as it is represented on the map-board itself.

⁵⁸⁹ Eugen Fink, *De la phénoménologie*, trans. Didier Frank (Paris: Minuit, 1974), 62.

⁵⁹⁰ Jean-Baptiste Crépy, *L'école des Plaideurs* [Game of the College of Litigants], Paris, 1685. Crépy’s later games, which gained popularity in the eighteenth century, also include military games, geographical games, and games specifically targeted at children.

⁵⁹¹ Jacob, *The Sovereign Map*, 332.

Only one winner is declared—only one may reach Duval’s France—but all players participate in this imaginary narrative.

The geographical games of eighteenth-century England move even further beyond the original *Game of the Goose* template by shifting their mode of design to accentuate *place* as the principal characteristic of the game’s overall design; themes are no longer solely manipulated to fit within a familiar pattern (the spiral track), but rather developed through projective drawings and depictions of their worlds. In both John Jeffreys’s *A Journey through Europe* (1759) and John Wallis’s *Tour through England and Wales* (1796, Figure 4.6), the world itself takes precedence visually as a means of creativity and narrative, an active map that, in the words of Jacob, “opens the path to the imagination of being moved into another world: graphic space becomes a living space by means of proxy and fantasy.”⁵⁹²

⁵⁹² Ibid., 333.



Figure 4.6: *Tour through England and Wales* (London: John Wallis, 1796), my personal collection.

In place of pictograms around a linear board, the game designers set the course of the track around a map of Europe and England, respectively, with scenarios keyed to specific locales.

Earlier games like Dal Buono Floriano's *Nuovo Gioco dell'Honore* [The New Game of Honour] also depart from the *Game of the Goose* structure, but they nevertheless retain homage to the game through other means, including rules, symbolic numbers, and number of spaces. In

Jeffrey's and Wallis's games, the map-as-game is fully realized, for the game and its mechanics are determined by the cartographer's representation of the land and "project[ed] onto it an everyday life, an alternative life."⁵⁹³

The *Game of the Goose* nevertheless continued to influence the design and production of board games well into the eighteenth century and beyond, and remained a popular game in its own right throughout Europe and North America. Later games continued to adapt the *Game of the Goose*, such as J. Harris's *Panorama of London* (1809), but in a number of early games that depict imaginary situations in the world, including William Spooner's *A Voyage of Discovery, or the Five Navigators* (1836), *Funnyshire Fox Chase* (c. 1842, Figure 4.7), and *Country Fair or Rural Sports and Rural Rambles* (1854), the setting and geography continue to formulate the setting, aesthetics, and pathways that guide the movement of the players.

⁵⁹³ Ibid.

it emanates.”⁵⁹⁴ Early modern geographical games do, as I have shown, create figurative spaces and narrative moments in their depictions of the world. But how and when did games first come to represent purely fictional, imagined worlds? Two English games published by Champante and Whitrow in 1796 are among the first games to exhibit fantastical worlds. In the first game, called *The Magic Ring*, players traverse a fairytale realm full of enchantment, monsters, and wizards (Figure 4.8).



Figure 4.8: *The Magic Ring* (London: Champante and Whitrow), 1796.

⁵⁹⁴ Bertrand Westphal, *Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Spaces*, trans. Robert T. Tally (New York: Palgrave, 2007), 76.

Each medallion along the counter-clockwise track, numbering fifty in total, features a person, place, or object that corresponds to a specific reward or penalty found on the margins of the board. Landing on the “hostile fairy” (circle thirteen) “immediately take[s] the comer to No. 24, the Inn, leaving him there till another guest arrives, or he spins the same number at each go,” while the “benevolent fairy” (circle thirty-seven) “permits the comer to have two goes more, and makes him advance double the number of points he spins.”⁵⁹⁵ Possible places players can visit include the city gate (circle one), the city (circle eleven), the temple (circle 15), the villa (circle twenty-one), and the village (circle forty-nine). While the board’s circular layout pays homage to the *Game of the Goose*, the characters and places a players encounters in the land of fairy echo the same type of narrative moments found in the earlier geographical games discussed above. The rules also reveal a blend of old traditions and new ideas. As in the *Game of the Goose*, a player must land exactly in the centre square (“the magic ring”), but here the game designers add further rules: “the player who enters this symbol instantly sets free all those who are detained on any of the pictures of the game, so that they may spin on again, each in his turn.” Furthermore, a player landing on the magic ring must also spin the teetotum (spinner) twice, landing on a one, two, or three to win the game.⁵⁹⁶ The image in the centre is also telling of the game’s imaginary trappings: the “magic ring” dangles from a chain, ostensibly forming a long necklace to which all previous medallions are attached. Meanwhile, a fully-coloured knight sitting at the centre of the board, clad in armour with a red cape and plumed helmet, gazes longing at a pastoral landscape in the distance (possibly in wait for his lady-love).

⁵⁹⁵ Champante and Whitrow, *The Magic Ring* (London, 1796).

⁵⁹⁶ Ibid.

Champante and Whitrow's other game, *Combat with a Giant*, is perhaps more daring in its conception. Unlike most other board games of the period, the gambling game was not structured as a race or card game but rather as a role-playing game; using a deck of forty-eight cards (the tens are removed), players must be dealt a Court card, which personate men and women, or an ace, which represents a woman. Each of these cards acts as an avatar, signifying a player in the game. Once every player has his or her character, they then become either "active combatants" or "prisoners of war" depending on the sum of their hand. Combatants fight a giant—a figure featured prominently in the centre of the board—by casting three dice or spinning a teetotum three times. Successful casts hit the giant and the fighter receives a prize from the "war-chest" (the game pool). Prisoners of war are held in the giant's citadel, which is illustrated in the background of the game board. A roll of seventeen or eighteen wins the game (that is, an amount from the war-chest): as the rules state, "he who throws this lucky number [18], whether he be a prisoner or an active combatant, hits the heart of the giant, and consequently kills him."⁵⁹⁷ In both of Champante and Whitrow's games, the fictional worlds stem primarily from figures and objects found in fairytales and other stories, and here we see a return to the 'medieval' as a place of imagination, rendered as a plaything for the amusement of players. As Caroline Goodfellow notes, the "early games stressed learning through play, but this aspect was gradually dropped in favour of sheer enjoyment of play."⁵⁹⁸ The board stands in as an active, organic space, as *The Magic Ring* becomes a landscape in which to encounter imaginary characters and things, and *Combat with a Giant* proffers a lively battlefield for high stakes.

⁵⁹⁷ F. R. B. Whitehorse, *Table Games of Georgian and Victorian Days* (Hertfordshire: Priory Press, 1971), 61.

⁵⁹⁸ Caroline G. Goodfellow, "The Development of the English Board Game, 1770-1850," *Board Game Studies* 1 (1998): 70.

4.5 Conclusion

In many ways, the history of tabletop games reflects the history of maps. The rise of cartographical thought, of a new orientation with the world, ushered in new notions of space that were visually depicted on maps and, consequently, game boards. Maps had the power to project national ideologies through markers and borders, but games furthermore had the capacity to place players directly into the overarching narratives. While medieval games shared a close affinity with narrative, the rise of the thematic game placed narratives directly within the games themselves. With the creation and dissemination of the visualized thematic game board, games also became more standardized than their medieval predecessors (with their many variants and assizes). Even chess, a game that garnered a number of regional assizes and preferences in the Middle Ages, shifted toward a singular rule system after 1474, and its earlier narratives depicted in chess problems and allegories lost their cultural significance.

As spatial objects of learning and leisure, games open the player to new experiences; the designer's rules, the represented world, the movement of the pieces, and the interactions between players themselves all work together to formulate novel experiences with each playthrough. Through their ability to represent the imaginary visually on the board, thematic games thereby enable players to fictionalize and project the self *in potential* within a wider world—a navigator, lover, or fighter of giants—set in places like Duval's world of powerful nations or in fantasy worlds like Champante and Whitrow's *The Magic Ring*. Herein lies the power of thematic games, and early game designers saw that potential inherent in the game board by striving to use them as pedagogical tools with which to teach history, geography, virtue, and social mores. Premodern and modern thematic tabletop games encouraged active participation and immersion through their explicit use of visuals, characters, mechanics, and rules and, in doing so, created

stories that intermingle theme and gameplay, fiction and real life. While the 1590 pocket-atlas themed geographical cards remained a novelty item in Elizabethan England, Bowes's combination of geography and game presented England as a unified nation, an intermixing of play, materialism, and spatiality that had never appeared before—and would not appear again until Henry le Gras's production of geographical playing cards in seventeenth-century France. Representations of the wider world on maps and iconic markers on game objects like boards and playing cards, coupled with the rise and regulation of domestically-produced games, eventually gave way to the design of interactive geographical game worlds such as John Wallis's *New Geographical Game Exhibiting a Tour Through Europe* (1794) and *Wanderers in the Wilderness* (1818), which were produced for a growing commercial market.

This interactive “mapmindedness”—the desire to playfully engage with the wider world—continued well into the “Golden Age” of commercial games with titles such as *Uncle Sam's Mail* (1893, Figure 4.9)—in which all “the leading railroad systems and cities in the United States are shown on the map, and great care has been used by one of the most reliable map makers in the country to make it accurate in detail.”⁵⁹⁹

⁵⁹⁹ “Instructions,” *Uncle Sam's Mail* (New York: McLoughlin Brothers, 1893).

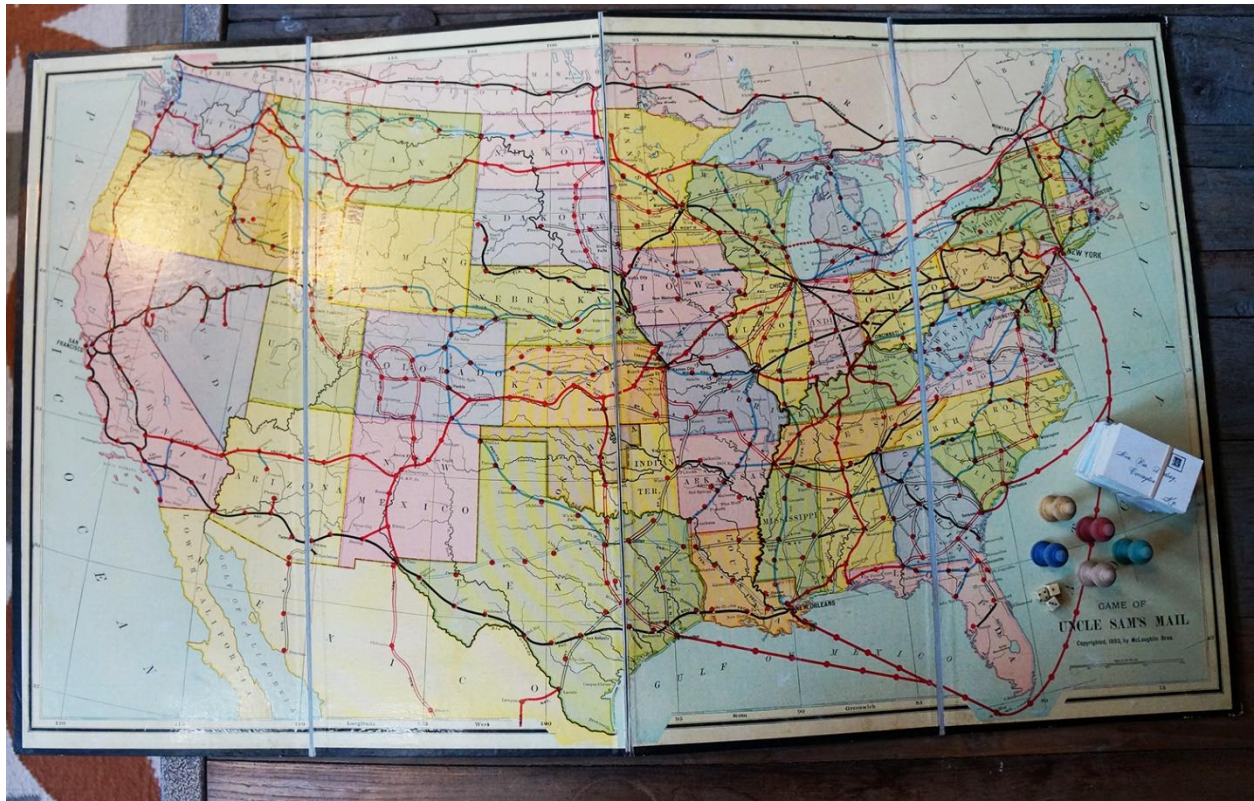


Figure 4.9: *Uncle Sam's Mail* (New York: McLoughlin Brothers, 1893), my personal collection.

Geographical tabletop games remained a staple pedagogical tool for learning about the world and its inhabitants, but geography was also instrumental in viewing the game board itself as a place to reflect actual and imaginary spaces. Envisioning the world as a game board, in other words, was conducive to actually *creating* imaginary game worlds. Geography was not simply an addition to early modern games, but rather a catalyst for changing the idea of *game* altogether.

Chapter 5

Coda: The Social Value of Medieval Games

In many ways, there has always been a problem with games in society. Huizinga, in his influential and enduring *Homo Ludens* attempted to respond to the theoretical appropriation of play as a biological process by arguing that—far from useless ludic activities—play and game spaces form the basis for culture in general, from language and poetry to law and art: “It is a *significant* function—that is to say, there is some sense to it. In play there is something ‘at play’ which transcends the immediate needs of life and imparts meaning to the action. All play means something” and “[h]owever we may regard it. The very fact that play has a meaning implies a non-materialistic quality in the nature of the thing itself.”⁶⁰⁰ The field of game studies has largely moved away from Huizinga’s structuralist arguments by recognizing the importance of games as a semi-bounded form of cultural expression, which has more recently become a main tenet of the discipline.⁶⁰¹ Yet in the many attempts to define ‘games,’ modern game studies scholars have nevertheless overlooked the necessity of considering the complex cultural history and development in the idea of ‘game’ itself. As I have demonstrated throughout this dissertation, medieval games were more malleable in their play and circulation in part because the objects by which they were designed (e.g., manuscripts) were also thought of differently from our modern separation of ‘game’ and ‘literature.’ Additionally, medieval audiences often perceived medieval

⁶⁰⁰ Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 1 (see chap. 1 n. 19).

⁶⁰¹ See Chapter 1 for a discussion of the critical responses to Huizinga’s *Homo Ludens* within game studies.

games from a much broader lens than has previously been considered by medievalists and game studies scholars. Medieval games also fit into a wide array of activities that were not necessarily always ludic in nature, ranging from meditation and cognitive exercises to serving a significant social function among friends.

Nevertheless, the rationale for Huizinga's study—that is, placing games and play at the forefront of cultural significance as fundamentally important and rewarding activities—still finds resistance in academia and the modern public consciousness as moral panic and apprehension continues to surround the play of games.⁶⁰² Indeed, despite the growing body of research in premodern games and game studies which argues that games are cultural objects worthy of study, a stigma persists in both popular culture and academia that questions (and in many cases denounces) the validity of games as a form of cultural production. As game studies scholar Jane McGonigal notes, “[a]lmost all of us are biased against games today—even gamers.”⁶⁰³ As the popularity of video games rose in the late 1970s, they fell under increased scrutiny among parents for their potential damaging impact on the thoughts, actions, and behaviours of youth.⁶⁰⁴

⁶⁰² See, for instance, Joseph P. Laycock's illuminating monograph on the public's anxiety surrounding role-playing games in *Dangerous Games: What the Moral Panic over Role-Playing Games Says About Play, Religion, and Imagined Worlds* (Oakland, CA: The University of California Press, 2015). See also the essays on aggression, addiction, health, and moral panic in *The Video Game Debate: Unravelling the Physical, Social, and Psychological Effects of Digital Games*, edited by Rachel Kowert and Thorsten Quandt (New York: Routledge, 2016).

⁶⁰³ Jane McGonigal, *Reality is Broken: Why Games Make us Better and How they can Change the World* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2011), 19.

⁶⁰⁴ Released in 1976, Exidy's video game *Death Race* was the first video game to trigger moral panic among the public. See, for instance, R. Blumenthal, “‘Death Race’ game gains favor, but not with the safety council,” *New York Times*, December 28, 1976, accessed 22 July 2016, <http://www.proquest.com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu>; and Carly A. Kocurek, “The Agony and the Exidy: A History of Video Game Violence and the Legacy of Death Race,” *Game Studies* 12.1 (2012): n.p., accessed 12 August 2016, http://gamestudies.org/1201/articles/carly_kocurek. In the 1980s, media scholars began studying the effects of games on youth and, notably, many found that early video games

They have been deemed wasteful, juvenile, and even dangerous—their play an activity best avoided by productive, responsible citizens. Games are, of course, not the only media entertainment to be viewed through a critical ethical lens—a constant valuation of their existence in the world.⁶⁰⁵ The moral panic over the influence of games continues to rage in the public consciousness and, as I will demonstrate, is part of a longstanding tradition in Western culture—from ancient Greece through the Middle Ages—to regulate gameplay for fear of its effects on the broader social structure. To conclude this dissertation, I will first discuss the history of discontent toward games before moving to focus on the duality of ‘medieval games’ as significant objects

did not significantly alter the behavior of children, but may have other side-effects such as depression and lower self-esteem. See: Merle Royse Walker, “The Effect of Video Games and TV/Film Violence on Subsequent Aggression in Male Adolescents,” PhD diss. (The University of Southern Mississippi, 1984); Robert P. Bowman and Joseph C. Rotter, “Computer Games: Friend or Foe?,” *Elementary School Guidance and Counseling* 18.1 (1983): 25-34; Joseph R. Dominick, “Videogames, Television Violence, and Aggression in Teenagers,” *Journal of Communication* 34.2 (1984): 136-47; and Eric A. Egli and Lawrence S. Meyers, “The role of video game playing in adolescent life: Is there reason to be concerned?,” *Bulletin of the Psychonomic Society* 22.4 (1984): 309-12. Nevertheless, games still often become a scapegoat for violence such as the mass shooting which occurred at Sandy Hook Elementary School, Newtown on December 14, 2012: Nicole Saidi and Doug Gross, “After Newtown, some shoppers think twice about violent video games,” *CNN*, December 20 2012, accessed August 12 2016, <http://www.cnn.com/2012/12/19/tech/gaming-gadgets/violent-video-games-newtown>. Despite the panic surrounding video games after the shooting in Newtown, the state’s attorney general did not mention video games in his speculation about the shooter’s motive. Further investigation revealed that while the shooter may have played violent games, his chief game obsession was *Dance Dance Revolution* (Konami, 1998-2016)—a decidedly non-violent dance game.

⁶⁰⁵ Crossword puzzles, comic books, film, and television have all been condemned by the public, especially early in their adoption among consumers. Influenced by the condemnation of crossword puzzles in newspapers in the 1930s, Frances Payne funded studies to address societal concerns about the dangerous effects of motion pictures on adolescent audiences, see: W. W. Charters, ed., *Motion Pictures and the Social Attitudes of Children: A Payne Fund Study* (New York: MacMillan & Company), 1933. Similar studies were conducted by scholars in the 1950s concerning comic books, see: F. Wertham, *Seduction of the Innocent* (New York: Reinhart, 1954).

of cultural expression in society as games played in the Middle Ages and modern digital games with medieval themes.

5.1 Games and their Discontents

The media has remained outspoken on the *goodness* or *badness* of games, whether praising their ability to increase cognitive ability, teach important workplace skills, educate, and relax or, conversely, to condemn games as addictive, juvenile, violent, and, ultimately, a waste of time. Neuroscientists, psychologists and scholars of new media and literature have similarly long debated the potentials and pitfalls of gaming and their effect on culture. But the question I continually return to is not whether games are necessarily *good* or *bad*, but rather why we ask this question in the first place.

One ready answer might be that games grant us agency to *act* even as they create imaginary worlds for us to play in, and that agency has consequences whether it is enacted within a safe space on a game board surrounded by friends or gambling for high stakes at a craps table in Las Vegas. Games are viewed under an ethical lens because they are ethical objects that are uniquely suited to enable players to actively explore moral tensions. Games also reflect certain moral ideologies about the world; their *thingness* is the embodiment of their own code of ethics that is rendered through aesthetics and formalized rules. Unlike unstructured, freeform play, which both humans and animals enjoy, games have identifiable guidelines within a contained system. They require varying degrees of abstract thought, cognitive representation, skill, and imagination, as well as an understanding of rules—traits that, taken together, are found

within diverse human cultures around the world since at least 3000BC.⁶⁰⁶ Games encourage choice and, from a medieval standpoint, garner a reputation as a pleasurable or sinful object—especially games that include an element of chance to decide one’s fate. Medieval players, authors, and readers, as we shall see, viewed games as complex spaces, particularities, and possibilities—spaces that tested one’s moral character and therefore needed to be contained and controlled.

From a philosophical standpoint, scholars and critics often attribute this tension between play (which includes games) and society to the rise of industrialism and Marxism. As Lawrence Hinman notes, “work became increasingly alienated, [so] the activity of play also became alienated . . . Insofar as we take the experience of work in our own society (i.e., the experience of alienated labor) as the equivalent to the experience of what work *must* be, we are led to a false notion of play and leisure.”⁶⁰⁷ Josef Pieper further sharpens this dichotomy between work and play in his influential 1961 book, *Leisure: The Basis of Culture*, arguing that work and play are two completely separate human activities, and that labour satisfies basic human needs through extrinsic reward while leisure does not (a concept that has now been widely discounted among psychologists, sociologists, and other scholars).⁶⁰⁸ One need not look far to see that this distinction is troubling, not only in the trivialization of play, but also in its narrow view of work. As psychologist Stuart Brown notes, “the opposite of play is not work—the opposite of play is

⁶⁰⁶ The earliest extant board game pieces were recently found in a 5000-year-old burial at Başur Höyük, a 820- by 492-foot mound near Siirt in southeast Turkey: Rossella Lorenzi, “Oldest Gaming Tokens Found in Turkey,” *Seeker*, August 14 2013, accessed 12 August 2016, <http://www.seeker.com/oldest-gaming-tokens-found-in-turkey-1767702348.html>.

⁶⁰⁷ Lawrence H. Hinman, “On Work and Play: Overcoming a Dichotomy,” *Man and World* 8 (1975): 337.

⁶⁰⁸ Josef Pieper, *Leisure: The Basis of Culture*, trans. Alexander Dru (New York: The New American Library, 1963).

depression.”⁶⁰⁹ The lines between work and play in the digital age have become increasingly blurred and porous, and these materialist and structuralist modes of inquiry are clearly outdated, yet we see remnants of this philosophical argument in current discussions of *play* and *game* such as when historian Scott Eberle defines *play* as “purposeless” in his 2014 article “The Elements of Play.”⁶¹⁰ Even in the Middle Ages, where one’s daily activities were perhaps more often regulated, work and play could still be mutually supportive, such as when gentry children learned chess to reflect their status and upbringing among other houses and at court or a bored scribe practiced fanciful letters in the margins of a manuscript.⁶¹¹

This tension between play and society stretches back much farther to at least Plato and Aristotle. Both philosophers, as Armand D’Angour writes, “were conscious of a moral ambiguity in the concept of play: on the one hand, play seemed to imbue the norms of serious cultural activity; on the other, it suggests something intrinsically unserious and childlike.”⁶¹² Indeed, the ancient Greek word for ‘child’ (*paides*) is intrinsically related to the word ‘play’ (*paidia*)—the word sociologist Roger Caillois defines as “an almost indivisible principle, common to diversion, turbulence, free improvisation, and carefree gaiety” or “uncontrolled fantasy” to contrast with the controlled play of *ludus*.⁶¹³ Plato also views *paidia* as chaotic, anarchic spontaneity, but, rather

⁶⁰⁹ Stuart Brown, *Play: How It Shapes the Brain, Opens the Imagination, and Invigorates the Soul* (New York: Penguin, 2010), 126.

⁶¹⁰ Scott G. Eberle, “The Elements of Play: Toward a Philosophy and Definition of Play,” *American Journal of Play* 6.2 (2014): 215.

⁶¹¹ See Patterson, “Introduction: Setting Up the Board,” 7-9 for a discussion of the game/earnest dichotomy in medieval literature and culture.

⁶¹² Armand d’Angour, “Plato and Play: Taking Education Seriously in Ancient Greece,” *American Journal of Play* 5.3 (2013): 299.

⁶¹³ Caillois, *Man, Play, and Games*, 13 (chap. 1 n. 16).

than discourage play in children, he proposes that society harness its power for utilitarian purposes:

No society has ever really noticed how important play is for social stability. My proposal is that one should regulate children's play. Let them always play the same games, with the same rules and under the same conditions. And have fun playing with the same toys. That way you'll find that adult behavior and society itself will be stable. As it is, games are always being changed and modified and new ones invented, so that youngsters never want the same thing two days running. They've no standard of good or bad behavior, or of dress . . . This poses a threat to social stability, because people who promote this kind of innovation for children are insidiously changing the character of the young by making them reject the old and value the new. To promote such expressions and attitudes is a potential disaster for society.

For Plato, *play* and *game*, as unstable, unwieldy activities, can be tethered and controlled to produce model citizens. They become, in the words of game studies scholar Thomas Malaby, "static appraisals of unchanging social order."⁶¹⁴ And herein lies a central anxiety about games: the element of indeterminacy in games reflects the potential open-endedness of everyday life. As Malaby notes, "It connects games to other domains of experience by showing how they contain the same kinds of unpredictabilities and constraints that saturate our experience elsewhere . . . games relate to a particular mode of experience, a dispositional stance toward the indeterminate."⁶¹⁵ Aristotle similarly observes this indeterminacy, stating that play, as a leisure activity, "was the be-all and end-all of life," for it is but a repose from labour.⁶¹⁶ Plato concludes in *Laws* (347BC) that man and woman should "play the noblest games . . . [l]ife must be lived as playing, playing certain games, making sacrifices, singing, and dancing" in the likeness of the gods as the highest form of achievement. Left to their own devices, games, according to Plato

⁶¹⁴ Thomas Malaby, "Anthropology and Play: The Contours of Playful Experience," *New Literary History* 40 (2009): 207.

⁶¹⁵ Malaby, "Anthropology and Play," 208.

⁶¹⁶ D'Angour, "Plato and Play," 301.

and Aristotle, can also be dangerous: just as they have the ability to reflect the activities of the gods, they also have the power to destroy societies.

Plato's notion of harnessing play to create a productive society is similarly found in more recent examinations of games. Observing what she calls a "mass exodus" into the imaginary world of games as people around the world spend more than three billion hours per week playing games, McGonigal argues that games are a social good that fulfills human needs and can be used to better all aspects of society, including health, education, and combat. While Caillois contends that games are "an occasion of pure waste" and Brown observes how people have so "internalized society's message about play being a waste of time that we shame ourselves into giving up play,"⁶¹⁷ McGonigal concludes that "games don't distract us from our real lives. They *fill* our real lives: with positive emotions, positive activity, positive experiences, and positive strengths. Games aren't leading us to the downfall of human civilization. They're leading us to its reinvention."⁶¹⁸

Far from meaningless activities, the praise and condemnation of games and play highlight their perceived power to redefine our world. As philosopher Miguel Sicart contends, "[p]lay is always on the verge of destruction, of itself and of its players, and that is precisely why it matters . . . [it is also] a fundamental part of our moral well-being, of the healthy and mature and complete part of human life"⁶¹⁹ McGonigal praises games for their ability to improve how we as citizens live and exist in the world, and other recent game scholars, media scholars, and scholars advocate for an appreciation of play and games if, like Plato's musings on *paidia*, games and play become primarily productive and serviceable activities for social good.

⁶¹⁷ Caillois, *Man, Play, and Games*, 5; Brown, *Play*, 145.

⁶¹⁸ McGonigal, *Reality is Broken*, 354.

⁶¹⁹ Sicart, *Play Matters*, 3, 5 (see chap. 1, n. 35)

It is perhaps not surprising that games become a scapegoat for society's ills when they fail to meet these lofty expectations. A rich and absorbing game like those found in the *Grand Theft Auto* series (1997-2016)—which satirize films like *The Godfather* (1972) and where players can steal cars, shoot police officers, and fraternize with prostitutes—are socially contentious at the same time they are clever and pleasurable experiences that bring ethical considerations to the forefront of gameplay. Players negotiate ethical situations within a complex network of moral responsibilities; as a pair of recent studies finds, when players are presented with moral transgressions, they will “actively avoid the anti-normative behavior (such as committing an act of violence) or they will feel a deep sense of guilt if they do commit it.”⁶²⁰ Unlike film, television, or music, games provide a physical or digital space to play with social boundaries and explore actions and roles that are prohibited in society. Whether one agrees with the premise of games like *Grand Theft Auto* is not my point here: the games provoke their players (and non-players), tempting them to pass judgement on the game's themes and commercialization as a form of entertainment according to one's ideals. To define games as having social value is therefore to judge their worth in accordance with perceived cultural mores. Transgressions from these values in both the themes within the games and the outcomes of gameplay (such as monetary loss or the development of an immoral attitude) become aspects that those in positions of power feel the need to quell ‘for the good of society.’ Elizabeth I, for instance, sought to control the production and sale of playing cards in sixteenth-century England in an effort to control gambling. Similarly, the moral panic surrounding Warners Bros.

⁶²⁰ Bowman, “The Rise,” 34. See: Sven Joeckel, Nicholas Bowman, and Leyla Dogruel, “Gut or Game? The Influence of Moral Intuitions on Decisions in Video Games,” *Media Psychology* 15.4 (2012): 460-85 and Matthew Grizzard, Ron Tamborini, Robert J. Lewis, Lu Wang, and Sujay Prabhu, “Being Bad in a Video Game Can Make Us Morally Sensitive,” *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking* 17.8 (2014): 499-504.

Interactive's arcade fighting game *Mortal Kombat* (1992) spurred the creation of the Entertainment Software Rating Board for video games in 1994.⁶²¹

5.2 Valuing Games in the Middle Ages

If recent game studies scholars praise the capacity of games to improve modern societies, then how did the Middle Ages conceptualize games as they related to social welfare? Among medieval thinkers, there was a clear lack of consensus regarding where play and games fit into medieval society. In his encyclopedic *Etymologiae* (c. 600CE), Isidore de Seville classifies games alongside war and battle in Chapter 18, “de bello et ludis.” For Isidore, games are narrowly defined as physical sports and competitions such as throwing, running, horse racing, and wrestling, and he deemed them sinful and best avoided. In contrast, in his treatise on education, *Didascalicon* (c. 1128), the Parisian theologian Hugh of St. Victor proposed an independent science of games, *scientia ludorum*, which formed a part of the seven *artes mechanicae* (or, learnable crafts). Games could not only provide nourishment, but also educate the young. The Dominican Vincent of Beauvais also includes a variety of games in his treatise *Speculum doctrinale* as part of the *artes mechanicae*, but, like Isidore, associated them with violence and war and was disturbed by the diversions and consequences of gambling. For Vincent, games were suspicious and frivolous activities that prevented the elevation of the soul.

⁶²¹ See Chapter 4 for a discussion of the commoditization of playing cards in sixteenth-century England. For more on the moral panic of *Mortal Kombat* and the founding of the ESRB, see Bowman, “The Rise,” 28-30. Notably, the ESRB did little to calm the public's anxiety about video game violence. As Bowman writes, high profile school shootings in the United States “re-ignited concerns that video games served as interactive murder simulations” and implicated video games as a root cause of violence—a sentiment still found in media coverage of shootings and violence. “The Rise,” 30.

Officials regularly attempted to designate places and times specifically for work or play, often to no avail. In the early twelfth century, Odode Sully, the Bishop of Paris, issued a decree banning the clergy from playing or owning dice or chess pieces. During the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, new Church policies restricted the clergy from both playing and observing games. However, regional policies varied widely. While some diocese allowed chess and other board games, others restricted them entirely. The Archbishop of Canterbury, John Peckham, in one of his letters of January 1281, condemned the game of chess as a sinful activity played by the monks in the monastery of Coxford, in county Norfolk:

Scaccorum autem ludum et consimilia scurrilia solatia vobis omnibus, occasione Roberti de Hunstaneston, perpetue inhibemus, quod si ipse vel vestrum aliquis contrarium praesumpserit attemptare, ipsum ad ingressu ecclesiae et omni actu legitimo suspendimus, donec tribus diebus in pane et aqua jejuneverit, omni dispensatione circa hoc cuilibet subditio nostro penitus interdicta.

[The game of chess and other clownish entertainments which have been introduced by Robert de Hunstaneston will be forbidden forever. If he himself or anyone else dare to break this law, we will suspend them, on the strength of law, from the right to enter the church and perform all duties unless they fast for three days on bread and water. This law is binding without any exceptions in this matter for anyone under our authority.]

Despite the sanctions and criticism decreed by the Church, ecclesiastics and laypersons continued to enjoy games throughout the Middle Ages as a form of recreation.⁶²² The clergy were among the first players, for instance, to introduce chess and record chess problems.⁶²³

Games also became an essential part of an aristocratic child's upbringing as they were thought to instill good moral character, tactical skill, and courtly values.⁶²⁴ Petrus Alfonsi, Henry

⁶²² For a detailed discussion of the various conflicting attitudes toward medieval games and the Church, see Bubczyk, "Ludus inhonestus et illicitus?," 23-43 (see chap. 2 n. 67).

⁶²³ See Chapter 2 for a discussion of the adoption of chess among the clergy in medieval England.

⁶²⁴ For more information about how chess educated and entertained aristocratic communities in medieval Europe, see Richard G. Eales, "The Game of Chess: An Aspect of Medieval Knightly Culture," in *The*

I's physician, writes in his twelfth-century treatise *Disciplina Clericalis*, that the seven knightly skills include, "riding, swimming, archery, boxing, hawking, chess, and verse-writing."⁶²⁵ In fifteenth- and sixteenth-century England, governors and founders of schools attempted to regulate play, designating certain times of the day and holidays for students to play games; these times came with specific rules such as the avoidance of "fighting, swearing, brawling or other disorders."⁶²⁶ If they could not successfully rid childhood of play altogether, they could at least try and manage it, essentially marginalizing the role of games in the lives of those medieval children taught in schools. However, games also signified social standing and were critical in showcasing one's sophisticated performances among peers in the gentry and nobility. As Nicholas Orme notes, the "educators most tolerant of games were those concerned with the bringing up of noble and gentle boys and girls. They saw games as complimentary to literary studies, useful in teaching military skills to men, and valuable in developing the health and accomplishments of both men and women."⁶²⁷ Those in power also continually attempted to regulate or outright prohibit games, especially in response to the negative consequences of gambling.⁶²⁸ Whether or not games were banned, they remained popular pastimes across all levels of medieval society, from churches to households, courts to universities.⁶²⁹

Ideals and Practice of Medieval Knighthood. Papers from the First and Second Strawberry Hill Conferences, eds. Christopher Harper-Bill and Ruth Harvey (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 1986), 12-34.

⁶²⁵ Hermes, *The "Disciplina Clericalis,"* 115 (see chap. 2 n. 186).

⁶²⁶ Nicholas Orme, "Games and Education in Medieval England," in *Games and Gaming in Medieval Literature*, ed. Serina Patterson (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), 48.

⁶²⁷ Orme, "Games and Education," 57.

⁶²⁸ See Chapter 4 for a discussion of the commoditization and regulation of playing cards in early modern England.

⁶²⁹ For discussions of games enjoyed in different medieval environments, see the first four chapters in *Games and Gaming in Medieval Literature*, ed. Serina Patterson (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015).

As I have discussed throughout this dissertation, ecclesiastics, authors, educators, and scribes tended to internalize and regulate games, to wield games for the purpose of developing one's character and edify them for teaching the principles of a moral life. Perhaps one of the most obvious examples of this is Jacobus de Cessolis' socio-political allegory, *Liber de moribus hominum et officiis nobilium super ludo scacchorum* [Book of the morals of men and the duties of nobles—or, On the Game of Chess]. To exemplify the hierarchies and functions of medieval society, Cessolis discusses the duties of each piece, the rules of chess, and, notably, ascribes a different role to each pawn. For instance, wisdom, loyalty, courtesy, strength, mercy, justice, and a desire to protect the kingdom are all characteristics imbued in the idealized Knight pieces.⁶³⁰ Cessolis does not condemn or criticize chess, but rather praises it. In his frame narrative, Cessolis attributes the invention of chess to a Greek philosopher named Xerxes, who aimed to reform the wicked King Evilmerodach through gameplay. As Xerxes says to Evilmerodach, “No one should learn this game except those who view themselves as students and consent to being disciplined.”⁶³¹ Cessolis further expounds on the purpose of chess, stating that it combats idleness, sadness, and slothfulness, since these dispositions lead to sin. Chess “was invented to indulge a desire for novelty . . . Many people wanted to invent great and clever things merely to curtail the inclination towards laziness or idleness.”⁶³² Cessolis thus saw playing chess as both a moral and cognitive exercise that could teach the aristocracy proper social behaviour through its many variations: “Because of the countless number of ways to play, because of the various meanings and metaphors, and because of the ingeniousness of the battles, the game has become

⁶³⁰ Jacobus de Cessolis, *The Book of Chess*, trans. H. L. Williams (New York: Italica, 2008), 30-40.

⁶³¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁶³² *Ibid.*, 9.

famous.”⁶³³ This sentiment is shared in a few manuscripts where Nicolas de Nicolay’s *Bonius Socius* (a collection of problems for chess, tables, and nine-man morris) are juxtaposed with Cessolis’ *Liber*; readers could enjoy chess through either problem-solving or contemplating the aspects of a moral life.

Medieval authors also employ games and game-playing in cautionary tales to illustrate the consequences of poor real-life choices. The Chaucerian continuation *Tale of Beryn*, translated from the French romance *Bérinus* in the fifteenth century for the Merchant’s second tale in *The Canterbury Tales*, uses games as a pedagogical tool to represent the consequences of an immoral lifestyle (i.e., a gambling addiction). Raised as a spoiled child without a proper education, Beryn spends much of his time losing at dice-games: “Berynus atte hazard many a nyzte he wakid, / And offt[e] tyme it fill so, þat he cam home al nakid.”⁶³⁴ The narrator immediately establishes a clear contrast between Beryn’s dutiful, nurturing parents and their spoiled, addicted son. As an object representing chance, the dice signifies the lack of direction and variability of Beryn’s life and future. Each time Beryn returns home stark-naked after losing, for instance, “Agea his modir wold[e] cloth hymn newe” (930), yet he refuses to leave his game-playing even when his mother lies on her deathbed. He does not heed his concerned parents and his gambling problem has so enraptured him that he is not present when his mother finally dies.

Games in *The Tale of Beryn* become a vehicle for Beryn’s growth and maturity. The narrator continually points to Beryn’s lack of education as the result of his lewd, selfish behaviour: “A man I-passid 3owith, & is with-out[en] lore, / May be wele I-likened, to a tre without[en] more” (1055-56). As a child, Beryn plays simple games of chance, but when he

⁶³³ Ibid., 10.

⁶³⁴ F. J. Furnivall and W. G. Stone, eds., *The Tale of Beryn*, Early English Text Society (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1909), 927-28. Parenthetical references to *The Tale of Beryn* will appear throughout.

travels to ‘Falsetown’ island as a newly minted merchant, Syrophane, a Burgess and skilled chess-player, immediately challenges him to a chess game with the intention of tricking him into an outrageous wager: after the first few games, in which he lets Beryn win, Syrophane states: “[t]hat who-so be I-matid, graunt & [eke] assent / To do the todirs bidding; & who-so do repent, / Drynke[en] al the water, þat salt is of the see” (1767-69). Believing himself the better gamester, Beryn overextends himself: his lack of schooling does not prepare him for this world of merchants, dealings, and strategy. ‘Falsetown,’ as both Jenny Adams and Andrew Higl note, becomes a space for Beryn to learn about the corruption involved in mercantile trade on an island where the cultural conventions of the English and French landscape no longer hold substance.⁶³⁵ Here Beryn enters an environment where deception and cheating become normative behaviour. Notably, the translator selects and expands the sections of the romance dealing with Beryn’s youth and gamefulness, omitting his later adventures as an adult—ostensibly as a warning against the dangers of game-playing.

In his study of adolescence in *The Tale of Beryn*, Ben Parsons observes that the translator uses Beryn’s youth as an exemplary tale, noting how youth can be molded to practice proper behaviour.⁶³⁶ In *The Tale of Beryn*, then, the boundary between games and reality—or, between serious and non-serious consequences—dissolves. After Syrophane declares a checkmate, the sergeants seize Beryn as Syrophane accuses him of fraud; the rules have changed. Beryn pleads, “‘Why, hoost, sey yee this in ernest, or in game?,” not yet understanding the island’s customs.

⁶³⁵ Adams, *Power Play*, 106-114 (see chap. 4 n. 468); Higl, *Playing The Canterbury Tales*, 94-95 (see chap. 3 n. 300).

⁶³⁶ Ben Parsons, “‘For my synne and for my yong delite:’ Chaucer, the ‘Tale of Beryn,’ and the Problem of ‘Adolescentia,’” *The Modern Language Review* 103.4 (2008): 949. Hélène Dauby constructs a similar argument, stating that reforming adolescence forms primarily out of the consequences of action. “Violences physiques et violences morales dans *The Tale of Beryn*,” *Cercles* 6 (2003): 54-61.

What he perceived to be a game within a safety net set by a ridiculously untenable wager suddenly becomes a reality he must address. Through the later mentorship of Geoffrey on the island, Beryn is not only able to learn the rules that govern the island, but also able to learn responsibility for his actions as a young adult. Whether used as an image for reform or as a cautionary tale, the reconceptualization of games to teach readers and players how to live a good life runs throughout the course of medieval literature and culture—a theme I have touched on in previous chapters. Games in medieval and early modern Europe not only blurred the boundaries between what we would consider ‘game’ and ‘literature’ as a form of entertainment (as I discussed in Chapter 1 and 3), but were also used, re-appropriated, and re-tooled for other purposes that undoubtedly held social significance to players.

Thus far, I have discussed tensions and suspicions toward games as they relate to the ambiguities of life and the ways in which medieval society attempted to regulate and appropriate games as a social good or, conversely, condemn and restrict them as a sinful activity. Philosopher Miguel Sicart, in his exploration of play in culture, argues that “games don’t matter” because they occur as just one form of expression within the wider context of play.⁶³⁷ If play is “a manifestation of humanity, used for expressing and being in the world,” then I would argue that games *also* matter because they become a nexus between materiality, players, and narrative—a ‘text’ to be read and interpreted as a particularity within given social contexts.⁶³⁸ Medieval games, as we have seen, do not rest in an ‘either/or’ dichotomy, but rather as a ‘both/and;’ they “can be *both* serious *and* playful because it is not just about play, or the rules of the game, or the medieval text—it is about medieval culture itself.”⁶³⁹ Far from being a

⁶³⁷ Sicart, *Play Matters*, 4.

⁶³⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁶³⁹ McCormick, “Afterword,” 214 (see chap. 1 n 122).

background “prop for play”, games in the Middle Ages, as *designed experiences*, become exemplary objects of value by: becoming a place to impart knowledge about the world (e.g., learning mathematics and applied skills, Chapter 2, and geography, Chapter 4), improving cognition and learning (e.g., recreational mathematics and chess problems, Chapter 2), practicing polite conversation (e.g., the *demandes d’amour*, Chapter 1 and Chapter 3), redefining social values and moral conventions (e.g., game-texts, Chapter 1 and *Ragemon le Bon*, Chapter 3), critiquing social circumstances (e.g., *Le Voeux dy Paon* excerpt in the Findern MS, Chapter 3), and contemplating morality and the journey of one’s soul through life (as in the *Game of the Goose*, Chapter 4)—all of which demonstrate that the prevalence of games in medieval society was a much more complex network of interrelationships, moral choices, and materialities than has previously been discussed.⁶⁴⁰ Yet despite this constellation of various actor-agents that can make-up a medieval game and its cultural contexts, medievalists and early modern scholars have only just begun to seriously study premodern games. In her rallying cry addressed to medievalists in the conclusion of my edited collection *Games and Gaming in Medieval Literature*, Betsy McCormick proclaims: “medieval studies has been slow to recognize the centrality and power of the ludic function” and “there is still much to explore”—and indeed this subject is ripe for new theoretical and historical approaches as both an addition and correction to the emerging field of cultural game studies.⁶⁴¹ Even within the field of medieval studies, the study of premodern games sheds new light on both familiar and unfamiliar texts and brings the notion of the medieval ludic function into sharper focus in other areas of medieval life. As McCormick writes, “perhaps it is as simple as reminding ourselves that studying play and games

⁶⁴⁰ Sicart, *Play Matters*, 14.

⁶⁴¹ McCormick, “Afterword,” 213, 209.

is not itself unserious,” and that such an assumption would miss the significance that medieval games held in the medieval imagination.⁶⁴²

5.3 Playing the Middle Ages

*My plan was going well: after escaping from the dragon’s attack, I had ducked the prison sentries and was running through the woods when I happened upon a stable. With darkness near and not a soul in sight, I stole the farmer’s lone horse and bolted down the road, making my way to Whiterun. But a clean getaway was not to be and, in my haste, I was captured by two city guards. As I was too poor to pay a bribe for immediate release, they escorted me into Dragonsreach jail where I spent the night contemplating my actions (including my futility in trying to break out of said jail). The next morning I was let go with a warning and, strolling into the city, accidentally joined a group of rugged mercenaries. And so ended my hour-long play session in the vast medieval-like province of Skyrim.*⁶⁴³

“The Middle Ages is magic,” write Tison Pugh and Angela Jane Weisl in *Medievalisms: Making the Past in the Present*, “it is continually reborn in new stories, new media, new histories.”⁶⁴⁴ There is a certain aesthetic and cultural appeal—a mysticism—about the Middle Ages that draws audiences and is a primary interest within the study of medievalism. Throughout the course of this dissertation, I have examined games in the Middle Ages and Early Modern

⁶⁴² Ibid., 213.

⁶⁴³ This is a personal anecdote that summarizes an one-hour play session in the game *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* (Bethesda Game Studios, 2011).

⁶⁴⁴ Tison Pugh and Angela Jane Weisl, *Medievalisms: Making the Past in the Present* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 1.

period and in particular how their development, enjoyment, and significance as forms of cultural expression differ from definitions of games as understood by game studies scholars. But there is another kind of “medieval game” that is wholly modern and appealing to millions of players. To conclude, I wish to pivot toward these modern games, examining whether game spaces in neomedieval games—as objects in their cultural moment and as fabricated notions of the Middle Ages—specifically contribute to a perceived social good in their reimagining of the medieval. *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* (2011, henceforth called *Skyrim*) presents an exemplary model for this inquiry due to its popularity as one of the best-selling games of all time, vast open world, character-driven experience, and emphasis on narrative.⁶⁴⁵ In the twenty-first century, the primary touchpoint for audience engagement with the Middle Ages is shifting from books, television, and film toward digital and tabletop games, and *Skyrim*, with over 20 million units sold, attests to this cultural development.

Games are now among the most influential forms of popular expression in what has become known as the “ludic century,” and the appetite for medieval board and digital games has remained steady among players as medieval games continue to be funded, produced, and released.⁶⁴⁶ Medieval games do not attempt to replicate a past reality based in historical authenticity, but rather take the Middle Ages as a point of departure to build immersive, coherent worlds. As Daniel Kline remarks, “[g]ame makers have used the medieval past to lend credence to their plotlines, to make exotic their characters, to romanticize their settings, and to give authority to their efforts. The medieval period is not something in the distant past but a present

⁶⁴⁵ Bethesda sold 7 million copies in its first week of release, with a combined total of 23,270,000 units sold since 2011. See “Skyrim: The Elder Scrolls V Statistics,” *Statistic Brain*, accessed January 23rd 2017, <http://www.statisticbrain.com/skyrim-the-elder-scrolls-v-statistics>.

⁶⁴⁶ Eric Zimmerman, “Manifesto for a Ludic Century,” n.p., accessed 23 October 2014, http://ericzimmerman.com/files/texts/Manifesto_for_a_Ludic_Century.pdf.

reality, a treasure trove whose contents can be ceaselessly reconfigured for current needs.”⁶⁴⁷ In his groundbreaking effort to untangle various types of modern medievalisms, Umberto Eco beckons us to be cautious in our scholarly responsibilities: “we have the moral and cultural duty of spelling out what kind of Middle Ages we are talking about.”⁶⁴⁸ But within the textual pluralities of neomedieval games, which are only ever fully realized through player experiences within the larger context of complex player communities, the medieval world itself encompasses a multitude of assemblages that may only have tangential connections to a medieval past. Medieval settings in digital games go “beyond mere convenience; the imaginary spaces [they build] fulfill fundamental emotional needs.”⁶⁴⁹ For social video games especially, “the ‘medieval’ is a way to not only escape the real world, but also further define oneself within it.”⁶⁵⁰

The action role-playing game *Skyrim* also encapsulates this rich “possibility space” and potentiality of games.⁶⁵¹ Although players adopt the identity of the “Last Dragonborn,” a character destined to defeat the dragon Alduin the World-Eater, they can freely develop this character by roaming *Skyrim* in the immersive world of Tamriel, which consists of cities, villages, dungeons, and vast swaths of wilderness. There are no identifiable classes—that is, character archetypes based on a rigid set of abilities which are typical of role-playing games—no

⁶⁴⁷ Daniel T. Kline, “Introduction,” in *Digital Gaming Re-Imagines the Middle Ages*, edited by Daniel T. Kline (New York: Routledge, 2014), 5.

⁶⁴⁸ Umberto Eco, *Travels in Hyperreality*, trans. by William Weaver (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986), 72.

⁶⁴⁹ Serina Patterson, “Casual Medieval Games, Interactivity, and Social Play in Social Network and Mobile Applications,” in *Digital Gaming Re-Imagines the Middle Ages*, edited by Daniel T. Kline (New York: Routledge, 2014), 251.

⁶⁵⁰ Patterson, “Casual Medieval Games,” 254.

⁶⁵¹ “Possibility Space” was a concept coined by game designer Warren Spector, which, in the words of Eric Zimmerman and Katie Salen, “links the embedded ‘overarching narrative’ of the game to the emergent actions and outcomes of moment-to-moment play,” Salen, *Rules of Play*, 390 (see chap. 1 n. 30).

winning or losing scenarios, and no ‘correct’ way to play the game (even the main storyline is optional); a player can forge his or her own path by joining a band of mercenaries, becoming a folk hero helping those in need, or assuming the role of an assassin or thief—a world experienced through the freedom of player choice as illustrated by my personal gameplay anecdote above. As I have mentioned elsewhere, “ideas of the medieval past *can* bring about and indeed highlight, current civic, social, and political debates” as neomedieval games “mirror and shape our own modern cultural values.”⁶⁵² While games such as Double Fine’s turn-based fantasy strategy game *Massive Chalice* includes Western liberal values such as same-sex marriage in the game’s core aesthetics and mechanics, *Skyrim* turns these ethical quandaries onto the players themselves. *Skyrim* becomes a world for players to indulge in an alter ego, a persona that can reflect social values or, conversely, change them.

As with other games, players in *Skyrim* are not passive receptacles, but rather moral agents continuously engaging with a game’s own ethical system—a viewpoint akin to Bruno Latour’s Actor-Network Theory (ANT).⁶⁵³ As Sicart writes, “through playthings, we experience play, and they have a role in shaping the activity in the ways they mediate it, but also in the ways they open themselves to being interpreted, questioned, [and] appropriated.”⁶⁵⁴ *Skyrim* not only crafts a rich medieval world for players, but also enables players to “see values and practice them and challenge them.”⁶⁵⁵ The ‘medieval’ thus provides an alternate play space, a world that sits

⁶⁵² Serina Patterson, “Women, Queerness, and *Massive Chalice*: Medievalism in Participatory Culture,” *Studies in Medievalism* 24 (2015): 73.

⁶⁵³ Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

⁶⁵⁴ Sicart, *Play Matters*, 114, fn68.

⁶⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

between a fantastical space of possibilities and a recognizable space of relationships, actions, and consequences.

So why do we view games under an ethical lens in the first place? The answer is unfortunately opaque and multifaceted. The element of indeterminacy inherent within games ushers in fear of the unknown, but by indulging ourselves and playing the game we may find the skill to deal with life's ambiguities. The valuation of games ultimately rests upon one's own principled disposition. I would like to conclude this dissertation with a short passage from Bernard Suits's philosophical treatise, *The Grasshopper: Games, Life, and Utopia*: "For even now it is games which give us something to do when there is nothing to do. We thus call games 'pastimes,' and regard them as trifling fillers of the interstices in our lives. But they are so much more important than that. They are clues to the future. And their serious cultivation now is perhaps our only salvation."⁶⁵⁶ When people play—and, for our purposes, when people specifically play games—they realize their potential and possible selves. Whether for good or ill, games change people, and in doing so they have the capacity to change the world.

⁶⁵⁶ Suits, *The Grasshopper*, 159 (see chap. 1 n 27).

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Appendix

To date, the following text has been unedited.

1. The poetic *demandes d'amour* in MS Additional 60577

Fol. 80v

Die[u] chastell damours vous demand

Nomes le p[re]mier fundement

Après nommer le maistre mure

Qui plus le face fort et steure

Dites moy qui sont les carneaulx

Les saiettes et les quarreaulx

Je vous demand[e] quelle est la clef

Qui le chastell peult deffermer

Nommes la sale et le manoire

Ou leu peult premier joye avoir

Quelle est la chamber ou sont sy litt

On lamant prent son premier lit

Après les gardes me nommes

Par quoy le chastell est gardes

Qui fins amans peult jouyre
De ce dont ilz ont grant desire

Qui fait amours long temps durer
Et enforcier et embraser

Dont peult greig proufit venire
En fines amours maintenir

Quest en amours grant courtoisie
Moins prouffitable et plus prise

Fol. 81r

Quelle est la mendre qua iours fare
Qui plus conforte et plus solace

Quest en amours grant courtoisie
Que nulz ne la Recroit qui rie

Par quelle stanoir ne par quell chose
Peult meulx sage dame es prouver
Celluy qui la prie damez la du cuer

Quest en amours mere et norrice
Tant plus est nobill tant plus est nice

Amis amans qui amie vault
Quel chose est ce qui mieulx sy vault

Et a plus grant besoinge lieu fault

Dy moy damours le dart villain

Tant plus me fiert ie plus laime

Tant plus me fiert villainement

Plus lendure legierment

Quelle est lenseigne plus de guers

Qui plus monster lamour des cuers

Et est lenseigne si aperte

Quelle ne peult ester couverte