

CULTURES OF PLAY, 1300-1700



Edited by Robin O'Bryan

Games and Game Playing in European Art and Literature, 16th-17th Centuries

Amsterdam
University
Press



Games and Game Playing in European Art and Literature, 16th–17th Centuries

Cultures of Play, 1300–1700

Cultures of Play, 1300–1700 provides a forum for investigating the full scope of medieval and early modern play, from toys and games to dramatic performances, from etiquette manuals and literary texts to bulls and tractates, from jousting to duels, and from education to early scientific investigation. Inspired by the foundational work of Johan Huizinga as well as later contributions by Roger Caillois, Eugen Fink, and Bernard Suits, this series publishes monographs and essay collections that address the ludic aspects of premodern life. The accent of this series falls on cultural practices that have thus far eluded traditional disciplinary models. Our goal is to make legible modes of thought and action that until recently seemed untraceable, thereby shaping the growing scholarly discourses on playfulness both past and present.

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Robin O'Bryan

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“That you have seen the pride, beheld the sport,
And all the games of fortune, played at court ...”

Ben Jonson, “An Epigram” (c. 1625)

“Gaming is an enchanting witchery ...”

Charles Cotton, *The Compleat Gamester* (1674)

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Acknowledgments

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Introduction

A Passion for Games

Robin O'Bryan

Abstract

This introductory chapter provides a general background on the European passion for games in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. As well as giving a brief overview of some of the most popular games in the period, the discussion addresses the various roles that games played in early modern society. The examination then moves on to elucidate a wide range of ancillary topics related to games and their play, while also looking at the ways in which games and game playing revealed greater truths about the inner workings of European culture. In identifying leitmotifs and metaphors used by authors, dramatists, and artists, the investigation shows that the games and issues discussed in the essays are part of a much larger cultural narrative.

Keywords: chess, playing cards, gambling, tennis, educational games, game metaphors

Writing in his *Il libro del cortegiano* (*The Book of the Courtier*, 1528), Baldassare Castiglione engages his characters in a dialogue on the role of game play in the making of an ideal courtier. A young man asks if it is “wrong for the courtier to play at cards and dice?” with his respondent—a courtier himself—assuring him that it is fine as long as he does not neglect things of greater importance nor play to win money and cheat his partner.¹ As for chess, although acknowledging that it is “a refined and ingenious recreation,” the speaker goes on to say that it takes too much time and study to master the game, time and effort that is best spent in more noble pursuits; in short, he concludes that for chess “mediocrity is more to

Unless otherwise attributed, translations are mine.

¹ Castiglione, *Book of the Courtier*, 140. The original Italian reads: “[...] parvi che sia vizio nel Cortegiano il giocare alle carte ed ai dadi? [...] A me no [...] eccetto a cui nol facesse troppo assiduamente e per quello lasciasse l'altre cose di maggior importanza, o veramente non per altro che per vincer danari, ed ingannasse il compagno [...]”; Castiglione, *Il cortegiano*, ed. Cian, 162–63.

be praised than excellence."² While there were a number of chess advocates who would have certainly disagreed with him, Castiglione seems to be arguing for temperance in game play, recognizing, if not anticipating, the burgeoning taste for such diversions that was to gain traction as the century progressed.

That a discussion on the relative merits of game play should figure in a manual on courtier conduct is indicative of how thoroughly the penchant for games had been embraced by European society. Indeed, commensurate with an increased interest in, and opportunity for leisurely pastimes, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries witnessed an unprecedented vogue for playing games.³ We may get a good idea of this phenomenon by considering the way games are presented in François Rabelais's classic text *Gargantua and Pantagruel* (1542). In one chapter the author describes how a cloth laden with all sorts of dice, cards, and board games was set before Gargantua for his postprandial amusement.⁴ The names and numbers of these games is staggering—Rabelais enumerates 217 both real and imaginary games—but more surprising is the way his contemporaries augmented this number in their subsequent translations.⁵ In the German, Dutch, and English versions, the translators added their own expansive list of national games to those mentioned by Rabelais.⁶ While putting a regional stamp on the French text, their embellishments are duly suggestive of the manic hold games seemed to have exerted on the early modern imagination.

Games were, of course, not new to the European cultural vocabulary. In Antiquity, as well as competitive games of sport, the Greeks and Romans played dice, knucklebones, and variants on chess, backgammon, and checkers.⁷ Game pieces discovered in Viking ship burials provide evidence that not only were such games still being played in the medieval epoch, but as in past traditions, game objects were considered valuable enough that they were included among the precious articles

2 "Quello certo è gentile intertenimento ed ingenuoso [...] di modo, che a cui vuol esser eccellente nel gioco de' scacchi, credo bisogni consumarvi molto tempo, e mettervi tanto studio, quanto se volesse imparar qualche nobile scienza, o far qualsivoglia altra cosa ben d'importanza [...] cioè che la mediocrità sia più laudévole che la eccellenza"; Castiglione, *Il cortegiano*, ed. Cian, 163. Castiglione's words hint at some of the negative connotations that were sometimes assigned to chess and chess players in the epoch; see discussion below.

3 See Burke, "Invention of Leisure," and Arcangeli, *Recreation in the Renaissance*.

4 Rabelais, *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, 1.22.83–85, and *Oeuvres de Rabelais*, 1: 392–447; and Bakhtin, "Role of Games in Rabelais."

5 The list contains not only the names of actual games, but also reflects gaming terms and methods of playing, with the first third referencing card games and the remainder referring to sports; see discussion by Hayes, "Games," 89. Also see Mehl, *Les jeux au royaume de France*.

6 Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, 231–32, and "Role of Games in Rabelais," 125.

7 On games in the ancient world, see, for example, Purcell, "Literature games."

accompanying the deceased into the afterlife.⁸ By the late thirteenth century, King Alfonso X in Spain had had compiled his *Libro de los juegos* (Book of games, 1283), an encyclopedic illustrated text on tables (backgammon, similar to tric-trac), dice, and mill (or merels, an early version of nine men's morris).⁹ Chess, described as the "most noble and of greater mastery than the others," figured prominently in the text with over a hundred problems discussed. But while Alfonso's *Libro* offers confirmation of the rising popularity of games during the Middle Ages, what is unique about the early modern period is the extent to which games permeated all aspects of European life.

What kinds of games were being played in this epoch? Games ran the gamut, from those requiring skill and wit to those considered to be tactical games of luck, and still others that were entirely dependent upon chance. There were seasonal games, outdoor games, and educational games; games for well-heeled aristocrats, games played by those occupying the lower rungs of the social order, and often both. Some games were primarily for men, others for women, still others played by mixed sexes, and those by children. The period saw the development of entirely new games, as well as the popularization of traditional games and changes in how they were played.¹⁰ Further reflective of this interest there was an outpouring of informational works devoted to games and the rules of their play. Similarly, a host of game objects—chessboards, hand-painted playing cards, gaming tables, and the like—were produced to satisfy the demand, articles both utilitarian and those of great beauty. In art, while games and their players had long been represented in the margins of medieval manuscripts, the game topos became a prominent genre unto itself as a number of artists made game players the subject of their works. Writers, poets, and playwrights responded in kind using the game leitmotif as the theme or subtext of their literary and dramatic endeavors. Royals and nobles, traditional arbiters of culture, often encouraged these pastimes, and it is not coincidental that the plentiful treatises that were composed on games were frequently dedicated to those whose taste in such matters, mattered.

8 Hall, "Board Games in Boat Burials." Game objects have been found in Mesopotamian and Egyptian tombs, while knucklebones have been discovered in Roman children's graves, their presence indicating that the deceased were not slaves and thus had the luxury of being able to play games.

9 Golladay provides a translation and extensive analysis of the text in "*Los libros de acedrex dados e tablas*."

10 On the new games that emerged in France in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, see Belmas, *Jouer autrefois*, who also discusses the social ramifications of this "global phenomenon."

Games and Play: Theories and Approaches

Despite the overarching absorption with games and game playing that characterized the early modern period, the study of games did not emerge as a serious subject of academic inquiry until relatively modern times.¹¹ This investigatory lapse is all the more surprising considering that from the late Middle Ages on, scholars and theologians had lent a critical eye to the subject, providing historical and ethnological surveys of games and offering commentary on ancillary issues related to game play.¹² Medical, legal, and moralistic tracts added to the discussion, with jurists weighing in on the lawful implications of awarding winnings for gambling, and physicians and religious authorities evaluating game play in terms of its impact on physical and spiritual health.¹³ Others offered taxonomies of games, while putting forth their theories of game play. In his 1538 pedagogical treatise *Dialogos* (Dialogues), the Valencian humanist Juan Luis Vives presented an early classification scheme for games, differentiating them according to criteria of the players' age, gender, and social class, and proposing a generic theory of laws of play "las leyes del juego".¹⁴ Several decades later Torquato Tasso articulated his ideas on the cultural and social meaning of games and play in his two treatises, the *Gonzaga secondo overo del giuoco* (Second Gonzaga or on games, 1581) and *Il Romeo overo del giuoco* (Romeo or on games, 1582), written at the court of Duke Alfonso II d'Este in Ferrara.¹⁵ Reprising the dialogue format, Tasso established an analytical framework that evaluated games based upon type (for example, games contingent upon luck versus skill) and the role played by Fortune, as well related issues that brought in the

11 This is an oft-repeated observation. A short essay on the "History of Games" posted on the website of the Fondazione Benetton di Ricerche comments that the study of games was long considered to be not "serious" enough, which would account for the lacuna of scholarship on medieval games observed by Patterson, "Introduction," 3. De Voogt has duly noted that research on board games is a relatively recent development; "Editorial," 6. Especially striking is the assessment of Zollinger, paraphrasing Caillois, who asserts that "gambling and lottery studies were exposed to a modern form of ostracism"; Zollinger, "Dealing in Chances," 1; and Caillois, "Unity of Play," 93.

12 Already in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, for example, games had begun to figure in European encyclopedic (such as Alfonso's *Libro*) and other writings; see chapter 3 entitled "Early Writings on Games," in Willughby, *Francis Willughby's Book of Games*, 43–51.

13 Such issues are treated by Arcangeli, *Recreation in the Renaissance*.

14 Vives distinguished between physical exercise, children's games, games on paper or cards, and ball games. His "six laws of play" were enumerated in terms of the correct time to play, companions for playing games, the kinds of games played, their stakes, the manner of play, and the length of play; see Vives, *Tudor School-Boy Life*, xliii, and Vives, *Dialogos*, trans. Coret y Peris, 353–72. Also see Renson, "Le jeu chez Juan Luis Vivès," who notes that this categorization of games predates twentieth-century writing and theories on the subject.

15 As McClure observes, Tasso's treatises represent "the most ambitious theoretical attempt in the cinquecento to develop a theory that embraces all types of games"; McClure, *Parlour Games*, 5.

politics of gender and the moral and psychological ramifications of play.¹⁶ Girolamo Cardano's *Liber de ludo aleae* (*Book on Games of Chance*, written sometime in the mid-1500s and published posthumously in 1663) concentrated on gambling. After acknowledging that games could be dependent on agility or strength, or on skill and/or chance, he went on to set out the conditions appropriate for gambling, while also specifying "Who Should Play and When."¹⁷ (Playing with professional gamblers, he deemed, was "most disgraceful" (*turpissimum*) and "dangerous" (*periculosum*).¹⁸) The Englishman Francis Willughby, an ornithologist by training, utilized his scientific background to produce his encyclopedic *Book of Games* (c. 1660). Unpublished and thus overlooked until recently, his text is now recognized as an invaluable source for its systematic observation, description, and classification of period games.¹⁹

While others addressed the game issue in intervening centuries, in contemporary scholarship Johan Huizinga's *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* (1938) is traditionally used as the starting point for studies on games as they fall under the larger rubric of "play."²⁰ Offering a model for description and classification of games as undertaken by earlier theoreticians, Huizinga distinguished play from "ordinary life" to assert the impact of the play element upon all forms of culture and social institutions.²¹ Other notable pioneers in the field of game studies have included Mikhail Bakhtin, whose analysis of Rabelais's games focused on their association with popular carnival and feasts, and Peter Burke dealing with games in the context of a developing leisure society in early modern Europe.²² Alessandro

16 One of Tasso's interlocutors addresses the notion of whether victory in games of chess and playing cards is due to *ingegno* (wit or skill) or *fortuna* (luck); Tasso, *Il Gonzaga secondo*, 10. Among the other issues addressed in Tasso's treatise were the venues for game playing, the goals of various games, and archetypes of players; *ibid.*, and McClure, *Parlour Games*, 4–13.

17 "Quibus, & quando magis conveniat ludere"; Cardano, *Liber*, 262; and Cardano, *Book on Games of Chance*, 1–4. Written over a thirty-year period, the published version was a collection of notes and thoughts on his behalf. I thank Greger Sundin for this information.

18 Cardano, *Book on Games of Chance*, 3; and Cardano, *Liber*, 262.

19 Willughby, *Francis Willughby's Book of Games*, 2.

20 In the mid-eighteenth century, for example, Edmund Hoyle produced his widely influential treatise *Mr. Hoyle's Games of Whist, Quadrille, Piquet, Chess, and Back-gammon*, which established rules, procedures, and strategies for playing these games, as well as discussing the laws of probability. In the latter part of the nineteenth century, several references to games in Jacob Burckhardt's influential *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (published originally in German as *Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien* in 1860), prompted scholars such as Ludovico Zdekauer, Gerolamo Boccardo, and Angelo Solerti to tackle the subject; see Guerzoni, "Playing Great Games," 43 and n. 2.

21 Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 9. Caillois discusses Huizinga's work vis-à-vis games in *Man, Play and Games*, 4–5.

22 Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, 231–32 and 235–39, with a focused discussion in "Role of Games in Rabelais"; and Burke, "Invention of Leisure," 139. Slethaug, "Game Theory," 66, addresses the subversive aspects of games in Bakhtin.

Arcangeli's recent text has advanced the discussion in exploring how games figured in Renaissance attitudes toward recreation and pastime.²³ More circumscribed period and regional studies have produced encyclopedic collections and monographic works devoted to chess, playing cards, board games, parlor games, gambling, and related sports such as tennis and soccer.²⁴ Game scholarship has duly infiltrated a number of different disciplines, with terms and mathematical concepts from game theory used to explain economics, political science, psychology, and other social and behavioral sciences.²⁵

Some of the most important research in the field has been undertaken by Roger Caillois who issued his *Man, Play and Games* in 1968.²⁶ Building on the work of Huizinga and most certainly on earlier treatises, Caillois proposed a theoretical classification of games that is widely referenced by scholars of game studies. Although not all have been in agreement over what activities should be included under the game rubric (Huizinga, for example, did not make allowances for games of chance played for money), Caillois nevertheless included gambling in his classification scheme; likewise his typology was expanded to incorporate sports.²⁷ Placing all games in the domain of "play," Caillois divided games into four categories.²⁸ The

23 Arcangeli, *Recreation in the Renaissance*.

24 Listed in the bibliography are notable specialized monographs and edited collections which include those by H.J.R. Murray, Richard Eales, and Daniel O'Sullivan on chess; Catherine Hargrave, Michael Dummett, Detlef Hoffmann, David Parlett, and Timothy Husband on playing cards; H.J.R. Murray, David Parlett, and Jean-Marie Lhôte on board and table games; Adrian Seville on the Game of the Goose; George McClure on parlor games; Manfred Zollinger on gambling; Heiner Gillmeister and Cees de Bondt on tennis; and sports and games of the Renaissance by Andrew Leibs, and of the early modern period by John McClelland and Brian Merrilees. Among the general edited volumes on games are Elliot Avedon and Brian Sutton-Smith's *The Study of Games*; the expansive *Les jeux à la Renaissance* edited by Philippe Ariès and Jean Claude Margolin; and *Jeux de princes, jeux de vilains* edited by Ève Netchine. Also noteworthy is Manfred Zollinger's comprehensive bibliography on game treatises published between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries (*Bibliographie der Spielbücher*). In addition, increasing scholarly interest is testified by the inauguration of journals such as *Ludica* (1995) devoted to the history and culture of games, and the international journal of *Board Game Studies* founded in 1998. Allison Levy's edited collection on *Playthings in Early Modernity*, 2017 (which came out after the essays in this volume had been assembled) addresses a variety of games under the rubric of "play." The edited text by Serina Patterson (*Games and Gaming in Medieval Literature*, 2015), which examines the role of games in medieval culture and literature, comes close to the orientation of this present volume.

25 This application of games to these other fields is concomitant with Huizinga's recognition that the play element can be found in a variety of otherwise serious disciplines including art and poetry, law, war, etc.; Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*.

26 Slethaug, "Game Theory," provides a succinct overview of the various approaches taken in games scholarship, which include those that are firmly rooted in philosophy.

27 Patterson discusses the disciplinary distinctions between game and sport in "Introduction," 4.

28 See Caillois's chapter 2 entitled "Classification of Games" (*Man, Play and Games*, 11–36), which includes a schematic of his classification.

first, *agōn*, refers to games of skill, characterized by competitive games such as physical sports and cerebral chess; the second, *alea* (the Latin name for dice), denotes games of chance in which the player's skill is sublimated to the vagaries of destiny (in other words, Fortune).²⁹ The third type of game Caillois designated *mimicry* or simulation, which he used to connote theatrical representations and drama, as, for example, games of make-believe; with the fourth category—*ilinx* or vertigo—referring to games comprising improvisation and joy as manifested in children's games like leapfrog.³⁰ This theoretical construct recognizes that such types may overlap and that in some games (like cards) luck might triumph over actual skill. Caillois's typology is invaluable for permitting us to appreciate the various ways in which games coincided with seemingly disparate areas such as theater, dance, performance, and the like, but his theory is also crucial for providing insights into how games traditionally prompted conflicting viewpoints in terms of their value to society. Those falling under the category of *alea* were often censured because the player's abdication of will subjected them to dependence on external (occult) forces; conversely, games that relied on the competitive agents of skill in *agōn* generally merited higher in such assessments.

As becomes evident in the analyses of Caillois, Huizinga, and others, because of the corollary applications of "game" to "play," a precise definition of "game" is often elusive.³¹ Compounding the issue are the etymological variations in European languages which, unlike in English usage, conflate the two words. The original Latin *ludus* is an all-encompassing term meaning both "play" and "game," with the German *Spiel*, French *jeu*, Spanish *juego*, and Italian *giuoco* having similar dual connotations.³² How then to define *game*? Bernard Suits offered a theoretical distinction between games and play in *The Grasshopper: Games, Life and Utopia* (1978), defining "playing a game [as] the voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles."³³ In "The Oasis of Happiness: Toward an Ontology of Play," Eugen Fink proposed disregarding antithetical frameworks of "work-play" and "frivolity-seriousness" to see play as an essential element

29 According to Ortalli the distinction between games of skill and games of chance was first expressed in judicial writing of the early thirteenth century, perhaps in Azzone of Bologna's *Summa codicis*; Ortalli, "Uncertain Thresholds of Tolerance," 64.

30 Chomarat, "Les échecs d'après Vida," 370, applies Caillois's theory of *mimicry* to chess as it simulates war.

31 The fluid and amorphous parameters that extend to the meaning of game led the games historian David Parlett to dismiss the need for an exact definition; Parlett, *Oxford History of Board Games*, 1.

32 See, for example, Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 35–37; Patterson, "Introduction," 5–7; and Guerzoni "Playing Great Games," 43 n. 1, who piquantly observes that in sixteenth-century Italian courts "everything can be considered both game and play."

33 Suits, *Grasshopper*, 55. Suits was responding to the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein's assertion that games were indefinable.

of man's very being.³⁴ Although his discussion finds points of comparison between games and play, he nevertheless asserted that play is not for the sake of reaching a "final goal."³⁵ This latter point aligns with the ideas of Jacques Derrida and other French philosophers who demarcated games as governed by rules and structure as opposed to play activities, which are open-ended.³⁶ Caillois essentially challenged this binary assessment in his assertion that not all games subscribe to rules: those that are free and improvisational (which incorporate the highest degree of play, or *paidia*) can be distinguished from those that are rule-based (categorized as *ludus*).³⁷

Deferring to Caillois's more flexible interpretation, but otherwise disentangling our investigations from the complex philosophical and theoretical issues regarding notions of "play," in this volume we put the focus squarely back on "games," examined herein as a leitmotif of creative enterprise. In this respect, our study represents a new approach in the field of game scholarship. The first of titles to be published under AUP's *Culture of Play* series, although pertinent to game scholars, this collection is envisioned to have broader appeal for the general academic readership. To that end, the introduction—admittedly expansive—is intended to provide an appropriate background for those not conversant in the specialized field of game studies. Not only does this extended discussion set out an analytical framework for the games, themes, and subtexts that are treated in the individual essays, but it also allows us to see them as part of a larger cultural construct. Keeping the inquiries "game-centric" then, the essays seek to answer two main questions: how were games used to convey special meanings in art and literature, and how did these games speak to greater issues in European society? In chapters dealing with chess, playing cards, game prints, dice, gambling, and outdoor and sportive games, our essayists show how games were used by artists, writers, game makers and collectors, in the service of love and war, didactic and moralistic instruction, commercial enterprise, politics and diplomacy, and assertions of civic and personal identity. Offering innovative iconographical and literary interpretations these analyses reveal how games played, written about, illustrated, and collected functioned as metaphors for a host of broader cultural issues related to gender relations and feminine power, class distinction and status, ethical and sexual comportment, philosophical and religious ideas, and conditions of the mind.

34 Fink, "Oasis of Happiness," 19. Fink refined his ideas further in his more expansive *Play as Symbol of the World*.

35 Fink, "Oasis of Happiness," 21. Fink characterized play as "interrupting the continuity and purposive structure of our lives," which could also be said of games; *ibid.*, 22. Likewise, allowing that "each game is an attempt at existence," he went on to say that "we do find occasionally in play [...] a withdrawal from the real world, which can go so far as enchantment and trance and reach a point of total enslavement [...]," words that conjure up the serious game player; *ibid.*, 23, 25.

36 Slethaug, "Game Theory," 68.

37 Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, 27–35. *Paidia* comes from the Greek for "childish play."

Games, Game Play, and Cultural Response

Chess

As might be inferred from Alfonso's *Libro* and Castiglione's dialogue, the most prestigious game in the epoch was chess. Originating in India and passing through Persia, the game is thought to have been introduced into Europe around 1000 CE via Islamic-controlled Sicily or Spain. From the thirteenth century, chess became a fashionable pastime among the nobility and the clergy, its popularity reflected in a spate of chivalric romances, poems, and moralistic treatises. One of the most significant of the latter was the "chess morality" written by the Dominican Jacobus de Cessolis (c. 1273). The *Liber de moribus hominum et de officiis nobilium ac popularium super ludo schachorum* (Book of morals and the duties of nobles and commoners, on the game of chess) was fashioned as an allegory of society, functioning as a *speculum principis* (mirror for princes) and used to instruct young nobles in the art of governance.³⁸ Lighter in tone but equally influential were a variety of poems treating the game as an allegory for love and seduction.³⁹ While many of these early chess classics were still being read and/or translated into the sixteenth century, the period also ushered in a host of new instructional tracts and other literary works devoted to the chess theme.⁴⁰

One such treatise was *Das Schach- oder König-spiel* (The Chess, or the King's game, 1616), written by a German duke using the pseudonym Gustavus Selenus.⁴¹ As suggested by his title chess continued to maintain its associations with elite activity. To be sure chess was played by those of more modest means, but in art and literature chess players were often portrayed in aristocratic guise playing the game in elegant settings.⁴² Paris Bordone showed two finely dressed men at a chessboard set upon a table covered with an oriental carpet (c. 1550), while a portrait

38 Cessolis's Latin text was immediately translated into French, and then into a number of other languages by the fifteenth century assuring it wide distribution. For the English translation, see Cessolis, *Book of Chess*.

39 For more on chess as an amatory pursuit, see the essay by Robin O'Bryan in the next chapter.

40 Besides the work of Luis Ramirez de Lucena in the 1490s, these include instructional treatises by Pedro Damiano (1512), Ruy López de Segura (1561), and Arthur Saul (1614) who published the earliest original book on chess in English, as well as the "love chess" allegorical poems by Catalan writers, and by Marco Girolamo Vida in Italy discussed in the next chapter.

41 *Das Schach- oder König-spiel* was written by August the Younger, Duke of Brunswick-Lüneburg, a member of the elder branch of the House of Este. He reappears in Greger Sundin's essay in Chapter 9 of this volume.

42 Some of the more modest chess sets were fabricated of copper alloy, wood, bone, or horse teeth; Patterson, "Introduction," 2. Interestingly, although chess was played by Dutch royals, chess players are rarely depicted in Dutch genre painting; Naumann, "Chess Players," 358–59 and n. 6.

by Jan Cornelisz Vermeyen (c. 1548) presents the Elector of Saxony outfitted in a fur garment as he plays a match. A charming miniature by Hans Mielich (1552) portrays the Duke of Bavaria and his wife playing chess accompanied by several attendants and two precious lap dogs which occupy a place of honor on the table with the chessboard.⁴³ William Shakespeare perpetuated the nobility of chess players in *The Tempest* (1610) in staging the match between the daughter of the Duke of Milan and the son of the King of Naples.

Playing Cards

Playing cards were another inheritance from the Arab world, filtering into Europe from Islamic territories in the mid-fourteenth century and achieving remarkable popularity within a few decades. Some of the earliest decks were luxury cards made for noble and royal patrons and decorated with hand-painted imagery; more commonly, cards printed with woodblock or engraved designs were produced for the general playing populace.⁴⁴ As with chess, the iconography of the cards was often based on courtly hierarchies, hence kings, queens, jacks/knives, and occasionally fools/jesters; before codification in the late fifteenth century, depending on geographical region the individual suits might be represented by such motifs as flowers, animals, fruits, cups, hearts, bells, shields, and even hunting imagery.⁴⁵ Cards were used in a variety of trick-taking games including tarot (*tarocchi*), German *Karnöffel*, and trappola, as well as in primero (an early version of poker).⁴⁶ An English painting from the 1560s shows a group of four men, some wearing fur-trimmed garments and all with rings on their fingers playing primero, the coins on the table indicating they are playing for stakes.⁴⁷ In Shakespeare's *Merry Wives of Windsor* (1602) Falstaff invokes the game when he declares, "I never prospered since I foreswore myself [cheated] at primero."⁴⁸ (He lied.)

43 The miniature is the second illustration in the *Jewel Book of the Duchess Anna of Bavaria*, World Digital Library, www.wdl.org/en/item/4104/. Accessed September 10, 2018.

44 Hand-painted playing cards were produced for Charles VI of France in 1392, while the earliest of the woodblock playing cards were made around 1440–50; Hargrave, *History of Playing Cards*, 31, and Husband, *World in Play*, 47.

45 Husband, *World in Play*, 26–41. The Knave is depicted as a jester with a *marotte* in a deck now in the Cloisters Museum; *ibid.*, 85.

46 Feigenbaum provides a concise discussion of primero/a (also spelled primiero/a) in "Gamblers, Cheats, and Fortune-Tellers," 167–68.

47 The painter is attributed to the circle of the so-called Master of the Countess of Warwick, with the image viewable at Wikimedia Commons ("Four Gentlemen of High Rank Playing Primero"), <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Primero.jpg>.

48 Probably written in 1597, it was not published until 1602; see Shakespeare, *Merry Wives of Windsor*, ed. Melchiori, 266 (4.5.94).

Dice and Cards and Gambling

Like cards, dice were widely played in the early modern era, and both frequently used for gambling.⁴⁹ Although gambling often received the censure of moralists and religious leaders, Pietro Aretino adopted the leitmotif of playing cards in his *Le carte parlanti* (The speaking cards, 1543) to argue for gambling as an appropriate noble activity: “To risk nothing is a thing for a man worth nothing [*uomo da niente*] [...] a man is not esteemed unless he loses.”⁵⁰ A gambler himself, Cardano went on to advocate for dice and gambling (albeit with moderation) in his *Liber de ludo aleae*, while allowing that games of dice were suitable for soldiers.⁵¹ This latter was likely a reference to the ubiquitous soldiers that populated the landscape in the sixteenth century and for whom gambling was a favorite pastime.⁵² In art, vignettes of dice-playing soldiers had long been included in Crucifixion scenes, but in the seventeenth century artists such as Michelangelo Cerquozzi and Pieter Jansz Quast devoted their entire paintings to portraying motley groups of soldiers casting dice on overturned drums. Shakespeare used the unpredictability of dice as a metaphor for life’s fortunes and dangers in *King Richard III* (1592). Upon the realization that he is about to be killed by enemy forces, the king says to his minion, “I have set my life upon a cast/ And I will stand [i.e., accept] the hazard of the die,” “hazard” here meaning “risk,” but also serving as a pun on the popular dice game of the same name.⁵³

Board Games

Dice were also commonly used in the playing of board games, including backgammon, and surprisingly enough, an early variant of chess.⁵⁴ One of the most well-known of the so-called “games of chance” traditionally played for money was the Game of the Goose (*Gioco dell’oca*), which achieved great popularity in

49 Once dice were standardized in 1450, they became readily available to the masses, fueling the Elizabethan penchant for gambling among the lower classes; Leibs, *Sports and Games of the Renaissance*, 96–97.

50 Cited in Walker, “Gambling and Venetian Noblemen,” 29 n. 3. Aretino did, however, caution against the perils of high-stakes gambling. Also see discussion by Olivieri, “Jeu et capitalisme à Venise,” 156–57.

51 Cardano framed the discussion in terms of gambling being “proportionately less of a reproach to boys, young men and soldiers” (“ut contrà pueros non adeò dedecet, & adolescentes, & milites”); Cardano, *Book on Games of Chance*, 3, and Cardano, *Liber*, 262.

52 As Feigenbaum observes, continual wars in the sixteenth century resulted in “large uprooted populations of soldiers”—many of whom were probably mercenaries—and gambling was a favored diversion; Feigenbaum, “Gamblers, Cheats, and Fortune-Tellers,” 154.

53 5.4.10, in Shakespeare, *King Richard III*, ed. Hammond, 328.

54 On dice used in chess, see Poole, “False Play,” 59–61.

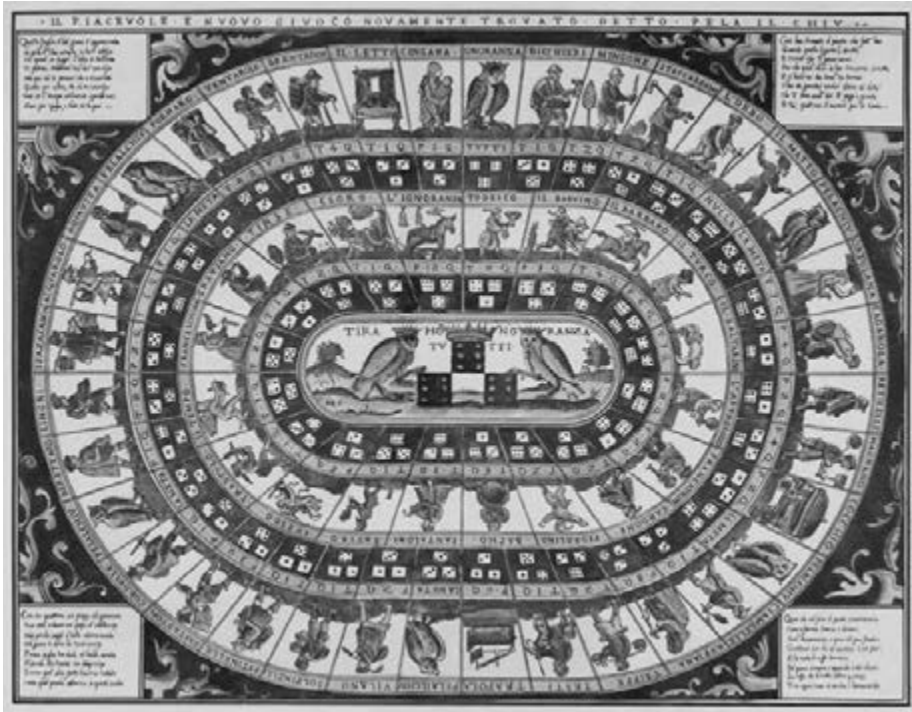


Fig. I.1 Ambrogio Brambilla, “Il piacevole e nuovo gioco novamente trovato detto pela il chiu” (The pleasant and new game recently found called skin the owl) [Game of Skin the Owl], 1589

the sixteenth century.⁵⁵ The goose in the game was considered to be a symbol of good luck, which in subsequent versions was sometimes replaced by the capricious figure of Fortune and other salubrious motifs. A “race game,” players rolled the dice to move along a progression of usually sixty-three, but sometimes forty-nine numbered spaces, encountering along the way the pitfalls and fortune that led to the center and eventual victory. The numerical underpinnings of the game were actually quite esoteric, with symbolism assigned to the number sixty-three based upon what the fifteenth-century philosopher Marsilio Ficino had determined were nine seven-year periods in a person’s life.⁵⁶ Although some Goose game boards were made of wood and stone, those printed on paper flourished from the late sixteenth century when other printed game sheets were also being produced.

55 By tradition the game was thought to have been invented by Duke Francesco I de’ Medici, but according to Adrian Seville the earliest reference to the game was in a book of sermons by the Dominican friar Gabriele da Barletta in 1480; Seville, *Royal Game of the Goose*, 13, 16. Also see Ciompi and Seville, *Giochi dell’Oca e di percorso*, for expansive illustrated examples of goose and other game boards.

56 Seville, *Royal Game of the Goose*, 16–17.

As if to reinforce the message that chance plays in such games, dice are represented in the imagery of many of these game prints.⁵⁷ In the board game illustrated by Ambrogio Brambilla, three dice are liberally displayed in segments along the two interior tracks, the number of dice representing the three that were typically used for playing games of chance (Figure I.1).⁵⁸

Parlor Games

Both dice and playing cards were accouterments in the fortune-telling games that became fashionable in the epoch. Dedicated to the Duke of Ferrara, Francesco Marcolini's text *Le sorti intitolate giardino di pensieri* (The oracle called garden of thoughts, 1540) used cards for divination, while dice were cast to predict the players' personal horoscopes in Lorenzo Spirto's *Libro de la ventura* (Book of fortune, first published in 1482 and reprinted several times in the sixteenth century).⁵⁹ Games such as these belong to the genre of aristocratic parlor games that sprang up in the sixteenth century. Appearing earlier in Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier*, such intellectual sparring games became popular with the rise of the literary academies in Italy. In 1551, the Bolognese poet Innocenzio Ringhieri published his *Cento giuochi liberali, et d'ingegno* (One hundred games of learning and wit) dedicated to the French queen Catherine de' Medici; he was followed twelve years later by Girolamo Bargagli who compiled the 130 games played by the Accademia degli Intronati (Academy of the Bewildered) in Siena.⁶⁰ Referred to as *giochi di veglie* (games of nights of recreation), parlor games involved scintillating repartee and/or displays of knowledge with topics drawn from a variety of subject areas including music, painting, proverbs, nature, and mythology. There were also games mocking social customs, and games with titillating, if not obscene overtones. Among the so-called "forbidden games" was the rhetorical game "Letting the Bird [*Uccello*] Peck at the Fig [*Fico*]," bird and fig having been euphemisms for the male and female sexual organs respectively.⁶¹

57 Such prints were meant to be glued onto a harder surface for playing the games.

58 For the illustration and description of the rules of this game, see Ciompi and Seville, *Giochi dell'Oca e di percorso*. Patricia Rocco discusses game prints displaying three dice in Chapter 5 of this volume.

59 See Burke, "Invention of Leisure," 145. Spirto's (alternative spelling, Spirito) fortune-telling game also used three dice; Céard, "Jeu et divination à la Renaissance," 407.

60 McClure, *Parlour Games*, 51ff.; and Marchetti, "Le désir et la règle recherches."

61 Specifically, *uccello* signified a phallus, while *fica* referred to the vagina. Ruggiero discusses this game in *Machiavelli in Love*, 19.

Ball Games

At the opposite end of the spectrum were ball games, both informal (if not violent) sports like folk or street football, and others with more regulated play such as the Italian *calcio*, similar to today's soccer, where players were organized into distinct teams and wore uniforms.⁶² In 1580, Giovanni de' Bardi devoted an entire treatise to *calcio* in his *Discorso sopra 'lgiuoco del calcio Fiorentino* (Discourse on the Florentine game of *calcio*). Dedicating it to Duke Francesco I de' Medici, he established firm rules for the game while asserting its Florentine pedigree. Twenty-five years earlier Antonio Scaino had published his *Trattato del giuoco della palla* (Treatise on the game of the ball, 1555), which he dedicated to Alfonso II d'Este, later Duke of Ferrara. Written as an instructional manual for the courtier, Scaino's treatise described several ball games including the prototype to tennis, *pallacorda*, so named for the cord serving as the net which was strung across the middle of a covered court.⁶³ By the end of the fifteenth century tennis had become popular in France where it was referred to as the royal *jeu de paume* (literally "game of the palm") because the ball was hit with the hand; by the sixteenth century rackets were used. Tennis proved to an equally popular theme for period artists and writers. In 1561, Giovanni Andrea dell'Anguillara gave a modern twist to Ovid's *Metamorphosis* by transforming the discus game played between Apollo and Hyacinth into a tennis match.⁶⁴ Several decades later, a follower of Caravaggio acknowledged this revised version in the *Death of Hyacinth* (c. 1620) by including two tennis rackets in his rendering of Apollo comforting the dying youth.⁶⁵ A number of French and English poets treated the game allegorically, with Thomas Middleton and William Rowley elevating the game to dramatic prominence with the title of their court masque, *The World Tossed at Tennis* (1620).⁶⁶

62 In his *Book of the Governour* of 1537, Sir Thomas Elyot condemned football for its "bestly fury"; Guttman, *Sports*, 64–65.

63 Tennis was originally played in the cloisters and in the street using a building as the backdrop; see Gillmeister, *Tennis*, esp. figs. 31 and 58; and De Bondt, *Royal Tennis in Renaissance Italy*, 3–4. Among some of the other ball games described by Scaino were *il bracciale* (a type of handball), *la palla con lo scanno* (ball game with a "scoop"), and *la palla con la racchetta* (a forerunner of racquetball). Also see Belmas's discussion of various ball games in *Jouer autrefois*.

64 De Bondt, "Apollo and Hyacinth Tennis Theme," 122.

65 The illustration is shown in *ibid.*, 123. This conceit had staying power as evidenced by Giovanni Battista Tiepolo's inclusion of a tennis racket in his 1752 painting of the subject.

66 See Gillmeister, *Tennis*, 132–42, and Mark Kaethler's essay in Chapter 7 of this volume.

Children's Games

Children of the nobility played the same games that their parents played, not only chess and cards, but also backgammon, nine men's morris, and even dice.⁶⁷ (As a seven-year-old, Henry VIII played a game for money against his father and won.⁶⁸) In France royal offspring were traditionally taught tennis, while children of other European princes also played the game, considered to be beneficial for their health and well-being. Children of lesser means often resorted to inventiveness for game play. In England in 1611, the "childish game of cobnut" (a large cultivated hazelnut) involved "throwing of a ball at a heap of nuts, which done, the thrower takes as many as he hath hit or scattered."⁶⁹ Other popular children's games included rough-and-tumble ball games, quoits (ring toss, similar to horseshoes), skittles (bowling at ninepins), and prisoner's base (called *barres* in French) in which two teams try to capture the others' members by tagging them and bringing them to a prison, or base.⁷⁰ In art, Pieter Bruegel's Rabelaisian-inspired painting of *Children's Games* (1560) showed over eighty different games played by youths.⁷¹ Although chess, cards, dice, and gaming boards are noticeably absent, some of these games were to reappear with youthful players in seventeenth-century painting. In Spain, Bartolomé Esteban Murillo depicted two street urchins casting dice as they sit upon crumbling stone steps, a potent illustration of Vives's observation that in the city the worst sort of boys play with dice (*taxilli*).⁷² Dutch genre painters Judith Leyster and Dirk Hals captured the quotidian experience of humble children playing cards, while Adriaen van der Linde (1595) and Wybrand de Geest (1631) elevated the gaming theme with their portraits of young aristocratic boys with a "colf" club and a ball, equipment used in the prototype golf game played indoors.⁷³ Such game paraphernalia must

67 Orme, *Medieval Children*, 178.

68 Ibid.

69 The entry appeared in Randall Cotgrave's French dictionary; *ibid.*, 176.

70 Although Leibs, *Sports and Games of the Renaissance*, 86, indicates that this game never caught on as one for grown-ups, Bethany Packard's essay in Chapter 6 of this volume might suggest otherwise.

71 See discussion in Orrock, "Homo Ludens." Branden, "Les jeux d'enfants de Pierre Bruegel," provides an extensive description of the games and toys played by the children in the painting, while also tying it to contemporary interest in alchemy.

72 Asked whether school masters allow students to play any games other than tennis, one of the interlocutors responds: "But sometimes, secretly, they play at cards and dice, the little boys with knuckle-bones [*tali*], the worst sort of boys with dice [*taxilli*]; Vives, *Tudor School-Boy Life*, 203–4. The original passage in Latin reads: "[...] sed interdum clam luditur foliis: pueruli talis nequiores taxillis"; in Vives, *Dialogos*, trans. Coret y Peris, 362.

73 On "colf," see Wilkins, *Sports and Games of Medieval Cultures*, 139–40. Hendrick Avercamp's painting (c. 1625) depicts an outdoor version of the game being played on a frozen river; see *A Scene on the Ice*, National Gallery of Art Online Editions, www.nga.gov/content/ngaweb/Collection/art-object-page.50721.html.

have been viewed as prestigious props, similar to the tennis rackets and balls accompanying the sitters in the portraits of Carlo Emanuele II of Savoy (1636) and Federico Ubaldo della Rovere (1622), the young sons of Italian dukes.⁷⁴

Seasonal Games

Various games were associated with seasonal events, played in conjunction with fairs, civic celebrations, church feasts, and holidays such as Christmas and Carnival. In the late seventeenth century Thomas Hyde reported on the chess matches played at trade fairs by German, Danish, Swedish, and Croatian merchants, with the results of unfinished games recorded by notaries so that the games could be continued at the next festival.⁷⁵ In Florence, annual *calcio* matches were held in June for the birthday of St. John the Baptist, the city's patron saint; Fat Thursday was similarly a popular occasion for *calcio* in Siena and for ball games elsewhere. Cards were fashionable with the nobility at Christmastime in England, with special dispensation allowed to servants and university students for playing cards during the holiday season.⁷⁶ With its emphasis on overturning the established social and hierarchical conventions, Carnival presented the perfect occasion for games associated with gambling. In his painting *Carnival between Lent* (1550) Bruegel captured the madcap atmosphere of the festivities, showing amid the chaos two men casting dice (barely noticeable in the lower left-hand corner), and a scattering of several playing cards on the ground by the wine barrel.

Tavern Games

Taverns, which proliferated in northern Europe, provided the locus for games of chance—and for drink.⁷⁷ That drinking and game play often went hand in hand is suggested by the frequent depictions of players and/or their spectators holding drinks as the games unfold (intimated as well by the location of the cards in Bruegel's painting). Unlike parlor games which were played in aristocratic settings, taverns

74 As De Bondt observes, these tennis accouterments served to “emphasize the beneficial qualities of the game for the physical education of the nobility”; De Bondt, *Royal Tennis in Renaissance Italy*, 7.

75 Murray, *History of Chess*, 851. Hyde's *De ludis orientalibus* (The book of oriental games) was written in 1694.

76 In 1495, Henry VII issued an edict forbidding card playing for servants and apprentices except at Christmas. In English universities, although normally prohibited during the school year, cards and other game activities were permitted during the holidays.

77 Clark, “Games and Sports in the Long Eighteenth Century,” 78, observes that the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries witnessed a proliferation of drinking establishments. Coincident with the gaming trend, drinking evidently made for good business.

were typically associated with country folk and were generally not frequented by the upper classes. In the seventeenth century, tavern games became a specialty of Flemish and Netherlandish genre painters such as David Teniers the Younger and Adriaen van Ostade who produced several versions of peasants drinking and playing cards and backgammon. Jan Steen took the scenario a step further by showing what happens when alcohol and games are involved, cards, a backgammon board, and a tankard having been knocked to the ground from a table as peasants brawl in front of a tavern.⁷⁸ Given the tavern's acquired reputation as a place for drunkenness and gambling—and sexual encounters—it may be why one Game of the Goose board has the player landing on the space marked “tavern” losing two turns.⁷⁹

Spaces for the Play and Display of Games

Unless otherwise prohibited, public spaces such as large greens and grand piazzas provided ready-made spaces for game play, but period architecture duly responded to the gaming trend.⁸⁰ In Venice private *ridotti* and social clubs called *casini* served as preferred sites for gambling for the nobility, notable for providing secrecy while similarly used as sites for illicit sex and drinking.⁸¹ Princely palaces were specifically designed with open areas for game play. In his *De re aedificatoria* (*On the Art of Building*, 1453), Leon Battista Alberti had recommended the use of spaces such as courtyards and vestibules within palaces as suitable places where young men could practice playing ball games, throwing quoits, and the like.⁸² Palace gardens similarly functioned as the locus for chess, cards, backgammon, and other games that were typically played in an interior setting.⁸³ Gardens were also frequently used as the site for the erection of special buildings used for playing games, as well as for the closed and open tennis courts that had become de rigueur additions to European

78 Such displays of unruly behavior associated with tavern folk differentiated them from nobles who were more likely to exercise self-control when playing with those of equal social standing. By contrast, nobles were themselves occasionally guilty of disruptive and violent behaviors. See discussion by Walker, “Gambling and Venetian Noblemen,” 35, 41, 52.

79 The game is referenced in Leibs, *Sports and Games of the Renaissance*, 96.

80 For example, in Nuremberg a law of 1503 prohibited the playing of cards and dice on the lawn of the town hall, while in Florence “profane” gambling was not allowed near churches, nunneries, and governmental buildings; Smoller, “Playing Cards and Popular Culture,” 190.

81 According to Fortini Brown, *Private Lives in Renaissance Venice*, 250, by the late sixteenth century, the terms *ridotto* and *casino* began to be used interchangeably. Prostitutes were often involved in gambling activities in Venice, from presiding over the card games to managing *ridotti*; see Walker's discussion, “Gambling and Venetian Noblemen,” 33, 61–62. These venues were sometimes rooms in the palaces of the aristocracy.

82 Alberti, *On the Art of Building*, 121.

83 Characters playing chess in a garden was a popular topos in medieval art and literature.

palaces in the epoch.⁸⁴ Italian princes such as the Sforza, the Gonzaga, the Este, and the Medici all erected tennis courts at their residences, but the fashion duly extended to the “princes of the church” in Rome. In 1510, Paolo Cortesi’s treatise *De cardinalatu* (On the cardinalate) had advocated for tennis courts to be part of the cardinal’s palace; a century later there were few grand palaces in Rome that had not installed such a court in the garden or palace interior.⁸⁵ Elsewhere, Francis I and his son Henry II built a number of tennis courts at their chateaus in the Loire Valley, while Henry VIII ordered the construction of five open and closed tennis courts (as well as bowling lanes) for his palace at Whitehall.⁸⁶ Nor were tennis courts only for titled nobility. According to a Venetian ambassadorial report of 1596 there were 250 tennis courts in Paris; soon after, public ball houses were constructed in northern Europe as well as in Florence and Turin.⁸⁷

Within the palace proper, special rooms served as dedicated areas for the play and display of games. In Italy, frescoes of game players had long graced the walls of princely and aristocratic residences, a trend that continued well into the cinquecento.⁸⁸ In the mid-sixteenth century, male and female card players were represented in the frescoes of noble dwellings in Bologna and Vicenza.⁸⁹ Giovanni Stradano depicted a game of *calcio* in the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence for Duke Cosimo I de’ Medici in 1560; a decade later, Duke Alfonso II d’Este’s *castello* in Ferrara included a *saletta dei giochi* (small games room) illustrated with children’s games including skittles, and a *salone dei giochi* (large games room) used as a reception area, which was frescoed with images of young men playing various ball games.⁹⁰ Game objects also began to be included among the examples of natural and man-made marvels that were housed in the *Kunstkammern* (cabinets of curiosities). In the early sixteenth-century garden room of Margaret of Austria’s palace near Brussels, chess and other games joined the items contained in her collection of

84 For example, a “games” building was planned for the garden of the Gonzaga palace at Marmirolo in the late sixteenth century; Carpeggiani, “Giochi’ nei giardini dei Gonzaga.” At the Scottish royal castle in Falkland, the auxiliary structure was evidently used for billiards and bowling; see Giovanna Guidicini’s essay in Chapter 8 of this volume.

85 De Bondt, “Apollo and Hyacinth Tennis Theme,” 119–20.

86 Nederlandse Real Tennis Bond, “Jeu de Paume (France).”

87 De Bondt, *Royal Tennis in Renaissance Italy*, 6, indicates that tennis in France was being played by urban elites and upper middle classes.

88 Notable examples include the mid-fourteenth-century fresco in the Palazzo Davanzati in Florence which shows a duchess and a knight, two characters from a popular romance, playing chess, and the Castello Borromeo in Milan which depicts women playing cards and a ball game (1440s).

89 In Bologna, Nicolò dell’Abate painted his fresco of men and women playing *tarocco* for the Palazzo Poggi in 1548–50. Giovanni Antonio Fasolo’s fresco (c. 1570), executed for the Caldogna family’s Palladian villa in Vicenza, shows the card game being played in a garden.

90 See Arcangeli, *Recreation in the Renaissance*, 25–28.

exotica from the New World, while playing cards were among the games listed in the inventory of Archduke Ferdinand II of Austria's *Kunstkammer* at century's end.⁹¹ In such collections, game objects might be housed in special boxes and art cabinets or even incorporated as game boards in the surfaces of elaborate gaming tables, which would have been equally sumptuous in their materials and assembly.⁹²

Games and Ingenuity

The games that typically found a home with elite owners were oftentimes unique in their fabrication. A Game of the Goose board carved on stone for Ferdinand II's brother, Archduke Charles II of Austria, was decorated with the words and music of drinking songs—more material evidence that drinking often accompanied game play.⁹³ The set of playing cards produced by Peter Flötner for Francesco d'Este in the 1540s was later inscribed with musical notations and lyrics on the back of the cards, with the various suits designating soprano, alto, tenor, and bass to create four-part songs.⁹⁴ As is evident with these particular cards, the games in princely and aristocratic collections were not necessarily meant to be played, but rather might serve as objects of delectation for the owners and their distinguished guests. Transformed into *objets d'art*, such game objects were a testament to the owners' taste and sophistication, a veritable declaration of their elevated status. A cogent example is Hans Mielich's aforementioned miniature of the duke and duchess playing chess. The fact that this image appears in a lavishly illustrated manuscript depicting the *jewels* in the duchess's holdings implicitly elevates the chessboard itself to a treasure.

While many parlor games were designed to exhibit—if not test—the players' knowledge and wit, games became the vehicle by which artists, craftsmen, writers, and game enthusiasts demonstrated their own ingenuity. In 1664, Christopher Weickmann invented a new version of chess in which the board was expanded in four different directions with the rules allowing for up to four or more players, each

91 Margaret's collection is considered to be a forerunner of the *Kunstkammer*; see Eichberger, "Margaret of Austria's Treasures." Ferdinand's cards are discussed in Husband, *World in Play*, 26, 49. Sometimes the exotic object *was* a game. A Game of the Goose board now in the Metropolitan Museum is fabricated of ebony and inlaid with ivory, horn and gold wire; it was made in India, probably to Italian specifications. See Seville, *Royal Game of the Goose*, 13–14.

92 Granados, "Reflections on the Role of Baroque Games Tables," 38–42, provides examples of elaborate gaming tables made for Max Emanuel, the electoral prince of Bavaria, in the late seventeenth century. Greger Sundin discusses the art cabinets for the display of games in Chapter 9 in this volume.

93 Seville, *Royal Game of the Goose*, 15–16. Ferdinand II and Charles II were sons of the Holy Roman Emperor Ferdinand I.

94 See Smoller, "Playing Cards and Popular Culture," 199–200; and Husband, *World in Play*, 103, who notes that the deck was evidently commissioned as a collector's item and was never intended to be used in a card game.

with thirty chessmen.⁹⁵ Some game objects functioned as hybrids, doing double or even triple duty. Luxury game boxes were made with chess and nine men's morris boards on alternate surfaces with a backgammon board in the interior and the box itself used for storing game pieces. Goose game boards printed on paper were designed so that the segments could be cut apart for use as playing cards, while playing cards were disseminated in the form of a book.⁹⁶ Nor were such creative displays confined to game objects and their imagery. In *The Tempest*, Shakespeare divided the dialogue of the chess scene into two equal parts of thirty-two words each, a clever allusion to the number of pieces used in the game and the sixty-four squares on the chessboard.⁹⁷

Games and Theater

One of the more interesting aspects regarding games in this epoch is their conflation with theater and entertainment, of special significance given the pervasive use of the game theme in the works of Shakespeare and a number of other playwrights. Considering that games of all kinds were often played in front of an audience, this may seem a natural connection in itself, but there were actually deeper roots for the relationship. In medieval tradition vernacular dramas were referred to as "games," while plays in early modern England were categorized together with games and sports.⁹⁸ Moreover, like theatrical productions, many games involved "dressing up" (as seen in uniforms for *calcio*, for example).⁹⁹ Parlor games were duly conceived as performances with special music composed to accompany them, and the players' "acts" sometimes linked to contemporary theatrical productions and the *commedia dell'arte*.¹⁰⁰ In turn, the *commedia* inspired Ambrogio Brambilla's 1589 game board which features a range of its comedic actors (see again Figure I.1).¹⁰¹ The convergence

95 Influenced by Selenus's treatise on chess, Weickmann published his game as the "Newly Invented Great King's Game," and dedicated it to Selenus; see discussion by von Hilgers, *War Games*, 19–28.

96 Seville, *Royal Game of the Goose*, 39–40; and Smoller, "Playing Cards and Popular Culture," 193, 187. A print by Stefano della Bella displays twelve mythological playing cards on a sheet, where half of the individual card segments are devoted to the imagery and the remaining space below left for the insertion of text; see Stefano della Bella, *Mythological Playing Cards*, National Gallery of Art, www.nga.gov/content/ngaweb/Collection/art-object-page.51020.html. This is the system used for the cards discussed by Naomi Lebens in Chapter 2.

97 Jones-Davies advances this idea in "Chess Game and Prospero's Epilogue," 118.

98 Kolve discusses this connection in *Play Called Corpus Christi*, 12ff., noting that the French "*jeu*" and German "*Spiel*" also referred to drama. Also see Hattaway, "Playhouses and the Role of Drama."

99 Hattaway, "Playhouses and the Role of Drama," 138.

100 See Haar, "On Musical Games in the 16th Century," 26–30, and McClure, *Parlour Games*, 63–64, who notes that Bargagli's Game of Comedy drew from the *commedia dell'arte*.

101 Katritzky discusses this game in *Art of Commedia*, 245–47.

between games and theater likewise extended to court masques and other entertainments devoted to the game theme. In a ballet staged in Paris in 1676, the dancers were dressed as kings, queens, and knaves with their costumes derived from the imagery of playing cards; the queens were accompanied by slaves outfitted to represent tennis, dice, backgammon, and billiards.¹⁰² In architecture, the intersection between games and entertainment is readily apparent in the design of indoor tennis courts which had seating for spectators and thus made perfect makeshift theaters. In the late sixteenth century Duke Alfonso II d'Este became the first prince to use his tennis court for such purposes, but after the game began to lose favor in the seventeenth century, public tennis buildings were converted into venues for theatrical productions—especially popular with traveling commedia dell'arte troupes.¹⁰³

Gamesters and Cheats

The connection between games and performance brings into play the recognition of the consummate game players, individuals who gained renown for their skill, if not luck, at various games. Tomaso Garzoni paid homage to this contemporary fascination by including a chapter on “Game Players” in his 1585 encyclopedic *La piazza universale di tutte le professione del mondo* (The universal piazza of all the professions of the world). Chess notables included Ruy López de Segura from Spain, the author of a popular treatise on chess, and the names of well-known card players have similarly been recorded. The reputation of tennis players lured them to the courts where they were employed to play with their princely patrons—and to entertain the court and its distinguished guests.¹⁰⁴ Even those women skilled at the wit and repartee displayed in parlor games were acknowledged, as Bargagli indicates in his treatise.¹⁰⁵ In art, singular portraits of individuals with game accouterments might suggest that the sitters had earned distinction for their skill at play. This is the message conveyed in the early seventeenth-century Florentine painting, over life-size, which shows a man (perhaps a fool in the Medici ducal court) in the process of throwing from under his raised leg a small ball probably used in the game of *pallottole* (similar to *bocce*).¹⁰⁶ Then there was the dedicated habitual gambler

102 Vuillier and Grego, *History of Dancing*, 118. Also see Arcangeli, *Recreation in the Renaissance*, for various discussions on dance in relation to games and play.

103 According to De Bondt, *Royal Tennis in Renaissance Italy*, 8, by the eighteenth century, Europe had at least 150 tennis court theaters.

104 Among the Italian princes employing tennis professionals in the sixteenth century were Alfonso II d'Este, Francesco Maria II della Rovere, and Cosimo de' Medici; *ibid.*, 69–74.

105 McClure, *Parlour Games*, 58, 77; and McClure, “Women and the Politics of Play,” 773.

106 The portrait (c. 1620–25) is illustrated and discussed in Bisceglia et al., *Buffoni, villani e giocatori*, cat. 26, p. 138.



Fig. 1.2 Giuseppe Maria Mitelli, *Il giuocatore*, from *Le ventiquattr'hore dell'humana felicità* (The twenty-four hours of human happiness), 1675



Fig. I.3 Georges de La Tour, *The Cheat with the Ace of Clubs*, c. 1630–34

known as the Gamester, who was immortalized in a number of plays including James Shirley’s eponymous drama of 1635.¹⁰⁷ A 1675 engraving by Giuseppe Maria Mitelli entitled *Il giuocatore* (The player) epitomizes such a man shown with the accouterments of his profession—playing cards, dice, tennis rackets, and balls—the money on the table indicating that he is playing for stakes (Figure I.2).

The Gamester had fitting company in the Cheat and the Con, who gained equal prominence in period art and literature.¹⁰⁸ Castiglione had warned his courtier against cheating at cards and dice, but in England a genre of writings known as “rogue literature” approached the issue from the other direction. Gilbert Walker’s *A Manifest Detection of the Most Vyle and Detestable Use of Dice Play* (1552) served as a manual for professional cheats at dice, with Charles Cotton providing various tricks of the trade in *The Compleat Gamester* (1674).¹⁰⁹ Artists such as Caravaggio and his followers aggrandized the issue by making cheaters and cheating the

107 Zucker, “Social Stakes of Gambling in Early Modern London,” 83.

108 As Caillois observes, the cheat “pretends to respect the rules [but] takes advantage of the other players’ loyalty to rules”; *Man, Play and Games*, 7.

109 Cotton also paints a very unflattering portrait of the obsessive game player in his section entitled “The Character of a Gamester”; Cotton, *Compleat Gamester*, 21–22. The work was attributed to Cotton in the eighteenth century; on this point and Walker’s text, see Willughby, *Francis Willughby’s Book of Games*, 45–47. Earlier Vives discussed such a trickster in setting out strategies for gambling and card games in his *Dialogs*; Renson, “Les jeux chez Juan Luis Vivès,” 477.

subject of their paintings.¹¹⁰ In his *Cardsharps* (c. 1594), Caravaggio showed an innocent young man playing cards (probably primero) with a mercenary soldier, as the soldier's accomplice signals to him behind the youth's back.¹¹¹ Notably, while the cheaters here are assigned a male identity, women, typically of ill-repute, were also complicit in such scams, sometimes operating as free agents. In Georges de La Tour's painting of the *Fortune Teller* (c. 1630s), a young dandy is surrounded by a gypsy fortune-telling crone and three young women, two of whom are in the act of robbing the unsuspecting youth. La Tour also produced two similar versions (1635) of a courtesan conning a young man in a card game as her maidservant pours wine and her accomplice displays his own cards, some tucked behind his back (Figure 1.3).¹¹² Such compositions appear as mini-dramas with the artists using pointed gestures, sly glances (sometimes directed to the audience), and sleights-of-hand to enact the cheat—and to make the viewer complicit in the con.¹¹³ The theatricality of such works is of little surprise, as both La Tour's and Caravaggio's paintings were closely allied with the skits of the *commedia dell'arte*.¹¹⁴ As for the Cheat, the Con, and the unfortunate Dupe, they were to reappear on the English stage, an appropriate venue since the theater itself was associated with deceit.¹¹⁵

Games and Rhetorical Expression

The extent to which games had invaded the popular consciousness is reflected in the use of gaming terms to flavor contemporary rhetoric.¹¹⁶ Sir James Melville resorted to using a tennis metaphor when he reported that Queen Elizabeth had

110 Feigenbaum provides an excellent discussion on this artistic phenomenon in "Gamblers, Cheats, and Fortune-Tellers."

111 *Ibid.*, 156. Caravaggio apparently produced two versions of this painting.

112 The other version is housed in the Louvre. In his *Dice Players* of c. 1650, the artist expanded the cheating repertoire to show a player's pocket being picked as he plays a nocturnal game of dice.

113 In this respect, we might view these enactments of cheating as similar to the representations of "living chess"; see note 129 below. Feigenbaum, "Gamblers, Cheats, and Fortune-Tellers," 168, discusses the details of La Tour's paintings noting that the astute viewer would have recognized the mechanics of the game in play—and thus be in on the cheat. Similarly, in Caravaggio's painting of *Cardsharps*, the attuned audience would have observed that the accomplice wears gloves with the fingertips removed, which would have allowed him to feel special marks on the cards used in the scams; *ibid.*, 156.

114 See Gregori, "The Fortune Teller," 215. According to Feigenbaum, "Gamblers, Cheats, and Fortune-Tellers," 155, the early sixteenth-century play by Venturino da Pesaro in which a gambling cheat tries to lure a naive young man to a card game may have also served as the inspiration for Caravaggio's *Cardsharps*.

115 As in painting, cheating at cards was an easily adapted subtext for playwrights such as Shakespeare, whose Falstaff, we may recall, cheated at primero.

116 Consistent with Huizinga's observation on the play-concept expressed in language; *Homo Ludens*, 28.

“a fair ruby, as great as a Tennis-ball.”¹¹⁷ In 1641, referring to the controversy over profane game play on Sunday, Pastor John Ley described the Sabbath as “a Ball, betwixt two Racketts bandied this way and that way [...] betwixt the godly and the profane.”¹¹⁸ Given the obvious connotations of game play as metaphors for doing battle—and the numerous games that reinforced this idea—it may have been only natural that Sir Francis Drake saw his contest over a great sea battle in the context of a game, allegedly saying “There is plenty of time to win this game, and thrash the Spaniards, too.”¹¹⁹ Puns on gaming terms were especially popular in English theater, a hotbed of licentiousness. Thomas Heywood’s *A Woman Killed with Kindness* employed card terminology for double entendres, particularly those of an overtly sexual nature.¹²⁰ And among the salacious puns used by Shakespeare and other playwrights in the epoch were dice for genitals, ace for the vulva, and tennis balls having obvious implications for testicles.¹²¹

Games, Satire, and Social Commentary

As suggested by this type of vulgar punning, the games mania provided artists and writers with ready subjects for satire and parody. In a genre of painting referred to as *Singerie*, a seventeenth-century engraving after the work of David Teniers the Younger portrays two monkeys playing backgammon, one wearing a plumed hat and the other holding a glass of wine (Figure I.4).¹²² While such works were intended to illustrate the idea that monkeys ape human activities, we might also see them as a humorous commentary on the contemporary obsession with game play. Perhaps because of their ubiquity, the illustrations of playing cards were especially suitable vehicles for satirical treatment. Cards produced in Nuremburg in the sixteenth century used carnivalesque imagery of the “world upside down,” showing parodical scenes such as wives beating husbands, rabbits roasting a hunter on a spit, a hunchback dwarf on a goat attacking a pig with a lance (imitating St. George), and fools pulling a sled of other fools, the latter reminding us that dwarfs and fools, like jesters, were common motifs in game imagery.¹²³ Samuel Rowlands

117 Melville and Scott, *Memoirs of Sir James Melvil*, 97.

118 Ley, *Sunday a Sabbath*, pref. (no. pag.).

119 *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*, 193.

120 See Wiggins, *Woman Killed with Kindness*, 311.

121 For example, playwrights such as Thomas Middleton, John Ford, Robert Greene, and John Fletcher; see Williams, *Dictionary of Sexual Language and Imagery*, 1: 233–34.

122 Castiglione had written of a chess-playing monkey in his *Book of the Courtier*, 108–9.

123 In a Goose game print from 1690, a jester is shown at the start of the game; Seville, *Royal Game of the Goose*, 55–56. Another Goose game board from c. 1640 displays hunchbacked dwarfs (*gobbi*), which were clearly indebted to Jacques Callot’s prints; figure 1 in *ibid.*, 26. Jesters were also featured on playing cards; see note 45 above.



Fig. 1.4 Coryn Boel (after David Teniers the Younger), *Two Monkeys Playing Backgammon*, 1635–68

went on to use playing cards as the basis for his early seventeenth-century satirical series entitled *The Four Knaves*.¹²⁴ And in his *Henry V* (c. 1599) Shakespeare parodied the period fixation with tennis when he included a scene of the French ambassador presenting an insulting gift of tennis balls to Henry on behalf of the Dauphin.¹²⁵ While the implication was that the English king was better suited for frivolities such as tennis than he was for war, the analogy would not have been lost on the audience who would have equated Shakespeare's fifteenth-century character with Henry VIII, renowned for his own love of the game.¹²⁶

The reference to tennis in *Henry V* duly illustrates how games and gaming metaphors were called into action for making commentaries on contemporary political and religious conflicts, which were often propagandistic in nature. In the early sixteenth century, the court poet Mellin de Saint-Gelais used the card game primero to frame the political battle between his patron Francis I, and Pope

¹²⁴ Hargrave, *History of Playing Cards*, 171.

¹²⁵ 1.2.258–97, in Shakespeare, *Henry V*, ed. Taylor, 115–16.

¹²⁶ Vienne-Guerrin, *Shakespeare's Insults*, 397.

Clement VII and Charles V.¹²⁷ Anti-Catholic propaganda issued after the Protestant Reformation showed German cards with suits depicting monks' cowls, choir robes, and fools' caps.¹²⁸ Thomas Middleton used *A Game at Chess* (1624) to make a satirical anti-Catholic, anti-Spanish political and religious commentary, going so far as to present his characters in the guise of White and Black Kings, Queens, Knights, and Bishops, and staging the play in the form of a "living chess" match.¹²⁹ Games were also at stake in real-life politico-religious debates. The tensions that arose between Catholicism and Protestantism in England after the Reformation led King James I of England to issue his *Declaration of Sports* (also referred to as the *Book of Sports*) in 1618.¹³⁰ In response to the Puritans' attempts to prohibit game play on Sundays, James's declaration gave license to his subjects to indulge in such activities, while duly serving a missiological purpose in convincing Protestants that prohibiting Catholics from playing games on the Sabbath made them less likely to convert.¹³¹

Games, Class, and Social Order

Within the highly stratified society that was early modern Europe, certain games reinforced expectations with regard to class and social order. Cessolis's treatise on chess had been especially influential in this regard. In his allegorical treatment of the game, he used the chessboard to represent the ideal city, with the various pieces symbolizing the roles that nobles and commoners were expected to play in an orderly society. The imagery of playing cards also implicitly upheld these divisions, the figures based upon the structure of the court setting with values attached according to rank.¹³² The woodblock prints of cards made by Peter Flötner were later inscribed with verses by Hans Sachs referring to proper social station and the text accompanying the king cards asserting, "Where the common good is

¹²⁷ Bakhtin, "Role of Games in Rabelais," 126.

¹²⁸ In fact, although games came increasingly under attack, the Reformation had little detrimental impact upon the production of playing cards in sixteenth-century Germany; see Smoller, "Playing Cards and Popular Culture," 183, and for the propagandistic anti-Catholic cards, 187–88.

¹²⁹ Having seen the performance at the Globe playhouse in 1624, John Holles described the "whole play [as] a chessboard, England the white house, Spain the black"; quoted in Yachnin, "Playing with Space," 44. Middleton derived the notion of "living chess" from Rabelais, who adopted the conceit from the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*; see Yachnin, "Game at Chess and Chess Allegory," 321. "Living chess" is discussed in the next chapter.

¹³⁰ The actual title of the work was *The Kings Majesties Declaration to His Subjects Concerning Lawfull Sports to be Used*. James ruled as King James VI of Scotland until 1603 when the country was united with England, at which point he became James I.

¹³¹ James was no doubt helped along by Philip Stubbes who in his *Anatomic of Abuses* of 1583 attacked the theater and other recreational activities including cards, dice, tables, tennis, and bowling played on the Sabbath, a day for listening to God's word; see discussion by Ellis, *Games People Play*, 18–21.

¹³² See Husband, *World in Play*, 9.

followed, there is good government."¹³³ Here the textual message was explicit, but the imagery of these and other Nuremberg playing cards also tacitly reinforced class distinctions by showing peasants engaged in unseemly activities that would have been repugnant to aristocratic sensibilities; despite this, the cards were actually intended to appeal to both upper and lower class audiences.¹³⁴ Other games carried built-in prejudices that similarly spoke to social station. Parlor games were primarily the reserve of the elite, while tennis, originally called "royal tennis," was initially banned to servants and laborers.¹³⁵ From the standpoint of the societal hierarchy, gambling—which offered a level playing field—was a truly egalitarian game, but it was nevertheless problematic because there was always the potential for a commoner to best a noble, thus subverting the rigid social order.¹³⁶ In his treatise Cardano had specifically warned against gambling with unequal partners, a theme reiterated in seventeenth-century English tracts against card playing which complained that gambling caused people of noble birth to mix with those of lower social standing.¹³⁷ Of course, during Carnival, all bets were off as the seasonal celebrations allowed for the playing of games that challenged the societal hierarchy.

Games and Gender

In their appeal to both men and women, games naturally brought into consideration issues having to do with gender, particularly in terms of what was deemed appropriate behavior for males versus females in game play.¹³⁸ Many games were played, if not portrayed, to reinforce ideas on male dominance and masculinity, with warlike games and gambling traditionally seen as passageways to male maturity. But the period also saw women beginning to penetrate what were formerly the preserves of male activities, offering the potential to overturn the prescribed patriarchal order. In Desiderius Erasmus's dialogue on knucklebones (*tali*), one of his interlocutors points

133 "Wo gemeiner nutz gefodert wird/ da ist gut Regimente"; see translation and discussion in Smoller, "Playing Cards and Popular Culture," 199–200, and Husband, *World in Play*, 102ff.

134 Smoller, "Playing Cards and Popular Culture," 183, 212.

135 In a more literal respect De Bondt observes that tennis "enabled the elite, playing on their purpose-built tennis courts, to raise a wall between themselves and the ordinary citizens who continued to play a crude type of tennis in the streets"; *Royal Tennis in Renaissance Italy*, 196.

136 Walker, "Gambling and Venetian Noblemen," 30. Tennis posed similar problems when the bourgeoisie played against the nobility as realized by Scaino; see McClelland, "Sport and Scientific Thinking in the Sixteenth Century."

137 Cardano, *Liber*, 262–63, and Cardano, *Book on Games of Chance*, 3; and Smoller, "Playing Cards and Popular Culture," 213.

138 Vives allowed that some games were not suitable for girls, and that women should not even watch war games; Renson, "Les jeux chez Juan Luis Vivès," 473–74. Megan Herrold approaches the theme of gambling (in the form of wagers) and gender in her essay in Chapter 3 of this volume.

out that the age-old game was “scorned even by girls today [who] take up dice, cards, and other masculine amusements instead.”¹³⁹ Although ball games were typically played by boys and men, Scaino observed that women in Italy played “*all Palla*”, and an account of a Parisian diarist records that in the fifteenth century a 28-year-old woman tennis player gained fame for winning at the game against men.¹⁴⁰ In Venice, the rise of casinos in the seventeenth century offered women free access for mingling with male gamblers—if not playing at cards and gambling themselves, where they could compete on equal terms.¹⁴¹ The courtesan Veronica Franco was alleged to have played cards with her suitors, but even women of unquestionable repute were among those who succumbed to the lure of gambling: in Florence, Eleonora of Toledo, wife of Duke Cosimo I de’ Medici, was an inveterate gambler.¹⁴² The theme of strong females reasserted itself in the realm of aristocratic parlor games where women were afforded the opportunity to potentially best men in a legitimized social setting, not subject to the strictures of refined courtly comportment.¹⁴³ In chess, the emergence of a new version of the game at the end of the fifteenth century saw the queen becoming the most powerful piece on the board, a pertinent metaphor for the feminine challenge to masculine dominance in a game conventionally considered to be a predominantly male activity.¹⁴⁴

Games, Love, and Sexual Comportment

Games were also used to express contemporary attitudes toward love and sexual comportment (with corresponding implications for women’s reputations), not altogether surprising considering that the word “game,” like “play,” had long carried

139 “Nam istud lusus genus etiam puellis hodie fastiditum est; sed alcam, chartas, aliosque masculos lusus affectant”; Erasmus and Patrick, *Colloquiorum*, 414, trans. in Erasmus, *Colloquies*, 894.

140 “Le Donne ancora presso ad Homero giuocavano all Palla, & in Udine terra principalissima del Friuli, & altrove ancora hoggidi le vaghe Donzelle con honesti modi si trastullano in questo giuoco”; Scaino, *Trattato del giuoco*, 2. Burke, “Invention of Leisure,” 145, interprets this as football, although De Bondt, *Royal Tennis in Renaissance Italy*, 55, suggests the game may refer to tennis. On the woman tennis player, see Guttman, *Sports*, 63.

141 Walker, “Gambling and Venetian Noblemen,” 61.

142 *Ibid.*, n. 145, for Veronica Franco. Eleonora as an “incorrigible gambler” is discussed by Langdon, *Medici Women*, 60.

143 Tasso weighed in on the issue of gender in game play, his male character allowing that men lose to women out of a sense of chivalry, with his female arguing against letting women win for amatory reasons; McClure, “Women and the Politics of Play,” 757–59.

144 In fact, the theme of Luis Ramirez de Lucena’s text dealing with the queen’s power in this new game is viewed as “a biting attack on the rising awareness of feminism”; Hooper and Whyld, *Oxford Companion to Chess*, 238. This transformed game is discussed in the next chapter. Because it was initially conceived as a metaphorical war game and was part of the knight’s training, chess was long viewed as a “man’s game”; O’Sullivan, “Introduction,” 9.

sexual connotations.¹⁴⁵ While chess framed as an allegorical contest between men and women in amorous pursuits was a popular and traditional leitmotif in art and literature, John Fletcher and Philip Massinger turned this theme on its head in *The Spanish Curate* (1622), when a male chess player woos his female opponent in front of the woman's husband.¹⁴⁶ Thomas Heywood used the trope of playing cards and seduction as the impetus for the downfall of a marriage in *A Woman Killed with Kindness*.¹⁴⁷ In his 1603 play, the virtuous wife succumbs to the attractions of her husband's friend during the course of a card game which leads to adultery (cheating!) and her eventual death. The follower of Lucas van Leyden gave overt acknowledgement to the relationship between card games, sexual advances, and feminine respectability in showing a man nestling up to a woman and hovering his hand over her bosom as he places his other hand on her cards, one displaying the six of hearts.¹⁴⁸ Ringhieri's book of parlor games offered an assortment of games which fell under the rubric of "love," with games dedicated to, among other things, Chastity—a game meant to control female sexual behavior—or to sublimate it, represented by the Game of the Bawd.¹⁴⁹ In Giovanni Antonio de Paoli's Goose-like board game, *Il novo et piacevol gioco del giardin d'amore* (The new and pleasing game of the garden of love, c. 1590), the winning player passes through a triumphal arch to enter a walled garden of love where Cupid shoots his bow.¹⁵⁰ Paradoxically, while love emerged victorious in that game, in tennis the word "love" was used to signify zero, or complete loss.¹⁵¹

The Social Benefits of Games

At their most basic, games were seen to be a source of pleasurable distraction, providing amusement for the players and entertainment for those invited to watch the games in progress. Although physical games such as *calcio*, tennis, and other

145 See, for example, Poole, "False Play," 52 n. 10, and Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 43, who also observes that in Sanskrit, the "jewel of games" means copulation. To these we might add "match," with its traditional connotations of partnership between the sexes.

146 Poole, "False Play," 68.

147 See discussion by Bloom in "Games."

148 The image is viewable at the National Gallery of Art website, Anonymous (after Lucas van Leyden), *The Card Players*, www.nga.gov/Collection/art-object-page.46126.html.

149 McClure, "Women and the Politics of Play," 772.

150 This game print is illustrated in Ciompi and Seville, *Giochi dell'Oca e di percorso*, www.giochidelloca.it/images/g/giardinamore1105a.jpg. Another game devoted to love, the Royal Game of Cupid, is discussed by Seville in *Royal Game of the Goose*, 35–37.

151 According to Leibs, this term may have derived from the English pronunciation of *l'oeuf*, meaning "egg" in French, which resembles a zero; Leibs, *Sports and Games of the Renaissance*, 81.

ball games clearly functioned as spectator sports—Scaino allowed that *calcio* “gives great pleasure to spectators”—even games such as chess, cards, and board games were typically played in front of an audience as period imagery makes clear. (This is duly suggested by the numerous paintings in which one or more observers watching a game in play direct their gaze to the beholder.) More important, game playing of various kinds was touted as being good for physical and mental health.¹⁵² Tasso advocated for games as a welcome break from the rigors of daily life, providing a refreshing diversion that enabled one to return to their tasks more willingly.¹⁵³ In his *Remedio de jugadores* (Remedy of game players, 1519) the Dominican friar Pedro de Covarrubias allowed that (some) games were necessary for “alleviation [and] relief, and relaxation from vexation and weariness of the spirit.”¹⁵⁴ Scaino voiced a similar sentiment, observing that the ball game was especially beneficial “in the purification of the spirits through which the soul performs all its functions.”¹⁵⁵ Cardano took this idea a step further in maintaining that gambling was helpful in times of great anxiety and grief.¹⁵⁶

Games were deemed to be important instructional tools in the forming of moral virtues and life skills, especially by the nobility. This is the inference in an English portrait of 1568 which portrays the Earl of Warwick and his wife with their four sons, two of whom play chess as two others play cards while their nursemaid looks on.¹⁵⁷ In Venice, card playing and gambling were seen as ways to introduce young men to the world of adulthood, with its implicit lessons to be taught on etiquette and honor.¹⁵⁸ Games and game paraphernalia were also employed for more didactic purposes.¹⁵⁹ In the fifteenth century the Franciscan Thomas Murner invented card games to teach elementary logic to his university students; in the sixteenth and seventeenth, playing cards were imprinted with imagery and text offering

152 On Scaino, see McClelland, “Sport and Scientific Thinking in the Sixteenth Century,” 136. Cavallo and Storey discuss the positive benefits of game play in the period in *Healthy Living in Late Renaissance Italy*, 164ff., a theme also treated by McClelland, *Body and Mind*.

153 In the operative passage in his *Il Gonzaga secondo* Tasso associated games with *trattenimento*, or entertainment; Tasso, *Il Gonzaga secondo*, 9–10, with discussion in McClure, *Parlour Games*, 5.

154 The chapter is subtitled “como el juego es necessario para la releuacion [y] aliuio: y descanso de la vexacion y fatiga del spiritu”; Covarrubias, *Remedio de jugadores*, pt. 1, ch. 1 (fol. V^o), with translation in Burke, “Invention of Leisure,” 145.

155 Scaino, *Trattato del giuoco*, 1 (1555); and translation in Burke, “Invention of Leisure,” 144.

156 “Itaque videtur in gravioribus curis, ad moerobius non tam licere, quàm expedire”; Cardano, *Liber*, 262; and Cardano, *Book on Games of Chance*, 1.

157 Chess was considered to be an important part of the noble child’s education, a theme duly reflected in several medieval romances which contain vignettes of children playing the game; see Murray, *History of Chess*, 432–33.

158 Walker, “Gambling and Venetian Noblemen,” 55–56.

159 Vives argued for the importance of games in the education of youths in his treatise of 1538, proposing that the school itself was a form of *ludus*; Vives, *Tudor School-Boy Life*, xli.

instruction on such topics as world geography, the planets, important historical events, notable personages presented as exemplars, and even lessons on religion.¹⁶⁰ Games were also used in the service of sophisticated mathematical concepts and philosophical theories. Popular in the Middle Ages and Renaissance, *Rithmomachia* (Battle of Numbers) was played on a double (elongated) chessboard and designed to teach principles of Boethian mathematics while providing moralistic instruction; more intellectual players saw in the game (also known as the “Philosopher’s Game”) the potential to better understand the secrets of the cosmos.¹⁶¹ In Nicolò Cusano’s *De ludo globi* (The game of spheres, 1463), framing it as a dialogue conducted with the sons of the duke of Bavaria he used his ideas about the vagaries associated with the movement and handling of the ball to “playfully” discuss metaphysics, cosmology, mystical theology, and the soul.¹⁶² Scaino’s treatise on ball games relied on mathematical and geometric models for his discussion of tennis, while Cardano, a polymath as well as a gambler, used dice and card games to articulate his theory on probability.¹⁶³

While board games were generally considered to be training for the game of life, some games were played to hone the tactical skills and knowledge needed for war. In the late Middle Ages, sporting games such as tournaments and jousts often took on the dimensions of a competitive game viewed as physical preparation for battle; so too, did chess and its derivatives, but from a strategic point of view.¹⁶⁴ In his treatise on chess, Cessolis laid the groundwork for this idea, using the chessboard to signify the battlefield while expounding on the duties of the knight and rook (soldier) as reflected in the chess pieces themselves.¹⁶⁵ In the sixteenth century Luigi Guicciardini reasserted these allegorical relationships in comparing the

160 On Murner, see especially Pauser, “Invention of Educational Card Games in the Renaissance”; and for examples of didactic playing cards, Hargrave, *History of Playing Cards*, 107–9, 161–62, 191. Naomi Lebens examines the instructional playing cards made for the young king Louis XIV in Chapter 2 of this volume.

161 The subject is treated by Moyer, *Philosopher’s Game*.

162 See Duclow, “Life and Works,” 46; and Cusano, *De ludo globi*, 152–68. Cusano, who is also referred to as Nicholas of Cuso and Nicolaus Cusanus, is discussed by Giovanna Guidicini in Chapter 8.

163 On Scaino, see McClelland “Sport and Scientific Thinking in the Sixteenth Century”; and for Cardano’s treatise, Walker, “Gambling and Venetian Noblemen,” 44–46.

164 For example, *Rithmomachia* was the game of “battling numbers,” while Weickmann’s chess game, conceived after the Thirty Years War, portrays the game as a battle for the offices of a kingdom; von Hilgers, *War Games*, 21–26. Moreover, as Huizinga notes, armed combat might also be accompanied by a game of dice; *Homo Ludens*, 81.

165 The figurative relationship between the board and the battlefield is well expressed in Italian, with *scacciera* meaning chessboard, and *scacciere* used to denote a military zone. This connection to combat was also expressed literally: because chessboards were often constructed of wood or metal, they made for effective weapons. Medieval romances relate how chessboards and chess pieces were flung at the player’s opponent after quarrels over a game of chess, actions that were based on actual happenstance; see discussion by Murray, *History of Chess*, 739–42.

game of chess to the military arts in his manuscript “Compara[z]ione del giuoco delli scacchi alla arte militaire,” which he dedicated to Duke Cosimo I de’ Medici. Likewise, Bardi and Scaino saw ball games such as *calcio* and tennis fruitful for helping players cultivate the skills needed for combat.¹⁶⁶ Cards, too, served as metaphorical battles, with Aretino likening them to playing at arms and equating gamblers with soldiers for their similar quest for Fortune.¹⁶⁷ The educational Game of Fortifications, a variation of the Goose game produced in 1697 by an engineer in the service of Louis XIV, was designed to be played with dice or cut up to make a pack of playing cards, with each card illustrating an aspect of the military stronghold.¹⁶⁸

Games played a part in diplomacy. Dignitaries and courtiers at the French courts were regularly invited to watch their hosts in a game of tennis—or even engage in play themselves. In London in 1522 to discuss a political alliance with Henry VIII, Emperor Charles V was asked to serve as Henry’s doubles partner in a game of tennis.¹⁶⁹ Game objects were duly considered appropriate gifts for presentation to foreign sovereigns. The Venetian diarist Marino Sanudo wrote in 1527 about a chess set on display in the Doge’s Palace, “wrought of gold and silver and inlaid with chalcedony, jasper, and other jewels,” with the chess pieces made of the “purest crystal”; it was thought that the set might be presented to the Ottoman Sultan Suleyman.¹⁷⁰ In the late sixteenth century, Duke Francesco I de’ Medici gave a Game of the Goose playing board to King Philip II of Spain, an especially attractive offering considering their mutual interest in numerology and symbolism.¹⁷¹ Less prestigious, but what must have been viewed as a masterful creation was the confectionary chessboard Cardinal Wolsey presented to the French ambassador at a banquet held in Hampton Court in 1528.¹⁷² While acknowledging the French

166 While Bardi was specifically concerned with *calcio*, Scaino saw the applications in both tennis and *calcio*. De Bondt provides a cogent synopsis of Scaino’s views on tennis as beneficial to battle: it “constitutes the best possible test to value the player’s character and stamina in a personal battle. In his quest for personal honor the dedicated player will eventually become famous if he applies the right strategy. On court he must appear calm and collected and never show his fear of losing. The ball game will teach Capitano how to lead armies, how to plan a battle, how to capture or defend a stronghold. In addition, he will learn when to advance or retreat and how to take the enemy by surprise and lead him into making errors of judgement”; De Bondt, *Royal Tennis in Renaissance Italy*, 65.

167 See Walker’s discussion, “Gambling and Venetian Noblemen,” 49, 68–69.

168 Seville, *Royal Game of the Goose*, 39–40.

169 Gillmeister, *Tennis*, 40.

170 “[U]no scacchier grande bellissimo in tondo et alto lavorato d’ariento et d’oro con calzedonie, diaspri ed altre zoie, et li scacchi di cristallo finisimo” (Sanudo, *Diari*, XLIII, 599); quoted in Molmenti, *Golden Age*, 2: 158, with English translation by LaBalme and White, *Cità Excelentissima*, 263.

171 Seville, *Royal Game of the Goose*, 16.

172 Murray, *History of Chess*, 773, indicates that this was a “sweetmeat,” which could have been a sugar sculpture or a cake.

for their skill at chess, the tribute would have paid implicit homage to Francis I, himself an avid player of the game.

Games were included among the activities staged for contemporary marriages. In 1558 the Florentine wedding of Lucrezia de' Medici and Alfonso II d'Este was celebrated with the playing of two games of *calcio*. Over thirty years later, *calcio* was again included in the festivities when Ferdinando de' Medici married Christina of Lorraine in Florence. Tasso used the occasion of Alfonso's (third) marriage as the setting for the dialogue in his *Il Romeo overo del giuoco*, in which his characters discuss a range of games and the new bride watches her husband playing primero.¹⁷³ Luxury gaming objects were also commissioned as wedding gifts celebrating the union of important families. A sixteenth-century Venetian gaming table incorporated the arms of two patrician families in the center of the marble top, with an inlaid backgammon and a chessboard at either end.¹⁷⁴

Games were used to assert civic and even national identity. Scaino's treatise on *calcio* had stressed its importance as a Florentine game despite the fact that it was played elsewhere. So important was *calcio* to the city's identity that in 1606 authorities issued a law punishing anyone who stopped a game in progress in the piazza of Santa Croce.¹⁷⁵ In Nuremberg, home to a thriving card-making industry, a common practice among card makers was to depict the arms of the city on the cards they produced, thus spreading the fame of Nuremberg (and the card makers themselves) wherever their cards were sold.¹⁷⁶ A variation on the Goose game, *Le jeu des princes de l'Europe* (The game of the princes of Europe, c. 1662), had players traveling through various regions before arriving in France, described as "the eye and pearl of the world"; not surprisingly, the originator served as the geographer to King Louis XIV.¹⁷⁷ This game may well have inspired the unusual game board printed in 1678 entitled *Lo splendore della nobilta Napoletana* (The splendors of Neapolitan nobility). The playing surface depicts 183 shields of the Neapolitan nobles, each shield serving as a claim to aristocratic status, with the player's passage suggesting the ceremonials of a court culture.¹⁷⁸ Even parlor games staged as public performances for visiting dignitaries were seen to enhance the reputation of the city as Bargagli informs us in his treatise.¹⁷⁹

173 See McClure, *Parlour Games*, 5.

174 Fortini Brown, *Private Lives in Renaissance Venice*, 132, figs. 149, 150.

175 Doidge, "Il Calcio as a Source of Local and Social Identity," 40.

176 Smoller, "Playing Cards and Popular Culture," 193. The card makers put their personal monograms on the cards.

177 Seville, *Royal Game of the Goose*, 38–39.

178 Fabris, "Giochi, spettacoli e società," 47, with illustration on 45.

179 Bargagli's account is contained in McClure, *Parlour Games*, 58.

Games contributed to European economies, playing a quantitative role in local and national commercial enterprises. While mercantile endeavors often involved taking monetary risks—in other words, *gambling*—business in games and gaming equipment proved to be a rewarding venture.¹⁸⁰ In the sixteenth century, France did a brisk business supplying tennis balls to England, with over 12,000 furnished in one month in 1567 as the London port records attest.¹⁸¹ The demand for games also stimulated—if not was stimulated by—a vibrant print culture, with gaming paraphernalia such as game boards, playing cards, and instructional treatises easily reproduced and propagated thanks to the printing process.¹⁸² Trade in playing cards was especially lucrative.¹⁸³ During Carnival when proscriptions against gambling were generally relaxed, the sales of playing cards increased dramatically, earning sizeable profits for those who made and sold them.¹⁸⁴ Playing cards also generated funds through taxation by regional and national entities, which allowed governments and sovereigns such as Charles V and even the pope to control gambling as they profited from it.¹⁸⁵ A similar financial benefit occurred with state-sponsored lotteries.¹⁸⁶ On a local level, Italian communes rented out the local *baratteria* (gaming shop) which allowed them to fill their civic coffers with profits made from gambling.¹⁸⁷ Games were actively promoted by purveyors of food and alcohol, who recognized the money to be made by offering venues for game playing and drinking (especially when they took a share of the winnings). If such practices are indicative of how games had a quantifiable impact upon early modern economies, Ringhieri's Game of the Merchant offers a more cogent example, using the terminology of trade and commerce to teach players the vagaries of mercantile activities.¹⁸⁸

180 As scholars have noted, the line between common wagers and speculating on trade was often blurred.

181 *Port and Trade of Early Elizabethan London*, 118.

182 As Bloom, "Games," 197, observes, with the spread of printing technologies it was cheaper to produce playing cards, game boards, and game manuals, which made games more available to the masses.

183 By the 1680s over a million decks were being manufactured every year; Smoller, "Playing Cards and Popular Culture," 199; and Tosney, "The Playing Card Trade in Early Modern England," 637.

184 Walker, "Gambling and Venetian Noblemen," 37 n. 36. During the period 1500 to 1700, gambling in Venice saw a substantial increase relative to the growing importance of Carnival in the social and economic life of the city; *ibid.*, 57.

185 Depaulis, "Bingo!," 43–45.

186 In sixteenth-century Venice, the "lotto" promoted by the doge Andrea Gritti to benefit the mercantile state was duly embraced by the clergy and monasteries, including convents, as a method of funding; see discussion by Olivieri, "Jeu et Capitalisme à Venise." In Genoa, a new form of the lotto (the *lotto di Genova*) was begun in 1576, which eventually displaced other lotteries; Zollinger, "Gioco e finanza."

187 This practice began in the late thirteenth century; Ortalli, "Uncertain Thresholds of Tolerance," 65. The negative associations of the *baratteria* are reflected in the term *barattiere* which refers to a corrupt official or cheat.

188 See McClure, *Culture of Profession*, 58.

As well as contributing to early modern economies, the period enthusiasm for games provided numerous opportunities for artists and craftsmen. Skilled artisans were called upon to fabricate luxury games and game-related objects, but even more humble materials were manufactured bearing game imagery. In seventeenth-century Netherlands, Delft tiles ornamented with motifs of children playing games were produced for decorating the walls of bourgeoisie interiors.¹⁸⁹ We have seen how period artists responded to the gaming trend with paintings depicting game players, but their works were sometimes reproduced in cheaper prints for the popular market.¹⁹⁰ The construction of special tennis courts and other auxiliary structures for game play provided financial incentives for those involved in the building trade. Even the work of sculptors was called into play. For the Palazzo Barberini in Rome, a new tennis court was constructed in 1625, with Gian Lorenzo Bernini tasked to create marble versions of tennis balls, which were then mounted on walnut pedestals leading the way to the court.¹⁹¹

The Downside to Games

In his *Book of Sports* King James I had had to toe the fine line between honoring the Sabbath and advocating for game play, but there were plenty of moral implications against games in this epoch—ironically enough considering all the games that were meant to inculcate moralistic values. Partially the argument was expressed in terms of games being a *waste* of time, a counterpoise to the idea of games used to “pass time.”¹⁹² Such thinking echoed Seneca’s words in the first century CE: “It would take too long to examine all those who have wasted their lives with board-games or ball-playing or acquiring a really good sun-tan.”¹⁹³ For Puritans, indulgence in games and other recreations was believed to lead to idleness (cousin to sloth and melancholy), an affront to the value of time that was a God-given benefit crucial to

189 Schama, *Embarrassment of Riches*, 497. Pieter de Hooch’s painting of *The Bedroom* (c. 1660) shows such tiles on the wall, viewable at the National Gallery of Art website, www.nga.gov/content/ngaweb/Collection/art-object-page.1172.html.

190 In terms of audience, Burke invites us to consider the issue of where such paintings would have been originally displayed and who would have bought or commissioned them; Burke, “Invention of Leisure,” 146. In the case of Bruegel, Orrock (“Homo Ludens,” 3–4) suggests that his paintings were probably commissioned by Antwerp’s professional merchant class and displayed within their homes where they served as conversation pieces for like-minded individuals.

191 De Bondt, “Apollo and Hyacinth Tennis Theme,” 130 and n. 37.

192 Burke addresses the notion of games as a means to “pass time” in “Invention of Leisure,” 143.

193 “Persequi singulos longum est, quorum aut latrunculi aut pila aut excoquendi in sole corporis cura consumpsere vitam”; Seneca, *De brevitate vitae*, 13.1, trans. in Purcell, “Literate games,” 185–86.

living a productive life.¹⁹⁴ In his emblem book of 1552 Barthélemy Aneau depicted tennis as a futile undertaking, the image showing two tennis players accompanied by the motto “great, but useless effort.”¹⁹⁵ Years earlier Sebastian Brant’s *Das Narrenschiff* (The Ship of Fools, 1494) had included a woodcut of four players wearing fools’ caps in his chapter “On Gamblers,” a potent assertion of gambling as a foolish enterprise. Even the noble game of chess was not excluded from criticism. James I who was otherwise disposed to game play, described it as a “philosophical follie,” while the Catholic theologian Jean Baptiste Thiers criticized chess for its failure to exercise the body and its propensity to cause excessive fatigue of the mind.¹⁹⁶ Cardano cautioned that the losses incurred in gambling might lead to the “lessening of reputation,” while others saw games as the threshold to greater sins.¹⁹⁷ In Thomas More’s *Utopia* (1516), one of his characters expressed this concern in no uncertain terms, invoking the Cheat when he opines: “Look at all the crooked games of chance like dice, cards, backgammon, bowling and quoits, in which money slips away so fast. Don’t all these pastimes lead their devotees straight to robbery?”¹⁹⁸ Several decades later, Martin Luther was more succinct in labeling gamblers (but not card players) “thieves before God.”¹⁹⁹ Luther probably had cheats in mind, but tracts against gambling adopted a more specific moralistic bent, with images of cheaters and swindlers serving a similar admonitory purpose.

Although Cardano had advocated for playing games of chance in times of anxiety and grief, others believed that a propensity for game play had a deleterious effect on the human spirit, creating an imbalance of humors that was manifested in melancholy. The clergyman Robert Burton cited a “love of gaming” as one of the causes for this condition in his medical treatise *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (published in 1621).²⁰⁰ Some years earlier Matthias Gerung had given visual expression to the

194 Ellis discusses the puritanical notion in *Games People Play*, 21. According to Arcangeli, at the end of the Middle Ages, sloth merged with melancholy and came to be identified with idleness; *Recreation in the Renaissance*, 15–16.

195 In his *Picta poesis*; see De Bondt, *Royal Tennis in Renaissance Italy*, 198.

196 James’s words were contained in his *Basilikon Doron* (The King’s Gift), which took the form of a letter to his son Henry advising him how to be an effective ruler. Describing chess as being “over-wise and Philosophicke a folly,” James objected to the game for its propensity to fill men’s heads with thoughts of their game plays rather than thinking about more important affairs; quoted in Murray, *History of Chess*, 839 n. 7. The *Basilikon Doron* was composed around 1599, when James was still ruling as James VI of Scotland; it was later published during his reign as King James I of England and Scotland. On Thiers, see Arcangeli, *Recreation in the Renaissance*, 43.

197 “Damna verò iactura existimationis”; Cardano, *Liber*, 263; and Cardano, *Book on Games of Chance*, 4.

198 Quoted in Kendrick, *Utopia, Carnival, and Commonwealth in Renaissance England*, 124.

199 Smoller, “Playing Cards and Popular Culture,” 189.

200 This appears in his chapter entitled “Causes of Melancholy”; Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy*, 171. Burton’s text was revised and expanded five times during his lifetime, with eight editions released. Citations in this essay are from his sixth edition (1651–52).

linkage between games and melancholy in his painting *Melancholy in the Garden of Love* (1558).²⁰¹ The image shows the fulsome, oversized title character seated in a verdant landscape surrounded by a host of people engaged in a variety of leisurely activities and playing games including quoits, bearbaiting, jousting, and sports.²⁰² Appropriate to the scenario are two jesters, no doubt included for their time-honored role as a cure to sadness.²⁰³ Gerung's pleasurable tableau belies the fact that game play had the potential to drive men from a melancholic state to outright madness. Cardano acknowledged that "gambling arouses anger and disturbs the mind," while Burton was more effusive in pronouncing that all gamesters who lose when gambling at tables and cards become "so choleric and testy that no man may speak with them, and break many times into violent passions, oaths, imprecations, and unbecoming speeches, little differing from mad men for the time."²⁰⁴ Perhaps no more piquant illustration of the connection between games and madness is that reflected in the Italian "joker" playing card represented in the guise of the fool and referred to as *il Matto*: the madman.

Like melancholy and madness itself, games were also associated with occult activity, especially games dependent on chance.²⁰⁵ The antithesis of Divine Providence, Fortune—the ruling agent in such games—was often linked to the devil. Dice and playing cards had long been condemned by religious leaders such as the Franciscan Bernardino of Siena who in the early fifteenth century had called playing cards the "devil's breviaries."²⁰⁶ His ideas were propagated by his fellow Franciscan James of the Marches who portrayed games as the devil's religion, using imaginative religious metaphors to castigate dice and playing cards and the people who played them.²⁰⁷ Despite allowing that some games were good for the spirits, de Covarrubias nevertheless attached diabolical connotations to games of chance such as cards and dice.²⁰⁸ Astonishingly, in the early sixteenth century,

201 The original name in German is *Die Melancholie im Garten des Lebens*; see next note.

202 The female personification of Melancholy in the garden of love bears on the poetic courtly tradition of "love melancholy" attributed to women; see Bell, *Melancholia*, 92. The image is viewable at *Wikimedia Commons* (*Die Melancholie im Garten des Lebens*), https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Matthias_Gerung_Die_Melancholie_im_Garten_des_Lebens.JPG.

203 Jesters are mentioned frequently in Burton's treatise.

204 Cardano, *Liber*, 262, "quòd Ludus iram mouet, turbat mentem"; Cardano, *Book on Games of Chance*, 2; and Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy*, 174.

205 Burton addresses this issue in his section entitled "A Digression of the nature of Spirits, bad Angels, or Devils, and how they cause Melancholy"; Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy*, 55. Kevin Chovanec examines the connection between occult activity and dice in Chapter 4 of this volume.

206 Dice were censured especially because they were associated with the Crucifixion. On Bernardino, see Depaulis, "*Breviari del diavolo so' le carte e naibi*," 115–34.

207 *Ibid.*, 123–25.

208 Burke, "Invention of Leisure," 145.

Thomas Murner, who had employed playing cards to teach his students logic, was accused of witchcraft for his success.²⁰⁹ Notwithstanding chess's noble pedigree, it, too, was aligned with insidious occult activity. In Robert Browne's *Religio medico* (The religion of a doctor) of 1643 he writes: "Thus the Devill playd at Chesse with mee, and yeelding a pawne, thought to gaine a Queene of me, taking advantage of my honest endeavors."²¹⁰

What moralists put into words, artists expressed in more macabre fashion, with Death playing a major iconographic role. In his woodblock print from around 1524–25 Hans Holbein depicted the fate that lay in store for the hapless gamester, Death strangling the card player as the Devil waits to take his soul. A similar outcome is expressed in Bruegel's *Triumph of Death* (1562). Set against a devastated landscape peopled by skeletons and corpses, in the right foreground a backgammon board and playing cards have been knocked to the ground as a jester tries to find refuge under the table, where the coins used for gambling are displayed. Mitelli combined text and image in his engraving of the *Giucatore* (see again Figure 1.3), adding a caption below the figure in which Death (*Morte*) cautions the player about the risk of losing his soul at the expense of profiting from game play.²¹¹ That the perniciousness of gambling was linked with Death presents a somewhat ironical note to what seems to have been contemporary practice: Cardano informs us that gambling was permitted at funeral banquets.²¹²

Notwithstanding the vehement outcries against games made by religious and moralistic leaders in this period, Luther himself resorted to using game metaphors in his preaching. In a sermon of 1525, he presented God as the ultimate game player (although assuredly not a "gamester") writing: "If I were rich, I would have myself made a golden chess set and silver playing cards as a remembrance; for God's chess pieces and cards are great and mighty princes, kings and emperors; for He always trumps or overcomes one through another, that is, lifts him off his feet and throws him down."²¹³ Luther goes on to refer to contemporary rulers before declaring that

209 Hoffmann, *Playing Card*, 38.

210 Quoted in Poole, "False Play," 64. Actually, Browne's linkage of chess with the devil had been a popular conceit in medieval chess allegories; see Yachnin, "Game at Chess and Chess Allegory," 323–24; and Juel, "Defeating the Devil at Chess," 90–92.

211 Mitelli's engraving is part of a satirical series entitled *Le ventiquattr'hore dell'humana felicità* (The twenty-four hours of human happiness), which juxtaposed allegorical figures with verses on dialogues with Death. The work was dedicated to Cardinal Giovanni Nicola Conti. See Mitelli, *Le ventiquattr'Hore dell'humana felicità*.

212 Cardano, *Liber*, 262, "ut licuerit in epulis mortuorum ludere"; and Cardano, *Book on Games of Chance*, 1. He also cited a "heading in the law books" entitled "Funeral expenses and games of chance" (*Unde titulus est a pud Iurisconsultos de sumptibus funerum, & ludo Aleae*); *ibid.*

213 Translated in Smoller, "Playing Cards and Popular Culture," 188–89, with German original text supplied in n. 25.



Fig. 1.5 Lubin Baugin, *Still Life with Chessboard*, 1630

“[l]astly, our Lord God comes, deals out the cards, and beats the pope with Luther, which is His ace [...]”²¹⁴ Luther himself was an avid chess player and a frequent bowler—he used the pins to represent devils, demons, and papal officials—the latter activity he had in common with his contemporary John Calvin.²¹⁵ Calvin was to emerge as a substantial voice in the religious battle over games and game playing in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Preaching a doctrine of Divine Providence and predestination, he set the stage for his followers who took special issue with games and especially those dependent upon Chance: reliance on Fortune reflected a rejection of God’s will, allowing for the intercession of occult forces.²¹⁶ While Calvinist subtexts undergird many a Dutch painting in the seventeenth century, a still life by the French artist Lubin Baugin from 1630 presents an overt moralistic message (Figure 1.5). Juxtaposing objects including playing cards, a

214 The references are to the pope, the Turk, the emperor, and Ferdinand; *ibid.*

215 On Luther, see Mansch and Peters, *Martin Luther*, 140.

216 For example, Fortune ruled over life’s forces on earth, as opposed to Providence, which was an expression of God’s will; Walker, “Gambling and Venetian Noblemen,” 43. In Geneva where Calvin was to preach in the 1540s, his immediate influence is seen in the city prohibiting dice, cards, and ball games in 1546; Selderhuis, *John Calvin*, 158.

chessboard, and a purse full of money (alluding to the illicit profits made from gambling on games) with the Eucharistic symbols of bread and a chalice, he neatly articulates the proper course to spiritual redemption.²¹⁷ Rejection of game play was paramount.

In the chapters that follow our scholars employ a variety of methodologies—literary and iconographical analyses, connoisseurship, social and feminist history, and permutations thereof—to expand upon several of the games and issues treated in this preliminary overview. While not all European countries are covered (only France, England, Scotland, Italy, and Germany are represented), these studies nevertheless inform us of the various ways in which artists and writers, game makers and collectors, lowborn and aristocratic players, and rulers responded to the vogue for games in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.²¹⁸ Although almost evenly divided between art and literature, the essays are arranged in “gaming” sections that allow us to better appreciate how games infiltrated all forms of cultural expression, without privileging the discipline over the game leitmotif itself. Five of the chapters are concerned with games and game playing as expressed in painting, prints, sculpture, and collections of game objects. Of the four remaining chapters that treat games in period drama, notably, all deal with the works of English playwrights. While this regional focus speaks to the flourishing theater industry in London in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, it also illustrates the propensity of dramatists to appeal to their audiences with popular references to the gaming theme. A subtle undercurrent running through several of the visual and literary works treated in these essays is the linkage of games with “madness,” which we might see as an apt metaphor for the period mania for game play.

Part I is devoted to chess and luxury playing cards, here grouped together as aristocratic pastimes. In the opening essay Robin O’Byrne adopts a semiotic approach in analyzing a sixteenth-century Italian painting that depicts a chess game in progress. In his *Partita a scacchi (The Game of Chess)* Giulio Campi showed a knight and a well-dressed woman engaged in chess combat, attended by several other figures and a scowling dwarf jester who commands the woman’s attention. Highlighting the erotic content of the artist’s pictorial plays, O’Byrne demonstrates

²¹⁷ The inclusion of the chessboard with the cards and money bag alludes to the fact that chess was often played for stakes; on this point, see Murray, *History of Chess*, 474.

²¹⁸ It is noteworthy that with the exception of Scotland, these same four countries are those which saw the most production of game texts in the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries; Patterson, “Game On: Medieval Players and Their Texts,” 7. This output reflects a deeply rooted game culture which was manifested in art and literature.

how his iconography was rooted in artistic and literary conventions that treated the game as an allegory of love and sexual conquest. In addition to identifying these prototype works, she goes a step further in envisioning the scene as a game of “living chess,” showing how Campi used directional glances and pointed gestures to set the game in motion. While this method of presentation speaks to the artist’s ingenuity in treating the chess topos, the composition duly betrays his knowledge of contemporary rules of chess play. A change to the game in the late fifteenth century saw the queen becoming the most potent piece on the chessboard, leading to the revised game being dubbed *scacchi alla rabiosa*, or “mad chess.” Campi alludes to this transformed game through the gestures and attributes of the woman player and her interaction with the dwarf jester whose maniacal expression provides the key for interpreting the enigmatic iconography. The artist’s rendering of chess players reflects the popularity of the topos in this epoch, even as his unique presentation provides subtle insights into gender relations, sexuality, and the rise of feminine power in Renaissance Italy.

In Chapter 2, Naomi Lebens examines four sets of didactic playing cards made for the five-year-old French king, Louis XIV, in the mid-seventeenth century. Illustrated by the Italian artist Stefano della Bella, the cards were embellished with textual information by Jean Desmarets, a French writer and dramatist at the royal court. The cards were originally intended to provide Louis with the rudiments of basic knowledge, while offering moralistic lessons on responsible rulership. The Game of French Kings and the Game of Famous Queens assigned numerical values based upon positive or negative character traits, which emphasized the attributes associated with and expected of the most praiseworthy monarchs, and in the case of the queens, also reinforced cultural ideas on virtuous conduct and sexual mores for women. Nationalist pride was stressed, evident in the Game of French Kings and the Game of Geography (which put a high premium on French territorial holdings in the context of the Thirty Years War). Interestingly, some of Della Bella’s imagery was based on the costumes of court ceremonials, another example of the intersection between games and performance. Over the course of fifty years the plates for printing the cards were sold and the cards reissued in the form of books and prints for collection and use by a popular audience. Lebens’s discussion provides a potent illustration of the merging of class boundaries that was often attendant in game play, while also demonstrating the impact of game culture upon commercial enterprise in early modern Europe.

Part II is devoted to gambling and games of chance, which includes not only dice and board games, but also wagers. In Chapter 3 Megan Herrold takes up the subject of gambling as a subtext of several of Shakespeare’s plays, with a specific focus on implications of gender. Shakespeare was fully conversant in the rhetoric and imagery of gambling—his dialogues are sprinkled liberally with words such as

“odds,” “stakes,” “luck,” “adventure,” and the like—and his characters gamble with frequent abandon. However, it is not cards or dice or other games they play here, but rather bets among and between each other. Shakespeare’s gambling plotlines are tied to patriarchal authority, social standing, love, sexual potency, and feigned madness, and bring in the expected acts of cheating, conning, and duping. The stakes are often high, with the outcomes potentially leading to emasculation, social perdition, or the greatest of “odds-levelers”: death. We are introduced to the “stylish” male gamester, who gambles to affirm his masculinity and dominance over rivals and women; when females assume the role of gamester they leave cuckoldry and depleted male identity in their wake. Amid these dramatic conflicts, Shakespeare entertains with puns and playful metaphors on gambling terms. Marriage vows are declared to be as false as dicers’ oaths, and women are compared to loaded dice. Especially piquant are his puns on “stakes,” which allude to the stakes used in bearbaiting, a popular betting activity whose arenas were located near the London playhouses. Considering the traditional relationship between theaters and blood sports, this play on “stakes” is especially pertinent given that Shakespeare’s wagers often result in “a stage littered with bodies.”

The gamester reemerges in Chapter 4, but he is now in league with the devil. Kevin Chovanec investigates gambling in English stage productions with a specific focus on dice and their relationship to the occult, a popular subtext of seventeenth-century plays. Seeking to explain the gambling craze, contemporary moralists argued that it was due to possession by occult forces. Dramatists responded in kind, using as their source material puritanical pamphlets which decried games of chance by linking them to the devil, witchcraft, and demons. One pamphleteer asks if the “gamester” invoked enchantment to become a winner, which seems to be the premise of the play by the anonymous writer who frames the courtesan’s bewitchment of a lover in the context of a dice game. Thomas Middleton uses the husband’s addiction to gambling and dice as the portal for demonic possession, which ultimately brings about the downfall of his family and leads him to murder. What is there in three dice he asks, for to hazard a roll of the dice was to risk the devil’s intervention. Thomas Heywood plays to this trope (and invokes Franciscan-like metaphors) when his character refers to Satan as the inventor of the dice. In yet another overlap between games and entertainment, moralists linked gambling to the theater since both exerted an occult pull on players and spectators. Dicing games played especially well to the dramatic context since dice and the theater were rooted in deceit—and, as Chovanec reminds us—there was “inherent theatricality” in the roll of a die.

In Chapter 5 Patricia Rocco discusses the game prints produced by the seventeenth-century Bolognese artist Giuseppe Maria Mitelli, which exhibit and use three dice in their play. Tracing the roots of his iconography to parlor games, local proverbs and folklore, and the works of the popular satirist Benedetto Croce

and the Carracci family painters, Rocco shows how Mitelli's games asserted the city's identity while responding to the religious demands imposed by the Counter-Reformation. His game prints functioned as "hybrids" for a high and low audience, which enabled players to temporarily perform the roles of the characters portrayed in his imagery. Although Mitelli was quite prolific in the production of these prints, Rocco focuses on three games operating under the rubric of the world upside down (which we might see as another implicit nod to madness). Two of these two games deal with the theme of food—one with gluttony, the other with deprivation—while offering social commentaries on class differences and the contemporary food shortages brought about by war and famine. The third game is presented as a cautionary tale about two female characters, whose behavior deviates from the pious model expected of Bolognese women. Divided into twenty-four squares, the winning "home" space (achieved only by rolling three 6s) was positioned at the very beginning of the game, thus reinforcing the notion that the woman's rightful place was in the home. Paradoxically, while virtuous lessons were couched in Mitelli's games of chance, the only way to achieve moral victory when playing them was by rolling the dice—a clear affront to the Church's views on gambling.

Outdoor and sportive games are the focus of Part III. In Chapter 6, Bethany Packard analyzes the works of English dramatists who used the rhetoric and actions of prisoner's base, a typical children's game, for their adult characters. Packard provides a cogent explanation of the mechanics, nuances, and variants of prisoner's base, highlighting the notion of contingency, where players both pursue and are themselves pursued, which exposes them to sudden turns of fortune. As becomes evident in her analysis, period playwrights were clearly familiar with the rules and language of the game, which they manipulated for optimal effect in plotlines dealing with social class, political machinations, battles, love and sex, madness, and women's agency. Richard Brome's noble character prefers the country game of prisoner's base to hunting with his aristocratic peers, while Christopher Marlowe presented the game as an analogue for an ensuing civil war, the relationship to battle similarly treated by Shakespeare. Ben Jonson, Brome, Shakespeare, and Shakespeare working with John Fletcher, used the game and/or its corollary, barley-break, as metaphors for romance and sexual activity. Henry Chettle invoked both games in the actions and lines for his female protagonist who pursues and is pursued, safeguards her chastity, and cures her temporary madness, all while playing the game. Given its origins as a children's activity, such titillating adult themes may seem a bit incongruous, but playwrights duly recognized that components of the game—chasing and capturing—were actions mirrored in the game of courtship. Prisoner's base references were additionally suited for the theatrical venue since children's games in England were referred to as "plays."

In Chapter 7 Mark Kaethler turns the discussion to tennis as reflected in the title of Thomas Middleton and William Rowley's *The World Tossed at Tennis*. The drama was originally intended to be performed in London as a masque for King James I and his son Charles, and was no doubt meant to appeal to their advocacy of and interest in tennis. However, apart from the fact that "tennis" appears in the title, the work has actually little to do with the game itself. Rather, the playwrights use tennis metaphors as a moralistic allegory for the differing approaches taken by James and Charles regarding English involvement at the outbreak of the Thirty Years War. As Kaethler's careful analysis shows, the playwrights' allusive language invokes the two ways of playing the game, that is, both with the racket, or with the hand as in the original French version. The ending of the play thus suggests the importance of taking a twofold team approach—as in tennis—for handling the military crisis, with the work implicitly using the tennis metaphor as an assertion of national identity. Among the cast of characters we find Deceit and the Devil, whose inclusion in this drama "about" tennis suggests the playwrights were tapping into the contemporary moralistic outcries against games and their representation on the stage. That this royal masque ostensibly about tennis was transformed for the popular audience finds an interesting corollary in the period conversion of princely covered tennis courts into public theaters.

Games on display are treated literally and figuratively in Part IV. In Chapter 8, Giovanni Guidicini examines the sculptural decorations made for King James's predecessor James V of Scotland for his castle in Stirling. After establishing the Stewart royals' strong tradition of game play at their court—both typically outdoor activities such as tennis and bowling, and interior games like chess and playing cards—she proceeds to show how this game culture may be reflected in the statuary that adorns three of the palace facades. Guidicini posits that the imagery of luxury playing cards and Nicolaus Cusanus's (Nicolò Cusano), treatise on the game of spheres inspired the iconography of the exterior sculptures and was meant to impart edifying and moralizing messages for the king and his courtiers. On one facade, statues of children throwing balls toward a devilish figure associated with Sloth might remind courtiers playing ball in the Bowling Green below not to succumb to idleness, but to instead play the moralistic ball game such as described by Cusanus. This would allow them to demonstrate their own physical virtues while prompting dual reflection on their place in the cosmos. On the other two facades Guidicini argues that the sculptures served as three-dimensional representations of the characters illustrated in *Trionfi* cards—astrological deities, mythological figures, and members of the courtly household (including the Fool)—and were duly indebted to contemporary triumphal imagery. Thus, this imaginary stone parade of triumphal figures on the castle walls would honor James's rule as sovereign even as they functioned as a metaphor for his imposing social order, a philosophical claim for controlling his realm as he did in the handling of cards.

Greger Sundin's discussion of the game objects assembled by the Augsburg art agent Philipp Hainhofer serves as a fitting conclusion to the essays presented in our volume. A diplomat and entrepreneur, in the seventeenth century Hainhofer created a number of *Kunstschränke* (art cabinets) which were intended to function as miniature *Kunstkammern* for a wealthy clientele. Two of his projects—one commissioned by a duke, the other presented by the city as a gift to a visiting royal—serve as the basis for Sundin's study. Hainhofer included a number of games in these two cabinets, not only the more commonplace games of skill and chance, but also others with obscure pedigrees and inexplicable rules; as well, some of the gaming boards were actually incorporated as pull-out shelves in the cabinets' design. Notably, although a few of the games in the collections show signs of use, the bulk were meant for display, reminding us again how game objects duly functioned as objects of status and delectation. In his investigation, Sundin proposes an interesting paradox regarding the traditional role of kings and princes as tastemakers, suggesting that with Hainhofer, who assembled these games for his potential clients, the roles were reversed: it was the agent who actually influenced the taste of his noble patrons. Ironically, given the unusual manner in which he operated (spending money on art cabinets before securing a buyer), Hainhofer emerges as an inveterate "gamester." Although apparently motivated more by aesthetic impulses and personal pleasure than by monetary gain, his obsession with games contributed to his near financial ruin.

Hainhofer remains little known in the annals of general history, but he must surely be seen as an important figure in the history of games. As well as leaving us with tangible game objects and detailed records of the games he assembled and had fabricated for his *Kunstschränke*, he gave accounts in his diaries of the types of games he played during his travels. He was not alone in putting to paper what today might seem to be rather banal activities. Writing in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the physicians Thomas and Felix Platter and Hippolytus Guarinonius evidently considered the gaming experience to be noteworthy enough that they recorded in their journals the games they had watched during their travels throughout Europe.²¹⁹ The London diarist Samuel Pepys was no less informative, recording for a two-year period the fifteen card games he had played or watched, typically after dinner (like Rabelais's Gargantua).²²⁰ After visiting France in 1598, the Englishman Sir Robert Dallington was particularly struck by the French propensity for tennis, later commenting "there be more tennis players in France

219 See various accounts in Katritzky, *Healing, Performance and Ceremony in the Writings of Three Early Modern Physicians*.

220 The years were 1664–66; Pepys, *Diary of Samuel Pepys*, 2: 150 *passim*. He also mentions (*ibid.*, 2: 275) the game of "shovelboard" (shuffleboard) that was played on a table with coins, which sounds similar to tiddlywinks.

than ale drinkers [...] with us.”²²¹ Although clearly speaking in hyperbolic terms, his observation is striking nevertheless since it offers confirmation of how early moderns themselves recognized that the times in which they lived were besotted with games and game play.

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221 Dallington's words were contained in his *A Method for Travell: Shewed by Taking the View of France; As It Stood in the Year of Our Lord, 1598* (London, c. 1605), quoted in Lecky, “Sports and Games of Ancient France,” 239. In linking ale with tennis, Dallington's comment reminds us once again of the close relationship between drink and games in the period.

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