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Gaming Medieval French Literature

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[Title](#) | [Introduction](#) | [Critical Engagement](#) | [Primary Texts](#) | [Chapter 1](#) | [Chapter 2](#) | [Chapter 3](#) | [Chapter 4](#) | [Chapter 5](#) | [Cutscenes](#) | [Conclusion](#) | [Works Cited](#)

Introduction

The 1987 cult classic, *The Princess Bride*, opens on an 8-bit, pixelated image of a baseball field while the MIDI chiptune version of “Take Me out to the Ballgame” beeps along in the background. A sick Max (Fred Savage) is home, holed away in his sports-themed room, playing *HardBall!* on his Commodore 64.¹ Max’s player is sliding into first base as his mom (Betsy Brantley) enters the room to tell him that his grandfather has come to pay him a visit. Grandpa (Peter Falk) brings along a book, *The Princess Bride*, to read to Max, who is reluctant to hear the story if it lacks sports. Once he mentions the fencing, racing, revenge, adventure, and excitement of the story, Grandpa begins his narration, which is consistently interrupted by a dubious Max. Eventually, however, Max is won over by *The Princess Bride* and all the adventure found within its pages; he asks Grandpa to return the next day to read it again. The movie ends as Grandpa closes the door to Max’s room, the light fading away and the Commodore 64 joystick resting at the foot of the bed.

¹ *HardBall!* was a popular baseball game franchise from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s. The Commodore 64 was sold from 1982 to 1994 by Commodore International; it is believed that the C64 is the highest-selling single computer model of all time.



Although this project does not take film as its subject or medium of inquiry, these highlights from *The Princess Bride* serve to show the importance of gaming to medievalism. Despite the relative nascence of the study of medievalism(s), a rich body of criticism on the cinematic Middle Ages already exists, but very little of that work attends to gaming's relationship to and presence in these representations of the medieval.² To be clear, medievalism is used here to denote the study of works that either intentionally or unwittingly evoke the (largely European) Middle Ages. For example, *The Princess Bride* presents to its audience a self-conscious understanding of its medievalism: the fictional kingdoms of Florin and Guilder, the characters' quests and adventures, and the narrative form seem coextensive with, and certainly inspired by, those of medieval romance. Yet, film and television are not the only media within this category of medieval afterlives, notwithstanding the seemingly disproportionate screen time they receive. Video games, on the other hand, frequently immerse players in medieval-inspired worlds, inviting new modes of interaction with the medieval. Strategy games such as *Crusader Kings* (2004), *Age of Empires II: Age of Kings* (1999), and *Medieval Total War* (2002) present opportunities to manage medieval political systems, from agricultural production to grand-scale warfare. Role-playing games, like *Assassin's Creed* (2007), *Assassin's Creed II* (2009), and *Kingdom Come: Deliverance* (2018), offer a first-person perspective of medieval cities as players explore the digital streets of 12th and 13th-century Masyaf, Jerusalem, and Damascus, and 15th-century Florence, Constantinople, and Bohemia respectively. Finally in *The Sims: Medieval* (2013), a life

² See Louise D'Arcens, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Medievalism*, Cambridge University Press, 2016; Bettina Bildhauer, *Filming the Middle Ages*, Reaktion, 2011; Martha W. Driver and Sid Ray, *The Medieval Hero on Screen: Representations from Beowulf to Buffy* McFarland, 2003; Andrew B. R. Elliott, ed. *Remaking the Middle Ages: The Methods of Cinema and History in Portraying the Medieval World* McFarland, 2014; Laurie A. Finke and Martin B. Shichtman, eds, *Cinematic Illuminations: The Middle Ages on Film*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009; Nickolas Haydock, *Movie Medievalism: The Imaginary Middle Ages*. McFarland, 2014; Peter Linehan and Janet L. Nelson, eds, *The Medieval World*. Routledge, 2013; Spencer-Hall, Alicia. *Medieval Saints and Modern Screens: Divine Visions as Cinematic Experience*, Amsterdam University Press, 2018.



simulation game, players create and live in their very own medieval worlds through quest-driven gameplay, embodying monarchs, blacksmiths, knights, bards, or even sectarian “Peteran” and “Jacoban” priests.

Whether these video games accurately represent the Middle Ages is not necessarily important to the task at hand. Instead, these digital games that represent or reproduce various aspects of the past call our attention to a significant interplay between games and the medieval, and one that is largely overlooked in studies of medievalism. The lack of scholarship, however, is not for want of source material: a term search for “medieval” on Steam, a digital software store and platform, reveals that over 1200 games are available to be played that have some connection to the Middle Ages (store.steampowered.com). And while some scholarly attention has been paid to the medievalisms of video games, there isn’t much of it. Daniel T. Kline’s *Digital Gaming Re-imagines the Middle Ages* is one of the only edited collections that explores this subject explicitly. Often, studies of medieval representation in games are folded into broader examinations film and television, which is useful, but elides the important position games hold as a medium. Furthermore, investigations of how the Middle Ages are presented in video games encourages an exploration of how games are portrayed in medieval sources.

Using video game medievalism as a point of departure, this dissertation traces the diverse ways that Old French texts employ and represent gaming. In treating game and text as comparable forms, an investigation of their intersections yields insights into how the ludic and the narratological inform one another. To return briefly to *The Princess Bride*, the presence of Max’s game and the underlying competition between Grandpa’s story and Max’s joystick positions gaming as an integral component of a critical discussion of narrative. While my project does not explicitly explore ludic



quality of film, *The Princess Bride* serves as an apt visualization of the imbrication of game and narrative, their relationship to the medieval, and the urgency for a deeper examination of how to game medieval literature.

Critical Engagement

As a framework for understanding game structures, I endeavor to employ video game terminology with reference to genre and categories. This approach will situate my work more squarely within the specific theoretical context of video game studies more generally, while always remaining attuned to how this methodology benefits the study of medieval literature. And while several examples of gaming categories are mentioned above, such as role-playing, strategy, and simulation, others include sports, e-sports, action-adventure, massively-multiplayer, art games, casual games, idle games, and, of course, serious games. These genres are often defined in ways that differentiate them from other media, such as film. Action games, for example, are determined by the style of game-interaction mechanics, that is, the focus on hand-eye coordination, movement, and other skills of motion. Unlike film, these games are not necessarily categorized by content, but by modality; this does not, however, preclude games from falling into theme-based genres, or into more than one genre. As an example, the classic arcade game *Pong* (1972) created by Atari is considered a sport game not because of its iconic tabletop tennis representation. *Pong* can also be considered an action game because the game mechanic is the movement of a “paddle” vertically across the screen, using a dial-like controller (potentiometer). As a sports, action, arcade game, *Pong* demonstrates the rich potential for and unique characteristics of video game categorization.

In addition to the game structures above, I take up Roger Caillois’ distinction of four game categories: *agôn* [contest and competition], *alea* [chance], *mimicry* [simulation], and *Ilinx* [dizziness



and disorientation] to also ground my work in game theory as it might apply to a variety of gaming (13-26). Each category, Caillois suggests, exists on a spectrum between means of play, that is between ludus [calculation and subordination to rules] and paidia [spontaneity and childish amusement] (13). In considering the category of agôn, for example, there are several games that come to mind: chess, unregulated wrestling, betting, and football. Chess and football are far more ludic, while spontaneous horseplay and betting lie closer to the paidian pole of the play spectrum. Furthermore, Caillois suggests that games can belong to more than one category at once, displaying characteristics of seemingly endless combinations of agôn, alea, mimicry, or Ilinx (71-2). This figuration is helpful in understanding how games shape narrative and provides a constellation of game categorization, in addition to video games genres, with which I can map out the critical role of gaming in medieval French texts.

While Caillois has inspired ways of thinking about categorizations of game, Bernard Suits is helpful for understanding the processes of play. He explains that playing a game is “to attempt to achieve a specific state of affairs [prelusory goal], using only means permitted by rules [lusory means], where the rules prohibit use of more efficient in favour of less efficient means [constitutive rules], and where the rules are accepted just because they make possible such activity [lusory attitude]” (34, Suits’s bracketed terms are my own addition). Suits’s schema for understanding play opens up possibilities for reading games within narratives from the Middle Ages. I argue that like games, medieval narratives ask that their readers and auditors adopt a lusory attitude toward the text. In another sense, the audience is asked to suspend its disbelief. In doing so, a reader/gamer abides by the text’s arbitrary rules (i.e. depiction of environments, characterization, social structures and



broader milieux). While only one formulation, Suits's process is helpful as a starting point for analyzing characters in medieval texts and how, why, where, and when they interact with games.

Play is very difficult to define precisely, but Caillois asserts that it can be summarized into six main characteristics: it is voluntary, separate from routine life, uncertain, unproductive, rule-bound, and representative of fictional worlds (43). Yet, the medieval narratives explored in my dissertation demonstrate that play is not always voluntary; routine is difficult to identify; play can produce wealth and renown; the division between worlds is not always clear. Both Caillois and Suits insist on the relationship between play and games, but many Medieval French texts invite us to consider how different modes of gaming exist that are separate from the implications of play. Coercion and survival, for example, are two forms of engagement with a game for which "play" seems an unsuitable lens of interaction. Although, I acknowledge and benefit from an approach in which games and play operate together, my dissertation explores how gaming, as a critical framework, opens possibilities for different interpersonal, intertextual, and transhistorical relationships. A shift away from play as a primary method of gaming means that I am still negotiating what aspects to borrow from important gaming critics like Caillois and Suits. In an effort to move toward a more inclusive discourse on gaming, my project will engagement many of the scholars found in the Palgrave *Games in Context* series, which presents an interdisciplinary and interprofessional approach to gaming and race, gender, LGBTQ+, class, and other social considerations. Despite the importance of the games as defined by Suits and Caillois, I would like to better understand the limitations of their categories to encapsulate a diverse theoretical figuration of gaming. This project, after all, does not seek a singular definition of games, but rather it considers the multitudes of units, systems, structures, and interactions that gaming evokes.



Primary Texts

With an eye toward diversifying the conception of gaming, my dissertation finds value in echoing such variation with a broad selection of primary texts. I have largely limited my corpus to works from the 12th and 13th centuries, although my final chapter engages with a work from the late 14th century. Since my project claims gaming as an important structure and mode in medieval French narrative, it is important that the generic scope remain broader while maintaining narrower temporal parameters. Furthermore, in spite of, or perhaps because of, the challenges presented in defining any medieval genres, an array of texts across generic categories echoes the dissertation's engagement with video game categorization. In looking (and gaming) across lais, romances, theatre, fabliaux, didactic works, and more, my dissertation troubles the hard and fast categories used in defining and describing medieval texts. If we can understand a video game as an adventure quest, then we can also understand certain old French narratives using video game genres. What prevents us from categorizing *Le Voyage de Saint Brendan*, for example, as a saint's sailing simulation? Or, why is *Jean de Saintré* not a sports game for the attention it pays to jousting and the carrying-out of tournaments? In an investigation of games in medieval French literature, one can expect to play around with genre.

Chapter 1 - Feminist Agency and Game Design in *Lai de Doon*

_____My first chapter explores the concept of game design as a means of exercising agency, particularly in its integral function in the anonymous 13th-century lai, *Doon*. The text begins with the narrator introducing a Lady (as women are so often called in our texts) in Edinburgh who refuses to attach herself to any husband nor live as a servant under the pretext of marriage (l. 17-24). Powerful



people of the city, however, exercise their influence and persuade the Lady to seek out a husband, much to her chagrin. In an act of gamification, the Lady adds a condition to marriage: that whomever she marries must complete the journey from Southampton to her residence in Edinburgh in one single day (l. 29-33).³

Many men attempt the journey and make it to the Lady's residence, but they all die in bed from exhaustion. Doon, a knight who has heard of the challenge, successfully rides his horse, Bayard, from the south of England to the middle of Scotland.⁴ Identifying the bed as a risk, Doon stays up all night and lives to see dawn. Expecting to marry the Lady, Doon is surprised when she reveals a further condition to the arrangement: he must repeat the journey in four days' time, but now he must race a swan back to Edinburgh.⁵ She requires Doon to "level-up," and enhance his skills. In video games, leveling up occurs when a character has accumulated a sufficient amount of experience or points to temporarily or permanently improve their abilities such as stamina, strength, available lives or total health, defense efficacy, or inventory capacity to name just a few. Leveling up is required in order for gamers to progress through the game. Doon succeeds in leveling up after he demonstrates his abilities to complete the same challenge, only this time made more difficult. After he wins—the goal of the game—and marries the Lady. Doon leaves after a short period, however, and tells the Lady she is pregnant with a baby boy and gives her a ring with which their son can find

³ As the crow flies, the distance between Edinburgh and Southampton is approximately 350 miles (574 km). Assuming that a horse, mounted by a knight, can maintain a constant speed of 25 mph (40 km/h), then the fastest possible time it would take for the journey is roughly 14.5 hours. Distance measured with a calculator online: <https://www.freemaptools.com/how-far-is-it-between.htm>

⁴ It is unclear if the horse is only a namesake of the legendary Bayard, but it may possibly allude to Doon's horse's ability to run at supernatural speeds.

⁵ A swan flies on average about 30 mph (48 kmh), so not that different from a horse, but with tailwind, they can reach significantly faster speeds, upwards of 50-100 mph (80-160 kmh). So, a swan could make the journey at the fastest in 3.6 hours with favorable tailwinds. The difference between top speeds in horse and swan serves to show how racing an animal with such variable speeds places this game between the categories of *agôn* (competition and skill) and *alea* (chance).



him.⁶ Years later, the son travels around France where he participates in tournaments and one day finds his father. They ultimately joust one another and the son wins, revealing to his father the identifying ring. Together they return to the Lady in Edinburgh, where they are welcomed and honored as sires, son, and husband.

The Lady makes a game. In a moment of ludic creation, the Lady sets up her challenge laying the rule she will only marry the one who can make the journey (l. 29-33).⁷ In this moment, the Lady's game can be read as a tool for her negotiating the citizens' request for her marriage. Among other things, this chapter argues that gamification a form of reclaiming and enacting power. For the Lady in *Doon*, the game allowed her to remain outside of the social expectations the people of Edinburgh held her to. She put the caveat in place intending to remain unmarried, thereby creating a no-win game. The Lady is not a player, but rather she is the game designer and the objective. She invites players to win an unwinnable game, but when Doon wins, the reader and the knight learn of Level 2. Eventually winning the game, Doon's prize is marriage, which does not signify that the Lady lost, but rather it demonstrates the success of her game design in producing the most suitable player/husband. Doon, however, acting like a gamer bro, leaves his new responsibility in search of far-away games.

Next, this chapter explore the implications of creating a game in which the designer knows a likely outcome. This is not a question of ethics, necessarily, but rather one of responsibility. A designer may create a game where death is a possibility for the players, but the onus seems to fall on the player, once they know the rules and risks. In *Doon* knights continually attempted the voyage in

⁶ I'm not sure how it fits in right now, or if it will, but I'm fascinated by Doon telling the Lady she's pregnant. Perhaps this is one of the skills he gains in leveling-up.

⁷ « Ja ne prendra, ce dit, seignor, / se tant ne feïst por s'amor / qu'en .I. seul jor voisist errer / se Sothantone sor la mer / desi que la ou ele estoit : ».



full awareness of the death risk involved. Of course, gladiatorial games, jousting, extreme sports, and other games have a deep history of violence and mortality. This underlines the aspect of risk in some games, and the importance of risk-taking (in various degrees from small to big risks) to gameplay. It also emphasizes, again, the Lady's cunning design.

My first chapter will explore the role that animals have in game, evoking notions of posthuman gaming. In the Lady's game, Level 1 requires the ability to ride a horse the distance of two cities. Level 2 requires the ability to ride a horse (probably the same horse) the same distance, but faster than the speed of a swan. Logistically, the swan and Doon must begin the race at the same time, so it may be assumed that the swan was released. Does it know it's playing a game? Does the horse? Huizinga claims that play is older than civilization since nonhuman animals also play (1). If this is the case, how can the horse's and swan's participation be categorized? Bayard is trusted by Doon and so does not seem to be only a means to an end, especially considering the knight-horse machine so present here, yet the text is silent on Bayard's understanding of the game. The swan is also ambiguous since it can't be read as a competitor player; it assumedly cannot marry the Lady if it wins the race. Neither is the swan a tool used only to measure speed. In any case, animal presence in games reveals further complexity about gameplay and design.

Finally, this chapter examines how gaming and game design mediate social relationships and dynamics in *Doon*. The most obvious way games mold relationships in this lai is with the Lady's game. She creates competition through forcing players (knights who attempt her challenge) to display how skilled they are. She also implements risk in providing a bed in which the players dies if they sleep. This can be seen as a trap, either laid intentionally or not, that prevents players from advancing to Level 2. Later in the lai, however, competition (Agon) and chance (Alea) bring together



Doon and his son, in a moment that echoes gaming's role in Doon and the Lady's relationship. This time, however, Doon acknowledges defeat when his son unseats him jousting. When Doon no longer holds the top score, it's time to call it quits.

Chapter 2 - Game-play and rule-making in *Jeu de Robin et de Marion*

This short pastourelle written by Adam de la Halle in the second half of the 13th century finds gaming as one of the main structures throughout its narrative. I was inspired to read this text because I thought it would be worth exploring the connection between a play and gaming, but in a way that attends to the French, “*jeu*.” At the beginning of the play, a knight, in his attempt to woo Marion, asks her to come play on his horse all through the woods along the valley (l. 70-2). Refusing the knight's multiple advances, Marion expresses her preference for her beloved Robin and she sings,

Hé ! Robechon, leure leure va,
 Car bien a moi, leure leure va,
 S'irons jeuer dou leure leure va,
 Dou leure leure va. (l. 103-6)

Robin repeats the refrain and addresses himself to Marion. As this is a pastourelle, the knight returns, but when Marion finally asserts that a union between the knight and herself would be impossible, he leaves. For the next 200 lines, Robin, Marion, and their friends play at least two different games. The group decides they prefer games that are popular around Christmas (l.426-7) and the first game they choose is *St Coisme*. The mechanics of this game are simple: Whoever is St.



Côme, or *it*, sits in the middle of the group and by making silly faces tries to make the others laugh and, therefore, lose.⁸

A second game the group plays is called *Rois et Roines*, which is a version of truth or dare and results in some interesting confessions and actions. Even deciding who acts as “king” or “queen” first is gamified as everyone places their hand one atop the others, and whoever’s hand is on top after 10 counts goes first. Throughout *Jeu de Robin*, characters allude to the witty banter and explicitly reference word games and wordplay. Ultimately, however, the games are interrupted by the threat of a wolf, and the play ends in the company dancing and singing, which as I argue, further reinforces the piece’s game-like qualities.

Games structure this text from beginning to end. While plays are different from the other texts this project is concerned with, the self-conscious and inescapable presence of games in *Le Jeu de Robin et de Marion* justifies this piece as worthy of examination. One key consideration about the text is gaming’s ubiquitousness throughout the play. If it is anticipated that an audience watches a piece like *Jeu de Robin* it is remarkable that 160 lines of 770 are dedicated to the company playing games on stage. This also raises the question of gaming as a spectator, not just as a participant. What does watching a game but not playing it do? Here’s another way in which “play” is not the only type of gaming interaction worthy of analysis.

As a piece of theatre, *Le Jeu de Robin et de Marion* exhibits several different types of games, which inflect the work in unique ways. Verbal play like the “*leure leure va*” brings a new element to the piece. How is this different from wordplay, which really is based on linguistic compatibility and skills—wordplay is ludic and structured, whereas the nonsensical refrain is paidian and exuberant.

⁸ In an excellent moment of ludic clarity, one of the party members, Huart, explains the rules, “Quiconques rira / Quand il ira au saint offrir, / Ens ou lieu sain Coisne doit sir, / Et qui en puist avoir s’en ait” (1.432-5).



This may be a function of a theatrical work versus other works, but this chapter examines how a play invites, creates, or even expects gaming in a ways that other types of texts may not. Furthermore, this chapter will consider the word “jouer” and the many ways that it is used throughout *Le Jeu de Robin et de Marion*. In this text, its use appears ambiguous, although it often appears as a sexual euphemism. Ambiguity may also be helpful because it keeps open the possibilities for broader conceptions of gaming.

Chapter 3 - Modes of Gaming in *Pelèrinage de Charlemagne*

This short narrative begins when Charlemagne asks his wife if she has ever seen anyone so handsome with a crown and sword before. With rebuke from the narrator, she responded that King Hugon of Constantinople was more handsome. As though accepting the challenge, Charlemagne decides that on his return trip from his pilgrimage to Jerusalem he will pay a visit to Hugon to set the record straight. On the way back to France from the Holy Land, Charlemagne and his barons are welcomed at the court of Hugon. That night they all pass time playing a game: each baron and duke proposes a feat that he would perform in order to demonstrate prowess. The goal is to impress the emperor Charlemagne as much as possible and, ostensibly, one-up the peers. A spy overhears the men, many being disrespectful of Hugon, and he recounts his findings to the king. Some of the “gabs” as they’re referred to in the French, include: Roland claims that he’ll take Hugon’s olifant and blow so hard that he’ll blow all the city’s doors off their hinges. Oliver claims that he’ll be able to sleep with Hugon’s daughter 100 times in one night. All the barons play the game and each comes up with a feat to achieve. The following day, Hugon expresses his feeling of betrayal and threatens to behead Charlemagne and his companions if they are unable to complete their feats. The emperor prays to God and is visited by an angel who says that all of the challenges will be completed and that



no one will die. Time after time, God allows the barons to alter or achieve their tasks in order to attain success.

Charlemagne and his party return to Paris and the narrator once again scolds the emperor's wife for her folly in stating that King Hugon is more attractive. *Le Pèlerinage de Charlemagne* is a text about games. The poem begins and ends with a challenge, with the rules being: whoever is most handsome wins. And Charlemagne wants to win. When Charlemagne arrives at both Jerusalem and Constantinople, the narrator mentions people playing chess and other games as a form of entertainment. Finally, the barons' game of "gabber," presents a game whose objective is to impress Charlemagne through the criteria of creativity and, arguably, physical prowess. The game has serious consequences when Hugon has it played out in reality the following day. He allows Olivier to sleep with his daughter and challenges him to do so 100 times or be killed. He manages 30 times, but the daughter lies to Hugon and claims that Olivier achieved the promised 100. The stakes of this game are incredibly high. Another example of a "gab," is when it's Bernard's turn: he must make the river rise and flood the city's basements, the fields, etc. This is a success as the narrator tells that God caused the river's levels to rise and fall again, ensuring that Bernard won his level of the game. I'd like to spend more time on this, but God is analogous to a cheat code, which allows a player access to resources, skills, etc. that they wouldn't otherwise have. In *Pèlerinage de Charlemagne*, God is one of the ultimate cheat codes.

This text is an excellent example of places of play and provides insight into how games can be integral to social interaction as well as the development of the narrative. Games infiltrate this text and demonstrate how they are a source of entertainment but are also very serious. This chapter explores at length the modes of gaming that exist apart from play. We speak of gameplay and playing



games, but to what extent is “to game” the appropriate verb for these types of forces structures like Charlemagne and his posse must endure. While a qualification of play (e.g. serious play, reluctant play, attritional play, etc.) may be helpful to discuss how individuals operate within these gaming frameworks, I place this type of gaming in contrast to the models offered by theorists like Suits and Caillois.

In continuing from modes of gaming, this chapter examines motivations behind gaming. If we consider Charlemagne’s acceptance as an *agôn*, competitive action, we can perhaps begin to understand the other desires behind gaming in this text. In particular, this chapter will discuss the lusory attitude, whereby a player agrees to the arbitrary rules and standards of a game they are about to play. It is a required element in all games, from tag to chess to jousting, etc. This chapter explores how and if Charlemagne, his wife, Hugon, and the Barons all adopt the lusory attitude when the games are afoot. At a metanarrative level, medieval romance and shorter texts ask that their readers and auditors also adopt a lusory attitude toward the text. In another sense, the audience is asked to suspend its disbelief. In doing so, the audience abides by the text’s arbitrary rules (i.e. depiction of environments, characterization, social structures and broader milieux).

Chapter 4 - Ludic Objects and Gaming Economies in *Floire et Blanchefleur*

The 12th-century romance *Le Conte de Floire et Blanchefleur* best exemplifies several types of games. As young friends, Floire and Blanchefleur are reared together and become exceptionally intimate until Floire’s parents decide to separate the two and sell Blanchefleur as a slave to an emir from Babylon. Floire embarks upon a quest to rescue his beloved and fashions himself as a merchant—with his parents’ royal resources at his disposal—and gathers information about Blanchefleur’s whereabouts through an exchange of goods and currency. Upon his arrival to



Babylon, the only way for Floire to enter the city is to play chess against the porter several times, ensuring that he wins, only to give his winnings back to the porter. Floire's skill at chess and effective use of bribery grant him access to Blanchefleur, who is awaiting marriage to the emir, having been selected by the magic tree in the garden.⁹ Eventually, Floire and Blanchefleur are reunited, Floire's game having been won, and they return to Spain where they live out their lives as king and queen.

This text traces the adventures of a young couple from their paidiaic education together to the skillful, ludic navigation of the world through mercantile means. *Le Conte de Floire et Blanchefleur* exhibits moments where the division between object and human is obfuscated, particularly in the collapse between Blanchefleur and the material good for which she is exchanged, and for which information about her location is granted to Floire. The heroine is initially sold to the Emir for seven times her weight in gold, and at one point, Floire even remarks that he cannot find nor but the merchandise (Blanchefleur) he has come in search of (l. 1478-80). Therefore, Blanchefleur becomes the object of the game, the objective of the quest.

In this chapter, I explore how Floire's mimicry allows him to enter into cooperative gaming, wherein alliances can be formed, strategies must be anticipated and altered, and an exchange of goods in relation to value all relate to gameplay. This section also explores the relationships between economics and gaming. Until this point, economic game theory has been only distantly related to the scope of my project. The explicit mercantile thrust of Floire's quest, however, invites an economic reading of the narrative. Particularly, a focus on the mercantile and commercial characteristics of

⁹ The tree is an aleatory component of the narrative. I am identifying, using Caillois' categories, Floire's merchant disguise as mimicry, the game of chess as agôn-alea, and the tree as alea. In a moment of misrecognition, the emir's chamberlain sees Floire and Blanchefleur in bed together, but understands the scene as Blanchefleur and another concubine, Claris. This moment, although relatively brief, serves as an example of *ilinx*, or vertigo, in which a disorientation is critical to the game. While I am using categories of games other than Caillois' as well, *Floire and Blanchefleur* exemplifies how different types of gaming structures are used in conjunction to progress the narrative.



Floire et Blanchefleur reveals a facet of gaming that is ignored in Huizinga's *Homod Ludens*: material interest in gaming.

Finally, this chapter investigates how objects function in gaming. In *Le Conte de Floire et Blanchefleur*, for example, objects are exchanged, gifted, rewarded, paid for services rendered, given as material consideration, and desired. As mentioned above, Blanchefleur becomes the object of Floire's economic quest.¹⁰ Objects (e.g. chalices, rings, horns, saddles, and gold) negotiate relationships between people in the narrative, and Floire balances the value of information with the material goods he has brought with him on his quest (at least 8 pack animals are on the quest with Floire). This is a narrative that brings to the forefront the notion of value and its relationship to game structure and gaming. So often, too, do objects connect us to games: sports use a variety of balls, hitting and catching implements, protective gear, etc.; video games employ different controllers, screens, sensors, microchips, and wires during the gaming experience. An exploration of objects reveals how objects are involved in gaming processes.

Chapter 5- Games at Home in *Le Menagier de Paris*

My final chapter takes on the question of the domestic space and its role in gaming. Whereas the previous chapter focusing on movement away from home, the present one zooms in on the relatively static domestic space. As I was growing up, games were always played at or close to home: my home, a friend's house, a nearby field. Games like the idea of a home, a place for teambuilding, perhaps, but also a place for recollection, strategizing, rest, etc. The notion of home evokes homebase in baseball, away vs. home games, and the main menu in a video game. In the variation of

¹⁰ I am not arguing that the motivation behind Floire's quest to rescue Blanchefleur is economic, only that the mode of his gaming is. Insofar as Charlemagne and his barons demonstrate one mode of gaming, Floire and his entourage exhibit another, a gaming of goods.



tag I grew up playing, “home” was always an area that granted immunity to whomever stood within its boundaries. It seems, then, that starting from this intersection of the ludic and domestic, an analysis of gaming at home in medieval French literature yields a deeper understanding of games in these texts. This chapter undertakes several texts instead of focusing on one in order to trace more closely the domestic as a shared motif.

Le Ménagier de Paris signals for my project a movement forward, a futurity and evolution of gaming as we might find it in literature beyond the Middle Ages. Compiled at the twilight of the 14th century, *Le Ménagier* is framed as a guidebook written by a husband for his young wife, with the aim of instructing her on morality, social behavior, cooking, sports, and much more. The editors of the text, Gina Greco and Christine Rose have chosen to reorient the work as a “Good Wife’s Guide,” emphasizing the silent yet ever-present reader-wife, the intended audience of the book. They’ve also categorized the text as a “household book,” which clearly defines the limits of this work’s scope as domestic. For the purposes of my project, this chapter will focus on the feminist reframing of Greco and Rose’s translation to mirror my first chapter’s interest in game design and feminist agency.

Divided into three parts, *Le Ménagier* treats a wide array of subjects: section 1 is a lengthy moral treatise on womanly behavior; section 2 comprises articles on household management and recipes for cookings; section 3, the section that concerns this chapter, focuses on games and amusement. Rather, the third section would have provided instructions and insight into gaming in 14th century Paris, but it remains unfinished in any extant manuscripts. The only article that exists is one on the sport of hawking.¹¹

¹¹ Greco and Rose write, “According to the prologue, section 3 was destined to have three articles treating ‘pleasant enough games and amusements to help you socialize with company and make conversation.’ . . . Its first article was to describe parlor games for indoor amusement, dice, and chess—this part is now lost or was never finished according to his plan. The third article, a book of riddles and arithmetic games, is now also



Working from a partially-completed section, this chapter explores hawking as a type of domestic sport—a moment where sports, as a gaming category, will be discussed in my dissertation, but with relation to empty scaffolding of the unfinished third section. In my final chapter, I examine how hawking and other medieval sports align with other indoor games like dice, chess, riddles, and arithmetic problems. One thing to consider in *Le Ménagier* is its explicit class alignment as a work that exhibits one version of an aristocratic way of life. Hawking is an elite sport that is extremely financially costly and time consuming, and one that seems in opposition to other commonplace games like chess and dice. Such a line of inquiry also opens up this phenomenon to the modern understanding of professional and amateur gaming, as well as continued issues of accessibility in the contemporary gaming industry, pro sports, and more.

Next, this chapter returns again to the relationships between gender and gaming. In light of recent events like #Gamergate—a harassment campaign where several women in the video game industry were targeted on social media and subsequently received rape and death threats—my dissertation self-consciously attends to the roles of gender in gaming. In focusing on the silent figure of the Good Wife in this text, this chapter considers the implications of an instruction for gaming, especially as the prologue asserts that games serve as a socialization tool and as a means of conversation. Thus, a gendered gaming in *Le Ménagier* also reveals new motivations for games in medieval texts.

Finally, this chapter makes use of the domestic as a space in which games are represented and looks at similar conceptions of “home” games across other texts. For instance, the fabliaux

missing” (6). The editors placed the remaining article on hunting with hawks in the second section, which means that the intended tripartite form exists as bipartite in the modern edition. My chapter will also consider other editions of the text, such as Brereton and Ferrier’s, which do not follow this construction.



often represent a more urban way of life, bringing to light a different version of the domestic than that found in *Le Ménagier*. In these texts, like *La Saineresse* (The Healer) or *Des chevaliers, des clers et des villains* (The Three Estates), characters emerge as gamers who trick, deceive, misrecognize, play, trap, and turn the world around in their realistic, domestic spaces. While the fabliaux are neither explicitly aristocratic or bourgeois—or rather, a consensus among scholars doesn't exist—they represent a more socially varied notion of the domestic than *Le Ménagier* alone.

Cutscenes

One of the objectives I'm envisioning for my project is an engagement with public thought and scholarship. Given the interdisciplinarity of my dissertation, and with a view to attending to the complications that scholars have had defining games and gameplay, I plan on weaving cutscenes between each of my chapters. In a video game, a cut scene is a moment of cinematic narration where a player only watches an event or interaction. It is often a time when a player is relieved of their participatory role in the game, and fills the position of an observer. Here at the cutscene, the narratological stands out from the ludic in ways that are often blurred during the game. The cutscenes I imagine for my project will similarly allow readers to take a step back and consider the larger scope of my project, which is the cultural (if mostly literary in my dissertation) importance of gaming.

During cutscenes, readers will enjoy interviews I have conducted with members of various gaming communities at the University of Michigan and in Ann Arbor, MI. Participants will hold different roles within different categories of gaming: UM sports (of several student athletics and intramural, etc.), retail gaming (of Pinball Pete's, Get Your Game On, Vault of Midnight, etc.), student organizations (of Casual Gaming Club, Informative Gamers, Michigan Games and Cards,



etc.), community gaming (of International Game Developers Association - A2, Ann Arbor Gaming Group, Girl Develop It - A2, etc.). Whichever representatives from these options that get picked will ultimately be asked the same series of questions relating to gaming and their relationship(s) with games. Possible questions include: What is your definition of a game? My dissertation engages with more scholarly definitions of games, but I'd like to provide a space for others to join the conversation. Are games always fun? Since I'm arguing for other modes of interacting with games other than play, maybe there are other ways of thinking about games. What's your favorite game? Why? A widely subjective question like this is sure to yield a lot of interesting answers. Why do people like the games they interact with?

It is my hope that these cutscenes will, in some ways, game the dissertation format, pushing the reader to level-up their engagement with the project. The main motivation behind these side quests is to strike at the cultural significance of games while allowing for other players to take a turn.

Conclusion

My dissertation is one of many extant projects that hold medieval literature and games together in exciting and innovative ways. While most trace broader historical and geographical relationships to gaming (Patterson; Kapell and Elliott), my project demonstrates the importance of gaming to the narrative structures, progress, and themes of 12th- and 13th-century French texts. A narrower temporal and geographic scope allows for a more distilled examination of gaming structures in literature. This dissertation also gestures toward the afterlives of these ludic and paidiac narratives, how games continue to structure a wide array of transmedia narratives in similar ways. These unique aspects of my project offer a new perspective to readers. And much like Max's



Commodore 64 and Grandpa's story in *The Princess Bride*, my dissertation opens up lines of inquiry into how we might be able to game medieval French literature.

- G A M E O V E R -

[Play Again?](#)



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