The Sociable *Game of the Goose*

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References in the form [Ciompi n] are to the Goose*-game site set up and maintained by Dr Luigi Ciompi at* `http://www.giochidelloca.it` *where legible images and further information on each particular game may be viewed by typing the number n into the* **codice** *field on the* **archivio** *page.*

Overview

The Game of Goose *(Jeu de l'Oie, Giocodelloca, etc.)* is a simple race game played with dice on a spiral track, with the usual tokens, the aim being to arrive exactly at the winning space, numbered 63 in traditional versions. The track is provided with favourable spaces, each traditionally marked with a goose, and with hazards, involving payment into the winner's pool, and in most cases delaying the player's progress. In this traditional form, the game is one of pure chance, the movement of the tokens being entirely determined by the throw of the dice. Indeed, the course of the game can readily be simulated by computer, with no human interaction [Seville, 2001].

However, there do exist variant versions, in which the human aspect of the players becomes significant and the players are required by the rules to interact in ways that are not confined to movement of a token according to the dice throw or the payment of determined stakes. Into this category fall many, but not all, educational variants. There are also a few games in which different rules apply according to the gender of the player. Then, there are games in which the player is called upon to undertake the playing of a particular role, with or without influence on the actual play. And finally there are games — such as those involving forfeits — where the player is called upon to perform a particular action. These last exhibit some crossover into the category of party games (jeux de societé).

This paper discusses these variant categories, placing them in their historical and social context against the background of the development of race games over four centuries, and briefly indicates the relevance of this analysis for the modern designer of games.

The traditional Game of *Goose*

Before discussing variant forms, it is helpful to review the social context of the game in its 'traditional' form [Seville, 1999]. The *Game of Goose* is historically the most important spiral race game ever devised. It has its roots in the Italy of Francesco de Medici (1574–87), who, as [Carrera, 1617] reports, sent it as a present to King Philip II of Spain. The game took hold there and elsewhere in continental Europe, where it is still played. When John Wolfe introduced it into England on the 10th June 1597 [Stationers' Hall register, London] it was called *The Newe and most Pleasant Game of the Goose*, though its princely roots led it often to be labelled as 'Royal', as in the oldest surviving English board: *The Royall & Most Pleasant Game of Ye Goose* printed by John Overton at the Black Lion in Exeter Exchange [in the Hannas collection sold at Sotheby's, London in 1984 and dated in the catalogue as c. 1660]. Although the game was regarded as a suitable diversion for a Dauphin of France, the game had also a popular following and was regularly played for gambling stakes by men in taverns.

Figure 1 Goose as a gambling game in a tavern — detail from *Het nieuw en vermaekelyke GANSEN-SPEL*, Charles de Goesin-Disbecq, Ghent, end 17th C (author's collection [Ciompi 992])

Over the years, this rough gambling element diminished and the game became one that could be played in respectable mixed company [Figure 2] or indeed in the family with children [Figure 3], until by the 20th century it became regarded as a children's game [Figure 4].

Figure 2 Goose in respectable mixed company — detail from Bowles's *ROYAL and Entertaining GAME of the GOOSE*, Carington Bowles, London, mid 18th C (author's collection [Ciompi 927])

Figure 3 Goose as family entertainment — detail from *Nieuw Vermakelijk Ganzenspel*, Vlieger, Amsterdam, late 19th C (author's collection)

Figure 4 Goose as a children's game — detail from *Het aloude Ganzenspel*, Daan Hoeksema, Netherlands, early 20th C (collection of Christine Sinninghe Damsté)

Variants of *Goose*

The question arises as to what games can properly be regarded as variants of traditional *Goose* [Seville, 1999]. The present paper is essentially concerned with unicursal race games played with dice or an equivalent random number generator such as a teetotum (a spinner in the form of a small top). Very many such games are derived from *Goose*, though not all: for example, *Snakes and Ladders,* which may be regarded as unicursal if the ladder/snake excursions from the track are implemented by forward or backward movement, has a separate historical pedigree of comparable age [Parlett, 1999].

Perhaps the most compelling evidence of the influence of *Goose* is if the game has favourable spaces embodying the *Goose* rule of moving the token past the **goose** space to the extent of the throw. Another is the reverse overthrow rule, seen in most versions of the traditional game (though not in Spain), whereby a player overshooting the winning space must count backwards from it until the throw is fully used. Again, the hazard spaces in their particular rules and/or iconography may reflect those in the traditional game, most notably **death,** on space 58, which requires the player to begin the game again, or the **prison** or the *well,* both of which require the player to remain unless and until rescued by another, who must then suffer the same fate. In the examples set out below, the extent to which each game resonates with traditional *Goose* will be indicated.

Educational Race Games

Educational race games based on *Goose* are a French invention of the 17th century. The earliest known game of this type is Mariette's *Jeu Chronologique,* dated 1638 [D'Allemagne, 1950, p. 44] designed to teach History. It was followed by games designed to teach Geography, the Arts of War, Heraldry — indeed, all the accomplishments required of the noble cadet class studying in the colleges of France. These were expensive games produced from finely engraved copper plates, predominantly in and near the Rue St. Jacques in Paris, as opposed to the more down-market provincial productions of games for amusement, from woodcut blocks.

It is evident from these games that some participation was expected of the players. For example, in Duval's *Le Jeu des Princes de L'Europe,* published by Nicolas Berey in 1662 [Ciompi 541], each of the 63 circular spaces of the spiral track is a small map of a region or country of Europe, with France as the winning space. A map of Europe is in the centre. A note to the rules advises as follows: "He who would take some profit in Geography concerning the knowledge of Europe should take care to say the names of the countries where he arrives and to read those of the towns that are found there" [present author's translation]. Duval's game is clearly based on *Goose*, as is evident from the careful grouping of countries and provinces to produce the canonical 63 spaces. And many of the particular rules for the individual spaces derive from this source, for example **Candie** at No. 57: Must be arrested to serve against the infidels and must stay until another takes his place (cf. the *Goose* prison rule). Duval's games also take from *Goose* the fact that their rules are concise enough to be included on the playing surface, so that the game could be played quite quickly, as compared with more erudite educational games where there was continual reference to a separate and often lengthy book of rules.

In England, the development of educational race games began about 100 years later than in France [Shefrin, 1999]. Whitehouse [1951] gives the first dated game of this kind as that invented by John Jefferys in 1759: *A Journey through Europe, or the Play of Geography,* published by Carington Bowles in London [Figure 5]

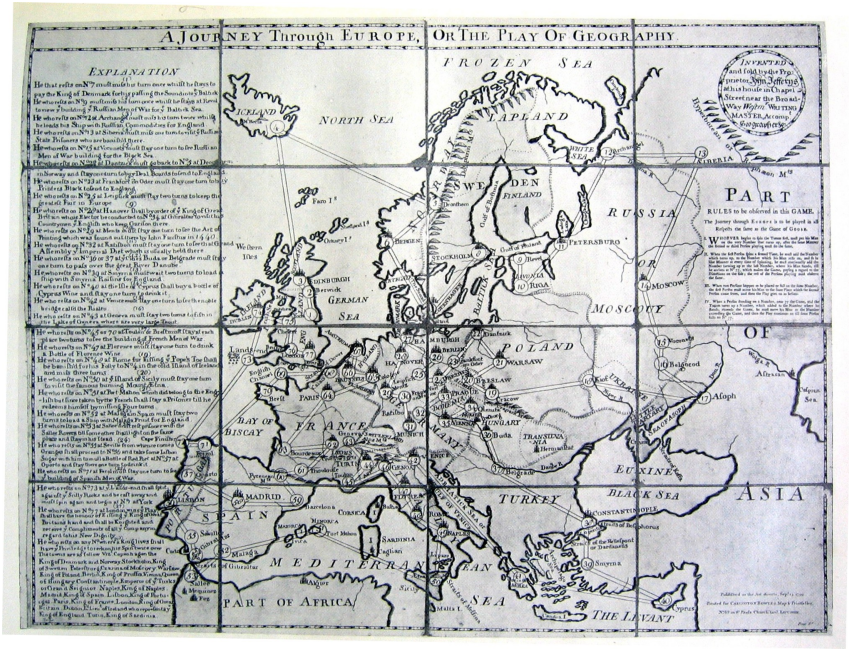

Figure 5 The earliest dated English educational game, John Jefferys' *A Journey through Europe, or the Play of Geography*, Carington Bowles, London, 1759 (Whitehouse, 1951, plate 1)

The rules to be observed in the game begin: "The Journey through Europe is to be played in all respects the same as the *Game of Goose*. Whoever begins to spin the Totum first must place his man on the very number that turns up...". The 'totum' (later known as the teetotum) was used because in this period the use of dice was frowned upon, as being associated with gambling and cheating. The rules then explain how the next move is to be made by adding the next number spun, that the directions given for the various places encountered are to be followed, and that if the number spun carries a man past the winning space (London, at 77), the excess is to be counted negative — i.e., reverse overthrows are played, just as in the *Game of Goose*. Indeed, the game has considerable structural similarity to traditional *Goose*. The doubling forward of the throw when a goose space is encountered is found in Jefferys' game, where the equivalent spaces are '...any number where a King lives', and the player who lands on such a number has the privilege of reckoning his spin twice over. The rules for the individual hazard spaces are instructive, for example: "he who lands on No. 42 Venice must stay one turn, to see the noble bridge called the Rialto". But no player-participation is required to reinforce the educational

message. There is, though, an element of role-playing for the winner: "He who rests on No. 77 at London wins the play, shall have the honour of kissing the King of Great Britain's hand and shall be knighted and shall receive the compliments of all the company in regard to his new dignity".

Before the end of the century, English educational games were beginning to follow the lead of the French in requiring active participation from the players. For example, in Wallis and Newbery's *Royal Genealogical Pastime of the Sovereigns of England* [Ciompi 980], published in 1791, the rule is expounded as follows: "As an encouragement to the player for the attention he may pay to the useful Science of Genealogy, he will be entitled to move one number forward when he can tell without looking into the description of the game what King immediately preceded and followed that number on which chance may have thrown his pyramid; and if he can tell the date in which such King was born began his reign and how long he reigned he shall be allowed to move one number more forward." This game, though it is deliberately made to look like a genealogical chart, is in fact a unicursal race game, played with 'pyramids' as moveable tokens and using an eight-sided 'totum' in place of dice. The educational 'utility' of the game is clearly set out: "This being a scientific game in which the amusement and the instruction of the parties are equally considered, we hope that the young player will not think much of exercising his memory to acquire a perfect knowledge of it. Most games are calculated only to promote little arts and cunning but this, while it will undoubtedly amuse, will not a little contribute to make the players acquainted with the genealogy of their own King" (George III — the winning space at No. 52). Reverse overthrows are played, as in *Goose*. There is no equivalent of the *Goose* doubling rule but landing on Henry VIII results in the instruction: "as his treatment of his queens was so unjustifiable, the player must go back to No.1" — recalling the **death** rule and being an early example of "go back to square one".

The use of a separate rule booklet, following French precedents of the 17th century, is common in the many English games intended to teach history. Much more detail could be given in this form than could be shown on the playing surface but at the cost of slowing down the game considerably. Typical of such games is Wallis' *New Game of Universal History and Chronology* [Ciompi 854]. Published in 1814 with George Prince Regent as the winning space at No. 138, the game was accompanied by a 24-page booklet, of which pages 3 to 17 set out the rules to be observed on the individual spaces, which constitute a chronological track of historical events. The pages that follow give an 'Outline of History' associated with certain of the historical events that are judged to be particularly important, with

the rule: "Where a player is directed to read the history of an event, in another page, he shall have the privilege, after so doing, of spinning again, and be rewarded with a counter from each player". The choice of important events is to our modern minds a little obscure, e.g. No. 5 Babylonish and Assyrian monarchies founded A M 1787. However, none can quarrel with the selection of No. 10 Birth of Moses AM 2433 or No. 16 Birth of Homer ("if you can say who he was and what he wrote receive 2 from each player; otherwise place 6 [counters] on 13 [Trojan War] and learn there"). The selection of the Birth of Mahomet (No. 58) as an important historical event is an encouraging indication of some breadth of religious understanding in Regency times; but this positive view was evidently too challenging for the owner of the present author's copy of the booklet where the relevant rule has a chilling manuscript addition — begin again. This is an example of another kind of social interaction with the game — the imposition of local or family rules.

Our final example is a game published in Germany in about 1933: the *Reise der Deutschland (Tour of Germany)* [Ciompi 526]. At first sight, this looks like so many of the games published from the end of the 19th century to promote tourism, especially in Switzerland. But there are differences! First, this is the divided Germany that resulted from the Treaty of Versailles, after World War 1, as sown by the swathe of white that represents the Polish (Danzig) Corridor. It is significant that the 'Tour' swings confidently through this region (by motor bus and with the appropriate documentation). Next, though there is a general atmosphere of rural life, supported by the images of country workers in traditional costume, a warship lurks in the Baltic Sea. And the detailed account of the tour begins in Berlin, with reference to the opening by Hitler of the first Reichstag of the Third Reich. This game evidently had a political message — but, as the rules printed on the envelope make clear, the message was not aimed at the tourist. At various points in the tour, the player is required to repeat accurately a short verse. For example, at No. 19, on the River Oder, two piles of crops are shown, one labelled 'with potash' and the other, a smaller one, 'without potash'. The player landing there is required to repeat after the leader (the oldest player):

> *Kartoffeln, Futter und Zuderrueben*
> *Kali und Stallmist besonders lieben.*

(potatoes, mangold and sugar beet like potash and stable-manure very much). If this is done without error, the player advances to No. 24. The

game is in fact a promotional device for fertilisers produced by the German firm of Kainits. The social interaction in this game is evidently complex, with messages at various levels being imparted, and reinforced through authority of seniority in the social circle.

Over the centuries, therefore, educational race games have developed from those in which learning is incidental to the enjoyment of play, to those in which success in learning is tested with rigour and rewarded by favourable moves in the game itself. And, like other effective learning tools, they can be used to promote a variety of ends, not all of them necessarily overt or altruistic.

Male/Female rules

A few race games have rules that differ according to the gender of the player. One might expect the various games of courtship and matrimony to fall into this category but not all do. Thus Crepy's *Nouveau Jeu de l'Himen* (Paris, 1725) [Ciompi 790] has no such differences of rule. However, the same firm's *Les Etrennes de la Jeunesse* (1713) [Ciompi 921] has different tracks for the two sexes and markedly different rules: this game is treated below as a game of forfeits (section 7). In the 18th century English game of *Courtship and Matrimony* [Ciompi 978] (publisher unknown) there is an interesting and highly thematic rule difference. Though the track is 64 spaces in length rather than 63, this game is clearly derived from *Goose*, the favourable spaces where the throw is counted again being denoted by the titles of popular ballads of the period, several of which are familiar as the tunes used in John Gay's *Beggars' Opera* of 1728. Most spaces are governed by rules that are not gender specific but the **Prison** at No. 55 has the following rule: "Pay 1 into ye pool stand there & lose 3 turns of throwing unless released by another coming in. N.B. If one of ye other sex comes in it is a Fleet marriage and you win the Game and divide the pool" (A Fleet marriage was a marriage which took place in the Fleet Prison in London, which claimed to be outside the jurisdiction of the Church. Disgraced or pretending clergymen often conducted them, for a fee. Such marriages were in fact legal until the Marriage Act of 1753).

The Dutch game of *Sint Nicolaas* (Saint Nicholas) first published by G Theod. Bom about 1858 [Ciompi 832] affords an example of another kind. This is a 63-space game with favourable spaces of the *Goose* type, marked by boots and shoes containing the presents traditional in Holland for the season of the Saint's day, in December. As is usual with *Goose-*

games, where the geese are spaces at intervals of 9 there are special rules to deal with an initial throw of 9, which would otherwise give an immediate win by jumping all the way to 63. The standard *Goose* rule is that if the throw, with double dice, is by 6 and 3, the move is to space 26, whereas if it by 5 and 4, the move is to space 53; these two spaces are traditionally marked with images of dice, to remind the players of the rule. However, in the *Sint Nicolaas* game, the special rule is that an initial throw of 6 and 3 leads to space 25 if the thrower is a man and to space 26 if a woman: these two spaces respectively are marked with a young woman and a young man, both eminently marriageable. But an initial throw of 5 and 4 leads to space 51 if the thrower is a man and to space 53 if a woman: these two spaces respectively are marked with an old woman and an old man, both well beyond the age of marriage. These throws would no doubt have led to much general amusement among the company.

An example of a different kind is provided by *The New Royal Game of Goose* a 19th century English game [Ciompi 586] where the track is in the form of a goose. Although the track has 63 spaces and does have **Goose** spaces (though not at traditional numbers), the rules are very idiosyncratic. One such rule is at space 57, which shows a man with a pipe: here, the rule is that the player 'must, unless a lady' go back to 47 — plainly, no lady ever smoked a pipe!

These male/female rule variations, though rare, are interesting in confirming that the games concerned were intended to be played in mixed company, even at periods of history when there may have been disapproval of dice games and gambling generally.

Role-playing

An extension of the recognition of specific male/female roles is role-playing of a more diverse kind. One might have thought that race games such as *Goose* would lend themselves to such variations, with corresponding variant rules that would perhaps wittily reflect the role assumed by, or assigned to, the individual player. However, such is the strength of tradition — fortified by the merit of the traditional rules in furnishing an exciting but fair game — that examples are hard to find in close variants of *Goose*, notwithstanding the huge range of thematic treatments over several thousands of published games.

Thus, in the football game, *Guioco del Calcio* (Marca Stella, 1920)[Ciompi 113], suitable roles are assigned to players dependent on their initial throw

e.g. double six leads to space 34 (of 56) and the role of *Arbitro* (referee) is assigned; roles of Captain etc are similarly assigned. Yet it is specified that the players assigned these roles thereafter follow exactly the same rules as everyone else.

For role-playing with appropriate and specific rules, we may look to a race game published by the firm of Spear in several countries and languages: *Cat and Mouse* (c. 1920). In this simple race game, playing figures of two cats and four mice are provided as tokens. The specific rules differ for the two species: for example, when a mousetrap is encountered, the mouse is out of the game but the cat proceeds without hindrance.

A variation on this theme by the Swiss firm of Karlit, published in the 1950s, is interesting because of the ingenious mechanism by which the role-playing is enforced. Here, the cat is represented by a large marble whereas the mice are small marbles. The track is composed of holes of two sizes punched in the horizontal playing surface, which is raised above the base of the box. When a mouse encounters a trap (large hole) it falls through, whereas the cat remains safe; both mouse and cat are safe on the small holes.

It is interesting to reflect on the paucity of examples of role-playing in *Goose* variants. Perhaps one reason may be that to alter the rules non-uniformly will give one or another player an advantage that the remainder will perceive as 'unfair'. True, it is difficult to construct diverse rules within a single game that would all be fair with respect to each other, especially in a game as complex as *Goose*, with its traps, delays and re-starts. However, if the discrepancy were not gross, then some unfairness might add spice to the game e.g. by winning when in a role that was (or was thought to be) unfavourable.

Forfeits and Actions

As mentioned above, there have been attempts to combine race games with forfeits and other human actions, though it has to be admitted that some of the resulting games are far from *Goose* both in concept and in playing terms

In Crepy's *Les Etrennes de la Jeunesse* (Paris, 1713) [Ciompi 921], the females ('Dames', further referred to as shepherdesses) play on the left-hand of two circular tracks, while the males ('Cavaliers' or shepherds), who must be in equal number, play on the right. The two circles touch (one is tempted to say 'kiss'!) in the middle of the sheet, and it is here that the

winning spaces are, each being marked with a crowned heart. Initially, each 'shepherdess' chooses her 'shepherd' to sit on her left, the choice being first made by the highest thrower of the dice, and so on. The rules say that the game 'se gouverne à peu près de la jeu de l'oie'(the rules are quite like those of *Goose*) though in truth they are peculiar to the game. Typical of the rules is that for **inconstance** (inconstancy) on the left track. The unfortunate shepherd who lands on the butterfly that marks this space must submit to being tied to his chair by his shepherdess, using her scarf. But there are penalties for the ladies, too: at **La Jalousie** (jealousy), the jealous one must go and hide behind a curtain or half-open door, missing two turns and paying to the pool. The game ended for the males (for example) when one of them reached the crowned heart, where their circle touched the other. If no female had reached the corresponding heart in the other circle, the males waited until this had occurred. The two winners, on these two hearts, would then share the pool and 'seront unis ensemble' (will be joined together). Clearly, this was a game that depended for its success on having much leisure and the right company! However, the rules do contemplate the possibility of there being only two players, one of each sex, who then compete to see who reaches their crowned heart first and do not share the pool — the state of matrimony rather than courtship?

Forfeits are certainly an integral part of the game of *Din-Don ovvero Tutte le Strade conducono a Roma* (Ding-Dong or really All Roads lead to Rome — Caroccio, Milan, 1933)[Ciompi 316]. Here, the object is to get from a starting place to the centre space, Rome. The starting places are all Italian cities — but cities like Mogadiscio and Pola are included from the Italian colonies, reflecting the sense of empire that developed under the Fascist regime. It is not a unicursal game and is far from Goose in concept. It is played with a single die, two faces showing 'Din' (being favourable), two showing 'Don' (unfavourable) and the remaining two being blanks so that the player does not move. The game is evidently meant to be played in a bar, so that drinks can be bought when directed, and indeed several of the playing spaces are hostelries. A forfeit to be dreaded in such circumstances is shown by a pair of scissors, the meaning being: 'cut off the tongue', i.e. remain silent for the rest of the game — a truly terrible punishment!

A danger of combining human actions with the playing of a race game is that the game is apt to be slowed down unacceptably. An ingenious way of avoiding this trap was found by the inventor (P. Louwerse) of the Dutch game *Schoolmeester en Collectant* (Schoolmaster and Collector for Charity) dating from about 1875. Here, in addition to usual penalties such as paying to the pool, landing on certain spaces requires the player to 'sit with puffed

cheeks' or 'with an agonised face', cry "ooh, ouch!" according to the scene depicted in the unfolding story. (The help of Christine Sinninghe Damsté in suggesting the inclusion of this game and translating the instructions is gratefully acknowledged).

Finally, in this short catalogue of games requiring human rather than mechanical actions, mention should be made of the Dutch games advertising biscuits. These were to be played with biscuits as stakes and indeed special biscuits were also made to serve as playing tokens. An example is the *Nutrix Kabouter Spel* (Leiden) [Ciompi 968], a unicursal game of 63 spaces depicting a fairyland journey, with various imaginative delights and perils, and quite evidently a *Goose* variant. Each player begins with 10 Nutrix biscuits and puts two of these in the pot. At various points on the journey, the player is directed to eat a biscuit from the pot; but a worse punishment is to have to eat two of one's own store of biscuits — and begin the game again.

Discussion

In surveying the field of goose-related race games, it is striking that — with the exception of educational games — so few of them call for any involvement of thought or judgement. Yet these games have been produced and marketed successfully in thousands of versions and millions of copies over four centuries. There is obviously a human need for 'non-mind' games that, like *Goose*, are cleverly constructed to provide uncertainty and excitement within a reasonably short — but not instant — time frame. This need is more complex than the gratification associated with gambling. It involves social interaction — competition, seeing who will win, learning how to win without offending others, how to lose with equanimity — and, of course, in a non-mind game, everyone is equal. *Goose* rules are therefore ideal for the family environment, where young and old can compete on equal terms. The design of the game provides variety of experience on the board: there are many but not too many favourable spaces and hazard spaces, nicely contrasted with the 'plain vanilla' spaces. The fear of the principal hazards — **well**, **prison**, **death** — may be acute but the penalties are not final and the unfortunate player is not banished from the game — indeed, he or she may even win from an apparently hopeless position. Being 'rescued' by another of the social group — perhaps someone who does not even like you — adds to the frisson. And the 'reverse overthrows' rule is brilliantly conceived to maintain tension to the end — there is none of the boring waiting for an exact throw on a space near the finish, as happens in many

other race games. Indeed, because the death space is within reach by a reverse overthrow, a slowly approaching 'tortoise' can humble the proud 'hare'. And the game can end in a couple of throws or, just occasionally, can go on for many rounds: variety and unexpectedness is built in.

Designers of race games depart from these principles at their peril.

[Mascheroni & Tinti, 1981, p. 78, present author's translation] comment on the tedium of some of the geographical games dating from the 18th and early 19th centuries:

> The information was always of the same kind: the world was divided into four sections. The principal cities were specified. There were notes on economic resources but these were concerned only with gold, diamonds, commerce in porcelain, and silk...
>
> For movement along the track, it was necessary to refer to an extremely long series of rules that in practice consisted of a reward of another throw or the payment of a penalty.

The need for repeated reference to a detailed rulebook, unlike in *Goose* where the simple rules were apparent from the face of the game, was a worthy but stultifying device, aimed at imparting detailed knowledge but sacrificing playing values. By contrast, designers like Duval kept to the spirit of the original game and used wit to make their educational points. For example, in his *Jeu des Princes de l'Europe* [Ciompi 541], the rule for **Muscovy**, though a familiar *Goose* rule, adds a comment that is entirely memorable, making clear just why the player may not stay on the space concerned:

> Must advance once according to the points on the dice. The Muscovites do not permit entry to their country, yet you pay.

The design of successful race games with variants of *Goose* rules is therefore not easy, by comparison with the relatively simple task of providing thematic variations around the invariant skeleton of the traditional rules. Testing such variants in practical play would have been daunting in the past and even now computer simulation is not without programming effort.

It may be for these reasons that games with complex variant rules have never substantially displaced the traditional game, something that may explain the virtual absence of goose-derived games that allow through their rules for individual role-playing.

As far as forfeits and actions are concerned, their introduction tends to slow the game down to the point where the character of a *race* game is lost:

the game then takes on a wholly different character: that of a spectacle where waiting for one's turn is made bearable by watching the antics of one's fellow players.

It is hoped that these comments may be of some use to present-day game designers who, though the resources at their disposal are now incomparably greater than the simple engraved or lithographed playing sheet, might do well to remember that the psychology of social interaction, as mediated by board games, has not changed over the centuries to a like extent.

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