

The *Game of the Goose* in Advertising: A Study in Board Game Design

This paper is an expanded version of the presentation made to the Board Game Studies Colloquium in Oxford, at the end of April 2005. The games illustrated may be viewed in high definition on the Giochidelloca website, by clicking on the links to the catalogue numbers indicated by the symbol #. All illustrations are from the author's collection.

1. Introduction

In the late 19th century, the traditional *Game of the Goose* began to be adapted for promotional purposes,¹ while in the 20th it was further developed to advertise goods and services of many kinds.² A few of these games simply reproduced the traditional form of the game, with advertising material being added to the non-playing surface. More usually, though – and more interestingly – the game itself was re-designed, being adapted to emphasise whatever was being advertised.

These adaptations have been little studied. Given the variety and extent of material, an exhaustive treatment is obviously impossible. However, there are aspects that can be treated systematically, giving insights into factors underlying board game design. Of particular interest is the creative tension between, on the one hand, remaining faithful to a well-loved and very playable game and, on the other, devising something clever, new and attractive to promote the product successfully. This paper seeks to outline the main methods by which creative design solutions have been achieved in this genre of games: use of a 'story line'; iconographic variation; rule variation; and track design. These ideas are illustrated by a selection of games chosen to show the diversity of approaches, spanning several countries of the world. Such a selection must inevitably omit literally hundreds of games.

2. The 'Story Line'

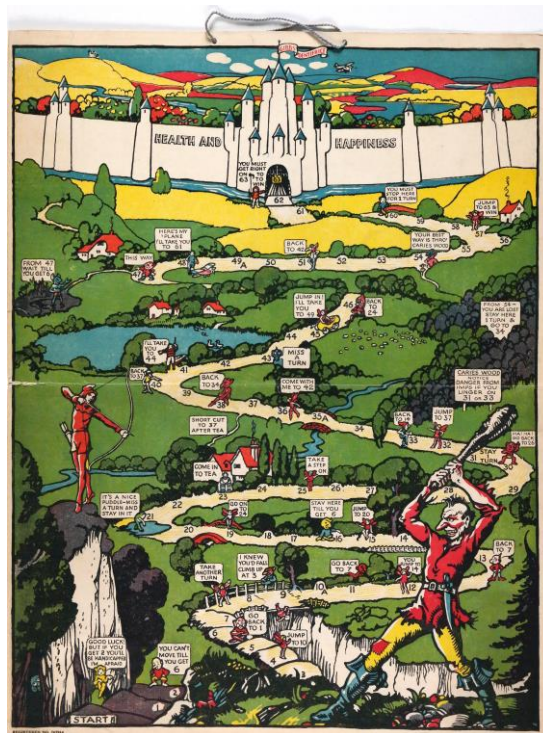
The term 'story line' is used in this paper to characterise games where the player is invited – in the imagination – to participate in an unfolding story, from the start to the winning space. In the original *Game of the Goose*, devised in the 16th century, the underlying imagery was that of a game of human life, the aim being to reach 63, representing the 'grand climacteric', or crucial year of life. This imagery is not made explicit and indeed is not generally apparent to modern players. However, many of the variations of the game throughout the centuries do tell an explicit story – for example, the progress of a new recruit up to high rank in the army, or the course of history, or a geographical tour. Likewise, many of the advertising games have a clearly stated story line:

¹ Adrian Seville, 'From Dolls to Drinking Chocolate – three early advertising games', *The Ephemerist*, Winter 2011, pp. 3–9.

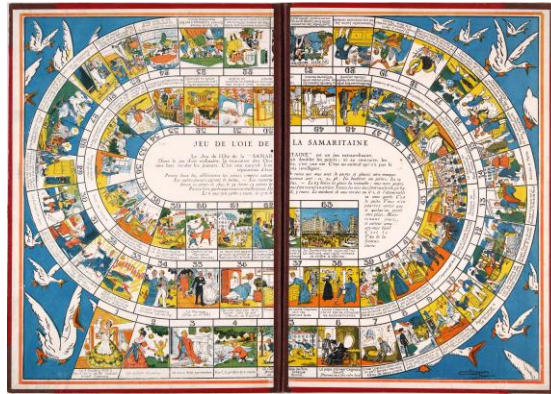
² For an overview of advertising and promotion in board games, see: Adrian Seville, *The Cultural Legacy of the Royal Game of the Goose: 400 years of Printed Board Games*, Amsterdam University Press, 2019, pp. 317-330.



(a) healthy development of the child (the *Jeu de Lune*, advertising patent medicine against worms: from birth to healthy youth; France, #0440)



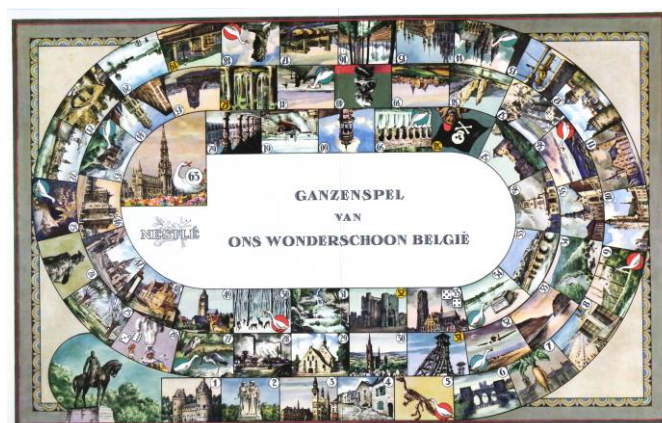
(b) a fairyland journey to health and happiness (*The Ivory Castle Game*, advertising Gibbs' dentifrice; England, #1045)



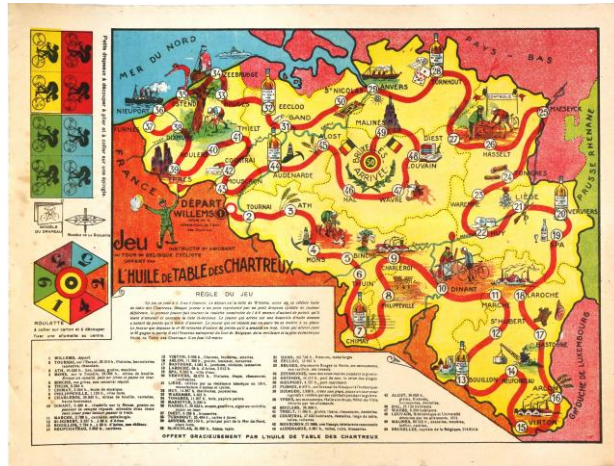
(c) a particular human life story (*Le Jeu de l'Oie de la Samaritaine*, advertising the Paris department store through the life of the founder, Ernest Cognac; France, #0052)



(d) the course of a single day from rising to bedtime (*Le Jeu de Santé*, advertising Coca Cola; Canada, #1066)



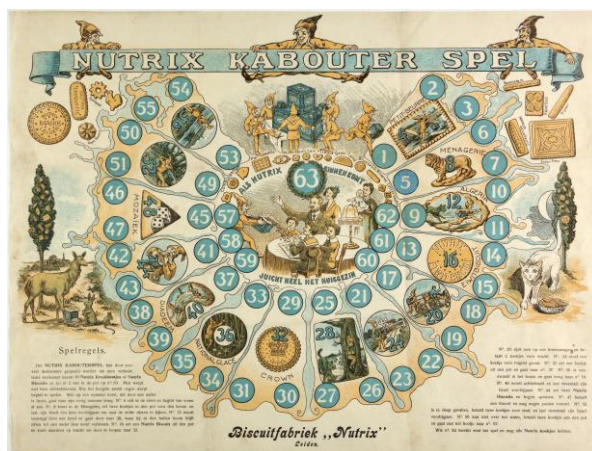
(e) a geographical tour (the *Ganzenspel van ons Wonderschoon België*, advertising Nestlé products; Belgium, #0436)



(f) a cartographic journey (*Le Jeu de L'Huile de Table de Chartreux*, [game 1], advertising table oil: tour of Belgium, from Willems, just across the border in France, where the oil is made, to the capital; France, #0953)



(g) a journey of exploration (*La Corsa al Polo*: the journey to the North Pole, advertising Lana Polo wool; Italy, #0323)



(h) a fairyland journey (e.g. the *Nutrix Cabouter Spel*, advertising biscuits; Netherlands, #0968)



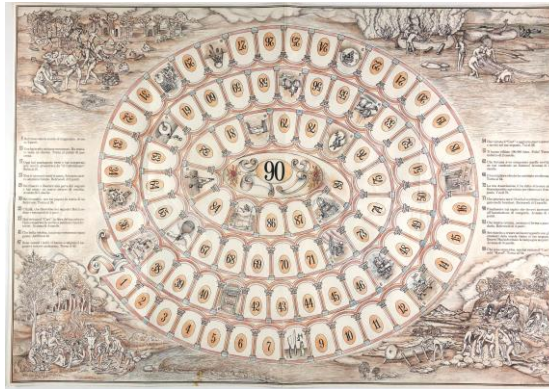
- (i) choosing and using the product (the *Jeu de l'oie de la Biscuiterie Lorraine*, advertising biscuits; France, #0566)



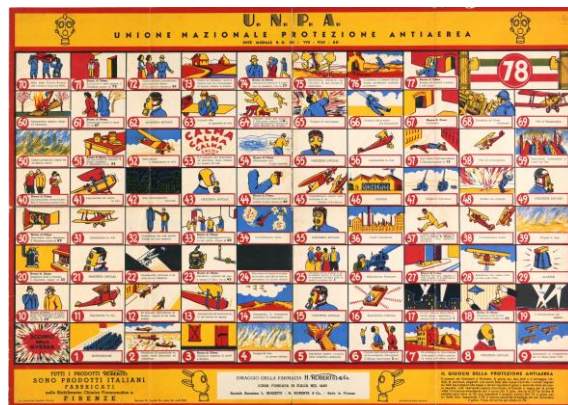
- (j) the process of production and distribution (*Le Jeu de l'huile de Table de Chartreux*, [game 2], advertising table oil: from the peanut to the bottled product; France, #0152)



- (k) using the product (*Le Jeu du Lion Noir- Frottinette et Frottinet*, promoting cleaning materials: the track shows the benefits of using the products and the hazards of using others; France, #0445)



- (l) achieving commercial success (*Il Commerciodromo*, advertising to small shopkeepers the benefits of the *cartolibreria* book and stationery wholesalers; Italy, #1059)



- (m) preparing defences against air raids (*UNPA Unione Nazionale Protezione Antiaerea*, promoting Roberts pharmaceutical products; Italy, #0105)

It is noticeable that, though the story line is often chosen to associate directly with the product, this is not always so. For example, in the Nestlé game, the design motivation is to produce a game with attractive scenes of the home country, promoting the product by indirect association. Again, the Roberts game promotes the product only indirectly, by associating its manufacturer with a sense of civic responsibility; this game could also be classified as a ‘propaganda game’, another genre of *Goose* variant.

3. Iconographic variation

The second main method of adapting *Goose* to the requirements of advertising is that of iconographic variation. In the traditional game, there are:

- the favourable spaces, each denoted by the image of a goose;
- the hazard spaces, denoted as: bridge, inn, well, labyrinth, prison, death;
- the ordinary spaces, often left plain or filled with arbitrary devices;
- and

- the winning space, often showing a goose, a bag of money, the victor or other positive image.

Adaptation of the game by iconographic variation (as opposed to mere decoration) can proceed in a number of typical ways:

- goose spaces uniformly replaced thematically
- goose spaces replaced thematically but not uniformly
- hazards replaced thematically
- ordinary spaces (those without special playing significance) treated thematically or otherwise differentiated
- winning space treated thematically.

Examples of type (a) occur frequently. For example, in *Les Jeux de La Phosphatine Falières*, a child holding a tin of product appears on each of the traditional 'goose' spaces – and, in an example of type (e), the winning space shows children enjoying their Phosphatine soup. This game – beautifully drawn by Benjamin Rabier (1864-1939), creator of the famous image *La vache qui rit* - is very close to the traditional game in most respects (France, #0385)



Likewise, in the ALSA game (France, #0305) – more modified than the *Phosphatine* game but retaining many features of traditional *Goose* – there are iconographic replacements of type (b) emphasising the story line: the geese are replaced by packages of ALSA raising agent. The 'death' hazard is replaced by a shopping bag that does not contain such a package – go back to the start: a type (c) replacement.



Another example of type (b) occurs in a still-more modified game, the *Jeu de Lune*, where the favourable spaces show a package either of worm powder or of a bottle of worm syrup. The latter game also demonstrates type (c): the successive hazards are: illness in bed; 'ascarids' (large intestinal round-worms); nightmares (arising from worms); the bonnet of an ass (for not learning lessons); refusing a bath; 'oxyures' (pin worms). The iconographic replacements are consistent with the theme of healthy development, though not all refer directly to the product.

A witty adaptation of the 'well' space is shown in the *Jeu du Lion Noir*: space 32: 'bad floor polish' – stay there polishing until released by another. Such type (c) examples could be multiplied.

Type (d) is also of frequent occurrence. Again, the *Jeu de Lune* provides an example: the ordinary spaces show children in various stages of growing up, from the baby (found, evidently, in a cabbage patch) to the youth at the winning square, specified as a 'large and strong boy of 15 years of age, thanks to Vermifuge Lune' – this last substitution being an example of type (e).

However, not all iconographic variations are directly thematic. For example, the 'death' space may be replaced by an image more suitable for a juvenile market: it becomes a scythe in the *Phosphatine* game, for example, while in the *Jeu du Chocolat Menier* (France, #0685), advertising chocolate products, it shows a knockout in a boxing ring.



And, occasionally, variations seem contrary to any reasonable promotion of the product: the *Jeu de L'Huile de Table de Chartreux*, [game 2] has, in the 'death' space, the seal of guarantee of the oil, with the instruction: go back to space 1 (the peanut).

4. Rule variations

The key features of the rules that characterise the traditional *Game of Goose* are:

- (a) Agreed stakes, paid into a pool which goes to the winner
- (b) Spiral track of length 63
- (c) Double dice
- (d) Special rules for initial throws of 5,4 and 6,3 allow early wins
- (e) Favourable 'goose' spaces on 5,9,14,18,23 etc
- (f) Move forward by the amount of the throw on landing on a 'goose'
- (g) Hazards: pay to the pool and: 'bridge' move forward as specified; 'inn': lose a turn; 'well': stay until released by another; 'labyrinth': move back as specified; 'prison': stay until released by another; 'death': go back to start
- (h) change places on a 'hit', and pay
- (i) reverse overthrows allow 'death' space to be reached after passing it.

These rules are sometimes found unmodified (as in the *Ganzenspiel van ons Wonderschoon Belgie*). More often, rule variations occur; indeed, these may be so considerable as to leave scarcely any vestige of the traditional game except the unicursal track: thus, *Le Jeu de Santé* despite its French-Canadian origin shows no detectable rule inherited from traditional *Goose*; likewise, *The Ivory Castle Game*, where the only influence (perhaps traceable to the fact that the firm of Gibbs is French) is the length of the track, finishing on 63, 'health and happiness'. The other games listed in section 2 above are more recognisably 'goose games'. Even so, their rule variations are too numerous to list in full. The examples noted below are chosen because of their relevance to the design problem of promoting the product.

Relevant variations of type (a) relating to stakes occur sometimes. In *Nutrix Cabouter Spiel*, the stakes are specified as Nutrix biscuits (ten to each player and two for the

pot) and, indeed, some of these biscuits are required to be eaten on specific occurrences during the game. Less unusual is the specification of a product-based prize for the winner: e.g. the *Huile Chartreux* [game 1] suggests that the winner deserves some table oil.

Variations (f) of the doubling rule affecting the ‘goose’ spaces are rare. Examples are:

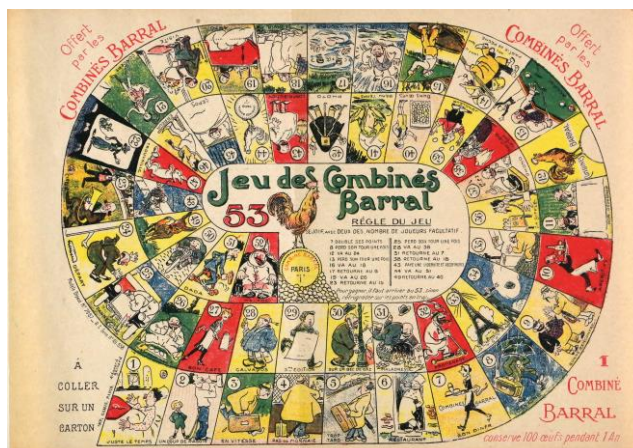
- the doubling rule may be modified, as in the *Jeu de l’Alsa*, promoting cake raising agent, where the rule on landing on a ‘goose’ space, denoted by a packet of the product, is ‘go on to the next cake’
- the doubling rule may be replaced by ‘go back to original position’ as in the *Jeu de La Samaritaine*, the geese being regarded as symbols of stupidity. However, there are three other spaces where the doubling forward rule applies.

Rule variations (g) affecting the hazards are more common, since these can be readily combined with iconographic variation to reinforce the story line. Examples are:

- ‘death’ space: go back to a specified space, not the start (*Jeu de Lune*, promoting medicine against worms: space 58: ‘oxyures’: go back to space 5, showing a bottle of the medicine. In this game, the other worm-related hazards give rise to the same penalty.
- ‘inn’ space rule adapted: (*Jeu du Lion Noir*, space 4, ‘bad shoe polish’ – advance to space 7, ‘cracked shoes’, and lose two turns. (The same antipathy to ‘brand X’ can be found in the *ALSA* game).

However, whatever the details, the rules for hazards in general are of the type found in *Goose*: advance, go back, stay a number of turns, wait for release.

Rule variations affecting the playing mechanics (length of track, number of dice) are not thematic and often occur when it is desired to accommodate the game to a small sheet of paper. This was a design consideration, since the games were usually given free, though some were rewards for collecting tokens etc. An example of this is the small sheet (215 x 305 mm) of the *Jeu des Combinés Barral* (France, #0055), advertising egg preserving compound.



This has only 53 spaces; by contrast, the Jeu de Lune provides the full 63 spaces on a sheet of comparable size (219 x 300 mm), so that the playing spaces are uncomfortably small.

For games that do not retain the traditional 63 spaces, the arrangement of favourable spaces and hazards is arbitrary. Even for those games that do have 63 spaces, the arrangement of favourable spaces and hazards does not always follow that of *Goose*: for example, in the *ALSA* game, the favourable spaces are at 9, 28 and 47. This makes unnecessary the special rule for the initial throw of 9 found in *Goose* (needed in that game to prevent an instant win, since the geese are arranged by nines). Nevertheless, the *ALSA* game retains the rule in modified form (advance to 19 'cake' on initial throw of 6:3 and advance to 57 'cake' on initial throw of 5:4). In *Goose*, these initial throws lead to spaces 26 'dice' and 53 'dice', respectively. The rule is retained in *ALSA* game to provide the excitement of a possible early win.

The rules for a hit and the reverse overthrows are standard for any game recognisably derived from *Goose*. By contrast, *Le jeu de Santé* provides a special rule that the player hit must throw a 5 to move on; and it does not mention reverse overthrows.

5. Re-design of the track layout

In contrast to the frequent use of the methods described above, little use has been made of the possibilities of re-designing the track layout. The vast majority of advertising race games use the traditional 'snail shell' spiral or a plain rectangular spiral. A few use another conventional form, that of the cartographic game, where the track is drawn on a map. The *Lana Polo* game illustrated above uses this form more imaginatively: the track is drawn within a representation of part of the sphere of the Earth, rising to the North Pole and so emphasising the brand name. Another exception is the *Jeu du Pere Quin*, promoting the Perruoin brand of shoes (France, #0045), where the track is in the shape of an enormous letter P.



6. Discussion

The advertising games form a pleasing and interesting genre. Indeed, they are by their nature designed to look attractive and eye-catching. Some are wittily drawn by eminent cartoonists. The story lines are diverse and often skilfully adapted to the product. Some represent new departures not seen in the other genres of variations of *Goose*. And all this is done within constraints of cost of production and the need to satisfy the sponsor, conscious of the demands of the market.

Iconographic variation is imaginative and sometimes reflects a sensitivity to the intended market going beyond simple strengthening of the story line. However, some of the games overcrowd the images and thereby sacrifice a degree of playability. The early games of *Goose* are often models of clarity, it being obvious without reference to the printed rules which are the hazard spaces and which the favourable ones.

The most striking tendency in the rule variations occurs in the treatment of the hazards. In many of these advertising games, the space to which the player is redirected after landing on a hazard is given iconographic significance. This is not true of *Goose* – though it *is* true of its contemporary in Italy, *Il Barone*, also a spiral race game. In *Barone*, though the rules are not so stable as those of *Goose*, there are directions of the following kind: space 5 ‘Arab racehorse’ – go to space 12 ‘palio’; space 11 ‘thief’ – go to space 20 ‘prison’. It is unlikely that many of the inventors of the advertising variants of *Goose* would have been aware of *Barone*. A more likely source – if, indeed, one is needed – may be other variants of *Goose*, for example those with a geographical theme, where similar treatment of hazards appears even in the earliest educational games, invented by Pierre DuVal in the mid-seventeenth century.

However, many of the rule variations in the advertising games tend to be arbitrary and are obviously made without knowledge of the intricate self-consistent numerical structure of *Goose*. Such variations risk detracting from the playing enjoyment of the game.

Successful interweaving of these considerations – practicalities of play, theoretical consideration of the game, cost, promotion of the product, nature of the market – presents a considerable challenge in board game design.

Adrian Seville

Original version 10 December 2004; illustrated and expanded version February 2021.