'GAME' IN *THE TALE OF GAMELYN*

It is often said that the protagonist of the fourteenth-century *Tale of Gamelyn* has a name that means 'son of the old man', deriving from the Icelandic *gamall* or 'old'.[1] This reading speaks to Gamelyn's status as the child of his father's old age, and the fact that it is his position as a son among other sons that sets the narrative in motion. But Gamelyn's name also bears a significant relationship to the word 'game' in its multiple senses of amusement, delight, and pleasure; wild animals hunted for sport; the act of hunting them; and structured play, of the sort explored by Johan Huizinga in his classic 1938 study of 'the play element of culture', *Homo ludens*. These resonances have been noted by a number of different critics, but so far as I am aware no one has yet developed them into a structured account of the text.[2]

This article investigates the extent to which the dynamics of the *Tale* can be thrown into relief by inserting it into a late medieval culture of 'game'. This engagement has a double character. In the first place, game and play are characterized by rule-boundedness. 'All play', Huizinga argues in *Homo ludens*, 'has its rules.' Hence his comment, that play 'creates order' – more than that, that it '*is* order'.[3] Consideration of ordered 'game' in *Gamelyn* leads towards late medieval conduct books and household manuals – books of 'game' and of 'nurture' – and their codifications of rules for proper behaviour. It explores the ways in which these rule-bound game-spaces help constitute the patterns of inclusion and exclusion that structure medieval society, and it works its way towards a language that describes the breaching of these rules. Secondly, though, game and play are for Huizinga characterized by a certain quality of pretence. As forms of make-believe, they suspend straightforward distinctions between truth and falsehood. This aspect of game-behaviour is rejected by *Gamelyn*. *Gamelyn* reconfigures the meanings of game prevalent in chivalric romances, where it typically speaks to the role-playing demanded by sophisticated forms of social organization. It also unfolds an entirely different understanding of game from that prevalent in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, with which *Gamelyn* is associated in the manuscript tradition. Critical accounts of the dialectic of 'ernest' and 'game' in Chaucer have argued that *The Canterbury Tales* offer a celebration of the complex satisfactions offered by the organized untruths that go by the name of literature. *The Tale of Gamelyn* bears a far more antagonistic relationship to questions of duplicity. It may be that all games – and all fiction – must involve some measure of deception, but that is not how *Gamelyn* sees things. The most significant structural antithesis of 'game' in the *Tale* is not 'ernest' but 'gyle'.

Gamelyn thus simultaneously affirms and dissents from the conventionalism implicit in game-playing. At the level of plot, it stages a number of violent breaches of customary rules of behaviour, but the unruly energies it unleashes are ultimately directed to the service of a law of paternal and sovereign power. Simultaneously, the text's semantic gamesomeness is mobilized to rule out of bounds a conception of social life as a texture of sophisticated play. The pun hidden within the protagonist's name is central: *Gamelyn*, I argue, pits 'game' against 'game'.

I

The story of *Gamelyn* can be quickly told. Gamelyn is the youngest of the three sons of Sir John of Boundys. He is bequeathed the largest share of his father's estate. His eldest brother (also John) deprives him of this inheritance, and the fraternal conflict that ensues leads to Gamelyn being outlawed and taking refuge in the forest. He becomes the king of a band of outlaws and with their assistance seizes control of the court that has condemned to death the middle brother, Sir Ote (who had supported Gamelyn). Sir John as sheriff, the Justice, and the jurymen are all killed instead. Ote makes Gamelyn his heir, and Gameyn regains his inheritance.

Gamelyn's was a real name.[4] The *Tale*, however, repeatedly pairs it with 'game' vocabulary in ways that make it available for interpretation. This is most prominently the case in the formulaic exhortations that punctuate the narrative:

> Now litheth, and lesteneth • both ȝonge and olde,
> And ȝe schul heere gamen • of Gamelyn the bolde. (lines 289f.)
>
> Litheth and lesteneth • and holdeth youre tonge,
> And ȝe schul heere gamen • of Gamelyn the ȝonge (lines 340f.)
>
> Now lytheth and lesteneth • so god ȝif ȝou good fyn!
> And ȝe schul heere good game • of ȝonge Gamelyn. (lines 551f.)

'Game' or 'gamen', in Middle English, might more or less neutrally signify an action or course of events.[5] In these instances, however, we seem to be getting something more specific. The 'game' promised here is one of enjoyment and diversion.[6] These passages describe the text as a space of narrative pleasure, and they punningly identify its young protagonist as the final cause and guarantor of the games it plays.[7]

'Game' can also be a contest or battle; violent action.[8] This sense of the word comes to the fore in the episode in which Gamelyn finds himself duped and bound hand and foot for two days and nights in his brother's hall. He is freed by Adam Spenser, his father's steward, who advises him to maintain the pretence that he is still imprisoned. There is to be a great banquet on the Sunday. 'Abbotes and priours • many here shal be, / And other men of holy chirch' (lines 435f.):

> Whan that they have eten • and wasschen here hondes,
> Thow schalt biseke hem alle • to bryng the out of bondes;
> And if they will borwe þe • that were good game (lines 439–41)

Building upon the 'litheth and lesteneth' addresses, the text here develops a second semantic strand, within which Gamelyn's violent exploits are identified as play. For in the event the clergymen do not wish to 'borwe', or stand bail for, Gamelyn. Instead, they scorn and curse him, whereupon Gamelyn and Adam attack them with staves:

> 'Gamelyn,' seyde Adam • 'do hem but good;
> They ben men of holy chirche • draw of hem no blood,
> Saue wel the croune • and do hem non harmes,
> But brek both her legges • and siththen here armes.'
> Thus Gamelyn and Adam • wroughte right faste,
> And pleyden with the monkes • and made hem agast. (lines 521–6)

For Gamelyn to have been bailed when he was in reality free would have been 'good game'. But for those who refused to liberate him to be beaten and broken – this is an alternative and a superior form of 'pley'. The text repeatedly makes this connection. When Gamelyn first attacks his brother's servants, we read that 'he gan to pleзe' (line 130). 'Come a little nere,' he invites his brother, 'And I will teche a play • atte bokeler' (lines 135f.). After a particularly violent episode in which Gamelyn exacts revenge for being refused entry to his brother's house by breaking the porter's neck and throwing his corpse into a well, we are told that Gamelyn 'hadde pleyd his play' (line 306). The *Tale*'s 'pley' thus yokes together two key senses of the word: on the one hand, 'play' as 'merriment'; and on the other, 'strife, fighting'.[9]

It is this understanding of game and play as physical aggression that has attracted the most sustained attention in the critical literature on *The Tale of Gamelyn* to date. It prompted John Scattergood to comment that 'this violent story of crime and retribution is described with a heartlessly sardonic relish'. Subsequently, Jean E. Joost quoted Scattergood during a discussion of the *Tale*'s emphasis on 'game'. 'Wherein,' she asked, 'lies the blame in a tale of games distinctly dangerous?' That is, who does the poem most condemn ('the failed legal and administrative establishment', it is suggested), but also: just how culpable might the text be in its heady conflation of game and violence?[10]

Yet while the presence of 'game' in *Gamelyn* is most obviously related to these physical encounters, it is not restricted to them. Indeed, part of the pleasure of the text derives from an awareness of a variety of different senses of the word moving in and out of play – of individual semantic threads being first twisted together and then teased apart in an ongoing process of verbal interrelation and differentiation. *Gamelyn* is often described as a violent, even atavistic tale. One could scarcely dissent from the judgement: it is a ferocious narrative of vindication, often quite extraordinarily brutal. And yet, even as Gamelyn beats up his enemies, so too his *Tale* hammers away at a small number of key terms,

and gradually the very repetitiveness of its style (often noted by the critics, disparagingly) begins to produce a kind of auxiliary conceptual interest.

II

The different senses of 'game' are evoked from the first appearance of the word in the text. The *Tale* begins by introducing us not to its eponymous protagonist, but to his father:

> Litheth and lesteneth • and herkeneth aright,
> And ȝe schulle here a talking • of a doughty knight;
> Sir Iohan of Boundys • was his right name,
> He cowde of norture ynough • and mochil of game
> Thre sons the knight hadde • that with his body he wan (lines 1–5).

It is the fourth line of the poem that will provide the initial focal point for my discussion: 'He cowde of norture ynough • and mochil of game.' In the first scholarly edition of the *Tale of Gamelyn*, published in 1884 and the foundation for the majority of subsequent commentary on the poem, Walter W. Skeat glosses the line as meaning 'He was sufficiently instructed by right bringing up, and knew much about sport.' For Skeat, what is understood to be at stake in the line is Sir John's own good breeding. Furthermore, 'by *game*', he continues, 'is meant what is now called *sport*; "The Master of the Game" is the name of an old treatise on hunting' (p. 35).[11] In what follows, I would like to begin by supplementing this gloss, initially by following Skeat's own suggested sources and analogues. The aim will be to produce an expanded field of reference for the line, extending beyond that suggested by Skeat: one that reads it as potentially linking back to the 'Boundys' that are associated with Gamelyn's father in the previous line, and forward to the 'thre sones' who are introduced in the next.

1. Firstly, then: Skeat's gloss to the line takes it to be basically positive. Might it, however, bear just the faintest suspicion of an accusatory undertone? '*Sufficiently* instructed,' he writes. If there is a reservation here, it is one that responds to an ambiguity in the text. 'Ynough' in line 4 most likely means 'very much', but it also admits the possibility of the qualifier 'enough', set in opposition to 'mochil'.[12] In this reading, 'game' might be significantly related to 'norture', rather than existing in a merely paratactic relationship to it. It must be admitted that the manuscript upon which Skeat based his edition, British Library, Harley MS 7334, is unique in offering 'ynough'.[13] The moment seems transient. Yet in its very uncertainty it also seems representative of the ways in which the poem works to generate ambivalence around the figure of John of Boundys.

2. 'Norture' in its broadest sense signifies nurturing or nourishment, with no necessary restriction to the human world.[14] Consider Thomas Usk's adaptation of a line from Chaucer: 'How shulde the grounde without kyndly noriture bringen forthe any frutes?'[15] 'Norture' in this sense might refer to food, to plants and

livestock, and to the cultivating activity that promotes their growth. Sir John's knowledge of 'nourture' could thus direct us to his responsibilities within the 'Boundys' of his property, and we might read line 4 as suggesting something like: 'he managed his land adequately and enjoyed himself on it hugely.' Later we are told of John of Boundys that 'non housbond he was' (line 13). That is: he was no mere farmer, but a substantial man of property, but also conceivably suggesting that he was an incompetent landowner, deficient in husbandry.[16] Alternatively, then, and making the connection with 'game' in the sense of game animals: 'he managed his land adequately and hunted on it enthusiastically; his interest in hunting outstripped his talent for husbandry.'

3. 'Norture' can also be understood as referring to a gentle education specifically, as Skeat suggests.[17] In the Chaucerian translation of *The Romaunt of the Rose*, for instance, Vilanye 'litel coude of nature'.[18] This association was particularly strong in the romance tradition. In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the hero is described as the 'fyne fader of nurture'; whilst in Malory, the young Tristram is sent to France 'to lerne the langage and nurture and dedis of arms'.[19] Skeat's note directs us to two fifteenth-century versified treatises on household service and manners by John Russell and Hugh Rhodes, both entitled the *Boke of Nurture*. 'Now fayre fall yow fadir', comments the pupil in Russell's text, following a section on appropriate condiments and sauces to serve with fish: 'in fayth*e* y am full fayñ, / For louesomly ye han lered me þe nurtur þat ye han sayñ.'[20] 'Nurtur', in Russell's treatise, is framed as something 'louesomly' transmitted from father to son. We might even say that 'nurtur' creates that filial relationship, since the youth in Russell's dialogue is not in fact a real son, but a 'semely yong*e* mañ' encountered stalking deer in the forest at the very start of the text, who begs the narrator for assistance to 'gete … a mastir' (lines 20, 34). This scene of encounter between young man and surrogate father is *The Boke of Nurture*'s analogue for a late medieval world of household education, in which youths might move from their own home to be brought up in another and parents might reciprocally educate other parents' children. To nurture, in Russell, is to assume fatherly responsibility. So the line from *Gamelyn* might allude to John of Boundys' 'nourture' of his three sons just as much as to his own upbringing. To adapt Skeat's reading: 'he knew how to instruct his sons and bring them up well, and he knew much about sport.'

4. 'Game', too, has multiple significations, which bring it close to questions of 'nourture'. Rather than suggesting a simple understanding of 'game' as sport, *The Master of Game*, the treatise on hunting to which Skeat refers, exploits the conflation of multiple meanings of the word. It alludes to sport, certainly; but also game understood in relation to hunting specifically; and, much more broadly, game as pleasure. The book is a translation of Gaston de Foix's *Livre de chase*, made by Edward III's grandson Edward, second Duke of York. Its dedication, to the future Henry V, declares that the book is called 'Master of Game', since 'þe matere þat þis book treateþ of bene in euery sesuonn most durable, and to my thenkyng to euery gentils hert oftenest most disportful of alle games þat is to say huntyng'.[21] Hunting, here, appears as a species of 'game' more generally. But

when we come to instructions for the successful management of a royal hunt, we read that 'þan shuld þe maister of þe game worþe vpon horse and mete wiþ þe kyng, and brynge hym to his stonding, and telle hym what game is wiþ inne þe sett' (p. 108) – a 'sett', here, being the portion of forest around which men and hounds are stationed. Is this 'game' as sport, or game as hunting, or game as pleasure in general, or game as a class of animals? It seems impossible to tell. In a sense the whole aim of the treatise is to produce the mindset capable of finding these meanings if not indistinguishable, then at least significantly interrelated. We get a similar effect in the instructions for hunting contained in the fifteenth-century *Boke of St Albans*: 'Yowre craftis let be hydde: and do as I yow bydde / All my sonnys in same: and thus may ye konne of game.'[22] 'Konne of game': to learn about hunting; and about gentlemanly recreation in general; and to do so with pleasure. Once again the point is the folding together of different meanings of 'game', and once again this act of conflation is performed in the context of instructions offered to 'sonnys'.[23]

5. 'He cowde of norture ynough • and mochil of game': following the tracks laid down within Skeat's own points of reference, it is possible to locate the analogical structure that underpins a certain late medieval construction of the household education. Why, we might ask, should a forest serve as the backdrop to Russell's primal scene in the formation of a civilized subject? On the face of things, it seems quite incongruous. The *Boke of Nurture* offers instruction in the duties of a 'buttlier … panter*e* or chamburlayne' (line 41), and the routine of domestic service it describes is presented taking place almost entirely within doors. Nonetheless, this life is imagined to participate in the same order of existence as that described in *The Master of Game*. It is not just that the middle section of Russell's treatise consists of a panoply of details about carving and serving and saucing meats, fish, and fowl, and that some of these belong to one of a relatively small number of 'game' animals classified as such in hunting manuals (the hart, the hare, the boar, and the wolf). More than that: the introduction to the text stages the training of the youth as a process of being brought into conformity with the laws of the forest. It describes how the narrator 'rose owt of my bed, in a mery sesou*n* of may / to sporte me in a forest' (lines 13f.). He asks permission of a forester 'þat I mygh[t] walke in to his lawnde, where þe deer*e* lay' (line 16), and it is only after he has received authorization that he is free to wander 'weldsomely' (line 17), at will, and to take pleasure in the 'semely syght' of 'iij. herdis of deer*e*' (line 18). The forest, here, is a managed legal space as much as it is a natural one; the forester acts to preserve its game in order that it can be hunted by its proper owner. It is within the bounds of the forest that the narrator encounters the youth, armed with a bow and seeking to stalk deer. Asked whom he serves, the youth admits that 'y serue my-self / & sels noon oþer mañ' (line 26). The narrator takes his 'sporte' 'weldsomely', unsupervised, yet his is a licensed freedom. The youth's presence in the forest is unauthorized: he is a poacher. We might therefore say that he is only hunting deer, rather than participating in the 'game' of the hunt. But not for long. The taming action of 'nourture' begins its work: the youth is inducted into the

discipline of the gentlemanly household and finds his place within its hierarchies, no longer the intruder who shoots at deer, but the trained server who presents them, cooked, to his master. Russell's frame narrative tacitly suggests that to be well nurtured is to have found, through the medium of quasi-paternal instruction, a lawful space within the forest environment of 'game' and pleasure that dominates a hunting manual such as Gaston de Foix's *Livre de chase* – even when that space is wholly domestic and is located exclusively within doors.[24]

6. We might return to Johan Huizinga's comment, that play does not just create order, but that it '*is* order'. Texts such as *The Boke of Nurture*, *The Boke of St Albans*, and *The Master of Game* are in a sense nothing but obsessively detailed compendia of the rules governing one kind of medieval game-space. Serve plums, damsons, and cherries before dinner, nuts and strawberries afterwards. Place the salt on the right side of your lord. Fold your napkin like this. Bow when you leave the room. Never touch venison with your bare hand. Touch beef only with your left. A hart of one year's age is called a calf; at two years old it is called a bullock; at three years, a brocket. In its sixth year, it is known as a hart of ten, and may be hunted. When the hart is slain, the hounds and their keepers should return home; then, 'alle þe remenaunte of the hunters shuld strake in þis wise trut trut trororow trororow … and oþer wise shuld not the hert hunter strake fro þen forþ til þei go to bedde'.[25] Treatises such as Russell's present codifications, or orderings, of ordered behaviour, and they work to define a space of privileged culture. If Russell's *Boke of Nurture* stages the process of 'nourture' as a movement into conformity with the law of 'game', we might note the reciprocal implication that 'game' itself appears to involve something broader than just the practice of hunting and indeed seems (tautologically enough, in relation to 'norture') to take on something of the sense of lawfulness or cultivation in general.

The preceding discussion has tried to open out to view some of the scenes of recreation and instruction hidden within Skeat's explanatory glosses to *The Tale of Gamelyn*, in the hope that they might contain new routes into the poem, moving beyond Skeat's own understanding of the text. The relation argued for between the poem and these scenes is indirect and analogical, not unlike that between Russell's frame narrative and the main business of his book. *Gamelyn* never directly depicts a deer hunt. Yet the concerns indicated by the Middle English language of game go to the heart of the *Tale* – even whilst, at the same time, the poem refuses to just straightforwardly reproduce its assumptions. One recalls the giddy thrills of transgression that 'game' identifies in the *Tale*: the forcible entry, the threats, the killing, the sportive assaults upon monks and clergymen. Gamelyn is the son of a knight, but he is palpably anything but a well-disciplined subject. Must all 'game' straightforwardly consolidate the outlines of the orderly gentlemanly household and the way of life that it sustains? Or might there be something potentially unregulated in the matter of 'game' – correlated perhaps with its semantic mobility, its tendency to slip between meanings – something excessive that, playing on Sir John's title, takes us 'out of bounds', beyond the limits of ordinary or respectable behaviour?

This is the question that *Gamelyn* explores, through the protagonist's movement between two very differently constituted game spaces: that of his father's estate on the one hand, and the forest to which he escapes as an outlaw on the other.

III

The *Tale* begins on the property of John of Boundys. Skeat comments that 'it is not clear what is meant by *Boundys*' and that there is 'nothing to indicate the locality of the place so named' (p. 35, vii). As he goes on to note, however, the name could easily mean something like 'of the Marches or of the border-land' (viii).[26] More than that: what is being evoked here may ultimately be less any specific place, real or imagined, than the idea of a place as such, a bounded zone. Throughout *The Tale of Gamelyn*, 'Boundys' signifies in relation to 'bounds' understood as borders, whether these be the borders of a landed estate, of a legal jurisdiction, or of lawful or conventional behaviour. It imagines an array of limits that can be breached or transgressed and that function to create an inside and an outside, just as John Russell's evocation of a forest space does in *The Boke of Nurture*. Before his escape to the life of an outlaw, Gamelyn is repeatedly described in ways that remind us of his father's name. During the episode of 'pley' at John's banquet, we find him 'full harde i-bounde' (line 350); 'bounde • bothe hand and foot' (lines 374, 377); 'bounden in the halle' (line 387). The sense of contained energy is palpable, and when Adam Spenser does release Gamelyn 'out of bond' (line 401), the result is a gleeful explosion of violence. This movement is played out in reverse at the end of the text. When Gamelyn seizes control of the courtroom, it is in order to free his middle brother, Ote, condemned to hang. Once again a son of Sir John is released 'out of bende' (line 837), and with this act Gamelyn returns from the forest and reclaims his status as principal legatee. He has returned within the bounds of his father's estate.

As a metonym for familial possessions, 'boundys' initially directs our attention towards Sir John's supervision of that which is his in relation to the 'nourture' of his sons. It is his responsibility to oversee a flourishing property that can descend to his heir or heirs upon his death. In this matter, Sir John is defiantly unconventional. As he lies dying, he assembles a group of 'wise knightes' (line 17) to help make his testamentary arrangements. He asks them to divide the land 'among my sones thre' (line 36), and not to forget Gamelyn. The knights' preference is to favour just one son, presumably John; they then suggest that the estate be divided between the eldest two only. Sir John defies their counsel entirely. He divides his land unequally between all three sons: five ploughs of land go to John; and five to Ote; the remainder, later estimated as fifteen ploughs of land, goes to Gamelyn. Why? While the *Tale* ultimately vindicates Sir John's flouting of the conventions of primogeniture, there is no suggestion that Gamelyn is favoured because he is, like some male Cordelia, the best son, the most affectionate or virtuous of the three brothers. We are told the eldest is a bad person, 'moche schrewe' (line 6), and that the other two are loving (line 7), but we are given no reason why Gamelyn

specifically should be singled out. It is later mentioned that he is the 'strengest' of the brothers, but this doesn't appear relevant (line 78). It may be that he is, simply, the youngest: Sir John refers to him as 'my ȝonge sone' (line 48). Overall, though, it seems that what we are presented with is neither patrimonial strategy nor moral judgement. Rather, John divides his land 'as it might falle':

> All the lond that he hadde …
> Fayn he wolde it were • dressed among hem alle
> That ech of hem hadde his part • as it might falle. (lines 15–17)

There is a suggestion of arbitrariness here – even of the kind of sportiveness that actively surrenders human decision-making to the powers of chance. John of Boundys wilfully oversteps the bounds of conventional behaviour so far as the division of his property is concerned, a transgression that we might see foreshadowed in line 4 of the *Tale*, which might be understood to say something like: 'he nurtured his sons well; and' – or, conceivably, 'but' – 'he was a playful man'.[27]

Land, sons, and the actions of John of Boundys. These are the triangulated elements out of which the *Tale of Gamelyn* is developed, and which the text's early introduction of the word 'game' serves to draw together. As Sir John nears death, he announces that he wants his land 'dressed' (line 15) between his sons – that is, portioned out, as a deer might be in the aftermath of the hunt.[28] It is in this sense of the word that *The Boke of St Albans* offers instruction on 'dew termys to speke of breekyng or dressing of dyuerse beestis and fowlis'. 'With owt moore dyne,' it recommends, 'Than dresst the Nombles …' (sigs. F7ᵛ, F3ᵛ). In medieval hunting culture, this 'breaking' or 'unmaking' of the deer is the ritualized activity – heightenedly violent and ceremonious – that thematizes the internal relationships of the social body participating in the hunt. At the climax of the hunt, the deer was skinned, disembowelled, butchered, and then shared out between the participants. This procedure was structured around a dynamic of inclusion and exclusion, in which the distribution of dressed meat mapped the contours of an idealized communal body. Within the group, all should have a portion. All should be acknowledged, each in his place.[29] *The Master of Game* directs that in the aftermath of a royal hunt some meat goes to the 'seuers'; and some to the 'sergeant of þe larder'; he who has killed a deer may 'chalaunge his fee'; the 'folies' go to the master of harriers; and so on (p. 111). In *The Boke of St Albans*, even the innards left for the crows are imagined as an allotted portion, the 'corbyns fee' (sig. F3ʳ). The eucharistic echoes of this communal ritual of blood and flesh seem unavoidable, although they are never acknowledged.

Yet if the estate of John of Boundys is 'dressed' as the body of the deer might be at the climax of the hunt, dressing in *The Tale of Gamelyn* bears a perverse or ironic relation to the procedure of breaking or unmaking the deer. The aim of the hunt is to produce cohesion out of destruction. Here, the process fails. As Sir John's land is 'dressed', something just falls apart. 'Dressing' in the *Tale* stands for partible inheritance, as opposed to primogeniture, the procedure under which the estate would be transferred more or less intact to Sir John's eldest son. The

dressing of the land defies the recommendation of the knights whom Sir John calls upon to advise him upon his testamentary arrangements, and it breaks open the relationships between his sons and between them and their father's will, in the dual sense of legacy and wish.[30] It will require the duration of the *Tale*, and a series of scenes of symbolic violence, this time enacted upon human bodies, to put them back together again.

The activity of dressing thus offers a further point of contact between Sir John's estate and its 'game'. 'Game' produces a series of spaces within *The Tale of Gamelyn*, an internal topography significantly thematized in relation to a late medieval culture of gentlemanly sport. After Sir John's death, his eldest son not only appropriates the 'land and leede' (line 71) bequeathed to Gamelyn. He also allows the estate to fall into disrepair. Gamelyn's movement out of bounds – away from the position of an orderly brother, and back towards his father's legacy – begins when he realizes what has happened:

> Gamelyn stood on a day • in his brothers ȝerde,
> And bygan with his hond • to handlen his berde;
> He thought on his londes • that layen vnsawe,
> And his faire okes • that down were i-drawe;
> His parkes were i-broken • and his deer byreued;
> Of alle his good steeds • noon was him byleued;
> His howses were vnhiled • and full yuel dight;
> Tho thought Gamelyn • it went nought aright. (lines 81–8)

Although Gamelyn enumerates a number of causes of grievance, 'game' offers a significant focal point. Parks, here, are reserves for private hunting, enclosed by a fence or ditch and stocked with deer. They are spaces of 'game', in the sense both of pleasure and of animals hunted for sport, and the breaking of their boundaries constitutes a major element in Gamelyn's complaint; he repeats the accusation when he confronts his brother face to face, stating that 'My parkes ben to-broken • and my deer byreued' (line 97).

Although one detail of Gamelyn's speech suggests an intensified exploitation of the land (his trees have been felled, presumably to be sold or put to use), the dominant note here is one of arbitrary waste and neglect – and of waste, furthermore, in spaces and of goods that are themselves significantly non-productive. Parks might be used for pasturing animals, to provide firewood, or as sources of raw material such as timber and stone. Fundamentally, though, they functioned within an economy of pleasure rather than one of profit or productivity.[31] So Gamelyn's point is not the loss of the deer as a resource. Instead, the harm is primarily registered within a symbolic order of 'game'. For Gamelyn's parks to be 'broken' suggests that their enclosures have been breached or allowed to decay, and that the deer have been stolen by outsiders or have simply wandered elsewhere. That is: the bounds of the park are 'i-broken', and the deer shall not be, at the climax to the hunt. The neglect of the parks is construable as an attack upon Gamelyn's identity as the son of his knightly father. This, one might say,

is the very opposite of the careful 'nourture' of an estate; or of its 'game'; or of a thriving lineage.[32]

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IV

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These questions of boundaries, of patterns of inclusion and exclusion, retain their prominence in the second half of the narrative. Breaking free from his brother's hall, Gamelyn evades the town sheriff and his men and escapes into the forest, where he lives as an outlaw; eventually he becomes the outlaw king. The forest is introduced as the antithesis of the forms of coercion and restraint that await Gamelyn within his own community. When he flees, it is on Adam's advice that 'we to wode goon … Better is vs ther loos • than in town y-bounde' (lines 604f.). The forest exists in opposition to the 'toun', but also to Sir John's estate. It is a non-familial space, without gates or porters – a space, it might be thought, within which Gamelyn's unbound energies can finally find scope for free play and expression. Yet the forest doubles John of Boundys' estate even as it opposes it. It too is imagined as a space of play and 'game'.

When Gamelyn and Adam first encounter the outlaws, they are required by the outlaw king, whom Gamelyn will ultimately succeed, to account for their presence in the forest. Gamelyn responds:

> 'He moste needs walke in woode • that may not walke in towne.
> Sir, we walke not heer • noon harm for to do,
> But if we meete with a deer • to scheete therto,
> As men that ben hungry • and mow no mete fynde …' (lines 672–5)

The forest is identified with free access to game meat. It also harbours 'game' as pleasure. Once he is accepted into the outlaw company, we find Gamelyn's life story being reworked for the pleasure of the 'mery men' (line 774):

> Gamelyn and his men • talkeden in-feere,
> And they hadde good game • here maister to here;
> They tolden him of auentures • that they hadde founde,
> And Gamelyn hem tolde aȝein • how he was fast i-bounde. (lines 775–8)

The forest figures as a space of literature as *Gamelyn* conceives of it: tales of violently emancipatory 'auentures', orally circulated between young men. The outlaws share game meat as food; at the same time, they participate in the exchange of stories of 'good game'.

To walk in the woods freely, to tell how one found enjoyable 'aduentures', to 'meete' deer and eat venison (lines 777, 674): these are all forms of game reliant upon a kind of happenstance, an absence of regulation that finds its echo in the freedom to roam and wander. The forest is the space within which, punningly, one just meets one's meat (lines 674f.). These scenes read like an inversion of the parallel episode in Russell's *Boke of Nurture*. When Gamelyn encounters the outlaws, he asks them, 'What man is your maister'? (line 657), just as Russell's narrator does

his poacher. But these young men's response is not a plea for employment within the gentlemanly household. Instead, they defiantly claim allegiance to an authority beyond the law: "'Oure maister,'" they respond, "'is i-crouned • of outlawes kyng.'" (line 660). We might compare the knitting together of 'game' as violent pleasure and 'game' as deer in relation to a scenario of greenwood outlawry produced in the Anglo-Norman song of 'Trailbaston'. The speaker has fled to the forest of Belregard, where 'there is no deceit nor any bad law' ('La n'y a faucet ne nulle male lay'). From this space, he threatens his enemies with a violent 'game' ('giw') that is also a retributive variant on the ceremony of breaking and unmaking the deer:

> Je lur apre[n]droy le giw de Traylebaston,
> Et lur bruseroy l'eschyne e le croupon,
> Les bras e les jaunbes, ce serreit resoun;
> Le lange lur toudroy e la bouche ensoun.

> I will teach them the game of Trailbaston, and I will break their back and rump, their arms and their legs, it would be right; I will cut out their tongue and their mouth into the bargain.[33]

The song highlights an oddity that finds its echo in *Gamelyn*. 'Trailbaston' depicts a scene of transgressive violence, enacted upon the law abiding. Yet that violence is asserted as right ('resoun') and it takes the form of instruction; it also mimics the ritual of breaking and unmaking the deer that elsewhere seems connected with the imagining of an ordered community. That is, its transgressions seem to be embedded in forms of discipline and boundedness. So too with *The Tale of Gamelyn*. 'Game' points towards a kind of ambivalence within *Gamelyn*'s narrative structure. The text diverts questions of inheritance and social reproduction through a narrative of outlawry in a forest space, before moving back within bounds, returning to the father's estate. However, close examination of the operation of 'game' in *Gamelyn* suggests that what we have here is something more subtle than the bare opposition between a space of legitimacy and one of exclusion. Sir John's instructions regarding his property are disregarded in an act of filial disobedience that will be righted over the course of the *Tale*. But his plans for the disposal of his estate are not themselves free from hints of perversity or transgression that also find purchase within the referential field of 'game', and when Sir John the younger arrogates Gamelyn's legacy to himself he is simply reinstating the socially approved practice of primogeniture, as recommended by Sir John's friends. Furthermore, as the *Tale* progresses, it becomes evident that Sir John the younger, the wicked son, has the weight of society on his side, and that the law supports him fully in his conflict with his brother. So while there is a sense in which Gamelyn never leaves his inheritance and it is John the younger who is out of bounds (aberrant, disobedient, in defiance of the law of the father), there is also the suggestion that in the eyes of the world it is the original division of the estate that lacks legitimacy. As we track the consequences of the breaking of Gamelyn's deerparks, we are confronted with a persistent uncertainty as to which side of the boundary between proper and improper behaviour either of the brothers' actions might lie

at any given time – as if a certain 'bound' had been not simply transgressed in some deplorable way or other, but breached in a more profound sense, such that its ability to draw the line between inside and outside had been turned in upon itself.

The forest is the logical environment within which to stage these reversals, and an account of the status of forests in late medieval and early modern culture can clarify the ways in which this space contributes to the *Tale*'s games with questions of boundedness. John Manwood's *Treatise of the Lawes of the Forest*, first published in 1598, is an early modern attempt to codify legislation and custom relating to the forests, reaching back into a medieval past, to the age of *Gamelyn* and before that. A forest, according to Manwood, is a space of cultivated wildness, set aside for the recreation of the monarch. 'In the Forests,' Manwood writes, 'there are the secret pleasures and princely delights of the kings for Kings and Princes doe resort vnto the Forests for their pleasure of Hunting.' 'And therefore,' he notes, 'there haue been always certaine particular laws differing from the Common Lawes of this Realme, that were only proper vnto a Forest.'[34] They are spaces outside regular jurisdiction, yet within their own 'proper' laws. Forests were supplied with their own legal officers, the forest wardens, who appointed foresters, and who worked under the ultimate supervision of the two justices of the forest. They had their own courts (the 'Swainmote'), which enforced a distinct body of regulations relating to 'vert' and 'venison': the forest law.[35] Forests were, in short, a space apart, both jurisdictionally and by virtue of their connection with the sovereign, for whose person and pleasure ('game') they were supposedly reserved.[36]

Taking its cue from this environment, the closing movement of *The Tale of Gamelyn* produces a final elaboration of its basic narrative structure, as questions of familial property and of social reproduction at the gentry or armigerous level are re-routed through symbolic circuits concerned with sovereignty and royal power. At the end of the *Tale*, we read that Gamelyn, having freed Ote and killed John, 'made pees' (line 889) with the king. The king forgives all the outlaws, he appoints Ote justice of the court that had been about to execute him, and he makes Gamelyn 'Chef Iustice • of al his fre forest' (line 891). These moments suggest the presence in the text of a new analogical structure, devoted to exploring affinities between the figures of outlaw and sovereign. The outlaws in *Gamelyn*, cried 'wolues-heed' (line 700), exist outside the protection of the customary legal order. Yet they have their own king, who proclaims his freedom to shoot deer, and at the end of the *Tale*, the real king appears to forgive them and to draw them back within the bounds of the community. In the course of its account of the genealogies of sovereign power, Giorgio Agamben's study *Homo sacer* argues that the medieval outlaw and monarch resemble each other in their paradoxical status, both inside and outside the law.[37] *The Tale of Gamelyn* develops this parallel through its recourse to a forest environment, within which the game of hunting is the simultaneous mark of the outlaw's impunity and the sovereign's privilege.[38]

Previous studies of *Gamelyn*'s legal themes have tended to address themselves to 'the law' as such, and not the minutiae of different jurisdictions.[39] However,

the climax of the *Tale* is careful to distinguish between them. Jamie Taylor writes that the final courtroom drama enacts a confrontation with royal officials, in which Gamelyn supplants the judge: 'his status as "king of the outlaws" is thus rendered official, and Gamelyn is re-absorbed into the juridical authority of royal law.'[40] But at the end of the *Tale*, it is Ote, and not Gamelyn, whom the king names as judge. Gamelyn he appoints 'bothe in est and west, / Chef Iustice • of al his fre forest' (lines 890f.). By taking refuge in the forest, Gamelyn had escaped one jurisdiction, that of the sheriff and his officers, only to enter another one. His execution of the judge and jurors, and Ote's appointment to the shire court, resolve the first strand of the text's engagement with legal themes. This is that of the common law, associated with a town space populated by a justice, a jury, and 'scherreue', in which law is dispensed by a 'schire' court in 'the moot-halle' (lines 720, 715, 717). Gamelyn's reward from the king resolves the second strand: that of the forest law, associated with the forest as a space of simultaneous outlawry and sovereignty, of the pleasures of 'game'. We should note just how important a role 'Chef Iustice • of al [the king's] fre forest' was. Henry III had established two such justices, one for the forests north of the Trent, and one for those south of the Trent.[41] Gamelyn governs 'al' the forests, 'bothe in est and west'. The land is divided along a different axis; the scale of the post is, if anything, magnified. For Manwood, the office of Lord Chief Justice of the Forest was 'a place both of great honour and high authoritie, and that the same place is to bee executed by some great Peere of the Realme, that is always one of the Kings most honourable priuie Councell' (sig. Ff6ʳ). It is Ote, then, who gets a reward commensurate with the gentlemanly and provincial concerns that have often been seen to mark the outer limits of the narrative's worldview; he is made a dominant figure within his own community. Gamelyn is elevated out of all proportion with it. The conclusion of the *Tale* thus has a double character, since the familial drama that provides its point of origin is supplemented by a second thematic chain devoted to questions of sovereignty. Gamelyn's significant Other in this closing phase of the narrative is the king, just as much as it is his brother

What logic summons the king onto the scene of action? In part, it is that of the forest space itself. But we might also read the monarch's appearance retrospectively, in relation to the inheritance drama that initiates the narrative. What, after all, is *Gamelyn*, if not a vindication of the quasi-sovereign will of the testator? It begins with a deathbed tableau of rejected advice; opens out into scenes of violent conflict, as it works through the consequences of the defiance of the father's legacy; before concluding with the jubilant restoration of the rightful heir. That John of Boundys' will is itself characterized as perverse, existing outside the bounds of customary behaviour, merely underlines its absolute character. The *Tale of Gamelyn* might be described as a fantasia on what Blackstone's *Commentaries* were to call the 'sole and despotic dominion' involved in possession, and the absolute rights of disposal that accrue to it.[42]

V

We have been exploring the implications of 'game' generated by the relationships between the different environments imagined within *The Tale of Gamelyn*. But what of the *Tale* and the environment that contains it? Each of the surviving texts of *The Tale of Gamelyn* appears in a copy of *The Canterbury Tales*, almost invariably following the Cook's Prologue. *Gamelyn* is therefore tacitly positioned as a second 'Cook's Tale', and several manuscripts make the link explicit through running titles, headings, or transitional passages (Walter Skeat's designation of the poem as the 'Tale' of Gamelyn responds to this context). It is also evident, however, that *Gamelyn*'s status was in question from a very early stage: the manuscript record registers a number of hesitations about its relationship to 'The Cook's Tale', and it appears in no printed text of Chaucer until John Urry's *Works* of 1721. Modern scholarly opinion concurs in excluding *Gamelyn* from the Chaucerian canon.[43] Yet this need not preclude an investigation of how the *Tale* might relate to the Tales that house it, and to the values of Chaucerian 'play' more generally.

As in *Gamelyn*, the telling of 'The Cook's Tale' is identified as a matter of 'game and pley' (I.4354).[44] Furthermore, as is often noted, the tale-telling structure of *The Canterbury Tales* is explicitly proposed as a game. 'And wel I woot,' Harry Bailey suggests to the Canterbury pilgrims, 'as ye goon by the weye, / Ye shapen yow to talen and to pleye' (I.773f.). The Knight will 'bigynne the game' (I.853). 'Game', in this context, stands in contrast to 'earnest', as in the Miller's plea that 'men shal nat maken ernest of game' (I.3186). The opposition is formulaic, and reappears throughout Chaucer's writing. It has provided the cue for a series of modern studies that explore the importance accorded to game and play in Chaucer's writing, the tendency of which is to dissolve any stark distinction between game and earnest by positioning the former as a source of authentic value. Thus, Laura Kendrick's study of *Chaucerian Play* in the *Canterbury Tales* speaks of 'the meaningful *depths* of play and how man's creation and identification with unreal, fictional worlds helps him, not only to cope with the real world, but also to change himself and thereby, to some extent, the world'.[45] Yet Chaucerian 'game' has its more sinister connotations, too. *Troilus and Criseyde*, for instance, might be described as a tale of 'game' become earnest, play with tragic consequences. 'Game' is one of Pandarus' favourite words for describing the intrigue that forms the basis of the plot. 'A ha!' he exclaims, on the point of extracting from a reluctant Troilus the name of his love, 'Here bygynneth game' (I.868). When Criseyde agrees to stay overnight at her uncle's house, having previously made a show of leaving – and possibly knowing that Troilus is not, as is claimed, away from Troy – she states that 'I seyde but a-game I wolde go' (III.647). 'Game', here, suggests both a sense of social life as delightfully sportive and its correlate: a gloss of quotidian deceit, so ubiquitous as to make it impossible to pinpoint the line of division between deception and self-deception. In both the *Canterbury Tales* and *Troilus and Criseyde*, 'play' and 'game' figure as agents of sociability. They describe forms of pleasurable interaction that

bear the potential to open out into something far more consequential, whether in a positive or a negative vein.

The Tale of Gamelyn thus bears no straightforward relationship to this understanding of 'play' and 'game'. It is true that it identifies itself as a pleasurable narrative, just as The Canterbury Tales do. It is also true that the Tale is constructed out of the punning interplay of the senses of a small number of key words. At the same time, though, its foregrounding of the association between game and violence stands at odds with the liberal values – the play of alternate perspectives – that modern criticism would like to discover in medieval 'game'. The Tale of Gamelyn is, in Chaucerian terms, a profoundly unplayful text, bearing a far more antagonistic relationship to questions of deception than any of the texts that accompany it in the manuscript tradition. Its commitment to 'trouthe' (line 678) is manifested most obviously through the staggering gullibility of its protagonist. John the younger tells Gamelyn that, although he now wishes to be reconciled, he had earlier vowed 'That thou schuldest be bounde • bothe hand and foot'. 'Lat me nought be forsworen,' he pleads (lines 374–6). Oblivious to the ruse, Gamelyn permits himself to be captured. When Gamelyn escapes from his bonds, it is Adam who proposes the 'good game' that tests John's guests: the deceit is externalized and transferred to a subordinate. We might note too that while the guests at the feast fail in charity, John has told the abbots and priors that Gamelyn is insane. They are deceived too, and have no reason to free him. Gamelyn knows this, and beats them regardless. The ambivalences of will and action that attach to 'game' in Chaucer hold no force here.

We can see a similar movement in relation to Gamelyn's generic antecedents. Throughout the European tradition, romances align game and play with questions of political hierarchy and sexual encounter and with the game-playing endemic to sociable interaction. Frequently, chess figures as an analogue for courtship or effective rule. Equally, it might emblematize a breakdown of social order: in Chrétien's Perceval, Gauvain defends himself against a mob using a chessboard.[46] The game of the hunt occupies a similar symbolic territory. In Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, for instance, it offers a violent counterpoint to the seemingly more innocuous manoeuvrings at Hautdesert.[47] The Tale of Gamelyn bears obvious affinities with these texts, given its identification of social space as a space of game. At the same time, however, it rejects the implication that social life can or should be organized through structures of playful pretence. Gamelyn is an entirely uncourtly romance – to the point that some commentators have identified it as a 'popular' text.[48] That seems to misread the Tale's ultimate social affiliations. (Gamelyn's one attempt to engage with the populace, at a wrestling match, produces a fraternity of pleasure that dissolves as soon as he can no longer feast the companions he acquires there.) Yet there is a sense in which one might detect an aesthetic of deliberate crudity and recalcitrance at work in the text. In Gamelyn the structural antithesis of 'game' is not 'earnest', but 'gyle'. John the younger's efforts to keep Gamelyn from his inheritance are repeatedly identified as such: 'Nothing wiste Gamelyn,' we read, 'of his brothers gyle; / Therefore he him bigyled • in a litel while' (lines

369f.); he 'gyled the 30nge knave' (line 70).[49] Gamelyn's own characteristic verbal mode is declarative; he rarely even asks questions. Sir John the younger, by way of contrast, speaks 'with mowthe' only (line 163). The *Tale* thus argues for the extirpation of all non-straightforwardness from social life. On his deathbed, Sir John the elder tells his neighbours exactly how he would prefer his estate to be divided between his children – yet nobody, it seems, believes him. 'Game' is the name the poem gives to the violence that erupts as this falsity is purged from the narrative; it signifies a sort of rough glee in its destruction. In *The Tale of Gamelyn*, anything less than total transparency of speech – or at most a laboured, clearly signalled punning, as with Gamelyn's jests – elicits punitive physical violence. *Gamelyn* is unquestionably fun. It is also curiously mirthless. We search the poem in vain for fancy or lightness of touch, or the *jouissance* of language that 'game' might identify in a courtly text of the period, never mind of the qualities of mutuality and intersubjective encounter that 'play' designates for a theorist such as Johan Huizinga. The delights that the *Tale* imagines are those of some fourteenth-century Squire Western: physical dominance, and moral and social vindication. And yet, the *Tale* is itself, transparently, a lying fiction; it makes no claim to historical status. It is, in its way, a kind of anti-literature.

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NOTES

[1] See the discussion in *The Tale of Gamelyn*, ed. Walter W. Skeat (Oxford, 1884). This edition provides the source for my quotations from the *Tale*. I have also consulted Neil Daniel, '*The Tale of Gamelyn*: a new edition' (unpublished Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1967); the TEAMS edition of the poem to be found in *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, ed. Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren (Kalamazoo, Mich., 1997); and Nila Vázquez's *The Tale of Gamelyn of the Canterbury Tales: An Annotated Edition* (Lewiston, Queenston, and Lampeter, 2009).

[2] Matthew Giancarlo produces the same connection between protagonist and narrative that I want to argue for here when he writes: 'This is a fantasy for younger brothers. The young men who gather in the forest with Gamelyn are a striking image for all those (male) children cut out of the deal by the rules of the inheritance game.' See 'Speculative genealogies', in *Middle English*, ed. Paul Strohm (Oxford, 2009), pp. 352–68 (p. 361).

[3] *Homo ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (London, 1949), pp. 11, 10.

[4] William Camden places 'Gamelin' in a list of 'surnames [that] are derived from those Christian names which were in vse about the time of the Conquest, & are found in the Record calld Doomesday book'. See *Remaines of a Greater Worke …* (London, 1605), sig. Q1ʳ; and see also Skeat's comments in his introduction (ix).

[5] *Middle English Dictionary*, s.v. 'game' (n.) 5. I have consulted the online *Middle English Dictionary* (*MED*), accessible at: http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/.

[6] *MED* 1 and 2a.

[7] Edward Z. Menkin, 'Comic irony and the sense of two audiences in the *Tale of Gamelyn*', *Thoth*, 10 (1969), 41–53 (p. 43) notes that Gamelyn's 'very name is a play on the Old English "gamen" (sport, pleasure, amusement)'.

[8] *MED* 3a.

[9] See *MED*, s.v. 'plei(e' (n) 1a: 'Merriment, disport; joy, pleasure'; 2: 'The play of children'; 3: 'Games, a game'; 4a: 'Martial play, martial games; a martial game or field game; hawking, hunting, a ball game; also, a joust, tournament; – also with ironic reference to real combat.' See also 'ple' (n) 1a: 'Strife, contention, complaint; a debate, quarrel; also, fighting, battle.'

[10] John Scattergood, '*The Tale of Gamelyn*: the noble robber as provincial hero', in *Readings in Medieval Literature*, ed. Carol M. Meale (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 159–94 (p. 176). Jean E. Joost, 'Why is Middle English romance so violent? The literary and aesthetic purposes of violence', in *Violence in Medieval Courtly Literature: A Casebook*, ed. Albrecht Classen (New York and London, 2004), pp. 241–67 (p. 251).

[11] Most editors follow Skeat here. It is the first but not the last such indication of his influence on his scholarly descendants and of the determinative force of the legacy contained in his glosses. Daniel offers: 'He had good breeding and knew much about sport' (p. 110). Knight and Ohlgren suggest that the line means that Sir John 'knew about breeding and sport' (p. 194). Vázquez gives: 'he had a refined education and … he was familiar with sport, probably hunting and other types of amusement of the high social classes in the Middle Ages' (p. 294). Jean E. Joost paraphrases the line as 'enough of good breeding and much concerning sport' (p. 247). By leaving open the exact sense in which they understand the word 'breeding', all but Vázquez are plausibly gesturing towards the kind of multiple field of reference explored in this essay.

[12] See *MED*, s.v. 'inough' (adv.) a: 'Very, very much, extremely, a great deal'; b: 'enough, sufficiently'; also e: 'moderately, fairly, tolerably …'

[13] 'Ynough' does not appear in any of the other nine manuscripts consulted in Vázquez's 'synoptic edition'.

[14] *MED*, s.v. 'norture' (n.) 1: 'Nourishment, food; also *fig.*'

[15] *The Testament of Love*, ed. Gary W. Shawver (Toronto, 2002), p. 48. See also *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Oxford, 1987), *Troilus and Criseyde*, IV.767f.

[16] *MED*, s.v. 'husbondri(e' (n.) 1: 'The management of a household'; 2a: 'Farm, management, farming operations, agriculture'; 2b: 'cultivation'.

[17] *MED*, s.v. 'norture' (n.) 2: 'The action or responsibility of rearing a child'; 3a: 'Breeding, manners, courtesy'.

[18] See *The Romaunt of the Rose*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, line 179.

[19] See *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, ed. W. R. J. Barron (Manchester, 1974), line 919; Sir Thomas Malory, *Works*, ed. Eugène Vinaver, 2nd edn, 3 vols (Oxford, 1967), I, 375.

[20] John Russell, *The Boke of Nurture*, in *The Babees Book, Aristotle's ABC, Urbanitatis, Stans puer ad mensam, the Lytille Childrens Lytil Boke*, ed. F. J. Furnivall (London, 1868), lines 859f.

[21] Edward, 2nd Duke of York, *The Master of Game by Edward, Second Duke of York: The Oldest Book on Hunting*, ed. Wm. A. Baillie-Grohman and F. Baillie-Grohman, foreword Theodore Roosevelt (London, 1904), p. 3.

[22] *The Boke of Saint Albans by Dame Julia Berners Containing Treatises on Hawking, Hunting, and Cote Armour*, introd. William Blades (London, 1881), sig. E3ᵛ.

[23] Meanwhile, T. A. Shippey floats the possibility in relation to line four that 'game' understood in the sense of 'sexual intercourse' (*MED* 2d) might indicate that Gamelyn is a 'game-ling' or love child, which would serve to call Sir John's 'husbandry' into question in

quite another sense. At any rate, it is useful to be reminded that Sir John is literally 'non housbond': his wife seems to be dead, and the *Tale* is notable for its near-total exclusion of all women. Whatever game is entered into here, it is one played between men. See '*The Tale of Gamelyn*: class warfare and the embarrassments of genre', in *The Spirit of Medieval English Popular Romance*, ed. Ad Putter and Jane Gilbert (Harlow, 2000), pp. 78–96 (p. 87).

[24] On poaching, see Barbara Hanawalt, 'Men's games, king's deer: poaching in medieval England', *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 18/2 (1988), 175–93. Hanawalt emphasizes that 'poaching is a game – a dangerous, titillating game of hide and seek' (p. 175). For Hanawalt, poaching exists within the larger 'game' of medieval hunting culture, because it is an activity that works to reinforce status and gender identities, even as it transgresses the actual laws of the forest. I would agree, but would add that Russell's *Boke* is committed to at least imagining a distinction between behaviours within and outside an order of game. The point is nicely made when Hanawalt mentions a case in which 'the foresters came across a boy, Roger the son of Lawrence of Wadenhoe, in the forest carrying a bow and barbed arrows, and a Welsh arrow'. For Hanawalt, this relates to 'the triumphal rite of passage in taking a first deer' (p. 185). In contrast, Russell's nameless youth is imagined as socially isolated – without master or, apparently, family. His poaching is a mark of disconnectedness, rather than a paradoxical signifier of communal identity, as it is for Hanawalt.

[25] Details taken from: *The Boke of Nurture*, lines 77f., 201, 237–52, 261, 393; and *The Master of Game*, pp. 17, 101.

[26] Here again Skeat's heirs speak largely as one. Daniel says that 'Boundys' 'means "limit" or "boundary" … and might signify a man of the marches or borderland' (p. 110). Knight and Ohlgren comment that Sir John's name should mean 'of the boundaries' or 'of the borders' – adding, however, that this 'is not very informative, especially since it is obscure where this story is set' (p. 220). Other critics play on Sir John's name in ways similar to those I attempt here. Dean A. Hoffman writes of the porter scene that 'Gamelyn is now literally separated from his property by a barrier which physically conveys the division between the two brothers [the gate] and the larger dimensions of the forest and the enclosed demesne. In this light, *The Tale of Gamelyn* may be viewed in a broader sense as a narrative of opposites and of the demarcation between them, a notion given further resonance by the divided line structure and the elder knight's family name, "of Boundys" or "of the boundaries".' '"After bale comeþ boote": narrative symmetry in *The Tale of Gamelyn*', *Studia Neophilologica*, 60 (1988), 159–66 (p. 161). Meanwhile, Nancy Mason Bradbury argues that the name 'suits Sir John's position at the very margins of medieval elite society'. See 'Gamelyn', in *Heroes and Anti-Heroes in Medieval Romance*, ed. Neil Cartlidge (Cambridge, 2012), pp. 129–44 (p. 131).

[27] Noël James Menuge argues that Sir John does practise primogeniture, albeit in a limited sense: what he passes on to John the younger is the land he inherited from his father. Ote gets the land won on campaign. Gamelyn gets what Sir John has added to his estate during his lifetime. See his *Medieval English Wardship in Romance and Law* (Cambridge, 2001), p. 52.

[28] The phrase is repeated at lines 18 and 36.

[29] Naomi Sykes emphasizes this point: 'At every stage of the process people knew, and were reminded of, their place within society: different ranks had different roles within the hunt itself … the framework was hierarchical and the individual would have known his place, but it was a place *within* a group.' See 'Taking sides: the social life of venison in medieval England', in *Breaking and Shaping Beastly Bodies: Animals as Material Culture in the Middle Ages*, ed. Aleksander Pluskowski (Oxford, 2007), pp. 149–60 (p. 155). See also William Perry Martin, *Hunting Law and Ritual in Medieval English Literature* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 144, on the 'fees' and 'rights' of the hunt; Ryan R. Judkins, 'The game of the courtly hunt: chasing and

breaking deer in late medieval English literature', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 112/1 (2013), 70–92, which explores the importance of 'game' to the social significance of the hunt (see especially pp. 74f.); and Susan Crane, *Animal Encounters: Contacts and Concepts in Medieval Britain* (Philadelphia, Pa, 2013), pp. 101–19, which places a strong emphasis upon the hierarchical ideology latent in hunting practices.

[30] The common law did not recognize the power to devise land by will until 1540. However, by the fourteenth century this restriction had been effectively circumvented through the practice of uses, whereby real property would be granted to friends or neighbours who undertook to reassign it in accordance with the original tenant's wishes after his death. The result was a system that effectively permitted the bequeathing of land by will. And so it proves in *Gamelyn*. Sir John's assembling of his neighbours plausibly stands in for the grant of land in use, but his deathbed arrangements are clearly identified with the last will. 'I will dele my londe • right after my will,' he declares (line 56), before insisting his 'quest' or bequest be honoured after his death.

[31] See S. A. Mileson, *Parks in Medieval England* (Oxford, 2009). Mileson aims to challenge accounts that argue for the medieval park as a rational economic asset, although he does not deny that parks could be exploited in ways that offset the high costs of deer-keeping.

[32] A mere coincidence: Russell's *Boke of Nurture* makes reference to 'Sawce gamelyñ' (line 539), otherwise known as 'sauce camelin', made of bread and vinegar, flavoured with cinnamon and to be eaten with a variety of different wildfowl (herons, egrets, cranes, and plovers, among others) – but also, according to a number of French-language treatises on cookery from the period, a fitting accompaniment to a dish of game. 'All fresh venison which is [roasted and] not basted is eaten with a cameline sauce,' declares one fifteenth-century manuscript. See *Le Menagier de Paris*, ed. Georgine E. Brereton and Janet M. Ferrier, foreword by Beryl Smalley (Oxford, 1981), p. 227: 'Toute venoison fresche, sans baciner, se mengue a la cameline.'

[33] *Anglo-Norman Political Songs*, ed. Isabel S. T. Aspin (Oxford, 1953), pp. 67–78.

[34] *A Treatise of the Lawes of the Forest …* (London, 1615), sigs. G3^v, ¶4^r.

[35] On forest law, I have relied upon J. Charles Cox, *The Royal Forests of England* (London, 1905); Richard W. Kaeuper, 'Forest Law', in *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, ed. Joseph R. Strayer, 13 vols (New York, 1982–9), V, 127–31; and Marvin, *Hunting Law and Ritual*.

[36] The forest also supplies the ground for a discourse about space as such, in which its status as a special jurisdictional zone is heightened to the point of paradox. What, asks Manwood, is a forest? It is a bounded space, a territory of ground, 'meered and bounded with vnremoueable markes, meres, and boundaries' (sig. C2^r). But how, we might wonder, can meres and bounds mark the edges of marks, meres, and bounds? The problem recurs within Manwood's discussion of individual terms: a 'mere', for instance, is defined as 'a distance or place betweene the kings forest, and such things, wherein the king shall haue no interest' (sig. C5^v); but at the same time, 'the mere of the Forest is a parcel of the forest' (sig. H1^{r-v}). Etymologically, a forest is an enclosure for Manwood. 'The Latinists,' he writes, 'haue framed this latin word, *Foresta*, for a Forest, being compounded of those two words, *fera*, and *Statio*, so that *Foresta, est ferarum Statio*, which is, that a Forest is a safe abiding place for wild beast' (D8^r). Yet there were, and are, other etymologies. As Corinne Saunders notes, the word's derivation from the Latin *foris*, 'out of doors', is commonly accepted. However, 'a case has also been made for the alternative Latin etymology *forum*, implying "under public jurisdiction", and for a German etymology *forst*, from either *forth*, "to hold", or *föhren*, "a wooded stretch of land".' See *The Forest of Medieval Romance: Avernus, Broceliande, Arden* (Cambridge, 1993), p. 1 n. 1. Saunders later amplifies the significance of *foris*: to be outside is to be 'not privately owned land' (p. 6). See also Robert Pogue Harrison, *Forests:*

The Shadow of Civilization (Chicago, Ill., 1992), who comments that 'the royal forests lay "outside" in another sense as well, for the space enclosed by the walls of a royal garden was sometimes called *silva*, or wood. *Forestis silva* meant unenclosed woods "outside" the walls' (p. 69). Is a forest a space of private enclosure, or one of common ownership? Does it imply exteriority or containment?

[37] Giorgio Agamben, *Homo sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, Calif., 1998), pp. 104f.

[38] Strikingly, it is only at the end of the *Tale* that this space is named as a 'forest' (line 891). Hitherto the word used for the outlaws' territory has been 'woode'. Geraldine Barnes argues that this terminological shift 'signifies the transition of Gamelyn's sphere of authority from the marginal society of the greenwood to legally defined territory', when he is rewarded by the king. See *Counsel and Strategy in Middle English Romance* (Cambridge, 1993), p. 49.

[39] See for example Edgar F. Shannon, Jr, 'Medieval law in the *Tale of Gamelyn*', *Speculum*, 26/3 (1951), 458–64; Kaeuper, 'Forest law'; and Scattergood, '*The Tale of Gamelyn*', pp. 166f.

[40] Jamie Taylor, 'Neighbours, witnesses, and outlaws in the later Middle Ages', *English Language Notes*, 48/2 (2010), 85–97 (p. 93).

[41] Kaeuper, 'Forest law', p. 129.

[42] *Commentaries on the Laws of England. Book the Second* (Oxford, 1768), p. 2.

[43] See A. S. G. Edwards, 'The *Canterbury Tales* and *Gamelyn*', in *Medieval Latin and Middle English Literature: Essays in Honour of Jill Mann*, ed. Christopher Cannon and Maura Nolan (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 76–90; Daryl T. Green, '"And forgetith not Gamelyn my yonge sone that is": scribal confusion and reception of the *Tale of Gamelyn*' (unpublished MA diss., University of York, 2007); and Andrew Higl, *Playing the Canterbury Tales: The Continuations and Additions* (Farnham, 2012), pp. 155–66.

[44] See also I.4357, 4384, 4420. 'The Cook's Tale' is richly populated with the language of play and game, and whatever the story behind the relationship between the two texts, in this respect it makes an entirely apt match for *Gamelyn*.

[45] *Chaucerian Play: Comedy and Control in the Canterbury Tales* (Berkeley, Calif., 1988), p. 3.

[46] On chess and romance, see Megan G. Leitch, 'Ritual, revenge and the politics of chess in medieval romance', in *Medieval Romance and Material Culture*, ed. Nicholas Perkins (Cambridge, 2015), pp. 129–46.

[47] On play in *Gawain* generally, see Martin Stevens, 'Laughter and game in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*', *Speculum*, 47/1 (1972), 65–78; and – for a discussion of the poem's games with questions of value – Jill Mann, 'Price and value in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*', *Essays in Criticism*, 36 (1986), 294–318.

[48] See for example Bradbury, 'Gamelyn', p. 130.

[49] Much later in the story, Gamelyn's porter is 'adrad of gyle' (line 562). However, Gamelyn orders him to open his gate to the sheriff's men, for then, he promises, 'thou schalt see … a gyle' (line 580). It is possibly the only time in the poem when 'gyle' is tacitly aligned with 'game', rather than standing in opposition to it.