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Renaissance Futures:

Chance, Prediction, and Play in Northern European Visual Culture, c. 1480-1550

By Jessen Lee Kelly

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction

of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

History of Art

in the Graduate Division of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Elizabeth Honig, Chair

Professor Whitney Davis

Professor Niklaus Largier

Fall 2011

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## **Abstract**

Renaissance Futures:  
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By Jessen Lee Kelly

Doctor of Philosophy in History of Art  
University of California, Berkeley

Professor Elizabeth Honig, Chair

This dissertation examines the relationships between chance and visual culture during the Northern Renaissance, focusing on the use of images in the deliberate, ritualized application of chance in games and divination. I argue that, prior to the development of probability theory in the seventeenth century, images served a critical function in encountering and negotiating uncertainties about the future. The casting of lots for prognostication and play was nothing new in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Yet, aided in part by the growing print industry, the period witnessed the development of new and varied forms for these practices, forms that were increasingly pictorial in character. A series of case studies examines the popular media of chance, such as playing cards, game boards, and divinatory devices. In addition, I connect these objects to works by major artists of the period in order to assert the importance of chance for the development of early modern artistic production. Just as images helped stage a confrontation with future contingency in play and divination, artists also began to experiment with the construction of time and narrative in pictorial representation. In Northern Europe in particular, the rise of visual media for chance coincides with the emergence of artistic subjects that were not bound to pre-established or predictable narratives and, significantly, often incorporated references to games of chance and fortune's mutability.

Taken together, these phenomena not only point to the importance of chance and futurity in the development of early modern art and visuality, they also suggest crucial but neglected epistemological, social, and aesthetic aspects of image-making and use. These aspects have remained largely unexamined due to the traditional view of the Renaissance as a period defined by its relationship to the past of classical antiquity. This project thus seeks to recast our understanding of Renaissance temporality by pointing to the future as a key impetus within the visual culture of the period.

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## Introduction

In approaching the uncertainty of the future, we often appeal to numbers. The development of mathematical probability in the seventeenth century—the beginning of what Ian Hacking has called “the taming of chance”—has enabled a certain statistical management and apprehension of contingent possibilities.<sup>1</sup> As a method of calculation, probability offers a means of quantifying expectations about future occurrences that are not subject to necessity. The ability to both determine and assess the odds for everything from meteorology to political events is deeply ingrained in our daily habits. It has shaped both our conceptual images of chance and the future and our relationships to them. Although we tend to grant these calculations an objective authority, probability is ultimately, as Thomas Kavanagh has emphasized, a system of representation, one that attempts to offer access to the future in the form of mathematical reckoning.<sup>2</sup>

Although widely applicable to a variety of situations, as a mode of representation probability has some of its most fundamental origins in an extremely widespread activity throughout the early modern period: the aleatory (or chance) casting of lots in diceplay. In their famed correspondence of 1654, Blaise Pascal and Pierre Fermat arrived at an initial formulation of mathematical probability by considering a problem pertaining to gambling: if a game of dice is disrupted before its conclusion, then how should one divide the remaining stakes among the players?<sup>3</sup> While the prevalence of gambling in social life rendered this problem a relevant subject of analysis, for Pascal and Fermat the appeal of diceplay was also due to its own representational status: by virtue of the relatively circumscribed possibilities afforded by the six sides of the die, the game of dice offered an especially distilled and contained model of the chance event.<sup>4</sup> The throw of the dice dramatically stages the chance event and its characteristic lack of a clear connection between cause and effect. Performing both the experience of the uncertain future and its eventual resolution for participants, diceplay deliberately invokes and structures the unfolding of an event with an unknown outcome. Probability theory used gambling with dice as the impetus and framework for its representational forms, thereby construing gambling as a platform for its own brand of divination.

Though Pascal and Fermat constitute an important future of some of the material I will consider, this is not an account of the eventual “arrival” of European thought at mathematical probability after centuries of misguided conceptions of chance.<sup>5</sup> Instead, this study is concerned

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<sup>1</sup> Ian Hacking, *The Taming of Chance* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); and also Ian Hacking, *The Emergence of Probability: A Philosophical Study of Early Ideas about Probability, Induction, and Statistical Inference* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Kavanagh, *Enlightenment in the Shadows of Chance: The Novel and the Culture of Gambling in Eighteenth-Century France* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 14-15.

<sup>3</sup> For an account of this correspondence, see Lorraine Daston, *Classical Probability in the Enlightenment* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988), 15-19.

<sup>4</sup> On the dice game as a model of the chance event, see David F. Bell, “Pascal: Causistry, Probability, Uncertainty,” *The Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 28, no. 1 (1998), 37-8.

<sup>5</sup> Historical studies of chance and probability are often preoccupied with the question of why it took so long for the mathematical approach to be formulated. Such approaches not only naturalize what I would argue is a historically-specific framing of chance and futurity, they also pronounce—whether implicitly or explicitly—a negative judgment on the preceding periods. See, for example, Hacking *The Emergence of Probability*; and F.N. David, *Games, Gods, and Gambling: The Origins and History of Probability from the Earliest Times to the Newtonian Era* (London:

with the casting of lots in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Northern Europe. If I begin with a consideration of probability here, I do so in order to begin to denaturalize and contextualize it, and to demonstrate how the representations framing chance-based practices can profoundly shape conceptions of time and futurity.

Although probability is now thoroughly integrated into our daily habits, this conception of time was largely unknown in the later Middle Ages and Renaissance. I contend that, prior to the formulation of mathematical probability, images formed a vital framework for aleatory rituals and, as such, a principal means of encountering and apprehending chance and its related concepts of *fortuna* and future contingents. Inquiring into the visual, material, and epistemological dimensions of prognostication and play, this project treats the self-conscious ritualized application of chance as a future-oriented practice that illuminates and shapes temporal, social, and perceptual experience. In order to pursue this claim, I examine the varied popular culture of the casting of lots, such as game boards, playing cards, and fortune-telling devices. But I also connect these objects to the work of major Northern artists of the period in order to argue for the significance of chance and its ritualized invocation to the larger development of early modern artistic production.

The appeal to aleatory methods to engage with the future was certainly nothing new in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, as the casting of lots already had an extensive history dating to ancient societies. Yet late medieval and Renaissance Europe witnessed a remarkable growth in the demand for and production of aleatory forms. Facilitated in part by the developing print industry, these forms were increasingly visual in character, as, for instance, in the expanding trade in playing cards and illustrated fortune-telling devices. In the North in particular, this concern for uncertain futures was not limited to such practical objects but coincided with the emergence of new forms of representation in painting and printmaking, forms in which prospective ambiguity was of similar importance. In the early sixteenth century, a range of earthly subjects began to appear in the pictorial arts, subjects that frequently lacked a clear, pre-existing narrative source. If images helped stage the confrontation with chance in acts of gambling and divination, artists also began to experiment with ways of visually structuring similar experiences in narrative representation, often using themes of fortune and games of chance to do so.

During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, there were a variety of methods for attempting to predict what, as yet, remained outside of mortal vision. In his influential critique of divinatory methods in the *Summa Theologica*, Thomas Aquinas identified three main types of prognostication.<sup>6</sup> The first, necromancy, involves the summoning of spirits. The second, which he called augury, is based on the evaluation of visible signs that are ready-made in nature or on the body, as in practices of astrology or chiromancy. Only the third, the casting of lots, or “sortilege,” requires “the actions of man.” It involves practitioners in the time-based construction *and* interpretation of signs—casting dice, throwing sticks in random patterns, or opening a book to a page and pointing at the text, listed among them.<sup>7</sup> For Aquinas, then, it was the role of specifically human performance and artifice that distinguished the casting of lots from other forms of divination. In limiting my considerations to the casting of lots, I focus on a technique

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Charles Griffin, 1962). This idea also inflects the more wide-ranging study, Gerda Reith, *Age of Chance: Gambling in Western Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

<sup>6</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. the Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 22 vols. (London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne, 1912-36), IIa.IIae.95,3.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. IIa.IIae.95,8.

that has special relevance to artistic practice as a method that entails deliberate making and reception of representations.

To examine the materials of aleatory divination and play in the Renaissance is to investigate a widespread function for artifacts that has thus far been neglected in scholarly inquiry. Historical and literary studies have recently begun to address issues of chance and future time in medieval and early modern Europe, significantly calling attention to the diverse philosophical, aesthetic, and practical facets of these topics.<sup>8</sup> Yet the sources discussed in these works are primarily textual; visual and material culture remain largely outside of the purview of the investigations. Although, in art history, H.W. Janson has explored the discourse on images made by chance in the Middle Ages and Renaissance, chance and its invocation have entered art historical scholarship almost exclusively as a facet of modern and contemporary practices of art making.<sup>9</sup> In this context, chance methods have been employed by artists to, for instance, reflect on notions of authorship, to parody aesthetic norms or established art institutions, or to explore relationships between art and technology.<sup>10</sup>

The absence of chance in studies on fifteenth- and sixteenth-century contexts may be due in part, however, to traditional interpretations of the period. Indeed, the orientation toward future time that is played out in the casting of lots is at odds with one of the more fundamental principles of art historical inquiry and periodization—namely, that the Renaissance is defined by its distinctive interest in the *past*, an interest that is exemplified by the renewal of classical antiquity and the changed relationship to time that this renewal is understood to represent.<sup>11</sup> Thus art historical discussions of the Renaissance have often focused on questions of ancient style and sources, archaeological endeavors, and the changing sense of history. In this schema, the image is assessed as a vehicle for engaging with the past, and time and referentiality are primarily retrospective, moving back to what once was.

The question of the Renaissance sense of time is a traditional and even foundational one in the history of art as a discipline, but it has itself recently been revived in a number of interesting studies that address both the historical and historiographic dimensions of the

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<sup>8</sup> Edited collections such as John D. Lyons and Kathleen Wine, eds., *Chance, Literature and Culture in Early Modern France* (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2009); and Andrea Brady and Emily Butterworth, eds., *The Uses of the Future in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2009) both indicate the richness of the themes through a range of perspectives. The essays are largely focused on later sixteenth- and seventeenth-century subjects. Also significant for my purposes is the collection by Ian P. Wei and J.A. Burrow, eds., *Medieval Futures: Attitudes to the Future in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2000), which helped inspire the title for my own project.

<sup>9</sup> H.W. Janson, "The 'Image Made by Chance' in Renaissance Thought," in *De Artibus Opuscula XL. Essays in Honor of Erwin Panofsky*, ed. Millard Meiss (New York: New York University Press, 1961), 254-66.

<sup>10</sup> This of course touches only very briefly on a range of approaches that utilize chance methods. For an array of perspectives on chance in modern and contemporary art, see the recent textual anthology edited by Margaret Iversen, ed. *Chance, Whitechapel: Documents of Contemporary Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2010); and the catalogue edited by Bernhard Holeczek and Lida von Mengden, eds., *Zufall als Prinzip: Spielwelt, Methode, und System in der Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Heidelberg: Braus, 1992). For chance as it pertains to Dada and Surrealism in particular, see Harriet Ann Watts, "Chance: A Perspective on Dada" (Ph.D., University of Texas at Austin, 1975); and, for the notion of "objective chance" in Surrealism, Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993), esp. chapter 2.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Erwin Panofsky, "Renaissance and Renascences," in *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art* (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiskell, 1960), 42-113; and Aby Warburg, *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity: Contributions to the Cultural History of the European Renaissance* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 1999).

problem.<sup>12</sup> Some of the most elaborate and notable contributions to this renewed concern have been put forth by Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood. In a series of collaborative and individual studies, Nagel and Wood articulate a complex reinterpretation of late medieval and Renaissance temporality based on what they refer to as the theory of substitution.<sup>13</sup> Briefly put, this theory holds that medieval and Renaissance artifacts that possessed the same referent existed in a “chain of replicas,” in which one object in the chain could be substituted for another without altering its value or signification. Thus a work known to be of very recent production and decidedly different stylistic appearance could still be perceived as “ancient” as long as it had a place in a procession of substitutions that led, however vaguely, to a point of origin. To this they contrast the performative model that emerged in the Renaissance, that of the artistic creation that, by virtue of its uniqueness, is impervious to substitution.<sup>14</sup>

Wood and Nagel present an extremely eloquent and sophisticated account of these models, and their work offers a nuanced challenge to long-held notions of chronology, authenticity, and referentiality. Moreover, they present their arguments through an impressive array of artifacts that goes beyond the standard canon of humanistic and antique-inspired works. Yet, despite these innovations, they focus almost exclusively on how artifacts were understood to mediate the historical past, even as they propose a sweeping scope of application for their temporal and interpretive models. Although they do assert that substitution could operate prophetically, future time is treated directly only briefly.<sup>15</sup> In this sense, their studies remain very much governed by the traditional interpretation of the Renaissance.

In focusing on the casting of lots in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, I not only aim to assert the significance of the future for a reconsideration of Renaissance temporality. I also wish to highlight the ways in which the perception of future time poses unique problems and is not simply an extension of the logics governing the time of the past. It may be, as Wood and Nagel suggest, that the substitutional model can be applied to prophecy in the form of typology or *figura*, but this is ultimately only one notion of futurity at work during the period in question.<sup>16</sup> Since classical antiquity, many thinkers have noted the peculiar nature of future time and the epistemological problems it can pose, and conceptions of chance and contingency were vital to

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<sup>12</sup> The renewal of this discourse is at least in part attributable to the work of Georges Didi-Huberman, who has not only taken up the notions of time informing the work of Aby Warburg (one of the main theorists of the Renaissance sense of antiquity), but also explored the multiple and anachronistic construction of time at work in, for example, the art of Fra Angelico. See Georges Didi-Huberman, *L'image survivante: Histoire de l'Art et Temps Fantômes selon Aby Warburg* (Paris: Minuit, 2002); and Georges Didi-Huberman, *Devant le Temps: L'Histoire de l'Art et Anachronisme des Images* (Paris: Minuit, 2000). Aspects of these arguments can also be found in Georges Didi-Huberman, "Artistic Survival: Panofsky vs. Warburg and the Exorcism of Impure Time," *Common Knowledge* 9, no. 2 (2003): 273-285; and Georges Didi-Huberman, "Before the Image, Before Time: The Sovereignty of Anachronism," in *Compelling Visuality: The Work of Art in and Out of History*, ed. Claire Farago and Robert Zwijnenberg (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 31-44.

<sup>13</sup> See Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood, "Toward a New Model of Renaissance Anachronism," *Art Bulletin* 87, no. 3 (2005): 403-415; Christopher Wood, *Forgery, Replica, Fiction: Temporalities of German Renaissance Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008); and Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2010).

<sup>14</sup> Explications of these models are provided throughout their studies, but the article "Toward a New Model of Renaissance Anachronism" offers a succinct articulation of the complex formulation.

<sup>15</sup> In *Forgery, Replica, Fiction*, Wood notes the use of images as providing a prophetic connection with the future, but does not substantially elaborate on this notion (see. Pages 362-66).

<sup>16</sup> Wood and Nagel invoke Erich Auerbach's notion of *figura* and typology in "Toward a New Model of Renaissance Anachronism," 409. See Erich Auerbach, "'Figura,'" in *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 11-78.



the future's special character. Augustine, for example, asserted that the past and the future are ontologically symmetrical in that they exist only subjectively and not in the world. But he also suggested that we adopt a different relationship to each, encountering the past through memory and the future through expectation.<sup>17</sup> His discussion of time implies further distinctions. He speaks of memory as something pertaining to singular events and that possess a more concrete indexicality: recollections are impressions that are "like footprints in their passage through the senses."<sup>18</sup> In the case of future time, however, Augustine confines his reflections to larger natural patterns, such as the daily rising of the sun. He thereby implicitly acknowledges the difficulty of conceiving of the future outside of pattern and identity. If, as Aristotle argued, proper knowledge pertains to causes, then knowledge is the ability to observe and identify the logic connecting cause and effect, in order to understand the past origins of phenomenon but also to be able to predict the future: identifying the presence of certain causal factors allows for the projection of effects in a rational pattern.<sup>19</sup> The future, then, is knowable insofar as it conforms to this pattern and thus exists in the image and likeness of the past. Chance challenges both the rational patterning of phenomena and the mimetic relationship between past and future, such that the latter cannot be subsumed into the former.

Aquinas, though he would not contest the workings of Divine Providence, nevertheless suggested that the past and the present appear to us as endowed with a necessity that the future often lacks.<sup>20</sup> The experience of the future as a site of contingency, and not necessity, acknowledges the possibility that the future may turn out otherwise than stated or expected. It has a long history in philosophical and theological thought. In Aristotle's writings, too, the future presented peculiar difficulties, which he articulated in the problem of future contingents: how can we assess the truth of statements about events that have yet to occur? If a statement about the future is true, then is this future also somehow necessary, thus compromising our free will? This problem was contentiously debated throughout the Middle Ages and early Renaissance in relation to Divine Providence and necessity in particular, and formed an important aspect of notions of chance.<sup>21</sup>

For his part, Aquinas asserted that the problematic nature of contingent futures positioned them outside of the realm of legitimate forms of knowledge. Whereas future events that occur by necessity or most of the time can be "foreknown by human reason . . . there can be no true arts or sciences of other [i.e., contingent] future events." The theologian instead relegated claims about these futures to the province of divination, which he regarded with extreme suspicion and indignation. Indeed, the difficulties posed by the contingency of the future provided an important basis for Aquinas's condemnation of divination on both intellectual and moral grounds: rather than permitting true knowledge, divination offers only "vain inventions of the devil's deceit."<sup>22</sup>

Thus there were a range of perspectives on the singular epistemological status of future time in the Middle Ages and Renaissance. Each suggests the ways in which chance could challenge prevalent notions of knowledge as well as models of representation based on mimesis,

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<sup>17</sup> Augustine, *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, trans. Albert Cook Outler (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955), X.xxviii.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, X.xviii.

<sup>19</sup> Aristotle's remarks on causality can be found in the *Metaphysics* V.2; and *Physics*, II.3.

<sup>20</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, IIa.IIae.49, 6.

<sup>21</sup> For the problem of future contingents, see W.L. Craig, *The Problem of Divine Foreknowledge and Future Contingents from Aristotle to Suarez* (Leiden: Brill, 1988); Léon Baudry, ed. *The Quarrel over Future Contingents (Louvain, 1465-1475): Unpublished Texts* (Boston: Kluwer, 1989).

<sup>22</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, IIa.IIae.95, 1.

identity, or other modes of likeness. Images and artifacts deployed in the casting of lots at once engaged with and occupied this vexed epistemological territory.

The shift in temporal emphasis I am undertaking in this project—from past to future—is additionally accompanied by a shift in geographical emphasis in the traditional narrative of the period, as I center my narrative primarily in the Low Countries and Germany in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, rather than in the Italian peninsula. There are both historical and historiographic motivations for this focus. Italian developments do figure occasionally into this study, and certain threads of inquiry are quite applicable to the southern European contexts. Yet, by directing my investigation to Northern Europe, I am in part attempting to account for a period that often escapes standard art historical categories and periodization. Not strongly conforming to either “medieval” or “Renaissance” criteria, the Low Countries and Germany offer an excellent perspective to reconsider the traditional temporal emphases of art historical scholarship. Historically, however, Northern Europe presents its own particular and particularly relevant conditions. Though the North shared in many of the humanistic and antiquarian tendencies of Italy, it lacked the same kind of proximity and visible presence of classical antiquity.<sup>23</sup> Further, the development of speculative urban capitalism, a burgeoning print industry, and distinctive intellectual as well as religious cultures all combine to give the visual culture of chance and futurity a special resonance.

This project is structured as a series of case studies that build upon one another, examining various aleatory media across a range of contexts. I begin by exploring the configuration of chance in the representation of *Fortuna*, the classical deity who persisted into the Middle Ages and Renaissance as both a sign and bearer of inconstancy. In contrast to previous art historical studies of Fortuna that primarily address her iconographical evolution, I concentrate on the ways in which her representation reflects on the epistemological value of images as mediators of future time. The rhetoric of images and visual perception often characterizes discussions of Fortuna in both popular and philosophical texts, where the relationship between Fortuna and the divine is frequently at stake. I consider how these epistemological issues are enacted in depictions of Fortuna in the graphic arts of the period, especially in Albrecht Dürer’s prints from around 1500. Dürer’s highly-influential *Little Fortune* and *Great Fortune* (or *Nemesis*) constituted some of the earliest uses of classicizing style and iconography in Northern Europe. Yet they suggest that, for Dürer and his viewers, the appeal of classicism lay in part in its ability to offer a novel visual framework for configuring future time. In this sense, Fortuna points to a complex temporality in the artistic revival of antiquity, in which the past is not appropriated simply for the value ascribed to its “pastness,” but for its ability to offer an engagement with the uncertain future.

In chapter two, I explore the genre of lottery books (or *Losbücher*), a category of illustrated divinatory texts which has thus far received little art-historical attention.<sup>24</sup> Users of these volumes would select a concern from a list of broadly applicable topics of inquiry, often pertaining to earthly matters under Fortuna’s purview, such as love, money, and social relationships. By means of dice or spinning dials, they were then directed throughout the book to locate the answer to their chosen questions. I analyze the forms of chance in these books, and the

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<sup>23</sup>Wood has suggested the unique aspects of the North in this respect in his analysis of the German Renaissance sense of the past. See Wood, *Forgery, Replica, Fiction: Temporalities of German Renaissance Art*, esp. chapter 3.

<sup>24</sup>For one of the few in-depth art historical analyses of lottery books, see Suzanne Karr Schmidt, “Art—A User’s Guide: Interactive and Sculptural Printmaking in the Renaissance” (Ph.D., Yale University, 2006), esp. chapter 2, where lottery books are discussed in terms of the phenomenon of the interactive print in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

ways in which they visually framed the aleatory act in their pictorially-mediated statements about the future. Lottery books placed the casting of lots within a visual, performative, and narrative framework. They offered an experience of aleatory prediction as social entertainment, one that was defined by anticipation and an awareness of multiple possible outcomes.

The third chapter takes up the relationships between chance, divination, and devotion, focusing especially on the vision of time and eschatology in works by Hieronymus Bosch. The artist's depictions of vice and its hellish consequences predict a future of damnation for humanity, while often omitting the possibility of salvation. In such a schema, future redemption is invisible and must be divined by the viewer. Bosch's works intimate potential salvation by advocating the Christian virtue of prudential foresight in terms of popular practices of prediction. In his tabletop of *The Seven Deadly Sins*, the theme of prudence is presented through the iconography of Fortuna and games of chance. I explore the references to chance and Fortuna in this work, focusing especially the tabletop's game board-like configuration, which echoes that of a variant of backgammon known as the zodiac game. Analyzing the role of chance in this game, I argue that the artist's allusion to it illuminates the ways in which devotion could be construed as a form of fortune-telling regarding the future of one's soul.

Chapter four, "Playing Cards, Genre Painting, and the Framing of Future Time," addresses playing cards as a pictorial medium for chance that offers insight into the early development of genre imagery. Although playing cards have not received substantial scholarly notice, card games were tremendously popular pastimes that were pursued across a broad range of social groups. Examining the visual, social, and temporal conditions of the card game, I argue that playing cards formed an important aspect of Renaissance visuality that should be considered in relation to other aspects of visual culture. The dynamics of the card game were rendered the subject of painting in a series of sixteenth-century genre panels associated with the Dutch artist Lucas van Leyden. In the absence of a preexisting narrative source, the paintings use the social and visual conventions of the card game as a frame for the viewer's divinatory involvement in the image. I delineate some of the ways that play could inform painting as an ambiguous scenario requiring predictive action. But I also suggest the ways in which games of chance were important to the formulation of other predictive forms of representation in the early modern period, particularly in the domain of mathematics and economics. Examining these modes of future representation clarifies both the specificity of pictorial medium of genre painting and the ways in which such images could acquire value within shifting artistic and economic conditions.

While this dissertation seeks a revised perspective on the Renaissance through previously-overlooked artifacts, its aim is not simply to accord attention to heretofore neglected material. Rather, I also seek to recast Renaissance temporality in a way that accounts for the future as a vital impetus for image-making and use. Erwin Panofsky saw the Renaissance sense of time as akin to the "fixed distance" between the "eye and the object" that is constructed in linear perspective.<sup>25</sup> However one may assess the significance of this metaphor, it presents a highly evocative and influential conception. Panofsky's metaphor artfully and, I believe, usefully, asks us to look not only to pictorial forms but also to the relationships between artifacts and viewers when assessing issues of temporality. Yet, in his interpretation of perspectival constructions of space, the coveted past was kept forever remote from knowledge and experience. Through rituals of chance, I propose a greater proximity and interdependence

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<sup>25</sup> Erwin Panofsky, "Renaissance and Renaissances," 108. This metaphor is also a point of departure for Wood and Nagel in their initial explorations of Renaissance temporality, "Towards a New Model of Renaissance Anachronism," 409.

between images and viewers, one where the present seeks a connection, not with the removed past, but with an imminent, equivocal future.

The ways in which the future has been perceived in the past, however, have a strong significance for the present. Indeed, the roots of the current global economic crisis are replete with instances in which speculations on risky financial futures were experienced and represented as a “sure thing.” The images we have of the future, our relationship to these images, and our understandings of chance all have very real consequences for peoples’ lives and livelihoods. Examining the ways in which the future has been construed in the past helps frame the future as a subject of analysis in the present, and can create a greater consciousness of our current representational schemas and practices with respect to what has yet to occur.

There are, then, certain stakes in broadening the temporal frameworks and categories that inform historical and art historical scholarship. Art historians are often drawn to the artistic depiction of the past, and the centrality of the Renaissance in art historiography provides ample evidence of these disciplinary predilections. Yet if historians have tended to privilege the engagement with the past, it is perhaps because in such activities there lies both a justification and prefiguration of their own scholarly endeavors. The neglect of the future in favor of the past carries the trace of longstanding denigrations of divination as a form of knowledge. Unlike historical investigations, inquiries into future time proffer knowledge that is suspiciously unverifiable and lacking in a concrete object. While the knowledge of the future has traditionally been excised to the dubious domain of soothsayers and clairvoyants, perhaps we would do well to find in their activities an impetus to expand the thematic contours of historical work.

## Chapter One: *Imago Fortunae*

William Shakespeare's tragedy *Timon of Athens* opens with an extended exchange between a Painter and a Poet, each vying for the patronage of the play's prominent but overly-generous titular character.<sup>1</sup> Over the course of the scene, the economic and social competition between the two artists finds its most pronounced expression in a debate regarding which of their respective crafts is better suited to portray Fortuna, the ancient deity of luck and chance whose inconstancy renders the future a source of uncertainty. Their debate addresses how to effectively convey this inconstancy as sudden transformation, and the Poet describes one of the works he has prepared for Timon, a poem that is meant to emphasize the goddess's dramatic "shift and change in mood" as she "spurns her late beloved" from a position of authority high on a hill.<sup>2</sup> The Poet's allegorical representation depicts Fortuna as both an instigator and sign of dramatic alteration in personal fortune, her shifts setting in motion a narrative of the patron's fall from the goddess's grace. The composition is discussed as an aesthetic entity but also as source of knowledge for his patron, an instructional work that will warn Timon about Fortuna's wayward ways and thus better insulate him against the possibility of his own ruin. Dismissing this scenario as conventional, the Painter promotes the superiority of his own craft as an alternative mode of portrayal: "'Tis common: / A thousand moral paintings I can show / That shall demonstrate these quick blows of Fortunes / More pregnantly than words."<sup>3</sup>

In this exchange, the depiction of Fortuna calls attention to the specificity and the limits of the different media in question. As critics have noted, the debate between Poet and Painter constitutes an instance of Renaissance *Paragone*, or the rivalry between the visual and textual arts.<sup>4</sup> Yet, whatever evidence their discussion may carry of this larger debate, it is inseparable from the particular, and particularly long-standing, status of Fortuna as a resonant problem of epistemology and representation.

Since the rise of her cult in ancient Rome, the fickle goddess of chance and luck had retained considerable, if changing, status as a ruler over random events. Imparting and retracting her gifts of prosperity without respect to logic or merit, her changes rendered her difficult to comprehend and predict. In this respect, Fortuna's status is inseparable from her intimate connection to the complexities of perceiving and negotiating future time.

The difficulties posed by Fortuna echo those posed by future time within a variety of fields, such as, for example, the problem of future contingents. Though the figure of Fortuna was not always directly invoked in relation to such issues, she nevertheless constituted a primary means through which the problems of chance and futurity were consistently articulated, textually

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<sup>1</sup>William Shakespeare, "The Life of Tymon of Athens," in *Mr. VVilliam Shakespeares Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies, Published according to the True Originall Copies* (London: Isaac Iaggard, and Ed. Blount, 1623), 80-1.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>4</sup> The significance of the scene as an instance of *Paragone* was first noted in Anthony Blunt, "An Echo of the "Paragone" in Shakespeare," *Journal of the Warburg Institute* 2, no. 3 (1939): 260-2. It has also been addressed in greater detail by W. M. Merchant, "Timon and the Conceit of Art," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 6, no. 3 (1955): 249-57; and John Dixon Hunt, "Shakespeare and the *Paragone*: A Reading of *Timon of Athens*," in *Images of Shakespeare: Proceedings of the Third International Shakespeare Association, 1986*, ed. D.J. Palmer Werner Habicht, Roger Pringle (London: Associated University Presses, 1988), 47-63.

and visually, across a wide range of fields in both popular and specialized sources. Her portrayal attempted in part to give the absent future a point of reference, to make the nature of the future available for observation.

Although Shakespeare, writing in the early seventeenth century, lies beyond the late medieval and Renaissance material I will be considering here, the force of the opening scene derives from the accumulation of debates and iconography surrounding the goddess from classical antiquity through the early modern period. Perhaps true to her inconstancy, Fortuna's depiction has been subject to considerable variation, the full range of which cannot be addressed in this chapter. Yet the discussions and visible transformations of her figure were especially pronounced in the early Renaissance. With the renewed interest in classical antiquity in Italy during the later fifteenth century, the interpretation of the goddess underwent a striking renovation, shifting from her predominant medieval manifestation of a woman at a wheel to a classically-inspired notion of a nude woman balancing atop a globe. While the Renaissance has traditionally been understood in terms of a "rebirth" and "revival" of the distant past, the importance of Fortuna in the visual and philosophical discourses of this revival suggests the diverse temporal facets of this process. As Joseph Koerner has noted, Fortuna has been present at key moments in the development of the Renaissance, North and South, as well as its subsequent articulation by art historians.<sup>5</sup> In Northern Europe, for example, the painter-printmaker Albrecht Dürer chose the goddess as the subject for his print, the *Little Fortune (Das Kleine Glück)* [fig. 1.1], a work that, insofar as it conforms to the Panofskian criteria of merging classical form with classical content, can be identified as the first properly "Renaissance" composition north of the Italian city-states.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, one of Aby Warburg's most seminal works on the emergence of the Renaissance addresses references to classicized goddess Fortuna in the will of the Florentine businessman Francesco Sassetti, who referred to Fortuna to articulate uncertainty to his sons regarding the fate of their family's economic standing.<sup>7</sup> For Warburg, Sassetti's words spoke above all of a new valuation of the classical pagan past, one that had to be balanced with Christian virtue in an "age of transition."<sup>8</sup> While scholars have long seen a growing interest in the past as *the* defining condition of the Renaissance, Sassetti's concern with his family's future suggests the ways in which the past was appropriated not simply for the values ascribed to its "pastness," but also for the practical engagement with an unknown future.

But if the futurity of Fortuna problematizes the notion of the Renaissance as a "rebirth" of the past, then her persistence surely adds to this effect. Her unique endurance throughout the Middle Ages well exceeds that of her pagan counterparts, as does her ability to find her way into theological discourse and treatises. It is perhaps this very persistence, however, that has rendered the goddess a seductive subject for iconographic analyses of the most sweeping nature. Indeed, she has been seen as an ideal figure through which to measure changing beliefs and mental habits.<sup>9</sup> In particular, the striking transformation of the goddess's representation during the

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<sup>5</sup> Joseph Leo Koerner, "The Fortune of Dürer's 'Nemesis'," in *Fortuna*, ed. Walter Haug and Burghart Wachinger (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1995), 256.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 241. The dictum that a truly Renaissance work blended classical form with classical content is specified in Panofsky, "Renaissance and Renascences," , 111.

<sup>7</sup> Aby Warburg, "Francesco Sassetti's Last Injunctions to His Sons," in *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity: contributions to the cultural history of the European Renaissance*, ed. Kurt Foster (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1999), 223-62.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 242.

<sup>9</sup> The classic study in this regard is Alfred Doren, "Fortuna im Mittelälter und in der Renaissance," *Vortraege der Bibliothek Warburg* 2, no. 1 (1922); see also Howard Patch, *The Goddess Fortuna in Medieval Literature*

Renaissance has been seen as an affirmation of the period as a thorough rejection of medieval systems of representation and thought. The narrative of Fortuna is in this sense is seen as duplicating that of the Renaissance in general, as she is assimilated into a teleological tale of the emergence of the modern individual, with all his ability to prevail over the determinism heretofore represented by Fortuna at the wheel.<sup>10</sup> This narrative, however, tends to cull evidence of Fortuna's new form and connotations from humanistic textual sources of the Italian peninsula, privileging these written sources as causes or correlations to visual representations, which are positioned as illustrations of undisputed ideas.<sup>11</sup> Besides uncritically assuming a transparency between texts and images—a strategy that Shakespeare's scenario in *Timon of Athens* would caution against—these studies overlook the contradictions, contentions and diversity of opinions on Fortuna that are present even in texts by a single author.<sup>12</sup> They also overlook the fact that, while the textual discourse on Fortuna was a facet of Italian Renaissance humanist culture, artists working in the graphic arts in Northern Europe, such as Dürer, played a major role in formulating and disseminating the classicized image of Fortuna at something of a remove from many of the intellectual debates occurring in the Italian city-states. Perhaps most significantly, however, the iconographic studies deemphasize the complex ontological issues surrounding Fortuna as an *agent*, and not simply an allegorical or personified vehicle for the expression of ideas about chance and the future. Fortuna's ambiguous and dual status as both concept and agent is inscribed in her etymology: derived from the Latin *fors*, meaning “luck,” and *ferre*, “to bring,” Fortuna's origins suggest her status as at once idea and action.

In *Timon of Athens*, Shakespeare leaves the Painter's representation of Fortuna to the reader's own speculation, suspending the dialogue between Poet and Painter prior to any

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(Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1927); Gottfried Kirchner, *Fortuna in Dichtung und Emblematik des Barock; Tradition und Bedeutungswandel eines Motivs* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1970); and Eherengard Meyer-Landrut, *Fortuna: Die Göttin des Glücks im Wandel der Zeiten* (Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 1997). A more specifically intellectual history of Fortuna can be found in Vincenzo Cioffari, *Fortune and Fate from Democritus to St. Thomas Aquinas* (New York: [s.n.], 1935). Walter Haug's essay offers a study that addresses the medieval material yet is noteworthy in its approach to the conceptual and ethical tensions raised by the figure; see Walter Haug, "O Fortuna. Eine historisch-semantische Skizze," in *Fortuna*, ed. Walter Haug and B. Wachinger, *Fortuna Vitrea* (Tübingen: 1995); *ibid.*, .

<sup>10</sup> This view is present in Warburg, “Francesco Sassetti”; and Doren; but is also conveyed, for instance, in Frederick Kiefer, “The Conflation of Fortuna and Occasio in Renaissance Thought and Iconography,” *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 9(1979): 1-27.

<sup>11</sup> This is particularly the case in Kiefer, “The Conflation of Fortuna and Occasio.” For an interesting article which addresses the relationship between Fortuna, Occasio, and agency yet takes a critical approach to iconographical methodology while also addressing the problem of gender, see Lisa Rosenthal, “Seizing Opportunity: Rubens's *Occasio* and the Violence of Allegory,” *Jaarboek Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp* (2000): 185-208.

<sup>12</sup> The standard example that is referred to in this approach is Machiavelli's famous remarks on Fortuna in *The Prince*, in which the political philosopher describes the goddess as violently malleable by (male) human agents: “As for me, I believe this: it is better to be impetuous than cautious, because Fortune is a woman and it is necessary in order to keep her under, to cuff and maul her. She more often lets herself be overcome by men using such methods than by those who proceed coldly.” See Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. George Bull (New York: Penguin, 1999), chapter 25. But, as Hanna Pitkin has argued in her study of gender in Machiavelli's political works, his views on Fortuna were inconsistent and sometimes did not emphasize individual agency. Overall, the goddess is a “confusing figure” in Machiavelli's thought. See Hannah Fenichel Pitkin, *Fortune is a Woman: Gender and Politics in the Thought of Niccolò Machiavelli*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 160; and Ch. 6 for the larger discussion. The debates and opinions about Fortuna and agency in the Renaissance context are summarized in Antonio Poppi, “Fate, Fortune, and Human Freedom,” in *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, ed. C. B. Schmitt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 641-77.

resolution. In examining the medieval and early Renaissance image of Fortuna, however, this chapter seeks to resume aspects of their discussion. I do so in an effort to argue not for the *superiority* but rather for the *specificity* of visual constructions of Fortuna. Drawing both on texts and images, this chapter examines the importance of images and visual perception in the construction and reconstruction of Fortuna in the Middle Ages and Renaissance. My intent is not to analyze her iconography per se, but to explore how aspects of Fortuna's representation could raise questions about the theological and epistemological values of images during the period. While this chapter does not specifically address the ritual deployment of chance, the visual discourse on Fortuna not only illuminates the contours of chance as both concept and action, but also the important yet often ambiguous function of images in the aleatory rituals that are explored in other chapters.

I begin by examining aspects of Fortuna's classical history and her translation into a Christian framework in Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*, a text whose presentation of Fortuna was highly influential into the Renaissance. I assess how Boethius's treatise construes Fortuna as an image and the encounter with future contingency as a matter of visual perception. This emphasis remains, in various forms, in Fortuna's subsequent history. I examine this theme in the depiction of Fortuna at her wheel and in connection with Dürer's prints of Fortuna from around 1500. When seen in terms of its reception in the German graphic arts, these works suggest not only the importance of futurity in early Renaissance classicism, but the epistemological dimensions of images of Fortuna during the period more broadly.

### **Classical Histories and Medieval Revivals: *The Consolation of Philosophy***

Fortuna's early history in the ancient world indicates the roots of some of her persistent characteristics, while also illuminating some of the issues that would inflect her representation during the medieval and Renaissance periods. Although Fortuna lacked a place among the indigenous Roman deities (or the *di indigetes*) and was not a participant in mythological narratives, her role in the culture of the Roman Republic was quite formidable. Her cult seems to have originated on the Italian peninsula, where she was considered a fertility goddess, a function she would also assume in the early Republic.<sup>13</sup> Yet, with the growing Hellenization of Roman culture, Fortuna was increasingly assimilated into the image of Tyche, the Greek deity of chance, luck, and prosperity.<sup>14</sup> This assimilation granted the goddesses certain common attributes among their symbolic accessories, sharing, for instance, the emblem of sphere (a sign of inconstancy) and the rudder (emblematic of their role in shaping worldly events). And from Tyche, she also received the Aristotelian characterization of her domain. In accordance with the philosopher's discussion in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Magna Moralia*, Fortuna was associated with the realm of external goods, the *bona externa* (such as wealth, commodities, and power) as opposed to the goods of the soul, the *bona animi*, which consist in internal wisdom and virtues.<sup>15</sup> Like Tyche, her domain was not only material but social and practical, as well, in contrast to the

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<sup>13</sup> Jerold C. Frakes, *The Fate of Fortune in the Early Middle Ages: The Boethian Tradition* (New York: E. J. Brill, 1988), 11. For the origin of Fortuna's cult, see Georg Wissowa, *Religion und Kultus der Römer* (Munich: Beck, 1912), 256-7. See also Howard Patch, "The Tradition of the Goddess Fortuna in Roman Literature and in the Transitional Period," *Smith College Studies in Modern Languages* 3(1922): 140.

<sup>14</sup> The relationships between Tyche and Fortuna are discussed by Fritz Graf, "Fortuna," *Brill's New Pauly*(2008), [http://www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=bnp\\_e414000](http://www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=bnp_e414000).; and Doren, 73.

<sup>15</sup> See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. W.D. Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908), I.8; and Aristotle, "Magna Moralia," in *Works of Aristotle*, ed. W.D. Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1915), I.3.



Greek notion of chance that occurs in nature, which was described under the category of *Automaton*.<sup>16</sup> As the wanton ruler of the *bona externa*, however, Fortuna's status seems to have exceeded that of her Greek predecessor. In her governance over contingent human affairs, Fortuna became a major deity of the Roman Republic, her popularity reflected in numerous references by writers and orators, as well as an abundance of variations in her cultic identity.<sup>17</sup> In his encyclopedic *Natural History* (c. 77 A.D.), Pliny the Elder wrote of the prevalent fixation on the inconstant deity. Taking stock of diverse religious beliefs throughout the world, the author pauses to consider the distinctive range and effects of Fortuna's popularity:

Among the discordant opinions, mankind has discovered for themselves a kind of intermediate deity, by which our skepticism concerning God is still increased. For all over the world, in all places, and at all times, Fortuna is the only god whom everyone invokes; she alone is spoken of, she alone is accused and is supposed to be guilty; she alone is in our thoughts; is praised and blamed and loaded with reproaches; wavering as she is, conceived by the generality of mankind to be blind, wandering, inconstant, uncertain, variable, and often favoring the unworthy. To her are referred all our losses and all our gains, and in casting up the accounts of mortals she alone balances the two pages of our sheet. We are so much in the power of chance, that Chance itself is considered a god and the existence of God becomes doubtful.<sup>18</sup>

In Pliny's account, the varied occurrences of the material world are understood as signs of the authority and causal agency of the goddess of chance, whose determining force is so palpably felt that it inspires a belief that threatens to exceed all others. The upshot of her diverse operation is to transform social and cultural disparities into a unified expression of faith. Indeed, for Pliny, Fortuna abolishes difference yet she herself *is* difference—embodied in assorted identities, articulated by Pliny as a fragmented list of qualities. Fortuna's blindness to merit has rendered her the most absolute ruler and potentially also the most democratic, threatening economic and moral hierarchies through her disregard for such distinctions. The text betrays both awe and disdain for the scope and nature of Fortuna's cult, its hyperbolic tone derisively invoking the "generality" as in thrall to a goddess that is everywhere evident yet nowhere fixed.

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<sup>16</sup> This distinction is articulated in Aristotle, *Physics*, trans. R.P. Hardie and R.K. Gaye (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930), II.6.

<sup>17</sup> These variations are enumerated in Graf, "Fortuna;" and in Patch, "The Tradition of the Goddess Fortuna in Roman Literature," 135-6.

<sup>18</sup> Pliny, *Natural History*, trans. John Bostock and H.T. Riley, 6 vols. (London: H.G. Bohn, 1855-7), II.5. I. The last line of the passage contains is rather ambiguous. Bostock and Riley translate *sortis* as "chance, but, significantly, the term also denotes an aleatory lot. An early modern English translation of the *Natural History* translated *sortis* (*sors*) in this way, and certainly employed a more dramatic use of language: "So abject we are, so servile also and enthralled to Lots, that even the very chance of Lots is taken for a god, than which nothing maketh us more doubtfull and ignorant of God." See Pliny, *The Historie of the World, Commonly Called the Natural Historie of C. Plinius Secvndvs*, trans. Philemon Holland (London: Adam Islip, 1601). The original Latin reads: "Invenit tamen inter has utrasque sententias medium sibi ipsa mortalitas numen, quo minus etiam plana de deo coniectatio esset. toto quippe mundo et omnibus locis omnibusque horis omnium vocibus Fortuna sola invocatur ac nominatur, una accusatur, res una agitur, una cogitatur, sola laudatur, sola arguitur et cum conviciis colitur, volubilis . . . .que, a plerisque vero et caeca existimata, vaga, inconstans, incerta, varia indignorumque faulrix. huic omnia expensa, huic feruntur accepta, et in toto ratione mortalium sola utramque paginam facit, adeoque obnoxiae sumus sortis, ut prorsus ipsa pro deo sit qua deus probatur incertus."

For Pliny, however, the perceived subjecting force of chance, in all her manifestations, is so potent that it threatens faith in a single and eternal deity. Although Pliny's characterization of God is not clearly defined and of course cannot be identified with Christian monotheism, it does suggest the derivation of the natural world from a unified or "first principle."<sup>19</sup> Belief in Fortuna seems to exist in an inverse ratio to that in God; to have faith in one is to take faith from the other. Thus Fortuna inspires both belief and doubt in proportionate relation. As an "intermediate deity," she is situated between humans and God, and, through her activities in the material world, interferes with the former's perception of the latter.

Writing in the first century A.D., Pliny is of course at an historical remove from the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Yet his remarks on the incompatibility between Fortuna and a single deity resonate with the difficult position of Fortuna in Christian culture. However pervasive the element of chance might be in daily life, Fortuna's fickle demeanor was at odds with the notion of divine Providence and God's omniscient power over the universe. Fortuna presents what is potentially an alternative, undermining order. It is no surprise that theologians often sought to deny the existence of contingency signified by Fortuna. Augustine's condemnations were especially pronounced. In *De Ordine*, for example, he asserts the existence of an all-encompassing divine order in a manner that renders debate of the issue all but impossible: "I shall . . . defend the order of things; and I shall maintain that nothing can take place outside the range of order . . . even though some were to worst me in this debate, I should attribute even that fact to the order of things, and not to reasonless chance."<sup>20</sup> The theologian even went so far as to express, in later revisions to this text, his displeasure at "the frequent intrusion of the word 'fortune'" in his earlier discourse—its presence perhaps an effect of common parlance.<sup>21</sup>

But Augustine was not the last word on the matter, despite his desire to negate his potential adversaries from the outset. If Fortuna was condemned by Augustine, the goddess's translation into Christian thought was afforded by the philosopher Anicius Manilius Severinus Boethius, who formulated a place for the goddess in the divine order in his early sixth-century treatise *The Consolation of Philosophy*.<sup>22</sup> Written when Boethius was imprisoned and facing execution, the *Consolation* is a literary-poetic dialogue between the personification Lady Philosophy and a prisoner who has been unjustly condemned, a characterization which evokes what is known of Boethius's own situation. The treatise uses the prisoner's predicament, that of an unanticipated and unjust shift in personal fortune, as the impetus for the exploration of larger issues regarding time and futurity: the sources of true happiness and wisdom in the fluctuations of earthly existence, the problem of divine Providence and necessity, and the nature of eternity. These are lofty concerns, yet Fortuna—in her dual sense of concept and agent—is a consistent feature of their discourse. In order to reconcile chance, Fortuna, and the divine order, Boethius

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<sup>19</sup> On Pliny's notion of God as "first principle," see Roger French, *Ancient Natural History: Histories of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1994), 196-9.

<sup>20</sup> Augustine, *De Ordine*, I.3.9, translated in Augustine, *Divine Providence and the Problem of Evil: A Translation of St. Augustine's De Ordine, with Annotations*, trans. Robert P. Russell (New York: Cosmopolitan Art and Science, 1942). As Haug notes, Augustine constituted an especially vehement "grosser Fortuna-kritiker" (1), as does Doren (75-6).

<sup>21</sup> As cited in *ibid.*, 176.

<sup>22</sup> Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. Victor Watts (New York: Penguin, 1999).

effectively rescinds the goddess's deification, depriving her of autonomy and rendering her a servant of God's plan, an ordering mechanism despite her ostensibly disordering effects.<sup>23</sup>

The *Consolation*, though dating from early Christianity, proved enormously popular and influential throughout the Middle Ages and during the Renaissance.<sup>24</sup> Boethius's treatise was the subject of numerous commentaries and vernacular translations by well-known authors, as well as a text of educational curricula for centuries throughout Western Europe.<sup>25</sup> Considered a major philosophical and theological work, the *Consolation*'s wide audience was perhaps due partly to its ability to balance complex philosophical concepts and a relatively accessible, literary style. The inclusion of Fortuna, with her appeal to the "generality," assists in this process. Even as Boethius's ideas about future contingents might be critiqued and debated by theologians, his work, more than any other, established the broader interest in and iconography of Fortuna for centuries.

Though scholars have tended to highlight Fortuna's transformation in the Renaissance as exemplary of a "rebirth" of the antique, the *Consolation* constitutes another, earlier instance in which the goddess formed a crucial aspect of a classical revival. For Boethius's treatise not only revitalized the goddess Fortuna, the work is also crucially important for its presentation of classical philosophy in terms of Christian theology.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, one of the key precepts of the book—that virtue and wisdom constitute a source of certainty and protection against fluctuations in Fortune—was drawn from Stoicist ethics. Boethius's interests in the themes of Fortuna and futurity were not only motivated by ethical concerns but also metaphysical ones; his recourse to Stoicism was accompanied by a considerable interest in Aristotelianism and, most significantly, Neoplatonism.<sup>27</sup> The *Consolation* comprises one of the earliest, most sustained efforts to integrate Christian and Neoplatonic metaphysical systems.

Fortuna, though de-deified, has a role within this larger framework. The goddess appears in Book II in a conventional form as a deceptive woman who subjects men to her inconstancy by proffering happiness via external goods of wealth, power, and fame. For Lady Philosophy, this investment in earthly goods is the hallmark of false happiness that distracts one from the true happiness that comes with living a spiritual, virtuous life, of directing one's attentions away from earthly vicissitudes in a spiritual ascent to the divine, the elevation from lowly to high that is central to Neoplatonic thought. Fortuna, in her fickleness, points to her own alternative. By demonstrating the inconstancy of the material world and its goods, Fortuna prompts (particularly on the part of those she has punished) a contemplation of the eternal and immaterial goods of the soul, just as the Prisoner, confined and condemned by misfortune, can rise to consideration of higher things. Fortuna thus contains a crucial ambiguity: while derided as antagonistic to virtue and spiritual contemplation, she also provides the starting point for the reorientation toward true

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<sup>23</sup> On Boethius's transformation of Fortuna, see Frakes, esp. 31-35, and 63. On Boethius's text in general, see Frakes, Ch. 1-3, 7; and John Marenbon, *Boethius* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>24</sup> On the medieval and Renaissance reception of Boethius, see Marenbon, Ch. 9; and Frakes, Ch. 4-6.

<sup>25</sup> For the Renaissance reception of Fortuna, see Konrad Burdach, "Die humanistischen Wirkungen der Trostschrift des Boethius im Mittelalter und in der Renaissance," *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literatur- und Geistesgeschichte* 9(1933): 530-58. Robert Black, *Humanism and Education in Renaissance Education: Tradition and Innovation in Latin Schools from the Twelfth through the Fifteenth Centuries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) indicates the role of the *Consolation* in late medieval and Renaissance education (see esp. Appendices IV and VI).

<sup>26</sup> As Marenbon has noted, this aspect of his work tends to overshadow others in contemporary scholarship, which often regards the philosopher as simply a transmitter of ancient ideas (4).

<sup>27</sup> See Frakes, Ch. 7, for a thorough discussion of Boethius's contribution in this respect.

happiness, to (as Lady Philosophy stipulates) “turn your gaze in a different direction” toward the eternal divine and thereby immunity from Fortune’s blows.

But the epistemological dynamics advocated for the Prisoner within the treatise bear a striking resemblance to those that inflect the Boethius the philosopher and his intellectual successors outside of the text. As Frakes has argued,

The ultimate philosophical significance of *fortuna* lies in its necessary relevance to the problem of the ontology and relationship between material and spiritual goods, the earthly and the heavenly, *materia* and *intelligentia*. And it is in the proposition of solutions to this problem that Boethius and his commentators deal with *fortuna*.<sup>28</sup>

Though the distinction between material and immaterial was already inscribed in Fortuna by virtue of her jurisdiction over the *bona externa*, as opposed to the *bona animi*, Boethius’s discourse affords her a certain mobility between these two domains rather than confining her exclusively to base matter.

As figure and concept, then, Fortuna possesses a vital and necessary role in the divine structure as a kind of mediator, an emblem of the material that prompts a movement to the immaterial, from the earthly to the divine. In this respect, she embodies not simply the Neoplatonic dimensions of Christianity, but the ideal mechanisms of the devotional image: the movement *per visibilia ad invisibilia* and the role of the visual representation, in all its materiality, as vehicle for its own transcendence via contemplation of the spiritual. The Boethian justification of Fortuna thus echoes one of the most consistent justifications of images in Christian theological debates throughout the Middle Ages and into the Reformation: the status of the material world as shadow or emanatory images of a higher spiritual reality facilitate access to this reality and thus partake of its ideal status.<sup>29</sup> The effort to discipline Fortuna within a metaphysical hierarchy endeavors to transform her into a representation, according her a structural position akin to that of the proper devotional image. In this sense, though ostensibly de-deified, she remains in some sense the “intermediate” figure of Pliny’s complaint, situated between humankind and God. Boethius’s account of Fortuna suggests some of the ways in which her representation as an image was necessary to her function and conceptualization in the medieval and Renaissance periods. In the discourse of Boethius’s text, Fortuna’s status as an entity that facilitates connection to God would seem to work smoothly once the falsity of her goods has been recognized. But, as a philosophical topic, Fortuna, and her ability to invoke the problem of the relationship between the material and the immaterial, as Frakes indicates, remains an ongoing problem.

### **Fortuna: Image and Vision**

Boethius’s treatise provides a point of departure for the reconsideration of Fortuna in the Middle Ages and Renaissance from the perspective of visual media and experience. But Fortuna, as a figure bound up with the contingency of the future, additionally permits us to see the ways in which the mechanisms of the image in these contexts are motivated and inflected by the problem of future time. If the goddess’s integration into a divine system allowed her to function

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<sup>28</sup> Frakes, 157.

<sup>29</sup> On the role of Neoplatonism in these image debates in the Middle Ages, see Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, trans. Edmond Jephcott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 152-4.

in representational terms, it did not allay but rather created ambiguities regarding her status and, by extension, that of chance in general. These ambiguities turned on the nature of her relationship to God, and whether that relationship should be defined by likeness or difference.

Though the *Consolation* indicates how Fortuna functioned as an effective representation within a Christianized Neoplatonic framework, the mechanisms by which the figure might be said to attain this status are rather distinctive. Broadly speaking, Christian Neoplatonism tended to define the relationship between the material and the immaterial as that between an image and its prototype: the earthly sphere constituted a mimetic image—however imperfect and partial—of its divine Origin. This emphasis on similitude resonates in one of the other key justifications for images in the Middle Ages, the notion that Christ, as the Word made flesh via the Incarnation, made God visible in his likeness to the divine prototype. Humankind, though also made in the image and likeness of God, has lost their likeness to the divine after the Fall. Nevertheless, there remains a residue of this resemblance and, through acts of devotion and contemplation, mortals work to reform the soul in the image of God and this now-distorted foundation in an ordered pattern of likeness. In each case, however, knowledge of the divine is attained through the contemplation of similitudes and prototype.<sup>30</sup>

Fortuna, however, does not assimilate easily into this framework, and possesses a complicated connection to the matter of origins. If God is the primary cause and origin of all things, then, within the Christian system he would of course be prior to the earthly goods and chance events that are figured through Fortuna. Yet the problem of prototype in Fortuna seems especially pronounced. As Lady Philosophy suggests in the *Consolation*, through her constant change Fortuna maintains her “own particular kind of constancy.” It is therefore difficult to discuss the goddess as concept and event in relation to origins and imitation, since she does not point to any fixed referent but rather to her successive manifestations. And while, in Neoplatonism, the domain of *materia* is not a precise, symmetrical likeness but an inferior imitation of the divine immaterial, in the case of Fortuna-fortune the difference between the two spheres is particularly striking. It is here not likeness but generally radical disjuncture that characterizes the relationship between the earthly and the spiritual, both morally and aesthetically. In the *Consolation*, as in Roman literature and religion, Fortuna’s variability is described in terms that are antithetical to the notion of God’s eternity and immobility. Yet it is her inconstancy and dissimilarity from God that compels a spiritual ascent and a rejection of mutable materiality through the cultivation of internal spiritual contemplation in its various levels.<sup>31</sup>

But if Fortuna’s inconstant ways can prompt a turn upward toward the Godhead, this process is precarious. Dissimilarity not only defines her relationship to the immaterial, it constitutes the relationship between appearance and meaning in the goddess, her habitual mode

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<sup>30</sup> For art historical discussions, see, for example, Belting, Ch. 8; and the work of Reindert Falkenburg, particularly Reindert Falkenburg, “The Household of the Soul: Conformity in the Merode Triptych,” in *Early Netherlandish Painting at the Crossroads: A Critical Look at Current Methodologies*, ed. Maryan Ainsworth (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2001), 2-17

<sup>31</sup> In this respect, the dynamic suggested by Boethius is not unlike that described by Georges Didi-Huberman in relation to Fra Angelico in Georges Didi-Huberman, *Fra Angelico: Dissemblance and Figuration*, trans. Jane Marie Todd (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995) Here, Didi-Huberman, drawing on the negative theology of Dionysus the Areopagite, delineates a mode of representation that functioned not through likeness but rather through non-resemblance in relation to the Godhead. According to the Areopagite, it is through “unreasonable figures” that one can “better raise our minds than [through] those fashioned in resemblance of their object”—the figure of dissemblance points beyond itself and conveys the unfigurability of the Godhead (cited p. 52). See esp. Didi-Huberman, 45-55.

of being as a figure of deception. As an image, Fortuna is fallible and misleading, and is described as such in a wide range of sources. In the *Consolation*, this defining attribute is evoked as a form of temptation and dishonesty, as Lady Philosophy describes “the many faces of that monster Fortuna.”<sup>32</sup> Beguiling with false promises of happiness through wealth and power, Fortuna’s demeanor ultimately masks both her own mutability and that of the earthly goods she oversees. Over the course of the Middle Ages, this deceptive quality and her potential to lead astray became some of the most emphasized aspects of her portrayal, a constant refrain of moralizing discourse that identified Fortuna exclusively with sin, greed, and imprudence. Perhaps one of the most popular of these works, Sebastian Brant’s *Ship of Fools* (first published 1494 in Basel and widely translated thereafter), contained multiple admonitions regarding the perils of Fortuna, each reiterating her misleading ways: Fortuna “laugheth often tymes and holdeth the man in prosperyte / but in a momente she tourneth her whele aboute & her false face also.” To trust that her countenance will not change is but “vycous fantasie.”<sup>33</sup> Promising riches one moment and then suddenly taking them away, Fortuna presents a gap between appearance and meaning that is revealed in time as one falls from her favor. The understanding of Fortuna in terms of deception, as an embodiment of false appearance, stressed not the elevating potential of images but rather their base and illusory qualities.

As an image, however, Fortuna is not only characterized by her potential to mislead through deception. In proffering false happiness of constancy and future prosperity, Fortuna and her earthly goods not only mislead, they inspire misguided devotion. Indeed, in the moralizing condemnations of Fortuna, the trust in her uncertainty often carries implications of idolatry, the reverence of her false appearances and goods over the true Godhead. To be seduced by Fortuna is not only to be tempted by the counterfeit appearances of a woman, it is to have faith in those appearances and the transitory material goods to which they are linked. She embodies in particularly precise fashion the valuation of material goods over faith in God.

In the moralizing discourse that developed over the course of the Middle Ages, authors consistently use the rhetoric of misdirected devotion. As suggested in the *Ship of Fools*, anyone who put faith in Fortuna is the “deuylls sone” because the regard he or she shows for Lady Fortuna should rightly go to God and the saints.<sup>34</sup> In a tract attributed to Thomas More, Fortuna is depicted as a temptress and an authority whom “unworthy men setteth in honor.”<sup>35</sup> To attempt to place oneself in Fortuna’s favor and grace is to wrongly perceive oneself in a “blessed condition,” trusting in false appearances and mistaking Fortuna as a sovereign agent.<sup>36</sup> As such, it is an erroneous conviction that can allow, in a manner akin to that described by Pliny, Chance to become a god.

While Pliny suggested the ways in which chance and Fortuna inspire powerful but improper devotion, the Roman satirist Juvenal commented the devotion to Fortuna in a similar vein, and his remarks were taken up in somewhat different ways by Renaissance scholars. Concluding his *Satires* (c. 100 A.D.) with reflections on the requests men make of the gods through prayer, Juvenal advocates the Stoic emphasis on virtue as a means to attain happiness.

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<sup>32</sup> Boethius, *Consolation*, II.1

<sup>33</sup> Sebastian Brant, *The Shyppe of Fooles*, trans. Henry Watson (London: Wynkyn de Worde, 1509), 47.

<sup>34</sup> Brant, 87.

<sup>35</sup> Thomas More, “The Book of the Fair Gentlewoman Lady Fortune,” in *Fugitive Tracts, written in verse, which illustrate the Condition of Religious and Political Feeling in England, And the state of Society there during two centuries. First series, 1493–1600*, ed. Henry Huth (London: Chiswick Press, Witthigham and Wilkins, 1875 [1540]), 3.

<sup>36</sup> More, 5.

He suggested that it is only in the desire for goods that Fortuna in particular acquires her power: “O Fortuna, if we had but wisdom; it is we that make a goddess out of thee, and place thee in the skies.”<sup>37</sup> As a deity, Fortuna is a fabrication wrought from human desire, made in the image and likeness of divinity but lacking any essential divinity herself. Juvenal’s remark is cited in a print included in an early sixteenth-century French edition of Petrarch’s *De Remediis utriusque fortunae* [fig. 1.2].<sup>38</sup> Petrarch’s text drew upon the Stoicist principles that were promoted in Boethius’s *Consolation*, espousing the power of virtue as an effective antidote against the unpredictable whims of Fortuna. The print endeavors to visually express this idea. It juxtaposes Fortuna, enthroned at left on a round sphere to symbolize her inconstancy, with Virtue, who sits on a square seat as offering a more certain, stable fate. Fortuna, blindfolded, looks blindly at men turning on her emblematic wheel, while Virtue regards herself in a mirror, employing vision in the service of insight and wisdom. While the figure of *Insapiens* positioned above Fortuna speaks the words of Juvenal on the goddess’s fabricated divinity, *Sapiens* in the upper right defines Virtue as the proper source of investment: “*fidite Virtuati: Fortu[n]a fugatior vndis*” (trust Virtue, Fortuna flees like waves). Fortuna’s status as man-made divinity is redoubled visually by the excessive adornment of her headgear in contrast to the more modest Virtue—a false image in comparison to the truth of Virtue, whose sight is directed toward the ostensibly unmediated reflection in the mirror. Fortuna is opposed to virtue and to knowledge. Turning away from Fortuna is a turning toward true wisdom, an appropriate framework for a text that advocates a mystical movement from the world of substances toward metaphysical knowledge.

But there is another aspect to Fortuna’s fabricated status that puts her in a potentially more favorable position vis-à-vis the Godhead. An apparent gloss on a passage from Juvenal’s *Satires*, attributed to the German humanist and Reformer Philip Melanchthon, asserted that “whom the poets call Fortune, we know to be God.”<sup>39</sup> This assessment emphasizes the “made” nature of Fortuna, defining her as an effect of artistic representation (in this case that of texts) to the truth of theological knowledge. Yet, while art may be misguided in its designations, Melanchthon nevertheless implies how Fortuna might lead one to contemplation of the divine beyond the framework of the rejection and transcendence of the material world posited by Boethius: the notion that Fortuna (and, additionally, the chance event with which she was associated) was a way of giving shape and significance to incomprehensible mysteries was a consistent assessment during the Middle Ages and Renaissance, one that even Augustine espoused. Arguing for the uncompromised order of things, Augustine invoked an example of the observation of unpredictable signs in nature, asserting that even the manner in which a leaf falls into a body of water is structured by Providential necessity. If the manner of the leaf’s descent

<sup>37</sup> Juvenal, *Satires*, X, 366.

<sup>38</sup> Francesco Petrarch, *Messire Francois Petracque des remedes de lune et lautre fortune prospere et aduerse*, trans. Jean Daudin and Nicholas Oresme (Paris: Gaillot du Pré, 1523), sig. a1r. *De Remediis* was published in many editions and translations during Renaissance Europe. For a modern edition, see Francesco Petrarch, *Petrarch's Remedies for Fortune Fair and Foul: A Modern English Translation of De remediis utriusque fortunae, with a Commentary*, trans. Conrad H. Rawski, 5 vols. (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1991) This print was also included in Charles de Bouelles, *Que hoc volumine continetur: Liber de intellectu. : Liber de sensu. Liber de nichilo. Ars oppositorum. Liber de generatione. Liber de sapiente. Liber de duodecim numeris. Epistole complures. Insuper mathematicū opus quadripartitū. De numeris perfectis. De mathematicis rosis. De geometricis corporibus. De geometricis supplementis.* (Paris: Henri Stephan, 1510), 116.

<sup>39</sup> *Quod Poetae fortunam, nos Deum appellamus.* I have been unable to locate or verify the origin of this gloss. It is ascribed to Melanchthon in a section on Fortune in Sir Walter Raleigh, Sir, *The History of the World* (London: William Stansby for Walter Burre, 1614), 20. A marginal citation links the statement to Juvenal’s *Satires*, but does not mention any originating text by Melanchthon himself.

*appears* to be by chance, it is only because the cause of its movement “remains hidden, completely hidden from our senses. Yet this one point, at least, namely, that nothing done without a cause—this point is somehow or other not hidden to the mind: and that is enough for the problem proposed.”<sup>40</sup> In this construction, the random event is not random at all but rather a visible sign of the presence of both God’s comprehensive ordering power and the limited nature of human perception and knowledge. In perceiving the chance event, the mental faculties perceive a causal agent, though they may not be able to retrace the logic of this agency and sometimes err in its attribution. Human blindness in the postlapsarian present veils the nature and mechanisms of divine authority; it is this blindness, not Fortuna, which constitutes the true cause of futures that appear random and are experienced as uncertain. Fortuna may be a false image and a case of mislabeling, but through her figuration she allows the invisible and ineffable powers of God to become partly visible as representation.

In this view, Fortuna is a matter of mortal perspective, a sign of partial human vision and epistemological capacity. The emphasis on perspective calls attention to the theme of vision in the description of future time, chance, and Fortuna throughout the Middle Ages and Renaissance. This emphasis is certainly present in the *Consolation*. Boethius’s attempt to resolve the problem of Providence and future contingents stresses the relative and distinct perspectives of human and divine knowers, using the rhetoric of vision to demonstrate the ways in which future time and its apparent lack of fixity is an effect of mortal perception. In discussing whether God’s authority governs the nature of future events, even at the expense of free will, Lady Philosophy argues that God’s omniscience places him outside of the progression of past, present, and future. Thus he sees and experiences everything in an eternal present; he cannot *foreknow* the future because from his point of view the future does not exist as such.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, God’s knowledge of the future-as-present does not determine it as necessary.<sup>42</sup> Throughout the discussion of Providence, Lady Philosophy makes recourse to visual perception in describing the eternal and temporally-embedded modes of knowing that distinguish God from mortals: God does not see in advance but rather “looks forth” onto the immediacy of the eternal as a “spectator on high of all things,” a judge whose gaze constitutes human character and action as objects of knowledge, as humankind “lives in the sight of a judge who sees all things.”<sup>43</sup> By contrast, human perception is limited by its condition in time and the changing conditions of the material world, a condition that creates “blindness” with respect to God and future time.<sup>44</sup> The relative invisibility of the future for mortal eyes attests to humankind’s material situatedness; it is only through the transcendence of this material condition that this blindness can be ameliorated.

The visual iconography of Fortuna participates in this characterization of the future as fundamental to the engagement with the goddess and her particular modes of operation. The blindness that is so often ascribed to Fortuna and constituted such a mainstay of her iconography into the early modern period is thus perhaps simply a reflection of the viewer’s own epistemological condition. But Fortuna’s relationship to sight is itself unstable; while often

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<sup>40</sup> Augustine, *De Ordine*, I.4.11.

<sup>41</sup> Boethius, *Consolation*, V.5.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, V.4.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, V.4. As Lady Philosophy argues, “Each future thing is anticipated by the gaze of God which bends it back and recalls to the presence of its own manner of knowledge.”

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, V.4. This is of course an extremely abbreviated summary of the complex and, at turns, rather ambiguous argument that emerges in the dialogue between Lady Philosophy and the Prisoner over the course of Books IV and V. Boethius’s resolve divine omniscience and free will (and, with it, the potential openness of the future) does not always convince in light of the declarations of the extent of God’s power.



devoid of vision she is also depicted by an excess of points of view, as in the so-called *Fortuna mi-partie*, defined by her bifrontal gaze [fig. 1.3].<sup>45</sup> With her divided countenance, this representation of Fortuna fixes her transforming face along a lateral axis; as viewers we are granted a privileged view onto these different manifestations, which register within the fixed medium of the image as the simultaneous articulation of possibility via her look. But this possibility is also a verdict, and vision is a means of actively transforming not just herself but the fate of those in her range of vision, thus invoking Boethius's associations between sight and impending divine judgment. The image evokes the chance that the viewer is or will become the object of an unstable gaze. In this respect, both blind and all-seeing images of Fortuna stress the viewer's own perceptual limitations with respect to the future. By delineating the goddess in terms of the faculty of sight, however, visual representations of Fortuna indicate the importance of vision for the experience of and engagement with the future. The relationship to future time is mediated by sight, even as these images themselves underscore the shortcomings of visual perception and representation.<sup>46</sup>

But, within Christian theology and devotional practice, these limitations have a crucial function in defining the relationship of the image to future time. The Neoplatonic image, though it is often considered primarily in spatial terms as vertical hierarchy, moving between the concrete world and the abstracted realm of meaning, is not simply a spatial but a *temporal* transition. The visible world, in its immediacy, is bound to the lower register of the present which leads toward an elsewhere of the not-yet-seen, and not-yet-known. While the spaces of heaven are themselves ultimately beyond time, from the perspective of human experience, grounded as it is in the limitations of the physical world and embodied sensation, this space exists in time as future promise and, paradoxically, timeless endpoint. This schema is of course inherent in the resonant Pauline maxim in Corinthians 13.12, often quoted by art historians for its visual import: "We see now through a glass darkly, but then face-to-face." The fallen and limited condition of human vision in the earthly time of here and now is juxtaposed to unimpeded sight in the future condition of salvation. The sense of vision is oriented toward the future, but this temporal import only becomes apparent in vision's limitations—it is the inadequacy of the image that both defines its futurity, its condition of not being fully present, and that which propels it toward its future ends and instills it with a kind of prophetic quality. The symmetry that is inherent in this future condition—the recapturing of soul's likeness to God that was lost in the Fall—suggests that referentiality moves both backward and forward in time, its origin framed within the collective history of humankind but its future experienced potently at the level of individual fate.<sup>47</sup> By embodying the invisibility of the future, Fortuna-as-representation

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<sup>45</sup> On the *Fortuna mi-partie* or bifrontal Fortuna as an iconographic type, see Pierre-Michel Bertrand, "La Fortune mi-partie: un exemple de la symbolique de la droite et de la gauche au Moyen Age," *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale* 40(1997): 373-79.

<sup>46</sup> The association between blindness and chance is still evident in post-structuralist theory. As Jacques Derrida has written, "when something does not befall us 'by accident' (*par hasard*), as the saying or belief goes, then one can also fall oneself. One can fall well or badly, have a lucky or unlucky break---but always by dint of not having foreseen---of not having seen in advance and ahead of oneself." See Jacques Derrida, "My Chances/Mes Chances: A Rendezvous with Some Epicurean Stereophonies," in *Taking Chances: Derrida, Psychoanalysis, and Literature*, ed. Joseph H. Smith and William Kerrigan (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), 5.

<sup>47</sup> Didi-Huberman's notion of "dissemblance" is relevant here, particularly when he speaks of the anagogical element of dissemblant figure, though his discussion sometimes privileges the spatial elements of anagogical interpretation as a means of transit over its anticipatory aspects (see, for example, Didi-Huberman, 52-3). For an example of art historical scholarship that addresses the temporal dimensions of the devotional image, see Jeffrey Hamburger's discussion of the Trinitarian miniatures of the Rothschild Canticles: Jeffrey Hamburger, *The*

participates in this dynamic and suggests her devotional and epistemological potential. Yet the ambiguity of her status also raises questions regarding the relationship between earthly and divine futures, the material and immaterial domains of temporal experience.

By the later Middle Ages, then, Fortuna had accrued a variety of associations—both visual and textual—that defined her in terms of visual representations and perception. Thus far I have been examining primarily the textual construction of this visual status. I will now turn to a detailed consideration of Fortuna’s portrayal in images, focusing on the particular epistemological potential of images of the goddess, and the ways in which Fortuna’s position along the material and immaterial divide might be impacted by her formulation in visual media.

### ***Rota Fortunae***

If Boethius and his successors suggest the import of Fortuna for the general dynamics of the Christian devotional image and the relationship between vision and time, the *Consolation* additionally serves as a key source for a particular visual representation of the goddess, one that would influence her depiction and invocation for hundreds of years: the *rota fortunae*, the wheel of fortune. The notion of Fortuna as a goddess presiding over a moving wheel, controlling the ascent and descent of those who have submitted themselves to her rule, appears in Book II, section one. While the wheel is typically associated with medieval mentalities and iconography, Boethius’s references were not entirely novel but rather another part of his own engagement with classical sources: although not the dominant construction of Fortuna in ancient culture, references to her wheel can be found in works dating from both Greek and Roman antiquity.<sup>48</sup> But Boethius gave the figure a special resonance in the references to the wheel in his treatise, elaborating it not simply as an isolated allusion or figure of speech but as a more extended account of Fortune’s nature and changeable dynamics.<sup>49</sup>

As described by Lady Philosophy, the wheel is moved by the goddess with a “domineering hand . . . like currents in a treacherous bay swept to and fro,” dramatically deposing kings and elevating the wretched “in a single hour.”<sup>50</sup> Bound to the wheel by their desire for earthly goods, Fortuna’s charges have no choice but to be subject to her sudden whim to raise them in prosperity and lower them into impoverished despair. Following the “random strokes” of her caprice in this regard is her right as sovereign of her domain, and to do otherwise would be against her temperament:

Inconstancy is my very essence; it is the game I never cease to play as I turn my wheel in its ever changing circle, filled with joy as I bring the top to the bottom and the bottom to the top. Yes, rise up on my wheel if you like, but don’t count it an injury when by the same token you begin to fall, as the rules of the game will require.<sup>51</sup>

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*Rothschild Canticles: Art and Mysticism in Flanders and the Rhineland c. 1300* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1991).

<sup>48</sup>For classical references to this motif, see David M. Robinson, “The Wheel of Fortune,” *Classical Philology* 41, no. 4 (1946): 207-16; Doren also addresses Boethius’s classical sources, 80-1.

<sup>49</sup>For Boethius’s unique evocation of the wheel, see Doren, 81; and Ernst Kitzinger, “World Map and Fortune’s Wheel: A Medieval Mosaic Floor in Turin,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 117, no. 5 (1973): 362.

<sup>50</sup>Boethius, *Consolation*, II.1

<sup>51</sup>Ibid.

For Fortuna, then, the wheel is not simply a device of rule through violent motion and change, it is a game of mutation and transposition, a form of play wrought for and by the goddess. This game, experienced as uncertain and potentially devastating by her subjects, is for Fortuna a pretext for her own enjoyment in her mutable artistry, changing kings into paupers and paupers into kings. Change and movement, their constant imminence and enactment, constitute the only rules conditioning this game, in which other participants are rendered impotent, more pawns than proper adversaries. Inconstancy, however, is not only the single rule of this contest but the projection of the goddess's nature, materializing her qualities as a spectacle of constant inversion. The wheel is thus an allegorical representation, a materialization of an immaterial nature, yet one that remains within the goddess's purview. The wheel reveals a hidden essence beneath her fluid figure, but rather than stabilizing her mutability for inspection and illumination, what is revealed merely duplicates the inconstancy that the figure herself not only displays but incessantly performs as agent. Nevertheless, by materializing her essence as a game, the wheel gives a formal structure and dynamic to this essence. Fortuna's "joy" in watching the wheel is an aesthetic pleasure in her own qualities and agency, the mirror of vanity for her (often veiled) gaze.

While apprehension of the wheel might constitute a source of delight for the goddess herself, its use in visual representation during the Middle Ages displayed it for other objectives. Despite its visual resonance, Boethius's account of the wheel remained a textual image for some time. It does not seem to have been represented in visual form until the twelfth century.<sup>52</sup> In the high and later Middle Ages, however, the *rota fortunae* became a familiar sign of the dangers of faith in Fortuna or the transitoriness of earthly prosperity. The images thus upheld the admonitory intent of Lady Philosophy to the Prisoner to shun the false pleasures of the mutable world in favor of the true happiness of a spiritually-directed life. The depiction of bodies clinging helplessly to the spokes and rims of the wheel, and the violent corporeal experience of rising and falling along, could serve as an instigation for viewers to reject the goddess and pursue devout, virtuous behavior in its stead.

In spite of the fact that Fortune's wheel comprised a longstanding and familiar motif for various audiences in the Middle Ages and Renaissance, the treatment of the theme in art historical scholarship has not adequately addressed this pervasiveness. It is as if this very pervasiveness has hindered a precise critical engagement with its visual specificity, encouraging scholars to take it for granted as a commonality or to presume that contemporary viewers did the same.<sup>53</sup> Perhaps, too, the often strident moralizing overtones of the image and its textual

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<sup>52</sup> Perhaps the first known manuscript illustration of the wheel appeared in the treatise *Hortus Deliciarum* (1167-95) by Herrade von Landsberg. Although the manuscript was destroyed in 1870, it is known now through line-drawing reproductions. However, the use of mechanical wheels as *rota fortuna* in ecclesiastical settings and theater may have slightly predated this, with one of the earliest known references to such a wheel recorded around 1100. See Alan H. Nelson, "Mechanical Wheels of Fortune, 1100–1547," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 43(1980): 228

<sup>53</sup> Exceptions in this regard are Mitchell Merback, *The Thief, the Cross, and the Wheel: Pain and the Spectacle of Punishment in Medieval and Renaissance Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999) In chapter five of his study, "Wheel: Image, Symbol, Screen," Merback examines the significance of the wheel of Fortune in relation to rituals and instrument of punishment, suggesting ways in which the iconographic theme could impact and be impacted by the interpretation of actual punishment rituals during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Daniel Heller-Rozan, analyzing the text of the *Roman de la Rose* and Jean de Meung's translation of the *Consolation*, and not images, nevertheless offers intriguing assessments of the wheel in relation to what he calls the "poetics of contingency." Although he largely neglects the religious discourse on the wheel in favor of the romance literary context, he nevertheless provides some ways of thinking about the aesthetic principles of Fortuna that are intriguing

accompaniments suggest that the image is simply reducible to its apparent message. And yet, in addition to the theme's historical fortitude, the wheel of Fortune demonstrated a remarkable adaptability of context, moving between religious frameworks, political commentary, and secular-minded romances; it appeared in illuminated manuscripts, ecclesiastical architecture and theater, and, by the later fifteenth century, popular prints.<sup>54</sup>

Such contextual variety certainly impacts aspects of the appearance and signification of different representations of the wheel, and, indeed, there are variations in the way in which the goddess and her emblematic inconstancy are portrayed. At times, for instance, Fortuna is shown facing the wheel, in the position of both its operator and primary spectator in a manner akin to her self-description in the *Consolation* [fig. 1.4]. In this case, the viewer of the image encounters the wheel as an object, often from an oblique point of view that allows for an engagement with Fortuna's own interaction with the proceedings. Yet perhaps the most resilient and mobile representation of the wheel portrayed the goddess from a frontal point of view, framed by her game of movement and transformation [fig. 1.5]. Although this image proved strikingly unfixed in its applicability to different viewers and situations, its basic visual conventions are themselves quite consistent. This constancy is attributable in no small part to the image's schematic quality, a quality that Villard d'Honnecourt recognized and exploited in a geometric drawing from his thirteenth-century pattern book [fig. 1.6]. The reduction of the wheel to its most fundamental structure in this case is coincident with its appearance in the pattern book—it anticipates its future adaptability and use in other contexts.<sup>55</sup>

The consistency of the visual conventions in this image-type, I would suggest, could allow it to exceed or exist in tension with the textual frameworks of the illuminated manuscripts in which it was often placed, since its compositional and iconographic codification was such that it could be "imported" as a pre-existing prototype into diverse texts and situations. But rather than promoting an easy familiarity on the part of viewers, this codification should be seen as a consequence of the complex efficacy of the image's epistemological dimensions. In its schematic character, this construction of the wheel could function as a kind *denkbild*—or an image that uses diagrammatic imagery in order to articulate theological concepts and relationships. The translation of Boethius's wheel from text into image transformed it in crucial ways, even when the stated intent of its framing discourse was quite similar.

A number of examples of this image-type, dating from the fourteenth through the early sixteenth century, demonstrate its basic character and shifts between various manuscript genres and into the medium of print [figs. 1.7-1.10]. Each of these images offers their own opportunities for reflection and elaborates the schematic prototype in different ways, yet their similarities demonstrate that it is possible to discuss this approach to the wheel as a type. My own analysis

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for art historical study and have informed my thinking. See Daniel Heller-Roazen, *Fortune's Faces: The Roman de la Rose and the Poetics of Contingency* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), esp. Ch. 3.

<sup>54</sup> For the multiple contexts in which the wheel appeared in the Middle Ages, see Doren, 85-6. For church contexts, see Helen J. Dow, "The Rose-Window," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 20, no. 3/4 (1957); and Kitzinger, "World Map and Fortune's Wheel: A Medieval Mosaic Floor in Turin,"; and Kitzinger. Marcia Kupfer remarks on the allusion to the wheel in the communal palace of Siena in her article Marcia Kupfer, "The Lost Wheel Map of Ambrogio Lorenzetti," *The Art Bulletin* 78, no. 2 (1996), esp. 305. For the studies addressing the significance of Fortun's wheel in the literary romance genre, see Heller-Roazan; Haug; and Stanley Leman Galpin, "Fortune's Wheel in the Roman De La Rose," *PMLA* 24, no. 2 (1909) Nelson takes up the theatrical use of the wheel from the Middle Ages through the sixteenth century, while Frederick Kiefer offers perspectives on the Elizabethan context in Frederick Kiefer, *Fortune and Elizabethan Tragedy* (Marino, Calif.: Huntington Library Press, 1983).

<sup>55</sup> Paris, Bibl. Nat. MS Fr. 19093. The pattern book also includes a design for a mechanical wheel, or "perpetuum mobile."

will make references to multiple works, noting their differences and specific contexts but also suggesting their continuities. By attempting to materialize Fortuna's essence or game, these images frame the goddess within Christian systems and habits of contemplation, establishing a relationship between the material and immaterial that is at once devotional, allegorical, and predictive. In so doing, the images register the tensions inherent in her position as mediator of time, knowledge, and her relationship to the divine. Yet, the specifically *visual* nature of this materialization gives special, added dimension to these problems.

In a fourteenth-century miniature from a French manuscript of the *Roman de la Rose* [fig. 1.7], a text in which Fortuna figures prominently at certain points, the goddess is shown positioned behind the wheel, yet remains visually and functionally prominent as the central axis of both the composition as a whole and the wheel itself, for which she constitutes the operative support. Crowned and blindfolded—and thus exhibiting the attributes of her unseeing authority—she is enclosed at once by the circular wheel and the black-and-red patterned frame that comprises the edge of the miniature and divides it emphatically from the surrounding text. The four personages along the wheel—the victims and participants of Fortuna's game in various states of prosperity and decline—highlight the contraption's framing activity: located along the edge of the wheel's rim, they help define its circular edge while transgressing the boundaries of the miniature's own patterned frame. Thus while the goddess forms the center of the image and apparatus, the crucial activity that the image conveys lies at its margins, where the four men are displayed in a drama of ascent and descent.

And it is in its visual form that the dramatic potential of the wheel finds special articulation. In the *Consolation*, the wheel is a figure for ongoing transitoriness and change. Fortune's game involves the continued possibility of moving between apex and nadir, as Fortuna attempts to console the prisoner by observing that, just as he has fallen from the highest to the lowest point of the wheel, its movements dictate that he can return there: "Indeed, my very mutability gives you just cause for hope for better things."<sup>56</sup> Yet as an image, the wheel is consistently pictured as a kind of temporal and narrative apparatus, a device for spatializing relationships between past, present, and future. Through their varied social and physical states, the figures dramatically register the wheel's movement, their animation bolstered by the patterned backdrop, whose ornamental motifs wind their way along the curves and spokes of Fortuna's emblematic wheel. Although the uppermost figure sits atop the wheel facing the viewer in a static pose of crowned glory, the remaining characters in the drama face a common clockwise direction that intimates a steady rotating motion. Their shared orientation propels the viewer's gaze along the wheel's rim, such that the viewer travels—visually, if not physically—with Fortuna's charges in their clockwise trajectory. In this sense, the wheel governs not only the fate of the figures portrayed, but the viewer's visual involvement, as well. This positioning of figures is a consistent strategy in this image-type [see also fig. 8, for example]. Personages on the wheel are only rarely shown in random positions or disarray. More often, they are positioned so as to convey the unidirectional motion of the wheel.

The animation that is thereby created, while suggestive of the goddess's essence of mutability in its presentation of transforming states, is, however, neither erratic nor unsteady. While the movement of the wheel in the *Consolation* was unending and thus lent a certain inevitability to changes in individual fortune, the rhythm of its motions was subject to the "random strokes" of Fortuna's whims.<sup>57</sup> Later moralizing accounts similarly stress the

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<sup>56</sup> Boethius, *Consolation*, II.2.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

suddenness of the wheel's changes, a suddenness that renders the wheel not only unstable but uncertain. The image of the wheel converts the experience of uncertainty into a steady, regular movement from one state to another. Not only is the directionality of the wheel's motion unbroken, but the equal spacing of figures over the span of the rim enhances the impression of regularity, such that the figures define discreet and identical segments of Fortuna's ongoing game. The visual experience that is thereby afforded is one of a steady cyclical progression. The animation of the figures is muted by their typical placement along the vertical and horizontal axes of the wheel, a compositional choice that tends to fix the dynamic potential of the wheel in favor of the construction of a schematic pattern. Indeed, images that depart from this custom and place figures on diagonal axes demonstrate the extent to which this imaging of the wheel by and large eschewed the impression of action in order to distill the goddess's nature into a visual design, available for the viewer's apprehension and contemplation [fig. 1.9, for example]. The multiplication of personages and spokes redoubles the impression of transformation and subverts the conversion of the wheel into perpendicular axes, thus endeavoring to overcome the stasis of pictorial representation and intimate the wheel's circular animation.

Yet, despite the elements of pattern and stasis, the aims of these representations are strongly temporal and narrative in character. Whether the four personages represent separate individuals depicted simultaneously, or constitute a single character at different moments, the *rota fortunae* uses repetition and variation of figures in a unified space renders the wheel in terms of the principles of continuous narration. In this respect, the wheel forms a reliable connective tissue for narrative representation during the period, linking each successive state through its curved structure and effectively disciplining the viewer's sequential perception. And this story has a proper end. The lowermost character in this story is typically shown to be expelled from the contraption itself—falling from the apex of Fortuna's favor means ultimately falling from the wheel as a whole. In some sense, the narrative of the wheel's turn is a refiguring of the narrative, not just of any fall, but the Fall, the corruption of man by virtue of his own frailty at the hands of a woman. The Fall is the cause of the blindness that affects humankind's condition of limited vision, which in turn effects the recurring fall on Fortuna's wheel. Within the image, the story portrayed indeed indicates no further action in the narrative save for its own repetition. Although in the MS Douce miniature, the bearded figure is positioned slightly to the left of the central axis so as to facilitate the spectator's continued visual mobility along the wheel's edge, he himself lies on the ground, lacking any visible, viable opportunity to begin his story anew. The four stations of the wheel are reduced to a single outcome in the delimitation of possibility.

By making this fate and what precedes it fully visible, this image of the wheel expunges chance from its frame. Its aim is not to display the essence of Fortuna's inconstancy as such, but to transform this essence into a narrative sequence and knowable configuration in accordance with her place in a divine order. The visual representation of the wheel enables a balance between simultaneity and temporal unfolding, a view that permits an unveiling of an ordered structure underlying the experience of suddenness and uncertainty. Via the image, the wheel becomes a map for the perception and projection of future and past moments, in which the viewer is given full access to the recitation. In so doing, it affirms the value and authority of visual representations as predictive devices, their prophetic capacity ostensibly serving as an alternative and corrective to Fortuna, a mediator of certainty rather than ambiguity. Images, whatever their material status, are potentially sources of insight and knowledge. The unveiling of this structure is accentuated by the goddess's frequently veiled gaze within these representations.

Our privileged insight, courtesy of the image, stands in contrast to both Fortuna's lack of vision and the absence of foresight on the part of her charges.

Given these conditions, it is perhaps no surprise that this configuration of the wheel was also converted into a meditative image of the most universalizing necessity: the life cycle itself, the movement from birth to death, a theme known as the *Lebensrad* [fig. 1.11].<sup>58</sup> Such representations align the wheel with transitoriness of all matter, the figure of the passage of time in general. The body moves from origin, through a multiplicity of corporeal states, toward death through the activity of time. The wheel's conversion of chance to necessity that is suggested in this theme, however, also reasserts the significance of the temporal dimensions of the wheel's design. It is precisely the wheel's diagrammatic aspects as an image that facilitate not only the viewer's *temporal* movement between successive moments but the *allegorical* or interpretive movement between what is shown (the wheel as particular material entity) and what lies beyond this particularity. As a visual schema, the wheel bears a strong resemblance to astrological and time-keeping charts of the period [fig. 1.12], an association that not only furthers its predictive associations but links material bodies to heavenly bodies, the earthly to the celestial sphere.<sup>59</sup>

In the MS Douce miniature, the process of the wheel's dematerialization is facilitated by the absence of modeling on the wheel itself. The two-dimensionality of the contraption helps to dilute the distinction between foreground and background, partially collapsing Fortuna's emblem into the surrounding ornamentation. This destabilizing of referentiality that is central to the movement between material and abstract has in this case a visual analogue in the form and content of the transitional figures at the wheel's edge. Whereas the figures at the upper and lowermost rungs of Fortuna's game are rendered in grisaille and bear evidence of modeling, the characters between these two positions display a similar linear definition and lack of shading as the wheel itself. The wheel's movement between material and abstraction, between its iconic referentiality and the possibilities afforded by its allegorical dematerialization, might therefore be paralleled with the movement between spatial and temporal states. It is worth considering how the wheel can be seen as a diagram reflecting on the temporality of mediation more broadly, and how this mediation is structured by a sense of past, present, and future.

The transitory figures on Fortuna's wheel in general bear the primary burden of animating the image, as their portrayal contrasts with both the stasis and relative definition of the figures positioned along the vertical axis of the structure. Fortuna herself defines this axis, visibly connecting the glorified and the disgraced. In their relatively stationary condition, these figures assert their present-ness in time, an effect that is especially enhanced in the case of the king crowned at the wheel's apex, whose frontal gaze toward the spectator establishes a connection with his or her present moment. Thus the vertical axis of the wheel can be seen as establishing a temporal division between the intermediary, mobile time of the horizontal axis defined by the transitional figures. This construction of time is echoed in other versions of this theme, in which each of Fortuna's charges is accompanied by speech banners bearing declarative statements about the respective conditions [see fig. 8, for example]: *regnabo*, *regno*, *regnavi*, *sum sine regnum* (I will rule, I rule, I have ruled, I am without kingdom). The present-tense

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<sup>58</sup> On the theme of the *Lebensrad*, see K. Weinhold, "Glücksrad und Lebensrad," *Abhandlungen der Königlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin* (1892).

<sup>59</sup> Dow discusses some of the cosmic associations of the wheel, 270-2, though here assessments are based largely on textual evidence. The visual resemblance to time-keeping and astrological diagrams would perhaps have been sufficient to create these connections for viewers.

speech of the most elevated and fallen is framed by the future anticipations of the upwardly mobile figure at left and the past-retrospections of the ill fated at right.

The speech banners define the act of rule, the apex of the wheel, as the measure of the wheel's temporality—the point in relation to which the future advances and the past recedes—due to its desirable status. The king is in this sense the reference of the image, since each of his counterparts orient themselves in relation to his status and, through their speech acts, point emphatically to him. Yet, in Fortune's game, this reference point is unstable. The design of the wheel is to unseat the ruler, to move beyond his trappings of authority and locate stability and truth elsewhere. But, given the transparency of the image's schematic and predictive framework, this "elsewhere" is within the image itself. The wheel presents not only a vertical axis dividing moments of transition, the figures of transition themselves constitute a horizontal axis that is delineated by Fortuna's outstretched arms and the slightly tilted spokes of the wheel itself. Separating the highest from the lowest, the axis marks the line of transposition in Fortuna's game. But in the image, which insists more decisively on the permanence of the fate of the lowly deposed, the axis marks the boundary between image and referent, pointing to the truth of the king's trappings of status—that is, his status as representation. His crown and stature, signifiers of the false happiness provided by earthly goods, are but impermanent and mutable, despite appearances to the contrary. The king who declares his rule so decisively, and to whom all other figures seem to refer in some way, is simply a representation. More so than his three colleagues, his portrayal has a strong precedent as a representational convention in other images: the king's stance decisively evokes the iconography of royal authority in medieval visual culture more broadly, in which monarchs are depicted enthroned from a frontal perspective [fig. 1.13]. By unseating this familiar image of royal power and revealing its precariousness, Fortuna's game is to unveil the underlying truth of representation, to animate the ostensibly permanent and iconic image at the hands of the wheel's movement.

Seen from this perspective, the goddess Fortuna, so often condemned as deceptive, untrustworthy, and source of uncertainty, becomes a purveyor of truth and knowledge about the future. She is the source and impetus of the act of initiating movement between high and low, between image and referent, both allegory and agent in her activity. This activity is temporal—the movement between high and low is instilled with the futurity of the transitional figures on the wheel. Just as the Neoplatonic image is instilled with the futurity of what lies beyond the material world, the movement between high and low is instilled with moving-toward a future state. But while, broadly speaking, this movement of unveiling—whether allegorical or epistemological—tends to be directed toward the abstract and immaterial realm, conceived of as higher than the realm of appearances, in the case of Fortuna's wheel this revelation entails not an elevation but rather a literal fall into depth. The knowledge that Fortuna and her wheel mediate is not necessarily transcendent but earthly, at once about and bound to the transitoriness of lowly matter in unfolding time.

The image's role as a source of knowledge is congruent with Boethius's dictum on the value of bad fortune in particular, for it is only in one's fall from her favor that the goddess "shows her true fickleness" and serves as a vehicle for more elevated forms of contemplation.<sup>60</sup> To show good fortune would be to purvey falsehoods, to seduce with promises of prosperous futures that are transitory and thus counterfeit. By revealing the essence of her inconstancy as misfortune, the image can be said to compel a turn toward eternity and a transcendence of earthly goods, just as the devotional image itself aims to direct attention away from its own materiality

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<sup>60</sup> Boethius, *Consolation*, III.8.



and toward the otherworldly beyond the present moment. Yet it is precisely in fixing Fortuna as a transparent, purposeful, mediating entity within a divine structure that the purpose of this image-type becomes obscure. If the image is relatively transparent regarding earthly time and the activity of Fortuna, it presents certain ambiguities about what lies beyond the wheel, the status of the goddess and the ends to which image is potentially directed.

The diagrammatic depiction of the wheel reveals the progression of earthly time under Fortuna's sway, but it also attempts to distinguish between the transitory temporality of earthly goods and the aims of spiritual contemplation. This is evident in following the course of the emblems of authority as they are displayed within certain examples of this image-type. The signs of royalty bestowed upon the unsuspecting figure enthroned at the apex of the wheel, and soon to be unseated by its movements, call attention to the trappings of investiture often displayed by Fortuna herself. In a fifteenth-century manuscript of Valerius Maximus's *Facta et Dicta* (Paris, Bibl. Nat. MS France 43), for instance, Fortuna is shown crowned and clothed in a similar red and white ermine garment as her most favored subject immediately above her [fig. 1.5]. The suggestion is that she is the "true" authority in the proceedings, the agent who in fact governs the male king in spite of his trappings and visually hierarchical position within the composition as a whole. But the chain does not stop with the acknowledgment of Fortuna's authority. Like the royal figure she is poised to unseat, Fortuna can be seen as part of a larger narrative in which her own authority is subject to that of another, though the unfolding of this narrative remains outside of the miniature's frame. Her horizontally extended arms, gesturing to elevate one figure and cast down another in the wheel's continuous, imminent clockwise movement, evoke the iconography of the Last Judgment [fig. 1.14].<sup>61</sup> Indeed, with the condemned on her right and the exalted on her left, Fortuna is made in the image of the Godhead, the axis along which judgment is visually enacted.<sup>62</sup> The act of judgment is redoubled by her divided gaze in her bifrontal or *mi-partie* portrayal: as in the *Consolation*, judgment is equated with sight, though in this case it is Fortuna and not the Godhead who is bearing the authoritative look. Through this allusion, Fortuna and her wheel are connected not simply to the movement of earthly time but to eschatological time within the Providential order.<sup>63</sup> Her actions of raising up and casting down only appear without intention. While this reference has been interpreted as suggesting that Fortuna is simply an instrument of divine Providence on earth, it might be better understood in temporal terms, as a kind of prophetic representation within an image that proclaims a privileged relationship to the representation of future time. The allusion to the Last Judgment allows the viewer to keep in mind not just the visible earthly futures but also personal salvation in a moment yet to come, to overcome the blindness of one's worldly condition by acknowledging an omniscient judge. Viewing the wheel also allows the spectator to keep this final Judge in view. But because the subject is conveyed allusively rather than directly, it exists at a different level of representation than the earthly time so clearly delineated by the movement of the wheel. Through its obliqueness, it refuses the present and presence of the Last Judgment and thus maintains its futurity.<sup>64</sup> Fortuna is in this sense affirmed as a mediator, not just of the immaterial and divine,

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<sup>61</sup> This reference is made especially clear in MS Douce 332 and the frontispiece to Gregor Reisch's *Encyclopaedia*, where the goddess's right arm is turned upwards and left arm downwards, as is Christ in the conventional representation of the Last Judgment.

<sup>62</sup> Bertrand comments on this symbolism, 377.

<sup>63</sup> For the connections between the wheel and Providence from a more textually-oriented perspective, see Haug, 7.

<sup>64</sup> The image of Fortuna at the wheel contrasts sharply with the portrayal of the Last Judgment scenes of the later Middle Ages, which meticulously render the details of the event and the fate of the blessed and the damned in a manner that not only binds it to the elaborate accounts within the text of Revelation but makes the future concretely

but of future time, or the moment when unfolding earthly time gives way to eternity. Like the transitory figures on her wheel, then, her significance is instilled with an anticipatory quality, a moving toward a different state outside of the wheel's movement.

But in asserting Fortuna's place within a heavenly order, this image-type departs from the principle of non-resemblance that characterized the relationship between Fortuna and God in the *Consolation*. In the play of likeness and difference between Fortuna and divine authority, the image tilts the balance toward the former, a gesture which, by positing a mimetic function for the goddess, is necessary to making her—and her distinctive mode of future time—available for knowledge and insight. While likeness is not antithetical to the aim of defining Fortuna as a mediator between the material and immaterial, it positions Fortuna as the stable nucleus from which change emanates. Indeed, Boethius himself, although he describes the *rota fortunae* as an “ever-changing circle,” he also describes the Providential order as a “set of revolving concentric circles,” the center of which constitutes the unmoving and eternal deity, while the movements of the outermost ring is associated with the mutability of fortune—the further one is from God, the more one is subject to the uncertainties of the material world.<sup>65</sup> Although Boethius may or may not have intended this structural similarity, it remains implicit at the level of its articulation in the text. It is through the visualization of the wheel as a diagram that the similitude becomes apparent; the image of the wheel maps center and periphery such that Fortuna takes the place of God.

Although this expresses a prophetic alignment with the Providential order, the image creates a certain ambiguity as to how to negotiate this resemblance and its precise nature. If, as an image, Fortuna is presented in the likeness of God, this likeness does not necessarily escape the pervasive characterization of the goddess as deceptive and morally reprehensible, whether such characterizations are articulated in the textual framework or simply ingrained from surrounding cultural discourse. The frequent descriptions of Fortuna as offering false but visually delightful goods poses the possibility that the image of eternity and divine authority in these works is just that—an image, in which form does not correspond to content and is subject to earthly mutability. The visual medium of her representation only heightens the sense of her potentially misleading ways, particularly in the case of miniatures, which may embed a rich and colorful depiction of the goddess within textual condemnations of her false promises. Moreover, the internal conventions of the image themselves promote skepticism about the signs of authority through the portrayal of royal deposition on the wheel, providing a diagram for the future unmaking of authority. And yet the image presents a scenario of judgment that is not incongruous with that which would be sanctioned or enacted by God, insofar as the figures on the wheel are defined by an overinvestment in earthly goods. In the *Consolation*, it is the precisely the disjuncture between Fortuna's judgment and that of God which is at stake, not their

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present for the viewer. Insofar as this image of the wheel refers only obliquely to the Second Coming, it maintains the futurity of the event and refuses to make it palpable present, thus suggesting that it remains immaterial, in the time to come.

<sup>65</sup> Frakes describes this structure in detail in Ch. 7; see also Dow (270-1), who comments on the connection between these two configurations but not on the implications of the *rota fortunae*'s alignment with that defining the divine order. Interestingly, when Alfred the Great translated and commented on the *Consolation*, the structure of the divine order is illustrated in the margins of the manuscript, not as concentric circles, but as a wheel (see Frakes, frontispiece, for a reproduction). For an interesting discussion of how this (fundamentally Neoplatonic) structure inflects the form of Boethius's text as a whole, see Elaine Scarry, "The Well-Rounded Sphere: The Metaphysical Structure of the *Consolation of Philosophy*," in *Essays in the Numerical Criticism of Medieval Literature*, ed. Caroline D. Eckhardt (Lewisburg, Penn.: Bucknell University Press, 1980), 91-140.

similarity. Condemnation by Fortuna opens the way for salvation. But, in the image, the visualization of the resemblance does not necessarily make this trajectory clear or necessary, and instead poses questions regarding the similarity. If this representation of Fortuna can be said to provide an image and likeness of Providential authority, or that which remains outside of normal human comprehension, what is the nature of this resemblance? Is it an idolatrous error to mistake her judgment for that of divine Providence? But how can her judgment be seen otherwise if Fortuna is understood as performing God's will? What does it mean to figure this will in the likeness of a woman, the more fallen of the sexes? And how should one respond to this likeness in a contemplative and didactic framework?

Fortuna's relationship to visual perception clarifies this dilemma with special force. Although the goddess's frequent portrayal as blind is typically defined as emblematic of the indiscriminate quality of her actions and her disregard for her subjects' merits as she plays her game, in this image-type it seems a rather arbitrary motif: in the midst of what the image reveals as a predictable, clear framework, Fortuna's blindness-as-haphazard-favor loses its import, since the future is shown to be an effect of the wheel's continuous and regular movement. Her blindness thus does not illuminate the connection between Fortuna and her subjects on the wheel but rather serves as a device to structure the connection between her image and the viewer. In MS Douce 332, the goddess is shown in a frontal pose that is not incongruous with the conventions of the devotional image or icon, and her orientation toward the viewer echoes that of the present-tense position of *regno* on the wheel just above her. Yet the expectations of immediacy and mediation are undercut by the inaccessibility of her gaze and the resultant blocking of intersubjectivity. Even as the remainder of the miniature offers privileged insight into the workings of time and the fate of the figures on her wheel, it does not lift the veil covering Fortuna herself. The ostensible subject of the image, she is resistant to interpretation and communication. Blindfolded, bifurcated, or lacking eyes completely, the central figure of Fortuna subverts the expectations of devotional images as operating through participation, empathy, and interaction. Her blindness therefore reflects the viewer's state of unknowing, since, complicating the movement between image and referent, Fortuna herself proffers not knowledge but undecidability, cause-without-(legible)-intention.

Whether the resistance of the image may finally point to the incomprehensibility of God's will—its earthly manifestation in veiled form—or to the uncertain appearances of the mutable world remains itself a point of instability. While the moralizing discourse on Fortuna presents the choice between virtue and vice, between earthly and spiritual goods in stark and clearly articulated terms, the image does not necessarily duplicate this clarity. In its allegorical aspirations, the image positions itself in a relationship with the immaterial, yet this relationship remains fraught with the potential for misrecognition and misinterpretation. The referentiality of Fortuna, like her bifrontal representation, would seem to contain a dual possibility of moving upward toward the immaterial divine or downward toward base matter. This potential to shuttle between two poles is in accordance with Frakes's assessment of her philosophical function and the dual characterization of the image in medieval culture. But it also resonates with the dynamics of the goddess's game, described in the *Consolation* as an interplay between the highest and the lowest as Fortuna moves "the top to the bottom and bottom to top." This description, which stresses the vertical registers of the wheel, invokes the movement toward unity with the divine and the mobility between material and immaterial that image-based devotion and contemplation themselves entail. But, as this image-type suggests, this movement is not simply spatial, it is also a movement in time, toward a future within the image or perhaps

beyond what it shows. Even as the image-type points to a visual likeness between Fortuna and the divine, between earthly time and eschatological time, it also attempts to keep these distinct by employing both direct, continuous narrative representation and allusive references to the future.

Taking the miniatures and prints as images—that is, apart from their textual and contextual frames—they may seem especially inconstant. Though the specific textual and contextual frameworks would surely impact the directionality of each image’s referential movement, the fact that this category of image could move between contemplative and condemnatory frameworks dramatizes the inconstancy and itself testifies to the possibilities of interpretation the representation could provoke. It is perhaps no wonder, then, that images of Fortuna at her wheel would sometimes seek to fix the relationship between Fortuna and the divine by means of a rope connecting the wheel to the hand of God, an excessive of textual inscription to stabilize interpretation, or both [fig. 1.15]. In this section, I have aimed to trace the *possibilities* inherent in this mode of representation. I do not wish to suggest that each example referred to would necessarily take viewers on the interpretive pathways I have delineated. My purpose is not to deny context or its importance, but rather to suggest that the persistence of this image-type lies in its ability to move between varied contexts and ends.

### **Albrecht Dürer and the Futures of Classicism in the North**

The persistence of the visual tradition of the wheel is in part what makes the introduction of classical iconography appear so dramatic. Indeed, as Koerner has suggested, the emergence of the image of the woman on the globe would seem to exemplify the notion of Renaissance as a break with the past; certainly it is difficult to bring continuity to a discussion of this transition.<sup>66</sup> When Albrecht Dürer took up the classicized representation of Fortuna in the mid-1490s, he was approaching a figure that, although it had been recently reworked in the Italian context, had a long, ambiguous, and diverse history in Christian art and theology. Far from an obscure classical deity, Fortuna was a prominent character in the wider visual culture. Her relevance for social and virtuous life was immediate and apparent, even if her value and connotations were not. Despite her attendant difficulties as a subject of representation (or perhaps because of them), Fortuna had her place in a tradition of imagery with devotional import, a tradition that traversed both print and manuscript production. In her guise at the wheel, the goddess posed questions, not only regarding the limits of human comprehension and the nature of divine authority with respect to future events, but the status and dynamics of images as mediators of time, the unknown, and the unseen. Fortuna was bound up with the potential relationship of form to content, the epistemological value of images and their relationship to time—all major concerns that we associate with the Renaissance, North and South alike. While in this respect the appeal of Fortuna for Dürer, with his self-conscious attempts to adapt and disseminate classicizing traditions in Northern Europe, should not come as a surprise, her orientation toward specifically future time complicates the historical motivations typically ascribed to the period. It is striking that Dürer, following his first trip to Italy in 1494-5, should find Fortuna the most suitable subject for his first published effort to blend classical style and subject in the so-called *Little Fortune* [fig. 1.1]. Perhaps the way to promote classicism in Northern Europe was not through an emphasis on its historical character, but rather through its possible appeal to a sense of the future.

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<sup>66</sup> Koerner, “Dürer’s Nemesis,” 256.

The *Little Fortune* departs not only from the prevalent iconography of the wheel in Northern Europe, but also from precedents in the Italian graphic arts—that is, modest, small-scale niello prints—which typically contextualized Fortuna, not on a globe, but at sea, her instability an effect of the elements and integrated into an overall decorative effect. Dürer’s figure does bear some resemblance to one of the Muses in Mantegna’s *Parnassus*, but seems to have its primary visual sources in a set of broadly allegorical prints dating from the 1460s, known as the *Tarocchi of Mantegna*, but of unknown authorship [fig. 1.16-1.17].<sup>67</sup> Representing a range of astrological principles, classical deities and personifications, these “cards” do not conform to the conventions of Tarot decks in any direct way, though could very well have been used for some kind of game.<sup>68</sup> Dürer made copies of many of these images during the mid-1490s, and though it is not clear that he understood his models as parts of a game *per se*, the format of single classicized figures in a reduced space, clearly informed his portrayal of Fortuna during the same period and offered a model for allegorical personification within a classicizing framework.

The *Little Fortune* demonstrates the extent to which the dramatic iconographical shift from wheel to globe reconstrued Fortuna’s function. The elimination of the wheel as template and structure, along with the attendant multiplication of figures across its spokes, put added pressure on the body of the goddess to articulate meaning and to configure the viewer’s relationship to the future. In the absence of a continuous narrative, movement was not mapped out but implied, as Fortuna in this case does not oversee instability but is rather constituted by instability as her physical condition. This in turn exerts added strain on the medium of visual representation, which cannot convey unfolding movement but must immobilize inconstancy within its frame. By placing Fortuna in a blank background, defined only by a few hatchings to indicate a horizon line, Dürer’s *Little Fortune* sets the stage for an emphasis on her figure as she steadies herself on her sphere. Eschewing a strict frontal or profile presentation, the artist instead depicts the goddess from an unusual point of view, showing her from a partial three-quarter perspective at the torso that gives way to the face in profile, complete with downcast gaze that Panofsky took as a literal indication of her blindness in the form of gouged or absent eyes.<sup>69</sup>

The subtle suggestion of torsion in the figure’s pose is echoed more powerfully, however, in the cloth that she holds, which drapes and twists around her frame. The cloth helps frame and articulate the body, highlighting the curves of the spine and abdomen as it terminates in a subtle right angle indication of movement, whose meanderings are accentuated by the stark verticality of the staff on which Fortuna steadies herself. The cloth, with its coiling and winding action, expresses a wavering movement that her physical form does not—it displaces the primary burden of inconstancy from body to object.

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<sup>67</sup> Panofsky suggested a link to the Mantegna’s *Parnassus*, though, as Rainer Schoch notes, this would require a revision in dating of the print to after 1497, when Mantegna’s painting was completed, a revision that he argues is not sustainable. See Rainer Schoch and et al., *Albrecht Dürer: Das Druckgraphische Werk, Bnd. I, Kupferstiche, Eisenradierungen und Kaltnadelblätter* (Munich: Prestel, 2001), 37. On the connection to the *Tarocchi*, see Koerner, “Dürer’s Nemesis,” 241-44.

<sup>68</sup> On the *Tarocchi*, see the exhibition catalogue Uwe Westfeling, ed. “*Tarocchi*”: *Menschenwelt und Kosmos: Ladenspelder, Dürer und die "Tarock-Karten des Mantegna"* (Cologne: Wallraf-Richartz Museum, 1988), 39-65. For Dürer’s involvement with the *Tarocchi*, in relation to its classicism, see Christopher S. Wood, *Forgery, Replica, Fiction: Temporalities of German Renaissance Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 92-4.

<sup>69</sup> Erwin Panofsky, ““Virgo & Victrix”: A Note on Dürer’s *Nemesis*,” in *Prints: Thirteen Studies*, ed. Carl Zigrosser (London: Peter Owen, 1962), 27. Panofsky notes that he consulted a medical doctor to confirm that this Fortuna is “blind—not merely blindfolded, as is so often the case in medieval, Renaissance, and even Baroque art, but actually sightless . . . her eyes either firmly closed or lacking both pupil and iris.”

But the cloth is only one aspect of the dispersion of meaning into Fortuna's accoutrements.<sup>70</sup> This is perhaps an effect of one of Dürer's presumed textual sources, the *Tabula Cebetis*, a Hellenistic text dating from the first century A.D. and attributed to Cebes, a disciple of Socrates.<sup>71</sup> The text was likely known to Dürer through his friend, the Nuremberg humanist Willibald Pirckheimer, who would translate the work into German around 1496-1500.<sup>72</sup> It is an extended ekphrasis on an allegorical painting in the Temple of Cronus at Thebes, which reflects on the various states of life and the proper course of navigating through its diverse situations. An instructive speaker leads readers through the painting in a dialogue with an inquisitive companion, identifying and interpreting the various stages and pitfalls of human existence, advocating both knowledge and virtue as a means to a proper existence and final good. Immensely popular in Europe in the sixteenth century, the text conforms to the Stoic ethics advocated by Boethius in the *Consolation*, and thus it is perhaps no surprise that Fortuna appears as a potentially distracting figure on the route through the painting. The textual presentation of Fortuna's image in the form a question-and-answer session between guide and novice, however, centers on the explanation of her attributes in a clear, unadorned fashion:

A: . . . But who is that woman / who seems both blind and senseless / standing on a round stone?

B. She is indeed called Fortuna (*das Glück*) / he said: and she is not only blind / but also mad and deaf.

A. What does she have to distribute to those below her?

B. She / he said / wanders to and fro: and from some she takes what she has: to some she gives / and takes again from those / to whom she has given / and gives them to others / altogether unthinking and inconstant. Hence this image explains quite well the manner and attributes of Fortuna.

C. Of which do you mean / I said.

D. That / she stands thusly on a round stone.

E. But what does that mean?

F. It shows / that the gifts of Fortuna / are not constant. Because one suffers a great and powerful trouble if one trusts in Fortuna . . .<sup>73</sup>

In stating the correspondence between attribute and meaning, the text deemphasizes Fortuna as physical presence and transforms her into a series of attributes and actions indicating her character. While I would not suggest that the *Little Fortune* comprises a direct illustration of the *Tabula*, it is characterized by a similarly communicative mode. It states the condition of uncertainty as epistemological fact, but, despite Fortuna's blind aloofness, is not overly

<sup>70</sup> As Koerner suggests, "the woman acts as a scaffolding for the emblems of fortune" ("Dürer's Nemesis," 247).

<sup>71</sup> For an edition of the *Tabula* with historical background and reception, see John T. Fitzgerald and Michael L. White, eds., *The Tabula of Cebes* (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1983).

<sup>72</sup> See Schoch, 36.

<sup>73</sup> As cited in Reinhart Schleier, *Tabula Cebetis; oder, Spiegel des Menschlichen Lebens, darin Tugend und untugend abgemalet ist; Studien zur Rezeption einer antiken Bildbeschreibung im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert*. (Berlin: Gebr. Mann, 1973), 147. I have translated the text from German. The original reads: "A. . . . Wer ist aber das Weib / welches gleich einer blinden vnd vnsinnigen / auff einem runden Stein stehet? // B. Sie heist zwar das Glück / sagt er: Vnd ist nicht allein blind / sondern auch toll vnd taub. // A. Was hat sie den für ein Ampt zu verwalten? // B. Sie / sagt er / spazieret hin vnd her: Vnnd nimbt etlichen / was sie haben: etlichen schenckt sie / vnndt nimbt jhnen wider / was sie gegeben hat / vnnd begabt andere damit / gar vnbedachtsam vnnd vnbestendig. Erkläret derwegen diss Bildt eben recht die art vnd eigenschafft dess Glücks. // C. Welches meanest du / sagt ich? // D. Das /so auff einem runden stein stehet. // E. Was bedeutet aber das? // F. Es zeigt an / dass die gaben des Glücks / nicht stat noch bestendig sein. Denn es leidet einer grossen vnnd gewaltigen schaden / wann er dem Glück trawet . . ."

interested in staging this uncertainty for the viewer. Nor is the image overly concerned with the moralizing overtones of the *Tabula* or the wheel imagery and lacks a strong condemnatory character.

The print's communicative mode has been achieved in part by severely limiting the domain Fortuna's power. Holding an eryngium, a flower with well-known aphrodisiac properties, Fortuna's inconstancy applies here specifically to the realm of romantic affairs. Dürer had depicted himself holding the flower in his self-portrait of 1493 [fig. 1.18], a work completed just before his marriage and which highlights his hopes for a good match.<sup>74</sup> The eryngium stands apart from the remainder of the emblematic repertoire insofar as it functions as both symbolic indicator and agent, an object intended to influence the future. Yet the flower's agentive capacity only highlights Fortuna's own lack of agency. Indeed, in Dürer's self-portrait the flower is part and parcel of his own impotence in the face of the future, "my affairs are ordained from above" (*My sach die gat / Als es oben schat*)—a hopeful but perhaps hopelessly diminutive remedy against future contingency and (as?) the divine. In the print, the portrayal of the eryngium, while it indicates a framework of interpretation for the goddess, is logically inconsistent with the notion of Fortuna as causal agent (however blind or unknowing), since it makes little sense as to why one who determines romantic futures would need the same protection against misfortune that the artist himself required. It constitutes another instance of the print's acts of displacement, draining the figure herself of efficacy and shifting it into the agency of a floral attribute.

Although, as an image, the *Little Fortune* may demonstrate the stylistic and intellectual ambitions of her author, she herself does not appear to exude much in the way of forceful potential. Perched atop her small sphere, her ostensibly unseeing gaze directed downward as she leans upon her staff, Fortuna seems more passive and demure than efficacious. While the *Little Fortune* suggests the interest in the theme itself and the importance of classical form as a means of engaging in uncertain futures, it does not respond to a demand for images that mediate the future per se. The work may seem, then, to promote the new image of Fortuna in which the dictates of time and the divine are absent, leaving room for both visual pleasure in the nude female body and the exercise of the viewer's will. Nevertheless, though the print was copied and was influential in establishing iconographic knowledge, it was typically repeated without significant variation; it did not inspire agency on the part of its viewers.

Whatever the extent and nature of the influence the *Little Fortune* exerted on Dürer's contemporaries, she was certainly not the endpoint of the artist's own exploration of these motifs. The diminutive status that is inscribed in the print's current conventional title is contingent upon her scale relative to Dürer's subsequent deployment of Fortuna's iconography in a more ambitious project, *Das Grosse Glück*, or *The Great Fortune* [fig. 1.19]. Measuring 329 by 224 millimeters, and thus almost three times the size of its predecessor and the second largest engraving completed by Dürer during his career, the *Great Fortune* was completed around 1501-02, and it can be counted among the more elaborate printed works undertaken by the artist during the period.<sup>75</sup> The work couches the iconography of Fortuna in a grand format and in a manner that addresses the contemplative activity of the viewer, and does so in a way that is generally coincident with the meditative possibilities of the image of Fortuna at her wheel. In this sense,

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<sup>74</sup> Koerner discusses the eryngium in the *Little Fortune* and Dürer's self-portrait as an aspect of love magic in "Dürer's Nemesis," 247, 250-1; and, with respect to the 1493 self-portrait and the theme of marriage, in *Joseph Leo Koerner, The Moment of Self-Portraiture in German Renaissance Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 31.

<sup>75</sup> Only the engraving of St. Eustace (355 x 259 mm), dating from the same period, exceeds the size of *The Great Fortune* in Dürer's graphic oeuvre.

the work articulates this longstanding figure of the future within the novel possibilities offered by both classical style and the developing print medium.

Unlike the *Little Fortune*, however, in this case Dürer uses the emblems of Fortuna for a more systematic exploration of the classicized body: the print constitutes an early manifestation of the artist's involvement with the Vitruvian theory of human proportions, a topic that he became interested in during his first trip to Italy and that he would continue to engage with over the course of his career.<sup>76</sup> The scale of the print can thus be seen as proportionate to the scale of one of its key objectives—the artist's first display of the canon of bodily proportion for a wider audience. Through the print, Dürer first “published” this theory in visual form. His subsequent writings on this system indicate part of the rationale for his involvement with promoting and adapting the Vitruvian framework. In his draftings for a planned treatise on art, written c.1512-13, Dürer states that he has made his ideas public to promote aesthetic principles in the context of Northern Europe, as an aid to German artists: “Now I know that in our German nation, at the present time, are many painters who stand in need of instruction, for they lack all real art, yet they nevertheless have many great works to make.”<sup>77</sup> Seen in terms of this statement, the *Great Fortune* uses the signs of the goddess of fortune not simply to present a schema of aesthetic knowledge, but with an eye to the future of German art. A self-conscious visual statement by one of Northern Europe's most self-conscious artistic practitioners, the print is not only bound up with Dürer's own awareness of his future posterity as painter-printmaker and theorist, but with the desire to make other, future works of art possible. Like the schema of Fortune's wheel, Dürer's corporeal structure is laden with a narrative of futurity, a transferrable structure of organization that would seem to permit a vision of what will be.

If Dürer's success in this regard can be measured simply by subsequent references to the image, then the *Great Fortune* surely seems to have achieved its aims: the image was incorporated into the graphic arts in Germany throughout the sixteenth century to an extent that its smaller counterpart was not. Indeed, as we shall see, the work is perhaps one of the most influential treatments of the female nude in Northern Renaissance printmaking, though its effects were also registered in the Italian context, as evidenced by references to the work in the graphic arts in both regions [fig. 1.20-1.21]. Yet in other, quite vital respects the work does not meet its basic objectives. For, although the work was long understood (and is indeed still typically referred to secondarily) as an image of Fortuna, it was in fact conceived of as an image of another classical deity, Nemesis.<sup>78</sup> Whatever confusion this figure may have created with respect to its identity, whether we see her as Fortuna or Nemesis the futurity of the artist's intentions are echoed in the essential thematics of his subject. For Nemesis, as the goddess of retribution, was linked to Fortuna both functionally and iconographically. Functionally, Nemesis's acts of justice were understood to be correctives to Fortuna's illogical favors—she redistributed fortune in order to influence the future in a more logical or measured manner (hence, as Panofsky noted, the appropriateness of Dürer's use of the figure in his display of measured human proportions).<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Dürer's intensive involvement with the theory of human proportions has been discussed by Erwin Panofsky, "The History and Theory of Human Proportions as a Reflection of the History of Styles," in *Meaning in the Visual Arts: Papers in and on Art History* (New York: Doubleday, 1955), chapter 8.

<sup>77</sup> As cited and translated in William Martin Conway, *The Writings of Albrecht Dürer* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1958), 176.

<sup>78</sup> In an article in the *Archiv für die Zeichenden Künste* in 1856, Bernhard Hausmann first suggested that the print that had so long been identified as an image of Fortuna was in fact an image of Nemesis, based on Dürer's own mention of an engraving he called *Die Nemesis* in his journal from his trip to the Netherlands.

<sup>79</sup> Panofsky, "Virgo & Victrix," 15.



Yet, if Nemesis seems opposed to Fortuna in this respect, her accoutrements and demeanor are often quite similar. The presumed textual source for Dürer's print, Politian's poem *Manto* of 1482 describes Nemesis in terms that could easily be applied to the change, motion, and instability of Fortuna herself, evoking Boethius's description in the *Consolation*: "Exchanging high and low, she mixes and tempers our action by turns, and she is borne hither and thither by the whirling motion of the winds."<sup>80</sup> Thus the figure in *Das Grosse Glück* is inseparable from Dürer's engagement, past and present, with Fortuna's iconography and conceptualization. Indeed, Dürer seems to have lacked a precise visual source for portraying Nemesis, and thus his recourse to the classicized image of Fortuna is a significant indication of the extent to which he connected the two figures.<sup>81</sup> That the deity was often interpreted by its contemporaries and historians alike as Fortuna is of course in part indicative of this engagement and associations. But this misrecognition was not simply a matter of iconography, but rather additionally bound to the problematic status of Fortuna as a representation, or as a mediator between material and immaterial domains that had characterized her portrayal in the later Middle Ages. The centrality of the theme of mediation to the print is also evident in its use of proportional theory, since this throws into relief the process of embodying abstract principles—the work is in some sense *about* the complex relationship between particular and general, material form and immaterial significance. And, with their emphasis on futurity, both Nemesis and Fortuna call attention to the temporal aspects of this process. Engaging with these issues requires a close visual attentiveness to the work, and in my discussion I take seriously the apparent aim of the print to engage its viewers in the contemplation of its visual details and schemas.

Suspended on her globe over a contemporary landscape, Dürer's hulking winged goddess is positioned along the image's central axis, and shown bearing her distinctive attributes of goblet and bridle, associated with reward and subjection, respectively.<sup>82</sup> In no danger of falling, her form exudes a rather rigid stability, presented in a strict profile view and set against a blank ground, an approach that seems geared to highlight the underlying structure of her physical form. The contrast between figure and ground is redoubled by that between the goddess's vacuous backdrop and the profuse detail that defines the setting below. Unlike the *Little Fortune*, viewers are given an alternative to the empty zone in which the deity is contained. Rather than grounding the unstable Fortuna on a vaguely defined horizon, *Nemesis* redefines this empty setting as an indeterminate heavenly locale. The goddess's globe floats just above a thin layer of clouds which part to reveal her to the spectator, separating from the earthly domain through a subtly meandering 'V' that angles sharply along the central axis to conform to her position. This internal boundary not only frames the goddess as vision, it sharply marks the physical and aesthetic border between earthly and cosmic domains. The print thus builds the theme of mediation into the structure of the composition itself, positioning Nemesis/Fortuna as a figure who would illuminate the relationship between the two spheres portrayed. However one may interpret the goddess's identity, it is through her form that the juxtaposition of these contrasting spaces is both justified and arbitrated.

While the division between heavenly and worldly spaces is immediately striking, there are nevertheless clear attempts to conjoin the two visually divergent domains. The thin, ribbon-

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<sup>80</sup> As translated in Panofsky, "Virgo & Victrix," 15-16. Given the problem of identification posed by the print, it is difficult to designate its title in this discussion. I will call the print *Nemesis/Fortuna* when the similarities of the two figures are under consideration, but will maintain the title *The Great Fortune* when considering the figure's significance in her interpretation as Fortuna.

<sup>81</sup> On the recourse to Fortuna's iconography as an effect of the absence of a visual source, see Schoch, 98.

<sup>82</sup> Panofsky, "Virgo & Victrix," 20.

like clouds frame the goddess as vision, but they do not completely contain her, as both her bridle and drapery meander subtly across the border between sky and landscape at left, their circuitous movement echoing that of the surrounding mist and craggy mountainscape alike. Within the register of the landscape, the oblique convergence of river and pathways at the central axis conforms to the 'V' of Fortuna/Nemesis's cosmic frame and her billowing drapery, uniting both spheres through their shared construction. Just as the *rota fortunae* asserted the structure cosmic time in the shape of a physical object, here the landscape is constructed in the image of heavenly activity.

But it is Fortuna/Nemesis's gaze that perhaps constitutes the most intricate and vital point of interface between upper and lower registers. In this print, the goddess's expressed mode of authority is not physical (as in the violent rotation of bodies on the wheel); rather her mode of interaction with her charges is through the medium of visual perception. Her resolute gaze from her elevated location appears as the potential instrument of her causal agency and judgment, evoking the threatening but shifting faces of the Fortuna *mi-partie*, operating through sight to affect those under her sway. The prominence accorded to her gaze is all the more arresting given its contrast, not only with the conventional blindness of so many representations of Fortuna, but the reserved, unseeing status of the *Little Fortune*. Although, in the print, Fortuna's gaze is directed steadfastly before her, the division between the cosmic and earthly spheres helps to indicate the range of her perspective. The textual accounts of Nemesis that were available to Dürer emphasize her aerial point of view as a goddess who "looks down upon the terrestrial realm of the heavens" to perceive and correct the inequities of humankind.<sup>83</sup> In this description, the gaze joins heaven and earth in an act of surveillance that characterizes the all-seeing divine judge of the *Consolation*.

Yet the landscape below not only presents a different kind of space than Nemesis's celestial void, it presents a point of view that is at odds with the relatively level position from which spectators perceive the figure herself. As Koerner has noted, the landscape in Dürer's print does not portray proper linear perspective even though it may have been intended to evoke such an impression. Rather, the landscape is shown in a kind of reverse perspective, lacking horizon and vanishing point.<sup>84</sup> The setting seems to curve sharply upwards rather than receding steadily or logically into the distance, though its full oddity is somewhat censored by the clouds that surround the deity. The effect is to suggest a quasi-aerial point of view that intimates the extent of Fortuna/Nemesis's power as spectator over the landscape. Although it elevates observers and allows them to at least partially partake of this lofty point of view, the sharp division in perspective additionally unsettles spectators' position and divides their own look between level and aerial perception. However proximate viewers may be to the deity's perspective, the specificity and contemporaneous features of the landscape render it a point of identification for the early sixteenth-century viewer, in which the familiarity with mundane architecture and detail comes with an acknowledgement of one's own earthly context. The fragmentation of the spectator between aerial and horizontal, between heaven and earth, constitutes a destabilizing effect of the representation, as the viewer potentially oscillates between upper and lower registers and points of view—the fluctuations between high and low that constitute the basis of both Fortuna's and Nemesis's respective games. This dynamic is echoed in the figure herself. For, although she is positioned in the dematerialized and rather despatialized realm of the upper

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<sup>83</sup> As cited in Panofsky, "Virgo & Victrix," 24. The text in question is from Pomponius Laetus's *Manual of Roman History*, which was first published in 1500 and, Panofsky suggests, was known within Dürer's circle in Nürnberg.

<sup>84</sup> Koerner, "Dürer's Nemesis," 290.

register, she seems more visually aligned with the intricate detail and physicality of the realm below in her mode of depiction.<sup>85</sup> Her meticulously-textured and substantial wings, the cumbersome weight of the bridle with its many leather strands, and the careful regard for shaping her form in three-dimensional modeling—the material quality of these motifs is awkwardly enhanced by the utterly blank background, such that she appears foreign to the celestial sphere. The ‘V’ of clouds creates the impression that she is being gently lowered onto the landscape from a heavenly point of origin, yet, given her tangibility, it almost appears as if the clouds constitute a kind of horizon line for the landscape from which she seems to emerge. Rising and falling, she shares in the play between high and low that constitutes the lack of resolution between the two segments of the composition.<sup>86</sup>

But the movement of this game, just as in the case of the wheel, is hindered by blindness. Although the clouds seem to part for our benefit to grant privileged access to the goddess, the scope of this access is ultimately limited to material particulars. The figure, despite her awkwardness, intimates a strong sense of her own intentional capacity through her resolute gaze and unyielding pose. Within both the image itself and its textual source in Politian, sight is identified with agency in the characterization of the goddess. When the figure is interpreted as Nemesis, the faculty of sight is linked to an ability to perceive character and motivation: in Politian’s poem, for instance, Nemesis perceives and subdues “arrogant minds” and those with “wicked desires.”<sup>87</sup> If the goddess can perceive the internal failings of her subjects in her role as all-seeing judge, viewers are kept at a distance from the goddess’s own motivations. Dürer betrays the presence of this capacity, but registers it as future potential rather than depicted actuality. In the portrayal of blinded or blindfolded Fortuna, viewers’ uncertainty had an analogue or reflection in the unseeing goddess herself. The Nemesis/Fortuna of Dürer’s print, however, offers no such point of connection or reflection. The image does not mirror but rather conceals, and the viewer’s blindness is a point of contrast with the image’s subject.

This blindness calls attention to one of the other key differences between the classical formulation of the goddess and the *rota fortunae*: the image’s presentation of time and personal fate. The wheel presented a fully-articulated structure that narrated an act of condemnatory judgment, and though it presented different possibilities as to the origin and ultimate nature of this judgment, it did enable a contemplation of future, eschatological judgment that would occur beyond the frame. Although the figure in the print, through her implied agency and vision, conveys her status as judge, the nature and framework of this judgment is difficult to ascertain. The intended subject of the work seems to presuppose a difference between two forms of judgment, forms that were ostensibly aligned in the integration of Fortuna in the Providential schema signified by the wheel: the ordered and logical judgments of Nemesis versus the random and purposeless acts of Fortuna. But, despite this implication of difference between Nemesis and

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<sup>85</sup> The notion that Dürer’s nudes are somehow *too* material, too real, is a common one, voiced by Vasari in his remarks on the artist and echoed by Panofsky’s interpretation of *The Little Fortune*, in which Dürer’s goddess is described in terms that suggests a fall from a higher ideal in relation to the presumed source in Mantegna’s *Parnassus* as a “Mantegnesque Muse, restudied after a Nuremburg model and thereby deprived of much of her original gracefulness,” Erwin Panofsky, *The Life and Art of Albrecht Dürer* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005), 70. Koerner echoes this assessment in his more general remark that “unlike the idealized, abstracted nudes of Italian art, Dürer’s early nudes always look like real, specific people who, against custom and climate, have undressed for the artist” (Koerner, “Dürer’s Nemesis,” 244).

<sup>86</sup> As Panofsky remarks in *The Life and Art of Albrecht Dürer*, “no doubt a conflict can be felt between the didactic and at the same time naturalistic treatment of this figure and the fantastic character of the theme,” though Panofsky attributes this to a lack of balance between the artist’s “new scientific interests” and his “artistic imagination” (82).

<sup>87</sup> See Panofsky, “Virgo & Victrix,” 15.

Fortuna as judges and agents, neither Dürer nor his contemporaries keenly distinguished the two figures at a visual or iconographic level, as is evident in Dürer's recourse to Fortuna for his iconographic program and the subsequent interpretation of *Nemesis* as the *Great Fortune*. Yet any alignment between these two forms of judgment is complicated by the elimination of a visible narrative or temporal structure within Dürer's interpretation of the theme. The absence of a narrative structure is additionally echoed in the lack of a clear moral structure in which the figure operates; viewers thus cannot plot themselves within the image or in relation to the goddess with certainty, or contextualize earthly judgments clearly within a larger eschatological framework. The future ends of her actions, and thus the viewer's own future, are made invisible. But in eliminating references to unfolding time and narrative structure, Dürer's print collapses the distinction between earthly and heavenly futures, rendering the viewer's blindness to both as a defining feature of the visual encounter with Fortuna. In so doing, however, *Nemesis/Fortuna* makes explicit what the medieval iconography had attempted to manage through the play of likeness and difference between Fortuna and the divine: while earthly and heavenly futures may be distinguishable at an ontological level, they are equivalent at the level of their shared invisibility, particularly in the case of contingent futures. This was intimated in Boethius's discussion of future contingency in the *Consolation*, in which the relationship to God in heaven (that is, the future of salvation) and the contingent, unfolding future on earth are constituted through human blindness. This equivalence at once licenses and problematizes the extension of the image's mediating function from its devotional context and into the engagement with future uncertainty.

Yet whatever differences the image may possess in relation to *rota fortunae*, it is the figure's resistance to interpretation that helped establish her identity as Fortuna. If contemporaries identified the subject of this print with the goddess of inconstancy, it is at least in part because she seemed to conform to longstanding problematic condition of Fortuna as a mediating figure and figure of judgment, one who embodies both the possible connections between the material and the immaterial as well as the uncertainty about the nature of these connections. The *Nemesis* was an effort to convey knowledge—knowledge of classical iconography and the aesthetics of human proportion. Dürer's print was hardly a success on either count. Yet, as Koerner and Panofsky have both shown, the reception of the print, though extensive, demonstrates both a lack of regard for the intended subject and the laws of proportion: references to the figure elongate and rotate her frame, combining her with all manner of iconographic details that modulate her identity from Fortuna, to Venus, to Prudence, and beyond [22-23, for example].<sup>88</sup> Unlike the *Little Fortune*, Dürer's later print was thus subject to extreme variations and was notable to contemporaries for the possibilities that it posed. While the issues arising from this range of interpretations are themselves varied and complex, it is interesting to note that many of the reworkings of the goddess seek specifically to restage, in one form or another, the uncertainty of mediation and future action that Dürer's *Nemesis* presents.<sup>89</sup>

The reception of *Nemesis-as-Fortuna* demonstrates a desire to see and engage with the goddess of uncertain futures over and above the work's attempts to state connections to the

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<sup>88</sup> Koerner, "The Fortune of Dürer's *Nemesis*"; and Panofsky, "Virgo & Victrix." Koerner in particular charts the amazing afterlife of the *Nemesis* print.

<sup>89</sup> Koerner, for instance, these uncertainties are bound to the realm of sexual fantasy. He interprets the reception of the print in part in relation to the themes of sexual subjection and masochism, noting the distance between Dürer's intended message of ethical and aesthetic balance and the received message of *imbalance* that is played out in relationships between the sexes—whether portrayed in the images or implied in the relation between male viewer and image ("Dürer's *Nemesis*").

classical past. It suggests the prevalence of a figure of chance that, contrary to the standard Renaissance narrative of Fortuna, complicated viewers' sense of knowledge, agency, and will even as it provoked further interpretations. It is perhaps paradoxical that, although the work fails in its *intended* epistemological program, the image and its iconography became mainstays of the representation of Fortuna in the sixteenth century, as Panofsky noted.<sup>90</sup> It was not the image of the *Little Fortune* but the representation of a woman holding a bridle and a goblet, the traditional attributes of Nemesis, that would appear on the frontispiece of many sixteenth-century editions of the *Tabula Cebeitis*, despite the fact that the attributes did not correspond to the textual discussion of the goddess [fig. 1.24]. In the North, the *image* of Fortuna exerted a certain causal efficacy in determining knowledge of Fortuna, even if, in the case of *Fortuna/Nemesis*, this determination was itself accidental.

For Dürer and his viewers, then, the appeal of classicism lay in part in its ability to offer a new visual framework for reflecting on the difficulties of future time, rather than simply or even primarily as a means of connecting to a distant past. Fortuna already had a fraught history as a figure whose wheel enabled a certain visual apprehension of the future, but who also existed in an ambiguous relationship to the divine. Whatever its ambiguities, however, the image of the *rota fortunae* mapped a narrative engagement with the future that Dürer's image complicated. The wheel did not disappear in the Renaissance, but as Fortuna's iconography shifted and diversified, the burden of predictive narration could shift from image to viewer, thereby posing additional complications. While this chapter has focused on the broader epistemological and representational issues associated with Fortuna as a figure of chance, I now turn to the ways in which these issues functioned within the ritualized application of chance in play.

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<sup>90</sup> Panofsky, "Virgo & Victrix," 28-9.

## Chapter Two: The Illustrated Lottery Book as Prospective Form

In his histories of Gargantua and Pantagruel, François Rabelais fashions a variety of scenarios for his raunchy and amusing protagonists. Such scenarios allow the author to satirically explore a range of subjects, from the nature of a proper theological education to the significance of codpieces in military attire. In the third book, or *Tiers Livre* (1546), of the five-volume series, Rabelais turns his attentions toward the epistemological and social practices of divining the future.<sup>1</sup> The specific future in question belongs to Pantagruel's friend Panurge. Having decided that he wishes to marry, Panurge is wracked with uncertainty regarding his fortune in selecting a good partner and fears that he may end up a cuckold. Thus: to marry or not to marry? For Panurge, deliberating each alternative presents so many intricate possibilities and speculations that he finds himself paralyzed in deciding the best course of action.

Pantagruel, enlisted by his friend for advice, laments that Panurge's considerations are so laden with "ifs and buts . . . that I can't base anything on them or come to any conclusions." Given the potential for misfortune in marriage, he argues, the only clear course of action is to put things to chance [*mettre à l'aventure*], with blindfolded eyes, bowing your head, kissing the earth, and, for the rest, entrusting yourself to God, seeing that you have made up your mind to go for it. That is the only thing that I can tell you for certain.<sup>2</sup>

More specifically, Pantagruel suggests that they should consult the so-called Homeric and Virgilian lots (*sors Homeriques et Virgilianes*) in order to divine how to proceed. The method is simple. One need only randomly open a book containing the works of Homer or Virgil and point to a line whose content will illuminate the situation at hand. Although he cautions that this strategy can be fallible, Pantagruel nevertheless marshals an impressive list of its successful implementation in the preceding centuries. Thoroughly convinced and eager to arrest his doubts, Panurge casts three dice in order to designate a line number from the randomly chosen page of the text, in this case a volume by Virgil. The line that the lot selects, however, is interpreted in wildly different ways by the two characters. Their inability to agree on the prophetic message drives Panurge to a seemingly endless assortment of prognosticators, each of whom purports to solve his marriage dilemma through recourse to their particular methods—dreams, poetry, astrology, physiognomy, geomancy, and so on. Despite Panurge's insistent counter-interpretations of their prophecies, every authority points to his inevitable fate as a cuckold.

The *Tiers Livre* of the history of Gargantua and Pantagruel presents a veritable marketplace of early modern divinatory methods to satirical effect. Significantly, however, the first and most obvious method that the characters turn to (and the only one that does not require the knowledge of a prophetic expert) is that which is governed by chance: the casting of lots through the medium of the book, or bibliomancy. Pantagruel speaks favorably of bibliomancy that uses classical texts, but he refers far less sympathetically to a related method that is heavily

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<sup>1</sup> François Rabelais, *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, trans. J. M. Cohen (New York: Penguin Classics, 1955), 281-438. Although I cite the modern translation, when relevant or appropriate, I have made parenthetical reference to the original French text. See François Rabelais, *Tiers Livre des Faictz et Dictz Heroïques du Noble Pantagruel* (Paris: Christian Wechel, 1546).

<sup>2</sup> Rabelais, *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, 313; Rabelais, *Tiers Livre des Faictz et Dictz Heroïques du Noble Pantagruel*, 79.

reliant on the casting of dice. In contrast to the Virgilian lots, the use of dice in divination is “deceptive, unlawful and utterly scandalous.” Indeed, it is only with hesitation that he allows Panurge to use dice as part of his divinatory venture. Pantagruel’s wrath on this matter is especially virulent regarding a particular “accursed book” that promotes this method, for it represents a “most dangerous plague,” one that his father Gargantua had censored and burned due to its illicitness.<sup>3</sup>

The book that Pantagruel so avidly condemns was a highly-popular fortune-telling text by Lorenzo Spirito, first published in Italy in 1482 as the *Il Libro delle Sorti*. It was frequently republished and translated over the course of the sixteenth century, first appearing in France in the 1520s under the title *Le Livre de Passez temps de la Fortune des dez*.<sup>4</sup> Spirito’s text was a major representative of a predictive aleatory genre known as the lottery book (*Losbücher*, sometimes also referred to as “books of fate”), which, unlike the Virgilian and Homeric texts, were produced exclusively for divinatory purposes. Users of lottery books employed the devices of chance to navigate the pages of the text and uncover answers to pressing questions about their futures. If Rabelais accorded a certain pride of place to this genre in his comic tour of different prophetic methods, this was undoubtedly due in no small part to the striking fame of texts like that of Spirito, through which, he claimed, so many “simples souls” had fallen into error.<sup>5</sup>

But his caustic indictment of Spirito is not simply due to its illicit deployment of dice. It is also bound to another, vital aspect of the lottery book’s currency, one that distinguishes it from the classical lot. The folly of the *Passez temps* and its extirpation by Gargantua is linked to the material and visual nature of the book, “with its prints and pictures [*les moules & portraictz*].”<sup>6</sup> The sixteenth-century lottery book was not just a textual affair, it was also heavily illustrated. For Rabelais, the lottery book is distinguished not only as a printed object, but as a particularly visual one. His assessment accords well with extant editions of Spirito, which are invariably saturated with pictorial content (see fig. 2.1, for example). However, Spirito was just one example of a much larger phenomenon. In the late medieval and Renaissance periods, the growth of the lottery book as a variety of bibliomancy appears to have been strongly linked to its pictorialization, first in manuscript and, eventually, in print. The *Losbuch* thus comprised a major instance of the increasingly visual configurations of aleatory forms in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Images constituted a defining element of their role as mediators of fortune and future time, and it was the construction of the book as not only a physical object but a pictorial one that was central to framing users’ experience of chance.

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<sup>3</sup> Rabelais, *Gargantua and Pantagruel* 316.

<sup>4</sup> Lorenzo Spirito, *Il Libro delle Sorti* (Perugia: S. Arndes, P. Mechter and G. Thomae, 1482). The earliest French translation was published in 1528, but the work seems to have gone through at least three editions (one by Rabelais’s own printer) by the time the *Tiers Livre* appeared in 1546. See Lorenzo Spirito and Antithetus Faure, *Le livre de passe temps de la fortune des dez, traduit d’italien en français par maistre Anthitus Faure, d’après Laurens Lesperit* ([S.l.]: [s.d.], 1528). In the original French text, the book is referred to simply as *Le Passez temps des dez* (Rabelais, *Tiers Livre des Faictz et Dictz Heroïques du Noble Pantagruel*, 79). For the relationship between Rabelais and Spirito’s text, see M.A. Screech, “Lorenzo Spirito’s ‘Du passetemps des dez’ and the ‘Tiers livre de Pantagruel,’” *Etudes rabelaisiennes* 8(1976): 65-8. For the numerous editions of Spirito in French, Spanish, and Italian (as well as, in the seventeenth century, Dutch and English translations), see Manfred Zollinger, *Bibliographie der Spielbücher des 15. bis 18. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart: A. Hiersemann, 1996).

<sup>5</sup> Rabelais, *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, 316.

<sup>6</sup> Rabelais, *Tiers Livre des Faictz et Dictz Heroïques du Noble Pantagruel*, 83. The term *moule* usually suggests a mold or cast, but can imply printed matter, as well. Cohen translates the phrase as “types and engravings” (316), but *moule* tends to connote ornamental artifacts, which suggests to me a more pictorial connotation, though it is a difficult phrase to translate.

The prevalence of the lottery book in the Renaissance is only faintly apparent in the small number of examples that currently remain, since such texts, as Michael Screech puts it, were easily “played to pieces” and subsequently disposed of.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless it is possible to isolate some of the most crucial conventions of these multi-media, time-based forms of prediction. My aim in this chapter is not to explore a plethora of volumes in great detail, but rather to delineate some of the more fundamental contours of the genre as a method of aleatory divination. In particular, I examine the ways in which the formal conventions of the lottery book could structure the experience of time, fortune, and futurity for users. While Spirito’s book conveys the extent of the *Losbuch*’s popularity and pictorialization, I treat the *Libro delle Sorti* as a uniquely international instance of a genre that developed principally in Northern Europe. Lottery books did indeed enjoy a certain vogue in the Italian city-states; however, this production did not necessarily rival that of the North and, in particular, German-speaking regions.<sup>8</sup> Thus my consideration of *Losbücher* examines them primarily in terms of the context in which they would find their most formidable success, and where they would ultimately bear a special relationship to developments in the larger visual culture. As a ritualized invocation of chance, the lottery book illuminates how the contingent future was being reframed and consumed through novel aleatory media in which images figured prominently. I begin with a consideration of the history of the lottery book before continuing to an analysis of its formal and social implications.

### **Lottery Books: Histories and Forms**

As defined by the literary historian Johannes Bolte, a lottery book is “a collection of prose or metrical oracles, one of which may be obtained by the curious inquirer in a manner that is not dependent on his own calculations, but rather on the mysterious exercise of an instrument subjected to and set in motion by chance.”<sup>9</sup> Serving as a mediator between the questioner and the array of possible oracles within the book’s pages, this instrument can take a number of different shapes. Most often, it is a device that has strong connections to themes of fortune and games of chance, connections which both augment and insist on the aleatory element of the process. Given the genre’s strong tendency to eschew specialized knowledge and calculations, anyone could make use of the lottery book for their own divinatory ends. The volume is presented as the locus of interpretation. If the inquirer casts the lot, the book transforms the action of sortilege (as the casting of lots is often called) into a meaningful statement for the reader’s reception.

Among the diverse aleatory methods used in relation to the lottery book, there are three main procedures that emerge in a consideration of the genre as it developed from the later

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<sup>7</sup> Screech, "Lorenzo Spirito's 'Du passetemps des dez' and the 'Tiers livre de Pantagruel'," 65. See also Karr Schmidt, "Art—A User’s Guide: Interactive and Sculptural Printmaking in the Renaissance," 2-5, for remarks on the limited preservation numbers of interactive prints in general.

<sup>8</sup> In his ground-breaking survey of the lottery book genre, Johannes Bolte argued that Spirito essentially initiated the tradition of the illustrated lottery book in Italy, whereas the German tradition was already well in place in the manuscript tradition. See J. Bolte, "Zur Geschichte der Losbücher," in *Georg Wickrams Werke* (Stuttgart: 1903): 276-342. Aby Warburg noted that Spirito’s original 1482 edition of the *Libro delle Sorti* was published by German printers working in Perugia. See Aby Warburg, "On the Image of the Planetary Deities in the Low German Almanac of 1519," in *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity: Contributions to the Cultural History of the European Renaissance*, ed. Kurt Forster (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1999), 595. For Italian lottery books after Spirito, see Marie-Cécile van Hasselt, "Les livres de sorts en Italie de 1482 à 1551 : l’imaginaire astrologique, les systèmes de causalité et la marge de liberté accordée à l’individu" (Ph.D., Université de la Sorbonne, 1997).

<sup>9</sup> Bolte, "Zur Geschichte der Losbücher," 277.



medieval period. One of the most common was that which was fiercely denounced by Pantagruel: the casting of dice (usually three), with the outcome of the throw serving to determine the user's subsequent destination in the text. The dice might be employed as the opening stage of the inquiry, or at another point in a multi-staged process. In Germany, the sub-genre of the "dice book" (*Würfelmuch*) appears to have been relatively common. Here, the aleatory technique of investigation is limited to a single act of tossing three dice, the results of which are mapped and interpreted by the book [fig. 2.2].

A second method required that users turn a moveable pointer or volvelle, usually set against a circular frame divided into radial or concentric segments [fig. 2.3]. The composition of this variant evokes a range of associations with respect to methods of astrological and temporal calculation, for which such volvelle constructions were often employed.<sup>10</sup> Yet, as a "lot" or randomizing instrument, the moveable volvelle evokes the popular iconography of the *rota fortunae*, the wheel spun by Lady Fortune that determined the fate of those held in its influence. The partitioning of the circle into segments appears as a clear reference to the spokes of the wheel, but it also possesses a practical function for the act of divination: each section was defined by a symbol or particular instructions that designated the next point in the journey toward future insight. In a *Kartenlosbuch* of 1523, for instance, a unicorn serves as the turning device [fig. 2.4].<sup>11</sup> Its horn serves as the pointer within a circle radially inscribed with the names of all cards in the German deck. The volvelle was principally a phenomenon of German *Losbücher*. In extant examples it is invariably found at the beginning of the book as the inaugural move in the predictive procedure.<sup>12</sup>

A final format simply asks users to select from a list of questions or topics at the beginning of the text. Thus a reader who wished to perceive his or her romantic fate in particular could select the most relevant question or theme from a predetermined list within the book itself. Or, more randomly, one could simply blindly point to the list and follow the course of what came up, in the manner of the classical lots. As with the volvelle, an accompanying motif or set of directions serves to specify the next steps in the process. However, within the lottery book, this method does not seem to have been employed as the sole means of divination. It was rather combined with one of the other methods, thus adding to the complexity and interest of the entire course of action.<sup>13</sup>

In their aleatory techniques alone, lottery books possessed a striking variety and flexibility that undoubtedly sustained the ongoing interest and currency of the genre. Although the extent of this interest was quite considerable, *Losbücher* constitute one of the more overlooked artifacts in scholarship on the late medieval and early modern period. In-depth studies have in general taken the form of bibliographic and historical surveys, though aspects of the category have been treated in shorter investigations.<sup>14</sup> Recently, Suzanne Karr Schmidt has

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<sup>10</sup> For the use of moving dials in astrological and calendrical calculations during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, see Karr Schmidt, "Art—A User's Guide: Interactive and Sculptural Printmaking in the Renaissance," esp. 65-71.

<sup>11</sup> *Kartenlosbuch*, (Strasbourg: Jacob Kammerlander, 1523).

<sup>12</sup> For the primarily German interest in the spinning volvelle, see Karr Schmidt, "Art—A User's Guide: Interactive and Sculptural Printmaking in the Renaissance," 306.

<sup>13</sup> Spirito's text, for instance, combines the selection of a question with the use of dice.

<sup>14</sup> For bibliographic surveys, see Bolte; and Zollinger, *Bibliographie der Spielbücher des 15. bis 18. Jahrhunderts*. Select shorter studies include Willy Louis Braekman, *Fortune-Telling by the Casting of Dice: A Middle-English Poem and its Background*, vol. 4, Scripta: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies (1981); M. G. Kendall, "Studies in the History of Probability and Statistics. XII. The Book of Fate," *Biometrika* 48, no. 1-2 (1961): 220-22;

addressed the lottery book as a major component of what she calls the “interactive and sculptural print”—that is, prints that were constructed from moveable parts and encouraged the viewer’s physical involvement.<sup>15</sup> Her work provides a valuable critical framework for these artifacts, arguing that the “personalized” mode of reception they promoted constituted a form of knowledge and could ultimately inform the reception of art in other media. Karr Schmidt’s emphasis on the roots of the lottery book in late medieval “hands on” devotional practices is illuminating, but it tends to obscure the importance of chance and *fortuna* in the history and significance of the genre. It was not the moveable print per se (which were not a facet of dice-based examples), but the category of the lot that defined lottery books as such.<sup>16</sup> Thus, while I share her interest in the epistemological import of the books’ interactivity and their relationship to artistic production, I want to shift the focus to questions of chance, time and futurity as aspects of Renaissance visual culture. In order to undertake this inquiry, it is useful to consider the history of bibliomancy in general. Such an examination helps identify the particular form and significance of the lottery book in its chance-based depictions of the future.

The casting of lots through texts of Virgil and Homer had a long pedigree by the Renaissance. The period’s affinity for such lots is alluded to by Rabelais, who notes the deployment of the method by ancient luminaries such as Socrates, who predicted his own death through recourse to the *Iliad*.<sup>17</sup> But his discussion, while keen on antique precedents, papers over another, perhaps even more well-known form of sortilege: the bibliomantic use of the bible, or the *Sortes Biblicae*. The authority of the lot in classical culture was inseparable from the special value accorded a particular text, a valuation that endows it as an object with a kind of magical power. The use of a chance-based technique to mediate between the reader and the object is motivated by the premise that an act that seems random is, in fact, governed by the causal power embodied in the book. Given the reverence accorded to Scripture as both word and material entity in Christian culture, it is hardly surprising that the bible should be seen as an appealing candidate to take on this mysterious, quasi-miraculous role.

Moreover, Scripture itself contains instances in which the casting of lots is an accepted and even divinely-sanctioned means of discerning divine will in future courses of action, or to determine the hidden causes of events. In the first book of Samuel, for instance, Saul emerges as the chosen king in a process that entails lots.<sup>18</sup> And in Joshua 7:14, God proposes that lots will help catch a thief among the tribes and families of Israel. Although sortilege was far less customary in the New Testament, a key instance occurs when the Apostles cast lots to determine whether Mathias or Barnabas will replace Judas among them.<sup>19</sup>

These references, combined with the tradition of the *Sortes* in classical culture, undoubtedly granted the aleatory engagement with holy texts a remarkable appeal. This appeal would find credence in venerable authorities like Augustine, who, in his *Confessions*, describes how his conversion to Christianity was fully realized when, in a moment of deep crisis, he heard

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and T. C. Skeat, "An Early Mediaeval 'Book of Fate': The Sortes XII Patriarcharum," *Mediaeval and Renaissance Studies* 3(1954): 41-54.

<sup>15</sup> Karr Schmidt, "Art—A User’s Guide: Interactive and Sculptural Printmaking in the Renaissance," esp. chapters 1 and 4.

<sup>16</sup> In Germany, printed lottery books using dials and dice each typically declared themselves as *Losbücher* in the opening lines.

<sup>17</sup> Rabelais, *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, 313.

<sup>18</sup> 1 Samuel 10: 17-24.

<sup>19</sup> Acts 1.23-26.

a voice calling out to him to “take up and read” (*tolle lege*). Recalling that St. Anthony had received a sacred “admonition” from a passage of the Gospel, Augustine

rose up, interpreting it no other way than as a command to me from Heaven to open the book, and to read the first chapter I should light upon . . . I grasped, opened, and in silence read that paragraph on which my eyes first fell: “Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying; but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof.” No further would I read, nor did I need; for instantly, as the sentence ended, by a light, as it were, of security infused into my heart, all the gloom of doubt vanished away.<sup>20</sup>

Through the encounter with the text, uncertainty passes over into certainty. The dramatic nature of the account instills the incident with a vivid tension that draws the reader into Augustine’s experience and additionally echoes that inherent in the bibliomantic act itself. The book is a channel between heaven and earth, its words conveying the particular will of God. Of course, these examples are not divinatory per se. They suggest a consultative function for the lot rather than a strictly predictive one. Nevertheless, the obvious estimation of sacred texts as manifestations of divine knowledge in all its omniscience renders it but a short step from the deployment of lots for consultation to those of divination. And, indeed, late antique and medieval sources do make reference to the *Sortes Biblicae*, as well as their reprobation by Church authorities.<sup>21</sup>

Both biblical and classical lots constitute a kind of repurposing of extant, highly-regarded texts that exert a sense of authority across time. The “pastness” of the books is not simply a matter of historical origins but also a matter of narrative content, since the texts represent and preserve events that have already occurred. Through bibliomancy, the content of these books is dislodged from its specificity as a narrative of the past, and recalibrated, via interpretation, as an allusion to a particular future. The lottery book appropriated some of the basic concepts of the *Sortes*, but detached its content from pre-existing narrative texts. Here, the casting of lots for prediction is the basis of a separate category of representation, since the sole motivation for the lottery book lies in its divinatory function. The future is thereby disengaged from the depiction of the past and framed as its own subject of representation.

The consultation of specifically oracular texts through aleatory methods did have a precedent in antique culture with artifacts such as the *Sortes Astramphisci*, dating from the third century A.D. This Greek text presented the inquirer with a list of no less than ninety-two questions about the future to choose from, and included elaborate instructions as to how to find the proper response.<sup>22</sup> This format was, like the Homeric and Virgilian lots, adapted and oriented away from pagan concerns in early Christian culture in divinatory manuscripts such as the *Sortes*

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<sup>20</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, VIII.12. The biblical passage is from Romans 13: 13-14. As Pierre Courcelle has pointed out, the language of the incident evokes the practices of drawing lots from oracles in ancient culture. The term *tollere* was a term employed in drawing a lot with the response to an oracle; *legere* designated the reading of the response. See P. Courcelle, “Source Chrétienne et Allusions Païennes de l’épisode de ‘Tolle, Lege,’ (Saint. Augustin, Confessions VIII 12, 29),” *Revue d’histoire et de Philosophie religieuses* 32(1952): 171-200. Later, the bibliomantic nature of Augustine’s conversion was cited by the Jesuit Jan David as a justification for his spiritual lottery book. See Johannes David, *Veridicus Christianus* (Antwerp: Christopher Plantin, 1601).

<sup>21</sup> For late antique and early Christian uses of the lot, see Pieter W. van der Horst, “Sortes: Ancient Books as Instant Oracles,” in *The Use of Ancient Books in the Ancient World*, ed. Leonard Victor Rutgers and et al. (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 151-9.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 161-6.

*Sangallenses*, dice-driven prophetic text from c. 600 A.D. that, in light of its denunciation by Church councils, must have been in reasonably wide usage in religious circles.<sup>23</sup> Whatever the virulence of ecclesiastical censures, these manuscripts persisted into the later Middle Ages, acquiring different variants but seemingly maintaining its status as a Latin discourse for religious users. The monk Matthew of Paris, for instance, composed his “Book of Fate” in the mid-thirteenth century, and it has been suggested that it was used by his own monastic community at St. Albans.<sup>24</sup>

Matthew of Paris’s manuscript, however, is distinguished by its relatively lavish illustrations [fig. 2.5]. But in the fifteenth century, the vernacularization and growing popularization of the lottery book was coincident with the increasingly consistent inclusion of pictorial material. Although the defining aspect of bibliomancy as a genre would seem to be its textual status, the late medieval development of lottery books rendered visual content an invaluable factor of their production and reception. Indeed, by the mid-sixteenth century, Rabelais cited the pictures in Spirito’s printed (and, moreover, vernacular) volume as feature that differentiated it from the more acceptable Virgilian lots. If lottery books had always been condemned in Christian culture, the use of images would seem in this case to have offered new fodder for this reproving discourse.

Briefly examining the fundamental characteristics of Spirito’s text helps clarify the dramatic contrast between the Renaissance lottery book and forms of bibliomancy that were based on the reading of texts alone, while also specifying some of the characteristics of the Renaissance *Losbuch* in general. Spirito’s text in some respects constitutes one of the more extreme instances of the genre’s pictorialization during the period. But, given its longstanding popularity, it is quite likely that its illustrations played no small part in sustaining its fame. It stands as evidence of the extent to which the illustrated lottery book proposed to mediate the future through images, a task accomplished in combination with the aleatory lot.

The book retains a consistent structure and set of visual features throughout its numerous editions and translations. An Italian edition from 1551 forms the subject of my observations here.<sup>25</sup> The *Libro delle Sorti* presents an elaborate, multi-stage process as it moves from initial inquiry to final prediction. It opens with a frontispiece portraying the wheel of fortune bearing four personages along its rim, some of whom, in turn, bear banderoles with the possible questions that a user may choose from to locate their future [fig. 2.6]. Each question is accompanied by instructions directing the user to a specific king in the succeeding pages. The kings then specify a natural or astrological sign as the next destination [fig. 2.7], where a set of three dice are cast to determine where to go next. All of the possible outcomes are duly illustrated, and each possesses a caption designating a different river [fig. 2.8]. These rivers must then be located on a series of “spheres” defined by a classical deity or other motif [fig. 2.1]. Locating the proper river along the edges of the sphere, the user is given the name of a prophet and a number. These constitute the endpoint of the inquiry in the concluding pages, each of which carries the rubric of a sacred prophet’s name with an array of brief numbered prophecies [fig. 2.9].

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<sup>23</sup> On the denunciation of the *Sortes Sangallenses*, see William E. Klingshirn, “Christian Divination in Late Roman Gaul: the *Sortes Sangallenses*,” in *Mantikê: Studies in Ancient Divination*, ed. Sarah Iles Johnston and Peter T. Struck (Boston: Brill, 2005), 99-128.

<sup>24</sup> Oxford, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, Ms. Ashmole 304. For the monastic use of the manuscript, see Daniel K. Connolly, “Imagined Pilgrimage in the Itinerary Maps of Matthew Paris,” *The Art Bulletin* 81, no. 4 (1999), 611-12.

<sup>25</sup> Lorenzo Spirito, *Libro delle Sorti o di Ventura* (Mantua: [s.n.], 1551).

Throughout this intricate sequence, textual materials are kept to a minimum. They convey only the barest information necessary to advance to the next step, and are utterly subordinated to the visual components of the page. Moreover, the text is typically configured in a diagrammatic fashion that integrates it into a pleasing overall formal presentation, such as the concentrated grid of directives and dice in the third step. In the section of so-called *spheres*, the instructions are so densely arranged in their radial frame that they are almost illegible, and upon a single glance appear as virtually on par with the ornamental borders on the upper and lower registers. While each section of the book proffers a different composition and set of motifs, they all have the general effect of transforming the book into pictorial object that is primarily seen rather than read. This effect is quite palpable in the images of the kings. Here, the quadripartite division of the page into iconic representation of full-length enthroned figures suggests a kind of architectural and ornamental façade, a gallery of regal effigies.

But if the images saturate the pages of the text and define the viewer's engagement, this engagement is not of an involved, contemplative sort. Although pictorial motifs are centralized in the book, they exhibit little detail or intellectual complexity that would compel lengthy attention or speculative interpretation. It is their mere pictorial presence that is deemed vital in fashioning the experience of the book. The images here define a liminal space prior to the resolution provided by the concluding prophetic texts, a source of mediation that effectively moves the user along and frames the determining agency of the dice. Following such a rich succession of images, the scant two lines of prophetic text may seem disappointingly meager indeed. But it is perhaps not the primary point. The emphasis lies instead on the process of moving through the text via its concoction of imagery and lot-casting.

Thus the illustrated lottery book presents a very different experience than other forms of bibliomancy, which, even as they highlight the book as a material form, do not offer the variegated sensory facets that the images and dice provide. To be sure, both textual *Sortes* and the *Libro delle Sorti* construct a sense of passage from uncertainty to certainty, from blindness to insight. As Pantagruel counseled Panurge, "putting things to chance" involves a figurative "blindfolding" of one's eyes—not unlike that which characterizes Fortuna herself. The use of an aleatory device such as dice dramatizes the inquirer's uncertainty regarding future events in a temporally-concentrated fashion, thereby integrating a heightened experience of uncertainty into the predictive process itself. At the same time, the pages of the book, irrespective of the medium of their content, serve as a means of temporarily creating a sense of dramatic concealment with respect to what lies ahead within the ritualized framework of divinatory inquiry.<sup>26</sup> Yet Spirito's text contextualizes and highlights this blindness through a veritable onslaught of pictorial depictions. Pictures, not words, are construed as the proper accessory to the lot's authority, crystallizing the play between visible and invisible in the quest for knowledge of what will be. It is not the apprehension of textual content that defines the divinatory experience, but the mediation of the future through the application of chance and its accompanying visual scaffolding.

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<sup>26</sup> As Karr Schmidt has argued, the interactive print has a key origin in late medieval devotional art. She designates these as "revelatory playthings" to indicate the element of contact and visibility that these prints, including lottery books, would allow. See Karr Schmidt, "Art—A User's Guide: Interactive and Sculptural Printmaking in the Renaissance," chapter 1.

## Delineating the Future

While volumes like that of *Spirito* may grant a special emphasis to the process of divination by lot, the nature of the content of lottery books' predictions is hardly immaterial. The precedents for the illustrated lottery book suggest the religious framework that surrounded the history of both lot-casting and bibliomancy, a framework that *Spirito* alludes to in his inclusion of prophets culled from sacred texts. Thus it would not be difficult to suppose that the futures articulated in lottery books would frequently concern spiritual affairs, operating in conjunction with a devotional visual culture geared toward the attainment of salvation. Yet this is seldom the case. Instead, it is overwhelmingly earthly futures that are at stake in these artifacts, even in some of the earliest examples. In medieval manuscript versions of the so-called *Sortes XII Patriarcharum*—at least some of which seem to have been made for monastic contexts—users are given a list of questions that pertain to a range of concerns: will a sick person recover, whether a journey will be easy or difficult, whether a proposal should be carried out, and so forth.<sup>27</sup>

With the popularization of the lottery book, the importance of worldly topics remains yet is expanded considerably. Among the extant manuscript and printed *Losbücher* of the period, the futures tend to pertain to the security of material goods and the body, the dangers of travel, and the vicissitudes of love, family, and social relations. Economic and romantic futures, naturally absent in the monastic *Sortes XII Patriarcharum*, take on a new prominence, such that Panurge's curiosity about his marital prospects would have been easily identifiable with the genre. A later fifteenth-century manuscript in the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek attributed to Konrad Bollstatter is perhaps instructive in this respect.<sup>28</sup> Heavily illuminated and bound together in a single volume with thirteen other lottery books (each defined by a specific iconographic and/or thematic focus), this particular example opens with sixteen questions that nicely delineate the boundaries of the typical *Losbuch*'s predictive discourse:

Whether some wish will be fulfilled, that is near to one's heart, or for which one has struggled.

Whether a friend or companion is trustworthy.

Whether a widower or a bachelor shall be married.

Whether one who is sick will recover.

Whether a person who is on a trip will return.

Whether one will become richer.

Whether a young lady or a widow shall marry.

Whether a particular day is favorable for fighting.

Whether a beloved person is faithful.

Whether one will win at gambling.

Whether a particular time is favorable for doing business.

Whether something lost will be recovered.

Whether one should take an admired person as their beloved

Whether one's debts can be paid.

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<sup>27</sup> Skeat, "An Early Mediaeval 'Book of Fate': The *Sortes XII Patriarcharum*," 43.

<sup>28</sup> Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich, Ms. Cgm 312. My citations of this text are, unless otherwise noted, from a partial facsimile of the manuscript, which reproduces only one of the fourteen lottery books bound together in this volume. Karin Schneider, ed. *Ein Mittelalterliches Wahrsagespiel: Konrad Bollstatters Losbuch in Cgm 312, der Bayerischen Staatsbibliothek* (Wiesbaden: Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 1978).

Whether an imprisoned person will be freed.

Whether one will be free of worry.<sup>29</sup>

Other contemporaneous sources expand on or emphasize certain aspects of these basic elements of love, money, social relationships, and physical well-being.<sup>30</sup> In lottery books that do not begin with a list of questions but are structured instead on the casting of dice, the domains of future inquiry are not isolated so neatly, but the content of the fortunes themselves tend to remain along these lines.<sup>31</sup> This is even evident in Paul Pambst's *Looßbuch* (1546), which presents itself as a more spiritually-inclined lottery and presents a plethora of biblical illustrations to match [fig. 2.10]. The subjects of the fortunes remain largely worldly, even if the framework is not.<sup>32</sup>

This is not to say that the lottery book is always devoid of spiritual counsel, or that is so thoroughly secular that any religious iconography it may possess is without significance. Only that the encounter with sacred content is instigated by the user's curiosity about what will happen in this world. Moreover, the earthly futures articulated here are decidedly individual in nature. One does not consult a lottery book to discover what will become of political or military disputes or collective concerns, for example. The texts and lot-casting methods they demanded provided a ritualized frame for these futures, providing a site for their distinctive representation.

As a genre, the *Losbuch* is thus overwhelmingly devoted to the realm of Fortuna and her goods—the *bona externa* that exist outside of internal virtues, intellect, and spiritual concerns. Firmly under Fortuna's purview, these goods are subject to the vicissitudes and transience of chance and its contingent transformations. That contingent matters should form the subject of divinatory representation of course comes as no surprise. As Aquinas argued, necessary futures are those that can be apprehended by human reason, whereas contingent futures escape standard modes of knowledge and must be submitted to sinful divinatory practices.<sup>33</sup> Certainly contingent futures could be subjected to all manner of predictive methods, as Panurge discovered in his grand tour of prophetic authorities. Yet what is significant about the lottery book is the relationship between the *form* of divination and its *content*. The lottery book, in its combined visual and textual construction, represents futures that are under the dominion of the *bona externa*. And it undertakes its representations through the very means and procedures of chance and Fortuna—the casting of lots and the spinning of the *rota fortunae*. These forms help structure the engagement with the contingent futures they represent, but they also purport to mimic the experience of contingency in “real life.” Divinatory access to contingent futures is

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<sup>29</sup> “Ob etwas Gewünschtes eintrifft, das einem am Herzen liegt oder worum man sich bemüht. / Ob ein Freund oder rein Gesell zuverlässig ist. / Ob ein Witwer oder rein Jungeselle heiraten soll. / Ob ein Kranker wieder gesund wird. / Ob ein Mensch, der auf Reisen ist, wiederkommt. / Ob man reicher wird. / Ob ein Mädchen oder eine Witwe heiraten soll. / Ob ein bestimmter Tag günstig zum Kämpfen ist. / Ob ein geliebter Mensch treu ist. Ob man im Spiel gewinnt. / Ob eine bestimmte Zeit günstig zum Verhandeln ist. / Ob sich etwas Verlorenes wiederfindet. / Ob man jemand, den man im Sinn hat, zum (zur) Liebsten nehmen soll. / Ob man seine Schulden wird bezahlen können. / Ob ein Gefangener freikommt. / Ob man von seinen Sorgen befreit wird.” The questions are on fol. 120v of the manuscript (page 23 of the facsimile).

<sup>30</sup> See, for example, BSB Cgm 472 (fol. 1r), which includes twenty-four questions, including a slightly greater emphasis on economic matters. The manuscript is likely north Bavarian in origin, and two identical versions of it are held in the Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nuremberg (GNM Bibliothek HS 7032); and the Universität Heidelberg (UB Cpg 552). Of these, I was only able to consult the examples in Munich and Nuremberg.

<sup>31</sup> An early printed German *Würfelsbuch*, for instance, is exclusively devoted to matters of romance. See *Hort vnd mercket eben [Würfelsbuch]*, (Bamberg: Marx Ayrer, 1483).

<sup>32</sup> Paul Pambst, *Looßbuch zu ehren der Römischen, Ungarischen und Böhmischen Königin* (Strasbourg: B. Beck, 1546). The questions include issues of marriage, pregnancy and birth, what astrological sign one was born under, illness, and so on (A.iii).

<sup>33</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II.IIa.95,1.

rendered through the outcome of a chance event via the casting of lots, just as the *bona externa* are experienced as intimately bound to mysterious causal processes in the social sphere.

If the use of lots to divine hidden, future contingencies had a considerable pedigree by the fifteenth century, the novel appearance of the lottery book intimates a new, growing concern with the forms of contingency. I will now turn to a consideration of the formal and epistemological properties of chance in the lottery book, before proceeding to a more detailed analysis of the role of images in these texts.

## The Future in Time

As a textual volume, the lottery book structures the experience of chance and futurity as a striking disruption in the logical unfolding of sequential time, as if to uphold the notion of chance as a break between predictable cause-and-effect relationships. Although constructed as a book, when activated in use it unsettles conventional modes of reading in which pages are turned and viewed in an ordered succession. This process is also evident in the classical and biblical *Sortes*, in which the aleatory engagement with the text enables the negation of both the structure and meaning of the original narrative. Here, the progressive relationships of the events portrayed in the text are rejected, as a single utterance is extorted from its context by the reader who reorients it toward different, future ends. However, the lottery book proper, as noted, dispenses with any pretense at a preexisting narrative and renders the future as such as its own unique content. The genre takes as one of its defining characteristics the potential multiplicity of the future, thus breaking down any sense of uninterrupted structure in order to accommodate an array of different paths. As a fragmented collection of discrete instructions and fortunes, the lottery book simply cannot be read page-by-page in the manner of a standard narrative text. Through the spinning of the volvelle or the casting of dice, users shift discontinuously through the text, often skipping numerous pages at a time within a single “move.”

The endpoint of the process is physically and temporally divorced from its initial inquiry or aleatory act. In the classical and biblical *Sortes*, the sense of chance-as-break derives from the reorientation of an existing text and the introduction of intentions that exist *outside* of the original motivations of the narrative. But with the lottery book, the sense of break is internalized in the volume itself. The volumes frame and require the casting of lots as part of their impetus and activation. But, in the breach between inquiry and outcome, the lottery book professes the futurity of the futures it represents. By virtue of the erratic itinerary it induces, the *Losbuch* spatializes the gap between now and what will occur and construes the future as an “elsewhere.”<sup>34</sup>

While the book provides a support and frame for a spatial and temporal experience of fortune, the visual elements augment and interpret this experience in its epistemological facets. This is especially evident in the frequent appearance of the *rota fortunae* as a defining motif in the volumes, a convention that is consistently deployed in fifteenth-century German examples. In Bollstatter’s compendium of *Losbücher*, for instance, many of the individual volumes open with a different, full-page illumination of Lady Fortune turning her wheel, elaborately-populated with figures who further crowd the composition with curving speech banners [fig. 2.11]. Spirito’s text drew on this custom and rendered the wheel an essential element of the text. In a mid sixteenth-century French edition, Fortuna is positioned at the wheel’s center as its turning agent, flanked

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<sup>34</sup> Connolly, “Imagined Pilgrimage in the Itinerary Maps of Matthew Paris,” 612. As Connolly notes, the sense of travel is reinforced by certain geographic aspects of the iconography, such as cities and rivers.



by speech banderoles that specify the mutable nature of her activity, a nature that the static conditions of pictorial representation cannot adequately convey: *Toujours suis en mouuemēt / Sans arrester incessamēt* (always I am in movement / incessantly without stopping) [fig. 2.12]. At left, the text of her speech has been inverted as if to insist on this point. In its capsized condition, it would seem to foreshadow the eventual state of the figure who rises on the wheel immediately below as he moves toward his own inversion on the unremitting rotation of the wheel. In the four corners of the frontispiece, larger banderoles delineate the questions that the book promises to answer, as well as instructions for the first step to attaining the response. To know whether you will fare well on a journey, go to King Arthur; if you will be victorious in some venture, go to King Robert, and so on. The standard goods in which Fortuna traffics are duly addressed in these questions—love, money, business, health, and personal relations. To inquire about these matters and pass into the pages of the book, both Spirito and Bollstatter imply, is to submit oneself to the mutability of Fortune, to enter the domain that she so blindly and ficklely governs.

Although Spirito and Bollstatter each require the casting of dice to introduce the element of chance, the wheel reappears throughout the pages of the volume as readers journey toward their fortune. The tenacity with which the motif is employed hints at the extent of the goddess's power as well as her authority over the tossing of the dice. But the wheel also inflects the experience of the divinatory process for the viewer. In the *Passez temps*, the sections devoted to "spheres" configures the instructions as a series of concentric circles that enclose a principle figure [fig. 2.1]. The densely-packed directives are pressed into a radial orientation that, like the characters along the opening *rota*, turns over the central form and are inverted at the circles' lowermost point. To most effectively discern the books' rather miniscule commands, readers would be well-served by physically turning the volume itself. The process of inquiry is thereby tangibly linked to the forms of mutability that are expressly associated with the goddess of chance. Indeed, because the section of spheres occurs after the casting of dice, this mutable sensory engagement assures the reader-viewer's continued location in Fortuna's domain.

Spirito presents the spheres as the final step prior to the arrival at the predictive utterance. The fortune is articulated as a conventionally arranged, horizontally-oriented linear text that, in the French version, is devoid of any accompanying imagery. Thus, despite Fortuna's claims of her perpetual rotation in the frontispiece, the terminus of the divinatory journey entails the cessation of images and physical mutability. The reception of knowledge of the future is coincident with the stabilization of the book and the definitive transformation of the viewer into a reader. However, in Bollstatter's manuscript, the endpoint of the inquiry does not halt the appearance or changeability of the wheel. Rather, the apprehension of the future is shaped in accordance with Fortuna's laws of movement and alteration. Bollstatter's *Losbuch* tenders its final verdicts within a single circle, divided perpendicularly into four segments [fig. 2.13]. Each segment supplies a separate fortune, in which the script curves in conformity with the larger circular structure and similarly encourages a rotation of the manuscript as an object. The division of the circle into quadrants subtly invokes the iconography of the four stations of the *rota fortunae*, so often defined through their relative expressions of sovereignty: *regnabo*, *regno*, *regnavi*, and *sum sine regno*. But the manner in which the circle is partitioned does not identify the individual fortunes with the traditional location of these stations along the horizontal and vertical axes of the wheel. Instead, the segments of the predictive circle fall between these posts. The fortunes are thereby represented in an intermediary space that highlights the element animation visible in the curving text as it moves between the wheel's conventional axes. In this

case, then, the representation of Fortuna's futures hardly exonerates the user from her sway. These allusions to the wheel provide a structural form for the organization as well as sensory apprehension of the future through Fortuna's own properties of mutability and inversion.

These diagrammatic wheels helped contextualize the form of the moveable volvelle as an aleatory device in *Losbücher* throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. None of the extant lottery books with volvelles that I know of include the figure of Fortuna herself within their iconographic schemas. At the same time, the pervasiveness of the iconography of the wheel and its significance as a representation of fate would have made the association easily accessible to users, irrespective of the motifs depicted. Rather than displaying the image of Fortuna herself, these volvelles present a range of motifs that could reinforce or multiply the associations of the wheel. Angels, the Christ child, animals, and well-attired gentlemen—all of these inhabited the turning dials of *Losbücher* as their pointing agents [fig. 2.14].<sup>35</sup> In their oscillation between heavenly and earthly domains, these figures partake of the ambiguous nature of Fortuna herself as either divinely-ordained or hopelessly bound to earthly vanities.

Like the image of the wheel in the lottery book, the volvelle serves as an intermediary, opening design that structures the reception of the volume. It strikingly interjects the theme of changeability into the divinatory process as part and parcel of the aleatory act. These moveable paper constructions would have been cut and assembled, and the pointer affixed as a separate layer on the opening page with, for example, a string or metal pin. Turning the pointer physically connected the user to the object as if to assure the former of a unique address by the latter.

Given the lottery book's identification with chance, one might presume that the volvelle, once set in movement, would simply continue to spin independently and in a random fashion to its eventual point of rest. Yet, among all of the examples that I have had the opportunity to handle, not one volvelle effectively moves without the persistent aid of the user who turns it. There is simply too much tension or friction in the components of the construction for the dial to continually rotate following the release of the hand. Thus the person turning the volvelle must deliberately maintain a grip on its movements and, ultimately, determine the point at which it should land. Assuming that one had not played the game before and had not already memorized the outcomes of the different possible paths indicated along the wheel, the process of inquiry here is essentially one of blind choice rather than what we would define as "pure chance." One must designate an end in advance for the pointer to alight upon, and act intentionally without knowing the ensuing consequences that the pages of the book sequester from view.

In light of the number of *Losbücher* that have been lost, as well as the inevitable degradation of materials in existing volumes, it is difficult to determine if these sluggish constructions are representative of the general modes of assemblage and operation in the volvelles' original state.<sup>36</sup> Surely there would have been different methods of making these devices that would have impacted the extent of their mobility. The pointer of a later fifteenth-

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<sup>35</sup> For the angel and Christ child, see Pambst, *Loßbuch zu ehren der Römischen, Ungarischen und Böhmisches Künigin*; for the animals, see, as noted above, the unicorn dial in *Kartenlossbuch*, (Kammerlander, 1523); and Jörg Wickram, *Kurtzweil* (Strassburg: Rihel, 1550); for the gentleman pointer, see *Thuys d' fortunē. Eñ dz huys d'doot*, (Utrecht: J. Berntsz., 1531).

<sup>36</sup> Indeed, it is possible that the lottery books whose volvelles are still intact may actually remain because faulty assemblage made the dials too listless or static to work properly, and thus decidedly lacking in the aleatory pleasure that would have resulted in their eventual wear and tear. Karr Schmidt has pointed to other kinds of erroneous volvelle constructions, which would indicate the difficulties inherent in putting the devices together (Suzanne Karr Schmidt, "Constructions Both Sacred and Profane: Serpents, Angels and Pointing Fingers in Renaissance Books with Moving Parts," *Yale University Library Gazette* 78, no. 3-4 (2004), 119-20.

century manuscript, now in the collection of the Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg, offers evidence of this variety: instead of paper or vellum, this particular disk is made from brass and fastened, not to the opening pages, but directly into the inside front cover of the book itself with a metal pin [fig. 2.15].<sup>37</sup> With such a material constitution, the pointing angel that has been painted directly onto the surface of the metal disk may well be able to spin more easily. Mounting the dial into the inner cover of the book would have most likely significantly facilitated its fluid motion in spinning, since the back of the pin would not be pressed against subsequent pages and thereby restricted in its movement.

I have been dwelling on the question of the *volvelle*'s mobility in part because the problem suggests the extent to which these mechanisms often constituted an expendable facet of the lottery book, even as it appears as one of its most prominent attributes.<sup>38</sup> If users could simply choose where they wished the pointer to land, then the moveable dial is fundamentally gratuitous, since one could pick out a symbol or figure from the circle by pointing blindly, or mentally selecting from the possibilities. If there were indeed occasions when the dial *did* spin randomly, in theory it would still be possible to dispense with it in favor of other, more immediate modes of decision. The importance and persistence of the wheel of fortune as a facet of the lottery book specifies the extent to which the genre was defined by its connection to recognizable, visible forms of chance.

Like the motif of the *rota fortunae*, the *volvelle* marks a vital threshold for the ritualized application of the lot in bibliomancy. As the opening page of the volume, the pointer frames a space in which the future was mediated by the distinctive operations of Fortuna, demarcating a particular aesthetic and temporal realm for the pursuit of knowledge. Physically turning the wheel indexically links the user to the capacities of the book, investing each in the divinatory procedure. But in turning the *volvelle*, the user assumes the role of Fortuna herself in blindly spinning a wheel explicitly associated with the aleatory lot and future fate. With the lottery book, however, the user is both the subject and object of the wheel, since those turning the *volvelle* were likely often doing so to inquire about their own destiny. Turning the circle enmeshes the user in apparently dual identity. On the one hand, they control the action of the *volvelle*. Yet, because the dial seems to have demanded a continued grasp in order for it to move at all, the turning agent is also simultaneously aligned with the traditional iconography of the figures who cling to the *rota fortunae* and give their agency and futures over to the goddess of fortune.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> UB Heidelberg, Cod. pal. 552. Unfortunately I have only been able to view this manuscript as a digital facsimile, and thus I cannot directly attest to the ability of the *volvelle* to spin freely.

<sup>38</sup> Karr Schmidt has noted that the *volvelle* in Pambst's lottery book is unnecessary, since the fortunes are actually cast with dice later in the book. But with the lack of mobility that seems to characterize many *volvelles*, this extraneousness would appear to extend well beyond the example of Pambst. See Karr Schmidt, "Constructions Both Sacred and Profane: Serpents, Angels and Pointing Fingers in Renaissance Books with Moving Parts," 119-120. One instance in which the *volvelle* would have had greater import, however, is Heinrich Vogtherr's *Christliches Loffbuch* or *Christian Lottery* (Strasbourg, 1539). Here, as Karr Schmidt notes, the turning of a Christ Child *volvelle* simultaneously moves a second, angel *volvelle* hidden on the verso, adding an element of invisible action and mystery to the users' actions (Karr Schmidt, "Art—A User's Guide," 22).

<sup>39</sup> While Karr Schmidt's construction of the user tends to construe the interactive print more broadly as a kind of liberating genre that allowed access and insight, here the subjection of the user to the mutable wheel suggests another aspect to interactivity. As Jacques Ehrmann has argued, theorists of play such as Johan Huizinga and Rogier Caillois went too far in their belief that the player constituted "the subject of play . . . [that] present at the game, at the center of play, they dominated it. They forgot that players may be played; that, as an object in the game, the player can be its stakes (*enjeu*) and its toy (*jouet*)." See Jacques Ehrmann, "Homo Ludens Revisited," *Yale French Studies*, no. 41 (1968), 55.

This twofold aspect of the volvelle suggests the extent to which its mode of lot casting helped construct a particular experience of chance, one that could incorporate a certain element of agency and choice, albeit of a blind variety. Those who rotated the wheel in the lottery book actively interpreted the circle and determined an end for the pointer. But in the very act of doing so, they subjected themselves to an unknown fortune. The position of the turning agent in the case of the volvelle also evokes the words of Fortuna regarding her own pursuits at her wheel in Boethius's *Consolation*:

Inconstancy is my very essence; it is the game I never cease to play as I turn my wheel in its ever-changing circle, filled with joy as I bring the top to the bottom and the bottom to the top.<sup>40</sup>

For Fortuna, the wheel was at once an instrument through which to enact her unknowing and blind will and a representation that objectifies her essence, in all its mutability, for contemplation. This contemplation carries both an interpretive and aesthetic dimension—it is a source of insight as well as pleasure for the goddess. In the *Consolation*, Fortuna kept these pleasures all for herself. Taking hold of the volvelle in the *Losbuch*, curious inquirers submit themselves to fortune while appropriating the “joy” in mutability. Depending on the type of book in hand, the user may have decided on an endpoint for the dial, spun a fluid pointer to a randomized destination, or turned the entire volume in order to perceive its transposed contents, or to turn the figural motifs displayed therein on their heads. In each case, these diverse *rota fortunae* afforded the experience of volatility, inversion, and blindness—all attributes of Lady Fortune and her wheel. Participating in the forms and mechanisms of fortune is central to the process of knowledge and representation that the lottery book sets in motion.<sup>41</sup> Whether in the shape of dice or dials, the forms of chance constitute a means of framing and engaging the future as a subject of knowledge.

## Predictive Play

Fortuna's pleasure in her wheel as a “game” highlights the ludic quality of the divinatory process for those who employ the *Losbücher*. The earlier *Sortes* had certainly also possessed a game-like quality, one that is an effect of longstanding and broader relationships between aleatory play and prognostication.<sup>42</sup> But with the Renaissance lottery book the epistemological and ludic functions of the divinatory lot interface in striking ways. If the pictorialization of the lottery book granted new emphasis and shape to the instruments of fortune on which it relied, it was also coincident with the growing assertion of its own status as a game. This assertion was not only an effect of the lots employed in initiating the divinatory act, which, as we have seen, bore strong connections if not outright identity with those used in games of chance. It could also be carried out iconographically, through direct references to cards and dice within the

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<sup>40</sup> Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, Book II.2.

<sup>41</sup> As Karr Schmidt argues with respect to interactive prints in general, “through manipulating these images, the viewer learned to read their dual meanings as if the act of handling them had brought the ideas themselves into a more concrete and understandable form,” Karr Schmidt, “Art—A User's Guide: Interactive and Sculptural Printmaking in the Renaissance,” 15.

<sup>42</sup> The relationship between divination and games of chance has been observed by many, among them E.B. Tylor, who noted that the two are “so similar that the same mechanism passes from one use to the other.” See Edward Burnett Tylor, *The Origins of Culture* (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1970), 80. For a study devoted specifically to the Renaissance (though not limited to aleatory methods), see J. Ceard, “Jeu et divination à la Renaissance,” in *Les Jeux à la Renaissance*, ed. P. Aries and J.C. Margolin (Paris: 1982), 405-420.

illustrations themselves. But the texts frequently articulated their own alignment with play through their own self-identification as “pastimes.” In the German tradition, in particular, *Losbücher* often explicitly styled themselves as *kurzweilen*—that is, an amusement or entertainment.<sup>43</sup>

The general proximity between gambling and divination is in part an effect of their shared future orientation and material procedures. Both types of lots frame the uncertain future as an object of epistemological interest and desire, and localize this future in the outcome of the aleatory event. Chance provides the means for a ritualized engagement with this object. In gambling, of course, this future is constituted principally in terms of financial or personal gain—that is, the source of its value as an object. In the divinatory lot, it is the content of the future that is the desired thing to be gained, a narrative of what will occur that possesses an epistemological value.

The “ends” of each lot are, to be sure, not thoroughly collapsible in every sense. Yet gambling not only invoked varied practices of prediction by players desiring victory, the outcome of the lot in play could itself be subject to a kind of divinatory reading, one that accorded the result its own narrative significance. Victory or loss could be understood as a sign of favor or disfavor within a larger or Providential order.<sup>44</sup> The narrativity of the lot in general, as well as its status as a site for the investment of future hopes and projections, drew divinatory and gambling practices together. In the Middle Ages and Renaissance, the discourse surrounding Fortuna and her contingent goods heightened these likenesses. Riches sought after in gambling were part of Fortuna’s domain, part of the contingent futures that served as the desired end of so many predictive exercises. By virtue of the shared entrenchment in the transitory sphere, external goods tended to be equated morally and ontologically by theological authorities. Divination, like gambling, indicated one’s subjection to earthly vanities and the mutability of Fortuna in the temporal realm, while moreover comprising diabolically-inspired temptations. Thus lottery books and gambling were consistently subject to a similar condemnatory ire.<sup>45</sup>

And yet each persisted and even thrived, reconfigured through increasingly varied material and visual supports. These supports point to an interest in the forms of chance as a source of aesthetic pleasure as well a site of potential interpretive value, a means of framing and apprehending the contingencies of the social world. The lottery book highlights the formal interests at work in this process through the problematic role of the illustrations and devices that grace its pages. If the *rota fortunae* of certain *Losbücher* were often extraneous to the base functioning of the lottery book, then it might additionally be argued that all images were fundamentally nonessential in this respect. Indeed, the *Sortes* could operate just fine without them. Images were thus themselves contingent and not necessary to the books in a broad sense. And yet, by the sixteenth century, one is hard-pressed to find examples of lottery books that *lack*

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<sup>43</sup> Jörg Wickram, for example, gave his immensely popular lottery book (first published in 1539) the heading, not of *Losbuch*, but *Kurtzweil*.

<sup>44</sup> On the interpretability of the outcome of gambling, see, for example, Reith, *Age of Chance: Gambling in Western Culture*, 176.

<sup>45</sup> Karr Schmidt argues that lottery books were essentially “surrogates” for gambling, which was avidly condemned and moreover subject to increasing legal proscription in Strasbourg, a key center for the production of the printed *Losbuch*. However, the fact that divination more broadly and lottery books themselves were viewed with suspicion (as she notes, as well), makes this an unlikely scenario. Moreover, Strasbourg was hardly unique among European cities in its legal strictures on gambling; the fact that repeated anti-gambling measures were passed there in the sixteenth century may simply point to their ineffectual status. (Karr Schmidt, “Art—A User’s Guide: Interactive and Sculptural Printmaking in the Renaissance,” 312-16). For late medieval and early modern condemnations of the lottery book see *ibid.*, 305 and 317.

such illustrations. There were, of course, many aspects and rationales for these surplus “prints and pictures.” But in the lottery book as a genre, the development of a strong pictorial component as part of its conventional identity exhibits an effort to negotiate or even separate the ludic and epistemological aspects of the lot in various ways.

### The Contingent Image

The superfluity of the image within the lottery book is succinctly demonstrated by those examples based solely on the casting of three dice. The sub-category of the *Würfelmuch* is perhaps the most straightforward and minimalistic of the genre. It usually includes little if any prefatory material and no divinatory questions to choose from. One cast of the dice is the only step necessary to determine one’s fortune. Since these fortunes are based on the numerical value of the three individual dice, the book need only note these three numbers in order to aid the player in locating his or her fate within the pages. This could be easily accomplished with simple numeric signs, the types for which would have been readily available at the printer’s shop. Yet I have not encountered a single volume that employs this mode of representation. Instead, the books invariably illustrate three dice themselves as a rubric for the fortunes [fig. 2.2, for example]. All fifty-six possible combinations are included, with the specific values in question turned up. These are not, to be sure, carefully delineated objects. The dice are instead presented as stark, unmodulated forms, reduced solely to the two-dimensional depiction of the relevant surface with its particular pattern of pips. The books thus insist on the instruments of chance as the means through which the fortunes are conveyed. The communicative dimension of the dice as vehicles for aleatory divination, it appears, is somehow linked to their material status. Even as each particular cast of dice is “translated” into a rhymed divinatory statement, the dice themselves resist conversion into purely numerical symbols. If anti-gambling and divination treatises would condemn dice as an implement of sin, here the dice are baldly asserted as the basis of authority. Including the *image* of the dice emphatically connects the fortune conveyed in the book to the causal act that took place outside of its frame, thereby establishing a referentiality with what has just occurred that grants credence to the textual verses concerning the future.

But the inclusion of the dice not only asserts the importance of the objects employed in the casting of lots, it also affords the articulation of a visible design within which the divinatory act takes place. In a *Würfelmuch* of 1529, the alternating rows of dice and divinatory text create a striking pattern [fig. 2.16].<sup>46</sup> The insertion of pictures not only constructs a sense of referentiality, it grants a patent order to what could otherwise appear as a confusing or uniform collection of text. However, the sense of order that is evident here is not simply geared toward practical clarity or visual appeal. More broadly, the consistency of its composition and iconography expresses a kind of visible order underlying the aleatory act. This holds for the lottery book as a category overall, since individual examples, in conveying their divinatory texts, customarily employ visual iconography and composition that are internally consistent, thereby fashioning a sense of regularity within the overall text. While *Würfelmücher* use the image of dice as an organizing principle for mapping future possibilities, the genre as a whole presents a wide array of iconographic schemas for the intimation of a superseding structure. A *Losbuch* published in 1485 by Martin Flach, for example, uses animals as the governing iconographic

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<sup>46</sup> Alfred Goetze, ed. *Das Straszburger Würfelmuch von 1529: Facsimiledruck der Erstausgabe*, Jahresgaben der Gesellschaft fuer Elfaessische Literatur (Strassburg: Karl J. Truebner, 1918).

motif. Each fortune is indicated by a thumbnail-like image of a particular creature [fig. 2.17].<sup>47</sup> Spirito's volume subdivides the different sections within the text in terms of iconography and composition, such that the user experiences each step in the process of inquiry as a movement between different domains, beginning with the effigies of the kings, through the astrological and natural signs, to the "spheres," before finally arriving at the prophet who purveys divinatory wisdom. Other books confine their imagery, for instance, to birds, kings, nuns and monks, or prophets.<sup>48</sup> Although non-essential to the basic operation of the lottery book, the very inclusion of images are instrumental in granting the appearance of a structure in which the invocation of chance via the casting of lots can occur. The casting of lots allows the players of the divinatory "game" to locate themselves within this structure. In the schema of the lottery book, the future—in all its multiplicity of outcomes—is already present elsewhere in the pages of the book. It only remains for the lot to reduce multiplicity to singularity, to isolate and facilitate the appropriation of a specific instance by the user.

Indeed, the confinement of the pictorial material to a sole (or delimited range of) iconographic theme, a particular lottery book extracts multiplicity from a single order, demonstrating the possibilities inherent in a distinct category. In this way, the pictorial dimensions of the lottery book at once intimate a temporal order, while simultaneously highlighting the future as a site of profuse possibilities. Images aid in the negotiation and navigation of this profusion. By making the formal principles of the book more perceptible, the pictures in the lottery book undoubtedly helped players, through repeated use, to apprehend the governing principles of its organization and more effectively memorize the different futures and the routes needed to attain them. The fixed set of possibilities in the lottery book enabled the future to be effectively memorized, and the linking of images to specific fortunes only advanced that process.<sup>49</sup>

So diverse are the pictorial themes that populate the lottery book (sometimes even within a single example) that it may almost appear as if the content of the images themselves is immaterial. What matters most is the consistent grouping of the images under a common or logically-connected subject throughout. And yet there are certainly examples of books in which the iconographic content specifically evokes other, well-established discourses. Astrology and religious figures are some of the more frequently-summoned categories in this respect, while the occasional inclusion of animals and birds among the pages would appear to refer to the genre of the bestiary. Such references endeavor to appropriate the authority of other forms of knowledge to lend credence to the books' representation of the future. Through recourse to these iconographic domains, the lottery book explicitly asserts the value of its own divinatory discourse in relation to other types of future-engagement, be they secular or eschatological in orientation. It connects the casting of lots to celestial and earthly systems in a network of implied

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<sup>47</sup> This text is preserved in a single example at the Staatsbibliothek in Berlin, where it has been subjected to annotation and intervention by its original owner. For a facsimile version, see *Losbuch: ein scherzhaftes Wahrsagebuch gedruckt von Martin Flach in Basel um 1485. Nach dem einzig bekannten Exemplar der Preussischen Staatsbibliothek in Berlin*, (Berlin: Reichsdruckerei, 1923). Karr Schmidt presents an interesting discussion of the annotations in her dissertation (p. 306). As she notes, the annotations have been thoroughly banished in the facsimile.

<sup>48</sup> *Nun höret zu vnd mercket eben [Losbuch]*, (Nuremberg: Neuber, 1570); *Ein gar kurtzweilich Losbuch / darinnen mancherlen frag / vonn allerlen Thieren vnnd Voegeln verzeignet sein*, (Nuremberg 1586); and *Losbuch*, (Strasbourg: Georgius de Spira?, c.1480).

<sup>49</sup> The memorization of the lottery book is evident in alterations and annotations to extant examples, which Karr Schmidt nicely analyzes. See chapter 4, section 3.

relations. The agency of the lot is visibly sutured to an epistemological framework that accords it a particular communicative identity. While the content of the images themselves do not always plainly define a causal origin for the eventual outcome of the lot, their presence can work to vaguely suggest an agentive process. Thus the ordinarily invisible connection between cause and effect presented by chance are given a certain shape and order through the iconographical content, even if the text of the fortunes themselves may not directly articulate such connections.

### **The *Thuys der Fortunen***

The insinuation of causal relationships via imagery foregrounds the epistemological facets of the *Losbuch*. These facets are perhaps most apparent in the tendency to employ astrological imagery within these books, one which is evident, for instance, in Spirito's occasional use of astrological signs, but has a longer pedigree in the German manuscript tradition.<sup>50</sup> One of the most interesting instances of this practice, however, also offers strong evidence of its wide and longstanding popularity. The *Thuys der Fortunen ende dat Huys der Doot* (*The House of Fortune and the House of Death*) is a printed text that opens with an extensive lottery book that functions through a spinning dial. It was published several times in the Low Countries during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The earliest extant edition dates from 1518 and was printed in Antwerp by Jan van Doesborch. Another printing was undertaken by the Utrecht printer Jan Baerentsz. in 1531.<sup>51</sup> The book was additionally reprinted in Brussels in 1583, while 1611 edition from Rotterdam constitutes the latest known edition.<sup>52</sup> Heavily illustrated with a variety of woodcuts, both the pictorial status and apparent popularity of the text suggests a considerable and persistent diffusion within Dutch-speaking regions of the early modern period.

The book offers a combination of the imagery of Fortuna and the discourse of popular astrology. Although the lottery book proper is confined to the opening section of the volume, the importance of Fortuna in its overall program is evident in the frontispiece [fig. 2.18]. Here, Fortuna is presented in her regal guise, framed by a cloth of honor and holding a miniature version of her wheel and an arrow in the manner of a scepter. She is flanked by two figures who are charged with distributing the goods of her favor and disfavor. At left, *Geluck* is personified as a well-dressed gentleman with a moneybag, from which he showers a considerable array of coins to the (equally sartorially refined) fortunate below, who scramble to acquire the loot. On the right, the unfortunate are pelted with stones by a shabby and despondent *Ongheluk* holding a straw basket. Fortuna herself is elevated and kept at a remove from these goings-on by a brick wall, occupying a separate sphere as an authoritative agent who watches the effects of her distributed agency unfold as if in a theatrical production. Her royal garments are symmetrically split into light and dark, a division that is echoed in the clothing of the recipients of her grace and condemnation, respectively. In its dual presentation of fate, the frontispiece thus presents a variant on the so-called Fortuna *mi-partie*, in which the values accorded to her right and left sides accord with those of divine judgment.

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<sup>50</sup> See, for example, a fifteenth-century "losbuch von den Planeten" in Berlin SB Ms.Germ.fol 244.

<sup>51</sup> Jan van Doesborch relocated to Utrecht around 1530, and settled at the shop of Baerentsz., who would reprint many of his texts. Piet J.A. Franssen, "Jan van Doesborch's departure from Antwerp and his influence on the Utrecht printer Jan Berntsz " *Quaerendo* 18, no. 3 (1988): 163-90.

<sup>52</sup> *Thuys d' fortunē. Eñ dz huys d'doot*, (Antwerp: Jan van Doesborch, 1518); *Thuys d' fortunē. Eñ dz huys d'doot*, ; *Thuys der fortunē. Met het huys der doot. En de thien outheden des menschen*, (Rotterdam: J. van Gelen, 1611).



But if the image represents elements of Fortuna’s familiar iconography, the subtitle does not comment on these matters. Rather it delineates the content of the book in terms of physical well-being: the ages of man, the means of determining health, the astrological signs, and the four “impressions” or humoral dispositions, all of which, it declares, are illustrated with figures. Thus, if the frontispiece employs the conventional iconography of Lady Fortune in terms of financial prosperity and worldly goods (or their absence), the text does not uphold the promise of a discourse on wealth but focuses instead on another aspect of Fortuna’s domain, the health of the body.

The lottery book’s volvelle would have been affixed to the verso of the title page, and its appearance was accompanied by a strong shift in emphasis to celestial concerns. The diagrammatic configuration of concentric circles is divided into twelve radial segments [fig.2.19]. One of the outermost rings is inscribed with the directions of twelve winds (north, south, north northwest, etc.). This band encloses an inner ring of stars and heavenly spheres, which appear as almost celestial dice pips in their alternating positive and negative colorations. A central circle is partitioned into four quadrants, and it forms the site of the original moveable pointer. Although this volvelle is absent in every example I have viewed, Braekman has reproduced an intact version that shows a fashionable gentleman extending his arm as a pointing device [fig. 2.20]. Through the segmentation of the circle into different winds, turning the volvelle is rendered akin to submitting the poor fellow to varied blustery currents, a construction that connects the process to the heavens while also implicitly evoking the iconography of Fortuna tossed to-and-fro on the stormy seas [fig. 2.21].

The instructions for the text assert the didactic and beneficial effects of pursuing it, mapping an itinerary of signs and lessons that follow for those who pursue their fate. “This book is made to drive out melancholy, which often makes men ill, and to avoid folly,” the text asserts.<sup>53</sup> For those who wish to know their fortune (*auontuere*), the text instructs them to “turn the little man” on the inside from the outside—an ambiguous wording that may indicate that the figure was attached by a string or pin to another device on the recto of the page that the player moved before turning the page to see which direction the wind had blown the “little man.”<sup>54</sup> If this was indeed the intention, it would have added a layer of blindness to the process. Moreover, the user would have turned a device whose axis was centered on the very figure of Fortuna herself on the frontispiece.

Whatever the pointer’s original format, the selection of a particular “wind” through the volvelle leads one on an intricate path of pictures and texts, whose basic course the instructions foreshadow for the inquirer: from the twelve winds one is led to one of the twelve zodiac signs, then to one of the twelve months, and then to a female allegory or mythological figure. The women present a brief rhymed speech before indicating the user’s final destination at one of twelve “*meesteren*,” each of whom offers an extensive discourse on one’s fate [figs. 22, 23]. The astrological emphasis that emerges in the path to the *meester* is at least briefly upheld in their predictions, for each *meester* notes the zodiac sign that the user passed through to reach them and learn of their *avontueren*. These concern, as usual, love, money, general fortune or misfortune, and the like.<sup>55</sup> The accompanying woodcuts appear rather crude and, taken as a group, exhibit

<sup>53</sup> “Dyt boecxke is geordineert om dye melācolie te üdrÿnē dye dicwil dē mensie siecte maect eñ clapperie te scuwē,” *Thuis d' fortunē. Eñ dz huys d'doot*, Aii (1531).

<sup>54</sup> The original text reads “Wildi hier in/ u auontuere soecken so suldi vā buyten drayē dz mānekē vā binnē en dat sal u metter hōt wisē eñ vā dē.xii.windē / die indē cirkel stā,” (ibid.).

<sup>55</sup> For instance, Meester Averaoy discusses questions of riches, foreign travel, and practices for good health (Er-v).

some stylistic variations that suggest that the printer may have simply employed a haphazard collection of images rather than followed a consistent program. While the different components of the lottery book link the process of inquiry to a long-established specialized discourse, the images offset the potential seriousness of this inquiry with humorous references and occasional caricature.<sup>56</sup> Nevertheless, the strong visual dimensions and use of ornamental borders assert the visual status of the book and insists on the importance of pictures in the journey to one's *avontuere*.

Yet the arrival at a prophetically-wise *meester* does not in this case constitute the endpoint of the book's predictive or visual discourse. For, following the prose fortunes, one encounters "many beautiful teachings" on such matters as the four complexions, the influence of the heavenly signs, and what to eat and drink over the course of the twelve months in order to maintain physical health. Thus the lottery book is only one mode of wisdom proffered in the text. The other sections, while not all prophetic in a strict sense, nevertheless draw on aspects of popular astrology as a means of negotiating ambiguity, structuring time, and understanding bodily health. Though it does contain a certain moralizing dimension, the techniques and teachings it presents are geared toward practical ends on earth. We may all end up in the house of death, the text suggests, but along the way there are many potential paths and influences for the individual. Thus extensive reflections on the temperaments and signs are bound together with sections that purport to predict one's humoral activity over the course of the year according to the day of the week one's birthday falls on. Illustrations are used throughout to convey the arrangements and concepts presented in the text. Charts of the heavenly sphere, while not themselves mobile, reinvoke the *volvelle* at the opening of the text and grant it a further astrological import [fig. 2.24].

Lest such pictorial material cancel the reader's memory of Fortuna on the frontispiece, a foldout in subsequent pages introduces the royal depiction of the goddess once more, centralized in her familiar *mi-partie* regalia and *rota fortunae* attributes [fig.2.25]. Gathered among her attendants are personifications of the temperaments, duly labeled with banners and aligned on either the light/fortunate or dark/unfortunate axis. Just beyond this central courtly vignette, portraits of the planets personified are similarly arranged along the positive/negative axis. The accompanying text explains that the planets in question are, by inclination, either fortunate or unfortunate with respect to the House of Fortuna.<sup>57</sup> Although the pages are configured in terms of a dual symmetry, the gathering around Fortuna as queen of her heavenly "house" itself alludes to the circular configuration of the wheel, with the fortunate temperaments and planets located on the rising side, and the unfortunate on the falling side of the wheel in its traditional iconography. Fortuna as shown here has her own heavenly domain, one that potentially validates and reinterprets the lot in the opening pages.

The *Thuis der Fortunen*, then, presents a wide range of astrological knowledge that demonstrates the place of the individual in a larger cosmic scheme of influences. The full range and significance of this discourse is well beyond the scope of the present discussion. What is significant, however, is the placement of a lottery book within a text that is so clearly intended as

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<sup>56</sup> Some of the "vrouwen" are often pictured as part of an ill-matched pair of lovers, while Virgil is shown held captive in a basket by the daughter of the Roman emperor.

<sup>57</sup> It is not entirely clear what is meant by the "house of Fortuna" in this discourse, since it is not given a location on the included astrological charts and diagrams. Renaissance astrology does occasionally refer to the concept "part of fortune" (*pars fortunae*), an aspect of one's birth chart that is calculated through the relative positions of the sun, moon, and ascendant sign, though this does not seem to be what is referred to here. The figure of Fortuna appears to serve simply as a means of visualizing lucky and unlucky planets in a structural schema.

a collection of useful teachings oriented toward practical application. The lottery book itself exhibits its own formal characteristics that separate it from the presentation of material in the ensuing pages. It is, however, iconographically and thematically linked with this material and presented as epistemologically on par with it, even if it is not always clear that the different parts of the book represent a consistent or clearly-articulated discourse.

The *meesteren* link their predictions to a particular sign that the user reaches, not by the irrevocable past event of one's birth date and time, but by the variable casting of lots in the spinning of the *volvelle*. The legitimacy of this process is presumably an effect of the lot's own subjection to heavenly influences that similarly inflect the individual, the coagulation of inclinations around the wheel of Fortuna in the fold-out pages. The casting of the lot and its attendant staging of uncertainty is significantly positioned at the beginning of the book as a whole, perhaps as a means of drawing the reader into its other teachings beyond the game of the lottery book. The lot thus constitutes the point of access for a larger predictive body of knowledge that it, along with the frontispiece image of Fortuna, mediates.<sup>58</sup>

The *Thuys der Fortunen* represents the convergence of the lottery book and astrology in especially striking fashion. As such, it illuminates the extent to which the lottery book could inhabit and appropriate other forms of knowledge through its iconographical formats. The alignments that different lottery books asserted or formalized through their imagery were, as a whole, not consistent. But in their sheer range they demonstrate just how potent the lot could be as a means of framing and mediating the relationship to future time. Images were one way the aleatory lot could exercise a certain claim to other discourses even as it might benefit from the association, imposing a particular formal and ritualized apparatus on existing sign systems and interpretive methods. In the early sixteenth century, the casting of lots had become a leading means of engaging with the future and its representations, assimilating other divinatory practices into its own iconography and procedures.

## Social Forms

There remains, however, a vital element of the pictorial conventions of the lottery book that have not been directly touched upon thus far. Whatever the diversity of theme and iconography among the images that populate the category of the *Losbuch* as a whole, they do not represent the *content* of predictive speech. Rather, these images are persistently included in order to posit a speaking subject or prophetic figure for the oracular utterance at its various stages. This figure, of course, need not be a person. Regardless of their identity, these prognosticative voices are in some way visually proximate to the textual oracle. Additionally, they are effectively sutured to the textual oracles through the consistent inclusion of first-person pronouns. The "I" of the image interacts with the reader, who is positioned as the object of the predictive speech by virtue of an I/you deixis woven throughout the written text.

A printed *Kartenlosbuch* of c. 1520 makes this especially clear, as nearly every fortune begins with a deictic utterance that institutes a particular relationship between reader and the proposed site of knowledge. Many cards "speak" with an opening assertion of their authority: "I am the fine king of hearts / and I speak this true opinion to you"; "I am the banner of hearts / and

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<sup>58</sup> This collection of various predictive techniques has a precedent in late medieval manuscript volumes, in which texts of a similar theme were often bound together. The lottery book manuscript in UB Heidelberg cod. pal. 552, for example, is bound together with various astrological and geomantic texts.

I speak this true opinion to you / and tell you not more than that.”<sup>59</sup> Thus every fortune opens with an assertion of the truth of an “opinion” that belongs to the self-identified talking card. The card in question is duly represented adjacent to the text as a recognizable number and suit [fig. 2.26], but one which lacks a frame defining it as a discrete thing. The “I” of the text is visibly anchored to a speaking agent, while the “you” shifts in relation to the reader or focus of the divinatory utterance.

On the one hand, the pictorial establishment of a figure who pronounces the prophetic text has the effect of fragmenting the agency of the book as a quasi-magical object, distributing the power of prediction across multiple entities who are given shape within the pages. If the book represented text alone, it would be all too easy to mistake the volume-as-physical-object as the sole source of authority. The *Losbuch* as such is divested of any ability to speak as a material, discrete thing animated with predictive power. Instead, it merely portrays and offers access to a host of other prophetic subjects assembled within its pages. It enables the animation and agency of other entities, like playing cards, but the book itself cannot be mistakenly perceived or revered as a thing endowed with subjectivity.

More importantly, however, the representation of prophecy as a speech act insists quite strikingly on divination as a social relationship, a form of representation based on intersubjective communication. Prediction is a form of social agency, licensed by the aleatory lot and distributed across multiple subjects in the pages of the book.<sup>60</sup> The images of the lottery book are unabashed substitutes for an actual oracle, but they nevertheless present the user with a dramatic encounter with their future as articulated by a pictured interlocutor. But if the *Losbuch* creates a simulated impression of social interaction, it was nevertheless typically invoked for use within the collective frameworks of play and the context of lived social situations. The pictorial accentuation of the intersubjective element only draws attention to the ludic frameworks of the books’ implementation.

Surely lottery books could be successfully employed by a solitary inquirer. Indeed, the manuscript of the *Sortes XII Patriarcharum* advocates a lengthy ritual preamble as preparation for the divinatory act, including prayer as well as certain strictures on food consumption.<sup>61</sup> While the manuscript could have been consulted in a variety of contexts, these instructions suggest that its use could possess a strong affinity with practices of personal devotion and meditation. By contrast, many Renaissance lottery books allude to social situations as their most appropriate venue. As one *Würfelbuch* notes, “this game goes together with good wine / in that place where good society is practiced.” After you have taken your turn with the dice, the concluding text suggests, “let others throw too / one after the other.”<sup>62</sup> The frequent self-definition of the *Losbücher* as *kurzweilen*, or amusements, tends to highlight the element of shared, game-like entertainment and laughter as an aspect of the books’ use. In the Italian context, an image included in a 1557 Venetian edition of Spirito’s *Libro*, which depicts nine men and women

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<sup>59</sup> “Ich bin der konig der herzen feyn / vnd sag dir auff die trewe meyn;” and “Ich bin das baner van herzlein / vnd sag dir auff die trewe mein / Und sag dir nit mer dan das,” Adolf Hofmeister, ed. *Eyn Losbuch ausz der Karten gemacht* (Rostock: Volckmann & Jerosch, 1890), 2, 3.

<sup>60</sup> On the distributable, social agency of the art object, see Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

<sup>61</sup> See Skeat, “An Early Mediaeval ‘Book of Fate’: The *Sortes XII Patriarcharum*,” 42-3.

<sup>62</sup> “lass ander werffen auch / In ordnung,” *Ein neüw kunst eines yden Menschen Wesen Leben und Natur zu erfahren*, (Oppenheim: Jacob Köbel, 1528), Aii.r.

gathered together to play.<sup>63</sup> In the case of Spirito's lottery book, its consistently large format additionally stands as evidence of its intended use in social gatherings, as this would have facilitated its visibility for multiple players.

Within the potentially collective framework of its reception, the relationship between the lottery book and games of chance does indeed become quite prominent. In this game, the casting of lots does not determine a "winner" per se. It is not necessarily a competitive game but a collaborative one, in which the desired object—knowledge of the future—is subjected to the dramatic performance of the aleatory act, whether based on dice, volvelles, or the like. Yet it is not only the casting of lots that is rendered as a performance subject to the collective gaze of those present. Additionally, the divinations themselves offer the possibility of dramatic enactment, in which players orally recite the representations of future time inscribed in the text. The propensity of the fortunes to spoken performance is strongly conveyed by their composition in rhymed verse. This pretense distances the fortune from everyday speech, framing it as a representational conceit, one that instills it with a cadence tailored to oral performance. The speech act represented in the book via text and image is thus disbursed to the player(s), who index the oracular identity of a designated prophetic entity and thus insist on the status of the divination as a kind of theatrical representation.<sup>64</sup>

As a game-like activity, the lottery book frames the contingent future as a representation and as the basis for sociability. In this ludic context, the representation of the future is both instigated and framed by the casting of lots, which constitutes its own dramatic, time-based performance. As a staging of uncertainty through visual and material forms, the aleatory dimension of the lottery book structures the future as an object of desire and anticipation by players, a tense but potentially pleasurable experience that is intimately linked to the multiplicity of possible outcomes. As Rabelais's Panurge excitedly remarks to Pantagruel just before they open the book of the Virgil to discern his fortune, "My heart's flapping in my breast like a glove. Just feel how the pulse in my left arm's beating. You would imagine from its fevered rapidity that I was being mauled by the examiners of the Sorbonne."<sup>65</sup> The performance of chance via the lot gives way to a narrative performance of the future in the present and received by all players.

But in its persistent focus on Fortuna's goods and the futures of the social world, the lottery book grants a certain form to the social in a context that is itself, of course, constituted through social relations. The uncertain future is that which is subject to Fortuna in daily life and in the game, insofar as the representation of the future is only attainable through the lot. Chance is the medium of representation, but it is also the structuring interest informing social relationships and interaction in play itself, as the ritualized activity that structures the experience of the players. At multiple levels, then, the lottery book configures and grants a certain form to the social world, in all of its contingency.<sup>66</sup> If the lottery book frames the future for consumption,

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<sup>63</sup> Both Karr Schmidt and Marie-Cécile van Hasselt have drawn attention to this image. The image shows nine men and women gathered with an open book, dice, and an astrolabe. See Karr Schmidt, "Art—A User's Guide: Interactive and Sculptural Printmaking in the Renaissance," 324; Hasselt, "Les livres de sorts en Italie de 1482 à 1551 : l'imaginaire astrologique, les systèmes de causalité et la marge de liberté accordée à l'individu," 106.

<sup>64</sup> In French editions of Spirito, for instance, the images disappear entirely in the final section with the prophecies, while in most Italian versions the prophet is represented only through a small thumbnail-like image, an indication that the focus of attention is redirected from the book to the player reciting the prophecy.

<sup>65</sup> Rabelais, *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, 317.

<sup>66</sup> In using the phrase "social form," I am drawing on interesting questions raised in James Vernon, "The Social and its Forms," *Representations* 104, no. 1 (2008): 154-8. Here, Vernon considers the possibilities and problems of a "formal analysis of the social": "if the social already has its own history of form, in what ways can we think of form

then it also demarcates a novel, pictorially-mediated site for the representation of social life and relationships. That this form proved so compelling over the course of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries is a testament to its efficacy as means of apprehending time and social relations, even as it was fraught by its own epistemological ambiguities.

## A Divided Genre

If the images of the lottery book as a genre tend to oscillate between an alignment with games and established epistemological forms, this ambivalence is often reiterated in the texts themselves. For all the use they seem to have inspired, *Losbücher* express a curious and sometimes contradictory attitude to their own status as divinatory devices. The rhymed oracles that concluded each deployment of the lottery book were usually sufficiently broad to enable appropriation by the reader, yet they could speak in unambiguous language, shying away from expressions that might qualify the likelihood of the predictions. However, the frequent inclusion of prefatory and concluding lines, separate from the divinatory texts themselves, presented a much more conflicted space of commentary on the legitimacy of the *Losbuch's* discourse.

One *Würfelmuch* initiated its readers by assuring them of the veracity of what was to follow:

If you turn these pages  
You will discover the precise truth . . .  
Now I begin  
The first piece  
Which offers the highest fortune  
And holds within it the greatest opportunity:  
It [i.e., the three dice] is all six, and tells you  
The whole truth without fail.<sup>67</sup>

The accuracy that the book purports to offer is at least partially licensed by the religious nature of some of the fortunes. The vaunted opening fortune of a roll of three sixes, for instance, declares that if one follows the Ten Commandments then one will have good fortune on earth and eternal joy in heaven, such that the use of the lot simply affirms a causal relation between good behavior on earth and salvation.<sup>68</sup> The remaining fortunes in the text do not always maintain this emphasis on generalized devotional truths. They also speak of the player's specific character qualities without recourse to religious virtues. Yet the conclusion exhibits a certain anxious awareness about the fact that multiple uses could yield very different results for a single player, thereby compromising the text's authority: "I wish here to give you a warning: / [only] once should you try your luck / and not more often, in one game / so that you don't experience too much truth."<sup>69</sup>

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as social? If the social is not outside of representation, how can it provide a context for aesthetic form, a context for text?" (156).

<sup>67</sup> "So du dis pletter vmbher kerst / Die warheit gantz gerecht erferst . . . Nun heb ich an das / Erste stuck./ Das dinlich ist zûm ho<sup>o</sup>stē glück / Vnd insich helt die gro<sup>o</sup>steschantz / Das sein all Sechs / vnd sagt dir gantz / Die warheit on alles feelen." *Ein neüw kunst eines yden Menschen Wesen Leben und Natur zu erfahren*, , A1r and A2r. My thanks to Carolyn Hawkshaw for her invaluable help with this translation.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. Aiiir.

<sup>69</sup> "Ein warning ich dir hie wil thon / Ein schantz soltu ein werffen lon / Vnd kein mer in einem spiel / Das ym nit werd warheit zu viel," ibid.

Many lottery books, regardless of the nature of their predictions, were less liberal with such assertions, adopting more cautious attitudes toward their truth claims. Thus prefatory and concluding texts emerge as a strikingly self-reflexive space for the qualification—if not outright negation—of the knowledge that is proffered within the divinations themselves. One early printed lottery book in Germany, devoted exclusively to romantic futures, demonstrates the self-canceling proclivities of the genre. The opening text promises wisdom for those who use it: whoever “wants to know about love / take the dice game in hand,” and he shall know how his ribald longings will turn out.<sup>70</sup> Having posed the possibility of knowing through play, the subsequent lines proceed to revoke this promise: “do not believe the dice / for they deceive you with their story.” Finally, however, the prologue undercuts this statement, noting the limits of its own expertise and deferring to the dice: “I cannot say very much to you / the chance awaits he who wants to play.”<sup>71</sup> Following the lottery book proper, the printer himself interjects a conclusion in the form of a warning to the reader: one should not believe these things because they are a pack of lies (*wann es ist alles erlogen*). Faith should be invested in God instead.<sup>72</sup> Even in a volume which adamantly aligns itself with prior fields of knowledge, such as the *Thuyss der Fortunen*, concluding lines admonish users that, in the aforementioned matters, “there is no certainty” to be had.<sup>73</sup>

The lottery book thus tends to speak in a divided voice, luring readers to pursue divinatory representations that the text elsewhere contradicts as false. It espouses ideas and predictions within its pages, but also asserts its own deceptive nature and damages its own authority. The declaration of the lottery book as a *kurzweil* is a recurring strategy in this respect. Since the lottery book is only an entertainment, it should not be taken seriously and does not form a legitimate site for knowledge, presumably in contrast to the more trustworthy proposals of philosophical treatises and the like.<sup>74</sup> Such disclaimers use the game-like element of the *Losbuch* as a means of asserting the incompatibility between the ludic and epistemological dimensions of the genre.

Moreover, as a leisurely entertainment, the lottery book is not a source of divine wisdom, whatever its sacred aura or the history of the biblical *Sortes*. One of the more dramatic presentations of this “fine print” can be found in a single-sheet addition to Konrad Bollstatter’s extensively illustrated manuscript collection of *Losbücher*. At the conclusion of the *Losbuch* proper, a page has been appended that similarly depicts a centralized circular form, not unlike those which framed the predictive discourse in the preceding pages. It is attended by four figural motifs—in this case, four angels that indicate a proper orientation for the page [fig. 2.27]. This circle is divided concentrically, such that a large central form is enclosed by two smaller rings. The outer bands of the circle, which are best read by turning the book itself, cast doubt and disrepute on the authority of the lottery book’s discourse. “You should not be tempted [to find] God’s will with the lottery book, and [it] is contrary to faith, and with seeing eyes you are blinded,” warns the outermost band, while the second counsels that “one will cast the dice as

<sup>70</sup> “Und von der lieb wißen wil / der nem in hant wurffel spil,” *Hort vnd mercket eben [Würfelbuch]*, , 1.

<sup>71</sup> “Darumb gelaub dem wurffel nicht / er betruget dich des sey bericht ... Ich kan dir nit gesagen vil / er wart der schantz der do spilen wil,” *ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>73</sup> “Op dese voerk/ss dinghen / en[de] influencien der hemelen / der sterre[n] / ende der planeten en is gheen sekerheyt te stellen,” *Thuyss d' fortunē. Eñ dz huys d'doot*, 1531.

<sup>74</sup> As the opening lines of one *Kartenlosbuch* caution: “Ein losbuch aus karten gemacht /und alleyn durch kurzweyl erdacht / wer aber zuglauben sich daran wolt keren / Das selbig liefss sich vnrecht leren,” Hofmeister, *Eyn Loszbuch ausz der Karten gemacht*, 1.

entertainment, that which is in this book no one should believe, as the pope declared by decree, [for both] woman and man.”<sup>75</sup>

Bollstatter’s expression on this matter has a precedent in earlier Latin manuscript versions of the *Sortes XII Patriarcharum*. The makers of these manuscripts embedded harsh rebukes of the very lots they convey amidst other fortunes, rebukes such as “it is not possible for you to know the will of God through chance”; and “he who is led by chance, is never provided knowledge.”<sup>76</sup> As T. C. Skeat has noted, in the *Sortes*, often these condemnations were actually often used as decoy fortunes, since no possible combination of dice castings led to them.<sup>77</sup> Indeed, the fact that Bollstatter and other lottery book author-printers ensconced their own denunciations within the *frame* of the text proper—that is, as introductory and concluding remarks—suggests that they were perhaps none too keen to ensure that readers apprehend the message.

Despite these assertions of fallibility, the books’ success was bound to the capacity to seduce users into its depictions of the future through formal and experiential means. Through their disclaimers, *Losbücher* implicitly conceded their own efficacy as instruments of knowledge that could inspire belief. Publishers, perhaps wary of the potential for external reproach or censorship, included disclaimers as a kind of insurance policy that warned users who might be overly beguiled by the books. In this way, presumably, the captivating effects of the predictions and accompanying imagery would be annulled or, at the very least, blunted. The use of bibliomancy to determine the will of God, an aspect of biblical narrative and longstanding divinatory practice, similarly warranted a careful separation of the discourse of the lottery book from that of the divine.

Surely the origins and rationales for such disavowals may be varied in nature. It is rather their implications that most concern me here. With the *Losbücher*, multi-media depictions of the future are offered for consumption as representations—whether they are understood as sheer falsehoods by users, or simply as statements that lack a concrete object and thus are not (yet) verifiable. In their portrayals of the future, certain lottery books endeavor to explicitly disconnect their own discourse from that of the divine will, a move that is typically coincident with the declaration that these statements are not to be believed. Although such statements may very well simply be motivated by the desire to escape moral censure, they have the *effect* of defining a space of portrayal and interpretation, one in which *fortuna*—as form and content—operates outside of a governing divine will. The moralizing condemnation of lottery books, itself inseparable from that of fortune and the status of divination, cannot be considered simply in its restrictive effects. Such condemnations also helped instigate the production of alternative

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<sup>75</sup> The first circle reads: “Du solt mit losbüchen / gottes willen nit versüchen / und ist wider den gelauben / und würdest geblennt mit gesehende ougen.” Because the word “augen,” (eyes) was also used to denote the pips of the dice, the last phrase could also take on a different meaning as a pun on the notion of the omniscience of the dice: “you will be blinded by truly-seeing eyes [pips].” The original text of the second circle reads: “Man wu<sup>r</sup>fft es durch ain kürtzweyle wol, / das dem büche nyemant gelauben sol, / als der babst gebewt bey dem pan / frauen und man.” See BSB Cgm 312, fol. 143r, and the facsimile version of this portion of the text, Schneider, *Ein Mittelalterliches Wahrsagespiel: Konrad Bollstatters Losbuch in Cgm 312, der Bayerischen Staatsbibliothek*, 119. See also fol. 110r of the manuscript, which repeats some of these warnings.

<sup>76</sup> *Velle Dei nosse Casu non est tibi posse and Cui Casus Dux est, sibi nunquam previa lux est.* See Skeat, “An Early Mediaeval ‘Book of Fate’: The Sortes XII Patriarcharum,” 47.

<sup>77</sup> As Skeat notes, these condemnations were assigned to a casting value of one. Since these *Sortes* relied on the toss of two die for which the lowest possible outcome was two, no proper use of the game would actually result in these fortunes. They were, he argues, “retained for the sake of symmetry,” *ibid.*



strategies of framing and new representational forms for the apprehension of fortune and future time.

The lottery book comprised a unique social context in which the future was rendered an object of representation and discourse regarding their potentially fictional nature and truth-value. If the lottery book offered a depiction of the future, it also provided its users the opportunity, whether individually or collectively, to carefully assess these depictions and formulate their own, alternative narratives of events yet to occur.<sup>78</sup> The ability to consider the future as a site, not of necessary truths but rather of diverse possibilities, was likely a major aspect of the pleasures of these activities. Indeed, that the future could be otherwise than any particular prediction stated was plainly visible in the pages of these books. Multiple fortunes were often displayed in any given double-page spread, with each separate possibility visibly designated by an accompanying image, a fallible speaking subject.

For Leonhart Reymann, however, there needn't be a contradiction between the truth and epistemological value of the lottery book. His own venture into the genre focused mainly on matters of love and deploys the casting of dice and interprets the results in accordance with principles of geomancy.<sup>79</sup> In the preface to his *Losbuch* of 1530, Reymann avoided any self-denunciations and instead focused on the ways in which his artful game offered an alternative to dull reason:

Must we always be rational?  
No, truly, it brings great agony,  
And shortens life considerably . . .  
[As a remedy] For this I know a great art  
So that our reason will not bring us harm.<sup>80</sup>

He goes on to suggest that even priests, who are preoccupied with sorrowful images of hell, would do well to occasionally seek their fortunes in lottery books, because this brings great laughter and joy.<sup>81</sup> With the lottery book, then, the consideration of eschatological futures can give way to earthly ones, and helps insure the future well-being of the body on earth. To this end, "All of this / I, Leonhart Reymann have studied with care / and made this little lottery book (*losbuchlein*) / with cool wine out of the glass / and the many liberal arts."<sup>82</sup> This particular text presents a contrived method that is overtly ascribed to a particular person, and it has its origins and validation in both diversion (wine) and knowledge (the liberal arts).

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<sup>78</sup> Karr Schmidt's analysis of the annotated interventions in the pages is highly relevant on this issue. The critical, conversational engagement with the divinatory *narrative* pronouncements of the lottery book could easily have been an extension of this.

<sup>79</sup> Leonhart Reymann, *Auflösung etlicher Frag manlicher und weyblicher Person in Sachen des Glücks oder Unglücks, auch der Lieb Stetigkeit unnd Trew* (Bamberg: Georg Erlinger, circa 1530). The geomantic element to the text is undoubtedly introduced to add another "layer" of interest and mystery to the interpretive process, but is actually quite simple: users would cast three dice four times, and proceed according to whether the value of the toss was an even or odd number. In this way, Reymann multiplied the aleatory steps, but ultimately reduced and simplified the potential paths that users could take.

<sup>80</sup> "Muss wir dan[n] alweg witzig sein / Neyn warlich es bringt grosse pein / Und kürzet sehr das lebenn . . . Dafür weiss ich ein gute kunst / Das vns wiz nit kum zu schaden." *ibid.*, A.ii.1. Thanks again to Carolyn Hawkshaw for her help on this text.

<sup>81</sup> "Und wereten vns joch alle pfaffen / Und sagten stets von helle pein / Noch muss wir etwan fro<sup>e</sup>lich sein / Und auch dey weylen süchen / Die glück in en lossbüchen," *ibid.*, A.ii.1-2.

<sup>82</sup> "Das alles hab gesehen an / Mit fleyss ich leonhart reymann / Und gemacht diss lossbüchlein / Etwouil bey külem wein / Auss dem glass vnd vil künsten frey," *ibid.*, A.ii.2.

Reymann's assertion of authority was no idle comment. He had previously published a variety of prognosticative texts, principally in the field of astrology, and thus could legitimately avow his expertise.<sup>83</sup> Although he defines his *Losbuchlein* volume as a form of entertainment, to his mind this does not invalidate its value as a source of a specific kind of wisdom. "It is said," he suggests, that the dice fall in accordance with the desires of he or she who casts them, thus there should be no doubt that the book "speaks the truth." It does so, however, not rationally but teasingly and "playfully."<sup>84</sup> In his schema, play is the proper form for apprehending Fortuna's volatile sphere of love and romantic futures, futures that, by virtue of their contingency, had proven so resistant to traditional forms of knowledge.<sup>85</sup> Play is here conceived of as a ritualized, game-like activity (the tossing of the dice). But it is also an interpretive orientation in which one is aware of the potential gap between what the pages declare and what may in fact occur—that is, the jocular and "teasing" quality of the fortunes themselves.

In the playful discourse of the lottery book, the forms of representation could possess an epistemological import even as the pages ardently denounced them. The self-condemnations that are introjected into Bollstatter's lottery book are configured around a central circle in which further commentary is contained [fig. 2.27]. In contrast to the admonitory texts, the script of the central disk can be read from a single, proper orientation, which it shares with the four angels that occupy the corners of the page and direct viewers to the wheel's content. Here, Bollstatter presents verses in Latin and German verses that comment on the eternal mutability and unknowability of fortune. In the Latin verses, fortune is compared to the waxing and waning of the moon. The German text follows the Latin prose and is introduced by the words *Das spricht*, a phrase that frames it as the author's own translation and interpretation of what precedes. The German rhyme shifts and expands on the meaning of its Latin counterpart. Fortune is compared, not to the moon, but to the earthly domain, with which she shares the same form and nature as changeable, rotating circles.<sup>86</sup>

Bollstatter's lottery book may offer untrustworthy representations, but it does so in accordance with the forms and properties of fortune itself, as each future in the pages of the lottery book is written in a radial orientation that is best read by turning the book in a unique time-based reception. Once the wheel stops, as Lady Philosophy cautioned in Boethius's *Consolation*, it is no longer the *rota fortunae*, no longer properly of the goddess's special domain

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<sup>83</sup> See, for example (with variant name spellings), a nativity calendar with movable parts and an astrological component: Leonhard Reynman, *Welcher woll sein Leyb vnnd Leben // Fursehen vnd bewarn eben // Auch allem Vngluck entrynnen // Substantz Hab vnd Gut gewynnen // Glori Lob vnd Er erlaussen // Der solle diss Buchlin kaussen // Das weyset jn die rechte Strass // Zu Gluck vnnd Hayl on Vnderlass // Nach Naigung vnd Einfluss der Stern // Was nutzlich ist, Leyb Gut vnd Ern.* (Nuremberg: F. Peypus, 1515); and Leonhart Reymann, *Practika uber die groÿen und manigfaltigen Conjunktion der Planeten, die imm jar 1524 erschienen* (Nuremberg: Hieronymus Hölzel, 1523).

<sup>84</sup> "Man spricht gedencken pringt den val / Das is war vnd gantz müglich / Darumb verwunder nymand sich / Ob diss buch etwan in fragen / Schertzlich wirt die warheit sagen," *ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> The notion of epistemological value of play is asserted by Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (Boston: Beacon, 1955), esp. chaps. 6 and 9; and informs aspects of Karr Schmidt's broader work on interactive prints to different ends.

<sup>86</sup> The full text of the inner circle reads: "O bona fortuna / cur non es omnibus una? Si non mutater, / fortuna numquam vocarer. / Est rota fortune / variabilis ut rota lune, / crescit et descrescit, / in eodem sister nescit. Das spricht: / Das gluck is synwell / und ist auch zu wenncken schnelle. / Die welt und des geluckes radt / vil eben und gleich ordnung hatt. Die das wo'llent vernemen, die lassen sich diser rede zemen. / Gelücke nyemants schonet, / die welt vil sawr lonet. / Geluckes rade will umbgon, / so will dye welt vil dienstes hon," Schneider, *Ein Mittelalterliches Wahrsagespiel: Konrad Bollstatters Losbuch in Cgm 312, der Bayerischen Staatsbibliothek*, 119.

and character: change is Fortuna's own form of constancy.<sup>87</sup> The "truth" of the lottery book is unveiled by rotating the volume and thereby experiencing the mutability of fortune, while the "truth" of fortune's nature is articulated in a manner that contradicts this nature and disallows access to it—that is, by arresting the experience of mutability that defines it as well as the worldly sphere in general. In Bollstatter's manuscript, the mutable forms of falsehood thus convey a certain veracity.

## Conclusion

By the fifteenth century, bibliomancy had existed for centuries, often as exclusively text-based divinatory practices. The rise of the illustrated lottery book, however, gave a novel form and appeal to the genre that helped sustain its popularization. But it also modulated the book as a material apparatus for the application of chance, and constructed new, pictorially-mediated platforms for experiencing time, the future, and the whims of Fortuna. Indeed, that the pictorialization of the lottery book was deeply intertwined with an interest in the visual forms of chance is indicated by the consistent appearance of the iconography of the *rota fortunae* and games of chance in their pages. The encounter with Fortuna could here constitute a site for knowledge and aesthetic enjoyment.

As a chance- and time-based divinatory practice, the lottery book framed a space in which Fortuna's domain—the contingencies of earthly social relations—were framed as a subject of representation and interpretation. Like the goddess Fortuna who oversaw it, this domain was fraught with deceptive potential. Yet this did not preclude the experience of legitimate delight or insight, so long as one maintained a critical awareness. The lottery book marked off a curious epistemological terrain, one that claimed to move variously between truth and falsity, play and knowledge, pleasure and edification—perhaps not unlike the dynamics that would come to define the work of art itself.<sup>88</sup> Lottery books placed aleatory rituals within a visual, performative, and narrative framework. They offered an experience of the contingent future as social entertainment, one that was defined by anticipation and an awareness of multiple possible outcomes. And, as we shall see, it gave new form to earthly themes just as these themes were becoming a more important component of the traditional pictorial arts.

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<sup>87</sup> Boethius, *Consolation*, Book II.1.

<sup>88</sup> Indeed, these disclaimers would seem to align the lottery book with what Christopher Wood, writing about the emergence of the artwork in sixteenth-century Germany, has called "fiction." For Wood, fiction is as a mode of representation is essentially "a system of lying without dishonesty," the construction of a "virtual reality" which is absolved from expectations of truthfulness in part by virtue of its origin in a distinctive poetic or authorial performance. The modern artwork takes up this mode of representation, and Wood argues that this is formulated against the backdrop of the humanist and antiquarian investigation of the past. Yet the divided discourse of the lottery book suggests that the study of the future could have well been significant in developing this notion. This idea is extensively elaborated in Wood, *Forgery, Replica, Fiction: Temporalities of German Renaissance Art*.

### Chapter Three: *The Futures of Hieronymus Bosch*

This chapter examines the themes of future and prediction as they are manifested in the paintings of the Netherlandish artist Hieronymus Bosch (d. 1516). Active in 's-Hertogenbosch and serving bourgeois, noble, and courtly patrons, Bosch painted novel and monstrous subjects that are drawn from a variety of sources.<sup>1</sup> Although his paintings are now some of the most widely familiar and frequently reproduced of the Northern Renaissance period, in the domain of art historical inquiry Bosch's works have been a source of special interpretive difficulty, presenting an array of figures and motifs that defy easy reading. This opacity of meaning is all the more surprising given the remarkable prevalence of moralizing themes in Bosch's *oeuvre*, as the artist typically maps the world of sinful human behavior in rather stark terms. Yet, while Bosch's panels seem to offer clear categorizations of virtue and vice, the interpretive problems they present instead suggest the ways in which moralizing discourse possessed its own uncertainties and impediments.

The art historian Erwin Panofsky, for his part, could express little more than mystification about Bosch. His study *Early Netherlandish Painting: Its Origins and Character* presents a thorough and often impressive account of late medieval Flemish and Dutch panel painting in terms of its stylistic sources, its relationship to manuscript illumination, and its distinctive modes of signification.<sup>2</sup> Yet, having investigated the works of Jan van Eyck and Rogier van der Weyden in detail, Panofsky concedes his utter bewilderment regarding the work of Hieronymus Bosch:

In spite of all the ingenious, erudite, and in part extremely useful research devoted to the task of "decoding Jerome Bosch," I cannot help feeling that the real secret of his magnificent nightmares and daydreams has yet to be disclosed. We have bored a few holes through the door of the locked room; but somehow we do not seem to have discovered the key.<sup>3</sup>

Panofsky then abruptly concludes his substantial study with an epigrammatic confession of ignorance: "This, too high for my wit / I prefer to omit."<sup>4</sup>

Panofsky's reluctance to deal with Bosch derived in large part from the artist's glaring difference from what came before him. Panofsky already had his own "keys" for early Netherlandish art in notions such as that of "disguised symbolism"—that is, the infusion of symbolic meanings into realistic forms that Panofsky identified as a paramount to Early Netherlandish art.<sup>5</sup> In the case of Bosch, however, such interpretive keys simply did not fit. Rather than the subtle integration of realistic content and spiritual meaning that Panofsky perceived in, for example, the little dog in Jan van Eyck's *Arnolfini Wedding* [fig. 3.1], Bosch insists on a strident break between appearance and meaning in themes of deception and devilry.

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<sup>1</sup> For an excellent study of Bosch's sources and patrons, see Paul Vandenbroeck, *Hieronymus Bosch: Tussen Volksleven en Stadcultuur* (Berchem: EPO, 1987).

<sup>2</sup> Erwin Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting: Its Origins and Character* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 357.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* 358. The epigram is in fact a quote from a nonplused German Renaissance translator of Marsilio Ficino's *De vita triplici*, used to express his own befuddlement about his source.

<sup>5</sup> See Erwin Panofsky, "Jan van Eyck's Arnolfini Portrait," *Burlington* 64, no. 372 (1934): 117-9; 122-7, for the most concise articulation of disguised symbolism.

The world is not the repository of the spiritual but instead habitually speaks of its absence in the pervasive face of the sinful and grotesque.

The obvious differences between Bosch and what Panofsky described as the main currents of early Netherlandish painting amply demonstrate the difficulties of contextualizing this artist. It is a consistent refrain among art historians who have attempted the task: in his divergence from his forerunners and contemporaries, Bosch seems to depart from the logic of cause-and-effect that defines art history in terms of artistic influence, a logic that allows historians to make judgments about the connections between various moments of the past.<sup>6</sup> Like Fortuna herself, Bosch destroys the mimetic relationship between past and future, appearing as an unpredictable chance occurrence.

Yet the apparent impenetrability of Bosch's works is perhaps not strictly an effect of our own historical distance from his context. Whatever obstacles the artist has put forward for art historians such as Panofsky, we can hypothesize that interpretive transparency was most likely not part of Bosch's original agenda. Indeed, his works imply audiences who favored the close engagement with ambiguity, such that the process of interpretation is central to the meaning of the works themselves. The task for art historians is thus to contextualize the specificity and conditions of the difficulties the artist's works present.

Although Bosch's works have a complicated relationship to the *past* of Early Netherlandish painting, his works seem to resolutely point to its *futures*, determining the character of many facets of Northern European artistic production in his wake. The painter's distinctive panels inspired a bevy of anonymous imitators of his monstrous figures during the early sixteenth century [fig. 3.2], and, later, informed the teeming yet more humanistic landscapes of the famed Pieter Brueghel the Elder [fig. 3.3].<sup>7</sup> Linking Bosch to the future development of Northern art has thus proven a comparatively undemanding enterprise for art historians. Beyond the particular concerns of art history, however, Bosch's art is often understood as having a more generalized relationship to the future. With his dramatic difference from his predecessors, the artist appears to foreshadow various aspects of the coming epoch. Thus the rhetoric of prophecy colors interpretations, both old and new, of the painter's significance. The painter's famed triptych, *The Garden of Earthly Delights* [fig. 3.4], for example, is taken to "anticipate" psychoanalysis and surrealism; Bosch's image of human corruption "prefigures" some of the concerns of the Reformation; his art, in its unstable meanings, "presages" key aspects of the modern era.<sup>8</sup>

If Bosch is seen as a prophet of future artistic and historical developments, his panels foretold a different kind of future for their original viewers. Eschatological themes pervade his works: the Last Judgment, Hell, devilry, the fate of the soul that gives into temptations of various

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<sup>6</sup>See, for example the introductory essay in James Snyder, ed. *Bosch in Perspective* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1973), 4; Larry Silver, *Hieronymus Bosch* (New York: Abbeville Press, 2006), 21; and Joseph Leo Koerner, "Hieronymus Bosch's World Picture," in *Picturing Science, Producing Art*, ed. Caroline A. Jones and Peter Galison (New York: Routledge, 1998), 304-305.

<sup>7</sup>On the anonymous imitators of Bosch, see Walter Gibson, "Bosch's Dreams: A Response to the Art of Bosch in the Sixteenth Century," *Art Bulletin* 74, no. 2 (1992): 205-18; and Larry Silver, "Second Bosch," *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 50(1999): 31-58. Bosch's influence on Pieter Brueghel has been explored in the monographic literature for both artists. See, for example, Silver, *Hieronymus Bosch*, chap. 9, esp 383-91.

<sup>8</sup>Both Mario Praz and André Breton viewed Bosch as a precursor to surrealism. On this topic, see Snyder, 9-10. See also Charles de Tolnay's essay, "Hieronymus Bosch," 57, in the same volume for an echo of this assessment; Koerner, 305. In a similar vein, Charles de Tolnay suggests that Bosch was the "first to break from this noble convention [of Early Netherlandish Painting] . . . With Bosch art begins to break from the tutelage of the Church" Charles de Tolnay, *Hieronymus Bosch* (New York: Reynal, 1966), 10.

kinds all form central occupations in this body of work. In his stylistic and figural distortions, he continually exacts his own condemnatory judgment on his subjects, one that seems to foretell an eventual, divine judgment, whether or not this judgment is in fact portrayed within the frame. To see Bosch in prophetic terms, then, might mean accounting for the ways in which time and futurity are configured in his compositions. Yet the theme of time has been largely neglected in the vast scholarship on this artist. While Wilhelm Fraenger explored the eschatological predilections of Bosch's works, he saw this element in terms of a distinctive millennialist cult rather than as a part of the broader devotional and moral aspects of late medieval Christian culture.<sup>9</sup> Larry Silver has treated the relationship between vision and judgment in Bosch's *oeuvre* as a whole, yet he leaves the questions of time and eschatology largely untouched.<sup>10</sup> Joseph Koerner has argued for the prevalence of "contingency"—or, that which could be otherwise—in what he defines as Bosch's "world picture." Although this formulation is consistent with that of medieval theologians who considered the contingency of the future and chance possibilities, Koerner himself does not address the issue of time and instead construes contingency in largely spatial and cultural terms.<sup>11</sup>

In insisting on the importance of time within Bosch's works, I will examine the articulation of varied temporal structures in his compositions in which the engagement with the future is of primary importance. Spectators of these paintings were consistently placed in a relationship to scenes of what lay ahead. To view these images, then, was to be caught up in a discourse of prediction in a variety of ways. If Bosch's viewers were presented with difficult and opaque images, then future time constituted a key context for these interpretive difficulties. I will explore the extent to which these images could provoke the very strategies used to negotiate the uncertain future as a fact of spiritual and social life. I argue that, even as Bosch condemns many predictive techniques as morally corrupt, his equivocal configurations of the future invoke practices of foresight, divination, and play—practices that were deployed in the wider visual culture to interpret the future. While the images examined here do not always directly refer to Fortuna and her methods, they nevertheless originate in a growing visual culture of chance in which the staging of an ambiguous relationship to the future played an increasingly central role. My analysis is focused principally on two of Bosch's major compositions, *The Haywain* [fig. 3.5], and *The Seven Deadly Sins* [fig. 3.6]. Both paintings are now in the collection of the Museo del Prado in Madrid, and were most likely produced for a well-educated audiences affiliated with the Hapsburg court in the Netherlands in the early sixteenth century. While the panels exhibit significant differences in composition and form, they each function at the interface of divination and devotion in their presentation of eschatological schemas.

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<sup>9</sup> Wilhelm Fraenger, *The Millennium of Hieronymus Bosch: Outlines of a New Interpretation* trans. Eithne and Ernst Kaiser Wilkins (New York: Hacker Art Books, 1976); originally published in German as Wilhelm Fraenger, *Hieronymus Bosch: Das Tausendjährige Reich, Grundzüge einer Auslegung* (Coburg: Winkler-Verlag, 1947).

<sup>10</sup> Larry Silver, "God in the Details: Bosch and Judgment(s)," *The Art Bulletin* 83, no. 4 (2001): 626-650.

<sup>11</sup> Koerner, "Hieronymus Bosch's World Picture," esp. 299-304. If Koerner's conceptualization of contingency is less oriented toward the problem of time, it is perhaps because it seems to be based heavily on the more recent philosophical explorations of, for example, Richard Rorty, who explored implications of the contingency of truth in his book *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); and Martin Heidegger, whose lecture "Die Zeit des Weltbildes" (1938), which examined the development of a notion of *Weltanschauung* as a key factor separating the medieval from the modern period. Koerner does briefly point to a Scholastic idea of contingency of the world which, made possible through the divine will, could also easily have not existed or simply end (304). Yet Koerner does not note that some of the most avid theological debates of the Middle Ages concerned the temporal aspects of contingency—that is, the contingency of the future.

## Divination: Forms and Values

Anyone wishing to pursue knowledge of the future in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries had a number of methods at their disposal. Chiromancy, for example, offered knowledge of personal character and fate through the physical patterns of the hand, while astrology sought to interpret celestial configurations to similar ends. Lottery books used the mechanisms of chance to guide users through their pages to insights about love, money, and the like. All of these practices had their own particular intricacies and audiences. Their variety and number point to a persistent interest in the future from a range of social groups, an effort to know and manage the uncertainties of what Fortuna might bring. Despite their differences, all of these methods share a sense that visual forms provide an effective means to penetrate what is normally hidden from present view.

But what was invisible to human eyes was perceptible to God in his omniscience and divine Providence. In *The Consolation of Philosophy*, Boethius articulated the notion of divine Providence in terms of metaphors of vision, a construction that was undoubtedly licensed by the connotations of its roots in the Latin term *providentia* or foresight, to see in advance. Boethius suggested that God's foresight was in fact not a form of pre-vision at all, since God sees past, present, and future as if in an unchanging present—that is, apprehending a multiplicity of time within a single omniscient point of view. His Providential vision is a “looking forth rather than a looking forward, because it is set far from low matters and looks forth upon all things as if from a lofty-mountain top above all.”<sup>12</sup> As I argued in chapter one, access to the future, articulated in terms of vision, is a key factor distinguishing Godly from human perception, defining distinctive divine and mortal perspectives on time.

The medieval and Renaissance discourse on divinatory images was often highly condemnatory, whether this condemnation was articulated from a general moralizing point of view or through official theological channels. In part, these condemnations rested on a belief that divination breached the boundary between human and divine vision. According to theological authorities such as Thomas Aquinas, human efforts to access the future via divination constituted attempts to usurp knowledge of things known only to God in his divine wisdom and Providence.<sup>13</sup> As appropriations of divine prerogative, forms of divination that are not based on divine revelation, Aquinas asserts, are merely “vain inventions of the devil's deceit” in his effort to tempt mortals with falsehoods.<sup>14</sup> Divination is moreover typically focused on the wrong *kinds* of futures—that is, on the earthly goods and vicissitudes that characterize Fortuna's domain of love, wealth, and power.<sup>15</sup> Proper spiritual attention should be directed away from such concerns and toward God, and to a hoped-for future of personal salvation when knowledge and vision of God are gained in full.

Yet the orientation toward heavenly futures was not without its own divinatory import. Underlying the religious and moralizing censure of divination is the fact that Christian devotion

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<sup>12</sup> Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, V.4.

<sup>13</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* IIa.IIae.95.1. For an example of the persistence of the Thomistic perspective on divination, see J.R. Veenstra, *Magic and Divination at the Courts of Burgundy and France: Text and Context of Lauren Pignon's Contra les Divineurs (1411)* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), esp. introduction and chapter 4.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* All eight articles of Question 95 in the *Summa* are devoted to issues pertaining to divination.

<sup>15</sup> In IIa.IIae.95.2, Aquinas argues that divination is a form of superstition, and thus “undue worship” that takes humans away from proper focus on God. It is a defining characteristic of the New Law (as opposed to the Old) that “man's mind is restrained from solicitude about temporal things: wherefore the New Law contains no institution for the foreknowledge of future things in temporal matters.”

itself is predicated on a future promise that is also mediated and expressed through its own visual forms—and increasingly so in the fifteenth century, when the use of images in devotion became more varied and more personal.<sup>16</sup> Pious Christians not only attempted to influence their own future salvation through images in acts of patronage and the purchase of indulgences, they also used images that offered a “foretaste” of the reunion with God in heaven, simulating the encounter with Godhead or providing an impetus for its prophetic envisionment.<sup>17</sup> Spiritual manuals moreover advocated modes of internal visualization to meditate upon and facilitate this reunion. Images, both internal and external, helped keep the prospect of heaven in view, as it were. Indeed, such practices enabled the patron of Hugo van der Goes’s Trinity Panels to imagine himself in prayer before the Trinity, strikingly demonstrating the extent to which devotion could entail divinatory imaginings of salvation [fig. 3.7].

But if religious imagery highlighted a potential eschatological future for the faithful, the effective negotiation of earthly futures also served as a means to this end, as a virtuous life formed the best insurance for eternal salvation. Thus Christianity promoted the virtue of prudence as the most important among the four cardinal virtues, that which presides over the remaining qualities of justice, temperance, and fortitude. Prudence was connected to good judgment, and the projection of good courses of conduct in worldly and social affairs. It is a complex virtue with many component parts, yet its fundamental aspects concerned the subject’s relationship to time. Following Cicero, prudence was divided into three main parts: memory, intelligence, and foresight, which were linked to knowledge of the past, present, and future, respectively.

Although modern scholarship has tended to highlight dimension of *memoria*, in the Middle Ages prudence’s orientation to the future was deemed its essential feature.<sup>18</sup> Aquinas, though he avidly condemned other forms of divination, considered foresight the most important aspect of prudence.<sup>19</sup> Etymologists similarly highlighted the term’s derivation from the Latin term for foresight: *prudencia* was understood to be a contraction of the Latin *providentia*. Prudence is in this sense the more limited, human variety of Providence, bound to the experience of earthly time as the moral and mortal process of seeing ahead. Good judgment, and the formulation of virtuous action by the intellect, required not only memory and intelligence, but an ability to envision a proper *end* to practical deeds and to identify the means to achieve these ends—to fulfill one’s own prophecy, if you will. As a virtue, prudence addressed the practical and social matters that were so often taken up in other, less-accepted divinatory forms such as the lottery book. As a form of prognostication, prudence also addressed the vicissitudes of those

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<sup>16</sup> The “image explosion” of the later Middle Ages and its implications for personal piety have been explored by various scholars, including Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, esp. chap. 19; Michael Camille, *The Gothic Idol: Ideology and Image-Making in Late Medieval Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); and Henk van Os, *The Art of Devotion in Europe in the Later Middle Ages, 1300-1500* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994).

<sup>17</sup> On the use of images as simulations of the eventual *visio Dei*, see Hamburger, *The Rothschild Canticles: Art and Mysticism in Flanders and the Rhineland c. 1300*.

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, the discussion of prudence in Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), esp. chaps. 2 and 4.

<sup>19</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, IIa.IIae.49.6. For an interesting discussion of the futurity of prudence in Aquinas and its reverberation in other medieval discourses, see John Burrow, “The Third Eye of Prudence,” in *Medieval Futures: Attitudes toward the Future in the Middle Ages*, ed. J.A. Burrow and Ian P. Wei (Woodbridge, U.K.: Boydell & Brewer), 37-48. As Burrow asserts, the exercise of this virtue contextualized practical action in this world in relation to the final, desired end of salvation. In this way, it demonstrates the elision between the practical and the spiritual during the period (47-8). My own understanding of prudence is indebted to Burrow’s discussion.



things which lay outside of necessity. Indeed, prudence was fundamental to the engagement with Fortuna's sphere of influence, since, as Aquinas argued, the virtue concerned specifically "contingent matters of action" in the future.<sup>20</sup> The exercise of prudence could serve as a safeguard against Fortuna's random ways, since it permitted practitioners to both anticipate and intervene in future conditions. Thus a commentator on Petrarch would gloss the term "prudence" as "wise, more or less means 'seeing for certain'; for the prudent man is so wary that he foresees uncertain events."<sup>21</sup>

The artistic portrayal of Prudence often drew upon metaphors of vision in defining the virtue's specific character and mode of operation. Prudence was typically personified as a woman holding and gazing into a mirror, an emblem that indicated her link to wisdom but also highlighted the visual aspects of her etymology. Hans Burgkmaier, for example, shows her in profile, cutting the viewer off from the content of the mirror while accentuating the interaction between Prudence and her reflected image [fig. 3.8]. The mirror, in this case an emblem of contemplative knowledge rather than vain self-regard, reflects the self back to its viewer, making it available for contemplation as an image. Yet the mirror also entails a multiplication of points of view that possess a temporal significance: even as the mirror frames the self's present manifestation, it permits Prudence access to what lies behind her—that is, within the space of the past, while additionally reflecting upon the present. The look that reflects on itself is that which can foresee, or look ahead, beyond what is shown in the present time of the mirror image. The temporal aspects of Prudence are perhaps most dramatically expressed in an iconographic variation of the figure in which her face is split, Janus-like, into dual profiles, sometimes even of different genders, as vision is variously directed in space and time [fig. 3.9]. If God's Providence is understood as a continuous, omniscient vision of all time as present, the configuration of Prudence here suggests that human providence entails more multifarious points of view. While the past and the present inform the subject's epistemological orientation toward the future, they are not symmetrical or identical with this future; it is the lack of identity between them that necessitates prudential prediction. Indeed, the split gaze and gender of the figure in these representations of Prudence have an almost monstrous quality that is unusual in the personification of virtue, recalling the split visage of the Fortuna *mi-partie*. The image of Prudence provides a model of this vision for the viewer as a subject located in time. Yet, from our current point of view, this model departs dramatically from the unitary gaze of one-point perspective that Panofsky identified with the Renaissance sense of time. Rather than a single gaze upon the (classical) past, Prudence incorporates different moments into a view that is primarily fixed on the future. The multiplicity of perspectives in each iconographic version of Prudence implies that prudential perception is not continuous or unidirectional; human boundedness in time multiplies and fragments both the subject and vision.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> As Aquinas argues in *Summa Theologica*, IIa.IIae.49.6, both the past and the present are endowed with a necessity that the future is not. If divine Providence deals in necessity, human providence is distinguished by its focus on contingent things: "future contingents, in so far as they can be directed by man to the end of human life, are the matter of prudence: and each of these things is implied in the word foresight, for it implies the notion of something distant, to which that which occurs in the present has to be directed."

<sup>21</sup> As cited in Andrew Murray, *Reason and Society in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 135.

<sup>22</sup> Panofsky, "Renaissance and Renascences," 108. Panofsky also examined the divided vision of Prudence in his study of Titian's rather unusual image of the theme (*Allegory of Prudence*, London, National Gallery), in which young, middle-aged, and old male visages stand in for the different temporal facets of the virtue. As the inscription on the painting suggests, "from the past, the present acts prudently, lest it spoil future action." See Erwin Panofsky, "Titian's *Allegory of Prudence*: A Postscript," in *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1955), 146-68.

But the perspectives suggested by prudence are not simply temporal; this virtue additionally carries a strong rhetorical component. In her studies of the relationships between prudence and rhetoric in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Victoria Kahn has shown how prudence, as a mode of judgment, functioned in a manner akin to rhetoric itself as an interpretive practice.<sup>23</sup> Like rhetoric, prudence pertains to possible, effective modes of action with respect to contingent matters, matters in which truth is not certain but rather probable and thus subject to different points of view and contradictory readings. Thus the prudential thinker and the rhetorician can argue either for or against a particular question or course of action—or *in utramque partem* as the rhetoricians would define it, recognizing that “every figure is potentially reversible” in its significance.<sup>24</sup> While the divinatory aspects of prudence do not constitute a major focus of Kahn’s work, her linking of prudence and rhetoric with potential action, possibility, and contingency does indicate the value of her insights for my present concern with prognostication. For Kahn, both “literary and ethical decorum, rhetoric and prudence, are responses to the contingent realm of human affairs where things, as Aristotle says, can be ‘other than they are’”—that is, the domain of unpredictability and non-necessity associated with Fortuna and chance.<sup>25</sup> Prudence, in its varied perspectives and temporal aspects, was at once a mode of ethical comportment and a framework of interpretation, one that could be applied to both works of art and social life.<sup>26</sup>

Thus, despite the moral condemnation of various forms of divination, elements of foresight were interwoven into the Christian practices of devotion and prudence. Virtue, then, had its own forms of divination. In light of this range of divinatory procedures, it might be argued that the difference separating divination and devotion was in many respects a matter of *ends*—that is, whether the future aims and events were earthly or heavenly, sinful or upright. Indeed, in the case of prudence, Aquinas himself noted a distinction between true and false prudence. While true prudence constituted the application of wisdom and foresight for virtuous objectives, in false prudence the same methods might also be employed for questionable aspirations, such as when one uses prudential foresight to work for carnal or fraudulent ends. These acts are characterized by a “solicitousness” about the future in which one is motivated by acquisitive ends and the possession of material goods. They may resemble prudence but are really only a false image of it.<sup>27</sup> Although the form of foresight might be similar, the futures to

<sup>23</sup> Victoria Kahn, *Rhetoric, Prudence, and Skepticism in the Renaissance* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985); and *ibid.*, Victoria Kahn, “Giovanni Pontano’s Rhetoric of Prudence,” *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 16, no. 1 (1983): 16-34.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, *Rhetoric, Prudence, and Skepticism*, 22.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, “Pontano’s Rhetoric of Prudence,” 18.

<sup>26</sup> As Kahn writes in *Rhetoric, Prudence, and Skepticism*, “the central assumption of the humanist rhetorical tradition is that the text is valuable insofar as it engages the reader in an activity of discrimination and thereby educates the faculty of the practical reason or prudential judgment essential to the active life”(11). David Summers has also examined the place of prudence in early Renaissance art theory in developing notion’s of the artist’s responsibility and the standards of moral and intellectual judgment, though he, like Kahn, treats prudence in broader terms and not specifically with respect to foresight. See David Summers, *The Judgment of Sense: Renaissance Naturalism and the Rise of Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), chapter 12.

<sup>27</sup> See Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, IIa.IIae.55 for the discussion of false prudence in its various aspects. Here he clarifies in relation to carnal prudence that “a man is said to be prudent in two ways. First, simply, i.e. in relation to the end of life as a whole. Secondly, relatively, i.e. in relation to some particular end; thus a man is said to be prudent in business or something else of the kind. Accordingly if prudence of the flesh be taken as corresponding to prudence in its absolute signification, so that a man place the last end of his whole life in the care of the flesh, it is a mortal sin, because he turns away from God by so doing, since he cannot have several last ends” (IIa.IIae.55.2). Aristotle also describes the relationship between true prudence (or practical wisdom) and its component of

which they were directed governed the ultimate value assigned to them and the moral perspective from which such foresight might be viewed.

The array of predictive techniques examined here indicates that practices of divination that we might easily associate with astrology, for instance, constituted only one aspect of a larger epistemological concern with future ends that were addressed through visual means. Rather than simply adhering to contemporary categorizations of any of these strategies as either “good” or “bad,” however, I would like to focus instead on the instability of these categorizations. In examining Bosch’s works in terms of various forms of divination, my reading will suggest that these forms might be seen more usefully as a continuum of practices that could intersect with and inform one another.

## The Ends of Eschatology

The Last Judgment is itself a prophetic image of the future, representing St. John the Evangelist’s vision of the end of days. The Book of Revelation is saturated with a highly-figurative language that evinces the text’s origins in visionary experience. The events of the Second Coming unfold in vivid detail via St. John’s privileged foresight, thereby granting a certain solidity to the future episode in the reader’s present. Artists depicting the theme of the Last Judgment could draw on the figurative qualities of the biblical word, translating the written account back into the visual occurrence that formed the medium of the prophecy’s original mode of communication. The Book of Revelation presents the Apocalypse serially, as temporal occurrences that additionally and paradoxically mark the end of time as history passes into eternity. Though Bosch’s treatment of Christian eschatology was distinctive, the subject of the Last Judgment was not a novel one within the Early Netherlandish tradition or within later medieval art more broadly. In this section, I will examine the Last Judgment as representation of the future and explore Bosch’s revisions to the theme’s predictive enterprise.

Fifteenth-century artistic representations of the Last Judgment tended to distill the details of the proceedings into the act of judgment itself, incorporating the viewer into the prophetic scenario. Rogier van der Weyden’s interpretation of the theme in the interior of the *Beaune Altarpiece* [fig. 3.10] suggests the ways in which visual experience can be integrated into the temporal and prophetic dimensions of the subject. Like many of its precedents in medieval sculpture, the altarpiece focuses on judgment as an act of division that is disbursed from a central axis of divine authority. Christ and the angel Michael occupy the middle panel, facing the spectator and dramatizing the experience of future judgment. The work balances the movement of the resurrected souls *in* time with the image of the divine judge, whose static, hieratic quality bespeaks his location *outside* of time. Christ is elevated in his perpetuity above the lowermost earthly register, where Rogier has concentrated the serial animation of the souls across a continuous landscape. Rather than focusing on the quantity of resurrected figures, the artist has reduced the number of souls to a minimum—a tactic that highlights the temporal unfolding of each soul’s movement outward across the panels toward their fate in an almost cinematic fashion.<sup>28</sup> The dynamic plotting of bodies in their rise and division is compressed beneath the

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cleverness in the *Nicomachean Ethics*: “There is a faculty which is called cleverness; and this is such as to be able to do the things that tend towards the mark we have set before ourselves, and to hit it. Now if the mark be noble, the cleverness is laudable, but if the mark be bad, the cleverness is mere smartness” (VI.12.4). See Burrow, 40-1 for an elaboration of the various forms of sinful prudence in the *Summa*.

<sup>28</sup> For the element of cinematic time in the Beaune altarpiece see Dirk de Vos, *Rogier van der Weyden: Het Volledige Oeuvre* (Antwerp: Mercatorfonds, 1999), 258. Rogier’s intricate engagement with temporality in the

substantial and more static Heavenly Court, while the landscape below is transformed into heavenly and hellish environs at ends of the outermost panels. Despite the relatively compact space of the lower register, the animated postures of the souls solicit attention. The souls themselves, however, divide their gazes between the divine central axis—their point of origin within the composition—and the divergent endpoints. The persistent visual concentration on the divine judge is reiterated by the intercessors Mary and John the Baptist and the extended Court, strikingly framed by luminous clouds. This creates a centrifugal dynamic that exists in tension with the earthly figures' advancement away from the altarpiece's midpoint. As viewers we ourselves become divided in our focus between various poles of eternity, shuttling between the timeless center and the journey of the resurrected to their own eternal fates. Our visual experience is therefore bound up with the paradoxical temporal character of Christian eschatology.

As with most early Netherlandish altarpieces devoted to this theme, the dividing of souls is integrated into the structure of the polyptych itself. The symmetrical configuration of the altarpiece articulates the act of division and the conventional value ascribed to its two sides: the damned are defined as such in part by virtue of their location on the left of the Godhead (or the viewer's right), while the saved are positioned at His right (the viewer's left). The structure of the Last Judgment altarpiece is a structure of dual possibility, a structure that Rogier's polyptych presents across multiple panels.<sup>29</sup> Given the size of Rogier's open altarpiece (measuring just over two meters high and five and a half meters across), it is difficult to perceive the panels simultaneously, in a single glance. Viewers wishing to take in the details of Rogier's portrayal must walk along the panels, physically mimicking the journey of the soul to its potential destination in order to apprehend this future vision in the time of the present. Yet even as the twin possibilities of salvation and condemnation demand a peripatetic engagement, the proximity and direct gaze of the Angel Michael fixes the viewer at the central axis, simulating the future moment of judgment as present for the spectator. The work grants an immediacy to the spectator's judgment-to-come, but the outcome of this judgment remains unfixed and without certainty, thus maintaining a sense of futurity to the verdict itself. Calling viewers' future fate into question, the altarpiece encourages their reflection on their possible future salvation or condemnation, but it does not predict one potential fate over the other. The work, in accordance with the medieval tradition of representation, makes visible the fact of judgment, but acknowledges the dual possibility of judgment as part of its prophetic design.

In Bosch's interpretations of the Last Judgment, however, the act of judgment itself is often severely de-emphasized. Rather than highlighting the confrontation with the divine judge, the artist contextualizes the fate of the soul in an epic sweep of historical time. Bosch uses the triptych format that so frequently structures early Netherlandish interpretations of the biblical theme, yet he employs the multi-paneled configuration of the open state to different ends than his predecessors.<sup>30</sup> Whereas Rogier had applied the symmetry of the altarpiece's format to structure and divide the saved from the damned in the outermost panels, in Bosch's works the boundaries

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image and the viewer's experience have been examined in detail by Al Acres, most notably in Al Acres, "The Columba Altarpiece and the Time of the World," *Art Bulletin* 80, no. 3 (1998): 422-51.

<sup>29</sup> In early Netherlandish painting, however, this structure is often condensed into the triptych format. See, for example, Hans Memling's depiction of the theme in his Last Judgment triptych in the National Museum, Gdansk.

<sup>30</sup> On Bosch's intervention in the conventional forms of the Early Netherlandish triptych, see the excellent study by Lynn F. Jacobs, "The Triptychs of Hieronymus Bosch," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 31, no. 4 (2000): 1009-1041.

between panels signify borders between space and time in the progression of sacred history.<sup>31</sup> Thus in each of his four remaining triptych compositions of this theme, the origins of this history are represented in scenes from Creation and the Garden of Eden, moving through a central earthly sphere, and concluding in a representation of Hell, replete with ghastly tortures performed by hybrid devils.<sup>32</sup> In two of Bosch's triptychs of the Last Judgment now in Vienna and Bruges [figs. 3.11-3.12], Christ appears in his Evangelical role along the central axis in the uppermost space of the central panel. Yet the works dilute his agency as judge by forgoing the weighing of the saved and the damned. Instead, souls emerge from the ground and directly into a domain that bears a striking resemblance to Hell itself. In the Vienna triptych, it is only in the distance that one can see diminutive figures being elevated to Heaven—a slight allusion to the twin prospects traditionally inscribed in the Last Judgment. These works depart from the textual account of the Last Judgment in the biblical source, rendering the artist's own improvisations of Hell as one of the main aims of the prophetic representation, while also broadening the temporal span of this eschatological end.

These two triptychs demonstrate the extent to which Bosch reworked the conventional presentation of eschatological themes. But one of the most complex and interesting among the artist's engagements with time and futurity is found in the triptych known as *The Haywain* [see fig. 5]. Here, eschatological time is configured as a kind of continuous narrative unfolding across the three panels of the interior state. The altarpiece most likely originally belonged to the prominent Spanish courtier and diplomat of the Hapsburg court in Burgundy, Don Felipe de Guevara, who was something of a connoisseur of Bosch as well as early Netherlandish painting in general.<sup>33</sup> The triptych entered the collection of Philip II at the Escorial in 1570, when de Guevara's holdings were purchased by the monarch.<sup>34</sup>

The unusual central panel of the triptych represents a large cart stacked with hay, drawn by hybrid demons, and surrounded by a varied crowd struggling to appropriate the mountainous cargo. A key textual source for this subject lies in a Flemish proverb that defines the world as a hay cart, "from which each man takes what he can." This proverb is also linked to famous verses from Isaiah 40: 6-7, which state that "all flesh is grass, and all its beauty like the flowers of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades."<sup>35</sup> Bosch thus presents his eschatology in terms of a common theme of early modern moralizing discourse: the dangers of earthly goods whose futures are only transitory. Indeed, as Ambrosio de Morales commented on the work in the mid-sixteenth century, Hell is the endpoint for the population of "miserable souls" portrayed, "whose

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<sup>31</sup> Although *The Garden of Earthly Delights* is not an imaging of judgment per se, it does share the framing of a central scene by panels portraying aspects of creation on the left and the tortures of Hell on the right. It has been argued that it, too, is structured by a notion of sacred history, though whether the central panel represents a domain of sin or a golden age before the Fall remains a matter of debate.

<sup>32</sup> The four works in question are Last Judgment triptychs in Bruges (Groeninge Museum) and Vienna (Akademie der Bildende Kunst); and the *The Garden of Earthly Delights* and *The Haywain* (both in the Museo del Prado).

<sup>33</sup> In addition to *The Haywain*, Don Diego owned other works by Bosch (including *The Seven Deadly Sins*) as well as Jan van Eyck's *Arnolfini Portrait*. See Panofsky, "Jan van Eyck's *Arnolfini Portrait*," 117, for Diego's role in the portrait's provenance.

<sup>34</sup> For the documentation of Bosch's works at El Escorial, see Paul Vandebroek, "The Spanish Inventarios Reales and Hieronymus Bosch," in *Hieronymus Bosch: New Insights into his Life and Work*, ed. J. Koldeweij and et al. (Rotterdam: Museum Boijmans van Beuningen and Ludion: Nai Publishers, 2001), 48-63.

<sup>35</sup> This reference was put forth by some of the earliest writers on the work. See, for example, Ambrosia de Morales, "The Panel of Cebes" (1586) as reprinted in Snyder, 32.

lives were passed in the vanity of sins, must now suffer, being themselves just like the hay that dries and dies away without the fruit of virtue.”<sup>36</sup>

The exterior of the altarpiece depicts a worn and impoverished traveler navigating a rural path beset by treachery [fig. 3.13]. On the interior, the journey of the individual gives way to a grander, a sweeping trajectory that moves across the space of the three segments. The different panels are unified through the continuous horizon line that traverses the span of the open triptych in the upper portion of the composition. The continuity created by the horizon line is moreover reinforced by the division of each panel into commensurate registers of middle and foreground spaces, as, for example, the foliage isolating the expulsion in the immediate foreground of the left section extends, albeit transmuted, as a rocky ledge into the middle image and a stone wall in the representation of hell at right. Thus, even as the different panels are distinguished by general tonality and depict discrete domains of paradise, worldly reality, and hell, Bosch has still used deliberate visual strategies to construct a visual, navigable whole of unfolding time.<sup>37</sup>

Bosch’s tale begins in biblical history, principally in the story of Genesis and the garden of Eden. Although the artist arranges this narrative in vignettes whose divisions share a horizontal alignment and orientation with the subsequent scene, its own narrative also moves vertically from the Fall of the Rebel Angels in the background through creation and the expulsion from the garden in the lower, most proximate strata. This dynamic echoes the vertical movement of the Fall. But, in moving from background to foreground, it also projects the narrative toward the space of the viewer, whose immediate relation to the Expulsion from the gates of Eden is indicative of humanity’s continuing exclusion from paradise—that is, insofar as viewers are located outside the garden walls, at a remove from the originating scene of creation, the advance of the narrative can be said to dramatize the Fall as a move away from a God, who is kept at a spatial distance as a celestial figure and creating agent.

The vertical progression of the right panel is accompanied by the broader horizontal trajectory that the Fall and expulsion set in motion. In the foreground, Eve’s despairing gaze toward the remaining panels propels the succeeding directionality of the fallen couple’s movement, away from the gates of Eden and toward the right edge of the frame, where the narrative movement is swept up into the melee of figures surrounding the haywain as it, too, processes rightwards. The crowd’s covetous assailment of the cart is given the quality of a ritual march by virtue of the presence of dignitaries, a king, and a pope on horseback who ride above the less-privileged, brawling throng as if on procession.

The boundaries between the three panels of the interior can be seen as divisions of both space and time: the implied state of the post-lapsarian world in the central image is bracketed by the past history of Paradise and the future fate in Hell. Indeed, given the especially strong continuity in the monstrous procession between the middle and rightmost panels, the seam between them appears to constitute nothing less than the entrance to the underworld itself. The damned are led to diverse and highly unpleasant torments, while demons work to construct ever more intricate devices through which to inflict anguish on their eternal prisoners. This is the termination of the trajectory. The circular tower at the far right, topped with a spindly yet lofty pulley system, arrests the horizontal dynamic of the procession in its looming verticality and

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>37</sup> For Jacobs, Bosch’s triptychs broke down the traditional hierarchy and separation between different panels (“The Triptychs of Hieronymus Bosch,” 1019-1033). While *The Haywain* certainly partakes of this attenuation in creating a continuous *spatial* whole, the borders between panels nevertheless uphold a sense of distinct temporal phases, creating structured narrative of past, present, and future. For Koerner, the navigability of the image is linked to its status as “the first genuine *Weltlandschaft* in Western painting,” (“Hieronymus Bosch’s World Picture,” 309).

participates in a general sense of spatial compression that inhibits the possibility of visually navigating the diabolic, if formidably large, landscape. Passage, in this space, can only proceed deeper into the image, through the multiple portals that perforate the architectural facades.

Figures proceed through the panels toward their future with a relentlessness that renders the act of Judgment, alluded to by the diminutive Christ in the central panel, almost comically irrelevant.<sup>38</sup> In Hell, punishment is carried out on individual bodies, but these bodies seem to bear the effects of collective sin that transcend individual responsibility, and perhaps individual control. Violence will persist in the hellish afterlife, the triptych thus asserts, but it will shift from struggle among humans to a vehemence exerted by monstrous demons onto lone, passive souls. If we are meant to reflect upon the atrocious present state of humanity—both as a whole and in its component social parts—the future fate we are provoked to contemplate (and fear) is quite personal. In this sense, a major aim of Bosch's teleology is not just moral condemnation but the individual spectator's reflection on the future state of his or her own soul. Viewers are encouraged to contemplate their own future, just as in traditional visual interpretations of the Last Judgment.

Yet there is no dividing of souls, no image of salvation, and very little inclusion of details of Judgment as presented in the Book of Revelation. Thus, as a prophetic image, *The Haywain* is of a different order than one's average Last Judgment scene. It does not visualize the future event of Judgment, but rather takes it upon itself to predict the outcome of judgment. The work maps the future fate of the soul in terms of causal relationships: because of the Fall, we are morally corrupt, and thus we are destined for damnation. These relationships at once explain the current state of moral decrepitude on earth and predict its logical end, thereby enabling us to predict *our* logical end. Salvation is invisible and its existence uncertain. Bosch gives us privileged access to the future of Hell, but denies viewers the possibility of foreseeing a heavenly end that one might actively work toward. But if the artist seems to refuse to explicitly represent salvation, he does allude to its possibility. And I want to suggest that practices of divination, as a visible and visual engagement with the future, forms the means through which this allusion is accomplished.

### **Divination in *The Haywain***

We might expect the prevalent condemnation of divinatory techniques to strongly resonate within Bosch's works, since the artist generally does not pass up the opportunity to engage in moral censure. And we need look no further than *The Haywain* to find such an instance. In the lower register of the composition, amidst an array of monks, nuns, quacks, and gypsies, Bosch has depicted a pair of women standing opposite one another and interacting closely [fig. 3.14]. On the left, a bourgeois woman extends her hand toward her companion, who can be identified as a gypsy by her turban-like headdress.<sup>39</sup> The gypsy, carrying a small child wrapped across her chest, leans forward as if to examine the more affluent woman's hand. The gypsy appears to be engaged in reading her counterpart's palm in an act of chiromancy.

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<sup>38</sup> The general pessimism of Bosch's outlook is often noted. As Snyder suggests in his introduction to *Bosch in Perspective*, the artist's figures "seem to be caught in some frantic Brownian motion, racing in no particular direction toward no goal. But from infancy to old age, man charges on, inevitably, toward a seething Hell," in an image in which there is no heaven (4). Snyder is undecided, however, as to whether or not the figures' actions are enacted through free will or its absence.

<sup>39</sup> On the identification of the figure as a gypsy, see Vandebroek, *Jheronymus Bosch: Tussen Volksleven en Stadtcultuur*, 69-70.

Given the vain preoccupation with external goods that characterizes the figures of the central panel as a whole, it would be easy to see these women as yet another instance of the prevailing condemnatory lexicon: the woman who has solicited the attentions of the gypsy diviner must be motivated by the same earthly ends as those who grasp at the hay cart's payload. Although the women are part of a group that is removed from the violent tumult of the main procession, greed and duplicity exist here, as well: a quack doctor peddles false promises while monks and nuns hoard hay. Duplicity is certainly the state of affairs in Hans Burgkmair's representation of gypsy palm-reading dating from the same period [fig. 3.15], which similarly portrays a woman who has wandered into a gypsy encampment in search of knowledge of her future. The act of chiromancy performed by the palm-reader, however, serves as a means of distracting the client from the fact that she is being robbed of her purse and her market goods. Viewers of Bosch's altarpiece, then, would likely have had a series of negative associations at hand in interpreting the foreground motif of the two women.<sup>40</sup>

Although chiromancy is a highly unusual subject in early Netherlandish painting, the women do in fact evoke a common spiritual theme in Northern visual culture of the period. Whatever vain concerns may have prompted their encounter, the women stand apart from the main procession and exhibit a subdued, intimate interaction that offers an alternative to the surrounding ferocity. In particular, their gesture echoes the late medieval iconography of the Visitation, the meeting of the pregnant Virgin Mary and her elderly cousin Elizabeth, herself pregnant with John the Baptist. Fifteenth-century prints frequently portray the communication between the two women through acts of touch. Master E.S., for instance, shows the two women in a landscape setting, standing opposite one another, and clasping hands across the central compositional axis [fig. 3.16]. Their gesture is given added tangibility by the volume accorded to the figures through stippling and shading that defines their substantial garments. While this print shows the interaction in particularly detailed fashion, the basic interface and characterization of the women is evident across a variety of representations. An anonymous German print of the same period [fig. 3.17] depicts the two women clasping hands in a similar manner though through less intricate means and reduced detail. As in *The Haywain*, the differences between them are signified through headgear: while Elizabeth is defined by her distinctive cloth-headdress, while Mary's head is uncovered. In *The Haywain*, references to motherhood are conveyed in the presence of multiple gypsy children, strengthening the iconographic connections between the two themes.

I have dwelt on the details that enable the iconographic recognition of this motif because the Visitation is itself an episode of recognition. In the gospel of St. Luke, when Mary arrived at the house of her cousin, Elizabeth recognized her as the Mother of Christ, and was filled with the Holy Spirit, and cried out with a loud voice, saying "Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And how have I deserved that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, the moment that the sound of thy greeting came to my ears, the babe in my womb leapt for joy. And blessed is she who has believed, because the things promised to her by the Lord *shall be accomplished*" (Luke 1:41–5 [emphasis mine]).

With her use of prophetic language and her special insight into Mary's condition, Elizabeth here emerges as a kind of fortune-teller, one who perceives and articulates privileged knowledge about her cousin's future, and, by extension, the future of humanity as a whole. By aligning the iconography of the Visitation with that of fortune-telling practices, Bosch highlights Elizabeth's

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<sup>40</sup> See *ibid.* for the contemporaneous discourse on gypsies.



distinctive role within the biblical narrative while also calling attention to the prophetic dimensions of Christianity.

Yet, for the viewer, recognition of the Visitation entails its own act of fortune-telling. Like chiromancy, the recognition of this motif involves the use of a visual sign to project an account of the future—in this case, the account of the Redemption. It is thus through this iconographic detail that an epistemological relationship to the image is suggested, one where fortune-telling and devotion are not morally opposed but rather paralleled in value and operation. It is through a kind of divinatory foresight that the viewer can depart from the necessity that is shown in the triptych and envision another history, a history in which salvation is in fact possible. Projecting a future that lies beyond the logic of cause-and-effect portrayed is the only way to see the possibility of salvation in this schema. Though it may seem like a suspect activity, the act of divination within the image refuses any stable moral coding. The women represent a form of knowledge whose valence is reversible depending on the *ends* that we as viewers perceive—that is, whether we see them in terms of the Hellish future portrayed or the salvific future that is implied. In both cases, the two women are figures of prudence, not simply in the rhetorical reversibility of their signification but with respect to the foresight they clearly exercise. When seen in terms of a vain or deceptive interest in earthly goods and futures, the women are easily inscribed into the Hellish fate that the artist so clearly depicts as practitioners of false prudence. When viewed as sacred figures who engage in true or virtuous prudence, the two women point to the future redemption of humankind by Christ's Incarnation and sacrifice and thus the hope of individual redemption. The act of foresight shown here foreshadows both possible fates within the traditional representation of the Last Judgment; it reasserts the Last Judgment as a prophetic scene of dual possibility.

The chiromancy portrayed in the central panel of Bosch's altarpiece, while an act of divination intended to better control the contingencies of Fortune, does not itself employ the *forms* of Fortuna to achieve these ends. The interpretation of the lines on the hand is an unfolding ritual, but the lines themselves are fixed and fully visible in a way that the casting of lots is not. Nevertheless, the reversibility of this motif, its ability to move between different poles of meaning, unfixes the larger image from necessity.<sup>41</sup> The moral reversibility of the two women can be linked to that which Kahn associates with the rhetorical dimensions of prudence—that is, the notion that any figure can be argued for from different, opposing perspectives, *in utremque partem*. Yet the reversibility of this motif also resonates with the *rota fortunae* as a structure of persistent inversion, since, as described by Boethius, the wheel that Fortuna, in her inconstancy, turns the high to the low and the low to the high.<sup>42</sup> The inconstancy of the gypsy palm-reader and her client moreover points to the ways in which Fortuna, though easily identified with a sinful interest in worldly ends in Christian discourse, might also be reversed to carry a positive valence in accordance with other ends. Though Fortuna is not part of the divinatory schema in *The Haywain*, aleatory methods of prediction are not absent from Bosch's broader eschatological *oeuvre*. I turn now to the consideration of a panel in which the iconography of Fortuna figures more prominently. In so doing, I hope to show more decisively how the artist's imaging of the future could be inflected by the growing visual culture of chance and the various divinatory strategies used to manage prospective uncertainty.

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<sup>41</sup> In this sense, the figures constitute an instance of contingency in a manner akin to Koerner's conception. Yet the future-orientation of this contingency—its dependency on the ends in view—is a crucial aspect of their ability to be otherwise.

<sup>42</sup> Boethius, *Consolation*, II .2.

## The Image of Time in *The Seven Deadly Sins*

*The Seven Deadly Sins* [see fig. 6] is one of the more distinctive compositions of Early Netherlandish art, and it stands out from Bosch's already remarkable catalogue. Its uniqueness has at times been understood in a negative sense by art historians, labeled as an "unwanted child" in the Boschian *oeuvre* due to both its difference from other works and a perceived awkwardness in execution.<sup>43</sup> The work is first mentioned by the Spanish nobleman Felipé de Guevara in his "Commentaries on Painting" of 1560, where he describes it as a work possessing many "excellent and ingenious" aspects, held in the collection of Philip II in Spain.<sup>44</sup> But the panel was likely originally in the collection of Felipe's father, Diego de Guevara, the Spanish courtier of the Hapsburg Burgundian court who also owned *The Haywain*. From Diego's collection, the panel was at some point sold to Philip, who transferred it to the Escorial in 1574 and kept it in his chamber there.<sup>45</sup> The work was thus received within an educated, courtly milieu from its inception and, like *The Haywain*, appealed to spectators who would have been attentive to its interpretive details and intricacies.

But while these two works shared the same owner and a similar context of reception, they present drastically different compositional configurations. Whereas, in *The Haywain*, space and time unfold in a continuous, horizontal design, in the case of *The Seven Deadly Sins* we are presented with a symmetrical arrangement of circular forms against a rectangular, darkened ground, each enclosing their own scenes and spatial conceptions. The main roundel contains a series of concentric circles that collectively frame a central image of Christ, displaying his wounds and rising from his tomb. Gazing outward toward the viewer, the Son of God is set against a bright blue background that projects his figure from the surrounding neutral tones. Just below him, presented as a sort of caption, a Latin inscription warns *Cave cave d[omin]us videt* (Beware, beware God sees). The theme of divine vision is made clearer through the rays that extend from the central circle in an iris-like pattern which, once noticed, transforms the entire central structure into an eye that peers at the viewer, redoubling Christ's gaze and making good on the inscription's assertion of God's omniscience.<sup>46</sup>

This divine surveillance projects not only out toward the spectator, but to the outermost circle which houses the seven sins. These ocular indicators give way in the widest, outermost circle to the architectural segmentations that divide the space into seven partitions housing one of the seven sins and framing them as discrete entities. The variations in color and action that characterize the sins themselves serve to animate the eye. Portrayed not as allegories but as lively contemporary scenarios, they are played out across a continuous landscape that unfolds radially. Moving between interior and landscape, each segment of the circle of sins configures the vice in question in terms of an arrangement of contemporary figures who have often been vaunted as

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<sup>43</sup> On the perceived low-quality of the panel and its questionable status, see Walter Gibson, "Hieronymus Bosch and the Mirror of Man: The Authorship and Iconography of the Tabletop of the *Seven Deadly Sins*," *Oud Holland* 87(1973), 205-7.

<sup>44</sup> Felipé de Guevara, "Commentaries on Painting," as reprinted in Snyder, 29.

<sup>45</sup> Vandenbroeck, "The Spanish *Inventarios Reales* and Hieronymus Bosch," 49-50; Felipé de Guevara, "Commentaries on Painting," 29.

<sup>46</sup> The motif of the eye as it relates to human and divine vision has been extensively addressed by Gibson, "Hieronymus Bosch and the Mirror of Man"; Silver, "God in the Details," 628; and Koerner, "Hieronymus Bosch's World Picture," 317. I address certain aspects of this scholarship below.

early examples of genre imagery.<sup>47</sup> Thus the figures of gluttony gnaw at their supper with hyperbolized ferocity and pour entire jugs of drink into their mouths in the midst of a cluttered kitchen, while a stern woman brings still more food to the surely already well-supped men of the house.

While the sins themselves may reference the contemporaneity of the original viewers' present, other elements of the composition point, in divinatory fashion, to the future. The main ocular circle is surrounded by four smaller roundels representing the Four Last Things, beginning with the scene of Death and extreme unction in the upper left and moving clockwise to Judgment, Heaven, and Hell. In the upper and lower registers, flanking the omniscient "eye" of sin, banderoles bear Latin inscriptions from the thirty-second book of Deuteronomy, in which God speaks of his judgment on the Israelites for their turn toward pagan idols. Above, unfurled between the roundels of Death and the Last Judgment, a banderole declares: *Gens absque consilio est sine prudentia Utinam Saperent et intelligerent ac novissima providerent* (For they are a nation void of counsel, and there is no prudence in them. If they were wise, they would understand this, they would foresee their latter end [Deuteronomy 32: 28-9]). Below the eye, the inscription reads: *absconda[m] facie[m] mea[m] ab eis et [c]onsiderabo novissi[m]a eor[um]* (I will hide my face from them, and see what their end will be [Deuteronomy 32: 20]). The texts emphasize the theme of foresight, of seeing the *ends* of earthly activity. In the upper inscription, the use of the Latin verb *providerent*, or to see in advance, elucidates this divinatory metaphor. It is a skill that the figures within the godly eye apparently lack. In the inscriptions, the pagans' inability to see their end is linked not only to a deficit of wisdom but also to their lack of *prudentia*, or prudence, the quality that helped make a cardinal virtue out of foresight. Given the predominance of vice in the pictorial content of the panel, the terms used in the upper inscription contains essentially the only references to virtue within the image as a whole, albeit phrased in negative terms. It thus provides an important rubric for interpreting the visual components of the panel.

For if the pagans condemned by God were blind to their futures, viewers of the panel are given privileged access to what will be through the inclusion of the Four Last Things, which exist outside of the worldly configuration of the central circle as future moments. In the upper corners, we have future *necessity*: everyone will experience death and judgment. In the lower corners, we have future *possibility* in the fates of condemnation and salvation. Though the inclusion of favorable outcome to judgment in the roundel of Heaven presents a more balanced perspective than in *The Haywain*, it is worth noting that the images of both the Last Judgment and Heaven are highly conventional in comparison to the remainder of the panel's approach. They appear to be closely adapted from manuscript illumination and do not demonstrate the inventiveness that characterizes the image of sin and Hell, both in *The Seven Deadly Sins* and the Boschian *oeuvre* as a whole. This difference is often understood as an indicator of the work's early date within Bosch's artistic development, but it might be more usefully seen as corroboration of the extent to which heavenly futures were generally alien to the artist's overall conception.<sup>48</sup>

Although the dual outcomes of the Last Judgment are both represented and, moreover, symmetrically balanced within the panel, the schema of the composition unsettles this balance in

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<sup>47</sup> On the genre-like (as opposed to allegorical) character of these vignettes, see Snyder, 5; and Tolnay, *Hieronymus Bosch*, 15.

<sup>48</sup> See Gibson, "Hieronymus Bosch and the Mirror of Man," 208-9 for a negative evaluation of the roundels' execution.

favor of condemnation. The geometric configuration of the panel as a whole keeps the Last Things visibly separate from the sinful episodes at the center. Yet it textually connects them by means of inscription. Each sin within the central roundel is accompanied by a Latin caption identifying the wicked act portrayed. These captions are echoed in miniature in the lower left roundel of Hell, where the diverse punishments are distinguished through inscriptions of a corresponding sin from the main roundel [fig. 3.18]. Each vice is thus linked to a corresponding torture: Anger, for instance, results in what appears to be some form of flaying, while the sin of Pride carries the penalty of one's genitals being bitten by frogs.

*The Seven Deadly Sins*, then, despite its distinctive composition, presents viewers with another typically Boschian lesson in cause-and-effect. Its delineation of causality is central to its divinatory enterprise. By presenting a narrative chain of condemnation, it allows us to see our ends and instructs us as to how to predict our own damnation in a manner similar to *The Haywain*. Yet in this case, it frames this lesson through the radial composition of the central form, a configuration which had multiple connotations with respect to time, and, in particular, future time. Bosch exploits these various connotations to indicate a complex understanding of temporality. The work's representation of time, I suggest, is couched in a visual rhetoric that evokes devotion, divination, and play as instruments of foresight.

The central, ocular roundel itself invokes the diagrammatic construction of earthly time evident in astrological and time-keeping devices of the period. Such radial schema could also serve as a framework for the presentation and arrangement of secular imagery. In a Netherlandish panel from around 1500 that was apparently used as an hourly clock and calendar, for example, scenes of agriculture labor and social rituals are enclosed in a rounded sequence of twenty-four segments and framed by the children of the planets in the four corners of the rectangular panel [fig. 3.19]. The composition articulates a picture of time on earth as a mirror of the unending patterns of heavenly movements. The astrological connotations of the panel not only invoke temporal patterns but also the related theme of prediction, as the movement of the seven planets (corresponding in number, of course, to the seven sins illustrated on the panel) could signify future developments in the terrestrial sphere, personality traits, and so forth.

In addition to its astrological and time-keeping significance, the general structure of the central eye-like form served a variety of functions in wider late medieval visual culture. Although Bosch's composition is unusual in painted panels of the period, similar designs were much more common in print and manuscript culture. Such diagrammatic forms served many purposes: to organize information, to make calculations, as well as for use as mnemonic devices and meditative images. Walter Gibson has linked the radial configuration of this painting to a genre of devotional images that defined themselves as "mirrors" in which their users might see the sinful state of their soul reflected. These images were intended to aid the viewer's striving for virtue and self-knowledge, often indicating at once the tarnished condition of the soul in the present and a future image of perfection.<sup>49</sup> A devotional woodcut dating from the late fifteenth century [fig. 3.20], for example, uses the abstracted forms of the diagram to instruct users on the various aspects of virtue and vice, so that they may turn away from the latter and toward the former.<sup>50</sup> The diagram creates a framework through which one may more easily perceive and recall the intricacies of the sins and their implications, combining the abstracted scaffolding of the circle with pictorial motifs from the Fall, the life of Christ, and God at its center. By using

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<sup>49</sup> Gibson, "Hieronymus Bosch and the Mirror of Man," 205-226.

<sup>50</sup> Dirk Bax links the general form of this woodcut to Bosch's panel in Dirk Bax, *Ontcijfering van Jeroen Bosch* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1949), 244.

these schemas to reflect on this sinful state and thereby forsake it, the viewer could work toward regaining a resemblance to the Godhead and, by extension, a heavenly future.

*The Seven Deadly Sins* presents God's eye as reflecting both an image of sin and Christ himself at its center, thus mirroring the present and a desired point of eventual resemblance for the viewer. The division between present and future perspectives in the image is suggested by the difference in radial and vertical orientations of the roundels portrayed. This split perspective helps render the viewer both the subject and the object of sight before the panel.<sup>51</sup> The eye of God objectifies the spectator, capturing him or her in the present state of worldly time. Yet the image *also* presents a simultaneous view of different moments in time that is associated with the omniscience of God. We might note that, contrary to the typical arrangement of Last Judgment scenes, the lower roundels depict the saved on the right and the damned on the left. This reversal of the standard structure of judgment suggests a reversal of perspective for the viewer. Indeed, the configuration of salvation and damnation—found in early Netherlandish triptychs such as that of Rogier—is structured on the difference between mortal and divine points of view and a simulation of the confrontation with the divine judge at the end of days. Because Heaven and Hell in *The Seven Deadly Sins* conform to the divine perspective on the act of division entailed in judgment, it suggests that we see the eschatological future from the point of view of God himself. Foresight, then, grants viewers a kind of likeness to God, turning prudence into Providence and facilitating the devotional ends of the image in the desired future of eternal salvation.

But the radial schema also bespeaks a second, more unstable connotation with respect to future time: the architectural partitions that fracture the circle additionally suggest the spokes of Fortune's randomly spinning wheel, thereby alluding to one of the most pervasive images of chance in medieval culture. Although this allusion has been noted before by art historians, its various implications and dimensions have not been adequately considered.<sup>52</sup> Tracing the facets of chance and fortune as they are played out in Bosch's image affords insight into the ways in the futurity of salvation might be engaged in late medieval visual culture.

As both goddess and initiator of the chance event, Fortuna stood for a break in the logical relation between cause and effect—that which occurs outside of expectation and renders the future unpredictable. As we have seen in previous chapters, this notion of chance and the unexpected constituted a problem for Christian theology, in which God's power is predicated on his omnipotence, and linked to the notion of an infallible divine order. Theology tended to address this problem by turning Fortune into a tool for divine providence and an image, not of future uncertainty, but of future necessity. There *is* an order, but it is invisible due to the significant limitations of mortal perceptual capacities. What is perceived as a break in the causal order is really just an effect of an unseen organization, one that human senses cannot access. The allegorical image of the wheel converted what may be experienced as uncertainty into a steady narrative of ascension and decline. The image of the wheel thereby attempts to remedy the human *perception* of randomness by bringing it into a clearly-articulated and providential design. The wheel of Fortune, as we have seen, defines the female figure of Fortuna as an intermediary figure representing God's will. In *The Seven Deadly Sins*, Bosch forgoes the middle woman in

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<sup>51</sup> See Koerner for another discussion of the viewer's objectification, in which the divine gaze transforms the viewer into the viewed, demonstrating the extent to which Bosch was the "master of pictures that see us" ("Hieronymus Bosch's World Picture," 317).

<sup>52</sup> Gibson, for instance, points out this similarity in "Hieronymus Bosch and the Mirror of Man," 213-15; see also Merback, *The Thief, the Cross, and the Wheel: Pain and the Spectacle of Punishment in Medieval and Renaissance Europe*, 169-170.

favor of Christ, in a sense unveiling him as the causal agent behind the proceedings, elucidating the significance of the wheel as an instance of judgment.

But while the causal and Providential elements of Fortuna had multiple implications, previous studies of Bosch's panel have focused almost exclusively on the relationship between the goddess and sin.<sup>53</sup> Fortuna, as the ruler of the contingencies of the earthly domain, presided over the instabilities of material goods. To over-invest in these goods was to invest in the wrong kind of future, to misdirect one's attentions from the fixity of spiritual matters to the transitoriness of vain things—that is, precisely the stuff of the seven deadly sins. Fortuna's necessity was typically a necessity of decline, giving shape to Divine Providence's judgment against the wicked. In this respect, the *Seven Deadly Sins* is quite traditional, expressing a similar sentiment found in an illustration from a spiritual manual of 1478, the *Buch der Kunst dadurch der Weltliche Mensch Mag Geistlich Werden* (Book of the Art through which a Worldly Person may become Spiritual [fig. 3.21]).<sup>54</sup> Here, the wheel serves as both a visual frame and physical scaffolding for figures engaging in each of the seven deadly sins. Suspended over a landscape setting, the wheel's inconstancy, with the aid of two henchmen flanking the device, propels the practitioners of vice from the wheel and into the mouths of Hell. The condemned tumble to their fate, their bodies traversing the face of the wheel and thereby creating a kind of visual chaos that dramatizes the inconstancy of Fortuna's domain. The destination of the sinful in the jaws of neatly arranged and virtually identical demons signifies the appropriateness of their destiny and the restoration of a proper order. In the text of the manual, which is written as a dialogue between a young woman and the personification of Wisdom, the wheel is presented as a vision, a didactic pretext through which Wisdom can propound the value of a well-directed spiritual life.<sup>55</sup> The wheel is shown and explained to the young woman and reader-viewer alike as a vision of a possible future, a future wrought from the absence of virtue and devotion.

The image of the *rota fortunae* from the Augsburg manual attests to this link between Fortuna and divine judgment by depicting a direct path from Fortuna's wheel to the spaces of Hell. In the spirit of Boethius, turning away from Fortune's goods and toward God, from worldly to spiritual futures was advocated in the text as the best way to avoid the goddess's whims and certain damnation. As discussed in chapter one, the print comparing Fortuna and Virtue from a French edition of Petrarch's *De Remediis* [fig. 3.22] articulates this often-voiced sentiment through the theme of vision. The image contrasts blind Fortuna, poised precariously on a sphere and holding similarly unsteady figures on her miniature wheel, with the stable guarantees of a woman seated steadily atop a cube. Inscriptions in the print identify this figure at once with Wisdom and the generalized quality of Virtue. Yet her iconographic presentation strikingly resembles virtue's more specific incarnation as Prudence, demonstrating substantial visual acumen and self-regard before her mirror.

Upholding the print's overall structure of opposition, the mirror's circularity echoes that of Fortuna's wheel, framed not by tumbling mortal bodies but by heavenly motifs. The blindness of Fortuna appears to be reflected in the figures on the wheel, who cannot see their future destinations along the curved rim of the structure to which they cling. To see the personification at right in terms of Prudence is not only to perceive the ways in which virtue, wisdom, and

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<sup>53</sup> This connection is asserted, for instance, by Gibson ("Hieronymus Bosch and the Mirror of Man"), and Merback.

<sup>54</sup> Anon. *Buch der Kunst dadurch der Weltliche Mensch Mag Geistlich Werden*, (Augsburg: Johannes Bäumler, 1477).

<sup>55</sup> The young woman describes a vision that corresponds in its main components to the image included in the book itself: a wheel suspended over a lake, spinning as monsters snap at those who fall. *Buch der Kunst*, 54a-b.

prudence coalesce in the theme of vision; it is also to highlight the temporal aspects of this vision. The image of the self reflected back to its viewer enables the management of Fortuna and her contingent futures. Although the print is concerned with virtue and action in earthly time, it shares in the dynamics of the devotional “mirrors” with which Bosch’s panel has been aligned: by reflecting the state of the self in the present, it also affords perspective on a desired future.

The viewer’s own perspective vis-à-vis *The Seven Deadly Sins*, however, was potentially inconstant and subject to change. I want to turn now to a consideration of the significance of the unique conditions of viewing that the panel could present.

### **Prudence, Fortuna, and the Play of Perspective**

Thus far, I have been discussing the panel of *The Seven Deadly Sins* as an object that hangs on the wall, adhering to the point of view suggested by the orientation of the Four Last Things and the image of Christ. And, indeed, this is how the image appears to have been displayed by Philip II in his chamber at the Escorial.<sup>56</sup> But while the image clearly accommodates a single, fixed perspective when displayed vertically, it also incorporates other possibilities. In 1560, prior to the work’s installation in the Escorial, Felipe de Guevara described the work using unusual terminology for works of art at the time. Spanish inventories of Boschian panels consistently use the word *tabla* to refer to those works completed on wood.<sup>57</sup> The term *tabla* denotes a board or plank and implies portability, and is thus quite appropriate as a designation for panel painting. Yet in his “Commentaries,” Felipe describes *The Seven Deadly Sins*, not as “*una tabla*,” but as “*una mesa*,” a designation that specifically indicates, not a movable panel, but a *table*, an item of furniture and a horizontal surface.<sup>58</sup> This suggests that *The Seven Deadly Sins* was displayed as a painted tabletop.<sup>59</sup> This detail, though only rarely explored in analyses of the panel, seems vital to understanding the complexities of perspective, time, and vision that the work introduces.

In order to examine some of these complexities, it is worthwhile to briefly investigate the spiritual significance of point of view in devotional literature of the period. For scholars analyzing Bosch’s panel, the image of the all-seeing divine eye at the center of *The Seven Deadly Sins* has consistently resonated with a passage from a fifteenth-century treatise by the theologian Nicholas of Cusa, the *Visio Dei* (c. 1453).<sup>60</sup> The text was written at the request of the Benedictine monks at Tegernsee, who wished to know more of Cusa’s mystical theology. The treatise explores this theology through the theme of vision as a means of addressing various facets of the

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<sup>56</sup> Although the work is not specifically described as *hanging* on the wall of Philip’s chamber, the account of the work by Fra José de Sigüenza in his “History of the Order of St. Jerome” does not give any indication of a distinctive display. See the translation and reprinting of Sigüenza’s text in Snyder, 36.

<sup>57</sup> See, for example, the inventory entries published by Vandebroek in “The Spanish *Inventarios Reales* and Hieronymus Bosch.”

<sup>58</sup> Felipe’s text is translated in Snyder, 28-31; the original Spanish is reprinted as Don Felipe de Guevara, “Comentarios de la Pintura,” in *Fuentes literarias para la historia del arte español*, ed. F.J. Sánchez Cantón (Madrid: 1923), 159-61.

<sup>59</sup> The work is currently displayed as a tabletop in the Prado Museum. Recent conservation reports note that the panel in its current state suggests that its original support was highly unusual and does not correspond to standard Netherlandish practice at the time. Based on detailed technical examination, “it is difficult to imagine the original presentation of the work,” Carmen Garrida and Rogier van der Schoute, eds., *Bosch at the Prado Museum: Technical Study* (Madrid: Museo del Prado, 2001), 117.

<sup>60</sup> My references to this work are taken from the translation published in Nicholas of Cusa, *Nicholas of Cusa: Selected Spiritual Writings*, trans. H. Lawrence Bond (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), 233-290.

relationship between the individual and the divine. Throughout, Cusa highlights the omniscience of God's vision, at one point identifying the deity with the ocular organ: "You Lord see and have eyes. You are, therefore, an eye . . . You thus observe all things in yourself."<sup>61</sup> Cusa, as Gibson noted, compares the eye to a mirror and an "infinite sphere" compared to the limited scope of human vision. Gibson understands the reciprocity between Cusa's words and the forms of Bosch's panel as a declaration of a simple fact of an all-encompassing divine sight that share a common metaphoric construction.<sup>62</sup> Yet he neglects a vital aspect of Cusa's linking of God and omniscient vision, one that the theologian articulates not simply through such metaphors but also through a concrete examination of the mutable, time-based relationship between viewer and image.

When Cusa sent his manuscript of *Visio Dei* to the monks at Tegernsee, he included with it a painted icon, "an all-seeing image, what I call an icon of God."<sup>63</sup> He opens his treatise by instructing the monks to display the image on the wall and gather around it in order to reflect upon the peculiar visual experience it induces. Although each brother stands in a different location vis-à-vis the image, each will believe that the eyes of the icon are fixated solely on him. Cusa then directs the monks to walk around the image, changing places with one another, such that the gaze of the icon appears to be static yet fixed simultaneously on every figure as he moves from different directions, viewing the picture from his own individual, mobile perspective. For Cusa, this physically itinerant relationship to the icon strikingly expresses the omniscience and perfection of God's sight, his love, and Providence.<sup>64</sup> The image enables an encounter with divine Providence, yet the encounter with the absolute and eternal qualities of God's vision is itself rendered strikingly apparent through the dramatic fragmentation and mobilization of points of view in the exercise Cusa proposes. The multiplicity of perspectives on the image enacts, in time, the particularities of human vision to devotional ends. The monks move in relation to the image and to each other, such that the exercise structures a relationship between the individual the Godhead, but between the individual and the social community of the monastery as a whole.

I want to propose that Cusa's devotional exercise, with its visual and physical mobility, constitutes a more valuable connection between the treatise and *The Seven Deadly Sins* than that suggested by Gibson. In Bosch's panel, the vignettes of sin do not conform to a single point of view but tumble over the image of Christ, and they solicit attention from different perspectives. Wilhelm Fraenger noted the distinction between the "standing view" and the "walking view" that the panel offers for its spectators. Although Fraenger's overall interpretation of *The Seven Deadly Sins* (which he renames as "The Table of Wisdom") is often fanciful, his analysis does usefully suggest the ways in which these dual perspectives are bound to different relationships to time and the divine. Walking around the wheel, as Fraenger argued, dramatizes the distinction between earthly time and eternity, contrasting our mutable position with the static orientation of Christ and the Last Things. The inscriptions and the image of Christ and the Four Last Things become distorted.<sup>65</sup> Fraenger identifies the "walking view" with transitoriness of earthly time in

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<sup>61</sup> Cusa, *Visio Dei*, 240.

<sup>62</sup> Gibson, "Hieronymus Bosch and the Mirror of Man," 217. See also Silver, "God in the Details," 628.

<sup>63</sup> Cusa, *Visio Dei*, 235.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 236-38.

<sup>65</sup> Wilhelm Fraenger, *Hieronymus Bosch* (Dresden: Verlag der Kunst, 1975), 271. If Fraenger's assessment of this aspect of the panel has not received much attention or development, it is most likely because of the rather strange and far-fetched ends to which his analysis is geared. Fraenger argues (without substantial documentation) that the image was commissioned by a Jewish convert to Christianity (268). The table was meant to serve (among other



general, but his assessment has important implications for our consideration of foresight and future time in this work. We might, for instance, connect this transitoriness more decisively with the dynamics of Fortuna's domain. Moving around the table, spectators not only initiate a time-based reception of the piece but also perform the rotation of Fortune's wheel, as if positioned on its perimeter, inspecting each act of wickedness from its proper orientation. Given that the artist's portrayal of the seven deadly sins departs substantially from existing artistic conventions in their secularism and genre-like qualities, these novel and varied vignettes would certainly have demanded attention from viewers familiar with Netherlandish artistic production during the period.

The viewer's physical enactment of mutability also suggests the ways in which the volatile perspective specifically inhibits the prudential virtue of foresight. Although the roundels of Christ and the Four Last Things do point to a state of eternity, as Fraenger suggested, this eternity exists in future time with respect to the viewer. Through these roundels the work simulates a future encounter with death, the divine judge, and the fates of eternal salvation or condemnation. The distorted view of Christ in particular illustrates God's statements from Deuteronomy inscribed on the table: namely, that his face will be hidden from those who lack the wisdom and prudence to see their latter end. To proceed around the table is thus to transform the image into a predictive device: it fulfills the prophecy that God speaks on the panel itself. And it enmeshes viewers in the causal relations inscribed between vice and condemnation. By way of our mobile alignment with the sins portrayed, the work prophesizes our latter end. In this respect, the panel resembles the volvelle of the frontispiece of the *Losbücher* in both its form and divinatory import, a resemblance that may well have been recognizable to a sixteenth-century spectator. Like the lottery book, the painting instigates an animated reception of the image, one that structures the experience of time and the apprehension of the future. In this case, Christ escapes the mutability that defines the books' pointers. Viewers are not turning agents but rather themselves set in motion by the qualities of the image.

Yet, in this framework, Bosch does not simply proffer a duality of fixed and mobile engagements as Fraenger would have it. Instead, his table presents an array of orientations over the course of the central radial structure. To see the *Seven Deadly Sins* as a tabletop is also to open it up for different and varied kinds of reception. While the panel could surely address a single viewer's personal meditations, as a table it anticipated and accommodated multiple, simultaneous spectators.

As a table, *The Seven Deadly Sins* evokes the solemnity of the altar. Gathering around the table offers an opportunity to reflect on Christ's betrayal and sacrifice, on both the narrative and Eucharistic significance of the Last Supper. But, as an object of interior décor, the table also presents itself as a site for social gathering, activity, and dialogue. Within the courtly milieu of the panel's reception, the table was a site for collective discourse as well as the display of virtuous behavior and clever wit. It was also a place where art was consumed in various forms. In Valois Burgundy, for example, the courtly feast constituted an occasion for staging elaborate allegorical performances that intermingled with the offering of artfully displayed centerpieces and dishes. Christina Normore has recently shown how these aspects of fifteenth-century Burgundian feasts drew upon a prevalent aesthetic taste for ambiguity and multifarious meanings that provoked the nuanced interpretive skills of viewer-diners, involving them in the

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things) as a structure of atonement, one pervaded with all kinds of esoteric numerical symbolism and connected to cosmic imagery of eastern religious traditions (Ibid., 269-70). In any case, his assessments regarding point of view are barely acknowledged in subsequent literature on the piece.

performative spectacle.<sup>66</sup> The *Seven Deadly Sins* suggests of course a far more solemn situation than that of a convivial courtly banquet. But viewers of the panel from Diego de Guevara's courtly milieu would have had good precedent for seeing the table as at once a context for social interaction and the reception of complex visual media. The table, in short, was not simply a functional site, but a site for play.

As such, the connotations of Bosch's composition would have been up for discussion, along with some of the ambiguities of its conception. If *The Seven Deadly Sins* presents a relatively transparent schema of cause-and-effect with respect to condemnation, it is remarkably silent, as Bosch generally is, about the causes of salvation. It gives us privileged foresight of the Four Last Things, but leaves the relationship between means to heavenly ends open. To be sure, the image's overall message is calculated to exert a causal influence on viewers, exhorting them to refrain from the sinful acts portrayed. But the wheel at the center is a cyclical form whose movement resembles that of time itself. The question therefore becomes whether there is a place outside the eye's schema in this life of earthly time, a way to avoid the mutability portrayed and its necessary fate.

On the one hand, Bosch adheres to the allegorical image of the wheel that explains Fortuna as a form of necessity, rendered transparent through the revelation of the structure and narrative of the goddess's domain. Yet the artist reinscribes the notion of Fortuna as a perceived break between cause-and-effect by highlighting the ambiguous causal relationship between this world and heaven. This, I want to suggest, opens up for different considerations of Fortuna and its relationships to individual fate. The means of engaging with these problems are, I believe, inscribed in the composition of the table.

With its diagrammatic configuration and accommodation of multiple points of view, *The Seven Deadly Sins* actually evokes a specific kind of table—that of the game board. In its horizontal presentation, the panel offers a surface suitable for play. The work's status as a game board is perhaps hypothetical rather than actual: although the paint surface does exhibit some damage and frailty, this wear and tear does not appear sufficient enough to be attributed to extensive use in this manner. I am thus not suggesting that *The Seven Deadly Sins* was consistently employed as a game board, but rather that this function comprised one of its feasible applications. The reference to the game board, I would argue, formed part of the broader allusions the work puts forth for contemplation, as an extended metaphor of sorts.

Cusa, whose reflections on divine vision illuminated the panel's dynamics, also treated games in a metaphorical manner in another theological treatise, *De Ludo Globi* (c. 1460).<sup>67</sup> Here, Cusa's attentions remain largely focused on the relationship between the individual and the divine. In this case, however, his reflections are framed not in terms of spectator and painted image, but in terms of player and game—a relationship that, I would argue, is perhaps not so distinct from that defining the painted icon, as the game board itself constitutes a diagrammatic picture that the viewer interacts with physically and visually in time. The theologian describes a game that strongly resembles early forms of bowling: players are given a diagrammatic field or ground consisting of ten concentric circles and a ball that has been partially hollowed out on one side [fig. 3.23]. The object of the game is to roll the ball as close as possible to the center of the

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<sup>66</sup> Christina Normore, "Feasting the Eye in Late Medieval Burgundy" (University of Chicago, 2008), esp. chapters 3 and 4. The social and intellectual elements of late medieval and Renaissance feasting are also treated in Roy Strong, *Feast: A History of Grand Eating* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2002); and Michel Jeanneret, *A Feast of Words: Banquets and Table Talk in the Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

<sup>67</sup> My references to this work are based on Nicholas of Cusa, *De ludo globi. The Game of Spheres*, trans. Pamela Watts (New York: Abaris Books, 1986).

circular configuration—a challenge since the uneven structure of the ball causes it to move erratically to its own end in stasis. For Cusa, the game provides a basis for speculation on the soul’s journey to God: the movement of the ball is likened to the soul, which seeks the endpoint of its trajectory in the union with the divine, which is identified with the centermost circle of the playing field. Thus the *ludo globi* is itself a representation of a desired future of salvation, an exercise in foresight. The game, in its many aspects and associations, generates multiple lines of inquiry throughout the treatise in addition to the primary metaphor regarding the soul.

Nicholas’s text is written as fictional a dialogue between Cusa, and Duke John of Bavaria and, in the second book, Duke Albert of Bavaria. Thus the presentation of ideas is framed in a social context. The game of the spheres is never actually played in this dialogue; instead, the speakers consider the game as a kind of aesthetic entity whose formal relations constitute the basis for contemplation and conversation. The playing field of the game of spheres is in this sense both a picture and also a conversation piece, not unlike the sociability that frames Bosch’s table. But if the playing field can be said to constitute a horizontal pictorial surface, its stasis is disrupted by the movements of both the player and the instruments of play. It is a surface that, with each casting of the ball, is animated and redrawn by the particular activity of that ball—activity that, as Cusa insists, is never identical, nor is it fully predictable despite the efforts of the player to refine his or her skills. The diagram thus incorporates an “infinity” of possible motions and outcomes.<sup>68</sup> Although participants in Cusa’s dialogue are not portrayed playing the game itself, they similarly animate the diagram in their discussion of its varied significance. It is the interpretive perspectives of the multiple speakers (whose words are conceived, of course, by the single author, who thereby fragments his own individual perspective in composing the treatise) that help move the discourse along through its various topics and stages.

I want to suggest that the configuration on Bosch’s table resembles, not bowling, but a pastime known as the zodiac game, which is described in the *Libro de los Juegos*, a manuscript completed in 1283 for the King of Spain and Castile, Alfonso X.<sup>69</sup> The zodiac game was essentially an alternative form of what is now known as backgammon. A game that was quite popular in the later Middle Ages and Renaissance that existed in many variations, backgammon was referred to as *tables* because its typical format was two tablets hinged together, in the

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<sup>68</sup> The irregular shape of the ball lends the game as a whole a resemblance to the casting of lots, since the ball’s asymmetrical weight renders its motion accidental and violent, and the uneven ground may also impact its course, such that “it is never certain before it comes to rest just where it comes to rest” (ibid., ). This opens the discussion to the issue of *fortuna* and its ambiguous role in the proceedings. For Cusa, *Fortuna* is “that which happens outside of intention” (83). Cusa insists that *fortuna* has no real place here, since man’s free will is the operative agent and, as part of the “noble kingdom,” is safe from the external goods and determining power of *fortuna*. Yet, even as Cusa advocates a kind of ‘practice-makes-perfect’ philosophy regarding victory at the game, there remains the factor of unpredictability and the unforeseen in play, something beyond human agency whose origins and rationale are not adequately addressed in his discussion. He only assures his readers that “God will not abandon those who place their home in Him,” no matter how much the ball may appear to be cast “capriciously and inconstantly” (85).

<sup>69</sup> Anon. *Libro de los Juegos*, Madrid, El Escorial, MS. T.1.6. The manuscript, also known as the *Libro de acedrex, dados e tablas* (Book of Chess, Dice, and Tables), is one of the most extensive accounts of games prior to the later sixteenth century. The manuscript is heavily illustrated with 150 miniatures. The work has recently been translated from Old Spanish by Sonja Musser Golladay as part of her dissertation research. See Sonja Musser Golladay, “*Los Libros de Acedrex Dados e Tablas: Historical, Artistic, and Metaphysical Dimensions of Alfonso X’s Book of Games*” (University of Arizona, 2007) . Her translations is also available online, and it is this translation that I have used for my research: “Alfonso X’s *Book of Games* Translated by Sonja Musser Golladay, Images Courtesy of Charles Knutson,” (undated), <http://www.mediafire.com/?nenjj1dimtd>.

manner of a diptych [fig. 3.24].<sup>70</sup> Like the diptych or *una tabla* more generally, the game board was intended to be easily transportable, a mobile image that could reconstitute its pictorial framework as a site of sociability at any given location. Of course, the game board shifted the conventional point of view inherent in the use of devotional diptychs from the vertical to the horizontal, as the playing board was to be displayed flat on a table and viewed from above.

When seen from this perspective, the standard backgammon board presents its own eloquent diagrammatic composition, one that was often highlighted through the addition of pictorial motifs and luxury materials in the more costly examples. The typical board presents not a radial but a rectilinear schema, bisected by the central vertical axis of the hinge and a horizontal band, which, together, create four equal and symmetrical quadrants. Each quadrant contains six elongated triangles, based along the outer edge of the frame and slenderly extending toward the central horizontal axis. The symmetry of this abstract, rather ornamental configuration presents a structure for navigation and movement; the board is a framework for space as well as time. Because backgammon typically involves two opponents seated on opposite sides of the board, the game unfolds from dual points of view, incorporating the particularities of each player's perspective [fig. 3.25]. Standard backgammon or tables is essentially a race game, in which each player is given a set number of checker-like pieces. Players move these pieces counter-clockwise (from their point of view) along the triangular points in accordance with the chance fall of three dice. The object or end of the game is to get ones pieces around the configuration and then bear them off of the board before one's opponent.

As a variant of backgammon, the zodiac game follows the basic parameters of tables but adapts these rules in relation to astrological symbolism of the seven planets. It is played with seven players, on a seven-segmented radial board, and with seven-sided dice. Each player receives seven pieces for their planetary "home." All pieces are moved around the board in a single direction, in a manner intended to mimic the movement of the heavenly bodies.<sup>71</sup> An image from the original Spanish manuscript [fig. 3.26] shows the board set for play, exaggerating its size and tilting it toward the picture plane, a tactic of display that at once accentuates the diagrammatic quality of the game and simulates the aerial perspective of actual play for the spectator.

The board illustrated in the *Libro de los Juegos* is highly schematic, yet its reduced appearance is sufficient to invoke the astrological references underpinning its design. Like *The Seven Deadly Sins*, the multiple associations of the diagram hinder a stable meaning. The board mediates the social and visual relationships between the players, yet the relationships it instigates are further inflected by the unseen but vital presence and agency of Fortuna. With the figures seated along its edges, the zodiac game board bears a marked resemblance to the iconography of Fortuna's wheel with the spinning inhabitants of its rim, combining the figural and diagrammatic components that characterize so many of the *rota fortunae* representations over the course of the Middle Ages. This correlation is bolstered by the location of the king (presumably King Alfonso himself) at the uppermost register of the miniature, a detail that accords with the apex or *regno* position in traditional iconography of the wheel. Thus the board defines and frames a social context just as Fortuna's wheel constituted a structure of shifting social relations. The iconography of Fortuna in this miniature calls attention to the role of the dice and chance in the zodiac game in general. Although astrology and Fortuna share similar diagrammatic

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<sup>70</sup> For the history of backgammon and its many variations, see H.J.R. Murray, *A History of Board Games Other Than Chess* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1952), esp. 117-19.

<sup>71</sup> The rules of the Zodiac Game are enumerated on fol. 97r of the *Libro* manuscript.

constructions, the iconography of Fortuna potentially exists in tension with the astrological components of its formulation.

As games of chance, all forms of tables unfold rather erratically through the roll of the dice. Because its outcome is not known in advance, the game dramatizes the future as a source of uncertainty for players. Indeed, as David Parlett has suggested, games that progress through the chance operations of dice are games of “future imperfect” information, since one can chart one’s past course, but any predictive activity or anticipated developments could be thwarted at a moment’s notice.<sup>72</sup> In this sense, the zodiac game highlights the human perceptual experience of Fortuna as uncertain over and above the allegorical interpretation of Fortuna as predictable necessity. This is underlined, I believe, by the astrological basis of the zodiac game. Astrology was and remains a discourse predicated on charting the cyclical movements of the planets for time keeping and prognostication. While the *Libro de los Juegos* describes the game as a representation of the planets’ motion, the game itself cannot provide a regular, foreseeable pattern of these movements. It submits planetary motions to the fall of the dice. It transforms a technique of future prediction into a performance of *unpredictability*. Whereas the allegorical *rota fortunae* tended to point to an inevitable fate of condemnation and decline, the miniature of the zodiac game can offer no certain outcome. Seven players are gathered around the board, and, while each seeks a common end in victory, the scenario of play and the identity of the victor himself cannot be known in advance.

However, the category of “tables” to which the zodiac game belongs is not only a game of chance, but of skill, and was understood as such in the medieval period. King Alfonso’s manuscript affirms the mixed character of this genre of play specifically in terms of the virtue of prudence. The preface to the *Libro* recounts a tale, taken “from the ancient histories of India,” of three wise men asked by a king to identify which qualities were most important and noble for a man to possess, and which games might best demonstrate the value of such attributes. The first among them chose chess, because it demonstrated that one should possess intelligence and be “perceptive” to win; the second chose dice, because these showed that fortune could not be avoided and prevailed over intelligence. Yet the third wise man promoted the game of tables because it combined both fortune and intelligence, since, in the encounter between fortune and intelligence one finds “the truest prudence” (*la cordura derecha*):

The third who said it was best to draw from both [intelligence and fortune] brought the table board with its pieces counted and placed orderly in their spaces and with its dice which move them in order to play . . . [showing that] he that knows how to play them well, even though the luck of the dice be against him, that because of his prudence he will be able to play his pieces in such a manner as to avoid the harm that may come to him through the rolls of the dice.<sup>73</sup>

If this account speaks of tables in terms of prudence, it is because the game of tables demands that players exercise perceptive foresight in order to play effectively. The game of tables is not simply a mad dash across the board. As Parlett notes, backgammon requires that players exercise tactical decision making, as numerous strategies for movement are presented with each toss of

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<sup>72</sup> David Parlett, *The Oxford History of Board Games* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 19.

<sup>73</sup> The story of the wise men is recounted in fol. 1v-2r of the manuscript (pages 4-5 of Golladay’s translation). The original passage reads: “El tercero que dizie que era meior tomar delo uno & delo al; troxo el tablero co sus tablas contadas & puestas en sus casas ordenadementre & con s[us] dados; que las mouiessen pora iugar . . . que el qui las sopiere bien iogar. que aun q[ue] la suerte delos dados le sea contraria; que por su cordura pora iogar con las tablas de manera que espquiara el danno quell puede uenir por la auentura delos dados” (fol 2r). My source for the original text is Golladay’s Ph.D. dissertation, 1243-44.

the dice.<sup>74</sup> Players must try to anticipate the moves of their colleagues, to project a variety of possible paths for their pieces depending on the roll of the dice. Prudence, as a form of virtue and divination, is essential to the managing of the contingencies that Fortuna both represents and brings. The game demonstrates the extent to which the formulation of prudential action entails predictive insight. The vision the game requires is prudential, directed toward the framed action of the game board. Yet this prudential vision, with an eye toward a future end in victory, is also immersed in the domain of social interaction, in which players move between an interactive engagement with one another and their representations in multiplied miniature in the pieces of the game board.

The dynamics of the zodiac game thus crystallize the themes of virtue, time, foresight, and Fortune that are woven throughout Bosch's panel and framed by the biblical inscriptions declaring the value of prudence in attentiveness to the future. The game provides a model for the consideration of the confrontation between virtuous, prudential foresight and sinful Fortune; indeed, it stages this confrontation for contemplative ends.<sup>75</sup> And it does so with the benefit of the panel's iconography. The board illustrated in the *Book of Games* is schematic, yet it clearly invokes the astrological references underpinning its design. In the *Seven Deadly Sins*, however, the images of sin and the Last Things provide a framework through which the mechanisms of chance acquire special resonance with respect to hellish and heavenly futures. The importance of vision in this process is upheld by the divine eye reflecting back at the viewer-players, continuously framing the temporality of the game in terms of sight. The game provides a discrete instance for the application of prudential foresight, enfolding the social, worldly dimensions of the virtue into the ends of sacred history.<sup>76</sup> To triumph at this game would be to triumph over the spaces of sin and vice, to exercise virtue in the face of Fortune. To ascribe a positive function to this kind of play would seem at odds with the general orientation of the artist's moralizing perspective. Bosch's eschatological works frequently condemn games by exiling them to the spaces of Hell, portraying, for example, dice and tables in the rightmost panel of *The Garden of Earthly Delights* [fig. 3.27]. In the image of this hellish end, gambling is construed as a financial activity, motivated by the vain ends of augmented wealth in winning the agreed-upon stakes. Yet, just as the gypsy palm-reader in *The Haywain* could be seen from different points of view, the perspective on play and chance is altered when the future ends of the game are shifted from the vice-laden category of worldly goods and monetary prize to salvation and self-knowledge. To see the game in terms of prudence is to see it as "potentially reversible," in its eschatological and rhetorical significance.

Such an interpretation would still see the figure of Fortuna in a negative cast, as a purveyor of vice. It would prioritize the will of the player, directed toward virtuous action, as a causal agent. But the question becomes whether Fortuna herself might be subject to the same reversibility, whether she, like those who she turns on her wheel, may be shifted from low to high and thereby point to a different future than that which the work would seem to most immediately align her. To see Fortuna from a different perspective would be consistent with the debates about Fortuna and contingency within Christian theology, debates that, as discussed in chapter one, were taken up by theologians since Boethius. If the zodiac game and the panel

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<sup>74</sup> Parlett, *The Oxford History of Board Games*, 63.

<sup>75</sup> Indeed, as Kahn notes in her discussion of Fortuna and Prudence by Pontormo, though Fortuna and Prudence may be seen in opposition to one another, Fortuna is "less an adversary than . . . a rhetorical occasion for the exercise of prudence" (see Kahn, "Giovanni Pontano's Rhetoric of Prudence," 30).

<sup>76</sup> The ability to merge heavenly and practical ends is a key characteristic of prudence as a virtue; see Burrow, "The Third Eye of Prudence," 47-8.

together invoke the themes of human providence in the form of prudence, *The Seven Deadly Sins* additionally raises the question of divine Providence in the form of the diagrammatic godly eye. Just as the question of Fortuna and Providence was contested in Christian theology over the course of the Middle Ages and Renaissance, the goddess's relationship to the godly eye is here a site of instability.

While the panel alludes to the goddess's wheel, the artist shows Christ, not Fortuna, in the place of the operating agent. The collapsing of the wheel with Providence suggests that personal fate, whether good or bad, is due to the workings of the divine. Perhaps, then, this game suggests not the agency of virtue but the limitation of that agency: Christ controls the roll of the dice and determines the future outcome of the game and, by extension, the fate of the soul, as well, irrespective of human action and intention. Here, Fortuna is not just a form of divine Providence but divine predestination, in which God has both knowledge of and control over future contingents. Good fortune at play is akin to the divine gift of grace, the divine gift necessary to salvation after the Fall, but whose logic of disbursement is highly opaque, like that governing Fortuna's offerings. Indeed, if the causal mechanisms of chance were obscure to human perception to theologians such as Augustine of Hippo, the basis on which God separated the elect from the damned shared in chance's invisible and impenetrable causality. In works such as *De Diversis Quaestionibus ad Simplicianum*, for example, Augustine suggests the necessity of grace for salvation, but suggests that the basis for this selection is based on a "hidden equity far removed from human perception."<sup>77</sup> In the zodiac game, the roll of the dice performs the mysteries of grace and salvation in its invisible and uncertain causes; it calls attention to the likeness and not disjuncture between Fortuna and the Godhead, in which the figure may take a less negative cast. But the Scholastic theology of grace in the Middle Ages stipulated that the bestowal of grace, in all its seemingly illogic and unpredictability, required that mortals recognized and "cooperate" with the divine gift in order for the promise of salvation to be realized. Prudence is in this sense the means through which human participation is achieved: the cooperation between the will and grace is manifested through the prudent perception and projection of paths of praiseworthy play. The role of skill in tables at the very least provides players with the *experience* of agency in their own fate; in their capable recognition and cooperation with God's grace, they might reach an understanding of meritorious action and its potential efficacy.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Augustine, *Ad Simplicianum*, I.2.16. Augustine's views on grace, predestination, and free will were shifting and complex. For a summary of the development of his thinking, see James Wetzel, "The Recovery of Free Agency in the Theology of St. Augustine," *The Harvard Theological Review* 80, no. 1 (1987): 101-25.

<sup>78</sup> Cary Nederman's study of Machiavelli's political thought suggests the persistence of Scholastic views into the early Renaissance. Although Machiavelli is often taken as a model proponent of free will and individual agency, she suggests that his notion of *fortuna* often intersects with a notion of divine Providence or plan. Underlying Machiavelli's political theory is a notion of divine grace, in which humans are chosen by God but must use their will in cooperation with this grace in order to overcome external circumstances. Though, in this case, the ends of grace are not found in personal salvation but successful political administration. See Cary Nederman, "Amazing Grace: Fortune, God, and Free Will in Machiavelli's Thought," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 60, no. 4 (1999): 617-38. The parallels between the random gifts of Fortuna and the "free gift" of divine election by grace are intriguing yet remain unexplored in the particular contexts of the Renaissance and Reformation. They have been discussed in connection with nineteenth-century America in Jackson Lears, *Something for Nothing: Luck in America* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2003). Gerda Reith, in her wide-ranging study of modern notions of chance, argues that all gambling constitutes a "ritualized dialogue with fate" on one's larger destiny; Reith, *Age of Chance: Gambling in Western Culture*, 176-7.

Thus Fortuna herself is subject to the reversals she purveys to those on her wheel, moving between high and low in her connotations. Whether we see Fortuna from this, more flattering perspective or reverse the view and understand her as a figure of sin, Bosch's panel points not only to the links between play and devotion, but also suggests that devotion itself constitutes a form of fortune telling regarding the fate of one's soul. The panel-as-game, or as an allegory of a game, operates as a stage for the exercise of predictive action via prudence, and as a predictive instrument. Here, winning at the game indicates its own kind of judgment, whether this judgment is seen as an effect of human agency or its circumscription through the uncontrollable workings of chance.

Although the moralizing discourse on Fortuna tends to propound a rigorous separation between the *bona externa* and the *bona animi*, between the terrestrial and the spiritual, the points of likeness between them precludes such a sharp distinction. Bosch's panels are consistently defined by their diatribes against material activities identified with sin, an "enmity" toward this world and those immersed in it.<sup>79</sup> Yet the artist's works are additionally inflected by resemblances between the means of engaging with terrestrial and spiritual ends. Fortuna and Providence, devotion and divination, true and false prudence—the formal reciprocity between these practices is aptly demonstrated by the motif of the palm-reader and the central diagram of *The Seven Deadly Sins*, which demonstrate a fluidity of values and significations. It is the likeness between these forms that enables the viewer's shifting perspective, and to foresee different possible ends to the proceedings portrayed.<sup>80</sup> The rhetorical instability and potential for reversal displayed by some of the figures examined here, it might be argued, is indicative of their contingency, their submission to Fortuna's capacity to transform high to low and low to high. But this contingency, the potential to be otherwise, is not merely ontological, cultural, or spatial, as Koerner's assessment of Bosch's works suggests. Rather, it is principally temporal, oriented to divergent future fates. If Fortuna disburses contingency, Prudence must manage it, seeing the different possibilities of the future and actualizing the preferred ends in view.

Thus the moral and legal condemnations of Fortuna, gambling, and divination that we have so frequently encountered are only but one perspective on the import of the engagement with the future. Although the vociferous condemnation of such practices often seems to overshadow alternative assessments of divination and games of chance, these activities possessed a value as epistemological and speculative procedures that could exist outside of vain motivations.

If Bosch's works frame their interpretive difficulties in relation to eschatology and future time, they also draw upon a variety of forms from the artist's wider visual culture that were used to engage with this future as a source of interpretive difficulty. And, while the artist's works may

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<sup>79</sup> Joseph Leo Koerner, "Bosch's Enmity," in *Tributes in Honor of James H. Marrow: Studies in Painting and Manuscript Illumination of the Late Middle Ages and Northern Renaissance*, ed. Jeffrey Hamburger and Anne S. Korteweg (London and Turnhout: Harvey Miller, 2006), 285-300. For Koerner, this enmity is not just within the image itself in its subject matter, but extends to the relationship between viewer and image.

<sup>80</sup> Rhiannon Purdie, in a wide-ranging survey of references to diceplay in medieval and early modern literature, suggests that dicing constitutes the "inversion of prayer" insofar as gamblers blasphemously invoked the names of the saints and the Virgin in order to win at their sinful activities. In this case, too, then, it is the ends which determine the value assigned to the means, since in proper prayer these same figures are invoked for the ends of God's grace. Purdie does not fully address in detailed fashion *why* one could function as the inverse of the other (nor is the element of "prediction" in this process well defined in her study), but I would venture to say that it is due in large part to the formal similarity between the two rituals. See Rhiannon Purdie, "Dice-Games and the Blasphemy of Prediction," in *Medieval Futures: Attitudes toward the Future in the Middle Ages*, ed. J.A. Burrow and Ian P. Wei (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell, 2000), 167-84.



seem novel or incongruent with respect to their original context, the various forms of foresight that I have traced here were not. Collectively, they point to the importance of the future as a motivation for visual culture during the period, and the ways in which the future might be constituted as a site for knowledge.

## Chapter Four: Playing Cards, Genre Painting, and the Framing of Future Time

I begin this chapter with a rather unassuming scrap of paper: a printed playing card produced in Germany around the end of the fifteenth century [fig. 4.1]. Its blotched, coarse condition alludes to a history of almost exhaustive use and obscures the already half-hearted delineation of form on its surface. Although this surface is largely blank, mottled lines do trace a limited set of pictorial motifs. The sharp diagonal of a flagstaff cut across the composition. The activity of these diagonals is partly eclipsed and offset by the meandering movements of the flag itself. Curving in accordance with the frame in the lower left, this banner comprises the vehicle for the presentation of the card's suit and value. Cursory hatchings and the overall lack of definition curtail the impression of physical volume and thereby highlight the card's status as a two-dimensional object. The summary execution is additionally echoed in the frequent protrusion of a visible frame along the edge of the object, likely the result of a careless cut from the larger, gridded arrangement of cards in which this particular example was originally situated [see fig. 4.2, for example]. This print was not made with an eye toward its potential future posterity, but rather with the expectation that it would be jettisoned once wear and tear rendered it unusable in play. The fact that any examples of cheap, individual cards have survived at all is in this sense a substantial feat of chance. Most cards of this kind are preserved as uncut sheets, often as wastepaper stuffed into book bindings to provide necessary but invisible support.<sup>1</sup>

Like many early woodcut prints, this modest image departs from some of the more fundamental qualities that are strongly associated with Renaissance art-making and invention, whether in painted or printed media—deliberation, technical virtuosity, references to classical antiquity, and unique stylistic markers. Indeed, cards such as this one appear as a foil to the qualities of authorial origin and past historical reference that have been identified as central to art historical developments of the period and the initial emergence of art as an increasingly discrete category. This frayed artifact may seem devoid of serious art historical interest; nonetheless, it belongs to a class of objects that constituted a major aspect of late medieval and Renaissance visual culture. Despite the prevalence of card play at all levels of society during the period, the social and art historical import of this aleatory medium has not yet been examined.<sup>2</sup>

Playing cards constitute perhaps one of the most dramatic instances of the growing visual frameworks for chance in the later Middle Ages. Cards offered a complex pictorial framework, one that could incorporate the mechanisms of fortune to varying degrees through the drawing and exchange of cards. In this sense, it rendered the encounter with chance as an encounter with

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<sup>1</sup> On the repurposing of prints as “disposable commodities” in the sixteenth century, see Jan van der Stock, *Printing Images in Antwerp: The Introduction of Printmaking in a City: Fifteenth Century to 1585*, trans. Beverly Jackson (Rotterdam: Sound & Vision Interactive, 1998), 173.

<sup>2</sup> Studies devoted to playing cards, while considerable in number, are often oriented toward the interests of collectors, or, at times, contemporary interests in the occult tarot. For the former, see Sylvia Mann, *Alle Karten auf den Tisch: Geschichte der standardisierten Spielkarten aller Welt / All cards on the Table: Standard Playing Cards of the World and their History* (Leinfelden-Echterdingen; Marburg: Deutsches Spielkarten-Museum and Jonas Verlag, 1990); and Catherine Perry Hargrave and U. S. Playing Card Co, *A History of Playing Cards and a Bibliography of Cards and Gaming* (New York: Dover Publications, 1966). For the latter, see, for example, Ronald Decker, Thierry Depaulis, and Michael A. E. Dummett, *A Wicked Pack of Cards: The Origins of the Occult Tarot* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996). A general, historically-minded survey can be found in Detlef Hoffmann, *The Playing Card: an Illustrated History* (Greenwich, Conn.: New York Graphic Society, 1973).

images. First documented in the later fourteenth century in Italy and Spain, by the mid-fifteenth century references to card games had appeared throughout Europe.<sup>3</sup> Their considerable popularity crossed socio-economic boundaries and would only be magnified by the large-scale production afforded by the developing print industry.<sup>4</sup> The rise of playing cards is thus intimately intertwined with one of the most far-reaching changes in the visual arts of the period. Although playing cards have only rarely been incorporated into art historical study, I would suggest that they are part and parcel of the extraordinary expansion of contexts and themes for pictorial representation, an expansion of which print was both a cause and an effect. While there are many facets to these changes, I will focus on the relationships between playing cards and the historically-coincident emergence of another type of picture—new, earthly subjects that are now discussed under the rubric of “genre imagery.”

As an art historical category, genre imagery refers rather broadly to pictures that depict aspects of social life. Secular anecdotal imagery and motifs had appeared in facets of classical and medieval art, but it was specifically during the Northern Renaissance such scenes became a consistent feature of visual culture as independent works in both paint and print. In Antwerp, for example, the development of genre images occurred in the midst of a move toward a mercantile economy in which an open market for art promoted the formation of different types of images that were geared toward the concerns of lay, non-noble audiences.<sup>5</sup> Early genre images in Northern Europe demonstrate a range of conventions and concerns, particularly prior to the greater codification of secular themes by the mid-sixteenth century. The degree to which religious and moralizing themes might be referenced in these pictures could similarly vary, and there has been some discussion as to whether the modern notion of *genre*, formulated in the late eighteenth century and rooted in a more thoroughly secular and modern concerns, can be applied to the early modern period. These issues have formed a major aspect of the critical work on early modern genre, and at times to polarizing effects.<sup>6</sup>

While acknowledging that the term and category of “genre imagery” is to some extent retrospective, I use it here as a kind of shorthand for what I take to be the most decisive and unifying aspect of early genre: the absence of a singular, pre-existing narrative that grounds the image and its interpretation in a prior source. Early genre images typically evince some kind of

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<sup>3</sup> For dates and documentation regarding the early history of cards, see Wilhelm Ludwig Schreiber and Paul Heltz, *Die ältesten spielkarten und die auf das kartenspiel bezug habenden urkunden des 14. und 15. jahrhunderts* (Strassburg: J.H.E. Heitz, 1937); and Hellmut Rosenfeld, "Zur Vor- und Frühgeschichte und Morphogenese von Kartenspiel und Tarock," *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* 52, no. 1 (1970), 75-6.

<sup>4</sup> The relationship between playing cards and the development of print has been debated by scholars of cards and early prints alike, with some arguing that playing cards formed a central impetus for the invention and success of printing technology, while others taking a more cautious view. For a summary of the principal perspectives, see Richard S. Field, "The Early Woodcut: The Known and the Unknown," in *Origins of European Printmaking: Fifteenth-Century Woodcuts and Their Publics*, ed. Peter W. Parshall and Rainer Schoch (Washington, D.C. and New Haven, Conn.: National Gallery of Art and Yale University Press, 2005), 21-23.

<sup>5</sup> For the connections between the economic conditions in Antwerp and the emergence of genre imagery, see Elizabeth A. Honig, *Painting and the Market in Early Modern Antwerp* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1999); and Larry Silver, *Peasant Scenes and Landscapes: The Rise of the Pictorial Genres in the Antwerp Art Market* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006). On the development of the open market for art in Antwerp, see Filip Vermeulen, *Painting for the Market: The Commercialization of Art in Antwerp's Golden Age* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003)

<sup>6</sup> Hessel Miedema, in an installation in the ‘realism vs. symbolism’ debate in Golden Age imagery, links interpretations of early modern genre paintings which take “immediacy” as their most salient trait to this tendency. See Hessel Miedema, "Realism and Comic Mode: The Peasant," *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art* 9, no. 4 (1977): 205-19.

narrative or anecdotal content, and do gravitate thematically to a set of conventional situations. But, in the absence of a fixed, external narrative source, they are also characterized by a particular mode of narrativity, in which the nature of the situation portrayed (however conventional it may be) is not necessarily inferable from the present moment that is shown. The referential momentum of genre imagery is thus not predominantly toward the past of a former articulation, and the details of its progression are in principle not fixed by such an articulation. This lack of fixity, in which a viewer could not have recourse to a known outcome in interpreting the image, defines uncertainty and future contingency as a key aspect of the spectator's experience. And herein lies the relevance of playing cards and the visual media of chance that I have been considering. For at the same time that playing cards accorded a strong pictorial dimension to the ritualized application of chance, artists began to insistently experiment with novel subjects without a predetermined story whose outcome could be definitively known in advance of encountering the image. Together, these phenomena point to the significance of chance and futurity as motivating features of visual culture during the period, features that inflected the making and reception of images in a variety of social contexts.

In this chapter, I examine a series of early sixteenth-century panels by the northern Netherlandish artist Lucas van Leyden that depict cardplay as a social activity. In these works, the import of playing cards and games of chance for early genre painting is made particularly apparent. Examining the social, temporal, and visual dynamics of the card game, I propose that this novel aleatory form helped ritually frame the relationship to an uncertain future as an entity that had a financial, aesthetic, and epistemological value. Lucas at once appropriated and reconfigured this pictorially-mediated futurity for painting. With respect to both cards and painting, I am interested in the role of prediction as a facet of social practice and pictorial narrative, and the ways in which play could inform painting as an ambiguous scenario requiring predictive action. In the case of lottery books and lotteries, narrative representation unfolded as an aspect of the time-based, performative media. Here, the conditions of the pictorial arts modulate the possibilities for narrativity, even as the fundamental subjects of the plot remain Fortuna and her external goods.

But even as I connect the framing of chance in card play to the early manifestations of genre painting, I also conclude by situating this connection as part of a broader phenomenon. While playing cards can be identified as an important source for early genre painting, they, like genre painting, constitute a new form for restructuring long-established conventions of aleatory play. In this sense, they suggest the extent to which the uncertain future, as both an epistemological problem and an element of social interaction, was reshaping conventional modes of representation in the late medieval and early Renaissance periods. While games of chance were subjected to their own reworkings in terms of form and media, through their framing of *alea*, games of chance helped conceptualize new modes of representation for social situations in which the uncertainty of the future figured prominently. Genre painting was one of those modes. But mathematical and economic domains engaged in a similar appropriation in an effort to devise its own representational schemas of future time. Examining can clarify the significance of the development of early modern genre imagery more broadly.

## Playing Cards

In 1377, the municipal authorities of Florence voted by a veritable landslide margin of ninety-eight to twenty-five to proscribe play at “a certain game called *naibbe*, [which] has

recently been introduced into these parts.”<sup>7</sup> The game that had compelled this legal ordinance was none other than that of playing cards. *Naibbe* constituted one of the earliest designations for cards; it is used to refer to them in a Catalan source of 1371, and in a chronicle from Viterbo, which deemed the arrival of this new form of play worthy of historical note: “in the year 1379 there reached Viterbo the game of cards, which in Saracen speech is called *nayp*.”<sup>8</sup> While the precise origins of these then new-fangled ludic forms is unclear and widely debated, it is indeed likely that the European deck is based on Middle Eastern prototypes.<sup>9</sup> Whatever their source, however, once cards had arrived in Europe, they seemed to quickly acquire their modern form of the fifty-two card deck. They also spread throughout the continent with an almost astonishing velocity: in 1378, a law against “*spilen mit der quarten*” was passed in Regensburg, indicating that cards had already spread across the Alps. Similar legislation was enacted in Leiden in 1397.<sup>10</sup> By 1400, anti-gambling regulations throughout the continent had begun to include cards, together with dice and tables, in the array of aleatory pastimes subject to repeated and futile prohibitions.

Such legislation attests to the speed with which cards were disseminated and also to the striking popularity that they must have achieved at a very early stage, given that they were sufficiently visible in public life to have so quickly caught the attention of legal authorities. This popularity would only increase with the growth of printing, allowing for packs to become accessible at low cost. While copious amounts of cheap printed playing cards from the period have been lost, records of production levels in the sixteenth century suggest the extent of demand. A sixteenth-century legal dispute involving the Flemish printer and card-maker Robert Peril, for example, notes strikingly large quantities of materials and production: 500 reams of paper in a single shipment, and forty gross (or approximately 5700) packs of printed cards.<sup>11</sup> Playing cards were not limited to a single class but rather formed an element of a shared popular culture.<sup>12</sup> Like early devotional prints, they were a truly “popular” form in the premodern sense that Rainer Schoch and Peter Parshall have applied to early woodcut prints more broadly: cards were a “medium that embraced high and low across conventional social boundaries.”<sup>13</sup>

The lack of textual sources on card games from the period and the apparent regional disparities in rules has made the early popular culture of cards appear highly elusive.<sup>14</sup> Yet it is

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<sup>7</sup> As cited in David Parlett, *A History of Card Games* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 36.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> The connections between the European deck and an example of fifteenth-century Mamluk cards in the collection of the Topkapi Museum in Istanbul have provided the most tangible evidence of this lineage. See Richard Ettinghausen, “Further Comments on Mamluk Playing Cards,” in *Gatherings in Honor of Dorothy E. Miner*, ed. Ursula E. McCracken and et al. (Baltimore: The Walters Art Gallery, 1974), 51-78.

<sup>10</sup> The law in Regensburg is cited by Parlett, 36. For Leiden legislation from the late fourteenth through the sixteenth centuries, see H. G. Hamaker, *De Middeleeuwsche Keurboeken van de Stad Leiden* (Leiden 1873), and p. 63-4 for the 1397 law.

<sup>11</sup> The case of Robert Peril is published in Jan van der Stock, *Printing Images in Antwerp*, 328-9.

<sup>12</sup> Laura A. Smoller, “Playing Cards and Popular Culture in Sixteenth-Century Nuremberg,” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 17, no. 2 (1986): 183-214. Smoller’s study is one of the few focused, historically precise studies of early modern playing cards in their cultural context.

<sup>13</sup> Peter W. Parshall and Rainer Schoch, *Origins of European Printmaking: Fifteenth-Century Woodcuts and their Public* (Washington: National Gallery of Art, in association with Yale University Press, New Haven, 2005), 2.

<sup>14</sup> It was not until the seventeenth century that rules for card games—or most games for that matter—were consistently recorded and published. Cardano touches on the rules of certain games in his manuscript in ways that have allowed for at least their partial reconstruction, but he does not elaborate them in detail. Early instances in which rules of play were at least partially published include a very brief dialogue, apparently on a version of *triomi* by the humanist Hadrianus Barlandus, *Dialogi omnes, sanequam elegantes ac lepidi, admodum pueris utiles futuri*.

possible and instructive to contextualize the formal attributes of playing cards in terms of their origins and early development through the Renaissance. Contemporary writers will occasionally comment on these attributes, but it is clear from the earliest legislation that there was an awareness of the novelty of cards as a method of play. Prior to the development of playing cards, dice had formed the principal vehicle for the casting of lots for centuries. Cards instituted a new, temporally and visually intricate support for structuring the invocation of chance, one that was moreover highly adaptable and subject to variation in the invention of particular games. That the earliest mentions of playing cards note their recent origin intimates their consciousness of the uniqueness of the form.

Even in the second quarter of the sixteenth century, when cards had been in circulation for some time, the relatively modern status of playing cards did not escape mention. In his treatise *De Ludo Aleae*, one of the few extended meditations on gambling from the period, the Italian mathematician, astrologer, and avid gambler Girolamo Cardano (1501-1576) aligns cards with dice as a type of *alea*.<sup>15</sup> But whereas dice and *astragali* were an aspect of classical culture, “in ancient times cards were unknown, and for that matter even the material they were made from.”<sup>16</sup> For Cardano, the newness of cards as a mode of *alea* is linked in part to their physical composition, a factor that also distances them from any possible classical pedigree. Writing at the height of the Italian Renaissance’s esteem of antiquity, Cardano’s distinction between cards and ancient culture points to the significance of cards as an alternative to Renaissance classicism and the interest in the past it entails. Examining the visual and material elements of playing cards in this period, then, can allow for different temporal and aesthetic concerns to surface. In this section, I explore these concerns with respect to the unique format of the playing card as a medium for chance in play. This will not only illuminate the novel contours of playing cards in their early historical circumstances, but will clarify the social and ritual aspects of card play, aspects that were taken up in genre painting by Lucas van Leyden. In order to pursue such an analysis, however, we need to defamiliarize many qualities of these objects we now take for granted.

Displaying an array of motifs on a two-dimensional surface, playing cards are, of course, a fundamentally pictorial medium. The standard fifty-two card deck is divided into four suits which, although varied according to region, are conveyed as pictorial motifs, such as hearts, coins, acorns, etc. Each suit consists in a hierarchy of thirteen numerical and figural cards, the latter comprised of courtly personages. In its combination of both numerical and figural elements, the card deck drew on select aspects of both dice and chess. On the one hand, cards expand and pictorialize dice, whose six planar surfaces present numerical values in a pattern of pips. Cards effectively disengaged these planes from their three-dimensional support. On the other, the courtly personages of the deck are coincident with the regal iconography that had long

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*Unà cum dialogo Aug. Reymarii de chartarum ludo, ac Barlandi opusculo de insignibus oppidid Germaniae inferiores* (Paris: Christ. Wechelus, 1530), f1r; and an English broadsheet: Anon, *The groome-porters lawes at Mawe, to be obserued in fulfilling the due orders of the game* (London: F. Kingston, c. 1600). Neither text can be said to provide a thorough explanation of the games in question, however.

<sup>15</sup> Girolamo Cardano, “The Book of Games of Chance (*Liber de Ludo Aleae*),” in Cardano, *The Gambling Scholar*, ed. Oystein Ore (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1953), 184. Although Cardano is writing in a different geographical context than the visual material that concerns me here, I have nevertheless drawn liberally upon this text as a rare and invaluable instance of a gambler’s own perspective on play. My references are primarily to Sydney Henry Gould’s English translation. For the original Latin, see Girolamo Cardano, *Liber de ludo aleae*, ed. Massimo Tamborini (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2006).

<sup>16</sup> Cardano, “The Book of Games of Chance (*Liber de Ludo Aleae*),” 185.

defined the hierarchy of the pieces that populate the chess board. But even if the courtly cards would have been originally legible in terms of the conventions of chess, this iconography is thoroughly coincident with the prevalent courtly emphases in secular images during the period. Indeed, the rise of playing cards and their courtly hierarchies corresponds with the so-called “late gothic” style and its favoring of exaggerated elegance and aristocratic themes. More importantly for my purposes, however, are the transformations in patronage and audience that are imbricated with this style: namely, the steady displacement of ecclesiastical institutions by wealthy and noble lay patronage. As Brigitte Buettner has argued, the emergence of secular, courtly themes in artistic media was an effect of this process, and is visible primarily in the commissioning of richly-illuminated manuscripts of non-religious texts (such as political history, myth, and literary romance) whose illustrations are typically populated by stylized courtly figures in luxuriant contemporary attire [fig. 4.3].<sup>17</sup> For Buettner, such references are motivated in part by a desire for proximity to the narratives portrayed, as well-to-do reader-viewers wanted to see these painted worlds as in some sense continuous with their own in an affirmation of aristocratic values through visual representation.<sup>18</sup>

It is in this context that the pictorial content of the Western card deck was initially formulated, and it was in many respects completely continuous with the dominant lay visual culture of the later Middle Ages. This is evident in some of the earliest extant decks, whose figural cards portray elegantly-curved bodies accentuated by rich fashions and materials, and often adapt the suits to the theme of the noble hunt.<sup>19</sup> Such luxury decks suggest that playing cards were at least initially strongly linked to court culture, and they demonstrate that the pictorial element of the playing card was understood as a defining feature of the medium, one that could be taken to extremes in the most costly examples. The queen of harts from the elaborate *Stuttgarter Kartenspiel* of c. 1430 [fig. 4.4], for example, represents the queen and her suit against a gold-leaf background, which frames sumptuous and finely-delineated patterned cloth and foliage. In its stylization and sensuous qualities, the card appears as an illumination extracted from any textual support to serve as a freestanding image.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, the very fact of the card’s preservation strongly implies that, by virtue of its sheer preciousness, it was meant to be looked at *as a picture* and rather than heavily used in actual games. Thus we might venture that playing cards were instrumental in consolidating the very possibility of free-standing, secular images divorced from any textual framework to structure interpretation. Moreover, if late medieval, wealthy lay patrons were actively involved in articulating a non-ecclesiastical domain of visual culture, I would suggest that cards additionally aided this process by granting secular images a ritualized significance through play. Cards helped frame a non-religious ritualized context for images, in which the ludic use of chance—and not prior written sources—governed the reception of visual forms.

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<sup>17</sup> Brigitte Buettner, "Profane Illuminations, Secular Illusions: Manuscripts in Late Medieval Courtly Society," *The Art Bulletin* 74, no. 1 (1992): 75-90.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 81-2.

<sup>19</sup> In accordance with the iconography of courtly culture, hunting themes seem to have been popular in early playing cards. In addition to the so-called *Stuttgarterkartenspiel*, the suits of a Franco-Flemish deck from c. 1480—the earliest extant complete pack of cards—employ the imagery of the hunt (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York): dog collars, hunting horns, dog tethers, and game nooses form the suits of this illuminated pack.

<sup>20</sup> In a technical examination of the Stuttgart pack, Ernst Ludwig-Richter and Heide Härlin interestingly note that the cards exhibit a mix of both illuminated manuscript and panel painting techniques, suggesting that these objects represent “an intermediate work of art between illuminated manuscripts and easel paintings.” Ernst-Ludwig Richter and Heide Härlin, "The 'Stuttgarter Kartenspiel': Scientific Examination of the Pigments and Paint Layers of Medieval Playing Cards," *Studies in Conservation* 21, no. 1 (1976), 23.

To be sure, courtly culture had developed other secularized forms in, for example, political ceremony and rituals. But the broad dissemination and popularity of playing cards among all social classes grants the form a distinctive, wider impact. This popularity was without doubt profoundly enhanced by the introduction of printing technology, allowing players to avoid the expenses associated with the painted deck. Through this accessibility, the courtly iconography was itself recontextualized and, with it, the contexts for the use of non-religious imagery as a prominent element of social practice.

If printed cards may have helped render cards easily accessible to a variety of social classes, this accessibility was not accompanied by a de-emphasis on the importance of the medium's visual features. Rather the pictorial interest is evident in less refined examples from the fifteenth century, which often exhibit a certain inventiveness in experimenting with the potential of the form itself. Although lacking the opulent materials and landscape setting of the Stuttgart pack, the engraved nine of birds after the Master of the Playing Cards [fig. 4.5] nevertheless takes care to articulated textured feathers and curving linear elements that define the individual specimens, details which are further highlighted by the blank background in which the birds appear to float. Since each animal is depicted in a distinctive pose, they do not coagulate into a unified pattern but solicit attention in their particularity. Master PW of Cologne also experimented with an avian suit in his rounded playing cards of c. 1500. His eight of parrots [fig. 4.6], for example, presents the birds in an almost symmetrical arrangement, subtly merging and interweaving their extensive tails for an ornamental effect while maintaining an interest in the intricacies of texture and pose. In this deck, the ace card of each suit is accompanied by a banner with inscriptions, often advising players on the effects of fortune: *FORTUNA OPES AVFERRE NON ANIMVM POTEST* (fortune can take away wealth, but not fortitude), counsels—or perhaps, more accurately, consoles—the ace of pinks [fig. 4.7].

When seen in comparison to these more decorative packs, the visual elements of the anonymous woodcut with which I began this chapter surely appear even more feeble. Yet it is perhaps not so much the *quality* of the pictures in such decks that should catch our attention, but rather the fact that they are present at all. Generally speaking, although the identity of any individual numerical cards is communicable through a simple integer, the quantity that the card signifies is primarily if not exclusively imparted through an assortment of suit motifs to which the actual number, if included, is strongly visually subordinated. As Detlef Hoffmann has noted, cards need only convey their value and suit (which also could be more efficiently symbolized, for instance, by a letter) in order to function effectively in a game; pictures of any kind are utterly extraneous in this respect.<sup>21</sup> I would suggest, however, that the functional gratuitousness of the images is a sign of their fundamental significance for the experience of play as a sensory and interpretive activity. We might speak of the significance of the visual as external to and—insofar as pictorial motifs could occasionally hinder an easy legibility of the card's identity—potentially even resistant to the declaration of a set *numerical* value in cards. The artistic components of playing cards evince quite clearly the necessity of images as mediators of chance during the period in question more broadly. Within the specific conditions of a game, however, the status of cards as pictures helps to accentuate the visual dimensions of the game as a whole, construing it as a larger perceptual field to be negotiated by participants.

This negotiation is characterized as much by an engagement with images as it is by their withholding. Cards are not just two-dimensional pictures but also material objects to be handled. In this sense, they are continuous with late medieval religious practices, marked by the desire for

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<sup>21</sup> Hoffman, *The Playing Card*, 9.



physical proximity and involvement with the devotional object as a facilitation of spiritual contemplation—a phenomenon that the devotional woodcut print would eventually address quite effectively.<sup>22</sup> Yet, unlike devotional prints, cards were not simply held and intimately viewed, they were meant to be consistently seen from two perspectives. The obverse of the card exhibits its pictorial content, suit, and value in the hierarchy of the deck. The *reverse* offers only a blank or uniformly patterned plane that serves as a veil, censoring the card's pictorial facet. The latter is typically viewed at close range and (ideally) visible only to the player who holds the card in the context of a larger “hand.” To look and contemplate this hand is to simultaneously display the non-signifying surfaces of this hand to the remaining players, such that the act of seeing and interpreting is rendered coincident with that of concealing. The exhibition of equivalent versos to opponents transforms the particularity of the individual cards in a hand into a single, equivalent *invisibility*. It is the dual-sided nature of cards as *objects* that institutes a kind of blindness as a major facet of play, as card games unfold through the interchange between what is seen and what is hidden from vision.

For Cardano, these visual conditions markedly distinguish play at cards from that of dice: a game of dice, he argues, “is open, whereas play with cards takes place from ambush, for they are hidden.”<sup>23</sup> The action of veiling that is constitutive of the playing card is further inscribed in the artifacts themselves: early cards were often mounted on successive sheets of paper or board, thus physically redoubling the concealing nature of the verso by locating the image beyond multiple layers while additionally thwarting the pliant nature of paper itself, such that the card is both picture and sculptural object. This hiddenness is arguably not limited to the nature of the cards as double-sided objects. Rather, the concealing disposition of the card is additionally duplicated in the demeanor of players themselves, who will mask their response to their hands through the maintenance of a stoic or misleading expression.<sup>24</sup> In this sense, the properties of the cards provide a model for players to emulate in constructing themselves as representations founded, not on mimetic principles or the clear conveyance of knowledge, but on strategic opacity that opponents must try to penetrate.<sup>25</sup> The card game renders this lack of transparency as one of the foundations of social interaction in play. Indeed, it frames sociability as a site for the play of chance but also as an occasion for the performance and interpretation of potentially obfuscating signs. Play at cards is not simply a matter of viewing pictures, it also entails the observation of players who themselves are involved in their own acts of viewing, concealing, and interpretation.

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<sup>22</sup> The haptic aspects of early prints have been examined in relation to late medieval devotional culture by David S. Areford, “The Image in the Viewer's Hands: The Reception of Early Prints in Europe,” *Studies in Iconography* 24(2003): 5-42. For a broader view of the “interactive print” in Renaissance culture, see Karr Schmidt, “Art—A User's Guide: Interactive and Sculptural Printmaking in the Renaissance,” esp. chapter 1.

<sup>23</sup> Cardano, “The Book of Games of Chance (*Liber de Ludo Aleae*),” 220.

<sup>24</sup> The inscriptions on Master PW's circular deck seem to instruct their users to maintain a steady demeanor regardless of what chance brings. On the ace of hares, for example, one would encounter the words FELIX MEDIE QVISQVIS TURPE PARTE QUIET (He is happy who is quiet in the midst of turmoil). Pietro Aretino, in his comic dialogue *Le care parlanti* (1543) between a card-manufacturer and a pack of cards magically endowed with speech, describes a nobleman who played cards with a mask so that no one could see his reactions to the cards. See Jonathan Walker, “Gambling and Venetian Noblemen c.1500-1700,” *Past and Present*, no. 162 (1999), 61. Walker notes (n. 142) that wearing masks during games of chance seems to have been common in Venice prior to the eighteenth century, judging from the laws that expressly forbade it. His study charts the development of a “mythology of self-control” among noble gamblers, one that I would link to the nature of the card as an object.

<sup>25</sup> While bluffing had previously formed an aspect of play at chess, for example, it is only in the card game that player and object come to share a similar structure of presentation.

Thus, while the random distribution and redistribution of cards at various stages of the game made the progress of play uncertain, the role of cards as blocking agents afforded the persistence of uncertainty throughout, an uncertainty that is forcefully articulated in terms of the visual unavailability of opponents' cards. And if chance constitutes a break in a logical relationship between cause and effect, then the obscuring—not only of cards—but of a reasonable response to one's holdings, institutes a continued performance and encounter with this break throughout the game. In this sense, the element of *fortuna* in cardplay is strongly linked to the fragmentation and restriction of vision in which it is impossible to fully and simultaneously apprehend the proceedings. The individual player's perception is deliberately isolated from a collective point of view, as the gaze moves between a contemplation of one's own hand and a larger but circumscribed perspective on the social context of the game. Within dominant theological discourse on Divine Providence and future contingents, the delimitation of human perception is that which separates it from God's eternal, unified gaze. It is precisely this partial perspective that subjects humans to the uncertainty of the future and base temporality. But whereas in Christian theology, this partiality was linked to the postlapsarian condition of humanity to be overcome through devotion and eventual salvation, in cardplay this epistemological and temporal situation is deliberately evoked, transposed into a social situation and given material reinforcement.

The perceptual and temporal circumstances of play ensure that cards are not, like dice, games of pure chance. Rather, the ability to navigate these circumstances requires special sensory and interpretive capacities, and ensures that cards constitute (like *tables*) a unique hybrid of chance *and* skill, the ratio of which could change depending on the extent that *fortuna* was integrated into a specific game. Cardano advised his readers that cardplay demanded "keen senses" and an extraordinarily (indeed, almost obsessive) heightened sensory awareness of one's surroundings and fellow players.<sup>26</sup> In this way, one could take care to note the progress of play but also avoid being cheated at the hands of diverse and often quite subtle practices of deception instituted by players and onlookers alike. Marked cards, mirrored rings, coded signals, sensory distractions—the possibilities by which players could turn chance into necessity through deceit were legion and, given the importance of obfuscation in even a just game—the line dividing dishonest from fair play could be hard to define or discern.<sup>27</sup>

But in addition to the problem of deception, successful players should maintain a strong orientation toward the temporal conditions of play. While the particular dynamics of play would surely vary in accordance with the rules of different games, in general cards require that players attempt to negotiate and contextualize chance within a larger continuum. As Cardano notes, cards leave room for the abilities of a prudent player, for whom the consideration of past, present, and future are all of varying importance in mapping a series of moves. Accomplished players can make use of memory to recall which cards have already been played, while also formulating "judgment about one's present holdings and of one's opponent's."<sup>28</sup> Because in cards, "we exercise judgment in an unknown matter," memory can provide one of the few solid bases of information for players.<sup>29</sup> Yet insofar as card games incorporate *fortuna* in the random allocation and reallocation of cards, they demand, like dice, the "expectation of future events" to which

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<sup>26</sup> Cardano, "The Book of Games of Chance (*Liber de Ludo Aleae*)," 226.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 210-11. Cardano mentions the practice of examining "the appearance of cards by means of mirrors placed on their rings," or the marking of cards with soap so that the cards slide easily past one another. He also briefly cites the "devices of kibitzers—the organum, the consensus, and the like," the nature of which he leaves obscure.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 224.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 220.

interpretation should ultimately be primarily directed.<sup>30</sup> The ability to effectively conjecture is thus vital to play at cards, as players must be able to analyze the unfolding occurrences of the game in order to divine, not only the holdings of other participants, but how these holdings may change and alter the array of possible actions. Cards dramatize the invisibility of the future, and the extent to which this invisibility can provoke modes of prognostication as essential facets of knowledge and social action.

For Cardano, the element of chance in *ludo aleae* in general grants a prophetic element to play, a form of knowledge that is at once necessary and peculiar. In dice, for instance, the role of fortune markedly separates the epistemology the game requires from more conventional avenues to understanding. “To conjecture about the present is more the part of the prudent man skilled in human wisdom”—wisdom being that part of prudence that is focused on the here and now. But “to conjecture about the future, although it is another kind of guessing, not as to what will be, but *what we may rightly count on*, is nevertheless the part rather of a divine man, for the melancholy are given to prophecy.”<sup>31</sup> The knowledge that games of chance demand is not a matter of certainty but of probability, and thus seems to fall outside of legitimate learning. Though Cardano in this passage seems somewhat reluctant to align cardplay with chance, elsewhere he is quite straightforward about *alea* in cards and enthuses that some of the most “beautiful” card games are essentially based purely on chance.<sup>32</sup> Applying his remark to cards, however, suggests the anticipatory and prognosticative types of spectatorship that these games could entail. The present “hand” of a player comprises a locus of possibility, and it is contemplated principally for the ways in which it opens up onto potential futures. Even as cards place chance within a temporal continuum, the visuality they promote is highly prospective in nature, as different future paths emerge in the interplay between what is seen and what must be projected. In considering their cards, participants must be able to internally formulate multiple hoped-for or plausible scenarios regarding the imminent development of the game, devising their actions with respect to the contingencies of chance and the actions of fellow players. Formulating one’s own course of action in this sense involves the construction of prophetic narratives. With dice, Cardano argues, “there is no certain sign.”<sup>33</sup> In cards, however, one can at least draw upon and interpret the present visual field, which could serve as a kind of divinatory device for the mapping of future outcomes in relation to this present.

Cardano’s own text stands as evidence of the ways in which gambling at games of chance could entail a wide array of both social and epistemological practices regarding future time. The author’s own status provides the basis and authority for his considerations: Cardano, besides pursuing a career as a mathematician, astrologer, and physician, was experienced at games of chance and self-professed gambling addict who depended on his winnings for his livelihood.<sup>34</sup> These considerations are, on the one hand, social and psychological, disbursing occasional counsel on strategy and etiquette that maximize the chances for success. Yet his varied reflections pertaining to *alea* demonstrate that applied chance, while itself a form of divination in the casting of lots, could also generate a host of predictive practices in the effort to manage it in play. Cardano refers to gamblers who resort to consulting astrology and geomancy in an effort to win at games of chance.<sup>35</sup> He himself describes in detail an occasion on which, prior to playing

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 225.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., (emphasis mine).

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 185.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 224.

<sup>34</sup> Girolamo Cardano, *The Book of My Life: De Vita Propia Liber*, trans. Jean Stoner (New York: Dover, 1962), 73.

<sup>35</sup> Cardano, “The Book of Games of Chance (*Liber de Ludo Aleae*),” 209.

an important, high-stakes game with a Venetian nobleman, he “contrived a certain art,” apparently founded on geomancy, whereby he had access to all the plays and numbers that he would play. The accuracy of this foreknowledge was striking, but “there was no trickery or deceit about it,” such that it seemed his “genius” was advising him.<sup>36</sup>

If this anecdote may now appear as hopelessly superstitious, Cardano also used gambling to elucidate other methods of prediction that we might deem more rational: mathematical probability. *De Ludo Aleae* presents some of the earliest formal probability calculations regarding the casting of dice and “circuits” of possible outcomes, with related reckonings on card games.<sup>37</sup> His formulae, although not entirely correct, do partake of the notions of frequency and tendency that would become important for subsequent developments in probability theory. However, because the work remained in manuscript form until the posthumous publication of Cardano’s complete works in 1663, it did not have the impact on the larger intellectual history of probability that Pascal and Fermat ultimately did in their own calculations pertaining to dice in the mid-1650s. *De Ludo Aleae* has been analyzed thus far almost exclusively by historians of probability, who are concerned with locating its author’s mathematical insights in a larger teleology toward “accurate” probability calculations and evaluate it on these terms.<sup>38</sup> It is not the accuracy of Cardano’s calculations that concerns me, but rather the fact that they existed at all, and that gambling provided the impetus for their formulation. At some level, these calculations seem to have informed his gaming habits and are presented in the text as noteworthy for gambling practices more broadly. The mathematical aspects of the text are embedded among a host of social considerations and references to geomancy and “genii.” And even as he submits chance to numerical computations, he also defers to the power of *fortuna* at various points in the text.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, it is not clear from Cardano’s remarks that his calculations lead to any greater certainty than other methods of prediction that we might understand as superstitious: “this [mathematical] knowledge is based on conjecture and is approximate, and the reckoning is not exact in these details; yet it happens in the case of many circuits that the matter falls out very close to conjecture.”<sup>40</sup>

*De Ludo* is likely published from an unrevised manuscript, and it can be a frustratingly disorganized text. Readers have expressed confusion at its rambling qualities and the fact that Cardano skips so quickly from social and philosophical considerations to mathematical computations.<sup>41</sup> Surely there are personal stylistic factors at work in the text’s fragmentary nature, but I would also suggest that this fragmentariness itself points incisively to the ways in which games of chance—and the futures they put in play—constituted a site for the convergence

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<sup>36</sup> This anecdote is narrated on p. 217-18 of *De Ludo Aleae*.

<sup>37</sup> Cardano’s calculations on the probable outcomes of the casting of dice are presented primarily in chapters 11-15 of his manuscript (pages 195-206 of the modern English translation). The text also includes briefer calculations regarding the division of stakes in card games (208-10).

<sup>38</sup> Cardano’s complete works were published as Girolamo Cardano, *Hieronymi Cardani Mediolanensis philosophi ac medici celeberrimi Opera omnia*, ed. Carolus Sponius, 10 vols. (Lyon: Jean Antoine Huguetan and Marc Antoine Ravaut, 1663). Discussions of Cardano’s work as one of the most noteworthy (albeit unpublished and thus without wide influence in specialized mathematical circles) probability calculations prior to Pascal, Fermat, and Christiaan Huygens in the mid-seventeenth century are numerous. See, for example, Hacking, *The Emergence of Probability: A Philosophical Study of Early Ideas about Probability, Induction, and Statistical Inference*, 51, 54-5; David, *Games, Gods, and Gambling: The Origins and History of Probability from the Earliest Times to the Newtonian Era*, chapters 5 and 6; Daston, *Classical Probability in the Enlightenment*, 36-7.

<sup>39</sup> Cardano, “The Book of Games of Chance (*Liber de Ludo Aleae*),” 216, for example.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 196.

<sup>41</sup> See, for example, Daston, *Classical Probability and the Enlightenment*, 15.

of seemingly disparate discourses and forms of interpretation. Playing cards provided a context in which these kinds of diverse discourses could coagulate around the medium of pictures. Or, to put it a different way, one might say that pictures provided a unique medium for this coagulation in the late medieval and Renaissance periods, framing the epistemological problem of the future as part of a ritualized social activity.

It is this act of framing that perhaps crystallizes most precisely the significance of playing cards for the development of early modern visual culture more broadly. For framing, as many theorists have noted, is constitutive of games and play as such: the implementation of specific rules, sensory habits, and modes of conduct in games partially disconnects them, as ritualized forms, from the goings-on of “normal” everyday reality even as they are informed by and mimic aspects of this reality.<sup>42</sup> In later medieval society, as scholars such as Buettner have argued, courtly patronage comprised an important stimulus for the articulation of a non-devotional sphere of image making and reception. With the advent of playing cards, such non-devotional images—themselves devoid of religious or textual sources—were accorded a ritualized role on a wide scale, just as the patronage of images was rapidly expanding beyond courtly confines.<sup>43</sup> Thus cards actively fashioned a secular space for the production and reception of images that lacked both devotional and textual underpinnings. And it was through such framing that the temporal and formal properties of these images, along with the social conditions in which they were implemented, could become a site for self-conscious interpretive practices that were strongly imbricated with the problems of chance and futurity. Playing cards helped codify certain modes of looking and interpretation in relation to pictures, modes in which the ability to navigate future uncertainty had both a financial and aesthetic value. Art historical narratives tend to highlight the role of the past in the emergence of secular art—as, for example, in the phenomenon of classicism or politically-motivated historical representations.<sup>44</sup> Yet, in the trajectory I propose here, it is the future, and not the past, that is of primary importance in conceptualizing forms of time and widely-available pictorial representation that are disengaged from devotional structures.

While playing cards were an international phenomenon, it was principally in Northern Europe that the pictorial mediation and thematization of fortune and futurity would find

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<sup>42</sup> The separation of play from daily reality is one of the most fundamental points of play theory, and variations of this idea appear in most major theoretical reflections on play. Huizinga in particular promoted the idea that play occurs in a “magic circle” that is temporally and spatially separate from “ordinary reality.” Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*, 8-9. Rogier Caillois, though he disagreed with Huizinga in crucial respects, similarly asserted that “play is essentially a separate occupation, carefully isolated from the rest of life” as a “pure space.” Rogier Caillois, *Man, Play, and Games*, trans. Meyer Barasch (New York: Free Press, 1961), 6-7. In referring to games as “partially” separate, I am drawing on Thomas Malaby’s recent critique of play theory with respect to the particular form of the game, where he argues for a less rigid separation between games and “ordinary reality.” Thomas M. Malaby, “Beyond Play: A New Approach to Games,” *Games and Culture* 2(2007): 95-113. A game is an act of framing social activity, but it cannot be fully dislodged from mundane sociability. On play as framing, see Adam B. Seligman et al., *Ritual and its Consequences: An Essay on the Limits of Sincerity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>43</sup> Buettner, “Profane Illuminations, Secular Illusions: Manuscripts in Late Medieval Courtly Society,” notes that, even as courtly secular art promoted the notion of a fixed, permanent social order of the court, this order was rapidly being undermined by late medieval social transformations (89-90). Keith Moxey has charted some of the ways in which the dissemination of courtly imagery through print also produced satirical commentary on this aesthetic from middle and upper-middle class perspectives. Keith Moxey, “Master E.S. and the Folly of Love,” *Simiolus* 11, no. 3-4 (1980): 125-48.

<sup>44</sup> For one of the most recent of these, see Wood, *Forgery, Replica, Fiction: Temporalities of German Renaissance Art*.

articulation in other domains of visual culture. Genre painting is not the only instance of these articulations, but it is one of the more striking and consequential within early modern visual culture as a whole. Lucas van Leyden's images of cardplay point to the connections between genre painting and this aleatory pastime. They also bring the issue of uncertainty and the *narrative* construction of future time to the fore.

## Lucas van Leyden

Lucas van Leyden, was born around 1489 in Leiden, and was trained as an artist by both his father, the painter Hugh Jacobsz., and in the workshop of Cornelis Engelbrechtsz., one of the most prominent painters in the city.<sup>45</sup> Although he undoubtedly received training as a painter in these contexts, it was as a printmaker that Lucas built his career and, eventually, an international reputation that spread beyond the Alps. In his *Schilder-Boek*, Karel van Mander describes Lucas as a kind of child prodigy, who was producing and publishing his own engravings at an early age—a sign that the artist was “predestined” for future fame and achievement.<sup>46</sup> Lucas would indeed eventually enjoy significant success as an artist, success that was registered in his own economic prosperity and the prices that his works would fetch. Van Mander notes that sheets of his largest engravings could sell for the substantial sum of twenty-eight *stuivers* apiece during the artist's lifetime.<sup>47</sup> As Elise Lawton Smith notes, this amount was equivalent to an entire week's salary for a bricklayer in the city.<sup>48</sup>

Lucas's financial fortunes, then, were quite good. Yet these fortunes were largely achieved through forsaking the local artistic economy in favor of the widely-distributable medium of print. This was no small move, given that in Leiden, cloth formed essentially the only good produced for non-local consumption.<sup>49</sup> Though the city of Leiden was involved in the international cloth trade, the selling of art was a highly local and regional affair, and moreover consisted almost exclusively of painted commissions for religious institutions and wealthy patrons from the city.<sup>50</sup> Lucas did complete large-scale works for such patrons—such as, for example, a *Last Judgment* altarpiece for the Sint Pieterskerk (c. 1530). However, these works seem to have been limited in number and confined to a relatively short period of his career, after the death of Cornelis Engelbrechtsz. presented more opportunities for commissions.<sup>51</sup> His *oeuvre* is overwhelmingly tilted toward print: compared to the more than 200 engravings and woodcuts he produced in his lifetime, a mere thirty paintings have been attributed to his hand.

The artist's success in the printed medium was built upon an approach to narrative in which the experience of prediction and future uncertainty figured prominently. Peter Parshall has

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<sup>45</sup> Walter S. Gibson, "Lucas Van Leyden and His Two Teachers," *Simiolus* 4, no. 2 (1970): 90-9.

<sup>46</sup> Karel van Mander, *The Lives of the Illustrious Netherlandish and German Painters*, ed. Hessel Miedema (Doornspijk: DAVACO, 1994 (1603-04)), vol. 1, 105.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>48</sup> Elise Lawton Smith, *The Paintings of Lucas van Leyden: A New Appraisal, with Catalogue Raisonné* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1992), 7.

<sup>49</sup> As local authorities themselves noted in 1542, Leiden had “but one industry,” that of cloth. The quote has been taken from Robert S. DuPlessis and Martha C. Howell, “Reconsidering the Early Modern Urban Economy: The Cases of Leiden and Lille,” *Past & Present*, no. 94 (1982), 52. DuPlessis and Howell present a very thorough and insightful analysis of this industry on p. 51-63.

<sup>50</sup> Christiaan Vogelaar, “Lucas en Leiden: Schilders, Stad en Samenleving tussen Middeleeuwen en Renaissance,” in *Lucas van Leyden en de Renaissance*, ed. Christiaan Vogelaar (Leiden: Museum De Lakenhal and Ludion, 2011), 20.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 19-20.

noted the importance of narrative in Lucas's prints, an importance that has made them difficult to assimilate into iconographical models of interpretation.<sup>52</sup> It is as experiments in visual storytelling that these works most fundamentally addressed their viewers. Together, Parshall argues, these prints exhibit a consistent set of characteristics that he identifies as the artist's "narrative style." Rather than treating particular stories as a series of discrete yet interconnected episodes, Lucas sees narrative in general as a "temporal continuum" from which especially resonant moments can be extracted to convey a story. In his portrayal of religious texts, the artist often favors those instances just prior to the conventional climax of the story. Thus, as Parshall asserts, in the engraving *David Playing the Harp before Saul* [fig. 4.8], Lucas focuses on the buildup of psychological tension, the "ambiguity and intrigue" surrounding the relationship between the two figures rather than the Saul's eventual assault on David with the javelin he clutches in his hand.<sup>53</sup> Similarly, in *David and Abigail* [fig. 4.9], we are not presented with the actual meeting between the two figures but instead a previous moment as David proceeds along the path to the diminutive Abigail at right. In each case, the configuration of the instant portrayed effectively works to obscure the subject matter of the images. Parshall argues that this approach promotes viewer involvement in the process of narration, since spectators must not only discern the nature of the story itself, they also are required to internally complete the unfolding action that is implied. Thus it is not the outcome of the story that is privileged in the images, but rather the cultivation of a "state of uncertainty" in the viewer with respect to unfolding events.<sup>54</sup> This "narrative style," it is proposed, is an effect of a distinctive artistic personality responding to the new conditions of patronage and reception wrought by the rise of the print collector.<sup>55</sup>

Parshall's study insightfully outlines both the general importance and specific characteristics of Lucas's elaboration of narrative imagery. Yet I want to look more closely at the precise implications of some of these characteristics in light of the concerns of this chapter. Indeed, although Parshall does not use these terms himself, I would call attention to the element of futurity inherent in his pictorial narratives. Engravings such as *David and Abigail* construct an ambiguous relationship to folding events, one that requires a predictive, anticipatory disposition on the part of spectators. Lucas eschews the depiction of ends and outcomes in order to define the relationship in terms of a relationship to futurity, withholding a direct encounter with the narrative's conclusion. Viewers are thus granted an opportunity to pursue projective accounts of the narrative content, divining the future from the visual signs that the image presents.

What the viewer experiences as prediction is, in fact, retrospection. Most of Lucas's prints represent biblical texts, and, because they are taken from an extant source, their ends are already written and thus a matter of necessity. Successful projection on the part of the spectator would, in the end, amount to an act of recognition about narrative content that could be independently verified through recourse to the text in question. Yet Lucas consistently repackages familiar tales in a manner that veils this necessity and obscures the nature of the content for the benefit of a particular kind of spectatorial venture, building a sense of contingency into the interpretive process. His success on the international print market suggests that there was a significant demand for this kind of viewing experience. Rather than understanding this success as an effect of a personal narrative style, we might ask what larger conditions made it both possible and advantageous to conceive of visual narrative in this way.

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<sup>52</sup> Peter Parshall, "Lucas van Leyden's Narrative Style," *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 29(1978), 191.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 229.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 192; 231.

Lucas's game paintings pose questions regarding the potential connections between narrative technique and the social as well as interpretive practices of play. There are four panels depicting games that are firmly attributed to the artist that span the full range of his artistic career, and to which my analysis will be restricted: three of these depict card games while one is devoted to chess: *The Chess Players* [fig. 4.10], *The Fortune-Teller* [fig. 4.11], and paintings of card games in Madrid [fig. 4.12] and England [fig. 4.13]. In addition to the works by Lucas himself (none of which are actually signed), his card images formed the basis for a range of subsequent works over the course of the sixteenth century, including close copies as well as substantial variations that nevertheless exhibit certain stylistic similarities. The multiplicity of works on the theme of cardplay, combined with its ensuing adaptations, points to a significant interest in the panels and their construction of the pastime, but the material has been only rudimentarily treated in the scholarship thus far.<sup>56</sup> In their small scale, undocumented early provenance, and innovative secular subject matter, these works are not easily mapped onto the prevailing conditions of painting in Leiden at the time. Moreover, they are in many ways highly distinct from his printed production, as well: in addition to key stylistic differences which I discuss below, there remains the simple fact that there is no extant evidence that Lucas ever represented games of any kind in his graphic production. Insofar as card games framed future uncertainty in its social, sensory, and temporal dimensions, the artist's paintings of the theme strongly suggest the connections between broader changes in narrative technique and the social pastimes of the games depicted. At the same time, however, certain disparities between these images and Lucas's prints indicate that these changes could be bound to the particularities of both artistic and ludic media—that is, between the support for images and for play.

### Conventions of Play and Representation

The limited scholarship on Lucas's game panels has invariably suggested that these works are moralizing critiques of gaming in both intent and effect. Both Smith and Parshall point to a tradition of disparaging social commentary articulated in a variety of sources.<sup>57</sup> Moralizing diatribes and legal strictures against games of chance were indeed substantial and could be quite pointed, the sheer force of such diatribes can often overshadow alternative viewpoints that generally did not have a set forum for their articulation. While chess still represented the apex of ludic skill, cards, in their mingling of fortune and ability, nevertheless could be valued as a pleasant pastime that engaged the mental and perceptual capacities of players. Cardano's *De Ludo* represents this perspective, but he was not alone in his promotion of the worthy qualities of such games. Laura Smoller has pointed out that Martin Luther's writings demonstrated a certain

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<sup>56</sup> Only three studies address these images in any detail: Smith, *The Paintings of Lucas van Leyden*; a chapter from Parshall's unpublished dissertation, Peter Parshall, "Lucas van Leyden and the Study of Narrative" (University of Chicago, 1974); and an essay for the catalogue of the recent Lucas van Leyden exhibition at De Lakenhal, Ilja Veldman, "Beeldtraditie en Vernieuwing: Onderwerpskeuze in de Leidse Kunst van 1480-1550," in *Lucas van Leyden en de Renaissance*, ed. Christiaan Vogelaar (Leiden: Museum de Lakenhal and Ludion, 2011), 43-78. The influence of the panels ranges from more or less direct copies (as in a copy of *The Fortune-Teller* in the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Nantes), to close variations (as in a *Card Players* panel from c. 1550 in the National Gallery, Washington, D.C.), to liberal adaptations that exhibit stylistic and thematic similarities but depart significantly in tone and iconographical aspects (such as *The Card Game* in the Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest).

<sup>57</sup> Smith, *The Paintings of Lucas van Leyden: A New Appraisal, with Catalogue Raisonné*, 52; Parshall, "Lucas van Leyden and the Study of Narrative," 117. In this sense, Parshall's analysis of the images constitutes a recourse to iconography even as he asserts the resistance of the artist's prints to iconographic analysis.



fluency with card games, and that he even expresses a potentially non-condemnatory attitudes toward them as part of a larger ludic culture:

Games with cards and dice are common, for our age has invented many games. Surely there has been a reaction. In my youth all games were prohibited; makers of cards and musicians at dances were not admitted to the sacraments, and people were required to make confession of their gaming, jousting, and dancing. Today these things are in vogue, and they are defended as exercises of the mind.<sup>58</sup>

Luther's comments, though based on a construction of "then" versus "now," point not only to positive assessments of cards, but also the ways in which the values assigned to cards could vary considerably in different times and locales. Cards were moreover deemed of sufficient intellectual value for the scholar Thomas Murner to develop a memory game for students based on the form, and for the humanist Hadrianus Barlandus to publish a very brief account of some of the conventions of the game *triomfi*.<sup>59</sup> The skills of interpretation that cards promoted, then, did find affirmation in wider intellectual and even theological circles despite the discourse against them. Indeed, the source of condemnation in representations of gambling is not gambling itself, but the susceptibility of players to deception and cheating by their counterparts—that is, the inability to play intelligently and perceptively, to exercise the visual skills necessary to avoid being duped.<sup>60</sup>

One of the principal reasons for the diagnosis of Lucas's game panels as moralizing is the fact that they invariably portray men *and* women playing together, something that was deemed highly improper in moralizing and instructive treatises by authorities such as Sebastian Brant and Juan Luis Vives.<sup>61</sup> The identification between games of chance and sexuality was of course an element of its representation within the framework of courtly love. Card games, it is implied, are forms of seduction that stir up wanton desires. Yet even as art historians have connected such comments to Lucas's paintings, they are less clear about the precise mechanisms through which the moral messages are conveyed in the works themselves.

Moreover, while *textual* critiques of both card play in general and mixed gender play in particular did exist by the early sixteenth century, in *images* this discourse had yet to be substantially elaborated. Instead, the visual iconography of card games, like that of the cards

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<sup>58</sup> As cited in Smoller, "Playing Cards and Popular Culture in Sixteenth-Century Nuremberg," 187.

<sup>59</sup> Thomas Murner, *Logica memorativa : chartiludium logice, sive totius dialectice memoria, et novus Petri hispani textus emendatus* (Argentinae: Grüninger, 1509); Barlandus, *Dialogi omnes, sanequam elegantes ac lepidi, admodum pueris utiles futuri. Unà cum dialogo Aug. Reymarii de chartarum ludo, ac Barlandi opusculo de insignibus oppidid Germaniae inferiores*.

<sup>60</sup> A poem published by Jacob Köbel around 1520, for example, describes the unfolding of a collectively-implement ruse at the card table. The author frames his account as a warning to readers, and concludes with an entreaty that even brings divine authority into the mix: "May everyone protect himself from this [deception] / and may God help us to the host of the angels / Amen" (Ein yder sich dafür bewar / Und helff uns got zuor engelschar / Amen). *Eyn neüwe Gedicht*, (Oppenheim: Jacob Köbel, c.1520), 10. My thanks to Carolyn Hackshaw for her help in translating this difficult text.

<sup>61</sup> In the *Narrenschiff*, Brant condemns all gambling, but suggests that women who gamble are disrupting the conventional duties and spaces of gender, since women should be working at the loom and not poking around in men's games (Sie sollten an der kunckel laecken / Vnd nit jm spyel byn mannen staecken). Sebastian Brant, *Das Narrenschiff* (Basel: Johann Bergmann, 1494), 103r. Similarly, Vives's instructional manual for women, first published in 1524, cautions against play at cards and dice as shameful forms of idleness: "Since this pastime is disgraceful even for men, it cannot be but loathsome in women. What will a woman be able to learn or think about who gives herself to gambling?" Juan Luis Vives, *The Education of a Christian Woman: A Sixteenth-Century Manual*, ed. Charles Fantazzi, trans. Charles Fantazzi (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 93. Neither author directly mentions the erotic element of mixed-gender play that was so central to visual representations.

themselves, was bound to the interests and motifs of courtly culture. While Lucas was perhaps the first artist to commit the theme to panel painting, the subject had already appeared in a variety of media, where it was rapidly replacing chess as a means of configuring the dynamics of courtly love. A tapestry dating from the later fifteenth century [fig. 4.14], for example, depicts a card game between a richly dressed young man and woman, tended by a servant, in a sumptuous garden of love. Amply populated by flora and foliage, the restricted space of the garden is defined by a wall of vines and pink flowers that dwarf the couple in their disproportionate scale. The patterned effect of this wall seals the space of aristocratic play within its lush confines and ensures its status as a world apart. Between the couple, who is doubly sealed by the lavish tent in which they play, a table is tilted slightly forward to reveal foodstuffs, cards, and coins. While the coins point to gambling as a form of exchange, this game is played not just for money but for love, and its particularities are articulated in twisting speech banners just above each figure. The man presents a card and declares “to you I cast this well-considered hand” (*den.us.wurf.hand.ihr.wohl.besunnen*). The mix of chance and skill entailed in the presentation of his hand is conveyed in the inscription’s terminology: however well-considered his hand may be, the use of the verb *auswerfen* (to cast) is linked to the term for dice (*würfel*), suggesting the moment of uncertainty inherent in the act of displaying one’s hand. The risk is for naught. As he presents his card, his counterpart’s victory is made certain: “With that I have won the game” (*Do.mit.han.ich.das.spil.gewunnen*).

This work presents the courtly milieu of the card game through the costly, more aristocratic medium of tapestry. However, the dissemination of this iconography through print is evident in an engraving from around 1500 by Master M.Z. [fig. 4.15], the so-called *Grand Ball*. Here, a wealthy couple play at cards, not in a garden, but in a spacious interior setting. Within the composition, the game possesses a certain dominance by virtue of its elevated placement, framed within a smaller niche toward which the (inaccurate) orthogonals of the floor tiles vaguely recede. This niche separates the game from the remainder of the scene, but it also appears as thoroughly embedded with the presentation of courtly leisure activities: located on the central axis, the game serves as a kind of rubric for the array of dancing and interacting couples that promenade along the lower register. The card players themselves remain spatially distant from the viewer, yet there are details that render the details of the game legible and indicate that the woman is winning. The table’s surface hosts not only the card game itself but is the surface for the inscription of a line crossed with smaller hatches that convey each player’s score. And it is the woman’s score that is clearly higher. She points to the deck as a gesture that could signify either the placing of a bet or the declaration of imminent victory. While images of women triumphing over men in the later Middle Ages might easily be interpreted as moralizing satires on the dangers of female temptation, in this image the tone is more ambiguous and subtle. A fool is among the crowd of onlookers in the upper right, as if to comment on the apparent disruption of gender hierarchies and imprudence that both love and games of chance can bring. Yet, at the same time, the scenarios of seduction are source of pleasurable speculation for the viewer, and the image contains its own kind of harmony. Through the windows that flank the couple, urban streets recede tranquilly, as if to convey that all is orderly with the world.

But to insist too strongly on the importance of such images in informing Lucas’s own account is to imply that viewers would have derived their interpretive schemes primarily if not exclusively from other representations. Prints such as *The Grand Ball* offer a notable precedent for the portrayal of cardplay in pictorial media, Lucas’s paintings diverge from the conventions of courtly representations in important respects and take an approach that is rather

unprecedented. In addition to converting the theme of the card game into the medium of panel painting, his works purport to simulate for viewers various aspects of the *experience* of the card game as a social, temporal, and visual activity. Thus the images resolutely insist that the ritualized practice of play should form a vital basis for interpretation, perhaps even over and above recourse to pre-existing conventions in images, or moralizing dictates in textual sources.<sup>62</sup> The extent and precise methods of simulation in these works could vary from image to image. But each work takes up the task of using the card game to configure narrative uncertainty in its imaging of social and romantic relationships.

## The Game Panels

In his paintings depicting games, Lucas constructs the experience of the game by consistently deploying visual techniques that help construct a heightened connection between the viewer and the scene portrayed. This is evident in the earliest panels portraying the theme of gaming, both of which likely date from around 1508 and confine their content to a relatively modest scale: *The Chess Players in Berlin* [fig. 4.10; 27 x 35 cm], and the so-called *Fortune-Teller* [fig. 4.11; 24 x 30 cm] in the collection of the Louvre. Each work foregrounds a game between a man and a woman at a table, locating their interaction within a space that has been sharply circumscribed by the presences of multiple figures in the immediate vicinity of play. Though these works may appear crude and unskilled in their limited spatial and compositional organization, the apparent simplicity of the conception might nevertheless be seen as the result of an overriding desire to closely orchestrate the viewing experience. The effect of the constricted composition is to push the scene of the gaming table toward the spectator and thereby compel an engagement with the specificity of the action it contains. The spectatorial interest of this action is further heightened by the gathering of personages around the table, who provide a model for the viewer's own position. The predominance of half-length and three-quarter figures enhances the sense of a mutual space for those who stand both within and without of the frame, for it creates the impression that the table mediates our engagement with the scene, just as it would for spectators of an actual game.

The compositions of these works and the close interaction they afford would seem to be an adaptation of certain formal strategies evident in early Netherlandish devotional imagery made for personal meditation [see, for example, fig. 4.16]. In such works, the portrayal of proximate, truncated divine figures helps create the impression of what Sixten Ringbom has called the "dramatic close-up": simulating an intimacy with holy individuals, these images place a premium on the devotional value of intersubjectivity, whether focused on a single figure or given a narrative apparatus.<sup>63</sup> As Ringbom argues, the composition helps sustain an empathetic and meditative relationship with the scene, allowing for intimacy and participation.

But if the visual conventions of Lucas's panels can be linked to devotional imagery from the period, when transferred to the subject of play the visual rhetoric of proximity and interactivity is intimately linked to the social event at hand. For a game, as Erving Goffman has

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<sup>62</sup> This approach is also quite different from the later development of moralizing images, which tend to shy away from showing card games in action, favoring instead the representation of a static deck as a generic sign of iniquity. See, for example, Jan Sanders van Hemessen *Lockere Geselschaft* (Kunsthalle, Karlsruhe) of 1543. Here, a man is coddled by apparently loose women in what appears to be a brothel, and the presence of a deck of cards in the immediate foreground serves to simply to reiterate the impression that improper temptation is afoot.

<sup>63</sup> Sixten Ringbom, *Icon to Narrative: The Rise of the Dramatic Close-Up in Fifteenth-Century Devotional Painting* (Åbo: Akademi, 1965).

argued, is not just a game but a “gaming encounter,” a “focused interaction” among members of a social gathering.<sup>64</sup> To participate in a game is to agree to give one’s psychological involvement and “visual and cognitive focus” over to the face-to-face relationships of the activity.<sup>65</sup> This involvement holds for players and spectators alike, since kibitzers, although they are not officially taking part or technically impacting the result, nevertheless fundamental to the social and psychological conditions that characterize the encounter.<sup>66</sup> It is this shared engrossment in the immediacy of the game that helps construct the sense of a closed circle, one that partially separates the game from the conventions of normal social life and, arguably, here affords the framing of the gaming encounter as artistic representation.

*The Chess Players* panel frames the engrossment of play not in terms of a game of chance, but rather one of skill, demonstrating that Lucas’s initial interest in ludic themes was not restricted to their aleatory instances alone. Chess, of course, was a much more esteemed activity than cards, due to both its comprehensive dependence on skill, its associations with noble and educated classes, and its already centuries-old lineage. During this time, chess had become the subject of an extensive literature of both practical and allegorical interests: in addition to texts containing problem-solving exercises and scenarios of play for instruction, a substantial discourse had developed that linked the chess game to notions of political and social organization.<sup>67</sup> But chess was also a principal motif of courtly romance, conveying the mechanisms of seduction and as a locus of erotic tension between the sexes, a theme that would also become a mainstay of courtly visual culture.<sup>68</sup> Lucas’s painting alludes to the courtly and romantic implications of chess in its depictions of relatively well-to-do figures and a game that is underway between a man and a woman. However, the allegorical implications of the theme are decidedly absent. Instead, the viewer’s position alongside the table aligns us with the (principally male) onlookers who press toward the board as the woman makes a move against her counterpart. This spectatorial accompaniment is in keeping with the depiction of chess in medieval literature, which notes the presence of often vociferous viewers who comment and advise on a game.<sup>69</sup> But if the crowd offers a kind of “reality effect” of the social occasion and enhances the element of staging or simulation, it also frames the board as a locus of narrative action in the absence of a textual source.

For Parshall, Lucas’s interest in the representation of games is an extension of the artist’s interest in visual narrative in general, connecting the subject-matter to the broader problem of representing secular themes that lack a textual source, such that the image is left to its own devices in conveying the story. With regard to the Berlin panel, Parshall argues that,

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<sup>64</sup> Erving Goffman, “Fun in Games,” in *Encounters: Two Studies in the Sociology of Interaction* (London: Allen-Lane, 1972), 15-31.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>67</sup> Chess problems, for instance, formed a major aspect of Alfonso X’s manuscript on games. On the impact of chess problems on medieval chess literature, see H.J.R. Murray, *A History of Chess* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962), 564-5. The principal text employing chess as a model of socio-political order is the widely read allegory of the game by Jacob de Cessolis, which has been recently published in a modern translation as Jacob de Cessolis, *The Book of Chess*, ed. H.L. Williams (New York: Italica Press, 2008). For an insightful analysis of the allegorical construction of chess in the later Middle Ages as it relates to both politics and romance, see Jenny Adams, *Power Play: The Literature and Politics of Chess in the Late Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006).

<sup>68</sup> Moxey discusses the satirization of the courtly image of chess in “Master E.S. and the Folly of Love,” for example.

<sup>69</sup> Murray, 476-77. For some writers, Murray notes, the co-participatory element of chess was part of the essence of the game.

retrospectively, it is clear that games are ideally suited to this difficulty, “for the game brings with it an arena of psychological engagement projected on the abstract pattern of the board that can be clearly read out by the audience.”<sup>70</sup> Here, I understand Parshall to be ascribing a certain narrativity to games in pictorial media, as a form that possesses a visible and legible structure that viewers can “read” in relation to the action portrayed. While I of course share this interest in the narrative capacities of games, the terms through which this is examined need to be refined and reconsidered. Parshall understands this reciprocity with regard to a pre-existing and quasi-autonomous “problem” of art-making—that is, how to represent a non-textual narrative in general. Yet rather than construing that the depiction of games as a solution to a broader artistic problem, we might see it as inseparable from the historically-specific status of particular *kinds* of games in the early sixteenth century. Playing cards in particular helped make it possible to consider images as having an extra-religious and non-textual function. But, prior to the conversion into painting, they had already framed a certain experience of time and interpretation as itself problematic. Moreover, through the historical reception of card games, certain pleasures and values had been ascribed to these experiences. In unpacking the relationship between narrative, early genre painting, and games, I propose to rephrase it as a problem not so much of pictorial legibility as one of uncertainty, and of predictive narration instead of narration per se. These aspects are best apprehended by considering games not only in literary but also anthropological terms.

In a very basic sense, the narrativity of games is bound to their status as time-based activities that are delimited not only in space but in duration, marked by a beginning and endpoint that sets the game to some extent apart from the ongoing flow of social life.<sup>71</sup> This packaging of time into an isolated unit, subject to its own particular cadences, is largely accomplished through the enactment of a system of rules that help distinctively mold temporality and behavior in the process of play. By virtue of the rules and conventions that regulate their unfolding, games offer a structure for acts as well as their interpretation, an invisible yet potent framework for the sequencing and elaboration of deeds. The game composes social interaction into a specific, rule-governed module that is oriented to a particular end. As both formal and processual constructs, games can be said to function in a manner akin to the literary plot. For a plot, too, constitutes an “intelligible whole that governs a succession of events,” a design that organizes time and intention toward an individual conclusion.<sup>72</sup>

Yet, as a social form, the *content* of the game—the actions and developments peculiar to each instance of play—is not determined in advance and then duplicated in each subsequent pursuit of the game. This factor strongly distinguishes games from the literary text, whose pre-existing content is either uncovered in reading or simply recalled and reiterated at a later point. Knowing how to play a game, after all, is not the same as knowing a story, since in the case of the former each repetition (assuming it is played fairly) carries the possibility of difference in both its result and the details of its unfolding. Indeed, the element of uncertainty in games and play is consistently identified as one of its most potent defining features, even among theorists who hold otherwise divergent views on ludic matters. Both Goffman and Rogier Caillois, for example, note that a game is deprived of all interest, pleasure, and momentum once its outcome is clear; players will typically abandon the game table rather than proceed to a foreknown

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<sup>70</sup> Parshall, “Lucas van Leyden and the Study of Narrative,” 107-8.

<sup>71</sup> The temporal discreteness of play is asserted by both Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*, 9; and Caillois, *Man, Play, and Games*, 6, for instance.

<sup>72</sup> Paul Ricoeur, “Narrative Time,” *Critical Inquiry* 7, no. 1 (1980), 171.

conclusion.<sup>73</sup> Uncertainty, Goffman argues, is central to the experience of psychological involvement of the gaming encounter. For Thomas Malaby, a game constitutes a form of “contrived unpredictability,” that, in its contingency, interfaces at an ontological level with daily life even as they function as distinct, processual “social artifacts.”<sup>74</sup> The uncertainty inherent in games is what ultimately distinguishes it not only from narrative but also ritual proper. Ritual and play are both founded on a “framing” of action that is in some measure separate from the goings-on of mundane reality. But ritual is precisely repeatable.<sup>75</sup> Like a written narrative text, its fundamental actions are scripted and its conclusions (ideally) foregone. Games comprise more formalized instances of play, such that they allow for the *ritualization* of play rather than serving as rituals themselves in a strict sense.<sup>76</sup> Rather, we might say that games proffer structures for the ritualization of uncertainty and unpredictability itself, operating through various media and rule-bound mechanisms.

This divergence between play and ritual is evident in their temporality. Both construct a fictionalized space for their performance, but ritual is intent on making “the past into the present,” while play is “continually defers the present into the future when the ending will become clear.”<sup>77</sup> The futurity of games is thus intimately conjoined to their contingency in process and ambiguity of outcome. But the sense of future time introduced by games in general is not the vacant expanse of what is not yet known. Rather, the conventions instituted by the rules extend a structure for participants to map their actions and interpretations in relation to several potential occurrences, or what Goffman refers to as a “matrix of possible events.”<sup>78</sup> Indeed, the narrativity of a game in progress is multiple, directed toward the various outcomes of different moves, accounting for the shifting conditions of play. Ludic “plots” demand that participants not only exercise foresight, but construct predictive accounts within the larger structure of the game as they work toward a desired endpoint. As conjectures about futures that are not necessary but contingent, however, such tales of play-in-progress lack a concrete referentiality and retrospective dynamic that has been deemed essential to the narrative act: “to speak of the future,” as Robert Scholes, “is to prophesy or to predict or to speculate—never to narrate.”<sup>79</sup> In this schema, what is at stake in games is not narrative at all, but rather acts of divination centered on unknown outcomes. And yet, as a processual structure in which time and action can be variously configured, the game does provoke a sequenced projection of time that makes a close and even story-like engagement with the future possible. In this sense, what Parshall describes as a problem of narrative and artistic representation is predominantly a problem of futurity and uncertainty, and is already inherent in the experiential aspects of game-playing. Malaby’s account of games as “contrived contingency” nicely indicates the extent to which genre imagery in general and Lucas’s works in particular could appropriate a certain experience of reception from the domain of play.

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<sup>73</sup> “An outcome known in advance, with no possibility of error or surprise, clearly leading to an inescapable result, is incompatible with the nature of play,” Caillois, *Man, Play, and Games*, 7. Goffman notes that the most effective gaming encounters employ “equalizing strategies” in the rules that guarantee a “problematic outcome,” Goffman, “Fun in Games,” 67.

<sup>74</sup> Malaby, “Beyond Play: A New Approach to Games,” 96.

<sup>75</sup> Seligman et al., *Ritual and its Consequences: An Essay on the Limits of Sincerity*, 73-4.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>78</sup> Goffman, “Fun in Games,” 19.

<sup>79</sup> Robert Scholes, “Language, Narrative, and Anti-Narrative,” in *On Narrative*, ed. W.J.T. Mitchell (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1981), 206.

But although in this section I have been discussing games in more uniform terms, not all games are created equal with respect to contingency and uncertainty. The pictorial arts of the early sixteenth century did not yet strongly differentiate between genres of representation. Yet we have seen how forms of play were already explicitly categorized according to their characteristics and modes of operation, as games of pure skill, luck, or a hybrid of each. King Alfonso's *Libro de los Juegos* demonstrates the early provenance of the notion of ludic "genres," one that was reiterated by Cardano at various points in his own treatise.<sup>80</sup> If all of these categories are inflected by uncertainty, the extent and *form* of uncertainty and the attendant possibility for agency on the part of the participants are what separate them. In the late Middle Ages and Renaissance, chance and *fortuna* were at once a source of social preoccupation and the preferred form of play. Games of chance have the decided advantage of amplifying the potential for unpredictability and deemphasizing the skills of individual players as a causal factor in the outcome of the game. For Goffman, "chanciness" is coincident with what he calls "action"—the experience of unpredictable and consequential events that he sees as most effectively dramatized in gambling, in which the self is oriented "prospectively to fatefulness" and to the "exposure to uncertainty."<sup>81</sup> Games of pure chance ensure to an extreme form what Cardano refers to as "equal conditions" among players, such that, when play is fairly conducted, there is no way to predict the result at the outset based on the abilities of the participants.<sup>82</sup>

That Lucas was conscious of both the different genres *and* media of games is evident in his two earliest treatments of ludic themes, the Berlin *Chess Players* and the Louvre *Fortune-Teller*. Because these two works essentially insert two different kinds of play into a highly similar compositional configuration, they allow us to see more precisely the impact of different ludic forms on pictorial narrativity. Additionally, however, these two works demonstrate the extent to which the genre and material support of the game could impact its translation into pictorial representation.

In the Berlin panel, we are shown a chess game in progress and thus, in principle, prior to its known outcome. Yet what we are shown, while technically not the final move in the game, appears to be the moment at which its outcome becomes both visible and irrevocable. The commotion surrounding the chess board thus signals a building of tension as well as its resolution once the gravity of the woman's move is perceived by the onlookers. As if in reiteration of this fact, the victor's awkwardly-rendered male opponent removes his hat and leans back as if in acknowledgement of his own defeat. Yet it is only through knowledge of the game that the necessity of this result becomes absolutely clear to the viewer. Leaning into the board, the spectators within the image establish the board as a site of interpretation and ask viewers to do the same.

The knowledge of chess that the work anticipates is quite specialized, as the game shown in *The Chess Players* is not standard chess but a variant known in the later Middle Ages as

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<sup>80</sup> In Alfonso's manuscript, the threefold division of ludic *media* (chess, dice, and tables) corresponds to a division in *forms* of play (pure skill, pure chance, and a mix of both). Cards, had not been developed in Europe in the later thirteenth century and thus are not included in this schema. Cardano's manuscript, focused solely on games of chance, nevertheless distinguishes between games of pure fortune (dice) and those involving a varying degree of skill (cards and tables). While he notes a variety of characteristics on which games of chance, and even card games themselves, might be subcategorized, the principal term of division is, as we have seen, the element of visibility—that is, whether play is open or hidden.

<sup>81</sup> Erving Goffman, "Where the Action Is," in *Where the Action Is: Three Essays* (New York: Penguin, 1969), 125.

<sup>82</sup> Cardano, "The Book of Games of Chance (*Liber de Ludo Aleae*)," 189.

*Kurierspiel*, or “courier chess.”<sup>83</sup> This game was played, not on a standard but rather a twelve-by-eight chess board, complete with an expanded number of pieces and its own distinctive rules governing possible moves. Awareness of these particularities would allow spectators to perceive that the woman is moving a black rook in such a way as to guarantee that the opposing white king will be checked within a few turns, thereby defeating her opponent.<sup>84</sup> Disentangling this scenario through recourse to the rules of play allows expert viewers to perceive the man’s imminent downfall. Tilting the board toward the picture plane, the image additionally asks its savvy spectators to approach it in a manner that evokes the genre of the chess problem, which would have been known to skilled viewers of this painting. Typically illustrated by a two-dimensional board with pieces arranged as if in the midst of play [fig. 4.17], chess problems would be accompanied with instructions for readers to contemplate the most efficient actions necessary to achieve a particular outcome or configuration. Such exercises functioned as a kind of dematerialized play that could enhance skill and extend the pleasures of the game to those who lacked the (sometimes extensive) time to invest in an entire game.<sup>85</sup>

This tradition of “virtual” play effectively renders the act of narrative interpretation coincident with that of playing the game itself. It is thus not simply a “reading out” of the board that is at stake as an act of story-telling in itself, but the collapse between narration and the gaming encounter and, in particular, the way in which the chessboard allows for a predictive account of the future. What has happened thus far on the board may be of mild interest, but it is immaterial for the interpretation of the picture. Spectators are granted the pleasurable *experience* of a form of future prediction through a chessboard that enables them to project the scenario forward to its unalterable conclusion. Because chess does not incorporate chance (although variants played with dice are noted in the Middle Ages), the singular possibility of the game’s end is knowable. Viewers do not have to account for chance, and thus the succeeding actions on the board are not subject to the interventions of fortune. The legibility of the future and the absence of chance are upheld by the transparent visibility of the game board for internal and external spectators. This transparency is moreover echoed and enhanced by the clarity of the figures’ various responses. Cause and effect are not put in doubt, the work proffers an engagement based on future projection that can be converted into certainty. Hence the readability that Parshall ascribes to the board: it functions like a text insofar as its “end” can be considered retrospectively once perceived.

But in the artist’s depiction of cards, the future is articulated somewhat differently. In the so-called *Fortune-Teller* we are again positioned before an inordinately shallow and congested space, in which a table is foregrounded that also mediates the encounter between a man and a woman. Yet, in this case, their interaction and the moment portrayed takes on a different cast that throws the form of play into sharp relief.

Although the Louvre panel shifts the vehicle of play from chess to cards, the actual *use* to which the cards have been put in this image is somewhat ambiguous. The current title of *The*

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<sup>83</sup> Although art historians have not concerned themselves with Lucas’s panel, it has been of a certain interest to chess enthusiasts. The identification of the game in the Berlin panel as courier chess, along with certain characteristics of the game, are outlined in Rick Knowlton, “Courier Chess,” *The Chess Collector* 18, no. 1 (2009), 13-17. Courier chess, or *Kurierspiel*, seems to have been a more obscure variant of the game in the later Middle Ages. It is cited mainly in German sources of the period (Murray, *A History of Chess*, 483-5). My thanks to Ton van Kempen for discussing the panel with me and directing me to this material.

<sup>84</sup> Knowlton, “Courier Chess,” 16.

<sup>85</sup> The skill-building and time-efficient elements of chess problems in the Middle Ages are discussed by Murray, *A History of Chess*, 564-5.



*Fortune-Teller* indicates the dominant identification of the subject as one of divination by cards. This interpretation apparently attempts to explain the centrality of the woman and the absence of a clear counterpart in play by according her a kind of professional role as a prognosticator. Evidence for fortune-telling by cards at the time is rather scant, however.<sup>86</sup> The title seems to date from at least the nineteenth century (when the work was attributed to Jan van Eyck), and likely results from an anachronistic projection of more modern conceptions of cartomancy onto the past.<sup>87</sup> There is, moreover, a decided lack of coins or other goods in this image that would indicate a relationship of economic exchange. Instead of money, the pair trade in a flower whose identity is unclear but which intimates romantic involvement.<sup>88</sup> Thus we might ask: what is happening in this image? What kind of narrative intentions does it have in presenting us, as spectators, with cards in this way?

The cards themselves are set against the brightly-patterned fabric covering the table, but they are no longer held definitively in hand by the central figure. A four of diamonds is turned up before her, but two cards remain partly concealed and facedown under her hand. The placement of yet another upturned card (apparently another numerical card from the diamond suit), largely cut off by the lower edge of the frame, extends the action into the spectator's space and implies a scene, not of fortune-telling, but of a card game. In this game, we are situated directly across the table as the woman's opponent—a position perhaps just vacated by the richly-dressed young man at left, who, upon his victory or defeat, approaches his counterpart directly. This implied positioning of the viewer as both spectator and potential player imparts an interactive element to the image and brings the artist's fashioning of the gaming encounter to the fore.

But even as it models this experience, the panel seems to forgo the act of play itself in favor of the centralized romantic interaction, as if the game itself has already concluded. This deferral may in part be linked to the nature of the medium of cards themselves. Given the importance of withholding and the delimitation of point of view in this form of play, the simultaneous presentation of different hands within the frame would, at the very least, pose certain practical problems for the artist. Putting the cards "on the table," as it were, avoids this difficulty and allows for a mutual visibility of different hands. Yet this visibility and the fact that the game has likely concluded does not arrest the uncertainty for the viewer: although the cards are prominently displayed on the table as a potentially legible framework for the "reading" of narrative action, what is actually shown appears insufficient for solid conclusions regarding the nature of the game or its clear victor. More broadly, however, Lucas maintains an interest in the dynamics of concealing that define cardplay as a means of propelling narrative engagement in the work.

This narrative turns on the nature of the relationship between the pair. We might speculate, for instance, that, having concluded their game, the man approaches his counterpart,

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<sup>86</sup> As Smith notes, the principal sources suggesting a consistent divinatory use of cards at the time derive solely from lottery books like the *Kartenlosbuch* published by Kammerlander and discussed in chapter 3. Smith, *The Paintings of Lucas van Leyden: A New Appraisal, with Catalogue Raisonné*, 57.

<sup>87</sup> A printed illustration of a copy of the panel in Nantes was published under the title "The Archduke of Austria Consulting a Fortune-Teller," in the 1879 edition of William Chambers, *Chambers' Book of Days: A Miscellany of Popular Antiquities in Connection with the Calendar, Including Anecdote, Biography, & History, Curiosities of Literature and Oddities of Human Character*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1879), 282. The image appeared as part of a larger section on the "Folklore of Playing-Cards" (281-4), which addressed divination symbolism in detail. If the identification of the scene as one of fortune-telling was the accepted view in the nineteenth century, it has not been substantially questioned since.

<sup>88</sup> Both Parshall ("Lucas van Leyden and the Study of Narrative," 113) and Smith (58) suggest that the flower may be a carnation, signifying betrothal.

doffing his hat as if to imply that she has been victorious. At the same time, the woman appears to reciprocate by giving the man a flower from a miniature bouquet gathered in her bodice. Yet the moment of transfer represented complicates a transparent identification of giver and receiver, since the flower is mutually grasped.<sup>89</sup> The shared (if rather odd) heavy-lidded expressions would seem to affirm a common romantic admiration whose articulation has somehow been licensed by the context of gaming, such that the anticipated prize is not money but the fulfillment of romantic desire. Close scrutiny of the table, however, reveals a barely-visible card just to the right of the central female figure's oversized, fur-trimmed sleeves, thereby raising suspicion that the cut of her attire has aided in the construction of a deception during play. The apprehension of narrative, then, is one that raises questions about hidden intentions and their possible future effects on this interaction.

Additionally, the prominent presence of a jester in striking striped headgear just to the left of the central axis invokes the temptation to categorize this work as entirely moralizing in its own intentions. And, indeed, the very fact of his presence has been seen as irrefutable evidence of a commentary against cards and wanton desire.<sup>90</sup> This fool lacks the grotesqueness that defines him as a moralizing figure elsewhere in both Northern Renaissance visual culture and Lucas's own *oeuvre*.<sup>91</sup> Indeed, the absence of physiognomic exaggerations or an unpleasant facial expression accords his commentating function a certain opacity within the scene.

The ambiguities posed by the fool point decidedly to the larger difficulties of locating the scene itself. The crowd of figures censor access to the larger domain in which the action unfolds. Space in this image is essentially composed of two disjunctive figural strata: the couple is isolated in their own circuit of interaction, while the figures immediately behind them are similarly involved in their own activities. In preventing the perception of place, these figures effectively define this space and its character. But whereas, in *The Chess Players*, a similar delimitation of space was accomplished through figures of a relatively uniform social background, here the crowd is rather mixed—some bear evidence of wealth in their attire, while others seem to be more of a more middle-class background. Since chess was a game of skill with unquestioned value as a pastime, it did not require a clearly-defined space to cement this facet of its interpretation. Moreover, the tightly-woven group in the chess scene helped create visual interest in the drama of the game, while the narrative function of the figures in the Louvre panel is less clear.

The concealment of space in this work would have had a vital impact on guiding the assessment of the activity. Due to its somewhat hazy status as a game of chance and skill, the moral value assigned to cards was often highly dependent on the context in which it was played. In Leiden, legal restrictions on gaming were strategically articulated, not as a ban on gaming *per se*, but on the locations where cards, dice, or games “where one may win or lose money” could be legally pursued. This delimitation of legitimate gaming locales was, to be sure, rather broad: the Leiden *Keurboeken* from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries consistently proscribe gambling inside the city walls and its environs.<sup>92</sup> While the Leiden *Keurboeken* suggest the legal dimensions of these meanings,

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<sup>89</sup> Smith also notes the ambiguity inherent in this gesture, 57.

<sup>90</sup> Both Smith and Parshall suggest connections between this image and betrothal imagery (Smith, 57; and Parshall, “Lucas van Leyden and the Study of Narrative,” 113).

<sup>91</sup> This fool is a far cry from, for example, the distorted *narren* painted by Quentin Massys (see *The Ill-Matched Pair* in the National Gallery, Washington, D.C., for example), and the rather misshapen jester in Lucas's own *Tavern Scene* woodcut from c. 1517, which exists in a single impression at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris.

<sup>92</sup> The first legislation to mention playing cards in Leiden is dated 1397 and specifies that no citizen of Leiden, or anyone within the city or one-half mile of the city, shall play at games of chance under penalty of a fine or, more

Cardano's *Liber de Ludo Aleae* echoes the concern for context in broader and more practical terms. Noting that legal authorities often permit games of chance at funeral banquets as a form of solace, Cardano emphasizes that various "conditions of play" can make all the difference in determining both the decorum of the activity and one's chances for success. Avoiding improper locales is additionally of the utmost, yet also a difficult matter due to the possibilities for deception or disgrace: "the most respectable place is at home or at the house of a friend, where there can be no public scandal."<sup>93</sup> Additionally, one must play on "suitable occasions" and with opponents from a "suitable station in life"—playing with lower-class or suspect opponents is ill-advised if one desires to project an upright character.<sup>94</sup> The condemnation of gambling is in this sense not absolute. Rather, it is contingent upon the spaces and circumstances of the game itself, such that shifting the context of play—that is, reframing it—can potentially alter its connotation. But, as Cardano's judgments on these factors make clear that it is not only the communication of moral *meaning* that is important here, it is the ability to predict one's relative odds of victory from the circumstances of the game: quite simply, the probability of both scandal *and* loss is higher once one leaves an intimate sphere of friends and private spaces.

By offering only a partial and confused sense of the locale in which the image occurs, Lucas engages in his own act of withholding, veiling his own artistic intentions and thwarting an easy resolution of uncertainty. Thus, although the panel does not seem to portray the game in action, the narrative and visual strategies employed by the artist are closely bound to those that define cardplay as a social and time-based activity. This strongly distinguishes the Louvre work from the chess panel, where the clarity of the game's result aids in the construction of an endpoint to the narrative, a point at which future projection can be reasonably halted. The drama that is created around the chessboard has the upshot of confining spectatorial interest to the activity of the game board alone—that is, it provokes such interest that it arrests speculation on what occurs subsequent to play, such that the relationships of play are confined to the actual game. In the Louvre panel, however, the presumed conclusion of the game does not entail a cessation of its forms. Rather, it is as if the forms of social interaction themselves have come to be conceived of in terms of the perceptual and interpretive dictates of the card game, and this resemblance helps facilitate the framing of social interaction as visual representation. For the conclusion of play presents its own possibilities and uncertainties. In this sense, viewers themselves are forced into the role of fortune-teller in the interpretation of what is shown and what is withheld. After all, we are positioned across the table from the interaction. Even if the game has properly concluded, we still view the scene from the perspective of the gaming encounter—that is, as a player with cards before us on the table. And, if we ultimately conclude that this is a moralizing work, the fact remains that the forms of interpretation it requires of spectators are coincident with the card game itself and thus bound to the very pastime the panel condemns.

The theme of chess does not appear again in Lucas's *oeuvre*. Instead, both he and his later copyists focused exclusively on the theme of cards when portraying games. This upstaging of chess is evident in the wider visual culture, as the scenes of courtly romance at the chess table—a mainstay of, for example, late gothic ivories—were overtaken by dice and cards in

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dramatically, a two-week exile from the city (Hamaker, *De Middeleeuwsche Keurboeken van de Stad Leiden*, 62-3). The basic spatial conditions of this law would be reiterated in subsequent laws through at least the mid-sixteenth century, though the types of play were soon more efficiently worded as "any game where one may win or lose money" (noch geen spul, dair men gelt mede winnen of verliesen mach [Ibid., 235]).

<sup>93</sup> Cardano, "The Book of Games of Chance (*Liber de Ludo Aleae*)," 187.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

prints and painting. In Lucas's works, this shift suggests that cards, not chess, constituted the most compelling means of narrating social relations.<sup>95</sup> The particular blend of chance, visuality, and skill proved the most suggestive and rich subject of representation for early genre imagery.

If Lucas used the card game in part as a means to explore narratives of social relationships, the ends to which he did so were not fixed but themselves point to the possibilities inherent in cards as a flexible, multi-faceted medium of play. In *The Card Players* in the Thyssen-Bornemisza collection in Madrid [fig. 4.12], the artist reiterates certain aspects of the Louvre panel, once again constructing a half-length composition with a central female figure whose considerable sleeves grant her a kind of pyramid-like presence and emphasis. Her attentions are directed toward a male opponent at left, yet in this case the drama of desire is expanded to incorporate a third party. An older gentleman at right himself appears preoccupied with the central woman player, the presumed object of his aspirations. The card game thus becomes the means for contriving sexual competition, expressed here principally through the chain of looks moving from right to left. Just as the woman's gaze favors her younger opponent at left, so, too, does the composition conspire to tilt our own attentions to the same focal point. His colorful attire, with its striped and slashed accents provokes speculations on his personal fortunes in relation to his more modestly-dressed fellow players, speculations that are only increased by the significant holdings of coins on the table before him. The Thyssen panel introduces money into the narrative mix, juxtaposing the promise of both romantic and financial ends to the game. We are positioned once again along the table's edge in the immediate foreground, not as players but as spectators to the gaming encounter.

The compositional status of the woman in the panel underlies the ambiguity of her status as subject and object of desire in relation to her counterparts. Through her centrality, the woman appears as an agent in actively determining her future lover. But this centrality simultaneously undermines this agency insofar as it also places her between two men, a position that implies that she herself is the prize of play, an object of aleatory exchange between them. The panel presents the cards and the card game as narrative signs through which to elucidate the social and romantic relationships that it frames. Play is in process, yet the drawing of cards by all players indicates we are shown a decisive moment in the proceedings, and, once again, the act of laying cards on the table affords their simultaneous representation. Interpreters of the scene have relied on these pictorial emblems to divine a future in which the younger and, judging from the loot he has assembled thus far, clearly more successful player at left has won the game and, with it, the affections of the woman herself. The king of spades he reveals would seem to defeat the jack of the same suit that the woman has already turned on the table. She points to the card in a gesture of apparent triumph, only to have her success suddenly undermined by her opponent. Meanwhile, the senior, but less well-to-do player holds only a meager eight of spades, seemingly fearful that he will lose both the game and the opportunity to fulfill his romantic desire.

This scenario assumes a correspondence between the developments of the card game and the implied romantic sentiments of the players. Lucas's construction of the anecdote would highlight the instant at which the woman's expectations of victory are reversed, and would seem to encourage the viewer to take pleasure in the discovery of this reversal through the intervention of Fortuna. But to see the narrative in this way is to assume that the past success of the well-

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<sup>95</sup> This choice of subject matter should be seen in the context of larger shifts in the taste for games of chance and skill. Murray argues that, in the fifteenth century, cards had begun to overtake chess in popularity, a dominance that was irrevocable by the eighteenth century. For him, however, this shift is attributable to the fact that card games were "simpler" than chess (Murray, *A History of Chess*, 442).

dressed male in itself ensures his future success, and that the future is determined through its likeness to the past. Moreover, to take the cards at face value within the hierarchy of the deck neglects any inquiry into the nature of the game represented. And the nature of the game is difficult to determine from only three cards. In contrast to the Berlin chess panel, the particular game being pursued here is not discernable from the evidence provided. The fact that each player is in the act of revealing a card from the same suit strongly indicates that they are playing a game involving a trump suit, but beyond that it is not clear.

To take the cards at face value in determining narrative content is to ignore the fact that the value of individual cards could be subject to variation and inversion depending on the nature of the game or the collective preference of the players. Cardano, for instance, notes a version of the popular game *primero* in which the traditional values of the cards are entirely reversed in determining the points of each hand.<sup>96</sup> A late sixteenth-century broadsheet describing the rules for a volvelle-based game of chance employing card iconography, specified that it was up to players to arrive at a consensus for determining in advance both the hierarchy of values in the deck *and* whether the player with the highest or lowest number of points would be declared the winner.<sup>97</sup> In the sixteenth century, then, there was an inherent flexibility to the rules of established games and the worth of each card, and this flexibility was undoubtedly only enhanced by the utter rarity of formally-recorded rules.

But the values of cards could be reconfigured in more complex modes of inversion, as well. A popular trump-based game known from German sources as *Karnöffelspiel* seems to have been founded on such modes, such that lower values in the deck carried the ability to triumph over courtly cards in some, but not all, instances. The inversion of hierarchies, however, made it a noteworthy subject when the game first appeared in Germany and Switzerland in the late fifteenth century. The German bishop Johannes Geiler von Keyserberg would sermonize against a new card game. Once, he says, card playing was a fairly straightforward matter, with a predictable hierarchy of rank and value. But now “we have a game called *Karniffelius* in which everything is reversed,” and the low can defeat the high. “So that one plays a card, now one [card] is the king, then another becomes the king, as fortune has it.”<sup>98</sup> Bishop Geiler’s statement that “*everything* is reversed” is geared toward a dramatic articulation of “the world turned upside down” in his sermon.<sup>99</sup> Yet other sixteenth-century sources suggest that, most often in *Karnöffelspiel* it was not the lowest card that triumphed over the highest, but rather the *Unter* (or, in the French and Netherlandish decks, the jack) card which was deemed the most valuable of the trump suit and for that reason typically called the *Karnöffel* card.<sup>100</sup> The jack, of course, is

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<sup>96</sup> “Now there are two kinds of primero. In one the greater number wins, and this number is different according to the nature of the hands; in the other the smaller number wins,” though this kind is “little in use” (Cardano, “The Book of Games of Chance (*Liber de Ludo Aleae*),” 206).

<sup>97</sup> This broadsheet is preserved in the Germansisches Nationalmuseum Bibliothek in Nuremberg (“Ein Offen Kartenspiel,” GNM HB 2569 Kapsel 1258). Since the game itself is relatively simple, the text of the sheet spends more time noting all the conditions that have to be agreed on prior to play.

<sup>98</sup> Johannes Geiler von Keyserberg, *Das buoch Arbore humana. Von dem menschlichen baum* (Strassburg: Johann Grüninger, 1521), fol.139. The original reads: “Vor zeiten war es gar ein schlechtes’ ding zu spielen auf dem karten . . . Aber itzt hat man ein spiel, heisset Karniffelius, da seyn alle dinge verkehrte . . . und so schlägt man um, itzt so ist einerley kaiser, darnach so wird anderley kaiser, wie glück gibt.”

<sup>99</sup> Ernst Voss, “Karnöffelspiel, a German Card Game of the Sixteenth Century,” in *Transactions of the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts, and Letters*, ed. Chancey Juday (1930), 53.

<sup>100</sup> This is the version that Parlett discusses in his *History of Card Games*, noting a 1546 source that describes the game in these terms (166). Schreiber similarly notes an earlier publication of Geiler von Keyserberg’s sermons mentioning Karnöffelspiel that gives divergent accounts of the values of the deck, but which notes the new and

precisely the card played by the woman in the Thyssen panel. If the figures are playing an equivalent of this variant of the German *Karnöffelspiel*, then the woman need not wait for her opponents to reveal their holdings. She knows she cannot lose.

However one interprets the narrative, the Thyssen panel asks viewers to account for the possibility of fortune-as-reversal in assessing the game, exercising prudence in formulating their conjectures. No matter how one interprets the value of the cards, mapping these values onto the image involves some kind of reversal of expectation in configuring the outcome to the game. If we understand the game to be based on a strict overturning of the traditional values of the cards, then the old man has won despite compositional indications to the contrary. On the other hand, to see the image as an instance of *Karnöffelspiel*, then it is not the object but the agent of desire that unsettles expectations: it is the woman who is allowed to set the terms of her own attainment of her longing, even as the image does not explicitly resolve whether the *cause* of her affections for the young man is ultimately romantic or economic in nature.<sup>101</sup> Even assessing the value of the cards in traditional terms carries its own reversal: identifying the young man at left as the winner may adhere to the conventions of gender ideologies and hierarchies, but it would go *against* the conventions of the artistic representation of play, which, as we have seen in the examples discussed, construed the woman as the winner.<sup>102</sup> Although the identity of the game remains speculative, it is nonetheless central to the narrative of the scene and the possible configurations of agency and desire (for love and money) within this narrative.

The Madrid *Card Players* poses the question of the value of convention as a basis for speculative interpretation.<sup>103</sup> It construes the narrativity of games of chance in terms of the assessment of possibilities, the evaluation of visual signs (both of the cards and the painting as a whole) in the weighing of different outcomes, each of which involves some form of reversal, an accounting for things turning out otherwise than expected. Insofar as such reversals introduce the workings of Fortuna, whose wheel turns the high to the low and the low to the high, they constitute a confrontation with “contrived contingency” in the act of interpretation.<sup>104</sup> The image

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confusing nature of the game that derives from shifting values. At one point the preacher suggests that “thus simple and plain play at cards one has no more, since men devised the Karnöffelspiel, where the lesser beats the greater, and the lower the higher, and what normally was the king, one turns, so that the two beats the king, and the six the two, the obermann and the *karnöffel* beat all together” (*also einfaltig vnd schlecht kartet man nicht mer, man hat erdacht karnöffelsspiel, da stechen die mindern die meren vnd die unter die obern, vnd macht man einerley keyser, dei schlecht man vmb, als da die zwei stechen ein künig, vnd die sechss die zwei, den oberman, vnd das tarnöffel sticht es allssamen*). This text, then, suggests that the ober- and untermann cards have an unbeatable trumping capacity. The text in question is *Die brösamlin doct. Keiserspergs vffgelesen von Frater Johann Paulin* (Strassburg: Grüninger, 1517). As cited in Schreiber and Heltz, *Die ältesten spielkarten und die auf das kartenspiel bezug habenden urkunden des 14. und 15. jahrhunderts*, 93.

<sup>101</sup> The nature of female desire and its relationship to the sexual and economic domains would constitute a persistent problem in the development of the mercantile economy in Northern Europe. For subsequent artistic engagements with this issue, see Elizabeth A. Honig, “Desire and the Domestic Economy,” *Art Bulletin* 83, no. 2 (2001): 294-315.

<sup>102</sup> On the significance and popularity of the so-called power of women theme (which appears elsewhere in Lucas’s printed *oeuvre*), see, for example, Natalie Zemon Davis, “Women on Top,” in *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Palo Alto, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1975), 124-151.

<sup>103</sup> Lucas himself also accomplishes this by engaging in his own reversal: the social and age difference into the garden of love, the traditional bastion of an idealized and uniformly aristocratic milieu. The outdoor, garden-like setting clearly evokes the courtly iconography of the tapestry examined earlier, but here the class of the occupants is other than what this tradition would dictate.

<sup>104</sup> The placement of such drastically different male figures at opposite poles of the circular table may well have been perceived as a reference to the Wheel of Fortune for its original viewers and, with it, the possibility that the present could be dramatically undermined by the uncertainty of the future.

asks viewers not only to assign a plausible value to the cards, but to consider the limits of what they consider possible in social and artistic terms.

Perhaps the most radical instance of Lucas's engagement with the theme of cardplay, however, is a panel in the Earl Pembroke's collection, Wilton House [fig. 4.13]. Dating from around 1520-5, *The Wilton House Card Players* depicts, once again, a social gathering of men and women involved in a card game. It shares with its predecessors the effort to model the gaming encounter for the spectator, yet its presentation of the theme is both visually and temporally more intricate than its counterparts within Lucas's *oeuvre*.<sup>105</sup>

The game that this *Card Players* puts on view is a rather crowded affair. The number of players has been expanded to six—three men and three women—along with three onlookers. Rather than the horizontal arrangement of half-lengths that defines the Louvre and Madrid panels, the artist has in this case constructed a more complex layering of figures, grouping them around a circular green table where play is taking place. The frame of the panel is constituted through that of the game itself, as the scene extends just far enough to incorporate the players who define its outer edges. The participants, in turn, form an internal frame for the game table, where the presence of cards and coins alludes to the action that has preceded our gaze. The composition is crowded and compressed, both laterally and into depth. The shallow space of the room is further curtailed by players and onlookers, thereby ensuring that our focus is drawn to the action of the card game as it unfolds.

But this orchestration of the viewer's gaze is also an effect of the propensity of the card game to serve as a unique spectator sport, one that is not based on a shared field of vision but rather a contingent and fragmented view. In *The Card Players*, Lucas capitalizes especially dramatically on the spectatorial practices associated with card games in order to enhance the impression of the gaming encounter: the compact group of figures parts at the lower edge of the frame, creating a space at the table that anticipates our presence as kibitzers. To stand before the painting, it is implied, is to stand before the game table itself. The presence of the viewer outside the frame is mirrored by those viewers pictured as standing opposite the table, who both affirm and provide varied models of the visual engagement with the game. But we are most forcefully interpolated by the image by the woman at the far right, who looks out from the space of the panel to meet our gaze, thereby disallowing the viewing position of a removed witness. As if to further assert that the boundary between spectator and player could be remarkably fine, we are granted privileged, over-the-shoulder access to the cards held by the foremost player at right, apparently unbeknownst to him. Insofar as he holds the only visible hand, we are able to identify with him as a participant.

Although the presence of equal numbers of men and women at the gaming table does invoke the theme of the relationships between the sexes, Lucas nevertheless has refrained from strongly coding the image in moral and social terms. The interior in which the game takes place reveals little to the viewer save for the fact of its own unadornment. Devoid of color and significant features, this space is clearly no sumptuous locale for courtly interludes. And yet it is no urban den of iniquity, either: a window in the upper left situates us in a verdant yet generic rural landscape, the lone evidence of location. This bucolic backdrop might be taken literally, as in keeping with Leiden's anti-gaming laws stipulating that all gambling should be pursued well

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<sup>105</sup> Though its early provenance is unknown, a panel from the later sixteenth century in the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. seems to be heavily based on this particular work, suggesting that the image did have a certain impact and circulation shortly after its production.

outside the city. Or, the landscape might also constitute a gesture toward the courtly gardens of the fifteenth century, here rendered diminutive and distant.

Yet the inclusion of this reference establishes expectations about the economic status of the players that are strikingly undercut. The unembellished interior serves as a neutral backdrop through which to highlight the more lively tones and details of the players' clothing. The figures seem to be of middle- to upper middle-class, an economic categorization that thwarts both the conventions of courtly representation, though evidence of amorous exchange are present. Nor do the participants conform to the moralizing discourse that tended to associate gambling with the tendency toward drunkenness and lowly behavior. Lucas withholds the social cues that would aid in the viewer's interpretation, a strategy that underscores the importance of the game itself in guiding analysis.

Yet disentangling the specific nature of this activity is a muddled process. Our focus is pulled toward the table and its contents by a centrifugal convergence of gestures and the diagonals created by the striking red hats of the men flanking the central axis. At the same time, however, the varied demeanors of the figures around the table compete for attention. The centermost male figure, accorded a compositional prominence that is upheld by his ample sleeves, appears to move aggressively forward toward the stakes while meeting the gaze of the woman seated opposite him. At left, the man sporting a fur-trimmed hat points at the stakes as if to place a bet or dispute a counterpart's move. The woman who looks out from the panel perhaps entreats us to signal the content of her opponent's hand, which she knows we can see, tempting us to dishonest participation as spectators of the game. Meanwhile, the couple in the upper left is absorbed in the hand that has been dealt. Oblivious to any goings-on, they present a model for close collaborative viewing as they assess the possibilities presented by their holdings. The cohesive motion toward the table is thus framed by a fragmented assortment of looks and deeds.

But even as the image provides details in these actions, the composition is also contrived to stress the limits of our knowledge and vision—part and parcel of its modeling of the experience of the card game. Indeed, the cards that we *can* see only seem to underscore those that we *cannot* perceive, and which appear as swatches of white paint whose sheer vacantness insists on our lack of knowledge and certainty. The obstructive effects of the cards are amplified in the players themselves, as the crowding and overlapping of figures prevents unimpeded access to the scene. Additionally, it is difficult to determine whether the signs within the picture are simply accidental, or intentionally motivated by conspiratorial concerns. For instance, we might ask whether the man opposite the table on the right places his hand in his jacket innocently or as a signal to a conniving partner—a hint of a possible deception that ultimately cannot be verified with the information the painting provides. Our fractured perspective, combined with the compounding of gazes within the panel, suggests the partial and contingent nature of each figures' own viewpoint within the card game. There is no single standpoint from which the action can be apprehended in its entirety, and our own circumscribed perspective demonstrates the extent to which each viewer within the image potentially projects a different scenario based on the incomplete evidence of what they see. This lack of comprehensive knowledge creates the desire to move around the table, to encircle the space of play in time and thereby access what is hidden, yet of course the painting anchors us to a particular point of view.

If we must formulate our interpretation based on partial knowledge, however, the revelation of the player's cards in the foreground helps to structure our orientation within the events portrayed. This detail opens the possibility of reflection on the particular conditions of play, such that viewers can attempt to identify the game and contemplate subsequent activity. As



Parshall suggests, the cards' inclusion within the composition "invites the viewer to speculation about the outcome" of play.<sup>106</sup> Nevertheless, Parshall, like Smith, sees the game panels in general as narrative works with a moralizing bent, not unlike the literature of exempla during the period. And yet, in the case of the Wilton House panel, the coagulation of multiple interactions and relationships renders the assignation of a singular "message" or aim of the work especially problematic. The disclosure of a single player's hand promotes a form of narrative interest that makes the work *about* something other than a uniform conveyance of moral content. Indeed, the cards themselves ask viewers to employ their own knowledge of the specific rules and possibilities of play in relation to an image that supposedly condemns card games and the conditions of play portrayed. It may well be that there is a moralizing component to this and other works by the artist which portray ludic themes. Yet the knowledge and interpretive activity that the panel asks of spectators with respect to the game would seem to sharply diverge from and even contradict its didactic or moralizing ends.

Indeed, in order to even begin to speculate about the future outcome of the game, one has to be sufficiently informed about different games and their rules. It is through recourse to the rules of various games that possible frameworks can be projected for the tentative mapping of subsequent action. In the Wilton panel, the element of futurity inherent in this process is accentuated by the moment of play that is depicted. In this case, he presents us with what appears to be the moment when players place their bets: the woman in the lower left seems to deal the cards, while some of the other players push their money to the center "pot" on the table or consider their current holdings. Each participant in the panel is shown holding two cards; the dealer seems to pause as she looks toward the older man opposite her who moves toward the centralized stakes. The artist here may well have portrayed a variant on one of the most popular card games of the period, *primero*. Much beloved by Cardano, *primero* has been deemed a distant ancestor of modern poker and is heavily dependent upon chance in the drawing and exchange of cards. Cardano's discussion of the game in his *Liber de Ludo Aleae* gives a general outline of the rules, one that suggests certain structural similarities with the scene portrayed in the Wilton painting. In *primero*, players are initially dealt two cards prior to placing wagers. Once bets are placed based on both present as well as the expectation of future holdings, two more cards are dealt to complete a hand of four. Play then can continue to the left, with players exchanging cards or placing further wagers until someone forces a showdown in which all hands are revealed and the stakes are given to the winner.

Lucas thus devises a moment of anticipation and calls viewers of the panel as witnesses. Selecting a moment preceding the intervention of fortune in the dealing of cards, he takes the experience of uncertainty and its attendant assessment of possibilities as central to the process of viewing and narration. To be sure, we need not identify the game in question as *primero* in order to designate the specific nature of the instant that the artist has selected. Other games additionally might have fit the criteria for what is shown. Yet in order to formulate a conjecture on the outcome of the game, the viewer must be able to identify this game, to impose a structure of potential action onto what is seen. Lucas has chosen the moment of risk, when the outcome of action remains most in doubt and subject to the whims of fortune.

In addition to dramatizing the uncertainty inherent in the game of chance, this moment also allows the viewer to engage in a narrative act that resembles that of play itself. If the revealing of a single hand of cards promotes the predictive involvement of spectators before the panel, these spectators wager interpretation, not money in the effort to project a possible scenario

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<sup>106</sup> Parshall, "Lucas van Leyden and the Study of Narrative," 112.

for what is shown. For what is a wager but the formulation of a probable (or, in desperate situations, simply hoped-for) scenario, a staking one's goods on the validity of an envisioned outcome, and the events necessary to connect the present to this desired future end? As Algirdas Julien Greimas has noted, "every game has a stake: each player busies himself with the elaboration of a global discursive program for victory."<sup>107</sup> While every game may have certain stakes, in games of chance the "discursive program" must account not only for the contingent actions of other participants, but the agency of fortune and bring it into a narratable framework. In the Wilton House *Card Players*, then, the narrative activity of viewers is coincident with the activity that is shown within the image itself. It is also integral to sustaining the fiction that the work proposes—that is, the fiction that spectators are standing before a game and not a painting, or that the game and the painting are one and the same.

### The Interrupted Game

I have been examining Lucas van Leyden's card panels for the ways in which they attempt to simulate the experience of the gaming encounter in their visual and narrative facets. Yet, even as these images institute striking correlations between play and painting, there are patent limits to this identification. As a picture, paintings like the Wilton House *Card Players* are restricted with respect to time and duration, even as they may effectively allude to unfolding time. Games depart significantly from pictorial representation in that they are time-based activities that proceed from beginning to end in a discreet temporal interval, sometimes with considerable velocity. In his *Liber de Ludo Aleae*, Cardano notes that play can unfold quite quickly toward a conclusion, and that "those games that depend on the arbitrariness of fortune, either entirely or together with skill" can be "played rapidly and time is not given for careful thought."<sup>108</sup> It is this element of tempo that, for Cardano, distinguishes gambling from practices that are heavily based on abstract theoretical knowledge, such as jurisprudence, medicine, and mathematics. In all of these fields, there is time for exacting reflection.<sup>109</sup> Successful gamblers therefore must not only possess perceptual acumen, they must also have substantial hands-on familiarity with the actual activity of play in order to cultivate a certain "quickness." It is not sufficient for to simply be learned about play at a conceptual level.<sup>110</sup>

In its stasis, the medium of painting cannot replicate this quickness or duration of games of chance even if it can hint at aspects of this temporality. Although card games and early secular painting could both entail a skilled and prospective mode of visual engagement, the card game ultimately offered a different mode of looking than that which characterized the pictorial arts, which offer a potentially interminable duration of seeing and contemplation. In the Wilton House panel, the fixing of time is only emphasized by the moment of risk portrayed: the animation that surrounds the placing of wagers whose outcome is not yet known calls attention to the forever-deferred future of the game's conclusion.

The disruption of time in visual representation accentuates its heightened relationship to futurity, since the *end* of narration can potentially be held in permanent abeyance through the fixing of a particular moment in the present experience of the spectator. The permanent stasis of the image is, of course, its principal difference from textual story-telling and helps further clarify

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<sup>107</sup> Algirdas Julien Greimas, "About Games," *SubStance* 8, no. 1 (1979), 33.

<sup>108</sup> Cardano, "The Book of Games of Chance (*Liber de Ludo Aleae*)," 226.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

the significance of genre imagery as a novel form of temporal experience. Reading an unfamiliar text, to be sure, offers its own experience of uncertainty in the process of moving through the pages to the story's end. But, as Peter Brooks has argued, the act of reading is here defined by a strange temporality that he calls the "anticipation of retrospection." Narrative representations ask us to encounter a past event that has already occurred prior to its representation *as present*, within our own moment of reading. And yet, "if the past is to be read as present, it is a curious present that we know to be past in relation to a future we know already to be in place, already in wait for us to reach it."<sup>111</sup> The written text constitutes a physical object that, quite simply, holds in its ensuing pages the promise that the future will be made present, and available to retrospection. Images, particularly those which portray scenes without an extant textual source, cannot offer this possibility of retrospection and are defined instead more by that of anticipation. Both past and present are not certain but subject to conjecture. Yet it is future time that is especially problematic. This is demonstrated, I believe, in some of the card images examined here, where the presence of coins and scoring diagrams submit the past to a legibility that future time decidedly lacks. For Brooks, reading a text is motivated by a desire for the end, its apprehension and possession.<sup>112</sup> In this schema, narrative images are predicated on the bald refusal to fulfill such desires. As images without ends, genre imagery both underscored and intensified the status of narrative pictures as divinatory devices, whose interpretation was necessarily based on projection from visual signs.

Lucas's panels still the action of play at different moments, yet in each case they facilitate the viewer's careful predictive involvement in ensuring that the future never becomes present. The arresting of action renders contingency more readily available for reasoned consideration, dislodging play as an *image* from the domain of practice to that of conceptual knowledge. In early modern mathematics, the motif of the arrested game served a similar function in the so-called problem of points. The problem of points, in a very basic sense, can be seen as an occasion for the mathematical representation of an uncertain future. It proposed a hypothetical situation in which a game, played by two persons for monetary stakes determined in advance, has to be abandoned after only a few rounds due to external reasons, with one player needing two more points to win and the other only one. The question that interested mathematicians pertained to the fate of the participants' wagers—that is, how should one fairly divide the stakes among players? On what rational basis can the most probable winner be determined and how can mathematical formulae help determine a fair partition of the money ventured? In offering answers to this problem, mathematicians had to at once weigh the possibilities of different outcomes and come up with a numerical justification for who was considered the most likely victor should the game be pursued to its proper end. Proposed solutions to this problem were central to early calculations in mathematical probability. Indeed, they formed a subject of the famed correspondence between Blaise Pascal and Pierre Fermat in the mid-seventeenth century, where the first "correct" solution to the problem was offered. Their calculations with regard to an

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<sup>111</sup> Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), 23.

<sup>112</sup> "If the motor of narrative is desire, totalizing, building ever-larger units of meaning, the ultimate determinants of meaning lie *at the end*, and narrative desire is ultimately, inexorably, desire *for the end*" (Ibid., 52). Brooks ultimately conceives of this desire in terms of erotics and meaning. While he asserts that the end can never really fulfill the desire that narrative puts in motion, in textual representation it is at least possible to physically reach this end.

interrupted game of dice established the vital groundwork for the modern notion of probability and its rapid diffusion.<sup>113</sup>

Although Pascal and Fermat are credited with the first accurate solution, the problem of points dates to at least the early fifteenth century.<sup>114</sup> Its formulation is thus historically coincident with the rise of playing cards as well as the diversification of aleatory visual culture more broadly. During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, such calculations were confined largely to Italy and not yet prominent aspects of *published* mathematical discourse. Moreover, they could involve a highly specialized set of skills. Thus the relationship between this problem and artistic representation may seem tenuous, and I am not suggesting any causal influence between Lucas's panels and the problem of points. Yet I do want to call attention to the fundamental similarities between these two projects as representational enterprises. For, in essence, both artist and mathematician were involved in *modeling* a fictional game that would forever remain incomplete and uncertain. This arresting of action affords perspective on the future and enables probable—but not certain—predictive constructions of outcome and the possibilities presented by fortune. In mathematics, the motif of the interrupted game was formulated as a conceit to submit the future to calculation, while in the province of the pictorial arts the arresting of action constitutes a necessary condition of the medium itself as a spatial rather than temporal art. Particularly with the rise of images which did not possess a prior narrative source, pictures would come to capitalize on this status as a crucial facet of the experience they offered to viewers. In its subsequent elaboration in the seventeenth century, mathematical probability both posited and codified what genre imagery had already promoted in a broader sense: the epistemological value of impeding action with respect to an uncertain future.

While early modern mathematics and genre imagery could converge in their fashioning of eternally-arrested fictions lacking certain outcomes, their contiguity in this respect raises the question of the *medium* of representation through which the future might be interpreted. I have argued that playing cards, as a pictorial medium for chance, structured time and social relationships in terms of the visual configuration of future uncertainty. It was this configuration that helped facilitate the conditions for the game's reframing as a subject of narrative painting. In these images, themes of love and money stressed the ways in which card games gave shape to social relationships and the role (as well as the necessity) of divination in narrating these relationships in their dependence on future contingency. However, genre imagery was not the only novel category with a significant lineage in games of chance. The visual culture of games of chance significantly enhanced the framing of contingency in games and may have made it more available to translation and framing in other contexts. The problem of points was bound not simply to a conceptual dilemma, but instigated by the need to elaborate schemas for forms of social interaction in which chance and future uncertainty were of central concern. Mathematics

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<sup>113</sup> For aspects of the problem of points in historical studies of probability, see Hacking, *The Emergence of Probability: A Philosophical Study of Early Ideas about Probability, Induction, and Statistical Inference*, chaps. 5 and 6; Daston, *Classical Probability in the Enlightenment*, chaps. 1 and 3; James Franklin, *The Science of Conjecture: Evidence and Probability before Pascal* (Baltimore, Md.: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), chap. 11; and David, *Games, Gods, and Gambling: The Origins and History of Probability from the Earliest Times to the Newtonian Era*, chap. 9.

<sup>114</sup> Franklin locates an early instance of the problem in an Italian manuscript dating from around 1400 that treats the problem in relation to a game of chess (Franklin, *The Science of Conjecture*, 291-6). For an analysis of proposed solutions to the problem during the Renaissance that accounts for their philosophical and mathematical intricacies, see Ernest Coumet, "Le problème des Partis avant Pascal," *Archives Internationales d'Histoire des Sciences* 72-3(1965): 245-72.

was closely aligned with economics in this respect. I want to explore this alignment further in order to speculate on the broader context of Northern genre imagery, and the economic conditions in which it emerged as a class of visual representation.

## Framing Chance and Futurity

As a question concerned with the division of stakes, the problem of points conceived of games, not just as interpretive objects, but as economic activities based on the exchange of property. The need to find schemas of interpretation for economic situations was a crucial motivating factor in the continued engagement with the problem of points in the early modern period.<sup>115</sup> The first *published* solution to the problem of points was put forth in 1494, in Fra Luca Pacioli's *Summa de arithemtica, geometrica, proportioni et proportionalita*, the first mathematical textbook published in the vernacular in Italy, one that was geared toward mercantile interests.<sup>116</sup> Luca presents the problem as one that has been variously debated by colleagues: "For this problem I have found different opinions, going in one direction and the other."<sup>117</sup> Whatever intrinsic interest the problem of points may have held for Fra Luca, its significance within his text derives from the game's resemblance to other forms of social interaction, namely economic ones. The problem of dividing the stakes in a game interrupted by "certain accidents," he proposes, is akin to the ways in which profits should be split among those who have established a trading company together, such that the methods for the former can inform the latter.<sup>118</sup> The analogy points to the transferability of the problem of futurity between ludic to economic domains, and the utility of games in conceptualizing economic relationships. Luca's solutions to the problem of points, as historians of probability have pointed out, does not treat the future as such. His (incorrect) calculations are based only on what had happened *prior* to the interruption of the game, not what needs to happen *subsequent* to this cessation for one player to win over another.<sup>119</sup> Consequently, he treats the future division of stakes as simply an image of past action. In part, his inability to conceptualize the future as contingent and thus distinct from the past is due to the media of play he uses as his hypothetical examples: he does not use games of chance as his models in the text but rather games of skill (ballgames, horse races and the like), such that the success of one player could feasibly be predictably duplicated

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<sup>115</sup> The relationship between economics and the problem of points is addressed in the excellent study by Ernest Coumet, "La théorie du hasard: est-elle née par hasard?," *Annales: Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations* 25, no. 3 (1970): 574-98; Daston, *Classical Probability in the Enlightenment*, esp. chap. 1 and 3; and Ivo Schneider, "The Market Place and Games of Chance in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries," in *Mathematics from Manuscript to Print, 1300-1600*, ed. Cynthia Hay (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 220-35.

<sup>116</sup> Luca Pacioli, *Summa de arithemtica geometria proportioni et proportionalita* (Venice: Paganino de' Paganini, 1494). My understanding of Pacioli's text and the problem of points more broadly has been aided by the commentary and translations by Richard Pulskamp, "Sources in the History of Probability and Stastics," <http://www.cs.xu.edu/math/Sources/>.

<sup>117</sup> Luca Pacioli, "Summa de Arithmetica Geometria Proportioni et Proportionalita, f. 197r and 198v," <http://www.cs.xu.edu/math/Sources/Pacioli/summa.pdf>, 1.

<sup>118</sup> "Now it will give this same thing immediately according to the way of the trading company, as we say in that of a ballgame. What you make there in two steps, here you make in one. There is however to say: 3 establish a trading company; the one puts 4 shares, the second 3, and the third, 2, and they have to divide 10. What is due to each? Work! You find it, as has been said before, etc." *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>119</sup> The blindness of Pacioli to the futurity inherent in this problem is noted by Pulskamp in his commentary on the document (Pacioli, "Summa de Arithmetica Geometria Proportioni et Proportionalita, f. 197r and 198v", 4-5); and Franklin, *The Science of Conjecture*, 296-7.

over the course of the game. Even so, his account appears to be utterly blind to the contingencies inherent in play, save for those “accidents” that disrupted the games in the first place.

Cardano also took up the problem of points approximately forty years later in his own mathematical treatise. His work is undoubtedly informed by his own practice as a gambler. Certain games seem to have incorporated rules that dictated a premature conclusion to play under particular conditions, and mathematical savvy for the division of stakes would have been useful in these instances. In *Liber de Ludo Aleae*, for instance, Cardano notes a valid (if ill-esteemed) move in *primero* which a player, suspecting his own imminent defeat, can declare a *fare e salvare* that concludes the game early and forces the division of the “pot” between players. In this text, he offered thoughts on how the stakes should be divided as a practical matter of fair play in games of chance.<sup>120</sup>

In his earlier treatise *Practica Arithmetica* (1539), Cardano presents a more generalized treatment of the problem. While he does not define the nature of the game in question, he does insist that the projection of how play should proceed should be addressed as if the two players are entirely equal in their luck and skill.<sup>121</sup> In this way, he implicitly frames the problem as a matter of chance and contingency, since in a fair game of pure chance such as the casting of dice, all odds are equal.<sup>122</sup> Although Cardano still did not get the problem of points “right,” he came much closer than Pacioli. His greater success derived from an acknowledgement that it was a question of how to adequately represent future time apart from past events.<sup>123</sup> It is a problem, to use Cardano’s language, not of what is certain, but “of what we may rightly count on.”<sup>124</sup> Just as Lucas’s experimentation with different media of play impacted his modes of narrative representation, the form of play adopted by mathematics and economics would impact its representation of the future. It is through recourse to the conditions of equality defining the purest games of chance that the future is produced as an intellectual object in mathematics. It is, moreover, not just an epistemological object, it is an object to which quantifiable value might be ascribed.

Cardano approached the problem of points as a gambling problem, and not as a metaphor for other social practices. To him, gambling *was* the social practice at stake. Pacioli understood the problem as one analogous to partnership or *societas* contracts more broadly—the game is *like* a contract, a formal social relationship and agreement between participants regarding the sharing of an investment at the conclusion of a defined period.<sup>125</sup> Luca chooses an established type of

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<sup>120</sup> Cardano, “The Book of Games of Chance (*Liber de Ludo Aleae*),” 208-9.

<sup>121</sup> Girolamo Cardano, “Practica arithmetice et mensurandi singularis: Chapter LXI, De Extraordinariis & Ludis, §§13–17 (f. 143 r. - f. 144 r.); Last Chapter On the Error of Fra Luca, §5 (f. 289 v. – f. 290 r.),” (1539), [http://www.cs.xu.edu/math/Sources/Cardano/cardan\\_practica.pdf](http://www.cs.xu.edu/math/Sources/Cardano/cardan_practica.pdf). On page 4 of Pulskamp’s web publication, Cardano notes that we should assume that the two players continue to play “with equal luck and skill of the game.”

<sup>122</sup> As Franklin has noted with respect to a manuscript of c. 1400 that correctly treats the problem of points in relation to chess, which also was devoid of any consideration of skill: “The author does not mention anything like chance or probability. All he uses is the implicit assumption that it is as easy for one player to win a point as it is for another. This means that he effectively treats the problem as if it were a game of chance, whereas chess is a game of skill . . . The difference is that in a game of chance each player is in an equal position in every game, whereas in a game of skill previous wins to one player indicate that he is more skillful and, hence, more likely to win” (296).

<sup>123</sup> “Cardano has grasped the central point: that what matters is the events that need to happen for the various players to win, not what has happened so far” (Franklin, *The Science of Conjecture*, 298).

<sup>124</sup> Cardano, “The Book of Games of Chance (*Liber de Ludo Aleae*),” 224.

<sup>125</sup> Coumet, Daston, and Schneider (see op. cit. 115) have each taken up this analogy as key evidence for the importance of economic and contractual history to early attempts to solve the problem of points, and my remarks here are indebted to their insights.

contract, a partnership or *societas*, which was in the later medieval period considered licit: multiple parties pool resources in order to pursue a business opportunity. He imposes this form—essentially a problem of proportion—on the mathematical problem at hand.<sup>126</sup> The absence of a loan in this type of contract exculpates it from the sin of usury, since there is no charging of interest involved and thus no sale of time, which by rights belongs only to God.<sup>127</sup>

But, as Ivo Schneider has pointed out, solutions to the problem of points began to circulate in the midst of considerable transformation in the European economy.<sup>128</sup> Luca was writing in a context in which novel kinds of speculative exchange configured the relationship to the future in unique terms. New types of contracts were beginning to play a major role in economic life, contracts which occupied an ambiguous relationship to established forms of exchange and the church's proscription on usury. With the development of speculative capitalism and international trade, the importance of future uncertainty—the potential intervention of *Fortuna*—came to the fore in defining economic and social relationships. Insurance contracts were among of the most important of these: a merchant pays an investor in the present to protect himself from the possibility of loss in the future (of goods on a sea voyage, for example). The commercial, social relationship of the contract is thus instigated by and formed around the ambiguity of the future. Because, as some theologians argued, the insurer essentially stood to profit without legitimate cause, in effect gaining from humans' inability to know the future, it was perilously close to the illicit exchange of usury and the vain practice of divination on the unknown.<sup>129</sup> These contracts provoked interrelated debates on both their legitimacy as non-usurious, and on the nature of their classification, since they did not fit easily within the categories of Roman contract law.<sup>130</sup> If one could establish a distinct category for such contracts, they could be effectively separated from usurious agreements and thus rightfully pursued.<sup>131</sup> Recourse to the analogy of games of chance would prove useful to commentators in this respect. As Giovanni Ceccarelli has argued, the notion that games of chance constituted a kind of contract played a part in the conceptualization of a discourse on these contracts and a larger category of *aleatory contracts* (which also included lotteries and other wagers), which “are dependent on the outcome of an uncertain event.”<sup>132</sup> In taking the game as an analogy, the discourse on contracts, like genre imagery itself, made use of the ways in which games could frame chance and futurity in the development of new categories of representation.

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<sup>126</sup> Coumet, "Le problème des Partis avant Pascal," 250.

<sup>127</sup> Jacques Le Goff, *Time, Work, and Culture in the Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 29.

<sup>128</sup> Schneider, "The Market Place and Games of Chance in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries," 220-1. Schneider is also interested in the role of usury in the economic and contractual elements of the problem of points, though his discussion touches more on the so-called triple contract rather than the broader issues of insurance and risk that I will consider here.

<sup>129</sup> On this view, see Giovanni Ceccarelli, "Risky Business: Theological and Canonical Thought on Insurance from the Thirteenth to the Seventeenth Century," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31, no. 3 (2001), 623-24.

<sup>130</sup> For the connections between these debates, see J. P. van Niekerk, *The development of the principles of insurance law in the Netherlands from 1500 to 1800*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Johannesburg: Juta, 1998), 95. As van Niekerk also notes, contracts that shared important features with insurance contracts existed in classical culture and in Roman law, but there was no formal category for it in the medieval period.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 9-10.

<sup>132</sup> Giovanni Ceccarelli, "Le Jeu Comme Contrat et le *Risicum* chez Olivi," in *Pierre Jean de Olivi (1248-1298): Pensée Scholastique, Dissidence Spirituelle et Société*, ed. Alain Boureau and Sylvain Piron (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1999), 239-250. Olivi represents the initial articulation of this notion, which would be more forcefully taken up again in the sixteenth century by later Scholastic commentators such as Domingo de Soto. For the latter, see Ceccarelli, "Risky Business: Theological and Canonical Thought on Insurance from the Thirteenth to the Seventeenth Century," 610-612.

But the theological and juridical reflection on the particular properties of these contracts with respect to futurity also produced a much more formalized account of the notion of risk (*periculum*) involved in all kinds of wagers. To summarize a very complex and long-standing discussion, it was the identification of risk as an *object* that could be bought and sold: indeed, if new contracts like insurance were to be deemed non-usurious, they had to have an object or form of property that would distinguish them from usurious transactions, which illicitly profit without labor or goods.<sup>133</sup> As early as the fourteenth century, for example, the jurist Baldus argued that life annuity contracts are not usurious because “the buyer subjects himself to the peril of fortune, whence the price of the peril.”<sup>134</sup> This sentiment would be echoed by commentators attempting to justify and characterize contracts based on future uncertainty through the sixteenth and into the seventeenth centuries: risk is a thing, a tradable commodity, one that separates mode of exchange from the religious proscription on usury and helps separate economics from religious concerns.<sup>135</sup> And it was the increasing formalization of the theory and practice of the aleatory contract that facilitated the development of mathematical probability.<sup>136</sup> Mathematics needed categories of representation that conceptualized the aleatory future as a quantifiable aspect of socio-economic practice.

Thus games of chance were involved in the theorization of new forms of representation based on future uncertainty. The problem of points and aleatory contracts are of course different, numerical and monetary media for futurity. In their most formalized articulations, they additionally post-date the visual culture of chance that I have been analyzing. While they are not conventional narrative representations per se, they do constitute efforts to frame an ambiguous future from the perspective of the present. And they both suggest the ways in which this framing renders it available to quantification and commoditization.

These developments are of a more widely-ranging geographical context than the paintings of Lucas van Leyden, and may seem far afield from the problem of genre painting and playing cards. Such issues do, however, resonate with the problem of the contingent future as a site for knowledge, representation, and perhaps ultimately exchange in the larger context of the development of genre painting as a major category of artistic representation during the sixteenth century. While the mathematical and contractual modes of addressing the unknown future do not directly clarify the *mode* of pictorial narration that I have been examining in Lucas van Leyden’s genre paintings, they can illuminate some of the ways in which genre painting could come to function within the changing economy of Renaissance Europe. For the discourse on risk in the insurance contract, itself linked to the contractual nature of wagering in games of chance, rendered future uncertainty an object with financial value. The notion of risk propounded by commentators not only objectified and commodified the uncertain future. Perhaps more

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<sup>133</sup> Aspects of this are addressed in Ceccarelli, “Risky Business;” the process of the “objectification” of risk in later medieval and Renaissance thought constitutes a major aspect of a book-length study: Giovanni Ceccarelli, *Il Gioco e il Peccato: Economia e rischio nel Tardo Medioevo* (Bologna: Società editrice il Mulino, 2003). See also Niekerk, chap. 1.1-3.

<sup>134</sup> As cited in Franklin, *The Science of Conjecture: Evidence and Probability before Pascal*, 272. Baldus, however, would not go so far as later commentators on risk, as he would also note that an annuity “is sold at some suitable and just price, namely, whatever such a hope can commonly be sold for at the time of the contract. And a hope is not worth as much as a thing, since a hope may be interrupted by many chance events: just as a crop is worth less on the stalk than in the barn” (ibid).

<sup>135</sup> Ceccarelli, “Risky Business: Theological and Canonical Thought on Insurance from the Thirteenth to the Seventeenth Century,” 631-2.

<sup>136</sup> Daston, *Classical Probability in the Enlightenment*, chap. 1; and Coumet, “La théorie du hasard: est-elle née par hasard?,” esp. 576-583.



importantly, this notion attached value to a particular *relationship* to this future. What is traded in the insurance contract is the dependence of one party on the outcome of an unpredictable event that has not yet occurred; the other party pays to be absolved from this dependency.<sup>137</sup>

Games of chance, in their changing visual and material support, had found various social, aesthetic, and temporal ways of reconfiguring and highlighting the relationship to future uncertainty, submitting it to the value of stakes wagered in a particular game. But with the development of contract theory on aleatory relationships like insurance, such relationships were not only granted extensive reflection but also accorded a place on the market proper as objects of exchange. With their eschewing of textual sources and focus on the contingencies of worldly existence, early modern genre images helped make contingency an aspect of artistic interpretation. To varying degrees, these works proffered the encounter with narrative ambiguity and conjecture for viewers. While insurance commodified the relationship to future uncertainty through the object of risk, genre imagery accorded new significance to the viewer's relationship to pictorial and narrative content, localized in the material object of the artwork. Lucas's game panels, for instance, take the time-based, ephemeral practice of the card game and transform it into a material, enduring entity. In these objects, there is an increasing value assigned to the experience of uncertainty, which can persist indefinitely in the relationship between spectator and image.

Yet insurance is also especially instructive in the case of genre painting because it is such a two-sided exchange. While the insurer takes on the burden of future uncertainty at a price, the insurer pays to be absolved of such uncertainty. Lucas van Leyden's images of card games present narrative ambiguity, configured through the card game, as the source of their interest. And they represent an important thread of early sixteenth-century painting in this respect. Yet, for many genre images of the early sixteenth century, it was not the presentation of future ambiguity but its presumed *resolution* that comprised the principal value for the spectator. Thus, in addition to the more ambiguous narratives of the gaming panels by Lucas van Leyden, genre imagery of the period also concerned itself intently with the elaboration of elaborating the ill *effects* of certain social behaviors. In such images, it is not the concealment but rather the mapping and disclosure—whether narratively or in terms of physiognomy—of action and character [fig. 4.18, for example] that is at stake. The contingency of social life is packaged into ostensibly predictable and stable moral precepts, incessantly elaborating the unfortunate aspects and outcomes of certain social practices. Here (to speak in rather broad terms), the work provides a sense of security by suggesting a clear schema of cause-and-effect relationships.<sup>138</sup> In this two-sided aspect of genre painting, the artwork, conceived outside of predominantly religious functions and narratives, configures certain relationships to the future and that can be assigned a value as a good of exchange.

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<sup>137</sup> As Lorraine Daston has put it, "in place of labor or property, the parties to the contract exchanged present certainty for future uncertainty." Daston, *Classical Probability in the Enlightenment*, 117.

<sup>138</sup> Narratively, this tendency is perhaps best exemplified by proliferation in the early sixteenth century of images of the Prodigal Son wasting his inheritance, as well as the related tale of Sorgheloos. On the significance of popular genre imagery as a means of providing viewers with a secure sense of social self-definition, see Paul Vandembroeck, "Verbeeck's Peasant Weddings: A Study of Iconography and Social Function," *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art* 14, no. 2 (1984): 79-124.

## Conclusion

Although the media of mathematical probability and genre images are decidedly different, they both took some of their most important early formulations from games of chance, framing future uncertainty as such for the purposes of predictive engagement. Genre imagery—one of the most forceful detachments of pictorial story-telling from a textual support—occurred not only around the moment that games of chance acquired their own pictorial forms, but also as other discourses struggled to frame and apprehend the uncertainty of the future as an aspect of social life. Like the card game, genre imagery was bound to a skillful and divinatory negotiation of a visual field. Through its pictorial media, the card game helped frame social interaction as a site for contingency and (insofar as it relied on acts of strategic withholding) representation. In addition to genre painting, however, games of chance helped fashion a particular space for the conceptualization of new modes and categories of representation in which future contingency, separated from religious iconography and ritual, played a major role. Novel, secular visual vehicles such as playing cards gave chance both a quantifiable *and* pictorial structure, and this and other apparatuses for aleatory play may well have suggested and encouraged chance's availability for conversion into other predictive media.

While this chapter has focused on Lucas van Leyden's game panels as neglected instances of early genre painting, I would suggest that these works also exemplify early genre painting's links to chance, futurity, and prediction more broadly. For in their permanent deferral of future action, all narrative images can be said to constitute divinatory devices to a certain extent. But, with genre imagery's tendency to sidestep a textual source that could inexorably guide a viewer to a known or predetermined *end*, visual narration becomes speculation based on visual signs, and anticipation is rendered primary to the act of narrative construction. Spectatorship is forced in especially acute ways to conjecture, "not as to what will be, but what we may rightly count on." This suggests the importance, not just of classicism and mimesis, but of futurity in the artistic transformations of the period, transformations in which the interpretation of such uncertainty had at once a social, epistemological, and financial import. In modern philosophical reflections on the arts, the delimitation of pictures with respect to time has sometimes been construed as a deficit. Yet, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, this delimitation emerged as potentially one of the pictorial arts' most potent values.

## Conclusion

The deliberate appeal to chance in the casting of lots has a long history that extends to ancient societies and across various geographical contexts. As ritualized practice, lot casting, whether for ludic or divinatory ends, was hardly new or unique to Renaissance Europe. Yet in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, there was a striking proliferation and diversification in the visual and material culture of aleatory play and divination. In this context, pictures became an increasingly important facet of the encounter with chance and the domain of Fortuna. While games of chance and divination have often constituted the scholarly province of the social sciences, the visual and material support that helps shape these activities grants them a significance for the study of art history. This significance is not limited to the Renaissance, of course. But the remarkable pictorialization of aleatory play during the period does highlight their art historical import with special force.

This study has focused on the casting of lots as a particularly resonant context for the assessment of the notions and values of future time in the Northern Renaissance. The application of chance in predictive and ludic contexts can be seen as a deliberate staging of an uncertain relationship to the future. That images came to play such a necessary role in this staging suggests the extent to which they aided in the negotiation and mediation of future contingency for participants. In various ways, visual artifacts framed the temporal, sensory, and epistemological aspects of future time. I have been most concerned here to delineate the different *media* of chance as they developed in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. While the ritualized activities themselves, of course, no longer remain, the objects that were deployed within them comprise one of our best avenues for engaging with the manners in which they structured time, experience, and interpretation in diverse devotional and social contexts. Through pictures, aleatory activities interfaced with existing modes of representation and facilitated the development of new ones.

This aleatory visual culture was, in principle, a popular one that could be pursued by a wide range of social groups. But, at the moment that pictures became a marked characteristic of aleatory play and prediction, the pictorial arts in the North similarly began to appropriate the ability of the game to engineer uncertainty and manipulate the experience of time. The emergence of earthly themes in painting and prints, themes which frequently lacked a clear narrative pre-text to orient interpretation, is closely bound to the visual culture of chance and play. If games and divination were time-based arts which held the promise of resolving participants' uncertainty, pictures could capitalize on their ability to halt time and fix this uncertainty. In Lucas's card panels as well as prints of Fortuna hovering precariously atop her globe, the future never becomes fully present. This is a key source of their interpretive and, increasingly, financial value and distinctive objects.

When the casting of lots is accorded attention in its visual, material, and social dimensions, a modulated image of Renaissance temporality begins to emerge. The regard for classical antiquity could coexist with an interest in future time as that which is not assimilable to forms of knowledge founded on mimesis or repetition. And through the ritualized use of chance, the social world and its contingencies were accorded visual depiction. If images would give way to numbers as the predominant medium for chance in the seventeenth century, the Renaissance engagement with chance and futurity helped create novel and enduring aspects of artistic representation.

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