

## Chapter One

### Introduction

Delved into meticulously, the adage, “All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy,” carries an overtone of subjective judgment, namely the subordination of play to work. The subject consists of two noun phrases, all work and no play; thus the verb, by principle, is supposed to be a plural form. The third person singular form of the verb, nevertheless, connotes that work and play cannot coexist synchronically. It is an either/or dichotomy. In addition, the sequence of the noun phrase also insinuates the priority of work over play, which, at best, can merely be thought of as non-work.

The coinage of the word, recreation, in another way reveals the appurtenant position of play. Re-creation suggests a kind of purpose-oriented philosophy of value, imposing a moral ideology on sheer play. Play becomes a means to an end, that is, to re-create, or to re-produce. There unwittingly exists a devious causality or link between play and work: we play for the sake of work, or, as a circle, for the recuperation of work.

With only two examples of proverb and etymology, it seems an exaggeration to say that game loses its autonomy, bowing its compliance to work. However, it can never be underestimated that language reflects the context of its time, leaving its mark on the thought of the age. Where there is a phenomenon, there is legitimacy. The usage of proverbial words, to a certain degree, unvarnishedly epitomizes and reflects the real extrinsic world. In a similar fashion, we may find the slightest vestige of the significance regarding play. A few phrases are expressed in a discriminative way:

dream a dream, sleep a sleep, breathe a breath, and live a life. The basic tone of these phrases resides in the fact that the essential concept embodied by the noun is reiterated by the verb. Furthermore, all of them have something in common, namely they altogether represent the alpha and omega of our lives. We cannot live our lives without breathing a breath, sleeping a sleep, or dreaming a dream. They are indispensable parts of our intrinsic organic whole. The phrase “play a game,” as a matter of fact, subsumes the same notion, just in an implicitly latent way. The word “play” can be used as a verb or a noun, both signifying the identical meaning: game. “Play a game,” thereupon, can be substituted for “play a play,” and assuredly the phrase is expressed in the expository way as “Spielt ein spiel” in German.

Play is so innate and natural to us that we almost always overlook its importance. The theory of play, with only few scattering essays, never seems to carry heavy weight in academic history. Instead of advancing to the mainstream, the theory of play slips sideways into the margin. Besides, its starting point is early, but neglected. “Roots of theory can be traced to Aristotle and Plato, but the first serious efforts at theory building were not seen until the last half of the nineteenth century” (Joe L. Frost 3). We can see that not until the post-industrial period was the theory of play emphasized a little bit.

Concerning the origin of play, there are generally four kinds of classic viewpoints. The first school, represented by Friedrich Schiller, argues that play takes its derivation from the “surplus energy” and is “the aimless expenditure of exuberant energy” as well as “the origin of art” (Frost 3). When we do not have to worry about the source of food and clothes, we have leisure along with strength and thus use the

extra time and surplus energy to do some goalless trivial, which is later developed as art. The second school, influenced by Darwin's *The Origin of the Species*, setting out from another perspective, declares that play is the recapitulation of primitive people. It is to Sanley Hall's credit that "Children are a link in the evolutionary chain from animals to humans and reenact through play the interests and occupations of prehistoric people and their remote animal ancestors" (Frost 4). Even animals play. A dog will chase its own tail, circling around until exhausted. A cat will run after a ball of yarn, treating it as a prey. Our pristine ancestors, coming into existence from evolution, bear the rudimental vestige of animals, inclusive of the instinct to play. Children's practicing plays function as the re-presentation of primitive people's vestige of animals.

The third school, mainly grounded by Karl Groos and termed as the "instinct-practice theory," holds that play is a "preparation for adult life" (Frost 4). Children's playing, to be precise, is regarded as a transitive vehicle for skill-training. Chasing a spool is to a kitten what stretching his body ad lib is to a baby. Playing makes a kitten adroit in pursuing a rat; similarly, playing concretes a baby's coordination mechanism as he grows. The fourth school, much more familiar to us, is known as the relaxation theory. This school holds the opinion that play is "a person's need for relaxation as a relief from mental fatigue" (Frost 5). Play is thus viewed as a channel of acopic catharsis, alleviating human's burden, mentally in particular.

There are at least four diverse classic standpoints trying to deduce the filiation of play, whereas none of them could really prove its validity, proposing the exact answer with solid and irrevocable evidence. Just as what Gayev says in *The Cherry Orchard*,

“When a lot of remedies are suggested for an illness, it means that the illness is incurable” (Anton Pavlovich Chekhov 203). Multiple arguments, in a sense, rebut the probability of the absolute only answer.

The Dutch scholar, Johan Huizinga, a paradigm-shifter, averting the trodden road, imbues play with exalted eminence and new dimension. His masterpiece, *Homo Ludens*, begins with an overwhelming sentence, “Play is older than culture” (Johan Huizinga 1). If culture is empirical, play is transcendental. Everything is based upon the desire to play. Rather than trace the genealogy of play, Huizinga proposes that play is transcendental. Like Christianity, God is above everything. You have to admit the existence of God before the Bible means anything to you. God says, “I am who I am.” Likewise, play is what it is. It is noteworthy that transcendental existence, a kind of metaphysical proposition, is somewhat different from instinct, which, more or less, directs toward the physical aspect. For instance, love is transcendental, whereas sex is instinct. Insofar as human nature is concerned, play pertains to a higher level, superior to some hard-wired and genetic instincts such as eating and sex.

With the premise that play goes before experience, Huizinga comes up with the definition of play, which is his best contribution in this field. His definition, though with some oversight, is nearly close to completion.

Summing up the formal characteristics of play we might call it a free activity standing quite consciously outside “ordinary” life as being “not serious”, but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space

according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner. It promotes the formation of social groupings which tend to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress their difference from the common world by disguise or other means.

(Huizinga 13)

The first and foremost characteristic of play lies in the fact that it can only be done under the circumstances of free will. People play games out of their own volition. A voluntary state of mind, not an obligatory one, is the decisively overriding key to play. Without this premise, the other ensuing characteristics of play cannot exist.

The second characteristic of play, adjacent to the first and foremost one, pinpoints as well the universality that play is necessarily outside ordinary life. Reality bites. When the real world is no longer consummate, people attempt to find a fictional perfection as a stopgap in place of the real imperfection. In the terrain of temporary fullness, pressure and tension are momentarily released, extending far away from getting down to the nitty-gritty.

The third characteristic of play, in Huizinga's opinion, dwells on its non-seriousness, coming mainly from the essence of impromptu, which amounts to saying that it can be run, suspended, and stopped at any time. Work, in contrast, must be initiated and ceased at a given time. Even the break takes place as a fixed stereotype. From start to finish, the pattern of work is almost unexceptionally immobile. Play is impromptu, while work is routine. Or, to put it in another way, play is not urgent. "The need for it is only urgent to the extent that the enjoyment of it makes it a need" (Huizinga 8). The degree of enjoyment and the extent of pretending are also yardsticks for non-seriousness/seriousness, but the cardinal criterion results

mostly from the impromptu feature.

The fourth characteristic of play consists in its disinterestedness. It seems that Huizinga strives to refrain from taking into consideration every possibility of material interest in the domain of play. Certain games fraught with the atmosphere of profit do not appear in the list of his discussion. This part defined by Huizinga is problematic and not cogent insofar as he seems to scrutinize play with the spectrum of morality. Since play is assumed transcendental, it is supposed to be amoral. It would be rash to say that Huizinga is wrong. We may say, instead, that his articulating the exclusion of interest is, to borrow Homi K. Bhabha's term, "in a tone that is forked, not false" (Bhabha 85). When it comes to the flaw, Huizinga's successor, Roger Caillois, airing his own eloquent voice, has complemented and modified it. Caillois' complement and modification will be drawn under parley later on.

The fifth characteristic of play holds true that it happens within the purview of specific time and space. The elaboration can be construed in roller-coaster-style phases. At the first sight, it looks apparent that play, as a matter of course, occurs at given time and space, just like other activities. On the second thought, however, it seems that this characteristic goes at odds with another feature of play mentioned before. In the previous passage, play is said to be non-seriousness owing to its impromptu feature, whereas it is now asserted to take place at given time and space. The two arguments, diametrically opposed, appear to be overtly at odds with each other. In spite of the contradiction in disguise, we may unravel the skein of this inconsistency after in-depth thought. On the one hand, play indeed can take place and come to a standstill at any time out of the player's free will, while the whole span

from start to finish, which actually happens at a certain period of time, can be seen as a given time. On the other hand, time and space are inseparable here, conceived as a collective union. Consequently, in terms of logic, the limit of time is incommensurable and unequal to the boundary of time and space. The two kinds of characteristic of play do not go incongruous with each other.

The sixth characteristic of play is its rules. Although there are always exceptions to all rules, for example, no rules in doll-playing, Huizinga still argues that “all play has its rules” and that the “rules of a game are absolutely binding and allow no doubt” (Huizinga 11). The rule, however strict, is a necessary evil, with the absence of which, play will derail desultorily toward all directions.

Last but not least, play delineates a clear-cut configuration circumscribing the players, distinguishing them from the others, forming an air of secrecy. The meaning is similar to one of the explanations elucidating the difference of language, “[D]ifferences of language originated among savages for the purpose of keeping one tribe’s secrets hidden from another” (August Strindberg 292). In the spell-bound square demarcated, the players aggrandize and confirm their subjectivity through the action of excluding others.

It is worthwhile to notice that all the seven characteristics of play, in fact, ought to be treated as a whole, albeit we have analyzed them respectively. In the discourse of Huizinga, all the characteristics of play are supposed to be well-contained simultaneously to construct what we call the play. One characteristic is always coupled with the rest synchronically or, at least, successively. To trace Huizinga’s mind, it is of little wonder that the “free” quality of play brings the ambience of

“non-seriousness,” which enables play to happen at any time and thus is cut “outside ordinary life” on the grounds that the real world operates as a clocklike routine. Since the pretending world is a fictional one, profit or interest takes no account because morality does not exist in a putative world. Moreover, in the imaginative world, the as-if “rule” determines the “ambit of time and space,” which, certainly, contours a demarcation of “secrecy” constraining others from breaking in.

Independent of the seven characteristics, two other essential elements of play are posited as well: repetition and tension. For one thing, repetition here is not so much overall identical as the often quoted term, “almost the same, but not quite” (Bhabha 86). The repeatable essence of play is repetition with difference:

In this faculty of repetition lies one of the most essential qualities of play. It holds good not only of play as a whole but also of its inner structure. In nearly all the higher forms of play the elements of repetition and alternation (as in the refrain), are like the warp and woof of a fabric. (Huizinga 10)

To take Christmas for example, every year on the same day we adorn the evergreen and eat lucullan ambrosia in celebration of this holiday. However, it is impossible that every detail is entirely the same all the time. Through subtle dissimilitude, Christmas of each year proves itself to be the same one. By the same token, the concept of play hangs there, and every time the same play is repeated with difference, it rings a bell and emphasizes that what we are playing at that moment echoes the same one.

Tension, for another, heralds an air of competition, no matter who the rival is.

The element of tension in play to which we have just referred plays a particularly important part. Tension means uncertainty, chanciness; a

striving to decide the issue and so end it. The player wants something to “go”, to “come off”; he wants to “succeed” by his own exertions. (Huizinga 10)

Every play, to an extent, is a struggle against an inveterate enemy, be it visible or invisible. In a contest, needless to say, we have to face the adversary standing in front of us. Even in a game without a tactile antagonist, we have to wrestle against a latent tension. The situation may be exemplified by flying a kite. When we fly a kite, there is no concrete rival, but we still have to compete with the intangible force inflicted upon the kite from all sources. Were it not for the ethereal tension, any game would lose its playfulness at once due to the lacking of uncertainty. Anything with the result known in advance means nothing at all.

Combining the two elements, repetition and tension, Huizinga marches on, pointing out the function of play.

The function of play in the higher forms which concern us here can largely be derived from the two basic aspects under which we meet it: as a contest *for* something or a representation *of* something. These two functions can unite in such a way that the game “represents” a contest, or else becomes a contest for the best representation of something. (Huizinga 13)

In summation, the function of play is to represent a contest. Hereunto, on the morrow of ingestion and digestion, the definition and function of play have been both codified by Huizinga.

Huizinga’s neglect, as mentioned before, is later complemented and modified by his successor in this field, another brilliant scholar, Roger Caillois, whose insightful

epexegeses and extension of this treatment touch upon the unearthed part, enriching the theory of play. Summarizing Huizinga's definition of play, Caillois develops his own, although most of their insights overlap. Play<sup>1</sup> in Caillois' term is defined as "free," "separate," "uncertain," "unproductive," "governed by rules," and "make-believe" (Caillois 9-10). The term "separate" employed by Caillois here refers to the same idea proposed by Huizinga, namely the circumscription of time and space. "Uncertain" is the protraction of tension, which has been succinctly elaborated before. "Make-believe" is another way of saying that play is outside ordinary life, being a temporary fictional self-contained world. "Unproductive" is not equivalent with non-profit. Unlike Huizinga, Caillois reckons play to be involved with interest or profit in some cases. Play, from beginning to end, does not produce anything indeed. What operates in the whole process, at best, is the "exchange of property among the players" (Caillois 10). As long as there is exchange of property, there is profit, which incubates the speculative mindset, from which game of chance emanates. Game of chance stands no position of enunciation in Huizinga's discourse, but it occupies a crucial foreground in Caillois'. For Caillois, game of chance is a sort of patented cultural activity possessed by human beings only. Other than human-beings, no animal plays the game of chance, which is leveled at a higher mental activity. Game

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<sup>1</sup> Game and play are interchangeably used by Caillois in his discourse. In fact, there is still subtle difference between game and play. Caillois "classifies games with very simple rules as *paidea*, a Greek word that means both child and school. He uses the terms *ludus*, the Latin word for game, to describe games which rules are more complex. For example, merry-go-round would be an example of *paidea* and poker would be *ludus*. *Paidea* and *ludus* could be associated with the English terms "play" and "game" respectively." <<http://www.ludology.org/articles/thesis/>>. Since Caillois discusses all the four categories of game, including games with simple and complex rules as well, it is natural that he uses "game" and "play" interchangeably. However, I incline to use "game" because "play" also has other meanings.

of chance is so unique to human-beings that Caillois subsumes it under one of the four fundamental categories of play. To take Huizinga's achievements a step further, Caillois serves as an archivist, arranging play into four categories.

After examining different possibilities, I am proposing a division into four main rubrics, depending upon whether, in the games under consideration, the role of competition, chance, simulation, or vertigo is dominant. I call these *agon*, *alea*, *mimicry*, and *ilinx*, respectively. All four indeed belong to the domain of play. (Caillois 12)

In Huizinga's discourse, *agon*, or, to be more precise, the representation of competition, is the ultimate function of play, whereas Caillois solely adopts *agon* as one of the four categories of play. By so doing, Caillois opens up the multifold possibility of play and makes the domain of play more comprehensive. If Huizinga shines torch on the field of play, then Caillois sheds radiance on the discourse of play.

Speaking of competition, *agon* is somehow entailed by *alea*. They are actually two sides of a coin and in certain situations *alea* is a bifurcation of game of chance. In *agon*, we are confronted with a corporeal rival, while in *alea* we may face many resistances coming from multiple factors, artificial or natural.

*Mimicry* and *ilinx* are vestiges handed down from the ritual of aboriginal tribes. *Mimicry* stems from the mask, and *ilinx* (*vertigo*) derives from the dance. The original intention of one's *mimicry* is that "the subject makes believe or makes others believe that he is someone other than himself" (Caillois 19). In a ritual, through the action of wearing a mask, the subject identifies himself with the spirits, seemingly oblivious of his own identity. Transformed unwittingly in bits and pieces, the

primordial meaning and function of mimicry is attenuated, converted into many ways, say, drama, opera, role-play, and so forth; even playing with a doll or toy soldiers is a residual trace of mimicry. Ilinx is one of Roger Caillois' break-through insights in comparison with his forerunner, Huizinga. Ilinx is derived from the dance ceremony held in a ritual, where the participants are in a state of centrifugal weightlessness, dizzy yet convivial. It is ostensibly undeniable that people are prone to decentralize themselves for a momentary relief. Poised in the balance of order at usual time, people seemingly are not in the habit of feeling satisfied with the status quo; on the contrary, they try to plumb the bottom line of order, allowing themselves to be equilibrists for a while, walking on the precarious edge of imbalance. "This vertigo is readily linked to the desire for disorder and destruction, a drive which is normally repressed" (Caillois 24). Gradated into diverse forms, ilinx develops a host of alternative games. Ferris wheel, merry-go-round, roller coaster, and coffee cups are all the modern counterparts of ilinx. In earlier days, ilinx can also be performed in many ways: wire-walking, pillar-standing, top-spinning, somersault, carnivalization, and so on.

With Huizinga's theory of play and Caillois's elaboration of it, this thesis purports to adapt their theoretical framework of play to Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*. However, in the first place, I want to introduce some critics who also see *The Canterbury Tales* as a game from different perspectives.

The first critic is Carl Lindahl, whose key work is *Earnest Games: Folkloric Patterns in the Canterbury Tales*. Lindahl's work mainly centers around the folkloric patterns used in *The Canterbury Tales*. According to his survey, medieval society set

severe punishment for verbal abuse. Therefore, people turned to employ folkloric language as a strategy to make indirect insult. For example, fabliau, mockery, parody, or pun were skillfully manipulated as substitutions for direct attack. Lindahl shows how Chaucer's low-class pilgrims adopt folkloric patterns to resist the high-class pilgrims and to protect the socially less influential people. Centering around the folkloric patterns, Lindahl bases his discourse upon the verbal war, or, verbal game between the gentils and the churls. He basically divides the pilgrims into two groups competing with each other in story-telling and in verbal warfare. In addition to the binary opposition between the two classes, Lindahl also sees the whole journey as a dialectical process between two ends. For instance, the starting point of the journey is Tabard Inn, which represents the most profane place; the destination of the journey is the Canterbury Cathedral, which stands for the most sacred place. In the dialectical process, many binary forces continually wrestle against each other: play/pray, game/earnest, and feast/fast. Sometimes the playfulness is in domination, and sometimes the seriousness is in charge. Generally speaking, Lindahl's discourse inclines toward binary analysis, and he focuses on the linguistic style and oral strategy used by the pilgrims in their interaction.

Another critic, Wolfgang Rudat, disagrees with Lindahl's viewpoint. Rudat's article, "Reading Chaucer's earnest games: Folk-mode or literary sophistication," is a subversive article against Lindahl's work. Unlike Lindahl, who emphasizes the language used by the pilgrims, Rudat sets off from the literary skill that Chaucer uses. Rudat focuses not on the interaction between the pilgrims, but on Chaucer's rhetorical skill and literariness. Rudat takes the *Merchant's Tale* as an example to illustrate

Chaucer's literary game. In this tale, an old man named January marries a young bride named May. On their wedding day, January has a sexual intercourse with May. Rudat thinks that this sexual intercourse scene is an echo to the opening line in the General Prologue: "Whan that April with his shoures soote / The droghte of March hath perced to the roote" (I. 1-2). In other words, what the old man, January, does to his young bride, May, is what April does to March. It is a sexual implication, a word game. By looking for such playful details arranged stealthily by Chaucer, Rudat thinks that it is the best way to understand Chaucer.

The third scholar is Arthur McMahon, whose dissertation is *Chaucer's Use of Game and Play in The Canterbury Tales: The Game of Rhetoric; The Play of Irony*. In my opinion, McMahon's argument is a balance point between Lindahl and Rudat's. He focuses both on Chaucer's device and the pilgrim's interaction. On one hand, he thinks that this game is Chaucer's rhetorical device to express the irony in life. What is the irony? Through the mouthpiece of his pilgrims, Chaucer repeatedly emphasizes that they should not take the game too seriously. However, whenever evoked, the pilgrims who are insulted will fight back immediately. They are very earnest about this game, and this earnest attitude is where the irony lies. On the other hand, Rudat also thinks that this game is a verbal warfare among the pilgrims. In his view, this game shifts from the story-telling game to the "quitting game," which means, a person's story is told in order to quit the previous one. In short, they take the game too seriously.

The fourth critic is Glending Olson, who writes the article, "Chaucer's Idea of a Canterbury Game." He thinks that the medieval view of play is different from the

modern view of play. As a result, he sets off from the medieval thinking. According to him, "Chaucer did not have to have his pilgrims play a game in order to have them tell stories. Their prologues and tales could have emerged as part of conversation or debate or advice" (Olson 72). However, Chaucer chooses the form of game in telling the stories. Olsen adopts the medieval thinking to elaborate the reason. On one hand, in the Middle Ages, literature was "conceived as a form of entertainment" (Olson 73). It is no wonder that game is the best way to express the entertainmentness. On the other hand, in medieval view, game is regarded as a vehicle for morality. Therefore, Olsen thinks that Chaucer reveals the virtue of morality in the game to educate his readers. For example, the Knight is not necessarily willing to tell the first tale. However, since he draws the first lot, he behaves in a gentle manner. His geniality is "an aspect of his moral goodness" (Olson 79). If I would conclude Olson's argument, I would say that his view of game is "to teach and to delight."

The fifth critic is Roy Peter Clark, whose article is "Christmas Games in Chaucer's *The Miller's Tale*." In his view, *The Miller's Tale* is a celebration of Medieval Christmas. During medieval Christmas, there were some conventions, like story-telling, performance of folk plays, and game-playing. Among the games, there was one called "Blindman's-buff," during which a man was blindfolded to guess who struck him. Clark thinks that the action of the *Miller's Tale* seems to echo this game. On this holy day, the festive atmosphere and theological significance are converged. A subtle dialectical relationship between lechery and liturgy is there. Consequently, bawdy tales like the *Miller's Tale* could be told in celebration of this holiday.

Three of the critics I mentioned above discuss the game in *The Canterbury Tales*

from the perspective of the “language.” Lindahl focuses on the linguistic style and oral strategy used by the pilgrims; Rudat focuses on the literary skills employed by Chaucer; McMahon focuses on the rhetorical devices used both by Chaucer and the pilgrims. Of course, language could be game, like word game. However, I want to raise a question: When we talk about game, why don’t we talk about “game itself?” I do not want to talk about language in the disguise of the game. I will not focus on the game in words or in deeds, but on the practice of real game itself. Clark’s “Christmas Game” mentions the real practice of the game of the “Blindman’s-buff,” but he does not go further or extend this issue. As for Olson, I think his argument to see game from the medieval thinking is good. I believe the medieval view of game is different, but I also believe the nature of game is universal. I believe Chaucer’s work is universal, so I will try to adopt a generalized modern theoretical framework of the game to analyze his work.

In the kaleidoscope of his *Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer plays the role of a croupier, ushering in his readers to take part in the game. The multiple-generic narrative device smacks of variety show style. It is not difficult to tell that Chaucer, more or less, reckons himself as a literal entertainer. Through the mouthpiece of the Host, Chaucer speaks out his inclination to map out the pilgrimage journey as a game,

And wel I woot, as ye goon by the weye,

Ye shapen yow to talen and to pleye;

For trewely, confort ne myrthe is noon

To ride by the weye doun as a stoon;

As I seyde erst, and doon yow som confort. (I. 771-76; emphasis mine)

In order to make the journey interesting, the Host intends to devise a game for the pilgrims. The journey to Canterbury as a whole can be regarded as a big game, all the conditions matching the definition of play. Firstly, the game is initiated according to every pilgrim's free will with no one forced. The Host of the Tabard Inn propounds the idea of everyone's telling tales on the way to and fro Canterbury, and all the pilgrims assent unanimously:

And if ye vouches auf that it be so,  
 Tel me anon, withouten wordes mo,  
 And I wol erly shape me therefore.

This thing was graunted, and oure othes swore. (I. 807-10)

The proposition is not a compulsory one, but everyone answers in the affirmative. Thirty people, save the Host, comprise a huge body, which is absolutely not easy to achieve concord. As long as one person disagrees, this game cannot keep going or at least, cannot go smoothly. To our surprise, everyone accepts the proposal with alacrity and no hesitation. Secondly, the Host sets the rule,

That ech of yow, to shorte with oure weye,  
 In this viage shal telle tales tweye  
 To Canterbury-ward, I mene it so,  
 And homward he shal tellen othere two  
 Of a ventures that whilom han bifalle. (I. 791-95)

Besides, the reward and penalty are ordained:

And which of yow that bereth hym best of alle  
 That is to seyn, that telleth in this caas

Tales of best sentence and moost solass

Shal have a soper at oure aller cost. (I. 796-99)

And whoso wole my juggement withseye

Shal paye al that we spenden by the weye. (I. 805-06)

He who tells the most interesting and instructive tale will get a free dinner paid by the other pilgrims, and he who goes against what the Host says must pay for all the expenses on the way. Thirdly, coupled with the setting of rule, the boundary of time and space is settled, too. The time is limited within the days of pilgrimage, the space circumscribed within en route to and fro Canterbury. During these days, on the way, they temporarily alienate themselves from the outer world, playing their own secret game separate from and unknown to others. Fourthly, the result is uncertain. Not until the lots are drawn do they know the sequence of telling tales. Neither could they foretell which kind of tales would be told, nor could they foreknow who the winner would be. There are too many uncertain factors hidden in the whole journey, including the accident, coincidence, and interaction among the pilgrims, etc. None could even anticipate that the game may be stopped and suspended in the middle. Fifthly, the whole process is an unproductive one. As a matter of fact, nothing is produced from start to finish. What comes out, at most, is the exchange of tales. The pilgrims do not create these tales. These tales are originally there. The pilgrims just exchange the tales with one another. As John Ganim points out, "Much of the talk in the *Canterbury Tales* is 'traditional' in the sense that speakers are repeating information they have gotten elsewhere. Of course, this is the definition of communication" (Ganim 127). Analogically speaking, the situation is like that two apple-peddlars sell their apples to

each other, with no profit created in the long run. Lastly, the journey is situated in a scenario of make-believe, “accompanied by a special awareness of a second reality or of a free unreality, as against real life” (Caillois 10). It is noteworthy that, for Caillois, game is against reality, just corresponding to what Freud argues, “The opposite of play is not what is serious but what is real” (Sigmund Freud 143). Maybe that is why Caillois abolishes the non-seriousness characteristics of play in his discourse. In the magic square of pilgrimage secluded from the external reality, every pilgrim is in a pretending state of mind after accepting the rules of the game. In a sense, everyone is playing a role outside his ordinary reality. “In a role-playing game, the players take the roles of fictional characters and act out a story or adventure” (Lawrence Schick 10). In the first place, all of the pilgrims are supposed to make their route to receive the bliss of St. Thomas á Becket in a highly esteemed manner. Nevertheless, in the temporal fictional world free from ordinary responsibility, everyone seems to be able to get rid of the handcuffs and fetters, playing a role that is much more ludic and frolic than usual. That is one of the reasons why tales like the fabliau could appear.

The following chapters will dwell respectively on the three aspects: agon/alea, mimicry, and ilinx. Each chapter will discuss a tale from *The Canterbury Tales* according to one of the three aspects. Huizinga and Caillois’ theories would be the chief framework. Other theorist’s ideas, like Hans Georg Gadamer’s argument of play, Erving Goffman’s notion of presentation and Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of carnivalization will be drawn upon as well in support of the construction of analysis. As the Knight says, “Syn I shal bigynne the game, / What, welcome be the cut, a Goddes name!” (I. 853-54), now the game begins.