

The Various Editions of *The Game of Human Life*.

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Abstract

The New Game of Human Life, published in London in 1790 by John Wallis and Elizabeth Newbery, was arguably a catalyst for the great flowering of English printed board games of the Late Georgian era. It was, though, a close re-working of a game published some fifteen years earlier by the French firm of Crépy, *Le Nouveau Jeu de la Vie Humaine*. A German version, clearly copied from the English but using French language for the text, appeared in 1790 or soon after, published by Simon Schropp of Berlin. The final incarnation was a second English edition, published between 1814 and 1826 by Edward Wallis, one of John Wallis's sons. This paper compares these editions, noting particularly the changes that were made in adapting the game to the different national audiences.

Crépy's *Le Nouveau Jeu de la Vie Humaine* [giochidelloca 2799](#)



Crépy's version is immediately recognisable as a variant of the *Game of the Goose*, from which it differs by having the favourable throw-doubling spaces at intervals of 12 rather than nine. There is a single series of these, rather than the interleaved double series of classic *Goose*. But the main feature is that these spaces now correspond to the Seven Ages of Man. Accordingly, the track length is extended from the classic 63 to 84. Another difference is that all the spaces are illustrated with different human figures, each with a short title, mostly indicating the character of the person shown. Most of these spaces are

inactive, in the sense that a token landing on one remains there with no resulting action, but others are active, in ways similar to the active spaces of Goose, but with special rules.

Wallis and Newbery's New Game of Human Life - [giochidelloca 144](#)



The Wallis and Newbery version is a close but by no means exact copy of Crépy's, sharing with it all the features mentioned above; differences will be explored below. An interesting example, in Edward Copisarow's collection, lacks the corner text and is presumably a proof before final engraving.



The Berlin edition of Simon Schropp



The Schropp edition is laid out differently, with the track starting at the top of the sheet rather than at the lower left, but otherwise shares the features of both the editions described above.¹ No rules are given on the existing states.

Rules

The rules for the Crépy edition appear in translation in the Wallis/Newbery edition:

The Immortal Man who has existed 84 years seems worthy by his Talents and Merit to be a Model for the Close of Life, which can end only by Eternity. When we shall arrive at the No. 84, we shall have gained all we can by this Game but if we exceed this number we must go back as many points as we have proceeded beyond it.

The Age of Man is divided into seven periods of twelve years, viz. Infancy to Youth, Manhood, Prime of Life, Sedate middle-age, Old age, Decrepitude, & Dotage.

He passes through life in a series of situations which are here arranged in the order they generally succeed each other.

¹ The V & A Museum has an example [MISC.124-1989] printed from the same plate but with the main title and the individual ones in four languages: French, German, English and Polish.

This game, like others of the same kind, is played with a Totum, [Crépy: *On ne jouera ce jeu qu'avec 2 Dés* - This game can only be played with two dice] each player spinning twice in his turn, the only difference is that the Players cannot stop at any of the seven ages, but must proceed as many points beyond as they have in coming to them. Yet as they may spin at first two sixes, & consequently would go on to No. 84, which would be improper, those who have this chance at first must content themselves with going to the Historian at 59.

The Studious Boy at 7 shall receive a Stake and shall proceed to 42, the place of the Orator.

The Negligent Boy at 11 shall pay a Stake and shall remain two rounds without spinning.

The Assiduous Youth at 15 shall receive 2 Stakes, and proceed to 55, where he will find the Patriot.

The Trifler at 19 shall pay 1 Stake, and proceed to the Songster at 38.

The Duellist at 22 shall pay 2 Stakes, and return to take the place of the Boy at Number 3.

The Complaisant Man at 26 shall remain there, and let others play until another comes to take his place, and then he shall go back to the place of his liberator.

The Prodigal at Number 30 shall pay four Stakes, and go back to the Careless Boy at Number 6.

The Married Man at 34 shall receive two Stakes for his Wife's Portion and go to be a Good Father at 56.

The Romance Writer at 40 shall pay 2 Stakes and go back to the Mischievous Boy at 5.

The Dramatist at 44 shall pay 4 Stakes to the Masters of his Art and shall begin the game again.

The Benevolent Man at 52 shall go to 78 to amuse himself with the Joker.

The Temperate Man at 58 shall go to 82, to find the Quiet Man.

The Drunkard at 63 shall pay 2 Stakes and go back to the Child at 2.

The Patient Man at 68 shall receive 2 Stakes and go to amuse himself with the merry fellow at 80.

The Manhater at 71 shall pay 2 Stakes and go back to the Obstinate Youth at 16.

The Old Beau at 74 shall receive 1 Stake and let each of the others play one round.

The Satyrist at 77 shall pay 4 Stakes and go back to the Malignant Boy at 8.

Lastly the Tragic Author at 45 shall go to the place of the Immortal Man at 84 and win the Game by Succeeding him.

Starting spaces



Crépy

Wallis & Newbery

Schropp

In all three editions, the starting spaces are essentially the same. The images of the Wallace and Newbery version are clearly copied from those of Crépy, are similarly titled and strike similar poses. The same is true of those of Schropp, though they are all reversed on the plate, as happens when an image is copied directly onto the plate from another impression. Schropp's titles diverge slightly: the boy of space 5 is 'petulant' rather than 'mischievous'.

End spaces



By contrast, the end spaces of the three editions are very different. Comparing first the Crépy and Wallace/Newbery versions, we note that the figures of the Genevan philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778, recognisable by his fur hat) and of the writer Voltaire (François-Marie Arouet, 1694-1778, shown leaning characteristically on his stick) have been replaced for the English market by those of John Locke (1632-1704) and Sir Isaac Newton (1642-1726/7, shown in Cambridge doctoral robes). Both Rousseau and Locke were notable for their role in advocating the diffusion of Enlightenment thought by means of free education. And both Voltaire and Newton died at the age of 84, so that the substitutions were cleverly done.²



For the Schropp edition, a different substitution was made for the final space, which now shows a monument to Leopold of Brunswick. Maximilian Julius Leopold of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel, Prince of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel (1752-1785) was a Prussian major general. Princely charity towards soldiers and citizens and the circumstances of his death made Leopold famous: in the great flood of the River Oder, he tried to join his soldiers by boat to give them support but was drowned. This was mis-reported as a valiant but vain attempt to save lives.

Other adaptations for the English market

Other adaptations were made for the English market. The Geographer at space 47 became Captain Cook, shown pointing on a map to New Zealand, while the Ambitious Man at space 57 was cruelly shown as the future George IV (1762-1830), covetously grasping the crown that was not yet his in 1790 – for not until 1811 did he become Prince Regent, later assuming the throne on the death of his father in 1820. These substitutions were copied in the Schropp edition, though how far the new personages were recognised in Germany is not clear.

² Gemma Tidman (private communication) notes that if the number 84 of Voltaire's space is that of his age at death, then the commonly-given date of 1775 for the Crépy edition is too early.

47 The Geographer



57 The Ambitious Man



Linda Hannas further identifies the Poet at space 41 as Alexander Pope and notes that the Patriot at space 55 has been changed 'from a soldier into Pitt'.³



³ Linda Hannas, *The English Jigsaw Puzzle*, London: Wayland, 1972, p.115. This is presumably William Pitt the Younger (1759-1806), Prime Minister of Great Britain at the date of issue of the edition.

The 'age' spaces

The treatment of the 'age' spaces is almost identical in the three editions. Slight differences in titles occur at space 48, with meanings 'the mature man', 'the sedate man' and 'the perfect man' respectively.



Special rules of the earlier games

The rule that the Prodigal (shown dispensing coin to street urchins) must go back to the Careless Boy, who is building a house of cards, expresses a familiar trope symbolising idleness. However, the rules are more remarkable for their emphasis on aspects of literature: for example, the Satirist must 'go back to the Cruel Boy'. Most surprising is the rule for the Dramatist: 'Begin the game again', as in the death space in *Goose*. The reason for this harsh rule, both in the Crépy original and repeated in the Wallis/Newbery edition, is not evident. The Schropp edition has no rules; there the figure is identified as the *Bel-lettriste*.

A clue may lie in the full expression of the rule: '[il] paiera 4 jettons aux Maitres de son Art et recommencera le jeu/ Shall pay four stakes to the Masters of his Art and shall begin the game again.' In all three of these earlier editions, the flanking spaces are the Comic Author and the Tragic Author. Gemma Tidman suggests that the 'masters of his art' are those stationed on either side of the dramatist, who is thus visually portrayed as the writer of a new, hybrid genre intermediate between comedy and tragedy: the '*drame bourgeois*', championed by 'modernes' like Marivaux and Diderot, to whom one might add Beaumarchais.



In contrast, landing on space 45 in these games gives an immediate win: 'The Tragic Author shall go to the space of the Immortal Man and win the game by succeeding him.' On this interpretation, the game thus takes sides in the aesthetic debate on the merits of different theatrical forms in late eighteenth-century France.

'The Utility and Moral Tendency of the game'

Under this heading we find in the upper left corner of the Wallis/Newbery edition the following bold claim:

If parents who take upon themselves the pleasing task of instructing their children (or others to whom that important trust may be delegated) will cause them to stop at each character and request their attention to a few moral and judicious observations, explanatory of each character as they proceed and contrast the happiness of a virtuous and well spent life with the fatal consequences arising from vicious and immoral pursuits, this game may be rendered the most useful and amusing of any that has hitherto been offered to the public.

Nothing of the sort appears on the Crépy original and one must assume that it originates from Elizabeth Newbery, a London bookseller and publisher whose substantial list of publications for children was very much dominated by moral and didactic writing. In any case, the claim sits oddly with the instructions in the upper right corner, which clearly suppose that it is played by adult men for money:

This game may be played by any number of persons at a time; but care must be taken, that each player make use of a different mark to move with & be provided with at least twelve counters each, and agree how much to value them per dozen. Let us then suppose that four Gentlemen agree to play a game together, & stake four counters each. A takes red for his mark, B green, C black and D white.

The moral theme is continued in the instructions printed below the track:

It is necessary to inform the purchaser that the Totum must be marked with figures 1,2,3,4,5,6 & to avoid introducing a Dice Box into private families, each Player must spin twice, which will answer the same purpose.

The English games manufacturers were not above claiming that their use of the teetotum was driven by moral grounds rather than a need to evade the punitive dice duty.⁴

The edition of Edward Wallis - [giochidelloca 1304](#)

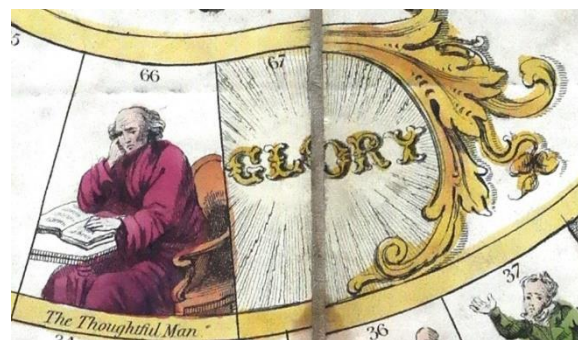


In the last of the four editions of the game, Edward Wallis turned away from the *Game of the Goose*, abandoning the sequence of throw-doubling spaces and also the 'seven ages of man' device. Although most of the characters were re-used, there were omissions, resulting in a track of only 67 spaces. For example, the starting spaces, while generally copying the earlier editions, omit the Boy on space 3 of the Wallis/Newbery edition.

⁴ Adrian Seville, 2021. 'The Quest for the Pyramids - Playing Equipment in English Printed Board Games of the Pre-Georgian, Georgian and Early Victorian Eras'. In *An Antique Games Compendium*, edited by The Games Board, 13–26. Brighton: Doplín Books.



The final space is now simply labelled Glory, though the image of Locke in the penultimate space is retained.



In place of the Goose-like rules of the earlier editions, Edward Wallis provided only the special rules taking account of the natures of the human figures portrayed in the spaces concerned. In his expression of the rules, in the central oval, he uses the numbers of the spaces rather than their titles. It is however easier to see the basis of the special rules if the titles are inserted, as below (in red):

- 1 The Game is played with a teetotum and each Player is to spin twice, reckoning both numbers together.
- 2 Each player has a coloured mark, besides 2 dozen counters
- 3 Spin for first player, the highest to begin.
- 4 Each player put 6 into the Pool.
- 5 Whoever goes beyond 67 must return as many back as he exceeds it.
- 6 Whoever arrives at 6, **The Studious Boy**, shall receive 1 from the Pool and go on to 35, **The Orator**
- N°9 **The Negligent Boy** shall pay one, and stop two turns.
- N°13 **The Assiduous Youth** shall receive 2 and go to 46 **The Ambitious Man**.
- N°15 **The Trifler** pay one and proceed to N°22 **The Flatterer**.
- N°18 **The Duellist** pay 2 and return to 8 **The Thoughtless Boy**.
- N°21 **The Complaisant Man** shall remain there 11 until some one arrives at the same.

N°24 **The Prodigal** shall pay 4, and go back to 5 **The Careless Boy (house of cards)**.

N°28 **The Married Man** receive 2 for a dowry, and go to 47 **The Good Father**.

N°33 **The Romance Writer** pay 2 and go back to 4 **The Mischievous Boy**.

N°37 **The Dramatist** Begin the Game again.

N°44 **The Benevolent Man** shall go on to 65 **The Merry Fellow**.

N°49 **The Temperate Man** shall go to **The Learned Man** 56.

N°53 **The Drunkard** pay 2 and go back to N°2 **The Child**.

N°57 **The Patient Man** receive 2 and go to 66 **The Thoughtful Man**.

N°58 **The Vindictive Man** pay 3 and go back to 18 **The Duellist**.

N°60 **The Old Beau** receive 1 and stop 1 turn.

N°63 **The Satyrist** pay 4 and go back to 7 **The Cruel Boy**.

N°67 Win the **Game**, and take the Pool.

Most of these rules are identical with those of the parent game, subject to changes made necessary by the shortening of the track. For example, the Duellist now returns to the Thoughtless Boy rather than to the Boy, an omitted figure. A curious change is that the Assiduous Boy now proceeds to the Ambitious Man, rather than to the Patriot. And the Dramatist is now not instructed to pay as before 'to the Masters of his Art', making the 'start again' rule seem even more arbitrary.

It is a matter of speculation as to why Edward Wallis made these changes. Perhaps it was because the *Game of the Goose* was out of fashion? It is certain though, that by abandoning the Seven Ages of Man as a template he sacrificed the formal elegance of the Crépy original.

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