which I believe will be immensely help-
ful to play therapists, students, and child
development and play scholars for years
to come.

—David A. Crenshaw, Children’s Home of
Poughkeepsie, Poughkeepsie, NY

Slantwise Moves: Games,
Literature, and Social Invention
in Nineteenth-Century America
Douglas A. Guerra
Philadelphia, PA: University of
Pennsylvania Press, 2018. Introduction,
notes, index, and acknowledgments.
253pp. $69.95 cloth.
ISBN: 9780812250619

“Games are about invention itself.” Doug-
las A. Guerra puts this proposition to a
rigorous test in Slantwise Moves: Games,
Literature, and Social Invention in Nine-
teenth-Century America. By drawing from
the careers of preeminent game designers
such as Milton Bradley, William Simmons,
and Anne W. Abbot, Guerra reconsid-
ers several landmarks of midcentury
American literature as archives of social
performance—Walt Whitman’s Leaves
of Grass (1855), Herman Melville’s The
Confidence Man (1857), The Autobiogra-
phy of P. T. Barnum (1855), and Nathaniel
Hawthorne’s Blithedale Romance (1852).
In many ways, this is a book less about
games than about how games can illumi-
nate the social meaning of literary works.
Readers expecting a detailed survey of
nineteenth-century board games and
parlor games will likely be frustrated; at
times, the author is more engaged with
critical theory than with the relevant
historiography and material culture. Yet
Guerra’s approach not only enriches our
understanding of the cultural history of
nineteenth-century games, it yields a
productive—if unwieldy—framework for
extending the field of game studies beyond
the material culture of formal game play.

Guerra argues that books, no less than
games, provided Americans with oppor-
tunities for social experimentation. Both
offered exercises in “how to arrange your-
self, your friends, and various associated
objects in order to produce a specifically
countoured performance space” (p. 11). By
shaping how people performed such “pro-
cedural orientations,” games and books
alike register an otherwise overlooked
history of slantwise moves: the unlikely
social configurations that people create
when they play—and read—together.

Guerra situates his analysis histori-
cally during the consolidation of market
capitalism in cities like Boston and New
York during the middle of the century.
Of course, how Americans fashioned
social selves during the antebellum mar-
et revolution is a deeply familiar pursuit
for scholars of American culture. In five
chapters, Guerra offers a new approach
by pairing a popular game with a con-
temporary work of literature. His method
is “contrapuntal.” He plays the game—its
materiality, its rules of play, its “perfor-
amance space”—off the text’s narrative to
throw light on the social subjectivity at
stake in both cultural artifacts.

In the bravura first chapter, Guerra
uses Bradley’s best-selling Checkered
Game of Life (1860) to discern in Leaves
of Grass a “playfield” where the poet of “The
Song of Myself” created an interactive
interface between himself and the reader he beckons. On levels of typography, book design, and poetics, Guerra demonstrates the parallels between game and poem as algorithmic processes.

The method is applied across the remaining chapters. In Simonds’s Peter Coddle and Melville’s confidence man, Guerra discovers a “state machine subjectivity” premised on Boolean logic. In tangram configuration puzzles and Barnum’s memoir, he finds a self “configured” according to capital speculation. In billiards and Hawthorne, he sees the “procedural logics” of utopian thinking. Linking Abbott’s Dr. Busby and Bradley’s The Game of Bamboozle (1872), he locates a social modality of networked productivity.

To some degree the jargon here cannot be avoided; it is part of the point. For Guerra the genealogy of game studies—largely focused on new media studies and video games—extends back to the nineteenth century, when game designers and writers alike sought to capture the energies of social interaction under capitalism.

Drawing from new media studies, performance studies, and new materialist studies, Guerra develops a sophisticated framework that enlivens his objects with social potentialities. With attention to the wear and tear of board games as well as the nuances of literary aesthetics, Guerra reveals the intersection of games and literature to be “an archive of potential agencies” (p. 129). What makes such abstract claims convincing is how well the author grounds his analysis in historical detail. One of the delights of the book is learning about the proximity of games and literature in commercial centers of the urban Northeast, both as objects of print culture and bourgeois amusements. The proximity more than warrants rethinking the boundaries that have kept games and literature on different tracks of scholarly inquiry.

The book’s conceptual reach often exceeds its historical grasp, however. Guerra’s is a very short nineteenth century; he does not range far beyond the 1850s and 1860s. And his selection of books and games—although compelling pairings in themselves—remain squarely in the canon of the American Renaissance. In other words, for all of Guerra’s attention to the social potential of games, his analysis is largely limited to the white middle class and appears sanitized of any overt conflict. Guerra might have gone further by asking how African American writers, say, or working-class consumers experimented with game play. Outside a few glances, Guerra does not address problems of racial or gender difference. Nor does he engage in the historiography of slavery and capitalism, which has long been concerned with problems of speculation, contract, and agency in the shaping of American freedom. Most surprising, however, is the lack of any attention to the turn of the twentieth century, when an incorporating game industry, an emerging philosophy of pragmatism, and a vogue for social realism would seem to offer fertile terrain for Guerra’s inquiry (see William Brown, *The Material Unconscious: American Amusement, Stephen Crane, and the Economics of Play*, 1996). As it is, the “social invention” in *Slantwise Moves* hardly leaves the midcentury parlor.

Nevertheless, the book’s core argument and case studies are worthy of critical attention in advanced undergraduate or graduate courses on game studies, new

---

Book Reviews 417
media studies, and literary history and print culture. Researchers in American culture more generally will find much of interest in Guerra’s recovery and analysis of board games in the world of nineteenth-century consumer culture. Above all, Guerra offers an important advance in thinking about games in relation to the major currents of American history. More than a reflection of ideology or a product of social relations, games are sites where individuals could rehearse and transform their repertoires of social life.

—Chris Dingwall, Oakland University, Rochester, MI

Resonant Games: Design Principles for Learning Games that Connect Hearts, Minds, and the Everyday
Eric Klopfer, Jason Haas, Scot Osterweil, and Louisa Rosenheck
Series foreword, foreword by Colleen Macklin, references, and index. 253 pp.
$40.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780262037808

The field of educational game design and development in digital media is still young and rapidly evolving. Emerging technologies provide new possibilities for content, deployment, and means of distribution. This plethora of opportunities has unfortunately also fostered the development of many products being labeled “educational games” without any fact-based foundation for making this claim. Even the terminology for how to describe this kind of work seems constantly in flux. Games that seek to educate players and change post-game player behavior may be called serious games, games for impact, games for change, and applied games (among other terms). This volume seeks to establish a rigorous foundation and clear guidelines for practice to enable the production of what the authors call “resonant” games—games that “create deep learning experiences inextricably connected to the educational ecosystem they exist in” (p. 3).

Using a series of examples from games that they have designed, built, and distributed, the authors lay out twenty design principles for creating high-quality, high-impact game experiences for school-aged children. Many of these are standard practice for good game design in general, but others are tailored to specific challenges faced by designers developing for the K–12 system such as working within the requirements of educators’ curricular and standards-testing goals while also improving the quality of the education: “The approach we’ve taken in Radix and other projects is to design a game that covers the shallower content necessary in schools but that also builds in activities that foster deeper thinking” (p. 124).

The twenty principles address critically important features of game development such as extensive use of focus groups and play testing to ensure that the content and structure of the games is appropriate for the intended audience. Step-by-step descriptions of the iterative process of game design are tied to the game examples to demonstrate exactly how these principles can be applied in practice. The section on data is especially useful. Guidance is provided on how to