

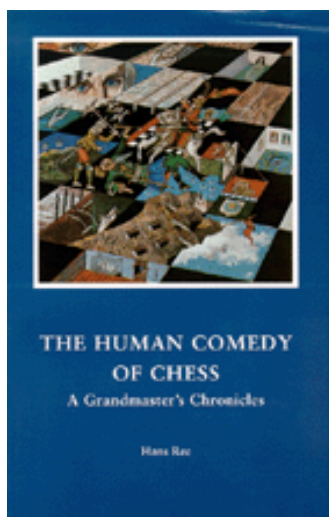


C O L U M N I S T S

Dutch Treat

Hans Ree

The Human Comedy of Chess



by Hans Ree

"Hands off, dirty bastard!"

The last time I spoke with Román Torán Albero was in 1992, after the Candidates match between Jan Timman and Arthur Yusupov. I had been present as a reporter and before I left I went to the restaurant of the Hotel Anibal in Linares to do a round of handshaking with the chess officials who were waiting there for the closing ceremony to start. At the time Torán was president of the Spanish Chess Federation. With a broad smile he send me off, saying in perfect Dutch: "Milk is good for everyone," a commercial slogan he had picked up in the 1950s during a Hoogoven tournament. In Dutch it rhymes.

Torán died this year on the first of October in Madrid, shortly before his 74th birthday. Not much attention was paid to his death in the chess world and I only noticed it because of an obituary by Gert Ligterink on the website of the Corus tournament. Torán was famous in Spanish chess circles and quite well-known among those who frequented the Hoogoven tournament, which nowadays is called the Corus tournament.

Between 1953 and 1960 he took part there five times. The milk slogan was only one of the snippets of Dutch he had picked up; even much later, whenever he met Dutch chess players, he was to greet them in Dutch: "Hello, street-dog!" or "Hands off, dirty bastard!"

I think this last phrase must have been taught to him by a particularly prudish Dutch woman, for Torán didn't need it to force himself on female company at those Hoogoven tournaments in Beverwijk. His tall and handsome stature, his roguish smile and impeccable dress made him the darling of the more adventurous ladies who resided in that little town. Some of his conquests are still visiting the tournament nowadays, maybe cherishing sweet memories.

He was a good international master, but he gave up serious chess at an early age to become a journalist, businessman and chess official. As his friend Pablo Morán wrote: "At a certain moment Román realised that it is better to live like a marquis than to be a strong chessplayer." I don't know much about Torán's record as a chess official in Spain, but I suppose that he must have been quite effective in seducing rich sponsors.

The quote from Morán may not be quite accurate, for I haven't read his book on Torán. It's what Ricardo Calvo told me, and he considered himself an enemy of Torán, both in chess politics and in general Spanish politics.

Apart from being president of the Spanish Federation Torán was also vice-president of FIDE, from 1982 until 1990. These were tumultuous years (but when are they not?) with bitter fights between supporters and opponents of FIDE-president Florencio Campomanes. Torán was friendly with Karpov and obviously supported the administration of which he was part. Calvo took part in the election campaign of 1986 for the group, headed by Keene and Kasparov, that aimed to replace Campomanes by the now forgotten figure-head Lincoln Lucena.

For his role in that campaign Calvo was declared persona non grata by FIDE in 1987. He went to court to fight the decision, spent a lot of money on it and attained nothing, which was in fact what he had expected.

Once, when I was talking about chess history with Calvo, our conversation turned to the Arabian poet Yahya ben al Hakam, nicknamed al-Gazal, who lived in the 8th and 9th century in Andalusia. Calvo had written about him unfavourably and I found the way he described this poet quite similar to the way he used to talk about Torán. Had he written a pen-portrait of his own enemy in the guise of a historical article?

Not quite, but Calvo recognised the similarity. “Such authoritarian characters turn up all the time,” he said. In fact, though al-Gazal had called the game of chess satanic and impure, the life and works of this poet and diplomat appealed to me. The fragments of his poetry that I had seen showed him as a cynical and witty observer, not without self-irony.

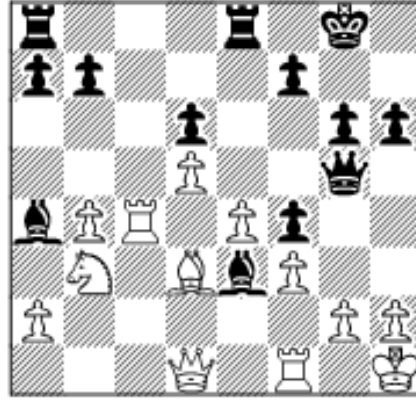
I couldn't share Calvo's dislike of al-Gazal and Torán, but in his chess-political battles my instincts were at his side. In my book, it is not a point in favour to be a highly-placed FIDE official, neither then nor now.

Nevertheless, Torán had many redeeming qualities. He had played some fine attacking games, written a book about Bronstein which I cherish, and as a chess journalist he kept his virtue long after he had given up competitive play.

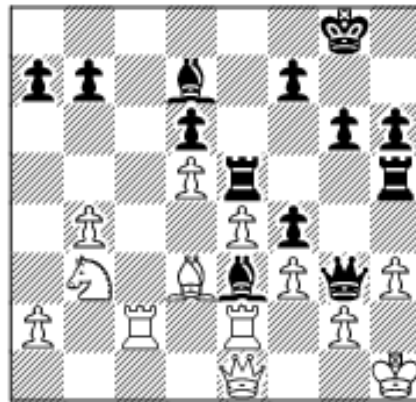
Whenever I was in Spain at a chess event I used to read his reports in the newspaper ABC. “They're all fascists there,” said Calvo dismissively. That is not for me to judge, but what I can say is that Torán's technical analyses were of a high level and must have cost him many hours of labour. Although he had chosen to live like a marquis, he remained a real chessplayer.

Theo van Scheltinga • Román Torán
Hoogoven Tournament
Beverwijk 1953

1. d2•d4 Ng8•f6 2. c2•c4 g7•g6 3. Nb1•c3 Bf8•g7 4. e2•e4 d7•d6 5. Ng1•f3 0•0 6. Bf1•e2 e7•e5 7. 0•0 Nb8•d7 8. Ra1•b1 Rf8•e8 9. d4•d5 Nd7•c5 10. Bc1•g5 h7•h6 11. Bg5xf6 Qd8xf6 12. b2•b4 Nc5•d7 13. Nf3•d2 Qf6•e7 14. Be2•d3 Nd7•f6 15. Nd2•b3 Nf6•h5 16. c4•c5 Nh5•f4 17. Nc3•e2 Qe7•g5 18. Ne2xf4 e5xf4 19. f2•f3 Bc8•d7 20. Rb1•c1 Bd7•a4 21. c5xd6 Bg7•d4+ 22. Kg1•h1 c7xd6 23. Rc1•c4 Bd4•e3



24. Qd1•b1 Re8•e5 25. Rf1•e1 Qg5•g3 26. h2•h3 Re5•h5 27. Re1•e2 Ra8•e8 28. Qb1•f1 Ba4•d7 29. Rc4•c2 Re8•e5 30. Qf1•e1



30...Rh5xh3+ 31. g2xh3 Qg3xf3+ 32. Re2•g2 Bd7xh3 White resigned.

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