

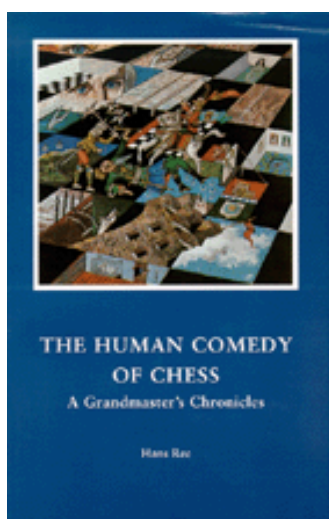


C O L U M N I S T S

## Dutch Treat

Hans Ree

### *The Human Comedy of Chess*



by Hans Ree

## Adriaan de Groot, 1914-2006

The Psychological Laboratory of the University of Amsterdam must have been a pleasant chess joint during the early sixties. Johan Barendregt, professor of the theory of personality, was an IM. Adriaan de Groot, professor of methodology, didn't have a chess title, but around 1940, when he had been playing in international tournaments, he had been of master strength. And then there were the students, Kick Langeweg, Tim Krabbé, Fedde van Wijngaarden and Piet van der Weide, one strong IM and the others of near-master strength. Piet van der Weide said that the yearly championship of the psychologists was stronger than the official championship of Amsterdam, and he may have been right.

Somewhat later Johan Barendregt was to ask me tentatively if I wouldn't be interested in a job at the Lab, something to do with statistics or the methodology of science. Never mind that these subjects had not been on my curriculum as a mathematics student; I would learn them on the job. The important point was that he would be able to play chess with me. Such was Johan, who all his life pretended that his main career was that of a failed chessplayer who was forced to fulfill his professorial duties as a sideline, just to earn some money, the way Spinoza earned his livelihood grinding optical lenses.

Adriaan de Groot, who died on August 14 at the age of 91, was different. For about a decade he played on an international level, but after that he stopped rigorously. He still liked to play blitz with friends and to correspond about games he had seen in a newspaper and analysed, but he didn't participate in serious tournaments anymore.

The international chessworld knows him mainly because of his book *Thought and Choice in Chess*, an English version of his Dutch dissertation of 1946. I have never spent much time or thought about the implications of this study for the theory of thought and choice in general, or for computer science, but I liked to read the protocols of the verbalised decision process of chessplayers confronted with an interesting position.

Most of these were taken from the participants of the great AVRO tournament of 1938, to whom he had been introduced by Max Euwe. Their way of thinking had no big surprises for me. Of course they were world-class players, so they would calculate more quickly and accurately than me, but still it was my own way of thinking, only better.

But even more interesting were the protocols taken from lesser players, and to be

honest, it was two Dutch lady chessplayers who surprised me by talking at great length about a certain position without even touching on the essence of it: the plan that black was forced to adopt in order not to lose without fight. These two ladies had played in international tournaments also, sometimes with considerable success, and apparently at their time this had been possible without understanding chess.

De Groot understood chess well enough. He represented the Netherlands at three Olympiads, that of Munich 1936, Stockholm 1937 and Buenos Aires 1939, and took part in two Dutch championships, with decent results.

As a psychologist he had great influence not only on Dutch psychology, but on Dutch society in general. He had been raised in the German psychological school of intuitive understanding and had become disappointed by it. Psychology should be a more exact and testable science, he found. Counting and measuring would be more fruitful than vague intuitive understanding.

De Groot became the leading Dutch writer on education and the measurement of performance and as such he brought the Dutch educational system to a massive adoption of multiple choice tests. I think that later he experienced the disappointment of someone whose ideas have triumphed more drastically than he had wanted. A test does not only measure performance and knowledge, but after a while it will also influence teaching methods, as pupils are trained for the tests. Knowledge would become the kind of knowledge that can be easily tested with multiple choice questions. In an interview De Groot once remarked ruefully that the pendulum had swung too much the other way. It had been the way he had wanted, from vague understanding to exact measurement, but a bit too much and too exclusively.

Now and then he had his publishers send me some of his publications on computer chess and related fields, but the only book that I received from his own hands was something quite different; an English translation of a Dutch book that he had written in 1949 and of which he was still quite fond: *Saint Nicholas, a Psychoanalytical Study of his History and Myth*. A literal translation of the original Dutch title would have been *Saint Nicholas, Patron of Love*. There is no counting and measuring in this charming book, but psychoanalytical and intuitive understanding, as in the old days.

Here is a game from the last important tournament in which De Groot participated, the Hoogoven tournament of 1946. It was won by the Belgian Albéric O'Kelly de Galway, who lost only one game.

### ***De Groot • O'Kelly de Galway*** **Hoogovens Beverwijk 1946**

**1. e2•e4 e7•e5 2. Ng1•f3 Nb8•c6 3. Bf1•b5 Ng8•f6 4. 0•0 Bf8•c5 5. Nf3xe5 Nc6xe5 6. d2•d4 c7•c6 7. d4xe5 Nf6xe4 8. Bb5•d3 d7•d5 9. Qd1•f3** This is not dangerous for black. The usual move was then and still is 9. exd6

**9...Qd8•h4 10. g2•g3 Ne4•g5** It was not necessary to move the knight, for 10...Bg4 11. Qf4 Qh5 12. Bxe4 dxe4 13. Qxe4 0-0-0 would be a promising pawn sacrifice.

**11. Qf3•d1 Ng5•h3+** Black's previous move would make more sense after 11...Bxf2+ 12. Rxf2 Nh3+ 13. Kg2 Nxf2 14. gxh4 Nxd1 15. Be2 Nxb2 with a difficult ending.

**12. Kg1-g2 Dh4-e7 13. f2-f4** Now with a strong pawn center and black's knight out of play, white is fine.

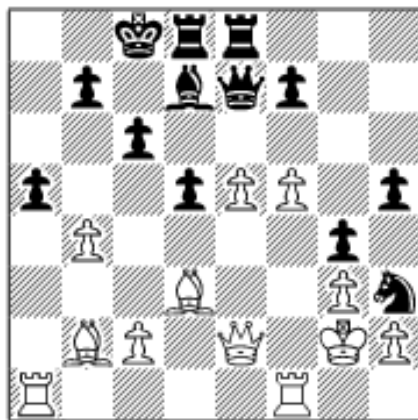
**13...h7•h5 14. Nb1•c3** He could have gone for the knight with 14. e6 Bxe6 15. f5, but he prefers a solid attack to a messy material advantage.

**14...g7•g5 15. f4•f5 g5•g4 16. Qd1•e2 Bc8•d7** At first sight 16...Bd4 looks good, but white has 17. Be3. Then 17...Bxe5 would lose material after 18. f6 and 17...Bxc3 18. bxc3 Qxe5 19. Rae1 0-0 20. Qd2 would give white a very strong attack.

**17. Nc3•a4 Bc5•b6** And here after 17...Bd4 white has 18. c3 Bxe5 19. f6 Qe6 20. Nc5 with excellent play.

**18. b2•b4 0•0•0** Or 18...Qxb4 19. Nxb6 followed by 20. e6 with a winning attack.

**19. Na4xb6+ a7xb6 20. a2•a4 Rh8•e8 21. a4•a5 b6xa5 22. Bc1•b2** Much stronger would have been 22. Rxa5, for after 22...Qxe5 - there is not much else that black can do - 23. Qxe5 Rxe5 23. Bb2 black would lose an exchange.



**22...d5•d4** The decisive mistake. 22...axb4 would also lose quickly after 23. e6 with the threat of 24. Qe5, but after 22...Qxb4 black would be still in the game. One variation is 23. Rfb1 c5 24. e6 Bc6 after which white has to choose between playing for a draw by repetition with 25. Bc1 and winning a dubious exchange after 25. Bf6 d4+ 26. Kf1 Qc3.

**23. Ra1xa5** Now white's attack is irresistible.

**23...Qe7xb4 24. Ra5•a8+ Kc8•c7 25. Bb2•a3 c6•c5** He has to give the queen. White finishes it off quickly.

**26. Ba3xb4 Rd8xa8 27. e5•e6 Bd7•c6+ 28. Bd3•e4 c5xb4 29. Be4xc6 b7xc6 30. Qe2•e5+** Black resigned.



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