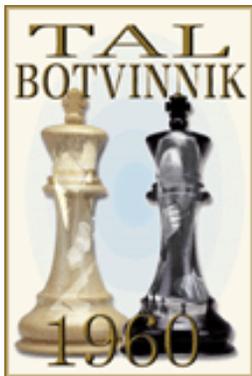




SKITTLES ROOM

From the Archives

Hosted by
Mark Donlan



From the Archives...

Since it came online many years ago, [ChessCafe.com](#) has presented literally thousands of articles, reviews, columns and the like for the enjoyment of its worldwide readership. The good news is that almost all of this high quality material remains available in the [Archives](#). The bad news is that this great collection of chess literature is now so large and extensive – and growing each week – that it is becoming increasingly difficult to navigate it effectively. We decided that the occasional selection from the archives posted publicly online might be a welcomed addition to the regular fare.

Watch for an item to be posted online periodically throughout each month. We will update the [ChessCafe.com](#) home page whenever there has been a “new” item posted here. We hope you enjoy *From the Archives*...

The following is an excerpt from an unpublished manuscript by Hans Kmoch (1894-1973). Kmoch’s career as a player, journalist, and arbiter brought him into contact with some of the greatest players of all time. We extend our thanks to Burt Hochberg, who owns the manuscript, for allowing us to publish this excerpt, which he has edited especially for [ChessCafe.com](#).

Grandmasters I Have Known

by Hans Kmoch

Géza Maróczy (1870-1951)

For ten days the Euwe family had been celebrating. There was the father’s birthday on May 20, the parents’ twenty-fifth anniversary a few days later, and the wedding of the eldest daughter on May 30. Well-wishers, cakes, and flowers filled the spacious Amsterdam apartment, and congratulatory telegrams poured in from all over the world.

By the tenth day Max Euwe had hardly enough energy to read the new batch of telegrams. Warily opening a few of them, he smiled when he saw one from Budapest. “Wat aardig!” (“How nice!”) he thought, certain that this one had come from his fatherly friend and chess teacher, Géza Maróczy. He was stunned when he read that Maróczy had died.

Géza Maróczy (pronounced GAY-zaw MAHR-otsee not MarOXy) died on May 29, 1951, shortly after reaching his eighty-first birthday. With his passing the chess world lost another of those world masters whose fame started in the previous century. In Maróczy, however, the chess world lost more than a grandmaster and a fine gentleman. It lost the unchallenged champion of chivalry in chess.

This chivalry is hard to describe. It is sportsmanship with a medieval touch. It is the Occidental version of the Asian’s anxiety about “face.” It is a basic and noble belief that a

man should prefer to die than do wrong, to kill rather than submit to an insult; that honor is sacred.



Géza Maróczy

The Magyar nation (often misleadingly called Hungarian) has always been famous for its chivalry, and chivalry was certainly the norm at the time Maróczy was born. An autonomous part of the Austro-Hungarian empire, it had its own laws that respected the feelings of its indigenous Magyars. Dueling, for example, though outlawed in Austria, was common in Hungary. Nobles of the Budapest parliament often settled their disputes that way, a practice that was approved by the general citizenry. The typical Hungarian man was chivalrous, charming, proud, gallant, chauvinistic, and, at times, intolerant. Hungarian schoolchildren were taught in their Latin classes that *Extra Hungariam non est vita* (There is no life beyond Hungary), and, like grandmaster Rudolf Charousek, they held to that idea even at the brink of starvation.

Such was the atmosphere in which Maróczy grew up. He was born March 3, 1870, in Szeged, Hungary's second city, where to this day the genuine Magyar lifestyle is most clearly preserved. This allows us to understand the sixty-one-year-old Maróczy's decision, during the tournament at Bled in 1931, to challenge Nimzovitch to a pistol duel. It turned out to be much ado about nothing, though, when Nimzovitch flatly refused to participate in what he termed his own assassination. Maróczy was satisfied. To his way of thinking, refusal to accept such a challenge was, as a matter of honor, worse than being shot to death.

Yet Maróczy was hardly a warrior. He was, in fact, an extremely peaceful personality. I suspect that, had that duel actually taken place, Maróczy would have been hard put to decide which end of the pistol to hold.

He was an ample six feet of bone and skin especially skin. His skin, which hung loosely in innumerable ripples like that of a Chinese Shar-Pei dog, seemed roomy enough to accommodate two people of his size. Though as a young man he tried but failed to grow a mustache, he did manage to accumulate a surfeit of black hair, which silvered a bit toward the end of his life. Mary Bain, whose guest Maróczy was for a while in New York, remembers the day he had his hair cut; a memorable occasion merely because it was so rare. He had small, deep-set eyes that sparkled with energy, prominent cheekbones, a broad mouth, and a mighty set of teeth that must have been the despair of dentists. His cadaverous frame was fortunately supported by a pair of enormous feet, which, despite his old-fashioned clothes that ballooned like sails, kept him upright in the strongest wind. He moved very slowly, and talked even more slowly, especially in such difficult languages as German and English. He thought exclusively in Hungarian, and although he struggled hard to make the

complicated linguistic switches, he always sounded Hungarian. Playing bridge, he never won the “rabber,” as did Bogoljubow, but always the “rebbey.”

He was not really attracted to any game other than chess, but he played bridge because it was an English game, and Maróczy was an Anglophile. One reason was that he had started his career at the great Hastings chess congress of 1895 and had become a master of the British Chess Federation by winning the Major Open tournament. Another reason was the warm reception he received in Great Britain and the United States during his years of exile.

Maróczy was forced to live in exile for some seven years. Somehow he had become compromised during the Communist revolution that shook Hungary in 1919. To imagine Maróczy as a revolutionary, and a Communist one at that, is completely ridiculous. He would never knowingly break the law or abet any kind of law-breaking. The only explanation for his difficult situation is that he must have fallen into some sort of political trap, perhaps by signing a petition the portent of which he failed to appreciate. He was naive enough to have done that.

Some time after he left Hungary the Communist authorities realized their mistake and called him home, but since he had in the meantime resumed his chess career, they had to wait. Maróczy's second chess career (1920-1936) was to last about as long as his first (1895-1911). His first prize at Ostend crowned his first career; his tie for first, second, and third with Alekhine and Bogoljubow at Karlsbad 1923 crowned his second. And his second career sparkles even more thanks to his teaching two world champions: Miss Vera Menchik and Dr. Max Euwe.

In his wandering years Maróczy became devoted to certain places. Beautiful Bad Aussee in Austria, close to Ischl, the summer residence of the emperors, reminded him of Zurich, Switzerland, where he had gone to college. Amsterdam attracted him because of his close friendship with Euwe and his family. Hastings, England, was an inspiration because it reminded him of his success there in 1895. And New York, which he considered the most desirable place to live, recalled for him the skyscraper of a plan he had cherished while at the peak of his first career: to challenge Emanuel Lasker for the world championship.

That plan emerged soon after the tournament at Cambridge Springs 1904. New York chess circles tried to raise the money for the match stakes, but failed. In time, Maróczy was grateful both for the effort and for its failure. He realized that Lasker would have been too much for him he had always felt handicapped when facing a heavy smoker.

Maróczy had a deep-seated, though perfectly concealed, aversion to two kinds of people: smokers like Lasker, and players who preferred to open with the queen-pawn, like Alekhine. In his second career, he worried constantly about finding a satisfactory defense against 1 d4. When that move was played against him by Heinrich Wolf at Vienna 1922, he considered it an act of malice. Though he managed to draw the game, he later remarked, “Wolf doesn't know much about 1 d4 himself. He made the move only to irk me.”

In the closing days of World War II, Maróczy had a dreadful time. Budapest was besieged by the Russians, and for weeks he had to live in an overcrowded shelter, with beans as the only food and no sanitation facilities. He contracted pneumonia and almost died. Brave Mrs. Maróczy, his faithful companion for five decades, as noble as he and no less religious but far more practical, pulled him through.

After the war, Géza realized that everything in Hungary was changing. He sought to leave, longing for Holland, dreaming of America. In 1946, he and his wife left for Amsterdam but got no farther than Vienna. In 1947, they tried again and this time made it to Amsterdam, where they stayed for half a year. During that time Maróczy made a heartbreaking attempt at a third career, but finally had to go back to Budapest. Very little was heard of him afterward.

His letters to friends contained nothing to raise the suspicions of the notoriously suspicious Communist Party censors.

And finally we heard that he had died. Farewell, grandmaster, friend, gentleman, cavalier. As Horatio said to his dead friend Hamlet, "And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest."

This article appeared in somewhat different form in *Chess Review* in 1951.



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