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Capablanca Defeats Marshall's Attack, 1918.

“Few major chess openings can be traced to a specific origin, much less a particularly interesting one. The Marshall Attack in the Ruy Lopez is a rare and special exception. The perennial U.S. Champion Frank Marshall's deployment of 8...d5!! in the Ruy Lopez against none other than future World Champion Jose Capablanca introduced a sensational opening idea in a brilliant game... [The idea is still] played by many of the greatest players in history and now considered so effective that White is best advised not to allow the Marshall. In the game, Marshall managed to create many threats and serious problems for Capablanca. Near-perfect play was needed by Capablanca to navigate the many threats.

Capablanca met Marshall's innovation not only with accuracy, but also with something resembling scorn, saying ‘I felt that my judgement and skill were being challenged by a player who had every reason to fear both.’”¹

Aligned left is a history imagined to have been written by a Michelet-like, Castro-sympathizing narrator in 1966, the year Cuba, Capablanca's home country, hosted the Chess Olympiad. Some text is taken verbatim from Michelet's *Joan of Arc* and other Michelet excerpts from *Metahistory* with pronouns changed. This text is **bolded** and not put in quotation marks. The intention is to create a tension between the Michelet liberal romanticism and the anarchist tendency of romanticism.

A Heideggerian analysis is justified in the center. Arguments from Bambach's explication of Heidegger were modified and applied to this context.

A pastiche of *How to be Both* is aligned right. It begins in the exact form and style found at the start of the painter's section, then diverges slightly, but always remains “in” the painter's section. More details about the narrator and narrative choices can be found in the conclusion.

¹ Sam Copeland, “Capablanca Explains Refuting The 1st Marshall Gambit - Best of the 1910s,” Chess.com, 2022, <https://www.chess.com/blog/SamCopeland/capablanca-explains-refuting-the-1st-marshall-gambit-best-of-the-1910s>

Jose Capablanca was a living legend... But the vital force in him, exalted and concentrated, became all the more creative. Unawares, the young [man] *created*, so to speak, [his] own ideas, turned them into realities, made them entities, powers, imparted to them... an existence so splendid, so compelling that the paltry realities of this world grew faint in comparison.²

If *poetry means creation*, this no doubt is supreme poetry. We must enquire by what degree [he] reached such a summit, and from what a humble beginning.³

Beginning does not prefigure middle and end. Understanding that beginning is not a question of method, it is the mode of being.⁴ Historicizing the opening as the opening itself is meaningless.⁵ We only choose to historicize the opening that brings decisive conclusions, that is specifically repeatable, and that matters because it continues to be played today. A chess player projects the future in his opening moves—nothing has been accomplished yet, and the possibilities abound. Thus the rightly historicized opening has past, present, and future. The Marshall attack is such an opening.⁶

J'adoube—this is a knotted twisted rope wound fast as a
watersnake hunts minnows at night if
we imagine minnows as somnolent : watersnakes as
lubricious : water not as viscous but
jagged with permutations of nine distinct forms breathing
air as pistons breathe or as automatons move or
as trained mice traverse a maze chasing
toward air at the end of every rope winding round the immortal
conclusion we chase wall to wall to end to a miscalculation
after his father told him not to and
he did anyway and
with the light touch

² Jules Michelet, *Joan of Arc*, trans. Albert Guerard (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1967), 9.

³ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁴ Charles Bambach, *Heidegger, Dilthey, and the Crisis of Historicism (H, D, & Crisis hereafter)*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 247.

⁵ As Ranke might.

⁶ Chess analysis “discloses the possibilities of what *Dasein* can be futurally” (what moves can be played, and how you might respond to them) “on the basis of what has already been” (working from past master games to explore possibilities and deviations). Bambach, *H, D, & Crisis*, 247.

hammering a nail nailing itself onto
the blue white drift of snow on littered water
and now me buying the expensive suits and tightly pegged pants
I'll be buried in.

A boy in front of a chessboard.⁷

Capablanca's father was a soldier in the Spanish-controlled Republic of Cuba. "As a consequence," Capablanca wrote, "my companions were soldiers; my playground a military fort." Capablanca loved "the glamour of military life." At age four, he watched his first two games of chess. Without anyone explaining the rules to him, he caught his father making an illegal move. He challenged his father to a game and beat him, **realizing the full meaning of chess as war:**⁸ "I could soon appreciate the fact that a game of chess may be compared to a military battle – something that involves an attack on the part of one player, and a defense on the part of another."⁹

Young Capablanca stood amazed and in tears, as though he had envisioned his whole destiny. Hitherto he had heard but one voice, that of his mother, of which his own voice was but the echo; now he heard the mighty voice of the angels!¹⁰ Reflecting later on the question of where he got this talent, he wrote that "it was due partly to a mastery of the principles of the game, born of what I often felt to be a peculiar intuition, and partly to the possession of an abnormally developed memory – a memory far stronger than that of the average boy of four."

A boy with no past already has intuition for chess. Not logic, intuition. A
boy with no past already has memory.

At age 10, the Spanish-American War ended. At age 13, Capablanca became the Cuban chess champion.

⁷ "We" is the pronoun of choice in chess analysis. "J'adoube" is the word meaning "adjust" which a chess player says to signify they are adjusting a piece rather than moving it." Immortal" is a term granted only to the most incredible and artful chess games, eg. "Kasparov's Immortal" or "The Immortal Pawns Game." The phrase "tightly pegged pants" is borrowed from a real phrase describing this real narrator, who cared quite a bit about fashion. I'm hesitant to cite it as it might give things away.

⁸ "Thus she realized the full meaning of war." Michelet, *Joan of Arc*, 11.

⁹ Edward Winter, "Capablanca: How I Learned to Play Chess," Chess Notes, April 2022, <https://www.chesshistory.com/winter/extra/capablanca4.html>. Winter is the leading historian of chess, and here presents a 1916 article by Capablanca.

¹⁰ The Michelet quote is "She stood amazed and in tears, as though he had envisioned his whole destiny... Hitherto she had heard but one voice, that of her mother, of which her own voice was but the echo; now she heard the mighty voice of the angels!" Michelet, *Joan of Arc*, 12-13.

14 was the age of my first knight sacrifice though I admit, that game over there, also a Morphy, with the combination that inspired mine was, I admit, quite good : he less misleading than I : hiding behind the face of a boy
and from Morphy I learned to accept the King's Gambit. Reshevsky stood and looked for a time at the combination I created. He played on, but he was already lost : in 10 moves.¹¹

Capablanca was destined to bring Cuban chess to the world, and bring a worldliness of Chess to Cuba.¹² Marshall, his opponent, played nervously and cruelly.¹³ He faced Capablanca eight times with the idea to play his invention, but each time balked: he knew the danger of the crucifixion he yearned to perform. On the eve of the game, Marshall requested a postponement, barely sleeping the night before.¹⁴ Some Americans were in awe of Capablanca's play, but others viciously feared him. Ten years prior, Capablanca had defeated Marshall 8-1 in a match. **Never were the Jews filled with such jealousy against Jesus as the Americans against Capablanca.**¹⁵ Capablanca would not balk. He wrote after the game, "The lust of battle, however, had been aroused within me." When Marshall played his crafty pawn sacrifice, Capablanca decided, "I was honor bound, so to speak, to take the pawn and accept the challenge."¹⁶

When Capablanca plays d4, he discovers (over the board, no less)¹⁷ the most important defensive resource for White in the Marshall, a resource still played today. D4 will only matter a dozen moves later, when it allows him to defend his bishop and escape a forced draw. A chess player cannot view time and causation purely linearly: playing d4 is not the result of calculation into every possible sequence of future moves; nor is it achieved purely by evaluating the current position;¹⁸ and as this opening had never been played, no past games in this position exist to aid

¹¹ Inspired by Ali Smith, *How to be Both* (New York: Penguin, 2014), 9 & 27.

¹² Chess remains an incredibly popular activity in Cuba.

¹³ Michelet doesn't invest much time into developing other characters. The English are portrayed in his writing as flat.

¹⁴ Marshall was one of four participants to ask for a postponement, but while accuracy was important to Michelet... that wouldn't be wildly important to mention.

¹⁵ "Hatred" was replaced with "jealousy." Michelet, *Joan of Arc*, 106.

¹⁶ Edward Winter, "The Marshall Gambit," Chess Notes, October 2023, <https://www.chesshistory.com/winter/extra/marshallgambit.html>.

¹⁷ Meaning, it was not an idea or pattern learned in advance. There is a popular conception in the chess world that the artfulness of chess arises when players are "out of their preparation" and improvising.

¹⁸ "Calculation" and intuition are often combined by chess players deciding on the best move.

Capablanca. A chess game's recent past blurs with the current position, a monument to that past but independent from it.¹⁹

The current position and future possibilities are on a chess player's mind. However, he must view the full past—his knowledge of prior games, his study of chess up to this moment—as “having been,” accounting for it in the choices he makes in the present. How do the patterns this player knows apply to the current position? The act of considering a move *is* the act of retrieving the meaning of the past within the situation of the present as a move to be played, a possibility for a player's future.²⁰ He is looking forward to the endgame coming toward him. He calculates possibilities, he intuits from past, from memory, from chess itself. Capablanca, a human being, plays with intuition. Human being(s) who have since learned from Capablanca's games are aware of his intuition, and consider it as part of their own, but another player never having seen Capablanca's games may play d4 as well, just as young Capablanca caught his father's illegal move before he could catch a baseball.²¹ Chess is better temporalized through being—time is a less valuable axiom when anyone can play at any time.

Even in chess, the most logical game, Capablanca the *temporal being* full of intuition and anachronic knowledge wins, not Capablanca the chess analyst who memorizes and calculates every possibility.²² Capablanca performs an act of understanding the past in every move he plays. Writing a history of Capablanca grounded in the method of understanding would neglect the act of understanding Capablanca performs. Instead, we must look at him (the being), the beings that come before and after him, and ask our own selves—what do we wish to understand about his temporality?

I was not yet recognized, invited to tournaments, but already I saw fiery conflagrations on the board that would have been invisible to Morphy.

I don't believe in psychology. I believe in good moves.²³

I learned from good moves.

¹⁹ In two identical positions reached differently, a strong chess player will always make the same move. There might be more to be said: perhaps psychology, time pressure, and other factors from the past can influence the present.

²⁰ Paraphrased from Bambach, *H, D, & Crisis*, 220.

²¹ Capablanca played baseball for the Columbia College team in 1905.

²² Bambach, *H, D, & Crisis*, 220.

²³ This sentence is a real quote from this real narrator.

Since I was a boy I lived in fear of the cough an anonymous stranger let
out as I was capturing a poisoned pawn (an undefended pawn that may be
captured at risk of vitiating your position) : the board was bud rosewood :
my opponent held a draw.

The American attempted to crush us, and failed. D4 was the first move in our
revolution, long before 1959. **We, who the disfigured and perverted Yankee imperialist,**
daily becoming more impossible, has banished from every temple; we who, by his
monopoly, are deprived of victory, and often feel sad in the isolation of our thoughts,
we had victory on that day—such a victory as had never existed before!²⁴ Capablanca is
the birth of Cuba.

Shaking Castro's hand I felt the memories fly off me.²⁵ Hadn't I lost to him
on purpose? I looked at my moves and for the first time was not surprised
with any knowledge : the position was dead, past, catastrophic : what had
I done.

I shook my head.²⁶



²⁴ “Past” is replaced with Castro’s phrase “Yankee Imperialist.” “Temple” and “communion” language is replaced with words like “victory.” Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 152.

²⁵ “[Redacted] felt it unusual that when the team returned to the United States, FISCHER remained on in Cuba. He felt maybe FISCHER wanted to see what the CASTRO regime was accomplishing.” FBI, “Case: ‘Robert James Fischer,’ 4. <https://vault.fbi.gov/robert-james-fischer/Robert%20James%20Fischer%20Part%201%20of%201>

²⁶ Inspired by the scene in *How to be Both* where the Falcon looks at Franchesco’s work.

He put his hands over his mouth.
When he took his hands away I saw that he was grinning.
Stay for another week, he said. Teach me to play like Capablanca and I
will show you the Cuba he never saw.
Thank you, Mr. Castro, but I don't know that my country will let me stay
any longer, I said.²⁷
Your country will let you stay longer, he said.²⁸

History is resurrection. Americans frame Fischer as their pawn against the Soviets, but he plays in the style of Capablanca. He was born a year and a day after Capablanca died. He played in our Capablanca Memorial tournament even when his country denied him permission. His opponents fear unleashing the Marshall attack on him.²⁹ Fischer resurrects the world champion: he shakes Castro's hand in the city where Capablanca was crowned as such. It is asserted that Fischer said to Castro, "you have put the Americans in a position I'd call poisonous," that he showed Castro how, in 36 irrefutable moves, they could both champion their worlds.³⁰

Is Fischer, a player inspired by Capablanca, who no doubt had many Capablanca games memorized, acting with historical consciousness? Is he appropriating the past or using it as an object for research, learning from Capablanca's moves, or actively playing against Capablanca and *reviving* Capablanca when playing others?³¹

I am more eyes on a wall than a being in time.

But do you not study Capablanca's games in conversation—as Barth frames the now-ness of conversation with God—deciding what you yourself would play at every turn?³²

²⁷ Michael Goeller, "Fischer - Castro, Havana 1966? Not!" *The Kenilworthian*, August 2006. <https://www.kenilworthchessclub.org/kenilworthian/2006/08/fischer-castro-havana-1966-not.html>. This is also the source of the earlier image.

²⁸ And he did stay.

²⁹ Spassky had three opportunities to play the Marshall, a pet line of his, against Fischer and balked twice. The third was a relatively quiet game where neither played in the aggressive spirit of the opening.

³⁰ There is evidence that they talked for a long time.

³¹ Bambach, *H, D, & Crisis*, 221.

³² Bambach, *H, D, & Crisis*, 195.

I have no style. Capablanca has no style. What defines us is that we play
perfectly.

Impossible. Analyzing your games with a chess engine we'd find
many imperfections. Rankian as that approach may be—

—you are a resurrection of another player, even if your perfection *precludes* another
player from being resurrected as *you*. They would be called perfect, not Bobby.

Morphy had no masters to learn from. He was better than his
contemporaries : I was better. He and I are the same beings in different
times. That is the important quality of a game—the poise, the skill—not
the change in chess theory between him and me. A history of rain
pretends every drop in a storm falls simultaneously. They are the storm
together. But the same drop has cycled through the ocean and the clouds.

Many times. The drop repeats.
My chess is not all mine : his not all his.

Your rain will rain again. True revolution will be achieved!

Is that the only ideal you can grok, revolution?³³ That romanticism
is progress from the pure scientism that has plagued history, but it fails to
grasp the fullness of what Fischer is saying. Time is not an axiom for
history. It is only that which facilitates
being-ahead-of-itself-in-already-being-involved-in.³⁴ I was wrong earlier,
when I discounted the calculation of future possibilities every chess
player makes as purely analytical. That act is not discrete from intuition
(being-in-the-word)³⁵ and knowing the full past: It is that very act of
looking forward which creates the being. The calculation is the possibility
to be futural, and the possibility of access to history is grounded in it.³⁶
Only in considering possibilities for the future is one forced to recall their
past knowledge, their intuition, the present position.

³³ White, *Metahistory*, 162

³⁴ Martin Heidegger, *History of the Concept of Time: Prolegomena* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 320.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 298. I believe Heidegger, asked whether chess intuition is past, present, or a peek into the future, would say “*I am, that is, I can*” and view intuition as a quality of Dasein being possible, and therefore having possibilities.

³⁶ Bambach, *H, D, & Crisis*, 221

Concluding Clarifications

The Bobby Fischer narration in the *How to be Both* pastiche (to clarify—it's all Bobby, all the way through, and all references are to games he really played) requires the most explanation, mostly because it does not explicitly cover the Capablanca-Marshall game. The idea of Fischer hovering over a game which is not his seemed to be more fitting than any more direct explication of the moment. It creates a temporal challenge of ownership—Whose game is it, the creator's or the players whose games stem from it? Does playing the same idea, or with the same style, signify a breach of temporality? Is chess intuition past, present, or is it a peek into the future? Ali Smith writes “Because if things really did happen simultaneously it'd be like reading a book but one in which all the lines of the text have been overprinted, like each page is actually two pages but with one superimposed on the other to make it unreadable.”³⁷ But chess games *are* superimposed on one another, and I see this essay as being in direct conversation with her superposition idea.

To varying degrees, Fischer, Heidegger, and Michelet were antisemitic people.³⁸ At the historical moment Fischer is intended to be speaking from, he has not yet been known to do anything antisemitic. Heidegger is Heidegger. It is unclear if Michelet was antisemitic for his time, or just leveraged unusual language to describe Not French™ characters. The attempt, at least, was to recreate a tendency in Michelet to give deep historical texture to his protagonists but not to his antagonists, a framing decidedly in support of Hayden White's argument that Michelet was a faux-liberal anarchist. It was important to me to end the class with at least in some way bringing the antisemitic aspects of the historical thought we encountered, even if only replicating its strangeness in doing so. My deep intention, however, was to plant a seed in the Michelet that might explain Fischer's future turn toward antisemitism. By leaving open the contents of his conversation with Castro and giving control of that portion of the narrative to the Michelet-Castro-esque figure, give space for the possibility of somehow, in some way, antisemitism growing.

More importantly, the main intention was to put all three narratives (history, theory, and superimposed fiction) in increasingly direct conversation, forcing disparate ideologies hardly ever in conversation to reckon with the temporality of chess—as a practical, grounding example of historical consciousness.

³⁷ Ali Smith, *How to be Both*, 371

³⁸ And arguably Castro, who deported Jews from Cuba.

This is my own work in accordance with university regulations.

/s/ Ben Guzovsky

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