

CAO Sirui_reflection 3

by Sirui Cao

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CLIT7802 Book review 3 Stefan Zweig, *Chess* (1941)

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I was struck and moved by the description of obsession in the novel. The author narrates from the point of view of a dispassionate observer, even with the simple interest of **observing** human beings, so that it seems as if he is not involved. At first, I thought that the author's attitude towards Czentovic was one of envy, envy of the fact that he was absolutely gifted in one area, and that he justifiably made chess his whole life. And, going deep enough into any aspect of it brings one closer to the truth of the world. As depicted in the novella, "...the more a man restricts himself the closer he is, conversely, to infinity; characters like this, apparently remote from reality, are like termites using their own material to build a remarkable and unique small-scale version of the world". However, the author's attitude is evident in the wording, such as "a cold and usually ostentatious pride", which shows the author's mockery of Czentovic. Czentovic's obsession makes him lose sight of the importance of human connection and isolates him from the real world. As for Dr. B, obsession once saved him from dying of nothingness, yet later became a source of pain.

The bridge sequence where Dr. B plays against his other self in the hotel room reminds me of the plot of *Life of Pi* (2012). The tiger on the boat can be interpreted as a fictional self, and the boundless sea is very similar to the empty hotel room; Dr. B's

imagination about chess enables him to escape his traumatic past, and Pi's vivid imagination enables him to survive and find meaning in the middle of the sea. The description of Dr. B's demeanor and actions at the end of the novel is so compelling that it made me as nervous as if I were there, which also demonstrates the danger of obsession and imagination - like a tiger that could swallow one's real ego at any time.