

Stefan Zweig's chess story The Royal Game

Stefan Zweig's private phone address book from the years 1940 to 1942 contains many interesting names. Here you can read the biographies to the names in Stefan Zweig's address book [stefan-zweig-address-book-1940-1942.pdf](#)

Please also read my very special remarks on the early book editions of the chess story [stefan-zweig-1942.pdf](#)



Stefan Zweig art exhibition poster designed by [Isabel Stolze](#) in Berlin

75 years of chess story "The Royal Game" by Stefan Zweig. In 2017 there was an art exhibition at the Library in Neuenhagen near Berlin.

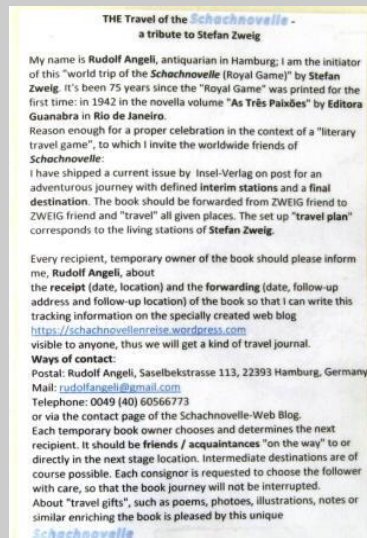
75 years of *Schachnovelle* or Chess Story or The Royal Game by Stefan Zweig

In December 2017, the German chess player and antiquarian bookseller [Rudolf Angeli](#) started in Hamburg a world trip of a current issue of ***Schachnovelle***. It is a tribute to the famous Austrian writer Stefan Zweig, who died 1942 in exile in Brazil. The first edition of his chess story was translated into Portuguese and published in September in 1942 by Editora Guanabara in Rio de Janeiro. The title is *A Partida de Xadrez*. It was published together with two other novellas in a compilation titled *As Três Paixões. Três Novelas de Stefan Zweig*.

This issue of the German *Schachnovelle* has to be sent from one friend to another following Stefan Zweig's living stations: Vienna, Berlin, Zurich, Salzburg, London, Bath in England and Petrópolis in Brazil. Each owner of this special book can enrich it with texts, photos or any other supplements and so it becomes unique.

The book also travels to the places where the chess story was first published, namely to Rio de Janeiro, Buenos Aires, Stockholm and New York. At the end of

the voyage, the book should arrive at [Stefan Zweig's bibliographer Professor Dr. Randolph J. Klawiter](#) in South Bend, Indiana.



The Travel of a current issue of Schachnovelle, a tribute to Stefan Zweig

Here is the link to the German Blog where you can also choose your desired language [The anniversary journey of Schachnovelle](#)

Books and graphic art to the chess story The Royal Game by Stefan Zweig



The Chess Story in Aramaic: In April 2014, the chess story by Stefan Zweig was published in Aramaic and German. From German into Aramaic translated by Zeki Bilgic. Edited by Nisibin Aramaic studies. Publisher: Edition Tintenfass. Cover illustration by the German artist Elke Rehder. Soft cover, size: 12,5 x 19 cm, 157 pages. ISBN 978-3-943052-62-6



Miniature Book Chess Story by Stefan Zweig: Since October 2013 the Chess Story by Stefan Zweig is now available in an illustrated miniature book published by Miniaturbuchverlag Leipzig. It's the first edition in this mini book size 38 x 53 mm with 378 pages. The miniature book contains illustrations after woodcuts by the German artist Elke Rehder. The illustrated cover is made of white Cabra-leather. The precious book is kept safe in a nice slipcase. ISBN 978-3-86184-253-8. The book price is 24.80 EUR



Woodcut prints to the The Royal Game by Stefan Zweig: "The Royal Game 2013" - my new woodcut has an image size of 22.7 x 11.7 cm, printed on a sheet size of 31 x 20 cm. The total edition of the black and white woodcut is 350 signed copies. The hand-colored woodcut is in an edition of 100 numbered, titled and signed copies.

My woodcut was first published in the magazine "theaterZeit" in April 2013 for the promotion of the world premiere of the new opera "Schachnovelle" by the Spanish composer Cristóbal Halffter. The world premiere of the opera was on May 18th 2013 at the Kiel Opera House. Born in Madrid in 1930 Cristóbal Halffter is a famous Spanish composer. His opera "Schachnovelle" (chess story The Royal Game) he has composed for the Opera House in Kiel in Germany. The libretto was written by Wolfgang Haendeler after the chess story by Stefan Zweig. Here are some scenes from the opera. Photographer is Olaf Struck in Kiel. A click on a small picture will open a larger size in a new window.



Schachnovelle opera © Photo by Olaf Struck



Schachnovelle opera © Photo by Olaf Struck



Schachnovelle opera © Photo by Olaf Struck

The opera "Schachnovelle" was composed by Cristóbal Halffter after the story by Stefan Zweig

Conducted by Georg Fritzsch, directed by Daniel Karasek, stage by Norbert Ziermann, costumes by Claudia Spielmann, choir by Barbara Kler and video by Konrad Kästner. Names of the ensemble of the opera premiere: Susan Gouthro, Juliane Harberg, Anna Petrova, Heike Wittlieb; Ulrich Burdack, Fred Hoffmann, Michael Hofmeister, Mirko Järviluoto, Andreas Kaspersen, Michael Müller, Jörg Sabrowski, Thomas Scheler, Tomohiro Takada, Marco Vasalli, Andreas Winther, Marek Wojciechowski, Christoph Woo, Salomon Zulic del Canto, Rahel Brede und Bogna Bernagiewicz.

More information about the opera: [Opera-Chess-Cristobal-Halffter.pdf](#)

My reflections about The Royal Game by Stefan Zweig

Some years ago, I got some original drawings by Hans Fronius from Erich Fitzbauer in Vienna. Fronius illustrated the "Schachnovelle" for the publishing house Bermann Fischer 1949 in Stockholm. The small book contains 7 illustrations. The pictures show the young Czentovic in front of the chessboard, a cafe house scene, a steamer accompanied by sea gulls in the foreground, Dr. B. laying in a deckchair, a sea gull catching a big fish, three sitting and two standing people around a table and Dr. B. leaving Czentovic after the last game. I like the kind of art by Hans Fronius very much, but I had other ideas and I was looking behind the action to understand the meaning. Consciously I avoided to illustrate the book again. My request was to represent the idea behind it. In 1996 I published a portfolio with 6 woodcuts on Dosabiki Masashi Japanese paper.

The 1942 published "Schachnovelle" is such a multilayered novella that repetitive reading points out new aspects again and again. Stefan Zweig described masterfully the psychological procedures of people. This novella was published in countless editions and was translated into nearly all languages of the world, but I like to describe the contents here very briefly:

On a steamer on the journey from New York to Buenos Aires plays the Austrian emigrant Dr. B. (a certain soul relationship to Stefan Zweig is to assume here), an intelligent, creative and sensitive man, against the chess world champion Czentovic. In this framework novella there is the story of Dr. B., who was held in prison by the Gestapo in the Nazi regime. By coincidence he catches a book with master games of chess. Without a chess board he trained the combinations. In his jail cell he began to play against himself, which caused a personality splitting and this manifested itself in a "chess poisoning". This kind of the "poisoning" caused a "nerve fever".



On the steamer Dr. B. gets a "Remis" against the chess world champion Czentovic. The world champion is playing like a robot but is not able to think abstract. He needs the optical perception of the chessboard.

Against his will Dr. B. is forced to a second game. Czentovic uses the psychological weakness of his opponent by using his time limit. In the waiting periods Dr. B.

begins to simulate in his spirit imaginary game situations. The consequence is a "chess poisoning" as in his earlier solitary confinement. Before an arising "chess fever" can cause his collapse, Dr. B. gives up the game. Czentovic, whose mental horizon does not seem to go beyond the 64 squares of the chessboard, triumphed in his statement: "The attack was not so badly disposed at all. For a dilettante this gentleman is actually unusually talented".

Sensitivity and differentiated intelligence are lost. This is also the fate of many intellectuals in that time, who could save themselves from the destruction only by escape into the emigration.

Stefan Zweig warns with his story against the endangerment of the liberally humanistic spirit by the political force. Zweig thought that his novella was too abstract "for the large public". Perhaps this was also the reason for the fact that the first German edition of this novella was published in Buenos Aires by Pigmalión only in a numbered edition of 250 paperback copies and 50 roman numbered clothbound hardcover copies by the edition János Peter Kramer.

For Stefan Zweig the emigration was a large psychological load. In end of the novella Dr. B. will not be able to play the royal game. Zweig believed that he will never see again the liberal Europe. The game is over and always settled. For Dr. B. as for Stefan Zweig there will be no way out, both are victims.

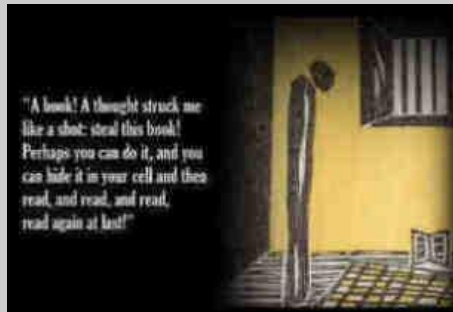
In 1942 Stefan Zweig and his wife Lotte committed suicide. According to the death certificate of Stefan Zweig the death occurred on Monday 23rd February, at 12.30 pm. In his farewell letter Zweig wrote: "After the sixtieth year of life it requires special forces, to begin completely new. And mine are exhausted by the long years of homeless walking. Thus I hold it for better to end in time and in upright attitude a life for that mental work always has been the greatest joy and personal freedom has been the highest property on the earth." Despite his security in the emigration Zweig could not get over the loss of the liberal Europe.

The Chess Story is a literary masterpiece. When I published 1996 during the international Frankfurt book fair my artistic interpretation of this novella, I could not foresee that the edition of 36 copies was out of print in a very short time. My woodcuts were printed from two blocks on Japanese paper. Dosabiki Masashi is a fine, handmade paper. The prints were individually pressed by hand.

The Brazilian short film The Royal Game - Zweig's Last Checkmate

In 2013 I created the new woodcut "The Royal Game 2013". The impulse for this came from the Brazilian short film "The Royal Game - Zweig's Last Checkmate" directed by Leonardo Dourado. The short film from 2012 is about 7 minutes. The Zweig biographer and journalist Alberto Dines talks together with Flávio Tavares about Stefan Zweig's chess story and his death in exile.

This film was directed by Leonardo Dourado; script: Kristina Michahelles; consultant: Alberto Dines; editing: Lupércio Bogéa; field production: Rafael Schultz; photography: Marco Frossard and Luiz Maurício Leite; sound recording: Paulo Felipe, translation: Jordan Noel Hawkes and Kate Lyra; woodcut prints: Elke Rehder; production: telenews (Rio de Janeiro).



Here you can watch the film https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UpGrmfI_WYQ

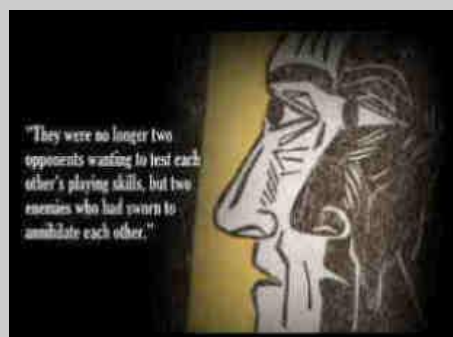
Flávio Tavares

Flávio Tavares (born 1934) is a prominent Brazilian journalist. He was a member of a communist organization and a political prisoner during the Brazilian military dictatorship.

At the age of 20 years Flávio Tavares was the political commentator of the newspaper "Ultima Hora" and later one of the founders of the University of Brasilia.

After the military coup in 1964, he was imprisoned for the first time for his political views. Between 1967 and 1969 he was again arrested for being involved in an armed campaign for the liberation of political prisoners from the Lemos de Brito prison in Rio de Janeiro. In September 1969 he was exiled to Mexico.

In the 70s, during the exile, he worked for the Mexican newspaper Excelsior and worked as a correspondent in Buenos Aires since 1974. In July 1977 Tavares was abducted by military organs of repression in Uruguay. He spent 195 days in prison. Here is a parallel to the situation of "Dr. B.", the political prisoner in the chess story by Stefan Zweig. He found a small magazine in his prison cell. The constantly reading and memorizing of the text gave him spiritual strength. Due to an international protest Tavares was released. He lived in London and after the amnesty of 1979 he returned to Brazil. (*Translation and notes by Elke Rehder on the basis of the text of the Portuguese Encyclopedia Wikipedia*)



Alberto Dines

Alberto Dines (born 1932) is a Brazilian journalist and writer. With a career spanning over five decades, Dines directed and launched several magazines and newspapers in Brazil and Portugal. He has taught journalism since 1963, and was a visiting professor at the Columbia University School of Journalism in 1974.

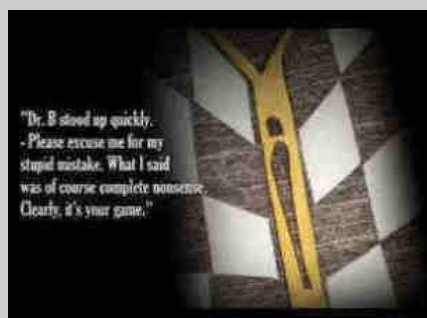
Dines was the editor in chief of *Jornal do Brasil* for twelve years, in addition to coordinating the Rio de Janeiro branch of *Folha de S. Paulo*. He was also the director of Grupo Abril in Portugal, where he launched the *Exame* magazine.

After years of dodging the military dictatorship censorship as the editor in chief of *Jornal do Brasil*, Dines was fired on June 1984 for publishing an article criticizing the overtly amicable relationship between the owners of the newspaper and government of Rio de Janeiro.

In addition to working as a journalist, Dines has written more than 15 books, including *Death in Paradise*, the *Tragedy of Stefan Zweig* (1981) and *Fire Links - Antônio José da Silva, the Jew and other stories of the Inquisition in Portugal and Brazil* (1992). His book about Stefan Zweig was adapted into the film *Lost Zweig* (2002), directed by Sylvio Back. Dines also discussed Zweig in a documentary by the same director.

On April 1996, Dines launched the groundbreaking *Observatório da Imprensa* website. The media analysis website was later adapted into a weekly TV show, currently aired by TV Brasil, and a daily radio show, aired on public stations.

Dines was a recipient of the Maria Moors Cabot prize on 1970. On October 2007 he received the Austrian Holocaust Memorial Award. On March 29, 2010, he received the Roberto Marinho Prize for Communication, awarded by the Brazilian federal government. *(text selected by Elke Rehder from the English Encyclopedia Wikipedia)*



Casa Stefan Zweig - Life in Exile

Anyone who's interested in the life of Stefan Zweig should visit the following website. In July 2012, the museum Casa Stefan Zweig opened in Petrópolis, Brazil. The well-known Stefan Zweig biographer Alberto Dines and many other helping hands have managed to save the house from destruction and to keep it as a memento. The house will be filled with cultural life. There are a lot of rare archive images to explore at this website.



Please follow the link to Casa Stefan Zweig
<http://www.casastefanzweig.org/index.php?language=en>



Part 2: The symbolism in the short story "Chess" by Slawomir Mrozek

With the symbolism in the game of chess I already argued as an artist for many years. In my fantasy the chessmen lead an independent existence. It became clear to me by observing an open air chess game in a city park. In that kind of game, the players themselves stood on the black and white squares.

Chess - is also the title of a short story by the Polish writer *Slawomir Mrozek*. Mrozek belongs together with *Samuel Beckett* and *Friedrich Dürrenmatt* to the most important dramatists of our time. The German literary critic *Marcel Reich-Ranicki* describes it with the following words: "Mrozek is an committed writer - thus he regards the literature not for a noble play with words, but as a medium to affect people. He is humorist - thus he means it particularly serious. He is satirist - thus he lampoons the world, in order to improve it. He is surrealist - thus he cares about the reality, which he alienate with unrealistic motives, in order to clarify it. He is a man of the absurd one - thus he shows the paradoxical to provoke the sense."

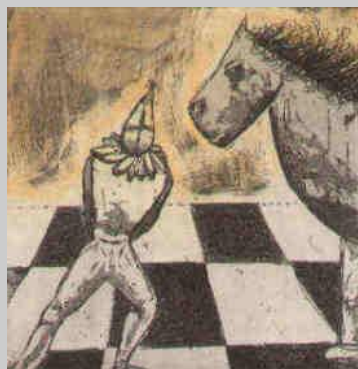
These ideas conform with my point of view and so I illustrated the story. This story shows the analogy between the game of chess and the valid rules in our life. The chessmen in my paintings develop an independent existence similarly to Mrozek's short story.

The strategic thinking in a game of chess is comparable with the procedure in our working world and environment. For goal attainment the strategically important positions on the squares must be set by suitable people. The possibilities of action are limited by the rules. The relations between the chessmen are unlimited like

the relations in our everyday life. Often a "small pawn" decides the development of a whole game, like in the short story by Slawomir Mrozek.



Slawomir Mrozek Chess - "The crucial step"



"Under guidance of the knight"



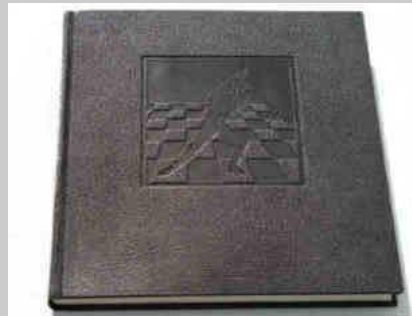
"Let us not deceive ourselves"



"The hollow strokes of a knife"



Slawomir Mrozek book with the color etchings by Elke Rehder



Slawomir Mrozek hand bound goat leather bookbinding for the artists' book

For the book I created six color etchings, which were printed on thick mould-made paper. Text printed by letterpress printing. In the face of a constantly growing number of carelessly mass productions on the book market, I decided to create this book to a sensuous experience. For this reason I used only precious and high-quality materials for this book. This bibliophile preciousness, hand bound in black oasis goat leather, is limited to only 30 copies. For each book a whole goat skin was used and the best leather was selected. Also the smell of the leather is a sensuous experience. The precious hand binding is a masterpiece by famous German bookbinder Christian Zwang in Hamburg.

More images and information about the special edition of this rare book on my homepage about [Slawomir Mrozek](#)



Print from a brass plate for the Compendium of Contemporary Hand Press Printing, Bartkowiaks forum book art, Hamburg 1995. *Excerpt from a press release by the Frankfurt International Book Fair 1995*



Please also visit my homepage <https://www.elke-rehder.de>