

Reflections 6 : 2018 – Birth of the Chess Queen by Dr Advocate Lyndon Bouah

During the recent December vacation I spent part of the vacation reading a lovely chess book called the Birth of the Chess Queen - a history by Marlyn Yalom , 2004 , Pandora Chess.

The books speak about how chess travelled throughout the ages and how the queen came to be the powerful piece that she is today. Yalom starts her book with a poem and I quote :

" The world dreams in chess
Kibitzing like lovers

Pawn's queened redemption
L is a forked path only horses lead
Rook and King castling for safety
Bishop boasting of crossways slide

Echo of orbit: starless squared sky
She alone moves where she chooses

Protecting helpless monarch, her bidden skill.
Attacking schemers, plotters, blundered all.

Game eternal

War breaks

She enters

Check mate

Hail queen

How we crave

Her majesty "

By Gary Glazner

The author undertakes a voyage through the ages and her introduction sets the scene. I quote from xviii ;open quote

" Initially, she sits at the side of the king, as befits a royal spouse. During the game, she charges forth to protect her lord and destroy his enemies. If necessary, she may give her life in combat, for ultimately it is the king's survival that counts. This is the paradox of chess : he is the crucial figure , even if she is more potent. "close quote.

The author states that this scenario did not always exist as there was no queen on the chessboard in India, Persia and the Arab lands where the game was first played as all the human figures were male.

She notes that it was only after the Arabs invaded Southern Europe in the eighth century that women appears on the chess board. Around the year she started to take a position next to the King and by 1200, she could be found all over Europe including Italy and Norway. The author then examines the

major question about the role of women in the middle ages and what caused their sudden appearance on the chess board.

The author then examines the role of the queen in the ancient times, in Spain, Italy, Germany, France, England, the Nordic countries and Russia. It really is a fascinating book which I enjoyed very much. She traces stories from the Arabian Nights to ancient texts that depict princes and husbands playing chess with their princesses and wives.

She concludes in her epilogue that despite their relatively poor performance as players (her words!), women can at least take pride in the superiority of the chess queen.



Enjoy International Women's day on the 8th of March!

Regards
Dr Adv Lyndon Bouah