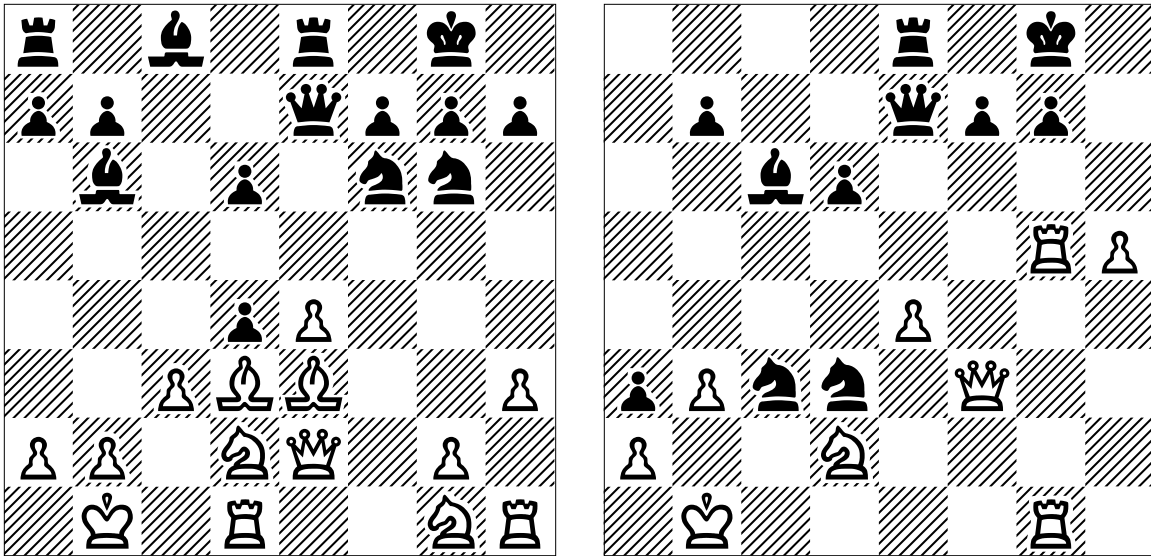


Seven Cautionary Chess Games 1834-1927

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David Glenn Pinehart



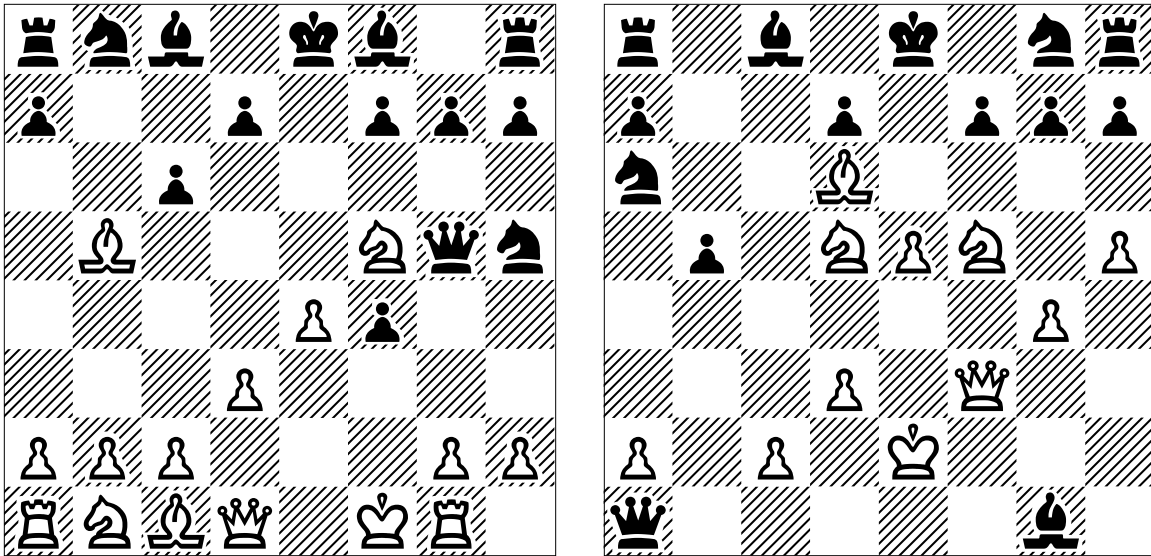
Game One: La Bourdonnais-McDonnell, London 1834

I approve strongly of rational games for they serve to perfect the art of thinking.

—GOTTFRIED WILHELM VON LEIBNITZ

This fiery bombast is a spectacular—but not atypical—example of the maniacally ferocious strategies employed during early 19th century Chess games. These encounters, which remind the studious observer of nothing so much as a mad game of schlagschach, were perhaps the first series of formally arranged matches to be preserved and published—for our amusement, no doubt. Louis Charles de la Bourdonnais went on to win this blood-bath—the 21st game of the series—by checkmating Alexander McDonnell on the 38th move. (La Bourdonnais was reported by George Walker to have “talked and laughed a good deal at intervals, when winning, and swore tolerably round oaths in a pretty audible voice, when fate ran counter to his schemes.”) The match—suspended to allow La Bourdonnais to return to Paris on business—was never completed, leaving La Bourdonnais the *de facto* victor +45 =13 -27. The unfortunate McDonnell developed a severe kidney ailment and died of Bright’s disease on 14 September 1835. This auspicious tournament marked the highlight of La Bourdonnais’ Chess career; after selling all of his possessions—including his clothes—he died penniless on 13 December 1840. La Bourdonnais and McDonnell are buried near each other in London’s Kensal Green cemetery.

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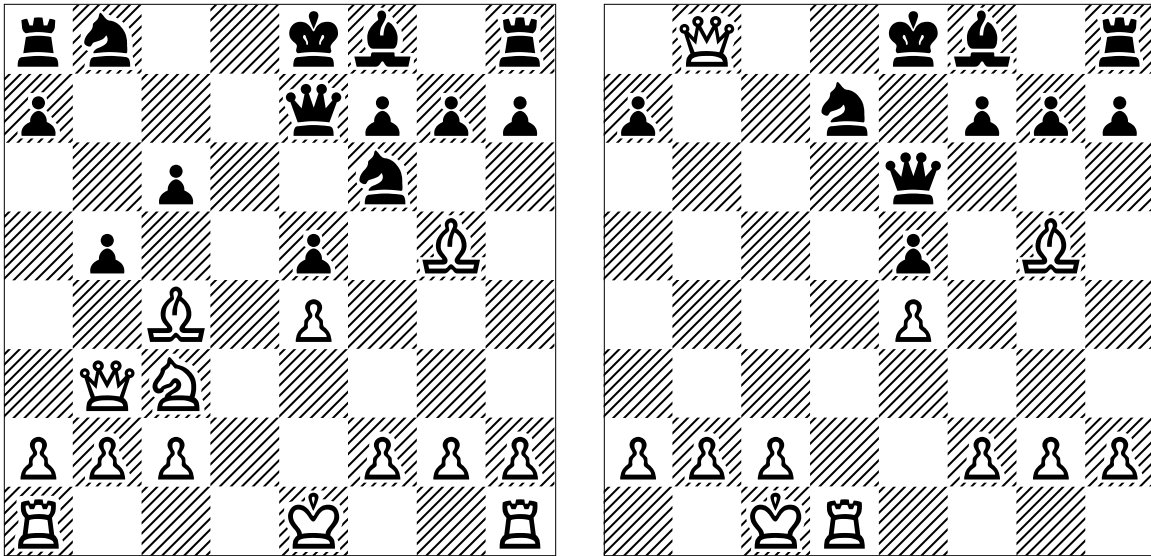


Game Two: Anderssen-Kieseritsky, London 1851

"Chess is a domain in which criticism has not so much influence as in art; for in the domain of chess the results of the game decide, ultimately and finally."—RICHARD RÉTI

Adolph Anderssen and Lionel Adalbert Bagration Felix Kieseritsky played what has become universally known among Chess aficionados as "The Immortal Game" at Simpson's Divan at the same time the rest of the Chess world was transfixed by the nearby international Chess tournament. (Staunton described the event—the first of its kind—as "a series of grand individual matches.") Kieseritsky was weakened early in the so-called "friendly" game by his questionable use of Bryan's Counter-Gambit, a strategy that foreshadowed the inefficacious development that was to soon cost him the game. Anderssen capitalized in a most daring fashion by sacrificing a bishop, a rook, *another* rook, and finally his queen before checkmating Kieseritsky on the 23rd move. A diagram from this monumental game was immortalized on a German 75 pfennig currency coupon, along with Anderssen's austere intellectual likeness. The loser died penniless in the Hotel du Dieu—the charity hospital for the insane—in Paris on 18 May 1853; no one attended his burial in a pauper's grave.

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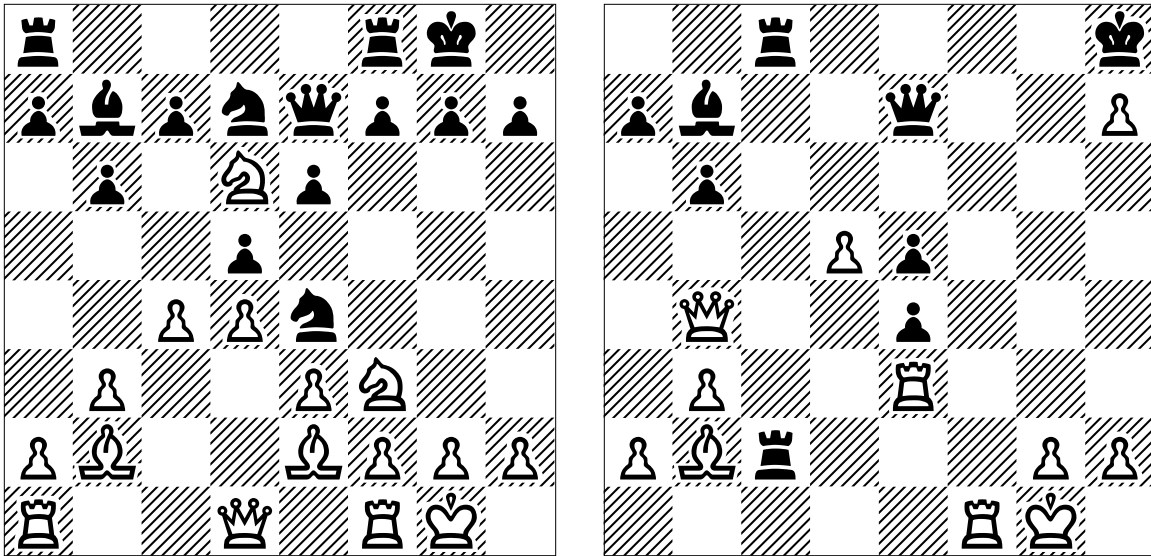


Game Three: Morphy-Duke of Brunswick and Count Isouard, Paris 1858

“Chess is a sport. A violent sport. This detracts from its most artistic connections. One intriguing aspect of the game that does not imply artistic connotations is the geometrical patterns and the variations of the actual set-up of the pieces in the combinative, tactical, strategic and positional sense. It is a sad means of expression, though—somewhat like religious art—it is not very gay. If it is anything; it is a struggle.”—MARCEL DUCHAMP

This match is well-known to every well-read Chess buff, albeit more for its anecdotal value than as an example of a Master's subtle brilliance. Paul Charles Morphy, having been invited to the opera by the Duke of Brunswick and Count Isouard, was then seated with his back to the stage and invited to play a game of Chess. An impatient Morphy annihilated his opponents in only 17 moves during *The Marriage of figaro*, a slaughter that was best described by the great German analyst, Helmut Jüngling, in his pivotal book *Matings of the Masters*. “This game—if, indeed, it merits the honorable distinction of being called a game—exhibited none of the delicate foreplay of two sensitive virtuosi, but rather the frenzied bestial thumping of an impassioned hart driven to frenzied Wagnerian passions.” Morphy, having withdrawn from the world of Chess after only 75 competitive games, suffered from severe bouts of delusions and paranoia before being felled by a stroke while taking a bath on 10 July 1884.

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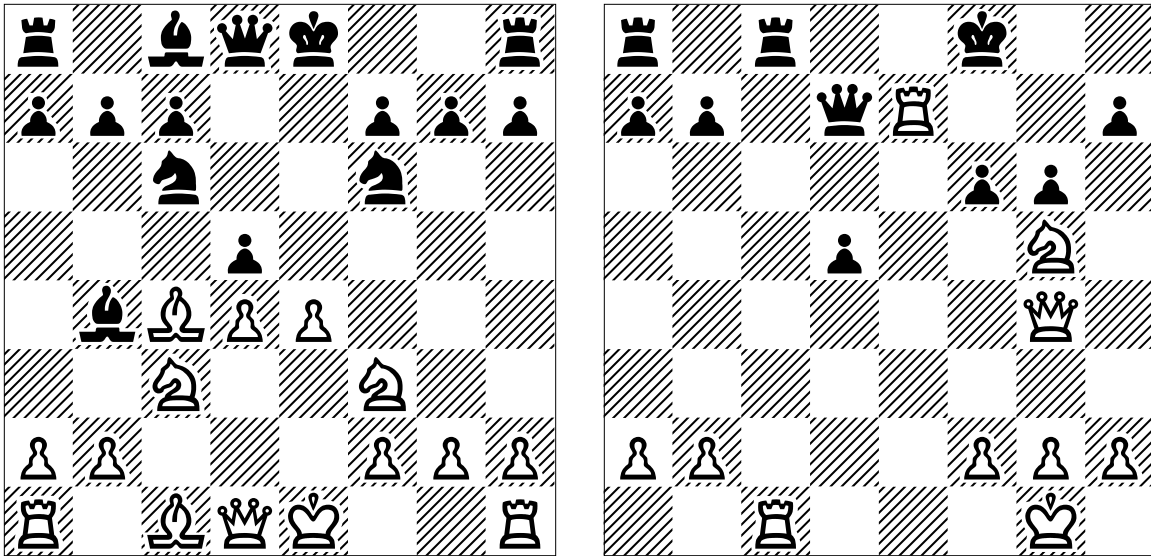


Game Four: Zukertort-Blackburne, London 1883

"Chess is a game where the most intense activity leaves no trace." -MAN RAY

In his 1497 book *Repeticion de Amores y Arte de Axedres*, Luis Ramirez de Lucena observed, "Try to play soon after your opponent has eaten or drunk freely." Chess historians do not agree whether Johannes Hermann Zukertort ever studied *Repeticion de Amores y Arte de Axedres*, but empirical evidence would indeed suggest that, if he did, he did not take Ramirez de Lucena's well-intended advice seriously. Prussian Master Zukertort was known to have used opium to "calm his nerves," and was to have been seen drinking whisky during informal matches. His predilection for chemically-enhanced stimuli notwithstanding, Zukertort took 32 moves to defeat Joseph Blackburne, "the Black Death," with a brilliant sacrifice of his queen in a game that Steinitz himself described as "one of the most noble combinations conceived over the chess board." Ironically, Zukertort lost to Steinitz +5 =5 -10 three years later in the first official World Championship Match. (The match, with stakes of \$2,000, was sponsored by the Viceroy of India in an act of largess later emulated by his Highness the Maharajah of Travancore and Maharajah Vizayanagaram.) The defeat left Zukertort utterly devastated: "I am prepared to be taken away at any moment." Following these prophetic words, he died the very next day, felled by a stroke at Simpson's Divan.

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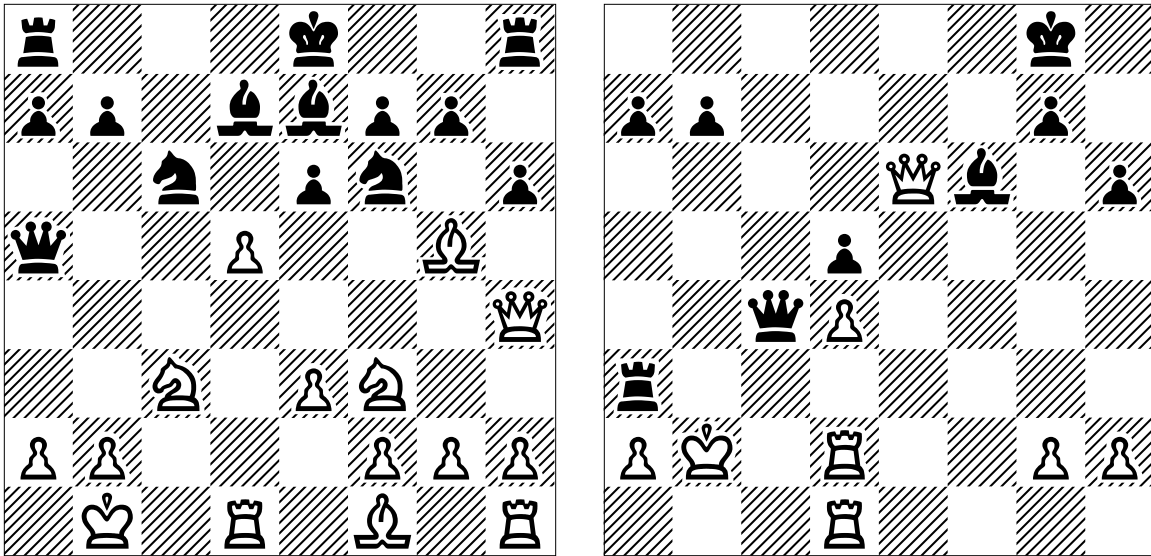


Game Five: Steinitz-von Bardeleben, Hastings 1895

"Whoever sees no other aim in the game than that of giving checkmate to one's opponent, will never become a good chess player."—MACHGIELIS EUWE

1895 found Wilhelm Steinitz past his peak, having lost the World Championship to the 25-year-old Emanuel Lasker the previous year. "I may be an old lion," he remarked defiantly, "but I can still bite someone's hand off if he puts it in my mouth." The someone in this case is Kurt von Bardeleben, who went into a rage and stalked away from the game after the 25th move—after he had been put in check five consecutive turns. Von Bardeleben, who intentionally lost on time rather than suffer the ignominy of resigning, later committed suicide in 1924 by jumping from a window. Steinitz, who was known to drink copious quantities of champagne during matches "to fortify his nerves," completed the total humiliation of his opponent by demonstrating to the audience a series of checks that led, inexorably and inevitably, to checkmate on the 35th move. Reuben Fine described it as "A game with a combination which ranks amongst the most profound ever made." The following year, however, Steinitz was again defeated by Lasker +2 =5 -10, and suffered a nervous breakdown, claiming to be able to make telephone calls without the use of any hardware. Steinitz, who Harold Schonberg in *Grandmasters of Chess* referred to as "the most unpopular chess player who ever lived" died penniless in 1900 and was buried in a pauper's grave at Brooklyn's Evergreen Cemetery.

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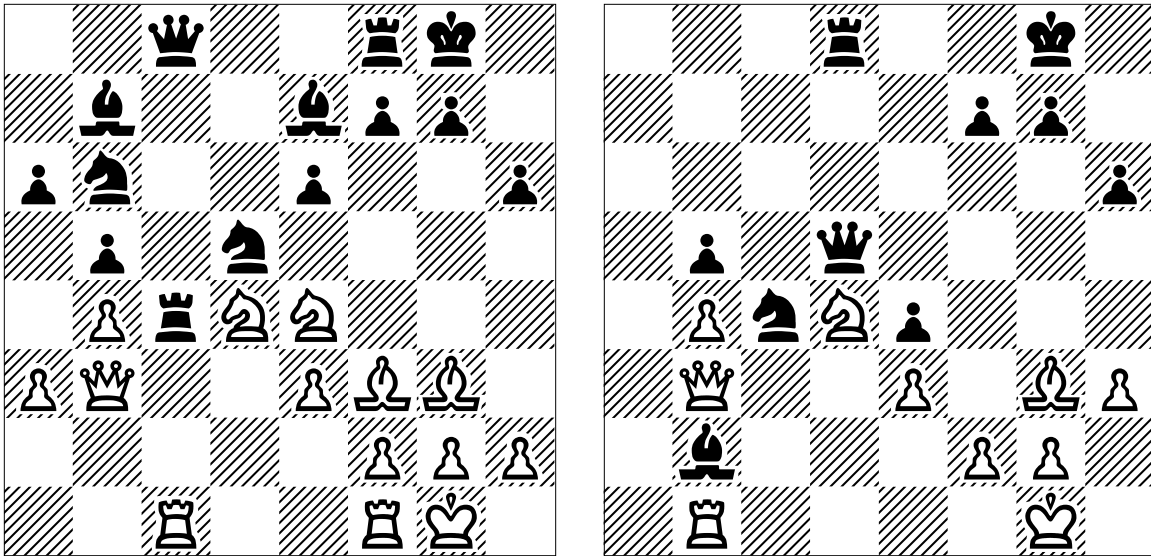


Game Six: Pillsbury-Lasker, St. Petersburg 1896

"Lovely chess moves and lovely melodies (and lovely theorems in mathematics, etc.) have this in common: every one has idiosyncratic nuances that seem logical a posteriori but that are not easy to anticipate a priori." —DOUGLAS R. HOFSTADTER

Emanuel Lasker, on the mend from a devastating case of typhoid fever, wasn't expected to triumph against the American wunderkind Harry Pillsbury. In the middle of the tournament, however, Pillsbury's morale was shattered by the news that he had contracted syphilis. Deeply shaken, Pillsbury prematurely developed his queen, a tactical error that Lasker exploited with characteristic brilliance by sacrificing a rook. This well-played—and indeed brilliant—strategy that eventually led to Pillsbury's resignation on the 29th move. Pillsbury was a tragic example of Cyril Connolly's observation "Whom the gods wish to destroy they first call promising." After what the *Evening Bulletin* referred to as "a period of temporary insanity" Pillsbury tried to commit suicide by jumping from the fourth floor of the Philadelphia Presbyterian Hospital in 1904. He didn't have long to suffer, however, for his short, brilliant life ended when he died at age 33 from general paresis of the insane on 17 June 1906.

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Game Seven: Capablanca-Alekhine, Buenos Aires 1927

"Chess, like love, like music, has the power to make men happy."—DR. SIEGBERT TARRASCH

Alexander Alexandrovich Alekhine's miserable life was best summed up by the eminent Austrian Chess analyst Franz Michael Kraelor: "Had Alekhine restricted his pervasive megalomania and vile hatred of humanity to the confines of the chess board, he would certainly be remembered as one of the greatest chess players of all times instead of perhaps the most despicable." Alekhine, who played or studied Chess "eight hours a day on principle," was almost the polar opposite of the Cuban José Raúl Capablanca y Graupera. Capablanca couldn't be bothered with studying; his brilliant play was almost intuitive. In the end, Alekhine's maniacal obsession triumphed over Capablanca's imperturbable demeanor; he won this intricate game when Capablanca resigned on the 33rd move. After winning the world championship $+6 =25 -3$, though, Alekhine never honored promises for a return match against Capablanca. Alekhine was ultimately disgraced by his collaboration with the Nazis who published his shrill anti-Semitic articles, and his heavy drinking and smoking led to cirrhosis of the liver, duodenitis, and hardening of the arteries. Alekhine died friendless and penniless from a heart attack on 24 March 1946.

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