

# GO IN WESTERN LITERATURE

By Brian 'Chiwito' McDonald © 1995, 2002  
Edited by Peter Shotwell

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## PART I: SPECULATIVE FICTION

While many recently written works of English literature mention go, only a few have given the game a major role. The most important are:

'Shibumi' by Trevanian  
'Chung Kuo' (series), by David Wingrove  
'Limbo System' by Robin Cook  
'Jian' and 'Shan' by Eric V. Lustbader

In each of these works, go was a major ongoing theme, with both characters and authors using the game as a metaphor for political, cultural and military conflict. These books have introduced large numbers of non-players to an appreciation of some of the culture of the game.

Unlike the major Japanese 'go novel,' Kawabata's 'The Master of Go,' all of these books came from the overlapping genres of science fiction, fantasy, and horror. There are several possible reasons for this.

One is that the number of people familiar with the game in the West has increased greatly in recent decades, especially with the advent of the Internet and its appearance in many TV shows and such major motion pictures as 'Pi' and 'A Beautiful Mind.' Go players generally believe that this increase will continue in the future, so for go *aficionados* who happen to be writers (or writers who happen to play go), it may simply seem that a work set in the future will naturally involve a society where go is more common than today.

Also, when go is used as an integral part of a plot rather than just a passing reference, it is usually used as a metaphor for fairly elaborate strategic and/or philosophical conflict. This makes it

especially apt not only for espionage fiction such as 'Shibumi' and 'Jian'/'Shan,' but also for 'space opera' and other science fiction subgenera such as 'Chung Kuo' and 'Limbo System.'

## **'SHIBUMI'**

In the Fall 1988 'American Go Journal,' the late Bob High printed a number of random facts he had gleaned from a survey of AGA membership forms, including how members had been introduced to the game. According to Bob, most discovered the game by reading 'Shibumi,' one of the Cold War's premiere espionage thrillers, whose sweeping plot spanned five decades and three continents.

Protagonist Nicholai Hel was the world's most highly paid assassin and the main plot was a fairly commonplace sort of thing for this genre, circa 1974. Arab governments, American oil interests (linked to something called the Mother Company) and elements of western spy agencies were all working together for nefarious purposes, which required them to wipe out an Israeli special operations unit. The sole survivor contacted Hel and persuaded him to involve himself. Stuff happened in general spy novel fashion, ending with an adventure in a cave in the Spanish Pyrenees.

What made the book important to go players was Hel's life before he became an assassin. Born in Shanghai, he learned go at a young age and later was taught intensively by a Japanese general, who was an excellent player (and Hel's mother's lover). After Hel's mother's death, the general sent him to Japan to live in the home of a famous go professional, Otake 7-dan. According to the acknowledgements in the front of the book, Otake was based upon a real life individual. Hel spent six years as, in effect, an insei. The game of go was intimately connected with his lifelong pursuit of the ideal of 'shibumi'—great refinement underlying commonplace appearances; authority without domination.

Many specific events in the plot involved go; for example after the war when the general was imprisoned by the US, he and Hel were able to talk in front of his guards by using go terms as a code. All six chapter titles were go terms: 'Fuseki' ('Opening'), 'Sabaki' ('Light, Flexible Play'), 'Seki' ('Standoff'), 'Uttegae' ('Sacrifice Play'), 'Shicho' ('Ladder'), and 'Tsuru No Sugomori' ('Crane's Nest').

Sometime after this section was written, Peter Shotwell published, with permission, some extracts from 'Shibumi' in the American Go Journal and a letter from the author.

In one game after Nikko had played two moves 'of no particular brilliance . . . but no particular fault . . .,' Otake-san asks him:

*'Explain to me please, why you did not have to look at the board, Nikko.'*

*'I . . . ah . . . well, I was resting.' Nicholai could see that Otake-san did not understand, . . . 'Well, . . . the flow of the play was just right and it began to bring me to the meadow. It always begins with some kind of flowing motion . . . if the structure of the Go stones is flowing classically, that . . . can bring me to the meadow.'*

*(Otake-san replied,) 'I see . . . How do you know where the lines cross? How do you know where I placed my last stone?'*

*Nicholai shrugged. It was too obvious to explain. 'I am part of everything, Teacher. I share . . . no . . . I flow with everything. The Go ban, the stones. The board and I are amongst one another. How could I not know the patterns of play?'*

*'You see from within the board, then?'*

*'Within and without are the same thing. But 'see' isn't exactly right either. If one is everywhere, he doesn't have to 'see.' ' Nicholai shook his head. 'I can't explain.'*

Later in the book, however, Nicholai does explain why he was able to develop at least his other qualities:

*' . . . only in Japan was the classical moment simultaneous with the medieval . . . In the West, philosophy, art, political and social ideal, all are identified with periods before or after the medieval moment, the single exception being that glorious bridge to God, the cathedral. Only in Japan was the feudal moment also the philosophical moment. We of the West are comfortable with the image of the warrior-priest, or the warrior-scientist, even the warrior-industrialist. But the warrior-philosopher? No that concept irritates our sense of propriety.'*

That statement might irritate some historians, too, just as Nicholai's personal attitude seemed to irritate his beloved Teacher. In Otake-san's farewell address to Nikko as the Japanese were about to

capitulate to the U.S. troops and the Japanese World was about to end, he told Nikko:

*' . . . I have seen brilliance of play equal to yours, but never in a man of your age, and not in any player now living. But there are other qualities than brilliance in the successful person, so I shall not burden you with unqualified compliments. There is something distressing in your play, Nikko. Something abstract and unkind. Your play is somehow inorganic . . . unliving. It has the beauty of a crystal, but lacks the beauty of a blossom . . . you play only against the situation on the board; you deny the importance—the existence even—of your opponent. Have you not yourself told me that when you are in one of your mystic transports, from which you garner rest and strength, you play without reference to your adversary? There is something devilish in this. Something cruelly superior. Arrogant, even. And at odds with your goal of shibumi. I do not bring this to your attention for your correction and improvement, Nikko. These qualities are in your bones and unchangeable. And I am not even sure I would have you change if you could; for these that are your flaws are also your strengths.'*

*'Do we speak of Go only, Teacher?'*

*'We speak in terms of Go. . . .'*

Otake-san added:

*' . . . Your defeats will not come from those more brilliant than you. They will come from the patient, the plodding, the mediocre . . . Your scorn for mediocrity blinds you to its vast primitive power. You stand in the glare of your own brilliance, unable to see into the dim corners of the room, to dilate your eyes and see the potential dangers of the mass, the wad of humanity . . . The amoeba outlives the tiger because it divides and continues in its immortal monotony. The masses are the final tyrants. See how, in the arts, 'Kabuki' wanes and 'No' withers while popular novels of violence and mindless action swamp the mind of the mass reader. And even in that timid genre, no author dares to produce a genuinely superior man as his hero, for in his rage of shame the mass man will send his 'yojimbo,' the critic, to defend him. The roar of the plodders is inarticulate, but deafening. They have no brain, but they have a thousand arms to grasp and clutch at you, drag you down.'*

*'Do we still speak of Go, Teacher?'*

*'Yes. And of its shadow: life.'*

*'What do you advise me to do then?'*

*'Avoid contact with them. Camouflage yourself with politeness. Appear dull and distant. Live apart and study shibumi. Above all, do not let them bait you into anger and aggression. Hide, Nikko.'*

A letter from Trevanian demonstrated those principles:

*Dear Mr. Shotwell:*

*A note from Mr Garlock, Managing Editor of the American Go Journal, arrived at my door in the Basque mountains by a most circuitous path, having passed from the editors of the American paperback version of 'Shibumi' to a one-time agent in New York to a one-time agent in the Netherlands to a mutual friend in Paris and thence to me . . .*

*First, let me tell you, Mr Shotwell, that I am flattered that you should want to do a piece on the use of Go metaphor in Shibumi (which I would assume would be the theme of your article, for the book contains nothing of import about the game per se).*

*Alas, my lifelong dislike of publicity has ripened (or perhaps soured) into my becoming a thorough-going recluse who devotes his remaining time and energy to polishing up a few pieces of writing, so I cannot grant you an interview; but I can and do wish you every good fortune with the article, and I can offer you a few shards of information that you may wish to use as decoration.*

*My affection for Go began with a brief period of total immersion when I was a lad in Japan in the 1940's.*

*Having lived for many years now amongst the mountain Basque, who have no access to and hence no fondness for Go, I have not touched a stone for a very long time, so my 'eye' for pattern and potential has totally atrophied.*

*But I still recall the clean sound of an aggressive stone being placed with a crisp, minimal gesture.*

*From the above, it will be evident to you that I tend towards the old pre-war school that values style-of-play and table-behavior over dog-fight matters of victory or defeat—but then I suppose the concept of 'shibumi' would suggest that preference . . .*

*Yours Cordially,*

## **'CHUNG KUO'**

David Wingrove's 'Chung Kuo' series was a huge sprawling epic set about 200 years from now in a world ruled by China. The title, 'Chung Kuo,' was the spelling used for 'China' in Taiwan, where Wingrove spent some time teaching English. Perhaps patterned after urban development on that island, each continent in the world was spanned by a single enormous structure, a city of 300 levels standing on great pillars above the old demolished civilization. This world, and the technology which made it possible, were highly implausible and stretched to the limit the suspension of disbelief necessary to accept the premise. However, if one can get past this lack of underlying logic, the books have a wealth of fascinating characters and scores (perhaps hundreds) of interesting plots and subplots.

The Chinese overlords (perhaps like their contemporary counterparts), valued stability above all else, and devoted most social institutions to the unending battle against that most frightening of all possible enemies, 'Change.' Various inhabitants of the cities either wanted to see it happen or were engaged in activities which were likely to bring it about, even if unintentionally. This conflict formed the overall element which drove most of the plots. Meanwhile, of course, all the many characters had their own little personal dramas, and the reader gets drawn into each and every one.

'Chung Kuo' stands between 'Shibumi' and 'Jian'/'Shan' in the extent and importance of wei qi. The famous poem by Meng Chiao about the woodsman watching an other-worldly game of wei qi for so long that the handle of his axe rotted away was used as an epigraph at the start of the first book. This set a pattern of fairly frequent overt use of the game by Wingrove as an analogy of aspects of the plot.

Several major characters in the books played the game well. Wingrove made it very clear that skill at the game was a good indicator of the general intellectual ability of an inhabitant of his world. A couple of important turning points in the plot hinged on this fact. In addition, the major antagonists very openly used wei qi symbolism in their dealings with one another, and they often analyzed their political maneuvering in terms of game strategy.

The game was played both on traditional boards and on the computer (nope, not like the Internet: just player against machine). Characters who were not specifically mentioned as playing clearly recognized the symbolism of various wei qi references, so there was an implication that the game was widely known among the ruling classes.

The wei qi material in the plot made pretty clear Wingrove's feelings about the game, but just in case there's any doubt, he said in an author's note, 'The game of Wei Qi mentioned throughout this volume is, incidentally, more commonly known by its Japanese name of Go, and is not merely the world's oldest game but its most elegant.'

The long out-of-print 'The Game of Wei Qi,' by the Italian Count Pecorini and Chinese informant Tan Shu played a role in the first volume. In the author's note to that volume, Wingrove expressed the hope that his use of that book would lead to its republication. I don't know whether it's pure coincidence, but 62 years after its first appearance, the book was republished in 1991.

## **'LIMBO SYSTEM'**

Another good example of the use of go themes as a metaphor for the stages of the conflict underlying a science-fiction plot was Rick Cook's 'Limbo System.' Cook is primarily a writer of fantasy, but this novel was pure science fiction and something of a throwback to the pulp era. Although not as big a seller as some of the others in this genre, this book may do more than any other to familiarize non-players with the essence of go.

An interstellar spacecraft from earth encountered an alien race, whom they called 'Owlies,' which had colonies throughout its own star system but no way to get out. The aliens, or at least one faction of them, desperately wanted to expand beyond their system and conquer the galaxy. The only way to start was to capture the earth ship and its star drive, or capture enough of the expedition's scientist and technical personnel, along with engineering manuals and the like, so that they could design their own star drive.

One of the scientists, Sukihara Takiuji, was the best go player in the crew. He played the game every day with other crew members during the voyage and taught it to some of the aliens in the early post-contact period before the 'Earthers' discovered their true intentions.

After that happened, Takiuji analyzed the alien motives and actions in terms of go principles, which he explained to the crew. Eventually he and an Earther Catholic priest developed strategies that reflected their respective philosophical traditions.

Cook very explicitly linked the sequence of events in the plot to the stages and strategies of a go match. Like Trevanian in 'Shibumi,' he made this clear by labeling his chapters with go terms, which he defined at the beginning. The chapters were, in order: 'Fuseki,' 'Joseki,' 'Chuban' ('Middle Game'), 'Tesuji,' 'Sente,' 'Ko,' 'Gote,' 'Semeai,' 'Damezumari,' 'Yose,' and 'Aji.'

This sequence, however, was perhaps weakened a bit by the fact that he misdefined two of the terms. One of the errors was possibly just a typo: instead of just 'sente.' he defined both 'sente' and 'gote' as 'when the player has the initiative.' From the events in the 'Gote' chapter, it was indeed possible that the definition should have said 'other player.'

'Ko,' however, was defined as, 'a move which must be answered, giving the opponent one or more 'free' moves.' Although the most appropriate word here would presumably have been 'kikashi,' I suspect that Cook was confusing 'ko' with 'ko threat.'

'Aji,' on the other hand, besides appearing out of order, was used in an unusual sense. Normally, one says that a board position can leave 'aji' (or 'taste'), meaning there is a lingering influence that will influence the rest of the game. Cook expands this idea in a postscript to say that, in real world events, unlike the confines of a board game, long after the 'game' is over the moves as a whole can leave a lingering 'taste,' which affects other games to come.

As the plot proceeded, lots of other stuff happened, including factional conflicts among the Earthers as well as the 'enemies.' Although some of the Earther characters were overly one-dimensional in their roles, the action in general was better and less hackneyed than can be conveyed by a description of the old-fashioned plot.

## **'JIAN' AND 'SHAN'**

Eric van Lustbader's best-selling 'Jian' was a complex tale of battles for the control of Hong Kong between several factions of the Chinese government, the KGB, other elements of the Soviet system, American intelligence, local triads, business interests, the Yakuza,

and plenty of others. It's sequel, 'Shan' had a slightly less complex plot, in which opium gangs and their private armies were the principal enemies of the main protagonist, Jake Maroc, who worked for an American intelligence agency known as 'The Quarry.'

The chief enemy assassin, who was Maroc's most bitter enemy, was code-named 'Nichiren' after the Buddhist monk whose sect played such a prominent role in Edo period Japanese go. These two men, along with a beautiful Soviet general, were all excellent wei qi players. They often played and in their discussions about the games, they analyzed each others' political and personal maneuvers in light of their styles of play, each one recognizing that a player's wei qi strategy was a reflection of his or her view of life.

However, these episodes of go activity and reflection were isolated incidents and Lustbader made only indirect attempts through their conversations to create a parallel between the plot structure and the flow of the game. The result was that go did not play as central a role in 'Jian' or 'Shan' as it did in 'Shibumi,' 'Chung Kuo' or 'Limbo System.' Nor did the game appear in any of his other books, despite the fact that his heroes, whether Japanese- or Caucasian-Americans, were usually like Jake Maroc and had a strong affinity for the philosophical-warrior traditions of Japan.

## Part II: OTHER TYPES OF GO FICTION

### 'SILK ROAD'

Making the lead character a stone that could talk would seem to lead to an awfully slow moving plot. However, this formed the beginning of the greatest work of Chinese historical fiction, 'The Story of the Stone,' and that premise was emulated by Jeanne Larsen in 'Silk Road:'

*Once above a time, deep within the rosy cloudbanks of the morning sky, in the great Yang-Purple Palace of the supreme Taoist deity, the Jade Emperor Himself, the Assistant Undersecretary of Baubles humbly presents a newly arrived gift of tribute to His Divine Majesty. .*

*'This,' says the Undersecretary with only a tiny tremor in his voice, 'is offered to Your Divine Majesty by his loyal vassal, the Tutelary Deity of Pearlshore. Allow me to show you the Go stones, if you will.'*

*The Jade Emperor nods, and the Undersecretary removes the first lid with a flourish. Within the bowl rest nearly two hundred perfectly matched black pearls, each just the size to fit the tiny depressions where the corners of the squares meet. The crowd of heavenly courtiers gasps.*

*Allowing his lips to curve just the slightest bit upward, the Undersecretary removes the second lid. Instead of the white pearls one would expect to complete this stunning Go set, the bowl holds pearls in a multitude of tints: pale peach, and creamy gold, and powder pink, and the faint blue of the sky seen through thin wisps of fog. The courtiers are still now. The Jade Emperor's face glows with pleasure, and he reaches forth a gracious hand and runs it through the bowl of colored pearls. 'We are pleased with the gift,' he says, 'and you, Undersecretary, will write a letter to the Tutelary Deity of Pearlshore, informing him of his promotion to Illustrious Pearl Baron of the Southern Sea. But first' —the Undersecretary's heart quickens—'first, you will join me in a game of Go.'*

The Undersecretary prudently took black, but one of the pearls he handled was oddly shaped, a bit smaller than the rest and had a greenish-tinge. It began to speak and by the end of the conversation the Emperor had granted the pearl's request to live a lifetime as a

human. The Undersecretary was unwillingly assigned as a sort of otherworldly guardian of the young lady whom the pearl would become.

The bulk of the novel was the story of the adventures that Greenpearl met during her life as a human. These adventures included much of the history of the Tang Dynasty and included Taoist and Buddhist mythologies, traditional Chinese legends, and excerpts from all sorts of literature of the time and place. None of these stories involved go, although frequent interludes involving the Undersecretary reminded the reader of the rationale behind the story.

The second-to-last chapter, titled, 'Around the Go Board,' detailed a conversation, over a game, of course, between the Undersecretary and other celestial functionaries which brought together some of the earthly and heavenly threads of the plot.

### **'WALKING ON GLASS' AND 'QUEENMAGIC, KINGMAGIC'**

In the Winter 1990 'American Go Journal,' Bob High's column was devoted to 'Deviant Go'—variations in rules or playing surfaces. This was a long-time interest on the part of Mr. High, who usually took the lead at Go Congresses in organizing non-standard matches and tourneys. In this column, he mentioned two classics of the literature of Deviant Go.

Both Iain Bank's 'Walking on Glass' and Ian Watson's 'Queenmagic, Kingmagic' were structured around series of impossible variations of common board games. In 'Walking on Glass,' the various chapters involved games which could not be played to a conclusion. One-dimensional chess, open-plan go, spotless dominoes, Chinese scrabble, and tunnel were all either infinite in duration or impossible to score in a normal manner—one could not have had a meaningful match in any reasonable amount of time. The unplayability, or rather unfinishability of each of these games, was the key to one of the three major strands of what could only loosely be termed a plot. Open-plan go, incidentally, was regular go played on a board of infinite size.

In 'Queenmagic, Kingmagic' the ongoing theme was a series of worlds, each of which contained two groups in constant conflict with one another. Each world was essentially a realization of a common board game, with humans, individually, or in groups, being the game

pieces. The first of these, the world in which the novel was theoretically set, was the old standby, chess.

Each of the two nations had 16 people who were able to actually act in ways that affected the conflict between them, and these 16 had 'full souls' based on the various pieces in a chess set. The protagonists made their way to other similar worlds based on roulette, monopoly, and other games. At last they found themselves in a world where the conflict manifested itself as a series of camps, which sprang magically into existence at seemingly random points across a vast steppe.

Each camp contained a unit from one of two armies, identified only as black and white, and they materialized alternately. At first the camps were few and widely scattered about the steppe, but gradually they become more dense and groups of camps were able to link up. When such linked groups had enemy camps surrounded, they were able to force their surrender, at which point the vanquished groups disappeared just as mysteriously as they arrived. However, a 'double eye' formation of camps was considered invulnerable.

Eventually when the battle ended, the camps would have had to be moved around the plain to determine which army actually controlled more territory. As in all the worlds of this novel, whenever a 'game' ended, the 'board' would be reset to the starting position and a new game would begin.

Incidentally, there was a rumor, (or at least there will be if I start it here), that the two authors, Watson and Banks, once tried to play a game of Banks's open plan go. Since the game never ends, it can't be won in the normal way and they had to call in an expert to adjudicate the result. The referee was none other than Bob High's creation, 'Go Kiburi,' whom regular readers in the 1980s would recognize as the star of dozens of shaggy dog (or 'feghoot') type stories, all of which ended with elaborate puns on common go proverbs. Go Kiburi, of course, had no choice but to award victory to Banks, based entirely upon the different spellings of the authors' common first name.

## **PIERS ANTHONY**

In the Piers Anthony book, 'Isle of Woman,' the chapters were separate stories, and Number 16 ('T'ang') could be read as a short story with significant go content. He also wrote about go in 'Split Infinity' but the 'plot' was too episodic for

any scene to be crucial. In both books, the scene would play pretty much the same if the game were chess or sprouts or any board game which was oriented toward skill rather than luck.

## **PART III: EUROPEAN LITERATURE**

This section will of necessity be less comprehensive than the others. I am an all-too-typical American in that I read no other language than my own. I have tried to be complete with respect to European works with English translations, but can barely scratch the surface of the material, which is undoubtedly available in other languages. I hope that readers familiar with those works will either post follow-ups to this article or email me any information they have, which I will include in future installments.

### **FRANCE**

#### **OuLiPo**

The history of go in French literature is dominated by members and associates of the literary and word-play group known as OuLiPo, an acronym (in French of course) for 'Workshop in Potential Literature.' This small band (a total of 25 members over 30 years) of mathematicians, poets, novelists, professional puzzle writers, lit critics, and chess analysts, along with the unclassifiable Marcel Duchamp, was devoted to playing tricks with languages and exploring various unusual writing activities.

Specifically, they had as their goal the exploration of 'constrictive forms'—types of writing in which the rules of a literary form control or severely limit the content. For example, an Elizabethan sonnet can be a constrictive form, especially for the novice. The combination of strict rhyme scheme, grammatical convention and standard line length and meter can so greatly restrict the author's choice of language that they limit in substance what can be said.

The OuLiPo, however, mostly explored more rigid and more artificial forms. These oddities included 5000 character-palindromes (which read the same backwards as forwards); lipograms (which do not use certain letters of the alphabet, such as wedding poems that utilize only the letters in the bride's and groom's names); and poetry written with words which exist in both French and English, but with different meanings in each language.

One predecessor to the OuLiPo was a math collective known by their group pseudonym as 'Nicholas Bourbaki.' One of the members of Bourbaki, Claude Chevalley, was an avid go player and

taught the game to many of his grad students. Two of them, Jacques Roubaud and Pierre Lusson, became proselytizers for the game as well as well-known mathematicians. Roubaud, who eventually gained fame (well, some anyway) for his novels and other writing as well as for his math, wrote a book of poetry whose title cannot be printed here. No, it's not a naughty word—it physically cannot be written with my keyboard, which does not contain the Greek alphabet. The title is a single Greek letter, capital 'epsilon.'

This book, 'E,' was a book of poetry which can be read in several different orders, one of them determined by the patterns of a 7-stone handicap game between Masami Shinohara 8-dan and Mitsuo Takei 2-kyu, as reported in the April 1965 'Go Review' magazine.

Presumably these were professional ranks ('insei' levels were denominated by professional 'kyu' ranks in those days), as Shinohara Masami ('Go Review' had reversed his name to 'western style') was a well-known pro. He invented the point system used in the Oteai Ratings Tournament and he beat Go Seigen in the latter's first game in Japan. I'm not at all sure just how the 'Go Review' game was supposed to determine the order of verses. As far as I can see, Roubaud simply gave many of his verses go-move numbers, i. e. ('GO 88'), and told the reader that one of the orders in which the book could be read was the order of the go numbers. I don't see any pattern that would indicate how the go numbers were generated from a board position or order of moves. Perhaps there is an explanation in the text which a French-literate reader could explain, but I couldn't find anything which looked like one.

This book of 'poems' was actually several hundred seemingly dissimilar short bits of poetry and prose, some original and others quoted from various sources. Two were in English—an excerpt from 'Robinson Crusoe' and part of an 'Encyclopedia Britannica' article on Santa Catalina Island. One was part of a computer program, possibly in Algol. About half the bits were given go numbers. Each piece, whether or not it had a go number, had either a black or a white go stone printed with it; there was no correlation between the go stone colors and the move numbers of those 'poems' which contained them.

The go stones printed with the text bits were occasionally used for some pattern. For example, one section title consisted of the definition of a 'ko' followed by a diagram consisting of the titles of the next seven bits arranged in a 'ko' formation. The colors of the go

stones assigned to these bits corresponded to the 'ko' diagram. The move numbers assigned to the same bits, however, were all over the board and bore no relation to the one 'ko' which occurred in the actual game.

The book contained, according to its introduction, 361 'poems' of which 181 were marked with black stones and 180 with white. There were a number of other brief references to the game or to various elements of it, and probably more which I missed as a result of not reading French. The short appendix described the game in a couple of paragraphs and referred the reader to the bibliography, which contained Takagawa's 'Vital Points' and a book titled 'How to Learn Go with Ease' by Masaki Kurumi, published by the Nihon Kiin in 1962. The appendix also included a fold-out diagram of the game, up to move 157, which was all that Roubaud used for his numbering scheme. 'Go Review' showed the first 200 moves and indicated that the game was won by two points by Black.

'E' brought Roubaud to the attention of the OuLiPo, which invited him as the first new member outside the founding circle. At about the same time as the publication of 'E,' Roubaud's friend Alain Guerin published a novel titled 'Un Bon Depart.' This novel, which has not to the best of my knowledge been translated into English, had references to the game.

When the publisher, Christian Bourgois, who thought the game was a fictional invention by Guerin, found out otherwise, he expressed interest in a book on how to play. Guerin spent the summer of 1968 at a sort of literary retreat in the mountains, where he and Jacques Roubaud taught go to several other writers, most notably Georges Perec, who would become one of the most honored French writers of their generation. Bourgois's interest in a go book, passed on by Guerin, led to perhaps the quirkiest book on the subject in any language.

A collaboration between Perec, Roubaud, and Roubaud's mathematical colleague Pierre Lusson entitled, 'Petit Traite Invitant a la Decouverte de l'Art Subtil du Go,' was one-part instruction book to about two-parts wordplay, atrocious puns, anagrams, literary allusions, and general silliness. The book began with a plot synopsis of the 'Tale of Genji,' then went on to a serious and accurate look at the history of go. The authors then compared go to another game which played a large role in the fiction of both Perec and Roubaud, saying, 'We shall several times along the length of this book, in order

to aid you in the comprehension of this game, speak of chess. Understand well that this is just a convenient example, imposed on us by the popularity of that game (chess). Because it is important to have this idea set clearly in your minds: go is the anti-chess.'

They then made a number of comparisons which, without actually disparaging chess, made clear their tilt toward 'des supremes raffinements du go!' Most of the volume consisted of instruction in the game, with slight diversions into such topics as the construction of the go board. The lessons were very basic; how good they were awaits comments from someone who reads French. The only comment I can make is that the book introduces and explains a very large number of Japanese go terms; far more, I would think, than any beginner needs or wants to know. The glossary in the back lists 90 Japanese words or phrases, all of which were used in the text.

Bits of wordplay and silliness were scattered throughout the book, but were heavily concentrated towards the end, where a series of proverbs included such items as 'KOgito erGO Sum.' The book even had a section on go references in literature, which would be invaluable if it contained actual references, rather than odd things like 'AntiGOne,' or the statement that John GOleswarthy wrote the 'Forsythe SaGO.'

The bibliography ranged from the real 'Go Proverbs Illustrated' and the first two Ishi Press books, to Samuel Beckett's 'Yose,' which they claimed was a treatise on the 'endgame,' and Jorge Luis Borges's 'History of Infamy, History of Ko.' Much of this can be explained by the authors' statement early in the book that there was only one other art to which go can be effectively compared, and that was literature. Much of the word structure in this book, as well as that of 'E,' appeared to be an attempt to illustrate this contention.

After this 'small treatise,' go became something of a signature motif for Perec. He included brief references to it in four of his major works, most notably his monumental novel, 'Life A User's Manual,' which was often classed by critics and other authors as one of the top dozen or so literary accomplishments of this century. It was also an Oulipian project of immense complexity.

When I was a kid, a common puzzle consisted of small plastic pieces in five different shapes (square, star, circle, etc.). Each shape came in 5 different colors, for a total of 25 unique combinations. The object was to arrange the 25 pieces in a 5 x 5 array such that no two pieces of the same shape or color were in the same row, column, or

diagonal. This puzzle represented a math concept known as a 'bi-square.' Apparently the discovery of the first 10 x 10 bi-square (i.e. 10 shapes in 10 colors with the same rules) caused a bit of a stir in the math world because it had previously been thought not likely to exist.

When a fellow Oulipian who had been involved in the solution explained it to Perec, he decided to construct a novel from it. Perec first made 42 different lists of ten elements each, ranging from items of physical description, such as furniture, jewelry, fabrics, and colors, to types of music and several lists of authors to quote or paraphrase. He then used 21 bi-squares to create 100 'rooms' containing 42 elements each, one from each list. Then he mapped this grid onto a 10 x 10 diagram of an apartment building (10 floors including basement and attics with 10 'rooms' per floor including hallways and stairwells). After this, he described the contents of each room and the stories of the inhabitants using the assigned list elements.

The order of the chapters was then created by superimposing upon the plan of the house a knight's tour of a 10 x 10 chessboard, which Perec himself created. The stories of the residents and the contents of their apartments intertwined in various complex ways and most related to the main plot of the book, a complex project involving jigsaw puzzles and world travels undertaken by several of the characters.

Many of the chapters had additional constraints. For example, one of the chapters described a resident painter's plan to do a picture of the building with its facade removed, showing the contents of each room. This, of course, was a bit of a self-reference to the descriptions of those contents throughout the novel. The list of items in the picture, however, consisted of 179 lines of exactly 60 characters each. The first line had the letter 'a' in the 60th spot, the second had it in the 59th, etc., until line 60 began with 'a.' The letter 'm' traveled through the next 60 lines in the same way. The letter 'e' traveled through the last 59 lines. The last line, beginning with 'e,' was deliberately left out as a reference to one of Perec's other books, the famous 'La Disparition' which written without using the letter 'e.' Later, it was translated into English (as 'A Void'), again without using 'e'—quite a feat!

Go was briefly mentioned once in 'La Disparition' (and chess, of course, not at all), and elements of the game appeared four times, also in small ways, in 'Life A User's Manual.' For example, seven of the various objects found on the stairs of the building over the years

were marble lozenges—four black and three white—that laid in a ‘ko’ pattern. Perac’s description included a diagram of the pattern, which was duplicated on the cover of the British edition and of at least one German edition.

Two of his other novels, ‘La Boutique Obscure’ and ‘Especies D’espaces,’ also mentioned the game, but again the references were minor.

There were a number of essay collections and other works by and about various members of the OuLiPo including, ‘The Poetics of Experiment’ by Warren Motte, and ‘Georges Perec: A Life in Words’ by David Bellos. These two books can be considered part of the body of Western go literature in their own right because they were the source of much of the information given above.

## **GERMANY**

### **‘DOUBLE-CROSSING IN THE UNDERGROUND’**

‘Go Oder Doppelspiel Im Underground’ (‘Double-crossing in the Underworld’) by Guenter Karau was an espionage thriller set in and published by the former German Democratic Republic. The protagonist, an East German agent, learned of the death of a colleague who was in the habit of always carrying two go stones, one of each color, in his pockets. His mutilated body was identified by that fact. This caused the protagonist to reminisce about the many times that he and the deceased used to play go together, using their games as a cover for contacts that would otherwise have raised suspicion. (Playing go was not that unusual in Germany because of the Fascist encouragement of the game that followed contacts with Japan during World War II.)

### **‘THE GLASS BEAD GAME’**

At this point I want to debunk the major ‘urban legend’ of go literature. Because of its title and theme, many go players believe that ‘The Glass Bead Game’ by Herman Hesse referred to go. There are, however, several considerations which make this less likely.

I’ve read virtually all of Hesse's non-fiction writing, most of which (although by no means all), has been translated into English. Although it is possible he may have known about the game, he did

not deem it worthy of writing about it in his travel letters or essays, despite the favorable impressions that the Chinese people and culture made on him during a trip he took to Southeast Asia, several years before the book.

After the book was published, many people claimed to have invented or played the game he had described. Some of his correspondence with these people, and with friends about such claims, are found in the letters. In them, he insisted that he invented the game from thin air, never indicating that any part came from an existing game.

Of course the game itself, as described in the novel, bore absolutely no similarity to go. In fact, if one were to attempt, as an academic exercise, to invent a game which could have the title 'The Glass Bead Game,' and resemble go as little as possible, it would be an achievement to come up with something as unlike it as Hesse's invention.

In the novel, even though the 'game' acquired its name during the brief period in history that physical pieces were used, the supporting structure was a series of wire strings like a musical scale diagram. Multicolored beads representing notes were hung on this frame and moved around, presumably giving it the appearance of a side-ways-turned abacus of many colors. However, in the novel, this wire apparatus had become extinct centuries before and at the period of the action, the glass bead 'game' was purely word and concept, with no 'playing' pieces at all.

Since the book is generally considered the work which won Hesse the Nobel prize, a great deal of commentary and analysis has been written about it. While I don't read German, most Hesse scholars do, and the fact that they've never considered the go hypothesis, even as an inspiration for the title, makes me suspect that there aren't any references in German either.

*Brian is currently composing a list of all Western books in which go has played a part.*