Adventures in Card Play

Géza Ottlik & Hugh Kelsey (1979)

Well, it is the nature of man to be curious. A child cannot stop asking ‘Why?’ any more than he can stop breathing. And the true bridge-player is like the child – once having glimpsed the astonishing beauties of the game, we are driven to find out all there is to know about it. The peculiarly satisfying quality of a bridge hand is that it is a fragment of human experience, a sliver of reality that, unlike most things in life, can be completely understood. We can grasp its meaning, relate it to a larger scheme of things, spot harmony, introduce order. Bridge relieves a small part of our urgent need for clarity. Really, we play and study the game for the same reason Dylan Thomas gave when asked why he wrote poetry: ‘For some measure of light.’

If we seek to explain further our fascination with the game, we run up against the limitations of language. For bridge, in a sense, is like the act of love – its delights have to be experienced at first hand. How could a non-player be expected to understand the sweet torment of lying awake in the early hours of the morning while your mind tries to work out new ways of making last night’s three no trumps? When an interesting deal arises, it is the inherent mystery that attracts us, not so much whether it ended in triumph or tragedy, in a brilliancy or a blunder. In fact, we sometimes find ourselves playing with great accuracy but without any real understanding of what is happening.

Extrait original en anglais — Géza Ottlik & Hugh Kelsey