



C O L U M N I S T S

The Kibitzer

Tim Harding

Materialism in Chess

In this article, and the related one to follow next month, I shall be grappling with some conceptual issues in chess.

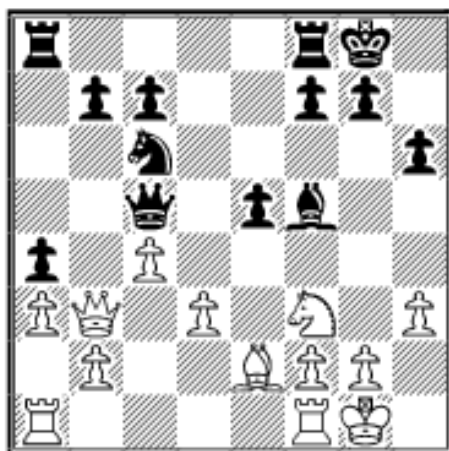
The Kibitzer column is wide-ranging and, while many readers may prefer the articles that deal with opening variations or historical matters, those are not my only interest. I can assure you that before long I shall be returning to those areas. I ask you to bear with me and you may find you learn something — or at least read something challenging here.

The games with this article are there to illustrate points. Where they are taken from my own games, I am certainly not claiming they are masterpieces, but they are useful to my purpose as I can recall certain games of mine that set my thoughts going in certain directions.

Any player who has coached juniors or beginners will recognize the following typical scenario from novice chess. After a few move, one player or the other wins a pawn or a piece. It may be due to a basic tactical element such as a knight fork, but it is just as likely that one player attacks something and his opponent doesn't notice and fails to defend it. Or else, one player grabs a pawn or two, neglecting his development or overlooking a trap, so that a few moves later the player who was originally ahead on material is now behind.

For example, here is the decisive moment of a game I had

against a weak opponent on the CC server Stan's Net-Chess a few months ago.



I had just answered 14 Qb3 by 14...a4. Missing the point, my opponent continued 15 Qxb7?? Rab8 16 Qxc7 Rfc8 and after 17 d4 Qf8 White lost his queen.

The game then develops with the stronger side winning more and more material, until the dominant player sees an opportunity for checkmate. At this level of chess, losers rarely resign. In the worst case scenario, which is not so uncommon, a player who has an extra queen and rook proceeds to promote further pawns to queens and then by good or ill luck manages eventually to either checkmate or stalemate his opponent.

Then the coach steps in and advises the weaker player to pay more attention to defending his pieces and pawns in the opening, and tells the stronger player than once he has a large material advantage he should not bother about increasing it but simply play for mate.

Thus the beginner learns that material gains in chess are not an end in themselves, but a means to an end. In the vast majority of games, however, it is the most important means to the end of winning the game. Once the young player has shown he is able to hold on to his pawns and pieces, then it is time to start teaching more advanced concepts like sacrificing material for a specific objective, such as the Bxh7+ 'Greek Gift' combination.

When amateurs, even quite strong ones, play a chess game, it is usual for one player or the other to establish a decisive

material advantage by around the 30th move. Of course there are exceptions. In 1972, at the BCF Major Open (an annual event for players just below British Championship level), I played a game in which the material balance was not disturbed until well into the endgame.

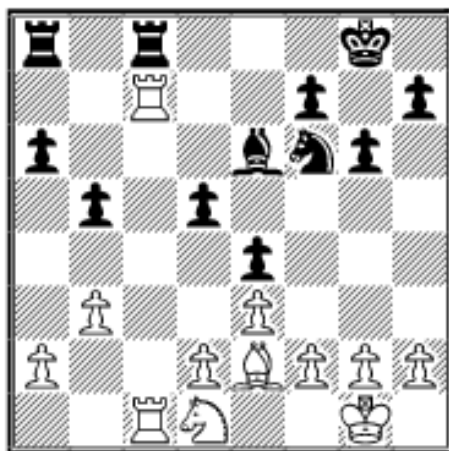
This is by no means a perfect game, but I quite liked it at the time. Comments are based on notes I made then.

Tim Harding – B. Marshall [A01] Major Open, Brighton 1972

1 b3 d5 2 Bb2 Nf6 3 Nf3 Nbd7?! 4 e3 g6?! 5 c4! c6 6 cxd5 cxd5 7 Nc3 e6?! 8 Rc1 a6 9 Be2?!

It would probably be better to play 9 a4! and meet 9...Bg7 10 Ba3!.

9...Bg7 10 Qc2 Qa5 11 Na4 0-0 12 Ba3 Re8 13 Qc7 Qxc7 14 Rxc7 b5 15 Nb2 e5 16 0-0 e4? 17 Nd4 Bf8 18 Bxf8 Nxf8 19 Rfc1 Ne6 20 Nxe6 Bxe6 21 Nd1 Rec8

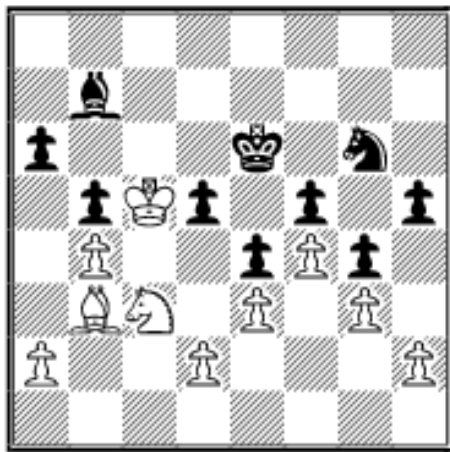


Black's Bishop is impeded by his pawns on d5 and e4. Now I fixed Black's queenside pawns on the same colour as his Bishop. His exchanging rooks probably plays into my hands

22 b4! Rxc7 23 Rxc7 Rc8 24 Rxc8+ Bxc8 25 Nc3 Bb7 26 Kf1 Ne8

If 26...Nd7 27 f4.

27 Ke1 Nd6 28 Kd1 f5 29 Kc2 Kf7 30 f4! Kf6 31 Nd1 g5 32 g3 g4 33 Kc3 Ke6 34 Kd4 Nc8 35 Kc5 Ne7 36 Nc3 h5 37 Bd1 Ng6 38 Bb3

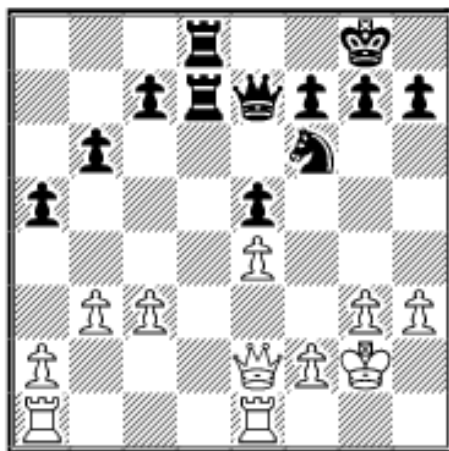


Material has been level until now. However, after 38...Ne7 39 a3, Black would suddenly find himself in zugzwang and lose his d-pawn. So he tried a desperate diversion on the kingside. Resigning would have been more artistic as then we would have had a decisive game of almost 40 moves in which material remained level throughout — quite rare even in master chess, I believe.

38...h4 39 Nxd5 hxd3 40 hxd3 Nh4?! 41 Nc3+ Kf6 42 gxh4 Kg6 43 Ne2 Kh5 44 Ng3+ Kxh4 45 Nxf5+ Kh3 46 Be6 g3 47 Nxd3+ Kxd3 48 Bd5 1-0.

Black gave up at last. Another curious reason why I like this game is that the white d-pawn never moved!

Even at relatively high levels, a good many games are decided by short-range tactical blunders, and I don't mean just in time pressure.



This position occurred in the fourth round of a 5-round weekend tournament in Wales. I was White and like my opponent (a regular member of the Welsh international team at the time) I was on 3/3. Having played the opening much better than I, Black (to play) was obviously trying to win this position

although it should be defensible.

The game continued 1...Rd3?! 2 Rac1 g6?? 3 Nd4! and, winning a rook for knight and pawn, I went on to win this miserable game — and eventually the tournament. So if this sort of thing can happen to a 2300 player, it can probably happen to you! (Correspondence chess is different, because

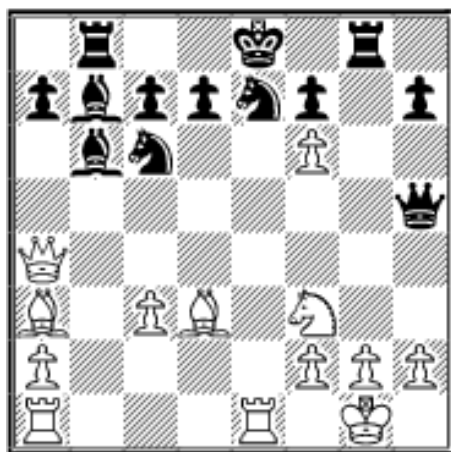
such crude errors are rarer, at least nowadays with computers to ‘blundercheck’ the move before mailing it.)

For every million routine games, decided by poor play or an outright blunder, there is the occasional “brilliancy”. That usually means a game in which the winner sacrifices a lot of material with surprising moves and checkmates his opponent. In other words, the traditional material values of chess are suspended as the ultimate goal of checkmate is shown to be paramount.

Here is one of the classic examples, the so-called ‘Evergreen Game’.

Adolph Anderssen – J. Dufresne Berlin, 1852

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Bc5 4 b4 Bxb4 5 c3 Ba5 6 d4 exd4 7 0–0 d3 8 Qb3 Qf6 9 e5 Qg6 10 Re1 Nge7 11 Ba3 b5 12 Qxb5 Rb8 13 Qa4 Bb6 14 Nbd2 Bb7 15 Ne4 Qf5 16 Bxd3 Qh5 17 Nf6+ gxf6 18 exf6 Rg8



19 Rad1!? Qxf3? 20 Rxe7+ Nxe7? 21 Qxd7+!! Kxd7 22 Bf5+ Ke8 23 Bd7+ Kf8 24 Bxe7# 1–0

A beginner will probably be struck most of all by White's 21st move, giving up the mighty queen for a mere pawn.

However, a more advanced player will see that checkmate is forced in a few (easily calculable) moves after Qxd7+ so that this is no true sacrifice. Black could have avoided that shot by 20...Kd8 although this will also lose in the end after 21 Rxd7+ Kc8 22 Rd8+!!.

A connoisseur prefers the preparatory move that makes it all possible and shows how early the attacker had seen what

was coming. Grandmaster Richard Réti, in his *Modern Ideas In Chess* asks what most compels our admiration here. He answers his own question by saying that it is “the quiet inconspicuous introductory move 19 Rad1 which just by reason of its inconspicuousness operates with such great charm”.

Arguments about whether 19 Rad1 is really the strongest move, and whether Black could have defended better, have gone on for more than a century. In 1898, P.Lipke wrote an article ‘Ein Blick in die Tiefen Anderssenscher Kombination’ (*Deutsche Schachzeitung*, page 110) where he tried to prove that 19...Rg4 would have saved Black. Later analysis has shown that White still stands much better, if not winning by force, after that move, but Emanuel Lasker (in his *Manual of Chess*) thought White should have played 19 Be4. This may lead to some advantage, but there was a big hole in Lasker’s main line: 19....Qh3 20 g3 Rxc3+ 21 hxc3 Qxc3+ 22 Kh1 Bxf2 and now Lasker’s 23 Re2 would lose to 23...Nd4!! as was pointed out several years ago. Burgess, Nunn and Emms (in *The Mammoth Book of the World’s Greatest Chess Games*) say that instead 23 Bxe7 “might keep some advantage, e.g. 23...Qxh3+ 24 Nh2 Qh4 25 Re2 Nd4 26 bxb7 Nxe2 27 Qxh4 Bxh4, but the position is messy”.

Looking at the crucial position now, with the strong computer programs Deep Fritz 7 and Junior 7, I find that they believe Black could hold the position after 19...Qh3 and maybe also after 19...Bd4 20 cxd4 Qxf3. I am unsure whether the latter continuation has been deeply examined anywhere, but the right result after 19...Qh3! does seem to be a fairly quick draw. This move is not even mentioned in the Mammoth book, while in Sid Pickard’s edition of Anderssen’s games (*Adolph Anderssen, Master of Attack* from Pickard & Son, 1996), it is analysed.

After 19 Rad1 Qh3 Pickard gave 20 g3 (“!”) 20...Rxc3+ 21 hxc3 Qxc3+ 22 Kh1 Qxf3+ “=” but the final position of this variation is an easy forced win for Black since White is not defending f2. Therefore White would have to play 20 Bf1 (“?! from Pickard) 20...Qf5 21 Bd3 (not considered by Pickard) when a repetition of moves comes about by 21...Qh3 22 Bf1 etc.

Even if the computer’s view proves ultimately correct, I am not sure how much it detracts from one’s appreciation of the conception begun with 19 Rad1, since no alternative move gives White a clear win. I guess it depends on your aesthetic values. A pessimist will probably say that the computer is taking the magic out of the game of chess. This is an area for discussion that I will return to in next month’s article; it’s not the main point of this month’s discussion.

For most of us, the opportunity to play such a remarkable and famous combination will probably never arise, nor is it necessary to be a tactical genius to have a fair degree of success in the chess world. It is possible to progress quite a long way in “over the board” junior or club chess, or on Internet server chess for that matter, just by being prudent with material and waiting for the opponents’ mistakes. Of course, a bit of opening study and calm nerves help too.

I recall that when I first came to Ireland in 1976, the strongest player in the country was Bernard Kernan, who never reached his full potential. After winning the Irish Championship, he played top board at the 1996 FIDE olympiad, drawing with strong players like GM Unzicker and making a substantial plus score. I lost about six games against him before I identified his weaknesses and managed to make a few draws. Primarily, he was a good attacking player in the John Nunn mould and rarely made a tactical error.

Bernard had a girlfriend, whom he soon taught to be a very effective player in lower division club and tournament chess. Unusually for players of sub-1500 standard, she always played carefully in the opening and kept all her pieces and pawns defended. Generally, after ten or twelve moves her opponents would make a short-range tactical mistake. Then she would take advantage and win the game. Unfortunately for Irish chess, the couple then got married and they both stopped playing competitive chess; otherwise they would both have comfortably obtained IM titles.

The materialistic style of play practiced by these two was relatively rare in those days, but from the mid-1980s it began to be seen much more frequently. That is because the chess computer came on the scene in that decade. The computer in the early days (and still primarily today) aims to achieve a material advantage, subject to a few prime directives like castling to keep the king safe, and then seeks to win either by attack or exchanging to an easily won endgame. If it sees forced mate it will play it, otherwise it prefers to maximize material advantage.

Material advantage means having more pieces (and/or pawns) than the opponent, or having more powerful ones (e.g. Queen for Knight). Other things being equal, an advantage of a pawn (or the equivalent) creates winning chances and an advantage equivalent to two pawns or more virtually guarantees victory. However, as we all know, there is quite a wide “margin of draw” in chess and a resourceful player with only a small material deficit can often draw the game. Of course, if this is all there is to chess, it would be a rather dull game and in many cases the materially weaker side has “compensation”, but for the sake of argument I am trying to keep things simple for a moment.

Let’s go back to basics for a moment. What are the “material” values of the pieces? Most of us are brought up

with a simplistic scale that goes:

- King of infinite value (but practical fighting value in an endgame =4)
- Pawn = 1
- Knight = 3 (pawns)
- Bishop =3
- Rook = 5
- Queen = 9

Certainly there is a practical value in assigning integer values to each of the pieces, for the purposes of rough-and-ready calculation of exchange sequences. However, as we gain experience as players, we become more sophisticated and realise that Knights and Bishops are rarely of equal value, with the Bishop having the edge, so that Staunton (in his *Chess Player's Handbook*) once came up with:

- Knight = 3.05
- Bishop = 3.50
- Rook = 5.48
- Queen = 9.94

and, in his *Modern Chess Instructor*, Steinitz commented that this basis “in the main is in accordance with our own experience and observations”. You can imagine people losing on time as they try to wrestle with calculations involving decimals like those!

Modern players would, I think, reckon that the Staunton scale overvalues the heavier pieces in relation to the minor pieces, certainly in relation to the Bishop. Staunton's formula would mean that Bishop and two pawns roughly equaled a rook and that Knight and two pawns were significantly inferior to a rook. Correspondence grandmaster Adrian Hollis, on the other hand, has suggested that Rook = 4.5 and Queen = 8.5 would be more accurate than the

normal beginner's scale.

The common view nowadays, I think, is that in the average situation a minor piece and one pawn is worth a bit less than a rook while a minor piece and two pawns is worth more than a rook, and that rook and one pawn are rarely equivalent to two minor pieces.

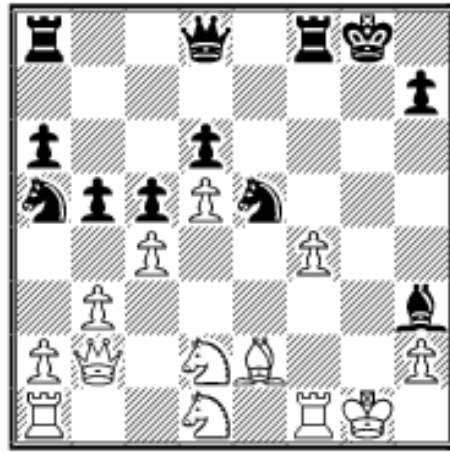
A common feature of modern master play is the “exchange sacrifice”. This term can puzzle players from continental Europe where the usual term for the “exchange” is “quality”, i.e. when you give up a Rook for a Bishop or Knight, the two players still have numerically the same quantity of pieces, but their value differs in quality. The trick is to recognize when the Bishop (or sometimes Knight) can be more valuable than the Rook.

Sometimes the circumstances are special enough that even a double exchange sacrifice is possible. I remember that in the early 1960s a Russian article on this theme was published in B.H. Wood's magazine ‘Chess’, attracting a lot of interest. Then in 1966 there was played perhaps the most brilliant example of this type of sacrifice.

***Tigran Petrosyan - Boris Spassky 10th match game,
World Championship, Moscow 1966***

**1 Nf3 Nf6 2 g3 g6 3 c4 Bg7 4 Bg2 0–0 5 0–0 Nc6 6 Nc3 d6
7 d4 a6 8 d5 Na5 9 Nd2 c5 10 Qc2 e5 11 b3?! Ng4 12 e4 f5
13 exf5 gxf5 14 Nd1!? b5 15 f3?! e4! 16 Bb2 exf3 17 Bxf3
Bxb2 18 Qxb2 Ne5 19 Be2 f4! 20 gxf4 Bh3?**

In a sharp position, Spassky is playing for a win but here he overplays his hand. The correct move was 20...Rxf4 since 21 Rxf4 would fail to 21...Qg5+. Now comes the first exchange sacrifice.



21 Ne3! Bxf1

Spassky accepts because otherwise he just stands worse.

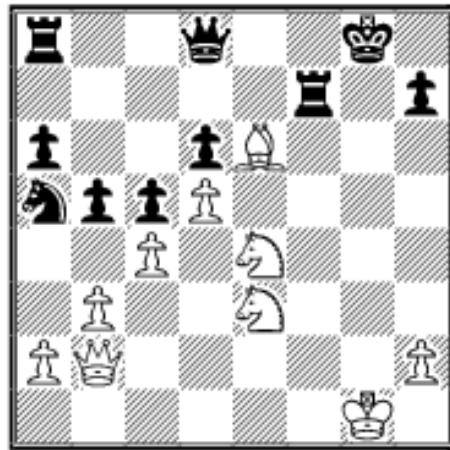
22 Rxf1 Ng6

Better was 22...Nd7 23 Bg4 Qf6.

23 Bg4 Nxf4?

Not 23...Rxf4? 24 Be6+ Kf8 25 Rxf4+ Nxf4 26 Qh8+ and White wins. Spassky had to try 23...Qf6 but Black stands worse. Now comes the second exchange sacrifice.

24 Rxf4! Rxf4 25 Be6+ Rf7 26 Ne4



One exchange can be regained at any time. As for the other, comparing White's two knights on the e-file with Black's rook and knight on the a-file, there is no doubt which are of the higher quality.

26...Qh4

If Black tries to use his Queen's rook, then White will meet 26...Raa7 by 27 Nf5 Qf8 28 Qf6 threatening Nh6+.

27 Nxd6 Qg5+

27...Qe1+ 28 Kg2 Qxe3 does not work because of 29 Bxf7+ Kf8 30 Qh8+ Ke7 31 Nf5+ Kxf7 32 Qg7+ and 33 Nxe3.

28 Kh1 Raa7 29 Bxf7+ Rxf7 30 Qh8+! 1-0

A neat way to bring the proceedings to a conclusion. After the fork on f7, White emerges a knight and pawn ahead.

The winner of that game, the late Tigran Petrosyan, studied for a degree of Master of Philosophical Science at the University of Yerevan, Armenia, in the 1960s, after becoming World Champion. His topic was “Chess Logic” and an abstract of his thesis was translated into English by the Dane Carl Andersen. I have copy 90 of the limited edition of 250 copies.

I want to quote one passage from this, which is relevant to my topic here. After observing that chess players often apply certain philosophical concepts to the game in a faulty way, he gives the example of grandmaster Réti (in his book *Modern Ideas In Chess*). Petrosyan wrote:

“This is seen, for instance, in the conclusion by Richard Réti that in chess, consciousness or spirit triumphs over matter — a conclusion based on an erroneous identification of spirit, consciousness, with combinative play, while regarding a victory attained as a result of accumulation and subsequent realization of material advantages with prejudice as something trivial”.

Here, I think that Petrosyan was referring to the first section of Réti’s famous book. I have the second English edition (1924, translated by John Hart, published by G.Bell & Sons Ltd.). Réti has been discussing the finish of the ‘Evergreen Game’ between Anderssen and Dufresne, and in the middle paragraph on page 4 he observes that “...the apparent senselessness of the sacrifice is a convincing proof of the design of the playing offering it. Hence it comes about that the risk of material, and the victory of the weaker material over the stronger material, gives the impression of a symbol of the mastery of mind over matter”.

It would seem from this passage that Réti was not exactly saying what Petrosyan accused him of saying. Certainly many chess players have succumbed in the past, and still do succumb today to what I may term Petrosyan’s Fallacy, but Réti himself was more subtle. Maybe something was lost in the translation to Russian?

For indeed, Réti went on to write that: “Play by means of combinations and positional play are not opposed to each other, but rather mutually supporting. The scheme of a game is played on positional lines, the decision of it is, as a rule, effected by combinations.”

Petrosyan then gave another example of what he meant: “Another philosophic aberration is the characterisation of the style of Capablanca by R. Fine, where the latter calls the positional style of Capablanca materialist, confusing the philosophical conception materialism with a realistic sober attitude to reality.” The passage by Fine, which he cites here, was (according to a footnote) from an article in the journal *Psychoanalysis* 1956, no.3, p.57.

To fully understand this comment by Petrosyan, you have to remember that the official philosophy of the Soviet Union was “dialectical materialism”, which derived from the thinking of Hegel via Karl Marx. Any implication — especially from an American — that materialism was in some way dirty, or inferior to some higher form of thought necessarily had to be rejected (at least if Petrosyan wanted to get his degree from a Soviet university). I think this largely explains his attacks on Réti and Fine.

The world champion also rejected the interpretation by English chess master and writer P.H. Clarke that Petrosyan’s style or method of play was “pragmatic”. Clarke had written (in his introduction to *Petrosyan’s Best Games*, on page 2) that “He is a pragmatist ...one who does what is needed to meet the requirements of a position and, on the whole, makes no attempt to impose his own wishes on it”. As an example, Clarke instanced the 4th game of the 1963 world championship match where, in order to minimize the disadvantage of a poor opening, Petrosyan accepted the need to play an ugly move.

1 c4 c5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 Nf3 g6 4 e3 Nf6 5 d4 cxd4 6 exd4 d5 7 cxd5 Nxd5 8 Qb3 Nxc3 9 Bc4 e6 10 bxc3 Bg7 11 Ba3



Here Petrosyan played **11...Bf8!**
12 Bc1 Bg7 13 Bb5 Bd7 14 Ba3
Bf8 15 Bxf8 Kxf8 16 0-0 Kg7
 and drew in a few more moves.

Of Black's 11th move, Clarke commented "This is the only satisfactory continuation; but you will appreciate that when in single combat with the World

Champion before a vast crowd of critical spectators, it is brave man who risks derision with such a humiliating retreat".

On the face of it, it is hard to understand why Petrosyan expressed such hostility to this assessment. I suspect that the word "pragmatist" had such negative connotations in Soviet ideology that Petrosyan could not publicly accept this assessment of his play. What Clarke called "pragmatism", Petrosyan saw as the search for truth in chess, which could manifest itself not only in finding the sole path to victory in a tactical situation but also in playing in accordance with "the spirit of the position".

For Petrosyan, an example of a "pragmatic" approach would be playing an incorrect sacrifice or dubious manoeuvre for the sake of a desired result: "...leading the opponent into error, and serving an unwarranted gain. In this case, victory or draw is not the result of disclosing the truth in chess".

On the other hand, possible political or ideological influences on the concepts he used do not mean that Petrosyan's views can be written off. It is clear from the abstract that he had thought deeply about the nature of chess and of course he wanted, having beaten Botvinnik for the world championship, to get some other recognition of his achievements and worth. Born in 1929, he grew up in the

difficult wartime years when his opportunities for formal secondary and further education were extremely limited. At the 1973 IBM Congress in Amsterdam, through an interpreter, I suggested to Petrosyan that he develop his thesis into a more popular book that could be read by ordinary chess players in the West. Unfortunately I was unable to interest the Batsford publishing house in this idea, and the opportunity fell through.

Here is another quotation from Petrosyan, which I think is completely on the mark and not affected by any political undertones. “The fact that we may experience aesthetic delight at a game of chess does not turn chess into a kind of art, just as the aesthetic beauty of the solution of a mathematical problem does not make mathematics a variety of art. In one case as in the other, we see the beauty not in the artistic appearance, but in the interior harmony of ideas, in their logical perfection”.

The final sentence here is (probably deliberately) an echo of the famous quotation from Dr Siegbert Tarrasch which was used by GM Ludek Pachman as the motto for his series of opening books. Tarrasch said: “The beauty of a chess move lies not in its appearance, but in the thought behind it”.

In other words, the most beautiful moves in chess (for a grandmaster or advanced amateur player) are not necessarily those spectacular sacrificial shots which so pleased the ‘romantic’ players of olden days, maybe even provoking a shower of gold coins on to the board from impressed spectators. Today’s master player is more impressed by a true sacrifice of strategic depth than by a superficially flashy shot that a computer can find in seconds.

In my opinion, many of the most famous ‘sacrificial combinations’ in the tactical text books, like Qxd7+ in the Evergreen Game, cannot really be called sacrifices at all. If

you add to the scale of value of the pieces an arbitrary high value for mating the king (say 100), then it is clear that any amount of material ‘sacrifice’ that leads to certain checkmate will yield a net favourable balance. Give up two rooks, a knight and a queen and obtain checkmate, tot up the figures and you have +78 or thereabouts. It’s not really sacrifice, at all, is it? It’s just good business.

The same point basically applies if the defender, to stave off checkmate, has to give back all the invested material with interest, as at the end of the Petrosyan-Spassky game above. Combinations that just win material, without mating ideas being involved, are just as mechanical — although they become interesting if they involve one or two surprising moves or variations with a sting in the tail.

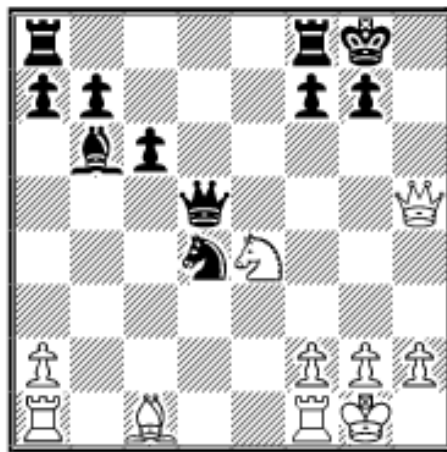
The following combination, from a Dublin league game, I would assess as fairly routine if it occurred in a postal or email game, but in an over-the-board team match against the clock it had a little more merit. White is a pawn up but his task is to reach a clearly won position without allowing any more counterplay.



The game ended **27 Bxh6! Qxf3 28 gxf3 Nd6 29 Be6 Re7 30 Bg5 Rb7 31 Bd5 1–0.**

Just because a combination is ‘mechanical’, it doesn’t necessarily mean that humans automatically see it. If a computer finds the right idea in a few seconds, it’s

mechanical nonetheless.



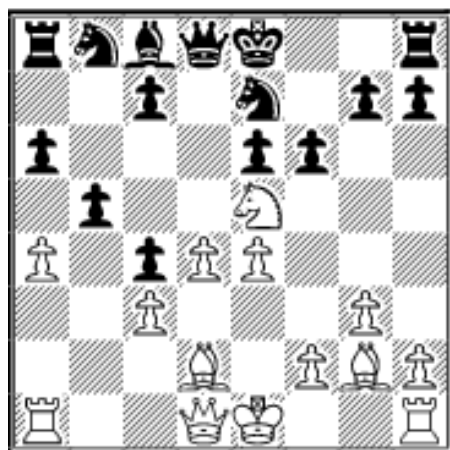
This position arose from an Evans Gambit in a friendly OTB match at an ICCF Congress. I was waiting for my elderly opponent to play 1 Nf6+! gxf6 2 Qg4+ and shake hands in view of perpetual check. Instead he played 1 Qg4?!, and he had to resign after my 1...f5.

Computers are just showing everyone what masters knew all along: a high proportion of flashy tactical moves that novices may see as 'artistic' are really just everyday transactions at the counting house. If there is artistry in chess, it has to lie somewhere deeper.

The following game, which I annotate in my new book *64 Great Chess Games*, is an example of what I mean by a true sacrifice.

Tim Harding - Alan Borwell ICCF 50th Jubilee Officials tournament IM-A, Email 2001-2

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 g3 d5 4 Bg2 dxc4 5 Nf3 a6 6 Ne5 Bb4+ 7 Nc3 Nd5 8 Bd2 b5 9 a4 Bxc3 10 bxc3 f6 11 e4 Ne7



In this position, White embarked on a continuation involving a knight sacrifice for one or two pawns, with no certain payback. There were several possible follow-ups around moves 14-16.

12 Qh5+ g6 13 Nxg6 Nxg6 14 f4 Bb7 15 0-0 Kf7 16 f5 exf5 17 exf5 Bxg2 18 Kxg2 c6?

A fatal slip after which there is no way to prevent either mate or loss of material in the long run.

19 axb5 cxb5 20 Kg1 Nd7 21 Rf4 Qb6 22 Re1 Qd6 23

Rfe4 Ndf8 24 Bf4 Qd7 25 fxg6+ 1–0

To conclude, I agree with Petrosyan that it is a fallacy to think that winning chess games by accumulation of advantages (material or positional) is somehow artistically inferior to winning games by sacrificial combinations. Of course a lot of games have little or no artistic merit because they are essentially decided by blunders or relatively simple tactical tricks, of which I gave a few examples.

Winning a game with an elegant combination is obviously more satisfying than a win achieved in those ways. However, a high percentage of the sacrificial combinations that have received high praise in the past (from casual players but also sometimes from masters) are seen now, with the benefit of computer analysis, to be either mechanical transactions leading to obvious immediate benefits (i.e. they are not really material sacrifices at all) or else they may have holes in them (like the Evergreen Game). Even in such cases, grandmasters admire more the quiet preparatory move than the flashy sacrifice itself (e.g. Réti's preference for 19 Rad1 over 21 Qxd7+ in the Evergreen).

In a true sacrifice, the favourable result cannot be calculated mechanically within a near horizon of moves, if at all. The player who give sup, say, knight for pawn (as I did against Borwell) or rook for bishop (like Petrosyan against Spassky) bets his judgment in an unclear situation. He reckons that in the long run the compensations he achieves will be more significant than the material advantage he concedes to his opponent.

It is precisely in this area of positional sacrifices and judging compensation that the human master can hope to stay ahead, for a few years yet, of his silicon adversary. However, we shall soon see what happens when world champion Kramnik takes on the Deep Fritz program in Bahrain. I think he will do better than Kasparov did against Deep Blue II in 1997, but we shall see.

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