

The Art of

# SACRIFICE

in Chess



by Rudolf Spielmann

21st Century Edition

Revised and Enlarged by German Grandmaster Karsten Müller

# The Art of Sacrifice in Chess

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Rudolf Spielmann

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*Revised and Expanded by Karsten Müller*



2015

Russell Enterprises, Inc.  
Milford, CT USA

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21st Century Edition

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ISBN: 978-1-936490-78-3

Published by:  
Russell Enterprises, Inc.  
PO Box 3131  
Milford, CT 06460 USA

<http://www.russell-enterprises.com>  
[info@russell-enterprises.com](mailto:info@russell-enterprises.com)

Cover design by Janel Lowrance  
Translation of the original edition by J. du Mont

Printed in the United States of America



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### Signs & Symbols

!	a strong move
!!	a brilliant or unobvious move
?	a weak move, an error
??	a grave error
!?	a move worth consideration
?!	a dubious move
=	an equal position
±	White stands slightly better
±	White has a clear advantage
+−	White has a winning position
∓	Black stands slightly better
∓	Black has a clear advantage
−+	Black has a winning position
∞	an unclear position
#	mate
(D)	See the next diagram
<b>W</b>	White to move
<b>B</b>	Black to move

## Introduction

### Preface

Rudolf Spielmann was born in Vienna on May 5, 1883. He was one of the top chessplayers in the world in the first part of the 20th century. His style of play, particularly in the days of his youth, was quite daring, often described as “romantic.” He relished combinational, sacrificial play, and this earned him the moniker “The Last Knight of the King’s Gambit.”

Spielmann’s love of the brilliant and creative side of chess resulted in his *opus magnum*, *The Art of Sacrifice in Chess*. This seminal work was the first attempt to categorize and explain the different kinds of chess sacrifices. Although many chessplayers have since written about these same themes, in fact the original effort early established itself as a genuine classic, and it remains so today.

Written in the mid-1930s, it has heretofore only appeared in English with antiquated English descriptive chess notation. It featured 37 games played by Spielmann himself, each illustrating one or more sacrificial themes.

When the American publisher Russell Enterprises suggested the re-release of a new algebraic edition of this classic, with additional material, I was immediately enthusiastic, as sacrifices have always held a special fascination for me. But it also presented a challenge: How do you edit and try to improve a classic?

This question was partially answered by Spielmann himself. In his Epilogue to the original edition, while hoping the reader was suitably intrigued and pleased with the work accomplished, he suggested that other sacrificial topics were omitted as a result of space considerations. I did not follow his suggestion directly as this would indeed lead to a different book, as Spielmann had already pointed out.

I think that one other way to get a feeling for sacrifices is to study the patterns of the typical sacrifices on certain squares like the Greek Gift ♖xh7+. I hope that this complements Spielmann’s approach well and helps the reader to develop a more general intuitive approach as well. This can not be traced back directly to Spielmann’s answer, but I nevertheless hope that this way to look at *The Art of Sacrifice in Chess* is in Spielmann’s spirit, and whenever possible I have used Spielmann’s games as examples.

Furthermore, I have added chapters about the modern attacking geniuses Mikhail Tal and Alexei Shirov, both from Riga, and one chapter on the art of defense, a theme whose development has been greatly helped thanks to the computers.

## The Art of Sacrifice in Chess

The publisher was also able to provide additional insight. Drawing from the experience of having successfully released “21st-Century Editions” of such classics like *Lasker’s Manual of Chess* by Emanuel Lasker, *New York 1924* by Alexander Alekhine, along with many others, it was decided to not only add new material as suggested by Spielmann some 70+ years ago, but also include an examination of the original text, with corrections if necessary, and supplemented by dozens of exercises.

The original text remains intact. Spielmann’s analysis was checked by one of the strongest computer programs. When there were comments to be added by me, they were integrated into the original text in *blue italics*. We wanted to preserve the original flair and spirit of his great work.

Spielmann’s concept was initially presented in two main sections and divided into 13 chapters according to the nature of the sacrifice being discussed. This approach has been maintained with the newly added material. Seven new chapters of material and one of exercises now round off Spielmann’s work.

In addition, in the spirit of the original, I have included Spielmann’s games in the new material whenever possible. I have also added exercises to many chapters as I think they are very important for training purposes.

Overall, in its transition to a modern to a “21st-Century Edition,” Spielmann’s original effort has approximately doubled in size. There is new material, my italicized notes to the original material (hopefully the reader will not consider them too intrusive!) and more diagrams have been added. All in all, I very much hope that the final result would have pleased the Austrian grandmaster.

Please enjoy the magic of Rudolf Spielmann’s chess wizardry!

German Grandmaster Karsten Müller  
Hamburg  
May 2015

## **Introduction**

by Rudolf Spielmann

The beauty of a game of chess is usually appraised, and with good reason, according to the sacrifices it contains. Sacrifices – a hallowed, heroic concept! Advancing in a chivalrous mood, the individual immolates himself for a noble idea.

Such sacrifice evokes our homage and admiration even where the idea as such does not meet with our full approval. In chess, which we like to view as a counterpart of life a sacrifice arouses similar feelings in us. On principle we incline to rate a sacrificial game more highly than a positional game. Instinctively we place the moral value above the scientific. We honor Capablanca, but our hearts beat higher when Morphy's name is mentioned. The magic of the sacrifice grips us and we care nothing for the accompanying circumstances – whether Morphy's opponents were weaker than Capablanca's, how Morphy would fare today, how Capablanca would have played in those far-off days. The glowing power of the sacrifice is irresistible: enthusiasm for the sacrifice lies in men's nature.

The experts like to disparage the habit of valuing a game according to the amount of material sacrificed. This is understandable to a certain extent, but nonetheless deplorable. The expert is too preoccupied with technique to be able to share the simple-hearted joy of the multitude. He watches the play not from the auditorium but from the stage itself. He is also perhaps a little case-hardened. But the rank-and-file players have preserved fresh and natural feelings: they are delighted now as always with the combinative style.

In spite of this fact – and the related fact that chess books are after all written for the ordinary player – there is no systematic treatise in chess literature dealing with the nature of the sacrifice in all its variety. This is why I have undertaken to deal with this hitherto neglected subject.

My unpretentious book lays no claim to being exhaustive. It is meant to be a guide, not a textbook – which is unsuitable for the subject.

For this reason I have thought it best to preserve a subjective standpoint by using only my own games by way of illustration. I have given much thought to the characteristics of the sacrifice, and as I have played many sacrificial games in the thirty years of my career, I have collected a mass of pertinent information, the fruits of which will be found in this volume. May this material be both useful and stimulating to those who are relatively inexperienced.

Finally, I wish to anticipate the possible reproach that I have written this book for the purpose of self-glorification, because I am reputed to be an attacking, combinative player.

## The Art of Sacrifice in Chess

This reputation doubtless has its origin in the fact that in former years I frequently adopted gambit openings. It must be said, however, that any fairly successful player has brought off combinations and sacrifices; the perception of such possibilities forms a part of sound play as much as the knowledge of openings and endgames.

If I have drawn on my own games as illustrations, the reason is not that I think that they are the best examples, but that, as a matter of course, I am more familiar with them; I am naturally better able to give the reasons underlying my own combinations.

The art of sacrificing correctly cannot be learned to quite the same degree as expertise in the openings; sacrificial play is much more dependent on personal qualities. That is why every great master goes his own particular way in this field; when it comes to sacrificing, there are many artists and many styles, all of them unique.



*Rudolf Spielmann*

## Part I: The Various Types of Sacrifices

In the domain of problems the various sacrificial themes have long since been classified and given their own nomenclature. In practical chess such a classification has never, to my knowledge, been attempted. A few combinations, such as “Philidor’s Legacy,” have their own names; but apart from that, nothing has been done except an occasional loan from the problemist, as “self-block,” “vacating sacrifice” and the like. True, problem composers have a much easier task: their ideas are pre-conceived and can be executed without any interference by an opponent! Superfluous pieces are simply eliminated, so that the underlying idea ultimately appears in purest form permitting clear-cut diagnosis.

It is otherwise in practical chess. Here well-defined combinations and sacrifices turn up more or less at hazard. Hardly ever are they “pure” and “economical” as in problems, and consequently they are harder to recognize and classify. This is doubtless one of the reasons why such classification has not yet been attempted.

I can well imagine that some other author would classify the various types of sacrifices in an altogether different manner. That is why I again emphasize my purely subjective point of view. A definitive treatment cannot be expected from a first attempt. It will probably take a long time to establish for practical chess the kind of universally acceptable nomenclature that exists in the realm of problems.

Sacrifices represent in chess an excep-

tionally important phase of the struggle. Beauty is not the sole object. They have the common aim of increasing the effectiveness of other pieces outside of the normal routine, if possible suddenly. In equalized positions, their purpose is to gain time. But mostly they served to increase already existing advantages and they are consequently particularly adapted to the exploitation of mistakes by the other side. It may be that an advantage in development is turned into a grand assault, or that a weak point in the enemy lines is ripped open in the same way.

The advantage to be exploited need not be of a general nature; it can be merely local. Particularly in such cases does the sacrifice provide an indispensable weapon; for placid play is apt to dissipate the advantage, with resultant drifting into a drawn position.

A sacrifice at the right moment takes opportunity by the forelock. The opponent may gain material, but he is tempted or forced to make some temporarily useless moves, his troops become disordered and the disconnected forces are beaten before they can put up a united front to the enemy.

To get the unwieldy mass of possible sacrifices into some sort of order, we must first classify them under three heads: form, size and object.

Under the heading “form,” there are two types, the deciding factor, from a scientific point of view, would be whether the sacrifice arises from a move made for the purpose of sacrificing or from a

## The Art of Sacrifice in Chess

raid by the enemy. In other words, through moving and offering a piece – or through disregarding the enemy's threat to capture. Thus, after 1.e4 e5 2.f4 is an active sacrifice. Conversely, after 1.e4 e5 2.♟f3 ♘c6 3.d4 e×d4 4.♟×d4, the raid 4...♞h4 allows the passive sacrifice 5.♟b5.

From a practical point of view, however, I prefer to make a different distinction, namely whether or not acceptance of the proffered sacrifice is compulsory. Those which must be accepted I call active, the others passive.

In the Allgaier Gambit (1.e4 e5 2.f4 e×f4 3.♟f3 g5 4.h4 g4 5.♟g5 h6 6.♟×f7) both forms occur in the first six moves. 5.♟g5 is a passive sacrifice, as it can be declined by 5...♟f6 with no worsening of Black's position. Contrariwise, 6.♟×f7 is an active sacrifice because it has to be accepted.

In the nature of things, the active sacrifice is by far the more powerful of the two.

The size of the sacrifice appears to be perfectly easy to determine. But, as we shall see later on, this aspect also presents problems, as the value of each unit varies qualitatively according to the nature of a given position.

There are sacrifices of pawns and of pieces. The latter can be subdivided into full- and part-sacrifices, depending on whether a whole piece is given up or whether there is partial compensation.

When considering part-sacrifices, we must distinguish between the major and minor pieces. When minor pieces are

sacrificed, any material compensation can consist only in pawns. In the case of a major piece, the compensation may be minor pieces or pawns or both. The possible resulting situations are quite dissimilar, for after full sacrifices the number of your own units diminishes, while after a part-sacrifice it frequently actually increases.

A separate chapter treats of the sacrifice of the exchange and all its ramifications.

The most important classification of sacrifices is according to their object. In this respect we must first distinguish between two groups, namely sham and real sacrifices. The difference is this: sham sacrifices involve losses of material only for a definable amount of time; in the case of real sacrifices, the amount of time required for recovering the material is not clear.

There a sham (temporary) sacrifice involves no risk. After a series of forced moves, the player either recovers the invested material with advantage, or else even mates his opponent. The consequences of the sacrifice were foreseen from the first. Properly speaking, there is no sacrifice, only an advantageous business deal.

Yet such sacrifices must not be disparaged; often fine perception and a great deal of imagination are required, as well as the gift of intricate calculation, in order to discern possibilities in a position and exploit them.

We shall divide sham sacrifices into three groups:

## Part I: The Various Types of Sacrifices

- (1) Positional sacrifices;
- (2) Sacrifices for gain; and
- (3) Mating sacrifices

Positional sacrifices lead to forced recovery of the material lost with an improvement in position. Thus, after 1.e4 e5 2.♟f3 ♘c6 3.♟c3 ♘c5 White can sacrifice advantageously with 4.♟xe5, for after 4...♟xe5, he recovers the piece by 5.d4, with improved prospects.

The sacrifice for gain leads to an advantage in material, the sacrificed material being regained by force and with interest. An example: 1.e4 e5 2.♟f3 ♘c6 3.♘b5 a6 4.♘a4 ♟f6 5.0-0 ♘e7 6.d4 b5 7.♘b3 ♟xd4? 8.♘xf7+ ♟xf7 9.♟xe5+ followed by 10.♟xd4.

The mating sacrifice leads to checkmate or, alternatively, to immediately decisive gain of material. The actual mate can frequently be delayed by the heaviest counter-sacrifices (loss of the queen, for example), which are, in effect, tantamount to mate.

For example: 1.e4 e5 2.♟f3 d6 3.♘c4 h6 4.♟c3 ♟c6 5.d4 ♘g4 6.dxe5 ♟xe5? 7.♟xe5!. If Black now captures the queen, mate follows by 7...♘xd1 8.♘xf7+ ♟e7 9.♟d5#. True, Black can avoid this mate in various ways by declining the sham sacrifice. But in that case White remains a piece to the good.

In real sacrifices the player gives up material, but is unable to calculate the consequences with accuracy; he has to rely on his judgment. He obtains dynamic advantages, which he can realize gradually. Should he not succeed in this, he will most probably lose the

game through deficiency in material. Therein lies the risk, and the risk is the hallmark of the real sacrifice. This group will occupy most of our attention from now on.

Compared with sham sacrifices, the real sacrifices are much more difficult to treat scientifically. Their secrets reveal themselves only to the gifted and courageous player, who has strong if controlled self-confidence. The timid player will take to real sacrifices only with difficulty, principally because the risk involved makes him uneasy.

The theory of real sacrifices cannot go beyond general rules, advice, warnings and illustrations. But let no one be discouraged: the moderately gifted player can obtain a considerable playing strength by applying himself diligently; while, on the other hand, weak play does not necessarily indicate lack of talent!

Unlike the sham sacrifice, in which the aims are clear as day, the real sacrifice has vaguely defined goals; the result lies in the lap of the gods and at most can be formulated only intuitively.

It follows that it must be a matter of some difficulty to differentiate between the various types of real sacrifices. I have had to adopt a subjective point of view again and to proceed at times by instinct. This conforms, after all, with the nature of these sacrifices, which in actual play are generally decided upon on an instinctive basis.

I have arrived at the following subdivisions:

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- (1) Sacrifices for development;
- (2) Obstructive sacrifices;
- (3) Preventive (or anti-castling) sacrifices;
- (4) Line-clearance sacrifices;
- (5) Vacating sacrifices;
- (6) Deflecting or decoy sacrifices;
- (7) (Castled) king's field sacrifices;  
and
- (8) King-hunt sacrifices

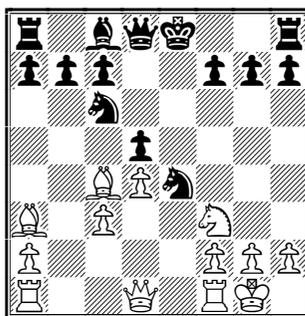
The sacrifice for development aims at an unusual acceleration of one's development. To this type belong more or less all gambits, as, for example, the Muzio Gambit (1.e4 e5 2.f4 exf4 3.♁f3 g5 4.♁c4 g4 5.0-0 gx♁f3).

The rapid formation of a center which is said by many to be the object of most gambits, is, strictly speaking, only a means to the attainment of that object (accelerated development). In the nature of things the developing sacrifice occurs in the opening stages – when the development on either side is as yet uncompleted.

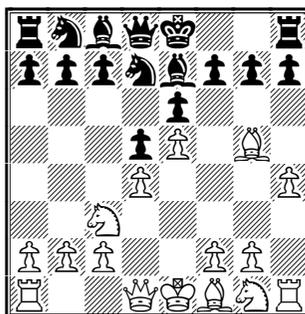
Besides the developing sacrifices known to theory, new ones are constantly evolved in practical play. For the most part they are pawn sacrifices, but – as in the Muzio, mentioned above – pieces are sometimes sacrificed as well.

The obstructive sacrifice also occurs before the respective developments are completed, and the object is likewise a net plus in development. But here we achieve our objective not by speeding up our own, but by slowing down the opponent's development. The material staked will have to be of a modest nature. An instance from the Caro-Kann Defense: 1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.e5 ♁f5 4.g4 ♁g6 5.h4 h6 6.e6.

The preventive (anti-castling) sacrifice is intended to prevent the opponent's castling. To this end even a whole piece can be given up in certain circumstances, namely when it is possible to hold the hostile king in the middle and to open up the center files. In his second match with Lasker, Steinitz gave up a piece early in the game for this purpose: 1.e4 e5 2.♁f3 ♁c6 3.♁c4 ♁c5 4.c3 ♁f6 5.d4 exd4 6.cxd4 ♁b4+ 7.♁c3 ♁xe4 8.0-0 ♁xc3 9.bxc3 d5 10.♁a3 (D)



The line-clearance sacrifice aims at the early development of the rooks on open lines. The Alekhine variation of the French Defense belongs to this category: 1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♁c3 ♁f6 4.♁g5 ♁e7 5.e5 ♁fd7 6.h4 (D)

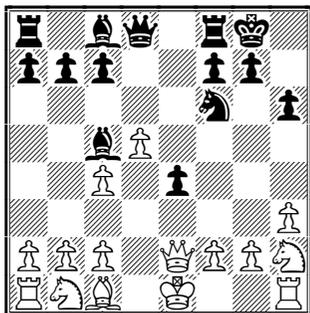


After 6...♁xg5 7.hxg5 ♁xg5, White's open h-file becomes very powerful. In certain cases this type of sacrifice justifies a very large stake.

## Part I: The Various Types of Sacrifices

The vacating sacrifice procures access for a particular unit to a more favorable square. For so limited an object, only a small investment should be risked. A pretty case in point is the following example from the Two Knights Defense:

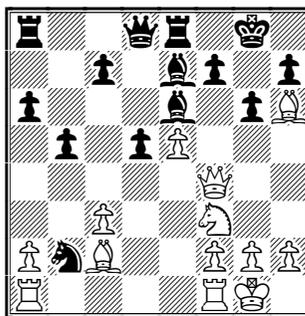
1.e4 e5 2.♖f3 ♘c6 3.♗c4 ♜f6 4.♘g5 d5 5.exd5 ♖a5 6.d3 h6 7.♜f3 e4 8.♞e2 ♘xc4 9.dxc4 ♗c5 10.h3 0-0 11.♜h2 (D)



Now Black has only one really promising continuation of the attack: 11...e3! 12.♗xe3 ♗xe3 13.fxe3 ♜e4. Thanks to this knight's strong position, Black's attack is very powerful.

The deflecting or decoy sacrifice has the definite object of luring or diverting one or more enemy pieces from the main field of battle. The attacker, for instance, allows his opponent to graze on one wing in order to be able to pursue his attack undisturbed on the other side. Such sacrifices ordinarily occur only after development is far advanced. An example from the Ruy Lopez:

1.e4 e5 2.♖f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 a6 4.♗a4 ♜f6 5.0-0 ♘xe4 6.d4 b5 7.♗b3 d5 8.dxe5 ♗e6 9.c3 ♗e7 10.♗e3 0-0 11.♜bd2 ♖a5 12.♗c2 ♘xd2 13.♞xd2 ♘c4 14.♞d3 g6 15.♗h6 ♘xb2 16.♞e3 ♗e8 17.♞f4 (D)

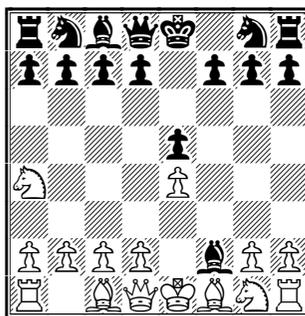


White has a strong attack against the hostile castled position. Black's knight is out of play and for the time being is unable to participate in the defense.

Sacrifices in the King's Field have the object of breaking up the hostile king's castled position. They are the most frequent combinations in the middle game and occur in countless variations. They are seldom encountered in the opening stage, requiring as they do an advanced stage of development.

King-hunt sacrifices I call those which drive the king into the open, where it is automatically exposed to a great many dangers. An example from the Vienna:

1.e4 e5 2.♘c3 ♗c5 3.♖a4 ♗xf2+ (D)



White hardly has an alternative to capturing and must at least attempt to hold the extra piece. But his king will be driven from pillar to post after 4.♞xf2 ♖h4+ 5.♞e3 ♖f4+ 6.♞d3 d5.

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In comparing the two broad groups of sacrifices, we now perceive the train of thought on which this division is based. In the sham sacrifice, the ultimate object is paramount. In the real sacrifice, only the provisional aim is considered. The common ground in both types is that only the object visible at the time of the sacrifice is taken as the characteristic feature.

In practical play, combinations frequently occur which are composed of several sacrifices. These usually belong to only one of the two main groups. But it is quite possible for a sham sacrifice to precede a real one. The converse can happen in the course of a game, but hardly as part of one combination.

In the following pages, the various types of sacrifices will be treated according to their object, that is, according to their type. Only in two cases will the classification be according to the amount of material given up. These are the sacrifice of the exchange and the queen sacrifice. The reasons for this are set forth in the respective chapters.

### **Sham Sacrifices**

A surprisingly large number of sacrificial combinations must be classified as sham sacrifices, because they lack the real characteristics of the sacrifice. The material given up is regained subsequently, frequently with interest. They are sham sacrifices in the most literal sense of the word. With these we shall deal in the next three sections.

## Chapter 1 Positional Sacrifices

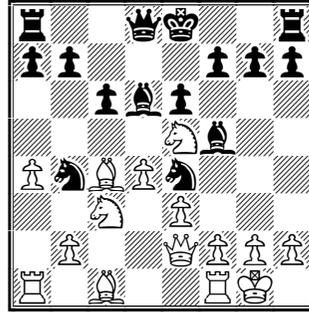
To this class belong all sacrifices which have the object of effecting an improvement in position by temporarily giving up material. The recapture of the material given up, is an essential characteristic. It is not necessary for the compensation to be in the same currency. But the *quid pro quo*, in the material sense, must be adequate. In effect the positional sacrifice is a form of barter – only the return is not made immediately, but rather in the course of several moves. Again, a positional sacrifice need not necessarily lead to an advantage in position. Undertaken in a bad position, it may barely save the game or merely prolong resistance.

However, if when all is said and done the positional sacrifice is only an exchange, it is nevertheless an exceedingly valuable weapon. Of course, one must gauge accurately the consequences of such a deal. This should not be difficult as a rule.

**(1) Spielmann – Pirc**  
Rogaska Slatina 1931  
Slav Defense [D16]

**1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♗c3 dxc4 5.a4 ♗f5 6.e3 ♘a6 7.♗xc4 ♗b4 8.0-0 e6 9.♞e2 ♗e4?** Black seeks mechanically to prevent the annoying advance e4, but is all the sooner at a disadvantage. **10.♗e5 ♗d6** (D)

In this position Black threatens to free his game by 11...♗xe5 12.dxe5 ♗xc3 13.bxc3 but in consequence of the unhappy move 9...♗e4? his minor pieces are quite insecure. This circumstance



gives White an opportunity for a decisive positional sacrifice.

**11.♗xf7!**

Not really a sacrifice at all, as White is bound to obtain adequate material compensation. But the important point is that Black's game becomes disorganized beyond hope of salvation.

**11...♞xf7**

An alternative variation also characterized by a temporary sacrifice is 11...♗xh2+ 12.♞xh2 ♞h4+ ? 12...♞xf7 13.♞f3 ♗d6 is called for, but White's initiative is strong in any case. 13.♞g1 ♗g4 14.♗xe4 ♗xe2 15.♗fd6+ followed by 16.♗xe2 – when Black has won the queen but still stands to lose! It is true that White has only three minor pieces for the queen, which in ordinary circumstances assures equality, but here, considering the exposed position of the black king, White should quickly obtain a winning attack.

The relative value of the pieces, a vital criterion in appraising this type of sacrifice, is shown here in the most instructive light.