

“Velimirović Attack” (Chasing One’s Own Tail)

by Milan Velimirović

Almost from my first steps in chess composition my mind “went cyclic”. To make the same things happen differently after other same things (like the shift of mates in the Lačný theme), or to make them happen for themselves (like circling the effects in various single phase themes) is a fascinating peculiarity which makes the position on a chess board look like an incredible machine working like a clockwork.

Composing a cyclic problem is another “Adventure”, but quite different from those described in the famous book by Comins Mansfield. Here you have only limited possibilities to alter the path determined before the very beginning. Once you take it, it’s usually a road with no detour if you want to end up with the pattern you’re looking for. This is a journey through unforgiving and unfriendly territory, uncertain that you’ll finish it with your head on your shoulders. And if you do, there’s no guarantee either that you’ll like what you find there, or that others will appreciate it.



Milan Velimirović:
“*Sorry but my mind went cyclic*”

Such complex and highly constrained themes by definition consume a lot of resources. So, when (and if) the composition is finished there is not much room for the composer to turn himself from the scientist into the artist and polish his work in a way which would comfort the commonly accepted artistic conventions; or to turn himself into the narrator and remodel the story in a more digestible way. Unlike in compositions where the artistry can be expressed (and sometimes faked) by replacing one ingredient by another, or (not a rare case!) even by taking something out of the content,

in a cycle the elements are usually so tightly linked to each other that any change would probably ruin the whole conception. Thus, it’s not a surprise that with this kind of theme the idea is often better than the final product.

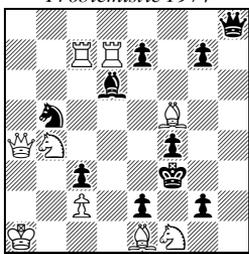
Perhaps the combination I am about to show will not be as interesting for you as it is for me. This is one of many ideas I had written down in my notebook in my late teens and early post-teens, but had never worked on it since. Yes, I published two problems in the 70s, but never dedicated myself seriously to it, although during three decades I did some research from time to time. I stumbled upon some promising mechanisms, but always with a frustrating result. However, so far I haven’t noticed that anybody else was thinking in that direction and therefore I will take the opportunity, by right of priority, to associate the combination with my name. So from now on I will call it “Velimirović Attack”, a term already known in OTB chess where one aggressive variation in the Sicilian defence is named after my namesake, and a good friend of mine, GM Draško Velimirović.

The logic of the combination is fascinating in its simplicity: in tries White self-invalidates two out of three thematic elements, which are almost inevitably white lines.

Each try provides compensation for one invalidation so that black can utilize only the remaining one to reject the try. In this way all thematic tries contain two degrees of attack, i.e. each one is at the same time a correction and an error to be corrected.

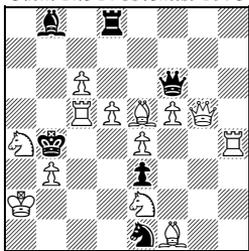
As a picture speaks for a thousand words, it would be the best to illustrate how the combination looks on the board. In example **No.1** the three thematic lines are (1) d7-d3(-f3), (2) the bent line c7-c3-f3 and (3) the bent line a4-a8-f3. White has to move his Sb4

1. M. Velimirović
3-4. *hm Buletin*
Problemistic 1974



≠2✓✓ 9+10
1. Sc6!? Sd4 2. Sxd4# 1... Qa8!
1. Sd5!? Qa8 2. Sh2# 1... Bb4!
1. Sd3? Bd4 2. Se5# 1... Sd4!
1. Sa2! ~, Sd4, Bb4, Qa8
2.. Qe4, Rxc3, Rd3, Qxa8#

2. M. Velimirović
3. *hm The Problemist 1975*



≠2✓... 13+6
1. Se~? ~ 2. Rb5#, SdB!
1. Sc3!!!? Qc6! (1... e2 2. threat)
1. Sd4!!!? Rxd5! (1... Qe6 2. Sxc6#)
1. Sf4!!!? e2! (1... Rxd5 2. Sxd5#)
1. Sc1! ~, Sd3, Qxc6, Rxd5, e2
2. Rb5, Sxd3, Bc3, exd5, Qd2#

for the threat 2. Qe4#, but where to? 1. Sd3? closes lines 1 and 2, but provides the compensation for the first injury: 1... Bb4 2. Se5# (instead of 2. Rd3??). However, 1... Sd4! defeats (2. Rxc3??). Further, 1. Sc6? again closes the line 2, this time with compensation for 1... Sd4 2. Sxd4# (instead of 2. Rxc3??), but also closes the line 3 and 1... Qa8! defeats (2. Qxa8? not a mate). Finally, 1. Sd5? closes the line 3 now with provision for 1... Qa8 2. Sh2# (2. Qa8?), but closes the line 1 as well and 1... Bb4! defeats (2. Rd3??). The key is a safe and expressionless 1. Sa2! with no self-injuries. In short, Sc6!? corrects Sd3?, Sd5!? corrects Sc6?, Sd3!? corrects Sd5? and now we can start all over: Sc6!? corrects Sd3? and so on, like a silly dog chasing his own tail.

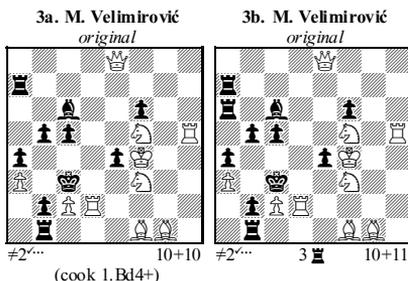
This is a clear thematic example but, frankly, hardly anything more than that. However, it made the FIDE Album, so maybe it's not so bad after all. Either way, I felt that my expectations had been denied, that something more was needed for a great problem. What could it have been? Maybe the play raised one degree up would give a more attractive problem? So I composed **No.2** – just to be denied once again. Here the Black has a strong defence 1... Sd3! to parry the threat 2. Rb5# after a random removal of the Se2. Therefore, White must either put another guard on b5 (a pretty primitive way to correct), or provide the mate by a capture on d3. Three such corrections collide by turns with a pair of three white thematic lines: e5-c3(-b4), h4-b4 and g5-d2(-b4). As in the first example, each compensates for one weakness: 1. Sc3!? e2 2. threat# (also primitive!) but 1... Qxb6! (2. Bc3?); 1. Sd4!? Qxc6 2. Sxc6# but 1... Rxd5! (2. ed5?); 1. Sf4!? Rxd5 2. Sxd5# but 1... e2! (2. Qd2?). The key is 1. Sc1! and after 1... Sd3 2. Sxd3#.

Compared to No.1, the thematic play in No.2 takes corrections and the white compensations are tertiary corrections. That should undoubtedly be a better form, but not in such an opportunistic realisation, with the threat standing in for the missing mates (i.e. twice after 1... Sd3 and once after 1... e2).

In the mid-90s I returned to chess problems after a decade-long break, and one of the first things I tried to do was to find a decent rendering of the theme I am talking about. Soon I came to a seemingly perfect mechanism, but sadly ended in another frustration,

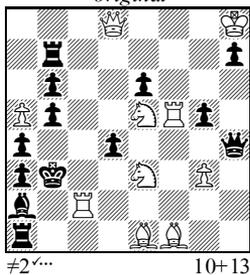
which hasn't faded away ever since. It became like an obsession and until now all my thoughts about the theme have in fact been thoughts about this very mechanism. A stubborn belief that some "deus ex machina" would suddenly pop up and resolve everything made me, during all these years, into the above-mentioned silly dog. As the miracle didn't happen, I decided to put an end to my attempts and show you how close to, and yet how desperately far from, my goal I have reached, and by doing it at least to illustrate what a beautiful elusive problem I am still dreaming of.

Except for the absence of the primary weakness, **No.3a** shows perfect White Correction. A random removal 1.S5~? (2.Rxc5#) is defeated by 1... Bd5!, so white has to prepare a mate by knight on b5 or d5. Three corrections coincide with white thematic lines e8-e3(-c3), g1-d4(-c3) and e8-e5(-c3). In addition to the provision for 1... Bd5, each of the three prepares a mate which compensates for one closed line, but fails due to the lack of mate for another: 1.Se7? e5 2.Qg8# (2.Qe5??), 1... exf3! (2.Qe3??); 1.Se3? exf3 2.Rd3# (2.Qe3??), 1... c4! (2.Bd4??); 1.Sd4? c4 2.Se2# (2.Bd4??), 1... f5! (2.Qe5??). The key is 1.Sd6! Bd5,exf3,c4,f5 2.Sxb5,Qe3,Bd4,Qe5#.



You may imagine what excitement I felt having reached this position. I set by my computer to test it and only an innocent looking cook 1.Bd4+ was signalled. Never mind, I thought, I have the black queen, bishop and two knights to spare. Alas, I found no use for them! The only benign unit would be a black rook (on a6, diagram **No.3b**), but I had already used two, and both were definitely irreplaceable. What a frustration!

3 M. Velimirović
original



- 1.S5~? bxa5!
- 1.Sd7!?
- 1... bxa5,e5 2.Sc5,Qg8#
- 1... d3/dxc3!
- 1.Sc4!?
- 1... bxa5,b4 2.Sxa5,Sd2#
- 1... c5/exf5!
- 1.Sd3!?
- 1... bxa5,dxc3 2.Sc5,Rc3#
- 1... b4!
- 1.Sc6! ~ 2.Rxb5#
- 1... bxa5,dxc3,exf5,b4
- 2.Sxa5,Qd3,Qd5,Bc4#

My first reaction was an attempt to convince myself that the third rook in this position is not a big deal: if we adopted the convention that a promoted piece (e.g. obtrusive bishop) is acceptable if it replaces a captured unit of the same kind, a rook replacing a stronger captured unit – the queen – should be an even smaller fault. But when the state of shock passed I had to admit that this was not acceptable.

Diagram **No.3** is my attempt to save what can be saved, but the built-in constraints of the mechanism were again the bar I could not jump over without scratching it. The replacement of the Bc6 by a black pawn allows the black rook to be moved from a7 to c7. The cook is stopped, but an unfavorable chain of events starts to unfold. Now e4 is a weak square which requires the black queen on the 4th rank. Consequently, the e-pawn is not forced to defend by capture on e3 any more: a random move opening the BQ line is sufficient, thus leading to a double refutation of one

try. Furthermore, to prevent the BQ from interfering on the 5th rank the position must be shifted to to the left and the white rook moved away as far as possible, right under the attack of the black pawn (now on e6). Another double refutation! Again frustration, but the position can at least partially bear the possible criticism. Therefore, I believe, it can serve well, as an impure but still orthodox prototype of the “Velimirović Attack” wrapped in White Tertiary Correction.

Finally, I’d like to show that the combination can also be performed by Black. In **No.4** it is presented in a purely logical fashion. This form is less demanding for at least two



- 1.Sb6? Bxe4!
- 1.Sc3? Bd3!
- 1.Sc5? Ba2!

- 1.Qe1! ~ 2.dxe3 ~ 3.Qc3/Qa5#
- 1... S~(=f1,g2,g4,f5) 2.Qc1+
- 1... Sd1 2.d3 Sc3 3.Qxc3#

- 1... Sc2!! 2.Sb6 ~ 3.Sa8# (2.Sc3? Sxd4!)
- 1... Sc4!! 2.Sc3 ~ 3.Sb5# (2.Sc5? d6~!)
- 1... Sd5!! 2.Sc5 ~ 3.Sxe6# (2.Sb6? Sxb6!)

reasons. Firstly, after three thematic moves the job is done, while in a two-mover a fourth good move, the key, is necessary. And secondly, the geometry can be stretched since the thematic lines can target different squares, while in a twomover all three must have a common terminus: the black king’s square.

This last advantage has the consequence that all three lines can have a common origin, thus allowing mechanisms involving only one black line-mover, in this case bBb1. Thematic tries will help us detect these lines: 1.Sb6? (2.Sa8#) but 1... Bxe4! because the bent line b1-e4-a8 is clear; 1.Sc3? (2.Sb5#) Bd3! using the b1-d3-b5 line; and 1.Sc5? (2.Sxe6#) is defeated by 1... Ba2! along the [b1-]a2-e6 line. The key 1.Qe1! threatens 2.dxe3 with 3.Qc3/Qa5# thus forcing the black knight to escape from e3. A random removal 1... S~ would allow two answers, but no duals happen since after 1... Sf1(g2,g4,f5)

only 2.Qc1+, and after 1... Sd1 only 2.d3 works. Now comes a “dèjà vu”. What remained are knight corrections to c2, c4 and d5, right to the intersections of three lines: 1... Sc2! 2.Sb6! (2... Bxe4??) but not 2.Sc3? Sxd4!; 1... Sc4! 2.Sc3! (2... Bd3?) but not 2.Sc5? e6~!; and finally 1... Sd5 2.Sc5! (2... Ba2?) but not 2.Sb6? Sxb6!. It’s hard to believe that, with changed roles of White and Black, an enormously difficult idea can be made so simple that it required only three light units (black knight and bishop and white knight) and a few supporters for the side-show.

The black attack lacks the edge and the intensity of the white one. Being not nearly as demanding, it is a wide open field for composing original (preferably logical) threemovers with neat and quiet play. At the time I published No.4 I foresaw a series of threemovers I would compose in months to come. However, I never did, although I had some half a dozen good matrices. Somehow, the fruit within the grasp doesn’t look so sweet and so tempting as those on an almost unreachable branch. You can feel free to harvest it instead of me with one condition: don’t forget to label it with the term promoted here.