COLUMNISTS

The Kibitzer

Tim Harding

Paul Morphy: A Modern Perspective
by Valeri Beim

The House of the Setting Sun

The choice of topic for the greater part of this month's column was dictated by current events. For any chess player at all knowledgeable about the games' great historical figures, Paul Morphy stands tall in the pantheon and Morphy, of course, lived all his brilliant and tragic life in New Orleans.

Morphy lived nearly all his life in his home city, except for two trips to Europe and some time spent elsewhere in the USA. An imaginative semi-fictional account of his life was written many years ago by the novelist Frances Parkinson Keyes under the title *The Chess Players*. I cannot say how accurate was its portrayal of New Orleans, but you should look for this book if you have never read it.

In this short article, I will give you an outline of Morphy's chess career and some highlights from it, but I haven't made any special study of Morphy and I won't discuss, for example, the Staunton controversy.

Paul Morphy was born on 22 June 1837 and died in the city on 10 July 1884. His father Alonzo played chess and his uncle Ernest Morphy (1807-74) was a strong player. Perhaps from an early age he watched them play. Jacob Löwenthal, in the Memoir at the start of his collection of the games, tells us that Paul's father "was a chess player of considerable skill" (this may be an exaggeration) and that Ernest Morphy "was generally considered the chess king of New Orleans" (apparently true). When ten years old, Paul was taught the moves of chess by his father and Uncle Ernest "gave him a lesson in the art of play."

One of the earliest known games is this brevity against his father.

Paul Morphy – Alonzo Morphy
New Orleans, 1848
Bishop's Gambit [C33]

1 e4 e5 2 f4 exf4 3 Bc4 Qh4+ 4 Kf1 Bc5 5 d4 Bb6 6 Nf3 Qe7 7 Nc3 Nf6 8 Qd3 c6 9 Bxf4 d5 10 exd5 0–0

11 d6 Qd8 12 Re1 Re8 13 Ng5 Rxe1+ 14 Kxe1 Qe8+ 15 Kd2 Be6 16 Re1 Nbd7 17 Nxe6 fxe6 18 Rxe6 1–0

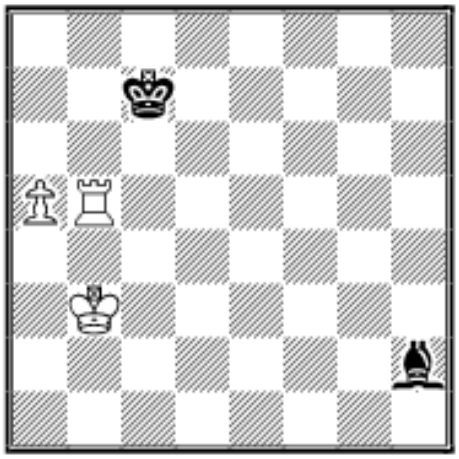
Morphy's ancestors are said to have relocated from Ireland to Madrid, where their name transformed from Murphy to Morphy in custom with the local pronunciations. I don't know if anyone has definitely been able to prove this Irish connection, but you can find out all sorts of more or less accurate Morphy information on the Net. I believe the most accurate recent book on the American genius is reckoned to be Lawson's *Paul Morphy, the Pride and Sorrow of Chess*, of which a new edition appeared fairly recently. Those who want to know more should look there. The title comes from an epithet applied to Morphy in the nineteenth century, for his meteoric successes and subsequent sad withdrawal from the game.

Many books have been written about Morphy, but the ones I have referred to while writing this article are the game collection *Morphy/ Paulsen* in the *Weltgeschichte des Schachs* series and the book by Löwenthal, who Paul encountered in 1850. The Hungarian master (by then living in Britain) paid a visit to America and spent a few days in New Orleans. Since Ernest Morphy was reputed to be the strongest chess player in the region at that time, Löwenthal got to meet the 13-year-old and played several games with him.

"When only thirteen years of age he was a really good player," wrote Löwenthal, laying on his excuses fairly thick. "At that early age he was victorious in one or two games with the Editor of this work, who was then paying a short visit to New Orleans, and although the latter was at that time depressed in mind and suffering in body, and was also prostrated by the climate, yet the achievement of the young Paul argues a degree of skill to which it is wonderful that a child could have attained."

"One or two games," he wrote. The finish of one has often been wrongly shown as a draw.

P. Morphy – J. J. Löwenthal
New Orleans, 25 May 1850



55 a6 1-0

However, the *Weltgeschichte des Schachs* book gave the finish as 55 Kc4 Kc6 56 Rh5 Bg1 57 Rh6+? *(*57 Rh7 would still win.) 57...Kc7 58 Kb5 Kb8 draw. David Lawson (in *British Chess Magazine* for August 1978) indicated that the correct finish had been published by Staunton in 1856 before the incorrect finish somehow got into circulation.

Here is the other of those games.

P. Morphy – J.J. Löwenthal
New Orleans, May 1850
Sicilian Defence [B21]

1 e4 c5 2 f4 e6 3 Nf3 d5 4 exd5 exd5 5 d4 Bg4 6 Be2 Bxf3?!

The value of the bishop pair was inadequately understood in those days.

7 Bxf3 Nf6 8 0–0 Be7 9 Be3 cxd4 10 Bxd4 0–0 11 Nc3 Nc6 12 Bxf6!?

Morphy gives up the bishop pair to seize the d-pawn, probably not the optimal plan. Now a double-edged opposite-colour bishop middle-game arises.

12...Bxf6 13 Nxd5 Bxb2 14 Rb1 Bd4+ 15 Kh1 Rb8 16 c3 Bc5 17 f5 Qh4 18 g3 Qg5 19 f6 Ne5 20 fxg7 Rfd8 21 Be4 Qxg7 22 Qh5 Rd6

23 Bxh7+!?

This temporarily wins a pawn but loses two tempi that give Black counter-chances; the mature Morphy might have preferred 23 Qf5 or 23 Ne7+.

23...Kf8

23...Qxh7?? 24 Qxe5.

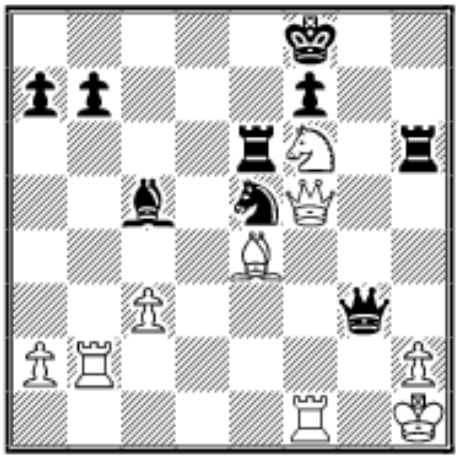
24 Be4 Rh6 25 Qf5 Qxg3 26 Rb2

The only move, but sufficient; White holds on to some advantage.

26...Re8?

Now White is winning again. 26...Qh3! would get the queens off and test the boy in a queenless middle-game.

27 Nf6 Re6?



It would have been wiser to give up the exchange at once on f6; White now misses a clear win.

28 Rg2?

Now Black can simplify to an endgame: still losing, but not easy for a 13-year-old to bring to victory. 28 Nd7+ Ke7 (28...Kg7 29 Rg2) 29 Nxc5.

28...Qxg2+ 29 Bxg2 Rexf6 30 Qxf6 Rxf6 31 Rxf6 Ng4 32 Rf5 b6 33 Bd5 Nh6 34 Rf6 Kg7 35 Rc6 a5 36 Rc7 Kg6 37 Kg2 f6 38 Kf3 Nf5 39 Be4!

Correctly eliminating the knight. Morphy displays good technique in the final phase.

39...Kg5 40 Bxf5 Kxf5 41 h4 Kg6 42 Rc6 Kh5 43 Kg3 f5 44 Rf6 f4+ 45 Kxf4 Bf2 46 Ke4 Bc5 47 Rf5+ Kxh4 48 Rxc5 bxc5 49 Kd5 1–0

Eight years later, when Paul came to Europe, Löwenthal was his first match opponent. Apart from him, probably no Europeans knew of the rising star until the first American chess congress was held in New York in 1857, but during the intervening years young Paul had been increasing and testing his strength in contests against many of the leading players resident in the USA, including the Frenchman, Rousseau (of whom Morphy was reputedly winning nine games out of ten) and Stanley, the English player and writer on the game. So Morphy's triumph in the American Congress probably was no great surprise to his American contemporaries, although hitherto his name was virtually unknown in Europe.

The New York event, a knock-out tournament, was recorded in a book by D. W. Fiske, the main organiser. Morphy won his mini-matches in turn against James Thompson, Alexander B. Meek (whom he already knew), Theodor Lichtenhein (a native of Koenigsberg) and, in the final, another master of European origin, Louis Paulsen, of Iowa. Short matches followed with Stanley, Schulten and other opponents, none of whom could match him in

more than the occasional game. The trip to New York was a triumph for the young Louisiana player and now he set his sights further afield.

Seeking new worlds to conquer, the young American crossed the Atlantic in 1858. His avowed intention was to challenge Howard Staunton, whom he wrongly believed to be Europe's strongest player. As it turned out, they met over the board only in two consultation games, in which Staunton was paired with the Rev. John Owen (aka "Alter") while Morphy partnered with Thomas Barnes, winning both games. Here is one of them:

Staunton & Owen – Morphy & Barnes
London, 1858
Philidor Defence [C41]

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 f5

"The celebrated counter-gambit, to which Philidor so fondly clung and which occupied him during a great part of his life" (Jaenisch); "weakens Black's king position and contributes nothing to Black's development" – Larsen.

4 dxe5 fxe4 5 Ng5 d5 6 e6

This was an Ercole del Rio improvement (1750) on Philidor's 6 f4 (1749 edition) according to Jaenisch's 1843 book!

6...Nh6 7 Nc3

Kosten gives this an '!' without considering alternatives. 7 f3 was preferred by Löwenthal.

7...c6

Not 7...Bb4?? 8 Qh5+ g6 9 Qxh6 and wins.

8 Ngxe4! dxe4?!

This should lose. 8...Nf5 9 Ng5 Qf6 is the critical line.

9 Qh5+ g6 10 Qe5 Rg8 11 Bxh6

11 Bg5 is standard theory now.

11...Bxh6 12 Rd1 Qg5!

12...Qe7? had been played several times in a series of games George Atwood-

J.Wilson, played 1798-9. (See, for example, Keene, *Chess Combination from Philidor to Karpov*, page 23). The text move seems to have been an innovation by Morphy, or perhaps Barnes, and maybe the reason they chose the variation was to test it.

13 Qc7 Bxe6 14 Qxb7 e3! 15 f3 Qe7 16 Qxa8 Kf7 17 Ne4

White should have played 17 Rd4! (according to Staunton), e.g. 17...Rc8 18 Bc4 Bxc4 19 Rxc4 Qd7 (P.W. Sergeant's book on Morphy thought Black better but now...) 20 Ne4! (threat Rb4-b7) e.g. 20...Na6? 21 Qxc8+- (Keene), which later occurred in a 1993 postal game C.P. Tucknott-Anon, the loser supposedly being a 2300+ player.

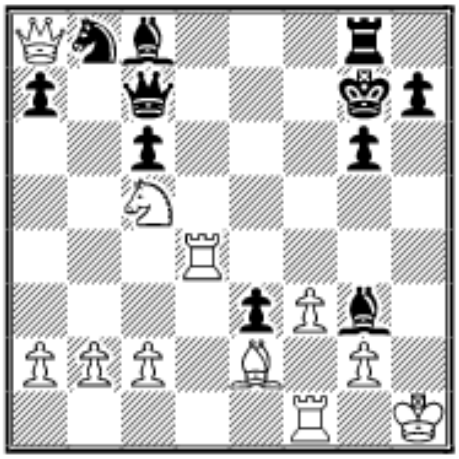
17...Bf4 18 Be2?

Probably the losing move; 18 g3, as observed by Löwenthal, "would have rendered Black's game much more difficult."

18...Kg7 19 0–0 Qc7 20 Nc5

Else ...Nd7 traps the white queen.

20...Bxh2+ 21 Kh1 Bc8 22 Rd4 Bg3



Now Black is definitely winning, though your computer may not immediately recognise this. If 23 Rfd1 then 23...Qe7 also gives Black an irresistible attack.

23 Re4 Kh8! 24 Rd1 Qg7! 25 Rh4 Bxh4 26 Qxb8 Ba6 27 Qh2 Bxe2 28 Rd7 Qh6 29 Ne4 Bc4 30 Nf6 e2 31 Re7 Qc1+ 32 Qg1 Qxg1+ 33 Kxg1 e1Q+ 34 Rxe1 Bxe1 0–1

The issue of whether Staunton did break a promise to play a set match with Morphy has been debated for over a century. Löwenthal, for example, who had fallen out with Staunton most bitterly, had his own reasons for portraying the Englishman in a bad light. I should like to raise another question, is there evidence that Morphy himself broke a promise to play a return match with Adolf Anderssen in 1859? That is what Anderssen told Löwenthal, who in turn was quoted by the Rev. G. A. MacDonnell in the *Illustrated Sporting & Dramatic News* of 29 May 1880 (vol. 13, p. 264). Anderssen apparently claimed that he only agreed to make the arduous winter journey to Paris because Morphy promised that if he won he would play a return match in Breslau, but Morphy welched on this deal.

However, Löwenthal gives no hint of any such arrangement in his book on Morphy.

Even had a return match taken place, Morphy would surely have won it. Anderssen, winner of the 1851 tournament, was (apart from the short Morphy "interlude") the world's strongest player from (probably) the late 1840s up to the rise of Setinitz in the mid-1860s, but he did not play his best against Morphy. His was an all-out attacking, combinative style, whereas the American's play was subtler and deceptively simple. Morphy rarely wasted a tempo, did not force the play as much as Anderssen, and had a good endgame technique. However, the main problem for Anderssen was that Morphy was very effective with the white pieces and Anderssen's openings and approach with black would have needed considerable improvement to match the American.

Paul Morphy – Adolf Anderssen
7th match game, Paris 1858
Scandinavian Defence [B01]

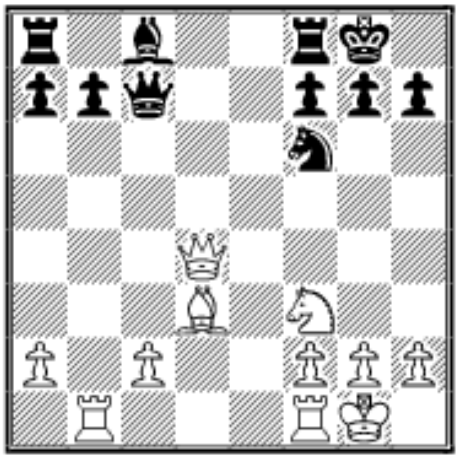
1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Qxd5 3 Nc3 Qa5 4 d4 e5 5 dxe5 Qxe5+ 6 Be2 Bb4 7 Nf3 Bxc3+ 8 bxc3 Qxc3+ 9 Bd2 Qc5

Black's development is backward and it is doubtful whether the extra pawn was worth the trouble.

10 Rb1

10 0–0 seems simpler, although it might be met by 10...Bf5, but Morphy prefers to make it difficult for Black to develop that bishop.

10...Nc6 11 0–0 Nf6 12 Bf4 0–0 13 Bxc7 Nd4 14 Qxd4 Qxc7 15 Bd3



15...Bg4?

15...Be6 is better, as 16 Ng5 could then be met by 16...Bxa2.

16 Ng5 Rfd8 17 Qb4 Bc8

An admission of error at move 15, for if 17...b6 18 Nxh7 Nxh7 19 Qxg4 White wins a pawn.

18 Rfe1 a5 19 Qe7

Unlike many nineteenth century players, Morphy has no inhibitions about exchanging the queens. He plays the strongest and simplest move.

19...Qxe7 20 Rxe7 Nd5?

Black sets a trap (21 Rxf7? h6), but it is easily avoided and so Black's defeat is accelerated.

21 Bxh7+ Kh8 22 Rxf7 Nc3 23 Re1 Nxa2 24 Rf4 Ra6 25 Bd3 1–0

After vanquishing Anderssen, and finding no prospect of a match with Staunton, Morphy returned home and paid only one more visit to Europe in 1863, when he played against Arnous de Riviere in Paris. He played very little after 1858 and the last games in the WGS book are dated 1869. His withdrawal not only from chess, but also from life, seems complete after that, although he survived another fifteen years.

For more information on Morphy, you can look here and here. The former interestingly enough links back to articles that are posted in the **ChessCafe Archives**, while the latter is a good Paul Morphy homage site.

New Orleans Chess in Later Years
Nevertheless, Morphy's fame seems to have ensured a popularity of the game in the city while he was still alive. Thus the *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News* claimed at the end of 1883 that the New Orleans chess and checker club had 650 members – although they were not all chess players ("whist and other games having considerable representation, although no money-play is permitted"). Three months later, the club claimed a membership of 943; the large majority being chess-players. But in the column of 16 May, 1884, whist was now also in the club title. A few months later, Morphy was dead.

Checking my database, it looks as if New Orleans has never hosted a major chess tournament, at least not an international, which is perhaps rather surprising. In more recent times, New Orleans has no doubt produced other chess masters. The best-known New Orleans player in recent decades has probably been Jude Acers. Here is an example of him in action.

Arthur Spiller - Jude Acers
U.S. Open, Aspen, 1968
Queen's Gambit [50]

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 d5 4 Bg5 c5 5 cxd5 cxd4 6 Qxd4 Be7 7 e4 Nc6 8 Qe3

Better 8 Qd2 or 8 Bb5 perhaps.

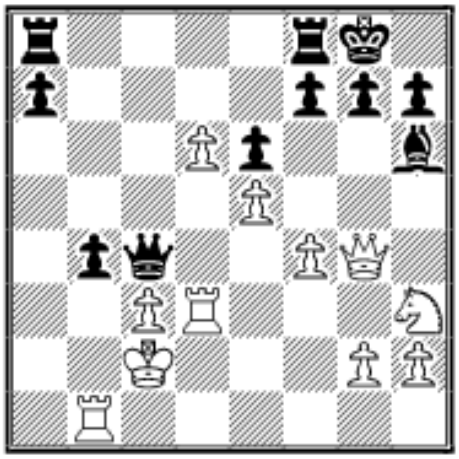
8...Nb4

Better than the old move 8...Nxd5.

9 0–0–0

This seems very unwise. Play now becomes very sharp and entertaining.

9...Ng4 10 Bb5+ Bd7 11 Bxd7+ Qxd7 12 Qg3 Bxg5+ 13 f4 Qc7 14 d6 Nxa2+ 15 Kc2 Qc4 16 Qxg4 Nxc3 17 bxc3 Bh6 18 Nh3 0–0 19 e5 b5 20 Rd3 b4 21 Rb1

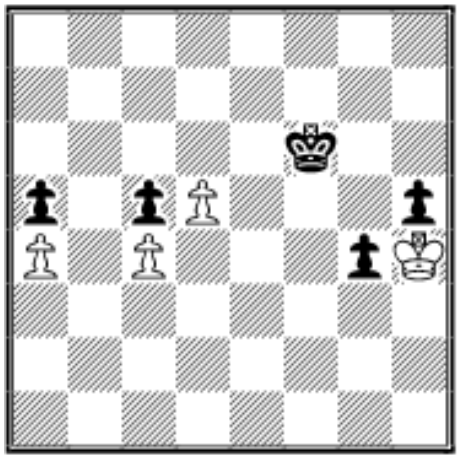


21...a5 22 Qf3 Rfb8 23 Nf2 a4 24 Ne4 b3+ 25 Kd2 Qb5 26 h3 a3 27 Ke2 a2 0–1

Postscript: More on the Ladies of 1897

Following my previous three articles on women's chess, some readers have supplied new information and a few more games from the first Ladies' International have turned up, as well as a couple of corrections (one result was the wrong way round). I have added these to my PGN download file and there are now 23 complete games and 11 fragments in it.

That file also includes analysis that proves Black should have won in both the king and pawn endings shown last month that actually ended in draws; I am grateful to GM Karsten Müller and another reader for sending in their views on this. In Gooding-Field, the line I gave last month was correct, while in the more complicated case **Forbes-Sharpe v Watson,** Karsten Müller says Blackburne was right; Miss Watson should have won whether or not it was her move in the position that was printed in *The Times*.



For example, writes Müller, **1 Kg3** (If Black moves first, then 1...Kg6 leads to the same position.) **1...Kg5 2 Kg2 h4 3 Kh2 g3+ 4 Kh3 Kf5 5 Kg2 Kg4 6 d6 h3+ 7 Kf1 Kf3** and it is over.

Chris Williams from England, a reader of my magazine *Chess Mail*, has unearthed many facts about Miss Thorold, who played in the London 1897 international. The following are just the highlights. From a website he found, Eliza Mary Thorold was christened on 25 July 1835, at Blyth, Nottinghamshire, the daughter of Michael Wynne Thorold and Eliza; her actual birth date would be shown on the baptism register. The strong amateur player Edmund Thorold was one of her brothers. He died on 26 June 1899 (according to Sergeant's *Century of English Chess*; Gaige's *Chess Personalia* only has the month).

Mr. Williams has discovered that Eliza Mary died at Bridlington, aged 68 in the first quarter of 1904; the registry of deaths would have to be consulted to find the exact date, unless an obituary or death notice could be found in one of the local papers. She was living in Scarborough at the time of the 1881 census, with her brother Rev. William Thorold and his wife. There was also a third brother; Eliza Thorold does not seem to have married or to have had a paid occupation.

The article by John Richards about Mary Rudge has now been published in a local history journal which is available online in PDF format.

The excellent research by Mr. Richards and Mr. Williams shows how local historians, using the resources of their neighbourhood such as local newspaper archives and public libraries, can still discover new information about amateur players whose names turn up in columns, books and magazine articles. This is a topic I may return to later.

Also worth looking at is a Web exhibition entitled *Queen's move; women and chess through the ages* at the Royal Dutch Library site, made by students at the New Media of Utrecht School of Arts. To enjoy this you need a fast internet connection and the Flash 4 (or higher) plug-in for your browser.

Meanwhile, I am still collecting games by Mary Rudge, including ones played in simuls, at odds and even one in a consultation game. I am not yet ready to publish this file as I feel confident of finding more games in the future. The current tally is 28 OTB games and 14 correspondence games, which is, of course, only a tiny fragment of the thousands of games she must

have played in her 30-year career.

I now believe that she continued playing somewhat longer than I implied in my last article. She played a few correspondence games up to 1903, perhaps only private friendlies, and on a visit to Dublin in 1899 she played at least one simultaneous display and was engaged to play chess at two cafes in the city centre in the afternoons. On 16 November that year, the *Dublin Evening Mail* reported that eight women had played in an Amsterdam ladies event, won by Miss Jansen of Utrecht. It also said that "Mary Rudge hopes to play in proposed New York international tournament" planned for 1900; the Rowlands were getting up a subscription fund to send Mary to defend her title, but the event fell through. That, and health reasons, probably made her decide to retire from competitive play.
