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one's normal lines and accept a sharp position. Short's play in this game is an excellent example of this.

Heading for the Divorce Courts

Thus far in this chapter, we have considered merely temporary departures from one's repertoire, in a one-off game. I now want to consider the more fundamental decision to change one's repertoire on a permanent basis, and to abandon a particular opening or variation for good.

As you will have gathered from the foregoing chapters of this book, I am in general quite hostile to the idea of changing one's opening repertoire in a fundamental way. Just as in other walks of life, divorce can be a messy and expensive business, and in my opinion, it is rarely justified in the context of chess openings. The main cause of my hostility is the impact that changing openings has on one's understanding of an opening.

I have repeatedly stressed throughout this book that understanding typical positions is the single most important factor in successful use of an opening. Such understanding is first and foremost the product of experience, and must be built up over a period of years, by playing and analysing the opening. It follows from this that by changing openings completely, one is abandoning the experience and understanding that one has built up in the line concerned, and thereby putting oneself

back to square one in this respect. In the great majority of cases, the change will backfire.

I know a player in England who is a particularly drastic example of the effects of this constant switching of openings. The player concerned, rated around 2000, was a friend of mine in the 1990s. In the 8 years or so that we were playing tournaments together, his white opening repertoire changed five times. He started off playing 1 e4 (Bishop's Opening and 2 f4 Sicilian). After a couple of tournaments in which his results with these openings were disappointing, he switched to the Colle System. One year on, he decided that this was too quiet, and that the path to triumph lay in going back to 1 e4, only this time taking on main-line Sicilians. After six months of sitting up until 4 a.m. each morning, studying Nunn's *Beating the Sicilian*, he played one international open, scored 0/3 on the white side of the Sicilian, and decided that he should instead play Torre systems (1 d4, 2 ♖f3 and 3 ♗g5). A couple of years later, it was the English Opening with 2 g3 that became the secret of all success. Not surprisingly, over the period he scored about 30% with White, and even that owed much to his tenacity in defending lost opening causes. Yet, over the same period, as Black he never varied from the French against 1 e4 and the Slav against 1 d4, and his score as Black averaged close to 70%! The moral of the story could scarcely be clearer.

At a much higher level, the top Russian GM Dreev underwent a similarly