
Thomas Eakins's *The Chess Players* Replayed

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In Philadelphia, they play chess in all houses.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

In the past few decades students of Thomas Eakins's paintings have produced at least two books offering reassessments: *Thomas Eakins Rediscovered* and *Eakins Revealed*.¹ Both offer new perceptions, some controversial, of the artist's paintings, studies, methods, and personality. One painting that is owed further consideration is *The Chess Players* of 1876 (Figure 1), an early work regularly reproduced and cited in the abundant Eakins monographs but the object of only two art historical examinations. The first, published by Robert Wilson Torchia in 1991, emphasized the dramatic content of the painting and placed its iconographic schema within the context of the Philadelphia chess world in Eakins's time.² The author raised many fine points but erred in his assertion that the chess position Eakins depicted was too indistinct to be transcribed. As a result, he made assumptions about the actual game and the players' reactions to it that are somewhat dubious. Michael Clapper, in the latest exploration of the iconographic intricacies of *The Chess Players*, corrected this point, providing a more extensive interpretation that adds considerably to our understanding of the work.³ Clapper's article includes several elements that are particularly relevant to seeing the painting freshly, especially in reconstructing for the first time the position on the chessboard and also in establishing that the site of the match, thought logically to have been the Eakins house, could not coincide with the known floor plans. Further, Clapper discussed the significance of the objects that surround the players, including the table on the left and the cat on the right.

Both articles brought needed attention to Eakins's small panel, realigning it as a more substantial work of the artist's early years than was formerly considered. Despite these thought-provoking studies, other aspects of the painting,

including the chief protagonists who are the focus of Eakins's attention, could be scrutinized further. The players, in fact, are often treated casually or in passing in the literature, with only brief mention of their closeness to the Eakins family. Even more vital to our understanding of *The Chess Players* is a thorough explanation of the dynamics of the chess game being played, which Eakins recorded at a specific moment of the match and painted so accurately that he must have intended it to be read. As can be discerned in Clapper's reconstruction of the game, the position is key to the struggle being enacted on the board and has a direct bearing on the iconographic meaning of the scene. The present article seeks to further broaden the interpretation of the painting by providing additional information about the players; their place in Eakins's circle and their interest in chess; and an analysis of the position of the board, which from the perspective of a chess player adds a critically important perception to our understanding of the internal dynamics of the painting.

THE CHESS PLAYERS

Eakins called his painting *The Chess Players* and not *The Chess Game*, hence the intention to portray specific participants whose portraits he rendered with meticulous attention. The names of the three protagonists have been known for decades, but the biography of only one of the men, Thomas Eakins's father, Benjamin, has been carefully researched. The other two are generally described as personal friends of the Eakins family group who regularly met to play chess. The figure on the left of the chessboard, playing the white pieces, is Bertrand Gardel; the figure on the right, playing the black ones, is George W. Holmes. Benjamin Eakins, who serves as a pyramidal cornerstone connecting the two, silently observes the game as he ponders the position on the board. While it has always been assumed that the game was played in the parlor of the Eakins family house at 1729 Mount Vernon Street in Philadelphia, Clapper



1. Thomas Eakins (American, 1844–1916). *The Chess Players*, 1876. Oil on wood, 11¾ x 16¾ in. (29.8 x 42.6 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of the artist, 1881 (81.14)

has convincingly shown that this cannot be the case, correctly proposing Gardel's house in suburban Germantown as the venue, further evidence for which is introduced below.⁴ Since Thomas Eakins centered on Gardel and Holmes as the focal point of the scene, it is fundamental to examine their lives and their relationship to the Eakins household in greater depth, as well as their mutual interest in the game they play.

Holmes, born in Ireland in 1812, was a landscape painter, drawing teacher, and special friend of Benjamin Eakins, whose own father was Irish. A prominent Philadelphian, he earned much of his income by providing private drawing lessons from his house, presumably to the young Thomas Eakins, among others. From the late 1850s, Holmes resided and taught at 1711 Filbert Street, about a mile to the south

of the Eakinses' house; from about 1876, he lived only two blocks away, at 1926 Mount Vernon Street.⁵

While hardly discussed in the literature on Eakins, new information on Holmes is revealed in the census data. In 1860 Holmes listed his profession as "artist," not "teacher," and, notably, had sixteen people residing under his roof.⁶ These included, besides his wife Mary, thirty-two years old, other family members, all with the surname Holmes: Marshall, twenty-six; George W., twenty-three; Mary, thirteen; Annie, eleven; Gerald, nine; Herman, seven; Helen, five; and Lizabeth, three. Since Holmes's wife was only thirty-two, it is likely that some of the inhabitants were relatives or children from a previous marriage. Added to this brood was a woman named Emma, twenty, with no last name listed, and two women indicated as domestics:

Elizabeth Sowers, twenty-two, and Marg Percy, twenty, born in Ireland. One may assume that the remaining residents were boarders: Joseph B. and Elizabeth Smith, both sixty; and Clarence Bird, twenty-one, who noted his profession as attorney. The same census report indicated that Holmes enjoyed a comfortable income from investments: his real estate holdings were listed as \$9,000 and his personal estate value at \$29,000, a substantial sum, given that the average annual earnings in 1860 in the building trades, for example, amounted to about \$400.⁷

With the 1870 census, the Holmes family circle had been reduced to ten members, including Holmes, his wife, six children, “Geo. Knorr,” twenty-eight, and Eliza Rodgers, fifty, probably a boarder or housekeeper.⁸ The 1880 census added that Holmes was now blind and living at 1926 Mount Vernon Street, closer to the Eakins family house. Holmes’s blindness, in fact, was already recorded two years earlier: when a collection of paintings by Philadelphia artists was auctioned to benefit Holmes and his family, it was noted that he had recently lost his sight.⁹ This census also revealed that the “Geo. Knorr” listed a decade before was George T. R. Knorr, a Civil War veteran who married Holmes’s daughter Mary H. Holmes in 1870. Mary Loney, twenty-one, a black servant from Virginia, completed the household.¹⁰

Holmes’s pedagogical skills must have been highly regarded, and amply rewarded, as in addition to teaching from his home, he served on the faculty of the University of Pennsylvania, located at Ninth and Market Streets, from 1840. Holmes, “to whom so many a Philadelphia boy owe[d] primary lessons in the limner’s art,” also taught drawing from 1850 at Haverford College.¹¹ In addition to his teaching duties, Holmes pursued private projects, such as the series of lithographs that he offered for sale directly from his home in 1863 as teaching aids for landscape painters.¹² An associate member of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Holmes frequently exhibited his own landscapes there and developed a modest reputation.¹³ He was also involved in the Philadelphia Art Union, established in 1844; after a fire in 1852 destroyed some of the Union’s stock of prints, Holmes donated a painting to help rebuild the collection.¹⁴ As a favored friend of the family, Holmes often accompanied Benjamin and Thomas Eakins on weekend hikes along the Schuylkill River where they would picnic and draw together, sometimes in the company of Gardel. After 1880, when Eakins began using a camera, he made several photographs of Holmes (Figure 2).

Although much has been written about Benjamin Eakins, census reports provide supplementary information. In 1870, Benjamin, then fifty, maintained a residence with nine inhabitants. Benjamin, listed as “teacher,” and Thomas, twenty-five, as “artist,” were the only male members of the house.¹⁵ The other inhabitants included Caroline, forty-eight,



2. Thomas Eakins. *George W. Holmes*, 1880s. Platinum print, 10¼ x 8⅛ in. (25.9 x 20.5 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, David Hunter McAlpin Fund, 1943 (43.87.13)

Benjamin Eakins’s wife, noted as “housekeeper”; “Eliza C.,” fifty-six, presumably Eliza Cowperthwaite, Benjamin’s sister-in-law; “Couperwaith. E.,” also aged fifty-six, who was surely Emmor Cowperthwaite, Caroline’s brother; Clementine Cowperthwaite, fifty-four, about whom we know almost nothing; and Benjamin’s daughters “Fanny” (Frances), twenty; “Maggie” (Margaret), sixteen; and Caroline, five. Benjamin Eakins’s real estate holdings were valued at \$12,000 and his personal estate as \$30,000, roughly the equivalent of Holmes’s assets. Benjamin’s income from his real estate investments had declined since the 1860 census, when he listed it as \$17,000 (but his personal estate value was only \$10,000, while his wife indicated her real estate value as \$5,000).¹⁶ In 1860 the Cowperthwaite family members living with the Eakins family included Margaret Cowperthwaite, then seventy-eight, who listed her real estate as valued at \$10,000; Eliza, whose fortune was noted as \$5,000; and Clementine, whose value was the same. The family fortune, including that of the Cowperthwaites, was therefore substantial.

Much more is known about Bertrand Gardel, the third member of the group. Born in Paris in 1808,¹⁷ he emigrated to the United States in 1841 and became a naturalized citizen only three years later.¹⁸ Gardel and his wife, Julia Hawks,¹⁹ ran a school in Philadelphia where young ladies were taught French studies, art, and music.²⁰ Among the texts he used was Mary Longstreth’s *The Young Student’s Companion*,

a series of lessons for translating English into French, which included Gardel's own endorsement of the text in its opening pages.²¹ In the 1850s, Gardel lived at various addresses on Chestnut Street, about half a mile away from the Eakins home.²² That Gardel resided on this street, where the houses were often large and expensive, points to his financial success. In the 1860s Gardel moved to Germantown, to the northwest of the city, as Clapper has shown. The census report of 1870 listed the house only as situated on the "South Side of Mill Street," no. 8 by "order of visitation"—meaning the order by which the census was taken, not an address—with only one occupant, here spelled "Gardell."²³ The circumstances of Gardel's move to Germantown can now be established. About a decade earlier Gardel had met a fellow Frenchman, Louis René Jacques Joseph Binet, a journalist and lawyer, who became the secretary to the ill-fated Maximilian when he was appointed emperor of Mexico by Napoleon III. Binet had retired afterward to Germantown, at the corner of Bowman's Lane and Knox Street, and apparently suggested that Gardel purchase a house nearby.²⁴

Although officially retired in the 1860s, Gardel continued to teach French occasionally in Philadelphia and became associated with the Lyman sisters' private school at 226 South Broad Street, a school so exclusive that it was not listed in the directories. Fourteen-year-old Cecilia Beaux, who later became a professional painter, attended the school in 1866 and received instruction from Gardel. Beaux described the school as neither an institution nor an academy, but a progressive establishment where classes were conducted according to age and ability, relying not on an established grading system to evaluate progress but on monthly reports before teachers and parents.²⁵ Beaux greatly admired the Lyman sisters, Catherine (known as the "Queen") and Charlotte,²⁶ both imposing figures in the school. As for Gardel, Beaux described him as "remote," somewhat impersonal but always "soigné," a severe teacher who often remarked, "You must not 'think.' You must *know*." To Beaux, Gardel was "the delicate, strained old man" who, seated in his classroom, became "a feature" of the school. Beaux could not help noticing that Gardel always arrived and departed from the premises accompanied by a young girl, whom she assumed was his granddaughter. Despite Gardel's austerity and grave nature, the students thought well of him, and Beaux remarked, "I am glad to say no one would have dared or wished to irritate him."²⁷

Gardel, like Eakins and Holmes, possessed substantial wealth, of which the most conspicuous evidence was his financing of his wife's tomb in Mount Vernon Cemetery, a massive Canova-like pyramid twenty-five feet high that became a showpiece of the area and was even featured in tours during the 1860s.²⁸ This remarkable structure, where

Gardel himself would eventually be interred, was said to have cost about \$30,000, almost six times more than Benjamin Eakins paid for his house in 1857 and the equivalent of Holmes's entire fortune at that time.²⁹

Gardel also used his riches to furnish his Germantown residence, where the chess game is played, with impeccable taste. The parlor that Eakins painted attests to the extent of Gardel's success and indicates more than a middle-class level of comfort. Unlike a sitting room, where families spent their time, the parlor was a supplementary room for meeting and entertaining guests.³⁰ Its trappings of Victorian refinement include the richly red-patterned carpet at a time when most bourgeois Philadelphia households had only scatter rugs on the floors. Carpets covering the entire floor surface—and therefore made to order—were considered the height of elegance and prosperity.³¹ The other fittings of the room, particularly the stylish side table that supports fine crystal glasses and a decanter, which from the color of the liquid no doubt contains sherry, the drink of social luxury, further reflects his elevated status. The bottle of wine also indicates Gardel's taste, as its distinctive shape, with sloping shoulders, identifies it as Burgundian. With this detail Eakins suggests that Gardel imported his wines from his native country and laid out such treasured delicacies for his guests, no doubt a welcome change from the homemade wines that Benjamin Eakins served at Mount Vernon Street.³² The background objects—the Second Empire shelf clock that records the precise time of the chess game, 1:12, and the globe on a brass stand at the right, a Holbrook model³³—also attest to Gardel's discriminating taste in material objects.

The only article of furnishing that appears out of place in this characteristic Philadelphia interior is the hookah at the left of the clock. Its presence, often mentioned in the literature on the painting but never discussed in detail, further confirms that Gardel's Germantown house is the venue for *The Chess Players*. Gardel purchased the hookah during one of his trips abroad—two trips to chaperone some of his young students are recorded. In July 1851, Gardel applied for a passport, noting that he was traveling "accompanied by his wife and 4 young ladies," and then again in August 1858, this time with his wife and two students.³⁴ One of the students on the latter trip, Anna Rebecca Johnson, traveled to Europe, Egypt, and Palestine "under the care of Mr. and Mrs. Gardel."³⁵ During this trip, in 1859, Gardel's wife died in Syria of apparently undocumented causes. They had visited Constantinople, where they met Binet for the first time when he reported on the Crimean War for the *Journal des débats*.³⁶ Binet remained in Constantinople, where he settled civil and criminal cases among Turks and foreigners and earned as much as £200 a month, before returning to the United States and settling in Germantown.³⁷ There is more than a likelihood that

Gardel bought the hookah as a keepsake of his voyage to Constantinople, displaying it among his personal treasures in his Germantown house.

The habitual meeting of these friends, at the Eakinses' house, and at Gardel's home, to which Benjamin Eakins and Holmes sometimes walked on Sunday mornings, would also include Thomas Eakins—with whom his father's friends must have felt a strong kinship. When Eakins decided to continue his painting studies in Paris in 1866, he naturally turned to Gardel and Holmes for guidance. Gardel accordingly provided letters of recommendation, and probably rudimentary French lessons, while Holmes suggested the essentials of the Louvre and other cultural attractions. Eakins referred to them as intimates several times in his Paris correspondence, as when he noted, "I think better of myself in remembering that such people as . . . Mr Gardel[,] Mr. Holmes and other true & big men have admitted me to their friendship."³⁸ That friendship indeed continued well after his return to Philadelphia, often in association with his father. During the 1880s, Eakins even used Holmes as a model for the elder figure with a cane in his plaster relief *Pastoral* (Figure 3).³⁹ In a further testament to the constant company they kept, Eakins captured the members of his circle on film several times, frequently Gardel and Holmes together, and occasionally all three of the figures in *The Chess Players* (Figure 4).⁴⁰ The painting of 1876 remained one of Eakins's favorites because the two men it depicted were such eminent partners of the Eakins family environment. He exhibited it only once while it was in his possession, in the Centennial Exhibition of that year (as no. 49), where another painting of chess players by the Charleston painter J. Beaufain Irving, *The End of the Game* (no. 187), was also included.⁴¹ When Thomas Eakins subsequently exhibited the painting before 1881, when he gave it to The Metropolitan Museum of Art, he listed it as in the possession of Benjamin Eakins.⁴²

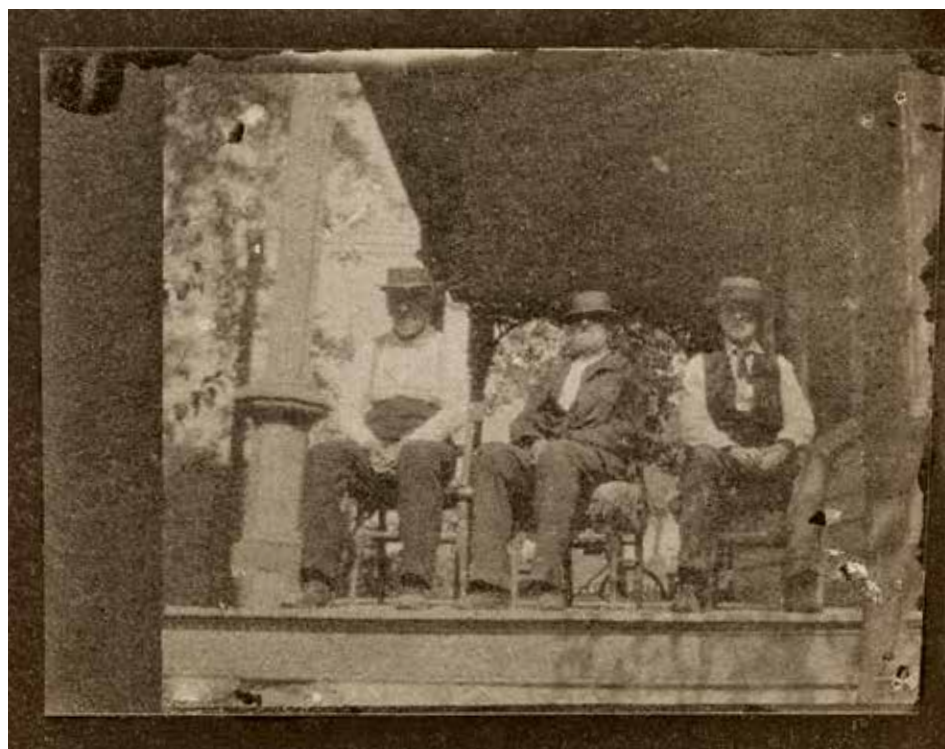
CHESS IN VICTORIAN PHILADELPHIA

In 1876 chess was considered a tasteful pastime, more cerebral and complex than checkers or cards, a game enjoyed by moneyed gentlemen in comfortable surroundings as they sipped wine or sherry. In Philadelphia households, playing chess was deemed a commendable and rewarding amusement that stimulated mental powers. Just as a piano in the front parlor suggested cultural civility, so the display of a chessboard and pieces, often in a rich material such as ivory, signaled genteel tastes, respectability, material comfort, and intellectual proclivities. American children were encouraged to play chess in order to develop skills of logic, planning, and strategy; cards, on the other hand, were considered a boorish diversion that could lead to gambling.



3. Thomas Eakins. *Pastoral*, 1883–84. Plaster with transparent brown patina, 11⁵/₈ x 24 x 2¹/₄ in. (29.6 x 61 x 5.6 cm). Philadelphia Museum of Art, Purchased with the J. Stoddell Stokes Fund, 1975 (1975-84-1) Photograph: Philadelphia Museum of Art

Although ladies were cautioned that chess was too strenuous a mental activity, images of chess players sometimes depict female participants, and in Germantown they even had their own chess club.⁴³ Benjamin Eakins was known to keep a carved alabaster set, a luxurious item, in his private study, for those times when Gardel and Holmes played at Mount Vernon Street.⁴⁴



4. Thomas Eakins. *Benjamin Eakins, Bertrand Gardel, and George W. Holmes*, ca. 1882. Platinum print, 2 x 2³/₈ in. (5.2 x 6.2 cm). Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, Charles Bregler's Thomas Eakins Collection, purchase with the partial support of the Pew Memorial Trust (1985.68.2.162). Photograph: Courtesy of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia

That all the participants in Eakins's painting were indeed prominent Philadelphians underscores the importance of the game in the city, as Ralph Waldo Emerson had rightly noted, and Henry James even observed that the city itself was organized in a squared chessboard arrangement.⁴⁵ By the 1870s the tradition of chess as a fashionable intellectual activity had long been established, owing in large part to the legacy of Benjamin Franklin.⁴⁶ An avid lifelong chess player, Franklin published in 1786 what was believed to be the first American text on the subject, a "bagatelle," as he called it, entitled "The Morals of Chess," in which he extolled the virtues of the game.⁴⁷ The first chess club in America was in fact founded in Franklin and Eakins's native city in 1827, after the display of Johann Nepomuk Maelzel's celebrated Automaton, a sham mechanized chess player, known as "The Turk," which augmented interest in the game, and incidentally was defeated in a Philadelphia exhibition by a woman referred to as "Mrs. F."⁴⁸ More importantly, in 1847 Philadelphians established a chess club at the new Athenaeum, which contained on the second floor, four tables for games and in-house competition.⁴⁹ By 1859, at least six clubs, named after famous masters of the day, prospered in Philadelphia; some of the games were annotated and thought significant enough to appear in international chess journals.⁵⁰ When the Mercantile Library planned its new facilities about 1869 at Tenth and Chestnut Streets, it incorporated a large chess room—37 x 65 feet—on the second floor.⁵¹ Recognizing the popular interest in chess, Philadelphia newspapers began publishing columns on the game, usually once a week, so that by 1860 seven such columns appeared. The sport of chess continued to reign in Philadelphia clubs and in intercity tournament games (in 1860 and 1875), in correspondence, and in telegram matches with New York and Boston clubs. Known lists of participants do not include the names of Eakins, Gardel, or Holmes, underscoring their purely recreational status as occasional amateurs.

But in 1876, at the moment when Eakins painted this scene, Philadelphia had become energized by the game as the result of hosting the fourth American Chess Congress, then called the American Centennial Championship, the first in the United States to attract international participation. In August 1876, sixty games were played in fourteen days, and all were open to the public, even during the evening hours.⁵² Without a doubt, the ardent participants in the chess match in Eakins's painting would have gone to some of these games during their tour of the Centennial Exhibition in Fairmount Park. To add inducements for such visits, Eakins showed five paintings in the exhibition at Memorial Hall, including *The Chess Players*. The participants, who always encouraged Eakins's painting, would certainly have visited the exhibition, no doubt to see their own portraits displayed.

THE PAINTING

The theme of Eakins's painting is not only a triple-portrait keepsake of intimates playing chess, but also of their studious deliberation of a particular game. Paintings of chess players are plentiful throughout much of the history of art, common to various cultures East and West, ancient and modern. They often illustrate imaginary encounters and rarely record games actually observed by the painter, who frequently depicted the contest in an indiscriminate manner. Most painters focused on the setting of the match, placing it in an exotic or a historical context, but rarely did they offer legible details so that one might read the progress of the pieces on the board or distinguish a winning or losing position. The iconography of chess in art was often treated ideologically and thematically rather than practically: the game itself was less important than the players and the context, with many representations conceived in allegorical terms and thus not necessarily observing the precise rules of the game.

Eakins's painting, however, has all the earmarks of factual authenticity in its fastidious representation of the players, the room in which the game is played, the accoutrements of the interior, and the chess pieces on the board. The uniqueness of Eakins's depiction of chess players within the iconography of American art can be gauged from the few examples of the genre before Eakins's time. Most are sentimental scenes often laced with anecdotal overtones. *The Chess-Players—Check Mate*, of about 1836 (Figure 5) by George Whiting Flagg, is representative with its homey manner, showing a polite encounter between male and female opponents as a black maid offers refreshment. Flagg's bland painting does not appear to have any allegorical content other than depicting a game, but in a style that makes it



5. George Whiting Flagg (American, 1816–1897). *The Chess-Players—Check Mate*, ca. 1836. Oil on canvas, 43¼ x 56¼ in. (109.9 x 142.9 cm). New-York Historical Society (1858.12). Photograph: New-York Historical Society

difficult to read. One previous interpretation, that the female player “has thwarted the advances of a suitor by defeating him at a traditionally masculine activity,” seems highly suspect.⁵³ Even the actual checkmate of the title is difficult to establish, since the perspective Flagg chose does not readily make the mate distinguishable, even though Flagg’s painting is more than three times larger than Eakins’s.

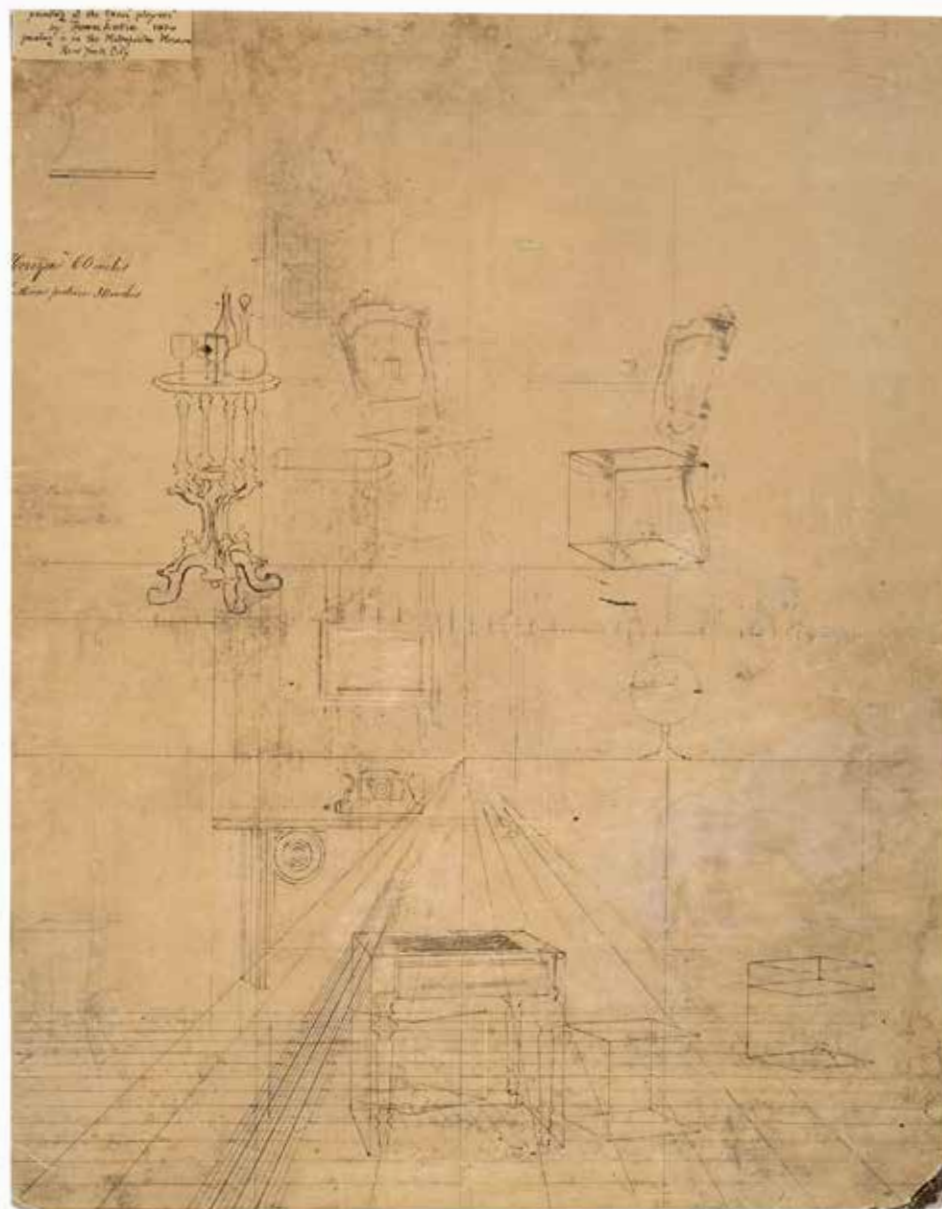
The scene that Eakins laid out is characteristic of descriptive genre painting common to American art of the post-Civil War period, but duly void of the sentimentalism inherent in Flagg’s canvas. In painting this familial scene on a small wood panel, Eakins transposed the practice of Dutch interior views of common everyday activities into an American vernacular. Eakins also absorbed the small genre scenes of his master Jean-Léon Gérôme, the French Academic painter whose works influenced Eakins’s paintings after his return to Philadelphia from Paris on July 4, 1870. In many of his letters from Paris, Eakins wrote admiringly about his meetings with Gérôme, clearly indicating his great respect for his master’s talent, intellect, and teaching. In November 1866, Eakins even bought a photograph of Gérôme as a souvenir—the *carte de visite* by Charles Reutlinger—which he sent to his family, and wondered whether they saw a resemblance to their friend Gardel.⁵⁴



6. Thomas Eakins. *Home Scene*, ca. 1871. Oil on canvas, 21 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 18 in. (54.4 x 45.7 cm). The Brooklyn Museum, Gift of George A. Hearn and Charles Schieren, by exchange, Frederick Loeser Art Fund and the Dick S. Ramsey Fund (50.115). Photograph: Brooklyn Museum, New York, USA/The Bridgeman Art Library



7. Thomas Eakins. *The Champion Single Sculls (Max Schmitt in a Single Scull)*, 1871. Oil on canvas, 32 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 46 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. (81.9 x 117.5 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, The Alfred N. Punnett Endowment Fund and George D. Pratt Gift, 1934 (34.92)



8. Thomas Eakins. *Perspective Drawing for "The Chess Players,"* 1875–76. Graphite and ink on cardboard, 24 x 19 in. (61 x 48.3 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Fletcher Fund, 1942 (42.35)

In 1869 Eakins acknowledged his esteem for Gérôme by purchasing a reproduction of one of his celebrated Roman works, *Ave César*, of 1859.⁵⁵ It is this print, elaborately framed, that hangs in the background of *The Chess Players*—presumably a gift from Eakins to Gardel to thank him for his earlier recommendation. In the same letter, Eakins wondered whether the image was too brutal and whether the meeker scene of “a Roman playing chess” would have been more appropriate.

After Eakins returned to Philadelphia he painted several portraits of family and friends in a genre-like manner similar to that of *The Chess Players*. Most of these are modest scenes with little perceptible space or background, such as *Home Scene* (Figure 6) of about 1871, modeled by his two sisters, Margaret at the family piano and Caroline on the floor. The painting is a personal portrait with no immediate

purpose other than to portray his typical home environment. In its effects of hazy, muted light, the painting contrasts starkly with the formal clarity and sharp brilliance of the first major work in Eakins’s celebrated rowing series, *The Champion Single Sculls*, also painted in 1871 (Figure 7). The latter is a model of Eakins’s determination to construct a painting by applying pictorial rigor and scientific method, as careful and markedly defined as the calligrapher’s art that his father practiced and taught. The series of rowers conveys Eakins’s earliest expressions of the marriage of science and art, paintings intricately planned and executed, which reflect his study of placement, proportion, and highly refined mathematical perspective.

The Chess Players is therefore representative of two aspects of Eakins’s works at this time: his continuing interest in domestic activities, and in the intense naturalism, planning,

and meticulousness of his sporting scenes. Like the rowing picture, the deliberately lucid arrangement of planes and strictly premeditated perspective of *The Chess Players* suggest Italian Renaissance prototypes. Eakins's preliminary drawing of the scene (Figure 8), the only one extant although others must have existed, attests to his interest in absolute fidelity to the observed contents of the picture as well as the scientific method for realizing it. The inscription in ink at the top—the pencil notations under it are illegible—indicates “Horizon 60 inches/Distance picture 30 inches”;⁵⁶ that is, Eakins calculated precisely how and where the painting should be viewed so as to perceive the image correctly. This diligence toward describing visual truth, applied to the players, the setting, and the game itself, is at the heart of Eakins's image.

GARDEL'S CHESS FURNITURE

Just as the hookah provides strong evidence that the venue of the chess game is Gardel's parlor, so the table designed expressly for the purpose of playing chess testifies to Gardel and Holmes's interest in the game. Benjamin Franklin introduced chess tables into the United States in 1785, after he imported a French model on which he had played in Paris. Franklin's table, which he might have had a hand in designing,⁵⁷ was inlaid with the dark and light squares and, like the one in Eakins's painting, equipped with a side trough that permitted players to depose captured pieces without cluttering the game surface. In Philadelphia at the time, only one manufacturer was listed as selling chessboards—and presumably tables as well: F. H. Smith, located at 716 Arch Street, from whom, presumably, Gardel bought the table, as a central focus of his parlor.⁵⁸ Such tables were far more expensive than portable boards: a chess table with oak pieces included, shown at the Centennial Exhibition, was valued at \$300, slightly less than the average yearly wage for an entire working-class family.⁵⁹ The square table depicted in Gardel's parlor was the type generally used in chess clubs, as most tables for private use were smaller and usually round in design, befitting smaller rooms. It was this type of large, square mahogany table, with a side trough, that was used at the Athenaeum Chess Club during the later nineteenth century (Figure 9).

As with the chess table, the pieces used by Gardel and Holmes are the latest models, known as the Staunton set (Figure 10). The pieces were named after Harold Staunton, the most vaunted English player of the 1840s, who also wrote a chess column for the *Illustrated London News* from 1845 until his death in 1874. In 1849, the editor, Nathaniel Cook, recognized the need to redesign the chess pieces to ensure clarity and uniformity. Consequently, he commissioned John Jaques, head of a sports and game equipment firm in London, to manufacture them. Staunton endorsed



9. Chess table, 1847. Mahogany, 28 x 34 x 34 in. (71.1 x 86.4 x 86.4 cm). The Athenaeum of Philadelphia (AP:18.01). Photograph: Jim Carroll



10. Staunton chess set. Designed by Nathaniel Cook, made by John Jaques, London, 1849–50. Ivory, H. of king 3³/₈ in. (8.5 cm). The British Museum, London (reg. no. 10). Photograph: © Trustees of The British Museum

the new pieces in a column later that year, promoted the design in his own match games, and for a time personally signed each of the labels on the chess sets sold.⁶⁰ The early Staunton sets were costly: £2 5s for mahogany, whereas ivory pieces were more than double that sum for the set.

Before the production of the Staunton sets, chess pieces were not always standardized. Many highly ornate sets, like the one depicted in Flagg's painting, were confusing to decipher in the heat of the game. These elaborate models were commonly used in the United States as showpieces: an Indian set in lacquered wood and ivory that belonged to



11. Chess set, ca. 1800. India. Lacquered wood and ivory (board), 1 3/4 x 16 5/8 x 16 5/8 in. (4.4 x 42.2 x 42.2 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of the Members of the Committee of the Bertha King Benkard Memorial Fund, 1946 (46.67.74a–gg)



12. Chess pieces owned by Benjamin Franklin, ca. 1750–80. Turned fruitwood (possibly pearwood), H. of tallest piece 3 1/2 in. (8.9 cm). American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, Gift of Morris Duane, 1976 (1976.7). Photograph: American Philosophical Society

Daniel Webster is preserved in the Metropolitan Museum (Figure 11). While remarkable artifacts in their own right, chess pieces of this type, and their many variants—the Calvert, St. George, Northern Upright, Barleycorn, and other models—were impractical in actual play.⁶¹ Difficult to identify on the board—Franklin’s own chess pieces (Figure 12) typically do not adequately differentiate among the queen, bishop, and pawn⁶²—most of these pieces were top-heavy, on too-small bases, and did not move smoothly across the board.

The Staunton pieces, on the other hand, had an airy design and were graced with classical references, such as the motif of the knight inspired by the Parthenon horse from the Elgin Marbles. The pedestals had solid bases for facile maneuvering on the chessboard, and perhaps most important, the pieces could easily be recognized from above by the players from the superior parts of the piece: the cross for the king, the crown for the queen, the miter for the bishop, and the crenellation for the rook. The ease in distinguishing the pieces was also aided by a perceptible hierarchy of size—the standard king was 3 1/2 inches tall—so that a quick overview of the board and of the position was more feasible, precisely what Benjamin Eakins enjoys in the painting. When the Staunton pieces first appeared in the United States in the 1850s, they were considered esteemed objects and sometimes were offered as prizes in tournaments. By the end of the nineteenth century, they were being mass-produced and sold cheaply (except those made in special woods or alabaster) and were widely available by mail order.⁶³ Although it is difficult to say with certainty, the high gloss on Gardel’s pieces suggests that they may have been carved from ivory and ebony, or perhaps from ivory both neutral and stained, as would befit the valuable chess table.

GARDEL, HOLMES, AND CHESS

More so than Eakins’s scenes of his family in shared daily pursuits, the painting of the chess players invites deep iconographic consideration. An abundance of allegorical allusions associates chess as metaphor for war fought over a board of sixty-four squares with thirty-two pieces battling for position and victory. Thus, Eakins’s subject has been the source of much speculation. Did he intend a larger purpose for the painting beyond the depiction of a chess encounter among friends? Some art historians have proposed a Freudian interpretation, seeing in the game an instinctive manifestation of belligerence, a conflict between the pieces and their manipulators in which the object is to capture, and thus kill, the king—the father figure. Consequently, Eakins’s seemingly personal painting of a chess game has received attention that, in some instances, takes it remarkably far from the framework of an accustomed scene of leisure and propels it into the realm of psychoanalytical analysis. Many scholars have seen layers of meaning within Eakins’s choice of subject matter, particularly as played or observed by two elderly men in the sanctuary of a typically male space. Did Eakins and his friends have anything more in mind than a few hours of enjoyment, a “bond of brotherhood”⁶⁴ across a board in what was still considered a sophisticated diversion, and a regular routine among the three? One writer in 1859 noted that chess was purely a game of thought, wits, and strategy that “possesses no meaning”⁶⁵ other than a manifestation of the cultivated mind, a notion that should be kept in mind when analyzing Eakins’s painting.

Some of the Freudian readings of Eakins’s panel have extended to interpretations of aspects of the painter’s life

and particularly his relationships with the participants. One historian understood Eakins's contestants to be symbolically plotting the course of their lives through the schema of a chessboard, an interpretation hardly recognizable in the painting itself.⁶⁶ Another historian noted that chess in the painting is a "metaphor of human life and achievement," an analysis that coincides with the common belief that chess is a miniaturized "Game of Life" or a meditation on human existence.⁶⁷ This notion was popularized through paintings such as Moritz Retzsch's *Die Schachspieler* (*The Chess Players*) of 1831, which depicts a game played by the devil for the soul of his opponent, significantly enacted on a board resting on a coffin, with the chess pieces designed as virtues and vices.⁶⁸ Discussed in chess circles and by art critics for its blatant allegorical implications, the painting became well known through widely available line engravings (Figure 13).⁶⁹ The idea extended to modern times, as in Ingmar Bergman's film *The Seventh Seal* (1957), in which the returning disillusioned knight, Antonius Block, challenges Death to a match in order to prolong his own life and therefore beat the devil, as it were, at his own game. In the case of Eakins's painting, however casual the notion of chess and life as parallel struggles, the painter provides no visual indications that he saw the scene in metaphorical terms, or even considered chess as anything more than a parlor amusement.

One critic understood *The Chess Players* as an allusion to the passing of time, as Gardel and Holmes deliberate on the future—each player "is depicted at a distinct stage of life" as suggested by the clock and the globe, despite the fact that these were habitual fixtures of a Victorian household and need not be interpreted as symbols.⁷⁰ Time in Eakins's painting is relative to chess time, move by move, not allegorical time; that the players are elderly is only a record of these men already in their sixties. The same author further suggested that since the younger Holmes is, metaphorically, trying to kill the older man's king (even though only four years separate Gardel from Holmes)—"it seems inevitable to read the work as one that grapples with Oedipal issues."⁷¹ The origin of this curious interpretation was no doubt a celebrated essay by Freud's biographer and protégé, Ernest Jones, on the player Paul Morphy's plunge into paranoia during the 1860s.⁷² Jones tried to correlate chess, at least in Morphy's case, as an unconscious substitute for the father-son rivalry that culminated in the murder of the father-king. Later psychoanalytical interpretations questioned this point of view, however, as too exaggerated.⁷³

Yet another Oedipal interpretation is forcefully endorsed in a curious examination of the painting in which the panel is considered to be symbolic of "another game . . . taking place across the opposite sides of the board, pitting Eakins against his father."⁷⁴ This equally odd assertion is founded



13. Moritz Retzsch (German, 1779–1857). *Die Schachspieler* (*The Chess Players*), 1831. Etching, 11 x 14¼ in. (28 x 36.3 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1935 (35.65.7). Photograph: Mark Morosse, Photograph Studio, MMA

on the idea that Benjamin Eakins disapproved and demeaned his son's aspirations to become a painter and, therefore, was the object of Thomas Eakins's animosity. There is nothing in the painting to suggest such a reading: the facts that Benjamin Eakins is but an inactive observer of his two friends' game and that he serves as a secondary element in the composition counter the argument entirely.

Other authors propose less radical interpretations, reading Gardel's and Holmes's gestures and demeanors as indicators of the progress of the game. Since Gardel appears in the painting to be a reserved, guarded figure, hunching over the board, his legs crossed under the table, and his left arm crossed over his chest, some believe he is depicted not only in a poorer position on the board but also as being wholly aware of his plight and ready to abandon the game.⁷⁵ In contrast, because Holmes is shown more erect in his chair, he appears more poised, and leans somewhat assertively forward so that his left leg projects outward and his right heel is raised, thus conveying conviction and confidence, as would be only natural for someone in a winning position about to force his rival's resignation.

Even though much has been assumed regarding these attitudes, should they be read, in fact, as suggesting victory or defeat? That Gardel's and Holmes's gestures were common among chess players can be illustrated from an 1860 correspondence game played between Boston and New York clubs. The players, recorded only as Thompson and Perrin, were described in dispositions similar to the ones in Eakins's painting: Thompson's "forehead resting on his hand, his gaze fixed on the chess-board, his lips firmly closed." Perrin "inclines his body forward . . . his hands clasped" near his knees.⁷⁶ Chess players, even amateurs, sometimes instinctively employ personalized body language and react to the rigors of the game in individual ways that can change depending on diverse factors, particularly

14. Detail of Figure 1 showing poses of Bertrand Gardel and George W. Holmes with chessboard



mental and physical fatigue. The postures displayed in the painting are familiar ones of individual concentration around the chessboard, which are equally visible in variation in other paintings of chess players in a more generalized context. Gardel's and Holmes's facial expressions reveal neither dejection nor self-assurance over the position; both indicate intense concentration without covert signs of betrayal on the part of a weaker position or of confidence on that of a stronger one. The evident preoccupation of both players is the next move to be played, which, as will be seen, is the crucial element of the game they play as Eakins painted it.

How erroneous it is to judge the temperament of each player at this moment in the game by construing their poses as signs of a winning or losing position is illustrated in Gardel's odd posture at the table with his left arm placed across his chest (Figure 14). The explanation of this decidedly peculiar pose is on the whole more banal and is owed to Gardel's physical ailments. When Beaux described him seven years before Eakins painted him, she already noted his frailty and stoop, which in 1876 were surely more pronounced. One of the aspects of Gardel she described was that the "poor old man" was ill much of the time, although she did not elaborate, except in one instance. Gardel, she said, "suffered from some malady which caused

him to keep his left arm constantly pressed against his breast."⁷⁷ What this malady might have been is not explained, and no other reference to it has been found, but it would suggest a muscular or circulatory weakness or a form of paralysis, consequently the need to be accompanied when he arrived and departed from his teaching duties at 226 South Broad Street. Eakins portrayed his friend in *The Chess Players* as he was accustomed to seeing him, with the characteristic position of the left arm regularly folded against his chest. In depicting Gardel's infirmity rather than hiding it, Eakins provided yet another reminder that the painting was, in essence, a visual accumulation of naturally observed facets of a witnessed scene.

Common art historical sense in regard to Eakins's work in the 1870s should dictate that interpretations such as those outlined above digress considerably from what is known of Eakins's typical practice. Many of the features of the painting can be ascribed to direct observation from the accoutrements of the room, to the chess furniture, to the poses, and as will be seen, to the makeup of the game itself. Does anything in the painting truly indicate that Eakins wished to imply more, even unconsciously, than two friends engaged in their habitual and satisfying pastime? Using chess as the basis for exploring psychological problems, Oedipal and otherwise, is always hazardous, as most

analysts agree, since chess is not a particularly good model on which to study the core of human relations.⁷⁸ Chess revolves around an artificial structure, and even who will play white, and therefore who should have the theoretical advantage of the first move, is no more than a question of chance. Skills and intentions in chess are difficult to measure even within a Freudian framework. It might be surprising to learn that Freud, who stopped playing chess after 1901 because he thought it more of a strain than a pleasure,⁷⁹ said little of the game in his writing, although he compared his analytic treatment of patients in different stages to the complexities of chess.⁸⁰ He knew that psychological correlations to chess were difficult to sustain and probably fruitless. This was vividly exemplified at a meeting of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society on March 15, 1922, when Freud heard a paper, “Über das Schachspiel (About Chess),” the first on the subject in any psychoanalytic congress, read by a dentist, Dr. Fokschaner, but never published. After having listened to Fokschaner’s argument in which he saw the Oedipal struggle as intrinsic to the game, Freud, who was a co-respondent at the session, reportedly remarked: “This is the kind of paper that will bring psychoanalysis into disrepute. You cannot reduce everything to the Oedipus complex. Stop!”⁸¹

THE CHESS POSITION

Particularly remarkable in Eakins’s painting is the attention with which Eakins rendered the chessboard and the placement of the pieces. As his preparatory drawing clearly indicates, Eakins carefully mapped out the composition and the chess table with its inlaid squares with the same mathematical diligence used in the rowing series and other paintings (see Figure 8). The drawing reveals a deliberate rationale of picture-making in which details are infinitely studied in a perspective grid with all of the angles and spaces predicated on a vanishing point exactly above the board and to the right of the clock. The result of this discipline is that the details are so remarkably distinct as to make it possible to reconstruct the exact position of the pieces on the board, as Clapper has shown. Before examining that position, it is worthwhile to note for those less familiar with the game that all chessboards include an equal number of dark and light squares with horizontal and vertical sequences of letters and numbers reminiscent of longitude and latitude markings, so as to designate and annotate the position of any piece during the game. Horizontal squares begin with the letter “a” at the left corner of the player of the white pieces, which is always a black square, and proceed to “h” at the right, always a white square. Vertical numbering follows in the same manner from “1” at the left corner

to “8” on the opponent’s side, a system that is commonly called algebraic notation in chess circles.⁸²

In both the drawing and the painting, Eakins delineated the board in the proper position for the white and black pieces, that is, with Gardel’s corner square closest to the picture plane, h1, a white one, and Holmes’s corner square, h8, a black one. Similarly, looking across the board toward the interior, Eakins painted eight vertical and horizontal squares, still decipherable despite the acutely receding perspective of the chessboard. By calculating the position of the pieces as Eakins placed them, as well as from the distinct forms of the Staunton pieces, the topography of the game at this point in the contest can be determined with exactitude (Figure 15). This is made possible as well by the point of view Eakins selected, high enough to include precise indications of the squares. Had Eakins lowered the vanishing point (as in Flagg’s painting), the board would not have been as legible. Thus, Eakins intended from the outset to record an unambiguous moment of the game as a fundamental part of the painting, corresponding to the physical rendering of the portraits and the details of the interior setting. The position Eakins painted is consequently indicated, as Clapper showed, in the diagram in Figure 16; Eakins’s viewing position is to the right of the board.

Previous readings of the game have not been entirely accurate. The black piece on e5, a bishop with the distinguishing miter barely visible but still distinct enough in the detail, has often been understood in the literature on the painting as a black queen,⁸³ an unbeatable advantage for black. Also crucial is the obscure presence of a white piece at d2, partially hidden from view by the black knight at e2 in the shadow caused by the light entering from the right. The piece cannot be readily identified but can be adduced by elimination: it is not the white queen, as she has been already captured; her crown protrudes from the trough of captured pieces at Gardel’s right. Nor can the piece be the white bishop since the square d2 is a black one, and white already has a bishop on a black square at e7; white’s second bishop had to have been placed on the white square. From its rounded form and height—thus eliminating it as a pawn or a rook—the piece must be understood as a knight. The identification of this piece is noteworthy for the role it will play in the outcome of the game.

With the position clearly described by Eakins, the question is, which player has the advantage at this point and what kind is it? With about half the pieces exchanged—fifteen of the thirty-two are visible—the match is now evidently in the end-game phase. At such a decisive moment many matches are won or lost, the result of specialized end-game play and of tactics players apply when fewer pieces are on the board. An overview of the board confirms that Holmes indeed has a material advantage because of three pawns to the good,

15. Detail of Figure 1, showing chessboard



formidable weapons in any end-game position. He also appears to enjoy greater possibilities in positional play and momentum, as his pawn structure is solid and can menace Gardel's king side. Moreover, Holmes's king is reasonably secure at g8, protected by his pawn formation, while his rook dominates the open c8-c1 file, which permits him to descend unobstructed and to menace white's territory.

On the other hand, Gardel's pieces appear passively placed and do not easily interact with each other, breaking

one of the maxims of chess tactics, namely, that the coordination of the pieces is essential particularly in the end game. None of his pieces appears set for either attack or defense purposes. His king is placed perilously on h2 with no protection or maneuverability, just as Gardel's bishop at e7 has neither support for an attack nor enough operational freedom to maintain a defense against black's approaching pieces; indeed, few squares are available to him either to intimidate or to protect. Gardel is surely aware of his evident predicament as he studies the board with his eyes fixed on the critical zone around the rook and knight on e1 and e2, respectively, the area of the board where the end game will culminate. Benjamin Eakins, who has risen from his chair to better examine the board, focuses also on the same area, sensing that the decisive moment of the battle will be fought there.

What Eakins has not indicated, and what cannot be judged from the gestures depicted in the painting, is whether it is black's or white's turn to move. This is critical, since it will decide the probable outcome of the game. Clapper noted that the position is roughly equal despite Holmes's material advantage and has surmised that it is white's turn to play, probably owing to the direction of Benjamin Eakins's gaze, toward Gardel's pieces, as though pondering how he will move.⁸⁴ Previous commentators have seen, or sensed, that Gardel's position is rather futile because of his discordant pieces with three pawns behind, even to the point of stating that he appears to be considering resigning faced with black's superior forces. Yet this conjecture is not



16. Diagram of chess pieces in *The Chess Players*. Position of George W. Holmes in black; position of Bertrand Gardel in white. From Clapper 2010, p. 81, fig. 2

altogether convincing because the weakness of his position is not as fatal as it appears, depending on who is set to move and the strategy behind the move. If it is now Gardel's play, it is clear that he must contend with several threats as black's king side pieces begin to weave a mating net. But at the same time, white's rook at e1 attacks black's unguarded knight at e2, a tempting target as capturing a piece could offset his disadvantage. This is precisely what holds Gardel's attention at this instant: should he take the knight, which Clapper thought he could capture "feasibly and soundly"?⁸⁵ Gardel should have seen that, in fact, he may not capture the piece with impunity, as 1. e1 x h2 is answered by 1 . . . , f3+, a discovered check, forcing black to move his king to the only square available to him, at h1, followed by capturing his rook at e2. This exchange would considerably favor black and make white's position an impossible one to defend.

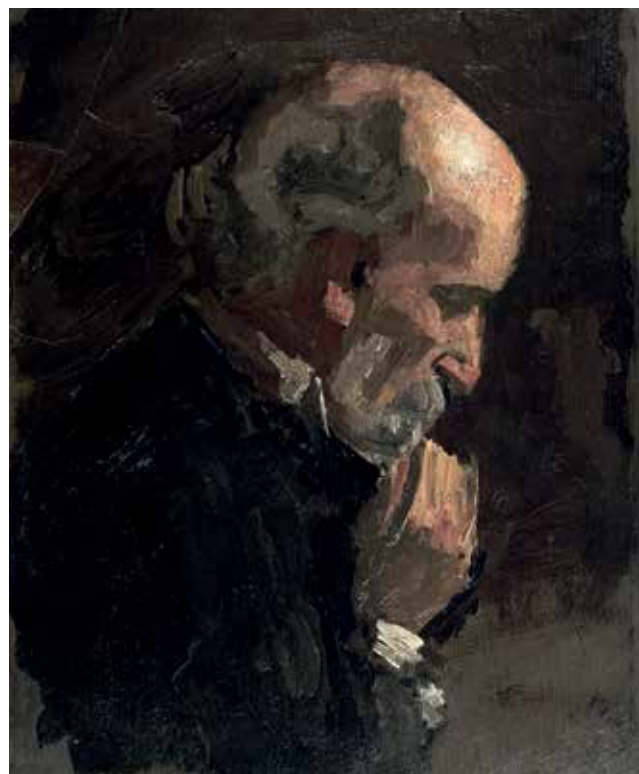
We have no indication how strong a chess player Gardel was, but if his talents were formidable, white would have seen two possibilities to avoid the discovered check, his Achilles' heel in this position. It is surprising that both moves actually solidify his position and in turn offer counter-threats that black cannot easily meet. White can play 1. Kg2, which has several positional advantages: it removes the king from the immediate danger of the discovered check; it prevents black from playing f3, as now the pawn can be captured by the king or the knight; and at the same time the rook's attack on the knight at e2 is maintained. Further, in that position the threat of the rook is doubled, since the knight may not be moved because it hides another hidden attack on the black's unguarded bishop at e5. The second possibility available to Gardel is even more effective and is undeniably his winning move. If Gardel plays 1. Nf3, the move likewise serves a similar purpose in blocking the advance of the pawn at f4, but it also has the advantage of attacking the bishop at e5. If Gardel makes this move, the assault on Holmes's pieces cannot be easily parried, since now two of black's pieces are under attack simultaneously—the knight at e2 and the bishop at e5—while only one can be defended. Black in effect will not be able to avoid the loss of a piece, which would provide white with a notable development of his position in the later end-game struggle despite black's better pawn structure. Gardel's move, 1. Nf3, leaves black's response so limited that he would have little counterplay.⁸⁶

As promising as Gardel's position is—if it is, indeed, his move—the drama of the game in this position is heightened in that a comparable situation exists for black. Should it be Holmes's turn to move, he must contend immediately with the attack on the knight at e2, which he may not move because of the masked attack on the bishop at e5. Therefore, playing 1 . . . , f3 is the obvious answer to the threat, as it

reveals the discovered check noted above, compelling black to his forced retreat at h1, the only square available, while simultaneously defending his knight against the rook's attack. In this case, it is white who has no practical reply to the impending threats that would further devastate Gardel's forces. With white's king bottled up at h1, black has various possibilities at his disposal and could take full advantage of his position to forge a decisive victory.⁸⁷

Suffice it to say that the position in Eakins's painting is not a straightforward one in which Holmes is assured a victory or Gardel a resounding defeat, as has been generally supposed. The uncertainty is in itself an absorbing aspect of the painting that adds considerably to the tension with which Eakins infused the depiction of the players' concentrated deliberation and the observing participant. It is likely that Eakins had intended to convey uncertainty, because he selected the moment exactly before a move. The spellbound immersion of the three figures is a stimulating prelude to the next phase of the game in which winner and loser will be determined, barring blunders. Had Eakins indicated whose move it was by having one of the players raising his hand, about to move a piece, for example, the dramatic content of the picture would have been altered considerably.

It is reasonable to suppose that Eakins derived his rendering of the board from a particular game played between Gardel and Holmes that he witnessed in Gardel's parlor. Although Eakins's knowledge of chess is undocumented, he no doubt understood that at this moment of the game—



17. Thomas Eakins. *Bertrand Gardel* (Sketch for "The Chess Players"), 1876. Oil on paper and cardboard, 12 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 9 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. (30.8 x 24.8 cm). Philadelphia Museum of Art, Gift of Mrs. Thomas Eakins and Miss Mary Adeline Williams (1930-32-6). Photograph: Philadelphia Museum of Art

one intrinsic to the notion of a real contest, where winner and loser are not yet apparent—the gripping possibilities of the scene were at their maximum. In perceiving this position as the climactic one, we presume Eakins’s intimate knowledge of the game, no doubt gleaned from the many matches he observed. But to ensure that the position was correct when he painted it, Eakins must have memorized it, or perhaps made notes—although neither Gardel nor Holmes has pencil and paper on the chess table to annotate the game—or even sketched it separately as an aide-mémoire. At this time he did not yet own a camera. Eakins could have followed the game closely and sketched or annotated the position as the players were reflecting, as is suggested by a painted sketch of Gardel that no doubt shows him contemplating a move during another phase of the game (Figure 17).

The absolute commitment to an observed scene, selected for its riveting pictorial content, fits Eakins’s artistic psyche at this time: compare his studies for the rowing series, where unconditional fidelity and control of the composition are fundamental. Since the painting is a record not only of three people close to Eakins but also of a specific game at a particular moment, little is gained by speculating on his intentions beyond a desire to depict a genre scene accurately. That he offered the painting to his father indicates further that he intended it as a souvenir, a token of a common activity among Eakins’s long-standing friends, not unlike his pictures of his sisters playing the piano, but in this case laden with greater emotional intensity and suspense.

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The epigraph was written by Emerson in a journal entry dated January 16, 1843 (Emerson 1911, p. 339).

NOTES

1. Foster 1997 and Adams 2005, respectively.
2. Torchia 1991.
3. Clapper 2010.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 84–86.
5. Holmes’s address is noted in *McElroy’s Philadelphia City Directory for 1867*, 30th ed. (Philadelphia, 1867), p. 432. Holmes is usually listed in these directories as a “teacher of drawing”; Boyd’s *Philadelphia Blue Book* (Philadelphia, 1890–91), p. 432. Holmes’s

- address is given in the *Blue Book* as at 1926 Mount Vernon Street. See also Foster 1997, p. 234n26.
6. National Archives, Washington, D.C., Population Schedules of the Eighth Census of the United States, 1860, Microfilm 653, roll 1159, Philadelphia, 9th Ward, June 28, 1860, p. 321, no. 858 (hereafter NA, with the census date).
7. Long 1960, p. 15. See also Bank 1997, p. 80, where it is estimated that the yearly wage in Philadelphia in 1850 as less than \$300, but almost twice that was needed to maintain a modest family.
8. NA, Ninth Census, 1870, Microfilm 593, roll 1422, Philadelphia, 9th Ward, p. 378.
9. *Art Journal* 1878, pp. 30–31.
10. NA, Tenth Census, 1880, Pennsylvania, no. 67, part 7, p. 245. The occupations of the children were also noted: Gerald, spelled “Jerrold,” was a druggist; Herman a house carpenter; Helen, spelled “Ellen,” a housekeeper; Lizabeth, here as “Lizzie,” a school teacher; Knorr was a “vocalist” and his wife, Mary, an “artist.”
11. The quotation is from Garrett 1892, p. 211; see Goodrich 1982, vol. 1, p. 8, for a similar quotation. Holmes is listed as a teacher at the University of Pennsylvania first in *Catalogue of the Trustees, Officers, & Students of the University of Pennsylvania 1840* (Philadelphia, 1840), p. 6, and remained in his post for several years; he is no longer listed in the catalogue for 1859–60. His appointment at Haverford took place before the close of the 1850–51 session.
12. *American Publishers’ Circular and Literary Gazette* 1 (June 1, 1863), p. 145. Called *The Sketch-Book*, the work consists of twelve sheets of sketches “drawn from Nature and on Stone,” some of them scenes of Philadelphia. The notice said that these sketches “are well worthy [of] the attention of those having drawing-classes under their care.”
13. Philadelphia 1865, p. 3. Holmes is listed as an associate since 1862.
14. *Graham’s Magazine* 1852, p. 325. See also Thistlethwaite 2000, p. 42.
15. NA, Ninth Census, 1870, Microfilm 593, roll 1399, Philadelphia, 15th Ward, p. 482.
16. NA, Eighth Census, 1860, Microfilm 653, roll 1165, Philadelphia, 15th Ward, p. 110.
17. Montgomery 1987, p. 333, lists Gardel’s birthplace as Paris and his age as forty at the time of the 1850 census. The actual dates of his birth and death, however, are inscribed on his tomb in Mount Vernon Cemetery as January 6, 1808–December 18, 1895.
18. *Index to Records of Aliens’ Declarations of Intentions and/or Oaths of Allegiance, 1789–1880* ([Harrisburg], 1940), part 4, Letter G, p. 36.
19. Julia Hawks, also a teacher, came from a well-known family in Goshen, Massachusetts; see Barrus 1881, pp. 211–12.
20. Little information has come down about the school, but see Buckley 2000, p. 387, no. 46. See also Engstrom 2007, p. 75, referring to Lavinia Ellis Cole, who after 1849 attended “Mme. Gardel’s school in Philadelphia.”
21. Gardel’s recommendation was dated May 20, 1858, and was included in the opening unnumbered pages of Longstreth 1867.
22. See *McElroy’s Philadelphia Directory for 1858*, 21st ed. (Philadelphia, 1858), p. 235, where his address was listed as 1418 Chestnut Street. Previously, he resided at 419 Chestnut Street—the old street numbers were in effect until 1857—and 275 Chestnut Street. This was the last year that Gardel appeared in the directory. His occupation was always noted as teacher. Gardel’s residence at 1418 Chestnut Street was destroyed when Charles F. Haseltine erected his gallery there in 1887.

23. NA, Ninth Census, 1870, Microfilm 593, roll 1437, Philadelphia, 22nd Ward, p. 439B.
24. Ward 1882, p. 130.
25. Beaux 1930, pp. 44–45. My thanks to Linda Seckelson, Museum librarian, Thomas J. Watson Library, MMA, for providing me with this information.
26. Beaux identified the former only as “Miss Lyman,” but in *McElroy’s Philadelphia Directory for 1864*, 27th ed. (Philadelphia, 1864), p. 447, Catherine Lyman is listed as living at 226 South Broad Street, her occupation “gentlewoman.” She is not listed in the directories before that date.
27. Beaux 1930, pp. 52–53.
28. Scharf and Westcott 1884, vol. 3, p. 1882; Archambault 1924, p. 75; Keels 2003, p. 55. The monument is also discussed in Foster 1997, pp. 14–15.
29. *Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 18, 1871. Benjamin Eakins bought the Mount Vernon house for \$4,800; see Kirkpatrick 2006, p. 26.
30. Bushman 1992, p. 273.
31. Cole and Williamson 1941, pp. 12–16.
32. Kirkpatrick 2006, pp. 28, 281, 330.
33. The Holbrook family was the premier producer of globes and scientific instruments at the time. See Brownell 1861, pp. 13–14, for a brief history of the company, and p. 19 for a current price list, noting no. 18a, an eight-inch globe, “brass mounted, with Horizon and Quadrant” selling for \$10. A larger model, which seems to be the case here, could be ordered.
34. National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C., “Passport Applications, 1795–1905,” Microfilm M 1372, rolls 37 and 73, respectively. These passport applications likewise provide a physical description of Gardel.
35. Davis 1905, vol. 3, p. 99.
36. Hotchkiss 1889, p. 61. It must be the same Gardel, since he is referred to as “Mons. Gardel, the Philadelphia teacher.”
37. Senior 1859, p. 9.
38. Homer 2009, p. 138.
39. Rosenzweig 1977, p. 111.
40. Danly and Leibold 1994, nos. 153–63.
41. Strahan 1876, pp. 288–90, with an engraving of the painting opposite p. 288. Irving’s painting attracted much notice in Memorial Hall; however, it depicted the bloody aftermath of a match, when one of the players called for a duel after accusations of cheating—rather than the game itself. The second exhibition is noted in Philadelphia 1877, p. 10. See also Clement and Hutton 1879, vol. 1, p. 384.
42. At the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in 1877 (no. 225); at the National Academy of Design, New York, in 1878 (no. 612); and then at the Brooklyn Art Association the same year (no. 222). See Spassky et al. 1985, pp. 600–605.
43. Gelber 1999, p. 26, citing *Godey’s Lady’s Book*. The *Chess Player’s Magazine* 2 (1864), p. 113, announced the organization of a “Ladies’ Chess Club” that had formed in Germantown, the first in the United States. Men were not admitted “until the hour when their services as escorts [were] required.”
44. Kirkpatrick 2006, p. 28.
45. See epigraph to the present article. James (1907) 1993, p. 586: “. . . vast, firm chess-board, the immeasurable spread of little squares, covered all over by perfect Philadelphians.”
46. See “The Chess Life of Benjamin Franklin,” in Fiske 1859, pp. 331–39. There is also a chapter titled “Chess in Philadelphia,” pp. 348–62.
47. Franklin 1786; see Hagedorn 1958. Franklin also wrote a manual on how to play the game, *Chess Made Easy*, published posthumously first in 1792 with other editions afterward.
48. The Automaton was devised first by Johann Wolfgang Von Kempelen (1734–1804) and then improved by Johann Nepomuk Maelzel (1772–1838), a friend of Beethoven’s. The device was an illusion in which a human chess player hidden in the mechanism actually operated the moves. In 1826, Maelzel brought the machine to the United States, where it had an immense success. See Rice 1994. A description of the spectacle in Philadelphia is in *Franklin Journal* 1827, pp. 125–29. A decade later, in Richmond, Edgar Allan Poe exposed the fraud in the *Southern Literary Messenger* ([Poe] 1836). See Wimsatt 1993, p. 78. The defeat of the Automaton by a woman of Philadelphia is recorded with the annotated game in *American Chess Magazine* 1847.
49. See Reichhelm 1898, p. 6, from which information given here is gleaned.
50. For example, in the *Chess Player’s Magazine* 2 (1864), published in London, three games from Philadelphia clubs were published.
51. The Library Company of Philadelphia, Print Department, P 8922. The architect was John McArthur.
52. Sayen 1876. James Mason, an English-born player then residing in New York, won the match.
53. Torchia 1991, p. 270.
54. Homer 2009, p. 75. See also Danly and Leibold 1994, p. 25. Eakins also sent a portrait of his second teacher, Léon Bonnat; he also owned photographs of Thomas Couture and Rosa Bonheur.
55. Homer 2009, p. 244, and Foster 1997, pp. 32–33. See des Cars et al. 2010, no. 70. Eakins also purchased a print of Gêrôme’s *Deux augures* of 1861 and other works by the French artist; see Foster 1997, pp. 32, 237.
56. I thank Catherine Mackay, administrative assistant, Department of American Paintings, MMA, who inspected the drawing and confirmed the inscription.
57. In a letter of about 1769 from John Foxcroft to Franklin, he asked Franklin to visit him for a game of chess “on his New Invented Table.” It is not certain to whom “his” refers. See Franklin 1972, p. 275.
58. Freedley 1858, p. 464.
59. *Souvenir of the Centennial Exhibition* 1877, p. 213. For the wages of a worker at about the turn of the twentieth century, see Volo and Volo 2007, pp. 55–56, who noted that in 1874 the minimum of \$520 to \$624 annually was necessary; for a family of five, in which neither the wife nor the children earned wages, the minimum was \$850. The average expenditure for food was \$422. In 1883, the average annual miner’s wage in Pennsylvania was only \$350; see Klein and Hoogenboom 1980, p. 319.
60. An advertisement in the *Illustrated London News* of September 29, 1849, noted that Staunton signed the sets to avoid “fraudulent imitations.” The Jaques firm, which is still in business, invented croquet in 1851; they also produced tiddlywinks in the late 1880s; and developed ping-pong in 1901.
61. In 1783 Wedgwood hired John Flaxman (1755–1826) to design a set based on *Macbeth*, the king and queen modeled by Sarah Siddons and Charles Kemble; see Meteyard 1865–66, vol. 2, p. 494, and pp. 485–86, for Flaxman’s bills for his pieces. There is an early nineteenth-century Flaxman set in the Metropolitan Museum (48.174.130 a–p, aa–pp).
62. Richardson 1979.
63. *Montgomery Ward & Co. Catalogue & Buyers’ Guide*, 1895, p. 121, was selling Staunton-designed pieces, the size not indicated, for \$1, box included. Checker pieces, on the other hand, could be had for \$.35 a dozen.
64. [Edge] 1859, p. 12.
65. *Chess Monthly* 1859, p. 299.
66. Wilmerding 1993, p. 25.

67. Clapper 2010, p. 79.
68. The painting was even discussed in *Columbia Chess Chronicle*, where the position of the “Game of Life” was transcribed from the painting, but inaccurately; see Gilberg 1888. One of the legends about the painting is that Paul Morphy, the greatest of the early American chess champions, supposedly saw an engraving of it in a home of a friend in Richmond and announced that he could win the game and thus beat the devil.
69. See Miltitz [1837]; and *Saturday Review* 1837, p. 170, with an engraving published on p. 169. A copy of the painting was exhibited at the Apollo Association in New York; see the *Knickerbocker* 17 (April 1841), p. 344; presumably it was this copy that was in Luman Reed’s collection, for which see Foshay 1990, pp. 164–65.
70. Berger 2000, p. 71. The clock could equally represent the timing device for regulating the game. Since the 1850s, chess authorities sought to standardize how long each player had to contemplate his or her moves. After the World Tournament in London in 1851, sandglasses were proposed to prevent unusual slowness; Staunton’s twenty-first match with Pierre St. Amant took more than fourteen hours for sixty-six moves. Chess clocks were not introduced into play until 1867.
71. *Ibid.*, p. 76.
72. Jones 1931.
73. See Menninger 2007, p. 201.
74. Adams 2005, p. 190.
75. Torchia 1991, p. 269. Chess etiquette of the day advised: “When you find your game hopeless, do not prolong it, but retire gracefully.” See Pardon 1860, p. 21.
76. *Chess Monthly* 1860, p. 126.
77. Beaux 1930, p. 52.
78. Szasz (1965) 1988, p. 70.
79. Jones 1955, p. 384.
80. Freud 1958, p. 83. In a letter of February 12, 1911, to Carl Jung, Freud related a dream a patient recounted, which he referred to as an “ingenious chess problem”; see McGuire 1977, p. 391.
81. *Sigmund Freud House Bulletin* (Sigmund Freud Gesellschaft) 1 (1975), p. 5. See also *Internationale Zeitschrift für Psychoanalyse und Imago* 8 (1922), p. 117, and Reider 1959.
82. In Eakins’s time, the system used was called positional notation, descriptive notation, or sometimes English notation. The older version provides the actual movement of the piece and its destination, such as P-K4, meaning the pawn on the king side—the player’s right—moves vertically to the fourth square. Algebraic notation is more compact with each square on the board identified by letter and number so that the position is more specific. Pieces are indicated by the first letter of the chessman, with K for king but N for knight. The player notes the movement of the pieces by the letter of the piece and the square coordinate where it will be placed. Thus, Ba2 means the bishop moves to the coordinate a2. When no piece is indicated, it designates a pawn move; thus, g6 means the pawn moves to that square. Captures are noted by an x after the piece and before the coordinate: b x f4 designates that the bishop captures the piece at f4. Check of the king is indicated by the sign + at the end of the notation. White’s move is always seen first in a sequence followed by black’s move; thus the notation 1.e4 e5 means that white has moved his pawn to coordinate e5 and black has answered by moving his pawn to e5.
83. Berger 2000, p. 72, thought the piece to be a queen, as did others. My thanks to Joseph Loh, managing museum educator, MMA, who inspected the painting anew under optimal lighting conditions and verified the identification of the piece and the position.
84. Clapper 2010, p. 81.
85. *Ibid.*, p. 98n4.
86. A possible outcome follows: Should black counter 1. Nf3 with 1 . . . , Nd4, white counters with 2. N x B; should black play 1 . . . , Rc2 to protect the knight, white still captures the bishop with the following probable sequence: 1 . . . , Re2, 2. N x B Ng3+, 3. Kg1 and black has few possibilities to win.
87. The logical sequence would be 2 . . . , f2, which presents white with the predicament of having to move his attacked rook. He may not block the pawn by 3. Rf1 as black replies 3 . . . , Ng3+ forking king and rook, from which 4. Kg2 N x R, 5. N x N, Bd4 and his material advantage should be sufficient to win. Should black play 3 . . . , N x R, then 4. Rc1+ is devastating and white could not easily avoid a mate several moves further. The probable sequence would be: 1 . . . f3, 2. Kh1 f2, 3. R x N Rc1+, 4. Kg2 (forced) Bd4, and white has few options after 5 . . . , Re1, forcing an exchange of rooks allowing the pawn to queen; if the rook captures the pawn, the white bishop at e7 falls, with enough material gain to win.

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