

# THE EPOCH TIMES

# ARTS & CULTURE

ROYAL COLLECTION TRUST



▲ Needlework casket, 1626–1649, produced in Little Gidding, Cambridgeshire, England. Silk needlework, mirror glass, leather, silver thread, wool, silk, gilt wood; 11.1 by 9.4 by 6.8 inches.

## DECORATIVE ARTS

# Unpacking Boxes From the Past

Treasures to hold treasures from The Metropolitan Museum of Art

By Michelle Plastrik

A museum's interest in historic boxes does not depend on whether they still contain their original contents or are now emptied. Scholarly unpacking of these boxes shows the breadth and depth of their materiality, form, function, and beauty. Their exteriors stand on their own, continuing to delight viewers today.

A highly prized material in medieval Europe, and one that cannot be used today to create new items, was ivory from the exotic elephant tusk. Ivory was typically carved to create decorative objects. During the early Middle Ages through the Romanesque period, ivory was mainly employed to make book covers and ecclesiastical items.

The ivory supply declined in the 12th century but rematerialized in the Gothic mid-13th century with its

primary imports from the African savanna. Hand in hand with this influx, the artistic use of ivory expanded. It became fashionable to have ivory religious statuettes, private devotional paneled reliefs, and luxury objects such as combs, writing tablets, and caskets (decorative boxes) for jewelry. The latter personal items were popularly decorated with low-relief carved scenes.

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LITERATURE

# A Thrilling Moment Became a Refused Rescue

Anton Chekhov's 'The Kiss'

By Jeff Minick

"I married the first man I ever kissed," Barbara Bush, wife of President George Bush, would say. "When I tell this to my children, they just about throw up."

Staff-Capt. Ryabovich of the N-Artillery Brigade would have understood the power of that kiss. After experiencing an unexpected embrace from an upper-class stranger in a darkened room, and unable to identify the woman who kissed him and then fled, Ryabovich spends days romanticizing the moment, carrying the memory with him like a boutonniere of the heart that only he can see, smell, and touch.

This brief encounter is the heart of Anton Chekhov's short story "The Kiss."



▲ The protagonist is a timid, plain man, someone hardly noticeable. A painting of an unknown man, circa 1830, by Friedrich von Amerling. Oil on canvas. Belvedere, Vienna.

**'The Kiss'**

When an artillery brigade on the march encamps in a village, a local aristocrat, Gen. von Rabbek, welcomes 19 officers into his home to join a party of relatives, visitors, and neighbors already in session. The officers join in the festivities, dancing, drinking, and playing billiards.

All except Ryabovich. Extremely self-conscious and highly self-critical, he watches the others as if from a bleacher, removed from the chatter and conviviality. While trying to find his way back to the party after watching a game of billiards, he becomes lost in the large house and enters a darkened room. Hidden by the shadows, a woman whispers "At last!" and slips her arms around his neck, kisses him, shrieks when she realizes her mistake, and disappears before Ryabovich can react. When he rejoins the others, Ryabovich studies the young women and tries to guess which one of them has set his heart racing, but to no avail.

Back in his quarters, he can think of nothing but her: "His neck ... still seemed anointed with oil; on his left cheek near his moustache where the unknown had kissed him there was a faint chilly tingling sensation as from peppermint drops." On the march the next day, "He pictured her and his happiness as he pleased, and put no rein on his imagination." That night, when he shares his story with two comrades, Lobytko and Merzlyakov, he feels that this telling has flattened his adventure, and "vowed never to confide again."

At the end of the summer, the troops encamp again near von Rabbek's house, but it seems a second invitation will not be forthcoming. Standing beside a nearby river, Ryabovich thinks "How unintelligent everything is!" In that moment of epiphany, he decides that the world is "an inscrutable, aimless mystification" and that "his life struck him as extraordinarily meagre, poverty-stricken, and colourless."

On returning to his quarters, he discovers that his comrades have gone to revisit the von Rabbeks. For a moment he is tempted to join them, "but he quenched it at once, got into bed, and in his wrath with his fate, as though to spite it, did not go to the General's."

**The Man**

Chekhov's introduction of Staff-Capt. Ryabovich to readers is abrupt and direct. He is "a short, round-shouldered, spectacled officer, whiskered like a lynx. While his brother officers looked serious or smiled constrainedly, his face, his lynx whiskers, and his spectacles seemed to explain: 'I am the most timid, modest, and undistinguished officer in the whole brigade.'"

Ryabovich fulfills that self-assessment during the first part of the von Rabbeks' party. He scarcely speaks to anyone, and "amazed at the daring of men who in sight of a crowd could take unknown women by the waist," he, of course, never dares to ask any of these women for a dance.

Then the accidental kiss occurs. Momentarily gone are his previous shyness and self-lacerations. "He felt that he must dance, talk, run into the garden, laugh unrestrainedly," and for just a few minutes his inhibitions vanish. When Madame von Rabbek passes near him, his wide, gracious smile causes her to pause and engage him in conversation.

As the story progresses, we also realize that Ryabovich is not entirely ignorant about women. The men in the barracks "talk of love and women," and the womanizing Lobytko "made Don Juan excursions to the 'suburb,'" a chase in which Ryabovich participates but mentally asks the lady of the kiss for forgiveness.

**Outside Influences**

Nature conspires with circumstances to make this kiss special. The time is late May, and inside the house the



▲ After disappointment, some choose to ignore life. "The Hermit in Front of His Retreat," 1844, by Carl Spitzweg. Oil on canvas. Städel Museum, Frankfurt, Germany.

open windows make the air fragrant "of roses, of lilac, and of the young leaves of the poplar." To Ryabovich, a bit tipsy on cognac, "it seemed to him that the smell of roses, of poplars, and lilac came not from the garden, but from the ladies' faces and dresses." Just a little later, in the dark room in which the kiss takes place, "the windows were wide open, and there was a smell of poplars, lilac and roses."

On their return to camp that evening, the officers pass a bush where a nightingale is singing. They shake the bush, but the bird remains in place and continues its melodies, much to the admiration of the officers.

On Ryabovich's return trip to the village, it is the last day of August, and "there was no sound of the brave nightingale, and no scent of poplar and fresh grass." The romantic urges that budded in spring in Ryabovich's heart are giving way to fall, and soon to winter.

The von Rabbek party, with the kiss at its center, also reinforces Ryabovich's turn toward the romantic. The music, the candlelight, and the women themselves are fuel to the fire of his obsession. In reality, however, the young ladies seated around the table are of the upper class, and a lowly artillery officer like Ryabovich has almost no chance of winning their lasting affection.

**Explorations**

On my first reading of "The Kiss," I found Ryabovich a comic figure, almost unbelievable for loading so much freight onto a few seconds of mistaken affection. His disillusionment in the end, when he essentially declares life meaningless, seems intended as both a valid and a universal experience.

A second and a third reading changed my mind. Ryabovich's sudden insight—that life is meaningless—is in fact the subjective justification for a failure of the imagination in a man we already know as weak. To declare that life is without meaning is, in this case, an overblown interpretation. After receiving the kiss, Ryabovich could just as easily have interpreted it as a great gift, an invitation to open himself to possibility.

The kiss that had brought on hopeless infatuation had as well the power to rescue him from his self-made, negative image: to make him more of a man, grow in confidence, become healthier and more self-assured. We see this possibility in his brief conversation with Madame von Rabbek at the party when, for once, his shyness and self-loathing are absent, banished by a kiss.

Moreover, "The Kiss" should remind us that prototypes of Ryabovich live among us today here in America—lonely men who yearn for affection, but who believe, like Ryabovich, that their physical appearance or their personality renders that sort of love an impossibility. Instead of falling, as Ryabovich does, into despair, we should hope they take the leap toward life and the possible engagement with life that the kiss has offered them.

So, while some may find "The Kiss" a story about the hopelessness of the human condition, for me it speaks more of missed chances, of the dangers of turning a blind eye to possibility, and of the love and affection so many of us need and desire.

In "Love Is Not All," Edna St. Vincent Millay gives us this pointed reminder:

Love can not fill the thickened lung with breath,  
Nor clean the blood, nor set the fractured bone;  
Yet many a man is making friends with death  
Even as I speak, for lack of love alone.

However long a man like Ryabovich has to live, he has already made friends with death.

Jeff Minick has four children and a growing platoon of grandchildren. For 20 years, he taught history, literature, and Latin to seminars of homeschooling students in Asheville, N.C. He is the author of two novels, "Amanda Bell" and "Dust on Their Wings," and two works of nonfiction, "Learning As I Go" and "Movies Make the Man." Today, he lives and writes in Front Royal, Va.



▲ "The Kiss," 1885, by Auguste Toulmouche. Oil on canvas. Ary Jan Art Gallery, Paris.



TRUTH and TRADITION

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Snuffbox, 1734–1735, by Daniel Gouers. Gold, diamonds; 1 by 3 1/4 by 2 3/8 inches. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

“Box With Courting Couples,” 14th century. Elephant ivory with modern iron and cardboard mounts; 2.75 inches by 6.1 inches by 3.6 inches. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Cassone, circa 1425–1450. Pinewood and poplar, gesso, partly gilded, form molded, and painted; 20 inches by 58.7 inches. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

DECORATIVE ARTS

# Unpacking Boxes From the Past

Continued from Page 1

### Courting Couples

The Metropolitan Museum of Art’s “Box With Courting Couples” is an exemplary ivory box composed of six panels from the 14th-century French royal courts. Boxes like this were often commissioned and gifted among royals and aristocrats during festive occasions. This work is also emblematic of artisanal evolution. In earlier times, vessels such as this were adorned with decorative designs including foliate and figural motifs. However, in the 14th century, carvers crafted storytelling narratives, drawing on tales from antiquity, epics, and romances.

The theme of this jewelry box is generalized vignettes of romantic courtship and love set in an imagined idyllic setting. Scenes include maidens with men kneeling before them, with some being encouraged while others are snubbed, a suitor offering a ring to his beloved, hand-holding and embracing couples, flower gathering to make a crown, and horseback riding with hawks.

### Italian Cassone

Large decorated wooden chests called cassoni are historic objects unique to Italy. They were produced from the 14th to 16th centuries, mainly in central Italy. The production of cassoni was a thriving industry, and there were artisan workshops

devoted solely to their manufacture and decoration. As in medieval caskets, their decoration often included mythological, classical, biblical, or personally symbolic motifs.

A cassone was typically commissioned by a man on the occasion of his marriage. Given to his bride, it would be filled with her dowry and trousseau, and would be paraded during their public ceremonial nuptial procession. Many couples had more than one, with each holding items of great value. Accordingly, their exteriors were richly ornamented. By the late 1300s, cassoni were the most luxurious items of furniture in an Italian home. After a wedding, they would be proudly displayed in the newlyweds’ main bedchamber, signifying

the unification of two families. The more elaborate and luxurious the cassone, the greater its status symbol as a reflection of family wealth.

Since cassoni were valuable pieces of furniture, they would have been moved from home to home. As a result, many cassoni were damaged over time. Cassoni decorated with elaborate exterior gilding were particularly susceptible to incurring damage. Thus, the surviving 15th-century Tuscan Renaissance cassone at The Met is a rare and esteemed example.

The Met’s cassone features ornamental and figural carvings. It is illustrated with a pattern of facing eagles, two heraldic shields representing the bride’s and groom’s fami-

lies, and a fleur-de-lis pattern. Three main decorative media were used on cassoni: intarsia, in which designs are inlaid; painted panels; and pastiglia, which are sculptural reliefs made in gesso. The Met’s cassone falls into the latter category. Its raised decorations were modeled with the use of a mold on a wooden base in gesso (a plaster mixture used as a primer especially in the Middle Ages and Renaissance) and subsequently gilded.

### Needlework Casket

Pursuing fine embroidery and needlework as a privileged female leisure activity became popular in England during the 16th century. Prominent practitioners who could spare the time to learn the craft and afford the luxurious materials included Mary, Queen of Scots. In the next century, the production of small decorative caskets (or small cabinets) was the height of an affluent girl’s needlework education.

These caskets were usually decorated with a set scene on each side, with themes ranging from mythological to biblical to pastoral. The interiors contained multiple compartments, sometimes also hidden ones, that were used by young women to store personal possessions such as jewelry,

toiletries, writing and sewing implements, and letters.

The needlework casket is a fine example in the Royal Collection Trust that is covered in long stitch needlework in silk. Its frontal scene shows a stylish man and woman in a landscape, with each figure set on a door. However, the casket opens in a total of three places and includes divisions, drawers, and hidden compartments. The makers of such surviving boxes are seldom conclusively known.

This object is also called “The Little Gidding Cabinet” as it is thought to be the handiwork of one of the Miss Colletts. The young ladies were famous for their skill with a needle and grew up in the Little Gidding Anglican religious community in Cambridgeshire, England. Mary, Queen of Scots’s grandson, King Charles I, was a patron of the community. According to tradition, this casket was acquired by the king himself, but he left it with the Collett family for safekeeping. It remained in the Collett family until the late 19th century when it was purchased by Queen Victoria, thus returning it to the royal family.

### Parisian Snuffbox

In the late 16th century, tobacco began to be exported from the New World to Europe. At first, smoking tobacco became a popular habit. But during the 18th century, the taking of a pinch of snuff (tobacco in powdered form) evolved into an elaborate aristocratic ritual that denoted taste, status, and wealth.

Vessels called snuffboxes were created to hold the substance, and this

gave craftsmen the opportunity to fashion magnificent works employing a range of decorative materials from jewels to miniature portraits, lacquer, mother-of-pearl, hardstones, and enamel to bases made of gold, silver, tortoiseshell, or porcelain.

Wealthy owners would have had a collection of snuffboxes that they could match to their fashion or the season. Snuffboxes were exchanged as presents between friends and lovers, like medieval ivory caskets, along with being employed as diplomatic gifts. In fact, a secret language pertaining to specific snuffbox gestures developed in the European courts.

**A cassone, commissioned by a groom, would be filled with his bride’s dowry and trousseau.**

Eighteenth-century Paris, much like today, was the capital of the luxury goods market. It was also the center of snuffbox production. Lids had to be made secure in order for the snuff to remain fresh. The most expensive examples were made of gold. One of the greatest goldsmiths of the period was Daniel Gouers. His snuffbox at The Met is an early example of Rococo decorative arts. This style is characterized by flowing asymmetrical curves, abstract scrolls, and undulating forms. This sumptuous snuffbox brilliantly showcases these motifs with high-quality goldwork and a profusion of diamonds.

These four historic boxes were both public and private objects in their time. They were deeply personal items that stowed valuables and sometimes concealed secrets. In addition, they visibly signaled attributes about their owners and displayed the skill of artisans, many of whom thought “outside the box” to craft these unique items. That is why they are still treasured today in fine art museums.

*Michelle Plastrik is an art adviser living in New York City. She writes on a range of topics, including art history, the art market, museums, art fairs, and special exhibitions.*

OPERA

# Creating Beauty From Sadness

Offenbach’s light opera masterpiece has 3 tales in one

By Ariane Triebswetter

A mechanical doll, a young singer, and a Venetian courtesan. All are loved by Hoffmann, the central character of “The Tales of Hoffmann,” a captivating opera wherein reality and fantasy become one.

Based on three stories by E.T.A. Hoffmann, the opera follows the love of Hoffmann for Olympia, Antonia, and Giulietta. Despite being a dark tale, it is filled with melodic richness, instantly recognizable arias, funny moments, and emotional depth. It is also Jacques Offenbach’s last and greatest work, with a fascinating background.

During his lifetime, Offenbach was famous for his operettas, a light operatic genre that he popularized. However, the composer wanted to be remembered for more, and “The Tales of Hoffmann” (“Les Contes



◀ An illustration from the Olympia act, as staged at the 1981 premiere of “The Tales of Hoffmann.” Gallica Digital Library.

d’Hoffmann”), with a libretto written by Jules Barbier, became a masterpiece of French Romantic opera. Unfortunately, Offenbach died before the premiere in Paris, leaving the score incomplete.

Ernest Guiraud completed the score, and the posthumous premiere in 1881 at the Opéra-Comique in Paris was an immediate success. Performed 100 times in its opening year, the “opéra fantastique” gained an immediate following, which endures to this day.

### A Compelling Tale

“The Tales of Hoffmann” is one of the most popular works in the opera repertoire. Its compelling story, featuring themes of love, music, truth, illusion, art, and science, is unique and continues to fascinate audiences all over the world. Over the years, music scholars have found different manuscripts for the opera and different versions of the score. The order of the acts may vary with each production, but the overall story remains generally the same.

The opera begins with the prologue in

Luther’s Tavern in Nuremberg, Germany. Hoffmann is thinking about his love for Stella, a famous opera singer. As always, he is accompanied by his muse, disguised as Nicklausse, the poet’s friend.

A crowd of students arrives at the tavern, and Hoffmann entertains them with the tale of Kleinzech, a legendary dwarf. However, the poet’s mind keeps wandering off, preoccupied with romance. Encouraged by the students, he starts to tell them about his past loves. Councilor Lindorf, Hoffmann’s

rival for Stella, plays a crucial role in these and becomes the villain in the three unfortunate love affairs.

Hoffmann’s first love is Olympia, a mechanical doll. He arrives at a party organized by Spalanzani to show off his newest invention and falls deeply in love with Olympia, who he believes to be human despite Nicklausse’s warnings. The doll performs a brilliant aria, and Hoffmann, wearing a pair of magic glasses, is infatuated. The glasses’ maker, Coppélius, who is a representation of Councilor Lindorf, is furious when Spalanzani gives him a bad check for his contribution to making Olympia and so smashes the mechanical doll. Horrified, Hoffmann has to accept that she is not human.

The young singer Antonia is Hoffmann’s next love. Hoffmann and Nicklausse visit her, and they sing a love song. However, the singing exhausts Antonia and she’s forbidden to sing due to her poor health. The villain, Dr. Miracle, leads her to her death by encouraging her to sing.

In Venice, Hoffmann meets the beautiful courtesan Giulietta and falls in love with her. She is under the influence of Dapertutto, a sorcerer who wishes to procure Hoffmann’s reflection. Giulietta carries out the magician’s wish, and then breaks Hoffmann’s heart as she takes on a new lover, drifting away in a gondola.

Back in Luther’s Tavern, the “tales” are over. Stella arrives at the tavern and, finding Hoffmann drunk, leaves with Lindorf. Although she declares her eternal love for the poet, Stella tells him to find consolation in his art. Hoffmann begins to awaken, inspired by the various characters. His creative genius is reborn from the ashes of his suffering.



◀ An illustration of the Giulietta act, Gallica Digital Library.

### A Memorable Score

“The Tales of Hoffmann,” as well as being a captivating story with great emotional depth, marks Offenbach’s musical genius through a memorable score.

The “doll aria” is the most famous aria of the opera. It is a florid aria for a coloratura soprano and one of the most demanding in the operatic repertoire. Its music is so difficult that it seems only a machine could sing it, through which the composer explores the lines between fantasy and reality.

Generally, the three heroines are sung by

three separate singers with different voice types. However, sometimes one singer sings all the roles to reinforce the idea that they are all facets of Stella. This is an arduous task, demanding great flexibility and technique with different requirements upon the voice—from coloratura to lyric or dramatic soprano.

Another famous piece in this opera is the “Barcarolle,” a duet between Giulietta and Nicklausse about the pleasures of love, generally sung by a soprano and mezzo-soprano. It is one of the most

famous and beautiful melodies in opera history.

Many other arias fill this memorable score. A work like no other, “The Tales of Hoffmann” earned its place in the opera repertoire through its captivating story and compelling score, with the ultimate message that life experiences can be transformed into great art.

*Ariane Triebswetter is an international freelance journalist, with a background in modern literature and classical music.*





▲ The Lick Observatory in 1900.

PROFILES IN HISTORY

# Carpenter Turned Tycoon

How the California real estate mogul made his money

By Dustin Bass

James Lick (1796–1876) was the eldest of seven children and became a master carpenter under the strict tutelage of his father. Born and raised in a place called Stumpstown, the Pennsylvanian had his sights set on a young girl whom he had fallen in love with and incidentally impregnated. When the 21-year-old asked for her hand in marriage, her father, a mill owner, responded caustically, “When you own a mill as large and costly as mine, you can have my daughter’s hand, but not before.” Angered by the insult, he shot back, “Some day, I will own a mill that will make yours look like a pigsty!”

Henceforth, his great effort to win his prize and settle the score with the miller began. He first moved to Baltimore to learn the trade of building pianos. Already possessing the gift for woodworking, his transition to pianos was seamless. After apprenticing in Baltimore, he moved to New York and opened a piano business. As he sold pianos, he began to realize that most of his inventory was going to South America. Simple economics suggested a move to the southern continent,

which would eliminate shipping costs and dangers.

**South America and Back Again**  
In 1821, Lick moved to Buenos Aires. Although business was successful, the atmosphere was rife with political turmoil. Argentina had won its independence from Spain only five years before he arrived, and now he worked in the country’s seat of power. After several years of increasing product demand and continuous profit mixed with an uncertain political and social scene, he decided to take a year-long vacation to Europe.

Relaxed and rejuvenated, Lick hopped a ship back to Buenos Aires. Whatever peace and serenity he had secured in Europe was undoubtedly lost on the return trip, as his ship nearly sank during a fearsome storm, and after surviving it, the ship was captured by a Portuguese man-of-war. The ship was hauled into Montevideo,

Uruguay, and all on board became prisoners of war. Lick, undeterred and never forgetting the motivation for his hard work, made a daring escape and finally arrived in Buenos Aires.

The demand for his intricate musical instruments remained high, and by 1832, he believed he had saved up enough money to win his lover’s hand and possibly shame her father. He had saved up \$40,000 (about \$1.4 million today) and returned to Stumpstown. Apparently, he had never informed his family that his motivation for working so long and diligently was to marry the miller’s daughter.

When he arrived, he was soon notified that she was already married. Lick left Pennsylvania downcast. He returned to his Argentine home and continued his business. South America, however, was a hotbed

for revolution. From Buenos Aires, Lick moved to Valparaiso, Chile, where he remained for four years until war appeared on the horizon. The piano maker moved

to Lima, Peru, and remained for 11 years, making friends and plenty of money. One of those friends was a chocolatier by the name of Domingo Ghirardelli. This friendship would eventually pay dividends to both men and, later, the world.

Lick maintained a close eye on America’s foreign relations. When the Mexican-American War broke out, he believed that much of Mexico would soon belong to America. In the spring of 1846, he began making plans to move to California, but many of his workers who were Mexican had joined the fight against America. With numerous piano orders outstanding, he resolved to build them himself, then close up shop in Peru and move to California. By November 1847, Lick was on a ship bound for San Francisco. Only days after his arrival, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo would be signed, which ceded more than half of Mexico’s territory to America, including Nevada, Utah, New Mexico, most of Arizona and Colorado, parts of Oklahoma, Kansas, and Wyoming, and of course, California.

**Perfect Timing**

Lick arrived in the city of the Golden Gate full of gold and chocolate. Armed with

made by the U.S. and Japanese leaders during the spring and summer of 1945. Stimson and Spaatz are shown as moderating forces in the U.S. deployment of atomic weapons. Togo was the only Supreme War Council member seeking peace through surrender.

Peace was not really the issue. By 1945, Japan wanted the war to end but, as Mr. Thomas shows, on its own terms. Its islands were to remain unoccupied, and its government and surviving military left intact. It wanted to be able to claim that it had “won” the war, even if it had really lost. These terms were unacceptable to the Allies. They wanted to neutralize Japan’s military threat the same way they neutralized Nazi Germany’s—through unconditional surrender.

Following the bomb on Hiroshima, Japan’s military wanted to continue the war. It took the intervention of Emperor Hirohito, Russia attacking Japan, and the Nagasaki bomb to force the Supreme War Council to finally yield. Mr. Thomas shows

ration of war on Japan, the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was necessary to force Japan’s surrender. Anything less would have allowed the Imperial Army to continue the war.

Mr. Thomas uses three men to focus the story: Henry Stimson, Carl “Tooe” Spaatz, and Shigenori Togo. Stimson was the U.S. secretary of war. Leading the U.S. war effort, he was the one man with the big picture of the atomic bomb project. Gen. Spaatz commanded the U.S. Strategic Air Forces in the Pacific, in ultimate charge of the air war against Japan. Shigenori Togo was Japan’s foreign minister, one of six members of Japan’s Supreme War Council.

Through these three, Mr. Thomas frames events. He follows the decisions



▲ James Lick first built pianos. PUBLIC DOMAIN

BOOK REVIEW

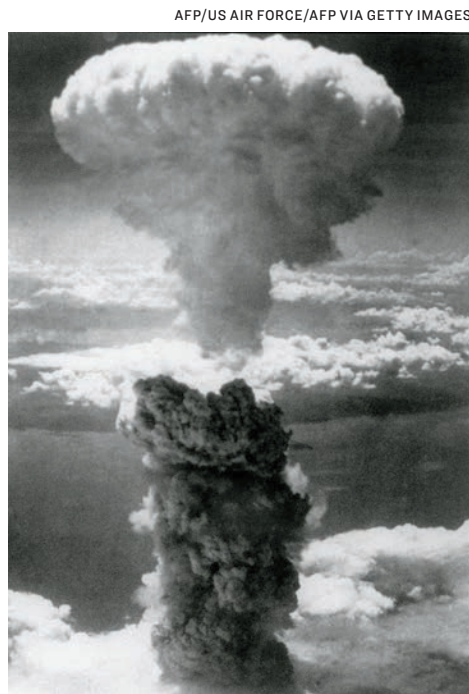
## Why the Hiroshima and Nagasaki Bombings Were Necessary

By Mark Lardas

In August 1945, the United States dropped two atomic bombs on Japan to end World War II. Since then, an industry has emerged insisting that bombing Hiroshima and Nagasaki was unnecessary. That Japan would have surrendered soon without that drastic measure. That an uninhabited target would have sufficed instead of a city.

**‘Road to Surrender’**

“Road to Surrender: Three Men and the Countdown to the End of World War II,” by Evan Thomas, examines that question. Mr. Thomas’s ultimate conclusion is that, combined with Russia’s decla-



▲ The second atomic bomb exploding on Nagasaki, Japan, on Aug. 9, 1945.

AFP/US AIR FORCE/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

his workbench, tools, \$30,000 in Peruvian gold, and more than 500 pounds of Ghirardelli chocolate, he was ready to make his mark in the newly won territory. With immense capital, he began purchasing real estate in San Francisco. His chocolate sold quickly, so quickly that he advised his friend of the lucrative possibilities in San Francisco. Ghirardelli took his advice, moved to San Francisco, and has ever since captivated America’s sweet tooth.

Lick proved to have exceptional timing. Not only had he arrived right before the treaty signing, but he also had begun his real estate purchasing merely weeks before gold was found at Sutter’s Mill. The Gold Rush was on. Lick transitioned from wealthy piano maker to real estate magnate. Property owners sold their land on the cheap in order to quickly head for the hills and mountains in search of gold. Lick would become one of the state’s richest men and would build numerous buildings, including an elaborate mill in 1855 that cost him \$200,000. Though the miller of Stumpstown (by then named Fredericksburg) was probably dead by then, he had photos taken of the mill and then disseminated throughout Fredericksburg to make his point known.

Along with the mill, he built the Lick House, arguably the finest hotel west of the Mississippi River. Its 400-seat dining hall was modeled after the one he had seen in the Palace of Versailles. Lick, still a master carpenter, built the hall’s wood inlay.

**Leaving His Fortune**

Lick’s fortune was immense. Shortly before he died, he created his will, which left much of his fortune for numerous charities, including establishing public baths, a home for elderly widows, a vocational school, statues in memory of his parents and grandfather, and a large donation to an orphanage. His largest gift, however, would be to honor his name and legacy. Several ideas were floated around, including a pyramid to rival those of Egypt or a statue of himself that could be seen from far out at sea. But Lick decided that his money would go to the advancement of science.

When he died, \$700,000 (nearly \$20 million today), which is the largest philanthropic donation in the history of science, was earmarked to build an observatory that would possess the most powerful telescope in the world. It would be placed atop Mount Hamilton.

Construction of what would become the Lick Observatory began in 1880. During this time, a 36-inch refractor lens was ordered to be built. The project advanced at a glacial pace due to years of delays and a shipping mishap that cracked the initial lens. In January of 1887, with the observatory nearly complete, Lick’s body was reinterred under the pier that would hold the large telescope. On Dec. 31, the lens was placed in the telescope, but poor weather prevented observation. It was several days later that observers were finally able to observe “first light,” which proved to be the Aldebaran star in the constellation of Taurus.

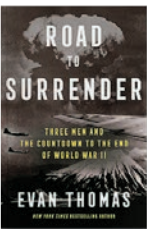
The Lick Observatory is now owned and operated by the University of California and is used by all nine UC astronomy campuses. The observatory continues to be used to test and develop astronomical instruments and technologies.

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that, even then, it was a yielding that almost didn’t happen. An attempted coup occurred, the day of the surrender, to force the war’s continuance.

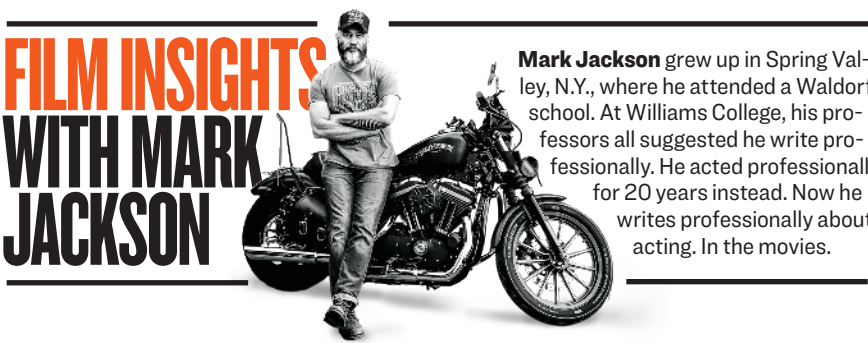
“Road to Surrender” should settle the question of the necessity of using the atomic bomb. A magisterial work, it is excellently researched. Still more impressive is the clarity and readability the book possesses.

*Mark Lardas, an engineer, freelance writer, historian, and model-maker, lives in League City, Texas. His website is MarkLardas.com*



**‘ROAD TO SURRENDER: THREE MEN AND THE COUNTDOWN TO THE END OF WORLD WAR II’**

By Evan Thomas  
Random House  
May 16, 2023  
Hardcover  
336 pages



**Mark Jackson** grew up in Spring Valley, N.Y., where he attended a Waldorf school. At Williams College, his professors all suggested he write professionally. He acted professionally for 20 years instead. Now he writes professionally about acting. In the movies.

FILM REVIEW

## ‘Top Gun’ Meets ‘The Hill’

Race car gamer tries the real deal

By Mark Jackson

“Gran Turismo” didn’t do well at the box office; probably bad marketing and a sub-par poster. But it should have been a 2023 summer sleeper hit—it’s big, big fun. When word of mouth gets around, I predict this racing movie will grow legs, er, wheels, and join many families’ movie collections.

Now, mind you, when I heard the premise, I scoffed. Some gamer kid who plays car games goes on to become a professional race car driver? Yeah, right. Oh wait—it’s a true story? Well, whaddya know?

And then, immediately, I scoffed some more: Well, yeah, okay, so car simulator games must be uncannily accurate—the skills must transpose easy. But let some l’il gamer dude try something where toughness, physicality, and athleticism are involved. Like, say, let some “SOCOM U.S. Navy SEALs” gamer kid try and be an actual Navy SEAL.

**Hello?**

And then I remembered: Ex-SEAL Rorke Denver has listed seven different archetypal categories of men who tend to be successful at becoming Navy SEALs:

- 1) Smurf SEAL
- 2) Rough-upbringing SEAL
- 3) Brawler SEAL
- 4) Proto SEAL
- 5) Legacy SEAL
- 6) Ivy League SEAL
- 7) Gamer SEAL

In 2005 and 2006, Microsoft’s Xbox 360, Sony’s Playstation 3, and Nintendo’s Wii kicked off the modern age of high-definition gaming. I personally can’t stand the whole concept of gaming, but, per “Gran Turismo,” I’ve now come to see that the gaming phenomenon has become something to be reckoned with. It can clearly provide a person with the archetypal 10,000 hours of practice needed to master a skill set. And if an individual possesses the passion and the grit to endure beyond the simulator—they can be real contenders. Kind of amazing, really.

**Story**

Kazunori Yamauchi, the game’s designer, spent many years working on perfecting the simulation’s looks and performances, using a wide selection of vehicles (most of which are licensed reproductions of real race cars) and also mapping out all the top, real-world racetracks. All of which combine to give gamers the detail-rich sensation that they’re doing the real thing. “Gran Turismo” is about GT racing—circuit auto racing utilizing 2-seat cars with enclosed wheels (unlike Grand Prix racing’s single-seat Formula 1 cars, that have exposed wheels).

But “Gran Turismo” is primarily about the true story of a motley crew of young male and female GT gamers who actually managed to transition from simulation driving to actual track racing, under the tutelage of talented trainer and former driver Jack Salter (David Harbour). Salter himself had bailed on his own racing dreams after an accident that he was involved in, early in his career, through no fault of his own, resulted in someone’s death.

**Legolas Has a Dream**

I will never be able to look at Orlando Bloom without seeing “The Lord of the Rings” archery-elf Legolas, but be that as it may, Mr. Bloom here plays motorsport executive Danny Moore. Moore enthusiastically pitches the idea of sponsoring a contest among the best simulator drivers in the world, for the chance to compete in a real race, to the Nissan car company.

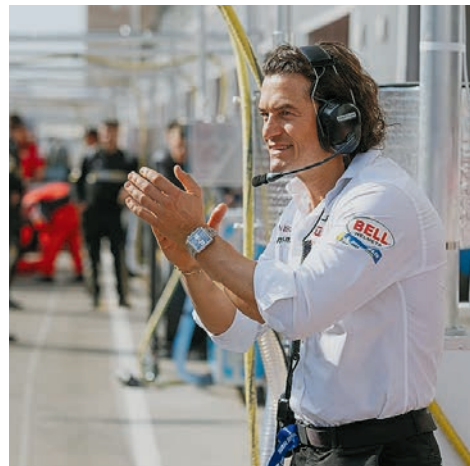
The risks and liability must have seemed outrageous, but Nissan bought it as an innovative, long-term marketing scheme. They built an extensive and grueling racing academy that served to sift out the best of the best. Which makes it basically a race car driving “Top Gun.” Jann Mardenborough (Archie Made-



▲ Jann Mardenborough (Archie Madekwe) ready to race, in “Gran Turismo.”



▲ GT race cars ready to take off.



▲ Gran-Turismo-to-real-racing mastermind Danny Moore (Orlando Bloom) cheers the racers, in “Gran Turismo.”

kwe), an extremely talented gamer from a working-class family, whose only life goal was to become an actual driver despite his dad’s (Djimon Hounsou, playing a similar role to the one Dennis Quaid recently played in “The Hill”) virulent objections. Jann’s mom (former Spice Girl Geri Halliwell Horner) is more supportive of her boy, as moms tend to be.

**Out of the Frying Pan and Onto the Track**

Salter, having recently ditched his job as crew chief of the Capa team due to despising the owner’s spoiled-brat kid, Nicholas Capa (Joshua Stradowski), who’s also the team’s driver, took this weird gig in order to finally be, more or less, his own man.

Salter basically plays the Cmdr. Mike Metcalf (aka “Viper”) “Top Gun” role, except that he doesn’t believe in the GT program and sees his job as trying his best to wash every last miserable wannabe-driver out of the program rather than to create winners. But also, after seeing some formidable talent begin to blossom in Jann, to protect the untried rookies from killing themselves.

After all, gamers tend to be out-of-shape pencil-necks. The whiplash from standing starts that generate 467 foot-pounds of torque, the near fighter-jet level g-force turns, and the fact that you can’t hit “reset” in the wake of a fiery crash can almost guarantee that one of these kids is either going to be headed to the ER on a gurney or to the morgue in a body-bag. Which of course necessitates some “Rocky”-like getting-in-shape montages.

Jann’s start in real-world racing is not half bad—no one, especially the pit crews, expects him to even finish the race. He improves gradually, from race to race, and the excitement begins to build. Jann needs to become a top finisher in order to get his race car license, and he pulls it off. However, there’s a major setback, à la the “Top Gun” Maverick-and-the-death-of-Goose scene, and Salter has to extol the virtues of immediately getting back in the driver’s seat, like Viper saying of Maverick, “Keep sending him up.”

**The Showdown**

“Gran Turismo” crescendos to the 24-hour race at Germany’s Nürburgring, where Jann and two other drivers from the academy are under massive pressure

to win in order to keep the flagging interest of the Nissan sponsors in play. The Nürburgring ordeal is exhausting, rainy, slippery, dangerous, harrowing, and unbelievably thrilling to watch.

But wait, there’s an even bigger showdown! The Le Mans race in France, where Salter flamed out and ended his career.

Director Blomkamp packs the race scenes with so much tension that the audience hoots and claps when there’s a major tension resolution. He also shows us visually how Jann uses his 10,000 simulation training hours to ingeniously outmaneuver his opponents—especially archenemy Capa—by finding hidden lanes in race car traffic like a Walter Payton or a Gale Sayers navigating NFL defenses—nobody else can see them but him.

It must be said that the film unnecessarily sets up Capa as the villain, whereas the real villain here is death by inexperience. It works though; it’s good fun.

The film’s race sequences leave us buzzing with energy and a teeny bit exhausted, as they should. “GT” will be compared to “Days of Thunder” (another Tom Cruise, er, vehicle), and it is basically the same movie but with a less charismatic lead. It doesn’t matter, though. The lead performance is that of a low-charisma-having, downtrodden, unformed, millennial boy striving to follow his bliss and get out from under his father’s iron-willed dominance. Win or lose (you’ll have to watch it and find out which), the kid managed to get himself out of his bedroom and his mall job selling underwear and attempt something great. Very inspiring!

**‘Gran Turismo’**

**Director**  
Neill Blomkamp

**Starring**  
Orlando Bloom, David Harbour, Archie Madekwe, Djimon Hounsou, Geri Horner

**Running Time**  
2 hours, 14 minutes  
**MPAA Rating**  
PG-13

**Release Date**  
Aug. 25, 2023

★★★★★



POPCORN AND INSPIRATION

# Great Knowledge Nurtured by Great Love

A great mind can break down unless supported by those who care

By Rudolph Lambert Fernandez

Director Ron Howard’s film based on the life of American mathematician John Forbes Nash Jr. is more a fictionalized fable about the healing power of love than a faithfully accurate biopic. Nash may have won the 1994 Nobel Memorial Prize in Economics, but his contributions to “governing dynamics” are nearly impossible to make entertaining for the screen. So, it’s a tribute to Mr. Howard and his crew that the film won four of its eight Oscar nominations.

At Princeton University on a 1947 Carnegie Scholarship, John Nash (Russell Crowe) befriends college mates Martin Hansen (Josh Lucas) and Richard Sol (Adam Goldberg). Nash’s research exploits earn him a place at MIT, and his charming social awkwardness earns him a place in the heart of girlfriend Alicia (Jennifer Connelly).

Married to Alicia, but bored with teaching, Nash runs into the mysterious Agent William Parcher (Ed Harris) who commissions him to decipher encrypted messages from the Soviets that U.S. military intelligence officers have intercepted.

Nash starts spending his days poring over magazines and newspapers hunting for hidden patterns, delivering his findings to a “classified” mailbox. Soon, he’s withdrawing into himself, suspecting that he’s being pursued by Soviet agents led by another mystery man, Dr. Rosen (Christopher Plummer).

Diagnosed with schizophrenia and for years in a psychiatric hospital, Nash eventually alienates Alicia and their baby after he secretly discontinues medication. But Alicia stays by his side, valiantly trying to nurse him back to health.

Hanson’s empathy overrides the professional envy he may have felt watching Nash’s rise. Ms. Connelly’s outstanding turn as faithful Alicia, torn between hopes



▲ John Nash (Russell Crowe), in 2001’s “A Beautiful Mind.”

for a normal life and the grind of caring for Nash as he rides a rollercoaster of delusion, won her a Best Supporting Actress Oscar.

Mr. Crowe tinges his swaggering but tragic Nash with just enough humor and humility to make him lovable. Boxed in by the empty pathos of his equations and symbols, he first strives for “recognition,” whether from “achievement” or not, and then watches helplessly as his fragmenting mind tries to wrest both from his grasp.

James Horner’s soundtrack mirrors Nash’s psychological jolts between hallucination and reality. Akiva Goldsman’s screenplay, adapted from Sylvia Nasar’s biography of Nash, expertly draws you into Nash’s worldview, one that masks a painfully real confusion in his mind with a pretended clarity in his imagination.

But Mr. Howard’s not about to dismiss the imagination. In fact, he suggests that it may be love’s faith and imagination that elevates and transforms the mind, making it beautiful.

**A Steadfast Love**

It’s tempting to be swept up by the virtuosic showcases early in the film of intellectual prowess, Nash’s, or that of his Ivy League buddies. But Mr. Howard briskly moves past his teaser to the main event: Alicia’s love for Nash, how that love is tested and proven, and how Nash struggles, despite his mental misery, to respond to that love.

Howard takes his time, introducing Alicia a full 30 minutes in. But from that moment, she becomes Nash’s “governing dynamics,” sensibly and sensitively showing him a warm universe of the heart beyond his cold world of algorithms.

She believes in “deciding” that things will be good luck; he doesn’t believe in luck at all. Ever the logician, Nash asks for “proof” that theirs will be a long-term commitment; she playfully reminds him that as the physical universe is infinite without knowing for certain that it is, so too, love is an act of faith.

As Nash’s psychiatric treatment runs its bruising course, Sol drops by to check in on Alicia, to see how she and the baby are coping. She looks up from the pram and delivers one of the most profound on-screen sermons on marital love that’s severely tested: “Often, what I feel is obligation, or guilt over wanting to leave. Rage! Against John, against God ... but then I look at him, and I force myself to see the man that I married. And he becomes that man. He’s transformed into someone that I love. And I’m transformed into someone who loves him. It’s not all the time, but it’s enough.”

Mr. Goldsman and Mr. Howard show, in ways that few filmmakers do, how it’s the heart not the head that “knows the waking from the dream,” how it’s love’s faith and imagination that separates what’s real from what’s unreal, what’s fleeting from what’s lasting and worth preserving. A beautiful mind, it turns out, is Alicia’s.

*You can watch “A Beautiful Mind” on Amazon Video, Vudu, and Apple TV.*

*Rudolph Lambert Fernandez is an independent writer who writes on pop culture.*

‘A Beautiful Mind’

**Director**  
Ron Howard

**Starring**  
Russell Crowe, Jennifer Connelly, Josh Lucas

**Running Time**  
2 hours, 15 minutes

**MPAA Rating**  
PG-13

**Release Date**  
Dec. 21, 2001

★★★★★

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