

The Orchestration of Chaos: The Context and
Structure of the Novels
of William Gaddis

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ABSTRACT

A major issue in William Gaddis' novels, The Recognitions and JR, is the problematic role of art and the artist. The thesis traces this theme to certain classic and romantic ideas about art in the nineteenth-century American romance, as well as to the literary theories of such modernists as T.S. Eliot and Virginia Woolf, and to the theories of such disparate writers as, among others, the New Critics and Alain Robbe-Grillet. The ideas and structure of Gaddis' novels are located and discussed in relation to this context. Like many contemporary novelists, Gaddis transposes his themes into the reflexive structures of his works. His development of self-referring form culminates in JR, a novel in which language is itself the structural and thematic focus. This thesis shows that, although Gaddis' novels demonstrate the modernist tenet that art vindicates life, they are also powerful satires which express the writer's concern for the social relevance of art.

RESUME

Un thème majeur dans les romans de William Gaddis, The Recognitions et JR, est le rôle problématique de l'art et de l'artiste. La thèse retrace ce thème à certaines idées classiques et romantiques de l'art dans le romanisme américain du dix-neuvième siècle, aux théories littéraires de modernistes tels que T.S. Eliot et Virginia Woolf, et aux théories d'écrivains disparates tels que les Nouveaux Critiques et Alain Robbe-Grillet: Les idées et la structure des romans de Gaddis se situent et se discutent en relation à ce contexte. Comme plusieurs romanciers contemporains, Gaddis transpose ses thèmes dans les structures réflexives de ses oeuvres. Son développement de la forme réflexive culmine dans JR, un roman dans lequel le langage même est le point de mire structural et thématique. Cette thèse soutient que, quoique les romans de Gaddis démontrent le principe moderniste que l'art revendique la vie, ils sont aussi des satires puissantes qui expriment la préoccupation de l'écrivain vis-à-vis de la pertinence sociale de l'art.

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INTRODUCTION

William Gaddis' novels, The Recognitions and JR, have for their central theme the problems of modern art. Gaddis' main characters are artists and his novels are forums for their ideas as well as fictional milieus for their actions. Gaddis carries the artists' dilemmas into his fictional structures, making form an extension of content and rendering the novel a symbolic compensation for, if not a resolution of, these artistic conflicts. Certainly Gaddis is not the first novelist to make art and the artist his fictional concern.¹ Modernism has come to be recognized as the pluralistic tradition which has made artistic creation, itself, a prominent theme in literature.² Nor is he alone in creating formal structures which take account of his theme. Reflexiveness is characteristic of much modern literature.³ This thesis will explicate the theme and structure of Gaddis' novels against the background of modernism in order to show the continuity and evolution of The Recognitions and JR within an influential literary tradition. In creating the context for Gaddis' novels, I have brought together a number of disparate works from nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature and literary theory which present art and the role of the artist as problematic. Although the selected writers represent different genres, periods, and literary theories, they share a conviction that the world does

not provide a secure, receptive home for artistic creation. In reasserting the place of art, these writers, in varying ways, make art the subject matter of their own creations. Gaddis' novels carry on this artistic self-consciousness.

Although articles have mentioned the theme of art as evidence of reflexiveness in Gaddis' fiction, no contextual and formal analysis of The Recognitions and JR, such as this thesis sets forth, has been produced.⁴ Thematic, textual and source studies have appeared, as well as analyses based on principles of time and reader response.⁵ All these works, the present included, have a common respect for literary form as the basis of literary analysis. This thesis establishes the literary tradition behind Gaddis' theme and demonstrates his extension of this theme into novelistic form.

The methodology of this thesis consists of a thematic and formal analysis of Gaddis' novels with reference to a background of literary and cultural history provided by representative works of literary modernism, nineteenth-century American romance fiction, and selected documents of literary theory contemporary with the appearance of The Recognitions in 1955 and also relevant to the more recent novel, JR.⁶ This method finds precedents in the work of a number of critics, among them Richard Chase who, in The American Novel and its Tradition, has attempted to locate the unique nature of the American novel in the romance.⁷ In Symbolism and American Literature, Charles Feidelson has illuminated the connection between symbolism and classic and modern American literature.⁸ Tony Tanner, in City

of Words, has provided a study of the modern American novel which stresses the theme of individual creation in much fiction and the relevance of this theme to a variety of cultural trends.⁹

The first chapter of this thesis presents the classic and romantic elements of literary modernism as a context for Gaddis' ideas about art and the artist.¹⁰ It will be shown that modernist literature takes as a central concern the problematic role of the artist and his work. Certain classical attitudes towards tradition and the role of the artist combine with the romantic inheritance of Symbolism to make modernism a complex and influential literary tradition.¹¹ If Gaddis' implicit theory of art may be said to resemble anyone's, it is that of T. S. Eliot, to whose literary theories and techniques Gaddis is indebted. In particular, The Recognitions inherits Eliot's form of romanticism, epitomized in the spiritual nature of the artist's quest, and Eliot's literary classicism with its emphasis on the autonomy of the work. Gaddis' work also exhibits the modernist concern for perception. In his attempt to make the novel illustrate the relativity of perception, Gaddis shares a purpose similar to that of Virginia Woolf. This literary context will show that Gaddis' treatment of the artist's quest also echoes something of the nineteenth-century American romance tradition. Like Hawthorne, Gaddis expresses a profoundly moral vision which is self-consciously American. Like Melville, Gaddis sees the artistic quest as culminating in ambiguity, with a hint of Manichean dualism. Gaddis' novels keep alive the spirit of mystery which romance novelists associated with

the life of art. In addition to these nineteenth- and early twentieth-century influences, certain later developments in Europe and America reveal a concern with the artist and with re-evaluation of the novel form which is applicable to Gaddis' work. In his attempt to expand the formal limits of the genre, especially in JR, Gaddis' implied purposes resemble the novelistic theories of Alain Robbe-Grillet who, like Gaddis, would also make the novel serve the reality of individual perception. Unlike Robbe-Grillet, however, Gaddis' structural innovation makes perception not merely an end in itself but the vehicle of satire. The morality of Gaddis' novels derives from a sense of crisis which the author shares with other American writers and critics of his time. Selected documents from American literary criticism and the American literary community of the 1950s will provide evidence of a sense of artistic alienation and a need to re-evaluate the place of the artist and the purpose of art.

Having established a context in which Gaddis' novels may be interpreted, the thesis moves on to explicate the theme and structure of The Recognitions and JR. The second chapter presents a detailed analysis of the theme of art and the artist in both novels. It will be seen that The Recognitions portrays the artist as a kind of spiritual questor who struggles to make sense of a contingent reality which he must then find ways to express artistically. The chapter reveals the way in which Gaddis' surrealist techniques contribute to the novel's ambiguous outcome. In contrast to the first novel, JR presents

a grimmer vision of the artistic dilemma in depicting the artist as increasingly beleaguered by the conditions of modern life. While the artists of the first novel may have been alienated, they were at least sustained by the vitality of their inner lives. In JR the artistic imagination and the means of expression--in this case, language--are themselves threatened.

No matter how obsessed by ideals or beleaguered by the world, the artists of both novels are shown to need human relations, particularly love, in order to survive. However, love and art are frequently irreconcilable. Chapter Three analyzes the nature of the art-love conflict as it culminates in the artists' relationships with women. A complex pattern of images and symbols links female characters to the artists' dilemmas. In The Recognitions, these symbols indicate the artists' conflicting feelings of desire and guilt as they view women both as art and as love objects. In JR, women are portrayed more unequivocally as destructive muses whose alluring power is part of a larger chaotic element which threatens both art and love.

Chapter Four departs from the previous discussion of characterization and theme to analyze the novels' structures and prove them to be extensions of Gaddis' artistic arguments. The alienation and fragmentation of reality felt by the artists of The Recognitions are transposed into the discontinuous narrative in which counterfeit meanings abound and the artist-characters, as well as the reader, are challenged to piece together the fragments of meaning. It will be shown that the novel contains an organization which, with the help of an

intrusive narrative voice, provides a formal resolution transcending the ambiguity of plot and characterization. In JR, Gaddis further develops innovative structural techniques to make the novel a more completely reflexive work. Image patterns and parodies of myth are linked to Gaddis' theme--cultural degeneration--at the level of the novel's language. This chapter will prove that the structure of JR is the basis of both the novel's satire and its celebration of art and the artist.

NOTES

¹The following are some of the more venerable modern novels to make art and the artist a central theme: André Gide, The Counterfeiters; James Joyce, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man; Thomas Mann, Doctor Faustus; Marcel Proust, Remembrance of Things Past. Among contemporary American novels, Thomas Pynchon's V, John Barth's Chimera, Donald Barthelme's The Dead Father, and Bernard Malamud's Pictures of Fiedelman represent the continued importance of this theme. In nineteenth-century American literature, the subject of art is a prominent element in Melville's Pierre and Hawthorne's The Marble Fawn.

²I associate the term "modernism" with the work of writers living in England during the first three decades of this century. The writing principally of T.S. Eliot, James Joyce, and Virginia Woolf registered a reaction to the decline of traditional values and, at the same time, the need for the artist to make values present in his work. For these writers, the artist's perception and quest for truth become, in various ways, the focus of the work of art. At the same time, the work becomes, as a receptacle of tradition, a self-sufficient fragment in a world in flux. Thus it is that literary modernism involves a paradoxical perspective combining the primacy of the work with the importance of artistic consciousness. My study of modernism in relation to the novel has been aided by the discussions provided in the following sources: Maurice Beebe, "What Modernism Was," Journal of Modern Literature, 3, No. 5 (July, 1974), 1065-1084; Bernard Bergonzi, "The Advent of Modernism: 1900-1920," in The Twentieth Century, ed. Bernard Bergonzi, Vol. VII of History of Literature in the English Language (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1970), pp. 17-48; Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, eds., Modernism: 1890-1930 (New York: Penguin Books, 1976); Richard Ellmann and Charles Feidelson, eds., The Modern Tradition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964); Edward Engelberg, "Space, Time and History: Towards the Discrimination of Modernisms," Modernist Studies, 1, No. 1 (1974), 7-25; Peter Faulkner, Modernism (London: Methuen, 1977); Joseph Frank, "Spatial Form in Modern Literature," in The Widening Gyre: Crisis and Mastery in Modern Literature (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1963); Irving Howe, "The Culture of Modernism," in The Decline of the New (New York: Horizon Press, 1963); Irving Howe, ed., The Idea of the Modern in Literature and the Arts (New York: Horizon Press, 1967); Gabriel Josipovici, "Modernism and Romanticism," in The World and the Book (1971; rpt. Frogmore, Eng.: Paladin, 1973), pp. 190-209; Louis Kampf, On Modernism: The Prospects for Literature and Freedom (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1967); Frank Kermode, "The Modern," in Continuities (London: Routledge and Kegan, 1968), pp. 1-32; Kermode, The Sense of an Ending (1966; rpt. New York: Oxford University Press, 1975); Harry Levin, "What was Modernism?" in Refractions: Essays in

Comparative Literature (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), pp. 271-295; Georg Lukacs, "The Ideology of Modernism," in The Meaning of Contemporary Realism, trans. John and Necke Mander (1957; rpt. London: Merlin Press, 1963), pp. 17-46; Lillian S. Robinson and Lise Vogel, "Modernism and History," in Images of Women in Fiction, ed. Susan Koppelman Cornillon (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1972), pp. 278-307; Sharon Spencer, Space, Time and Structure in the Modern Novel (Chicago: Swallow Press, 1971); Alan Wilde, "Modernism and the Aesthetics of Crisis," Contemporary Literature, 20, No. 1 (Winter, 1979), 13-50; Edmund Wilson, Axel's Castle (1931; rpt. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969).

³By reflexiveness I mean direct and indirect self-reference in literature, achieved through theme and structure. This term is not to be confused with Joseph Frank's term, "reflexive reference," meaning a repeated reference to a word or a phrase within a work, similar to the technique of leitmotif. Joseph Frank, "Spatial Form in Modern Literature," in The Widening Gyre: Crisis and Mastery in Modern Literature (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1963), p. 27. Critics have interpreted reflexiveness in the novel as a development which pre-dates modern literature. Of nineteenth-century American literature, Joel Porte writes, "...it is a curious but important fact that our writers have consistently tried to fulfill their role by reflexively questioning their own assumptions within their books." Joel Porte, The Romance in America (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1969), p. x. Charles Feidelson finds reflexiveness originating in symbolic techniques common to the work of both Melville and Gide. Charles Feidelson, Jr., Symbolism and American Literature (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), pp. 161-212. Although symbolic techniques are crucial to the reflexive structure of many modern novels, I am not using the words "reflexiveness" and "symbolic" interchangeably. To the extent that language is symbolic, any novel could be said to symbolize itself and thus to be self-referring. Rather, I use the word to designate thematic and structural techniques designed to call attention to the novel form and to make the creation of art and the situation of the artist the central concern of the work. In other words, the novel, rather than being about something else, is also (and sometimes primarily) about itself. The following critical works take note of reflexiveness in theme and structure as an important element in modern fiction; R.P. Blackmur, "The Artist as a Hero," Art News (Sept., 1951), pp. 18-21, 52; Christel van Boheemen-Saaf, "The Artist as Con Man: The Reaction against the Symbolist Aesthetic in Recent American Fiction," Dutch Quarterly Review, 7, 305-318; David I. Grossvogel, Limits of the Novel: Evolutions of a Form from Chaucer to Robbe-Grillet (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968); Steven G. Kellman, The Self-Begetting Novel (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980); Hugh Kenner, The Stoic Comedians (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962); Frank Kermode, The Sense of an Ending (New York: Oxford

University Press, 1967); Jacques Maritain, Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry (New York: World Publishing, 1953); Tony Tanner, City of Words (New York: Harper and Row, 1971).

⁴ Joseph Salemi notes evidence of "the remarkably self-reflexive" quality of The Recognitions as indication that the work as well as the theme of art is "a thematic and structural concern." Joseph Salemi, "To Soar in Atonement: Art as Expiation in Gaddis' The Recognitions," Novel (Winter, 1977), p. 128. George Hegarty makes a similar observation in his dissertation. See George Hegarty, "Gaddis' The Recognitions: The Major Theme," Diss. Drake 1978 p. 40.

⁵ To date no full-length book has been published on Gaddis' novels. However, dissertations are rapidly being produced. The first to appear was Peter Koenig's ground-breaking study of The Recognitions which included invaluable citations from Gaddis' notes for the novel. Peter Koenig, "'Splinters from the Yew Tree': A Critical Study of William Gaddis' The Recognitions," Diss. New York University 1970. A subsequent thesis provided further analysis of the novel's themes. Robert L. Minkoff, "Down, Then Out: A Reading of William Gaddis' The Recognitions," Diss. Cornell 1976. A thesis comparing reference techniques in Mann's Doktor Faustus and The Recognitions is not concerned with the thematic implications of the Faust myth, and comes to negative conclusions as to the purpose to which Gaddis put his copious allusions. Robert C. Brownson, "Techniques of Reference, Allusion and Quotation in Thomas Mann's Doktor Faustus and William Gaddis' The Recognitions," Diss. University of Colorado 1976. A more fruitful study treats the psychological and social implications of the portrayal of time in Gaddis' novels and selected others. Charles Banning, "The Time of Our Time: William Gaddis, John Hawkes and Thomas Pynchon," Diss. SUNY, Buffalo 1977. Another thesis, while touching on the thematic concerns of the present work by presenting the major themes of The Recognitions as a search for salvation through art, religion and human relationships, does not analyze the theme of art as it is made a part of the novel's structure, nor does it provide a contextual analysis of Gaddis' work and a study of JR, which the present work includes. George Hegarty, "Gaddis' The Recognitions: The Major Theme," Diss. Drake 1978. The most recent dissertation at the time of this writing, uses techniques of reader response to interpret the metaphoric meaning of "recognition" in Gaddis' first novel as a directive towards audience understanding. Gary L. Thompson, "Fictive Models: Carlyle's Sartor Resartus, Melville's The Confidence Man, Gaddis' The Recognitions, and Pynchon's Gravity's Rainbow," Diss. Rice 1979.

⁶ By "culture," I mean the intellectual and creative dimensions of human activity, particularly as these are expressed in art.

⁷Richard Chase, The American Novel and its Tradition (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday-Anchor, 1957).

⁸Charles Feidelson, Jr., Symbolism and American Literature (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953).

⁹Tony Tanner, City of Words: American Fiction 1950-70 (New York: Harper and Row, 1971).

¹⁰I am using the terms "classic" and "romantic" specifically in connection with the purpose of the artist and his relation to the work of art. By classic I am not referring to Graeco-Roman literature or its imitation, but rather to a concern voiced by modernists that literature should be grounded in tradition. By "romantic" I refer to the vast inheritance of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century influences from Europe and America which serve to define the artist's purpose as in the nature of a transcending personal quest.

¹¹Modernism can be seen now, at the distance of more than a half-century, as a convergence of disparate artistic ideas which constitute a major influence on present developments and thus can be said to be, if not a doctrine, certainly in the nature of an inheritance embodied in a loose collection of artistic documents.

CHAPTER I

THE LITERARY CONTEXT

Modernism was not so much a concerted movement at one time and in one place as it was an apprehension on the part of certain artists that the world and perceptions of it were changing rapidly, and that art was challenged to take account of these new perspectives.¹ Modernist art theories, as some critics have proven, can be traced to earlier developments such as the advent of relativity theory, Freudian psychoanalysis, World War I, and the decline of nineteenth-century mores.² Most relevant to this thesis is the prevalent sense that with the breakdown of traditional values, art was jeopardized and the role of the artist made problematic. The idea of something problematic in modern art can be interpreted either as a boon or a threat to art, depending on one's reaction to crisis, as either a harbinger of meaningful change, or a sign of disorder, even chaos. Many modern artists sensed a splintering, if not a breakdown, in reality. If moral order, religion, stable social relations could no longer be assumed, the alternative would be moral relativism. Others tended to focus on the regenerative nature of art.³ There was a widespread sense that art should fill the void left by religion, that it should provide order and an expression of human integrity. In other words, modernist art had to be humanistic.⁴

Some writers insisted that to be humanists, artists should reassert not merely the value of the individual but of tradition as the bulwark of order in a time of flux. Underlying the belief in tradition was skepticism about the goodness and perfectibility of humanity. In the following excerpt from his essay, "Romanticism and Classicism," T.E. Hulme bases his recommendation of "classic" principles on his view of the relation between the individual and society:

Here is the root of all romanticism: that man, the individual, is an infinite reservoir of possibilities; and if you can so rearrange society by the destruction of oppressive order then these possibilities will have a chance and you will get Progress.

One can define the classical quite clearly as the exact opposite to this. Man is an extraordinarily fixed and limited animal whose nature is absolutely constant. It is only by tradition and organization that anything decent can be got out of him.⁵

Hulme and his contemporary T.S. Eliot recommend a return to a concept of ordered reality based on tradition. In verse, Eliot follows Hulme's dictum that "It is essential to prove that beauty may be in small, dry things."⁶ Such beauty can only come about through disciplined adherence to tradition, and a kind of artistic invisibility.

Edmund Wilson recognizes modernism's debt to both classic and romantic notions of art. In Axel's Castle, Wilson defines the basic difference between the classic and romantic view of art as involving the primacy of the text, on the one hand, and the primacy of the artist and artistic consciousness, on the other.⁷ What Wilson terms classical English literature

emphasized the text as a communication of certain philosophical and aesthetic traditions. The classic artist was not himself the focus of the work of art. Romanticism tended to reverse this order of importance, making the text a vehicle for the expression of a unique consciousness. For Wilson, T.S. Eliot's thought was a modernist model of the classic perspective.⁸ In "Tradition and the Individual Talent" Eliot considers the artist a creative vehicle whose personality lies behind and never overshadows his art work. The power of cultural traditions is gathered behind the artist and expressed in his work.⁹

Eliot's sense of a fundamental change in social order, marked by a general moral and social decline, affected his opinion of human potential. A believer in hierarchies (religious, intellectual and social), Eliot felt that only through a social order patterned on religious orthodoxy could a culture maintain itself. Although this conservative attitude is not characteristic of all his thought, nonetheless he did advance such a critique of society and literature in, among other essays, "After Strange Gods," which is partly an update and modification of the earlier "Tradition and the Individual Talent." In addition to stressing the previously mentioned values, Eliot makes clear his opposition to individualism and moral relativism, both dubious products of the "cult of personality" which he considers prevalent in the novel. Not for Eliot the mysterious vicissitudes of individual character. Eliot claims that the decay of Protestantism provides a clue to understanding much in Anglo-Saxon literature. If a reader recognized an English

writer's religious background he would understand something of what drives him as an artist.¹⁰ Despairing of the artist's position in modern atomistic society, Eliot believes that the artist's morals should not be individualistic but should grow out of orthodoxy, by which he means "the habits of community formulated, corrected, and elevated by the continuous thought and direction of the church."¹¹ Although Eliot upheld orthodoxies as a means of maintaining values, he also considered the possibility of independent exploration into new regions of human experience. The outcome of such action, however, was always dubious. Eliot wrote about the problems of personal self-transcendence in his play, The Cocktail Party. Briefly summarized, the play involves a group of middle-class English men and women who, with the unsettling aid of a mysterious psychiatrist guest, learn to distinguish between fantasy and reality. Some characters discover that they have lived most of their lives with delusions about their own identities and those of their most intimate friends. In spite of their new understanding, some of these characters lack the courage to change. Only one character, Celia, actually transcends her former fantasies, puts guilt behind her, and moves courageously into a future which she admits is uncertain. She dies a ludicrously violent, gratuitous death in the African bush. The other less heroic characters remain to sift through their memories of her and their guilt. In other words, they are left to themselves.

Were it not for the strange psychiatrist, Reilly, Celia might not have decided to change her life. Reilly appears to

his hosts as a kind of "devil-seer" of psychic mysteries.

Claiming not to understand fully his "powers," he admits "... when I say to one like [Celia] /'Work out your salvation with diligence,' I do not/ understand/ What I myself am saying."¹² He is a modern-day priest in a time of religious decline. Celia pleads with him, "I want to be cured/ Of a craving for something I cannot find/ And of the shame of never finding it" (Cocktail, II, p. 139). Reilly explains that she is faced with "the human condition," to which she can be reconciled only if she will be resigned to leading a mediocre, half-realized, but safe life. Of those who accept this life, he says, "They may remember/ The vision they have had, but they cease to regret it,/ Maintain themselves by the common routine...." At least such a careful life avoids "the final desolation/ Of solitude in the phantasmal world/ Of imagination, shuffling memories and desires" (Cocktail, II, p. 141). These less adventurous characters live with a kind of pallid acceptance of their own limitations, while Celia moves towards symbolic and literal darkness, armed with "the kind of faith that issues from despair" (Cocktail, II, p. 140). Reilly reassures those who are left behind that Celia's life was freely chosen and may come to a good end. Her death makes his prophecy ironic and deepens the mystery of her quest.

Celia's death in innocence and humility amid violent and seemingly gratuitous circumstances indicates the perils of the path of action. Yet Eliot implies that on such a path the individual stands a chance of transcending the "human condition," and "possessing what [was] sought for in the wrong place."

Those who choose to stay behind, must accept what Reilly terms, "the building of the hearth," a profoundly human activity providing creature comforts rather than vision. These home bodies have learned from Celia's death. Reilly tells them, "You will have to live with these memories and make them/ Into something new. Only by acceptance/ Of the past will you alter its meaning" (Cocktail, III, p. 182). Celia has become a kind of martyr to their self-understanding.¹³ Among these hearthbuilders is the artist, Peter, who is haunted by his failure to understand, and hence, to love Celia, his former lover. Reilly reassures him, "You understand your métier... / Which is the most that any of us can ask for" (Cocktail, III, p. 175). Here Eliot is not equating the artist's work with the mysterious psychic quest acted out by Celia. However, métier is endowed with certain value, more akin to the hearth than the dark inner path. Eliot views art as a disciplined activity, accounting for "small dry things" and sustaining human culture rather than forging any romantic paths. The quest towards expanded self-awareness is akin to radical religious activity, leading away from the defined, ordered world of human culture and into the unknown.

Another example of the way modernist writers have combined these classic and romantic ideas of the artist and his work is found in Joyce's A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man. Here, young Stephen's art theories derive from classical aesthetics, while his actions as an artist make him an inheritor of the romantic urge to credit the individualistic artistic identity as much as the work.¹⁴ Joyce's artist-hero emerges from a

classical education into a world which he chooses to reject in favor of a journey to another culture, armed only with "silence, cunning, and exile."¹⁵ Rather than champion a work which would perpetuate the values of a world he rejects, Stephen will wander in search of a more obscure self-expression, which at the same time will carry on his racial heritage. The fact that Stephen (and Joyce) never abandoned their origins in their art does not alter Stephen's identity as an isolated individual. He is joined by other artist-heroes, among them Gaddis' Wyatt, who exist in exile, alienated from their society; their creative resources come from within them or the past, but not from community. However, the reality of environment and surrounding culture is never absent from Joyce's work or Gaddis' novels, providing a tension of focuses--lyrical and satirical, romantic and classic.

Born out of a rational, empirical age in which to "copy nature" was to grasp reality, the novel tradition, however, has not so much been negated as expanded by modernism's complex inheritance. New novelistic techniques collapsed traditional conventions of space, time and character to accommodate new visions.¹⁶ The neo-romantic impulse towards a lyrical rendering of individual consciousness was also strongly evident in the modernist novel. This intention arose not from a desire to glorify the individual but from a sense of psychological relativism. If there are as many views of reality as there are percipients, then the work of literature must turn inward to the individual awareness if it is to capture reality. Virginia

Woolf's multiple consciousnesses, and Dorothy Richardson's and William Faulkner's stream of consciousness techniques approach the challenge of depicting such inner realities.

Woolf's experiments with form derived from her sensing a fundamental shift in the way reality was perceived. She generalized on the nature of this change when she wrote in "Mr. Bennet and Mrs. Brown," "All human relations have shifted. ...And when human relations change there is at the same time a change in religion, conduct, politics and literature."¹⁷ It was this altered sense of human relations as perceived by the individual consciousness that Woolf wished to depict in her fiction. There is something romantic in her purposeful rendering of an individual way of seeing in an age which was giving birth to mass communications technology. Chief among Woolf's seers is the artist who, like Woolf herself, must face up to the difficulties of capturing multifold reality. In The Waves, Woolf has Bernard, the nascent artistic consciousness, express just this dilemma when he thinks:

[writing] is the effort and the struggle, it is the perpetual warfare, it is the shattering and piecing together--this is the daily battle....The trees, scattered, put in order; the thick green of the leaves thinned itself into a dancing light. I netted them under with a sudden phrase. I retrieved them from formlessness with words.¹⁸

Bernard struggles to make sense of perception without reducing it to something less than it is. In the following passage, Bernard alludes to his role as an orchestrator of cacophony:

The crystal, the globe of life...far from being hard and cold to the touch, has walls

of thinnest air. If I press them-all will burst. Whatever sentence I extract whole and entire from this cauldron is only a string of six little fish that let themselves be caught while a million others leap and sizzle....Faces recur ...they press their beauty to the walls of my bubble.... How impossible to order them rightly; to detach one separately, or to give the effect of the whole-again like music. What a symphony, with its concord and its discord... then grew up!¹⁹

The notion of reality as flux is a prominent modernist idea. According to Woolf, the writer must attempt to record the fluid, changing processes of perception as faithfully as possible, using as the fictional centre a human consciousness, a character.²⁰ Thus, the fictional centre must be a human centre. Woolf's innovations did not so much reject older novelistic definitions, such as character; rather, they were redefinitions of these elements.

In "Mr. Bennet and Mrs. Brown," Woolf explains why she rejected existing definitions of what the novel should do but, at the same time, maintained what she saw as the vital centre of fiction: character. She gently criticizes those Victorian and Edwardian novelists who portrayed a surface and, to her mind, a partial vision of the world which overlooked the consciousness of individual perceiver-characters, in favor of taking an acceptable social view. For Woolf, reality is not to be known simply through a received view of the way things should be, however much such an attitude gives one a sense of social approbation. Reality is shifting and mysterious.

Woolf's romantic convictions about the role of the artist and her innovative narrative techniques do not extend to the

question of language. While she considers Edwardian perspectives wrong for the contemporary (c. 1920) novel, she is also skeptical of recent attempts to revolutionize literary decorum. She senses that the Georgian age is full of chaotic change with rather little direction, a condition that is reflected in the unstable state of the novel. What Woolf recommends for fiction is hardly iconoclastic. She believes that nowhere were standards more vital than in the use of language itself. In the following passage from "Mr. Bennet and Mrs. Brown," Woolf implies that she opposes such literary improprieties as obscenity and obscurantism:

At the present moment we are suffering, not from decay, but from having no code of manners which writers and readers accept as a prelude to the more exciting intercourse of friendship. The literary convention of the time is so artificial...that, naturally, the feeble are tempted to outrage, and the strong are led to destroy the very foundations and rules of literary society. Signs of this are everywhere apparent. Grammar is violated; syntax disintegrated.... The more adult writers do not...indulge in such wanton exhibitions of spleen. Their sincerity is desperate, and their courage tremendous; it is only that they do not know which to use, a fork or their fingers. Thus, if you read Mr. Joyce and Mr. Eliot you will be struck by the indecency of the one, and the obscurity of the other.²¹

However much Virginia Woolf might blanch at the stylistic excesses of her modernist contemporaries, she does not resort to nostalgic recommendations. She wishes the novel to move in the direction of a more subtle, and accurate portrayal of character; however, she is nonprescriptive as to the nature of the innovations she would like to see take place, when she cautions:

But do not expect just at present a complete and satisfactory presentment of [character]. Tolerate the spasmodic, the obscure, the fragmentary, the failure....we are trembling on the verge of one of the great ages of English literature. But it can only be reached if we are determined never...to desert [character].²²

Virginia Woolf shows traces of the romantic and the classic view of art and the artist within her own innovative perspective. She would revolutionize the novel by expanding its formal boundaries in order to record more faithfully what has traditionally been considered the centre of fiction: character. Woolf might have sensed a change in the way people perceived each other and the world, but she never doubted the importance of such perception and the necessity of expressing it accurately.

Two such different writers as Virginia Woolf and T.S. Eliot reacted to a common sense of a shift in reality by redefining the role of the artist in communicating that reality. Their reactions and recommendations were different, but both writers depended on the combined heritage of classic and romantic thought which informs so much modern literature. In spite of their differences, these writers share the conviction that explorations into human destiny belong at the centre of literature and can be sustained and continued by it. This generalization may at first sound blandly self-evident. However, if we contrast such "early" modernists as Woolf, Eliot, and Joyce with later writers, principally novelists, who have been somewhat prematurely labelled "post-modernists," the former generalization gains clarity.²³ In contrast with the work of "early modernists," the trend identified as "post-modern" tends to be

rather less well-grounded in a sense of humanistic values, more willing to tread along the edge of nihilism, especially regarding the role of the artist. With the writing of such experimentalists as Pynchon, Hawkes, and Barthelme, there came attendant critical intimations that the self-parodying aspect of post-modernism sounded the death-knell for a human-centred literature.²⁴ Those "early" modernists already mentioned exhibit a strong sense of humanism in their literature, no matter how formally or thematically iconoclastic it may be. I agree with the view that modernist literature affirms the human context and that its formal innovations do not endanger the "human" context of art.²⁵

Its humanism notwithstanding, modernist literature's pervasive atmosphere of impending doom reflects not so much nihilism as the writer's perception of dissociation on a number of levels. Virginia Woolf expressed it as fragmented perception which posed a nearly insurmountable task for the writer. Eliot perceived the dissociation not only in the percipient but in the world. He referred to the artist's need to "shore" up the salvageable fragments of culture against the ruins of modern life.²⁶ Of particular use to Eliot and other modernists such as Joyce was ancient myth which gained primarily parodic meaning as a reference in modern literature. Eliot explained the importance of myth in modern literature in the following analysis of Joyce's Ulysses:

In using the myth, in manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity, Mr. Joyce is pursuing a method which other must pursue after him. They will not be imitators.... It is simply a way of controlling, of ordering,

of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history....Instead of narrative method, we may now use the mythical method. It is...a step toward making the modern world possible for art....²⁷

For Eliot, a sense of psychic loss marks the "human condition." The development of his poetry indicates his continued wrestling with the awareness of human spiritual diminution and the hope of some form of transcendence. Eliot's description of modern humanity as caught between "memory and desire" calls to mind the sense of "nostalgia" expressed by George Lukacs in his early work, The Theory of the Novel. Both writers described a loss of cosmic integrity which Eliot linked with the ancient rituals of purgation and renewal and which Lukacs associated with Greek epic. Lukacs describes the Greek world in lyrical terms, as a homogeneous culture in which human consciousness sustained no sense of a subject-object split. In this world, humans were oblivious to alienation; so much at home were they in their rounded universe. According to Lukacs, philosophical conceptualizations marked the end of such homogeneity. What was to follow, especially the concepts of Christianity, could never recover Greek unity. Chief among the modern concerns which were blissfully unknown to the Greek world was a sense of indeterminacy. Writes Lukacs, "The Greek knew only answers but not questions, only solutions but no riddles, only forms but no chaos. He drew the creative circle of forms this side of paradox, and everything which, in our time of paradox, is bound to lead to triviality, led to

perfection."²⁸ Lukacs' description of the contrast between the Greek concept of wholeness and our modern experience of indeterminacy and fragmentation bears further quoting for its relevance to the modernist novel:

...the circle whose closed nature was the transcendental essence of [Greek] life has, for us, been broken; we cannot breathe in a closed world. We have invented the productivity of the spirit: that is why the primaeval images have irrevocably lost their objective self-evidence for us, and our thinking follows the endless path of an approximation that is never fully accomplished. We have invented the creation of forms: and that is why everything that falls from our weary and despairing hands must always be incomplete.²⁹

This assessment of the modern condition of "homelessness" laments for a happy state of oneness with the cosmos from which subjectivity and intellection arose, only to fall more profoundly into loss and moral despair. Such primitivism seems worlds away from the erudite modern novel, yet such novels express a kind of modern nostalgia for completeness through art, while at the same time recognizing the limitations of the novel form. For Lukacs, the novel grew out of such an impulse towards retrieval, which was itself self-limiting and by nature problematic.³⁰

In the modernist novel, the finite world is forever battering the confines of its own form, only to double back on itself. Reflexiveness in the novel is itself a kind of nostalgia for wholeness worked out structurally. Through such techniques as repetition of images, doubling and fragmenting of characters, and allusion to cultural fragments, the novel calls up a world whole, within fiction, which takes account of

the present state of life while setting itself as an artifact over and above that life, almost as a compensation for loss. However, as Lukacs says, the days of the Greeks are over and no amount of formal juxtaposition will reunite subject and object. Within the realm of the novel, born of an empirical age, words will always be at the service of counterfeit, just as they may be used to retrieve past culture and to simulate a lost wholeness. Modernist art and literature are symbolic forms of communion. At best, the artist, like the percipient, must trust his own perceptions and must approach his work armed only with faith in himself and trust in communication. This is the challenge set forth by modernist literature.

The nineteenth-century American novel of romance expressed the indeterminate state of consciousness, which Lukacs later claimed characteristic of the modern human condition. In particular, Melville and Hawthorne worked their own kind of expansion on the novel form in narratives of the dark ambiguous reaches of human nature. Richard Chase finds this intention characteristic of much American literature. He includes the work of Melville and Hawthorne when he writes:

Judging by our greatest novels, the American imagination, even when it wishes to assuage and reconcile the contradictions of life, has not been stirred by the possibility of catharsis or incarnation, by the tragic or Christian possibility. It has been stirred, rather, by the aesthetic possibilities of radical forms of alienation, contradiction, and disorder.³¹

Of particular relevance to this thesis are the works of Melville and Hawthorne which provide precedents for Gaddis' particular

concern for the creative intellect. The romance novel has in common with modernist literature a belief in art as the touchstone for personal growth.³² Melville's Pierre and Hawthorne's The Marble Faun show the mysterious potentials of the artistic consciousness. Both novels concern artists and intellectuals haunted with an inheritance of guilt and entangled in symbolic struggles with the dark reaches of their own strange natures. The novels attempt, in different ways, to explain but not necessarily resolve these entanglements.

Melville's youthful poet, Pierre, begins life in privileged conditions which do not prevent the young man from being haunted by an obscure sense of guilt. The last of the male line of an illustrious New England family, Pierre lives in a quasi-incestuous relationship with his overpowering mother. He is haunted by the memory of his famous father, whose ambiguous portrait stirs questions in the young man about his paternity. These questions lead him inexorably to a loss of innocence when he discovers the existence of an illegitimate stepsister. Pierre learns the shattering truth about his father's adultery, and this knowledge destroys his complacency and drives him into an obsessive commitment to the product of this paternal adultery, the dark, compelling Isabel.

Pierre's decision to reject his past has the aura of full-blown romanticism about it. His ambiguous obsessiveness is never fully clarified but remains a kind of tantalizing emblem of the mysteries of human nature which may prove fatal to the explorer. In the chapter, "Chronometricals and Horologicals,"

Melville explains that those who opt for the inner journey into human mystery stand a poor chance of surviving in the outer, everyday world:

...this chronometrical and horological conceit, in sum, seems to teach this: That in things terrestrial [horological] a man must not be governed by ideas celestial [chronometrical]; that certain minor self-renunciations in this life his own mere instinct for his own everyday general well-being will teach him to make, but he must by no means make a complete unconditional sacrifice of himself in behalf of any other being, or any cause, or any conceit....A virtuous expediency, then, seems the highest desirable or attainable earthly excellence for the mass of men, and is the only earthly excellence that their Creator intended for them.³³

As the novel shows, Melville is not interested in "the mass of men," but in those extraordinary individuals who are driven by some inner promptings which may remain a mystery even to them. Still, he emphasizes the hazards of such a way of life even for the exceptional personality. That Pierre is partly driven by a sense of responsibility for his father's guilt, and partly by his half-sister's mysterious powers, only makes his fate more complex.

Hawthorne's The Marble Faun takes up mysteries of the human condition; but unlike Melville, Hawthorne reveals mysteries which he puts to moral use. The human heart may be a mystery, but to search it is not necessarily for Hawthorne, as it is for Melville, to lose touch forever with the world of light and reason. Hawthorne takes up a number of dualisms in human nature as his themes: innocence and experience, reason and instinct, good and evil, virtue and sin. For Hawthorne there may be an

educational power in sin (shades of the fortunate fall). As with Pierre, Hawthorne's novel reverberates with a sense of some shadowy evil deed which affects the lives and fates of all the characters. This dark force emanates from the equally dark Miriam. It ravages the innocent young swain, Donatello, the last male descendent of a noble Italian family, and the possessor of an archaic primitivism. Throughout the novel, Donatello's human identity is ambiguous on two counts: he is thought to have satyr-like ears, a sign of his faun-like nature, closer to the animal than the human. This hidden sign makes the other artists claim him as the model for the Faun of Praxiteles, which only further removes him from present reality. Donatello's prelapsarian nature makes him the ideal victim of Miriam, the femme fatale. Donatello contracts a fatal obsession with Miriam and finally seeks revenge against her dark persecutor (presumably a jilted lover-turned-celibate). He murders the monk and subsequently plummets from high-spirited naiveté to sober worldly experience. Apparently the wages of sin are no match for the power of the human heart: Donatello's penance is marriage to his heart's desire, Miriam.

Another victim of Miriam's power in the virginal, innocent Hilda who is as light as Miriam is dark. She is significantly portrayed as an art copyist rather than a painter of original work; having faith in the power of virtue, she does not probe too deeply into life's mysteries.³⁴ Hilda becomes strangely implicated in Miriam's guilt, but is ultimately saved by marriage to the stalwart American sculptor, Kenyon. Having set

up his dualisms of innocence and experience, virtue and sin, Hawthorne extricates his characters from the brink similar to the one over which Melville sends Pierre, and binds them into harmonious unions. In spite of his rather schematic optimism, Hawthorne, like Melville, implies that the dark recesses of human nature are fatally attractive to the creative mentality. To strive towards extreme states of knowledge is to expand human consciousness but not necessarily to understand or control it.

In both of these nineteenth-century novels, women hold powerful sway over the fates of males, particularly artists. The inspired female is an ambiguous influence on consciousness and creativity, identified as she is with both beauty and corruption, good and evil. Pierre considers Isabel his fate, as if she were the culmination of his heritage. He responds to her intuitively, feeling that she expands the possibilities of his life even as she destroys his chances for normalcy and domestic security. Once her influence takes hold, she sweeps up those who are passive associates of her lover, principally the innocent Lucy, whose love for Pierre turns to an obsession which dooms her to death with him. Pierre the docile swain, like the innocent, animalistic Donatello, becomes obsessed with a woman whose mystery symbolizes her experience of sin, precisely that part of the world as yet unknown to the boy. The power of this femme fatale overshadows feminine innocence, symbolized by the fair, virginal girls, Melville's Lucy and Hawthorne's Hilda. As has been mentioned, Hawthorne allows innocence a reprieve, and

his virtue-sin dualism endures, while Melville shows dark mystery overpowering frail, virginal womanhood. The compelling mystery of these women symbolizes the nether reaches of the psyche and inspires the questing spirit to approach these regions.

The romance novel assumes no givens about the nature of human life except its mystery. The probing of life's dark wellsprings is its clearest purpose. Hawthorne's romances allow a certain morality to clarify the shadows and to resolve human conflict, if not ambiguity, in favor of "the truth of the human heart." Melville provides few resolutions. Like Thoreau, Melville proposed to back life into a corner so as to discover its true nature.³⁵ Unlike that transcendentalist, he could never be certain of anything but an eternal conflict in the hearts of human beings. He symbolized this struggle as: "The catnip and the amaranth: man's earthly household peace, and the ever-encroaching appetite for God."³⁶ This latter appetite Melville associates with a kind of transcending passion or unreason, a life-expanding force which threatens order as it enlarges consciousness. He describes the force as "life" itself, and links it with instinct, as opposed to reason, in the following passage describing Pierre's jealousy at discovering that his ex-fiancée is involved with his cousin:

All [Pierre's] Faith-born, enthusiastic, high-wrought, stoic, and philosophic defenses, were now beaten down by this sudden storm of nature in his soul. For there is no faith, and no stoicism, and no philosophy, that a mortal man can possibly evoke, which will stand the final test of a real impassioned onset of Life and

Passion upon him. Then all the fair philosophic or Faith-phantoms that he raised from the mist, slide away and disappear as ghosts at cock-crow. For Faith and philosophy are air, but events are brass. Amidst his gray philosophizings, Life breaks upon a man like a morning.³⁷

It is one of the ambiguities of this novel that the passion which drew Pierre away from "life" and into his spiritual marriage with Isabel is subsequently in conflict with an equally strong natural "life" urge, jealousy. Melville never resolves these conflicting reactions in his protagonist. Pierre's urge to join his mysterious half-sister is described as partly a kind of stoical idealism, partly dark passionate nature. His earlier intended union with Lucy is similarly portrayed as correct, but also irrational.

According to Henry James's famous definition, the kind of experience which romance portrays is its primary attribute:

...it deals--with experience liberated, so to speak; experience disengaged, disembroiled, disencumbered, exempt from the conditions that we usually know to attach to it and, if we wish so to put the matter, drag upon it, and operating in a medium which relieves it, in a particular interest, of the inconvenience of a related, a measurable state, a state subject to all our vulgar communities.³⁸

In their skepticism about science and in their concern for the fundamental ambiguity of human perception and the mystery of human experience in general, modernist novels inherit much from the romance.

The modernist inheritance is, however, full of dichotomies, as the classic/romantic influences show. The modernist novel in particular demonstrates a mixed inheritance of romance and

realism. Moreover, modernist theories of art overlap genres and media. One discovers that Eliot's concepts of tradition, artistic "invisibility," and myth apply to novels as well as to poems, even as Eisenstein's cinematic collage techniques have been employed as novel techniques.³⁹ While the modernist novel shows a debt to romance, it also contains elements of realism, or what James calls "our vulgar communities." With the advent of film, there began an attempt to expand the boundaries of the novel beyond the so-called confines of characterization into the realm of pure reportage where, presumably, it could achieve greater verisimilitude.⁴⁰ During the 1950s, the French writer and film maker Alain Robbe-Grillet formulated a theory of the novel which purported to revolutionize the novel form. Robbe-Grillet recommends a movement away from the novel-as-characterization and towards an emphasis on the novel as written artifact, and the artist as wordsmith. Robbe-Grillet condemns his definition of "humanism" in fiction as sentimental, archaic, and ideologically and philosophically incorrect.⁴¹ As a phenomenologist, he sees no point in creating heroes or probing something called "mystery." Life is what one observes, and it is at the level of observation that the novel should function.

Although his philosophical background and politics separate him from the modernist novelists under discussion, Robbe-Grillet's radical revamping of the novel form reflects a conviction not unlike that of Woolf, that the novel must be faithful to the perceptions of a discreet consciousness. Unlike Woolf, he refuses to focus on character. Rather, he would have the novelist

be a camera eye, to record perceptions with minimal comment.⁴²

Robbe-Grillet denounces the Flaubert tradition with its interest in psychology, and the Balzac inheritance with its concern for milieu.⁴³ He explains his concept of the traditional novel's obsolescence as follows:

The world's destiny has ceased, for us, to be identified with the rise or fall of certain men, of certain families. The world itself is no longer our private property, hereditary and convertible into cash, a prey which it is not so much a matter of knowing as of conquering... Our world, today, is less sure of itself, more modest perhaps, since it has renounced the omnipotence of the person, but more ambitious too, since it looks beyond. The exclusive cult of the "human" has given way to a larger consciousness, one that is less anthropocentric. The novel seems to stagger, having lost what was once its best prop, the hero. If it does not manage to right itself, it is because its life was linked to that of a society now past. If it does manage, on the contrary, a new course lies open to it, with the promise of new discoveries.

(FANN, 29)

For Robbe-Grillet, the artist is a common man; he does not inhabit the centre of the fictional universe as a moral-spiritual questor however flawed, as in the romance. His role as wordsmith is nonetheless crucial to the production of art. To the extent that the artist opens up unknown territory in art, he is a kind of cultural revolutionary (but not a hero) in the cause of a new creation. For Robbe-Grillet, the domain of the writer is language. Through words, he comes into his own. His artistic consciousness is nothing in itself; it only takes on importance through creation.

Robbe-Grillet, like many modernist writers, came under attack by those critics who considered his work formalist,

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hence morally gratuitous.⁴⁴ He responded with a concept of the novel and novelists which is reminiscent of the view of modernists such as Woolf who lacks, however, his antihumanist approach. Robbe-Grillet makes a startling case for the validity of what has been considered a decadent aesthetic when he writes:

Art for art's sake does not have a good press: it suggests a game, imposture, dilettantism. But the necessity a work of art acknowledges has nothing to do with utility. It is an internal necessity, which obviously appears as gratuitousness when the system of references is fixed from without: from the viewpoint of the Revolution, for example...the highest art may seem a secondary, even absurd enterprise.

(FANN, 45)

For Robbe-Grillet the necessity of art comes from the novelist's sense of purpose which Robbe-Grillet describes somewhat aphoristically as follows: "Might we advance on the contrary [to the charge that Robbe-Grillet's novels lack purpose], that the genuine writer has nothing to say? He has only a way of speaking. He must create a world, but starting from nothing, from the dust..." (FANN, p. 45). Part of the writer's purpose is to have no preconceived purpose, certainly to avoid having a goal designed to suit audience expectation. This is not to say that Robbe-Grillet claims for the writer a kind of romantic ineffability. He admits the limits of the novelist's world, the subjectivity of which is due to "[it being] God alone who can claim to be objective." Robbe-Grillet wants his work to have human stature and "total subjectivity," if not humanism. He intends to depict only "a man who sees, who feels, who imagines, a man located in space and time..." (FANN, 139).

He contends that his focus on the common perceiver makes his work accessible to a larger audience "once [the audience] frees [itself] from ready-made ideas, in literature as in life" (FANN, 139). However, the aesthetic sophistication of his novels may have warded off such an audience, who seem to prefer formulaic fiction to innovation.

Robbe-Grillet would open up the novel to his readers by obscuring the narrator's role and bringing the reader as close as possible to the fictional "eye," until he begins to feel himself a kind of accomplice to the action. This is a technique designed to deflect reader sympathy away from the storyteller but to manipulate the reader's "vision," much as it is manipulated in the viewing of a film. The camera "narrates" the film, but so total and invisible is its omniscience that the viewer frequently finds himself sinking helplessly into the reality of the film world. It is true that Robbe-Grillet's novels do have little "to say," but nonetheless they are powerful expressions of human perception. Robbe-Grillet refuses responsibility for defining or judging his world. This detachment, coupled with techniques of repetition, give his fiction its peculiarly hypnotic quality and its ambiguity, as the reader is locked into the flow of unexplained images. It is not surprising that Robbe-Grillet has chosen for his subjects forms of perception such as spying and obsessive observation (*Jalousie*, *Le Voyeur*). His interest in conveying the verisimilitude of perception may explain why Robbe-Grillet now works primarily in film.

American novelists differ from Robbe-Grillet in their

tendency to include moral and social perspectives in realism, while Robbe-Grillet remains faithful to a more abstract phenomenological approach.⁴⁵ Even post-modernist fiction tends to depict the individual in relation to society, a relationship which has become more of a central issue in the American novel as American culture has incorporated a commercial, even mechanistic dimension which threatens individual creative growth.⁴⁶ Not only artists but also many critics viewed the influence of science and technology as a threat to cultural values.

In the 1930s and 1940s, literary critics began reassessing the way in which literature was being interpreted, and a number of them made analyses and recommendations concerning the nature of art and the place of the artist that were gradually gathered under what by 1950 came to be termed the "New Criticism."⁴⁷ New Criticism did not do anything so fundamental as redefine aesthetics, but it did have pretensions to becoming the one, comprehensive theory of literature. Like most theories of critical judgement, New Criticism inevitably considered not only the role of the critic but also the relation between literature and the world. It is this aspect of New Criticism, rather than its particular textual exegesis, which is relevant to the modernist novel. In establishing a broad context for Gaddis' work, this analysis will focus on New Criticism's attitude toward American culture, the role of the artist and critic, and the place of the work of art. New Critics and many modernists express a common distrust of science and materialism.

As an antidote to the American progressive spirit, many writers sought the re-establishment of literature as a central human activity. In his discussion of New Criticism, one writer has summed up its outlook as follows: "If one could hazard a guess as to what will one day seem common to this critical age it would be the assumption that literature is the most important of human activities."⁴⁸

For some writers and critics, this criticism marked a new way of interpreting poetry and defining the role of the artist. For some adherents, it carried with it an ideology, mostly voiced by the Southern Agrarians in their manifesto, "I'll Take My Stand."⁴⁹ By the 1950s, New Criticism had found its way into the academy as a new mode of scholarship which substantially liberated the student of literature by collapsing traditional critical boundaries even as it established new ones.⁵⁰

By the late 1940s, some viewers of the American cultural scene considered many of the New Critics (by then not so new) to be traditionalists, if not outright political reactionaries.⁵¹ The Southern Agrarians, in particular, viewed the rise of technology as a threat to morality, religion, and received social values, although they were hardly alone in this assessment.⁵² Their distaste tended to localize on things northern, for which they substituted the notion of an ideal hierarchical, agrarian society. What is unique about the Southern Agrarians' criticism of American culture is not their attack on technology and materialism, but their solution: a return to a near-feudal, homogeneous culture based on an agrarian economy in which

religious and political orthodoxy could again flourish. It is not surprising that Eliot took appreciative note of their ideals in After Strange Gods.⁵³

Because they saw little merit in the culture around them, certain New Critics, many of them poets, viewed the situation of the artist (again, principally the poet) with concern. The poet could only live in alienation from his culture, withstanding a kind of moral damnation-by-association with its decadence. The accurate poetic vision inevitably included a kind of knowledgeable desperation arising from the artist's predicament.⁵⁴ If he cannot gain a moral foothold from his milieu, from where will the impetus for his art come? The answer is unclear within New Criticism. Certainly there was tradition, but no contemporary models.

New Criticism discarded literary criticism which interpreted a text by referring to its historical context or the biography of its author. If this kind of information was irrelevant, then the critic was left to study the work in relative isolation. Presumably the work itself--its techniques and meaning--contained the order and value which previous schools of criticism had attempted to find in a widened critical scope. It might be ventured that New Criticism was formalist, but it certainly considered content as well as structure to be inextricable from meaning.

To raise the importance of the text above biographical or historical contexts, while at the same time discounting questions of artistic intention, puts the critic in a one-to-one

relationship with the work. The critic, not the artist, is in control of meaning; and hence, the critic is faced with an almost priestly task of interpreting in a vacuum. In discounting the historical context of a work, New Criticism "recovers" art from the past, making it accessible to the critic who is willing to enter into analysis, armed only with formal principles.⁵⁵ Gone also is the necessity of limiting oneself to tedious textual criticism when one could embark fresh on a close reading of a text. Analyzing literature of the past without reference to its era thus makes possible the establishment of so-called timeless principles of formal criticism. Disparagers of this approach claim that its vague analytical principles--there was never a New Critical "method" agreed upon--lead to eccentric analysis. Presumably it would be possible to generate as many interpretations of a text as there were interpreters.⁵⁶

The individualistic dimension to New Criticism may prove exhilarating for the student, but could potentially lead to a kind of critical alienation. It is difficult to approach anything like critical agreement with so many interpreters but no common body of rules. As reassuring as it may be to retrieve an ancient work through a study of its imagery and symbols, such criticism has a static quality if it is not associated with a broader context. To accept this kind of criticism is, ironically, to perpetuate the isolation of the artist and art. It is not surprising that New Criticism focuses primarily on the meaning of poetry, and that its most famous proponents have been themselves poets. As has already been mentioned, the personal,

lyrical nature of poetry provides a fitting subject for this criticism. By contrast, the novel, with its historical, social basis, is less easy to extricate from a social, historical context. Nevertheless, there is something of the New Critical spirit in much modernism. With its emphasis on the isolation of the artist and the primacy of the work in an age hostile to art, modernist literature echoes some of the attitudes of New Criticism.

The issue of cultural crisis or decline and the effect of such a situation on the artist and critic was of considerable interest not only to New Critics but to writers and thinkers generally around the time when The Recognitions appeared. This concern was sufficiently important that in 1952 (the year that Gaddis' first novel appeared), Partisan Review ran a series of symposium issues in which well-known writers and intellectuals were asked to give their views. An overview of this symposium shows how selected artists and critics viewed the impact of "mass culture" on art.⁵⁷

The Partisan Review editors make several assumptions when they pose their four questions to the potential respondents.⁵⁸ By claiming that "American intellectuals now regard America and its institutions in a new way," the editors are implying a change in America's political and literary climate after World War II. The editors and respondents alike refer to the need to reassess American democracy in the face of Russia's so-called mass culture, which they would like to regard as different from America's mass culture. The editors are not without a certain skepticism about any "mass culture." There is nothing new in the tendency to

disparage America's attempts at bringing art to the people. The notion that America mediocratizes art goes back to early republican times.⁵⁹ The editors refer to "mass" culture as "levelling" standards and "overrunning" the elite. Their questions imply that until recently France enjoyed a kind of cultural hegemony which it no longer holds, thus leaving its younger overseas neighbor bereft of an older cultural model. The decline of such cultural influences and the rise of commercialized art placed the artist in jeopardy.

Louise Bogan's comment on the way intellectuals view American culture is particularly relevant for its romantic echo. She believes that American culture, long dependent on European influences, lies stagnant, and must look to itself and its youth rather than to the past or future for useful innovations:

Apocalyptic visions of the future and nostalgic yearnings over the past, at the moment, will not do....The actual present is now the region of time which tends to be neglected.

This neglect has come to pass because we are now, in American as elsewhere in the Western world, artistically and spiritually at a point of stasis. We stand in the midst of what the French have called "an intergeneration"--one not characterized by fresh creative activity, but by imitation, repetition, analysis and critical appraisal....the young [those born c. 1930] need an insight into their situation which the older American intellectual, immobilized in his own emotional and spiritual depletion, has not yet been able to supply.⁶⁰

It is significant that Bogan associates a cultural crisis with a crisis of emotion and spirit. Imitation has replaced authenticity. An infusion of romanticism seems to be called for.

Other writers held romantic views of the relation between the artist and the world.⁶¹ Like Bogan, Lionel Trilling chose

a spiritual metaphor to describe the plight of the modern artist in the following passage:

For the purposes of his salvation, it is best to think of the artist as crazy, foolish, inspired-- as an unconditionable kind of man--and to make no provision for him until he appears in person and demands it. Our attitude to the artist is deteriorating as our sense of his needs increases. The more we undertake to provide for the artist, the more we incline to think of the artist as Postulant or Apprentice, and the less we think of the artist as Master....It may be coming to be true that for us the Master is not the artist himself but the Foundation, whose creative act the artist is.
(PR, 323)

Jacques Barzun considered the cultural consumer--the audience-- to be the biggest threat to artistic freedom when he writes:

...too many people know what they want from art, expect it, and...get it. Our political ideals dignify this tendency; our economic habits support it. The sovereignty of the people turns out to resemble...the infallibility of the customer.
(PR, 427)

Barzun goes on to say that the modern audience is no worse in cultivation than in other ages, but that the conditions of modern industrial life cause people to be "drained, mindless" yet "demanding" (PR, 428). C. Wright Mills picks up on Barzun's analysis of the damaging psychological effects of modern industrial society when he writes:

One key thing about American mass culture...is that it is not an "escape" from the strains of routine, but another routine, which in its murky formulations and pre-fabricated moods...deprive[s] the individual of his own fantasy life, and often emptie[s] him of the possibilities of having such a life. (PR, 446)

In light of Mills's statement, it is significant that surrealism in the novel has been hailed by some critics as the manifestation of a healthy impulse in modernist literature, designed to

liberate the reader from precisely that routine of culture which Mills describes, and to return to him the liberating potential of his own psyche.⁶² A number of critics echoed Trilling's assessment that the "stupidity and vulgarity" of American culture make it a hostile environment in which to create but that the artist must nonetheless gird his loins for this challenge to his survival.⁶³

The final question posed to the symposium respondents admits the ambivalence many artists and intellectuals feel about American culture. "Critical non-conformism (going back to Thoreau and Melville...)" is evoked as a possible model for the artist and intellectual (PR, 286). Norman Mailer, Delmore Schwartz, and Richard Chase share the common conviction that the artist defines himself in opposition to cultural norms.⁶⁴ The young Mailer exhibits fervor reminiscent of Trilling's "unconditionable artist" when he asserts:

Is there nothing to remind us that the writer does not need to be integrated into his society, and often works best in opposition to it.

I would propose that the artist feels most alienated when he loses the sharp sense of what he is alienated from....

Today the enemy is vague, the work seems done, the audience more sophisticated than the writer. Society has been rationalized, and the expert encroaches on the artist. (PR, 229)

Although Mailer's novels are markedly realistic, his attitudes on art, the artist, and society show the influence of romanticism and will find an echo in Gaddis' first novel.

These responses to the Partisan Review forum imply the paradoxical nature of the artist's relation to modern culture.

He is in opposition to what Trilling calls its vulgarity, yet he cannot escape the power of its technology and the increased demands of the popular audience. With his *métier* in danger of being usurped by television and film, the writer is challenged to reassert the dimensions of his artistic world. Reflexiveness demonstrates the impulse both to explore the technical confines of the novel form (an impulse which frequently ends in self-parody), and to call attention to the potential crisis in modern communication. That is, the dilemma of art and the artist can be approached by making the novel a process of posing and solving the problems confronted by the artist.⁶⁵

The novel which takes account of itself within its own pages is as old as the form. As early as the seventeenth-century, implied authors have intruded into their works, calling attention to the novel as a created artifact as well as commenting upon life. The authorial voice might enter the story to mock it (as did Sterne in Tristram Shandy), to undercut characters (as did Cervantes in Don Quixote), or to insure that the reader heard the correct moral voice, lest he be led astray by fallible characters (as did Richardson in Pamela). Within all these authorial intrusions there lies an important assumption: that the novel gives the reader a sense of reality; it creates a world which could be mistaken for so-called objective reality. If earlier novelists intruded into their fictions, it was usually out of a responsible impulse to set the scales of realism back to rights, to assure the reader of the fictive

nature of fiction and the moral nature of the world. Even if mock heroic or satiric intentions prompted the implied authors of Tristram Shandy and Tom Jones to enter their works, such intrusion did not jostle the equilibrium which existed between the novel and the world. No such equilibrium can be anticipated with modern fiction, with its question of perception. That dire consequences would result from the audience's mistaking a story for reality is now borne out by television and the cinema rather than the novel. Even the most formulaic adventure stories (Jaws, for example) achieve their realistic apotheosis on film, the medium which has supplanted the novel as a vehicle for realism.

Cinematic techniques and advanced communications technology have had an impact on fiction techniques, as novelists have applied principles of collage and juxtaposition to their narratives in order to increase the impression of verisimilitude which linear narrative could not produce. However, rather than making the novel more realistic, these technologically inspired techniques alter the narrative flow and call attention to the medium of the novel--words printed on a page. The kind of reflexiveness which marks the novels of Pynchon and Barth, for example, tends to be fundamentally different from the wry narrative intrusions of Sterne or Cervantes. The difference between early and modern reflexiveness lies in different attitudes to form and to the world which that form depicts. However critical they were of their world, the early novelists wrote with reference to an external reality, and they used

narrative form without calling that form into question. The reflexiveness of modern novels tends to come from a questioning of both reality and the forms used to describe it, a situation which has prompted critical mutterings about the "death" of the novel.⁶⁶ The novel has not ceased to be "about" something, in spite of Robbe-Grillet's arguments in that direction; it is rather that the nature of that "something" can no longer be readily described with reference to existing forms. The novel form, no longer a mode all writers feel comfortable taking for granted, has become, for some novelists, problematic. In Gaddis' work, the problematic nature of the form extends to questions about the nature of art in general and the role of the artist. These questions are expressed not only through plot, but in the very structure of Gaddis' novels.

Critics have considered the reflexiveness of much modernist fiction to be a sign of its irrelevance to life. On the contrary, reflexiveness can show up fundamental artistic problems which traditional forms sometimes leave unexamined. Inherent in both of Gaddis' novels, as in other modernist works, is a sense of cultural crisis which endangers the production of art. In The Recognitions this crisis is portrayed as a spiritual conflict within the artist which the novel demonstrates symbolically. In JR the crisis is more deeply engrained in language itself as the novel shows the virtual devaluing of human communication and its consequences for the artist's life and work. Both novels use reflexive techniques to enlarge on the conflicts which their artist-characters experience. It is

(to the situation of the artist in The Recognitions and JR
that this thesis now turns.

NOTES

¹Although critics vary in their dating of modernism, most concede that it includes artistic developments during the first four decades of this century. Peter Faulkner confines himself to British literature and dates modernism from 1910 to 1930. For Faulkner, modernism reflects the breakdown of established order and tradition. Modernist novelists in particular demonstrated the conviction that art should take into account this breakdown (Faulkner, Modernism, pp. 21-22). In The Sense of an Ending, Frank Kermode finds the expression of crisis and chaos most characteristic of modernism, which he categorizes in response to this sense as either "traditionalist," "anti-traditionalist," or "schismatic" (Kermode, pp. 103-104). The first movement he identifies with such "clerics" as T.S. Eliot. The second he links with the Continental influence of Dada and Surrealism. The third corresponds to what he considers the avant-garde. In a later work, Kermode refers to "palaeo" and "neo-modernism," as the traditionalist and later forms of this trend (Kermode, "The Modern," Continuities, p. 8). Bernard Bergonzi sees the distinguishing characteristic of the modernist temperament as "an unwillingness to take anything on trust, whether a sense of the nature of reality or the nature of literary form. Uncertainty was emphasized by a conviction that there had been a radical break with established cultural traditions, and that new ones had to be formed, or older ones recovered" (Bergonzi, "The Advent of Modernism: 1900-1920," in History of Literature in the English Language: The Twentieth Century, p. 44). Sharon Spencer, taking the term "modernism" for granted as not needing explanation, analyzes the innovative techniques developed by certain novelists since 1910 to depict the altered sense of reality which has come to be associated with the modernist vision (Spencer, Space, Time and Structure in the Modern Novel).

²Richard Ellmann's and Charles Feidelson's ambitious volume, The Modern Tradition, compiles the intellectual tradition which these critics consider to have informed the modern world view, a task which takes the editors back to eighteenth-century sources of modern philosophical attitudes and allows them to include documents from philosophy, psychology, physics and theology, as well as more predictable works of modern literature. Peter Faulkner also catalogues the eclectic influences on modernist literature in a useful summary (Modernism, pp. 13-22).

³Irving Howe explains the often contradictory visions of modernist art in his essay, "The Idea of the Modern." Howe sees modernism, like romanticism, as a break with its immediate past. With a "devotion to the problematic," modernists questioned beliefs of all kinds, yet persisted in making the artist a kind of quasi-spiritual quester (Howe, "The Idea of the Modern," pp. 19-22). According to Howe, modernist art

violates traditional aesthetic unities in an attempt to forge new expressions, and rejects modern culture as inauthentic while attempting to reclaim primitive realities through myth and techniques of surrealism. Although Howe does not question the seriousness of the modernist attitude, he hints that it frequently leads to relativity and nihilism which often is expressed in self-parody.

The strangely contradictory nature of the modernist attitude is well demonstrated by the case of T.S. Eliot, whose poetry was innovative and highly influential while his social criticism was reactionary and ultimately became a renunciation of modern culture.

⁴By humanism I mean an attitude which makes human life and culture its central concern. I am not designating specifically the humanism of Babbitt and More, the so-called New Humanists, with whom such traditional modernists as Hulme and Eliot took issue. T.S. Eliot, "The Humanism of Irving Babbitt," in Selected Prose of T.S. Eliot, ed. Frank Kermode (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), pp. 277-284; T.E. Hulme, "Humanism and the Religious Attitude," in Speculations, ed. Herbert Read (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1924; rpt., 1949), pp. 3-71. Both Eliot and Hulme object to the vague eclecticism of the New Humanists, a fault which derives, apparently, from their unsuccessful attempt to compensate for lost religion. However, in their concern for man, albeit with all his inadequacies, both Hulme and Eliot fit my deliberately large definition of humanism. The definition arises in part to assert the human-centered nature of modernist literature against criticism that it is denatured, sterile and nihilistic.

⁵Hulme, "Romanticism and Classicism," Speculations, p. 116.

⁶Hulme, p. 131.

⁷Edmund Wilson, Axel's Castle: A Study in the Imaginative Literature of 1870-1930 (1931; rpt. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969), pp. 1-3. I follow Wilson's definition in my use of the terms "classic" and "romantic" regarding the relation between the artist and the work of art. Later, the term "romance" will be defined in connection with the nineteenth-century American novel. In Chapter II further comments on the terms "classic" and "romantic" will be made in connection with a cross-reference in The Recognitions to Classical Greek art and the work of Nietzsche. This thesis argues that elements of classic and romantic thinking inform modernism and are apparent in Gaddis' treatment of the situation of the artist.

⁸Wilson, p. 117. As many other critics, Wilson laments Eliot's growing reactionary point of view, especially as it revealed what Wilson considered Eliot's futile belief in religious revelation (Wilson, p. 126).

⁹T.S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," in The Sacred Wood (1920; rpt. London: Methuen and Co., 1967), pp. 52-54.

¹⁰T.S. Eliot, After Strange Gods (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1934), p. 41.

¹¹Eliot, After Strange Gods, p. 58.

¹²T.S. Eliot, The Cocktail Party (1940; rpt. London: Faber and Faber, 1971), Act II, iii, p. 47. All further references to this work appear in the text under the truncated title, Cocktail.

¹³F.O. Mattheissen notes that Celia's path takes her to divinity while the other characters discover the way to greater humanity. F.O. Mattheissen, The Achievement of T.S. Eliot (1958; rpt. New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 229.

¹⁴Stephen's argument about aesthetics ranges over the ideas of Plato, Aristotle and Aquinas. James Joyce, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (1961; rpt. Harmondsworth, Eng.: Penguin Books, 1967), pp. 204-215.

¹⁵Joyce, Portrait, p. 247.

¹⁶Two works which examine such innovative novel techniques are Ralph Freedman, The Lyrical Novel (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963); and Sharon Spencer, Space, Time and Structure in the Modern Novel (Chicago: Swallow Press, 1971).

¹⁷Virginia Woolf, "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," in Collected Essays, ed. Leonard Woolf, I (London: Chatto and Windus, 1966), p. 321. Woolf expresses a similar sentiment elsewhere about the change in sensibility brought on by World War I. Virginia Woolf, A Room of One's Own (1928; rpt. Harmondsworth, Eng.: Penguin Books, 1974), pp. 13-17.

¹⁸Virginia Woolf, The Waves, in Jacob's Room and The Waves (1931; rpt. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1959), pp. 263-264.

¹⁹Woolf, The Waves, p. 354.

²⁰Henry James shows his modernity in his recommendation of a clear central consciousness, as in the following:

The figures in any picture, the agents in any drama, are interesting only in proportion as they feel their respective situations; since the consciousness, on their part, of the complication exhibited forms for us their link of connexion with it.

Henry James, "Preface to The Princess

Casamassima," in The Art of the Novel, introd., R. P. Blackmur (1934; rpt. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1962), p. 62.

²¹Woolf, Collected Essays, I, p. 334.

²²Woolf, p. 337.

²³The term "post-modernism" distinguishes between contemporary literature and what Kermode terms "traditional modernism," with its roots in romanticism, surrealism, and symbolism, and its belief in the necessity of art reclaiming tradition and hence providing order in a world of contingency. Eliot, T.E. Hulme, Pound, Joyce prior to Finnegan's Wake, and Virginia Woolf are all traditional modernists. The post-modernist attitude is parodic, reflexive, and frequently skeptical about the nature of reality and the power of language to convey anything but contingency. Beckett and a number of contemporary American novelists (not necessarily lumped together) are considered to embody this post-modernist attitude. See Christel van Boheemen-Saaf, "The Artist as Con-Man: The Reaction Against the Symbolist Aesthetic in Recent American Fiction," Dutch Quarterly Review, 7, pp. 305-318; Ihab Hassan, The Dismemberment of Orpheus: Toward a Postmodern Literature (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971); Hassan, Paracriticisms: Seven Speculations of the Times. For a more positive view of post-modernism, see Richard Wasson, "From Priest to Prometheus: Culture and Criticism in the Post-Modernist Period," Journal of Modern Literature, 3, No. 5 (July, 1974), pp. 1118-1202.

²⁴The following works express skepticism about the purpose and value of contemporary fiction: Saul Bellow, "Some Notes on Recent American Fiction," in The American Novel Since World War II, ed. Marcus Klein (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett Pub., 1969), pp. 159-174; Hugh Kenner, A Homemade World: The American Modernist Writers (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1975); Leslie Fiedler, "The Death and Rebirth of the Novel," in The Theory of the Novel: New Essays, ed. John Halperin (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), pp. 189-209. Mr. Fiedler does not so much sound the death knell for the novel as he does herald its transformation into a subspecies of communications technology. John Barth's views on the "fictive reality" of modern fiction (a quality which he sees as central to storytelling) imply the irrelevance of the so-called realistic novel. John Barth, "The Literature of Exhaustion," in The American Novel Since World War II, pp. 267-279; and John Barth: An Interview, Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature, 6 (Winter-Spring, 1965), 3-14.

²⁵While I agree with Ortega Y Gasset that modern art does, for the most part, convey a sense of a dehumanized universe, this is not to say that modern art, the novel in particular, demonstrates human experience within a diminished

sphere. Gaddis' novels are examples of art's capacity to express dehumanization from a humanistic perspective which is ultimately moral. José Ortega Y Gasset, "The Dehumanization of Art," in The Dehumanization of Art and Other Essays on Art, Culture, and Literature, trans. Helene Weyl (1948; rpt. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1968), pp. 3-54.

²⁶T.S. Eliot, "The Waste Land," in The Complete Plays and Poems (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1962), p. 50.

²⁷T.S. Eliot, "Ulysses, Order and Myth," in Selected Prose of T.S. Eliot, ed. Frank Kermode (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), pp. 177-178.

²⁸Georg Lukacs, The Theory of the Novel, trans. Anna Bostock (1920; rpt. Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1971), p. 31.

²⁹Lukacs, Theory of the Novel, pp. 33-34.

³⁰Lukacs moved away from his early romanticism to an open contempt for what he saw as the decadence of the modernist novel, with its confusion of perspectives and its despair at understanding reality. In "The Ideology of Modernism" he rejects his earlier idea of nostalgia:

Modern subjectivism, taking these imagined possibilities /of abstract and concrete potentiality/ for actual complexity of life, oscillates between melancholy and fascination.

Georg Lukacs, "The Ideology of Modernism," in The Meaning of Contemporary Realism, trans. John and Necke Mander (1957; rpt. London: Merlin Press, 1963), p. 22.

³¹Richard Chase, The American Novel and its Tradition (Garden City, New York: Doubleday-Anchor Books, 1957), p. 2.

³²I am indebted to Joel Porte for his insight that the romance novel, especially Pierre, studies human growth in terms of artistic growth. Joel Porte, The Romance in America (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1969), p. 170.

³³Herman Melville, Pierre or, The Ambiguities, ed. Henry Murray (New York: Hendricks House, Inc., 1962), pp. 251-252.

³⁴Hawthorne, implying that Hilda's choice of the copyist's profession is something of a sacrifice in the face of originality, writes:

Hilda's faculty of genuine admiration is one of the rarest to be found in human nature; and let us try to recompense her in kind by admiring her generous self-surrender, and her brave, humble

magnanimity in choosing to be the handmaid of those old magicians, instead of a minor enchantress within a circle of her own. (Nathaniel Hawthorne, The Marble Faun, in The Complete Novels and Selected Tales of Nathaniel Hawthorne, ed. Norman Holmes Pearson [New York: The Modern Library, 1937], p. 624.)

³⁵Henry David Thoreau, Walden and Civil Disobedience, ed. Owen Thomas (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1966), p. 61.

³⁶Melville, Pierre, p. 405.

³⁷Melville, p. 340.

³⁸Henry James, "Preface to The American," in The Art of the Novel, introd., R.P. Blackmur (1934; rpt. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1962), p. 33.

³⁹Eisenstein's discussion of montage techniques in music, film and painting apply also to the spatial organization of certain modernist novels. Sergei Eisenstein, "Synchronization of Senses," in The Film Sense, trans. Jay Leyda (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1947), pp. 68-109. See also Joseph Frank, "Spatial Form in Modern Literature," in The Widening Gyre: Crisis and Mastery in Modern Literature (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1963), pp. 3-62.

⁴⁰Montage techniques may be interpreted as giving the novel greater spatial impact. Stream of consciousness narration is also a development which increases the psychological if not pictorial realism of the novel form. Most obviously linked to cinematic reportage techniques is Dos Passos' use of the "camera eye."

⁴¹Robbe-Grillet writes:

...if I say, "The world is man," I shall always gain absolution; while if I say, "Things are things, and man is only man," I am immediately charged with a crime against humanity.

To condemn, in the name of the human, the novel which deals with such a man is therefore to adopt the humanist point of view, according to which it is not enough to show man where he is: it must further be proclaimed that man is everywhere.

(Alain Robbe-Grillet, For a New Novel: Essays on Fiction, trans. Richard Howard [1963; rpt. New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1965], pp. 52-53.) All further references to this work appear in the text under the acronym FANN.

⁴²By "camera eye" I mean a neutral lens rather than Dos Passos' camera eye technique. Robbe-Grillet wants to achieve total narrative objectivity and to eliminate authorial bias. Dos Passos used his camera eye technique to heighten the impact of his subject matter but not to eliminate his point of view.

⁴³In spite of his criticism of Flaubert, Robbe-Grillet shares with the French master a concern for objectivity which in the novel Jacques Barzun terms "naked form." Barzun's discussion of Flaubert's attempts to eliminate subjective elements from his fiction could also apply to Robbe-Grillet. Jacques Barzun, Classic, Romantic and Modern, 2nd rev. ed. (1943; rpt. Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1961), pp. 104-107.

⁴⁴The most virulent attack on Robbe-Grillet's theories and practice that I have found comes from Louis Kampf, who considers Robbe-Grillet's method "an unintentional parody, perhaps the reductio ad absurdum, of the empiricist theory of knowledge," and his novels a reflection of his "refusal to confront the complexities of human experience." Louis Kampf, On Modernism: The Prospects for Literature and Freedom (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1967), pp. 288-292.

⁴⁵R.W.B. Lewis and Tony Tanner have both shown that American novelists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, while creating a wide range of fictional worlds, have usually taken note of the particular social and moral milieu of their times. R.W.B. Lewis, The American Adam: Innocence Tragedy and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1955); and Tony Tanner, City of Words: American Fiction 1950-1970.

⁴⁶Frequently the relationship between the individual and society is depicted by postmodernist fiction in satire or parody. John Barth's Giles Goat-Boy: or, The Revised Syllabus (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1966) and Thomas Pynchon's Gravity's Rainbow (New York: Viking Press, 1973) are two such works.

⁴⁷John Crowe Ransom is thought to have coined this title in his book of the same name. John Crowe Ransom, The New Criticism (Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1941). Although he never defines the word specifically, he does term R.P. Blackmur a "new" critic because of his innovative close readings of poetry (Ransom, The New Criticism, vii). An American Scholar Forum took up the question of definition but came to no single conclusion. Allen Tate defined New Criticism as a "return to the literary text" and a revolt against "historical scholarship." William Barrett et al, "The New Criticism: American Scholar Forum," American Scholar, 20, No. 2 (Spring, 1951), 218. William Barrett disagreed with Tate, claiming that historical criticism characterized the work of Tate and John Crowe Ransom ("The New Criticism: American Scholar Forum," 219). For all

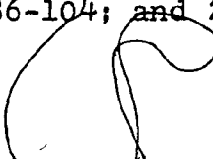
their differences, the assembled critics were united in agreeing that there were New Critics but no clearly defined New Criticism. Nonetheless, the term persists.

⁴⁸Vernon Hall, Jr., "The New Criticism," in A Short History of Literary Criticism (New York: New York University Press, 1963), p. 172. That the New Critics considered literature a vital, ineffable activity is clear from Ransom's praise of T.S. Eliot as a critical "prophet," and Ransom's belief that poetry is "ontologically different from other discourse," and cannot be dealt with scientifically (Ransom, The New Criticism, pp. 146, 281). Although he was not considered a New Critic, I.A. Richards shared the belief of these American critics that literature, primarily poetry, was vital to society and that a reaffirmation of aesthetic values was needed. His criticism proposed a psychological theory of value in relation to which literature could be judged and its artistic and social importance could be understood. See C.K. Ogden and I.A. Richards, The Meaning of Meaning (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1922); I.A. Richards, Practical Criticism (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1929); and I.A. Richards, Principles of Literary Criticism (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959).

⁴⁹Donald Davidson et al. I'll take My Stand (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1930). The terms Fugitives and Agrarians are used in reference to the group of southerners, some of whom came to be associated with New Criticism. Louise Cowan distinguishes between the two titles when she identifies the Fugitives as sixteen poets who met between 1915 and 1928 to discuss poetry and who from 1922 to 1925 published the literary magazine The Fugitive. The Agrarians were twelve scholars who agreed on certain economic, social and religious principles. John Crowe Ransom, Donald Davidson, Allen Tate, and Robert Penn Warren were part of both groups. Louise Cowan, The Fugitive Group: A Literary History (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1959), p. xvi.

⁵⁰Frederick Pottle writes that New Criticism rejected the prevailing historical method of analysis but at the same time established its own somewhat vague critical methodology which, according to Pottle, reflects but does not extend the limits of "historically given sensibility." Frederick A. Pottle, "The New Critics and the Historical Method," Yale Review, 43, No. 1 (1953), 15-17.

⁵¹This view is maintained in the following works: Alfred Kazin, On Native Grounds: An Interpretation of Modern American Prose Literature (1942; rpt. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1970), pp. 425-446; Robert Gorham Davis, "The New Criticism and the Democratic Tradition," The American Scholar, 19, No. 1 (Winter, 1949-1950), 9-19; and William Barrett et al., "The New Criticism: American Scholar Forum," American Scholar 19, No. 1 (Winter, 1949-1950), 86-104; and 20, No. 2 (Spring, 1951), 218-231.



⁵²This view emerges from the Agrarian anthology: Herbert Agar and Allen Tate, eds., Who Owns America? A New Declaration of Independence (1936; rpt. Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1970). Allen Tate also criticizes modern mechanized culture in his work Reason in Madness (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1941).

⁵³T.S. Eliot, After Strange Gods (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1934), p. 17.

⁵⁴A general sense of resignation to human "fallenness" characterizes much of Tate's Reactionary Essays, particularly his attack on the optimism of the humanists Babbitt and More. Allen Tate, "Humanism and Naturalism," in Reactionary Essays on Poetry and Ideas (1936; rpt. Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1968), pp. 113-144. A similar distrust of contemporary literary themes as mere fads makes Robert Penn Warren's plea for renewed spontaneity of purpose in literature a strangely hollow recommendation. Robert Penn Warren, "Literature as a Symptom," in Who Owns America? pp. 264-279.

⁵⁵By formal principles I mean those elements which have come to be seen as fundamental to the creation of literary genres, for example, meter and imagery in poetry, and narration, plot and imagery in fiction.

⁵⁶The vagueness of New Criticism has led one commentator to note that "there seems to be a trend on the part of certain 'new critics' to emphasize their own importance by de-emphasizing that of the poet himself." This situation leads to an interpretative free-for-all in which poetic intention is obliterated. Alexander E. Jones, "The Poet as Victim," College English, 16, No. 3 (Dec., 1954), p. 167.

⁵⁷Newton Arvin et al., "Our Country and Our Culture," Partisan Review, 19, No. 3 (May-June, 1952), 283-326; No. 4 (July-Aug., 1952), 420-450; and No. 5 (Sept.-Oct., 1952), 562-597. Marcus Klein refers to this symposium as evidence of what he considers to be the mood of "accommodation" which characterizes the novels of the 1950s in contrast to the "alienation" of the novels of earlier decades of this century. Marcus Klein, After Alienation: American Novels in Mid-Century (New York: World Publishing Co., 1962), pp. 14-17. It seems to me that Klein distorts the symposium responses to make his point. The attitudes expressed, while not a consensus, nonetheless demonstrate the ambivalence with which many writers view American culture, an attitude which hardly bespeaks accomodation to existing norms.

⁵⁸

Question One: To what extent have American intellectuals actually changed their attitudes toward America and its institutions?

Question Two: Must the American intellectual and writer adapt himself to mass culture? If he must, what forms can his adaptation take? Or do you believe that a democratic society necessarily leads to a leveling of culture, to a mass culture which will overrun intellectual and aesthetic values traditional to Western civilization?

Question Three: Where in American life can artists and intellectuals find the basis of strength, renewal, and recognition, now that they can no longer depend fully on Europe as a cultural example and source of vitality?

Question Four: If a reaffirmation and rediscovery of America is under way, can the tradition of critical non-conformism (going back to Thoreau and Melville and embracing some of the major expressions of American intellectual history) be maintained as strongly as ever?

(Newton Arvin et al., "Our Country and Culture," Partisan Review, 19, No. 3 [May-June, 1952], 286.) All further references to this symposium appear in the text and are entitled PR.

⁵⁹ Writing in the early part of the nineteenth-century, Alexis de Tocqueville had this to say about writing and publishing in America: "The ever-increasing crowd of readers, and their continual craving for something new, ensure the sale of books which nobody much esteems." Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, trans. Henry Reeve (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1889), II, p. 55. Elsewhere in this work, Tocqueville makes clear his conviction that the tyranny of majority opinion in a democracy acts as a damper on extremes of any kind in literature, including excellence (Tocqueville, I, p. 269). James Fenimore Cooper has a fictional character comment about the impact of free enterprise on American writing: "Talent is sure of too many avenues to wealth and honours, in America, to seek, unnecessarily, an unknown and hazardous path." James Fenimore Cooper, "Letter to the Abbate Giromachi," Notions of the Americans Picked up by a Travelling Bachelor (London: Henry Colburn, 1828), II, pp. 141-142.

⁶⁰ PR, 562-63. This sentiment is reminiscent of Emerson's plea for a fresh indigenous literature in "The Poet." Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Poet," in Selections from Ralph Waldo Emerson, ed. Stephen E. Whicher (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1957), pp. 222-241.

⁶¹ It must be added that respondents did provide a range of reactions to the question of the influence of mass culture, from William Phillips' willingness to accept the commercialization of art (PR, 58-8), to Mark Shorer's less optimistic

vision of the impact of such culture on artistic autonomy, in the following excerpt:

...writers, choosing [mass-media] to work in, have to give their lives to them, and being incapable of sociological neutrality, lose their lives. If poets were ever the unknown legislators of the world, they can under these circumstances....no longer attempt to be. (PR, 317)

Irving Howe considers that "culture industries" have become "parasites on the body of art, letting it neither live nor die" (PR, 578). He sees the only positive change to be signaled by the advent of a time when artists can sustain themselves by their own work.

⁶²Fredric Jameson notes the psychically liberating dimension of surrealism in the following discussion of the sense of mystery in the surreal:

For about the feeling of mystery there is nothing to be said: it is in itself merely a sign that that long-hoped-for enlargement of our beings, release from the repressive weight of the reality principle, has taken place, that life is suddenly once more transformed in quality, has somehow recaptured its original reasons for being. If we wish to say more about this relatively ineffable value, we must somehow shift to a more precise, or at the least more articulable terminology, and it is at this point that the Surrealists have recourse to the words for the privileged experiences in which the sense of mystery is most frequently released: love, the dream, laughter, automatic writing, childhood. (Fredric Jameson, Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature / Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1971; pp. 102-103.)

⁶³Leslie Fiedler responds:

It seems to me that it has become absurd to ask whether a democratic society is worthwhile if it entails a vulgarization and leveling of taste. Such a leveling the whole world is bound to endure, with or without political guarantees of freedom; and the serious writer must envision his own work in such a context, realize that his own final meanings will arise out of a dialectical interplay between what he makes and a given world of "mass culture." (PR, 295)

Joseph Frank recommends that American writers expand their

horizons beyond their own national boundaries to avoid being stunted by the meager aspects of cultural nationalism (PR, 435).

⁶⁴ Although Richard Chase questions the applicability of the term "alienation," to American culture, he nevertheless notes that a dissidence has, paradoxically, been incorporated into the very fibre of American life. In another vein, Delmore Schwartz attacks American cultural conformity as a complacent evasion of the true nature of reality. He writes:

It is in the light of this darkness [Schwartz's word for the cultural miasma of the 1950s], that the will to conformism, which is now the chief prevailing fashion among intellectuals, reveals its true nature: it is a flight from the flux, chaos and uncertainty of the present, a forced and false affirmation of stability in the face of immense and continually mounting instability. (PR, 594)

⁶⁵ The notion that art involves problem-solving in which the work provides the solution is an idea with which Gide prefaces L'Immoraliste: "C'est à contre-cœur que j'emploie ici le mot 'problème'. A vrai dire, en art, il n'y a pas de problèmes- dont l'oeuvre d'art ne soit le suffisante solution." André Gide, L'Immoraliste (Paris: Mercure de France, 1957), p. 2.

⁶⁶ see note 24.

CHAPTER II

ARTISTS AND ART

The Recognitions and JR are both forums for art theories which are argued by the novels' artist-characters. The Recognitions demonstrates that art creation is a kind of symbolic moral action. The artist discovers that traditional values have been divested of their true meaning and merely survive as fetishes and fads. Moreover, he perceives that the very nature of reality is open to question. Given the chaos of modern life, it is understandable that the artist would desire to project a form of order on his perceptions and his art. However, such an impulse frequently leads to self-delusion and personal isolation, as the novel shows. The artist, as a spiritual questor, must seek to know reality in all its swirling contingency without substituting a false artistic order for such challenging experience. The novel presents an ambiguous outcome to this struggle. JR continues the artistic quest of The Recognitions but in middle age, as it were, with only a memory of its former idealism. The vulgar culture from which the first novel's youthful artists are alienated has grown into an ominous spectre of both chaos and control, which threatens the survival of the artist and his art. Their critical consciousness notwithstanding, JR's artists are all made victims of the destructive element in American life. With their humanity and

their creativity sapped by "conditions" beyond their control, JR's artists nonetheless struggle grimly to survive, and the novel's ending is testimony to the value, if not the success, of that struggle. It is the purpose of this chapter to trace the development of Gaddis' ideas of art through analysis of the artist-characters in The Recognitions and JR.

The Recognitions

Gaddis' depiction of the misplaced values of modern culture calls to mind Thoreau's statement: "Shams and delusions are esteemed for soundest truths, while reality is fabulous."¹ Gaddis might have rephrased Thoreau thus: modern culture is fraudulent and crass while reality is mysterious. As the novel shows, Americans are terrified by the mystery of reality and seek to dispel the exterior unknown through science and the interior unknown through the so-called science of psychology, both disciplines for which Gaddis has little respect. The mysteries of the irrational and the unconscious (Gaddis uses the words interchangeably) are linked to images of both wholeness and chaos. Part of the artist's quest is to know this reality, to know himself and, presumably, to symbolize this knowledge in art.²

The major delusion under which Gaddis' artists labor is the impression that they can control all the elements of reality by controlling the elements of their art--the artistic impulse, the medium, and the audience response--thus making art a virtual substitute for life. Forgery represents one such form of control:

The artist drives out technical and interpretive variables by remaining intent on the "original" which he copies. Thus forgery becomes, as Wyatt says, "safe from accident," or contingency, and invulnerable to audience response. The artist turns in on his work, retreats from the world and removes the threat of audience rejection. Mechanization is another blight on art. It robs the artist of his creative autonomy and limits the potential for communication of meaning. Ultimately, it turns the artist into a technician, obsessed with his medium instead of meaning. The projection of rigid orthodoxies onto art also robs it of spontaneity and relevance, especially if the artist's ideas are rooted in a vision which the contemporary world does not embrace. This is not to say that Gaddis is an iconoclast who rejects the power of history and tradition. The opposite is true. However, he implies that traditions should always take account of and be relevant to the conditions of the present. Once again, art should not replace life. Thus the artist's task is not easy, since he must recognize, in the process, undeniable fears and vulnerabilities and be willing to confront the world as it is, in all its fortuitousness and degradation, and at the same time continue to search for philosophical and emotional grounding. Gaddis presents the possibility of such grounding in the principle of love, which he associates with human relations and art. Finally, the artist must be willing to live in a world in which nothing is certain except uncertainty and still seek human community in life and communication through art.

This section of the chapter will analyze the artist's dilemma by examining his cultural milieu, the New York and Paris art scenes, and the secondary artist-characters who inhabit them. It is this welter of detail which gives The Recognitions its topical and satiric impact. Then focus will shift to the main artist-characters whose ideas and actions constitute the central forum of the novel.

We turn first to the novel's urban scenes, the different yet fundamentally similar worlds of Paris and New York. Gaddis debunks the so-called Old World culture before he exposes the feverish vacancy of the New. It would seem that Gaddis shares a common attitude of his time that France could no longer live up to its reputation as cultural model for America (cf. Ch. i). Paris is introduced with a parody of Shakespeare's description of the aging Cleopatra: "Paris lay by like a promise accomplished: age had not withered her, nor custom staled her infinite vulgarity."³ Parisians have established the monetary price of everything, in the process levelling art to a vulgar standard. The French, considering themselves arbiters of world culture, judge even counterfeit art original if it is produced in France. Most gullible to French cultural hegemony are the feckless Americans. The following scathing narrative comment makes clear that Americans continue to respect French culture while denying the reality of their own:

Before their [Americans'] displacement from nature, baffled by the grandeur of their own culture which they could not define, and so believed did not exist, these transatlantic visitors had learned to admire in this neatly

parceled definition of civilization the tyrannous pretension of many founded upon the rebellious efforts of a few, the ostentation of thousands presumed upon the strength of a dozen.... (73)

Gaddis condemns French culture for perpetrating "grounds for vanity of language...supercilious posturing of intellect...insolent arbitration of taste...[and] dogmata of excellence" (73). Paris affects Americans in such a way that they become passive observers of a culture which excludes them, because everywhere there is the illusion of completion. "From the intractable perfection of the crepusculous Île de France...to the static depravity of the Grands Boulevards, it was unimpeachable: in superficiating this perfection, it absorbed the beholder and shut out the creator: no more could it have imitation than a mermaid..." (73).

Paris becomes synonymous with the word "art" which, like "love," has long since ceased to mean anything legitimate. The narrative catalogues instances of artistic "sacrilege," making a case for the accusation that in this culture "pictures are bullion" (81). Art has been bartered for money the way love has been sold through prostitution. Gaddis extends the metaphor of prostitution to encompass both art and love. Paris is full of people who are willing to traffic with and undercut the value of art and love. The narrative gives no quarter to innocence or spontaneity; even the simple grace of a man sitting beside the Seine with his lover turns vulgar when the narrative undercuts the scene by showing the man's repeated "delicate" nose-picking (83-85).

Paris presents an alluring façade for naive Americans, but no chance for growth.⁴ To take Paris seriously is to bank on illusion, as even the broken Mr. Feddle seems to recognize when he quotes from Dostoyevski's The Idiot: "We've had enough of following our whims; it's time to be reasonable. And all this, all this life abroad, and this Europe of yours is all a fantasy. Remember my words, you'll see it for yourself" (1,000-1,001)! This quotation prefaces the final Paris section. Clearly the Greenwich Village art crowd that has migrated to Left Bank cafés has not heeded Feddle's warning.

The only wise reaction to French cultural hegemony seems to be rejection, a solution sought by the youthful Wyatt at the end of the first Paris scene. The narrative compares his decision to leave Paris with Raymond Lully's rejection five centuries earlier of diseased love symbolized by a beautiful woman ravaged by cancer (86). The success of Wyatt's escape from the diseased culture can only be determined by examining the culture to which he returns.

The attractiveness of Paris culture is only a gaudy veneer over its corruption. No such superficial beauty characterizes Gaddis' descriptions of New York. If Paris turns the visitor passive with its illusion of cultural completion, New York stupefies its inhabitants with its assaults on their senses. The sustaining forces of love and religious belief have long since been given over to the transcending value of money. In the following description, Gaddis indicates that New York's population has repressed the need for love in exchange for the

more controllable monetary equivalent, an exchange which Protestantism inadvertently sanctioned. Gaddis refers to the early Christian scholar and proto-Arian thinker, Origen, to heighten his parody of modern self-denial, and of the debasing of the human spirit before commerce:

So well had Origen succeeded [allegedly castrating himself for God], sowing his field without a seed, that the 'conspiracy' conceived in light, born, bred in darkness, and harassed to maturity in dubious death and rapturous martyrdom, continued. *Miserere nobis*, said the mitred lips. *Vae victis*, the statistical heart.

Tragedy was foresworn, in the ritual denial of the ripe knowledge that we are drawing away from one another, that we share only one thing, share the fear of belonging to another, or to others, or to God; love or 'money' tender equated in advertising and the world, where only money is currency, and under dead trees and brittle ornaments prehensile hands exchange forgeries of what the heart dare not surrender.⁵

Bereft of love, New York's population composes a kind of "naked city." The following passage is reminiscent of The Waste Land. "Faith is not pampered, nor hope encouraged; there is no place to lay one's exhaustion; but instead pinnacles skewer it undisguised against vacancy."⁶

The environment in which human faith withers is depicted as a milieu at war with itself. In his imagery, Gaddis anthropomorphizes the conflict as a battle of the sexes. The masculine sky threatens but does not subdue "mother" earth and her "son," the city, as the two conspire to usurp the father's power.⁷ New York, the "Titanic capital," seems to gain nourishment from its own polluted, cacophonous atmosphere. Only those humans who have grown up with this filth can survive on its

pollutants, like cockroaches. Otto is such an inhabitant, "...his faculties so highly civilized that he seemed not to notice the billions of particles swirling around him, seemed not to notice the flashing of lights, the clangor of steel in conflict, the shouts, and the words spoken, timorous, timerarious, eructations of slate-coloured lungs, seemed to acknowledge nothing but his own purpose..." (229).

The urban population is passive, bereft of vital free will. People do not act so much as they are acted upon. "Intent on immediacies," they are unconscious of their predicament. Gaddis describes these citizens as inanimate objects, driven by the mechanisms of urban economy. The homeward flow of office workers becomes an extended monetary metaphor:

Each minute and each cubic inch was hurled against that future as inevitable as the past, coined upon eight million counterfeits who moved with the plumb weight of lead coated with the frenzied hope of quicksilver, protecting at every pass the cherished falsity of their milled edges against the threat of hardness in their neighbors as they were rung together, fallen from the Hand they feared but could no longer name, upon the pitiless table stretching all about them, tumbling there in all the desperate variety of which counterfeit is capable, from the perfect alloy recast under the thudding heaviness of lead and the thinly coated brittle terror of glass. (303)

Those individuals who do exercise their originality, who separate themselves from this vacant flow of "button beings" face a difficult life. Some, like Anselm, become warped by their vision of the world and turn their need for love into perverse outrage. Other sensitive souls like Esme do not survive. Esme literally cannot "stomach" modern urban life.⁸

Like the perpetual conflict of inanimate life in the city, the firmament too is out of harmony. Most of the outdoor scenes take place in inclement weather (438-440), and at night. As will be explained later in this chapter, the night is associated with the unconscious. It is during such periods that the moon, a feminine symbol, appears threatened, shrunken by the doings on earth, as if this feminine image could no longer brook the masculine violations to which she must bear nocturnal witness.⁹ Equally unsettling is the unbroken vacancy of "another blue day" of sunshine, which hints at a kind of cosmic stasis. The narrative denounces the animated inanimate of mechanized city life exemplified by feverishly flicking night lights and street signs indicating the mechanical control of human activity (162-63, 690). Gaddis implies that it is part of human responsibility to take back control over one's life, to exercise free will. At the same time, the desire to control reality through art can threaten the very process of artistic growth, as Wyatt learns.

The New York art scene is the most obvious example of a milieu which substitutes artifice and control for truth and spontaneity. Gaddis repeatedly introduces images of the hot-house, an unnatural, over-cultivated milieu in which creative fruits tend to rot (217, 651, 662). A highly visible part of this scene is the camp culture of the homosexual population which Gaddis describes as the height of decadent masquerade.¹⁰ Café and party chatter echoes jokes and phrases from the Paris scene; but instead of lending a sense of shared experience and

common values, this repetition weaves a pattern of monotony and homogeneity, a turning in of events on themselves.

New York is rife with the consequences of commercialized art. Art becomes an item to consume in order to increase one's status. Dialogue and narrative combine to show the power of American "mass" culture to assimilate art and turn it into crassness and profit. Otto's father, Mr. Pivner, the passive consumer par excellence, reads an advertisement claiming to provide the novice with "ghost artists": "WE PAINT IT YOU SIGN IT WHY NOT GIVE AN EXHIBITION" (791). The advertisement shows that American capitalism plays on people's desire for "recognition" without effort. Another advertisement makes the case even clearer: "If you can count, you can paint..." (610). Gaddis' outrage at the "mechanization of art" is given fuller vent in his second novel, JR, where, as we shall see, mechanization is linked to the destruction of human communication. In The Recognitions, the debasement of artistic principles results from the introduction of the profit motive into art.

Gaddis indicates that it is not always easy to distinguish between true and false artistic ideas, as well as finished products. Artistic intention makes the difference between what Wyatt means by the "invisible" artist and what the newspaper means by "ghost artists," as will be shown. Even the most inviolable ideas--and Wyatt's ideas are just these--can be mouthed by pseudo-aesthetes. Wyatt's carefully phrased theory of "disciplined nostalgia" (46) turns up in the mouth of the stock Englishman, the British RA, who attends Brown's party for

art patrons. Amid drunken conversation, the RA claims that his own early art work is "disciplined nostalgia for things I umm ...might have done" (715). Gaddis implies that there is nothing new under the sun of modern culture. At the same time, he calls into question the distinction between Wyatt's and the RA's ideas. If a fool and an intelligent person say the same thing, wherein lies the difference? Gaddis implies that in this world of interchangeable parts, where originality is rarely possible, the difference between the real and the fraudulent lies in the individual's intention. Hence, forgery can have its own integrity, as Wyatt and Mr. Feddle know, depending only on the forger's approach to his work.

Gaddis questions the intentions not only of vulgarians and snobs but also of effete connoisseurs. Even more diabolical than Recktail Brown's activities as a trafficker in art fakes is the cynical attitude of his partner, Basil Valentine, who believes that art should be kept out of reach of ordinary people. Valentine sees Brown's work as a realistic pursuit. He tells an incredulous Wyatt, "[Brown] does not understand reality ... [he] is reality..." (262). According to Gaddis, Brown's cynicism is no worse than Valentine's belief that people are incapable of appreciating beauty (337). Crassness and effeteness are just two aspects of the same cynicism. Like Brown, Valentine wants to control the effect of art by substituting frauds in place of originals, as he tells Esme:

...because any sanctuary of power...protects beautiful things. To keep people...to control people, to give them something...anything cheap

that will satisfy them at the moment, to keep them away from beautiful things, to keep them where their hands can't touch beautiful thingsBecause there are so few...there is so little beauty...that to preserve them....(986)

Esme's question, "...but to make more...beautiful things?" goes unheard. According to Gaddis, the artist (and presumably the critic) must have the strength to accept a sense of *métier* that eschews these effete and vulgar views. An examination of critics and artists in The Recognitions as they struggle between the Scylla and Charybdis of artistic bad faith will further explain the nature of their dilemmas.

As a novel about the quest for personal enlightenment through art, The Recognitions contains conflicting signposts, rough moral escapades, and wrong intellectual turns along the way. Although some characters are more sensitive than others, none are without flaws and all are vital for an understanding of the cultural climate of the novel. Max, for example, illustrates commercial artistic success through cynicism. The narrative introduces him as a fraud with intelligence. Even the pretentious Otto is made uncomfortable by Max's ease, as the following passage shows:

The unconscionable smile, Otto remembered unpleasantly, not a smile to make one feel cheerful in its presence....Rather its intimation was that the wearer knew all the dismal secrets of some evil jungle whence he had just come....It was a smile that had encouraged many to devote confidences.... He dealt largely in facts, knowing for instance that most Hawaiian grass skirts are made in Switzerland, that Scottish Border ballads originated in the Pacific islands.... (204-205)

That Max spouts facts and intellectual glosses on other people's

problems does not earn him narrative respect. Once again Gaddis seems to be undercutting some seriously advanced ideas by having Max mention, for example, Frazer's theory of the connection between religion and ritual (571), a theory which the narrative takes up seriously elsewhere.¹¹ However, this "blasphemy" is another demonstration that ideas are public domain. Keen intellects may inherit these ideas, but unless they embrace them with integrity, they are frauds. Max is such a fraud: a con man who grasps facts but believes nothing. Max understands and uses the "fetid jungle," the entropic hot house atmosphere of the New York art world. He is up-to-date, "a parody on the moment" (560). An entrepreneur of fads, Max changes métier (from painting to novel writing) to suit the art market (484). He is Gaddis' parody of the modern Renaissance man whose ostensibly broad learning is really just the gleaning of fragments. He chooses institutionalized means to understand his friends, spouting psychoanalytical terms to explain their difficulties instead of offering compassionate help (488). The ultimate cynic, Max defends his own plagiarism with cool practicality. During a bistro argument with Stanley and Otto, Max tries to convince them that art forgery is justified because it satisfies the demands of the art market for more paintings. Ironically, the paintings in question are those Wyatt has forged. Max argues,

What's the difference?...Authorized paintings by Dierick Bouts?...Who authorizes them. Somebody says, One wishes there were more stories by Conan Doyle, somebody else wishes there were more paintings by...van der Goes. So, after a careful study

of the early Flemish painter's technique....
 What's the difference? You fake a Durer by
 taking the face from one and turning it
 around, the beard from another....

--But only on the surface, Stanley said.

--On the surface! How much deeper do people
 go? The people who buy them....Is there
 something diabolic about bringing Sherlock
 Holmes back to life? (494)

Max's argument would at first seem similar to Wyatt's own justification for forgery, evidence that Gaddis might subvert the ideas of his most prominent artist. But on closer examination there is a crucial difference between the two artists' intentions: Max justifies forgery as a means to satisfy the demands of a superficial art market; Wyatt has purer artistic impulses, as will be shown. That Max's art interests really penetrate no further than his wallet becomes clear when, towards the novel's end, he is reported to have paid off a Paris critic in return for a favorable review of his art show, a practice which Wyatt refused to accept earlier in his career (1,003).

Max is associated with the perversion of the intellect and the denial of the spirit. Stanley alludes to Max's diabolical aspect as he points towards the former's disappearance into the subway and says, "...he's gone, down there" (496). Max disbelieves in sin, God, the devil. He taunts Stanley for his religiousness and Otto for his gullibility, in the process making these two characters seem more humane.

Like Max, the critic in the green wool shirt is another denizen of the New York art world whose success is based on false intentions. The reader receives no indication that this character should be seen in terms other than those in which

Anselm, the feverish ascetic, describes him. Anselm points him out to an incredulous Otto:

Some half-ass critic,...a three-time psychoanaloser....With his fake conversion to the Church. You remember that little tiny girl that used to be around?...He used to take her home and dress her in little girl's clothes and rape her.¹²

The critic's masturbatory sexual experience with Esther supplies further evidence of his perversions (685). Benny, like Anselm, another sensitive failure, condemns the critic for his inability to "recognize" another artist's work (643-646). Finally the critic becomes Gaddis' personal antagonist: the critic makes an appearance in a tailor shop, pants down, next to an anonymous poet. The two men discuss their reading matter: a large red-and-black covered novel resembling The Recognitions. Neither of them intends to read it, but both of them will pass judgement on it in their various art circles. The critic shows himself not only lacking in intellectual integrity, but in compassion. He leaves the tailor shop and inadvertently meets Mr. Feddle, the kindly eccentric who amuses himself by autographing literary masterpieces. He is carrying The Idiot, as well as Anselm's new Confessions, both of which he claims to have written. Outraged, the critic refuses to understand Feddle's harmlessly absurd self-vindication; it strikes too close to the absurdity of the critic's own judgements. Feddle looks after the critic and quotes a relevant line from Dostoyevski: "'Did you imagine that I did not foresee all this hatred'" (1,000):

Of central importance to the novel as a forum on art are

the three would-be artists, Otto, Stanley and Wyatt. Their ideas compose the central complex of Gaddis' artistic arguments; Otto, the least successful of the three artists, has the worst artistic (and personal) intentions. He is all pretense. Like his name, which is reversible, Otto becomes a mirror image of his times. The narrative alludes to his Prufrockian character (182, 476, 541). He is obsessed with being what he thinks others find acceptable; thus, he succeeds only in being a chameleon. The narrative reveals the pretension to elegance, romance and action which underlies Otto's travel plans, his behavior, dress and even his facial expression. He fools no one but himself. He carries around his unfinished play, fittingly titled The Vanity of Time which is culled from the conversation he hears in cafés. Because he lacks a moral or intellectual center, his work, like his personality, is fragmented. In fact, Otto lives as if he were acting. When not observed, his features are vacant (657). Feasley says he is a reproduction of something that never existed (492). Esme claims that he is a victim of his own observations (479). Lacking identity, Otto is at the mercy of contingency, much as his father, Mr. Pivner, becomes the victim of his own half-grasped ideas. Mr. Pivner pathetically believes in Dale Carnegie's formula for personal success, How to Win Friends and Influence People (532). His attempts to practice this plan backfire when his attempt at friendly conversation on a bus leads to his being accused of making a homosexual advance (538). Like his father, Otto tries to put his postures into action. He pretends

that he is affluent and successful in his work and with women. He is undercut on all three counts: he is accused of plagiarism; his friends borrow his money and he finally becomes the inadvertent carrier for Sinnisterra's counterfeit money; and he is repeatedly accused of being "a fag" who is terrified of women. When father and son attempt to meet, their contingent worlds breed a kind of slap-stick chaos which results in Mr. Pivner's hospitalization and Otto's arrest (539-540). That they are the victims of their own delusions does not qualify them for narrative compassion. Gaddis does not withhold criticism of those individuals who fail to think and act with integrity.

Otto may lack control over his life, but he over-controls personal relationships by refusing to give love while offering a pretense of his plaintive need for it. In simpler terms, he is insincere; his words are belied by his actions. This disjunction appears most damning when, in his final scene with Esme, Otto makes a passionate case for the necessity of belief in "things" while refusing to believe in the relationship he claims to want with Esme. He pleads, "It's as though when you lose someone...then you lose contact with everything...and nobody...and nothing is real any more" (515). The narrative describes Esme's rejection of Otto and his reaction in monetary metaphor. She slips between his fingers like loose change. For his part, Otto has "hoarded" his feelings:

He stood before her as he had stood on the dock before the glare of that white fruit boat; and as he had counted out change for the beggar in whose face he saw no beauty...he computed his

emotions, reckoning how much he could spare, and how much retain for himself. (515-516).

When he moves to embrace Esme, his bogus sling falls off; he literally drops his pretense. But it is too late for honesty. Esme walks out of his life and Otto is left "...looking beyond her, so quickly gathering up all that he had almost lost" (516).

As the novel progresses, Otto gains belated self-awareness. He explains to Wyatt's ex-wife Esther that he mistrusts even himself, that he does not know his own feelings, and that as an artist he cannot "produce the gold":

Do you think it's you [Esther] I mistrust?... if I didn't trust you then, I mean mistrust you, then, I wouldn't have learned to mistrust myself....And this...mess, ransacking this mess looking for your own feelings and trying to rescue them but it's too late, you can't even recognize them...because they've been spent everywhere and, vulgarized and exploited and wasted and spent wherever we could, they keep demanding and you keep paying and you can't...and then all of a sudden somebody asks you to pay in gold and you can't. (663-664)

That Gaddis condemns Otto to be an absurd fragment of his own fantasy shows just how much the novelist believes in the necessity of action. What form this action should take remains to be explored in the novel's more complex artist-characters.

As has been shown, Otto is not on any one path of his own conscious choice; rather, he wanders in the maze of modern trends, following one influence only to jump to another. In the end he gets nowhere. Stanley, on the other hand, pursues his goal--the completion of his organ piece--with a single-minded drive. Gaddis may have intended a parody of Eliot's later orthodoxy in Stanley's retreat into Catholicism. He

lives alone, celibate, repulsing the romantic advances of various women, all the while professing that art itself should be a work of love (495). Unlike Otto or Wyatt, Stanley does manage to complete this work, but its début coincides with his death. He is literally destroyed not by his artwork but by his attitude to it: he makes art take the place of life, in the process disregarding his own and other people's needs. In his life and art theories, Stanley represents the error of a particular path: that of the ascetic aesthete.

Gaddis takes issue, however, not with Stanley's perceptions but with his solutions. The narrative describes his loathing for the makeshift in culture:

Everything wore out. What was more, he lived in a land where everything was calculated to wear out, made from design to substance with only its wearing out and replacement in view.... But there was more to it than gross tyranny of business enterprise; and advertising....only a symptom of the great disease, this plague of newness.... (342-43)

Stanley asks Max, "Don't you wonder why...everything is negative?...Why just exactly the things that used to be the aspirations of life....have become the tolls....Everything's sort of contraceptive..." (488). He could be describing his own delusions about religion when he says that "God has become a sentimental theatrical figure in our literature...used to throw people in novels in a turmoil..." (488). Stanley hopes that Catholicism will set at bay the culture which surrounds him. As a sign of his religious faith he will create approximations of the church music by Bach and Palestrina (345). According

to Stanley, these artists "...touched the origin of design with recognition" (345). However Stanley's emulation of early religious art does not furnish a solution to his alienated life. Finally, he explains lamely to his friends that he wants to establish a creed which he and others will follow (491). When the world proves too varied, too threatening, he retreats into religious dogma. He believes that human beings have fallen through original sin. Because guilt indicates awareness of this condition it is a quality to develop. Suffering is the appropriate condition for those who sense their guilt, a kind of self-vindication through passive acceptance of pain (564-5). In the world of The Recognitions, suffering has become a fashionable way to express one's powerlessness against the forces of modern life. Many less sincere characters than Stanley exploit suffering as a personal stance for themselves.¹³ Anselm, who has developed suffering into a one-man bistro show, knows that in a world without spiritual faith this attitude is meaningless.

He claims:

...everybody suffers, the crime is in this world you suffer and it doesn't mean a God-damned thing, it doesn't fit anywhere. You can stand any suffering if it means something...The only time suffering's unbearable is when it's meaningless. (565)

As Anselm implies, Stanley's suffering leads nowhere because it has no context.

In addition to developing a negative stance towards the world, Stanley's Church-fixated art theory emphasizes repression rather than creativity. This repression may be a reaction to Stanley's sense that modern life is dominated by scientific

positivism which leads to what he terms "the self-sufficiency of fragments" (640-658). Because there exists no belief in guiding laws, Stanley proposes that art must rediscover its creative force within religious dogma (659). There is something puritanical in Stanley's religious aesthetic. Like Wyatt's Aunt May, he feels that art must not dare to be "self-sufficient" or original, but must mirror a higher reality. Paradoxically, Stanley both desires and denies that art could perform a function similar to religion when he says,

When art tries to be a religion in itself...a religion of perfect form and beauty, but then there it is all alone, not uniting people, not... like the Church does but, look at the gulf between people and modern art....¹⁴

Again, Stanley's ideas are valid, but he cannot incorporate them into his life in a human way. The context of this speech is a case in point. Stanley speaks to an enamoured Agnes Deigh about the need for a humanized art while he is blind to his own need for human communication. Agnes Deigh tries to appeal to his affections, but the two are clearly speaking of different kinds of closeness. She pleads:

--And every time people meet, they seem to just get a little further away from each other.
 [Stanley replies]--These gulfs everywhere between everything and everybody...--it's this fallacy of originality, of self-sufficiency. And in art, even art...it isn't for love of the thing itself that an artist works, but so that through it he's expressing love for something higher, because that's the only place art is really free, serving something higher than itself, like us, like we are.... (674-675)

Although Stanley's perceptions go without direct narrative criticism, his religious solutions to "fragmentation" are

attacked by other characters. Anselm is repulsed by Stanley's delusions about love and art:

...you [Stanley] go around accusing people of refusing to humble themselves and submit to the love of Christ and you're the one who refuses love...who can't face it...right here in this God-damned world where you are.... (678)

Stanley's obsessive transference of all human feelings from life onto art echoes Wyatt's impulses. Like Wyatt, Stanley wants to create an encyclopedic work of art which will contain the totality of his life's expression (639). Like Wyatt, he fears "the melancholy of things completed" which will accompany that finished work (639). But while Wyatt undergoes a liberating transformation, Stanley becomes increasingly entrapped within his work until it literally entombs him (346). Stanley never learns that art becomes another deterministic device if it is seen as a control over, rather than a liberator of, consciousness.

Stanley's trip to Rome with Esme provides the grim finale to his religious and artistic delusions. On shipboard, his attempted seduction of Esme shatters his fragile sense of order. (Apparently his art work of "love" cannot coexist with sexuality.) On the "morning after," he awakes, peers at his untranscribed music score, and thinks "anathema," then rushes up to the ship's railing in a suicide attempt (891). To his fevered eyes, the ocean represents a universe of undifferentiated matter into which he longs to plunge, like Melville's watchman from the mast-head, but out of repulsion and despair rather than desire to unite with the universe.¹⁵ Nor surprisingly,

Stanley lacks the will to suicide and collapses into hallucinations.

Once Stanley reaches Rome, his religious illusions are shattered by Agnes Deigh's mother. Her fetishistic Catholicism with its undercurrent of lust forces Stanley to doubt the reality of his faith. "Everything is in pieces," he repeats in bewilderment (989). In a last ditch attempt to gain the love he has for so long denied himself, he lies to Mrs. Deigh that Esme is pregnant and that he will marry her. But his conversion to the world is too late. Esme dies and a distracted Stanley seeks the aid of Father Martin. The priest recognizes that Stanley's delusions have taken him beyond the reach of love. He suggests the solution for weakened spirits similar to that recommended by the psychiatrist in T.S. Eliot's The Cocktail Party. He urges Stanley to take up his métier as a partial replacement for action. Father Martin's words are almost those of Eliot's Reilly when the priest says to Stanley:

--We live in a world where first-hand experience is daily more difficult to reach, and if you reach it through your work, perhaps you are not fortunate the way most people would be fortunate. But there are things I shall not try to tell you. 16
You will learn them for yourself if you go on....

The narrative adds a touch of merciless irony as it shows Stanley emasculated by his religious obsession, clutching his extracted tooth, with tonsured head and suit moth-eaten at the crotch (1020).

Most damning to Stanley's stature is the similarity between his death and that of the pathetic alcoholic Army Munk

(1006). Like Arny, Stanley literally cannot read "the writing on the wall" of the Fenestruela cathedral that warns visitors that the cathedral's fragile masonry would not withstand the vibrations created by a powerful organ blast (1021). Stanley ends his life committed to his idea of art and careless of the fragile structures of the world. He wants the world to conform to his idea of it, and he fails to take other realities into account. It remains to be seen how The Recognitions' main character, Wyatt, overcomes his tendency, so like Stanley's, to control reality by limiting his view of it.

As has been shown, the artist is headed for self-delusion if, like Otto, he mimics values in which he does not believe, or if, like Stanley, he attempts to create a hermetically sealed value system which may enable him to order his art but separates him from real human connections. Wyatt faces both dilemmas. He grows up in an atmosphere which stunts his emotional development and his creativity. Wyatt's formative years contain fragmentary images and ideas which will haunt him until he discovers a personal resolution in Spain. Paradoxically, this resolution unifies these formative fragments and dispels their power; consequently, he is able to live freely for the first time. As Otto's and Stanley's lives fragment under the pressure of their control, Wyatt's life develops towards an integrity that makes positive action possible. The key to Wyatt's transformation lies in his discovery that love is a necessity of life, that it involves taking risks, daring to throw oneself into the world of contingency. Wyatt discovers that in losing control he gains a

more profound integration. This discovery leads Wyatt, like Celia of Eliot's Cocktail Party, away from his *métier* into experience of the unknown. Whether artistic expression will enter this new dimension of his experience is unclear as the novel ends. If this development sounds excessively abstract and unmotivated, an analysis of Wyatt's formative influences will show that he grows in a direction very much determined by the events of his past.¹⁷

Wyatt's childhood is filled with exotic images, obscure books, and equally obscure relatives who, for various reasons, deny him love. Young Wyatt's closest friend is Herakles, the Barbary ape which his father, Rev. Gwyon, brought back from Spain after his wife's untimely death.¹⁸ That Wyatt actually feels more affection for the beast than for his father indicates something of his alienation. In the normal course of daily events, Wyatt is exposed to esoteric questions of early Church doctrine such as the homoousian-homooisian question of whether Christ and God are constituted of the same or of like substance.¹⁹ This ancient controversy seems at first like a piece of obscurantism until one recognizes that the question of the relation between Christ and the "father" is echoed in Wyatt's question as to his relation to his own "Lord." The narrative alludes to the similarities between Wyatt's relationship with his father and the mystic struggle between Faust and the Lord.²⁰ Gwyon remains hidden from Wyatt when the boy comes to him seeking forgiveness for a sin of which his Aunt May has accused him. The minister's own guilt over his wife's death makes him

inaccessible to his son. This early experience of parental abandonment and lack of forgiveness leaves Wyatt with a nameless guilt and a feeling that he lacks a moral guide.

The narrative implies that Wyatt is bereft of true guides and nurturers, roles traditionally played by fathers and mothers. Without these positive formative influences, Wyatt is morally and spiritually adrift. A fledgling artist, he exists as an alienated fragment in a world of false values. Gaddis' belief in the primal influence of male and female figures in the life of the artist shows an indebtedness to Robert Graves' The White Goddess, a work which was an influence on his writing of The Recognitions.²¹ Although many of his ideas vary from Gaddis', Graves' view of modern America is similar to Gaddis' vision. In the following passage, Graves links the rise of Puritanism, the decline of morality, and the belief in money as the supreme value:

Puritanism took root and flourished in America, and the doctrine of religious equalitarianism, which carried with it the right to independent thinking, turned into social equalitarianism, or democracy, a theory which has since dominated Western civilization. We are now at the stage where the common people of Christendom ... have grown so proud that they are no longer content to be the hands and feet and trunk of the body politic, but demand to be the intellect as well--or, as much intellect as is needed to satisfy their simple appetites. As a result, all but a very few have discarded their religious idealism, Roman Catholics as well as Protestants, and come to the private conclusion that money, though the root of all evil, is the sole practical means of expressing value or of determining social precedence; that science is the only accurate means of describing phenomena; and that a morality of common honesty is not relevant either to love, war, business or politics....²²

Graves goes on to criticize modern Christianity for denying the human need for a single central myth appealing to emotional and creative life. Although there is no evidence that Gaddis follows Graves' belief in a specifically pre-Christian Mother-goddess whose role was usurped by a patriarchal Father-god, it is nonetheless evident in both Gaddis' novels that characters need but lack the belief in a nurturer and a guide symbolized by the mother and the father. Without belief in an inspiring female principle who embodies love, the artist lacks the confidence in life necessary to create, as will be shown (Ch. iii). By the same mythic token, Gaddis believes that moral authority is embodied in the father figure, which is now also largely absent. Such a figure is responsible for transmitting morality by which the individual becomes self-determining and responsible.

Because Gwyon is morally aloof, Wyatt's Aunt May takes over as a constant moral presence, if not a moral guide. She oversees Wyatt's upbringing and is responsible for imbuing him with a sense of his own damnation. She explains to him that heroism is achieved through sacrifice to something higher than oneself. She denounces Wyatt's artwork as an attempt to "falsify something in the divine order" (40). From Aunt May, Wyatt learns that creativity is evil, that art must not seek originality. Thus she inadvertently drives Wyatt towards forgery. She also invalidates his hallucination of his dead mother, the first of many experiences that prove to Wyatt that he does not perceive the world as others do. May's influence shows itself when Wyatt takes up seventeenth-century Dutch

painting techniques in Munich instead of working in a style of his own. When he returns to New York as a forger, Wyatt is carrying on May's legacy of guilt which fuels his sense of personal damnation.

Another personage injects a lighter influence into Wyatt's childhood: the eccentric Town Carpenter, Wyatt's grandfather. His name and exploits give him the stature of a legendary everyman. The community labels him a holy fool, a Thoreauvian life-affirmer.²³ (Significantly, the only positive influence in Wyatt's background is also not taken seriously.) It is the Town Carpenter who informs Wyatt about various mythic images such as the griffin's egg and the Pasiphae story. It is also the Town Carpenter who recognizes Wyatt's heroic qualities before the boy leaves home and later when he returns to "make full proof" of his artistic vocation. In addition, Wyatt's grandfather recognizes the most significant characteristic of his early painting, his interest in detail rather than harmony. This concern for fragments at the expense of harmonies becomes the central moral issue of Wyatt's later work.

Wyatt is relatively unmoved by his grandfather's personality, the effects of which emerge as he develops away from home. A more potent influence comes in the form of emblems of martyrdom and suffering. Wyatt's earliest reading matter, Fox's Book of Christian Martyrs, makes the boy acutely aware of the link between moral striving and suffering (32, 41, 39). This connection forms part of Wyatt's artistic credo. Wyatt discovers a vivid image of suffering in the Clementine monogram of an anchor on a

tombstone (34, 50), which stands for the story of a man who descended through the celestial sea of air to free an anchor which had caught on an earthly tombstone. He drowned in the process of descending. This image of inverted drowning turns earth into a terrain of suffering and the sensitive descending soul into a sufferer. Gwyon's statue of the Spanish martyr, Olalla, presents another disturbing icon of suffering. Wyatt becomes perversely fascinated with the mirrors set behind the figure to allow the viewer to see the wounds on its back (33, 37). Morbid children's rhymes and homilies contribute to Wyatt's confusion as to whether the present world is good or evil. He learns from Gwyon that evil spirits dirty the path to paradise in order to confuse mortals (34). From May, he learns rhymes about duplicity and sterility--the man of double deed who sowed his field without a seed (35).

Wyatt's mysterious fever is the most transforming experience in his early development, and its mark persists in the greenish gleam of his eyes. This illness alters Wyatt's perceptions and unsettles his sense of objective reality. When he awakes from delirium, he returns to consciousness and with it, to the arbitrary fragmented clock time as opposed to the undifferentiated flow of unconsciousness. He has been trained by Aunt May to "save" clock time and to equate it with something earned rather than wasted. His delirium reveals a deeper experience of time, which he loses when he returns to the world of consciousness, reason, and daylight. He begins to sense a deeper irrational reality different from that ordered flow of

daytime fragments. During his convalescence, Wyatt experiences the added confusion of the subjectivity of his waking perceptions when he discovers that the bedroom wallpaper he had interpreted as dog's faces is in fact a flower print which his grandfather--a fractious paper hanger at best--had reversed when he hung it.²⁴

Wyatt's changing awareness of perception and consciousness has an impact on his art work. He begins to associate unconsciousness with night and the irrational. Daytime, on the other hand, holds undifferentiated reality at bay behind arbitrary order. Wyatt has discovered that his emotions, particularly his yearning for Camilla, are antithetical to the rules of the daytime, rational world. Wyatt, like Melville's Pierre, has tapped the mysterious well of the psyche (cf. Ch. i). Love and its loss become associated with the nighttime world of chaos, a world which is both attractive and dangerous. The narrative explains that Wyatt first interprets day and night as psychically different during his convalescence, when he begins to paint:

[At dawn] after the throbbing flow of the night was broken by the first particles of light in the sky, he often pulled a blanket from the bed and crept to the window, to sit there...until the sun...rose, the unmeasured hours of darkness slowly shattered, rendered into a succession of particles passing separately, even as the landscape separated into tangible identities each appraising itself in static withdrawal until everything stood out separate from the silent appraisals around it....He was most clear-headed, least feverish, in these early hours when, as unsympathetically as the daylight, his own hand could delineate the reasonable crowded conceits of separation.²⁵ (Italics mine.)

At later points in the novel Gaddis returns to this depiction of night and day, the irrational and the rational. In the New England village where Rev. Gwyon will perform his Mithraic sacrifice, "Daylight's embrace" returns objects to their "separate identities," thus rescuing the villagers from "the throbbing harmonies of night," restoring propriety and reason (747). Near the end of the novel the hack writer Ludy is described as having:

...eyes as clear as the early sky itself, and features as reasonably detailed and separate as the illuminated composure of the landscape before him, where the world had emerged from the dangerously throbbing undelineated mass of the unconscious, to where everything was satisfactorily separated, out where it could all be treated reasonably (950).

According to Gaddis, the irrational element of reality corresponds to the human unconscious. Neither dimension can or should be controlled.

Wyatt is obsessed with the irrational as much as he fears it, because he associates it with love and love's loss. In the following description, the moon is a powerful nocturnal evocation of intimacy for Wyatt, much as it was for his father after Camilla's death:

Only once, going to the window before it was light, he was stopped in his tracks by the horned hulk of the old moon hung alone in the sky, and this seemed to upset him a good deal, for he shivered and tried to leave it but could not, tried to see the time on the clock but could not, listened, and heard nothing, finally there was nothing for it but to sit bound in this intimacy which refused him, waiting, until the light came at last and obliterated it.²⁶ (Italics mine.)

Wyatt's fear of the moon is linked to his fear of love's loss or "intimacy which refused him," which he associates with the mysterious death of his mother. He attempts to control these irrational fears and desires by not allowing them entry into his artistic expression. Thus Wyatt concentrates on "delineat-
[ing] the reasonable crowded conceits of separation" rather than expressing something "undifferentiated," chaotic and threatening. His copying of Flemish masterpieces enables him temporarily to lose himself in the expression of reasonable material entities and to repress the threat of love and love's loss.

Wyatt's formative artistic experience exposes him to conflicting ideas which contribute to his artistic dilemma. He struggles with the dichotomy of classic and romantic ideas as to whether art should be a spontaneous personal expression or a reasonable ordered pattern relating to a pre-existing ideal. There is no easy resolution to the question. From his father he discovers the classic theory associated with Praxiteles that art is the uncovering of ancient--perhaps eternal--forms.²⁷ The narrative later attributes this concept to Zarathustra.²⁸ There is an ambiguity to this idea, as there are to most of the novel's theories. Either art provides the consolation of order through the recognition of eternal form, or it hints at a static plenitude which the artist cannot contribute to but only copy. Wyatt uses the Praxitelean ideal as justification for not finishing his work. Unlike Nietzsche's Zarathustra, he is unready to free the "image sleeping in the stone."²⁹ He tells Gwyon (who urges him to complete the portrait of his mother in

order to exercise her influence):

There's something about a...an unfinished piece of work, a...a thing like this where...do you see? Where perfection is still possible? Because it's there, it's there all the time, all the time you work trying to uncover it. (65)

As fearful as he is of change, young Wyatt manages to break with his past, even if he is not ready to embrace a future, when he rejects his father's ministerial profession. His religious studies have introduced him to the possibility of free will and innate human goodness as alternatives to his inherited Puritan guilt. He discusses Pelagianism with Gwyon (65) but retains his guilty Puritan conscience. Later Wyatt will accept his German art teacher's criticism of "'That romantic disease, originality'" (99, cf. 106). At the same time, his reading matter--Fichte (106, 132), and Vaihinger (132)--reveals his search in romanticism for the justification of action. Throughout the course of the novel, Wyatt vacillates between his belief in free will and determinism. He cites Charles Fort and Schopenhauer to substantiate his tentatively held notion of a pattern to human events.³⁰ However, his father introduced him to his version of the Aristotelian distinction between substance and accident (66), an idea which persists in Wyatt's impression that reality is fraught with "accident" while the true substance lies elsewhere.³¹ It is this idea, more than his jumble of romanticism, that most affects his art.

When Wyatt moves to Paris, he establishes nocturnal habits, restoring old pictures by day and painting his own

original works by night in hermetic secrecy (77). In spite of his attempt to control his irrational fears and desires, Wyatt continues to be haunted by "a sense of something lost," associated with lost love. Gaddis contrasts the artist's obsessiveness with the blasé attitude of his model, Christiane, who seems to exist "unmenaced by magic, unafraid" (77). Like most Parisians, according to the narrator, she lives without reflection, accepting the arbitrary control of clock time (78). Just how out of touch Wyatt has become with this clock-ordered reality is made clear when he is awakened from sleep one evening by the critic Crémer. Wyatt thinks it is dawn until Crémer explains to him that the evening is upon them (78).

More than Wyatt's time sense is out of synchronism with the world. The young artist is also naive to the art world's corrupt standards. Crémer enlightens him on this account by offering to write a favorable review of his upcoming show in exchange for a percentage of the painting sales (80). Wyatt protests that his success is "up to the paintings." Crémer replies that art criticism pays very badly; the artist must subsidize his critic. Wyatt refuses to take up this offer, with the result that Crémer writes a scathing review of his Flemish-inspired oils, terming them "Archaïque, dur comme la pierre, dérivé, sans coeur, sans sympathie, sans vie, enfin, un esprit de la mort sans l'espoir de la Résurrection" (83). The reader is not given any description of Wyatt's paintings, save that they are inspired by Flemish genre painting. Possibly they are as lifeless as Crémer claims. Certainly, they are not

acceptable as original works of "modern" art, as Crémer makes clear when he questions Wyatt about his stylistic influences and registers surprise that the artist is not following contemporary trends (83). Crémer leaves Wyatt with one pregnant reference: he refers to Degas' remark that the artist must approach his work in the same frame of mind in which the criminal commits his deed, implying that the artist must work outside accepted rules, including norms of honesty (79). Wyatt will take Crémer literally when he decides to forge paintings.

Precisely why it is that Wyatt takes up Flemish art techniques when he studies in Munich is not clear, except that he has been warned against originality. Gradually he begins to consider forgery as a way of memorializing his earliest memories and desires and of controlling their influence. Thus forgery becomes a barrier to further experience rather than an expression of it. By the time he returns to New York, Wyatt considers himself a kind of fugitive or criminal. Crémer may have planted this idea by reminding Wyatt of Degas' recommendation. Esther tells Wyatt that he "looks like a criminal" (130). When speaking to his employer, Wyatt refers to himself as a "superlapsarian criminal" (384), meaning that his criminal status was determined by his Calvinist upbringing.³² Again, he seems to consider himself as living out a fate which has been decided for him. His bleak childhood sense of "something lost" persists throughout his adulthood in the conviction that love was lost to him before he had a chance to take responsibility for his own life. His métier becomes a grim substitute for

both love and personal salvation. When he realizes that he works for a man who stands for all he loathes, Wyatt feels truly damned. By evoking the paradox of the "elect" criminal, or sinner, Wyatt touches on the possibility that the criminal just might be the saved person as equally as the fallen one since the forger literally "saves" masterpieces. At the same time, his identification with Faust appeals to his somewhat grandiose sense of the criminal as a totally committed individual.³³ The contingent nature of reality makes the substitute of art for life an attractive choice. Wyatt's Faustian attempt to find a way around accident and loss makes him turn art into a vehicle of false power until he realizes that it provides no solution.

Wyatt is misguided and confused but, unlike Gaddis' other characters, he is never denigrated nor represented as a figure of fun or a feckless victim of his delusions. The narrative, in describing him, maintains a serious, even ponderous tone which carries over into his conversations and musings. The reader follows his development as if it were a philosophical argument. Further discussion of his ideas is necessary for an understanding of his artistic quest. Wyatt lives very much in alienation from his culture with a sense that the way he sees the world is not the way others see it. Art becomes the only way he can shore up the fragments of his perception, not through originality but through copying. What he brings to his work is his projection of life-long obsessions. "I'm working it out, and everything fits," he tells Valentine (587). "What

defense have they [the elements of the outside world], against our phantasies" (587)?

Self-protectiveness characterizes Wyatt's attitude not only to his work but to his personal relationships, of which he seems to have few. Women in particular pose a threat to his sense of self; he seeks to hide his thoughts as well as his art work from their loving eyes. Once again, his past experience provides a key to this behavior. Camilla becomes a figment of the young man's imagination, which he projects into his art in order to control it. He is obsessed with his unfinished portrait of her--unfinished and therefore a symbol of the possibility of love's fulfillment in imagination. Esther and Esme--Wyatt's wife and model--both recognize the obsessive quality of Camilla's image for Wyatt; neither of them can replace her. Wyatt controls the image best when he is projecting it onto his revered art subject--the Blessed Virgin (295). Thus Wyatt's love is perversely bound up with his art and threatened by his life in the world.

Finally, the private art experience becomes a substitute for human communication, a holding in of the need for emotional closeness, and itself a cause of suffering. Esme is also shown in an act of artistic creation which is imbued with suffering (320-323). She shoots heroin and, in a semi-hallucinatory state, writes poetry, waging her artistic "raid on the inarticulate" by creating her own language. Her works of intuition are beyond her control as is her extraordinary (and inexplicable) capacity to read German. Esme's suffering makes her vulnerable to the

world that Wyatt shuts out through his art. Ultimately she flings herself on that world and is destroyed.

Privacy, love, suffering and their externalization in careful, controlled art are epitomized for Wyatt by the arrogance of flamenco:

...this arrogance, in this flamenco music this same arrogance of suffering....The strength of it's what's so overpowering, the self-sufficiency that's so delicate and tender without an instant of sentimentality. With infinite pity but refusing pity, it's a precision of suffering,... the tremendous tension of violence all enclosed in a framework...in a pattern that doesn't pretend to any other level but its own....it's the sense of privacy that most popular expressions of suffering don't have...that's what makes it arrogant. (123)

Wyatt's behavior is also described as "flamenco" in its aloof machismo. Wyatt's behavior, flamenco, and Flemish art all have about them a rigidity and formality which the novel comes to associate with excessive control of human experience. When Wyatt speaks of "suffering" beauty he implies that he makes himself its servant (926). That the perception of beauty is an intense experience requiring humility is a romantic idea which persists in Gaddis' novels. It is the over-control of this experience which the novel rejects. At the same time, Esme's "suffering" of beauty presents the opposite extreme, a romantic plunge into chaos which could be debilitating, even fatal, to the artist.³⁴

A mixture of arrogance and humility makes Wyatt retreat ever further into his art. He makes clear to Esther that his few moments of happiness come not as a result of her love but

when he is engrossed in his work (123). Hence, he wishes to think of the work as a substitute for his identity. "What do you want from the artist that you couldn't get from his work?" he asks her, echoing Eliot's and Joyce's definition of the artist "refined out of existence."³⁵

Although Wyatt lives closeted with his work most of the time, when he does emerge into the world his face registers near-continuous surprise. The condition of surprise forms not a posture but one of the positive elements in his theory of the artist's relation to the world since it implies the importance of spontaneous perception. All around him he sees people who do not "see." Wyatt wishes to see the world with new eyes, as Emerson insisted.³⁶ However, this inclination to "see," when directed towards art, may blind one to the world. Once again art and life tend to be at odds. Wyatt's most complete definition of "recognition" in art, which he explains to Esther, comes itself as an explanation of why he did not "recognize" her at the art gallery because he was in the process of "recognizing" the work of art:

--Look, I didn't see you. Listen, that painting, I was looking at the painting. Do you see what this was like; Esther? seeing it.
 --I saw it [she responds]
 --Yes but, when I saw it, it was one of those moments of reality, of near-recognition. I'd been...I've been worn out in this piece of work, and when I finished it I was free...all of a sudden out in the world. In the street everything was unfamiliar...unreal. I felt like I was going to lose my balance...this feeling was getting all knotted up inside me and I went in there [the gallery]...And then I saw this thing. When I saw it all of a sudden everything was freed into one recognition, really freed into reality

that we never see, you never see it. You don't see it in paintings because most of the time you can't see beyond a painting. Most paintings, the instant you see them they become familiar, and then it's too late. (102)

According to his statement, there are at least two levels of recognition. One level is superficial ("the instant you see them they become familiar"). The other recognition is deeper, a sudden coming together of fragments which often follows a state of disorientation, of scrambling, when a new combination is therefore possible.

This deeper recognition which sometimes results from disorientation is strikingly similar to Wyatt's theory of art as breakdown-reconstruction. The following passage shows an attitude similar to that expressed by Bernard in Woolf's The Waves (cf. Ch. i). The narrative describes his facial expression in the vocabulary of his art theory, indicating that there is, after all, a connection between the action of life and art:

How...fragile situations are....That's why they keep breaking, they must break and you must get the pieces together and show it before it breaks again, or put them aside for a moment when something else breaks and turn to that....That's why most writing now, if you read it they go on...one two three four and tell you what happened like newspaper accounts, no adjectives, no long sentences, no tricks, they pretend, and they finally believe...that the way they saw it is the way it is....They write for people who read with the surface of their minds, people with reading habits that make the smallest demands on them, people brought up reading for facts...and get angry at surprises. Clarity's essential, and detail, no fake mysticism, the facts are bad enough.... Listen, there are so many delicate fixtures moving toward you....Why, all this around us is for people who can keep their balance only in

the light, where they move as though nothing were fragile, nothing tempered by possibility, and all of a sudden...something breaks. Then you have to stop and put the pieces together again. But you never can put them back together quite the same way. You stop when you can and expose things, and leave them within reach, and others come on by themselves, and they break, and you even then you may put the pieces aside just out of reach until you can bring them back and show them, put together slightly different, maybe a little more enduring, until you've broken it and picked up the pieces enough times, and you have the whole thing in all its dimensions. But the discipline, the detail, it's just...sometimes the accumulation is too much to bear....

He looked at Esther with an expression which was not a frown but had happened as an abrupt breaking of his features, an instant before apparently cast for good as they were...even now, in this new construction, renewing an impression of permanence, as molten metals spilled harden instantly in unpredictable patterns of breakage. (124-125)

From this passage, it becomes clear that reality for Wyatt is composed of shifting fragments which only the most careful artist can piece together. No sooner do these fragments cohere, than they may change and slip through the artist's language or his paintbrush. Thus, he must be a deft orchestrator of chaos. Moreover, he is often confronted with an insensitive audience weaned on journalistic realism. Even if the artist does succeed in shoring up fragments "maybe a little more enduring," there is no guarantee that his work will be recognized in the way that Wyatt "sees" Picasso's painting. Esme's attempts at poetry also bring her up against the "inarticulate" nature of reality (320-321). Perhaps because reality defies the artist's attempts to duplicate it, he becomes a restorer of fragments. The fragile difference between the original and his work constitutes his

particular artistic originality. Wyatt's forgery is both an expression of respect for other artists' creation and an escape from the painful and "delicate" experiences of his own life. Forgery is a method of controlling reality through controlling an artistic medium. Wyatt must get beyond this need to control if he is to develop.

Part of Wyatt's need to control reality by repressing his fears and desires in life and by copying art comes as a result of his discovery that there is no perceptible necessity in modern life. Since his early sense of loss, Wyatt has mourned the absence of a *raison d'être*. He explains the problem to his employer, Brown:

...there's no direction to act in now. [Brown answers] --That's crazy. You read too much. There's plenty to do, if anybody's got what you've got.
 --It isn't that simple....People react. That's all they do now...they've reacted until it's the only thing they can do....And here you are with all the pieces and they all fit...and what is there to do with them, when you do get them together? (156)

Brown accuses him of naiveté and Wyatt agrees, "In a sense an artist is always born yesterday" (157). Wyatt feels that:

...there's [no] sense of necessity about [the artists'] work, that it has to be done, that it's theirs. And if they feel that way how can they see anything necessary in anyone else's. And... every work of art is a work of perfect necessity ...everyone else's work around you can be inter-changed and nobody can stop and say, This is mine... you have to know that every line you put down couldn't go any other place, couldn't be any different....But in the midst of all this rootlessness, how can you... (157, italics mine.)

Like Eliot, Wyatt believes that without "roots" there can be

no sense "that what [an artist] is doing means anything," and thus there can be no aura of originality about a work. The problem of originality goes beyond the question of reproduction in art. Gaddis, however, is not recommending the cult of personality in art.³⁷ It would seem that the only direction to move in--the path toward rediscovery of artistic necessity--leads towards upholding older artistic values (as does Stanley) or forging new ones through experience, as Wyatt attempts to do at the end of the novel.

Other characters parody the question of artistic necessity. Max states that "Art is a work of necessity" (495). However, the only necessity that he respects is economic. Stanley believes that "Art is the work of love" (495). This statement also sounds valid, but is not borne out completely in Stanley's case. Although he labors with great sincerity at his art, he still lacks the capacity to accept love in his daily life.

Before Wyatt gains a sense of necessity (which does not occur until his transformation at the end of the novel), he lives dominated by contingency, or what he calls "accident," "the world of shapes and smells" (267). He tries to control this world of fragments by counterfeiting other artists' masterpieces, thinking that he can remain "safe from accident" by working closeted in his midnight studio (95). Rather than accept Otto's definition of reality as "things you can't do anything about" (131), Wyatt hopes to exercise full control over the world of "accident" as a kind of compensation for loss. Art becomes a refuge for his dreams, a substitute for experience

and growth. His brief moments of "recognition" are hints that meaningful perception is possible. Ironically, these moments make him blind to the world around him. It is only when he has renounced his counterfeiting and escaped to Spain, this time as a real criminal, that Wyatt is open to what Gaddis holds out as the only necessity, love.

After Wyatt precipitates Brown's death, he liberates Fuller, Brown's black valet, with whom Wyatt has a shadowy friendship. Irrational and superstitious, Fuller possesses a kind of romantic primitivism which Wyatt sets free when he insures the valet's safe passage to his Caribbean homeland. Wyatt's liberation of Fuller foreshadows the freeing of his own romantic impulses. In Spain, Wyatt discovers love by accident when he meets the rapist/murderer of a little girl who is soon to be canonized. The man has gained a kind of repentance through his victim's death-bed forgiveness of his crime. Wyatt begins to realize that if he is to experience love, he must risk being vulnerable to another, particularly one to whom he may have caused suffering. No longer can he hold suffering at bay through controlling devices.

At the Spanish monastery where he meets the murderer, Wyatt again takes up unoriginal art, this time restoration work. The narrator describes him working in a state of feverish vacancy; "He stared attentively, but from a face with no expression at all, neither surprise, nor curiosity, nor interest, nor any betrayal of intelligence at all" (924). He no longer projects any personal desires into his art, telling the hack

writer Ludy that he works only with scientific accuracy, so that he can "get things nice and separated" (929). He has taken counterfeit to its limit and moves, inexplicably, from this process to a personal transformation as a consequence of his talk with the murderer/penitent (953-957).

However hard Wyatt tries to sustain his identity as martyr to the purity of his copying, he eventually realizes that he must take responsibility for his life in the world. He has already shown a willingness to do this when he exposes his forgeries in New York, kills his quasi-evil employer, and heads eastward in search of his mother's grave. Ironically, by discovering the empirical fact of her death, Wyatt is able to lay her memory to rest. By the same token, his inadvertent consumption of his father's ashes symbolizes his acceptance of his heritage (927, 942). The movement of his quest is away from delusory controls and towards spontaneity, risk, action.

In extending Wyatt's quest into the unknown, Gaddis continues rather than resolves the ambiguity of his character's art theories. On the one hand, Wyatt's "epiphany" has about it a full-blown romanticism, as intoning a Thoreauvian exhortation to simplicity and deliberate living, he embarks on a solitary journey into the Spanish desert (960). He has, as he says, "put off the old man" while, at the same time, he has accepted his inheritance of guilt and resolved to move beyond it. It would appear that, like Eliot's Celia, he has discovered the power of choosing the path towards personal transformation (cf. Ch. i). The reader can only interpolate that artistic

creation may be possible after experience liberates consciousness. If the ending is interpreted symbolically, and its ambiguity indicates the suitability of such analysis, Wyatt's personal transformation, his name change (from Wyatt to Stephen), and his thrust into the unknown echo Nietzsche's view of the artist in Thus Spoke Zarathustra: "Creation--that is the great redemption from suffering, and life's easement. But that the creator may exist, that itself requires suffering and much transformation."³⁸ However, Gaddis' refusal to supply Wyatt/Stephen with a métier to carry with him is indication that the dichotomy between art and experience persists. As will be shown (ch. iv), the self-referring dimension of The Recognitions provides a form of symbolic "redemption" not apparent in the ambiguity of Wyatt/Stephen's ending.³⁹

JR

Gaddis ends his first novel with the composer Stanley caught in the collapse of an ancient cathedral where he is playing his organ work for the first time. The last sentence of the novel makes clear that Stanley's art work outlives him, but without much recognition. The cathedral--ambiguous symbol of both the destructive consequences of hermetically produced art and the encroaching power of the material world--underscores the art/life conflict at the centre of The Recognitions. Stanley and Wyatt each live out one aspect of this dichotomy: Stanley sacrifices his life for art; Wyatt leaves art behind in search of life. The common principle in both their decisions

is love. Human communion is the essence of Wyatt's idea of love; artistic communication is the essence of Stanley's idea. For both these characters, and for the reader, the question remains: are the demands of art and life compatible? Neither Stanley nor Wyatt manages to merge the two realms. However, their lives champion qualities of individuality, free will, and conscious action which, according to Gaddis, are vital components of the realms of art and life.

Gaddis' second novel, JR, continues the art/life dichotomy; however, in JR there is less hope than there was in The Recognitions for the survival of individuality, free will, and the ability to act, qualities which are increasingly threatened by the most mundane conditions of modern life. It is the purpose of this section of the chapter to analyze the artist's situation as it is depicted in JR, first by examining the origins of the art/life dichotomy. This discussion will lead into an analysis of the artist as victim, and the work of art as increasingly manipulated by forces outside the artist's control. Individual characters will be treated as spokesmen for the artist's dilemma.

JR continues the artistic issues of The Recognitions. While the primary characters of The Recognitions are all untried artists, presumably in their twenties, those of JR, with the exception of Edward Bast, are middle-aged, with education, marriage, and family behind them. Like Wyatt, they live with a sense of "something lost," which amounts to spoiled opportunities and failed love. Unlike Wyatt, these artists are

failures; they know what they want to do but many things have robbed them of their faith in humanity, not to mention the inspiration and the homely necessities that make artistic production possible. The cause of their loss of idealism is the focus of the first part of this section. Their lives and artistic ideas are the focus of the second part.

The artists of JR are victims. The nature of their victimization involves the perennially complex, ambivalent relationship between the artist and the world. In The Recognitions, this relationship is epitomized by Wyatt's alienation from his Puritan past as well as from the vulgar present. His staunch individuality isolates him but also allows him to make decisions. Although he lacks a guide, he possesses the capacity to act. His alienation--in the words of Charles Fort, his "exclusion" from everyday life--actually sets him on the path of personal salvation. By contrast, no such hopes of salvation follow upon the struggles of JR's artists, who are in the condition of being able to see clearly but do nothing. While Wyatt puzzled over the proper direction in which to act, JR's artists wonder if anything is worth doing.⁴⁰

What has changed in Gaddis' depiction of the artist that precludes action, while leaving room for vision? The answer lies in the conditions of everyday life which Gaddis virtually overlooked in The Recognitions. Young Wyatt emerges from an elite education into the New York and Paris art scenes with apparently independent means of support. He is oblivious to the amount in his bank account, as he is to nearly all the

mechanics of existence. His quest after artistic enlightenment is unfettered by mundane considerations. None of JR's artists are similarly exempt. While Gaddis may have overlooked the influence of everyday affairs except to satirize or symbolize them in The Recognitions, he takes up their reality with loathing in JR. The world of monopoly capitalism in which his characters struggle is not legitimized for being dramatized. Money, for Gaddis, is the root of all evil; it is the element which undermines both art and love, and which threatens to destroy human culture if not life itself.

Art and love, constants in Gaddis' view of the world, should be beyond any vulgar monetary exchange value. They are incompatible with a culture which reduces everything to standards of material worth. In The Recognitions, Gaddis plays on the monetary corruption of art. Counterfeit is a symbolic and realistic element of the novel's action. Nonetheless, the world depicted by this novel is sufficiently complex and rich that courageous characters manage partial triumphs over materialism: Stanley does produce his art work; Wyatt does achieve a recognition of true values. Neither character, however, succeeds in uniting art and life in the course of his fictional life. There is a sense in which worldly failure is success in The Recognitions, and vice versa, if the successful characters are any indication of the nature of worldly fame. Max, the Critic in the Green Wool Shirt, and the many incidental characters from the world of television and advertizing compute art's worth in dollars and expect to package whatever mass tastes

will consume. In his deploring of materialism, Gaddis avoids coming to terms with the inevitable dependence of the artist on the material world. It is this dependence which he faces head-on in JR.

The creative life has never survived easily, and the problematic relationship between the artist and the world, among which are his potential supporters, is one which has plagued artists and fascinated writers (cf. Ch. i). JR is full of allusions to the problems of artists and patrons. Gaddis implies that true artists never have had a lucrative time of it, but that modern mass culture is a particularly unfriendly customer. Gone are the eccentric patrons of the nineteenth century. Now those who would support the arts distrust artists and collect art as an "investment" which they parlay on the money market as they would any other commodity. Zona Selk hoards Schepperman's paintings until the art market bodes well for a sale. Bast composes "zebra music" for a stockbroker's whimsey: a promotional film on African safaris. The other artists of JR are similarly reduced to making money at tedious jobs in order to meet their various financial commitments. Clearly they have lost their status as autonomous seers. For Gaddis, the artist's work is mysterious, ineffable, not produced merely for financial purposes. To force the artist to cater to an audience and be accountable to its vulgar tastes is to rob him of his identity.

Nonetheless, in JR it is implied that free enterprise is not entirely responsible for the degrading of art. Gaddis'

novel is not primarily a critique of capitalism. The novelist advances no alternative to free enterprise; however, he does imply that monopoly capitalism tends to turn everything--including art--into a commodity. Because the operations of money and power are shifting from numerous competing interests to a few conglomerates, a kind of global homogeneity has set in which ultimately affects art. Monopoly capitalism is beginning to annihilate individual components, in the process sacrificing individuality to standardization in order to assure greater profits. Art is marketed to an audience increasing in size and decreasing in interest. The artist is continually required to produce something that the audience will accept. This state of compromise undercuts the necessity of art, an issue which was argued but left unresolved in The Recognitions. JR's artists (and other characters) are continually referring to their work as "doing what [you] have to do," or "doing what [you] are paid for" (151, 725). Bast distinguishes between artistic work and moneymaking in such a way that it becomes obvious that money is more necessary than art. In a sentence which he leaves significantly dangling, he tells Rhoda, "I'm just doing something I have to do [composing 'zebra music'] so I can try to do what I hope... [compose his cantata]" (561).

Monopoly capitalism's solution to standardization in art is mechanization epitomized by the player piano, an invention of the earlier free enterprise system which has outraged Gaddis since his writing of The Recognitions.⁴¹ Mechanized art threatens, as Gibbs says, to "get the goddamn artist out of

the arts" (288). Such an eventuality is built into capitalism, as Gaddis makes clear in his history of the Bast family, whose rising fortunes and simultaneous artistic decline is founded on their financing of a player piano company. That this corporation forms the base for the conglomerate JMI Industries, specializing in information storage and retrieval, illustrates the destruction of art (and communications generally) by money and mechanization.

In JR's mechanized world, traditions are barely remembered and social life is reduced to a frantic competition for money. Gaddis does evoke several myths which are relevant to this struggle but they are myths of destruction which deny the efficacy either of a guiding father-god or a benevolent mother-goddess. JR's central commentator, Jack Gibbs, laments the "decline from status to contract," meaning the loss of inherited traditions and the advent of a purely contractual order superseding received traditions.⁴² The novel catalogues evidence of the consequence of the decline of status values in everyday life. Family structure is shown to be disintegrating with the consequence that familial and connubial love are undermined. Love is still a vague ideal for JR's artists, but now it is nearly obliterated by the random obscenity and violence of daily urban life. Gaddis casts a grim eye on the liberation of women, seeing it as the abandonment of feminine identity, as women adopt patriarchal roles and enter the unsavory world of masculine conflict and competition. The artists of JR register the effects of their various failures to understand and love

women successfully, failures which are as much their own fault as the fault of women. Although JR does not recommend the return to an archaic form of goddess worship, nevertheless, the artists are all varyingly stupefied and victimized by the primitive power of women.

If the modern world lacks traditions, belief in primal mysteries, and is bereft of ideal women, it also lacks heroes. JR's artists are all diminished men, victims of forces outside their control. However, Gaddis does depict a character of energy and vision, albeit warped, who believes in success and exhibits will: the boy mogul, JR. It is significant that the novel is named after him, because it is against JR's notions of success and failure that the other characters are measured. In his enthusiasm and ignorance (if not innocence), he intuits and does not question the idea that everything has a price. He represents a new breed of individuals, born without knowledge of love or morality, who take no personal responsibility for anything that they find around them. Meanwhile, the artists represent a dying breed of individualists abandoned in JR's world. The artists feel "sold out" by the same nameless authority which the child, JR, accepts without question. As JR answers every question about why he does things with "that's what you do!" so the artists can find no reason for action and lament that there are so few things worth doing. To understand more fully the nature of this alienating world and its effect on the artists, it is necessary first to examine the artists themselves, their ideas, and their lives, which form Gaddis' view of the state of modern art and creativity.

Gaddis' artists have one characteristic in common: suffering. In The Recognitions suffering is mainly psychological. In JR it is physical as well, a product of mundane conditions. In the first novel, suffering is, among other things, a prerequisite for sensitive consciousness and, by extension, for creativity. In JR suffering is largely purposeless, linked to no such transcending and transforming meanings. In JR Gaddis depicts artists as strugglers, actually sickened by life, made ill through a combination of the circumstances in which they must live and their own self-destructiveness. Edmund Wilson sheds light on the sick and sickening relation between the artist and society in his essay on Sophocles' Philoctetes, a play which Gaddis has Edward Bast's assumed father, James, use as the basis for an obscure unperformed opera of the same name (12, 117). In comparison to The Recognitions, JR contains relatively few literary allusions; but, as with The Recognitions, so in the second novel, these references ground the novel's themes in literary tradition. Although Philoctetes is mentioned only fleetingly, its theme, particularly as elucidated by Wilson, is strikingly relevant to JR's portrayal of the artist in society. In interpreting Sophocles' play as a parable of human character, Wilson writes of the play's main character,

The victim of a malodorous disease which renders him abhorrent to society and periodically degrades him and makes him helpless is also the master of a superhuman art which everybody has to respect and which the normal man finds he needs....The bow would be useless without Philoctetes himself...its loathsome owner, who upsets the processes of normal life by his curses and his cries, and who in any case refuses to work for men who have exiled him from their fellowship.⁴³

Like so many modern Philocteteses, JR's artists are possessed of intellectual abilities that make them necessary, even sought-after in the world. Modern businessmen, like their cunning and pragmatic ancient Greek counterparts, want what these talented men have to offer without necessarily accepting what one character calls "the unpredictable human element" which comes along with their talent. Unfortunately, modern America is not ancient Greece. Gibbs, Eigen and Bast do not have the young humanitarian, Neoptolemus, to save them; they only have JR, whose favors are self-serving. Artists are exploited by their would-be patrons. The mysterious abstract painter, Schepperman, is discovered by Zona Selk, but his work is rarely hung. Lacking financial assistance, they dissipate their creative energies in meaningless work. Eigen wastes time writing speeches for semi-literate corporate-military types. Even Gibbs is used by the corporate system, when he inadvertently answers Crawley's phone call to the 96th St. apartment and is drawn into a discussion about stocks which demonstrates his talent as an economic analyst. All their benefits to the corporate world reap the artists no aesthetic or monetary rewards and rob them of precious working time. They are in the unenviable positions of having to work at jobs which do not further their artistic ends in order to scrape by economically. Moreover, they are frequently accused of being leeches on the system.

Although the artists are all in varying ways compromised, they never completely abandon their art. They struggle to pursue artistic lives in relative isolation. Gaddis provides

numerous descriptions of the lonely process of artistic creation in the improbable atmosphere of the 96th St. apartment. Eigen, it is true, sells out for comfort and financial security. Bast squanders a grant and wastes time being JR's factotum. Gibbs and the legendary Schepperman waste themselves with drink. These self-inflicted "wounds" notwithstanding, they stand together at the end of the novel, a motley collection, not equaling a "Renaissance man," but with their artistic convictions intact.

These men are not like the romantic outlaw-artist of The Recognitions, Wyatt, whose character resembles that of Gide's fugitive artist in Philotecte, rather than Sophocles' wounded hero.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, Wilson's insight into Gide's Philotecte is revealing for JR's characters. Wilson sees truth in "the idea that genius and disease, like strength and mutilation, may be inextricably bound together."⁴⁵ Like Gide's Philotecte, JR's artists are destined to wasting illness and psychic alienation, as a result of their self-destructive, anguished lives, and as the inevitable consequence of city life. All the men sustain hand and foot wounds resulting from a clumsiness that afflicts most the novel's characters, as if they were losing their ability to coordinate their limbs. In addition, they suffer from a variety of real and imagined diseases. Bast literally works himself into a nervous breakdown. Gibbs suffers with the flu, wrongly diagnosed as leukemia. Eigen imagines an eye disorder that may be a projection of his threatened sense of sexuality. That both Gibbs and Eigen imagine suffering worse than they actually experience diminishes the heroism of their

conditions. They are not of the stature of Philoctetes. Gaddis' frantic satire implies that the world no longer provides a context for noble suffering. Nonetheless, his artists survive to continue struggling and perhaps to create. In the final scene, two of them huddle in the cluttered 96th St. apartment. Schepperman finishes a long-undone portrait while Gibbs reads to him from Broch's The Sleepwalkers. This scene indicates that artistic community persists in a beleaguered form, as does past art (the book) and pre-technological forms of communication (reading aloud). How did Gaddis' artists sink to this level of minimal survival? The answer to that question requires that these artists--their ideas and their lives--be subjected to further scrutiny.

That Gaddis has revised his view of the artist in JR from what it was in The Recognitions is indicated by the presence of a character "the same but different" from the young Wyatt: Edward Bast. As Wyatt's family heritage was shown to be one of the factors in his artistic development, so Bast's heritage is brought to bear on his art. Like Wyatt, Bast comes from an old Protestant family. While religion proved to be the decisive pressure in Wyatt's early growth, it is the Bast family's musical background which haunts young Edward. The ineluctable power of heritage is ruefully symbolized by Wyatt's inadvertent consumption of his father's ashes. Similarly, Bast's grandfather is reported to have left his mark on his sons (Edward Bast's father and uncle) by demanding that a bust containing his ashes be sunk in Vancouver harbor. According to Edward's

Aunt Ann "...James and Thomas [were] out in the rowboat, and both of them hitting at the bust with their oars because it was hollow and wouldn't go down, and the storm coming up while they were out there, blowing his ashes back into their beards" (3). This scene appears on the first page of JR, providing a connection between the two novels' generations of artists. In The Recognitions Wyatt's eating of his father's ashes is part of his surreal apotheosis. As such, the scene loses its realistic quality precisely as it forms part of the novel's architectonics and the narrative's statement about art. In JR, however, the previously quoted "ashes" scene is rendered not simply improbable but unreal simply by being part of the past. As soon as Ann Bast mentions it, her sister, Julia, denies that the incident ever occurred. In other words, in the first novel, the past haunts the present by its exaggerated presence. In JR the past is lost to the present, and a consensus on details is impossible. Hence, the artist, in this case Edward Bast, is denied the reality of his own heritage.

The past may be muddled, but it nevertheless exerts considerable pressure on present action. The confused facts of the Bast family history, presented in the opening dialog provide the basis for much of the novel's conflict. As the novel opens, Thomas Bast has died intestate and the attorney for his daughter, Stella, and her husband, Norman Angel, visits the Bast family home on Long Island to attempt to get the necessary waivers that will allow Stella and Norman to inherit the controlling shares in the family company, General Roll. The lawyer encounters

formidable if somewhat incoherent resistance from Thomas' two aged sisters, Ann and Julia, sole inhabitants of the family house. In the process of their dialog at cross-purposes, family skeletons are set rattling. Thomas Bast married and his wife bore him one child, Stella. The first Mrs. Bast died and Thomas remarried Nellie, who subsequently left him to "cohabit," as lawyer Coen terms it, with his brother James, the composer of the unperformed opera, Philoctetes. During this affair, Edward was born, and soon thereafter Nellie died. The Bast sisters are vague about Edward's legitimacy, a matter of importance to Coen in the settling of Thomas' considerable estate. There is no apparent proof of Nellie's and Thomas' divorce, Nellie's and James' marriage, or even of Edward Bast's birth certificate. Coen, a literalist who claims that the law maintains order, not justice, is even uncertain about Edward's majority and persists in referring to him in legalese as the "infant," a term which Gaddis later weaves into some symbolic wordplay.

In spite of their desire to maintain family decorum, the Bast sisters air many intimate family conflicts which have affected Edward's career as well as the family's economic situation. The Basts, like the Gwyons of The Recognitions, are a family steeped in the Protestant ethic. The sisters speak of "Father," a patriarchal music teacher who left home after his own father beat him for accepting a violin instead of money in exchange for farm work. Julia explains to Coen, "We were a Quaker family, after all, where you just didn't do things that didn't pay" (4). This experience epitomizes the art-versus-money

conflict that will plague the family and later, Edward. Musical talent notwithstanding, Father, it is said, became something of an entrepreneur, importing famous musicians from Europe, submitting his children to rigid musical training, and sending them on lucrative tours. After Father's death, Thomas and James are rumored to have quarreled over (among more incestuous issues) Thomas' founding of General Roll, a company manufacturing player pianos. James, presumably the purer artist, objected to the commercialization and mechanization of art, and retreated into his composing and touring, neglecting Nellie and young Edward while taking on a mysterious protégé, Reuben.

Young Edward is affected by his family's past much as Wyatt is: both characters experience a sense of lost love. They have little memory of their mothers and lack the stabilizing influence of an accessible father. While Reverend Gwyon lapses into a gentle religious obscurantism, James Bast rejects the claims of his loved ones because, as Stella reports to an incredulous Edward, "...he was afraid for anything to come between him and his work..." (716). Although he is haunted by a sense of insecurity, Edward grows up remarkably innocent to the conflicts that lie in his wake. He lives with his maiden aunts, uses his father's barn-studio in which to compose, and supports himself by accepting a grant to teach music in the public schools, a job which leaves him little time for composing and which introduces him to his future business partner, JR.

It is Edward's innocence and insecurity that make him an easy target for the pragmatic money schemes of everyone from

his manipulative cousin, Stella, to the boy-mogul, JR. He is as ingenuous and malleable as his father is reported to be cold and rigid. As a result, he is ensnared by JR's manic energy and his proposals that "maybe we can use each other" (137). It is only after Bast loses control of his life and suffers a nervous collapse that he resolves to trust only himself, saying to Stella, who has just schemed him out of his inheritance, "... I've failed enough at other people's things I've done enough other people's damage from now on I'm just going to do my own, from now on I'm going to fail at my own..." (719).

Edward's gullibility extends to his love relationships. His principal romance seems to have been a brief prepubescent and unrequited infatuation with his Cousin Stella. This adolescent love inspired Bast to plan an opera loosely based on Tennyson's "Locksley Hall."⁴⁶ When he reveals this plan to Stella, she scoffs at his enthusiasm, telling him that it sounds "a bit" old fashioned, even romantic (71). Bast explains to her that he had actually been inspired by her eyes, her haunting, sad smile (71-2). He explains his impulse to use Tennyson's poem:

...I was trying to find something like the,
like Beethoven took Egmont his incidental
music for Egmont I tried to, I found that
long poem of Tennyson's I remember it from
school and I've been trying to work out
something like, it's something like an
operatic suite that part you picked up there
that line, those lines that open trust me
cousin, the whole current of my being sets
to, is that what you... (70)

Tennyson's poem is a meditation on youthful romance and

its loss, viewed from the perspective of middle age. Its conclusion does not so much negate the experience of romantic love as it rejects emotional obsession and the masculine speaker's love object, woman, in favor of common sense, positivistic thinking, and action. There is no evidence in either of Gaddis' novels of this particularly Victorian positivism. Gaddis' characters share a common weakness for loving women in spite of their ambivalence about love. Bast seems attracted by the adolescent love remembered by the poem's speaker. Tennyson's poetic voice ultimately rejects all but a sentimentalized view of woman in assuming his role of masculine superiority. Bast never makes clear his acceptance or rejection of romantic love. However, his humiliation seems to have affected his artistic self-confidence, for after Stella's criticism of his idea, he abandons the plan and decides to compose a cantata instead. Thus Bast's personal life cannot be kept separate from his art. Although he never explains why he changes the form of his composition, Gibbs, the novel's chief moral and artistic commentator, provides some insight when he notes that Bast has switched from a plotted to a plotless form. Gibbs' comments come just as he has discovered his friend Schramm's suicide, an act which Gibbs thinks was caused by a radical disillusionment similar to Bast's. The following drunken speech by Gibbs applies both to Bast's decision to compose a cantata and to Schramm's decision to end his life:

God damned wise man pulls out nobody to tell
what to do next right Bast? Write a cantata

you don't need a plot, problem everybody running around wants to be told what happens next don't need a plot, looking for the wise man tell them what am I supposed to do now God damned wise man find out he's doing the same God damned thing... walks up the shade and he's gone, rest of us sitting here looking at his footprints think he took it with him and he's gone... (398-399)

If Edward Bast has, as Gibbs assumes, changed the form of his work because of a setback in his personal life, then Bast has been thwarted by his own sense of creative exclusiveness. On the day that Stella Angel scoffs at his opera, Bast explains to her his need for a hermetic work place that will be safe from the outside world. Wyatt Gwyon, too, in his forgery period, needed a place "safe from accident" (95). Wyatt eventually learned the importance to the artist of embracing life outside the studio. Nonetheless, there is no certainty in Gaddis' novels that the artist can create successfully and still live fully in the world. In JR, life makes even greater encroachments on art and the artist. Like his predecessor, Wyatt, Bast is elliptical when he attempts to describe his artistic ideas and needs. He sounds very modernist and very like Wyatt in the following speech about balancing his work between the forces of creation and destruction. He explains to an unimpressed Stella his need to work in James Bast's ramshackle studio:

...it's one place it's the one place an idea can be left here you can walk out and close the door and leave it here unfinished the most, the wildest secret fantasy and it stays on here by itself in that balance between, the balance between destruction and realization until... (69)

Edward's hesitant, repetitive speech reflects his own ambiv-

alence about discussing his work or revealing his ambitions, as if he were unsure whom he doubted, himself or others. The static balance between creation and destruction is shattered when he tells Stella his plans, only to have her reject them and him. Bast's "mistake" was in needing another person to validate his idea, rather than trusting the original impulse which motivated his work. He blames Stella for encouraging without really believing in his talent, for believing an impossible ideal.⁴⁷ Her smile that had once inspired his idea is now destroying his belief in his work. He blurts out at her:

--There! you, there it's not even a smile no you let people try to do something they can't you know all the time they can't you let them try anyhow you just watch and, and then when it's too late and you smile that sad smile and it's still in your eyes that you knew all the time that's why it's wait, wait, where... (72)

Bast is accused by a number of characters of asking too much of others, and not taking enough responsibility for his work and his life (306, 447, 500). It would seem that in JR Gaddis has less sympathy than in the first novel for those artists who refuse responsibility for their failures. In spite of women's pivotal position in Gaddis' novels as both destroyers and muses, they are not entirely responsible for the decrepit state of the male artists. Nonetheless, Bast's art loses the element of order when he is rejected by his inspiring lover. In other words, Bast needs support from the world. Like Wyatt, who gave up original art in Paris after his disillusionment with critics, Bast is affected by his audience. That Gaddis makes Bast's humiliation partly a result of his own

weakness, shows just how reluctant the novelist is to admit that the audience should have such an influence on the artist's attitude.

Bast's particularly acute fear of audience rejection leads him to an equally acute form of artistic nihilism--a rejection of the meaning of art when his work is misunderstood or ignored. Near the end of the novel, Bast confronts an uncomprehending colleague with his final statement on the breakdown in artistic communication:

--I mean until a performer hears what I hear and can make other people hear what he hears it's just trash isn't it Mister Eigen, it's just trash like everything in this place everything you and Mister Gibbs and Mister Schramm all of you saw here it's just trash!⁴⁸

According to the cynical Eigen, no one expects another person to understand anything (725). However, Bast still retains a belief in communication between audience and artist. As shall be seen, there is a position somewhere between Eigen's cynicism and Bast's nihilism to which Gibbs gives credence simply by reading aloud, affirming the meaning of verbal communication.

The tenuousness and ambiguity of the artistic process make Bast vulnerable to an uncomprehending audience. His answers to questions about his method of composition indicate that he himself is unsure of the impact or reality of ideas, that is, whether the meaning of his composition precedes or emerges from the process of composition. This question is raised in slightly different ways by JR, Crawley, Rhoda, and Gibbs. In spite of their apparent disregard for art, JR,

Crawley and Rhoda are curious to know where Bast "gets" his music. Does an idea exist in his head? Does he hear notes?

JR has ulterior motives for his question. He is already maneuvering for Bast's services, and he needs to know the conditions under which he will render them. He asks,

I mean when you're writing this here music do you need to be someplace with a piano or horn or something? or like can you make it up anyplace....I mean when you make it up right inside your head so you hear it playing like? I mean if I think of some song I can like hear it playing only if you're making up this here music which nobody ever heard it before do you hear these here instruments...Or, or first do you think of these little notes which you write them down when you read them then you get to hear... (135-5)

Crawley, who has commissioned Bast to write "zebra music" for his safari film, asks, "Just tell me something, Bast. When you sit down to compose, do you hear this tumti tum tumti tum and then get it right down on paper? or....No no don't try to explain it to me probably wouldn't understand it if you did..." (439). Rhoda and Bast have a slightly more successful conversation about the meaning of a musical score. She peers at his stacks of freshly composed bars, asking,

--No like what did you call it?
 --Oh a cantata yes that's, it's a choral work voices and a large chorus with an orchestra, it's a sort of dramatic arrangement of a musical idea that...
 --I mean it's all this messy?
 --Yes well this is just the, it's like a sketch a painter does before he starts painting, to work out the form and structure so every note and measure will...
 --So like you never heard this, right? I mean how do you know what it even sounds like.
 --You don't yes that's one of the, you don't really know till you hear it performed that's one of the... (370-371)

A drunken Gibbs puts his finger on the problem that Bast leaves unexpressed in his discussion with Rhoda. Gibbs' comments on the chaotic 96th St. apartment--Bast's periodic work place--lead into a discussion of the artistic process:

--Problem Bast there's too God damned much leakage around here, can't compose anything with all this energy spilling you've got entropy going everywhere. Radio leaking under there hot water pouring out so God damned much entropy going on think you can hold all these notes together know what it sounds like Bast?

---...I mean there are some things you can't really write down especially simple things, they just have to be left for the performer, and till the music's actually performed it doesn't really exist at all so the only...

--Problem writing an opera Bast you're up against the worst God damned instrument ever invented... (287-288).

According to Gibbs, the artist's consciousness is a center of indeterminacy which a mechanically obsessed world would like to be rid of. As an example of the mechanization of art, Gibbs refers to Johannes Muller's creation of the mechanical larynx as a replacement for the unpredictable human voice (289). JR's narrative corroborates Gibbs' and Bast's theory of the ineffable nature of artistic creation when Bast's composing is described as "bringing sounds into being" (286). The popular audience, epitomized by the questions of JR, Crawley and Rhoda, thinks of art as a repetition of ideas and forms which are already familiar to artist and audience alike. Crawley insists to Bast that "music is something I hear" and he knows what he likes (447). Bast's experience of having his music misunderstood or rejected, first by the source of his

inspiration (Stella), then by those with whom he discusses his work, drives him to the brink of despair. He wants acceptance and when he does not receive it, he nearly gives up art entirely. However, Bast's retrieval of his unfinished cello score from a hospital waste basket ("Because it's all I've got" [718]:) indicates that he will continue to create, notwithstanding his discovery that between the idea and the artistic performance there are numerous pitfalls, misinterpretations and rejections.

Bast's flagging resolution to continue creating art in a world increasingly indifferent to the requirements of art and the artist must be seen in contrast to the attitudes of the one artist in JR who cannot go on, who commits suicide, Schramm. In comparison to Schramm, Bast appears to be something of a realist. Schramm, whose name translates from the German as "scratch" or "abrasion," succumbs to the wounding power of life and dies before he can ever be introduced into the novel's action. A friend of Eigen and Bast, Schramm is another tortured, unsuccessful artist with natural talent in many areas but with success in none. According to Gibbs, his work "fed on outrage." This outrage turns to despair and doom. Like his friends, he is radically disillusioned with life and unhappy in love. Because he is dead, Schramm can be idealized by his two friends. Although Eigen's guilt over Schramm's death makes him reticent and defensive, Gibbs provides ample analysis of Schramm's suffering. It is Schramm's identity as the tortured artist sold out by false values that becomes the standard of artistic experience to which the other

artists return again and again, as if to explain their own conditions.

The pivotal experience in Schramm's life occurred during World War II combat. According to Gibbs, Schramm performed an heroic, Faustian role of defending a "point" in the Ardennes offensive against overpowering German forces, commanded by one Blaufinger who, ironically, is now an American corporate ally. Schramm was betrayed by his commanding officer, General Box, also a figure in JR's corporate action. Box withdrew supporting troops without signaling Schramm, leaving him to fight unprotected while Box's armour shelled him from behind. Gibbs considers this betrayal the cause of Schramm's loss of faith in himself and others, and his inability to sustain any form of creativity. In the following drunken monologue, Gibbs compares Schramm's situation with General Box to that of Faust and the Lord in a manner that is reminiscent of Gaddis' narration of Wyatt's abandonment by his father,

...whole God damned point in Faust the Lord has everything laid out for Faust to win but he won't tell Faust, what the hell do you expect Faust to do? Lord staying above the God damned battle letting him break his God damned neck fighting for what was planned for him all the time....⁴⁹

Schramm's background, like that of Bast, is full of formative betrayals and familial dissension. In addition to being "sold out" by the forces of authority, Schramm apparently had "less than cordial" relations with his step-mother, a grasping seductive young woman who, according to Gibbs, married Schramm's widowed father in order to inherit his estate, which she

succeeded in doing (392, 617). Gibbs considers Schramm's betrayals endemic to modern experience which lacks stable, received values embodied by trustworthy authority figures. As in The Recognitions, JR's characters discover that there is no one to tell them what to do. This absence of authority can be interpreted as a lack of order and values. However, that all of JR's characters are "looking for someone to tell them what to do" indicates that they lack self-reliance which is linked to a deeper absence of personal responsibility for their actions. Gaddis implies that without inherited values, responsibility is difficult if not impossible to develop.

Whether Schramm's suicide is interpreted as a consequence of his sensitivity or of his weakness, it martyrs him in the eyes of his friends. That he blinds himself with a pencil as a preliminary act of self-mutilation makes him a parodic, modern Wotan, the god who put out his eye and hung from the World Ash Tree as self-punishment and cleansing.⁵⁰ However Schramm's fate is interpreted, he emerges as the ultimate victim of modern circumstances. His suicide is significant as a sign of human vulnerability, and for the reactions which it elicits from his friends. According to Gibbs, Schramm's loss of confidence destroyed him as an artist. He could no longer believe that he would ever be understood.⁵¹ Without faith in communication, Schramm could not create. He was finally unsure whether art could, in Nietzsche's phrase, "redeem suffering" and, if not, whether it was worth creating at all.⁵²

Thomas Eigen, who counts himself one of Schramm's best

friends, is actually one of his betrayers. Eigen, whose name derives from the German word for "particular" or "strange," is an egocentric individual who lacks compassion. If Schramm, Gibbs and Bast are modern Philoctetes, then Eigen is a self-serving, conniving Ulysses who has compromised his loyalties in order to survive. Eigen's cynicism about Schramm's artistic idealism, reminiscent of Stella's reaction to Bast, is something for which Gibbs cannot forgive him and which ultimately prevents Eigen from emerging as a sympathetic character. According to Eigen, Schramm's desire to make art vindicate life by "showing the world what it's lost" is a futile bit of romanticism (626). Eigen feels that Schramm was fatally obsessed with achieving an excellence that he could never attain.⁵³ A guilt-ridden Eigen tries to justify letting Schramm wander around on the night of his suicide:

...you know damn well she's [Rhoda, Schramm's lover] the only reason I let him leave that night, last shred of confidence as a man he was down there with those lines of Tolstoy there was something terribly lacking between what I felt and what I could do... (621).

Gibbs replies:

...can't you see it wasn't any of that [sex]: it was, it was worse than that? It was whether what he was trying to do was worth doing even if he couldn't do it?...trying to redeem the whole God damned thing by... (621)

But Eigen does not understand. He still considers Schramm's depression a romantic posture, a selfish way of making the world pay for his weaknesses. He says,

--I just meant look I mean being objective Jack facing it honestly instead of turning it into

this Tolstoy play this, to make the whole world know what it lost that's all I'm saying, this I shall write nothing the world will have to understand all by itself... (626)

Eigen blames Schramm's suicide on a desire to "get back at" the world. According to Gibbs, Schramm may have been seeing the truth. There may no longer be a reason to create.

What emerges from the two friends' debate over Schramm's motives is a sense of their own artistic motives. Gibbs recognizes that the artist may no longer be able to redeem the world through art. These doubts notwithstanding, Gibbs has compassion for Schramm's suffering and respect for his work. Eigen, however, scoffs at Schramm's thin folder of unfinished writing, testimony to what Eigen sees as his friend's weakness. Eigen will not reveal his own fears about writing, except that he continually blames his job, his broken marriage, and his friends' problems for his inability to finish his play. Gibbs claims that Eigen, who has written a much-acclaimed, little-read novel, is now escaping from the reality of hard work by doing other people's jobs (491). Eigen's jobs, which he admits seem "unreal" to him, include writing speeches for General Box, the man who "sold out" Schramm (408). The one glimpse afforded into Eigen's writing indicates that he is concerned not so much with human but with animal suffering.⁵⁴ Rather than admit what Gibbs, Schramm and Bast faced up to--that art just may not have an audience--Eigen scoffs cynically at such an ingenuous question as whether his work is interesting (625). He wishes to appear above such considerations. His comment is precisely

the opposite of Bast's and Wyatt's view that art, not necessarily the artist, should be interesting.⁵⁵

Finally, it is Eigen's lack of compassion and his betrayal of artistic community which brands him as a modern Ulysses, talented but cruel. Not surprisingly, of all the artists, Eigen seems to be best able to cope with the outside world. He does not drink; he has money; his injuries all turn out to be imaginary. As a periodic resident of the 96th St. apartment, Eigen greets intruders and phone calls with one desire: to use them as an audience for his complaints about his broken marriage, his unfulfilled artistic intentions, his imagined physical disorders. He is so obsessed with his own worries that he nearly ignores Gibbs when the latter receives a diagnosis of leukemia. Eigen's emotional and sexual insecurity leads him to blame women for most of his problems. In this novel of sex warfare, Eigen is the quintessential male chauvinist. He tries to seduce Rhoda and when she rebuffs him, he verbally abuses her, accusing her of destroying Schramm. His insecurity makes him a false friend to all. Not only does he slander Schramm after the latter's death, but he violates Gibbs' trust by disparaging his work behind his back. At the end of the novel, Eigen has taken up with Schramm's step-mother in order to manipulate his dead friend's estate and acquire some of it for himself.

It should be clear from the foregoing analysis of artists' lives and thoughts in JR that Jack Gibbs is the primary moral commentator and judge among them. His sentiments on art,

society and the lives of his friends provide a substitute for the kind of copious, intrusive narration that Gaddis used in The Recognitions. Gibbs is an "inner directed" man, alienated by an "other directed" age.⁵⁶ His background, even his trivial preferences, ground him in America's intellectual elite. He is from an old-fashioned eastern background, Harvard-educated. The automated world prompts Gibbs to quote Emerson's "things are in the saddle" adage.⁵⁷ He prefers archaic wooden boxed matches to lighters, wears either thrift-shop clothes or Tripler's suits and eschews cars. He is not a political radical but a traditionalist. Like most conservatives, Gibbs believes in American democracy. When accused of subversion in his history class, he responds by reading aloud the complete US Constitution.

Like Bast and Eigen, Gibbs has major flaws: he is unable to finish his writing, partly because of his teaching job, but mostly because of the difficulties he encounters in coping with daily life, difficulties which drive him to drink. Like Bast, he suffered early losses: a loveless childhood and a loveless marriage. Like Eigen, he wonders if art is still necessary. However, Gibbs possesses compassion and a capacity to express love. He is the only character who is described in the midst of a love affair however brief. That he abandons his affair with Amy Joubert in a series of ambiguous communications at the end of the novel only confirms what he told her during their fleeting three-day tryst: "...it's not you I don't trust Amy it's life..." (507). It is finally the fear that all action is

futile which drives Gibbs to his acts of self-destructive drinking and his subsequent failure to fulfill his commitments. Gibbs is even denied the uncertain dignity of a death by leukemia when he discovers that he has been misdiagnosed for a simple virus, brought on by dissipation. In his torn, ill-fitting suits and his red sneakers, he makes his way about the city, losing shoes, wearing a new suit out in the rain. Penniless and hungover, he resembles a Beckett anti-hero. That he may see himself as inevitably something of an absurd character, and that he sympathizes with the marginals of the world, is revealed in his concern for other forlorn characters.⁵⁸ When Eigen remarks that his leukemia diagnosis is absurd, Gibbs retorts, "Why what's wrong with being absurd, people all over the place being broiled like chops on the highway getting heart attacks cancer dandruff I just drew one that's..." (623). A student of entropy theory, whose name recalls that of Willard Gibbs, a pioneer in the field, Gibbs believes in indeterminacy. He would prefer to believe in meaningful order, but his experiences have convinced him that chance is the only law of modern life.

Gibbs has two personalities: one sober and one drunk. When sober he is courteous, helpful; when drunk he is abusive, savagely funny, insightful. It is on the latter occasions that Gibbs will vent his pent-up resentment by breaking into oafish mugging or babbling in non-English in an attempt to do what he calls "alter the context" (496-7). Gibbs refers to a creative persona, a Mr. Grynszpan, who seems to be the fictitious student created by Gibbs and Eigen and sent through Harvard for

a lark. Mail for Mr. Grynszpan piles up at the 96th St. apartment. Gibbs refers to the Grynszpan Law of Common Foci (290) which, although never explained, alludes to Gibbs' own tendency to find a common meaning in seemingly disparate phenomena. It is when drunk that his imagination is liberated to make the frantic collages of ideas that result, for example, in his description of the new divorce game called "Split," or his fugue-dialogue with Rhoda in which the characters, speaking at cross purposes and largely oblivious to each other, weave an intricate expression of the decline of free will and of the commercialization of art (608-9). As will be shown later, Gaddis orchestrates the complexities of his vision through various verbal collages of voices and perspectives which, it would seem, could never be brought together in any other way. Thus he puts forth a many-levelled statement about life while preserving intact the dramatic, idiosyncratic moments of spoken expression.

The phrase which Gibbs uses most frequently to express his sense of personal frustration expresses his awareness that he is "able to see clearly but do nothing."⁵⁹ Like Emerson, he considers this the worst dilemma in which a thinking individual could find himself.⁶⁰ However, he can perform as a social critic, and it is this role that he chooses when he rejects the novel form in favor of the social history. He tells Joubert that he had planned a novel which, the reader gleans, is based loosely on Schramm's war betrayal (501). He claims that "if I wrote a novel it would end where most novels begin" (248). This cryptic line may mean that Gibbs would concern himself

with the conditions and attitudes which most novelists take for granted, the assumptions about life from which they begin writing. However, like Bast, Gibbs claims that a novel cannot be fully explained or understood until it is completed. The work is "problem solving" which resolves itself in the actual process of completion.⁶¹

Gibbs tells Joubert that he has abandoned the idea of a novel because a novelist must understand women and he does not (248). He switches to a social history of what he calls "mechanization and the arts...the destructive element." The title of the work in progress is Agapé.⁶² Significantly, agapé is the value which, according to Gibbs, money-dominated culture has abandoned (282, 290). In thinking this, Gibbs is like Wyatt, who also considers love the primary value which artists should pursue and understand. His social history will presumably account for the absence of love in modern culture. Like JR's other artists, Gibbs is hopelessly distracted from his writing. When he does manage to find the time for sober thought, he has difficulty locating his rough drafts and his cryptic note cards. These cards, included in their rough form, provide evidence of the disorganized state of Gibbs' work and the massive complexity of his project. The cards and Gibbs' reading from his manuscript provide a commentary on his experience and on JR's world.⁶³ Like Gibbs' own commentary, the cards replace the erudite narration that Gaddis used in The Recognitions to locate the fictional action in a cultural context. In JR such history survives as scattered notes which bear

witness both to the complexity of that history and to the disorganization of the artist's mind. Gibbs admits ruefully that his book is like an invalid, perhaps a terminal case (603). Gaddis may be alluding to the two-decade lapse between his novels; however, Gibbs does not finish his work, while JR itself is proof of Gaddis' ability to orchestrate Gibbs' chaotic notes through the texture of his fiction.

The heart of Gibbs' dilemma is threefold: he has the suspicion that nothing is worth doing, that he lacks the talent to create what he knows is true; finally, that even if he can create a work, it may not find an audience. Schramm's phrase, "If you could have seen what I saw there [in the work]," is a refrain for all the artists (725). Schramm succumbs to despair when he cannot be certain that artistic communication is possible. Bast nearly gives up his work until he realizes that it is all he has, all he knows how to do. Only Schepperman continues to work apparently without either reluctance or reward. Eigen retreats into cynicism and obscurantism, claiming that he does not need to be interesting. Gibbs, the seer, ends the novel with his own work still in a shambles. However, there is hope in his final gesture of reading aloud to Schepperman while the latter finishes a long-incomplete painting. Perhaps he is biding his time, retrenching, establishing a sense of artistic community which may provide him with the support to finish his work. If he is sure of nothing else, Gibbs knows that he must provide his own context, create his own network of support, take responsibility for his own life and work. It is this

sense of personal responsibility which is most gravely lacking in JR's characters, which robs them of all thought and action, and which may prevent them from creating or recognizing another person's creation.

Personal responsibility is a quality conspicuously lacking, especially in JR's youth. The character JR accepts conditions around him without question. When he discovers that the economic principles on which he based his "family of companies" is outmoded, he does not rail against an unfair system, nor does he become disillusioned. Instead he busily sets about planning an operation based on what he believes to be the right "rules." Rhoda refuses responsibility for any of the many problems she encounters at JR's 96th St. pied-à-terre, assuming that all decisions are made elsewhere, by others. Unlike JR, she is not innocent; she senses that nothing she experiences makes sense; there is no plan; there are no rules to learn. Her friend Al attributes his abysmal musical career to having no connections, a problem which he assumes most other people do not share. Rhoda and Al are Gaddis' versions of "welfare bums," vulnerable people (they worry about people "not even being very nice" to each other [553]). They assume that the world is a sinking ship and they have all they can do simply to cling to the wreck. Gaddis does not show them to be wrong in their view.

Even Bast, who is older than Rhoda and more linked to the daily world of work, is described by others as lacking a clear sense of personal responsibility. Crawley and JR, both Bast's sometime employers, feel they are doing the young man a favor by hiring him to compose or, in JR's case, to monitor AM radio

stations, among other "corporate" duties. They each suspect that Bast is using them, not the reverse. As has been stated, all JR's characters have a tendency to "pass the buck" for their failures and to feel short-changed by everyone from their estranged wives to deceased relatives and past employers.

Finally it is the older generation of corporate controllers, the ones who were weaned on free enterprise, who feel that they must assume command of a system for which no one will accept responsibility. Governor Cates rants about irresponsibility and greediness, oblivious to the role that monopoly capitalism plays in creating these attitudes. He bellows at Beaton, his legal factotum:

...Well by God don't talk to me about interference somebody has to hold things together that's why damn it! Most of the damn trouble in the world's made by damn fools with nothing to do have to give them something to do to keep off the damn streets and I'm by God sick and tired of hearing them bite the damn hand that feeds them hear me? Only damn reason they think something's worth doing's they get paid for it make a nickel and they...take credit like they was the ones invented their success by their own damn selves....Somebody don't spend every damn minute working to hold the whole damn thing together for them, they'll be squatting in tents on the White House lawn...don't talk to me about interference! (710-11)

Among the novel's characters there is one, JR, who briefly succeeds at "holding together" his own corporate empire, not because he takes responsibility as Cates does, but because he accepts the implicit premise of monopoly capitalism that everything is grist for the economic mill and that nothing but monetary value is of importance. At the same time, he combines this understanding--really more of an instinct than anything

learned--with youthful enthusiasm and seemingly boundless energy. JR is a boy wonder. A parody of a protégé, JR is distinguished from his peers by what separates any young artist from mediocrity: talent (in this case, for money-making) and drive.⁶⁴ Whereas genius, parental guidance, and a rich cultural milieu aided the young Mozart, JR grows up in a world where genius is ignored, parents are largely irrelevant, and art is disregarded. The only recognized value in JR's world is money, so the boy strikes out in pursuit of this goal.

The secret to JR's success is really his ignorance: he disregards all fixed meaning, and parlays language the way a broker plays the market. He decides that the catch phrase for advertising a pharmaceutically dubious green aspirin should read simply, "It's green." When asked to explain the meaning of this phrase, JR counters Humpty-Dumpty fashion: "It doesn't have to mean anything. It's green, that's all!" JR emerges as the one sure survivor of the novel's corporate world, a freelancer with chaos whose only goal is to discover the way to win, with or without the rules. When he encounters Bast, JR exhibits the consequences of this disregard for forms of human communication. For JR, money, not meaning, is the message. Gaddis' depiction of JR's equation of art with money provides some of the grimmest and funniest social criticism in the novel. JR explains to an incredulous Bast that radio must transmit quantity, not necessarily quality. In the following tirade to an incredulous Bast, JR accurately describes the way in which communications concerns have merged with corporate concerns

so that the economic motive outweighs the content of communication:

Look is it my fault if this here symphony takes like a half hour to play it! I mean how many messages are you supposed to get across in this here hour where it takes this band half of it to play this one symphony for these here people... where this other crap takes like three minutes each, I mean what do I care what they play there! ...Like I mean this here station it's losing so much money it can't hardly last any more...we have to buy it to help them out....That's what you do!
(659)

In a futile attempt to make JR aware of "intangible assets," Bast forces the child to listen to Bach's cantata number twenty-one. When Bast asks JR what he heard, the boy is confused and begins describing sound effects, then asks Bast to tell him what he was supposed to hear. Finally, JR describes what he did hear:

I mean what I heard first there's all this high music right? So then this here lady starts singing up yours up yours so then this man starts singing up mine, then there's some words so she starts singing up mine up mine so he starts singing up yours... (658)

Bast is unsuccessful in his attempt to convince JR that music cannot be interpreted for the audience, that the listener must bring whatever he has within him to the work and interpret it with these resources or not at all. Presumably one must be educated in order to understand art, and must live in a milieu which respects art. JR has not been so educated, and his world shows no interest in art.⁶⁵ Hence, his response to the Bach piece is to be expected. His question about what he should hear is also understandable, given his ignorance. JR, a liter-

alist of the imagination, can only follow rules. Bast in his fury refuses to "hear" the problem which underlies the boy's question.

Finally, JR's ignorance and his need for authorities to tell him what to hear make him part of the vacant-eyed, inattentive audience that composes most of the novel's population. The boy's speech to Bast after the latter has attacked him for his ignorance expresses a mixture of pathetic friendship, vulnerability, and sadness beneath the abominable English. JR reminds Bast that in spite of JR's own ignorance of Bast's *métier*, he did fulfill his side of their understanding, which was all he ever was supposed to do. His plea for understanding without meaning is the ultimate statement of *laissez-faire*:

--These a hundred musical insterments all playing at once where they like taped it for you and all I mean didn't you? where you said it's something you have to do like it's your only reason to be anybody so I mean what's the difference if maybe I couldn't even understand it! I mean just because you know what you have to do without somebody's always telling you what's the difference if I look over there and see this ice cream cone thing where Mrs. Joubert sees this here moon coming up where I'm trying to find out what I'm suppose to do so you say it's trash? (661)

This indifference to meaning is even more disturbing when expressed by a well-educated adult. In the following excerpt, Amy Joubert tries to encourage Gibbs to keep writing:

--But it doesn't matter if I understand, it's when I hear you talk about something you care about...that's what I understand... (493)

Bast has confronted Gibbs and Eigen with the possibility that art may be "just trash" if the audience and the performer

interpret it differently than does the artist (725). This fear unhinged Schram because it opened a dark window on meaninglessness and chaos. JR, of all the characters in Gaddis' novel, can tolerate a world without meaning. Yet Gaddis does not present him as a freak, a mutation born of modern culture's detritus. Instead, there is a little bit of JR in all the characters: he is "the boy inside" each of the artists (31). Each of them is really just a grown-up boy, a man with a child's fears.⁶⁶ However, there is a fundamental difference between their attitudes and JR's: the middle-aged artists know that they have aged, that things have changed, that they are part of the process of change; JR is changeless. He ends the novel with the hope that he can "start over" with his new understanding of "cost-plus" operations. Failure has taught him nothing. A sign which Bast sees from a car window on his way to the 96th St. apartment could be JR's epitaph: "None of Us Grew But the Business."⁶⁷

Gaddis' artists struggle against the sterility of the world that JR accepts. While the boy remains fixed on his goal of monetary wealth and oblivious to the importance of human relations, the artists are deeply troubled by their personal lives, particularly by their relations with women. Moreover, in both of Gaddis' novels, women play a complex part in artistic inspiration. To understand further the nature of the artists' dilemmas, the following chapter will examine the role that women play in the lives and work of the artists.

NOTES

¹Thoreau, Walden, p. 65.

²I say "presumably" because none of Gaddis' artists are shown to be fully capable of self-knowledge and self-expression.

³William Gaddis, The Recognitions (New York: Avon Books, 1955), p. 71. All further quotations from this work will be followed by page numbers in parenthesis unless otherwise noted.

⁴Gaddis sprinkles the novel with incongruous images of stunted growth. Amid the café banter of Paris sits an androgynous female reading transition. She "looked like the young George Washington without his wig" (71). Near the end of the novel, she reappears, reading The Partisan Review: "Behind the clattering bastion of saucers, the aging image of the wigless father of her country read on, and someone said she could sit like that all night because she wore a Policeman's Friend" (1,009). The image of America has aged and the literary magazine has changed but the allure of Paris is perennial for feckless inhabitants of the New World.

⁵The Recognitions, p. 114. Gaddis first alludes to the sexually repressive, life-denying aspects of urban culture with the same imagery that he uses to show the negative influence of Christianity. Young Wyatt's puritanical Aunt May teaches the boy a rhyme about "the man of double deed, who sows his field without a seed..." (35).

⁶Gaddis' descriptions of the city are reminiscent of Eliot's evocative imagery in The Waste Land. The following excerpt was deleted by Pound from an early draft, but it bears comparing with Gaddis' scenes (125, 303):

London, the swarming life you kill and breed,
Huddled between the concrete and the sky;
Responsive to the momentary need,
Vibrates unconscious to its formal destiny,

Knowing neither how to think, nor how to feel,
But lives in the awareness of the observing eye.
London, your people is bound upon the wheel;
Phantasmal gnomes, burrowing in brick and stone
and steel:

T.S. Eliot, The Waste Land, A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts Including the Annotations of Ezra Pound, ed. Valerie Eliot (London: Faber and Faber, 1971), p. 31.

⁷The Recognitions, p. 229. This reference to the ambiguous power of the mother for the son is a motif which pervades Gaddis' two novels and will be taken up further in Chapter Three.

⁸Gaddis may be intending a play on the idea of consumption as a female activity and as a wasting disease. Esme lacks a stomach, or so it is rumored. A poor consumer of food, she is also a marginal economic consumer, unlike most of Gaddis' other characters, especially women. Finally, she dies of something very like consumption.

⁹The Recognitions, p. 864. It is widely recognized that the moon evokes the female and is linked with intuition and the unconscious. See J.E. Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, trans. Jack Sage, 2nd ed. (1962; rpt. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), pp. 217-218; Esther M. Harding, Woman's Mysteries: Ancient and Modern (1955; rpt. London: Rider & Co., 1977), pp. 107, 109; and Jolande Jacobi, "Symbols in an Individual Analysis," in Man and his Symbols, ed. Carl G. Jung (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1964), p. 328.

¹⁰According to Susan Sontag, camp champions cultural failure including the decline of religion and the irrelevance of high art. With affection rather than cynicism, camp makes artifice an ideal. It appreciates vulgarity in an age of mass culture. Camp and parody are similar; however camp is not intentionally satirical because it lacks a moral center. Susan Sontag, "Notes on 'Camp,'" in Against Interpretation and Other Essays (New York: Dell Publishing, 1961), pp. 283-291. Gaddis presents homosexuality from a satirical--hence an underlyingly moral--point of view. He does not embrace the culture; he condemns it. Camp culture is depicted as the ultimate masquerade. The vacuous theatricality of Gaddis' homosexuals contrasts with Wyatt's seriousness of purpose and lends his character depth.

¹¹The Recognitions, pp. 56-57. Rev. Gwyon takes up Mithraism as a primitive affirmation of life and an antidote both to repressive Protestantism and to sad memories of Camilla, his dead wife. Gaddis does not parody Mithraism itself, but he does show Gwyon's obsession as finally an escapist self-delusion.

¹²The Recognitions, p. 483. This passage may allude to the renewed interest in Catholicism in America during the 1940s and 1950s. Certainly, the entire novel satirizes the faddish dimension of Catholicism.

¹³As if to expose false suffering as well as the modern world's endless capacity to debase experience, Gaddis depicts a Paris café cluster discussing suffering. The leader of this group wears a false concentration number tattooed on her arm (1007). Elsewhere Otto plagiarizes Wyatt's idea of suffering in order to impress his colleagues (135-6). Stanley leads a

life in which asceticism, if not outright suffering, is axiomatic (20-24). Perhaps the most flamboyant of Gaddis' sufferers is the obscene ascetic, Anselm.

¹⁴The Recognitions, p. 674. Stanley's speech suggests T.S. Eliot's critique of the function of art and the function of religion in After Strange Gods.

¹⁵Herman Melville, Moby Dick or The Whale, ed. Charles Feidelson, Jr. (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1964), pp. 206-215.

¹⁶The Recognitions, p. 1016. This passage is similar to the interchange in Eliot's The Cocktail Party in which the psychiatrist, Reilly, reassures Celia's lover, Peter, who says he never understood his ex-lover: "You understand your métier, Mr. Quilpé- / Which is the most that any of us can ask for" (Eliot, Cocktail, Act III, p. 175).

¹⁷Bernard Benstock notes that Wyatt's apparently unmotivated growth might be a result of Gaddis' infrequent use of the interior monologue. Bernard Benstock, "On William Gaddis: In Recognition of James Joyce," Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature, 6, No. 2 (Summer, 1965), 186. On the contrary, Gaddis provides evidence, much of it symbolic, of what influences his main character's actions.

¹⁸The ape is brought to Wyatt's bedside during his mysterious fever and contributes to his strange cure (57-8). The beast also performs a kind of vindication by uprooting Wyatt's Aunt May's talismanic hawthorn tree, indirectly causing her decline and death. Then he too dies. The ape's name indicates that Gaddis intends the animal as a parody of the Greek hero and a symbolic foreshadowing of Wyatt's own form of heroism. Certain of Wyatt's actions, particularly his psychological descent into the depths, parallel Heracles' story. See Robert Graves, The Greek Myths (1955; rpt. Harmondsworth, Eng.: Penguin Books, 1975), II, pp. 88-89.

¹⁹The Recognitions, p. 33. See Encyclopedia of Religion, ed. Vergilius Ferm (1945; rpt. Paterson, N.J.: Littlefield, Adams & Co., 1959), p. 345.

²⁰Research has been done on Gaddis' allusions to the Faust legend in his first novel (see Peter Koenig, "'Splinters From the Yew Tree,': A Critical Study of William Gaddis' The Recognitions," pp. 60-66; and Brownson, "Techniques of Reference, Allusion, and Quotation in Thomas Mass's Doktor Faustus and William Gaddis' The Recognitions). Gaddis parodies the Faust story in the novel's satiric background, as when a character remarks: "--We're shooting Faust now, a sort of bop version, we've changed him to this refugee artist..." (706). However, Wyatt's over-reaching attitude is taken seriously. The myth adds depth to his situation.

- ²¹Koenig, "'Splinters From the Yew Tree,'" p. 21.
- ²²Robert Graves, The White Goddess (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1966), p. 476.
- ²³Gaddis provides direct and indirect allusions to the Town Carpenter's Thoreauvian eccentricity. The character exhorts others to "simplify" (438), a sentiment which Wyatt puts to good use at the time of his self-transformation (960). Some of the Town Carpenter's speeches are reminiscent of Walden's startling yet homely insights (450).
- ²⁴The Recognitions, p. 59. Roger Shattuck notes a similar concern for the ambiguities of individual perception in Proust's work. Roger Shattuck, Proust's Binoculars (New York: Random House, 1963), pp. 3-39.
- ²⁵The Recognitions, pp. 60-61. This passage is matched by a description of the hack writer, Ludy, who stares out into the Spanish dawn with features "as reasonably detailed and separate as the illuminated composure of the landscape before him..." (950). Gaddis' interchanging descriptions of landscape and physiognomy convey his sense of undifferentiated chaos which takes in the entire cosmos and the consciousness which perceives it. The rational intellect attempts to order and separate the component of this whole and in so doing, it would limit the primordial power of human consciousness. The artist must avoid this tendency to over-rationalize.
- ²⁶The Recognitions, p. 61. See p. 952 for the continuation of this description, transferred to Ludy's perception.
- ²⁷The Recognitions, p. 65. The narrative intimates that as early as his recuperation from his childhood illness, Wyatt was obsessed with leaving paintings unfinished once he had discovered their design (60).
- ²⁸The Recognitions, p. 162. See Friedrich Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (1961; rpt. Harmondsworth, Eng.: Penguin Books, 1976), p. 111. Elsewhere, in The Recognitions, Wyatt and Ottó (presumably mouthing Wyatt's ideas), attribute the Nietzschean idea of a design pre-existing the artist's work to Cicero's Paradoxa. Wyatt says, "--Yes, do you remember, Cicero, in the Paradoxa? ...and he gives Praxiteles no credit for doing anything more than removing the excess marble, until he reaches the real form which was there all the time" (933; cf. 136). Esme writes about a similar form of basic "recognition" in her letter to Wyatt after he rejects her: "Rooted within us, basic laws, forgotten gladly...are a difficult work to find. The painter, speaking without tongue, is quite absurdly mad in his attempt to do so, yet he is inescapably bound toward this" (503). Strangely, I have been unable to find any reference to

Praxiteles or the passage Gaddis describes in Cicero. See Marcus Tullius Cicero, "Paradoxa Stoicorum," in De Oratore, trans. H. Rackham, M.A. (London: William Heinemann, Ltd., 1960), II, pp. 252-303.

²⁹Nietzsche, p. 111. Until his final self-transformation, Wyatt is a reluctant romantic, hardly a Nietzschean hero, who would rather gain fulfillment through perception than action. I agree, however, with Banning's comment that Wyatt's final impulse to continue his quest is a romantic attitude. Charles Banning, "William Gaddis' JR: The Organization of Chaos and the Chaos of Organization," Paunch, Nos. 42-43 (Dec., 1975), p. 153.

³⁰The Recognitions, p. 96. See Charles Fort, The Books of Charles Fort (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1941), p. xii. The Recognitions, p. 940. See Arthur Schopenhauer, "Transcendent Speculation on the Apparent Deliberateness in the Fate of the Individual," in Parerga and Paralipomena, trans. E.F.J. Payne (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), I, pp. 201-233.

³¹There is no indication that Gwyon's idea about the "'accidents' of reality" is based on Aristotle's theory of the accidental as explained in the Metaphysics. See Aristotlé, Metaphysics, trans. Richard Hope (Ann Arbor: Ann Arbor Paperbacks, 1952), pp. 121-122. Gwyon and Wyatt both interpret reality as ambiguous at best and fraught with contingency.

³²Wyatt is referring ironically to the Calvinist belief that God predestined both the fall of humanity and the choice of the elect. See Encyclopedia of Religion, p. 751.

³³Jacques Barzun refers to the romantic view that "the lesson of Faust has to be relearned individually through experience" (Barzun, Classic, Romantic, and Modern, p. 87). This ultimately becomes Wyatt's conviction.

³⁴Esme's plunge into the inarticulate contrasts with Stanley's fear of taking the plunge into his unconscious (see note 15). These characters exist at opposite creative extremes.

³⁵The Recognitions, p. 105. See Joyce, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, pp. 214-215; and Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," in The Sacred Wood, pp. 52-53.

³⁶Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Nature," Selections from Ralph Waldo Emerson, ed. Stephen E. Whicher, p. 55. Wyatt's final striking out into the wilderness on the path of self-discovery also echoes Emerson's recommendation at the end of "The Poet," that the artist must move into the unknown armed only with his trust in the must, which, for Emerson, translates as the poet's creative essence.

³⁷See note 35. "The Big Unshaven Man," a minor character who appears in New York bars, is a parody of the lionized artist (327, 330, 332, 560). With his hard-drinking macho exterior, this character is a satirical version of Hemingway, whose personality was and is at least as well known as his prose.

³⁸Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra, p. 111. Wyatt-Stephen's return to his origins, symbolized by his consuming his father's ashes, canonizing his mother's bones, and taking back his originally given name evokes Nietzsche's idea of the "eternal return" (Zarathustra, pp. 178, 234). For a study of the Joycean associations in The Recognitions, including similarities between Wyatt and Stephen Dedalus, see Bernard Benstock, "On William Gaddis: In Recognition of James Joyce," Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature, VI (Summer, 1965), 177-189.

³⁹Without referring to the romantic dimension of Gaddis' first novel, both Joseph Salemi and John Stark note that in The Recognitions art provides compensation for the absence of spirituality in modern life. Joseph S. Salemi, "To Soar in Atonement: Art as Expiation in Gaddis' The Recognitions," Novel: A Forum on Fiction (Winter, 1977), p. 136; John Stark, "William Gaddis: Just Recognition," The Hollins Critic, 14, No. 2 (April, 1977), 12.

⁴⁰William Gaddis, JR (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1975), p. 492. All further quotations from this work will be followed by page numbers in parenthesis unless otherwise noted.

⁴¹See The Recognitions, p. 988. Decades before the writing of JR, Gaddis made the player piano a symbol of the connection between mechanization, the decline of the arts and the rise of popular culture. In an article for The Atlantic Monthly, Gaddis explained the appeal of mechanical art for Americans:

Selling player pianos to Americans in 1912 was not a difficult task. There was a place for everyone in this brave new world, where the player offered an answer to some of America's most persistent wants: the opportunity to participate in something which asked little understanding; the pleasure of creating without work, practice, or taking the time; and the manifestation of talent where there was none.

Age was no hindrance to success. A child in Seattle who had spent his full five years among players was an expert demonstrator. (William Gaddis, "Stop Player. Joke No. 4," The Atlantic Monthly, No. 188 [July, 1951], p. 92.)

⁴²JR, p. 393. Gaddis may be alluding to the distinction between "status" and "contract" societies. According to

David Riesman traditional or "status" societies changed slowly, depended on coherent family and kin organizations and inherited values, all of which modern "contract" societies lack. Status societies promoted fertility rather than the "fertility by calculation" of contract societies. David Riesman, The Lonely Crowd, abridged edn. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1961), pp. 11-13. Gibbs (and Gaddis) both lament the "decline" from this traditional society.

⁴³Edmund Wilson, "Philoctetes: The Wound and the Bow," in The Wound and the Bow: Seven Studies in Literature (New York: Galaxy-Oxford, 1965), p. 236.

⁴⁴Gide's Philoctète resigns himself to a life of isolation, devoted to writing which he has no hopes of anyone ever seeing. He tells young Néoptolème that virtue is not attained in sacrifice for Greece, but in something rarer, which he claims not to be able to describe. More the pacifist than Sophocles' hero, Philoctète gives up his bow and arrow to Ulysses and returns to his life of isolation, convinced that he is quit of society. That there is consolation in Philoctète's ending is indicated by Gide's notations that the frozen landscape of the hero's island should suddenly sprout flowers. Philoctète tells Néoptolème that virtue can only be attained when one leaves behind the demands of society. The play's ending symbolizes the birth of such virtue from suffering and isolation. André Gide, Philoctète, in le Théâtre complet de André Gide (Paris: Ides et Calendes, 1947), I, pp. 145-180.

⁴⁵Wilson, "Philoctetes: The Wound and the Bow," p. 236.

⁴⁶Tennyson's poem contains passages which relate to Gaddis' plot and characterization. The speaker, like Bast, is disinherited, "left a trampled orphan, and a selfish uncle's ward." Alfred Tennyson, "Locksley Hall," in Poems of 1842, ed. Christopher Ricks (London: Collins Publishers, 1968), 1.156. His beloved is named Amy, perhaps a source of Gaddis' choice of the name Amy Joubert. Like Joubert, Tennyson's Amy is "puppet to father's threat, and servile to a shrewish/tongue" (1.42). She marries a "clown" for a husband, as do Gaddis' Joubert and Stella Angel, Bast's cousin.

"Locksley Hall" concerns romantic love remembered from the perspective of comfortable middle age. The speaker returns to Locksley Hall, scene of his early incestuous romance. He remembers his cousin, their passion, her compromised marriage, and his own dejection. He rails against his cousin's "falseness" and his own unhappy fate. Finally, he regains confidence, convinced that "I myself must mix with action, lest I wither by despair" (1.98). Money and worldly pleasures provide certain compensations (1.99-106). The young man hopes he may avoid being engulfed by his deepest passions, yet, at the same time, that he may regain "the wild pulsation that I felt before the / strife, / When I heard my days before me, and the tumult

of / my life" (1.100-110). The hero is saved by a vision of the future "and all the wonder that would be" (1.120), which leaves him with a faith in common sense. He gloats: "So I triumph'd ere my passion sweeping thro' me left / me dry" (1.131). His optimism leads him to conclude that in spite of the slowness of human progress, "Yet I doubt not thro' the ages one increasing purpose / runs, / And the thoughts of men are widen'd with the process / of the suns" (1.137-138). This newly found common sense makes him ashamed of his former weakness. He admits, "I am shamed thro' all my nature to have loved so slight / a thing. / Weakness to be worth with weakness: woman's pleasure, / woman's pain- / Nature made them blinder motions bounded in a / shallower brain" (1.148-150). Still, a passionate rhythm beats somewhere within the speaker and he yearns for a female partner. He briefly considers an escape to some tropical paradise, mated with "some savage woman, she shall rear my dusky / race" (1.168). His Christian conscience, however, saves him from such a blunder into primitivism and he concludes: "Forward, forward let / us range, / Let the great world spin for ever down the ringing / grooves of change" (1.181-182). Finally, the speaker watches the disintegration of Locksley Hall, symbol of his early romanticism, calm in the conviction that "I see the crescent promise of my spirit hath not set. / Ancient founts of inspiration well thro' all my fancy yet" (1.187-188).

In contrast to Gaddis' characterization of Bast, Tennyson's speaker sounds naive in his final optimism. In the context of JR, the poem shows up young Edward's romanticism. Bast, like Tennyson's speaker, despairs at the world of flux. Edward Engelberg considers that the origin of the modernist sense of flux, "the continual loss of fixity in the objects before us," was first experienced during the Victorian era and given voice by such poets as Tennyson. Edward Engelberg, "Space, Time and History: Towards the Discrimination of Modernisms," Modernist Studies, 1, No. 1 (1974), 23. Unlike Tennyson's poetic character, Bast does not resolve his dilemma by finding a positivist solution. Bast possesses the romantic sensibility in a modern context which denies him any solution to the problems of his perceptions except through continued faith in creativity.

⁴⁷ Like other questing heroes, Bast considers himself undone by his attraction to an unattainable ideal epitomized by woman. Gilgamesh and Herakles come to mind as epic paradigms of this dilemma. See Graves, The Greek Myths, II, pp. 88-89; and Marina Warner, Alone of All Her Sex; The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976), p. 333.

⁴⁸ JR, p. 725. Gide expresses a more stoical but similar sentiment when he claims to prefer risking misunderstanding and lack of recognition than appeal to an audience "fond of trash,"

On peut sans trop de fatuité, je crois, préférer

risquer de n'intéresser point le premier jour,
avec des choses intéressantes--que passionner sans
lendemain un public friand de fadaïses. (Gide,
L'Immoraliste, pp. 2-3.)

⁴⁹JR, p. 391, cf. The Recognitions, p. 41. In his use of the Faust story, Gaddis' perspective has shifted from his earlier emphasis on the artist as a Faustian over-reacher to the middle-aged artist who, like Faust, is betrayed by forces which he thought would save him. In this respect, another more obscure allusion to Faust is provocative. Near the end of JR, Gibbs reads to Schepperman from page thirty-five of Broch's The Sleepwalkers (JR, p. 724). That Gaddis refers to the novel in English makes me reasonably certain that he intends a reference to the English translation of the work. Page thirty-five of The Sleepwalkers is significant for its reference to Faust and the problem of perception and betrayal. In this passage, Joachim has attended an operatic version of Faust by Gounod. In the foyer of the Opera House, he notices two young men chatting. One of the men bears a disturbing resemblance to Ruzena, a girl of low birth with whom Joachim has had a brief affair. Although he cannot remember her face, he senses her visage through the "mask" of the young man. He reflects on this coincidence as he watches the remainder of the opera, all the while projecting his interpretations onto the opera's characters, detecting the vile Valentine beneath the sweet face of Margaret, and concluding that it is for this resemblance that Margaret must suffer. Joachim reflects further (à la Proust) on the young man in the lobby; and he experiences guilt by virtue of the memory of Ruzena, as if he were being unfaithful to his current lover Elizabeth. Joachim is relieved when the opera is over and the catalyst to persistent memory and desire is removed. Hermann Broch, The Sleepwalkers: A Trilogy, trans. Willa and Edwin Muir (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1932), pp. 34-35. JR's artist-characters all fear betrayal and reversals because the world seems never to be what they expect or at first perceive. Art provides the only whole construction of which they have control; yet art, by its nature, stimulates chaotic impulses and frequently causes the artist further suffering.

⁵⁰Schramm's alleged incestuous love for his step-mother (617), and his symbolic castration through blindness make him a modern Oedipus.

⁵¹Schramm is described as lamenting: "If you could have seen what I saw there." Later Gibbs takes up the same lament in the scene in which he reads Schepperman's The Sleepwalkers (724). The central problem for Gibbs and Schramm is communicating their vision to others.

⁵²Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra, p. 111.

⁵³Gaddis has Gibbs recall Schramm quoting from Tolstoy's Redemption, "'there was something terribly lacking between what I felt and what I could do'" (621). This line was also a key expression of creative inadequacy in The Recognitions (647).

⁵⁴JR, pp. 262-263. Eigen's narrator describes shooting a pheasant and then watching it vainly struggle to hide itself between two rocks. This passage shows an interest in gratuitous violence which ultimately diminishes the human center of the writing by making him a voyeur and accomplice of such meaningless activity.

⁵⁵East asks Rhoda why he, rather than his work, must be interesting (JR, p. 561). Wyatt asks Esther what she wants from an artist's personality that she did not learn from his art (The Recognitions, p. 105).

⁵⁶I refer to Riesman's definition of "inner" and "other" directed character in The Lonely Crowd. It would seem that JR provides neither the formative values of the "inner-directed" individual nor the generally acknowledged rules of the "other-directed" person. JR's characters are all looking unsuccessfully for someone to tell them "what to do." See Riesman, The Lonely Crowd, pp. 13-24.

⁵⁷JR, p. 400. Emerson used the phrase to describe the way his contemporaries were burdened with materialism. For Gaddis mechanization is no longer under human control. Hence, individuals are "run" by the forces which they once set in motion.

⁵⁸Gibbs' compassion for society's marginals extends to Freddy, the pathetic retarded brother of Amy Joubert who Gibbs claims to have known in boarding school (618-619). Gibbs' sympathy for the minute and often meaningless compensations for life's monotony is demonstrated in his anger at Eigen for tearing down a mysterious string with a gum wad attached, that a neighbouring 96th St. apartment dweller is using as a kind of game, the object of which is to attach the gum wad to a randomly dropped quarter on the window ledge of the JR pied-à-terre. Gibbs confronts Eigen, "But why did you have to do it Tom, somebody up there, only God damned thing keeps them going's maybe they'll get that quarter out there ..." (623).

⁵⁹JR, p. 486. Gibbs attributes this line to Heraclitus but I find it equally characteristic of Emerson (see note 61).

⁶⁰In "The American Scholar" Emerson writes, "The so-called 'practical men' sneer at speculative men, as if, because they speculate or see, they could do nothing.... Action is with the scholar subordinate, but it is essential" (Emerson, "The American Scholar," in Selections from Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 70).

⁶¹JR, p. 499. See Chapter i, note 65.

⁶²JR, p. 290. Gibbs also picks up a long forgotten piece of fiction entitled How Rose is Read (583-585), concerning a beautiful young woman whose apparent passive receptiveness to men's vision of themselves leads to the ludicrous folly of her many suitors. Gibbs' narrative implies that the girl is not to be blamed for her attitude of acceptance, but that rather the young men were absurd in their eagerness that she should confirm their own pretensions. Unfortunately this idea is taken no further; but, as it stands, it contrasts with JR's portrayal of women as dubious comfort for the striving artist (see Chapter iii).

⁶³JR, pp. 283, 289, 571-575, 578, 581-584, 587, 594-595, 604, 605, 609. These references to Gibbs' text on mechanization and the arts could be allusions to Gaddis' own rough notes for JR. Gibbs' research concerns the history of communications and the link between art and technology in America.

⁶⁴Harold Schonberg's discussion of Mozart's childhood forms a relevant contrast with the boy wonder JR. Harold C. Schonberg, The Lives of the Great Composers (New York: Norton, 1970), p. 77. Although JR lacks Mozart's impetuous and exploiting father, JR, like that musical genius, discovers his métier early and devotes himself to moneymaking with a one-sided fervor which parodies youthful brilliance.

⁶⁵Not only is society largely unwilling to support art, but artists themselves are shown to have something less than humane attitudes, as exemplified by the case of the child caught in the enormous steel sculpture which a committee of artists ("the Modern Allies of Mandible Art," an allusion to MOMA, the acronym for New York's Museum of Modern Art) refuses to allow to be dismantled (JR, pp. 671-672).

⁶⁶Gibbs wears sneakers and shambles like an adolescent (346). Bast is legally identified as an "infant" (13) because his age is never determined. Ultimately the question remains as to whether these child-men believe in the possibility of personal growth. Physically they are adults. Emotionally they possess the fears of their childhoods without the compensatory wisdom of age.

⁶⁷JR, p. 719. The same title appears in The Recognitions, p. 791.

CHAPTER III

CREATIVE AND DESTRUCTIVE MUSES:

THE SYMBOLIC PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN

Critics of The Recognitions and JR have interpreted female characters primarily as victims of the novels' wasteland societies.¹ Although this analysis is not inaccurate, it overlooks the complex imagery and symbolism linking female characters to the male artists' dilemmas. Since both male and female characters are "flattened" into aspects of Gaddis' artistic argument, it would be unnecessary to treat female characters separately from male characters were women not given a unique position in the novels.² Although not themselves artists, women are sources of inspiration for men as art and love objects. They become symbolic projections of men's desires and fears about the mysterious nature of reality.³ In The Recognitions these projections center on women as inherently passive victims. The artists associate women with both their own guilt, and their search for salvation. Hence, women are both desired and feared as muses. In spite of this ambiguous portrayal of women, The Recognitions describes modern society, particularly artists, as badly in need of these primal female influences.⁴ JR is a more pessimistic work than the first novel, and this altered perspective affects the way women are seen. JR's artists are impotent victims of amoral, inhuman forces,

while women are accomplices to society's corrupt system of values and agents of men's destruction. Although all JR's characters are flawed, Gaddis advances a double standard in which the diminished humanity of the male artists is more understandable than the ambiguous nature of the women. JR depicts the threat of matriarchical control reminiscent of Philip Wylie's "momism" thesis in Generation of Vipers.⁵ Nonetheless, artists are fatally drawn to women as sources of inspiration.⁶ Women's glamour is, however, shown to be duplicitous and ultimately destructive to art. This chapter will analyze women's symbolic influence on artists in The Recognitions and JR in order to illuminate more fully the nature of the artistic dilemma.

The Recognitions

In The Recognitions women are associated with a wealth of pre-Christian and Christian mythic figures. Sometimes these references are used to parody the profanity of modern life. More frequently they enhance the primitive power of women for men. Lunar imagery evokes the often disturbing impact of women on the artistic consciousness.⁷ Figures from Greek myth link female characters with ancient plots, usually to do with love. This ancient imagery calls up women's beneficial and destructive influence on male creativity and sexuality. Passive, suffering femininity is epitomized by the image of the Virgin as both a victim and object of veneration. The novel's female characters with the greatest capacity for unconditional love and forgiveness are those most closely associated with the Virgin Mary. As

victims of male egoism and aggression, they become the cause of male guilt and also the source of male salvation.

In treating women as symbols of mystery and inspiration for the artist, Gaddis is carrying on the nineteenth-century American romance tradition.⁸ In The Recognitions, the artists' quest for fulfillment is a searching for self through art similar to that search carried on by Melville's *Pierre*. The artists find symbolized in women "what is lost" in themselves, a discovery which leads them to an awareness of love and its association with loss and suffering. However, no artist proves completely successful in realizing both love and art. In varying ways, they all stunt their emotional growth through their creative work. If they manage to recognize lost feeling and accept a spontaneously lived life, as does Wyatt, they do so at the expense of female suffering. Gaddis does however allow the possibility of a more perfect existence in which, presumably, women as well as men will partake of a more harmonious life.

This hope notwithstanding, The Recognition's neoromantic idealization of women contains a pessimism and an arrogance which reflects the artistic perspective of its male characters. Woman as a symbol of wholeness is an ideal which the artist despairs of ever realizing in life. Finally, it is only through art that the ideal becomes immanent; and even then, as Wyatt says, the pieces of the whole may not fit together quite as one would hope (cf. Ch. ii). Women are vehicles of the arrogance of this vision which presumes that the artist can create a separate world more perfect than reality. The repeated motif of the

artist as Faustian over-reacher enhances the arrogance of his creative attempts. Women provide the memory of wholeness which inspires this arrogance. That they become vehicles and not direct participants in this artistic transformation signifies that they must stay in their role as symbols of immanence. Women also become casualties of the male artist's attempt to abolish arrogance and integrate himself into life. Their identity as passive victims of male action makes them, by the same token, vehicles of male salvation, as will be shown. Where there is a sinner there must be one against whom he has sinned. Hence, as part of man's sin and his salvation, woman must take on the role of martyr. This section of the chapter will demonstrate the complex role of women in Gaddis' artistic argument through an analysis of the primary female characters in the novel: Camilla, Aunt May, Janet, Esther, Esme, and the paradigmatic victim, the Spanish child martyr.

The most extreme victim in The Recognitions is a figure who only exists through hearsay and newspaper account, the eleven-year old Spanish virgin whose imminent canonization prompts a faddish exodus of many of the novel's characters to Rome and Spain. The girl's story has historical basis in the 1951 canonization of Marie Goretti, an Italian girl who was murdered by her rapist.⁹ In her chapter on "Virgins and Martyrs" in The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin, Marina Warner makes the following connection between suffering and female purity in Catholic culture:

Through the ascetic renunciation of the flesh,
a woman could relieve a part of her nature's

particular viciousness as the Virgin Mary had done through her complete purity. The life of self-denial was seen as a form of martyrdom, and the virgin was encouraged to suffer physically....Through virginity and self-inflicted hardship, the faults of female nature could be corrected.¹⁰

Warner goes on to cite the Gorette case as evidence of the continued Christian (particularly Catholic) concern with martyrdom. Apparently, the girl, born in 1890, was accosted by a local villager, whom she knew. When he tried to rape her, she resisted, and he proceeded to stab her repeatedly. Before she died in hospital, she forgave him and was made a Child of Mary by local clergy. Warner cites Pope Pius XII's speech at Gorette's beatification in 1947:

'Italian girls, especially, in the fair flower of their youth should raise their eyes to Heaven and gaze upon this shining example of maidenly virtue which rose from the midst of wickedness as a light shines in the darkness...God is wonderful in His saints....Now he has given to the young girls of our cruel and degraded world a model and protector, the little maid Maria who sanctified the opening of our century with her innocent blood.'¹¹

Gaddis introduces references to this figure in inappropriate contexts as a way of parodying the fraudulence of modern religious practices.¹² Modern life desecrates this figure, but she remains a catalyst for the main character's "epiphany." Although Catholicism is satirized, the virgin/martyr remains a symbol of love and forgiveness in the novel. Wyatt, who changes his name to Stephen during his Spanish adventure, is himself a kind of profane St. Stephen, a sufferer in life and a quester after personal salvation through art (cf. Ch. ii). Yet

unlike female characters, his own self-discovery must come through another's martyrdom. Wyatt-Stephen speaks to the saint's murderer, who explains the effect of the girl's forgiveness. Wyatt-Stephen then shares the murderer-penitent's story with the "ludicrous" novelist Ludy:

The murderer is here, a penitent, but it's different, for she the virgin/martyr comes to him here in a vision, and...all this time he's carrying on this love affair, being loved. But for me, that's why he sent me on, to find what he has here. After what he did, and he learned only through her suffering,...If she comes to him carrying lilies that turn to fire? And the fire, what do you think it is? If somewhere I've...done the same thing? And something's come out of it, something...like...he has. While I've been crowding the work alone.
(955-956, italics mine)

As this passage makes clear, Wyatt-Stephen learns from the girl's murderer that he (Stephen) must cast off guilt for past sins by taking responsibility for them instead of escaping into his work. Wyatt-Stephen's focus is not so much on the child's suffering or martyrdom as on the murderer's subsequent transformation as a consequence of committing the sin and being forgiven. As will be shown, the closer women approach this model of passive suffering and forgiveness, the more they embody principles of love which become useful for the artist.

Camilla Gwyon, whose Spanish funeral begins the novel, is a source of formative love and guilt for her son Wyatt. Camilla's name derives from Latin and is the feminine variant of Camillus, meaning "noble youth assisting at religious rites." This reference may be ironic since her grave is confused with that of the Spanish martyr and Camilla's corpse faces possible

canonization.¹³ The circumstances of Camilla's death show her gratuitous victimization. She contracts appendicitis on board ship to Spain. The fraud Sinisterra, masquerading as a doctor, performs the operation which kills her. As he makes the incision he mutters, "The first turn of the screw pays all debts."¹⁴ Ironically, this first turn of the plot opens the gaping prospect of debt in the form of guilt which Sinisterra, Rev. Gwyon, and Wyatt will feel in connection with Camilla's death. However, it is this guilt which will ultimately spur Wyatt on his spiritual quest towards his own settling of personal debts. That is, Camilla, like the little Spanish saint, must die in order for Wyatt to begin the process of self-realization.

Camilla's untimely death drives her husband to manipulate his wife's identity by turning her memory into something she was not. The following passage shows that in insuring the purity of her funeral, Gwyon dishonors her spirit:

Camilla had borne Gwyon a son and gone, virginal, to earth, virginal in the sight of man, at any rate. The white funeral carriage of San Zwingli was ordained for infants and maidens. (19)

Gwyon's obsession with his wife's purity renders her incongruously "renovated like that remounted goddess who annually clambered forth from the pool with virginity renewed" (19).

In spite (or perhaps because) of Gwyon's elaborate reverence for his wife, he is haunted by her memory through lunar images which prompt thoughts of all that is lost to him. The power of memory reverberates through The Recognitions and is

implied in the title itself. A catalyst for memory takes the shape of images, principally the moon, which evoke women's influence. The full and crescent moon become associated with the young and aged women or "hag" as Gaddis describes her.¹⁵ In the following passage the full moon heralds Camilla's ghostly aura and voices a lost wholeness:

So [Gwyon] lay alone one evening, perspiring in spite of the cold, almost asleep to be wakened suddenly by the hand of his wife, on his shoulder as she used to wake him. He struggled up from the alcoved bed, across the room to the window where a cold light silently echoed passage. There was the moon, reaching a still arm behind him, to the bed where he had lain. He stood there unsteady in the cold, mumbling syllables which almost resolved into her name, as though he could recall, and summon back, a time before death entered the world, before accident, before magic, and before magic despaired, to become religion. Clouds blew low over the town, shreds of dirty gray, threatening, like evil assembled in a hurry, disdained by the moon they could not obliterate.¹⁶ (my emphasis)

In reaction to the guilt and desire called forth by Camilla's death, Gwyon begins searching for spiritual compensation beyond his Puritan heritage. He finds it in Mithraism, an ancient religious cult, barred to women.¹⁷ Its central symbol, the sun, countered the moon-inspired cults of the Great Goddess. If it does nothing else, Gwyon's attempt to revive this ancient male mystery religion helps to bury his wife's haunting memory.

As with so many of Gaddis' women, dualism enhances the mystery of Camilla's nature. She is both virginal and defiled, innocent and primitively wild. A New England Protestant, she nonetheless has an untrammelled strain inherited from her part-Indian father, the so-called Town Carpenter. As a young bride,

in a burst of passionate exhibitionism, she once donned heavy Byzantine gold hoop earrings which "contrasted with the fine bones of her face" and bloodied her ears (19). The hoops figure throughout the novel much as Pynchon's ivory comb does in *V*, as a kind of talisman for men, symbolizing the promise of harmony that women evoke.¹⁸ Gwyon gives his son the hoops as Wyatt leaves home. When Esme comes to model for him, she re-enacts Camilla's ear-piercing and wears the hoops in an attempt to inherit Camilla's symbolic power.

Camilla's moments of unrepressed self-expression are overshadowed by her death which occurs before she can fully realize her identity. Her enduring trait is her wistfulness, a characteristic which has been associated with the beauty of the Virgin Mary.¹⁹ Camilla's portrait bearing, "an expression of unchanging, ungratified yearning," hangs opposite the grim visage of the family's favorite Puritan, John Huss, as if depicting the ambiguous heritage of the Gwyon women (39).

For Wyatt, Camilla is his "virgin mother" (25). Like Gwyon, he experiences her ghostly presence in his bedroom (25). Later, he will have ambivalent feelings about the moon, perhaps in response to its evocation of her memory.²⁰ Camilla's image haunts Wyatt's art and crowds out other women in his life. As if to symbolize her potential for his work, Wyatt leaves Camilla's portrait unfinished. The cynical Valentine accurately associates the portrait with the *Stabat Mater*, the devotional hymns on the Virgin's suffering.²¹ With her potential canonization, and her role in Wyatt's epiphany, Camilla's symbolic

power as the vehicle of his salvation is complete. Approaching her grave, Wyatt perceives the final images of Camilla's persistent power in his life. In this passage, the definite articles designate the particularity of the images:

Straight ahead stood a separate mausoleum, a cross atop it, surrounded by a chain and four corner columns mounting stone faces, the girl, the woman, the hag, and the skull.²²

Wyatt's desire to recapture the memory of his dead mother is denied by his repressive Aunt May, the other woman most influential in his early years. May represents the negative power of virginity for men.²³ As a spinster, she exudes sexual repression rather than purity. Her name and her favorite tree, the hawthorne, or May-tree, associated with ancient tree worship, are in sharp contrast with her spiteful nature.²⁴ As a replacement for Rev. Gwyon, May is instrumental in every meaningful scene of Wyatt's childhood. She discovers and condemns childish mistakes. She confuses sacrifice with sharing when she demands that Wyatt give up his birthday cake to an uninvited guest, a lesson in Christian love which leaves him more alienated than ever from his religious heritage (26-27). At the time of her death, May is judged as one who led a life "bounded by terms of negation" (46-7). Indeed, her influence on Wyatt is entirely negative; she imputes evil to all his desires. Gaddis juxtaposes May's concern with foulness alongside her refusal to accept creative possibility. The following passage shows her repressiveness as a cause of Wyatt's warped creative development:

--Today is your mother's birthday, she said, ...
 --You have dirt all over your hands.
 --What is a hero? he asked...separating himself
 and looking up at her.
 --A hero?...A hero is someone who serves some-
 thing higher than himself with undying devotion.
 --But...how does he know what it is?
 --The real hero does not need to question....The
 Lord tells him his duty.
 --How does He tell him?
 --As He told John Huss....
 --And what happened to him? ...
 --He was burned at the stake.. (38)

May condemns creativity in the same manner that she condemns heroism. She points Wyatt towards art forgery by telling him that to be original is to falsify something in the divine order (40). According to May, evil is stronger than good; it is "the prospect of evil" which draws the sinner on to further commissions.

In his ambiguous eulogy, Gwyon claims that his maiden sister was an agent of "the evil that is in nature" (48-49). May considered herself an agent of the Lord, but her Manichean obsessiveness would indicate otherwise. Unaware of her possible damnation, May longed to be delivered from life. Like an acrimonious St. Theresa, she was "dying of not being able to die" (46). However, May's desire is to leave the repellent flesh rather than to attain to a mystical union.

May's impulse is to repulse life. As a spinster, she rejects her own sexuality and threatens male virility. She informs Gwyon, with some satisfaction, that she has seen a moor hen but no moor cock, a bird which figures on the Gwyon family crest. Clearly May intends to convince her family that no progeny should be anticipated because of weakness in the male line, namely in the child, Wyatt. In a similarly repressive

manner, she interprets Wyatt's fecal misbehavior as intimation of "the end of this Christian family..." (24).

If Aunt May's function is unequivocally negative, the role of her convert, Janet, is somewhat more ambiguous. As the "wise virgin" she is a boon to Wyatt's personal development. The narrative implies with much irony that since she accepts Aunt May's religious fanaticism, she must be no better than the stock figure of fun, the half-witted servant girl. However, the satire becomes ambiguous as Janet takes on the bizarre characteristics of a prophetess. After Aunt May dies, Janet grows obsessed with Christianity: she is subject to ecstatic swoons; she imagines herself afflicted with the stigmata. Her prayers, murmured at Wyatt's sickbed, burn themselves into his memory to be recalled as a form of exorcism as he approaches the family home for his final settling of spiritual debts with his father. The more ascetic Janet becomes, the more androgynous grows her body, which the narrative interprets as "her body's revenge on her attempt to disdain it" (42). Although sexually warped, Janet possesses insight. When Wyatt returns to the family manse, she greets him as a prodigal son, and refers to him as the medieval priest-king Prester John.²⁵

Her extraordinary behavior forms the climax to Wyatt's homecoming as she mates with a neighbor's black bull during a thunder storm in a modern parody of Pasiphae.²⁶ The context of this strange copulation is important for Wyatt's story rather than for Janet's life. In the copulation scene, the narrative focuses on Wyatt's spiritual dilemma (he asks, "Am I the man

for whom Christ died?"), rather than on Janet's act. Wyatt gets no direct answer to his question, save a thunder clap "louder than laughter" (769). For her part, Janet would seem to be enacting some grotesque sexual liberation. The scene is followed by a cryptic dénouement in which Janet and the Town Carpenter make passing references to the harrowing of hell (471). Wyatt, immersed in his own personal hell, is startled as Janet, sensing his dilemma, tells him that damnation is "life without love." She kisses him and says aphoristically, "No love is lost" (471). Her role as virgin-seer complete, Janet disappears from the novel, to be evoked by Wyatt as "that wise virgin" as he pursues his salvation (582).

In comparison to such eccentric characters as Janet and Aunt May, Esther is markedly lacking in mystery. Her motives are determined by her sex, and her sex victimizes her. The narrative describes her past as:

...a frantic concatenation whose victim she remained, projecting her future upon it in all the defiant resentment of free will, in a world where she had been victimized by every turn of the die since her father had first cast it. Where Esther's mind had gone since, her thighs had followed with errant and backbreaking sincerity. (89)

Principal in her current errors is her unsatisfying marriage to Wyatt. Esther manifests what Simone de Beauvoir terms female "immanence" in contrast to her husband's urge to "transcendence" through personal exploration.²⁷ Moreover, it is never clear that Esther recognizes her "second sex" status. Although she attempts intellectuality, she fails to be self-aware.

Esther's personality is described as a paradoxical combination of the intellectual and the pedestrian. She fits into what Cynthia Ozick describes as the double-bind of female stereotyping: she is either too rational, and insufficiently creative, or too irrational. Ozick puts the paradox thus:

...she will wander too much or she will wander not at all....She is either too emotional or she is not emotional enough. She is either too spontaneous or she is not spontaneous enough. She is either too sensitive...or she is not sensitive enough....²⁸

The narrative explains that Esther "worked very hard" to understand her situation, but never got farther than attributing her "fate" to her sex. She probed her past "with masculine ruthlessness" and became, in the process, "severely intellectual," a condition against her nature (87). Her attempts at rationalism are finally superseded by "feminine logic" when she rashly proposes marriage to Wyatt "before we know too much about each other" (87). The narrative sees in this moment of spontaneity a positive spark of feminine intuition:

...being a woman, and the woman she was, her proposal may have been an infinite moment of that femininity which is one of humanity's few approximations to beauty, asking no justification and needing none to act in a moment of certainty with nothing to fear one day to be recalled in a fearful moment threatened by certainty. (88)

Thus the narrative vacillates in its assessment of her nature. She is a mixture of the intuitive and the mundane. Narrative ambivalence shows clearly around the issue of Esther's desire to marry Wyatt. As the previous passage indicates, her decision may have been based on feminine instinct. Then again, according

to the following passage, Esther may have felt she could "save" Wyatt from himself, thus preventing him from going through what becomes his necessary quest for salvation:

...she could not wait to see him thoroughly damned first before she stepped in, believing, perhaps as they do, that if he were saved now he would never need to be redeemed. (87)

This impulse to take over a man's life is described as historically "genuine" and almost inevitable in women. Strangely enough, although Gaddis' men see women as their salvation, the woman who wants to "save" is presented as a threat to men.

Esther's threatening power is evoked by two images which have been shown to have pervasive associations with the destructive power of female sexuality for men: the vagina dentata and the spider.²⁹ Esther's ravenous sexual appetite is described as "a civilized correspondence to that primordial cannibal rite performed by sober comrades who eat their victims in order to impart to themselves the powers with which those victims had, as enemies, threatened to overcome them" (88-89). Gaddis supplies further imagery to specify male reaction to her behavior: "One of the more fastidious comments risen in her past had sported the phrase vagina dentata" (89). Gaddis goes on to describe the image of woman as a spider who secretes the web of her will to ensnare her male victims (89). Unfortunately for Esther, men fall through her net while she continues her devourings, "but not for love" (89).

Esther's reaction to "being left" is to consider herself "the conglomerate tragic figure" (89). However, the narrator

makes clear that because she lacks the ability to transcend the bounds of her feminine condition she is not tragic, merely female. As an earth-bound immanence--she is depicted as pure physicality, in spite of her intellectual pretenses--Esther lacks a sense of quest beyond that of getting a man. Nor does she seek personal transformation. Unlike Wyatt, she lacks guilt because she has no moral sense.³⁰ The following marital scene clarifies Wyatt's and Esther's moral differences. Wyatt sits reading, protective of his very thoughts, which Esther wants to "read." A distracted Esther tries to break through his silence with intimate conversation. Wyatt quotes Charles Fort: "'By the damned, I mean the excluded.'"³¹ The narrative interjects: "...but she would have to ask--'Excluded from what'" (90)? Esther lacks Wyatt's sense of personal guilt and "separation" from life. Instead, she would like to be central to his life and art. She enters his studio uninvited and confronts Wyatt about the unfinished portrait of his mother: "Finish it! Then there might be room for me" (98). Wyatt explains that Esther is already "so much there" that he could not make her a figment of his memory suitable for art. Wyatt is guilty here of living in a fantasy which neglects the present reality of his wife. Ultimately, however, it is Wyatt whose story is the center of the novel because, unlike his wife, he is capable of inner development.

Wyatt comes as close as he is capable to sensing Esther's need when he defines what amounts to the amorality of her nature in contrast to his own condition:

...men rising to isolated challenges, he spends his life preparing to meet one, one single challenge, when he triumphs it's, they call it heroic, but you, I know how hard you try for me, women just go on they just go on, and I...
 --They have to, Esther said.... (96)

When Wyatt returns for a final visit, he once again tries to explain to Esther his need for moral action when he says, "...this [his plan to expose his own counterfeiting] is going to expiate,...this is the only way we can know ourselves to be real,...this moral action..." (631). In the throes of pregnancy nausea, Esther only half hears him. She answers: "Moral sense. Do you think women have any morals? that...women can afford them? Do you know how much she has to protect?...And you make these things up and force them on her, men take their own guilt and call it moral sense and oppress her with it..." (631). As the narrative shows, Esther's criticism is accurate. Wyatt only frees himself from guilt when he takes responsibility for the pain he has caused others. However, the novel indicates no alternative to this situation. The inflicting of pain is something vague and unalterable in the "human condition."

Finally, Esther's feminine amorality causes her to slip into relationships with corrupt men, simply as a means of surviving. She explains to one of her unsavory lovers a version of the "biology is destiny" argument: "Just being a woman, do you know what a woman goes through? Just trying to keep things going...A man can do as he pleases...But a woman... she can't just get up and leave things....Because they can't because society...and besides physically..." (140).

Esther's role is significant only in relation to Wyatt's artistic and moral struggle. She is both an impediment to his work and a passive helpmate. Gaddis refers to the mythic figure Persephone in connection with Esther's condition of "waiting" in expectation of love which never arrives. She is described as "queen of the shades" attendant upon her husband's "infernal" kingdom of counterfeit.³² According to Graves, Persephone represented the matriarchal point of view and her name derives from the Greek as "fearful one" or its Latin equivalent, "bringer of destruction."³³ As a woman who "wishes" for powers she does not possess, Esther also resembles Wagner's Brunnhilda who says, after she has been stripped of her goddess' powers by her angry father, Wotan: "Do not despise / the wretched woman / who only wishes, / but cannot perform."³⁴ It is as passive helpmate that Esther completes her relationship with Wyatt. He "trusts" her with the fragments of his forged paintings which he returns to collect from her as evidence of his identity, asking her, "My wife God love you....Have you kept my secrets, then? I've come to get them."³⁵ Too mundane to be a symbolic goddess, threatening in her predatory sexuality, Esther is loved as a homebody and feared as a source of the artist's guilt.

Esme is the female character with the greatest number of symbolic aspects. She is linked with the ancient powers of seer and muse, succubus, hag, and witch, as well as with the Virgin Mary and the prostitute Mary of Egypt. Of all Gaddis' female characters, she is the most susceptible to idealization

by male artists, yet she is also most obviously linked with corruption. Like Esther, Esme manifests amorality, but with a difference. Esther claims her lack of morals is a necessity of her survival; for Esme, survival and morality are irrelevant. A marginal dweller in the world of so-called objective reality, Esme, like Henry Adams' Virgin, is terrified by the dynamo of mechanization but would accept "without profane curiosity" a supernatural event.³⁶ While Esther is portrayed as profoundly "here," earth-bound, fleshy and literal-minded, Esme is emaciated, ethereal, intuitive, forgetful of her earthly life because she is mindful of "inarticulate" reality. A child of the Village streets, she is rumored to have already given birth, but has lost track of her offspring. She lives an isolated life, indulging in journeys into heroin oblivion. She accepts with equal grace and good humor the attentions of Mr. Sinisterra's disreputable son, Chaby, her drug connection, and the pretentious Otto. Finally, she submits to Stanley's concern for her soul and allows him to abduct her to Italy for conversion to Catholicism. Her mysterious detachment notwithstanding, Esme is capable of love and its attendant vulnerability. The only man she "acts" with is Wyatt, and his objectification of her, as his painting model, drives her to insanity and a ludicrous death.

Esme's mysterious ethereal quality, echoing that of Isabel in Melville's Pierre, makes her a compelling symbol of unapproachable beauty for Gaddis' male characters. In the following passage, Otto, the first to see her, perceives her as an art object:

She was alone. The sight of her startled him: looking out at nothing, her lips silent and almost smiling while the rest chattered, her body still where everyone else shifted, conscious only in herself while all the others were only self-conscious. Alone on the couch, and alone in the room like the woman in that painting whose beauty cannot be assailed, whose presence cannot be discounted by turning one's back, but her silence draws him to turn again, uncertain whether to question or answer.³⁷

It is this beauty which Wyatt uses as his model of the Virgin, in the process robbing Esme of her identity. As she says to Otto, "If it [her face] is not beautiful for someone it does not exist..." (479). Men recognize Esme's beauty, but they only see in it a projection of their own desires. They mask her with their own intentions and obliterate her identity.

As well as evoking ethereal beauty, Esme exudes a primitive sexuality which throws into relief the repressive sexual mores of her companions. The narrative describes her reaction to a lewd tango she has danced as an outraged Otto looks on:

[she smiles] like the Baganda woman smiles in Central Africa, lain in the thick grass with a plantain flower between her legs, flower dislodged by her husband's rearing member before he takes her to dance in the gardens of friends, to encourage the plantain trees that grow in their gardens. (226)

Esme's smile suggests woman's ancient link with fertility rituals, for which there is no modern equivalent. Sterility would now seem to be the norm, as it is evoked by cocktail party banter and the perverse behavior of such odd couples as Maud and Army Munk.

Male characters also associate Esme with the more disturbing female images of succubus and witch. Esme is the most

openly promiscuous and the most universally desired of Gaddis' women; hence, she is most capable of threatening male sexuality. Her lack of pretence makes her susceptible to both male lust and sexual fears.³⁸ Anselm, the tortured ascetic, calls her a succubus (216, 217), and recommends her banishment to a nunnery (507). At the same time, he visits her apartment and exhibits strangely intimate behavior for someone who so virulently condemns her. Esme is an obscure catalyst for his religious conversion as well as his castration as a consequence of his finding pornographic photos for which she posed (667). Warped by the loveless "naked city," Anselm lashes out at false values but is finally unable to accept sexuality of any kind. Similarly, Stanley is attracted to Esme, only to be disgusted by his own recognition of sexual desire (883). In a fevered dream aboard ship to Italy, he imagines that Esme is possessed by the devil and must be exorcised.³⁹

Not simply defined in terms of her sexuality, as are several minor female characters, Esme possesses intuitive powers which make her a modern seer-sibyl.⁴⁰ Like the Town Carpenter, another visionary, she sees stars during the daylight hours, a sign of her extreme "insight" (508, 35). The narrative describes her powerful presence in hospital, where Stanley finds her after her suicide attempt.

...emerging from [the hospital's] synagogue, her face so abruptly familiar, delicately intimate in the sharp-boned hollow-eyed virginity of unnatural shadows, like those priestesses of Delphos in subterranean silence transfixing what might have been fear on a face in the light but there paralyzed in prophecy (until one of them was raped: then they were replaced by women over fifty)....

--It is so beautiful in there, she said, and smiled as one foretelling death by falling pillars, death at sea. (805)

As one who sees but can do nothing in a hostile world, Esme has a shadowy future. The above passage implies that she is a prophetess of oblivion.⁴¹

In her writing, Esme expresses a near-mystical vision in her own subjective language. Her attempt to transcend language, resembles that of Melville's Isabel, who creates incomprehensible music on the guitar.⁴² As Esme tells Otto, truth transcends reason and is usually beyond the rational grasp of the truth-speaker (481). She seeks in writing the same transcendence that she experiences on a more physical level through heroin. Esme's heroin-induced ecstasy is compared to the feeling of spiritual transport achieved through music and religious mysticism.⁴³

Finally, Esme's strange ethereal life brings her as close as any of Gaddis' characters to the experience of death-in-life. In this aspect Esme embodies the wise crone, or hag, the final manifestation of the Great Goddess as "layer-out" and harbinger of mortality.⁴⁴ Thus it is that Esme symbolizes both the ethereal and the all-too-mortal. After her breakdown as a consequence of her sorry love affair with Wyatt, Esme undergoes a personality change and begins speaking of herself in the third person as if she has accepted the objectified status Wyatt gave her as his model. It is also likely that this change in address indicates her foreknowledge of death. She tells Otto, "I have discovered that there is no one,"

referring to her sense of isolation and loss following Wyatt's rejection (512). She treats herself as a corpse, waiting for the actual circumstances of her death with equanimity, saying, "When the witnesses come, ... will they identify her? or will they turn from her to the paintings of her which are not of her at all, and shudder as you [Otto] shudder and look away" (514). Otto recognizes her "hag" aspect and fears it as a sign of his own mortality (514).

Esme's aura of quietism and suffering causes a number of men to consider her as a modern Virgin Mary. Otto thinks of her as the Madonna (204). Wyatt has her pose for a painting of the death of the Virgin (295-7). As his model, she soon becomes a replacement for the image of Camilla, another woman whom Wyatt associates with the Mater Dolorosa and the devotional hymn the "Stabat Mater."⁴⁵ Like the virginal Camilla, Esme communicates a sense of "infinite regret" and "deep remorse" (513-14). Esme's suffering borders on martyrdom indicated by the lilies which Wyatt brings her and which the narrative also associates with the death of the Virgin and the martyrdom of the little Spanish saint (313, 955). The flowers become a leitmotif which links Esme's experience, Wyatt's guilt and the guilt of the murderer-rapist who dreams that his victim brings him lilies which burst into flame.

Esme's virginal aspect is desecrated by a vulgar advertising man who searches Rome for her as a "natural" for the role of the "BVM" in an upcoming television series (974). Perhaps it is Esme who imagines the most appropriate role for herself when

she tells a bewildered Stanley that she hopes to pattern her Roman pilgrimage after that of the reformed prostitute, Mary of Egypt (879, 882). Like this peripatetic saint, Esme reforms, voyages to Rome, paying her passage in sexual favors if not prostitution, and dies of disease contracted by kissing a saint's toe.⁴⁶

The ludicrousness of Esme's death makes clear Gaddis' contempt for Catholicism, if such an attitude were not already obvious. When Stanley throws overboard her pulp renditions of convent melodramas, she asks in all innocence, "But isn't that how it's going to be" (884)? In embracing Catholicism with a childish literalism, Esme falls victim to the problem that undoes Stanley and Otto: she is deluded by a false reality. She resembles Agnes Deigh whose emotional isolation leads her to attempt suicide and, failing that, to retreat into religious fanaticism.⁴⁷

Ultimately Esme also becomes a victim of Wyatt's image of her and a vehicle of his transformation.⁴⁸ That Wyatt considers Esme a part of his guilty past and a means towards his spiritual growth is made clear in the final Spanish section when he links himself with the Spanish Saint's murderer (935). Meanwhile, Esme adopts Wyatt's early religious obsessions and "wastes away" as a doomed ascetic while her lover goes on to prove his selfhood.⁴⁹

In The Recognitions women's ambiguous nature is a symbol of the dichotomy of good and evil which Gaddis sees running through the universe. Wyatt's conversation with Brown's valet,

Fuller, reveals this dichotomy. A primitive philosopher in his own right, Fuller discusses the problem of belief in God with Wyatt:

--It remain a challenge to believe, always. Not so simple to accept, like the mermaids.

...
--And you can...accept the mermaids, without much difficulty?

--Yes, sar, though they remain the complication of the mermaid mahns.

--Yes, there does. There does.

--But the mermaid womans...

--Yes, the women...you can believe in the women...

--Woman bring you into the word, you got to stick with her.

--Wasn't it woman brought evil into the world, then?

--Sar?

--Yes. When she picked the fruit from the forbidden tree, and gave it to the man to eat?

--So the evil already there provided, and quite naturally she discover it.

--Yes, yes, and she gave it to the man...

--She share it with him, sar, said Fuller.--That the reason why we love her. (373)

It is women who "share" the evil with Wyatt. Through their suffering they reveal the existence of love and forgiveness in spite of evil. Women are ambiguously idealized presences. As the mysterious Other, they evoke the promise of the artist's transformation without possessing that power themselves.

JR

For JR's artists the act of creation is still bound up with the idealization of women, although there is some dispute about how vital women are to art. Eigen claims that Schramm lost belief in his work because he lacked a woman's love and trust to sustain him (615). Gibbs argues that the cause of

Schramm's suicide lay deeper in his sense of cosmic disorder (621). Yet Gibbs himself considers women's influence sufficiently central to the artist's work that he tells Joubert that he (like Bast) has had to switch genres because he does not understand women, something he takes as a personal prerequisite for writing a novel (249). Nonetheless, he claims enough understanding of women to explain to a naive Bast that women's biology is their destiny.⁵⁰ Finally he tells Joubert that it is not her but life that he does not trust (507). A minor female character recognizes that all the artists lack trust in women and in each other (616). Their responsibility for their own failures notwithstanding, JR's artists resent the loss of symbolic inspiration which women once provided. That they are not entirely unjustified in their bitterness is evidenced in the narrative and characterizations; which depict women in a strikingly negative way. The following analysis will demonstrate the symbolic portrayal of women as not merely victims but also agents of the destruction of art and love.

In The Recognitions certain passive victimized women become symbolic model-muses for male artists and catalysts of their salvation. In JR the Goddess and the Virgin are dead symbols and in their place stands the antithesis, a female warrior who preys on men. Gaddis depicts this "new" woman with a menacing pantheon of mythic figures, principally Teutonic. The myths associated with women in The Recognitions portray them as having ambivalent power; in JR the power is unequivocally destructive. Any appearance of grace, beauty or love

is a glamorous veneer to stupefy and trap men. JR's women are depicted as versions of the Rhinemaidens and the Valkyries of The Ring of the Nibelung, which functions as the mythic substructure of the novel. All the major male characters show aspects of their mythic forebears: Wotan, Siegfried, Alberich, Siegmund. Similarly, JR's women correspond to the Ring Cycle's females, but with a difference. Although JR does make brief allusion to the positive mythic qualities of two benign females, all the novel's female characters portray threatening aspects of the Rhinemaidens, the alluring guardians of "the gold," who will falsely relinquish their treasure in exchange for the fore-swearing of love. Certain female characters also resemble Valkyries in their power to capture the novel's victimized male "warriors."

Even more disturbing than the connection between JR's women and these figures from Teutonic myth is the pervasive link between women and the practice of witchcraft. Gaddis has his male characters refer directly to The Malleus Maleficarum (The Witches' Hammer), the fifteenth-century handbook for witch-hunters. Women's connection with witchcraft makes clear that they embody destructive principles which make them, at best, treacherous muses for the artist. Because the modern world is shown to function without the memory of inherited morality, and because women are presented as inherently amoral, they will thus be most susceptible to the corrupt and corrupting influences of modern life. The paradigmatic female in the first novel is the Virgin/Victim; in JR the counterpart is the

castrating Angel/Witch, the woman whose beauty belies her treachery.

Although JR abounds with unsavory characters of both sexes, it is women who are portrayed as most dangerous to male artists because they project a devious allure and a fundamental amorality. Even minor female characters, no matter how sympathetically depicted, are inevitable accomplices in a dehumanized system of mechanized culture. Thus the good-natured Nurse Waddams is implicated in the death of her patient, Isadore Duncan. The narrative makes the cause of death the ambiguous result of an injection Waddams gave Duncan to quiet him (687, 688). Even the actions of beautiful, sensitive Amy Joubert symbolize her capacity to wound men inadvertently, as a consequence of her link with corporate power.

Characteristic of the novel's few scenes of narrative description, the tableau introducing Edward Bast and Amy Joubert is symbolic. It evokes the connection between wealth and suffering. Joubert stands holding a bag of money collected from her students as their "share in America" to invest on Wall Street. A retarded child, who presumably should be under her guidance, stages a mock hold-up, inadvertently striking Joubert in the breast. She drops the money bag and an embarrassed Bast stoops to recover the scattered coins, as Joubert inadvertently steps backwards, gashing his hand with her spike heel.⁵¹ It is Joubert's link with wealth which corrupts her by association and causes injury to herself and others.

Joubert's relatives look on her teaching as an aberrant

lapse from the expected set of activities which should culminate in her marriage to someone of her class. That she ultimately does marry Dick Cutler, a family friend who she claims to loathe, indicates the determining power of her monied background. As a teacher, Joubert inadvertently steers her pupils towards the world that traps her when she takes them to Wall Street to learn about the stock market. She is however incapable of facing the consequence of her actions, and tells her colleague, Gibbs, that she "just doesn't want to think about" JR's corporate games (497). In this way she resembles many of the novel's characters who lack the energy to take active responsibility for or to oppose the corruption they witness.

Joubert's brief affair with Jack Gibbs provides the novel with its high point of sexual passion and its closest approximation to an unequivocal expression of love. However even Joubert demonstrates the destructive nature of sexuality when she inadvertently gouges Gibbs' back with her long fingernails. Even the mystery of their sexual difference, in which Gibbs revels, is tainted as Joubert coyly asks Gibbs if he has ever considered a homosexual encounter (489). However it is not so much sexual deviance that is depicted as undermining love, but rather a fundamental communication breakdown. Gaddis makes the end of Joubert's affair with Gibbs a tangle of ambiguities implicating both parties in a failure of trust. The pressures of her job, her disintegrating marriage, and her acrimonious family life combine to enervate Joubert, driving her to a near-collapse. Yet her feminine vulnerability is part of her

attractiveness for Gibbs, as his many poetic allusions indicate.⁵² At the same time, it is this inherent weakness which causes her to "grow down" into an arranged marriage rather than to attempt a reconciliation with Gibbs. At the novel's end, she has fully capitulated to family destiny and is rumored to be in a face-off with Stella Bast for control of the Bast family corporation (712).

If Amy Joubert is the female character who most portrays the "angel" of Gaddis' dualism, Stella Bast emerges as the witch. During the course of the novel, she undercuts the artistic resolve of her cousin Edward, plots the takeover of the family firm, and is responsible for the premature death of her husband. Most significant for Gaddis' treatment of the artist is Stella's rejection of her cousin's idealism which has been discussed at length (cf. Ch. ii). Bast's loss of confidence in his art is partly a result of his unrealistic vision of perfect love as he imagines it to be embodied in his Cousin Stella. However, Stella is more than a static ideal for Edward; she insinuates herself into his life for her own greedy purposes and blithely rejects him when she discovers the nature of his love. Moreover, the narrative persistently casts a diabolical aura around Stella, including an unsettling number of references to witchcraft and allusions to The Malleus Maleficarum. Analysis of these allusions and references will demonstrate the connection between women, duplicity, and the destruction of values.

Stella is introduced at the Bast family home where she is

prying into family estate matters with an eye towards a future takeover. She is described as mysterious, glamorous, possessed of incongruous mannerisms. She moves about the house languidly, speaking in a soft "dead calm," a condition which has been artificially induced by a thyroid operation performed to "slow her down" so that she would be more compatible with her doltish husband, Norman Angel (61). The Bast sisters comment on the scar from the operation and Stella replies:

--Oh, I don't try to hide it...she brought them forward with the dull calm in her voice.--The children in our apartment building, do you know what they say? That I'm a witch, that I can screw my head on and off. They think that this one comes off at night and I put on another....

--Stella! that's...you, you're a beautiful girl! --One that would turn them to stone if they saw it, she went on, all they could see of her expression its movement in the glass, and then--there were beautiful witches after all,... (60-61)

Later, the aunts discuss Stella's visit and her peculiar presence:

--She certainly was full of questions, wasn't she. You remember how she spread those stories about Thomas and James, about James and Nellie, that summer, she was still just a child. It all came back through Mrs., Mrs., fat, she had part of one finger missing....It's something about her eyes. They don't match her face. (68)

Stella's incongruous features allude to the false properties of witches as outlined in The Malleus Maleficarum: "Therefore it must be said that in no way does an angel either good or bad, see with the eyes of its assumed body..."⁵³ Further implications of Stella's negative powers extend to shadowy references such as that concerning the mysterious "Mrs. fat" with the missing finger who is said to have spread rumors about young

Stella. Robert Graves mentions that the ritualistic cutting of one finger was an important part of initiation rites in certain English covens.⁵⁴ Although Gaddis is not necessarily producing evidence of a Long Island coven, he is dropping mysterious hints which indicate that Stella is possessed of bizarre powers.

Further implications of Stella's witchcraft are of a sexual nature. In her seduction scene with the ingenuous Edward, Stella is all stealthy glamour. She seems to have calculated the effect she wants to make upon her cousin. He is so stupefied by her presence in his studio that he does not make the connection between her presence and the wreckage around him. His perception seems to be temporarily confused by Stella's "powers." The Malleus Maleficarum asserts that witches can distort men's sight.⁵⁵ When Edward asks Stella what happened in his studio, she responds..."What you see" (437). But he does not "see." Nearly six hundred pages later, Edward realizes that his cousin was responsible for the destruction and he confronts her with her guilt. Gaddis has Edward speak in images which are strangely similar to the images in which the Malleus Maleficarum describes woman's destructive aspect. A comparison of his speech and an appropriate passage from The Witches' Hammer may help to illuminate the allusion to witchcraft. The Malleus Maleficarum states:

[Witches are] More bitter than death, again because bodily death is an open and terrible enemy, but woman is a wheedling and secret enemy. And that she is more perilous than a snare does not speak of the snare of hunters, but of devils. For men are caught not only through their carnal desires, when they see and hear women: for Saint

Bernard says: Their face is a burning wind, and their voice the hissing of serpents: but they also cast wicked spells on countless men and animals. And when it is said that her heart is a net,...And her hands are as bands for binding; for when they lace their hands on a creature to bewitch it, then with the help of the devil they perform their design. (Mall. Mal. 47) (Emphasis mine)

Stella's sigh during her seduction of Edward is described as "so aspirant it seemed laid out there even when it was done, so heavy that it squared her shoulder..." (138). Her sigh is a hissing sound which lies, net-like, on the atmosphere. Edward recalling her seduction/destruction lashes out,

--Stella you broke in and destroyed every--up there I can still see you in those flashes of lightening I can still see on the bed up there I can still see your throat your voice I can still hear it don't you don't have to seduce me I can still feel your hand when you...

And his cousin breaks in:

--Destroyed of course I did! (716) (Emphasis mine)

In an angry climax to the argument, Edward shouts, "No you, you aren't you Stella you're, he [Gibbs], said you were yes you're a witch aren't you..." (716).

Other scenes of a more ambiguous nature link Stella with decadent, if not outrightly wicked practises. In particular, a scene which unfolds at the Angels' New York apartment implies Stella's bizarre behavior and mysterious sexual powers. Stella welcomes an anonymous character of ambiguous sex and national origin: "...but I thought you were in Palma."⁵⁶ The two then discuss "his" (James Bast's?) performance of Berg. They seem to share a common chic social circle. The visitor begins tracing

lipstick designs on Stella's scarred neck and naked body. He or she (the gender is ambiguous) refers to "your wicked friend" who described Stella's neck scar as her Brisingamen, an allusion to the magic necklace of Teutonic mythology.⁵⁷ Earlier, Gibbs tells Edward Bast, "I told him [Schramm] about Brisingamen, seen the necklace around her [Stella's] throat I know every God damned link in it..." (282). Thus Gibbs may be the "wicked friend" whom Stella is forced to recall while her anonymous visitor traces her neck scar. The allusion to Gibbs brings with it his bitter criticism of Stella's devious sexuality.

In such a tightly-woven narrative as JR, the ambiguity of this scene can only be interpreted as intentional. Rather than openly define Stella's infamy, Gaddis plunges the reader into the mystery which surrounds her character in order to show that Stella's power, like that of witches, arises from her capacity to create confusion, to deceive. Gibbs has accused Stella of considering lying "just a practical way of handling things..." (351). At the same time, Gibbs himself was sufficiently deceived by Stella to have had an affair with her. Her glamour, like the fatal beauty of witches, deceives in order to destroy. Bast eventually realizes this and accuses Stella: "...you destroyed [Gibbs] too..." (716).

The etymology of the word "glamour" and its association with "grammar" is useful in relation to Gaddis' treatment of Stella. In an article entitled "The Glamour of Grammar," Jane Caputi notes that "glamour...is an alternative of the word 'grammar,' which evolved...as a result of the popular

association of erudition with occult practises. "58 Thus glamour in females is both to be desired and mistrusted.

Although the narrative connects her most directly with witchcraft, Stella Bast is not the only woman whose character is deceitful and bewitching. All of JR's women are conniving in their lust for money and power.⁵⁹ The Malleus Maleficarum finds this failing chiefly among women. "The many lusts of men lead them into one sin but the one lust of women leads them into all sins; for the root of all woman's vices is avarice" (Mall. Mal., 43). Somewhat contradictorily, The Witches' Hammer claims that women are more likely to be converted into witchcraft than are men because they are intellectually and morally weaker.⁶⁰ As in this fifteenth-century document, so in JR women lack intellectual sensitivity; hence, they are not artists. Nevertheless they possess cleverness to attain their ends. Even the corrupt Governor Cates emerges as a figure of greater moral integrity than the women because, it is implied, he understands the money system and takes responsibility for it while women take responsibility for nothing and desire everything.

It is also in their role as wives that women are linked with witchcraft. Gibbs reads from The Malleus Maleficarum concernings witches' power to castrate men, making this passage a reference to the disastrous marriages of himself and his friends.⁶¹ The manual on witchcraft provides a comment on marriage that could have come from Gibbs himself: "And truly the most powerful cause which contributes to the increase of witches is the woeful rivalry between married folk and unmarried

women and men" (Mall. Mal., 45). The Malleus Maleficarum goes on to specify women's primary role in marriage disputes. In JR it would seem that women provide the disruptive influence in marriage, while men's sins are more of omission than commission. Thus, Gibbs' wife quibbles over visiting rights while Gibbs suffers the pains of separation from his daughter. Marian Eigen, the wife of Gibbs' friend Tom, is described as a castrator and it is with reference to her that Gibbs quotes from The Witches' Hammer. Another Wylian "mom," Marian is driven by boredom to mimic a friend's decision to divorce her husband because, in Marian's words, "I cannot live with a man I don't respect."⁶² While Marian considers herself "...a talented woman who has never been allowed to do anything," her husband describes her as "...a goddamned long illness I picked up somewhere..." (260-62). The narrative gives more indication of the accuracy of Tom's view than of Marian's.

In spite of the wealth of references which make them responsible for men's suffering, women in JR are also dehumanized and victimized by modern life. To the extent that Gaddis treats their victimization as beyond their control, but within their awareness, he shows compassion for his female characters. Women without wealth or high professional status are victims of their jobs. The business office pecking order provides the most obvious examples of the particular ways in which women are dehumanized. At the bottom of the economic and social scale are Myrna and Terry, Norman Angel's secretaries, who do not rate the basic respect of last names. (Office address indicates

social and economic station.) Their lives are a rhythm of boredom and anxiety, vacancy and paranoia.⁶³ The secretaries commute to work as if running the gauntlet. Gaddis' description of their rush-hour subway ride is a terrifying portrayal of the routinization of paranoia, as they try to evade a man they fear is following them (Gibbs?), mixing their fear with scraps of shopping gossip (160). Finally they are dross in the stream of human corruption, feckless onlookers at the death of love.

Myrna has a brief fling with Gibbs (presumably he picks her up on the subway), and when Rhoda confronts him with details of the tryst (she has inadvertently seen him cavorting in the next apartment), he dismisses the incident as irrelevant (621). Like Wyatt in The Recognitions, Gibbs is artistically motivated by a belief in ideal womanhood compared to which the women around him cannot compete.

Rhoda is the only character who exists outside the economic maelstrom of JR, although she is inadvertently drawn into it by her romantic connection with the deceased artist, Schramm. As the novel's representative of the counterculture, Rhoda at first appears to be just another stereotype who is made to demonstrate the consequences of America's loss of tradition. She has no values, neither accepts nor rejects the world she lives in, and takes responsibility for nothing beyond the simplest primitive-modern food-gathering activities. She exits the scene as mysteriously as she entered, on a volley of abuse from Eigen (617). Later it is reported that she took a job performing pseudo-suicides to boost a man's shady political career.

In spite of stereotyping, Gaddis implies compassion for this character by having Gibbs recognize her basic goodness (620). However, she remains an example of social degeneration rather than a character in her own right. Living without money in a consumer society, she sees herself as a commodity for primarily male consumption.

Yet there is another aspect to her character which redeems Rhoda while it reveals the problematic aspect of Gaddis' idea of the artist in the world. Rhoda is a parody of Wagner's earth-goddess and seer, Erda, in The Ring of the Nibelung. This character sustains the warriors and prophesies doom (cf. Ch. iv). Rhoda fulfills a similar function as she nurtures Bast, Gibbs, and Eigen, and carries on disjointed but insightful conversations with them about the world in which each struggles. She frequently comments that "the whole fucking scene is coming down," indicating that she sees imminent social collapse (555). Her constant baths, nose bleeds, menstruations, and the daily presence of her voluptuous body give her the status of a kind of profane sex goddess. Once again linking women and witches, Gibbs compares her to Baldung's Sorceress.⁶⁴ She is both the most sexually unrepressed and the most sexually objectified female in the novel. Such a conflict has had gruesome emotional consequences for her, as she objectifies herself as a sight to be observed rather than a vehicle of some more complicated personal destiny. Finally she admits that in normalizing the inhuman demands of her society, she has forgotten "really how to hate" (609). In Gaddis' world, hatred, with its implications

of incipient action, is to be valued over acquiescence; but the reader recognizes that in JR hatred is frequently turned on the self in acts of destructiveness.⁶⁵

Even Stella Bast is provided with belated humanizing as, at the end of the novel, she tells her cousin the details of the story that the Bast sisters discussed concerning her meeting with a mysterious gypsy fortune teller (the woman with the missing finger?) who coaxed Stella to reveal family marital problems (68). As a result of her meeting with the gypsy, rumours started about the Bast family's difficulties, and Stella claims that she has been scapegoated for family problems ever since (716-17). As the victim of a loveless childhood, Stella feels that she has grown into a withdrawn, misunderstood woman. These revelations provide an explanation for Stella's selfishness but they do not exonerate her. Certainly childhood "warping" has produced irrevocable effects, which are presumably within the realm of human moral responsibility, something Stella refuses to accept. One page after her confession to Edward, Stella coolly takes power of attorney for her dying husband and proceeds to assess the family stock matters, preparatory to her assuming power as the majority stockholder.

Stella's parting words to Edward serve to continue the ambiguity surrounding her character: "...no you won't understand...that your own selfish suffering's easier than facing suffering you've caused and can never call back Edward don't you think I, Edward? Well you will...(719-20). Her fragmentary "well you will" is an ambiguous prophecy of Bast's future: will

he understand that guilt keeps most individuals locked into endless self-centred misery? This dilemma haunts characters in The Recognitions. Only Wyatt-Stephen has the strength to "live through" and finally transcend his own guilt (cf. Ch. ii). At the end of JR, Gaddis shows Stella Angel possessed of just such an insight concerning the morally crippling aspect of guilt. Unlike Wyatt, she does not act positively on her insights, but instead, continues to reject those she has injured-- Edward Bast, Jack Gibbs--and to attempt to compensate for love's loss through the acquisition of wealth. For his part, Edward is at least shown deciding to take responsibility for his own work instead of accepting his old passivity (cf. Ch. ii).

In spite of these partially humanizing characterizations, Gaddis' women remain linked with money rather than love or creativity. Like the Rhinemaidens, JR's principal female characters, the angelic Joubert and the diabolical Angel, end the novel attempting to retrieve the gold. Linked as it is with the warrior and the Angel/Witch paradigm rather than with the Virgin/Victim paradigm of The Recognitions, women's mysterious power in JR is no longer a source of inspiration for the artist. In not fully explaining the cause of their behavior and attitudes, and in linking them with ancient myths of creation and destruction, Gaddis implies that women's power is ambiguous, primeval, and perhaps unalterably in "female nature." In his negative treatment of women as sources of inspiration for the artist, Gaddis has shifted away from the romanticism of The Recognitions. Although JR makes women responsible for the destruction of the

male artist's confidence, the novel also takes into account larger, impersonal forces which threaten art and life. Chapter Four analyzes the powers outside male or female control which, according to Gaddis, undermine human communication, and with it, human relations and art.

NOTES

¹See Banning, "The Time of Our Time," pp. 72-73. In his dissertation, Minkoff downplays the role of women in men's salvation, while admitting that they do appear as possible vehicles for such redemption (Minkoff, "Down, Then Out," p. 90). These studies, while not inaccurate, do not take into account the importance of women as ambiguous symbols for male artists.

²I am using the term "flat" characters as defined by E.M. Forster in Aspects of the Novel (New York: Harvest-Harcourt, Brace and World, 1954), pp. 67-73. Mary Allen also notes the atomistic quality of characters of both sexes in modern American fiction: "On first contact with the fiction of [the present era], particularly the fabulous tales, few individuals, men or women, stand out boldly because of the large casts of two-dimensional characters who are interchangeable or who constantly shift their identities.... But even when characterization is not the writer's first concern, his attitude toward women is usually quite apparent.... [and] quite reactionary." Mary Allen, The Necessary Blankness: Women in Major American Fiction of the Sixties (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1976), p. 4.

³Allen refers to "the fabulation of the woman in the mind of a man" in contemporary American fiction (Allen, p. 15). More generally, Simone de Beauvoir describes woman as "Other," so designated by self-determining man throughout Western culture from Aristotle onwards. Simone de Beauvoir, The Second Sex, trans. H.M. Parshley (New York: Bantam, 1952), pp. xvi-xxiii. Her analysis illuminates the way men conceive of women as alien, inferior beings. Although Esme and Esther are shown writing, neither is portrayed as an ambitious artist. Their situation is epitomized by Robert Graves' pronouncement: "Man's biological function is to do; woman's is to be. This difference is not a contrast of mere activity with mere passivity. 'To be' is indeed a full-time occupation.... If she paints or writes, this will be for her own private amusement, not to satisfy ambition...." Robert Graves, "Real Women," in Masculine/Feminine, ed. Betty Roszak and Theodore Roszak (New York: Harper Colophon, 1969), p. 36.

⁴See Chapter ii, note 22. The sterility of modern culture provides only parodies of primal female fertility and hence few symbols of regeneration (334). That Wyatt, after his Spanish transformation, speaks vaguely of fathering a daughter, shows his desire to contribute to such regeneration (957).

⁵Philip Wylie, Generation of Vipers (New York: Rinehart & Co., 1942), pp. 184-204. A number of male characters in The Recognitions feel contempt, fear, or outright loathing

for women. Mr. Sinisterra warns Otto and Wyatt to avoid the snares of sex (550, 856). Max tells his bistro pals, Stanley and Anselm, that their problems are due to their being "mothers' sons" (569). Valentine has a cultivated aversion to women which makes him scoff at Wyatt's romanticism (583). Anselm comes closest to Wylie's virulent dislike of women in what he considers to be their roles as grasping castrators when he says, "--That's the world we live in, the ladies wear the nuts..." (673). As an implicit advocate of love, the narrator does not condone such attitudes. Rather, they show that the alienation of the sexes is partly rooted in the sexual repression and fear of these characters.

⁶Gaddis' treatment of women bears comparison with Wylie on the subject of woman's archetypal power for men. Wylie advances the view that human beings are instinctive, a notion that modern science (which he, like Gaddis, disparages) seeks to dispell. He cites Jung's study of archetypes as evidence that myths and legends originate in instinctive projections. These archetypes, according to Wylie, reflect human needs and desires. He cites as a fundamental archetype, the situation of the hero who struggles "to win immortality or a beautiful woman or both," but who inevitably faces bad luck and fallibility, as well as a female who is both good and evil (Wylie, p. 36). Wylie derives this archetype from what he considers a prehistoric male view of women. See Carl G. Jung, "Psychological Aspects of the Mother Archetype," in The Basic Writings of C.G. Jung, ed. Violet Staub de Laszlo (New York: Modern Library, 1959), pp. 327-360.

⁷Robert Graves comes to a conclusion which illuminates Gaddis' treatment of women:

Since the source of poetry's creative power is not scientific intelligence, but inspiration--however this may be explained by scientists--one may surely attribute inspiration to the Lunar Muse, the oldest and most convenient European term for this source. By ancient tradition, the White Goddess becomes one with her human representative--a priestess, a prophetess, a queen-mother. No Muse-poet grows conscious of the Muse except by experience of a woman in whom the Goddess is to some degree resident. (Graves, The White Goddess, p. 490.)

⁸Cf. Chapter i, p. 27. According to Henry A. Murray, "abused female innocence" was "the most moving theme of the nineteenth-century mythology of the heart" (Murray, ed., Pierre, p. 503). Leslie Fiedler argues that nineteenth-century romance presented women as impossibly pure ideals for the male heroes which prevented the depiction of attainable love and credible women. Leslie Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel, rev. ed. (New York: Dell Publishing, 1966), pp. 288-308.

⁹Because the Gorette canonization was actually part of a Papal strategy aimed at allegedly immoral and politically corruptible Italian youth, Banning interprets Gaddis' use of the Gorette case as evidence of his plot's undercurrent of communist conspiracy (Banning, "The Time of Our Time," p. 155, n. 28). It seems to me that the Gorette canonization (see "An Eleven-Year Old Girl is Made a Saint," Life, 29 [17 July 1950], 107-08, 110, 113) is more significant as an example of the elevation of female victims than as an allusion to Vatican concern with Communism. See also Marina Warner, Alone of All Her Sex, p. 71.

¹⁰Marina Warner, pp. 68-69.

¹¹Warner, pp. 71, 337, n. 10. Warner's source for the Pope's speech is a work which Gaddis has Esme reading en route to the canonization: A Modern Virgin Martyr (887).

¹²Gwyon hears of the virgin's rape and murder at the time of his wife's death (21). Mr. Pivner reads about the rapist's testimony in his New York apartment (313, 600). The canonization takes many of the novel's characters to Rome (817). Finally, Mr. Yak (Sinisterra) enlightens Wyatt about the case (844).

¹³Mr. Yak, who will be responsible for mummifying the would-be-saint, tells Wyatt "all about this patron saint they're getting. When they took her out of the graveyard to put her somewhere else when she was beautified they thought she looks kind of big for an eleven-year-old girl, but the way the body was preserved after forty years almost, so that made them sure it's a saint" (844).

¹⁴The Recognitions, p. 9. The "turn of the screw" reference suggests Henry James' novella of that title in which the untimely death of two servants continues to haunt, or psychologically disturb, the new governess and her young charges. Certain further references to Camilla's mysterious presence as a figment of psychological and imaginative reality indicate that, like James, Gaddis is mindful of the power of psychological obsession and the supernatural in human events.

¹⁵The Recognitions, pp. 57, 61, 182, 847. Gaddis may be suggesting a variation on the Three-fold Goddess in her roles as mother, bride, and layer-out. See Graves, The White Goddess, p. 24.

¹⁶The Recognitions, p. 16. Gwyon's yearning for an earlier, more harmonious time before the perception of contingency is reminiscent of Lukac's early affinity for ancient Greek consciousness (see Chapter i).

¹⁷Wolfgang Lederer mentions that Mithraic mysteries were forbidden to women. Wolfgang Lederer, The Fear of Women (New York: Grune and Stratton, 1968), p. 36.

¹⁸The hoops are exotic symbols of unity and value for Gwyon and Wyatt, which both father and son associate with Camilla. In Pynchon's V the ivory hair comb is a more ambiguous symbol serving as a mysterious clue to the identity of V, the novel's composite female presence. Thomas Pynchon, V (New York: Bantam Books, 1963).

¹⁹Warner, Alone of All Her Sex, p. 336.

²⁰The Recognitions, p. 458. Fiedler's brilliant but eccentric study of the American novel makes the point that American heroes fear adult relationships with women. Writes Fiedler, "The ideal American postulates himself as the fatherless man, the eternal son of the mother" (Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel, p. 337). Wyatt, a child lacking paternal guidance, lives obsessed with the ideal of his mother and burdened with guilt about her death.

²¹The Recognitions, pp. 362, 732. Warner, p. 213.

²²The Recognitions, p. 829. See note 15.

²³On the subject of men's fear of virginity, Beauvoir has this to say:

Unless feminine virginity has been dedicated to a god, one easily believes that it implies some kind of marriage with the demon. Virgins unsubdued by man, old women who have escaped his power, are more easily than others regarded as sorceresses; for the lot of woman being bondage to another, if she escapes the yoke of man she is ready to accept that of the devil. (The Second Sex, p. 144)

²⁴Koenig interprets May's hawthorne as a symbol of her inherited sense of guilt (Koenig, "'Splinters from the Yew Tree,'" pp. 90-91). Presumably he considers the tree as a reference to the American novelist. I view the character's name and her favourite tree as ironic parodies of the preserving power which was associated with the hawthorne, or May-tree, a vestige of tree-worship. See Sir James George Frazer, The Golden Bough, abridged ed. (New York: Macmillan Co., 1963), p. 139.

²⁵The Recognitions, p. 430. Janet also alludes to Wyatt's Christ-like qualities when she says, "--Rabboni, they doubted ...I did not" (434).

²⁶Graves, The Greek Myths, I, p. 293.

²⁷ Beauvoir uses these terms to distinguish between the dominant and defining nature of the male role and the passive receptivity of the female for the male (The Second Sex, p. xxviii).

²⁸ Cynthia Ozick, "Women and Creativity: The Demise of the Dancing Dog," in Woman in Sexist Society, ed. Vivian Gornick and Barbara K. Moran (New York: Signet-New American Library, 1972), p. 437.

²⁹ The following works discuss these images in connection with men's fear of women's power: Beauvoir, The Second Sex, p. 144; Lederer, The Fear of Women, pp. 44-47, 80.

³⁰ On woman's amorality, see Beauvoir, pp. 577-78; Lederer, p. 177.

³¹ The Recognitions, p. 89. See also The Books of Charles Fort, p. 3.

³² She sat, listening and remembering, as though he had been gone a long time. Would the music of Handel always recall sinful commission, the perpetration of some crime in illuminated darkness recognized as criminal only by him who committed it: Persephone, she sat now listening. and would the scent of lavender recall it? as it was doing now; for she felt that she was remembering, that this moment was long past, or that she was seated somewhere in the future... recalling this moment only in memory, that in another moment she would breathe deeply, destroying the delicate scent, that she would arise and go: queen of the shades, was her mother wandering in search of her? now where she waited, here on the other side of the door opening upon her husband's infernal kingdom. (108)

In this passage, sense experience triggers Esther's memory and frees her from a specious present and into a conglomerate past-future, an oceanic realm reaching back to the mythic prototypes of her experience.

³³ Graves, The Greek Myths, I, p. 225; II, pp. 100, 404, 407.

³⁴ Richard Wagner, The Ring of the Nibelung, trans. Stewart Robb (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1960), pp. 266-67.

³⁵ The Recognitions, p. 393. Earlier (361), Valentine scoffs at Wyatt's trusting Esther with the fragments of his paintings.

³⁶ The Recognitions, p. 345. Henry Adams' use of the Virgin as symbol of the dwindling force of religion in the face of

technology, epitomized by the Dynamo, is illuminating in comparison with Gaddis' depiction of Esme as a kind of profane virgin who suffers the invasion of modern life. Adams writes: "The force of the Virgin was still felt at Lourdes, and seemed to be potent as X-rays; but in America neither Venus nor Virgin ever had value as force--at most as sentiment. No American had ever been truly afraid of either." Henry Adams, The Education of Henry Adams (Boston: Sentry-Houghton Mifflin Co., 1961, p. 383). Wyatt (and Gaddis) would seem to be an exception to Adams' generalization.

³⁷The Recognitions, p. 209. See Eliot, "Ash Wednesday," in The Complete Poems and Plays, pp. 60-67.

³⁸For male characters' fear of women in The Recognitions see note 5.

³⁹The Recognitions, pp. 900, 908. Although witchcraft figures prominently in the portrayal of women in JR, only one scholarly reference to witches appears in Gaddis' first novel, a mention that the Malleus Maleficarum appears on Gwyen's reading table (56).

⁴⁰Marga and Pastora are two such sexual entities. The more independent of the two, Marga provides an outlet for Wyatt's long-repressed sexuality. Pastora, also an amorous partner, is presented as wholly taken up with her passion for Wyatt, wanting only to marry him and give him a child. According to Koenig's citations from Gaddis' notes for the novel, Gaddis considered an ending in which Wyatt would have a daughter by Pastora, but finally rejected it as too mundane. Koenig, "'Splinters from the Yew Tree,'" p. 36.

⁴¹According to the narrative, Esme foresees Stanley's death "by falling pillars" at the church in Fenestruela, and the drowning of an unknown sailor in the mid-Atlantic.

⁴²Esme's "raid on the inarticulate" is comparable to Isabel's untutored guitar playing which produces "the swarming sweetness, and the utter unintelligibility, but the significancies of the sounds of the guitar" (Melville, Pierre, p. 148).

⁴³Esme's heroine ecstasy is compared to the rapture of St. Teresa, "dying of not being able to die" (322). Aunt May's rather different desire for oblivion was also expressed in these terms (46), and the reader is left to determine the shades of irony accompanying both references.

⁴⁴The Recognitions, p. 878; see note 15.

⁴⁵The Recognitions, p. 39; see Warner, Alone of All Her Sex, pp. 210-220.

⁴⁶The Recognitions, p. 1018; see Warner, pp. 233-234.

⁴⁷The Recognitions, pp. 814, 991. Agnes Deigh may partly inherit her fanaticism from her mother, the fatuous Mrs. Deigh who arranges for Stanley's organ debut at Fenestruela. It is in the scenes at her house in Rome that Gaddis' satire on religion reaches slapstick proportions.

⁴⁸It appears that Esme reminds Wyatt of Ibsen's Solveig and Faust's Gretchen. Thus he sees her as his lover-victim. See Gaddis' notes in Koenig, "'Splinters from the Yew Tree,'" p. 30.

⁴⁹Esme mentions the Celestial Sea story (973) recounted earlier by Wyatt (276). While Esme's obsession with the story does her no good, Wyatt manages to transform the story into an image of his own rebirth. He tells an astonished Ludy that he has been voyaging to the bottom of the sea and that he must continue his journey (954).

⁵⁰Gibbs explains to Bast that "in spite of its appetizing symmetry woman's body's an absolute God damned chaos spend their lives at the mercy of their bodies..." (JR, 120).

⁵¹JR, p. 19. Gaddis creates image clusters which link money, manual dexterity, art, and suffering. For example, the Bast family patriarch trained his pupils by having them balance quarters on the backs of their palms as they practised their piano scales (3).

⁵²Gibbs, referring to Joubert, quotes T.S. Eliot and tells Bast: "--Best authority there is says just get those breasts to stop shaking we may be able to collect some fragments of the afternoon" (120; see Eliot, "Hysteria," in The Complete Poems and Plays, p. 19).

⁵³Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger, The Malleus Maleficarum, trans. Montague Summers (New York: Dover, 1971), p. 10. Hereafter quotations from this work will be followed by the abbreviated title, Mall. Mal. and page numbers in parenthesis unless otherwise noted.

⁵⁴Graves, The White Goddess, 199.

⁵⁵The Witches' Hammer explains:

For fancy or imagination is as it were the treasury of ideas received through the senses. And through this it happens that devils so stir up the inner perceptions, that is the power of conserving images, that they appear to be a new impression at that moment received from exterior things. (Mall. Mal., p. 50)

⁵⁶ JR, p. 352. The question remains as to why Gaddis does not reveal the identity of Stella's visitor. The reader may piece together information from the present dialogue and other scenes which indicates that the musician Reuben may be Stella's lover. Reuben is James Bast's protégé who has usurped Edward's position as his father's pupil. James and Reuben are rumored to be in Spain performing, although the family hears nothing from them. At the novel's end, Stella reveals that she has known all along that the two musicians were returning to New York and that she has been in contact with them (719): Perhaps it is Reuben who returns mysteriously from Palma, on Majorca, to appear at Stella's door. Early in the novel, the Bast sisters refer to Reuben's European background, which would explain the non-English syntax of the mysterious visitor's speech (352-353).

⁵⁷ According to E. Cobham Brewer, the necklace symbolizes vanity. E. Cobham Brewer, "Brisingamen," in The Dictionary of Phrase and Fable (New York: Avenel-Crown Books, 1978), p. 177. The allusion further defines Stella as a vain, grasping woman.

⁵⁸ Jane Caputi, "The Glamour of Grammar," Chrysalis, No. 4, p. 36.

⁵⁹ Women who have managed to claw their way above a petty secretarial position have done so at the expense of their femininity. For example, Miss Bulcke (known by her stock-broker boss, Crawley, simply as "bulk") is no more significant than her name; she is a functionary and an office joke. Similarly, Miss Flesch (again the sexist pun) climbs out of her junior high school teaching job into an "executive" position in which she succeeds at playing the male power game. Her success is described in terms which imply that she has perverted her sexuality, she has gone against her feminine nature. Like Marian Eigen, another viper, she leaves lipstick on coffee cups and kleenex as an emblem of her predatory nature.

It is not surprising that the most sexless if not outrightly obscene woman in JR also exists closest to the corporate power center. Zona Selk (whose first name translates from the Latin as "money-bags"), sits on the board of directors of the powerful Typhon International Corporation. Like the other old-line powermongers in JR, Zona is clever. She insightfully notes the connection between Governor Cates' alarming number of prostheses and his increasingly inhumane (and inhuman) behavior. Yet her perceptiveness serves no ultimate purpose. She is murdered by the clever family lawyer Beaton, who plays on her gluttony and provides her with a combination of drugs and food which he knows will kill her. Selk's cleverness cannot save her from the stereotypically female penchant for consumption.

⁶⁰The Witches' Hammer asserts that women are more likely to be superstitious than men because "they are more credulous" (Mall. Mal., p. 43). In addition, because women are "feebler both in mind and body [than men], it is not surprising that they should come more under the spell of witchcraft.... Women are intellectually like children" (Mall. Mal., p. 44).

⁶¹JR, p. 398; cf. Mall. Mal., p. 121. Castration fear seems to obsess Gibbs and to concern such unlikely victims as the stockbroker Crawley. Gibbs notes a sign on the firehouse near the Bast family home commemorating "Our Dear Departed Member" (18), and makes grim comment about it to Stella Bast who is giving him a ride into New York (74). Crawley is shown at his desk with Hemingway's A Moveable Feast open to page one-hundred ninety (205). The same page in the 1964 edition concerns Scott Fitzgerald's fear (allegedly caused by Zelda) that he is sexually inadequate. Hemingway tries to reassure his friend that he is normally endowed, but Fitzgerald seems more upset by Zelda's attitude than by his actual physical condition. Zelda, like Gaddis' Stella Bast and Marian Eigen, has the power to make her husband impotent regardless of what he knows objectively. Hemingway tells his friend that Zelda is trying "to put you out of business." Gibbs often uses this phrase to describe the impact of women on men. See Ernest Hemingway, A Moveable Feast (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1964), p. 190.

⁶²JR, p. 268. Marian Eigen fits Wylie's description of a "spiritual saboteur" (Wylie, Generation of Vipers, p. 188). Another Wylie marriage is that of Anne and Dan diCephalis. The diCephalis' marriage holds together only because both partners are absurd. Anne is described as a grasping woman whose "peristaltic" grip on men recalls the woman/viper connection (314). She "performs" sex for her children and then markets it in the classroom as Kama Sutra lessons. The ultimate example of the capitalist woman, she sees the world solely in terms of personal advancement. Her husband, Dan diCephalis, whose name is a play on the Latin word which translates as "brainless," is the stereotypical castrated male, a victim of Wylie's matriarchal society, who finds his absurd apotheosis as a test-subject for communications technology. Gaddis implies that only a brainless guinea pig could live with such a woman. Predictably, she becomes a successful career woman by the novel's end. JR, like The Malleus Maleficarum, portrays marriage as a double bind for men and a boon for women. Married men exist under siege while their wives coolly reap the legal benefits of the institution.

⁶³The secretaries' conversation, accompanied by radio blather and nail filing, reflects the vacancy and tedium of their office lives. Their attempts at humanizing their jobs are merely pathetic. In and out of the office they are the constant prey of men. A shipping clerk discovers what he thinks are

photos of a nude Terry. Terry finds the pictures and thinks she recognizes Kenny, an erstwhile sexual partner, in one of them (160). The visual identification is muddled but the message is clear: women and men objectify and fear each other. At no point is direct confrontation possible, although the phone calls between Terry and Kenny, heard from Terry's end, have a casual, intimate violence which reveals the habitual nature of sex warfare (155).

⁶⁴JR, p. 285. Hans Baldung, a contemporary of Dürer, created highly erotic depictions of witches and sorceresses. In many of his etchings, the women are reveling in their booty of castrated male genitals. Yet the Baldung print, according to Gibbs, was one of Schramm's few consolations. Lederer refers to Baldung's compositions of the "Witches' Sabbath" as possessing "a sensuous freedom such as no other topic would have permitted" (Lederer, The Fear of Women, p. 208). Hence, there is an undeniable ambiguity to the imagery of witchcraft, combining erotic release and sexual threat.

⁶⁵Although JR's characters are shown in quarrels and in states of frustration, they seem unable to give vent to anger without feeling impotent rage at their inability to change things. Often, characters worry that others are "mad" at them for some trivial action. They fear violence and expect to be misunderstood and rebuked, but seldom is their frustration expressed in ways that could change their situations.

CHAPTER IV

ARTIST RESOLUTION THROUGH STRUCTURE

The Recognitions and JR demonstrate the conviction, amounting to morality, that art is the highest form of human expression and, in a post-religious age, one of the few remaining serious activities. Yet, in these novels, society seems bent on warping creative potential just as it is capable of destroying life. Nonetheless, both of Gaddis' satires hold out hope for art and the artist even as they present a grim vision of their situation. Evidence of such optimism is apparent in the construction of the novels themselves. Gaddis resolves the artistic dilemmas of his characters through the novels' structures, which emerge as testaments to the survival of creativity and order in a chaotic world. This chapter will examine the way in which the central themes of The Recognitions and JR are extended to the novels' structures in order to provide, through this reflexiveness, a form of aesthetic vindication.

The fragmented structure of The Recognitions embodies the multiple planes of the novel's visions of reality. The plot is forwarded by chance meetings between characters. Since indeterminacy and contingency have replaced causality, the narrative flow is discontinuous. In keeping with this seemingly inconsistent structure, the novel's artist-characters become questors after values in the midst of fraudulence. As the

artist is confounded by versions of reality, so the reader is confronted with a structure which combines counterfeit meanings with supposedly authentic ones. The novel does, however, possess an underlying order. Gaddis connects fragmented scenes by building up patterns of repeated images and phrases, and by flattening characters into fixed aspects of the novel's central artistic arguments. The resulting patterns both confirm and question the reality of these issues. Thus The Recognitions' structure becomes an extension of its theme. Moreover, the novel's wholeness demonstrates the unity of art in spite of the artist's failure to perceive or restore such wholeness in everyday life. The intrusive narrative voice condemns the world but, by its very presence, gives testimony to the survival of an artistic consciousness.

In analyzing the structure of JR, it becomes apparent that while the themes of this novel remain substantially the same as those of The Recognitions, the structural techniques have evolved significantly. In JR, modern culture, in general, and the artist, in particular, are increasingly threatened by capitalism and technology. A pernicious mentality is shown to have spread through many areas of culture ranging from art and education to human relationships and behavior. Cultural degeneration even extends to the principal means of communication--language. In focussing on language and composing JR almost entirely of dialogue, Gaddis departs from his previous novelistic techniques. The intrusive narration of The Recognitions is all but eliminated from JR in an attempt to present a dramatic, seemingly unmediated

vision of the threatened state of modern culture and consciousness.¹ However, in making JR a structural whole, in defiance of the disorder it portrays, Gaddis carries on the artistic imperative that shaped The Recognitions. Both novels exemplify the very artistic integrity which their narratives show to be at stake.

To demonstrate the reflexive structure of The Recognitions and JR, this chapter is divided into two parts. The first section concerns The Recognitions and begins with a discussion of the way in which surrealistic patterning of scenes and the flattening of characters produce a structural whole which presents Gaddis' artistic arguments on a symbolic rather than a realistic level.² Then there follows a close analysis of a particular scene to show the structural process in detail and to illuminate the central role of the narrative voice in upholding art. Finally, the motif of the circle will be discussed as a symbolic and structural device which is important to the understanding of the novel's ambiguous view of art and the artist.

The second part of this chapter concerns JR and begins by analyzing the surrealistic elements of the novel's structure to show how techniques of juxtaposition are used to achieve the illusion of verisimilitude, which is crucial to the impact of this satire. Then a close reading of one of the novel's few passages of description will show that Gaddis makes his themes increasingly relevant by locating them within the symbolic meaning of trivial everyday actions. It will be demonstrated that some of the novel's most universal image patterns, depicting

disorder in everyday life, have connections with the imagery of chaos in certain Greek myths and in pre-Socratic philosophy. This discussion of myth and imagery will then turn to the mythic work which is central to JR's theme and structure: Wagner's The Ring of the Nibelung. In addition to providing evidence of parody of The Ring in JR's plot and characterization, it will be shown that Wagner's artistic purposes are directly relevant to the artistic issues taken up in JR's narrative and exhibited in the novel's structure. The central image of circularity that pervades The Ring will be examined as a multi-faceted motif in JR, having associations not only with the novel's parody of the opera, but also with a naive optimism which such historians as Frederick Jackson Turner, as well as recent literary critics, have found basic to the American character. JR gives a grimmer meaning to this image of renewal. This discussion of the thematic implications of circularity will lead into an analysis of circularity in JR's structure. It will be proved that the novel is a critique of the circular or redundant state of modern language. The entropy theory of Norbert Wiener will be used to illuminate Gaddis' view of the chaotic state of modern communication. Finally, a case will be made for JR as itself a testimony to the continuation of art.

The Recognitions

In his notes for The Recognitions, Gaddis claims to be searching for the "necessity of a pattern" in fictional events.³ He also structures his novel by a pattern of contingency. Gaddis

builds into these patterns the question of their meaning anything at all. If meaning cannot be established, then there may be no commonly-accepted external reality. The repetition of phrases, images, and ideas becomes a sign of dwindling meaning in the midst of the narrative's seemingly plenitudinous world. Thus the patterning becomes a fiction open to debunking, or worse, to lack of recognition. Herein lies the paradox of the narrative stance: the world is full of meaningless expression, yet the narrative meaningfully presents this meaninglessness.

In The Recognitions, this paradox is given formal if not philosophical resolution at the novel's end, when the characters have all been resolved into the artistic pattern: they have been written out of the novel, and the narrative voice alone continues to speak. The narrative may order chaos into meaning through art, but such a feat only widens the gap between art and life, order and chaos. Yet, as a novelist and a satirist, Gaddis has chosen to work in a form which is ineluctably related to life. The tension in Gaddis' perspective involves this attraction-repulsion to his subject matter, as if it may threaten art. Nonetheless, the creation of meaning does depend rather precariously on life, because of the necessary communication between the artist, through his work, and the audience. One of the meanings of The Recognitions' title concerns precisely this communication.

In The Recognitions, surrealistic juxtapositions have the effect of lessening the reality of the so-called real world and strengthening the reality of the narrative "consciousness."

here termed the narrative voice. Thus, surrealism tends to serve a reflexive end by lending reality to artistic consciousness at a time when such consciousness is frequently in jeopardy, as the plot shows. Wyatt's perception of a dissonant world is paralleled by Gaddis' juxtapositions of erudite narration and satiric dialogue. The artist's perception is of fragmentation, but his inner vision is of harmony; taken together, these two elements of his experience constitute the paradox of his thought. Gaddis extends this paradox to the novel's structure by linking fragments of action through contingency. The resulting pattern creates an illusion of wholeness which compensates for the disharmony of life. This structuring of fragmentation grows in complexity as elements of contingency and surprise are injected into the developing plot.

In its broad outlines, the plot of The Recognitions is traditionally linear. Contingent meetings and the repetition of phrases and images in unlikely places give it the quality of a structure governed by the laws of chance. The plot begins in the recent fictional past, with the funeral of Wyatt's mother in Spain. There is a weird masquerade quality to this event, which sets the stage for further incongruities. The plot follows a bereaved Gwyon back to New England, where it focuses on the education of his young son, Wyatt. From there, it takes up Wyatt's fortunes in Paris and New York. As other members of the urban cultural scene are introduced, the plot fans out to describe incidents in their lives: Otto's trip to Central America on the pretense of writing a play; Wyatt's employer,

Brown, and his connivings with the effete Valentine; Wyatt's relationship with his wife, Esther, and his model, Esme; and the fortunes of minor characters--the literary agent, Agnes Deigh, the counterfeiter, Sinisterra, Otto's father, Mr. Pivner, and the menagerie of New York bistro characters. Finally, the plot follows most of these characters on missions both sacred and profane to Paris, Rome, and Spain.

What makes the plot nonlinear is the shifting back and forth between characters to give a sense of simultaneous action or montage. These splicings become more frequent and frantic as Gaddis winds up the fates of his lesser characters in ways which make an ironic comment on their misguided lives. Characters are either killed off or absurdly apotheosized. For example, the compromised ad man, Benny, jumps from a church steeple. His suicide is televised and becomes part of someone's publicity campaign (786). Agnes Deigh also attempts suicide but fails and is condemned to hospital, paralyzed, but capable of sending religious chain letters (788). Anselm castrates himself and retreats to a silent order of monks, where he writes the "confessions" of his Greenwich Village life (688, 979).

The action speeds up to a series of "camera shots" interspersed with longer scenes featuring the main characters. All the components of the novel's structure are sustained: the ludicrous juxtaposition of dialogue, the intrusive narration and the fevered monologues of the main artist-characters. However, these elements are further exaggerated to give a sense of heightened activity, of crisis and imminent climax.

The repetitious banality of café chatter begins to take on a desperate hilarity as the topics of conversation shift from the artistic to the religious in a gross parody of the spiritual crises of the main characters. Interspersed with these café scenes are news clippings which cite mounting suicide rates, random violence, rising illiteracy, increased art thefts and counterfeiting, all implying growing global disorder (1009-11). The juxtaposition of suicide and counterfeit plunges life and art into the same cruel arena.

Against the background of these details, the fates of the novel's larger characters are played out. All, with the exception of Wyatt, meet ends which are absurdly appropriate to the nature of their delusions about life. Gaddis carries his narrative into surreal scenes worthy of Fellini or Bunuel. For example, Stanley arrives in Rome with the goal of finding a cathedral pipe organ great enough to do justice to his oratorio. He seeks out Agnes Deigh's mother for advice. The old lady lives in baroque splendor, complete with her own papal messenger. The scene rapidly degenerates into surreal comedy as Mrs. Deigh reveals her unorthodox prayer rituals to a feckless Stanley, who rushes from this attempted seduction, narrowly missing an oncoming car, "so near running him down that he found himself standing stricken in the dark gap between its headlamps, his empty hand against its grill where he read the word FIAT" (922). This word, central to the ritual of excommunication, gives absurd testimony to Stanley's own spiritual abandonment.⁴ His death-- he is crushed by the collapsing structure of the church--rounds

out the novel's artistic argument, even as it reduces his character to a function of that argument. He is doomed by his blind faith in religion.

This bundling of fragmented lives into absurd endings turns characters into part of the pattern which Gaddis "uncovers" through The Recognitions. In flattening character for the sake of argument, the author may be accused of sacrificing the "life" of his novel for the sake of "art."⁵ He seems to be guilty of the same kind of devotion to art over life that he condemns in his characters. Wyatt's character falls outside this pattern of flattening only through the ambiguity of his fate. However, Gaddis does integrate Wyatt's end into the structure of the novel in a way which might at first escape notice. Although Wyatt is poised on the brink of the unknown, his character is locked into a pattern of other characters' fates.

The structure into which Gaddis fits Wyatt's ending includes the ultimate fortunes of the two other artist-characters, Otto and Stanley. Although they occur pages and fictional miles apart, these characters' fates take place under conditions which imply their simultaneity and thus their symbolic connection. Otto meets his fate on Barbados where he has gone to escape counterfeiting charges. In a ludicrous replay of Wyatt's youth, Otto contracts an obscure disease and is treated by the dubious Dr. Fell, the same physician who treated Wyatt's mysterious childhood illness. He makes a somewhat imperfect recovery, begins to call himself Gordon, the name of the main character in his unfinished play, and acts as Dr. Fell's assistant. The

tropical scene is a surreal apotheosis of his pretentiously lived life. Otto is destined to live out a parody of Wyatt's life. His accident has left him with imperfect sense perceptions and a lack of balance, all metaphors for his true lack of perspective. Like Wyatt when he was immersed in his counterfeiting, Otto acquires the first obsession of his life. Dr. Fell puzzles over the case: "...I've wondered how this sickness had done this to you, just left you with your eyes glazed and no interest in anything but your work" (994). He delivers vitamins and collects fecal samples and, as a cynical Dr. Fell puts it, "...that's what life is..." (994). Otto's transformation comes when he discovers that his money has been stolen and he is forced "to start all over again" (1014). Presumably this starting over is a parody of Wyatt's knowledge that he must begin to live anew with "empty hands."

Of the three would-be artists, Stanley is the only one who actually completes a work, although he does not live to hear it performed. The manner of his death, with its absurd parallel to Arnie Munk's death, serves to flatten Stanley's character into yet another symbol of human self-delusion and communication breakdown.

Gaddis orchestrates a kind of three-way ending, signalled by bells on Barbados ("a morning Angelus," [1014]), morning church bells in Spain (which "ring" Wyatt on his way, [960]), and morning bells at Fenestruela, Italy (which Stanley hears as he prepares to play his organ piece, [1020]). The bells bind each character's final gesture into a static pattern of connec-

tions which flatten character as they round out Gaddis' argument about the future of the individual artist. Wyatt's ending, as has been described previously (cf. Ch. ii), provides the only indication that authentic self-transformation is possible. Gaddis leaves his fate vague; but the fact that he fuses Wyatt with Otto and Stanley, his lesser selves, reduces rather than expands his potential. One knows what Wyatt is not; one does not know what he is.

The patterns which Gaddis creates through surrealist techniques indicate primarily negative elements at work in modern culture: banality, dishonesty and fraudulence. As has been mentioned elsewhere (ch. ii), the only potential for truth seems to lie with those artists who have the courage to face the world as it is, and to dream of it as it should be. Even then, as the fates of Wyatt and Stanley show, there is an ambiguous prospect for the future. Finally, it is the intrusive, erudite narrative voice, rather than the characters themselves, which completes Gaddis' novel structure. The implied artistic consciousness which underlies that narrative provides the positive outcome of the novel. The Recognitions is its own testimony to the continuation of culture in a time which threatens its survival. The novel's structure liberates it from its own subject matter by reforging content into new harmonies.

This reflexive structure is apparent in individual scenes. Many of Gaddis' scenes are constructed on two planes: a foreground, usually comprising the dialogue and central action, and a background scene, rich with minor characters and action.

Dramatic tension is created by the juxtaposition of these two planes. Resolution is only achieved through the intervention of the narrative voice which defines and judges the foreground and background planes, and without which the scene would lose its integration. The scene for examination occurs at a New York zoo (578-591), where Wyatt and Basil Valentine meet to discuss Wyatt's forgeries. Why they have chosen this site for their meeting is unclear. However, the juxtaposition of background action with their conversation creates a meaningful contrapuntal effect.

The foreground of the scene is composed of dialogue between Valentine and Wyatt. Valentine is a vital component of the scene because, as the only character whose erudition makes him a credible opponent to Wyatt's arguments, he can express ideas which might otherwise be relegated to the narrative voice. Valentine's criticism brings the art/life conflict to the foreground of the scene and to the reader's attention. Wyatt intends to expose his frauds, something which Valentine is bent on preventing him from doing. He tells Wyatt, ambiguously, "not to worry" about the fragments, referring possibly either to the sequestered fragments of his paintings or to the fragments of experience which Wyatt is obsessed with unifying. Most of the foreground dialog concerns Wyatt's fevered, disjointed monologues about unifying the disparate aspects of his experience. Valentine debunks these notions and finally accuses him of being a romantic, asking,

Why this sudden attempt to set the whole world right, by recalling your own falsifications of

it? And then? Happiness ever after? Then you will be redeemed, and redeem her....This lost innocence you're so frantic to recover....And this idea that you can set everything to rights at once is...is childish. (588)

Finally, Valentine gives Wyatt the cynical advice which, in JR, Gaddis finds at the core of the competitive nature: "That secret, do you remember....What Wotan taught his son? the only secret worth having....The power of doing without happiness" (588). According to Valentine, love and happiness are vulgar human needs which should have no place in the artist's intentions. His intoning of Wotan's secret seals Valentine's fate as a misanthropic character. He is described as prematurely old, asexual, lacking the principle of growth or change.⁶ Wyatt, on the contrary, is presented as possessing youthful enthusiasm. It is his innocence and his obsession with the life of the mind which make him oblivious to his associate's influence. However, it is precisely this detachment which flaws him.

Wyatt is an ephemeral figure in the zoo scene. Like his ideas, he seems hardly to exist materially. (As Valentine notes, "...when I look down to your feet, I'm almost surprised to see them there, on the ground" (579). If he is to realize his dreams of an integrated life, Wyatt will have to "get his feet on the ground." The everyday world, as Gaddis depicts it, is such a vulgar, debased place, that it hardly offers the hope of any alternative to Wyatt's romanticism. Nonetheless, the contrapuntal organization of foreground and background details indicates that some integration of art and life, the ideal and the debased, is desirable, if not necessarily possible.

Wyatt's disjointed speech provides the reader with a summary in fragment form of his obsessions and desires. His trip home has clarified something for him, and he has returned to the scene of his forgeries with a strengthened belief in his inner life. The nature of this life emerges only gradually and sometimes in reaction to Valentine's questions. When Valentine asks for an explanation of his recent whereabouts, Wyatt replies, "Who can tell what happened? Why, we have movement and surprise, movement and surprise and recognition, over and over... All of our situations are so fragile..." (579).

Wyatt has withdrawn into an inner world where the fragments of his experience are resolved into the wholeness of his non-rational atemporal dream. He explains to an unsympathetic Valentine: "I'm working it out, and everything fits..." (587).

The imagery and allusions in Wyatt's speech suggest the ideal wholeness which he is struggling to realize. These images recur in the novel, as thematic indicators or leitmotifs. In this scene, they evoke Wyatt's memories and indicate his desire to idealize women as a source of salvation (cf. Ch. iii). His references to the horned moon, the rose, a German fairy tale read to him by Esme, his allusion to the "Stabat Mater", the Mater Dolorosa, and his dream woman, all hint at his guilt and desire concerning women. Valentine adds fuel to Wyatt's smoldering obsession with further reference to fictional women.

Valentine scoffs at Wyatt's fevered stories of John Huss and Shabbetai Zebi (581, 582). He taunts him with allusions to the romantic mysticism of The Golden Ass and the passion of

Saint Rose of Lima (586, 588). He even resorts to condemning Wyatt's father's Mithraism (590). Finally, Valentine debunks the "Celestial Sea" story, originating with Gervaise of Tilbury, which has obsessed Wyatt since childhood. For Valentine, this is another example of Wyatt's fantasy. According to Valentine, the world is a vulgar slough, redeemable only by rationalism. Wyatt's idealism is, for Valentine, mere "Pelagianism," an unrealistic belief in the possibility of salvation and happiness on earth. The intensity of Wyatt's feelings make him a far more appealing and convincing character than Valentine. However, once this foreground scene is set in relation to the zoo background, Wyatt's idealism takes on a more ambiguous meaning.

Gaddis prefaces the entire tableau with the following epigraph: "Des gens passent. On a des yeux. On les voit" (578). This unidentified line describes the background scene: people watching caged animals (and vice versa) at the zoo, seeing without perceiving, without understanding. Sight, for most of Gaddis' characters, is a matter of the eyes, not of the mind. Gaddis begins the scene with a description of the sky. Such natural images are frequently met with human insensitivity, and this scene is no exception: "The sky was perfectly clear. It was a rare, explicit clarity, to sanction revelation. People looked up; finding nothing, they rescued their senses from exile, and looked down again" (578).

Wyatt and Valentine carry on their obscure conversation surrounded by a motley crowd of men, women, and children who

gaze vacantly at the animals as they pace repetitively around their cages, breaking this routine to scratch, growl, defecate, and copulate, all of which their human audience takes in with a kind of dull attention. Defecation and copulation are of particular interest to the crowd. Gaddis splices occasional outbursts of human enthusiasm at these bestial activities with the refined enthusiasm of his youthful artist, as in the following scene in which Wyatt tries to explain the power of the "Stabat Mater." Valentine's interest in his painting of the Virgin gives Wyatt the momentary hope that someone has recognized and appreciated his meaning. He exclaims,

--Yes, the reproach! That's it, you understand?
 They were halfway down the tiers of cages.
 --Gee lookit how he does it, said a boy before
 the apes' cage.
 --That's a her...and lookit her eat it, she's
 stoopin over and eatin it. (584)

Gaddis goes on to describe a white lioness pacing in an endless circle, snapping at her tail. This activity gives rise to a good deal of human comment, particularly that of a small boy who shouts over and over, "Gimmeyatail Zimba" (596): It will be shown that the circle, as a leitmotif in the novel, evokes, among other things, meaningless repetition in human activity and thought. Here the lioness' actions result from the boredom of her captivity. The little boy participates in just such aimless repetition as he shouts his taunt each time she makes her turn about the cage. The lioness and her human captors become an illustration of the mindless abusiveness of humanity. The animals themselves become images of desperate caged growth.

The part of this background most crucial to the meaning of the foreground is an element of incongruity: the appearance of a beautiful woman and child. Amid the general tawdriness of the zoo visitors, there appears a young woman of patrician beauty, taking her child through the zoo. The little boy stands fascinated in front of the copulating pumas, then runs to his mother for confirmation of what he takes to be a fight. She looks up at the mating animals and then inadvertently meets the lascivious gazes of the male onlookers. Embarrassed, the woman looks away and her eyes, "seeking escape," fall briefly on the abstracted Wyatt. To emphasize the dramatic impact of the scene, the narrative takes over, explicating:

...she found herself looking into eyes familiar from a minute before, eyes not drawn to her by this instant leveling, but still fixed on her, eyes which made no response at all...eyes which shared nothing, recognized nothing, accused her of nothing.... But that lack of response held her, that lack of recognition no more sanctuary than the opened eyes of a dead man, that negation no asylum for shame but the trap from which her shame cried out for the right to its living identity. (589, cf. Ch. iii)

The same inhumanity which cages the lioness now entraps this woman, and Wyatt's aloofness makes him an accomplice to this inhumanity.

Gaddis' background scene adds irony to the meaning of his foreground. Wyatt is bent on realizing his dream of lost beauty and love, yet he is blind to it when it stands before him. The scales of isolated subjectivity must fall from his eyes before he can realize his ideal, but first he must recognize the necessity of human communication. However, the narrative judgement in

this scene is weighted in favor of Wyatt's art and idealism and against everyday life. The woman enters the novel as an image of the possibility of beauty, but she is never encountered again. Wyatt's lack of recognition notwithstanding, the scene gives him little alternative but to embrace his inner fantasies. Finally, the scene's structure indicates the narrator's skepticism about the success of human communication.

Gaddis brings the scene full circle with a second reference to the fat woman who appeared earlier. She sits on a bench with an Italian phrase book. When one of her small charges asks her the meaning of a French nursery rhyme, she replies, "It don't mean nothin' stupid it's French..." (589). Her reaction exemplifies a vulgar form of the communication gap experienced also by the beautiful woman. The fat woman's double negative ("it don't mean nothing") means, ironically, that language does mean something, if only to the narrator.

Like so many scenes in The Recognitions, this one ends with gratuitous suicide. As Wyatt and Valentine leave the zoo, they pass the sprawled body of a man in a Santa Claus suit who has leapt from an apartment window (590-591). (Much of this novel takes place around Christmas, and Gaddis stresses the crassness and the pathos of this season in America.) The scene further touches on selfishness and inhumanity in the "naked city," as a well-dressed matron averts her eyes from the suicide to gaze at "her own hand laid out at elegant length on her friend's fur" (591). The incipient narcissism of this gesture echoes Valentine's pettish primping (580), and takes on meaning

in juxtaposition with an overheard reference to the Narcissus Festival in Hawaii (590). The scene culminates in another image of circularity and negativity, as a child weaves his tricycle in ever-smaller circles around the suicide victim, "to see how close the rear tire could come to the fingers on the pavement" (591). As if to confirm abandonment of its original "sanction" of "revelation," the sky has clouded over and snow has begun to fall. With this carefully constructed ending, the irony of the epigraph becomes all the more clear: people pass and see each other, but without true recognition.

The surrealist juxtapositions of the zoo scene create a formal unity out of dissonant fragments which conveys anything but the harmony and coherence of the characters' lives.⁷ Moreover, the unity of the scene is in part achieved by its circular organization, beginning and ending with references to the weather (worsening) and communication (certainly not improving). However, as a pervasive element in the novel's structure, circularity is linked with the ultimate ambiguity of Gaddis' meaning, and deserves further discussion.

The embossed image of the worm Uroborus which appears on the hardbound edition of The Recognitions provides a key to a central theme of the novel: self-transformation through acceptance of the opposing aspects of one's identity.⁸ The circular symbol of the serpent consuming its own tail is also applicable to the novel's circular plot structure, which returns to the opening scene as the main character completes his quest for reconciliation with his own origins (cf. Ch. ii). The meaning

of Wyatt's circular search can be summarized by a line from Eliot's The Cocktail Party, in which a character concludes: "[One] will have to live with [one's] memories and make them / Into something. Only by acceptance / Of the past will you alter its meaning."⁹

However, the motif of the return to origin also hints at the endless round of meaningless repetition, or "starting over," such as that acted out by Otto. Certainly The Recognitions contains much evidence of aimless circularity. Vacant, fatuous conversations are heard in New York, only to surface in a slightly altered form in Paris. Such cant forms the satiric level of Gaddis' novel, the dimension which sends up modern culture as stale, used up, redundant. Against this background, Wyatt's thrust into the future provides a positive image if not a clearly articulated statement of optimism. Yet what of the "recycling" of significant ideas in parodic form?¹⁰ It would seem that in allowing Otto and others to discuss art in the same terms as Wyatt, Gaddis is showing the relativity of all values. However, this relativism serves a rhetorical purpose. In the world of The Recognitions, there is an open season on ideas. The reader is challenged to distinguish between cant and authenticity, with the difference lying not in the idea but in the integrity of the individual who holds it. According to Gaddis, art and counterfeit, like all elements of modern culture, are accessible to the sensitive and the vulgar alike. However, the narrator never quite accepts this situation, and the tension caused by the clash of illusion and reality, fraud

and truth creates the principal aesthetic and satiric tension of the novel.

Once again, the fates of the three main characters demonstrate the ambiguity inherent in the novel's circular structure. Otto and Stanley are destroyed by their confusion of illusion and reality. Their ends confirm the negative circularity of their lives. Wyatt, on the other hand, breaks the seal of guilt that has prevented him from acting and moves into an open future symbolized by the Spanish desert. To seek life, he has had to leave art behind, and the narrator provides no clue as to his future creativity. The ambiguity of the novel's circular structure is shown in the ambiguity of Wyatt's regeneration at the expense of his art.

That Gaddis chooses to finish his novel, not with Wyatt's transformation but with a reference to the precarious survival of Stanley's masterpiece shows, that the novel is concerned with human destiny primarily in relation to artistic activity. As has been said, the novel reduces rather than resolves character and ends with the focus on art. Reflexiveness involves the distinction between art and life. To demonstrate the difference, Gaddis leaves a number of allusions, throughout the narrative, to his own novel and its theme. Basil Valentine, frequently astute about art though inaccurate in personal matters, tells Wyatt that,

...people read novels, to identify projections of their own unconscious. The hero has to be fearfully real, to convince them of their own reality, which they rather doubt. A novel without a hero would be distracting in the extreme.

They have to know what you think, or good heavens, how can they know that you're going through some wild conflict, which is after all the duty of a hero. (266)

This description applies to Wyatt's identity as a shadowy anti-hero in a world in which people do appear uncertain of the reality of themselves and others. Valentine's speech also hints at the symbolic nature of Gaddis' characters. In a continuation of the discussion of novels, Valentine drops more references to The Recognitions and Wyatt's central role in it:

...let's say you [Wyatt] eat your father, canonize your mother, and...what happens to people in novels? I don't read them. You drown, I suppose.

--That's too romantic.

--Novels are romantic. (282)

Captivated by this idea, Wyatt goes on to describe himself as the hidden hero of a novel in which all the elements refer to his role (282-83).

References to the novel itself are apparent when Valentine discusses "Willie's" idea for a long novel based on The Recognitions of Clement (398). Later the narrative makes veiled reference to a strange figure named Willie who writes for a TV program called "The Lives of the Saints" (783). The critic in the green wool shirt is overheard discussing a review he must do of a novel which resembles The Recognitions in size (enormous), cover design (red and black), and jacket fly leaf (conspicuously lacking a photograph of the author [999]). Perhaps the most revealing reference to the work comes in the final sentence of the novel, in which Stanley's organ piece is described as "still spoken of, when it is noted, with high regard,

though seldom played" (1021). Like Stanley's work, The Recognitions is the only possible compensation for the artist's struggles.

JR

In JR, artists are under even greater pressure than in the first novel from the encroaching outside world. To dramatize the threat that the conditions of modern life pose to art and the artist, Gaddis employs different techniques from those he developed in The Recognitions. Instead of undercutting the validity of external reality, as he did in the first novel, Gaddis heightens the reality of the outside world to emphasize its influence. In JR there is no collage of past and present events. Nearly everything happens in the present flow of the dialogue, with almost no time for narrative reflection. The dominant narrative voice of the first novel is all but eliminated. In The Recognitions, action takes place against a rich background. The result is a series of "stills" in juxtaposition to this background. In JR the action takes place in "fast-forward," and gives the illusion of being out of narrative control, like a tape recording at super-speed left on permanently.¹¹ This "fast-forward" speed of the action and dialogue has the effect of magnifying the power of everyday reality, which was debunked by the surrealist techniques of the first novel.

In The Recognitions, surreal collages demonstrate that objective reality is conditional upon the accuracy of individual perception. Without a set of inherited traditions to

order reality, the individual is challenged to create his own order. As has been shown, The Recognitions concerns the quest for accurate vision and the will to create art. Its ending, although ambiguous, does present the possibility of intellectual and artistic survival, providing that certain truths--faith in love and belief in personal responsibility for one's actions--are grasped and maintained. In JR, although such truths are still implicitly valued by certain characters, they are less likely to be realized. "Conditions" have encroached on the powers of human consciousness, creative and uncreative alike, and the result is a universal (one hesitates to use the word "democratic") leveling of awareness and of the power to act, let alone to think. This leveling is accelerated by the combined forces of commercialism and technology. Capitalism is not depicted as in itself evil. However, free enterprise, according to Gaddis, has spawned a kind of anarchy in which the only value is commercial and the only warning is "not to get caught." In JR's world, nothing is intrinsically valuable except money. Free enterprise is a "game" with "rules" which have nothing to do with morality; rules simply maintain order and permit the players to win or lose. With economic but no moral values, there is no check on what Gaddis sees as the irrational elements in society. Hence, it is these irrational forces which dominate the emotional tone of the novel, charging nearly every verbal exchange with the negative extremes of human passion: hate, greed, and fear. Love is fleetingly manifest in the few quieter eddies within the action's flow.

By doing away with an intrusive, judgemental narrator, Gaddis has chosen to prove his case against society by presenting what at first appears to be a recording of what is heard minute by minute, in a number of different vaguely defined "places," over the course of approximately three months. He all but eliminates references to speakers so that the characters are recognizable by habits of speech. As has been said, scenes are not introduced, they are shifted suddenly, as the narrative "ear" follows one conversation out of a room and pursues one half of that conversation into a further telephone monologue, and so on. The resulting structure gives the illusion of spontaneous, disorganized reality; however, every telephone call and chance meeting on the subway is linked to the ongoing story. Nothing is superfluous or random.¹² However, by its very order, JR is not a verbatim rendition of life: it is a careful exaggeration of everyday reality. The technique of "fast-forward" speeds up dialogue by eliminating the silences between speeches, the pauses for reflection. The sudden scene shifts accelerate the sense of the passage of time by nearly omitting references to periods of rest, sleep, or solitude.¹³ Finally, what narrative description exists, save for the exceptional tableau which will be analyzed, presents the illusion of an undifferentiated camera vision, taking in precisely what exists to the eye.

Scenes of the most unrelieved chaos occur in the New York apartment which becomes a shelter for struggling artists and the boy-mogul, JR. A sample of the camera-eye technique

[applied to that milieu shows the way narrative description exaggerates the sense of the threat posed to consciousness by the outside world.¹⁴ The following scene describes Edward Bast's return to the apartment in hopes of working on his cantata. Rhoda, Schramm's sometime bedmate, has recently left the apartment, having bathed in the kitchen bath tub and having smoked some marijuana. A disconcerted Bast enters in darkness:

...he stood there and sniffed, listened, felt his way past film cans, Mazola New Improved, 36 Boxes 200 2-ply to the punctured shade to turn on the light, stood there and sniffed again before he put down his case and Industrial Marketing on Hoppin' With Flavor! and returned carrying a paper sack, listening, turning abruptly to lift a cover on the tub and look in, reach in, and then stand more slowly letting it close. He had dropped a bouillon cube in the cup and held that under the dwindled torrent at the sink, carried it in with pâté of anchovies, cocktail onions, and Hostess Twinkies from the paper sack and arranged them on Moody's Industrials, and was bent recovering the blanket gone in a tempestuous heap to the floor when the sound of a bell brought him upright like a spring. By the third ring he crested 12 2 lb 10 oz Round Pkgs QUICK QUAKER, by the fourth found the receiver and lifted it.
--Hel, hello...? (378)

The juxtaposition of package labels, book titles, and general debris forms a powerful collage that nearly incapacitates the character by its sheer bulk. The symbolic meaning of the labels evokes the threat of manufactured dross. Bast is literally swamped by the ever-increasing pile of purchased goods, most of which arrive unsolicited in the mail.

The characters in JR have to contend with the chaos that surrounds them as it threatens to rob them of their time, money, and even their conscious thought. Those who can least take the

strain commit suicide. There are continuing rumours of those artists who seclude themselves in a last-ditch attempt to complete their work. However, for the most part, the everyday world inevitably encroaches on their privacy. Some creative characters take refuge in alcohol, or in illness (cf. Ch. ii). It is alcohol which seems to provide the creative "elixir" which frees the imagination to integrate fragmentary perceptions into a collage. Gibbs, in particular, is prone to suchsprees of inebriated verbiage, in the process of which he manages to integrate disparate experiences within a "common foci" (cf. Ch. ii). The following scene is typical of the way surrealism liberates the imagination from the mundane conditions which confine it.

Gibbs and Eigen return to Eigen's apartment after a chaotic meeting over the estate of their deceased friend, Schramm. Eigen's wife has recently left him, taking their son with her. Eigen plays straight man to Gibbs' drunken fool, as the latter launches into a tirade which becomes a surreal monologue about a new board game for dissatisfied couples, called "Split." To illustrate his nonstop rant on marital power struggles, Gibbs picks up the Nativity figures from David Eigen's broken crèche, using them as game pieces which he moves haphazardly over a racing tabloid as if it were a game board. The resulting collage provides a comment on divorce as a Monopoly-fashioned game of change:

...the smallest figure was thrust swaddled from
Big A to Yonkers Entries,--land here get custody
of the kid one turn just like real life

whole now generation God damned young couples sweep the country, go to court draw God damned card says pay wife's back psychiatrist bills twelve hundred dollars wife passes go collects alimony...the only seated, only female figure was shoved arms spread in wild surmise to join a lofty black on Cocky Jane Runs Second on Coast,--lands here caught in motel getting laid loses custody two turns, game for two to four couples play just like real life sweep the God damned country how's that. (411)

As has been said, the structure of JR gives the impression that chance governs human actions. Jack Gibbs "bets" his life on chance at the race track, rather than trusting anything more substantial or meaningful. However, throughout the novel, there is always the sense that controls exist, but that they are outside individual human responsibility. The stock market epitomizes the universal game of chance, governed by, as Isadore Duncan says, "people's fears about money," hence by the forces of unreason (683). The other source of control is technology, the product of fact, exact measurement, and the powers of intellect. Hence, it is not surprising that the matrix of these two controlling forces, unreason and technology, should combine a principle of disorder (equivalent in human life to unreason), and a principle of sameness (equivalent in human life to the regulatory aspects of science). Gaddis structures his plot and his action to show how this "controlled/uncontrollable" milieu inhibits independent thought and action. It is only when such characters as Gibbs do what they term "changing the context," either by switching into a foreign language, or by altering their own state of mind with alcohol, that they show their ability to act independently if ineffectually (189, 496, 508).

Patches of conventional narration do exist, however, like oases of silence and stillness in the rapid flow of dialogue and "camera-eye" description of the novel. Their conventional quality comes from their relative depth and tranquility. Characters are described acting in a coherent environment. In the following scene, which introduces the character JR, image and metaphor accomplish what intrusive narration was made to do in the first novel: they reveal the forces governing human thought and gesture at the level of everyday activities. It will be seen that these forces threaten creative activities also.

This tableau comes near the beginning of the novel (31-32). Part of the impact of the scene is its spare, understated quality. There are no "naked city" images of self-destruction or gratuitous violence and inhumanity as those which crowd The Recognitions. The shock of the JR scene is achieved subtly because the images and actions it describes are commonplace. Their significance could be easily overlooked were it not that they come as a sudden halt in the otherwise frantic pace of the novel's dialogue. In this scene Gaddis visually displays the forces which he reveals elsewhere through the novel's dialogue: boredom, greed, and a fundamental vacancy where human affections and values should be. These "lowest common denominators" will be subsequently identified with the forces of disorder and sameness: entropy.

The scene is introduced by a characteristic JR transition, as the reader follows characters' voices moving from one locale to another with minimal reference to their whereabouts; one

place is not substantially different from another in JR's world of speed. The characters move from Principal Whiteback's office towards a parking lot. Whiteback and Dan diCephalis narrowly avoid a collision with two men waiting outside. Above them hangs the ubiquitous wall clock which "dropped its longer hand with a click for the full minute and hung, poised to lop off a fragment of the next...." At that minute Jack Gibbs, a history teacher and one of the novel's central characters, passes the clock and performs the unconscious and symbolic gesture of "fingering the change in his pocket." The scene shifts with him as he moves out the door and into the sunshine of late afternoon "where time and the day came fallen through trees with the mottled movement of light under water...." Gaddis focuses first on the arbitrary movement of the clock ("murdering time," in Lewis Carroll's phrase), then shifts to the symbolism of Gibbs' spontaneous gesture (looking at the clock and fingering his change, unconsciously associating time and money). Finally, the narrative fuses time and space in the image of golden (money-colored) sunlight as seen underwater. The image of spilling gold pervades the novel's opening scene, which introduces the theme of money. The imagery alludes to the golden underwater atmosphere associated with the opening scene of Wagner's The Rhinegold. This suggestion of the operatic leitmotif, itself a structural device in the novel, as will be shown, is particularly significant in this scene, as it prefaces the reader's first view of JR, the sixth-grader who will play Alberich in the school production of The Rhinegold. The

scene is strangely static: a child stands idly under trees while behind a window JR sits reading the obituary page in a vacant classroom. Before further explicating its symbolic significance, the scene will be presented in full. As has been said, it begins with Gibbs leaving the building:

...fingering the change in his pocket on his way to the outside door and the cloudless sky filled with the even passage of the sun itself in brightness so diffuse no shadow could keep an edge on shaded lawns where time and the day came fallen through trees with the mottled movement of light come down through water, spread up an empty walk, over gravel and empty pavement, and lawn again, lending movement to the child motionless but for fragmenting finger and opposable thumb opening, closing, the worn snap of an old change purse, staring in through the glass with an expression of unbroken and intent vacancy.

Beyond the glass, the boy inside darted a glance from his newspaper out into the purse snapped open; snapped shut, he smoothed the porous fold of the obituary page away from him, nugged his lip with a pencil and then scratched his knee with it before his foot returned to forcing back, and forth, and back, the idle vent on a floor grating, shut, open, shut, as the light on his paper dimmed with the sun abruptly pocketed in a cloud and what shadow the child beyond had cast was lost beneath the trees where she sought the greenest leaves fallen from the pin oaks shading the grass around her. The largest she found, she folded its dark face in, creasing across the veins, then folded another as carefully chosen over it, pausing with one blown here from a maple and slightly discolored, the green already run from its edges but folded at last with the others stained back outside and snapped all together into the purse, as a wind rustled those on the ground around her and touched the trees above, the cloud past, their movement scattering the sunlight against the glass, never disturbing those within.

--Rhine... G O L D !... (31-32)

The reader is rushed into this scene on a string of subordinate clauses which tumble together visual impressions,

leaving behind the figure of Gibbs and focusing on the figure of the little girl gathering leaves. The scene is lent motion by the play of light on her clothing and on the ground. Her activity links with Gibbs' unconscious gesture, as she fingers a change purse and places folded leaves within, as if they were dollars. She is occupied with a trivial bit of play; but her gesture--the binary opening and closing of the well-worn purse--shows that she is enacting a kind of repetitive replacement activity which reflects boredom. Her "vacant" gaze is both "unbroken" and "intent." All that moves in her anatomy is that part which distinguishes human beings from apes: the "fragmenting finger and opposable thumb."¹⁵ She is using this distinguishing part to perform what will be seen as a primary human activity: opening and closing, a binary off-on action which forms the basis of all computer circuitry, and of electronic communications systems. In JR such systems pose a danger to individual thought and creativity, as will be shown. In this early scene, Gaddis reduces a complex source of power and control to an unconscious human gesture. The child performs this elementary movement while her expression reflects a vacancy which will be repeated in the stares of many of the novel's characters as well as certain stuffed game animals. This paragraph renders the novel's major argument concerning the destructive power of money and technology through a series of meaningless gestures. It provides a visual overture for the first appearance of JR, the novel's would-be entrepreneur of these powers.

JR, the boy inside the glass, and inside the system, is

also performing aimless, binary activity: with his foot he is "forcing back, and forth, and back, the idle vent on a floor grating, shut, open, shut...." He will repeat foot-jiggling throughout the novel, expressing both his own youthful energy and the meaningless repetitive action to which so much of modern life has been reduced. JR "smoothed the porous fold of the obituary page" much as the child outside the window smooths and folds leaves "across the veins" before stuffing them into her purse. The images converge on death (JR's reading matter) and the gratuitous brutality of innocent, unconscious actions. JR smooths the obituary page, which is "porous," once organic, rendered to its present state from living trees, while the little girl seeks "the greenest leaves" (the youngest, most resembling dollars) and folds them unnaturally against their living grain. She performs a pathetic parody of gathering "money that grows on trees."

The sun is associated with the novel's ultimate value: money. Like money, the sun is "abruptly pocketed" in a cloud. The wind "rustled" leaves, echoing the monetary image of the novel's opening line: "Money? in a voice that rustled" (?). These metaphors imply the conversion of nature and humanity into commodities of the market place. The opening shout of The Rhinegold provides the symbolic climax of the scene and the transition to the next scene in which Bast attempts to rehearse the school chorus.

In addition to narrated tableaux such as the one just described, JR depends on patterns of imagery which prevent the

work from lapsing into pure dialogue.¹⁶ Much of JR's imagery evokes elements of Gaddis' sources, which form the novel's mythic substructure and resonate with the author's themes. The central myth of the novel is the Ring of the Nibelung, which will be discussed in the next section of this chapter. This myth forms the thematic matrix of the work, linking money, power, and human relations.¹⁷ However, before discussing this myth, I will introduce other mythic motifs which figure prominently in the novel as organizing devices.

Most of the imagery in JR depicts nature at war with its own elements and human nature dissociated from itself. Direct and indirect references to Greek myths and to the imagery of pre-Socratic philosophy provide keys to the meaning of the novel's imagery. What nature remains in JR's world exists in a state of seige against the bulldozers of urban development. These patches of natural growth appear to have run riot, as if nature were somehow crazed. Such is the bedraggled scene around the Bast family house where "the prospect of roses run riot only to be strangled by the honeysuckle which had long since overwhelmed the grape arbor at the back, where another building was being silently devoured by rhododendron..." (4). An apple tree is described as if it were a mutation: "...its entire top blown out the year before, which redeemed itself now with a bumper crop of tasteless fruit in brave colors and curious shapes..." (17). Trees in particular have suffered grave damage at the hands of urban developers. The Bast house is soon to fall victim to demolition; hence its foliage is described in terms of near

martyrdom as "the crucified crabapple and torment of honey-suckle, grape and rose..." (72). Near the elementary school "trees...appeared to stagger without even provocation of a breeze, rearing their splintered amputations:..an atmosphere of calamity tempered, to the south, by a brooding bank of oak" (17). In the interests of the new, streets are being widened, their names are being changed, in the process obliterating their associations with history. The ensuing "renovation" is described as "the arboreal slaughterhouse" (52).

The conflict, waste and destruction evoked by these natural images is nothing new to those readers familiar with the imagery of modern "wasteland" literature, not to mention the landscape of urban Long Island, where much of this novel is set. However, in JR the cutting down of trees is indicative not only of a particular landscape, but also of a natural order, bereft of its symbols of fertility and virility. This motif will be taken up more fully in connection with the Gotterdammerung of Wagner's Ring Cycle.

The most pervasive natural images of JR are wind and darkness. The climactic (and climatic) "outside" scenes of the novel occur at dusk, amid blowing rain, leaves and debris (508, 667). The opening and closing scenes between JR and Bast are accompanied by these images. As oblivious as he is to nature, JR claims to detest wind (653). It is significant that Gaddis has JR in conflict with a Wall Street firm called Typhon International. In Greek myth, Typhon was a giant who was unleashed by the Titans in a final attempt to overthrow the

power of the new Olympian gods of ancient Greece.¹⁸ Among this god's characteristic powers was control over storms and wind. JR complains about the wind and rain, and seems more comfortable confronting the commercial winds unleashed by the giant Typhon corporation. This conglomerate also represents the older established money interests of Wall Street which the upstart JR is attempting to "take by storm."

Natural disorder also provides a metaphor for the very real human confusion that seems to reign in JR. At one point, Rhoda hallucinates that she and Jack Gibbs are in "this big fucking storm," which, of course, encompasses no more than the chaos of their apartment/hideaway (610). The Bast sisters are resentful that the beleaguered situation at their Long Island home should be termed a "shipwreck."¹⁹ Nonetheless, when any of JR's characters do find an "eddie of quiet," it is as if they are marooned, cut off from the ongoing chaos, as when Joubert and Gibbs hole up in Joubert's anonymous pied-à-terre for a three-day tryst (405-508).

Another image pattern in the novel creates a sense of human life at odds with itself. The source of this pattern is the imagery of the pre-Socratic philosopher, Empedocles. The narrative focuses on the crush of seemingly disembodied limbs on the rush-hour subway: "...countless hands and unattached eyes, faces looking in different directions" (161). Jack Gibbs comments insightfully that the "place is like the dawn of the world." The 96th St. apartment resembles the same kind of fragmented jumble. At the Bast residence, Julia remarks to her

aged sister, "These two chickens out here you ordered, they've got one heart and three gizzards between them. It makes one wonder when even a chicken can't..." (235), and the sentence is, characteristically, left unfinished. During a wild drunken spree, Gibbs attempts to match and mismatch fragments of JR's business mail after it has been shredded by an electric letter opener; the resulting juxtapositions provide surreal comic relief (385). In the wake of his wife's departure, Thomas Eigen frantically searches for his son's Christmas crèche, finding its fragmented figures in a box of broken toys. Gibbs comments: "Got to move the hell out Tom...looks like the God damned dawn of the world in here necks without heads arms seeking shoulders, only God damned person live here's Empedocles" (406).

According to Empedocles, the universe moved in a continual cycle between the extreme states of love, corresponding to harmony and peace, and hate corresponding to discord and aggression. In the phases marked by hatred, living beings were fragmented, literally disunited from themselves. They manifested bestial traits and lacked anatomical parts. As the universal cycle moved into its harmonious phase, beings gradually became whole. Empedocles characterized his own age as existing somewhere between these two extremes, but moving towards war and ultimate chaos.²⁰ As a pre-Socratic, Empedocles exhibited a pre-rational holistic view of human experience and the cosmos. His theory of alternating cycles of order and disorder appeals to Gibbs (and presumably to Gaddis) as a metaphor for modern human

experience. Empedocles' "system," which has survived only in fragmented form, evokes poetic images rather than logical explanations of particular cognitive problems. Gaddis alludes to this ancient source for its metaphorical power rather than for any substantial philosophical meanings.²¹

References to the discordant pole of the Empedoclean cycle make a significant addition to Gaddis' satire. That society may be in a warring "cycle" is not simply a fragment of Gibbs' drunken imagination. The imagery of dismemberment forms what Frye claims is a basic component of satire: its capacity to reveal a terrifying dimension of reality. Frye writes: "A slight shift of perspective, a different tinge in the emotional coloring, and the solid earth becomes an intolerable horror."²² To make his satiric point, Gaddis does not have to people his world with giants or view human life through the narrow end of the telescope; in other words, he has to do little distorting. The key to his satiric "technique of disintegration" is to give the illusion of removing what one of his characters calls "the unpredictable human element" (the narrator) and to record what remains.

The novel's imagery of disintegration also suggests the degeneration of human physical faculties, perhaps brought on by the glut of rapid transport and other technological conveniences. People seem to have lost the art of walking, even moving, with ease or grace. Almost every scene is marked by clumsy jostling, with feet proving to be an impediment.²³ JR, while being reprimanded by Whiteback, "began to wedge the toe of his sneaker

into a desk-drawer handle" (35). Later, while taking the train into Manhattan, he hollers at a friend, "My foot! Boy I can't hardly move with all this crap..." (129). Gibbs is also guilty of foot jamming and clumsiness, even when sober.²⁴ The scene of continual near-disaster is the 96th St. apartment, where new arrivals are greeted with warnings about where not to walk or sit. If the little toe is a vestigial reality, Gaddis' imagery implies that feet, even legs, may become obsolete before long.

A pattern of injury and illness runs through JR, as nearly every major character suffers minor accidents and wasting viruses. Only those who are close to the economic power centers are apparently invulnerable to their disorders. For example, Governor Cates survives into old age oblivious to his infirmities and his largely prosthetic body. The more sensitive characters, such as the artists, suffer constant illness and injury. The connection between illness and creativity in the novel has already been explored and an ancient prototype of this idea has been found in Philoctetes (cf. Ch. ii). There is, however, another dimension to these human disorders which relates to the novel's structure. JR's world wears down the characters' mental and physical capacities; this process is reflected in the decline of their physical and rational faculties. The plot traces this degeneration as it moves towards but does not reach a chaotic climax.²⁵ The mythic plot which is most relevant to JR's story of the decline of a world undermined by the lust for money is The Ring of the Nibelung. The discussion now turns to this central myth and its importance in the novel's theme and structure.

It has been stated that Gaddis' structural devices in JR are unobtrusive, designed to create the illusion of disorganized order. On first reading, one might overlook the fact that JR's plot structure loosely parallels that of Wagner's The Ring of the Nibelung. Like The Ring, JR concerns the struggle for power symbolized by money, and the threat to love and traditional values posed by such a struggle. Gaddis' plot, like that of The Ring, involves the wresting of power away from its traditional centers by those who have been traditionally disenfranchised.²⁶ This analysis of The Ring's relation to JR's structure, imagery and themes is not meant to be exhaustive.²⁷ It discusses general similarities between Wagner's stated artistic purposes and Gaddis' implied purposes, as they have been gleaned from the references and structure of JR. Then the analysis considers parallels in plot and characterization between JR and The Ring cycle.

Wagner and Gaddis share a common goal: they both attempt to extend the boundaries of their medium in order to express what has previously been left unexpressed. According to Wagner, the orchestra possesses "the faculty of uttering the unspeakable."²⁸ The orchestra gives to the ear what the gesture of the actor gives to the eye; and the combination of music and drama "carry on or lead up to what the verse-melody expresses in words."²⁹ Thus, in his "total work of art," Wagner hoped to communicate fundamental emotions through a combination of media. The orchestra, by returning to a musical motif, can evoke in the audience a feeling which a singer has first

introduced in drama and song. However, Wagner was looking for more than "a mere juxtaposition of poetic and musical expression." He strove for the perfect unity of form and content. He considered that "the chief motives of the dramatic action [should become] distinguishable melodic moments which fully materialize their content, being molded into a continuous [whole]." ³⁰ The orchestra guides the audience's "whole attention away from itself [the orchestra] as a means of expression, and direct[s] it to the object expressed." Thus, the orchestra becomes the vehicle of art; as such, it could be said to be unheard. ³¹

Unlike music, language, the medium of the novel, can "materialize thought." However, according to Gaddis, it is losing its capacity to do so and is becoming, paradoxically, a vehicle of nonverbal communication. Hence, Wagner's artistic goals take on ironic significance when applied to the medium of the novel. Gaddis' "art," his language, it could be said, does "reveal art" by focusing the reader's attention on language itself. As has been mentioned, Gaddis uses language as his subject as well as his means of communication. The impact of this reflexiveness makes JR an illustration of its implicit argument that language is a symptom of a culture's health. Gaddis, like Wagner, attempts to make an artistic point by creating the illusion of unmediated, dramatic reality. In fact, his characters discuss precisely this technique in JR: the composer, Edward Bast, and the teacher, Amy Joubert, have a tentative conversation about music amid the din of a Manhattan cafeteria. Wagner's rarefied creative requirements seem archaic when

discussed against the lunchroom background. As is typical of most attempts at conversation in JR, there has been a breach in communication and Joubert tries to explain what Bast has taken to be her derisive laughter:

--No at you no, no I was laughing at myself when I was young, at what I thought all composers were like I'd read something about Wagner somewhere, about how he couldn't stand books in a room where he was working and how he stroked soft folds of cloth and scent, he liked attar of roses and someone sent it to him from Paris, that's what I thought it was like all silk, silk and attar of roses.... (111)

Joubert's memories are abruptly interrupted by JR and his friends.

Eventually, Bast gets in a word of reply: "--that was when he was old though, Wagner, I mean, when Wagner was old and...."

Joubert interrupts to reply:

--Yes but that's what you [Bast] meant isn't it, about creating an entirely different world when you write an opera, about asking the audience to suspend its belief in the...

--No not asking them making them, like that E flat chord that opens the Rhinegold goes on and on it goes on for a hundred and thirty-six bars until the idea that everything's happening underwater is more real than sitting in a hot plush seat with tight shoes on and.... (111)

Several pages (and moments) later, Jack Gibbs breaks into the conversation and the subject returns to Wagner's creative requirements. Joubert recounts them and adds: "--Oh and the garden path yes I forgot, that he couldn't concentrate if he looked out and let his eyes follow the garden paths because they led to an outside world, to the real...." Gibbs interrupts: "--They led the God damned outside world in" (116).

These references to Wagner's theories shed light on the

artists' dilemmas in JR and on Gaddis' structuring of the novel to produce the illusion of immediacy. Gibbs' comment on Wagner's dilemma emphasizes the encroaching power of the outside world as a threat to artistic creation. The novel itself concerns exactly this threat. Gaddis uses the outside world, in the form of its language, as the basis of his own artistic expression. His technique is similar to that obsessive Wagnerian tonality, as it is explained by Bast.³² Gaddis, like Wagner, intends to give the work of art a life-like immediacy of expression, perhaps with the hope that the reader will suspend disbelief in the reality of language, just as Wagner hoped to force his audience to suspend disbelief in the reality of opera. To achieve this end, Gaddis sustains a near-nonstop dialogue which gives the impression of verbatim speech. Wagner's purpose was to extend the boundaries of opera so as to convey the illusion of reality across the proscenium arch. Gaddis' implied purpose is to force people to listen to the degeneration of their own tongue, through the illusion of unmediated narrative. Not only does Gaddis make use of elements of Wagner's artistic theory, but he also makes Wagner's four-part Ring cycle a structural device in JR. A summary of these connections will indicate the extent to which Gaddis made the operas an organizing device.

The most obvious evidence of the opera's role in JR is the direct reference to The Ring as the artistic production which Edward Bast has been hired to direct at JR's school. JR himself is well-chosen to play Alberich, the greedy dwarf who,

having been rejected by the lovely Rhinemaidens, forswears happiness in order to steal the Rhinegold (34). Wagner's Alberich is furthered in his exploits by the magical Tarnhelm, the shield of invisibility. The power of the Ring, once it reaches the upper regions of the earth, threatens havoc on established order. Ultimately Alberich is tricked by the powers that be, and the Rhinegold is recaptured by the Rhinemaidens and returned to the depths of the river. JR's improbable exploits parallel those of Alberich, as the boy steals the class's contributions that are to be used for buying a share of stock, and maneuvers his way upward in the world of corporate finance.³³ Like the dwarf, he is an unloved, isolated creature. However, he does not so much reject love as fail to discover its existence. JR lives in a world of pure greed. His youthful energy is completely unimpeded by moral considerations. He is a grim parody of the perfect fairy-tale hero. Having neither father nor mother as guide, he follows the advice of the corporate Wotans whom he inadvertently sees when the class makes its trip to Wall Street.³⁴ There are further parodies of the Alberich role. JR's "Tarnhelm" is his youth, which renders him invisible to Wall Street brokers and his other potential financial contacts. To hide his age, he carries on his business dealings by phone, his voice unconvincingly matured by the application of a wadded handkerchief to the mouthpiece. His Tarnhelm is also his youthful ignorance of the "rules" of the "game." When the JR Corp. runs afoul of the SEC, the "gold" is indeed recaptured by the novel's Rhinemaidens; however JR, is

acquitted of wrongdoing and is charged only with "erratic management." There seems to be no ultimate damnation in this world without moral values; neither is there salvation. Undaunted, JR is determined to use his knowledge of how things work to "start over."

JR/Alberich's stealing of the gold has repercussions through Wall Street where other power struggles are developing. The novel's corporate Wotan, Governor Cates, along with his sister Zona Selk, a Fricka character, are bent on building their own corporate Valhalla and, in order to do so, Cates is prepared to sacrifice even his own niece, Amy Joubert, a modern version of Wotan's daughter, Freia. Wotan's architects of power are lawyers, principally Beaton who later tangles with Schramm's lawyer, Beamish. Beaton and Beamish parallel Wagner's builders of Valhalla, the giants Fafner and Fasolt. Like the mythical giants, the lawyers are concerned only with order and power, not with right and wrong. Hence, they are untrustworthy and would work against any of the novel's corporate Wotans, if they could.

If the novel can be said to have heroes besides the boy wonder, JR, they are the artists, Jack Gibbs, Edward Bast, and Thomas Eigen, who vary in their talent and their integrity. All have elements of the Wagnerian heroes, Siegmund and his son, Siegfried.³⁵ Bast, like the youthful Siegfried, is innocent and fearless. In the myth, these qualities make Siegfried worthy of the Ring's power; but, in JR's parody of the myth, these characteristics only render Bast more vulnerable. All three

artists sustain unsatisfactory love affairs with women who combine the qualities of Valkyrie and Rhinemaiden, luring men, only to overpower and destroy them (cf. Ch. iii). Ultimately the women, even beautiful, sensitive Joubert, are more concerned with recovering the "Rhinegold" than with finding love. Only Rhoda, a counterculture version of the prophetess, Erda, in The Ring, seems to be without underlying malice.³⁶ However, she is victimized and finally disappears as mysteriously as she enters the novel.

As he did in the first novel, Gaddis has a way of dramatizing personal alternatives without having to develop complex psychologies in any one character. Doubling also gives his artistic argument clout by making a number of characters demonstrate variations on an idea. For example, Bast emerges as the most idealistic Siegfried, while Eigen is the sell-out to gold-power and Gibbs acts as a wise commentator on the action.³⁷ Of the women, Joubert is both Freia, Sieglinda and a kind of Rhinemaiden by virtue of her upper-class status. Stella Angel plays Brunnhilda to Bast's Siegfried, even to her destruction of his studio, a take-off on Brunnhilda's setting fire to Valhalla. In addition to his role as Alberich, JR is Mime to Bast's Siegfried.³⁸ Of the two lawyers, Beaton has more of the cunning of the mythic trickster, Loge, than he does the bumbling power of the giants; yet he and Beamish are true architects of power. Finally, the dead man, Schramm, resembles a tragic Wotan, while Cates' character parodies the malevolence of that god. Like Wotan, Schramm blinds himself and through suffering

gains a short-lived knowledge. He is immortalized by his artist-friends as a genius whose faith in art could not sustain him in the face of his distrust of life. Cates, on the other hand, has none of Schramm's insights; however, like a modern immortal, he undergoes numerous prosthetic operations--including an eye operation--and survives, defying mortality even from his hospital bed. There, he screams orders into the telephone and peers at his portable Quotron, fearing that Valhalla will be sold out from under him. Lesser characters, such as Dan diCephalis, his wife Anne, gym coach Vogel, the Bast sisters, and the corrupt paving contractors Parentucelli and Ganganelli, all form minor variations on the previously mentioned mythic characters.³⁹

JR parodies not only characters but also the plot of The Ring. Although the novel proceeds for over seven hundred pages without a break, as a verbal version of Wagner's "unending melody," it is possible to discern a general structuring of the plot which parallels that of the four-part Ring cycle.⁴⁰ The novel opens with a parody of the Rhinemaidens' refrain in The Rhinegold: "Money...? in a voice that rustled" (3). As in The Ring, so in JR, money is the catalyst to all the novel's action. The Bast sisters begin a kind of fugue-dialogue, explaining to lawyer Coen the Bast family's musical heritage and its connection with commerce. The underwater imagery of The Rhinegold is echoed in the imagery of the first hundred pages of JR, particularly the mottled oceanic light of the tableau scene previously analyzed (31-32).⁴¹ In addition, there is a timeless atmosphere created in the Bast sisters' overture-dialogue

(3-17), produced by their faulty memories of events and their isolation from the outside world. Timelessness as the backdrop to his ageless drama was what Wagner sought to evoke in the opening of the first opera of the cycle.⁴² JR, indeed, produces a sense of timelessness caused partly by a loss of a sense of history and of temporal and spatial references.

Gradually, the novel's focus turns to human relations, particularly the conflicts between the artists and their lovers. The clearest parallels between Wagner's second Ring opera, The Valkyrie, and JR come in the scenes between Stella Bast and her cousin Edward, as they meet, tryst, and part in the chaos of his studio. Subsequently, action shifts to the artists and their struggles to survive creatively. These scenes, interspersed with Wall Street business, grade school activities, and, always, the money dealings of JR, form the central part of the novel, and they could be said to correspond very generally to the third of Wagner's Ring operas, the Siegfried. The most obvious parallel in structure and purpose to Wagner's final opera, The Twilight of the Gods, is the novel's final hospital scenes in which Bast/Siegfried and Cates/Wotan languish. As in Wagner's opera, this section recapitulates much of the previous action and is rich with references to former scenes, as Beaton keeps Cates abreast of the corporate world and Isadore Duncan, Bast's roommate, reads to him from the daily newspaper, in the process providing a dénouement. As in Wagner's opera, JR ends with the triumph of the female characters, the novel's Rhinemaidens, who gain control of the precious corporate gold.

Wagner's Ring cycle traces the decline and fall of the old order of gods. In JR that order is represented by Cates, Moncrieff and Selk, the governing forces of American finance. Once they die, the "game" is open to anybody, even those, like JR, who do not know its origins and are oblivious to the rules. JR's tracing of the decline of a hierarchical, patriarchal culture is symbolized by the time of the year--autumn--in which the action is set. Leaves fall and children pocket them like dollars. Trees are cut to make way for pavement. In Wagner's opera cycle, Wotan hangs himself on the World Ash Tree and through this suffering he gains resurrection. In JR there is no final crisis, although panic is always imminent in the stock market, and there is surely no spiritual renewal. Nature withers but rebirth is uncertain.

JR parodies The Ring's theme of regeneration epitomized by the image of the circle. The structure of JR's plot is circular rather than cyclical, implying repetition without evolution. This motif dominates not only plot and theme but also the novel's language. When these circular structures are compared with the implicit cycle of recognition and transformation in the first novel, it becomes clear that in JR Gaddis' vision has become grimmer, more darkly ironic than in the first novel. There are a number of dimensions to JR's circularity which should be distinguished, in order to show their impact as aspects of Gaddis' complex structural pattern.

A pattern of circularity is revealed as the basis of so-called free enterprise. The money returns to the pockets of

those who understand the workings of the corporate game, and JR is reduced to his true status as dwarf-person, or child. However, he is undaunted and eager, as he says, to "start over," armed with his alleged new knowledge of the rules of the corporate game. He pleads with his erstwhile factotum, Edward Bast, to join him in this renewed venture:

--No but you can't give up now hey wait up!
I mean just when we find out how everything
works hey?...when you get to start over hey?
(662-663)

JR's persistent belief in a new start echoes an attitude which has been considered fundamental to the American outlook. In his venerable thesis, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," Frederick Jackson Turner writes:

American development has exhibited not merely advance along a single line, but a return to primitive conditions on a continually advancing frontier line, and a new development for that area. American social development has been continually beginning over again on the frontier. This perennial rebirth, this fluidity of American life, this expansion westward with its new opportunities, its continuous touch with the simplicity of primitive society, furnish the forces dominating American character.⁴³

Turner's thesis emphasized that what he termed the "first period of American history" had ended with the closing of the frontier, heralded by the 1890 census reports; yet, according to Turner, the frontier's impact on American character appeared to be indelible. JR's optimistic belief in "starting over" is a miserable parody of this frontier consciousness, or what R.W.B. Lewis refers to as the belief in the "second chance."⁴⁴

Although this thesis does not propose to analyze the theory of history implicit in Gaddis' novels, it is significant

for the structure of both books that a concept of "starting over" should figure as a pathetic farce rather than as a true promise of growth. In The Recognitions, the notion of a new beginning is meaningless when unaccompanied by a profound sense of personal history. Gaddis parodies a kind of witless beginning-over in the character of Otto. However, in the second novel, no sense of the possibility of personal growth exists to offset the enormous enthusiasm of JR. This character is a gruesome parody of an Horatio Alger hero. More perceptive adult characters, such as Joubert and Gibbs, sense in JR a "bleakness" which his vitality cannot mask. He is all energy without the grace of youthful ideals. In his faith in pragmatism--"what works"--and in a new start, there is no self-awareness. JR lives out the naive dream of a limitless frontier, and limitless growth, as an end in itself.

The end of the geographic frontier has not marked the end of the frontier myth, but rather its turning to purely symbolic zones, epitomized by the untrammelled territory of the stock market, with its "bulls," "bears," and its unmaterialized "futures" in such things as "bellies." Many of JR's characters believe in the myth of continual renewal afforded by the new frontier of money markets. Chief among the hunters in this realm is the stockbroker Crawley. His lust for the wilderness chase takes the stylized form of the African safari, a sport which he would like to introduce to the populated wilds of America where, if all else fails, he could hunt the human wildlings of the counter-culture (205). To dampen his lust for the hunt, he

hangs animal heads on his office wall. / His hand is described as "stalking" the desk, as he mixes stock jargon with his consuming interest in big game (206). He has Edward Bast compose what he calls "zebra music" to accompany a film he is producing as promotion for big-game hunting in America.

The circularity of the frontier myth as it is implied in JR does not lead to evolution; but neither does it lead to dissolution, climax, catastrophe, although there is always the threat of "the whole fucking scene...coming down..." (555), as Rhoda puts it. Gaddis does "kill off" a number of his lesser villains, like Zona Selk, in ways which ironically fit their offenses in life, a technique employed in the first novel also. However, he introduces into JR a whole new fate, perhaps worse than death: the artificial continuation of life by means of prosthetic parts. Hence, Gaddis presents the possibility of the technological perpetuation of life long after the mind and the spirit have succumbed to the energy loss of their closed systems. As has been stated (Ch. ii), the only glimmer of hope for human evolution in the novel comes from the artists who, in the spirit of T.S. Eliot, return to the art work of the past in an attempt to relearn what the present has forgotten.

The circularity of JR does not end with its plot but resonates throughout every form of communication depicted in the novel. At the level of its language, JR is a comment on the state of modern communication. Since spoken and written language is the unique possession of human beings, to analyze language is to study the matrix of a people's culture. Gaddis

takes up nonverbal as well as verbal communication, by analyzing gesture as an index to character. In the arts, he makes the nonverbal dimension of music a central metaphor for the state of the arts generally. We might puzzle why a novelist would choose music instead of literature as his paradigm.⁴⁵ However, it must be kept in mind that JR itself is a comment on the state of written and spoken language. The use of a non-literary genre--one which depends, as does language, on listening--allows Gaddis to widen the dimensions of his argument about language by depicting the problem in another medium.

Virtually all of the cultural problems in JR are shown to have an impact on language. The novel portrays society in chaos, dominated by chance, irrationality, and incipient anarchy. This is a world which has abandoned inherited values but which does possess a supreme concern: money, what Kenneth Burke has called "the God-term."⁴⁶ A sense of the power of money is the only awareness common to all of JR's characters. Money and "people's fears about money" keep JR's characters in constant activity, exhibiting an energy which belies the lack of control and ultimate meaninglessness beneath the frenzy. As has been mentioned, technological progress has made it possible for machines to replace human functions and to eliminate individual responsibility. The upshot is a society in which individuals have minimal understanding or control of the mechanisms around them, both technological and social. Technological innovations have produced systems of rapid communications which have affected the way humans experience their world.

These developments appear to have diminished rather than increased meaningful intercourse. Gaddis demonstrates that the breakdown of meaningful communication, while not an immediate threat to human survival, poses considerable danger to the rational faculty.

To explain chaos and loss of meaning, Gaddis has incorporated into JR a critique of communications similar to the entropy theory of Norbert Wiener.⁴⁷ Entropy provides one of the several keys to the novel's structure and meaning which it is the purpose of this chapter to discuss. This thesis does not, however, pretend to make an exhaustive analysis of entropy theory in Gaddis' novels. There are, however, aspects of Wiener's theory which are particularly relevant to this discussion. Wiener concludes from physical evidence that an element of chance, almost of irrationality, must be taken into account as an integral aspect of the universe. He explains this element of indeterminacy in the following description of Willard Gibbs' pioneer study of entropy:

The measure of [this] probability is called entropy, and the characteristic tendency of entropy is to increase.

As entropy increases, the universe, and all closed systems in the universe, tend naturally to deteriorate and lose their distinctiveness, to move from the least to the most probable state, from a state of organization and differentiation in which distinctions and forms exist, to a state of chaos and sameness. In Gibbs' universe order is least probable, chaos most probable. But while the universe as a whole, if indeed there is a whole universe, tends to run down, there are local enclaves whose direction seems opposed to that of the universe at large and in which there is a limited and temporary tendency for organization to increase. Life finds its home in some of those enclaves.⁴⁸

The theory of entropy may apply to two forms of meaning breakdown: a disintegration caused by disorder, or disintegration produced by rising homogeneity, or sameness. The first application of the term, entropy, describes the contingent nature of much human activity in JR. As has been shown, disorder is apparent in environments, in human actions, and in the frenetic patterns of human speech which reflect disordered relationships. The novel's action seems to be governed by chance, which is demonstrated as the narrative "ear" follows characters into unanticipated situations. Characters are themselves aware of the role chance plays in their lives. Eigen claims that his marriage hinged on an accidental meeting (347). A man who seems to have surrendered to disorder, Gibbs harbors an enthusiasm for games of chance. For him, marriage is an inherently entropic state (403). JR is himself a kind of entrepreneur of chaos with his ubiquitous spill of loose-leaf binders and his envelopes full of junk mail. Seemingly at home in a disordered world, JR is surprised by any form of simultaneity (347). The environments in which JR and the other characters live are havens for entropy. The 96th St. apartment contains leaking energy sources in the form of a nonstop water flow into the sink and a radio which babbles endlessly from beneath a pile of junk (364). Even the planned suburban areas, briefly viewed, show a lack of method in their chaotic pastiche of architectural styles (54).

Frenetic speed characterizes most of the novel's scenes of disorder. Speed seems to be outstripping time itself, as symbolized by the clock in the 96th St. apartment which runs

down at the end of each business day.⁴⁹ In the suburbs, "all allusion to permanence had disappeared or was being slain," according to a narrative delivered at breakneck speed from the window of a speeding car (18). Finally, communications systems have superceded human events themselves, as a news item actually appears in print before the event it describes has occurred (107, 637).

In physical systems, entropy designates the degree of energy loss in a closed system, resulting in the equal spacing out of component particles.⁵⁰ Gaddis' narrative registers this quality of energy loss in facial expressions of "intent vacancy" appearing in classroom and subway alike. A kind of emotional energy loss is responsible for Joubert's nervous breakdown (707), and for Bast's hospitalization. Human beings are "running down" and losing the ability to withstand the chaos which surrounds them.

In communications theory, entropy measures the loss of information exchanged and the increase in redundancy which accompanies loss of meaning. One of these two forms of entropy--either chaos or sameness--characterizes nearly every communication in JR. What makes the redundant aspect of entropy particularly ominous is that it implies the breakdown of discreet meanings. If words cease to have particular meanings, they are no longer tools with which human beings can communicate thought. Without these tools, thought itself is jeopardized. Hence, characters are often incapable of explaining themselves, except with reference to a vague norm, which they also cannot explain.

When asked to justify or explain their actions, Rhoda and JR frequently reply: "That's what you do!" They do not understand the need to reflect on or take responsibility for their actions. Presumably, this failure to think will simply increase one's inability to think. The degenerative process is circular.

As the previous discussion shows, according to Gaddis, language is a vivid barometer of human values. In JR, spoken language tells most about character and culture. Slips of the tongue reveal a character's fears, desires and obsessions. For example, scenes in JR's elementary school invariably include rattling conversations in which teachers are revealed to be working at cross-purposes but with the common goal of self-aggrandizement. In the following exchange, the repetition of the possessive pronoun raises the possibility that education may not be the primary goal of JR's teachers. Principal Whiteback, the obfuscator par excellence, discusses audio-visual systems with Flesch, diCephalis and Hyde:

...utilizing this new media to motivate the cultural drive in these youngsters should give things a nice boost right up their...

--Up their alley, check. My shelter...

--My Ring...Miss Flesch got in...

--My wife...ventured Mister diCephalis.... (26)

We grow to identify characters by their obsessions: Flesch's interest in the Ring production and her own professional advancement; diCephalis' Walter Mittyish fear of his wife and his obsession with measurement; Hyde's paranoid concern for fall-out shelters. Gaddis has a keen ear for differences in jargon and slang, and identifies each character by his or her

personal verbal quirks. Whiteback depends heavily on "ahms" to get him through equivocal dealings with the school and the bank. He attempts to hide his insecurity behind pompous technocratese. Jargon is also rampant on Wall Street, where Davidoff, Crawley's self-important clerk, dramatizes the so-called challenges of his job by using such colorful but inappropriate metaphors as "brush fires" to describe everything from a telephone call to a box-lunch delivery. Perhaps most arcane and devious is the legalese of the corporate lawyers, Beaton and Beamish. Language also reflects emotional stress, a result of what Gibbs calls "so many things from so many directions" (347). Characters display their bewilderment in self-contradictory responses, as in Bast's "Yes no wait look listen..." (538), or Whiteback's "Yes no" (324). Finally, language use reveals not only a character's desires, fears, class and self-image, but also his or her age. This fact is most obviously displayed in old Governor Cates' archaic slang and his homely grammar slips (423, 700). Gaddis' attention to the subtleties of speech indicates not only his acute ear for dialogue but also his respect for the vital power of language. JR implies that this vitality is waning.

In JR, communications breakdown usually affects one of the two components of language: phonetics or semantics.⁵¹ Much of the jargon previously mentioned is phonetically acceptable but semantically incoherent; that is, it sounds like English, but it means nothing. Mysterious transformations take place as words are mispronounced or misinterpreted. "Mandatory" becomes

"mandratory" (27). "Authorization" becomes anthropomorphized as "arthurization" (1985, 639). JR, for whom words are nothing but blunt instruments, thinks that his bankrupt corporation has been accused of "erotic" rather than "erratic" management (647). Then there are the verbal transmogrifications. For example, the Bast sisters mention in passing "that Bryce boy," who they remember as the son of a local undertaker (62). Over six hundred pages later, a fatuous "Mr. Brisboy" approaches Bast about an "elder care" scheme that turns out to be a nursing-home-to-cemetery scam begun by his mother, who runs Wagner Funeral Homes (62, 509).

In other cases of misinterpretation, characters literally hear different sounds and thus receive different meanings: they confuse both phonetics and semantics. A message gets through, but it bears no resemblance to the one that was sent. For example, JR hears a segment of a Bach piece, sung in German, which, to him, sounds like "up yours...up mine" (658). Later, this scene is "rerun" as lawyer Coen drives a bedraggled Edward Bast to hospital. In an attempt at conversation Coen says,

...if there's one thing I dislike Mister Bast it's disorder I don't like surprises, the caterwauling on most of radio that's why I felt the expense of having this FM here here listen! it's...Handel's Jephtha I remember this part yes when I was a child, I thought the soprano here was singing get away! (667)

In his dying speech, Isadore Duncan tells Bast of his confusion over a piano piece his daughter used to practice:

...she was learning a song called for Alise's something like that I never did hear it like it was supposed to be, she'd miss notes leave little

parts out and start again I always thought maybe someday I'd hear it right hear what I was supposed to.... (687)

Much verbal confusion in JR is caused either by ambiguity or redundancy. In the first category are those comic double-entendres which function as verbal jibes at the more ludicrous characters, and provide the satire with its ribald, even obscene moments. A running ambiguity throughout the novel plays on the word "holes." The intended meaning relates variously to diCephalis' computerized educational testing (23), his measuring of wall studs in his house in order to qualify for a mortgage (226), Norman Angel's law suit against a juke box company (152), and finally, the punched holes in player piano rolls which form the model for experiments into "information storage and retrieval" systems (681). The secondary meaning predictably concerns sex and defecation (681). Perhaps the most significant ambiguity of this satire is JR's verbal crutch: "Holy shit," which alludes to sacred fecal "wealth."⁵²

These seemingly random semantic links are paralleled by a sinister pattern of connections between art, education and technology. That the player piano mechanism is claimed as the basis of an information storage system suggests the appropriation of art by technology. This co-optation is not the result of high intellectual or moral intention but rather, it is the product of crass economic motives. Such connections hint of an ominous conglomeration and standardization which has a parallel in the increase of jargon and redundancy in speech. To put it simply, more means less. Inflated language, such as that used

by most of JR's "educators," communicates little, as in the following gibberish: "...this equipment item is justified when we testor tailing, tailor testing to the norm..." (22). For all his verbal bludgeoning, JR recognizes the seeming reversibility of communication when he admits, "I can't hardly tell what I'm sending from what I'm getting" (167). In his picnic fork deal, he replies to a question about incomprehensible army language: "...is it my fault if they all talk backwards..." (169)? That JR succeeds temporarily in building his corporate dream is testimony to what may be his unspoken maxim of success: his is not to reason why. Or, as he puts it: "That's what you do" (659):

Examples of verbal redundancy--and they occur on virtually every page of the novel--extend also to human gesture in the form of "binary" movement. That is, in the world as Gaddis sees it, the possibilities for human action have dwindled to variations of the binary "on-off," "open-shut," "in-out." Because narration is kept to a minimum, the few descriptive passages become highly visible. For example, all that is shown of an audio-visual studio is the door opening, closing, opening again (43). Dan diCephalis' actions as he enters his suburban house follow a nightly pattern as he, "...[starts] a round of turning off lights. Foyer, hall, bathroom, foyer, closet, side door, snap, snap, snap, snap..." (55). A frantic building contractor telephones Major Hyde "just [wanting] to know if you want the French doors in the dining room to open out or in" (180). Doors are opened, shut (506-7); bathrobes are opened,

closed (352); that someone goes the wrong way through a revolving door indicates to JR that he must be "really mad" (114). Human behavior, like thought, seems to be losing fine distinctions and the capacity for alternatives.⁵³

Mechanization has curtailed individualized differences in action and thought; it threatens to eliminate the cognitive aspect of communication altogether, turning human beings into mere cogs in a largely mechanized process. Children are shown to be most susceptible to the appeal of technology and mechanization; and with the breakdown of adult convictions, there seems to be no way to temper their enthusiasm. Here are JR and his classmates admiring a cashier's dexterity:

--Boy did you see how she throws out twenty nickels without she doesn't even look at them? Like her fingers can count them like they're this here machine....

--Like these blind people which they see with their fingers.... (113)

Technology has replaced outworn body parts; even more sinister is its takeover of mental processes. For Gaddis, developments in this area may ultimately "get the artist out of the arts," as Gibbs so often says (cf. Ch. ii). The story of the Bast family fortunes traces the growth of art as a commodity which is ultimately mechanized in order to reach a larger market. Ann and Julia Bast's description of their family's illustrious musical past is a catalogue of the rise of popular art as a commodity in America, culminating in the image of the player piano.⁵⁴ This collusion between art and the market place has grim consequences for the artist.

By making one of his themes the state of communications, Gaddis turns the structure of JR back onto itself. The novel's language provides the major illustration of the state of modern communications and its reciprocal connection with human relations and human creativity.⁵⁵ The question arises: how could a book which catalogues language breakdown, which contains so much redundant language, be itself meaningful? The answer is that Gaddis has not fallen prey to the fallacy of imitative form. JR is about communications breakdown; it comes as close as has any novel to demonstrating mimetically such a breakdown. However, its verisimilitude is not attained by the abandonment of structure, but rather, by the unobtrusive control of structure to produce the illusion of a narrative machine running itself. Gaddis' narrative triumph is precisely this: he has made his novel the demonstration of the sinister consequences of mechanized art. It is not an easy novel, nor one which allows the reader much escape from the grim realities of its subject matter. If anything, JR, running as it does at "fast-forward," increases the "noise" that the reader would normally encounter in daily life. The novel makes its satiric impact by exaggeration, which does not seem extreme until the reader pauses to reflect. Fortunately, JR's world is not life, at least not yet. To this reader, it presents a debased version of present conditions. Its structure simulates the two dimensions of disorder known as entropy: structural entropy, or chaos; and communication entropy, or the increase of redundancy. The first dimension is realized through the seemingly disordered plot structure, action,

and dialogue of the novel; the second is achieved through the verbatim transcription of speech patterns.

There is no indication that Gaddis holds out hope of entropy being reversed. However, a directive is implicit in the novel's circular structure: the two-way nature of communication must be respected if culture in general and art in particular are to survive. That is, someone ought to attend and, in an oral culture, this means listening. Even JR needs to be listened to; he admits this in a one-way telephone rant that he believes is being heard by Edward Bast. His words end the novel and sum up Gaddis' concern for human interchange. They also form a neatly capsulized reference to the novel itself:

...I mean like remember this here book that time where they wanted me to write about success and like free enterprise and all hey? And like remember where I read you on the train that time where there was this big groundswill about leading this here parade and entering public life and all? So I mean listen I got this neat idea hey, you listening? Hey? You listening...? (726)

The book that JR has been asked to write is a reference to JR itself. Similarly, Gibbs' unfinished work about mechanization and the arts alludes to Gaddis' novel (711). Thomas Eigen has published a novel similar to The Recognitions in its reception and publishing record (261, 269, 389, 417). Thus there is some indication that JR's writers portray versions of the author's own identity. The anonymous writer, Willie, from The Recognitions is again evoked, this time by a disembodied telephone voice asking for assistance (449). As the work which takes account of its characters' and its implied author's struggles to create

art in a hostile world using debased materials, JR becomes a self-vindication.

NOTES

¹I am indebted to the definition of dramatic form provided by Joyce through his character, Stephen, who explains:

Art necessarily divides itself into three forms progressing from one to the next. These forms are: the lyrical form, the form wherein the artist presents his image in immediate relation to himself; the epical form, the form wherein he presents his image in mediate relation to himself and to others; the dramatic form, the form wherein he presents his image in immediate relation to others.

(Joyce, Portrait, p. 213)

I say that Gaddis attempts a "seemingly unmediated" rather than an "immediate" expression because in the novel, narrative, however closely it approaches total dialogue, always maintains some vestige of mediation.

²By surrealistic I refer to the techniques developed in art (rather than the automatic writing techniques of European surrealism) which collapsed realistic images and perspectives and restructured them in such a way that startling new meanings were revealed through the juxtaposition of imagery. The resulting patterns frequently had symbolic impact which, it was hoped, would evoke the contents of the unconscious, which it was the goal of certain surrealists to liberate.

³Koenig cites the following from Gaddis' notes for The Recognitions: The novelist intended to probe "deeply enough to unfold, not the pattern, but the materials of the pattern, and the necessity of a pattern..." (Gaddis' notes, in Koenig, "Splinters from the Yew Tree," p. 81).

⁴When Stanley is hospitalized on shipboard, his roommate describes his (Stanley's) delirious ravings, in which he imagined himself excommunicated by priests who shouted "Fiat! Fiat! Fiat! Fiat! and threw their candles down" (907).

⁵On Forster's term, "flat" character, see Chapter iii, note 2.

⁶In contrast to Wyatt's youthful naiveté, Valentine appears prematurely old (578, 581, 589) and without emotion. His meticulous, grey-coated figure gives the impression of a static mannequin for which growth is impossible.

⁷In the zoo scene, Gaddis creates surrealistic dissonance between the foreground, background, and narration that is reminiscent of the juxtapositions in the compositions of Giorgio de Chirico. In these early surrealist paintings, mundane objects are placed in startling proximity to images of classical art, and set against perspectives down long,

deserted avenues, sometimes flanked by classical architecture. These vistas take the eye beyond the arresting foreground into a still expanse, an eternity of empty space where the sky is almost always pristine blue. That Gaddis was familiar with de Chirico is implied by a passage in which Esme, in her letter to Wyatt, states: "Perspective since de Chirico manipulated it plastically; resolve it in his painting paradigms, now, exists in the mind; a nostalgia; a co-relative isolation..." (502).

⁸Cirlot writes that the ouroboros "is symbolic of time and of the continuity of life....The ouroboros biting its own tail is symbolic of self-fecundation, or the primitive idea of a self-sufficient Nature--a Nature, that is, which, à la Nietzsche, continually returns, within a cyclic pattern, to its own beginning." J.E. Cirlot, "Ouroboros," in A Dictionary of Symbols, trans. Jack Sage, pp. 246-247.

⁹Eliot, Cocktail Party, Act III, p. 182.

¹⁰By the "recycling" of ideas I refer to the stating of a thought by one character and the subsequent appearance of that idea in the speech of another character, frequently someone who has been intellectually discredited, such as Max, Otto, and the vague, fatuous voices overheard in bistros.

¹¹I take the term "fast-forward" from the controls of tape recording devices which usually feature such a speed to facilitate skipping from one moment of play to another. The "sound" of fast-forward play is unintelligible squawking which Gaddis' dialogue is not. However, the pacing of the narrative is frantic, seemingly beyond the confines of spatial relations, as it takes place on the telephone and in speeding vehicles. Hence the term "fast-forward," although not a specific allusion to the taping technique which is the source of the term, nonetheless describes the impact of this fast-paced narrative.

¹²That none of JR's scenes are superfluous is demonstrated, for example, by a series of rapid transitions as Norman Angel leaves work at the Long Island offices of General Roll and, while walking through a residential neighborhood, is hit by a ball thrown by a little girl, whose name turns out to be Rose (159). A man in a grey suit is seen limping around the corner of the house where Rose lives, as her mother, a brash-voiced woman, calls her inside. Later Jack Gibbs turns up wearing a grey suit and limping. The reader subsequently learns that he has weekly visiting rights with his daughter, Rose, in spite of his ex-wife's attempts to prevent him from seeing the child. The scene, which provides evidence of this situation, transpires as Angel makes his way to the subway, where the narrative eye and ear shift to Angel's secretaries, who are also on the train (160), and from them to a glimpse of Gibbs (161), and finally to the chance meeting between Ann and Dan diCephalis (161), who are on their way home (162).

¹³Transitions between days are indicated by such fleeting mechanistic devices as a radio weather report predicting "tomorrow's" temperatures, followed by a traffic report on the "inbound" rush hour the next morning (155).

¹⁴Gaddis' use of this seemingly unmediated narrative technique, which preserves the illusion of objectivity, is comparable to that of Robbe-Grillet rather than Dos Passos. However, Gaddis, unlike the French novelist, instills his jumbled collage of descriptions with symbolic meaning. For example, the chaos of the 96th St. apartment contains Vol. II CRA-GRIM and Vol. III GRIN-LOC of an encyclopedia. Through repetition, these headings take on symbolic meaning to become a surreal comment on the grim chaos of the scene. Hence, Gaddis derives meaning from the meaninglessness of random objects.

¹⁵This phrase was used in The Recognitions to describe the "simian" aspect of Aunt May (43). In the context of both novels, this allusion to the animal in human nature hints of the base dimension of humanity which, it is implied, will emerge if the intellect is not cultivated, as it seems not to be in the case of Aunt May and the little girl gathering leaves.

¹⁶JR only seems to lack narration. A novel without narration would presumably no longer be a novel, but a piece of drama. Gaddis' narrative is dramatic but not drama. See note 1.

¹⁷In both his novels, but particularly in JR, Gaddis uses myth as an ordering device, much as Eliot described it in "Ulysses, Order, and Myth" (cf. Ch. i).

¹⁸Edith Hamilton, Mythology (New York: Mentor-New American Library, 1940), p. 67.

¹⁹Water imagery abounds in JR. Money and papers "spill" from people's wallets and off laps and desks. In the 96th St. apartment, a tap runs permanently. Rhoda hallucinates a shipwreck about which Gibbs hears (63). A seated JR is described as "quivering at anchor" (632), while old Governor Cates is depicted as a gale-borne sailing vessel from a by-gone era (90). Water imagery establishes the mythic motif of the Rhinegold and lends the descriptions a sense of impermanence as one scene flows into another. In regard to this imagery, a passage from Norbert Wiener is pertinent. Speaking of the entropic nature of existence, Wiener has this to say:

In a very real sense we are shipwrecked passengers on a doomed planet. Yet even in a shipwreck, human decencies and human values do not necessarily vanish, and we must make the most of them. We shall go down, but let it be in a manner to which we may look forward as worthy of our dignity. (Norbert Wiener, The Human Use of Human Beings: Cybernetics and Society [New York: Avon, 1950], p. 58.)

As will be shown, Gaddis' characters are similarly shipwrecked, but with minimal dignity.

²⁰ On Empedocles' cosmic system, see Helle Lambridis, Empedocles (University, Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1976); Denis O'Brien, Empedocles' Cosmic Cycle: A Reconstruction from Fragments and Secondary Sources (London: Cambridge University Press, 1969). For a translation of the available writings of Empedocles, see The Fragments of Empedocles, trans. William Ellery Leonard (1908; rpt. La Salle, Ill.: Open Court Pub., 1973).

In his prefatory essay to Lambridis' study, Marshall McLuhan notes that Empedocles is unique among the ancients for sensing a gap between what he could conceive and what he could express (Marshall McLuhan, "Empedocles and T.S. Eliot," prefatory essay in Empedocles, pp. vi-xv). It is Empedocles' concern for the limitations of expression, as well as his vision of a constantly shifting yet cyclical reality, which makes this ancient thinker profoundly modern.

²¹ JR contains a false reference to Empedocles as the possible origin of a Greek inscription over the door of JR's school (20, 45). The inscription is meaningless, but its position in the book is significant, as it precedes Gibbs' attempted classroom lecture on entropy and order. He says, "Order is simply a thin, perilous condition we try to impose on the basic reality of chaos..." (20).

²² Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 235.

²³ JR jiggles his feet (31) and wedges them into seat backs (632, 636). Bast struggles, "fighting a foot" which is his own (139).

²⁴ For further examples of Gibbs' offensive feet, see JR, pp. 187, 227, 248, 476.

²⁵ Such an ending would defy verbal description since it would involve the total disintegration of communication. This pattern of physical degeneration and communication breakdown is built into JR's structure.

²⁶ As has been stated, Gaddis does not so much abhor the existing power structures of capitalism as he deplores the threat of anarchy and an attendant loss of order and value.

²⁷ For an archetypal analysis of The Ring, see Robert Donington, Wagner's "Ring" and its Symbols (1963; rpt. London: Faber and Faber, 1976).

²⁸ Arthur Symons, "The Ideas of Richard Wagner," in Studies in Seven Arts (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1925), p. 172.

²⁹Symons, "The Ideas of Richard Wagner," p. 172.

³⁰Symons; p. 173.

³¹Symons, p. 173.

³²The extension of one chord to obsessive lengths has been called "endless melody," and was the expression of Wagner's idea that the orchestra should be an equal part of the opera and should express dramatic themes (leitmotifs) so as to do away with the necessity of "recitatives." See Harold G. Schonberg, The Lives of The Great Composers (New York: Norton, 1970), p. 27. It is possible that Gaddis intended Edward Bast to be, himself, a parody of Wagner. In his work on The Ring, Robert Donington cites evidence from Newman's biography of Wagner to show that the composer claimed to find everyday life difficult (Ernest Newman, Richard Wagner, Vol. I [London, 1933], p. 398, cited in Donington, Wagner's "Ring" and its Symbols, p. 301). Donington also claims that Wagner was thought to question his own legitimacy (Donington, p. 132). In his concern over his background and in his struggles with the mechanics of everyday life, Bast may parody Wagner's existence.

³³Not only does JR's role parody Alberich's, but there are a number of passages in JR which may be allusions to Alberich's speeches in Wagner's poem. For example, on the fateful stock-buying trip to Manhattan, JR goggles at a lewd movie billboard: "--Hey! Women wrestling in a tub of eels hey" (JR, 122). In the English translation of Wagner's poem, Alberich responds to the Rhinemaidens' rejection: "Get eels for your lovers, / if you find my skin foul" (Richard Wagner, The Ring of the Nibelung, trans. Stewart Robb [New York: E.P. Dutton, 1960], p. 8): In making JR a clumsy, disheveled child, constantly in need of a handkerchief, Gaddis may have been parodying Alberich's actions in the opening section of The Rhinegold when he exclaims: "I slide and slip! / My hands and my feet / cannot find any place / that is good to support me. / Muggy dampness / fills up my nostrils. / Accursed sneezing" (Wagner, The Ring of the Nibelung, p. 6): Like Alberich, JR manages to collect around him a number of improbable individuals who, like the Nibelungs, will help the child amass his corporate gold.

³⁴In the lavatory of a Wall Street office building, JR overhears the corporate gossip which sets him on the road to wealth (JR, 108-09). Throughout the novel, Gaddis indicates that the rules of moneymaking are "child's play." The trickster, Loge, tells Wotan the same thing as the gods plot to retrieve the ring from Alberich (Wagner, The Ring of the Nibelung, p. 31).

³⁵Edward Bast brandishes an empty beer can in a parody of Siegmund's handling of the magic sword (JR, pp. 66-72; cf. Wagner, The Ring, p. 94). Bast, like Siegfried, has never known his mother (JR, pp. 10-12; cf. Wagner, The Ring, 167-68). Gibbs

may be parodying Siegfried's wearing of the Tarnhelm (The Ring, p. 292) when he suddenly changes identities by switching into foreign languages, presumably in order to avoid direct communication with the world (cf. JR, p. 189). In his self-deprecating speeches to Joubert, Gibbs sounds like a plaintive Siegmund who says to Sieglinda: "Misfortune hunts me / in all my fleeings./ Misfortune dogs me / in all my doings./ May all this keep from you far! / Now must I take my leave" (The Ring, p. 78). Gibbs, a much less optimistic hero than his Wagnerian counterpart, leaves Joubert because he distrusts life and love.

³⁶ Wagner's Erda predicts doom for Wotan if he does not give up the ring (The Ring, p. 64). While Wotan takes her word seriously, none of JR's corporate Wotans solicit such prophecies, and Erda's profane predictions go largely unheard amid the chaos of the 96th St. apartment, with its Rhine of perpetually flowing faucets.

³⁷ In addition to the association between Eigen's name and its German meaning, "odd," it is possible that the name alludes to Wagner's character, Hagen, Alberich's son. Like Hagen, in The Twilight of the Gods, Eigen guards the 96th St. "household" while the other Siegfried-characters are gone. Like Alberich's son, Eigen turns against his former comrades in order to obtain financial security.

³⁸ Like Siegfried and Mime, Bast and JR seem to have no basis for friendship. They carp and bicker; however, JR continually reminds Bast of how much he, JR, is aiding the composer by giving him a job and a place to work. In his persistent belief that he is "helping out" Bast, JR is a parody of Mime (The Ring, pp. 162-64).

³⁹ An absurd, anti-heroic figure, diCephalis carries a child's umbrella in what may be a parody of Wagner's sword-wielding heroes (JR, pp. 21, 52). Dan diCephalis' wife is another parody of a gold-hungry Rhinemaiden (cf. Ch. iii). The Bast sisters also allude to the "gold" in the opening passages of the novel. In their concern for the teachings of "father," they echo Wagner's Rhinemaidens, who fear the approach of Alberich as something "father" warned them would be a threat to the gold (The Ring, pp. 5, 13; cf. JR, pp. 3-16).

⁴⁰ For discussion of Wagner's "endless melody," see note 32.

⁴¹ In addition to the imagery of light and the direct references to torrents of water, particularly in the 96th St. apartment, the image of the Bast's crippled apple trees (JR, p. 17) may be a parody of Freia's golden apples which are destined to wither after she has been kidnapped (The Ring, pp. 34-5).

⁴²Donington describes the impact of the opening chord of The Rhinegold thus: "We become increasingly aware of the modulation which is not happening. A sense of timelessness sets in" (Donington, Wagner's "Ring" and its Symbols, p. 35).

⁴³Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," in The Turner Thesis: Concerning the Role of the Frontier in American History, ed. George Rogers Taylor, 3rd edition (Toronto: D.C. Heath and Co., 1972), p. 4.

⁴⁴The "legend of the second chance" is noted by R.W.B. Lewis as persisting in such modern novels as The Great Gatsby, The American Adam (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), p. 197.

⁴⁵Some examples of novels in which literature is a central issue and a source of parody are: John Barth, Chimera, Lost in the Funhouse, and Letters; Donald Barthelme, The Dead Father; and Vladimir Nabokov, Pale Fire.

⁴⁶Kenneth Burke, A Grammar of Motives (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1945), pp. 108-117. On the same theme but in a different context, Graves writes: "Money, ceasing to be a practical means of exchanging goods and services, has achieved irresponsible divinity in the Gentile world" (The White Goddess, p. 475).

⁴⁷Tony Tanner notes the application of Wiener's study to the novels of Pynchon and their patterns of uniformity and increasing inanimateness (Tanner, City of Words, pp. 144-55). In addition to the similarities between Wiener's and Gaddis' thought, mentioned in the text; it is possible to find a number of parallels and direct references which link Gaddis' treatment of modern culture and Wiener's critique of communications and society. Both Wiener and Gaddis consider speech as, in Wiener's words, "the greatest interest and most distinctive achievement of man" (Norbert Wiener, The Human Use of Human Beings (New York: Avon, 1950), p. 116). In addition to his analysis of the chaotic element in communication, Wiener notes the social implications of entropy, particularly in law. Like Wiener (Wiener, pp. 143-152), Gaddis dramatizes the way legal language tends to confuse judgement. Throughout JR, lawyers practise obfuscation in order to control legal proceedings. Wiener and Gaddis both refer to the way the American legal system has violated the rights of entire groups, such as the American Indians (Wiener, pp. 148-49; cf. JR, pp. 399, 520-21, 579, 617).

Wiener and Gaddis see the fate of communications in America as located in its commodity value. This has particularly grim implications for the future of art (Wiener, pp. 153-63). However, faced with a world of increasing indeterminacy and dwindling meaning, Wiener still maintains that faith is necessary for survival. Because, according to Wiener, the universe is not subject

to law, it is ultimately mysterious. In the face of this mystery, Wiener chooses to reject a Manichean view and to accept a more benign principle of uncertainty (Wiener, 262-63). Gaddis is by no means as demonstrative in his faith, although, as this thesis shows, his implicit faith in art is a kind of humanistic affirmation.

In addition to a general similarity in outlook, Wiener's work and that of Gaddis have a number of direct correspondences. Gaddis refers to Wiener outright (JR, p. 403) and names his main character in a probable allusion to Willard Gibbs. Wiener explains the scientist's unique contribution as follows: "Gibbs' innovation was to consider not one world, but all the worlds which are possible answers to a limited set of questions concerning our environment" (Wiener, p. 20). Jack Gibbs echoes the scientist when he misquotes a Hart Crane poem by saying "there is a world dimensional" (my emphasis) instead of using the definite article, a slip which Eigen notices and mentions (JR, p. 621). Other direct connections between Gaddis and Wiener include their mention of possible ominous outgrowths of the communications industry, such as the transport of human life through space by means of its transformation into bits of information (JR, 645; Wiener, 139). Perhaps most significant for this study is the mention each writer makes of mechanization in art as typified by the player piano (Wiener, p. 251; for the importance of this invention in Gaddis' earlier work see Ch. i, note 42).

⁴⁸Norbert Wiener, The Human Use of Human Beings, pp. 20-21.

⁴⁹For other references to clocks attempting to "keep" time see JR, pp. 31, 51, 57, 164, 333, 552.

⁵⁰Energy "loss" may be a misleading term, since a closed system does not so much lose energy as exhibit a redistribution of energy (or information, in a communications system) with a resulting increase in sameness (redundancy) or chaos (randomness) which are each measurements of entropy.

⁵¹Wiener's discussion of these basic aspects of language is relevant to JR (Wiener, pp. 107-110).

⁵²Although Freud is perhaps the most obvious source of the analysis of the relation between money and excrement, the image is sufficiently predominant that Eisenstein, writing of the connection between color and meaning, states: "Gold, a symbol of highest value, also serves as a popular metaphor signifying--filth. This is true not only in a general way...but in the Russian language which contains the term 'zolotar' ('zoloto,' the root-gold), having the specific meaning of 'cess-pool cleaner'" (Eisenstein, The Film Sense, p. 127).

⁵³Gibbs speaks of the "Turschluss generation," as exhibiting a "paralysis of will" (492). His German word means,

literally, "door close" and implies the closing of options. The novel's motif of open and shut doors carries this idea to a symbolic level.

⁵⁴For Gaddis' ideas on the player piano, see Chapter i, note 42. Norbert Wiener writes of the dubious value of this piece of American "know-how" as follows:

Our papers have been making a great deal of American "know-how" ever since we had the misfortune to discover the atomic bomb. There is one quality more important than "know-how" and we cannot accuse the United States of any undue amount of it. This is "know-what" by which we determine not only how to accomplish our purposes, but what our purposes are to be. I can distinguish between the two by an example. Some years ago, a prominent American engineer bought an expensive player-piano. It became clear after a week or two that this purchase did not correspond to any particular interest in the music played by the piano but rather in the overwhelming interest in the piano mechanism. For this gentleman, the player-piano was not a means of producing music, but a means of giving the inventor the chance of showing how skillful he was at overcoming certain difficulties in the production of music. This is an estimable attitude in a second-year high-school student. How estimable it is in one of those on whom the whole cultural future of the country depends, I leave to the reader. (Wiener, The Human Use of Human Beings, pp. 250-51.)

⁵⁵Banning expresses something similar to this idea in the following: "Gaddis has, in JR, overcome the ambiguity of language not, as some writers would, through parody but by making such discourse the object (or constituent) of his discourse." Charles Leslie Banning, "William Gaddis' JR; The Organization of Chaos and the Chaos of Organization," Paunch, No. 42-43 (Dec., 1975), 163.

CONCLUSION

In The Recognitions and JR, Gaddis attempts to create artistic structures which not only express ideas about life and art but which are themselves the focus of the novels. In the first work, Gaddis hints at his artistic purpose by alluding to Praxiteles and the "origin of design" which all great art strove to "recognize" through its form.¹ In his notes for The Recognitions, Gaddis makes it a stated purpose to search out and imply a "pattern" and its "necessity" in the contingency of modern experience.² For his characters, as for the reader, Gaddis creates a web of illusory patterns, linked by chance but with an apparent unity. In JR especially, order, by its very contingency, seems disordered and life-like, but, like the work of Praxiteles, more harmonious than real life could ever be. E.H. Gombrich describes the sculpture of Praxiteles in a way which is analogous to what has been said here concerning Gaddis' structuring of The Recognitions and JR:

...Praxiteles and the other Greek artists achieved this [ideal] beauty through knowledge. There is no living body quite as symmetrical, well-built and beautiful as those of the Greek statues....The old types [of sculpture] had begun to move and breathe under the hands of the skillful sculptor, and they stand before us like real human beings, and yet as beings from a different, a better world....³

The Recognitions and JR give the impression of life-like experience transmitted through dialogue and the contingencies

of action. Characters tend to be one-dimensional, in the service of satire. Hence, they appear as beings from a worse rather than a better world. In The Recognitions, characterization dramatizes Gaddis' argument and fills out the novel's patterns of meaning. Ultimately, it is these patterns, not the characters, into which Gaddis has breathed life. Romantic excursions into personal destiny--chiefly concerning the main character, Wyatt--create structural and thematic dissonance. The novel's focus oscillates between the complex depiction of Wyatt's personal struggle and the surrealist background of primarily static, one-dimensional characterization. The resulting dissonance creates a question as to whether Wyatt's characterization implies the potential of art and love or the admission of artistic and human alienation. The novel's double focus on character and structure leaves the question unresolved. Gaddis, however, interjects an intrusive narrative voice as a means of allowing the novel to imply the championing of art. This attempt at resolution notwithstanding, The Recognitions is a difficult work to interpret. The thematic ambiguity discussed previously is compounded by stylistic inconsistency, as the novel waivers in its concern with arcane artistic matters as well as with social satire. This inconsistency may indicate authorial uncertainty as to whether the novel should record or provide an alternative to worldly experience.

In contrast to The Recognitions, JR gives the impression of a more structurally integrated, even seamless, work. Again, the reference to the ordered realism of classical Greek sculpture

is applicable: The thematic dissonance of The Recognitions is no closer to being resolved in JR: life proves a grave threat to art and the artist. However, JR transcends these conflicts and ambiguities through a structure which seems to be a disordered ordering which challenges reality. It is through JR's verisimilar dialogue, rather than its characterization, that the novel approaches the vitality which Gombrich describes in Greek sculpture. JR's form gives the impression of flux rather than the static collage of The Recognitions. The character, Gibbs, expresses a view applicable to the structuring of JR when he says, "Order is simply a thin perilous condition we try to impose on the basic reality of chaos" (JR, 20).

Works of such structural virtuosity as The Recognitions and JR tend to provoke questions as to the social significance of the contemporary novel.⁴ In particular, it may be asked whether such works have anything to say about the world outside the complex confines of their own forms. This thesis has attempted to show that through satire, with its tenacious stake in life, Gaddis' novels, especially JR, unite artistic and social concerns. The Recognitions and JR satirize the art world while, at the same time, the moral perspectives at the center of their satire imply respect for art and the artistic consciousness.

As satires, Gaddis' novels contain social criticism which elevates their purpose above the purely formal. However, as products of formal innovation, these works also make their aesthetic and moral points by turning in on their own structures. The structural dissonances of The Recognitions serve to demonstrate

the novel's artistic arguments. In JR, the integration of subject matter and structure produces a more successfully reflexive work which is also a more effective vehicle of social criticism than is the first novel. Nonetheless, JR, like The Recognitions, is a difficult novel which may intimidate the reader by its bulk. It is ironic that JR's style, largely composed of everyday speech patterns, should make the novel both difficult reading and a document of its times. Gaddis' focus on the means of communication--language--as both the subject matter and the structure of JR insures that the work is self-referring and world-referring. In attempting to eliminate the narrator who, in The Recognitions, served as the primary moral focus, Gaddis has not reduced JR to an hermetic work of experimentation. Rather, he has allowed the work to speak for itself, as it were, and, in the process, to demonstrate the vitality and necessity of art.

NOTES

¹For discussion of the references to Praxiteles, see Chapter ii, notes 27 and 28.

²For this citation from Gaddis' notes, see Chapter iv, note 3.

³E.H. Gombrich, The Story of Art, 13th ed. (Oxford: Phaidon Press, 1972), pp. 69-71.

⁴For evidence of critical skepticism about the social relevance of the contemporary novel see Chapter i, note 24.

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