learned wit, D. W. Jefferson noted, "Fewer people need to go to law today, so we are all less legally minded; [. . .] The community has benefited from these reforms, but a theme for wit has been lost." Gaddis has recovered this theme for our litigious society by means of his unmatched gift for parody, rendering an opinion in a brilliant display of legal discourse complete with citations and spacious learning. (It is not surprising that, asked what field he would have entered had he not become a writer, Gaddis answered, "The law.".) The orotund periods and Olympian ironies of Judge Crease's language do not conceal a crusty outlook of the sort one expects from Gaddis's older protagonists. Crease takes a dim view of Szyrk's postmodernist work, for example—his references to Shakespeare, Donatello, and Eliot (among others) define his artistic sensibility—and he passes judgment on self-referential art, denigrating the theory that in having become self-referential art is in itself theory without which it has no more substance than Sir Arthur Eddington's famous step "on a swarm of flies," here present in further exhibits by plaintiff drawn from prestigious art publications and highly esteemed critics in the lay press, where they make their livings, recommending his sculptural creation in terms of slope, tangent, acceleration, force, energy, and similar abstract extravagancies serving only a corresponding self-referential confrontation of language with language and thereby, in reducing language itself to theory, rendering it a mere plaything, which exhibits the court finds frivolous. (46-47)

But at the same time holding "the conviction that risk of ridicule, of attracting defamatory attentions from his colleagues and even raucous demonstrations by an outraged public have ever been and remain the foreseeable lot of the serious artist" (49-50), Crease gives the back of his hand to critics and complainants alike and finds in favor of the plaintiff with one of the most eloquent defenses of venturesome art in our time. In so doing, the learned judge also gives conclusive evidence, if more were needed, of the inquisitorial art of William Gaddis.

Notes and References

Chapter One

4. The Recognitions (1955; reprint, New York: Penguin, 1985), 240; hereafter cited in the text, abbreviated R when necessary. Because Gaddis uses ellipses extensively, my ellipses are bracketed; for consistency, I follow this practice in all cited material.
5. Interview with Miriam Berkley, 17 June 1983. A condensed version of this interview was published in Publishers Weekly, 12 July 1985, 56-57, but all of my quotations are from the unedited transcript, with a few corrections supplied by Gaddis.
16. Berkley interview.
18. Anselm twice refers to the critic in the green wool shirt as a "three-time psychoanalyst" (R 183, 453). In Finnegans Wake, Yawn boasts, "I can psoakoonaloose myself any time I want" (New York: Viking, 1939), 522.
23. Letter dated 28 February 1961; the quotation from Lowry that follows is from an unpublished letter to Markson dated 22 February 1957.
24. "The Rush for Second Place," Harper's, April 1981, 32. This essay, based on his Bard lectures, is the source for most of the titles that follow.
27. Postcard to me postmarked 6 August 1982.
31. Logan and Mirkowicz interview.

Chapter Two
3. Documentation of Gaddis's use of all these sources can be found in Steven Moore, Reader's Guide to William Gaddis's "The Recognitions" (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982).
9. Ibid., 261. When Wyatt examines the dead Recktall Brown he seizes the exposed ankle, seeking a pulse, and mutters, "Yes, there's where they nailed the wren, there's where they nailed up..." (683). "He was so kind and fatherly" Wyatt said earlier with drunken sentimentality (376), indicating Brown too acts in Wyatt's Oedipal drama.
11. Jung, Integration, 34.

17. Heracles is "waving a piece of bread" when Gwyon comes for him—recalling the Eucharist—and the description of Heracles's burial place (54–55) is taken from the Gospels (Matt. 27:60, Mark 16:4). Wyatt feels nails are being driven into his feet when he attempts to walk, recalling the Crucifixion itself.

18. The source of Aunt May's harangue is Catholic apologist Denis de Rougemont's The Devil's Share, trans. Haakon Chevalier (New York: Pantheon, 1944), 29, 38. Her comments, then, cannot be dismissed as simply the personal outrage of a soured Calvinist. The injunctions against pictorial art in Hebrew and Moslem traditions spring from the same belief that creation is a divine perogative.


20. In his study The Heretics, Walter Nigg writes: "In his struggle against the declining morality of Roman Christendom, Pelagius made the significant observation that the degeneration could not be ascribed to the decay of the Empire, which at that time was undergoing its last agony. Moral decline, Pelagius held, was indirectly fostered by the doctrine which stressed man's redemption through Christ too exclusively and ignored man's own efforts" (trans. Richard and Clara Winston [New York: Knopf, 1962], 133–34).


22. Jung, Integration, 73, 106.


26. Wyatt/Stephen tells Ludy, "They're waiting for me now," presumably referring to Pastora and the child she's expecting. "—Her earrings, he said, —that's where these are for" (900; cf. the child in the epigraph to this chapter). See Koenig for Gaddis's original intentions regarding a daughter (Kuehl and Moore, In Recognition, 24–25), and cf. R 127 for Wyatt's long-standing interest in a daughter.

27. Both Latin forms are given in the Oxford Dictionary of Quotations. Gaddis's probable source. His other borrowings from the ODQ are noted in Steven Moore, "Additional Sources for William Gaddis's The Recognitions,"

3. This is actually from a review of Carpenter's God, which is written in the same style as J. R., but it echoes similar complaints made of the second novel: Bruce Allen, "Gaddis's Dense Satire of Greed Is Often Amusing, Mostly Confusing," Christian Science Monitor, 17 September 1985, 26.


8. If the chronology I once constructed for J. R. were valid, the first third of the novel would occupy about two weeks, the following thirds about a week each: see my "Chronological Difficulties in the Novels of William Gaddis," Critique 22, no. 1 (1980):88-89. Although I now see that this time frame is too brief—Gaddis later wrote me "the novel's technique demanded compressing time so, I was afraid I'd be called on it but no one did" (1 June 1986)—the proportions are about right: Gaddis apparently intended the first third to occupy a month or so, the second and third a few weeks each. Closer attention to other details in the novel suggests it takes place in the fall of 1972—not 1974, as in my article—though the absence of any reference to the presidential election that year makes even this date suspect.


10. Here as elsewhere (289, 585), Gibbs quotes from Benjamin Jowett's translation of Aristotle's Politics.


17. Ibid., 84.


25. Norman O. Brown, Life Against Death: The Psychoanalytic Meaning of History (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1959), 238. Brown is summarizing Marx's Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844, as they are now called.

26. Gaddis shows his contempt for Skinner's "infantile ideas" (485) by dividing his name between the sleazy film producer B. F. Leva—whose initials Gibbs spells out (582)—and the philandering book salesman Skinner, subject of an obscene limerick (677).


Chapter Six

1. Bard College Bulletin. November 1984. Gaddis originally wrote two additional sentences: "Keeping the questions open, as I did at Bard, is a difficult way to teach; it's not like teaching mathematics. This puts a great deal of responsibility directly on the teacher's shoulders."


5. The only anachronism in the novel's time scheme is the headline Liz notes on p. 28, which appeared on the front page of the New York Times, 25 July 1980.


7. Fiedler, Love and Death, 131.

8. Ibid., 133.


10. Ozick, rev. of Carpenter's Gothic, 18. Cf. Robinson Jeffers's use of organic decay to describe America's decline in his poem "Shine, Perishing Republic" (1924), which Gaddis read while working on Carpenter's Gothic. He briefly considered using a phrase from this poem, "thickening to empire," as

hands and feet in the water make the deep, deep sea keep you up. So if you ask me—how to be? [...] I will tell you! [...] In the destructive element immerse" (chap. 20).


24. Shorn of its curlicues, the Greek phrase on p. 20 reads "FROM EACH ACCORD..."—from Marx's famous formulation in Critique of the Gotha Program (1875): "From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs."


the title for his third novel. (All the alternate titles I mention come from a conversation we had in August 1984.)


14. The satistics are Gaddis's. see "The Rush for Second Place," 37.


18. In "Tradition and the Individual Talent," Eliot writes: "Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality. But, of course, only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things" (Selected Prose, 43).

19. James Perrin Warren puts it differently: "The names record the attitudes of the names: Billy needs a sister locked in the childhood he has never escaped; Paul needs a secretary; McCandless needs an adulteress; and Elizabeth needs an Elizabeth" (review of Carpenter's Gothic, Southern Humanities Review 21 [Spring 1987]:192).

20. Richard Toney, review of Carpenter's Gothic, San Francisco Review of Books, Fall/Winter 1985, 8. I should point out that this review and his earlier one in the same journal on J R (February 1976, 12-13) are otherwise quite insightful.


Chapter Seven


6. The "attractive girl with the Boston voice" who recommends benny (R 651, 640) took her lines from Burntough's Mary (Junky [1953; reprint, New York: Penguin, 1977], 14), who was based on a six-foot redhead named Vicki Russell—not from Boston but, like Liz, from Grosse Pointe.

7. Markson writes: "There is no question in my mind that The Recognitions is the monumental American novel of the century. And, having read it twice when it came out, and then again perhaps five years later, I'd find it a miracle if I hadn't been influenced. Certainly in writing my novel Going Down, not only with a good deal of the intellectual materials I felt licensed to use, but also in the way I used them, I found Gaddis inescapable. I mean quite literally in what I allowed my central character to 'know,' for instance. But probably 'inescapable' is the wrong word, since I believed the influence to be liberating more than anything else" (letter to me dated 11 January 1988).


13. See chap. 1, n. 35 above; hereafter cited in the text. The new novel will be called The Last Act and "will progress largely through lawsuits, legal opinions, directly or indirectly interweaving a host of characters," according to Gaddis's editor; see "World Rights to Gaddis's Next Novel Bought by S & S," Publishers Weekly, 19 February 1988, 43.


15. Hills, "Don't Everybody," 100. When two friends and I visited Gaddis in May 1986, we found him researching torts involving negligence and admiring the "elegance" of someone's opinion. He was looking forward to the arrival of eighty volumes of American Jurisprudence a legal admirer was sending him, though he would have preferred, he said, the Corpus Juris Civile.