DISMISSING CHARGES: A STUDY OF THE RECEPTION OF WILLIAM GADDIS'S A FROLIC OF HIS OWN

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Dismissing Charges: A Study of the Reception of William Gaddis's A Frolic of His Own

by

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Abstract

This thesis explores the reception of William Gaddis's latest novel, A Frolic of His Own (1994), and presents a reading of the novel that is more sympathetic than most tendered to date. By examining the reception of this work, I reveal several patterns of negative criticism that have emerged. Gaddis's novel makes use of innovative narrative techniques in his portrait of American postmodern society. The participatory role of the reader is essential here as Gaddis's fiction tends to be both complex and erudite.

Chapter One briefly explains the theory of reception put forth by Hans Robert Jauss in his essay "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory." I apply the essential tenets of Jauss's Reception Theory to the many reviews of A Frolic of His Own. The examination of the popular reception of Gaddis's work better enables me to contend with its complexities.

Chapter Two studies the presence of indeterminacy in the novel. I address the notion of mimesis and the representation of reality in literature in addition to the reader's role in postulating real-world referentiality. My concern here is not to create a more complex text than that suggested by the majority of the novel's reviewers, but merely to demonstrate the utility of ambiguity to the reader of this rich, innovative fiction.

Chapter Three addresses allusion, a second readerly challenge left virtually unexamined by the reviewers of A Frolic of His Own. By exploring Gaddis's erudite and often obscure references and

citations, I develop a strong connection between allusion and humour in the novel. Gaddis's employment of cultural, historical, and literary allusion also adds to the realism of his text.

This analysis of the novel ultimately reveals both Gaddis's realistic portrayal of late-twentieth-century American society and his reliance upon readerly participation in fiction. Finally, Gaddis's novel calls upon each reader to create a personal fiction. Recognition of gaps left by indeterminacies and allusions can only enhance the myriad hermeneutic possibilities. The insights derived from the reader's collaboration with the text can then be employed in the reader's interactions with his/her own world.

Table of Contents

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Introduction

The recipient of the *National Book Award* on two separate occasions, William Gaddis is no stranger to the American literary community. His novels are rich in erudition and provide countless perspectives to engage the reader. The intertextuality in The Recognitions[1] alone provides ample material for a graduate course or, as manifest in the work of Steven Moore, a comprehensive book.[2] Though Gaddis has amassed an assortment of awards and fellowships over the years, his reputation has not flourished.[3] As Malcolm Jones Jr. notes, "Time has never been kind to the novelist William Gaddis" (52).

A less than prolific writer, William Gaddis has not enjoyed popular acclaim despite four well-crafted novels in forty years. His first novel, The Recognitions (1955), was the topic of much criticism as evident in Fire the Bastards, the quasi-reception study of the novel by Jack Green. For many reasons, including unsatisfactory advertising by the publishers, the novel remained in obscurity until the late 1970's. Gaddis's second novel, J R (1975), won the *National Book Award* indicating critical acclaim from his peers, but doing "little to promote sales or shelf

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[1]William Gaddis. The Recognitions. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1955. New York: Penguin, 1993. I cite from the Penguin edition here.

[2]Steven Moore. A Reader's Guide to William Gaddis's *The Recognitions*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1982.

[3]Gaddis has been awarded the *MacArthur Foundation Fellowship* (1982) and the *Lannan Award* (1993) in addition to the *National Book Award* (1975, 1994).

recognition" (Birkerts 27).[4] Gaddis's obscurantism kept him from receiving the same widespread praise as some of his colleagues, e.g., Joseph Heller and E.L. Doctorow. Carpenter's Gothic (1985), Gaddis's third novel, though a great deal shorter than his first two offerings, seemed destined to be his most popular.[5] However, the author's attempt to make his work more accessible resulted in a novel described as "thin and deliberately superficial" (Rafferty 496).

With his latest novel, William Gaddis risks many of the same pitfalls. Gaddis's receipt of the 1994 *National Book Award* for A Frolic of His Own does not necessarily indicate the novel's potential for success as his second novel, J R, suffered much criticism after it was awarded the same prize.[6] The frequent identification of the novel as Gaddis's "most accessible" work raises the possibility that readers will find Frolic falls short of its mammoth predecessors (Birkerts 27; Dirda 10; Calve 39). In an effort to demonstrate the novel's literary and social significance, I will concern myself with the allusive nuances of Frolic and its mimetic import. Though an examination of the novel based on these essential elements may not change a reader's opinion of the work,

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[4]William Gaddis. J R. New York; Knopf, 1975. New York: Penguin, 1993. I cite from the Penguin edition here.

[5]William Gaddis. Carpenter's Gothic. New York: Viking, 1985. New York: Penguin, 1986. Hereafter shortened to Gothic. I cite from the Viking edition here.

[6]William Gaddis. A Frolic of His Own. New York: Poseidon P, 1994. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995. Hereafter shortened to Frolic. I cite from the Simon and Schuster edition here.

it should serve as a vehicle for the development of other readings not suggested or otherwise ignored by the novel's first audience.

In Chapter One, I examine the reception of Gaddis's Frolic by American academics and journalists. I first examine the importance of the reception of a literary work by subsequent audiences through references to Hans Robert Jauss's theory of *Rezeptionästhetik*. I concentrate specifically upon Jauss's "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory." I analyze the important facets of Jauss's theory, e.g., horizon of expectation and the tripartite vision of the history of literature, for the purpose of providing a framework for an examination of the reception of Frolic. Concentrating on the reviews of the first two editions of the novel, I discuss two particular patterns of reception. Keeping in mind traditional views of the novelistic genre and the role of the reader, I indicate and examine the diverse expectations of the novel's first audience. This exploration reveals the failure of the novel's initial reviewers to deal adequately with the novel's indeterminacy and allusion. By understanding these elements and how they contribute to the mimesis and humour of the novel, a more favourable reception of the novel becomes available.

In Chapter Two, I focus on Frolic's numerous ambiguities and indeterminacies. Although many reviewers deal with the structural difficulties of the novel, most fail to explain the ambiguities of content that are essential aspect of Gaddis's fiction. My intent here is not to make the novel more complicated for the reader, but merely to indicate that Gaddis demands the reader's constant

participation in the narrative. In my discussion of content, I focus on Gaddis's use of indeterminacy. My explanation of the ambiguities of Frolic emphasizes the mimetic function of literature. I use several critics, Erich Auerbach in particular, to explore Gaddis's portrayal of postmodern reality in his ambiguous text. Gaddis's decision to leave certain questions unanswered and situations unexplained, though confusing to readers, actually allows them to make their own decisions. Rather than act as a moral mentor, Gaddis presents a problem, namely the insanity of contemporary American culture, and summons the reader to recognize and deal with it.

Finally, Chapter Three considers Frolic's extensive allusivity. Excessive and obscure allusion is another timeless criticism of Gaddis's literature that the reader is compelled to confront. As with the novel's ambiguities, Frolic's countless references remain unexamined by its initial audience. The depth of Gaddis's erudition in The Recognitions is mirrored in his latest novel. In this chapter, I examine several definitions of allusion and use these definitions to pinpoint Gaddis's references to other sources. Allusions to cultural events, people, and issues are combined with extensive historical and literary references. Gaddis endeavours to expose the foibles of American mass culture in the 1980's and 1990's as he addresses major issues that have faced Americans since the Civil War. By focusing on the rift between high and low culture, Gaddis presents the reader with a realistic example of American values gone awry.

In my discussion of Gaddis's allusive technique, I focus on the humour created by his references. References to television shows and movies create a low-brow humour that most postmodern readers will indeed recognize. Historical and legal references aid in Gaddis's creation of pastiche in the form of his inserted texts, particularly the legal documents and Oscar Crease's Civil War play. Finally, I build on the insights of Elaine B. Safer, in particular, to show how the literary references in Frolic are used ironically. The allusions demonstrate that the Puritan work ethic and other traditional American values have been replaced in a consumer-based society. Postmodern America exhibits an increasingly hedonistic attitude. It is a society intent on making easy money with the help of the increased democracy and freedom offered by the American legal system. As Gaddis himself states, Frolic is a "trial of the American psyche" (qtd. in Swartz 2). By ironically referring to many traditions and national literatures, Gaddis humorously describes what American society has become.

Chapter One

Conflicting Impulses in Initial Reception

Critics of contemporary fiction cannot ignore the importance of a text's reception by its first audience. Though texts can, and often do, survive initial unfavourable receptions, it is significant to explore these receptions in order to distinguish the patterns that develop. There are various interpretations of reception and the reader's role in hermeneutics, but one of the most influential comes from German theorist Hans Robert Jauss. The works of Jauss are perplexing at points but they are widely influential among reader-response scholars. Jauss's *Rezeptionästhetik* or *reception aesthetics* is one of the several different reader-response theories to come out of Germany and the Konstanz School since the late 1960's. At the time, "Reaction to social, intellectual, and literary development in West Germany" resulted in the Konstanz School's attempt to reaffirm the reader's position in the field of hermeneutics (Holub xiii). In reaction to numerous influences on the discipline of literary history, Jauss tries to bring together the disparate schools of Russian Formalism, Marxism, phenomenology, and hermeneutics. His quasi-manifesto, "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory," is viewed as "the most significant document of German literary theory in the last few decades" (Holub 69).

Considering the relevance of Jauss's work for contemporary literary theory, it is appropriate to employ his theories in a reception analysis of a contemporary work of fiction -- William

Gaddis's Frolic. A little known, yet much praised novelist, Gaddis has seen mixed reviews for each of his four novels -- The Recognitions (1955), J R (1975), Gothic (1985), and Frolic (1994). A leading Gaddis scholar contends that "William Gaddis is in the paradoxical position of being one of the most highly regarded yet least read novelists in contemporary American literature" (Moore, William Gaddis vii). In this chapter my purpose is three-fold. First, I will examine the theories of reception put forth by Jauss in his essay "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory." I will look closely at the main elements of Jauss's work which will be helpful in the analysis of the reception of literature, both past and present. Next, I will examine common criticisms of Jauss's theories in an effort to suggest possible revisions and new perspectives to be taken. Finally, I will apply the theories to the reception of Gaddis's novel. I will choose a cross-section of reviews to expose patterns in the novel's reception. These patterns will reveal possible routes of further investigation for Frolic.

As with most theorists, Hans Robert Jauss has spent many years developing his theories. In fact, the tenets of his position are still being refined. Though Jauss's publications are diverse and his influence on hermeneutics considerable, a cross-section of his work can provide an ample background for a study of his notions regarding literature and its reception. An example of an early Jauss essay, "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory," is perhaps the closest thing we find to a manifesto in the corpus

of Jauss's work (de Man x). From this work alone, we can extract a functional theory of reception aesthetics that is readily applicable.

In "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory," Jauss takes up the plight of the faltering genre of literary history and attempts to create a new approach to it. Jauss recognizes that the popularity of literary history has steadily dwindled in the past century. He playfully posits that

> literary histories are still to be found only, if at all, on the bookshelves of the educated bourgeoisie who for the most part opens them, lacking a more appropriate literary dictionary, to answer literary quiz questions. (3)

Jauss attributes this lack of popularity to a misunderstanding of the relationship between literature and history. A focus on genre, biography, and chronological order, according to Jauss, has led literary history into "disrepute" (3).

In his quest to rescue literary history, Jauss arrives at an important conclusion. For him, literary history is inherently dialectical. Jauss believes that "the thread from the past appearance to the present experience of literature, which historicism has cut," must be refastened (19). The link between present and past must be accentuated. Jauss combines the one-sided views of Marxism and Russian Formalism, taking the best characteristics of each. He borrows a concern for "the general process of history" from the Marxist view and a concern for linguistics and aesthetics from the Russian Formalists (18). The

combination of these beliefs leads Jauss in search of a new paradigm based on three major concepts and seven theses.

The first major concept, advanced by Jauss in his first thesis, is the notion of reception and its importance to literature. Jauss claims:

> A renewal of literary history demands the removal of the prejudices of historical objectivism and the grounding of the traditional aesthetics of production and representation in an aesthetics of perception and influence. The historicity of literature rests not on an organization of "literary facts" that is established *post festum*, but rather on the preceding experience of the literary work by its readers. (20)

Reception is a continuing process involving "the receptive reader, the reflective critic, and the author in his continuing productivity" (21). For Jauss, the combined reception of a work is just as important as its production and the facts it contains. Robert Holub, a noted scholar of reception theory, acknowledges the insight of Jauss's recognition that the historical significance of literature "is not established by qualities of the work or by the genius of the author but by the chain of reception from generation to generation" (15).

The second major concept of Jauss's discourse is the subject of discussion for his next three theses. Jauss examines the "horizon of expectation" of literature in terms of the reader and the text (22). Jauss borrows the term *horizon* from Gadamer, Heidegger, and Husserl -- all of whom offer unique perspectives on

its nature and importance. The combination of *horizon* with *expectation* is also borrowed for it is found in the work of such diverse thinkers as Karl Popper, Karl Mannhein, and E.H. Gombrich (Holub 59). Though these ideas are not initially formulated by Jauss, they are new to reception theory.

Jauss's horizon of expectation addresses the prejudices that surround a text and that are augmented by the experiences and preconceptions each reader brings to that text at a specific time. Jauss concludes that one can measure the expectations of each group of readers and, in time, compare these measurements to the changing hermeneutical views of contemporary readers. Jauss even suggests ways of objectifying these horizons. He proposes three methods of accomplishing this goal:

> first, through familiar norms or the immanent poetics of the genre; second, through the implicit relationships to familiar works of the literary-historical surroundings; and third, through the opposition between fiction and reality, between the poetic and the practical function of language, which is always available to the reflective reader during the reading as a possibility of comparison. (24)

Though each reader may have different experiences and psychological disposition, one can generalize expectations with the help of prevailing trends in genre and literature. By utilizing these three methods of objectification, Jauss maintains that theorists can make generalizations about reception at many different levels.

The horizon of expectation surrounding a work of literature

can also determine the quality of a given text. By determining the distance between expectation and work, Jauss believes an evaluation can take place. He posits:

> The distance between the horizon of expectations and the work, between the familiarity of previous aesthetic experience and the "horizontal change" demanded by the reception of the new work, determines the artistic character of a literary work, according to an aesthetics of reception: to the degree that this distance decreases, and no turn toward the horizon of yet unknown experience is demanded of the receiving consciousness, the closer the work comes to the sphere of "culinary" or entertainment art. (25)

A "good" literary work pushes the envelope of contemporary expectation. In several instances, works of literature surpass any prevailing expectation, and therefore take time before they can be accepted. These works "break through the familiar horizon of literary expectations so completely that an audience can only gradually develop for them" (26). This is a familiar phenomenon to the reception of the innovative literature of any period. Gustave Flaubert's Madame Bovary, James Joyce's Ulysses, William Burroughs's Naked Lunch, and Thomas Pynchon's Gravity's Rainbow are all examples of texts that developed an audience over time.

A reconstruction of the horizon of expectations surrounding a text can tell many things about the readers and the society of the time. By reconstructing an initial reception one can determine the horizon of expectation of the first audience and locate the

"hermeneutic difference" between present and past audiences (Jauss 28). Social constructs and influences can all be detected by examining these expectations. Jauss's rehabilitation of literary history hinges on this mediation between past and present.

The final three theses of Jauss's work are based on a tripartite vision of the history of literature. Rather than endorsing the common linear view, Jauss calls for a new vision. He writes:

> This project must consider the historicity of literature in a threefold manner: diachronically in the interrelationships of the reception of literary works . . . synchronically in the frame of reference of literature of the same moment, as well as in the sequence of such frames, and finally the relationship of the immanent literary development to the general process of history. (32)

A text must be studied in terms of how it compares with other texts before, during, and after its publication. It is not sufficient to study a text in terms of only one of these methods. A true understanding can only come from a multi-faceted analysis. The reader constantly "concretizes" hermeneutic gaps by examining all these relationships.[1] Some readers may fill more gaps than others depending upon the information that each reader possesses. It is important to remember that:

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[1]Jauss borrows this term from Roman Ingarden's The Cognition of the Literary Work of Art. Jauss's Konstanz colleague, Wolfgang Iser, explores in detail the function of textual "gaps" in literary works in his The Act of Reading.

> Reading is not a straightforward linear movement, a merely cumulative affair: our initial speculations generate a frame of reference within which to interpret what comes next, but what comes next may retrospectively transform our original understanding, highlighting some features of it and backgrounding others . . . each sentence opens up a horizon which is confirmed, challenged or undermined by the text. (Eagleton 77)

Just as reading a sentence can change our expectations for the rest of the text, reading a new text can change our expectations of other texts -- past and present. Jauss recognizes that the field of literary hermeneutics is constantly changing. New interpretations of new texts can affect obsolete interpretations of old texts.

In his introduction to Jauss's Toward an Aesthetic of Reception, Paul de Man concedes the importance of Jauss's theories for the study of literature and literary theory. De Man points out that "The lack of compatibility between literary theory and practice that plagues the study of literature everywhere . . . seems to be on the way to being overcome by a judicious aesthetics of reception" (xv).[2] Jauss's ideas and theories seem all-inclusive, yet, there remain several discrepancies between their ideal and practical application. Reception theory, and Jauss's theory in particular, is the subject of much debate among critics

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[2]Although de Man praises Jauss's work, he spends much of his later life engaged in a lengthy debate with Jauss over the irreconcilability of deconstruction and reception theory.

and theorists. Jauss has taken part in the debate by constantly reworking his theories. In order to arrive at an applicable theory of reception, therefore, some of the common criticisms must be addressed.

Jauss's reliance on the reader as the source of interpretation is problematic. According to de Man, many writers have "denied the efficiency of a theory of interpretation based on the public reception of a work of literature" (xv). At times, reception theory places excessive emphasis on the reader at the expense of adequate discussion of author or text. Also, Jauss is not able to present a practical method of psychological analysis in order to determine the prejudices of each reader. Henry Schmidt believes that Jauss "adheres to a concept of audience that fails to differentiate according to social standing, education, sex, reading preferences -- to name but a few of the many variables" (158-9). The focus on the often unidentified reader is one of many problems with Jauss's theories.

A second nebulous concept discussed by Jauss is *horizon of expectation*. Robert Holub tackles this problematic notion in his discussion of Jauss's theories. Holub writes:

> The trouble with Jauss's use of the term "horizon" is that it is so vaguely defined that it could include or exclude any previous sense of the word. In fact, nowhere does he delineate precisely what he means by it . . . Furthermore, the term is found in a variety of compound words or phrases. Jauss refers to a "horizon of experience," a "horizon of

> experience of life," a "horizon of structure," a "horizon of change," and a "material horizon of conditions." (59)

Jauss confuses many readers with his ambiguous terminology. He assumes that all readers will have a shared understanding of his meaning despite his vague rhetoric. How can the distance between horizon and text be measured if the reader is not able to understand the concept of horizon?

Jauss's assumption that all texts have a *measurable* influence upon society is another perplexing issue. This assumption presents a number of questions regarding the utility of contemporary literature if the latter cannot be immediately measured for its social implications. Jauss contends that good literature can only be revealed after its social implications are determined. Determining social significance takes much time and effort. Current publications must endure the test of time or at least conform to standards of genre in order to be judged on the basis of these concepts. Only then can they be measured for social prejudice and influence. Maybe Jauss is able to determine significance instantaneously but, in that case, all contemporary texts would have to be considered "entertainment art" (25). It would be contradictory to Jauss's idea of changing horizons and "good" literature to suggest that innovative works can be popular and deserving of merit in their own time.

Another common criticism of reception theory is that it assumes the presence of a definitive text in order to create the same text. In his discussion of the theories of Jauss and Wolfgang

Iser, Terry Eagleton proposes that:

> Reception theory of the Jauss and Iser kind seems to raise a pressing epistemological problem. If one considers the 'text itself' as a kind of skeleton, a set of 'schemata' waiting to be concretized in various ways by various readers, how can one discuss these schemata at all without already having concretized them? (84)

Jauss is unable to explain how all the readers can have the same text in mind if they each have different 'skeletons' to 'concretize.' There has to be a concrete text in order for any interpretation to take place at all.

In their totality, the above criticisms seemingly render Jauss's theory inapplicable. Jauss's overall position does not pass the test of application. Though many have tried to apply his ideas to literature, most have found that the theories are too vast and complicated to apply to the reception of any one text.[3] Margot Zutshi suggests that the problem stems from Jauss's inability "to integrate the many diverse ideas which his essay brought together -- from philosophy, aesthetics, literary theory, sociology, etc. to Communication Theory and semiotics" (101). In retrospect, the theory seems to be more about literature in general and the act of reading than about application.

The solution to the problem of application is simplicity.

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[3]H. Vaget and G. Jäger both fail in their attempted applications. Vaget found that the amount of textual work required was unjustified, while Jäger was forced to change the tenets of the theory (Zutshi 109).

Collectively, Jauss's theories are saturated with gaps. As with any text, the gaps in Jauss's text need to be filled by the reader. No reader can fill all the gaps in one reading. The key is to apply the theory one concept at a time. The tenets of Jauss's theory, when taken together, require much effort to apply. Taken individually, however, the concepts of Jauss's reception theory can offer a great deal to the study of literature and literary theory.

The notions presented by Jauss have a definite utility if used in a controlled setting. Therefore, in my attempt to apply Jauss's reception theory I have developed distinct parameters for my analysis. First of all, the text chosen can alleviate several problems. In examining a contemporary novel like Frolic, I am able to avoid the pitfalls of having to reconstruct both the literary and the social contexts of an older text. In the case of this particular novel, though its reception is divided on several issues, there is only one original audience. It is unnecessary to recreate the social conditions faced by the reader as many other critics of reception theory have had to do. By keeping my task simple, I am able to create a foundation for future readers of the novel so that they can examine the novel's "hermeneutic difference" without difficulty (Jauss 28).

To keep matters uncomplicated I will also specify the aspect of reception to be studied. The reception of a new novel entails several possible avenues of analysis. For example, reception involves editing, reviewing, advertising, and distributing material. The author's public appearances are also influential in

terms of the reception of his/her work. Even the choice of quotations for the dust jacket of the novel is important. All of the above aspects influence the reception of a novel. Though all are legitimate concerns, most affect commercial appeal more than literary interpretation. My concern is with advancing a proposed reading of the novel. Owing to the absence of scholarly discussions of Frolic, I will deal specifically with the relevant book reviews of the novel in order to accomplish this goal. Despite Henry Schmidt's warning regarding the diversity of the reading public, the book reviews are the only texts that I can examine (159-9). It is true that we can never really know reviewers and their relationship with the general public, but as Robert Wilson advises:

> it must be assumed that critics and newspaper reviewers are central to the literary process, part of the vast corps of middlemen who stand in all the contemporary arts between individual creator and anonymous audience. (122)

In examining book reviews, however, one encounters an additional obstacle. Reviews frequently serve diverse objectives. Depending on the journal, the timing of the review, and the reviewer, the review may be intended to sell the book, to malign the author, or to merely advance a reading of the novel. Also, the space allocated by the editor of the publication can determine a review's length. Reviews can range from a few lines to a few pages. Keeping these factors in mind (and the taxonomies offered by Wayne C. Booth, Robert L. Patten, and Herbert Lindenberger), I

have divided the reviews of Frolic into three distinct categories.[4] Some reviews are mainly interested in introducing the novel to the public. Journals such as Booklist, Library Journal, Publisher's Weekly, and Kirkus Reviews, to name a few, are generally concerned with briefly reviewing as many forthcoming books of different genres as possible. Although significant, I feel that the reviews found in these journals, with some exceptions, are not pertinent to my study. Another type of review I have found to be irrelevant is the short insert included in a section with others of its kind. Examples of these can be found in sections of the New York Times Book Review, The Chicago Tribune, and The Nation. Frequently, reviewers and editors will continue to commend a novel even if it is not on the best sellers list of any notable publication. These reviews are often "Editor's Favourites" or "Books for Vacation" and are predominantly excerpts from longer reviews carried by the publication at an earlier date.

The majority of the reviews I have compiled are essay-length reviews dealing with thematic, structural, and interpretive aspects of the novel. Addressing diverse audiences, these reviews appear in major American newspapers, scholarly journals, magazines, and legal publications. Individually, the purpose of these reviews is noticeably mixed, yet most seem intent on both describing the text

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[4]Though these taxonomies are more concerned with scholarly works than works of fiction, they are very useful in their recognition of the business of book reviewing. Booth examines the book reviewers' intentions, Lindenberger observes the different types of reviews, while Patten contemplates the editor's position on book reviewing.

to the reader and advancing criticisms of text and author. As with most essays, these pieces are marked, in varying degrees, by the ego of the reviewer. Gaddis himself suggests that critics, like dogs chasing a fox, "are running for their dinner" (qtd. in Gurley E6). Despite the biases of many critics, most reviews are composed by knowledgeable readers and writers of contemporary literature and, as a result, display some knowledge of past Gaddis literature and scholarship. It is this group of reviews I will use for my analysis of the reception of Frolic.

The final restriction to be set is the process of analysis. My intention here is not to suggest that more people disliked the novel than liked it. In fact, the reviews are mostly mixed as contemporary reviewers tend to avoid what Lindenberger calls the "all-outter" (282). Of course there are enthusiastic reviewers such as Alicia Metcalf Miller of The Cleveland Plain Dealer who claims that the novel "reminds us of all literature can be" (11). Then again, Eric Jacobs is of the opinion that "The law is an ass, and so is the author" (28). The majority of reviews, however, point out both good and bad aspects of the novel. In light of this fact, I have decided to examine the overall patterns of reception. Rather than merely label reviews as positive and negative, I have kept track of all observations in an effort to create an overall interpretation of the novel's reception.

An examination of the major reviews of Frolic based on Jauss's concept of horizon of expectation reveals that two distinct standards of interpretation inform the text's reception. The first

of these patterns has specific ramifications for the novel as a genre. It becomes increasingly obvious that reviewers have varying notions of the novelistic genre itself, some maintaining narrow prescriptive biases with others embracing experimentation. Brad Hooper's Book List review makes an important observation in reference to this dichotomy. In this pre-publication review, Hooper predicts:

> Readers familiar with Gaddis and/or appreciative of experimentation in narrative will be served a banquet of ideas and language; those whose tastes tend toward the traditional will leave the table early and go back to the likes of Willa Cather. (581)

Hooper's speculation on the potential reception of the novel is confirmed by the reviews studied.

As stated above, Jauss believes that one can objectively determine the horizon of expectations of a text's readership through an analysis of "familiar norms or the immanent poetics of the genre [in question]" (24). An examination of the reviews of Frolic in light of normative poetics of *the novel* reveals that many readers are influenced by traditional aesthetics. These readers tend to show contempt for some of Gaddis's innovative techniques. One of the noticeable targets is Gaddis's imaginative narrative technique.

Narration often facilitates the management of circumstance and time. Gaddis, however, rarely makes use of direct narrative in his novels and is considered, by some, the "unchallenged master of

the dialogue-driven narrative" (Battersby, "A Frolic of His Own" 9). Though Gaddis receives overwhelming recognition for his ability to mimic the human voice, at points the dialogue is "exhausting to read" (Herstein 2). Because of sparse punctuation and lack of speech indicators, e.g., "he/she said," in the novel, "You never know who is speaking to whom unless the speaker happens to mention somebody by name" (Jacobs 28). Sven Birkerts warns:

> *Frolic* is claustrophobic-inducing. Not only is there no reprieve from talk, not only does the whole work unfold in the same few rooms, but the nature of the narrative itself is deeply, if not profoundly cyclical. (29)

As far as circumstance is concerned, Gaddis "Offers little description and virtually no exposition . . . and the reader must decipher the circumstances and setting by context" (Herstein 2). Gaddis does not "Tell [the] story as much as tease it out of his characters" (Calve 39). The time-line is also affected by Gaddis's dependence on dialogue. If a reader in not constantly alert, key time-indicators and "fine points of explanation [are] missed along the way" (MacDougall 17). Even the most ardent Gaddis supporters admonish,

> Blink and you'll find yourself in mid-flashback, unaware of how you got there. Blink again ("And so she turned now to her guest over tea and coffee cups...") and you'll miss an indication--the "now"--that you've returned from the flashback to the novel's present. There are no chapter divisions and few page breaks to clue the reader in to shifts of time and

place. (19)

It is characterization, however, that suffers the most from Gaddis's preference for the spoken word. Gaddis defines his characters through speech. He is not always successful. Characters are rarely multi-dimensional. In fact, according to Sven Birkerts,

> the most injurious flaw of Gaddis's book is the relative inertness of its central characters. Oscar, Christina and Lily are all thin to the point of being types. They serve as voice-boxes, appliances for the generation of spoken material. Which, as it accumulates, tends less to reveal their depths than to overpower them. What they talk about discloses Gaddis's obsession with law, not their own characters. (30)

Rather than create full characters to whom the reader can relate, Gaddis often develops characters who "exist, after all, not as the completed creations of an omniscient novelist, but as modernist symbols in a continuous state of becoming" (Kakutani C20). Many readers are unable to find any "sympathetic" characters at all (Dregni 14F). Richard Eder is modestly forgiving, informing us that Christina is "the only fully human character" (3).

In addition to opting out of traditional methods of narration and characterization, Gaddis disregards the traditional structure of the novel. Eric Jacobs cautions, "this book is not well-crafted. There are no chapters" (28). Gaddis seems purposefully to cause additional confusion by omitting chapter headings and divisions in his text. The only breaks from the dialogue are the

numerous inserted texts which represent further trouble for many reviewers. These inserted documents, briefs, depositions, opinions, and excerpts from a play are described as "ghastly" (Bergin 25), "tiresome" (Kakutani C20), "lousy" (Jones 52), "dull" (Bradbury 12), and even "perverse" (Towers 22). Any reader having trouble following plot through the dialogue is more than vexed by these annoying impositions in place of chapter divisions.

The normative reader reaches the height of irritation when confronted with the underlying levels of difficulty found in the novel. Even if readers are able to conquer the structural difficulties, they are still faced with problems of a more demanding nature. Indeterminacy, for example, is a tool favoured by Gaddis. Ambiguities of theme, message, and resolution are all common in Gaddis's novels. Countless literary allusions can also scare away the most ardent of readers. Gary Amdahl forewarns that "Reading *Frolic* is something like listening to a life insurance salesman and biblical prophet--one who knows world literature forward and backward--interpret your wildest dreams" (42). The depositions, the opinions, and the play are all filled with references to secondary sources. Some of these references can be obscure and daunting to the reader.

A novel receiving comments like those mentioned above would seem doomed to disaster; however, there is substantial recognition of Gaddis's stylistic innovations among the supporters of contemporary fiction. Many readers have come to expect creative adroitness from Gaddis's fiction as he has been known to push the

limits of the genre. Though normative readers criticize Frolic for its confusing techniques, those readers expecting these from Gaddis are not disappointed. Michael Wood notes:

> Gaddis is not difficult or unapproachable, once we get the hang of his shifts from monologue to dialogue, and from dialogue to narrative. We pick up a habit, realise that the puns and misunderstandings and false starts that litter our reading are an unshakeable part of his and our world; that we are not missing things, just getting too much. (20)

Rather than feel daunted by the "cacophony of heard and found voices," enthusiastic reviewers urgently recommend that the reader persevere (Steinberg 57). In her endorsement of Frolic, Alicia Metcalf Miller quotes Thomas Mann who argues that "Only the exhaustive can be truly interesting" (11E).

Supporters of Gaddis's dialogue also believe that his characterization is not affected by lack of narrative. The novel has "a number of strong characters" who are "complex, interesting, sometimes noble individuals" (Gutteridge 34; Herstein 2). Robert Towers admits that:

> The major figures -- Oscar, Christina and even Oscar's dopey girlfriend Lily -- reveal themselves (and are characterized by one another) with a vividness and immediacy that embrace pathos as well as comic futility. (22)

Steven Moore similarly compliments Gaddis's ability to have characters reveal each other. He points to the fact that Lily introduces Christina's character traits. Moore maintains that

"This occurs early in the novel, before Gaddis has described Christina, and now he doesn't need to: Lily has" (570).

In addition to praising the dialogue, several reviewers are impressed with Gaddis's virtuoso pastiche. These reviewers see criticism of the author's numerous inserted texts as misguided. These texts "mercifully" interrupt the dialogue to give the reader a break (Harrison 1). These interruptions are "not only a relief from the hectic babble but are among the book's chief delights" (Harrison 1). They are "priceless pastiches" in which "the author takes obvious pleasure in couching some of his sharpest barbs" (Kamine 18). The two lawyer-reviewers studied commend Gaddis's legal pastiche as "scathingly funny" and "finely crafted" (Herstein 2; Calve 39). Even the sections of Oscar's play are endorsed as they help to illustrate that "Even the mediocre have the right to have their work protected from theft" (McGonigle 3).

A more influential developing controversy is a questioning of the role of the reader in Gaddis's "literary event" (Moore, "Reading" 569). Perusal of nearly sixty reviews indicates that two schools of thought form in regards to the reader's assumed role in the text. One group sees the reader as an active participant in the text. The other emphasizes the importance of readerly distance from the text, based on the assumption that the text is composed by an author with a specific intention.

Despite recognition that Gaddis's latest novel is his "most accessible," several reviewers of Frolic display concern for its readership (Birkerts 27; Dirda 10; Calve 39). This is not the

first time that Gaddis has been accused of "letting the reader do his work for him" (Gurley E6). As Steven Moore notes, "Charges of difficulty have plagued Gaddis all his career" ("Reading" 569). Gaddis himself admits that his work is not necessarily "reader friendly" (qtd. in Hoover 14).

Michiko Kakutani of The New York Times, perceives Gaddis's indifference to the reader as a major liability in the literary success of Frolic. Kakutani argues that the author's expectations are too high -- or at least quite different from those of the reader. She asserts:

> Mr Gaddis seems to suggest, the reader is supposed to make order out of disorder, discern the patterns among repetitions, ellipses and digressions . . . As a result of this highly oblique approach, Mr. Gaddis's provocative vision of modern society is purchased at a price, the price of hard work and frequent weariness on the part of the reader. (C20)

This concern for the reader is reiterated by numerous other reviewers who expect the author to be cooperative with his reading public. Richard Eder complains, "The author will not help us, we feel; baleful forces have kidnapped him" (3). Joseph Calve warns the "casual reader" that the novel is "not a curl-up-with-a-good-read-on-a-winter-weekend legal thriller à la the popular and pedestrian works of John Grisham" (39). Yet, it is Sven Birkerts who perhaps best summarizes the dilemma admitting, "We [the readers] realize how much we depend on our novelists to balance off inner and outer claims" (29). Indeed, the absence of authorial

presence has a powerful impact on the readers of this novel.

This impact, however, can be positive. Assuming active readerly involvement, reviewers such as Steven Moore, Mark Kamine, Jonathan Raban, and others rise to Gaddis's challenge. Moore tackles the charge of Gaddis's extraordinary difficulty in his review entitled "Reading the Riot Act":

> Is A Frolic of His Own that difficult, that exhausting? I devoured it in a weekend in a state of exhilaration and delight. Yes, you do have to keep your wits about you when reading Gaddis, but it's a rare privilege these days to be taken this seriously as a reader. Like Henry James, William Gaddis wants the kind of reader on whom nothing is lost. He doesn't talk down or assume you can't make connections. He expects that you've read a few books in your time, read the papers. This is literature, not a TV sitcom. (569)

In a similar review, Michael Dirda quotes Gaddis in an interview about J R, an earlier novel criticized for its difficulty. According to Dirda:

> Gaddis once explained, "the characters create the situation," adding "it was the flow that I wanted, for the readers to read and be swept along, to participate. And enjoy it. And occasionally chuckle, laugh along the way." (10)

Comparing Frolic and J R, Dirda sees "authorial absence" as the most important element of Gaddis's work (100).

Taking the charge to the extreme, some reviewers deny the novel's difficulty. Vanessa Friedman of Entertainment Weekly

boasts that despite innovative techniques, "the story is surprisingly clear and easy to follow" (51). Malcolm Jones Jr. chastises Gaddis for his inability to give "his readers more for their trouble" (52). Jones goes so far as to proclaim "Intellectually and literarily, it's a lazy book" (52). Apparently Jones and Friedman were expecting much more of a challenge.

As manifest in the aesthetic reception of the novel, the author's expectations of reader participation were not met on all levels. Roland Barthes's discussion of the different views on the act of reading, for example, indicates that this rift is common to literature. Barthes contends:

> Our literature is characterized by the pitiless divorce which the literary institution maintains between the producer of the text and its user, between its owner and its customer, between its author and its reader. The reader is thereby plunged into a kind of idleness--he is intransitive; he is, in short, *serious*: instead of functioning himself, instead of gaining access to the magic of the signifier, to the pleasure of writing, he is left with no more than the poor freedom either to accept or reject the text: reading is nothing more than a *referendum*. (S/Z 4)

Barthes's commentary on literature and the reading process explains the line of demarcation between the two receptions of Frolic. The readers' attitude toward reading is key to their reception of the novel.

It is evident that there are diverse expectations surrounding

Frolic. It is also likely that there will never be agreement on the merits of Gaddis's work. Yet, innovation -- of style, of language, of structure -- can be assimilated. Almost all of the reviewers concede that the reader must rise to the challenge of reading Gaddis. Reading his work does get easier. The problems that need to be addressed now are problems of content. Granted, book reviews are restricted in their discussion of a text. Yet, some reviewers have found that the novel is not only structurally daunting, but its allusions and indeterminacies prevent traditional closure. If any attempt to advance a sympathetic reading of the novel is to be successful, it must address these concerns in greater detail.

Chapter Two

Indeterminacy and the Reader: The *Mimetic* Connection

In a brief overview of the diachronic reception of Vladimir Nabokov's Pale Fire (1962), John Haegert warns that Nabokov's "most baffling and elusive book is in some immediate peril everywhere of being 'overstood'--rather than understood" by its readers (409). Haegert maintains that enthusiastic readers claim to have located a "controlling principle" for the novel despite the existence of what he calls "radical indeterminacy and disorder" (410). Judging from the reviews of William Gaddis's latest offering, Frolic, this "overstanding" of literature is a problem common to the reception of postmodern fiction.[5] The analysis of Frolic's first audience has indeed provided a look at the patterns of reception the novel has undergone (Chapter One); still, the same analysis has unveiled issues that remain unexamined. Although lack of available review space and publishers' impending deadlines are likely at fault, the majority of the reviews have only touched the surface of several important aspects of the novel. One of these issues is the presence of indeterminacies and ambiguities and their role in the text. Reviews focus intently on what Michael Riffaterre, in his Semiotics of Poetry, calls the reader's "linguistic competence" (5); but this focus suggests a general insinuation that structural

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[5]Douglas Keesey's essay "Vineland in Mainstream Press: A Reception Study" in addition to Jennie Skerl and Robin Lydenberg's study William S. Burroughs At the Front: Critical reception, 1959-1989 address similar problems with the receptions of Thomas Pynchon's Vineland and William S. Burroughs' Naked Lunch respectively.

ambiguities provide the only readerly problems. Apart from the combination of dialogue, internal monologue, and scant narration, which, according to Malcolm Jones Jr., is "not too daunting these days," there seems to be no other obstacles to reader comprehension (52). Carey Harrison boasts:

> Reputed to be difficult . . . the only difficult thing about A Frolic of His Own, once you have accepted the headlong rush through punctuation that has earned the author comparisons to James Joyce, lies in turning the pages quickly enough to satisfy your craving for more. (1)

A close examination of the novel in light of past scholarship, however, reveals that there is more to reading Gaddis's work than attributing names to the endless voices. In this chapter, my purpose is two-fold. First, in order to explain my position regarding the ambiguities in the novel, I will examine closely the central indeterminacies of structure and content in Frolic. Second, I will suggest an explanation of the novel's indeterminacies based on its mimetic functionality and the reader's role in creating a link between fictional and everyday reality.

In a rare interview, Gaddis admits his preference for a theory of writing based on the "notion that the reader is brought in almost as a collaborator in creating the picture that emerges of the characters, of the situation, of what they look like, everything" (Abádi-Nagy 79). Gaddis's insistence on reader participation has resulted in a writing style favouring certain textual ambiguities that could otherwise be avoided with

traditional narration. Gaddis's preference for dialogue over narration is a technique that he has honed over the course of forty years and four novels. His chaotic prose, his reliance on characters to tell the story, and his unattributed dialogue have all forced reader participation in the process of the text. As Carl D. Malmgren notes of Gaddis's work, "the reader must quite literally give flesh to a disembodied narrative surface" (10). Gaddis provides some of the story while the reader has to do the rest.

The reception study conducted in Chapter One suggests that the greatest problem with Frolic, as with Gaddis's first three novels, is the reader's initial comprehension of simple linguistic peculiarities. As readers of Frolic, we are thrown into a chaotic world and forced to fend for ourselves. We are faced with unexplained characters and circumstances, and we must attempt to figure out who is talking to whom and, from this, the context of the situation. An intrusive narrator is rarely present to offer an accurate account of the action or to identify the characters. A reader who normally turns to the author to provide substantial narratorial direction, traditional punctuation, and speech indicators can find this novel rather disconcerting.

The uninitiated Gaddis reader recognizes a potentially confusing read from the first page alone. In all, the page contains three sentences of narration. The novel begins in the middle of an argument between two major, as of yet unidentified, characters:

Justice?--You get justice in the next world, in this world you have the law.

--Well of course Oscar wants both. I mean the way he talks about order? She drew back her foot from the threat of an old man paddling by in a wheelchair,--that all he's looking for is some kind of order?

--Make the trains run on time, that was the...

--I'm not talking about trains, Harry.

--I'm talking about fascism, that's where this compulsion for order ends up. The rest of it's opera.

--No but do you know what he really wants?

--The ones showing up in court demanding justice, all they've got their eye on's that million dollar price tag.

--It's not simply the money no, what they really want...

--It's the money, Christina, it's always the money. The rest of it's nothing but opera, now look. (13)

We soon realize that our initial concern will be with textual comprehension. The novel continues in a similar vein with constant arguments and discussions that are often left open-ended. Characters pop in and out of the dialogue without our knowledge. Voices are blended in casual conversations. Characters change topics in mid-conversation. Phones ring and papers and legal documents are read aloud. Television shows and commercials seep into the dialogue unexpectedly. Time indicators are scarce. Chaos abounds. The novel's combination of dialogue, internal monologue, and slight narration leads to reader's confusion regarding the

simple identification of who is speaking and to whom, especially in the more densely populated scenes.

Nevertheless, a close analysis of the short passage quoted above indicates several helpful hints for the inquisitive reader. With some hard work and sharp perception on behalf of the reader, structural problems can be resolved. In our quest to locate the speaker, we cannot depend on the narrator for much assistance; still, the conversing characters do help. Christina addresses Harry and mentions Oscar. Harry, in turn, addresses Christina. By the end of this short section, the attentive reader realizes that this argument is between Harry and Christina and it involves, in some way, a third character by the name of Oscar. Judging from their tone, the two are engaging in a habitual argument. We can also perceive that Harry wishes to end the argument when he says "now look," a subtle hint to Christina that agreement is not imminent (13). Additional information can be gained from the single sentence of narration, hidden within Christina's opening speech. From this sentence, the attentive reader gains information about the setting. This scene probably takes place in a hospital or retirement home as the narrator nonchalantly mentions an old man in a wheelchair. Finally, it is evident that quotation marks have been replaced by dashes. When these dashes begin a paragraph, a new speaker is indicated. By recognizing changes in verb tenses, such as those between Christina's first speech and the first sentence of narration, we dispense with the need for closing quotation marks. We can see that the narrator is interjecting.

Fortunately, Gaddis's prose is consistent throughout the dialogue sections of the novel. Most of Frolic's textual information is provided by the characters. Even some of the inserted texts are read aloud by certain characters (259-62). Most of our work is done unconsciously as we begin to grasp Gaddis's prose and to realize that, if ample effort is put into reading the novel, many of the formal ambiguities can be unravelled. Hints are no longer as subtle when we familiarize ourselves with relationships among the characters. Also, unlike J R and The Recognitions, Frolic does not have an unusually large cast of characters. When a character enters the dialogue, the reader does not have to consider a long list of possibilities. In retrospect, Harrison's quotation about the novel is partly true; once the reader grasps the writer's dialogue, completing the novel is not a burdensome task. However, the reader's ability to conquer the prose and complete the novel introduces several important questions. Is the novel too easy to comprehend? Is Malcolm Jones Jr. right when he suggests that Gaddis does not give his readers their money's worth with Frolic (52)? Does Gaddis hide a simple message behind "relentless banks of dialogue" (MacDougal 17)? Is he merely trying to suggest that "the law diminishes the humanity of all who are touched by it" (Anft 8D)? I think any interpretation of Frolic based on affirmative answers to any of these questions must maintain that Gaddis rewrites Bleak House in

a contemporary setting.[1] It is here that I must restate my objection to the insinuation that linguistic comprehension is the sole problem faced by the reader. Hard work and practice can resolve most of the structural ambiguities; yet, these ambiguities are fused with gaps in Gaddis's content. It is the latter that genuinely test the reader's comprehension.

Gregory Comnes, in a footnote to the introduction of his The Ethics of Indeterminacy in the Novels of William Gaddis, contends "Generally speaking, criticism of Gaddis tends to fall into two categories: identification of sources and discussion of themes in isolation" (151). For the most part, Comnes is correct in his analysis of early Gaddis scholarship. More recent work (including Comnes's book), however, concerns itself with the unity between structure and content.[2] Critics have begun to assert that Gaddis's ambiguous form is mirrored in his fiction. Jonathan Raban writes, "If readers of Gaddis are often hard put to it to follow the novelist's drift, their difficulties are precisely mirrored by those of the characters inside the novel" (3). Once readers are able to discern the structural ambiguities of the novel, they are forced to acknowledge the ambiguities of meaning faced by the characters. Difficulty in communication between author and reader is mirrored by the characters' inability to communicate with each

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[1]Richard Eder, Peter Kemp, and Kathye Self Bergin all take this position.

[2]Steven Moore's William Gaddis, Thomas LeClair's "William Gaddis, J R, and the Art of Excess," and Frederick R. Karl's "Gaddis: A Tribute of the Fifties" all make this connection between form and content.

other. Since Gaddis's novels are mostly dialogue, meaning is one of the many ambiguities of content his readers must face.

In Frolic, specifically, the reader discovers that conversing characters rarely communicate effectively. Once we figure out which characters are involved in a specific conversation, we must interpret what each character means by what he/she says. Attributing meaning to speech is not as easy as it sounds. We soon realize that some characters are frequently unable to express what they mean. Others are not even sure *what* they mean. Oscar, for example, believes that he is always being ignored. He says things like "just what I've been saying" (101, 102), "that's what I'm talking about" (136), "That's what I meant" (146), "That's what I just..." (229), and "That's what I mean" (294, 340). Oscar either does not make his meaning clear when he speaks or does not say what he thinks he says. When another character says something he finds agreeable, Oscar claims to have already made the same point. In a conversation with Mr. Basie regarding a movie director's plagiarism of his play, Oscar claims ownership of ideas he does not even understand. Basie begins:

> --You ever see Errol Flynn in The Charge of the Light Brigade Oscar? Don't know how many horses got killed making that movie, actually injured and killed so bad they got the laws changed, these Kiester people didn't need to steal from you. Just claim they went to see Errol Flynn in The Charge of the Light Brigade.
>
> --Listen, I did not see Errol Flynn in The Charge of the

> Light Brigade, no. That's the point, that's exactly what I'm afraid of, people connecting my name with this mindless nonsense if they think I took my play from Errol Flynn in The Charge of the Light Brigade there goes my whole reputation and loss of income as a scholar and a, a playwright, now what about that. What about that. (146)

Mr. Basie has obviously brought up the Errol Flynn movie to make a point regarding possible origins for scenes in Kiester's film. He is not suggesting that Oscar has plagiarized his play. Oscar, who has never seen the movie, has the nerve to say "That's the point" (146). What point? He does not even know what Basie is talking about. Mr. Basie later suggests that Oscar could possibly "ask compensatory and triple damages for mental stress and professional distress," to which Oscar replies "That's what I meant" (146). Oscar rarely says what he means.

Confusion of meaning is increased with Gaddis's use of what John Johnston calls "complex" and "simple" repetition (26). Both can easily confuse the reader, but complex repetition is much more obvious in the change in meaning it reveals. Complex repetition always allows for obvious and ironic "reversibility" in meaning (Johnston 26). The easiest examples of complex repetition found in Frolic are the numerous court cases that Gaddis repeatedly cites. Fortunes, opinions, and decisions are constantly changing in both the Szyrk and the Crease suits. We realize that any subsequent repetition of these cases can easily result in a new decision.

Johnston sees simple repetition as the mere replication of

words or phrases resulting in a slight change in meaning. An obvious example in Frolic would be Oscar's "breakdown of our civilization" speech (136). To his students he says, "It's not the breakdown of our civilization that we're watching but its blossoming" (136). Later he changes his mind warning, "I see the entire crumbling of civilization before our very eyes" (223). We can see how meaning has changed in the repetition of a similar sentiment. Unfortunately, it is not always easy to determine change of meaning in Frolic. Simple repetition does not always suggest anything more than exact replication. In Frolic, many phrases are repeated verbatim by the same and different characters. Harry repeats his "nothing but opera" phrase at least three times (13, 13, 40) and it is, in turn, repeated by Christina (23). Lily's "tragedy strikes" remark is repeated several times in one speech (225) and several more times in different forms throughout the novel (245, 267, 283, 385, 445, 479). Basie's complaint filed for Oscar repeats the same phrases several times (157-8). Oscar repeats his own phrases and sentiments and is also the biggest verbal plagiarizer in the novel. Anyone who comes in contact with Oscar provides him with possible verbal ammunition for his next tirade. He steals Basie's "got a lot on their plate" (102) for a later discussion about his father (293) only to be quoted himself in Lily's speech (305). He repeats Mr. Madhar Pai's "swine" (316) and also his "wrong end of the stick" comment (317). He even reclaims a phrase of his own from Harry when he asks Christina "Why does he want to see me playing baseball?" (20). He seems confused

and surprised by the comment; yet he has already used the same phrase (18). Despite this confusion, Oscar continues to use the "playing baseball" phrase throughout the novel in different situations (28, 46, 236, 316).

The indeterminacy caused by Gaddis's simple repetition, results from the notion that words and phrases all change slightly with usage. When viewed in conjunction with Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of *heteroglossia* in the novel, simple repetition is monumental in creating indeterminacy of meaning. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist define heteroglossia as:

> The base condition governing the operation of meaning in any utterance. It is that which insures the primacy of context over text. At any given time, in any given place, there will be a set of conditions--social, historical, meteorological, physiological--that will insure that a word uttered in that place will have a meaning different than it would have under any other conditions. (Dialogic Imagination 428)

In Gaddis's text, therefore, every repeated word or comment can ultimately mean something different each time it is used. Gradually, many phrases lose all meaning when they are repeated enough times by enough characters. Oscar's use of the "playing baseball" phrase is an excellent example. When Christina asks whether Oscar has been in therapy, Oscar sarcastically replies "Did you think I'd be out playing baseball?" (Frolic 18). In another context, Harry says "Look Oscar I've got to get, downtown, hope the next time I see you you're out playing baseball" (Frolic 20).

Although he is the first one to use it, when Oscar hears Harry repeat the phrase he is confused by it. Oscar assumes that Harry is making a sarcastic remark similar to Oscar's earlier comment. Oscar proceeds to use the phrase in several different contexts. Since a character can never be completely sure he understands another character's meaning (by Oscar's own admission), repetition of borrowed words can, and will, be accompanied by ambiguity. As an outsider looking in at the conversations, the reader cannot help but be confused.

In addition to facing ambiguous meaning, Gaddis readers face an indeterminate message. Many reviewers claim that the novel is merely a comment on the immoral American legal system. Michael Dregni naively calls the novel "a 586-page brief in defense of William Shakespeare's call for arms in "Henry VI Part 4": 'The first thing we do, let's kill all the lawyers'" (14F). Kathye Self Bergin quotes the same Shakespeare reference and contends that Gaddis's is a "too-easy, too-familiar target" (25). Taken at face value, it is understandable why reviewers think this way about Frolic. The main characters in the novel are all connected to the law in some way. Some are lawyers and judges while most others are litigants in one case or another. In fact, as Richard Eder notes, Gaddis's novel contains "at least 18 lawsuits" (3). Because these suits are constantly being reversed, the reader is left with an uneasy feeling about guilt and innocence, and assumes that Gaddis is putting the entire legal system under attack.

It is important to acknowledge, however, that Gaddis's views

on the law are not absolute. In a recent interview with Laura Sydell, Gaddis admits:

> As the basis of civilization, law allows us, presumably, to live together without cutting each other's throats. And it has become so compounded that it has created more disorder where originally it was obvious that from Plato on we've tried to establish order.[3]

This dichotomy is important in Frolic. Peter Wolfe perceptively indicates that Frolic "both attacks our legal system and affirms the necessity of the law" (5B). According to Wolfe, Gaddis is "eminently fair" to lawyers suggesting they are like "detectives, dentists or welfare workers; people only come to them reluctantly and in times of need, when they're unlikely to show their best sides" (5B). Some of the lawyers profit in Gaddis's novel, but many do not. Harry dies. Mr. Madhar Pai falls into disrepute with his firm. Mr. Basie ends up back in jail. Dolores Flaherty and Roger Flaherty suggest that "the frolic benefits no one but the lawyers who collect the fees," but when characters like Lily, Trish, and Oscar refuse to pay their fees there can be little benefit (20).

The difficulty with locating Gaddis's message is compounded further by the belief that the novel is not just a commentary on the questionable American legal system. According to Mark Kamine:

> Gaddis turns the law here into a vehicle for comments about a

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[3]William Gaddis. Interview with Laura Sydell. Morning Edition. National Public Radio. WNYC, New York. 17 November 1994.

> broad range of issues. Thus we get keen observations on (and not-so-oblique references to) the contemporary state of literary criticism, multiculturalism, pop culture fetishism, violence in movies, religious fundamentalism, the hiring policies of corporate America, tabloid journalism, and activists of every stripe. (19)

The subject of the novel may be the law, but like Shakespeare's The Merchant of Venice, Frolic is not solely about legal proceedings and the letter of the law. Several of the above mentioned issues can be seen as possible controlling elements of the novel. For example, Gaddis's comment on the failing quality of language permeates the novel in the characters' inability to communicate effectively. The author's comments on pop culture, art, and plagiarism are also particularly important. Christina's epiphany about money and recognition is of more than passing import. Perhaps Alicia Metcalf Miller sums up the novel best noting that it "manages to take a whack at nearly every sacred cow in our culture" (11E). Gaddis's message may be found in a combination or intersection of all these issues.

Finally, though Gaddis tackles several confusing issues in his novel, all are left open-ended in the novel's conclusion. Gaddis's endings are perhaps the most frustrating of any contemporary novelist. Nothing is solved in Frolic's dénouement. Not only do we face unanswered questions regarding the future of the characters and the cause of Harry's death, but we are unable to find any

remanence of moral suggestion.[4] Most professions have been described as "self-regulating" and modern society seems doomed to destruction (338). Oscar's tickling scene in the end invokes a possible Romantic message in his return to childhood, but the reader cannot be sure. Gaddis even revisits the ambiguous ending of his previous novel, Gothic, to complicate matters further (334-5). We are left with a satire devoid of any particular morality or closure. With Frolic, William Gaddis renews his membership in a select group of contemporary satirists who "offer no specific remedies for the contemporary world but instead use man's frustrated pursuit of virtue in the face of societal vice as part of their absurdist comedy" (Safer 17). In the end, the reader is left in the cold.

My intention in revealing the difficulties in Gaddis's Frolic is not to ascribe additional problems to an already problematic text. I do not wish to concentrate on indeterminacies that may never be filled, nor do I wish to encourage the indifference of reviewers, like Eric Jacobs, who admit to having failed to complete the exhaustive novel (Jacobs 28). Rather, I wish to demonstrate that authors, and particularly William Gaddis, provide less than perfect texts. This is not a criticism. I feel that Gaddis's text and others like it are surprisingly realistic. It is only with a new examination of mimesis, however, that difficulties like indeterminacies can be transformed into opportunities for the

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[4]Ostensibly, Harry's death is ruled an accident. Like others in the novel, however, this ruling is open to interpretation.

engaged reader.

The issue of indeterminacy is tied to the broader matter of mimesis, that is, what Erich Auerbach calls the "representation of reality in Western literature." Modern ideas of realism have all evolved from extensive literary and philosophic traditions too complex to mention. Though concepts of mimesis vary, they all owe a great debt to Plato.

Most theorists concerned with the concept of imitation acknowledge Book Ten of Plato's Republic as the first important discussion of the subject.[5] In Book Ten of Plato's Republic, Socrates and Glaucon discuss *mimesis*, or art as imitation. Socrates attempts to explain his reasoning for expelling the artist, e.g., painter, poet, humorist, tragedian, from his *polis* or ideal republic. Socrates begins with a premise arrived at in Book Six, namely that man exists in a world of forms that imitate ideal truths (206). Keeping this premise in mind, Socrates adds to his argument the assumption that art attempts to imitate truth. In the artist's attempt to imitate truth, however, he has only the base forms to guide him. Rather than represent an ideal, the artist becomes "an imitator who is concerned with that which is begotten three removes from nature" and he cannot be trusted (299). Socrates also takes up the dangers of imitation. He finds poetry morally corruptible as it encourages a movement away from the truth and towards the baseness of human nature. Though poets like Homer

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[5]Erich Auerbach (Mimesis 554), John D. Boyd (Function of Mimesis 4), and Arne Melberg (Theories of Mimesis 10) all acknowledge Plato as a major source.

are good at what they do, Socrates fears that unless they are expelled from the polis, man will settle for imitation over truth. For this reason, he expels the poet from the Republic.

Plato's comments on mimesis have generated many literary and philosophic reactions regarding the nature and purpose of imitation in art. From Aristotle to the nineteenth-century German philosophers, to contemporary literary theorists, Plato's notions have caused a considerable controversy. Rather than explore all avenues of Plato's influence, I will take as my vantage point Erich Auerbach's Mimesis, which provides a constructive overview of mimetic form in literature from Homer to twentieth-century modernists like Woolf and Proust.

Most studies dedicated to mimesis and its derivatives, such as those of Plato, Aristotle, Heidegger, Kierkegaard, and Derrida, tend to be theory-orientated. In choosing Auerbach's text for my framework, I opt for a more "reception-biased" view of mimesis (Varsava x). Though Auerbach's Mimesis is devoid of introduction or lengthy explanation of its structure, I find that the text is surprisingly clear in its attempt to outline the history of mimetic form in Western literature. As Arne Melberg explains, "Auerbach notably presents the history of mimesis in twenty chapters in chronological order, basing each on a piece of text and discussing its *Darstellung*, its representation of reality as an integration of style, morality and reality" (2). In his epilogue, Auerbach is able to give cohesion to his text by examining his original intention. Auerbach admits that forms of representation of reality

in art have changed over time and that finding a focus is difficult. He admits, "[In the end] I was no longer concerned with realism in general, the question was to what degree and in what manner realistic subjects were treated seriously, problematically, or tragically" (556). However short and ineffectual Auerbach's epilogue may be, it does recreate for the reader a helpful analysis of a work in progress.

Auerbach's epilogue is also successful in its attempt to organize the chapters of his study coherently. Auerbach notes, "As I studied the various methods of interpreting human events in the literature of Europe, I found my interest becoming more precise and focused. Some guiding ideas began to crystallize, and these I sought to pursue" (554). In attempting to create a cogent study of his topic, Auerbach explains his decision to discuss three main epochs of mimesis giving indefinite dates for each. The first he calls "the doctrine of the ancients" (554). In this category, Auerbach places classical Greco-Roman poets. The second approach can be defined as the Judaic-Christian tradition (Varsava 44). Auerbach refers to it as "the view of reality expressed in the Christian works of late antiquity" (555). An example of this tradition is an allegorical play like Everyman, in which Christian doctrine of both Testaments is replicated in the actions of universal characters. The final epoch is that of "modern realism" as exemplified in the works of the French realists of the nineteenth-century (Auerbach 554). This tradition borrows several characteristics from its predecessors, but is different in one

important respect. Honoré de Balzac and other modern realists write about real people in real situations. Auerbach concentrates his study on the search for the origins of this modern realism.

An interesting element of Auerbach's study is that it holds both a synchronic and a diachronic view of mimesis (Varsava 45). Auerbach tries to maintain ordered, separate traditions of mimesis, yet he is able to see that there can be connections between traditions. Within each tradition there are differences and similarities; this accounts for the synchronic view. Between the traditions, however, there are also similarities and differences. Auerbach believes that ancient poets are similar to modern realists in their representation of reality even though they write about Gods and Goddesses. In his discussion of the first tradition of mimesis, Auerbach admits that poets like Homer deal with base human matters. Although Plato dismisses such subjects as morally corrupt, Auerbach sees it as realistic. He writes:

> The Homeric poems, then, though their intellectual, linguistic, and above all syntactical culture appears to be much more highly developed, are yet comparatively simple in their picture of human beings; and no less so in their relation to the real life which they describe in general. (13)

Rather than impress boundaries upon mimetic traditions, Auerbach believes it important to keep the channels open for movement between traditions. This movement explains the diachronic view.

Auerbach's discussion leaves the reader with an image of "various modes of mimesis [existing] simultaneously" (Varsava 45).

Application of such diverse traditions to a contemporary text may seem impossible, but in the case of Frolic, one need look no further than the idiosyncrasies of style to find modern realism at its finest. Gaddis's structural ambiguities can easily be explained as a productive attempt to represent real life and real characters. Gaddis displays an uncanny ear for the human voice garnering him high praise from reviewers of Frolic. As one reviewer admits, "Gaddis has razor blades for ears" (Harrington F-08). Gaddis is able to mimic the conversations we might hear at a bus stop or at a coffee shop. We may have to work to put faces and names to the dialogue, but Gaddis does not claim to make reading easy. Gaddis is also able to mimic the language and speech patterns of several different types of people. In Trish, Gaddis "mimics perfectly the language of the socialite" (Bergin 25). In the people of Tantamount, Virginia, Gaddis mimics the language of the blue collar worker (Frolic 34). In Harry, Basie, Madhar Pai, and the other cast of lawyers and Judges, Gaddis imitates the language of the law. In several other characters, Gaddis is able to express the language of real estate agents, insurance agents, and much more. Most of all, his style imitates the mundane existence of everyday life. "*Frolic* is rich in mundane detail--family spats, elaborate meals, off-color exchanges" (Kamine 19). Confusing and exhausting though it may be, one cannot help but admit that the world of Frolic is similar to the one we inhabit.

The ambiguity of content discussed above can also be explained as productive attempts at representing reality. Frolic's confusion

in meaning, for example, merely imitates the reality of miscommunication that conversing humans may encounter from day to day. Characters and readers realize that Plato had a point about truth being lost in imitation. Imitation becomes repetition. Even when we can see the facial expression of the person to whom we are talking, it is not excessive to suggest that we all need clarification of meaning in daily conversations. Oscar's confusion over Madhar Pai's comment about his "suit," for example, is a comic example of miscommunication that can happen to anyone (316). Oscar assumes that Madhar Pai wants to talk about the law suit when Oscar's suit of clothes is the topic of discussion. Of course, this miscommunication offers the two characters to discuss the law suit as well.

Confusion of message can be explained as Gaddis's attempt to show all sides of an issue. Here, Gaddis really shows us that our world is not black and white. We live in a world in which lawyers win and lose; in which cases are overturned; in which art is both praised and criticised; ultimately, this is a world without absolutes. When asked to describe his fiction, Gaddis has suggested that he has no real answers. He claims that the reader must have "the courage to live without Absolutes, which is really nothing more than growing up . . . the courage to accept a relative universe" (Abádi-Nagy 77). One important message of Frolic turns out to be that nothing is certain. Oscar seems to be losing his case, but then his fortunes miraculously change. Later, it is revealed that his settlement is minimal; in fact, Oscar ends up

owing money. Ironically, Oscar's request for justice is granted; but, as Oscar soon finds out, real justice has little monetary value (466). In another legal case, the fortunes of the participants of the Szyrk v Tantamount et al. case are continuously changing. The case against Reverend Ude ends with the horrifying suggestion that a boy's life is "for all practical purposes worthless" (377). Just like in the real American justice system, guilt and innocence are relative terms. Guilty parties are often set free because of lawyers who have a great command of the legal language and clients who can afford their services. Hope need not be lost, however, since the law is fickle. As O.J. Simpson is set free, the Menendez brothers are found guilty.

The connection between indeterminacy and mimesis in Frolic becomes problematic when contemporary criticism is consulted. It is the popular opinion of critics of contemporary American literature that most postmodern fiction in not mimetic. John Aldridge contends that "Most of our novelists now disdain the realistic reflection of life with as much reverence as they disdain the happy ending" (vi). Jerome Klinkowitz seconds this opinion asking "If the world is absurd, if what passes for reality is distressingly unreal, why spend time representing it?" (32). Most of the arguments supporting the antirealistic quality of contemporary fiction note the absence of morality as the deciding factor. Aldridge regrettably admits:

> However gifted Bellow, Barth, Pynchon, Mailer, Roth, Heller, Updike, Hawkes, Gaddis, and our other important novelists may

> be, we somehow do not look to them for intellectual and imaginative leadership, as at one time we looked to the major novelists of the twenties and thirties. (2)

In order to complete my explanation of Frolic's mimetic indeterminacies, I must deal with the issue of morality that Aldridge cites. A new definition of mimetic form is required.

There is little doubt that "Gaddis the satirist never becomes the moralist" (Battersby, "A Frolic of His Own" 9). Sven Birkerts explains "Top-heavy with legalistic obsession, it [Frolic] skimps on character and thereby undercuts its chances of making a strong moral connection to the material" (27-8). Birkerts is correct in this explanation of the text, but I think he overlooks the reader as an important contributor. In order to attach a mimetic quality to Frolic, it is necessary to obtain the reader's collaboration in the imitation of both fictive and actual reality. The traditions of mimesis mentioned so far all suggest a production-oriented method of representing reality. Certainly Auerbach, who promotes the possibility of a new mimesis, does not deny the importance of morality (553). In order to see Frolic and other contemporary texts as "mimetic," it makes sense to allow the reader to first make sense of the novel, and then relate it to his/her own life.[6] The new tradition of mimesis I suggest must retain both productive and receptive qualities. As Varsava suggests in his Contingent

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[6]In "Double Session," Jacques Derrida discusses a new tradition of mimesis, but he focuses on self-referential literature and fiction imitating fiction (169-99). The reader is still not consulted.

Meanings, "problem resolution should not be an a priori requirement in literature" (76). With a "switch from character to reader as locus for development," the reader can help complete a character's profile and then use it to "recover some semblance of meaning in the world the language of the novel reflects" (Comnes 9).

As readers of Frolic, we are called upon to fill in gaps. In the dénouement, especially, we are forced to assess character profiles and determine what does, or could, happen to each. For instance, judging from the myriad gaps in the text, readers could ultimately have different opinions as to the nature of Harry's death. Gaddis provides enough information for the possibility of an accident, but Harry's nihilistic attitude throughout the text does not rule out the possibility that he has been slowly committing suicide over a long period of time. He has abused his body and mind with drugs and alcohol, and has become impervious to emotion. By making a choice concerning character profiles and resolutions, the reader can then make a decision as to the moral utility of Gaddis's text. Just as Gaddis's characters have their own versions of reality and the truth, so do his readers. Moral utility depends on what the reader brings to the text. As one of Gaddis's characters in J R suggests, "Don't bring a God-damned thing to it can't take a God-damned thing from it" (605).

Comnes admits in his study of indeterminacy in William Gaddis's first three novels that "one might ask . . . if I am hopelessly naive in apparently claiming a mimetic form for any postmodern novel" (6). In the case of Gaddis's Frolic, a socially

critical mimesis is in obvious evidence. By his own admission, Gaddis's latest novel is his bleakest yet. He admits, "I can't protest . . . Each book does seem to take a dimmer and dimmer view of our prospects" (qtd. in Donahue 3D). Many would not even attempt to consider the novel realistic. In my attempt to explain the indeterminacies of the novel, however, I find it difficult to ignore the presence of real-life situation, dialogue, and confusion. Given Gaddis's unusual call for reader participation in the performance of his work, there is no reason why the obvious real-world referentiality of the novel cannot lead to the construction of a moral purpose for the reader's lived praxis. Assisting in the creation of the fictive world of the novel, e.g., character profile and resolution, only helps to make the novel morally useful for the reader. Though packed with indeterminacy and disorder, Gaddis's Frolic comes as close to reality as a contemporary text can.

Chapter Three

Allusion and the Reader: The *Humorous* Connection

In a New Criterion review of Frolic, Allen warns the unsuspecting reader of William Gaddis's "intellectual entropy" and "aggressive allusiveness" (61). Allen outlines, though briefly, the "allusive richness" of Frolic with its references as timeless as Plato and as recent as Gaddis's own Gothic (62). Most reviewers of Frolic, however, neglect to focus on a topic that is common to contemporary fiction. Writers like James Joyce, Thomas Pynchon, and John Barth have all utilized extensive allusion in their monumental texts.[1] Gaddis himself has used this technique, a technique Fredric Jameson calls the "play of random stylistic allusion," in each of his first three novels (18). Allusion of this sort is more an element of a writer's style rather than a tool to convey a necessary connection between the text and the alluded to reference. Gaddis's first novel, for example, was highly criticized for the "excessive deployment of the author's phenomenal erudition" which "[added] very little to the novel in information about characters or insight into events" (Rolo 80-1; Bass 12).[2] Perhaps a contemporary reviewer who encounters a text like Frolic sees nothing particularly original in Gaddis's penchant for direct and indirect citation. By declining to discuss this technique,

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[1]Joyce's Ulysses, Pynchon's Gravity's Rainbow, and Barth's Sot-Weed Factor have all been the subject of scholarly studies regarding allusion.

[2]For a more detailed look at the negative reception of Gaddis's allusive technique, see Jack Green's Fire the Bastards.

reviewers ignore, or perhaps confirm, the fact that many readers still hold a traditional view of allusion. In other words, these readers still believe that all allusions must be located and understood in order for a reader to complete a competent interpretation of the text. Allusive postmodern texts are, however, quite different from modern and epic texts, especially with regard to the demands they make of their readers. These texts can be daunting and intimidating in their obscurantism and frustrating in the readerly results they generate. In this chapter I will examine the extensive allusion in Gaddis's Frolic. I will outline in detail the modes of allusion employed by Gaddis and the problems they may cause for his readers. Using the novel's richly varied humour, ranging as it does from low-brow comedy to realistic pastiche and irony, I will examine those allusions that give Frolic its distinctive complexity and thematic depth in addition to its real-world referentiality.

An appropriate starting point for this chapter would be an examination of allusion's defining characteristics. The term can be elusive in that it has various definitions and boundaries. Traditional attempts to define allusion note that it refers mainly to subtle references. Harold Bloom, in A Map of Misreading, stresses "implied, indirect or hidden reference" as he employs the Oxford English Dictionary in his examination of allusion (126). Contemporary notions of allusion, however, are more open, allowing for direct as well as indirect references. Michael Wheeler acknowledges the importance of direct quotations in his definition

of allusion. He writes:

> I use *allusion* in [a] generic sense for two reasons: first, it is now part of critical usage, and secondly, no other word, such as *quotation* or *reference* will do . . . *Quotation* will not do as the generic term, as *references* are specifically not *quotations*, whereas *allusion* in my generic sense can comfortably accommodate *quotations* and *references*. (3)

The notion of allusion I will be using is based on Wheeler's definition. Like Wheeler, I believe that allusion is perhaps the most useful term to describe not only quotations, references, name and title dropping, character nomenclature, and other techniques but also indirect allusions to a text, an author, or a social concept. A direct plagiarism of a line or phrase without proper recognition tendered to the author can also fit this definition of allusion. An article by Linda Hutcheon also provides a helpful explanation of the many possible levels of allusion in a text. The title, "Literary Borrowing . . . and Stealing: Plagiarism, Sources, Influences, and Intertexts," explores the many terms that have all been subsumed under allusion's definition by one or another critic. It seems naive to cite any possible reference as an example of allusion, but it is necessary in order to update Bloom's notion of the term. New cultural and historical possibilities need to be addressed as the meaning of the term is constantly revamped. The major difficulty arises in the attempt to explain the relationship between author, text, and reader in terms of allusion. As Hutcheon demonstrates, the techniques of allusion employed by today's

writers often have a "disruptive effect . . . upon the act of reading" (235).

Gaddis utilizes various methods of allusion including character names, titles of works, acknowledged quotations, unacknowledged quotations, brief descriptions, and indirect references. Gaddis's methods are frequently obvious, but sometimes oblique. In some cases the allusions refer to specific texts or incidents while elsewhere they refer to general practices and social issues. In order to keep matters as simple as possible, I will treat each instance of reference as an example of allusion. I have organized my findings around three general thematic modes of allusion. I will discuss each mode separately, identifying each as an aspect of the novel's humour. The three modes, in order from least to most complicated, are postmodern culture, history/law, and literature/fine arts. Though there may be incidents of cross-reference between the modes, for the most part, the three chosen are distinct in their purpose and effect.[3]

The first and most obvious type of allusion found in Frolic is of a cultural nature. Such allusions are immanent reflections of a culture's tastes, issues, and ideals. In an attempt to portray realistically the postmodern American culture of his day, Gaddis saturates his fiction with references recognizable to the contemporary American reader. These references are particularly

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[3]Some examples of cross-referencing include Sir Francis Bacon who was a philosopher, a writer, and a chancellor as well as E.M. Forster who was both a novelist and a literary theorist. Both Plato and Aristotle could be considered classical literary and nonfictional references.

interesting to the novel's first audience because of the audience's close proximity to the people and events described. This proximity is not as apparent in the other types of allusion. The cultural references that appear in Frolic range from television shows and films to a wild assortment of postmodern issues. The information/entertainment age and the messages received from television, newspapers, magazines, and movies are common focuses for Gaddis. They are much in evidence in J R and Gaddis addresses them extensively in Frolic.

Gaddis admits in his article "Old Foes with New Faces," that the television, along with the radio, is one of "those twin Pandora boxes that shape and reshape our world daily" (9). The television, in particular, symbolizes the fragmentation and eclecticism of postmodern America. As in many postmodern texts, the television plays a major role in Frolic.[4] The reader is confused by constant interruption from commercials, programs, and news. Commercial jingles like "a little dab'll do ya" become part of the dialogue (23). Short narrative descriptions of advertisements for hemorrhoid cream (45, 379), false teeth (45), arthritis cream (284), and waffles (285) seep into the narrative unsuspectingly. Accurate descriptions of realistic newscasts relate stories of "the stretcher borne writhings of survivors of a tenement fire" (284), and "Serbs killing Croats" (442). References to intellectual quiz shows (441, 443), nature shows (226), and cartoons (242) permeate

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[4]Don DeLillo's White Noise and Thomas Pynchon's Vineland are other postmodern texts that make light of the influence of television on our everyday lives.

the novel as the characters sometimes watch, but frequently ignore, the television set. At one point Christina, in frustration, complains "--you're not even watching this grisly thing then?" (284). Not only is Oscar not watching the television, he is reading a book with the television going in the background. The reader is perhaps the only one that is always watching Gaddis's television; he/she has no choice.

The movie world also influences Gaddis's fragmented plot. As he employs a legal situation involving the making of a movie, Gaddis often makes reference to movies and movie stars. He alludes to stars with names like Clint Westwood (49), Robert Bredford (47), Hattie McDaniel (89), Butterfly McQueen (89), Leslie Howard (89), and Errol Flynn (146). Some names are real, others humorously contrived. Classic films like The Hunchback of Notre Dame (85), The Charge of the Light Brigade (146), and Gone With the Wind (354) are named. Gaddis even makes allusion to popular animated characters like Mickey Mouse (226) and movies such as Bambi as he compares the noble heroes of Longfellow with the new childhood idols of Thumper, Flower, and Bambi (508). Gaddis's penchant for satirizing the world of Hollywood, however, shows a deeper concern. Gaddis's novel, though obviously fragmented, displays a general anxiety for an era in American history which has seen not only the law become chaotic and money take control of people's lives, but popular actors elected to some important political positions, e.g., Ronald Reagan, Clint Eastwood, and Sonny Bono. Although the celebrity status placed on movie actors is not necessarily absurd

for Gaddis, combined with the other problems in today's society, it creates for the author a picture of an absurd society.

Gaddis makes use of magazines and newspapers in his look at other avenues for the dissemination of information in our fragmented postmodern society. He refers to People Magazine (267) and Hobby Time (280-2). He frequently mentions the average New Yorker's connection with the New York Times (279) and jokingly suggests that certain incidents require a "stern letter to the Times" (sic) (209).[5] Other newspapers named in Frolic include The South Georgia Pilot (36, 279), The Arkansas Family Visitor (36), The Globe Newspaper (36), The Charlotte Observer (279), and The Atlantic Constitution (279).

Gaddis tackles a plethora of postmodern cultural issues from post-colonialism and affirmative action, to AIDS, abortion, breast implants, drug/alcohol abuse, and greed. The characters of Basie and Madhar Pai remind the reader of continuing racial tension in America despite the abolishment of slavery. Mister Madhar Pai is dubbed "Swyne & Dour's token ethnic" (214). Christina later admonishes the practice of affirmative action, when she says:

> I've never heard such nonsense from you in my life. From you Harry! Swyne & Dour and your friend Sam trying to give these minorities a leg up like your little bastard Mister Mudpye? Out of two, three hundred lawyers you've got there every one

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[5]This particular reference could also be an allusion to Robert Coover's The Public Burning, a novel that addresses, among other issues, a similar connection between The New York Times and its audience.

> of them white? male? and you need a black face or two in the window before some antidiscrimination law wakes up and hands out a good stiff fine in the only language they speak up there, money? (272)

Combined with his use of the Civil War references, Gaddis's utilization of contemporary racial issues show that the struggle of minorities in America is still very real. AIDS, a disease that has afflicted popular sports figures such as Ervin Johnson, Arthur Ashe, and Tommy Morrison and been the subject of movies like Philadelphia, is brought up in several conversations. Oscar asks of a daytime soap opera "will Gary the star halfback test positive for AIDS?" (52) and later he says "I wasn't a baseball player with AIDS" (88). The abortion issues of the 1970's, 1980's, and 1990's, e.g., pro-choice versus pro-life, are brought up in Trish's decision to sue for foetal endangerment while fighting for the right to have an abortion. Lily's faulty breast implants recall the dangerous decision of American doctors and manufacturers to practice a less than perfect surgery. As Barbara Ehrenreich writes in a Time essay, "Why diddle around with slow, costly tests while an epidemic is raging out there?" (56). That supposed epidemic is, of course, small breasts. Elsewhere, Gaddis addresses greed in his depiction of the people of Tacamount and employment stress through his description of Harry's alcohol and drug abuse.

Finally, the Gaddis reader is confronted with an excess of unrelated references to postmodern life. In dealing with American "consumerism," Gaddis refers to club and restaurant names (47, 209,

456), product names (291, 432), in addition to fragments of cooking instructions for ham and fishcakes (433-4, 471). The reader also recalls, among other things, the Bush administration with stories about a "dog that lived in the White House" (88) and remembers childish jokes like "art today is spelled with an f" (240) and "calling the zoo and asking for . . ." (300). Puns on car names ("Sosumi" and "Isuyu") recollect the competition between foreign and American manufacturers in the 1980's and also, more importantly, the litigious nature of Americans (27-8).

For the most part, these allusions do not go unnoticed. These are timely references that a reader cannot help but recognize. They add an immediate sense of realism to the setting of the novel. Because of the striking nature of these references, the humour generated by the allusions is also howlingly obvious. Though they indicate a lower form of comedy, Gaddis's puns, comical nomenclature, and foolish television and movie plots keep readers amused even if they are the only allusions they might recognize. Readers also realize that it is not necessarily important whether Gaddis refers to The Simpsons or Looney Toons in his cartoon reference (282), or what brand of hemorrhoid cream is being mocked by his parody of commercials (45, 379).

Several reviewers dislike Gaddis's easy humour and, in the words of Scott Bradfield, suggest that "Gaddis's puns are intrusive and dumb" (27). True, Gaddis is often "guilty of going for the obvious joke" (Harrington F-08). What is important, however, is that readers recognize that more important issues like the

commercialization of tragedy and pain and the desensitization of postmodern society are beneath this humour. The slapstick humour present in the low-brow cultural allusions, though annoying to some, undoubtedly results in more sophisticated messages. Without necessarily taking sides, Frolic explores the direct relationship between continued growth, e.g., political and economic, and the evolution of American mass culture. Though economic and political growth has its advantages, it can also be destructive of high culture. Gaddis shows that incessant consumerism has a distinct effect upon the differences between high and low culture. He reveals the presence of what Christopher Lasch calls "the contemporary culture of 'narcissism'" in his realistic portrayal of America in the 1980's and 1990's (Lasch Minimal Self 18).[6] Hedonistic quests for money and personal gain through deceit, falsity, and absurd litigation have replaced traditional values and the Puritan ethic. Readers of Frolic are reminded of real-life figures such as Tanya Harding who are motivated to commit criminal acts and then litigate for libel against character. Thematically, all of Gaddis's cultural references present the cheapening of high culture by the absurdities of mass culture in America. For Gaddis, and others like him, there is nothing more imaginative than real-life situations. As Philip Roth writes of reality, it "stupefies, it sickens, it infuriates, and finally it is even a kind of embarrassment to one's own meagre imagination" (224).

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[6]Lasch expands on the notion of self-love and the American psyche in The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations (1979).

The second type of allusion prevalent in Frolic is of a more nostalgic nature and comes mostly from the inserted texts of Oscar's play and the legal documents. For want of a better epithet I have dubbed this order of references historical/legal allusion. The two are related in that most of the legal references come from landmark decisions or historical characters involved in the law. These allusions can also be subdivided into categories.

The historical references of Frolic can be separated into three groups. The first of these groups is the source books. The source books mentioned in the dialogue are those of Plutarch and Holinshed (179, 192) while those used directly by Gaddis include Bruce Catton's Mr. Lincoln's Army.[7] The importance of sources is later brought into question when the reader compares Shakespeare's use of Plutarch and Holinshed to Gaddis's use of Catton and others.

Gaddis alludes to several historical incidents and places, e.g., Heidelberg which was attacked frequently during the seventeenth century (24). More importantly, Gaddis names several events that were consequential during the American Civil War, obviously one of the most formative events in American history. Oscar's play is centred around the Battle of Antietam. Both within the play and throughout the novel, battles such as Shiloh (297, 309), Manassas (126), Seven Days (123), Richmond (83, 143), and Balls Bluff (83, 397, 413, 417) are named.

In terms of historical figures receiving mention in Frolic,

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[7]On the novel's inside cover, Mr. Gaddis acknowledges his debt to Bruce Catton for the Civil War references.

many come from the Civil War. Gaddis mentions Generals Hooker (52, 416-7), Longstreet (52), Jackson (83-4, 140, 443), Lee (140, 143, 417-8), McClellan (140, 416-8), Stuart (416), Ricketts (416), Meade (416), Sedgwick (417), Hill (418), and Porter (418). Steven Foster, the Civil War-time songwriter is named (411) and Colonel Thomas Kane is a possible source for one of Oscar's characters (76). Other historical figures found in the pages of Frolic are George Washington (89), Napoleon Bonaparte (95), Burke and Hare (255),[8] Lee Harvey Oswald (277), Peter the Hermit (328), Thomas Münster (328), T.E. Lawrence (Lawrence of Arabia) (329), King Tut (358), Solomon (398), and Queen of Sheeba (398).

Closely related to the historical references in Frolic are the legal allusions. These are somewhat difficult to categorize as they can waver between all three modes of allusion. They can be literary, e.g., Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., historical, e.g., Henry VII, or even cultural, e.g., Roe v Wade. In this novel, however, the legal references are closely linked to the historical because Oscar's play is about the American Civil War, and the several legal documents provided involve a combination of the two areas of reference. The connection between the Civil War and Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. also suggests this historical/legal categorization.

Legal figures that make an appearance in the novel mostly appear in the densely populated decisions of Judges Crease and Bone. Timeworn figures like Henry VII (33), Sir Francis Bacon

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[8]William Burke and William Hare were Scottish criminals accused of stealing dead bodies. Gaddis calls them the "Resurrectionists" (Frolic 255).

(256), Lord Edward Coke (258), and Alexis de Tocqueville (324) are found alongside more recent legal personalities such as Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. (43, 258, 251-3), Judge Learned Hand (251, 356), Judge Lewis F. Powell, Jr. (256), and others. Other references include legal terms such as "frolic of his own" which gives the novel its title and appears frequently throughout the dialogue (348, 376). Terms such as "ex parte" (30), "in situ" (35), "curator bonis" (252), "guardian ad litem" (252), and countless others are found throughout the text. A comical reference to Murphy's Law is also present.[9] Actual case law Gaddis has researched in the "84 volume set of American Jurisprudence" (Swartz 2) substantiates Frolic's inserted legal texts (29-38, 157-61, 164-208, 251-9, 349-64, 373-9). Gaddis is able to make use of case histories with the ease of a judge preparing a precedent-setting decision. He cites legal case histories to support all decisions so the reader can see the Socratic method at work in the legal world of Frolic.

Like the cultural allusions, the historical and legal references occupy a certain role in the reader's understanding of the text. Initially, readers are confused with the countless case references and historical allusions. They are not sure whether to research the case references or take it for granted that they are real and quoted correctly. Eventually, however, readers realize that these references also aid in creating the realism already

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[9]In a heated conversation Harry notes, "point's not that anything that can go wrong will go wrong" (343).

outlined in Chapter Two. One could easily read one of Gaddis's case decisions and think that it was an actual case decision.[10] This also applies to Gaddis's reliance on documented history in creating the fiction that is Oscar's play. By using Catton's text, Gaddis is able to insure that the situations in Oscar's play are believable.

Each of the inserted texts are parodies of similar real-life texts. Traditional notions of parody label it a genre in itself rather than part of a larger text; yet, from Mikhail Bakhtin's study of carnivalistic literature and Menippean satire, we learn that parody can also be "organically compatible" with other genres (Poetics 104). In other words, Frolic itself need not be a parody of any particular text or idea in order for the inserted texts to be considered examples of the form. The fact that the legal documents are so realistic allows Gaddis to create a more sophisticated level of humour. According to Moore, in his description of the fictitious case decision published by Gaddis in The New Yorker, "Gaddis has recovered [the] 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" (William Gaddis 142). The reader of Frolic is duped into believing that a real Judge is commenting on the death of Wayne Fickert, for example, and though the decision seems rather absurd, it is all too realistic (373-9). The alert

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[10]In fact, the first case decision found in Frolic (29-38) originally appeared as a short piece of parodic fiction in The New Yorker, 12 October 1987, 44-50.

reader, however, realizes that Gaddis is satirizing contemporary America and its decaying, litigious nature. Personal want has surpassed justice as the assumed intention of a litigating party. Actual cases brought by figures like Art Buchwald (Buchwald v. Paramount Pictures et al.) and Johnny Carson (Carson v. Here's Johnny Portable Toilets) illustrate the realistic quality that comes through in the cases of Frolic. Gaddis sees clearly that somewhere along the way, American jurisprudence has lost sight of the noble efforts of Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. and others like him. Gaddis's nostalgic look at original American legal thinkers explores how the American legal system of today has gradually strayed from order. The author is appalled with what Jesse Birnbaum describes as the "age of the self-tort crybaby, to whom some disappointment . . . is sufficient occasion to claim huge monetary awards" (36). Birnbaum's article quotes countless cases that prove the realism of Gaddis's litigious Frolic. Birnbaum mentions real absurd litigation like an employee suing another for flagrant flatulence and the estate of a dead car thief suing a parking lot for "failure to prevent [evidently fatal] auto thefts" (36-7). Contemporary America has been left with an "adversarial society" in which the law has become a tool to pit one side against another for personal gain (Swartz 2).

In Gaddis's realistic creation of a Civil War drama, he is able to raise questions regarding the copyright of history and the plagiarism of sources. Oscar's poorly crafted play is just realistic enough to make the reader question Oscar's rights under

copyright law even though he has borrowed much of his dialogue. Here Gaddis mocks the creative process and the plagiarism that it encourages. The reader of Frolic soon realizes that all literature is, and must be, a borrowing of some sort. Oscar's plagiarism of Plato and other sources mirrors the work of great plagiarists like William Shakespeare. Though the historical and legal allusions are a little more difficult for the reader to understand than the cultural ones, the major problems with allusion come with the third and final order, namely literature/fine arts.

In a brief statement regarding Gaddis's use of literary allusion, Amdahl notes that "reading Frolic is something like listening to a life insurance salesman and biblical prophet -- one who knows world literature forward and backward -- interpret your dreams" (42). Gaddis is obviously an avid reader. This accounts for the most difficult category of allusion found in Frolic. The third mode of allusion is the most frequently employed by Gaddis. It can be subdivided into several sub-categories. The important divisions subsumed under this category are Gaddis's references to many sub-genres and various national literatures as well as his allusions to music, architecture, sculpture, and painting. The diversity and density of Gaddis's literary references can be daunting. Gaddis's fictional allusions alone range from those made to mythological and classical sources to his own contemporary novels.

The mythological and classical references in Frolic are mostly brief and passing references to names, figures, and titles.

Mention of Erebus (157) and Jove (258) alludes subtly to both Greek and Roman mythology. Early classical literature is represented by references to Homer (91, 324), Aeschylus (199), Aristophanes (33), Euripides (33, 87), Epictetus (91), Vergil (324), and Horace (38). Later classical writers such as Dante (52), Nicochares (324), and Boccaccio (179) are also named. Most important of the classical references are those to the Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle. In several sections of his text, Gaddis refers to Plato's Republic (101, 190-3, 195-6, 198-9, 203, 320), Crito (204, 326, 358), and Cratylus (208, 330). Underlying allusions to Plato's notion of justice permeate the novel as Gaddis contrasts it with contemporary legal notions. Allusions to Aristotle, though confined to a few references to Politics (91, 298) and Poetics (203), are enhanced by Aristotle's obvious influence on Civil War confederates appearing in Oscar's play. Gaddis makes it evident that Aristotle's beliefs on slavery had a great effect on later thinkers like Jean Jacques Rousseau and, subsequently, on the American Civil War (298).

Allusions to European and American drama abound in Frolic. Brief references include those to early English dramatists Francis Beaumont, John Fletcher, John Ford, John Webster, Christopher Marlowe (228), and Richard Sheridan (292). Gaddis also names Henrik Ibsen (37), James Joyce (87), Elmer Rice (108), Tennessee Williams (108), and George Bernard Shaw (113). Of the dramatists that are alluded to in Gaddis's novel, William Shakespeare and Eugene O'Neill are the most important. Gaddis quotes directly from Macbeth (18), The Merchant of Venice (31), and Hamlet (365). He

also provides oblique quotations such as "words, words, words" (162) and "Strange Bedfellows" (248) which may or may not be allusions to Hamlet and The Tempest respectively. Gaddis briefly mentions Othello (171), King Lear (179, 179, 327), As You Like It (179), All's Well That Ends Well (179), Richard III (179), Macbeth (179), Antony and Cleopatra (179), Julius Caesar (179), and Timon of Athens (254). In all, no less than twelve of Shakespeare's plays are named in an effort to examine the leitmotif of originality in literature. As Shakespeare plagiarized much of his material, so Oscar borrows from Plato, Camus, and O'Neill. Eugene O'Neill's drama plays a similar role in the development of Gaddis's theme of literary borrowing. Oscar, in fact, is formally accused of plagiarizing O'Neill's Mourning Becomes Electra (392, 504). Madhar Pai also borrows several direct quotations from O'Neill's play in order to strengthen his case against Oscar (187-90). Oscar also mentions O'Neill's play, Emperor Jones (86, 245, 270), in his discussions regarding the similarities between his play and O'Neill's drama.

Poetic references are common. As with the dramatic allusions, some are more obvious than others. Several poets are mentioned such as Ezra Pound (87-8), Lord Byron, (159), Rudyard Kipling (312), William Blake (327), and Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr (426). Other poets mentioned briefly or quoted directly include T.S. Eliot (38), A.E. Housman (291), John Dryden (412, 485), and Robert Frost (507). Poets of seemingly greater importance, if frequency of reference is any indication, include John Keats, W.B. Yeats, and

Henry Longfellow. Gaddis not only quotes from Keats's "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" (23) but he mentions both "Endymion" (317) and "Ode on a Grecian Urn" (37, 361). Yeats's "Maid Quiet" is quoted on several occasions (79, 105, 280) and Yeats is offered as an incorrect reference for a Robert Frost poem (425).

Perhaps the most important poetic source employed by Gaddis is Longfellow's "Song of Hiawatha." Oscar's favourite poem as a child becomes an important and frequent source of allusion for Gaddis's novel. Gaddis mentions several characters and objects from the poem. He frequently refers to Hiawatha's "Magic Mittens" or "Minjekahwun" (285-6, 304, 372-3). Characters such as Wenonah, Minnehaha (Laughing Water), Nokomis, and Hiawatha, as well as animals like Kahgahgee, Kayoshk, and Adjidaumo all become part of the internal monologue and the external dialogue of Frolic. By alluding to a childhood poem and its influences upon a character, Gaddis is able to portray contemporary society's inclination for reversion. As Nasch explains, contemporary culture "tends to favour regressive solutions instead of 'evolutionary' solutions" (Minimal Self 185). Rather than move forward into an unknown world, Oscar ultimately chooses to retreat.

In addition to classical writers, dramatists, and poets, Gaddis alludes to prose writers of the nineteenth and twentieth-century. American transcendentalists Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson provide the references for the novel's chosen epigraph. Herman Melville is also a popular figure for Gaddis as references to reviews of Moby Dick become part of Judge Crease's

tirade on art (37). References to Steven Crane are interesting in the way Oscar misinterprets the story A Dark Brown Dog while at the same time misquoting the title. Oscar finds the short story "syrupy" and laughs at those who cannot believe that Crane could have written The Red Badge of Courage as well (45).

Frolic reads like a who's who of world novelists with allusions to Leo Tolstoy (37, 321), Fyodor Dostoyevski (320, 366), Sir Walter Scott (412), Charles Dickens (450, 489), E.M. Forster (360), and Albert Camus (199, 351). American novelists are indirectly alluded to in the novel. Richard Brautigan, for example, is not named directly but the incident of Sam going "trout fishing in Norway" is an obvious allusion to Brautigan's cult novel, Trout Fishing in America (342). Gaddis's exploration of the relationship between the people of New York and The New York Times is an indirect reference to Robert Coover's The Public Burning (279). Other indirect references include F. Scott Fitzgerald who surfaces in Madhar Pai's annoying "old sport" (165) phrase, and Richard Bach whose Jonathan Livingston Seagull is mocked in the character Jonathan Livingston Siegal (157).

Perhaps the most important fictional allusions come from Gaddis's own corpus of work. One of the major differences in the allusions found in Frolic and those found in Gaddis's early works is that, with Frolic, Gaddis has a substantial personal literary tradition of his own from which to borrow. In The Recognitions, Gaddis's first novel, a character is overheard saying, "--Plagiary? What's that. Handel did it. They all did it. Even Mozart did it,

he even plagiarized from himself" (941). Taking advice from his own character, and other great writers, Gaddis practices personal plagiarism and allusion on a grand scale in Frolic. Gaddis's theme of literature as a public entity becomes most clear in his use of his previous work to create a new text. The most obvious example would be his decision to incorporate sections of his own Civil War play Once at Antietam into the script. However, his personal recycling of material runs the gamut from characters' names, direct and indirect quotations, common incidents, and even sources. All three of Gaddis's former novels are referred to in Frolic.

In his use of common themes throughout his four novels, Gaddis invariably returns to the same sources. In Frolic, Gaddis borrows from many of the sources he consulted when writing The Recognitions. His choice of epigraph for Frolic, first appears in The Recognitions (265). Oscar's quotation from Montaigne also appears in The Recognitions (553) as does Judge Crease's citation of the "unswerving punctuality of chance" (Frolic 258, The Recognitions 9, J R 486). Brief references to other figures such as Sir Arthur Eddington (The Recognitions 301), Sir Thomas Gresham (The Recognitions 364), Tertullian (The Recognitions 436), Vincent Van Gogh (The Recognitions 461), Dale Carnegie (The Recognitions 498), Plato (The Recognitions 478), John Ruskin (The Recognitions 571), T.E. Lawrence (The Recognitions 581), and Sir Walter Scott (The Recognitions 692) among others are recycled in Frolic at one point or another. It is also in The Recognitions that the occasion of a play being possibly "stolen" and "produced with great acclaim

under someone else's name" is first introduced (The Recognitions 216). This play, like Oscar's Once at Antietam, has lines that "were familiar" to those who read it (The Recognitions 296).

Gaddis's second novel, J R, provides opportunity for Gaddis to practice more personal allusion. In J R Gaddis introduces the Cyclone Seven statue (665, 671, 685), which becomes a large part of the action in Frolic, as well as the idea of failing at "something worth doing" (715). This idea returns in Gothic (167, 228) before it reappears in Frolic (461). J R provides additional references for Oscar's play with its "undigested Plato" (282). The reader is even treated to a short section of Once at Antietam (282). Another incident of plagiarism is mentioned in reference to a "Western called The Blood in the Red White and Blue" (694), the name of Kiester's film in Frolic (411). Other brief references that appear in J R and reappear in Frolic include "Minnehaha" (J R 560), dying "intestate" (3), and "Erebus" movie company (554).

Gothic provides more direct instances of borrowed material than both The Recognitions and J R. Gaddis borrows characters, incidents, phrases, and more from this novel. Characters like Reverend Ude, Liz Vorakers, Edie Grimes, and Mr. Jheejheeboy are all named in both novels. Incidents such as Liz's death (Frolic 335, Gothic 255) and Wayne Fickert's death (Frolic 293, Gothic 48) make important appearances in both novels. The Battle of Antietam makes an appearance in Gothic as it does in J R and Frolic. Other allusions to Gothic include mention of rattlesnakes in a mailbox (Frolic 268, Gothic 98) as well as direct quotations such as "Sikhs

killing Hindus, Hindus killing Moslems, Druse[s] killing Marionites, Jews killing Arabs, Arabs killing Christians . . ." (Frolic 471, Gothic 185-6) and "[scenes of mayhem] from Londonderry to Chandigarh" (Frolic 237, 391, Gothic 186).

Gaddis's reliance on literature includes references to nonfiction texts and writers. Gaddis's interest in contemporary notions of religion has been a popular leitmotif in all three of his early novels. This is especially true in Gothic where the struggle between religious fundamentalism and Darwinism comes to the forefront. As he borrows characters and situations from this novel, Gaddis also re-investigates its concern for religious belief in a postmodern world. In Frolic, Gaddis explores the laws of God and man. Frolic develops religious themes in its use of Reverend Ude and his fundamentalist view of God's law. Judge Crease's decision to banish God from his courtroom, however, reveals the differences between the laws of church and state. In Frolic, Gaddis mentions the Bible on several occasions, especially in Oscar's play and Judge Crease's decision in the Ude case. Gaddis quotes from the New Testament Books of Matthew 4:1-11 (72), Matthew 6:19-21 (69, 378-9, 485), Matthew 8:26 (376-7), Matthew 10:34 (38, 327), Luke 2:49 (376), and John 3:16 (480). He also alludes to the Old Testament Books of Genesis 11:9-11 (248), Exodus 15:1-18 (327), and Jeremiah (309). John Israel, the black slave from Oscar's play is an indirect reference to the personification of Israel the slave in Jeremiah 2:14-19. Brief religious allusions include those to the Koran (330), Tertullian (330), a "Hail Mary" license plate

(455) and all the warring religious factions of the world (471). Gaddis's depiction of the importance of religion is relevant for the American reader as fundamentalism is alive and well in America. The American public's inclination for belief in a higher force has survived despite the increasing scientific debates regarding evolution and the existence of Christ.[11] In fact, it still fuels an "ultraconservative movement within the Republican party" with candidates like Pat Buchanan (Wuthnow and Lawson 19).

As mentioned above, philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle play a large part in Frolic. Additional philosophers who bear mentioning are Michel de Montaigne (474), E.M. Cioran (259), and William Ockham (256). Gaddis even makes mention of modern popular philosophers such as Dale Carnegie (196, 478) whose book How to Win Friends and Influence People enjoyed much popularity in the 1950's. Jean Jacques Rousseau and his Social Contract are perhaps as important to Oscar's play as Plato and his Republic in that Rousseau represents a nostalgic look at the importance of all races of man to the state. References to the Social Contract in Frolic include direct quotations (64, 72, 81, 82) and brief mention of Rousseau's ideas (21, 199, 351, 358). Rousseau's views on freedom and slavery are comparable to Aristotle's in their influence upon the Civil War of Oscar's Once at Antietam.[12]

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[11]Both Time (8 April 1996) and Newsweek (8 April 1996) have recently run articles dealing extensively with what has been called the "Jesus" debate.

[12]Their views represent the contrary notions on slavery during the American Civil War.

Gaddis's nonfiction allusions come from an assortment of disciplines other than philosophy. Political treatises such as George Fitzhugh's Cannibals All (45) and the writings of Sir Francis Bacon (256) are briefly mentioned. References to well known scientific figures such as Sigmund Freud (215, 321) and Charles Darwin (268), are mixed with obscure references to Sir Arthur Eddington (33) and Merck's Manual (318). Literary and artistic critics are not neglected as Larzer Ziff (27), John Ruskin (37), C.M. Bowra (352), and E.M. Forster (360) receive mention.

Completing the first type of allusions is Gaddis's employment of the fine arts. Gaddis makes use of these references mostly in his arguments about the (un)importance of art. This issue is a popular one for Gaddis as it appears in all of his works. In an attempt to present both sides of the issue, Gaddis discusses artists who were chastised in their own time. He mentions such composers as Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (20, 21, 23, 472), George Bizet (37), and Igor Stravinsky (37). Other references from the fine arts community in Frolic include Donatello (33), Milos Aphrodite (33), the Cubists (37), James Whistler (37), Albrecht Dürer (44), the Acropolis (91), Vincent Van Gogh (173), Hermogenes (330), and Michelangelo (398). References to the evils of the art dealer as avaricious middleman remind the reader of Gaddis's The Recognitions, a novel preoccupied with art and its importance to society (Frolic 54). By discussing contemporary art in the same vein as artists like Bizet and Van Gogh, Gaddis is able to show that, no matter how ludicrous a statue like Cyclone Seven sounds,

it may one day be considered a great piece of art.[13]

The examination of literary allusion in Gaddis's novel results in a problem for the reader. Traditionally, allusion has been employed as a method of strengthening a text's message. The realism and humour of the first two modes of allusion strengthen Frolic by helping to depict an absurd, fragmented, postmodern society by deploying a variety of realistic pastiches. In the case of the novel's literary allusion, however, matters are different. Authors have used extensive allusion in order to "show . . . knowledge of the tradition in which [they] operated, and also the new possibilities [they] saw in [their] particular redistribution of those traditional formal elements" (Hutcheon 235). According to Elaine B. Safer, epic writers like Cotton Mather have "developed a sense of a legendary past" to which the reader can relate (25-6). Readers' knowledge of the referenced texts helps to create a better understanding of the text at hand. Therefore, readers are encouraged to prospect ancient literature for themes and references with which to better understand what they read. Today, contemporary theory encourages such extensive reading through the proliferation of theories of intertextuality. Theorists like Julia Kristeva, Roland Barthes, Gérard Genette, and others teach that new texts like Frolic are merely intersection points of other, already written, texts. Even those theories of intertextuality that hold a favourable view of reader participation in the text, focus on the

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[13]Gaddis's defense of postmodern art is similar to that offered by enthusiasts of Andy Warhol's work.

author's role in the text's creation. Michael Riffaterre, for example, believes that the reader's role should be to find the intertexts that make up the text studied. He writes, "The intertext leaves an indelible trace in the text, a formal constant which plays the role of an imperative for reading, and which governs the decoding of the message" ("Trace" 5).[14] In other words, "each literary text guides the reader towards its own intertexts" (Morgan, "Space" 262). When confronted with a possible allusion the readers have a decision to make:

> Will they continue to read, obeying the culminative narrative and linguistic pressure to proceed? Or will they stop, investigate the alternative, the contiguous or simultaneous echoing reference, and then, perhaps, integrate *that* into their reading and interpreting as they proceed? (Hutcheon 235)

This decision is a particularly daunting one in the face of novels as richly allusive as those of William Gaddis or, for example, Thomas Pynchon.

As shown above, the reader of Gaddis's Frolic is confronted with a text that is encyclopedic in size and scope. Traditional methods of tracing allusion will present the reader with long hours of arduous work. Even a reader well-versed in American and European literature is confronted with Gaddis's irritating hybrid and unattributed references, e.g., "Go to Shiloh and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people" (309). In one instance, a

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[14]This translation comes from Thaïs Morgan's "The Space of Intertextuality."

phrase is italicized, suggesting a possible allusion, then later it is paraphrased in Gaddis's narrative (285-6, 304). Ownership of language is constantly called into question. One soon learns that tracing all of the references may be impossible.[15] However, the courageous reader finds that many of the literary references found in Frolic are not what they seem. Rather than employing allusion to strengthen his text, Gaddis utilizes is in quite another way.

As with many contemporary novelists, Gaddis employs a technique Safer has dubbed "ironic allusiveness" (113). In her study of The Recognitions, Safer notes:

> Gaddis alludes to earlier literature in order to show an ironic contrast with the precepts of his era. He returns to literary depictions of traditional beliefs and behaviour from earlier centuries to show--by contrast--the superficialities of twentieth-century America. (113)

Safer mentions Gaddis's references to transcendental writers like Emerson, religious writers like Clement, and dramatists like Goethe to demonstrate this point. In Frolic, the reader is treated to much of the same innovative use of allusion. As previously indicated, Frolic borrows from many of the same literary traditions as The Recognitions. The novel's epithet sets up the contrast between transcendental thinking and the insipidity and confusion that is postmodern America. The reader realizes that the ideals represented by the sources alluded to in the novel are contrary to

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[15]Steven Moore acknowledges the impossibility of locating all of the references Gaddis incorporates into The Recognitions in his gloss of the novel (Guide x).

those demonstrated by the novel's contemporary society. Judge Crease quotes Shakespeare's "Hath a dog money" in its literal sense as he explains the impossibility of monetary damages for Spot's actions against the sculpture (31). Of course, Shakespeare intends a more figurative meaning in his choice of the phrase. For Shakespeare, issues of race and equality are more important as Shylock attempts to prove his humanity (The Merchant of Venice I.iii.115).

Elsewhere in Frolic, we see more examples of innovative allusion. Madhar Pai's reference to "Endymion," for example, is contrary to the poet's original thoughts. Madhar Pai explains, "Nobody can write a better poem than Endymion" (317). Keats was quite displeased with the poem. Oscar misunderstands the Stephen Crane short story. In fact, A Dark Brown Dog is a tragic story, especially from the point of view of the dog (Crane 158-63). In Mr. Szyrk's choice of the Cioran quotation, Gaddis makes a comparison between Szyrk's creation and God's Creation (259). Judge Bone cites E.M. Forster's Aspects of the Novel in his description of the mass rape scene in Kiester's movie (360). References to Aristotle reveal that his influence has had a negative effect on racial tension despite the treatment of his works as classical learning. Characters in Oscar's play who quote from Aristotle reveal that the philosopher harboured views highly controversial by today's standards. Important allusions to Longfellow's "Song of Hiawatha" are mocked in the novel's conclusion. Longfellow's noble Minnehaha is found in sexually

explicit scenes with Oscar on the riverbank (508). Sexuality becomes a part of a seemingly innocent childhood tale. Connections with Thumper the Rabbit, Flower the Skunk, and Bambi also show the contradiction between the high ideals of past societies and the low ideals of contemporary America. Oscar's tickling scene shows an absurd example of a traditional Romantic ideal of returning to childhood (508). All in all, Gaddis's literary references tend to weaken, rather than strengthen, the novel's possibility of reaching a desirable moral conclusion. The utilization of personal allusion only increases the confusion since Gaddis's first three novels employ similar allusive techniques.

In light of this realization, the reader's role is made considerably less difficult. Knowledge of shared characteristics between each mode of literary allusion employed by Gaddis allows for an understanding of their combined result. As readers do not necessarily need to know and understand every cultural, legal, and historical reference, they need not share the precise literary background of the author. Of course knowledge of several sources such as Plato's Republic, Rousseau's Social Contract, and Longfellow's "Song of Hiawatha" aids in a deeper understanding of the novel; yet, Gaddis does provide enough insight into these sources to facilitate understanding of their major themes. Comprehension of the irony set up by the combined literary sources is enough to help the reader picture the chaos that is William Gaddis's twentieth-century America.

The combination of the three modes of allusion and the

fragments of humour they enhance, creates many possibilities for contemporary innovative narrative. Whether labelled a "Menippean satire" (Bakhtin, Poetics 87), an "anatomy" (Frye 312), an "encyclopedic narrative" (Mendelson 1267), a "comic epic" (Safer 17), or an "encyclopedic satire" (Weisenburger 201), William Gaddis's latest novel provides both comic enjoyment and incisive social commentary in its complex allusivity. More important than the recognition of the many allusive levels of Frolic, however, is the reader's realization that not every source need be traced and understood completely. Reader frustration, followed by reader participation, is precisely the desired result of fictions like Frolic. Of all the possible examples of allusion the reader can trace, not one alone, e.g., Plato's Republic, can fully explain the novel. Acknowledgement of this fact increases the possibility of each reader's individual enjoyment of innovative fiction.

Conclusion

Frolic stands in a line of inventive, thematically rich fiction by William Gaddis. Like its predecessors, Frolic confirms the notion that "Gaddis has that uncanny knack for understanding the cultural movement, for ferreting out exactly what are the problems and preoccupations of the day" (Carnegie B8). Each of his novels uncovers an aspect of American society in need of criticism. With The Recognitions, Gaddis reveals the falsity of human nature and the unoriginality of the arts. In J R, Gaddis attacks American greed is symbolized by the actions of a business-minded child prodigy. Gothic takes religious fanaticism and politics as its main targets. Frolic embodies all of Gaddis's previous leitmotifs in an intricate web of hilarity. With Frolic, Gaddis exposes the decaying legal system and its wide-reaching control over a narcissistic society. In the words of Gregory Comnes, Gaddis "explores the vagaries of the law and the legal profession in a world where the failure of a David Stockman simply means that he will be replaced by a J R" (148).[1]

Initial reviews of Frolic, however, suggest disagreement regarding its importance within contemporary American fiction. Several reviewers have shown concern for Gaddis's seeming insensitivity towards his readership. Others have expressed a sincere enjoyment of Gaddis's innovative style and ear for the

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[1]David Stockman was the controversial budget director for the Reagan administration (1981-5). He publicly disagreed with many governmental expenditures and later wrote a critical book entitled The Triumph of Politics: Why the Reagan Administration Failed.

human voice. This divergence stems from a difference in opinion regarding the role of the reader in postmodern fiction. It is essential to the enjoyment of Gaddis's fiction, however, that the reader accept the act of reading as "a collaboration between the reader and what is on the pages" (Abádi-Nagy 80). Often seen as a writer of hopeless fiction, Gaddis is a actually a proponent of what Abádi-Nagy calls "Creative reading" (82). As I have already shown, readers of Frolic are confronted with many questions to which only they can provide satisfactory answers. By practising authorial absence, Gaddis allows readers to compare the America of Frolic with their own reality.

In addition to the recognition of the reader's role in creating mimetic fiction, the reader must also realize the role he/she can play in making a connection between Frolic's allusion and its humour. Gaddis's realistic depiction of the difference between high culture and mass culture is greatly emphasized by his techniques of allusion. The use of allusion in Gaddis's satiric fiction only increases the reader's enjoyment of Frolic. Gaddis expects a reader to be well read, but he does not expect each reader to have read all of the books he cites. Ample explanation of the necessary resources is given. Knowledge of how modes of references affect the humour is sufficient for a reader to make a decision about how Gaddis sees American society. Identification of the relationship between author, text, and reader results in a much more sympathetic view of the novel than that expressed by the majority of Frolic's first audience.

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