



A Frolic of His Own

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With the publication of the "Recognitions" in 1955, William Gaddis was hailed as the American heir to James Joyce. His two subsequent novels, "J R" (winner of the National Book Award) and "Carpenter's Gothic," have secured his position among America's foremost contemporary writers. Now "A Frolic of His Own," his long-anticipated fourth novel, adds more luster to his reputation, as he takes on life in our litigious times. "Justice? - You get justice in the next world, in this world you have the law." So begins this mercilessly funny, devastatingly accurate tale of lives caught up in the toils of the law. Oscar Crease, middle-aged college instructor, savant, and playwright, is suing a Hollywood producer for pirating his play *Once at Antietam*, based on his grandfather's experiences in the Civil War, and turning it into a gory blockbuster called *The Blood in the Red White and Blue*. Oscar's suit, and a host of others - which involve a dog trapped in an outdoor sculpture, wrongful death during a river baptism, a church versus a soft drink company, and even Oscar himself after he is run over by his own car - engulf all who surround him, from his freewheeling girlfriend to his well-to-do stepsister and her ill-fated husband (a partner in the white-shoe firm of Swyne & Dour), to his draconian, nonagenarian father, Federal Judge Thomas Crease, who has just wielded the long arm of the law to expel God (and Satan) from his courtroom. And down the tortuous path of depositions and decrees, suits and countersuits, the most lofty ideas of our culture - questions about the value of art, literature, and originality - will be wrung dry in the meticulous, often surreal logic and language of the law, leaving no party unscathed. Gaddis has created a whirlwind of a novel, which brilliantly reproduces the Tower of Babel in which we conduct our lives. In "A Frolic of His Own" we hear voices as they speak at and around one another: lawyers, family members, judges, rogues, hucksters, and desperate

A Frolic of His Own Details

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From Reader Review A Frolic of His Own for online ebook

Nathan "N.R." Gaddis says

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

One of the greatest opening lines in the history of the novel.

Why does Gaddis choose such an easy target for his wit and satire, the law and its attendant system of legalism and legalese? To save the language. The language of the law is opaque to most of us not versed in it. But as with any technical and conventional language it is precise, addresses directly and clearly the phenomena, difficulties, concepts, REALITY which we encounter in our murky worlds and relations as human beings. And the language of law attends to itself as a language, how it expresses itself, covers itself and its reality. Gaddis found himself fascinated with legal language to the same high degree that readers of Proust are fascinated with Proust's prose and Heidegger with the sayings of the pre-socratics, recovering what was covered over by an obscuring Latin; all three seeking to recover something which is passed over in our everyday bungling of our inept relationship with what we say and how we say it.

But what about the novel which Gaddis did not write, and the novel which perhaps only Gaddis could write, the kind of novel which will not be written in an age following the decline of the systems novel, the novel of industry; and if not the systems novel of our Gaddises and Pynchons, how about a revivification of that old-timey social realist novel ::

Health care? --You get health care in the next world, in this world you have health insurance.

I mean to say that beyond the congressional=military=industrial complex, what threatens internal USAian politics, society, economy, well=fare and well=being, is the obscene state of our health care industry. There is a novel to be written here.

A patient in a hospital room with Television playing, nurse enters; nurse performs task; returns to nurses station, chats with coworker about weekend plans, answers phone; family enters to visit patient with flowers and kids in tow; there's a doctor doing rounds with perhaps a few medical students, it's a teaching hospital; a janitor mops the floor, another has his head in the ceiling; the patient perhaps has insurance, doesn't have insurance; was injured, has a life-threatening disease or not; doctors have a morning conclave with cellophane-wrapped croissant ham sandwiches; an administrator makes rounds; some tech sysadmin person still trying to get the paperless transition papered over; nurses bitch about the scheduling; they wonder whether it'd be better to have union representation, or maybe they do and there's a new contract to negotiate, possible picketing; meanwhile our administrator returns to her office to count more beans; it's a for=profit hospital and there are a lot beans to count; or it's a not-for-profit hospital and grants need writing but the pool of grant money is drying up for some reason or there's a large donor who's nervous about the recent Joint Commission report; or maybe it's a religious institution and some recent laws passed about birth control have a few dogmatists nervous about funding; and then someone threatened the staff in the ER last night with what we thought was a gun, the police are still milling around collecting information and conducting five=minute interviews; which is all complicated enough but then there are a dozen or so insurance companies who have actuaries predicting the future of the population and its health and then some politicians who'd like to just get rid of the entire insurance scam and simply provide single-payer health care

for all citizens and even some non-, with the backing of like 60% of the population *in a democracy* but this would shut down the insurance industry so we've got to save them too and the money they spend getting our people elected into various houses and offices; and there's a farm bill which is making people sicker by selling them things made out of inedible No 2 field corn in the form of big macs but that's a pretty lucrative sector of the economy so we can't shut them down just spend more money on sick people is good for the economy; and as long as people are buying things poison doesn't matter; but this isn't what we see when we see the interior of a hospital on the television screen in the various hospital rooms which have the television on for the patient who is unfortunate enough to have to spend even a single hour in this dungeon..... It's not like you can actually get any serious reading done or reviews written under these working conditions.

I don't know. But it's a novel that won't get written because I've heard that Hysterical Realism is out and something called The New Sincerity (is that a threat?) is in; and what we want to read about is honesty and integrity and a good person and authentic experience and consciousness and first-personness ; and but we lose when our writers of big square books are not bothering to pay attention and think through what are in fact incredibly large sectors of our lives. And instead of a Gaddis addressing the crisis of health care in the USofA we have little more than a Michael Moore with his Sicko!, and so I'm wondering why we don't have our greatest fictional minds thinking about these things;

Rissi says

Sloughed through 372 pages of this and just can't find motivation to read the last 130 or so pages. Not only is the avant garde, or Gaddis's personal idiosyncratic stream of consciousness and to heck with conventional conversation and punctuation, extremely off-putting and difficult, the "frolic" takes place in mid-1980s, which (and I was there) were boring, banal, and otherwise a pain to live through, he puts us through it again. Only thing missing is the bad music.

I'm complaining also about the typesetting. When he inserts, in ghastly legal detail, the legal suits filed that have some strange relevance to the story, he does it in sans serif typeface with no leading. Hard to read. As mentioned above, he uses no quotation marks to identify conversation and every character's conversation (or blathering) runs into the next characters.

There is some humor, but it's too hard to find and to care about.

Finis.

Lee Foust says

There's so much to say about this... That is to say, I despair, in this format, of doing justice to the scope of this--probably Gaddis's weakest--novel justice. To get the review part out of the way: If he'd written only this I'd probably be hailing it as the greatest great American novel of all time. As is, it's the weakest of the author's first 4--I've yet to read *Agape, Agape* (but I snagged a used copy in San Francisco this summer so it won't be long now).

Specifically, *A Frolic of His Own* takes on justice and it's earthly version, the law. But, as usual for Gaddis, that's only a stepping stone into the massive labyrinth of being in and of the United States of America--what

it means to be an individual living in and with that particular culture (or lack thereof) in the twentieth century. (Ostensibly set in the decade in which it was written, the 1980s, only a passing reference to the AIDS crises really dates it. Put it in your post-WWII catalogue and leave it at that.)

While our so-called minorities are represented here--a black lawyer and an undocumented Hispanic who works for a garage--the point of view is certainly white and Middle--or even upper--Class. And, yes, the portrait is one of a rickety, narcissistic male's hold on the auto-generated concepts of what those things mean. Which is brilliant. And which is also to say that the novel, like the truly great work of art that it is, is prescient and well informs how the U.S.A. has mutated in the three decades since the novel's publication into Trumpistan. (For, while our protagonists here are all childless, I can easily see an imaginary next generation of these people basking in the past to which Oscar, the protagonist, alternately clings and rages against as they shuffle off to menial jobs at Walmart and Home Depot, their legacy squandered, and looking for new immigrants and new minorities to blame for the culture of parasitism that their forefathers created, that culture having destroyed them all, both spiritually and materially.)

The core of the U.S. sickness, which I would call the flipside of the humanistic ideal; to wit: the narcissism of the pre-Baby Boom white American artists, professors, lawyers, and businessmen of the 1980s who deludedly believed that they belonged to the greatest generation of the greatest nation of the country with the greatest government in the greatest place ever in the history of humankind expands into themes of alcoholism, commercialism, phoniness in all business dealings (even Dale Carnegie gets an honorable mention), fiscal irresponsibility, the shabbiness of art and film as they were degraded into "popular culture" and "entertainment," an opportunistic sue-happy culture, a lack of ethics or loyalty, entitlement, American exceptionalism, religion as capitalist scam, casual misogyny, casual, entitled racism, etc. etc. So many beautifully intertwined and inter-related themes in such a beautifully composed fugue of humorous disgust and outrage. I loved it.

Certainly Gaddis was at the height of his powers as a composer of sentences, as comfortable with his very original style as he would ever be--formally *Frolic* is 95% the stilted, realistic-yet-mesmerizing logorrhoea of dialogue of *JR* and 5% the exquisitely lyric run-on prose of *The Recognitions*. yet I call *A Frolic of His Own* Gaddis's weakest novel. For, despite the stylistic acumen and the beautiful intertwining of themes, there's some small spark missing that glows so brightly in the three novels that preceded *Frolic* I can't quite put my finger on it here, but I felt it's lack. So I'll just call it the fourth greatest great American novel and leave it at that.

bushn says

There is so much going on here. But I need to tell you one thing: watch Lily.

Gaddis manages to direct a background character *in the background* with stage directions given by another character, all through dialogue. How do I even describe it?

Lily is the only actor in a solo play. She's introduced as a simple, shallow and discordant accessory to Oscar's scattered intellectualism. Through her rare and persistently ignored speeches she relates a life somehow more chaotic and absurd than Oscar's: a dead sibling, brainwashed parents, insolvency, several affairs and lawsuits. Despite this, she remains with Oscar and becomes the silent anchor during the Crease family collapse. She's constantly told (mostly by Christina) to help. We find out that she does (all through dialogue) because she's either reporting back or ordered to do another task. She never argues. She's never asked nicely

or thanked. She's mistaken for the housekeeper and doesn't complain (or doesn't notice). The gaps in her lines are almost always explained by assumed intervals during which she wordlessly completes a task. The reader has to do all her work in their head, because nothing is described. Lily's expected (and deserved) revolt, exhaustion or abandonment never comes. She is in the background, but she is *there*, more than anyone. It's amazing.

And try to find Lily referenced meaningfully in any other review of this book. There's so much going on. But I also want to tell you something else:

People often refer to Gaddis' dialogue as some kind of gimmick or pretension. Maybe it was. But Lily's astonishing character arc is only a small part in a book full of astonishing parts. Parts in an unwieldy Civil War play Gaddis wrote and then wrote this book about, to ridicule and deconstruct. Parts in trials that drive the plot, showcased in elegant legal writing and stenographed transcripts. And finally parts in and around a family carefully created and destroyed, also transcribed verbatim. Gaddis is not writing a story, he's presenting evidence.

A trial is a story, a *real* story. To leave something out, to perjure the reader with cleaned up, encapsulated, marked-up dialogue that doesn't represent how people actually exist and interact, is against the law. Or it should be.

Jeremy Hornik says

Oh my God this book is hard to read. Gaddis not only knows a lot of words, he's happy to leave out the quotation marks to indicate someone is speaking. (Incidentally, every book I've ever read that left out quotation marks was brilliant. They have to be, because they're practically unreadable.) Anyhow, it's brilliant. There's a legal opinion that is dry, dry, dry and hilarious, and there's deep sadness and crushing emotion, and it made me read (eventually) every other book Gaddis wrote.

PS They're all good, and they're all too hard for you to read. You probably shouldn't try.

Alex says

Outstanding, hilarious, and almost overwhelming at times. *A Frolic of His Own* trains William Gaddis' satirical eye on America's litigious culture. It presents a world in which everyone is suing someone for some perceived wrong and demands of justice are really just weakly disguised grabs for cash. The legal system is supposed to offer order and reliability to this chaotic existence, but the disarray in which all these characters live makes clear the chasm between the theory and the practice. Trapped in a world of words, even everyday communication is a haphazard and anxious affair. Meanings and misunderstandings carom around as the plot takes humorous dips and dives through the characters' disintegrating lives.

Though often hilarious, this book is also extremely heavy. It has the humor of tragedy. Gaddis has a cynical outlook that some readers might not be extremely comfortable with, but it's not wholly nihilistic, and there might be salvation hiding between the lines if you look hard enough. In all, it is a major book by one of my very favorite authors, and one of the most perceptive accounts of American existence written in the last fifty years.

MJ Nicholls says

J. Franzen says about *A Frolic of His Own* that "its only aesthetic weakness, really, is that much of it is repetitive, incoherent, and insanely boring." Repetitive? No but listen there are about 600 pages here of unstylised dialogue where the protagonists use the same phrases ad nauseam and run-on sentences like we do in life what else did you say, Franzen? Incoherent? No but listen there is a plot here, a satirical plot about lawsuits and an avaricious professor and listen did you remember to peel the potatoes? what was I saying about the incoherent plot? it might be incoherent but that doesn't mean the legal satire isn't in the best absurdist tradition because it is and although like Franzen I don't see . . . hang on whose voice is transmitting now, is this Franzen speaking? How about insanely boring? No but listen you can't have a near 600pp novel written almost entirely in dialogue no sprouts for me thanks I hate the things without a few lags . . . well the last 200 pages are sort of one long lag and the momentum of the first 400 with its whirling-dervish satire is cancelled and replaced with well *incoherence* is the word but listen Gaddis is a pioneer of the free-floating narratorless narrative no but there *is* a narrator, like a camera lens he pops up to narrate in unusual ways, as I said like a camera describing certain movements the characters are making mostly the protagonist groping his floozie . . . but I said I didn't want sprouts weren't you oh never mind I'll take them anyway no but listen Franzen was wrong because this isn't a waste of time it simply isn't a particularly successful novel. Did he finish it? Who is he? Franzen? No, MJ. No. Bailed on p526. Wimp. At least Franzen a real man got to the end no thanks I don't want anymore Gaddis I mean *gravy*, I said I don't want anymore *gravy*.

Ali says

So you know how Gravity's Rainbow is basically about boners, right? Sure, a lot of other things happen, if they didn't, the book wouldn't be nearly as (in)famous, but let's not be too pretentious here, it's mainly about boners. Few pages go by without a reference to penises or vaginas, either symbolic, or literal, and often both at once. In the same way that GR is about erections, *A Frolic of His Own* is about lawsuits.

There is a review which summarises GR in one sentence. All it says is:

THIS BOOK IS ABOUT A MAN IN WW2 HE GETS ERECTIONS.

I like that. It's pithy and accurate and gets right to the point. It gives you the plot in one small sentence. It does not fuck around, unlike most of the characters in Gravity's Rainbow. "Here is Gravity's Rainbow," it says. "I hope you like you some hard-ons, because there are going to be plenty up in this bitch," it says. "Some people like cupcakes better; I for one care less for them," it says. "I am not made of yak wool," it says. "Alter the whole thing and kill both children," it says. "Tell me everything, omit nothing," it says. "So pool the begg and pass the kish for crawsake," it says. "explosions of blue elephants cause the moon to explode with pink coloured barbie dolls," it says. It doesn't try to tell you how to interpret the book; all it does is alight on the one element which is consistent and ever present and which cannot be interpreted any other way. Boners.

In the style of that review, I have attempted to summarize *A Frolic of his Own* in the same manner.

THIS BOOK IS ABOUT RICH PEOPLE IN THE NINETEEN EIGHTIES AND THEY SUE EACH OTHER SOMETIMES! AND OTHER TIMES THEY SUE THEMSELVES, OR DEAD PEOPLE!

Some telling quotes:

"—What did you expect, you're suing the hit and run driver who ran over you aren't you?

—No I'm suing his, I mean my, I'm suing the insurance company for the owner of the car who are suing the, I think they're suing the dealer, the original dealer who's suing the car's maker it's all in the letter I got with this bill about a postponement for that summons to appear as a witness against the, I'd better call them" (P. 385)

"—Yes but I mean my God Lily, at least you can be happy it didn't turn out to be cancer after all, y'

—Why should I be happy, I mean if it was who am I supposed to sue?" (P. 468)

"—I hadn't wanted to take more of your valuable time getting into all these details Mister Crease but you see you are only a part of the bigger picture which threatens to get out of control and may go on for years involving a whole series of defendants. When your second attorney Mister Preswig filed your motion as the victim against the car's owner this in turn brought Ace Worldwide Fidelity in as his or your insurer where it might possibly have ended.

—Well why didn't it!

—Because liability attaches to anyone who sells the product going back to its manufacturer including the makers of parts supplied by others since it is marketed under the manufacturer's name, if you follow me? Our legal department sought out the person you bought it from who had joined the Navy and so proceeded against the dealer from whom he'd purchased it new and the dealer then sued the wholesaler who has brought suit against the manufacturer who in turn is suing the assembler of the defective component parts whose makers are as you observed in your summons as a witness in the suit being brought against them by the assembler all over the globe as you put it, however. As you were notified that trial has been postponed since these component parts makers abroad turn out to be largely subsidiaries or joint ventures with American companies which must all be sorted out before matters can proceed to the Supreme Court where it all appears to be headed." (P. 476-7)

Alex says

A Frolic of His Own is more difficult than *The Recognitions*, less difficult than *JR* and way less difficult than *Carpenter's Gothic*, which I found impenetrable. Punctuation is only the tip of the iceberg that the reader has to plow through to reach appreciation of this comic masterpiece. Numerous subplots, an epic cast of characters, Latin and legalese, whiplash shifting of POV (perhaps it's the shifting of no point of view), the integration/interruption of the main narrative with background sounds and images (similar to the famous scene in *Madame Bovary* when Rodolphe seduces Emma against the backdrop of an agricultural fair auctioneer selling swine), several fonts, formatted excerpts from plays and movies, transcriptions of depositions. Why write a book this way? To capture the mania of our absurd contemporary life.

The main plot involves Harry Crease, steeped in law, history and family legend, suing Constantine Kiester, a Hollywood producer, for plagiarizing *Once at Antietam*, Crease's hard wrought Civil War play, which years ago Crease had shopped around. Kiester's movie is called *The Red in the Red, White and Blue*, a cinematic bloodbath that includes a scene described by one critic as "the most widely discussed mass rape scene in screen history."

Disgruntled writers sue Hollywood for plagiarism daily, but what makes Oscar's suit so wonderful is summed up by Oscar's sister, Christina: [I'm forced to use quotes]"—Well my God Oscar what's the problem then. You're furious because they've stolen your play and then you're furious because there's

nothing like it in the movie anywhere, how do you expect anybody to take you seriously if you..."

Oscar contends that even if his work has been distorted out of all resemblance, it's still his work, (based on the Crease family history) that has been distorted. And so the suit—against all odds of winning—is pursued. This is the spine of the novel: Christina's husband, Harry (a lawyer) says, "He goes off on a frolic of his own writes a play and expects the world to roll out the carpet for..." When Christina asks what this "Frolic of his own" means, Harry explains, "—Just a phrase, comes up some times in case of imputed negligence, the servant gets injured or injures somebody else on the job when he's not doing what he's hired for, not performing any duty owing to the master, voluntarily undertakes some activity outside the scope of his own employment like..."

Compounding the complications of Oscar's suit are numerous other suits both intersecting and tangential to Oscar's. Jardnyce and Jardnyce times ten.

One of the suits has Oscar suing himself for running over himself with his own car. Frank Gribble, a representative of the insurance agency meets with Oscar and asks to be shown the vehicle. Oscar is compliant.

"—Examine the car of course, I only want justice after all.

--It's garaged at your, at the place of the accident I can't find the, what kind of car is it.

--Sosumi

--I'm being quite serious Mister Crease.

--So am I. it's a Japanese car, a Sosumi."

From the sublime to slapstick. Iceberg ahead, captain!

Simon Robs says

Justice and the Law, huh? With "A Frolic of His Own" William Gaddis has blown the lid off this coop and the chickens come home to roost under the starry firmament that's a glittering, blithering endless nebulae much like the idea of judicial finality in a court of law. Or like Hamlet says 'words, words, words' the legal kaleidoscope of point counterpoint I'll thrash you, you, me, file a motion make yer head spin like a hooty barn owl on mouse crack. Oscar Crease, our pawn our foil says it's all farce, may as well sit catatonic in front of the boob tube and swill pinot while Rome burns, Nero sawing at the strings, ass over teakettle oblivion. This hardy har har takedown of what we supposedly call our bedrock of freedom, the rule of law the rights of every citizen for a chance to assert his/her inalienable freedom to be anything they can create IS only as good as the house of cards it sets on. Do the lawyers or the bankers or the politicians really believe that this system can be prolonged indefinitely, or at least propped whilst they get theirs and screw the pooch of a next generation, or the environment or the very fabric of family hearth gone cold. Plato's Republic and biblical verse are evoked repeatedly 'laying up treasures in heaven' - whose a slave to what and if some are just naturally meant to embrace a lesser or servitude existence while their masters look out for their sheep only to be fleeced into the bargain.

I've thought about that 10,000 hours of practice thing, a threshold of learning and doing, in my case the

reading and thinking about books and what it means to engage with authors' realm of creating narratives reflecting bit/pieces of what's purportedly our "real world." Guys like Gaddis have distinct signatures, sure hands at style and composure, a real sensibility for their readers' appetite for both surprise and confirmation that whether or not cogito ergo sum sums qualitatively may never be fully understood but it serves as basis with which all things human in generative fact abide. Gaddis is a cool cat and slings his wares onto hot tin roofs so that a sizzle is ours, brains lit up like a Griswold spectacle of gaud and pomp, we us readers get paid, our suits and zoots skippity doo da day!

Sentimental Surrealist says

Pynchon isn't the only preeminent postmodernist subjected to a (largely un-postmodern) "major work"/"minor work" dichotomy. If you believe the word on the street about Gaddis, the big ones are the *Recognitions* and *JR*, and the lesser ones are Carpenter's *Gothic* and this one, with this one getting a little more "major-Gaddis" cred because of its quasi-iconic first sentence. And if you look at my ratings, you might think that I'm on board that train as well; I do, after all, have this book rated a full star lower than either of Gaddis' first two, and I haven't even read Carpenter's *Gothic* yet.

And yet, I don't think it quite breaks down so simply, because *A Frolic of His Own* occupies a unique place in, and in many ways adds to, Gaddis' oeuvre. Like *JR*, *Frolic* is written mostly in dialog, which might be perceived as laziness until you consider the way Gaddis expands upon that dialog; he expands it out from characters talking to excerpts from scripts, courtroom records, newspaper articles and a legal decision, each serving their own purpose with regard to the novel's themes, each conversing with and building on each other. Formally, it's an advance over *JR*, and it's easy for me to read it as an attempt to push into new territory Gaddis might've gotten to if he'd lived to complete novel number five. Gaddis also juggles a number of moving parts by, paradoxically, not juggling them; his decision to let the plot pile like a Jenga structure made of kudzu is bold and beautiful.

Yet, for all the advancing Gaddis does - so much that it definitely qualifies as an important novel re his development as a novelist - it's a step back in one major way: characterization. Only Christina, the eternally and internally conflicted voice of reason, emerges as memorable in the same way as earlier Gaddis characters - Wyatt, Basil, Reck tall and Stanley from the *Recognitions*, *JR* and Bast from *JR*. As it stands, Oscar Crease's monomania is funny to read about, as Gaddis remains a great comedian, but he never quite comes alive, even in the fractured postmodern character-deliberately-as-abstract way. So it's hard to really tell where to put *A Frolic of His Own*, beyond to say that the "major novel/minor novel" dynamic isn't what it looks like. Still worth your time, of course; Gaddis is Gaddis.

Hadrian says

Oh god this is amazing. I'm exhilarated and unabashedly proud I could finish something by Gaddis. The legalese alone is excellent, hilariously absurd - probably the best lampooning of the whole profession in years. I particularly enjoyed the 'dog in the statue' opinion.

Of course, this leaves several hundred pages of book left. This, too, has its own sultry charms. The prose is

thick and thorny with references, and almost wholly dialogue, with an occasional descriptive sentence tossed in to help the poor reader regain their bearings. The dialogue is also brilliant - Gaddis, to put it simply, knows how Americans talk.

I'm laying it on a bit thick here, so I'll stop. But read it - if you can handle it.

Jonathan says

Towards the end of the novel, Christina (one of the clearest ripostes to the contention that Gaddis' oeuvre lacks strong, admirable female characters), states in one short line a summation of the core of every one of Gaddis' books. They are:

“about failing at something worth doing because there was nothing worse for a man than failing at something that wasn't worth doing in the first place simply because that's where the money was, it was always the money...”

Wyatt in *The Recognitions*, Edward Bast and Jack Gibbs in *JR*, Mr. McCandless in *The Gothic*, and Oscar (and perhaps, even sadder, Harry) in *The Frolic*. The great conflict inherent in the Capitalist system between Art and Money. It is the great theme of the modern age, and Gaddis is its greatest dissector.

His works are vital, both in the sense of being full of life, and being essential for any literate, concerned, modern Human Being.

And now, in homage, and in support, and in response to Mr Franzen who said of this wonderful book that it is *"repetitive, incoherent, and insanely boring"* (to which I say - pot - kettle - black):

W Gaddis

Defendant

**05 October 2013 **

**IN THE HIGH COURT OF FICTION
GOODREADS DIVISION**

B E T W E E N : -

JONATHAN FRANZEN

Claimant

And

WILLIAM GADDIS (ex-corpis and ex-vivo)

Defendant

WITNESS STATEMENT OF JONATHAN MORTON

I Jonathan William Morton of this here corner of Goodreads say as follows: -

1. I make this witness statement in support of the Defendant's application for summary judgment against the Claimant on the issues of liability in respect of alleged breaches of contract and for an order for directions for damages to be assessed against him. The facts and matters set out in this statement are within my own knowledge unless otherwise stated, and I believe them to be true. Where I refer to information supplied by others, the source of the information is identified; facts and matters derived from other sources are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

2. I am a reader of the Defendant's Novels and have read the entirety of his fictional output as published during his lifetime (the "Works"). I have read, and subsequently been informed in detail about, the Claimant's claims against the Defendant in respect of the Works. In particular I note that the Claimant claims the following:

2.1. that there exists at all times a binding contractual relationship between the creator of the Works (the "Author") and its readers (the "Reader");

2.2. that such a contractual relationship places certain obligations on the Author, most importantly an obligation to ensure that a certain level of enjoyment is experienced by the Reader during its consumption of the Works, and, furthermore, the Works do, at all material times, remain clear and readily comprehensible to the Reader; and

2.3. the Works repeatedly breach the obligations outlined in paragraph 2.2 above and that, accordingly, the Author should be held fully accountable and liable for such breaches.

3. I deny the truth, validity and applicability of the Claimant's claims, as detailed in Clause 2 above. The reasons for such a submission are as follows:

3.1. In respect of the Claim made in Clause 2.1 above, it is denied that there exists, or has ever existed, any such contractual relationship between the Author and the Reader. The Author has illimitable freedom to create as he or she feels fit, and to structure the Works in whatever manner best serves his purpose. The Reader is similarly free to read in whatever manner he or she feels appropriate;

3.2. In respect of the Claim made in Clause 2.2 above, it is denied that any obligations are placed on the Author at any time in respect of the Reader's response to, or experience of, the Works. Accordingly, the Author does not have any responsibility should the Reader fail to gain pleasure from the Works;

3.3. Notwithstanding the above, and despite the fact that the Defendant refutes the Claimant's allegations in their entirety, as a Reader of the Works, I am well placed to respond to the Claim made in Clause 2.3 above. At no material time did I ever cease to receive enjoyment from the Works. Furthermore, at no material time did I find the Works impenetrable, confusing or otherwise deficient in the essentials of a great novel. I do not claim the Works are easily consumed, nor do I claim they are without complexity. However, it is clear that such alleged "difficulty" is, in fact, one of the main sources of enjoyment to be found in the Works, and indicative of the superiority and sophistication of the Works.

4. I believe that there is no real prospect of the Claimant proving that the Defendant has either responsibility or liability for its claim. There is also no other reason for the case to be disposed of at trial. Accordingly the Defendant respectfully asks for an order giving him judgment against the Claimant with damages to be assessed.

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true.

Signed

J Morton

Dated 05 October 2013

Michael says

To me, this is Gaddis' most accessible work. It's lively, funny, and not nearly as obscure or as bewildering as his other novels. As a law teacher, I love the opening line: "Justice?--You get justice in the next world, in this world you have the law." Too true!

David Lentz says

I read Frolic after JR and The Recognitions of which I was more impressed than Frolic. It's amusing to watch Gaddis skewer the legal profession -- I can think of few professions more worthy of it -- but while he addresses the national feeding frenzy of greed associated with litigation his characters fail to capture much empathy as they were more hideous in many cases than their legal representatives. Consequently, I found myself detached from main characters and unsympathetic to their sordid fates. In JR and The Recognitions I found characters whose destinies in the story lines mattered to me -- not so in Frolic. Gaddis has his finger on the pulse of a national disgrace in the need for tort reform but, since the reformers are self-regulating lawyers, it isn't likely to happen anytime soon. This novel is very finely written with powerful, pithy observations expressed in breathtaking jabs and poetic riffs. Frolic isn't as densely packed with intellect as JR or The Recognitions but is more accessible than either as his style is more accommodating in Frolic. This novel is just shy of great compared to the high standards set by his other works, which are among the best brace of American novels of the late 20th century. The great novels of Gaddis are destined to be discovered by wider readerships, to radiate brilliantly on America's literary landscape and to endure.

