

Ontological recognition in *The Recognitions*

—No. No, I'm not joking. Who can tell what happened? Why, we have movement and surprise, movement and surprise and recognition, over and over again but . . . who knows what happened? ¹

According to Aristotle 'recognition' is, "just as the label announces, a chute out of unknowing into knowledge."² Recognition of what? Starting from the *Poetics* Terence Cave surveys the variety of predicates of recognition in Western literature: inanimate or trivial objects; whether someone has or has not done something; *l'humaine condition* (Charles Batteux); complete knowledge of the nature of the world (Schopenhauer); the nature of the deed (*King Oedipus*); our own inner minds (Freud); a moral truth.³

In Gaddis's novel the character Wyatt Gwyon recounts his recognition of 'reality':

“—Yes but, when I saw it, it was one of those moments of reality, of near recognition of reality. I'd been . . . I've been worn out in this piece of work, and when I finished it I was free, free all of a sudden out in the world. In the street everything was unfamiliar, everything and everyone I saw was unreal, I felt like I was going to lose my balance out there, this feeling was getting knotted up inside me and I went in there [a gallery] just to stop for a minute. And then I saw this thing [Picasso's *Night Fishing at Antibes*]. When I saw it all of a sudden everything was freed, into one recognition, really freed into reality that we never see, you never see it. You don't see it in paintings because most of the time you can't see beyond a painting. Most paintings, the instant you see them they become familiar, and then it's too late. Listen, do you see what I mean?”⁴

Maybe. Wyatt's words suggest an ontic event of the ontological structure *Angst(Unheimlichkeit)-Augenblick-Entschlossenheit*. Heidegger writes that *Angst* "can 'befall' us right in the midst of the most familiar environment. . . . We then say: one feels *uncanny*. . . . One no longer feels at home in his most familiar environment, the one closest to him; . . . in [*Angst*], being-in-the-world is totally transformed into a 'not at home' purely and simply. . . . Every

¹ William Gaddis, *The Recognitions* ([1955] intro. Tom McCarthy, afterword William H. Gass 2020) 529; Wyatt Gwyon speaking. Like watching *I'm Thinking of Ending Things* (dir. Charlie Kaufman 2020).

² ἀναγνώρισις δέ, ὡσπερ καὶ τοῦνομα σημαίνει, ἐξ ἀγνοίας εἰς γνῶσιν μεταβολή. *Poetics* 1452a.

³ Terence Cave, *Recognitions: A Study in Poetics* (1988) 34, 148, 153, 156, 165, 231. *Recognitions* does not recognize *The Recognitions*.

⁴ *The Recognitions* 93. As usual with Gaddis 'there's a joke in there somewhere.' The seer-of-reality walked right past his wife at the gallery without recognizing her. Story of their marriage: she's not real to him. "—Why do you always leave me so quickly afterward? Why do you always want a cigarette right afterward? —Reality, he answered." *Id.* 120.

orientation draws a blank [*die Orientation geht ins Leere*].”⁵ “That *Present* which is held in authentic temporality and which thus is *authentic* itself, we call the ‘*moment of vision*’ [*Augenblick*]. This term must be understood in the active sense as an ecstasis. . . . ‘In the moment of vision’ nothing can occur; but as an authentic Present or waiting-towards, the moment of vision permits us *to encounter for the first time* what can be ‘in a time’ as ready-to-hand or present-at hand.”⁶ “In [*Entschlossenheit*] we have now arrived at that truth of Dasein which is most primordial because it is *authentic*. . . . ‘[*Entschlossenheit*]’ signifies letting oneself be summoned out of one’s lostness in the ‘they’.”⁷

Entschlossenheit is not altogether for keeps: “Dasein is already in [*Unentschlossenheit*], and soon, perhaps, will be in it again.”⁸ Yet in the phrase Gaddis puts to various uses *semper aliquid haeret*, a bit always sticks (flesh to soul, tell to fake, shit to heel); authentic *Entschlossenheit* “resolves to keep repeating itself;”⁹ a glimpse of ‘radical opened-upness’ sticks in the *Sein*.

We might ask what *Night Fishing at Antibes* has to do with reality.¹⁰ The Gaddis scholar Steven Moore glosses Wyatt’s experience by quoting Bernard Berenson, one of Gaddis’s sources, on the aesthetic moment as “mystic vision.”¹¹ Lévi-Strauss’s account may better direct us to the concrete question of what structure in this particular painting speaks to Wyatt’s overstrung sensibility:

“Perpetually midway between design and anecdote, the painter’s genius consists in fusing inner and outer knowledge [*à unir une connaissance interne et externe*], a being and a becoming; in producing, with his brush, an object that does not exist as an object and that he is nonetheless able to create on his canvas: a precisely balanced synthesis of one or several artificial and natural structures and one or several events, both natural and social. The aesthetic emotion comes from this union between the order of structure and the order of event instituted within a thing created by man, and so virtually by the spectator, who discovers [*découvre*] its possibility through the work of art.”¹²

⁵ Martin Heidegger, *History of the Concept of Time: Prolegomena* (tr. Theodore Kisiel 1985) 289-290; emphasis in original.

⁶ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (tr. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson 1962) 387-388.

⁷ *Id.* 343, 345; emphasis in original.

⁸ *Id.* 345; *Das Dasein ist je schon und demnächst vielleicht wieder in der Unentschlossenheit*.

⁹ *Id.* 355; *eigentliche Entschlossenheit zur Wiederholung ihrer selbst*.

¹⁰ Cf. ‘Crab-walking in Bouville’: “I turn back, lean both hands on the balustrade. The *true* sea is cold and black, full of animals; it crawls under this thin green film made to deceive human beings. The sylphs all round me have let themselves be taken in: they only see the thin film, which proves the existence of God. I see beneath it! The veneer melts, the shining velvety scales, the scales of God’s catch explode everywhere at my look, they split and gape. Here is the Saint-Elémir tramway, I turn round and objects turn with me, pale and green as oysters. [tram ride omitted] And suddenly, suddenly, the veil is torn away, I have understood, I have *seen*.” Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea* ([1938] tr. Lloyd Alexander 1949; American ed. 1959, reiss. 1964) 124, 126; italics in original.

¹¹ <https://www.williamgaddis.org/recognitions/l3anno1.shtml> .

¹² Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Wild Thought* (tr. Jeffrey Mehlman and John Leavitt 2021) 30-31.

The reader of *The Recognitions* soon recognizes the trope ‘maybe we’re fished for’ as recurrent in Wyatt’s story.¹³ When he and his wife Esther walk east through New York City at dawn,

“The sky ahead was already light. Look at it! he said abruptly, catching her arm. —Can’t you imagine that we’re fished for? Walking on the bottom of a great celestial sea, do you remember the man who came down the rope to undo the anchor caught on the tombstone? Then she heard his name called.”¹⁴

Angst/Unheimlichkeit is the mode through which Dasein calls to and harkens to itself, motivating its temporary escape from *das Man* and disclosing to Dasein its *Seinkönnen*. “Dasein is anxious in the very depths of its Being;” “Uncanniness is the basic kind of Being-in-the-world.” Finding itself (*sich befindende*) in the ground of its uncanniness Dasein is the caller of the call of conscience: “The caller is Dasein in its uncanniness.” “In the tendency to disclosure which belongs to the call, lies the momentum of a push—of an abrupt arousal.”¹⁵ The call jolts Dasein awake from “the somnambulism of certitude”¹⁶ to wanting to have – to being out for, *Aussein auf – Gewissen*, ‘conscience.’ So the complex *Angst/Unheimlichkeit/Ruf* forms the impetus driving Dasein to seek itself, its ‘ownmost potentiality of being;’ to retrieve itself from ‘lostness in the they.’

Der Ruf is showing up repeatedly for Wyatt under the description ‘maybe we’re fished for.’ *Night Fishing at Antibes* frees this “reality we never see” for ontological understanding,¹⁷ for Wyatt’s explicit recognition. Yet “real *Angst* is rare,” and Wyatt says of the experience, “you can’t see freely very often, maybe seven times in a life.”¹⁸

Angst can result not in *Entschlossenheit* but in sheer bafflement, or terror, and this barren confounding may be the most frequent outcome. At the end of his story Wyatt again calls someone’s attention to the sky, and this time the other sees as he does:

“—Look!
Startled, Ludy turned to look. Seeing nothing, he asked, —What?
—The sky. If no one ever painted it until El Greco did? Look at it, the Spanish sky. And glad of an opportunity to escape the strained face and eyes, Ludy stared out at the sky. He stared; and found himself trying to find something to fix his eyes upon, but every line led him to another, every shape gave way to some even more transient possibility. And he stood there trapped, between the vast spaces before him and the intricate response behind to which he almost turned, seeking

¹³ *The Recognitions* 33, 47, 88, 116, 253, 375, 416-421, 531, 796, 871.

¹⁴ *Id.* 115-116. The ontic caller here is John, a fellow student when they were at Divinity School.

¹⁵ *Being and Time* 234, 322; 321; 316.

¹⁶ *The Recognitions* 41.

¹⁷ *ontologischen Verständnis. Being and Time* 73-74.

¹⁸ *The Recognitions* 93.

some detail for refuge, when the voice in strained calm over his shoulder stopped him, gave him, at any rate, separate fragments to hang one sense upon while he suspended the torment of loss through the other.”¹⁹

A principal topos of *The Recognitions*: ‘lines of completion don’t complete;’ *Alles ist Weg*. So also Roquentin: “In another world, circles, bars of music keep their pure and rigid lines. But existence is a deflection [*un fléchissement*].”²⁰ Eight hundred pages ago, back in New England at the Calvinist parsonage where Wyatt grew up and taught himself to paint, Rev. Gwyon saw in a portrait of his late wife an aspect of the same phenomenon Ludy sees in the Spanish sky:

“Gwyon’s interest in his son’s painting was perfunctory when it did occur, slightly distracted and puzzled as he became now for anything intruding on him from worlds that were not his own. He only broke through this withdrawal once, when he sustained a shock at seeing an unfinished approximation to the picture of Camilla on the living-room mantel. It was done in black on a smooth gesso ground, on strong linen, a stark likeness which left its lines of completion in the eye of the beholder. It was this quality which appeared to upset Gwyon: once he’d seen it he was constantly curious, and would stand looking away from it, and back, completing it in his own mind and then looking again as though, in the momentary absence of his stare and the force of his own plastic imagination, it might have completed itself. Still each time he returned to it, it was slightly different than he remembered, intractably thwarting the completion he had managed himself.”

His father at last blurts out “—Why won’t you finish it?” Wyatt replies,

“—There’s something about a . . . an unfinished piece of work, a . . . a thing like this where . . . do you see? Where perfection is still possible? Because it’s there, it’s there all the time, all the time you work trying to uncover it. Wyatt caught a hand before him and gripped it as his father’s were gripped behind the back turned to him. —Because it’s there . . ., he repeated.”

¹⁹ *The Recognitions* 868-869.

²⁰ *Nausea* 128.

More directly: two millennia of ‘nothing unfinished can be beautiful’ are enough.²¹ Rev. Gwyon misrecognizes Wyatt’s stammered ‘it’s there’ for something it is not and

“turned back to the unfinished panel muttering, —Yes, yes . . . Praxiteles . . . and his voice tailed off as he returned and stood following the line of the nose, bringing it back round the broken circle of a Byzantine hoop of gold, while behind him his hands opened and closed on nothing.”²²

Years later near the end of his story, in a room of the Pensión Las Cenizas (‘The Ashes’) in Madrid, Wyatt stares (Mr. Yák: “you went to sleep with your eyes open it looked like”) at yet another manifestation of the topos:

“Nothing moved there, but the smoke rising gently behind the disorder of newspapers, the untended trail of a fire smoldering in a pile of debris where nothing retains its original shape, or purpose, among broken parts and rusted remains of useful objects, unidentifiable now, indistinguishable from other fragments of the past, shapes and sharp angles of curious design and unique intention, wasting without flame under the litter of news no longer news, pages of words torn by the wind, sodden with rain, words retaining separation, strung to the tear, without purpose, but words, and nothing moves but the smoke, rising from two bright embers.”²³

²¹ ἀτελεῖ γὰρ εὐκοκὸς οὐδὲν ποτ’ ἂν γένοιτο καλόν. *Timaeus* 30c. “In Greek philosophy, which always hovers in the background of Heidegger’s work, the condition of being-open indicates imperfection. For Aristotle, closure (self-closure upon oneself, i.e. realization of all one’s possibilities) means perfection, completion, accomplishment – the achievement of the *telos* (*en-tel-echeia*). Therefore, by describing the meaning-giving world as ‘open’ rather than ‘closed,’ Heidegger is indicating that the game is not over yet – there is still time to play, and room to maneuver (*Zeitraum, Spielraum*). The goal of full intelligibility may be near and even impending, but it never completely arrives. As open, the world – which is human being – is always incomplete and finite. That is why everything it constitutes – every form of meaning or being that appears within it – is also ineluctably finite.” Thomas Sheehan, “Dasein” in *A Companion to Heidegger* (ed. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall 2005) 200. Synchronically incomplete, if that’s the word, like the Spanish sky and Wyatt’s painting of Camilla, and diachronically incomplete as the crooked art critic Basil Valentine describes: “—Taste changes, he went on in an irritating monotone. —Most forgeries last only a few generations, because they’re so carefully done in the taste of the period, a forged Rembrandt, for instance, confirms everything that that period sees in Rembrandt. Taste and style change, and the forgery is painfully obvious, dated, because the new period has discovered Rembrandt all over again, and of course discovered him to be quite different. That is the curse that any genuine article must endure.” *The Recognitions* 227. The *Seinkönnen* of the work of art, as of any human thing, is the possibility of its reinterpretation; the ‘curse’ of open-ended finitude.

²² *The Recognitions* 60. *item Carneadem fingere dicis de capite Panisci; quasi non potuerit id evenire casu et non in omni marmore necesse sit inesse vel Praxitelia capita. illa enim ipsa efficiuntur detractioe, necque quicquam illuc affertur a Praxitele; sed cum multa sunt detracta et ad lineamenta oris perventum est, tum intellegas illud quod iam expoliturum sit intus fuisse. Potest igitur tale aliquid etiam sua sponte in lapicidinis Chiorum extitisse.* M. Tullius Cicero, *De divinatione* 2.48-49 (not, *pace* Riccardo Nobili, in *Paradoxa stoicorum ad M. Brutum*); see <https://www.williamgaddis.org/recognitions/l3anno3.shtml>. Read phenomenologically the passage bears *intus* a sound meaning: for human being everything holds possibilities; marble blocks contain heads worthy of Praxiteles, flint chunks hold points worthy of Clovis knappers. “Higher than actuality stands *possibility*.” *Being and Time* 63.

²³ *The Recognitions* 776.

Other fragments of the past: *viz.*, the kitchen midden where in childhood Wyatt buried his drawings, his abandoned clutter in their apartment when he left Esther, the burnt works in his studio when he fled to Spain. Now at the end in the rocky countryside of New Castile Wyatt quotes the Buddha to Ludy: “I was that king, and all these things were mine! See, Ananda, how all these things are past, are ended, have vanished away . . .”

“And with this, Ludy was suspended, doubly bereft: the silence, untroubling a minute before, became as empty as the sky; and as he’d sought the sky with his eyes for something to fix them on, now he did that and listened too, for something to break through the fearful vacancy which was tolling his senses one by one until, in this absurd anxiety mounted in him from the consciousness at his back, he abruptly saw himself darting his eyes’ attention everywhere, sniffing, clutching at anything, even grass, to taste, speaking to hear.”²⁴

In this scene every orientation draws a blank for Ludy but he experiences no resulting ‘opened-upness,’ only “absurd anxiety” and confusion; ‘that truth of Dasein’ escapes his recognition.²⁵ ‘Real *Angst*’ – in any case some fundamental mood, *Grundstimmung* – is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for *Entschlossenheit*.

As for Wyatt’s ultimate recognition, he had told Mr. Yák only weeks before “It’s like drowning, this despair, this . . . being engulfed in emptiness.” Now here, in his final appearance in the novel, is what he tells Ludy:

“Look back, if once you’ve started in living, you’re born into sin, then? And how do you atone? By locking yourself up in remorse for what you might have done? Or by living it through. By locking yourself up in remorse with what you know you have done? Or by going back and living it through. By locking yourself up with your work, until it becomes a gessoed surface, all prepared, clean and smooth as ivory? Or by living it through. By drawing lines in your mind? Or by living it through. If it was sin from the start, and possible all the time, to know it’s possible and avoid it? Or by living it through. [. . .] But for us, with it there from the start, and possible all the time, to go on knowing it’s possible and pretend to avoid it? Or . . . to have lived it through, and live it through, and deliberately go on living it through. [. . .] Now at last, to live deliberately.”²⁶

²⁴ *Id.* 869. Cf. “This absolute helplessness in the face of the threatening, because it is indeed indefinite, because it is nothing, offers no ways and means of overcoming it. Every orientation draws a blank.” *History of the Concept of Time* 290.

²⁵ “It is easy to suppose that few people realize on that occasion, which comes to all of us, when we look at the blue sky for the first time, that is to say: not merely see it, but look at it and experience it and for the first time have a sense that we live in the center of a physical poetry, a geography that would be intolerable except for the non-geography that exists there—few people realize that they are looking at the world of their own thoughts and the world of their own feelings.” Wallace Stevens, “The Figure of the Youth as Virile Poet” (1943).

²⁶ *The Recognitions* 873, 876.

What to make of this? We notice that “locking yourself up” corresponds to “getting knotted up inside me” of the earlier recognition triggered by *Night Fishing at Antibes*. We have come to know Wyatt by now as a hand-wringing, head-clutching, self-complicating mess. As Esther says to him mid-novel, “—Everything is just like it was, isn’t it. Only worse. [. . .] —You’ve just got everything tangled up worse and worse, haven’t you. [. . .] —And your guilt complexes and everything else, it’s just gotten worse, hasn’t it, all of it.”²⁷ So we can see “at last, to live deliberately” by *figura etymologica* corresponds to “everything was freed.” Both events have the structure δέσις-ἀναγνώρισις-λύσις.²⁸ Wyatt is fished out of desperate waters, thereafter to go on living it through, deliberately. “Life begins on the far side of despair” Sartre said somewhere.²⁹ Provided you survive despair. And that’s a problem in *The Recognitions*.

The end of Wyatt’s story is not the end of the novel. Gaddis appends a chapter closing out the story lines of other characters, and we recognize that in this novel to a first approximation ‘everybody else drowns.’ Suicide is another pervasive topos in *The Recognitions*, depicted in sardonic ecphrasis, beginning in Part I, chapter 1 with

“a nine-year-old boy who had taken a look at his prospects, tied a string around his neck with a brick to the other end, and jumped from a footbridge into two feet of water. Courage aside, he had that [Gwyon] family’s tenacity of purpose, and drowned [. . .].”³⁰

The fact that self-destruction can proceed at slower pace is evidenced by a distant Gwyon cousin’s, “who had found taxidermy the Way Out and was last seen in the Natural History Museum in Capetown, South Africa, drinking himself to death in a room full of rigid hummingbirds he had stuffed himself.”³¹

Just to flesh out the extent of ‘pervasive’: Esmé attempts suicide by gas, is saved by her heroin connection. Agnes Deigh mails a long, confessional letter and then attempts suicide by jumping out a window, lands on postman. Esther’s analyst kills herself. Herschel’s analyst kills himself.³²

²⁷ *Id.* 574.

²⁸ ἔστι δὲ πάσης τραγωδίας τὸ μὲν δέσις τὸ δὲ λύσις, . . . λέγω δὲ δέσιν μὲν εἶναι τὴν ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς μέχρι τούτου τοῦ μέρους ὃ ἔσχατόν ἐστιν ἐξ οὗ μεταβαίνει εἰς εὐτυχίαν ἢ εἰς ἀτυχίαν, λύσιν δὲ τὴν ἀπὸ τῆς ἀρχῆς τῆς μεταβάσεως μέχρι τέλους. *Poetics* 1455b. Recalling that Aristotle’s definition of ‘recognition’ continues ἢ εἰς φιλίαν ἢ εἰς ἔχθραν, τῶν πρὸς εὐτυχίαν ἢ δυστυχίαν ὠρισμένων, and that καλλίστη δὲ ἀναγνώρισις ὅταν ἅμα περιπετεία γένηται (1452a) – the καλλίστη structure of tragedy is therefore δέσις up to the simultaneous ἀναγνώρισις/ περιπετεία, thence λύσις to the end. *Angst-Augenblick-Entschlossenheit* and δέσις-ἀναγνώρισις-λύσις are isomorphs.

²⁹ At Café de Flore maybe. “On the terrace of the Flore, a passably dressed man who had compounded a new philosophy sat surrounded by some of the unshaven, unshorn, unwashed youth who espoused it.” *The Recognitions* 916.

³⁰ *Id.* 19.

³¹ *Id.* 30.

³² “—He didn’t kill himself, it was an accident. —An accident! He ties a rope around his neck and climbs out a window, but the rope breaks and he falls forty-six stories, so it’s an accident?” *Id.* 178.

Benny kills himself by jumping off a building. Deedee Jaqueson shot herself. Stanley's mother kills herself by jumping out her hospital-room window. Woman at Esther's Christmas Eve party: "—Wasn't it silly of me. I tried to kill myself twice in two weeks. The second time I was out for two days. Sleeping pills. —How many did you take? —Twenty-three. Why? —I just wondered. It's always a good thing to know." Woman in apartment below sends her seven-year-old daughter to Esther's party seven times to fetch sleeping pills; child is later discovered shooing flies off her mother because "she won't wake up." (In *The Recognitions* children are victims sacrificed for the aims of adults.)

In case we have yet to smell the carnage the epilogue chapter heaps up more bodies:

"—A young man jumped from the inner dome of Saint Peter's, and I thought it might . . . Oh! His body landed right in front of the high altar, right in front of all those tourists, and I felt . . . though the paper does say he was a well-dressed young man";

"—Who was that guy Charles that Max was talking about? He said he finally made it? under a subway? that he held up the IRT for twenty-five minutes . . .";³³

"—Because Rudy just looked and looked for months for a place just like this, overlooking the water, and the very first night we were here, standing right here in this very spot looking out at the lights and the Seine, a girl went out on the bridge and took her shoes off and jumped, right before our eyes, and that's just ruined the view ever since for both of us . . .";

"The thirty-third person leaped from the Eiffel Tower (though unofficial figures had it nearer a hundred), this time from the 348-foot second platform";

"The 00th person leaped from the Empire State building in New York. In San Francisco, seven strands of barbed wire were strung at the jumping-off place on the Golden Gate Bridge, which one hundred and fifty people had chosen as a point of departure from this world since the bridge was opened in 1937";

"And for the first time, civilized use was found for the Great Pyramid of Cheops in Egypt, where a native son hurled himself effectively down the slope of two-ton blocks."³⁴

As for the rest of Unweltdorf's inhabitants, at dawn in winter

³³ "—Was that Charley? Otto had noticed a scar across the boy's throat, and a glitter in his hair. —What's that in his hair? —That's a silver plate. They put it there when they took the bullet out he tried to kill himself with." *Id.* 179.

³⁴ *Id.* 891, 917, 921, 922, 923.

“The streets were filling with people whose work was not their own. They poured out, like buttons from a host of common ladles, though some were of pressed paper, some ivory, some horn, and synthetic pearl, to be put in place, to break, or fall off lost, rolling into gutters and dark corners where no Omnipotent Hand could reach them, no Omniscient Eye see them; to be replaced, seaming up the habits of this monster they clothed with their lives.”³⁵

As Wyatt did in his childhood drawings Gaddis elaborates a domain where the agony of human being takes remarkable directions; a marathon of suffering and disaster,³⁶ with jokes, in the idiom of Breughel and Bosch and pre-emigration George Grosz. Now it may be that, in Roquentin’s words, “Not completely, of course [*semper enim aliquid haeret*], but as much as any man can” Wyatt, who thought he was “lost irrevocably, drowned in existence,” has been “washed of the sin of existing.”³⁷ Only, however, by “the unswerving punctuality of chance.”³⁸ We learned much earlier from Basil Valentine the fate of Hugo van der Goes: “—Van der Goes. He died mad, you know. Settled down in a convent, working and drinking. He believed himself eternally damned, finally ran around telling everyone about it.”³⁹ And we remember the cousin drinking himself to death in a museum room stuffed with his *oeuvre*. Just before the end of his story – before we last see him with Ludy outside the walls – Wyatt is living in the monastery at San Zwingli (*sic*), working and raving and hewing to the foreshadowed pattern of doom until the old caretaker, the Penitent, drives him away in a physical struggle, telling him to go where he is wanted. Like a Zen slap, we are to believe, this awakens him ‘for real.’ In Gaddis’s domain the recognition Heidegger called *Entschlossenheit* – Wyatt’s “to live deliberately” – can happen if at all to few only, by an indeliberate stroke of non-Pelagian *Seyn*; and the monster takes the rest.

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³⁵ *Id.* 323. “Unreal City,
Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,
A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
I had not thought death had undone so many.” *The Waste Land* (1922) lines 60-63. In *The Recognitions* it is life undoing so many.

³⁶ *The Recognitions* 38.

³⁷ *Nausea* 177.

³⁸ <https://www.williamgaddis.org/recognitions/l1anno1.shtml> .

³⁹ *The Recognitions* 226.