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Robert M. Dowling, Donald Pizer

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A Cold Case File Reopened: Was Crane's Maggie Murdered or a Suicide?

Maggie Johnson's death in Crane's 1893 *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* was for much of the critical history of the novel considered a suicide. More recently, however, a number of Crane critics, including Stanley Wertheim,¹ Keith Gandal,² and Paul Sorrentino³ have accepted the premise that Maggie may have been murdered by the huge fat man she encounters at the edge of the East River. For these scholars, the issue is unclear, and they therefore state, in one form or another, that Maggie may either be a suicide or a murder victim. Even more recently, Robert M. Dowling has claimed in two essays⁴ and in his study *Slumming in New York* that Maggie is murdered by the huge fat man. During the spring of 2007, Dowling and Donald Pizer, who holds that Crane in the 1893 edition wishes us to believe that Maggie Johnson commits suicide, discussed their opposing views in a series of emails. Given their disagreement over this fundamental issue in the reading of *Maggie*, it occurred to them that it might be critically useful to publish their ideas about the conclusion of the novel in the form of a debate. "A Cold Case File Reopened" is the product of that decision. Each critic makes an initial presentation of his position, a presentation prepared without having read that of the other critic. These are followed by briefer rebuttals in which each critic responds directly to his opponent's position.

Donald Pizer

My belief that Maggie commits suicide in the 1893 edition of *Maggie* between the close of chapter XVII, when we leave her at the foot of the East River, and the announcement of her death at the opening of chapter XIX

rests on both historical and critical evidence. But first I would like to discuss briefly the textual history of the novel, a history which bears significantly on the issue of the cause of Maggie's death.

Textual

The possibility that Maggie is murdered did not enter criticism of the novel until the mid-1960s, following R. W. Stallman's and Joseph Katz's discussions (in 1955 and 1966 respectively)⁵ of the significant difference between the close of chapter XVII in the 1893 and 1896 editions of *Maggie*. Both the rarity of the 1893 edition and the fact that the most widely used collections of Crane's work—William M. Gibson's *The Red Badge of Courage and Selected Prose and Poetry* (1950) and Stallman's *Stephen Crane: An Omnibus* (1952)—used the 1896 edition had made this version the sole basis for discussion of the novel. The 1896 version is in one sense neutral on the subject of the cause of Maggie's death in that she arrives at the East River on her downward slide as a prostitute but no specific cause of death is provided. On the other hand, since—as I will later discuss—the popular trope of the decline of the street girl often included suicide, the general presumption was that she had died in this fashion. Marcus Cunliffe, for example, in his 1955 essay "The American Background of *Maggie*," assumes throughout that Maggie dies by suicide in the East River and does not even mention the possibility of a murder.⁶ The almost unanimous acceptance of the significance of the 1893 text, however—a number of facsimile editions appeared in the 1960s⁷ and most reprints of the work were soon to adopt the 1893 text—brought into prominence the "leering" and probably drunk "huge fat man in torn and greasy garments" who is absent in the 1896 version of the novel but who accompanies Maggie to the foot of the East River in the 1893 version. Now the story has not only a violent death but also a potential perpetrator.

Since the 1896 edition also underwent, in addition to the cutting of the explicitly offensive "huge fat man" passage, bowdlerization of its profanity and considerable verbal tidying, it also became common to dismiss it as an instance of editorial censorship. Crane's letters of the time make clear that he himself revised the work, but it is often claimed that he did so under pressure. Of course, as in most matters textual, there is no agreement on this issue. Hershel Parker and Brian Higgins, in accord with the general tendency in Parker's textual criticism of Crane to discredit the role played by D. Appleton's editor Ripley Hitchcock in Crane's career, cast Hitchcock as the outside force demanding propriety.⁸ Fredson Bowers⁹ and more recently Fritz Oehlschlaeger,¹⁰ however, argue that Crane cut the "huge fat man" passage for legitimate critical reasons. Bowers believed that Crane wished us to understand that Maggie was revolted by her career as a prostitute and

thus intended from its onset to put an end to her life, a theme which Crane later realized was compromised by the presence of the fat man as a possible murderer. And Oelschlaeger holds that Crane, in revising *Maggie*, sensed the “bathos” of the passage and was moved to omit it on that ground. Yet another angle on the matter is provided by several recent critics—notably Keith Gandal¹¹ and David Halliburton¹²—who suggest that the possibility of two interpretations of the cause of Maggie’s death may reveal that Crane wished to imply his own basic ambivalence in the matter. Nevertheless, despite these disagreements, the overall consequence of the shift to the 1893 edition by both critics and editors on the grounds that it constitutes the version of the novel closest to Crane’s intent has been to highlight the “huge fat man” passage and thus to isolate and increase the interest in him as a possible specific cause of Maggie’s death.

I myself believe that it is impossible to determine with any degree of certainty Crane’s motives in cutting the “huge fat man” passage but that in any case the issue is extraneous to that of how Maggie died. Since, as I have noted, the belief that she was murdered by the “huge fat man” is intimately connected to the 1893 edition, the question of the legitimacy of the belief should be determined entirely by reference to that text rather than to Crane’s motive in cutting the passage. We don’t know why he cut it, but we do know what he wrote and published in 1893, and thus the 1893 edition should serve as the basis of any discussion of the issue.

Historical

Maggie is “a girl of the streets,” a late nineteenth-century euphemism for a prostitute, and as much solid research since Cunliffe’s groundbreaking 1955 essay has demonstrated, Crane cast her fully in the conventions of this role. Her parents are impoverished, slum-dwelling Irish-Americans who abuse both alcohol and their children. Maggie’s only work experience is in an East Side sweatshop. She is seduced by Pete, a Bowery tough and bartender, is kept by him, and then, abandoned both by Pete and her family, becomes a prostitute. Whether or not this “case history” was indeed that of most lower East Side prostitutes, it was in any event, as a number of scholars have confirmed since Cunliffe noted it over fifty years ago, the common archetype expressed in the writing of the day.

The archetype contained as its conclusion the death of the prostitute, usually by suicide in the East River. (The East River on the lower East Side was an appropriate final destination for New York prostitutes. Many had their origin in East Side slums; the Bowery, the major avenue of the area, was the lowest a prostitute could sink in the pursuit of trade; and the river thus provided a conveniently close and certain means of escape.) Cunliffe

cites, for example, a passage describing the death of a typical New York prostitute in the Reverend T. De Witt Talmage's *The Night Sides of City Life* (1878). The downward spiral of her life eventually takes her to

the street that leads to East river, at midnight, the end of the city dock, the moon shining down on the water making it look so smooth she wonders if it is deep enough. It is. No boatman near enough to hear the plunge.¹³

Cunliffe also notes Charles Loring Brace's *The Dangerous Classes of New York* (1872), which contains "an engraving called 'The Street Girl's End,' in which a dejected prostitute stands at the end of a quay, peering down into the river-waters below."¹⁴ Thomas Gullason and James Colvert have traced the prevalence of the archetype or trope into the 1890s, Gullason citing Jacob Riis's widely read *How the Other Half Lives* (1890)¹⁵ and Colvert citing Benjamin O. Flower's *Arena* exposes.¹⁶ And George Monteiro has even discovered a specific East River pier—Pier 55—which apparently served as a common resource for the East Side prostitute seeking suicide. In November 1894, a New York newspaper published a story with the headline "Pier of the Suicides / Three Hundred Have Sought to Use It as the Stepping-Off Place to Oblivion."¹⁷

Both strands in these contemporary accounts of the life and fate of an East Side prostitute—reformers with a strong religious foundation such as Brace and Talmage, or social reformers such as Riis and Flower—stressed that the prostitute herself bore little responsibility for her condition. She was the product of an environment which provided many young slum girls few options other than a life of misery in a sweat shop or one of degradation on the streets. As Colvert sums up, "According to the common view [the slum girl's] natural purity and virtue were all too often overwhelmed by the corrupting power of her environment." Thus, "Her life of shame, according to the myth, typically ended in suicide."¹⁸

It is significant that Crane echoes both halves of this common 1890s interpretation of the street girl—her innate purity and her destruction by her environment—in his most direct comment on the theme of *Maggie*. In several copies of the 1893 edition, he wrote that the novel "tries to show that environment is a tremendous thing in the world and frequently shapes lives regardless. If one proves that theory, one makes room in Heaven for all sorts of souls (notably an occasional street girl). . . ."¹⁹

The bearing of this historical context on the issue of the cause of Maggie's death should be self-evident. Crane depicts Maggie's life fully in accord with the stereotype of the East Side prostitute. She has an innate purity—"None of the dirt of Rum Alley seemed to be in her veins"²⁰—but the conditions of her life doom her to the streets. Included in the stereotype, almost without

deviation, is the belief that the East Side prostitute dies by suicide. A murder—whether by a pimp, let's say, or a client—may have been not uncommon in “real life,” but was outside the thematic boundaries of the convention. Crane was not interested in depicting East Side life in order to render the criminal activity often associated with slum conditions. He wanted to show an innocent destroyed by her environment, and for this a suicide—an event already embedded in the consciousness of the time as the appropriate end of an innocent crushed by her world—was the best vehicle. Of course, as Colvert also points out, it is Crane's artistry—“the almost perfect detachment, the brilliant impressionism, the critical power of its irony”—which rescues Maggie's story from its “inherent banal sentimentality.”²¹ But somewhat as a great composer creating a brilliant variation on a hackneyed popular air, the traditional basic tune has to be present in identifiable form in order for the mix to work.

Critical

The principal evidence within the text of the 1893 *Maggie* that Crane wishes us to construe Maggie's death as a suicide lies in the account of her decline in chapter XVII (51–53). During the 1960s both the availability of the 1893 *Maggie* and the extraordinary revitalization of Crane studies by the application of New Critical interpretive techniques to his fiction—a method best exemplified in Stallman's Crane criticism—contributed to a new realization of the complex fictional dynamics of the chapter. Apparently it was Edwin Cady who initially alluded in passing to Crane's striking telescoping of time in the chapter,²² an idea soon developed further by Joseph Katz²³ and Matthew Bruccoli.²⁴ The chapter, it was now understood, did not describe one evening's work by Maggie, even though that is its ostensible time frame. Maggie's descent from soliciting in the brightly lit fashionable theater district to her final client—the “huge fat man”—in the darkness of the adjacent East River, though cast as one evening's journey, is also a rendering of the conventional downward spiral of a New York prostitute over a considerable span of time. Each of her downward phases is rendered both by the type of neighborhood in which she functions and the social level of her potential customer. At the outset, the “girl of the painted cohorts of the city” is in a world of theaters and restaurants, and she encounters, in order, a young man in evening clothes, a “stout gentleman,” and a man in “business clothes,” all of whom recognize her for what she is and reject her unspoken solicitation. Maggie then “walked on out” of this district “into darker blocks than those where the crowd travelled.” In this area, she meets consecutively “a young man in light overcoat and derby hat,” a “laboring

man" carrying bundles, a boy, and a drunken man. All of these exchange words with Maggie but all also reject her services. Finally, Maggie "went into gloomy districts near the river." There she initially meets a man with "blotched features" standing outside a saloon and then, "further on in the darkness, a "ragged being with shifting, blood-shot eyes and grimey hands," both of whom decline her solicitation. Finally, "she went into the blackness of the final block," where almost at the river, she meets

a huge fat man in torn and greasy garments. His grey hair straggled down over his forehead. His small, bleared eyes, sparkling from amidst great rolls of red fat, swept eagerly over the girl's upturned face. He laughed, his brown, disordered teeth gleaming under a grey, grizzled mustache from which beer-drops dripped. His whole body gently quivered and shook like that of a dead jelly-fish. Chuckling and leering, he followed the girl of the crimson legions.

At their feet the river appeared a deathly hue. . . . The varied sounds of life, made joyous by distance and seeming unapproachableness, came faintly and died away to a silence. (53)

The "huge fat man" plays an important role in Maggie's descent from the light and life of Broadway to the darkness and death of the East River. He constitutes in his physical grossness a mirror of her own decline in attractiveness and thus her professional viability. It is significant in this regard that of the ten males she encounters during the chapter, he is the only one to accept her solicitation. We are to understand, it appears, that each of her previous failures signals the nadir of her functioning in that sphere and thus heralds her descent into the next sphere downward. Her solitary success, the "huge fat man," thus represents her full decline into the darkness that he represents. There is no lower level she can descend to. She has sunk so far into a darkness of body and soul that only the ultimate darkness of death can offer relief.

In this reading of the conclusion of chapter XVII in the 1893 *Maggie*, the "huge fat man" does not murder Maggie when they reach the East River. With her acceptance of him, she has reached the absolute darkness which he represents and which the presence of the river confirms. There only remains her fulfillment of the archetype of death by suicide of the previously pure slum girl who abhors the life of prostitution she has been fated to pursue. The notion that Maggie is murdered by the "huge fat man," besides detracting from the symbolic richness of his role in her decline, also does not take into account Crane's telescoping method in the chronology of the chapter. If the "huge fat man" does murder Maggie, the event would have to occur at the "real time" of their encounter near the river. But Crane has made it clear that we are to think about the events of the chapter not as

those of a single evening but as those constituting the key moments in the entire career of a New York prostitute. Thus, the appearance of the “huge fat man” at the close of the chapter does not mean that Maggie’s death occurs in conjunction with his presence shortly after the chapter concludes. It means rather, as is true of all the other men she encounters during the chapter, that he represents a stage in her decline, in this instance the stage of absolute degradation. Just as we accept that lapses of time have occurred between earlier stages in her descent, so we should accept a similar passage of time between the death foreshadowed by the “huge fat man” and the death itself. The “huge fat man,” in short, is a harbinger, not the agent, of Maggie’s death.

Robert M. Dowling

I have always taken for granted that Stephen Crane’s titular character in *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* is murdered in the 1893 self-financed edition and commits suicide in the 1896 D. Appleton edition. I also assumed that Crane’s substitution must have occurred through a process of editorial bowdlerization. Crane’s motive for the revision appears quite clear to me, as I lay out in a short passage from my article “The Case for *George’s Mother*.”²⁵ What I considered a rather orthodox reading of the novel, however, was quickly challenged by none other than Donald Pizer. The opposition apparently has some teeth, and I soon found that Pizer is not alone. Here’s how I rephrase the point with slight variation in my book *Slumming in New York*.²⁶

Crane makes Maggie’s death scene palatable to his audience, the respectable outsider, by recycling the tragic circumstances of a girl who blossoms in a mud puddle but then meets a fateful death. Still, in the 1893 edition Maggie is murdered by her client, a “huge fat man in torn and greasy garments” who “laughed, his brown, disordered teeth gleaming under a gray, grizzled mustache from which beer-drops dripped . . .” (72). The grotesque man follows her until they stand together: “At their feet the river appeared a deathly black hue” (72). In the D. Appleton edition, on the other hand, Maggie commits suicide, a trope of the Victorian melodrama: “She went into the blackness of the final block . . . At the feet of the tall buildings appeared the deathly black hue of the river” (144). Crane made these changes to appease the marketplace. By having Maggie commit suicide, Crane could both punish her as a fallen woman and allow her to achieve redemption by contrition, thereby allowing the book to end on a sentimental note.

Pizer was quite correct that I should have, in his words, “acknowledged the variety of approaches to the subject while staking out [my] own reading.”²⁷

I begged the question here, and he rightly asked it. (Later I even discovered that I said “presumably murdered” in the *George’s Mother* article but omitted any qualifier in the book.) By agreeing to this debate, Pizer has offered me the opportunity to redress this misstep and explain why I read Crane’s novella in this way.

Pizer argues that Maggie Johnson’s encounters in chapter XVII of the 1893 edition “constitute a parable of a prostitute’s fall as it might occur over a considerable stretch of time,” which should induce readers “to discount the importance in the death of Maggie of the huge fat man. . . . He functions as a symbol of her final degradation, not as a physical force responsible for her death.”²⁸ Beginning with the telescopic-chronology argument, this opening sentence of chapter XVII assures us that what follows takes place “upon a wet evening, several months after the last chapter” (51). Once Crane establishes this time frame, he never mentions time in a concrete way again. Rather, the sequence is organized spatially, with phrases like “further on,” “into the blackness,” “on going forward,” “at their feet,” etc. (51–53).²⁹ If each neighborhood Maggie passes through is meant to distort “real” time and last for “a considerable stretch of time,” why establish a time frame at all? If it’s because Crane feels it takes several months to decide upon a life of prostitution and then begin a decline, I still see no evidence her progress moves beyond that one “wet evening.”³⁰ Here’s the last sentence of the penultimate paragraph in the 1893 edition, followed by, importantly, the transitional sentence of the final paragraph of the chapter: “Chuckling and leering, he followed the girl of the crimson legions. . . . At their feet the river appeared a deathly black hue.” This clear transition indicates that 1) only a short time has elapsed between paragraphs, and 2) the huge fat man stands with her at the water’s edge, after which the “varied sounds of life . . . died away in silence” (53). My conclusion isn’t as elegant as Pizer’s, but I see no evidence to suggest otherwise: this is murder, and the 1896 revision is suicide.³¹

That Maggie might have flung herself into the East River as an existential choice is another complicating matter. Crane famously inscribed copies of the 1893 edition to Hamlin Garland, Lucius L. Button, and others that it is “inevitable” readers will be “greatly shocked by the book,” but he begs them to continue “with all possible courage to the end. For [*Maggie*] tries to show that environment is a tremendous thing in the world and frequently shapes lives regardless.”³² What remains “shocking” about his 1893 edition is that the environment determines Maggie’s demise—not a sense of personal moral failure—just as what shocked Victorian audiences about Theodore Dreiser’s *Sister Carrie* is that neither Carrie Meeber nor Dreiser’s narrator

ever explicitly questions her moral position in the end. I'll beg a couple of more questions here and submit that Edith Wharton's Lily Bart in *The House of Mirth* and Kate Chopin's Edna Pontellier in *The Awakening* do not explicitly commit suicide as deliberate choices either. Both consider their lives in their minds' eyes before dying, and each arrives at an alternative for survival and happiness before death overwhelms her. Of the three naturalistic heroines—Maggie, Lily, and Edna—only Edna consciously resigns herself to death. Returning to Crane's inscription on "the environment as a tremendous thing," I disagree with the assertion that Maggie's 1893 death is a suicidal choice, even insofar as characters in a naturalist text have a limited capacity for choice in "those ways in which [characters'] actions are not naturally proscribed."³³ Rather, I see her prostitution as a naturalistic representation of the Darwinian struggle to survive that actual prostitutes, no matter the time period, face as a matter of course.

James R. Giles draws upon the symbolism of Maggie's rotund assailant for the central motif of *The Naturalistic Inner-City Novel in America*, which is relevantly subtitled "Encounters with the Fat Man." Giles argues that the suppression of the fat man in the 1896 edition will later come to haunt, in a variety of avatars, urban American naturalist fiction over the course of the twentieth century. Giles sees Crane's suppression not as sociological or cultural, but as a psychological act of self-protection on the author's and/or his narrator's part. But if chapter XVII, as Giles argues, "can only be read surrealistically," and the fat man is thus "a personification of the sordid reality of the inner city, as well as of the human capacity for grotesque and 'evil' actions,"³⁴ I see no alternative than to view Maggie Johnson as a personification of feminine virtue undone by moral and cultural hypocrisy;³⁵ more broadly, she represents the animalistic drive to endure in an indifferent universe. I don't see her as any less of a caricature than the fat man, her ironically-named mother "Mary" Johnson, the avaricious manager of her sweatshop, or any number of reductive urban types in the book.

All of Crane's characters in this novella are "types" more than well-rounded individuals, and their base attempts at self-reflection go nowhere. This is what makes the work more cinematic or episodic than *George's Mother*. Indeed, Maggie Johnson is one of the most one-dimensional characters in American literature, ironically presented as the heroine of a melodrama while deliberately distorting the traditional rules of the genre. Midway through the narrative, Crane describes the melodramas to which Pete regularly escorts Maggie, importantly focusing on the audience's reaction to the plays. He then juxtaposes the fictional dramas being enacted on the stage with Maggie's own plight and emphasizes that after she falls the tene-

ment children in her neighborhood “ogle her as if they formed the front row of a theatre.”³⁶ Heroines in melodrama, of course, are always “pure as the driven snow” in contrast to the villainous “monster of malignity,” as M. H. Abrams has described them.³⁷ Hence Crane envisions Maggie as a girl who “blossomed in a mud puddle,” then ironically becomes affected by the same cheap theatricals that inform the flatness of her own character. And as Crane himself describes in his theatrical treatise of chapter VIII, a traditional melodrama drives the plot along with the threat of the heroine’s murder by a villain with whiskers—the embodiment of evil—not her suicide.

Crane’s tone and imagery in chapter XVII directly correspond to the choir of his earlier melodrama from chapter VIII that sings “Joy to the World” within a “happy-hued church” while oppressed and poverty-stricken New Yorkers listen from the street without. “To Maggie and the rest of the audience,” Crane writes, “this was transcendental realism. Joy always within, and they, like the actor, inevitably without. . . . They sought out the *painted* misery and hugged it as akin” (27; emphasis mine). Crane describes Maggie in chapter XVII as “a girl of the *painted* cohorts” (52; emphasis mine), a state accentuated by an ironic distance highlighting her situation “without” the joyful comforts of church or community. “The varied sounds of life,” Maggie apprehends from the waterfront, are similarly “made *joyous* by the distance and seeming unapproachableness” (53; emphasis mine). Crane’s narrator also corresponds to the members of the theater’s gallery, who are equally “without” the action of the story while at the same time “overwhelmingly with the unfortunate and the oppressed” (27). The distanced revelry in chapter XVII importantly spans several of Pizer’s and others’ proposed temporal jumps. When Maggie moves toward the river, “Afar off the lights of the avenues glittered as if from an impossible distance. Street car bells jingled with a sound of merriment” (53); at the pier, “Some hidden factory sent up a yellow glare,” as if footlights on the stage had been switched on to signal the melodramatic dénouement. At the theater, the gallery hoots and jeers at the villain while “calling attention to his whiskers,” just as Crane in chapter XVII specifies one late-night city walker’s hypocrisy by calling attention to his “pompous and philanthropic whiskers” and ultimately the fat man’s “grey, grizzled moustache from which beer-drops dripped” (37, 52, 53). In fact, the character Maggie perceives to be her great-hearted hero is at that moment spending lavishly on Maggie’s street-wise competitor Nell, as the chapter that immediately follows suggests. This would be her seducer Pete, and Crane fashions a direct connection between the sequential chapters by labeling Pete “the man” and Maggie “the girl.”

Crane's playfulness with melodrama directly relates to his naturalistic ethics, as melodrama depends upon socially accepted norms of "evil" and "virtue" to inform stock characterization and plot. Biographically speaking, Crane's unorthodox relationship to prostitution in actual life suggests he would be inclined to design the 1893 ending as a radical departure from the Victorian norm—unredeemed murder by the fat man—as opposed to what Pizer considers an "appropriate end" in the expurgated edition—her suicide via redemptive guilt. To my mind, then, the fat man allows Crane to present a naturalistic ethics dictating that no one should catch blame for perceived moral transgressions. From this perspective, the revision from 1893 to 1896 is substantive rather than merely verbal in that Crane deletes the fat man, and thus his ethical position, completely from the picture.³⁸ "Seems to me," Crane wrote his editor at D. Appleton, "the book wears quite a new aspect from very slight omissions."³⁹

Cunliffe's "Stephen Crane and the American Background of *Maggie*" struggles with two related and important questions: The first is why Maggie would commit suicide if she is apparently successful at her trade, with her "handsome cloak" and "well-shod" feet. The second is why Crane, an author who once claimed that he was "not very friendly to Christianity as seen around town,"⁴⁰ ends the otherwise naturalistic tale on a didactic Protestant note. Both seeming contradictions, Cunliffe writes, can be reconciled by an acknowledgment that "friendly or not . . . Crane is affected by the American religious heritage."⁴¹ Cunliffe's questions might have been more easily answered had he applied the 1893 edition, as there is no mention of the fat man in his article. Timothy J. Gilfoyle likewise writes in his comprehensive study of New York prostitution in the nineteenth century *The City of Eros* that "the novella reaches its melodramatic conclusion when Maggie jumps into the river and ends her life."⁴² Though Gilfoyle specifies the 1893 edition, he doesn't mention the fat man either.

Suicide as a redemptive choice on the part of fallen characters, as Cunliffe, Gilfoyle, and Pizer correctly recognize, occurs in many such religious tracts from the period, and often, as Pizer notes in his original email, "by means of the East River." I agree that this well-established format was adopted for the sanitized 1896 edition, but the argument does not serve, again, to provide a clear analysis for the 1893. Cunliffe quotes from a religious parable of the fallen woman in the moral reformer T. De Witt Talmage's 1872 treatise *The Abominations of Modern Society*:

And so the woman stands on the abutment of the bridge, on the moonlit night, wondering if, down under the water, there is not some quiet place for a broken heart. She takes one wild leap,—and all is over.⁴³

Here is Crane's naturalistic revision for the 1893 edition:

At their feet the river appeared a deathly black hue. Some hidden factory sent up a yellow glare, that lit for a moment the waters lapping oilily against timbers. The varied sounds of life, made joyous by distance and seeming unapproachableness, came faintly and died away into silence. (53)

The paragraph in the 1896 edition is identical except for the first sentence, which Crane changed to "[a]t the feet of the tall buildings appeared the deathly black hue of the river" (75). If we assume Maggie's death is a suicide in the 1896, we can place the ending squarely in the context of the well-established fallen-woman genre. Hershel Parker and Brian Higgins contend that reading her death as a suicide "is not authorial but adventitious, projected by some sense-making readers onto the unintelligible 1896 text"; but the D. Appleton change was not "an indefensible textual decision,"⁴⁴ as Parker and Higgins assert, once the fallen-woman genre argument is taken into account. And since Crane famously proclaimed that "preaching is fatal to art in literature," for the 1896 edition he would have to be satisfied with his derisive portraits of hypocritical missionary types and the working-class dupes who follow their lead elsewhere in the book.

In the 1896 edition, the "ragged being with shifting, bloodshot eyes and grimy hands" replaces the fat man as the last person Maggie encounters before facing the "deathly black hue" of the river (53).⁴⁵ By removing the fat man, Crane must have consciously altered the intertextuality between his novella and the melodramas he critiques toward the period's more religious, Victorian-style melodramas of redemption; in the process, he markedly lessened his play-within-a-play motif. Pete may be a seducer, but he is no moustache-twirling villain from melodrama, as I argue the fat man represents. In fact, Pete is the character Maggie mistakes as her "great-hearted" hero, while the fat man is the stock "monster of malignity." Maggie surely commits suicide after her fall by the seducer in the 1896 edition, offering her redemption as a Protestant morality tale might, rather than performing a traditional melodrama and being murdered at the hands of a villainous cretin as she had been in 1893.

Lastly, Maggie's final piece of dialogue in the 1893 edition has been mistakenly identified as the question "who," which she asks herself in chapter XVI after being rejected by Pete. "Who," in fact, is her last line in the 1896 edition only; in the 1893 it is near the end of chapter XVII: "Ah, there," she says after spying the man with "blotched features" as a potential customer (53), the second to last man she encounters before her death. Crane removed the phrase "ah, there" in the 1896 and thus strong evidence

suggesting her determination to survive by prostituting herself. If Crane intended to imply suicidal tendencies or self-digust, this line would be a sizable error. From this overlooked detail, I would argue that we can read Maggie's drive to endure right up to the final moments of her life in 1893. If Crane means the chapter to be telescopic or surreal—neither of which are representative of his other fiction—offering Maggie's last words, as a free-standing paragraph no less, would further muddle the issue here. In terms of a time line, if not a symbolic descent into darkness, anything more than a powerfully-rendered narrative of one fateful evening's trawl must be taken as purely speculative.

Crane offers no compelling evidence in either edition to suggest that Maggie ever felt remorse or self-loathing for her entry into prostitution, but I certainly agree with the inference of her suicide in 1896. In light of the Protestant trope of the fallen woman that demands she kill herself for redemption, this editorial decision can easily, if not exhaustively, be read as Crane and his editors arriving at the "appropriate end." After the removal of "ah, there," what I read as her survival instinct, and the fat man, her villain from melodrama, Maggie does appear to have committed suicide as would be "appropriate" from the perspective of the D. Appleton editorial staff (specifically the chief editor Ripley Hitchcock). On the other hand, why did the pronoun "her" in the third to last paragraph of the 1893 edition change to "them" in the second to last paragraph of the 1896? "The structures seemed to have eyes that looked over them [her], beyond them [her], at other things" (53, 74–5). Perhaps Stephen Crane insinuated the fat man back into his story after all.

Pizer: Rebuttal

It is unnecessary to discuss Dowling's remarks about Crane's intent in 1896 in revising the conclusion of the 1893 *Maggie*. As I comment in the "Textual" section of my opening statement, what Crane did in 1896 is largely irrelevant to his intent in including the "huge fat man" passage in the 1893 edition.

Dowling's argument in favor of a "murder reading" of the 1893 conclusion has two basic components, both of which are flawed. First, he holds that Crane is not telescoping Maggie's entire career as a prostitute into one night, as most critics have held since the late 1960s, but rather is describing her activities during a single night. His argument requires this position because Maggie's suicide is made more probable when the fat man's presence near the river with her is separated by a passage of time from her death, as is surmised by those who believe that Crane has telescoped her entire career into one evening. On the other hand, the closer the fat man can

be associated with Maggie's death not only in space but in time the more likely his active role in her death.

Read as a single night's work by Maggie, however, chapter XVII not only loses its brilliant compression of a prostitute's career but is improbable to the point of absurdity. We are asked to believe that the Maggie who bears a "handsome cloak" and is "well-shod" while plying her trade in the fashionable theatre district at the beginning of the evening has descended to soliciting drunks and bums in the grimy and poverty-stricken riverside area just a few hours later. Also lost in adopting a literal reading of the chapter's time scheme is the effect of inevitability in the life of an East Side prostitute—the sense that every step is a step downward toward death. If one reads the chapter as one night in the life of Maggie Johnson, culminating in her murder, that effect is replaced by one of fortuitousness. She merely had the bad luck on a specific night to meet a disturbed client. This second effect runs counter to one of Crane's central themes in the novel. The slum dwellers in *Maggie* are not doomed by any single event in their lives but by the inevitable consequence of their circumstances—what Crane called their environment—a doom which plays itself out in Maggie's case in the phased decline in value of what she is offering for sale.

Dowling's second major point is that Crane casts the fat man in the role of the villain of stage melodrama in order for the novel to act out a playfully ironic version of the melodramatic theme of absolute good under attack by absolute evil. In this instance, Dowling misses the direction of Crane's depiction of the fat man. There is little or nothing of the threatening or dangerous in the account, but there is a great deal of gross sexual desire. He is portrayed not as a potential murderer but rather as a fat man in "torn and greasy garments" whose "whole body gently quivered and shook" in anticipation of the consummation of his purchase. Crane describes him as a representation of the nadir of commercial sexual transactions, not as a pathological killer. His point is that Maggie, finding that she has sunk this low, chooses the river as a preferable alternative to what he represents.

Dowling: Rebuttal

Two important issues require further emphasis in response to Pizer's position statement: 1) Stephen Crane's lifelong predisposition to resist popular trends, both stylistic and moral, rather than conform to what Pizer calls "the traditional basic tune"; and 2) the *a priori* assumptions that combine to form the telescopic-chronology argument, which relies on too little textual evidence. To argue against the first discounts everything we know about Crane's mindset toward literary tropes "embedded in the conscious-

ness of the time.” Crane’s writing was so distinctive in style, form, and content, so unwaveringly contrary to literary expectations, his editors and reviewers scarcely knew what to make of him. As his 1893 inscription to *Maggie* demonstrates, Crane held seditious, often shocking artistic and ideological positions from his earliest stage as a writer. Indeed, as late as 1896, but prior to making his changes, he specified to his delicate-minded love interest Nellie Crouse that *Maggie* is “the worst—or the most unconventional—of me.”⁴⁶

That Crane’s fiction, journalism, and poetry did not cover conventional topics in a conventional way reveals a thematic genius that, along with his unique impressionistic style, constitutes the basis for his enduring reputation in American letters. If Crane had followed the narrative strictures of late nineteenth-century popular writing, in “The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky” Sheriff Potter would have gunned down the outlaw Scratchy Wilson before riding off into the sunset toward a life of rugged bachelorhood on the wild frontier.

Furthermore, no concrete textual evidence suggests to me a “telescoping method in the chronology of the chapter.” It’s appropriate to resurrect New Criticism for this debate, but textual evidence was the bread and butter of that theoretical school. I do see how chapter XVII suggests a symbolic “downward spiral,” and thus the fat man might symbolize Maggie’s final step of degradation, with or without a time concern. But as I outline in note 30 of this essay, an argument can be made against this once we take into account both the sequence of male types Maggie encounters and the 1896 deletion of the fat man—and with him the most powerful implication of a symbolic descent. Evidence is also lacking to support the claim that Maggie is “revolted by her career as a prostitute,” which I take as a natural act of survival.

Crane’s account of Maggie’s “wet evening” also reflects actual cartographic realities of Manhattan in the 1890s that further discredit the telescopic-chronology theory. W. D. Howells, for instance, closely matches Crane’s sequencing in his 1896 essay “New York Streets” when Howells describes the walk toward the East River from Fifth Avenue: “[The streets] lose their genteel character; their dwellings degenerate into apartment-houses, and then into tenement houses of lower and lower grade till the rude traffic and the offensive industries of the river shores are reached.”⁴⁷

—Tulane University

—Central Connecticut State University

Notes

1. Wertheim, *A Stephen Crane Encyclopedia* (Westport: Greenwood, 1997), pp. 213–14.
2. Gandal, *The Virtues of the Vicious: Jacob Riis, Stephen Crane, and the Spectacle of the Slum* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1997), p. 170n49.
3. Sorrentino, "Stephen Crane," in *American History Through Literature, 1870–1920*, ed. Tom Quirk and Gary Scharnhorst (Detroit: Gale, 2006), II, 653.
4. Dowling, "Stephen Crane and the Transformation of the Bowery," in *Twisted from the Ordinary: Essays on American Literary Naturalism*, ed. Mary E. Papke (Knoxville: Univ. of Tennessee Press, 2003), 42–62; and "The Case for George's Mother," *Stephen Crane Studies*, 15 (Fall 2006), 18–37.
5. Stallman, "Stephen Crane's Revisions of *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*," *American Literature*, 26 (January 1955), 528–36; and Katz, "The *Maggie* Nobody Knows," *Modern Fiction Studies*, 12 (Summer 1966), 200–12.
6. Cunliffe, "Stephen Crane and the American Background of *Maggie*," *American Quarterly*, 7 (Spring 1955), 31–44.
7. See the editions prepared by Katz (Gainesville: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1966) and Pizer (San Francisco: Chandler, 1968).
8. See two essays by Hershel Parker and Brian Higgins: "Maggie's 'Last Night': Authorial Design and Editorial Patching," *Studies in the Novel*, 10 (Spring 1978), 64–75; and "The Virginia Edition of Stephen Crane's *Maggie: A Mirror for Textual Scholars*," *Bibliographical Society of Australia and New Zealand Bulletin*, 19 (1995), 131–66.
9. See Bowers, "Textual Introduction" to Crane's *Bowery Tales*, ed. Bowers (Charlottesville: Univ. Press of Virginia, 1969), pp. lxi–xcvii.
10. Oehlschlaeger, "Stephen Crane, Ripley Hitchcock, and *Maggie: A Reconsideration*," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 97 (January 1998), 34–50.
11. See note 2 above.
12. Halliburton, *The Color of the Sky: A Study of Stephen Crane* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1989), pp. 66–69.
13. Quoted in Cunliffe, p. 39.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 36.
15. Gullason, "The Sources of Stephen Crane's *Maggie*," *Philological Quarterly*, 38 (October 1959), 497–502.
16. Colvert, "Introduction" to Crane's *Bowery Tales*, p. li.
17. Monteiro, *Stephen Crane's Blue Badge of Courage* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 2000), p. 32.
18. Colvert, p. li.
19. *The Correspondence of Stephen Crane*, ed. Stanley Wertheim and Paul Sorrentino (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1988), p. 53.
20. Crane, *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*, ed. Thomas Gullason (New York: Norton Critical Edition, 1979), p. 16. Further citations will appear in the text.
21. Colvert, p. lii.
22. Cady, *Stephen Crane* (New York: Twayne, 1962), p. 105.
23. Katz, p. 210.
24. Bruccoli, "Maggie's Last Night," *Stephen Crane Newsletter*, 2 (Fall 1967), 10–11.
25. See note 4 above.
26. Dowling, *Slumming in New York: From the Waterfront to Mythic Harlem* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 2007), pp. 76–77.
27. Pizer to Dowling, 17 May 2007.
28. *Ibid.*
29. Gullason in his notes to the Norton Critical Edition of *Maggie* advises readers at the

beginning of the paragraph introducing the fat man to “note how Crane has telescoped time in this chapter” (53n). Crane’s sentence begins, “When almost to the river the girl saw a great figure” (53). I see no evidence of telescoped time here.

30. In the 1893 edition Maggie encounters ten men along her way (nine in the 1896 edition): a theater-going prude, a hypocritical “gentleman” with “pompous and philanthropic whiskers,” a hurrying businessman who mistakes her for her mother Mary, a street-wise kid in a derby, a polite laborer, a happy-go-lucky young blonde boy, a drunk with no cash, a man outside a saloon with “blotched features” who already had a date, a wretched-looking man with “shifting, blood-shot eyes and grimey hands,” and ultimately the “huge fat man in torn and greasy garments” (53). Pizer and Eric Solomon argue that Crane means this series of men to represent symbolically a telescopic fall into degeneracy (Pizer to Dowling, 17 May 2007; Solomon, *Stephen Crane: From Parody to Realism* [Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1966], p. 42). Although I agree with this reading on its face, if not that the sequence might have lasted for months rather than a single night’s work, when read closely the moral descent is not steady, but rather a swift drop into degeneracy at the end. Maggie’s last prospect in the 1896 is the poverty-stricken man, which effectively erases the symbolism of the fall. The argument still has merit and appears elsewhere (e.g., Benedict Giamo, *On the Boverly: Confronting Homelessness in American Society* [Iowa City: Univ. of Iowa Press, 1989], p. 150), but I still contend the descent offers spatial rather than temporal descriptors in which she walks into more obscure alleyways toward the river and the lights of civilization grow dimmer and finally plunge into blackness where the fat man lurks.

31. Fredson Bowers has concluded similarly that for Maggie’s death “the possibility of murder is as present as that of suicide, given the degeneracy of the man in Crane’s description.” Laura Hapke argues against this, remarking that although there is violence in the life of a prostitute, Bowers’ argument lies in the realm of “pure speculation” (*Girls Who Went Wrong: Prostitutes in American Fiction, 1885–1917* [Bowling Green: Bowling Green State Univ. Popular Press, 1989], p. 63). Dowling makes precisely the opposite argument here.

32. *Correspondence*, p. 53.

33. Giles, *The Naturalistic Inner-City Novel in America: Encounter with the Fat Man* (Columbia: Univ. of South Carolina Press, 1995), p. 26.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

35. Pizer has made a similar claim, writing that Maggie “functions as an almost expressionistic symbol of inner purity uncorrupted by external foulness” (“Stephen Crane’s *Maggie* and American Naturalism,” *Criticism*, 7 [Spring 1965], 187).

36. See also Solomon, p. 35; and Pizer, “Stephen Crane’s *Maggie*,” pp. 189–90, for similar treatments of *Maggie* as a parody of melodrama; and Gullason, “Tragedy and Melodrama in Stephen Crane’s *Maggie*,” in *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*, ed. Gullason (New York: Norton Critical Edition, 1979), pp. 245–53, for a discussion of Crane’s innovative conflation of melodrama with tragedy. I am adding evidence to the body of scholarship on this line of inquiry by discussing Crane’s use of melodrama to support the use of the fat man as a melodramatic villain.

37. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 6th ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1993), p. 110.

38. Without taking on the issue directly, Solomon (p. 42) parenthetically argues that Crane likely removed the fat man because “no matter how disgusting, he at least *sees* Maggie, in order to follow her, and for Crane’s purposes she is, metaphorically, invisible.” Of course, Maggie is seen by several of these potential customers before the fat man arrives.

39. *Correspondence*, I, 200.

40. Cunliffe, p. 100.

41. Ibid.

42. Gilfoyle, *City of Eros: New York City, Prostitution, and the Commercialization of Sex, 1790–1920* (New York: Norton, 1992), p. 271.

43. Quoted in Cunliffe, p. 100.

44. Parker and Higgins, “Maggie’s ‘Last Night,’” p. 72.

45. Giamo, who uses the 1896 edition, also believes that Maggie commits suicide, but adds that the man with “blotched features ushers Maggie to her terminus” (p. 150). This would be impossible, since the last person she encounters in that version is the destitute “ragged being with shifting, bloodshot eyes and grimey hands.”

46. *Correspondence*, I, 198.

47. Howells, *Impressions and Experiences* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1896), pp. 248, 249.