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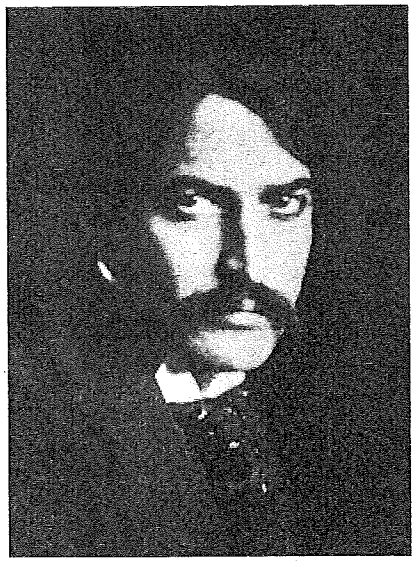

Stephen Crane Society

Stephen Crane Studies

Department of English
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Table of Contents

Review

Sequential Art Fights the Civil War: the *Classics Illustrated* Version of *The Red Badge of Courage*

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One of the pivotal episodes in the history of the American comic book—or, as one of the masters of the form, Will Eisner, would have it, "sequential art" (Jones 4)—is the crusade against the medium spearheaded by psychiatrist Fredric Wertham in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Wertham laid much of the blame for the putative rise in juvenile delinquency in that era on the violence, gore, and glorification of criminal and deviant behavior that he found in the comic books being foisted on unformed American youth, such as the "psychologically homosexual" relationship of Batman and Robin and the "morbid ideal" of Wonder Woman's subtly encoded lesbianism (qtd. in Savage 97). Many other guardians of public morality flocked to Wertham's banner,[1] including the New York Legislature and the United States Senate, with the result that a considerable number of comic-book publishers were forced out of business, particularly after the 1954 publication of Wertham's best-selling *magnum opus, Seduction of the Innocent*. Most of the survivors placated the critics by regulating their own industry through the 1955 creation of the Comics Code Authority, a set of content guidelines aimed at weeding out all putative inducements to delinquency. The few publishers who refused to subscribe to this code and display its seal on their covers did so not out of defiance but on grounds of superfluity, asserting that their in-house policing of content already insured a product safe for youthful consumption. In the forefront of this group was the Gilberton company, which in 1941 had begun publishing *Classic Comics*, monthly adaptations of works of literature, as that term was defined in that era, including, among many others, *The Iliad, Hamlet, Moby-Dick, Tom Brown's School Days*, the *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, Mutiny on the Bounty*, and, most crucially for the purposes of this essay, *The Red Badge of Courage*. Gilberton's founder and owner, Albert Kanter, had asserted from the inception of the series that its devotion to "stories by the world's greatest authors," as a line on each cover proudly proclaimed, precluded any corrupting influences.[2] Indeed, Kanter argued that his product could not even be classified as "comic books" in Wertham's derogatory sense of the term; making this point and simultaneously emphasizing the social approval he had garnered, in 1947 he changed the name of the series from *Classic*

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Comics to *Classics Illustrated* because, as a Gilberton publicity release explained, "you readers, your parents, teachers, and clergy" had asked for the rechristening (qtd. in Jones 72).

However safe Kanter may have felt *Classics Illustrated* to be on the blood, crime, and alternative lifestyle fronts (after some judicious adjustments to a few titles[3]), they were vulnerable to attack in another area, which Wertham addressed trenchantly. Calling the series "Classics Mutilated" (143), he argued that reducing literary works to comic-book form "emasculate[d] the classics" by "leaving out everything that makes the book great" (36), encouraged "an evasion of reading" (qtd. in Richardson 80), and thus fostered illiteracy in the rising generation. Many less overwrought and more intellectually respectable critics of mass culture, including Clement Greenberg, Dwight MacDonald, Ernest Van Den Haag, John Mason Brown, and Delmore Schwartz held the same view; and most added that the inevitable elisions and distortions of the original texts necessitated by the change of medium rendered American children not only illiterate but also ill-informed regarding the small portion of high culture to which *Classics Illustrated* did expose them (Beaty 125-27, 134-36). Gilberton's consistent response to such charges was straightforward denial. Kanter routinely asserted, as in a 1950 *New York Times* interview, that his mission was to raise, not lower, the intellectual level of comic books and their readers ("Shakespeare Bows" 24); as proof, he pointed to the injunction printed at the bottom of the last page of every issue of his creation: "Now that you have read the Classics *Illustrated* edition [italics sic], don't miss the added enjoyment of reading the original, obtainable at your school or public library." Carrying this view further, Gilberton managing editor Meyer Kaplan offered the following defense when he was called to testify before a New York Legislature investigative committee in 1951:

> [I]n all humility, I suggest that the child who has no interest in good literature will never, of his own choice, read it. . . . The taste for good literature and fine art must be cultivated in a child slowly. He must be made to understand it before he can like it. By forcing him to read the truly heavy and none too easily understood language of the classics while still too young to appreciate it, a dislike for good reading will be cultivated rather than an interest. But a pictorial rendering of the great stories of the world which can be easily understood and therefore more readily liked would tend to cultivate that interest. Then, when he grows older, if he has any appetite at all for these things, he will want to know more fully those bookish treasures merely suggested in this, his first acquaintance with them. He will more eagerly read them in

the original form because he will already have a mind's eye picture of what the author was trying to portray in words. (qtd. in Jones 119)

Despite the skepticism with which the original critics greeted this rationale, some modern scholars have upheld its validity. William Jones, who published an exhaustive history of *Classics Illustrated* in 2002, quotes Anne Rice and Pete Hamill saying that the series was their first introduction to literature and that it did, indeed, whet their appetites for the full texts (4). Attesting to his own similar childhood experience, Jones acknowledges that simplifications of complex works were inevitable in the project but maintains that most of the comics did not significantly distort their sources. "Shakespeare's language may have been abridged," he says, "but it was never rewritten.... Though trimmed to 64 or 48 pages, Javert's obsessive pursuit of Jean Valjean and Edmond Dantes's implacable quest for vengeance were faithfully represented. The ugliness of racial hatred was not disguised in either *Uncle Tom's Cabin* or *Pitcairn's Island*" (5). Donna M. Richardson, who characterizes herself as "a former *CI* junkie who turned into an English professor" (82), attributes at least part of her career choice to the fact that she dutifully obeyed the back-of-the-comic injunction to move on to the original versions. She goes further than Jones in admitting that in some cases the comics omitted "crucial subtleties"—she says, for instance, that the *Classics Illustrated* version of *Crime and Punishment* makes "a great psychological and moral study resemble an episode of *Columbo*" (83)—but she contends that the series as a whole was nevertheless an effective invitation to the full texts because "[t]he abridgments often cleared an initial path of plot through a dense overgrowth of style and subplot" and because "the compression sometimes clarified style that was simply bad," as in the case of works by James Fenimore Cooper and Jane Porter (84).[4]

While the *Classics Illustrated* version of *The Red Badge of Courage*, first published in August, 1952, and reissued at least ten times before publication of the series ceased in 1971, may be something of an anomaly, for reasons that will shortly become apparent, it strikingly controverts the various defenses rehearsed above. Few critics have accused Stephen Crane of impenetrable plotting or obfuscatory style in this work, so Richardson's claims of compression leading to stylistic improvement are not applicable in this case. Indeed, Crane's brevity and highly visual style might seem well suited to sequential-art adaptation, which would readily give the juvenile reader the "mind's eye picture of what the author was trying to say in words" that Kaplan identifies as the key value of the project while preserving Crane's depiction of the

The oft-noted inconsistencies in the text over nature and nurture are, Boeckmann argues, flaws of the genres Twain parodies: in the book's multiple plots of confused and disguised identities, Twain satirizes the one-to-one correspondence between racial behaviors and appearance characteristic of the plantation romance, yet the detective-story plot undoes the satire with its obligatory reading of physical clues, which demand a fixed relationship between the body and identity. Like Twain, Howells and Chesnutt reject stereotypical racial traits in creating character, instead satirizing sentimental genres such as domestic fiction and the historical romance in *An Imperative Duty* and *The House Behind the Cedars*. For example, Rhoda in Howells's *An Imperative Duty* responds like a sentimental heroine to the news of her black blood and tearfully renounces her engagement, but the novel's representative of science and realism, her suitor, Olney, persuades her to marry him and move to Italy instead. In another approach to breaking free from typed characters, the unnamed narrator of James Weldon Johnson's *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man*, the subject of the final chapter, finds black forms of art the best guide to racial character.

Although Stephen Crane is mentioned only once in *A Question of Character*, Boeckmann's overview of scientific race theory and the ways in which realist authors responded to it through their works suggests potential new approaches to Crane's works. Boeckmann's insistence on placing race at the heart of realist theory is persuasive, too, although her statement that realist texts are as racist as those by Thomas Dixon makes sense only if taking race as a subject defines racist intent. Indeed, Boeckmann's analyses of Howells, Chesnutt, Twain, and Johnson demonstrate their interest in undercutting racist theories rather than the reverse, although such efforts are not necessarily successful. Despite a few such minor issues, however, *A Question of Character* is an interesting and provocative contribution to current scholarship on literary realism, one that should prove of interest to scholars working on Crane.

Note

[1] When this review appeared in the spring 2005 issue of *Stephen Crane Studies*, the last part was left off because of a printing error. Here is the complete text of the review.

gible traits such as intelligence or brutishness with externally readable signs, among them Johann Caspar Lavater's principles of physiognomy and Franz Joseph Gall's and Orson Fowler's writings on phrenology. Boeckmann's focus is the moment in which these systems of reading character and race through exterior bodily features lose ground to equally problematic systems of reading race through character traits. She traces the development of two modes later challenged by realists, the plantation romance and the sentimental novel, to this preoccupation with reading character through signs. The stock characters of the plantation romance, such as "the passive slave, the buffoon, the brute" (52), were represented in terms of "*kalokagathy*, the ancient belief that beauty is good and ugliness is evil" (54); abolitionist texts such as the sentimental novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* reversed the terms of the equation, linking the features of black bodies to positive rather than negative traits, but these texts never questioned the logic of equating outer with inner selves. Realists such as Howells tried to abandon such simplistic portraits, yet their belief that defining the "invisible aspects of racial character" (61) was possible traps them in a similarly limited system of thought. Boeckmann's point is that all genres and their devices, from the stock characters of sentimental romance to the trope of the photograph in realist novels, must inevitably fail to contain the inconsistencies that control representations of racial character. All of these genres are concerned with race, and according to Boeckmann's reasoning, realist novels are thus not "in a fundamental way less racist than Dixon's novels" (8).

The four subsequent chapters apply these theories to a number of novels featuring mixed-race characters. The equation of exterior signs of race with interior racial character is nowhere more evident than in Thomas Dixon's *The Leopard's Spots* and *The Clansman*, twentieth-century novels that try to legitimize the character types of plantation romance through the turn-of-the-century pseudoscience of racial categorization. Directly challenging *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by introducing characters such as Simon Legree in *The Leopard's Spots*, Dixon reverses the terms of Stowe's characters and ideas, shifting the terms of sympathy from a suffering, Christlike Uncle Tom to a suffering, Christlike white man, Tom Camp. As Boeckmann points out, for Dixon race is absolute and must always be visible; if it is not, as in mulatto characters such as Silas Lynch and Lydia Brown of *The Clansman*, the result is a destabilizing force that threatens white superiority. By contrast, Mark Twain's *Pudd'nhead Wilson* presents race as a shifting category dependent on learned behavior, the "fiction of law and custom" that assigns racial identity.

chaos of battle and the ambiguities that shroud Henry Fleming's motivations throughout the story and his assessment of himself as a man and a hero at the end. Such, however, is not the case. Despite various apologists' claims that the series generally preserved the original authors' words and ideas, the script of the *Classics Illustrated* version displays all the flaws Richardson identifies in the series' handling of *Crime and Punishment*, turning Crane's complex psychological meditation into a simplistic baptism-of-fire tale, and it accomplishes this mutilation not merely by insensitive compression but rather by active rewritings of Crane's language and insertions of invented episodes at crucial points.[5] Despite Kanter's claims that a reliance on great literature rendered Wertham's accusations of corrupting America's youth irrelevant, the pattern of these alterations suggests that they may have been carried out to excise elements in Crane's original text that Wertham and his cohorts might have found subversive. And despite the various claims rehearsed above of a smoothly enriching passage from sequential art to original novel, the reader who goes from comic to Crane will find him- or herself blinking with confusion, as I myself did in 1967, when, as a high-school junior and former *CI* junkie not yet aspiring to be an English professor, I first opened Crane's novel with fond and confident memories of the comic book I had read at age nine.

Given the demands of fitting a novel of about one hundred pages into twenty-nine pages of sequential art, it is not surprising that abridgments and compressions begin at the very outset. Whereas Crane opens his story in the Union army camp, with rumors of battles passing among the men of Henry's untried regiment, and then gives the reader the events leading up to Henry's enlistment in flashback, the comic dispenses with this structure in favor of straight chronology, beginning with Henry on the farm dreaming of battlefield glory, proceeding to enlist, and then discovering the monotonous, rumor-driven character of camp life. While this simplification might not of itself necessarily obscure Crane's themes, several other changes within the two pages devoted to these events do. The comic preserves Henry's mother's initial opposition to his enlistment, picturing her, as Crane does, telling Henry not to be a fool, but the comic then dissolves that opposition quickly and decisively, in clear violation of the original text. In the novel, Henry announces his enlistment to his mother while she is busy milking cows, to which news she replies, after "a short silence," "'[t]he Lord's will be done, Henry'" (Crane *Red Badge* 6). After some lapse of days, Henry bids her goodbye "with his soldier's clothes on his back" (Crane *Red Badge* 6), and she responds with a page-long fare-

well that alternates between expressions of love and admonitions to courage and morality. The shifting tones and subjects of this speech, as well as Crane's breaking it up into numerous paragraphs, convey Mrs. Fleming's anguish at Henry's action, which is amplified when, as the departing Henry looks back, he sees his mother "kneeling among the potato parings" with sobs racking her frame and feels "suddenly ashamed of his purposes" (Crane *Red Badge* 7-8). Condensing this span of events into two panels, the comic eliminates the "short silence" between Henry's announcement and his mother's ejaculation, and then presents an abbreviated version of Mrs. Fleming's farewell speech as occurring immediately thereafter, creating the impression that, her doubts notwithstanding, she quickly comes to believe that Henry has done the right thing. This interpretation is reinforced on the next page, where the comic makes its first shift from abridging Crane's text to rewriting it. In place of the image of Mrs. Fleming kneeling and weeping, we are given a picture of the uniformed Henry being seen off at the train station by his mother, clad in her Sunday best and saying, "Goodbye, son. God bless you" (*Classics Red Badge* 3), an image that seems to owe much to 1940s movies and Norman Rockwell paintings and nothing to Crane, and one that dispels the original author's potentially disturbing suggestions—disturbing, at least, to Fredric Wertham and his supporters—that, on one hand, an American boy might really disobey his mother and that, on the other hand, an American mother might be even tacitly opposed to an American war.

The comic does a more creditable job with the rest of the first five chapters of the novel, leading up to Henry's first experiences under fire. Although tightly compressed, most of Crane's key points are present: Henry's doubts about his own courage and his reluctance to express those doubts, Jim Conklin's reflections that he himself will likely fight if others fight and run if others run, Wilson's bravado and subsequent premonitions of his own death that prompt him to give letters for his family to Henry, Henry's sense that he is trapped "in a moving box" as the regiment advances (Crane *Red Badge* 23, *Classics Red Badge* 5), and his impulse to warn his fellows that their generals are incompetents leading them to slaughter. Problematic omissions begin again when the Confederates attack Henry's regiment. Crane offers a complex, pluralistic explanation for Henry's standing and fighting in this first instance, saying that

> He suddenly lost concern for himself, and forgot to look at a menacing fate. He became not a man but a member. He felt that something of which he was a

***A Question of Character: Scientific Racism and the Genres of American Fiction, 1892-1912.* By Cathy Boeckmann. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2000. Viii + 238 pp. $39.95.**[1]

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During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, measuring intelligence and human behavior with "scientific" objectivity seemed a worthwhile pursuit, yet in hindsight such studies yielded a decidedly mixed result: the same impulse that led to Alfred Binet's development of the Simon-Binet Scale in 1905, the first modern intelligence test, also spawned such pseudoscientific eugenics studies as Richard Dugdale's *The Jukes: A Study in Crime, Pauperism, Disease and Heredity* (1877) and Henry H. Goddard's *The Kallikak Family: A Study in the Heredity of Feeble-Mindedness* (1912). In *A Question of Character*, Cathy Boeckmann demonstrates the ways in which biological and social scientists turned an equally earnest, if misguided, eye toward measuring racial difference. Not content with physical classification, they sought to pin down correlations between race and that most nebulous of concepts, character, leaving unspoken the logical flaw at the heart of the project: that traits of character are necessarily judged subjectively. Their efforts at confirming racial identity through character were also shared by novelists, among them W. D. Howells, Thomas Dixon, Mark Twain, James Weldon Johnson, and Charles W. Chesnutt. Boeckmann argues that the "shared vocabulary of character" (5) resulting from this convergence of interests places race at the heart of realism, the plantation romance, and sentimental fiction, genres that do not simply represent race but are fundamentally constituted by it through the "pseudo-scientific logic of character" (6) inherent in all three.

In the excellent overview of nineteenth-century race theory that comprises the first third of the book, Boeckmann explains the arguments linking character and race even as she dismantles their false logic. Turn-of-the-century theories of race and character were self-contradictory and chaotic rather than unified: scientists argued variously that character is and is not inherited; that character is an unchanging entity in some cases but entirely malleable in others; and, in a nod to the discredited Lamarckian theory that one's learned experiences could be transferred through the genes, that the experiences of the parents were transmitted genetically to the children. Identifying character, and with it racial character, was the business of systems that correlated intan-

Another Copy of the 1893 *Maggie*

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Forty years ago Joseph Katz undertook a census of known copies of the 1893 edition of *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*. Part I of his list contained descriptions of nineteen copies; Part II, three copies; and Part II, one copy. Three of the copies were marked "Unlocated." It is possible that another "unlocated" copy can be added to Katz's list.[1]

Under "Wanted and to Exchange" in the *New York Times* for August 26, 1899, there appears the following item:

> Edwin Hammond, 870 Driggs Avenue, Brooklyn: 'I have a copy of the first edition of Stephen Crane's "Maggie, a Child [*sic*] of the Streets, by Johnston Smith," in paper, to exchange. Would like to hear from those having files or odd numbers of The Philadelphia Saturday Night, embracing the years 1873 to 1878.' (p. BR571)

It would be of interest to know how this copy of *Maggie* came into Hammond's possession. That he was offering to trade it in 1899, ten months before Crane's death at twenty-eight, suggests two immediate possibilities: that Hammond purchased his copy at the time of its publication (which is rather unlikely) or that Crane gave him the book or gave it to someone who passed it on. If the latter, one would expect the copy to be inscribed.

Who was Edwin Hammond? My best guess is that he was an actor in the New York area in the final decades of the century. Edwin Hammond had roles in *Florinell*, a play written by Sydney Rosenfeld and produced at Abbey's Park Theatre in 1882, and in a production of Meilhac and Halévy's *Frou-Frou* at the Standard Theatre in 1883. It seems likely that he is the same Edwin Hammond (96 Hudson Avenue, Weehawken, N.J.) who placed an item in the "Readers with Books to Sell" column of the *Times* for 16 June 1900 (p. BR12): "Five hundred programmes of dramatic performances in the last fifteen years, for a cash offer; copies of the 'Gallery of Players,' and volumes of the New York Dramatic News for sale."

Note

[1] [Joseph Katz], "*Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (1893): A Census (Part I), *Stephen Crane Newsletter*, II (Winter 1967), 7-9; (Part II), III (Fall 1968), 6; and (Part III), III (Spring 1969), 10-11.

> part—a regiment, an army, a cause, or a country—was in a crisis. He was welded into a common personality which was dominated by a single desire. For some moments he could not flee no more than a little finger can commit a revolution from a hand. (Crane *Red Badge* 34)

In place of this meditation, the comic offers nothing to account for Henry's actions. He is shown in one panel at the outset of the attack as thinking, "I hope I don't run—I hope I don't run" (*Classics Red Badge* 7), and two panels later the attack is over, with nothing depicted but the external action of an officer's cutting off a soldier's flight and Henry and Wilson's expressions of relief at the end of the assault. Henry's hope has been answered, but the reader who wonders about the source of that courage is less fortunate.

The comic's treatment of Henry's subsequent flight in the face of the renewed Confederate attack is equally inconsistent and thus equally mystifying. As does the novel, the comic presents Henry as being influenced to run primarily by the flight of several other men, and it preserves in condensed form most of the significant episodes of the early part of Henry's literal and psychological wanderings through the wilderness: his ignoring of an officer's call to him to stand and fight; his belief that the enemy is close at his heels; his running blindly into a tree; his assessment of himself as sagacious for running from certain death and his comrades as fools for failing to do so; his feeling of personal betrayal upon learning that his regiment has repulsed the enemy; and his subsequent justification of his terror as a natural instinct in the face of threat, culminating in his throwing a pine cone at a squirrel, to whose flight Henry favorably compares his own. At this point, though, the comic abruptly breaks the curve Crane gives to Henry's musings. In the original text, Henry is said to develop a theory of nature as "a woman with a deep aversion to tragedy" and to regard the squirrel's action as proof that this woman is "of his mind," only to have this view shattered by his discovery of a corpse in a place where "the high, arching boughs [make] a chapel" and "a religious half light" prevails (Crane *Red Badge* 46-48). The comic dispenses with Henry's personification of nature and Crane's ironic religious imagery; in one panel Henry simply throws the pine cone and thinks, in the scriptwriter's invented words, "That proves it. Even a squirrel's got sense enough to run from danger," and in the next panel he sees the corpse and lets out a typical comic-book "E-e-e-yow" (*Classics Red Badge* 10). The reader is then treated to two panels

of the corpse, which is depicted as having green flesh and a huge gash in its forehead—in contrast to Crane's text, in which the corpse is said to have gray skin and ants on its face, with no gash. There is horror in the comic's panels, to be sure, but in its lack of connection to what has preceded it, it is simply visual, seeming to owe more to EC comics than to Henry's implicit perception in the original that this sight overturns his comforting metaphysics.

The comic significantly tones down the horror, both visual and psychological, in the next section of the story, Henry's encounter with a column of wounded men and his witnessing of the death of his friend Jim Conklin. Crane devotes several pages to the physical gore and psychological dislocations to be seen in this group, both of which reach their peak in his depiction of Conklin's pain-maddened behavior and death throes, at the end of which Henry discovers that one side of his friend's body looks "as if it had been chewed by wolves" (Crane *Red Badge* 58). The comic shows a bedraggled column of men, but no blood is evident upon them, and though Conklin dies in agony, there is no visible evidence of his wound. We might explain this relatively sanitized depiction as the result of nervousness on the scriptwriter's and artist's part—perhaps they feared that, having given full rein to horror in their earlier depiction of the corpse, they might antagonize Wertham and other critics if they seemed to be wallowing in gore at this point. This view is logical enough, but an equally likely view is that their fear ran deeper than this level, that their visual restraint is part of a larger effort to avoid being accused of sending a negative or even nihilistic—and thus unpatriotic—message about war to America's children.

The evidence for this reading lies in what else the comic alters in this episode. In the original, Conklin's death evokes an implosive cosmic rage in Henry. In perhaps the most famous passage in all of Crane, we are told that "[t]he youth turned, with sudden, livid rage toward the battlefield. He shook his fist. He seemed about to deliver a philippic." However, all he gets out is one word, "'Hell,'" after which the narrator says, "[t]he red sun was pasted in the sky like a wafer" (Crane *Red Badge* 58). This image has evoked widely different interpretations, ranging from a sense of redemption to a sense of ultimate unknowability or even meaninglessness, but the comic eschews any uncertainty by leaving this moment out altogether; in its depiction, Henry is angry, but his anger is very clearly focused solely on the enemy: he turns to the wounded soldier who has befriended him and says of Conklin, "He was the first friend I had in the army.

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I'd like to get 'em for this!" (*Classics Red Badge* 13). That this sentiment would seem to come out of movies such as *Back to Bataan* and *The Sands of Iwo Jima* rather than out of Crane appears to be no accident, for from this point forward the comic renders Henry's experience in the unambiguous terms of masculine redemption that were a specialty of mainstream war movies of the forties and fifties.

A crucial part of this simplified rehabilitation is the comic's depiction of the aforementioned wounded soldier, who is generally referred to in the original as "the tattered man" or "the tattered soldier." In Crane's version, he is described as "diffident," with a voice as "gentle as a girl's," and suffering from two serious wounds, one in his head and another in his arm (Crane *Red Badge* 52). His repeated compassionate questions to Henry about the location of his own wound enrage the uninjured youth, who, the narrator says, "could have strangled him" for his persistence (Crane *Red Badge* 61). Instead, Henry abandons the tattered soldier as the latter, evidently close to death, begins to stagger and talk wildly. At the end of the story, this callous action returns to Henry to taint his pride in the heroism he regards himself as having displayed on the second day of battle, until he realizes that no one saw him perform it, at which point he "muster[s] force to put the sin at a distance" (Crane *Red Badge* 135). The comic removes the questions a reader may harbor about Henry's maturity due to these matters by picturing the tattered soldier as a tough, grizzled specimen who has only one wound, in his head, from which he seems in no danger of dying when the embarrassed Henry runs away from him, and by excising Henry's memory of this moment from the meditation upon his new self that concludes the story.

However damaging to Crane's original complexities these alterations may be, the comic does not go so far as to eliminate the ironies attendant upon Henry's being clubbed by a fleeing Union soldier and then, when he returns to his own regiment, passing the wound off as the result of his being shot while he was fighting on another part of the line after he was "separated" from the regiment. What it does eliminate are the various unpleasant, if entirely human, calculations and self-deceptions Crane has Henry engage in after his fellows accept his story. In Crane's text, when Henry awakens the next morning, after having been ministered to by a newly soft-spoken and charitable Wilson, he determines that "[h]e had performed his mistakes in the dark, so he was still a man" (Crane *Red Badge* 86). This conclusion leads him to regard himself as "a man of experience," a proved man who has "license to be pompous and veteranlike"

(Crane *Red Badge* 86), but one who is also frightened that questions from Wilson may compel him to face the falsity of this self-image. He rejoices, therefore, that he can "prostrate" Wilson with the supposed cowardice he exhibited in having given Henry the packet of letters before the battle on the previous day (Crane *Red Badge* 85). When Wilson shamefacedly requests the letters back before Henry feels compelled to use them in this way, Henry allows him to escape without criticism only because he can "conjure nothing of sufficient point" to say, and he then preens himself on the generousness of spirit he sees his silence as betokening (Crane *Red Badge* 87). In covering the same episodes, a caption in the comic says that "[a]ssured that no one in his regiment questioned his bravery, Henry welcomed the chance to prove to *himself* [emphasis added] that he could be as brave as any of the others," while in the same panel he joins the ranks while thinking, "[b]y ginger, I'll show 'em this time," with no explanation of the antecedent of "'em" (*Classics Red Badge* 17). He is presented as pleased to have Wilson's letters as a weapon against embarrassing questions; but when Wilson asks for them back, Henry's generosity lacks the ironic edge of the original, becoming instead a wholly admirable milestone on the path to an idealized maturity. "Poor devil. He feels bad about it now," Henry is shown as thinking. "I won't say anything to add to his embarrassment" (*Classics Red Badge* 18).

Crane's complications are similarly stripped from Henry's thoughts and behavior once the second day's fighting begins. In both the original and the comic, Henry's battle ardor is explained as the product of a ferocious hatred for the enemy, but in the original Crane makes that hatred more than slightly ridiculous, stemming as it does from Henry's feeling that, having proved himself the day before, he has earned "opportunities for contemplative repose" that the Confederates are thoughtlessly denying him. Described as feeling "like a kitten chased by boys," he tells Wilson, "'If they keep on chasing us, by Gawd, they'd better watch out. Can't stand *too* much,'" to which Wilson replies, "'If they keep on a-chasin' us, they'll drive us all inteh th' river'" (Crane *Red Badge* 94). The comic elides Henry's self-indulgent delusions, depicts his warning, which he here shouts at the enemy rather than addresses to Wilson, as a response to a near-miss from an enemy shell that is wholly absent from the novel, and drops Wilson's deflating reply. Henry is then given a sense of self-awareness he lacks in the novel; he is described as "proud of his new-found courage," which pride, along with his hatred of the Confederates, motivates him to load and fire "like a battle-seasoned

described. The mystifying totality of urban space and the material unconscious of its participants have become a central obsession of modern souls like George Kelcey, Stephen Crane, our students, and ourselves. Rather than defer to Joseph X. Brennan to finish this essay, as he rightly deserved to begin it, I will again quote from John D. Barry's 1896 reassessment, where he hopefully muses, "isn't there some animal that has a way of pretending to be dead and then springing up full of energy? I have a feeling that *George's Mother* is like that animal" (179).

Notes

[1] This article will appear in modified form as a section of a chapter in Robert M. Dowling's book *Slumming in New York: From the Waterfront to Mythic Harlem* (U of Illinois P), which comes out summer 2007.

[2] All references to Crane's work refer to this edition.

[3] Crane must have begun work on it after completing *Maggie* in 1893 (Colvert 192).

[4] Colvert points out that "the historian must be content to conjecture that a phrase in the critic's remark on the current situation in fiction, reported by Crane in his article in the *Times*, is a reasonable indication that Howells at least knew of the existence of the novel in October, 1894 . . . ." (102-3) We might take Howells's comment in Crane's interview a step further, since in his 1896 New York *World* review "New York Low Life in Fiction," Howells, albeit ambiguously, states that "I think it is two years, now, since I saw George's Mother." To see it, of course, is not necessarily to read it, but it goes beyond a "reasonable indication" that he was aware of the novel in 1894.

[5] In a footnote, Monteiro calls our attention to Crane's Publisher's Circular obituary, which lists *St. George's Mother* as one of his books (72, June 9, 1900; p. 629) and further that there exists a 1907 book entitled *St. George and the Dragon: England and the Drink Traffic* by Rev. J. Johns (16n).

[6] The legend of George and the dragon was also popularly adopted as a symbol of the U.S. defeating Spain in the Spanish-American War and white supremacy. Thanks to my former colleague Faye Ringel in the Humanities Department of the U.S. Coast Guard Academy for her tutelage on the legend of St. George.

[7] *On the Bowery* is a penetrating study, with a somewhat misleading subtitle, of the turn in urban representation from the "sensational mystification" of the middle decades of the nineteenth century to the "critical realism" of Crane and Dreiser.

the fight with a message from Kelcey's mother. "She's awful sick! She was hollerin'! Dey been looki' fer yeh over'n hour!" (124-25). Like the bride in Crane's short masterpiece "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky" (1898), who symbolically wins the final gunfight between Sheriff Potter and Scratchy Wilson by simply observing their altercation, Kelcey's mother ends the battle before it had even begun by calling her son to her death bed. For a woman without weapons to defeat the dragon of urban influences, death is the only effectual contingency. To the end, Kelcey is obsessed with the disappointments he suffered outside the home: "When he entered the chamber of death," Crane writes, "he was brooding over the recent encounter and devising extravagant revenges upon Blue Billy and the others" (125). The young clergyman from Mrs. Kelcey's church group is present, thus bringing all of the influences of the Bowery to bear on George's conscience. A war of words erupts in the hallway outside their flat, when a young man refuses to obey his mother's call to go to the store: "In a minnet, I tell yeh!" (127) That one incident in the hallway completely absorbs Kelcey's thoughts, and it is the clergyman who discovers that George's mother is dead. There is no resolution in this final scene, only more questions.

Joseph X. Brennan's 1960 petition on behalf of *George's Mother* appeared at the wrong time. In the 1950s and early '60s, the misery imbued in *Maggie* affirmed middle-class conclusions about "low" forms of urban life when the popular view of Old New York (roughly from the antebellum years to the early 1920s) remained firmly Victorian. *George's Mother* is less critical in its treatment of youth culture in the streets and thus lacked a sympathetic readership during its first 75 years on the shelves. Audiences today, however, are generally more open to and accepting of candid tales of Old New York "low life." Along with the "boom" in contemporary scholarship on the subject, as discussed in the introduction, there has also been an astounding rise in the popularity of New York low-life literature reprinted and published for the first time. This inclusive perspective of urban culture was not fully accepted until the 1980s, and by now it is the rule rather than the exception.

With the waning influence of Victorianism on contemporary images of nineteenth-century New York, we are discovering that the urban fiction of the nineteenth century presented the city as the ultimate proving ground for the success or attrition of the United States. Those of us fascinated with the tastes and temperaments of marginalized urban neighborhoods like the Bowery are returning to a time in New York history when the voices of writers like Stephen Crane expressed what was good and what was bad about the New York they so provocatively

veteran" (*Classics Red Badge* 19). Given this description, his subsequent advance beyond his own lines and continuing to fire after the enemy has retreated come across in the comic as straightforwardly heroic, a simple excess of the right stuff. In the original, by contrast, Henry is shown to perform these actions unconsciously, out of blind rage, thus giving them an ironic dimension summed up in the narrator's paraphrase of Henry's thoughts: "[H]e was now what he called a hero. And he had not been aware of the process. He had slept and, awakening, found himself a knight" (Crane *Red Badge* 97).

Self-forgetfulness in the fog of battle, for better and for worse, is also the motivation in the novel for Henry's behavior in the series of charges that form the story's climax, but here again the comic gives Henry a greater degree of self-awareness and preserves only those responses that may be construed as wholly admirable; in most cases, in fact, it does not leave this assessment up to the reader but dictates it by the addition of invented comments and lines of dialogue. When, for example, Henry's lieutenant seeks to push the youth forward in the first charge, an indignant Henry responds in the novel, "'Come on yerself, then'" (Crane *Red Badge* 108); the comic punches this speech up to "Come on yourself if you're so brave!" (*Classics Red Badge* 22). Henry's response to the flag during this charge is close to hysterical in Crane's text; he regards it as "a creation of beauty and invulnerability. It was a goddess, radiant, that bended its form with an imperious gesture to him. It was a woman, red and white, hating and loving, that called him with the voice of his hopes. Because no harm could come to it, he endowed it with power" (Crane *Red Badge* 108). No such analysis appears in the comic; Henry simply shouts, "[t]he flag! It's falling" (*Classics Red Badge* 22), an expression of uncomplicated patriotism that is underscored when, as the regiment's *ad hoc* color bearer, Henry seeks to assist his lieutenant in rallying the faltering troops. Crane says of this moment that Henry "harangued his fellows, pushing against their chests with his free hand" (Crane *Red Badge* 111), but he does not indicate the specific character of Henry's exhortations, which seem close to ravings, given their generic description as "all manner of hoarse, howling protests (Crane *Red Badge* 112). In the comic, Henry stands under the stars and stripes and grips a panic-stricken trooper—who might easily be understood as an image of his former self—and shouts, composedly and eloquently, "Stand and fight, man! Where's your courage? Your love of country?" (*Classics Red Badge* 23).

Another set of inventions and deletions equally smoothes out

Henry's motivations in the comic's rendition of the final charge. Crane makes clear that much of what drives Henry in this engagement is a combination of anger at a general's dissatisfaction with his regiment's performance in the previous attack and pride at the same general's commendation of his personal conduct as color-bearer. Crane also implies a strong and ludicrous self-dramatizing component to this mixture when the charge stalls and the regiment is pinned down under enemy fire. Henry's response is a resolution "not to budge whatever should happen.. . . . It was clear to him that his final and absolute revenge was to be achieved by his dead body, lying torn and guttering, upon the field. This was to be a poignant retaliation upon the [general]. . . . [I]t was his idea, vaguely formulated, that his corpse would be for those eyes a great and salt reproach" (Crane *Red Badge* 125). The same moment in the comic becomes a straightforward celebration of irrevocably achieved manhood in the Hollywood vein. Kneeling and firing under the American flag, Henry harbors no realistic misplaced anger; with fully lucid and conscious self-awareness, he thinks only, "[t]hey'll wipe us out if we stay here. Looks like this is really the end. But I won't run again no matter what happens" (*Classics Red Badge* 27).

If these alterations are striking, the comic's scriptwriter saves the most significant ones for last. As Henry's regiment charges from its pinned-down position to drive the enemy off, Crane describes Henry as feeling "the daring spirit of a savage, religion-mad. He was capable of profound sacrifices, a tremendous death. He had not time for dissections, but he knew that he thought of the bullets only as things that could prevent him from reaching the place of his endeavor" (Crane *Red Badge* 128). For this description of an only partly conscious state, a caption in the comic substitutes, "[g]one forever was Henry's cowardice," once more emphasizing the putatively irrevocable nature of Henry's transformation, and then it adds something wholly absent from the original: *"[g]razed by enemy fire again and again* [emphasis added], he pushed forward fearlessly with the others" (*Classics Red Badge* 28). What makes this caption particularly meaningful is the way it seems to tie into the comic's version of the story's conclusion. Henry's final assessment of himself in the original is, of course, very similar to the first sentence of the caption: he believes his fear is, indeed, gone forever, and he judges himself "a man" and looks forward to "an existence of soft and eternal peace" (Crane *Red Badge* 135). However, Crane casts doubt on the complete reliability of this analysis by pointing out that to hold it Henry has to dismiss from his mind his

boarding house orgies, all of which, his mother's death suggests, might be fully realized in time. Thus the correspondences between rhetoric and ideology are so strong in both *Maggie* and *George's Mother* that the former reads scene by scene like the stage dramas Crane might have observed in New York, experimentally interesting but less convincing as a novel, while the latter pits genre against genre, allowing for a more seamless, distinctly novelistic plot line. In this way, Crane's second novel is a more mature articulation for establishing, as Bill Brown has phrased it, "the archetypical maneuver of the realist project, the novel distinguishing itself from romance" (Brown 32).

Crane ends *Maggie* in a way that is more acceptable to his audience, the respectable middle-class reader, than in *George's Mother* by reprocessing the tragic circumstances of a girl who blossoms in a mud puddle, then meets a fateful death. In the 1893 edition Maggie is presumably 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 fat man follows her until they stand together: "At their feet the river appeared a deathly black hue" (72). In the D. Appleton edition, Maggie commits suicide in the end, 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). As I suggest in an earlier essay, "[h]e made these changes to appease his more respectable readership, to expose the hypocrisy of the Bowery characters, and because he himself was equivocating. 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" (Dowling 57-58).

By contrast, the ending of *George's Mother* is more ideologically open-ended than the 1896 version of *Maggie* that Crane's critics reviewed. Out of a job and penniless, Kelcey asks his barroom cronies, Jones, Bleeker, O'Connor, and other members of their social club, if he could have a loan, but swiftly discovers that "he was below them in social position...in them all he saw that something had been reversed. They remained silent upon many occasions, when they might have grunted in sympathy for him" (121, 122). On his way home, his self-esteem in shambles, the street gang on his corner goad him into picking a fight with a street tough named Blue Billy. Kelcey demurs at first, but then changes his mind with the idea that fighting Billy, no matter the end result, might serve as an antidote for his wounded pride. Just before the two young men come to blows, a street herald stops

tive of staged melodrama. Since visual performance in theater and film exacts a manner of caricature and episodic pacing to establish a line of thinking in substantially less time than it takes to read a novel, and additionally since in *Maggie* Crane's social agenda is fairly explicit – the economic, social, and cultural prostration of the urban poor within the naturalistic environment of the slums – then *George's Mother* is a more accomplished *novel*, even if *Maggie* might be a more accomplished *drama*.

Crane invites this reading unreservedly. Maggie Johnson's romantic idealism comes principally from staged melodrama. While attending the theater, "no thoughts of the atmosphere of the collar-and-cuff factory came to her" (33), whereas Kelcey's desire to be the "sublime king of a vague woman's heart" only fully achieves "clearer expression" after some exposure to the uplifting chivalric romances so popular among readers at the end of the nineteenth century (20). Indeed, Kelcey's theatrical "material unconscious" emerges only in part seven, where he dreams of marrying Maggie Johnson. She alone inspires the dramatic imagery that permeates Crane's first Bowery novel so richly. Overhearing Maggie's mother Mary Johnson in her drunken "uproars" in the stairwell, Kelcey

> used then to sit in the dark and make scenes in which he rescued the girl from her hideous environment . . . With her he builded his grand dramas so that he trod in clouds, the matters of his daily life obscured and softened by mist . . . He reflected that if he could only get a chance to rescue her from something, the whole tragedy would speedily unwind. (94)

In the main, however, Kelcey derives his imaginings from "scenes which he took mainly from pictures" (92) and more significantly in "some books" that he had read while still at Handyville (93).

This treatment of the popular romance and its significance to daily life echoes Crane's evangelical father's 1869 assertion that the "habit of novel-reading creates a morbid love of excitement somewhat akin to the imperious thirst of the inebriate" (qtd in Brown 32). The influence of romantic novels on Kelcey does appear part and parcel with his enamored view of social drinking, as the romantic portrait of himself as a knight rescuing Maggie from catastrophe (which Crane implies he might have done had she given him the time of day) finally gives way to a more realistic image of the picaresque socializer roving the streets and taverns of the Lower East Side, using his fists to settle injustices, living hand-to-mouth with no steady job, and drinking his life away in unholy

cruelty to the tattered man and by the extravagant improbability of the language used to characterize Henry's conceits, such as his belief that "[h]e came from hot plowshares to prospects of clover tranquility, and it was *as if* hot plowshares were not [emphasis added]. Scars faded as flowers" (Crane *Red Badge* 135). In place of the three pages Crane devotes to this final meditation, the comic offers one short paragraph that reduces Henry's entire experience to a straightforward case of cowardice redeemed by valor. As the regiment leaves the battlefield, this caption says, "Henry again thought back to his first wild flight. But the thought was soon buried beneath the knowledge that he had finally proven himself a man. He had been out there, face-to-face with death and had found that it was, after all, nothing but death. His head high, he wore his red badge of courage with great pride" (*Classics Red Badge* 29), with this last statement seeming to explain the comic's addition of Henry's having been repeatedly grazed by enemy fire. If Henry originally incurred this red badge ignominiously, it is now redeemed by standing for all those other honorably gained grazings by enemy bullets, and so Henry's pride in it is not self-delusion.

With this range of violations in view, one should have no trouble imagining the confusion a reader might experience when moving from the comic to Crane's text. What I most vividly recall in my own case is reading Crane's account of the final attack several times, first wondering how I had managed to miss the moment when Henry is grazed again and again by enemy fire and then wondering, with considerable frustration, why Crane had left this key "fact" out of his version of the story. What I wonder now is whether I might have been the very child Delmore Schwartz had in mind when he argued in *Partisan Review* in 1952 that, rather than leading children to the full texts, *Classics Illustrated* would in fact create resistance to the challenges posed by reading the originals (421-23). Something else I wonder is who is responsible for this state of affairs. Ordinarily, *Classics Illustrated* titles were selected by Albert Kanter and his editors at Gilberton and then, in a practice most publishers followed in this period, the creation of the script and artwork was contracted to an independent "comic shop" that operated under the general parameters of the publisher's house style. From 1945 to 1953, the period in which *The Red Badge* was produced, Gilberton routinely contracted with a shop run by the then-well-known commercial artist Jerry Iger (Jones 37), and, as William Jones has demonstrated, enough records of these transactions survive to enable scholars to identify the scriptwriters and artists who worked on most individual issues. However, the script

and art for *The Red Badge* were originally commissioned by another publishing house, Seaboard, as an issue in a series entitled *Famous Authors Illustrated*, begun in 1949 as a competitor to *Classics Illustrated*. In 1951, Kanter bought out this line and discontinued it, but he turned the as-yet unpublished *Red Badge* into an issue in his own series (Jones 90-91). The artist who did the pictures for this volume has been identified as Gustav Schrotter, a busy illustrator of juvenile books and comics of the period, but, as a result of these tangled antecedents, the identity of the author of the script is lost to history (Jones 93).

Given this fact, one can only speculate on what motivated this person to alter Crane's text in such frequently diametric ways, although, as I have already suggested, fear of Wertham and his ilk seems the most likely explanation, particularly since one wing of the anticomics crusade of the era was directed specifically at stories that took a jaundiced view of combat in America's then-current war in Korea. In his study of American comics from 1945 through 1954, William Savage notes that while comics icon Harvey Kurtzman was the editor of *Two-Fisted Tales* and *Frontline Combat* in 1951-52, he ran numerous stories that depicted American soldiers in Korea as often frightened to the point of neurosis. "In Korea," Savage says, "comic books held that American boys dropped like flies. Those who survived were confronted at every turn by irrefutable evidence of their mortality. . . . There was so much death—and so much fear of it . . . that it overwhelmed any and all jingoistic philosophies" (53). Kurtzman justified this approach by telling his readers that "[w]e can only hope that by showing how ugly war is YOUR generation will work hard to find the solution" (qtd. in Savage 57), but other Cold-War guardians of the next generation preferred their charges to work hard in other directions, with the result that attacks against Kurtzman and others effectively stifled any antiwar sentiment in comics for the next two decades (Savage 102).

In such a climate, the bowdlerization of Crane's novel to obviate any possibility of Henry's courage as neurotic, as not rooted in manly patriotism, may readily be understood as a sacrifice of artistic integrity to political and commercial considerations.[6] However, one cannot move from this example to a sweeping condemnation of *Classics Illustrated* regarding depictions of war, for in the same period Gilberton published adaptations of three novels with overt antiwar messages—Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1952), Émile Zola's *La Débâcle* (1955), and Erckmann-Chatrian's *Waterloo* (1956)—and made no effort to tone down their sentiments. If Kanter had

Bowery and its population: "The saloon keeper fulfilled as many roles as his establishment, shifting from banker to business advisor, employment agent, political contact, publicity director, and messenger. In all, he was a social force in the community, an agent who made the subculture cohere and made his presence known to both insiders and outsiders" (22-23). Even Maggie Johnson is enthralled by Pete's worldly occupation, though unlike George she was born and raised in the Bowery district: "[his] elegant occupation [bartending] brought him, no doubt, into contact with people who had money and manners" (*Maggie* 23).

To this day, the most vital qualities of the small-town bartender are threefold: loyalty to the establishment, a commitment to the longevity of their careers there, and a full knowledge of the town and its inhabitants. If the church, the family, and the community still hold sway as the great triumvirate of small-town American influence, the bartender is the personification of community, as the minister is of the church and the mother of the family. In a trade city like New York, the social literacy of a successful bartender would necessarily be infinitely more complex; the language of the broker, the street walker, the Irish tough must all be naturally absorbed and applied at the workplace. The Bowery bartender must be, as Shakespeare's Prince Hal in *Henry IV, Part I*, "so good a proficient in one quarter of an hour/ [he] can drink with any tinker in his own language" (2.4.15-18).

Regardless of Kelcey's adoration of Charley Jones, Jones remains an outsider like Kelcey in the purview of the Bowery, since both men emigrated to the big city from Handyville; as such, Jones might represent Kelcey's future on the Bowery after the death of his living conscience, his mother, at the end of the novel. The consummate insider Pete, the pretentious bartender from *Maggie* and Maggie Johnson's corruptor, complicates the disingenuousness of Crane's ironic pose. Kelcey is utterly star-struck when he encounters Pete for the first time in the hallway of his and Maggie's tenement: "[he] had felt a sudden quiver of his heart. The grandeur of [Pete's] clothes, the fine worldly air, the experience, the self-reliance, the courage that shone in the countenance of this other young man made him suddenly sink to the depths of woe" (94-95). He feared that if Maggie were to observe him abreast of a "real" man like Pete, the apex of Bowery masculinity and style, "she might have felt sorry for him" (95). Like Pete, Kelcey aspires to be both Bowery tough and chivalric gentleman, and like Maggie, he apprehends his beloved only through the lens of popular culture.

The performative moments Crane weaves into *George's Mother* are more subtly conveyed than in *Maggie*, making *Maggie* more reflec-

could not help but admire a man who knew so many bartenders. (92)

Jones appears to have the two things Kelcey desires most: knowledge of the city and moral certainty. As Paul Orlov has shown, the indirect discourse Crane employs betrays and mocks the "general tendency of city dwellers to see themselves and their lives in an unrealistic, romanticized light" (218):

> There was something very worldly and wise about him. Life did not seem to confuse him. Evidently he understood its complications. His hand thrust into his trousers pocket, where he jingled keys, and his hat perched back on his head expressed a young man of vast knowledge. His extensive acquaintance with bartenders aided him materially in this habitual expression of wisdom. (74)

The qualified tone of the passage, signaled by the words and phrases "there was something," "did not seem," "evidently," "expressed," and "materially" demonstrates that the characterization, drawn from Kelcey's glance at Jones through the mirror behind the bar, reflects an obscured reality, one which "probably" does not exist at all, in spite of Howells's sanguine confidence in Crane's "unerring mastery of absolute knowledge"; but if it does exist, it does so in the figure of the Bowery bartender rather than the poseur Charley Jones.

Kelcey's conclusion about bartenders in the indirect discourse of Crane's narrative does not entirely lack authorial empathy and, indeed, conviction. Kelcey's "vast curiosity" about the city and the sublimely enticing prospect of striving toward its complete comprehension, a goal Crane implies is a delusion of the uninitiated, speaks to recent studies of literary naturalism's harboring "pseudo-totalizing vitalistic rhetorics" like the sublime, specifically in Christophe Den Tandt's *The Urban Sublime in American Literary Naturalism*. Oddly, given its title, Den Tandt mentions *Maggie* only in passing and, more typically, *George's Mother* not at all. Den Tandt clarifies his point by arguing that "the function of the rhetoric of sublimity is, first, to give utterance to the writer's doubts about the very possibility of portraying the city as a totality comprehensible in human terms" (39). What urban type, we might ask ourselves, is more likely in the milieu of the Bowery to portray "the city as a totality comprehensible in human terms," a figure that symbolizes the city itself, than the Bowery bartender? The saloon keeper on the Bowery after all, as Benedict Giamo suggests in *On the Bowery: Confronting Homelessness in American Society*,[7] personifies the

originally commissioned and overseen the *Classics Red Badge*, then a logical inference would be that he believed questioning European wars was acceptable to America's guardians of youth, but casting doubts on American conflicts and soldiers was not. This explanation may, of course, be true even given the text's actual provenance; its respectful treatment of American fighting men could be the reason Kanter incorporated it into his *Classics* line with no alterations. Perhaps, though, the most likely explanation is that Kanter and his editors were ultimately less concerned with artistic or political considerations than with immediate financial ones: Kanter had paid a considerable sum to buy out the *Famous Authors* line, and issuing the already completed *Red Badge* was an inexpensive way to generate some quick return on that expenditure. It is tempting to speculate that Crane himself would have offered an irony-tinged approval of this decision, given his willingness to have Bacheller, Johnson and Bacheller publish *The Red Badge* in syndicated form despite that version's being "much smaller and to my mind much worse than its original form" (*Correspondence* 81). He might, however, have requested a slight change in the comic's closing injunction, to something along the lines of "Now that you have read the *Classics Illustrated* edition, you should surely read the original, and you had better be prepared for a few surprises!"

Notes

[1] William Jones notes, for example, that in 1948 *Time* magazine reported that some youthful burglars and murderers had gotten the ideas for their crimes from comic books and that ABC radio ran a cautionary broadcast entitled "What's Wrong with Comics?" (119)

[2] Whether all of the authors themselves would have agreed with Kanter's assessment of the purity of their intentions with respect to the juvenile-decency standards of 1950s America is, of course, another issue. The opinions of Herman Melville, Mark Twain, and Stephen Crane may be safely conjectured.

[3] Most of these changes consisted of new cover art in response to charges of excessively violent images on the original covers of some titles, including *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, and *The Prince and the Pauper* (Jones 119). Although no documentation

can be found that such criticism was ever leveled at the cover of the *Classics Illustrated* version of *The Red Badge*, which depicts Henry Fleming fleeing from the battle line on his first day of combat, this cover was changed in 1968; the newer one shows Henry carrying the American flag as he leads his regiment's successful charge on the second day.

[4] Bart Beaty takes the defense of *Classics Illustrated* in a more theoretical direction, arguing the essentially deconstructionist point that what upset Greenberg, MacDonald, and the others was the fact that the series "incorporated elements from both literature and the visual arts to create a new form of literacy[,] which was deemed inadequate by the reading experts" (124). These critics' hostility to this effort "to provide access to canonical literature for new audiences," Beaty says (124), "presupposed a notion that there were ways of addressing oneself to culture which were fundamentally correct, ways which necessarily excluded the possibility of the incorporation of text and image" (135).

[5] William Jones is the only one of this group to look specifically at the *Classics Illustrated Red Badge*, and he does acknowledge its flaws, saying that "Crane's masterpiece received less than its due" in its comic form (93), while arguing that they are anomalous for the series as a whole.

[6] In making this sacrifice, the adapter may well have been following the lead of the film version of *The Red Badge*, which had been released one year earlier, in 1951. According to Lillian Ross and the film's director, John Huston, the original cut of this film reflected Huston's belief that Crane's point was "that courage is as unreasoning as cowardice" in battle (Ross 216). However, the film's producer, Dore Schary, regarded this version as likely to upset or confuse audiences, and so he re-edited the film and added voice-over narration at the beginning and the end to "clarify" the story, including the simplifying explanation that Crane's story "is of a boy who, frightened, went into a battle and came out of it a man with courage" (qtd. in Ross 216). William Jones points out that many of the *Classics Illustrated Red Badge* drawings appear to be based on images from this film (93); it seems possible that the scriptwriter drew on the film as well, with or without awareness of the protection from charges of lack of patriotism that this approach might provide.

> barbarism. Tears welled piteously from his eyes. He planned long diabolical explanations! (103)

On his lackluster experience at a prayer meeting with his mother,

> At last the young clergyman spoke at some length. Kelcey was amazed, because, from the young man's appearance, he would not have suspected him of being so glib; but the speech had no effect on Kelcey, excepting to prove to him again that he was damned. (110)

On his mother's imploring him to stay home, do well at work, and not be carousing at all hours,

> He listened to her harangue with a curled lip. In defense he merely made a gesture of supreme exasperation. She never understood the advanced things in life. He felt the hopelessness of ever making her comprehend. His mother was not modern. (117)

The darkly playful irony in these passages produces less hilarity than serious insights into Crane's ambivalence toward the moral and social lessons of modern times, along with his relationship to his own mother. Kelcey apprehends that in the modern world sensuality appears to triumph over Christian morality in ways that Crane's Methodist parents, like Kelcey's mother, adumbrated and publicly spoke out against. The street gang's nickname for him, "Kell," after all, is a form of pottage, calling to mind the biblical "mess of pottage" Esau substituted for his birthright, and subsequently God's (or a pious mother's) good will.

The most revealing instance of this conflict between Crane's ironic tone and Kelcey's earnestness is the final paragraph of section six, in which Crane emphasizes the powerful hold the city had on Kelcey, elaborates on the disruptive influences of urban mystification and personal dissociation, and, again with pseudo-irony, encapsulates the mysteries of the city in the figure of the Bowery bartender:

> He had begun to look at the great world evolving near to his nose. He had a vast curiosity concerning this city in whose complexities he was buried. It was an impenetrable mystery, this city. It was a blend of enticing colors. He longed to comprehend it completely, that he might walk understandingly in its greatest marvels, its mightiest march of life, its sin. He dreamed of a comprehension whose pay was the admirable attitude of a man of knowledge. He remembered Jones. He

ire than its weapon. As his close niece Helen R. Crane remembered in 1934, by 1891, two years before Crane began work on *George's Mother*, her uncle "was in full rebellion against the traditions on which he had been nourished and reared," and he "did marvel always that such an intellectual woman [his mother]...could have wrapped herself so completely in the 'vacuous, futile, psalm-singing that passed for worship' in those days" (qtd in Colvert 107, 108). However, Kelcey is no more a simple allegory of Crane's youth than Bartleby is of Herman Melville's writing career, though the correspondences between the texts and their authors' lives cannot be denied; rather, Crane's hero represents the floundering foundations of young men and women breaking away from the insularity of childhood and experiencing life in order to arrive at semblances of meaning. The incomprehensible dragon is more likely "joy," "the world," "the mystery of a street," "the advanced things in life," or simply put, a wholly "vast" knowledge of the city and the cosmopolitan, distinctly modern condition it represents. Given his age and origins, Kelcey's naïve consciousness naturally guiles him into spinning alcohol and its sensuous accessories into vehicles for understanding "this city" and the modern complexities it signifies.

In the case of the evangelical prayer-meeting set, Crane reveals Kelcey's reluctance to join his mother at the local church this way: "In his ears was the sound of a hymn, made by people who tilted their heads at a prescribed angle of devotion. It would be too apparent that they were all better than he. When he entered they would turn their heads and regard him with suspicion. This would be an enormous aggravation, since he was certain that he was as good as they" (98). Kelcey's uncertainty on this last point is clear in the unconscious slip of the second sentence. He is unconvinced by his moral standing with the objects of his own criticism, just as Jimmie Johnson in *Maggie* is unwilling to ask himself why his sister might have "gone teh deh devil" or whether his own defiled sexual partners had brothers (36).

Crane perpetuates this pseudo-ironic tone throughout *George's Mother* by repeatedly concluding chapters with glib insights into Kelcey's small-town naiveté, an iterative rhetorical schema that produces conflicting reader responses. The final sentences of each chapter read like punch lines meant to expose Kelcey's bumpkin-style haplessness: On his social dissociation in the late hours of a drunken house party at his drinking companion Bleeker's tenement flat,

> [Kelcey], the brilliant, the good, the sympathetic had been thrust fiendishly from the party. They had had the comprehension of red lobsters. It was unspeakable

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The Case for *George's Mother*[1]

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> Our ancient word of courage, fair 'St. George,'
> Inspire us with the spleen of fiery dragons.
> William Shakespeare, *Richard III* (1.3.349-50)

Nearly 50 years ago, Joseph X. Brennan made his case for the critical resuscitation of Stephen Crane's "other Bowery novel," *George's Mother* (1896). In his concise formalist essay "The Imagery and Art of *George's Mother*" (1960), Brennan submitted that

> *George's Mother* has received almost no critical consideration at all, although it is eminently more satisfactory in its realism, more convincing in characterization, and less bizarre in style than *Maggie* [1893] . . . . On every account, indeed, *George's Mother* deserves to be rescued from critical neglect; for like all of Crane's best fiction, this work too can give us a valuable insight into his remarkable ingenuity as an artist . . . . For both the precision of its art and the acuteness of its realism, *George's Mother* decidedly merits far greater recognition. (125, 125, 134)

In spite of Brennan's well-wrought-urn approach to the novel, contemporaneous as it was for mid-twentieth-century scholarship, anyone perfunctorily familiar with Crane studies would know that his venture failed utterly. Academics might easily prove this by simply taking a poll in their department, disregarding fields of interest, asking how many have read *Maggie* and how many have *heard* of *George's Mother*. The numbers speak for themselves.

George's Mother is in many ways a more "modern" text than *Maggie* in that it is more fully ambiguous morally and ideologically than its prequel, lending itself to recent theoretical trends in literary study and the contemporary boom in Old New York "low life" studies and its reciprocal infusion into popular culture. Moreover, although *Maggie* is now recognized (decidedly more than it was in the 1890s) as a minor masterwork because of its highly controversial subject matter, *George's Mother* is a more balanced treatment of that material, which made it downright incendiary in Crane's time and should be given more credit for its proto-modernist deliberations in our own. In this essay, I hope to

nineteenth-century co-optations of the St. George and the dragon legend in British and American newspapers was single-framed cartoons marking the dragon as intemperance and St. George the temperance movement.[6] Brennan argues that from Mrs. Kelcey's point of view the green dragon is alcohol and the insidious influences of the streets, and thus Crane ironically inverts the old legend wherein the mother sees herself as St. George. Here is the indirect "dragon discourse" from the mother's perspective:

> Her mind created many wondrous influences that were swooping like green dragons at him. They were changing him to a morose man who suffered silently. She longed to discover them, that she might go bravely to the rescue of her heroic son. She knew that he, generous in his pain, would keep it from her. (qtd in Brennan 128)

Kelcey's mother is no less influenced by the material culture of the times than Kelcey, or other Crane characters like Maggie, Pete, or Henry Fleming. Like them, she deludes herself that romantic fancies come true. She "wielded" her pots, pans, broom, and dust-pan, "like weapons," and she carried out her housework as if in a "flurry of battle":

> Her broom was continually poised, lance-wise, at dust demons. There came clashings and clangings as she strove with her tireless foes . . . her voice was often raised in a long cry, a strange war-chant, a shout of battle and defiance . . . . Finally she halted for a moment . . . . Still it could be seen that she even then was planning skirmishes, charges, campaigns . . . but she now hurled herself fiercely at the stove that lurked in the gloom, red-eyed, like a dragon. (77-78)

As a member of the WCTU who lectured nationwide on behalf of the temperance movement, as Crane's own mother Mary Helen Peck Crane had done, Kelcey's mother wishes to slay the dragon of intemperance and vanquish the armies of dust demons. Moreover, she fantasizes that her son will correspond with equally noble attacks on the public world outside the tenement, with her at his back, defending him from the "wondrous influences that were swooping like green dragons at him" (89).

Crane was a product as well as a producer of the United States' inchoate modernist ethos, and if his only dragon was demon rum he would be proselytizing a temperance perspective, which, given Crane's actual habits and temperament, is more likely the target of Crane's sat-

bartender said to George? There is no meaning to any of it" (116). Peck accuses Crane of "rhyparography," creating distasteful imagery for its own sake, which is, Peck insists, "the lowest form of art" (116).

Peck's assumption is that Crane's misshapen scenes of debauchery in the tenements and taverns of the Bowery are non-sequitors in the framework of the novel, that "anyone can hang around a bar-room and jot down the conversation and also print it, but this is not realism" (116). In truth, George never speaks to a bartender aside from Pete in the book, as he is too far removed from the pulse of the street at that point in his New York life. But his associate Charley Jones, the excitable alcoholic ne'er-do-well, can cultivate informative social contacts like bartenders, which makes him an almost meta-bartender in the eyes of an inquisitive young greenhorn like Kelcey, a figure of "sublime" proportions. By extension, the saloon and its complementary potations appear to expand the vista of New York knowledge Kelcey seeks: "As he drank more beer Kelcey felt his breast expand with manly feeling. He knew that he was capable of sublime things" (85). Drinking beer does not come naturally to Kelcey, but, like Jack London chronicles of his incipient experience with alcohol in *John Barleycorn* (1913), he induces himself to conquer his natural revulsion, for the benefits of drunkenness to the youth appear to outweigh the bitterness of the drink:

> He understood that drink was an essential to joy, to the coveted position of a man of the world and of the streets. The saloons contained the mystery of a street for him. When he knew its saloons he comprehended the street. Drink and its surroundings were the eyes of a superb green dragon to him. He followed a fascinating glitter, and the glitter required no explanation. (110-11)

Crane stylizes the saloon-as-street synecdoche for Kelcey here with repetitive syntax: drink/streets, saloons/street, saloons/street. Furthermore, the popular novels that give form to Kelcey's world suggest that the dragon, a mythic monster born of chivalric romance and defeated most famously by Kelcey's canonized namesake, St. George, is conquerable and thus knowable.

In his study of *George's Mother* and the temperance movement, George Monteiro observes that "echoing the language of 'The Warfare,' George's mother sees herself as truly a crusader. To fight against George's intemperance is to do the Christian God's work. Her opponent is the dragon of alcoholism that the ironically named (Saint?) George does not have the will to defeat" (15).[5] One of the many late

show what we gain from this novel in and out of the classroom, and I truly hope that further critical studies by other scholars will follow. In short, Joseph Brennan initiated a conversation that is long overdue.

A chronologically contiguous sequel to *Maggie, George's Mother* is the story of George Kelcey, a working-class young man from the fictional town of Handyville who relocates to New York's Lower East Side with his unsophisticated but adoring mother. At first glance, George is a character borne of literary aristocracy, with implications of Hawthorne's young Goodman Brown, Twain's Huckleberry Finn, Emerson's self-reliant man, and a flavor of Rebecca Harding Davis's Hugh Wolfe from *Life in the Iron Mills*:

> A brown young man went along the avenue. He held a tin lunch-pail under his arm in a manner that was evidently uncomfortable. He was puffing at a corn-cob pipe. His shoulders had a self-reliant poise, and the hang of his arms and the raised veins of his hands showed him to be a man who worked with his muscles. (74)

George is the last survivor of his mother's five sons (the cause of their deaths is unclear) and as such feels enormous pressure to, as his friend Charley Jones advises him, "brace up an' be a comfort t' th' ol' mother" (75). At the same time, he is drawn, for the first time since transplanting to the city three years before, to give up his daily grind, adopt a gentleman's life of ease and leisure, and drive himself pathologically toward a mastery of the great metropolis. Throughout the novel, the "brown young man" vacillates awkwardly among three social strains in the neighborhood of the Bowery: One is his mother's moralistic devotion to the church and her appeals for her son to attend nightly evangelical prayer meetings; another is a fraternal drinking club of self-aggrandizing men of varying age, loosely run by a former associate of Kelcey's from Handyville named Charley Jones, who together sound off Victorian aspirations but are far too dissipated to achieve any public respectability; and the last is the alluring but ultra-violent life of the street gang on the corner of his tenement block. No one social group satisfies Kelcey, who longs to fit in but despairs over his options; each is presented as conformist, almost tribal alternatives to rural community life as Kelcey guilelessly searches for the sense of social coherence he had left behind.

Recent critical developments have invited new readings of Crane's major work in rigorous post-formalist theoretical frameworks that have the potential to allow for Crane's so-called minor work,

like *George's Mother*, to be rediscovered. Benedict Giamo's strategy of "mystification," Bill Brown's "material unconscious," and Christophe Den Tandt's discourse of the "sublime" all powerfully elucidate the fundamental goals of naturalist rhetoric in contrast to and in concert with the realist movement, canonized realist texts, and Crane's historical moment. These approaches are interrelated in their attentiveness to cultural representation and absorption, whether they demonstrate Crane's acceptance that culture is more mystifying than knowable (Giamo), his ability to represent the demoralized masses incorporating mass culture as escape (Brown), or his acknowledgment of the impregnable nature of the fin de siècle urban scene and its challenge of representation (Den Tandt 152). But only Giamo, whose subject is Bowery culture from the age of realism to the 1980s, provides any substantive treatment of the text. *George's Mother*, I will show, more than any of Crane's other works, illuminates these theoretical constructs explicitly, voicing Kelcey's wonder over "sublime things" (85) and the "impenetrable mystery, this city" (92).

Scholarship on nineteenth-century New York "low life" in literary studies, along with history, sociology, musicology, and art history, has enjoyed a remarkable rebirth. Over the last fifteen years or so, cultural historians like Sean Wilentz, Christine Stansell, David S. Reynolds, Timothy J. Gilfoyle, Keith Gandal, and Giorgio Mariani have successfully deconstructed the myth of nineteenth-century Victorian supremacy. Their studies have opened new doors of perception for scholars and students alike, though most contemporary scholarship on American literary realism continues to reinforce the dominion of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century canonical writing. Luc Sante, best-known for his enormously popular folk history *Low Life: Lures and Snares of Old New York* (1991), has recently edited a collection of Stephen Crane's New York writing, *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets and Other New York Writings* (Modern Library 2001). *George's Mother* is included in it, and thus the Modern Library has now published that novel in a teachable (i.e., affordable) form for the first time in decades.[2] After the unequivocal success of *Low Life*, Sante now has the authority to republish an unsung novel like *George's Mother* for reasons that help us understand cultural production at the turn of the twenty-first century as much as the turn of the twentieth. As my conclusion suggests, I believe the case for this novel's value is timely in a way that Joseph X. Brennan's essay "The Imagery and Art of *George's Mother*" was not in 1960.

The Stephen Crane Society's online bibliography lists only 10 scholarly essays directly related to *George's Mother* published since Brennan's article appeared, with a near international silence on the text

ism," what he might have called "naturalism," as a source of discomfort for the reader, rather than the "humor, thought, reason, aspiration, affection, morality, and religion" that good writing weaves into its narrative (Anonymous 112); but these are qualities parents extol, rarely youths. I would argue that George Kelcey's mother satisfies at least the "affection, morality, and religion" from the reviewer's criteria, while Kelcey himself is driven by issues altogether more relevant to his youthful position – identity, desire, friendship, wish-fulfillment, and sexuality – topics that stem from the mind of a person in his early twenties, where Crane's own mind was during the book's composition. The *Daily Tatler* published a "reassessment" of *George's Mother* by John D. Barry (12 November 1896), in which Barry substantiates the perception that reviewers widely panned the novel: "As soon as the book appeared a battalion of enraged reviewers fell upon it, hacked it and then turned exultingly away from the remains with the self-congratulatory manner of people who have done good work"; but he regards the initial critical response as a "mystery" given the "intense humanity of the story" (179, 180). In fact, of the eight reviews of *George's Mother* included in Richard M. Weatherford's collection, *Stephen Crane: The Critical Heritage*, five are remarkably positive, two are mixed in their appraisal, and only one, Harry Thurston Peck's, is entirely negative. This might be explained by Weatherford's editorial choices; but whatever the case, Barry concludes his review with this confident assertion: "In *George's Mother* Mr. Crane has written a great book, and I shall be amazed if it does not have a revival" (180).

Only 21-years old when he began writing the novel (spring 1893), and 23 at the time of completion (fall 1894), Crane himself was, as Luc Sante stresses in his introduction, a "kid," and it is important to keep that fact in mind, since "being a kid gave him a number of advantages of stance" (xii). One altogether revolutionary aspect of Crane's career, particularly with regard to *George's Mother*, is that he allowed himself to be a kid and in so doing often circumvented the demands of the established publishing elite. Crane wrote about "low life" on the Bowery, repressed sexuality, hangovers, and jobless indolence with an ambiguousness that appalled genteel critics and fellow authors alike. With this in mind, the reviews collected in the Merrill volume strike me as written by a cluster of middle-aged Victorians troubled by the onset of youth culture, who reacted to *George's Mother* in ways we might find in 1950s reviews of Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*. In Harry Thurston Peck's scathing *Bookman* review (July 1896), for example, the critic demands to know "who cares about what George said to the bartender, or what the

Howells wrote about *George's Mother* in his *New York World* review,

> the wonder of it is the courage which deals with persons so absolutely average, and the art that graces them with the beauty of the author's compassion for everything that errs and suffers. Without this feeling the effects of his mastery would be impossible, and if it went further or put itself into the pitying phrases it would annul the effects. But it never does this; it is notable that in all respects the author keeps himself well in hand. He is quite honest with the reader. He never shows his characters or his situations in any sort of sentimental glamour; if you will be moved by the sadness of common fates you will feel his intention, but he does not flatter his portraits of people or conditions to take your fancy. (264)

Similarly, in an otherwise glowing appraisal, Garland wrote that *Maggie* "fails of rounded completeness. It is only a fragment. It is typical only of the worst elements of the alley. The author should delineate the families living on the next street, who live lives of heroic purity and hopeless hardship" (7).

But the question still remains: Why have later scholars over the past century abjured the novel's literary reputation when the "Dean of American Letters" William Dean Howells and Stephen Crane himself have argued that *George's Mother* is "superior" to *Maggie* as a work of literary realism, the author's "best thing"? One important fact is that Howells's review "New York Low Life in Fiction" is generally read as a review of *Maggie* (1896 edition) and Abraham Cahan's *Yekl: A Tale of the New York Ghetto* (1896), not *George's Mother*. When Howells's critique is brought up in scholarship on *George's Mother* at all, it is his reworking of the original review for publication as the introduction to the 1896 edition of *Maggie*, which naturally touts the novel in question rather than Crane's other work. Indeed, Stanley Wertheim, who did not include "New York Low Life" in the *Merrill Studies in* Maggie *and* George's Mother (1970), provides a series of reviews that debase almost any attempt at finding social, psychological, or artistic worth in the novel (although Brennan's later appeal is included as a secondary source); we can only surmise from Wertheim's choices that Crane's contemporary reviewers in 1896 were mostly critical of *George's Mother*, which explains Crane's reluctance to either discuss or reprint the novel with more verity than Colvert's reasoning that Crane himself disliked it.

One caustic review from *The Nation* points to Crane's "animal-

over the 1980s and early '90s. (*Maggie* scored 54, one of which is my own, not to mention its integral function in numerous monographs on literary naturalism and material culture.) Only four of these have been published in the last two decades: Donald Pizer's "From a Home to the World: Stephen Crane's *George's Mother*" (1996), George Monteiro's "The Drunkard's Progress: Bowery Plot, Social Paradigm in Stephen Crane's *George's Mother*" (1999, soon after modified in chapter form in his exemplary *Stephen Crane's Blue Badge of Courage*), Ko Masuzaki's "Suramu O Kakoikomi Mugaikasuru: 19 Seiki Matsu Korera Kyofu to Stephen Crane No Suramu Hyosho" (2002) and Shunji Kuga's "Feminine Domesticity and the Feral City: Stephen Crane's *George's Mother*, *Maggie*, and 'A Detail'" (2004) and one essay not yet included in the bibliography, Paul Orlov's "Psychology, Style, and the Cityscape in Stephen Crane's *George's Mother*" (1990). But these most recent studies, all of them important contributions to the field, either position the novel in the historical context of Crane's more celebrated work rather than a text worthy of study in its own right, or discuss it within a limited historical or theoretical framework in which history or theory surpasses the novel as the main subject.

Paul Orlov, in his introduction to "Psychology, Style, and the Cityscape," admits that *George's Mother* is a "seldom-studied companion-piece to the more famous *Maggie*" and argues that the potential for regenerating the novel's status is to be found in its "contribution to the embodiment of psychology in American fiction – just as *The Red Badge of Courage* and *Maggie* have been" (212). Orlov's essay does not defend *George's Mother* for its own contributions as much as show the extent to which Crane's most famous psychosocial themes and stylistic techniques, such as self-delusion, the psychological impact of material culture, environmental determinism, ironic distance, and the use of sentimental tropes for satiric purpose, can be found in *George's Mother* as well as his more "famous" novels. George Monteiro in "The Drunkard's Progress" describes *George's Mother* in the context of late nineteenth-century temperance polemics like Crane's father Rev. Jonathan Townley Crane's *Arts of Intoxication* (1870), the president of the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU.) Francis E. Willard's essay "Which Shall Win?"(1877), and several temperance songs and poems germane to the novel's treatment of alcohol and its ill effects on the constitution of body and nation. Monteiro singles out the temperance movement as the driving force with which Kelcey must ultimately contend and concludes that "this war will not be fought by George but over him" (15). One source Monteiro points to, an anthology of temper-

ance tracts entitled *Weapons for Temperance Warfare* (1897), importantly demonstrates the extent to which the conception of a nationwide *battle* with demon rum had a special hold on the nineteenth-century American imagination, though it cannot be the source for Crane's working title, "Women Without Weapons," since it came out three years after Crane finished his novel in late 1894.[3]

Donald Pizer's essay "From Home to World" is the most comprehensive in its handling of *George's Mother* but treats the novel mainly as a stepping stone from *Maggie* to *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895). Pizer posits the moral alternatives Crane's protagonists Maggie Johnson (*Maggie*), George Kelcey (*George's Mother*), and Henry Fleming (*The Red Badge of Courage*) face in gendered terms and argues that for George Kelcey no one vanquished the others. Pizer aptly contends that Kelcey is caught between the feminine "home" defined by "cleanliness, order, hard work, and temperance" (280) and the masculine "world" of "camaraderie and gentility" (281) that he discovers in the saloons and on the street corners of the Bowery and thereabouts. He concludes that none of Kelcey's three options prove viable; by the end of the novel Crane's hero is lost in a condition of "spiritual stasis" (284), whereas Henry Fleming in *The Red Badge of Courage* grows to be "far more than the child who fled his mother's home at the opening of the novel" (288). In the end, though the bulk of Pizer's scrutiny centers on *George's Mother*, his subject remains a vehicle to more fully understand Crane's better-known work. Similarly, Shunji Kuga, in "Feminine Domesticity and the Feral City," while analyzing Crane's balancing act between domesticity and the "feral viciousness of the metropolis," applies *George's Mother* and *Maggie* to garner a new reading of a lesser-known short work, "A Detail," and shed light on Crane's standpoint on alcoholism, prostitution, and insanity (29).

In his introduction to the University of Virginia's edition of *George's Mother*, James B. Colvert suggests that "the record, such as it is, can only lead to the conclusion that Crane was indifferent to the fate of *George's Mother*," since Crane mentions it so infrequently in his correspondence, though he admits "the evidence is altogether circumstantial" (105, 103). Colvert's highly visible introduction regrettably reads like an apology for the novel, in which there is clear admiration for Crane's endeavor to reconcile the contradiction between his Methodist upbringing in New Jersey and his bohemian lifestyle on the Lower East Side; but in the end, he concludes by writing off *George's Mother* as an artistic misfire: "[Crane's] lambent and witty impressionism, for all its peculiar strength, was unequal to this particular burden" (108).

Highlighting the "curious concealment of the book" in Crane's correspondence as he does (106), Colvert downplays the only hard evidence about the early years of the novel's existence we do have. Crane first wrote a letter to Hamlin Garland about *George's Mother* on May 9, 1894, informing his "literary father" that he was "writing another novel which is a bird" (qtd in Colvert 101). The following fall, Crane wrote Garland again, this time declaring unequivocal pride for his creation: "I have just completed a New York book that leaves *Maggie* at the post. It is my best thing. Since you are not here, I am going to see if Mr. Howells will not read it" (qtd in Colvert 102). In Crane's own estimation, then, the quality of *George's Mother* surpassed both *Maggie* and *The Red Badge of Courage*, neither of which had yet been released for a larger audience (a fact which disavows the possibility of Crane's merely promoting his latest book for publication and sales, as he had just finished *The Red Badge of Courage* the previous spring, April 1894). Howells eventually did read it,[4] and by all accounts agreed with Crane, particularly with regard to *The Red Badge of Courage*. His remark about Crane's two Bowery novels in his 26 July 1896 *New York World* review "New York Low Life in Fiction," is worth quoting at length:

> Their present publication is imaginably due to the success of *The Red Badge of Courage*, but I do not think that they will owe their critical acceptance to the obstreperous favor which that has won. *As pieces of art they are altogether superior to it, and as representations of life their greater fidelity cannot be questioned.* In *The Red Badge of Courage* there is a good deal of floundering, it seems to me. The narration repeats itself; the effort to imagine, to divine, and then to express ends often in a huddled and confused effect; there is no repose, such as agony itself assumes in the finest art, and there is no forward movement. But in these other books the advance is relentless; the atmosphere is transparent; the texture is a continuous web where all the facts are wrought with the *unerring mastery of absolute knowledge.* I should say that *The Red Badge of Courage* owed its excellence to the training the author had given himself in setting forth the life he knew in these earlier books of later publication. He learned to imagine vividly from seeing clearly. (emphasis mine, 262-63)

Colvert implies that with *George's Mother* Crane was pandering to his patron saints, Garland and Howells, by writing a book wherein, as