

MAGGIE
A GIRL OF
THE STREETS

STEPHEN CRANE



EDITED BY THOMAS A. GULLASON

A NORTON CRITICAL EDITION

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STEPHEN CRANE

MAGGIE:
A GIRL OF THE STREETS

(A STORY OF NEW YORK) (1893)

AN AUTHORITATIVE TEXT
BACKGROUNDS AND SOURCES
THE AUTHOR AND THE NOVEL
REVIEWS AND CRITICISM



Edited by
THOMAS A. GULLASON

UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND

W • W • NORTON & COMPANY
New York London

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

- Daniel Aaron: "Howells' 'Maggie,'" *The New England Quarterly*, Vol. 38 (March 1965), pp. 85-90. Reprinted by permission of the author and the publisher.
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Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Crane, Stephen, 1871-1900.

Maggie, a girl of the streets.

(A Norton critical edition)

Bibliography: p.

I. Gullason, Thomas A. II. Title.

PZ3.C852Maf 1979 [PS1449.C85] 813'.4 78-24596

ISBN 0-393-01222-0

ISBN 0-393-95024-7 pbk.

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Dedicated
to the Memory of
the Reverend Jonathan Townley Crane
(1819–1880)
and
Mary Helen Peck Crane
(1827–1891),
the parents of
STEPHEN CRANE

Preface

Stephen Crane's first novel, *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (A Story of New York), written under the pseudonym Johnston Smith, was published at his own expense in early 1893 because no commercial publisher would touch it. Even his hired and still-unknown publisher, a firm specializing in religious and medical texts, presumably refused to have its imprint on such a shocking and "cruel" book. Of the eleven hundred copies printed, Crane gave away a hundred and sold only a handful. *Maggie* was stillborn. But it won Crane two powerful champions whom he called his "literary fathers," Hamlin Garland and William Dean Howells. His second novel, *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895), was a phenomenal bestseller and acclaimed—then and now—as a great American novel. Only because of this was *Maggie* officially published in 1896, by D. Appleton and Company, though Crane had to make some concessions and revisions.

Neither the 1893 *Maggie* (reprinted in this volume) nor the 1896 *Maggie* is a great American novel. Yet it remains an important novel for many reasons. More starkly than *The Red Badge*, it presents the essence of Crane's art and vision, where he flourishes a radically new lifestyle in writing and seeing and feeling. Its avant-garde techniques of impressionism, symbolism, and irony, and its perception of reality signal the spirit of modern American literature found in Crane's disciples of the 1920s—Sherwood Anderson and Ernest Hemingway. It is the first major naturalistic novel in America. (Unfortunately, the naturalistic novel has never had a fair hearing; moreover, *Maggie* is no mere handbook of naturalism, but a highly individualized and highly stylized work of art.) It made the city, with its slum dwellers and social problems, a fit subject for serious literary study, when the novel of the 1890s was still generally regarded as escapist fare, as mere entertainment. It helped to liberate the American novel, for in its satiric portraits of sacred institutions (like the Church), its profanity, crude slang, violence, prostitution, and degradation, *Maggie* was battling the genteel realism and romance of the day, along with the tight censorship imposed by publishers and public alike. It prepared the way for Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* (1900), which also suffered at the hands of censorship; and for the muckraking movement that began in the early 1900s.

In other ways, Stephen Crane's *Maggie* has assumed a special status in American culture. It epitomizes the young man's first novel, the "genius of youth" (Crane began writing *Maggie* at nineteen as a student at Syracuse University). It is the "new" novel, the "anti-

novel" of its day. It is the work of an "angry young man," the "rebel" challenging conventions and traditions. It is the "experimental novel," for basically as in his other major works—*The Red Badge*, "The Open Boat" (1897), "The Monster" (1898), "The Blue Hotel" (1898)—Crane in *Maggie* was working in a relatively new genre, Henry James's "blest nouvelle," the short novel, which still defies definition. The importance of *Maggie*, then, lies in what it promised and accomplished in both intrinsic and extrinsic terms. It is the great "seminal" novel.

Stephen Crane's family world and his private life add to his long-lived appeal and glamour. He was the fourteenth and last child of the Methodist minister, Jonathan Townley Crane, and Mary Helen Peck Crane, daughter of the well-known Methodist minister, George Peck. Both parents were prolific writers and doers. They were zealous crusaders against drinking, smoking, dancing, gambling, and other sins. The Reverend Crane wrote distinguished tracts and volumes like *An Essay on Dancing* (1848) and *Arts of Intoxication* (1870); he also delivered a popular talk, "The Teachings of Science about Alcoholic Liquors." His wife presented an illustrated lecture, "The Effects of Alcohol upon the Organs and Tissues of the Body," and was president of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) of Port Jervis, New York, and later of Asbury Park and Ocean Grove, New Jersey. She faithfully attended the annual national conventions of the WCTU held in various parts of the country.

As Stephen Crane grew up, he became the wayward son, indulging in many of the sins that his parents had warred against. He was a chainsmoker, and in his bohemian days in New York City, he was alleged to have tried opium and to have consorted with prostitutes. He defended a prostitute, Dora Clark, in court. Later he eloped with Cora Taylor, the madam of a bawdyhouse in Jacksonville, Florida; there is no record that they ever married.

Beneath his bohemian veneer, Stephen Crane had the crusading instincts of his parents and many of their values. While he did say that "preaching is fatal to art in literature," he drew large lessons: the terror and waste of slum life in *Maggie*; the stupidity and meaninglessness of war and violence in *The Red Badge*. His parents would have been proud of these humanistic ends but shocked by the "profane" and "vulgar" means he used. The touching and pathetic discord between Stephen Crane and his mother is partially revealed in his third novel, *George's Mother* (1896).

The fact that Stephen Crane did so much in such a brief life of twenty-eight years (1871–1900) also makes him appealing and glamorous. As a youth he resided in idyllic and rural communities (Port Jervis and Asbury Park), next to nature, hunting and fishing and swimming. In New York City, he was a reporter for several of the

leading newspapers; then a foreign correspondent, covering both the Greco-Turkish War and the Spanish-American War. He was an expatriate in England, enjoying the friendship and respect of major literary figures such as Joseph Conrad and Henry James. With all his movements and activities, he was still able to produce six novels, more than a hundred short stories and sketches, two volumes of poetry, plays, news reports, and war dispatches. In the end, he was the artist dying young of tuberculosis in a sanatorium in Badenweiler, Germany. Stephen Crane remains the "genius" of his generation and the "wonder boy" of American literature.

Many libraries and individuals have been of inestimable help in the preparation of this volume. I want to express my deep appreciation to the staffs at the Library of Congress, Harvard, Princeton, Brown, Rutgers, Columbia, Drew University (especially Kenneth E. Rowe and Donald Vorp), the Boston Public Library, the New York Public Library, the New Jersey Historical Society at Newark, the National Woman's Christian Temperance Union in Evanston, Illinois, the Interlibrary Loan Department (Roberta Doran and Vicki Burnett) and the Audiovisual Services Center (Peter J. Hicks III and Roger Merola) at the University of Rhode Island. A special thanks to the contributors whose essays are reproduced in this volume; to Harold Kuebler and Doubleday & Company, Inc.; and to my son, Edward, my wife, Betty, and my mother, Rebecca Sahagian Gullason, for their interest and encouragement.

I want also to acknowledge the guidance and wisdom provided by the editorial staff at W. W. Norton & Company, especially John W. N. Francis and Emily Garlin, who helped and advised at all stages of this undertaking.

THOMAS A. GULLASON

Contents

Preface	xi
The Text of <i>Maggie: A Girl of the Streets</i> (<i>A Story of New York</i>) (1893)	1
A Note on the Text	59
Backgrounds and Sources	61
New York City Locales Mentioned in <i>Maggie</i>	62-63
Map of Lower Manhattan	64
Charles Loring Brace · From <i>The Dangerous</i> <i>Classes of New York</i>	65
Reverend Thomas De Witt Talmage	
From <i>The Evil Beast</i>	68
From <i>The Night Sides of City Life</i>	71
Jacob Riis · From <i>How the Other Half Lives</i>	75
From <i>The Children of the Poor</i>	85
Benjamin Orange Flower · From <i>Civilization's</i> <i>Inferno</i>	87
Lars Åhnebrink · [Zola as Literary Model for <i>Maggie</i>]	90
Marcus Cunliffe · Stephen Crane and the American Background of <i>Maggie</i>	94
Thomas A. Gullason · [A Minister, a Social Reformer, and <i>Maggie</i>]	103
David Fitelson · Stephen Crane's <i>Maggie</i> and Darwinism	108
Daniel Aaron · Howells' "Maggie"	112
Eric Solomon · [<i>Maggie</i> and the Parody of Popular Fiction]	116

The Author and the Novel	121
BIRTH NOTICES, LETTERS, AND INSCRIPTIONS:	
THE 1893 <i>Maggie</i>	123
Frank W. Noxon · The Real Stephen Crane	123
Willis Fletcher Johnson · The Launching of Stephen Crane	124
Stephen Crane · Howells Discussed at Avon- by-the-Sea	125
The Broken-Down Van	126
Summer Dwellers at Asbury Park and Their Doings	131
Letters and Inscriptions	132
REBIRTH AND REVISIONS: THE 1896 <i>Maggie</i>	137
Stephen Crane · Letters	137
Contemporary Reviews	141
AMERICAN REVIEWS: 1893	143
From the <i>Port Jervis</i> [New York] <i>Union</i>	143
Hamlin Garland · An Ambitious French Novel and a Modest American Story	144
The Author-Artist Will Soon Issue a Book— Stephen Crane's "Maggie"	145
From <i>The Bookman</i> [New York]	146
Chelifer [Rupert Hughes] · The Justification of Slum Stories	147
AMERICAN REVIEWS: 1896	149
From the <i>New York Tribune</i>	149
From <i>The Nation</i>	150
Frank Norris · Stephen Crane's Stories of Life in the Slums: <i>Maggie</i> and <i>George's Mother</i>	151
Edward Bright · A Melodrama of the Streets	152
William Dean Howells · New York Low Life in Fiction	154

ENGLISH REVIEWS: 1896	157
From <i>The Bookman</i> [London]	157
From <i>The Athenaeum</i>	158
H. G. Wells · Another View of "Maggie"	158
Novels of American Life	160
Criticism	161
John Berryman · [Crane's Art in <i>Maggie</i>]	163
Charles Child Walcutt · [Hallucination and Hysteria in <i>Maggie</i>]	165
William Bysse Stein · New Testament Inversions in Crane's <i>Maggie</i>	170
Joseph X. Brennan · Ironic and Symbolic Structure in Crane's <i>Maggie</i>	173
Janet Overmyer · The Structure of Crane's <i>Maggie</i>	184
Donald Pizer · Stephen Crane's <i>Maggie</i> and American Naturalism	186
Joseph Katz · [Art and Compromise: The 1893 and the 1896 <i>Maggie</i>]	194
Eric Solomon · [<i>Maggie</i> as a Three-Act Drama]	203
Jay Martin · [<i>Maggie</i> and Satire]	209
Donald B. Gibson · [The Flawed <i>Maggie</i>]	212
Arno Karlen · [Lapses and Craft in Crane's <i>Maggie</i>]	218
Katherine G. Simoneaux · Color Imagery in Crane's <i>Maggie: A Girl of the Streets</i>	222
Frank Bergon · [The Framework of <i>Maggie</i>]	230
Hershel Parker and Brian Higgins · Maggie's "Last Night": Authorial Design and Editorial Patching	234
Thomas A. Gullason · Tragedy and Melodrama in Stephen Crane's <i>Maggie</i>	245
Selected Bibliography	254

The Text of
Maggie: A Girl of the Streets
(A Story of New York) (1893)

Chapter I

A very little boy stood upon a heap of gravel for the honor of Rum Alley. He was throwing stones at howling urchins from Devil's Row¹ who were circling madly about the heap and pelting at him.

His infantile countenance was livid with fury. His small body was writhing in the delivery of great, crimson² oaths.

"Run, Jimmie, run! Dey'll get yehs," screamed a retreating Rum Alley child.

"Naw," responded Jimmie with a valiant roar, "dese micks³ can't make me run."

Howls of renewed wrath went up from Devil's Row throats. Tattered gamins on the right made a furious assault on the gravel heap. On their small, convulsed faces there shone the grins of true assassins. As they charged, they threw stones and cursed in shrill chorus.

The little champion of Rum Alley stumbled precipitately down the other side. His coat had been torn to shreds in a scuffle, and his hat was gone. He had bruises on twenty parts of his body, and blood was dripping from a cut in his head. His wan features wore a look of a tiny, insane demon.⁴

On the ground, children from Devil's Row closed in on their antagonist. He crooked his left arm defensively about his head and fought with cursing fury. The little boys ran to and fro, dodging, hurling stones and swearing in barbaric trebles.

From a window of an apartment house that upreared its form from amid squat, ignorant stables, there leaned a curious woman. Some laborers, unloading a scow at a dock at the river,⁵ paused for a moment and regarded the fight. The engineer of a passive tugboat hung lazily to a railing and watched. Over on the Island,⁶ a worm of

1. Rum Alley and Devil's Row are apparently fictitious places; they assume symbolic importance. Rum Alley may have been suggested to Crane by the chapter, "The Reign of Rum," in Jacob Riis's *How the Other Half Lives*, below, and by the long-lived prohibition work of his parents. (His father wrote *Arts of Intoxication* and his mother served as president of local chapters of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union [WCTU].) Crane repeated the theme of alcoholism in his third novel, *George's Mother* (1896).

2. In the 1896 *Maggie*, published by D. Appleton and Company, "crimson" was deleted. Color is a significant aspect of Crane's art and vision. See Joseph J. Kwiat, "Stephen Crane and Painting," *American Quarterly*, IV (Winter 1952), 331-38; and Robert L. Hough, "Crane and Goethe: A Forgotten Relationship," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, XVII (September 1962), 135-48. For color imagery in *Maggie*, see the essay by Katherine Simoneaux, below.

3. Derogatory slang, from "Michael," for a person of Irish descent and usually of the laboring class. Variant of Michael—"Mike"—appears elsewhere in the novel. In the 1896 *Maggie*, "micks" was changed to "mugs."

4. References to "demon," "assassins," "barbaric," and later "fiends" reflect the melodramatic and nightmare reality of the slum world. Crane employs a mixed style in *Maggie*—drawing on the Bible, the epic, romance, naturalism, melodrama, irony, and parody—to capture the nature of things and various attitudes toward existence. See Leonard Lutwack, "Mixed and Uniform Prose Styles in the Novel," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, XVIII (March 1960), 350-57.

5. The East River, a tidal strait connecting Upper New York Bay with Long Island Sound (about sixteen miles in length) and separating the western end of Long Island (Brooklyn and Queens) from Manhattan Island and the Bronx.

6. In the 1890s, the "Island," located in the East River and extending from 51st to 86th Streets in Manhattan, was known as Blackwell's Island. Here the City of New York maintained a penitentiary, various hospitals, and almshouses. Later it was called Welfare Island; now it is Roosevelt Island. Though referred to as a naturalist, Crane often avoids the literal documentation and close details of a more typical naturalist like Theodore Dreiser.

yellow convicts came from the shadow of a grey ominous building and crawled slowly along the river's bank.

A stone had smashed into Jimmie's mouth. Blood was bubbling over his chin and down upon his ragged shirt. Tears made furrows on his dirt-stained cheeks. His thin legs had begun to tremble and turn weak, causing his small body to reel. His roaring curses of the first part of the fight had changed to a blasphemous chatter.

In the yells of the whirling mob of Devil's Row children there were notes of joy like songs of triumphant savagery. The little boys seemed to leer gloatingly at the blood upon the other child's face.

Down the avenue came boastfully sauntering a lad of sixteen years, although the chronic sneer of an ideal manhood already sat upon his lips.⁷ His hat was tipped with an air of challenge over his eye. Between his teeth, a cigar stump was tilted at the angle of defiance. He walked with a certain swing of the shoulders which appalled the timid. He glanced over into the vacant lot in which the little raving boys from Devil's Row seethed about the shrieking⁸ and tearful child from Rum Alley.

"Gee!" he murmured with interest. "A scrap. Gee!"

He strode over to the cursing circle, swinging his shoulders in a manner which denoted that he held victory in his fists. He approached at the back of one of the most deeply engaged of the Devil's Row children.

"Ah, what deh hell,"⁹ he said, and smote the deeply-engaged¹ one on the back of the head. The little boy fell to the ground and gave a hoarse, tremendous howl. He scrambled to his feet, and perceiving, evidently, the size of his assailant, ran quickly off, shouting alarms. The entire Devil's Row party followed him. They came to a stand a short distance away and yelled taunting oaths at the boy with the chronic sneer. The latter, momentarily, paid no attention to them.

"What deh hell, Jimmie?" he asked of the small champion.

Jimmie wiped his blood-wet features with his sleeve.

"Well, it was dis way, Pete, see! I was goin' teh lick dat Riley kid and dey all pitched on me."

Some Rum Alley children now came forward. The party stood for a moment exchanging vainglorious remarks with Devil's Row. A few stones were thrown at long distances, and words of challenge passed

7. Frequent device of Crane's, not to name his characters immediately or often (in this case Pete). To Crane, people were more important as types and symbols than as individuals.

8. Sample of Crane's fondness for alliteration ("seethed," "shrieking"), for poetic effects in his prose. Crane's best poetry can be found in his best prose, like "The Open Boat," and not in his poems.

9. For the 1896 *Maggie*, Crane made various changes or concessions. "Hell" became "h—

ll" or "h—l" and "damn" became "d—n." Sometimes these words were removed entirely.

1. The hyphen in "deeply-engaged" was removed in the 1896 *Maggie*, thus blurring Crane's epithet (compound adjective) and his ironic use of the epic tradition, classical and medieval. Note references to "shouting alarms," "warriors," "catapultian," "flails," and to epic ideals like "honor" and "valor." See Warren D. Anderson, "Homer and Stephen Crane," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, XIX (June 1964), 77-86.

between small warriors. Then the Rum Alley contingent turned slowly in the direction of their home street. They began to give, each to each, distorted versions of the fight. Causes of retreat in particular cases were magnified. Blows dealt in the fight were enlarged to catapultian power, and stones thrown were alleged to have hurtled with infinite accuracy. Valor grew strong again, and the little boys began to swear with great spirit.

"Ah, we blokies² kin lick deh hull damn Row," said a child, swaggering.

Little Jimmie was striving to stanch³ the flow of blood from his cut lips. Scowling, he turned upon the speaker.

"Ah, where deh hell was yeh when I was doin' all deh fightin'?" he demanded. "Youse kids makes me tired."

"Ah, go ahn," replied the other argumentatively.

Jimmie replied with heavy contempt. "Ah, youse can't fight, Blue Billie!⁴ I kin lick yeh wid one han'."

"Ah, go ahn," replied Billie again.

"Ah," said Jimmie threateningly.

"Ah," said the other in the same tone.

They struck at each other, clinched, and rolled over on the cobble stones.

"Smash 'im, Jimmie, kick deh damn guts out of 'im,"⁵ yelled Pete, the lad with the chronic sneer, in tones of delight.

The small combatants pounded and kicked, scratched and tore. They began to weep and their curses struggled in their throats with sobs. The other little boys clasped their hands and wriggled their legs in excitement. They formed a bobbing circle about the pair.

A tiny spectator was suddenly agitated.

"Cheese it, Jimmie, cheese it! Here comes yer fader," he yelled.

The circle of little boys instantly parted. They drew away and waited in ecstatic awe for that which was about to happen. The two little boys fighting in the modes of four thousand years ago, did not hear the warning.

Up the avenue there plodded slowly a man with sullen eyes. He was carrying a dinner pail and smoking an apple-wood pipe.

As he neared the spot where the little boys strove, he regarded them listlessly.⁶ But suddenly he roared an oath and advanced upon the rolling fighters.

"Here, you Jim, git up, now, while I belt yer life out, you damned disorderly brat."

2. Slang for "fellows." In other places in the novel, the term "blokies" (also "bokes") is almost always used contemptuously.

3. Stop or check.

4. Blue Billie, Maggie, and Pete reappear in Crane's companion novel of the slums, *George's Mother*.

5. In the 1896 *Maggie*, the violence of "kick deh damn guts out of 'im," was changed to "kick d' face off 'im!"

6. Besides the fights and near fights, Crane also creates the atmosphere of passivity and indifference.

He began to kick into the chaotic mass on the ground. The boy Billie felt a heavy boot strike his head. He made a furious effort and disentangled himself from Jimmie. He tottered away, damning.

Jimmie arose painfully from the ground and confronting his father, began to curse him. His parent kicked him. "Come home, now," he cried, "an' stop yer jawin', er I'll lam⁷ the everlasting head off yehs."

They departed. The man paced placidly along with the apple-wood emblem of serenity between his teeth. The boy followed a dozen feet in the rear. He swore luridly, for he felt that it was degradation⁸ for one who aimed to be some vague soldier, or a man of blood with a sort of sublime license, to be taken home by a father.

Chapter II

Eventually they entered into a dark region where, from a careening building, a dozen gruesome⁹ doorways gave up loads of babies to the street and the gutter. A wind of early autumn raised yellow dust from cobbles and swirled it against an hundred windows. Long streamers of garments fluttered from fire-escapes. In all unhandy places there were buckets, brooms, rags and bottles. In the street infants played or fought with other infants or sat stupidly in the way of vehicles. Formidable women, with uncombed hair and disordered dress, gossiped while leaning on railings, or screamed in frantic quarrels. Withered persons, in curious postures of submission to something, sat smoking pipes in obscure corners. A thousand odors of cooking food came forth to the street. The building quivered and creaked from the weight of humanity stamping about in its bowels.

A small ragged girl dragged a red, bawling infant along the crowded ways. He was hanging back, baby-like, bracing his wrinkled, bare legs.

The little girl cried out: "Ah, Tommie,¹ come ahn. Dere's Jimmie and fader. Don't be a-pullin' me back."

She jerked the baby's arm impatiently. He fell on his face, roaring. With a second jerk she pulled him to his feet, and they went on. With the obstinacy of his order, he protested against being dragged in a chosen direction. He made heroic endeavors to keep on his legs, denounce his sister and consume a bit of orange peeling which he chewed between the times of his infantile orations.

7. Slang for "wallop" or "beat."

8. One of the themes of the novel; foreshadows Maggie's later degradation.

9. This word is repeated several times, as well as set descriptions, to sketch one Rum Alley tenement building, which comes to represent life in the slums. Crane may have known the history of the Tenement House Commission of 1884, which

reported on the cramped, unsanitary, and unsafe tenement buildings; another commission was formed in 1894, one year after the publication of *Maggie*.

1. Though he appears only briefly in the novel, Tommie reappears in other slum tales by Crane: "An Ominous Baby," "A Great Mistake," and "A Dark-Brown Dog."

As the sullen-eyed man, followed by the blood-covered boy, drew near, the little girl burst into reproachful cries. "Ah, Jimmie, youse bin fightin' agin."

The urchin swelled disdainfully.

"Ah, what deh hell, Mag. See?"

The little girl upbraided him. "Youse allus fightin', Jimmie, an' yeh knows it puts mudder out when yehs come home half dead, an' it's like we'll all get a poundin'."

She began to weep. The babe threw back his head and roared at his prospects.

"Ah, what deh hell!" cried Jimmie. "Shut up er I'll smack yer mou'. See?"

As his sister continued her lamentations, he suddenly swore and struck her. The little girl reeled and, recovering herself, burst into tears and quaveringly cursed him. As she slowly retreated her brother advanced dealing her cuffs. The father heard and turned about.

"Stop that, Jim, d'yeh hear? Leave yer sister alone on the street. It's like I can never beat any sense into yer damned wooden head."

The urchin raised his voice in defiance to his parent and continued his attacks. The babe bawled tremendously, protesting with great violence. During his sister's hasty manoeuvres, he was dragged by the arm.

Finally the procession plunged into one of the gruesome doorways. They crawled up dark stairways and along cold, gloomy halls. At last the father pushed open a door and they entered a lighted room in which a large woman was rampant.

She stopped in a career from a seething stove to a pan-covered table. As the father and children filed in she peered at them.

"Eh, what? Been fightin' agin, by Gawd!"² She threw herself upon Jimmie. The urchin tried to dart behind the others and in the scuffle the babe, Tommie, was knocked down. He protested with his usual vehemence, because they had bruised his tender shins against a table leg.

The mother's massive shoulders heaved with anger. Grasping the urchin by the neck and shoulder she shook him until he rattled. She dragged him to an unholy sink, and, soaking a rag in water, began to scrub his lacerated face with it. Jimmie screamed in pain and tried to twist his shoulders out of the clasp of the huge arms.

The babe sat on the floor watching the scene, his face in contortions like that of a woman at a tragedy.³ The father, with a newly-laden pipe in his mouth, crouched on a backless chair near the

2. In the 1896 *Maggie*, "by Gawd!" was deleted ("Gawd" was also deleted elsewhere; sometimes it was softened to "Gee") probably because it was considered blasphemous.

3. Crane draws on dramatic form—tragedy and melodrama—in *Maggie*. The tenement neighbors act as a "chorus."