

## Study Guide: *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*

### *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets Notes and Study Guide*

#### Notes on Stephen Crane's *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*

Brief Chronology of the Author's Life

- \* Born on November 1, 1871 in New Jersey.
- \* Lived to be only 29 yrs. old, died June 5, 1900.
- \* Family: last of 14 children, son of Methodist minister who died when he was nine. He also moved three times when he was a child in the New York area.
- \* He never cared for schooling, attended Syracuse University for one semester where he was most noted for playing baseball.
- \* Began writing for newspapers in 1891 when he settled in New York where he developed his powers as an observer of psychological and social reality.
- \* Eking out a hand-to-mouth existence while living in the Bowery, Crane rewrote a novel he had drafted in college. In 1893 Crane self-published (because no publisher would print it) *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* under the pseudonym Johnston Smith.
- \* After he wrote *Red Badge of Courage*, in 1895, he was hired as a reporter in the American West and Mexico.
- \* Red Badge of Courage earned Crane international acclaim at age 24.
- \* He later covered the Spanish-American War for Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World*.
- \* Crane moved to Jacksonville, Florida when he was 27. His boat *The Commodore* sank off the coast and he wrote about the harrowing adventure in *The New York Press*.
- \* In Jacksonville, he took up with a woman named Cora Taylor. She was the owner of a favorite night spot, the *Hotel de Dream*, and had a shadowed and unhappy past — two failed marriages and only one divorce. But she was intelligent, charming, patient and loyal.
- \* Crane covered the Greco-Turkish War and later settled in England where he and Cora set up housekeeping as husband and wife and he made friends with famous writers of the time including H.G. Wells and Henry James.
- \* During the last few years of his life, he began writing furiously because he was in debt and suffering from tuberculosis. He later died while he and Cora were in Germany, where she hoped to take him to a sanatorium in the Black Forest, having gotten financial help from their friends.

#### Inscription to Hamlin Garland in his first Copy of *Maggie*, 1893

It is inevitable that you be greatly shocked by this book but continue, please, with all possible courage to the end. For it tries to show that environment is a tremendous thing in the world and frequently shapes lives regardless. If one proves that theory, one makes room in Heaven for all sorts of souls (notably an occasional street girl) who are not confidently

expected to be there by many excellent people. It is probable that the reader of this small thing may consider the Author to be a bad man, but, obviously, this is of small consequence to

*The Author*

#### A Letter from Stephen Crane to Miss Catherine Harris November 12, 1896

Thank you very much for your letter on *Maggie*. I will try to answer your questions properly and politely. Mrs. Howells was right in telling you that I have spent a great deal of time on the East Side and that I have no opinion of the missions. That—to you—may not be a valid answer since perhaps you have been informed that I am not very friendly to Christianity as seen around town; I do not think that much can be done with the Bowery as long as the [word blurred] are in their present state of conceit. A person who thinks himself superior to the rest of us because he has no job and no pride and no clean clothes is as badly conceited as Lillian Russell. In a story of mine called "An Experiment in Misery" I tried to make plain that the root of Bowery life is a sort of cowardice. Perhaps I mean a lack of ambition or to willingly be knocked flat and accept the licking. The missions for children are another thing and if you will have Mr. Rockefeller give me a hundred street cars and some money I will load all the babes off to some pink world where cows can lick their noses and they will never see their families any more. My good friend Edward Townsend— have you read his "Daughter of the Tenements"?—has another opinion of the Bowery and it is certain to be better than mine. I had no other purpose in writing "*Maggie*" than to show people to people as they seem to me. If that be evil, make the most of it.

## Notes on Background, vocabulary, geography, etc. in Maggie

### Chapter 1

Maggie operates within the actual geography of New York City in the eighteen nineties, and many of the landmarks cited in the novel function as referents of reality.

The “Island,” for example, is Blackwell’s Island, a narrow strip in the East River extending from about 50th to 86th Streets in Manhattan. Stephen Crane’s early home in Manhattan was on what was then Avenue A (now Sutton Place). From his window he could see the Penitentiary on the Island, directly opposite. (Nineties slang included “getting sent to the Islands” as generally meaning being incarcerated.) In addition to the Penitentiary, the Island contained institutions housing the City’s unwanted—the destitute, the insane, and the blind. Places like “Rum Alley” and “Devil’s Row,” however, do not appear on official maps: they apparently bear constructed names which function symbolically in the novel.

“Deeply-engaged one” is an Homeric epithet, in this instance a compound adjective modifying an impersonal pronoun (“The \_\_\_ one”). This is the language used in descriptions of epic battles, and it is intentionally inappropriate here. The inappropriateness of high, epic language to low, unheroic action throughout results in furthering the sharply ironic tone of the novel, and is part of the pattern which weaves classical, especially epic, modes of literature and life with delineations of modern slum existence.

Catapults were mechanical devices used, notably by the Romans, to hurl projectiles. The word “catapultian” is also used in *The Red Badge of Courage*

Blokies: in Irish tinker’s argot, a “bloke” is a contemptible fellow.

### Chapter 3

Fifth Avenue is nine streets west of the fictive setting of the John-son’s tenement. Between 59th and 110th Streets, it is the eastern border of Central Park. The suggestion is that the old woman took her station at one of the entrances to the chief promenade in the park, the Mall, opposite the most glittering residential area in the city. That few of its residents contributed alms dramatizes the social and moral creeds Crane projects in “Above All Things.”

### Chapter 4

“... his pay was marching on.”: This echoes the refrain of “The Battle Hymn of the Republic.”

### Chapter 6

Dago: [Slang]. a person of Latin, esp. Italian, descent. Derived from “Diego” (James), the term is used contemptuously.

Lambrequin: a drapery. This one is made of creton —a heavy, un-glazed cotton or linen cloth printed with a colored pattern.

### Chapter 7

The Bowery is the section of lower Manhattan beginning at Chatham Square and ending northward at the junction of Third and Fourth Avenues at 7th Street. A polyglot area (one which contains many different ethnic groups), in Maggie’s time it was the settlement of large numbers of German and Polish immigrants.

Pony: a small drinking glass with a capacity of one ounce.

“...dancer’s smile of stereotyped enthusiasm...”: Crane, a newspaperman, is comparing the fixed expression to a stereotype, a printing plate cast from a papier maché mold which was in turn made from material set in type. Then a comparatively recent development, the method is still in use.

Duffer: [Slang], a stupid person.

### Chapter 8

Elevated trains: In Maggie’s day there were four elevated railway lines in Manhattan: on the East Side were lines which ran along Second and Third Avenues, and on the West Side were the Sixth and Ninth Avenue lines. The shirt factory, therefore, probably was “begrimed” by an East Side line.

Three gilt balls identified a pawn shop.

Dime Museums were a class of cheap entertainment establishments against which nineties tourists were warned categorically by the guide books.

The Central Park Zoological Garden is behind the Old State Arsenal in the southeast corner of Central Park, near Fifth Avenue and 64th Street. Incorporated in the year of Crane’s birth, the Metropolitan Museum of Art has its main entrance on 82 Street and Fifth Avenue. “Dese little jugs” about which Pete explodes were part of the Cesnola Collection of Cypriote Antiquities, at that time the largest and most famous collection of its kind in the world. The reference probably would have been clear and especially effective to a contemporary reader of the novel. And, since admission to both the Zoo and the Museum was free on Sundays, the contemporary reader would have recognized that Pete was not being strained financially by his excursions with Maggie.

### Chapter 9

Jude: a rendering of “dude”; a term for one who is overly concerned with his manners and appearance.

#### Chapter 10

Jay: inexperienced person.

Plunks: [Slang], dollars. The friend (probably the Blue Billie of Chapter I grown older) is familiar with the fine for brawling.

#### Chapter 14

There was a successive degeneration in the quality of the night clubs to which Pete took Maggie. The “green-hued hall” (Chapter VII) catered to immigrant laborers and their families. It was, of course, cheap and pretentious, but it was also a “respectable” place. The “hall of irregular shape” (Chapter XII) was itself irregular because it admitted the two painted women. And the “hilarious hall” of this chapter is an inferno-like establishment with a woman installed at each table.

**ALSO LOOK UP WORDS YOU DO NOT KNOW AND WRITE THEM AND THEIR DEFINITIONS IN YOUR NOTEBOOK!!!**

## **Study Guide questions begin below.**

### **Letter and Inscription**

1. In the inscription to Hamlin Garland (found earlier on this handout), what does Crane say about environment?
2. In the letter to Catherine Harris (found earlier on this handout), what does Crane say about religion?

What does he say about Bowery life?

What does he imply about urban versus rural lifestyles?

### **Ch. I**

1. What is Jimmie Johnson’s neighborhood called?
2. How are Jimmie’s features described (p.1)?
3. How are the children behaving at the outset of the novella? Why?
4. What does Jimmie’s father say and do to him?

## Ch. II

1. What are the mood and tone of the first sentence here?

Describe the building in which Jimmie lives. (p.4)

2. It is here (p.4) that we first see Maggie (“Mag”). What is she doing?

3. What reason does Mag give for not wanting Jimmie to fight (§ 8, p. 4)?

What is Jimmie’s reply? What does he do to Maggie?

What is ironic about the father’s scolding, “Stop that, Jim ...”?

4. How is the mother described (p. 5)?

How does the mother treat Jimmie?

During the washing scene, how is the baby’s (Tommie’s) face described?

5. What does the father tell Mary (the mother) she’s always doing? (p.5)

6. On p.6, how is Maggie described as she eats?

7. What does the old woman at the end of the chapter remark?

## Ch. III

1. What errand is Jimmie sent on?

2. Why doesn’t he complete it?

3. Why does the father drink?

4. What is ironic about Mary's remark, "Why deh blazes..." (p.8, bottom)?

5. How are Mary's arms described on p. 9 (end of ¶7)?

6. How do the Johnsons' neighbors act? (p.9)

7. How does the chapter end?

What is the relationship between Maggie and Jimmie like (what do they do for each other)?

#### **Ch. IV**

1. What happens to Tommie? How is it described?

2. How has Jimmie become?

What is his experience with religion?

Whom does he despise most of all (p.11)?

3. What happened to the father?

To the mother?

4. How does Jimmie feel about his job as a truck driver (pp.11-13)?

5. Why is Jimmie able to survive in his environment?

6. What has he been doing to/with women (p. 13)?

#### **Ch. V**

1. How does Maggie differ from the rest of Rum Alley?

What do people start to say about her?

2. What advice does her brother give her at the beginning of this chapter?

What is he really warning her about (I.e., what exactly would it mean for her to “go teh Hell”)?

3. What job does Maggie get?

4. What has happened to Jimmie?

To the mother?

5. What does Pete symbolize to Maggie?

How does Maggie’s perception of her home change? (p.15)

6. What is the significance of Maggie’s vision at the end of this chapter?

What sort of vision is it, in literary terms?

## Ch. VI

1. What are Pete’s first words to Maggie?

2. How does she regard herself in relation to Pete (p.16)?

3. What contrasts does Maggie see on pp. 16-17?

4. What does she do to impress Pete? Does it work?

5. How does he ask her out?

6. Of what is she afraid? (p.18, top)?

7. What is the final description in this chapter?

Contrast this with the final description of chapter V.

### **Ch. VII**

1. Describe what goes on in the green-hued hall (customers, atmosphere).

2. How does Pete act?

What does Maggie think of this?

3. What does Maggie wonder as she watches the dancer (p.20, top)?

4. What is the purpose of music halls such as this one?

5. What does Pete say to Maggie to urge her to kiss him?

What does he wonder at the end of their date?

### **Ch. VIII**

1. What kinds of places do Pete and Maggie go?

What do they all have in common?

Does Maggie realize this?

2. What plot do all the plays have?

What does the audience think while watching them?

3. What does Maggie, specifically, think/wonder (end of chapter)?

### **Ch IX**

1. What happens with Mary Johnson in this chapter?

2. How does this affect Maggie's actions towards the end of the chapter?

3. Who comes into the hall and why?

4. What does Pete say to Maggie when he comes for her?

5. What are the last two lines of dialogue here?

Can you tell yet what their significance will be? (Remember what "go teh Hell" means for Maggie.)

### **Ch X**

1. What did the old woman see? What did Maggie ask Pete?

What does it all **mean**?

2. What does Jimmie wonder for an instant? (p.28, middle)

3. How does the mother react to the news about Maggie?

4. How does Jimmie react?



5. How do the neighbors react? (p.29)

Why are they talking about Maggie this way, and how is it similar to how the women by the scaffold reacted to Hester Prynne?

6. What does Jimmie want to do, and what does his friend advise him?

### **Ch. XI**

1. What does Jimmie go and do?

2. What is humorous (in a dark way) in this chapter?

### **Ch. XII**

1. What is this music hall like, and how does it differ from the “green-hued hall”?

2. How does Maggie imagine the future? (p.35)

3. Does Maggie feel like a “bad woman”? Why?

4. What are the women seen at the end of this chapter?

### **Ch. XIII**

1. What does Jimmie not understand about the way Maggie has turned out? Why is this ironic? (p.36)

2. What does Jimmy suggest to Mary that they do concerning Maggie? Why?

3. Why does Jimmie publicly damn his sister? (p.38)

4. What has Mary been saying when she gets arrested?

5. At the end of Ch. XIII, what does Jimmie wonder about Maggie? Why can't he let himself think about this?

#### **Ch. XIV**

1. What is the "hilarious hall" full of?

2. How long has Maggie been living with Pete?

3. How is Nellie described?

4. What do you suppose Nellie's job is?

5. What does Pete do in this chapter?

6. Where does Maggie decide to go?

#### **Ch. XV**

1. Who is the "forlorn woman" and why does she want to speak with Jimmie? (Think about "two women" p. 13)

2. When Maggie returns home, what does Mary keep ordering everyone to do to her?

3. What do the neighbors do?

4. How does Jimmie react to Maggie? How does this contrast with the situation when they were children and were with their mother? Why has Jimmie changed thus?

5. What is Maggie's passage through the hall like?

#### **Ch. XVI**

1. Carefully read the 1st ¶ of this chapter. How, exactly, had Maggie been "ruined"?

Who, in your opinion, is truly responsible for Maggie's being "ruined"?

2. What does Pete not see the necessity of (p. 45)?

Do you see the necessity of it ? Why or why not?

3. What does Pete say to Maggie when she comes to the bar?

4. Where does Pete tell Maggie to go?

5. What does Maggie discover happens if she walks around aimlessly? (p.47)

6. What happens with the "stout gentleman"?

## Ch. XVII

1. How much time has passed since Maggie last saw Pete?

2. Where is Maggie walking when we first see her here?

3. What does Crane mean by calling Maggie, "A girl of the painted cohorts of the city"?

4. During her stroll, how does the setting change? What are the different neighborhoods like, what is the pattern, etc.?

5. Describe the only customer Maggie is able to get that night.

6. What does Maggie do at the end of this chapter? (It is implied, not stated.)

## Ch. XVIII

1. How does Pete end up? Is this a fitting end for him, do you think?

**Ch. XIX**

1. What has happened to Maggie?
2. Where does Miss Smith's (in black gown) death-time vocabulary come from? (p.54, top)
3. What is the significance of Crane's calling the sunlight "inevitable"?
4. What does Crane call the neighbors who have come to commiserate with Mary?
5. What does the woman in black say to Mary?
6. What does Mary say in the end?
7. Name several details that Crane used throughout this chapter to make the whole scene seem like some sort of theatrical production.