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Marcus Cunliffe Writes America

MICK GIDLEY

Marcus Cunliffe (1922–1990) was incontestably an important figure in American studies. In the early part of his academic career he helped to found the subject area in Britain, and he was later both awarded professorial appointments at the Universities of Manchester and Sussex and elected to the chairmanship of the British Association for American Studies, from which positions he served as a personal inspiration and professional mentor to several "generations" of UK American studies academics. Those who knew him and worked with him were invariably struck by his tall good looks, charisma and charm – characteristics that no doubt also contributed to his successful career, in Britain and in the United States, first as a visiting scholar, and later, during his final years, as the occupant of an endowed chair at George Washington University in Washington, DC. As the correspondence in his papers attest, he was held in high – and warm – regard by many of the leading US historians of his heyday. More might be said about his charm here because it also permeates his writing and persists there as a kind of afterglow, and not only for those who encountered him in person – but this essay is a critical reconsideration of his published work that, though appreciative, at least aspires towards objectivity.[1]

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[1] Cunliffe's papers, covering both his professional activities and his writings, are in the Gelman Library at George Washington University. The obituary John Higham wrote on Cunliffe for *American Quarterly*, 43 (1991), 255–258, constitutes a representative assessment by an American scholar of the relevant age group. For the record, like so many in the generation of UK students of American studies who came of age in the 1960s, I owe a lot to Cunliffe, but I was not then very close to him: at the University of Manchester in 1961 or 1962 I was a shy undergraduate in one of his courses who also attended papers he gave, and at the University of Sussex in 1966 I experienced his postgraduate core seminar series, "Texts and Topics in American Studies". Later he took over the supervision of my Sussex doctoral thesis and, because I spent forever completing it, I got to know him quite well then. Michael Heale, who was also inspired into American studies by Cunliffe, kindly read a draft of this essay and offered specific suggestions for its improvement; I am also grateful for the comments of the anonymous reader appointed by the *Journal of American Studies* (*JAS*). The drafts were produced while I served as the William Robertson Coe Distinguished Visiting Professor of American Studies at the University of Wyoming;

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I would imagine that for most people who know or know of Cunliffe's scholarship, it is the sheer breadth of it that is most impressive. (And the same range applied to his teaching: In the autobiographical essay "Backward Glances", produced in 1980 for the 25th anniversary number of the *Journal of American Studies*, he reported that when he first went to Manchester in the 1950s he had to teach three different year-long courses – one each on American politics, literature, and history.[2]) At one extreme, so to speak, there are his works of military history, notably his early chronicles of the Royal Irish Fusiliers and the Royal Warwickshire Regiment, and his major work in this field – indeed perhaps his most impressive research-based achievement – is *Soldiers and Civilians: The Martial Spirit in America, 1775–1865*, which was published in 1968 and went through three editions. At the other extreme there are his literary studies: most obviously, *The Literature of the United States*, which appeared in 1954 and remained almost continuously in print, through various revisions, for over 40 years. But numerous articles on single authors, mainly but not exclusively American, from Swift, through Hawthorne, to Henry Adams, Cather and Hemingway, also call attention to themselves, and there are the two edited volumes on American writing produced for the Sphere History of Literature in the English Language. Somewhere between the extremes of military history and literary studies, there are his political histories: the famous early books, *George Washington: Man and Monument* (1958) and *The Nation Takes Shape, 1789–1837* (1959) and, later, *The American Heritage History of The Presidency* (1968) – which, as *American Presidents and the Presidency*, was revised for new editions in 1972, 1976, and 1987. Finally – though, of course, other taxonomies of Cunliffe's output are possible – I would single out as a category the various endeavours in American intellectual history and historiography, such as his much-reprinted article "American Watersheds" (1961) and the collection of essays on historians of the US that he edited with Robin Winks, *Pastmasters* (1969).[3]

It is worth stressing that these multifarious works are not just notable studies in their disparate fields, but many of them, whatever their primary

I would like to thank colleagues there, especially Eric Sandeen and John Dorst, for their stimulating collegiality.

[2] Cunliffe, "Backward Glances", *Journal of American Studies*, 14:1 (April 1980), 83–102; most of this essay is reprinted in Cunliffe's posthumous collection *In Search of America: Transatlantic Essays, 1951–1990* (New York, Westport & London: Greenwood, 1991), 1–17 (quotation, 3), the version I used.

[3] There are quite full bibliographies of Cunliffe's writings in both *In Search of America* (403–430) and John White and Brian Holden Reid (eds.), *Americana: Essays in Memory of Marcus Cunliffe* (Hull: University of Hull Press, 1998), 359–374; in the present essay, citations will be provided only for works by Cunliffe actually quoted or discussed.

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designation, are also, in themselves, *between* fields. They are genuinely inter-disciplinary. They deploy evidence culled from reading in and experience of an array of disciplines. They sometimes invoke conceptualizations, key terms, or buzz words derived from one or other of these fields. They are sensitive to the distinguishing methodologies of different disciplines. And, often, their inter-disciplinarity amounts to forms of *cultural* history. If culture is an interactive field of force, with sparks flying between ideas, institutions and organizations, behaviours, art endeavours, folklore, and so much else, Cunliffe's writing often seems concerned to register, at the least, the crackle of the whole field. Indeed, a central contention of this essay is that such inter-disciplinarity constitutes one of the defining features of Cunliffe's work. Let me begin to show what I mean in a specific instance.

George Washington: Man and Monument is, of course, a perceptive and breezy chronological outline of Washington's life, covering his coming of age as a colonial Virginia gentleman, his command of the revolutionary army, and onward to his terms as president. It is based on judicious examination of primary and, especially, secondary sources, very compact, and informative. But insofar as it is narrative history, it tells a familiar story and seems – to this non-authority on Washington – unexceptional.

The really fascinating parts of the book are the conclusion and, even more, the opening chapter "The Washington Monument" – which, despite its title, is not primarily about the obelisk, but about the making over of the man Washington *into* a monument. In these chapters, Cunliffe cites not just the notorious case of Mason Weems (whose inventive work he also elsewhere edited and presented), but numerous biographies, pseudo–biographies, poems, sermons, folkloric pamphlets, and much else. And, using beautifully evoked typologies against which to set Washington, he codifies him – as neo-classical gentleman, suffering saint (if a secular one), and – by merging him *into* the country – as an iconic hero for the new America. Cunliffe's folkloric and typological take on Washington foreshadows some of Garry Wills's deliberately more politicized and provocative investigations into the nature of presidential leadership, whether practised by the founding fathers or by figures as recent as Nixon. And it also prefigures this aspect of a relatively recent and well-received study of Washington himself, *His Excellency George Washington* (2004) by Joseph J. Ellis, who openly acknowledges a debt to Cunliffe. On the other hand, in the cultural dimension to this early work, with its emphasis on Washington's almost timeless, indeed mythical, status, Cunliffe had much in common with exemplars of the now much maligned "myth and symbol" school of Americanists, with their tendency to float free of changing economic conditions. It is also

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worth pointing out, though, that even as early as *Man and Monument*, Cunliffe insistently maintains a comparative perspective; for example, in anatomizing the particular character of Washington's heroic status, he does not see him in exceptionalist terms but continually recalls the similar deification of Nelson, Wellington, and Napoleon.[4]

A second preliminary observation is that, like some of the other "founding fathers" of American studies in Britain, Cunliffe had a sense of vocation about his subject. "On my return [from a period of study at Yale] to England I started out as a sort of New-World missionary", he claimed; and this proselytizing zeal led to a desire to communicate not just with fellow academics, but with the general public. For this reason, even in his most learned works, he fought shy of too many footnotes or citations that draw attention to themselves. Like D. W. Brogan in the immediately preceding generation of British commentators on the US, who actually started out as a journalist, Cunliffe produced much of his work – including some of his most searching pieces – for general magazines and broadsheet newspapers aimed at the intelligent reader and, in the case of some of his books, for series or for publishing houses, such as Penguin and American Heritage, that sought a wide readership.[5] This means that we should look at both Cunliffe's rhetoric, in the broadest sense, and, more closely, at his *writing* – the structure of his books and articles, the rhythms of his prose.

When we do so, it is immediately apparent that this is writing – especially in the books – that mainly impresses by its sheer narrative drive and its remarkable penchant for the memorable anecdote. In the discussion of the problem that was faced by Americans in the early national period, the problem of how to inaugurate a new literature, to be found in *The Literature of the United States*, Cunliffe creates numerous parallels with the

[4] Cunliffe, *George Washington: Man and Monument* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1958) and Mason L. Weems, *Life of Washington*, ed. by Marcus Cunliffe (Cambridge, MA: John Harvard Library of Harvard University Press, 1962). See also Robert Lawson-Peebles, "On First Looking into Cunliffe's Weems's Washington; or, the Story of America", in White and Reid (eds.), *Americana*, 23–46. Joseph J. Ellis's salute to Cunliffe appears in the preface to *His Excellency George Washington* (New York: Knopf, 2004).

[5] The quotation is from "Backward Glances", 5. Michael Heale contextualized the founders' missionary zeal (the talk appears at essay length in this issue of *JAS*) and Owen Dudley Edwards evoked Brogan's popularizing abilities in their lively presentations at the British Association for American Studies (BAAS) 50th anniversary conference held at Cambridge in April 2005. I can report direct evidence of Cunliffe's facility as a writer. He could not resist saying things for effect, and once cancelled a lunch appointment with some of us postgraduates with words something like: "I have agreed to write a book in just under 8 weeks and have been experiencing problems, but today I'm really into it, so lunch will have to wait". Nevertheless, the resulting book, *The Presidency*, remained in print for 15 years.

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political situation faced by the new republic. In the course of a long paragraph, he then writes:

> … political independence did not bring cultural independence, and … the former led to a clamour for the latter. There is a story that one of the more rabidly nationalistic of the delegates to the Continental Congress moved that henceforward the United States should cease to employ the English language; and that another delegate, Roger Sherman, proposed as an amendment that the United States should keep the English tongue, and force the English themselves to learn Greek.[6]

Doubtless, it was humor and story-telling verve such as this that made not only *The Literature of the United States*, but *Man and Monument*, *American Presidents*, and other works, so popular with generations of students.

Cunliffe's writings are playful, wary of dogma, and often dance on daring yet subtle juxtapositions. For instance, his essay "Newness as Repudiation: Styles in Modern American Thought" (1980) examines the ever growing reverence for novelty in western civilization, especially in the United States, and not so much in its pure form – as summed up, say, in Ezra Pound's injunction to fellow artists to "make it new" – but what we, if not Cunliffe, might call its degenerate guise: that is, where newness is achieved merely by a reversal of the expected (as in Ambrose Bierce's quip "Where there's a will there's a won't"). Almost relentlessly, the essay offers example after example like this to demonstrate, all but definitively, a habit of mind. But then, perhaps too much in keeping with the trope being pursued, it concludes on a paradox: "The United States delights in novelty because it is basically a traditional society". But Cunliffe did not come to a complete stop there, with a formulation apparently so effortlessly achieved that it could be dismissed as a cop out. He was aware that the time in which he was writing – with the triumph and triumphalism of Reaganism and Reaganomics – was one of seemingly wholesale change, so the essay actually concludes: "The advocates of [such] change may appeal for support with a double assertion – both that they wish America to make a fresh start, and that the fresh start consists in going back to the figure you first thought of".[7] In this formulation, though Cunliffe forbore to say so, the new is actually old.

It is equally evident that Cunliffe's writings are full of vigorous and arresting phrasings. Just two examples must suffice as demonstration, an

[6] Cunliffe, *The Literature of the United States* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1954), 42.

[7] Cunliffe, "Newness as Repudiation: Styles in Modern American Thought", *Times Literary Supplement*, May 30, 1980, 615–16; this essay was also delivered as a plenary lecture to the BAAS 25th anniversary conference held at Lancaster in 1980.

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ending and a beginning. The first is the end of the chapter on Twain and Western humour in the first edition of *The Literature of the United States*:

> In his [Twain's] hands, comic jargon and dialect became a finished literary weapon, unemphatic, visual, and deceptively simple, sounding like speech and yet not quite the same. Howells said that orthodox English, as written by accepted masters, "is scholarly and conscious; it knows who its grandfather was". With Mark Twain, *content* – like Western life – had a mongrel incongruity; but *form* began the lineage that has led to Hemingway.

What this paragraph says, even for 1954, is almost clichéd. But the *way* it is written – the deployment of the probing yet deliberately colloquial phrase "sounding like speech and yet not quite the same", as if in echo of the sentiment expressed, and the use of the striking quotation from Howells – definitely skirts truism and, insofar as such a thing is possible, comes close to the certitude of a dictionary-like definition.[8]

The second example is the beginning of the essay "European Images of America", first published in 1963:

> For most Europeans, it may be contended, America has never existed. Instead of being a "real" place it has served as an image: a symbol, a Never-Never Land. How characteristic that the whimsical Scottish dramatist J. M. Barrie should stock the Never-Never Land of his *Peter Pan* with figures of fantasy from the New World: Caribbean pirates and prowling Indians. The children who read Barrie in British nurseries took to bed another product of American folklore, the teddy bear, which derived from the near mythical exploits of Theodore Roosevelt. What head of state in a European country has made a comparable contribution to the dreams of early childhood? The founder of the Boy Scout movement, Baden-Powell, drew their name and some of their rituals from what he heard of … Indian life. When the French writer of fantasies, Jules Verne, visited the United States with his brother just after the Civil War, they made a special pilgrimage to the Fenimore Cooper region and addressed one another while there as "Hawkeye" and "Chingachgook". James Russell Lowell remarked in 1869, "For some reason or other, the European has rarely been able to see America except in caricature".[9]

This paragraph encapsulates Cunliffe's characteristic method: note especially the almost cheeky use of a question that cannot be answered and the variety of fields and levels of discourse from which its illustrations are culled. Also, it uses relatively little known episodes from the lives of prominent people,

[8] Cunliffe, *The Literature of the United States*, 169. In the fourth edition of this book, by which time Cunliffe presumably thought this a truism, the corresponding paragraph is more nuanced – but also, by the same token, less arresting; see *The Literature of the United States* (New York: Viking Penguin and Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), 211.

[9] Cunliffe, "European Images of America", as reprinted in *In Search of America*, 309–310.

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which gives the reader a reassuring sense of familiarity while simultaneously piquing his or her curiosity. And the same may be said of the summative quotation from James Russell Lowell: it is not an obvious formulation to deploy, but comes from a sufficiently acknowledged source to grant an aura of authority to the paragraph as a whole.

But there were and are risks attached to such facility. In the 1950s and early 1960s, when Cunliffe was establishing his reputation as a writer, the American New Critics and other American literary scholars often cast aspersions on what they saw as the merely "essayish" or, worse, impressionistic writing of many British scholars; a common term of dismissive characterization of the despised writing was "belle lettres". A ghost of such sentiment survived in Richard King's 1992 *Journal of American Studies* review essay of a Cunliffe *festschrift* and Cunliffe's own essays collected as *In Search of America* (1991). King pointed out, rightly, that UK Americanists, especially historians, had so prioritized the pursuit of data that they had paid scant attention to *any* kind of theory. He did not exempt Cunliffe – and also pointed to Cunliffe's lack of interest in "the complexities of race, class, gender and ethnic allegiances" – but in this respect he let him off a little more lightly than the generality of UK Americanists up to that point.[10]

And this surely was, and is, right: despite its witticisms and studied elegance, Cunliffe's writing is not belle lettristic. It advances theses and, while there are relatively few overt references to named theorists, it is not the case that Cunliffe's work as a whole – as I hope this essay shows – is *un*theorised. Most obviously, the set of lectures entitled *Chattel Slavery and Wage Slavery: The Anglo-American Context* (1979) – which, perforce, *does* treat both race and class – engages with the complex historiography of slavery and with at least some Marxist thought. Similarly, though Cunliffe's 500-page *Soldiers and Civilians* is almost overwhelmingly full of data, these data are ultimately subordinated to a very powerful vision. This vision is that the signs of a "martial spirit" in the antebellum era are manifold, that they may be discerned beyond the realm of the purely military, and – however tangled – may reveal much about a whole epoch. In fact, the phrase "martial spirit", one increasingly realizes, is deployed with deliberately vague

[10] As evidence of certain US academic attitudes, I recall that when I was at the University of Chicago in the mid-1960s, the Chicago Critics often derided British writing, especially literary criticism; Elder Olson's most condemnatory phrase, which he routinely applied to essays in the *TLS*, was "that's just belle-lettristic". It is perhaps unfair to cite Richard H. King's judicious review essay in the same note, but it is "Present at the Creation: Marcus Cunliffe and American Studies", *Journal of American Studies*, 26:2 (August 1992), 265–268 (quotation, 267).

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inclusiveness. When characterized this way, it is clear that *Soldiers and Civilians* is, of course, a study of war, preparations for war, rumours of war, but it is also a profound cultural history of the ante-bellum and Civil War eras that has not yet been fully understood as such.[11]

Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. noted, and with approval, that "all" of Cunliffe's writing "revolves around the questions of nationhood, national identity, national peculiarity, national culture, national iconography, national tradition", and it is true that this national emphasis – however much tempered by comparison with Europe – does mark much of Cunliffe's *oeuvre*. This emphasis – which for Cunliffe never acquired the polemical (almost neo-conservative) edge that Schlesinger honed in some of his later works, meant in turn that, as for most of the now often derided "consensus" commentators with whom Cunliffe might be associated, his books and articles remained, through the 1950s and even the 1960s, largely unruffled by race, gender, or other issues that cut across the national.[12]

But this is not true of the later work. In particular, though *The Literature of the United States* was always, through its various editions, primarily a story of the way American writing intersects with American society, nationally conceived, and with "mainstream" America's preoccupations, the later editions show that Cunliffe increasingly realized that questions of race, gender and ethnicity *were* national preoccupations. He accommodated them by liberally creating new and separate chapters that treat writings by women or minorities ("Women's Voices", "Southland", for example). But – except in an important respect that I am coming to – he stopped short of acknowledging the then already current work of scholars, such as Michael Rogin, who were discerning these categories of difference in writing, such as Melville's, that Cunliffe too blithely saw as univocally "American".[13]

[11] Cunliffe, *Chattel Slavery and Wage Slavery: The Anglo-American Context, 1830–1860* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1979) and *Soldiers and Civilians: The Martial Spirit in America, 1775–1865* (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown, 1968); I consulted this edition rather than later revised ones.

[12] Schlesinger, Foreword to White and Reid (eds.), *Americana*, xvi–xvii. A particularly strident Schlesinger work is *The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multi-Cultural Society* (Knoxville: Whittle Direct Books, 1991). It is also worth pointing out that in *Soldiers and Civilians*, Cunliffe repeatedly delves into the ethnic and class composition of military units and, as early as *The Nation Takes Shape* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959) there is enough of a recurring emphasis on ideological division and conflict during the first years of the national period to distance the book from the output of the "consensus" historians in general.

[13] See especially the 1986 edition of *The Literature of the United States*, which contains both of the separate chapters mentioned. Rogin, *Subversive Genealogy: The Politics and Art of Herman Melville* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1983). King (*op. cit.*, 267) noted that, as late as 1973,

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Cunliffe's most significant and interesting accommodation, if that is the right word, revolved around questions of race and ethnicity. For the 1986 edition of *The Literature of the United States* he gathered comments on the "genteel tradition" – comments that in previous editions had been (increasingly) scattered through the book – into a new chapter, "Against and After the Genteel Tradition", and structured it to reflect not just oppositional views of American culture viewed "purely" intellectually and nationally, but also inter-ethnic suspicions and rivalries. Thus, Jewish-American writers are witnessed both as writing restively under WASP "standards" and restrictions – Abraham Cahan, for example – and, later, in the form of figures such as Lionel Trilling and Meyer Schapiro, "as exemplary custodians of Culture with a capital C". This chapter, which also treats a range of African-American writers, from William Wells Brown to Ishmael Reed, with passing references to other minority figures, such as Kiowa author N. Scott Momaday, manages to incorporate disruptions of any essentialist conception of the nation into a debate about, precisely, the nature of a national culture.[14]

Let me conclude by offering brief readings of aspects of two of Cunliffe's early essays, both of which were more overtly exercises in cultural history *per se*, and were received as such: "America at the Great Exhibition of 1851" and "Stephen Crane and the American Background of *Maggie*". Both were first published in the *American Quarterly*, the Great Exhibition essay – which by its very nature anticipates an aspect of the current trend towards the internationalization of American studies – in 1951, and the second – which 50 years later is still being reprinted in casebooks on Crane's first major work – in 1955.[15]

The Great Exhibition essay was written, of course, to commemorate the centennial of Prince Albert's Crystal Palace show. It is partly a lively evocation of the chief American exhibits, which included the Colt revolver, Hiram Power's sculpture "The Greek Slave", the awesome McCormick

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Cunliffe could write a major essay on Cather and Frederick Jackson Turner without raising the issue of gender – with reference to either figure, I might add.

[14] Cunliffe, *The Literature of the United States*, 1986 edition, 369–401 (quotation, 400).

[15] Cunliffe, "America at the Great Exhibition of 1851", *American Quarterly*, 3:1 (Summer 1951), 115–127 and "Stephen Crane and the American Background of Maggie", *American Quarterly*, 7:1 (Spring 1955); I used the *In Search of America* versions, 229–244 and 259–272. Today the majority of readers probably encounter the *Maggie* essay in the *Norton Critical Edition of Maggie* ed. Thomas A. Gullason (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1979). With respect to the internationalization of American studies, it is worth pointing out that in the late 1970s and 1980s Cunliffe was a prominent reviewer for Bernard Mergen's still largely unsung journal *American Studies International*.

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reaper, Goodyear rubber goods, super-efficient sewing machines and massive daguerreotypes by Mathew Brady and others. It also provided Cunliffe with the opportunity to retell – and with the appropriate degree of suspense – the tale of how one Alfred Charles Hobbs of Massachusetts was able to pick the best locks produced by British companies such as Chubb and Bramah, while his own parautoptic permutation lock (basically the first combination lock) could not be broken by either force or ingenuity. But – and this is what seems most important about the essay – Cunliffe also shows how the US exhibits and their British reception reflected pervasive *attitudes* on either side of the Atlantic, but especially those of the British hosts, attitudes sometimes based on reasoned and principled economic assumptions about free trade, but more often than not derived from only half articulated and irrational fears. Without fanfare, the essay indicates the origins of certain British prejudices about the US.

At the same time, it is instructive to compare Cunliffe's essay – admittedly the work of a relatively young scholar publishing in the United States for the first time – with one on "America at the World's Fairs, 1851–93" by the intellectual historian Merle Curti, then approaching the peak of his powers and reputation. Curti's essay appeared in 1950 (while Cunliffe's was in press). It is much less animated than Cunliffe's, but Curti risks naming just what the common features – or, at least the recurring features – of the triumphant American exhibits at the Crystal Palace were: "utility", "comfort", "appeal to the great masses", together with – he implies rather than states – scale and replicability; he surmises that Europeans realized that "Americans had an eye to the mass market". Curti thus identifies the signs of America's emergence as the dominant power in what was to become the next phase of capitalism. If tentatively, he registers the initial stage of a *process* – a process not merely cultural, but economic and technological. In comparison, Cunliffe, despite – or perhaps because of – his receptiveness to the lively and cantankerous comments in *Punch* and other London publications, stays too readily at the level of suggestive narrative, and reflects primarily on "attitudes". In his pursuit of comparative cultural assumptions, he misses the underlying dynamic that Curti begins to sketch.[16]

The Crane essay is an interesting study – and a more detailed one than I can adequately convey here – of the novelist's possible sources for *Maggie*.

[16] Curti, "America at the World's Fairs, 1851–93", *American Historical Review*, 55:4 (July 1950), 833–856 (quotation, 840). For further discussion of the American exhibits at the Crystal Palace, see Clive Bush, *The Dream of Reason* (London: Edward Arnold, 1977), 80–86, and Mick Gidley, "Conclusions", in David E. Nye and Mick Gidley (eds.), *American Photographs in Europe* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1994), 271–276.

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Cunliffe argues that they lay not in French naturalistic fiction, which was then the critical orthodoxy, but in the reforming investigations of the American city by such figures as Charles Loring Brace and the rash of sermonizing tracts that appeared in Crane's formative period. The tracts Cunliffe so eruditely identified castigated the evils of the urban environment and its assumed threats to innocent young women of the lower classes. Cunliffe's thesis is that Crane mainly absorbed his ideas and images of prostitution from the American city discourse of the time. His clincher, to my mind, is the reproduction of the lithograph titled "The Street Girl's End", which originally appeared in a Charles Loring Brace publication. It shows a young woman, at the pier's edge, her hand on one of its timbers, eyeing the murky waters that await her.

But this was not, for Crane, a simple one-to-one equation in the manner that Cunliffe implies. Something also happened at the level of form – and it goes unremarked by Cunliffe because, in his concern to tell a continuous story he almost never pauses over particular passages in the texts produced by his authors. Crane did not *simply* borrow a suitable end for Maggie from the tract literature and graphics of his time. You will remember that the text doesn't actually describe Maggie's drowning. At this point she is not even named but is wholly typologized as "a girl of the painted cohorts of the city", and we intuit her drowning by the fact that her demise is indirectly implied by a noticeable focalization from almost *under* the harbour waters: "At their feet the river appeared a deathly black hue. Some hidden factory sent up a yellow glare, that lit for a moment the waters lapping oilily against timbers. The varied sounds of life, made joyous by distance and seeming unapproachableness, came faintly and died away to a silence."[17] In other words, the engraving Cunliffe reproduces exteriorizes the street girl's plight, while Crane's writing interiorizes it. We recognize the connection between the visual and the verbal because both depend for their completion on an awareness of the discursive trope that fallen Victorian women end up drowned. Nevertheless, while Cunliffe may not have noticed the formal nuances of his discovery, in his sensitivity to the commonality of the subject matter, the narrative element traced in both the graphics of the tracts and in Crane's novella, he *demonstrates* how widely divergent parts of a culture may nevertheless interact.

If these two early essays are, indeed, indicative of Cunliffe's qualities as they would display themselves through the trajectory of his writing career,

[17] *Maggie*, ed. Gullason, 53.

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we might conclude – and, of course, any such summation must be an oversimplification – that his content, as it were, remains worthy of assimilation, but it has been (and, of course, is continuing to be) augmented and refined by subsequent scholarship. (Doubtless, had he lived longer, new editions of his key works would have continued to appear.) His style, both word-for-word and in a larger structural sense, however engaging and even impressive, must now, to most readers, seem just a trifle overblown – and, sometimes, by its very ease, it skates over difficulties whose solution might have yielded bigger prizes. In this latter regard, if not in others, it can, after all, appear "belle lettristic". In any case, it is inimitable. But Cunliffe's *scholarly stance* – open, omnivorous, respectful of earlier authorities but determined genuinely to "make it new" and, above all, attentive to what Roland Barthes famously termed "the innumerable centres of culture": well, we could all profitably emulate that.

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