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Stephen Crane's Inamorata: The Real Amy Leslie

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In Memoriam

Stephen Crane's Inamorata: The Real Amy Leslie¹

BY CHARLES S. YANIKOSKI

ALTHOUGH STEPHEN CRANE'S love affair with the pioneering newspaperwoman Amy Leslie was kept a secret in their day, it is no secret in ours. What has remained hidden from view is the nature of the woman Stephen Crane once loved. During the research for *Badge of Courage*,² Linda H. Davis's recent biography of Crane—research in which I was privileged to participate—some of what was previously hidden has now come to light.

Regrettably, little is known of the progress of the romance between Crane (1871–1900) and Leslie (1855–1939). They seem to have been acquainted by the end of 1895, the year Crane became famous as the author of *The Red Badge of Courage*. Eyewitness accounts and correspondence provide scant information about their relationship during the following year, although it appears that they shared living quarters in New York City during the summer of 1896. But by the end of that year, Crane was off in Cuba, and it is unknown whether the two ever saw one another again.³

There would seem to be two Amy Leslies, or at least two widely divergent, almost mutually exclusive, views of her. Among students of American literature, the first and best known of them might be

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1. The original research for this paper was collected from a variety of manuscript libraries, public documents, and personal communications. All notes underlying this study, as well as many Amy Leslie materials not cited here, are now available in the Linda H. Davis Collection housed in the Department of Special Collections, Syracuse University.

2. Linda H. Davis, *Badge of Courage: The Life of Stephen Crane* (New York: Houghton-Mifflin, 1998).

3. *Ibid.*, 167–70.

called the “New York” view: Amy Leslie as a romantic interest of Stephen Crane’s. The second view, much older but nearly unknown to Stephen Crane scholars, might be called the “Chicago” view: Amy Leslie as local actress, arts critic, and celebrity.⁴

In the New York view, Amy Leslie was a shady character, accused in turn of psychological disorder, criminal associations, and the habit of assuming other identities or even impersonating people. These accusations are based on limited evidence, all of it false.

In the world of theater arts, the Chicago view has prevailed. Amy Leslie is remembered as the long-time theater critic of the *Chicago Daily News* (1890–1930), a career that followed her successful run of soprano performances in Gilbert and Sullivan and other operas, both light and serious. She was “the most famous woman in Chicago, always excepting Jane Addams.”⁵

At the time of her marriage to Frank Buck in 1901, the editor of the Chicago society and arts weekly, *The Saturday Evening Herald*, wrote that “everybody who is in society, or connected with literature or the press or interested in the drama, knows and likes Amy Leslie.”⁶

One might suppose that the two views of Amy Leslie had eventually merged, but the opposite has been true. As Chicago memories of her fade, the New York picture of her gets darker and more bleak.

As Joseph Katz revealed, the dark view began with the knowledge that Amy Leslie sued Stephen Crane in 1898 for misappropriating \$800 of hers some fourteen months earlier.⁷ Her action was once thought to be vengeful and wrong, but in time documentation supporting her case came to light.⁸

4. Amy Leslie used her real name, Lillie West, on the stage.

5. Vincent Starrett, *Born in a Bookshop* (Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1965), 92.

6. [Edward Freiberger], “Society,” *The Saturday Evening Herald* 52, no. 19 (20 July 1901): 9. This article is unattributed, but it is clear that Freiberger wrote it from letters, now housed in the Harvard University Theatre Collection, that Amy Leslie sent him on 17 and 23 July 1901.

7. Joseph Katz, “Some Light on the Stephen Crane–Amy Leslie Affair,” *Mad River Review* 1 (winter 1964–65): 43–62. Katz cites biographies by John Berryman, Robert Stallman, and Lillian Gilkes.

8. The relevant correspondence is located in the Crane Collection of the Dartmouth College Library. John D. Conway reprinted the most pertinent items in



Lillie West (the real and stage name of Amy Leslie). Photograph courtesy of The Harvard Theatre Collection, The Houghton Library.

The myth of the hysterical, unbalanced Amy had taken root, however, and it persisted. Her mental disequilibrium was attributed to the loss of her only son to diphtheria. At last in 1993 Stanley Wertheim observed that this loss occurred at least half a dozen years before she met Crane, so that it probably was not pertinent.⁹ And in 1939 the *Chicago Daily News* editorialist commenting upon her death had noted that the loss of her son “caused no permanent loss of her spirit of joy that so endeared her to her friends.”¹⁰ Her great nephew James West, a now retired psychiatrist who attended medical school in Chicago when Amy Leslie was still alive and who knew her quite well, told me emphatically that his aunt was not the sort of person to be prostrated by grief years after her son’s death.¹¹

New evidence of Leslie’s emotional problems was offered by Joseph Katz in the mid-1960s. He considered her playlet, “Lone Amy: The Sherman House Orphan,” which he discovered and reprinted, a sign of her “instability.”¹² Certainly it is a disturbing piece, abstract and depressing, and it represents the author as a sad and lonely woman. But even if it was serious, as Alma J. Bennett in her dissertation on Amy Leslie sensibly suggests it may not have been, it does not mean much.¹³ For if Katz’s dating of the playlet is correct (1900), it was written within a few years of her failed love affair with Crane, and perhaps within a few months of his death; her feeling lonely at such a juncture is hardly evidence of imbalance.

More likely, however, the piece was written later, probably after 1913. There are several reasons for thinking so. For one, while Katz

his important rebuttal of the Mentally Unstable Amy thesis, “The Stephen Crane–Amy Leslie Affair: A Reconsideration,” *Journal of Modern Literature* 7, no. 1 (February 1979): 3–13; they are also included in Stanley Wertheim and Paul Sorrentino, eds., *The Correspondence of Stephen Crane* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).

9. Wertheim, “Who Was ‘Amy Leslie?’” *Stephen Crane Studies* 2, no. 2 (fall 1993): 29–36.

10. “Amy Leslie,” *Chicago Daily News*, 6 July 1939, p. 10.

11. Telephone interview, 11 December 1992.

12. Katz, “Some Light on the Stephen Crane–Amy Leslie Affair,” 62.

13. Alma Jean Bennett, *Traces of Resistance: Displacement, Contradiction, and Appropriation in the Criticism of Amy Leslie, 1895–1915*, Ph.D. diss., Kent State University Graduate College, May 1993, 126.

based his dating on a scrawled notation on the copy he then possessed—"Originally a work of art written on the back of a College Inn menu, 1900"—he himself notes that the College Inn did not open until 1910. More important, Amy Leslie could not have been the "Sherman House orphan" as early as 1900, since she lived at the Virginia Hotel that year and the following year. In 1901 she married Frank ("Bring 'em Back Alive") Buck, and they moved first to an apartment in the city and soon afterward to a house in the then still relatively rural Norwood Park section of Chicago. Amy Leslie can be found in Chicago city directories at the Norwood Park address until 1913. It is true that she would stay overnight sometimes at the Sherman when she had to review a play in the Loop, since transportation back to Norwood Park was not good.¹⁴ But she did not actually move to the Sherman until about 1916, the year she and Buck divorced.¹⁵ Other clues appear in the text itself, including a reference to Buck, who was not yet important to her in 1900, a reference to Norwood Park, and a *dramatis persona* called the "Awful Stillness," a personification of the aftermath of the great Chicago Fire. The Awful Stillness, she says at one point, has been around for forty years; since the fire occurred in 1871, a date for the playlet as early as 1900 is implausible.

The date matters because Amy Leslie had reason to feel "orphaned" in the second decade of the twentieth century. Buck, some twenty-five years her junior, sailed off on his first jungle adventure to South America in 1911.¹⁶ In the spring of 1912, she found herself denying in the press that she had gone to Texas to fetch him back and that he had run off with an actress.¹⁷ In 1916 he was seen leaving the Rialto with a showgirl.¹⁸ Before their divorce, he sued Amy

14. Frank Bering, long-time manager of the Sherman, recalled this on the occasion of her retirement. See the *Chicago Daily News*, 27 August 1930, p. 10.

15. She does not appear in the city directory as living at the Sherman until 1916, although she is simply absent from the 1914 and 1915 editions.

16. As with Amy Leslie's chronology, many events in Buck's life are variously dated, depending on the source. The 1911 date, which seems accurate, is given in *Current Biography 1943* (New York: H. W. Wilson Co., 1944), 86.

17. See, for example, "Amy Leslie Makes Denial" in the *Chicago Record-Herald*, 15 March 1912, p. 7.

18. *Chicago Daily Journal*, 6 January 1916, p. 1.

Leslie for “cruelty, nagging and public humiliation,” charges she denied.¹⁹ By the end of 1916, he was gone for good. Amy Leslie, meanwhile, turned sixty-one that year, and if she thought her love life was over and anticipated “long unsatisfying years,”²⁰ she was right; no evidence of any later romance is recorded, though she lived until 1939. If she was feeling sorry for herself at this point in her life, if she was feeling “orphaned” and alone, who can blame her?

As John D. Conway concluded, “Amy Leslie is not the whimpering and pathetic female so often portrayed in Crane scholarship. She was, rather, . . . an extraordinary woman who would not be bamboozled by the likes of the itinerant Mr. Crane.”²¹ No one in Chicago would ever have thought otherwise. But the tone of the New York interpretation continued to deteriorate. In 1992, almost thirty years after Katz’s article, Christopher Benfey, perhaps picking up a clue from Melvin Schoberlin’s unpublished Crane study in Syracuse University’s Stephen Crane Collection, stated as simple fact that Amy Leslie and Amy Huntington were one and the same.²² Not much is known of Amy Huntington, except that when Crane testified in a suit against the New York City police, who then tried to discredit him, an Amy and/or Sadie Huntington (it is not clear from newspaper accounts whether this is one person or two) lived in the same building as Crane during the preceding summer (1896). Amy/Sadie was evidently an opium smoker, perhaps a dealer, and perhaps worse—“a well-known member of the New York underworld,” as one scholar summed it up.²³

Although Benfey offered no evidence for conflating the two Amys, Stanley Wertheim subsequently repeated and elaborated the charge.²⁴ He had discovered a notation in Crane’s 1896 bankbook,

19. *Chicago Daily Journal*, 6 January 1916, p. 1.

20. Amy Leslie to George Ade, 18 April 1917, the Ade Collection, Purdue University.

21. Conway, “The Stephen Crane–Amy Leslie Affair: A Reconsideration,” 13.

22. Christopher Benfey, *The Double Life of Stephen Crane* (New York: Knopf, 1992), 179.

23. Olov W. Fryckstedt, “Stephen Crane in the Tenderloin,” *Studia Neophilologica* 34 (1962): 135–63, 156.

24. Wertheim, “Who Was Amy Leslie?”; then again in Stanley Wertheim and Paul Sorrentino, *The Crane Log: A Documentary Life of Stephen Crane 1871–1900* (New York: G. K. Hall, 1994), 212–13.

now located at Columbia University, that associated “Miss Amy Leslie” with 121 West 27th Street in New York’s “Tenderloin” district. This was Crane’s address that summer, and where Amy/Sadie Huntington also lived that summer, and where drug-taking and possibly prostitution was going on. It is known from Amy Leslie’s letters, located at Dartmouth, that she had a sister she lived with (for a while, at least, in 1897). The most economical interpretation of these facts, in the New York version, is that Amy and Sadie Huntington were really Amy Leslie and her sister, and that they were up to no good.

Even in the New York context, there are some holes in this theory. The press accounts of the Dora Clark case in 1896 relate that, according to the janitor’s testimony, Crane lived that summer with a woman who is not referred to by name, although it is stated that her name was given in court. If this woman was Amy Leslie, as it almost certainly was, and if Amy Leslie was an otherwise respectable member not only of society but of the press (as she indeed was), the circumspection of the New York reporters or their city editors in omitting her name as the woman Crane lived with is understandable.²⁵ But if Amy Leslie was really Amy Huntington, whose name is provided elsewhere in the same stories, this reticence makes no sense at all. It is also worth pointing out that the name “Amy” was a common one in those days, and that since 121 West 27th Street was not a private residence, it is not at all astonishing that more than one Amy might have been staying at that address. The U.S. Census for 1900 lists twenty-five different persons living there; presumably, in 1896 the number was not much different.²⁶

The biggest problem with the New York version of the story, though, is that Amy Leslie did not live in New York and therefore could hardly have been a player in the New York underworld. She had performed in New York from time to time during her years on the stage, and later she would visit New York sometimes for business or pleasure. But she was a Chicago drama critic, and her beat

25. Accounts of Crane’s appearance on the stand were carried in the dailies in New York City, as well as in many other cities, principally on 16–18 October 1896.

26. U.S. Census for Manhattan, Enumeration District 674, Sheet 24, taken 1 June 1900.

was Chicago. Even a cursory look at her reviews published in the *Daily News* during the 1890s reveals this, and a more detailed examination proves it.²⁷

In fact, Chicago had been her home base since the early 1870s, when her parents moved there from Council Bluffs, Iowa.²⁸ Her father, Albert West, died in 1892, but her mother, her sister, and at least two brothers continued to live in Chicago into the 1890s and beyond, as the city directories attest.²⁹ In the 1880s, Amy Leslie and her first husband, Harry Brown, tramped around the U.S. and Canada with a variety of opera companies.³⁰ But when her son died and she abandoned the stage, she returned to Chicago, and she never left. Many newspaper articles and biographical essays published in Chicago refer to her residence there.³¹ She was so identified with that city that a friend of Ashton Stevens, another Chicago drama critic, once commented that “she was more local than the Cubs, more Chicago than the ‘yards’ or the First National Bank.”³²

27. I performed the cursory review myself. The real dirty work was done by Alma Bennett, who covered twenty years of Miss Leslie’s writing in her dissertation, and since then has extended her researches beyond that period. She has assured me (private communication) that Amy Leslie stayed close to Chicago most of the time, and when she left that city, it was often to go to Boston, London, Paris, or other cities, not just to New York City.

28. Records from St. Mary’s Academy (now St. Mary’s College) in South Bend, Indiana, show Lillie West and her sister listed as coming from Council Bluffs; the family also appears there in the 1870 U.S. Census. Albert West first shows up in the Chicago city directory for 1874–75.

29. Both city directories and federal census records show her father, brothers, and sister there; her mother, though, is not mentioned, and it is possible that she moved back to Iowa (where at least two of her own sisters lived and where Lillie West was born) after Albert West died. His obituary appeared in the *Chicago Daily News* on 7 April 1892, his wife’s on 29 September 1911; her obituary in the *Chicago Tribune* suggests that she was living in Winterset, Iowa.

30. See the *Chicago Daily News* and the *New York Times* obituary of Amy Leslie, 4 July 1939; also, the notes of Evelyn Ackerman (Amy Leslie’s personal secretary), sent to St. Mary’s, 31 March 1927.

31. To give but one example, the St. Mary’s College magazine, the *Holy Cross Courier*, said of Amy Leslie in the 1874 class notes that appeared in the May 1931 issue, “She had made Chicago her home since retiring from the light opera in 1890” (p. 25).

32. Quoted in the *Chicago Daily News*, 1 September 1930, p. 7.

Amy Leslie's sister (called Sallie, not Sadie) was also a Chicago woman. Her husband was Zina R. Carter, a prominent and successful grain merchant. They lived on Ogden Avenue throughout the 1890s.³³

One reason the New York version of Amy Leslie missed the fact of her Chicago residency, and one reason the New York version exists at all, is that Amy Leslie was indeed in New York during the summer of 1896, and again in the autumn of 1897. But a check of her *Chicago Daily News* articles indicates that she spent no more than about six weeks in New York City during the 1896 off-season for Chicago theater.³⁴ Her trip in 1897 was even briefer, perhaps just a week or so. A series of still extant letters she wrote earlier in 1897 to Crane's friend Willis Hawkins could hardly have been sent from New York, since she was consistently reviewing show openings in Chicago during those months and even sometimes within a day or two of the letters to Hawkins.³⁵ Yet the letters are return addressed "266 W. 25th St." and "42 W. 29th St.," which in the New York version indicates that she was residing in Manhattan's Tenderloin district. Any Chicagoan, however, would immediately recog-

33. Albert West died at the Carter home in 1892, according to his death certificate. Carter had been a neighbor of the Wests in the late 1870s (according to city directory and census records), though in 1880 he was married to a woman named Emma. There is no record of Sallie after the 1900 census, and she probably died not many years later (she is not mentioned in her mother's 1911 obituary); by 1907 Zina Carter had moved to Trumbull Ave., and the 1910 census shows him married to still a third woman, this one named Maude.

34. She reviewed a series of Chicago theater events in late June. Her last item from Chicago before her New York visit was a report from the Democratic convention, held in that city; her column appeared on 10 July. An article on 8 August was the only one that summer that specifically referred to her being in New York. On 22 August her first review of the new theater season appeared in the *Daily News*, for a play that opened the night before. Several other Chicago openings are reviewed shortly thereafter, so it is apparent that she was back home.

35. For example, on 13, 22, and 31 January she wrote to Hawkins. Yet her column positively places her in Chicago on 4, 11, 17, 18, and 25 January, as well as on 1 February; she also reported on several other Chicago events in January, but the precise date of her attendance cannot be ascertained. It is not plausible that she made three separate trips to New York in January, with a similar itinerary in February and March.

nize these as South Side Chicago addresses. And in fact, there is independent testimony that Amy Leslie temporarily rented on the South Side at about this stage in her life.³⁶ Although these addresses no longer exist in Chicago, the first lying beneath the Adlai Stevenson Expressway and the second beneath a housing project, in the 1890s both were legitimate Chicago locations.³⁷

But apart from these details, the New York story is just not plausible. Amy Leslie may have been small potatoes in New York, but in Chicago she was a celebrity. By the mid-1890s she had been writing for the *Daily News* for several years, her first book (*Amy Leslie at the Fair*) had appeared in 1893, and she was listed in the *Chicago Blue Book* (in 1895 and 1896, the period she was friendly with Crane). When she married Frank Buck, as well as years later when their marriage broke up, the stories of her marriage and its dissolution made the front page of most of the Chicago dailies. She was written about and gossiped about. Yet there was no hint of criminal scandal about her. No one who knew her and wrote about her—including Alexander Woollcott and Jack Lait, who both could dish

36. At the time of Leslie's marriage to Frank Buck, the *Chicago Tribune* interviewed her brother-in-law, Zina Carter, who presumably supplied the information about her residence: "For many years Miss Leslie lived at the Granada Hotel, where the colony to which she belonged was gathered. Later she took a flat on the South Side, but in 1897 she went to the Virginia, where she has since resided." See "Amy Leslie Weds a 'Bell,'" 17 July 1901, p. 1. The last evidence of Amy Leslie at the Granada is a letter she sent to Freiberger on 11 December 1896 (Harvard collection) on the hotel's stationery. These sources, then, bracket Amy Leslie's residence on the South Side between December of 1896 and December of 1897, which is consistent with the letters to Hawkins.

37. I am indebted to the Chicago Recorder of Deeds for this information. I should also point out that some discrepancies remain even assuming that these are Chicago addresses. These discrepancies would make more sense if it could be demonstrated that Hawkins or someone representing him went to Chicago and delivered certain payments in cash and in person to Amy Leslie, or else made them to a representative of hers in New York, since receipts for certain transactions were signed and dated in New York. I have even doubted whether all the Dartmouth documents are authentic, since the Amy Leslie signature and other handwriting on those documents differ from that on other correspondence that she unquestionably wrote; but the penmanship also contains some similarities and could be by the same hand.

the dirt along with the nastiest of them—ever hinted that she had underworld connections of any kind.³⁸ No scholar of the New York underworld ever said so; no scholar of Chicago crime ever said so.³⁹ In the midst of such deafening silence from her contemporaries and from persons intimate with that milieu, the notion that Amy Leslie led a double life, needs more than mild circumstantial evidence to support it.

The same is true to an even stronger degree when applied to Amy Leslie's sister Sallie. Sallie's husband, Zina Carter, was so successful in business that in 1898 he was elected president of the Chicago Board of Trade. In 1899 he was the Republican nominee for Mayor of Chicago. His name was all over the newspapers (even the New York papers covered the election). Yet there was no suggestion that the candidate's wife was a notorious New York dope fiend, an unaccountable omission in a city where politics has always been a contact sport. Unaccountable, that is, except by its being completely false.

Wertheim's further belief that Amy Leslie "assumed the identity" of Amy Traphagen is equally dubious.⁴⁰ Wertheim is clear, at least, that these were two completely separate persons; he has noted the

38. Alexander Woollcott, "In Memoriam: Rose Field," *The Atlantic* 163 (May 1939): 643–48; Jack Lait and Lee Mortimer, *Chicago Confidential* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1950), 254.

39. There are numerous mentions that a Chicago hooker did Amy Leslie the "honor" of renaming herself Aimee Leslie, but no hint that there was any other connection between Amy Leslie and crime. See Alson Smith, *Chicago's Left Bank* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1953), 143; also John J. McPhaul, *Deadlines & Monkeys: The Fabled World of Chicago Journalism* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1962), 258; and McPhaul, *Johnny Torrio* (New Rochelle, N.Y.: Arlington House, 1970), 83. Lloyd Wendt and Herman Kogan report in *Lords of the Levee* (Garden City, N.Y.: Garden City Publishing, 1944), 283, that Aimee Leslie's pedigree in crime went back quite a few years, and (in case it might be supposed that Amy and Aimee were one and the same) that Aimee married Ed Weiss, "leading light in the Coughlin-Kenna organization, who had begun as a pimp in Freddie Buxbaum's Marlboro Hotel." In *Gem of the Prairie: An Informal History of the Chicago Underworld* (New York: Knopf, 1940), 262, Herbert Asbury puts Aimee's marriage late in 1904, just three years after Amy Leslie's wedding to Frank Buck.

40. See "Who Was 'Amy Leslie'?" and *The Crane Log*, on the pages cited above.

roughly twenty-year discrepancy in their ages. It is worth adding to this that there is also no family connection whatever, either by blood or by marriage, as far as federal census records show.

The principal underpinnings of Wertheim's argument are two: that there has been direct testimony of a connection between the two women, and that such a connection is the best explanation of how certain Amy Leslie papers now at Dartmouth turned up as they did with the Siesfeld family (since the Siesfelds and Traphagens apparently *were* related by marriage).⁴¹

Although there is room for reasonable difference of opinion here, I do not believe that either of these arguments can be made to bear the weight that is being placed on them. Of course, from the New York point of view, this weight might not seem so great. Knowing that Lillie West had adopted the pen name Amy Leslie, and then believing that (living in New York City) she also adopted the name Amy Huntington so that she could engage in illegal activities, why could she not have adopted the name Amy Traphagen as well? But if, on the contrary and in line with the Chicago view, Lillie West adopted only the Amy Leslie pseudonym (and not in any blameworthy way),⁴² but was otherwise a well-known and celebrated Chicago personality who never resided in New York, it is a

41. I am indebted to Professor Wertheim for sharing with me in private correspondence his thoughts and some of his documentation about the Traphagens and Siesfelds, and for correcting some factual errors and faulty interpretations of my own. His published comments on these matters were necessarily cut short due to space limits. Although I do not wish to respond to what has not been published, I do want to address the key points that might lead future scholars down the same path.

42. It is not known why she adopted this pen name. As for the name itself, she later said that it was "picked out of nowhere" (quoted in the *Chicago Daily News*, 26 August 1930 and again in her obituary, 5 July 1939). Of course, it has not been unusual in literature for authors to adopt pseudonyms; entire reference books are devoted to listing them. One likely motivation in Amy Leslie's case is that in writing theater reviews, she would be commenting on the performances of people she knew personally, and she may have had the idea at first that she could keep her identity secret. This hope would have made particular sense if, as the *Chicago Tribune* of 17 July 1901 suggests, she began submitting occasional drama criticism under this name several years *before* her retirement (and while she was still married to Harry Brown, who was not yet near the end of his own career).

tremendous stretch to suppose that she impersonated women of doubtful character in a city where she did not even live. Such behavior would be so outrageous that by any normal standard of argument some substantial evidence for it has to be adduced before we can credit it as plausible.

The direct testimony that touches on the case is, on the contrary, quite insubstantial. One Dorothy Haltom, who was a friend of Hazel Siesfeld, who was evidently the daughter of Sadie Siesfeld née Traphagen, who was in turn the sister of Amy Traphagen, reported to Professor Wertheim that Amy Leslie was quite well known in the Siesfeld family and that in reality Amy Traphagen and Amy Leslie were one and the same! But clearly there was some serious confusion somewhere along this trail, for we know that the two Amys were certainly not the same person: they were different ages, came from different families, and according to census records were born in different states to different parents.⁴³ It is impossible to determine at this late date whether the confusion arose first in Mrs. Haltom's or in Hazel Siesfeld's mind. And quite possibly neither of them was at fault; it might have been a shrewd but false guess. After all, they had the coincidence of the name *Amy*, and they had physical possession of some of Amy Leslie's letters, which proved a connection with Stephen Crane. Someone in the family came up with the notion that Amy Traphagen was really Amy Leslie, and the story persisted.

But what does this really mean? It means, at the worst, that there is tenuous evidence that Amy Traphagen assumed the identity of Amy Leslie. But there is no evidence of the reverse. There is no evidence that, as Wertheim has stated, "Amy and her sister seem to

43. The earliest surviving public record of the Traphagen girls appears to be the 1880 census for Manhattan (Enumeration District 220) in which John Traphagen and his wife Albertina appear with two daughters, Sarah E. Traphagen (age eight) and "Annie M." Traphagen (age four). All four Traphagens were born in New York State, according to this census entry; of the Wests, only the father, Albert, was born in New York, with the others all born in the Midwest. Wertheim, meanwhile, has already noted in writing that a life insurance application for Amy Traphagen gives an age far too young to be Amy Leslie's. The non-identity of the Traphagens and the Wests is not in dispute, therefore. Wertheim's informant was simply wrong about the key fact in her report.

have at times appropriated” the name Traphagen.⁴⁴ There is, furthermore, no evidence that anyone connected with the Siesfelds ever made such a claim; rather, the claim that was made was that the two Amys were the same person, and this claim is simply untrue. While it could be concluded that the Siesfelds/Traphagens “seem to have at times appropriated” the name Amy Leslie, this in no way indicts Leslie’s character.

But what about those letters? How did the Siesfelds and Traphagens get hold of them? First, it must be noted that this is not truly a crucial question. Surely almost any explanation is more plausible than that Amy Leslie was impersonating Amy Traphagen. The impersonation theory, moreover, doesn’t even account for how the letters got into the family! If Amy Leslie *was* Amy Traphagen, as Mrs. Haltom believed, that would account for it; but given, as all living parties now agree, that the two Amys were different, Amy Leslie’s adopting the identity of Amy Traphagen would not at all explain how Amy Traphagen or her sister Sadie Siesfeld gained possession of letters that Stephen Crane wrote to Amy Leslie.

Fortunately, an explanation exists that accounts for all of this. And although part of this story is conjectural, it is supported at a few key points by solid evidence. As has long been known, Amy Leslie sued Stephen Crane in January of 1898. Her attorney was George Mabon of New York. Although Leslie was not a New York resident, Crane was (or at least had been), and Amy Leslie believed, according to the legal filing, that he owned property in New York, hence the propriety of a suit in that state.

There are at least two apparent connections between George Mabon and the Siesfeld family. First, shortly before Mabon took Amy Leslie’s case, he had kept his office at 80 Beekman St. in Manhattan; Max Siesfeld, an artisan with whom Isidor Siesfeld (Sadie Siesfeld’s husband) had lived temporarily, worked at 70 or 78 Beekman, depending upon which year of the New York City directory one consults.⁴⁵ Being business neighbors does not prove

44. *Stephen Crane Studies*, 32.

45. See particularly the New York City directory for 1896–97, which lists both Mabon and Siesfeld. Isidor Siesfeld seems to have been somewhat itinerant, but based in New York City, since he is listed as a clerk in the city directories there

a business connection, but it is at the very least a suggestive coincidence.

Second, a letter of Mabon's in the Dartmouth collection pertaining to the case is addressed "Dear Issie," which probably refers to Isidor Siesfeld. Meanwhile, one of the Leslie-to-Hawkins letters in the collection instructs Hawkins to address his payment to "Mrs. I. Siesfeld" at the Parker House in Chicago—this while she was out of town. Although one could take this as evidence that Amy Leslie was impersonating Mrs. Siesfeld, a more conventional explanation for these facts would be that Isidor Siesfeld was working on behalf of George Mabon on this case.

Most likely he was the local (Chicago) liaison between Amy Leslie and her New York attorney. This explains why funds for her would be going to his rooms at a Chicago hotel when she happened to be temporarily away from that city. It would also explain how Siesfeld got possession of Crane's letters to Amy Leslie. As someone acting on behalf of her attorney, Isidor Siesfeld might well have collected materials that pertained to the lawsuit. In this regard, it is notable that the only letters from Crane in this collection are ones that he wrote *after* the incident that led to the suit, that is, after 1 November 1896. Letters prior to this date—and there must have been some, since an intercity romance was being carried on for a period of at least several months and perhaps closer to a year—have never turned up at all. The legal connection explains, therefore, not only how the Siesfelds got the letters they did, but also why they didn't get any others.⁴⁶ It appears that the suit never did go to court, a settlement presumably having been worked out (the letter to "Issie" indicates that negotiations were underway). Siesfeld proba-

for 1889, 1896, 1900, and 1901, though not in the intervening years. In no years does he appear in the Chicago city directory. He presumably was good at his work, though, for when he reappears in the New York City directory in 1909 and 1910, he is listed as a vice president. If he happened to be in Chicago at the time of the Leslie-Crane contretemps, or was willing to be sent there, he would have been a convenient and probably a capable agent for Mabon.

46. The only exception is a photograph of Crane inscribed to "Kid" in April of 1896. But Siesfeld presumably did not know Crane personally and might well have asked for a photograph of him.

bly simply kept the items in his possession, perhaps recognizing that they were of some historical and material value. They stayed in the family until Hazel Siesfeld turned them over to Dorothy Haltom, who later sold them.

We do not need to hypothesize any bizarre behavior on Amy Leslie's part, therefore, to account for these papers or to account for the stories concerning her that were passed down in the Siesfeld family.

She also was not responsible for another misidentification. Several reference books listing pseudonyms indicate that she used the pen name "Marie Stanley" in addition to "Amy Leslie." This is an error based on the simple fact that both Amy Leslie and Marie Stanley were Mrs. Harry Brown, though not at the same time.⁴⁷ Marie Stanley, also an author (*Gulf Stream*, 1930) and former actress, was Harry Brown's third wife; she died in 1937, two years before Amy Leslie's death.⁴⁸

The real Amy Leslie did not assume multiple identities. Although her real name was Lillie West, she tried to give up that name and go only by "Amy Leslie." The preamble to her will, for example, makes an impassioned statement in favor of her right to sign a legal document with her assumed name.⁴⁹ She was proud of this name, rightfully proud of the reputation she had made with it. She had no reason to present herself as Amy Huntington, Amy Traphagen, or Marie Stanley, and there is no serious evidence that she ever did.

It is time for the community of Stephen Crane scholars to stop looking at Amy Leslie through a peephole. True, she was not a saint, and her relations with men were "advanced" for her day: she was divorced twice in an era when divorce raised eyebrows, she invited younger single men to escort her to the theater, and she did,

47. I suspect that this confusion first arose in the card catalog of the New York Public Library, which correctly notes the marriages but falsely concludes that the two are the "same person."

48. "Third wife" per Amy Leslie's obituary in the *Chicago Daily News*, 4 July 1939. Marie Stanley's obituary appeared in *Variety*, 7 April 1937.

49. Evelyn Ackerman's letter to St. Mary's, cited above, also argues the propriety of Amy Leslie's use of her pen name, even in a community that had known her only as Lillie West.

most likely, share a nest with Stephen Crane for six weeks in the hidden regions of New York. But her strayings were well within the normal human model; she did not engage in criminal or other inexplicably peculiar behavior.

Amy Leslie was not a New York City misfit. She was a Chicago lady, a woman of distinguished family, a pioneer in the field of journalism, an honored and well-liked celebrity in her own city and her own day. And perhaps it says something about Crane that he could fall for this kind of woman, too.

Postscript. This article, based on research performed in the mid-1990s, was drafted before the insightful and resourceful Kathryn Hilt began circulating her idea that Amy Leslie of Chicago was not the same Amy Leslie who lived with Crane in the summer of 1896, received letters from him in 1897, and sued him in 1898. Recently, in collaboration with Stanley Wertheim, she published her ideas in more detail.⁵⁰ Hers is an intriguing hypothesis, and she has produced some important new evidence and analysis to support it. At the same time, the case she and Wertheim make is circumstantial, and, while pointing out significant oddities and lacunae in a story such as I have related here, they replace it with a story that has at least as many oddities and lacunae.

It would take another article to adequately analyze their contribution. I draw the curtain on the present effort, therefore, by observing that, as in so many areas of Crane's life, we are left with uncertainty.

50. Kathryn Hilt and Stanley Wertheim, "Stephen Crane and Amy Leslie: A Rereading of the Evidence," *American Literary Realism* 32 (spring 2000): 256ff. I am very much indebted to Ms. Hilt for indulging me with extensive correspondence during the summer of 2000 to help clarify a number of points in her analysis.