

DAVID KRAMER

Strains of Failed Populism in Stephen Crane's Spanish War Stories

The Spanish War finished us. The blare of the bugle drowned out the voice of the Reformer [William Jennings Bryan]. The privileged classes all profit by this war. It takes the attention of the people off the economic issues, and perpetuates the unjust system they have put upon us. What do the people get out of this war? The fighting and the taxes?

—Tom Watson, unsuccessful 1896 Populist Vice-Presidential candidate ¹

In all the Cuban business, there is one man [Lieutenant Andrew Rowan] stands out on the horizon of my memory like Mars at perihelion.
—From Elbert Hubbard's "A Message to Garcia," 1899 ²

Elbert Hubbard's inconceivably popular short homily "A Message to Garcia" has almost no parallel in the history of American letters. First published in Hubbard's little magazine *The Philistine* in March 1899, during the period of celebration over the United States' victory over Spain, "A Message" retells the story of Lieutenant Andrew Rowan, one of the Cuban Campaign's acclaimed heroes. After war with Spain was declared, and prior to the American invasion, President McKinley decided to contact General Calixto García, the leader of the Cuban insurgency. Rowan was ordered to deliver a message (whose contents were never disclosed) to García who was positioned deep in the interior of Cuba. Despite the obvious danger, Rowan is supposed to have carried out his order without question or hesitation.

The opening passages of the 1,500 word pamphlet, which Hubbard calls a "literary trifle," reads as a straightforward paean to the heroics of Rowan, cast as an exemplary American soldier. Hubbard, however, abruptly shifts his emphasis. Directly addressing his ostensible middle-class businessman readership—"You are now sitting at your office; six clerks are within your call"—Hubbard uses the occasion to launch a full-scale harangue against the working classes: "the incapacity for independent action, the moral stupidity, this infirmity of the will, this unwillingness to cheerfully catch and hold . . . the insane suspicion that his employer is oppressing, or intending to oppress him."³ Hubbard's solution to the dangers of class resentment ultimately resides in his valorization of Rowan's Cuban War Message: the unstinting loyalty of Lieutenant Rowan to Commander-in-Chief McKinley. Hubbard's essay, which appeared, without a title, in the back pages of *The Philistine* as part of longer commentary, seemed an unlikely candidate for literary greatness. However, Cornelius Vanderbilt's New York Central Railroad ordered 100,000 copies, triggering a publishing extravaganza. Within a year, eleven million copies had been printed. Overnight, Hubbard, who was mainly known as the founder of the Roycroft Arts and Crafts Community in East Aurora, New York, was heralded as the "Voice of American Business." By the time Hubbard perished in the 1915 *Lusitania* sinking, he had sold over forty million copies of "A Message."⁴

In "A Message to Garcia: The Subsidized Hero" Jules Zanger argues convincingly that the Hubbard's tract appealed most strongly to the burgeoning managerial classes whose "economic privileges were under increasing attack and whose social and cultural pretensions . . . could always use shoring up." As such, the pamphlet served as "a manifesto of shared principles and an affirmation of class identity." Furthermore, Zanger attributes the phenomenal success of "A Message"

to Hubbard's perfect timing. Hubbard's audience could, in a sense, simultaneously celebrate victory over Spain and imagine victory over the working classes.⁵

Still, not everyone was so enthralled with Rowan's exploit. In May 1899 Stephen Crane, a friend of Hubbard's who regularly submitted works to *The Philistine*, wrote to Hubbard with his own observations of Rowan:

He [Rowan] didn't do anything worthy at all. He received the praise of the general of the army and got to be made lieutenant col. for a feat which forty newspaper correspondents had already performed at the usual price of fifty dollars a week and expenses. Besides he is personally a chump.⁶

Nonetheless, Crane's debunking appears to have neither upset his friendship with Hubbard nor slowed sales.

In many ways, Hubbard's tract presents a highly crystallized blueprint for the ways Spanish War rhetoric served to reinforce existing class relations by associating military success with business success and by picturing recalcitrant workers as almost unpatriotic. Hubbard's homily was tailored towards urban office workers not agrarian populists. Nonetheless, Hubbard's affirmation of the bourgeois establishment is not dissimilar to the blare of the bugle alluded to by Tom Watson. As lamented in Watson's doleful eulogy, patriotic and nationalistic celebrations of the American victory worked to blunt rather than sharpen populist dissent.

To Crane's middle class, urban audience the curbing of populism was a reassuring sign that the capitalist system was intact. I argue that the several of Crane's war stories are imprinted with the tropes, images and scenarios associated with populist and anti-populist rhetoric. As the Cuban War coincided with the waning and fragmentation of populism, Crane renders the "virtues" of war inaccessible to characters that can be described as emblems of populism.

The populist movement, or the agrarian revolt of the nineties, was primarily a reaction to the increasing dominance of eastern and urban industrial, corporate, and financial institutions. Drawing support primarily from rural areas in the south, Midwest, and parts of the west, populist rhetoric cast itself against the "moneyed powers." The political force of the movement reached its peak during the election of 1896. William Jennings Bryan, heading both the Democratic and Populist tickets, ran on the radical platform of Free Silver. Bryan's opponents denounced his populist rhetoric as backward thinking, dangerously provincial and socially divisive. Ultimately, Republican William McKinley prevailed.

After the defeat of Bryan, agrarian discontent, blocked on domestic issues, found expression in the cause of Cuban Independence. Populist newspapers and Congressmen frequently equated the struggle of the Cuban people against Spanish oppression with their own resistance to industrial and financial capitalists. Bryanites also hoped that the war would put a strain on the currency so that the opponents of free silver would collapse. Senator Pettigrew of South Dakota, an ardent silverite, stated, "I don't care anything about Cuba . . . I want a war with Spain, because I believe it will put us on a silver basis."⁷ As such, the "real" enemy was not Madrid but Wall Street.

After the April 22 Declaration of War, Bryan himself petitioned McKinley for a commission in the army and was granted a colonelcy in the First Nebraska Volunteers, nicknamed the Silver Regiment. The Silver Regiment, however, never made it to Cuba. As Colonel Roosevelt was leading the Rough Riders up San Juan Hill, Bryan was relegated to a swampy training camp near Jacksonville, Florida. Roosevelt himself was a staunch and highly vocal opponent of the populist movement and had allegedly suggested that its leaders should be stood against a wall and "shot dead."⁸

Bryan's famous "Cross of Gold" speech at the 1896 Democratic Convention provides an unequaled source of populist rhetoric, centered on denouncing the eastern establishment and extolling the agrarian life:

You come to us and tell us that the great cities are in favor of the gold standard; we reply that the great cities rest upon our broad and fertile prairies. Burn down your cities and leave our farms, and your cities will spring up again as if by magic; but destroy our farms and the grass will grow in the streets of every city.⁹

In *Man over Money*, Bruce Palmer points out that a significant feature of agrarian rhetoric was its emphasis on the tangible: "That which was most real and most important in the world was that which was most tangible, that which could be seen and touched."¹⁰ Palmer's formulation suggests that, for Bryan, the value of the prairies and farms reside in their very tangibility (seen and touched) in opposition to the distant, alien and dangerous metropolis. Bryan's rhetoric both opposes and, to a degree, threatens the great cities. The farms can be destroyed but the grass of the prairies is indestructible. Nonetheless, Bryan's populist narrative cannot quite erase the great cities it resists. Even if visibly "burned down," the metropolis "will spring up as if by magic." The cities maintain a shadowy yet powerful solidity.

Throughout the 1890s, William Allen White, the owner and editor of *The Emporia Gazette*, vehemently criticized the populist movement. Published shortly after Bryan's address, "What's the Matter with Kansas" was reprinted nationally and widely circulated by the Republican Campaign Committee. In his essay, White figures Bryan's narrative of country and city differently, as caricature and parody:

Oh, this is a state to be proud of! We are a people who can hold up our heads! What we need is not more money, but less capital, fewer white shirts and brains, fewer men with business judgment, and more of those fellows who boast that they are just 'ordinary clodhoppers' but they know more in a minute about finance than John Sherman . . . we don't need well-dressed men on the streets, we don't need cities on the fertile prairies . . . What Kansas needs is men who can talk, who have large leisure to argue the currency question while their wives wait at home for that nickel's worth of bluing. . . .

Go east and you hear them laugh at Kansas; go west and they sneer at her; go south and they 'cuss' her; go north and they have forgotten her. Go into any crowd of intelligent people gathered anywhere on the globe, and you will find the Kansas man on the defensive. The newspaper columns and magazines once devoted to praise of her boastful facts and startling figures concerning her resources, are now filled with cartoons, jibes, and Pefferian speeches. Kansas just naturally isn't in it . . . Oh, yes, Kansas is a great state. Here, the people fleeing from it by the score every day . . . Take up the government blue book and you will see that Kansas is virtually off the map.¹¹

White not only refers to caricatures of populist Kansas—Peffer was a Populist agitator often lampooned for his long, scraggly beard—he makes his own: know-nothing hicks, long-winded deadbeats, and backward farmers. More so, in these passages, White reverses Bryan's terms. Now, the fertile plains are being de-populated, "the people fleeing by the score every day." As White satirizes the remaining Kansans, idle crackpots who think they know more about the currency question than John Sherman, Kansas seems to be vanishing itself.

During the nineteenth century the "invisible hand" became a dominant metaphor within economic discourse that was meant to describe the fluctuations

of supply and demand. In general terms, the invisible hand metaphor imagines a circulation of exchanges between points of relative tangibility (consumption and production of goods) and relative invisibility (marketing and pricing systems). Through this circulation, in which no mode represents a fixed origin, value becomes recognizable. In populist rhetoric, the image of the invisible hand was often rendered negatively. Robert M. LaFollette, a Republican Wisconsin legislator who adopted many of Bryan's tenets, opened his 1897 gubernatorial campaign with an attack against the menacing corporation:

The existence of the corporation, as we have it today, was never dreamed of by the fathers . . . The corporation of today has invaded every department of business, and its powerful but invisible hand is felt in almost all the activities of life . . . The effect of this change upon the American people is radical and rapid . . . All personal identities and individualities are lost.¹²

In a similar way, Bryan presents the processes of the invisible hand as potentially destroying not producing value, whether it is LaFollette's personal identities or the fertile prairies themselves.

White, however, casts Bryan's fixation on the tangible prairies independent from the magical cities as a misrecognition of the processes of the invisible hand. In White's caricatured Kansas "white shirts" and "well-dressed men" are absent. Their absence points to a circulation of value between the farm and the metropolis that Bryan's rhetoric tries to erase. In White's Kansas, where the prairies can be untouched by the great cities, populist rhetoric produces nothing of value except wives in need of a nickel's worth of bluing. Soon *only* grass will grow in Kansas. Kansas is making itself intangible.

The economic historian Alfred Chandler has written that by the 1890s another term was emerging to describe the processes of supply and demand: the "visible hand." In *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business* (1979), Chandler describes this shift:

The visible hand of managerial direction had replaced the invisible hand of market forces in coordinating the flow of goods from the suppliers of raw and semifinished materials to the retailer and ultimate consumer.¹³

In this model, the economic exchanges are not so much magical but almost transparent. Chandler's sense of transparency parallels White's construction of

Kansas from the outside, through the lens of the newspaper reading “east,” “west,” “south,” and “north.” “Anywhere on the globe” Kansas is visible but Kansas cannot see itself. To White, Kansas’s value is constituted by its “resources” and their now-vanished circulation, the newspaper’s columns “boastful facts and startling figures.” To White, it seems that forgotten Kansas is confused by both versions of economic processes: the invisible and the visible hand. Finally, in White’s parody of populism, Kansas is displaced and self-effaced. Populism as opposition becomes populism as emptied prairies and empty discourse. Kansas is a state that “just naturally isn’t in it.”

Today, bucketshops—quasi-brokerage houses proliferating in Midwestern small-towns—appear as an obscure, bizarre activity of the late 1890s. Nonetheless, the bucketshop phenomenon itself can be seen as a metaphor for populism. Located in a region where populist sentiment ran high, bucketshops operated by gaining access to the stock and commodity prices quotations generated in New York and Chicago. Customers “bought” shares from proprietors or “sold” produce to them and calculated their profits simply based on changing prices. Money changed hands but no official transactions were made. Customers and proprietors—who called themselves brokers, bankers, or commission merchants—intended neither to deliver nor to receive grain. To attract customers, the larger establishments often displayed complicated ticker tapes and telegraph wires. The bucketshops provided private back rooms, replete with free lunches, cigars, subscriptions to market letters, and pictures of naked women on the walls. Given the agrarian bias against urban institutions, the bucketshops promoted themselves as an alternative to the establishment exchanges. Further, by circumventing Wall Street and the Pit, the bucketshop’s internal transactions seemed to operate entirely within the small towns of Bryan’s fertile prairies. By contrast, detractors characterized the bucketshops as both dangerous and valueless.

John Hill’s tract *Gold Bricks of Speculation* (1903), a compendium of newspaper articles, editorials, trial transcripts (1896-1903) and his own inflammatory commentary, is representative of anti-bucketshop ideology.¹⁴ Hill argues that the bucketshops were themselves entirely dependent on the urban exchanges. “*Quotations are the one thing absolutely essential to the existence of the bucketshop. The moment quotations cease coming in, betting stops and the bucketshop is out of business.*” [Hill’s emphasis] In Hill’s formulation, the quotations generated from New York and Chicago have value while the bucketshops produce nothing. When Hill renders the bucketshops as vanishing and potentially reappearing, he enacts a kind of reversal of Bryan’s negatively rendered metropolis. Now, it is the bucketshop,

and its populist clientele, that can spring up like magic when quotes return from the great cities. Hill concludes that “except for the exhilaration which so beautiful a bet must furnish his patron, the keeper of the bucketshop performs no service” and, more dangerously, “prevent the intelligent mass from distinguishing between the unreal and the real in speculation.”⁵ The bucketshop as an emblem of populist agrarianism is thus configured by Hill as confusion and misapprehension.

In relation to Crane’s stories, Bryan, White, LaFollette, and Hill provide intertextual evidence and a set of cultural markers that can serve to distinguish populist and anti-populist tropes. In Bryan, we see agrarian imagery and tangible prairies. White presents absent businessmen and characters in flight. LaFollette invokes corporations never before dreamed of. Hill provides duplicitous Midwestern farmers. In Crane, these cultural markers take the form of images of thwarted exchanges, images of circulations and non-circulation, and images of elusive tangible value

Failed populism implicitly marks several of Crane’s characters who are presented as self-defeating and stymied, not unlike the exiled Bryan languishing in a Florida training camp. In “This Majestic Lie,” the central character, Johnnie, is a displaced plantation manager who goes to Cuba only to be fleeced and to perform no service. “Virtue in War” portrays the clash between a Midwestern farmer, a private in the Cuban Campaign, and his officer, a former middle manager of the Standard Oil Corporation. In “The Clan of No-Name,” Manolo Prat goes from Tampa to Cuba only to be supplanted by the businessman Smith, one of White’s white shirts and well-dressed businessmen.

This Majestic Lie

First published posthumously in two parts in the *New York Herald* and other newspapers on June 24 and July 1, 1900, “This Majestic Lie” tells the story of Johnnie, an American manager of an American owned sugar plantation in the Cuban province of Pinar del Rio. The United State’s declaration of war with Spain forces Johnnie to return to Key West. Separated from his beloved rural estate, Johnnie, despondent and angry, returns to Cuba as a scout for the American Navy. Ultimately, Johnnie’s military efforts prove to be futile, entirely ineffectual and self-defeating. Johnnie is a caricatured version of an agrarian populist. Johnnie’s quest, propelled by his desire to restore the lost value he places on the plantation, shapes the narrative.

The story’s structure is complex and partly fragmented. An omniscient narrator opens the story, but, in the middle of the second section, is abruptly and

temporarily replaced by the first-person narration of an unnamed journalist who only reappears at closure. When re-constructed chronologically, the story has three stages. The first section describes Johnnie's life on the sugar plantation. Initially, the plantation is figured as a kind of Bryanesque agrarian oasis. The plantation's fecundity—"food and wine had been in Johnnie's house even when a mango could gain the envy of the entire Spanish battalion"—stand in for the fertile prairies. Johnnie's crop "staked him down to the soil," so much so that his identity is merged with the plantation, "him or the crop; it is the same thing."¹⁶ The tangible crop—in Palmer's terms that which can be seen and touched—represent, for Johnnie, the sole source of value.

Johnnie's relation to the plantation is problematic. For one, Johnnie did not own the sugar cane himself. More so, Johnnie's function was not to harvest the crop but to act, on behalf of the owners, as a "trimmer." As a trimmer, Johnnie negotiated sales with the Spanish garrison and the Cuban insurgents, both of whom periodically threatened to destroy the plantation. Johnnie's value was to control the conditions through which the crop could be exchanged but not to make the crop itself. Johnnie, however, does not view himself as an intermediary. Instead, he is fixated only on the crop, which he always, "wrote the word thus: C R O P."¹⁷ Johnnie's enlarged but gapped spelling encapsulates his impossible quest. Johnnie wants to restore the original value of the vanished crop—in a sense, to fuse the separated letters—yet he cannot recognize the exchanges that created its value. In this sense, Johnnie's mode of perception subtly matches White's caricature of the misguided populist.

The next scene shifts to Key West where now-exiled Johnnie mixes with the press corps gathered before the American invasion. In Key West, Johnnie, "a little tan-faced refugee without much money," is an insignificant character:

Johnnie brooded in silence over a bottle of beer and the loss of his crop. He received no sympathy . . . None cared about the collapse of Johnnie's plantation when all were thinking of the probable collapse of cities and fleets.¹⁸

Invisible Johnnie has become one of White's displaced agrarians. Like forgotten and denuded Kansas; Johnnie—as White might say—"just naturally isn't in it." In desperation, Johnnie plots a return to Cuba by offering his services to scout Havana's fortifications for the commander-in chief of the North Atlantic squadron. The commander has no use for any superfluous information that Johnnie can provide.

Out of bemused sympathy, however, the admiral “touched Johnnie smartly enough with a brush to make him, officially, a spy” and sends him to Havana as a secret agent. In Cuba, Johnnie’s populist narrative, his obsessive desire to restore the lost value of his crop, is structured by a series of episodes centered upon misleading perceptions and images of food.

When Johnnie arrives in Havana, Mary Clancy, an Irish-American landlady in whose boardinghouse Johnnie takes refuge, greets him. In the opening scene, after war has been declared and an American blockade enforced, Johnnie and Mary observe a gathering of civilians in Havana’s largest piazza. The crowd is cheering the “news” that the Spanish fleet has utterly destroyed Dewey’s American squadron at Manila Bay and also:

Inhabitants of Philadelphia had fled to the forests because of Spanish bombardment, and also Boston was besieged by the Apaches, who had totally infested the town. In Chicago, millionaires were giving away their palaces for two or three loaves of bread.¹⁹

The Havanians, both hungry and illusioned, fantasize about a cannibalistic feast, “How unfortunate it is that we still have to buy meat in Havana, when so much pork [supposed American sailors] is floating in Manila Bay!” In celebration of a battle that never took place, the crowd depletes more of its limited resources—“wine and brandy were being wildly consumed in honor of victory at Manila”²⁰—foreshadowing the story’s ending.

After the mis-celebration, Johnnie and Mary return to her boardinghouse. His appetite piqued, Johnnie asks for lunch. However, because the landlady rents rooms to “Cuban lodgers who had no money to pay her”²¹—a fitting establishment for a spy with no real mission—there is very little food, only codfish salad. Johnnie’s disappointment propels him on a risky undertaking—to dine on eggs and coffee at the Spanish-owned Café Aguacate.

Once inside the restaurant, Johnnie and the proprietor begin a protracted negotiation over the cost of each menu item. Johnnie is forced to pay in advance. With each payment, however, the proprietor announces that cost of food throughout all of Havana has instantaneously increased, and that he has no choice but to raise his prices accordingly. Finally, Johnnie is talked into two eggs, bread, and coffee—for fifty dollars! The proprietor disappears, never to return. Belatedly, Johnnie discovers his error: “Say these people are clever. They know their business.”²² He attributes his confusion to an identity crisis:

There was a mirror on the wall and springing to his feet, the spy thrust his face close to the honest glass. "Well, I'm damned!" he ejaculated. "Is this me or is this the Honourable D. Hayseed Whiskers of Kansas? Who am I, anyhow?"²²

This is a key passage. Has Johnnie walked into a Cuban bucketshop? Money changes hands, but, alas, Johnnie never even gets the imaginarily priced eggs that never existed! The business was only a game of quotations that Johnnie could not recognize.

In Crane's Cuban bucketshop, Johnnie's misperceptions are on full display. Johnnie's alter ego—D. Hayseed Whiskers—is no less than one of White's cartooned populists. Johnnie's fleecing makes Hill's phrase apt: "Except for the exhilaration which so beautiful a bet must furnish his patron, the keeper of the bucketshop performs no service." Johnnie's excursion into the bucketshop/restaurant has given him negative stimulation but no C R O P.

As the scene ends, Johnnie directs his anger at the impudent Spaniard, lamenting: "When this cruel war is over, I'll be after him —I'm a nice secret agent of the United States government, I am."²³ Later, we learn more about Johnnie's position as secret agent:

If the company which owned the sugar plantation had not generously continued his salary during the war, he would not be able to pay his expenses on the amount allowed him by the government, which by the way, was a more complete bit of absolute nothing than one could possibly invent.²⁴

The surprise is not that the government paid him nothing but that the plantation did pay. In one sense, Johnnie never lost the C R O P which he never owned. Johnnie, however, does not equate the production of the crop with the salary which marks it and signifies Johnnie's value as a trimmer. The result is that he spends fifty dollars on a non-egg in Havana when he could have dined heartily in Key West.

After the café episode, Johnnie begins his secret agent career, still obsessed by his gouging

Johnnie's subsequent activity in Havana could truthfully be related in part to a certain part to a temporary price of eggs. It is interesting to note how close the famous event got to his eye, so that, according to the law of perspectives, it was as big as the Capitol of Washington . . . A certain

temporary price of eggs! It not only hid the capitol at Washington; it obscured the dangers in Havana.²⁵

On the one hand, Johnnie's revelation—a linkage between eggs, the pricing of eggs, and the great cities—suggests Bryan's rhetoric. Bryan, resisting the invisible hand metaphor, figured "magic" (the cities, the pricing of eggs) as distorting the tangible and original value only found in prairie itself (the eggs). On the other hand, Crane, more akin to White, satirizes Johnnie's populist epiphany. Now, Johnnie's perceptions are imbued with the terms of circulating value, but his configuration—"the famous event"—are cast as myopic confusion.

Impelled by his newly found fervor, Johnnie scouts Havana's fortifications. The narrator only says that Johnnie has learned "something" about the Santa Clara battery. Nonetheless, Johnnie proceeds to a remote beach on the outskirts of Havana where he catches sight of the blockading American fleet to which he madly gestures: "He was to wave something white. His shirt was not white, but he waved it whenever he could see the signal-tops of a warship."²⁶ Perhaps he is signaling "something" about the temporary price of eggs, now more imposing than the Capitol in Washington. Not surprisingly, the fleet is unresponsive. Johnnie's incomprehensible message—like his salary as a spy—is a more complete bit of absolute nothing than one could possibly invent. Johnnie has been displaced from the plantation in Pinar del Rio, Key West and is barely visible on a remote Cuban beach. Johnnie's frantic waving produces nothing but his own effacement. As White might say, Johnnie is virtually "off the map."

In the story's final episode, the war has ended. Still in Havana, Johnnie has invited the reporter he met in Key West for dinner at the now-liberated Café Aguacate, presumably so that Johnnie can retell his story of the war. Johnnie has ordered the meal in advance, choosing every item on the menu. The tangible meal that Johnnie can see and touch would seem to signify the restoration of Johnnie's identity and the original value of the vanished crop: "him or the crop; it is the same thing." Can Johnnie can have his C R O P and eat it too?

However, the journalist's description of the meal is oddly vague; ultimately, it is not clear exactly what Johnnie is eating. First, the journalist observes that, "the variety of dishes was of course related to the markets of Havana, but the abundance and general profligacy was related only to Johnnie's imagination."²⁷ Yet, at the same time, he says, "our fancies fled in confusion before this puzzling luxury." But why is the luxury puzzling? R.W. Stallman has shown that Crane based the character of Johnnie in part on the spy Charles J. Thrall. Thrall reported that, after

the American blockade of Havana was lifted, there was food in quantity but food in quality was very dear or non-existent; according to Thrall, there was no exotic variety to be had.²⁸ This historical fact might explain why not a single description of the actual contents of the meal is given to the reader by the journalist, only Johnnie's one regretful sigh that the restaurant has no "peacock's brains and melted pearls." Finally, when the journalist says, "I began to think him [Johnnie] probably a maniac," the reader senses that Johnnie may be fantasizing.

In his analysis of the story, William Crisman argues that while "exchange for food fails initially in 'This Majestic Lie' when the owner of a Cuban Café threatens Johnnie into paying a fortune for a meager meal," Johnnie has in the end obtained the supposed exotic delicacies "through a devious black market connection."²⁹ In contrast, I argue that Johnnie has eaten a mediocre meal and fantasizes it into a sumptuous dinner. In the end, Johnnie is now like the illusioned Havanians in the opening passage celebrating and expecting "Yankee pork" that did not come. Is this then Johnnie's "Majestic Lie"—eating ordinary swine and calling it melted pearls?

Furthermore, Johnnie has ordered with another principle in mind: "Apparently Johnnie had had but one standard, and that was the cost." Earlier, he was fixated on the price of eggs. Willing to pay any amount for the café's eggs, Johnnie has become a version of "the Chicago millionaires" who the Havanians thought were "giving away their palaces for two or three loaves of bread." When the dinner is over, Johnnie concludes, "the war is now over."³⁰ In the end, the journalist, concerned that he has participated in Johnnie's illusions and delusions, tells Johnnie "when you invite me to dine with you, don't ever do *that* again."³¹

That has become Johnnie's quixotic narrative of his Cuban Campaign, a war that he spent as a pseudo-spy in a pseudo-boardinghouse and a pseudo-restaurant. Johnnie's feast—"the abundance and general profligacy was related only to Johnnie's imagination"—is rendered by Crane as only a fantastically imagined return of the crop. For, Johnnie cannot yet recognize that the price of eggs is always temporary—"of course, related to the markets of Havana"—and that the vanished crop, dependent on Johnnie's function as the plantation's trimmer, was always provisional. Crane's text registers populist resistance via Johnnie's refusal to forget his C R O P. But the text obscures Johnnie's narrative within its structural frame as resistance is transformed into absurdist confusion.

Virtue in War

In "Virtue in War," first published in the November 1899 issue of Frank Leslie's *Popular Monthly*, the signs of populism explicitly mark Crane's construction of the Cuban Campaign. The story revolves around Private Lige Wigram and Major Gates. Wigram, a farmer, has joined his states' volunteer regiment. Like most members of the regiment, Lige brings to the war the agrarian values invoked by Bryan. In contrast, Gates, a former manager for the Standard Oil Corporation, is the very emblem of forces opposed by populist ideology. The plot is formed around two exchanges between the men. In the regiment's Georgia training camp, Lige makes an informal visit to Gates but is rebuffed. In Cuba, Gates is mortally wounded leading a successful assault on the Spanish blockhouses. Lige comes across the now dying Major and offers assistance, but is again rejected. Ultimately, Lige's bravery goes unrecognized; while Gates's seemingly heroic death is widely publicized.

The characterization of Gates, who had left the Regular Army in 1890 to pursue a career with Standard Oil before re-enlisting for the Cuban Campaign, is primarily marked by his corporate tenure. In 1890, disappointed with the slowness of his promotion in the Army's ranks, Gates was attracted by the efficiency of Standard Oil:

The Standard Oil Company differs from the United States in that it understands the value of the intelligent services of good men and is certain to reward them at the expense of incapable men . . . It is simply that the Standard Oil Company knows more than the United States Government . . . In the course of time he knew that if he lived a rigorously correct life, his position and income would develop strictly in parallel with the worth of his wisdom and experience.³²

In "What's the Matter with Kansas," White caricatured populist rhetoric as a misapprehension of the economic metaphors of the invisible hand. Gates's description of Standard Oil belies no such misapprehension. Through the corporation's abstracted intelligence, "value" and "reward," "income" and "worth" seamlessly circulate. Market forces are rendered more transparent and controllable. Gates would be one of White's easterners who laugh as confused Kansas effaces and impoverishes itself. Gates's decision to sign on with Standard Oil is particularly significant. According to Chandler, Standard Oil was one of the first corporations to harness effectively the expanding forces of national markets: "By the early, 1890s, Standard Oil had centralized the administration of production and moved into new functions. Its senior executives, the trustees, hired large numbers of middle

managers to supervise and coordinate its many operating units.” Within the story, Gates is Standard Oil’s prototypical middle manager.³³ Still, upon leaving the army and joining Standard Oil, Gates misses something; “But he was not happier. Part of his heart was in a barrack.”³⁴ The “heartfelt barrack” registers a sort of missing or lost tangibility, almost a version of Johnnie’s crop. As the story unfolds, however, Gates can never return to the metaphorical heartfelt barrack. His absorption within Standard Oil has altered his mode of perception.

By contrast, Lige embodies the values of tangible, personal contact. In the Georgia training camp, Lige, in the same way he might visit a new farmer at home, goes to the major’s tent. Gates, however, is curtly distant, only using the terminology of the corporation: “And, now, what is your business?” As Stallman shows, “Lige is Old French for *liege*, a vassal bound by feudal law to give service and allegiance to his *liege-lord*, who in this instance is the Major Gates of Crane’s story.”³⁵ If so, Crane uses the term to further his irony. The relationship between Lige and Gates is anything but the familiar and tangible reciprocity between feudal lord and vassal.

Later, Lige, in agrarian vernacular, denounces the major to his comrades who ask what Gates is like:

Like? cried Lige. “He’s like nothin’. He ain’t out’n the same kittle as us. No. Gawd made him all by himself--sep’rate. He’s a speshul produc’, he is, an’ he won’t have truck with jest common men, like you be.”

More so, Lige is as much enraged by Gates’s indifference to common men as he is by Gates’s impersonality:

That, so far from gaining any hatred in return, he [Lige] seemed incapable of making Gates have any thought of him save as a unit in a body of three hundred men. Lige might just as well have gone and grimaced at the obelisk in Central Park.

If Gates is the obelisk—a statue in New York—then Lige has come face-to-face with Standard Oil itself. The encounter evokes LaFollette’s description of the menacing corporation: “the corporation of today has invaded every department of business, and its powerful but invisible hand is felt in almost all the activities of life.” More so, the obelisk is—“like noth”—both visible and invisible: Lige can see the statue but it cannot see his grimaces. The obelisk—both empty and present—is a marker of economic processes whose value Lige cannot fully apprehend or accept. In addition,

Lige's perception of Gates matches LaFollette's formulation of the corporation that "dissolves all personal identities." To Lige, Gates as the obelisk is a mutation: not a flesh-and-blood soldier but a "spechul produc," a manufactured abstraction.³⁶

Before the climactic scenes—similar to the appearance of the correspondent in "This Majestic Lie"—Crane introduces images of publicity and news. An unnamed Lieutenant Colonel sends constant dispatches back to Washington; he "was an invaluable man in the telegraph office."³⁷ Major Carmony, a wealthy wholesale hardware dealer, mails home copies of approving articles from local newspapers. Twice, Crane interrupts the narrative with—"as *Harper's Weekly* says." These images—a kind of meta-narrative—foreshadow the ending. The war is being circulated and consumed by its domestic audience even as it is being produced in Cuba.

When the battles commence, Gates's experience is inflected with corporate language: "He felt that his charge was being a success. He was carrying out a successful function."³⁸ Gates approves of the conduct of other units who "thoroughly, completely, absolutely, satisfactorily, exhaustively understand what the business is. They're lawyers."³⁹ Gates has returned to the battlefield but not the old barracks. He experiences the war through the lens of Standard Oil, seeing not soldiers but middle managers.

During the battle, Lige discovers the wounded Major and attempts to praise Gates's bravery but is cut short. This time, however, Lige is not angered:

If Gates had ever criticized Lige's manipulation of a hayfork at home, Lige would have furiously disdained his hate or blame. He saw now that he must not openly approve the major's conduct in war. The major's pride was in his business.

Gates's detached personality—the obelisk, empty and present—is crystallized for Lige:

He [Lige] pondered over the resemblance [between the earlier encounter in Georgia and this one in Cuba], and he saw that nothing had changed. The man bleeding to death was the same man to whom he had once paid a friendly visit with unfriendly results. He thought now that he perceived a hopeless gulf, a gulf which is real or unreal, according to circumstances.

Finally, the dying Gates tells Lige:

“You’re no soldier, but—” He tried to add something. “But—” He heaved a long moan. “But—you—you—Oh, I’m so-o-o-o tired.”³⁰

In these passages, the key phrase is the real or unreal gulf. To Lige, he and Gates stand on two opposing sides: agrarian familiarity (the hayfork) and Standard Oil (the corporation). Lige thinks he can see Gates on the other side of a gulf, but Gates—like the obelisk—apparently cannot look back. The dying Gates cannot even say what Lige is. In a way, Gates may not be Lige’s opposite; instead, Gates is the gulf. As Standard Oil’s representative middle manager, Gates is only a mediating space, a visible and invisible hand, “real and unreal, according to circumstances.” After the battle, Lige comes upon three correspondents who are discussing Gates’s death that will be reported in their newspapers, “—as *Harpers Weekly* says.” As Gates is about to be buried, Lige wants to mark his grave and asks the correspondents for a bottle. The newsmen think he wants their liquor:

“But, said the other [Lige], dazed, “I mean an empty bottle. I didn’t mean no full bottle.” The correspondent was humorously irascible. “An empty bottle! You must be crazy! Who ever heard of a man looking for an empty bottle?”

Lige tells the correspondents he only wanted:

“To take an’ write his [Gates’s] name an’ reg’ment on a paper an’ put it in th’ bottle an’ bury it with him, so’s when they come fer to dig him up some time an’ take him home, there wouldn’t be no mistake.”⁴¹

For the moment, the agrarian Lige appears to restore some missing tangibility to Gates, even if only as a message in an empty bottle. When Lige says he wants “no mistake,” it is not so much Gates’s grave that he marks but his own agrarian presence. Lige’s presence—tilting at New York obelisks with a hayfork—is his populist story of the war.

Ultimately, Lige’s message in the bottle is an irrelevant gesture. The correspondents have told Lige that an account of Gates’s death would appear in their newspapers. If Gates is like Standard Oil—abstract and impersonal—then the official report of his death is entirely sufficient. Gates’s name, enshrined in the official report, outlives his death. By contrast, Lige’s story becomes an anonymous message bearing another man’s name and is recognizable only to himself. Lige’s

story will not re-circulate in *Harper's Weekly*. Gates is gone and buried but with his remains are interred Lige's bottle and its note, and with it the populist narrative of the war.

The Clan of No-Name

First syndicated in a number of American newspapers on March 19, 1899, "The Clan of No-Name" is set in Florida and Cuba in the months before the American intervention. Manolo Prat, a young Cuban expatriate living in Tampa, returns to Cuba to join General Calixto García's insurgent army. Manolo has two motivations. First, he believes in the cause of Cuban Independence and is willing to risk his life to overthrow Spanish rule. Second, in Tampa the idealistic but impoverished Manolo has been secretly courting Margarita, a maiden of Spanish descent who is also being pursued by Mr. Smith, a wealthy American businessman. Unable to compete financially with Smith, Manolo hopes that by winning honor and glory on the battlefields of Cuba, he can return to Florida and claim the hand of Margarita. As the narrative unfolds, however, Manolo's efforts to further the cause of Cuban Independence and to supplant Smith and win the heart of Margarita are foiled. In Cuba, Manolo is killed; in Florida, Margarita marries Smith.

As discussed earlier, the rhetoric of American populism often equated the cause of Cuban Independence, described as a popular struggle against Spanish tyranny, with its own wholesale opposition to the money power of the business classes. In this sense, Crane fashions Manolo as both an explicit emblem of the Cuban Independence movement by joining García's rebel army and an implicit emblem of the Populist movement by contesting Smith's economic control over Tampa's courtship market.

To begin, the historically doomed positions occupied by Manolo in "The Clan of No Name"—populism, Cuban independence—can be read against Hubbard's monumentally successful, "A Message to Garcia" (which was also first published in March 1899). Often overlooked in Hubbard's paean to American business is the figure of García himself. Among Cuban revolutionaries, García was fairly well disposed toward American intervention; García personally doubted the motives of the McKinley administration but calculated that American public support for Cuba Libre would suffice to ensure the island's independence. As such, García welcomed Rowan's "Message" from McKinley which was that American forces would soon be landing in Cuba. García would be bitterly disappointed by the American indifference and occasional hostility to the Cuban soldiers, prompting García finally to resign his command. The McKinley Administration tried to

make amends by inviting García to Washington, but Garcia took sick and died suddenly on December 11, 1898, one day after the war's official end. He did not live to see the 1902 Platt Amendment which effectively ended the promise of Cuban Independence. The ironies abound. Rowan's Message to García actually signaled García's own undoing, yet García's name became immortalized in Hubbard's propagandistic diatribe against the working classes. I argue that "A Clan" is imprinted with a set of tropes similar to those used by Hubbard.⁴²

Without drawing one-to-one correspondences between Hubbard's pamphlet and Crane's fiction, there are striking—if ironic—parallels. Crane's story opens in Tampa Bay as Manolo and Margarita secretly exchange photographs before Manolo leaves to join García's insurgent army which is—to use Hubbard's phrase—"somewhere in the mountain fastness of Cuba; no one knew where."⁴³ In the story, deep in the Cuban countryside, the rebel forces are moving ammunition and rifles across a heavily guarded Spanish road. Manolo is sent to deliver a message, quite literally to García. In contrast to Rowan's triumph, Manolo's mission ends in fiasco. Trapped between the lines, Manolo is shot, paralyzed and ultimately decapitated by a Spanish machete. The message is undelivered; no supplies are transferred; the insurgents withdraw. Manolo's pockets are rifled; the photograph of Margarita is found and given to the Spanish Colonel who lasciviously admires the maiden's visage. After the skirmish, the Colonel mediates upon the bloody stalemate:

As a matter of truth, he was not sure to be wholly delighted or wholly angry, for well he knew that the importance lay not so much in the truthful account of the action as it did in the heroic prose of the official report, and in the fight itself lay material for a splendid poem.⁴⁴

Manolo's Cuban Campaign has come to nothing but his own victimization. In a sense, the Colonel's "poem"—in which Manolo is used for the Colonel's self-serving ends—is similar to Elbert Hubbard's "Message" in which "Garcia" becomes only a symbol to be appropriated and transmuted into a sermon defending the capitalist status quo. In the end, Manolo has killed no one; won nothing that could gain the hand of Margarita. Instead, an unsavory Spanish colonel has appropriated her love letter and Manolo lost his head. Manolo's quest for martial heroism has become first his corpse—the dismembered sign of his fleeting bravery—and then material for the Colonel's self-glorifying poem. Although Lieutenant Andrew Rowan was successful, Crane called him "personally a chump." Now Manolo is the chump.

The last scene returns to the courtship economy of Tampa. In Manolo's absence, Smith has advanced his own cause to an increasingly receptive Margharita, her enthusiasm for Cuban Independence waning. As Smith is preparing a marriage proposal, he casually mentions Manolo:

“Too bad about young Manolo Prat being killed over there in Cuba, wasn't it?” [Smith] “And wasn't it queer that we didn't hear about it for almost two months? [Margharita] “Well, it's no use trying to git quick news from there” [Smith] ⁴⁵

Relieved at Smith's ignorance of her liaison, Margharita accepts Smith's proposal. Margharita reads Smith's words like a ticker tape; as Smith's stock rises, the closing price of the idealistic soldier approaches zero. Rid of a bad debt, the socialite is free to invest in a more promising future.

That night Margharita destroys the evidence:

She took a stained photograph from her dressing-table and, holding it over the candle, burned it to nothing, her red lips meanwhile parted with the intentness of her occupation. ⁴⁶

One of the riddles Crane poses in “The Clan of No-Name” revolves around the question of whose photograph Margharita burns just after she accepts Smith's marriage proposal. Is it her own inscribed photo taken from Manolo's body in Cuba by a Spanish officer and somehow returned to her in Tampa? Or is it a picture of Manolo that he gave to her with an inscription identical to the one she gave him except for the omission of her name? William Crisman maintains that Margharita burns her own photograph that was “returned through some undisclosed mysterious network that the reader finally can not understand.”⁴⁷ This reading matches Crisman's conjecture that Johnnie obtained his meal through a devious black market connection. I conclude that Margharita burned a picture of Manolo. In either interpretation, the result is the same: Manolo has been ignominiously slaughtered in Cuba and expunged in Florida; his Message is for naught. An American businessman—a Hubbard reader?—has usurped Manolo in Tampa. Soon the American army will usurp García's army in Cuba.

Placed on the battlefields of Cuba, Crane's stories narrate the displacement of populism, whether used as material for parody in the case of Johnnie, or ironic realization in the case of Lige, or tragic failure in the case of Manolo. On Crane's

Cuban battlefields, class hierarchies are sustained. Johnnie's exploits in Cuba come to nothing and are given by Crane a comic, almost phantasmagoric tone. Private Lige was there and he lived, but an agent of the Standard Oil Company smothers his agrarian narrative. Manolo Prat loses everything.

Notes

1. C. Vann Woodward, *Tom Watson: Agrarian Rebel* (New York: Macmillan, 1938) 72.
2. Elbert Hubbard, "A Message to Garcia," (East Aurora: The Roycrofters, 1913) 7. Reduced facsimile, *American Heritage*, February, 1971, 107.
3. Hubbard, 13.
4. Robert L. Beisner, "'Commune' in East Aurora," *American Heritage*, February, 1971, 109. Beisner describes the meteoric success of "Message," which is now estimated to have been reprinted over a hundred million times. He notes that a copy was given to every member of the United States Marine Corps. During the 1904 Russo-Japanese War the czar's officers carried "Message" into battle. The Japanese outdid the Russians by giving copies to enlisted men as well.
5. Jules Zanger, "A Message to Garcia: The Subsidized Hero," *Mid-Continental American Studies*, Spring, 1979, 99.
6. Beisner, 108.
7. Arthur Wallace Dunn, *From Harrison to Harding* (New York: Putnam's Sons, 1922) 232.
8. Theodore Roosevelt's reported commentary regarding populists, as attributed to him by Willis J. Abbot editor of the Democratic New York *Journal*, is as follows:

The sentiment now animating a large proportion of our people can only be suppressed as the Commune in Paris was suppressed, by taking ten or a dozen of their [Populist] leaders out, standing them against a wall, and shooting them dead. I believe it will come to that.

Although Roosevelt considered many Populist leaders to be demagogues, he heatedly denied making such an exact statement to Abbot. Source for the above is Richard Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition & the Men who Made It* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961) 220.
9. William Jennings Bryan, "Cross of Gold," *A Populist Reader*, George Tindall, ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 210.
10. Bruce Palmer, "Man Over Money," *The Southern Populist Critique of American Capitalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980) 3.
11. William Allen White, "What's the Matter with Kansas?" *A Populist Reader* George Tindall, ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1966) 196-199.

12. Robert M. LaFollette, "The Danger Threatening Representative Government," Speech. Mineral Point, Wisconsin, July 4, 1897 <http://www.shsw.wisc.edu/wisconsinstories/documents/LaFollette/robertm.htm>
13. Alfred Chandler, *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977) 286.
14. John Hill Jr., *Gold Bricks of Speculation* (Chicago: Lincoln Book Concern, 1903).
15. Hill, 25.
16. Stephen Crane, *Tales of War*, The University of Virginia Edition of the Works of Stephen Crane Volume VI (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1970) 203.
17. Crane, 203.
18. Crane, 204.
19. Crane, 201.
20. Crane, 202.
21. Crane, 202.
22. Crane, 214.
23. Crane, 215.
24. Crane, 216
25. Crane, 217.
26. Crane, 218.
27. Crane, 220.
28. R.W. Stallman, *Stephen Crane: A Biography* (New York: George Braziller, 1968) 425.
29. William Crisman, "Distributing the News: War Journalism as a Metaphor for Language in Stephen Crane's Fiction," *Studies in American Fiction*, Vol.30 No.2 Autumn, 2002, 211.
30. Crane, 220-221.
31. Crane, 221.
32. Crane, 180.
33. Chandler, 325.
34. Crane, 180.
35. Stallman, 396.
36. Crane, 183.
37. Crane, 182.

38. Crane, 180.
39. Crane, 187.
40. Crane, 191-192.
41. Crane, 193.
42. John Clendenning, "Prat Falls: A Revisionist Reading of 'The Clan of No-Name,'" *Stephen Crane Studies*, Vol.9 No.1, Spring, 2000, 2-8.

In this essay, Clendenning looks at Crane's choice of the name "Prat":

Prat is also strangely inappropriate as a Cuban name, since Pratt (usually spelled with a double "t") is an old Yankee name . . . There is also an echo of Prat in Platt—the name of Orville H. Platt, a powerful Republican U.S. Senator from Connecticut and a staunch supporter of McKinley's policies toward Cuba before, during, and after the Spanish-American War.

If Clendenning is right, then it is ironic that Crane has associated Manolo with the Platt Amendment. Inserted into the Cuban Constitution in 1902, the Amendment stipulated that the United States could unilaterally intervene in Cuban foreign affairs.

43. Hubbard, 7.
44. Crane, 132.
45. Crane, 135.
46. Crane, 135.

DAVID KRAMER is a Fellow at the Nazareth College Center for Public History. He has taught American Literature at the Rochester Institute of Technology and St. John Fisher College. His previous *WLA* publication was "Infirm Soldiers in the Cuban War of Theodore Roosevelt and Richard Harding Davis."