

Sunny Tropic Scenes: U.S. Travel Writers in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba

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in *American Travel Writing and Empire*, ed. Susan Castillo and David Seed, Liverpool University Press, April 2009.

Our flag's unfurled to every breeze
From dawn to setting sun;
We have fought in ev'ry clime and place
Where we could take a gun;
In the snow of far-off Northern lands
And in sunny tropic scenes;
You will find us always on the job—
The United States Marines.

(from the Marine Corps Anthem)

In the fifteenth century Guantanabó, in eastern Cuba, was the name of a river, of the bay into which the river flowed, of a town on the river, and of a political province, all located within the Indian *cacicazgo*, or chiefdom, of Baitiquirí.¹ Columbus called this huge bay Puerto Grande, but the indigenous Taino name survived in the hispanised form of Guantánamo. There was little Spanish settlement in the area, so English pirates frequented the bay during the seventeenth century, anglicising that name as Walthenham. When Admiral Vernon landed troops there under General Wentworth in July 1741 in an unsuccessful attempt to take the city of Santiago de Cuba, he called the bay after the Duke of Cumberland, third son of George II, a name which didn't take either.² In 1904, when the U.S.A. negotiated the lease which allowed it to establish a coaling station on the bay, that station became known as the Guantanamo Bay Naval Base, an Anglo-Saxon country having no truck with suspiciously foreign accents. From the military abbreviation GTMO, the base is now often referred to simply as Gitmo.

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The idea that U.S. travel writing about Cuba might have a political dimension is unlikely to prove a challenge for most readers, so prominent has been the political antagonism between the two states over the last half century. Indeed, ever since the creation of the U.S.A., Cuba has caught the national eye, sometimes as an object of desire, sometimes as an irritant, but usually as something that requires an investigative trip, preferably during the northern winter. The relatively short and easy passage between the countries has ensured a constant stream of U.S. writers visiting Cuba to

¹ See the 1841 map by José María de la Torre reproduced in Leví Marrero, *Cuba: Economía y Sociedad*, vol. 1, Río Piedras: Editorial San Juan, 1972, p. 109.

² See Edward Vernon, *The Vernon Papers*, ed. B. McL. Ranft, London: Printed for the Navy Records Society, 1958.

extol its tropical beauty, anathematise its colonial rulers, converse with its revolutionary heroes, or criticise its experiments in socialism.

A very broad overview of U.S. travel writing about Cuba might identify four major periods, eight kinds of writers, five themes, and four itineraries. Between 1776 and 1868 Cuba is a safe, tropical island to the south. Visitors often travel for health reasons and because of economic links, some writing about their experiences. The period between 1868 and 1898 is dominated by the island's struggle for independence, especially in 1868-78 and 1895-98, when increasing numbers of journalists and other writers visit to report on the insurgency and eventually on one of the theatres of the Spanish-American War. Between 1899 and 1958, Cuba becomes a major centre for U.S. tourism, which brings an associated travel writing, but periods of political unrest continue to encourage the documentary tradition. Since the Revolution, Cuba has been a popular destination for travel writers, many with political agendas, some not.³

Across these periods books on Cuba are produced by established writers with an established interest in matters Hispanic (William Cullen Bryant, Joseph Hergesheimer, A. Hyatt Verrill)⁴; by journalists with longish term relationships to the island (Richard Harding Davis, Ruby Hart Phillips, Herbert Matthews); by scientists—usually archaeologists, naturalists, or anthropologists (Mark Harrington, Nelson Lowry, Oscar Lewis); by newspaper reporters on particular assignments (James J. O'Kelly, Sylvester Scovel, Ralph Paine); by travel writers who alight on Cuba as an interesting destination (Richard Henry Dana, Samuel Hazard, Basil Woon); by political tourists (Demoticus Philatheles, Amiri Baraka, C. Wright Mills); by long-term residents often with business interests (Edwin Atkins, Caroline Wallace, James Adams); and by U.S. soldiers who leave accounts of their experiences (Theodore Roosevelt, Frederick Funston, John Bigelow, Jr.).⁵ Themes are almost impossible to categorise, but various interests might be distinguished: the environmental interest in tropical difference, the anthropological in the nature of the population, the touristic in things to do and see, the political in how things work or don't, and the military in the details of campaigns. Many travel books will contain several, sometimes all, of these themes.

Travel writers have usually taken one of four itineraries: Havana, in the island's north-west, is almost always the first port of call, and sometimes the only one; Havana plus involves side trips to other places in the western region, such as Matanzas and Pinar del Río; journalistic and military expeditions will often have been exclusively to the east—home to revolution and invasion; and occasional writers will have deliberately been to all parts of the island. Distance travelled should not necessarily be equated with the quality of the insight—in *San Cristóbal de La Habana* Joseph Hergesheimer has great difficulty getting further than the balcony of the Hotel Inglaterra with his evening daiquiri, but his is one of the most perceptive and beautifully written of travel books. However, a willingness to travel east, to the

³ On the traffic between the U.S.A. and Cuba, including the production of travel writing, see the three books in the bibliography by Louis A. Pérez, Jr.

⁴ The names that follow are keyed to the bibliography at the end of the chapter.

⁵ This last group offers a very particular kind of relationship to Cuba, limited almost exclusively to 1898, but which produced an enormous body of writing. It is certainly not travel writing in any narrow sense, but should be seen as part of the genre because of its vibrant if often critical engagement with the island.

quarter of the island referred to as Oriente,⁶ often signifies at least a desire to look beyond the surface, to see more of Cuba, to find some ‘real’ Cuba beyond the grasp of most visitors.⁷

Of the many ways of going east in Cuba, the most archetypal is the journey from Havana to Oriente, by road or rail. As so often in travel writing, the journey away from the capital city marks a move towards something more authentic, more typical of the country, more likely to garner the kind of transcendent experience travel writing often likes to evoke. (Other travellers will arrive in eastern Cuba from the sea, or these days by air, provoking contrast rather with their point of origin.) Amiri Baraka (still then Leroi Jones) provides a classic example of this journey east in his article “Cuba Libre”, written in 1960, little more than 18 months after the triumph of the Revolution.⁸ A group of black writers and activists had been invited by the Cuban government to see what was really happening in Cuba. Baraka describes the usual round of meetings and talks in Havana, but the climax of his trip is the journey east from Havana by train to Yara (itself a resonant place where the Ten Years’ War had been proclaimed in October 1868 and where the renowned Taino leader, Hatuey, had been killed in the early sixteenth century), then by cattle truck and wagon to the Sierra Maestra for a celebration of the key anniversary in the revolutionary calendar, 26 July, the day of Fidel Castro’s 1953 attack on the Moncada Barracks in Santiago de Cuba. Baraka is assailed on the train by delegates from a Latin American youth conference, especially two Mexicans, a woman economics student, Rubi Betancourt, and a poet, Jaime Shelley, who call him a “cowardly bourgeois individualist” for his attempt to separate his writing from politics.⁹ Exhausted by the extreme heat and lack of water, Baraka then endures 24 hours out in the open. Havana, with its *cafecitos* and its conversations, contrasts with the harshness of the mountainous countryside which had provided the cradle for the Revolution. But in these mountains, on the platform, is Fidel, whose hand Baraka touches, and whose speech entrances him: “It was,” he later wrote, “a rare moment in one’s life and if the harangues of Rubi and Jaime and the others weren’t enough, this final stroke was, my head spinning with recognition, revelation, and the hot-ass sun”. The trip was, he says, “a turning point in my life”.¹⁰

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Within Oriente there are many places to visit: Santiago, Cuba’s second city; other cities of historical significance such as Baracoa and Bayamo; mountain ranges such as the Sierra Maestra and the Sierra del Cristal. And then there is Guantánamo Bay. What has happened in places colours their names for ever: Auschwitz, Wounded Knee, Hiroshima, My Lai, Sharpeville—these can never simply be places like any

⁶ Widely recognised as a region, even though the term is no longer part of the official provincial terminology. What used to be Oriente province is now Granma.

⁷ See Graeme Gibson, “Santiago and Beyond, 1987” [1994], in *The Reader’s Companion to Cuba*, ed. Alan Ryan, San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1997, pp. 304-318.

⁸ Imamu Amiri Baraka, [writing as Leroi Jones], “Cuba Libre”, in his *Home: Social Essays*, London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1968, pp. 11-62.

⁹ Baraka, “Cuba Libre”, p. 42.

¹⁰ Imamu Amiri Baraka, *The Autobiography of Leroi Jones*, New York: Freundlich Books, 1984, pp. 165, 163.

other. Guantánamo Bay is a huge natural feature of southeast Cuba, with a hinterland containing the city of Guantánamo and the towns of Caimanera and Boquerón. However, what has happened in recent years on the part of Guantánamo Bay which forms the U.S. Naval Base has indelibly associated the name Guantánamo with the stain of torture and illegality, even if that stain rightly belongs only to the name of Gitmo. The rest of this chapter will look more closely at examples of U.S. travel writing about Guantánamo Bay from three different moments: the exact moment of first U.S. occupation in 1898, the relatively stable period just before the collapse of the Soviet Union (1990), and the present conjuncture (2006). Perhaps appropriately, only the second case fits the conventional mould of travel writing. The first deals with a war correspondent, the third with two of an increasing number of individuals who are writing testimonials of their Gitmo experiences, in the process extending our sense of what the elastic genre of travel writing might usefully encompass.

Before 1898 not that many U.S. citizens had ever visited Guantánamo Bay: it was certainly not on any tourist route and there was no particular reason for travel writers to go there. But Guantánamo Bay was known about for its huge and safe harbour, which had been coveted for many years by U.S. naval strategists such as Alfred Thayer Mahan, so that when, during the early days of the Spanish-American War, the U.S. navy needed a coaling station to support its blockade of the Spanish fleet in the harbour at Santiago de Cuba, Guantánamo Bay—forty miles to the east—was an obvious choice and the marines were called to effect a landing.¹¹

While the First Marine Battalion was en route from Tampa, Commander Bowman McCalla took three Navy warships into the bay on 7 June 1898 to clear the outer harbour. He drove a Spanish gunboat back into the inner harbour, destroyed the Spanish blockhouse on the hill overlooking Fisherman's Point, cut the cable connections leading out of the bay, landed 80 marines under Captain M.C. Goodrell to conduct reconnaissance, selected a site for a camp, and destroyed the signalling station at Playa del Este. Scouts also made contact with local Cuban insurgents who reported on Spanish troop numbers and positions. With this advance landing party were a number of newspaper reporters, including three working for the *New York World*, Ernest McCready, Ralph Paine, and Stephen Crane. Once the main contingent of marines (commanding officer, Lt. Col. Robert W. Huntington) landed on 10 June, McCready and Paine left to cable reports from Jamaica; Crane helped the marines unload their stores and was soon ferrying messages between the marine adjutant and the wig-wag signallers, who conveyed messages to the ships by means of a single flag.

Of the 750 or so U.S. citizens who landed on the beach at Fisherman's Point, Guantánamo Bay, in June 1898, several would write accounts of their actions but only one came fully-formed as a writer.¹² Stephen Crane, still only 26, had made his name

¹¹ The first mention of the possible usefulness of Guantánamo Bay as a coaling station was by Secretary of the Navy, Gideon Welles, around 1862 (see Bradley Michael Reynolds, "Guantanamo Bay, Cuba: The History of an American Naval Base and Its Relationship to the Formulation of United States Foreign Policy and Military Strategy Toward the Caribbean, 1895-1910", Ph.D. thesis, University of Southern California, 1982, p. 22). Cf. Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Interest of America in Sea Power, Present and Future* [1897], Boston: Little, Brown, 1911 and *Letters and Papers of Alfred Thayer Mahan*, ed. Robert Seager II and Doris D. Seager, 3 vols., Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1975.

¹² Other reporters at Guantánamo Bay during the week of fighting included Sylvester Scovel, Harry Brown, and Alexander Kenealy (*New York World*), Carlton T. Chapman (*Harper's Weekly*), H.J.

with his civil war novel, *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895). In 1898 he was working for Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World*, part of a whole regiment of journalists who would produce a huge number of articles and books about this first U.S. overseas war.¹³ Crane himself produced forty-six reports from Cuba and Puerto Rico (latterly for William Randolph Hearst's *New York Journal*). From his experiences he also wrote a series of short stories, *Wounds in the Rain* (1900).¹⁴ However, this distinction between "reports" and "stories" or "tales" (used as an organisational principle by the canonical University of Virginia edition of Crane's work) is by no means straightforward or unproblematic. Crane was certainly not a reporter in any conventional sense: indeed his fellow journalists, such as McCready and Harry Scovel, often had great difficulty extracting material from him with the urgency they thought appropriate. While other reporters steamed back and forth on an almost daily basis to Haiti or Jamaica in order to beat their rivals to the news, many of Crane's Cuban dispatches were *mailed* to New York, therefore appearing several weeks after the events they described. They were already crafted pieces of writing, often little different in tone or style from what are thought of as the "short stories" or "tales" of *Wounds in the Rain*.¹⁵ Crane was, in this respect, more of a travel writer than a journalist, interested in angles and in irony, full of the kind of self-deprecation which is premised on a felt superiority to the quotidian reporter, analogous to the superiority felt by travel writers to mere tourists.¹⁶ As McCready put it, in mingled exasperation and admiration: "He was an artist from crown to heel, temperamental, undisciplined in the narrow sense of the word, careless of any interest that did not match with his own private ones, contemptuous of mere news getting or news reporting, thinking of

Wigham (*Chicago Tribune*), Thomas W. Steep (*Leslie's*), Howbert Billman (*Chicago Record*), Harry L. Beach (*Associated Press*), and at least one each from the *New York Sun* and *New York Herald*. Other first-hand accounts of the operations, beyond newspaper reports, include Carleton T. Chapman, "Operations at Guantanamo", in *Harper's Pictorial History of the War with Spain*, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1899, pp. 292-295; John H. Clifford, *History of the First Battalion of U.S. Marines*, Portsmouth N.H.: privately printed, 1930; and Frank Keeler, *Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, 1898: The Journal of Frank Keeler*, ed. Carolyn A. Tyson, Marine Corps Paper Series Number One, Quantico, Va.: Marine Corps Museum, 1967.

¹³ See Charles H. Brown, *The Correspondents' War: Journalists in the Spanish-American War*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1967, and Joyce Milton, *The Yellow Kids: Foreign Correspondents in the Heyday of Yellow Journalism*, New York: Harper & Row, 1989.

¹⁴ See Stephen Crane, *Reports of War*, The University of Virginia Edition of the Works, Volume IX, ed. Fredson Bowers, Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1971 (henceforth *RW* in text) and *Tales of War*, The University of Virginia Edition of the Works, Volume VI, ed. Fredson Bowers, Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1970 (henceforth *TW* in text).

¹⁵ On the genre issue, see Michael Robertson, *Stephen Crane, Journalism, and the Making of Modern American Literature*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1997. On Crane's Cuban reports, see William Chrisman, "'Distributing the News': War Journalism as a Metaphor for Language in Stephen Crane's Fiction", *Studies in American Fiction*, 30:2 (2002), 207-227; John Dudley, "Crane's Dispatches from Cuba: The Dynamics of Race, Class, and Professionalism in 'The Correspondents' War'", *Stephen Crane Studies*, XI/2 (2002), 11-22; and Amy Kaplan, "Black and Blue on San Juan Hill", in Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease, eds., *Cultures of United States Imperialism*, Durham: Duke UP, 1993, pp. 219-236.

¹⁶ See the characterisation by Christopher Benfey, *The Double Life of Stephen Crane: A Biography*, London: Vintage, 1994, p. 79.

his *World* connection as a convenient aid rather than as one imposing sharp and instant responsibility upon him”.¹⁷

McCready and Paine returned on the morning of Sunday 12 June to find the marines reeling from twelve hours of enemy fire which had killed four of them, including the doctor. McCready had great trouble coaxing Crane onto their boat, the *Three Friends*, in order to take down his firsthand account of the fighting. The resulting report, “In the First Land Fight Four of Our Men are Killed”, is one of plainest pieces of reporting found under Crane’s name, though in fact it should probably be credited to McCready.¹⁸ According to Ralph Paine, when Crane objected to what he thought was probably being done his dictated prose, McCready responded: “I dropped a few adjectives here and there, Steve... This has to be *news*, sent at cable rates. You can save your flub-dub and send it to New York by mail.”¹⁹ Flub-dub is an old term for masturbation, so McCready, the reporter, was basically calling Crane, the writer, a wanker. Of course, it’s because of this flub-dub that Crane is still a leading figure in U.S. literature and McCready is only remembered by researchers obsessed with the minutiae of U.S. war journalism. Crane couldn’t be kept away long from the action and was soon back with the marines for the decisive event of this early engagement in the war.

Daunted by the Spanish attacks, Huntington wanted to abandon camp and re-embark his troops, but McCalla refused: “You were put there to hold the hill and you’ll stay there! If you are killed, I’ll come out and get your dead body.”²⁰ The Cuban allies advised that the major Spanish force in the vicinity had its headquarters at the Cuzco well, two miles southeast of Fisherman’s Point, the well providing the only fresh water nearer than the city of Guantánamo.²¹ They urged an expedition to destroy the well, to which Huntington and McCalla agreed.²² So on Tuesday 14 June Capt. George F. Elliott led 160 marines, along with Lieutenant Colonel Enrique Thomas and 50 Cubans, on a successful mission to destroy the well at Cuzco, along with the Spanish camp.²³ Short of officers, Elliott asked Crane to go along as an aide: “He accepted the duty,” Elliott reported, “and was of material aid during the action,

¹⁷ Unpublished letter from McCready to B.J.R. Stolper, quoted in R.W. Stallman, *Stephen Crane: A Biography*, rev. ed., New York: George Braziller, 1973, pp. 366-367.

¹⁸ No. 29 in Crane, *Reports of War*, pp. 128-130.

¹⁹ Ralph D. Paine, *Roads of Adventure*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1925, p. 246.

²⁰ Bowman McCalla, unpublished “Autobiography”, quoted by James Holden-Rhodes, “Crucible of the Corps”, in Jack Shulimson et al., ed., *Marines in the Spanish-American War, 1895-1899: Anthology and Annotated Bibliography*, Washington DC: History and Museums Divison, US Marine Corps, 1998, p. 71.

²¹ There were 800 Spanish troops at Cuzco: six infantry companies (64th Barcelona), a few of the 3rd Príncipe, and two companies of guerrillas (250 in total) (Charles L. McCawley, “The Guantanamo Campaign of 1898”, *Marine Corps Gazette*, I, no. 3 (September 1916), 221-242, at 237).

²² Colonel Laborde, acting as pilot on the *Marblehead*, had been sent ashore on 11 June to pass information to Huntington about Spanish troop numbers based at Cuzco and Lieutenant Colonel Enrique Thomas y Thomas suggested to Huntington on the night of the 13 June the advisability of sending a force to destroy the well (McCawley, “The Guantanamo Campaign”, 228 and 235).

²³ M. E. Murphy [and John Pomfret], *The History of Guantanamo Bay 1494-1982*, 2 vols., I, chapter 2, <http://www.nsgtmo.navy.mil/htmlpgs/gtmohistorymurphy.htm> [accessed 16 February 2006].

carrying messages to fire volleys, etc., to the different company commanders”.²⁴ By putting the Cuzco well out of commission this attack forced to Spaniards to withdraw, arguably one of the decisive actions of the short war because it bottled up in Guantánamo City the very troops which might have offered significant reinforcements to Santiago de Cuba, the main target of the U.S. invasion.²⁵ That this action should have concerned water supply was prophetic. One of the reasons that the U.S. naval base could be built in Guantánamo Bay in the first place was that the absence of fresh water had limited human settlement in the area. Predictably, water supply was the most difficult issue faced by the base until the construction of three massive desalination plants in the 1960s.

Crane’s first account of the Cuzco well fight was “The Red Badge of Courage was his Wig-Wag Flag”,²⁶ datelined Guantanamo Camp, 22 June (though Crane had left Guantánamo Bay on Friday 17 June) and published on 1 July. It reports, Crane begins by saying, “the first serious engagement of our troops on Cuban soil” (*RW*, p. 134). As the soldiers prepare themselves, Crane’s eye is taken by the contrast between the two forces. The U.S. companies “were formed”, as if they simply fell into place by habit, “their strong figures very business-like and soldierly” (*RW*, p. 135). He notes “a curious expression” in their faces, “something dreamy”, as they wonder in rather detached fashion about what the wheel of fortune will deal them. Meanwhile, the Cubans “were bustling noisily into some kind of shape,” some with shoes on their feet, others with shoes around their necks, “all according to taste” (*RW*, p. 135). The general picture is interested but by no means negative:

They were a hard-bitten, under-sized lot, most of them negroes, and with the stoop and curious gait of men who had at one time labored at the soil. They were, in short, peasants—hardy, tireless, uncomplaining peasants—and they viewed in utter calm these early morning preparations for battle. (*RW*, p. 135)

Crane then makes a further distinction within the Cubans between the “ambitious officers” who wanted to see proper drill and their reluctant charges: “The men had to be adjusted one by one at the expense of considerable physical effort, but when once

²⁴ Capt. G.F. Elliott, Letter to Lieut. Col. R.W. Huntington, 18 June 1898, reprinted in Shulimson et al, *Marines in the Spanish-American War*, pp. 124-125.

²⁵ The strongest claim is by James Holden-Rhodes: “Guantanamo Bay was the linch-pin to the entire invasion of Cuba” (“Crucible of the Corps”, p. 76); the strongest argument is in Bradley M. Reynolds, “The Impact of the Marine Assault on Guantánamo Bay and the Outcome of the Spanish-American War”, in *New Aspects of Naval History: Selected Papers from the 5th Naval History Symposium*, Baltimore: The Nautical and Aviation Publishing Company of America, 1985, pp. 145-151. Recent scholarship has tended to give a greater role than previously to the Cuban forces in this operation: Cuban insurgents certainly intercepted many Spanish messengers between Guantánamo City and Santiago (Julián Suarez Inclán, *Defensa del General Toral ante el Consejo Supremo de Guerra y Marina reunido y constituido en Sala de Justicia*, Madrid: n.p., 1899, p. 31, quoted in Reynolds, “Guantánamo Bay, Cuba”, p. 125). After the war, when General Shafter told Bowman McCalla he was surprised Spanish troops at Guantánamo Bay didn’t come to Santiago, “McCalla was delighted to tell him that a thousand Cubans he supported had established a line of outposts ringing Guantánamo Bay” and had brought him 15 couriers sent out for Santiago (in Paolo E. Coletta, *Bowman Henry McCalla: A Fighting Sailor*, Lanham: University Press of America, 1979, p. 97).

²⁶ The title doubtless added by a sub-editor keen to make the most of Crane’s reputation but ignorant as to the significance of the “red badge of courage” in the novel.

in place they viewed their new position with unalterable stolidity. Order arms? Oh, very well. What does it matter?" (RW, p. 135).

In the middle of Crane's report is a description of the "long, irregular line of men fighting the first part of the first action of the Spanish war" on a razor-backed hill under severe enemy fire. Among them is "a spruce young sergeant of marines, erect, his back to the showering bullets, solemnly and intently wig-wagging to the distant *Dolphin!*" (RW, p. 138). The man had to stand at the very top of the ridge so that his flag could appear in relief against the sky, making him a clear enemy target: "His society was at that moment sought by none. We gave him a wide berth" (RW, p. 138).

"Marines Signaling Under Fire at Guantanamo", composed in Havana later that summer, takes the wig-wag motif and develops it as a sign of the courage of the ordinary soldier.²⁷ The first part of the story concerns night-signalling with a lantern box, the second part returns to the wig-wagging on the Cuzco well expedition:

At the wild little fight at Cusco there were some splendid exhibitions of wig-wagging under fire. Action began when an advanced detachment of marines under Lieutenant Lucas with the Cuban guides had reached the summit of a ridge overlooking a small valley where there was a house, a well, and a thicket of some kind of shrub with great broad, oily leaves. This thicket, which was perhaps an acre in extent, contained the guerillas. The valley was open to the sea. The distance from the top of the ridge to the thicket was barely two hundred yards. (TW, p. 197)

Of the war reporters on this campaign, some—like Richard Harding Davis—knew Cuba quite well. Crane had set out on a filibustering mission to Cuba (the boat was wrecked), and had tried unsuccessfully to get to the island in early 1897, so the Cuban landscape was as new to him as it was to the marines: like them, his view is from the beach and camp up towards "those mysterious hills not far away" (RW, p. 135). The vegetation is unfamiliar and vaguely threatening.

This time there are two incidents of wig-wagging. First a red-headed Irishman whom Crane calls Clancy ("I think his name was Clancy—at any rate it will do to call him Clancy" (TW, p. 198)) ties his blue polka-dot handkerchief to a rifle: "It did not make a very good flag" (TW, p. 198). "We all cleared out of his neighborhood. If he wanted sole possession of any particular spot on the hill, he could have it for all we would interfere with him" (TW, p. 199). Then, when Capt. Elliott needs to signal again to the *Dolphin* to tell them to stop firing, Sergeant Quick announces that he's a signalman and also produces a blue polka-dot handkerchief: "Again we gave a man sole possession of a particular part of the ridge. We didn't want it. He could have it and welcome. If the young sergeant had had the smallpox, the cholera, and the yellow fever, we could not have slid out with more celerity" (TW, p. 199). Quick is the spruce young sergeant from the earlier report.²⁸

Usually the war correspondent, behind the front line, has his best view of the backs of the fighters and the faces of those returning wounded or defeated. Here,

²⁷ Richard Harding Davis called "Marines Signalling" (included in *Tales of War*) the finest piece of reporting to emerge from the war (Benfey, *The Double Life*, p. 247).

²⁸ John H. Quick and John Fitzgerald ("Clancy") both won the Congressional Medal of Honor for gallantry for their actions.

however, Crane can look Quick in the eye as he deliberately fails to live up to his name, thereby providing Crane with his defining image of the campaign:

I watched his face, and it was as grave and serene as that of a man writing in his own library. He was the very embodiment of tranquillity in occupation. He stood there amid the animal-like babble of the Cubans, the crack of rifles, and the whistling snarl of the bullets, and wig-wagged whatever he had to wig-wag without heeding anything but his own business. There was not a single trace of nervousness or haste. (*TW*, pp. 199-200)

As Christopher Benfey suggests, this is as close as Crane ever came to specifying his ideal of the writer: “a cool messenger of feverish events, a trafficker in codes and signals”.²⁹ But, at the moment of its articulation, this ideal must find its counter-image in the “animal-like babble” of the Cuban fighters—noisy and inefficient.

In 1899 Crane was asked by Jennie Jerome, Lady Randolph Spencer Churchill, creator and editor of a new and expensively produced journal, the *Anglo-Saxon Review*, to write a memoir about his time in Cuba. “War Memories”, in which he recaps his Cuban experiences in almost hallucinatory style, gives a third account of the fight for the Cuzco well.³⁰ In Crane’s initial report of the fight (“Red Badge”), the first-person singular makes no appearance: “It was known...” (*RW*, p. 134), “it was impossible not to fall into deepest sympathy” (*RW*, p. 135), “It would have been a fine view if one had had time” (*RW*, p. 138). He explains his presence by saying that “It was my good fortune to get leave to accompany [the mission]” (*RW*, p. 134), after which he simply includes himself in the first-person plural: “we passed pickets of Cubans” (*RW*, p. 136), “we swung up to the crest” (*RW*, p. 137). In “Marines Signaling” the first-person singular is the careful observer, but still so much the embedded reporter that he can refer to the signalmen as “my pals” (*TW*, p. 195).

“War Memories” begins with the renaming of the four correspondents on the boat, *Three Friends*, Crane referring to himself in the third person as Vernall, but the first-person singular soon comes to dominate, subjective and digressive, free with its of question marks and dashes, as if Crane is attempting to reflect the very processes of memory.³¹ Although retelling what is in earlier stories and reports, “War Memories” has much more detail and offers a seemingly open set of recollections of Crane’s feelings at the time:

In the morning I wished for some mild attack of disease, something that would incapacitate me for the business of going out gratuitously to be bombarded. But I was in an awkwardly healthy state, and so must needs smile and look pleased with my prospects. (*TW*, p. 228)

In “Red Badge”, the Cubans are included in the possessive term: marines and Cubans together form “Our fighting line” (*RW*, p. 137); and that this well offered the only water supply in the area was pointed out, Crane notes, by the Cubans (*RW*, p.

²⁹ Benfey, *The Double Life*, p. 248.

³⁰ “War Memories” appeared in a shortened version in the *Anglo-Saxon Review*, then at full length in *Wounds in the Rain*.

³¹ See Robertson, *Stephen Crane*, pp. 167-76.

134). In “War Memories” the Cubans hardly feature at all in the Cuzco well raid: simply “We were to be guided by fifty Cubans” (*TW*, p. 228), with no suggestion that they supplied the original intelligence and no description of the fighting men. Instead, in place of all that, is what Crane calls his “one truly romantic figure”: “This was a Cuban officer [identifiable as Enrique Thomas y Thomas] who held in one hand a great glittering machete and in the other a cocked revolver. He posed like a statue of victory. Afterward he confessed to me that he alone had been responsible for the winning of the fight” (*TW*, p. 231). This self-aggrandising Cuban pomposity is again made to stand in implicit contrast to the gravity and serenity of the marine wig-wagger.³²

One of the key motifs of travel writing presents the writer’s relationship to the ‘host’ population—the travelees, as they are sometimes called. The sub-genre of war reporting necessarily complicates this relationship, especially when, as in Cuba, there are two distinct sets of people to be encountered, the Spanish soldiers and their volunteers (the “guerillas” to whom Crane refers), and the Cuban insurgents, who were fighting alongside the U.S. troops and were also representative of the Cuban population being ‘rescued’—according to the popular U.S. narrative—from Spanish oppression.³³ Indeed, one of the oddities of reading war correspondents as travel writers is that they rarely have direct contact with the supposed enemy: the alien community on which they report is therefore usually either that of the troops on their ‘own’ side or that of the civilian society resident in the warzone. The complication in 1898 is that the alien community was provided by these Cuban insurgents who had been fighting the Spanish army for more than three years but who were now expected by the U.S. generals to stand back while the U.S. army took over. One of the complexities of Crane’s work about 1898 is that as his writing gained nuance and depth, his presentation of these Cuban allies became more and more one-dimensional.³⁴ Indeed, the whole body of U.S. reporters to which Crane belonged was responsible for changing the popular image of Cubans in the U.S.A. from a plucky and picturesque people fighting for their independence from Spain into a suspiciously dark-skinned set of cowards who did little to aid the brave U.S. soldiers who had come to help them in their hour of need. The individual marine is contrasted with the undifferentiated mass of Cubans; the serenity of the marine with the babble made by the Cubans. And we find the oldest contrast in the colonialist repertory: the eminently human against those humans condemned by their metaphorical company—“animal-like”.

³² In 1947 Don Enrique was respectfully interviewed at the scene of the Cuzco well fight by Marine Major Arthur J. Burks: “Recall in Cuba”, *The Leatherneck*, 30, no. 12 (December 1947), 58-59.

³³ See Peter Hulme, *Rescuing Cuba: Adventure and Masculinity in the 1890s*, College Park, MD: Latin American Studies Center, 1996.

³⁴ To some extent Crane was reflecting the views of the soldiers he was living alongside: “The attitude of the American soldier toward the insurgent is interesting. So also is the attitude of the insurgent toward the American soldier. One must not suppose that there was any cheering enthusiasm at the landing of our army here. The American soldiers looked with silent curiosity upon the ragged brown insurgents and the insurgents looked stolidly, almost indifferently, at the Americans” (*RW*, p. 147); and “It becomes necessary to speak of the men’s opinion of the Cubans. To put it shortly, both officers and privates have the most lively contempt for the Cubans. They despise them. They came down here expecting to fight side by side with an ally, but this ally has done little but stay in the rear and eat army rations, manifesting an indifference to the cause of Cuban liberty which could not be exceeded by some one who had never heard of it” (*RW*, p. 163). Crane knew otherwise from his experience at Guantánamo Bay, but doesn’t say so.

Along with the development of this stereotype of the Cubans, the Spanish enemy—previously the very embodiment of medieval barbarism—was rehabilitated: the U.S.A. and Spain became two ‘great powers’ recognising each other as honourable opponents. One popular token of this mutual recognition was a letter written by a repatriated Spanish soldier. Just before he left his prison in Guantánamo this Spanish soldier wrote to the U.S. victors to thank them for their kind treatment: “You fought us as men, face to face, and with great courage... a quality we had not met with during the three years we have carried on this war against a people without religion, without morals, without conscience, and of dubious origin”.³⁵ That phrase “of dubious origin” was nicely gauged to respond to U.S. uncertainties about the kind of people they had been fighting alongside, uncertainties which contributed to the very limited form of independence that Cuba was granted in 1904, a condition of which was that the U.S.A. gained a lease on the lower part of Guantánamo Bay along with the right to construct a coaling station there.

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After the 1959 Revolution there was a rash of travel books about Cuba, all eager to report on what this new society looked like. By the mid-1960s, the novelty had worn off and ideological dividing lines had been clearly drawn: there were few U.S. travel books about Cuba and most writers found what they knew they would find, for good or evil. Appearing in 1992, Tom Miller’s *Trading with the Enemy: A Yankee Travels Through Castro’s Cuba* was therefore the first U.S. travel book about Cuba for some years: it was also a remarkably thorough, even-handed, and well-written one. As Miller tells it, the idea for the book dated back to 1986. He visited Havana in 1987 and 1989, setting up an extended stay from mid-1990 to early 1991; he was there again for a few weeks in early 1992. As a resident alien speaking Spanish, Miller had the status, the time, and the ability to engage with many Cubans in different walks in life and in different parts of Cuba. One section of the book deals with Oriente: “Everyone assured me that when I got to the countryside I’d see the real Cuba”.³⁶ So he flies to Santiago and travels around the south-east of the island, from Manzanillo to Baracoa. Miller’s timing was immaculate: because U.S.-Cuba tensions were relatively loose, he was given a privileged tour of the Cuban military post just beyond the Gitmo fence shortly after he had visited Gitmo itself (though having had to return to the U.S.A. in order to do so).

As throughout his book, Miller’s tone remains cool and detached as he recounts the bizarreness of Gitmo: the 3,048 mile trip from outside the gates on the Cuban side to the airstrip on the U.S. side; the 1992 rent paid by the U.S.A. (in cheques uncashed by Castro) of fourteen cents per acre; the one and only McDonald’s in Cuba; the large community of self-exiled Cuban workers who live on the base. Miller gives a brief history of the marine landing, the Platt Amendment, and the nature of the agreement:

Cuba has ‘ultimate sovereignty’ over the base, says the treaty, but the lease expires only when both parties agree to abrogate it or when the navy abandons

³⁵ Quoted in Gerald F. Linderman, *The Mirror of War: American Society and the Spanish-American War*, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1974, p. 146.

³⁶ Tom Miller, *Trading with the Enemy: A Yankee Travels Through Castro’s Cuba* [1992], New York: Basic Books, 1996, p. 42 (henceforth *TE* in text).

the land. In plain language, the navy has the base as long as it wants. As a result, the United States is in the enviable position of an imperious tenant who establishes the rent, controls the lease, and ignores the landlord. (*TE*, p. 203)

But he is also able to recount the unusual personal experience of walking the fence line and talking to Lance Corporal Hedges and his partner, as well as Lieutenant Joseph Dennison, platoon commander Orlando Ortiz, and Gitmo's commanding officer, John Boyd. One marine sentry tells him that the Cubans have war games once a month: "They're pretty good. They're getting professional... Almost as good as our army". Dennison concurs: "They're not much different from us... They just work for a different boss" (*TE*, p. 204).

As his title suggests, and in keeping with travel writing traditions, Miller is particularly interested in the trading of ideas and goods and people across various dividing lines, the so-called cactus fence between Gitmo and Cuba providing an obvious example. He chooses to crosscut his encounters when constructing his text, so that the division between Cuba and Gitmo is not simply repeated in his prose.

Earlier in the twentieth century Gitmo had been the area's major employer with thousands of Cubans working on the base, and thousands more servicing the troops' leisure needs in the bars and brothels of Caimanera. After relations broke down in the 1960s, "an informal agreement"—Miller notes—"allowed the existing Cuban commuters to continue working on the U.S. base, with no new hires". When *Trading with the Enemy* was published, twenty-seven Cuban citizens worked at Gitmo: "They are the last unfrozen trickle in our icy relations" (*TE*, p. 205). In classic travel writing mode, Miller tells the background story before recounting a conversation with a named individual, Santiago Pérez, who is retiring after forty-three years of commuting to the base, working as a sandblaster. Miller watches as Pérez's friends help him drag out the clothes, stereos, and VCRs he's bought with his dollar salary, booty only allowed into Cuba after a worker terminates his contract. In June 2006 there are just two Cubans still working in Gitmo but living outside the base.

Miller is equally alert to trading in the other direction. He recalls the twenty-nine Gitmo servicemen kidnapped by Raúl Castro and the three U.S. servicemen's sons who temporarily joined the guerrillas in 1957. But his best example is provided by Nydia Sarabia, the woman who had organised Graham Greene's trip to Santiago in 1957. She tells him that many of the arms used to defeat Batista came from Gitmo, supplied via the Caimanera prostitutes who would ask for payment in rifles, bullets, and grenades, continuing a tradition established by their Havana counterparts in the 1890s, and undoing the unofficial aid that the U.S.A. was giving to Batista at the same time (*TE*, pp. 210, 209).

Before his trip east Miller has spoken to Dr Olga Miranda, "a high-ranking expert with the Ministry of Foreign Relations in Havana" (*TE* p. 209), in order to learn about official Cuban policy with respect to the base. The interview with Miranda is placed between those with the Cuban exile, Harry, and a civilian construction co-ordinator, Jack Neal, both of whom live on the base. From Miranda he gets the expected line: "We see it as an occupation... Since the Revolution there has been violence and provocation along the border. Murders!" Her body shook with fright." But he also elicits a smile, always a mark of success for a travel writer talking to a government official:

"We want a proper solution to eliminate this major point of contention. It is an important item on the agenda between the two countries. Legally, it's ours.

Since the Revolution, not one rent check has been cashed. To us, they are not valid.”

“Excuse me, but I understand the 1959 check *was* cashed.”

“Oh well.” She smiled. “We didn’t have a clear idea in the first months of the Revolution.” (*TE*, p. 209)

From Colonel Solar of the Brigada Fronteriza, Miller gets the Cuban tour. John Boyd, commanding officer at Gitmo, had been presented neutrally. They had met in his office: some of his words are quoted, but no description or opinion is offered. The impression is of a short and business-like encounter, the commanding officer doing his public relations duty, but no more than that. In contrast, Solar is waiting for Miller at 7 a.m., serves him coffee (a telling touch of hospitality where one would expect a secretary or lower rank to do the serving), and gives him a detailed personal tour of the area, including a boat trip to Caimanera. His reward is a warm pen portrait:

We chatted about Cuba’s war vets who had served in Africa (he had put in two years in Angola himself), about the rivalry between Havana and Santiago de Cuba, and Guantánamo’s chances in the upcoming baseball season. Solar was a career man with low-key pride in the military, its accomplishments, its professionalism. He was born in 1938, the year Cuba’s Communist Party became legalized. Any country would be proud to have a soldier of his calibre. (*TE*, p. 211)

They drive to a hill called Malones, which the Cubans refer to as El Mirador, the U.S. navy as Castro’s bunker. This is the land which the U.S.A. tried unsuccessfully to have included in the original lease on the grounds that the base would be vulnerable to attack from such high ground. Solar points out all the main features of the base, “accurate down to specific location and even name” (*TE*, p. 211). Miller is even taken deep into the underground bunker which acts as command centre, with its bas relief topographical map of the base. “The Cuban military knew the base better than most Americans living there” (*TE*, p. 212), Miller concludes.

The Brigada Fronteriza facilities match those on Gitmo: on the U.S. side health club, five outdoor movie theatres, scuba diving, golf course, library (*TE*, pp. 204-5); on the Cuban side gym, pool, rec hall, bar, sauna, squash and basketball courts, library (*TE*, p. 213). U.S. Desert Shield exercises are matched by Cuban Shield manoeuvres in response to increased activity at the base.

Although his tone towards Solar is warm, Miller is careful to retain his objectivity. They cross to Caimanera through the waters Cubans swim in trying to reach the base, “but the colonel belittled the phenomenon. ‘Only eight or ten people a year try that,’ he said, off by a factor of fifteen or so, according to the U.S. statistics. ‘Mainly they’re people having trouble with the law’” (*TE*, p. 213). But Solar is allowed the last word on the politics of the situation when Miller asks him what he would say if he could sit down and talk with his U.S. counterparts:

“I don’t want to talk with them,” he answered in measured tones. “It’s our property. Our land. It’s not a real border. I would talk with them when they treat us with respect and in a harmonious manner. When the United States realizes that the land is ours, we’ll welcome it back into our heart.” (*TE*, p. 212)

The overall impression conveyed by Miller's account of Guantánamo Bay is of shadow-boxing between the U.S. and Cuban forces, both knowing that overt conflict is unlikely, but both well-prepared for any eventuality. The only recent violent incident Miller has to recount is the "code red" hazing of a marine private in Gitmo in 1986, which was turned by Aaron Sorkin into his play, *A Few Good Men* (1989), and then into a film starring Demi Moore, Tom Cruise, and Jack Nicholson. The recent history of Gitmo makes such a story look as if it belongs to an altogether more innocent age.

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The first indication that Gitmo might have an alternative function to the routine servicing of U.S. ships came in the early 1990s when tens of thousands of refugees from Haiti were temporarily housed there in appalling conditions, on the site of what later became Camp X-Ray. It was in litigation regarding these Haitian refugees that the U.S. government of George H. W. Bush first formulated its legal position that the Constitution did not apply at Gitmo, a position adopted by George W. Bush until the Supreme Court decision of 29 June 2006.³⁷ Little writing seems to have emerged from the Haitian refugee experience beyond the terrifying first-person account by Yolanda Jean (collected by Paul Farmer) and the story of the interpreter, Nikòl Payen.³⁸ In 1994-95, 30,000 Cuban refugees were held in the same place, in similar conditions (though many of them eventually made it the U.S.A., unlike most of the Haitians, who were returned to Haiti). Then, in early 2002 the first shipments of so-called enemy combatants began arriving at Gitmo, housed in the hastily constructed Camp X-Ray. The pictures of these prisoners being wheeled on trolleys, dressed in orange overalls, shackled and goggled, left a lasting impression on the eyes of the world. Camp X-Ray was soon abandoned, replaced by the modified shipping containers of Camp Delta, and subsequently supplemented by further specialist installations.

The amount of writing now emerging from the camps at Gitmo has become a veritable torrent. Many of the released prisoners have written accounts in the form of legal depositions, essays, or books; and some of the U.S. personnel employed at Gitmo have also begun to tell the story of their experiences. Erik Saar was an army sergeant with a knowledge of Arabic who supported the intelligence and interrogation operations at Camp Delta as a linguist and interpreter. James Yee was a Muslim chaplain at Gitmo. Their books might not fit the conventional definition of travel writing, but they both tell of travel to another place, recount what was experienced there, and speak of return to their home country, just as most travel writers do.³⁹

³⁷ Michael Ratner and Ellen Ray, *Guantánamo: What the World Should Know*, White River Junction (VT): Chelsea Green Publishing Company, 2004, p. xv.

³⁸ Paul Farmer, "Pestilence and Restraint: Guantánamo, Aids, and the Logic of Quarantine", in *Pathologies of Power: Health, Human Rights, and the New War on the Poor*, Berkeley: UC Press, 2003, pp. 51-90, and Nikòl Payen, "Something in the Water... Reflections of a People's Journey", in *The Butterfly's Way: Voices from the Haitian Diaspora in the United States*, ed. Edwidge Danticat, New York: Soho, 2001, pp. 66-82.

³⁹ Erik Saar and Viveca Novak, *Inside the Wire: A Military Soldier's Eyewitness Account of Life at Guantánamo*, New York: The Penguin Press, 2005 (henceforth *IW* in text); and James Yee (with

Travel writing often struggles to keep touch with travel's etymological connection with *travail*: Saar and Yee, especially the latter, have no problem in that regard. Neither went to Gitmo as a writer and so their books are genuinely retrospective accounts, aided in unspecified ways by their journalistic co-authors. Like many travel accounts, their stories tell of growing misgivings with the situation in which they find themselves, leading to a delayed and obstructed return home where they finally opt to write about their experiences as a way of bringing their concerns to public attention.

Both writers start by telling of fairly conventional U.S. backgrounds. Saar was a law-abiding Christian from Pennsylvania with a degree in marketing, working as a sales rep with UPS, with a wife he'd married at 19, two young kids, a father who'd served in Vietnam and a cousin who'd fought in the Gulf—but with a yen to work in intelligence. So when he joined the army, it sent him to language school for two years of Arabic. He was posted to Gitmo in December 2002. Yee was a third-generation American whose grandparents emigrated from China in the 1920s. He grew up in New Jersey, then attended West Point. His father and two brothers had also served in the army. Yee was originally Lutheran but became Muslim after his first spell in the army. After four years of intensive study in Syria, he rejoined the army in order to become one of its first Muslim chaplains. He was posted to Gitmo in November 2002.

At the moment of Tom Miller's visit, what in retrospect must seem to U.S. forces like a relatively mild enmity permitted little official contact between Gitmo and Cuba at all, leaving Miller to suggest ways in which the world of Gitmo mirrored and was mirrored by the Cuban world outside its fence, complicating the idea of the enemy. Writers often became fascinated by the shady contact zone where the two enemy worlds *did* connect with each other, and they took a special interest in the relatively few people who were ambiguously placed, those who had crossed the cactus curtain, as he himself was able to do. In the very different world of twenty-first century Gitmo the main enemy is not across the fence but within the gates, held in prison as enemy combatants. Ironically, though, while the the political dividing line is now even starker—between prisoners and U.S. military personnel supposedly representing, respectively, the terrorism associated with Islamic extremism and the civilisation of the West—there is no equivalent physical dividing line to the cactus curtain between Gitmo and Cuba. An interrogation camp needs contact, however unsavoury the captors might find it, and that need for contact has resulted in serious breaches between the camp guards, for whom the enmity is usually absolute, and the interrogators and linguists, who could not function without close contact with the prisoners. Erik Saar notes a further distinction:

As fraught with tensions as the relationship between the guards and the interrogators was, the guards reserved a special loathing for linguists. They didn't trust us because only we could understand what the detainees were saying, and they tended to think of us as sympathizers, a term at Gitmo that included anyone who betrayed any signs of compassion or empathy for the captives, or talked to them a little too long. (*IW*, p. 73)

Distrusted by the guards, Saar begins to listen to the prisoners' stories and to ask himself questions. Why did some prisoners never go to interrogations? Could some of the prisoners have been wrongly arrested? Was it right to treat the prisoners so brutally? Why did so many suicide attempts go unreported? Could the war on terror be counter-productive? His turning point, the moment when final disillusion sets in, comes when he witnesses the use of sexual provocation to demoralise a prisoner (*IW*, pp. 222-230). An interrogator called "Brooke" rubs her breasts against the prisoner. She then pretends to be having a period, stains her knickers with red marker pen, unbuttons her trousers and places her hand in her pants, bringing it out with what looks like blood on it, which she wipes on the prisoner's face, to his utter horror. At this moment, Saar says:

I felt as if I had lost something. We lost something. We lost the high road. We cashed in our principles in the hope of obtaining a piece of information. And it didn't even fucking work... There was no honor in what we had just done. We were grasping and in doing so our tactics were way out of bounds. What we did was the antithesis of what the United States is supposed to be about. (*IW*, p. 228).

As an Arabic-speaking Muslim, James Yee probably always had more in common with the prisoners than he did with most of the other military personnel at Gitmo. He recounts the favourite pastime of the latter with more than a hint of distaste:

When the long days finally came to an end, most troopers rebelled against the heat and exhaustion and gave in to the need to blow off steam. They found solace in alcohol, and as the night became bright with stars and the mosquitoes began their symphony, the base became transformed from an intense combat zone to just another tropical island in the Caribbean. (*FGC*, p. 87)

Yee is soon disturbed by witnessing the lengths that guards will go to disrupt the prisoners' prayers and the deliberate mishandling of their Korans (*FGC*, pp. 110-112). The rules were being openly violated, he says, "and nobody seemed to care" (*FGC*, p. 113). Like Saar, he sees a contradiction between official images of the prisoners as dangerous terrorists and the people he actually talks to on the cell blocks (*FGC*, p. 65).

Yee's nemesis appears as Captain Jason Orlich, head of JDOG S-2 section (physical security), who had started keeping Yee and other Muslim military personnel under surveillance:

As time went on, what began as minor suspicions grew into something far more serious. The accusations were retold and exaggerated in backyards and on the beaches during the hot Cuban evenings, fueled by the boredom of restless young soldiers and discount vodka. Some troopers adopted names for us: "the Muslim clique" and, far more disturbing, Hamas. (*FGC*, p. 131)

Eventually, on a trip back to the U.S.A., Yee was arrested. A memorandum signed by Gitmo's commanding officer, Major General Geoffrey Miller, authorising his arrest, said he was suspected of mutiny and sedition, aiding the enemy, spying, and espionage, all crimes which carry the death penalty (*FGC*, p. 145). He was widely

portrayed in the U.S. media as having spearheaded a terrorist infiltration of the military (*FGC*, pp. 166-7, 182-3). Despite the absence of any evidence against him, Yee was held in solitary confinement in the consolidated naval brig in Charleston for ten weeks before being charged with taking classified information to his housing quarters and transporting classified material without the proper container, matters usually dealt with administratively (*FGC*, p. 161). Charges of adultery and downloading pornography onto a government computer were added for good measure (*FGC*, p. 179). Once the facts of the case became known, the *New York Times* wrote of “the incompetence and mean-spiritedness of [the] prosecution” (*FGC*, p. 198), now widely seen as purely vindictive. Yee was found guilty on these minor charges by his commanding officer. This verdict was overturned, equivocally, on appeal, though the military authorities clearly failed to respect the final verdict, leading Yee to resign from the army at the beginning of 2005. Commenting on the arrests of Yee and his two Muslim colleagues, Saar notes: “Ultimately, what they went through was a lot like what the detainees have had to endure: presumptive guilt and imprisonment based on suspicion rather than proof” (*IW*, p. 239).

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If the books by Saar and Yee can be considered as travel writing, as I’m suggesting, then can they be considered travel writing about *Cuba*, like their predecessors discussed earlier? To the extent to which that is a legal question about the status of Gitmo, it lies beyond the bounds of this essay.⁴⁰ Phenomenologically, however, the answer might be that Gitmo clearly offers what is in effect a small U.S. city and military outpost, but one set within a general Cuban environment. Apart from the Cuban TV stations which are broadcast into Gitmo for the benefit of the Cubans who have now moved permanently on to the base, that environment makes its presence felt principally through climate, flora, and fauna.⁴¹

The ideal of the military outpost or colonial enclave has often been autonomy from the locality in which it’s situated, and Gitmo has perhaps come as close as any place in history to achieving this autonomy. The base has its McDonalds and Starbucks (now both plural), which obviously distinguish it from its general Cuban setting, but it is also completely independent of its locality for food and water and almost for labour. Within Gitmo Camp Delta takes autonomy from the local to a new level. It’s constructed entirely from imported materials—turning a tidy profit for Halliburton—and it’s *designed* to cut its prisoners off as completely as possible from the larger environment they inhabit. To use Merleau-Ponty’s term, which Edward Casey quotes in his discussion of the relationship between lived bodies and their

⁴⁰ On the legal question, see Amy Kaplan, “Homeland Insecurities: Reflections on Language and Space”, *Radical History Review*, 85 (2003), 82-93; David Rose, *Guantánamo: America’s War on Human Rights*, London: Faber and Faber, 2004; Amy Kaplan, “Where Is Guantánamo?”, *American Quarterly*, 57/3 (2005), 831-858.

⁴¹ It’s important to resist the idea that Gitmo is somehow *unreal* because it has rearranged its landscape so drastically: the military place is just as real as any other: see John B. Jackson’s classic essay, “Learning about Landscapes”, in his *The Necessity for Ruins and Other Topics*, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980, pp. 11-17. Part of that military landscaping sees a hill on Gitmo named after Stephen Crane.

environments,⁴² the prisoners are denied the “operative intentionality” of the region in which they live, most obviously when they experience sensory deprivation and immobilisation, but even on a daily basis without those aids. The U.S. personnel at Gitmo are obviously not immobilised in the same way, although both Saar and Yee note that the camp becomes a prison for the guards as well as for the prisoners, with stays of duty extended sine die with no written orders issued and personnel having to find their own replacements if they want to leave: “Ironically,” Saar notes, “what was happening was that many of the camp personnel were getting a taste of the way the detainees probably felt – the uncertainty and the anxiety about whether we’d be able to leave Cuba, the sense of complete powerlessness that goes with not knowing when a really bad ordeal is going to end” (*IW* 203).

In some ways Saar and Yee—like all U.S. personnel at Gitmo—now replicate one of the commonest tourist experiences in the Caribbean: they fly into an enclave where all their needs are met so that they can avoid any contact with the rest of the island on which they are notionally staying.⁴³ Both writers see a tension between the splendour of the setting and purposes of Gitmo’s built environment, apparently unaware that genocide and slavery have flourished as readily in sunny tropic scenes as in more temperate climes to north and south. This is Saar’s first view from inside Camp Delta:

In the distance straight ahead, about half a mile away, stretched the gorgeous vista of the clear blue Caribbean shimmering in the morning sun, the tropical paradise of Guantánamo Bay. But in the near and middle distance lay a Halliburton-built prison camp of drab off-white metal structures resembling double-wide trailers. The ground cover was gravel and dust. A prison camp where a Club Med should have been. (*IW* 45)

Both writers tend to offer their experience of Gitmo as a *betrayal* of this tropical paradise, a betrayal of the natural qualities of the place which, in some unspecified way, stands for the betrayal of their illusions about their own country. This could be a tricky political point since it might be taken as implying that Guantánamo Bay’s natural qualities would be restored through its return to Cuban sovereignty. Yee avoids this difficulty by investing the whole of the island with this sense of betrayal, here pictured on his arrival from Florida but foreshadowing his subsequent disillusion and psychological suffering:

Green and verdant, the Bahamas are outlined in a flawless white ribbon of sand, packed with tourists. Cuba, in comparison, is withered and sun baked, with a jagged shoreline. The most common vegetation is cactus and the dead remains of trees that once decorated the island but have become hollow, clawlike sculptures that line the roads, holding tight to the dry soil. (*FGC* 5)

⁴² Edward S. Casey, “How to Get from Space to Place in a Fairly Short Stretch of Time: Phenomenological Prolegomena”, in *Senses of Place*, ed. Steven Field and Keith H. Basso, Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1996, pp. 13-52, at 22.

⁴³ See Mimi Sheller, *Consuming the Caribbean: from Arawaks to Zombies*, London: Routledge, 2003, pp. 36-70; and Ian Gregory Strachan, *Paradise and Plantation: Tourism and Culture in the Anglophone Caribbean*, Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002.

Cuba's partial deforestation is certainly worthy of mention, but Yee has flown around the eastern end of the island, seeing only a fraction of the whole (the west is much greener), and in any case the coral islands of the Bahamas—even should one want to see them as an ideal—could hardly be described as “green and verdant”. But Gitmo—allowed to stand metonymically for Cuba—is paradise betrayed and so the whole island must be rendered as desert.

The association of the Caribbean in general with the idea of the terrestrial paradise has a long history. When Columbus arrived back in the familiar landscape of the Azores after his 1492 voyage west, his first comparison was between the bad weather he experienced there and the good weather he had had throughout his journey through the Caribbean islands. Recalling that “venerable theologians and wise philosophers” have said that the terrestrial paradise with its temperate climate is at the end of the Orient, he concludes that this must be where he has returned from.⁴⁴ The logic may not stand much scrutiny, but the implication that he has been in the neighborhood of the terrestrial paradise is inescapable.⁴⁵

As far as Cuba is concerned, the very first thing that Columbus says about the island when he lands there during his first voyage is that “that island is the most beautiful that eyes have ever seen” (*D*, p. 119). The houses are more beautiful than elsewhere, the fishing equipment is wonderful, the singing of the birds and grasshoppers delights everyone, the breezes are sweet and pleasant, the climate temperate, the mountains beautiful (*D*, pp. 121-123). There are fresh and fragrant groves of trees (*D*, p. 131). “He says that everything he saw was so beautiful that his eyes could not tire looking at such beauty [*tanta lindeza*]” (*D*, p. 131). The lands are fertile and the people on them “very gentle and very timid ... without weapons and without law” (*D*, p. 133), “very trustworthy” (*D*, p. 135). On his second voyage he put in briefly at Guantánamo Bay: “There he anchored and dined on roast fish and hutias, of which the Indians had an abundance”,⁴⁶ paradise not being complete without a barbecue, a word and practice which Columbus took back to Europe with him.

For Columbus, to find paradise was to prove he had reached the East so, for him, these were the Indies, outlying islands in the case of the Bahamas and Hispaniola, the Asian continent itself in the case of Cuba. Perhaps the sheer size of Guantánamo Bay helped persuade Columbus that Cuba really was *tierra firme*, about which he made members of his crew sign a deposition.⁴⁷ For this reason Cuba plays a special role within Columbus's orientalisising discourse. He describes Cuban houses as “made in the fashion of very large Moorish campaign tents” [*de alfaneques muy grandes*] (*D*,

⁴⁴ Christopher Columbus, *The Diario of Christopher Columbus's First Voyage to America: 1492-93 / Abstracted by Fray Bartolomé de las Casas*, ed. and trans. Oliver Dunn and James E. Kelley, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989, p. 383 (henceforth *D* in text).

⁴⁵ Columbus's certainty on this matter would harden during his third voyage when he claimed to have located the terrestrial paradise on the mainland coast close to Trinidad. On the background to Columbus's thinking about the terrestrial paradise, see Valerie I. J. Flint, *The Imaginative Landscape of Christopher Columbus*, Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992, pp. 149-181.

⁴⁶ Ferdinand Columbus, *The Life of Christopher Columbus by His Son Ferdinand*, trans. Benjamin Keen, London: The Folio Society, 1960, p. 139 (and “huttie” in the Italian version which is the nearest we have to an original: Fernando Colombo, *Le Historie della vita e dei fatti di Cristoforo Colombo*, ed. Rinaldo Caddeo, 2 vols., Milan: Edizioni “Alpes”, 1930, I, p. 303).

⁴⁷ “Informe y juramento de como Cuba era tierra firme” (*Cartas de particulares a Colón y Relaciones coetáneas*, ed. Juan Gil and Consuelo Varela, Madrid: Alianza, 1984, pp. 216-223).

pp. 120-121), where “alfaneque” is a Spanish adaptation of a Berber term. One of the mountains he sees has a further peak on top of it which he compares to “a pretty mosque” [*una hermosa mezquita*] (*D*, pp. 122-3). In order to prove that he’s reached Cathay, Columbus sends a diplomatic mission inland to seek the Great Khan, with Luis de Torres, the expedition’s Arabic speaker, as would-be interpreter, but the mission predictably finds no use for his language skills. It is one of small ironies of history that so many Arabic speakers now find themselves in Cuba. Luis de Torres was just 510 years too early to get a job with U.S. intelligence.

Although neither Saar nor Yee remarks on it, their view of Gitmo’s natural setting is echoed—even parodied—by the prisoners themselves. In response to concerns over the treatment of prisoners at Gitmo, the U.S. authorities brought in psychiatric technicians, whose idea of looking after the prisoners’ mental health was to broadcast formulaic prerecorded questions, to which, according to Saar, the prisoners evolved an equally formulaic response: “I’m sleeping well; I’m eating well; I don’t have nightmares; and I don’t want to hurt anyone, including myself. This place is paradise” (*IW* 182). This place is paradise. Given the overwhelming heat, the restrictions on movement, the absence of views, the physical and psychological torture, this must count as both a nicely sarcastic comment about the positioning of Gitmo within the tourist paradise of the Caribbean, and a knowing reflection on the Middle Eastern origins of the word, from *pairidaeza* (in Avestan—the ancient Iranian language), meaning a walled enclosure.

*

Looking to encapsulate his experience, Saar ventures this: “Take a rat, make it uglier and more possumlike, and there you have the unofficial mascot of Guantánamo Bay” (*IW*, p. 33). The indigenous population of Cuba called them *hutías*, and Columbus feasted on them when he stopped at Guantánamo Bay on his second voyage, probably at what subsequently became known as Fisherman’s Point, just where Stephen Crane set foot on Cuban soil along with the U.S. marines in June 1898, and where Saar, Yee, and all the prisoners go ashore from the ferry which carries them from the leeward half of the base where planes land. Columbus called the creatures “taso” or “taxo”, *tasso* being Italian for badger (*D*, p. 157) but later, against an entry in his copy of Marco Polo describing the “rats of the Pharoa” in a region peopled by Tartars, he wrote *jutia* in the margin.⁴⁸ In “War Memories”, Crane’s Cuban escort “went like rats up and down extraordinary trails” (*TW*, p. 236), presumably a reference to the local *hutías*. Linnean classification calls them *Capromys pilorides*, but—like much else in Cuban flora and fauna—they retained their indigenous name in Spanish, only to lose it to the marines, who call them banana rats because of the shape of their droppings. But the *hutías* are playing a long game: they will still be in Guantánamo Bay after the U.S. marines have long abandoned their sunny tropic scenes.

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⁴⁸ Miles H. Davidson, *Columbus Then and Now: A Life Reexamined*, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997, pp. 82-3. Las Casas also has a marginal note glossing Columbus’s “big rats” as “*hutías devian de ser*” (*D*, pp. 159, 158).

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