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 **Brazil through the Eyes of William James: Letters, Diaries, and Drawings, 1865–1866 (review)**

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REVIEW

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Reviewed by:

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This delightful and illuminating book contains many surprises, beginning with an 1865 photograph that portrays 23-year-old William James as a very cool dude. The photo was taken in Rio de Janeiro while James was recuperating from a near-fatal bout of smallpox that had left him temporarily blind. He looks insouciant, if slight, as he slouches casually for the camera in dark glasses, a panama hat and baggy trousers. This picture brings him startlingly to life, and the book brings nineteenth-century Brazil sharply into focus.

Perhaps historians of nineteenth-century Brazil are familiar with the fact that James, one of the pioneers of modern American psychology and philosophy, accompanied his professor, Louis Agassiz, on a wide-ranging scientific expedition to Brazil in 1865–66. But many Brazilianists might not be aware that he wrote letters to family and friends, kept a journal, and wrote an incomplete narrative about his eight months of travel and study in the Amazon, the Southeast and the Northeast. He also made some charming drawings of Brazilians, flora and fauna, and his expedition colleagues. These materials repose in the Houghton Library of Harvard University, where James spent his long professional career. They have been published in bits and pieces in various places, but this book brings together all of James's Brazil writings for the first time.

The wide-ranging and very informative introduction, by Maria Helena Machado, associate professor of Latin American history at USP, reflects her keen understanding of James as a young intellectual and scientist, Darwinist and observer of nineteenth-century Brazilian reality. Machado also explains Agassiz's racist theories, which James could not accept, and James's perceptions of Brazil in the context of the momentous social, cultural and political changes taking place in both North and South America at the time. Her introduction enriches the reader's experience of James's informal letters and drawings and gives them a weight that might not otherwise be obvious. These youthful effusions have little in

common with James's later works, but they amount to something more than mere juvenilia. In them we can perceive the early development of a great critical thinker, open to and stimulated by the amazing sights and events of a culture so different from his own.

James's letters home are full of details that will spark *saudades* in any Brazilianist who has been to the places he visited or had similar experiences. One passage that made me chuckle concerns a visit to Tabatinga, which, it seems, has not changed much since 1865: "Tabatinga is a flourishing city composed of 5 houses 5 hovels a flagstaff and 2 cannon. It is populated by 1 white man, the 'Administrador' of the Custom house and a number of Indians & several billion mosquitoes & flies" (78). In another letter James poignantly describes a social evening in Santarém: **[End Page 180]**

in a large palm leaf house with a beautiful hard dirt floor. There was a young negro [sic] swell who played on the lute for music. . . . It was quite a picturesque scene. . . . The only illumination was a lamp of the primeval model with a twist of yarn for wick, which smoked & flickered & sent the shadows floating over the walls, of beautiful poles and leaves. . . . It is disgusting in the last degree to live in a country & feel yourself a foreigner, to be prevented by the trammels of a foreign tongue from giving vent to the thoughts that arise in your soul. . . .

(74)

This is both a serious and a beautiful book, with numerous illustrations, photographs, maps, and informative notes next to the text, in the wide margins. It is also a bilingual edition, skillfully translated by John Monteiro, who captures James's lighthearted tone, so both Lusophone and Anglophone readers can enjoy it. It should appeal as much to James scholars as it does to Brazilianists, making it an elegant model of interdisciplinarity, for which Brazilian scholars seem to have a...

Machado, Helena P.T. (ed) and John M. Monteiro (trans). *Brazil through the Eyes of William James: Letters, Diaries, and Drawings, 1865–1866.* Cambridge and London: DRCLAS, Harvard University, 2006. 230 pp.

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