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EXOTIC SCIENCE AND DOMESTIC EXOTICISM:
THEODORE ROOSEVELT AND J. A. LEITE MORAES
IN AMAZONIA

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This is a tale of two accounts of Amazonia, one by an American ex-president and one by the appointed governor of a Brazilian province. How do they confront one of the great “exotic” spaces in the world? How do they tell their tales? How do their accounts work?

In 1912, after losing his third-party bid for reelection as President of the United States, Theodore Roosevelt found himself co-directing the Roosevelt-Rondon Scientific Expedition, whose aim was to gather specimens of Amazonian fauna for the Museum of Natural History in New York and explore the River of Doubt, whose headwaters Cândido Rondon, a Brazilian army engineer, had discovered on an earlier expedition. Every day, even under the most trying circumstances, Roosevelt wrote up an account of events, which he was to publish at Scribner’s, and which he eventually published as *Through the Brazilian Wilderness*, in 1914. The book documents diverging and intersecting ideological assumptions of the American and Brazilian members of the expedition, organizational shortcomings and triumphs, marvels of will power and endurance as well as of baseness, and the complex

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ways in which national character and identity, definitions of “otherness,” scientific notions and methods, forms of relating to nature, revealed themselves and shaped the events. After the initial stages, when its directors were received according to their rank (and the resources of their hosts), the expedition took place under extreme circumstances of weather and terrain. These, as well as the personalities involved affected the way in which the power relations played out that one could expect to establish themselves among its members, and between the cultures or sub-cultures represented.

In fact, *Through the Brazilian Wilderness*, like many travel or exploration accounts, is more than a rattling good tale, though it is that too. It is also a picture of the teller of the tale, and of his culture and his position, and it raises questions about the dynamics of contact, about technology and scientific method, about the relation of humans to the environment, as well as the ways in which travel and exploration fulfills the expectations and confirms images derived from earlier travel accounts. I propose to follow some of those leads.

In a way, the accounts falls, at least as far as its subject, into a long line of writings about exploring the Amazon, beginning in the 16th century: in *A Invenção da Amazônia*, Neide Gondim discusses tales of the expeditions of Orellana, Alonzo de Rojas, Cristóbal de Acuña, the plans of the French expedition of Condamine, and various others; along the centuries, the Amazonian region has had a hold over the European and also the North American imagination, as witness novels or fictional diaries by Jules Verne or Conan Doyle, not to mention Werner Herzog’s *Aguirre* and *Fitzcarraldo*. It is a hold that makes of the Amazon a metonymy for all of Brazil, and that rests on a fundamental fascination with the confrontation between untamed nature and ambitious civilization, encompassing both a nostalgia for the natural and a desire to control it. Yet it is precisely there, more than anywhere else, that the tenuousness of any control is made obvious. In the process of exploration, telling, or “invention,” some of the accepted definitions of how the relation between the human and the natural should express

itself suffer a dislodgement, apparent in the images of the original inhabitants of that environment of extreme nature who tend to appear as problematic embodiments of the human: they obviously need to be brought into the discursive universe of those who speak of them, even though their practices allow them to exist where the owners of that discourse have trouble staying alive.

Roosevelt's travel account follows a pattern common to such documents, as it starts from the familiar, and proceeds to the strange and menacing. After he decides to accept the invitations to speak at several South American countries, and the Brazilian government's invitation to join colonel Cândido Rondon in the exploration of an as yet unmapped river in the Amazon basin, Roosevelt goes to the Museum of Natural History in New York and proposes that it sponsor and man a scientific expedition to Amazonia to collect specimens. The Roosevelts had personal ties to the museum, since Theodore's father was one of its founders and Theodore himself had contributed to its collections. The Museum agreed. Roosevelt also agreed with Scribner's, who had published others of his books, that he would write a running account of his exploration, to appear in installments in their magazine and later in book form. Thus his expedition inserts itself in a somewhat overdetermined historical structure of relation with the wilderness, a concept charged with multiple meanings. He will bring samples of wilderness into the structured and scientifically sanctioned space of the museum; he will open unexplored parts of the world for knowledge and possible exploitation, and he will also take discursive possession of the wilderness, twice, or even three times, in the form of articles, a book, and numerous speaking engagements. On the other hand, the wilderness will take its toll: at one point in the expedition, he is so sick that he asks to be left behind so as not to burden the others. Though he recovers, the recovery is only partial; he is never quite well again, and dies not long after his return.

The title of his report has some historical and ideological depth, which one could trace in Greg Garrard's discussion of how the concept of "wilderness" originated and changed along the centuries, balancing

notions of danger and authenticity, and opposing itself to notions of civilization, rationality, and control both intellectual and economic. In effect, all those connotations appear in Roosevelt's account.¹ He proposes to explore and map the wilderness, to make it known and expose it to view. He considers the Amazon to be the "last frontier," into which Americans (or humanity for which the evolved American stands) can expand, after the West has been won. He never fails to make a note when he considers that a particular terrain would be appropriate for agriculture or cattle-raising, or when a particularly beautiful waterfall would, if harnessed, yield the electricity necessary to run an industry. He records very carefully the number and kind of flora and fauna samples collected by the scientists with whom he is traveling, for the Museum of Natural History. But what really attracts him is the danger of the whole thing: the rapids and the mysterious forest, the distance from civilization. And of course, if one reads the account itself and also Candice Millard's book on the expedition, one realizes the extent to which the hardships the men suffered in the wilderness were the result of accepted, unexamined, and often mistaken, ideas on how to live in Amazonia.

From the Brazilian point of view, the presence of Roosevelt in the expedition is at the same time a gesture of courtesy from one government to the former head of another, a self-insertion of the tropical nation in its exoticism as it opens its wilderness to the former president, a validation of the status of the Brazilian government as a partner in the endeavor, and also a validation of its ability to do science on its own. Rondon's initial reluctance to have Roosevelt in his expedition as a tourist on a safari helps, in the end, to strengthen the scientific intent and to de-exoticize the image of the nation and its inhabitants who are thus shown to be on an intellectual par with their visitors. In *O Brasil não é longe daqui*, Flora Süssekind argues that an early self-image of Brazil, mirrored in the first literature of nationality, arises from travel reports by the earliest—non-Brazilian—visitors to the land; in essence, she argues, throughout the essay, that the creation of a concept of national or cultural identity depends in part on the view of the "other." It is on

purpose that I am trying to create some confusion about the notion of "other:" the visitor may be "othering" the residents, but there is no reason why the residents should not "other" the visitor, and in fact, they do. I am of course aware that the expression and reception of a view from the outside puts into play the power relation between the viewer and the viewed, but that relation is not always stable; some of the allure of travel to "dangerous" parts of the world comes precisely from the fact that, away from his power base, the traveler is subject to, and possibly helpless before, the gaze of the observed. Some of the impact of a travel account also depends on its dissemination; all of it, in turn, rests on cultural context of both the traveler/observer and the things observed. It is possible, for instance, that neither the "nation" or the "culture" of the examiner nor the one under examination is homogeneous: the various groups of native Brazilians in early accounts may be quite distinct from each other; the accounts of explorers and missionaries may differ greatly in points of interest and points of view; at the same time, on both sides there may be common sets of cultural characteristics and assumptions.

So I propose an experiment. If Süsskind is right and travel accounts can shape the self-view of those among whom the travel took place, this still depends on the dissemination of the accounts. What, if anything, can we tell from travel accounts that did not (at least till this hour) get widely disseminated? So let us look for a bit at two tales of travel in Amazonia about which almost nobody has heard, the *Apontamentos de viagem* by Leite Moraes, published only recently in an edition by Antônio Candido, whom I thank for having brought the book to my attention, and *Through the Brazilian Wilderness* by Theodore Roosevelt, published in 1914.

Leite Moraes's notes were kept mostly for his own use as a record of the year he spent on the Emperor's service as a president of the province of Goiás, appointed by the Emperor to implement some electoral reforms he had championed. He details the trip from São Paulo, taking one month first by train and then for 900 km on horseback and

oxcart, through fields and swamps, fording rivers and riding in mud to the horses' bellies and then the trip back, by river north on the Araguaia then the Tocantins to Belém and back South on the Costeira. He had a good reason for undertaking the long, circuitous way back: on his first trip the long days on horseback had caused him a serious case of hemorrhoids and he just could not face riding all the way back.

The aim of his trip was administrative; he had been made President of the Province of Goiás, in 1881, and traveled there in order to preside over elections in accordance with a new law (*lei Saraiva*), that established direct vote by district and that was intended to clean up elections (Candido 10-15). His notes on conditions in the hinterland are those of an official, as much as those of a traveler, and this perspective offers a very different view of what Brazil was like then from those of contemporary explorers, say, or modern anthropologists. Both the things that he takes for granted and those that surprise him are informative.

Among the things he takes for granted is the system of extended and intense sociability underlying the administration and the politics in which he is involved. He is greeted, at every train stop, by a friend or a former classmate at the Law School he had attended in São Paulo. They inform him of the conditions in their town, and often they facilitate the continuation of his voyage, which is especially important after he reaches the end of the rail tracks and needs to put together a completely different kind of expedition. And while his official task is made possible because of his personal contacts, his interest in the places where he stops is mostly administrative. He asks to see the public buildings, the jail, the city hall and the market, and the port if there is one; he wants to know what the region produces and how that production is transported or consumed. And throughout he thinks of ways of making improvements. The most important work to be done, he thinks, is to extend the railways into the backlands. He envisions technical progress and economic development reaching into the country and changing the depressing picture he encounters once he leaves the realm of the rail; he wants the Mogiana railway to reach the province of Mato Grosso:

the difficulties of travel are not tests of his mettle or signs of the exotic otherness of the places he is crossing, but impediments to a necessary economic development. When his horses sink to their bellies into bogs; when he has to wait for hours or days till floods drain away; when horses are hurt on rutted roads, and slow, cumbersome ox carts do most of the transportation (or when they lose their way in the rain and are attacked by billions of cockroaches) (Leite Moraes 69-70), these are signs that Brazil is not keeping up with the century—or even, for that matter, with São Paulo—city or province, or the capital in Rio de Janeiro. He sees the failings of the central government, but does not comment: at one point he crosses the Sapucaí river on a bridge built privately on government orders and discovers that the government failed to reimburse the builder, who therefore reimburses himself by charging a toll at gunpoint (53). This retaliatory lawlessness, which, like neglected ports, ports destroyed by floods, fetid ponds that harbor typhoid and other fevers, are “so far away from the government” (62), central or local he sees as a failure of the authorities, not of the governed, and he tries to fix things. When he finds that the former governor of Goiás had not rebuilt an economically essential bridge that took cattle from Goiás to Minas, Leite Moraes took care to have it restored—he wants to see economic development and finds it thwarted at all points (80).

In part, he attributes the problems to the population he encounters: he senses they lack ambition and the desire and willingness to improve conditions, but he also senses this is in part due to local and even national politics. Yet, as a faithful servant of the emperor, any change he advocates is administrative, not political. He is not an analytical sort and does not necessarily note contradictions in his attitudes and beliefs, but he is imbued with what he calls a “paulista” respect for achievement and efficiency, and every once in a while, sees himself as a new *Bandeirante*, not conquering as much as integrating the hinterland.² However, though he is interested in the administration of the territories he crosses, the bulk of his account does not deal with his official life, but with his travel to and from his appointment and it is this that gives us a

view not only of the conditions in the Amazonian basin, but also of how this nineteenth-century Brazilian administrator with leadership qualities and an adventurous streak saw these conditions.

He begins by seeing his voyage as a plunge from civilization into barbarism—after an encounter with a boatful of Indians, he says that “we understood finally that we were in a land of savages and that we were no more than some bits of civilization that floated on those waters” (144), but along the way begins to make more nuanced distinctions between the two: he is taken aback in a town where *carajás* and *xavantes* walked around completely nude (146), but recognizes that they are interested in and capable of commerce (158-9); he deplores their occasional ferocity but recognizes that they were treated viciously by some whites; above all, however, he recognizes, with a shock, their numbers on the banks of the river as they pass by villages with “more than 2000 bows...of bloody traditions” with whom they trade and argue.³ On the other hand, the *goianos* (inhabitants of the province of Goiás) are passive, and dominated by stupid local political parties; they do not take up the offer of mineral rights, waste government funds, and refuse to vote for reforms. He wants to have the railway extend its lines to the Araguaia river that crosses the region, and drag its people into the rest of the nation. Most of all, he makes contact with the unknown, untamed portion of the country of whose government he is a part. He passes the Rio das Mortes, unexplored; he hunts herons and sees his shots graze alligators who are then killed by Indians with arrows, and he conceives a strong respect for the “*remeiros*” (oarsmen), who, ill paid as they are (236), guide the boats with skill and bravery through rapids and over the “*rebojos*” that would swallow them, and then qualifies his praise when they tire of their job and slack off “here ... giant[s], there ... pygm[ies]” (277). He wonders how far Valentim, the cook, would have got, with a “scientific education” (265); he quotes Gonçalves de Magalhães’s “Napoleão em Waterloo”: “You have completed your august mission / you are human;—stop!” as he interrogates nature and the godhead in the moonlit night (194). But later he exclaims:

How far are we from the world! What a huge distance separates us from the 19th century!" And how happy is he when he sees the lights of a town and leaves that barbaric world behind him, even if on the way home he has to put up with jangadas: "I have never seen a means of transportation more barbarous, savage and stupid than that jangada, in the harbor of civilized nations. (323)⁴

In short, throughout, whether overwhelmed by the majesty of nature, homesick for his family, beset by insects, threatened by Indians, saddened by the fate of military outposts overcome by Indians or outlaws, almost drowned in the rapids and waterfalls on the majestic and dangerous affluents of the Amazon, his constant preoccupation is the possibility and the necessity of completing the work of the first explorers, improving the administration, and bringing the nineteenth century to the interior of Brazil in the form of railroads, communication, commerce, industry. Nature is there to be tamed and used, and his function is to make that possible. And yet he also realizes the magnitude of the task, not only because of the physical but also because of the human obstacles. In the "Introduction," Antonio Candido calls him a romantic, and he is; but the account shows another and less acknowledged facet of Romanticism: it may have been horrified by the inroads of modernity, but it was also fascinated by them and as unwilling to give up on the virtues of the railroads as we, who rail against globalization, are unwilling to give up on our cell phones. And in his travels and travails, Leite Moraes found, in the Amazon, not a negation of the modern world, but an invitation for it to spread its bounty, not an affirmation of the wonderful internal exoticism of Brazil, but the need for it to de-exoticise itself. In effect, it shows that Brazilian identity (and perhaps all national/cultural identity) is necessarily split or possibly just multiple; experienced from the inside, a national identity is the unstable result of a continuous process of adjustment. It is only when facing the outside that identity can acquire something like unity or coherence.

Theodore Roosevelt's *Through the Brazilian Wilderness* (1914), on the other hand, lets us think about the possibility of knowledge from the outside that might touch at times, that of the "inside." The account is not well known—in fact, few people are aware that the former President of the United States visited Brazil as an explorer; he almost died here, not a victim of any political unrest or security breach, but undone by the forest, the water, the heat, the diseases, and hunger, the entire arsenal of an aggressive nature that for him, should, as we will see from his diaries, be known, civilized, accounted for.

Theodore Roosevelt does not need much of an introduction: he was president of the United States for two terms at the beginning of the twentieth century, and he had had dramatic dealings with the nations south of the border, as in the Spanish-American war; he had also asserted the power of the United States over them, in an extension of the Monroe Doctrine that allowed active intervention by the United States in its "sphere of influence," rather than just its defense in case of a threat by European nations. Yet when he traveled to Brazil, he had just lost an election, and was, to an extent, employing his legendary energy in another field of endeavor where he intended to make his mark.

He had always had an interest in history, and also in the natural world as an amateur naturalist, as a farmer, and as a hunter. Before and after his terms as President, he had published several books on hunting and on history, natural and chronological. After his failed third-party campaign to be elected for an unprecedented third term, he accepted an invitation to give a series of lectures in Argentina, at the newly established Museo Social, which offered him a substantial fee and the promise that he would be appreciated by people of his own views; the trip also gave him the chance to visit his son, Kermit, who was working at the Anglo Brazilian Iron Company after a stint with the Brazil Railway Company. The Madeira-Mamoré railway had just been concluded (in 1912) and news of the high human cost in building it and the unexplored and forbidding country where it had been set had percolated into the rest of the world.⁵ The Amazon was another last frontier—Frederick

Jackson Turner had declared the end of the nation-defining American internal expansion in 1893,⁶ but when president, Roosevelt had asserted a national interest in the rest of the American continent, and as Candice Millard suggests, he might have hoped to find, in the Brazilian unexplored forest, another version of that “unbounded, unfamiliar frontier and harsh physical adventure” that had always attracted him as personal adventure and national myth (22). But he also, and perhaps more demonstrably, thought he could do some of the hunting, exploring, and studying of natural history that had always attracted him.

He did more, however: he contacted the American Museum of Natural History in New York, which his father had helped found in 1869, and suggested that they find a couple of naturalists to go with him and collect specimens for their exhibits, which they did.⁷ With that, he inscribed his trip in the ongoing process by which knowledge of the world, particularly the “exotic” world, was being gathered, exhibited, and to an ever increasing extent, institutionalized in museums of art, history, and natural history, whose officials went around the world gathering specimens. It was—and to a large extent, still is—a curious blend of science and, as Robert Aguirre argues in the case of the collection of cultural artifacts from Mexico, of imperialism. Aguirre’s study examines the case of Mexico, whose codices, evidence of the existence of writing in the “savage” Americas and record of a history that was not acknowledged as such, were transported to private collections and public exhibits in England. But Brazil, like the Africa where Roosevelt had been hunting in a previous expedition, exports nature and is not deeply involved in the controversies about pre-Columbian history, and both the museum and Roosevelt were functioning within that knowledge. In fact, so was Brazil: when the Brazilian ambassador to Washington learned of Roosevelt’s planned voyage, he arranged for a meeting with Lauro Mueller, the minister of the Interior, who in turn suggested he should accompany Candido Rondon on one of his explorations. Roosevelt was more enthusiastic about the plan than Rondon, who only fell in with it when assured that

he was not going to be a tourist or safari guide, but that Roosevelt was on a legitimate scientific expedition; as a practitioner of positivism, Rondon strongly approved of scientific expeditions.

Rondon planned to explore the course of a river whose headwaters he had discovered as he extended the telegraph into remote corners of the country: he wanted to know where the river led, and whether and how it connected with other, known rivers of the Amazon basin. For him, the river he had named Rio da Dúvida presented a scientific problem, which the expedition intended to solve (Rondon 57). They did follow the river, for almost one thousand kilometers, to where it entered the Tapajós, and it is now named the Rio Roosevelt—or, to friends, the Rio Teodoro.

The account of the voyage moves by degrees from lecture halls in Argentina and Chile, to Paraguay, to Corumbá, and then to the extremely difficult travel through the Amazon basin, the core of the adventure. The earlier, cultivated places are the springboards for the adventure in the wilderness, but they are also an image of what the wilderness should aim to become. Though the purpose of Roosevelt's trip was collecting rare zoological specimens for the museum and exploring a river where no white person had ever been, that is, exploring unknown, untamed nature, there is in his account a keen appreciation of the force and the beauty of the region traversed and also a continuous tension and contradiction between that immediate experience and the repeated projections he seemingly could not keep himself from making, of long-term development. Roosevelt was eager to go where no one had gone before, but could not stop himself from observing that this river of Doubt, unknown to geographers, was as large as, or larger than, the long-mapped Elbe or Rhine at their headwaters. The comparison is telling for it establishes a double opposition, on one hand between the historical depth associated with the European rivers and the lands through which they flow and the savage river that has not even been written into a map, and on the other hand, between sense of possibility opened up by the powerful flow of the newly found

waterway and the implication of exhaustion in the civilized waterways of Europe. Yet the expedition quickly found out about the obstacles to civilization defined as taming and controlling nature, in the serious and continuous dangers it had to confront: rapids and waterfalls imposed wearisome portages through dense forest, mud, and rock; when boats attempted to run the rapids, these could, and did drag men to the bottom; some brave rowers were drowned. Heavy rains that lasted for days soaked clothes and boots that did not dry; wounds festered in the humidity. And the expedition contended with insects: ticks, mosquitoes, *borrachudos* (a kind of no-see-ums), *muriçocas*, any number of mysterious biting beasties that might be of interest to the accompanying entomologist, but that made life miserable for every one else: there is a photo of Roosevelt doing his daily writing for Scribner's, the journal that would publish his account, wearing heavy gloves, a helmet and a net over his face and neck. There was another roadblock, mentioned in snippets all along the account and placed in relief by Candice Millard: the Roosevelt part of the expedition was miserably organized by people who had no idea of the conditions they would encounter; the food, the clothing, the implements, the boats were all excessive and inappropriate; aiming to keep Roosevelt in a luxury befitting a former president, the equipment contributed to delays and ultimately to the hunger and sickness that plagued the participants and almost killed Roosevelt (he in fact never quite recovered from his ordeal).

The forest and the rivers were emphatically not "home" for Roosevelt, though he had hunted in the African wilderness, hunted and ranched in the wild American West; he had never imagined how different this trip was from his latest safari in Africa, with Kermit. But just as had been the case with Leite Moraes (and though he in fact suffered greater discomfort than the earlier traveler) no hardship kept him from considering means for bringing the wilderness up to civilization, and sketching out the possibilities for settlement that would come to the plains and the forest with the advent of railroads and with full cultivation. Rondon's mission had been at least at first strategic: the

telegraph would link the hinterlands to the capital and never again would it be possible for a war to happen on the border with Paraguay and the news take its own sweet time to reach the central government: that was the function of government with which he was concerned. Roosevelt, however, was concerned with commerce and dreamt of government facilitating railroads that would bring progress to the backlands and open it to commercial exchange with the rest of the world.

Roosevelt's attitude toward the wilderness he is exploring is paradoxical but not uncommon. He feels the lure of the wilderness as wilderness; he wants to be there because it is wild, but whenever he comes upon dry and healthy land (and he classifies much of what he sees in terms of its healthfulness) he explains that it could certainly support large populations that would live on agriculture and cattle raising and open pastureland, build farms and prosperous towns in the wild. When he is taken to a magnificent waterfall in the forest, he describes its untouched beauty and majesty, and punctuates his enthusiasm with visions of making it into a tourist attraction, and with the observation that it would easily furnish 36,000 HP of energy and could service a manufacturing community. All that is needed is a rail line and the right kind of settlers (193-94). The ideal of progress, the ideal of populating the known world and conquering the as yet unknown world for industry and commerce pervades the account; he is perfectly able to recognize what is greater than his strivings, to bow before the grandeur of nature, but his appreciation of the beauty of the wild does not contradict his ambition to interfere with it. But we are not talking about beauty in its general meaning. The attraction is not simply that of the beautiful; it is also that of the strange, of the unknown, of the exotic, and the impulse is to turn it into the known, as the members of the expedition hunt for the native fauna, and into the familiar, as Roosevelt dreams of railroads, hydroelectric plants, and tourism which, by definition, turns otherness into the familiar.

He never puts it that way, but there is an implicit awareness that these envisioned improvements depend on the people who would

implement them, and Roosevelt spends some time describing the Brazilians who are part of the expedition or who help it along the way, the *caboclos*, the *vaqueiros* (cattlemen), and the Indians who inhabit the forest and the parts tenuously reclaimed from it, and who are more, or less, willing to engage with the white men who are exploring it. Reclaiming wilderness for civilization is not for the faint of heart or body. He approves thoroughly of Rondon, and if the idea of a Positivist Indian⁸ seems somewhat incongruous to him, it is also more than sufficient evidence that modernizing is rational and feasible. The toughness and resilience of the *vaqueiros* and *caboclos* is promising as well—they may be almost barefoot and they may be the result of a thorough racial mixing, but he learns to dismiss that. Roosevelt is extremely aware of the racial mixture in the population and always remarks on it, but unlike so many other foreign travelers does not draw specific conclusions about the present or the future of the country on that basis.⁹ Consistently, he judges the people he encounters according to merit rather than appearance, and is careful to point out that the worst member of the expedition, the one who committed murder against another member, was white. He does however complain about the native dogs, and how useless they are as hunters.

Roosevelt agrees with Rondon that the process of reclaiming the wilderness for civilization should be benevolent and voluntary; he writes approvingly of Rondon's refusal to use violence against the Indians, of his plan to employ them in the guardianship and defense of the telegraph lines he has implanted, and of his effort to persuade them not to make war on other tribes but to follow the law of the land, which he is adamant should be taught by example (the most serious disagreement between Rondon and Roosevelt arises when the former wants to catch the expedition's murderer and take him to justice while Roosevelt wants him to be abandoned in the forest or perhaps even killed by Rondon's men rather than impose another, useless body on the explorers who were hungry, sick, exhausted, stressed to the limit). Rondon is aware of reasons for the Indians' distrust. At no point,

however, is there any doubt in his mind that Indians must be brought into civilization and that this transition will be to their advantage. It must be done, Roosevelt adds, by making them wards of the nation till they are absorbed and he is not in favor of converting them to any religion—the conversion should be entirely secular (Roosevelt 57).¹⁰

Thus an underlying story in the accounts is that of the political will to occupy the last “empty” portion of land and to make it available to what both men see as civilization. In that sense, Rondon at the head of the Telegraph Expedition is a link between the Roosevelt Scientific Expedition and the Emperor D. Pedro II, who sent Leite Moraes on his mission to Goiás and who also started the establishment of telegraph links from the remoter parts of the land to the center (so that the central government would not be left ignorant of events at the outlying portions—an endeavor central to the establishment of empires). Roosevelt too had worked to link up the world, encouraging the secession of Panama from Colombia to build the Panama Canal for the sake of communication and commerce, leading to progress, as he told an initially but not finally hostile audience in Chile. Yet, one should also remember that he established the system of national parks in the US, to protect wilderness areas, and that though he hunted in the Brazilian wilderness and had thousands of specimens shipped to the museum, he also refused to kill more than he would study or eat and was in that sense more of a conservationist than Leite Moraes, who pleased himself in shooting birds whose beauty he also admired.¹¹

Roosevelt, on the other hand was working in the mode of what one commentator speaks of as his “manliness,” the quality he had worked so hard to develop in himself and that encompassed energy, strength, resilience, resolution and allowed man (now in the collective) to impose himself, albeit respectfully, on nature.¹² It was a quality that he thought indispensable in an individual as well as in a nation, leading to progress and deserved prosperity. He declared that the only man worthy of participating in an enterprise such as his Amazonian adventure, was the one ready to be left behind if he proved too weak to

continue and placed his companions in danger, and he made a point of never being spared any hardship that befell his expedition.¹³ Leite Moraes was much less interested in putting himself to the test; he wanted to get back home as quickly and as comfortably as possible, though the comfort possible was limited and costly in time.

Reading the two accounts made me consider that the emphasis on difference that has predominated in discussions about the relations between the more and the less powerful nations—the discourses of cultural and economic imperialism that pit one world against another, may be leaving out precisely those regions where agreement could initiate a profitable platform on which to build a productive engagement, curbing the unbridled enthusiasm for railroads with consideration for the lives of birds, bringing food and medicine to the wilderness without displacing the forest, making it possible for Indians to survive without either killing them or confining them to ever-shrinking territories that do not sustain their livelihood. It is not clear that this will be possible. On the other hand, it is clear that pure opposition and disregard for the possibility of coming to an understanding will not help either. The travel accounts of men who were used to deal with the practical contingencies of politics and administration can show the way to improve conditions that do not have to be miserable. On the other hand, Leite Moraes's hemorrhoids and the disorganization of the Roosevelt expedition also caution us to take into consideration the weaknesses both of the people who set out to change the world and of the organizations that they put in place.

Notes

1. In his overview of ecocriticism, Garrard notes that “the concept of wilderness only came to cultural prominence in the eighteenth century, and the ‘wilderness texts’ discussed by ecocritics are mainly non-fictional nature writing” and that “work in this area might easily ...stretch the bound of traditional literary criticism” (59).
2. The *Bandeirantes* organized inland expeditions in search of riches: Indian slaves at first, mineral wealth later; typically, they set out from the then small village of São

Paulo, built on the banks of two rivers that are part of the River Plate basin; they opened up the lands back of the populated Atlantic coast and greatly increased the originally allotted territory of the Portuguese colony.

3. This is a complex episode, involving reciprocal accusations, by Leite Moraes that they had killed the wife of a captain; by the chief, Roco, who is introduced as being "a false and treacherous character," (189) that the whites had killed the Indians' wives and daughters. Nevertheless, they engage in trade, and the encounter is peaceful (188-193).
4. *Jangadas* are the balsawood sailing rafts typically used by fishermen along the Northeastern Brazilian coast. They sound romantic in song and verse.
5. Legend has it that each dormer stands for one life lost in the construction of the railway.
6. See "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," a paper presented to the American Historical Association at the World Columbia Exposition in Chicago, in 1893.
7. Roosevelt had started contributing to the museum's collections while still a child: on vacation in the Adirondacks he collected and then donated "a bat, a turtle, four birds' eggs, twelve mice, and a red-squirrel skull" (Millard 23). The two naturalists were in fact the only members of the expedition who had any actual, detailed knowledge of the general area where the expedition would travel.
8. Rondon stressed his Indian ancestry.
9. Karen Macknow Lisboa, in "Olhares estrangeiros sobre o Brasil do século XIX" in *Viagem incompleta, 1500-2000: A experiência brasileira*, details the various opinions about the effect of miscegenation on Brazilian history and development as expressed by a number of foreign travelers, and notes the changes in their pronouncements along the century, from racial optimism to pessimism (267-99).
10. Rondon observes that if you want Indian to become fellow citizens, treat them rationally; "*Jesuitic*" treatment produces servants (46).
11. Roosevelt's vision was not good; that made him a very incompetent hunter in the dense forest.

12. "Manliness" comes up often in discussions of Theodore Roosevelt: he believed in it, strongly; one straightforward account of it in various realms (politics, foreign policy, nature) appears in Mansfield, "The Manliness of Theodore Roosevelt."
13. His wife had enlisted their son Kermit to accompany the expedition even though he longed to get back home to the girl who had just agreed to marry him. While Roosevelt was being manly, his family gathered around him to protect him (Millard 68-70).

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