

The Addressee of Ludwig Leichhardt's *Journal of an Overland Expedition*

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When searching for all the passages where Ludwig Leichhardt uses the words “compare”, “similar” and “different”, one realizes that Leichhardt almost exclusively compares present observations – with a date given because of the diary form – with observations made earlier or later on the overland journey. A quarter of his comparisons refer to plants, almost an eighth to animals, a tenth each to the soil, the indigenous population and to the direction of water and hills, finally a twentieth to the weather. Four comparisons only do not link a present observation with earlier or later ones of the journey to Port Essington, but refer to Europe, in three cases, and, once, to China. The usage of comparisons does not only prove that the travel-writer Leichhardt made observations in the fields of various disciplines, but also as narrator linked observations and events of travelling by the way of retrospection and anticipation. Both practices could be explained from Alexander von Humboldt being Leichhardt's model: also “with Leichhardt the disciplines were all in one man's head”¹, and Humboldt postulated for travelogues that the narration of events of travelling must dominate the description of observations.²

A letter which Leichhardt, while working out his *Field Notes* into the *Journal*, wrote to his helper Philipp P. King, is proof that Leichhardt did not conceive the addressee of his travelogue as member of a scientific discipline: “Though I was several times on the point of condensing my route along the rivers, I continued to give the character [sic] of the country of every stage, thinking that though it will not be so pleasing to the general reader, it will be useful to the colonist [...]; they will allways [sic] know what country exists along the rivers between given latitudes.”³

Leichhardt's disregard of a scientific reader in his reflections on the narration of his text with regard to ‘the colonist’ who is distinguished from ‘the general reader’, was *ex negativo* confirmed by academic reviewers of his *Journal*.

In the Weimar journal *Fortschritte der Geographie und der Naturgeschichte* Otto Schomburgk reviewed Leichhardt's *Journal* exclusively with respect to geographical knowledge: “In this journal, only what seemed necessary for a more precise overview of the geographical and geognostic relations of this continent which, with every year, more clearly emerges from the dark, can find its place. Especially reports on localities suitable for pasture and other attempts at cultivation belong to the information science is less interested in.”⁴ Leichhardt's naming of rivers or mountains, however, leads the reviewer to take notice of his

botanical observations when the names follow from plants, and in the case of adopting indigenous names to explicitly questioning Leichhardt's observations on the population. Although Schomburgk remarks on the name Yappar that Leichhardt "often heard this word [...] spoken by the blacks"⁵, he emphasizes, the country "seemed numerously populated although the travellers only three times came into touch with natives."⁶

The journal *Petermanns Mittheilungen* which equally orientated towards special geographical knowledge, but excluded natural history, promised, in the introduction of its review, a cartographic overview, but turned into a narrative of indigenous violence. It credited Leichhardt the merit, to have "added the region on the Albert to those regions of the Australian mainland of which we possess a relatively detailed knowledge, in particular, the system of rivers there which earlier maps represented mostly incorrect and confused, always very incomplete, now is clear."⁷ The cartographic reviewer becomes a narrator by linking Leichhardt's journey to Port Essington with one of the later searches for the missing Leichhardt in the same region: "Leichhardt's right to approach the river which nowadays carries his name, was disputed by a band of savages, but the threat to cut them off the river brought them round, they jumped into it and swam across." Similarly Augustus Charles Gregory's search expedition is presented which reached "the Leichhardt river a little upwards the place where its discoverer had crossed it": "A bunch of natives tried by force to prevent the crossing."⁸

Whereas the reviews in German scientific journals did not keep to the proclaimed rule of disciplinary specialization, the *Tasmanian Journal of Natural Science* equated 'the general reader' of Leichhardt with 'the colonist' when praising him as "the 'Prince of Explorers'" for discovering "a country surpassing in richness any that he has previously seen in Australia". The editorial postscript to Leichhardt's *Lectures on the Geology, Botany, Natural history, and Capabilities of the Country between Moreton Bay and Port Essington* read: "the attention of almost every individual in New South Wales and the neighbouring colonies was so completely absorbed with the wonderful route performed by the gallant leader."⁹

In the same way as the title of the *Lectures* adds 'Capabilities of the Country' to the three scientific disciplines, Leichhardt defines the addressee of his public lecture by stating his intention: "to direct your attention [...to] the practicability of colonization."¹⁰ From Leichhardt's answer to an assumed question of his listeners: "If you ask me how far the country we have travelled over will be available for colonisation, I would reply that the greatest part is fit for pastoral purposes; and I except only the scrubs [and the swamps (92)]"¹¹, follows the composition of the *Lectures*: the division of the country travelled over in

eight sections only two of which are excluded from the ‘capability’ of colonization; all eight sections are presented as “uninhabited parts of the continent.”¹²

In this respect, however, the text of Leichhardt’s *Journal* contradicts the *Lectures* for a colonialist addressee. It is ‘a general reader’ who is told, “how thickly the country was inhabited”¹³; “we heard, to our great joy, the noisy jabbering of natives, which promised the neighbourhood of water [...]. Their numerous tracks [...] soon led me to two wells.”¹⁴ Leichhardt’s *Journal* is the narrative of a journey on “well beaten tracks”¹⁵: “Natives, crows, and kites were always the indications of a good country.”¹⁶

Notes

¹ Nix, Henry. “Ludwig Leichhardt: a loss to science and Australian culture.” Leichhardt Symposium, National Museum of Australia, 15 June 2007.

<http://www.nma.gov.au/audio/transcripts/Leichhardt/NMA_nix_20070615.html>

² Leask, Nigel. *Curiosity and the Aesthetics of Travel Writing, 1770-1840: ‘From an Antique Land’*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2002, 7.

³ Arousseau, Marcel, ed. *The Letters of F. W. Ludwig Leichhardt*. Vols.1-3. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press for The Hakluyt Society 1968, Vol III, 882.

⁴ Schomburgk, Otto. „Dr Leichhardt’s Reise von Moreton Bay nach Port Essington.“ *Fortschritte der Geographie und der Naturgeschichte*. Ein Jahrbuch in wöchentlichen Lieferungen hrsg.v. Ludwig Friedrich von Froriep. Weimar 1847, 289-302.

⁵ Schomburgk, 296.

⁶ Schomburgk, 297.

⁷ “Die Flussgebiete des Albert, Nicholson und Leichhardt in Nord-Australien. Nach den Untersuchungen von Stokes, Leichhardt, Gregory usw.” *Petermanns Mittheilungen*. 1864, 175-182, 177.

⁸ *Ibid.* 180.

⁹ Leichhardt, Ludwig, “Lectures on the Geology, Botany, Natural History, and Capabilities of the Country between Moreton Bay and Port Essington.” *Tasmanian Journal of Natural Science* 3 (1847): 81-113, 113.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 81.

¹¹ *Ibid.* 94.

¹² *Ibid.* 96.

¹³ Leichhardt, Ludwig. *Journal of an Overland Expedition in Australia, from Moreton Bay to Port Essington, a distance of upwards of 3000 miles, during the years 1844-1845*. London: Boone 1847.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 24 February 1845.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 14 January 1845.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 19 October 1845.

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