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The Leichhardt papers Reflections on his life and legacy

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The young Leichhardt's diaries in the context of his Australian cultural legacy

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This paper examines Ludwig Leichhardt's early Australian diaries, spanning from April 1842 until July 1844, in relation to his cultural legacy. Although Leichhardt's standing as an explorer was initially established following the success of his journey to Port Essington in 1844-46, his reputation in Australia was later damaged by controversies arising from rival accounts of both this first journey and particularly of the second expedition of 1846-47. These controversies, at times informed by anti-Prussian and later by anti-German prejudices, have dominated Leichhardt's reception in Australia, while at the same time diverting attention from his German cultural background and the ways in which it may have influenced his writings on Australia. Leichhardt's education took place within the contexts of the late German Enlightenment, of philosophical idealism and of romanticism, and key elements of these interrelated movements can be detected in his early Australian diaries. It is, moreover, clear that Leichhardt saw his letters and diaries as contributions not only to the natural sciences, but also to the genre of romantic travel literature, exemplified by his idol Alexander von Humboldt, among others. This in turn raises the possibility that Leichhardt's own romantic modes of expression may have influenced his most culturally resonant alter-ego in the canon of Australian literature, the eponymous protagonist of Patrick White's novel *Voss* (1957).¹

□ *Leichhardt, Ludwig (1813-1848); Australian cultural reception; German philosophical idealism and romanticism; German romantic travel writing; White, Patrick (1912-1990); Voss (1957).*

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By virtue of his successful journey of exploration conducted in 1844-46 – commencing in the Darling Downs region to the west of Brisbane, extending through the Gulf of Carpentaria and ending in the far northern coastal settlement of Port Essington in 1845-46, a remarkable overland trek through largely uncharted territory that covered some 4,800 kilometres – Ludwig Leichhardt (1813-1848) must be regarded as the most significant non-British explorer of 19th century Australia. Inspired by the success of this first journey, Leichhardt twice attempted the first recorded east-west crossing of Australia along a proposed route that would initially mirror the earlier stages of the Port Essington journey of 1844-46, but would then follow supposed inland river networks extending from the north-west coast of Australia down to the Swan River in Western Australia (on Leichhardt's proposed route, see Lewis, 2006). His first attempt at this journey in 1846-47 was abandoned due to torrential rain and was characterised by acrimony between expedition members, while the 1848 attempt ended with Leichhardt and his party disappearing without a trace in the Australian interior, creating one of the great mysteries of Australian history. At an official level, the cultural impact exerted by Leichhardt's journey of 1844-46 is recorded in the geographical locations that carry his name, from one suburb in Sydney's inner-west, via another in the Queensland town of Ipswich, through a major highway in Queensland and a river running through the town of Mount Isa, to the far north Queensland electoral division that still carries his name.

But just as Leichhardt's record of exploration can hardly be described as one of unmitigated success, so too is his cultural legacy in Australia both complex and ambivalent. Some of the possible reasons behind this complexity and ambivalence are on

remarkable display in the diaries published together with this volume, showing as they do the attempts made by a highly educated German not only to understand his new geographical setting, but also to mediate between the German and British cultures and to make his way in life and in love. The image that many of us have of Leichhardt is of the stern, Teutonic and unforgiving Prussian of Patrick White's *Voss* (more on that text and its sources later). Yet this caricature might lead us to forget that the Leichhardt before us in these diaries is a young and to some extent an inexperienced man; a man who is unsure of himself professionally, socially, romantically and even erotically – and a man who is, when these diaries begin in 1842, not yet 30 years old. These diaries reintroduce us to the *young* Leichhardt, but in order fully to understand them, we need to be aware of the culture in which he was educated. In the first half of the 19th century, the high or educated culture of the German-speaking territories was a culture in which science and literature had not yet clearly been demarcated as discrete professional fields, and a culture with some striking elements that might (to use a term which appears repeatedly in these diaries) be described as *romantisch* (romantic).

The historical controversies and disputes about Leichhardt – was he an incompetent romantic dreamer? Did he steal food from his expedition companions? Did he needlessly thrash his livestock? – have filled volumes (for an overview see Webster, 1980). These debates surrounding Leichhardt's personality (or personalities) have arisen from rival accounts of the first two expeditions, which certainly make for interesting reading. But trying to draw definitive psychological conclusions about a person based upon the historical records that he and his companions have left behind is, at least from a philological point of view, a mug's game. We will never decisively know

what kind of a person Leichhardt really was, because for us he is now no more than a series of texts. But what texts! Written in what language! The young Leichhardt wrote his first impressions of Australia in his native German, and it is that German – its emotional resonances, the cultural and philosophical edifices that stand behind it – that will be analysed here. This is not to discount the value of Tom Darragh's translation; it is merely to underscore the fact that in order to decipher Darragh's faithful interpretation we also need to look at the original that underlies it.

To come to terms with these diaries, and also with the historical figure of Leichhardt, in cultural and philological terms, is to attempt to answer some fundamental questions: to what body or bodies of knowledge did Leichhardt imagine he was contributing when writing them? Did Leichhardt want these diaries, or his correspondence, to become public, and if so, to what extent and why? Why did Leichhardt become such a controversial figure in Australian cultural history, and what light, if any, do these diaries shed on these controversies? And might these diaries have contributed, either directly or indirectly, to the definitive fictional portrait of Leichhardt, the character of Johann Ulrich Voss, in Patrick White's novel of 1957?

LEICHHARDT'S GERMAN EDUCATION AND PHILOSOPHICAL WORLDVIEW

The reception of Leichhardt in Australia has focused first and foremost upon his feats and alleged follies as an explorer; among English-language biographies of Leichhardt, only Roderick (see 1988 and 1991) has offered an accurate account of Leichhardt's educational background, based on a close analysis of Leichhardt's pre-Australian diaries, logs and field-books.² Leichhardt began his tertiary

studies in 1831 at the Humboldt University in Berlin, where he studied philology under Professor Franz Bopp (1791-1867), at that time the leading German authority on Indo-European languages. This linguistic training may explain Leichhardt's interest in transcribing Aboriginal languages (see, for example, Darragh and Fensham, 2013: 218-219, 336-337), as well as his scientific emphasis on recording Aboriginal names for flora and fauna (Darragh and Fensham, 2013: 245, 329), and his recognition, relatively progressive in its colonial context, that any accurate assessment of Aboriginal cultures and of the intellectual capacities of Aborigines would require a detailed knowledge of their languages (Darragh and Fensham, 2013: 390).

Yet Leichhardt's philological approach to Aboriginal cultures did not prevent him from adopting the prejudiced views of his age; like the early Australian anthropologists who would follow him,³ Leichhardt opines on 3 October 1843 that Aboriginal tribes are at the level of childhood in developmental terms. This leads him to predict that they will face extinction, at least in Australia's coastal areas, when forced to compete with European civilization, and he initially recommends slavery and forced education as the only possible way out of this historical fate (see Darragh and Fensham, 2013: 324-325). In a marginal note added to this initial entry on 15 February 1844, Leichhardt ameliorates this view slightly by stating he would prefer to see the Aborigines die in freedom rather than in slavery (Darragh and Fensham, 2013: 325). There is no doubt, therefore, that Leichhardt took a genuine scientific interest in, and even had sympathy for, the predicament of Aboriginal cultures in Australia. Nevertheless, he clearly saw these cultures as being naturally subordinate to European civilisation. (Darragh and Fensham, 2013: 325).

The other main focus of Leichhardt's early studies was philosophy, and for this subject the Humboldt University was indeed a prestigious address, since both Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814) and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) had recently been prominent professors there. Leichhardt's early diaries indicate that he had undertaken some philosophical reading that seems, in turn, to have shaped his worldview. Here the prestige of philosophy in Germany during the first half of the 19th century should not be underestimated, since just about any intellectual trained in the humanities in this period would have derived from it some kind of general existential orientation that would have supplemented more traditional religious views. Roderick reveals that in Berlin Leichhardt imbibed the standard fare of Kantian and post-Kantian German idealism and its central notion that a dialectical relationship pertains between the *a priori* cognitive faculties of the self on the one hand and the external objects of nature on the other (Roderick, 1988, 30; 1991: 22-39). In basic terms, this means that when an observer has, say, a plant or a mountain range before him, he does not see the plant or mountain range 'in itself' (which is to say, objectively); rather, his cognitive faculties and also his emotions already shape these external objects for him in advance.

Leichhardt does not consciously reflect on such abstract matters in his diaries, but their entire orientation expresses the idea that a scientific journal does not only record the raw external data, but also gives an indication of how the observer feels during the process of recording. The idea that an ostensibly 'scientific' journal should also include what might be regarded as literary asides was not unusual in German literature at this time, since the division between 'arts' or 'letters' on the one hand and the natural sciences on the other did not occur until

the second half of the 19th century, when academic disciplines were demarcated into those that now exist in modern research universities (see Diemer, 1968). Leichhardt would have had a plethora of canonical models for this type of scientific-cum-literary journal to choose from, the most important of which would have been Alexander von Humboldt's monumental *Relation historique du voyage aux régions équinoxiales du nouveau continent* (1814-1825, translated into English as the *Personal narrative of travels to the equinoctial regions of the New Continent*), an account of Humboldt's travels in Latin America between 1799 and 1804.

As a keen follower of Kant's attempts, outlined in the *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (Critique of Judgement, 1790), to bring aesthetics and the natural sciences into dialogue with one another, Alexander von Humboldt was given to interspersing his scientific observations with more poetic reflections like this one from volume three of his *Relation historique*, in which he recounts his adventures in Venezuela:

Nothing can be compared to the impression of majestic tranquillity, which the aspect of the firmament inspires in this solitary region ... we thought we saw from afar, as in the deserts of the Oronoko, the surface of the ocean supporting the starry vault of Heaven. The tree under which we were seated, the luminous insects flying in the air, the constellations that shone toward the south; every object seemed to tell us, that we were far from our native soil (Humboldt, 1818: 90).

If these rather grandiloquent turns of phrase sound familiar to readers of Leichhardt's diaries, it is because Leichhardt based his own approach to recording nature on the culturally prestigious model of Alexander von Humboldt. In 1841, only one year before his departure for Australia, Leichhardt had met Humboldt in Paris, and he regarded

Humboldt's voyage to Latin America as a model worthy of emulation: 'his example was and is constantly in my view' (*sein Beispiel war und ist mir beständig vor Augen*), wrote Leichhardt to his brother-in-law Schmalfluss on 21 October 1847 (Leichhardt, 1881: 166; see also Roderick, 1988: 146-7). When considered in this context, passages such as the following from Leichhardt's diaries can be seen not only as a form of personal reflection, but also potentially as a self-conscious and highly stylised rehearsal for the stage of German romantic science:

Now and then on my excursions a beautiful view appears, a mountain landscape before my eyes, and puts courage and strength through every vein with invigorating heartbeats. All of a sudden I feel again that God's nature, God's beautiful nature surrounds me here too and that I belong to it. I feel that I could sacrifice all pleasures of life for it, because it offers me even higher pleasures. Often, when sunk in dreams of love I think of my sweetheart, and then bluish mountain ranges peep out, one behind the other in fainter and fainter blue and the view fills me with a strange fresh feeling of pleasure, I asked myself: and would you abandon this nature in order to perhaps rest on the full soft white bosom of a young woman? And the feeling winning through cries out 'Never never', although the repressed pangs of love, like the fallen angels, still resist while falling away (Darragh and Fensham, 2013: 303).

(Auf meine Excursionen tritt dann wohl bisweilen eine schöne Aussicht, eine Berglandschaft vor die Augen und treibt mit kräftigendem Herzschlage Muth und Kraft durch jede Ader. Ich fühle auf einmal wieder, daß mich Gottes Natur, Gottes schöne Natur auch hier umgiebt, und

daß ich zu ihr gehöre. Ich fühle, daß ich für sie alle Freuden des Lebens aufopfern könnte, da sie mir eben höhere Freuden bietet. Oft wenn ich in Liebesträumen versunken an meine Geliebte dachte, und nun bläuliche Bergreihen, eine hinter den andern in schwächeren und schwächeren Bläuen hervorsehen, und der Anblick mich mit einer eingenthümlichen frischen Freudegefühle erfüllte – fragte ich mich: und würdest du diese Natur verlassen um vielleicht an einem vollen weichen weißen Mädchenbusen zu ruhen? und das siegende Gefühl rief Nimmer Nimmer – obwohl die zurückgedrängte Liebeswehen, wie die fallenden Engel, selbst fallend noch widerstrebten). (Leichhardt, 1842-1844: Diary 3, 10 September 1843)

Even if Leichhardt did not intend that such overwrought passages should be published, what we see here is the young scientist finding a language through which to unify individual observations of empirical objects with the emotions of the observer. Here it is important to note that Leichhardt's repeated usages of the word 'romantic' (*romantisch*) all refer to rustic scenes, views or vistas in which 'nature' is regarded not simply as a collection of separate organisms or objects but rather as a unified order giving rise to a sense of beauty in the perceptions of the beholder (Darragh and Fensham, 2013: 44, 62, 65, 123, 422).

Readers of these diaries will also become familiar with Leichhardt's tendency to turn quickly from reflections upon nature to questions of religious faith. In this respect the diaries provide a portrait of a young scholar trying to square the teachings of the late German Enlightenment with traditional (and in Leichhardt's case Protestant) religious dogma. It was Kant, once again, who had led the way in this field by virtue of his writings on anthropology and religion. In his *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht* (Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View, 1798),

Kant distinguishes between what he calls 'physiological' and 'practical' anthropology; the former describes 'what nature makes of the human being' while the latter outlines what man as a 'free-acting being makes of himself, or can and should make of himself' (Kant, 2006: 3). Physiological anthropology is particularly concerned with what Kant termed man's natural inclinations: the human needs for food, shelter and sex. Leichhardt observes these drives not only among the European and Aboriginal populations that he encounters in Australia, but also in himself, commenting that it is only the 'animal' in him (*der animalische Mann*), and not his spiritual or intellectual (in German: *geistige*) nature, that requires him to have a wife (Darragh and Fensham, 2013: 302); Leichhardt, 1842-1844: Diary 3, 10 September 1843). Here Leichhardt's use of the term *Geist* (meaning both spirit and intellect) shows his thinking poised between the Christian tradition and the Enlightenment. The strong romantic attraction that Leichhardt feels towards the young Marianne Marlow, the daughter of an established family to whom Leichhardt was tutor in French, is characterised by him as a kind of sensuous affliction that he must overcome in order to serve the greater practical goals of science, and he also tends to speak of marriage and science as being mutually exclusive paths in life (Darragh and Fensham, 2013: 29-30, 302-303).

Yet Leichhardt's position on religion is, as he himself notes, far from being orthodox (Darragh and Fensham, 2013: 384-385), and this is because his natural-scientific world view comes into increasing conflict with the strict version of Protestantism that he encounters at the mission of the Reverend Carl Wilhelm Schmidt at Moreton Bay. Referring to members of Schmidt's congregation, Leichhardt writes:

What my studies taught me and what my observation of nature allowed me to comprehend in association with natural laws is completely different for them, who think all of it is cursed, all of it is sin! (Darragh and Fensham, 2013: 384)

(Was meine Studien mich lehrten und was meine Beobachtung der Natur mich [im] in Zusammenhange mit natürlichen Gesetzen auffassen ließ, ist alles anders, ist alles Fluch, ist alles Sünde!) (Leichhardt, 1842-1844: Diary 4, 21 January 1844)

Schmidt and his congregation view the natural reproductive drive as sinful. Leichhardt is appalled by such dogma, describing it as the 'arch-enemy of all humanity' (*Urfeind aller Humanität*) (Darragh and Fensham, 2013: 385; Leichhardt, 1842-1844, Diary 4, 21 January 1844). Although Leichhardt still professes to be a Christian and to resist the yearnings of his own flesh (Darragh and Fensham, 2013: 385), he at the same time comes round to a theological position that is redolent of the pantheism of early German romantic authors like Johann Gottfried Herder and Johann Wolfgang Goethe:

We study this nature and every day we find more to admire, we sense its uniqueness, even though only fragments have become clearer to us, we sense them as the announcement of an omnipotent, omniscient being, whose presence reveals itself in nature much more visibly than in a direct but questionable revelation, with which all natural laws are in conflict (Darragh and Fensham, 2013: 384).

(Wir studiren diese Natur, wir finden jeden Tag mehr zu bewundern, wir ahnden ihre Unübertrefflichkeit obwohl nur Bruchstücke uns klarer geworden sind, wir ahnden sie als die Verkündigung eines allmächtigen allweisen Wesens, dessen

*Dasein sich in ihr viel augenscheinlicher
offenbart, als in der dem Zweifel
ausgesetzten unmittelbaren Offenbarung
gegen welche alle Naturgesetze streiten).*
(Leichhardt, 1842-1844: Diary 4, 21
January 1844)

Leichhardt goes on to argue for a theology based on what he calls 'rational induction' (*vernünftige Induction*), rejecting out of hand the belief in miracles (Darragh and Fensham, 2013: 385; Leichhardt, 1842-1844: Diary 4, 21 January 1844).

All of this suggests that Leichhardt had been exposed to progressive German theology during his time in Berlin, probably in the form of Kant's *Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft* (Religion with the Limits of Reason Alone, 1793), which proposed that ideas such as the immortality of the soul and the existence of God are merely necessary postulates of reason that at the same time are not susceptible of objective proof, and via David Friedrich Strauss's *Das Leben Jesu, kritisch bearbeitet* (The Life of Jesus, Critically Examined, 1835-36), which simultaneously argued for the mundane historical existence of Jesus and the essentially mythical character of the New Testament. Strauss is mentioned in Leichhardt's diary when he reflects upon a meeting with a Sydney clergyman who displayed a combative 'religious zeal with regard to German theology' (*der [...] seinen englischen Religionseifer in Bezug auf deutsche Theologie an den Mann brachte*), perhaps suggesting that its liberal tendencies may not be welcome in a British colony. Leichhardt is surprised to learn that despite these views, the clergyman has not heard of Strauss's works (Darragh and Fensham, 2013: 17-18; Leichhardt, 1842-1844: Diary 1, 26 May 1842). And his encounter with the Sydney clergyman was not the only time when he encountered anti-German prejudices concerning theological matters, since in a discussion with a certain Mrs Mitchell (the wife of the

industrialist James Mitchell), he is shocked to be told that Germans are 'free thinkers' (*Freidenker*) who have no religion (Darragh and Fensham, 2013: 32-33; Leichhardt, 1842-1844: Diary 1, 7 September 1842).

It is likely that Leichhardt's desire to undertake journeys of exploration and to compose journals based upon them was inspired by his studies at the University of Göttingen in 1833 and 1834. On account of the efforts of Christian Gottlob Heyne (1724-1812), Director of the University Library, this institution had, during the second half of the 18th century, become an important German centre for the collection of travel literature from the European colonies. Philological examination of such travel literature was seen to provide a basis for comparative ethnology and comparative mythology, and Heyne's students included many of the leading figures in German romanticism, such as August Wilhelm Schlegel and Friedrich Schlegel, Friedrich August Wolf, Friedrich Creuzer, and Wilhelm von Humboldt, among others (Vöhler, 2002; Williamson, 2004, 30-32). In Göttingen, Leichhardt would have been made abundantly aware of how to present and market a travel journal that combines natural scientific explorations with literary, philosophical, anthropological and religious reflections. A key publication that had inspired Alexander von Humboldt, while also combining the fields of botany, zoology and ethnology in a similar way to Leichhardt's diary, was Georg Forster's account of James Cook's second voyage to the Pacific in 1772-1775, entitled *Voyage Around the World* (1777). Forster enthused that 'there is perhaps no part of the world which so well deserves future investigation as the continent of New Holland, of which we do not yet know the whole outline' (Forster, 2000: 114) – a description that may have inspired Leichhardt to visit the Antipodes.

Among Leichhardt's professors in Göttingen were the Orientalist Georg Heinrich August Ewald (1803-1875); Jakob Grimm (1785-1863) the philologist and, with his brother Wilhelm, famous anthologist of fairy tales; the renowned professor of physiology and comparative anatomy Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (1752-1840); and the philosopher Johann Friedrich Herbart (1776-1841). Herbart, who had combined Kant's transcendental philosophy with the principles of mathematics and physics, is said to have convinced Leichhardt to favour the natural sciences over the humanities (Roderick, 1988, 45), while the influence of Blumenbach can be seen in Leichhardt's emphasis in the diaries on both the physiology of Australian fauna and (rather more problematically) of the Australian Aborigines. Leichhardt spent the remainder of the 1830s on medical and scientific study in Berlin and on various research expeditions in Britain, France, Switzerland and the Mediterranean undertaken with his British companion William Nicholson. Unlike Nicholson, who completed his doctorate in medicine, Leichhardt did not take his medical examinations, pursuing instead a general course of natural scientific study in preparation for his research explorations. Hence, while some publications refer to Leichhardt using the title of 'Dr', he was never awarded a doctorate or a medical qualification. This, however, did not prevent Leichhardt from carrying out medical procedures in the Australian outback, the efficacy of which seems to have been at least questionable (see, for example, the very troubling episode concerning 'little David' in Darragh and Fensham, 2013: 368).

When Leichhardt departed England for Australia on 26 October 1841, his choice of destination was influenced by the fact that William Nicholson's brother Mark had immigrated to Port Phillip district (now the

state of Victoria) in 1840 (Roderick, 1988: 71). Leichhardt left Europe without having reported for his compulsory Prussian military service, which had, upon his request, only been deferred until October 1840. For this reason he effectively became an exile from his homeland (Roderick, 1988: 84), and this may in part explain his desire to remain in Australia, even at the cost of never seeing his family again (see, for example, his remarks in Darragh and Fensham, 2013: 29, 55). This situation only changed in 1847 following the success of the 1844-46 expedition, which attracted gold medals from the geographical societies of London and Paris, and which led to a pardon being granted by the King of Prussia following an intercession on Leichhardt's behalf by Alexander von Humboldt (see Leichhardt's response to this news in Leichhardt, 1881: 165).

These early diaries document the problems that Leichhardt's Prussian background seems to have caused him in the young British colony. A major focus of the entries for 1842 concerns Leichhardt's attempts to secure a post as superintendent of the Botanic Gardens in Sydney. These attempts seem to have faltered on two grounds: that the applicant should have credentials from England, and that the post was in any case for a gardener, not a botanist (Darragh and Fensham, 2013: 10-13; Roderick, 1988: 165-167). Even before his arrival in Australia, and probably with the image of Alexander von Humboldt's Latin American expedition in mind, Leichhardt was intent upon carrying out a great journey of exploration in the Antipodes (as we see in Darragh and Fensham, (2013: 6), Leichhardt also seriously entertained the idea of undertaking an expedition to New Zealand). Thus, before even leaving England, Leichhardt had taken the trouble to secure a letter of introduction to the Surveyor General of New South Wales, Sir Thomas Mitchell, written by the renowned

English biologist Richard Owen (1804-1892), and this explains his initial contact with Mitchell's family during the early phases of his life in Sydney (see Roderick, 1988: 154-55; see also Darragh and Fensham, 2013: 3-4). Leichhardt's aim seems to have been to accompany Mitchell on a proposed expedition from the eastern seaboard of Queensland to Australia's north-east coast, and Mitchell initially welcomed Leichhardt's offer to accompany him (Darragh and Fensham, 2013: 367). But when Mitchell's proposed expedition was delayed because it required approval from the Home Office in London, Leichhardt realised that the success or failure of any future expedition would fall on him alone (Darragh and Fensham, 2013: 457). Accordingly, he organised his own party, financed by private funds (Roderick, 1988: 228, 236), and the latter stages of these diaries (from roughly April 1844 onwards) document Leichhardt's initial plans for this first great journey of exploration.

There is no doubt that Leichhardt's place in Australian history was secured by the success of this journey of 1844-46, a success that, through the various places that carry Leichhardt's name, is literally inscribed onto the map of Australia. Yet there is another altogether less official and rather more controversial Leichhardt that persists as a presence in the Australian literary and historical imaginations. It is well known, particularly on account of Patrick White's novel *Voss*, that Leichhardt became a literary subject, a celebrated and mysterious person to be *written about*. Less well known is the fact that Leichhardt *saw himself as a writer*: a literary recorder of the Australian landscape who espoused a worldview and used a language that were both redolent of the German philosophical and cultural movements of idealism and romanticism from which he emerged. Did Leichhardt the writer – as opposed to just Leichhardt the explorer – also

influence Australian literature and culture? An inspection of Leichhardt's diaries and their reception may yield answers to this question, while also revealing that when it comes to Leichhardt's legacy, his words were almost as important as his deeds.

THE DIARIES, THE SECOND EXPEDITION AND 'THAT LETTER'

When reading these diaries, the question arises as to whether, and if so to what extent and in what form, Leichhardt might have wished to see them published. As Tom Darragh notes in his editorial comments on the diaries, Leichhardt often used abbreviations and left wide margins when writing his diaries, allowing space to elaborate upon earlier entries. This may suggest that Leichhardt intended to use them as rough source material for more polished publications. When examining these early diaries, it is instructive to compare them with Leichhardt's published German correspondence. Published in 1881 under the title of *Dr. Ludwig Leichhardts Briefe an seine Angehörigen* (Dr. Ludwig Leichhardt's Letters to his Relatives), these letters have a rather curious publication history that merits a brief examination here.

Most of Leichhardt's German correspondence was originally sent to his brother-in-law, Carl Schmalfuss, who, deeming it to be of scientific and/or literary interest, forwarded it to Alexander von Humboldt. Humboldt apparently did not make the publication of Leichhardt's letters a matter of great priority, since they seem to have lain dormant with his papers until 1865 when some of them were sent to the Adelaide office of Moritz Richard Schomburgk (1811-1891), a Prussian refugee from the German revolutions of 1848 who had settled in Australia in 1849 and had become curator of the Adelaide Botanic Gardens (Middelmann, 1976; Roderick, 1988:

457-459). As the most prominent botanist in Adelaide, and a German botanist at that, Schomburgk would probably have been in contact with Ferdinand Jakob Heinrich von Mueller (1825-1896), the Director of the Botanic Gardens in Melbourne (until 1873) and founder of the Royal Society of Victoria. Mueller was involved in organising one of the many search parties to find Leichhardt's remains following his expedition of 1848 (on Mueller see Kynaston, 1991, and Webster, 1980: 308-309), and he delivered a rousing public lecture on this subject in Melbourne on 9 February 1865, the German version of which was later published (see Mueller, 1865). It is likely, therefore, that Schomburgk and Mueller, two prominent German scientists in Australia, thought it necessary to represent Leichhardt's cause not only in their adopted country but also in the homeland. It was, finally, another German scientist who had been active on Australian soil – Georg Balthasar von Neumayer (1826-1909), the meteorologist who established the Flagstaff Observatory in Melbourne – who, along with Leichhardt's nephew Otto, oversaw the publication of Leichhardt's German correspondence in 1881, after the former had been appointed as the Director of the Oceanic Observatory in Hamburg upon his return from scientific work in Australia (Home, 1991; see also Roderick, 1988: 456-457 and Nicholls: 2012, 153-158).

All of this suggests that after the fatal journey of 1848, Leichhardt's legacy was championed by a network of German scientists active in Australia, who, in collaboration with members of Leichhardt's own family, seem to have felt it necessary to present him in a rather more positive and sympathetic light than some of his erstwhile Anglophone companions had done. This factor needs to be kept in mind when comparing the 1881 edition of the German letters with the diaries published here, as does Leichhardt's own

expressed intention to publish his German correspondence. Writing to his mother on 6 September 1842, Leichhardt suggests offering his letters to the Reimer publishing house in Berlin, and he compares them with the historian Friedrich von Raumer's (1781-1873) published correspondence about England and Italy (Leichhardt 1881: 119; see also Raumer, 1831). This demonstrates that Leichhardt was aware of the German market for travel journals and letters. He also mentions a financial incentive for him to publish his correspondence; namely, in order to assist his mother financially. 'I am convinced' (*ich bin überzeugt*), wrote Leichhardt to his mother, 'that such a book, published by a competent bookseller, may well be financially worthwhile' (*dass ein solches Buch, von einem tüchtigen Buchhändler herausgegeben, sich wohl bezahlt machen würde*, Leichhardt, 1881: 119). In short, when writing both the diaries and the correspondence, Leichhardt seems to have had the educated German public in mind, but while the diaries seem to represent Leichhardt's more or less unedited or uncensored opinions on Australian life, the published German letters are rather more refined. This is also suggested by Neumayer in his foreword to the German edition of the letters, when he notes that the editors have granted Leichhardt's wish that some personal details in the letters be suppressed (Neumayer in Leichhardt, 1881: v). And a comparison between Neumayer's publication of Leichhardt's *Briefe an seine Angehörigen* with Marcel Aurousseau's more extensive 1968 edition does in fact reveal that such suppressions did take place, albeit on a minor scale. Absent from Neumayer's edition are two rather personal letters that Leichhardt wrote to his parents: the first, dated 13 May 1835, concerns matters relating to the divorce of Leichhardt's parents and includes Leichhardt's bitter and scathing critique of his father's new personal arrangements; the second, dated 28 July 1837

and sent from Clifton near Bristol, comments extensively on the personal scandals within the Nicholson family (see Leichhardt, 1967-68, vol. 1, 10-15; 53-69).

Bearing these editorial practices in mind, it is hardly surprising to find that Leichhardt's tortured erotic reflections concerning his love for Marianne Marlow (Darragh and Fensham, 2013: 18, 21, 28-30), his conversations with cynical colonial doctors about venereal diseases (Darragh and Fensham, 2013: 172), his avid speculations concerning the sexual habits of Aborigines (Darragh and Fensham, 2013: 379), and his moments of embarrassment and shame when, on account of his ragged appearance, he is taken to be a commoner rather than a gentleman (Darragh and Fensham, 2013: 228), do not appear in the published letters to his relatives, though in these cases the censor must have been Leichhardt himself. The contrast between these early diaries and the published letters is even starker when we compare Leichhardt's aforementioned scathing critique of Carl Wilhelm Schmidt's mission at Moreton Bay with the glowing account in the letters. Writing to his mother from Moreton Bay on 27 January 1843, Leichhardt proudly reports that 'everywhere the German earns for himself the love of his neighbours through his diligence and modest frugality' (*der Deutsche überall durch seinen Fleiss und durch seine bescheidene Genügsamkeit sich die Liebe seiner Nachbarn erwirbt*), noting that the German Christian mission in Moreton Bay 'consists of dear and brave people' (*aus lieben, wackeren Leuten besteht*) who have 'undergone much in order to convert the blacks' (*die Manches erduldet haben, um die Schwarzen zu bekehren*, Leichhardt, 1881: 127).

Yet one key feature of the diaries does come through forcefully in the letters: namely, the strong literary sensibility of Leichhardt's writing and his quite self-conscious rhetoric concerning the divinity inherent in nature.

Take, for example, the following heady passage from a letter written by Leichhardt to his sister on 15 May 1844:

What should I say to you concerning my activities? You delight in the beautiful flower and its perfume, you delight in the verdant tree and its shadow, you gaze over the forest and meadow from the earth to the starry sky, and you feel yourself to be moved by higher feelings, since so many voices speak to you of an infinite being unknown to you. If nature moves you in such a friendly way, how much more must she do this to me, in that I have made it my task to penetrate into her deepest secrets and to discover her eternal laws, according to which she functions so magnificently, so splendidly (Leichhardt, 1881: 129).

(Was soll ich Dir über meine Beschäftigungen sagen? Du erfreust Dich der schönen Blumen und ihres Duftes, Du erfreust Dich des grünenden Baumes und seines Schattens, Du blickst über Wald und Flur von der Erde zum gestirnten Himmel, und Du fühlst Dich von höheren Gefühlen bewegt, indem so viele Stimmen von einem unendlichen Wesen, Dir unbewusst, sprechen. Wenn Dich die Natur so freundlich bewegt, wie vielmehr muss sie es mir thun, der ich es mir zur Aufgabe mache, in ihre tiefsten Geheimnisse ein zu dringen und die ewigen Gesetze zu entdecken, nach welchen sie so herrlich, so grossartig wirkt).

Here we find Leichhardt adopting the voice of the romantic German travel writer, a voice that he also rehearses in the diaries.

When it comes to memoirs or letters and their impact upon a person's reputation and legacy, the crucial factor is not only *which* private documents enter the public domain, but also *when* this entry takes place. In the case

of Leichhardt's letters, one key letter written in German in 1847 and then published in English in 1866 (probably via the mediation of Ferdinand von Mueller) had a significant impact on his Australian reception, an impact that arguably lasted well into the 20th century (Roderick, 1988: 457-459). This letter has as its subject the failure of Leichhardt's first attempted east-west crossing of Australia in 1846-47. Apart from the sense of mystery and tragedy that still surrounds Leichhardt's fatal second attempt to cross the Australian continent from east to west in 1848, this first attempt has generated by the far the most controversy, not to mention a detailed and convoluted secondary literature (for an overview, see Webster, 1980). When taking all of the divergent accounts of this journey into consideration, it seems fair to conclude that, for whatever reason, a significant level of acrimony came to exist among members of an expedition party that had been exposed to torrential rain, a factor that not only impeded their journey but also led to dissension concerning the consumption of limited provisions. Prior to the publication in 1866 of the crucial letter written by Leichhardt in 1847, one member of that expedition had published his own account of the journey, which diverged significantly from that of Leichhardt, whose logs of the journey were only published in English in 1989 (see Sprod, 1989). In his *Travels with Dr Leichhardt* (1859), the botanist Daniel Bunce made the damning allegation that Leichhardt had stolen food from others in the expedition party at a time when all were ill and malnourished (Bunce, 1979: 153-59, also discussed in Webster, 1980: 144-46).

In the aforementioned letter written by Leichhardt to his German brother-in-law Schmalfuss and dated 20 October 1847, Leichhardt attributed the failure of the second expedition to a lack of endurance and character among his companions. These men,

wrote Leichhardt, were accustomed to 'a soft and comfortable city life' (*ein weichliches, behagliches Stadtleben*) and expected only to receive the rewards of success without enduring the necessary tribulations of the journey (Leichhardt, 1967-68, 3: 948). There is, it should be said, no existing indication from Leichhardt that he wished this letter to become public, yet following the publication of this letter in the *Adelaide Observer*, the *Geelong Advertiser* and the *Sydney Morning Herald* in January 1866, members of Leichhardt's party sought to defend their own reputations. The portrait of Leichhardt that emerged in John Frederick Mann's highly retrospective *Eight Months with Dr Leichhardt in the Years 1846-1847* (1888) was not a flattering one: 'As a leader, he [Leichhardt] was wholly unfitted for such a responsible position, being deficient in almost every requirement' (Mann, 1888: 63). Mann accuses Leichhardt of having used 'violent and abusive language' in arguments with other members of the expedition; of repeatedly unsettling the expedition's livestock, leading to long delays spent in recapturing them; of being vain, melodramatic and given to excessive self-pity; of beating livestock for no apparent reason; of first secretly and then openly eating more than his share of provisions; of having poor personal hygiene; of being obsessed with his own fame; and of being lax in his religious observances (Mann, 1888, 12, 14, 32-33, 36, 49, 63-70).

A similarly negative, not to mention extremely influential, portrait of Leichhardt is painted by the Australian journalist and former editor-in-chief of the *Australian Encyclopaedia*, Alec H. Chisholm (1890-1977) in his book *Strange New World: The Adventures of John Gilbert and Ludwig Leichhardt* (1941). In 1938, Chisholm discovered the diaries of a member of Leichhardt's first expedition to Port Essington of 1844-46: the naturalist and ornithologist John Gilbert (1810?-1845),

who was killed by Aborigines near the Gulf of Carpentaria during that journey. Gilbert's diaries were critical of Leichhardt, and these criticisms became the centrepiece of Chisholm's book. Writing in the context of extreme anti-German sentiment during World War 2, Chisholm's account mirrors that of Mann, depicting Leichhardt as a 'queer' and 'unbalanced German', who was an 'unworthy leader' given to 'self-centred dreaming' and who merely 'blundered through' in this successful first expedition. Leichhardt is also held to have contravened the Australian principle of 'mateship', to have 'starved his dogs unnecessarily and foolishly' and to have 'thrashed mules for no reason whatever.' Depicted as a dreamy German romantic with no grasp of real Australian bushcraft, Leichhardt's feats as an explorer are described as being akin to the blind striving of 'the moth for the star' (Chisholm, 1941: vii, xi-xiv). An astonishing character assassination of Leichhardt can also be found in Chisholm's introduction to L.L. Politzer's translation into English of a selection of Leichhardt's letters published in 1944 (see Leichhardt, 1944).

This negative Australian reception of Leichhardt did not, however, remain an historical curiosity of the late 19th century and of World War 2. Writing in 1979, in the foreword to a reissue of Bunce's memoirs of 1859, Russel Ward alleged that Leichhardt was 'greedy, tyrannical, pompous, unpredictably erratic in his behaviour and utterly lacking any faculty of self-criticism or sense of humour' (Ward in Bunce, 1979: viii). The question as to whether these allegations concerning Leichhardt contain any real substance has, at least since the publication of Marcel Aurousseau's translation of Leichhardt's letters in 1967-68, been a significant preoccupation of the scholarly literature, with the most reliable sources concluding that a good deal of self-

serving distortion, combined with anti-Prussian and anti-German prejudice, may have coloured the portraits of Leichhardt drawn by members of the first and second expeditions and by later Australian commentators such as Chisholm and Ward (see, for example, Aurousseau 1968: x-xvi; Webster, 1980: 367-380; Roderick, 1988: 1-3, 442-462). The diaries published here certainly do not reveal Leichhardt to have been a rigid Prussian misanthrope given to wanton cruelty, although they admittedly do not deal with any of the major expeditions and their attendant physical and mental stresses. Yet herein lies perhaps their greatest significance, portraying candidly not only Leichhardt on his way to becoming a great explorer, but also Leichhardt the young man, anxious to make his way professionally and socially in Australia, and to reconcile his burgeoning scientific worldview with Christian theology.

LEICHHARDT IN PATRICK WHITE'S VOSS

During the second half of the 20th century, perhaps the greatest impact exerted by Leichhardt's legacy on the Australian cultural landscape is to be found in the eponymous main character of Patrick White's *Voss* (1957). White's fictional re-conjuring of the sense of pathos, mystery and tragedy associated with Leichhardt's final journey of 1848 succeeded to such an extent that the 'real' Leichhardt may have been obscured by his high-romantic and fictional alter-ego, a phenomenon referred to by Horst Priessnitz as the 'Vossification' of Leichhardt (Priessnitz, 1991). But White's novel was by no means the first literary treatment of Leichhardt's expeditions, since esteemed Australian literary figures of the 19th century such as Henry Kendall (1839-1882) and A.B. (Banjo) Paterson (1864-1941), writing in 1880 and 1899 respectively, had devoted poems to the great explorer, mostly laudatory in

tone (see Kendall, 1966: 228-230; Paterson, 1899). In fact, Susan Martin has argued that Leichhardt is, alongside Ned Kelly, 'one of the two most important white male heroes who figure in Australian fiction', and has inspired literary works far too numerous to be dealt with here (on this subject see Petersson, 1990: 183-202; Martin, 2007). It was against this backdrop that White used material from Leichhardt's explorations to create a far more ambivalent anti-hero in the character of Voss.

Johann Ulrich Voss is a morose German explorer who leads a fatal expedition aiming to cross the Australian continent in 1845. Voss conceives of his mission in high-romantic terms, declaring that he is 'compelled into this country', leaving behind him the 'trivialities of daily existence' in order to 'attempt the infinite' (White, 1957: 32, 38-39). The expedition ends tragically: Voss is held captive by a tribe of Aborigines, severely malnourished and drifting in and out of consciousness, with an increasingly weak grasp on reality. He is finally murdered by Jackie, a young Aboriginal boy who had formerly been a member of his expedition. The last word on Voss comes from Laura Trevelyan, a young Sydney woman with whom Voss forms a romantic connection prior to his expedition, and with whom he communicates in a quasi-telepathic manner, spiritually conquering the distance between the remote Australian interior and the civilised life of the city. Laura remarks that 'Voss did not die His legend will be written down, eventually, by those who have been troubled by it' (White, 1957: 478).

It would be entirely incorrect to suggest that White's novel was intended to offer anything resembling an accurate historical portrait of Leichhardt (on this subject, see Arousseau, 1958; Orel, 1972). Writing to Marcel Arousseau on 18 July 1970, White observes that the character of Voss was assembled

from 'bits of Leichhardt' and also from Edward John Eyre's journals (White quoted in Marr, 1991: 314). White's biographer, David Marr, is of the opinion that White 'took little directly from Leichhardt's papers,' but relied predominantly on 'Alec Chisholm's often mocking attitude to the explorer set out in *Strange New World*, the book in which White first discovered Leichhardt' (Marr, 1991: 316). The following letter, written by White on 11 September 1956 to his American editor Ben Huebsch, does indeed suggest that Chisholm's contentious book may have offered him important source material:

Some years ago I got the idea for a book about a megalomaniac explorer. As Australia is the only country I really know in my bones, it had to be set in Australia, and as there is practically nothing left to explore, I had to go back to the middle of last century. When I returned here after the War and began to look up old records, my idea seemed to fit the character of Leichhardt. But as I did not want to limit myself to a historical reconstruction (too difficult and too boring), I only based my explorer on Leichhardt. The latter was, besides, merely unusually unpleasant, whereas Voss is mad as well (White, 1994: 107).

Leichhardt's early diaries offer a counterpoint to White's contention that Leichhardt was 'unusually unpleasant'; they definitely present a young man who is uncertain of himself, perhaps given to a sense of self-importance and dramatic oversensitivity, but in no way do they suggest that Leichhardt was malicious or unpleasant in the manner suggested by the account of Chisholm in *Strange New World*, which seems to have been the defining 20th century caricature of Leichhardt, while also being a significant source for *Voss*.

Yet we now know, as David Marr could not definitively have done in 1991, that White consulted a lot more than Chisholm's *Strange New World* when writing *Voss*. Due to the recent discovery of a collection of White's letters, notebooks and manuscripts, sold to the National Library of Australia (NLA) in 2006, it has become possible to examine White's main research notebook for *Voss*.⁴ This notebook includes a bibliography in which White lists a range of Leichhardt sources, most notably his 'Letters' and 'Diary', and it also reveals that White undertook research into all three of Leichhardt's expeditions, with by far the most attention being devoted to the first attempted east-west crossing of Australia of 1846-47. White would, moreover, have been in a position to appreciate the German sources in their original language, having studied German at Cambridge during the 1930s (Marr, 1991: 114-137). White took direct notes from L.L. Politzer's 1944 translation of selected letters by Leichhardt, since the English transcriptions in White's research notebook for *Voss* match Politzer's renderings of Leichhardt's original German.⁵ Presumably White also read Alec Chisholm's extraordinarily prejudiced account of Leichhardt's character and deeds in the introduction to Politzer's translation.

However, this recent discovery from White's papers does not rule out the possibility that he also looked at Neumayer's more comprehensive German edition of Leichhardt's correspondence, as well as at Leichhardt's diaries, in which Leichhardt's romantic German prose is in full view. In fact, in 1958 no lesser authority than Marcel Aourousseau opined as follows: 'it seems most likely that Mr. White has read Leichhardt's letters to his relatives, I should say in the original German edition of 1881, and that he read them with most perceptive understanding' (Aourousseau, 1958: 85-86). Aourousseau's conjecture is certainly not

proven by White's research notebook for *Voss*, but it remains plausible. Although not possible here, a systematic comparison between the modes of expression used by Leichhardt in his correspondence and in his diaries on the one hand, and by White in *Voss* on the other, may reveal more than superficial correspondence. While much of the commentary on White's novel has sought prototypes for the character of *Voss* in high canonical German sources such as Goethe's *Faust* or Nietzsche's notion of the *Übermensch* (see the summary of the scholarly literature in Petersson, 1990: 203-215), the diaries on display in this volume suggest that White would have found plenty of high-romantic material in Leichhardt's own writings; some of which, as we have seen, were intended for publication and were self-conscious contributions to the genre of German romantic travel writing (for more detail on this question, see Nicholls, 2014). In fact, perhaps the most striking idea expressed in White's *Voss* – that of an explorer compelled by force of will to explore the unknown interior of the continent – can be found in Leichhardt's own correspondence, even expressed in the rather grandiose terms favoured by White's fictional explorer. Writing to his brother-in-law Schmalfuss on 27 September 1841, before he had left Europe, Leichhardt remarks of Australia that 'this interior, this core of the dark continent is my goal, and I will never relent until I have reached it' (*dieses Innere, dieser Kern der dunklen Masse ist mein Ziel, und ich werde nicht eher nachlassen, als bis ich es erreiche*, Leichhardt, 1881: 104). And following the failed second expedition of 1846-47, Leichhardt writes again to Schmalfuss concerning the 'infinite, unconquerable urge' (*unendlicher unbezwingbarer Drang*) that 'drives me to study this nature and to solve the puzzle of this land' (*treibt mich, diese Natur zu studiren und die Rätsel dieses Landes zu lösen*, Leichhardt 1881:163). In short, Leichhardt's diaries and letters suggest that

his own self-conception as an explorer was already informed by the ideas and even by the language of German romanticism. These diaries, then, reveal Leichhardt to be one of the earliest contributors to a very strange hybrid indeed: that of German-Australian romanticism, bringing the worldview and sensibilities of German idealism to the Australian landscape.

EPILOGUE: LEICHHARDT'S CONTINUING AFTERLIFE

Ludwig Leichhardt has consistently attracted interest and controversy in Australia ever since his successful first journey of 1844-46 and his subsequent disappearance in 1848. As Colin Roderick points out, it has widely been concluded that the members of Leichhardt's last expedition 'died from starvation or illness or mass drowning in a flooded creek or at the hands of hostile Aborigines' (1988: 499). Yet this conclusion has not prevented numerous search parties from trying to find their remains, from an expedition undertaken by Hovenden Hely in 1852, to a search party organised by the South Australian government as late as 1938.⁶ In 2006, the so-called 'Leichhardt name plate' – a metal plate bearing the text 'Ludwig

Leichhardt 1848' and thought to have been mounted on the gun used by Leichhardt on his last expedition – was rediscovered and bought by the National Museum of Australia. This plate had originally been found in 1900, probably in the north-western region of the Tanami desert, near the border between the Northern Territory and Western Australia. The authentication of this plate by the National Museum led to a symposium in 2007, which re-examined Leichhardt's scientific and cultural legacy.⁷ Alongside these developments, academic debates concerning Leichhardt's last expedition have continued, with a recent article arguing that Leichhardt and his party died in the Great Sandy Desert in the north-western Australian interior, west of where the aforementioned 'name-plate' was found (Lewis, 2006). More recently still, significant parts of Leichhardt's personal library were rediscovered in the State Library of New South Wales and the Australian Museum Research Library, leading to a new assessment of Leichhardt as a scientific scholar (see Stephens, 2007). Over 160 years after his disappearance, Ludwig Leichhardt continues to inspire scholarly interest in Australia, and the new translation of these diaries will doubtless provide another source of inspiration.

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□ ENDNOTES

1. Aspects of the information presented here on Leichhardt's biography and educational background, as well as some of the material relating to the treatment of Leichhardt's journeys in Patrick White's novel *Voss*, are also outlined in different contexts in Nicholls (2012) and Nicholls (2014).
2. For recent German-language accounts of Leichhardt's education and Australian journeys of exploration, see Finger (1999) and Finger (2000).
3. See, for example, the biologist-cum-anthropologist Baldwin Spencer (1860-1929), who when discussing the confrontation between Aboriginal and European cultures in Australia, wrote that "the weaker and less cultured would certainly be exterminated by the stronger and more highly cultured" (1921, 30).
4. These materials are listed in the National Library of Australia catalogue as follows: MS 9982 Papers of Patrick White, 1930-2002 [manuscript]. Series 2: Literary notebooks, 1930s-1970s. Item 5: notebook containing research for *Voss* (1957), c.1955-1957. A second notebook – listed as Item 4: Notebook, including material for *Voss* (1957), *Riders in the Chariot* (1961) and *A Fringe of Leaves* (1976), c.1947-1976 – contains only very limited material of direct relevance to *Voss*. For a more detailed account of White's *Voss* notebook, see Nicholls (2014).
5. For White's transcriptions from Politzer's edition of Leichhardt's letters, see: NLA, MS 9982 Papers of Patrick White, 1930-2002 [manuscript]. Series 2: Literary notebooks, 1930s-1970s Item 5: Notebook containing research for *Voss* (1957), c.1955-1957, Part 49.
6. The various Leichhardt search parties are discussed in Webster (1980) and Roderick, (1988, 499-505).
7. The papers given at this symposium can be found on the National Museum of Australia website: *Leichhardt: the Man, the Mystery, the Science, the History*, symposium held at the National Museum of Australia, Canberra, 15 June 2007, <http://www.nma.gov.au/audio/series/ludwig-leichhardt-series/> (accessed 22 November 2011).