

Introduction

“Fictionalizing *The Indigenous* in German Travel Literature: The Expeditions of Chamisso, Forster, Humboldt, and Maximilian” is a cross-cultural project that unites German Studies, Travel Literature, Anthropology, Ethnography, and Native American Studies. Maritime exploration and land travel at the end of the eighteenth and into the early nineteenth centuries by European *Others*¹, namely German explorers, enabled them to narrate—and sometimes, *fictionalize*—the stories, lives, and environments of the Indigenous communities they encountered.

The German understanding of the Indigenous world was heightened, not just by travel, but also by the rapport the explorers established with the local natives by actively participating in Indigenous daily life. Before the explorers were comfortable enough to engage with the natives, they had to learn and interpret through tacit observation. They did not recognize that their Indigenous hosts suspiciously, yet silently gazed back. There were a few Indigenous guides who were not so silent, however, such as Kadu and Omai, friends of the explorers whom we will meet in forthcoming chapters.

The travelogues that resulted from the voyages were possible because of direct observation and experience coupled with intense introspection. Travel accounts were enthusiastically received by the European, particularly German, readership because of the detailed interpretations and subsequent narration of native culture, of nature, and of anything not European. According to Susanne Zantop:

Comment [c1]: Before your introduction, and at the top of every page, you need a header. It should be your last name and the page number (e.g., Doe 2). This header should be 1 inch from the top and the right.

Comment [c2]: In MLA format, these are spelled out.

Comment [c3]: This text seems early in your paper. Spend a little more time introducing readers to the topic.

Comment [c4]: Were the travelogues possible because of direct observation, etc. or were they a *result* of these things?

¹ As defined by postcolonial scholars, namely Edward Said: “Other” is used to identify an alter ego, distinct from the subject. As an Indigenous scholar reversing the traditional lens by looking at Germans who looked at *The Indigenous* while on their excursions, I am constructing this alter ego. I strive to recapture the perspective of the perceived. European explorers, specifically Germans, happened upon Indigenous communities, and were thus foreign and *Other* to these inhabitants.