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DISPLACEMENT AND TRAVEL IN FYNES MORYSON'S *AN ITINERARY*

Claudia Bujoreanu Gheorghe
Ovidius University of Constanta

Abstract: *In the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, travel was the only available opportunity of finding new things and exploring new worlds. However, travel was difficult because of the limited transportation possibilities and also because of the many perils it involved. Because of these limited possibilities for travel, printing material about travel was very popular, as people were curious to find out as many things as possible about foreign places. They regarded the new places as a new world of knowledge, of civility, even though reality was not exactly as idyllic as it was imagined or represented in books. Early modern texts represent travel as dangerous and accommodation and food as poorer than at home. I argue that these ways of comparing foreign places to familiar ones is meant to persuade the readers to appreciate what they have at home. The traveller is always displaced, "travailing" in rough conditions, and missing home. Travel is, therefore, perceived as "travail," meaning hard and unpleasant work for the traveller. By observing local customs, institutions and economics in various countries, the early modern English traveller constantly compares them to the amenities available at home. Sometimes, such a traveller is a prejudiced and unreliable informant. One example to support this idea is the focus on the Catholic Italian reality in* An Itinerary, *where the convinced and earnest Protestant Fynes Moryson presents a hostile Italy, whose antiquity and monuments are compared negatively to the undesirable effects derived from the prevalence of the Catholic religion in the country. There is, however, nothing unfamiliar about the negative attitude of an Elizabethan English traveller towards Papacy.*

Keywords: *travel, displacement, foreign places, comparison, new worlds*

Travel has always been considered a tiresome activity, and many travelogue writers emphasize the benefits of reading about travel from the comfort of their home rather than travelling to distant spaces. Defining the genre of travel writing, Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs, the editors of *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing* (2002), argue that "Writing and travel have always been intimately connected" and that "the traveller's tale is as old as fiction itself" (2). Writing about travel has been described as a kind of non-fictional literature that relies on personal impression, so it is highly subjective and almost fictional in the interpretation of facts. As Mary Campbell observes when examining travel writing and its theory, "[a] text that generically proffers itself as 'true,' as a representation of unaltered 'reality,' makes a perfect test case for analytical work that tries to posit or explain the fundamental fictionality of all representation" (Campbell 263). Even more so, when we are talking about the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, when the travel writing genre was just beginning to emerge, this kind of semi-fictionality is even more obvious. In this paper I will examine geocritically Fynes Moryson's earnest Protestant interpretation of Italy, with personal critical notes about Catholicism, to show the ways in which travel writing can be influenced by the traveller's opinions and comments.

Personal opinion may generate a "sense of disorientation" (Tally 1), similar to spatial displacement, in the readers' minds and may create confusion. Robert Tally discusses this sense of displacement when one finds himself positioned "in the middle" and the sense of space is rather disturbed (Tally 1). Whenever the traveller finds him-/herself in a new place, the first feeling is that of being lost; it is like a new beginning and it is always hard to find the right path. Tally supports his ideas by quoting from the opening lines of Dante's *Commedia*:

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> Midway along the journey of our life,
> I woke up to find myself in a dark wood,
> For I had wondered off from the straight path. (Dante, qtd. in Tally 1)

Whether being lost, or just experiencing new places, new situations, people get a feeling of anxiety when they face change brought by spatial displacement. This occurs when one truly appreciates what one used to have, and starts comparing the new world with the familiar one. In *Spatiality*, Tally gives another example of how one feels when being lost in a new environment. He quotes the American critic Fredric Jameson, who describes his sense of displacement after experiencing the feeling of being lost in the architectural dark woods of the Westin Bonaventure Hotel in postmodern Los Angeles:

> This latest mutation in space—postmodern hyperspace—has finally succeeded in transcending the capacities of the individual human body to locate itself, to organize its immediate surroundings perceptually, and cognitively to map its position in a mappable external world. (Jameson, qtd. in Tally 2)

I argue that this sense of being lost in space and the attempt at mapping the world can be critically enhanced and radically improved by looking at the biased views of reality that certain travel writers had about foreign places. By comparing these prejudiced evaluations with what people might have thought in Elizabethan and Jacobean times, when they were influenced by an Anglocentric perspective, it is possible to coherently map the reality faced by both readers and travel writers.

Moryson's 1617 *Itinerary* presents his judgement about peoples and civilizations of Europe and the Mediterranean world during the last decades of the sixteenth century. With his *Itinerary*, Moryson gave something valuable to the world, which was useful especially to the unexperienced traveller: a set of suggestions on how travellers should behave while they are abroad. According to Peter C. Mancall, in his Introduction to the volume of essays entitled *Bringing the World to Early Modern Europe*, "Whatever might be said about Moryson's judgments about the peoples and civilizations he encountered—he was, after all, caught up in the predictable biases of his age—he left something valuable to posterity: a set of recommendations for how travelers should behave when they were abroad and when they returned home again (1). Moryson argues that visiting a foreign country is "good and profitable" (3: 349) and praises the experience of the senses and the knowledge that can be drawn from it, though he typically excludes women, the elderly and the sick from the travelling experience (Moryson 3: 350-352). Even the "grave university men" are excluded from the group of wise travellers because he disparagingly considers them to be "reputed idiots in worldly affaires" (Moryson 3: 354). In volume 3 of Moryson's monumental four-volume book we find a list of 27 items that travellers should know. His suggestions were made mainly for the inexperienced voyageurs, though there is also advice for the ones who had already travelled. All in all, Moryson favours the experience of travel because "the theater of this World" (3: 355), as he claims, is full of the wonders of God and he considers it worth seeing and describing.

In his praise of the advantages of travel, however, Moryson is concerned about the relation between mind and body and the effects that travel has on the mind. In the section recording his travels through Germany and Italy during 1605–1617, there is advice concerning the traveller's health, strictly categorized into six rules: air, diet, purging, exercise, sleep, and avoiding accidents and "passions of the mind" (3:391). As concerns the "passions of the mind," Moryson becomes more specific and expands upon the subject: "I will onely say that mirth is a great preserver of health, and sadness a very plague thereunto. The body followes the temper of the mind, as the temper of the mind followes that of the body" (*Itinerary*, 3:394). No one could argue with this view. Giving examples from his personal life, when he was on the brink of death because of grief,

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Moryson insists on the point that a positive mind keeps a healthy body, while a sad person is more likely to have health problems. He also offers advice for travellers who suffer from sea sickness and considers that roses, oranges, lemons, or herbs are the best cure for this problem (3:395). The personal examples of Moryson's account remind readers that this is a published journal, after all, and this fact gives a sense of verisimilitude and intimacy to the narrative.

Since the travelogue's author looks at travel through the perspective of his personal experience, the narrative is pregnant with moralizing precepts and private counsels. According to Moryson, there is a certain psychology of the traveller that keeps him away from unpleasant situations. A traveller should never judge unfamiliar forms of behaviour, as he notes in the section dedicated to cautions for travellers: "Let him reprove nothing in another man's house much less in a strange Common-wealth" (Moryson 3: 396). Yet this is exactly what Moryson does throughout his narrative. He criticises many customs of the countries he visits. Those travelling to new lands should conceal their religion, their excessive curiosity, in order not to provoke the hostility of the hosts. He also advises the traveller to be humble and dress in such a manner as the locals should not realise they are foreigners. However, he adds that quick judgements should not be made about other civilisations, while he is doing just so. In this respect, Moryson gives the example of the ways in which one's behaviour could be misleading, unless it is not the proper one. Italians in England, for example, took the women "for Harlots, who are much chaster then their Women would be, having liberty as ours have" (*Itinerary*, 3:420). Actually, Moryson presents various ethnic perspectives on the situation of women; compared to the socially restrained condition of women in Italy—who were kept inside the house and could not go out unless they were attended by a companion—women in England were thought to be much more libertine because they could attend the theatre and other social functions unchaperoned.

Being able to compare various cultures through travel and travel writing, however, comes at a certain price. Moryson admits that travellers gain authority because they have so much to offer from their experience, as they have seen so many distant new places. However, this asset comes with certain disadvantages, such as facing the troubles that travelling to distant lands include. Travel, therefore, is seen as an empowering experience, provided that one keeps the golden mean between "liberal modesty" and "clownish bashfulnesse" (3: 399). Yet this is a highly judgemental statement about travellers. It is no wonder, therefore, that scholars have compared Fynes Moryson with the comic character Puntavorlo, ironized in Ben Jonson's *Everyman Out of His Humour* (1599). In Jonson's play, Puntavorlo is a vainglorious knight with histrionic tendencies, who gets involved in various brawls yet manages to get out of them unscathed. Critic H. L. Snuggs argues that Puntavorlo is modelled on Fynes Moryson because "Puntavorlo's eccentricity and humour was 'dealing upon returns,' i.e., putting out money to receive more upon his return from a journey" (230). Snuggs maintains that Moryson, too, when he returned from Constantinople, tried to capitalize on his return by putting money as a kind of insurance, just as Ben Jonson's character does (Snuggs 232). Probably this is the reason for Moryson's critical position towards excess during travel and for his emphasis on the difficulties of travel, which Moryson and his travel companions (including his brother Henry) had to endure. However, I find Jonson's irony much more intense. Puntavorlo says he intends to draw an official document insuring the safe return of himself, Dog, and Cat, from their journey to the Turk, and he even draws such a document in the notary's office (Jonson, *Everyman Out of His Humour* II.i, p. 72 and IV.iv, p. 136). The playful device of including the character's pets in the officially drafted document draws attention to the difference between theatre and real life. Puntavorlo's character may have been inspired by Fynes Moryson, as Snugg argues, but the theatrical irony is even more acute because of the grotesque insertion of animals in the dramatic interaction.

Many critics, however, praise the authenticity of Moryson's accounts. German scholar John A. Waltz, for instance, argues that the details recorded in Moryson's travel through Germany, particularly the description of Eulenspiegel's tomb, are correct. Confirming every detail of

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Moryson's narrative, Waltz notes: "Moryson's further statement that the townsmen had an annual celebration of Eulenspiegel is not confirmed, so far as I can see, by any German source, but it is doubtlessly correct" (466). Preserved Smith and Robert Barr attest to the authenticity of Moryson's account of Wittenberg in Germany by testifying that he inscribed his name "on the Wittenberg register" (Smith, Barr 429). Nobody doubts the authenticity of Moryson's travel account. One may object, however, to the fact that he emphasizes too much the difficulties of travel and that he is too judgemental about the countries and peoples he encounters. Another article, however, published in the *North American Review* (1916), criticizes Moryson's account of Ireland. C. R. Miller writes that Moryson contributed to "creating an entirely false impression of the morals of the Irish people in the seventeenth century and before" (Miller 796) and considers some of his statements "criminal falsehoods" (796). In his demonstration of how Ovid was interpreted by English travellers through the lens of Italian garden architecture, John Dixon Hunt invokes Moryson's account for providing correct information about the Hesperidean gardens outside Naples (Hunt 4). Recent critics even consider that Moryson "resorts to strategies of dissimulation" (Pfannebecker 570) in order to defend himself against detractors.

Whatever the ironies of drama, the criticism, or praise that Moryson's travelogue might have received, Moryson himself seems to have taken his travels seriously. His description of Western Europe is done conscientiously and with self-confidence. When travelling to Italy, Moryson first describes it as the most praised of all nations; he admits that the gods have been so generous with it and that there is no other nation in the whole world adorned with so many beauties. However, as can be seen further in his description of Italy, he has a mocking style and does not move away from the tradition of the Elizabethan English traveller, who has always had an unfamiliar attitude toward Papacy. At first, readers get an idyllic impression of fruitful Italy, an almost-mythical land where everything is perfect:

> Italy worthily called the Queene of Nations, can never be sufficiently praised, being most happy in the sweete Ayre, the most fruitfull and pleasant fields, warme sunny hils, hurtlesse thickets, shaddowing groves, Havens of the Sea, watering brookes, baths, wine, and oyle for delight, and most safe forts or defences as well of the Sea as of the Alpes. Neither is any part of Europe more inhabited, more adorned with Cities and Castles, or to be compared thereunto for tillage and husbandry. (Moryson, *Itinerary* 4:75)

This idyllic description seems more suitable to a poetic narrative than to a travelogue. Moryson's description, in fact, contributed—along with other contemporary texts—to shaping a romanticised image of Italy in the early modern English imagination.

Later in his narrative, however, readers find what may have been Moryson's true feelings, which are highly critical, probably stemming from his direct interaction with the inhabitants. He considers the Italians Narcissists, as they think Italy is a true Paradise, without even having travelled too much in their own country. Moryson regards the Italians as ignorant because they boast about the beauties surrounding them in a maximum ten miles area, but they have no wisdom or life experience. The Italians are so concerned with themselves that they are satisfied with living in their small circle. By contrast, Moryson argues, the Englishmen are wise, for they have gained experience by travelling, by being eager to find more information every day. Writing of the fertility of Naples, Moryson quotes English travel writer Jerome Turler, who creates a mirific image of the country of Italy in the English imagination (Moryson 4: 81). Yet Moryson brings his own experience and looks critically at the Italians' limited view of themselves:

> This I write, to shew that the Italians are so ravished with the beauty of their owne Countrey, as having by sharpnesse of wit more then the true value of things, magnified and propounded to strangers admiration, each Brooke for a River, each vice for the neighbour

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> vertue, and each poore thing, as if it were to be extolled above the Moone, they have thereby more wronged themselves then us. For we passing through Italy, though we find our selves deceived in the fame of things, yet still we heare and see many things worthy to be observed; but of the Italians, holding Italy for a Paradice, very few sharpen their wits with any long voyage, and great part of them have not seene the Villages and Cities within ten miles of their dwellings. Hence it is that great part of the Italians have nothing to boast of, but their naturall wit, while our Nations beyond their Alpes, besides naturall gifts, have wisdome gained by experience. (Moryson 4: 82)

What Moryson does in this comparative view of Italians and Northern European nations (who live North of the Alps) is, actually, to highlight the practical knowledge gained by experience, as opposed to knowledge from books, which most readers in his time were able to obtain. Indirectly, therefore, Moryson advises his readers to interpret critically what they read. He also suggests that it is always more profitable to see places for oneself rather than read or hear about them from other sources, which may be misleading. In his critical view of the Italians, Moryson promotes his own views on the subject of travel.

True to his precepts of emulating the host culture as much as possible, in order to be able to blend and not look too much of a stranger, Moryson is also capable of dissimulation by concealment of his real purpose. When he narrates the days he and his brother spent in Jerusalem, he describes the events as an "Epilogue to a Comedy" (2: 37). They had been hosted by friars at a monastery; when they asked to pay for their food, their hosts said that it was not necessary. An aside from the author—doubtlessly derived from his experience as a traveller—notes that these friars are "greedy" because they do not ask money for food, but they receive more than the price of food through the alms donated to the monastery. As a result, Moryson says he and his brother do not want to be partners in this "conspiracy" (2: 37). Aware that food is cheap in the Holy Land, the English party offer six zechines for their food, which is considered adequate payment (2: 38). In fact, Moryson uses any excuse to criticise Catholic practices for the benefit of readers in his home country, while he continues to be ambiguous and self-ironic concerning his own opinions in matters of faith. Thus, Moryson invokes the 24th "Precept of Dissimulation" used in the first volume of his travelogue (2: 38), referring to the reverence of the body shown during the "Papist" service.

Since the English party is trapped in the company of Italian friars, they pretend to be Catholics but do not go to Mass, under the excuse of being sick (2: 40). Not only is Moryson ready to lie and pretend that he is of a different religion—which he hates—just because they were given free accommodation and meals, but he also justifies his action. For one thing, he confesses that "in those days, my conscience was not so tender" (2: 39), probably in comparison with his more mature years. Secondly, he adds with conviction:

> I am confidently of the opinion, that no man returnes home with more detestation of the Papist Religion, then he who well instructed in the truth, hath taken the libertie to behold with his eyes their strange superstitions … (Moryson 2: 39)

Not only is Moryson prejudiced against the Catholic faith, but he also avows that he detests its superstitions. Moreover, he indirectly claims that only Protestantism has monopoly over the truth and all other religions are fake and irrelevant – a position typical of all Christian denominations with respect to other (monotheistic) religions.

The English party, however, proffer only half a lie when they say: "we professed our selves Catholiques, as the Papists will be called, yet enemies to the King of Spaine, as enemie of our Queene and country" (2: 41). Elizabethan English patriotism takes precedence over pragmatism in this statement. Moryson's party pretend to be members of the religion they hate just because they need material gratification (free accommodation and food with the Italian friars), but they do not

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admit allegiance to the King of Spain. Since in those times Spain was England's most vehement enemy, Moryson prefers to be considered a Catholic from England rather than appear to betray his home country by professing allegiance to Spain. Yet the English Catholics at that time were supported by the Pope and Catholic Spain, in their opposition against the Protestant Queen Elizabeth. Therefore, not only do the members of the English party denounce formally their moral and religious principles in favour of a pretence of faith that would bring them free food, but they are also cowards and avoid being considered traitors to their home and country. This would have brought them a traitor's punishment at home, namely being hung, drawn and quartered. This dissimulation episode in Moryson's narrative demonstrates that displacement in space (the English party was in Jerusalem, away from home) can cause deep moral confusion and induce travellers to lie and pretend a different religious allegiance when faced with the bare necessities of life. However, since the publication of Moryson's travelogue in England would transform their religious transgression into documentation of treason, written in black and white on the page, Moryson is inclined to justify his anti-Catholic position.

When looked at from the perspective of the modern reader, Moryson's narrative seems biased and extremely subjective. Nor can an objective interpreter accept the formal and poor excuses that Moryson brings in support of the English party's lie, as well as their vituperative deprecation of Catholicism and extolling of Protestantism. However, when looked at from the perspective of the spatial interpretation of travel writing, things become more nuanced. What in Jerusalem seemed to be a perfectly justifiable lie—brought about by circumstance and need—could not be tolerated on the printed page in officially anti-Catholic England. Evidence shows that Moryson's anti-Catholic message was received enthusiastically in England. In a study discussing the 1632 will of Alexander Cooke, a Puritan controversialist, historian John Barnard documents that Cooke left his daughter, by will, the gift of Moryson's *Travels* (1617), which "indicates that his daughter read for knowledge and pleasure" (Barnard 85). Therefore, Moryson's anti-Catholic stance did have an impact on English Protestants at home. Yet no one can know how sincere Moryson was—either in Jerusalem or at home for his English Protestant readers.

This analysis of Moryson's *Itineray* has shown that the discourse of travel can be radically distorted and brought to mean differently, in accordance with the space of its reception. Ethical and religious matters are pragmatically left to a certain rhetoric suitable for the printed text—where anti-Catholic issues were vocally displayed—while in the practice of everyday life the space *where one is* counts absolutely. As the saying goes, "When in Rome, do as the Romans do." When in Jerusalem, the holy city, Moryson was ready to abjure his Protestant principles, which he had maintained throughout his life, while, on second thought, these principles were vocally perpetuated in his travel writing. This doubleness observed between actual travel and the discourse about travel shows us that things are not always as they seem, in travel writing and in real life.

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