

Writing Travel in Early Modern Europe: Fynes Moryson's advice for building Bridges and not Walls

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Background:

Information, travellers circulated via modes of publication of their accounts of travel abroad, played an influential role in how readers back home comprehended the world around, and also paved the path for successors hoping to undertake travel. The successors, who read such travel accounts, undoubtedly increased their knowledge concerning the newer lands described therein and found hints on the necessary outlook a traveller required to adopt in order to maximize on arduous journeys they planned to embark upon. 'Attitude' was a decisive element in training the eye of a traveller who chose to survey new lands, its peoples and culture, and other new encounters that captured their attention.

Travel as one knows, depends on a variety of factors. In the present times, factors such as political situation of a traveller's homeland, the homeland's relation with the countries to be visited, climatic conditions, travel conditions, licenses, language barriers, religious restrictions to list a few, play an important role in determining one's travel plans, and need careful consideration during travel. Similar factors sought consideration 400 years ago.

In early modern Europe, despite several odds, individuals whose curiosity translated into travel perambulated continental Europe and at times even further east. On their return, these individuals narrated their experiences, which were published for attracting a wider readership at home. These travel narratives served the primary purpose of disseminating first hand information of their travel abroad.

In this paper, I shall examine the *Itinerary* authored by Fynes Moryson, specifically focussing on the set of twenty seven precepts that Moryson lays down for the "unexperienced." Moryson similar to Thomas Coryat travelled purely for pleasure. Moryson's travel accounts written in a clear and lucid style were targeted towards a general readership. Although, the precepts form a small proportion of the voluminous *Itinerary*, its significance and contribution within the

discussion of travel as a genre is much larger. These precepts provide a lens calibrated by Moryson's ideas and provide a window into the world of the voluminous *Itinerary*. It would not be an overstatement to say that the precepts served as an introduction and encouragement to the young who chose travel as a mode of education and learning.

Introduction of Fynes Moryson

Fynes Moryson was born in Lincolnshire, in 1566 as the third child of Thomas and Elizabeth Moryson. Fynes was educated at Peterhouse, Cambridge where he earned a Bachelor's Degree. Moryson bagged a Fellowship of twenty pounds at the same college, to study Civil Law abroad. Fynes shared a close relationship with his younger brother Henry who was three years his junior. This proved advantageous to them when they shared the room at Peterhouse.

Charles Hughes reveals that Moryson "for some years had an ambition to be a traveller," and Peterhouse made provision for two Fellows to travel. (Hughes iii) After receiving his parents' approval, Moryson sailed for Continental Europe in May 1591. As was the custom, mentions Hughes, how certain young Englishmen from affluent families yearned to travel abroad especially to universities in Italy. For instance, Hughes reveals that Richard Hooker's students George Cranmer and Edwin Sandys spent three years studying in France, Germany and Italy.

Fynes Moryson through his Fellowship studied Civil Law at three destinations, Universities of Wittenberg, Leiden and Padua. All of these cities where he chose to study were distanced, thus travelling between them was worthwhile in satiating his desire to travel. Besides his formal education, Moryson was fluent in French, German and Italian.

Another member worth mentioning is Thomas Coryat (1577?-1617). Known for his travels around continental Europe in 1608, Coryat too encouraged travellers to visit various famous universities. Regarding the University of Padua, Coryat mentions the main subjects taught were "physicke and the civill law," and at full capacity the University accommodates almost one thousand five hundred students. Moreover, he also notes that Padua boasted a rather large community of foreign students from France, Germany, Netherlands and England, "who with great desire flocke together to Padua for good letters sake, as to a fertile nursery, and sweete emporium and mart town of learning" (*Coryat's Crudities*, Vol. I 297-298).

Fynes Moryson set out on his second journey in 1596, accompanied this time by his younger brother Henry Moryson (1569-1596). This peregrination took Fynes Moryson to eastern mediteranean lands all the way to Constantinople. However, events turned tragic during this journey when Henry Moryson succumbed to dysentery and died in Turkey. Fynes built a memorial for his brother reports William Biddulph, "About eight miles from Scanderone, we came to a

Towne called Bylan, where there lieth buried an English Gentleman, named Henrie Morison, who died there coming downe from Aleppo, in companie with his brother Master Phines Morison.”

The grave bearing the Moryson coat of arms was inscribed with the epitaph,

To thee deere Henry Morison

Thy Borthier Phines here left alone:

Hath left this fading memorie,

For Monuments, and all must die (*Purchas His Pilgrimes*, Vol. VIII 258).

This uneventful incident haunted Moryson, who lamented the death of his younger brother for the rest of his life.

Moryson after his arrival in London on July 10, 1597 retreated to Lincolnshire spending time with relatives and resting his weary body. It was in 1600 that Moryson chose a new career as secretary to Lord Mountjoy the Lord Deputy in succession to Essex and followed him to Ireland. Mountjoy and Moryson returned to England in 1603, after which Moryson continued to serve Mountjoy until the latter's death in 1606. After Moryson finished his service to Lord Mountjoy, he finally settled down to writing his monumental work, the *Itinerary*.

The Itinerary

Fynes Moryson declares that he wrote the *Itinerary* at leisure enjoying every bit of long distractions and pleasures. The *Itinerary*, originally written in Latin was later translated into English, and to save large expenses a major portion was handwritten by Moryson himself. The first three volumes were published in 1617. Another fourth volume was prepared and received the necessary licensing for publication around 1626, but remained in manuscript form and was kept in the library of Corpus Christi College, Oxford. In 1903, Charles Hughes compiled the fourth volume into *Shakespeare's Europe*.

Fynes Moryson's advice to travellers

Fynes Moryson in his *Itinerary* devotes a section to the conduct of travellers not only while they are travelling but also after their return home. The section rests under the title, “Precepts for Travellers” wherein Moryson sets down twenty seven guidelines for persons who are not accustomed to or acquainted with travel. Moryson starts by instructing travellers to show gratitude to God for His protection, goes on to clarify that a traveller must always bear in mind the purpose of his travel and,

Experience teacheth, that no action is wisely undertaken, whereof the end is not forecast

in the first place, howsoever it be put last into execution (*Itinerary* 371).

Once the purpose is clear Moryson in the third precept explains:

Let a Traveller observe the underwritten things, & of them some curiously, some slightly, as he shall judge them fit for the purpose. He shall observe the fruitfulness of each Counterey, and the things wherewith it aboundeth (372).

'Fruitfulness' according to Moryson refers to the natural resources like mines, baths, rivers, fountains, plants, diet, the meat and various sauces, horse races, monasteries, churches, libraries, public houses, universities, libraries, the city in general, the policies of state, the industries, the historical and religious aspects connected with the place, the value of coins among others. Indeed, Moryson's eye for abundance encompasses nature, exquisite objects, man-made buildings as well as governance. Furthermore, he also does not hesitate to include abstract and philosophical ideas which according to him are a vital part of social life in general. Moreover, it is interesting to note that Moryson does not leave out the significance of an army and that every traveller ought to visit,

The most learned men, and those that excell in military Art or any other vertue, and let him conferre with them, as his ends require (374).

This Antoni Maczak concludes,

I believe that the great flood of information and impression which tourists absorbed on their travels, as well as the elementary knowledge which they gained of a vast number of different cultures, landscapes and social systems, possessed a certain value in itself (*Travel in Early Modern Europe*, 291).

This value being discussed here can be evaluated in numerous ways; however one of feature or quality that this value can possess is that it has the power to revolutionise the thinking process of the readers positively or negatively. The mind of the common man at the time when Moryson travelled was one filled with curiosity. Again Maczak notes,

The number of books giving information about the outside world was constantly increasing; so it is hardly surprising that the desire to know 'foreign lands' also increased. (291).

After one has witnessed the different conditions of the region, Moryson advises that one must make note and record in the manner a clerk would as, "the memory is weake" (373). He also has exclusively recommended scholars of Rhetoric,

...at first seeking matter for words, rather than words for matter, at last attaine an easie stile flowing like a still River, and lay aside the affection for words. (373)

He further emphasises that,

Let nothing worth the knowledge passé his eyes or eares, which he draweth not to his own possession in this sort. In the meane time , though he trust not to his papers, yet for

the weakenes of memory, let him carefully note all rare observations; for hee lesse offends that writes many toyes, then he that omits one serious thing, and after when his judgement is more ripe, he shall distill Gold (as the Proverbe is) out of this dung of Ennius. (373)

In such manner Moryson proposes that inferences can be drawn later, the initial attempt to record facts and figures are of prime importance. One can notice how well he is accustomed with the habit of students of rhetoric who tend to be obsessive about perfection. Such keen observations on the part of Moryson speaks not just of his sensitivity as an advisor to fellow travellers but of his attitude towards his own investigation and research.

As a preparatory course Moryson appeals to his successors to acquaint themselves with cosmography. Mastering this art shall enable one to interpret direction or else be left like a “blind folded man” (376). He also proposes travellers to acquire knowledge of the areas they are planning to visit and also to note the names of places that may have changed so that they can also read older texts with ease. This set of advice that Moryson extends involves preparatory efforts on the part of the travellers so that they can not only observe keenly and record the new with ease, but also independently take the right decision without relying on other sources for help. The last of the preparatory steps before embarking on the journey is the writing of one’s will.

This sort of practical preparatory advice in the travel accounts of early modern Europe furthermore can be said to have laid the foundation of what in the present day is a guide book for travellers. Daniel Carey observes, “the sixteenth century constituted a remarkable period of expansion in travel,” (167) meaning that travel accounts inclusive of instructions had evolved to the present state by the time Moryson’s book was actually published in 1617. This trend in itself created a demand for travel accounts in order to abreast oneself with the necessary course of action. In this regard, Peter C. Mancall remarks, “The publication of Moryson’s *Itinerary* in 1617 came at a decisive moment in a larger European intellectual project” (4).

Once embarked on the journey, Moryson speaks of the language barrier that hinders the enjoyment of real travel. According to Moryson not knowing a language can be equated to hearing disability, and the dependency on an interpreter renders a traveller’s experience as second hand. In addition, Moryson advises that:

In Kingdome which he desires most to know, and the language whereof is of most use in his owne Countrey, he goe directly to the best Citie for the puritie of language...where having learned the language, at least as much as is necessary to understand, and to bee understood, he shall make his next journey more profitable by discourse, and in the same make his language more perfect (377).

The above excerpt shows that Moryson stresses the importance of mastering one’s own language.

Moryson mentions the importance of the necessity to for a traveller to understand one's own language. This is to enable the travellers to communicate better so that they can be understood by others. Understanding one's own language enables a traveller to channelize his experience through his discourse as a result, making the subsequent travel more profitable.

Moryson goes on then to specifically advise the rich, that even though it is affordable to hire interpreters, it would be desirable to draw their own conclusions. From experience he states that, "Princes Ambassadors and Peeres of other Realmes are more welcome and esteemed, and lesse subject to contempt, if they doe but only get the formes of saluting and calling for necessaries in the language of the Country, as if they would not seeme strangers" (377). As a next step to better communication he advises reading the translated versions of books like "Amadis of Gaule" (Amadis de Gaula) wherein the speeches between the Knights errant and the ladies of court shall equip one with a sound knowledge of phrases. Another critical piece of advice is the maintenance of "Pythagorickall silence," to ensure the thorough learning of pronunciation after which one may attempt to speak. (378)

Next Moryson points that to master a certain language one should not reside with people from one's own country as this shall greatly hamper their progress of language learning. Here he states an instance of a Dutch traveller who in spite of having spent thirty years in Italy could not speak Italian. This Moryson claims, was due to "his perpetuall conversing with his Countrey-men." (379) However, in the case of his own countrymen Moryson states, "I professe freely, that I never observed any to live lesse together in forraigne parts, then the English, nor any who made more profit of their travel than they." (379)

On a lighter note Moryson suggests that even though their flaws and mistakes be mocked, no one should ever take it to heart, instead he says that such embarrassment shall further encourage one to work harder towards the improvement of their language skills. He further recommends that in order to improve conversational skills one must talk to women, children and talkative people. Finally he ends his instruction on language learning by stating the example of Queen Elizabeth who was a polyglot.

Moryson specifically advises Englishmen to first travel to Germany in order to get acquainted with travel in general, and that he quite strictly mentions that he personally sees no good arising from travelling with one's own friends or countrymen. Moryson regrets travelling with friends or countrymen by stating,

How shall any man cast off a vice proper to his Nation, if he doe not disuse by little and little, which he shall hardly doe among his Countrey-men inclined thereunto. Neither is there danger to learning forraigne vices by leaving to converse with his Countrey-men, so hee propound to himselfe the foresaid end to learne vertues and cast off vices, and if he

bend himselfe wholly to attaine that end (385).

Since travel involved more danger than enjoyment, Moryson advises that friends should not be taken along on journeys. According to him it is better off to leave friends waiting at home so that one can return to them to share the successes of one's travels. Moryson recommends the carrying of a book just like Alexander the Great did, and "laied Homer under his pillow" (387). A book, Moryson believes shall relieve one of loneliness and protect him against unpleasant events.

With another reference to Alexander the Great, Moryson advises travellers to travel light, similar to the manner in which "all the Macedonians cast away their spoyles taken from Persians, lest they should hinder them in their expedition against India" (387), travellers too should carry the bare minimum to avoid any inconveniences that could be disruptive or have a negative influence on their onward journey.

More practical advice follows regarding the choice of inns, swimming and the dangers of travelling on foot. Moryson advises that in Germany and in Italy, a traveller must choose an inn with a medium range price tag because, "In the best Innes, with moderate and ordinary expences, he shall avoid the frauds and injuries of knaves, and shall sleepe safely, both for his person and the goods hee hath with him" (388). He then goes a step further and cautions travellers,

In all Innes, but especially in suspected places, let him bolt or locke the doore of his chamber: let him take heed of his chamber fellowes, and alwayes have his Sword by his side, or by his bed side; let him lay his purse under his pillow, but alwayes foulded with his garters, or some thing hee first useth in the morning, lest hee forget to put it up before hee goe out of his chamber: And to the end he may leave nothing behind him in his Innes, let the visiting of his chamber, and gathering his things together, be the last thing he doth, before hee put his foote into the stirrup. (388)

In such manner, Moryson cautions travellers on blunders that they are likely to commit with such clarity, as though he has committed all of them and then came up with a solution to rectify the fault.

Moryson recommends personal health maintenance. He states that, "the preservation of health consists in the use of sixe things, namely, of Ayre, Dyet, Purging, Exercise, Sleepe, and Accidents, or Passions of the mind" (391), after which he explains each factor in detail. An interesting explanation about the umbrella reveals that usage at the time of the publication of this account was rather obscure in England.

On the contrary, in hot regions, to avoide the beames of the Sunne, in some places (as in Italy) they carry Umbrels, or things like a little Canopy over their heads, but a learned Physician told me, that the use of them was dangerous, because they gather the heate into a pyramidall point, and thence cast it downe perpendicularly upon the head, except

they know how to carry them for avoyding that danger" (391).

In the health section, another interesting advice worth mentioning is the measure to be undertaken to avoid the offensive smells on ships. Moryson mentions, "to avoid the ill smelles of the ship, hee may in Summer carry red Roses, or the dried leaves thereof, Lemmons, Oranges, and like things of good odour, and in winter he may carry the roote or leaves of Angelica, Cloves, Rosemary, and the foresaid Lemmons, Oranges, and Rose leaves" (395). The above remedy once more validates that Moryson was a keen observer who paid attention to minute details and recommended simple and practical measures that everyone could follow.

The next guideline pertains to the overall behaviour of the traveller and opens with the proverb, "Being at Rome, the Roman manners use, And otherwhere, each places custome chuse," after which he quotes the English equivalent, "The Country where thou goest, Use thou as doe the most," followed by the French one "As many Nations, So many fashions"(396). Here Moryson clearly emphasises that a traveller ought not to try anything new and advises,

"Let him reprove nothing in another mans house, much lesse in a strange commonwealth, in which kind it is not amisse to seeme dumb or tongue-tied, so he diligently imploy his eyes and eares, to observe al profitable things. Let him be courteous, even somewhat towards the vice of curtesie, to his Host, the children, and his fellow sojourners in the house" (396).

These instructions at a glance seem utterly simple, however here it should be noted that something that is usual and common in a certain country may be offensive in another, hence its inclusion here.

He reinstates,

"I have observed the Germans and French in Italy, to live and converse most with their owne Countymen, disdainng to apply themselves to the Italians language, apparel, and diet, and the English above all others, to subject themselves to the Lawes, customes, language, and apparrell of other nations" (397) .

On the other hand he mentions that in spite of the adjusting nature of the English they "are by other accidents lesse agreeable to the liking of strangers in diverse places, when they confesse what Countrie-men they are" (397). For instance, they are not liked in Italy "for the difference of religion", in the Low- Countries "for that many of them have gone away in debts," in France and Scotland "for the old hatred of both Nations," and in the Hans or sea- bordering areas "for the many injuries they pretend to have received from the English men of warre at Sea." Thus, it can be noticed that the Englishmen travelling in this period faced the consequences of their country's political agenda and religious beliefs. Nevertheless, Moryson urges that in such circumstances one must maintain equilibrium and not react harshly.

Next he urges that a traveller must be humble and decent. As for advice to the youth he uses two Italian proverbs, "Keepe close lips, and never feare, Any flies should enter there." and "The tongue is boneless, yet doth make, The broken backbone oft to ake" (399). Through these proverbs Moryson hopes to explain that frankness and pride can cause obstacles in the way, and uses the other Italian proverb to prove that silence is golden and that a traveller must learn to be diplomatic. He also asserts that curiosity is a necessary attribute of a traveller; however one must keep curiosity in check so that it does not drive him into trouble.

Moryson as a precautionary measure notes that, "it is a point of art for a Traveller to know how to avoide deceit, and how to dissemble honesty (I meane to save himself, not to deceive others.) Let him have a cleare countenance to all men, and an open brest to his friend, but when there is question of his Countries good, of his enemies lying in waite for him, of his owne credit or life, let him shut his bosome close from his inward friends" (410). In this manner, a traveller must judge for oneself as to how much of information can be let out. Dissemination of information beyond the necessity could lead a traveller into unnecessary perils.

A Traveller must dissemble his long journeys, yet onely in dangerous places, and among suspected persons. My selfe have observed some too warie in this kinde, who is most safe waies, used grosse caution, to hide from their neere friend the purpose of their journey, and some-times in Cities would conceale where and what hower they dined and supped. In like sort a traveller must sometimes hide his money, change his habit, dissemble his Country, and fairely conceale his Religion, but this hee must doe onely when necessity forceth (410).

Moryson clarifies that spreading unnecessary information at times could cause hindrances in one's journey. However, it is wise to weigh the consequences before circulating and divulging information.

Quarrels are another precept which Moryson has dealt with in detail. Moryson separates them country-wise and advises how one can avoid them. Further, there follows a long treatise on dissimulation which is followed by an important precept concerning the course a traveller must observe following one's return to the homeland. Moryson also focuses on how a travellers' "discourse must not be generally and continually in dispraise of other Nations: for so he shall bewray want of judgement, except he adde some good reason for all generall and severall imputations" (420).

While Moryson emphasises that it is unwise to make hasty decisions about foreign societies he explains with the help of examples, "Thus the Italians erre, who coming into England, and seeing the familiar conversation of our Weomen, doe repute them for Harlots, who are much chaster then their Weomen would be, having like liberty as ours have" (420). Similarly, Moryson

relates another instance, “thus strangers may easily judge amisse, of a weomen in Freesland giving kisses to each man to whom they drinke, and taking kisses of each whom they pledge” (420). Moryson in another instance cautions about the company of women is by saying, “As also of the Virgins in Holland, who hand in hand with young men, slide upon the yce farre from their Fathers house, and there lodge in a strange Towne or Village: for these old customes of particular places, are no certaine signs of unchastity” (420) .

In precept number twenty five titled, “How a Traveller ought to behave himself returning home,” Moryson humbly states, “It remains that to a Traveller returning home with experience, I should not give precepts, as a novice, but friendly admonitions, as to a fellow Souldier.” (420) In this regard, it can be said that Moryson refrains from showering advice to travellers with a condescending attitude and prefers to share an equal platform. This attitude of Moryson’s must have played rather positively with travellers who probably referred to the *Itinerary* as a sort of hand book while travelling abroad.

It can be observed that Moryson was careful enough to support his advice with examples pertaining to different countries, stressing that a traveller must not jump to conclusions without attempting to understand the culture and customs of new societies.

Moreover, Moryson states that, “We betray our ignorance or our selfe love, when wee dispraise forraigne things without true judgement, or prefere our owne Countrey before others, without shewing good reason thereof.” In such manner, Moryson encourages travellers to first take cognizance of foreign cultures and their customs thereafter make their judgements.

In the next precept, Moryson encourages travellers on their return to “renew his old friendships: as Souldiers in a good Common-wealth, when the warre is ended, returne to the works of their calling, (like the followers of Mercury as well as of Mars)” (421). Additionally, as a precautionary measure Moryson advises travellers on their return to set aside all the new manners and customs that were learnt when travelling abroad so as not to offend one’s own countrymen who are not accustomed to them. Moryson explains,

Dancing teacheth good carriage of the body, yet we must not always dance; so divers strange manners teach us good behaviour, yet we must not use inconstancy of manners: Thou didst wisely forbear abroad to offend strangers, with whom thou didst live but from day by day, either with thy apparel or diet, or austerity of thy Countrey manners, and why shouldest not thou much forbear, at home to offend thy own Countreymen, with whom thou art to spend al the rest of thy life, or provoke them to scoff at thee for the foresaid vanities disagreeable to them(422).

Furthermore, in this regard Moryson confesses that,

I will be bold to maintaine this position against the vulgar opinion, namely, that sharpe

sences, subtile wits, curious behaviour, and like nice properties, savouring of either extreme, are to be accounted among the owners calamities, and that a certain dulnesse (in some meane, not in extremity) doth give the owner great ease and quietnesse (423).

Finally, Moryson encourages a traveller to share his experiences openly,

Since stale Harlots by this art make their putrified wares saleable, how much more shall Travellers, whose discourse more pleaseth in the stomach then in the mouth, make the very stones and insensible creatures to daunce and hang upon their mouthes, as they are said to have been moved by the eloquence and musick of Ulusses and Orpheus (426).

With the above Fynes Moryson completes his set of twenty seven guidelines for inexperienced travellers. These precepts Mancall states, “carried authority because they accompanied his lengthy report about his years on the road.” Thus, it is evident that the work of Fynes Moryson was not a travel account that was compiled with the sole motive of entertaining the folks at home, but with a deeper aim of encouraging people at home to undertake travel and to return to relate all their experiences. However, Moryson advocated travel not just as a means of publicity but also clearly identified the responsibility that came with travel.

The precepts that Moryson lays down for travellers of the age reveal the degree of sensitivity and conscious effort on his part in explaining all the pre-and post-requisites that go into making a travel enterprise successful. Moryson not just stresses the physical well being of a traveller but also the mental health which according to him is equally important for a fruitful journey.

Conclusion:

Fynes Moryson’s inclusion of the twenty seven precepts as part of the *Itinerary* highlights the necessity of discussion on the topics mentioned in the precepts. Besides the precepts include factors that contribute to the overall enhancement of the traveller resulting in a comprehensive understanding of newer places and its people.

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