Gábor Gelléri and Rachel Willie, eds. 2020.
Travel and Conflict in the Early Modern World.
London: Routledge

Liam Benison
Universidade do Porto, Portugal

Travel writing has a long history that can be traced at least to ancient Egypt. Perhaps the earliest surviving travel account (eleventh century BCE) tells the misfortunes of a pilgrim who fails at trade and diplomacy in Phoenicia, suffers robbery and imprisonment, and is almost murdered. "The Report of Wenamun" illustrates Gábor Gelléri and Rachel Willie's straightforward contention that "conflict lies at the heart of the idea and practice of travel" (1). The joint editors and co-authors of this absorbing new volume of essays explore this claim in the introduction and twelve critical essays by examining a rich and diverse range of early modern sources, including travel accounts, journals, advice for travel, drama, utopias, and visual art. The contributions' geographical scope embraces China, Russia, the Ottoman Empire, and the Americas, as well as Europe (Africa appears courtesy of the brief opening reference to Wenamun). This volume offers a compelling discussion of the many ways in which conflict impinges on travel in early modern European literature, language, art, culture, faith, diplomacy, and cross-cultural encounters.

The volume addresses the textual record of travel, as well as its physical experience, for example, by conquerors such as Christopher Columbus; by the naïve English gentleman Thomas Sackville, despatched to the continent for a fatal education in French; by foreign diplomats and Jesuit missionaries; and by those seeking saintly intercession to safely cross the Alps on the *Viamala* ("bad way"). The reception of travel writing is also a strong theme in a number of essays, including the conflicts and contradictions aroused by the suspicion that travel accounts are inherently unreliable, if not deliberately deceitful. The stage performance of travel is explored in several plays including Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Thomas Drue's intriguing *The Duchess of Suffolk*, and Aphra Behn's little studied *The Emperor of the Moon*. The conception and imagination of travel is examined through the genre

of travelers' instructions known as the *ars apodemica,* and in utopian literature from Thomas More to Daniel Defoe. The twelve studies are well organized thematically with three essays on each of four topics: "language, translation, and assimilation"; "travel, religion, and the violence of the road"; "war, diplomacy, and dissimulation"; and "the art of travel and imaginary journeys." Women writers are well represented, including the more familiar Margaret Cavendish and Madame de Genlis, and lesser known figures such as Judit Vér from Transylvania, who composed travel advice for her son. A discussion thread considers how women challenged restrictions on their free movement and faced the risks of travel abroad.

The editors set out to meditate as much on the notion of conflict as on the concept of travel. Taking their cue from Morton Deutsch, who highlighted the necessity of conflict in human society and its role in defining identities and resolving social problems, they challenge the perception of conflict as necessarily negative. The authors consider conflict as a motivator for travel, as a consequence of travel, and as imbricated in textual, artistic, and performative responses to travel. Besides the many travails of travel, the essays show convincingly how conflict on the road and in cross-cultural encounters can improve understandings of cultural differences, as in Matteo Ricci's arduous but revealing linguistic and diplomatic efforts in China; and how reports of travel frequently model an ethics of self in relation to the world through the voyager's conduct, however (un)reliably.

In Part 1, Marie-Christine Gomez-Géraud shows how Columbus's and Jacques Cartier's misguided ideas about the similarity of languages led to conflicts with Indigenous peoples in the Americas. Céline Bonotte-Hoover explores the many cultural conflicts and differences that impeded the learning of Chinese during Ricci's Jesuit mission to China, and Natalya Din-Kariuski explains how Sir Thomas Smythe uses the rhetorical figure of *peripeteia* to promote his prudence in dealing with accidents and misfortune during his embassy to Russia in 1604. In Part 2, Eva Johanna Holmberg also finds Henry Blount "self-fashioning" in his stereotypical representations of Ottoman religious customs in *A Voyage into the Levant*. Joanne Anderson brings the *Viamala* to life through her investigation of how wayside religious art in churches, town gates, and fortified places offered protection from the dangers of travel. Robert Clines explores the ambivalent

attitudes to Lebanese Maronite Catholics in the travelogues of Jesuits who sought to restore the universal Church. In Part 3, David Nicol reads Thomas Drue's *The Duchess of Suffolk* (1624) as a journeying play, which valorizes restraint, intercultural communication, and avoidance of violent conflict by provoking sympathy for the devout Protestant duchess, persecuted by Catholics. Paul Dover examines how improvements in travel on the Italian Peninsula during the fifteenth century enabled ambassadors to become resident and establish correspondence networks. William Rossiter shows how Pietro Aretino's "armies of inkpots" advanced his reputation across Europe as he inserted himself in accounts of war and travel. The final section opens with Gelléri's fascinating study of women's contributions to the genre of *ars apodemica*. He finds that women writers succeeded in gendering the conception of mobility and in bringing to light the conflicts inherent in travel for women. Arguing that utopia is conflictual because the ideal is necessarily "discordant with 'reality'," Daniel Carey explores how travel narrative enables the reimagining of utopianism through the rhetoric of irony, and ends on the pessimistic note that "ironized" utopias show the "incapacity of human beings to realize alternative [worlds]." Finally, in a revealing discussion of Aphra Behn's *The Emperor of the Moon* (1687), Rachel Willie demonstrates how the planets, once a model of a harmonious universe, became a space of travel and conflict over knowledge, as the science of a geocentric universe gradually spread.

These thoroughly researched and engaging essays not only highlight the editors' contention that conflict lies at the heart of travel, they demonstrate myriad ways in which conflict and travel intersect. Until now, this topic has largely evaded sustained scrutiny. Although the role of conflict in early modern travel is often recognized or implied, as in discussions of the semantic and morphological split between "travail" and "travel" (Vitkus 2016, 229), the present volume is unique in its focused analysis. Its value is in setting the concepts of travel and conflict, and their intersection, in a theoretical framework and opening a rich variety of themes for analysis, encompassing gender, the intellectual discourse on travel, writing and reception, visual art, as well as travel experience in diplomacy, war, and other aspects. New interpretations likely to make a significant contribution to the field include Gelléri's findings on women writers' contribution to the *ars apodemica* and Willie's discussion of the connections and

disjunctions between private reading and public performance in Behn's play. Given the vast corpus of travel writing and the vaster quantity of scholarship about it, the authors' selection of material is commendable for bringing new light to well-known and lesser known sources in an original and highly engaging way. The book's twelve illustrations add delight; those in Anderson's essay are particularly helpful to the discussion, as well as evocative of the early modern experience of traversing the *Viamala*.

An unfortunate slip is the Eurocentric observation in the introduction that "[n]umerous new cultures were encountered for the first time by Europeans" (2)—non-European cultures were "new" only to European knowledge. The primary sources are predominantly European and focused on Eurasia and America, so that those with a specialist interest in early modern travel in Africa, India, Southeast Asia, Australia, or the Pacific might be disappointed by the absence of these regions. A more precise title might have been "travel and conflict in early modern European perspective." This highlights the challenge of achieving comprehensiveness when claiming to address "world" travel. However, the restricted origin of the sources reflects the contributors' expertise, and the need to be highly selective while ensuring focus for the book as a whole; and the volume more than makes up for a lack of world breadth with a depth of critical analysis of the varied sources concerning travel elsewhere. My beady eye noticed one typo on page 233 (a missing "of"), which speaks to good editing.

This volume will interest and delight scholars of early modern European culture and literature, as well as specialists in travel, whether advanced or early career scholars. It offers original and engaging discussions of many of the core themes and questions pertinent to early modern travel literature, and highlights the role of conflict in travel in unique and revealing ways.

Reference

Vitkus, Daniel. 2016. "Labour and Travel on the Early Modern Stage: Representing the Travail of Travel in Dekker's *Old Fortunatus* and Shakespeare's *Pericles*." In *Working Subjects in Early Modern English Drama*, edited by Natasha Korda and Michelle M. Dowd, 225–242. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.