

EARLY MODERN LITERARY STUDIES



Patricia Akhimie and Bernadette Diane Andrea, eds, *Travel and Travail: Early Modern Women, English Drama, and the Wider World* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2019). 384pp. ISBN 978 1 4962 0226 0.

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Despite restrictions on women's travel in the early modern period, *Travel and Travail: Early Modern Women, English Drama, and the Wider World* suggests that various women and girls indeed went on trips, either voluntarily or involuntarily, and 'engaged in extensive movement within and beyond the British Isles during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries' (p. 1). Patricia Akhimi and Bernadette Andrea, the two editors of this collection, argue that the available critical work on women's travel does not adequately address the different forms women's travels took, and those studies that do focus on the different forms tend to assume that the travel of women started with Lady Mary Wortley Montague (1716–18), thus ignoring the women travellers of the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries. While some works, such as Andrew McRae's *Literature and Domestic Travel in Early Modern England*, consider the travels of Queen Elizabeth I and Celia Fiennes, they do not account for 'women's travel to and from Britain as dependent wives, servants, and chattel' (p. 2).¹ In an attempt to address this vacancy in the study of early modern women's travel, this book considers the different forms taken by the travels of women and girls. The sixteen essays in this collection aim to redefine 'travel' in the period as a way to be more inclusive of the diverse nature of women's journeys. The chapters in the book, as well as its title, highlight 'the gendered challenges of travel with the early modern pun, "travail," meaning labour especially in childbirth' (p. 4).

¹ Andrew McRae, *Literature and Domestic Travel in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

The chapters engage a series of questions as a way to further highlight the significance of their contribution to early modern travel studies. Some of the questions they consider have to do with the elements that define local and global travels; factors that establish the authority and agency of women and the purpose behind their travels; the consideration of travel narratives as genres and the critical and theoretical approaches required to study them; and the extent to which literary representations respond to women travellers. In an attempt to challenge the definitions that exclude girls and women from early modern travel accounts, the book 'reassesses the nature of travel in the period, the experiences of historical women travellers, and imaginative representations of women's travel' (p. 3). The volume thus considers travel in the early modern period from a gendered perspective while simultaneously addressing the intersection of gender with race, religion, ethnicity, sexuality, and other 'social vectors' (p. 3).

The diverse range of essays in this collection is divided into two parts. The first part of the book, 'Early Modern Women Travelers: Global and Local Trajectories', includes eight essays that consider the travels of historical women locally and globally. The eight essays in the second part, 'Early Modern Women and the Globe: Gendered Travel on the English Stage', examine the literature of the period, addressing different forms, such as drama, manuscripts, and Englishwomen's published narratives. By examining and reconsidering women's travels through a focus on historical and literary accounts, these essays suggest that 'despite the ban in prescriptive literature on their mobility, women did indeed participate in the era's expansionist projects, whether global trade, colonialism, religious conversion, international humanism, or transnational literary genres' (p. 4). This further highlights the crucial cultural, religious, and political role of women in the early modern period.

In the first three chapters of this book, the contributors trace the presence, agency, travel, and travail of women related to the East India Company. While the EIC prohibited the direct participation of women in its overseas trades, the archival historical resources re-examined in these chapters diligently elucidate the active role of women in what Amrita Sen terms a 'global Renaissance' (p. 76). In an attempt to discuss women's presence, the first chapter, by Richmond Barbour, puts the historical account of Mrs. Keeling's travels, as part of her attempt to accompany his husband in his global trades for the EIC, in dialogue with the dramatic representation of Desdemona in Shakespeare's *Othello*. Barbour thus elucidates how both of these historical and literary accounts inform us about early modern anxieties on masculinity, women's travel, and global exploitation. Considering the

consequences and anxieties of the travels of other ‘forgotten women of the early seventeenth-century English trading company’ (p. 5), Karen Robertson’s ‘A Stranger Bride: Mariam Khan and the East India Company’ investigates the extent to which Mariam Khan’s journey along with her maid, Frances Steele, had been regarded as ‘encumbrances’ (p. 53), which eventually forced the company ‘to issue an edict forbidding wives’ (p. 54). This edict, Robertson believes, could have been the reason the company prevented Mrs. Keeling from accompanying her husband, Captain Keeling. Insightfully delineating the intersection of class, religion, race and ethnicity in the travels of other forgotten women, in ‘Sailing to India: Women, Travel and Crisis in the Seventeenth Century,’ Amrita Sen elucidates how despite the lack of extensive accounts of female travellers, those ‘moments of crisis’ addressed in Robertson’s chapter reveal the active presence, travel, and travail of women, such as Lady Powell and Mariam Khan, in the global trades and travels of the early modern period (p. 64). While Sen makes a passing reference to Teresa Sampsonia Sherley, Robert Sherley’s wife, as a way to focus on the significance of Lady Powell’s travel, Carmen Nocentelli carefully examines the status of Teresa as a ‘traveling consort’ (p. 82) in ‘Teresa Sampsonia Sherley: Amazon, Traveler, and consort’. Expanding on the role of Lady Sherley as a female traveller in the early modern period, in chapter five, ‘The Global travels of Teresa Sampsonia Sherley’s Carmelite Relic’, Bernadette Andrea demonstrates the significance of Teresa Sampsonia’s relic, which she ‘wore on her breast’ (p. 102) while en route to the Persian empire. Relying on a material culture approach, Andrea argues that the relic, as a ‘thing-in-motion’ (p. 112), protected Sherley against various false accusations after her husband’s death; rather than being simply a ‘thing’, the relic bears witness to its owner’s participation in a global enterprise. Additionally, given that the relic was a piece of flesh from the Catholic St. Teresa that was gifted to the Persian Teresa by the Saint’s niece, it also testifies to the shared history between women from the Islamic regions and Christian lands. While various travel narratives describe the travels of the Sherley brothers with a focus on ‘the patriarchal discourses of militarism, trade, and diplomacy’ (p. 113), the relic highlights women’s exertion of power beyond such discourses.

Central to the argument of the last three chapters of the first part are the negotiation and nature of women’s travel and the role of such travel in the composition of early modern English travel narratives. In that manner, Akhimi’s contribution offers compelling new readings of Richard Lassels’s negotiation of female travel in ‘The Voyage of the Lady Catherine Whetenall from Brussels into Italy’ (1650). Given the prevalence of the gendered discourse on travel, which greatly limited women’s travel and bound them to domesticity in the early modern period, Lassels’s account of Lady Catherine’s voyage,

Akhimi reasons, attempts to domesticize such a journey, in turn representing it as being 'miraculous' (p. 135). In the following chapter Elisa Oh insightfully examines the role of Pocahontas's travel and travail in early modern travel narratives and her subjection to English colonial 'choreographies', a term Oh uses as 'a metaphor for the culturally inflected representation and interpretation of literal and physical movement through space' (p. 140). Additionally, in an effort to widen the scholarship on female travels and travel writing in the early modern period, Laura Williamson Ambrose's chapter, 'Lady Anne Clifford's Way and Aristocratic Women's Travel', investigates Lady Anne Clifford's mobility in her travels and travel writings, both spatial and temporal. In doing so, Ambrose's reconceptualization of travel as a temporal movement challenges conventional views that associate travel only with spatial mobility.

Part 2 of the book starts with a return to the discussion of Desdemona in Shakespeare's *Othello*. Chapters 9–12 consider the representation, nature, and consequences of Desdemona's travel and her travelling desire as an aristocratic woman. Following that subject matter and considering Desdemona's relation to places she names in Shakespeare's *Othello*, Laura Aydelotte considers the intersection of gender with geographical locations and power in six of Shakespeare's plays, including *Othello*. Continuing the conversation on the role of Desdemona as a female traveller in chapter 10, Stephanie Chamberlain goes into more detail about Desdemona's desire for travel, a desire that leads the play's patriarchal system to view her as an outcast. Offering a new insightful perspective on the characterization of Desdemona as an aristocratic lady, chapter 11, 'Desdemona's Divided Duty: Gender and Courtesy in *Othello*', considers the representation of Desdemona in relation to class and status, rather than gender, to resist relegating her to a domestic frame. Relying on courtly conduct manuals of the early modern period, Michael Slater's chapter investigates the extent to which Desdemona's tragic ending, rather than being the result of her transgression of the bourgeois gender norms of early modern society, is caused by her attempt, as a courtly lady, to keep up with the ideals of an aristocratic society. The section concludes with Eder Jaramillo's discussion of the stage representation of Desdemona and Miranda's travels in chapter 12.

While still focusing on Shakespeare's representation of female travel, Ruben Espinosa shifts the focus from *Othello* to consider, instead, the significance of the invocation of the Black Madonna in *Antony and Cleopatra*, in 'Marian Mobility, Black Madonnas and the Cleopatra Complex'. Black Madonna narratives in European as well as trans-Atlantic settings, Espinosa reasons, offer valuable insight into the ways in which 'an archetypal

black foreign femininity' (p. 251) impacted the self-identification of the English Christians who were more often than not regarded as being white. Continuing the conversation on female travellers in Shakespeare's plays, Suzanne Tartamella draws parallels between the *Book of Ruth* and Shakespeare's *As You Like It* to investigate not only the indebtedness of the latter to the former, but also the extent to which the play's allusions to the *Book of Ruth* highlight the role of women travellers in shaping the perception of Christian identity and influencing cultural change. Reflecting the diverse range of literary sources that inform this essay collection, the following chapter considers the first English prose fiction written by a woman and a much-underrepresented play by Shakespeare. Dyani Johns Taff's 'Precarious Travail, Gender, and Narration in Shakespeare's *Pericles, Prince of Tyre* and Margaret Cavendish's *The Blazing World*' thoroughly examines how both physical labour, dramatized in the form of childbirth in Shakespeare's play, and intellectual labour, manifested by Cavendish's narrator, interconnect with travel, thus complicating the relationship between gender and environment.

The last chapter of this essay collection, 'English Women, Romance and Global Travel in Thomas Heywood's *The Fair Maid of the West, Part I*' reconsiders the role of Bess Bridges as a romance heroine and a woman traveller in *The Fair Maid of the West, Part I*. Gaywyn Moore argues that Bess's engagement in the sea economy, as a tavern wench, expands the role of the romance heroine whose main concern is anything but economic gain. Unlike the romance heroines, Bess is a lower-class English citizen, yet her commercial access enables her to change her identity from 'baseborn to wellborn' (p. 321). Additionally, while romance heroines cross-dress as knights, Bess's disguise as a pirate captain and a ship owner further challenges the tropes of the genre of romance, allowing her to find more freedom in her mobility and to change the nature of her quest as a lover to a form of conquest by a global traveller. Administering a global identity through her constant travels, Bess Bridges expands the boundaries of genre, gender, and nation associated with romance. *Travel and Travail* concludes with an afterword, 'Looking for the Women in Early Modern Travel Writing', wherein Mary C. Fuller emphasizes the presence of women in travel writings and thus encourages further engagement with archives 'in the service of turning the blank walls often encountered with difficult queries into widening gates' (p. 344).

This collection makes an important contribution to the study of travel in the early modern period by reconsidering the nature of travel, investigating the mode and form of historical women travellers, and further scrutinizing their representation in the contemporaneous

literature. The value of this book thus lies in its new ways of thinking about early modern travel and travail which will greatly influence scholarship and pedagogy in early modern studies. The book's wide-ranging corpus excellently coheres as a collection; the insights of one writer often complement those of another. With the main focus of the second part of the book on white or European literary female travellers such as Miranda, Desdemona, or Bess Bridges, I would be curious to learn more about the dramatic representation of non-European female travellers, such as Sycorax in *The Tempest*, or the extent to which a chaste portrayal of white women travellers depends upon the demonization of domesticized non-European figures, such as Tota in *The Fair Maid of the West, Part 2*. Given the scope of the research in each of the chapters, this might have been beyond the limits of the volume and could have hindered the editors' aim to arrange chapters in ways that speak to each other, an aim beautifully met.