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“Many and Dreadful Disasters”

Mediterranean Travel, Plague, and Quarantine in the Late Eighteenth Century

Kathryn Walchester

Abstract:

Our recent experiences of quarantine during the COVID-19 outbreak have exposed the vulnerability of poorer members of society and has highlighted their increased suffering during the period of restricted mobility. This article considers the way in which quarantine exacerbates inequalities from a historical perspective, looking at enforced periods of restricted travel and its impact on servants and lower-class British travelers of the eighteenth century in Europe. It examines both the history of representations of plague and contagion, and some of the human reactions to fears of disease, one of which was the imposition of quarantine measures. Three main sources are referred to: Patrick Brydone’s *A Tour through Sicily and Malta in a Series of Letters to William Beckford*, published in 1790; Elizabeth, Lady Craven’s “A Journey through the Crimea to Constantinople in a series of Letters,” published in 1789; and the unpublished letters of William Fletcher, manservant to Lord Byron, from his journeys in 1811. The texts produced by these travelers from the eighteenth century offer rich material for the consideration of the impact of mobility and immobility both of and on the body and how these experiences were strikingly different depending on the social class of the traveler.

Keywords: class, eighteenth-century, Europe, illness, quarantine, servants, travelers, travel writing

When we travel, whether for leisure or necessity, the body and its needs and fragilities are more pertinent than when we are in a familiar environment. Unfamiliar food upsets our stomachs, different climates make us uncomfortable, and the process of upheaval tires and debilitates us. Even leisured journeys become a balance between the excitement and novelty of the foreign and the hazards to the body of encountering that difference.¹ In “Body,” one of the essays in *Keywords for Travel Writing Studies*, citing Nicholas Bouvier’s *Le Corps, miroir du monde: Voyage dans le Musée imaginative de Nicholas Bouvier*, Charles Forsdick asserts that, “travel writing operates...as one of the most (if not the most) corporeal of literary genres” (Forsdick 2019: 22). He identifies the reliance of the body on either itself or other mechanized forms in order to propel it through space, and notes:

Any celebration of physicality (or definition of travel in relation to figures of youth or health) is accordingly tempered with an awareness of the potential fallibility (or at least unpredictability) of the travelling body). (Forsdick 2019: 22)

This article explores the way in which travel by sea was subject to the limitations of the human body and the restrictions imposed on the movement of human bodies by governments. It begins by considering the background of ideas around plague and contagion. From the outbreaks of plague in the fourteenth century, nations sought to control the spread of disease by curtailing the movements of travelers and goods. At a time when the methods of disease transfer were still not understood, assumptions about the spread of disease linked mobility and contagion.

Our recent experiences of the COVID-19 virus epidemic may prompt us to view some previous scholarship around the historiography of disease and plague with an altered perspective, such as the opening paragraphs of “Plague in Europe and the Mediterranean Countries” by M.W. Flinn from 1979. In this piece, Flinn claimed:

We all have to die sooner or later, but death from plague was mostly premature and always hideously unpleasant. If for no other reason, it is better to live in Europe in the twentieth century than at any time between the fourteenth and eighteenth centuries. (Flinn 1979: 131–132)

Although we have reappraised our previous understanding of epidemic disease as a dread confined to previous centuries, the consideration of the scholarship of medical history continues to offer us valuable insights into the way in which we encounter the representation of disease and its containment. Furthermore, with our new knowledge and reawakened fear of global pandemic, we see the experiences of the past with added potency. Historians of public health have established that the terror and human toll of disease is the central threat to the continuity of human populations. In “Man’s Greatest Enemy,” the first chapter of his seminal and much reprinted 1965 text, *The History of Public Health*, Arthur Swinson wrote:

Epidemic disease is the greatest enemy of man. For every death in battle it has caused hundreds. The total figures will never be known, but they run into countless millions. On more than one occasion it has almost succeeded in wiping out the human race. And we should not imagine, either, that the danger of great epidemics is past; modern science and

medical organization have certainly mitigated their effects in recent years, but the battle still continues. (Swinson 1965: 9)

Human fear of disease is played out primarily through the measures we invent to control it; however, its representation in art and literature allows us insight into the way identity impacts on those various depictions and the reactions of the individual to those controls. Our current context adds particular nuance to readings of accounts by European travelers who encountered threats of disease and disruption to their own journeys in the long eighteenth century. Focusing particularly on the representation of plague and quarantine restrictions, and the experiences and perceptions of travelers in the eighteenth century, this article continues scholarship addressing the corporeality of journeys and argues that, through a consideration of the representation of illness in travel writing, the philosophical, political, and ideological nature of mobility is brought into sharper relief.

While this article has limited its reference to travelers from Britain, a richer perspective will be offered by further scholarship to reveal the extent to which travelers from Turkey and the countries of the Eastern Mediterranean experienced and reflected upon periods of quarantine. I focus particularly on three main sources: Patrick Brydone's *A Tour through Sicily and Malta in a Series of Letters to William Beckford*, published in 1790; Elizabeth, Lady Craven's "A Journey through the Crimea to Constantinople in a series of Letters," published in 1789; and the letters of William Fletcher from his journeys in 1811. Fletcher was manservant to Lord Byron, and his letters were unpublished in his lifetime. The texts produced by these travelers from the eighteenth century offer rich material for the consideration of the impact of mobility both of and on the body and how these experiences were strikingly different depending on the social class of

the traveler. Before addressing the three case studies of experiences of quarantine, I examine both the history of representations of plague and contagion, and some of the human reactions to fears of disease, one of which was the imposition of quarantine measures.

A plague provokes primitive fears, bringing loss of control and the indiscriminate nature of life into starker view. These aspects are highlighted in the sublime representations of plague in art and literature, such as accounts of vast numbers of dead or images of streets littered with corpses, their significance in life unremarked by conventional modes of death-ritual. In his thesis, “La peste da ‘Metafora del Male’ a ‘Occasione di Rinascita,’” Mauro Marabini indicates the prevalence of plague imagery from ancient times, writing: “*Dai dardi di Apollo ai flagella biblici, la peste ha avuto innumerevoli citazioni nei testi antichi e nella mitologia* [From Apollo’s darts to the scourges in the Bible, plague has seen innumerable versions in texts from antiquity and in mythology]” (Marabini 2014: 3). Artistic and textual representations of plague are a common thread particularly in the culture of Italy, perhaps due to its encounter with numerous devastating plague outbreaks in the last millennium. The Black Death in the fourteenth century forms the context and the fictional prompt for the stories that make up Giovanni Boccaccio’s *Decameron*, which in turn drew on an earlier account of plague in Liguria in the sixth century by Paul the Deacon. “Everywhere,” Paul had written, “there was grief and everywhere tears...the corpses of the dead were more than eyes could discern” (cited in Migiel 2003: 18). Such features of the sublimity of plague are evident in eighteenth-century travel writing, as travelers try to capture the scale and indiscriminate scope of the disease.

Expressions of personal fear became manifest in concerns about contagion. Although the first uses of the word “contagion” in English pertain to the spreading of disease, its more general etymology (from the Latin *con*, meaning together, and *tangere*, meaning to touch) incorporated

the spreading of religious or philosophical ideas before later being associated with the spread of disease.² The moral association between disease and the spread of unhealthy ideas or views remained, and still remains, bound up in assumed links between mobility and ill-health or, more precisely, the way in which foreigners, foreign goods, or people who have traveled to foreign places are connected to suspicions of disease and danger, whether moral or physical.³ From this intellectual and etymological connection, we can see the emergence of the practice of quarantine.

The concept of quarantine originated in Italy and draws on the biblical connection of Christ's period of forty days in the wilderness, a period in which it was believed that any incubation of disease would have become evident. In the fourteenth century, Italian towns and cities imposed a period of containment for travelers from foreign countries in an attempt to halt the progress of the Bubonic plague. As M.W. Flinn notes, "Ragusa [Sicily] imposed a 30-day quarantine on incoming travelers as early as 1377, with Genoa and Venice following suit in 1388" (Flinn 1979: 139).⁴ The main period of quarantine in the Mediterranean lasted from the 1600s to the late-nineteenth century. According to Malika,

it was only from the seventeenth-century that maritime quarantine—generally understood as an isolation period for men, vessels, and cargos—came to be seriously applied in almost all Mediterranean ports of Europe. This helped to limit the number of epidemic cycles and later contributed to the disappearance of the plague, which by contrast continued to be widespread throughout the East until the 1840s. (Ezzahidi 2008:)

Those countries of Europe that traded and interacted with ports in the Eastern and Southern Mediterranean were the first to establish systems of containment. Flinn asserts that, "most of the

successive waves of plague in Western Europe during the whole pandemic from the fourteenth-century originated in the east” (Flinn 1979: 143). Quarantines were in place in both land borders between Eastern Europe and Turkey and seaports, such as Messina in Sicily, Malta, and Marseille, throughout the eighteenth century.

Italy, through her Venetian Empire, saw the first *Lazzaretto* or place of quarantine, which was built in response to the plague in 1423 (The Island of Lazzaretto Vecchio and Santa Maria di Nazareth), its name having been drawn from the name of Lazarus, the beggar said to have been healed and raised from the dead by Christ. The Lazzaretto was most often a place for maritime quarantine, offshore but close enough to allow communication with the mainland and the transferring of vital supplies while the period of containment was served or papers examined. However, within land-locked cities, there were also places of confinement established for incoming travelers, such as those in Florence and Rome. Beyond Italy, the main site for quarantine, halting the sea travels of those journeying from the East to the West, was Malta, which had its own Lazzaretto and which became a staging post for numerous travelers, including the poet Lord Byron and his servant William Fletcher.

In *Society Must Be Defended*, Michel Foucault speaks of the interplay between sovereign power, biopolitics, and race, and outlines the historical practices which he saw as culminating in the rise of racist and fascist ideologies of the twentieth century (2003). These “techniques of power” he groups in two phases: the “anatomo-politics” of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and the “biopolitics” of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which focused on the biological nature of the human body and addressed such aspects as public hygiene, sanitation, and controls of reproduction and mortality. Quarantine can be identified as one of the “techniques of power” from the former period of “anatomo-politics,” which “were used to ensure

the spatial distribution of individual bodies (their separation, their alignment, their serialization, and their surveillance)” (Foucault 2003: 241). For Foucault the association of nationality, race, and ideas of contagion or disease augments over the period but is ever-present in the desire of governments to protect and control their populations. In focusing on this early period, the eighteenth century, I explore the way in which quarantine was represented and experienced as a “technique of power” by those from Britain who traveled in the Mediterranean during the period and how the restrictions on their journeys impacted them disproportionately according to their identity.

Quarantine is a period away from the world, yet one which maintains and exacerbates the hierarchies of society. Suffering by the lower classes was made worse; they were kept away from their homes and families for longer periods than they expected on journeys accompanying upper-class employers. For servants and workers, the experience was largely uncomfortable and frustrating, slowing down already lengthy and tedious journeys. Sea journeys before steam power were dangerous and unpredictable, and periods of quarantine made them even more unpleasant. For travelers from the upper classes, challenges to their freedom of movement were frustrating. They were no longer what Susan George calls “fast castes,” possessing the privileged hyper-mobility of the Western global traveler (George 1999: 179). Thus in their frustration travelers from higher classes, such as Lady Craven, whose account I will discuss later, challenged the need for the restriction of their journeys, implicitly associating threats of disease with those of a lower class or those from other nations. Although the individual travelers’ views on quarantine largely depended on their class and occupation, there was much wider debate about the practice, throughout the period. Higher class travelers, such as ambassadors from Morocco in the eighteenth century, resented the need to have their journeys impeded and saw the

regulations as part of a wider “humiliation” imposed on them after the “Reconquista” of territory by the Spanish (Newman 2015: 143–158; Drace-Francis 2015: 191–203). Debate in Britain about the practice of quarantining ships between scientists and shipping merchants focused on the balance between the risks to the health of the domestic population and the risks to the economy and individual businesses.

For upper-class travelers like Patrick Brydone, who made a journey around the Mediterranean in the 1770, quarantine regulations were something of which he had an awareness, but which surprised him by their extent. Brydone’s *A Tour Through Sicily and Malta* outlines several occasions where his journey is interrupted by the need for the ship in which he is traveling to be quarantined or else for his journey plans to be thwarted by potential restrictions. In narrating these events, the text gives an insight into the different experiences of quarantine by different classes of travelers. Brydone had traveled extensively in Europe, accompanying William Beckford, as his tutor, or “bear-leader” on a Grand Tour to Italy. Brydone’s next visit abroad, from Naples to Sicily and then on to Malta, was ostensibly for scientific purposes, investigating electricity and volcanology, and he was accompanied by “the seventeen-year-old William Fullarton (later commissioner of Trinidad), a friend named Glover, and several servants” (Turner 2004).

Bryon describes how, when their ship neared the Sicilian port of Messina, they discovered that one of their servants was not listed on the “Bill of Health.” The “Bill of Health” was a certificate provided from the last port visited giving assurance that the vessel and its passengers were free from disease. As Flinn notes, “Clearance certificates of this kind became a normal feature of sea trade, particularly in the Mediterranean, from the seventeenth century”(Flinn 1979: 140). A change in mood on board the ship is highlighted by the contrast

between Brydone's account of the beautiful landscape and their discovery of "this weighty matter":

We cast anchor about four this afternoon, near the center of this enchanted semi-circle, the beauty of which greatly delighted us; but our pleasure was soon interrupted by a discovery that one of our servants had been omitted in our bills of health; and an assurance from the captain, that if he was discovered we should certainly be obliged to perform a long quarantine. (Brydone 1790: I, 50)

The peaceful moment of sightseeing on deck is further shattered when a boat containing the health officials from the port approached and the group rushed to hide the servant below deck, wrapped in a hammock. Brydone notes with some sympathy how:

The poor fellow was obliged to keep in his hole till it was dark, as our consul and some people of the health-office stayed on board much longer than we could have wished, and we are still obliged to conceal him; for if he be discovered, we shall probably get into a very bad scrape. (Brydone 1790: I, 50–51)

While Brydone, the other passengers and crew are certainly uneasy as the ship is inspected and pleasantries are exchanged with local dignitaries and officials, the servant is confined below deck. He has a much more difficult ordeal than his upper-class counterparts, remaining in the heat of late spring of southern Italy below deck, immobile and fearful for the rest of the day.

The extent of Brydone's travel plans are limited by quarantine laws in the south of the region. The ship neared the volcanic island of Stromboli, but the visitors cannot go ashore. He notes the following:

We were determined to have landed on the island, and to have attempted to examine the volcano; but our Sicilian pilot assures us that the crater is not only inaccessible (which indeed I own it appears to be), but that we shall likewise be obliged to perform a quarantine of 48 hours at Messina. (1790: I, 34)

Although his movements are restricted by the quarantine laws, Brydone understands their necessity. He is aware of the relatively brief period of less than thirty years that had elapsed since the decimation of the Sicilian population by plague:

They are particularly strict here in this respect; and indeed they have great reason to be so; since this beautiful city was almost annihilated by the plague in the year 1743, when upwards of 70,000 people are said to have died in it and its district in the space of a few months. (1790: I, 51)

Italy as a whole, like France and Spain, had been badly affected by plagues in the previous century. Naples, for example, with a population of around three hundred thousand inhabitants lost almost half of them to plague in 1656 (Benedictow 1987, 409). Guido Alfani describes the nation enduring a series of "catastrophic plague waves" during 1629–1630 and 1656–1657, from which it took populations in affected towns and cities nearly eighty years to recover and which

saw the long-term impact on local crafts and skills (2003: 409, 426). In spite of localized outbreaks, the plague retreated from Europe in the eighteenth century. This diminution in the spread of disease was due to a series of increasingly effective controls, such as the creation of local health boards, established in some parts of Italy since the fifteenth century, and “harsh administrative measures, extensive deployment of troops, quarantines, *cordon sanitaires* and strict control of travel and trade” (Alfani 2003: 423; Benedictow 1987: 409). Although the waves of epidemic were mostly quelled by the eighteenth century, there were still significant citywide epidemics, such as that described by Brydone in Messina. These fairly isolated occurrences were caused by relaxations of the quarantine restrictions. Flinn notes that quarantines “interfered with trade and governments were too frequently willing to sanction exemptions, while port officials were susceptible to bribes” (1979: 143).

Brydone’s experiences of quarantine indicate the continued impact of the recent history of plague in the region. Brydone, while frustrated by his inability to visit Stromboli, which would have been a significant site in his investigation into volcanology, outlines his understanding of the necessity for regulation. In contrasting the benign aspect of the “beautiful” city of Messina with the devastating impact of the plague by drawing attention to the large number of dead, he communicates his impressions of the sublime potential of disease on the population.

In *A Journey Through the Crimea to Constantinople in a Series of Letters*, Lady Craven, like Patrick Brydone, negotiates between an empathic and intellectual response to the plague and a more negative response to the regulations imposed to combat its spread. Where Brydone’s intellectual response involves an expression of historical statistics alongside an aesthetic appraisal of the city, Craven’s leans more toward an empathetic, aesthetic response to paintings, which relies heavily on the conventions of the eighteenth-century discourse of sentiment.

Craven's text was formed from a series of letters addressed to the "Margrave of Brandenburg, Ansbach, and Bareith," who was to become her second husband in 1791 following the death of her first husband Lord William Craven, from whom she had been separated for several years. The text, as noted in the preface, is partly an attempt to signal herself as the "travelling Lady Craven" in contrast to Lord Craven's new partner (Turner 2004). In anticipation of her departure for extensive travels, which encompassed Turkey and Eastern Europe, from Marseille in 1785, Elizabeth, Lady Craven begins Letter XII with foreboding imagery of the plague. She describes her visit to see paintings by Puget, which although unfinished were placed in the Council Chamber of Marseille in 1694:

There are two very fine pictures, painted by Puget, representing some of the horrid scenes at the time of the plague at Marseilles; they are only too well executed; I saw several dying figures taking their leave of their friends and looking their last anxious kind and wishful prayer on their sick infants, that made the tears flow down my cheeks. (1789: 1, 34)

Although the paintings precede the catastrophic plague of 1720, in which more than 150,000 people were said to have died, to visitors in the later eighteenth century these paintings offered a grisly insight into the city's long history of plague outbreaks (Benedictow 1987: 18, 24; Biraben 1975: I, 231). Lady Craven's account of her emotional response to the paintings leads into a description of the practical implications of the threat of disease on her travels.

I have spoke [*sic*] to Captain—, who commands the King-Fisher; he is obliged to perform quarantine here, though he had done his duty in that way at Leghorn [Livorno] and Genoa

before; but the plague rages very much all along the Barbary coast, from whence he is come; and we cannot be surprised at any precaution taken at Marseilles to avoid this danger. (1789, I, 34)

Lady Craven's sympathetic response to the need for quarantine to protect the local population from disease is not sustained. Later in her text she describes entering Wallachia, modern-day Romania, in July 1786 after having traveled to Turkey. There she is stopped on the outskirts of Bucharest and directed toward a convent.

My carriage was presently surrounded by people of various nations, talking all languages to me. At last I addressed myself to one on French dress; pray, Sir, said I, where am I? — A German servant of mine spoke to him in German, and I found I was driven in there to perform quarantine, for five days at least. (1789, I, 303)

She asked the superior of the convent where she was to stay, and he gestured toward what she describes as “a small miserable room across the court, with only bare walls, and the windows of [which] were all broken” (1789, I, 304). Her discomfort with the situation is compounded when she notices a sick man:

Close to the door of this room I saw a wretched creature alone, with death in his countenance—and pray, says I, what is that miserable figure? —A man suspected to have the plague, who was put away as far from the others as possible, with a little clean straw to lie upon. (1789, I, 304)

The man has been standing near to the servants and is clearly of a lower class than Lady Craven and even her maid, “Mademoiselle,” who gets to dine at the table with her employer and the superior of the convent. The plague disproportionately affected the poor, often in worse health than their wealthier peers to begin with and more likely to catch disease due to their cramped living conditions (Evans and Evans, 2019; see also Carmichael 1986). Lady Craven’s observations draw attention to the way in which experience of disease within quarantine amplified the suffering of those from the lower classes.

The discrepancy in the experience of quarantine is further shown by the events that followed and Lady Craven’s reaction to them:

I confess I was heartily glad when the Imperial agent came from the town to inform me that the Prince was very sorry for the mistake—that it was never his intention I should be sent to the convent....A gold coach, made I believe in the year one, came to the door, with a set of brown-bay stone-horses, that seemed to spurn the earth—There was a Turkish groom that held the bridle of each horse—A kind of chamberlain, with a gold robe on, and a long white stick in his hand, and the Prince’s private secretary came to fetch me. (1789, I, 305)

The entourage containing Lady Craven was escorted through the streets of Bucharest to the prince’s court, where she was entertained with coffee, sweetmeats, and music. Scholarship on Lady Craven’s travel writing has commented on her often self-aggrandizing tone and clearly there is an element of this here as she relishes the attention and glamour of her welcome to

Bucharest.⁵ However, the contrast between the simple architecture of two potential sites of hosting the traveler is stark: the simple convent and the pomp of the royal court.

Patrick Brydone and Lady Craven found space in their published texts to stand back from the impact of both plague and quarantine to offer intellectual and aesthetic analysis. In both of these texts by upper-class travelers, glimpses of the experiences of those from lower-class backgrounds are presented, but these are short-lived and highlight the emotions of the upper-class traveler. Brydone is empathetic toward the forgotten and hidden servant, yet the scene encourages the reader to anticipate, with Brydone, the repercussions for him and his peers should the servant be found by the officials. In Craven's case, the presence of the critically ill man at the convent is used to highlight the danger to herself and again increase the tension as she waits for the prince in Bucharest to recognize her status and allow her to enter the city.

The contrast between the experiences of rich and poor travelers are outlined more clearly from the perspective of the lower-class traveler William Fletcher's letters. Fletcher, in his letters to his employer, Lord Byron, is immersed in discomfort and illness. Fletcher had accompanied Byron on his trip to Turkish-controlled Greece, and was sent back to England with papers pertaining to the sale of Newstead Abbey, following Byron's financial difficulties in 1811. His letters make difficult reading. In a letter to Byron dated the January 28, 1811, and sent from Malta, Fletcher describes some of the terrible conditions he had endured so far on his journey from Greece. He describes, "I living so verry [*sic*] Bad and being frequently obliged to be on deck (to assist pulling Ropes) got a Violent Cold that brought on a Bowell Complaint that continued 3 weeks. And no Doctor or Medinsons."⁶ Fletcher's considerable discomfort on his travels bears witness to the practical difficulties and physical curtailments, such as quarantine laws, which continued to impact travel across the Mediterranean during the beginning of the

nineteenth century and until the mid-century in the eastern Mediterranean (Flinn 1979: 145). Moreover, Byron and Fletcher were traveling in the context of the Napoleonic Wars, adding to the danger and discomfort of sea travel around the Mediterranean. After having to change ships and itinerary twice in Cephalonia due to “contrary winds,” Fletcher writes,

we had bad winds for 20 Days when we got in sight of Malta but could not get in and Remained in sight for 5 Days & then was drove away by a Terable Gale of Wind which Continued for six Days & nights....Most thought every day was our last. (Fletcher 1811)

In the meantime, on board, Fletcher was ill and the conditions were harsh.

We was all Terebley Distressed having no water for 5 Days & Nothing to eat for a fortnight oneley what Capn Wilder pleased to give us which was Turkeys that he did mean to take to his wife at Malta when dieing for want of water we killed them. (Fletcher 1811)

Two spells of quarantine followed this ordeal, when the ship had to stop in Messina, Sicily, for twenty days and a further period in Malta. Fletcher describes how,

We was in all 7 weeks & 3 Days in getting from Zantea to Malta & never went on shore at Messeanea [Messina] & and had one day & night to continue in Quirintum [quarantine] in malta before it was finished. (Fletcher 1811)

In this summary of his journey, the period of quarantine is the last part of the ordeal. The letters to Byron from his manservant were written for a number of purposes, mainly to ask for money to cover the cost of his own living expenses as Fletcher was virtually destitute on the journey, but also to inform his master of the status of money and packages on Malta, and finally to advise Byron of the best way to proceed on his own passage home. In seeking his master's sympathy, and perhaps admiration of his servant's fortitude and loyalty in enduring hardship, Fletcher's account of the journey here highlights his suffering, and significantly the two periods of quarantine are used as the final flourish.

For the wealthier travelers, sea travel was potentially easier and its discomforts could be mitigated to some extent. The positive aspect of the presence of English warships in the Mediterranean was that they would afford other passengers a passage. Fletcher writes to Byron, advising him that it would be best to get a place on an English ship and consoling him with what he might look forward when he got to Malta.

Pray My Ld Do Not Trust aney Greek ships but Pray get an Inglish man of war then your
Ldship is safe My ld i am at Thorms at the New hotell &they Charge me verry

Reason[able] they have got very fine accommodations for your Ldship. (Fletcher 1811)

Byron managed to get passage on the *Hydra*, a transport ship, which was also carrying the famous cargo of marbles for Lord Elgin. Later, his journey homeward from Malta was on the *Volage*, "a frigate returning victorious from its recent battle with the French and Italian squadron off Lissa, on the Dalmation Coast"(MacCarthy 2002: 134).

Byron stayed on Malta during May 1811 for a month's quarantine. In Malta, the Lazzaretto, or place of quarantine, was situated on a former palace, "with courtyards and views across the harbor to Valetta, and the gentry, at least, were frustrated but not uncomfortable" (Manley 2003: 760). On May 15, he wrote to John Cam Hobhouse of his own sufferings while on the island.

I am in bad health and worse spirits, being afflicted in body with what Hostess Quickly in Henry 5th. calls a villainous "*Quotidian Tertia*." It killed Falstaff & may me. I had it first in the Morea last year, and it returned in Quarantine in this infernal oven, and the fit comes on every other day, reducing me first to the chattering penance of Harry Gill, and then mounting me up to a Vesuvian pitch of fever, lastly quitting me with sweats that render it necessary for me to have a man and horse all night to change my linen.

(Lansdown 2015: 75)⁷

As indicated, Byron endured a bout of malaria during his quarantine on Malta; he had first suffered with malarial fever on the Greek island of Patras (MacCarthy 2002:134). However, as he details here, he has recourse to servants and relative comfort during his illness. Byron had first visited Malta on his journey out to Greece and Turkey with John Cam Hobhouse in September 1809 and enjoyed a pleasant lifestyle. His biographer Fiona MacCarthy notes that the two men "were quickly absorbed into the military and merchant community in Malta, invited out to gossip dinners, initiated into eating quail and 'a curious fish found in a shell'; resembling a mussel enclosed in a rock" (2002: 98). On both visits to Malta, Byron became part of a social scene, in 1809 beginning a love affair with Lady Constance Spencer Smith and hiring a tutor in

Arabic during his stay. On his second visit, he notes the presence on the island of two acquaintances, Giovanni Battista Lusieri, Lord Elgin's agent, and Nicolo, or Nicolas Giraud, whom he had first met in Athens (Lansdown 2015: 77). Byron's experiences during his month-long quarantine on Malta are perhaps emblematic of the experience of quarantine for other upper-class travelers for whom, while frustrating in terms of lengthening a journey, the stay was furnished comfortably with a vibrant social life given the numbers of travelers subject to similar restrictions and Malta's status as a British post.

What this article has proposed is that Western travelers were drawn into a dynamic in which places of quarantine, and regulations governing the movements of people from the fourteenth century across the Mediterranean, enacted beliefs and associations between travelers from the East and contagion. Such legislation and places of constraint draw on cultural expressions of fear and ideas of contagion of plague to instill and concretize ideas about mobility, race, and threats from disease. From a Foucauldian perspective, the practice of quarantine as a "technology of power" forms part of the machinery of state, which plays its own part in the construction of negative and harmful ideologies of racial difference. Travelers from Britain, while part of the "self" that is preferenced in this dynamic, were themselves subject to its controls, and aspects of their own identity had a bearing on the way in which they understood, experienced, and expressed ideas about quarantine. The practice of quarantine affected the lower classes disproportionately, with their already "dependent" mobility further restricted and their living conditions made more unpleasant (Clifford 1997: 34). Reflecting on the class implications of a period of quarantine brings us back to recent experiences resulting from the COVID-19 outbreak, which has shown inequalities in much sharper relief. Quarantine, while frustrating the

leisured mobility of some, has been shown as isolating, hunger-inducing, and life-threatening for those in lower social classes.

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Notes

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1. For a recent appraisal of the significance of corporeality in travel writing see Charles Forsdick, "Body," in *Keywords for Travel Writing Studies* edited by Charles Forsdick, Zoë Kinsley, and Kathryn Walchester (London and New York: Anthem, 2019), 22–25.
 2. "Contagion, n.," 2020, *OED online*. Oxford University Press, March 2020, Web, March 27.
 3. In the chapter, "Contagion, Sympathy, Invisibility: Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*," Elizabeth A. Dolan connects racial othering with fears of contagion, through her representations of blindness and symbolism about unnatural eyes. She notes that, "Mary Shelley found a model for racial and ethnic othering and a means for expressing fear of contagion in the widespread outbreak of Egyptian ophthalmia during the Napoleonic Wars." *Seeing Suffering in Women's Literature of the Romantic Era* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 49–76.
 4. Flinn, 1979, 139. In his discussion of the incidence and effects of plague in Europe, Flinn draws on the seminal work by French historian Jean-Noel Biraben, *Les Hommes et la Peste en France at dans les pays européens et méditerranéens* (Paris and La Hague: 1775–1776).
 5. Katherine Turner, 2004, "Elizabeth [née Lady Elizabeth Berkeley] margravine of Brandenburg-Ansbach-Bayreuth" (1750–1828); also Lia Guerra, 2017, "Meeting the 'other' body: Physical Encounters in eighteenth-century Women's Travel Books," *ACME*, December 70 (2): 51–64.
 6. William Fletcher to Byron, from Malta, January 28, 1811: NLS Acc. 126.04/4180.
 7. Richard Lansdown (ed), 2015, *Byron's Letters and Journals. A New Selection* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 75. Byron's reference to the "Quotidian Tertian" comes from Shakespeare's *Henry VI*, Act II, Scene 1 and refers to Falstaff's malaria. The other literary reference in this quotation comes from William Wordsworth's "Goody Blake and Harry Gill," published in 1798 as part of the *Lyrical Ballads* anthology. Gill is a "mean-spirited farmer [who] is cursed with the shivers by an old housewife" (Lansdown, 2015), 75, fn48.