The Yonghy-Bonghy-Bò’s Journey: Romantic and Gothic Destinations in Edward Lear’s *Journals of a Landscape Painter in Albania &c* (1851)

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Through the silent-roaring ocean
Did the Turtle swiftly go;
Holding fast upon his shell
Rode the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bò.
With a sad primæval motion
Towards the sunset isles of Boshen
Still the Turtle bore him well.

—Edward Lear, ‘The Courtship of the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bò’ (1888)

Edward Lear manifests his life-long focus on the journey to the next horizon, to the next destination, in the leaves of his books. He suffuses his nonsense stories with ocean journeys and travellers in works like ‘The Courtship of the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bò’ and ‘The Story of the Four Little Children Who Went Round the World’, as well as in his other nonsense and visual work. As James Williams writes in *Edward Lear* (2018), the Bò describes ‘a story which is about the double life of the traveller, always looking or belonging elsewhere’. Lear’s important theme, the journey, is axiomatic in his six travel books. Extended to his posthumous travelogues, Lear’s travel writing encompasses wide geographical coverage (the Mediterranean, the Middle East, and India) and an extended timestamp (1841–1875).

Lear published six travel journals, two of which were primarily collections of lithographic prints: *Views in Rome and Its Environs Drawn From*...
Nature and on Stone (1841) and Views in the Seven Ionian Islands (1863). In addition to publishing these art books, Lear published four longer narrative travelogues: Illustrated Excursions in Italy (1846), Journals of a Landscape Painter in Albania, &c (1851), Journals of a Landscape Painter in Southern Calabria, &c (1852), and Journals of a Landscape Painter in Corsica (1870). The majority of Lear’s narrative travel literature presents accounts of his journeys in the Mediterranean and conforms to tropes of other eighteenth- and nineteenth-century travel literature. Excursions, Southern Calabria, and Corsica offer readers an engaging combination of two tropes: the pursuit of the picturesque in landscape and the acquisition of scientific and socio-political knowledge. This paper analyses Lear’s departure from this type of travel literature in his Albanian travelogue, with a concomitant purpose of establishing a critical practice of exploring the narratives of his journeys throughout the Mediterranean, the Balkans, and the Middle East as travel literature, rather than as corollaries to the nonsense for which he is more commonly known.

Lear’s nonsense work has understandably received the bulk of literary criticism, but scholarly explorations of his travel literature and natural history illustrations have been published with the recent renaissance of Lear scholarship. Even earlier than the current ascendency in Lear studies, however, in 2005 Peter Swaab addressed Lear’s travel writing in the introduction to his critical edition Over the Land and Over the Sea: Selected Nonsense and Travel Writings. Swaab links Lear’s nonsense and his travel journals closely, writing:

> But what, after all, is nonsense poetry if not a poetry of departures, always departing from our usual norms, often in stories of voyaging and questing? And what is travel writing if not a series of encounters with the extraordinary and often absurd?

Similarly, the most recent critical work has interrogated Lear’s travel literature in the context of its relationship to his nonsense, his work as a landscape painter, or both. For instance, Jenny Uglow definitively connected

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Lear’s travel literature with his picturesque landscapes in *Mr Lear: A Life of Art and Nonsense* (2017), writing that

"He wanted readers to travel with him not as a political commentator but as a painter, following his hunt for a good view, his dashes to sketch before sunset, his penning-out of drawings at night. His judgements were painterly, often referring back to his favourite artists, Claude Lorrain, Salvator Rosa and Poussin."

More recently, Sara Lodge in *Inventing Edward Lear* (2019) argues that Lear’s travel writing was linked to his landscape artistry, that ‘The business of his landscape painting and writing was travel, but it was also a potentially infinite process of revisiting himself.’ She then explores the relationship between Lear’s landscapes, travelogues, and nonsense, noting that ‘Lear’s nonsense works bring his painter’s eye to bear on language; they are unusually full of words describing colour.’

Lodge, however, also discusses Lear’s vivid imagery, which was inspired by the ethnomusicology that Lear included in his travel literature with transcriptions of folksongs: ‘Each region had its own soundscape, which Lear tried to record—as he recorded the landscape—in words and images.’

James Williams also links Lear’s nonsense and landscape to his travel literature in *Edward Lear*. He writes of Lear’s Romantic tendencies, as well as the thread of doubt—of ‘characteristically Learical ambivalences’—in Lear’s relationship with the Romantic, connecting the ambivalences to both Lear’s nonsense songs and his landscape painting via his travel experiences.

Regarding Lear’s landscape, *The Rocks at Kasr as Saad* (1865), Williams writes:

*The vastness of this ‘rocky shore’ embodies a grandly Byronic rapture without apparent self-doubt, and speaks to Byron’s sense of profound loneliness, but it is also imbued with characteristically Learical ambivalences. The early morning sun makes the Egyptian stone glow a deep honey colour, or is it the late evening sun?—an ending or a beginning? Are the birds coming in to land or, more likely perhaps, taking off?*

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7 Lodge, p. 289.
8 Lodge, p. 21.
10 Williams, p. 89.
Williams applies this ambiguity to the frequent double meanings of Lear’s neologisms, the conflicted desires of The Bò, and Lear’s other travellers both to escape and remain with the familiar. Williams, however, also interrogates the timeline of Lear’s adoption of nonsense words—dating it to after the beginning of Lear’s extensive travels, arguing that Lear’s encounters with different languages were the true foundation of the neologisms that appear in the later nonsense songs.\footnote{Williams, pp. 91–93.}

Secure in the knowledge provided by these well-argued critiques of the relationship between Lear’s nonsense, landscapes, and travel literature, this article explores Lear’s Albanian travelogue, as well as one particular landscape painted on this Balkan journey, with a different focus than that of Lear as a nonsense poet who also wrote travel literature. That being said, interrogating Lear’s travel work in a vacuum would, most certainly, be complete nonsense. Therefore, references to the more nonsense-focused critical work described above are both constructive and inevitable in my exploration of Albania as travel literature.

Sandwiched between Italy and Southern Calabria, Lear’s Albanian narrative is an anomaly. Albania was Lear’s attempt to expand his practice of travel writing beyond that used in his other travelogues. With this Balkan journal, Lear proffers a Romantic journey through the Albanian landscape, following in the footsteps of Byron and his route through Greece and Albania. The work proffers, too, an exercise in Balkan Gothic storytelling. This travel journal, I contend, was a literary experiment for Lear in which he stretches the boundaries of his travel literature and his role as a travel author and artist into a sampler of a Romantic trek through the little-known Balkan peninsula. Combining threads of Romantic travel; a pastiche of the peoples, places, and events in Byron’s travels; and Gothic storytelling, Lear weaves these different threads into patterns reflective of his own travels in the Balkans and his complicated relationship with Romantic literature.

Criticism of Romantic elements in Lear centre on his nonsense. Michael O’Neill, in his chapter ‘‘One of the Dumms’: Edward Lear and Romanticism’ in Edward Lear and the Play of Poetry (2016) writes that Lear’s ‘reworking of Romanticism fulfils what was latent or overt in it already, as well as exceeding, subverting, and departing from it’.\footnote{Edward Lear and the Play of Poetry, ed. by James Williams and Matthew Bevis (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 54.} Furthermore, O’Neill argues that Lear’s nonsense worlds ‘occupy the territory they shape for...
themselves with a quiet refusal to be co-opted by the dominant discourses of his time.' Uglow notes, several times, the influence that many Romantic poets had on the young Lear, including Byron. Uglow writes:

He was throwing off his family’s chapel-going zeal, and as a fan of Byron and Shelley, he was scathing about political corruption and attempts to ‘christianize the nation’. At fourteen, he wrote an accomplished parody, part radical drinking song, part spoof evangelical hymn: ‘Ye who have hearts – aloud REJOICE, / For Oligarchy trembles’.14

While Williams discusses the Tennysonian aspects of ‘The Courtship of the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bô’, he also analyses different types of Romantic despair in ‘There was an old person so silly’: ‘Despair is connected for Lear with roots and rootlessness, and beneath the limerick’s pleasurable nonsense is the dark hint that it is an all-too-human desire for groundedness that makes an old person ’so silly’’.15 Lodge argues for the same type of conflicted intent in Lear that Williams discusses:

Is nonsense in essence a parodic mode, or does its nearness to pure sound in fact bespeak a relationship with psychological truth? These contemporary reviews alert the modern reader to the range of echoes that nineteenth-century readers heard in Lear’s work, and their competing identifications of him as a master of genre fusion, whose ‘pervading melancholy’ was Byronic, and as a comic showman, whose work was posed between that of the Smith brothers (who also wrote songs) and W. S. Gilbert.16

Vivian Noakes also discusses Lear in a Byronic context, writing in Edward Lear: The Life of a Wanderer (2004) that ‘Byron’s death affected him in an extraordinary way’.17 Noakes continues: ‘The poet-idol, the social outcast, the figurehead of Greek independence—it was a mature hero for a boy of eleven’.18 Educated at home by two elder sisters on a Rousseau-like diet of natural history, music, drawing, and Romantic poetry, Lear’s personal reaction to the death of this Romantic poet is not wholly unsur-

13 Williams and Bevis, p. 56.
14 Uglow, p. 23, 25, 37.
16 Lodge, p. 83.
18 Noakes, The Complete Nonsense and Other Verse by Edward Lear, p. 10.
prising. It was not until almost 40 years later that Lear wrote in a diary entry dated 18 September 1861 about his feelings upon learning of Byron’s death:

Pale cold moon, yet now as in 1823 – ever strangely influencing me. Do you remember the small yard & the passages at— in 1823, & 1824— when I used to sit there in the cold looking at the stars, & when I heard that Ld. Byron was dead, stupefied & crying.  

A certain scepticism might be applied to the eleven-year-old Lear’s reaction; however, it seems that Noakes’ comment may be justified in that Lear probably felt a certain empathy for Byron, considering the biographical congruencies of their ambiguous sexuality and bouts of depression. Additionally, both struggled with physical disabilities—Byron with his congenital talipes equinovarus and Lear with his epilepsy. Lear would mark his diary entries with an ‘X’ to denote an epileptic attack, which he referred to as ‘the Demon’. Some entries contained an astounding number of attacks for one day; the mark ‘X6’ was not a rare occurrence. Struggling with their sexual orientation, Romantic despair, and physical challenges, both authors imposed exile on themselves, which led to extensive travels in the Mediterranean and the Balkan peninsula.

In 1847, Lear travelled to Italy and prepared notes for Southern Calabria. He had to leave the country suddenly because of revolution, but in April 1848, he was invited to join the British consulate’s retinue travelling to Istanbul, where he met Charles Church (1823—1915). Church was the nephew of Sir Richard Church (1784—1873), the man who led the Suliot War of 1803 against Ali Pasha and served in the independent Greek government.

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22 Uglow, pp. 16–17.
23 Uglow, pp. 16–17.
24 Lodge, p. 80; Williams, p. 93.
Lear and Church agreed to travel to Mt. Athos and Thessaloniki together. Following in the fashion of Carl Thompson’s *The Suffering Traveller and the Romantic Imagination* (2007), the trip was marred by various illnesses and injuries; Lear was eventually stricken with a life-threatening bout of malaria and had to recuperate at the consulate. While there, he arranged to meet up with Church near Mt. Athos. When Lear arrived at the port in Salonika to start the overland journey to Mt. Athos, however, he was prevented from travelling on to the legendary mountain because of a cholera quarantine; it was then that Lear opted for the circuitous overland route through Albania to meet up with Church in Corfu. Lear was an avid reader of travel works like W Martin’s *Travels in Northern Greece* (1835) and thus had long desired to travel and paint his way through the peninsula. Did the opportunity of following in the footsteps of a favoured poet from childhood also inspire in Lear the idea of capitalising on the success of Byron’s travel verse, by mimicking the poet in his own travelogue? Regardless of motive, it was there, at the port in Salonika, that Lear began the patterns of his experimental Albanian sampler.

The first pattern appears in Lear’s references to Byron himself. In his other travel works, Lear often quotes poems without attribution; in *Corsica* there are many unattributed quotes from Tennyson—another of Lear’s favourite poets. However, these unattributed quotes are absent in *Albania*, in which Lear instead experiments with mentioning Byron specifically by name or title:

> The sun was sinking as I sat down to draw in what had been a great chamber, below one of the many crumbling walls—perhaps in the very spot where the dreaded Ali gave audience to his Frank guests in 1809—when Childe Harold was but twenty-four years old, and the Vizir in the zenith of his power. * The poet is no more;—the host is beheaded, and his family nearly extinct;—the palace is burned, and levelled with the ground.  

Additionally, Lear frequently mentions Ali Pasha and the Albanian Suliots, with whom Byron was closely associated through his role in the Greek uprising. Lear echoes Byron’s admiration of Ali Pasha, mentioning

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26 Uglow, pp. 173–77; Thompson, Carl, pp. 4–17.  
him by name nine times. Lear references him here, writing of Zuliki, an Albanian leader who led a revolt against the Turks in 1846:

Their rebellion under Zuliki seems to have been the last convulsive struggle of this scattered and disarmed people, and the once proud territory of Ali Pasha is now ground down into a melancholy insignificance, and well nigh deprived of its identity.\(^{30}\)

Lear alludes to Byron’s association with the revolutionary struggles against Ali Pasha and the Ottomans in the following description of the mountainous area of Mitzikeli in Jannina:

I would take a boat and cross to the little island, and visit the monastery, where that wondrous man Ali Pasha met his death: or sitting by the edge of the lake near the southern side of the kastron [fort], sketch the massive, mournful ruins of his palace of Litharitza, with the peaks of Olytzika rising beyond. For hours I could loiter on the terrace of kastron opposite the Pasha’s serai, among the ruined fortifications, or near the strange gilded tomb where lies the body of the man who for so long a time made thousands tremble!\(^{31}\)

Byron and Ali Pasha were clearly prevalent in Lear’s mind in Albania, and he brings readers’ attention to the two with deliberate references. Additionally, Lear mentions Byron in a private diary entry of 1 June 1848 when he writes of discussing the poet and his verse with the British consul on a boat to Istanbul, as well as referencing Byron’s death in a 19 April 1848 letter to his sister, Ann. Both of these correspondences were written during his Balkan journey.\(^{32}\)

Elements from the text of the Balkan travelogue relating to *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* and *Don Juan* constitute another pattern in the sampler of Lear’s literary experiment, including references to British and Balkan historical figures, places, and events. This experiment is animated by an earlier British traveller, William Martin Leake (1777—1860). Thompson in *The Suffering Traveller* describes Byron’s grudging admission that only one Englishman had explored Albania: ‘he recalls how his journey to Albania in 1809 took him to regions unvisited by Englishmen (with the sole excep-

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Lear frequently references Leake’s trek in *Albania*. Coincidentally, Leake had also served as the British representative to Ali Pasha’s court in 1807. The mention of Leake and his activities in the affairs of Greek independence lends a factual credibility to Lear’s account and might point to another possible source of inspiration for a successful Balkan travel publication. Again, regardless of motive, Lear writes in the introduction that he was ‘the only Englishman who has published any account’ particularly of Acroceraunia, Scanderbeg, and Lake Ohrid. Lear thus presents himself as an intrepid traveller of Albania, surpassing even Byron’s and Leake’s mishaps and adventures.

Lear’s oblique appeals to events of the Greek rebellion, however, are not confined to citations of Leake’s work and continue the pattern of references to places and events from the period. In the second half of the journal, Lear seems to compare his own narrative to aspects of *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* and *Don Juan* via the Suliot War against Ali Pasha in 1803. In the Second Canto, Stanza XIII of *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*, Byron writes:

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What! shall it e’er be said by British tongue,
Albion was happy in Athena’s tears?
Though in thy name the slaves her bosom wrung,
Tell not the deed to blushing Europe’s ears;
The ocean queen, the free Britannia, bears
The last poor plunder from a bleeding land:
Yes, she, whose generous aid her name endears,
Tore down those remnants with a harpy’s hand,
Which envious Eld forbore, and tyrants left to stand.
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Here, Byron refers to Britain’s political activity in the Balkan peninsula in the early nineteenth century. This is echoed in *Albania* when Lear writes about Britain’s sale of Suliot Parga to Ali Pasha during Corfu’s liberation.

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33 Thompson, Carl, p. 148. See also *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*, Second Canto, Stanzas XLVIII-LV.
34 Lear, Journals of a Landscape Painter in Albania &c, pp. 2, 3, 10, 23, 28, 30, 37, 50, 81, 187, 219, 234, 275, 304, 380, etc.
36 Thompson, Carl, p. 164.
37 Lear, Journals of a Landscape Painter in Albania &c, p. 4.
from the Ottoman Empire in 1815.³⁹ Lear discusses the fate of the Suliots at the rock of Zalongo in Epirus during the Suliot War:

This was the scene of one of those terrible tragedies so frequent during the Suliote war with Ali. At its summit twenty-two women of Suli took refuge after the capture of their rock by the Mohammedans, and with their children awaited the issue of a desperate combat between their husbands and brothers, and the soldiers of the Vizir of Ioannina. Their cause was lost; but as the enemy scaled the rock to take the women prisoners, they dashed all their children on the crags below, and joining their hands, while they sang the songs of their own dear land, they advanced nearer and nearer to the edge of the precipice, when from the brink a victim precipitated herself into the deep below at each recurring round of the dance, until all were destroyed. When the foe arrived at the summit, the heroic Suliotes were beyond his reach.⁴⁰

Lear further writes, 'I felt anxious to leave Parga. The picture, false or true, of the 10th of April, 1819, was ever before me, and I wished with all my hear that I had left Parga unvisited.⁴¹

The date, 10 April, refers to the actual sale and transfer of Parga to Ali Pasha, which Lear underscores as an echo to Byron's earlier renunciation of the British betrayal and later abandonment of Parga.⁴² Byron himself refers to this incident specifically in Don Juan, Cantos III/IV in The Isles of Greece, when he writes not to trust the Franks:⁴³

On Suli's rock, and Parga's shore,
Exists the remnant of a line
Such as the Doric mothers bore;
And there, perhaps, some seed is sown,
The Heracleidan blood might own.
Trust not for freedom to the Franks— ... ⁴⁴

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⁴⁰ Lear, Journals of a Landscape Painter in Albania &c, pp. 346–47.
⁴¹ Lear, Journals of a Landscape Painter in Albania &c, p. 374.
⁴² Cochran, p. 1.
⁴⁴ George Gordon Byron, Don Juan, Third and Fourth Canto Isles of Greece, accessed
Another pattern of Lear’s Albanian sampler includes a mimicry of the
devices used by the Romantic poets, but in prose form. Lear describes
his encounters with sites associated with Byron’s legacy in Albania,
displaying a conflicting emotionality. For example, Thompson comments on
Stanza I in the First Canto of *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*. Regarding a visit
to Delphi, he notes that for Byron:

> what emerges from his travel experience is a growing understanding
> that all such sites, and the systems of belief built around them, have
> only a provisional or partial usefulness. Sometimes this is explicitly the
> result of an inadequacy in the supposedly sacred site.\(^{45}\)

**Following is Byron’s stanza:**

> Oh, thou! in Hellas deem’d of heavenly birth,
> Muse! form’d or fabled at the minstrel’s will!
> Since shamed full oft by later lyres on earth,
> Mine dares not call thee from thy sacred hill:
> Yet there I’ve wander’d by thy vaunted rill;
> Yes! sigh’d o’er Delphi’s long deserted shrine,
> Where, save that feeble fountain, all is still;
> Nor mote my shell awake the weary Nine
> To grace so plain a tale—this lowly lay of mine.\(^{46}\)

Lear, too, finds disappointment in one of the sites of his own travels, di-
rectly citing Byron’s ‘Monastic Zitza’ and its immortalisation in *Childe
Harold’s Pilgrimage* in a 5 November 1848 entry.\(^{47}\) Here is Byron’s ode to
this monastery that he had visited in Ali Pasha’s Jannina:

> Monastic Zitza! from thy shady brow,
> Thou small, but favour’d spot of holy ground!
> Where’eer we gaze, around, above, below,
> What rainbow tints, what magic charms are found!\(^{48}\)

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45 Thompson, Carl, pp. 241–42.
46 Byron, *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*, First Canto.
47 Lear, *Journals of a Landscape Painter in Albania &c*, p. 326. Zitza is the site of the mon-
astery described in *Childe Harold*, Second Canto, Stanza XLVIII.
48 Byron, *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*, Second Canto, Stanza XLVIII; Byron, George Gor-
House, 1993), 29. Byron wrote to his mother Catherine Gordon Byron (1770-1811) of the
beauty of the Greek monastery at Zitza.
Following is Lear’s deflated reaction to Zitza:

Making due allowance for the bad weather, I cannot but feel disappointed in Zitza: the surrounding scenery, though doubtless full of varied beauty, does not seem to me sufficient to call forth such raptures of admiration, even if selected as a spot where an imaginative poet, reposing quietly after foregone toils and evils, might exaggerate its charms. But after traveling through the daily-remarkable beauties of Albania, the view from Zitza, to speak plainly disappointed me.⁴⁹

In contrast to Lear’s earlier delight in the view of Mt. Athos’s ‘great beauty’ and other majestic Balkan sites, the disappointment with Zitza is noteworthy, especially compared to another passage about Zitza.⁵⁰

On the way to the same monastery, Byron had been caught in a raging thunderstorm, which inspired his ‘Stanzas composed during a thunderstorm’ (1809):

Chill and mirk is the nightly blast,
Where Pindus’ mountains rise,
And angry clouds are pouring fast
The vengeance of the skies.⁵¹

Storm imagery is a common trope in Romantic literature, and Lear conjures up similar storm-laden vocabulary when he writes about a reckless gallop near Lake Lapsista (which is near the Zitza monastery) in Jannina for that 5 November entry of 1848:

Thenceforth relentless torrents poured down, and the lake Lapsista was only dimly seen through intervals of shifting dark cloud—conveying a sensation of water and mountain, rather than an ocular conviction of their presence; and so amid rolling thunder and flashing lightning did I gallop on, across the treeless level . . . ⁵²

This reckless galloping of horses through a thunderstorm is extremely uncharacteristic for Lear (who had been thrown from a horse and severely injured not six months previously and had written a picture story satirising his own questionable horsemanship).⁵³ He seemingly abandons verisi-

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⁵⁰ Lear, Journals of a Landscape Painter in Albania &c, p. 411.
⁵² Lear, Journals of a Landscape Painter in Albania &c, p. 328.
⁵³ See Lear in Sicily (1847) http://www.nonsenselit.org/Lear/LiS/lis01.html.
militude for a Romantic emulation of the storm-obsessed Byron and other Romantic poets in this uncharacteristic night gallop through a storm after his personal disappointment with Zitza, the site of Byron’s monastery.54

These scenes are remarkable for their contradiction and bring to mind Lodge’s discussion regarding the parodic aspects of Lear’s work, as well as Williams’ ambivalences, when compared to other scenes in the narrative. For instance, throughout the journal, Lear relates comedic episodes, often with himself as a figure of fun to the local people. Early in the journal, on 14 September, he describes a scene in which he awkwardly trods on and breaks a pipe-bowl while having coffee with a local post-master.55 Near the middle of the narrative on 17 October, Lear comments wittily on the lack of ‘borrowing’ in Albania: ‘if you hired fifty horses of fifty men in this part of the world, you would have all the fifty owners for company, because in Albania nobody lends anything to anybody’.56 Near the end of the journal, in a November entry, Lear relates his delight on finding and feasting on water-cress, ‘an act which provoked the Epirote bystanders of the village to ecstatic laughter and curiosity’. He continues:

Every portion I put into my mouth, delighted them as a most charming exhibition of foreign whim; and the more juvenile spectators instantly commenced bringing me all sorts of funny objects, with an earnest request that the Frank would amuse them by feeding thereupon forthwith.57

Amongst these typically comic Learical entries, the contrasting emotive qualities of the episode at Zitza and the galloping ride through the thunderstorm are suggestive of Lodge’s discussion of parody in Lear. She writes: ‘It explores the hyperbolic and hopeless nature of emotion itself, via a consciousness of genre that teeters between sincere echo and parody, exposing the nature of reprise as always potentially melancholy and funny at the same time.’58 Such a mix of melancholia and risibility as Lodge describes could also be applied to the final pattern that Lear inscribes on his Albanian sampler—Gothic storytelling.

54 Thompson, Carl, pp. 232–71. Thompson discusses the topic of storms in Romantic travel literature extensively. See also the chapter in the same work ‘Wordsworthian Scripts’ pp. 186–230.
55 Lear, Journals of a Landscape Painter in Albania &c, pp. 33–34.
56 Lear, Journals of a Landscape Painter in Albania &c, p. 197.
57 Lear, Journals of a Landscape Painter in Albania &c, p. 321.
58 Lodge, p. 84.
This thread, based on two anecdotes in *Albania* and a corresponding landscape, is a link from Lear to the Balkan Gothic and has enjoyed only two mentions in biographical accounts of Lear: Angus Davidson’s *Edward Lear: Landscape Painter and Nonsense Poet, 1812—1888* (the 1938 and 1968 editions) and Susan Chitty’s *That Singular Person Called Lear* (2002 edition). Davidson writes that ‘Here, he [Lear] told Church, he ‘lived on rugs and ate with gipsies and unclean persons and performed frightful discrepancies for 8 days’. Davidi then describes and quotes the anecdote from *Albania* without providing a citation. He leaves the reader to assume this is a tale that Lear related to Church, rather than a direct quote from Lear’s journal. This link with the Gothic in Lear’s travel literature was also noted by Uglow, who writes about *Calabria*: ‘As a sop to Gothic tastes, Lear includes a couple of tales of mad aristocrats, murdered lovers and crumbling castles.’ The Gothic elements in *Albania*, however, relate anecdotes in which Lear himself is an active participant, rather than relating second-hand descriptions of local histories and long-dead actors.

Lear’s dip into the Gothic in *Albania* aligns with the shift from the Italian Gothic that Vesna Goldsworthy traces in the migration from the Mediterranean to the Balkans in *Inventing Ruritania: Imperialism of the Imagination* (1998). With the increasing frequency of European travel, Italy became too much a part of the standard Grand Tour and was therefore unable to present the exotic setting necessary for the Gothic that Goldsworthy discusses. Thus, she writes that Byron’s travel in the Balkans offers an inroad from Italy into the establishment of the Balkans as a scene for the Gothic tale:

The Gothic is itself, as in John Polidori’s work *The Vampyre* (1819)—whose hero, Lord Ruthven was modelled on Byron – frequently a darker expression of the Byronic myth. . . . The desire to escape the dullness of civilised life . . . and immerse oneself in the ‘unspoilt’ world of other peoples—a more primitive and more cruel world—is accompanied by a fantasy of threat and a fear of being ‘sucked in’ and losing one’s identity.

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60 Davidson, p. 61.
61 Uglow, p. 170.
63 Goldsworthy, p. 75.
This description is akin to the following anecdote from *Albania* and is another glimpse into Lear’s experimentation in this travel narrative. While traveling in the Khimara district of Epirus on the Greek-Albanian border, Lear relates his own ‘darker expression of Byronic myth’ in Albania:

>. . . we proceeded to a house, where, in a dark room of great size, a mat and cushions were spread for me, and there was no lack of company. A very aged man, more than a century old, occupied a bed in one corner; a screaming baby in a cradle on the opposite side, illustrated another extreme point of the seven ages of the family; two or three women, retiring into the obscurest shade, seemed to be knitting, while circles of long-haired Khimariotes thronged the floor.

Many of these, both outside and in the house, extended their hands for mine to shake, I supposed from being aware of Frank modes of salutation; but among them, three or four gave me so peculiar a twist or crack of my fingers, that I was struck by its singularity; though it was not until my hand had been held firmly for a repetition of this manoeuvre, accompanied by a look of interrogation from the holder, that the thought flashed on my mind that what I observed was a concerted signal. I shortly became fully aware that I was among people, who, from some cause or other, had fled from justice in other lands.

One of these was one who, with his face entirely muffled excepting one eye, kept aloof in the darker part of the chamber, until having thoroughly scrutinized me, he came forward, and dropping his capote, discovered to my horror and amazement, features which, though disguised by an enormous growth of hair, I could not fail to recognize. ‘The world is my city now’, said he; ‘I am become a savage like those with whom I dwell. What is life to me?’ And covering his face again, he wept with a heart-breaking bitterness only life-exiles can know.

Alas! henceforth this wild Alsatia of the mountains—this strange and fearful Khimara—wore to my thoughts a tenfold garb of melancholy, when I considered it as the refuge, during the remainder of a weary life, of men whose early years had been passed in far other abodes and society.\(^{64}\)

Only after he has passed the interrogation and been accepted into their circle, is Lear approached by the cloaked figure, this ‘life-exile’. Lear provides no further information regarding this ‘muffled’ character. Davidson

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\(^{64}\) Lear, *Journals of a Landscape Painter in Albania &c*, 276–77. See also *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*, Second Canto, Stanzas XLVIII-LV. This term is ‘Chimaera’ in Byron’s work. Lear uses both ‘Khimariot’ and ‘Khimariote’ in *Albania*. 
links this passage to Byron’s *The Giaour* (1813), questioning the possible identity of the figure:

Unhappily Lear gives us no clue to the identity, or even the nationality of this mysterious figure—a notorious swindler? A murderer? An Italian revolutionary leader? A disgraced royalty—who, from his appearance, his behaviour, his surroundings, might be taken straight from the pages of Mrs. Radcliffe or some other of the Tales of Terror of fifty years before—or from Byron’s *Giaour*:

Dark and unearthly is the scowl  
That glares beneath his dusky cowl.  
The flash of that dilating eye  
Reveals too much of times gone by;  
Though varying, indistinct, its hue,  
Of will his glance the gazer rue.\(^{65}\)

Perhaps a more pertinent question would be: Why did Lear included this anecdote? It could be that, with this scene, Lear was experimenting with a brief story of the undead, similar to Byron’s ‘A Fragment’ (1819) that inspired Polidori’s *Vampyre* (1819). I contend this is a likely motive for Lear, especially given the concordance of the spectre, ‘muffled excepting one eye’, which is similar to the second and third lines of Byron’s vampire in *The Giaour* stanza above (as Davidson implies).\(^{66}\) Additionally, that strange term, ‘life-exile’, points in this direction. Here, to what, exactly, is ‘life’ referring? This mysterious figure’s previous life amongst society, or an actual physical life with its flowing blood and beating heart? Returning to my thesis that *Albania* was a literary experiment for Lear, I argue that this fragment of a tale was an attempt to mimic the efforts of Byron’s ghost story challenge at the villa in Geneva in 1815 with his own offering of the Balkan Gothic.\(^{67}\) With its strangely compelling cloaked figure and vampiric elements, it is as if Lear were deliberately mimicking Byron’s short story or *The Giaour*.\(^{68}\)

This anecdote, moreover, is not the only brush with the Gothic that Lear includes in the text of *Albania*. Earlier in the journal he writes:

I am awakened an hour before daylight by the most piercing screams.  
Hark!—they are the loud cries of a woman’s voice, and they come near-

\(^{65}\) Davidson, p. 62.  
\(^{66}\) Davidson, pp. 61–62.  
\(^{68}\) Marchand, p. 243.
er—nearer—close to the house. For a moment, the remembrance of last night’s orgies [Roma entertainment with screaming and howling], the strange place I was lying in, and the horrid sounds by which I was so suddenly awakened, made a confusion of ideas in my mind which I could hardly disentangle, till, lighting a phosphorus match and candle, I saw all the Albanians in the room, sitting bolt upright, and listening with ugly countenances to the terrible cries below. In vain I ask the cause of them: no one replies; but one by one, and Anastasio the last, all descend the ladder, leaving me in a mystery which does not make the state of things more agreeable; for though I have not ‘supped full of horror’ like Macbeth, yet my senses are nevertheless ‘cooled to hear so dismal a night shriek.’

I do not remember ever to have heard so horrid and deadly a sound as that long shriek, perpetually repeated with a force and sharpness not to be recalled without pain; and what made it more horrible, was the distinct echo to each cry from the lonely rocks around this hideous place. The cries, too, were exactly similar, and studiedly monotonous in measured wild grief. After a short time, Anastasio and the others returned, but at first I could elicit no cause for this startling the night from its propriety. At length I suppose they thought that, as I was now irrevocably afloat in Khimara life, I might as well know the worst as not; so they informed that the wailings proceeded from a woman of the place, whose husband had just been murdered. He had had some feud with an inhabitant of a neighbouring village (near Kudhesi) nor had he returned to his house as was expected last night; and just now, by means of the Khimariot dogs, whose uproar is unimaginable, the head of the slain man was found on one side of the ravine, immediately below the house I am in, his murderers having tossed it over from the opposite bank, where the body still lay. This horrid intelligence had been taken (with her husband’s head) to his wife, and she instantly began the public shrieking and wailing usual with all people in this singular region on the death of relatives.69

With the Gothic horror of this decapitation anecdote, Lear may be setting the scene for his later tale with the veiled, undead figure. The darkly comedic elements—‘This horrid intelligence had been taken (with her husband’s head) to his wife’—may nevertheless have a purpose beyond Lodge’s genre-teetering between the melancholic and the comedic. Decapitation as a method of preventing vampirism or as a method of disposing of a vampire is a common element in Balkan folklore.70 Goldsworthy discusses

69 Lear, Journals of a Landscape Painter in Albania &c, 243–45.
the burgeoning publication of translations of Balkan poetry, music, and folklore, including works by Mérimée, Scott, and Karadžić; thus, it is possible that Lear would have been aware of Balkan folk knowledge associated with vampires.\(^\text{71}\) Is this scene serving two purposes, a typically Learical subversion of Romantic Gothic horror (as in O’Neill’s discussion of Lear’s ‘Romantic reworking’) \textit{and} a signalling of Lear’s knowledge about Balkan vampirism to legitimise the subsequent fragmented story of the ‘muffled’ figure?

This ‘muffled’ figure might well have been revisited in one of Lear’s Albanian landscapes. Uglow, Lodge, and Williams all discuss the link between Lear’s travel-writing and his landscape artistry, and how an exploration of one of the landscapes that Lear painted on his Balkan travels suggests another shadowy foray into the Gothic. In Lear’s other travel literature, which focuses on the picturesque aspects of European travel, he provides numerous images of ruined architecture framed by the wild beauty of the Mediterranean, reflective of his use of the picturesque in the texts. I argue that Lear also infused one of his Balkan sketches with a Gothic element. Note this sketch (Figure 1) from one of Lear’s Balkan images, a watercolour wash of Gallipoli held at Harvard’s Houghton Library.\(^\text{72}\)

In the centre foreground is a ghost-like image (Figure 2). Unlike the rest of the sketch, this face has not been coloured. Lear often includes tiny elements in his landscapes, often birds, as Matthew Bevis discusses in his article, ‘Edward Lear’s Lines of Flight’ (2013), as well as instructions for colour and shading.\(^\text{73}\) This spectre in the Gallipoli image is clearly not a note on colour, nor is it one of Lear’s typical birds. The image is spectral, containing neither defined eyes nor a discernible mouth. Why did Lear leave this spectral image floating in the water of the port of Gallipoli? Was this another experiment with the Gothic for Lear, just as in the prose of his journal? Is it a visual link, perhaps, to Ali Pasha, Byron’s \textit{The Giaour}, or the ‘muffled’ figure in his own Gothic fragment?\(^\text{74}\) Perhaps

\(^{71}\) Goldsworthy, p. 24. Additionally, Mérimée was a friend of Lear’s. See Jenny Uglow, \textit{Mr Lear: A Life of Art and Nonsense} (London : Faber & Faber, 2017), 389.


Figure 1. 'Gelibolu [Galipoli] 10 September 1848.' Harvard University, Houghton Library.

Figure 2. 'Gelibolu [Galipoli] 10 September 1848' (closeup). Harvard University, Houghton Library.
it is at once both one and all of these—one of Williams’s ‘characteristically Learical ambivalences’.

Gothic storytelling fragment, Romantic journey, ghostly landscape: all are woven together in the Albanian sampler and expanded Lear’s travel literature beyond the informational and picturesque patterns he used in *Excursions, Southern Calabria,* and *Corsica.* With *Albania,* Lear expanded his travel writing in an experiment to describe his journey through the Balkans, infusing his journal with names, places, and events evocative of Byron’s and Leake’s treks, but also infusing the narrative with a definitive attempt at Gothic storytelling that nevertheless contains an ambiguous subversion of his own horrific tales with a typically Learical dark humour. This experimental expansion in his travel writing conformed to Lear’s life-long preoccupation with journeys and the analogous life-long quest for the literary or artistic sensation that would bring him the money and acceptance he perennially sought. Unfortunately for Lear, this acceptance always seemed to him just out of reach on the next horizon, in the next painting, in the next book, in the next destination.

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