'Edward Lear's Travels in Nonsense and Europe'

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'Nonsense writing' sounds like a negation of sense, but the genre is more accurately seen as part-sense or semi-sense – not entirely as an assault on meaning or a repudiation of it, but as an exploration of its dynamics. Nonsense writing is a place

<sup>1</sup> Critical literature on nonsense writing begins with some focused and suggestive essays, including notably G.K. Chesterton, 'A Defence of Nonsense', in The Defendant (London: R. Brimley Johnson, 1901), pp. 42-50; Aldous Huxley, 'Edward Lear', in On the Margin (London: Chatto and Windus, 1923), pp. 167-72; William Empson, 'Alice in Wonderland: the Child as Swain', in Some Versions of Pastoral (London: Chatto and Windus, 1935), pp. 253-98; George Orwell 'Nonsense Poetry', Tribune, 21 December 1945, reprinted in The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), iv. 64-68; T.S. Eliot, 'From Poe to Valéry' (1948), in To Criticize the Critic and other Essays (London: Faber and Faber, 1965), pp. 27-42. Influential full-length studies begin with Elizabeth Sewell, The Field of Nonsense (London: Chatto & Windus, 1952), and continue with Susan Stewart, Nonsense: Aspects of Intertextuality in Folklore and Literature (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), Jean-Jacques Lecercle, Philosophy of Nonsense. The Intuitions of Victorian Nonsense Literature (London: Routledge, 1994), and an important anthology, The Chatto Book of Nonsense Poetry, ed. Hugh Haughton (London: Chatto & Windus, 1988). See also Edward Lear and the Play of Poetry, edited by Matthew Bevis and James Williams (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

where sense and absurdity meet, often on cordial terms. It negotiates between the sensible and the senseless, and explores the limits of where we can go with coherence. It expresses scepticism about the feasibility and usefulness of making ourselves meaningful but is also fascinated by the ways that we are impelled to do so. If one single person is responsible for this dubious idea of 'nonsense writing', it is Edward Lear, who in 1846 gave the title *A Book of Nonsense* to his first collection of limericks (as they would get called for mysterious reasons fifty years later). I think the term has fostered two exaggerated tendencies in readers and critics. One of these is defeatist and quasi-aesthetic, holding to an idea of nonsense for nonsense's sake, as though it were a fault of taste to attempt to speak sense of nonsense, it's strictly for the kids; Lear himself may have given a lead here, speaking of "Nonsense", pure and absolute, having been my aim throughout.' The other is more solemn, and sees nonsense as a version of philosophy, an attack of schemes of meaning, an essay in epistemology by other means.<sup>3</sup>

As against these hermetic positions, we could see nonsense writing as a messier and more hybrid genre, overlapping with various other socially inflected

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> 'Introduction' to *More Nonsense*, *Pictures*, *Rhymes*, *Botany*, *Etc.* (London: Robert John Bush, 1872), p. vi. James Williams discusses 'nonsense for nonsense's sake' in *Nineteenth-Century Nonsense Writing and the Later Work of James Joyce* (Ph.D thesis, University of Cambridge, 2008), pp. 8-13, citing instances from Carolyn Wells, 'The Senses of Nonsense', *Scribner's Magazine* 29 (1901), p. 239, and Émile Cammaerts, *The Poetry of Nonsense* (London: Routledge, 1925), p. 7.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> The relationship between philosophy and nonsense literature is most fully considered in Jean-Jacques Lecercle, *The Philosophy of Nonsense*.

kinds of writing, among them parody<sup>4</sup>, satire, utopianism, mock-epic and travel writing. The last two are especially suggestive. Writing about Alexander Pope's use of the mock-epic, Emrys Jones described him as

setting out to exploit the relationship between the two realms [the epic and the modern], but ending up by calling a new realm into being. And this new realm does not correspond either to the coherent imagined world of classical epic or to the actual world in which the poet and his readers live and which it is ostensibly the poet's intention to satirize. It is to some extent self-subsistent, intrinsically delightful, like the worlds of pastoral and romance<sup>5</sup>.

Or indeed like nonsense writing. Starting out to exploit the relation between sense and nonsense, it ends by calling a new realm into being, one that combines the freedom of fantasy and the acumen of satire. 'Realm' suggests how readily we can see the genre as itself a kind of place. Departing from our usual places and norms, nonsense poetry is always a poetry of departures, always therefore a kind of travel writing, and it frequently narrates quests and journeys. Likewise when we travel in the ordinary world, we can often stop making sense, especially if we don't speak the language. One reason for travelling is to get to a new place where things don't make sense in the usual way and nor do we, we too can feel and look strange and new. Such

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Compare T.S. Eliot on Lear in 'The Music of Poetry' (1942): 'His non-sense is not vacuity of sense: it is a parody of sense, and that is the sense of it' (*On Poetry and Poets* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957), p. 29.)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Emrys Jones, 'Pope and Dulness', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 54 (1970), pp. 240-1.

considerations mattered for Lear in all his writings – the neglected travel journals as well as the nonsense. He liked travelling and wrote about it with relish both as nonsense writer and travel writer, but he had also a divided sense of what his biographer, Vivien Noakes, called 'the life of a wanderer'.

## Questions of travel in Lear's life

In July 1859 Edward Lear wrote to his friend Chichester Fortescue: 'How I wish I had some settled aboad – at least until the last narrow box. ——// But if I settled myself I should go to Tobago the next day.' Perhaps Lear misspelt 'aboad' as he did because his mind had unconsciously gone ahead to the following sentence, in which 'aboad' becomes abroad. Questions about abode and abroad occupied Lear throughout his life, and more especially in its second half when he wrote most of the poems for which he is remembered (his first nonsense song probably dated from 1865 when he was 53, so his were mostly poems of later middle age and beyond). He wanted a settled abode but he also wanted to be out and away, on the road, out to sea. He never reconciled these divided feelings, and we can see from the letter that he

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Letters of Edward Lear, edited by Lady Strachey (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1907), p. 141.

takes a fatalistic view of himself as a creature of contradiction. He expresses his urge to be on the move both as a creatively vital impulse and a self-thwarting constraint.

Struggling to reconcile the desire for mobility with the need for roots is a Wordsworthian and more generally a post-romantic predicament. Lear always felt both sides, the nesting and the questing urges, with unusual intensity. He often imagines, for instance, that staying in one place is like dying. The 'settled aboad' calls to mind 'the last narrow box'; the place where he is is the place where life isn't, so on he must go. In 1873 when he was a globetrotter of sixty-one he wrote that 'a sedentary life — after moving about as I have done ever since I was 24 years old, will infallibly finish me off SUDDINGLY.'7 On New Year's Day 1870 we find him thinking about a life and a death of travelling when he writes to Chichester Fortescue that 'it is perhaps the best plan to run about continually like an Ant, and die simultaneous some day or other'.<sup>8</sup> It is as though the end of running about would be the end of life itself. He had a horror of stagnancy. 'I HATE LIFE unless I WORK ALWAYS'9, he wrote to Fortescue in July 1870, with a violence of feeling that he would momentarily allow himself with his most trusted correspondents. Vivien

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> To Lady Waldegrave, July 6 1873; cited in Vivien Noakes, *Edward Lear: The Life* of a Wanderer (fourth edition, revised and extended, Stroud: Alan Sutton, 2004), p. 224.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Later Letters of Edward Lear, edited by Lady Strachey (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1911), p. 93.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Edward Lear: Selected Letters, edited by Vivien Noakes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 222. [Double-underlining and larger font as in Selected Letters]

Noakes tells us that 'Each year he copied into the front of his diary, "Always have 10 years' work mapped out before you, if you wish to be happy". This resolve, renewed so punctually every year, expresses an intense fear of vacancy, as though unrelenting purpose were the precondition of happiness. It suggests reasons why Lear as artist and also letter-writer was an astonishingly hard worker even by Victorian standards.

And yet he was drawn too to the calm of inactivity. It features especially in his way of imagining domestic bliss, all passion at a distance. On Christmas Day 1871 he wrote 'I think of marrying some domestic henbird and then of building a nest in one of my own olive trees, whence I should only descend at remote intervals during the rest of my life.' Will Mrs Henbird Lear be up the tree too? Probably, to judge from the charming drawing alongside the letter. <FIG 0.1 ABOUT HERE> The marital idyll is touched by reclusiveness, descending to the world only at intervals. Marriage seems here to be a cure for the need to get out and about in the difficult world of others. The letter travels away from human contact and the human condition.

Elsewhere Lear again thinks himself into bird form as he thinks about earthly paradise:

When shall we fold our wings, & list to what the inner spirit says – there is no joy but calm? [...] Perhaps in the next eggzistens you & I & Mylady may be able to sit for

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> The Life of a Wanderer, p. 249.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Later Letters, pp. 121-2; to Fortescue.

placid hours under a lotus tree a eating of ice creams & pelicanpie with our feet in a hazure coloured stream.<sup>12</sup>

This sounds like a mid-Victorian turn on an Islamic paradise, akin to Edward Fitzgerald's *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*, but replacing Fitzgerald's 'Jug of Wine, a Loaf of Bread, – and Thou | Beside me singing in the Wilderness' with a nonsense diet of ice creams and pelicanpie and Edward Lear as gooseberry. 'There is no joy but calm', he writes in this letter to Fortescue, yet only two days later we find him telling his diary something quite opposite: 'And on the whole as calm brings with it inevitable recollections & their pain, – it is perhaps better that calm should be as rarely found as it nowadays is.' Lear's dialogue of the mind with itself about 'calm' seems blankly but sustainably contradictory.

Lear had bad luck about where to live. Circumstances kept moving him on and away. The first time was as a child of four, with a temporary eviction from the family home in Holloway Road when his father's financial affairs were in crisis. Thereafter he was brought up mainly by his sister Anne, not his mother, and so the eviction entailed maternal loss as well as other estrangement. He grew to be at home with being unsettled. He liked staying at Knowsley Hall, where he resided for long periods in the 1830s, drawing the animals in Lord Stanley's menagerie and entertaining the children of the big house; but even here, writing to Fanny Coombe in 1835, he said

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> The full letter is in *Later Letters*, pp. 87-9. I cite the excerpt from *The Life of a Wanderer*, p. 204, as it more closely reproduces Lear's spelling and punctuation.

 $<sup>^{13}\</sup> The\ Rubáiyát\ of\ Omar\ Khayyám\ (1859);$  from stanza 12.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> The Life of a Wanderer, p. 204; citing Lear's diary for 18 June 1869.

that 'I shall always look back to it as the best home I have ever met with' 15, with a desolate implication that 'home' is something you 'meet with' rather than 'living in'. In later adult life, too, Lear's homes were temporary, on several occasions because of political upheavals in nineteenth-century Europe. In the late 1840s he established a clientele and social position in Rome, but he was forced to relocate when the 1848 revolution arrived. In 1863 he had to leave Corfu at the time of its cession to Greece, after living there for seven years. In 1868 he left Cannes when the Franco-Prussian conflict made living elsewhere a safer option; and finally, once he was in that better option of San Remo, a new hotel was built, to his rage. It blocked his light, forcing him again to relocate.

These were all bad luck. So too were changes in his professional situation as an artist: the remunerative zoological work in which he was so astonishingly a master at a young age proved too much of a strain on his eyes, so he said. He turned from this established expertise, which might have been pursued at English zoological collections, to landscape painting, which entailed a life of travel. Lear chose to go to remote regions of Europe and sometimes beyond, and to live by the market for paintings depicting inaccessible lands. He made lithographs to illustrate the four volumes of journals he published between 1846 and 1870, recording travels in Italy, Greece and Albania, Calabria and Corsica. Of his many unpublished journals selections from the ones he wrote in India, Crete, and Sicily have since been published. One further factor was his health. English winters were bad for his lungs.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> The Life of a Wanderer, p. 39; letter to Fanny Coombe, 20 July 1835.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Illustrated Excursions in Italy (2 volumes, 1846); Journals of a Landscape Painter in Albania, &c (1851); Journals of a Landscape Painter in Southern Calabria, &c.

He told his sister Ann that he was 'regarding my EXILE, as a medicinal & necessary remedy' 17 for his ill health in the coldest months. This was mainly to help with his asthma, but the arduous walking he undertook for his landscape painting had the big secondary health benefit of keeping his epilepsy at bay better than any other treatment. Beyond all these plausible reasons, however, there is a sense in which Lear's unsettled relation to place was elected; it suited him, or parts of him. Adam Phillips has suggested that 'his endless restlessness and travels' may have been partly driven by 'a fear of the dependence he craved and was deprived of as a child, and needed to master'. From October 1854 'he would belong nowhere', as Vivien Noakes puts it, dividing his time between England in summer and continental Europe at other seasons. He might have chosen to see this as a success, the best of two worlds, like one of the migratory birds he had drawn, sensibly dividing its time seasonally; but Lear was a Victorian pessimist, and preferred a darker perspective.

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(1852); Journal of a Landscape Painter in Corsica (1870). Excerpts from these are included in 'Over the Land and Over the Sea': Selected Nonsense and Travel Writings, edited by Peter Swaab (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2005). See also Edward Lear: The Cretan Journal, ed. Rowena Fowler (1984) and Edward Lear's Indian Journal, ed. Ray Murphy (1953).

 $<sup>^{17}</sup>$  The Life of a Wanderer, p. 106; to Ann Lear, 21 December 1853.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> 'Edward Lear's Contribution to British Psychoanalysis', in *Edward Lear and the Play of Poetry*, p. 340.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> The Life of a Wanderer, p. 110.

## 'move about continually & never stand still'20

The contradiction between staying put and moving on finds comic expression even in Lear's earliest nonsense writing. His early children's poems were mainly limericks and a series of verse alphabets; he made around twenty of these, of which the first surviving one dates from about 1846. They were mostly for children he knew, as in this instance from an alphabet made for Gertrude Lushington.

A was an Ant

Who seldom stood still,

And he made a small house

On the side of a hill.

a!

Little brown ant!<sup>21</sup> < FIG 0.2 ABOUT HERE>

A teeny enough poem, the Ant's story is a success story. Like the ant in the letter from 1870 he may 'run about continually' – but he does not 'die simultaneous'. You might reasonably expect a 'but' in the third line – though restless the creature still wants a home – but there is no contradiction here; the ant has got together the wish to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Letters of Edward Lear, p. 136; to Fortescue, 1 May 1859

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Nonsense Songs, Stories, Botany, and Alphabets (London: Robert John Bush, 1871), n.p.

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move about and to make himself somewhere to stay. Later in the same alphabet we

M was a Mouse

meet a less fortunate M.

With a very long tail,

But he never went out

In the rain or the hail.

m!

Poor little mouse!<sup>22</sup>

< FIG 0.3 ABOUT HERE>

Why is he 'poor'? It seems perfectly sensible to stay in when the weather's bad. Perhaps the reason lies in his inordinate tail, which in Lear's original drawing looks self-corralling; he can never get away from his own enclosure, he can never get out from himself. The alphabets only have space to be small fanciful little pieces, but even these casually bring up the dichotomies about travel that Lear is interested in.

Lear's published limericks span 25 years or so from the two-volume *Book of* Nonsense in 1846, when he was in his early thirties, to More Nonsense in 1872, when he was sixty. Though brief, they are not trifling; deep matters are contained, in both senses, by the laconic form. I find them increasingly fascinating and occasionally haunting, as a series of tight little portraits of the human creature, seen as compulsive,

<sup>22</sup> Edward Lear drawing for 'M was a Mouse' from 'An original nonsense alphabet

made for Miss Lushington', ca. 1865. MS Typ 55.3. Houghton Library, Harvard

University, Cambridge, Mass. Web:

https://iiif.lib.harvard.edu/manifests/view/drs:51101168\$14i.

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appetitive, a prisoner of the self each happens inexplicably to be, subject to luck in a chancy world, the luck of their environment and of what they rhyme with.

He published 212 limericks and the number is raised to 270 by the further ones Vivien Noakes included in the 2001 edition of The Complete Verse and Other Nonsense. The form has elements of formula. All 270 start with that barest of indicators 'There was a [or 'an']', and 226 follow this with 'old' (118 old men, 102 old persons, 6 old ladys).<sup>23</sup> After 'There was a' and 'old' the next most frequent component of the limericks is the word 'of'. In 190 out of the 270 a person is a person 'of a place, in only eighteen cases not being returned to that place-name in the last line. For the published limericks the proportion is even higher, with 172 'of protagonists out of 212 in all, with fourteen not being returned to the place-name. It is often a given of the limericks that people want to leave the place they're 'of', but the 'of makes that problematic in that the last line inexorably returns them back where they started. Some have disliked this circularity in the form. Adam Mars-Jones, for instance, reviewing Noakes's edition, complained that 'The limerick as Lear practised it (though he never used the word), ending with a repeated rhyme, is an oddly unsatisfying literary form – it's like a bicycle with stabilisers. '24 His terms are suggestive even if we disagree. We might for instance take one step back and say that the limericks are about being odd and unsatisfied, which isn't the same as being odd and unsatisfying; the inbuilt bathos and self-enclosure of the form is expressive and apt. Or that they turn on a tussle between dynamism and stability, with again an aptness in the form.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> The remainder are made up of 28 young ladys, 10 young persons, and 6 who are introduced in other ways.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> The Guardian, 11 November 2001.

Secondly, Mars-Jones calls the limerick a 'literary form', but it is important that in Lear it is a hybrid literary-and-visual one. All the published limericks comprise a drawing above the text. Since Holbrook Jackson's hugely reprinted 1947 edition of the *Complete Nonsense* (Faber and Faber), the limericks have tended because of the economics of publishing to be reproduced in a format that reduces the original size and proportion of the image. The early editions are scaled differently (see Figs 4,5,8 and 9 below); the image predominates, as it does not later on with the drawings accompanying Lear's longer poems. The effect is to give us a picture with a caption rather than a story with a sketch. Moreover, the text and image often diverge and sometimes clash, one being a small narrative, the other a snapshot of one of its moments – almost always a moment recording the outing and not the state of having returned.<sup>25</sup>

In several limericks nonsense is both a poetry of departures and a poetry of returns. <FIG 0.4 ABOUT HERE>

There was a Young Lady of Sweden,

Who went by the slow train to Weedon;

When they cried, 'Weedon Station!' she made no observation,

But thought she should go back to Sweden.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> See for instance the Young Lady of Dorking, the Old Man of Dundee, and the old person of Shields, and the Old Person of Bree in *Complete Verse*, p. 96, p. 100, p. 119, p. 337.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> A Book of Nonsense (London: Frederick Warne and Co (1846); eighteenth edition, 1866), p. 100. The drawings here and for the Person of Ems and the 'Young Lady whose bonnet' show the three-line format that Lear used in *The Book of Nonsense* 

This lady has her private purposes, inexplicable but satisfactorily carried through, with time enough on the slow train out to decide she should go back. We see her doing just that in the drawing, which must in this case take place after the poem ends. We are inclined to support her decision from the words because of the shapeliness of the chiasmus (Sweden Weedon, Weedon Sweden) and the sense to the ear at least that Weedon has nothing to offer that Sweden doesn't, it just lacks an 's'; and from the drawing because the perspective leads us away with her into the distance and we can just make out her tranquil smile in the window of the back carriage. Going there and then coming back again may be a perfectly sensible or a perfectly absurd venture, depending on the context and your point of view.

The Lady of Sweden goes back to Sweden, but some of Lear's other journeys seem to be one-way. <FIG 0.5 ABOUT HERE>

There was an Old Person of Ems,

Who casually fell in the Thames;

And when he was found, they said he was drowned,

That unlucky Old Person of Ems.<sup>27</sup>

(1846) but not in the later collections, where the limericks have four lines. For another returning venturer see p. 355 of the *Complete Verse*, the Old Man of Dunluce, who went out to sea on a goose: 'When he'd gone out a mile, he observ'd with a smile | "It is time to return to Dunluce."'

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> A Book of Nonsense (eighteenth edition, 1866), p. 100.

We hear that this Old Person of Ems 'casually fell into the Thames', which makes etymological sense, but what we *see* in the drawing makes it look other than casual. It seems like a voluntary dive into what his glassy eyes, cross-hatched frock-coat and finny tails suggest may be somewhere he can belong. 'They said' he was drowned, but though he's gone to join the fishes he doesn't look at all drowned. Nor does he look 'unlucky', but instead happily integrated into a new element. One of the fish nuzzles him, and they all cluster round, the chubby one, the pointy one, and the two with a more pesco-normative shape, together making one of the interspecies familial groups of the nonsense world. Remarkably, this Old Person still has his pipe, which makes him look self-hooked in some variation of the usual conventions of fishing. He might be his own merman.

In 1879 Lear wrote in his diary that 'it was decreed I was not to be human', one of his most stricken utterances.<sup>28</sup> Nonsenses such as these are dreams of metamorphosis. In them he imagines ways of not being human but being still a happy creature. He follows here in the line of a number of famous Romantic narratives which feel the pull of the non-human world, Goethe's 'Der Fischer' and 'Erlkönig', for instance, or Heine's 'Die Lorelei', transposing their romantic supernaturalism into a cooler mode of comic fantasy. He follows too in the line of poetic narratives which take inspired leave of dry land for perilously fluid sites of lakes and waterfalls, such as Wordsworth's 'Idiot Boy' and 'Blind Highland Boy'.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> The Life of a Wanderer, p. 187; citing the diary for 20 October 1879. The fuller context laments his childlessness, when he takes leave of some visitors, 'wishing, as I left them that I had sons or daughters. But it was decreed that I was not be human'.

As with the Person of Ems, Lear's other limericks often show his human protagonists taking partial leave of the human world. Most often they consort with the world of birds. <FIG 0.6 AROUND HERE>

There was a Young Lady whose bonnet,

Came untied when the birds sate upon it;

But she said, 'I don't care! all the birds in the air

Are welcome to sit on my bonnet!'29

Of the twenty-eight Young Lady figures this one is the most amply and securely maternal. Her bonnet is loose but doesn't look likely to fall off even if the big duck lands there, her pose is tiptoe but not precarious, and she has avian-friendly features, with fingers like webbed feet and dress frills like bird quills. She's altogether blissed out, and Lear's little poems wonder if you're likeliest to feel blissful when you're out of the human element.

Like his fondness for animal-human encounters, Lear's limerick conventions were influenced by his work as a zoological artist. 30 The limericks resemble the descriptions of animals in nineteenth-century zoology: they name the creature, then specify its habitat, then record its chief behaviour in relation to an

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> A Book of Nonsense (London: Frederick Warne and Co, third enlarged edition, 1861), p. 5. For a richly suggestive discussion of Lear and birds see Matthew Bevis, 'Edward Lear's Lines of Flight', *Journal of the British Academy* 1 (2013), pp. 31-69. <sup>30</sup> This paragraph and the next draw on my introduction to Edward Lear, 'Over the Land and Over the Sea': Selected Nonsense and Travel Writings (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2005), pp. x-xi.

environment. And indeed the descriptions of creatures in books with Lear's illustrations sometimes sound like they come from the world of the limerick. The 'Egyptian Neophron', for instance, of which there was one example only taken in England:

It appears that the example alluded to was killed near Kilve in Somersetshire, in the month of October 1825, and is now in the possession of the Reverend A. Matthew of the same place. When first discovered, it was feeding upon the body of a dead sheep, with the flesh of which it was so gorged, as to be either incapable of flight, or, at all events, unwilling to exert itself sufficiently to effect its escape; it was therefore shot with little difficulty.<sup>31</sup>

Or take the magnificent 'Ramphastos Toco', the toucan later famous in adverts for Guinness: <FIG 0.7 ABOUT HERE>

it is but thinly dispersed, and according to the information afforded me by my friend Dr. Such, is extremely shy, and not procured without considerable difficulty, keeping to the tops of the highest trees, and exercising the utmost wariness and caution. [...] it is said to be extremely partial to the banana.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> 'Over the Land and Over the Sea', pp. 344-5; extract from The Birds of Europe (1837).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> 'Over the Land and Over the Sea', p. 344; extract from John Gould, A Monograph of the Ramphastidae, or Family of Toucans (1834). Image Typ 805L.34, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass. Web:

The world of ornithology supplied Lear with such nonsense-friendly names as 'Dr Wagler' as well as Dr Such. He worked also on illustrating turtles – they feature in two of his alphabets and 'The Courtship of the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bò<sup>33</sup> – and they too sometimes bridge the worlds of zoology and nonsense. Here is Trionyx Gangetus, the snapping turtle:

Woe betide the limb, however, which comes in reach of the infuriated animal! I saw the top of one man's toe bitten clean off by a trionyx plagyry which was being staked; as these animals are both active and ferocious, it is always advisable to set a bullet through their brain as soon as possible. So tenacious of life, however, are these creatures, that their heads bite vigorously after being completely dissevered from their bodies.<sup>34</sup>

It is not difficult to imagine connections between these little life stories of far-fetched, colourful, endangered creatures, with their weird, dubious and various ways, and the narratives of remarkable fauna in the nonsense writings.

The new world of zoos and menageries brought creatures together in ways that may have started Lear's imagination. A drawing from the mid-1830s included in the Houghton Library exhibition 'The Natural History of Edward Lear' shows 'an eastern

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Houghton\_Typ\_805L.34\_-

John\_Gould, Ramphastos\_toco, 1834.jpg.

<sup>33</sup> Complete Verse, p. 266, pp. 326-7, p. 489.

<sup>34</sup> 'Over the Land and Over the Sea', p. 348; extract from Tortoises, Terrapins and Turtles (1872), illustrated by Lear in about 1836.

Gray Kangaroo and Geese from Knowsley Hall'.35 The Kangaroo is surrounded by five geese, one of them placed on the drawing just next to his big hand paws, nearer on the paper than they would ever be in life. Perhaps Lear remembered their proximity thirty years later in what was probably the earliest of his nonsense songs, 'The Duck and the Kangaroo'. 36 Bringing creatures unprecedentedly together is something nonsense writing can do, and it was also something in the original 1825 'Prospectus' of the Zoological Society of London where Lear worked as a precocious teenager. This announced an aim 'to introduce ... new varieties, breeds or races of living Animals', bringing for instance dodgy foreign marsupials to sturdy British wildfowl.<sup>37</sup> The very Victorian activities of global exploration and scientific classification suggest a structure and analogue for the discoveries of the nonsense world, and also at times a parodiable target for it, in Lear's botanies and alphabets as well as in his narrative poems. (With Lewis Carroll, born a generation later, the no less Victorian activity of philology is the chief suspect.)

Travel in many of the limericks is a wondrous adventure to the beyond and sometimes back again. But some of the other limericks present failures of travel, showing experiments in having your life well-arranged to a fault. Settledness, tranquillity, serenity threaten to become terminal sulks. Here are three limericks in which the protagonists take up residence reclusively on high, away from the danger of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup> See 'The Natural History of Edward Lear: Exhibition Catalog, Harvard Library Bulletin 22: 2-3 (Summer-Fall 2011), pp. 125-59 (p. 145).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> Complete Verse, pp. 207-9 and note on p. 500.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup> Cited in Robert McCracken Peck, 'The Natural History of Edward Lear', Harvard Library Bulletin 22: 2-3 (Summer-Fall 2011), p. 6; see also Robert McCracken Peck, The Natural History of Edward Lear (Boston: David R. Godine, 2016).

others, secured in a self-allegiance which is both the triumph and nightmare of the limerick figures.<sup>38</sup>

There was an old Person of Philae,

Whose conduct was scroobious and wily;

He rushed up a Palm, when the weather was calm,

And observed all the ruins of Philae.

There was a Young Lady of Portugal,

Whose ideas were excessively nautical;

She climbed up a tree, to examine the sea,

But declared she would never leave Portugal.

There was an Old Person of Bar,

Who passed all her life in a jar,

Which she painted pea-green, to appear more serene,

That placid Old Person of Bar. 39

The Old Person of Bar may be as wisely-foolish as Diogenes, but Portugal and Philae seem moody and misanthropic. Such nightmares of stasis and hinterlands of

 $^{38}$  On self-sufficiency in Lear see also Peter Swaab, "'Some think him  $\dots$  queer":

Loners and Love in Edward Lear', in *Edward Lear and the Play of Poetry*, pp. 96-107.

<sup>39</sup> Complete Verse, p. 167, 163, 358.

desperation are normal to Lear, and they can be a prompt to the nonsensical travelling he imagines as a remedy for the status quo. <FIG 0.8 ABOUT HERE>

There was an Old Man whose despair

Induced him to purchase a hare;

Whereon one fine day, he rode wholly away,

Which partly assuaged his despair.<sup>40</sup>

Sometimes the limerick despairers do away with themselves (like those from New York, Cape Horn and Tartary) but here despair prompts a project that turns out quite well. <sup>41</sup> This Old Man buys a hare, and it's an instance of retail as therapy. The magic of 'away' makes things better. However, it is not completely better, in that though he rides 'wholly away' this only 'partly assuaged' his despair – and 'assuaging' as against 'dispelling', for instance, already carries a sense of partiality. <sup>42</sup> He may be elsewhere but he is still himself. The drawing gives an imperfect match between the oddly masked eyes of the man and the considerate backward glance of the hare, looking back to him and also looking after him it seems, a rather nicer animal perhaps than he has any right to expect.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> More Nonsense, Pictures, Rhymes, Botany, Etc. (London: Robert John Bush, 1872), n.p.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> Complete Verse, p. 100, 97, 77.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> Compare the 'old man whose despair, | Induced him to purchase a bear; | [...] Which rather assuaged his despair' (*Complete Verse*, p. 113).

A final limerick voyager also seems to be going 'wholly away'. <FIG 0.9 ABOUT HERE>

There was an Old Person of Grange,

Whose manners were scroobious and strange;

He sailed to St Blubb, in a waterproof tub,

That aquatic Old person of Grange.

He probably comes from Grange because Lear's imagination was haunted by Tennyson's poetry, and above all, to judge from his repeated allusions to the poem, by 'Mariana'<sup>43</sup>. Tennyson was always the poet who counted most to Lear; he worked for decades on an illustrated selection of Tennyson and he also set a number of the laureate's poems to music, to some acclaim. Tennyson stimulated his serio-comic vein; Lear's 'Mr and Mrs Discobbolos' takes up from Tennyson's 'St Simeon

<sup>43 &#</sup>x27;Person of Grange' from *More Nonsense, Pictures, Rhymes, Botany, Etc.* (London: Robert John Bush, 1872), n.p.. See *The Life of a Wanderer*, p. 261, p. 292, *Complete Verse*, p. 458, p. 548, *Selected Letters*, p. 117. For Lear and Tennyson see Ruth Pitman, *Edward Lear's Tennyson* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1988), pp. 35-8. Lear and Tennyson are also discussed in Richard Cronin, 'Edward Lear and Tennyson's Nonsense', *Tennyson among the Poets: Bicentenary Essays*, ed. Robert Douglas-Fairhurst and Seamus Perry (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 259–75, and in two pieces by Anna Barton, 'Delirious Bulldogs and Nasty Crockery: Tennyson as Nonsense Poet', *Victorian Poetry* 47.1 (2009), pp. 313–330, and 'The Sense and Weariness of Nonsense' in *Edward Lear and the Play of Poetry*, pp. 243-59.

Stylites', for instance, and his great autobiographical poem 'Incidents in the Life of My Uncle Arly' imagines his own life to a metrical tune modelled on Tennyson's 'The Lady of Shallott'. In relation to travel Lear is more compelled by Mariana, static in her 'moated grange', than for instance by Tennyson's Ulysses who 'cannot cease from travel' or his 'Lotos-Eaters' whose travels lead to the cessation of activity. In this limerick the Person of Grange may be heading for St Blubb because of a memory of Mariana's terminal weeping; the refrain line 'She said, "I am aweary, aweary' modulates passionately in Tennyson's final stanza to 'She wept, "I am aweary, aweary'.

Although the Person of Grange's fishy eyes and finny thumbs again align human life with its setting in animal nature, he seems unreachably off in his own world. He embarks into the world of the 'scroobious', Lear's favourite invented nonce-word (we saw it also in the Philae limerick), the sign that this is a world of his own words as well as the usual stock. The tub is waterproof, but as his legs are outside it that seems beside the point. It's hard to see how he gets to St. Blubb: he has no sail, though he himself is like one. Moreover, the boat is facing right to left whereas the words go left to right, making us doubt his sense of direction. But the story tells us that he does arrive and the fish look like his escort, his pilot fish. On the epic seas of nonsense you don't have to be sensible to get places.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>44</sup> The OED lists the first uses of 'blub' as short for 'blubber' from Austin Dobson in 1866: 'Bob privately confessed to me that he always felt inclined to "blub" over those whipper-tunes.' The quotation marks round 'blub' suggest that it is a new usage; Lear's limerick was published six years later.

Questions of travel in the nonsense songs and journals of a landscape painter

This is something we also know at more length from such poems as 'The Jumblies' and Carroll's The Hunting of the Snark. The Jumblies go to sea in a sieve, but they do arrive. With a dramatic and musical modulation each stanza switches into a present tense for its chant-like refrain: 'Far and few, far and few, | Are the lands where the Jumblies live'45. The poem starts in the past – 'They went to sea in a sieve' - but the present tense brings the Jumblies and their lands nearer to us. However, the refrain also keeps them 'far' at a distance, so it is simultaneously what grammarians call 'proximal' (in time) and 'distal' (in place). The phrase 'far and few' is a play on 'few and far between', but there is something strange about it. Far is usually a relational term; a place can be far away from you or far off or even far out, but not just far; Tobago may be far but not if you live in Trinidad. But the lands where the Jumblies live are 'far', just like that, and they remain far at the end of every verse. The place that not only can but must remain permanently 'far' is the horizon, which is always unreachable, like the destination of nonsense. Its way of being forever inaccessible can suggest affinities with lost love, as for the stricken Dong with the Luminous Nose 'Ever keeping his weary eyes on | That pea-green sail on the far

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>45</sup> Complete Verse, p. 253.

horizon'.<sup>46</sup> Lear was repeatedly drawn to the word 'far', with its evocation of a distance between nonsense and sense. 'The Daddy Long-legs and the Fly', for example, find a little boat, 'And off they sailed among the waves, | Far, and far away'.<sup>47</sup> They go not just 'far' but 'far away', as if actively and rather fiercely repudiating the unfriendly world they leave behind and its insectophobic ways. And they go not 'across' the waves but among them, as though the waves were companionable encouragers of the getaway. 'Affection was miles away', Auden wrote in his sonnet on Lear.<sup>48</sup> The sites of nonsense tend to be miles away, far off yet also real enough for anyone who accepts the invitation to imaginative travel offered by the genre.

That doubleness is reflected in further layers of uncertainty within 'The Jumblies'. Should we think of 'the lands where the Jumblies live' as the place they set out from or the one they sail to, the cautious world of home or the sublime land of adventure? And who for that matter are the Jumblies themselves? Is it only the brave voyagers who deserve the name of Jumblies or does the group include also the risk-averse friends at the start? The poem keeps an amiable and undivisive silence about these possible lines of division. It manages to bring together in a spirit of celebration the stay-at-homes, who are like adults, and the voyagers, who are like children.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>46</sup> Complete Verse, p. 423; the poem includes a reprise of the refrain from 'The Jumblies' (lines 36-9).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> Complete Verse, p. 248.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>48</sup> 'Edward Lear', line 7, in W.H. Auden, *The English Auden: Poems, Essays and Dramatic Writings 1927-1939*, ed. Edward Mendelson (London: Faber and Faber, 1977), p. 239.

Lewis Carroll's great nonsense poem, *The Hunting of the Snark*, contrasts in many ways with Lear's. His crew members are hierarchical, professional, imperial, loquacious and liable to kill each other, whereas Lear's are anarchic, non-verbal and united by impulse. But Carroll's is another poem linking absurdity with courage; here the courage is to do what they dutifully must do, not as with the Jumblies what they recklessly want to. Following the map in Carroll, like steering by sieve in Lear, is a nonsensical undertaking.

... the crew were much pleased when they found it to be

A map they could all understand.

'What's the good of Mercator's North Poles and Equators,

Tropics, Zones, and Meridian Lines?'

So the Bellman would cry; and the crew would reply

'They are merely conventional signs!

Other maps are such shapes, with their islands and capes!

But we've got our brave Captain to thank'

(So the crew would protest) 'that he's bought *us* the best –

A perfect and absolute blank!' <sup>49</sup>

The tone of social satisfaction is purely Carrollian, with absurdity having decorums and pecking orders of its own, and the brave captain thanked for supplying a veritable Moby-Dick of a white map.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>49</sup> 'Lewis Carroll', *The Hunting of the Snark*; Fit the Second, lines 7-16.

Travel has figured variously in this discussion as escape from stasis, alleviation of grief, existential impulse, adventure, fun. It may also be a site of romance. Lear's poem, which never tells us whether the Jumblies are boys or girls, children or adults, has much of the lure of romanticism, but none of the complications of sex that are common elsewhere in the literature of exotic travel. Hence in part the lightness of 'The Jumblies'. Elsewhere his nonsense world is full of allegories of frustrated and sometimes rapturous love. If his loving families are unpredictably matched (the Person of Ems with his fishes, for instance, and the Young Lady with the bonnet and the birds of the air), then so too are his loving couples. The famous cross-species couples include 'The Owl and the Pussycat' and 'The Duck and the Kangaroo' and 'The Daddy Long-Legs and the Fly'; other couples who go off together come from the world of kitchenalia, 'The Nutcrackers and the Sugar-Tongs' and 'The Table and the Chair'.

Lear himself never married, though he often considered it, and the biographical evidence, though still disputed, points strongly to his being gay. He showed far greater intensity of feeling towards the men who meant most to him, above all Franklin Lushington, than the women, including those with whom he contemplated marriage. I have argued elsewhere that his poems are so frankly about social non-conformity and romantic love that there is no great discovery in seeing them as part of a history of queer writing.<sup>50</sup> The experience of unrequited love in Lear's own life suggests a shape for his stories and a context for the outsiderliness which fired his imagination, and they can give us respect for the mettle of the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>50</sup> Peter Swaab, "Some think him ... queer": Loners and Love in Edward Lear', in *Edward Lear and the Play of Poetry*, pp. 89-114; on the biographical contentions about Lear's sexuality, pp. 89-96.

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nonsense songs. Lear imagines for us and for himself a world where extraordinary intimacies can flourish, but always within the boundaries of the self-consciously fantastical genre, and sometimes within limits evoked by the nonsense narratives themselves. He locates the idea of fulfilled love in a world of nonsense and he also makes absurdity into the true and proper element of desire. Travelling until you are at a remove from the ordinary world is integral to his imagining of loving relationships.

Some of Lear's nonsenses seem to voice an impatience with their own creation of fantasy. His ambivalence about change of place can sometimes be heard in dark hints or grumbles within his own nonsense stories. In the last stanza of 'The Duck and the Kangaroo', 'away they went with a hop and a bound, | And they hopped the whole world three times round'.<sup>51</sup> That sounds sprightly and energised, but how would a fourth time round be? Or a fortieth? Even a child might eventually weary of repetition. Mr Daddy Long-legs and Mr Floppy Fly arrive at the end of their voyage at the 'great Gromboolian plain': 'And there they play for evermore | At battlecock and shuttledore'.<sup>52</sup> For evermore? Is that a happy ending? As Lear's contemporary Baudelaire asked in his poem 'Le Voyage', 'Et puis, et puis encore?'<sup>53</sup> In T.S. Eliot's *Sweeney Agonistes* South Seas romance turns both deathly and murderous and, as Doris and Sweeney agree, not interesting.

DORIS: I'd be bored.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>51</sup> Complete Verse, p. 209.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>52</sup> Complete Verse, p. 248.

<sup>53 &#</sup>x27;And then, and then what?'; Charles Baudelaire, *Oeuvres Complètes* (Bibliothèque de la Pléiade. Paris: Gallimard, 1975), p. 135. The half-line is the entirety of Section V of the poem.

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SWEENEY: You'd be bored.<sup>54</sup>

Some of Lear's travel writings also bring death and ennui into their voyagings. His first prose narrative, 'The History of the Seven Families of the Lake Pipple-Popple', sends forty-nine children tearfully out on their voyages and meticulously kills off the lot of them; the surviving predators jump into pickling bottles and donate themselves to the museum of Tosh, 'for the perpetual benefit of the pusillanimous public'. 55 We might even wonder about the Owl and the Pussycat; how long can the dancing by the light of the moon go on? In Lear's unfinished sequel poem, written in 1885, the offspring say 'We made a happy home and there we pass our obvious days'. 56 The far-fetched places of nonsense do not always impress their maker; they can become obvious too.

Lear's travel journals remain little known. They are vivid and appealing books, full of Pickwickian English humour, exquisite landscape description, pioneering cultural anthropology, and an interesting union of religious sensibility with fierce anti-clericalism. 'In an age that abounded in travel writers and travel painters', Susan Hyman argues, 'he was both, leaving a visual and verbal record of foreign lands that was unique in his own time and possibly unequalled in any other <sup>57</sup> – a high

Christopher Ricks and Jim McCue (London: Faber and Faber, 2015), p. 122.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>54</sup> The Poems of T.S. Eliot: Volume I, Collected and Uncollected Poems, ed.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>55</sup> Complete Verse, p. 206.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>56</sup> Complete Verse, p. 541.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>57</sup> Edward Lear in the Levant: Travels in Albania, Greece and Turkey in Europe, 1848-1849, ed. Susan Hyman (London: John Murray, 1988), p. 10.

but not an implausible claim. His journals deserve far more attention than they have yet received. I have space here only to suggest that many of their most vivid moments are reflexive and cast a light on Lear's sense of the wonder and nonsense of travel.

In his excursions of the 1840s to the Abruzzi, Calabria and Albania, Lear is frequently the first Englishman that local people have met. Misconceptions follow. In Calabria in August 1847 he is greeted in puzzlement though hospitably at the monastery where he is spending the night:

'Why had we come to such a solitary place? No foreigner had ever done so before!' The hospitable father asked a world of questions, and made many comments upon us and upon England in general, for the benefit of his fellow-recluses. 'England,' said he, 'is a very small place, although thickly inhabited. It is altogether about the third part of the size of the city of Rome. The people are a sort of Christians, though not exactly so. Their priests, and even their bishops, marry, which is incomprehensible, and most ridiculous. The whole place is divided into two equal parts by an arm of the sea, under which there is a great tunnel, so that it is all like one piece of dry land. Ah-checelebre tunnel!'58

Who is the absurd one here? Each is an object of energetic wonderment to the other. Lear as a polite guest is not heard to remonstrate and is somewhat at a disadvantage; as narrator, however, he has the advantage. But the good temper survives and even flourishes across cultural misunderstanding and beyond competition.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>58</sup> Journals of a Landscape Painter in Southern Calabria, Etc. (1852); in 'Over the Land and Over the Sea', pp. 249-50.

The Albanian journal includes another exchange where the differences do not get the last word.

We halted at the khan of Episkopi, close to a stream full of capital watercresses which I began to gather and eat with some bread and cheese, an act which provoked the Epirote bystanders of the village to ecstatic laughter and curiosity [...] One brought a thistle, a second a collection of sticks and wood, a third some grass; a fourth presented me with a fat grasshopper – the whole scene was acted amid shouts of laughter, in which I joined as loudly as any. We parted amazingly good friends, and the wits of Episkopi will long remember the Frank who fed on weeds out of water. <sup>59</sup>

This meeting is structured like a limerick, with Lear as the oddball. He sees himself from both sides, as the discerning Englishman with a horticultural eye for 'capital watercresses', but also as the strange ruminant transplanted from home, feeding on weeds. Englishman and Albanians part 'amazingly good friends' indeed, with the idea that amazement is a healthy state in which to meet life. They become friends not in a conventional traveller's way by learning to understand each other's ways – and not via the explorations of history and archaeology and textiles which the journals also include – but from shouts of laughter, from exulting in their differences. The world of difference is the condition of friendship.

Lear's first travel book, *Illustrated Excursions in Italy* (1846), includes another meeting focused on contrasts around what people choose to eat.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>59</sup> Journals of a Landscape Painter in Albania, Etc. (1851); in 'Over the Land and Over the Sea', p. 223.

August 13th, 1843. The cool valley of Antrodoco is in deep shade till late in the morning. I was sauntering by the brawling river, when a little boy passed me carrying a dead fox. 'It is delightful food (*cibo squisito*)', said he, 'either boiled or roast'; – said I, 'I wish you joy'. 60

And that's the whole of this beautifully shaped and enigmatic meeting. Separated by age and nationality, the two people pass in a changeless landscape, exchanging information and good will, never to meet again. The little translated phrase in italics makes us conscious of how much has not been translated, and how differently 'delightful food' and 'joy' may be understood in different languages and places. Is it much or little to wish somebody joy, a mere courtesy or something heartfelt? It feels like much here.

Lear's narrator is a reticent figure, but some of the encounters open out onto his sense of his own life and identity. In Calabria he is quizzed by a Baron who is utterly mystified to see Lear drawing the landscape and asks him what he can possibly be doing.

'Signore Baron,' said I, when I had done my sketch, 'we have no towns in our country so beautifully situated as Gioiosa!'

'Ma – perchè?' quoth he.

I walked a little way, and paused to observe the bee-eaters\*, which were flitting through the air above me, and under the spreading oak branches.

'Per l'amor del Cielo, cosa guardate? Cosa mai osservate?' said the Baron.

'I am looking at those beautiful blue birds.'

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>60</sup> 'Over the Land and Over the Sea', p. 140.

'Perchè? perchè?'

'Because they are so very pretty, and because we have none like them in England.'

'Ma perchè?' perchè?'

It was evident that say or do what I would, some mystery was connected with each action and word [...]

\*Merops Apiaster. [Lear's footnote] 61

The Baron brings about a certain vertiginousness when he keeps asking 'why', like an unappeasable child. Lear dramatises first his own composure but then his discomfiture, with the mannerly 'Signore Baron' and 'said I' disappearing as the dialogue goes on. The footnote denoting the bee-eaters as 'Merops Apiaster' is intriguing. To whom is it addressed? Presumably not to the Baron, but to the reader or even himself, as if his knowing the Latin name of the bird explained his presence there. In a way it does so; it signals his zoological knowhow and cultural credentials. It is as if the challenge of the Baron's questioning prompts this unusual gesture of self-authentication in Lear. But his replies are entirely unsatisfactory to the Baron, who thinks him very likely a spy and continues to find his actions as a travelling artist beyond the intelligible.

A final passage, from the journal for the following day (20 August 1847), also turns also on Lear's discovery of a point of view from which he appears entirely strange.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>61</sup> Journal of a Landscape Painter in Southern Calabria; in 'Over the Land and Over the Sea', p. 259.

At dinner-time, good old Don Giovanni Rosa amused and delighted us by his lively simplicity and good breeding. He had only once in his long life (he was 82) been as far as Gerace, but never beyond. 'Why should I go?' said he; 'if, when I die, as I shall ere long, I find Paradise like Cánalo, I shall be well pleased. To me "Cánalo mio" has always seemed like Paradise – sempre mi sembra Paradiso, niente mi manca'.

Considering that the good old man's Paradise is cut off by heavy snow four months in the year from any external communication with the country round, and that it is altogether (however attractive to artists) about as little convenient a place as may well be imagined – the contented mind of Don Giovanni was equally novel and estimable. 62

Don Giovanni is much less exasperating than the Baron, but he poses another challenge to how the Landscape Painter leads his own life. Don Giovanni is always rooted, Edward Lear always wandering. However, the contrast is not pushed into a disagreement or a comparison of ethical value beyond the pacific word 'estimable'. From one point of view that may be disappointing. The conclusion here – that Don Giovanni's contentment was 'novel and estimable' – is blandly expressed; Lear does not argue the point. From another point of view, though, the narrator's courteous reticence suggests distinctive attributes of Lear's journals; they are zestful, observant, appreciative, curious narratives, never self-preoccupied. Lear is a generously curious observer who takes pleasure in the world being wide and not always being what he expects or can easily deal with. Like the nonsense writings, the travel journals are

explorations of different perspectives on things, different assumptions about where in the world to stay and what to want from it.