

Greek Weird Books

Strange and curious books in the Modern Greek language, encompassing poetry, fiction and non-fiction works.



1)Essay

Greek Weird Books

It is no secret that I have always been a fan of the decadent and the bizarre. As a child I devoured the macabre tales of Edgar Allan Poe and the speculative worlds of H.G. Wells. Early on, this fascination with the strange gave way to an obsession with more transgressive material. I read *Naked Lunch* at twelve years old. Nabokov's *Lolita* and Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho* followed soon after. What defined these early literary adventures was the opening up of a world that seemed far removed from my own. Growing up in comfortable Sydney suburbia to Greek parents, I hated going to church and even more, hated learning Greek. Looking back, I realise that it was the very *weirdness* of these novels that I identified with. To quote Mark Fisher, my encounters with these books involved a "sensation of wrongness", a conviction, as he calls it, that *this does not belong*.¹

After leaving Greek school, I began to seek out the more unusual aspects of the culture I grew up with. I discovered the music genre of *rebetika* and the work of folklorist Elias Petropoulos, who wrote about subversive topics like prison life, gay slang and brothels. I also established a small press dedicated to publishing books in English on marginal themes in Modern Greek studies. Fuelled by these interests, I started collecting books in Greek on topics like psychoanalysis, conspiracy theory and UFOs, alongside genres like science fiction, queer, erotic, and outsider writing.

Two pivotal encounters set the course for my growing collection of books. One was meeting Nektarios Papadimitriou, who runs the book and record store *A Strange Attractor* in Athens. Under his mentorship, I was quickly introduced to a range of print media that reflected his deep knowledge of the weird and the underground. The second inspiration was a little closer to home. After stumbling upon a table of zines by Chris Mikul at a fair in Sydney, a curious title caught my eye. Alongside Mikul's *Bizzarrism* zine was a recent series entitled *Biblio-curiosa: Unusual writers/Strange books*. I was instantly hooked, and we soon became friends. By this point, it was clear

¹ *The Weird And The Eerie*, Mark Fisher. Repeater: 2016. (p. 13).

that my interests coalesced around one key word, and thus my collection of *Greek Weird Books* was born.

Although my drive to seek out the rare and unusual began in my early teens, this collecting mania also served practical purposes. As a researcher and publisher, it became a necessity to build my own archives. Living on the other side of the world, I lacked easy access to Greek libraries, and even then, when I made trips to Greece I realised there were serious gaps in their collections. This is partly due to Greece's unreliable legal deposit system, and that the books which interested me were never acquisition priorities for major institutions. Today, my collection numbers around 100 titles, dating from the late 19th century to the present day, spanning rare pulp fiction works, bibliophilic art editions and out-of-print paperbacks, all linked by their odd and erratic content.

As I built this collection, I came to realise that these books deserved a wider audience. Most of these works were essentially marginal literatures: written by marginalised people, or about topics and in genres that never secured a place in the canon. In many ways, they are at odds with established narratives of "Greece" and "Greekness". Science fiction for example, seems strange in the Greek context because it never consolidated itself in the same way as hyper-industrialised nations like Britain or America. Likewise, queer Greek writing has only recently begun to attract serious scholarly attention. To bring these neglected books into dialogue with world literature it didn't seem practical to embark on the arduous task of translating them into English. My collection made much more sense as the starting point for a writing project, narrating and contextualising these books anew for non-Greek audiences.

The titles I collect are admittedly eclectic, but they all capture a sense of what a Greek "weird" is or could be, and how they resist the boundaries of national and cultural identity. How do we place, for instance, the fantastic adventure novel *Jim Londos: King of the Jungle* (1931), when Greece never penetrated the African continent as a colonial power? Or the self-help book *The Path to Success* (1963), which imports American-style quackery with its advice on getting rich from selling tinned air? These eccentric titles (and more) form a counter-narrative of Greek print culture that unsettles our understanding of the throughlines in cultural history and memory.

Amassing this odd assortment of print media has been a lot of fun. From poring over bibliographies to scouring the second-hand bookshops of Athens, uncovering these printed artefacts has been something of an odyssey. There is another world of enchantment in reading books that for all their flaws offer vital insights into the time and place they were written. In the future, I hope to expand my collection into a public resource. As a cultural project, it will encompass essays, lectures and exhibitions that aim to introduce readers to a forgotten stratum of Greek print culture. In the meantime, there are still more bibliographic oddities I am chasing for my collection of *Greek Weird Books*.

2) Bibliography

All titles presented in chronological order according to the year of publication.²

TSOUKALAS, G. [Τσουκαλάς, Γ.].

Τζιμ Λόντος ο βασιλεύς της ζούγκλας: μυθιστόρημα αφάνταστων περιπετειών [Jim Londos the king of the jungle: a novel of fantastic adventures].

Athens: Apollonos Papadimitriou, [1931].

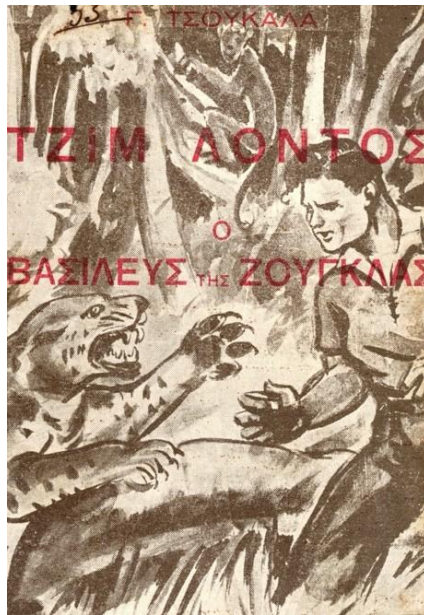
8vo (20 × 14 cm). 352 pp., with numerous black-and-white illustrations in the text.

First edition. Originally issued as an unbound paperback, this copy rebound by a previous owner in black matte leatherette with cloth stitching to spine. Original pictorial wrappers (two-tone grey and red on white stock) preserved and laid down. Front cover complete with small paper loss at lower right corner, featuring illustration of jungle scene. Rear cover largely intact, with minor losses at upper and lower corners and a larger chip at outer edge extending a quarter into the illustration. Internally clean with light foxing to text block. A sound, complete copy, notable for retaining the original illustrated wrappers, something rarely encountered in Greek pulp collecting.

A jungle adventure novel by the prolific pulp writer Georgios Tsoukalas (1903–1974). The story follows Greek-American wrestling star Jim Londos on a series of surreal adventures in the depths of an African jungle. Londos, endowed with superhuman strength, battles lions, tigers, elephants, and local tribes, accompanied by an American journalist and a supporting cast of Greek characters. The novel is a bizarre fusion of the American jungle-adventure genre with distinctly local elements.

² Notes: For consistency and clarity, author names are provided in English transliteration first, followed by the original Greek in brackets in the nominative case. Book titles are italicised in Greek, then followed by an English translation in brackets. Further bibliographic information is provided in English, with publisher names transliterated in the nominative case. All transcriptions of Greek text rendered in the monotonic system.

Wrappers and internal illustrations by “Neiros.” Illustrator information taken from Dimitris Hanos’ bibliography *Greek Popular Literature: Volume 2* (1987).



ΠΙΚΡΟΣ, Petros [Πέτρος Πικρός].

Μίκη Μάους και Καραγκιόζης: ιστορία με ιστορίες και φασαρία με κωμωδίες. Βιβλίο γραμμένο για... κλάμματα που έρχονται απ' τα γέλια [Mickey Mouse and Karagiozis: a story with stories and commotion with comedies. A book written for... tears that come from laughter].

Athens: Petros Dimitrakos A.E., [1939].

Paperback, 8vo (22.3cm × 17.5 cm). 108 pp., with 5 full-page black-and-white illustrations and numerous black-and-white illustrations in the text.

Early edition (possibly first). Original pictorial paper wrappers, front cover printed in red and black on cream stock with illustrations of Mickey and Minnie Mouse, rear cover with small illustration of shadow theatre character in black. Issued both in cloth and in wrappers; this copy in the original wrappers, unbound as issued. Small chip at head of spine with minor paper loss; slight lift of paper at foot. Wrappers with light foxing front and rear. Internally clean, printed on cream stock without foxing. A complete copy of the extremely scarce wrapped issue, well preserved for its age.

An unusual work by left-wing writer Petros Pikros (1894-1956). The novel is an unauthorised cultural mashup of Disney's Mickey Mouse and the archetypal figure of

Greek shadow theatre *Karagiozis*. The book includes numerous illustrations throughout by an unknown artist that adds to this edition's eccentric character. The story begins with Mickey and Minnie Mouse arriving in the port of Piraeus on an ocean liner from America. Upon arrival, they link up with a cast of characters from traditional Greek shadow theatre and decide to collaborate on a show, mixing American pop culture with local cultural elements. Comedic adventures and chaotic scenes follow, making this book a genuinely bizarre entry in my collection of Greek Weird Books. Publication date sourced from a bibliography on Pikros by Giannis D. Bartzis.



BONAPARTE, Maria [Μαρία Βοναπάρτη]

Η λανθάνουσα νεκροφιλία στο έργο του Έδγαρ Πόε: μελέτη ψυχαναλυτική [Latent necrophilia in the work of Edgar Poe: a psychoanalytical study]. Translated by Ally Drakoulidis. Prologue by Andreas Embirikos.

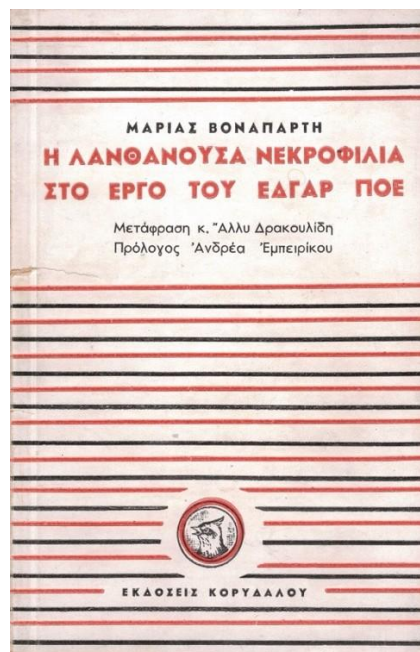
Athens: Korydallos, 1944.

Paperback, 12mo (17.5cm x 11.4cm). 64 pp.

First edition. Original pictorial paper wrappers, unbound as issued; front cover printed in red and black on cream stock with horizontal line design in alternating colours. Wrappers clean with light foxing and some surface soiling and rubbing. Front cover

with a tear extending 2 cm from the spine into the sheet, located one third from the top; rear cover blank, lightly foxed, with matching tear in the same position. Internally fresh and unmarked. A complete copy, near fine apart from the tears.

This small book is a translation into Greek of a study by princess and psychoanalyst Maria Bonaparte on necrophilia in the work of Edgar Allan Poe. The text is rendered in simple and accessible demotic Greek, which suggests that this book was intended for a general audience and could be considered an early work of pop psychoanalysis. The prologue is written by noted surrealist poet Andreas Embirikos (1901-1975), who writes that this book is arguably “a new work in the Greek language” by the translator Ally Drakoulidis. The prologue is dated to the 4th of April 1944, when Greece was still under Nazi occupation, adding to this work’s peculiar publication history. The final chapter of this book is titled: “Baudelaire the sadist and Poe the necrophile.”



WALLHOPE, John

Ιπτάμενοι δίσκοι: μηνύματα απ' άλλους πλανήτες [Flying saucers: messages from other planets]. Translated by Menelaos Vlahopoulos.

[Athens]: Phaethon, [1955].

Paperback, 8vo (21.8cm x 15cm). 208 pp.

First edition. Original pictorial paper wrappers, unbound as issued; front cover printed in offset colours and depicting a scene with UFO, two aliens and their abductee. Rear cover features blurb in Greek, printed in black on cream stock with light foxing. Front cover with scuffing, light foxing and fading, and a pencilled “25” at upper left below the author’s name. Lower wrappers extend over the text block, curled and slightly torn from use. Spine largely intact with minor paper loss at foot. Text block cut unevenly, with leaves not uniformly trimmed. Internally clean, with a single tear on p. 151 extending a quarter into the text block. A complete copy, in good condition.

Although presented on the title page as a translation from a work by “John Wallhope,” no English original has been identified. The work is almost certainly an original Greek novel by Menelaos Vlahopoulos, who is listed as translator on the title page. The year of publication is supplied from a note at the rear stating that the typesetting was completed in January 1955. The novel begins with the musings of a Greek scientist who recently completed his undergraduate degree in geology at Cambridge. The scientist is abducted by a UFO while strolling through the Parnitha mountain ranges north of Athens. He is taken on a tour of planet earth by two anthropomorphic aliens in silver suits—a male and female—and develops a crush on the latter. The scientist is finally taken by the UFO to Venus where he witnesses the incredible technological advancements of this alien species. The novel features many long-winded scientific and philosophical dialogues between the abductee and his alien companions, giving this work a veneer of seriousness that only adds to its strangeness.



SYNTELIS, Loukas [Λουκάς Συντέλης]

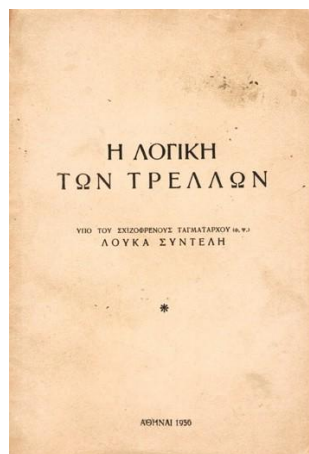
Η λογική των τρελλών: υπό του σχιζοφρενοῦς ταγματάρχου (Φ. Ψ.) [The logic of the insane: by the schizophrenic army major (Ph. Ps.)].

Athens: Self-published [printed by Takis Papakyriakopoulos], 1956.

Paperback, 8vo (22cm x 14.8cm). 84 pp.

First edition. Original paper wrappers, unbound as issued. Front cover printed in black on cream stock with title, subtitle, and imprint "Athens, 1956." Rear cover with printed price of 20 drachmas. Slight foxing to front cover with black patches at upper right; rear cover clean. Spine with small losses of paper at head and foot. Internally clean, with a few sentences underlined in ink; no foxing to text block. A sound, complete copy.

This seminal work of outsider literature is perhaps the first "novel" published in Greece by a person living with schizophrenia. It was self-published under a pseudonym by an ex-army major who spent four years institutionalised in an unnamed psychiatric hospital. With no conventional plot, the book consists entirely of a series of dialogues between asylum inmates and doctors. Full of humour and biting critique, the book satirises the institutions of psychiatry and the treatment of patients, including the use of restraint, electroshock, insulin therapy and the newly introduced anti-psychotic medications. In the Greek context it can be considered an early work of anti-psychiatric thought written from the perspective of a patient. In the early 1970s, underground writer and publisher Leonidas Christakis recognised its countercultural appeal and featured extracts from it in his periodicals *Kouros* and *Krevatina*.



ANES, A. [A. Ανέζ]

Ερωτες αγοριών [Love between men].

Athens: [n.p.], 1962.

Paperback, 8vo (20.5cm x 14.2cm). 104 pp.

First edition. Original pictorial paper wrappers, unbound as issued; front cover with black-and-white illustration of key-hole and two naked men. Wrappers with light scuffing, vertical crease down centre, and small chip at upper left with paper loss obscuring the initial “A.” Front cover extending slightly beyond text block. Rear cover blank, lightly foxed, with a single blue pen stroke and the number “20” in ink at lower left. Text block stapled, now detached from wrappers. Top edges cut, otherwise leaves clean and unmarked save for a small blue adhesive tab affixed to p. 45. Worn but complete copy.

A scarce and peculiar work of Greek queer literature, published anonymously in Athens in 1962, with the author’s surname possibly a pun on the English word “anus.” Dedicated to the parents and youth of Greece as a moral warning against homosexuality, the book combines confessional narrative with case studies. The main part of the book recounts the author’s affair with a man named Dany and his subsequent initiation into the clandestine gay world of Athens. This is supplemented with diary extracts and testimonies from other men, employing outdated terminology such as “passive” and “active”. An appendix includes questions on homosexuality with responses from gay men profiled in the text, alongside medicalised commentary by an unnamed “doctor”. Both a sensational expose and an earnest appeal for the public to understand the plight of Greek gay men, the author’s true motives for publishing this book remain a mystery.



SELF-TAUGHT, G. Iliadis [Γ. Ηλιάδης Σελφτόοτ]

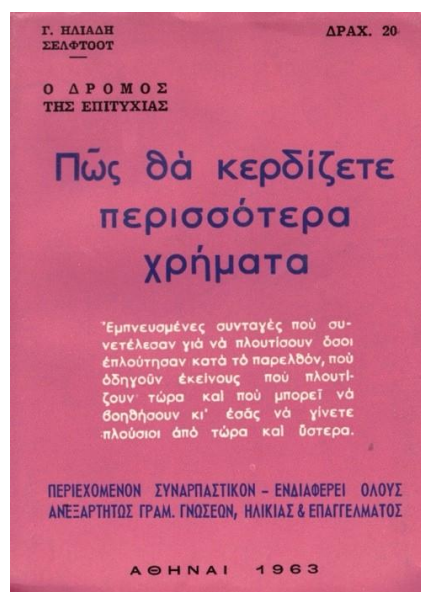
Ο δρόμος της επιτυχίας – πώς θα κερδίζετε περισσότερα χρήματα [The path to success – how to make more money].

Athens: [n.p.], 1963.

Paperback, 32mo (14.5cm x 10.7cm). 144 pp.

First edition. Original pictorial paper wrappers, unbound as issued; front cover with title, subtitle, author's name, imprint "Athens, 1963", and price of 20 drachmas, printed in black, purple, and white on a dark pink background. Rear cover with title and a list of "five personal tips this book provides you", in blue text on cream stock. Wrappers clean and unmarked with light rubbing to edges; lower edges extending beyond the text block and slightly curled. Internally fresh, top and fore-edges cut with leaves of uneven size. A fine, complete copy, unusually well preserved for an ephemeral publication of this kind.

One of the earliest self-help books published in Greece. It offers practical advice and tips on how to become rich, drawing on cases from around the world. Among the unusual and far-fetched examples is a British entrepreneur who sold tinned-air from the English countryside to American consumers, claiming that it would improve their health. The author's pseudonymous surname, which is a Greek transliteration of the English phrase "self-taught", adds an element of unintentional humour to this ostensibly serious work.



KOUKOULES, Mary (ed.)

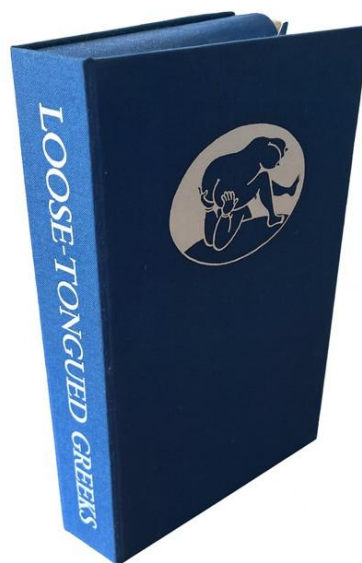
Loose-tongued Greeks: a miscellany of Neo-Hellenic erotic folklore. Translated by John Taylor, with an introduction by G. Legman.

Paris: Digamma, 1983.

Oblong 8vo (25 × 15 cm). 184 pp.

First edition. Bibliophilic edition printed on Arches paper at the Atelier Mérat, Paris, in an edition of 303 numbered and signed copies; this copy no. 187. Issued unbound in sheets, housed in the original hardback blue cloth case with cover illustration by Selçuk Demiral and the title "Loose-Tongued Greeks" lettered on the spine. Case and sheets completely clean and unmarked, a fine, complete copy. Provenance: gifted to the present owner by Mary Koukoules.

A fine press production of Greek erotic folk verse collected by Mary Koukoules and presented in bilingual format with English translations by John Taylor. Introduction by noted erotica scholar G. Legman. Scarce, with limited distribution. Printed in Paris at a time when a Greek edition was not possible due to censorship laws. Contents arranged thematically, with a glossary of Modern Greek erotic speech and a section entitled "Of Cunts, of Pricks and Arses."



PAPADIMITRAKOPOULOS, K. G. [Κ. Γ. Παπαδημητρακόπουλος].

Μαθήματα μαγείας και σατανισμού απ' τον... Χάρι Πότερ! – τόμος Α [Lessons in magic and satanism... from Harry Potter! – volume I].

Kantza [Athens]: Photodotes, [2000].

Paperback, 12mo (19cm × 11.5 cm). 264 pp.

Edition unknown, possibly first. Original glossy pictorial wrappers in full colour; front cover with author's name, publisher, title, and volume number, illustrated with Daniel Radcliffe as Harry Potter against a starry background with full moon and dragon; rear cover with publisher's blurb. Wrappers clean and unmarked; internally fresh, with no inscriptions or markings. A fine copy of this common trade paperback.

One of the first studies in Greek that attempted to demonstrate the cryptic satanic messages in J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter novels. In the early 2000s, this satanic panic circulated widely in Greek Orthodox communities, both in Greece and in the diaspora (including Australia). Publication date inferred from an internal reference in the first chapter noting that four novels in the Harry Potter series had already been published.



LEFKOFRYDIS, Yorgos K. [Γιώργος Κ. Λευκοφρύδης]

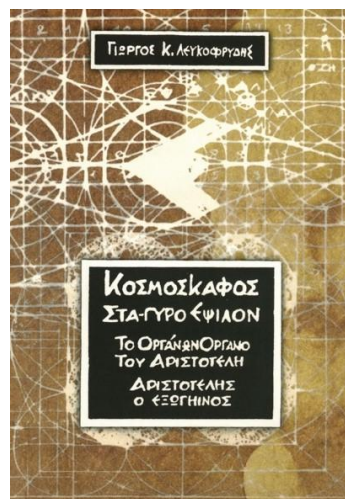
Κοσμοσκάφος στα-γύρο Έψιλον – το οργάνον των οργάνων του Αριστοτέλη – Αριστοτέλης ο εξωγήινος [Spaceship around Epsilon – the organ of organs of Aristotle – Aristotle the extra-terrestrial].

Thessaloniki: [n.p., 2017]

Paperback, 8vo (23.8cm x 16.9cm). 218 pp. with numerous full-page black-and-white illustrations.

Second reissue of a work originally published in 1977. For many years the book circulated as bound photocopies of the first edition. In 2000 it was reissued in book form for the first time. This copy undated, but year of publication listed on the bookselling website *Politeia*. Original glossy pictorial wrappers in full colour, unbound as issued. Front cover with author's name and titles against a background of the author's alien spaceship designs, continued on the rear cover. Wrappers clean and unmarked. Internally fresh, with some passages underlined in pencil by a previous owner. Numerous full-page black and white illustrations by the author of mathematical diagrams and alien spaceships. A fine, complete copy of this common trade paperback reissue.

A legendary work of conspiracy theory by the lawyer Yorgos Lefkofrydis, about whom little is known. Originally self-published in 1977 with each copy signed by the author, the book takes the form of an analysis of the secret messages that he decoded from Aristotle's collection on Logic, "The Organon". From this exegesis, Lefkofrydis attempted to prove that Aristotle was in fact an alien from outer space and came to earth on a giant spacecraft. He also claimed there was a secret society of Greeks called the Epsilon Group who were descended from this superior race of extra-terrestrials. What distinguishes this book from other works of conspiracy theory is how disorganised and incoherent the writing is, with odd capitalisation, italicisation, and emphases, along with the use of mathematical symbols and numeric codes.

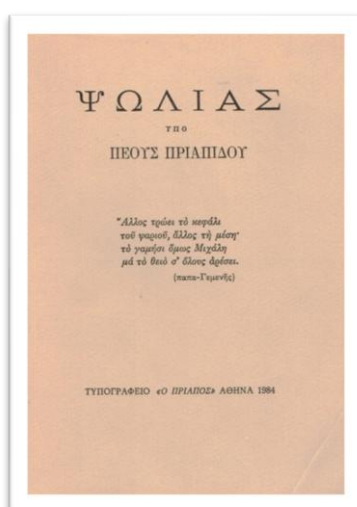


3) Wish List

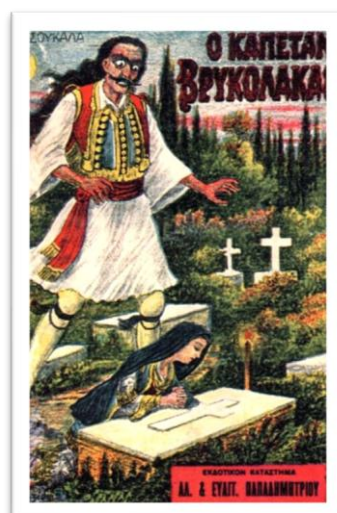
Most of the titles on my wants list are so elusive I doubt I will ever come across copies for sale. One exceedingly scarce title is a collection of obscene poetry titled *The Prick*, published in 1878 under the pseudonym “Penis Priapus”. It is one of only two printed collections of obscene verse in Greek from the 19th century. The city of publication is cheekily listed on title page of the first edition as “Hardonopolis.” The provocative content of this book and its outlier status in Greek 19th century bibliography would make it an ideal addition to my collection.

Another scarce volume that I am seeking is the pulp novel *Captain Vampire* (1931) by G. Tsoukalas. Described by bibliographer Kyriakos Kassis as a “patriotic story” of grand-guignol proportions, this is the first original vampire novel published in Greek. Fusing as it does local Greek elements with foreign genres, it complements other “weird” cultural mashups in my collection like *Micky Mouse and Karagiozis* (1938) and *Jim Londos: King of the Jungle* (1931).

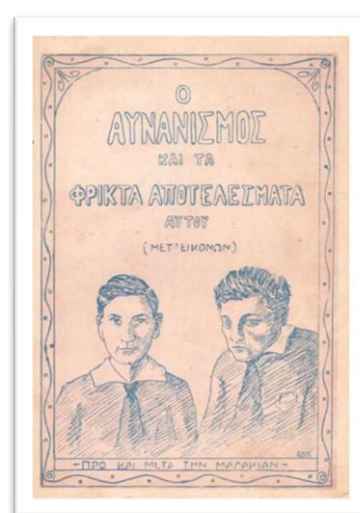
To round off this list, I am desperately seeking a copy of the book *Onanism (Masturbation) and its frightening consequences (with images)*, published sometime in the 1920s. Although there are earlier works of anti-masturbation literature out there, this title seems to have been written for the broader public rather than the scientific community. In the future, I hope to find other examples of “weird” non-fiction to round out my collection.



The Prick (1878; 1984)



Captain Vampire (1931)



Onanism (c. 1920)