

## The Hidden Childness of a Nobel Prize-Winning Poet: George Seferis's Limericks for Young Readers

### Abstract:

In addition to his outstanding poems for adults, George Seferis, the Nobel Prize-winning Greek poet, also wrote verses for children. The limericks he composed as gifts for children of his family were published in a volume entitled *Poiémata me Zōgraphiés se Mikrá Paidiá* [Poems with Drawings for Young Children] (1975), discussed in this paper. With these limericks, Seferis turned to the Anglo-Saxon poetic tradition of nonsense to oppose the 'seriousness' of adult life, while also coping with painful family memories and the dark atmosphere of World War II. He employed humour and playfulness as an antidote to harsh realities. Accompanied by surreal drawings, the playful verses became the playground where Seferis met his child readers as well as his childness.

### Key words:

childness, George Seferis, Greek children's literature, limericks, Nobel Prize-winning poet

### Ukryta dziecięcość greckiego noblisty. Limeryki Jorgosa Seferisa dla młodych odbiorców

### Abstrakt:

Oprócz wybitnych wierszy dla dorosłych, Jorgos Seferis, grecki poeta nagrodzony Nagrodą Nobla, pisał również wiersze dla dzieci. Limeryki, które skomponował

\* Dimitris Politis – PhD, Professor in the Department of Educational Sciences and Early Childhood Education of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Patras (Greece). His research interests include children's literature, theory of literature, and teaching of literature. Contact: [dimpolitis@upatras.gr](mailto:dimpolitis@upatras.gr).

\*\* Angela Yannicopoulou – PhD, Professor in the Department of Preschool Education of the School of Education at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (Greece). Her research interests include picturebooks, book materiality, and ideology. Contact: [aggjanik@ecd.uoa.gr](mailto:aggjanik@ecd.uoa.gr).

jako prezenty dla dzieci ze swojej rodziny, zostały opublikowane w tomie zatytułowanym *Poiémata me Zōgraphiés se Mikrá Paidiá* [Wiersze z rysunkami dla małych dzieci] (1975), omawianym w artykule. W tych limerykach Seferis zwrócił się do anglosaskiej poetyckiej tradycji nonsensu, aby przeciwstawić się „powadze” dorosłego życia, jednocześnie radząc sobie z bolesnymi wspomnieniami rodzinnymi i mroczną atmosferą II wojny światowej. Stosował humor i zabawę jako antidotum na trudną rzeczywistość. Zabawne wiersze, którym towarzyszyły surrealistyczne rysunki, stały się swoistym placem zabaw, na którym Seferis spotkał swoich dziecięcych czytelników, a także swoją własną dziecięcość.

**Słowa kluczowe:**

dziecięcość, Jorgos Seferis, grecka literatura dziecięca, limeryki, laureat Nagrody Nobla

## Introduction

Since 1973, when Marilyn Apseoff considered it “unfortunate that children’s literature is not sufficiently understood or appreciated by scholars” (p. 130), until these days, when the ever-expanding world of children’s literature studies develops alongside a theoretical and academic framework (Hunt, 2005), the contents and forms in the literary field [*champ littéraire*] (Bourdieu, 1992/1996) of non-adult literature get constantly enriched with new literary texts written by authors who write (only) for children. However, there is an ever-growing minority of authors who write for both children and adults and fall into one of three categories: (1) writers for adults who take up children’s literature; sometimes the impetus is their child; (2) authors of children’s literature, who begin to write for older audiences, and (3) authors who write for both children and adults from the beginning of their career (Galef, 1995).

George Seferis is a very famous Greek poet, who was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1963. He also wrote limericks for children, which were published after his death as *Poiémata me Zōgraphiés se Mikrá Paidiá* [Poems with Drawings for Young Children] (1975). Apart from Seferis, other well-known authors before him – such as the playwright W. S. Gilbert, the poet of the Victorian age Algernon Charles Swinburne, and Rudyard Kipling – embraced this form. Moreover, Wisława Szymborska, the Polish poet and translator who received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1996, also experimented with limericks (Tarnogórska, 2015, p. 38).

The study of Seferis’s limericks is considered important, because it sheds light on the works and personality of the famous poet while contributing to the

study of children's literature. Although Seferis is not the only acclaimed creator in the world who was fascinated by limericks, the question remains: why did a Nobel Prize-winning poet choose to write for children and even embrace an unconventional, playful genre that was completely unknown in Greece? This article makes an attempt to answer this question.

## George Seferis

The Greek diplomat and Nobel Prize-winning poet, George Seferis (pen name of Georgios Seferiadis), was born in 1900 in Vourla, a small town near Smyrna in Asia Minor (today İzmir). In 1914, his family moved from Asia Minor to Athens, where he completed his school education. From 1918 to 1924, he lived in Paris and studied law at the Sorbonne University. Although his family left Vourla before the war of 1922, when Greeks were forced to flee their homeland in Asia Minor and become refugees, Seferis was always left with the lasting bitterness of being in 'exile' that marked both his life and poetry. From 1927 to 1962, he lived in many parts of the world (Albania, Egypt, South Africa, Italy, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Iraq, United Kingdom, etc.) following his career as a diplomat. From 1957 until his retirement, he was the Ambassador of Greece in London (Beaton, 2003; Tsatsos, 1973/1982).

Since his student years, Seferis was deeply devoted to poetry. His poetic profile was shaped under the catalytic influence of his life's painful experiences, his deep knowledge of European literature, and his contacts with the international intellectual élite. His stay in Paris introduced him to French symbolism, while his sojourn in London, where he got familiar with the Anglo-Saxon cultural tradition, had a decisive influence on the formation of his poetical style. From 1931, when his first collection of poems *Strofi* (meaning 'stanza' and 'turning point'<sup>1</sup>) was published, until he died in 1971 in Athens, he never abandoned writing: poems, translations, essays, and diaries. In 1963, Seferis, a poet "quietly heroic in both art and life, a modern literary Odysseus" (Mason, 2004, p. 151), was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. He always remained a dedicated worker of poetry, who constantly experimented with new forms and poetical ways, and also an active citizen who did not hesitate to speak out politically.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise stated, the responsibility for translating Greek quotations, phrases, etc. into English rests solely with the authors of the paper – Dimitris Politis and Angela Yannicopoulou.

<sup>2</sup> See Seferis's statement, in 1969, condemning the dictatorial regime in Greece (1967–1974).

### *Poiémata me Zōgraphiés se Mikrá Paidiá* [Poems with Drawings for Young Children] (1975) – An Analysis

*Poems with Drawings for Young Children*<sup>3</sup> is an outstanding collection of limericks for children written by George Seferis (Figure 1). The book was published by Hermes Publications in 1975, four years after the poet's death.<sup>4</sup> The volume,<sup>5</sup> which was edited by the main editor of Seferis, professor George P. Savidis, includes: (1) twenty limericks with drawings, (2) an opera-parody for children entitled *Merlin the Wizard*, (3) two translations (a poem by Edward Lear and a short excerpt from Lewis Carroll's 1865 *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*), (4) a song about five black mice, (5) an Easter card accompanied by a poem, (6) a proverb and a drawing depicting it, (7) a letter from Seferis to his stepgranddaughter as a "Prologue," (8) the editor's "Notes," in which Savidis provides information about Seferis's limericks, and (9) a photograph of Seferis, his wife Maro, and her granddaughter Daphne on the back cover of the book.

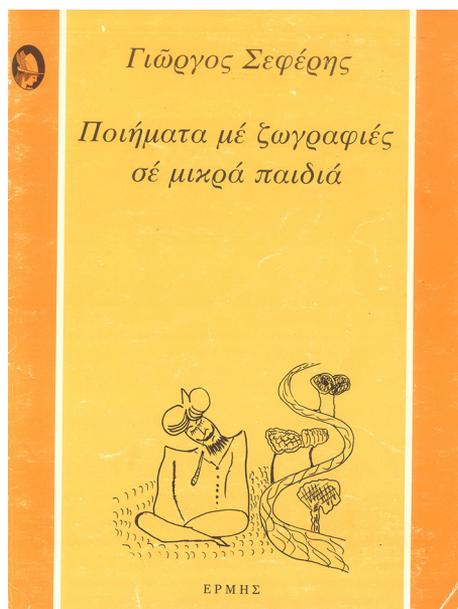


FIGURE 1. *Poiémata me Zōgraphiés se Mikrá Paidiá* [Poems with Drawings for Young Children] (1975)

---

<sup>3</sup> From now on, if necessary, we will refer to them as *Poems*.

<sup>4</sup> The book has been reprinted twice, in 1992 and 2013 (by Hermes Publications).

<sup>5</sup> There are only two papers in Greek that study Seferis's limericks (Kokkinos, 2008; Politis, 1994).

Each of Seferis's first seventeen limericks is presented across a double spread; on the left page is the printed poem, and on the right is the handwritten poem and its corresponding sketchy drawing made by Seferis himself (see Figure 2). Each of the final three limericks is placed on one page; the drawing, the handwritten poem, and the printed text. The poet did not sign all his poems and sometimes added the dates of their creation; if available, they appeared on the right pages. The dated limericks were arranged in chronological order. Additionally, on the left page and below the printed text, the publisher added footnotes, explaining rare words, such as Hellenised foreign words, e.g., *copi* – ‘cup.’

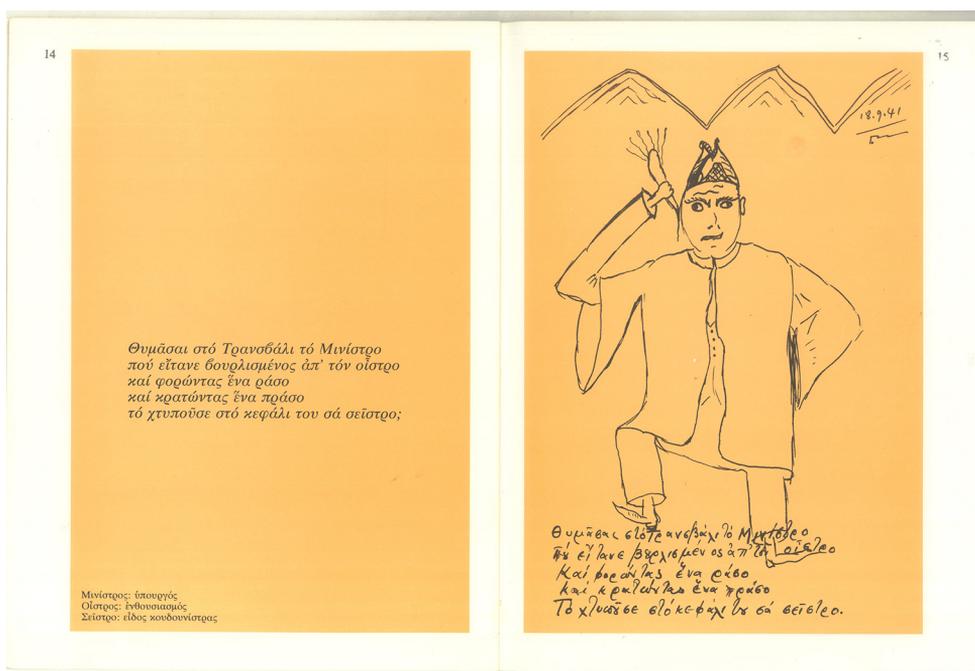


FIGURE 2. A double spread from *Poimata me Zographiés se Mikrá Paidiá* [Poems with Drawings for Young Children] (1975)

### The Time

The poet composed his limericks in two periods: he wrote the first seventeen limericks in South Africa in 1941 (Savidis's "Notes" in Seferis, 1975, p. 62), and the remaining three in Athens in 1946 on cigarette paper; the very last one, in which the poet's handwriting is not even recognisable, was written while he was walking (p. 62). Based on the dates provided in *Poems*, the first dated limerick (the third one in the book) was written on 16 September 1941, while

the last one – on 21 October 1941. According to his diary issued on Wednesday, 15 October 1941, the author “[...] spent two days composing and drawing limericks in every spare hour; with the same avidness one plays a solitaire card game” (Seferis, 1977, p. 144).

For the poet, writing limericks was a ‘game’ that helped him cope with his loneliness; this is obvious from a letter to his friend Lawrence Durrell (November 1941) in Cairo:

I am trying to write whatever I can, from limericks to metaphysical poems. I think that writing limericks is a good exercise for lonely men, and I suppose that the genre emerged in England because all of you are lonely as islands. But the interesting thing is that it brings forth a sort of individual mythology [...] (Seferis, 1977, p. 159).

Out of loneliness, Seferis wrote limericks, which are poems that deal mainly with lonely figures. Indeed, while living in an incomprehensible world and facing surreal circumstances, the protagonists of his verses are depicted as individuals who seldom interact or communicate with each other. Also, sketches of lonely people performing absurd actions accompany the verses throughout the book; thirteen out of twenty drawings portray just one lonely person.

Given the time of the creation of most of Seferis’s limericks, which coincides with the difficult years of World War II, we may assume that the Greek poet used them as an antidote to the absurdity of an irrational war. After the Nazi invasion of Athens (27 April 1941), the diplomat Georgios Seferiadis accompanied the Greek government in exile and fled (July 1941) to Crete, Egypt, and finally, South Africa, where he was appointed as senior diplomat, first in Johannesburg (8 July) and then in Pretoria (1 September). He mentioned in his diary: “Johannesburg, Tuesday 15 July. I found and bought Lear’s limericks today. As if a beloved animal returned home” (Seferis, 1977, p. 122). This sentence shows that Seferis already knew (“returned home”) and loved (“a beloved animal”) the work of Lear. Although it is not certain when he first became acquainted with the poetic genre of limericks, it is most probable that it was in London during one of the poet’s first two visits; either between 1924 and 1925, when he visited London as a student to improve his English, or between 1931 and 1934, when he was appointed Greek diplomat (Kokkinos, 2008, pp. 55–57).

The author’s ‘exile’ to South Africa reminded him of the acute trauma of the Asia Minor Catastrophe of 1922 (Seferis, 1977, p. 144). During his stay in Africa, he created hilarious verses with images, serving as an ‘oasis’ amidst the

devastation of the incomprehensible and painful reality of the new war. Just like the girl from Pretoria who wore fifteen overcoats layered on top of each other as her only entertainment in the city (the second limerick in his collection), the poet likewise collected seventeen funny limericks as his only consolation in Pretoria.

### *The Audience*

Seferis, like other authors for adults who ended up writing for children (Apseloff, 1973, p. 137), addressed his limericks to a child he knew. According to Savidis, all of the poet's limericks were not written for publication, but as gifts for the daughter of his wife Maro, Anna Londou; he had no children of his own. Besides, the opera *Merlin the Magician* included in *Poems* was written for Anna by Seferis under the pseudonym Mathios Paskalis.

When Anna grew up and became a mother, she passed the poems on to her daughter Daphne. In the writer's letter (London, 29 November 1961) to Daphne, published as the "Prologue" to *Poems*, the poet expresses his great satisfaction that she appreciated his limericks: "I have come to know that you now have the poems with images that I had given to your mother before you were even born" (Seferis, 1975, p. 7). He also addressed two translations of Lear and Carrol, the song "Five Mice," and an Easter card to Daphne – all of which are included in *Poems*.

Seferis indeed had a very cordial relationship with his wife's granddaughter. In the same "Prologue," he calls Daphne *Mantzouranaki* (a unique endearment that literally means a new sprig of marjoram) and signs his letter with his first name: just 'George.' In the same letter, the poet, apart from the limericks addressed to Daphne, refers extensively to a drawing she made for him. The author asks Daphne to enter together into her drawing, and "play and tell jokes," and he continues: "Now what I am telling you will be considered nonsense by the others, the grownups. How can I make them understand that it is not? But it doesn't matter. People always tell me I'm talking nonsense. But after a while they go «Ha!» like a donkey and admit: «You were telling us the truth!»" (Seferis, 1975, p. 7).

The poet was not like all the 'serious' adults, who dislike whatever does not comply with their 'boring' logic. In contrast, Seferis enjoyed spending time with children, and according to his wife, was "very entertaining and funny, especially with the children and young people who came to see him" (Seferis, 1986, p. 181). Moreover, he highly valued communicating with Daphne, as he did with her mother before, through irrational paths: imaginary dives into

drawings and nonsense poems. As an eternal child, the poet, just like Lear (Snider, 2009), seemed to maintain a perpetual childness and enjoyed imaginary journeys to dreamy universes.

### *The Genre*

Limericks are light and funny narrative poems that focus on peculiar characters, identified mainly by references to specific places. They typically follow a form consisting of five lines with a rhyme scheme of AABBA and an anapestic dominant metre. The generic form, which had a limited circulation from the Middle Ages, was popularised by Lear. While this author was not the first poet to write these poems, he is considered the father of limericks due to the extensive number and popularity of his verses (over two hundred in two collections), the establishment of a strict form, and his distinctive drawing style.

Lear composed and illustrated limericks primarily in his *Book of Nonsense* (1846), drawing inspiration from a nursery rhyme that begins: “There was an old man of Tobago” – as stated in his introduction to *More Nonsense, Pictures, Rhymes, Botany, etc.* (1872, p. viii). Lear follows a formulaic pattern, where the first line introduces a protagonist associated with a specific location or physical attribute, which is roughly repeated with the addition of an adjective in the final line. The middle lines usually depict actions filled with silly events and exaggerations. His poems establish “one of the fundamental activities limericks perform: the world of Lear’s nonsense is a playground” (Rieder, 1998, p. 49).

Although Lear himself did not use the term ‘limericks’ but ‘nonsense rhymes,’ or ‘nonsense pictures and rhymes,’ Seferis thought of translating the word ‘limerick’ into Greek as *learologima* [ληρολόγημα], which combines the meaning of a crazy, silly word, with a nod to the name of Lear (Politis, 1994, pp. 163–164, 170). Seferis’s poems do not follow closely Lear’s structure, especially regarding the final line, which is not a repetition of the first, but usually extends and culminates the action. However, to “break a rule in such a way does not invalidate it, on the contrary, such subversions are themselves rule-dependent” (Furniss & Bath, 2007, p. 330). The existential verb of the first line: “There was someone from somewhere” is followed by an accumulation of movement verbs and scenes of hilarious action, very much appreciated by children.

Both verses and sketchy drawings create surreal situations that function as an unfamiliarising process exposing the absurdities of reality. At the beginning of the poem, the reader thinks that this is an ordinary situation,

e.g., an old woman from Libya reads volume after volume of *Lives* of Plutarch. However, as the reader progresses, an unexpected turn of events humorously challenges reality, e.g., when she finishes reading them, she throws them into the street (Seferis, 1975, pp. 40–41). His poems do not attempt to outright violate logic but rather exploit the funny side of reality in an unpredictable way (Politis, 1994, p. 167).

Limericks are funny poems, filled with various forms of verbal and visual humour: grotesque, exaggeration, caricature, etc. An old lady filling an enema with cologne (Seferis, 1975, pp. 22–23) or a girl of Bursa herding thirty leeches tied with ribbons (pp. 18–19) are hilarious images that allow child readers to plunge into an amusing universe and engage in a captivating game with a 'serious' poet and diplomat. However, Seferis himself, who "was endowed with an Aristophanic humour, mostly expressed orally in private or in a series of indecent limericks" (Savidis, 1986, p. 154), turned to humorous verses to balance the anxieties of his very 'serious' career as a diplomat. His playful limericks for children seem to serve as an antidote to the distressing reality of adult life.

The deep irrational quality that characterises limericks and results in mocking people, especially adults and those in power, is deeply appreciated by young children. Limericks create "a hiatus in social rules and hierarchies, so that for a while it may become hard to tell the difference between us and them, high and low, teacher and student, or even adult and child" (Rieder, 1998, p. 54). In this sense, limericks fight arrogance and selfishness by winking at children, as they show that everyone, no matter how important, has their weaknesses.

Seferis liked to renew poetry with new, unconventional genres. The subversive nature of the genre fascinated the poet, who explored this humorous form in both versions of the Anglo-Saxon tradition: nonsensical verses for children and ribald poems strictly for adults. The author, in addition to his limericks for children, also composed erotic limericks, published posthumously under the pseudonym Mathios Paschalis.<sup>6</sup> Seferis introduced this new form to Greek readers, who completely ignored it (Stathi-Schorel, 2003, p. 125). However,

---

<sup>6</sup> In the Anglo-Saxon tradition, there existed a distinct type of obscene erotic limericks that were strictly meant for adults and primarily shared orally. Erotic limericks written by Seferis were published posthumously, in 1989 by Disc Club, under the title *Ta Entepsizika*. Mathios Paschalis was the pseudonym of Seferis, and G. P. Eftychidis – of Savidis. The word *entepsizika* comes from the Turkish word *edepsiz*, which means a reductive, without manners, impudent, and obscene man.

limericks were not the only new genre that Seferis introduced to Greek readers. He also composed visual poems, his *calligrammes* – verses written in such a way that the written words create visual images relating to their meanings.<sup>7</sup>

### *The Language*

Seferis treated limericks mainly as a linguistic game to test the knowledge, creativity, and flexibility of the Greek language (Kokkinos, 2008, p. 60). His verses encompass a wide spectrum of different words, including new and older terms (e.g., *tsoukali* for ‘boiling pot’), Greek and foreign words (*locanda* for ‘cheap restaurant’), colloquial expressions (e.g., *vourlismenos* for ‘crazy’) and formal (*seistro* for ‘rattle’), and well-known and inventive terms (e.g., *klysteri* for ‘enema’). Limericks are suitable for the playful use of language: “This is the beginning of nonsense: language lifted out of context, language turning on itself [...], language made hermetic, opaque” (Stewart, 1979, p. 3).

The Nobel Prize-winning poet was not interested in treating “languages like lexicographers and grammarians, but like the child and folks” (Seferis, 1974, p. 168). His constant engagement with language is also evident in his compilation of a brief glossary with English words used by the Greeks of South Africa, after incorporating them into the system of the Modern Greek language (Seferis, 1977, pp. 186–187). He eventually used some of those Hellenised words in his limericks, such as *aiskrimi* (for ‘ice cream’), *ministros* (for ‘minister’), making his poems rather difficult for young children to grasp (Kokkinos, 2008, p. 64). The idiomatic language of his limericks, which transforms ‘Transvaal’ (province of South Africa) into the Hellenised ‘Tranvali,’ reflects Seferis’s constant interest in experimenting with words not only as meanings but also as phonetic entities.

Furthermore, the linguistic analysis of the poet’s limericks reveals a humorous treatment of language favouring wordplay. He played with words referring to specific locations, allowing those puns to lead, through obvious phonetic similarities, to the second lines of the poems. Thus, in one limerick, a little girl from Brazil asks Ilia if it is boiling: (“There was a little girl from Brazil / who asked «is it boiling, Ilia?»”; Brazil is *Brazilia* in Greek and ‘is it boiling, Ilia?’ is ‘*brazei Ilia?*’ – Seferis, 1975, pp. 20–21). Wordplays fascinate older

---

<sup>7</sup> At the onset of the Second World War, Seferis also wrote six calligrammes included in the collection *Tetrádio Gumnasmátōn II* [Book of Exercises II], published posthumously in 1976. These calligrammes share many similarities with the *Calligrammes* of Apollinaire, a poet whom Seferis admired (Chidiroglou-Zachariadi, 1983).

child readers, who are “capable of treating language as a plaything that can be a source of intellectual satisfaction” (Tarnogórska, 2015, p. 40).

In his limericks for children, Seferis is interested in rhythm and metre. Although the poet soon abandoned rhyme for the sake of free verse in his poems for an adult audience (Garantoudis, 2000), limericks allowed him to explore rhymes and enhance the humorous effect of his verses. In another limerick, a pig got stuck in the nostril of the girl from Kalamaki, a place near Athens (Seferis, 1975, p. 43), probably only because the word *routhouni* (for ‘nostril’) happens to rhyme with the word *gourouni* (for ‘pig’). His limericks provide the poet with the opportunity to play with words like a child.

### *The Images*

In limericks, the images are considered so important (Hassett, 2017) that the genre is even termed “picture-limericks” (Dilworth, 1994, p. 42). Following the tradition of the genre, Seferis supplemented each limerick with a sketchy, colourless drawing that visually commented on the verses. While the poet lacked the skills of a professional painter like Lear, whose paintings were his main source of livelihood and who even taught Queen Victoria drawing (Lederer, 2019), he managed to maintain a style of illustration with remarkable similarities to that of Lear.

While the sketches in *Poems* can be characterised as simplistic and naive due to their exaggeration of human characteristics, they are very much appreciated by child readers. The author's images look funny and often imitate children's drawings, as can be seen in his violations of perspective rules. For instance, a girl from Samos hovers between earth and sky in an image that lacks depth (Seferis, 1975, pp. 8–9). The poet's drawings repeat, or even develop and complement the verbal text of his limericks. The visual addition to the verbal meaning can be seen, for example, in the limerick about an old woman who angrily pulled a knife because a ball broke her cup. The reactions of the others were depicted only in the picture: a short gentleman hides in horror under the table, while a lady with her arms raised in despair runs towards the enraged old lady (p. 37).

Furthermore, the author's cosmopolitan limericks make references to various places he visited (such as Pretoria, Cairo, Samos, etc.), creating a hilarious panorama of the world, especially through the distinctive clothing worn by their protagonists. The characteristic black costumes of the three men leave no doubt that the old woman from Lassithi lives in Crete (Seferis, 1975, pp. 26–27). Besides, the poet's drawings often include minimalistic visual elements that

indicate specific locations. For example, the three minarets in the background of a girl with the leeches become a visual hint to Bursa (pp. 18–19), while a typical Chinese house in the background of a double bass girl situates her in the setting of Beijing (pp. 20–21; Figure 3)

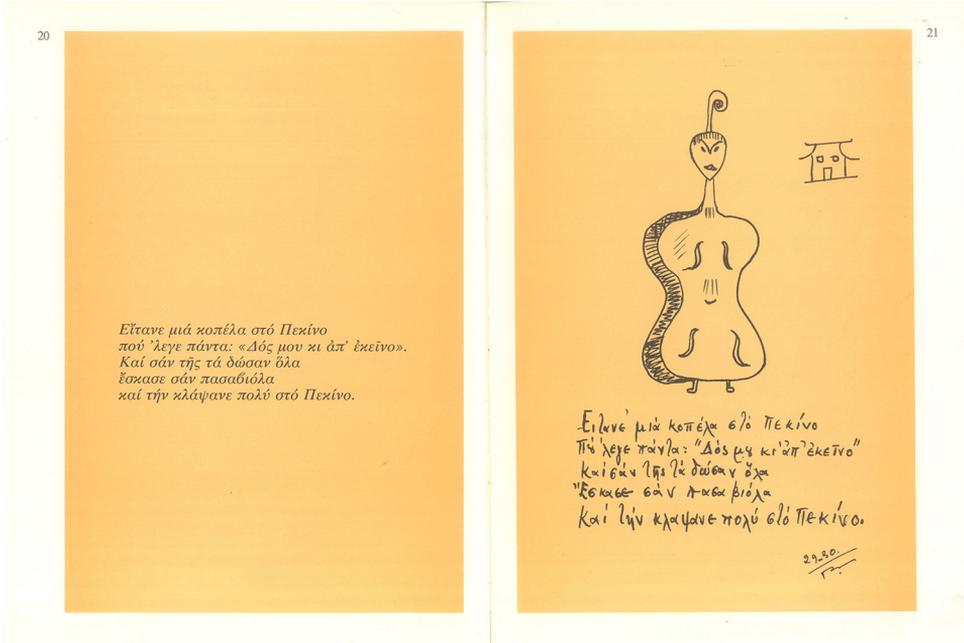


FIGURE 3. A double spread from *Poíemata me Zōgraphiés se Mikrá Paidiá* [Poems with Drawings for Young Children] (1975)

In these familiar settings, the poet creates the humorous anthropogeography of his travels and sketches a chorus of unconventional people who contrast with the monotonous everyday life. The illustration adopts a cartoonish style, greatly contributing to the playfulness of characters. He also uses the so-called “materialization of the metaphor” (Mitchell & Snyder, 2000, pp. 47–48), transforming verbal metaphorical expressions into visible reality. This is evident in the poem about the girl from Beijing who “exploded like a double bass”; she is depicted as a hybrid creature with a woman’s head and a musical instrument body (Seferis, 1975, pp. 20–21).

It is worth noting that the protagonists of limericks exhibit unexpected and thus very amusing behaviour. One striking example is the young priest who, after eating a rib in a local restaurant, refuses to pay; the illustration intensifies the humorous tone. While the verses mention only the dialogue between

the tavern owner and the young priest, the image depicts him running and constantly checking the distance between him and the furious tavern owner (Seferis, 1975, pp. 16–17). The black cat eyewitnesses the scene. Perhaps this cat is an allusion to Lear's beloved cat, Foss (a shortened form of the Greek word *aderfos* that stands for 'brother'), which appears as a recurring visual motif in Lear's verses and drawings.

## Conclusions: The Hidden Child

Seferis's engagement with limericks illuminates the portrait of a respectful diplomat and poet who occasionally, like a naughty child, laughs at the 'seriousness' and conventions of (high) society. Those poems express the hidden passion of a childish spirit oppressed by rationality and social constraints, asserting the right to imagination, playfulness, and freedom. Seferis approached limericks with a playful mindset that allowed his inner child to roam freely in a "playground" (Ede, 1987, pp. 58–60), making fun at all levels within a "(poly)systemic" context, where adult and child cultures coexist and interact with each other (Even-Zohar, 1990, pp. 22–25). Seferis's limericks for children do not merely seek "stimulation and satisfaction in the challenge of writing for children as well as adults" (Apseloff, 1973, p. 130), but stress the value of childness in both literature and life.

When addressing children, Seferis does not reside on the margins of creativity, but on the contrary, he directs his writing towards the centre of literary explorations, dynamically intersecting adult poetic culture with that of children (Even-Zohar, 1990, pp. 19–20; Nodelman, 2008, pp. 209–210). Through his verses for a young audience, he attempts to bridge the gap between adult and children's literature in a polysystemic mode (Even-Zohar, 1990, pp. 22–25; Shavit, 1986, pp. 67–71).

Seferis's creative activity of writing limericks complements his adult literary works and reveals the sensitivity of an author who values his childhood and constantly returns to it (Nodelman, 2008, pp. 206–210). By writing and illustrating his verses, he immerses himself deeply in his own childhood (Even-Zohar, 1990, pp. 12–15), revealing the 'hidden' child within a 'serious' poet and diplomat. By composing limericks, the adult poet playfully winks at child readers, exposing his own "shadows" (Nodelman, 2008, p. 206); the eternal child who loves to laugh and play within a surreal world, that, unfortunately, is often less irrational and incomprehensible than the real one, which is full of devastating disasters and rigid social conventions.

## References

- Apseloff, M. (1973). Children's books by famous writers for adults. *Children's Literature*, 2, 130–138. <https://doi.org/10.1353/chl.0.0231>.
- Beaton, R. (2003). *George Seferis: Waiting for the angel – A biography*. Yale University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1996). *The rules of art: Genesis and structure of the literary field* (S. Emanuel, Trans.). Polity Press. (Original work published 1992).
- Chidioglou-Zachariadi, A. (1983). Prótupa tōn 'kalligraphēmátōn' tou Sephérē. *Ekivolos*, 12, 969–984.
- Dilworth, T. (1994). Society and the self in the limericks of Lear. *Review of English Studies: New Series*, 45(177), 42–62.
- Ede, L. (1987). An introduction to the nonsense literature of Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll. In W. Tigges (Ed.), *Explorations in the field of nonsense* (pp. 47–60). Rodopi.
- Even-Zohar, I. (1990). Polysystem theory. *Poetics Today*, 11(1), 9–26. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1772666>.
- Furniss, T., & Bath, M. (2007). *Reading poetry: An introduction*. Pearson Education Ltd.
- Galef, D. (1995). Crossing over: Authors who write both children's and adults' fiction. *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, 20(1), 29–35. <https://doi.org/10.1353/chq.0.0905>.
- Garantoudis, E. (2000). Ē poīēsē tou Giórgou Sephérē anámesa ston émmetro kai ston eleúthero stíkho. In K. Kostíou (Ed.), *O Giórgos Sephérēs ōs anagnóstēs tēs eurōpaikēs logotekhnías* (pp. 133–159). University Studio Press.
- Hassett, C. W. (2017). Does it buzz? Image and text in Edward Lear's limericks. *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 45(4), 685–707.
- Hunt, P. (2005). Introduction: The expanding world of children's literature. In P. Hunt (Ed.), *Understanding children's literature* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., pp. 1–14). Routledge.
- Kokkinos, D. (2008). Ē skhésē tou Giórgou Sephérē me to érgo tou Edward Lear kai ta paidiká límeriks. *Paidagogika Revmata sto Aigaio*, 3, 54–67.
- Lear, E. (1872). *More nonsense, pictures, rhymes, botany, etc.* Robert John Bush.
- Lederer, R. (2019). *The art of the bird*. University of Chicago Press.
- Mason, D. (2004). Close to Seferis. *The Hudson Review*, 57(1), 150–158.
- Mitchell, D., & Snyder, S. (2000). *Narrative prosthesis: Disability and the dependencies of discourse*. University of Michigan.
- Nodelman, P. (2008). *The hidden adult: Defining children's literature*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Politis, D. (1994). Giórgos Sephérēs: Mia 'dokimé' stēn paidiké diástasē tēs poīēsés tou. *Epitheorisi Paidikis Logotechnias*, 9, 161–181.

- Rieder, J. (1998). Edward Lear's limericks: The function of children's nonsense poetry. *Children's Literature*, 26, 47–60. <https://doi.org/10.1353/chl.0.0040>.
- Savidis, G. P. (1986). The tragic vision of Seferis. *Grand Street*, 5(2), 153–174. <https://doi.org/10.2307/25006852>.
- Seferi, M. (1986). Anamnéseis apó tē zōé mou me ton Sephérē (sunomilía me ton Antónē Phōstierē kai ton Thanásē Niárkho). *I Lexi*, 53, 190–205. <http://www.ekebi.gr/magazines/ShowImage.asp?file=35428&code=8518>.
- Seferis, G. (1969). George Seferis's statement denouncing the Colonel's regime. Retrieved June 11, 2023, from <https://www.characters.gr/site/en/stories/classic/seferis-dilwsi-xounta-en>.
- Seferis, G. (1974). *Dokimés, A'*. Icarus.
- Seferis, G. (1975). *Poiémata me Zōgraphiés se Mikrá Paidiá*. Hermes.
- Seferis, G. (1976). *Tetrádio gumnasmátōn II*. Icarus.
- Seferis, G. (1977). *Méres, D'*. Icarus.
- Shavit, Z. (1986). *Poetics of children's literature*. University of Georgia Press.
- Snider, C. (2009). *Victorian trickster: A Jungian consideration of Edward Lear's nonsense verse*. Retrieved June 11, 2023, from <https://home.csulb.edu/~csnider/edward.lear.html>.
- Stathi-Schorel, A. (2003). *Éna stílvon podélato: Dekáexi sunomilíes gia tē neoellēniké logotekhnía*. Patakis.
- Stewart, S. (1979). *Nonsense: Aspects of intertextuality in folklore and literature*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Tarnogórska, M. (2015). 'Funny' and 'curious' verse: The limerick in Polish children's literature. *Bookbird*, 53(3), 37–45. <https://doi.org/10.1353/bkb.2015.0062>.
- Tsatsos, I. (1982). *My brother George Seferis* (J. Demos, Trans.). North Central Publishing. (Original work published 1973).