



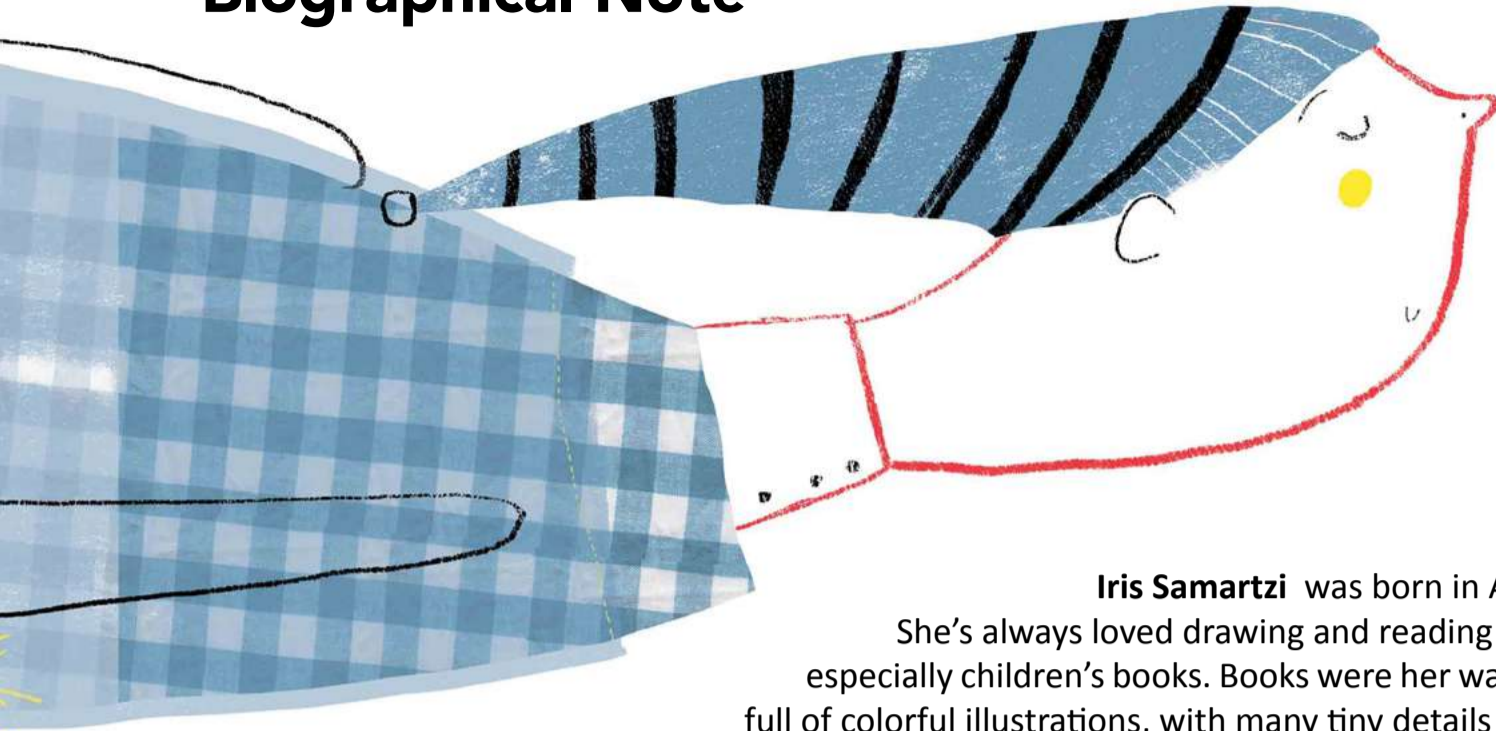
Hans Christian Andersen Award 2022  
Illustrator Nomination IBBY Greece

*“...If you want to be an illustrator, first you have to be a director, a scenographer, a graphic designer, a photographer, an interior designer, a costume designer  
...and last but not least a painter.  
I could add more occupations, such as historian, explorer, engineer, physicist and more.  
Of course, I am none of those things but, to me, illustration is constant research in oh-so-many fields...”*

<http://kokkinialepou.gr/iris-samartzi/>

[www.irissamartzi.com](http://www.irissamartzi.com)

# Biographical Note



**Iris Samartzi** was born in Athens, Greece.

She's always loved drawing and reading books - especially children's books. Books were her way out, a whole new world full of colorful illustrations, with many tiny details waiting for her to observe them, details where everything and anything could happen! So, at a very young age, she started a collection of children's books!

*".... I guess I'm among those lucky people who knew early on what they want to do in their life. I remember once I asked my mother to buy me a 2-meter cardboard (maybe it was smaller, but at that age it seemed huge) and every day after school I would spend endless hours perfecting my work : an orange snake that was a train - with windows and cabins - and all the animals would be on board. Unfortunately the project has been lost..."*

interview in [http://odaimontislogotexnias.blogspot.com/2017/11/blog-post\\_9.html](http://odaimontislogotexnias.blogspot.com/2017/11/blog-post_9.html)

She studied at the Vakalo Art and Design College, where she obtained her two Bachelor degrees, in Graphic Design and Interior Design.

She also attended seminars on Children's Art and Drama in Education at the Children's Art Museum.

It was back in 2004 when she discovered that neither Graphic nor Interior Design was the true love of her life. Her children's books collection was getting larger and larger, her love for illustration still existed among with her personal doodles, and it took a lot of courage for her to pick up her portfolio and start showing her work to editors. Luckily, it turned out that some did like her work. She was given her first assignment and her first book was published. From then on, everything fell into place.

Fifteen years later, she has illustrated more than 80 books. She loves her work, she is always looking for new ideas, new projects, and new techniques to explore; her work is recognised in Greece and elsewhere around the world; and she has won many prestigious awards. At the same time, throughout all those years she's been working in nursery and primary schools teaching art, organising art workshops for children, making book presentations, and getting inspired by the children's creativity.

On September 2015, she attended Picturecamp Masterclass with Benji Davies, Chris Haughton, Alexis Deacon, and Jorge Martin in Atapuerca, Spain.

She's also been a member of the judging panel of the Greek State Book Awards (2015-2016), the EBGE Awards in 2017 and the IBBY Greek Awards in 2019.

In April 2019, she ran the workshop "Paper Bag Stories" at the Bologna Children's Bookfair.

In May 2020, she participated in Bologna's Marathon24, as a reviewer of illustrator portfolios.

She was nominated for the Hans Christian Andersen Award 2020 by the Greek Section of IBBY.

She has been nominated for the Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award 2021.



# Awards and other distinctions

-Nominated for the **Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award (ALMA) 2021**

-Nominated for the **Hans Christian Andersen Award 2020**  
by the **Greek Section of IBBY**

-**IX Compostela Prize 2016** for picturebooks  
for the book **“Una última carta”** by A. Papatheodoulou (Kalandraka Editorial)  
[http://www.santiagodecompostela.gal/hoxe/nova.php?id\\_nova=15235&lg=ing](http://www.santiagodecompostela.gal/hoxe/nova.php?id_nova=15235&lg=ing)

-**IBBY Greece Illustrated Book Award 2017** and **EBGE Praise 2017**  
for the book **“Summer, Autumn, Winter, Spring, Summer...”** by A. Pipini (Patakis Publishers)

-**Greek State Picturebook Award** and **IBBY Greece Illustrated book Award 2016**  
for the book **“The Magic World of Federico”** by S. Trivizas (Diaplasia Books)

-**Greek State Picturebook Award** and **IBBY Greece Illustrated Book Award 2012**  
for the book **“The Good and the Bad Pirates”** by A. Papatheodoulou (Papadopoulos Publishing)

-**IBBY Greece Illustrated book Award 2015** and **IBBY Honor List**  
for the book **“Badboy”** by A. Darlasi (Patakis Publishers)

- **IBBY Honor List 2014**  
for the book **“Odyssey, the Ingenious Story”** by M. Angelidou (Vivliofono Books)

- **DIVAZO Illustrated Children’s Book Award 2014**  
for the book **“Grandma in the Fridge”** by V. Mastori (Psychogios Publications)

-**EBGE Praise 2012** for the illustration of the book  
**“The Good and the Bad Pirates”** by A. Papatheodoulou  
(Papadopoulos Publishing)

- **EBGE Praise 2011** for the  
cover illustration of the book  
**“The Tree that Had Wings”**  
by A. Darlasi  
(Papadopoulos Publishing)

- **IBBY Greece Illustrated  
Book Award 2008** for the book  
**“The Cuckoo’s Awakening”**  
by M. Sfakianopoulou  
(Taxideftis Publishing)

- **IBBY Greece Illustrated  
Book Award 2006** for the book  
**“A Tale of Tables Turned ”**  
by M. Sfakianopoulou  
(Taxideftis Publishing)

From the book  
“CENTO GIANNI RODARI”  
“Ascensore per le stelle”  
Einaudi Ragazzi 2019

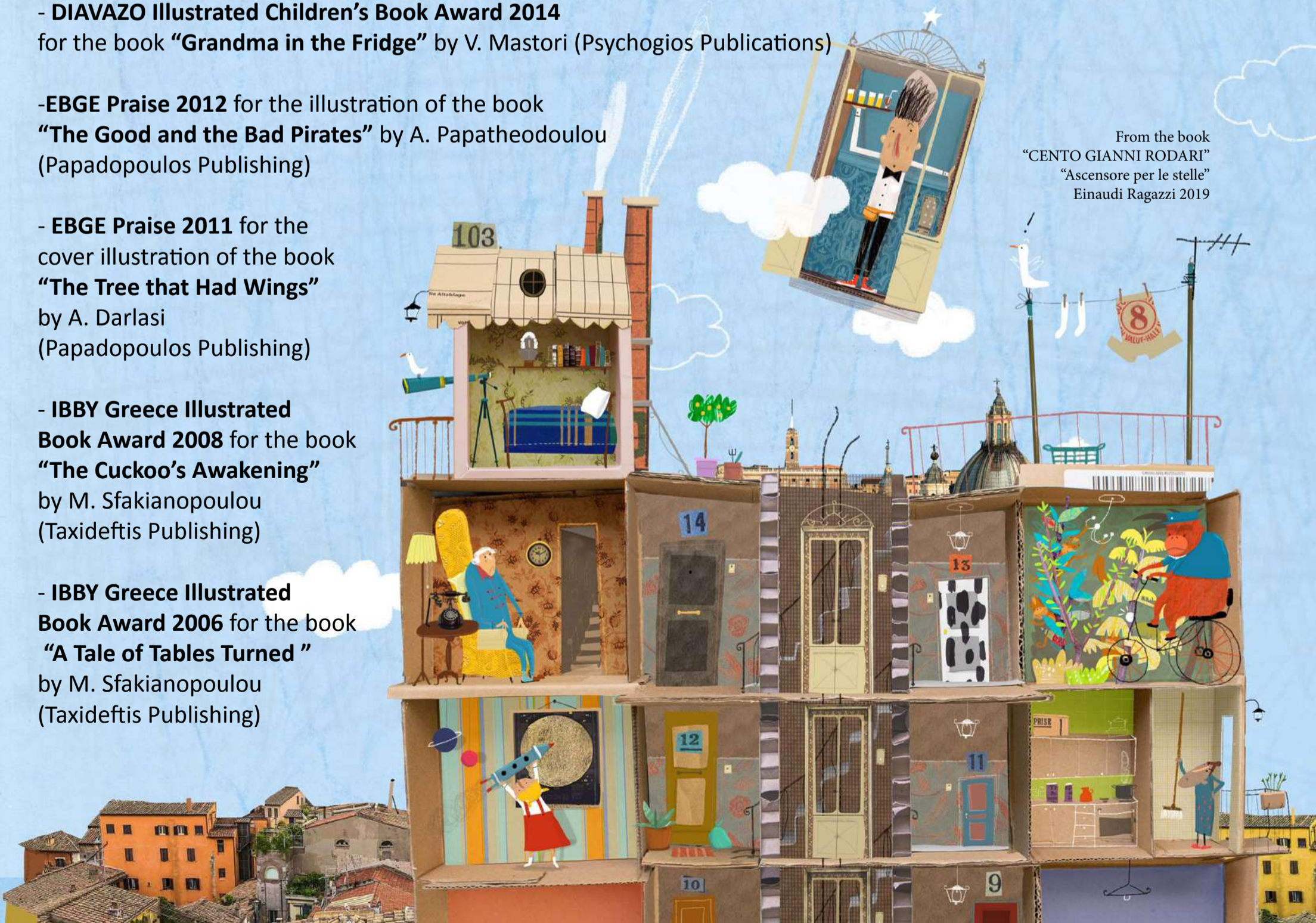




Illustration for the IBBY Greece  
2019 Christmas Greetings card

## Exhibitions

01/20

Group Exhibition: A Child's World  
organised by the Network for Children's Rights  
at Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center

12/19

Exhibition based on the book "Once Upon a Bear"  
Teloglion Foundation Thessaloniki

04/19

Bologna Children's Bookfair  
"Paper Bag Stories" workshop

02-03/19

The Children Gaze. The Artists Illustrate.  
OPANDA

10/2018

"Home"  
Myrtillo, Athens

09/2015

Bibiana- Biennial of Illustrations, Bratislava

12/2015

"Fairytale Snowflakes"  
M.Cacoyannis Foundation, Athens

05/2013

"Draw me a book"  
lanos Art Gallery, Athens

04/2009

"Authentic Illustration"  
Calliope Art Gallery, Chios- Greece

05/2008

"Greek Design- 50 Years of Vakalo School"  
Benaki Museum, Athens

10/2003

TRASH ART, Gazi- Athens

06/2002

TRASH ART, Bios- Athens

# Bibliography

2020

- **"Tata??"** - Ikaros Books - Greece
- **"Tell, tell a Story"** (by M. Papayanni) - Patakis Publishers - Greece
- **"When the Sun Goes to Bed"** (by A. Pipini) - Martis Books - Greece
- **"Pablo A Canvas of Memories"** (by A. Sergis) - Psychogios Publications - Greece
- **"Black Beauty Or A Book Written in the Language of Horses"** (A. Sewell- adaptation: A. Papatheodoulou) - Papadopoulos Publishing - Greece
- **"Dr Dolittle Or The man who spoke the Animal language!"** (H.Lofting- adaptation: A. Papatheodoulou) - Papadopoulos Publishing - Greece
- **"Mowgli Or The Man's Cub"** (R. Kipling- adaptation: A. Papatheodoulou) - Papadopoulos Publishing - Greece

2019

- **"Léon Millequestions"** (by A. Papatheodoulou) - Langue Au Chat - Belgium
- **Cento Gianni Rodari - "Ascensore per le Stelle"** - Einaudi Ragazzi
- **"Little Women Or A Tale About Four Real-Life Girls"** (L. M. Alcott - adaptation: A. Papatheodoulou) - Papadopoulos Publishing - Greece
- **"The Robinson Crusoe School"** (J. Verne - adaptation: A. Papatheodoulou) - Papadopoulos Publishing - Greece
- **"Alice in Wonderland or Curiouser and Curiouser"** (L. Carroll - adaptation: A. Papatheodoulou) - Papadopoulos Publishing - Greece
- **"Children on the move"** ( By A.Papatheodoulou) - Unicef & Department for the Protection & promotion of Children's Rights of the Greek Ombudsman

2018

- **"Level Up"** (by A. Papatheodoulou) - Papadopoulos Publishing - Greece
- **"Blue Circle Society"** (by A. Papatheodoulou) - Papadopoulos Publishing - Greece
- **"Don't Read This, Please"** (by D. Bogdanos) - Metaichmio Publications - Greece
- **"Once Upon a Bear"** (by E. Geroulanou) - Patakis Publishers - Greece
- **"Tom Sawyer Or the Largest Room in the World"** - (M.Twain - adaptation: A. Papatheodoulou) - Papadopoulos Publishing - Greece
- **"The Labours of Hercules"** Vol.1 - Vol. 2 (by M. Angelidou) - **Including Tales from the Greek Myths:** "The Capture of Cerberus" "The Apples of the Hesperides" - "The Cattle of Geryon" - "The Lernaean Hydra" - "The Stables of Augeas" - "The Girdle of Hippolyta" etc. - Metaichmio Publications - Greece
- **"Side by Side"** (by T. Papaioannou) - Ikaros books - Greece
- **"On Ellie's Wavy Sea"** (by A. Papatheodoulou) - Papadopoulos Publishing - Greece

2017

- **"The Mermaid"** (by A. Darlasi) - Metaichmio Publications - Greece
- **"The Yellow Buoy"** (by T. Katsifi) - Ilivaton Books - Greece
- **"Five Weeks in a Balloon"** - Jules Verne Adventure Stories (adaptation: A. Papatheodoulou) - Papadopoulos Publishing - Greece
- **"The Prince's Promise"** (by V. Koutsiaris) - Kokkini Klosti Demeni Publishing - Greece
- **"From Heroes to Miracles"** - Journeys to Greek Mythology (by M. Angelidou) - Papadopoulos Publishing - Greece
- **"From Humans to Heroes"** - Journeys to Greek Mythology (by M. Angelidou) - Papadopoulos Publishing - Greece
- **"Stories about Bold Girls: 40 Unique Greek Women"** - Various artists - (by K. Schina) - Papadopoulos Publishing - Greece

2016

- **"Una última carta"** (by A. Papatheodoulou) - Kalandraka Editorial - Spain
- **"Summer, Autumn, Winter, Spring, Summer..."** (by A. Pipini) - Patakis Publishers - Greece
- **"Manolo, Manolito & Manouil"** (by M. Kontoleon) - Patakis Publishers - Greece
- **"Evita's Treasure"** (by E. Tsitiridou) - Kalendis Publications - Greece
- **"Robur the Conqueror"** - Jules Verne Adventure Stories (adaptation: A. Papatheodoulou) - Papadopoulos Publishing - Greece
- **"From Gods to Humans"** - Journeys to Greek Mythology (by M. Angelidou) - Papadopoulos Publishing - Greece
- **"The Beginning of the World"** - Journeys to Greek Mythology (by M. Angelidou) - Papadopoulos Publishing - Greece

2015

- **"20,000 Leagues Under the Sea"** - Jules Verne Adventure Stories (adaptation: A. Papatheodoulou) - Papadopoulos Publishing - Greece
- **"Love Up to the Sky"** (by N. Sakka-Nikolakopoulou) - Patakis Publishers - Greece
- **"Across"** (by T. Papaioannou) - Ikaros Books - Greece
- **"From the Earth to the Moon"** - Jules Verne Adventure Stories (adaptation: A. Papatheodoulou) - Papadopoulos Publishing - Greece
- **"Erotokritos"** - V. Kornaros (adaptation: by K. Mouriki and I. K. Tzioti) Diaplasi Books - Greece
- **"The Lady with the Camels"** (by M. Sfakianopoulou) - Patakis Publishers - Greece
- **"The Magic World of Federico"** (by S. Trivizas) - Diaplasi Books - Greece
- **"Journey to the Centre of the Earth"** - Jules Verne Adventure Stories (adaptation: A. Papatheodoulou) - Papadopoulos Publishing - Greece

- 2014
- **"Upside Down"** (by T. Papaioannou) - Ikaros Books - Greece
  - **"Me and my Sister"** (by L. Sotiropoulou) - Metaichmio Publications- Greece
  - **"Tales from a realm still not extinct"** - (by E. Bakogerorgou) - Patakis Publishers - Greece
  - **"Stories that the Rock Told You"** (by M. Angelidou) - Metaichmio Publications - Greece
  - **"Stories that the Light Told You"** (by M. Angelidou) - Metaichmio Publications - Greece
  - **"Around the World in 80 Days"** - Jules Verne Adventure Stories (adaptation: A. Papatheodoulou) - Papadopoulos Publishing - Greece
  - **"Music Tales"** (by L. Lambrelli) - Patakis Publishers- Greece
  - **"Badboy"** (by A. Darlasi) - Patakis Publishers - Greece
  - **"I Want to Become a Magician"** (by G. Alexandrou) - Psychogios Publications - Greece

- 2013
- **"Oh, those Parents"** (by M. Tsitas) - Psychogios Publications - Greece
  - **"Grandma in the Fridge"** (by V. Mastori) - Psychogios Publications - Greece
  - **"Stories that the Road Told You"** (by M. Angelidou) - Metaichmio Publications - Greece
  - **"Stories that the Market Told You"** (by M. Angelidou) - Metaichmio Publications - Greece
  - **"Manolo & Manolito"** (by M. Kontoleon) - Patakis Publishers - Greece
  - **"The Good and the Bad Witches"** (by A. Papatheodoulou) - Papadopoulos Publishing - Greece
  - **"Tiribibim, the Colour Knight"** (by G. Mihail) - Diaplas Books - Greece
  - **"The Magic Violin"** (by M. Grammatikaki) - Kalendis Publications - Greece

- 2012
- **"Stories that the Sea Told You"** (by M. Angelidou) - Metaichmio Publications - Greece
  - **"Stories that the War Told You"** (by M. Angelidou) - Metaichmio Publications - Greece
  - **"Where did all the bats go?"** (by S. Mihail) - Metaichmio Publications- Greece
  - **"The Little Weaver of Words"** (by A. Papatheodoulou) - Metaichmio Publications - Greece
  - **"The Good and the Bad Knights"** (by A. Papatheodoulou) - Papadopoulos Publishing - Greece
  - **"Do I Get to Tell a Tale?"** (by A. Mertzani) Apopeira Books - Greece

- 2011
- **"Who does everything right?"** (by S. Georgiadi) - Diaplas Books - Greece
  - **"Odyssey, the Ingenious Story"** (by M. Angelidou) - Vivliofono Books - Greece
  - **"The Good and the Bad Pirates"** (by A. Papatheodoulou) - Papadopoulos Publishing - Greece

- 2010
- **"The Live Robot"** (by N. Sakka-Nikolakopoulou) - Patakis Publishers - Greece
  - **"Kelly, the Little Wasp"** (by A. Florou) - Tetragono - Greece
  - **"The Letters are Dancing"** (by M. Rousaki) - Papadopoulos Publishing - Greece
  - **"The Tree that Had Wings"** (by A. Darlasi) - Papadopoulos Publishing - Greece
  - **"Singalong: Traditional Tales"** (by P. Tsarouhas) - Diaplas Books - Greece
  - **"Singalong: Seasons and Months"** (by Y. Sergi) - Diaplas Books - Greece

- 2009
- **"Flying to Umbrelland"** (by S. Georgiadi) - Diaplas books- Greece
  - **"Getting Terrific with Terrific Tales"** (by K. Mouriki) - Diaplas books - Greece
  - **"Planet Earth Sends an SOS"** (by F. Alexopoulou) - Papadopoulos Publishing - Greece

- 2008
- **"The Fox and the Sparrow"** (by H. Karaiskou) - Diaplas Books - Greece
  - **"The Tree of Lies"** (by M. Angelidou) - Papadopoulos Publishing - Greece
  - **"The First Flower"** (by M. Kontoleon) - Patakis Publishers - Greece
  - **"The Last Leaf"** O'Henry - Papadopoulos Publishing - Greece
  - **"The Lost Alphabet"** (by Z. Skalidi- F. Tsampra) - Stratis Publishing - Greece
  - **"The Island of Numbers"** (by Z. Skalidi- F. Tsampra) - Stratis Publishing - Greece
  - **"Rubbish Stories"- "Electric Stories"- "Back to Nature"- "A Dolphin in our Living Room"** (by E. Svoronou) Papadopoulos Publishing - Greece
  - **"Christmas Honey and Butter Cookies in Action"** (by M. Theodoraki) - Diaplas Books - Greece
  - **"12 Christmas Presents"** (Various artists and writers) - Papadopoulos Publishing - Greece

- 2007
- **"Marianna, the Flying Girl"** (by V. Iliopoulos) - Patakis Publishers - Greece
  - **"The Cuckoo's Awakening"** (by M. Sfakianopoulou) - Taxideftis Publishing - Greece

- 2006
- **"On a Theatre Stage..."** (by P. Tomopoulou and K. Matiatou) - Kedros Publishers - Greece
  - **"The Christmas Starfish"** (by L. Vasileiou) - Kedros Publishers- Greece

- 2005
- **"A Tale of Tables Turned"** (by M. Sfakianopoulou) Taxideftis Publishing - Greece
  - **"The Journey of Mantinos"** (by A. Kanakari) Diigisi Editions - Greece

- 2004
- **"The Shoe Craftsman"** (by Z. Spiropoulou) Taxideftis Publishing - Greece
  - **"Mantinos in Dreamland"** (by A. Kanakari) Diigisi Editions - Greece



Illustration for the Little Bookstore Day 2020

# A Statement

on the candidate's contribution  
to literature for young people



From the book "Badboy"  
Patakis Publishers- 2014

by **Angela Giannikopoulou**

Professor of Children's Literature  
Department of Preschool Education  
National and Kapodistrian University of Athens

**Iris Samartzi** made her appearance on the Greek literary scene in 2004 with her illustrations for *The Shoe Craftsman [O Galetzás]* by Zoe Spyropoulou (Taxideftis Publications). Since then, Iris has illustrated over 80 children's books for Greek and international publishers and has won coveted Greek and international awards. At present, the Greek Section of IBBY (which had selected her in 2020 as well) has nominated her for the 2022 Hans Christian Andersen Award (HCAA). As an illustrator, Iris Samartzi stands out for the great respect with which she vests the texts

she illustrates. Instead of applying a uniform, across-the-board genre and of employing a repetitive technique reproduced as a distinct "signature" style, she experiments with a vast gamut of textures and techniques, colors and forms, materials and graphic designs, always guided by the narrative particularities of each story's plot. No wonder that the books she illustrates exhibit discrete differences, refusing to succumb to the callowness of the convenient, a practice that often leads to illustrations which are almost identical whether they regard a realistic story of a child's everyday life or a narrative featuring a digital theme and virtual reality characters.

It goes without saying, that digital themes necessitate illustrations which will depict within the all-too-limited space a book provides, the optics of computers, transferring familiar digital writing codes to the printed communication's environment which is unfamiliar with them. Case in point, her illustrations for the book **Level Up** by Antonis Papatheodoulou which spins the story of two, autonomous characters of a video game vying between them to win a series of battles with a view to moving to a higher level. In this ingeniously illustrated picture book, Iris Samartzi, fully honoring the digital environment in which the plot takes place, crafts illustrations which give the impression of pixilated images and creates multicolored compositions which mimic the ambience of digital games. On book pages whose very design reflects computer screens, heroes and monsters alike draw on computer games. In an equally digital style, all scenes illustrated are festooned with scattered lights and a multitude of onomatopoeic sound effects which, on the silent image, become alive as resounding "Plinks!" Moreover, the architectural design of electronic games is not confined to the illustrations. It extends beyond them to the graphic style of the written text which, in print, appears pixilated as well, and to the bookbinding elements surrounding the text such as the flyleaf where a classic hourglass with the pixilated "Loading" indication acts as the precursor of the narrative's plot and game. [https://issuu.com/iris\\_samartzi/docs/level\\_up-epbooks](https://issuu.com/iris_samartzi/docs/level_up-epbooks)

Also indicative of the unusual angle from which Iris Samartzi views each text is the way she smiths her illustrations of children, defying the oversimplified rationale of applying a crushing uniformity throughout. On the contrary, as the concept of childhood becomes a social construct and alters depending on the times and those times' social conditions, the children in Iris Samartzi's books do not comply with any uniform illustrating standard: to raise awareness over the different ways each society views them, Samartzi ensures that their depiction visibly differs from book to book.

For that reason, in the books that deal with the contemporary, prosperous Western societies which view the child not only as a harbinger of the future but also appreciate it for its beauty, innocence, and the hope with which the child endows the present, the children's spontaneity and guilelessness, placed under conditions which may well be considered child-centric, assume epic dimensions. One such case is the book **On Ellie's Wavy Sea** by Antonis Papatheodoulou: Ellie, a girl of today, enjoys the attention all children deserve. In illustrations inundated with Ellie's streaming, curly, red hair -a resourceful way to bring Ellie's emotions forth not by promoting her facial expressions but by setting the emphasis on her thick, striking hair- Samartzi illustrates the conceptual proximity between emotion and an unruly mane. In that way, she succeeds in showing Ellie's psychological ebb and flow through the girl's flowing hair.

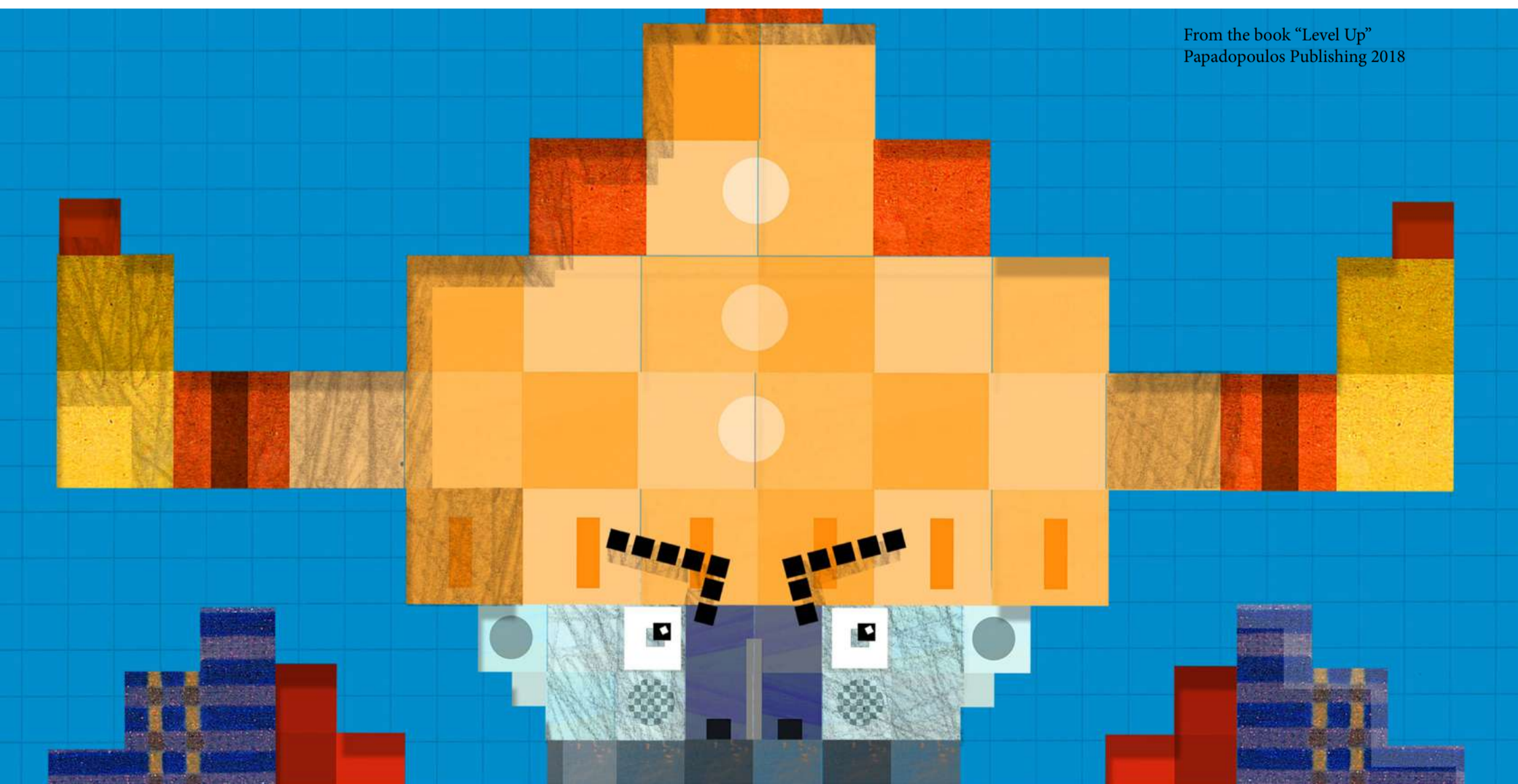
In **Ellie's Wavy Sea**, the illustrations establish on Ellie's hair a small world of its own, complete with seas, urban centers, and ports, a world that moves to the rhythm of Ellie's behavior and breathes to the beat of her moods. Ships and shores feel the vibrations of her bouts of anger, enjoy the serenity of her tranquil moments, and experience the elation of Ellie's enthusiasm in a world which closely observes her psychological ups and downs. On the book's pages, Samartzi unfolds a universe which is defined and governed by a child, a girl who, despite the fact that she is supremely unaware of her power, basks in the full entitlement gladly given her by a contemporary society.

However, Samartzi's illustrating style veers to the dramatic in the award-winning book **Badboy: from the Streets to the Symphonic** by Angeliki Darlasi. The book regards the Youth and Children's Orchestras established by José Antonio Abreu under the El Sistema program in Venezuela. It tells the story of a boy who dwells in the slums, the favelas, but manages to leave behind his peer groups' delinquent behavior thanks to music. In this book, Samartzi's illustrations define from a wholly different angle childhood which, in the case of favela dwellers, seems to remain the luxury of the well-to-do and the entitled: In the shantytowns of the impoverished, the children are no more than miniature adults who, as dispensable as their adult counterparts, are thrown into the inexorable battle of survival early on. That is why the members of the two communities, the one of adults and the one of the privileged, are portrayed by the book's illustrations as figures which have no features or weight: they are hollow, blank outlines manifesting absence. The children of abject poverty remain the children of a lesser god. They belong nowhere. Hurlled into an unjust world, they struggle to become part of something, to hold on to somewhere, just like the image that precedes the story which shows an unidentified child, a plain, featureless outline, which tries to form an attachment with an environment where, to all intents and purposes, it belongs not. Still, that unidentified child's yearning is of such magnitude that it perseveres, trying again and again to "stick" to somewhere, even if the means towards doing so are sticky tape or two pieces of strapping tape securing bandages, precisely like the ones used on visible bodily wounds.

By now, it has become clear that even the most cursory glance at the books illustrated by Samartzi confirms that the illustrator achieves visual pluralism through a range of graphic designs, techniques, compositions, and materials which alter depending on the style and uniqueness of each one of her books.

Collage, be it 'traditional' or digital, appears to be one of the illustrator's favorite techniques which she uses frequently mostly because she firmly believes that it is a good fit for children. The results are always exceptionally and visually pleasing.

From the book "Level Up"  
Papadopoulos Publishing 2018







In illustrating **Una última carta** [One Last Letter] by Antonis Papatheodoulou, Samartzi endows collage with the nature of an impressive and explicitly functional tool. Tiny boxes, scraps of paper, paperclips, pieces of cardboard, fabric, and leaves in lieu of trees compose the breathtaking Mediterranean setting of a Greek island. What is more, in order to stress the book's theme and showcase the social contribution of the mailman to the Greek communities of yore, Samartzi employed as her leading props, an array of stationery papers, postage stamps, stamp seals, envelopes, and photos, vesting the story with compelling credibility and showcasing the nostalgia of a rich, postal culture panorama. Crowning it all is the collage of the central figure, the mailman, crafted with the familiar post office envelopes trimmed in blue & white, the tan brown shipping paper used by the Greek postal service, and postage stamps. In that manner, the figure of the mailman becomes a constant reminder of his full association with his role. Mr. Costas, the mailman in One Last Letter may well be an ordinary postman but one who viewed his task as an office of the highest rank, thus maintaining open the communication channel of a remote, isolated island with the outside world.

In other instances, when photography seems to be the most appropriate medium for rendering the illustrations of a children's book, Samartzi does not hesitate to use it as her basis in order to create a visual cornucopia with express references to reality. In the book **Once upon a Bear** by Eleni Geroulanou, the setting of the "road trip" the small teddy bear takes to get home, comprises the actual exhibits of the Benaki Toy Museum which play a key role in a variety of settings: at the port, the farm, the railway station, the theater, the country fair, the mom & pop grocery store, settings which all lead to the final image of the easily recognizable Toy Museum building at Paleo Faliro and the picture of sweet Maria Argyriadi who bequeathed her toy collection to the Benaki Museum, thus making the dream of a toy museum come true. The intense intervisuality of the illustrated text, which allows the museum's actual exhibits to be ushered in a fantastical setting and participate in a fictional narrative, functions as a powerful promotion and discreet way of showcasing a magical museum whose premises are superbly fairylife.

Without a doubt, Iris Samartzi is fond of experimentation: undaunted, she steadily tries to discover new routes of expression even if they deal with new, innovative forms (the book **A Tale of Tables Turned** is a good example of that). Nevertheless, despite the fact that Samartzi adopts a dizzying range of styles and techniques with a view to bringing out the special character of each text she illustrates, her illustrations share common elements which act as her own recognizable signature.

In all the children's books she illustrates, Samartzi creates images which do not merely "translate" the written text into a visual code but enrich it with elements and details which engage in constant conversation with it.

More importantly, beyond establishing the words in images, she forges on to strengthen the overall spirit in which each story is written. In that vein, in the book **The Good and the Bad Knights**, where the ferocity of the evil knights is voided thanks to the indifference with which the good Knights treat them, the threat of the wicked knights "We're coming for you, we've got spears, crossbows and arrows, slingshots, catapults, and a launcher," is accompanied by the illustration of a catapult which, instead of massive boulders, launches... tomatoes! The depiction of the bad knights, instead of being stamped with the clear and present danger in their threatening words, expresses a strong tendency towards parody which goes hand in hand with the plot's humorous tone. <https://www.irissamartzi.com/thegoodandthebadpirates>

As an illustrator, Samartzi proves particularly sensitive when it comes to color: her requisite is that color should always convey the tone and mood of the text it accompanies. For example, in the **Yellow Buoy** by Theodora Katsifi, the domination of blue, which literally defines the seascape of action, and of red, which metaphorically flags a happy childhood, is challenged by the dazzling yellow of the buoy which personifies a wish. As the buoy/wish gradually grows into a fixation, it bathes with its luminosity all of the objects in the child's surroundings: the bed, the nightstand, the bedding, the chair, the swimsuit. Samartzi, by aggressively spreading the yellow color throughout, reveals yet another time her intention to place the visual arsenal of her illustrations at the disposal of the narrative. <https://www.irissamartzi.com/theyellowbuoy>

It needs to be said that Samartzi's illustrating technique is characterized by the pluralistic spirit by which the setting is dealt with. That spirit, apart from serving the expected showcasing of a community (see One Last Letter), it also enriches the story by weaving a complete and rounded profile for each character. In the book **Don't Read This, Please** by Dimitris Bogdanos, the mysterious affinity of the central character with the circus functions as the catalyst that sets the plot's fairylife universe in motion. As of the outset, the culture of the circus world is emphasized through the details of the illustration in each setting which directly allude to the circus. Everywhere around the home of the odd old man the readers look, the wondrous sphere of the circus is there: it is evident in the various circus trappings such as the trampoline and the unicycle; on the small table in the courtyard; and, above all, in the interior of the old man's home, portrayed in the penultimate double spread: the posters on the wall, the tiger-shaped salt & pepper shakers, the clown hat resting on the table, the armchair's upholstery, the quaint lampshade, the fruit bowl shaped like a seal, and the dishes in the sink acrobatically balanced atop each other. In that very same book, there is another element of Samartzi's illustrating style meriting a mention: a series of mute characters, mostly small animals are set in the background. Apart from serving as a game for the children to try and spot the silent figures in every double spread, they enrich the written text with minute, visual details which follow the myth as it unfolds. Another example in the same book of such details of technique is the white seagull. It appears in the book's pages when the kind, old man is absent from them, thus serving as his alter ego. In that way, the seagull extends the old man's presence essentially rendering the discreet benefactor ubiquitous through his altruistic actions.

Equally important to Samartzi is the metaphorical function of the settings which often assume intense elements of characterology revealing the central character's personality. Thus, in **Around the World in 80 Days**, on the pages depicting the quarters in which the eccentric, stickler-for-punctuality, very-model-of-an-Englishman Phileas Fogg lives and moves, there is a theme that seems to be compulsively repeated. It entails the presence of a series of clocks first evident on the façade of Fogg's residence –in fact, the façade itself is shaped like a clock- and then visible in the rooms and on the walls. The clock theme also reveals itself long before the reader opens the book: in the book's title the letter 'o' of the word "around" is replaced by a pocket watch! In that manner, Samartzi ensures that the trait of the story's hero for punctuality has been fully rendered.

Another distinct trait of Samartzi's art as an illustrator is her interest in all the peripheral components of a book. She is the one who, apart from meticulously curating the book title's design and the book's boards (covers), also tends to book elements which are less visible such as the initial and final endsheets. Those comprise the flyleaves, which remain loose and close to the book block, and the pastedown, which is attached to each book board. Quite often, Samartzi ensures that the endsheets are a visual summary of each story with the beginning endsheets flagging the story's starting point and the final endsheets marking the story's outcome.

The illustrator's attention is also captured by the form of the written text, as seen in the interesting series of books **The Good and the Bad Knights/Pirates/Witches** by Antonis Papatheodoulou and published by Papadopoulos Publishing. In the series, the printed words abandon the "automatic black" uniformity of the ordinary font and are studded with a wealth of illustrating elements which enthrone a causal relationship between the signified and the signifier. Classic elements from the world of witches and the witches' favorite paraphernalia such as pointed hats, magic cauldrons, and flying brooms illustratively erode the form of the words referring to those objects, forming a clever mosaic of snapshots of a fairytale society of bad as well as good witches.

Many are the categories of texts that Samartzi has illustrated throughout the years. Indeed, the extraordinary way in which she approaches each category is truly fascinating.

**History:** Iris Samartzi has illustrated many times a book with a historical content. In the series **Stories that the Rock/War/Sea/Road/Market/Light Told You** by Maria Angelidou, Samartzi inevitably came face to face with the key questions/challenges that the illustrated historical books addressed to children have posed for illustrators throughout time.

In the case of historical children's books, the illustrator is called upon to deal with the difficulties involved in promoting the truth of the historical events narrated in books which do not hesitate to label themselves "historical fairytales": after all, a historical book for children must deal with the pivotal area occupied by the historical literary narrative which, as a genre, unavoidably swings between myth and historic fact.

To respond to the fact that a historical literary text requires that the veracity of events be showcased, Iris Samartzi often chooses photographs as her medium towards a visual narrative. After all, photographs enjoy a high level of credibility and, as the saying goes, "a photograph never lies". She casts realistic painting in a similar role as, by mimicking photographs, realistic painting results in documenting the truth of the events narrated. In a like manner, the portrayal of archaeological finds, such as a funerary mask or a Mycenaean breastplate act as the foundation of a composition, with the figure of the King of the Atreidae being a good example. Using complementary techniques, Samartzi adroitly builds up that foundation so as to allow for the

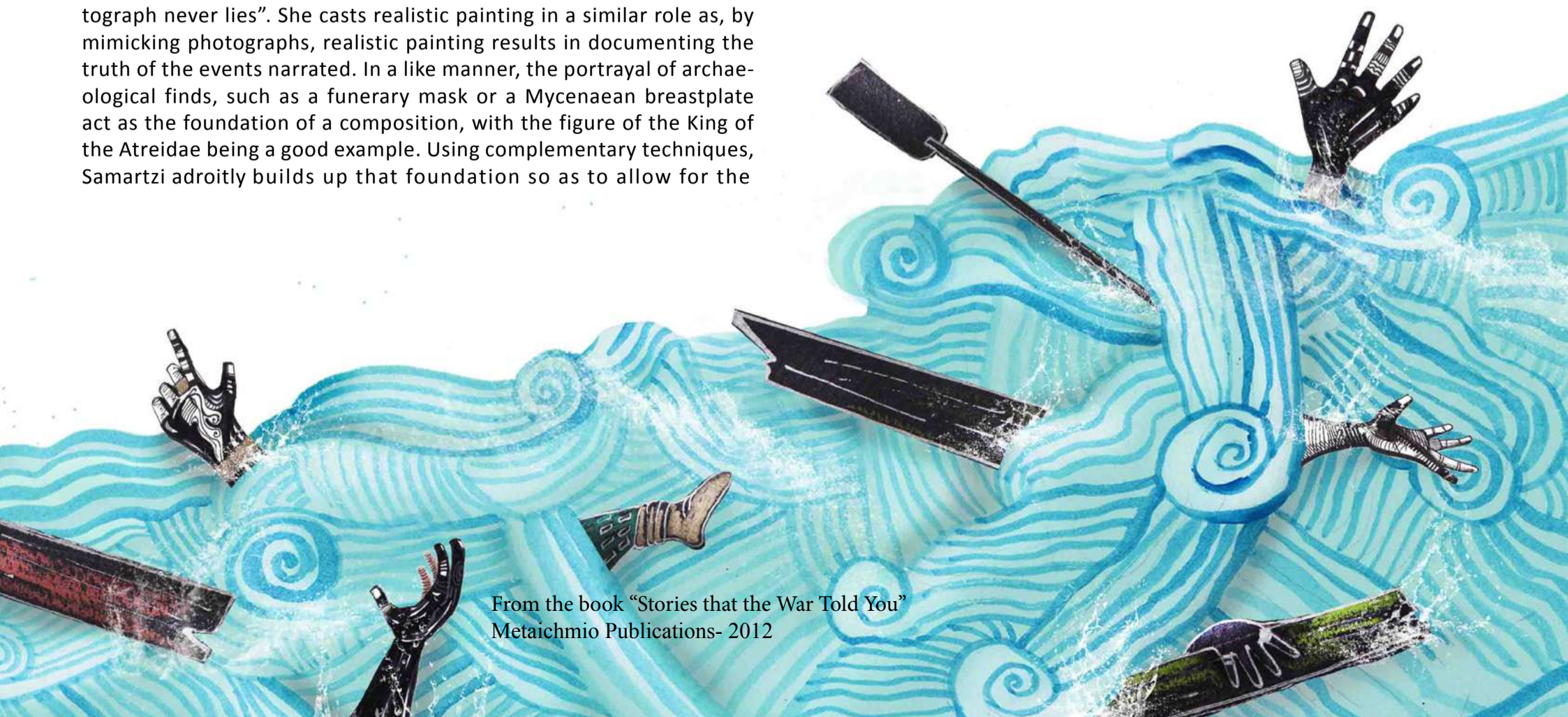
reformulation of autonomous segments of the past and, thus, visually reproduce the way History itself is made: the gaps found in historical sources are filled by a less "objective" view and interpretation.

Similarly interesting is the way that Samartzi regroups the image of historic personages. She often goes for metaphorical depictions so as to showcase their instrumental role in History rather than the key traits of their personality. Thus, Alexander the Great, who has remained in History as a great conqueror, is illustrated wearing a cloak made of images of the cities he conquered. In a similar manner, the unbridled ambition of the Athenian statesman Alcibiades is highlighted when the illustrator depicts him climbing up the walls –and fortunes- of Athens, his own city, which he uses as a stepping stone so as to climb even higher. In another illustration, Alcibiades is conspicuously absent but the direction the traces of his footsteps leave behind shows him quickly abandoning the "straight and narrow", wandering off towards the murky paths of exile and treason. <https://www.irissamartzi.com/storieswartoldyou>

Yet, there is another obstacle that the illustrator of a historical book for children has to scale: the inherent conflict between depicting horrific and gruesome facts, such as battles or bodies lying lifeless on the battlefield, and addressing a readership which, by definition, is vulnerable and sensitive. That hard-to-solve quandary is often dealt with by Samartzi through her choice of employing a minimalistic visual narrative which simply implies death instead of interpreting it realistically. For the naval battle of Salamis (Stories that the War Told You), Samartzi crafts illustrations which are brimful of minimal allusions: above the turbulent waves of a raging sea, hands whose skin is a somewhat faded ink-black –a color literally referring to the drowning sailors' origin and, symbolically, alluding to their grim destiny- are raised in a final adieu or even protest. The illustrations for the Battle of Thermopylae are also minimalistic and "unobtrusive": empty helmets lie scattered throughout the battlefield connoting the death of the 300 Spartans. Next to each helmet is a number, from one to three hundred. (Stories that the War Told you). Isn't that exactly what always happens with war and its toll? Fathers and husbands, men of flesh and blood, are turned into mere numbers: x number of dead and y number of wounded.

**Mythology:** Obviously, illustrations of a mythological content follow different rules than the illustrations of children's books laying claim to actual events. In the case of Greek mythology, the challenge is closely interwoven with the depiction of the wondrous, the transcendental, the lofty, all of which, despite the loss of their religious burden, should still be approached with respect so as to move, inspire, and enthrall. There are two such series of children's books that Samartzi has illustrated: one on behalf of Papadopoulos Publishing, and another one for Metaichmio Publications. Both series have been written by Maria Angelidou.

The actors in Greek mythology, gods and heroes, giants and monsters, all born from the bowels of the fantastic, are an almost overwhelming impediment for illustrators. Still, the alogical figures of myth are handled reverently by Samartzi who turns them into awe-inspiring and spellbinding beings. For instance, she illustrates the horses of Diomedes as strapping, haughty, and proud, with a wildness that makes their beauty undisputable.



From the book "Stories that the War Told You"  
Metaichmio Publications- 2012

She draws them magnificently large with a mane of braided arrows and places them in scenes where human beings, small by comparison and frightened, hide from the horses. In that manner, the illustrator brings her young readers closer to the concept of the horses' savage splendor (see **The Horses of Diomedes**). As to the overlords of the Underworld, Thanatos and Hades, Samartzi prefers to show them with their backs turned and stress only parts of them (e.g., Hades' garment), thus underlining the ignorance of humankind, then and now, as to the here and the hereafter (**The Capture of Cerberus**). <https://www.irissamartzi.com/laboursofhercules>

Running parallel with the actors of each myth, there are wondrous deeds and especially those which have withstood Time and contain the concept of eternity. Such myths prove a constant challenge for Iris Samartzi. She frequently finds herself having to confront with her illustrations the concept of shapeshifting as the human beings, animals, and gods in Greek myths may assume a different shape at any given moment. At times, she captures visually the crucial point when the shapeshifting takes place, illustrating figures where the "before" and "after" shapes co-exist, as in the case of the woman-tree hybrid in the etiological myth of Daphne (**Journeys to Greek Mythology: from Humans to Miracles**). At other times, the illustrations depicting the figures' earlier shape prepare the reader in advance about the shape to come. In that way shapeshifting assumes deterministic dimensions. An example of that type of illustrations by Samartzi can be seen in the figure of the mortal weaver Arachne (Gr: spider) whose hair and hands allude visually to the insect the woman Arachne will be turning into (**Journeys to Mythology: from Humans to Miracles**). One last technique that Samartzi employs when handling myths is to stress through her illustrations how transient transformation is: shapeshifting becomes skin-deep as it is incapable of depriving someone of his or her true nature: in **Journeys to Greek Mythology: the Beginning of the World**, the sea-god Proteus assumes one of his many shapes and turns into a swan but he still retains his divine persona promoted only through the attractive outline of a snowy bird. <https://www.irissamartzi.com/journeystogreekmythology>

Samartzi's illustrations become compelling even when her inventiveness serves a spurious interpretation of a myth. If we go by the claims that ancient stories are no more than poetic transcriptions of historical facts, then, in Samartzi's illustrations of Hercules, we recognize the collective effort by humankind to check the forces of nature and place them at its service. That view, is vibrantly present in the Herculean labor **The Stables of Augeas** as well as in the illustrations of **The Lernaean Hydra**, another Herculean labor. Given the etymological proximity of hydor, the Greek word for 'water', with Hydra, the Lernaean Hydra is a monster widely regarded as a mythological symbolism of the destructive power of water, a force difficult to harness. However many times one believes to be rid of it, water springs eternal and regenerated, flowing twice as fast and twice as uncontrollably.

The paired concepts Hydra-dangerous Waters, as a comment towards the interpretation of the myth, were showcased by Samartzi in **The Lernaean Hydra**: she creates twofold images of a monster fashioned like a choppy sea with twelve necks resembling threatening waves, and portrays Hercules confronting the sinister beast in a way that invokes images of people fighting against murky waters which rush forth to drown them.

**Adaptations:** classic novels demand that the illustrator handle them in a special way. In this case, the task of the illustrator to adapt such texts visually is arduous indeed: on the one hand she must make the age-old historical course of the original as clear as daylight, and, on the other, she needs to raise awareness over the significance the classics carry for present generations.

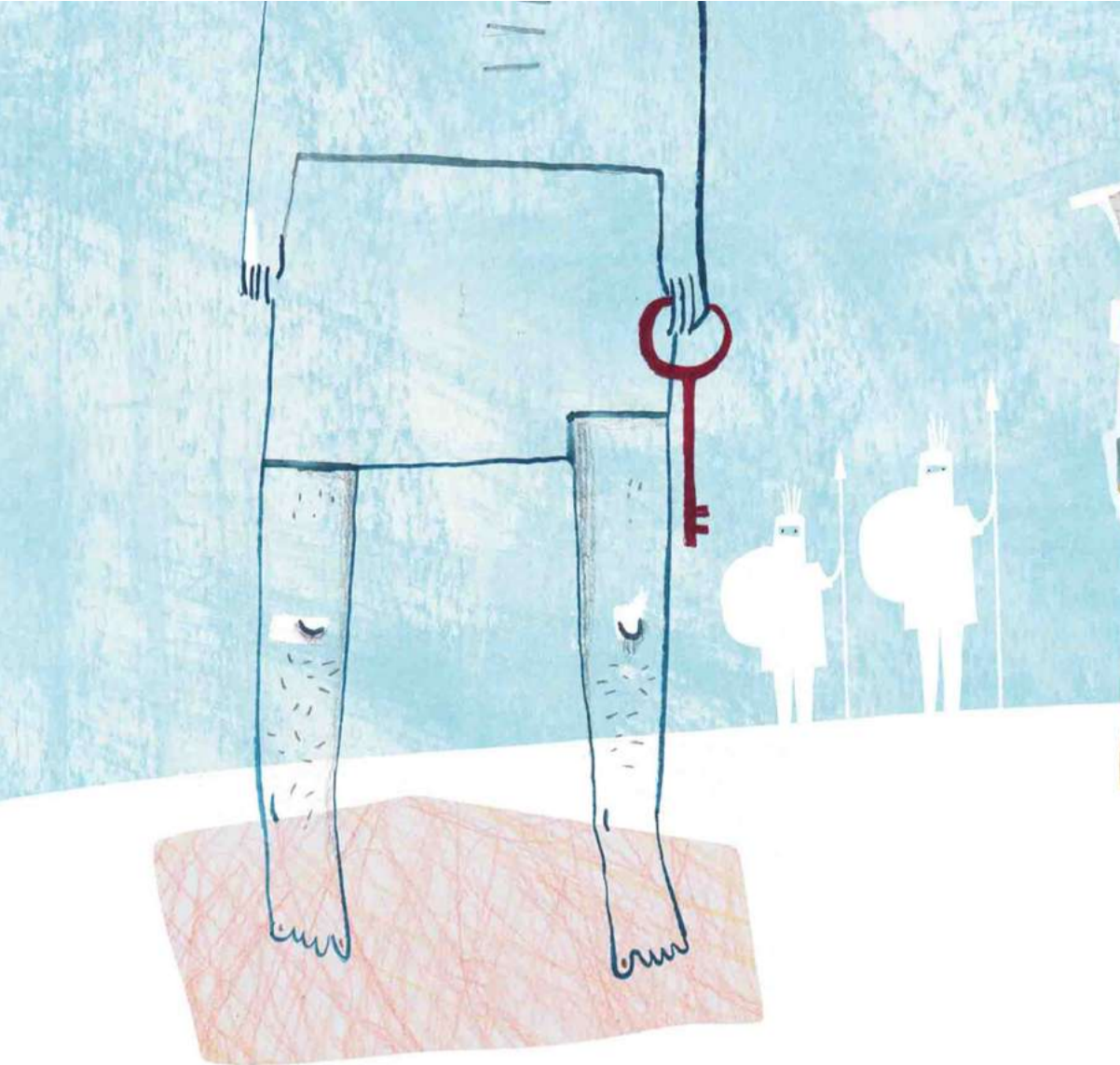
Iris Samartzi's illustrations allocate the visual narrative's center of gravity among various points in a plot, depending on the story her illustrations must spin. For the legend of the mermaid (**The Mermaid** by Angeliki Darlasi), a Greek folklore, traditional tale, the visual retelling must emphasize the legend's timelessness and folklore origins. Samartzi succeeds in doing so by using for the multicolored collages of her illustrations pieces of handmade embroideries. In the hands of Samartzi, grandma's embroidered table runners become foamy waves, a ship's sails, the mermaid's lace cap, underwater streamers, and even speech balloons which may well follow the graphic convention commonly used in comic books and cartoons but also transfer the lacy words of yore into a contemporary setting. Thus, the material Samartzi chooses to craft her illustrations with endows the adaptation of an old folk tale with a nostalgic mood and an old-fashioned mellowness.

Be that as it may, the illustrations of a story of olden times may have to shift their focus to the significance the story has for the present so as to underline the maxim that certain values remain unalterable throughout the ages. In that case, the emphasis is placed not so much on the space-and-time framework of the events and the difference between the settings then and now but on the central theme of the story which, despite being an old one, remains as current as ever.

In the adaptation of the popular, 17th-century romance **Eratokritos**, the visual narrative highlights the timelessness of true love, a value that transcends Time. To achieve that, Samartzi's illustrations focus on love and are anchored on motifs closely associated with it: a red apple; a promise ring; hearts; threads that bind the couple together; and, above all, moons which have always been the lovers' favorite. In fact, the moon is not encountered only in the adaptation's night skies and in the clandestine meetings of the two youths in love. It is also discernible on the faces of Erotokritos and AretoUSA as a waning crescent which desperately seeks completion (full moon) in the story's happy ending: a sweet kiss brings their two faces-moons together (the new and the waning one) to create a full moon, the sign of a love which is fulfilled at last. <https://www.irissamartzi.com/erotokritos>



From the book "The Labours of Hercules"  
Vol.1-"The Stables of Augeas"  
Metaichmio Publications - Greece  
2018

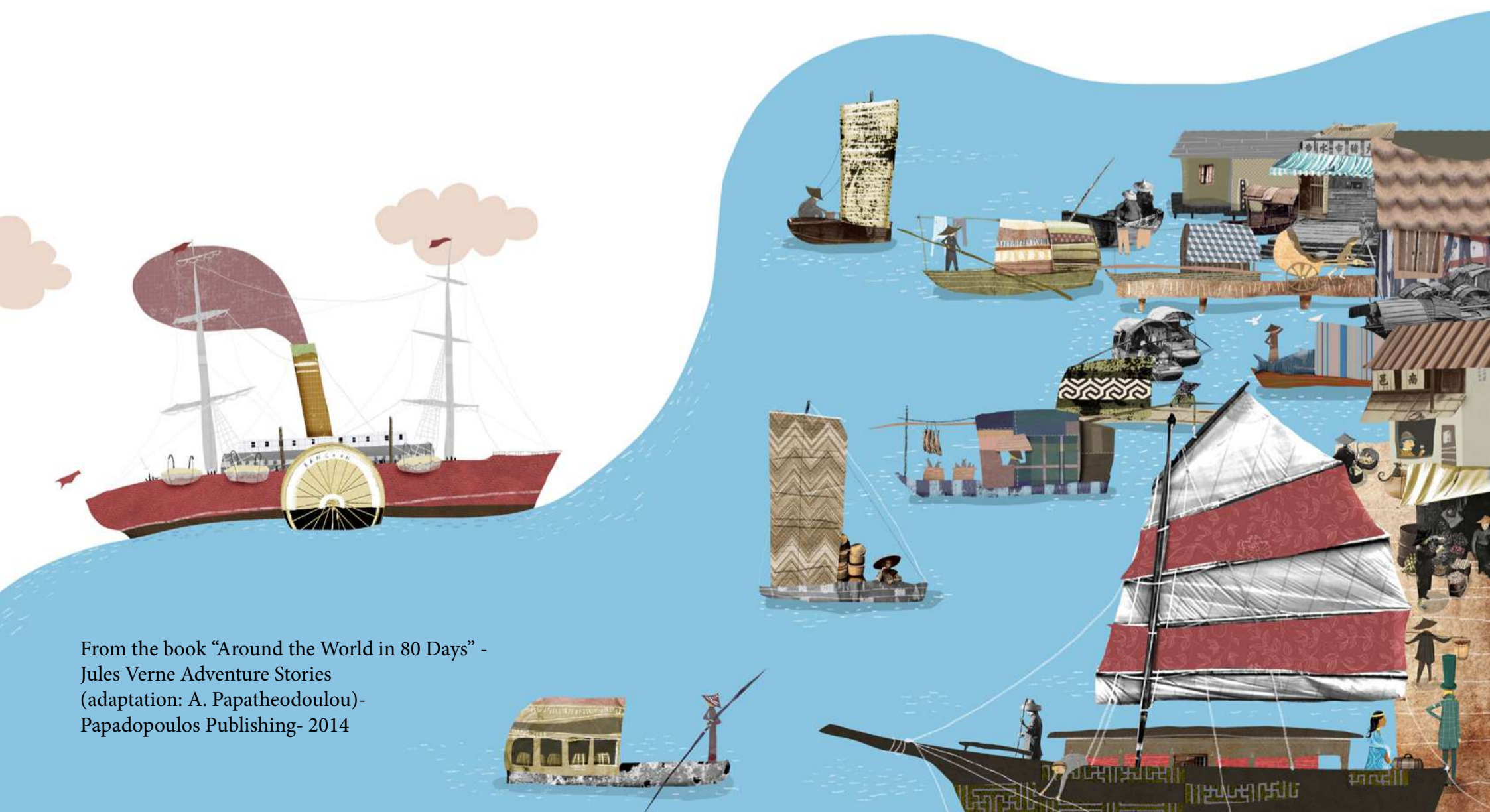


From the book "The Labours of Hercules"  
Vol.2-"The Mares of Diomedes"  
Metaichmio Publications - Greece- 2018

The adaptation of Jules Verne's adventure novels is treated differently by Samartzi. Here, her main goal is to showcase through her visual intervention the magic mechanical contraptions of a time when technological breakthroughs such as submarines, airplanes, and rockets were not commonplace but pure science fiction. So as to preserve the former prestige of *Around the World in 80 Days*, Samartzi crafts illustrations honoring the era in which the novel was written. She establishes it anew through a series of magical scenes overflowing with enchanting details which usher the children who read the book and view the illustrations into a marvelous and startling world. It is in that world that they can feel the magic once experienced by Phileas Fogg and Passepartout through feats which today's galloping pace of technology has made infinitely easier. To that end, in Samartzi's illustrations for the adaptation of this classic novel show ordinary objects converted into astonishing settings such as the suitcase in the first spread which turns into a Lilliputian theatrical stage.

The illustrations also serve as a game of discovery (a small monkey appears in each spread) and associations (the shadow of the last page's statue alludes to the land of the Native Americans), inviting their young readership to explore the absorbing world of Phileas Fogg and 'fiddle' with the secrets hidden in the illustrations. The pages of the book bring to life incredible traveling exploits which are spurred on by illustrations amplified through the addition of details hinting at a journey that is almost literally a 'map exercise': for instance, in the second spread, various transportation means are shown crisscrossing a world map whereas, in the third spread, a ship sails the 'tea' sea in Phileas' teacup and a train traverses the same world map.

In a book that fans the children's imagination over a trip around the world, the steady illustrating references on the map to travels, apart from being veiled indications of the story's fictional nature, sustain the sense that all journeys, including this one, have been, are, and will always be irresistible and astounding.



From the book "Around the World in 80 Days" -  
Jules Verne Adventure Stories  
(adaptation: A. Papatheodoulou)-  
Papadopoulos Publishing- 2014



## Interviews

## **"Art reminds us that we are not alone..."**

Iris Samartzi talks to Ioanna Giannakopoulou

Dec 04, 2020

*I admire people who mold the kind of universe I wish I were a part of. I wish I could wade in its waters, bask in its sun. Every time a book illustrated by Iris Samartzi comes out, I get that feeling. Each and every time, her work takes us to another world within our own world, to another possibility, to another version.*

*Those new universes of hers, delicately wrought, quiet, made with unexpected materials, fabric, paper, carton boxes, pencils, colors, lace, become the manifold reflections of our dreams; they become nostalgia, a quaint kind of nostalgia, for something we never experienced. We wade barefoot in the poetry of "Summer, Autumn, Spring, Winter, Summer"; in the playfulness of "Tell, tell a Story"; in the melancholy and the solitude or anguish that is Lorca; in all that has fallen through, the struggle of "Badboy". In some inexplicable way, it is the vastness in Samartzi's worlds that is sculpted even on staircases which are grayer and narrower. Working our way through them, we take a breath so we can plunge again towards the ocean floor of reality and be able to say "yes, things could be different".*

**- When did you start illustrating? Did you actively go after it? Was it the dream of a lifetime or did it just happen along the way?**

I've always been involved with illustrating in one way or another: at first, I did so as a young reader who pores for hours over the pictures of a book; it went on when I was a student, trying to break the code of what exactly illustrating is and what its media were. Now, I'm involved in illustrating as a professional who continues to be captivated by the power, the feelings, and the words hidden within a picture.

**- As a child, which was your favorite book?**

I couldn't get enough of Judy Brook's "Noah's Ark" because I loved, and still do, illustrations showing cross-sections. I also adored all of Alain Grée's "Little Tom" and "The Smashers" [Les Farfeluches] series, actually all books by Alain Grée, as well as those by Ali Mitgutsch for the endless hours of fun they gave me, when I would browse and look through them for details.

**- Have you recently read anything that you really liked?**

The most recent books I've read were "The History of Edible Books and Other Stories" translated by Konstantinos Paleologos (Gavriilidis Publications) and J.S. Foer's "Here I Am" (Kedros Publishers). But, apart from books for adults, it's been a few months that, patiently waiting on my nightstand, there sits the second book of the young adult sci-fi trilogy "Chaos Walking" by Patrick Ness (Patakis Publishers). As a member of the IBBY Awards Panel of Judges, I was swept away by the first book's setup and fast pace. That's why I wanted to find out how events unfold in the second book. Still, just as I said, it's there, patiently waiting: apart from actually having the time to read a book, you also need peace and quiet, and circumstances are not very helpful right now.

**- Was there someone in your family that you believe paved the way for what you became later?**

It was my parents, definitely, and my family home with its thousands of books, comic books, the wall-to-wall vinyl records. The room (actually my father's old office) where I did my homework looked to my eyes, the eyes of a child, like the National Library [of Greece] and my father like the librarian. Whenever I'd ask him about something, he knew what to answer and the right bookshelf to steer me to.



From the book  
"Five Weeks in a Balloon"  
Papadopoulos Publishing, 2017

**- Who are the artists that you consider as your influences?**

Enki Bilal, Hundertwasser, Gaudi, Mœbius, Basquiat, Dubuffet, Niki de Saint Phalle, Otto Dix, Klee, Kandinsky, Bosch, Escher, and many, many more. But as influences, I also consider the children I work with at the schools where I teach. With their energy and imagination, they're constantly leading me down new paths.

**- Who are the illustrators or artists you admire?**

Apart from Mitgutsch and Alain Grée I mentioned earlier, I also admire Carle, Serge Bloch, Einar Turkowski, Innocenti, Houliaras, Akrihakis, Opy Zuni, Shaun Tan, Oliver Jeffers, Olafur Eliasson, Peter Clark, Kyriakoulis, Hadjikyriakos-Gkikas, Maisie Paradise Shearring, Isabelle Arsenault, Albertine, Hervé Tullet, Carson Ellis, Victoria Semykina, Magali Le Huche, Tiziana Romanin, A.M. Azubel, Pintor...I could go on and on. My list doesn't end easily.

**- In your illustrations, various materials and techniques (collage with different color papers, photos, painting...) co-exist. How do you get them to wed each other in one and the same illustration?**

Their wedding comes together sweetly thanks to the computer. I always try to keep a balance, stressing this or that element, depending on the style of the story I'm illustrating. It's pretty much a playful process which demands that you're totally focused.



From the book  
"From the Earth to the Moon"  
Papadopoulos Publishing, 2015

**- Which are your favorite materials?**

Carton boxes and scraps of paper.

**- How do you begin setting up an illustration? Do you have a stock of illustrations that you created at some earlier opportunities?**

No, each time, I have to redefine things all over. I try to avoid the Iris of the past. It's of no interest to me to handle a story in the same way that I handled some other one in the past. I don't like that sort of condition and I'm not after that kind of security. I look at every new book as a challenge to try out new things but on a sound basis.

**- What is it like to work with a writer and interpret her or his ideas through illustrations? Do you feel free to express yourself the way you want or does the story pose restrictions on you?**

The writer-illustrator collaboration is quite an interesting process. Sometimes that collaboration is a necessary one and sometimes it's not. It all depends on the story. If a story carries biographical elements or has a certain kind of historicity which needs to be showcased, I'm interested in being in contact with the writer. If it's plain fiction, I'd rather handle it myself. Overall, I've got no complaints over my collaborations with writers. One way or another, I avoid people who issue guidelines and whose attitude "shouts out" that, if they could, they'd illustrate the book themselves.

**- How do you come up with ideas on how to create new characters?**

Most of the characters crop up right when I'm on the phone talking or when I'm painting, without my being aware what exactly it is I'm doing. But the characters I like best are those that come alive via a random item. Take for example "Léon Millequestions" (story: A. Papatheodoulou, Langue Au Chat Publishing). Well, he was created from a pair of socks! I had been wringing my mind for days trying to figure out what Léon the pirate, should look like. I also know that inspiration knocks on your door at the most random moments. So, at some point, just as I was taking my son's socks off the clothesline and was balling them up, I 'saw' my pirate. I chose a white pair of socks, took a photo of it, put the photo in my computer and began adding features and color. That's how my leading character and the rest of the characters in the book came to be.

**- How was Tata born in your mind?**

"Tata" is me: the way I played as a child, the way I think, the way I illustrate, the way I create along with the children. It's all there, in this book. The idea took hold of me during the first lockdown. It was then that I realized how much I missed the people who are near and dear to me, my friends...and how much more than any material good they are.

**- How about telling us about an ordinary day of yours?**

An ordinary day of mine is...quite ordinary. It includes my morning illustrating work, smoothies for the family, taking the dog for her morning walk, teaching in one of the schools I work at, shopping, cooking, house chores, phone calls, e-mails, afternoon dog walk, and evening illustrating work.

To make a long story short, illustrating finds a way of sneaking through the cracks of an ordinary day. But make no mistake: I do like my routine as is. It might look like routine but I always find ways to make every day different.

**-What are the things you love doing?**

Apart from illustrating while listening to music, I like to make pumpkin soup and apple pie, snuggle down under my comforter and watch movies and foreign TV series, go winter swimming, travel, go to concerts, read books for all age groups, take long walks with my dog, bask in the springtime sun, do my balcony gardening.

**-To what extent is the quest for artistic expression linked to the inner search of the artist?**

It's impossible for me to not be present in my illustrations. The only thing is I can't tell where I am exactly or define what exactly it is I'm looking for.

**-When you craft a universe with your materials, you are actually making a universe that is safe, even when it describes a dystopia, a brutal reality such as the one we encounter in "Badboy". We know the limits of that universe's stage presence, its beginning and end. How do you feel in terms of reality which is complex and constantly flows?**

It sort of takes me aback because I'm the kind of person who needs a schedule and a framework in which she can function. In a sense though, it's just the dimensions of the paper I'm working on that change and I just find ways to reposition myself. I spread the background, give the characters space, give myself a little more room to move in.

**- Do you believe that inspiration just dawns on us and hits us on the head or do we have to work hard for it to come?**

Yes, I do, it just dawns on us but if we don't work at it, inspiration by itself can't do much.

**-What are your plans for the future?**

I make no plans during this period, especially because of the overall fluid situation. I do have some ideas that keep going round and round in my head and have to do with books or a short film I'd like to make. But for the time being, they're sitting on the back burner and when the right time comes, I'll just turn the heat on.

**-What do you dream this world of ours should be like? Give us a description of the ideal.**

I dream of a world embraced by colors, with no shadows, no dark nooks; a world without fear.

**- Can art change us? Can it make our world better?**

Art, in all its manifestations, is there to remind us that we're not alone. It's there so that it can take off some of the burden we're shouldering. It does not heal wounds. So, yes, in a sense, it does make the world better and more beautiful.

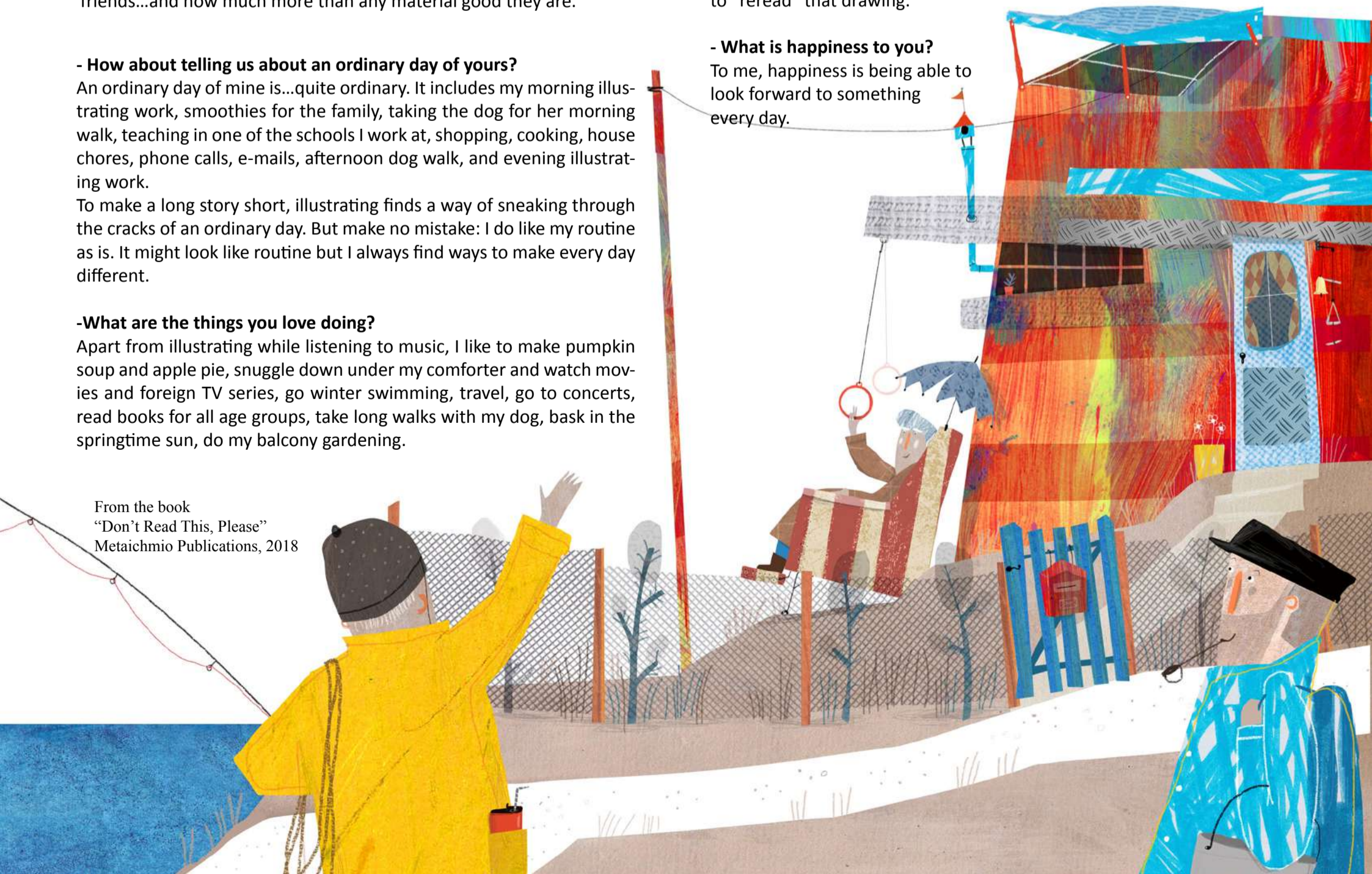
**- What do you believe is the relation between fantasy and reality?**

Fantasy is the "glitch" of reality which creates new takes on things. It's like the water droplets which, when spilled accidentally on a drawing, call on us to "reread" that drawing.

**- What is happiness to you?**

To me, happiness is being able to look forward to something every day.

From the book  
"Don't Read This, Please"  
Metaichmio Publications, 2018



## "The Magic World of Illustration" 08/15

ART22

### Interview to M. Xypolopoulou

#### 1. "Badboy" is a story about faith in man and humanity.

**A story of the power of art and culture against poverty and social exclusion. Today, we observe the elimination of art lessons (music, visual arts) from school programs. As an illustrator and visual artist, what is the role and importance of these courses in the educational system?**

It is like wondering what the importance of culture for man and society in general is.

Art in all of its versions (theater, books, cinema, concerts, museums, street art, graffiti on a wall, a smart showcase, a photo, a child's painting, or a great advertisement) is the one that softens our pain a little, makes us forget our problems, makes us feel less lonely. It's a meeting point in another space-time.

Our times are not the healthiest ones. Culture sounds like an expensive watch, a luxury, when basic goods are missing. I do not judge this, it is perfectly natural to happen. It makes sense, therefore, to be crowded out in schools. And teachers do not have the financial support they need, the means to do something more artistic, even a photocopy to show of a famous painting to the children. All the weight of contact with art falls clearly to their mood and flexibility.

But I am optimistic, because more and more teachers are turning to art-based projects. All it takes is state support, which surely has a lot to bear, but culture and education could be a great start.

#### 2. José Antonio Abreu decided to use the power of music to fight poverty in his homeland, Venezuela. Could something similar be applied to other forms of art such as visual art? Art is a great activist tool. How can an artist intervene socially?

It's true that the battle against poverty, social impoverishment, the need for survival is uneven. The artist with his work ought to listen, observe, scrutinize, sympathize, and bring out voices that are not heard, images that are ignored. I think the key to the history of Abreu is that he took out the notes from the pentagram and the musical scores.

He virtually released a good virus into society and left it to do its job. If the art comes out of the walls, out of the rules, out of the museums, forgets for a moment its elitist profile, and comes out in the streets, in the squares, becoming one with the world, it gives an incentive to the world to intervene, to dream, and then I think that, yes, something can be finally done.

#### 3. Fairy tales convey messages. Do you think that pictures can do the same? How do a children's book illustrations contribute to the education of a child?

The truth is that I do not embrace the idea that a book is better when it has a secret message. I believe that very long texts, with the stress of the message, destroy the potential readership.

I believe that through illustration I am invited to respond to an open philosophical question, eliminating all didactics, hoping that somewhere in my own interpretation, I will meet the interpretation given by the children.

#### 4. What is the relationship between an illustrator and an author?

There are two kinds of relationships.

The first one is the ideal relationship: the collaborative one. Together, author and illustrator can dream of their book-creation.

The other one is the destructive relationship: the writer has already made his own illustration in his mind and wants you to faithfully follow his own fantasy. In this relationship, it is as if you have no hands. You forget yourself, who you are, your aesthetics, you do not know what's nice and what's not. The illustrator is like a robot.

Fortunately, after many years, I can detect right away this kind of collaboration and I avoid it discreetly. It is nice to feel that the other person trusts you completely and gives you the freedom to create as in A. Darlasi's case.

#### 5. How important is the role of images in a fairytale? Does illustration help or limit the imagination of the young reader by giving him the picture ready?

There are specific stages in a child's relationship with a book.

In the early years, children receive hundreds of stimuli. Through a classic, fully illustrated book they observe, hear words, associate with images, decode things around them and understand them. They become familiar with the "function" of a book. They often want to read again and again the same book. It's a world that is familiar, intimate, dear, makes them relax.

The word that portrays this part of the relationship is "security". That's what children are looking for. Every book children read is a new journey that gives them strength and knowledge to go further on to other new journeys, to meet new books. This is the role played by illustration. It provides a visualized vocabulary, a code.

While growing up the child is not afraid to read, to travel. And now, knowing the vocabulary I mentioned above, s/he can make her own imaginary scenes.

The illustrated book does not restrict the imagination of the child. On the contrary.

#### 6. Having illustrated several books, what affects and determines the characters and style of your images?

The style of the book. What does the book want to say? What is the purpose of reading it? Does the book want to talk about a serious matter? Does it want to be pleasant and funny? Does the book want to sensitize children or to teach something? Does it want to put the child to bed? The lines, the colors, the technique, the material and the textures change according to the meaning of the book. The books I have illustrated are so varied that it's impossible to put everything under the same umbrella and manage them in exactly the same way.

#### 7. As a visual artist you have participated in various group exhibitions. Have you ever thought of presenting your work through an individual, this time, exhibition?

Yes, I've thought of that. I would like to have an exhibition, perhaps in the future. Not right now.

An exhibition for me is a closure. And I feel that I still have too much to learn, to do. I'm looking for new styles, I'm changing, I'm growing up and getting more mature.

TELEVISIÓN DE GALICIA A carta | TVG en directo | Programación

Zigzag Diario

#### "Visión", Lola Dueñas e "Angélica, una tragedia"

10/11/2018 21:00 h



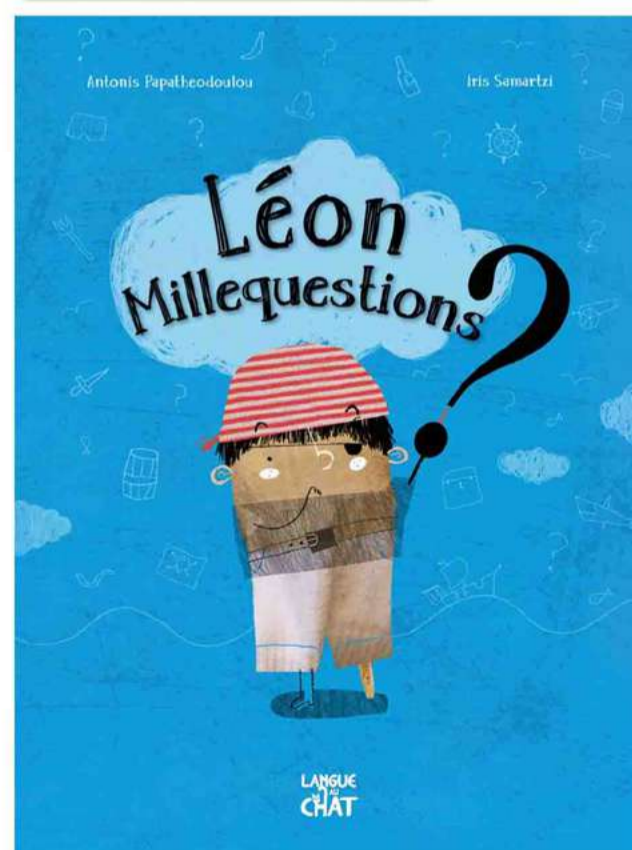
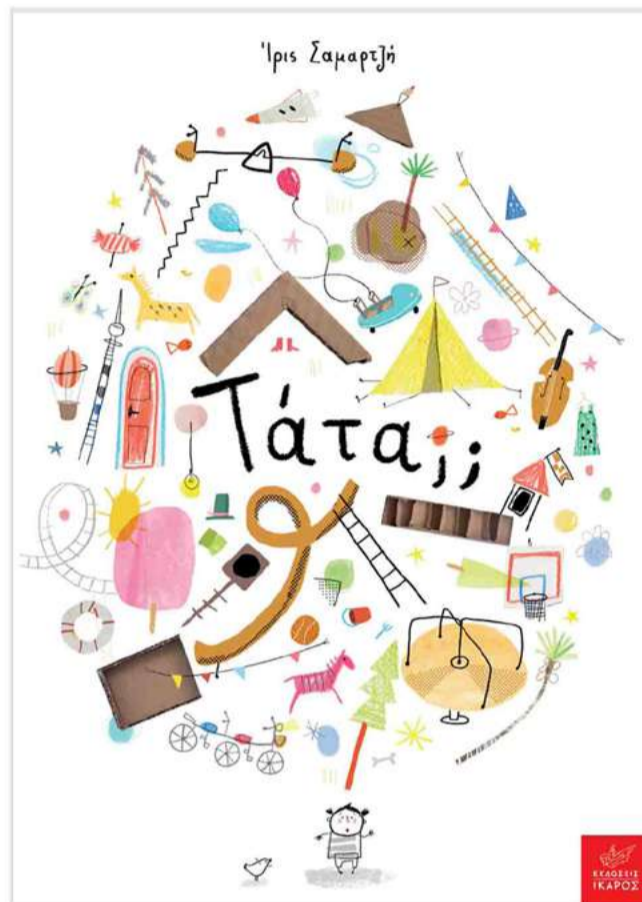
[http://www.crtvg.es/tvg/a-carta/visions-lola-duenas-e-angelica-una-tragedia?fbclid=IwAR1gp-PzZHPU1dxhN1ttZwG8j5wnwrhDKhow7C-6ckllQeJvAJ\\_PrjndVEEnA](http://www.crtvg.es/tvg/a-carta/visions-lola-duenas-e-angelica-una-tragedia?fbclid=IwAR1gp-PzZHPU1dxhN1ttZwG8j5wnwrhDKhow7C-6ckllQeJvAJ_PrjndVEEnA)

From the book "Tom Sawyer  
Or the Largest Room in the World"  
Papadopoulos Publishing, 2018





# The List of Five Books





1.

## “Tata??”

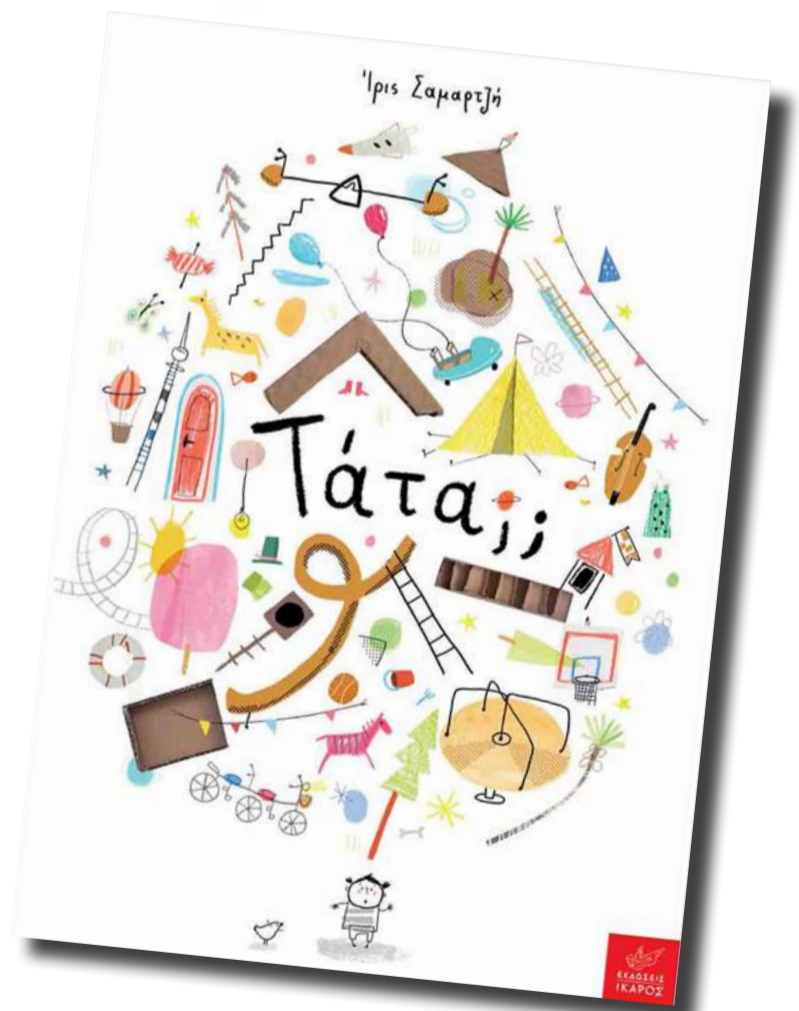
Written and illustrated by I.Samartzi  
Ikaros Publishing -Greece- November 2020

My many years of experience as an illustrator but also as an art teacher for preschoolers have taught me that children need no more than the humblest, ordinary materials to create their own “vocabulary”, invent new meanings, and assign new roles to objects: a pencil easily conjures up a rocket; a ruler acts as a bridge; a box, any box of any size, acquires a thousand and one new meanings in their inventive minds. It was that observation of mine and the children’s way of thinking that led me to writing and illustrating “TATA??”

In the story, a little girl has gathered together small, recyclable cardboard boxes and paper bits. She has placed everything in a heap on plain, white paper. She begins to mix and match these objects, assembling different spaces and creating imaginary worlds she intends to share with her best friend Tata, another little girl. As she crafts her new worlds, we are able to gradually follow the way she thinks, we monitor her movements from above, her play, her painting efforts, and the structures she makes while her imagination runs away with her. With every two-page spread the little girl expresses a new wish and adds a new object and a new space to her world. Like a stop motion animated film which incrementally “photographs” objects to produce movement, the story shows frame by frame how the little girl crafts her “compound” and how, in the end, the structures she has dreamed up are destined to fall apart like a house of cards.



The story’s leading “lady” has no name. She could be me, she could be you. It doesn’t matter. After all, the thought “What if that, and that, too, were mine? And why not have that one over there instead of this one?” are fleeting thoughts that cross the mind of the young and the older alike. They are thoughts that relate to our pursuit for a better life which, in theory, would make us happy, when all we actually want is to be with our best friend and a... ball to toss between us.





“...With “Tata??”, I’m actually replicating a game that my cousins and I started many, but many years ago during some Christmas holidays. It was the time when we all three had gone bananas over a plan we had: we would all live together in my cousins’ apartment building but we’d have it ALL to ourselves. So, we sat around planning what toys and playthings each floor would house. Parents, food, water? No, absent, not included in our plan. It was that memory that became “Tata??”. I began working on that idea during the first lockdown [March 2020]. That unprecedented situation we were all experiencing at the time (and, unfortunately, still do) made me rethink about what was important in life. All those goods we constantly long for, all those material things which we never consider to be enough, our constant drive to go after more, and more, have no meaning if we don’t have our own people to share them with. So, I think, my psychological frame of mind during the first lockdown, did play a part in the creation of “Tata??” ...”



## 2. “Una última carta”

by A.Papatheodoulou

Kalandraka - Spain - 2016

“I’ve always wanted to illustrate a book that had to do with islands, their architecture, the sun, the seaside, the houses that elbow each other creating a colorful patchwork, all that Mediterranean jigsaw puzzle that reflects on people’s daily habits.

A. Papatheodoulou also had a true story to tell which had taken place on a Greek island. So we tried to combine our wishes. Luckily, it all led us to “Una última carta”. As to the illustrations, I wanted them to be simple. I wanted the whole to look handmade and to give a lifelike impression.

My intention to do so was not surprising since islanders build their houses with the humblest materials. What I wanted was to keep to their practices and way of thinking.

So I used cardboard, papers of all sorts of texture and color, envelopes, paper bags, stamps, recycled materials, old letters and pictures (things that I collect anyway), to create miniature structures of the buildings, the main character, and furniture.

It’s a technique that I enjoy to no end. I feel like a child playing with its toys. Then I took photos of all those structures. After lots of photos and hours of scanning, I started working on my computer, combining all, adding details, changing colors. As far the illustrations’ colors go, the key word is “light”. This book had to be bright, like the Mediterranean. So, blue, white, and brown are the illustrations’ predominant colors.

The postman is the only solid-feature character in the book. He is the protagonist and I wanted him to be different from the others.

I also wanted to emphasize how important his job is. To achieve that, I had to portray the islanders as plain strokes drawn by hand. As if their identity should be defined by the contents of the letters they receive and not by their appearance. After all, their character, their very substance, is molded by the news they get just like in real life: news, facts, and the decisions we make, define who we are...”

IX Premio Internacional  
**COMPOSTELA**  
para álbumes ilustrados  
2016



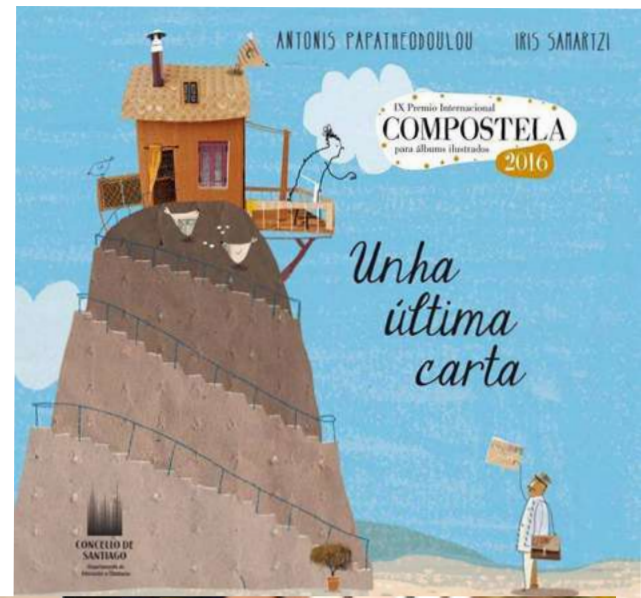
**-IX Compostela Prize 2016**

**-Nominated for the Peter Pan Prize**

Published in Galician, Spanish, Catalan, Basque, Portuguese, Greek, Italian, Swedish, Chinese, Korean

[Island, the making of - video](#)







### 3. “When the Sun Goes to Bed”

by A. Pipini  
Martis Books -2020

The book “When the Sun Goes to Bed” is the first accordion book that I’ve illustrated. It talks about the dreams that come to visit us on weeknights. In its accordion (concertina) form, fold by fold, the book reveals the dream that makes its appearance every night. And that’s not all. If you lay the accordion book flat on the floor and completely unfolded, you’ll see that underneath the dreams illustrated there’s a sprawling figure: it’s the figure of Sleep, who carries all those dreams and comes to take us on a journey to magical places, just like book’s storyteller tells us. What’s on that reverse side of the unfolded layout? A cozy comforter, of course, whose fluffiness is the key ingredient of the recipe for sound sleep!

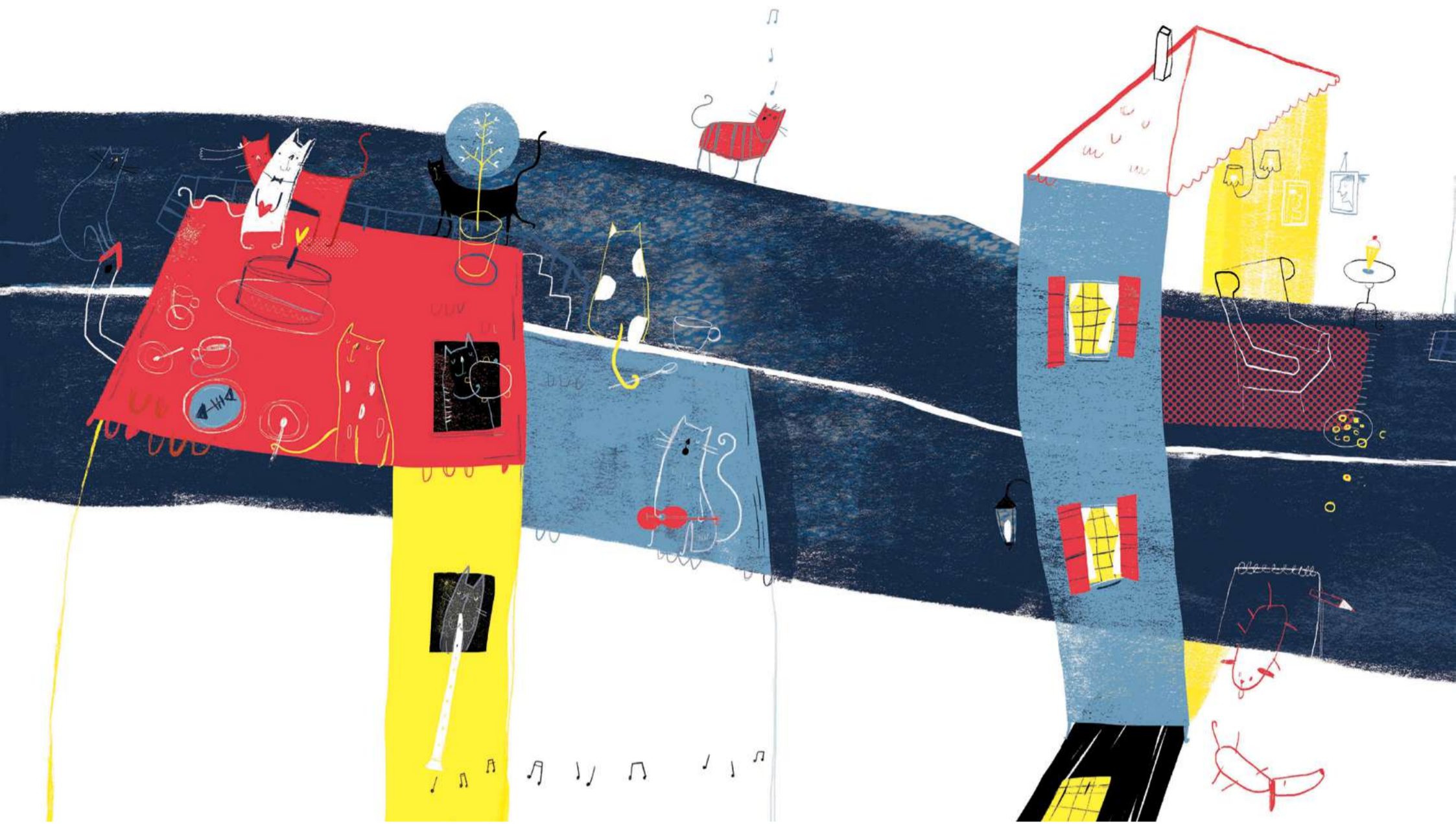


[A bit of presentation](#)

[Celebrating the book's 2nd edition from home!](#)

[promo video](#)

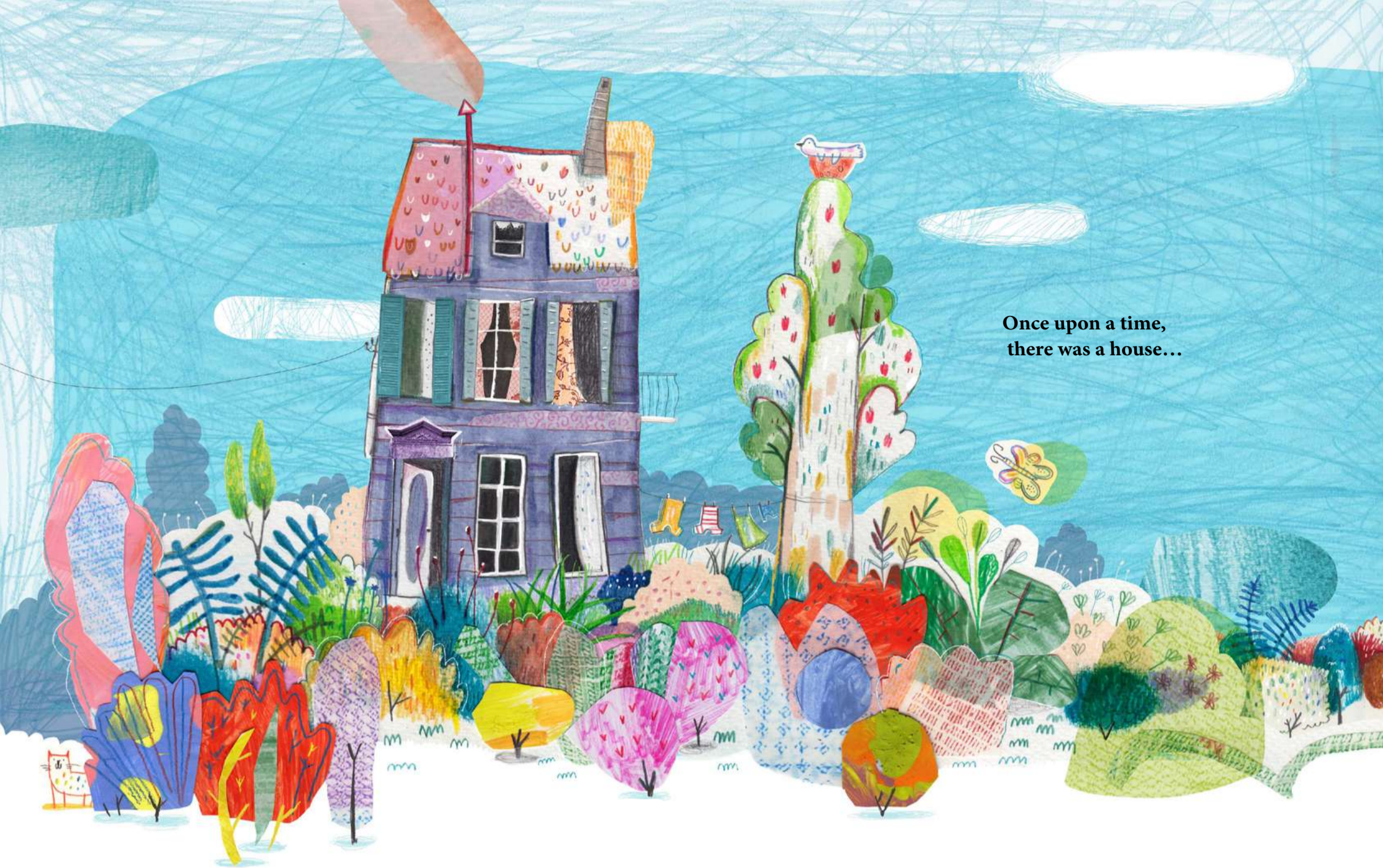




When imagination meets talent, and the love for children meets rhyming, a tender, different kind of book is born to find its niche right in the hearts of the young and the older alike. Joining forces, storyteller Argyro Pipini and illustrator Iris Samartzi, under the umbrella of Martis Publications, created a children's book that immediately captures one's attention. A long and narrow top-quality paper case with colors and illustrations that jump off the page to talk directly to the reader motivates children to explore the treasure hidden within and tantalizes their curiosity as to the case's mysterious contents. Sweet and lyrical, poetic yet giving the permanence of a soothing lullaby, the story by Argyro Pipini succeeds in mesmerizing its public, making instant fans of its young readers and listeners with its witty and humorous rhymes which breathe life into the illustrations. Yet, the book has further surprises in store: This illustrated accordion book could never forgive itself for letting a child go to sleep without offering the warmth of a cover. To that purpose, illustrator Iris Samartzi quilts together a patchwork of cats, elephants, umbrellas, palm trees, ice cream cones, squares crisscrossed by lines and streaks of color to create the plushiest of comforters (feel free to call it a bed spread). And as that dreamlike creation unravels itself, a new journey begins: the kind of journey during which children can use their imagination to come up with new takes and become inspired, making the book richer with their own adorable rhymes, and sprinkling it to the brim with fairytale dust. With every reading of the book, creative thinking travels down unexpected paths, giving birth to new adventures. The eternal cycle of day turning into night, and night turning into day, becomes visible and a fascinating world becomes mistily visible in the accordion book "When the Sun Goes to Bed".

[Athens Voice-K. Kritikou- 07/05/2020](#)





Once upon a time,  
there was a house...

## 4. “Summer, Autumn, Winter, Spring, Summer...”

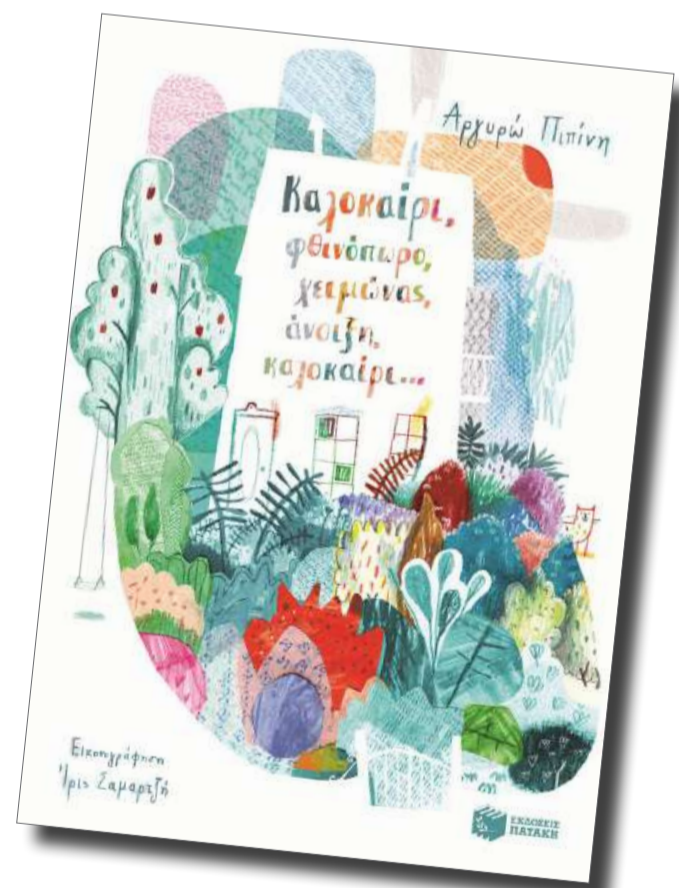
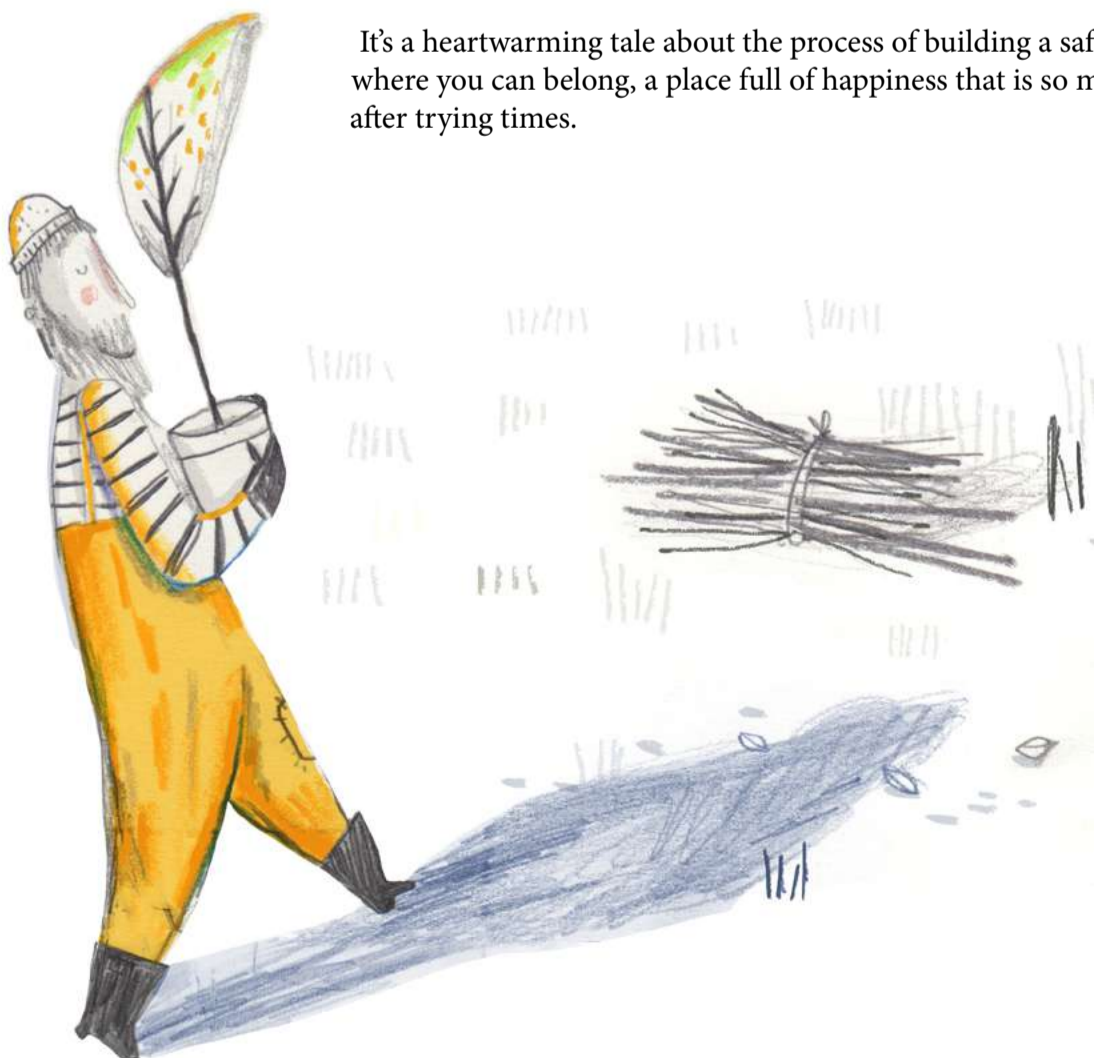
by A. Pipini

Patakis Publishers - Greece - 2016

In this sweet and tender fairy tale, we witness the first year in the life of a family of immigrants, as seen through the eyes of the house they now live in. The house, standing empty and abandoned for years, welcomes them on a sweet summer’s day. As the year slowly passes, both the house and the family become one, as they have made a home of one another.

A home of joy, stability, and beauty, where dreams can flourish.

It’s a heartwarming tale about the process of building a safe space: a place where you can belong, a place full of happiness that is so much needed after trying times.



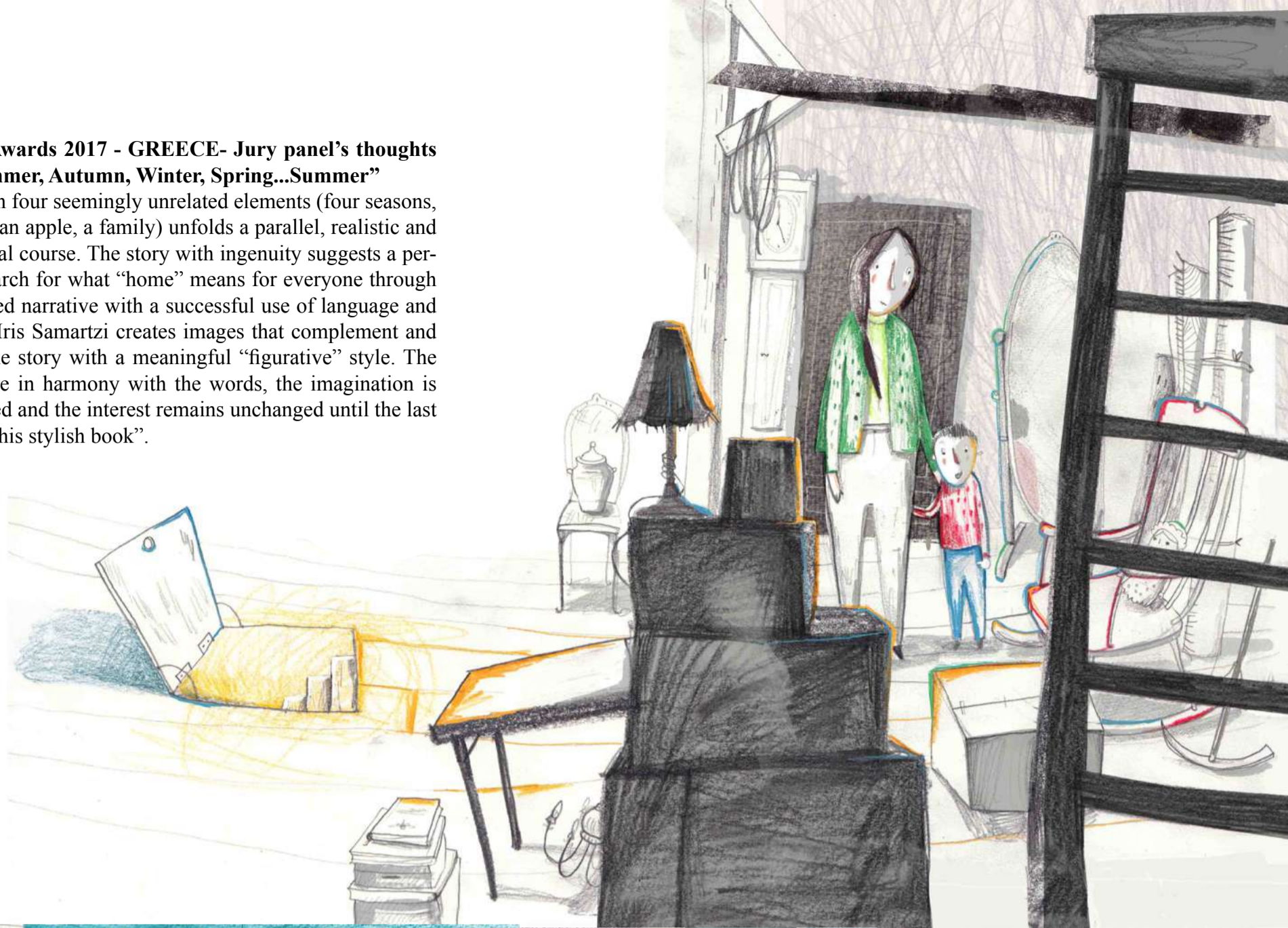
- Included in the outstanding titles of The 2020 HCAA “Jury Recommends” List
- Award, IBBY – Greek Section
- Praise by the Greek Graphic Design and Illustration Awards (EBGE)

Published in Greek, Korean



**IBBY Awards 2017 - GREECE- Jury panel's thoughts on "Summer, Autumn, Winter, Spring...Summer"**

"Through four seemingly unrelated elements (four seasons, a house, an apple, a family) unfolds a parallel, realistic and allegorical course. The story with ingenuity suggests a personal search for what "home" means for everyone through a balanced narrative with a successful use of language and images. Iris Samartzi creates images that complement and enrich the story with a meaningful "figurative" style. The colors are in harmony with the words, the imagination is stimulated and the interest remains unchanged until the last page of this stylish book".



Ώσπου μια μέρα, μέρα καλοκαιρινή,  
ένα αγόρι έσπρωξε την καγκελόπορτα του κήπου.  
Το σπίτι είδε μια οικογένεια να διασχίζει το μονοπάτι και  
να φτάνει στην εξώπορτα. Ο πατέρας κρατούσε μια βαλίτσα  
και η μητέρα έσπρωχνε ένα καρότσι. Το αγόρι ήταν σιωπηλό,  
το μωρό στο καρότσι έκλαιγε, οι γονείς μιλούσαν σιγανά  
μεταξύ τους.



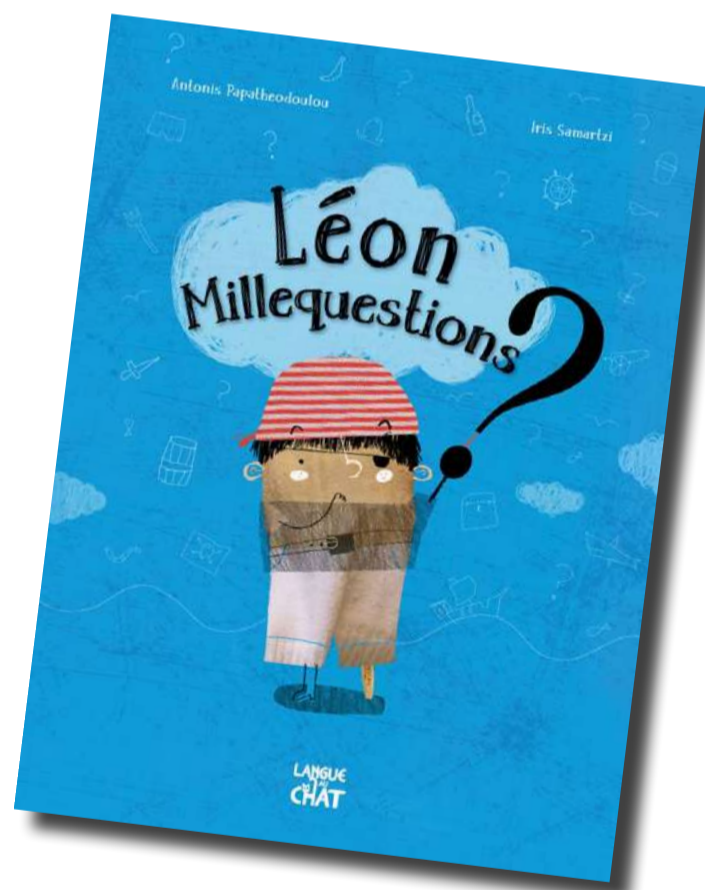
## 5. “Léon Millequestions”

by A. Papatheodoulou

Langue Au Chat - Belgium- 2019

“All pirates  
no matter where they come from  
no matter how different  
are born with a wooden foot, an eye patch and a hook.  
Everybody knows that.

Well not all pirates.  
Once upon a time  
there was a pirate named Mark  
who instead of a hook  
was born with... a question mark!”



<https://www.lisez.com/livre-cartonne/leon-millequestions-mes-beaux-albums/9782806310057>

Published in French, Portuguese

[Making of Léon from a pair of socks](#)



Alors que les autres pirates commencent  
par prononcer chien – chat – maman – papa,  
les premiers mots de Léon sont : qui, quoi, quand, comment et pourquoi.  
Et dès qu'il se met à parler, plus rien ne l'arrête !  
Il lève bien haut sont point d'interrogation et pose mille questions...



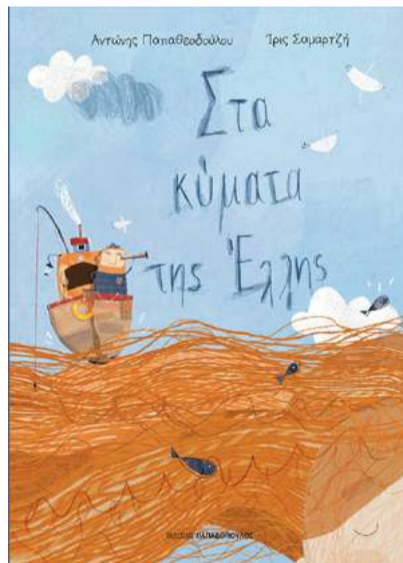
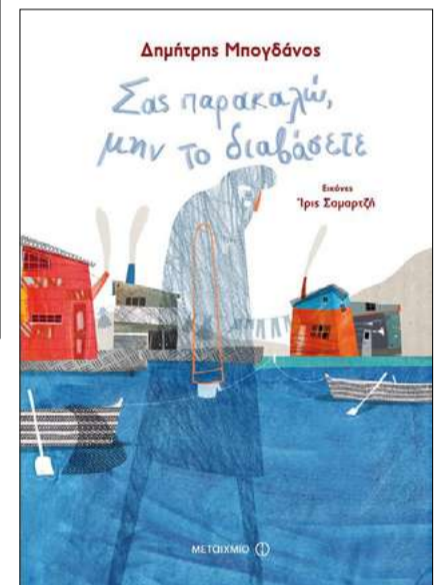
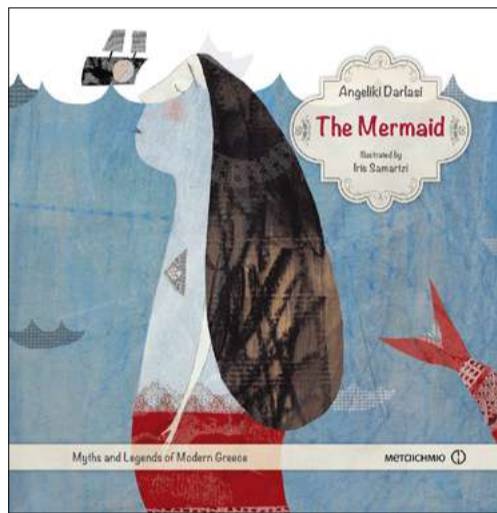
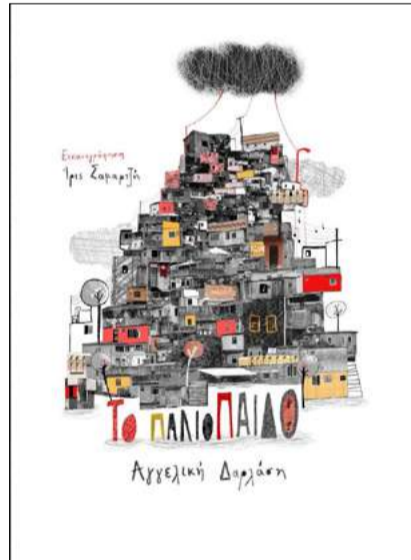
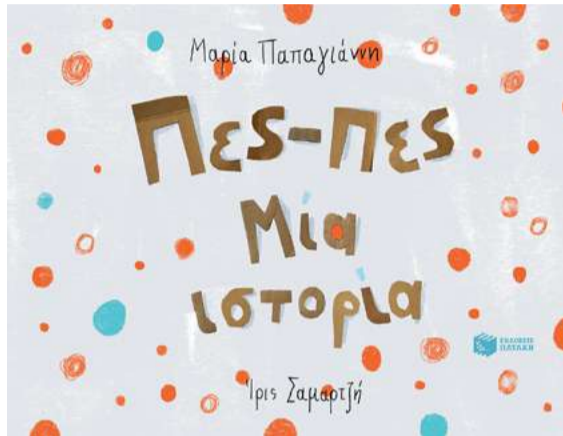
Making of the pirate ship



The making of the Island of Treasure, using actual leaves, branches, and various textured materials



# Ten of the Most Important Titles





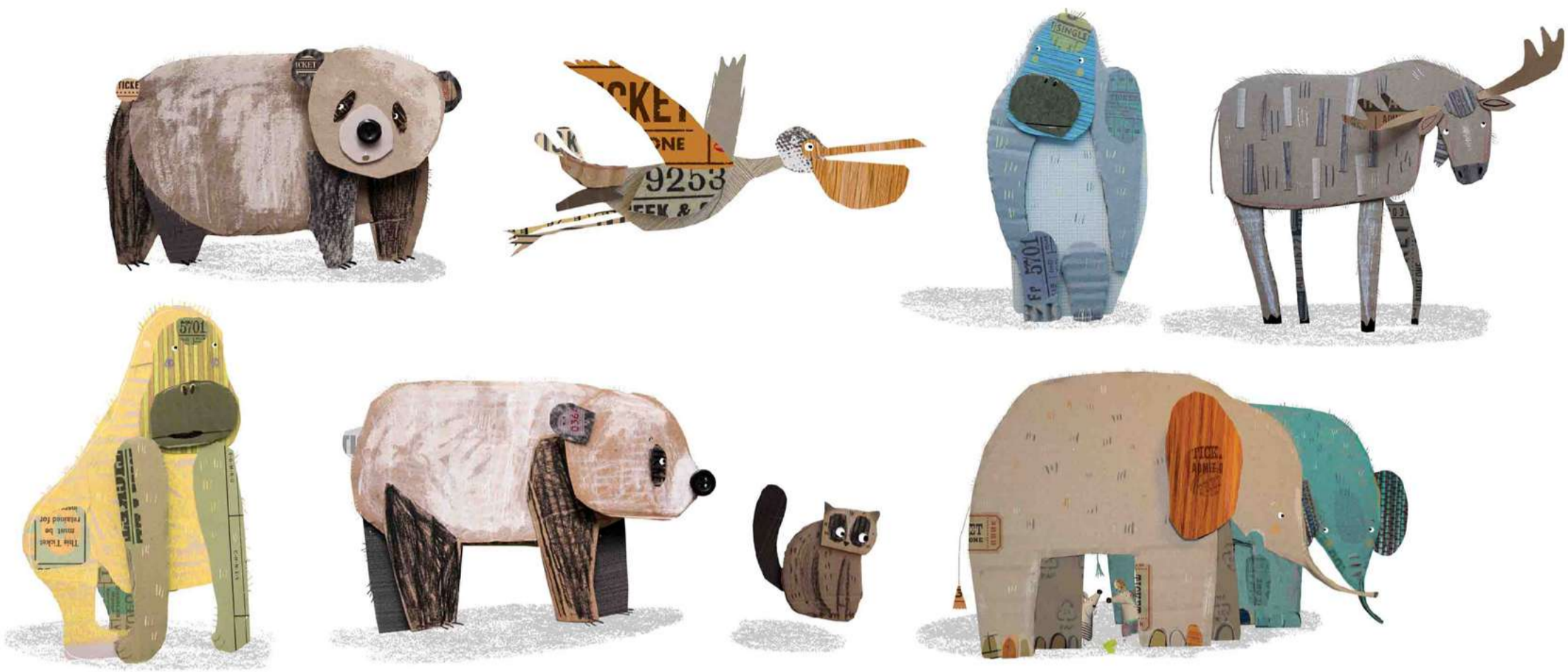
# 1. "En la Cola para el Arca"

by A. Papatheodoulou  
Kalandraka - Spain - Publication forthcoming (2021)

I wonder, what's that long line for?  
- For the Ark.  
- **WHAT ARK?**

Published in Galician, Spanish, Catalan, Basque, Portuguese, Italian.





Animal figures made of cardboard, fabric bits, upholstery samples, and recycled materials.





## 2. “Tell, tell a Story”

by M. Papayanni

Patakis Publishers - Greece- 2020

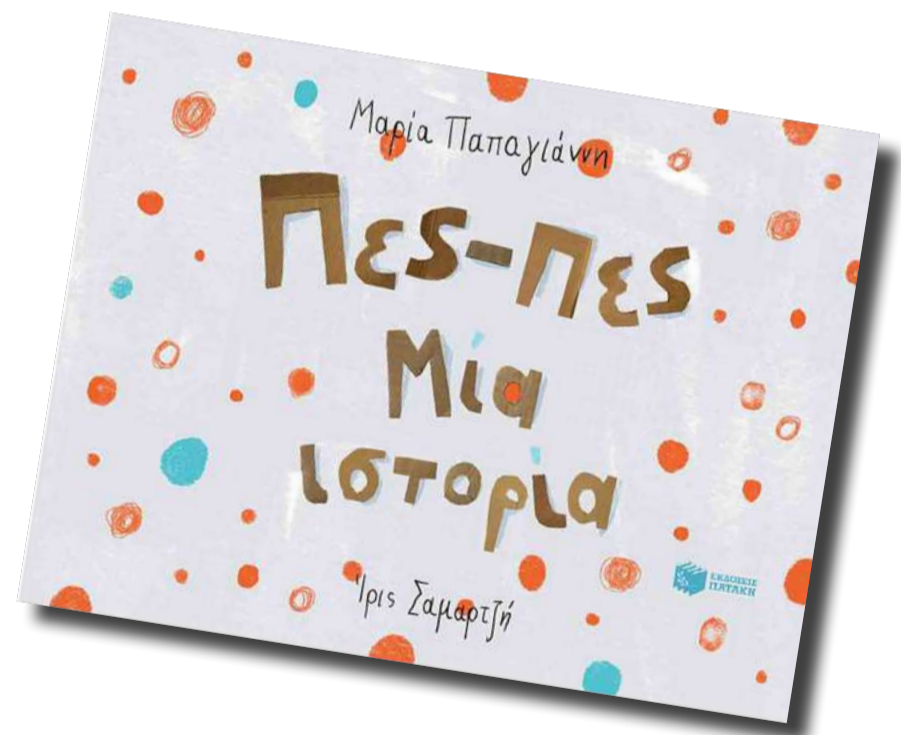
Mia is a kid like any other. At night she dreams, with her eyes open or closed, sleeping or awake.

Real adventures with dragons and princesses, pirates and knights. And of course, she loves ice cream.

But then a special night comes, when any wish a kid makes comes true. Mia doesn't wish to be a princess in a tower, or a pirate in a ship, or to travel the world in a hot air balloon.

She wishes for a best friend. Because what good are adventures if they can't be shared? Well, the friend who appears has a strange name, Tell-Tell.

And she eats stories!



Miniature structures expressly made for the book



“...Iris Samartzi delivers what she does best one more time... She entices the reader! With her mixed techniques, painting and collage, she materializes Maria Papayanni’s tender universe! Images filled with childlike innocence and at the same time with intense adaptability and detail come to stimulate the visual abilities of young readers. Observing the images, the reader draws information about the two heroines, their habits, hobbies and pets, all of which are never mentioned in the text. Magical shadow games, tender moments between Mia and the ladybug, wonderful nightly views, interweave and strengthen the short text.”

[Mary Birbili -Elniplex - 24/06/2020](#)





On little heads  
great big things  
happen!

### 3. “On Ellie’s Wavy Sea”

by A. Papatheodoulou  
Papatopoulos Publishing - Greece - 2018

“...This story has to do with all the fantastic things that take place in children’s mind- how they perceive all that happens around them- what affects them emotionally, the feelings in general. I wanted them to see themselves in Ellie and identify their personal moments of happiness, fear, shame or anger. So I wanted the “artistic language” to be recognisable to them. I chose this head of wavy hair to run from spread to spread, on purpose, till the last scene where she gets her hair cut. I also chose this mixed technique of different materials because I know how children love to make collages and how creative they can be even if the only thing they have in front of them is...a matchbox”!

<http://www.antonispapatheodoulou.com/books/2018-on-elli-s-wavy-sea>





## 4. “Once Upon a Bear”

by E. Geroulanou

Patakis Publishers - Greece - 2018

I consider “Once upon a Bear” one of the most interesting book assignments I’ve ever had. E. Geroulanou wanted to make a book that would present the large collection of the 20,000 toys the Benaki Museum has in its possession. M. Argyriadi was the person who started this collection in the first place. As a child she experienced the loss of her favourite toy: a small stuffed bear. She was devastated after that. Finding it became her purpose in life. During this search she discovered other old toys in flea markets and shops. And she started to collect them one by one. Soon she had a huge collection of toys, including a small bear who looked like her own. The only problem was that she needed a place to put all these toys, so that the children could enjoy them too. The Benaki Museum decided to house this collection in one of its buildings which looks like a castle. So the book, one way or another, tells a true story.

I was asked to illustrate this book and bring out the uniqueness and the nostalgia of these toys. The Benaki Museum gave me access to all of its photography archives. I worked digitally, combining photos and textures. The protagonist was the only character illustrated. He goes from spread to spread, searching for his home, asking around...till the last spread where he finally meets M. Argyriadi who welcomes him in her house-museum and he becomes real, like all the other toys... like the real bear that exists in the Museum’ display case No. 5.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nSvFGHx8vs0>



-Learning Book Award, Anagnostis Magazine, 2019  
Published in Greek, Chinese





# 5. "Jules Verne Adventure Stories"

Adaptation by A. Papatheodoulou  
Papadopoulos Publishing - Greece - 2015 to 2019



- 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea
- Around the World in 80 Days
- From the Earth to the Moon
- Journey to the Centre of the Earth
- Robur the Conqueror
- Five Weeks in a Balloon
- The Robinson Crusoe School

Published in Greek, English, Spanish, Catalan, Chinese



"Jules Verne's stories are well-known stories, well-illustrated stories, and well-filmed stories. So, trying to approach them in a new way was surely a great challenge.

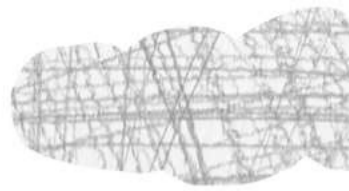
I really can't imagine an illustrator that wouldn't find this proposal intriguing. Of course, I would definitely place it among the most difficult "assignments" I've ever had.

The making of this book requires dedication. You need to do a lot of research, a lot of reading, watch movies, take notes. But this is a very interesting part of my work, because I learn new things..."

[Interview- Onada Edicions Blog 12/18](#)







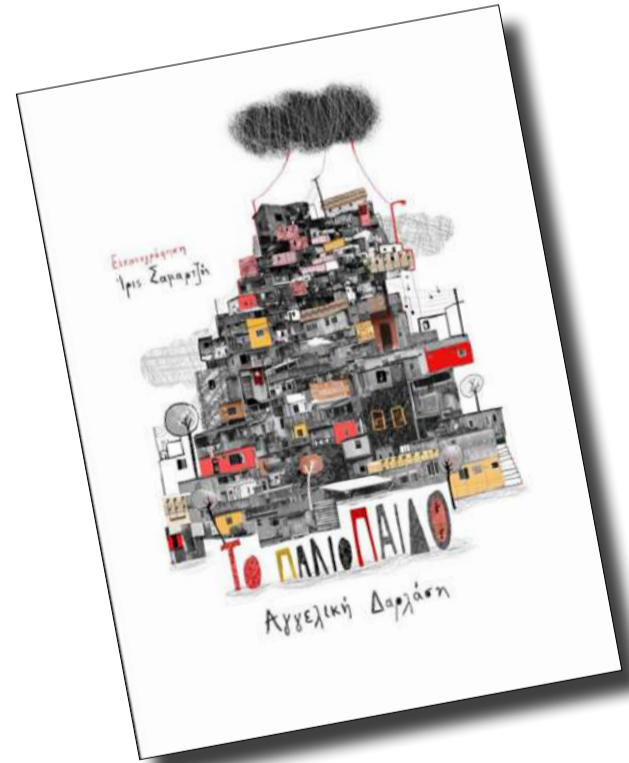
## 6. "Badboy"

by A. Darlasi  
Patakis Publishers - Greece- 2014

This is the story of Badboy; a boy who is ordinary and special at the same time, like any other boy. Badboy is growing up in a barrio, sad and grey like his old coat, too large for him, someone's castoff. They call him a bad boy, but he is only the poorest and unhappiest of all boys. But one day he decides to live up to his name, since this seems to be what everyone expects from him. Well, not quite everyone... This is a story inspired by the true account of El Sistema and the world-famous Bolivar Orchestra of Venezuela.

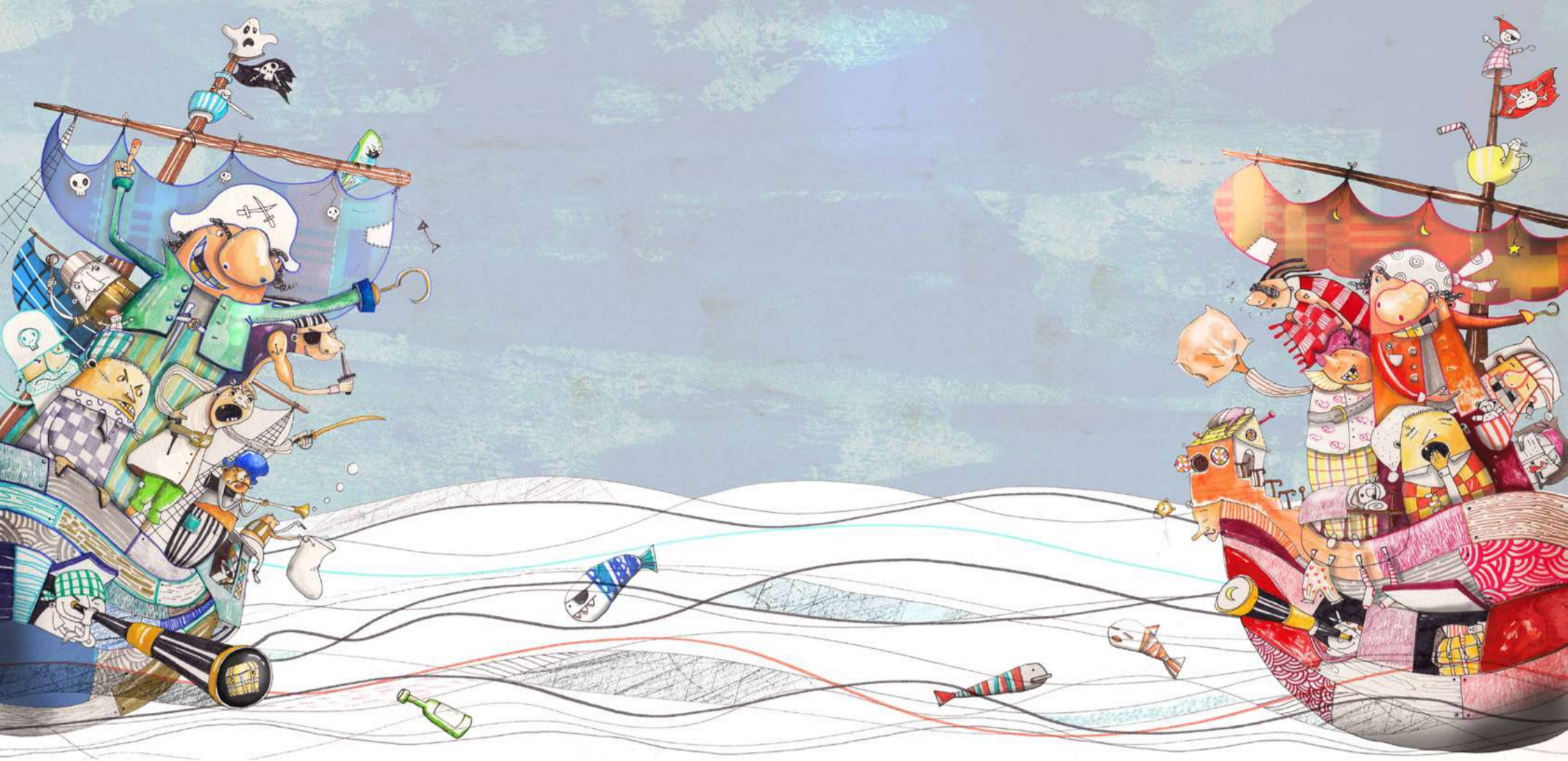
- Award, IBBY – Greek Section
- Selected for the IBBY Honour List

Published in Greek, Korean, Turkish



[http://rights.patakis.gr/sites/default/files/excerpts/09876\\_badboy\\_english\\_low\\_excerpt.pdf](http://rights.patakis.gr/sites/default/files/excerpts/09876_badboy_english_low_excerpt.pdf)





## 7. “The Good and the Bad Pirates”

Followed by “The Good and the Bad Knights”  
and “The Good and the Bad Witches”  
by A. Papatheodoulou  
Papadopoulos Publishing - Greece - 2011

“During a fierce attack, a rabble of blood-thirsty, roaring, rampaging pirates comes up against a curious opponent: a cheerful, good-natured pirate troupe, which stoically ignores every provocation and threat and counters these with invitations to dine together, share funny stories, or cosy up making arts and crafts. Utterly disarmed, bewildered, and totally in despair, the attackers decide to take part in a shared feast. Boisterous merry-making, roaring laughter, and music-making ensues. The illustrations underscore the message of this intelligent text in clever and lively ways. With a humorous touch, the book makes a case against violence by guiding the gaze from one-dimensional thinking and polarisation towards tolerance and humanity.”

Text from the IJB WHITE RAVENS Listing 2012



- Award, IBBY – Greek Section
- Greek State Picturebook Award
- White Ravens List



## 8. “The Mermaid”

by A. Darlasi

Metaichmio Publications- Greece - 2017

The series *Myths and Legends of Modern Greece* invites us to remember and be enchanted again by the words of old times, words that comforted people and kept them company, words that tried to explain whatever scared or charmed them in the past and passed on orally from one generation to another. Myths and legends to share with our children, now that we don't narrate stories the way people did in the past.



And wrapped she was with scales below the waist,  
instead of legs, she had a big, fish tail.  
Her body was half human and half fish;  
she was a magical and mythical mermaid.

«Ο Βασιλιάς Αλέξανδρος, ο μέγας στρατηλάτης,  
είναι αλήθεια ότι ζει, ναι, ζει και βασιλεύει».

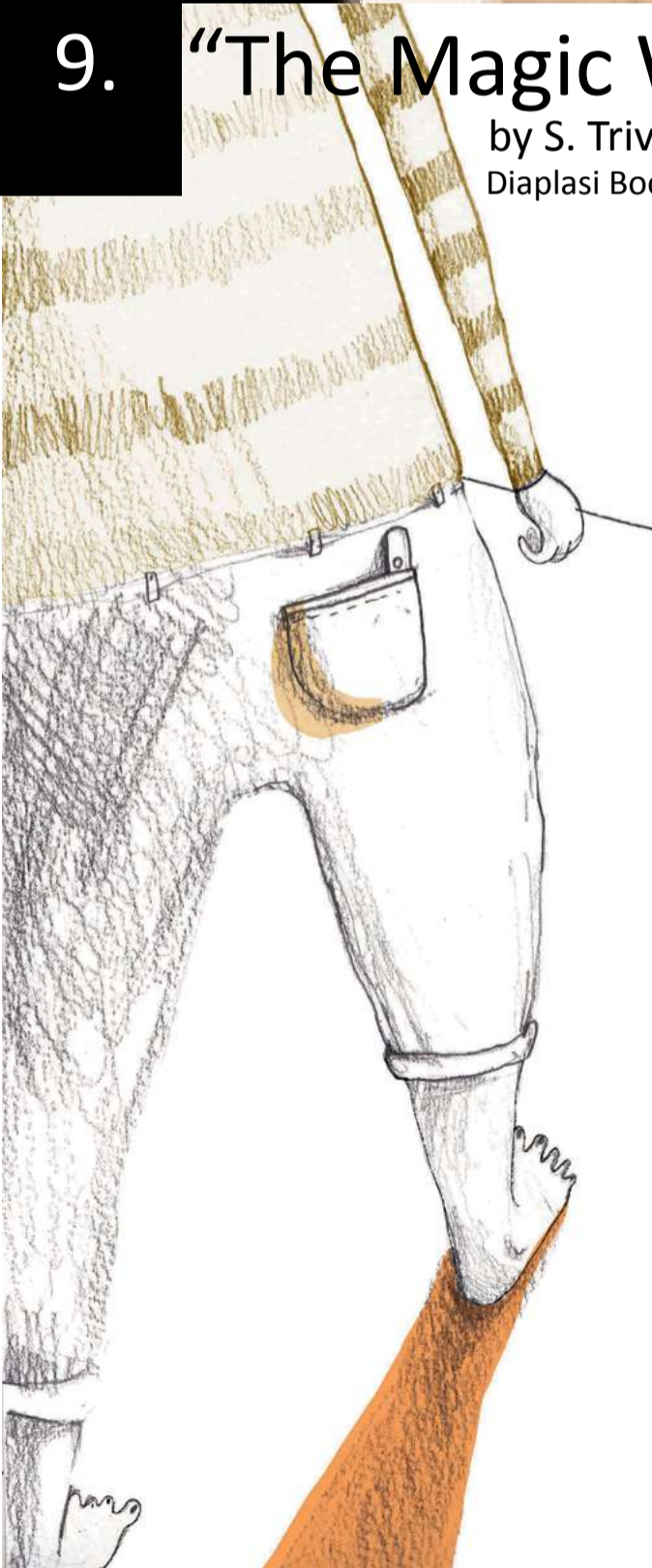


A story based on F. G. Lorca

## 9. “The Magic World of Federico”

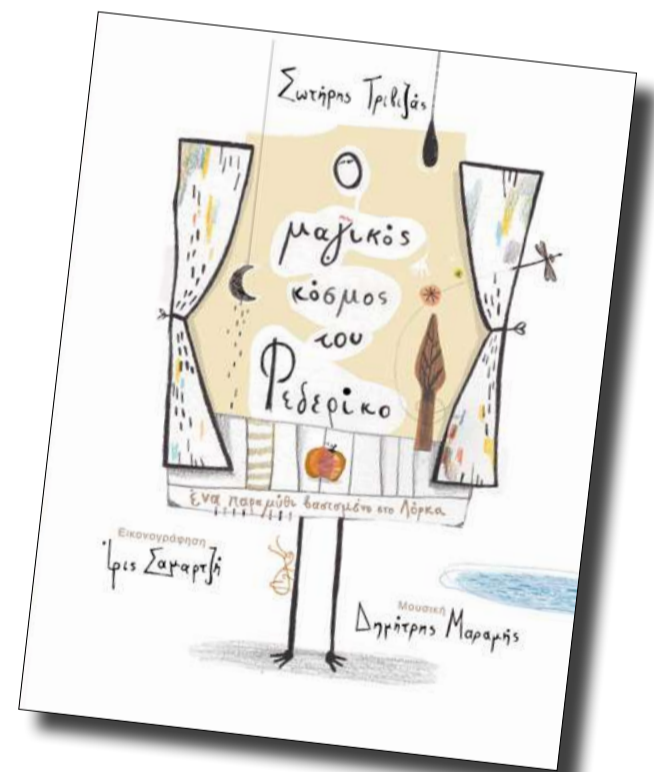
by S. Trivizas

Diaplasa Books- Greece - 2015



GREEK STATE AWARDS FOR CHILDREN'S LITERATURE 2016 (2015 publications):  
“The Magical World of Federico”- JURORS' RATIONALE

“It is a children's book based on Lorca's work and containing superb illustrations that interpret the dreamy and the adventurous through a riot of colors and images. It recreates in a poetic, fairytale manner that part of Lorca's childhood that was spent at the village. It contains utterly moving, eloquent illustrations which essay to familiarize young readers with poetry and the steady stream of symbolisms. The union between a variety of literary genres and the frames poems of Lorca throughout the narrative finds fruition through the book's dreamlike illustrations (which function as a parallel narrative with its own significations) and results in an exceptional book”.



- Award, IBBY – Greek Section  
- Greek State Picturebook award

“...I. Samartzi's remarkable color illustrations clearly point out the distinctive style of Lorca's surviving sketches (where “childish” innocence and naivety are combined with a sometimes inconceivable, tangible and sometimes overtly violent -or both- surrealism), unraveling the evocative images emerging from the tender and bold poetry of the text...”

<https://diastixo.gr/kritikes/paidika/5490-duo-afierwmatika-vivlia-texnis>





Μέσα στο δάσος ζώα και πουλιά έκαναν αισθητή την παρουσία τους με κελαηδισμούς και γρυλλίσματα. Μα όλα τα σκέπαζε το μονότονο, επίμονο τραγούδι των γρύλλων. Ο Φεδερίκο ένωσε το φόβο να μεγαλώνει μέσα του σαν δέντρο.

Η μικρή σταγόνα της βροχής, εκείνη που είχε πέσει από το μαύρο σύννεφο, κύλησε τώρα στην πλάτη του σαν κρύος ιδρώτας.



Ο Φεδερίκο κάθισε αποκαμωμένος στη ρίζα μιας ιτιάς κι έστρεψε τα μάτια του στο μακρινό ουράνιο, γυρεύοντας παραγαριά στα λιγοστά και τρεμόμενο φως που έστειλαν τ' αναρίθμητα άστρα. Το πιο λαμπρό ανάμεσά τους έμοιαζε να του γνέφει φιλικό. Ο Φεδερίκο είχε μάθει στο σχολείο ότι αυτό το αστερί ονομαζόταν Σείριος, που σημαίνει φωτεινός. Κάρφωσε εκεί τα μάτια του. Σε λίγο του φάνηκε πως άκουσε παιδικές φωνές και γέλια να φτάνουν σ' αυτιά του από εκείνο το μακρινό άστρο.

Στον Σείριο υπάρχουν παιδιά, σκέφτηκε ανακουφισμένος ο Φεδερίκο και αποκοιμήθηκε αμέσως.





In a tiny and humble fishing village, strange things have been afoot. Every morning, the inhabitants would find welcome, small surprises placed in the yards and window sills of their houses. But who was the night wanderer who put those surprises there without a trace? Yes, there are answers and they are all hidden in a book whose cover bears the words “Don’t Read This, Please”.



## 10. “Don’t Read This, Please”

by D. Bogdanos

Metaichmio Publications- Greece - 2018

[http://flip.metaixmio.gr/apospasmata/SAS\\_PARAKALO\\_MHN\\_TO\\_DIAVASETE/6/index.html](http://flip.metaixmio.gr/apospasmata/SAS_PARAKALO_MHN_TO_DIAVASETE/6/index.html)



# Reviews



Illustration for the IBBY Greece  
2019 Easter Greeting card

# “On a playful dollhouse island”

**It is the pictures that are exceptional in “Una Última Carta”, with humans drawn as handwriting and a reality of cardboard, paper, clips and colour.**

Antonis Papatheodoulou and Iris Samartzi

“Una Última Carta”

Translation: Anna Maria Gull

Atrium

Children’s books can come in many incredible forms, sometimes constructed as a mix between a book and a toy. Mostly the book loses in that context, confined to being the boring part of a fun toy.

But there are some books that are small, clever artwork. The Greek book “Una última carta” doesn’t become a book until you have opened the cardboard envelope, which is tied with striped lace. Inside lies the book, with a cover in the form of a stamp. The disadvantage is of course that the reader is not allowed to browse, it rather makes you scared to break the book. But he who dares is rewarded, and the construction is not at all fragile. This is a survivable envelope.

The story itself in “Una última carta” is a quiet story from a time “when there were no telephones or e-mails, and all news were delivered on foot”. During that time, Mr Kostas walked around his small island, where he was the only postman. He distributed good news (easy to carry), and bad news (heavy to shoulder), he was the contact between generations and continents. He even read some letters aloud, for those of the island’s citizens who had not been taught to read. Everyone knew Mr Kostas.

Now it is the last day of his working life, and oddly enough no one seems to be at home when he does his round. An increasingly disappointed Mr Kostas sticks letter after letter under door after door. Where is everyone? There is, of course, an explanation, unusually amiable.

The story is a friendly tale about a time that is about to end, but also an understated reverence for all the people working with infrastructure within society, people who seldom get appreciated in spite of the fact that postal services has been so crucial as an interface between people who live far apart. Nowadays, handwriting and writing paper is nostalgia, and a mailman who sees how the recipients react.

**But the great joy with “Una última carta” is Iris Samartzi’s pictures, a clever mix of drawing, painting and compositions boarded on handcrafted dollhouses and photographed. It is easy to see the Greek colors in the blue sea, blue skies, and sand- colored houses, but the sand color also becomes nostalgic sepia and wrapping-paper brown. People and animals she draws with thin, graceful lines, and it takes a while before you realize how they look like handwriting, where curly hair almost becomes a letter. Most houses, boats, and bridges are playfully made out of cutout cardboard, with decorative applications in the form of buttons and bottle caps which indicates size and a toy world.**

**The clouds are cutouts, some are pieces of handwritten letters, some hang from clips which, in turn hang from threads. It is a whole world, small, there in the cardboard envelope, imaginative in the same way Argentinian ISOL, the Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award Laureate, makes her pictures. And the longer you watch it, the more that world grows.**

Lotta Olsson- 24 March, 2018 - DN SWEDEN

<https://www.dn.se/kultur-noje/bokrecension-barnboken-ett-sista-brev-visar-en-verklighet-av-wellpapp-och-gem/>



“...The work of Iris Samartzi...is an elegant collage comprising familiar postal service items such as envelopes, stamps, and handwritten letters. Combination of those materials, together with old photographs and cardboard complemented by delicate black & white pen strokes, gives us sublime, nuanced illustrations which will make us want to read One Last Letter again and again. If you take a closer look at the Kalandraka Editorial’s website, it highlights one of the elements which, without reading it, has attracted my attention: the cinematographic treatment of the illustrations, with a wide variety of frames such as general and detailed ones, together with “American” and “media” shots. It draws attention to the game through a perspective and combinations which succeed in fitting several scenes within the same image. A visual delight in ochre and blue tones that seamlessly complement the story...”

Bichitos Lectores- 21 November 2016 - SPAIN

<https://www.bichitoslectores.es/una-ultima-carta/>

# Tata?? by Iris Samartzi

## (need to buy it...yesterday!)

“Tata??” is the first book signed by Iris Samartzi, not only as an illustrator but also as a storyteller this time:

“Having worked with her for years on end, I can’t exactly say that this is the first book that’s ‘hers’. Whatever project she works on, she dresses it with so much of her own inspiration and creativity that eventually the stories become rightfully hers. Still, “Tata??” is hers and hers alone”. That is how Antonis Papatheodoulou set things straight with this statement right from the start. Iris Samartzi co-signs all the books she illustrates; she molds them and is molded along with them. In “Tata??”, the time had come for her to play both parts in that children’s book, where her key expression as an illustrator playfully engages in a bras de fer with her storytelling skills. The result? Fascinating! It’s a book that can parade proudly next to the cream of the crop of children’s books worldwide. Let us help you see all that from our angle:

As early as the title itself, the name “Tata” carries two question marks after it so that the search for Tata may carry intensity and the voice that utters ‘Tata’ draws the word out: “Tata??” Our book’s heroine shows us her house and the house of Tata, another little girl who is her best friend. Then the heroine embarks on a monologue, expressing wishes brimming with a child’s guilelessness, impetuosity, and innocence, all bearing the banner of the unbridled, unadulterated imagination children have before all those traits are put paid to by the esteemed world of truly yours, the adults.

And here are the illustrations from the first three spreads of the book. The wishes/dreams of the little girl are rendered with precision, brevity, and the ingredients of childlike innocence we talked about earlier. Gradually, the two-page spread’s left side begins getting crammed with rooms, spaces, and imprints. The little one wants more and more. The objects of her wishes start taking over the right side of the spread to the point where, with inimitable sense of humor, she starts pushing Tata’s home to the right side’s border and beyond. The book’s young heroine dreams up all sorts of world, she’s sensitive, she wants to shelter pets, she wants a garden so she can plant flowers (always in the company of Tata), she wants a pond with two little fishes, a room serving as a library, an ice cream fountain exclusively for her. Page by page, she reveals all the beauty that crosses a child’s cerebral cortex, unveiling a child’s wants. Some are humble and some grandiose. And some are even out of bounds, somewhat bordering on the selfish or greedy. Samartzi’s heroine wants her home to house all of the world’s beauty, have it all next to her. She wants it all, right there, accessible by her and her friend Tata at any given moment. Is there anyone among you who, as a child, didn’t long for an ice cream fountain right inside your home, overflowing with ice cream 24/7? Who didn’t wish for a seesaw smack in the middle of their own living room? Who didn’t dream of a glass ceiling so they could gaze straight at the stars? Our heroine brings us back to order, to our childhood years, a time that we gradually forget, putting distance between us and our inner child’s soul: a time when our ‘want’ was enormous and invincible.

Her universe steadily expands, galloping on the pages just as the imagination of children does. Ultimately, she takes over the entire two-page spread which inevitably becomes a...four-page spread. Yet, Tata is not there to enjoy that unconstrained world crafted by her friend for both of them. And that’s when our heroine’s quest really begins: Tata??

We seek to indulge ourselves. We strive to gratify our loved ones by lavishing on them more and more, more material goods, more space, all the comforts, more luxuries. We go after that ‘one more thing’, that ‘one more step’. And when we’ve got it, we go looking for the next ‘one more thing’. What we forget while we’re running that ‘Wantathon’ of ours, is to look around us, to see whether our own people are still there. And that’s when we realize that, above all, what really counts is the sense of ‘together’, our steps and bodies next to each other’s, not the endless ‘wants’. If you don’t have that, you end up alone. The pages of your world become blank again, color and matter are no longer important. And that’s when, you start shouting out: Tata?? Maria?? John??

To craft her illustrations, Iris Samartzi uses carton boxes, and carton papers: she crumples and creases them, crinkles them, and gives them shapes, letting the naturalness of some scrappy nicks’ frayed ends sweeten the illustrations and bring you closer to the lofty indifference of perfection at the same time that it pushes you away from it. The combination of those all-natural materials with Samartzi’s digital pens, pencil scratches, and drawing pens; and with the natural and digital colors she uses on her sprawling white canvas conjures up a magic spell that draws our gaze to beauty, that allows imagination and a child’s guilelessness to triumph, that tenderly reminds us what it’s like to be a child. That parallel, visual narrative of the illustrator, endows the book with multiples of energy allowing it, once it has taken hold of your heart and mind, to surround you and demand your keenest sense of observation.

It’s one of the best books written and illustrated in recent years. How was it born?

*“Philippos and Mathildi, my first cousins, were my buddies in all our childhood pranks. They lived in Ambelokipoi [suburb of Athens] and I lived in Pangrati [suburb of Athens close to Ambelokipoi]. Some year or other...it must have been 30-35 years ago, in the middle of a chaotic universe made of toy cars, table top sports games, toy figures, tangle-haired dolls, and popcorn strewn all over the floor, we began talking about how much we wanted to have the apartment building in Ambelokipoi all to ourselves. How great it would be for us to live together, have all sorts of fairytale rooms filled with all the toys in the world, building floors featuring a football field, castles, scale models of houses, toy trains, dollhouses, and...and...and...just as Tata’s friend keeps wanting. Needless to say, we didn’t just talk about it. No. We started drawing architectural plans, cross-sections of the building’s floors, everything. That was the memory that visited me and that is how I began making “Tata??”*

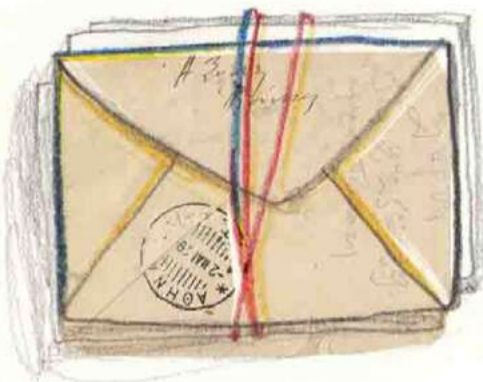
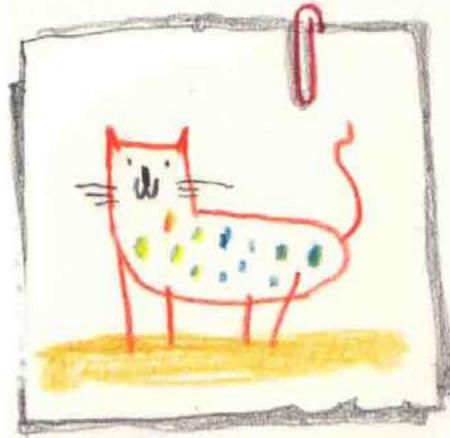
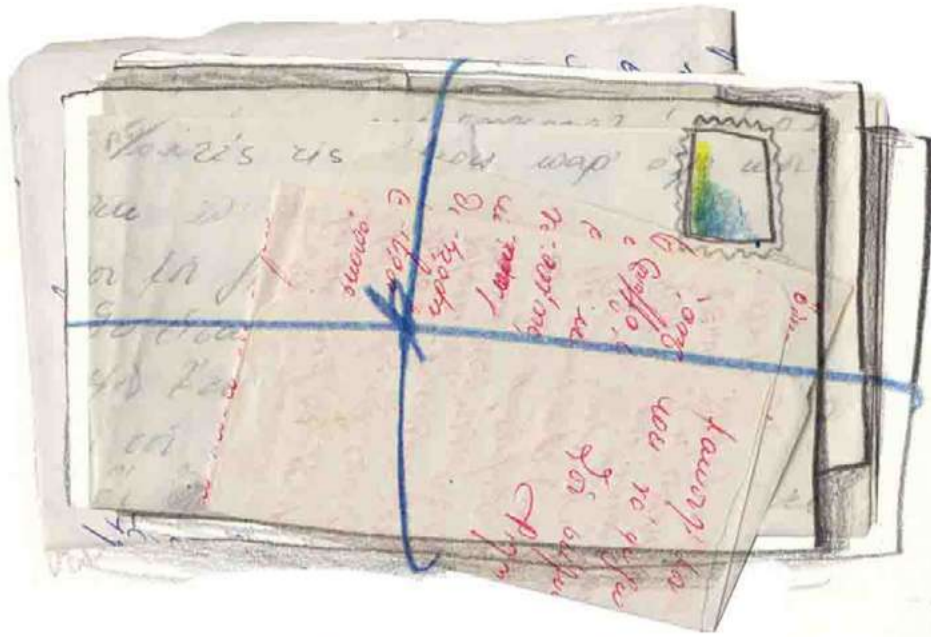
So, what is it, after all, that we need to have so we can have a great time with our friends? After reading “Tata??” you’ll know: just our friends and nothing but!

The book is structured on at least two cognitive levels. The first one is addressed to children 3½-4 years of age. As to the second level, which is somewhat more demanding and more philosophical, it addresses children 5-7 years of age who are the book’s keenest readership.

We can’t recommend the book enough and we’re doing so without any reservations whatsoever! It’s already a great favorite for the upper rungs of the ELNIPLEX 2021 Golden Lists, next spring.

[Apostolos Pappos 23/11/2020 - ELNIPLEX](#)





## “Summer, Autumn, Winter, Spring... Summer”

“...With a title that reminds us of the famous Kim Ki-Duk’s film *Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter...and Spring*, but also the changes of life through the year’s four seasons, the story of the house and the apple tree, is an ecumenical journey of courage, endurance, offering and rebirth, a poem on human adventure, the primordial quest for home, that protects, the home-soul that comforts, which is ready to offer. But are the houses living? Can they feel love, pain, joy, loneliness, abandonment?”

The story tells us: “Yes, they can!” They crack their doors and mourn, open their shutters and sigh. “The homes are sick without people and they pine when nobody takes care of them”. When they are empty and uninhabited they become melancholic, like the soul of a man, and they slowly pass away. G. Seferis saw some of these abandoned houses after his uprooting. And while he confesses that he does not know a lot of things about houses, he gives them essence in his poem *Kichli*. He describes them first as joyful babies and then getting older and older; even grow resentful / with those who stayed behind, or with those who went away /or with others who would come back if they could.

The story begins with the summer and the opening of the garden gates. The house sees a family crossing the path and reaching the front door. “They roamed in the rooms, climbed the stairs, opened two windows and made the decision: they would live there.” The door, the rise of the staircase leading upstairs and later on the exploration of the attic, where secret treasures are hidden, act as a transcendental allegory, as the beginning of a second opportunity for both, the house and the family that comes to live in. The narrative focuses on the relationship that grows slowly between the house and its new inhabitants, especially the boy, whose name is never mentioned, because, as in most fairy tales, names, place and time do not matter. The important thing is something else: the house and the man, having crossed the straits of loneliness and insecurity, will be connected and through mutual offer and companionship they will unite, evolve and create. The exploitation of the rotation of the seasons to emphasize the evolution and regeneration of the soul of man, is therefore a catalyst for the outcome of history.

The house is a kind of structural diagram of the human soul, as C. Yung tells us and G. Basselar in the *Poetics of Space* confirms this: It is the state of our soul, the accommodation of the unconscious. In other words, our soul is a house. But can a children’s book - because it primarily addresses to them - infiltrate such a big issue without becoming boring or failing? Of course it can, if it can balance the levels of understanding and incorporate meanings with language and illustration tools. Here, both are achieved.

The harmonization of Iris Samartzi’s illustrations and the author’s calm, sensitive- almost theatrical writing- the portray of the pictures of the house, but also of the seasons, sometimes with cold and sometimes with warm colors, constitute an elegant ensemble, able to excite the children’s imagination and stimulate the adults’s interest. And it is perhaps not at all accidental to realize that both creators manage with a lot of care, many places within the house with symbolic meaning eg. the door, the ladder, the attic, the balcony at the children’s room, overlooking the garden and the apple tree. The latter indeed, as a world symbol of artistic creation, is of particular semantic importance. It is the tree of desire, and the consumption of its fruit, both in literature and in art, functions as the acquisition of experience, knowledge, maturity, fullness and happiness. This is, in fact, the quest of every person, as long as the conditions allow it”.

G.Galanopoulou- 2 December, 2016- Diastixo GREECE

<https://diastixo.gr/kritikes/paidika/6089-kalokairi-fthinopwro-xeimwnas-anoiksi>

## When the Sun Goes to Bed or When a Book Opts for the Accordion Form

...The book, written by Argyro Pipini and illustrated by Iris Samartzi, makes for an interesting case where the book's form showcases the story and, in turn, the book per se propels the message the story wishes to relay.

Written by Argyro Pipini, the story, sweet, lyrical, and poetic, takes us to dreamlike and dreamy timescapes, where time expands to make room for journeys to magical spaces: to the Moon that chases nightmares away; to the celebrations surrounding a cat wedding; to high tea in a breathtakingly beautiful dollhouse; to attend class in the School of the Jungle; to a stroll through England; and to join the animals in India in their frolics. The spell-binding illustrations by Iris Samartzi sustain that magic by allowing twofold universes –the real and the fantastic– to emerge; and by repeatedly dipping reality into the enchantment of dream weaving.

The book is folded like an accordion. It opens in horizontal pleats, not unlike the way conventional books open but its concertina form allows for gradual revelation of each new journey. The concept of the dreamlike journey comes illustratively alive through the visual motif of a dark-colored pathway which traverses the book's folds while each new two-page spread welcomes a different dream destination that flags the beginning of a new, fascinating travel. Once the 'accordion' has been unfolded to resemble a 2.5-meter long poster lying flat, the pathway turns into...jammies, and the outline of a figure in slumber is revealed. It is thus that Iris Samartzi generates a kind of transformation which simulates the nature of dreams, a transformation where each image may potentially become another image, transfiguring the granted, the given, into something entirely different.

What is more, if the young readers, who by this time have to move about the floor in order to keep up with what is going on within the story, flip the unfolded accordion book over to reveal its reverse side, they will find themselves looking at a...comforter, made from the frays of fabric, images, and dreams. On that reverse side, where the tender story by A. Pipini is absent, there unravels an additional, hospitable space, ready to welcome new, dreamlike adventures. Exactly as in dreams, where anything and everything can happen, this dream-spinning book turns into a bed spread of rioting colors, a form which still allows it to replicate the enchantment relayed by the story. After all, how could a book that talks of the surreal sphere of dreams possibly go by a conventional, predictable shape?

The choice of publishing the story and its illustrations as an accordion book was not a random one: such a presentation affords a multitude of ways to approach the textual material. Apart from the conventional way of leafing through to approach the text, or of fully unraveling the accordion into a long and narrow strip of paper, "When the Sun Goes to Bed" also allows you to read it from a wide range of angles. Young readers may wish to unfold just half the book; lay it flat on the floor; hang it from a curtain rod and let its folds cascade down; place it standing up on a surface; or even make tiny 'book nooks' which they may enter or exit, reading the book inside out. Children can even place the first and last pages together, side by side, creating in that manner, again due to visual proximity, a carousel book. That practice would be perfect for a book such as "When the Sun Goes to Bed" where the initial text on the first page is repeated on the last one as well, refueling a child's wish to read the book anew after finishing it. Besides, a book that talks of the everlasting succession of the day by night, of the eternal cycle of light and darkness, could very well opt for a cyclical arrangement, so that it could stress that the perpetual alternation of alertness and slumber never loses its magic!

Angeliki Giannikopoulou <https://www.oanagnostis.gr/otan-o-ilios-paei-gia-ypno>



# Translated Editions



Illustration for the IBBY Greece 2020  
Christmas Greetings card

- “Una última carta” - Kalandraka Editorial- Spain -2016  
by A.Papatheodoulou  
-Galician, Spanish, Catalan, Basque, Portuguese, Greek, Italian, Swedish, Chinese, Korean
- “Léon Millequestions”- Hemma - Belgium - 2019  
by A.Papatheodoulou  
- French, Portuguese
- “Summer, Autumn, Winter, Spring, Summer...” - Patakis Publishers - Greece - 2016  
by A.Pipini  
-Greek, Korean
- “En la Cola para el Arca” - Kalandraka Editorial - Spain - 2021  
by A.Papatheodoulou  
- Galician, Spanish, Catalan, Basque, Portuguese, Italian



- “Level Up”- Papadopoulos Publishing - Greece - 2018  
by A.Papatheodoulou  
- Greek, English, Korean
- “The Mermaid” Metaichmio Publications- Greece - 2017  
by A.Darlas  
-Greek, English
- “Once Upon a Bear”- Patakis Publishers - Greece - 2018  
by E. Geroulanou  
- Greek, Chinese
- J.Verne Adventure Stories Papadopoulos Publishing - Greece- 2015 to 2019  
by A.Papatheodoulou
  - 20,000 Leagues under the Sea: **Greek, English, Catalan, Spanish, Korean, Chinese**
  - Around the World in 80 Days: **Greek, English, Catalan, Spanish, Korean, Chinese**
  - From the Earth to the Moon: **Greek, English, Catalan, Spanish, Korean, Chinese**
  - Journey to the Centre of the Earth: **English, Catalan, Spanish, Korean, Chinese**
  - Robur the Conqueror: **Greek, Chinese**
  - Five Weeks in a Balloon: **Greek, Chinese**
- “Badboy” Patakis Publishers - Greece - 2014  
by A.Darlas  
- Greek, Korean, Turkish



From the book  
“En la Cola para el Arca”  
Kalandraka Ed. , 2021



● “The Little Weaver of Words”

by A.Papatheodoulou

Metaichmio Publications- Greece - 2017

-Greek, English

● “The Tree that Had Wings”

by A.Darlasi

Papadopoulos Publishing- Greece - 2010

-Greek, Turkish

● Great Little Classics

by A.Papatheodoulou

Papadopoulos Publishing - Greece- 2018 to 2020

- Little Women Or A Tale About Four Real-Life Girls- L.M.Alcott  
**Greek, English, Chinese (soon)**
- Alice in Wonderland Or Curiouser and Curiouser- L.Carroll  
**Greek, English, Chinese (soon)**
- Tom Sawyer Or The Largest Room in the World- M.Twain  
**Greek, English, Chinese (soon)**
- The Black Beauty Or A Book Written in the Language of Horses-  
A.Sewell- **Greek, Chinese (soon)**
- Dr Dolittle Or The man who spoke the Animal language!-  
H.Lofting- **Greek, Chinese (soon)**
- Mowgli Or The Man’s Cub- R.Kipling- **Greek, Chinese (soon)**

● “Children on the move”

By A.Papatheodoulou - Unicef & Department for the Protection & promotion of Children’s Rights of the Greek Ombudsman- Greece- 2019

- Greek, English

● “The Good and Bad Pirates”

“The Good and the Bad Knights”

“The Good and the Bad Witches

by A.Papatheodoulou

Papadopoulos Publishing- Greece - 2018

-Greek, Chinese (soon)

● “The Lady with the Camels”

by M.Sfakianopoulou

Patakis Publishers - 2015

- Greek, Turkish

● “The Labours of Hercules”

Vol.1- Vol.2

by M. Angelidou

Metaichmio Publications- Greece

-Greek, English

From the book “Alice in Wonderland Or Curiouser and Curiouser ”  
Papadopoulos Publishing, 2019

*“...kids will pause before detail, will look for it. How about an example? When do you really but really get to know a person better? When you go to that person’s home and see her space, their hideaway. When you get to see in what colors they have painted their walls, what kind of books are on their bookshelves; when you look at their music selections, see whether they’re tidy or not, whether they have pets or not, things like that. So, when I begin molding a character’s profile for a book, I can’t even begin to think of leaving out that part [a person’s home]. If I do, there will be something missing from the character I’m crafting...”*

[www.elniplex-interview-irissamartzi](http://www.elniplex-interview-irissamartzi)



From the book “Dr.Dolittle by H.Lofting  
Adaptation by A.Papatheodoulou  
Great Little Classics  
Papadopoulos Publishing, 2020

[www.irissamartzi.com](http://www.irissamartzi.com)  
[iris\\_samartzi@yahoo.com](mailto:iris_samartzi@yahoo.com)  
[Iris Samartzi Illustrator|facebook](#)  
[iris samartzi instagram](#)