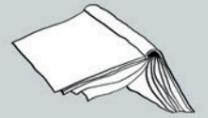
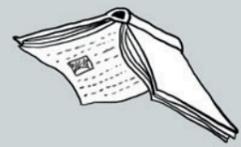


HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN AWARD 2024

# KELLY MATATHIA-COVO

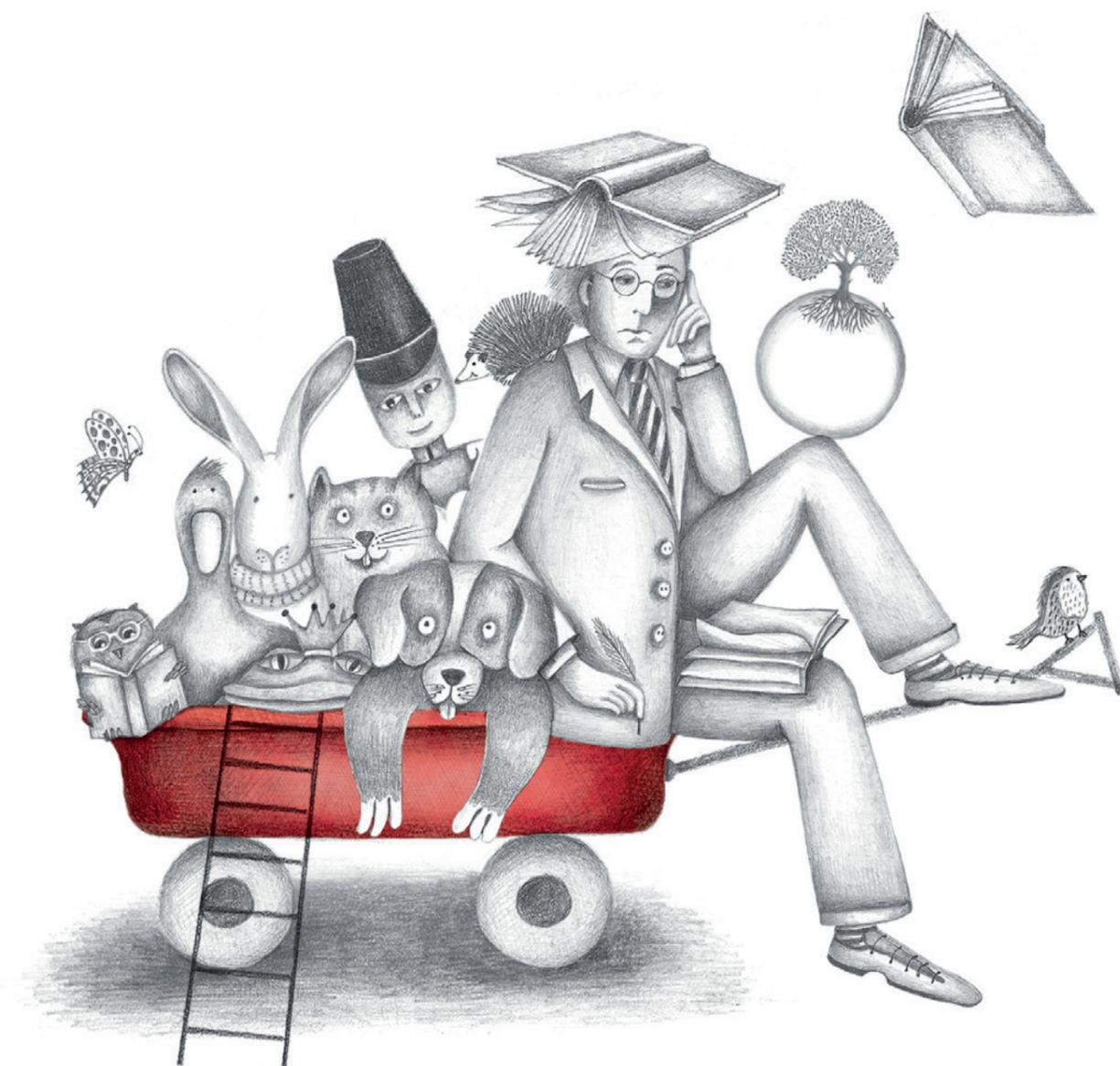
ILLUSTRATOR NOMINEE  
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What Do You Say is the Most Precious Thing in the World?

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**Kelly Matathia-Covo** was born in 1959 in Athens, Greece, where she continues to live and work as a Graphic Designer and Illustrator of Children's Books.

She attended the Neri Bloomfield Academy of Art and Design in Israel (1979-1983), where she studied Graphic Design and Illustration. After graduation she returned to Greece where she started her freelance professional career in 1985, designing book covers and corporate identities. Encouraged by her illustration teachers at the Academy, she started showing her portfolio of illustrations to publishers. In 1986, Kalendis Publishing commissioned her to illustrate *The Night's Race to Catch the Day*, and *The River's Race to Meet the Sea*, both by author Maro Loizou. For this work she received an Illustration Award, and an IBBY Honour List nomination, by IBBY Greece in 1988. Since then she has illustrated more than 20 children's books, many of which received awards, accolades, nominations and critical acclaim.

Kelly Matathia-Covo believes that storytelling and picture books always find the way to communicate even the most difficult subjects. So, in 2017 she wrote and illustrated *The Yellow Hats*, published in Greek by Patakis Publishers. A book inspired by her own family's rescue story during the Holocaust, for which she received the Picture Book Award, by IBBY Greece in 2018. In 2019 the book was nominated for the Greek-National Children's Book Award.

In 2020 the book she illustrated, *What Do You Say is the Most Precious Thing in the World?*, published by Patakis Publishers, received the Best Picture Book Award, by IBBY Greece. Currently, she is nominated for the Greek National Children's Book Award 2023, for the book *Phoebus and the Whale*, by author Anna Kouppanou, Patakis Publishers 2021.

In 2004 she served as a member of the Committee of the Greek National Children's Book Awards and is now a member of the Committee for the IBBY Greece Children's Book Awards 2023.

Volunteer work has always been among the candidate's priorities. She was a member of the board of her community's primary school, 1996-2008, and during those years she designed school books, yearbooks and the school's newspaper. Between the years 2008-2010 she was a member of the Committee for the competition for the Holocaust Memorial of Athens, Greece and volunteered for its implementation. In 2016 she joined the designing group for the Memorial of the Righteous Among the Nations in Athens, Greece.



*“It is our innate need for a better understanding of the world and of ourselves that drives us to create books, for they can be windows and mirrors.”*

<https://www.kellymatathiacovo.com>

by **Angela Yannicopoulou**

Prof. of Children's Literature  
National & Kapodistrian University of Athens

Kelly Matathia-Covo first appeared as an illustrator in 1985 with Maro Loizou's book *The Night's Race to Catch the Day*. Since then 38 years have passed, during which Covo collaborated with influential Greek writers and publishing houses and illustrated over 20 books establishing a clearly recognisable visual style, avoiding, at the same time, its standardisation. In fact she managed to evolve constantly, with her illustrations adapting to, serving, and highlighting the peculiarities of the text, constructing and enriching its atmosphere. On a visual level, her choices varied from highly humorous to deeply sentimental.

Thus, for instance, in the book *The Button of Love and the Prince Who is not Little Any More*, by Vaggelis Iliopoulos, Covo's illustrations adapted the characteristics of the classic fairy tale, so as to reproduce through images the well known atmosphere of a fairy tale: fine lace capes, pointy shoes with oversized bows, impressive palaces, but also old sewing machines and charcoal irons are utilized to help the young reader capture the atmosphere of bygone times. In every double spread, a hidden frog, which did not have the time or didn't want to turn into a prince, functions as a recurring double

pictorial allusion to the literary genre. Moreover, the contrasting black-and-white background scenery highlights the multi-coloured characters, allowing for an all-pervasive nostalgia inherent in a literary genre deeply connected with childhood.

The contemporary fairy tale's illustrations reproduce the structure and the well established features of the popular, classic fairy tales, managing, nevertheless, to articulate an underlying criticism to all those elements that need not be perpetuated. The classic crown, for instance, a symbol of totalitarianism and authority, which is standardly depicted on the authoritarian king's head, suddenly appears... on the frog's head in the image where he hands over the sceptre to his son. This is a subtle way of banishing monarchy to the land of fairy tales. In addition, on the spread depicting the wedding, the poor seamstress is shabbily dressed instead of putting fancy gowns on; she doesn't replace her humble and priceless love button on her finger with a sparkling diamond ring. This is a way of emphasizing the value of work, and the importance of emotions over an excessive display of wealth and vain consumerism. (Fig. 1 & 2).



*The Button of Love and the Prince Who is not Little Any More*

The style of Covo's illustrations in the book *Who Had a Pee in the Mississippi*, by Eugene Trivizas, is entirely different, as the images highlight and enhance the humour of the verbal text, in a book where cute ducklings emit freshness and childlike innocence. Dressed in human clothes, wearing ribbons, hats, glasses, and even flippers, the ducks relax while sipping their juice, play music and have fun on a riverboat, creating incredible duck-crowding and a hilarious universe of their own, in which even the Statue of Liberty takes up the form of a... duck! (Fig. 3)

In addition to humour, another persistent and favourite element in Covo's illustrations is the theme of visual quest games, with images evoking a peculiar



3 *Who Had a Pee in the Mississippi?*

hide-and-seek. For example, in *The Greedy Tortoise*, by Sophia Madouvalou, on every spread, cover and end sheets included, a tiny red ladybird and a long line of hard-working ants give rise to a playful challenge, inviting the reader to get involved in their tracking. (Fig. 4)

Covo's narrative images are continually opposed to the text's "centrifugal" tendency pushing on with the reading to the end of the book: they request the reading audience to slow down the reading pace, remain on the page and observe carefully the illustration, revealing small, cute, almost invisible Figures. In many cases, Covo's images display a narrative tendency, they construct running stories.



4 *The Greedy Tortoise*

At the same time, intense visual references attempt to start an additional visual game, where the reader is invited to recognise and identify familiar faces. In the book *What Do You Say is the Most Precious Thing in the World?*, by Lili Lambrelli, the text's reference to the storyteller is accompanied by Hans Christian Andersen's readily identifiable image, surrounded by well known heroes of his fairy tales. In this case, the game "Find out who the storyteller is" is enriched by its sequel "Find out what this fairy tale is". (Fig. 5)



5 *What Do You Say is the Most Precious Thing in the World?*

Covo's preference for drawing animals is evident in the majority of her illustrations. In fact, certain animals, such as rabbits, ducks, or sheep, appear in different books as typical cases of inner intertextuality, creating a well loved familiar atmosphere. Covo's illustrations of animals manage to develop well-defined personalities, serving or transcending the verbal text. For example, in Lily Lambrelli's book *The Day the Fox Turned Red*, by Lily Lambrelli, the depiction of both badgers and pigs, the anti heroes of the story who like to humiliate and abuse the little grey fox, their considerable sizes as well as their military boots and police hats contribute to the construction of unreasonably cruel and rather violent characters, bearing an undercurrent visual condemnation of police violence into the spatial representation of the fairy tale. (Fig. 6).



6 *The Day the Fox Turned Red*



7 *The Day the Fox Turned Red*



8 *Phoebus and the Whale*

The story ends with a narrative image of all the story's heroes sitting in a school classroom, an element that, although absent from the verbal text, underlines visually the value of education as the only antidote against intolerance and racism. (Fig. 7)

Covo often resorts to depict animals to represent concepts and feelings. In *Phoebus and the Whale*, by Anna Kouppanou, the little boy's fear is depicted as a giant blue whale, the largest of all mammals. Indeed, this fear-whale appears along with all the other big animals, with an accurate representation of their relative sizes on scale. Unlike the other animals, however, the fear-whale appears on a double spread with vertical instead of horizontal orientation (as in the rest of the book). It is also drawn in the upright position amidst a familiar urban environment, taking the form of a whale-block of flats, so that its size can be highlighted as comparable to actual multi-storey buildings in a big city. (Fig.8).

In images where the colour palette is limited ranging from black to dark blue, Phoebus confronts the fear-whale and finally manages to send it away. Now the distance makes the vast cetacean look small and harmless.

Colour in Covo's work is essential in serving not only aesthetic but also purely narrative purposes. An interesting example is the book *The Boy Who Read Tales to the Hens*, by Sophia Madouvalou, where the story takes place in two different, often intertwined, space-time continua. In Covo's images, which bring the writer's postmodern text to life, a red thread delineates reality from fairy tale, at times splitting the image in two; the realm of reality is always in black and white, while that of fairy tale emerges multi-coloured and fascinating, ready to march into the dream. (Fig. 9).

However, the red thread is not always related to meta-fiction. In *The Day the Fox Turned Red*, by Lili Lambrelli, the red thread appears almost at the end of the book, when the Fates, acting as "Deus ex Machi-



9 *The Boy Who Read Tales to the Hens*



10 *The Day the Fox Turned Red*



11 *The Day the Fox Turned Red*

na", or rather "Dei ex Machina", resolve the little fox's problem. Coiled around trees and branches, or wrapped around the legs of the Fates, or even attached to the fox's tail, the red thread connects two literary traditions: that of the Greek folk-tale, where the phrase "Red thread tied/ to the reel wrapped" is used as an introduction, a trigger for the tale to begin, and the one encountered in Greek Mythology where the three Fates define the destiny of humans by spinning and cutting the thread of their lives. Interestingly, since one's fate is unknown, concealed from view, Covo avoids representing the Fates in their complete form. She prefers to depict them as three pairs of legs ready to run and determine the destiny of people, or as floating mouths that pronounce the fates of mortals, in an image reminiscent of the Cheshire cat, evoking a sense of magic and mystery. Just like immortal Dryads or forest fairies, the Fates remain invisible, keeping their secrets well hidden. (Fig.10)

On the other hand, in the same book, we come across a tiny girl in red pants, apparently alluding to a standard final phrase of Greek folk-tales: "I was there as well / wearing pants all red". The little girl in her short dress is shown in almost every double spread, peeping out through the forest trees, an invisible observer of the goings-on. However, the appearance of the little girl, instead of the photographs of both the writer and the illustrator in their respective CV spread, adds a self-referential dimension, making the girl the alter ego of its creators. (Fig.11)

It is particularly interesting to notice how Kelly Matathia-Covo gives form to the invisible and the abstract in her work. In *What Do You Say is the Most Precious Thing in the World?*, by Lili Lambrelli, responses such as “To be light and fly” or “to be heavy and endure” constitute visual puzzles and riddles, to which Covo gives her allegorical responses: flying feathers to indicate lightness (Fig. 12), stormy weather to show endurance (Fig.13), book-like wings to refer to knowledge (Fig.14), and rusty nails for hurtful words (Fig.15). Furthermore, all these different responses are loaded onto a child’s little red wagon. This pictorial addition illustrates the idea that everything matters in life and nothing is lost, since, in the final analysis, our pursuits for answers are worth more than the answers themselves. That is why, when the verbal text refers to the poet and his view of words as the most precious of all things, the accompanying image is that of Constantine Cavafy, the poet of *Ithaca*, where he famously states the idea that real value lies in the journey rather than the destination. And while the verbal text suggests that dreams are the most precious thing, the illustration of the red wagon, which gradually fills during the course of the story, emphasizes the experience of the journey itself and visualises the answer to the central question of the title: *What Do You Say is the Most Precious Thing in the World?*

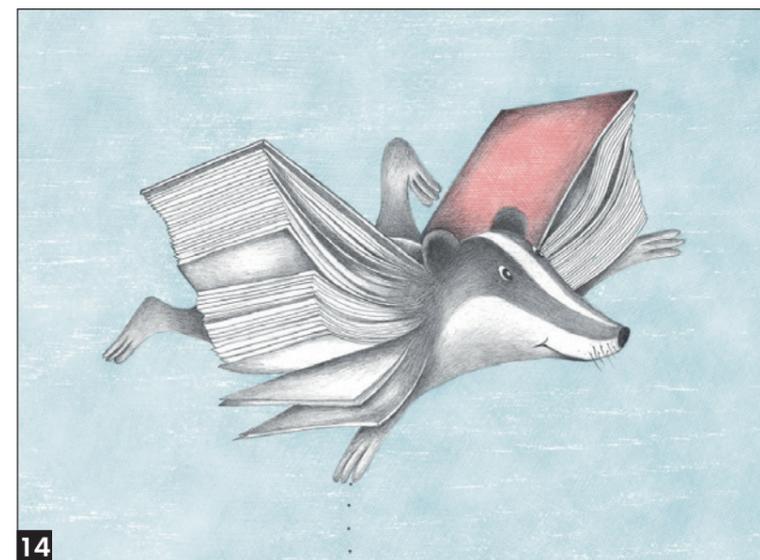


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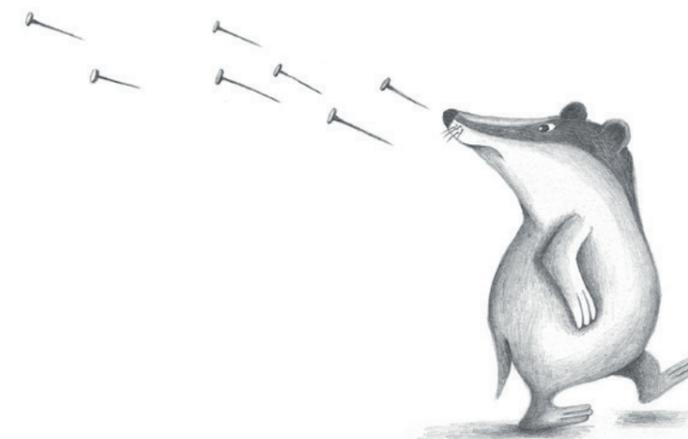
*What Do You Say is the Most Precious Thing in the World?*



13



14



15



Although the most significant part of Covo's work is in collaboration with well-known writers, in 2017 she authored and illustrated her own book, published by Patakis Publishers: *The Yellow Hats*. This is the first illustrated children's book in Greek that alludes to the Holocaust in order to talk not about it but about solidarity, vigilance and the concept of active, global citizenship. In a book which could be seen as relevant for readers of all ages, Covo has managed to transform the living cross-generational memory of the trauma from a family story with a limited audience, into a genuinely universal, timeless experience that speaks not only of persecution, injustice, war, but also of humanity, greatness of soul and the need for resistance. The book's reference to the Holocaust is only through illustrations and is limited to a single element emphasized in the book's title: *The Yellow Hats*.

In an effort to avoid identifying the absurdity of the "final solution" with the Jews alone, but also because the use of a religious symbol on animals would be disrespectful, the yellow hats mark the key points of the story: persecution, segregation, salvation.

Rabbits, cockerels, and mice were chosen as the story's characters, while the persecuted family mem-

bers are represented as white sheep. A cute animal, friendly, harmless, hardly lonely, as it lives in flocks, the sheep is heavily marked with the fate of the innocent victim since it is recorded in our collective memory as a timeless symbol of sacrifice (Fig. 16).

In conclusion we could say that this book is the meeting point of the main characteristics of Covo's art: animal characters, representing a pure and innocent world and the desire of unity with Mother Earth, manage to transcend their status as interesting illustration figures and constitute memorable, identifiable personalities. But most importantly, the image goes beyond a mere reproduction of the written word. It becomes a comment on the text, it complements and enriches it, and sometimes it even articulates a different point of view about art and the world.



by **Meni Kanatsouli**

Prof. of Children's Literature, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki

Navigating Children's Literature Through Controversy. *Global and Transcultural Perspectives* (forthcoming ed. Mateusz Swietlicki, Elzbieta Jamroz-Stolarska, and Agata Zarzycka)

## Controversies over the Holocaust Painful Memories in Greek Children's Books

### Introduction

Children's literature is inherently an arena of controversy, a term defined by the Merriam-Webster dictionary as a discussion marked by the expression of opposing views. One fundamental controversy over children's books revolves around what should actually be of uppermost concern in texts adults write for children. In books that deal with painful memories, particularly those regarding historical events, the debate focuses on whether, pedagogically speaking, young readers should be shielded from unpleasant situations or whether it does not really matter, because children today are continually exposed to multiple distressing experiences and are thus already aware of the negative facets of life.

### Painful Memories, and Trauma in Children's Books

When texts for children address difficult themes, such as painful memories or trauma, the controversy over what is and what is not suitable in children's literature intensifies. The very idea of what memory itself is invites doubts and disputes. Research into memory has revealed that memory is not a passive and fixed image that resides in the brain, but rather a dynamic process that constantly develops; in brief, it is the moulding and rebuilding of the past (Jaisson 167). This is the central idea in the work of Maurice Halbwachs (1925/1994), a French philosopher and sociologist known for developing the concept of collective memory, who has famously argued that remembrance is not a mere reproduction of the past, but a reconstruction of it.

In children's books that contain memories of past events from the world's or a society's history, children cannot be the bearers of these memories. Adults believe, whether deliberately or instinctively, that the memory of the past needs to be handed down to children, or, to use Halbwachs' words, to be reconstructed on their behalf. Children retain vivid memories as narrated to them by their parents or grandparents. These memories are fraught with the emotions of the adults who have experienced them. Such memory cannot be intrinsically painful to children, since they have not gone through these events and often were not even alive when they occurred. However, it can painfully and tragically affect children when transferred onto them by the adults involved. In traditional societies,

the transfer of memories was performed orally and to such powerful effects that oral narrative is considered to have become the site where history was enacted (Calvet 119). In modern societies, this inherited memory is also formed with the aid of various symbolic media, such as texts, pictures, buildings, and rituals (Assmann 189; Mandoglou, *Social Memory* 25). Painful memories of things that happened to the preceding generations are an increasingly common subject in children's literature, which adds urgency to the discussion on how the painful events should be handled in narratives.

Given the nature of the genre, children's literature by definition insists on life-affirming support for the child. As a result, authors, themselves struggling with traumatic events, may conceal or temper the atrocities by employing reader-protective strategies. Such evasions fuel the debate on whether children's books should indeed present an unalloyed positive and optimistic picture of life, or rather strive to convey a more realistic portrayal of it. It is in this context that Naomi Sokoloff asks: "What happens when the conventions of juvenile fiction combine with Holocaust themes? Will an overly simplistic, naïve message emerge? Alternatively, will there be a grotesque collision of values

with narrative results too intense for young children?" (175). Phyllis Lassner and Danny M. Cohen offer an answer to Sokoloff's queries by highlighting a dual impact of children's fiction about the Holocaust (and, by extension, other traumatic events), which "takes us on journeys that try to come close to terrifying events of the Holocaust and, at the same time, their wishful fantasies keep us at a safe distance" (180). While the need to balance out these two opposing effects is a controversial issue for authors of children's books, this "convergence of concerns with children's literature and the Holocaust [may] chart promising new artistic territories" (Sokoloff 175).

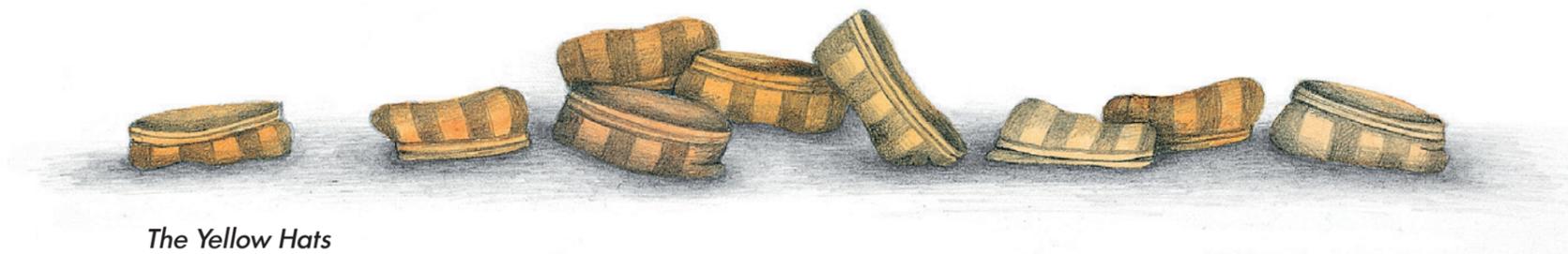
### The Holocaust of Greek Jews in Greek Children's Literature

Below, I examine the thematic and narrative choices of Greek children's books of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries regarding the two most tragic and traumatic events in recent Greek history: the Holocaust of Greek Jews and the Civil War that followed the German occupation. Following is my discussion on Kelly Matathia-Covo's *The Yellow Hats*.

The Holocaust was undoubtedly one of the most traumatic events of the twentieth century. The Greek Jewish Holocaust has only become a robustly researched issue in the last two decades. The extermination of Jewish populations in big cities, such as in Thessaloniki, where 94% of the Jewish residents were killed, produced a very sensitive and difficult situation. The Holocaust survivors avoided any public discussion on the theme for many years, and Christians were equally reluctant to address it, whether out of ignorance, personal interests or shame (Rigos 15-22; Benveniste and Hatzaroula). Consequently, books for children, which echo the ideas of grown-ups, were late in incorporating the theme into their thematic repertoire.

### The Yellow Hats

When dealing with violent and/or traumatic experiences and painful themes, children's books tend to adopt a softening approach, as they are governed by the guiding principle of leading children to optimistic conclusions. As a rule, whatever is bothersome is soothed over, and whatever is traumatic is "rationalized" (Higonnet 151-2). One such book, *The Yellow Hats* (2017), is a story for young children about the Holocaust written and illustrated by Kelly Matathia-Covo, herself a Jew, whose parents were saved by Greek Christians. An award-winner of the Greek IBBY Award, the tale features animals that wear yellow hats, which immediately call to mind the discriminatory yellow star that Jews had to visibly display on their clothes under the Nazi occupation. Georgia Karantona and Tasoula Tsilimeni observe that "even though recognizable Nazi symbols such as the swastika, the Nazi salute, or the Nazi insignia are totally missing from illustrations, the yellow striped hats refer to yellow stars that all Jews were obliged to wear as a symbol of discrimination". While the particular historical reference is unmistakable, the animals—the innocent Lambs-Jews and their protectors: Mouse, Rabbit, and Rooster—more broadly speaking, symbolize the people in our com-



*The Yellow Hats*

munity on whom we turn our backs in times of desperation or struggle. Matathia-Covo does not withhold the truth about what happened to the Jews during the Holocaust, but by using metaphors and symbolism, and by making the courage of the local population who risked their lives to save their Jewish neighbours her major focus, she somewhat reduces its harshness.

Although the text addresses a young readership, it also communicates with an adult readership or co-readership. In other words, there is another textual layer which, according to Perry Nodelman, has the “hidden adult” as its target audience. Nodelman explains: “The simple text implies an unspoken and much more complex repertoire that amounts to a second, hidden text –what I will call a ‘shadow text’. As a result, many of the book’s allusions to the annihilation of Jews in Greece can only be noticed by adult readers.

This is the solution Kelly Matathia-Covo proposes to the dilemma of painful topics in juvenile fiction: she converts such a topic into a literary plot that is suitable for young children, a plot that adheres to the truth of historical events, but at the same time salvages the signature optimism of children’s literature.



*The Yellow Hats*

by Marisa DeCastro

Author & Book Critic

○ Anagnostis - Literary Journal 4/11/2022



**Q.** Authors and Illustrators are also good readers. How do you imagine your reader?

**A.** The reader I imagine is one with an investigative mind and a curiosity enabling them to read beyond the text, to read the story narrated by the illustrator. Someone who has the ability to find the messages hidden in my pictures.

**Q.** How do you address the texts that you are asked to visualize? As a reader, as an artist or both?

**A.** As a reader, I look for sensitive, philosophical or social content, that will give me food for thought and growth. As an artist, during the first readings I look for original and important ideas conveyed, that will move me and make me see beyond the written words enabling me to create my own visual narration. Sometimes it is very challenging to visualize concepts for certain qualities, such as endurance or lightness, for instance. It can take many days with dozens of sketches before I can find a solution to such puzzles.

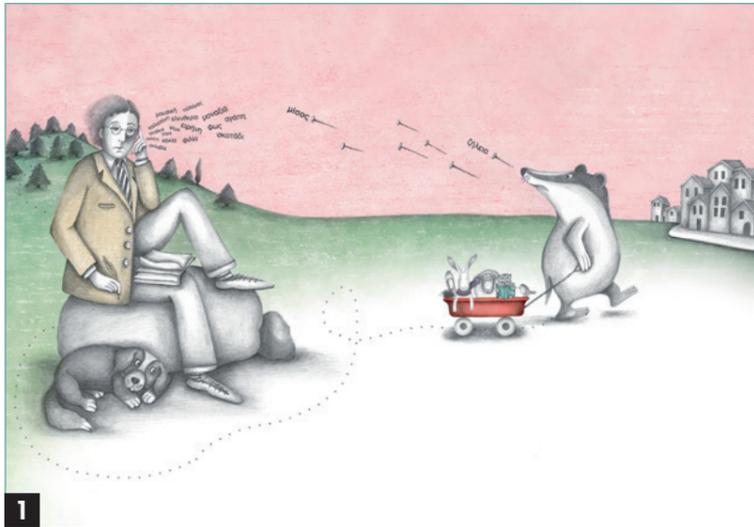


*“The reader I imagine is one with an investigative mind and a curiosity enabling them to read the story narrated by the illustrator.”*



**Q.** In the book *What Do You Say is the Most Precious Thing in the World?*, by author Lily Lambrelli, I saw images that lead to a different kind of intertextuality. I saw Cavafy and I saw Andersen.

**A.** At first, the Badger met a poet and asked for his idea on the most precious thing in the world. I was immediately reminded of the Greek poet Constantine Cavafy who wrote the famous poem *Ithaca*. (Fig 1) Like a new Ulysses, the badger set out in search for truth. During his journey he gained knowledge and experience. Next, the badger met a storyteller and asked him too. So I thought of illustrating that page with Andersen, as he is widely considered one of the greatest storytellers of all times.



1 *What Do You Say is the Most Precious Thing in the World?*

This approach gives the opportunity to the reader to reach out for further information on both Cavafy and Andersen, an opportunity that would have been lost if I had used fictional characters.

**Q.** What do you think is the essence of illustration? To depict the text? To comment on it? To sharpen the reader's observation skills? To create images of multiple interpretations? Which elements do you choose to focus on, as an illustrator?

**A.** For me, illustrating a book is the opportunity I am given to join an author in the process of narration. Together we will tell the same story following different paths. One with written words the other with pictures, all the while trying not to repeat ourselves. Often focusing on social issues, sometimes my pictures comment on the text with humour, using for instance exaggeration, or even with a delicate kind of irony, while on other occasions my illustrations may lead to interpretations that the authors themselves had not thought of. I would say that when I illustrate a book, I don't have an unknown prospective reader in my mind, but rather consider how the result of what I do would satisfy the child in me.

**Q.** Which factors play a key role in determining the style of pictorial narration? The age of the potential readers, the different narrative techniques, the colours, the values highlighted in the text...?

**A.** When I illustrate a book I do not think of the age or gender of the reader. I try to draw on the feeling I get when I read the text. Techniques and styles change as technology provides us with new tools. The colour palette derives from the atmosphere I decide I want to create for the story. Often, I want to stress a specific point in the text, which I consider important. For example, in the book *The Day the Fox Turned Red*, the badgers' speech is very abusive, even sort of racist. "Where are you going ugly fox?" "You stink, you know that?" "I have never seen a more ridiculous animal". "Does your whole breed stink, or is it just you?", etc. Here I wanted to show the arrogance of the badgers and the pigs and the power they thought they had. So, I decided to dress them in black military boots and police hats. This was my way to comment, with a touch of humour and irony, on contemporary social issues.

**Q.** In every good book words and images work together to create a personal space for the reader. How is this special space reflected in the books you illustrate?

**A.** Most of the time, the heroes in children's books reflect real people. They are like us and have to handle situations similar to those most of us find ourselves in. The reader will hopefully identify with characters in the story through such textual or visual similarities. For example, a child who has been bullied at school will probably find their "special place" in a story like *The Day the Fox Turned Red*. The process of identifying with another creature can make the child feel that they are not alone.

**Q.** When writing or illustrating do you think of possible reading activities?

**A.** No I don't think of possible activities mainly because I am not an educator and I think that, if I did, that would limit the freedom I have when I work on a book. My priority as an artist is to make a book that kids will enjoy because books should primarily bring joy and real delight to the young reader.

*"Books should primarily bring joy and delight to the young reader."*



*What Do You Say is the Most Precious Thing in the World?,*

by Eleni Korovila

Journalist

Book Press Online Portal for Books 14/12/2022



**Q.** You have been nominated for the Hans Christian Andersen Award 2024, the highest international recognition for an author and an illustrator of children's books. How do you feel about this honour?

**A.** Undoubtedly, this nomination is a great honour! Even though I started working back in 1986, the list of my works is not very long and I have to admit that, when the president of the Greek Section of IBBY, Mrs Vasiliki Nika, called me, she caught me by surprise and I instantly said to her: "Me? Why me? I haven't published that many books!" In any case, this is a major sign of recognition after so many years in the field. I am very happy!

**Q.** In illustration, how do you approach the text you are asked to illustrate and (in the case of your own books) how do you choose and approach your subject matter?

**A.** Once, I had a proposal for a book that I didn't really like but, as I needed to work, I agreed to illustrate it. I was not happy with the result, I was never proud of it. It was then that I promised myself I would never again illustrate books that didn't bring the best out of me, books that didn't inspire me. It is

not easy to say no, because you risk being forgotten. Nevertheless, in order for me to be motivated wholeheartedly, I try to choose either books that involve contemporary social issues, or those that the child in me, who is as present as ever, identifies with. At the top of my list are stories that allow me to unfold a parallel story. One narrated with pictures.

A few years ago, I wrote *The Yellow Hats*, the only book so far that I have both authored and illustrated. It's my family's rescue story during the Holocaust in Greece. It is a difficult, traumatic topic that I have always wanted to find a way to write a book about and illustrate it for young children.



*The Day the Fox Turned Red*



**Q.** Do current events affect you?

**A.** No sensitive person can remain unaffected by what happens in the world. When the war in Ukraine broke out in February 2022, I had a proposal about a book with very cheerful content. Every page was fun and frolic, parties and amusement. If circumstances were different I would have said yes, but the situation was such that I was not in the right frame of mind to accept it.

**Q.** Are there taboo subjects in children's literature and illustration?

**A.** I believe that Greek society is still quite conservative. There are many taboo subjects and stereotypes that we should try and introduce in children's books, although a sensitive and respectful approach is evidently required. However, I think that even if a book dealing with taboo subjects gets to be published, many parents or even teachers will hesitate to choose it, even though they should see it as an opportunity to start a conversation with children.

**Q.** No artist from Greece has ever received the Hans Christian Andersen Award. Why is this the case you think?

**A.** It's not that we don't have good artists. We do have many excellent ones. But the way I see it is that, in the field of children's books, we need better education. I always dreamt of a School where one would study the art of children's books in its entirety. It is not enough to be good at drawing or painting or at creating computer art in order to be a professional for children's books. We need more in depth knowledge in many areas that are related to the art of book creation: from the conception of an idea to writing and illustration, typography, paper and binding to distribution and collaboration with publishers. Undoubtedly, basic knowledge in psychology is also essential when dealing with anything that concerns children. Maybe authors and illustrators should be supported by an advisory team during a book's production. Or maybe I am an incurable dreamer!

Similarly to the case of writing a children's book, illustrating it is not a hobby. It's a serious profession that should financially support the artist. Nevertheless, it is very common for illustrators to sustain themselves through an alternative, primary occupation, so the time devoted to illustration becomes very limited, resulting in poor quality.

*"...literature makes our small world bigger.."*



**Q.** Why do you think Greek literature for children is not translated into other languages or very rarely translated at best?

**A.** Even though in recent years things have started to move towards this direction, I think that the topics we choose to deal with should have a rather global appeal. We are a small country and our language has a very limited audience. Our books are largely dealing with topics that target the Greek market. An additional issue is the outdated didacticism we often find in children's books. A state book policy that would invest in good translations and high quality production is also crucial.  
But we are a small country ...

**Q.** What is your definition for children's literature? How is it different from adult literature?

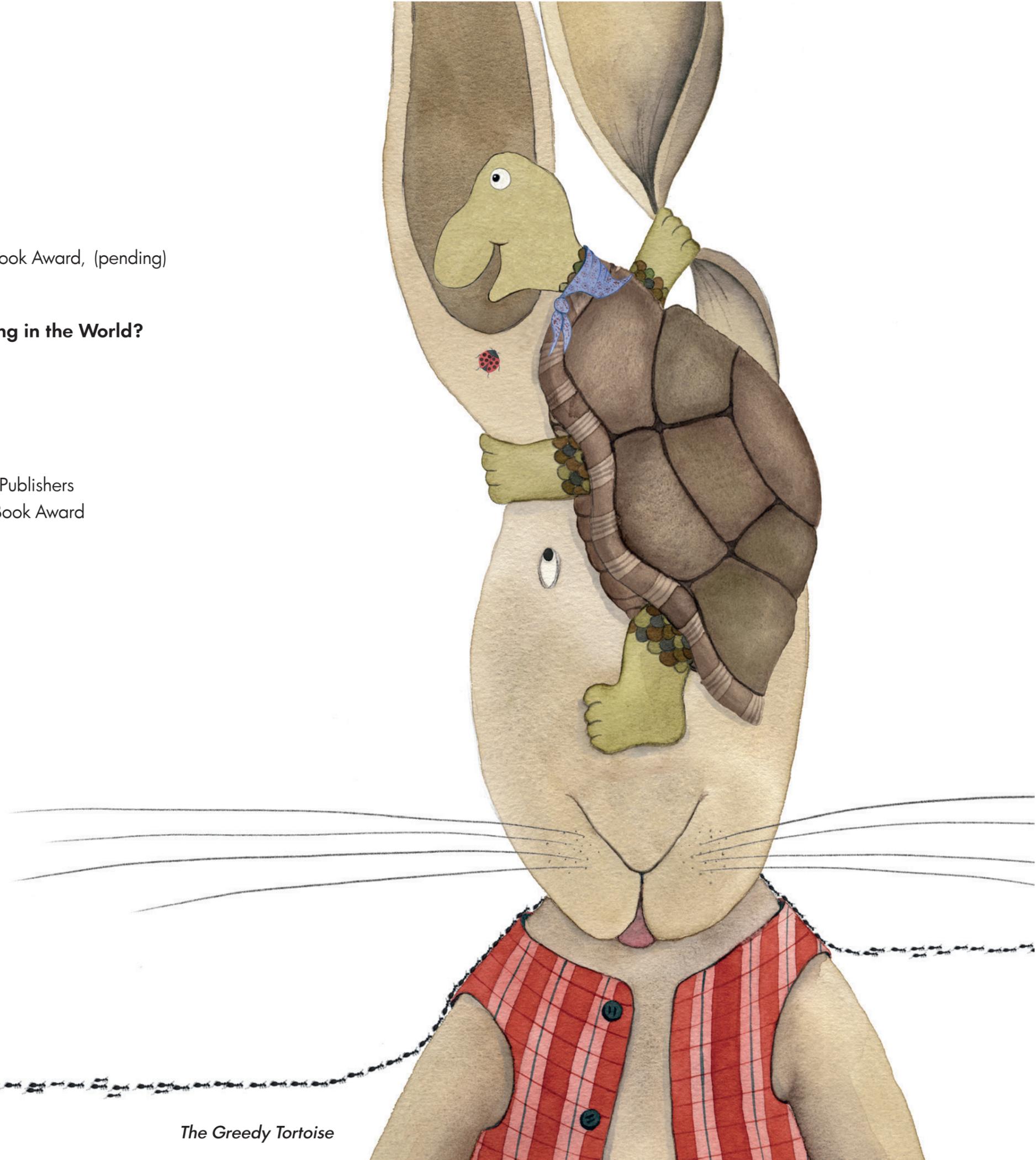
**A.** I believe that literature is the innate need we people have to write, and in my case to illustrate, stories for a better understanding of the world around us and of ourselves. Books are a window and a mirror. The difference lies in the needs of each age group.

**Q.** Why should children read literature? If you had a single reason, what would that be?

**A.** Because literature makes our small world bigger.



- 2023** **Phoebus and the Whale**  
 Author: Anna Kouppanou, Patakis Publishers  
 • Nomination for the Greek National Children's Book Award, (pending)  
 • O Anagnostis - Literary Journal Award Shortlist
- 2021** • O Anagnostis - Literary Journal Award Shortlist
- 2020** **What Do You Say Is The Most Precious Thing in the World?**  
 Author: Lilly Lambrelli, Patakis Publishers  
 • IBBY Greece Children's Book Award  
 • O Anagnostis - Literary Journal Award Shortlist
- 2018** **The Yellow Hats**  
 Author & Illustration Kelly Matathia-Covo, Patakis Publishers  
 • Nomination for the Greek National Children's Book Award  
 • IBBY Greece Children's Book Award  
 • O Anagnostis - Literary Journal Award Shortlist
- 2018** **The Greedy Tortoise**  
 Author: Sophia Madouvalou, Kalendis Editions  
 • IBBY Honour List for Illustration  
 • O Anagnostis - Literary Journal Award Shortlist
- 2016** • O Anagnostis - Literary Journal Award Shortlist
- 2004** **The Hen that Became an Egg**  
 Author: Sophia Madouvalou, Ellinika Grammata  
 • Accolade for Illustration IBBY Greece
- 1988** **The Night Runs to Meet the Day**  
 Author: Maro Loizou, Kalendis Editions  
 • IBBY Greece Illustration Award
- 1988** **The River Runs to Meet the Sea**  
 Author: Maro Loizou, Kalendis Editions  
 • IBBY Honour List for Illustration



*The Greedy Tortoise*



- 2022** **The Day the Fox Turned Red**  
*Η Μέρα που η Αλεπού Έγινε Κόκκινη*  
Author: Lili Lambrelli  
Patakis Publishers, Greece
- 2021** **Phoebus and the Whale**  
*Ο Φοίβος και η Φάλαινα*  
Author: Anna Κουρραπου  
Patakis Publishers, Greece
- 2020** **The Crying Cloud**  
*Το Σύννεφο που Έβαλε τα Κλάματα*  
Author: Sophia Madouvalou  
New Edition, Patakis Publishers, Greece
- 1997** 1st edition by Kastaniotis Publications
- 2019** **What Do You Say is the Most Precious Thing in the World?**  
*Εσύ τι Λες Πολύτιμο πως Είναι;*  
Author: Lili Lambrelli  
Patakis Publishers, Greece
- 2018** **The Boy Who Read Tales to the Hens**  
*Το Αγόρι που Διάβαζε στις Κότες Παραμύθια*  
National Litterary Award, 2019  
Author: Sophia Madouvalou  
Patakis Publishers, Greece
- 2017** **The Yellow Hats**  
*Τα Κίτρινα Καπέλα*  
Author & Illustrator: Kelly Matathia-Covo  
Patakis Publishers, Greece

- 2016** **The Button of Love and the Prince Who is not Little Any More**  
*Το Κουμπί της Αγάπης και ο Πρίγκιπας που Έμεινε Μικρός*  
Author: Vaggelis Iliopoulos  
Patakis Publishers, Greece
- 2015** **The Greedy Tortoise**  
*Η Άπληστη Χελώνα*  
Author: Sophia Madouvalou  
Kalendis Editions, Greece
- 2013** **Who Had a Pee in The Mississippi?**  
*Ποιός Έκανε Πιπί στον Μισισσιπή*  
Author: Evgenios Trivizas  
New Edition, Metaixmio Editions, Greece
- 1997** 1st edition, Ellinika Grammata Publishing
- 2013** **Number Riddle Book**  
*Αριθμητάρι με Γλωσσοδέτες*  
Author: Evgenios Trivizas  
2nd Edition, Metaixmio Editions, Greece
- 2004** 1st edition, Ellinika Grammata Publishing
- 2013** **Alphabet Riddle Book**  
*Αλφαβητάρι με Γλωσσοδέτες*  
Author: Evgenios Trivizas  
2nd Edition, Metaixmio Editions, Greece
- 1998** 1st Edition, Ellinika Grammata Publishing
- 2004** **The Hen that Turned to Egg**  
*Η Κότα που Έγινε Αβγό*  
Author: Sophia Madouvalou  
Ellinika Grammata Publishing



- 2002** **A Calendar of Female Gender**  
Author: Sissy Kaplani  
Papadopoulou Publishinga, Athens, Greece
- 1998** **Santa Retires**  
*Ο Άη Βασίλης Παίρνει Σύνταξη*  
Author: Rena Rossi Zairi  
Ellinika Grammata Publishing
- 1997** **I Am Writing to You to Say...**  
*Σου Γράφω για να σου Πω Πώς...*  
Author: Sophia Madouvalou  
Kanakis Editions
- 1996** **A-B Pranks**  
*A-B Χάχανα*  
Author: Sophia Madouvalou  
Kastaniotis Publications
- 1994** **The Magic Mirror**  
*Ο Μαγικός Καθρέφτης*  
Author: Sophia Madouvalou  
Kastaniotis Publications
- 1988** **The River's Race to Meet the Sea**  
*Το Ποτάμι Τρέχει να Συναντήσει τη Θάλασσα*  
Author: Maro Loizou  
Kalendis Editions
- 1988** **The Nights Race to Catch the Day**  
*Η Νύχτα Τρέχει να Συναντήσει τη Μέρα*  
Author: Maro Loizou  
Kalendis Editions



**The Day the Fox Turned Red**

Author: Lili Lambrelli  
Patakis Publishers, 2022

**Phoebus and the Whale**

Author: Anna Kouppanou  
Patakis Publishers, 2020

**What Do You Say is the Most Precious Thing in the World?**

Author: Lili Lambrelli  
Patakis Publishers, 2019

**The Boy Who Read Tales to the Hens**

Author: Sophia Madouvalou  
Patakis Publishers, 2018

**The Yellow Hats**

Kelly Matathia-Covo  
Patakis Publishers, 2017

**The Button of Love and the Prince**

**Who is not Little Any More**  
Author: Vaggelis Iliopoulos  
Patakis Publishers, 2016

**The Greedy Tortoise**

Author: Sophia Madouvalou  
Kalendis Editions, 2015

**Who Had a Pee in the Mississippi?**

Author: Eugene Trivizas  
Metaixmio Editions, 2013

**The River's Race to Meet the Sea**

Author: Maro Loizou  
Kalendis Editions, 1988

**The Night's Race to Catch the Day**

Author: Maro Loizou  
Kalendis Editions, 1988

## TRANSLATED TITLES

**The Yellow Hats**

Author: Kelly Matathia-Covo  
English, under publication  
Enchanted Lion Books

**Dünyadaki En Degerli**

Author: Lili Lambrelli  
Turkish, Yakamoz Cucuk, 2022

**Qui S'Ha Fet Pipi al Mississippi?**

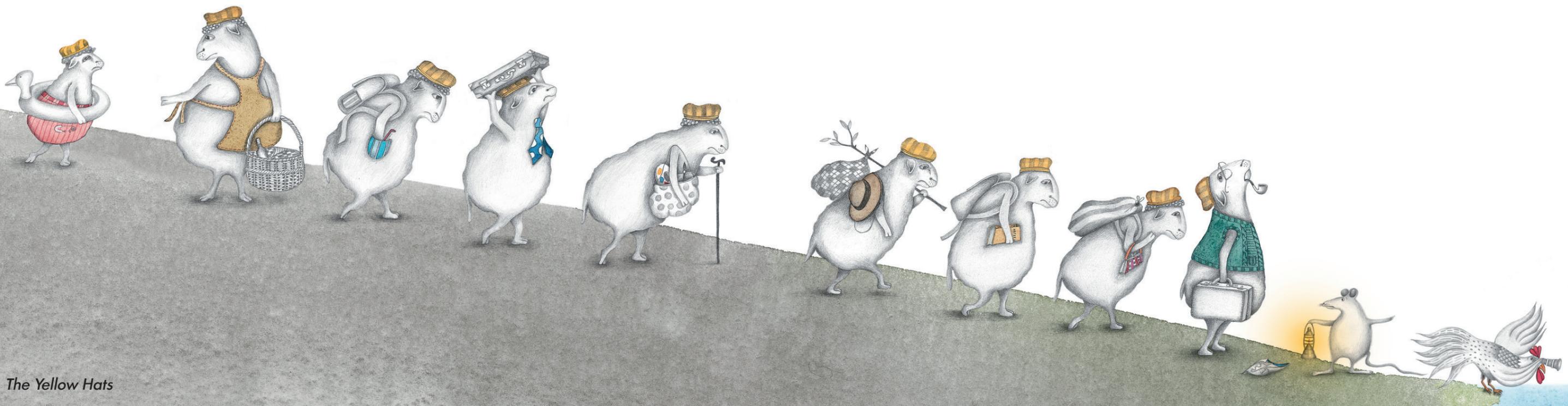
Author: Eugene Trivizas  
Catalan, by Mosaics Libres, 2019

**The River's Race to Meet the Sea**

Author: Maro Loizou  
English, Spring Press, Richmond, 1988

**The Night's Race to Catch the Day**

Author: Maro Loizou  
English, Spring Press, Richmond, 1988





*What Do You Say is the Most Precious Thing in the World?*



**The Day the Fox Turned Red**  
Author: Lili Lambrelli  
Patakis Publishers, 2022



**Phoebus and the Whale**  
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Patakis Publishers, 2020



**What Do You Say is the Most Precious Thing in the World?**  
Author: Lili Lambrelli  
Patakis Publishers, 2019



**The Boy Who Read Tales to the Hens**  
Author: Sophia Madouvalou  
Patakis Publishers, 2018



**The Yellow Hats**  
Author - Illustrator: Kelly Matathia-Covo  
Patakis Publishers, 2017

**illustrator****The Day the Fox turned Red**

Author: Lili Lambrelli  
Patakis Publishers

**Abstract**

A story about the difficult road to adulthood. Little foxes are grey. They turn red when they grow. The fox, who is the main character in this story, turned red on the day she was ridiculed and everyone laughed at her. But it is when you are at your lowest that life can bring its most unexpected rewards. If you stay true to yourself then everything else will fall into place. You will grow and progress while those who hurt you lag behind.

by Apostolos Pappos, Educator & Book Critic, Elniplex Review of Books 25/06/2022



[...] A modern fairy tale using as leaven the narrative style of traditional fairy tales: simple storyline, repetitions, (dual) juxtaposition of characters (fox-badgers, fox-pigs), highlighting of the weak emerging as the most powerful in the end. A fairy tale of bullying, of verbal and physical abuse, where the victim's life returns to normality thanks to their good luck. The external transformation is accompanied by moral empowerment and emotional balance: the little fox is transformed from a grey, ugly, filthy animal to an intelligent, beautiful and courageous creature.

[...] Covo's illustrations highlight the fairy tale elements. The colours reveal the intensity of emotions, from initial care-freeness to rejection and from the reign of bullying to the happy end with the Fates. At the same time, the award-winning illustrator skilfully differentiates between laughing at someone sarcastically and laughing of joy and innocence, while also successfully revealing the perpetrators' aggression.



**Georgia Karantona**

PH.D. Candidate & Researcher in Children's Literature, University of Thessaly  
Diastixo, Art & Book Review, 05/1/2023



When the Greek award winning writer and fairy tale narrator Lily Lambrelli meets “Hans Christian Andersen award nominee 2024” illustrator Kelly Matathia-Covo the result can only be a precious book like *The Day the Fox Turned Red*. Based on the idea that “you keep going and grow bigger”, while “those who hurt you are left behind”, the book highlights human power, perseverance, and faith, while denouncing racism, hatred and hostility against the Other, and lack of empathy.

In this fairy tale, space and time are indefinite and elusive (Once upon a time in a big forest), the number three stands out (three badgers, three pigs, three Fates, three wishes), both natural and supernatural elements are present, a happy ending and the moral of the story complement the list. So all the main features of the classic fairy tale are arguably employed in this story.

Very briefly, a little grey fox enjoying her first walk in the forest is suddenly accosted and bullied by badgers and pigs. Their derisive, sarcastic comments humiliate and belittle her. The fox's demoralization is followed, however, by a spiritual uplift, growth and vindication. The three Fates re-determine her destiny, and the grey fox turns red and grows a bushy tail.

In this fairy tale narrative of personal development and growth, the illustration plays a key role. How is a fairy tale illustrated, actually? Which elements characterize the illustrator's role, and to what extent do the images complement a text? David Lewis (2001) suggests that the influence on the text exercised by the illustration and the interaction between the two constitute not only the essence of the narration, but also a direct influence on how the story is perceived by the young reader. The combination of text and image affects how young readers delve into the story, assisting them in responding to and reflecting on the narrative process. The illustration contributes to the dynamics of a text's perception by adding meaning to the narrative.

Covo's organization of the illustrations reveals the developmental process to maturity from the very beginning, on the title page, a usual technique in contemporary picture books. The grey fox follows an incomplete red thread, the thread of life, or the thread of human destiny spun by the three Fates. On the first spread, the thread is coiled around the first capital letter of the text, implying a close bond between text and image. Much further

down, the red thread coiled around the Fates' legs marks a critical point on the fox's way to maturity. The forest Fates are represented not as humans but as immaterial entities, who swinging their legs on the lower branches of a tree... will re-determine the little fox's destiny by each one determining a set of desirable qualities for her. The red thread, either wrapped around the branches or around the fox's tale, sometimes a readily identifiable element, at other times a discrete or barely noticeable detail, shows that Covo as 'an omniscient illustrator' is inside the story observing the fox's course from a victim of derision to a creature with maturity and self-awareness.

Courage, bravery, pride, beauty, and intelligence compose the set of wishes that redefine her identity. In the end, as in all fairy tales, the less powerful becomes the stronger and the wiser. The character reconstruction the fox undergoes, accompanied by a parallel transformation of her physical features, is not unrelated to the transformation of the other animals.

Delving deeper into the illustration technique, one should mention its relation to Covo's personal history as a second-generation survivor of the Shoah. Covo's visual images highlight the text, integrating a unique political element. “Does your whole species stink, or



just you?”, the badger asks. The bullies wear black boots and hats, military law enforcement symbols, alluding to the Nazi regime and therefore serving the purpose of denouncing the Nazi policy of eugenics and racial discrimination. We come across a similar depiction of black tractor boots in the picture book *Benno and the Night of Broken Glass* (referring to Kristallnacht, an organised nationwide attack on the German Jews). Actual Nazi symbols are not necessary to explain Covo’s decision to dedicate a double spread to the boot kicking the fox. As a symbol of power, “superiority” and bullying, the huge boot is juxtaposed to the tiny, weak and helpless fox.

Covo’s ability to gently intervene in the text, artfully adding elements of her own identity, offers a different dynamic to the narrative. After all, the addition of objects or elements that seem unrelated to the story per se constitute an innovative and unique distinguishing feature of Covo’s as an illustrator. In this book, the little girl with her pigtails, the short red pants and her black shoes functions as an attention getter, a surprise. It pleasantly surprises the young reader from the first page and makes the adult wonder about the presence of this human figure in the middle of a forest. The fairy tale world of Lambrelli,

however, allows for the interweaving of magical realism with the human and animal world.

Although the verbal narration is completed, as signalled by the standard final phrase “I was there as well in red pants”, the pictorial one continues. In the last spread, Covo adds elements of her own school life, representing a girl sleeping on the desk during class, while all her classmates, i.e. the main characters, are focused on their assignments. Moreover, the presence of a blackboard, a piece of chalk, and a classroom environment in general, suggests the possibility of using the book for educational purposes at school, an opportunity that could provide useful information about the children’s responses to symbolism, text and image interaction, etc., revealing the different ways in which the story might be related to their own lives.

*The Day the Fox Turned Red*, like all Lambrelli fairy tales, succeeds in subverting stereotypes about animals, with its style, marked by absence of artificiality or didacticism and presence of folk wisdom. Besides, it is also exemplary in cultivating visual literacy by drawing the attention of young readers to details highlighting textual and pictorial elements responsible for the cohesion of the literary narrative.



illustrator

**Phoebus and the Whale**

Author: Anna Kouppanou  
Patakis Publishers

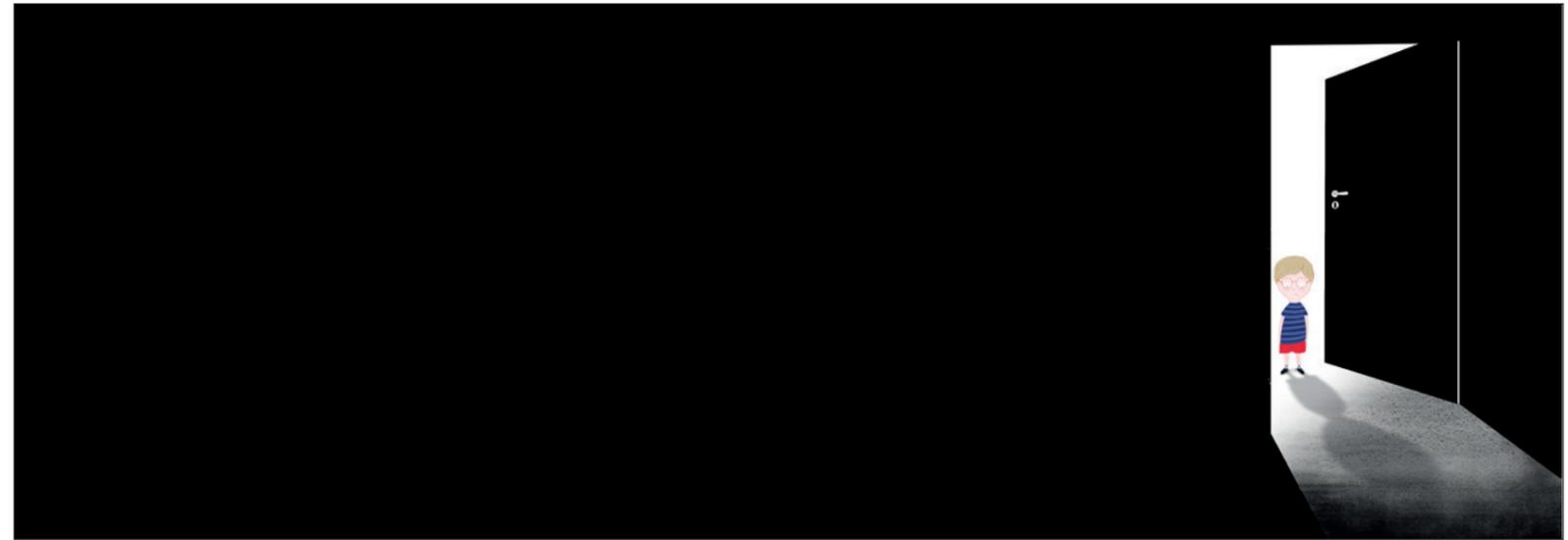


Greek National  
Children's Book Award  
Nomination 2023, (pending)

**Abstract**

Phoebus is scared of everything, but he doesn't know what his fear looks like. When Phoebus learns about the great blue whale, he will create one such creature out of card boxes and blue colors and then send it off to a great new journey. His heart will now be lighter and filled with other things.

A picture book about children's anxieties and the liberating moment that a vague feeling takes a form and thus becomes something we can face.



by Mary Birbili, Educator, Elniplex Review of Books 13/04/21



[...] Author Anna Kouppanou has written a heart-warming story about childhood fears, and illustrator Kelly Matathia-Covo gave it substance, form and colours. You will love the big blue whale that appears on the book's pages. Big but not scary. Here is what our beloved illustrator confided in us:

"As soon as I read *Phoebus and the Whale*, I felt an instant connection with the hero. Phoebus is an innocent, vulnerable, small boy in a big, wide world. He represents the child inside most of us. I suddenly had this strange feeling coming back from the depths of time. Phoebus is scared of everything, like I was when I was little. I used to hide under beds so that no one could see me. There, with my toys, books and pencils, I built a world of my own, simple and silent. A world where I felt safe. Growing up I realized that, in most cases, fear only exists and grows in our minds. So every time it tried to pull me into the dark, I painted it in a bright colour and it disappeared!"



by Zoe Koskinidou  
Journalist & Founder of Kokkini Alepou  
Online Children's Book Magazine 7/5/21

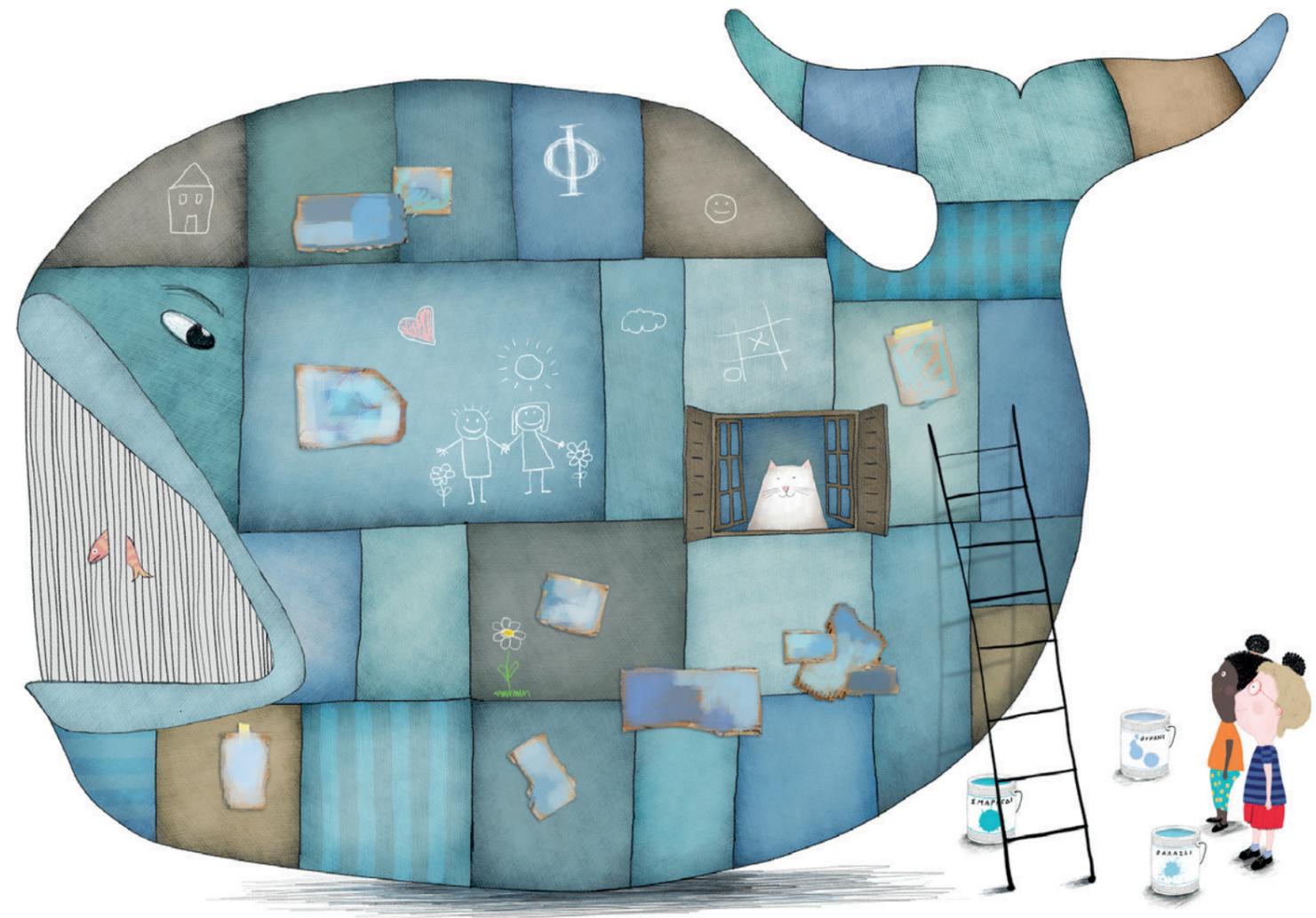


Phoebus is afraid. He is afraid of the dark, of the possibility of being examined by the teacher in front of his classmates, he is even afraid of his friend when she asks him to play ball with her. And this fear is big, bigger than grandpa Aristotle. Is it bigger than a blue whale? When the teacher mentions this mammal in class, Phoebus realises that his fear is as big as a giant blue whale. He starts constructing his fear using carton boxes. Finally, when his fear takes the shape of a whale, he feels ready to set the fear-whale free and send it to the sea, where it belongs.

The writer puts herself in the place of every kid who feels fear, and speaks to them as her equals. She gives to the main character the space and time to understand what this feeling is, accept its presence, sublimate it into a tangible object and finally reject it. And, more importantly, without the involvement of an adult.

Kelly Matathia-Covo's illustration of *Phoebus and the Whale* plays an equally important role; Covo is not afraid to apply black colour, to spread it on the pages and even on the book's cover. Rarely do we come across children's books where illustrators do not hesitate to use black. In this particular case it is the perfect choice. With her illustrations, Covo complements the text ideally.

Not only does she transform words into images, she also goes a step further, creating running stories with a wordless narrative and describing emotions without recourse to phrases. And she does all this even with static images. Author and illustrator have jointly created one of the most beautiful stories, ever, avoiding repetition of similar books. Phoebus will get into children's hearts and will explain, "sotto voce" how sometimes we walk side by side with our fears, while at other times we have to let them go.



by Ada Katsiki Guivalou  
 Prof. Emeritus of Greek Literature UOA  
 Bookpress 13/7/2021



The book *Phoebus and the Whale* discusses in an innovative, psychologically substantiated narrative and in an engaging and playful way, the overwhelming feeling of fear accompanying young children in many circumstances and situations of their daily lives.

Several Greek and foreign language books have been written on this subject, talking not only about fear of the dark, but of various other kinds in a child's social life, as school bullying and violence at home, fear stemming from lack of self-confidence, fear of monsters, dragons and other strange animals symbolising the multiple phobias and anxiety disorders caused by an unfamiliar and hostile environment.

The author deals with the subject with great consideration, and in such a way as to free the child from this unpleasant feeling and encourage them to even use it as a playmate. As a result, the child is familiarized with fear and supported in their effort to effectively deal with it. The process of liberation from fear is gradual and multi-modal.

Kelly Matathia-Covo's excellent illustration contributes greatly to the process. The dark cover (grey-

black and dark blue) serves to visually introduce the reader to the feeling of fear, while at the same time allowing for "safety exits" both through the bright windows painted on the buildings and with the whale-block of flats that represents the size of Phoebus's fear. On the other hand, his name, appearing in a bright red colour on the book's cover, reduces the reader's possible sense of fear, as does also the light-coloured head of Phoebus. The implication of fear is intensified on the first double spread which is predominantly black with the exception of a single word meaning "He was frightened".

From the next page on, an open door lets a little light in to mitigate the darkness, even though the verbal narrative describes the fear of a dark place. The narration continues with school and social life events from a child's life. Phoebus's fear is bigger than many large places he is familiar with, such as the nearby river, or favourite members of his own family, like his grandpa. Therefore, the main character is gradually lead to deal with fear on his own, although he also has his supportive friend Rosie by his side.

Thanks to a course on mammals at school, the blue whale is naturally introduced into the narration, both verbally and visually: "The whale is huge, gigantic, frightful!". This utmost symbol of fear is visualised in an impressive, yet unthreatening way, enabling Phoebus to start objectifying his fear. He constructs a cardboard whale, paints it blue, glues all sorts of papers on it with drawings of flowers, his cat, his whole world, and puts it in his bed. He releases his fear, and looks at it from a distance.

The harmonious juxtaposition of text and image, the dialogue between the two, the gradual thickening of the plot and the parallel development of the feelings and emotions of both fictional characters and readers, as well as the wealth of visual signals are among the main characteristics of this illustrated story. All these constitute the factors contributing to the creation of a book which can address emotionally and mentally any young reader, enhancing their confidence and supporting them in facing the inevitable difficulties they will encounter in the course of their lives.



*Phoebus and the Whale*

**illustrator****What Do You Say is the Most Precious Thing in the World?**

Author: Lili Lambrelli  
Patakis Publishers



IBBY Greece  
Children's Book Award 2020

**Abstract**

A badger wandered here and there seeking the most precious thing in the world. He asked a rock and a tree, three kinds of migratory birds, and then a poet, a storyteller, and a child. In the end, he snuck into someone's dream and asked them too. Some replied it was what they lacked. Others said it was what they sought or already knew, and still others said it stemmed from the heart. Each one offered part of the answer.

**The Jury's Statement on the Greek IBBY Children's Book Award 2020**

A climactic story in the traditional fairy tale genre, delving into a fundamentally philosophical issue, in a particularly original manner. Fairy tales are commonly about what is really precious, i.e. important, in life, for instance, life's essence, or the real reason why something happens. But what makes this book unique is the form chosen by Lambrelli and the absolute harmonisation with the work of the illustrator.

The illustrations of Kelly Matathia-Covo, simple and dreamlike, follow the climactic rhythm of the narrative, loading on a little red wagon all the precious things in the lives of the main characters. It is a book that charms the reader right from the start with its unadorned style, its simple and extremely elegant, black and white illustrations, the symbolic use of colour and the expressive characters playing leading roles in the narrative.



by Marisa DeCastro

Author & Book Critic

○ Anagnostis Literary Journal 13/11/2019



It is a fact that a well-written children's story leads to an exciting illustration. It is also true that a story lacking inspiration leads to an equally uninspired depiction. It is unusual for illustration to dominate over the text but it can happen. Finally, it is equally well-known that, just like writers, illustrators also develop and preserve their own recognizable style, while at the same time constantly trying to evolve.

Illustrators are commonly understood as required to give form and substance to words, visualise the abstract and the unspoken. Abstract or intangible words describe and narrate and have the power to produce images. The "unspoken" implies words as well. Except, in this case, the words do not exist as such, they are not written but are rather inherent in the text. These are the words for thoughts and ideas that inhabit both the writer's mind and his story. And indeed, here lies the difficulty, the art, the sensitivity and the in-depth reading of the illustrator, who is expected to submerge themselves in the text in order to be able to visualise the abstract and the unspoken. The images that will ensue are the ones that will ultimately leave the illustrator's imprint on the pages. An illustration turns out to be interesting



precisely when dual interpretations of the text by writer and illustrator give rise to new readings of the story. And that is what I am looking for as a picture book reader.

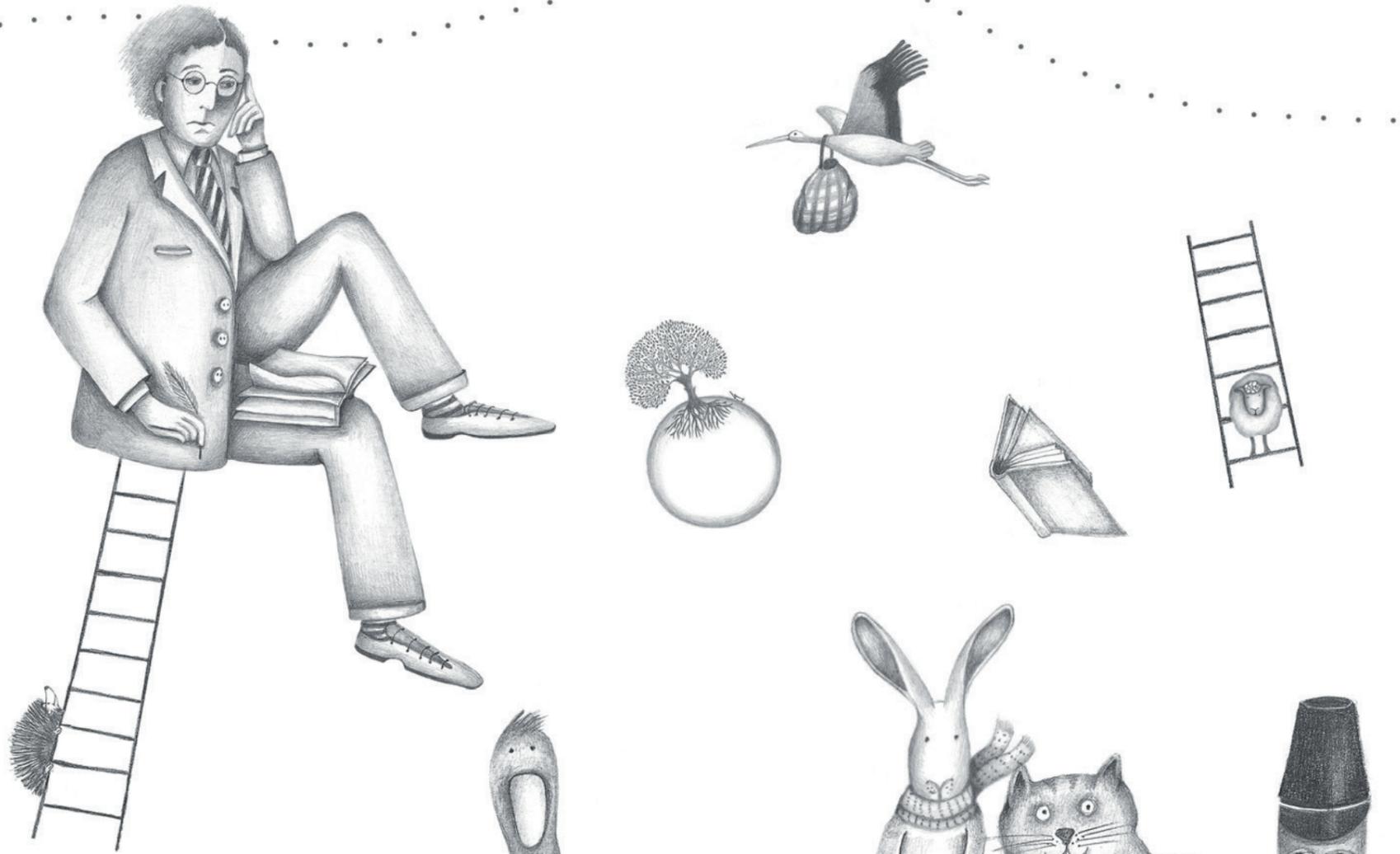
*What Do You Say is the Most Precious Thing in the World?* by Lily Lambrelli is a literary fairy tale, an introduction to the legendary wisdom of its ancestors: the traditional folk tales. The author, a narrator with in-depth knowledge of traditional folk tales, has created a simple and concise text. It tells the story of a badger in search of the most precious thing in the world. During the course of this pursuit, the badger asks everyone and everything he encounters. The answers he gets require careful consideration in order for the badger –the writer, or the reader– to discover the most precious thing for themselves, giving substance to the quest. That is precisely the role of illustration. In what follows I will discuss briefly the elements which render this book's illustration so rich in meanings and therefore extremely interesting.

Kelly Matathia-Covo illustrated the badger's encounters with both humans and inanimate objects and depicted the badger's route in his pursuit with a dotted line proceeding from one page to the next and from one encounter to the following one. Out of curiosity, the young reader will, instinctively, follow the dots with their finger to find out what will happen next. The marking of the route is a recurrent motif in a great deal of fairy tales, such as Grimm's *Hansel and Gretel*, where the children mark their path with breadcrumbs so that they could find their way back home. But I wouldn't have commented on the idea of the route's depiction if the artist's interference had stopped there. In this book, however, the layout of the spreads adds more meaning to the badger's journey due to these extra elements. Let me spell this out: On the one hand, the marking of the route alludes to the delicate, unspoken, yet real paths followed by a reflecting and seeking mind and on the other, it reveals the untold meanings hidden behind the words of the story. How is this achieved? In every spread, the badger carries a red wagon filled with everything he met along the way that mattered to him the most (a rabbit, a bird, a pebble, a butterfly etc.).



Ultimately, we realize that two different routes are depicted in the book: the badger's physical route and the illustrator's mental one. This suggests that, just like the badger, we cannot live without basic bonding elements anchoring us to our lives, and finally making us what we are.

In a book's illustration, everything needs to have meaning and a reason to exist, especially when it gives substance, through representation, to thoughts and ideas possibly common to author and illustrator that can be passed on to the young reader.





## illustrator

## The Boy Who Read Tales to the Hens

Author: Sophia Madouvalou  
Patakis Publishers



Greek National Literary  
Children's Book Award 2019

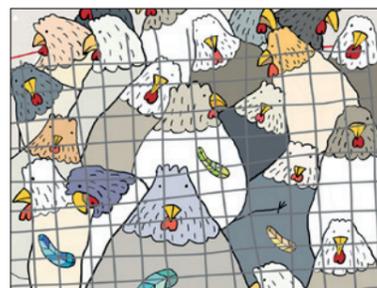


### Abstract

*The Boy Who Read Fairy Tales to the Hens*, is an allegorical story, whose hero, encouraged by his storyteller grandmother, is determined to change the education status of girls on the planet. The story unfolds in different space times where a red thread is drawn as a boundary between reality and tale. It is a simple story, with genuine ideological content but narrated with humour, about every woman's right to education. This is a story that makes children discover life's magic and encourages them to believe that "If you want to, you can change the world."

### The Jury's Statement on the Greek National Literary Children's Book Award 2019

The book involves three subjects which the writer masterfully manages to connect. First of all, the plight of totalitarian regimes and the methods of enforcement they use to impose domination. Secondly, the issue of women's oppression and the suppression of their human rights. Thirdly, the liberating power of imagination, which can be cultivated through reading stories. As in many books addressing young readers, such topics are handled here through metonymy, i.e. with animals rather than humans as the characters of the stories. In the case of this book, hens are presented as the oppressed "girls" denied access to school by a male tyrant who keeps them locked up at home. In fact, the "stupid-hens" are imprisoned in the chicken coop, fed exclusively with "grain-for-fools" guarded by Black-Rooster, who is the Lord's stooge, and are used for laying eggs. When Nicolas, the hero of the story, starts reading books to the hens, they become smarter and start imagining a better life. In the end, they rebel against the Lord and bring down their oppressors.



by Mary Birbili - Educator

Elniplex Review of Books 27/01/19



The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO] published a report on the status of women and gender equality in the world. The report, entitled “Re-thinking Women’s Empowerment and Gender Equality in 2015 and Beyond”, refers to the international community’s accomplishments and challenges to establish substantial gender equality. Two thirds of illiterate adults are women.

This fundamental issue was chosen by author Sophia Madouvalou for her book with a title that can’t help but intrigue the readers, i.e. *The Boy Who Read Tales to the Hens*. The book, which received the National Children’s Literature Award in 2019, is a masterpiece! The reality of girls’ education on the planet becomes a whimsical, allegorical story with an inventive storyline.

It is a meta-narrative text underlining the illusion of a clear boundary between fantasy and reality. The story takes place in two different space-times, in a never-ending interaction. Self-referentiality, the embedded comments of the narrator, and the distance from linear narrative conventions make for a postmodern, particularly interesting, yet steadily cohesive literary narrative.

The intended readers might identify with young Nikolas, who is determined to right social wrongs, thus changing a sad reality. Besides, the ambiguous end of the story can be seen as an implicit strategy to involve the readers and make them want to take action to reverse this reality. The paratextual elements, dedications, biographies and comments signal from the very beginning the main characteristic of the text, which involves the process of connecting fiction and non-fiction.

Kelly Matathia-Covo’s illustration contributes another level to the text’s interpretation. A red line, alluding to the red thread of the traditional Greek fairy tale introduction, connects the two space-time levels of the story. The illustrator depicts with precision colourful figures against a simple beige background. The hens are portrayed with anthropomorphic characteristics, as they are presented with their heads bowed and covered with headscarves. The depiction of their demonstration will probably trigger associative recall of the Suffragettes demonstrating for the right to vote.



author &amp; illustrator

**The Yellow Hats**

Patakis Publishers, Greece 2017



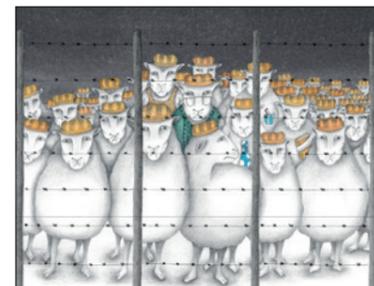
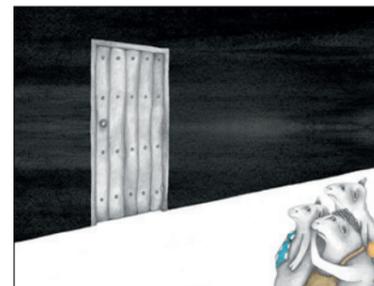
IBBY Greece  
Children's Book Award 2018  
Greek National Children's Book  
Award Nomination 2018

**Abstract**

*The Yellow Hats* is an allegory for the true story of the writer's own family's rescue during the Holocaust. It is a story about courage and resistance, about friendship that overcomes boundaries, about gratitude and remembrance. It talks about those who listen to their inner voices, their hearts, when faced with fear, and find the strength to decide about possible actions. But it also talks about those who put their own lives at risk in order to defend everybody's right to live.

**The Jury's Statement on the Greek IBBY Children's Book Award 2018**

*The Yellow Hats* is an allegorical story, with animals as the main characters, involving multiple levels of reading response. Written without bitterness, the story raises the issues of unfair discrimination, violence, war, and annihilation. Evidently, it is a story about the Holocaust and more generally about genocidal events in the course of history, or similar ones threatening modern society. Indirectly and through appropriate symbols, the author-illustrator alludes to the universal dimension of the Nazi genocide. The story is easy to follow, the language is lyrical, the text very well written. A number of values are indirectly focused upon, such as resistance to injustice and discrimination, generosity, greatness of soul, friendship, solidarity, and the need for remembrance. It is a picture book, in which the image engages in a narrative dialogue with the text, sometimes complementing it, at other times foreshadowing what comes next.



Georgia Karantona PH.D Candidate & Researcher in Children's Literature University of Thessaly  
 Tasoula Tsilimeni Prof. of Children's Literature, University of Thessaly  
 Bookbird Volume 58, Number 4, 2020



## YELLOW HATS AS YELLOW STARS

The visualization of the horrific massacre scenes of the Holocaust is either difficult or impossible for someone to imagine. In Greece, only a few authors and illustrators of children's literature have engaged in dealing with the Holocaust. A remarkable exception is the picture-book *The Yellow Hats*, written and illustrated by Kelly Matathia-Covo.

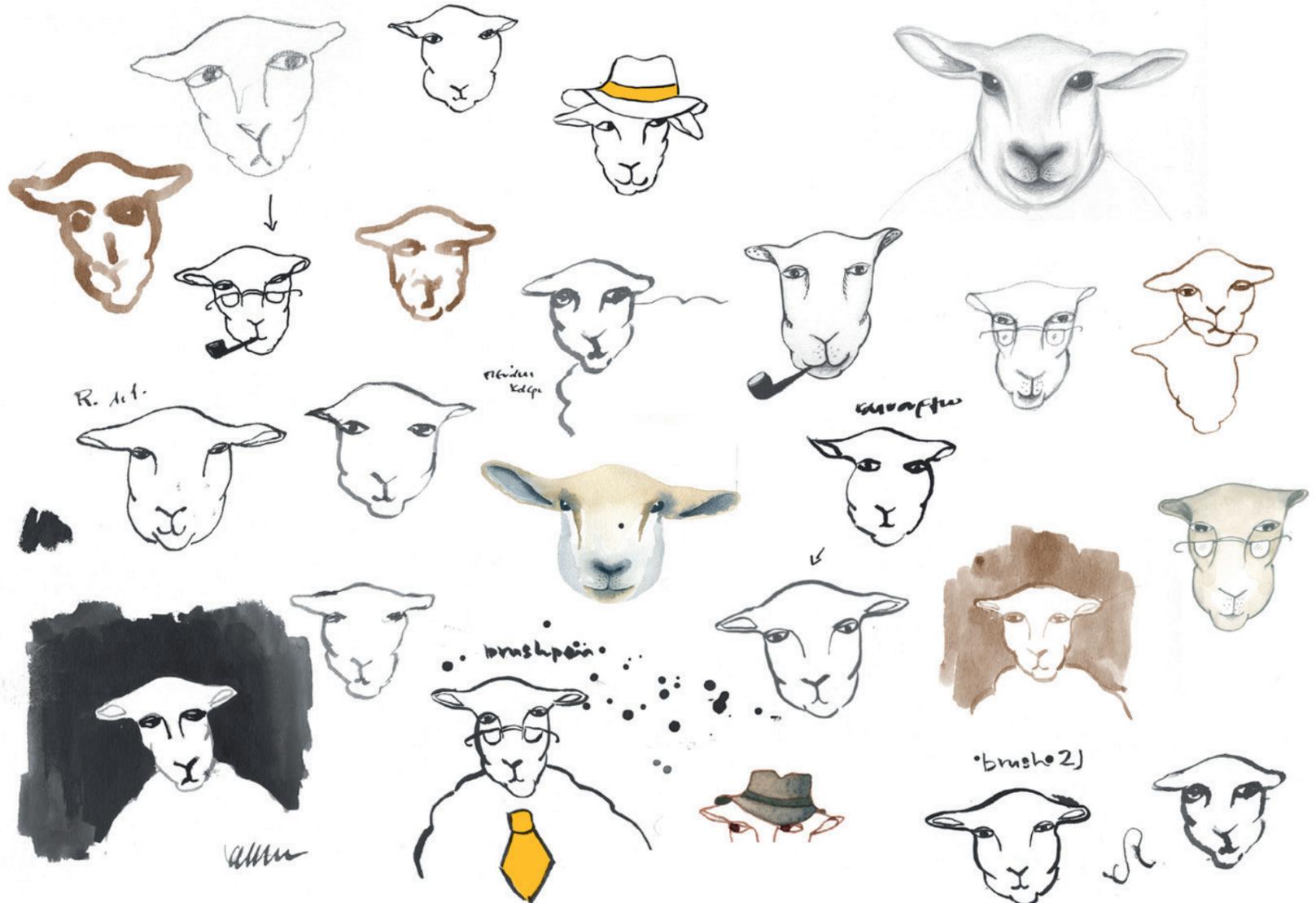
As a second-generation survivor, the writer and illustrator presents her own family story in a way that is accessible to children and to everyone who wants to learn about a true Holocaust story. The first words, "I remember", in the beginning of the book, indicate that the story is based on true events.

A glance at the cover of the book reminds one of nothing regarding the Holocaust, the Jews, or World War II. Only the yellow-drawn word, "hats", in the title and the word "yellow" itself can be associated with the yellow stars.

The story describes the survival of a Jewish family during WWII. Multiple meanings, various symbolisms, narration that emulates the illustrations, and a

happy ending compose an appealing story, which enables the reader to think deeper and concentrate on the fear and despair of the dark ages of the Third Reich.

The heroes of this book are a Jewish family who are portrayed as sheep. Orwell's famous representation technique seems more powerful than ever in this children's picture-book, as it can offer latent symbolisms to the reader in an easy and direct way.



Mr. and Mrs. Woolie, with their seven lambs, used to live in harmony with the other animals on the green farm. Suddenly, there are rumours that wild beasts are looking for the sheep. An adventure is about to begin for the sheep family as the rumours come true. The writer's skilfully used imagination, makes the reader feel familiar with the story. The number seven she craftily presents was used in a famous Grimm's fairy tale, "The Wolf and the Seven Young Goats."

In general, illustrations seem to follow a cycle: from colourful, when the family lives in harmony before the war, to black and grey tones when the Nazi danger is emerging, and back to colourful again at the end, highlighting their safety and security after the Allies win and the war is ended.

Even though recognizable Nazi symbols such as the swastika, the Nazi salute, or the Nazi insignia are totally missing from illustrations, the yellow striped hats refer to yellow stars that all Jews were obliged to wear as a symbol of discrimination.

On the visual level, perpetrators are unseen and covered carefully behind the dark sky, which makes the sheep feel and live in fear and anguish. In two spreads, though, the black sky and the grey-tone illustration compose a scene of fear and dread, with the airplanes flying threateningly in the sky, releasing their bombs.



Nazis, called wild beasts, intended to imprison the sheep “in dark places.” Obviously, the dark place is either the ghetto where the Nazis transferred the Jews or a concentration camp, as the illustration with the sheep behind a barbedwire fence depicts.

In one spread, the circumstances under which the sheep are forced to live constantly are described as simply as possible. Sheep could neither go to their work anymore nor to school nor out in the range. They could not play with their friends, and they are obliged to wear yellow hats instead of the common yellow stars. These obligations are noticeably referred to in the Nuremberg Laws as constituting the beginning of the end of the Jews’ freedom and as showing the increasing radicalization of policies toward the Jews, which culminated in massive murders.

While Jews are symbolized as sheep, the people who risked their lives to protect and save them from Nazi persecution are symbolized as the rabbit, the rooster, and the mouse. It is this remarkable choice of the rescuers that reminds us of the “Righteous Among the Nations,” non-Jewish people, who took great risks to save Jews during the Holocaust (Yad

Vashem). Rescue took many forms and the Righteous came from different nations, religions, and walks of life. In *The Yellow Hats*, the sheep found shelter in a small cabin on the mountain at a time when hostility and indifference prevailed. Rescuers’ actions were extraordinary as they did not act in a passive manner by enjoying the security and comfort their houses could offer. As is pointed out, all of them, with no exceptions, kept their secret safe, without revealing it to the Nazis.

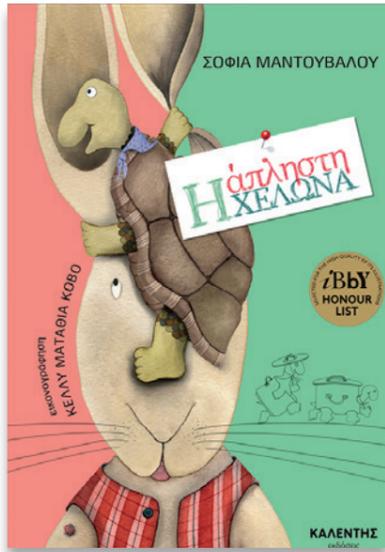
This story has a happy ending as the family is safe and secure, thanks to their friends’ altruistic efforts. The rabbit, the cockerel, and the mouse proved to be faithful friends who risked their lives to save the family. The story decries intensely those who were blind to the deportation, persecution and discrimination against the Jews in Greece and in other countries. It is the adult reader again who can realize the secret meanings, and only he or she can manage to explain it to the younger audience.

The book is an anthem of life, resilience, and fortitude as the sheep heroes rebuild their lives again, finding ways to overcome the fear, the darkness, and the traumatic experience, despite their sufferings. The book indirectly addresses the strength that people and systems demonstrate that enable them to rise above adversity. Holocaust survivors considered themselves resilient and felt they were transcendent or had engaged in behaviours that helped them grow and change over the years since the Holocaust. This included leaving a legacy and contributing to the community.

In the next-to-last spread, the author refers to modern anti-Semitism, indicating that history is repeated and all of us should stay alert as “the wild beasts...are still up on the mountains.”

In the last spread, a row of stones is depicted, referring to all those who were lost but never forgotten. Red poppies seem to flower through the stones as the most well-known symbol of remembrance.





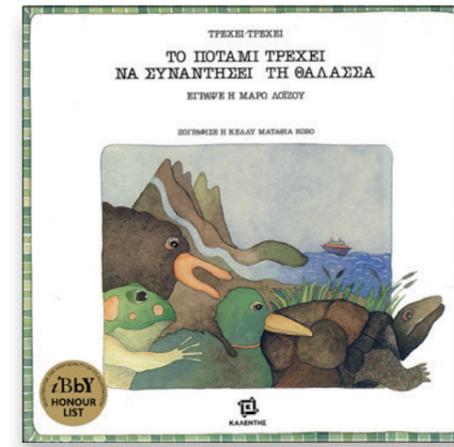
**The Greedy Tortoise**  
Author: Sophia Madouvalou  
Kalendis Editions, 2015



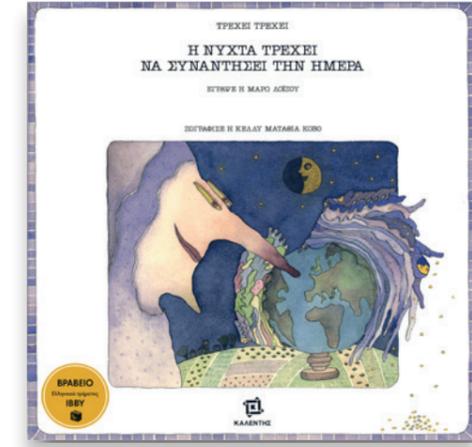
**The Button of Love and the Prince Who is not Little Any More**  
Author: Vaggelis Iliopoulos  
Patakis Publishers, 2016



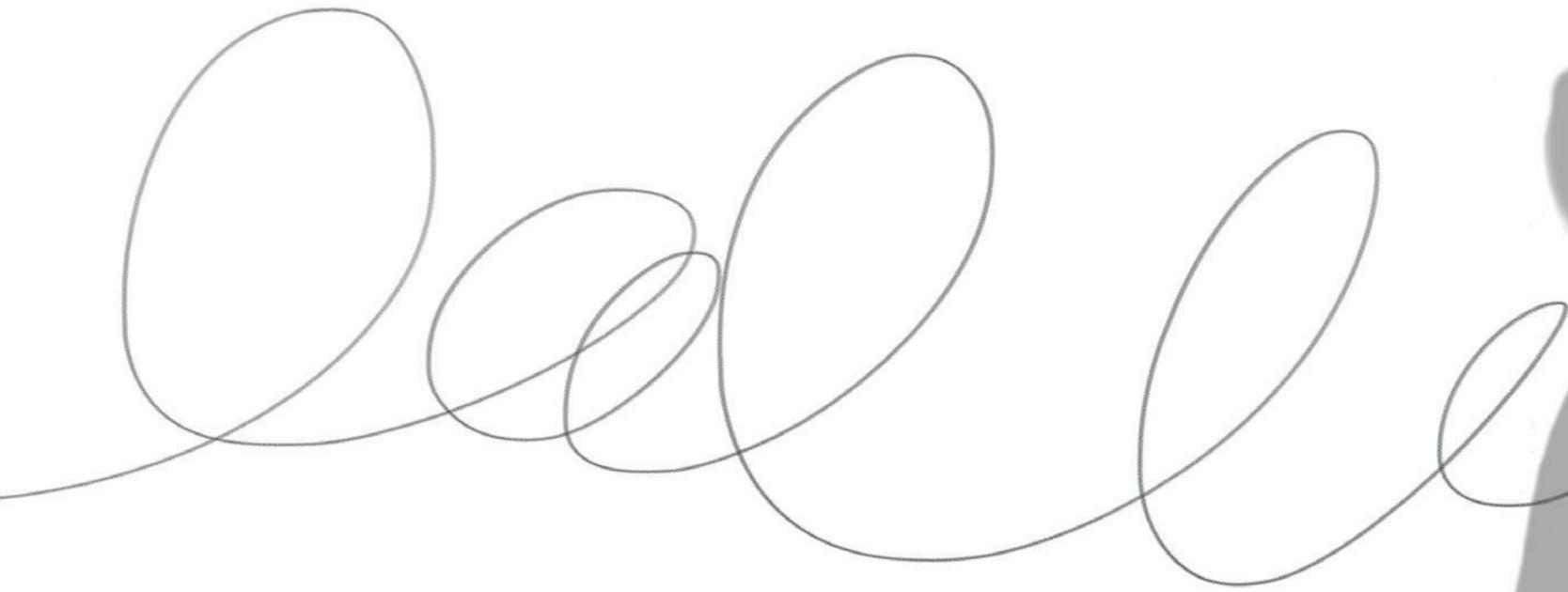
**Who Had a Pee in the Mississippi?**  
Author: Eugene Trivizas  
Metaximio Editions, 2013



**The River Runs to Meet the Sea**  
Author: Maro Loizou  
Kalendis Editions, 1988



**The Night Runs to Meet the Day**  
Author: Maro Loizou  
Kalendis Editions, 1988



*The Button of Love and the Prince Who is not Little Any More*

**The Button of Love and the Prince****Who is not Little Anymore**

Author: Vaggelis Iliopoulos, Patakis Publishers, 2016



This is a classic fairy tale that deals with hate speech. A self centred King belittles his people using humiliating speech. His son, the Prince, who never agreed with his father's tactics, stood against him and tried to change things. Instead of dividing hate speech he used uniting love language.

Covo illustrated a once upon a time atmosphere, with impressive palaces, old style clothing, big hats and pointed shoes with big bows, old hand sewing machines, charcoal irons etc. A small hidden frog, that did not want to turn into a prince, acts as a recurring Figurative allusion to the literary genre.

**The Greedy Tortoise** Author: Sophia Madouvalou

Kalendis Editions, 2015

IBBY Honour List 2018



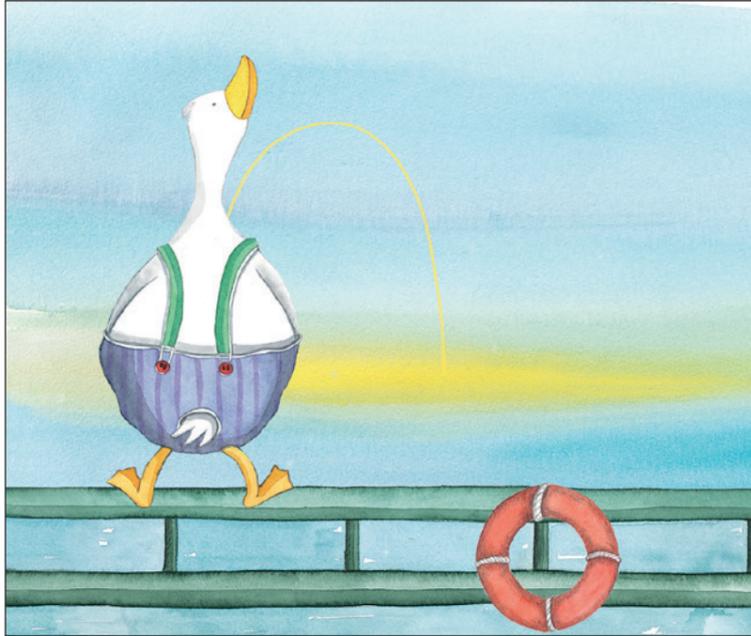
Once upon a time, in a green field, there lived a little tortoise who wanted to move to the big city and get herself a bigger house. House after house, none was good or big enough to satisfy her greed. Her greediness lead to disaster, but in the end, her friend the hare helped her to find the true meaning of life. In addition to humour, visual search games are yet another element in Covo's work. For example, on every page of this book, a little ladybug and a long line of ants challenge the reader not only to get involved in locating them but also to slow down, stay on the page and observe.





**Who had a Pee in the Mississippi?**

Author: Eugene Trivizas, Metaixmio Editions, 2013



Once upon a time, a steamboat filled with happy ducklings was sailing in the Mississippi river. All of a sudden the river turned yellow due to a duckling's sudden urge to pee, an act that could turn into a big disaster. From then on, a crazy investigation took place on the boat, in order to discover the culprit on board.

A new edition of the book with a more modern look, gives substance to the text, commenting on the story while proving that illustration in picture books is just as significant as the text.

**The River's Race to Meet the Sea**

Author: Maro Loizou, Kalendis Editions, 1988 (out of print)

IBBY Honour List 1988



Once there was a river, the happiest river in the world. Its source was found on a far away mountain peak and from there, the river rushed all the way down to the sea. One day, a great evil fell on earth and changed everything. The river refused to flow to the sea any longer and it began to dry up, resulting in all the creatures that lived around it dying. Until a wise beetle reminded the river of the good old days when it used to flow happily. The river cried its heart out and its tears turned into a big cloud. Rain started to pour, the river was filled with water, making again its way back to the sea.

**The Night's Race to Catch the Day**

Author: Maro Loizou, Kalendis Editions, 1988 (out of print)

IBBY Greece Illustration Award 1988



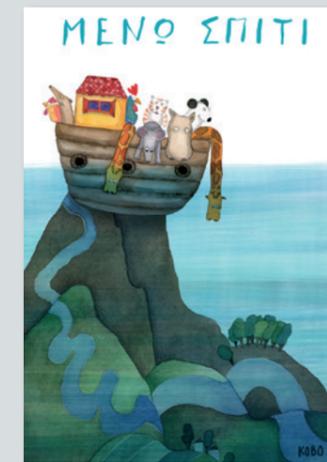
The Night was always boastful about her ability to read people's secrets and dreams on their eyelids while they slept. Calhar, the witch, was furious with the Night's arrogance and decided to teach her a lesson. She would find the man who never slept and whose secrets the Night could not read. The Day, Night's twin sister, was the only one who knew the man who dreamt with his eyes wide open. So, the Night started a race to catch the Day, only to find out that people's dreams are much bigger when they are awake.

Kelly Matathia-Covo, AT HOME, March 2020

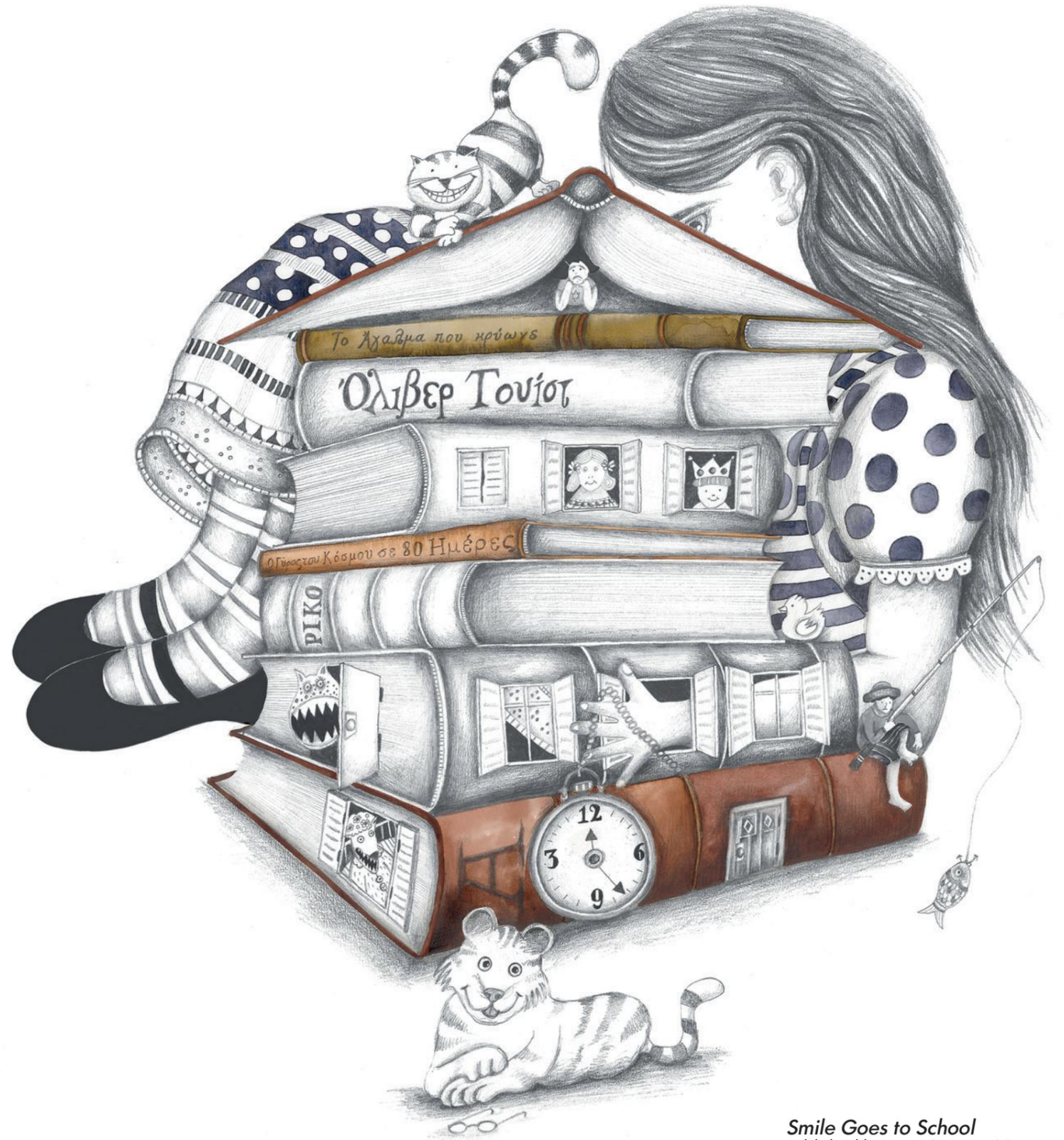
During the very difficult and stressful first year of Covid-19, I felt the need to communicate with the world, beyond the walls of my own shelter.

Staying home, at times alone, was very hard for people around the globe. Home became an island and staying safe was all that mattered.

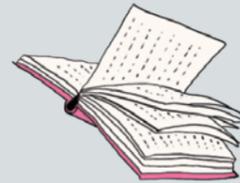
I produced a series of encouraging STAY HOME illustrations that appeared almost daily on social media pages. People's response was something I didn't expect! They felt they were not alone in this unusually depressing situation. Some said it was the light in the darkness of those days.



- 09/2022 **Illustradays - Immagini della fantasia**  
2nd Athens Illustration Festival
- 11/2021 **My Own Small Revolution**  
18th Thessaloniki International Bookfair
- 12/2019 **My Other Self**  
Children's Art Museum
- 03/2019 **Children Observe - 20 Artists Illustrate**  
Athens World Book Capital  
O Anagnostis, Literary Journal  
Art Center of the Municipality of Athens
- 10/2018 **Home**  
Athens World Book Capital  
Myrtillo Gallery
- 04/2004 **Barefoot Pictures**  
Bologna Children's Bookfair  
Greece - Country of Honour  
National Book Center of Greece







KELLY MATATHIA-COVO