

Redefining the margins: intertextual and secondary characters in children's historical novels

Redefinir los márgenes: personajes intertextuales y secundarios en las novelas históricas infantiles

Redefinir els marges: personatges intertextuals i secundaris en les novel·les històriques infantils

Rosy-Triantafyllia Angelaki. Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece.
aggelaki.rosy@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5096-2211>

Abstract

Historical fiction for children is the kind of literature that allows young readers to gain historical knowledge in a pleasant, easier way thanks to engaging characters who are at times entertaining. The fictional heroes in most children's historical fiction are examples to follow for the young readers whose behaviours and motivations we discover through our observation as readers. Additionally, the postmodern attestation of history as narration, with the appointment of microhistory is favoured when the psychography of fictional heroes is in the foreground. Or, when historical facts are interpreted from different perspectives and under various visual angles. These elements of historical fiction impel many writers to provide marginal characters with space as well as speech.

The Byzantine era is a subject in Children's Literature and contemporary novelists try to educate children and at the same time bring out Byzantium's charm either by highlighting neglected historic events or by examining already known faces and facts from a fresh angle. Bearing that in mind and given the fact that the concept of intertextuality in literature is a way to build up interpretive communities among young readers, this paper examines five Greek historical novels for children written by Penelope Maximou (1904-2001). More specifically, we will focus on the way the author attempted to make "visible" fictional characters who were until recently considered of less or least importance, such as slaves. In this paper will be also pinpointed the way the writer chose to make use of History so as to reflect female difference and multiplicity in historical records, aiming to deconstruct the gendered identity patriarchy had constructed.

Key words: children's literature, historical novel, intertextuality, marginality, Byzantium

Resumen

La ficción histórica infantil y juvenil es el tipo de literatura que permite a los jóvenes lectores adquirir conocimientos históricos de una forma amena y sencilla gracias a personajes entrañables que en ocasiones incluso los entretienen. Los héroes de ficción en la mayoría de las novelas históricas infantiles y juveniles son ejemplos a seguir para los jóvenes lectores; descubrimos sus comportamientos y motivaciones a través de nuestra observación como lectores. Además, la declaración posmoderna de la historia como narración,

con la designación de la microhistoria, se ve favorecida cuando la psicografía de los héroes ficticiales está en primer plano. O bien, cuando los hechos históricos se interpretan desde diferentes perspectivas y bajo varios ángulos visuales. Estos elementos de la ficción histórica impulsan a muchos escritores a proporcionar a los personajes marginales tanto espacio como discurso.

La era bizantina es un tema de la literatura infantil y juvenil, y los novelistas contemporáneos intentan educar a los niños y jóvenes al mismo tiempo que sacan a relucir el encanto de Bizancio, ya sea resaltando eventos históricos olvidados o examinando rostros y hechos ya conocidos desde un ángulo nuevo. Teniendo esto en cuenta y dado que el concepto de intertextualidad en la literatura es una forma de construir comunidades interpretativas entre los jóvenes lectores, este artículo examina cinco novelas históricas griegas para niños y jóvenes escritas por Penelope Maximou (1904-2001). Más concretamente, nos centraremos en la forma en que la autora intentó hacer "visibles" personajes de ficción hasta hace poco considerados de menor importancia, como los esclavos. En este artículo también se señalará la forma en que la escritora eligió hacer uso de la Historia para reflejar la diferencia y la multiplicidad femenina en los registros históricos, con el objetivo de deconstruir la identidad de género construida por el patriarcado.

Palabras clave: literatura infantil y juvenil, novela histórica, intertextualidad, marginalidad, Bizancio

Resum

La ficció històrica infantil i juvenil és el tipus de literatura que permet als joves lectors adquirir coneixements històrics de manera amena i senzilla gràcies a personatges entranyables que de vegades fins i tot els entretenen. Els herois de ficció a la majoria de les novel·les històriques infantils i juvenils són exemples a seguir per als joves lectors; descobrim els seus comportaments i motivacions a través de la nostra observació com a lectors. A més, l'atestació postmoderna de la història com a narració, amb la designació de la microhistòria, es veu afavorida quan la psicografia dels herois ficticials és en primer pla. O bé, quan els fets històrics s'interpreten des de diferents perspectives i sota diversos angles visuals. Aquests elements de la ficció històrica impulsen molts escriptors a proporcionar als personatges marginals tant espai com a discurs.

L'era bizantina és un tema de la literatura infantil i juvenil, i els novel·listes contemporanis intenten educar els nens i joves alhora que treuen a la llum l'encant de Bizanci, sigui ressaltant esdeveniments històrics oblidats o examinant cares i fets ja coneguts des d'un angle nou. Tenint en compte això i atès que el concepte d'intertextualitat en la literatura és una forma de construir comunitats interpretatives entre els joves lectors, aquest article examina cinc novel·les històriques per a nens i joves escrits per Penelope Maximou (1904-2001). Més concretament, ens centrarem en la manera com l'autora va intentar fer "visibles" personatges de ficció fins fa poc considerats de menor importància; menors i adults que estaven sent oprimits durant l'època bizantina, com els esclaus. En aquest article també s'assenyalarà la manera com l'escriptora va triar fer ús de la Història per reflectir la diferència i la multiplicitat femenina als registres històrics, amb l'objectiu de desconstruir la identitat de gènere construïda pel patriarcat.

Paraules clau: literatura infantil i juvenil, novel·la històrica, intertextualitat, marginalitat, Bizanci

1. Historiographic narration: between Literature and History

The borders between Literature and History have never been crystal-clear. As the postmodernist history philosopher Hayden White (1973) argued, 'History' as a text is a construct and cannot be represented objectively because historians can ignore or give significance to certain historical events, according to their ideology. For White (1973, p. 9), the narrative form is the only acceptable form of representation in the writing of History. Historical narration and literary narration constitute two different genres still, as many studies indicate, both involve many common traits such as the hermeneutic approach, the invocation of emotion, the spiritual development and the admonishment. In neither historical nor in literary narration is reality reflected faithfully. The narrative techniques and the rhetoric found in both genres are similar (Megill, 1994; Attwood, 1998, pp. 49-50).

When referring to the common rhetorical structure of these two types of discourses, the literary theorist, critic, philosopher and semiotician Roland Barthes (1963/1986) stated that:

The narration of past events, commonly subject in our culture, since the Greeks, to the sanction of historical 'science', placed under the imperious warrant of the 'real', justified by principles of 'rational' exposition – does this narration differ, in fact, by some specific feature, by an indubitably pertinence, from imaginary narration, as we find it in the epic, the novel, the drama? (p. 127).

Considering that a historical work combines knowledge and imagination (Collingwood, 1946; Nussbaum, 1991), we might wonder if the composition of historical knowledge denotes the presentation of the historical reality and the linguistic–narrative representation of the social imaginary which takes place within the historical novel.

With the advance in historical science, the historical novel (for adults) flourished, subsequently influencing History as a science. A novel is reckoned to be historical when its story is about figures and facts of a past period –a period which the novelist attempts to depict on the pages of the book depending on his/her imagination, lyricism, and observation (Davies, 1996; Parkes 2011). Excluding the element of fiction, the historical novel is based on a share of truth that the novelist has pumped from historical records and sources; a historical novel may be a work of fiction, but at the same time, it portrays the author's effort to convey in detail and as promptly and realistically as possible the socio-historical context of a past period (Furet, 1982; Gossman, 1990, pp. 227-284). It is vital that the protagonists of the historical novel behave according to their age, gender, nationality and the setting of the story. Moreover, the characters' dialogues add realism and persuasiveness to the novel (Taylor, 1938; Pasco, 2004).

Taking under consideration that one of the historical novels essential functions is the conveying of the aura of a historical period and the representation of the ethos of a society, we consider that it serves as a supplement to History. Historical novels partially reflect the historical reality and, as the setting that they portray is all-engrossing, it becomes identified with History itself. However, in a historical novel, reality is constructed and includes the author's contemporary and historical reality. What the novelist writes is the reality he/she conceives depending on his/her origin, education and general culture. This reality is considered to be inscribed within a social, anthropological and historical context, exceeding a personal experience (Nelson, 1975; Brown, 1998; White, 2001; Zhang, 2004; Travaglini, 2019).

2. Historical novels for children

The children's historical novel is a peculiar genre of fiction: it has a solid composition which is dispersed with fictive elements interspersed with historical information. In children's historical novels, reality is considered to enclose both what is known as historical reality and the writer's reality; young readers have the opportunity to witness History through the lens of another person's view, with the help of the pathos that Literature offers. By dint of its entertaining nature, it is considered to transmit historical knowledge in a pleasant and effortless manner to young readers. For this reason, Literature (and, in particular, the historical novel) is considered an alternative method of approaching historical knowledge (Adamson, 1987; Parkes, 2009; Howell, 2014).

The historical novel for children is considered as a demanding genre of Literature which challenges the readers, on condition that the novelist succeeds in unleashing the imagination and unlocking the emotion of the child reader. The novelist aims to create a novel with an interesting plot, accentuated by the element of adventure, with the intention of offering a realistic and distinct depiction of the story and protagonists. What is more, describing a person's physical appearance in a children's historical novel fulfils a double role: it functions as a means of attaching attributes to the protagonists and at the same time it may serve as a metonymic link between the internal and external cosmos (Rimmon-Kenan, 1985, pp. 59-62; Norton, 1995, p. 511; Power, 2003).

Since the 19th century onwards, an increasing number of European and Greek scholars have studied the Byzantine era. More specifically, the Byzantine civilization has been considered as an integral part of the Modern Greek national identity (Zannas, 2006, pp. 291-312; Wertsch, 2008). Byzantium and its religious, spiritual, artistic, political and cultural influence and ecumenical spirit has inspired numerous children literature authors to write about true stories or historical figures that played a major role in the Empire. Authors have presented in their books the philosophy and ideology of the multicultural

Empire, where Orthodoxy and the Greek contemplative spirit were the indispensable elements on which the Byzantines based their development and their political expression (Spanaki, 1998; Angelaki, 2018, pp. 93-96).

3. Intertextuality and microhistory in Children's Literature

Intertextual relationships in literary books are characterized by the production of a new text through

Intertextual relationships take on greater value if children, while trying to remember any literary allusions, focus on the very link between the original and the new text through phrasal passages or references. And once young readers attempt to infer the meaning of a discourse merged with another by making associations through their own intertextual metaphors, they have the possibility to become engaged in the text and to make synchronic and diachronic assumptions, while responding to new ideologies

its projected connection to another, earlier or contemporary. In contemporary books, writing intersects with tradition through intertextuality, whether the latter is distinct or inconspicuous: stories have over time become embedded in others as if they were living organisms and constitute a body of interesting information (Barthes, 1972; Wienold, 1981; Siafléki, 2020). However, intertextual relationships presuppose an experienced reader –a reader who is not necessarily a vulnerable child, whose thoughts and ideology are yet to be shaped (Kristeva, 1986; Cairney, 1990; Desmet, 2001).

Intertextuality is linked to ideology –and, consequently, to language, culture and society (Briggs & Bauman, 1992; Millán, 2018, p. 195; Orr, 2003, p. 28). Intertextual relationships take on greater value if children, while trying to remember any literary allusions, focus on the very link between the original and the new text through phrasal passages or references. And once young readers attempt to infer the meaning of a discourse merged with another by making associations through their own intertextual metaphors, they have the possibility to become engaged in the text and to make synchronic and diachronic assumptions, while responding to new ideologies (Hollindale, 1988; Lundin, 1998; Millán, 2018, p. 195). Intertextuality is one of the main narrative trends found in contemporary books for children, together with interior monologue, multiperspectivity, self-referentiality and the investigation, revelation and narration of particular people's lives, with the approach of microhistorical studies (Murray, 2004; Ginzburg, 2012). In fact, by revealing how historical agents perceived marginality and representing these agents perspectives to literature, the authors could be considered to be intent on revealing the past to young children, not only by presenting it, but also by explaining the answers to great historical questions through different narrative voices (Ginzburg, et al, 1993;

Mímisson & Magnússon, 2014). Additionally, as the authors try to interpret experiences of unknown people of the past to young readers, the marginalized “others” become acquaintances, accepted and understood by the child reader, who no longer feels that they belong to the so-called “dominant group”, since, in the marginal literary figures’ universe, what it is most personal, becomes most universal.

4. Penelope Maximou’s historical novels

Above all, we should stress that contemporary books for children in Greece include elements, thoughts and experiences of the first and second post-war generation, the generations of the 1970s and 1980. Many Greek authors who address children chose –and continue to choose, to this day– to write about Byzantium and, specifically, to explain to young readers that the Byzantine world was an extension of the Roman Empire, and that its legacy was not just linked to Roman territories but also to the vast amount of people who lived within these territories. Particularly, an awarded Greek novelist, Penelope Maximou (1904-2001), introduces to her readers the Byzantine ideology; as history constitutes the first intertext in her books, she points out that the Byzantines interacted with many other cultures (such as the Islamic world, the Slavs, the Armenians, the Georgians and, of course, Western Europe), as the cultural radiance of Byzantium was really powerful, without disregarding to state that the Byzantines were trying to achieve the dominance over those groups. Her five historical novels are examined in this article. Additionally, in all her books she remarks that the Byzantines were trying to preserve the peace among the groups that lived under their dominance and that they strived to Hellenize them.

The reason why we decided to deal with this specific writer is the fact that she has delved deeper into Byzantine history than most and, she has tried to depict Byzantine culture in her novels in a positive light. However, she did not try to beautify characters and situations related to the narrated era as it

She has delved deeper into Byzantine history than most and, she has tried to depict Byzantine culture in her novels in a positive light

seems that she felt it as her duty to be truthful to children. The fact that she also highlighted the multicultural character of Byzantine culture makes evident that she tried to promote the acceptance of ethnic diversity among her readers. Furthermore, it seems that Maximou not only wanted to portray the Byzantine society to young readers, but also to invite them to make comparisons between the narrated and the synchronic era. Perhaps she tried to demonstrate how –beyond the objective truth of History– there are always subjective interpretations of the historical events (all of them cohesively linked) (Martin, 1993; Mitrophanes, 2004).

Apart from demonstrating the literary and subjective sources of historical interpretation, we could argue that Maximou also considered that it was of utmost importance for children to confront their own misinterpretations of history. She makes obvious that she wants children to understand the motives of the historical personalities which she depicted in her novels, as empathy is critical when it comes to historical understanding and critical thinking; additionally, it is evident that she made an effort to portray the “lived experience” of the marginal characters’ in her books as well (Ashby & Lee, 1987; McCallum & Stephens, 2011, p. 364; Levins-Morales, 2016).

Historiographic metafiction is used by the author in order to demonstrate the co-existence of different perspectives (and of other voices) of historical facts along with their “official” interpretations (Bakhtin, 1992, pp. 300-324). Given that intertextuality is linked to identity and ideology, as aforementioned, Maximou’s books are populated with intertextual relationships. The author makes use of women’s and children’s characters in her novels –women and children who were until recently considered of less or least importance for the development of the story or plot itself– in such a way, so as to make them visible to young readers, who are at the stage of forming their own historical and social understandings. And indeed, since the fictional and at the same time intertextual protagonists share the same age and have common traits with the readers, we assume that Maximou uses this narrative technique so as to install the values and ideals of her fictional characters (values concerning the respect for women, for the poor, for people from other countries, etc.) to her readers, displaying that she considers Literature as a pathway for gender equality and intercultural communication (Nikolajeva, 2002, p. 183; Wilkie-Stibbs, 2004). At this point it should be underlined that Maximou decided to rewrite and subvert the historical material in her books in order to emphasize the silenced histories of marginalized groups as well as to present the female characters of her novels and their efforts to express their emotions freely and/or interfere with Byzantine society, long before the ideas of multiculturalism were widespread in Greek Children’s Literature.

4.1. Κοντα στην Αθηναίδα [*Close to Athenais*] (1972)

The plot of this particular historical novel for children takes place in Athens and Constantinople, in the 5th century AD. The narrator and protagonist is Daphne, a young girl hailing from Antioquia, a region that belonged to the Byzantine Empire at that time. On her way to Miletus along with her family, she and her parents were under attack and ever since her life changed drastically: from a little princess she became a slave herself, sold to a philosopher called Leontios. Her new master's name was Athenais, Leontios's daughter. Daphne, now separated from her family for good, appears within the novel to never lose hope that she would be reunited with her family and she often recalls happy moments with them –episodes that assumingly enable children to value and embed an optimistic point of view considering life.

Also, Daphne proves to have a highly dynamic personality, as she is a Hun. Huns were hated, according to the third-person narrator, due to their barbaric instincts and sporadic invasions against the Byzantine Empire. Daphne is described to present some brutal characteristics, something that the writer makes evident to her readers –especially at the episode of the book where a secondary character asks her: “What kind of animal was your soul before it came to you and you finally came into life in a human form?” (Maximou, 1972, p. 163). What is interesting, though, is the fact that the little girl is described to feel proud about belonging to this tribe and she does not hesitate to stop speaking with her best and sole friend in Athens, where she was sold as a slave, when she heard him saying that all Huns should be slaughtered. Undoubtedly, we could claim that, through her behaviour, the author aims to help children make connections between Literature and their everyday lives, help them gain pride for their past and culture and, also, show them that is possible to overcome preconceptions in cross-cultural relationships (Colby & Lyon, 2004).

Daphne’s rebellious character is also displayed at an episode where she hears others talking about her marriage with another secondary character called Ermolaos, who was kind, obedient, prude and low-key person. Daphne “did not want such a man” (Maximou, 1972, p. 52) and she refused to get married, because in her belief, by doing so, she would lose her autonomy forever. But Maximou continues to challenge the boundary between story and history and bring the untold stories to the fore: as Daphne was a little girl, she had, of course, some fears to overcome. Her master, Athenais, is described as a tender person who, from the very beginning, treated her with love and helped her overcome any doubts about herself. She even protected her from being treated like a “common slave”: she never had her hair shaven and she was not forced to work in the fields along with other slaves –with whom, according to regulations, she should eat and sleep (Lemerle, 1971; Economides, 1983). This kind of information allows children to realize the complicated, multi-faceted socio-economic situations with legal and political dimensions that people used to deal with and, definitely, highlights that Children’s Literature can be used as a powerful tool for young readers to value themselves.

It is also worth mentioning that Athenais is shown to increasingly realize how clever, discreet, responsible and studious Daphne is and tries to develop her skills. This is why, in the book, she makes efforts in order for the little Hun girl to receive an education besides other comforts: Athenais initiates her into art and at the same time spurs her to improve qualities suitable for a girl of that era, like knitting, etc.. Therefore, it is easily understood why Daphne was truly committed to her new master and did all her best to cheer her up. Someone could argue that behind the description of the little girl being really sentimental and moral (apart from being quite stubborn and short-tempered), and appreciating everything she enjoyed next to Athenais, the author’s displays a use of marginal,

adolescent and female characters in her literary work as positive role models for children (Grogan, 1996; Louie & Louie, 2001).

4.2. Στα χρόνια του Αλέξιου Κομνηνού [In the years of Alexios Komninos] (1984)

The plot unfolds in the early 12th century. Accordingly to the custom of that era, Andreas, one of the main characters, has a slave woman in his house, named Hypatia. She is a well-educated, discreet woman who takes good care of the housework and looks after Andreas' family members with true devotion. She is described preparing everyday meals with dedication, but also making sure that everyone in the family is warmly dressed and always given a snack whilst working; she even spends her salary on buying their favorite food. Her contribution is, according to the narration, acknowledged; for instance, in one chapter, Andreas is described as telling his family members: "Listen! I've seen it a long time ago –no, not a long time ago, but since forever! This woman loves us!" (Maximou, 1984, p. 154). Consequently, as they all feel so lucky to have such a hardworking and compassionate woman at their service, they even stop calling her "slave"; she is considered as a family member thanks to her kindness, rationale and devotion. It is also mentioned that she is trusted with matters of high concern.

However, through the listing of her duties, the readers of this novel are again provided with information concerning slavery and the role of women in the Byzantine society. As in *Close to Athenais* (Maximou, 1972), the voices of women and marginal characters are unveiled in this novel as well. It is worth noting that the traits of the "subcultural", the non-dominant characters, are revealed to the readers in all of Maximou's novels through their own words, by the narrator's voice and via the narrative voice of other characters, who may be also marginal and play significant roles in the books, as they let the readers know what happened in the past through their thoughts and deeds. For example, as children read the novels, they become informed about the fact that marginalized or not so privileged people (who were considered as such due to their gender or age) were mainly engaged in home care, were excluded from attending festivals, charitable activities, or visiting the baths, etc. Thus, Maximou, via intertextuality and metafictional elements in her non-linear narratives, achieves a multiplicity of histories and lights up the silenced lives and activities of the suppressed "others"; the existence of the non-dominant culture within the general culture (Angelaki, 2021).

4.3. Οι πρώτοι σταυροφόροι στο Βυζάντιο: 1096 - 1099 μ.Χ. [The first crusaders in Byzantium: 1096-1099 AD] (1989)

Maximou links her novels with intertextual relationships in such a way that many readers could easily get the impression that her work is published in sequential pieces. In this particular example, Hypatia appears again as an intertextual character and, more specifically, as a housekeeper in Eusebius' home, the son of her former boss, as she had practically raised him. She is described as "the angel of Eusebius'

home, who took care of everything” (Maximou, 1989, p. 28). As an intertextual character, she still possesses all the traits given beforehand: she is educated, soft-spoken, and skillfull. Moreover, she is well organized and that is the reason she has a plethora of marriage proposals –despite the fact that she is a slave. However, the family members in Eusebius’ home are described in the novel to be heart-broken when they are told that she was to leave Constantinople in order to finally get married.

Eusebius is particularly sad about her leaving, according to the third person narrator; he does not want her to get married since he was a little child, as he thought he would lose his mother figure. Hypatia’s kind heart is underlined at this particular episode, as she is described to “try hard to explain to young Eusebius the constitution of engagement and marriage” (Maximou, 1989, p. 12) and assure him that she would always love him and take care of him and his family, something that she actually does, as, before moving to Thessaloniki to get married, she makes sure that her trusted friend Athena, another marginal character of the book that supports its plot, replaces her and takes care of Eusebius’s family. Another example of how the writer uses marginal characters in her novels is the presence of Nathaniel, who is actually a beggar, and who is introduced to the Eusebius’ family by Athena. Nathaniel proves to be skillfull as well, since he is described to be an honest, hardworking young man who cooks, washes, does the shopping, takes care of the housework and, most importantly, has a vigilant eye.

4.4. Μανουήλ Κομνηνός, ο ιππότης αυτοκράτορας [Emmanouel Komninos, *The knight emperor*] (1990)

Once more, it becomes evident that Maximou creates specific characters in order to present details concerning the era she wishes to revive in her books, as well as the status and the living conditions of the Byzantine slaves and women, in general. The plot in this novel also takes place in the 12th century in Constantinople. According to the story, Helen, a tenant slave, is hired as a housekeeper in the house of Andreas, the father of Eusebius. A main character herself, she is presented as a hardworking person, with a sympathetic personality. Helen is diligent despite working in somebody else’s house for she is literate and can keep the household. Her social status never prevents her from being outspoken and audacious –combined with some female nagging, according to the narrator’s voice, as she never misses the chance of criticising people and situations and “especially the emperor, of whom she wasn’t fond and she was always ready to curse on him” (Maximou, 1990, p. 53), even though she is a religious person. At the same time, it is underlined that she is also really superstitious, following medieval Byzantium’s religious culture and customs (Marwick, 1970, pp. 11-13). Therefore, alongside with keeping the traditions of Eastern Christianity, she believes in astrology and practices magic.

We could argue that the impression received by the reader is that Helen’s character is somehow possessed by an anxiety that doesn’t allow her to unwind, to feel relaxed or grateful for all the good

things happening to her, such as the fact that she has the same civil rights as her former masters and that her children were literally free citizens (Lemerle, 1978). The character who points out her so-called ungratefulness is Maria, the second woman who works in the house of Eusebius's parents. According to the narrator, her mother sold her –as it was customary back then– when she was young to a seamstress, who raised her as a real mother. When Andrea's family meets Maria, they give her accommodation and a place to work next to Helen. Maria is presented as a trustworthy, giving, calm and tactful person, who never complains about anything, as for every setback she has the motto “that’s life” (Maximou, 1990, p. 165). She is also described to speak rationally, to make wise choices and to accept the fact that she is not allowed to be present along with a guest in Andrews’ house, or that she can never dine with her landladies and consume wine –this, particularly, is because she was a woman, the same reason for her not being able to participate in politics. In this way, Maximou uses marginal characters in her book not only to incorporate history and create a literary plot, but also to instruct children about the virtues of humility, prudence, wisdom and gentleness. Additionally, Maria’s silence is not a sign of weakness, but can be seen as the author’s effort to destroy the monologic discourse of the canonical history (Herndl, 1991).

4.5. Η καταστροφή της Θεσσαλονίκης [The sack of Thessaloniki. In the years of Andronikos Komninos] (1987)

The story of this book is situated in 1185, when the Normans of the Kingdom of Sicily sacked Thessaloniki –which was one of the worst disasters to befall the Byzantine Empire in the 12th century. As already mentioned, a young novel character could influence in the creation of a young person’s personality. Maximou took advantage of this fact by presenting a 12 years old slave called Mathew in her book, a boy who was actually a model of morality with an exemplary conduct, and tries to show young readers paths to follow by describing his feelings, his tactful reactions and his wise decisions.

Maximou informs her readers that child slavery was common in medieval ages and the exposure or abandonment of infants was considered to be the simplest solution for families who could not function as social and economic units (Hennessy, 2008). She also does not omit that orphaned children were the one of the most vulnerable collectives. Matthew, the main marginal character, was an orphan, whose cruel step-mother abandoned him. According to the narrator’s words, a couple living in a nearby house took pity of him and decided to put him up permanently and treat him well. This young character is presented to be quite sober and mature in the novel, regardless of his age. He is described to be well aware, not only of the turbulent socio-political situation occurring, but also of the offered love and care by his foster parents: that is the reason for which Matthew prefers to stay by their side instead of leaving them at God's mercy, even though they offer him the chance to escape Thessaloniki –as his foster mother did, who “stood by her husband’s side, as it was her duty” (Maximou, 1987, p. 35). It

could be argued that, in this specific novel, Maximou tried to combine historical information with literature in order to familiarize young children with the traces of the past and asks them to contemplate them from a contemporary perspective. We could also assume that she tried to point out the virtues of courage and bravery to children and aimed to help them appreciate parental love. The role of women in the Byzantine era is also illustrated in the novel, through the presence of Matthew's step mother.

5. Conclusions

Penelope Maximou's historical novels embark upon the construction of a dramatic structure of fictionalization and of a plot with a clear-cut beginning and end within a clear time context. Studying them, it becomes evident that she loves children as much as she loves History –and, especially, the History of Byzantium. In all of her books the historical events unfold through layers so as to help the readers understand not only the actions, but also the values of both the famed historical and the marginal characters of her novels (Finn, 2002; Bateman & Harris, 2008). Her novels are fraught with intertextual relationships, but the use of intertextual and also serial characters is not the only interesting technique concerning her work; many of the fictional characters in her stories belong to the so-called marginalized groups and, even though they are portraying real-life experiences from the Byzantine past, they are not assigned traditional gender roles and behaviour traits (Crenshaw, 1989; Lenski, 2001).

In her books Maximou promotes the stories, the perceptions and the personalities of secondary characters: Hypatia's, Matthew's, Helen's, Maria's and Daphne's marginalized experiences, perspectives and voices are presented as historical and literature narrative. All individuals appear to be realistic and speak as they would in their daily life, without the narrator distorting their language (Lukens, 1982; Wilkie, 1996). It is remarkable to consider how far ahead she was for her time, since she chose to give an official voice to the marginalized groups –something that the hegemonic ideologies denied to do– many years before the representation of the “underprivileged” and “disempowered” became a trend in Greek Literature for children.

Maximou tried, through history, to include an account of the marginalized groups' experience over time, as well as to transform her stories into a multifocal analysis, in order to highlight the multiplicity of social representations. Women in her books may be presented to be occupied with domestic chores and the upbringing of children, but they are described to overcome limitations and, also, to make their own choices. Despite the fact that they were maids, tenants and, basically, their role was interwoven

with domesticity, according to the Byzantine concepts, female characters are not described to be under the total control of men, but they were rather considered as family members and were treated as equal. Maximou makes clear that it was possible for women to fight for their rights and, at the same time, continue spinning, weaving and sewing inside or outside the house. Moreover, given the fact that her books combine both historical facts and fiction, she invites children to study History and make their own assumptions, as she implies that socio-economic, political and religious factors have contributed to the increase of the roles of women (Kazhdan & Epstein, 1990, p. 163). Of course, men were still considered to be the dominant gender, but readers realize that female characters had opportunities: to become educated, or choose if, when and who they would get to marry.

Maximou illustrated how, in Byzantine society, children worked in households and were exposed and enslaved too; she states that child labour was not an unusual phenomenon in the Byzantine era, as it was a built-in social component of a typical Byzantine household's economy. The author tried to engage young readers to interpret historical events, whose repercussions impacted numerous members of marginalized social groups. We argue that she did so with the aim of helping her readers develop their historical conscience and their capacity for critical thinking through Literature (Seymour, 1978, pp. 104-105; Booth, 1987; Rycik & Rosler, 2009; Anwaruddin, 2016).

However, the writer also implies in her books that children and their work were not considered simply as a commodity. Maximou's juvenile characters are described as self-confident people who begin to seek their identity, who want respect and try to gain it by continuing their own family's economic organization and by trying to beat "tomorrow's uncertainty". Nonetheless, while children's characters in her novels play important roles in the development of each story, she makes sure that the adult employers and foster parents of those characters disregard the Byzantine legislator's boundaries between childhood and adulthood, understand the children's need for love and appreciate their rationality and responsibility (Bruner, 1988; Sköld & Vehkalahti, 2016).

Since children are considered to learn certain behaviours through role models that appear not only in society, but also in stories, Maximou presents children's characters in her books as brave, trustworthy, diligent and hard-working. We believe that the author used this narrative technique to influence young readers' empathetic engagement with the young characters and maybe help them adopt their values and ideals. Judging by her fictional characters' personalities, she may have wanted to influence readers' concepts of morality, as well as deconstruct any stereotypical images and ideas concerning gender –which can still be found in every aspect of our modern lives (Docherty 1983, p. 17; Higbie, 1984; McCallum, 1999).

6. References

- Adamson, L. G. (1987). *A reference guide to historical fiction for children and young adults*. Greenwood Press.
- Angelaki, R.-T. (2018). *Διδακτική της ιστορίας. Το Βυζάντιο στη λογοτεχνία για παιδιά, από το 1955 μέχρι σήμερα: Συγκριτική και ιδεολογική προσέγγιση [Didactics of History. Byzantium in Children's Literature. Comparative and ideological approach.]* Γιαχούδης [Yiahoudis].
- Angelaki, R.-T. (2021). Οι αφανείς ήρωες-παιδιά στο ιστορικό μυθιστόρημα. [Marginalized children in historical novels]. In M. Kanatsouli, R.-T. Angelaki & D. Souliwiti (Eds.), *Αφηγήσεις και αφηγήσεις για την παιδική ηλικία. Πρακτικά του Συνεδρίου που διοργανώθηκε από το Τμήμα Επιστημών Προσχολικής Αγωγής και Εκπαίδευσης (ΤΕΠΑΕ) και το Μεταπτυχιακό Πρόγραμμα «Επιστήμες της Αγωγής» του ίδιου Τμήματος [Narratives and narrations about childness. Proceedings of the Symposium organized by the Department of Early Childhood Education, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki]* (pp. 19-29). University Studio Press.
- Anwaruddin, S. M. (2016). Why critical literacy should turn to 'the affective turn': Making a case for critical affective literacy. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 37(3), 381–396. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2015.1042429>
- Ashby, R., & Lee, P. (1987). Children's concepts of empathy and understanding in history. In C. Portal (Ed.), *The History Curriculum for Teachers* (pp. 62-88). Falmer Press.
- Attwood, C. (1998). *Dynamic Dichotomy: The Poetic "I" in Fourteenth- and Fifteenth-century French Lyric Poetry*. Rodopi.
- Bakhtin, M. M. (1992). *The Dialogic Imagination. Four Essays* (M. Holquist, Ed; C. Emerson & M. Holquist, Trans.). University of Texas Press.
- Barthes, R. (1972). *Mythologies* (A. Lavers, Trans.). Farrar, Straus & Giroux.
- Barthes, R. (1986). The Discourse of History (1963). In R. Barthes, *The Rustle of Language* (R. Howard, Trans.) (pp. 127-148). Hill & Wang.
- Bateman, D. & C. Harris, (2008). Time Perspectives: examining the past, present and futures. In C. Marsh (Ed.), *Studies of Society and Environment: Exploring the Teaching Possibilities* (5th ed) (pp. 268-290). Frenchs Forest.
- Booth, M. (1987). Ages and Concepts: A Critique of the Piagetian Approach to History Thinking. In C. Portal (Ed.), *The History Curriculum for Teachers* (pp. 22-38). The Falmer Press.
- Briggs, C. L. & Bauman, R. (1992). Genre, intertextuality and social power. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, 2(2), 131-172. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43102167>
- Brown, J. (1998). Historical Fiction or Fictionalized History? Problems for Writers of Historical Novels for Young Adults. *The ALAN Review*, 26(1), 7-11. <https://doi.org/10.21061/alan.v26i1.a.3>
- Bruner, K. E. (1988). Stereotypes in juvenile historical fiction. *School Library Journal*, 35(1), 124-125.
- Cairney, T. (1990). Intertextuality: Infectious echoes from the past. *The Reading Teacher*, 43(7), 478-484. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20200444>

- Colby, S. A. & Lyon, A. F. (2004) Heightening awareness about the importance of using multicultural literature. *Multicultural Education*, 11(3), 24-28.
- Collingwood, R. G. (1946). *The idea of history*. Clarendon Press.
- Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. *The University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 140, 139-167. <https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8>
- Davies, S. (1996). Interpreting Contextualities. *Philosophy and Literature*, 20(1), 20-38. doi:10.1353/phl.1996.0037.
- Desmet, M. K. T. (2001). Intertextuality/Intervisuality in Translation: The Jolly Postman's Intercultural Journey from Britain to the Netherlands. *Children's Literature in Education*, 32(1), 31-43. doi:0045-6713/01/0300-0031
- Docherty, T. (1983). *Reading (Absent) Character: Towards a Theory of Characterization in Fiction*. Clarendon Press.
- Economides, N. (1983). The Byzantine slaveholders. *Byzantine Symmeikta*, (5), 295-302. <https://doi.org/10.12681/byzsym.689>
- Finn, M. (2002). Victorian Law, Literature and History: Three Ships Passing in the Night. *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 7(1), 134–146. <https://doi.org/10.3366/jvc.2002.7.1.134>
- Furet, F. (1982). *L'Atelier de l'histoire*. Flammarion.
- Ginzburg, C. (2012). *In threads and traces. True false fictive*. University of California Press.
- Ginzburg, C., Tedeschi, J., & Tedeschi, A. C. (1993). Microhistory: Two or Three Things That I Know about It. *Critical Inquiry*, 20(1), 10–35. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1343946>
- Gossman, L. (Ed.). (1990). *Between History and Literature*. Harvard University Press.
- Grogan, M. (1996). *Voices of women aspiring to the superintendency*. State University of New York Press.
- Hennessy, C. (2008). *Images of Children in Byzantium*. Ashgate.
- Herndl, D. P. (1991). The Dilemmas of Feminine Dialogic. In D. Bauer & S. Jaret McKinstry (Eds.), *Feminism, Bakhtin, and the Dialogic* (pp. 2-24). State University of New York Press.
- Higbie, R. (1984). *Character and Structure in the English Novel*. University Press of Florida.
- Hollindale, P. (1988). Ideology and the children's book. *Signal*, (55), 3–22.
- Howell, J. (2014). Popularising History: Re-igniting pre-service teacher and student interest in history via historical fiction. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 39(12), 1-12. <http://dx.doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2014v39n12.1>
- Kazhdan, A. P. & Epstein A.W. (1990). *Change in Byzantine Culture in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Volume 7) (Transformation of the Classical Heritage). University of California Press.
- Kristeva, J. (1986). Word, Dialogue and Novel. In T. Moil (Ed.), *The Kristeva Reader* (pp. 34-62). Columbia University Press.

- Lemerle, P. (1971). *Le premier humanism byzantin. Notes et remarques sur enseignement et culture à Byzance des origines au Xe siècle*. Presses Universitaires de France.
- Lemerle, P. (1978). Cinq études sur le XIe siècle byzantin, *Revue des études byzantines*, 36(1), 283-285.
- Lenski, S. D. (2001). Intertextual connections during discussions about literature. *Reading Psychology*, (22), 313–335. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02702710127639>
- Levins-Morales, A. (2016). The historian as curandera. In K. Scott, S. E. Cayleff, A. Donadey & I. Lara (Eds.), *Women in culture: An intersectional anthology for gender and women's studies* (2nd ed.) (pp. 134-147). Wiley-Blackwell.
- Louie, B. & Louie, D. (2001). Why gender stereotypes still persist in contemporary children's literature. In S. Lehr (Ed.), *Beauty, brains, and brawn: the construction of gender in children's literature* (pp. 142–151). Heinemann.
- Lukens, R. J. (1982). *A critical handbook of children's literature*. Scott, Foresman.
- Lundin, A. (1998). Intertextuality in Children's Literature. *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science*, 39(3), 210–213. <https://doi.org/10.2307/40324158>
- Martin, R. (1993). Objectivity and Meaning in Historical Studies: Toward a Post-Analytic View [Review of Objectivity, Method and Point of View: Essays in the Philosophy of History, by W. J. Van der Dussen & L. Rubinoff]. *History and Theory*, 32(1), 25–50. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2505328>
- Marwick, M. (1970). *Witchcraft and Sorcery*. Penguin Books.
- Maximou, P. (1972). *Κοντά στην Αθηναϊδα [Close to Athenais]*. Αστήρ [Astir].
- Maximou, P. (1984). *Στα χρόνια του Αλέξιου Κομνηνού [In the years of Alexios Komninos]*. Στοχαστής [Stochastis].
- Maximou, P. (1987). *Η καταστροφή της Θεσσαλονίκης [The sack of Thessaloniki. In the years of Andronikos Komninos]*. Στοχαστής [Stochastis].
- Maximou, P. (1989). *Οι πρώτοι σταυροφόροι στο Βυζάντιο: 1096 - 1099 μ.Χ. [The first crusaders in Byzantium: 1096-1099 AD]*. Στοχαστής [Stochastis].
- Maximou, P. (1990). *Μανουήλ Κομνηνός, ο ιπποτής αυτοκράτορας [Emmanouel Komninos. The knight emperor]*. Στοχαστής [Stochastis].
- McCallum, R. (1999). *Ideologies of identity in adolescent fiction: The dialogic construction of subjectivity*. Garland Publishing, Inc.
- McCallum, R., & Stephens, J. (2011). Ideology and children's books. In S. A. Wolf, K. Coats, P. Enciso, & C. A. Jenkins (Eds.), *Handbook of research on children's and young adult literature* (pp. 359–371). Routledge.
- Megill, A. (1994). Jörn Rüsen's Theory of Historiography. Between Modernism and Rhetoric of Inquiry. *History and Theory*, 33(1), 39-60. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2505651>
- Millán, C. (2018). Adapting Intertextuality: The case of nursery rhymes characters in creating new canons in children's culture. *Journal of Literary Education*, (1), 193-226. <http://doi.org/10.7203/JLE.1.11445>

- Mímisson, K., & Magnússon, S.G. (2014). Singularizing the past: The history and archaeology of the small and ordinary. *Journal of Social Archaeology*, (14), 131-156. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1469605314527393>
- Mitrophanes, G. (2004). Ειδολογικές διεμβολίσεις στις αφηγηματικές δομές του κοινωνικού μυθιστορήματος για παιδιά της τελευταίας εικοσαετίας [Ideological interferences in the narrative structures of the social novel of the last twenty years]. In T. Tsilimeni (Ed.), *Το Σύγχρονο Ελληνικό Παιδικό - Νεανικό Μυθιστόρημα [The modern Greek children's-youth novel]* (pp. 61-71). Σύγχρονοι Ορίζοντες [Modern Horizons].
- Murray, H. (2004). Literary History as Microhistory. In C. Sugars (Ed.), *Home-Work: Postcolonialism, Pedagogy, and Canadian Literature* (pp. 405-422). University of Ottawa Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1ckpc18.26>
- Nelson, J. S. (1975). Review of Metahistory. The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe, by H. V. White. *History and Theory*, 14(1), 74-91. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2504605>
- Nikolajeva, M. (2002). *The Rhetoric of Character in Children's Literature*. The Scarecrow Press, Inc.
- Norton, E. D. (1995). *Through the Eyes of a Child: An introduction to Children's Literature* (8th ed.). Meril Prentice Hall Inc.
- Nussbaum, M. C. (1991). The Literary Imagination in Public Life. *New Literary History*, 22(4), 877-910. <https://doi.org/10.2307/469070>
- Orr, M. (2003). *Intertextuality: Debates and Contexts*. Polity Press.
- Parkes, R. J. (2009). Teaching History as Historiography: engaging narrative diversity in the curriculum. *International Journal of Historical Learning Teaching and Research*, 8(2) 118-132.
- Parkes, R. J. (2011). *Interrupting History: rethinking history curriculum after 'the end of History'*. Peter Lang.
- Pasco, A. H. (2004). Literature as Historical Archive. *New Literary History*, 35(3), 373-394. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20057844>
- Power, C. L. (2003). Challenging the Pluralism of Our Past: Presentism and the Selective Tradition in Historical Fiction Written for Young People. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 37(4), 425-466. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40171599>
- Rimmon-Kenan, S. (1985). *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*. Methuen.
- Rycik, M. & B. Rosler (2009). The Return of Historical Fiction: Teaching Tips. *The Reading Teacher*, 63(2), 163-167.
- Seymour, C. (1978). *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*. Princeton University Press.
- Siaflákis, Z. I. (2020). Intertextualité et histoire de la littérature. *Σύγκριση/Comparaison/Comparison*, (29), 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.12681/comparison.25263>
- Sköld, J. & Vehkalahti, K. (2016). Marginalized children: methodological and ethical issues in the history of education and childhood. *History of Education*, 45(4), 403-410. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0046760X.2016.1177609>

- Spanaki, M. (1998). Byzantium and the Novel in the 20th Century: From Penelope Delta to Maro Douka. In D. Ricks & P. Magdalino (Eds.), *Byzantium and The Modern Greek Identity* (pp. 119-131). Routledge.
- Taylor, A. M. (1938). The Historical Novel: As a Source in History. *The Sewanee Review*, 46(4), 459–479. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27535485>
- Travaglini, G. (2019). Imagination and Knowledge in the Metaphorology of Paul Ricœur. *Theoria*, 85(5), 383-401. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1111/theo.12204>
- Wertsch, J. V. (2008). Collective memory and narrative templates. *Social Research: An International Quarterly*, 75(1), 133–156. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40972055>
- White, H. (1973). *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in the Nineteenth-Century Europe*. John Hopkins University Press.
- White, H. (2001). The Historical Text as Literary Artifact. In G. Roberts (Ed.), *The History and the Narrative Reader* (pp. 221-236). Routledge.
- Wienold, G. (1981). Some Basic Aspects of Text Processing. *Poetics Today, Translation Theory and Intercultural Relations*, 2(4), 97-109. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1772489>
- Wilkie, C. (1996). Intertextuality. In Hunt, P (Ed.), *International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature* (1st ed.) (pp. 127-134). Routledge.
- Wilkie-Stibbs, C. (2004). Intertextuality and the Child Reader. In P. Hunt (Ed.), *International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature* (Vol. I, 2nd ed.) (pp. 179-190). Routledge.
- Zannas, A. P. (Ed.) (2006). Π.Σ. ΔΕΛΤΑ. Σύγχρονες προσεγγίσεις στο έργο της [P. S. Delta. *Contemporary Approaches to her work*]. Εστία [Estia].
- Zhang, L. (2004). History and Fictionality: Insights and limitations of a literary perspective. *Rethinking History: The Journal of Theory and Practice*, 8(3), 387-402. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1364252042000247837>

How to cite this paper:

Angelaki, R.T (2022). Redefining the Margins: Intertextual and Secondary Characters in Children's Historical Novels. *Journal of Literary Education*, (6), 114-131. <https://doi.org/10.7203/JLE.6.21735>