

# Printed hyper-texts in the Greek literature for children: Breaking the canon and creating a new type of implied reader

**Hipertextos impresos en la literatura grega per a infants: trencar el cànon i crear un nou tipus de lector implícit**

**Hipertextos impresos en la literatura griega para la infancia: romper el canon y crear un nuevo tipo de lector implícito**

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## Abstract

The article focuses on two ground-breaking books by the renowned Greek author Eugene Trivizas, which adopt a multimedia and hyper-media logic, incorporating, apart from text and image, forms of expression that refer to the digital world of multimedia. We analyse in detail the hyper-text characteristics of the selected books, which make the process of reading a game that involves the active participation of young readers.

We argue that in view of the contemporary canon of Greek children's literature, books which adopt a linear form of narration, printed hyper-texts are examples of non-canonical literature which enrich not only the form but also the content of contemporary Greek literature for children. At the same time, because of their hyper-text characteristics, such books construct an implied reader, who is not deterred by the neoteric element of their form, with quite a few 'qualifications', to accept the initiative that is offered to them and enjoy the reading game.

**Key words:** hyper-texts, metafiction, interaction, implied reader, active reader, children's literature, literary canon

## Resum

Aquest article se centra en dos llibres trencadors escrits pel nomenat autor grec Eugene Trivizas, el qual adopta una lògica multimèdia i hiper-mèdia, tot incorporant a més del text i la imatge, formes d'expressió que al·ludeixen al món digital del multimèdia. Analitzem en detall les característiques hipertextuals dels llibres seleccionats, els qual converteixen el procés de lectura en un joc que comporta la participació activa dels i les joves lectors i lectores.

Defensem que, respecte del cànon contemporani de la literatura infantil grega, amb llibres que adopten una forma lineal de narració, els hipertextos impresos són exemples de literatura no-canònica que enriqueix no

sols la forma sinó també el contingut de la literatura grega per a infants. Al mateix temps, a causa de les seues característiques hipertextuals, aquest tipus de llibre construeix un lector implícit a qui no el dissuadeix l'element neotèric de la seua forma - amb bastant "reserves" - per tal d'acceptar la iniciativa que se'ls hi ofereix i així gaudir del joc lector.

**Paraules clau:** hipertextos, metaficció, interacció, lector implícit, lector actiu, literatura per a infants, cànnon literari.

### Resumen

Este artículo se centra en dos libros innovadores escritos per el reputado autor griego Eugene Trivizas, el cual adopta una lógica multimedia e hipermedia, incorporando además del texto y la imagen, formas de expresión que aluden al mundo digital del multimedia. Analizamos en detalle las características hipertextuales de los libros seleccionados que convierten el proceso de lectura en un juego que conlleva la participación activa de los jóvenes lectores y lectoras.

Defendemos que, con respecto al canon contemporáneo de la literatura infantil griega, compuesto de libros que adoptan una forma lineal de narración, los hipertextos impresos son ejemplos de literatura no-canónica que enriquece no solo la forma sino también el contenido de la literatura infantil griega. Al mismo tiempo, a causa de sus características hipertextuales, estos tipos de libros construyen un lector implícito a quien no disuade el elemento neotérico de su forma, - con bastantes "reservas" - para aceptar la iniciativa que se les ofrece y así disfrutar del juego lector.

**Palabras clave:** hipertextos, metaficción, interacción, lector implícito, lector activo, literatura infantil, canon literario.

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## 1. Introduction

Over the years, the Greek illustrated children's book has gradually modernized its form and content following the imperatives of the current cultural expressions and norms. Particularly today, an increasing number of illustrated children's books seem to adopt a multimedia and hyper-media logic, incorporating, apart from text and image, forms of expression that refer to the digital world of multimedia (Yannikopoulou, 2007b). The handheld book remains useful. New modes of communication, though, rival the printed word (Hammerberg, 2001) and a qualitatively new relationship is instituted between the reader and the book. As Dresang claims (1999), these radical changes to the nature of the book, imposed by and related to the new technologies and the ways in which they (re)produce information, tend to lead contemporary children's books away from their traditional structures. Speaking of the contemporary Greek children's

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literature, we argue that books that adopt a multimedia and in particular hyper-media logic break the canon of the genre, not only in terms of their structure but also in terms of the alternative roles they allocate to their readers, which, as we will show, portray alternative types of implied readers.

## 2. Printed hyper-texts: definition and characteristics

The influence of hyper-media on the way printed literature is conceived and constructed has led to works that abolish linear reading by giving the reader or, rather, user the chance to interact with the text, thus, defining the course of the development of the story (Yannikopoulou, 1988, 209). One of the most interesting categories of such books are hypertexts. The term “hyper-text” itself, introduced by Theodor Nelson in the 60's, refers to a kind of text, read on the computer screen, which differs radically from the conventional printed text since it has no hierarchical structure, but, on the contrary, allows multiple ways of reading. It is, in other words, a multi-level text that encourages interaction with the reader (Giakoumatou, 2002). Although, according to reader-response theories (Booth, 1961; Iser, 1974; Holland, 1968; Culler, 1975), all books require active readers, there are certain kinds of books which expect from their readers to act in a specific, predetermined way, while others encourage a variety of different responses. Readers of “handheld hyper-texts” (Dresang, 1999, 63), in particular, are invited to interact with these books by making decisions during reading: they are given the chance to approach the text in a non-linear way and to select paths of reading that the authors themselves have not predetermined from the outset of the reading process.

Turning now to the specific characteristics of “printed” or “handheld” hyper-texts, we observe that “they borrow from the [electronic] hyper-text the “flexible” elements of multiple choices, nodes, links and networks” (Landow, 1977, 2 in Fokiali, 2008). As Yannikopoulou (2007a) argues, by abolishing the linear presentation of their material, such books essentially reproduce the “active domains” used by hyper-texts, that is hotspots and hyperlinks that allow the reader to have multiple choices. Thus, instead of the predominant plot, the author prefers to intersperse the main narrative points (nodes) with some nodal ones (links) that act as a hyper-text.

## 3. The characteristics of the printed hyper-texts examined

The two books by Eugene Trivizas that we have chosen to analyse are representative of the category of printed hyper-texts that we described above. Trivizas is a famous Greek author whose work has consistently renewed the mainstream Greek literature for children by introducing it into postmodern narrative techniques such as metafiction and intertextuality. The books we have chosen to analyse here, namely *Τα 88 ντολμαδάκια* [*The 88 Dolmadakia (stuffed vine-leaves)*] (1997) and *Τα 33 ροζ ρουμπίνια* [*The 33 Pink Rubies*] (2003) have been a breakthrough in the Greek publishing market and

have shown that the interaction of electronic hyper-media and literature can be an extremely fruitful development in children's literature.

Let us, then, examine the hyper-text characteristics of the selected books in detail. The abolishment of the linearity of reading, which is one of the main characteristics of printed hyper-texts, is achieved

**The abolishment of the linearity of reading, which is one of the main characteristics of printed hyper-texts, is achieved when, at the end of each page, the writer asks a question about what is going to happen next, and then allows the readers to choose one of the proposed responses so as to move on to the next step of the narration**

when, at the end of each page, the writer asks a question about what is going to happen next, and then allows the readers to choose one of the proposed responses so as to move on to the next step of the narration. For example, in *The 88 Dolmadakia* the narration of the story starts with the presentation of the little protagonist, Emma, who is alone in her house and feeds her goldfish. When suddenly the phone rings, Emma remains undecided. Then, the narrator, addressing the readers, asks them: "What do you want Emma to do? Should she pick up the phone or not?" Below this question there are two button-boxes, which contain two

alternative answers to the above question. The readers are asked to choose which one they prefer. Their choice will lead them to another page and will move the story forward. That reading process makes the influence of digital technology clear. For, in terms of an electronic hyper-text, the readers—users 'click' on one of these two buttons, which, because they act as links, refer them to another page with hypothetical buttons and links, and so on.

Apart from their original titles, these illustrated books by Trivizas also bear the same long subtitle: "A magic book with a thousand tales hidden in the same tale. A strange book that you read over and over and it tells you a different story each time". Such a subtitle highlights both the novelty of the reading process itself and the active role that is assigned to the implied reader of these books. In fact, at the beginning of each book there is a note explaining to the readers how to wander through the pages of the book and how to construct their own stories; the readers are also encouraged to interact with the illustrations of the book by coloring the black and white images that coexist with the text. The phrase "you decide", which is repeated in the editorial notes of the back covers of both books, is the key phrase that conveys the concept of a participative and energetic reader. Indeed, in *The 33 Pink Rubies*, the reader is even encouraged to cut out a cardboard figure of the protagonist of the story, provided in the last page of the book, so that they can use it during the reading process, transferring it from one page to another.

An additional innovative characteristic of both books is that they provide their readers with multiple endings of potential stories. In total, there are forty-four ending pages in the *The 88 Dolmadakia* and fifty-three in the *The 33 Pink Rubies*. Some of them are blank and give the readers the space to write their own end to the story. In the actual ending pages of the books, the readers will also come across something unexpected. In *The 88 Dolmadakia*, the ending page portrays the picture of a young boy who drives a car but has stopped before a sign that is placed in front of him by the fictional characters of the book and warns him: “Beware! Caution! This seems to be the last page of the book. But, it is not.” The driver, representing the reader who is the driving force of that playful narrative game, is literally and metaphorically driven to the end of the book, which, however, is not identified with the end of the reading trip, as would be the case in a conventional literary text. The last pages of *The 33 Pink Rubies* include a section of activities, supplemental to the main narrations. The reader is triggered to engage with these activities through references cited in the stories. For instance, a footnote on page 32 invites the reader to make use of the special cooking recipe that the princess herself followed in order to make baklava for her knight. As such, the fictional boundaries are blurred, since elements of the story are inserted into the reader’s world.

#### **4. The active role of the implied reader**

As we have shown so far, because of their hyper-text characteristics the two books under consideration assign to their implied reader non-canonical roles in the reading process. Let us, therefore, identify the ‘qualifications’ that the readers of these books should have in order to cope with such non-canonical roles, which will lead us to the identification of the implied readers of the particular books.

The implied reader, who can be also defined as a ‘model’ or an “ideal reader”, is the persona who is theoretically able to realize all the possibilities of the text: both those that the author himself may have considered, and the ones the text itself creates, ‘in absentia’ of the author. Wolfgang Iser, who introduced the concept in the sense in which we use it here, defines it thus: “the implied reader describes the pre-conditions of the text, pre-conditions that are activated and realized differently by different readers in each historical period” (1974: 281). We should bear in mind that while reading, the actual reader is called by the text itself to identify with the implied reader so as to realize its pre-conditions. This is the outcome of the reading act that every writer desires. However, this is not always feasible: for, very often the actual reader does not have the qualifications that the implied one theoretically has. As is the case when a child reads, for instance, poetry written for adults, or, conversely, the actual reader has more qualifications than the implied reader, as is the case when an adult reads literature for young children. In both cases, the identification between actual and implied

reader is not possible and the “reading event” (Hollindale, 1977: 28) is not successful (Oikonomidou, 2016).

Let us now put together one random story from the book, *The 88 Dolmadakia*, by making a series of choices on the way. Thus, we will be able to examine the function and the ‘qualifications’ of the implied reader of the particular story and also of the book as a whole. On the very first page of the book, the narrator, after introducing Emma-the central heroine, tells us that the phone rings and Emma picks it up. It is Athanasia, her best friend, on the phone and invites her to a Halloween party. But then Emma’s mother does not allow her go to the party, because on that same day they expect her aunt to visit. Emma gets so angry that she throws a fit. She keeps on shouting and screaming for so long that, in the end, she ruins everything around her and is left all alone.

Another random story, this time from *The 33 Pink Rubies*, will allow us to have a better view of the function of the handheld hyper-texts under examination.

The story starts when Rodolfos Ruleman, a poor and fearful knight, falls in love with a charming princess who is sitting on the top of a tower, feeding her canaries. He decides to enter the castle and ask the king for her hand in marriage. However, he soon finds out that he should compete with another seventy-two knights who have already arrived at the castle for the same reason. In order to win the competition, he draws purple pimples on his face and complains that he suffers from a contagious disease that turns the body limbs into eggplants. The other knights directly withdraw from the competition and the hero manages to meet the king. The latter consents to the knight’s request to marry his daughter, but he asks him which of his two single daughters he wants to marry. The knight is surprised by the fact that there is more than one princess. The king demands an answer right away, hence Rodolfos randomly goes for Elsinori instead of Elsvira. He soon realizes that Elsinori is actually an awful monster, but he decides to kiss her. With every kiss she receives, she looks even more horrible. Nonetheless, he keeps on kissing her. In the end, the monster turns into a beautiful princess, as a magic spell is broken, and the two of them live happily ever after, eating the most tasteful baklavas that the princess cooks.

By examining the two stories in detail, we can observe the ways in which the text itself constructs its implied reader, by setting specific pre-requisites to him or, to put it differently, by demanding specific ‘qualifications’ of him.

In general, when we seek the ‘qualifications’ of the implied reader of a text, we focus on the difficulties that it presents for its reader (Iser, 1978). In the case of the books we examine, we would argue that these difficulties are of five kinds. First of all, there is the difficulty concerning the language used, which is full of linguistic games such as puns, false etymologies or alliterations. The implied reader, then, seems to have the necessary knowledge of the language and the necessary fluency so as to be able to follow but also enjoy Trivizas’ linguistic games. A second kind of difficulty, directly related to the above mentioned, has to do with the kind of humour that permeates the books. Indeed, the texts are full of Trivizas’ situational<sup>1</sup> as well as linguistic jokes<sup>2</sup> that transfuse them with a characteristic satirical and often absurd kind of humour<sup>3</sup> which is a distinct feature of his style. The implied reader, then, is a persona who is in a position to appreciate that kind of humour and laugh with the absurd and often far-fetched jokes of Trivizas; however, on some occasions, actual young readers, unfamiliar with satire and even less sarcasm, may not be able to identify with him.

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The implied reader is, however, in a position to handle yet another kind of difficulty that these canon-breaking books present him with. We refer to the narrative but also ideological gaps, that is, to all those elements of the stories that are not mentioned in the narrative but, as self-evident, are only alluded to. In this case the implied reader is the hypothetical reader who has the necessary kinds of knowledge and the necessary reading experience so as to fill in those gaps by making all the necessary suppositions concerning what is left unsaid. It is worth adding here that many of the textual elements that the readers have to put together in order to form their stories, are imbued with intertextual allusions: many well-known fairy-tale figures, such as dragons, vampires, princesses and dwarfs stroll around in the pages of the books under consideration. We must not lose from sight, though, that such

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<sup>1</sup>Indicative example (from *The 88 Dolmadakia*): “Emma kept on crying until she was submerged in her tears. She feared that she would drown because she did not know that if one is submerged in tears they turn into fish. And that is exactly what happened: she turned into a sardine. Her mum put her in a fish bowl and fed her on crumbs of cake. When Emma grew up and was too big to live in a fish bowl, her mum took her to the beach and threw her into the sea.”

<sup>2</sup>For instance puns such as “Struttgard” instead of “Stuttgart”, “Piperu” instead of “Peru”, or made-up names such as “Patatistan” (in Greek “potato land”) or “Lihoudistan” (in Greek “greedy land”) and so on.

<sup>3</sup>Characteristic instances of absurd humour are jokes based on the effect of excess, as we will analytically show below, or jokes based on the effect of irrelevance, as is shown in the following example: “The honorary potato-frier of the palace presented Emma with a silver horn, three sugar apples, a cuckoo clock, a parrot and a flying trough to help her get back home” (p.51).



fairy tales' figures and fairy-tale conventions are systematically reversed or exaggerated by Trivizas. A

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typical example of reversal is the portrayal of the knight, the protagonist of *The 33 Pink Rubbies*: both in the text and in the illustration, his image reverses the corresponding model of the muscular and brave man of traditional fairytales: Trivizas' knight is skinny, funny and rather timid. He looks as if he needs the reader in order to get adventurous. But exaggeration, too, is one of Trivizas' favourite techniques. An example of a fairy tale convention that is intentionally exaggerated is the scene with the knight kissing the enchanted princess: he has to kiss her not once but

three times in order to break the spell. The reader is asked three times in a row whether the knight should give one more kiss to the monster or if he should run away from her. If the reader loses his courage and lets the prince run away, the story ends up with the hero being hurt or forcibly expelled from the castle and the country.

The implied reader, then, is a persona who can overcome the difficulty of the intertextual allusions and of their exaggerations and reversals, a persona who can meet the prerequisites that that specific narrative technique sets. In other words, he is a persona who has a good knowledge of fairy tales and classic works of children's literature and he can therefore fill in the intertextual gaps of the narrative, by understanding the intertextual allusions and jokes, making all the necessary connections and comparisons and drawing all the necessary conclusions.

One more aspect of *The 33 Pink Rubies*, but also of *The 88 Dolmadakia*, that presents their implied reader with a certain kind of difficulty is that in most nodal points in the two books, the reader comes across short riddles, drills or exercises that he has to do in order to proceed to the next page and continue the story in the way he has chosen. This prerequisite portrays an implied reader who has already acquired the skills to deal with them (math, grammar, etc.). For example, the reader is asked to make calculations or apply grammar rules in order to find out which is the next page that gives the story the turn he wishes.

It goes without saying that the very form of a printed hyper-text that characterizes the books we analyse presents the readers with yet another form of difficulty as it invites them to a non-canonical reading process. Thus, the implied reader of these books puts aside all the rules of reading canonical literary texts and embarks on something challenging because it is totally unknown. That is, indeed, a



'qualification' of the implied reader that many actual readers may not have. It is probable that a number of young readers, accustomed as they are to canonical books, will find reading a printed hyper-text a rather frustrating task. Because, as Yannikopoulou astutely observes, those books often inspire "a sense of wonder and insecurity in their audience. Readers often feel confused as they have to follow uncharted reading routes" (2007b, 20). Moreover, she continues, "because they confront a textual labyrinth, they often experience the frustration of an unsatisfactory reading" (Yannikopoulou, 2007b, 20).

In view of the above, we can safely argue that despite their enjoyable and playful character, the printed hyper-texts under examination present their young readers with quite a few difficulties. To put it otherwise, they 'construct' an implied reader with quite a few 'qualifications'.

To limit ourselves to the example of the above story we have created within the framework of *The 88 Dolmadakia*, let us now examine one indicative kind of difficulty that it presents to the readers, which has to do with the element of humor. When Emma, the central heroine, furious with her mother, who does not allow her to go to a party, begins to scream, we read:

all the houses collapsed, and the barber shops, and the grocery stores, and the kiosks ... The mountains blew up, the islands sank, the rivers flooded ... Everything turned into smithereens, ashes, dust. When Emma, worn out, stopped shouting, except for a telegraph post in Athens and the tower of Pisa in Italy, nothing else was left standing..." (p. 33).

The implied reader, who laughs at the joke in the above detailed description of the disproportionate disasters that take place around Emma, has the necessary sense of absurd humor so as to appreciate the excess that is the basis of that joke. In order to laugh with the above description, the actual young reader must identify with the implied one, must, in other words, have the same sense of absurd humor, which, as we mentioned above, is not always easy for young children.

But apart from the implied reader's particular 'qualification', a deeper examination of the events of the story we have composed reveals the ways in which the story itself leads him to accept specific ideologies, in other words, reveals the ideological role of the implied reader. As Stephens argues, very often the gaps of a text, which the implied reader has to fill in, are not of narrative or semantic nature but of ideological. Such gaps may refer to specific ideas, views or social practices that are not mentioned in the text because they are considered as self-evident. (Stephens, 1992:66) Thus, by inviting the reader to fill in an idea that is implied by the text, for example, that one ought to die for his homeland or that men are superior to women, the text actually pushes the reader to accept an ideology that it itself constructs and promotes (Stephens, 1992).

Now, our own composed story concerning Emma seems to follow a pattern that one can easily recognize in the everyday reality of the child-reader (control and forbiddance on the part of the adults and negative, violent reactions on the part of the child). Emma, who does not accept what her mother suggests and reacts with an angry outburst of screams, is eventually led to her self-destruction, as she is left all alone in a world that she herself has destroyed. The implied reader of the story, is led, then, to conclude, through that unfortunate ending of the heroine, that such egotistic and rebellious behavior is not simply unacceptable by the adults but is also destructive for the child itself. Uncontrolled anger, as is shown, is a feeling that breaks the healthy ties with the important 'others' for the child, such as family or friends, but also the ties with the society in general. We observe, therefore, that the reader who, through free choices, puts together the above story from the materials that Trivizas has offered him is led to accept a specific idea which is not explicitly expressed but only implied by the structure and the ending of his story. Although Trivizas avoids the overt manipulation of the reader by moral lessons, the endings of his pre-fabricated stories ask the reader to become aware of the 'self-evident' points that the story itself projects (Oikonomidou, 2016). Needless to say, though, that the ideas that are inscribed in any composed story, and which the implied reader is theoretically capable of decoding, are not self-explanatory for any actual reader. Some actual readers may not be in a position to grasp them (Oikonomidou, 2016).

## 5. Conclusions

In view of what we have shown above, we must stress once more the pivotal role that the two printed hyper-texts examined assign to their implied reader. Resembling the role of the user of an electronic hyper-text, it is a role clearly much more energetic and dynamic than that of the reader of a conventional book. We need to pay attention, however, to the fact that the implied reader of such neoteric books is a reader that responds adequately to a non-familiar textual structure (Rau, 2000) and accepts the fact that he is swaying in the middle of an unformed textual material to which he is the one to give form. If for the implied reader that role is self-evident, for the actual reader of such books it can be a challenge that may not always be pleasant. That challenge, however, we want to conclude, is in fact the 'breaking of the canon' of the Greek children's literature. For, in their overwhelming majority, contemporary Greek books for children insist on a linear narrative, and on a conclusive and indisputable ending, thus assigning to their readers the role of the passive recipient of the story.

One more conclusion that can be drawn from the analysis of our sample is that the implied reader of printed hyper-texts like the ones examined benefits from that playful reading process in more than one way. In the first place, he realizes that the evolution of the plot of a story does not have to be linear; for, by composing the pre-fabricated materials that Trivizas provides him with into syntheses of

his own, he finds himself creating exciting stories with abrupt ‘throws’ in their plot, backslides or reversals. Secondly, through his participation in the construction of the stories, he benefits by realizing that he, as a reader, is one of the dominant factors of the reading act, and that a literary work is not the realization of the writer's divine inspiration, but a construction with rules and commitments without which it cannot be written or read (Oikonomidou, 2011).

Such benefits as the above are in effect the benefits of metafiction. Indeed, if we observe the above-

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shown difficulties that printed hyper-texts present their implied reader with and also the active role that the latter is asked to play in the reading act, we realize the fundamentally metafictional nature of such books. For, to quote Patricia Waugh, “[metafictional books] with self-consciousness and systematically draw the reader's attention to the conventions governing their organization and operation, to the very fact that they are nothing but constructions” (Waugh, 1984 in Oikonomidou, 2011, 79).

In that way, hyper-texts like the ones we have examined fulfill “the central role of metafiction, which is to raise questions about the relationship between fiction and reality” (Waugh, 1984 in Oikonomidou, 2011, 79).

Recapitulating, if we take into account all the above mentioned hyper-text characteristics of the books examined and especially their metafictional character; if we also take into account the linear form of the majority of contemporary conventional Greek books for children, we can safely argue that such books like the ones by Trivizas are non-canonical. For, they construct an implied reader who, not deterred by their neoteric form, accepts the initiative that they offer him and participates in a reading process which resembles a game and which offers them a most creative role as readers.

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