Introduction

The transference of classic characters across the multilingual literary universe is a widespread phenomenon in international children’s literature. Characters from classic works transgress national and cultural boundaries, currying with them their national identities or forming new identities, adjusting to their new surroundings. As they engage in fresh metafictional adventures, their intertextual journeys (as described by Umberto Eco), and their multiple transformations, often serve national ideologies within the cultures that receive them; authors tend to invest national and cultural capital on these characters’ classic status.

Italo Calvino has claimed that the classics bring “in their wake the traces they themselves have left on the culture or cultures they have passed through” (128). The reverse also holds true; host cultures often leave their traces on classics, especially in the case of children’s literature. Emer O’Sullivan argues that the subjects and characters of classic books for children encourage liberal treatment, since they are both unique and universal. The present chapter investigates the adventures of Pinocchio and Alice in contemporary Greek literature for children, focusing on the manner in which these national, and international, personas interact with the Greek national culture into which they are transferred.

Structuring the discussion around two central texts, we first analyze Christos Boulotis’ O Pinokio stin Athina [Pinocchio in Athens] (2001), in which Pinocchio travels on a flying fish from Italy to Greece, looking for a magic cyclamen which has the potency to cure Gepetto from seeing only black-and-white dreams. During his
quest, the Italian “national hero” (Richter; O’ Sullivan) visits Acropolis and the ancient market and has conversations with statues of Greek national poets.

We then move on to Alki Zei’s *I Aliki sti Chora ton Marmaron* [Alice in Marble-land] (1997), which was concurrently published in Greek and English. In this book, elements from Carroll’s classic are reworked into a story about the Elgin Marbles; which according to an enraged Greek-speaking Alice “are not called Elgin Marbles […] but Parthenon Marbles” (n.p.). Ironically, a characteristically British story is turned into a cry of protest against the British Museum’s refusal to return the marbles to their country of origin.

Several theorists have argued that national or communal identity is always constructed in relation to “other,” “different” identities. Michael Ignatief, for instance, argues that nationalism is essentially a “language game” that plays with the “facts of difference,” turning them into nationalizing narratives (96). In the two stories discussed in this chapter, Greek national identity is communicated to the child-reader through a comparison and interaction with other national identities. This is attainable because both Pinocchio and Alice, in spite of their internationalization (O’Sullivan), have retained recognizable features of the national culture they originated from.

*O Pinokio stin Athina* [Pinocchio in Athens]

Christos Boulotis, an archaeologist by profession, has taught in several Universities and conducted excavations in Crete, Santorini, ancient Elis, and Lemnos. He has authored more than thirty children’s books. His first book won Padova University’s European Children’s Literature Award in 1989, and his 26th book, *To Agalma pou Krione* [The Statue who felt Cold] (2000), won three awards in 2001; the State Prize for Children's Literature, an award from the Greek magazine *Diavazo* [I Read] and the Greek IBBY award. His personal collection of old toys and children’s books has provided the initial exhibits for the newly founded *Museum of Children’s Toys and Books* in Lemnos.

Journalist Olga Sella begins her article about Boulotis as follows:
Archeologist, author or toy collector? Which of these three does Christos Boulotis prefer to be? In the apartment in Exarchia [Athens] in which he lives, old toys are scattered among the books on archaeology. Paper figures have been placed next to paintings by well-known artists and children's story books. Despite all this, it cannot, however, be said that the place is a mess. It looks as though the tenant has put all the things that matter to him in a pile, to which he turns every now and then, thus creating a palimpsest.

The above description also holds true for Boulotis’ *O Pinokio stin Athina* [Pinocchio in Athens] (2001), where all of the elements mentioned above are blended together into a children’s story. Pinocchio—described in the book as a toy that came alive—travels from Italy to Athens on a flying fish, in a quest for a magic cyclamen that only grows in Athens and has the potency to cure Gepetto from seeing only black-and-white dreams. The flying fish lands Pinocchio on Acropolis, and his quest takes him on a grand tour around most of the archaeological and other landmarks of Athens, engaging him in a process of learning about and appreciating Greek culture.

This is not the first time Pinocchio enters the world of Greek children’s literature. In her book, *To Diskolo Epagelma tou Klasikou Iroa* [The Tough Profession of being a Classic Hero], Sofia Gavrielidou observes that Tasoula Tsilimeni was the first to “bring Pinocchio to Greece.” In *Mpirlimpim o Kalikantzaro* [Mpirlimpim the Goblin] (2003) and in *I Exafanisi tou Mpirlimpim* [Mpirlimpim is Missing] (2006), Pinocchio meets “kalikantzarous,” goblins from the Greek popular tradition.

Interestingly enough, Carlo Collodi, the author of *Pinocchio* (1883), seems to have had good knowledge of ancient Greek culture. Alexandra Zervou explains:

Researchers are aware of the fact that ancient Greek myths, in their different variations, are transformed and transported into more recent texts. The most distinct example is *Pinocchio*, in which its author and intellectual, Carlo Collodi, creatively assimilates the broader Greco-Roman literary tradition, along with the Italian and French traditions. The myth of the statue that comes to life, parody as a genre from late antiquity, the Aesop-like presence of animals, and even comic inventions from Aristophanes, are some of the recognizable elements in the renowned Italian classic text for children. (10)
From this point of view, Pinocchio is an old friend of Greek culture and his arrival in Athens seems only natural. What’s more, Boulotis brings the intertextual connections to a full circle, as inspiration from Collodi’s *Pinocchio* brings to Boulotis’ work similar literary devices, such as the coming-to-life of statues (the statue of Nobelist poet Elitis and that of the Discus Thrower).

O’Sullivan observes that “Classics of children’s literature have produced subjects and characters that, like those of the old myths and fairy tales, encourage liberal treatment” (133). She asserts that they are “both unique and universal,” since they can be culturally and historically transmuted and transplanted to other languages, times, and media, with the appropriate alterations, without losing their identifiably (O’Sullivan 133). Boulotis is fully aware of this functionality of classic characters, since he calls them “persons that signify,” “have a wide appeal,” and “function as international codes of communication and identity” (“Kathimerini” n.p.).

However, as much as he may like the intertextual and metafictive games classic characters afford, at the same instance he also views the process of adaptation as an act of “forgery,” and a challenging “acrobatic fit” with no guaranteed results; thus, he is quite reluctant to alter in any way the central qualities of Collodi’s hero. As he explains, while writing *Pinocchio in Athens*, his foremost concern was “not to betray Collodi, in other words not to alter in any degree those characteristics that compose the uniquely special Pinocchio, and institute him one of the best characters in literature for children, and adults” (“Kathimerini” n.p.).

Indeed, Boulotis’ Pinocchio retains most of the central attributes of Colloti’s “borattino.” At the beginning of the second chapter, the narrator of the Greek story foregrounds the classic character’s personality:

Although finding [the cyclamen] in a foreign city, as big and as complicated as Athens was not at all easy, [Pinocchio] never lost his optimism. Because—how could it be different?—this is how the author wanted him to be, the Italian Mr. Collodi, who had written the book of his adventures more than one hundred years ago. He wanted him to be optimistic and somewhat frivolous, and gullible and, of course, kind-hearted. As for his lies, which made his nose grow every time he said them, oh, he would say none of them during this adventure of his in Athens. (18)
Pinocchio remains optimistic in most parts of the story, even though at some points he does lose hope; but then, this is a motif found in Collodi’s classic as well. He is also frivolous, since he often forgets his quest and follows the characters he meets in new and joyous games and adventures. And he certainly is kind-hearted; the wooden boy helps everyone who is in need of help, to the extent that he even sacrifices a wooden peg from his knee to help the little star he meets. Moreover, Boulotis chooses to ignore the didactic conclusion of the original story where Pinocchio matures and becomes a real boy, and instead keeps the immature, irresponsible and adventurous puppet-Pinocchio; evidently, the mature, real-boy Pinocchio would not be as fun to read about. However, one cannot claim that this Pinocchio is gullible; besides, no-one in Athens tries to trick him. What is more, the most important difference between this Pinocchio and the classic character is the fact that Boulotis’ character does not lie. The narrator’s comment about the absence of lies from this story reveals the author’s conscious choice regarding the issue. One has to wonder: If the Greek author is so keen on keeping Pinocchio “in character,” why does he choose to suppress such central personality attributes such as his tendency to tell lies or being gullible?

To answer this question, we first need to ask a more general one: If Boulotis considers the intertextual play with classic characters a challenging “acrobatic fit” with no guaranteed results, then why does he choose to play it in the first place? The acclaimed author explains that even though classic characters are usually imaginary people, the most successful between them become real persons, “almost historical individuals or rather individuals who erase the borders between the real and the imaginary, moving at ease between the two zones depending on the reader’s sensitivity and resistance” (“Kathimerini” n.p.). Boulotis believes that this holds true especially for the classic characters of children’s literature, since for children the fantastic and the real function complementarily.

It is this fusion of the imaginary and the real--the real being both modern and historical Greece--that he strives to achieve through the situating of Pinocchio in contemporary Athens. By placing the classic character in a real setting and a specific
time period, with identifiable landscapes, monuments, and people, Boulotis infuses the real with the magic charm of storytelling:

Besides, it is this infusion of the real with the imaginary and the fictional that absolutely fascinates children, as it renders the fairytale a lived experience, a breathing part of reality, at the same instance allocating concrete and everyday reality with access to the sunny world of fairytales, of fairytale thinking and acting. (“Kathimerini” n.p.)

But which reality does the author want to illuminate with the light of fairytales? Boulotis acknowledges the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens as the inspiration for his Pinocchio stories. *Pinocchio in Athens* (2001) was quite successful, since it captured the enthusiasm and national pride of Athenians prior to the Games. In fact, the book was so successful that two more followed: *O Pinokio ke to Agalma tou Diskovolou* [Pinocchio and the Statue of the Discus Thrower] (2002) and *O Pinokio Lambadidromos* [Pinocchio Carries the Olympic Flame] (2003). In the article quoted above, Boulotis makes specific references to the fictional participation of other imaginary characters in the Olympic Games: In one issue of *Asterix*, the Galois participate in the Olympics, while a character of the Greek traditional shadow theatre (Karagiozis) also participates in the Games and wins. Why not Pinocchio then? The excitement that spread throughout Greece during the period which preceded the return of the Games to the land of their origin, moved the author/archaeologist Boulotis to follow a similar motif in his Pinocchio stories.

One hundred and eighteen years after his birth, Pinocchio visits Athens to discover the beauty of its culture and its ancient monuments, mimicking the millions of visitors that would come to Greece for the Olympics. He then comes to Athens for a second time, to carry the flame and participate in the Olympic Games. All this, at a time when the Olympics were about to return to Athens--one hundred and eight years after the first modern Olympic Games were organized in the same place--when national and international media were starting to highlight Athens and its preparations for the Games, and when Greek national pride was at its peek. Pinocchio discovers the splendor of Athens at the same time when modern Greeks, along with millions of
visitors and TV-viewers from around the world were also re-discovering it. Through Pinocchio’s eyes, and with a touch of fairytale magic, the young Greek-speaking reader is also expected to discover the ancient and contemporary beauty of her/his motherland.

Pinocchio is the “eye-witness” who testifies to the magnificence of Athenian beauty. This function of his explains the author’s choice to keep most of the central characteristics of Collodi’s Pinocchio, but discard of the wooden boy’s habit to tell lies. Pinocchio needs to be a credible witness of Athen’s ancient and modern beauty. And since credible witnesses do not lie, nor are they gullible, there is no room for lying or deceiving in this story. The real and the imaginary are combined to tell the Truth; or, at least, the author’s truth. The story’s ending reveals its author’s intentions: “Truth is revealed only through fairytales!” (68).

Boulotis’ Pinocchio is a good eye-witness for another important reason: as a “foreigner” he looks at Athens with a fresh and unbiased eye. As he sees the Parthenon for the first time, he cannot but notice its magnificence and marvel at its splendor. It would look unnatural for a Greek character, like Karagiozis for example, to suddenly “discover” the splendor of the Parthenon, a monument that has been there, in front of him, for the whole of his life. Furthermore, if a native Greek were to praise the beauty of her/his own homeland, the effect would not be as convincing, as this could be considered “subjective” or “self-praising.”

This explains why Pinocchio’s “Italianness” is constantly foregrounded. O’Sullivan observes that, from an international perspective, Pinocchio has been thoroughly integrated into the globalized mass-culture system, featuring in picture books, pop-up books, comic strip versions, animated films, TV series, Nintendo games, toys, bed linen, wallpaper motifs, or advertisements (138). In spite of the view of Pinocchio as “a hero of national identity” in Italy (Richter 146), young and old mass-culture consumers outside Italy are likely to pay little attention to the character’s national origins. Nevertheless, the reader of Pinocchio in Athens, and of the other Pinocchio stories by Boulotis, is constantly reminded of the borattino’s Italian nationality.
The King of Snails who welcomes Pinocchio when he arrives at Acropolis, greets him as follows: “I salute you, Pinocchio! I salute you, famous youth from our neighboring Italy! I would like an autograph, oh yes! Never mind that I am a King” (14). Through this greeting, Pinocchio is instantly recognized both as an important figure and as a foreign visitor; but he is not too foreign, he is not an “alien” as he comes from “our neighboring” Italy. The use of first person plural (“our”) signifies the national identity of everyone else besides Pinocchio. All other persons, inside and outside the story, are united under a common national identity, they are Greeks. Benedict Anderson has demonstrated that the nation is always conceived as a community, a deep, horizontal comradeship, regardless of the inequality that actually exists among its members. The fact that everyone else in this story--from snail, to street-sweeper, to children, to mayor--is Greek contributes to the formation of this “imagined national community” within the framework of fictional Athens.

A second phrase, uttered by the snail on the next page, portrays Pinocchio as a delegate of the entire Italian nation. This time the second person plural is used: “You do have splendid monuments in Italy as well, oh yes! I cannot deny it, oh yes! But there is nothing like Acropolis anywhere in the world” (15). The privileging of Greek monuments compared to the ones in Italy is, of course, also evident. In spite of the fact that Pinocchio turns down the snail’s offer for a guided tour through the “world renowned” monuments of Athens, his quest takes him to most of the Athenian monuments and landmarks. Some of them are Acropolis, the Benaki Museum, the Greek Parliament and the Monument for the Unknown Soldier, Plaka, the columns of the Temple of Olympian Zeus, the statue of Elitis, the National Park, the Ancient Market, etc. In most cases, the narrator functions as the guide, explaining the history and providing some details to the reader about the landmarks visited by Pinocchio. Boulotis states in his article that throughout the story, he tries to keep a balance between “sensitivity, unrushed presentation of knowledge, and humor” (“Kathimerini”); one could claim, however, that in some instances the archaeologist overshadows the children’s author, since the archaeological or cultural information hinders the pace of the story.
Pinocchio’s “Italianness” is also emphasized through his use of Italian phrases, usually in scenes where he experiences intense emotions. Some of the phrases, which are printed in Greek characters and are always subsequently translated into Greek by the narrator, are the following:

‘Bongiorno!’ he shouted in a sweet tone of voice to a street cleaner. ‘Bongiorno’ in Italian means ‘good morning.’ (18)

‘Congratulazioni!’ whispered Pinocchio to the guard who seemed most genial, ‘congratulazioni’ in Italian means ‘congratulations.’ (36)

Some other Italian expressions used by Pinocchio are ‘Viva la vita,’ ‘Dio mio,’ ‘A casa tua?’ etc. It should be noted that he recognizes Athens as “a marvellous city” in Italian: “una cita meravigliosa!” (44). As explained earlier, this statement bares special weight, exactly because it is spoken by an unbiased visitor, in a language other than Greek.

This unbiased visitor views everyone he meets in Athens as part of a uniform Greek national community. The children he meets, for instance, have no names; they are all called “Ellinakia” [little Greeks or Greek children]: “Pinocchio was seeing Ellinakia for the first time. Although they were loud, he thought they were quite nice” (30). With the exception of some irritating adults, who view Pinocchio as a toy they should own, most Greeks are uniformly presented as hospitable and genial. Greek newspapers and radio stations also seem to represent a uniform Greek public opinion.

In the last scene, where Pinocchio departs from Acropolis, having found the magic cyclamen “that only grows in Athens,” all the characters he has met, along with all other inhabitants of Athens, are gathered to bid him farewell. The Mayor and the entire City Council of Athens bestow the City’s Golden Key on him, and he is named honorary citizen of Athens. The snail tells him “I say, Athenians love and honor you, dear Pinocchio, oh yes!” (65). Through their common love and hospitality towards Pinocchio, Athenians express their shared communal identity.

Writing about the historical contribution of literature to the construction/imagining of modern nations, Anderson argues quite convincingly that literature--
namely, the invention of the novel--along with the newspaper “provided the technical means for ‘re-presenting’ the kind of imagined community that is the nation” (25). A novel creates an entire sociological organism in the omniscient reader’s mind, where the various characters live and act simultaneously. By presenting its readers with a group of characters who inhabit the same space and time that the readers inhabit, belong to the same community, are influenced by the same everyday or historical events, and share the same habits, traditions, and ideas, the novel contributed to the construct of the imagined community conventionally referred to as the nation. Boulotis’ book reinforces the reader’s sense of nation-ness in a similar fashion, since not only is it representing Athens and Athenians as a unified sociological organism, but it also provides an affirmative, positive view of this organism through the eyes of an outsider, Pinocchio.

**I Aliki sti Chora ton Marmaron [Alice in Marble-Land]**

The second book we would like to discuss “is infused with Alice’s love towards the emblem of Greek national identity; the Parthenon Marbles” (Kanatsouli 83). To this effect, Alki Zei’s book *I Aliki sti Chora ton Marmaron* [Alice in Marble-Land] (1997) appropriates and adopts elements from yet another international classic, Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865). The story’s central theme is a call for the return of the Parthenon Marbles to Greece by the British Museum. During the past few decades, this has been an important national cause for Greece, while the issue has also attracted international attention.

As Meni Kanatsouli observes, Zei’s decision to choose “a book that is so popular in Britain, and that is in a sense the trademark of British children’s literature, in order to utilize its heroine and bring forward an issue that is of interest to both the UK and, mainly, to Greece constitutes an excellent invention” (84). Moreover, as an international classic, *Alice in Wonderland* is popular to audiences around the world, and not only in Britain. As *Alice in Marble-Land* was concurrently published in Greek and English, it aspired to reach both Greek and English speaking readers, casting a
wider net and promoting the cause of the marbles’ return both at national and international levels.

The Parthenon Marbles are Alice’s co-protagonist in the story, as the illustrator achieves to place them and their splendor at the centre of visual attention. The Greek title transforms “Wonderland” into “Marble-Land.” The title’s structure, *Alice in Marble-Land*, is similar to that of the book discussed earlier in this chapter, *Pinocchio in Athens*; however, the meaning of the title is far more complicated in this case. One could claim that the reader of Zei’s text is initially miss-guided by the title, since the main character is not Carroll’s Alice. Unlike Boulotis’ Pinocchio, this is not a story in which a classic character is transported to a different setting. This is not a story in which 19th century Alice leaves the British countryside and travels to a different land, transgressing in this manner linguistic, spatial, and epochal boundaries. It is rather a story about a modern, Greek girl, named Alice, who leaves in Athens but travels to London with her archaeologist uncle, to see the Parthenon Marbles at the British Museum.

Is the British Museum the “Marble-land” in the title, then? Since the entire story is a call for the return of the marbles to Greece, the land that created them, one would hardly agree with such an interpretation. “Marble-land” in the title could be more convincingly interpreted as an insinuation that Greece is the “Marble-land” proper, as opposed to Carroll’s British Wonderland. Another convincing interpretation would be one that views “Marble-land” not as an actual place, but rather as a metaphor about Alice’s, and the reader’s, educational journey through “the world of the Parthenon Marbles”; even though the call for the marbles’ return to Greece is the main theme of the book, another central concern of the story is to educate Alice and the young reader about the history and the art of the marbles. Three contributors are listed in the title page: Alki Zei (author), Sophia Zarabouka (illustrator), and Ioanna Foka (archaeologist) foregrounding the attention paid to scientific facts, as part of the educational aspect of the book. A second archaeologist is acknowledged in the last page of the book: Eleni Korka, Secretary of the Greek Committee for the Return of the Parthenon Marbles.
Alki Zei is an acclaimed Greek author whose books have been translated into many languages. Her novel *I Konstantina ke i Arachnes tis* [Constantina and her Spiders] won the Greek IBBY prize for the best book for older children. She has been nominated as a candidate for the Hans Christian Andersen Award for Writing and the Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award for Literature. Three of her books have been awarded the Mildred Batchelder Prize, which is awarded in the U.S. by the Association for Library Service to Children to the best foreign book in English translation. Sophia Zarabouka is also well known and widely respected. Both author and illustrator have dealt, each in her own style, with Greek culture and history in several works of theirs. At the same instance, they both have deep knowledge of the international literary tradition, in which they participate, broadening it with the creation of a new text. Zei’s knowledge of international children’s literature may also stem from the fact that she has lived abroad for long periods, namely in Russia and France. Through direct allusions to Carroll’s Alice, Zei and Zarabouka initiate a dialogue between the two texts (the classic and the new story) about an issue that pertains to both the “source culture” (British) and the “target culture” (Greek).

The protagonist of *Alice in Marble-land* is well aware of the classic story; she carries Carroll’s book with her and reads it during her trip to London. When she meets a vanishing cat at the British Museum, she remembers how the classic Alice responded to a similar situation and imitates her. While the Greek Alice is obviously proud of her national identity—as demonstrated by her discussion with the cat, which we later analyze—she is quite at ease with other national or international cultures. Her reading of Carroll’s translated book, as well as her admiration for a girl with a red Pocahontas coat at the museum, reveal this. Her more progressive stand is foregrounded when compared to her uncle’s worldview:

Oh, if only they would go to the stores, thought Alice who couldn’t get the red coat out of her mind. Her grandma had given her money for shopping. But she was sure her uncle would only buy clothes for her if they had a Centaur or a Caryatid embroidered on them. (Zei n.p.)
Throughout the story, both text and image play with the colors usually associated with Greece (blue) and the UK (red). Here, Alice wears a blue dress and red socks, while dreaming to buy a “rose-red” coat. Also, the first double-spread in the book presents an idyllic Acropolis under blue skies, while a later image depicts the British Museum in London, with white and red walls, under a red sky. In these two images, the color binary is extended to other dimensions as well; the open-air feeling communicated by the Acropolis double-spread, for instance, is the exact opposite of the sense of enclosure communicated by the crowded single-page that depicts the British Museum. The message is clear: Acropolis is the natural home of the marbles; the British Museum is like a prison to them.

When Alice gets tired of reading Carroll’s classic--she is bored just like her classic counterpart is before her adventures begin--she spots a girl with a red Pocahontas coat from her hotel window and decides to follow her, in order to ask her where she bought it from. In the process, she gets lost; the girl in the red coat is her white rabbit. Zei’s Alice has several common characteristics with Carroll’s Alice: Both girls have the same age and resemble each other in the illustrations; both girls embark on trips with surprising results, since they get lost into unknown worlds; both find themselves alone in difficult situations, and face curious circumstances; finally, both Alices take similar decisions (like drinking from the “Drink Me” bottle), and share similar experiences (like “shrinking” or talking to a disappearing cat).

But one of the most important common characteristics is their curiosity; after all, this attribute of theirs is what initiates their adventures. The child-reader of Zei’s story is expected to share Alice’s curiosity--a “classic” attribute of all children--in order to be educated about the marbles and sensitized regarding their return to Greece. The Greek Alice’s curiosity is mostly directed towards the central theme of the story; first by wanting to learn everything about the Parthenon Marbles from her uncle, and later by following the disappearing cat, and discovering a magic trick that might potentially return the marbles to Greece. Even her curiosity about the coat that prompts her to follow the girl, eventually takes her back to the marbles in the museum.
She gets lost, arrives at the British Museum by mistake, and gets in to ask for directions back to her hotel. When she enters, however, she postpones asking for directions and heads towards the rooms where the marbles are on display: “Alice headed straight for the rooms with the Parthenon Marbles. She felt less frightened there... it was as if the marbles knew her” (n.p.); national/ “home” culture is associated with familiarity and security in this scene (Hage 40). In Home Words, Mavis Reimer and her colleagues identify and analyze exhaustively “the common usage in which ‘home’ is understood as the nation” in Canadian children’s literature (xv). A similar tendency may also be found in several Greek books for children. In this specific book, a small pocket of national culture is enough to evoke the idea of a safe and familiar nation/home.

The Greek Alice is, also like her classic counterpart, defiant; but only selectively. Her defiance is solely directed towards the cat, since their verbal conflict is the ideological centre of the story. The cat first appears in the scene where Alice gets lost and finds refuge in the Parthenon Marbles display rooms. The cat, who brandishes a red fur according to both text and illustration, is a descendant of the Cheshire cat. What’s more, according to Zei, his great-great-great-great-grandfather was Lord Elgin’s cat. When the cat narrates the story of one noble Lord Elgin, a great man who risked his own life to save the Parthenon Marbles by taking them to Britain, the conflict of national narratives is inevitable.

Alice asks the cat about his source of the story, and when he tells her that this information came to him from his ancestors, by word of mouth, as each generation told it to the next, she insolently proclaims: “So, all of your grandfathers were chief liars” (n.p.). The girl then proceeds to narrate the Greek version of the story, explaining that Lord Elgin wanted the Parthenon Marbles to decorate his own mansion that was being built at the time in Scotland, that he wouldn’t pay for the special saws that should have been used to remove the marbles from the Parthenon, and that when the ship carrying the marbles to Britain sunk, the marbles would have been lost for ever had they not been collected by Greek fishermen. Furthermore, Alice continues,
when the marbles finally did arrive to Britain, Lord Elgin had them improperly stored in a damp coal warehouse, only to sell them later on to the British government.

In this confrontation of “historic truths,” text and images clearly side with the Greek truth. To begin with, no-one asks Alice where she got her information from—although one suspects that her source is her “Parthenon Marbles enthusiast” uncle. Secondly, when Alice starts telling the Greek side of the story, the text is no longer presented in a dialogue format; Alice’s words are rather incorporated in the body of the narration, thus acquiring a sense of objectivity. Thirdly, far more details are mentioned in the Greek version of the marbles’ recent history, implying that Alice is much better informed than the cat is. Furthermore, Alice’s irritated and ironic tone of voice affects the reader emotionally, prompting her/ him to empathize with her:

They are not called Elgin Marbles, shouts Alice furiously, they are called Parthenon Marbles.
And as for the fact that everyone in the world has the chance to admire them, they could still admire them where they were to begin with. Not butchered; the body here and the head there. (Zei n.p.)

Her sentimentalized description of the maiming of the marbles functions in the same manner:

The saws would not arrive, because, it is said, the lord was stingy as well. So Lousiere found a dreadful saw and, chop-chop, he started sawing. He tore heads from bodies, hands and legs from torsos, and when he had had enough butchering, he sent the message to the lord: ’I am ready.’ (Zei n.p.)

The emotionally charged narration is supported by illustrations that depict this act of mutilation, as well as the maimed statues themselves. Other parts of the story—like the one about the sad Caryatid in the museum, who misses her sisters in Greece, or Lapithes’ decapitated body, whose head is in Athens—also add to the emotional effect.

The cat is finally convinced about the truth in Alice’s story; after all, Grecian blood is running in his veins; his great-great-great-great grandfather, Lord Elgin’s cat, was married to a Greek cat from Acropolis, who was sent to Britain along with the
marbles. This also explains the cat’s ability to speak Greek. The implication being, of course, that modern Western culture, including British culture, has its roots in Ancient Greece. Zei’s invention is ingenious in the sense that she reworks a classic international/British story to make a point against colonial and post-colonial Britain and its politics: A Greek Alice, an alter ego of Carroll’s British Alice, critiques modern Britain and articulates the Greek position regarding the issue of the marbles, managing to make the cat, a descendant of the Cheshire cat, doubt the “British truth” he has received from his ancestors.

Towards the end of the story, a symbolic reconciliation between Greece and Britain is attempted. The cat shows Alice the way out of the closed museum. An illustration of the cat and Alice embracing each other combines harmoniously the blue of her dress with the red of his fur. The cat adopts the Greek terminology, referring to the marbles as “the Parthenon Marbles,” and promises to provide Alice with a magic liquid that will help her regain them and return them to Greece. Finding this promise quite satisfying, she stresses his double national identity, telling him that both his countries, Britain and Greece, will be proud of him. Alice then returns to her hotel and dreams of the red cat sitting on her bed, next to her neighbour’s blue cat; she also dreams of the White Rabbit sitting next to the statue of Lapithes, who now has his head on his shoulders. Finally, in her dream, she, the Greek Alice, is joined by the British Alice from Alice in Wonderland.

Dreams are a place beyond nations and countries, a place where all binaries are reconciled and blended into one. In reality, as in most of the story, the binaries hold their place and the issue of the Parthenon/Elgin Marbles remains unresolved. After the opening of the new Acropolis Museum in 2009, the British Museum issued an announcement, stating that they would be willing to lend the marbles to the new museum in Athens, provided that the Greek government recognized the British Museum as the owner of the marbles. Greek government rejected this proposal.

Zei and Zarabouka, do not resolve the issue in the story either. They provide the reader with a sense of hope for the future, but they also communicate a sense of bitterness and unfulfilled national aspirations. The imagined child-reader is expected
to remember that Greeks are still fighting for this just cause. Greek children, like the Greek Alice, are expected to keep fighting, until one day their national heritage is returned where it belongs. It is noteworthy that the book is dedicated to the late Melina Mercouri, famous actress-singer and former Greek Minister of Culture, who fought passionately for the return of the Parthenon Marbles to Greece. Finally, a last double-spread presents diagrams of the Parthenon and its marbles. Blue, capital letters explain that all the images in red are the marbles that are currently held at the British Museum, and that the diagrams demonstrate where they will be placed at, when Alice finally achieves their return. As demonstrated throughout the discussion of *Alice in Marble-land*, Zei adapts numerous elements from Carroll’s classic story, appropriating them and channeling them towards the ideological heart of the story, the call for the return of the Parthenon Marbles to the people of Greece, their rightful owner. By alluding to Carroll’s classic, Zei elevates the status of her story, seeks the child-reader’s identification with the “classic” childhood trades of Alice, and re-channels the original Alice’s criticism of Victorian Britain towards a critique of the modern off-springs of that society, who refuse to return the Parthenon Marbles to Greece. The child--both Alice and the young readers--is expected to act as a savior of the nation, who will restore national pride and preserve national heritage.

Both books discussed in this chapter, utilize international classic stories to support explicitly national ideologies. While Boulotis presents classic Pinocchio as the foreigner who testifies to the magnificence of Greek culture, Zei provides a modern Greek Alice who fights for the cultural and historical heritage of Greece.

**Works Cited**

**Primary Sources**


**Secondary Sources**


