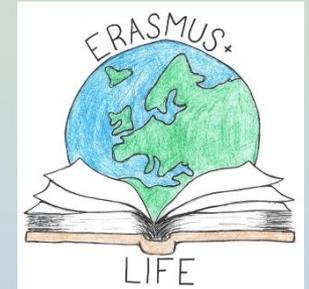


# Literature for Everyone LIFE

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# Alki Zei





- ❖ Alki Zei is a Greek writer.
- ❖ Born in Athens in 1925 she spent her first childhood in Samos, where her mother came from. When she started her school, her family settled first in Maroussi and then in the centre of Athens.
- ❖ She studied at the School of Philosophy of the University of Athens, at the Drama School of the Athens Conservatory and at the Film Institute of Moscow.
- ❖ She started writing in her high school years.

A main feature of her stories is the projection of her own life experiences on her heroes' lives achieving to present to the younger generations events of the troublesome recent Greek history in a collected but sharp way. Her work is characterized by realism, social concern for contemporary problems of urban society and respect for historical truth.

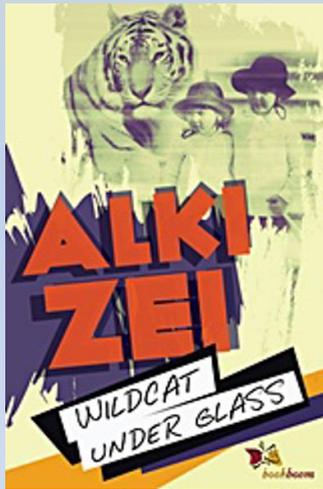


Despite the realism and seriousness of their subject matter, her books stand out for their optimistic view on life and their delicate humour, without lacking either the gift of fiction, therefore constituting admirable literary works. Her books have been translated into 20 languages.

**Wildcat**

**Under**

**Glass**

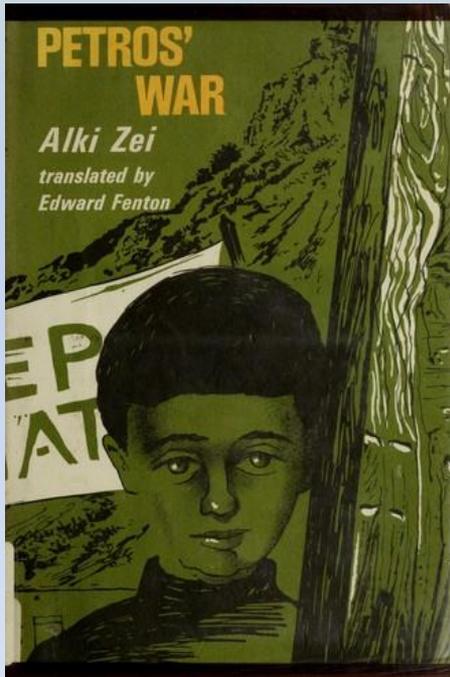


Set in 1936, the story centres on a family living on a Greek Island whose members react in different ways to the changing political climate after a Fascist dictatorship is installed. Nine-year-old Melia, the narrator, fears for her beloved cousin Niko who is in the resistance movement and has had to go into hiding, Grandfather, Mama and Stamatina hate what is happening, so too does their father, but he is concerned he will lose his job at the bank if he is not seen to outwardly comply with the new rules and regulations. Great-aunt Despina doesn't see what all the fuss is about and Melia's older sister, Myrto proudly joins the Fascist Youth organisation at school unaware of the sinister undertones of the fascist doctrine.

Combined with changing life on the Greek island due to the war, is the portrayal of the idyllic summer holidays Melia spends in Lamagari with her friends Artemis, Manoli, Odysseus and little Aurora. The stuffed Wildcat in a glass cabinet holds a place of honour in the family home and comes to symbolize the spirit of freedom that was kept alive in Greece after the Fascist dictatorship came to power.

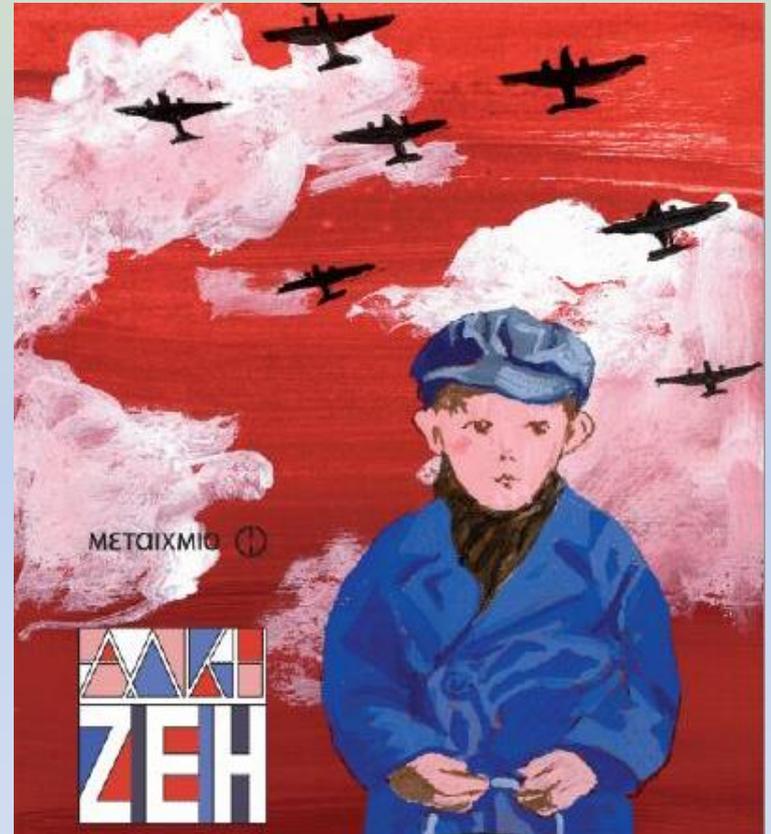


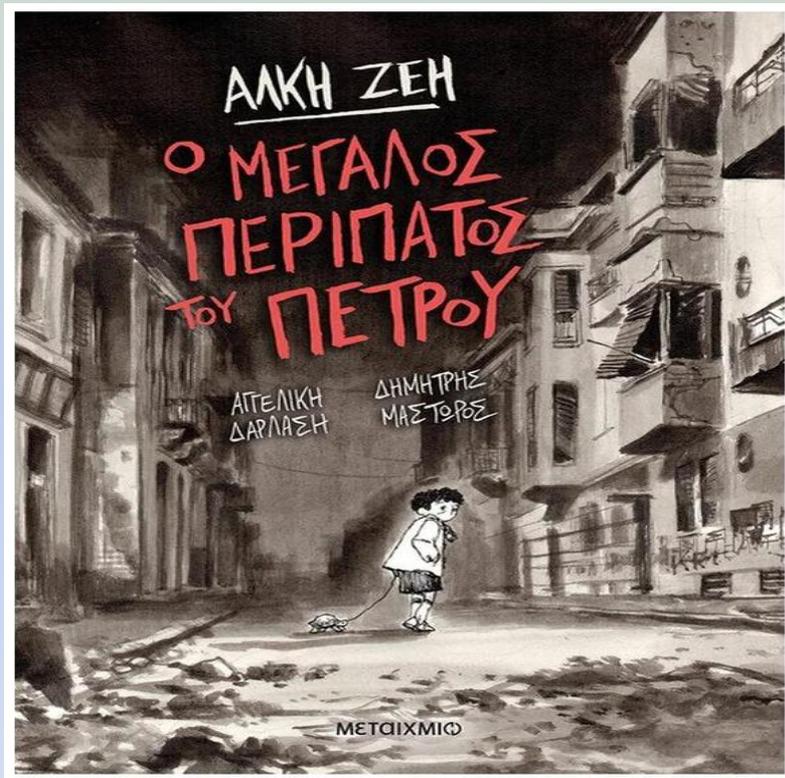
# Petros' War



As Athens is occupied by Italian and German troops in 1941, ten-year-old Petros decides it will be his heroic war filled with deeds of valour just like those of his heroes in his many books. However, liberating a dog from a German soldier and painting slogans on walls after dark for the Resistance do not require the heroism he had imagined. As the book gathers momentum, the reality of war and its hardships begin to take their toll on the population. Petros witnesses the terrible famine that envelopes Athens, people dying of hunger, with even his own grandfather going out begging for food.

Dead bodies begin to be left outside the cemetery walls as people are unable to bury their dead. Most Greeks are united in their opposition to the invaders but there are still those who are prepared to collaborate such as the local Baker with his three daughters, nicknamed 'The Little Czarinas' and Petros' neighbor who takes up with a German soldier. The mood changes significantly and the situation becomes much more serious when the Nazis take full control of Athens from the Italians after Italy joins the allies.

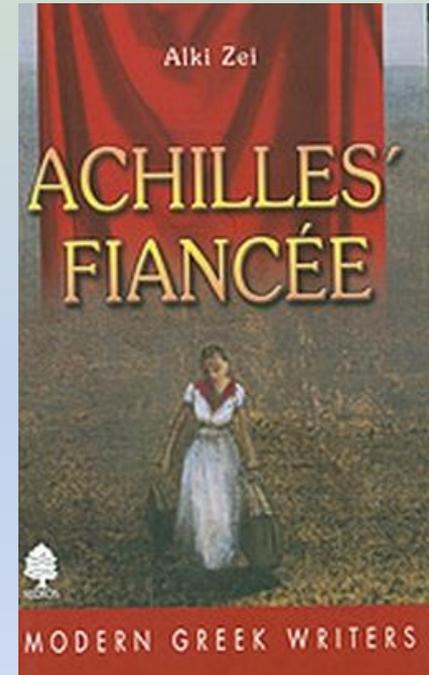


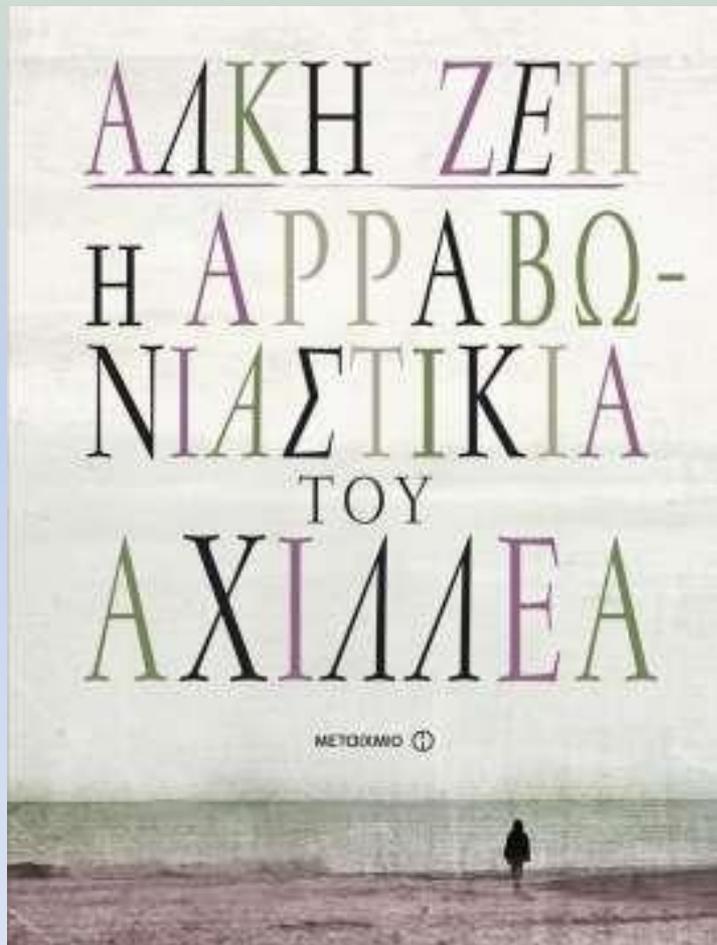


The protest march against forced labour through the streets of Athens is particularly full of pathos – the humorous image of oranges being hurled at the Carabinieri soon turns to tragedy. Petros finds himself caught up in the terrifying ‘Blocko’ – on 1st May 1944 when the Germans randomly round up people in the city and herd them to the main square blocking off the exits and witnesses individual callous acts of cruelty towards those he cares about.

## Achilles' Fiancée

The scene is Paris, sometime after the 1967 military coup in Greece. Eleni, together with a group of her friends and fellow political exiles, finds herself working as an extra in a French film: The Horror Train. It is not the first time Eleni has been caught up in a deadly drama, nor is it her first ride on a horror train. As the director waves his arms, shouting directions and re-shooting the sequence, Eleni's mind wanders to her first train ride: "Athens-Piraeus. My first big trip by train." " - You're Eleni? I'm Achilles." "They don't ask which Achilles. One name is enough...".





For the rest of her life, Eleni will be "Achilles' Fiancée", fiancée of the guerilla leader, the brave, handsome kapetanios whose code-name is Achilles. In the demonstrations against the German occupiers of Greece, in prison where she waits for a death sentence during the post-war persecution of suspected leftists, in exile in Tashkent where the exiled Greek communists fight amongst themselves, and finally in Paris. But somewhere along the way Eleni becomes an independent character with a mind of her own.

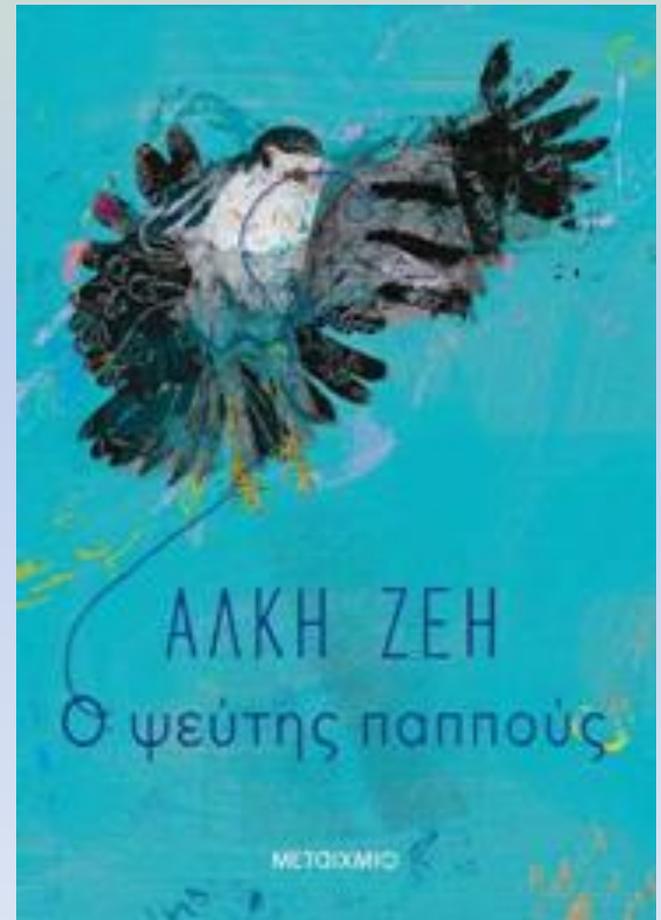
As she begins to doubt the slogans that she fought for when she was a blind follower of leaders like her fiancé, Eleni involves us in her own private world of self-discovery. It is a woman's world, where human warmth and friendships matter more than abstract ideals. The Greek word for a novel is *mythistorema*, a word that combines myth and history. In her story of a young woman's struggle to survive through an extraordinary period of Greek history, Alki Zei has woven the threads of her own quasi-mythical life into the stuff of history.



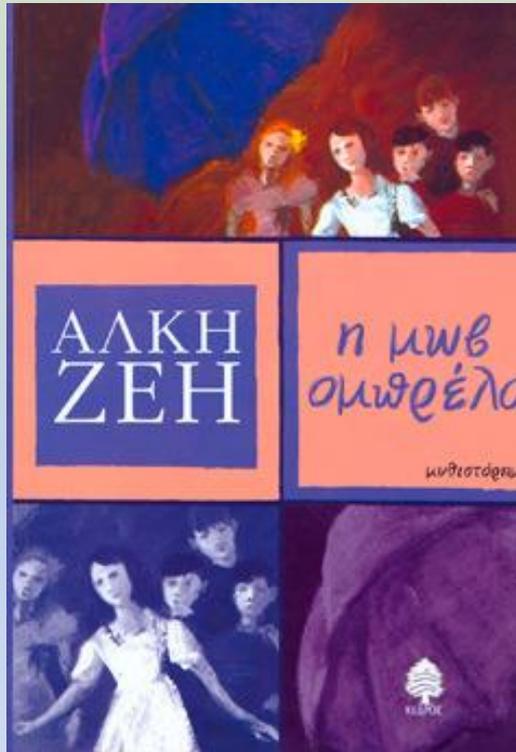
She wrote pieces for the puppet theater, short stories and novels, published in various literary journals. Along with writing, she actively campaigned for democracy, participating in the left-wing movement since the German occupation in Greece.

**Other books by Alki Zei:**

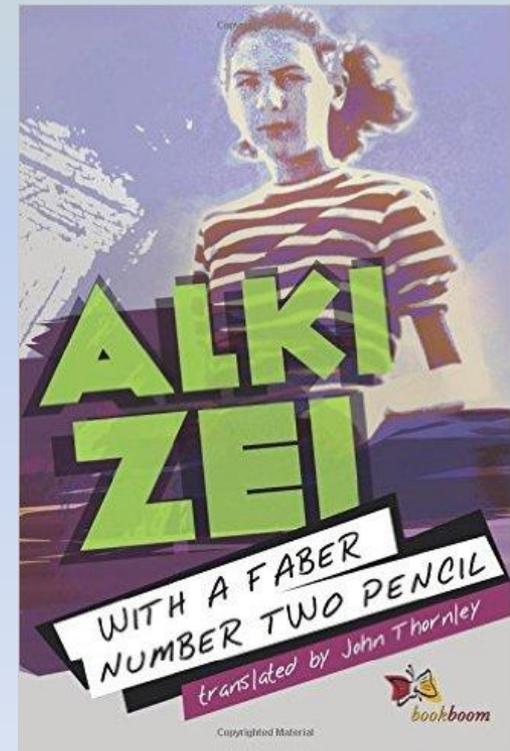
- ✓ Uncle Platon (1975)
- ✓ Granddad the liar (1992)



✓ The Purple Umbrella (1995)



✓ With a Faber Number Two Pencil (2013)



**Alki Zei has been awarded for her work by the Academy of Athens.**



**She died on February 27, 2020.**





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