

ELLI PEONIDOU (Cyprus)

**Statement on the writer's contribution
to literature for young people**

Elli Peonidou is a distinguished poet and writer of works for adults as well as young people. She has published more than 30 books and has been awarded the Cyprus State Prize for Literature on several occasions in addition to the Children's Book Association Award and other honours. For 40 years her books have been regularly reprinted in new editions in Greece and Cyprus. They have also been published in a number of other European countries (see bibliography).

In her works for young people, which are aimed at readers of all ages from pre-school to adolescent, the writer uses her elegant style and soaring imagination to attract young readers to the magical world of books. Her collection "*Ten Orphaned Fairytales*" was included in the 2002 IBBY Honour List.

Peonidou writes on a variety of subjects. Humour and imagination prevail in her stories for very young children and the texts are often interspersed with rhyming verse. A number of her books of the 'Children's Stories' series are used at the Cyprus University Pedagogical Department, as material for trainee primary and nursery school teachers. One of these books, entitled "*Glass, Wooden, Paper and Other Stories*", transforms items from a child's daily life into real characters, satirizing the bad ones with a great deal of humour and rewarding the good ones. For example, in one story a condescending bar of soap is transformed into a soap bubble while, in another, a lone yellow glove makes friends with an equally solitary blue sock.

In her stories for children of school age, she brings her great imagination into play, together with the infinite resources of Greek mythology, to take her young readers to places where they can wind down and cast off the anxiety caused by lessons and the influence of the computer.

Her novels for adolescents deal with life's problems, chiefly those of young people. Her book "*The Sirens of Manhattan*" which was published in 1995 and continues to sell, touches on the problems of migration (long before it took on its present-day dimension), drug abuse, unemployment, racism and the disorientation of young people, without ever losing any of the characteristics of a charming novel such as great love, adventure and ambition.

In "*The Two Children and the Black River*" she employs the language of fairytales to make children understand the deep wounds suffered by her country, its division into two parts and the unhappiness caused by war. In "*The Labours of Coffee in Seven Cups*", the drama of the ghost town of Famagusta provides

the backdrop to the fun-packed adventure of Little Coffee, which a lonely grandmother reads in the dregs of her morning coffee cup.

The main element in almost all Peonidou's work, however, is concern over the destruction of the environment, which sometimes takes the form of a main message and, at other times, appears discreetly and indirectly in the form of a game.

In "*The Green Tower*", the young residents of a town undertake an entire campaign, to save the garden and traditional house of an old man who wants to leave them as a legacy to the children.

In "*Ten Orphaned Fairytales*", the fairytales seek to find their Happy Ending in the Concrete State which is full of fumes, on the Blue Seashore which is full of rubbish, on the White Iceberg to save the Polar Bear, in the Grey Swamp which swallows up people, in the Red Desert which is dying of thirst, etc.

In her book, "*A Visit to Planet Allispossible*", two children and an elderly scientist visit the planet where everything is permitted apart from the use of the phrase "I can't". There, the children have a chance to eat all the ice cream they want, to fly in the sky holding their friend by her plaits, and to gather as many diamonds as their pockets can hold. But there, the Trees are the judges who pass sentence on the people who are murdering the Earth.

Costas Katsonis