

HERE WAS ONCE UPON A TIME: REFLECTIONS ON A MASTERPIECE OF ITALIAN LITERATURE: PINOCCHIO

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Abstract

In this article I will discuss the novel *Le avventure di Pinocchio*: storia di un burattino by Collodi, that firstly appeared serialized in *Il giornale per i bambini*, a children's magazine, and was published in 1883. I would like to start from the following question: can we consider Pinocchio a Bildungsroman? And I'll show that it is hardly possible to do so, for the reasons that I am going to discuss mainly due to the fact that there is no change in Pinocchio. The second question I would like to answer is whether this novel is actually a novel for children. I will argue that Pinocchio is actually a book against children, a book that does not consider the nature and the feelings of the poor boy, but simply aims at forcing him to adapt to the world outside. This world is made up of specific values and certainties that Pinocchio does not manage to understand throughout the story: the cause-effect logic, first of all, and the practical vision of the world as an economic entity. These are the same values and certainties that characterize the post Risorgimento period, from 1861 onwards, and the pursuit of the Italian nation. Pinocchio does not understand them, but, after all the adversities he goes through during his adventures, he decides to accept them as if they were his inner world.

Key-words: Pinocchio, Collodi, Children's literature, Italy, education, 19 century.

ERA UMA VEZ: REFLEXÕES SOBRE UMA OBRA PRIMA DA LITERATURA PARA A INFÂNCIA ITALIANA: PINÓQUIO

Resumo

Neste artigo discutirei o romance *Le avventure di Pinocchio*: storia di un burattino, escrito por Collodi, que apareceu inicialmente em forma seriada no *Il giornale per i bambini*, uma revista infantil publicada em 1883. Gostaria de começar com a seguinte pergunta: podemos considerar Pinóquio um *Bildungsroman*, uma história de formação? Mostrarei que é difícil fazê-lo, principalmente, devido ao fato de que Pinóquio não muda. A segunda pergunta à qual gostaria de responder é se esse romance é um romance para crianças. Discutirei que, na verdade, Pinóquio é um livro contra as crianças, um livro que não leva em conta a natureza e os sentimentos do pobre menino, mas simplesmente busca forçá-lo a adaptar-se ao mundo que o cerca. Esse mundo é constituído por valores específicos e certezas que Pinóquio não consegue entender durante todo o decorrer da história: a lógica de causa-efeito e a visão prática do mundo como uma entidade econômica. São esses os mesmos valores e certezas que caracterizam o período pós-

Risorgimento, a partir de 1861, e a busca da nação italiana. Pinóquio não os entende, mas, depois de passar por muitas adversidades, durante as suas aventuras, decide aceitá-los como se fossem o seu mundo interior.

Palavras-chave: Pinóquio, Collodi, literatura infantil, Itália, educação, século 19.

C'ERA UNA VOLTA: RIFLESSIONI SU UN CAPOLAVORO DELLA LETTERATURA PER L'INFANZIA ITALIANA: PINOCCHIO

Riassunto

L'articolo propone una riflessione su *Le avventure di Pinocchio*: storia di un burattino, il racconto di Collodi pubblicato nel 1883 e apparso dapprima a puntate sul periodico *Il giornale per i bambini*. La questione di partenza è: possiamo considerarlo un romanzo di formazione? La mia risposta è che difficilmente può essere considerato tale per varie ragioni, in primo luogo perché in Pinocchio non vi è mai reale cambiamento. La seconda questione è se lo si può considerare un racconto per bambini. La risposta, solo all'apparenza provocatoria, è che in realtà si tratta piuttosto di un libro contro il bambino, nel senso che non si cura dei sentimenti e della natura di questo ragazzino. Pinocchio è sicuramente indisciplinato, ma l'unica soluzione proposta è quella di adattarlo forzatamente al mondo che c'è. Si tratta di un mondo costruito attorno a determinati valori e certezze che per tutta la storia Pinocchio non riesce a gestire: la logica causa-effetto, prima di tutto, e poi una visione pratica del mondo considerato come un'entità economica. Sono i valori e le certezze che nel periodo post-unitario, dal 1861, caratterizzando in gran parte i modi educativi della costruzione di una nazione italiana. Pinocchio non li comprende, ma, dopo tutte le avversità che si trova ad attraversare, decide di far propria tale visione del mondo come se corrispondesse effettivamente al proprio mondo interiore.

Parole-chiave: Pinocchio, Collodi, Letteratura per l'infanzia, Italia, 19° secolo.

IL ÉTAIT UNE FOIS: DES RÉFLEXIONS SUR LE CHEF-D'ŒUVRE DE LA LITTÉRATURE ITALIENNE POUR LES ENFANTS: PINOCCHIO

Résumé

L'article propose une réflexion sur *Le avventure di Pinocchio*: storia di un burattino, le conte de Collodi publié en 1883 et apparu pour la première fois comme épisodes sur *Il giornale per i bambini*. La question initiale est: peut-on considérer cela comme un roman de formation? Ma réponse est qu'on peut difficilement être considéré comme tel pour plusieurs de raisons, d'abord parce que Pinocchio n'a jamais un réel changement. La deuxième question est de savoir si elle peut être considérée comme une histoire pour les enfants. La réponse, ce qui semble être une provocation, est qu'il est plutôt un livre contre l'enfant, parce qu'il n'y a aucune attention pour les sentiments et la nature de ce pauvre garçon. Pinocchio est certainement indisciplinés, mail la seule solution est l'adapter de force au système qui existe. C'est un système construit autour d'un certain nombre de valeurs et de certitudes que dans toute l'histoire Pinocchio ne parvient pas à gérer: la logique cause-effet, tout d'abord, puis une vision concrète du monde, considéré comme une entité économique. Il sont les valeurs qui, dans la période post-unitaire, à partir de 1861, caractérisent la plupart des moyens éducatifs utilisés pour la construction de la nation italienne. Pinocchio ne comprend, mais, après tout le mal, décide de suivre cette vision du monde, comme s'elle effectivement correspondît à son propre monde intérieur.

Mots-clé: Pinocchio, Collodi, littérature pour jeunesse, Italie, 19^{ème} siècle.

The author: Carlo Collodi

Collodi, pseudonym of Carlo Lorenzini, was born in Florence on the 24th of november 1826 and died in Florence on the 26th of october 1890. His father Domenico, from Cortona, specify region in Italy, was a cook for the marquis Carlo Leopoldo Ginori Lisci and his mother's father had been a farmer for the Garzoni Venturi marquises. His mother, Angiolina Orzali, was from a little village near Collodi called Veneri. She had a significant influence on the author's life and in fact his pseudonym Collodi was chosen as a tribute to her, through her birthplace.

In 1837 he entered the Seminary but he left in 1842 to study Philosophy and Rhetoric at the religious school Scuole pie di S. Giovannino in Florence. He then worked as the bibliographic bulletins editor for the editorial news catalogue at the Piatti Bookshop in Florence. The bookshop was also a publishing house frequented by intellectuals and patriots who included B. Niccolini. Afterwards Collodi became friends with the librarian and scholar G. Aiazzi. It was through Aiazzi that Collodi started working as a theatre reporter for the *Rivista di Firenze* and as musical critic for the *Arpa musicale*.

In 1848 he and other intellectuals started the satirical journal *Il lampione*. It was from this moment that he began signing his articles with the pseudonym Collodi. The journal's self-declared aim to illuminate those in the dark was shortlived; it was closed by censorship the following year, but reopened in 1860. He and his brother Paolo enlisted in the II Florentine battalion and fought in Montanara (1848) during the Italian Independence wars¹ that led to the unification of Italy. In the same year his father died and Collodi was again in search of work. With Aiazzi's help he was elected clerk in the Tuscan Senate. To make ends meet he collaborated on several magazines and translated novels from French. In 1853 he founded and edited the theatrical magazine *Lo Scaramuccia*. He wanted intellectuals such as P. Fanfani and P. Ferrigni to contribute to the magazine. He wrote for many magazines and his work for the theatre gave him an adequate livelihood.

In 1859 he enlisted as a volunteer in the Piedmontese army. After the Villafranca armistice, 2nd Italian Independence war, he was discharged and went back to Florence where he found a job in the office of theatrical censorship and subsequently at the prefecture. He continued to work as a journalist for magazines such as *Fanfulla*, *La nazione* and *Gazzetta del popolo*.

In 1875 there were changes to his working life. He translated *Contes* and the *Histoires* by Charles Perrault and other fairy tales for the florentine publishing house Paggi. In 1876 he published the book *Racconti delle fate*, illustrated by E. Mazzanti. This was the opportunity for him to start devoting most of his time to children's literature.

He also published two primers for the publishing house Paggi: in 1877 the *Giannettino*, inspired by the L. A. Parravicini's pedagogical novel, *Il Giannetto* (1837) and *Minuzzolo* in 1878. The protagonists of these books are rebellious and rather bored children, who gradually became good and obedient thanks to their adventures and to the affectionate advice of their relatives.

¹ About Italian Risorgimento cf. Banti (2010); Genovesi (2010).

In the same period Collodi's interest in education can also be seen in the textbooks he wrote on geography and history. They were written in an original, humoristic style which did not win the approval of the ministry of Education. Collodi used dialogues so the children could be entertained as well as educated. These textbooks include: *Viaggio per l'Italia di Giannettino* (1880-1886); *La grammatica di Giannettino* (1883); *L'abbaco di Giannettino per le scuole elementari* (1885); *La geografia di Giannettino* (1886); *La lanterna magica di Giannettino* (1890).

At the request of a friend, G. Biagi, Collodi began writing about Pinocchio and from 1881 the story of Pinocchio was serialized in *Il giornale per i bambini*, with the title *La storia di un burattino*. Initially the story ended with the death of the puppet, who was hanged from a tree. Owing to the story's huge success Collodi revived the puppet to write more adventures. In 1883 he published the book *Le avventure di Pinocchio: storia di un burattino*, illustrated by Mazzanti. The book was an immediate, huge success: the second edition followed in 1886, the third in 1887, the fourth in 1888, the fifth in 1890 with the Bemporad & figlio publishing house. It soon became the most widely read and translated book after the bible; translated into 260 languages with 187 editions.

In the meantime, from 1883 to 1885, Collodi became the director of the *Giornale dei bambini*. In 1887 he wrote the *Storie allegre*. In 1886 his mother died and he became increasingly more depressed. He died suddenly in Florence on the 26th of October, 1890.

Pinocchio: a Bildungsroman?

When I was a child, Pinocchio was always present in my parents' teachings, but most of all in my teacher's words: they used to say if you tell a lie, your nose will grow longer and longer, just like Pinocchio's one. And quoting Collodi, they would say there are two kind of lies: those with short legs and those with long noses. Sometimes I was really worried about the length of my nose and my legs but, just like Pinocchio, I shrugged my shoulders and kept on playing and telling innocent white lies.

Pinocchio was also present in adult's words to remind us that we had to obey parents, we had to behave in *the* right way, there really seem to be no more than one right way to follow, otherwise terrible things would have happened to us: and the image of poor Pinocchio hanging from the big oak tree terrified me as well as his long donkey ears, not to talk about poor Lampwick, who after all was nothing more than a little child with a tiny brain, but didn't deserve to die. For all these reasons I was not fond of Pinocchio at all and I didn't enjoy my mother telling me the story.

I think this personal experience of mine can show how profoundly Pinocchio has entered the Italian conscience: it was and it is generally considered a Bildungsroman, a novel that shows how a person's formative years can lead to a better understanding of the world and of their place in the world.

Actually it is possible to say that the story of Pinocchio as a model for a personal growth is focused on the child's guilt, on continuous threats, death in Pinocchio is always present, Pinocchio himself risks dying and in fact has to die to become a real boy, well this model has been exported also abroad, particularly with the Walt Disney film, that is

certainly less cruel than the original book, but contains this idea of dependence on adults and of the unique model for a right behaviour.

Looking at the novel with critical eyes, can we really consider it a *Buildungsroman*? In order to answer to this question², I would go through the story itself, starting from the beginning, as it should be done.

When Pinocchio is still a silent piece of wood, Geppetto goes to mr. Cherry and shares with him the following idea: "I thought I would make a fine wooden puppet - a really fine one, that can dance, fence and turn somersaults in the air. Then, with this puppet, I could travel round the world, and earn my bit of bread and my glass of wine" (Collodi, 2011, p. 8). The idea of Geppetto is to make a puppet in order to use it as a means to have a better life! It is neither a desire of fatherhood nor an educative idea, rather it is that of creating a marionette that can move but cannot think. And so he does - he creates a puppet, that can move, can run, can do a lot of things - but which cannot think at all. And Geppetto will discover to his cost that this was a big mistake. A puppet that cannot think is a puppet that cannot understand the world outside himself and that is always trying to obtain what he needs, without thinking of anyone else, but how is it possible to control a puppet without strings and without any brain? We can say that Geppetto has began the whole enterprise in the wrong way, forgetting that Pinocchio could grow up with his own personality, desires and identity. Throughout all the book no one has any respect for Pinocchio's ideas or wishes; he is always punished in order to make him grow up as everybody should grow up.

Anyway Geppetto should have considered that he was giving life, and not simply creating a puppet, but his intention is not that of a father rather that of man that doesn't want his personal order to be upset. Creating a life, even from a piece of wood, implies a great responsibility and Geppetto seems not to be aware of this. Instead, he appears to feel this responsibility as a huge load as the story unfolds. He loves his son, that's clear from the very beginning, but he doesn't actually know how to act as a father. Father and son should learn together, they should grow together, but they don't. He has just finished making Pinocchio's eyes and, to quote Collodi, "when Geppetto saw those two wooden eyes looking at him, he did not like it at all, and he said angrily "naughty wooden eyes, why are you staring at me?" (Collodi, 2011, p. 13).

Why is Geppetto angry? Why does he judge these wooden eyes and call them 'naughty'? He seems not to like the life stirring in the piece of wood. And when life explodes, a few lines after, with Pinocchio running away with his new legs and feet, Geppetto gets even more angry "You scoundrel of a son! You are not finished and you already disobey your father! That's bad, my boy - very bad" (Collodi, 2011, p. 15). And talking to himself he confesses he wished he'd never started carving the wood, but it is too late, the puppet is already there! He didn't properly consider the consequences of giving life to a piece of wood! That means educate, teach, make him understand the way things go, talk to him, listen to him, grow and change together with him. And Geppetto is not able

² For a more detailed analyses of *Pinocchio* cf. Avanzini (2012).

to do this! He only has a few certainties and he wants them to be respected by the puppet. So at the beginning of the story there is a strong contrast between the explosion of life, the puppet's enthusiastic approach to life and the still, slightly sad and static image of the world that belongs to Geppetto. Consequently Geppetto and Pinocchio have different expectations: Geppetto simply wants Pinocchio to act as it should be done, Pinocchio, on his side, lives in a world that he always fails to understand, a world that for him is completely unreadable, unintelligible, so he always does the wrong thing.

This lack of understanding culminates in the episode of the assassins and the big oak tree. He is deceived by the fox and the cat but he is too naïve and conceited at the same time to understand it! So he doesn't recognize the assassins, that are the fox and the cat in disguise, and is terribly scared by them. They want his money and, in order to obtain it, they hang Pinocchio on a branch of the big oak tree and wait for his death. In the fight Pinocchio bites off the cat's paw and spits it out. Notwithstanding this, he doesn't understand that he is fighting with the fox and the cat, the same two who have just promised to make his golden coins grow as if they were seeds. He never manages to read reality: he is curious, he would like to discover and understand the world, but he can never decode the deceitful behaviour of people. So what is his guilt this time? Why has he to be hanged and risk death? Because he didn't obey the adult (in this case the adult is the Fire-eater who had given him the five golden coins to bring to his father). But if we look more profoundly at the story, he actually trusts the adult, but the wrong one! He thinks the fox and the cat to be honest, but they aren't! He is so ignorant (since he doesn't go to school) that he doesn't know that coins never grow on trees, but his intentions are good: he would like his father to be richer and happier and proud of his disobedient son!

In the logic of the story we can say that the reason why he is hanged on a tree is because he has to learn a lesson: if you do wrong you get punished, if you keep on doing wrong you will pay with your life. The logic is cause-effect, nothing else will do. There are no other ways and Pinocchio is more and more distant from this reality: how can he ever learn how to act in the right way? There is only one possibility: lose his curiosity and his own personal journey with himself. It is not important to understand why it should happen like this, what counts is to do what is expected of you and obey. So, to answer our first question, we cannot consider this novel a Bildungsroman because there is no interest in giving the child a better understanding of the world, nurturing his soul and his mind.

This leads me to my second question: is Pinocchio a novel for children? I think it isn't and here are my reasons.

In this world the child-Pinocchio is always at risk: if he doesn't do what he is told to, he risks being trapped, caught, by the enemy, always a dishonest, wicked man, that can be the fox and the cat, the fire-eater, that fortunately after all was a good man, the fisherman, the couchman, known as the little man - the driver of the couch that deceived the children into thinking they were going to Playland. All these enemies have something in common: they are people without money and desperately searching for some. For this reason they are bad people, at the edge of society, people that Pinocchio should

recognize as such, because it is so clear that they are deceitful, but he never does! He never seems to be able to read the social code implicit in the story.

Anyway, whatever this social code is, the fact is there is only one code to follow, so he cannot make a choice; secondly it is imposed with a strict cause-effect logic. I can quote the episode where the peasant catches Pinocchio and makes him work as a watch dog because he had pick a few punches of muscatel grapes. For this reason he is considered the worst thief and tied like a dog to an iron chain - a terrible punishment which leads the puppet into a complete loss of identity, since he feels and behave as he really were a dog. As we can see, the world outside Pinocchio is always trying to brainwash him into feeling that he has done wrong, that is guilt of something terrible.

He also has a lot of supporters who represent the good in society, such as the Fairy, first of all, Geppetto himself, the magic creatures - the talking cricket, the parrot - and even the peasant, that acts for Pinocchio's benefit, in the logic of the story, but they never encourage him to find himself and to discover the world outside, instead they all make him feel bad.

It is possible to say that even the Fairy, Pinocchio's main supporter, has a cruel attitude towards him, since she uses guilt to teach him how to behave. She represents what is correct and good in society; she's beautiful, she has a house and a sort of housemaid (the snail), she's the right one to follow. But she intends to educate him by means of threats and fear, so as to limit his curiosity and his desire for exploring his new world. He has to share specific values and certainties and is prevented from becoming an independent thinker. For example in the XXIII chapter Pinocchio goes back to her house but, instead of the house, he finds "a little piece of marble on which these sad words were engraved: "Here lies the blue-haired child who died of sorrow for being deserted by her little brother Pinocchio" (Collodi, 2011, p. 130).

So, what are these values and certainties? They are work, industriousness, money. The fox and the cat are dishonest because they don't have a job and try to make a living deceiving people and stealing their money; the fisherman is wicked just because he is poor (after all he does nothing bad, simply catches fish to eat); the land of the Busy Bee is a good place because everybody is busy working while Play-land is a wicked place because everybody is busy playing.

A children's book?

What is there then in this book that can be considered suitable for children? I would say nothing, because the child's nature isn't take into account. We are miles away from Alice in wonderland, whose fever of curiosity - the same fever who makes Pinocchio burns in the IX chapter, where we can read: Pinocchio was in such a fever of curiosity that he lost his self-control. Takes her to wonderland, which she herself creates. She makes a lot of mistakes on the way, without being punished or killed, but in doing so her identity evolves and she can grow up. Furthermore thanks to Wonderland, Alice is going to learn new ways of thinking and of imagining the world and new different logics; she's going to

have an original view of things. So while Alice grows up, Pinocchio gets more and more frustrated and is prevented from becoming himself.

As I was saying, the values proposed by the book are mainly work, industriousness, money, that is to say the same values strongly proposed by the new born Italian nation. Unfortunately the dream of the Italian Risorgimento was in some way over and Italy was busy trying to be an Italian nation. Making Italians was the main concern of the new born Italy. The book *Pinocchio* did a great service to this new nation in being a model of controversial, but universally accepted values³. If the nation was to grow, Italy had to give up its diversity of cultures and languages and become a single nation. *Pinocchio* was the first example of a national language but we can also say of a single set of values, not very original and rather distant from what Italy actually was and most of all from what Risorgimental heroes would have wanted it to be.

As for the language it was noted that while the language of Alessandro Manzoni's *I promessi sposi* "ended up becoming a literary language invented by the writer", "Collodi, a Tuscan [...] adopted in Pinocchio the spoken language, Florentine, which he considered the only language... With his book Collodi provided the practical example of the language that Manzoni contemplated" (Paruolo, 2001, p. 77). As for the values, they were actually shared by all the social and political tendencies, that is by the conservative, but also by the progressive and even by the so popular philanthropic groups in the new country. Controlling the masses of illiterate people would have been impossible; literacy from this point of view was a means of control over the diversity of Italian nation - conservative view - but also a means of giving people some independence in order to be able to have a job - progressive and philanthropic view⁴. And it was universally accepted that people without a job could upset the social order. The concern for childhood and for the diversity of childhood was certainly not in the first place in a period that had to face so many social and cultural problems: actually most Italian citizens, up to 85% in certain parts of Italy, especially in the South, were totally illiterate.

We can say that Pinocchio is not a thought-provoking book as *Alice in wonderland* is, rather it is a book conceived to announce a sort of restoring of order in a particular social and historical situation: certain values were to be shared and there was no time and place for childhood with its huge potential, that is the capacity of looking at the world with those naughty wooden eyes, eyes that could put things upside down and completely upset such a delicate search for balance. After all, Pinocchio gives us the idea that childhood is a potentially dangerous age, because it has a rebellious way of looking at reality without any prejudice or barrier and if it is not restricted, it could really lead to a new vision of the world. In other words, the child has an immense power that the adult doesn't actually know how to control. From this point of view education seems to be intended only as a means of controlling the mind in order to make children act as they are expected to. If we compare children to the very diverse Italian people of the period, education is meant as a way of

³ About the relation between *Pinocchio* and the need to make italians cf. S. Stewart-Steinberg (2007).

⁴ About characteristic, potentialities and limits related to the filantropic attitude in post-unitary Italy cf. Avanzini (2013).

unifying them all into one. So, education is not intended as Bildung, as a search for personal, intellectual and emotional growth.

For all these reasons, I would say this is not a book for children but a book against children, since it aims at controlling the huge potentials of childhood and reduce it to the needs of society.

Conclusions

To conclude we can affirm that Pinocchio is not allowed to grow up and has to give up his freedom to think, his curiosity and his spontaneous nature in order to become a so-called adult. He hasn't the possibility to question the adult's values, but has to accept them as they are. So for him reality remains unreadable throughout the book: because of this Pinocchio gets more and more confused and sadder and sadder, so sad that he feels desperately guilty and tries to cure this feeling by behaving properly.

We can see that Pinocchio-child is dead when he meets Lampwick in the last chapter: his friend is a dying donkey while he is a good boy working hard to get his father a cup of milk. He goes and sees his friend, they recognize each other and Lampwick dies. Pinocchio only allows himself the time to wipe off the tears that were running down his cheek with some straw and then keeps on working. The real Pinocchio, the real child, that is the puppet, would have stamped his feet, would have cried and kicked the wicked gardener who was laughing at his poor friend but he doesn't. His childhood is behind him and he is now an adult, without hope, dreams or the ability to create reality. His only purpose is to obey to other people's rules.

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Received on February 10, 2014.

Accepted on April 28, 2014.