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Two Pinocchios

In the textual network of *Pinocchio* tales, Disney's 1940's film transforms decidedly the written tale of *Pinocchio* by Carlo Collodi, the pre-text published in Italy in 1883 about a naughty and arguably sadistic puppet-boy whose bad behavior is not intended to be charming or endearing, but rather to serve as a warning about how hard and not at all practical it is to be a parent of a mischievous little "rascal" (Collodi 10). Collodi's tale is rather sinister compared to the Disney version which is ultimately softcore. This overarching difference between Disney's and Collodi's versions of *Pinocchio* is seen especially clearly in the demeanor and behavior toward others the protagonist Pinocchio displays and the consequences surrounding his misbehaving and disobedience. Each version treats the process of conversion, that is the transition from childhood to adult life, differently. Collodi exposes Pinocchio to moments of brutality and savagery while also having him enact them himself, blurring the line between childhood and adulthood. Disney transforms the pre-text to create a visual story which, because of the medium and Disney's standards for production, necessitates the elimination of such dark elements and reinforces the boundary between childhood and adulthood, simultaneously reinforcing Disney's ideology of celebrating childhood and the worldviews that come with it.

Collodi's original written version of *Pinocchio* proved incredibly popular from the start, although it is a story where boyish charm and guilelessness is in short supply. The Italian novel,

originally intended to be a children's story (with a tragic ending however), was published in installments in the *Giornale per I Bambini* and received praise from people of all ages who eventually convinced Collodi to prolong the story past the current Chapter 15. Collodi's original pre-text includes physical fights, imprisonment, abduction, whipping, stabbing, hanging, and multiple deaths. Much of the brutality that Collodi utilizes for his successful children's story can be observed in the actions surrounding the protagonist himself, Pinocchio. Collodi writes, for example, that "most unfortunately, in the lives of puppets there is always a 'but' that spoils everything," introducing from the start an apparently inevitable downfall for Pinocchio (113). In scenes of death (of which there are many), Collodi not only uses narrative descriptions but also direct dialogue to instill true fear in the young reader who sees themselves in Pinocchio's shoes. He writes, "What do you want with me?' cried Pinocchio, sitting up in bed in a great fright" (58). The savage rabbits reply, "We are come to take you… you have only a few minutes to live" to which Pinocchio begs for the Fairy's pity and quick help (58). Not only does Pinocchio's body language covey true terror (springing up from bed in terror), but his exchanges with the other characters, the unsympathetic rabbits in this case, show the overall brutal nature of the Italian tale. In fact, Collodi creates an interesting image and a potentially uneasy feeling in the already frightened young reader by using rabbits, usually small and likeable furry creatures, as the villain.

Further from fear and harm imposed on the main character, Collodi also depicts Pinocchio himself committing brutal acts, leading to a story engulfed in violence from all angles. Pinocchio "struck him [Jimminy] exactly on the head, so that the poor Cricket had scarcely breath to cry cri-cri-cri, and then he remained dried up and flattened against the wall" (29). Between menacing warnings, speak of impending death, and beating of innocent characters, it is

evident just by observing the behavior and interactions of Pinocchio that there is no escaping savagery in Collodi's story. In terms of conversion, Collodi attempts to blur the line between childhood and adult life. He has Pinocchio live and experience the consequences, the ever so morbid consequences, of life events that usually one would deem inappropriate for a young boy. The exposure to the 'true world' from a young age leads Pinocchio to necessarily grow up quickly in order to survive. A form of integrative propaganda directed toward young boys is used by Collodi in this tale to prepare them for exaggerated, most extreme encounters they will have when they grow up. Pinocchio is Collodi's text figure that personifies his young reader. By throwing Pinocchio into serious adult situations, the young reader has a parallel experience through the puppet in preparation for adulthood.

The Disney cartoon version of the tale is a much more lovely, animated story that lacks the savagery of Collodi's tale: The dramatic transformation of the story can be immediately seen by observing Pinocchio's mannerisms. It is about a rather cheerful puppet, as opposed to Collodi's "wretched" Pinocchio, who wants to be a real boy (12). The film lacks horrifying deaths and hands-on fights but still incorporates milder mischievous acts and various challenging temptations that Pinocchio faces, which culminate in a lesson presented to the viewer about teaching kids how a real boy should behave. Collodi uses brutal consequences for the young boy's inappropriate actions, such as death and physical and verbal abuse. Disney's softening begins from the consequences of bad action – for example, when Pinocchio tells a lie (from innocence and naivete rather than out of spite), his nose grows long which is a harmless way to show children that undesirable actions have undesirable effects on you. In Collodi's original, Pinocchio also lies and experiences nose growth, but only twice, in Chapters 17 and 29. Disney zoomed in on this motif (one of the milder ones from the original text), amplified it, and gave it a

central role in the film. This has perhaps been one of the most influential distortions of the pre-text in the years that followed. The association between lying and nose growth has entered the American collective unconscious, assumed cross-curricular relevancy, and become an immediately recognizable, household symbol constantly reminding the American youth of moral lessons and their consequences - as the Blue Fairy says, “a lie keeps growing and growing until it's as clear as the nose on your face” (*Pinocchio* 49:55). Disney’s *Pinocchio* uses several other scenes from the book and magnifies them after removing some traumatic elements. For example, in Collodi’s version Pinocchio is turned into a donkey and his dead donkey flesh is consumed by fish. In the animated tale, Pinocchio never fully transforms into a donkey at all and the scene is used to represent a suppressed version of what succumbing to your temptations can do to you (*Pinocchio* 1:07:45). Lastly, the word of reason, Pinocchio’s conscience per se, takes many forms in Collodi’s story wherein many of the characters that enact their wisdom on Pincchio are eventually killed. In Disney’s version, reason on Pinocchio is seen mainly through Jimminy Cricket and the Fairy, both of which remain untouched. Rather than traumatizing children into fearful coercion, Disney shows how messages similar to those of Collodi can propagate and grow (for example, the growing nose motif) without necessarily instilling terror in children.

Disney eliminates brutality, in particular as it relates to the happenings of the main character, from Collodi’s pre-text due to the amplifying nature of the visual medium used and to maintain conformity with the company’s baseline for productions. Disney built an empire that caters to the idea of childhood and the idealized views of the world that go along with it, a sort of ‘false consciousness’ and unawareness of the real conditions in one’s life. When conveying important moral lessons, Disney does so by eliminating some violence in order to conform to the peppier childhood daze the brand claims in their productions and to avoid visual scarring effects

due to the film medium. Walt Disney and his team decided that a story of a disrespectful boy who gets tortured and almost killed was not in any way suitable for the big screen, not for the American child at least. In order to sell the story, the team painted a much nicer picture of a naive helpless boy in an animated world full of adventurous decision making. The lesson is that those who are brave enough, "follow your [their] conscience", always truthful, and do not succumb to "the world full of temptations" will find salvation (*Pinocchio* 16:22). Truth be told, this is a story much easier to sell. The ideology adopted by Disney solidifies, as opposed to blurring as Collodi seems to do, the line between childhood and adulthood. Conversion seems to be a clean-cut process in the Disney tale and one that their character Pinocchio certainly has not partaken in yet.

By observing the action in the text and film versions of *Pinocchio* by Carlo Collodi and Disney, it can be seen that each treats conversion and the line between childhood and adult life differently. Collodi breaks the barrier between the two, treating young Pinocchio as a mature adult, while Disney keeps the barrier steady and strong celebrating childhood and the hazed-over perception of the world that comes with it.

Works Cited

Collodi, Carlo. *Pinocchio.* New York: New York Review of Book, 2009. Print.

Pinocchio. Walt Disney Productions, RKO Radio Pictures, 1940. Disney Plus.