Pinocchio: Archetype of the Motherless Child

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Carlo Collodi's *The Adventures of Pinocchio* has to stand, along with Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, L. Frank Baum's *The Wonderful World of Oz* and J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan*, as one of the few truly classic pieces of children's literature. For whatever the fate of these authors has been in academic circles—where Carroll has understandably proved the most exciting of the lot—many of the characters they created have become independent entities with lives of their own, free of the vagaries of literary taste and opinion. They seem to have escaped the written page, disowned their makers and become part of the very fabric of twentieth century civilization, in much the same way as the fairies, heroes and ogres found in the folktales of the brothers Grimm, Perrault, Basile and Hans Christian Andersen have returned to the hearths, the taverns and the nurseries from which they were originally gleaned. To some extent theatrical productions, films, cartoon animations and the vast market of children's books have contributed to this process. Yet the resultant success could not have occurred were it not also for a certain profound and universal psychological appeal, transcending the powers of commercialism. A study of *Pinocchio* may, I think, shed some light on the dark forces of enchantment at work in such tales.

Carlo Lorenzini was born in Florence in 1826, the first of nine children. His father was employed as a cook by the marchesi Garzoni. His mother, a cultured woman of rich sensitivities, worked as a seamstress and chambermaid to the same household. At sixteen years of age Carlo entered the seminary at Val d'Elsa, probably with the financial aid of the marchese since his parents were short of funds at the time. 1 There he studied Latin, scholastic philosophy and theology, graduating with honors four years later. Feeling unsuited to an ecclesiastical career, however, he left the seminary and turned to journalism, a profession in which he was to exploit his biting but inoffensive wit to earn himself a place of respect as a critic and political commentator. 2

Lorenzini interrupted his apprenticeship with the *Rivista di Firenze* in 1848 to fight alongside his fellow Tuscans in the war against the Hapsburg Empire. Upon his return he was made secretary of the Tuscan Senate and shortly thereafter founded a journal of political satire, *Il Lampione*. In 1849 he was promoted to secretary first class in the provisional government of Tuscany, a post which he resigned after the restoration of Austrian rule. Not surprisingly his journal was soon suppressed. In 1853 he initiated another journal, *Lo Scaramuccia*, devoted to the dramatic arts. What little political comment he could work into its pages had to be carefully disguised to avoid the ubiquitous eye of the censors.

In April, 1859, Piedmont again declared war against Austria and Lorenzini abandoned his flourishing career—between 1850 and 1859 he had published a number of books on a wide variety of subjects—to fight as a volunteer on the plains of Lombardy. He returned after the Peace of Villafranca and was named secretary of the Prefecture of Florence.
there he remained until 1881, inaugurating a number of significant educational reforms during his term of office. in 1860 he reopened Il Lampione, picking up where he had left off eleven years before. In that same year he published a little book in defense of the unification of Italy, Il sig. Albéni ha ragione, which carried for the first time the pseudonym of Collodi—the name of a small town near Pescia where his mother had been born and where he had spent so many happy holidays as a young child.

What turned collodi to children’s books was, ironically, the pressure of gambling debts. With his creditors growing impatient and his usual income too meagre to meet their demands, he contracted to translate three of Perrault’s contes and a selection of fables from de Beaumont and d’Aulnoy. The collection appeared in 1875 as I racconti delle Fate. Soon afterwards he put his pedagogical skills to use to update a well known children’s reader, which he published in 1876 under the title of Giannettino. The success of these ventures led collodi, now over fifty years old, to write a number of other textbooks for children on reading, geometry, grammar and arithmetic. The last of these appeared in 1890; in October of that year, while preparing an outline for yet another children’s book, Collodi died suddenly and without warning.

It was during these last years of his life, in which Collodi had dedicated his talents almost exclusively to children’s literature, that the figure of Pinocchio was born. In 1881 Ferdinando Martini, an established publisher and author, began a children’s magazine called Giornale per i bambini, which had immediate success, reaching a subscription of some 25,000. Collodi, who had recently retired from public office, was among the first to be invited to write for it. His need for money and the solicitations of the editor, Guido Biagi, prompted him to overcome his habitual laziness and put pen to paper. Some time later Biagi received a packet in the mail with a manuscript bearing the title “La storia di un burattino” and the following message: “I am sending you this childishness to do with as you see fit. But if you print it, pay me well so that I have a good reason to continue with it.” In fact it took a good deal more coaxing both from the editor and from children who had grown fond of the little wooden puppet and his adventures, before Collodi agreed to see the project to the end. Two years later it appeared as a complete book whose sales quickly soared to a million copies in Italy alone.

It is difficult to know just how to classify Pinocchio in terms of literary genre. Strictly speaking we cannot treat it as a folktale since it was not handed down from tradition but rather originated in the creative mind of its author. On the other hand, it would be equally unfair simply to class it as a piece of imaginative fantasy for children, since the little wooden marionette who wanted to become a real boy has become something of a folktale tradition over the years. What is more, there is much in Collodi’s style which betrays a close affinity with the household tale and the apologue. And the problem of classification is further complicated by Collodi’s introduction of certain social and political criticisms into the text which add an element of contextual reality foreign to the folktale. In short, Pinocchio seems to fall on the borderlands between a number of literary forms and therefore lends itself to a variety of interpretations, no one of which can be taken as exhaustive.

The unusual blend of fantasy and reality which so many critics have observed in
Finocchio stems in part, I think, from Collodi's intention to recover in imagination his lost childhood. The course of his career having been run, he now seeks in his mature years to relive his past creatively and thereby to pass judgment on it, to evaluate its influence on his personality. Indeed the very fact that he chose the role of a storyteller to achieve this anamnesis supports such a view, for already as a lad Collodi was beloved for his ability to fascinate other children with his stories. His brother Ippolito tells us that "he did it so well and with such mimicry that half the world took delight and the children listened to him with their mouths agape." Moreover Collodi knew well enough that other character traits which had established themselves in his youth continued to mark him throughout life and into old age. His nephew writes that Carlo's career in government was distinguished "neither by zeal nor by punctuality nor by subordination" (P. Lorenzini, p. 986). He was an individual bordering on eccentricity, largely self-taught and always distrustful of status and rank. A true Florentine in spirit, Collodi was ever ready to mock what he saw about him, though always with affection and good humor (Biagi, p. 97, Morganti, pp. 12). These same qualities, by his own admission, were dominant in his childhood. The picture he paints of his early days at school as prankster and clown leave little doubt on the matter: eating cherries in class and stuffing the pits in his neighbor's pockets; catching flies and putting them into someone else's ears; painting figures on the trousers of the lad in front of him; and in general causing frustration to his would-be teachers. The fact that this short autobiographical sketch was done in Collodi's last years after the completion of Finocchio maintains our thesis that the book was an introspective venture. It does not take much effort to see in the puppet a mirror-image of the independent, indolent and self-reliant little Carlino who refused to listen to his elders. Yet there is something suspicious about Collodi's conclusion in that sketch, namely that he abandoned his impish ways and became a good boy, obedient and respectful towards his teachers. To some purpose imagination seems to have distorted memory so that his own life story might turn out as Pinocchio's had.

Unlike the adventures of Wendy Darling, Alice and Dorothy, the adventures of Pinocchio do not begin in the real world and progress to the fanciful. From the very outset we move in a land without time or geography. The color of Collodi's landscapes is of course unmistakably Tuscan, as Baldini has pointed out; but it is so typically depicted that it is meant to be "everywhere and nowhere." Likewise there is an apparent disregard for season and time. It snows and rains to fit the occasion; fireflies appear months ahead of their season; the muscatel grapes are ripe in the middle of winter (see Ch. 20, 21). The spoken idiom and certain details of social structure and fashion belong to the lower and middle bourgeoisie of nineteenth-century Italy. Yet the story and its principal themes belong to that universal time which its opening words recall: "Once upon a time ..." Further, unlike Alice's "wonderland," the "wonderful world" of Oz and "Neverland," there is no dream-like quality to Pinocchio's world. The fantastical elements are always kept in check by the realistic environment. The miracle of a living puppet is balanced by Pinocchio's subservience to the nature of a little boy, just as the anthropomorphisms of the animal characters must submit to the laws of nature. Even the Blue Fairy, who works some splendid feats of disappearance and transformation, is nevertheless powerless against the superior force of Pinocchio's free will and susceptible to sickness. Indeed every trace of
magic or surrealism is set against a backdrop of reality where magic is the exception and not the rule (Fanciulli and Monaci, pp. 216-218).

At the same time the book is full of factual inconsistencies of the sort frequent in fairy-tales but uncommon in authored children's books. For example, since Pinocchio does not go to school as he should be is unable to read the simple signs at the carnival, and yet somehow he succeeds in deciphering the more difficult text on the tombstone of the beautiful child. He has no ears, having escaped Geppetto's workshop before they could be added, and yet hears perfectly well. (It is conceivable, let it be noted, that Collodi may have intended a bit of irony here, because it is Pinocchio's inability to "listen" which causes him so much trouble.) Or again, Collodi seems to have forgotten that he gave his puppet a bread-crust hat and paper jacket for all the weathering that meagre wardrobe is made to suffer. That such slips are due merely to the carelessness of the author, who could after all have later corrected them, is unlikely. Even without their help the blend of the realistic and the fantastic would be dominant in the story.

Perhaps no aspect of Pinocchio is more striking than the role which animals play in the story. In the words of one commentator, it is "a veritable Noah's ark . . . with the typical apological function of betraying and translating the various dispositions of mankind" (Bernabei, p. 593; Baldini, p. 120). Crickets, rabbits, dogs, apes, donkeys, birds and fish of various sorts; not to mention the fox, the cat, the eel, the snake, the snail, the fire-fly, the crab, the marmot, the calf and the little goat—all these characters and more figure in the world of Pinocchio as naturally and unpretentiously as if they were human. It may be the case that by means of such animal projections the child is led to recognize traits of personality and signs of virtue and vice which are as yet indistinguishable to him, or at least only vaguely discernible, in the adult world about him. If this is so, then from the very outset Pinocchio is a didactic venture, and the blend of fantasy and reality serves the higher purposes of a moral fable.

If Pinocchio is a fable in narrative, it seems to be one with a fundamentally conflicting moral to it, and this for reasons again of the mixture of fantasy and reality. The lesson for children is clear and forthright. Hardly is Pinocchio taught to walk before he runs away in disobedience; as a result he burns his feet and has to be repaired. Repentance is short-lived, however, and he takes off self-reliantly again and again, piling up a history of lies and broken promises, and involving himself with shady characters who promise to fulfill all his desires without his having to go to school or do a stitch of work. In consequence of his misdeeds Pinocchio is nearly used for firewood, is hung by the neck on an oak tree, finds his nose grown to immense proportions, loses his money to the fox and the cat and goes to prison, is caught in a trap and tied up as a watchdog, is forced to beg for food, spends a second term in jail, is almost fried as a fish in a pan, is transformed into a donkey, is sold to a circus and then to a man who decides to make a drum of his hide after drowning him, and is finally swallowed by the great shark. The moral is obvious: evil comes to those who disobey their elders. "Woe to little boys who rebel against their parents . . . They'll come to no good in this world and sooner or later will live to regret their actions bitterly." Both the episodic style of the moral and the underlying metaphysic (virtue rewards, vice punishes) are close to the thought-patterns of the young child. It is, as Chesterton has
wisely noted in his autobiography, the most spontaneously appealing world to the child who knows too little of hypocrisy and cunning to reject such moralizing. And perhaps the appeal of *Pinocchio* to older generations simply indicates a desire to return to that purity of ideals which one once enjoyed as a child at play in imagination.

Together with this unambiguous advice to children to obey authority we find Collodi's lighthearted but subtler mockery of civil authority. Three times it happens that innocent parties are cast into prison: Geppetto for chasing after Pinocchio, Pinocchio for being robbed of his money and again later for staying to help a wounded friend. In the town of Fools' Trap, the judge is a giant gorilla wearing gold-rimmed glasses without lenses and his police are great bulldogs. When a general amnesty is proclaimed by the mayor, Pinocchio manages to escape prison with the others only by admitting that he is a criminal, since the jailer wants to keep him locked up because of his innocence. Such parody works deceptively to undermine trust in lawful authority on the part of the young child, and hence stands in contradiction to the surface moral of the story. More importantly, it seems to suggest that in the real world there is no justice; that only in the world of fantasy does good come of good, evil of evil. On our earlier hypothesis this tension can be traced back to Collodi's intention to recapture his youth and its ideals as a means of reflecting on his past life with its political concerns. But the conflict is not Collodi's own; it is a paradigm of our very human condition.

We are compelled, therefore, to see in Pinocchio more than merely the ghost-image of Collodi. In the same way that Pinocchio learns the harsh truths of life through experience by leaving his father-creator behind and venturing out into the world alone, so also does he escape the control of Collodi himself. It is a phenomenon familiar to the writer. John Fowles, for example, pauses in Chapter 13 of his brilliant study of Victorian England, *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, to reflect on the autonomy his characters had achieved: “Perhaps you suppose that a novelist has only to pull the right strings and his puppets will behave in a lifelike manner .... It is only when our characters and events begin to disobey us that they begin to live.” In the case of Pinocchio this lifelikeness means, however, not the concretization of an individual figure, but rather his universalization. Pinocchio represents man, *homo viator*. In the suggestive phrase of Benedetto Croce, “The wood of which Pinocchio is carved is our very own humanity.” This insight needs to be understood in turn on two levels.

On the first level, Pinocchio appears to us, in the words of one commentator, as “the personification of our very own natural tendencies” (Bernabei, p. 595; cf. Morganti, pp. 26, 29) and, more importantly, as the personification of a life-myth which brings those tendencies into harmony one with another. This Collodi achieves by depicting Pinocchio's progress as a quasi-Socratic version of the way to virtue. He learns the lessons of life not from abstract classroom theories, but from direct experience, the frequent repetition of which ends in true conversion. His latent sentiments of loyalty and altruism surface only as he slowly learns the need to trim his frenzied passions for independence and the sweet life. He is victimized by wicked and evil men not because of any real wickedness on his own part, but because of ignorance; and he disobeys his elders since he does not yet know any better. In short, Pinocchio's travels lead him from an ignorance of ignorance to a
knowledge of ignorance and thence to a self-conscious trust in the wisdom of age and tradition. In contrast to the cat and the fox whose hypocritical masquerade brings them finally to misfortune, Pinocchio's innocence is educated by his adventures in a world (unlike that of Voltaire's *Candide*) where happiness is ultimately guaranteed to the pure of heart.

Of all the animals who assist in Pinocchio's self-education, the Talking Cricket merits special attention. As every schoolboy knows, he represents "conscience," the wee inner voice of warning, the bond between law and responsibility. At their first encounter Pinocchio falls into a rage with the "patient little philosopher" and flattens him to the wall with a wooden hammer from Geppetto's workbench. But the Cricket cannot be so easily disposed of and his ghost appears later in the story to haunt Pinocchio, though his advice is again ignored. Still later the Cricket is called in by the Blue Fairy for his opinion on the ailing puppet, whether he be dead or alive. And here, true to his function as a *psychic censor*, he refuses to say anything about Pinocchio's physical well being, but simply denounces him as a disobedient little rogue who is going to be the death of his good father by and by. It is only at their final meeting that Pinocchio addresses him as "my dear little Cricket" and follows his counsel. Thus Collodi embodies in the figure of the Talking Cricket the imperative to trust in those inner promptings of the mind which curtail and yet finally protect one's independence.

Morganti summarizes the paradigmatic role of Pinocchio on what I have called this first level simply and accurately: "Collodi gives a place of value to the basic human goodness of the child and to his or her right to self-determination in the process of education. To adults, the child seems but a puppet . . . without a will, who must follow blindly the will of his educators."

The conflict in the moral of _Pinocchio_ which was pointed up earlier, therefore, cloaks a deeper irony in the book. It is not merely the case that children seem to be required to have faith in an older generation which often turns out to be corrupt; but also that true maturity is a function of individual insight which cannot be learned except through personal experience and reflection. Likewise, when Collodi concludes his sketch of school memories with the advice that students should obey their teachers, we can only presume that he is writing tongue-in-cheek, perhaps somewhat fearful of enunciating his own life-myth into a general principle. In _Pinocchio_ its signs are more apparent, though many have overlooked them and consequently have not understood the reasons (however mistaken) for which the book was condemned as immoral (Morganti, pp. 25,50f).

Pinocchio stands before us as a reflection of our human condition on another level—one is tempted to say a "deeper" level to stress its greater distance from consciousness, though not necessarily to imply a greater importance as well—which complements and balances the level of moral self-affirmation. To appreciate this we may consider the figure of the Blue Fairy, who can serve as a sort of psychopomp into the nether world of primordial, archetypal images. To ignore her, or to dismiss her as a mere *dea ex machina* who directs the fate of Pinocchio to a happy ending in typical fairytale fashion, is in my view radically mistaken and a distortion of the textual evidence of Collodi's finished tale.

The Blue Fairy, it will be remembered, first makes her appearance as a beautiful child with blue hair who lives in the mysterious House of the Dead, where she awaits the funeral
bier to carry her off. She speaks without moving her lips and watches helplessly as the murderers abduct Pinocchio. In the following episode we discover that the beautiful child is really a Fairy who has lived in the woods for a thousand years and commands an assembly of animals to do her bidding. It is she who makes Pinocchio's nose to grow, in order to teach him a lesson about telling lies. Then, having grown fond of him, offers the proposition: "If you want to stay with me, you can be my little brother and I your good little sister." Pinocchio agrees but only on condition that he can be with his father as well. The Fairy explains that she has already made arrangements for Geppetto to join them; and that if Pinocchio is really anxious to meet him, he need only take the path through the forest and he will find him on his way. Of course, things turn out otherwise; and when Pinocchio eventually returns to look for the Fairy he finds only a tombstone whose epitaph tells him that she died meantime of sorrow, abandoned by her little brother Pinocchio. Shortly thereafter he encounters the Fairy again, this time mysteriously grown into a good peasant woman. At first she tries to hide her identity, but when she sees the depth of his affection for her, reveals to him that whereas she had been his little sister previously, now she is "a woman who could almost be your mother." Whereupon Pinocchio begins to call her "mamma." His mischievous ways part them a third time, after which he returns with his usual fervent purpose of amendment. But before long Pinocchio's foolheartedness gets him in further trouble, and this time their separation is final. He sees her for the last time, though only for a brief moment, in the audience of a circus where he is performing as a donkey. She appears later in the form of a beautiful little goat with blue-colored wool who tries, in vain, to save him from the giant shark. The next news that comes to Pinocchio is that she is lying sick in bed, "gravely ill, struck down by a thousand misfortunes and without so much as enough to buy a crumb of bread." In his grief he vows to work double-time to help her, to which purpose he stays up half the night at work. When he falls asleep the Fairy appears to him in a dream and tells him that as a reward for his goodness she is going to make him a real boy. And with this miracle the adventures of Pinocchio come to a close.

Now there can be little doubt about the central role which the Blue Fairy enjoys in Pinocchio's life-story. As soon as he meets the beautiful child, his aimless wanderings begin to have an object: he wants to be with her. She proves inspiration and goal enough temporarily to conquer his innate distaste for school and even to forget about his father. For it is she who promises to make him a real boy, something Geppetto could not do. As Collodi himself suggests, she is something like a little sister; or later, something like a mother. More than that he does not seem to know. Indeed one feels that as the story progresses, the author does little more than record the activities of the Blue Fairy, who spontaneously suggests the part she will play in Pinocchio's process of development.

At this point we are obliged further to clarify our original hypothesis and to see Pinocchio as an involuntary autobiography which covers not only Collodi's childhood and his public career, but his private adult life as well. He never married, though it seems he sired a "secret" daughter (Morganti, p. 16), who would thus have been, for all practical purposes of reputation, "dead" like the beautiful child who could not communicate by word of mouth. But note the immediate transformation which the symbol undergoes once it has been introduced into the story. The child returns Pinocchio from the threat of death
which he had incurred by choking on the money he refused to give up; and then she teaches him a lesson about lies, those with short legs (which do not carry one very far) and those with long noses (which are apparent for all to see). The connection with Collodi’s gambling habits and the daughter he tried to keep hidden by deceit could not be clearer. The symbol becomes his savior both financially (the writing of the story provided him with an income) and psychologically (by reflecting him to himself).

The transformation continues and the child soon becomes the idealization of Collodi’s own mother, for whom his respect seems to have been constant and unfailing, as hers had been for him. The link between the images of child and mother can only be guessed at. Perhaps, because rumor has left us little or no information about the mother of Collodi’s daughter, it is the filial love—in the one case given, in the other received—which was more important to him than matrimonial love. In any event, the final import of the story is clear: Geppetto gives Pinocchio his body, but the puppet must search elsewhere for his soul, which he eventually finds in the healing power of a mother’s love.

Here again Pinocchio as the story of man-writ-small rises to the stature of man-writ-large. Willy-nilly Collodi has fallen into a world of symbols whose psychic roots touch more than the personal history which occasioned them in the first instance, and even more than the typical human problems of ethical maturation considered earlier. In a word, Pinocchio has now to be understood as archetype of the motherless child.

Pinocchio’s own description of the Blue Fairy—“She is my mamma, who is like all those good mothers who love their children deeply and never lose sight of them . . .”—tells only half the tale. Bernabei intimates the double entendre by referring to her description as the Blue Fairy: the color of her hair makes her as unmistakable to the puppet as each mother is to her children; but it is also the color of heaven, the seat of Providence, the mother of all. Thus Bernabei finds it natural that she disappears at the end of the story “since the rightful place of that mother is in heaven rather than on earth” (p. 599; Fanciulli and Monaci-Guidotti, p. 220). The point is well taken, though others less familiar with feminine forms of the divinity in the history of religions and myth, and in particular within the Judaeo-Christian tradition, might object to the inference.

To characterize Pinocchio mythologically as an archetypal motherless child is to classify his adventures psychologically as a quest for that which can transform a man from within, heal his divided self, and restore him to a state of primordial wholeness. For as the ego emerges from its embryonic identity with the mother’s womb, it finds itself in a state of ambivalence. On the one hand the expansion of consciousness and the affirmation of autonomy are highly desirable; on the other, the comforts of unconsciousness and the bliss of ignorance are less threatening. Pinocchio’s search for a mother is a symbol of this fundamental dividedness. At one moment we see him stubbornly following his own will in deliberate disobedience of the Blue Fairy; at the next, eschewing all temptation to freedom in a frantic flight to her protecting arms. He is a puppet of contrary forces not yet integrated into his nascent ego. It is only after his final adventure with the giant shark, in which he successfully demonstrates mastery over himself, that Pinocchio assumes the form of a hero and the Blue Fairy disappears as an external reality. He ceases to be a puppet and becomes a real boy; she ceases to be a projection and becomes a dream-figure of the scintilla divinitatis dwelling within. The solution to the moral conflict met on the first level is therefore confirmed here on the second: personal
consciousness and social obligation are harmonized through self-reflection, through union with but not absorption into the place of one's origins, the Great Mother, the realm of the unconscious.

Numerous other images and motifs in Pinocchio suggest similar mythological and psychological parallels which would add support to this interpretation of the tale. I would like briefly to consider two of them by way of illustration.

Let us first look at the unusual circumstances surrounding Pinocchio’s birth. Master Cherry the carpenter wants to make a table-leg from an ordinary piece of wood, when he hears a voice crying out from it in protest. “Can it be that someone is hidden inside?” he asks himself, and hastens over to the house of his friend Geppetto, who has coincidentally been dreaming up a plan to make a puppet of wood and travel about with it to earn a living. Cherry parts with his log and Geppetto sets to work to carve himself a little marionette, with no further objections from the wood.

The scene immediately brings to mind Michelangelo’s neo-Platonic concetto theory of art. According to this theory the true artist is one who discovers. He sees in a block of stone, for instance, an inner form which is hidden to the non-artist. His handiwork consists merely in chipping away what is extraneous in order that that form become visible to all. This theory is incarnated in Michelangelo’s famous Prigioni in Florence’s Academy of Fine Arts, figures struggling to get free of the rock which seems to hold them fast. This is also the image which Collodi creates—perhaps wittingly, being a Florentine himself and well acquainted with the art and theories of Michelangelo—in having the puppet in potentia (i.e. in a state of relative unconsciousness) cry out from a simple piece of wood, “a log like all the rest.” From the very outset, then, the principle of self-realization, according to which everything must develop after its own ideal, not as a product of environmental tools and forces but as a project of consciously exercised free will, is articulated in mythopoetic imagery.

The creation of man out of wood is a theme found in a number of mythical traditions. For example, we read in the Popul Vuh of the Quiche tribes of southern Guatemala of the gods first creating man out of clay and, finding them blind and stupid, sending a flood to destroy them. Next they carved manikins out of wood; but these creatures had no heart, lacked insight and were forgetful of their creators. They too were destroyed by flood. And so on, until a satisfactory man was made. The parallel is striking (all the more so in that it is nearly impossible that Collodi could have known of it) and shows us the other side of the coin to Pinocchio’s creation.

Both in Pinocchio and in the Quiche myth the relationship between creature and creator is so symbolized as to accentuate a broken rapport and its eventual restoration. If the wooden manikins turn out contrary to the expectations of the gods, so does Pinocchio show his independence in a manner which brings grief to his poor father. And just as the gods need to experiment with the work of creation in order to achieve success, so does Collodi, dissatisfied with what he has made of his own life, need to recreate himself in the figure of Pinocchio, who in turn has to be cast aside like dead wood to give way to a real boy. In each case the creature, intended as a reflection of its creator’s best qualities, reveals itself rather as a distortion. Its freedom, or capacity for self-formation, frustrates the plans
of the gods and requires the redemptive work of a new creation. In other words, if we may dissolve the relationship between Pinocchio and Geppetto into psychological language, man must acknowledge the relativity of consciousness vis-à-vis the accumulated wisdom of tradition if he is to achieve true self-realization; and conversely the keepers of tradition must beware fashioning a society which does not respect the essential freedoms of its individual members.

Secondly, let us consider the figure of the giant shark who swallows first Geppetto and then Pinocchio. Geppetto, we recall, has set off in a little skiff to look for his son. Meanwhile Pinocchio has nearly succeeded in catching his father up, but arrives at the seashore only in time to see him hopelessly out to sea. He dives in after him and swims to exhaustion until the waves cast him ashore on a sandy island beach. When he awakens a friendly dolphin tells him of the terrible shark who roams these waters and who has probably swallowed good Geppetto. Much later in the story, Pinocchio, now a donkey, is thrown into the sea to be drowned, but miraculously emerges his former self. “It must have been the sea water,” he exclaims. “The sea works such extraordinary changes.” (Later he tells how the Blue Fairy had sent a school of fish to eat away his donkey’s flesh and set him free again.) Pinocchio then swims away to escape the farmer who had purchased him as a donkey, and is soon swallowed by the sea monster, “the Attila of fish and fishermen.” When he awakens from the shock he finds himself in “a darkness so black and thick that it seemed to him that he had been dipped head first into an inkwell.” Seeing a faint light in the distance, Pinocchio follows it and finds his father, who had been living in the shark for two years. That night they escape through the open mouth of the shark who sleeps with his jaws ajar because he suffers from asthma and heart murmurs. Lifting Geppetto onto his shoulders, Pinocchio swims ashore, with some final help from a passing tuna. He then labors day and night for five months to support his failing father, at the end of which time he becomes a real boy and Geppetto is restored to good health.

The religious and mythical motifs at work here are immediately evident to the reader. Pinocchio’s adventure with the giant shark calls to mind stories like that of the Hebrew prophet Jonah or the Algonquin warrior Hiawatha, both swallowed by sea monsters from whose bowels they emerge as heroes. This same motif is re-enacted ritually, with remarkable similarity of detail, among certain New Guinea tribes in their ceremonies of initiation. In addition various structural parallels are to be found in baptismal and penitential rites from a wide variety of religious traditions too numerous to mention. Pinocchio’s transformation into a real boy takes the form of a double cleansing. First, the outer animal shell, the weaknesses of the flesh, is eaten away by a school of fishes. Second, the “old man” is devoured by the sea monster and is replaced by a “new man” spiritually reborn. In each instance the change occurs through the dark forces which dwell beneath the waters, the realm where the Blue Fairy is in command. It is she who sends the fish and who lures Pinocchio into the mouth of the giant shark in sirenic fashion by appearing as a little goat on a white rock. In other words, the imagery must be seen as a further elaboration of Pinocchio’s archetypal character. By confronting the unconscious the ego is confirmed and enabled to embrace social tradition and personal freedom in one saving act of self-realization. Thus the whole
magic lantern of adventures is swept up into this one final heroic gesture of Pinocchio carrying the aged Geppetto on his back across the sea to dry land.

If we are moved and enchanted by the story of Pinocchio it can only be in virtue of some underlying affinity with the material upon which the author has drawn for his tale. In struggling to recover his lost childhood through the symbols of imagination, Collodi refracts the reader’s gaze inwards to the often faint and nearly imperceptible truths of his own nature. This process takes three forms, as we have seen. First, it plays fantasy against reality, giving us an insight into the loss of idealism through continued contact with the bitter truth of man’s injustice to man. Second, it plays the deeds of desire against the deeds of duty, giving us an insight into the contrary forces out of which responsible self-realization is forged. And third, it plays security against transformation, which gives an insight into man’s need to yoke himself to a rhythm transcending the superficialities of the present moment. We are all of us, motherless children, whose task is to integrate our becoming with our origins.

*Several weeks after my text was written, Glauco Gambon’s “Pinocchio and the Problem of Children’s Literature” (published in this journal, Vol.2, 1973, pp. 50-60) came into my hands. If I understand Dr. Gambon correctly, I can only register amazement that our distinct points of view have yielded such similar conclusions. The question of literary genre which I have handled summarily he deals with at length; and most of the psychological themes which I have tried to describe in detail he condenses marvellously en passant.

Footnotes

1 This information is provided by Carlo’s nephew, Paolo Lorenzini, who incidentally denies the rumor that it was Carlo’s mother who made the decision to place him in the seminary (“Il Collodi,” La Lettura, November 1930, p. 985).

2 Unless otherwise indicated, the remainder of the biographical data was drawn from the following sources: Torindo Morganti, Carlo Collodi (Florence: Marzocco-Bemporad, 1952); Luigi Santucci, Collodi (Brescia: La Scuola, 1961); G. Fanciulli and E. Monaci, La letteratura per l’infanzia (Turin: S.E.I., 1949), pp. 209-21.

3 The best of his journalistic writings have been collected by Giuseppe Rigutini in two volumes, Note Gai e Divagazioni critico-umoristiche (Florence: Bemporad, 1892).

4 Cf. Guido Biagi, Passatisti (Florence: La Voce, 1923), pp. 112-14.

5 Numerous “sequels” to the story appeared later, including one by Collodi’s nephew Paolo, though none of them ever achieved the renown of the original Pinocchio. Morganti lists the most important in Italian (p. 44). The first English edition, translated by M. A. Murray, appeared in 1892 and remains the best in print. Due to certain inadequacies and omissions, however, I have provided my own translations throughout this essay.

7 P. Lorenzini, pp. 985-6. Note also that Collodi makes Pinocchio a confirmed story-teller who recounts his adventures, though not always very accurately, to any willing listener.

8 Antonio Baldini, Fine Ottocento (Florence: Le Monnier, 1947), pp. 120f. Baldini's theory, developed in his essay "La ragion politica di 'Pinocchio',' is that Collodi wanted to create a utopic Tuscany, cleansed of all moral and political strife, an ideal for which he had long struggled as a journalist (pp. 118f, 122-124). That Collodi had such visions is possible, even likely; but that he was expressing them in Pinocchio is a notion that overlooks too much of the non-political character of the book.


11 Amerindo Cammilli, who edited the critical edition of Pinocchio (Florence: Sansoni, 1946), notes in his introduction nearly twenty such inconsistencies.

12 To my knowledge, Santucci has been the only commentator to sense this deeper psychological significance of these projections. See his La letteratura infantile (Milan: Fabbri, 1958), p. 32; and his Collodi, p. 54.

13 The Autobiography of G. K. Chesterton (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1936), p. 40. It is this truth which the late Professor Tolkien has raised to epic proportions in The Lord of the Rings.

14 It is difficult to find an English equivalent to the Italian Acciappacitrulli. Literally it means "where the innocent (both legally and mentally) are caught red-handed."

15 "Pinocchio," La letteratura della nuova Italia (Bari: Laterza, 1939), Vol. V.

16 Morganti, p. 25. This I also take to be the reason for Pietro Mignosi's conclusion that Pinocchio represents in children's literature what Kant's Critique of Practical Reason does in the literature of philosophy, "Il pregiudizio della letteratura per l'infanzia," L'educazione nazionale 6:2 (October 1924), pp. 25-26. Cf. A. Michieli, Commento a Pinocchio (Turin: Bocca, 1933), pp. 156-158.

17 It is interesting that Collodi is reported by Ermenegildo Pistelli to have forgotten whether or not he wrote the concluding sentence to Pinocchio ("What a fool I was when I was a puppet... and how happy I am now that I have become a real little boy!"). Pistelli suggests that these words may have been added by the editor, Biagi, at the suggestion of Felice Paggi, general editor of all children's literature dealing with moral themes. See Pistelli, Eroi, uomini e ragazzi (Florence: Sansoni, 1927), p. 250.

18 This is, for example, the view of Santucci (pp. 53, 59), who stresses its concreteness and lack of similarity with the fairies of Perrault. Morganti (p. 39) also denies the Blue Fairy any symbolic value.

19 Cf. P. Lorenzini, p. 986. I have not been able to determine the date of her death, in connection with his assumption of "Collodi" as a pen-name in 1860.

An almost identical version of the same creation myth is found among the Dyaks of Borneo (9.174-175).

22. P. Bargellini has argued that the main characters of the story can best be understood in terms of Christian theology: Geppetto = God; Pinocchio = man; the Blue Fairy = the Virgin Mary. The movement of the story is then seen to progress along the lines of salvation history: fall, covenant, messianic hopes, redemption, resurrection. La verità di Pinocchio (Brescia: Morcelliana, 1942).

Such a theory is not without its supporting evidence, both in the grander themes of the book and in certain specific details. It seems more likely, however, that Collodi has fallen into a mythopoetic genre more basic than that of Christian theology. Then too, Collodi himself was not a church-going Catholic and even showed certain signs of outright impiety on occasion, a fact which caused his mother not a little grief (see P. Lorenzini, p. 986). This should not lead us to conclude as Michieli has (pp. 158f) that the absence of deliberate religious beliefs renders Pinocchio somehow imperfect and incomplete.

23. Walt Disney's famous animation of Pinocchio (probably the most successful of all the folktales and children's stories he has brought to the screen) depicts the giant shark as a whale named Monstro, thus recalling the widespread mistranslation of the biblical sea monster (tannin) in the story of Jonah. The escape scene in the Disney version is also of great interest. Pinocchio builds a fire which produces so much smoke that Monstro is forced to cough up his prisoners. An exact parallel occurs in a Maori myth where the hero, Nganaoa, finds his parents in the belly of a whale and builds a fire to set them free. Mythology of All Races, 9.69. See also Stith Thompson, Motif-Index of Folk-Literature (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1966), F.911.4.
