

The Fabulous Journeys of Alice and Pinocchio: Exploring Their Parallel Worlds. By Laura Tosi with Peter Hunt. McFarland, 2018.

Reviewed by Jan Susina

Books speak to other books, both consciously and unconsciously. I frequently pair the reading of texts whose themes or plots overlap: Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* and Mark Twain's *Tom Sawyer*; Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and L. Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*; and Heinrich Hoffmann's *Struwwelpeter* and Roald Dahl's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. But, although I often include both *Alice* and Carlo Collodi's *Pinocchio* in a

history of children's literature course, it has never occurred to me to pair these two novels. After reading Laura Tosi's study that is intended to be "a critical narrative and a parallel reading of two classics, which records mutual interests and avenues of exploration between and across diverse linguistic, historical, and national borders of England and Italy" (2), such a pairing now appears obvious to me.

The most useful aspects of this study lie in Tosi's careful examination of *Pinocchio*, drawing upon her own scholarship as well as that of other Italian scholars not previously translated into English. As an Italian children's literature scholar, Tosi spends about sixty percent of the book examining *Pinocchio* and the other forty percent focusing on *Alice*. While Peter Hunt's name also appears in the title, he contributes just two short sections to this volume—the first in chapter 2, detailing how *Alice* and *Pinocchio* function as gendered children's books, and the second in chapter 4, discussing the use of fairies by Carroll, Collodi, George MacDonald, and Charles Kingsley—and in the Appendix his own quirky contemporary fairy tale, "The Strange Meeting in Wonder-Tuscany," in which he imagines the meeting of these two famous protagonists.

Tosi acknowledges that *Alice* and *Pinocchio* differ in many ways, including their literary sources, authorial intentions, and the widely differing political and cultural backgrounds of the authors, yet she makes compelling claims for similarities between the two distinctive texts. Both books were written by eccentric bachelors who



published under pen names, and both were intended for a dual audience of children and adults. Building on the work of Ann Lucas Lawson, who has previously written on the similar nature of the authors' biographies, their frequent use of talking animals, and the pivotal use of courtroom scenes, Tosi argues that the books are also similar in their structure and composition: both are episodic wanderings of a protagonist who is confronted by a series of odd and somewhat threatening creatures during their travels. Curiously, both authors constructed the stories in two distinct sections. While Carroll intended *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and its sequel *Through the Looking-Glass* to be separate texts, the strong interlocking and mirroring of characters and episodes between the two volumes has led many publishers and makers of film adaptations to blend them into a single text. Similarly, Collodi produced *Pinocchio* in two distinct stages. *Pinocchio I*, initially published in the children's magazine *Giornale dei bambini* in 1881, originally ended with what is now chapter 15, which features the protagonist's gruesome death. At the request of the magazine's readers, *Pinocchio II* begins with his revival and chronicles his continuing struggle to become a real boy.

Both texts are strongly influenced by the fairy tale and fantasy tradition. In addition, each is lauded as a national literary icon; *Alice* is considered stereotypically British and *Pinocchio* is viewed as an embodiment of Italian culture. Both texts are highly theatrical in nature, with *Alice* being influenced by the British pantomime

tradition and *Pinocchio* growing out of the world of puppetry. Alice and Pinocchio experience unexpected and grotesque body changes; after eating, Alice grows either too tall or too short for her environment and experiences an elongated neck, while Pinocchio is famous for his nose that grows when he tells lies. Metamorphosis occurs in both books, with the Duchess's baby transformed into a pig in Alice's arms, and Pinocchio and Candlewick transformed into donkeys. Frequently translated, the books have transcended their national contexts to become part of the global canon of children's literature, aided by the popular but significantly altered film versions produced by Walt Disney.

Tosi acknowledges, however, that even though these two books share similarities, there are distinct differences between them. The protagonists represent strikingly different social spheres; Alice is part of the comfortable upper-middle-class environment of Victorian Oxford, while Pinocchio reflects the reality of poor children begging in Italian streets. *Pinocchio* is a cautionary tale that emphasizes the importance of education, the need for a strong work ethic, and the dangers of bad companions. Pinocchio is hounded by the Talking Cricket and the Blue Fairy, who are constantly plying him with advice. But while Alice's narrative features numerous characters who offer her advice or give her lessons (at one point she complains, "How the creatures order one about and make one repeat lessons! . . . I might just as well be at school at once" [91]), she is able to rebuff and discount their warnings without punishment. Un-

like Collodi, Carroll did not intend to teach his readers, insisting that *Alice* was simply nonsense that offered no lessons. Carroll frequently satirizes educational practices such as rote memorization, but Tosi observes that Alice, unlike Pinocchio, has always had access to books and education and is in the comfortable position of being able to poke fun at excesses of schooling. Alice is bored with her sister's book that has no illustrations, while Geppetto pawns his coat so that Pinocchio can have a spelling book. *Pinocchio* warns poor boys that without education they will become beasts of burden, kidnapped and exploited by uncaring adults. While Carroll can question the value of industriousness in his parody of Isaac Watts, Collodi provides a nightmare version of what life will become for a poor child who lacks an education.

Further, the texts differ in how they treat physical discomfort and suffering. While the *Alice* books are full of death jokes, no character actually dies; *Pinocchio* features the murder of the Talking Cricket and the painful death of Lampwick. And while both protagonists exhibit a fondness for food, Alice is simply impulsive or greedy, but Pinocchio is often at the point of starvation. Tosi notes that no one gives food freely in *Pinocchio* and that the word "hunger" is used thirty-seven times (89).

Despite the similarities that Tosi identifies between the two novels, then, I remain struck by how different they are in tone and intention. It seems that *Pinocchio* has more in common with Kingsley's overly didactic *The Water-Babies* than with *Alice*. Even Carroll's nightmare version of

Through the Looking-Glass seems tame compared to the torments and suffering endured by Pinocchio.

The final two chapters of *Fabulous Journeys* seem tangential to the examination of the parallel development of the national self-images found in these two books, and how these national characters have transcended their national and cultural contexts to become international children's texts. It is interesting that while *Alice* was quick to become a popular and celebrated children's text, *Pinocchio* was much slower in acquiring literary status, both within and outside of Italy. It wasn't until the 1920s that *Pinocchio* began to attract critical attention from Italian scholars. Tosi explores the various literary afterlives of both *Alice* and *Pinocchio* as they have been reimagined as postmodern texts for adults. She examines in detail how both characters appear in the fiction of Angela Carter and Robert Coover. While *Pinocchio* is recognized by many contemporary writers as a posthuman icon, the *Alice* books have become a fundamental feature of postmodern fiction. The various literary afterlives of these two celebrated nineteenth-century books would be an appropriate way to conclude this study; instead, Tosi's final chapter takes an unexpected turn and is an exploration of school stories and the development of citizenship. After previously exploring how education functions in both *Pinocchio* and *Alice*, she curiously concludes with an examination of the school stories of Thomas Hughes and Edmondo De Amicis and the adventure stories of George Henty and Emilio Salgari.

This parallel reading of *Alice* and *Pinocchio* makes clear some striking similarities between these two landmark texts of children's literature. But Tosi shows that while both characters embark on fabulous journeys, they are traveling on very different paths and, in the end, have very different stories to tell.

Work Cited

Carroll, Lewis. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass*. Edited by Hugh Haughton, Penguin, 1998.

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