

**Pinocchio's Social Conscience:  
Examining Work and Play in Childhood and Society**

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Pinocchio has broad social implications that may not be picked up on by young readers, and are entirely lost on those who have only seen the film. It really is a tale of great literary value, whose commercialization and adaptation into numerous films and television shows have diluted the story into little more than a trite family tale. Disney's film, while severely shortened from the original, is by far the most famous and is also perhaps the best. The theme of defining what is good for a growing society is so big that it bleeds into all the other, more apparent themes of the work, which include defining truth and conscience, childhood, play, and work. One can imagine all these themes grouped together like Chinese boxes—one thematic layer enveloping the next.

## **The works' composition**

The serial nature of the work brings about a number of inconsistencies in character and plot, which complicate its message. Collodi originally wrote his tale as a short series for a children's periodical. It ended with Pinocchio's death by hanging at the hands of the assassins. The puppet and his tale became so popular, however, that Collodi's readers demanded a continuation of the tale. After almost a year, the author continued the tale where he left off, writing in the same serial style. He faced a few problems; most notably he had to bring his presumably dead puppet back to life. Then, on a regular basis he had to create exciting chapters of this puppet's more and more incredible misadventures.

Because of this serial nature, the book is composed as a series of episodes, and like any episodic work; its plot could go on forever. Collodi did develop an overarching plot during his hiatus from the work, but he apparently forgot a few details about the work at the same time. Consequently, a few details do not make much sense. For

instance, the Talking Cricket, who is killed by Pinocchio in the beginning of the book and comes back as a ghost in the middle, is alive and well at the end. Furthermore, the serial nature disrupts Pinocchio's linear development from immature puppet to mature young man. Instead of smoothly riding a clearly defined character arc, the protagonist rambles on through a repeated cycle of success and setback, often seeming unchanged and unenlightened by his past experiences.

After completion, Pinocchio was soon compiled into a very popular children's book that was translated into many languages and sold around the world. The two main types of English translations that were freely available in the United States no doubt influenced Disney and his team. About half of the Pinocchio translations in circulation were as faithful as possible to the source material. The other half severely altered the tone of the tale in one of two ways. Some editions stressed the didactic element to ludicrous extremes. They depicted Pinocchio as a naughty boy who earns punished because he cannot mend his ways. Many schools used these adaptations to impart lessons about good behavior to their students. Some eliminated Pinocchio's final reward, transformation into a man, and even had him die in the end, just as in Collodi's original series. The other, later series of English translations, dating from the early 1900's, totally submerged the didactic element. Pinocchio was stripped of his waywardness; Geppetto was a kind and gentle man who simply wanted a son. Instead of the adventures of a spirited but misguided puppet, it became the story of an innocent yet wayward boy trying to find his way back to his father. This more saccharine version of the tale was adapted into popular musicals and plays, which undoubtedly Disney viewed before planning his film.

Disney's Pinocchio, as a film marketed toward children, prioritizes escapism and its own marketability. Because of length considerations, the adaptation boils Pinocchio's story to three essential episodes. The first episode is a conflation of the assassins and Fire-Eater's puppet show; the second is a more vivid telling of the Funland episode; and the third is an enlargement of Geppetto's rescue from the belly of a shark, now Monstro the whale. The plot simplification discards many of Collodi's points about economics and society. It is not entirely fair, however, to chastise Disney's team for missing crucial points about the work. Not only is adaptation a tricky affair—transforming a complicated book to an 86 minute movie requires massive cutting, after all—Disney was trying to do something never before attempted with film.

Pinocchio is only the second full-length animated feature. Disney could have recreated his success with Snow White, but he decided to push the genre of the animated feature film into unknown territory in order to legitimate the art form. Instead of adapting an innocuous fairy tale, he chose to take on a literary work, one that has only gained respect and admiration since its incarnation. He also wanted to stretch animation's visual style. As a result, technical innovation became a priority. Many of his compositions, notably the complex and convincing underwater sequence, are there to dazzle the eye and to display technical prowess. In terms of style, use of color, and complexity of composition (the sheer number of moving objects on screen), this film is light years beyond Snow White. It loses none of its visual impact today, even in comparison to the new, CGI-aided visual masterpieces like Beauty and the Beast and Tarzan.

Most children these days get their primary or only exposure to Pinocchio through this film and carry both fond memories of its dreamlike quality and frightful memories of Pleasure Island and Pinocchio's growing nose. Adults such as myself, watching this film again after a number of years, find sometimes disturbing undertones about the nature of childhood and society and an unfortunate lack of faithfulness to the source material. Still, however, we can appreciate the film as an art object, a dazzling display of animation, filmmaking, storytelling, ambition, and ingenuity.

## **The nature of work**

The story of a penniless schoolboy puppet literally yawning with hunger gives Collodi's didactic tale an element of social commentary on economic despair. At the tale's writing, Italy was a newly united country struggling with social and economic inequities. Work is so vital to the lives of Collodi's characters because many Italians are starving, living in squalor, or are economically disenfranchised. A number of economic transactions fuel the book's plot. First of all, Pinocchio sells his spelling book for admittance to the puppet show. Soon thereafter, Fire-Eater gives Pinocchio five gold coins after sparing his life. Next, Pinocchio purchases an elaborate meal for the Fox and the Cat, who persuade him to sow his money in a field, while eating next to nothing himself. Along with all the episodes involving starvation, begging, theft, and earning an honest living, thanks to Pinocchio's staggering poverty, these economic transactions bear great weight. Getting an education is Pinocchio's most important form of work. Since Geppetto probably could not afford schooling in the first place, Pinocchio's evasion of school and sale of his book especially damning. It takes the magical mother, the Blue Fairy, to discipline the boy and get him to school. That the plucky puppet excels is not

just an example of filling idle hands to prevent the Devil's work, but a class commentary saying that the underprivileged underclass are just as intelligent as the aristocrats, and are equally deserving of education and social welfare.

The economic realities present in the book give definition to Pinocchio's character that is lost in the film. Work and food are intimately connected in Collodi's tale. When the authorities take Geppetto away just after carving the puppet, Pinocchio is left alone and destitute, literally yawning with hunger. Pinocchio begs for charity from neighbors, but receives nothing but a basinful of water on the head. He does not eat until Geppetto returns and gives him his entire breakfast, three pears. The finicky Pinocchio insists, "I'll never eat fruit that's not peeled. I can't stand the skins" (127). Pinocchio eats ravenously, chomping down each pear in two bites, yet remains hungry.

"If there's nothing else," the puppet says, "then I'll eat some peelings.

And he began to chew on them. At first he made faces, but then one after another he polished off all the peelings, and after the peelings the cores too. And when he finished eating everything, he clapped his stomach with satisfaction and said gleefully: "Now I feel better!"

"So you see," Geppetto remarked, "I was right when I told you we shouldn't become too choosy or too finicky about our tastes. My dear boy, we can never be sure about what may befall us in this world. So many things can happen!" (127).

The themes in this episode—starvation, gorging oneself, making do with what is on hand, resourcefulness, accepting one’s lot in life—recur throughout the tale. Pinocchio is trapped for stealing grapes, and his punishment is to live the life of a dog, leash and all. Pinocchio eats vetch with the Pigeon, even though “all his life the puppet had never been able to tolerate vetch. According to him, it nauseated him and turned his stomach; but that evening he ate so much of it that he nearly burst, and when he had almost finished he turned and said to the Pigeon: ‘I would never have believed that vetch was so good.’ The Pigeon replies, “Hunger knows neither fancies or delicacies.”(263). Later in the tale, Pinocchio also adapts his taste to the straw and hay his master gives him as a donkey. Pinocchio’s shortcomings as a worker are not only sloth but also pride. As he humbles himself, again and again, he begins to appreciate what he has on hand.

Disney’s only nod to poverty is the character of Jiminy Cricket. The cricket himself, an enlargement of Collodi’s Talking Cricket, resembles an Irish Hobo. He begins the film in tatters, complete with a bundle, searching for a warm place to sleep. Geppeto’s house looks warm and inviting, so the cricket essentially breaks in. This carpenter is not poor; his home is stuffed with toys, clocks, and music boxes of all sorts. The Blue Fairy dubs the hobo figure Pinocchio’s conscience, and symbolically the Cricket plays the movie’s social conscience as well. This seems to complement Collodi’s theme of the worth of the underclass. Furthermore, a representative of the underclass is ideally suited to point out inequities the ruling class ignores, and to lead the way to social change. Yet the film abandons that premise as soon as the Blue Fairy replaces Jiminy Cricket’s rags with a fine suit and hat. Poverty never resurfaces as any character’s concern. Oddly enough, hard work has practically nothing to do with Jiminy Cricket’s

conversion. Jiminy's poverty is overcome by a combination of freeloading (after all, he is Geppetto's uninvited guest), luck (who knew the Blue Fairy would come to this house tonight), and pluck (Jiminy butts into the situation of a little boy asking for the definition of a conscience). His clothes are magically improved and he is even awarded the gold medal he asks for after his work as conscience—which ends up with a donkey-puppet-boy dashed upon the rocks—supposedly succeeds.

Pinocchio's strongest theme is that one's work and works carry remunerative and restorative powers. Both book and film reward the puppet at the end for his good work. Collodi ostensibly presents a didactic story strongly underlining the importance of assuming grown-up responsibility. Overall, his story portrays a naughty boy who gives up his hedonistic childhood ways to define a place for himself as a useful, hard-working member of society. Collodi's puppet does not want to become "a real boy," as the movie Pinocchio does, but "a man," a fully-actualized adult with all the trappings—responsibility, employment, civic duty, and the like. In the end, however, when Pinocchio finally accepts the mantle of responsibility, he is transformed into a real boy, and the twenty pennies he has earned are transformed into gold coins. Through industry, Collodi tells us, one makes a fortune.

The Disney film does not concern itself with poverty, wealth, or meaningful labor. While Collodi's puppet is rewarded because he accepts the full mantle of adult responsibility, Disney's Pinocchio is rewarded for his heroism. His work is like that of Hercules: a heroic feat. Pinocchio's reward is flesh alone; Geppetto apparently can provide him with all the love and material comfort he needs. One could argue that both



Pinocchios are rewarded for their selflessness, but neither one really exhibits a new type of selflessness at the end of their respective tales.

Pinocchio's reward in the book comes not just from his work, but mostly from his reformation; he is most famous for abhorring work and evading responsibility. At any rate, Pinocchio wants to live the good life—as dictated by his finicky tastes—but is too proud to work for it himself. He begs for food when Geppetto is in prison and later begs again on the island of Busy Bees. This second begging episode seems to change his notion of work, but only temporarily. The Busy Bees gladly offer him sustenance, as long as the puppet performs some meaningful—and physical—labor in return. Pinocchio first accosts the coal merchant:

“Would you be so kind as to give me a penny,  
because I feel I'm dying of hunger?”

“Not just one penny,” replied the coal merchant,  
“but I'll give you four, provided that you help me to pull  
home these two carts of charcoal.”

“I'm amazed!” answered the puppet, rather  
indignantly, “I'll have you know that I've never been a  
jackass. I've never pulled a cart!”

“Good for you,” replied the coal merchant. “And so  
then, my boy, if you're really dying of hunger, eat two  
good slices of your pride, and watch out that you don't get  
indigestion.” (275-277).

A bricklayer brushes the puppet off in a similar fashion, saying, “If you don’t like hard work, my boy, then have fun yawning [for hunger], and a lot of good it may do you” (277). The puppet refuses, and so goes hungry, until the kindly Blue Fairy offers him a drink for nothing. Pinocchio drinks “like a sponge” and mumbles, “I’ve gotten rid of my thirst. If only I could get rid of my hunger now!” (277). The Blue Fairy offers him food if he carries her water jug home. The puppet hesitates, looking at the jug. She has increase her offer three times, until she literally sweetens the deal to include “a nice sugared candy filled with rosolio,” before the puppet agrees to perform the task.

During his time with the Blue Fairy on the island of Busy Bees, Pinocchio eventually agrees to do work, goes to school, and succeeds beyond expectations. He has to learn his lesson first, of course, and the Blue Fairy, his surrogate mother, must grant him a little leeway. Pinocchio truly loves the Blue Fairy, however, and wants to become good.

“Oh, I’m sick and tired of always being a puppet!”

cried Pinocchio, rapping himself on the head. “It’s about time that I too become a man.”

“And you will become one, when you learn to deserve it.”

“Really? And what can I do to deserve it?”

“Something quite simple: learn how to be a proper boy.” (283-85).

When Blue Fairy begins to tell Pinocchio how a proper boy must act, Pinocchio proves himself well aware of his shortcomings. Pinocchio eventually goes to school, quickly

earning the respect and admiration of his classmates—he a popular rogue—even while becoming the star pupil. Such a transformation seems unlikely, but is plausible considering the energetic child finally has a suitable and constructive outlet for himself.

The Disney film does not verbalize its concerns about work, and even paints a contrasting picture about work's importance. The only real work we see in the movie is Geppetto's. Disney's Geppetto is not quite a carpenter; he is a clever inventor of machines and toys, such as music boxes and cuckoo clocks. Pinocchio himself is created as a toy, meant to amuse, and Geppetto seems endlessly amused with his work, with all his dancing and music boxes. His work is his art, and nothing about the warm, spacious cabin suggests poverty. Pinocchio, on the other hand, never starves—never really eats for that matter—and the hard economic realities never reach him. To be fair, the depiction of poverty in Collodi's book would have seemed really out of place in a children's movie, especially in a follow-up to Snow White. Furthermore, after surviving the Great Depression, the American moviegoer would have preferred to escape reality, as opposed to examining their recent economic divide. The film mainly promotes work's as importance by showing what type of lifestyle will not lead to reputable success—that of the actor.

Both the book and the film put the nature of theater work in question. When fellow carpenter Master Anthony comes across a curious block of wood, Geppetto tells him, "I thought of making myself a fine wooden puppet; but a wonderful puppet who can dance, and fence, and make daredevil leaps. I intend to travel around the world with this puppet so as to earn my crust of bread and a glass of wine" (89). He intends to put Pinocchio to work in the theater to make his fortune. Geppetto soon develops paternal

feelings for Pinocchio, however, and sends him to school instead. Interestingly, in both versions, Pinocchio never makes it to school the first day, but finds himself in a theater instead. Surprisingly, all the puppets in the show are also animated like Pinocchio—they stop the show to welcome him like a lost brother. It seems unlikely, then, that Geppetto could have exploited Pinocchio for his uniqueness, like Stromboli exploits the puppet in the movie.

Disney's Pinocchio, on the other hand, was created as a toy, not a working puppet. Geppetto, too, is not the gruff, misunderstood old man that he is in the book. Instead, he is a beneficent bachelor who prays, wishing upon a star, for son he never had—that his creation Pinocchio be a real boy. Pinocchio is clearly destined from the start to play, not to work, and to fit an empty place in his father's emotional life, not his economic life. The film vilifies theater work—"an actor's life"—as a daydreamer's profession. Pinocchio's performance is both clunky and tremendously effective, since the uncoordinated puppet, unlike any other, has "got no strings." Since Honest John and Kitty sell Pinocchio to Stromboli, and Stromboli pays Pinocchio a worthless washer for his troubles, the film indicts the theater as a profession of crooks and the talented innocents they exploit. The schooling that Pinocchio avoids, while not the promised "easy road to success," is Pinocchio's only and proper alternative to entertainment work. What is strange, of course, is that the film itself is essentially a form of theater, entertainment, and diversion, much like the puppet show it vilifies.

In the book, the ultimate power of work is its power to transform the boy into a man. Technically, the Fairy's magic transforms Pinocchio into a real boy, but Pinocchio

has already proven himself a man. Thanks to his work, he is no longer in danger of starvation. His efforts show that he is able and responsible enough to take care of himself. Furthermore, by taking on the support of his ailing mother instead of purchasing a new coat, he demonstrates that he is selfless enough to support his loved ones at the expense of his own pleasure and lifestyle. Understandably, in exchange for this new life, Pinocchio loses his freedom to run away, to play, and to have any more adventures. Of course, performing a constructive role in society and in his family becomes rewarding in and of itself.

Disney's Pinocchio is not rewarded because he renounces his waywardness or assumes responsibility but because he rescues Geppetto from the belly of Monstro the Whale. Pinocchio literally puts his life on the line to free his father. That the puppet apparently dies after smashing against the rocks and washing ashore only underlines the gravity of his commitment. His commitment to find and enter the dangerous whale, and his ingenious means of escape, are his only heroic and selfless acts in the movie. They are also the only acts of the movie that Pinocchio wills by himself; at all other points he is either guided by the good, angelic, conscience figure of Jiminy Cricket, or coerced by the devilish evil characters. The choices that come straight from Pinocchio's heart are valiant and heroic, which speaks very well of his character, especially as a generic, innocent, American boy. Pinocchio's transformation into a real boy—no self-actualized citizen but a round, wide-eyed babe—seems recompense for proving himself a good, loving child. He accepts no responsibility, other than schooling perhaps, and seems blessed to live in an idyllic, if not eternal, childhood. The nature of Collodi's original

puppet, a fun-loving rascal, seems at first far removed from the pure-of-heart Aeneas/Christ figure the movie draws.

Pinocchio is rewarded at the end not merely because he saves his father Geppetto from the Shark, but because he also makes sacrifices to support his sickly Fairy mother. The overarching story of a puppet that becomes a boy is submerged and complicated by all sorts of adventures in which the character apparently does not progress, change, or learn anything at all. After all, Pinocchio's reward does not come merely because he saves a life or puts another's welfare before his own, because he clearly does that early on. In chapter XI, he saves Harlequin the puppet from becoming firewood for Fire-Eater's roasting mutton. Pinocchio cries:

“I beg mercy of you for poor Harlequin.”

[Fire-Eater replies,] “There's no place for mercy here. Since I've spared you, I must have him put on the fire, because I want my mutton to be well roasted.”

“In that case,” cried Pinocchio boldly, getting up and throwing off his cap of crumb, “in that case I know where my duty lies. Come gendarmes! Bind me and throw me on those flames there. No, it is no right that poor Harlequin, my true friend, should die for me.” (153).

Furthermore, Pinocchio is not rewarded merely because he works hard and assumes responsibility for himself. After all, in his time with the Blue Fairy, whom he meets on the Island of Busy Bees, after much resistance, Pinocchio offers to work for his food, and goes to school. Pinocchio becomes a star pupil and works hard for months.

Pinocchio is rewarded for neither of these excellent feats and surprising turnarounds. That he repeatedly lapses into immaturity and irresponsibility soon afterward does not indicate a flawed character as much as it resembles the successes and setbacks of childhood development, and the trial and error one goes through to learn how to navigate the social structure.

Disney's Pinocchio does not seem to learn anything or change at all in the course of the film. One could argue that, like the original puppet, he is rewarded for a selfless act, but since the film's Pinocchio is not really selfish, no character reversal occurs. Pinocchio appears to have learned his lesson from his Pleasure Island experience, but he clearly has no conception of or experience with the alternative life of discipline, school, and industrious labor. That said, this Pinocchio would probably avoid hedonism not because he knew better, but mainly to avoid the harsh punishment he incurred. Clearly, Pinocchio does not earn his reward because he learns to act like a good boy, but perhaps because he finally develops a sense of agency. What is amazing about Pinocchio at the end of the film is that he, like Collodi's puppet, relies upon himself to make important decisions.

## **The nature of play**

With all the emphasis on the importance of work to self and society, Pinocchio's desire to play seems vilified. At the same time, at least in Collodi's character, we celebrate Pinocchio's playfulness, because it gives him the spunkiness that makes him unique and special in the world. Pinocchio's adventures, though full of terror, are also full of play—mischievous, dangerous, and fun. Since Pinocchio is an extraordinary child in an extraordinary world, the term play must be extended to include his misadventures. In a

broad sense, then, play boils down to a broad range of social interaction, which helps to define one's character and one's place in society. Whether structured or unstructured, constructive or destructive, the point of play is that it lacks the single-minded purposefulness of work. It encourages sociability, street smarts, and normalization in society. Because it has often been read in schools for its didactic value, as well as at home for its literary value, the book itself is divided in purpose between work and play, which makes the dialectic of the two forces within its pages all the more interesting. The Disney film, on the other hand, celebrates play while giving only a cursory nod to the value of work.

In the book, play often proves constructive and advantageous to Pinocchio. While repeatedly finding himself a victim of a scheming or unprincipled character such as Lampwick, or of circumstance, such as his police arrest for supposedly attacking a fellow student, Pinocchio often gets out of trouble because he was the master of another situation. In one instance, the puppet saves a dog from drowning; the dog soon returns to save Pinocchio from the Green Fisherman's skillet. "How thankful I am!" said the puppet. "There's no need to thank me," replied the dog. "You saved me first, and one good turn deserves another. It's a fact; in this world we help one another" (329). Another instance of constructive play is Pinocchio's example to the Tuna, of swimming out of the Shark's mouth when it is asleep. The Tuna returns to carry Pinocchio and Geppetto to shore. "How did you manage to escape?" the puppet asks. "I followed your example," the Tuna replies. "You're the one who taught me the way; and after you, I got away too" (441). Though these heroic acts have little to do with our modern conceptions of play, they do represent important social interaction that stretches beyond work. Of



course, as Pinocchio takes on more and more work, as he assumes adult responsibility, the role of play in his life diminishes. While Collodi makes it a point to show that one must work for one's own well being, this type of give-and-take and exchange of knowledge also has a lot to do with a society's well-being.

In the film, the most beneficial play is the music and dancing of Geppetto and his ad-hoc family in his shop. Like the book, the film demonstrates play's constructive value as social glue. The merriment the family shares demonstrates that they make their own little community through play as well as through work. Nowhere does the film suggest that play gradually loses importance in one's life. After all, the elderly Geppetto derives great pleasure from play. In fact, as a gifted carpenter/toy-maker, his work actually culminates in play—the dancing of the newly completed Pinocchio, the rhythm of the cuckoo clocks and the music of his elaborate music boxes. Since no other form of work is depicted in the movie, the film suggests that play is work's reward.

Play is the companion of work, but play without work is detrimental in both book and film. Pinocchio's most grievous error of judgment is going to Funland. Lampwick, an obvious Lucifer-figure, leads him down the slippery slope away from school, responsibility, and his mother. Collodi's puppet, though noticeably not Disney's, was also given ample warning that getting on the round old man's wagon was a bad idea. He notes that the donkeys are dressed like little boys, and one even talks to him, warning him of a bad fate. Furthermore, the round old man bites both ears off the recalcitrant donkey right in front of the puppet. Collodi amply warns his readers, if not his hero, by having the Round Old Man sing his eerie lullaby, "Everybody sleeps at night, But never asleep

am I,” when all the boys are asleep (365). Disney eliminates Pinocchio’s warnings, but Honest John and Kitty, and we the audience, recoil as the Old Man unravels his evil side and ghastly scheme.

In the book, Pinocchio deserves to be punished for this escapade because he ran away from home and violated the trust of his mother. More subtly, his act violates his promise to the Blue Fairy to be a good boy; he turns his good words into a lie. It doesn’t help that after all of Pinocchio’s victimization, he should have known better by now that nothing comes easy. For five months participating in “continual amusements and games of all sorts,” acting like a jackass, Pinocchio is turned into a real-life ass. For the last time, Pinocchio is punished for his innocence and ignorance. He is not shrewd enough to know that nothing in life comes easy, and that one should be skeptical of anyone offering something for free. The episode is reminiscent of the infamous Children’s Crusade, in which a large number of well-meaning children banded together to travel to and free the Holy Land. These children were ultimately intercepted by exploiters who coerced them onto slave ships.

Although Funland and Pleasure Island are essentially the same place, the latter’s horrible and adolescent nature proves far more disturbing. In fact, Disney’s Pleasure Island sequence is one of the most terrifying in children’s film. The children there do not play, they engage in a destructive perversion of play. Trashing houses and endless roughhousing seem more like street thug vandalism—a gross parody of childhood fun. Furthermore, cigar smoking, beer drinking, and pool shooting are decidedly adult leisure activities. Pinocchio, struggling to smoke and drink like Lampwick, ultimately flounders in this environment; he is too much a child. Instead of putting the eruption of ears and

tail into a semi-humorous light, as Collodi does, Pinocchio and Lampwick are visibly horrified at their rapidly metamorphosing bodies. The most terrifying change, Lampwick's transformation into full donkey, is shown in silhouette; that we don't see it actually preserves its horror. Since this scene is so unforgettable, the strongest theme of the Disney film, at least the most memorable, is that little boys who act like jackasses are doomed to become them. But acting like a jackass really means turning one's back on constructive childhood play as we know it. Play becomes perversion when children take on the vices of adults. Since we see no adults with such vices in this film—though all adult characters save Geppetto are evil—we find the devices in our lives outside the film.

## **The nature of childhood**

The tension between work and play raise the question of which is more important in a child's life. The answer to this question is culturally and historically dependent. In Collodi's time, Italy itself was still in childhood, and for the newly united country as well as for Pinocchio, childhood proves a time to work. Italy itself was dependent on work, on every citizen playing his or her part in society. Also, thanks to the new industrialized economy, children's bodies and services were called upon to help run the machinery of the economy. The socially minded Collodi also suggests that Italy itself must work for the people, too, so the relationship between people and society would be beneficial to all.

For Disney, America was a well-established country, mired in the Depression, yet poised at a crucial moment in history in which it was being called upon to become a superpower. While public education and child-labor laws kept a large number of children out of long hours of hard and dangerous labor, children were both economic drains and assets to their financially strapped families. To too many, childhood was bleak, entailing

hard work and few rewards. Disney romanticizes childhood, partly to dramatize children's almost limitless potential and natural beneficent temperaments, and partly part to make up for the fact that many children have so little of childhood to enjoy.

Strangely enough, even though Collodi creates a more believable child than Disney does, thanks to Pinocchio's long string of alternating successes and setbacks, the author ostensibly defines childhood as purely a preparatory phase—children should act like little adults. Disney, who presents a child who is nearly as bland as Collodi's is bratty, treats childhood as a sacred state. In both cases, a good childhood is a necessary perquisite to a productive adulthood. Both and play have their place in maturation; the former enables the child to be self-sufficient, the latter lets the child develop social skills and worldliness.

Disney is not nearly as concerned with Pinocchio's achieving adulthood as he is with the perversion of childhood purity. After all, the villains in the movie exploit Pinocchio's innocence, whereas those in the book usually take advantage of his good intentions. The Pleasure Island sequence shows the damage done when children ape their irresponsible elders. This incrimination of adulthood carries a social message. Even when a country seems to be running just fine—just picture the film's gorgeous Swiss-Italian town setting—there is a certain opulence, slothfulness, excess, and self-destructiveness that society seems to support. These worms at the heart of society endanger its longevity. The child must be protected from these malevolent forces in order to grow up to be that responsible, constructive citizen Collodi prizes.

Just as both works follow the evolution of the child's nature, they also comment upon the creation and maturation of the body.

Before he is carved, Collodi's Pinocchio exists as a playful, rambunctious spirit trapped in a piece of wood. Even before Geppetto finishes carving him, Pinocchio comes alive and unruly.

As soon as the nose was made, it began to grow;  
and it grew and grew and grew so that in a few minutes it  
became an endless nose.

Poor Geppetto kept struggling to cut it back; but the  
more he cut and shortened it, the longer that impudent nose  
became (99).

Pinocchio's growing nose obviously acts as a phallic instrument, denoting Pinocchio's unruliness and his upper hand in dealing with his father. "After the nose," Collodi continues, "he [Geppetto] made him a mouth. The mouth wasn't even close to done when it quickly began to laugh and mock him" (99). The ill-behaved puppet goes on to snatch Geppetto's wig with his newly made hands. Geppetto finds little joy in this puppet:

At that insolent and mocking behavior, Geppetto became  
sadder and more dejected than he had ever been in his life;  
and turning to Pinocchio, he said:

"Scamp of a child, you aren't even finished and  
you're already beginning to lack respect for your father!  
That's bad, my boy, bad!"

And he wiped away a tear. (101).

As soon as Geppetto gives him feet, Pinocchio runs away from his father's house, and ends up getting Geppetto thrown in jail for child abuse in an embarrassing mix-up. Clearly, this child was not born in the conventional sense, but shaped by his father from a natural, if not supernatural, form. His unruliness suggests a willful spirit that has nothing to do with the father. He is a creation of nature, not society.

Disney makes children a gift from God. Disney's Pinocchio comes into this world as a blank slate, an ordinary piece of wood, a blockhead in the ordinary sense. The puppet itself is a toy, a plaything; that Pinocchio seems born to play should not be surprising. After Geppetto's wish upon a star, which is essentially a prayer, the Blue Fairy rewards the old man for his good life by animating the puppet. The animated puppet is essentially a gift from God, not a captured nature spirit. He is gullible and malleable—far more than Collodi's puppet—but unlike the original character, he shows no impetus to disobey his father or to set off on his own adventures. Disney clearly celebrates the child's beauty, purity, and innocence.

Pinocchio's transforms into a "real boy" in much the same manner as he is animated in the first place. On Pinocchio's apparent deathbed, as Geppetto weeps and sobs over the puppet's limp body, the Blue Fairy restores Pinocchio to life, and transforms his wood into flesh, from a remarkable distance. The reward and Geppetto's tacit prayer are almost identical to those that brought Pinocchio to life. Also, there is no real feeling that Pinocchio is growing up or maturing in any way. Pinocchio never says that he is sick of childhood and longs to become a real man, as he does in the book.

Instead, the force that propels the movie is Jiminy Cricket's need to protect the child and guide him to his childhood needs: school, and his father.

Pinocchio's changing bodies and phallic nose dramatize the uncontrollable changes a child's body makes as it matures into adolescence. What makes Pinocchio's growing nose and the ears and tail that sprout from him so horrifying is his lack of control over them. The film's graphic depiction of these events makes them stand out far more than they do in the book. In fact, these are the two main punishments Pinocchio gets for his misbehavior. These appendages are obviously phallic, yet Pinocchio has no control over these phallic instruments. This is similar to the sometimes uncontrollable, awkward, even frightening changes that take place in a pubescent boy's body. The transformation into adulthood is shown to be jarring and frightening.

A strange subtext about bodies pervades both works: In many ways, it is better to be a puppet than a real boy. After all, Pinocchio's puppet body affords him super-human powers and opens up avenues for magical exciting adventures. He transcends the limits of the human body by swimming like a fish, riding on a pigeon's back, and even becoming a donkey. Pinocchio's hard wooden body also grants him special powers. In the book, he can swim like a fish, he is impervious to the assassins' knives, and he essentially cheats certain death three times, once by hanging, once by drowning (as a donkey), and once by swimming through the sleeping Shark's jaws. In the film, the puppet has no rotational limits (he can dance in a circle without moving his head), and he can walk on the floor of the ocean. It is impossible to imagine the industrious young man or the real young boy Pinocchio becomes leading such an exciting and varied life. In

essence, it seems that becoming a real boy is not so much of a reward, at least not in that his new body is better than the last. Pinocchio merely becomes more like the young reader or viewer, who interest in Pinocchio stems from the difference of the puppet's body in the first place.

## **The nature of morality, truth, and conscience**

Since Pinocchio's nose grows when he lies, his honesty and moral compass are strongly connected with his metamorphic body. In both works, the puppet incurs this punishment for dishonesty only once, when he is lying to his mother. In the book, the episode lasts less than two pages; in the movie, a minute at most. That said, however, the uncontrollably growing nose is such a graphic and horrific image that everyone who has seen the film remembers it in disproportion to all other images. Furthermore, since stalwart truthfulness is an important part of American myth—from George Washington's apocryphal "I never tell a lie"—this facet of Pinocchio gains even more power in the film. The idea of honesty being an admirable quality in a citizen and a vital quality in a leader is central to most Americans. Of course, to Collodi's Catholic Italy, honesty is not only the best policy; it is one of the Virtues as well.

Collodi presents shrewdness, the ability to tell truth from lies, as the most prized ability of adulthood. Right and wrong decisions have nothing to do with intent, since Pinocchio's swindlers take advantage of his desire to find or support his father. Instead, the definition of right and wrong depends on the decisions' outcomes. If, for instance, Pinocchio's buried coins did sprout money trees, his act would not have been foolish, and nothing would have been wrong about it. Understanding that the world is a dangerous



place, everyone is ostensibly out for himself or herself, and nothing comes easy, on the other hand, provides a buffer of skepticism that prevents a person from making bad decisions. The same rule applies to moral decisions, such as Pinocchio's violating his promise to his mother, but bad decisions, moral or otherwise, in Collodi's book always end with economic punishment. Witness, for instance, the suffering the Fox and the Cat incur for their unethical lifestyles.

Disney's film substitutes conscience for shrewdness, since conscience is merely shrewdness in circumstances involving morals. In that case, however, conscience is not simply knowing right from wrong; conscience by nature already knows what's right and what's wrong. Morality involves listening to and heeding the conscience, something Pinocchio repeatedly fails to do. Consequently, he is punished. Strangely enough, the evil characters in the film seem to have no consciences, and they remain unpunished despite their crimes. Perhaps conscience is not enough to guarantee success.

Disney's film also suggests that conscience alone might not be persuasive enough to keep one safe; it is best backed by strength or brute force. Jiminy Cricket, the conscience figure, often takes Pinocchio's place as the central character of the film. He narrates the story, and serves as a moral guide for the audience as well as the puppet. Furthermore, his setbacks and pratfalls account for much of the excitement of the plot. All in all, as a conscience or a moral guide, the cricket fails miserably. Even though Jiminy Cricket is always right when he steers Pinocchio away from danger, he does not do his job very well, and Pinocchio ends up falling into traps anyway. Pinocchio walks without his conscience to school because the suddenly spoiled cricket oversleeps. When Jiminy catches up to him and tries to convince the puppet to break with Honest John and

Kitty, the cricket's verbal arguments are ignored. The two con men simply take Pinocchio by the hand and lead him away. Jiminy Cricket then struggles in vain to pull him back, unable to counter their superior physical strength.

Another strange facet of the cricket is his awareness and interest in female sexuality. With all the themes of pubescent physical awkwardness, children aping adults, and living a moral life, there seems to be a great deal of sexy if mostly inconsequential female characters in the film. All the female characters or figures are somehow sexy, from the Marilyn Monroe-like fairy, to the female puppet dancing partners in Pinocchio's "Got No Strings" number, to the music box and cuckoo clock miniatures the Cricket flirts with, and even to Cleo the beautiful goldfish. Paring the clumsy puppet with all sorts of more nimble, sexily-clad marionettes—especially the can-can girls Jiminy Cricket notes with a whistles—not only underlines his physical inadequacies, but Jiminy's voyeuristic tendencies. Jiminy even leaves the puppet after the show, commenting that Pinocchio proved himself successful after all. Not only is the conscience figure distracted by his own desires, he also misinterprets the world around him. Both shortcomings put Pinocchio in danger.

In essence, Jiminy's weakness, failings, and distractions serve to say—against the perceived theme of the story—that convictions, however strong, are no match for muscle. Since Pinocchio's behavior in the film is always corrected by punitive, not instructive, measures—he is locked in a birdcage by Stromboli, and is half-transformed into a donkey at Pleasure Island—Pinocchio would probably benefit from a burly bodyguard more than his insect conscience. Collodi's story, obsessed with work and starvation, tells us over and over again that the needs of the body outweigh our finicky desires. To work, eat, and be

content with what is on hand is only logical. Disney's film tells us instead that our physical desires outweigh our logic. Pinocchio's true victory, his father's rescue at unimaginable risk to his own life, defies logic. The source of his newfound agency comes entirely from his heart.

## **Conclusion: The nature of society.**

All in all, Collodi's themes add up to show the way to maintaining a social contract. Society must create and support its own subjects to survive, and those subjects must work together to keep society running. Work is counterbalanced by play, which also helps to bring disparate people together. Childhood is an initiation to society, in which children learn to live together and exchange ideas through work and constructive play. Moral standards ensure that a society's children are able to avoid and/or cope with the inevitable divisive and criminal elements that plague society.

Disney's depiction of society, though visually serene, is far grimmer. Besides Geppetto and the Blue Fairy, every adult figure Pinocchio comes across is a malevolent, self-serving con. More alarmingly, all the evil characters—minus Monstro—are in cahoots: Honest John and Kitty lead Pinocchio to Stromboli, and are the Little Round Man's stooges. The outside world contains a vast conspiracy, a net of deceit designed to entrap and exploit innocent little boys. That no one punishes any of the evil characters sends the chilling message that evil cannot be purged from society, and also suggests that moral standards hold no weight. The only way for a child to navigate through this world is to develop a moral sense and the shrewdness to exercise it appropriately.

All in all, Pinocchio strives to get at the nature of many elements of society. But, like society itself, this “nature” is not natural at all. One of the reasons this story works

so well is that the child that figures in it is literally a manmade object. Not only does that enable the character to act as an outsider looking in, it also reminds us that all children are essentially manmade, handcrafted, and shaped by the society around them. Children cannot be shielded from the outside world; they must be taught to move through it. Both tales tell us—through the book’s positive but realistic world-view, or through the film’s bleak social outlook—that our responsibility to our children is not to shield them from society, but to introduce them to it.

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