

## The Fabulous Journeys of Alice and Pinocchio – Exploring their Parallel Worlds

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To cite this article: Anna Gasperini (2019): The Fabulous Journeys of Alice and Pinocchio – Exploring their Parallel Worlds, English Studies

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0013838X.2019.1595826>



Published online: 21 May 2019.



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## BOOK REVIEW

**The Fabulous Journeys of Alice and Pinocchio – Exploring their Parallel Worlds**, Laura Tosi and Peter Hunt, Jefferson, NC, McFarland & Company, 2018. ix + 227 pp., \$55.00 (paperback), ISBN: 978-1-4766-6543-6

The idea that “[i]n a way, Alice and Pinocchio are *us* in all their, and our, individual complexity” (p. 147) summarises *The Fabulous Journeys of Alice and Pinocchio – Exploring their Parallel Worlds* well. The book engages with Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass* and Carlo Collodi’s *Le Avventure di Pinocchio* as universal narratives that transcend apparently well-defined temporal and national boundaries.

The fruit of a “collaborative — and appropriately transnational” effort between Tosi and Hunt, though Tosi authored the bulk of the book (p. 6), *The Fabulous Journeys* is a transnational comparative study of the *Alice* books and *Pinocchio*; or, in Tosi’s words, “two readings that intersect with each other and with the societies and nations that produced them” (p. 9). Building on a theoretical framework that uses transnational comparative literature and imagology, the book challenges as too vague and simplistic the use of the word “timeless” to refer to narratives such as *Alice* and *Pinocchio* (p. 4). Instead, it interrogates the two texts’ “quintessential” “Italianness” and “Englishness” (p. 16), examining their double identity of narratives tied to a definite historical and national context and narratives that have been absorbed, translated, rewritten, and adapted in multiple national contexts over time. *Alice* and *Pinocchio* thus emerge as texts whose publication histories and authors are surprisingly similar, though they originated in the extremely different contexts of *Pax Britannica* Victorian England and *Post-Risorgimento* Italy. More importantly, *The Fabulous Journeys* unveils their common nature of generic hybrids, composed of folktale, fairy tale, fantasy and Bildungsroman elements that, unlike other coeval prominent children’s narratives, contributed to radically change and develop these genres.

Opening with an overview of the features these books share in such areas as production history, criticism of institutions, and gender, Tosi introduces the “illusion of the human” (p. 31) that sets Alice and Pinocchio apart from traditional, one-dimensional fairy-tale characters, making them universal, while Hunt highlights the specific expectations of Englishness and Italianness these “gendered” texts answer (p. 33). After comparing the two authors and their respective political, historical and educational contexts, the analysis delves deeper into the two narratives’ position within folktale and fairy-tale generic conventions. *Alice* and *Pinocchio* have a subversive take on typical fairy-tale structural elements and on such tropes as food, spaces and talking animals; they re-elaborated these conventions into new “genre configurations” that shaped subsequent children’s literature in their countries, which Tosi considers a key-component of their uniqueness among children’s narratives (p. 61). Fairies have a dedicated section, where Tosi discusses the impact on *Alice* and *Pinocchio* of Collodi’s and Carroll’s experiences of, and relationship with, contemporary fairy-tale publishing (p. 94). Hunt analyses the Blue Fairy herself, *Pinocchio*’s moral model (p. 97), and the two authors’ approach to — or rejection of, in Carroll’s case — the trope of magical characters as moral helpers in fairy tales.

Fantasy and the Bildungsroman are the subject of the subsequent section. Tosi considers “international fantasy tropes” in the two narratives (p. 105), noting that they deal far more explicitly — and realistically — than fairy tales or folktales with death, violence, metamorphosis, loss of identity, twisted morality, and dystopian spaces. Alice and Pinocchio react with


“resilience and resistance” to the realistic pain, disconcert, and fear to which these “powerfully dark” aspects expose them (p. 111). Their resilience combines with the “interior change” they undergo over the narratives (p. 142), a feature borrowed from the bildungsroman tradition, producing two characters of considerable psychological depth. This, Tosi argues, generates those “universal and popular patterns of childhood” (p. 111) that ultimately make *Alice* and *Pinocchio*, “[u]nlike other contemporary children’s books”, not “historical curiosities” (p. 58) but transnational, universal narratives. Tosi examines the effects of this sort of universalising darkness, reflecting on the “portability” of *Alice* and *Pinocchio*, that is, their being transtextual (p. 145), through the dark, anxious rewritings by Angela Carter and Robert Coover. In these “transtextual journeys”, Tosi argues, *Alice* and *Pinocchio* lose “their original national connotations, in order to become symbol of a transnational, postmodern, fractured self” (p. 146).

The analysis closes with a look at School stories and adventure stories as gendered channels of “civilization, class, nation and honor” ideals for English and Italian children (p. 168). Analysing two authors from both genres, Tosi outlines forms of Italian and English nationalistic literature produced at the time of *Alice* and *Pinocchio*, bearing in mind their fame as “quintessential” examples of their original national context.

The book ends with “Strange Meeting in Wonder-Tuscany”, a short story by Hunt that imagines an *Alice* that wanders away, bored, while holidaying in Tuscany, and meets the mercurial, unruly puppet-boy *Pinocchio*. This is certainly an unusual ending for an academic monograph, but an exceptionally apt one to conclude a transnational analysis that connects two apparently alien narratives and their distinct linguistic, spatial, and national contexts.

Stimulating and well-structured, with in-text references that connect sections addressing related topics, and careful handling of translation issues, *The Fabulous Journeys* is an excellent tool both for students first approaching (transnational) children’s literature and for scholars performing advanced studies in nineteenth-century Italian and/or English children’s literature and transnational comparative literature.

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<https://doi.org/10.1080/0013838X.2019.1595826>

