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COLLODI'S PUPPET IN FILM:
DISNEY, COMENCINI, BENIGNI

Geppetto's initial wish in Collodi's *Le avventure di Pinocchio* was to build a wonderful puppet who could perform acrobatics and help him earn a living touring the world.

Ho pensato di fabbricarmi da me un bel burattino di legno; ma un burattino meraviglioso, che sappia ballare, tirare di scherma e fare i salti mortali. Con questo burattino voglio girare il mondo, per buscarmi un tozzo di pane e un bicchier di vino¹.

Since Geppetto created Pinocchio with performance and entertainment in mind, it is not surprising to note how much interest the boy-puppet has attracted in cinema, theatre, and television. Cinema and television have given Pinocchio undivided attention for almost a century. Data shows that the story of the puppet generated approximately twenty feature film adaptations,² to which one should add the European co-production directed by Steve Barron (1996) and, of course, Roberto Benigni's *Pinocchio*, released in October 2002. Pinocchio the character attracts the media and continues to inspire cinema. It is worth noting, for example, Federico Fellini's predilection for Pinocchio—although he may have viewed the story of the puppet as a nightmare—and the presence of motifs from Collodi's story in many of his films.³ Pinocchio has had a large impact in

¹Collodi, *Le avventure di Pinocchio*, p. 8.

²Data from Laura, "Pinocchio nel cinema mondiale."

³One could mention the presence of a Collodian big fish/whale in Casanova, the attraction for the circus and automata in numerous of Fellini's films, or the direct association of actor Roberto Benigni to Pinocchio in his last film *La voce della luna*. Bernardino Zapponi, screenplayer of *La voce della luna*, remembering Fellini's project for a film on Pinocchio said: "Fellini vedeva Pinocchio come un incubo, con un po' di antipatia per questo Ottocento toscano, un po' borghese" (cited in Giusti, "Quando Fellini cercava Benigni, " n.p.). In Fellini's last film the protagonist, played by Benigni, is shown with a Pinocchio puppet.

America as well, particularly in popular cinema. Besides Walt Disney's *Pinocchio*, which will be discussed in detail below, Pinocchio has been the subject of an American musical starring Danny Kaye (1976), it has inspired Steven Spielberg in his film *ET*—the extraterrestrial child who became the most famous puppet in 1980s cinema—and more recently Pinocchio makes a comeback in his film *Artificial Intelligence* (2001).⁴ Pinocchio's appeal in the mass media is confirmed by the phenomenal number of television adaptations which amount to a stunning four hundred versions in various countries around the world. The puppet's natural predisposition for entertainment, show, and acting is highlighted also in Walt Disney's version of *Pinocchio*. Honest John and Gideon (the Cat and the Fox), who are responsible for leading Pinocchio astray and for enticing him to the theatre of Mangiafuoco/Stromboli, are themselves typecast as actors who promote a thespian's life as "fun" through the popular tune "An actor's life's for me."

The first cinematographic version of Pinocchio dates back to 1911 in Turin, three years before the birth of Hollywood, when Italian director Giulio Cesare Antamoro started the success of Pinocchio on the big screen. The role of Pinocchio in that film was not assigned to a cartoon, for cartoons had yet to be invented, but rather to French comedian Ferdinand Guillaume, also known as Polydor, member of a famous dynasty of clowns, who was attracted to Italy by the fame of Turin as a city of cinema industry.⁵ From the very beginning, then, cinema had highlighted Pinocchio's affinity with entertainment, his vocation for the circus and for the theatre. Critics have stressed the theatricality and the abundant use of dialogue in the narrative scheme of the novel, all elements particularly suited to performance. Fernando Tempesti, for example, has traced the origin of Collodi's text in the popular Tuscan theatre of Stenterello.⁶ The clownesque

⁴Francis Ford Coppola also contemplated a feature film on Pinocchio, but never realized it. See Giusti, "Quando Fellini cercava Benigni," n.p. See also in this issue Beckett's observations about Stanley Kubrick's interest in Pinocchio ("Le pantin persistant"). For more on Spielberg's *AI* see Demers, "Diventassi" and Anselmi, "Ars bellica," both in this issue.

⁵Other important film adaptations of Collodi's *Avventura di Pinocchio* are Umberto Spano and Raoul Verdini's *Le avventure di Pinocchio* (1936), Giannetto Guardone's *Le avventure di Pinocchio* (1947), and Attilio Giovannini's *Pinocchio e le sue avventure* (1954). More recently, before Benigni, Francesco Nuti made the hardly successful film *Occhio Pinocchio* (1994). This information on Pinocchio's filmography was collected from the *Italica* website (www.italica.rai.it) under the rubric "Speciale Pinocchio."

⁶See Tempesti, "Chi era il Collodi," p. 87.

aspect of Pinocchio and his automaton movements attracted Fellini, who had long wished to make a film on Pinocchio and had thought of Roberto Benigni as the most suited actor for that part.⁷

This essay examines the three most significant adaptations of Collodi's masterpiece produced for the screen in the past sixty years. Disney, Comencini, and Benigni provide three distinctive versions of the protagonist that reflect various modes of social and cultural practice. In Disney, Pinocchio is and remains a passive and harmless puppet (toy-boy), in Comencini he is a poor and rebel child, in Benigni he is an adult *burattino*. These three renditions of Collodi's hero are the product not only of different national and social scenarios, but also of different seasons in contemporary culture. As Wunderlich and Morrissey have well illustrated, Disney's film, released in 1940, effects an infantilization of Collodi's puppet, making of Pinocchio the most suitable hero for post-depression America and setting the trend for the image of Pinocchio still dominant today in American culture. Comencini's television colossal, created in the highly politically charged atmosphere of 1970s Italy, brings the focus on children issues and critiques the flawed methods of middle class education. Comencini's particular interest in an analysis of the problems of real children brings to a complete erasure of the fairy-tale dimension and of the puppet, making of Collodi's hero a boy in flesh and blood throughout his *teleromanzo*. Benigni's film, instead, as product of early twenty-first-century culture, oscillates between an acceptance of the morality espoused by Collodi at the end of the novel—the puppet must grow and become a good and real boy—and the embrace of an alternative scenario where a grown-up—namely Benigni himself—not only continues to be a child at heart, but also opts for the joyous rebellion of the puppet. Needless to say, this last proposition has sparked fierce attacks on Benigni's film, particularly in North America.

Disney's *Pinocchio*: the Toy-Boy

Walt Disney's *Pinocchio*, directed by Hamilton Luske and Ben Sharpsteen, was released in February 1940. Given the vast popularity of Collodi's book in the United States in the 1930s, Walt Disney's interest in making a film about Pinocchio developed possibly as early as 1937.⁸ Although it is

⁷In an interview with Enzo Biagi ("Indovina chi è Pinocchio," n.p.) Benigni himself says that ever since he was child he had been identified with Pinocchio by his mother and that great "maestro" Federico Fellini called him "Pinocchietto."

⁸Disney's staff attended performances of Yasha Frank's play *Pinocchio* in Los Angeles in 1937. Wunderlich notes that Frank's story line is very distant from

assumed by many that it was Disney's film which began the transformation and trivialization of Pinocchio in America, its expurgation of any disturbing and troublesome aspects of childhood, sociologist Robert Wunderlich shows how the changes in Collodi's story took place well before Disney's version, as the result of a simplified conceptualization, and social redefinition of childhood in the United States.⁹ Disney's plan was to continue the European fairy tale tradition inaugurated with the feature cartoon *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937). After Brothers Grimm's Germany, Disney naturally turned to Pinocchio's Italy, but Italy is Europeanized in many aspects: the mountain village setting, Geppetto as a clockmaker and even Pinocchio's costume, re-cast the Italian original in an idyllic Tyrol of middle-class fulfilled dreams. To quote from Wunderlich: "Unlike Collodi's egoistic, headstrong puppet, Disney's Pinocchio is the personification of childhood innocence and loving acceptance. He is the newborn infant filled with wonder, maintaining a sense of wide-eyed awe toward any joy about everything around him" (Wunderlich, "The Tribulations," 211). For Jack Zipes, Disney effects the Americanization of Pinocchio through the techniques which are used in all of Disney's adaptations of classical fairy-tales (Zipes, 16). Disney simplifies the narrative structure of Collodi's *Avventura* by condensing the story and reducing Collodi's topology to six different spaces: Geppetto's home, Mangiafuoco's (Stromboli) theatre and wagon, the tavern, the Paese dei Balocchi (or Pleasure Island), which in Disney becomes a huge American amusement park, the sea and the belly of the Whale (Monstro). New value is attributed to these spaces: the only desirable place is Geppetto's home, locus of livelihood and self-fulfilment, associated to the ideal of the family (middle-class American

Disney's plot, yet Frank's character revisions may have influenced Disney's renditions of Collodi's original ("The Tribulations," p. 211). Wunderlich defines Frank's play *Pinocchio* "the very antithesis of Collodi's vibrant character. He is not headstrong but thoroughly docile and passive ... Frank's Pinocchio is innocent and wishes harm to no one; he is incapable of being mean or ill-tempered." ("The Tribulations," p. 207)

⁹In the article "The Desecration of *Pinocchio* in the United States" Wunderlich and Morrissey conduct a sociological/psychological study of the various adaptations and translations of Collodi's book to examine the changes in the concept of childhood in America during the 1920s and later. While in Collodi the world of children is presented with its challenges and complexities, in modern America children are depicted in a simplistic and excessively positive way. Unlike in the original *Pinocchio*, in American translations and adaptations, all antisocial tendencies are removed from the child and the image of the parents is idealized.

dream).¹⁰ Since Disney's film was influenced by the experience of the depression and of the impending Second World War, the outside world is presented as particularly negative and hostile; for Pinocchio everything outside the home constitutes a threat. It is not coincidental that in Disney's version the story ends with the homecoming and reestablishment of the happy family, while this does not happen either in Collodi, or in Comencini, or in Benigni.

To make the woody puppet's movements less rigid and more natural Disney creates a half puppet, half boy, a toy-boy with typically woody legs, but with the rest of the body fully human. Moreover Disney places beside Pinocchio Jiminy Cricket, in the role of the narrator, a character with whom the audience can identify and a sympathetic vaudeville clown who charms the public and provides a didactic voice.¹¹ Disney then takes many liberties with Collodi's original story, among them the use of music (songs like "When you wish upon a star" quickly became classics) to express the optimistic philosophy of Disney, something that clashes with Collodi's bleak *Weltanschauung*. Disney's film, in fact, did not do well at the box office nor was it received positively in Italy, where it received negative reviews when it was released in 1947. The main criticism was precisely the distance from Collodi's original.¹² Evidence shows that Disney took the

¹⁰Zipes outlines some key elements in Disney's reworking of fairy-tales, such as the reshaping of the classical tale to suit the basic format of the musical and adventure tale. The story is simplified in order to highlight the technical artistry and invention to command audience's attention. Although changes to fairy-tale plots are few, there is more definite typecasting of characters: clear-cut gender roles associate women with domesticity and men with action. Evil characters are dark or black, while protagonists are fair. Zipes, "Towards a Theory," pp. 4-5.

¹¹Zipes points out that Jiminy Cricket is the major character in Disney's film since, as omniscient voice, he frames and narrates the story. His moral conscience is imposed on Pinocchio and on the audience, hence Jiminy provides all the excitement and makes the story of Pinocchio the puppet uninteresting. Zipes, "Towards a Theory," p. 17.

¹²In a review published after *Pinocchio's* release in Italy, Gormo, for example, says: "Questo Disney è un'acquerugiola cheta, più che protagonista è spettatore. Avessimo un burattino monello tirolese, americano, quel che volete! Il guaio è che il burattino quasi non c'è ed il monello neppure, c'è soltanto un mellifilo Giannettino da libro di lettura." Gormo, "L'ultimo Walt Disney," n.p. For Disney's reception in the United States see Wunderlich and Morrirey's chapter 4 in *Pinocchio Goes Postmodern*. For an evaluation of the positive qualities and for American critical reviews of Disney's *Pinocchio* see Sachse, *Pinocchio in U.S.A.*

story of Pinocchio very seriously, he knew Collodi's text directly through the translations available at the time.¹³ The comical effects derived from the automatism in the puppet's movements is transferred onto the ambience in Geppetto's house in the first sequences of the film: objects and people move mechanically and the Tyrolean music is well suited to the purpose, as are the many ticking clocks and their onomatopoeic sounds. By choosing a clockmaker's instead of a carpenter's shop, Disney can highlight the automatic and mechanic effect in gesture and movement, some of which is displaced on objects rather than on the puppet. Unlike in Comencini's and Benigni's film, in Disney's anthropomorphized animals abound, a typical Disneyan procedure well suited to animation films. Disney effectively typecast minor characters such as Honest John and Gideon as vaudeville actors, a choice endorsed thirty years later by Comencini himself, who, in his TV film, made the Cat and the Fox assistants to Mangiafuoco and chose for the roles comic actors Franco Franchi and Ciccio Ingrassia. In Disney's film the categories of good and evil are equally divided and clearly marked in an attempt to create a balance of forces among which Pinocchio finds himself. Characters then are unidimensional and markedly identified with either good or evil. As Annibaleto and Luchi observe, there is a progression in the negative figures encountered by Pinocchio, from Honest John and Gideon (Cat and the Fox), still in the comic tradition of vaudeville (pure comic), to Mangiafuoco (Stromboli), completely negative in Disney, up to the Coachman and finally the whale (Monstro), that represents an extraordinary degree of negativity bordering on the monstrous as its name suggests (Annibaleto/Luchi, 23). So in Disney's film Pinocchio faces a crescendo of negativity that culminates in the climatic encounter with horror. Pinocchio does not show any tension towards an objective, since there is always someone else making decisions for him. He effectively appears unchanged from beginning to end, like perfect, submissive, and compliant toy-boy. The cricket, which functions in Collodi as the conscience, in Disney becomes the narrative conscience; Jiminy Cricket's actions do not change the situation. The animated picture reinterprets the real world by giving a simplified vision of reality, in which moral values are juxtaposed. As Jack Zipes noted, Disney commodifies fairy-tale films and "sacrifices art to technical invention; innovation to tradition; stimulation of the imagination to consumption for

¹³For more on Disney's sources and the various translations and adaptations of Collodi's novel in America see chapter 2 in Wunderlich and Morrissey's *Pinocchio Goes Postmodern*.

distraction" (Zipes, 8). While Zipes' opinion is shared by many, the cinematic achievement and quality of Disney's *Pinocchio* is unquestionable. The film is still appreciated today for spontaneity, inventiveness, technical innovation, and a memorable soundtrack, so much so that experts consider it one of Disney's masterpieces. Disney makes the puppet into a passive, pliable toy-boy who reflects what Wunderlich and Morrissey see as the American accepted and sanctioned, and yet simplified, view of childhood.

Comencini's *Le avventure di Pinocchio*: the Poor Boy

It is hard to pinpoint precisely if and what impact Disney's animation picture had on Luigi Comencini when he completed his version of Collodi's masterpiece. Since Disney's *Pinocchio* marks a milestone in the diffusion of the character and story of the Italian wooden puppet, Comencini may have viewed the famous cartoon as a model to correct.¹⁴ Comencini, who in his early years had worked as a film critic, was very familiar with Disney's work and had expressed his negative opinion on Disney's *Snow White* in a review of 1939.¹⁵ While Comencini may have drawn on Disney for some aspects of Geppetto's character—the loving, tender, and indulgent parent fits both versions—his version of Collodi's hero could not be more distant from Disney's. If Disney proposes the model of childhood that best fits post-depression America—a domesticated and submissive view of boyhood—Comencini, who makes his film in post-1968 Italy, presents *Pinocchio* as a rebel and cheeky boy, who only occasionally appears as a puppet.

Comencini's *Le avventure di Pinocchio*, screenplayed by Comencini with Suso Cecchi D'Amico, aired for the first time on RAI Italian National TV on 8 April 1972.¹⁶ Since it was a film mini-series made for state television—the so-called *teleromanzo*, so popular in the RAI productions of the 1960s and '70s—it was directed to a mass audience, but was not conceived

¹⁴Comencini may have been influenced also by the previous Italian non-animated version of *Pinocchio* such as Giovannini's, Guardone's and Spano, and Verdin's.

¹⁵In the appendix to Comencini's autobiography we find some of his film reviews for various journals. Disney's *Snow White* was reviewed in the journal *Corrente* on 28 February 1939. Comencini criticized it for being "opera d'arte. ... anti-artistica" (*Infanzia*, p. 193).

¹⁶The film was created as a television series in six episodes for a duration of almost six hours. The production cost more than one billion lire, making it still one of the most expensive Italian films ever made, it was viewed in the whole world including China, Korea and Cuba.

as mere entertainment. At the time Comencini's film was aired, RAI was still holding a monopoly in Italian broadcasting and was carrying out a largely informational cultural and educational mandate.¹⁷ The cast included famous Italian actors: Nino Manfredi in the leading role of Geppetto, Italian diva Gina Lollobrigida as the Blue Fairy, master of Italian neorealistic cinema Vittorio De Sica in a cameo appearance as the judge; immensely popular comic duo Franco Franchi e Ciccio Ingrassia in the role of the Cat and the Fox. The only exception to the stellar cast was the nine year-old boy Andrea Balestri, a non-professional actor, who was chosen for the leading role of Pinocchio. This *television* was a high-budget production, two years in the making. Given its duration (over five hours) this film is destined to remain unique in the history of *Pinocchio* adaptations for the screen and is still considered the best film version of Collodi's masterpiece ever made. Comparing Comencini's film with Collodi's original, Alessandra Vitali states:

Un eroe della libertà, disponibile ad ogni richiamo della fantasia e dell'avventura ... e soprattutto un bambino in carne ed ossa ... questa è la differenza fondamentale rispetto all'originale letterario che fa le *Avventure* di Comencini un caso a parte nella storia delle trasposizioni del romanzo di Collodi e uno sceneggiato indimenticabile. (Vitali, n.p.)

In Comencini's film, the adventures of Pinocchio are narrated alongside the story of Geppetto, whose figure appears more prominently than in Collodi. In fact the director intended to feature the story of a father-son relationship and to raise awareness on education and on the condition of children in contemporary Italian society. The political movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s in Italy, culminating in the 1968 students revolt, marked a period of intense social ferment, rejection of authority, and critique of bourgeois society. In the politically charged atmosphere of the early 1970s, Comencini stressed the anti-authoritarian message of the story and made the rebellion of the boy into the central theme of the film.¹⁸ This is why rather than a professional actor, he chose for the role of

¹⁷See Dagrada, "Television and Its Critics."

¹⁸Ginsborg notes that in the period between 1968 and 1973 Italy witnessed the most extraordinary social ferment and "the high season of collective action in the history of the Republic" (*A History of Contemporary Italy*, p. 298) The protests, which began with the student revolt of 1968 in schools and universities, spread into factories and then into society in general. It was a time of high revolutionary potential which produced long lasting effects.

Pinocchio Andrea Balestri a saucy, rebel child.¹⁹

Comencini's preoccupation with children's issues is not exclusive to this film. The director, who made his artistic debut with the documentary *Bambini in città* (1946), embraces this theme just before his *Pinocchio* in the TV-documentary *I bambini e noi* (1970), where he conducts a social analysis of children's problems, takes unconventional positions *vis-à-vis* child education, and denounces the condition of poverty some children still endure in 1970s Italy.²⁰ Comencini was fascinated by the vitality of children and by Pinocchio, a child who, in order to pursue any possible adventure, is ready to reject any rule and disobey adults.²¹ In *Le avventure di Pinocchio* rebellion to adult authority is endorsed: police and school are ridiculed as institutions whose traditional methods of punishment and education are an obstacle to the development of the child.

Comencini models his film on his realistic view of the world and gives the story a distinctively late nineteenth-century Tuscan setting. He offers a realistic reading of the novel and highlights the plight of poverty and hunger that subtends the life of Geppetto and Pinocchio, a predicament that the director still sees afflicting some children in contemporary Italy.²² As Comencini himself declared in the interview for *Il Tempo*: "Non ho mai considerato il libro di Collodi una favola. Pinocchio è un racconto contadino e lo studio di un carattere con tutti gli aspetti universali e tipici del-

¹⁹Various articles stress the unruly temperament of Andrea Balestri, who was selected for that reason for the part of Pinocchio. Comencini said about Andrea Balestri: "Il suo carattere non è terribile, è semplicemente come quello del personaggio che interpreta." Cited in Danna, "Il naso di Pinocchio," n.p.

²⁰Although Comencini is best known for inventing the genre of "realismo rosa" and for comedy Italian style with films such as *Pane, amore e fantasia* (1953), *Pane, amore e gelosia* (1954), and *Tutti a casa* (1960), his predilection for childhood is evident in the recurrence of this theme in many of his films. Besides the documentaries quoted above and the adaptation of Collodi's text, Comencini made *L'incompreso* (1967), taken from Florence Montgomery's eponymous novel, and later *Cuore* (1984), taken from De Amicis' novel. Comencini acknowledged that his better understanding of children's psychology through the documentary *I bambini e noi* was crucial for the making of his *Pinocchio* (Comencini, *Infanzia*, p. 127).

²¹These statements by Comencini are reported in the article "Il naso di Pinocchio rispunta su Raitre" by Maria Paola Danna.

²²In his autobiography Comencini describes the poverty of children in a Roman borgata, as he portrayed it in the TV documentary *I bambini e noi* (Comencini, *Infanzia*, pp. 123-127).

l'infanzia."²³ Although the film is not completely faithful to Collodi's book, it often draws on the text for the dialogues and preserves the Tuscan language used by Collodi. In Comencini's *Avventure*, fairy-tale aspects are almost completely eliminated from the story: no more speaking animals (the Cat and the Fox are mountebanks working for Mangiafuoco), the cricket is merely a shadow on the wall; characters are preeminently human, therefore the allegorical dimension brought by the speaking animals disappears. Comencini makes of Collodi's hero a real boy from beginning to end. While in Collodi the change from puppet into boy is the final reward for good behaviour, in Comencini the boy is immediately there, after the Fairy turns Geppetto's puppet into a boy. Almost from the very start Comencini shows us a boy in flesh and blood, who reverts into a wooden puppet only when he misbehaves or when his life is in danger, as a repressive or protective process controlled by the Fairy. In an interview the director explains how he decided to change Collodi's plot by refusing to relegate the transformation from puppet into a boy to the end of the story: "Sarebbe stato quasi impossibile, allora, far recitare un burattino per tutto il film come fosse un attore; ... nessuno ... avrebbe accettato e amato un bambino mai visto che si presenta al pubblico proprio mentre il racconto si conclude."²⁴ In the *teleromanzo* the Fairy becomes Geppetto's dead wife and embodies the educational moralism which Comencini intends to stigmatize. The Fairy's magical, though somewhat ominous, arrival is marked by charming glockenspiel music but also by storm and thunder. Comencini's *Fata* will be revealed later as more of a witch than a good fairy. Identical to the picture of Geppetto's dead wife hanging on the wall, this *Fata* gives Pinocchio the rules to follow in order for him to remain a real boy: be good, obedient, and support his father in his old age or else, he will revert into a puppet. For Comencini the Fairy's conditions amount to blackmailing the child, an attitude he sees reflected in the treatment of children in Italian society at his time.²⁵ The director's program of highlighting children's issues brings to a reevaluation of Lucignolo. The bad

²³Excerpts from this interview are quoted in the pamphlet accompanying the new DVD release of Comencini's film (Multimedia San Paolo, 2003).

²⁴Comencini, "Il mio Pinocchio."

²⁵Comencini states: "L'opera di Collodi mi apparve come il racconto di un colossale ricatto fatto al bambino ... Decisi di sostituire il ricatto globale del libro con una punizione che colpisce il bambino ogni volta che disubbidisce o non tiene fede agli impegni presi con la fata. Pinocchio nasce nel legno e la fata lo trasforma subito in bambino a patto che ..." (Comencini, *Infanzia*, p. 129).

boy, who in Collodi leads Pinocchio into the temptations of the *Paese dei Balocchi*, is given a less negative role here. Lucignolo is presented sympathetically, as a true friend. The negative depiction of middle-class values and education is embodied in the character of the Fairy, who is criticized on various occasions and at the end is attacked by Geppetto for her methods of child's education.²⁶ In fact, the Fairy is associated here with two animals of Collodi's original, the cricket and the snail, which are given exclusively negative attributes. The cricket, who is reduced to a mere shadow on the wall, gives Pinocchio its words of wisdom that are a sum of trite and void moralities, to which Pinocchio responds by smashing the cricket and the picture of the mother/Fairy against the wall. The Fairy punishes this insult by temporarily reverting the boy into a wooden puppet. On various occasions Pinocchio himself curses the "fatina" and calls her "cattiva."²⁷ When the *Fata* is shown in her fairy-tale house on the lake she is accompanied by her shrewd, old, witch-like assistant the Lumaca, the hag-snail who is artfully revealed as the Fairy's unattractive side. Eventually, when Geppetto meets Pinocchio in the belly of the big fish and hears from the boy's words about the strict treatment of the Fairy, it is Geppetto who equates her with a witch. While Comencini redeems some of the negative characters of Collodi's original by revealing their humanity—the Cat and the Fox, are shown as partly victims of the same poverty and hunger which afflicts Pinocchio and Geppetto, Mangiafuoco is presented as more compassionate towards the boy, Lucignolo reveals to Pinocchio what friendship is about—it is the Fairy who becomes the catalyst for the negative side of the story. In an interview about Comencini's film and his role as Geppetto, Nino Manfredi pointed out this aspect of the fairy, as he saw it depicted in Collodi's text: "la Fata mi sta antipatica (sono convinto che Collodi fosse un misogino)."²⁸

The most notable discrepancy between Collodi's original and Comencini's adaptation is in the ending. In the *teloromanzo* the final shift

²⁶Institutional methods of learning are questioned in a scene where the teacher in Pinocchio's classroom is shown imparting ridiculous notions and inflicting dubious punishment. With his unsuited pedagogical methods the teacher is shown to be responsible for Lucignolo's and Pinocchio's removal from the classroom and ultimately for their escape to the *Paese dei Balocchi*.

²⁷In Collodi and in Benigni's film Pinocchio weeps for the death of the Blue Fairy and wishes he had died in her place, since he was such a bad person and she was so good. In Comencini instead, Pinocchio calls the *Fata* "cattiva" three times when he finds out that she is dead.

²⁸Bevilacqua "Nino Manfredi," n.p.

of the puppet into a real boy happens inside the belly of the big fish.²⁹ While for Geppetto the stomach of the fish has become a sort of artificial paradise for comfortable, sheltered life, with plenty of free time to read books, become educated, and fantasize about the real world, for Pinocchio the boy no artificial life, or book adventure can replace the excitement of experiencing reality. Here, then, it is the child who makes the adult understand the deficiencies of a fake world and who forces his father to re-emerge from the belly of the big fish and begin a new life. Comencini uses Collodi's story to carry out an investigation into the status of childhood, family relations, and education in contemporary society; the poverty of late *Ottocento* Italy is a subtext for an analysis of the condition of indigence that still plague poor children of his time. In Comencini's Italy of the early 1970s Pinocchio is a rebel child and a poor boy.

Benigni's *Pinocchio*: the *Burattino*

Roberto Benigni's *Pinocchio* offers yet a different and much debated version of Collodi's hero. In Benigni's film the carved piece of wood appears from the outset as neither a puppet nor a child, but looms large as a grown-up man, albeit with the soul of a puppet. The movie follows quite faithfully the path traced by Collodi. Pinocchio goes through various scrapes from which he grows and learns to take responsibility for his actions and to care for his parents (Geppetto and the Fairy). In short he becomes a "ragazzo perbene." However, at the end of the film, after the successful transformation into a well-behaved person, while Pinocchio goes to school, his cone-capped shadow reflected on the school's external wall takes a separate path and runs away following the blue butterfly seen in the opening scene. The finale suggests that this Pinocchio oscillates between the "ragazzo perbene" of Collodian memory and the adult/child puppet that is Benigni's own personal version of Collodi's hero. Rather than being judged with reservations or rejected, this interpretation of Pinocchio as a adult/child/puppet should be accepted as yet a different portrayal of Collodi's hero, more in line with Benigni's idea of Pinocchio as the perfect incarnation of the puppet, the clown, the *burattino*.

Benigni's *Pinocchio* was released in Italy in October 2002 and on Christmas day 2002 in North America in a fully dubbed English version.³⁰

²⁹Even within the film it is debated whether the fish is a shark or a whale. This is definitely a critical commentary on Disney's choice of highlighting the Biblical subtext by changing Collodi's "pescecane" into a whale.

³⁰Screenplayed by Benigni and Vincenzo Cerami, the film stars Benigni as

Both in Italy and around the world the film was accompanied by great publicity and advertising. The most expensive production ever in the history of Italian cinema, it was expected to repeat or even surpass Benigni's exploit with academy-award winning *La vita è bella* (1997). The film, which in Italy was appreciated by the public but not particularly by critics, was a complete fiasco in North America, both at the box office and among critics.³¹ Benigni, a self proclaimed Pinocchio, the actor already designated by Federico Fellini as Pinocchio incarnate, in the sense of the pure comic, was criticized by some for giving too literal a reading of Collodi's text, blamed by others for missing Collodi's social denunciation of the poverty in post-Unification Italy, accused of lacking the typical audaciousness of ribald provocateur, and mocked for being too old for the role.³² The polemics and politicization surrounding both the making and the distributing of this film have polluted the air so much that it is hard to regain a balanced view on Benigni's work.³³ While issues relating to the reception of Benigni's film in America will be fully explored in other articles in this volume, my observations may contribute to a more objective perspective. A negative evaluation of the film presented to North American viewers

Pinocchio, Nicoletta Braschi as the Fairy, Carlo Giuffré as Geppetto, Peppe Barra as the Cricket, Kim Rossi Stuart as Lucignolo. Famous English-speaking cinema and television stars lent their voice for Benigni's film. Glenn Close's voice was used for the Blue Fairy, John Cleese for the Cricket and Regis Filbin for the Circus Master. For more on Benigni's *Pinocchio* see Anselmi, "Ars bellica," in this issue.

³¹In Italy the success at the box office in the first days after its realease did not translate into an equally positive reception among critics. The positive reviews by Lietta Tornabuoni and Mariuccia Ciotta contrast with Roberto Fedi and Piero Cudini's slating reviews. Reviews by *Washington Post* Stephen Hunter, *New York Times* Elvis Mitchell and *The Globe and Mail* Jennie Punter unanimously chastise this film as one the worst and most boring films ever made.

³²For harsh criticism of Benigni's *Pinocchio* as boring see Cudini's review. For Fellini's idea of Benigni as a perfect embodiment of Pinocchio see Giusti's article.

³³In Italy critics seem to be divided in two factions, those who love Benigni and his films, and those who hate him. The fact that the film was distributed in Italy by Medusa Film, a company owned by prime minister and media tycoon Silvio Berlusconi, has outraged many left-leaning viewers and intellectuals who have always appreciated Benigni for his open and sharp criticism of Berlusconi and his conservative government. For Benigni's comments on the matter see his interview with Davide Grieco.

doubtlessly derives from the fact that the North American release was edited and fully dubbed. The version in English is in itself problematic; besides the fact that the dubbing is out of synch, the choice of the voices, often attached to easily recognizable actors, is completely inadequate, particularly so for Pinocchio and the Fairy. Furthermore, a great deal of Pinocchio's comic vein springs from the use of and play on words—starting with the Tuscan accent and language, which Tuscan actor Benigni is best suited to convey—but all this is lost in the dubbed version. These problems are quite evident when one compares it to the Italian version and considers how much better it would have been had it simply been given English subtitles.³⁴

Comencini's film, an inevitable model for any contemporary Italian film maker exploring the *Pinocchio* plot, differs from Benigni's *Pinocchio* at least in some fundamental points. While Comencini makes Collodi's story into a realistic "racconto contadino" and presents it as a social denunciation of the rights of children, Benigni thinks of his *Pinocchio* as a fairy-tale. In his interview with Davide Grieco Benigni states: "Ho cercato di restare fedele al mistero del libro che poi, non esageriamo insomma, è una favola." Furthermore, to Comencini's Pinocchio/the poor child, Benigni opposes Pinocchio the man/puppet. The idea of an adult playing the role of a child/puppet has outraged many, who refused to accept a grown-up man acting like a boy-puppet.³⁵ However, Benigni does not seem to acknowledge the negative connotation normally associated with the term puppet in the sense of a stringed marionette. For him, Pinocchio does not embody passivity and compliance of the toy-boy, *à la* Disney, nor does he personify the essential poor boy, *à la* Comencini, but rather the puppet is a *burattino*, the expression of a child-like, though ageless individual whose vitality, search for freedom, joy and pleasure leads to irreverence and rebellion. In short, Pinocchio the *burattino* coincides perfectly with Benigni's comic persona. In an interview with Enzo Biagi, the Tuscan actor/director responds to the question "Chi è Benigni?" with: "Io, se lei mi dice che Benigni è un buffone, un burattino, un comico, un clown, mi fa un complimento. Io vorrei tanto che mi si chiamasse così." (Biagi, n.p.) Pinocchio the puppet is the buffoon, the *burattino* which Benigni strives to be in many of his film personae. As Marcia Landy has noted, in the tradition of

³⁴For speculations about and reasons for the discrepancies between English and Italian subtitled versions of Benigni's *Pinocchio* released in North America, see Anselmi, "Ars bellica" in this issue.

³⁵See, for example, Mitchell: "It's hard to tell what's sadder, Geppetto's belief that Pinocchio is a child puppet or Mr Benigni's need to play one." Mitchell, "How Many Actors," n.p.

other comic actors, like Charles Chaplin, Jerry Lewis and Totò, “Benigni has a clearly defined persona that carries over from film to film” (Landy, 119). The Tuscan actor himself admits that there is a bit of Pinocchio in all his films, from *Piccolo Diavolo* to *Johnny Stecchino*, to *Il Mostro* and even in *La vita è bella*. Benigni reveals in an interview to Davide Grieco: “Ho sempre fatto Pinocchio in tutte le cose che ho fatto. *Il Piccolo Diavolo* era Pinocchio, ... L’ho sempre rincorso Pinocchio. In fondo lo era pure *Il Mostro*, lo era *Johnny Stecchino*, era un po’ Pinocchietto anche quello della *Vita è bella* se vogliamo.” (Grieco, n.p.) An adult man who plays the role of a child-puppet and longs to remain such throughout the film may have sparked disapproval, but the childish and puppet-like nature of Pinocchio reflects perfectly the essence of Benigni’s persona, a puppet, a *burattino*, who, like a clown, is ageless.

Benigni’s distinctive embodiment of Collodi’s hero as an adult/puppet brings to the fore the character of the *Fata Turchina*, who in this film is given space to shine as a positive force. By highlighting the *Fata Turchina* the Tuscan director sets this philogynist Pinocchio in opposition to Disney, Comencini, and Collodi.³⁶ In the book, the *Fatina* does not appear until chapter sixteen, she is an afterthought exhumed from the fairy-tale tradition when Collodi is asked by acclamation to resurrect his dead puppet and continue with the adventures of Pinocchio in the serialized children magazine. All three film adaptations introduce the character of the Fairy much earlier than Collodi’s original. In Disney and Comencini she appears during Pinocchio’s first night in order to lay down the rules for the successful transformation of the wooden puppet into a boy. In Benigni, however, the *Fata* not only appears earlier than in Collodi and in the other two films, but she takes centre stage in the prologue scene, precisely with the fairy-tale arrival of a stagecoach pulled by white mice and driven by Medoro. From the very start the Fairy is inextricably connected to the blue butterfly. It is the Blue Fairy who grabs for a moment the blue creature and sends it off to fly until it touches the very log which, rambling through the village, wreaking havoc everywhere and creating comic scenes, ends up in Geppetto’s shop to be carved into Pinocchio. That same butterfly will be seen in the epilogue, when the shadow of Pinocchio, finally a “ragazzo perbene,” still longs to fly freely and wander around. Hence, the butterfly is

³⁶While the misogynist treatment of the Fairy in Comencini has been discussed above, for Disney, suffice it to say that the fairy reflects the patriarchal view of the American bourgeoisie. She is depicted as a sex object with blonde rather than blue hair. Her appearances are drastically reduced, and her educational task is shifted to the male-gendered character of the cricket.

granted special importance as symbol of unfettered flight, tinged with echoes of Calvinian lightness. Unlike Collodi, Disney, and Comencini, Benigni's Pinocchio is an adult, or rather an ageless puppet, and not a wooden puppet who turns into a real boy. In Benigni's film the acquisition of the qualities of the "bravo ragazzo" at the end still leaves space for the puppet.

Pinocchio's search for freedom and his attraction to nature are two elements in Collodi's text which the Tuscan director has espoused for his version of Pinocchio. In the book, during the conversation with the cricket, to the insect's exhortations to get educated, find a job, and respect family values, Pinocchio opposes his philosophy of life: "e io, a dirtela in confidenza, di studiare non ne ho punto voglia e mi diverto più a correre dietro alle farfalle e a salire su per gli alberi a prendere gli uccellini di nido." (Collodi, 18) Benigni expands on this declaration made by Pinocchio in Collodi's text, uses a butterfly to symbolize freedom, and links the blue flying creature to the Blue Fairy's power to give life, as she is the one who sends the butterfly flying and touching the magical log which will become Pinocchio. Benigni shows the newly formed Pinocchio wandering freely around green open spaces, embracing the birds on a tree, and praising life: "che bellezza il mondo, questa sì che è vita." This declaration evokes the Blue Fairy's statement in the opening scene, when she tells Medoro that giving joy is the most beautiful thing one can do: "Dare allegria è la cosa più bella che si possa fare al mondo." These words recall Benigni's previous film *La vita è bella*. In the Oscar-winning movie the preoccupation with the child's survival and the task of disguising the cruelty and horror of the Holocaust from the child's life experience is given to the father figure, played by Benigni. In *Pinocchio*, instead, it is the mother figure, the Blue Fairy, who strives to secure the child/puppet's survival and to dispense relief and joy. Moreover, in the film the *Fata* has very deep feelings for the puppet, whom she praises twice for his beauty; in fact she never loses sight of him. In the end, when Pinocchio becomes a "ragazzo perbene" and is complimented by the Fairy for abiding by familial and societal rules, to the Collodian words of Pinocchio, "com'ero buffo quando ero un burattino," Benigni's *Fata* juxtaposes "era un bel burattino." In the final flight of the blue butterfly one can see the Fairy's endorsement of freedom and endless adventure embraced by Pinocchio's cone-capped shadow. The alternative message accepted by the Fairy is that the puppet is "depositario di anti-conformismo e libertà" (Tornabuoni, 41). Commenting on the Fairy, in his interview with Grieco, Benigni states: "il personaggio della *Fata Turchina* è il più complesso di tutta la storia, a parte Pinocchio ... è il per-

sonaggio più moderno ... appartiene a domani, è oggi stesso. Addirittura è lei che manda Pinocchio nelle braccia di Lucignolo.” (Grieco, n.p.) For Benigni the Fairy holds a subtle sadness because she knows that Pinocchio’s beauty cannot last very long, she knows that “happiness is there, we can look at it, but we cannot reach it” (Bruni, R7) yet it is our duty to search for it. The *Fata Turchina* tries to make the beauty of the puppet last as long as possible because it is the puppet whom she loves, but she knows she will not succeed. Benigni’s Pinocchio, then, is the ageless burattino who longs for an always elusive happiness which can make life beautiful. This festive, exuberant, child-like *burattino*, although not everybody’s favourite, is the Pinocchio that Benigni has presented us with.

This article proposes a comparative analysis of the three most important cinematic adaptations of *Le avventure di Pinocchio* in the past six decades. Each film version of Collodi’s classic presents a Pinocchio suited for a different socio-cultural scene: From Disney’s toy-boy for American post-depression era, to Comencini’s poor boy of politically charged 1970s Italy, to Benigni’s ageless *burattino* for the present time. As Disney’s animated picture, Comencini’s *tele romanzo*, and Benigni’s film have shown, Collodi’s original continues to generate new and distinctive cinematic versions of a classic that has reached iconic proportion

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