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## *The Fabulous Journeys of Alice and Pinocchio: Exploring Their Parallel Worlds* by Laura Tosi with Peter Hunt

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## Mythcon 51: The Mythic, the Fantastic, and the Alien

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### Abstract

Tosi is frank concerning the challenges presented to “say something new” about the tales of Alice and Pinocchio, yet while there has been much separate study and criticism on the subjects of these iconic children’s characters, there has been no scholarly study of each text through the lens of the other (Tosi 1). Tosi discusses the impact of the *Alice* books and *Pinocchio* on a broader, global audience by introducing an idea put forth by Italian novelist Italo Calvino, namely that “classics are those books which come to us bearing the aura of previous interpretation and trailing behind them the traces they have left in the culture or cultures (or just in the languages and customs) through which they have passed” (qtd. in Tosi, 1). Calvino’s words sum up the aims of Tosi’s *The Fabulous Journeys of Alice and Pinocchio*, and challenge her to present compelling proof that these tales are indeed classics, fashioned by the language, culture and history of their native soils.

### Additional Keywords

alice, pinocchio, wonderland, carroll, collodi, italian, british, national literature, folktales, storytelling, tropes, fables

On the other hand, weak spots do peek through in places, such as when Hohenstein reads the *Hunger Games* novels as demonstrating that "Gale symbolizes Katniss's masculine side [...] [while] Peeta, on the other hand, symbolizes the feminine aspects of Katniss's personality" (58). This is reductive, and comes far too close to allegorical claims for my liking, but in my experience these kinds of symbolic reading are fairly common practice when doing comparative work with Campbell, and I was actually expecting far more of them than Hohenstein included.

Overall, *Girl Warriors* impressed me by delivering a far more in-depth argument, using a far greater variety of texts, than I was expecting to encounter. I imagine that this book will be valuable to anyone writing about adaptation in almost any way, not just children's film or girl studies, and I look forward to seeing more of Hohenstein's work in the future.

—Maria Alberto



**THE FABULOUS JOURNEYS OF ALICE AND PINOCCHIO: EXPLORING THEIR PARALLEL WORLDS.** Laura Tosi with Peter Hunt. McFarland & Company, Inc, 2018. 227 pages, ISBN 978-1476665436. \$55.00.

IN THE CHAPTER ENTITLED "ALICE'S EVIDENCE" of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, the King orders the White Rabbit to "Begin at the beginning, [...] and go on till you come to the end; then stop" (Carroll 12:109). Yet it is sometimes necessary to begin at the end in order to understand the context of the evidence one is presented with. Peter Hunt's "Strange Meeting in Wonder-Tuscany," the Appendix to Laura Tosi's *The Fabulous Journeys of Alice and Pinocchio: Exploring Their Parallel Worlds*, is a charming short story of a chance encounter between the decidedly British Alice and the Italian Pinocchio:

Alice was growing very tired of sitting next to her sister (who was flirting with a very handsome Italian boy) and trying to understand this strange language, and trying to eat all this strangely-shaped food. [...] Alice longed to be in the shade of the tall trees that lined the white road, so she slipped off her chair and tiptoed in among the leaves of the lower branches. There was a little path and she followed it for a while, until she was startled by a voice near her shoulder, which said "Chi sei?" [...] Oh dear, Alice thought, more nonsense, but she said, politely, in the only phrases of Italian that she had learned: "No capisco. Ho solo parla Inglesi." (195)

Language and cultural barriers would keep these two iconic figures of children's literature apart for nearly two centuries; the prim Alice and the mischievous puppet Pinocchio would see their respective worlds collide only once, in Italian author Stefano Benni's 2016 *La Bottiglia Magica*. While Wonderland and Tuscany seem worlds apart, Tosi examines not only the status of these stories as national literature, but also the shared folk and fairytale framework that helped shape these tales.

In opening, Tosi is frank concerning the challenges presented to "say something new" about the tales of Alice and Pinocchio, yet while there has been much separate study and criticism on the subjects of these iconic children's characters, there has been no scholarly study of each text through the lens of the other (1). Tosi discusses the impact of the *Alice* books and *Pinocchio* on a broader, global audience by introducing an idea put forth by Italian novelist Italo Calvino, namely that "classics are those books which come to us bearing the aura of previous interpretation and trailing behind them the traces they have left in the culture or cultures (or just in the languages and customs) through which they have passed" (qtd. in Tosi, 1). Calvino's words sum up the aims of Tosi's *The Fabulous Journeys of Alice and Pinocchio*, and challenge her to present compelling proof that these tales are indeed classics, fashioned by the language, culture and history of their native soils.

Tosi begins by considering the role children's stories play in nation-building, mainly that "among children's literature's many functions is that it teaches children how to be citizens" (12). It is therefore of particular note that national texts, such as *Alice* and *Pinocchio*, over time serve as vectors for the "transmission of cultural stereotypes," by virtue of their influence and importance within their respective nations (13). National classics soon see their characters become ambassadors of these nations, borne of projections and the already internalized prejudices of their national audience (14-15). Both Alice and Pinocchio represent their respective national stereotypes. Alice is portrayed as the typical English lady, well-mannered, even-tempered, and no-nonsense, while Pinocchio represents the outdated caricature of Italians as lazy, easy-going, and Machiavellian (16).

Yet Tosi wonders, is Pinocchio quintessentially Italian? Is Alice truly a quintessential English lady? Pinocchio is, after all, impetuous, all action, and "a creature of impulse and passion" (16-17). While these traits seem to confirm certain stereotypes about Italians, there is also Pinocchio's innocence that speaks to a nation post-unification, a nation in its infancy, brought together by a poverty long-forgotten today (17). Furthermore, Tosi cites the Italian literary historian Alberto Asor Rosa who contends that Pinocchio and his tale represent a nation and a people who matured through misfortune; post-unification Italy "was

going through the suffering that changes a puppet into a man" (19). Similarly, Alice seems to represent the very epitome of Englishness; she is every inch a proper young woman, one who is polite, stoic, and reserved (17). In a world of nonsense, Alice is a voice of reason, if a somewhat problematic one wrapped in the trappings of "Victorian-nostalgic" classism (19-20).

*The Fabulous Journeys of Alice and Pinocchio* provides comparative literature scholars with context into the many literary traditions which helped to shape both the tales of Alice and Pinocchio. According to Tosi, folktales come to us from an oral tradition; fairy tales share many of the qualities of the folkloric tradition, while having a literary impulse (61). It is curious then, that the Italian word *fiaba* is used for both folktales and fairy tales (62). "As *Alice* and *Pinocchio* offer unique combinations of folktale, fairy tale and fantasy tropes, it is sometimes difficult to discriminate rigidly, and there is occasionally some overlap" (62). Both stories are hybrids of these unique literary and oral traditions; in structure, they appear to unfold in a rambling fashion, based entirely upon the reactions the main characters have to their surroundings and those they encounter along their respective adventures (69-70). The beginnings and endings of *Alice* and *Pinocchio* also appear to break from the formulaic "fixed metrical and rhyming tags" of traditional fairy tales, instead employing direct references to the tradition of storytelling (71-72). While *Alice* is framed as a fond childhood recollection retold, *Pinocchio* similarly begins with the narrator breaking the fourth wall and subverting the expectations of the "little readers" of the fairy tale (72).

Both stories also draw from a rich well of tropes that feed the worlds of folk and fairy tales. Early children's stories are presented as cautionary tales, meant to educate children on the consequences of disobedience (75). Grimms's fairy tales clearly exhibit a pattern in which disobedience and curiosity are frequently punished; by serving as tools of socialization, these stories plant the seeds of proper behavior in little boys and girls (76). Following this tradition, Alice and Pinocchio are frequently faced with situations meant to educate the behavior of the reader; Pinocchio's refusal to be good and go to school is punished by his being turned into a donkey, while Alice, cautiously, checks the label of a mysterious bottle as she knows that poisons are "certain to disagree with you, sooner or later" (Carroll 1:14). Both Alice and Pinocchio quickly learn that, in order to survive, they must follow the rules of their respective worlds, lest they disappear or die (76).

Both stories also feature the fantasy trope of talking animals prominently. "*Alice* and *Pinocchio* are characterized by a laterization of animal metaphors" (80). Animal associations are used to reflect the humanity of the characters; in *Alice*, her neck grows at a fantastic rate and a Robin mistakes her for a snake trying to steal her eggs (81). An indignant Alice denies this

accusation, though the clever Robin quickly concludes little girls are as dangerous as snakes after Alice admits that she does, indeed, eat eggs (81). In *Pinocchio*, however, these associations are used to reflect the loss of humanity suffered by the characters. Pinocchio finds himself constantly demoted to an animal state, and he learns what it means to be exploited and treated cruelly (82). In a particularly tragic passage, Pinocchio witnesses the dying breaths of a donkey, which he recognizes as his friend Candle-Wick. In his final moments, the poor boy is stripped of his humanity, able only to communicate his dying wish with Pinocchio through donkey-language (82). Alice and Pinocchio use this fantasy trope to impart important lessons about what it means to be human to its readers, and perhaps about how humans interact with the animals that fill our own world.

In returning once again to Hunt's "Strange Meeting in Wonder-Tuscany," Alice's wanderlust leads to her encounter with the little Italian puppet-boy Pinocchio. Upon freeing him from a woeful predicament, she watches, curiously and impatiently, as Pinocchio runs off into the woods, pursued by the Cat and Fox. As she considers the absurdity of the situation, he comes running back:

"Alice! Quando ti vedro di nuovo?," he shouted, and started running again.

And Alice, quite forgetting that she had nothing in common with the puppet, and didn't even speak his language, waved back and shouted "Molto presto, Pinocchio!" and waved and waved until he was out of sight. (Tosi 198)

Hunt's story perfectly expresses the very essence of Tosi's book: while the tales of Alice and Pinocchio were forged through very different cultures and languages, Tosi's cross-cultural examination of these texts and their similarities bring them to a crossroads upon which these barriers are forgotten. Thus Tosi's *The Fabulous Journeys of Alice and Pinocchio: Exploring Their Parallel Worlds* proves to be an important text for both comparative literature scholars and fans of these characters. Its influence on the fields of comparative literature and children's literature will be felt for many years to come.

—Bianca L. Beronio

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