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PINOCCHIO AND THE UNCANNY QUEST FOR SUBALTERN SPACES IN ITALIAN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

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Sommario
Con il suo *occupare uno spazio liminale, ibrido e frammentato, Pinocchio sembra rispecchiare l'ansia italiana di fronte ad un potere egemonico*, *nell'Italia post-unificazione. Da pezzo di legno a 'ragazzo per bene', la ricerca continua di Pinocchio per dare un senso alla sua identità e a quella del mondo che lo circonda, può essere paragonata a quella della giovane Italia, una nazione in cerca di una cultura nazionale che possa convalidarne l'esistenza. Il* Pinocchio *di Carlo Collodi (1883) può essere considerato un racconto di ricerca postcoloniale che non solo serve ad educare i bambini ma che rivela anche elementi essenziali di una giovane nazione e risponde al questito circa che cosa renda una persona italiana. Rivelando lo sconcerto di coloro che occupano spazi ambigui di (dis)unità, e mettendo in evidenzia l'importanza di rivisitare racconti per l'infanzia in quanto documenti dal valore storico, è possibile comprendere meglio l'emarginazione e l'impotenza dell'Italia post-unificazione nel corso del viaggio da essa intrapreso per diventare 'autentica' nazione.*

Keywords: *Pinocchio*, uncanny, subaltern, children's literature, identity-formation

Existing in a liminal space as a hybrid or fragmented form, the figure of Pinocchio can be read as a reflection of Italian anxiety at the hands of hegemonic power in the aftermath of the unification. In *The Pinocchio Effect*: *On Making Italians, 1860-1920*, Suzanne Stewart-

Steinberg suggests that post-unification Italy was "in a state of perpetual infancy" (2007:3), like children battling marginalisation and powerlessness on their journey to nationhood. The comparison of fragmented nations with children seeking a sense of self, should not be seen as derogatory towards ideas of childhood, but rather taken in light of the valid research done over the centuries concerning childhood and adolescence as tumultuous times of self-development (Coats, 2008:78). Likewise, marginalised nations or what Antonio Gramsci refers to as 'subaltern' groups, by being likened to infancy, can see such a comparison as offering hope that national emancipation is indeed a possibility. Literature, in particular fairy tales or children's stories, offers sites for cultural understanding through the realisation and awareness of ideological power struggles that explicitly or implicitly exist within narrative structures (Hunt, 1992). In this way, Carlo Collodi's *Pinocchio* (1883) can be seen as a postcolonial quest story that not only serves educative purposes for children, but reveals elements of nation-formation that in turn helped address the troubling question plaguing the Italian people after unification: what makes an Italian? From a log of wood to a 'ragazzo per bene' (a real boy), Pinocchio's search to make sense of himself and the world around him can be paralleled with Italy as a young nation: one that underwent a similar quest for authentication of a national culture amidst various hegemonic forces. I will be utilising a combination of Gramsci's notion of the 'subaltern' (1948) to situate *Pinocchio* within a postcolonial landscape, and scholarly variations of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic concept of the 'uncanny' (1919) to reveal how the character of Pinocchio functions as a site of cultural articulation. In conjunction, I will draw on current literary debates surrounding the validity of children's literature as powerful centres for identity-formation and change as it can be applied to Italian children's literature. It is my aim to unravel the 'unhomely homeliness' inherent in feelings of uncanniness by those occupying ambiguous arenas of unity and marred by a sense of dislocation both geographically and psychically. Adding to the exhaustive critical attention that Collodi's fairy tale has already received (Perella, 1986; Stewart-Steinberg, 2007), I wish to show the relevance of the psychoanalytic concept of the uncanny within one of the most

celebrated novels in Italian children's literature, and the implications that understanding such a concept might have within a nation's literature. It is thereby possible to highlight the importance of revisiting texts (originally created) for children as important historical documents that shed light on Italian nationhood whilst providing a truthful depiction (albeit allegorical) of social and political contexts within Italian history.

Pinocchio and the Uncanny: An Introduction

The playful and impetuous wooden marionette, Pinocchio, inhabits an ambiguous space within the confines of literary narratives and Italian history. The very words 'marionette' or 'puppet' as a description of Pinocchio, instantaneously signals a warning of an unusual dilemma. Semantically, 'puppet' and 'marionette' are indicative of something inanimate, typically moved by strings or controlled physically by a person. The *English Oxford Dictionary* offers the following definition for the word 'puppet': "A movable model of a person or animal that is typically moved either by strings controlled from above or by a hand inside it" (2018). The character of Pinocchio, however, on the surface is dependent on neither strings nor person and exhibits all the human qualities of a typically rebellious, young boy. Pinocchio is first revealed to us as "a piece of wood" (Collodi, 1995:11) with a mysterious unknown origin: "I cannot say how it came about, but the fact is, that one fine day this piece of wood was lying in the shop" (11). According to David Del Principe (2006), possible translations of Pinocchio's name as 'pine wood' or 'pine nut' reveal Pinocchio's "arboreal" heritage (Del Principe, 2006:34). There is something earthly, immortal and paganistic proposed in his origin, which remains unknown till the end of the novel. This piece of wood, which the carpenter Master Cherry remarks as having "come at the right moment" (Collodi, 1995:11), is laden with primordial insinuations that suggest something older and more powerful than the forces of the town and people Pinocchio will soon meet on his adventures. Herein lies the problem of placing Pinocchio within the rules of categorisation. As a puppet who is not quite puppet, or a boy who is not quite a boy, the figure of Pinocchio can be seen as an

"ambulatory"' (Bernstein, 2003:1119) revelation of the Freudian concept of the uncanny in literature. He is the epitome of a contradiction that defies signification as he walks, talks and cartwheels his way from immaturity to a responsible citizen or 'upstanding boy'. As something beyond the normal signifying process, as something aberrational in terms of beginnings, and as something that points to the unknown concealed beneath the surface, Pinocchio becomes the living embodiment of that ever-elusive concept known as *Das Unheimlich*, 'unhomely' or uncanny.

The uncanny, according to Freud's seminal essay entitled "The 'Uncanny'" (1919), expresses an ambivalent nature in which opposite meanings come to coincide, as the word *heimlich* (translated as 'homely' or 'canny') or all that is familiar and known, reveals an additional meaning of that which is "concealed" or "hidden" (Freud, 1997:199-200). Freud reveals, the word *heimlich* "belongs to two sets of ideas, which, without being contradictory, are yet very different: on the one hand it means what is familiar and agreeable, and on the other, what is concealed and kept out of sight" (Freud, 1997:199). The meaning of *heimlich* thus leads into the very meaning of its opposite *unheimlich* (uncanny) which comes to represent all that is unfamiliar, hidden and strange. Freud advocates Friedrich Wilhelm Schelling's definition of the uncanny as most poignant in unravelling its true meaning, "'Unheimlich' is the name for everything that ought to have remained… secret and hidden but has come to light" (Freud, 1997:199). The uncanny, then, contains an inherent ambiguity from an etymological point of view and invokes the feeling of fear or uncertainty by being the unlikely inhabitant of the canny or homely. It is indicative of an estranged unhomeliness that lives within the familiarity of that which is home to us. On studies of the uncanny in fiction, Maria M. Tatar in "The Houses of Fiction: Toward a Definition of the Uncanny" (1981) comes to the following conclusion concerning the idea of home and the elusive concept of the uncanny: "It is precisely in the border area between the familiar and the strange – at the point where *heimlich* and *unheimlich* merge in meaning to suggest the sinister or treacherous – that we must search for the matrix of those effects that are called uncanny" (1981:171). For Tatar, the uncanny comes alive in fiction through haunted homes or eerie

presences invading familiar, home-like spaces: when something unknowable pushes its way into the fabric of what is real and knowable. Whether we agree with psychologist, Ernst Jentsch's (pre-Freud) definition of the uncanny (1906) as "intellectual uncertainty" (Freud, 1997:206), or with Freud's interpretation of the uncanny as the return of something repressed (Freud, 1997:217), the uncanny almost always seems to invoke a sense of fear and anxiety at the point where boundaries of what is familiar and unfamiliar blur.

Similarly, Susan Bernstein's approach to the term foregrounds the possibilities the uncanny has within fiction, and proves most useful to my argument, when applied to the puppet figure of Pinocchio. In her article, "It Walks: The Ambulatory Uncanny" (2003), Bernstein draws on the arguments made by critic Samuel Weber in "The Sideshow, or: Remarks on a Canny Moment" (1973) and his essay "Uncanny Thinking" (2000) which admit to the uncanny's ability to be both "an emotive phenomenon" (Weber, 1973:1103) (identified with feelings of fear and anxiety) and containing "'objective' factors" (1103) that may expose its textual structure as something that "demands *reading*" (Bernstein, 2003:1112) rather than focusing on conceptual results alone. For Bernstein and Weber both identity and self-realisation come forth through the reading process, at the moment the uncanny shows itself within a text. Weber concludes that oppositional relationships need to be dislodged, there needs to be a fracturing of subject and object in order to get to the essence of a thing or kernel of meaning (2000:28). The uncanny becomes the means for achieving realisation of essences stuck in patterns of cyclic repetition through its blurring of oppositional boundaries. Weber (1973) supports the idea of the uncanny as a mode of realisation by rejecting Freud's narrow psychoanalytic approach to the uncanny as stemming from the anxiety of physical castration. Instead, Weber calls on a Lacanian tradition that sees the moment of castration as a mental process that shows the 'difference' a child experiences when aware that a lack exists within herself and the other (Weber, 1973:1112). Simply put, for Weber, the problem of castration is a "restructuring of experience"; of desires, perceptions and consciousness that questions difference and leads to an uncanny destabilising of binary oppositions (1973:1113). For Bernstein, the uncanny is not only an indicator of difference but also a

reminder of absence which is consequently thematised in texts as the "experience of dislocation, loss of control, the sense of the origin of the 'I' in an other or elsewhere, the experience of self-forgetfulness […] lapses of consciousness" (Bernstein, 2003:1125). The uncanny thus, according to Bernstein, questions definitions, the defining process and the very possibility of something having a rigid or correct definition. The uncanny becomes something rebellious, revolutionary, and border-breaking as it walks across constraints delineated by society and man through the centuries. It hints at the possibility of transforming the old and familiar into the new and unfamiliar. With no borders to enslave or restrict one's identity, it is infinitely possible to reconstruct and challenge our places within society, both as individuals and as part of a social community. Enter Pinocchio the puppet.

If we see the moment of destabilisation, afforded by the uncanny, as offering a space for subversion and challenging 'truth', then Pinocchio is not only "an expression of the Italian character" (Perella, 1986:2), but he is also a site for the nation's articulation of identity. How does one articulate a divided or chaotic nation to reach a consensus regarding nationhood? The answer lies in Pinocchio's physical and psychical aspects, which, through their uncanny nature, allow Pinocchio to become an apt site of articulation for those considered 'subaltern'. This 'uncanny subalternity' within examples of postcolonial literature, unearths inherent dislocations and penetrating anxieties of physical and mental spaces that are both familiar and unfamiliar to the Italian people. The psychoanalytic concept of the uncanny as a 'subaltern space' within a postcolonial landscape, is able to assist in restructuring cultural pasts and identities by offering a space where meanings and the idea of self may be confronted. I will attempt to illustrate this further through an analysis of Pinocchio's character and reference to the English translation of the text. Before analysing Pinocchio's uncanny subalternity, I will first examine Collodi's use of the fairy tale narrative within a European use of the genre, and then explain how his variation of said genre complemented Italian unification. Secondly, I will situate children's literature as complementary to postcolonial literature, and in doing so I hope to reveal *Pinocchio*'s 'uncanny subalternity' as a

literary text and national emblem. The uncanny is gaining attention within what is currently being referred to as children's Gothic (Jackson, 2017)[1], a subgenre of children's literature and a contemporary hybrid mix of many genres including Gothic, fairy tale, myth and fantasy genres. The possibilities children's Gothic literature hold for nations in distress and for fragmented societies, remains to be fully explored. Lindsay Myers has already identified Italian fantasy novels for children as a "key field of cultural production that formulates a culture's identity for the following generations" (2012:190), leaving the debate open for discussions on how children's Gothic texts (likewise) may offer interventions on socio-political issues past and present. For now, however, it is my hope that in exposing an 'uncanny subalternity' within Collodi's *Pinocchio*, I shall add to the plethora of debates surrounding *Pinocchio*'s ability to transgress national and international readerships, the almost immortal capacity it has as one of the most beloved and successful children's stories to date, and the ways in which it (re)negotiates Italian national anxiety.

On Collodi and the Use of Fairy Tale Narratives

First appearing, as a serial publication between 1881 and 1883, in an Italian periodical for children, *Giornale per i bambini*, Collodi's *Le avventure di Pinocchio: Storia di un burattino* managed to traverse the story's original didactic intention, meant solely to instruct children on the 'Italian character'. Appealing to both adults and children, the popular fairy tale slowly became a part of Italian culture and an encouraging call "to all Italians to better themselves and, thereby, their 'nation'" (Perella, 1986:9), proving that the text appealed to a double audience. In *La coltura italiana* (1923), Giuseppe Prezzolini succinctly summarised *Pinocchio*'s effect on understanding Italian nationality as "whoever understands the beauty of *Pinocchio*, understands Italy" (Perella, 2005:2), giving the text an almost mythical quality within Italian literature. Fairy tale narratives

[1] This essay follows its references as far as capitalisation goes, with non-capitalised genres and capitalised styles.

had been no stranger to the process of socialisation and nation-building at the time of Prezzolini's remark. Fairy tales, as extensions of oral tales, myth, wonder tales and folk tales were first adapted to text, as a literary genre, on the European continent. Although French writers such as Charles Perrault and Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy of the 1690s were seen as chiefly responsible for establishing the literary genre, it was actually in Italy that the transition had begun (Zipes, 2012). According to Jack Zipes in *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion*, Italian sixteenth century writers Giovan Francesco Straparola and Giambattista Basile introduced oral tales into short narratives which were later translated and rewritten into French and German (Zipes, 2012:12). Straparola's collection of fairy tales, *Le piacevoli notti* (1550/1553), displayed irreverence towards authority and delicately utilised a narrative frame to reveal the political tensions rife in Italy during his time. Adding magic, supernatural elements and unpredictability of events, Straparola used active male protagonists who went on quests and ultimately exposed harmonious 'happily ever afters' which were impossible without a change in Italian society (2012:14). Basile, likewise, used the fairy tale genre to comment on social inequality, family conflicts and social customs from a Neapolitan point of view (2012:16). His use of language and a carnivalesque atmosphere is very similar to the approach that would later be taken by Collodi in his writing. In a cheeky yet juvenile invocation of the carnival spirit of *commedia dell'arte* theatrics, Collodi will later, in the same manner as his Italian predecessors, invoke the use of the familiarity of the Italian Harlequin figure, through the acrobatic, wilful puppet, Pinocchio, with his agility and penchant for getting into trouble, to combat an unfamiliar characteristic in post-unification Italian consciousness.

The literary fairy tale genre continued to gain popularity thanks to (but surely not solely based on) Basile and Straparola, and was later adopted by French writers, allowing them to join in the European civilising process of the time, where they could express educative or subversive thoughts through a subtle medium. Zipes (2012) interprets the fairy tales of Italian and French writers during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as foregrounding important questions: "What virtues are necessary for members of the ruling class to bring about an

ideal kingdom? What type of behaviour must a young man or woman exhibit to rise in society or reform society so that there is just rule?" (Zipes, 2012:22-23).

From the scholarship on Collodi it is possible to deduce that, as a disillusioned republican clinging to *Risorgimento* ideals, he wished to answer similar questions as those put forth by Zipes. In answering such questions within his own time, he was able to inform Italian children on possible ways to survive the post-unification environment of Italy through the utilisation of a narrative structure. His answer comprised an idea of Italian-ness that encompassed all Italians across the divisions of class, gender and race. Following political unity in the nineteenth century, Italy was in need of building a culture that was inclusive of all. Yet, forming this unity proved challenging when, after unification, approximately seventy-five percent of the population were illiterate, and most Italians could not speak the national language (Stewart-Steinberg, 2007:2). It was an ensuing anxiety, initiated by the unification's disruption of what was known and familiar that began the project of 'making Italians'. Stewart Steinberg (2007:2) contends that Italians were forced in their state of infancy to navigate ideas of what it meant to become a 'postliberal subject', how to successfully invent a national tradition and how to restructure predominantly masculine, paternal discourses within Italy. It is within this 'ego of anxiety' that the figure of Pinocchio somersaulted his way into Italian lives as "'puppet-people-Italy'" who "matured through grief and misfortune, represents one of the truest searches into the national identity" (Perella, 1986:3). The simplicity of the fairy tale narrative within the children's literature canon, with its allusions/illusions to 'safety', helped the text to become an unlikely canvas onto which Italians started to form their very 'Italian-ness'. But they were in truth responding to something more troubling under the surface of this simplicity.

It is known that Collodi had spent time as a soldier during the first and second Wars of Independence, and he also actively voiced his opinions as a journalist, reinforcing his cause for national independence (Cro, 1993:87). By relying on a familiar fairy tale narrative, that had already proven reliable in transposing writer's social, political and moral beliefs, Collodi was able to tell a story

about "his Italy, its virtues and its flaws, its landscapes, festivals, poverty, people and puppets, its laws and legends" (Bacon, 1970:73-74). Yet, he also makes use of and deconstructs the traditional hero paradigm found in adventure and hero-quest stories for children. Pinocchio, like most male protagonists in typical hero narratives, will undergo a familiar, adolescent rite of passage or 'night-sea journey' (Stephens & McCallum, 1998:105) in the belly of the dog-fish sea monster that will prove to be the necessary transformation to set the reckless puppet onto the right path. It is through this skilful variation of traditional children's stories that Collodi was able to create what Stewart-Steinberg refers to as *Pinocchio*'s "hyperinterpretability" (2007:22), which permits varied interpretations, and consequently succeeds in being read as a cultural document that chronicles Italian national identity.

Postcolonial and Children's Literature: Literature of the Marginalised

Children's literature, which encompasses fairy tales and hero quest stories, thus develops from a tiny voice (like the wise Talking Cricket in *Pinocchio,* who is often ignored by the wooden protagonist) capable of skilfully outwitting dominant forces by exposing the power struggles of a Western, patriarchal society that render both child and citizen equally powerless. Historically, Italy, preoccupied with independence as a unified state, was characterised by a sense of anxiety stemming from the disintegration of national/international, Northern/Southern regions, traditional/modern and a search for a national language to match a national identity (Stewart-Steinberg, 2007). The hybrid or 'subaltern' form of Pinocchio (which I will later reveal in my analysis of textual examples) easily translates the Italian need for a consummation of oppressive opposites into something resembling cohesiveness and harmony through its uncanny shattering of signification. In a rethinking of Gramsci's use of the term 'subaltern', Marcus E. Green (2011) highlights the misconception in Subaltern Studies that the term "subaltern social groups" (387) was created by Gramsci to evade prison censors, or as a euphemism for 'proletariat'. He attributes the persistent and often exaggerated claims

by scholars using the term, to a circulating of incorrect information within scholarship that relies on references to incomplete readings of English translations of Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*. He insists that the term 'subaltern' has become restricted to issues of class alone, thus losing its radical or liberating element implied by Gramsci that 'the subaltern' is a representation of marginalised groups in Italy that include the common people, slaves, women, differences of race and religion, etc. (Green, 2011:2). By focusing on the 'subaltern' as including *all* those subordinated by hegemonic practices and denied meaningful roles within society (children, citizens of the state and those considered by society as 'other'), it is possible to view Collodi's *Pinocchio* as an allegory for Italy's pursuit of unity and a disavowal of subordinated subaltern spaces. This is possible through the presence of the 'uncanny'. The uncanny is not found in all children's literature, and Freud has been insistent that the uncanny cannot be evoked within fairy tales due to the fact that a magical, strange world is already adopted from the very beginning of a fairy tale (Rudd, 2013:108). Nor is the uncanny found in all postcolonial literature; however, when it does push through a text and reveal itself (as Weber & Bernstein declare), it can present troubling or disturbing aspects of reality in a recognisable literary form, which we can thus process, reflect upon and challenge if need be. This is where Pinocchio's continual appeal lies: in his uncanny subalternity.

In what manner can a fairy tale quest of a wooden puppet, who seeks to become a 'ragazzo per bene' ('real or upstanding boy'), exhibit the uncanny apertures of 'unhomely homeliness' of subaltern Italy? The answer is situated in the character of Pinocchio and his interactions with his environment and its various inhabitants. The uncanny complexity of not feeling at home in the universe, within a nation, or in one's own skin, is a familiar predicament of otherness that can be likened to feelings associated with Gramsci's 'subaltern groups' in society. Christopher Larkosh-Lenotti (2006), discussing the integrative possibilities of the notion of the subaltern, says that Gramsci's work "facilitates the drawing of numerous connections between class inequality and social immobility, but also racial, ethnic, geographic, linguistic factors, as well as questions of gender and sexuality that, by now, have become virtually inseparable from issues

pertaining to Italian and global meridionality" (2006:312-313). It is evident in the very character of Pinocchio, who as a walking, talking puppet not only epitomises the subaltern uncanniness of occupying ambiguous spaces or identities, but challenges notions of collective and individual freedom through his transgression and denial of animate or inanimate categories. His birth parodies the Gothic and Romantic traditions in literature of giving life to abominations as he rises similar to Mary Shelley's monster in *Frankenstein* (1818) and exhibits dual sides of good and bad like Robert Louis Stevenson's characters, Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, in his 1886 novel (Del Principe, 2006:32). Carved in Geppetto's (the second carpenter we meet in the text) workshop he continues as a womb-less creation, one that proves immortal through repeated surpassing of deathly encounters throughout the text. David Del Principe (2006) through a disturbing Gothic linking to Frankenstein's monster, presents Pinocchio's figure as "mirroring Italy's emergence from tyranny as an orphan state and the problematics of its (truant) pursuit of true revolution and independence" (2006:35). Similarly, from a postcolonial point of view, *Pinocchio* (1883) can be seen as an important historical document that reflects an infant state's fractured birth and development through disorder and domination. The Gothic inflections, interpreted by Del Principe, allow us to discover the pedagogical uses *Pinocchio* serves in the modern day as a way to "explore social problems facing the post-unitary Italian government – poverty, a lack of natural resources, literacy, and regionalism – as an historical frame to discuss these issues in contemporary Italy and the continuing political and economic divide between the North and the South" (Del Principe, 2006:31).

In contemporary debates concerning the usefulness of Gothic elements in children's literature, Karen Coats, in *The Gothic in Children's Literature: Haunting the Borders* (2008), argues that the 'sanitisations' that have occurred within the fairy tale genre over the centuries render them less effective. She argues that faced with keeping material appropriate for children, free from horror and vice, fairy tales have lost the transformative capacity their original sources once maintained. In "The Novel and the Fairy Tale", John Buchan, insists the origin of the fairy tale "sprang from a society where life

was hard, when a man was never quite certain of his next meal, when he never knew when he arose in the morning whether he would be alive in the evening" (1970:220). Seen in this light, Coats's argument – that placing value on the surface of texts have led to what she terms less "psychically effective" stories being produced (2008:79) – cannot be easily counter-argued. Dismissing literary qualities that may beneficially shock, scare or induce anxiety within child readers prevents them from achieving the human connection and hope that humankind has used to overcome adversity and the changes society has undergone. Coats advocates for children's Gothic literature as a suitable mode, one that can be seen as complementing Buchan's 'fairy tale', capable of expressing abstract psychic processes which children may find themselves struggling to give concrete expression to. She advocates a return to the elements that were once intrinsic to original fairy tales or folk tales. The uncanny is one such technique, evident in many contemporary texts that fall under the sub-genre of children's Gothic, that is permitting this return to what can be called "an eternal impulse in human nature" (Buchan, 1970:220) to transform human lives and their worlds. The uncanny functions 'reparatively' by mentally allowing readers to make sense of individual and collective identities through the protagonists encounter with ambivalent characters, situations or emotional states that are in keeping with the beneficial aspects of the uncanny as already outlined in this article. Interestingly, Carlo Collodi was already creating a way to express psychical conflict within Italian history in the nineteenth century through his use of an uncanny puppet.

Collodi's fairy tale can be viewed as slipping from under the supposed 'naïve' façade of children's literature, often accused of dealing with 'childish' things, to highlight previously marginalised literature and its capacity to engender cultural emancipation. The importance of forms of children's literature in contributing to current critical interrogations of texts and genres is highlighted by Peter Hunt (1992), who draws a parallel between postcolonial and children's literature emphasising the negative views both forms of literature have had to endure, "As a body of texts, as well as a body of criticism, it does not fit into the dominant system's hierarchies or classifications, and consequently, like colonial or feminist literatures,

it has presented an irritant to established thinking" (Hunt, 1992:2). Suzanne Stewart-Steinberg (2007), by interpreting post-unification Italy as "in a state of perpetual infancy" (as previously mentioned) symbolically joins child and postcolonial through the powerful image of a sprightly wooden puppet who rebels against the hegemonic forces that persistently try to render him mute and immobile. Stewart-Steinberg adds that Pinocchio is "one site in and through which questions of the Italian subject came to be worked out in the late nineteenth-century Italy, to the extent that he embodies broader social and cultural conflicts centred on the problem of the postliberal subject's increasingly contested autonomy in the face of forces beyond his control" (2007:24). What then, is the link between Italian nations or subjects to Pinocchio? What allows him to be a conduit of conflict? It is his uncanniness that permits an exposing of the subaltern condition, that simultaneously provokes a response of sentimentality, adoration and camaraderie.

The use of the puppet figure as a motif for the ways in which political states influence and dominate within their respective countries is hardly new. Jeffrey Dirk Wilson (2016) compares Collodi's *Pinocchio* with Plato's *Laws* to underlie the effects of political crisis on citizens. Interestingly, Wilson centres his argument around Plato's "Athenian Stranger" (284) who asserts that the law (represented by the golden cord of 'logos') and other non-golden cords are necessary if the puppet/marionette is to work efficiently. Plato uses the allegory of a puppet figure to highlight the conflicting forces within citizens of a distressed state and reinforces balance in achieving a successful resolution. Wilson goes on to stress that Collodi's text is concerned with the very same problem, "This piece of animated matter is the first premise of the new nation, because the challenge before Italy after 1861 was not whether they could make kings – there were more than enough of them about – but whether they could make citizens – of which there were all too few. Could the human-like denizens of the new Italy become fully human as citizens?" (Wilson, 2016:294). Pinocchio's figure as puppet is not coincidental, but integral in the restructuring of a fragmented nation that Italian adults and children alike were forced to come to terms with. In "National Consciousness in Italian Literature" (1973), Joseph

Rossi attributes the hostility of the Italian people towards unification to selfish economic interests and a refusal to relinquish "the ideal of a larger unity, the unity of the entire Western World embodied in the myth of the Roman empire" (Rossi, 1973:160). The Italian re-education that prompted the acceptance of unification was achieved by many factors, according to Rossi, with literature playing an important role: "Literature created the image of a united Italy and preserved it for centuries like a dormant seed" (166). Is it any wonder, then, that Pinocchio's arrival shattered the notion of a 'unified image' by exposing the inherent fractures that exist within a person and their country? As an uncanny puppet, Pinocchio disturbs readers, as a constantly evolving being he calls attention to previously held assumptions of the Italian people, asking them to evolve with the times (like himself), and achieve both personal and national liberation as a result.

In *Puppet: An Essay on Uncanny Life* (2011), Kenneth Gross identifies the inherent madness and ecstasy that the uncanny figure of a puppet can evoke as it disturbs the viewer. From their disproportionate bodies to their mechanical movements, there exists in their composition something jarring, a craziness that borders on the delirious. Gross attributes the potential uncanny feelings linked with puppets, to the fact that their "spirit" or "soul", their ability to be animate, are linked to a puppeteer (often unseen and mysterious) who permits this transfiguration of energy from self to puppet (2011:1-2). Pinocchio can be seen as a stringless puppet who spends his journey subjected to whim and fancy (his constant desire for fun and play throughout the text that keeps him from going to school and subsequently lands him in the Land of Toys (1995:177) where all wishes are supposedly gratified), to persuasions of others or naïve propaganda (the Cat and the Fox who misleadingly convince him burying his gold coins can sprout hundreds more); he is constantly fighting against the unseen hand of the puppeteer (economic, historical and social forces). However, unlike a typical puppet, Pinocchio's lack of strings gives him the choice of freedom. Not truly a puppet or a boy, Pinocchio has the option of blending both to create a unique identity, and herein lies the Italian's dream of maintaining autonomy yet existing under new control as a unified nation. Within

an uncanny space, ambiguities offer models or opportunities to subaltern readers who in turn may interrogate their place as subaltern figures. Pinocchio's appeal to the Italian people and his reproducibility as a cultural icon, is his ability to navigate hegemonic forces as a result of his uncanny ambiguity. Instead of accepting fragmentation and dislocation, he challenges the forces that would keep him as a powerless subaltern. He becomes a force to be reckoned with, which, as a result, has allowed nations (Italian and non-Italian alike) to latch onto his empowering frame as they in turn use it to interrogate their own place in the world. The following close-reading of *Pinocchio* will attempt to reconcile the above ideas with Collodi's text in an effort to offer a new interpretation to the substantial body of *Pinocchio* criticism.

An Analysis of *Pinocchio*

From the very first chapter of *Pinocchio*, the reader is made aware of uncanny incongruities within the text. An eerie presence invades the cosy, seemingly homely workshop of the carpenter, Master Cherry. The uncanniness unravels from what appears to be a haunted piece of wood that enters a familiar space of a common Italian citizen. The juxtaposition of wood as a material associated with nature, warmth-giving and building safe spaces against an unknown, unfamiliar, supernatural being, instantly breaks the illusion of home as a safe, familiar space. From the beginning, then, Pinocchio, as an uncanny harbinger and invading presence, alerts us to the false notions of safety and security a place like home can offer. The uncanniness is further accentuated when the character Geppetto rushes into Master Cherry's workshop announcing his sudden need for a piece of wood and his dreams of creating a puppet like no other: "I thought I would make a beautiful wooden puppet; but a wonderful puppet that should know how to dance, to fence, and to leap like an acrobat. With this puppet I would travel about the world to earn a piece of bread and a glass of wine", Geppetto exclaims (Collodi, 1995:16). In recalling Bernstein's emphasis on the dynamic quality of the uncanny and her statement that it "is not itself uncanny until it has violated its own nature by stepping forth into actuality, into the ontic" (Bernstein,

2003:1118), it is thus evident how the uncanny overthrows the laws of order within this seemingly normal society. Meaning slips from the surface of Geppetto's spoken words into our knowledge that there is already a mysterious piece of wood containing some sort of magical spirit within it, possibly capable of making his ideas of a 'grand puppet' into something more concrete. The laws of rationality and possibility are thus muddled as we sense something greater in the universe of the tale, about to work its way into the ordinary reality of two common citizens. Geppetto also ominously foretells his own future, further defying the laws of rational order, as he will travel the world indeed, in search of his runaway puppet, and will find himself trapped in the belly of a sea monster with a piece of bread and a glass of wine to keep him company. The ironic and repetitive structure within the narrative suggests Freud's aspect of the uncanny as something inescapable, an "inner 'compulsion to repeat'" (Freud, 1997:215) that stems from our unconscious. It is itself primitive and instinctual in all men, and a wish to return to a state of 'unorigin'. It will be a darker version of Geppetto's proclaimed hopes that materialises in the future, and the uncanny seizes itself at this point of something inescapable, to release the fugitive, Pinocchio. Pinocchio's form is one that cannot escape being unmade, and this is visible in his many transformations that he undergoes in the text, but mostly in his defiance of death. The anxiety of a beginning, of an identity or place in the world, can be likened to the constant reminder of a lack or absence within the subaltern. All that is left is the possibility of transformation. Like Pinocchio, the subaltern cannot escape her place in society and must constantly transform to adapt to the world. Gramsci adds that "Subaltern groups are always subject to the activity of ruling groups, even when they rebel and rise up: only 'permanent' victory breaks their subordination, and that not immediately. In reality, even when they appear triumphant, the subaltern groups are merely anxious to defend themselves" (Gramsci, 1999:207). Thus, Pinocchio, as an uncanny figure can be seen as representing the subaltern condition in his unwillingness to be subordinated or follow the natural rules allotted to him by nature. His rebelliousness is his defence against anxiety, an anxiety attached to a 'homelessness' or

displacement that can only be overcome once he attains self-realisation.

In his puppet form, Pinocchio's uncanny subalternity reveals itself in his identification with being a boy. He is, in fact, a wooden copy of a 'real boy', who acquires human needs only after Geppetto painstakingly carves him into one. His overwhelming hunger and fear of thunder appear only once he has assumed his boyish façade. His childish tantrums even go so far as to cause him to commit murder: he kills the Talking Cricket by throwing a hammer at him in a fit of rage. Despite his wooden exterior, he evidently starts to display human and childlike qualities. But these human qualities fluctuate constantly between a sense of good and bad, creating a tension that reflects the Italian hesitation towards being good, welcoming citizens of a unified Italy, or fighting the dominant system that keeps them subordinated. In the incident where he kills the Talking Cricket, Pinocchio is aware of his underlying penchant for rage and warns the Talking Cricket:

> "Take care, you wicked ill-omened croaker! Woe to you if I fly into a passion!..."
>
> "Poor Pinocchio! I really pity you!..."
>
> "Why do you pity me?"
>
> "Because you are a puppet and, what is worse, because you have a wooden head."
>
> At these last words Pinocchio jumped up in a rage, and snatching a wooden hammer from the bench he threw it at the Talking Cricket. (Collodi, 1995:27)

Pinocchio is aware of his antagonism towards being told what to do and to being demeaned through words or actions. The Talking Cricket underestimates Pinocchio, assuming he does not have it in him to act upon his threats. He treats him like a child who needs adult supervision and reprimanding. Whilst it is true that Pinocchio may require these things, he will learn only through his own self-reflection and experience. His is not just a "wooden head", there is more to this puppet, and he proves that he is calculating and somewhat witty, by using wood (a word used to insult his intelligence) to kill the Talking Cricket in a final 'look what this wood can do' gesture. This sense of

dark rebellion is surely desirous in the subaltern who wishes to overthrow dominant hegemonic forces that force one to play the role of powerless puppet, and Pinocchio is a testimony that action may be required when tensions are insurmountable.

Pinocchio, as a wooden boy, is also at odds with himself as a double of a man yet helplessly divided by his non-human status as a puppet. A characteristic theme of the uncanny, that Freud discusses in his essay, is the 'double': "the subject identifies himself with someone else, so that he is in doubt as to which his self is, or substitutes the extraneous self for his own […] there is a doubling, dividing and interchanging of the self" (Freud, 1997:210). The double in literature, in its positive form, is seen as an insurance against death, as preserving the soul against extinction. The double form also provides the self with an object it can observe, criticise and thus self-reflect upon. Pinocchio as a 'double figure' – a wooden puppet and human boy – is able to express, on a general level, humanity's plight to survive life, and on a more specific one, the Italian subaltern struggle to make sense of their post-unification Italian-ness. This is achieved through his non-destructible, wooden boy exterior, thus preserving the characteristic features of the Italian people indelibly.

Andrew Barnaby, in "'After the Event': Freud's Uncanny and the Anxiety of Origins" (2015), identifies the uncanny as related to an anxiety of origins, more in line with a type of existential anxiety stemming from uncertainty (2015:983). When transposed onto the subaltern form of Pinocchio, the uncertainty of identity becomes troublesome and even frightening. In a scene that can be read as similarly disturbing, Pinocchio falls asleep with his legs on a brazier, "And then he fell asleep; and whilst he slept his feet, which were wooden, took fire, and little by little they burnt away and became cinders" (Collodi, 1995:33). This is one of the first signs that Pinocchio has no instincts of his origins, of himself as a wooden puppet that could easily be susceptible to being set alight, as he "continued to sleep and to snore as if his feet belonged to some one else" (Collodi, 1995:33). Both these examples exemplify the subaltern's plight within a fragmented nation and insinuates that until the subaltern is 'awake' or aware of themselves as active, self-actualised citizens of a society, that they will continue to 'snore' and

'sleep', losing parts of themselves to threatening outside forces in the process. The Italian people are thus challenged, through Pinocchio's ignorance, to assert their identity or perish into dust.

Pinocchio also displays incompatible dualities present within his character throughout the novel. It is in the refusal to fit neat categories of definition, in the destabilisation of binary opposites that the uncanny starts to empower one's identity. The instability that is produced from undermined binaries can be seen in the novel when Geppetto returns home (from jail) and demands that Pinocchio open the door, and the puppet finds that he cannot:

> "Open the door!" shouted Geppetto from the street.
>
> "Dear papa, I cannot," answered the puppet, crying and rolling about on the ground.
>
> "Why cannot you?"
>
> "Because my feet have been eaten."
>
> "And who has eaten your feet?"
>
> "The cat," said Pinocchio, seeing the cat, who was amusing herself by making some shavings dance with her forepaws. (Collodi, 1995:35-36)

Pinocchio, legless, falls onto the floor and continues to roll about helpless. It is a dislocation of self, represented by the loss of limbs that prompts what Weber refers to as the uncanny's "articulation of difference, which is equally a dis-articulation, dis-locating and even dis-membering" of the subject (Weber, 1973:1114). Divisions are shattered and no longer hold the subject in place, signifier and signified become disrupted and poor Pinocchio finds himself impeded from moving forward as he crawls on the floor in a zombie-like state. Italy, after unification, would not have been oblivious to the plight of a legless Pinocchio as a sense of "backwardness" (Stewart-Steinberg, 2007:5) was evident in the growing need of Italians to adapt to a 'New Italy' with new ideas, new ways of living and ascertaining meaning under new power. Pinocchio's uncanniness is felt in his cohabitation of opposites that has led him to lose his foundation and topple over into powerlessness. It is his unruly and mischievous side that has led him to run away from Geppetto (Collodi, 1995:22), yet it

is his innocent ignorance and unrealised need for the order of parental rule (or home) that allows him to fall asleep hungry, without thinking about the hazards of the brazier. As a site of conflict, Pinocchio has not yet learned how to overcome his fragmentary halves. In fact, he cannot even take responsibility for his burnt legs and admit his carelessness, as he blames the cat. He later goes on to lament "poor me" (1995:36) and feel very sorry for himself, completely oblivious or unwilling to admit his accountability. When Geppetto offers Pinocchio whatever little he has to eat, the puppet proves insolent and demanding (contrary to the humility he should feel at having, only moments earlier, lost his very foundation):

> "These three pears were intended for my breakfast; but I will give them to you willingly. Eat them, and I hope they will do you good."
>
> "If you wish me to eat them, be kind enough to peel them for me."
>
> "Peel them?" said Geppetto, astonished. "I should never have thought, my boy, that you were so dainty and fastidious. That is bad! In this world we should accustom ourselves from childhood to like and to eat everything, for there is no saying to what we may be brought. There are so many chances!..."
>
> "You are no doubt right," interrupted Pinocchio, "but I will never eat fruit that has not been peeled. I cannot bear rind." (Collodi, 1995:37-38)

Pinocchio's refusal to eat what he has been offered despite his ravenous hunger is a sign of his inability to match his desires to the reality of the world. Firstly, he is a puppet and therefore should not be able to feel (let alone feel hungry) and this is incongruous to his wooden toy-like exterior. His internal and external environments do not match each other, and he struggles to find a connection between the two. The instability of internal and external environments pervades the text and thus becomes a pertinent allegory for the uncanny subaltern fractures that may exist within dominant systems.

Lastly, we will look at Pinocchio's interaction with the Blue Fairy, who also serves as a conduit of the uncanny within the text; and who emphasises Pinocchio's perilous subaltern position within society. The Blue Fairy in her many guises represents the uncontrollable forces within Italian life. She can be read as a glimpse of religion or providence that offers control in Pinocchio's world, or as a futile feminine influence of domestication typical to fairy stories that follow patterns of female suppression (see Zipes, 2012:48-51). Either way, she is only able to exert an influence if Pinocchio is willing to accept it, therefore teaching the lesson that to defy one's subaltern state one needs to battle against their own incongruities. Alternatively, the Blue Fairy can be seen as a powerful combination of death, fate and luck that assists the protagonist towards self-realisation: a force that can materialise to help or annihilate the everyday man or woman. Giorgio Bacci (2017) calls attention to the themes of 'darkness' and 'shadow' that run through Collodi's novel and the representation of the Blue Fairy's house (as first encountered by Pinocchio) as the depiction of a "troubled world" (Bacci, 2017:194). He quotes Giorgio Manganelli's (2002) unsettling vision of the home as "The snow-white little house, then, is the repository of death […]. Its familiarity is an illusion, its hospitality deceptive." (Bacci, 2017:193-194). The Blue Fairy is first introduced to us when Pinocchio is at his most desperate, "the puppet's courage failed him, and he was on the point of throwing himself on the ground and giving himself over for lost" (Collodi, 1995:77). She comes to signal impending doom and destruction that awaits the passivity of the puppet when he allows outside forces to control him or lead him astray. The first description we have of her is reminiscent of something ghostly or vampiric, "She had blue hair and a face as white as a waxen image; her eyes were closed and her hands were crossed on her breast. Without moving her lips in the least, she said in a voice that seemed to come from the other world: 'In this house there is no one. They are all dead'" (Collodi, 1995:78). Her refusal to help Pinocchio in his time of need echoes the helplessness of the subaltern who mistakenly believes power to be outside himself. However, anxiety and powerlessness can engender a moment of re-birth. After what seems like the puppet's death – "His breath failed him and he could say no more. He shut his eyes, opened his mouth,

stretched his legs, gave a long shudder, and hung stiff and insensible" (Collodi, 1995:80) – the Blue Fairy, upon seeing his hanged body swinging violently from the Great Oak tree, is moved to compassion. She quickly has him rescued and tends to him within the confines of her home, which was previously a forbidden space to Pinocchio. The puppet's enduring identity is realised as he accepts and proves able to manoeuvre the forces of death, fate and luck to his advantage. His wooden body, as a defiance of most forms of death, continuously saves him from expiration. Later in the novel, he changes his fate across species, from wood to human flesh, as he learns to possess the true qualities of a human boy, and he actively transforms his misfortunes by overcoming poverty through hard work and dedication (Collodi, 1995:219). Whilst the Blue Fairy does help influence all three of the above triumphs, it is through free will and his own understanding (concealed familiar things we possess deep within ourselves) that Pinocchio overcomes his struggles. He proves to be the master of his own fate. That which is concealed or hidden (uncanny) reveals itself to become a bridge between Italian consciousness and freedom. It is not an instant freedom or one that can be relied upon however, for at the end of the story, Pinocchio, in his boy form, is aware of his wooden puppet form seated disconcertingly in the corner of his room. His puppet shell becomes what Carl Jung would refer to as human-Pinocchio's 'shadow', that darker aspect of our personality that houses all that is unacceptable, considered wrong or evil, and at odds with what civilization deems correct (Le Guin, 1975:140). It is also the aspect that is responsible for creativity, spontaneity and a true understanding of our identity as a whole. Like a Jungian 'shadow', Pinocchio's other half will continue to watch him, an uncanny reminder that the subaltern self must constantly work at achieving and establishing identity if it wishes to be liberated.

An Afterthought on *Pinocchio*

The complexity of a culture or people suspended between states, brought to life through an uncanny literary character for children, indicates the importance national examples of children's literature

offer in commenting honestly on social issues within historical contexts. As we follow Pinocchio's infantile quests to satiate his overwhelming needs and desires against outside forces, we cannot ignore an underlying message, that to break free from our own egocentrism, we must find victory against dominating influences. In realising our individual and collective identities within a group or nation, mirrored or interrogated by the literature we surround ourselves with, there is a chance to restructure physical and psychical alienated or conflictual spaces. It is, after all, only through the shedding of the subaltern's hard wood of hegemony that real emancipation becomes truly possible, and identity can be (re)formed.

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