

Pinocchio: the persistence of becoming

Pinocchio: he is a puppet who talks and acts like a child, even if he is not a "real child". Pinocchio has two eyes, two arms, two legs, a mouth, a nose, yet his is not a "real" body. Pinocchio is above all what he is not: his identity is always placed on a threshold, imagined by himself and by all those he meets on his path. Pinocchio is the name of a life that is both inorganic, human and animal. This is why it emerges as the possible and overbearing name of a radical abandonment from the logic of every identity: being at the same time oneself and the other from oneself, is always changeable, fatally incomplete and indeterminate. Perhaps this is why he is a wanderer, capable of creating a community of disreputable and even impossible friends (think of the puppet community).

Conceived by Carlo Collodi as a serial novel for children, in 1881. Pinocchio. The story of a puppet is a tale that in particular reveals and highlights the anxieties of the adult world and the discomfort of childhood suffocated in a universe of dangerous and violent relationships. So much so that, in the first version, the story ends with the death of Pinocchio who "stretched his legs and, given a great jolt, remained there as if insensitive" before becoming a child. The great success of the public pushes the publisher to ask Collodi to follow up on the story. The second version, *The Adventures of Pinocchio* (1883), brings the puppet back to life and brings to a completely different conclusion the story of the puppet, who eventually becomes a "real child". However, on several occasions Collodi's work distances itself from the ascending dynamics of the moral tale, to the point of overturning the idea that the humanizing metamorphosis of the puppet is in itself an edifying event.

The double soul of Pinocchio - puppet and child - emblematically conveyed by the two versions, attributes to Collodi's novel the nature of a mysterious, symbolic and cursed work. In fact, the same nature that made his work famous all over the world and also made it a source of inspiration for the rewriting of adaptation works within the theatre and cinema, some of which destined to remain unfinished as in the famous case of the film never made by Federico Fellini. Perhaps this is due to the nature of the source text: an indomitable and in some ways unclassifiable, incongruous and double text, like the character who gives the story its name. Yet, for the same reason, Pinocchio is a literary work that has never stopped communicating with other artistic forms: theatre, cinema, music. In this vein, since the first illustrative versions of the work, Pinocchio has already appeared as a universe of figures, symbols and allegories that have made it possible to transform the story into images or single acting gestures.

What does it mean for a puppet to become a child and for a child to become a grown man? To what extent can this process become a metaphor for an entire country and for the unfinished "educational path" of which Suzanne Stewart-Steinberg speaks in her *Pinocchio Effect* (2011)? Many argue that Collodi's work represents a precious document for reading one of the most significant pages in Italian history, immediately after the Unification. Against the light, one finds in Pinocchio a testimony of social and economic history, in which the school is entrusted with the problematic task of forming a nascent nation by educating it. Pinocchio is therefore, in its complexity, an opportunity to verify whether a pedagogy capable of educating to disobey is conceivable, recovering the exemplarity of a farewell gesture (as Giorgio Manganelli claims in his formidable book dedicated to Pinocchio (1977), when he states that

educate disobey also means "disobedience to disobedience"). Keeping in mind that the "real" masters of Pinocchio are not masters, but shepherds, puppeteers and other children.

By withdrawing - almost systematically - from the school plans desired for him by a very poor and uneducated father who aspires to the cultural emancipation of his son, in the manner of Gramsci, Pinocchio is literally a figure of disobedience. He ignores his father's advice without any particular awareness, but as if driven by an impulse to life. He leaves school, rejecting the idea of becoming the model citizen that the nascent Italian state needs. However, it is worth noting that in Collodi's novel it is knowledge of the law (of the school, of the judge, of doctors) that is denounced, because it is extraneous to the life, candour and innocence of Pinocchio. On the other hand, the possibility of learning to live through a series of experiences not codified by social norms is not.

In the first version of the story, Pinocchio even ends up preferring a death by hanging to obedience, almost anticipating the death on the cross, experienced by Stracci (Pasolini *La ricotta*, 1963) who had to die "to remind everyone that he was alive". In fact, most of Pinocchio's adventures are a constant attempt to resist death until he penetrates time by becoming a child, emancipating himself from the fear of death (courage is the extreme sign of a transformation taking place), when he pushes Geppetto leaving the belly of the shark

It is in the wake of the contradictions and conflicts that mark Collodi's novel that Pinocchio becomes the figure shaped by Carmelo Bene of a childhood as an endless process, destined to remain open. Bene's dramaturgy suspends the moment of transformation and makes Pinocchio the very figure of becoming a child as a lasting and unlimited process. Bene focuses on the knots of the literary text and the personality of the character, interpreting the transformation of the wooden puppet into a child as a reflection of the Crucifixion and Resurrection. On the other hand, even before discovering that he is Pinocchio's father, Geppetto is a carpenter just like Giuseppe (there are, among other things, other biblical references, such as the reference to the belly of a large fish).

More generally, Pinocchio confirms himself as an opportunity to reflect, with the tools of psychoanalysis and beyond, on the question of identity, on the definition of the human being, in relation to what is not human: the inorganic on the one hand and animal on the other. The story of Collodi has in fact, among other things, the appearance of a real bestiary: cricket, cat, fox, donkey, snail, etc. Becoming what one is also means passing and understanding, just like Pinocchio does, the most radical otherness. It is only thanks to a long and adventurous itinerary made of unexpected events, encounters and setbacks that make us understand what we are not, that we can finally become what we are. Childhood is certainly the first part of this journey.

Trying to tell the childhood of a puppet is therefore an opportunity to question not only the educational aspect, but also the rebellious one, which typically manifests itself in this phase of life, questioning and upsetting both the regulatory protocols of society than the theological and teleological ancestry of the narrative. In the same way, the multiple creative acts that mark Collodi's tale provide above all to separate the linear narrative form from that typically present in children's stories. Collodi in fact invents an open universe where the threshold between truth and lie is a field that is usually indistinguishable (after all, the famous extension of the puppet's nose has a marginal weight in the course of history).

Although present in Collodi, it is no coincidence that the classic theme of lies as opposed to truth is instead strongly accentuated especially in the later softened versions of the story - that of Walt Disney above all - in which Pinocchio is punished for lies he says. In this regard, it seems useful to reflect on the value of the lie as Pinocchio proposes it to the reader: understood as a place of refusal and affirmation of one's independence. The lie, therefore, is not in contrast with a presumed, irrefutable truth, but it is an opportunity for a new truth, which is always the result of an interpretative operation. After all, as the

young Nietzsche thinks, Pinocchio's lies are that gesture that allows us to live; they represent the illusions that push us to act and try to transform the world in which we usually live and in which those like Geppetto have neither wine nor bread.