

COLLODI'S THEOPOETICS: THE HEBREW BIBLICAL INTERTEXT OF THE PINOCCHIO/GEPETTO NARRATIVE

ABSTRACT

Carlo Collodi's *Le avventure di Pinocchio* is one of the most beloved works of literature in world history. It has been interpreted almost as widely and as extensively as it has been translated. One of these matters of interpretation has been religious—*Pinocchio* has been interpreted as a Christological allegory with roots in the Gospels and New Testament. This paper presents a new reading and a new perspective on Collodi's classic: in contrast to other religious scholarly readings of *Pinocchio*, which have focused on the story's Christological and New Testament allusions, this paper illustrates how the Jacob/Joseph narrative of the Book of Genesis is the primary Biblical intertext for *Pinocchio*, and reveals how understanding the Biblical substructure with which Collodi undergirds *Pinocchio*—namely, the Jacob/Joseph narrative—invaluably enriches our appreciation of the work as a whole. This paper offers a new, original addition to the existing scholarship on *Pinocchio* and particularly to the question concerning the possible interconnections between Collodi's text and the Bible.

KEY WORDS

Carlo Collodi, *Pinocchio*, Hebrew Bible, literature and religion, Jacob and Joseph

INTRODUCTION

Carlo Collodi's *Le avventure di Pinocchio* is the third-most widely read, sold, and translated book in world history behind only the Bible and the Qur'an (Gasparini, Marcheschi, "Introduzione" xi), having been translated into over 280 languages and interpreted in almost as many manners.¹ Some scholars have interpreted *Pinocchio* religiously (see, e.g., Bargellini, Biffi, Marcheschi, Tempesti, Tessari), while others have argued that *Pinocchio* is a purely secular work and that, as Ann Lawson Lucas has argued, any references to God and religion in the text are merely "conventional" (Lawson Lucas, 176n34). *Pinocchio* is unquestionably first and foremost a secular (if frequently moralistic and didactic) work of literature, employing a great variety of comedic and fairy tale conventions, as well as literary devices from *Commedia dell'Arte*, Renaissance poetry (foremost among them for Collodi being Ariosto [Gilbert]), French fairy tales (some of which Collodi translated into Italian prior to writing *Pinocchio* [Pellerey 278-79]),

¹ By 1976 *Pinocchio* had been translated into over 200 languages (Citati "Ritratto"). That number has since grown to over 280, asserts Giovanni Gasparini (117). *Pinocchio* is the most translated Italian book, outranking even *La Divina Comedia*, according to Francelia Butler. By 1983, according to the scholar Fernando Tempesti, at least one thousand different writers had written in some form on *Pinocchio*. (Collodi, *Le avventure* Mondadori XLV-LXIX)

children's literature,² Italian folktales, Aesop's Fables, Italian opera (particularly those of Rossini and Bellini), nineteenth century Italian literature, Florentine architecture, Roman mythology (e.g. the character Alidoro), political satire, and as well as themes of and allusions to a great variety of classic Greek, Latin, neo-Gothic and modern literature (Pellerey 278)—references and allusions whose origins, as Roberto Pellerey has noted, have been “trasformati secondo le esigenze di un pubblico infantile che si appassionerà ai diversi episodi senza riconoscerne l'origine letteraria o le parodie” (268). Originally serialized, the novel has become one of the most beloved children's fables (notwithstanding Pietro Citati's assertion that *Pinocchio* is an “anti-fable” [Citati 151]) in world literature³ and has come to be greatly appreciated by adults as well.⁴ It would be a mistake, however, to overlook the fact that Collodi also employs a variety of theological tropes and Biblical narrative structures in *Pinocchio*. Not only are these motifs not merely “conventional” (Lawson Lucas, 176n34); a close study of these tropes and motifs reveals that Collodi was quite careful and deliberate in their use. Moreover, understanding the Biblical substructure of *Pinocchio* allows us to understand heretofore ambiguous and unexplained scenes in the story, such as the fight that occurs between maestro Antonio and Geppetto prior to Geppetto's acquisition of the piece of wood from Antonio which Geppetto uses to create Pinocchio in Capitolo II.

The argument that *Pinocchio* is a “wholly secular book” (Lawson Lucas, *ibid.*) is belied by the abundance of significant—and, it would appear, carefully and strategically used—theological motifs in the text. These include the motifs of “grazia” (Collodi 2019, 28), pleas for “pietà” (27, 48, 126), “elemosina” (15, 49, 51), “carità” (39, 64); theological expressions and references, such as “il Campo dei miracoli” (32, 34, 46, 50), “quaresima” (119), “pasqua” (131), the heavenly, Garden of Eden-like “paese benedetto” (93), and the infernal “sette peccati mortali” (77); Biblical allusions, such as “I morti son morti, e la miglior cosa che si possa fare è quella di lasciarli in pace”(61);⁵ and other significant theological and Christological motifs, such as crucifixion (implied by Pinocchio's death by hanging—a crucifixion-like manner of dying, in which, as Collodi emphasizes in

² Although it employs a great many tropes from children's literature, and while it at times may be classified and catalogued as a work of children's literature, it is far more than only children's literature, as the esteemed scholar Gianfranco Contini has insisted—it is *literature*, period: “Questa è letteratura senza aggettivo, non letteratura per bambini...” (241).

³ The great scholar and critic Benedetto Croce called *Pinocchio* “il più bel libro della letteratura infantile italiana” (330).

⁴ see Nasti 17-21.

⁵ Compare Luke 9:60: “Lascia i morti seppellire i loro morti” (*La Bibbia*). Other Biblical allusions in *Pinocchio* include Pinocchio's flying on the back of a bird (Il Colombo), which recalls the famous Biblical metaphor of God carrying the children of Israel out of Egypt as if on eagles' wings (Exodus 19:4), and Pinocchio's school companions' mocking his belief in the giant Pescecane with rather similar expressions to those which Elijah used to mock the believers of Baal: compare *Pinocchio*—“O il Pescecane dov'è?” [...] “Sarà andato a far colazione,” rispose uno di loro ridendo. “O si sarà buttato sul letto per fare un sonnellino” (Collodi 2019, 76)—with I Kings 18:27: “Elia cominciò a beffarsi di loro, e a dire: ‘Gridate forte; poich'egli è dio, ma sta meditando, o è andato in disparte, o è in viaggio; fors'anche dorme, e si risveglierà.’”

Capitolo XV, the process of dying lasted for hours, perhaps even more than a day [39],⁶ and in which the dying Pinocchio's final words—"Oh, babbo mio...Se tu fossi qui!..."⁷ recall the dying Christ's exclamation "Eli Eli lama sabachthani?" [Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34] and resurrection (anastasis), occurring upon Pinocchio's restoration to life in Capitolo XVI (41-43, 46)⁸ and initiated by the Fata dai capelli turchini's "tre piccoli colpi" (41)⁹ and uses expressions such as "impietositati" (43) upon seeing the near-dead Pinocchio, recalling Christ's restoration to life after the third day (I Corinthians 15:3-8). It is beyond the scope of this paper to adequately analyze all of these motifs (which also include references to Milton's *Paradise Lost*¹⁰); this paper instead focuses on the ways in which Collodi uses religion and theology in the beginning of the narrative in order to subtly ground the story within a theological framework, and the way in which—once Collodi has made us conscious of this theological framework—we are able to perceive the underlying Biblical substructure of the narrative.

Additionally, while previous scholars have observed parallels between Geppetto and Joseph (Biffi 48) and noted similarities between Pinocchio's hanging and Christ's crucifixion (Gasparini 100-7), no scholars have yet explored the ways in which the relationship between Geppetto and Pinocchio parallels (in strikingly similar manners) the relationship between Jacob and his son Joseph. This article will make a convincing case that Collodi consciously modeled his puppet on Joseph and that the reason he began his story with a physical confrontation between Mastro Antonio and Geppetto was to encourage his adult readers to see Pinocchio's arrival in the world as a fundamentally spiritual one.

I. The Theological Foregrounding of *Pinocchio*

A close reading of *Pinocchio* evinces the datum that its author was well-trained in religion and theology and had attained a high degree of Biblical and religious literacy—

⁶ Tempesti sees in the entire process leading up to and including Pinocchio's hanging many references to and evocations of Christ's passion; see Tempesti 105.

⁷ "Babbo" is the colloquial Tuscan term for father—a term for father also used by the Tuscan Dante in *Inferno* XXXII.9.

⁸ The theme of resurrection is a prominent one in *Pinocchio*; see, e.g., Morrissey and Wunderlich, and Gasparini 98.

⁹ Certain aspects of the Fata's caring for Pinocchio after she helps bring him down from the tree upon which he had been hanging evoke the Pietà (Mary's taking Jesus down from the cross and cradling him in her arms); Collodi, so that we do not miss these evocations, refers to the Fata in these moments as acting toward Pinocchio "con tutta la pazienza di una buona mamma" (45); Pinocchio later calls her his madre: "vi chiamerò la mia mamma" (71), whereupon she reciprocates his wish: "Io sarò la tua mamma" (73). Cf. 92 (wherein the narrator explains that the Fata was "per lui una specie di mamma," and 114 (Pinocchio reaffirms that she is "la mia mamma." Indeed, a number of scholars and critics have observed that the Fata is suggestive of the Virgin Mary [Perella 92]; others have said that the more apt comparison is to the Holy Ghost [Goldthwaite 198]).

¹⁰ See, e.g., *Pinocchio* (Collodi, 2019), wherein Collodi describes the Paese dei Balocchi as a "pandemonio" and a "baccano indiavolato"; for further analyses of the Christological motifs in *Pinocchio*, see, e.g., Antonie Wlosok (Harrison 156) and Joseph DeFilippo (Harrison 269-89).

which, indeed, was precisely the case. Collodi, it is critical to bear in mind, studied in a theological seminary—the Tuscan seminary of Colle di Val d'Elsa (Marrone and Puppa 485)—for five years prior to beginning his writing career, and was thus well aware of how to add religious meaning to texts through the careful use of strategic Biblical and theological references, especially from the Gospels and from the Catholic theological tradition (Perella 30). As a result, as Gasparini has noted, “è indubbio che il racconto si presta simbolicamente ad una interpretazione in chiave biblica ed evangelica” (Gasparini 104)—and the completed novel is composed of a Trinitarian structure composed with many references to not only the Gospels and New Testament but to the Apocrypha (which is only included in the Catholic Bible—hence furthering the importance of recalling Collodi's training in a Catholic seminary) as well (Pierotti). The following paragraphs will briefly elucidate how he accomplishes this Biblical and theological grounding of *Pinocchio* in the first few chapters of his beloved puppet's adventures before turning to what this paper considers to be *Pinocchio*'s most significant usage of Biblical intertextuality: the Jacob-Joseph narrative.

The story begins, as Collodi emphasizes in the first lines of Capitolo I, not with the phrase “c'era una volta un re” (i.e., something or someone already elevated, extremely valuable, and thus worthy of our attention) but with the phrase “C'era una volta un pezzo di legno” (3)—something lowly, seemingly worthless, and apparently not worthy of our attention. Not only is this a story about a mere “pezzo di legno” (3) but it is not even a story about a nice piece of wood, such as a “legno di lusso” (3); instead, it is a story about the humblest, seemingly least valuable piece of wood imaginable: a “povero pezzo di legno” (4), “un semplice pezzo da catasta, di quelli che d'inverno si mettono nelle stufe e nei caminetti per accendere il fuoco e per riscaldare le stanze” (3).

From the very first lines Collodi thus begins to undergird the story with a Biblical theological structure: the notion that redemption and salvation sprout forth from someone or something with the lowliest of origins. This theological story pattern is encapsulated in the Biblical verse “La pietra che gli edificatori avevano rigettata è divenuta la pietra angolare” (Psalms 118:22), and is expressed in the lives of redemptive and messianic Biblical figures from David (who was not only a humble shepherd from a

lowly, non-aristocratic family but was the least remarkable of the eight sons of his father Jesse [see I Samuel 16:1-13]¹¹) to Jesus.¹²

Collodi then employs a second narrative motif commonly encountered in religious narratives about such redemptive and salvific figures: their being raised outside their natural environment and places of origin and by those who are not their birth parents—“Non so come andasse, ma il fatto è che un bel giorno questo pezzo di legno capitò nella bottega di un vecchio falegname il quale aveva nome maestr’Antonio” (3). This is the case, in the Bible, most prominently in the story of Moses, whom his mother places in a basket which she places in the Nile, eventually floating into the arms of Pharaoh’s daughter, who takes him into her house and raises him in her father’s palace (Exodus 2).¹³

Still on the first page of the first chapter, Collodi employs yet another, even more outstanding and rather significant theological theme: that of hierophany. This occurs as maestro Ciliegia begins attempting to carve the piece of wood into a table, whereupon the piece of wood suddenly cries out: “Non mi picchiar tanto forte!” (3).

Here we have, for the first time in the story, the entrance of the magical—or, more aptly, the supernatural. In religious terms, what occurs here at the outset of this tale is nothing less than a hierophany: a manifestation of the sacred (not necessarily of God—which, if it were, would be called a theophany) in the midst of mundane space. These sorts of events occur, according to scholars of religion, when the supernatural (appearances [“phano”] from alien [“hieros”] spheres) manifests within ordinary life, as occurs here with the arrival of a speaking piece of wood; such intrusions mark the space and time within it as distinct from all other spaces surrounding it. The appearance of this special piece of wood signifies that this is a story which will not only take place within the fairy tale realm of the magical, but within the theological domain of the sacred as well.

¹¹ According to the New Testament (Matthew 21:42; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17; Acts 4:11) this verse from Psalms is said to apply most notably to Jesus Christ. The Bible underscores the lowly origins of David—the ancestor of the Messiah in both the Jewish and Christian traditions—by relating the shameful sexual deeds of his ancestors Judah and Tamar (and, before them, Lot and his daughter), thereby emphasizing that David’s origins and family lineage cannot even be said to be that of a “legno di lusso,” so to speak, but of “un semplice pezzo da catasta.” For a rabbinic explanation for why the Bible speaks of David’s embarrassing lineage, see Talmud, *b. Yoma* 22b.

¹² Salvation is a key theme in Pinocchio; see Gasparini (101-6), who considers the possibility of Providence playing a role in the story’s salvific episodes.

¹³ It is also seen in the case of the Prophet Samuel—a key figure in the Jewish and Christian sacred histories of redemption, in that he was the anointer of King David, the progenitor of the Messiah for both Christians and Jews—who, shortly after his birth, was sent to live with priests in the precinct near the Temple at Shiloh and was raised in the home of the High Priest Eli (see I Samuel 1:24-28).

This is also signified by the expression the piece of wood uses—“Non mi picchiar tanto forte!”—which connects Collodi’s work in modern Italian to two of the most important and influential works in the linguistic predecessors of Italian, Tuscan and Latin. First, the expression ineluctably recalls the expression Christ uses after his resurrection when speaking to Mary Magdalene, encapsulated memorably in the Latin Vulgate of the Gospels: “Noli mi tangere” (John 20:17). The piece of wood’s use of such a Christ-like expression indicates that just as Christ, according to the Bible, was no mere man but the incarnation of God, so too will this piece of wood be no mere piece of wood but rather will be a seemingly inanimate object which has been incarnated with the soul (and, eventually, the living and breathing flesh) of a real human boy, a “ragazzo per bene”.

Secondly, this scene also recalls the famous Canto XIII—the Canto of the Suicides—in Dante’s *Inferno*, written in Dante’s Tuscan, wherein the souls which committed the sin of suicide on earth are punished in the afterlife by being incarnated into trees (that is, wood), so that when Virgil tells Dante to pick a twig off of one such tree, the tree cries out—as Pinocchio does here—and then bleeds (*Inferno* XIII, 22-45). The expression of the piece of wood in *Pinocchio*—“Non mi picchiar tanto forte!”—also resembles the exclamations of the wounded tree in Canto XIII: “Perché mi schiante?” and “Perché mi scerpi?” (33, 35.) This serves to indicate that Pinocchio’s journey will be somewhat similar to the journeys of certain souls in the afterlife, but in the opposite direction—whereas in their voyage from this world to the next certain sinful souls are punished by being transformed from human beings into pieces of wood, in Pinocchio’s voyage from the realm beyond into this world he becomes transformed from a piece of wood into a human being. With this scene, and with this expression in particular, Collodi situates the story of Pinocchio subtly but significantly in the two primary theological texts—the Latin Bible and the Tuscan *Commedia*—which did so much to shape Italian language, literature, and culture for centuries (and, in the case of the Bible, for millennia), thereby simultaneously staking a claim for his story’s literary provenance while also endowing it with a veritable theological dimension.

Collodi completes establishing the theological grounding of his story in Capitolo I by embedding within it three additional key theological motifs: conveying how the mortal human who encounters the sacred, or who hears of such an encounter occurring close by, may at first doubt the veracity of this encounter; conveying the physical transfiguration of the mortal who has had an encounter with the sacred; and describing the sensations of fear and terror that accompany revelatory, hierophanic experiences. When the piece of wood cries out and utters actual words, maestro Ciliegia at first cannot believe that he heard the piece of wood actually speaking. He cannot believe that what he is experiencing is something otherworldly, such as a hierophany; he continues to think rationally, assuming that he must have imagined the voice: “‘Ho capito,’ disse allora

ridendo e grattandosi la parrucca: ‘si vede che quella vocina me le sono figurata io. Rimettiamoci a lavorare’ (4). When the piece of wood cries out a second time (“Ohi, tu m’hai fatto male!”), he still cannot believe that he is experiencing a hierophany—“Che sia per caso questo pezzo di legno che abbia imparato a piangere e a lamentarsi come un bambino? Io non lo posso credere” (4)—and continues to try to convince himself that what he heard was merely a figment of his imagination. Only when he hears the piece of wood cry out a third time—“Smetti! Tu mi fai il pizzicorino sul corpo!”—does he finally recognize that he is experiencing something out of the ordinary; and not just something out of the ordinary, but a veritable hierophany.

This scene evokes the episode in the Gospels of the Apostle Peter denying Christ three times before the cock crows (Matthew 26:33-35; Mark 14:29-31; Luke 22:33-34; John 18:15-27). It even more closely evokes the Lord’s first calling to Samuel in the house of Eli, wherein God calls to Samuel but Samuel at first believes it must be Eli who is calling him, and promptly presents himself in front of the priest. Only upon the third call does Eli realize that the voice Samuel has been hearing must be that of the Lord, and instructs Samuel to prepare himself to receive the word of the Lord (I Samuel 3:1-14). That it took until the third call for Eli and Samuel to realize that they were experiencing an encounter with the sacred is due, in large part—explains the Book of Samuel—to the fact that “in quel tempo la parola di Dio era rara, e non appariva alcuna visione” (I Samuele 3:1; Giovanni Diodati Bible), much as maestro Ciliegia’s inability to realize that what he had been experiencing was an encounter with the sacred must, we can understand, be due to the fact that such encounters have become even rarer in our time.

To underscore the detail that what maestro Ciliegia has experienced has in fact been a hierophany, Collodi uses the term *transfiguration*. It would have been enough to convey maestro Ciliegia’s shock and surprise at realizing that the voice he has been hearing was indeed coming from the piece of wood were Collodi to have simply written—as he did—that maestro Ciliegia’s face and the tip of his nose, “da paonazza come era quasi sempre, gli era diventata turchina dalla gran paura” (5). That Collodi does not stop there but adds the very theologically weighted term of *transfiguration*—“Il suo viso pareva trasfigurato” (ibid.)—indicates that we are meant to understand that maestro Ciliegia has indeed experienced a hierophany and has encountered the holy, undergoing the type of spiritually colored theological transformation which Moses and Jesus also underwent during their encounters with the holy, wherein the appearance of their visages were clearly altered as well.¹⁴ In describing the change in Jesus’s appearance after his calling from God on the mountaintop, Matthew 17:2 uses the term “transfigured”. The event of transfiguration would go on to play an important role in Christian theology, marking the moment of humanity’s encounter with the divine on earth and the meeting between

¹⁴ See Exodus 34:29-35, Matthew 17:1-8, Mark 9:2-8, Luke 9:28-36, and II Peter 1-16, 18.

the mortal and the eternal, with Jesus as the mediator between these two realms, much as the piece of wood in Capitolo I of *Pinocchio* acts as a meeting point between the realms of the ordinary and the extraordinary, the natural and the supernatural.¹⁵

Lastly, Collodi emphasizes the hierophanic nature of maestro Ciliegia's encounter with this extraordinary piece of wood by describing maestro Ciliegia's fear upon realizing that the voice he had been hearing was indeed coming from the piece of wood. Rudolf Otto's seminal work on religious experience, *Die Heilige* (The Holy), discusses how, constitutive of the encounter with the holy, is the sensation of fear—a "*mysterium tremendum et fascinans*" that causes a person to tremble in fear during such experiences. For rather similar reasons Søren Kierkegaard titled his work on religion "Fear and Trembling" ("*Frygt og Bæven*"). Thomas Hobbes, in his major work of philosophy *Leviathan* (whose title itself is taken from the name of the giant, fear-inducing sea monster of the Bible), asserted that "the natural seed[s] of religion" are awe, terror, fear, and mystery (69); T.S. Eliot, in his introduction to Pascal's *Pensées*, maintained that religion and fear are inextricably linked (xv), and Baruch Spinoza, in both of his major works of philosophy, the *Ethics* and the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, discoursed upon the natural nexus between fear ("*metus*") and religion as well.¹⁶ The Bible frequently portrays encounters with the holy as being suffused with fear.¹⁷ Writers from Dante and Cervantes, Thomas Mann, Albert Camus, Isabel Allende, Philip Roth, José Saramago, Joseph Conrad, and Robert Louis Stevenson, have all—intuitively understanding the inextricable link between the holy and fear and trembling—used religious motifs to heighten the sense of horror in particular scenes. Collodi clearly evinces his understanding of this connection as well, and thus uses the term "*paura*" not once, not twice, but three times (4, 5) during his portrayal of maestro Ciliegia's experience upon his realization that the voice he is hearing is in fact coming from the piece of wood. As maestro Ciliegia becomes more conscious of the extraordinary nature of this piece of wood, his trepidation intensifies from simple "*paura*" to "*gran paura*" (ibid.) and then to "tante paure" (7).

Not only does Collodi describe maestro Ciliegia's encounter with the extraordinary piece of wood as being suffused with fear, but he also employs other Biblical and religious motifs constitutive of hierophanic experiences as well. Thus, after hearing the voice for a third time and realizing at last that the voice is not only real but that it is in

¹⁵ On transfiguration in Christian theology, see, e.g., Lee and Meistermann. Collodi utilizes the motif of transfiguration later in the story as well; when describing Pinocchio's appearance following his resurrection (after having been hung on the quercia grande) and after the Fata has nursed him back to health, Collodi portrays Pinocchio as looking "trasfigurato" to her (48).

¹⁶ See Spinoza, *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, 6[5](1), and *Ethics*, I, appendix, pp. 439-40; G, 2:77(28)-78(12).

¹⁷ See, e.g., Genesis 15:12, 28:17 (Giacobbe "ebbe paura, e disse: 'Com'è tremendo questo luogo! Questa non è che la casa di Dio..."); Acts 5:5, 5:11; Revelation 11:11.

fact coming from the piece of wood, maestro Ciliegia falls to the ground “come fulminato” (5). The Bible commonly portrays falling to the ground as a reaction of those who undergo experiences with the holy (Exodus 34:8, Numbers 16:22; John 18:6), and describes the great hierophany experienced by the children of Israel at Sinai as being marked by “thunder and lightning” (Exodus 20:18). The sum of these theological motifs—motifs which typically accompany scenes of encounters with the holy in the Bible—which Collodi uses throughout *Capitolo I* thus serve to make abundantly clear that what maestro Ciliegia experiences during his encounter with the speaking piece of wood is, indeed, a hierophany—a fear-filled meeting of mortal, nature-bound man with an extraordinary, atemporal entity that is not bound to the ordinary laws and conventions of the natural world.

II. The Continuation of *Pinocchio's* Biblically Informed Prologue

Collodi continues his creation of a theologically weighted prologue for *Pinocchio* in his portrayal of the way in which Geppetto comes to acquire the puppet. Geppetto, at the outset of *Capitolo II*, visits his old friend the Maestro Antonio in search of a piece of wood from which, as he explains to his longstanding carpenter friend, he could be able to construct a puppet for himself. It is a rather odd manner through which to introduce a literary character: we are supplied with scant background information about Geppetto other than the fact that he has a nickname which he resents being called—“Polendina,” on account of his yellow wig which was similar in color to polendina—that he has a temper, and that he is terribly impoverished and in need of some sort of fortunate assistance in his life. We know that he is in need of this type of assistance when he declares that his desire for a puppet, with which he might be able to have perform tricks and feats such as dancing and acrobatics, as a potential wellspring of this fortunate assistance—something with which he could not only travel the world but, more importantly, enable him to earn enough money to eat: “Ho pensato di fabbricarmi da me un bel burattino,” as he explains to maestro Antonio, with which he could “girare il mondo, per buscarmi un tozzo di pane e un bicchier di vino” (6). He views the idea of the puppet as something which could save his life, an influx of fortunate succor which would enable him to keep living; he views the idea of the puppet, in short, as a potential instrument of salvation.

But how does one merit this kind of salvation? And can salvation be something that one can attain through merit at all? These questions have been debated for millennia by Jewish, Christian, and Islamic theologians in numerous theological treatises, and are not addressed here in this literary text. What is clear, though, is that within the theological scheme in which *Pinocchio* is operating, salvation is something that must be merited. And Geppetto merits it in the like manner in which the Biblical patriarch Jacob merits it—through struggle, in the most literal sense of the term.

Geppetto submits his request for a piece of wood to maestro Antonio, who, being a good friend of Geppetto's, is inclined to give his friend what he desires. And Geppetto does eventually receive a piece of wood from his friend—which turns out to be the miraculous, speaking piece of wood—and the story of Pinocchio which millions, if not billions, of adults and children all across the world have come to know and love proceeds from there. Were that it was this simple for Geppetto, however; for, in the interlude in which he requests a piece of wood from maestro Antonio and eventually receives it, he must undergo a literal struggle, involving a fairly violent and dangerous degree of physical confrontation with his good friend—a struggle which is provoked by the speaking piece of wood calling Geppetto by his hated nickname, causing Geppetto to think that his friend has insulted him—before he can return home with his much-desired piece of wood.

This is an exceptionally strange interlude. There are enough fantastic and outlandish adventures in *Le avventure di Pinocchio* to keep readers entertained throughout the length of the story. Why, though, is this specific escapade necessary? Why not simply have Geppetto arrive at maestro Antonio's house, receive the magical piece of wood—after, perhaps, becoming astonished himself at its magical properties—and then return home? What purpose does this bizarre and seemingly unnecessary fight scene serve in the narrative, and what does it add to our understanding of the story as a whole?

III. The Nexus Between Pinocchio and Geppetto and Jacob and Joseph

If one understands *Pinocchio* as only a fairy tale (though of course we should realize that most fairy tales are far from simple), the absurd fight scene between Geppetto and maestro Antonio—and especially the fact that Geppetto returns home with the piece of wood while limping—remains acutely problematic. But understanding *Pinocchio* within a theological register—and one wherein salvation must be merited—allows us to make sense of this otherwise nearly inexplicable passage.

There are a variety of manners, according to traditional religious thought, by which one may merit salvation. In the Bible, one of the most prominent methods of meriting salvation is engaging in some manner of confrontation with the person or persons of whom one is most afraid, or with the person or persons that have been the engineers of one's suffering. David must confront Goliath in order to save his tribe from the Philistines; Moses must confront Pharaoh in order to save the children of Israel from slavery in Egypt; Jesus must journey to Jerusalem to confront Pilate (and to then undergo the ordeals of his passion) in order to save mankind from sin; Joseph must confront his brothers in order to save himself psychologically from continuing to remain a prisoner of the trauma they had inflicted upon him, as well as in order to save his father and the rest of his family from the famine in Canaan; Abraham must confront the four kings in battle in order to rescue his nephew Lot from captivity (Gen. 14). And Jacob must

confront his furious brother Esau in order to save himself and his family from his brother's murderous vow of vengeance.

Collodi constructs the story of Geppetto's salvation through confrontation to conform most closely to the Biblical story of Jacob's salvation through confrontation. Thus, one of the scant, precious few pieces of background information Collodi supplies us with about Geppetto is that he has two names: a name which he does not like and which represents his lower nature ("Polendina") and the name which he prefers: "Geppetto" (likely derived from the Italian name "Giuseppe," for which "Geppetto" is a diminutive). This piece of datum—when understood within the totality of the manner in which Collodi maps the story of Geppetto onto the story of Jacob—serves to link the "vecchietto tutto arzillo" Geppetto (5) with the Biblical patriarch Jacob, who is one of the few major Biblical personalities to also go by two names: "Jacob," which represents his lower nature, and "Israel," the name he earns after his struggle with an unidentified man whom Jacob later believes to have been an angel (Gen. 32:22-31).

Geppetto's seemingly unnecessary wrestling match with maestro Antonio, then, parallels Jacob's seemingly unnecessary wrestling match with the angel. On the surface of the Biblical story in Genesis, Jacob's wrestling match with the angel is equally as unnecessary to the story of his journey from the house of Laban back home to Canaan as is the episode of Geppetto's wrestling match with maestro Antonio unnecessary to the story of his acquisition of the piece of wood which would eventually become Pinocchio. Jacob's struggle with the angel is necessary insofar as it was necessary for him, prior to salvation from the hands of his brother Esau, to undergo some sort of physical struggle that would allow him to merit this salvation. This turned out to be the purpose of his wrestling match with the angel, a struggle which allowed him to not only merit this salvation but to overcome the indignity of his name "Jacob" (a name which, in its Hebrew etymology [see Gen. 27:36], alludes to the kinds of underhanded trickery he had once had to employ in order to confront his life's challenges before gaining the courage—which occurred only during and after this struggle of his with the angel—to confront them directly) and to earn the name of "Israel," which, in Hebrew, means "he who struggles with God" (Gen. 32:28).¹⁸

¹⁸ This Hebrew etymology of the name Jacob derives from Esau's lament to his father over how his brother deceived him twice, whereas the original, more neutrally tinged etymology of Jacob—Ya'akov—simply alludes to the manner in which Jacob was grasping onto the heel (a'qev) of Esau as both were born. (See Gen. 25:26.) The Hebrew etymology of the name Joseph—Yoseph—is derived from the Hebrew root y-s-ph, "to add"; see Gen. 30:24: "[Rachel] called his name Joseph; and said, The LORD shall add (yo-seph) to me another son." This, in many ways, is the central wish that Geppetto has for Pinocchio—that he will become added to him (yo-seph) and to his household as his real son.

Geppetto's wrestling match with maestro Antonio is similarly what allows him to overcome the indignity of his name "Polendina" (thus, the significance of the wrestling match being provoked by the piece of wood's calling out the name "Polendina") and to earn not only the dignity of being able to be referred to by the name he prefers, but to earn the salvation which will be sent to him through the instrument of the miraculous piece of wood that will become Pinocchio. That Geppetto, after his fight with maestro Antonio, has indeed merited this salvation, is indicated by the fact that when he has succeeded in prying himself away from this struggle and returns home with the piece of wood, Collodi emphasizes that he is "zoppicando" (7), a highly significant datum in this context, for when Jacob concluded his struggle with the angel and returned to his family, he was also limping (Gen. 32:31). Only by becoming aware of and understanding this specific Biblical intertext of *Pinocchio*—the Jacob (and, as this paper will soon illuminate, the accompanying Joseph) narrative—and not other Biblical intertexts and Christological substructures (such as those who have read *Pinocchio* as a modern-day Adam [Audissino 17, Gasparini 104] and/or a retelling of the New Testament parable (Luca 15:17-19) of the figliol prodigo [Bargellini], and who have seen the story as a covert attempt to promote Catholic dogma [Ferrucci]), can we fully understand this otherwise perplexing episode, as well as a variety of other motivic threads and narrative structures in Collodi's story, as we shall see as well.

Collodi strengthens the interstructuring of the character of Geppetto with the Biblical personage of Jacob by informing us in Capitolo I of an otherwise meaningless detail: that maestro Antonio was also called "maestro Ciliegia," because of the point of his nose which resembled the color and luster of "una ciliegia matura" (3), a red fruit. This otherwise irrelevant detail becomes highly relevant once we understand the Biblical and theological substructure with which Collodi undergirds *Pinocchio*. Understanding now, as we do, that Geppetto is a character constructed with many important integuments of the patriarch Jacob—and, in turn, recalling that Jacob's brother Esau is also referred to in the Bible as "the red one" on account of his red hair¹⁹ (Gen. 25:25)—allows us to understand an additional element of Geppetto's confrontation with maestro Antonio. Just as Collodi endows Geppetto with some of the more noteworthy characteristics of Jacob, he attributes one of the most noteworthy characteristics of Esau—his redness—to maestro Antonio. Thus, within the salvation scheme in which Collodi has placed this story, just as Jacob needed to confront the reddish Esau prior to attaining his later salvation through Joseph, Geppetto needed to confront the reddish Ciliegia prior to attaining his later salvation through Pinocchio. (This reading is reinforced by certain rabbinic interpretations, which Collodi may not have been aware of to the same degree to which he was knowledgeable of the Bible and Christian theology, that the angel with whom Jacob wrestles was in fact the guardian angel of

¹⁹ See also Attridge (40).

Esau.²⁰) After Jacob successfully confronts Esau, he makes peace with his brother and they depart on friendly terms, remaining at peace with one another for the rest of their lives (Gen. 33:12-15), just as Geppetto makes peace with maestro Antonio following their confrontation and they depart on friendly terms as well, vowing to remain “*buoni amici per tutta la vita*” (7). And it is then, following Jacob’s making peace with Esau, that the story of his adventures and misadventures with his son Joseph can begin (Gen. 37), just as it is only after Geppetto’s confrontation with (and subsequent making peace with) his reddish-nosed friend that he is able to commence his adventures and misadventures with his puppet-son Pinocchio (8 ff.).

The correspondences between Geppetto and Jacob become even more clear upon understanding the manner through which Geppetto’s salvation arrives through his eventual (surrogate) son, the puppet Pinocchio—Geppetto, as soon as he creates him, begins referring to Pinocchio as his son (“*figliolo*”)(9, 11), “*ragazzo mio*” (9, 18, 19) and “*caro mio*” (19), and Pinocchio soon begins referring to Geppetto as his father (“*mio babbo*” [14, 15, 17] and “*babbo*” [20, 21, 22]) as well²¹—and the ways in which this salvation parallels the manner through which Jacob’s later salvation from the deadly famine in Canaan arrives through his beloved son Joseph. Geppetto is poor before the birth of his surrogate son Pinocchio (see p. 8), just as Jacob comes to Laban’s house poor before the birth of Joseph (see Bereishit Rabbah 70:12, quoted by Rashi, commentary to Gen. 29:11, s.v. “*na’yevq*”). Geppetto lavishes a great deal of love and care on Pinocchio, as Jacob does with Joseph; Geppetto creates the best possible clothes he can for Pinocchio, a “*vestituccio di carta fiorita*” (as well as a humble pair of shoes and a cap, 20), recalling Jacob’s famous gift of a coat of many colors (literally, a fine woolen tunic [“*k’tonet pasim*”]) to Joseph (Gen. 37:3). In both instances of these father-son relationships the respective texts emphasize that the great love that these fathers have for their sons is linked to their age—that is, the fact that they had Joseph and Pinocchio, respectively, during their old age, has endeared these children to them. Jacob (here called Israel) is said to have loved Joseph more than all of his other children because Joseph was “the child of his old age” (“*ben-z’qunim*” [Gen. 37:3]). Collodi similarly emphasizes Geppetto’s age—the very first descriptive he supplies us with of Geppetto is that he is old (“*un vecchietto*” [5])—and textually links Geppetto’s age to his great compassion and love for Pinocchio. When Geppetto expresses his sorrow for Pinocchio regarding his inability to buy him an alphabet book, Collodi here calls Geppetto not by his name and other descriptives, as he does elsewhere (e.g., “*Il povero Geppetto*” [8, 9]); but by his age: “*il buon vecchio facendosi triste*” (21, my emphasis). And when Pinocchio promises Geppetto that if he does acquire an alphabet book for him he will apply himself diligently

²⁰ Rashi, commentary to Gen. 32:25, s.v. “*na’ye’aveq ish*,” citing *Bereishit Rabbah* 77:3, *Tanchumah* 8.

²¹ Collodi then also continues to refer to Geppetto as “*suo padre*” (16) and “*suo babbo*” (20), and Pinocchio as Geppetto’s “*figliolo*” (23).

to study and to learn a trade so that, as he tells his father, “che sarò la consolazione e il bastone della vostra vecchiata,” a declaration which prompts an outpouring of love and compassion from his normally stern-faced father—“Geppetto che, sebbene facesse il viso di tiranno, aveva gli occhi pieni di pianto e il cuore grosso dalla passione” (20)—who then, promptly after hearing these words, sets out to make Pinocchio the finest clothes he is able to for him.

In addition to (like Joseph) possessing clothes that his adoring old father had made especially for him, Pinocchio also possesses some of the same character flaws of Joseph—shortcomings which cause both to stumble at first. Both, in their youth, are vain: Joseph spends an inordinate time styling his hair (Rashi, commentary to Gen. 39:6, citing the Midrash, *Bereishit Rabbah* 86:6, 44:5), while Pinocchio, after catching his reflection for the first time in a pitcher of water, becomes “così contento di sé” (20).

Both are dreamers, figuratively and literally; they both dream of earthly success—which, in their dreams, is symbolized by agricultural prosperity: sheaves of wheat in the field for Joseph (Gen. 37:7-10), and “carichi di grappoli” in the field for Pinocchio (34). Both Pinocchio and Joseph have grandiose visions (which are encapsulated in their dreams) which initially lead them astray: Pinocchio dreams of learning a great deal so that he can support his father in his old age—“fantasticava nel suo cervellino mille ragionamenti e mille castelli in aria, uno più bello dell'atro” (21)—dreaming of being able to attain enough money to support his elderly father (34), recalling Joseph's fantastic visions of his brothers' sheaves of wheat bowing down to his, and of the sun and the moon and of eleven stars (symbolizing his father, mother, and eleven brothers) bowing down to him as well (Gen. 37:7-10).²² Joseph's naiveté and his fantasies of his brothers' acquiescence to his leadership cause him to be oblivious to their actual, present and very real hatred of him (Gen. 37:4, 10-11); Pinocchio's naiveté and his visions of certain scholastic success lead him to take lightly the diligence he will need to achieve this success, prompting him to go listen to the music coming from the theater instead of going to school. “Oggi andrò a sentire i pifferi, e domani a scuola: per andare a scuola c'è sempre tempo” (22), he rationalizes to himself, before selling his alphabet book in order to buy a ticket to the theater from which the music is emanating (23).

Both Pinocchio and Joseph suffer from grievous miscarriages of justice: Joseph is wrongly accused of attempting to seduce Potiphar's wife and is thrown in prison when in fact it was Potiphar's wife who had attempted to seduce him (Gen. 39:1-20), while Pinocchio is robbed of his gold coins and then thrown in prison instead of the thieves

²² Pinocchio also entertains visions (or, perhaps more aptly, delusions) of great wealth; see Collodi 2019, 53. On symbology in *Pinocchio* more generally—itsself practically its own field of Collodi studies—see, e.g., Pierotti and Servadio.

who had robbed him (53-54). Both are released from prison only by the fortunate whims of the monarchs who rule their realms (Gen. 41:9-14; *Pinocchio*, 54), rather than by any overdue administration of justice. Both are sold—not just once, but twice: Joseph, by his brothers to a caravan of Ishmaelite and Midianite traders, who then sell him to a courtier of Pharaoh’s in Egypt (Gen. 37:25-28, 36); and Pinocchio, first to the director of a circus, and then to someone else who wants to use his skin for the purpose of making a drum (106-112).²³ Even more remarkably, both are sold for the same exact price: “venti soldi” in *Pinocchio* (112) and twenty silver coins (“*esrim keasef*”) in Genesis (Gen. 37:28). And both are saved by characters whose lives they had saved earlier—but these characters only act to save Pinocchio and Joseph out of their own self-interest.²⁴ Additionally, both Pinocchio and Joseph pretend for stretches to not be themselves; others speak about “Pinocchio” and “Joseph” to their faces while the real Pinocchio and Joseph indulge them, listening without admitting that it is they who are in fact Pinocchio and Joseph, managing to keep up this skilled playacting for some time (*Pinocchio* 2019, 87-88; Gen. 42-45).

Pinocchio begins his adventures outside of Geppetto’s house much as Joseph begins his adventures and misadventures outside of Jacob’s house—by being betrayed by his own brothers. After Pinocchio purchases a ticket for the theater, he meets his “brothers”—that is, his fellow puppets, Arlecchino e Pulcinella—who greet him as “il nostro fratello Pinocchio!” (24) and who describe themselves to him as “tuoi fratelli” (24). When the puppeteer Mangiafuoco, however, upon seeing this strange new puppet Pinocchio, desires to use him as kindling wood to help him cook his dinner, just as Joseph’s brothers at first abandon him in the pit (and to an all but certain death), Pinocchio’s brothers abandon him to the clutches of Mangiafuoco and to an all but certain death as well: “Arlecchino e Pulcinella da principio esitarono; ma impauriti da un’occhiataccia del loro padrone, obbedirono e, dopo poco tornarono in cucina, portando sulle braccia il povero Pinocchio il quale [...] strillava disperatamente: ‘Babbo mio, salvatemi! Non voglio morire, non voglio morire’” (25-26). Only the fortuitous

²³ Moreover, in the initial sales of both Joseph and Pinocchio, the narrators of *Pinocchio* and Genesis both mention explicitly the profit (“discreto guadagno”; *Pinocchio*, 106; “*betza*” [gain, or profit]; Gen. 37:26) that both sellers—Joseph’s brothers in Genesis and l’Omino in *Pinocchio*—believe they will be able to accrue through the sales of their human (and, in the case of Pinocchio, almost human) merchandise.

²⁴ Joseph’s interpretation of Pharaoh’s butler’s dream helps the butler liberate himself from prison (Gen. 40:1-23). When the butler is freed from prison, Joseph asks the butler to remember him and mention him to Pharaoh so that Pharaoh might release Joseph from prison. The butler does not do so, however, until it is advantageous to the butler to do so (Gen 41:9-13; see *Midrash* there, explaining that the butler only mentioned Joseph to Pharaoh because he had become fearful of losing his life if it would become known to Pharaoh that the butler was withholding information from him about a skilled dream interpreter who could interpret the dreams which were troubling him). Meanwhile, in *Pinocchio*, after the dog Alidoro whom Pinocchio saves from drowning proclaims to the puppet “tu m’hai fatto un gran servizio: e in questo mondo quel che è fatto è reso. Se capita l’occasione, ci ripareremo” (83), Alidoro returns the favor (by saving him from being fried in the green pescatore’s frying pan), but admits that he only came running to where Pinocchio was when he smelled the odor of delicious fried food (87).

intervention of Mangiafuoco's sneezing (signifying his sudden influx of compassion)(27-27)—like the intervention of Judah, who convinces the brothers to raise Joseph from the pit and sell him to a caravan of travelling Ishmaelite salesmen (Gen. 37:26-28)—saves Pinocchio's life.²⁵

What is also significant in this context is that the individual responsible for directing Pinocchio to this dire situation with his puppet brothers—the person who tells him how to get to the place from which the music is emanating—is not identified, just as the person who tells Joseph (while Joseph is wandering out of Hebron and searching for his brothers' flock in Shechem) is unidentified. In other works of literature, the appearance of unidentified characters may not be as significant as it is in the Bible and in *Pinocchio*, where virtually all persons who appear upon the text's stage are named and identified. Thus, in the context of understanding the ways in which Collodi models some of Pinocchio's early misfortunes on those of the Biblical Joseph—further reinforcing the interstructural connections Collodi builds between Geppetto and Jacob and Pinocchio and Joseph—it is rather significant that both of the individuals who play the roles of directing Pinocchio and Joseph to their brothers, setting in motion the events of the remainder of these respective stories, are nameless, unidentified persons: “un ragazzetto” in the story of Pinocchio (22), and a “man” (Gen. 37:15, 17) in the story of Joseph and his brothers.²⁶

Further, like the elderly Jacob, who was so stricken with grief after the loss of Joseph (see Gen. 37:34-35) that he mourned for his son for twenty-two years until their eventual heartfelt reunion in Egypt, Pinocchio is acutely conscious of the pain and great sadness that he knows his sojourn away from his elderly father will cause him: “voglio andarmene a casa,” he tells the deceitful fox and cat, who conspire to prevent him from doing so, “dove c'è il mio babbo che mi aspetta. Chi lo sa, povero vecchio, quanto ha sospirato ieri, e non vedermi tornare” (31). And, indeed, when he re-encounters the Grillo parlante after it has returned to him in the form of a ghost (the word that Collodi uses here for ghost—not the usual “fantasma” but rather “ombra”—recalls how Dante used the same word when describing the souls that he and Virgil encounter in *The Divine Comedy* [see, e.g., *Inferno* II.44, III.59, IV.55]—in contrast to works that are in fact wholly secular such as Calvino's *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore*, in which the word used for ghost is indeed merely “fantasma” (185), yet another way in which the Tuscan Collodi interlaces *Pinocchio* not only with the Bible but occasionally with the Tuscan Dante's great literary-theological epic as well), the Grillo confirms to him that his father is indeed already in

²⁵ Gasparini sees in Pinocchio's last-second salvation from Mangiafuoco evocations of Isaac's last-second salvation by an angel from being sacrificed by his father Abraham in Genesis (104).

²⁶ On the significance of unnamed characters in the Bible, see Reinharz.

great grief—“Ritorna indietro [...] al tuo povero babbo che piange e si dispera per non averti più veduto” (35)—over his departure from home.²⁷

Collodi completes his weaving of his father-son story of Pinocchio and Geppetto with the threads of the father-son story of Jacob and Joseph during the story’s most dramatic moment, wherein Pinocchio saves his father’s life while his father was trapped in the belly of the Pescecane. On the surface the Biblical story that this episode in *Pinocchio* is most closely parallel to is that of Jonah, who, according to the Bible, was also swallowed by a large fish before eventually being spat up back on shore.²⁸ While Collodi clearly drew from the Book of Jonah in creating this scenario, when considering, as this paper does, the even closer structural and motivic parallels in the narrative of *Pinocchio* between Pinocchio and Geppetto and Jacob and Joseph, this scene functions as a completion of the Pinocchio-Geppetto narrative along the lines of the Jacob-Joseph narrative. This is indicated by the many suggestions, as discussed above, as to how the Pinocchio-Geppetto narrative is constructed with the tissue of the Jacob-Joseph narrative, and thus, when Pinocchio sets about in this episode—Capitoli XXIII-XXIV, XXXV—to save his father from starving to death in the belly of the Pescecane, we understand how this act of heroism on the part of Pinocchio evokes Joseph’s saving his father Jacob from starving to death in the famine-stricken land of Canaan.²⁹ And, to make sure that we do not miss this evocation, Collodi reminds us in this section that the story of *Pinocchio* is indeed a story of a father who has “avendo perduto il figliolo” (65) and of a son who—as he exclaims—“Voglio salvare il mio babbo!” (66), and, perhaps even more significantly, in this episode puts into Pinocchio’s mouth one of the most evocative expressions of Joseph in the entirety of the Joseph narrative in Genesis. When Joseph finally reveals himself to his brothers in Egypt, the first question he asks them, after exclaiming to them “Io son Giuseppe,” is “mio padre vive egli ancora?” (Gen. 45:3 [Giovanni Diodati Bible]). Strikingly similarly, when Pinocchio encounters Il Colombo—whom Pinocchio soon learns knows of his father—Pinocchio exclaims,

²⁷ Cf. Collodi 2019, referring to the suddenly son-less Geppetto as “crepacuore” (43).

²⁸ Gasparini also notes similarities between this episode and that of Jesus’s descent to inferno and his reemergence from the realm of the dead (105).

²⁹ Collodi embeds the motif of famine and hunger—in the form of Pinocchio’s hunger during his journey to the seashore with Il Colombo—in this passage as well; see pp. 64–65, 67, and esp. at 68–69, wherein we’re told that of Pinocchio that by this point, after not having eaten anything for twenty-four hours, “la fame lo tormentava” (68), and that he feels about to “morir dalla fame” (69). Hunger is a persistent torment for Pinocchio throughout his adventures, as Perella has observed (34), much as famine is for the Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and his children in Genesis. Freudian critics read Pinocchio’s preoccupation with food as a product of an “oral fixation” (Stone 339), but understanding the Biblical substructure within which Collodi has embedded the story helps us realize that Pinocchio’s hunger evokes the constant famines which are today more foreign to us but which the personages of the Bible, such as Jacob and Joseph, had to endure.

“Pinocchio sono io!” (63) and then quickly follows up this declaration by twice asking the bird, “è sempre vivo? Rispondimi per carità: è sempre vivo?” (64)³⁰

Lastly, when Pinocchio and his father finally reunite, the first thing Pinocchio does upon reuniting with his father—“gettandosi al collo” of his father and cry (119)—is the first thing that Joseph does upon finally seeing his father once again as well: “gli si gettò al collo” and cry (Gen. 46:29 [Riveduta Bible]). Collodi, like the narrator of Genesis, mentions the collo specifically of the father, rather than other parts that might be more usual or comfortable for someone to lean on and cry—the back, the arms, the shoulders, or the torso as a whole—as well as the very specific verb “gettò/gettare” (rather than “slanciarsi”, “buttarsi”, and others he could have used), indicating once again the close parallels between the Pinocchio-Geppetto narrative and the Jacob/Joseph story. Moreover, while inside the belly of the Pescecane, prior to attempting to save his father, Pinocchio twice tells him to come with him out of the fish and “non abbiate paura” (122, 123), evoking God’s encouragement to Jacob prior to coming out of Canaan in order to see his son of “non temere di scendere in Egitto” (Gen 46:3, Riveduta Bible). And the specific manner Pinocchio uses to save his father—having his father ride on top of him (as if Pinocchio were a cart or wagon) while going out of the Pescecane and swimming back to shore (“montatemi a cavalluccio,” he tells his father [123])—is strikingly similar to the specific manner Joseph uses to save his father from the famine in Canaan and transport him to Egypt: he sends him wagons, something upon which his father may ride as he journeys to safety (Gen. 45:27). There are subtler indications in this section as well—not as clear and as conclusive as the strikingly similar phrase Collodi appears to borrow from Genesis 46:29, but other references—which also point to close parallels between the Pinocchio-Geppetto and Jacob-Joseph stories, such as one of Geppetto’s first actions upon seeing Pinocchio again to be that of rubbing his eyes (recalling the importance of Jacob’s eyes during the Joseph-Jacob reunion: God promises Jacob that when he will be reunited with his son, Jacob “metterà la sua mano sopra gli occhi tuoi” [Gen 46:4, Giovanni Diodati Bible]; later, when Joseph brings his children to meet their grandfather Jacob, the narrative emphasizes Jacob’s weakening eyesight [Gen. 48:10]), as well as the significance of fish in both narratives (see Gen. 48:16), and Geppetto’s mentioning to Pinocchio that he has been inside the Pescecane for “oramai due anni, Pinocchio mio, che mi son parsi due secoli” (121)—a doubling of twos—two and two—conjuring the 22 years that Jacob was separated from Joseph.³¹ All of these references and allusions to the Jacob-Joseph narrative point to the conclusion that the Pinocchio-Geppetto story is eminently capable of being read as a recasting of the Jacob-Joseph

³⁰ Pinocchio also poses the question about how he can find his father to the other creatures he encounters during his journey to rescue his father, such as il Delfino (see 68) and the revived Fata (72). On the subject of children separated from their parents in *Pinocchio* and in children’s literature more generally, see Ottevaere-von Praag.

³¹ For how it is determined that Jacob and Joseph were separated for 22 years, see Deffinbaugh.

story in a modern setting with fairytale features and Italian literary and artistic narrative tools. The full implications of this understanding of *Pinocchio* remain to be explored and elucidated by other scholars and critics. This article, I hope, is only the beginning in the discussion of the Biblical roots—and possible religious significance—of Collodi’s classic novel.

CONCLUSION

Pinocchio is not only one of the most beloved works of literature in literary history but—as this article has attempted to show—also one of the most complex, by virtue of its many frames of reference and multitudinous manners of interpretation. One of the primary modes of interpretation and frames of reference of *Pinocchio*, as this article has attempted to demonstrate, is religious—an experience of hierophany, followed by a retelling of the Jacob-Joseph through the guise of a puppet and his human father. Understanding the Biblical and religious frames of reference that Collodi utilizes in his construction of the narrative allows us to better appreciate the depth and complexity of this beloved text, and further allows us to see how *Pinocchio* is one of the most complex classic works of children’s literature in literary history. It is a children’s novel that offers much more than might initially appear to be the case. It is polysemic in its multiple meanings and highly ramified in its various possible readings. To deny, as some have, that *Pinocchio*’s cultural frames of reference are not only literary but also Biblical (Lawson Lucas, 186n154) is to deny the depth, richness, and complexity of *Pinocchio*, unfairly (and incorrectly) limiting its scope and reach. This is not to claim that *Pinocchio* is a religious work; it is, though, to claim, as this article has endeavored to show, that religion is one of the many important frames of reference in *Pinocchio*, and that understanding how Collodi uses theological motifs and Biblical narratives in his text permits us to have an even greater appreciation for the depth and complexity of this timeless, multi-dimensional work of literature.

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