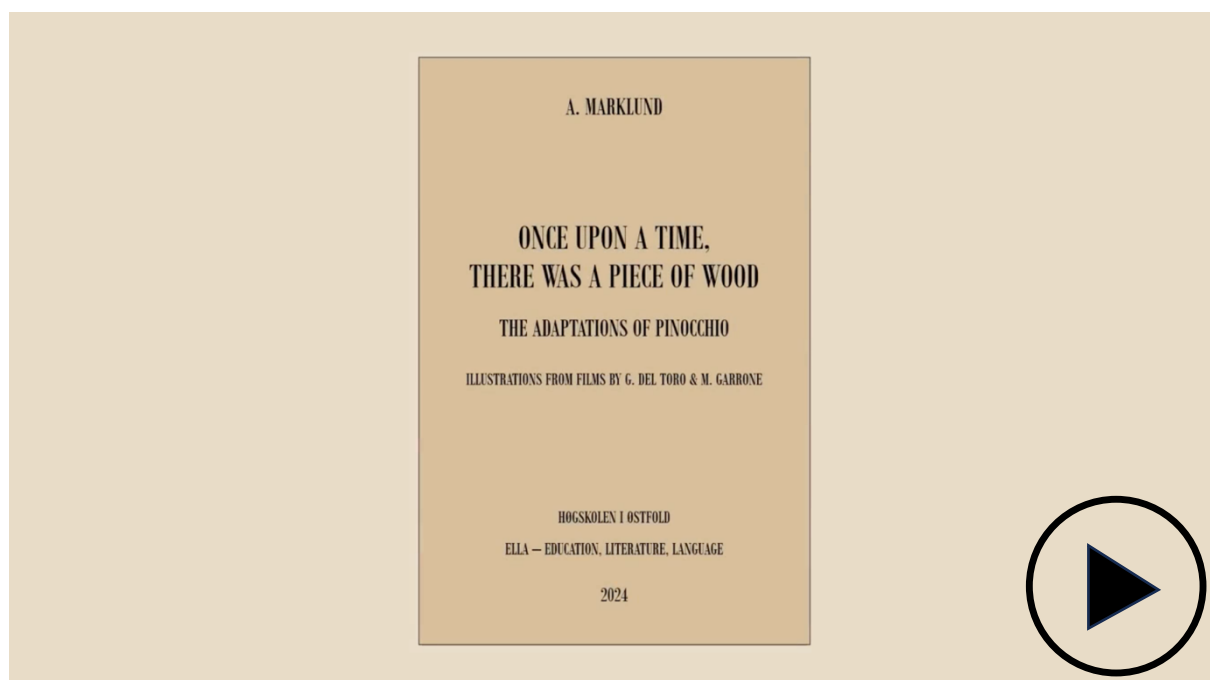


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Once Upon a Time There Was a Piece of Wood: The Adaptations of Pinocchio



Abstract

This project on adaptations focuses on interpretation and creativity. The aim is to offer a helpful and inspiring introduction for teachers (secondary school/college), by presenting a few key thoughts on adaptation and how this concept and practice may be productively used in the literature classroom – not only for the understanding of literature and audiovisual media, but also to facilitate critical thinking and creativity. The video essay presents a small case study of Carlo Collodi's 1883 classic *Pinocchio* and two of its recent film adaptations; one made by Matteo Garrone (2019), the other by Guillermo del Toro (2022). Exploring these examples, it becomes evident that adaptations, and studying adaptations, involve textual analysis,

imagination, critical thinking, and creativity – some of the central aspects of literary teaching, and ones that schools should facilitate.

Keywords: adaptations, creativity, literacy, *Pinocchio*, epigraphic video essay

Academic guiding text

This video essay on adaptations has a particular focus on interpretation and creativity. The aim is to offer a helpful and inspiring introduction for teachers (secondary school/college), by presenting a few key thoughts on adaptation and how this concept and practice may be productively used in the literature classroom. The underlying assumption is that using adaptations will further the understanding of both literature and audiovisual media, both in general and more specifically regarding the particular novels and films one chooses to work with. Equally important is, however, the insight that if teachers and students work with adaptations it will benefit critical thinking and creativity, both considered to be key competences today and for the future by organizations such as UNESCO and its International Bureau of Education (i.e. Marope, Griffin & Gallagher, 2017). As mentioned in the video essay, Thomas Leitch reasons that “the starkest challenge facing college English teachers is helping their students move from passive literacy – being uncritical consumers of the texts they face – to active literacy – being able not only to follow texts word by word and point by point but to engage them critically by producing powerful texts themselves” (Leitch, 2010). This video essay is an example of how such critical work may be carried out and presented in an audiovisual form. It introduces select theoretical concepts and uses illustrations from a case study on Carlo Collodi’s 1883 classic *Pinocchio* and two of its recent, and highly regarded, film adaptations; one made by Matteo Garrone (2019), the other by Guillermo del Toro (2022). Exploring these examples, it becomes evident that adaptations, and studying adaptations, involve textual analysis, imagination, critical thinking, and creativity – some of the central aspects of literary teaching, and ones that schools should facilitate.

Ideally this video essay should be watched and used by language and literature teachers in secondary schools and colleges, and possibly also by their pupils. With the aim to offer a

productive introduction it draws on and brings together three different scholarly fields; works on *Pinocchio*, adaptation studies, and literacy studies and pedagogy.

Regarding *Pinocchio*, since this is one of the earliest and most significant works of children's literature, and probably also the most read, translated and adapted work of Italian literature, there are numerous scholarly works written on it – both on the original serialized publication in *Giornale per i bambini* (between July 1881 and January 1883) and the first edition of the novel (1883), and on the many translations and adaptations. Such works cover *Pinocchio*'s place in general literature history (i.e. Asor Rosa, 1985), comments on editions and translations (i.e. Collodi, 1986), more nuanced interpretative readings (Manganelli, 1982; Agamben, 2021), as well as its reception history (i.e. in the US, Wunderlich & Morrissey, 2002) and many other aspects. While parts of this previous research have been useful, of equal importance have been the wide range of journalistic writings concerning Garrone's and del Toro's adaptations. These include interviews and interview-based articles with Garrone (i.e. Polovedo, 2020) and del Toro (i.e. Romney, 2020) as well as some of their key creative collaborators – professionals working with production design, music, cinematography, etc. Taken together they shed light on the considerations and practical work that formed the two adaptations presented in the video essay.

Regarding adaptation studies, a challenge has been to discern what a minimal selection of ideas about adaptations should include. Points of departure have been the works of adaptation scholars who began renewing the field two, three decades ago, including Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan (1999; 2014), Sarah Cardwell (2002), Robert Stam (2005), Julie Sanders (2006, second edition 2015), Linda Hutcheon (2006, second edition with O'Flynn 2013), Thomas Leitch (2007), and others. In this context, emphasising ideas about how an adapter appropriates and interprets earlier works to create something new – something that necessarily must be different from the original work – resonated best both with *Pinocchio* and with the pedagogical shift away from canon- and fidelity-focused teaching, towards a focus on learning that embraces the study and production of new forms and meanings in relation to earlier works. The quotes chosen for the video essay – by Robert Stam, Linda Hutcheon, Thomas Leitch and Marty Gould – introduce select ideas and place them in an analytical context.

Regarding literacy studies and pedagogy, the thoughts that goes into this video essay relate to concepts such as critical literacy (Janks, 2010) and multimodality (Kress 2010) and how they enhance each other. The view, formulated by Gunther Kress and Staffan Selander, that we should “regard learning as a multimodal, communicative and sign-creating ‘activity’” (Selander & Kress, 2021, p. 100) is a fundamental point of departure, and their emphasis on learning as moving through a “transformation cycle, where information is selected, processed and combined in a new way in the formation of a representation” (Selander & Kress, 2021, p. 104) actually shares the same process as in creating an adaptation. Similarly, critical literacy, as formulated by Hilary Janks, adds an understanding of how readers may interrogate texts and their selective version of the world, and “imagine how texts can be transformed to represent a different set of interests” (Janks, 2010, p. 22), and how students should be encouraged to “produce texts that matter to them in different formats and for different audiences and purposes” (Janks, 2010, p. 156). This is well aligned both with Linda Hutcheon’s view that “adapters are first interpreters and then creators” (Hutcheon, 2013, p. 18), and with the revised Bloom’s taxonomy, where “create” – along with its subsections generating (possible solutions), planning, and producing – is now understood to be the highest order cognitive skill, placed above, and building on, “analysis”, “evaluation” and so on (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). An educational initiative that integrates all of these ideas into a productive resource for teachers is the Estonian “Education on Screen”, where different projects depart from a broad understanding of film literacy as “the ability to watch and analyse films critically, comprehend the process of film creation and understand the manner in which film functions in relation to other media within a broader cultural context”, while also accounting “for both the rhetorical and aesthetic dimensions of literacies” (Ojamaa & Milyakina, 2019, p. 120). More specifically, regarding adaptations, the idea is that students “are encouraged not only to compare the source text to its adaptation, but also to embrace the whole life cycle of an adaptation, and indeed contribute their own interpretations by writing a script, choosing a soundtrack, making a mood board or something similar” (Ojamaa & Milyakina, 2019, p. 121).

By combining these three fields the video essay illustrates how working with adaptations fosters higher order cognitive skills, engages with both film and literature as specific

languages, and furthers an understanding of culture and particular works within a culture. These are qualities that one would hope all students – and indeed all of us – would develop throughout their education and use later in life.

Since the adaptations of *Pinocchio* discussed here are transductions of written text and illustrations to moving images and sound it seemed appropriate to use the video essay form. It allows each work to be explored and represented in its own mode, something a written text, even if accompanied by images, could not do. Nevertheless, the main emphasis in the video essay rests on the two films and, partly, the illustrations by Enrico Mazzanti for the first book publication in 1883. Collodi's original text, however important it was during the analytical work, was not given the space initially intended. Collodi's original formulations – naturally often lengthy and dispersed over several pages – could not be comprehensively included in a short video essay and are only used in the beginning and in a brief comparative segment. Clearly, a larger project and longer video essay would greatly benefit from incorporating both Collodi's original formulations to a larger degree, and other important intertexts, now only mentioned briefly.

Being new to video essay making, and rather inexperienced with editing, it seemed that an approach like the Videographic Epigraph exercise designed by Christian Keathley, Jason Mittell, and Catherine Grant in their encouraging introduction to video essay making (2019) would be useful. This exercise involves selecting quotes and finding a productive way to combine these with passages from films. Many examples of such exercises, and other video essays in a similar mode, offer an ounce of theoretical insight along with a new understanding of analysed material. This was also what I strived to do. Beyond that, an initial aspiration was not only to present ideas about adaptations and their usefulness for teaching, but also to spark some joy and inspiration, making the video essay a little bit playful or even poetic. To some degree this aspiration may be sensed in the suggested parallels between the transformations/adaptations of, on one hand, *Pinocchio* as a piece of wood into a puppet and a real boy and, on the other hand, *Pinocchio* as a text and book into film. The result should offer both a sense of this joyful exploring, and the benefits of an explanatory approach presenting and exemplifying key ideas.

About the author

Anders Marklund is a Senior Lecturer in Film Studies at Lund University, Sweden. Current research focuses on European cinema and television, and include studies on cultural memory, intermediality, and representation, usually with emphasis on contemporary and successful European productions.

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