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Pinocchio

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Editorial Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

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In its 'Consultation Paper on Children's Literature' (see **BfK** 144 editorial) Arts Council England deplored (as others have done now and then over the last forty years) the negligible amount of translation that is going on. That's easy enough. What's more difficult is to assess the problems inherent in presenting one country's children's books to the children of another and to assess the adequacy of the translator's work. So far as I know, Emma Rose's version of **Pinocchio** is here published for the first time and it would have been nice to know what her policy was as translator. For the text of this fancily produced gift-book does not follow as closely as it might Lorenzini/Collodi's original. A small amount of abridgment has taken place, most regrettably in the deletion of the narrative chapter titles, and this is combined with a sharpening of idiom so that nineteenth-century Italian prose takes on the flavour of twenty-first-century English vernacular. For instance, the author's faintly ironic addresses to *miei cari e piccoli lettori* are modified; *ragazzi* become 'kids' when required; phrases like 'hang on a minute' and 'do me a favour and shove off' take over from more formal diction; the ill-spelt graffiti in Toyland are altered... and so on. For the most part such changes blend in well to the register which the translator has adopted throughout, but the rhythm of the story with its thirty-six short chapters is brutally disrupted by the intrusive acrobatics of its illustrator. These consist of a variety of technical tricks, mostly involving collage either for broad coloured backgrounds (sometimes using photographs or the artist's favoured stock of graph and ruled papers) or for supplying smaller elements in the pictures such as clothing, furnishings, facial features etc. They occupy varying amounts of space from double-page spreads to small spot compositions and are supplemented by quantities of blotchy, slapdash sketches scattered about elsewhere. Pinocchio himself is featured not as anything resembling a wooden puppet but as a vacuous half-moon visage attached to spindly body parts. From time to time a picture will diverge from the requirements of the text: why does the cat wear an eyepatch if he's pretending to be totally blind? Why does the coachman 'wreathed in smiles' look at us as if he's chewing a slice of lemon? Why does a green serpent appear full-page coloured red? It is just possible that the intention behind all these higgledy-piggledy graphics was to match the street-wise tone of Emma Rose's translation, but their effect is to undermine the coherence and subtlety of Collodi's original. We puzzle over the tangled images; we are distracted by the technical ingenuity - and the infantile hand-lettering; a great tale is sacrificed to the cult of illustratorial personality. (The slipcase is pretty though. Carefully manipulated you can make it elongate the noses of the creatures on the back board of the book.)

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