



Pinocchio in Venice

Robert Coover

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Internationally renowned author Robert Coover returns with a major new novel set in Venice and featuring one of its most famous citizens, Pinocchio. The result is a brilliant philosophical discourse on what it means to be human; a hilarious, bawdy adventure; and a fitting tribute to the history, grandeur, and decay of Venice itself.

Pinocchio in Venice Details

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From Reader Review Pinocchio in Venice for online ebook

Rick says

love your puppet
but don't coddle him

Marc says

Probably best enjoyed by a reader quite familiar with the original Pinocchio story since this is a carnivalesque riff whereby the grown human Pinocchio returns to Venice and puppethood. His nose reveals itself as a substitute phallus and various torture and debauchery ensues as he faces his own mortality and learns the limits of friendship and aesthetics. Pretty typical Coover meta-fiction but it just wasn't working for me.

Amber Treadway says

Dense, raunchy, brutal, and ultimately transcendent continuation of the Pinocchio fairy tale, in which the aging professor finds his human flesh rotting away, revealing the wood within. Brilliant religious satire and one of the best books I've ever read.

Jonathan says

If the idea of Pini as a mother-fucker (for who can the Blue-haired fairy be but mother and lover?) with his nose as penis (watch how it grows!) makes you laugh, you will enjoy this a great deal. If, however, you are not fond of puns, phallus-jokes and lots and lots of shit-jokes, then this is probably not for you.

I personally found it a lot of fun, and wonderfully well written, with some great riffs on the nature of self. But, ultimately, there is nothing here which will really "stay with me"....

Stella says

I love the idea behind this book. I love the whole carnivalesque atmosphere and the ludic mania that Coover creates like no one else. My first encounter with Coover's writing was actually "A Political Fable" in which The Cat in the Hat runs for President, in which the narrative similarly disintegrates as the Rebelaision energy reaches its peak. In Pinocchio in Venice, it's not only the narrative that disintegrates but Pinocchio's "I-ness" as his limbs fall off and he starts turning back into a wooden puppet. I found it very moving as Pinocchio starts questioning his humanity (as well as his puppet-ishness), his destiny and dreams at the end of his long

life. The text of course does not want you to be overly moved and it does everything to prevent this from happening--with long confusing ramblings through Venice backstreets, suspensions of logic, misleading headings, Pinocchio's own plunge into hallucinogenic madness where the reader stops comprehending exactly what is happening. But the truth is, that the humanity of Coover's text starts peeking through its over-stylized mask--the flesh is revealed as the wooden veneer chips away. It is in these moments that Coover succeeds the most. Yet (and perhaps this is because the devices that Coover uses have been so over-used since this book's publication and I have encountered them so often that they have ceased to be original, creative, or clever), there is some element to this text that seems to be somewhat formulaic not so much in terms of structure, but in terms of all the post-modern literary crutches. Coover was obviously a very unique and original writer, but he wrote many similar types of narratives before this one that do exactly what this text does. Sure, every writer has a signature style and voice, but Coover just seems overly comfortable and complacent with his so there were moments where I wearied of reading passages where the same thing happens over and over again. Carnivals should be fun and less predictable, less ordered and more unrestrained.

On another note, Melampetta was amaziing!

Brian says

I cannot remember the last piece of fiction I've read that had required reading as a prerequisite. Yes, it is possible to read this work of Coover without first having read *A Death in Venice* and Collodi's *Pinocchio*, but the reader would unfortunately miss out on entirely too many jokes and plot points divined from those works. The more recent the reading of those two, the better.

I just did a search on the bizarro genre of fiction and it looks like the form is credited to having begun in 1999. I think Wikipedia is missing a trick; if *Pinocchio in Venice* isn't the progenitor of bizarro fiction then it is certainly its godfather. This work meets the basic criteria: it's absurd, it is ribald, it is rife with satire. It has rollicking scenes heading pell-mell through a narrative that the reader can't help but think the whole thing is going to screech off the page. Like the first time you listened to *Total Eclipse of the Heart* and you weren't entirely sure whether Bonnie Tyler's larynx would hold out through to the end of the song. Coover isn't just undressing a classic novella and children's story, he's slathering it in mineral oil and making it wrestle naked with angry bobcats. His lurid images blaze in the mind like retinal echoes from staring at the sun.

In rating this book I'm stealing from Vonnegut grading of his own novels. My 3 stars are strictly within the Coover Galaxy, much as Vonnegut says he can give himself an A+ for *Cat's Cradle* "while knowing that there was a writer named William Shakespeare". This was my least favorite Coover but still one of the better books I've read this year.

Rosemary Biggio says

This is more artifice than art, a fictional equivalent of a Mapplethorpe photo. This novel is the ribald on steroids. The book does not justify the reader's energy output, "love's labour's lost". Even the most avid bibliophile will find the task of reading the novel from start to finish daunting. If you like magical realism but have little taste for the vulgar, Angela Carter's works are a better choice.

Jim says

This book. . .

I read this book cover to cover for one reason and one reason only: So I could say it was the worst book I'd ever read. I mean, can you really physically throw a book in the garbage after 150 pages and say you've read it? Not if it's 330 pages. . . which this is.

So. . . worst book I ever read!

Jim says

Very interesting read. Coover can always be counted on that. PostModern Disney. Meta Fairy Tale! Very witty, but, once again, Coover can be counted on for that. "Difficult" but beautiful. He writes books that you read less for the plot, then for the sheer beauty of the writing. This was Ribald, (Hell,downright obscene!) Scatological, and Mystic all wrapped up in one package. I will read more Coover, (I also have Lucky Pierre, and Noir to read) but not for a while. I think need a complete change of pace.

Hmmmm...what now? Part of me is thinking hard-boiled fiction, but I picked up Le Morte D'Arthur, in the Middle English, and it's SUCH gorgeous prose! Do I dare?

Nathan "N.R." Gaddis says

Coover's Pinocchio is yet another of Coover's novels which the weak of heart and the easily queezy ought to avoid. It's not the excessive poop stuff or the sex stuff ;; we all have to put up with that stuff on a daily basis, like breathing. And it's not really the dimensionality of characterization -- another author may have done something different, like, portray a fully-fleshed-out 3D human Pinocchio slowly losing a dimension as his flesh falls and he becomes wooden once again, perhaps trailing an increasingly wooden prose as the novel progressed. That'd be a very modernistic method and'd probably be a great thing to read. Coover though is probably more moralistic than that, and nihilistic. Basically, rewriting Collodi's little children's book as a portrait of the puppet as an old man, emeritus professor, returning to his *roots* ;; essentially Coover doubling Collodi. Whence we return to the thought about that type of reader who will want to continue to avoid Coover's Pinocchio, i.e., what will disturb that average reader isn't the lack of sympathetic characterization, but the degree of cruelty with which Coover treats his protagonists (Pinocchio is sympathetic, Our Author is not)--I recall Moore making this very complaint in regard to Lucky Pierre, in which Coover's protag-directed cruelty comes to an extreme akin to the misogyny presented in Darconville's Cat. But the point is, Coover is *only following his leader, Collodi*, who is rather more than unkind to his little wooden-nosed near-boy. It's as if one can do what one likes with little wooden-boys.

In fine, kudos to my co-readers Brian and Amy without whose fellowship I may have continued to delay my Coover reading to unexcusables lengths. Do read Collodi first. Probably Mann's Venice novella too, which I ought perhaps to have done. But not to worry, Coover's Pinocchio is pure entertainment.

For the bibliographically aware, I'm tentatively placing this novel alongside three others of Coover's :: John's Wife, Gerald's Party, Lucky Pierre ; none are adequately read. Forthcoming further thoughts here perhaps in my eventual comments on John's Wife.

Collodi's Pinocchio is bawdy ; can't really believe that Coover's gunna be able to improve upon the tastelessness of the whole thing ;; maybe he's just going to add a touch of Dirty Old Man. Dunno. But at any rate ; here's a quick invite to join a little co-reading of Coover's little novel ;; Brian and Amy already maybe on board ;; there's a little thread in our little Coover group -- why not join in?

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To read in foresight:

The Adventures Of Pinocchio.

Mann's "Death in Venice."

Disney's 1940 film, probably.

And if anyone can help with an image:

From Pietro Lombardo's Church of Miracles, a 1409 Madonna with child (painting) by Niccolo di Pietro; "an infant Jesus who indeed looks like a cartoon character."

Coover's essay "Tale, Myth, Writer," from Brothers & Beasts: An Anthology of Men on Fairy Tales.

And:

"Notes on Craft: Some Instructions for Readers and Writers of American Fiction: An Interview with Robert Coover," by Gabe Hudson:

<http://www.mcsweeney.net/articles/no...>

James says

I didn't enjoy this book as much as I hoped I would but a big part of it is because the language was so dense and the movement so metaphysical that I found myself having to go back because I suddenly wasn't sure what I had been reading for the past five pages. This is one of those books where every word has importance and everything is a symbol for something else, and it is truly masterfully written, but went right over my head, much as I hate to admit it.

The story follows a decrepitly aged Pinocchio as he returns to his homeland in Venice to finish his final master work and probably end his life. Since becoming a real boy he has received world wide fame, won the Nobel Prize for philosophy and even had several movie adaptation made about his life. He is more miserable now than he ever has been. What follows is a wandering of Pinocchio through a Venice haunted by the magic of his wooden life and gangrenous from the rampant yuppie tourism as he hunts for the Azure Fairy, literally falls apart and gradually turns back into a wooden puppet.

The scenes are often absurd and perverse, but nonetheless masterfully written and hilarious. Pinocchio receives oral sex from two mastiffs, is used as a sex toy by the image of the Azure fairy, is forced to join an anarchic Venetian punk band of marionettes, and is obscurely coddled by a self-proclaiming loaf, though also a beautiful former student, and this is in the beginning of the book.

this is a book best for an upper level English or Philosophy class, and while it can be read for pleasure, will certainly need to be read actively. I recommend it, but only to those who are much braver readers than myself.

Peter says

This is a book about poo.

Terry says

I had to set this one aside. I was charmed by the concept, but Coover's writing style, at least for this book, left me frustrated. Too much barnstorming with the language, too dense for me! or maybe I'm too dense for it!

Michelle says

Sure, there were peeks of whimsy/laugh-out-loud moments in this novel, but the constant anal/womb/impotence/pinocchio's-nose-is actually-his-penis slapstick became tiring and predictable. Maybe this marks the end of an interest in layered language, jumbled narrative and self-consciousness, but I felt like I wanted to walk in a straight line for days after.

John says

Pinocchio gets his wish and becomes a real boy. Aaaahhhh! But does he live happily ever after?

Sadly life is no fairy tale... nor is this book.

In the book Pinocchio returns to Italy and meets up with his old friends - and enemies!

Coover is a very imaginative story teller; skilful use of language create grotesque characters and nightmarish

situations.

Pinocchio - the human - gets to deal with all the crap the rest of us have to manage - growing old, failures in relationships, the loss of mental agility and the inevitability of death.

Very much worth the effort in this novel novel.
