

Published in the Penn-Franklin News on January 23, 2023.

Pinocchio and Other Serialized Novels

There is a wonderful article in the June 13, 2022 issue of the weekly “The New Yorker” magazine. It is written by Joan Acocella with the title “Puppet Regime: The Further and Further Adventures of Pinocchio.” Everything that you ever wanted to know about this creation of Carlo Collodi (1826-90) is in it.

Collodi’s Pinocchio began his life in 1880 with a name derived from pino in Italian, or pine, and occhio, or eye. Pinocchio’s eye was the first of his parts to materialize from Geppetto’s carving of the original log. According to Acocella, the story began in serial form in a fledgling children’s newspaper with the name of “Giornale per i Bambini.” The serial was entitled “La Soria di un Burattino,” or “The Story of a Puppet.” Of the many subplots of Acocella’s telling from this point on, the thread about serialization as leading into novel, and then film much later on, including Walt Disney film, is of particular interest. The whole story is too long however, and has too many twists, for this present essay, except to say for now that Collodi’s 36-chapter book version began as a serial in only 15 parts.

In this one respect, serialization first, “The Adventures of Pinocchio” (1983), shares a lot in common with many other popular and classic novels of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Many presently well-known works of fiction began this way in a newspaper or in a magazine. A literary sensation in its time, Arthur Conan Doyle, for example, famously wrote 37 short stories of Sherlock Holmes for the English-language periodical known as “The Strand.” The illustrator, Sidney Paget, and illustration is a big serialization story in its own right, became famous too. Doyle’s complete novel, “The Hound of the Baskervilles,” appeared first also in installments in “The Strand” (1901-02).

Serialization was a path to get started as a writer of fiction, on the one hand, and, for the reader of little means, a way to gain access to literature in an affordable way (University of Victoria Libraries). Serialization was known as early as the 17th century, but reached something of a high point in England in the 19th century during the Victorian Period. Charles Dickens’ successful entry into prominence is often closely associated with this rise. His name is synonymous with the genre. His first serialized novel, “The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club” appeared in 1836-37. It is now known by the shortened title of “The Pickwick Papers.”

Dickens published other serialized novels, including ones that we know now as “Oliver Twist” (1837-39), “Nicholas Nickleby” (1838-39), and “The Old Curiosity Shop” (1840-41). “The Personal History, Adventures, Experience & Observation of David Copperfield the Younger” (1849 to 1850), a tortuous serial title indeed, became “The Personal History of David Copperfield.” It is considered autobiographical of Dickens himself.

Thomas Hardy too was a prolific novelist in serial format. His works appeared in various British literary magazines, and included such now well-known novels as “A Pair of Blue Eyes” (1872-73), “Far from the Madding Crowd” (1874), “The Return of the Native” (1878), and “The Mayor of Casterbridge” (1886).

Published in the Penn-Franklin News on January 23, 2023.

And so the list of well-known serialized authors can run on; this essay is only their story in brief. I need not remind you anew, but will anyway, that all their novels are to be had, free, at your local public Library. You need not pinch pennies for access, as in Victorian times.

Charles B. Greenberg
Board Director, Murrysville Community Library Foundation