The Lost Boys of Italia:
Peter Pan Syndrome in Italo Calvino's Male Figures

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ABSTRACT

This paper will explore the concepts of *scioltezza* and the Peter Pan Syndrome as exhibited by the male protagonists in three of Italo Calvino's key works: Pin (*The Path to the Spiders' Nests*), Cosimo Piovasco di Rondò (*The Baron in the Trees*), and Marcovaldo (*Marcovaldo*). In each case, *scioltezza* describes the protagonist's developmental fluidity as he approaches maturation but retains fundamentally adolescent or childlike qualities. This study will take a developmental approach to reveal elements of war, family values, and economic factors that contribute to Calvino's portrayal of *scioltezza*, setting up similar yet contrasting cases of the Peter Pan Syndrome. These factors ultimately confine each protagonist to a state of arrested maturation, in which he faces an identity crisis that prevents him from reaching identity achievement or total self-authorship. In these specific cases, we will also see how the text itself mirrors these developmental crises, and how some of Italy's pivotal moments in history have shaped this phenomenon. Ultimately, these characters and texts reflect a similar developmental plight in Italy itself.

INTRODUCTION

In 1956, Italo Calvino published *Italian Folktales*, opening with the story of *Giovannino senza paura*. Giovannino, who fears nothing, goes to a palace where nobody has ever been brave enough to stay a full night. Here, he confronts and defies a giant with the ability to dismember and reassemble himself at will. As a result of his sheer bravery, Giovannino fulfills a task that nobody has ever been able to complete, and he breaks the curse of the palace. He inherits the place, and the giant gives him three pots of gold. It would seem that Giovannino gets to live a long and healthy life, but as the story goes, one day, Giovannino turns around and sees his own shadow for the first time, and he is so startled that he dies of fright. (Calvino, *Italian Folktales* 3-4).

Although Giovannino can watch the giant's dismembered body kick its way down the chimney, defy him without blinking an eye, and survive the night in this notoriously

terrifying palace, the twist ending posits that the boy is not, in fact, as dauntless as his actions suggest. If one imagines Giovannino's shadow as an extension of his body, then one might say that he is a boy with a deep fear of some aspect of himself. In this respect, Giovannino could be interpreted as a sterling example of a boy afflicted by what has come to be known as the Peter Pan Syndrome. Made popular by psychologist Dan Kiley, the term 'Peter Pan Syndrome' is now used to describe the qualities of an adult man who hesitates to "grow up", and thus still embodies many characteristics of a child. Calvino makes Giovannino's story the first of the collection of folktales because the story "was so diffused throughout the Italian peninsula" (Miele 238). Interestingly, Giovannino's developmental plight is actually quite common in literature, sharing similarities with at least three other characters in Calvino's literary repertoire: Pin from *The Path to the Spiders' Nests*, Cosimo Piovasco di Rondò from *The Baron in the Trees*, and the title character of *Marcovaldo*.

Kiley conducts an analysis of J.M. Barrie's Peter Pan as a prototype of these subjects. In his analysis, he explains that Peter Pan came to be the icon for such a condition because he "was caught in the abyss between the man he didn't want to become and the boy he could no longer be" (Kiley 23). Pan, along with the male protagonists I will describe in this study, embody the space of emerging adulthood[1], or a state of arrested maturation between childhood and manhood. Kiley adopts a sympathetic tone toward Pan's condition, implying that "[Pan's] life was filled with contradictions,

[1] Schwartz et al (2013) summarizes a definition of emerging adulthood proposed by Arnett (2000): an "in-between" period between adolescence and adulthood, usually describing the late teens and people in their early 20's who are in a position to "try out potential adult relationships, experiment with substances, philosophize about various belief systems, and investigate and think about career possibilities."

conflicts, and confusion. His world was hostile and unrelenting. For all his gaiety, he was a deeply troubled boy living in an even more troubling time" (23).

The wide-spanning implication of Kiley's analysis is that the Peter Pan Syndrome seems to manifest as the result of turbulent times and a child's unsteady background. There are also implications for the future of such characters. According to literary critic Jan Kozma, "these adult-adolescents who refuse to grow up lack a strong identity, and they rarely experience feelings of self worth" (Kozma n.p.). From a developmental standpoint, this suggests a crisis that could be described by James Marcia's identity theories[2], as well as Robert Kegan and Marcia Baxter-Magolda's self-authorship theories[3], which this paper will examine more closely through the lens of some of the novels' episodes.

In Kiley's book, *The Peter Pan Syndrome*, he outlines some other key characteristics exhibited by its victims, including but not limited to: irresponsibility, anxiety, loneliness, sex role conflict, narcissism and chauvinism, and a "piratical lifestyle"[4]. Giovannino from Calvino's folktales may have been a prime example of this syndrome because of his narcissistic cockiness, which led him to speak to the giant so harshly. Arguably, Giovannino's actions and tone were considered dangerously irresponsible, as indicated by the fact that no other man had ever stayed a full night at the

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[2] Expanding upon Erik Erikson's Identity Development Theory, Marcia "introduced identity statuses as a way to explain how young adults experience and resolve crises" (Evans et al 52) in terms of exploration (crisis) and commitment.

[3] "Categorized as constructive-developmental, [these theories] focus on 'the growth or transformation' or ways people 'construct meaning' regarding their life experiences" (Evans et al 176-177).

[4] "Barrie suggests that Peter's alter ego is a pirate. Given enough time and space, Peter could become as heartless and uncaring as his nemesis Captain Hook … PPS victims are jolly, happy-go-lucky rogues. They have a penchant for uproarious laughter and a pint or two of whatever ale is available" (Kiley 32).

palace before. But once Giovannino acquires the gold, he lives and dies alone, having been forced to confront a physical extension of his aging self.

It is interesting to note that the Peter Pan Syndrome bears a striking resemblance to Suzanne Stewart-Steinberg's definition of *scioltezza*. Pasquale Turiello, who wrote *Governo e governati in Italia* in 1889, first invoked this term in a political context. Turiello referred to *scioltezza* as a state of indifference that renders one resistant to authority and prone to intense individualism, where the "I" is more important than the "we" (Turiello 33). In her book, *The Pinocchio Effect*, Stewart-Steinberg offers a close reading of Carlo Collodi's *Pinocchio* and outlines the ways in which the title character's experience reflects how Italy struggled to grow up as a nation. She describes their developmental experiences as a product of an evolved form of "*scioltezza* – a looseness or elasticity of both mind and body. *Scioltezza* is simultaneously an excess and a lack of affect or imagination that points to an overdevelopment of individualism and to its absence. This paradox leads to a state of perpetual civil war not just between individuals but also within the individuals themselves" (Stewart-Steinberg 31). In this paper, I will refer to *scioltezza* in a similar yet slightly different context, where a victim of the Peter Pan Syndrome and his elasticity between manhood and childhood puts him at a civil war with himself. As Dan Kiley asserts, "he's a man because of his age; a child because of his acts. The man wants your love; the child wants your pity. The man yearns to be close; the child is afraid to be touched. If you look past his pride, you'll see his vulnerability. If you defy his boldness, you'll feel his fear" (Kiley 3).

The Peter Pan Syndrome and the concept of *scioltezza* will work hand in hand as I explore important figures in Italo Calvino's literary repertoire: Pin (*The Path to the*

Spiders' Nests), Cosimo Piovasco di Rondò (*The Baron in the Trees*), and Marcovaldo (*Marcovaldo, or Seasons in the City*). Modern developmental theory will play a significant role as I offer a close reading of key passages and episodes from each work. The combination of these theories and critical perspectives will reveal the nature of each character's developmental journey as a growing male citizen in a changing society. Many aspects of these characters' psychological plights will vary quite drastically from character to character, but a close analysis will reveal that they all share one thing in common: these men experience symptoms of the Peter Pan Syndrome as well as a form of *scioltezza*, confining each subject to a type of identity crisis in which he's at war between his childhood and his adulthood. Furthermore, we will see this crisis reflected in qualities of the texts themselves, such as the duality of tone, the ambiguity of genre, or the elusive efforts to pinpoint a specific target audience. Finally, it is apparent that this identity crisis is often tied to pivotal moments in Italian history, which occasionally divided the country's people and hindered its growth as a nation. These characters who "never grow up" ultimately become symbols of a similar developmental crisis in Italy itself. To better understand how and why this is true, we must define our terms and identify the contexts in which they first appeared.

SCIOLTEZZA AND THE PETER PAN SYNDROME

In *Governo e governati in Italia,* Pasquale Turiello writes about *scioltezza* to refer to the Italian population during the years immediately following the unification. Interestingly, he often refers to it as a "*scioltezza individuale*", but he ultimately argues that it's a problem of a national scale. Turiello's definition of *scioltezza* bears the most political implications of those I will examine. He characterizes it as indifference to

authority and social responsibility, attacking the political left for its individualist mentality, in which the "I" takes precedence over the "we" and awareness of civic duties diminishes. Stewart-Steinberg later wrote that this mentality "leads to diffidence not only in the social … spheres, but also to a diffidence toward the self" (31).

In *The Pinocchio Effect*, she references Turiello's definition of *scioltezza* in the context of the Italian national identity before explaining the term in a slightly different light.

Stewart-Steinberg mostly agrees with Turiello, stating that "*scioltezza* guarantees the predominance of the personal over the social in all aspects of life", and that the "excess and lack of affect … points to an overdevelopment of individualism and to its absence … [leading] to a state of perpetual civil war not just between individuals but also within the individuals themselves" (31). However, in her exploration of *scioltezza*, she gives greater emphasis to the concept of elasticity.

Stewart-Steinberg frames her analysis by looking at passages from Carlo Collodi's *Le avventure di Pinocchio*. Her argument hinges on the observation that Pinocchio is "both puppet at the mercy of others, a helpless object of an external will … and he is also immensely influential himself … a figure capable of educating while being educated" (19). *Scioltezza* refers to several ideas with respect to Pinocchio. Turiello's context applies because Pinocchio tends to demonstrate indifference toward authority. For example, even when Geppetto is crafting him, Pinocchio misbehaves. He steals Geppetto's *parrucca*, causing his maker to say "Non sei ancora finito di fare, e già cominci a mancar di rispetto a tuo padre!" (Collodi 10). This is Stewart-Steinberg's argument about Italy itself, which has sometimes been characterized as having

"superficiality … and a childlike nature" (Stewart-Steinberg 3) in its path to a national identity. In the beginning of Collodi's novel, Pinocchio is an individual entity with a tendency to put himself above social and civic concerns, a quality that characterizes Turiello's concept of *scioltezza*. For instance, rather than prioritize school or education, Pinocchio runs away from home and spends most of his time disobeying the Grillo-parlante's advice. Meanwhile, a second context emerges, centering on the fluidity and elasticity of Pinocchio's identity. He is faced with an inner crisis in which he asks himself if he is mostly puppet, mostly human, or if he is somehow both (or neither). Stewart-Steinberg argues that this crisis is central to the Italian national identity as a whole. It creates an inner "civil war" for Pinocchio, just as Italy itself has been faced with civil war at several points in its history. Thus, Turiello's definition of *scioltezza* merges with Stewart-Steinberg's analysis. The political aspect is softened, while psychological overtones surface and are applied to the national identity.

While *scioltezza* has been identified as a characteristic of Italian culture and national identity, the Peter Pan Syndrome first appeared in an entirely different context. Also referred to as "arrested maturation" by some psychologists, the term "Peter Pan Syndrome" was popularized by Dr. Dan Kiley in the 1980's. The result of his analysis of Peter Pan is a condition that describes the qualities of an adult man who hesitates to "grow up", and thus still embodies many characteristics of a child. Kiley suggests that the Peter Pan Syndrome seems to manifest as the product of turbulent times and a child's unsteady background. The wider implication is that one's identity is shaped heavily by external factors. These external factors become a common theme in this examination of Calvino's male characters.

Even though *scioltezza* and the Peter Pan Syndrome appear in two very different contexts, these ideas share common characteristics and can be applied to this study. In Stewart-Steinberg's analysis of Pinocchio, she cites his identity crisis as central to her argument. His crisis demonstrates *scioltezza* because his identity possesses a degree of elasticity. He isn't *just* a puppet, but he can't be defined as *just* a boy by societal standards. He hovers in a "blank space" somewhere in between. For the purposes of this study, this "blank space" will represent *scioltezza*. Sometimes, it may have the effect of creating an individualist mentality with a disregard for authority or societal concerns, as Turiello posited. More often, it will be characterized by the elasticity to which Stewart-Steinberg refers. In my analyses, there will be broad implications for how the characters in question represent the Italian national identity in various periods of history.

However, I will refer to *scioltezza* on a much narrower scale, focusing primarily on the psychology of the individual and describing how he may arrive at and navigate a "blank space" between developmental stages. In this case, rather than boyhood vs. "puppethood", the inner conflict will manifest as boyhood vs. manhood, which invokes many qualities of Dan Kiley's Peter Pan Syndrome. The fundamental goal is to understand how these characters embody the undefined space between adolescence and adulthood, and to shed light on how this may represent various points of Italian history. After all, Stewart-Steinberg argues that in the 19th century, the idea of *italianità* was associated with "a childlike nature … that Italians were essentially children, that Italy – and this particularly when compared to other modern nations – was in a state of perpetual infancy" (3). To achieve its goals, this study will require an understanding of both *scioltezza* and the Peter Pan Syndrome, which share many commonalities in this context,

but perhaps the result is something entirely new, and we see all these aspects as early as Italo Calvino's *The Path to the Spiders' Nests.*

GROWING UP IN THE SPIDERS' NESTS: A LOOK AT PIN

> My own story was that of someone whose adolescence had gone on too long, a young man who had seized on the war as an alibi, both in the literal sense of going somewhere else and in its metaphorical sense. In the space of just a few years the alibi had become the here and now. It was too soon for me; or too late: I was too unprepared to live out the dreams I had dreamed for too long … Full of these youthful ambitions and anxieties, I lacked the spontaneous grace of youth. The rapid maturing of the times I lived in had only served to accentuate my own immaturity. The symbolic protagonist of my novel was therefore an image of regression: a child. (Calvino, *The Path to the Spiders' Nests* 24-25).[i]

These are the words of Italo Calvino himself, expressed in his repeated attempts to define his work in the preface to his first novel, *The Path to the Spiders' Nests*. Scholars have since maintained that Italian neo-realism is "notoriously difficult to define", and this preface has become a well-known attempt to do so (Gatt-Rutter 535). As we learn in this from Calvino's observations cited above, text itself can exhibit *scioltezza*. Works of neorealism fall nicely into this category because of their lack of "formal, structural, or thematic limitations" (Weiss 10). Their distinguishing features as a genre are nearly impossible to identify, as demonstrated by Calvino's repeated attempts to do so. He restarts his preface over and over, having trouble defining his own first novel nearly twenty years after he originally published the work in 1947. It would seem by Calvino's words that maturity bestowed him with a heightened awareness about the nature of his protagonist, Pin, and the *scioltezza* that he faces: a state of prolonged adolescence in a world that asks him to grow up too fast.

Calvino scholar Beno Weiss writes: “Calvino wrote his first novel during the postwar period marked by not only a remarkable resurgence in Italian fiction, but also by turmoil, unrest, desperation, hunger, revenge, and profound economic, social, and political instability” (Weiss 9). During the war, Italy’s own identity wasn’t quite clear. It was first an Axis power, then switched sides to be an Allied nation. It was torn by civil war after 1943, and finally faced the task of having to forge a collective national identity and redefine itself as a Republic (Duggan 2). This war-torn and tense environment tends to be the same setting that produces neorealist literature, and indeed, these are the same conditions in which Calvino thrusts the young protagonist of his novel. No more than thirteen years old, Weiss writes that Pin is “mischievously wicked and at the same time naive” (9). His sister is a young prostitute who sleeps with the Germans who occupy Italy during World War II, and she acts as Pin’s guardian as their mother is dead and their father abandoned them long ago. His sister makes infrequent appearances throughout the book, and Pin seems to be raising himself. He prefers to spend all of his time among adults, having no friends of his own age, and finds himself using this time “stealing and getting free drinks from the men at the local tavern who he entertains with bawdy songs and, at the same time, mocks with his biting tongue” (10-11). Even these adults are not portrayed positively, “a sorrowful pack of misfits … living on the margins of society” (11).

Among these adults are characters such as Lupo Rosso, Dritto, Cugino, and others who participate in the Resistance without fully understanding why they are fighting. Pin finds his own place and a sense of belonging in this group of misfits, reveling in every instance in which the adults validate him and make him feel as though he’s one of them.

He constantly seeks their approval, mostly by joking, singing, and making a show out of himself. In one instance, Pin makes fun of everyone in the camp, and he's pleased to see them laughing. It would appear that Pin's happiness is a sign of pure affection for his company, but in fact, there is a dual nature to Pin's sentiments:

> Pin, happy and excited, laughs until the tears come into his eyes; he's in his element, now, in among the grown-ups, people who are enemies and friends at the same time, whom he can laugh at till he has vented his hatred for them. He feels ruthless; he'll hurt them without pity. (Calvino, *The Path to the Spiders' Nests*, 170).[ii]

In 2001, Marcia Baxter Magolda "identified four phases in the journey toward self-authorship involving movement from external to internal self-definition" (Evans et al. 184). Her theory of self-authorship focuses on the growth of adolescents and new adults and the way they construct meaning in their lives. This constructive-developmental theory involves four phases of cognitive and interpersonal growth, beginning with a phase she calls "following formulas". Those who find themselves in this first phase "allow others to define who they are. Gaining approval of others is the critical aspect of relationship building" (Evans et al. 185). A close look at Pin's sentiments places him in phase one of Baxter Magolda's theory of self-authorship. The defining clue is his search for validation amongst the adults. He seems to be most pleased when he finds validation from Dritto, the leader of this particular group of Resistance fighters:

> "Then [Dritto] turns toward Pin. 'They're not firing yet,' he repeats. 'What on earth's happening down there?'
> Pin is pleased at being asked a question like that, as if they were equals."
> (Calvino, *The Path to the Spiders' Nests* 157).[iii]

Without his parents around to guide him, or without friends of his own age, Pin feels the need to gain the approval of Dritto and his military group in order to find a sense of identity and direction.

Baxter Magolda's theory holds that there are three more phases that developing adolescents must go through to reach self-authorship. The second is the crossroads, in which "they become dissatisfied with how they have been defined by others and see the need to create their own sense of self," and the result of continuing to follow others' formulas leads to "a general sense of unhappiness and lack of fulfillment" (Evans et al. 185). During the third phase the individual develops the ability to choose one's beliefs and stand up for them in the face of conflicting external viewpoints", and the fourth is characterized by a strong internal foundation as well as feelings of "peace, contentment, and inner strength" (186).[5] Pin's *scioltezza* is partially derived from the fact that he remains stuck in phase one, seeking the approval of others, but as with Barrie's Peter Pan, he feels tragically lonely. One might compare Pin, Dritto, and their company to Pan and the Lost Boys. As Dan Kiley observes, Pan was a boy consumed with loneliness, and he "looked around, saw others suffering an identical fate, and turned potential disaster into victory. He united all the lost boys into a legion, bonded together by their heartfelt commonality – they had all been rejected in the worst way". He also contends that Peter Pan "is quick to switch allegiance and entertain magical visions of himself. We are shocked to see how this young boy … reacts to others' care and concern by using pity to

[5] Baxter-Magolda's Theory of Self-Authorship relates closely to Robert Kegan's Theory of the Evolution of Consciousness, which identifies five "progressively more complex ways of knowing". Baxter-Magolda's first phase corresponds to Kegan's third order, known as the "socialized mind". In Kegan's theory, orders 1 and 2 correspond to infancy, whereas order 3 often corresponds to childhood (Evans et al. 178-179).

manipulate and indifference to intimidate" (Kiley 90). Similarly, Pin, as happy as he is to be accepted into a group of people just like him, maintains a spiteful distance from these adults by joking and having fun at the expense of their feelings.

Pin's dislike for the adults whose approval he so desperately seeks is first established in a metaphor involving insects, which depicts Pin as a child, an adult, and a grasshopper simultaneously:

> Pin is cruel to animals; to him they are as monstrous and incomprehensible as grown-ups; it must be horrible to be an insect, to be green and to shit in little drops, and always to be frightened that a human being like him might come along with a face full of ginger and brown freckles, and fingers that can pull grasshoppers to bits.
> (Calvino, *The Path to the Spiders' Nests* 52).[iv]

In this metaphor, meaning is circular. Pin compares animals, specifically bugs and grasshoppers, to adults, whom he sees as cruel and inhumane. But he casts this cruelty onto himself as he explains the pleasure he gets from torturing bugs, putting him at the same level as the adults he chastises for their behavior. In this metaphor, Pin is both the grasshopper and the human with the capability of destroying the grasshopper. He is both a victim of cruelty, and one who is capable of being cruel. While Pin attributes this cruelty to the fundamental nature of "grown-ups", Dan Kiley would say that it is a classic symptom of the anxiety experienced by a victim of the Peter Pan Syndrome. Kiley posits that "the PPS victim … has trouble with male authority figures." If they don't treat him as he wishes, or if they don't meet the demands of the child, "he will have a temper tantrum or, worse, engage in some type of abusiveness" (Kiley 75). Bugs and small animals are common targets for this level of anxiety. A reading of these passages side-by-side reveals a protagonist that craves the approval and the validation of the adults

whom he sees as evil. Pin simultaneously hates them and wants to be just like them, which puts him at the center of an internal battle, a type of *scioltezza*, between his fundamentally childlike behavior and the adult he is destined to become. Weiss summarizes this plight in one sentence: "No matter how hard he tries, he does not know how to take part in games either of children or grown-ups" (Weiss 15).

Having examined these passages that illuminate Pin's anxiety toward the adults of his time, it would be valid to ask what adulthood meant during the time of World War II. Calvino answers this question by showing us the people of the brigade that Pin spends most of his time with, who are as developmentally complex as Pin himself is. The reader learns about these characters (namely Dritto, Kim, and Pelle) in relation to how they feel about two things: weapons and women.

Early in the novel, Pin steals a pistol from a German sailor. In some of the darkest passages of the work, we experience Pin's thoughts as he struggles to understand what do with the gun and what owning a pistol means for his identity. He decides that "someone who has a real pistol can do anything, he's like a grown-up. He can threaten to kill men and women and do whatever he likes with them. Pin now thinks he will grasp the pistol and walk round with it always pointed at people; no one will be able to take it away from him and everyone will be afraid of him. But the pistol, wrapped in its belt, is still under his jumper, and he cannot make up his mind to touch it; in a way he almost hopes that when he looks for it, it will have vanished, melted away by the heat of his body" (Calvino, *The Path to the Spiders' Nests* 46).[v] He imagines shooting at a gutter pipe, at an old shoe, and finally himself:

> Pin cannot resist the temptation any more and points the pistol against his temple; it makes his head swim … Now

> he can put the barrel into his mouth and feel its taste against his tongue. Then, the most frightening of all, put it up to eyes and look right into it, down the dark barrel which seems deep as a well. Once Pin saw a boy who had shot himself in the eye with a hunting-gun being taken off to the hospital; his face was half-covered by a great splodge of blood, and the other half with little black spots from the gunpowder.
> (Calvino, *The Path to the Spiders' Nests* 47).[vi]

In these passages, we see how the pistol causes a new type of internal conflict for pin. It gives him security, which he associates with adulthood, and then it frightens him to such a degree that it makes him dizzy. He wants the gun to disappear completely, and he plans to get rid of it, but ultimately, he keeps the pistol and hides it in the place he calls "the spiders' nest." Thus, we again see how Pin's anxiety (indicative of the Peter Pan Syndrome) leads him to make irresponsible decisions.

Interestingly, Pin's irresponsible treatment of the gun does not appear to be anomalous when we observe the adults of the novel. Pelle and Dritto, for example, are only two of the adults who have a childlike fascination with pistols:

> Pelle's two passions are weapons and women. He won Pin's admiration by his knowing talk about the qualities of all the prostitutes in town and by saying things about Pin's sister that suggested he knew her too well too. Pin feels a mixture of attraction and repulsion for him, so thin, with that perpetual cold of his, forever telling stories about girls that he has grabbed by the hair and tricked into going out into the fields and then had there, or about the new complicated weapons issued to the Black Brigade. Pelle is young but he has been all over Italy camping with the Young Fascists, and he has always handled weapons and visited brothels, even before reaching the prescribed age.
> (Calvino, *The Path to the Spiders' Nests* 104).[vii]

Here, Calvino begins to make a statement about the nature of the war and how it affected the process of growing up as a man. Pelle is described in terms of his love for women

and for weaponry, and it is implied that he has been living a violent and misogynistic lifestyle even since he was a young boy. The fact that he has been visiting brothels and handling weaponry since before the prescribed age implies that during the war, weapons and women were seen as the primary sources of entertainment for men. More specifically, women were treated as objects and firearms were viewed as toys. It also implies that these behaviors were common and weapons were highly accessible during this time, which would expose boys to elements of this culture at a young age. Pin reinforces this point when we get another glimpse of his thoughts toward Dritto's resistance group, and he confirms that Pelle's attitudes toward women are in fact common among the men of the brigade.

> Pin feels among them as he felt among the men in the tavern, only this world is more brightly coloured, more savage, with these nights in the hay and those beards crawling with lice. There is something else which attracts and frightens Pin, apart from that absurd fixation about women which is common to all grown-ups.
> (*The Path to the Spiders' Nests* 110).[viii]

This point confirms that Pin has made an association between misogyny and adulthood, having generalized Pelle, Dritto, and the brigade's behaviors to adults in general. As Dan Kiley asserts, "chauvinism is the PPS victim's way of pretending that he is a grown-up". He believes that "it cements his relationships with other men as it defines his masculinity. It also gives him a chance to find steady work in a 'man's world' … His prejudice becomes wisdom; his rigidity, understanding; and his callousness, worldliness" (Kiley 141).

It is this "understanding" that Pin clings to – his observations of Pelle and the brigade – because as Weiss posits, "the boy protagonist, Pin, knows everything – that

men fornicate and kill – but understands nothing". The fact that the narrative "reflects the mentality of a child through whose innocent eyes everything is perceived" (Weiss 16) creates a type of *scioltezza* in itself, which mirrors the nature of the Peter Pan Syndrome. Just as Pin faces an internal struggle between childhood and adulthood, "Calvino modulates the novel on two distinct tones: on the one hand we have Pin's wretched life inserted into the Nazi-Fascist oppression and the civil war; on the other hand we have a lyrical, evocative tone that emerges from the Ligurian landscape and mountains where the boy's spiders operate in their secret hiding places" (14). While the subject matter is dark, mature, and begs for tension, Pin's point of view instead gives it levity and a childlike innocence, though this innocence always threatens to disappear. In fact, for a short while, the point of view shifts to one of the adults in the brigade: Kim, who provides his own musings about the nature of adulthood and the childlike behaviors of some of his comrades:

> Kim walks on alone, the slim Stengun hanging from his shoulder like a broken walking-stick. Nothing else matters. The tree trunks in the dark take on strange human shapes. Man carries his childhood fears with him for his whole life long. 'Perhaps' thinks Kim, 'I'd be frightened, if I wasn't brigade commissar. Not to be frightened any more, that's the final aim of man.'
> (*The Path to the Spiders' Nests* 142).[ix]

This reveals Kim to be one of the most introspective characters of the entire novel, reflecting on a plight that he can relate to both his childhood and his adulthood. The difficult conditions of war bring about anxieties that are unique to the adults who are forced into battle, but in this case, they unearth childhood fears that manifest in the form of shadows and the unknown shapes lurking in the dark. Kim is unique in that he recognizes the way his fear causes him to regress, and he questions how his role as a

commissar has affected his disposition as an adult. He then casts these observations about his developmental journey onto Dritto, the leader of the brigade:

> One day as a child I shut myself up for two days in my room without eating. I suffered terribly but would not open the door and they had to come and fetch me by ladder through the window. I longed to be consoled and understood. Dritto is the same.
> (*The Path to the Spiders' Nests* 144).[x]

Here, Kim directly compares the adult Dritto to a small child, throwing a tantrum to receive attention, comfort, and love. Indeed, Dritto, who holds the highest position of responsibility in the brigade, often comes across as the most childlike of all the characters of the novel. "When Pin's unit is ordered into combat, Dritto, claiming to be ill, refuses to join his men, preferring instead to remain at the encampment where he goes to bed with the wife of one of the fighters" (Weiss 11). Thus, he is portrayed as chauvinistic and cowardly, and like Pelle, he also has a childlike fascination with guns:

> Dritto seems a nice man when Pin talks to him like this, and when he's explaining how the pistol works he becomes enthusiastic and no longer looks obsessed by evil thoughts. Even pistols, when talked about like this, no longer seem instruments for killing people, but strange enchanted toys.
> (*The Path to the Spiders' Nests* 123).[xi]

In the end, Dritto, Pelle, and Pin almost seem to be at the same point in their developmental journey. Dritto and Pelle, two fully-grown men, are portrayed in childlike contexts, never having fully grown up because of the effects of war and the poor state of the economy. Pin, no older than thirteen years old, is thrust into a world that begs young men to grow up too fast, to experience the harsh and violent realities of war-torn Europe, and to escape their problems by turning to women, alcohol, and weaponry. The irony is that none of these individuals ever fully grow up, and they never experience the innocent

pleasures of childhood. Boy and man remain confined to a fixed point along the "path" to which the title of the novel refers, in which "the path symbolizes movement, transition, expression of an urgent desire or need for discovery and change that underlies the adolescent's life. It also presages Pin's escape from his dreadful life and entry into a different one where he will live new experiences intensively. The spiders, on the other hand, with their ceaseless weaving and killing, building and destroying, symbolize the continual alteration of forces on which the stability of Pin's universe depends" (Weiss 12). In the preface to the novel, Calvino suggests that this *scioltezza* and strange elasticity between manhood and boyhood reflects the reality he intended to convey in his portrayal of World War II:

> The identification between myself and the protagonist had developed into something more complex. The relationship between the character of the boy Pin and the partisan war corresponded symbolically with the relationship that I myself had with that war. Pin's inferiority as a child facing the incomprehensible world of adults was the equivalent of the inferiority that I too felt in the same situation because of my middle-class upbringing … To the jealous eyes of Pin, weapons and women seemed distant and incomprehensible; similarly what my philosophy wanted to exalt, my poetics transformed into hostile images, and my excessive love tinged with infernal despair.
> (Calvino, *The Path to the Spiders' Nests* 24-25).

Thus, Calvino has effectively used the war as a device to show us a plight shared by Pin, Dritto, Pelle, Calvino himself, and one could add even Peter Pan, whose "world was hostile and unrelenting. For all his gaiety, he was a deeply troubled boy living in an even more troubling time. He was caught in the abyss between the man he didn't want to become and the boy he could no longer be" (Kiley 23). At the end of the novel, Pin

comes to recognize his *scioltezza* and the plight of the Peter Pan Syndrome, and he raises the question of whether it's better to be a child or an adult in times of crisis:

> Never again will he be able to return to the detachment, never will he be able to go into action with them now. It is sad to be like him, a child in a world of grown-ups, always treated as an amusement or a nuisance; and never to be able to use those exciting and mysterious things, weapons and women, never to be able to take part in their games. But one day Pin will be grown-up too, and be able to behave really badly to everyone, revenge himself on those who have behaved badly to him; how Pin would like to be grown-up now, or rather not grown-up, but remain as he is, yet admired and feared, a child and yet a leader of grown-ups on some marvelous enterprise.
> (Calvino, *The Path to the Spiders' Nests* 175).[xii]

One can identify a similar struggle in another famous work of Italian literature: Carlo Collodi's *Le avventure di Pinocchio.* Angela Jeannet cites Collodi as a major influence on Calvino's work (Jeannet 56), and Pin's struggle between boyhood and adulthood mirrors the *scioltezza* that Pinocchio himself faces. Pinocchio, having been carved out of an enchanted piece of wood, faces a struggle of identity: *am I a puppet, or am I a boy?* Though he exhibits qualities of both, he cannot easily define himself as one or the other. He is caught in a *scioltezza* somewhere in the middle, and becoming a real boy requires him to "grow up" and shed his puppet body. A Collodian reading of *The Path to the Spiders' Nests* raises the question of whether the opposing natures of boyhood and adulthood can peacefully coexist. As Calvino has shown, this question does not have a simple answer, and it's one he continues to explore across his literary repertoire.

GROWING UP IN THE TREES: A LOOK AT COSIMO

While Pin's story was written in times of warfare, Calvino wrote *The Baron in the Trees* in a period when he was "still trying to define for himself the role of the intellectual

in contemporary society as well as his moral commitment to the Italian Communist Party" (Weiss 47). Having broken off from the Communist Party, Calvino faced the challenge of trying to assert new aspects of his identity, politically and intellectually. In this aspect, he presents a parallel between himself and the protagonist of his work: Cosimo Piovasco di Rondò. In Cosimo's story, we will get a closer look at how *scioltezza* can be present not only in a person or character, but in a text itself, which can sometimes exhibit a "hybrid" identity.

Cosimo's story is different from Pin's in several respects. The most obvious distinction is in the setting. While Pin's story takes place during the Second World War, we first meet Cosimo and his family in 1767, nearly two whole centuries before Pin's story begins. Cosimo does not grow up in a world pervaded as heavily by the irresponsible treatment of weapons and women, and warfare is not central to the backdrop of his story. His time period presents a different set of problems, which I will examine further in this section.

Another element that sets Cosimo apart from Pin is the fact that at the beginning of *The Baron in the Trees*, Cosimo is still living with all of his family. The novel opens with the entire household at the dinner table: twelve-year-old Cosimo; his father, the Baron Arminio Piovasco; the family tutor and almoner; his mother, the Baroness/Generalessa Corradina; his sister, Battista; his uncle, the supervisor of the family estate; and his younger brother, Biagio, who narrates the story. Whereas Pin only has his older sister and his adult friends from the taverns and the brigades, Cosimo is born into royalty and grows up in a large family. This presents a different set of circumstances for victims of the Peter Pan Syndrome. Jan Kozma posits that the Peter

Pan Syndrome is "usually [found in] the sons of relative privilege … They are parented by well-to-do but cold and emotionally detached mothers and often harsh and equally absent and psychologically distanced fathers" (Kozma, n.p.). In the novel's opening, we get a glimpse of what Cosimo's family is like and how it might be representative of the family that Kozma describes:

> Now, at table with the family, up surged the intimate grudges that are such a burden of childhood. Having our father and mother always there in front of us, using knives and forks for the chicken, keeping our backs straight and our elbows down – what a strain it all was! … So began a series of scenes, spiteful exchanges, punishments, retaliations, until the day when Cosimo … decided to separate his fate from ours.
>
> These accumulating family resentments I myself only noticed later; then I was eight, everything seemed a game, the battle between us boys and grownups was the same as in all families, and I did not realize that my brother's stubbornness hid something much deeper.
>
> Our father the Baron was a bore, it's true, though not a bad man: a bore because his life was dominated by conflicting ideas, as often happens in periods of transition. (Calvino, *The Baron in the Trees*, 4-5).[xiii]

We also learn that the Generalessa spends most of her day in her room, embroidering cushions with the designs of geographical maps. In these opening pages, Biagio has painted a picture of a large family with a lot of physical presence and very little emotional presence. Cosimo and Biagio's parents are always around, but they are not entirely nurturing, and most of their time is spent with the family tutor. When the parents are around, they are strict disciplinarians and dole out more punishment than care. It is also interesting to note that Cosimo's father exhibits his own form of *scioltezza*, described as a man with conflicting ideas in a period of transition. Thus, it appears that

Cosimo and Biagio don't experience very happy childhoods, and Cosimo may display some of the qualities of loneliness outlined by Dan Kiley[6].

In *The Baron in the Trees,* we see that Cosimo's *scioltezza* manifests as role confusion, starting after he rebels against his family in the opening chapter. The episode begins simply enough. His sister, Battista, prepares a family meal consisting entirely of snails, and in an act of defiance, he pushes his plate away and refuses to eat. Biagio confirms the family's shock and disbelief when he says, "Never had we seen such disobedience" (3). This results in an argument between Cosimo and his father, who insists that Cosimo eat his snails or he will spend the rest of the night locked up in a little room. Cosimo then leaves the dinner table, assumed to be going to his room, but instead, he grabs his sword and his tricorn hat, and he goes outside to climb an oak tree. There are two interesting contrasts worth noting in this episode. The first is the spatial contrast between the little room the Baron wants to lock his son in and the vast expanse Cosimo actually ends up in after dinner. The little room, in which Cosimo has spent a lot of time as a child, is a tight space with limited room for growth and movement, and perhaps functions as a metaphor for the way his parents have restricted his freedom. The trees are the room's symbolic contrast: open, vast, and providing seemingly limitless space for Cosimo to move about. Biagio states that he and Cosimo "used to spend hours and hours on the trees, and not for ulterior motives as most boys, who go up only in search of fruit or birds' nests, but for the pleasure of getting over difficult parts of the trunks and forks" (12). Here the trees become a symbol of the pleasure and freedom the brothers derive

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[6] "Loneliness becomes a cornerstone of the Peter Pan Syndrome when a child feels unwanted in his own home … Unrelenting anxiety around the home results in feelings of rejection, stripping [the PPS victim] of hope for a better tomorrow. Unmet needs of affiliation force him to find belonging outside his family" (Kiley 91-93).

from playing outside as children. This description also ties into the second interesting contrast in this episode: the narrator's emphasis on how Cosimo is dressed when he first climbs the trees:

> He was dressed up in the most formal clothes and headdress, because our father insisted on his appearing at table this way in spite of his twelve years of age – powdered hair with a ribbon around the queue, three-cornered hat, lace stock and ruffles, green tunic with pointed tails, purple breeches, rapier, and long white leather gaiters halfway up his legs, the only concession to a mode of dressing more suitable to our country life. (Calvino, *The Baron in the Trees*, 12).[xiv]

In this description, we see Cosimo take on an appearance similar to that of his father. This elegant outfit gives him a more adult appearance and seems to emphasize his sophistication and maturity in a situation when his actions convey the opposite. The narrator thus presents us with a type of oxymoron in which the reader experiences the actions of a twelve-year-old boy, dressed like a noble adult, rebelling against his parents and escaping to a place where he and his brother always used to play together. This is the nature of Cosimo's *scioltezza*. He, like Pin, has been expected to grow up too fast, yet his childhood simultaneously pulls him in the opposite direction and results in creating another type of "Peter Pan". Unlike Pin, the reader stays with Cosimo from this episode through his entire lifetime and observes as his developmental journey unfolds within the trees of Ombrosa.

What starts as a simple act of rebellion becomes a brand new lifestyle for Cosimo, as he never comes down from the trees. At first, his parents don't believe he'll actually stay there, and so they ignore him:

> And now out into the garden, after their coffee, came the Baron and the Generalessa. They stood looking at a

> rosebush, pretending not to take any notice of Cosimo. They were arm-in-arm first, then drew apart to talk and gesture. But I moved under the holm oak as if I were playing on my own, though really to try and attract Cosimo's attention; he was still feeling resentful of me, and stayed up there looking away into the distance. (Calvino, *The Baron in the Trees*, 14).[xv]

In this passage, there is an emphasis on spatial distance. Cosimo's parents are seen close together, and then they ease apart. Biagio is much closer to Cosimo, though Cosimo ignores him and stares somewhere far off into his new open landscape. There is no mention of how Cosimo reacts to his parents' neglectful behavior, presumably because he is already accustomed to their emotional distance. When he first climbs into the trees, he is much angrier with Biagio, who ate all of his snails out of fear for the consequences of not finishing his dinner. Biagio describes this as "a cowardice on [his] part which had the effect of making [his] brother feel more alone than ever", and he feels that Cosimo's separation from the family was also a protest against Biagio for letting him down. Biagio's spatial relationship to Cosimo also reflects his emotional attitude toward his brother. He plays directly underneath Cosimo and his oak tree, and for much of the novel, he has to look up to his brother. Figuratively, Biagio is always "looking up" to Cosimo as well. He consistently describes him in terms of respect, referring to him as "a sentinel" and one with "superhuman tenacity" (Calvino, *The Baron in the Trees*, 12-14).

The fact that Cosimo's younger brother is the narrator is one of the heaviest contributions to the novel's *scioltezza*. As Weiss posits, Calvino often plays with points of view, and in this novel, "his authorial deceptions leave the reader with insufficient guides for making judgments about the characters and the actions". Furthermore, "the eyewitness raconteurs are semi-reliable not only because they are just eight years old at

the onset of the novels and narrate with open-eyed innocence events whose implications are both tragic and humorous, but also because they do not share the protagonists' perspectives … This creates a disparity in … their narrative points of view, [especially] that of the Baron's brother, who at times becomes unreliable as narrator" (Weiss 53-54). The text itself displays *scioltezza* because Cosimo's experiences are constantly filtered through his younger brother's views of him. We see Cosimo at his most immature and childlike moments, but because the narrator is younger than him and looks up to him, we often perceive him through a filter of maturity and adulthood, where he exhibits "noble qualities of character: kindness, courage, patience, ingenuity, industry, and a profound sense of justice" (Weiss 48). Jill Margo Carlton points out how the narration contributes to its own form of *scioletzza* as well, stating that "sometimes [Biagio] has not even witnessed the events that he narrates. Biagio presents himself as one who puts together the story, relying on his own observation of events, second-hand information, hearsay and speculation." That is, the reader may not be getting the "objective account" of Cosimo's events in the trees, and this creates "a text under construction, one whose components are both the truth and other stories" (Carlton 198-199). In essence, *The Baron in the Trees* is composed of narration that sometimes does not know what genre it wants to be. On one hand, many of these stories are filtered through Biagio's imagination and external sources and thus become a sort of fairy tale, whereas other episodes are assumed to be the "objective reality" of the novel and thus seen as the truth.

Just as the nature of the narration becomes confused and muddled through Biagio's perspective, we also see *scioltezza* reflected in Cosimo's identity itself. Psychologist James Marcia devoted much of his life to the research of identity

development in young adults, where he proposed "four identity states, or ways of balancing crisis and commitment". In his stage theory, "exploration, often referred to as a crisis, involves the questioning of values and goals defined by parents and weighing various identity alternatives and their potential repercussions … Commitment refers to attaching ownership to pronounced choices, values, and goals". Marcia's four stages are based on various configurations of exploration/crisis and commitment. In *foreclosure*, an individual's "commitment to values and goals comes without crisis because authorities direct their path … Essentially they follow the rules, maintain conventional relationships, and typically demonstrate inflexible thinking". In the *moratorium* stage, individuals experience crisis without commitment, where they "shift between indecisiveness and ambivalence toward authority on one hand and creativity and engaging style on the other" (Evans et al. 52-53). The other two stages are known as *identity achievement*[7] and *diffusion*[8]. Throughout the book, we see Cosimo in various stages of Marcia's theory. The most poignant evidence shows him in the moratorium stage as he explores Ombrosa and his new lifestyle without actually committing to what he is going to do with his life in the trees. This is established when the narrator tells us, "Those first days of Cosimo's on the trees were without aim or purpose, and were dominated entirely by the desire to know and possess his new kingdom." (45).[xvi] Having broken free from the strict lifestyle

[7] "Achievement status comes after an extensive period of crisis in which individuals sort through alternatives and make crucial choices that lead to strong commitments in setting goals and establishing a firm foundation. Individuals in this status … are confident and can clearly articulate their choices and conclusions. [They] rely on an internal rather than external process to construct identity and contextualize their experiences" (Evans et al. 54).

[8] "People in the state of diffusion either refuse to or [are] unable to firmly commit … They also tend to conform, have difficulty with intimacy, and at times lack cognitive complexity" (Evans et al. 54).

his parents intended for him, Cosimo is in a state of exploration and crisis, focusing all of his attention on understanding his spatial configurations before setting off to the task of solidifying a purpose for himself. One might say that Cosimo never reaches the identity achievement stage, as he continuously explores roles throughout his life without fully committing to one. He "goes hunting and fishing, has a pet dog, turns into an avid reader and becomes a scholar and author, falls in love and has sexual encounters with women, goes mad and then regains his sanity, fights against pirates, becomes a Freemason and duels with Spanish Jesuits, participates in the Revolution and the Napoleonic wars, corresponds with the leading thinkers of the Enlightenment, prints newspapers, fights forest fires, is elected to public office, and helps the poor and downtrodden" (Weiss 48). He takes on such a vast number of roles that he cannot define himself with one specific identity. He becomes an active contributor to society, yet he lives in physical isolation. These crises and contrasting ideas give the reader an idea of instability reflective of Cosimo's spatial situation itself. As Biagio muses, "Youth soon passes on earth, so imagine it on the trees, where it is the fate of everything to fall: leaves, fruit" (Calvino, *The Baron in the Trees*, 208).[xvii]

Cosimo's moratorium is a constant state of exploration, where he (like many people in this stage) often experiences confusion about his emotions and feelings. For him, this confusion manifests in his relationship with Viola:

> His heart was beating fast. Here he was being invited by the Ondarivas of Ombrosa, the haughtiest family in the neighborhood, and the humiliation of a movement before changed to triumph: he was getting back at his father by this invitation from enemies who had always snubbed him, and Viola had interceded for him, and he was now officially accepted as a friend of hers and would play with her in that garden so different from all other gardens. All

> this Cosimo felt, but an opposite though confused emotion at the same time; an emotion made of shyness, pride, loneliness and determination; and amid this contrast of feelings my brother seized the branch above him, climbed it, moved into the leafiest part, on to another tree, and vanished. (Calvino, *The Baron in the Trees*, 23).[xviii]

In this episode, we see how Viola's affection leaves Cosimo feeling a multitude of contrasting emotions, uncertain as to how he should respond to her. This is coupled with his desire to spite his father, which depicts him as a child rebelling against authority and responsibility. Ultimately, his contrasting sentiments leave him feeling so confused that he simply disappears deeper into the trees, thus further distancing himself from Viola and the other people on the ground. As he separates himself emotionally from his girlfriend, he also looks to her for validation and as a means to solidify an identity. When he gets older, he has sexual relations with her, and their interaction is preceded by a look into their thoughts:

> They knew each other. He knew her and so himself, for in truth he had never known himself. And she knew him and so herself, for although she had always known herself she had never been able to recognize it until now. (Calvino, *The Baron in the Trees,* 159).[xix]

The fact that Cosimo has to "know Viola" in order to know himself is consistent with Kozma's notes on the Peter Pan Syndrome. "As adults these men are attracted sexually to nurturing women who through their own cosseting behavior encourage narcissistic irresponsibility in their male partners and who invariably rescue the men from their problems. Unwittingly, together the couple creates an emotional co-dependency of the strong and dominating woman who needs for her psychological fulfillment the petulant, self-centered, overly dependent, baby-figure of her man … For sufferers of arrested maturation the pursuit of others' acceptance is the only means to self-acceptance, the only

way to procure an identity" (Kozma, n.p.). Thus, Cosimo sees Viola as his means of solidifying his identity, though these identities are ultimately unfulfilled at the end of the novel. In one episode, Cosimo tells Viola that he's never been alone. He has contacts with other people all throughout his life, and each gives him a different role and purpose. With some, he reads and learns. With some, he fights pirates. With Viola, however, he "makes love". He sees her as no more than an object for "picking fruit or pruning" (Calvino, *The Baron in the Trees*, 162). This is indicative of the misogynistic nature of the typical victim of the Peter Pan Syndrome. Though he feels the need of a woman's presence to validate his worth and solidify his identity as a man, he maintains significant emotional distance from her by treating her as an object, similar to the men of the brigade in *The Path to the Spiders' Nests.* Unsatisfied by Cosimo's treatment of her, Viola eventually leaves for France, and the two never see each other again. He is thus left unfulfilled, and he goes mad as he continues to age, unable to attain the identity achievement stage outlined by Marcia's development theory.

The character of Gian dei Brughi strengthens the novel's theme of the unfulfilled. Gian dei Brughi, a notorious brigand, initially has a fearsome reputation. He and Cosimo first meet in their late teens, when Cosimo has taken up studying philosophy and avidly reading books. Shortly after Cosimo helps Gian, escape from a group of pursuers, Gian goes to prison, and the two become good friends when Cosimo begins to visit Gian to read him stories and supply him with books. As the two grow closer, Gian dei Brughi "begins to yearn for a quieter life, neglects his work and becomes timorous". He immerses himself in the world of books, taking a particular liking to Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*. But one day, "two of his former protégés … seize his *Clarissa* at

the ‘momento culminate’, burn the final pages and withhold the book, thus depriving Gian of the pleasure of the ending” (Carlton 196). To him, the story remains unfinished, its narrative potential unfulfilled, and trapped in a pivotal moment of transition, similar to his own journey. In his time of transition, when he decides he wants to live a more peaceful existence and become a more righteous person, his life is tragically cut off when he is sentenced to die at the gallows. Thus, his unfulfilled reading of the book *Clarissa* reflects his unfulfilled life and inability to complete his transition to the identity achievement stage of Marcia’s model.

Gian dei Brughi’s story is a powerful and abbreviated accentuation of Cosimo’s. After Viola moves to France for good, Cosimo grows old, but he regresses to a state of madness, acting more like a bird than a person. He becomes ill, and Biagio follows him underneath the trees with twenty other people and a large sheet, convinced that his unstable brother is going to fall. Instead, a hot air balloon appears, loses control, and passes by Cosimo’s tree. Biagio recalls that “the dying Cosimo, at the second when the anchor rope passed near him, gave one of those leaps he so often used to do in his youth, gripped the rope, with his feet on the anchor and his body in a hunch, and [flew] away, taken by the wind, scarce braking the course of the balloon, and [vanished] out to sea”. When the balloon finally lands, Cosimo is never found, and Biagio laments that his brother’s disappearance denies him of “the satisfaction of seeing him return to earth a corpse” (Calvino, *The Baron in the Trees*, 216). Just as the boys of this story don’t fulfill their developmental potentials, their relationships, or even the reading of *Clarissa*, Biagio is left at the end with an unfulfilled desire for closure, and he must memorialize his brother without having said a proper goodbye. It is this idea of the “unfulfilled”, coupled

with the nature of Biagio's narration, that lends an element of *scioltezza* to the text itself, as well as to the boys' developmental journeys.

On the last page of the novel, the trees disappear, and Biagio tells us that Ombrosa no longer exists. Giulia Pacini takes an arboreal and historical perspective on her reading of *The Baron in the Trees*, ultimately positing that Calvino's work is "a parable of the deforestation and excessive urban development that took place along the Italian Riviera, starting in the late eighteenth century" (Pacini 57). Pacini does not come up short with support for her claim. She writes that in the turn of the nineteenth century when *The Baron in the Trees* is set, "this woody and mountainous region was subject to extensive clearing to permit the construction of a vast network of roads and railways". Furthermore, "the most dramatic changes to the Ligurian landscape … came after World War II, at the time of the composition of Calvino's novel, when the region experienced a formidable and largely uncontrolled housing boom" (57). Under these circumstances, Calvino penned *La speculazione edilizia* to voice his frustration about the damages associated with this construction and "the psychological and social costs of these developments" (Pacini 58). Biagio himself voices these opinions in the narration of *The Baron in the* Trees:

> Nowadays these parts are very different. It was after the arrival of the French that people began chopping down trees as if they were grass which is scythed every year and grows again. They have never grown again. At first we thought it was something to do with the war, with Napoleon, with the period. But the chopping went on. Now the hillsides are so bare that when we look at them, we who knew them before, it makes us feel bad. (Calvino, *The Baron in the Trees*, 29).[xx]

If we imagine the novel as an account of an important historical transition, we can see how Cosimo's story is not so different from Pin's in *The Path to the Spiders' Nests*. After all, Dan Kiley's research frames the conditions of arrested maturation in terms of "contradictions, conflicts, and confusion", where the world can be "hostile and unrelenting", causing some young men to "surrender their fear and pledge allegiance to the cause of being lost", just as Peter Pan and the Lost Boys do (Kiley 23). While Pin's story depicts life transitions in terms of warfare, Cosimo's transitions manifest against the backdrop of a shifting landscape, a theme that Calvino heightens significantly in *Marcovaldo*.

GROWING UP IN THE CITY: A LOOK AT MARCOVALDO

> Marcovaldo, the Italian little tramp, is clearly a favorite of Calvino, who always presents him wittily, with great affection, commiseration, and admiration. The author always inserts a note of pathos that makes the hero not only amusing but endearing to younger and older readers alike: "A book for children? A book for teenagers? A book for grownups?" Calvino wonders in his preface, and then rhetorically replies by wondering, "Is it rather a book in which the Author through the screen of simple narrative structures expresses his perplexed and questioning relationship with the world? Perhaps even this." (Weiss 33).

As this citation demonstrates, Calvino had an interesting relationship with the title character of *Marcovaldo, or The Seasons in the City*. Published in 1963, this novel is a text that experiences its own moratorium and *scioltezza*, as it explores various identities and genres without committing to one. Calvino himself couldn't quite figure out to which genre it belongs. Composed of twenty brief episodes centering on the bumbling Marcovaldo and his misadventures, the work's relative simplicity makes it easily accessible to children. In fact, Angela Jeannet postulates that *Marcovaldo* was in some

ways the *Pinocchio* of Calvino's time, stating that "perhaps Italo Calvino would have liked to be considered the cosmopolitan [Carlo] Collodi of the *nuova Italia*". She also writes that "Marcovaldo's story was not born as a children's book, and yet its configuration, at all levels, placed it immediately in the lineage of prototypes of that ambiguous genre. It is significant that the author insisted on dedicating it to 'bambini e ragazzi'" (Jeannet 68). She supports her reading of Marcovaldo as a "testo pinocchiesco" by citing Calvino's own passion for the story and for Collodi's narrative technique, and then highlighting the similarities between the two texts in their grammatical and linguistic choices, as well as their "timing, pace, brevity of episodes, intensity and simplicity of plot". The protagonists themselves, she adds, also share important traits, "each underlining the protagonist's quality as a misfit in his environment, as well as his stubbornness in ignoring it" (Jeannet 61). The similarity between these two works is important in establishing the ambiguity of *Marcovaldo's* genre and target audience because as Jeannet points out, "audiences are seldom so clearly chosen, and adults are anyhow those who usually buy 'children's' books and read them to children, with all the implications such practices entail … Small children read Pinocchio's adventures well before they entered puberty and could be handed normative and more 'realistic' texts" (Jeannet 57). *Marcovaldo*, then, constantly straddles the line between being a book for children and being a book for adults. Interestingly, we will find a similar quality in our third protagonist: Marcovaldo himself, whose life seems to be in a constant state of transition.

Calvino's note to the reader in the preface of *Marcovaldo* tells us that his "stories take place in an industrial city of northern Italy. The first in the series were written in the

early 1950s and thus set in a very poor Italy, the Italy of neo-realist movies. The last stories date from the mid-60s, when the illusions of an economic boom flourished" (Calvino, Preface to *Marcovaldo*, n.p.). In this historical transition, dams and power plants appeared all over Italy, urban development was high, and inventions such as the Fiat and the television entered mass production, driving a mentality of consumerism (Duggan 274). In the novel, this economic situation and the ever-changing city become a metaphor for the development that Marcovaldo is unable to attain. Marcovaldo remains relatively static in his childlike naivety throughout the novel, whereas his surroundings are always growing, advancing, and becoming more complicated. Similarly, the text itself becomes more complex, as "the earlier tales are ideologically simple, Cinderella-like fables … where Marcovaldo struggles for the most basic needs for survival, and where the city with all its negative aspects is pitted against the idyllic countryside. The second series of stories, those written in the 60s, grow in sophistication, are more surreal, and present more conflicting values" (Weiss 29). His position in this ever-changing environment is established in the very beginning of the first story:

> This Marcovaldo possessed an eye ill-suited to city life:
> billboards, traffic-lights, shop-windows, neon signs, posters,
> no matter how carefully devised to catch the attention,
> never arrested his gaze, which might have been running
> over the desert sands. Instead, he would never miss a leaf
> yellowing on a branch, a feather trapped by a roof tile;
> there was no horsefly on a horse's back, no worm-hole in a
> flank, or fig-peel squashed on the sidewalk that
> Marcovaldo didn't remark and ponder over, discovering the
> changes of season, the yearnings of his heart, and the woes
> of his existence. (Calvino, *Marcovaldo*, 1).[xxi]

In this passage, Marcovaldo is instantly painted as a misfit, or someone who does not identify with the industrial lifestyle that will sweep over Italy in the course of the novel.

He is naïve and has a short attention span, preferring to focus on the simple things of nature as opposed to the skyscrapers and neon lights. "Just like children, who because of their innocence and fantastic abilities are seeing and believing certain realities that adults no longer perceive, so only Marcovaldo notices even the slightest traces of nature in the asphalt and concrete jungles of the city" (Weiss 32). Urban life and life in the country become opposing forces with which Marcovaldo must contend, and his *scioltezza* derives from the fact that he isn't particularly well-adapted to either one. In the first story, having already been established as ill suited to city life, Marcovaldo redirects his attention to the mushrooms that have started sprouting around his town. He develops a childlike possessiveness, determined to keep the mushrooms a secret and hoping that nobody will discover them so he can take them for himself and his family. To his dismay, the mushrooms do not go undiscovered. The road sweeper, Armadigi, for whom Marcovaldo harbors a passionate dislike that he cannot define or explain, has also seen the mushrooms, and he collects them in a basket. This produces a short bout of jealousy before Marcovaldo impulsively decides to invite Armadigi and a large group of people to his house to fry the mushrooms. He gathers enough for everybody, cooks them, and later that night sees everybody again in the hospital. The mushrooms to which Marcovaldo has developed such an attachment have poisoned him. Thus, he is established right away as a misfit of the city and an occasional opponent of the natural country life.

In the later stories, the country and the city become powerful metaphors of the innocence of childhood and the loss of this innocence, as demonstrated by the spring episode, *Smoke, Wind, and Soap Bubbles*. This chapter casts Marcovaldo's sons as young entrepreneurs who start a laundry service after cultivating a collection of Blancasol

soap coupons. They steal the coupons from the neighborhood mailboxes, redeem them for samples of Blancasol, and collect detergent to charge their neighbors for a washing. Soon after, the neighbors discover that the soap has all been redeemed from their stolen coupons, and the police bring charges against "criminals unknown". Frightened by the prospect of being caught and getting in trouble with the law, Marcovaldo's sons dump all of the Blancasol into a nearby river and generate swarms of bubbles:

> A little breeze stirred the morning air. A clump of bubbles broke from the water's surface, and flew off, lightly. It was dawn and the bubbles took on a pink hue. The children saw them go off, high over their heads, and cried: "Ooooo…."
>
> The bubbles flew on, following the invisible tracks of the city's currents of air; they turned into the streets at roof-level, always avoiding bumps with cornices and drainpipes. Now the compactness of the bunch had dissolved: the bubbles, first one then another, had flown off on their own, and each following a route different because of altitude and speed and path; they wandered in mid-air … And the wind, the wind raised up froths and frills and clumps that stretched out into rainbow garlands … and invaded the sky above the wires and antennae. (Calvino, *Marcovaldo*, 95).[xxii]

Meanwhile, the smoke-stacks of the nearby factories begin to release their black smoke. We learn that "the sky was divided between currents of black smoke and currents of rainbow foam, and in the eddying wind they seemed to fight, and for a moment, only one moment, it looked as if the tops of the smoke-stacks were conquered by the bubbles, but there was soon such a mixture – between the smoke that imprisoned the rainbow foam and the globes of soap that imprisoned a veil of grains of soot – that you couldn't understand anything. Until, at a certain point, after seeking and seeking in the sky, Marcovaldo couldn't see the bubbles any longer, but only smoke, smoke, smoke" (Calvino, *Marcovaldo*, 96).[xxiii] This episode has several layers of interpretation. The first

depicts Marcovaldo's horror at the rapid industrialization of his city, in which the bubbles are a product of nature and the smoke is a product of the increasing technological and industrial advances and the practices of consumerism that are changing his environment. The physical space around Marcovaldo becomes a battlefield between nature and industry, mixing unnaturally so that bubbles are "imprisoning" the soot, only to be enveloped by the cloud of smoke that grows much faster. Similarly, we could imagine this image as a manifestation of Marcovaldo's *scioltezza* between boyhood and manhood. Despite the fact that the foam is a product of something that pollutes the river, the bubbles are described in such a way that the reader associates them with innocence and childlike wonder. It is Marcovaldo's sons who create the bubbles, and they verbally express their fascination when the bubbles soar over their heads. They're also described with an astonishing array of color. First, they are "a whitish foam like a barber's mug lathered by his shaving-brush" (Calvino, *Marcovaldo*, 94).[xxiv] This could easily be symbolic of the innocence of adolescence, where the shade of white represents purity and the idea of shaving calls to mind the physical changes associated with puberty. The bubbles become more chromatic, first turning pink, and then stretching out into the form of "rainbow garlands", both of which evoke connotations of innocence and joy. The bright colors are dramatized in contrast with the smoke clouds, which, in their dark, foreboding forms, can be said to represent the loss of innocence that ultimately consumes the bubbles until Marcovaldo can no longer see them.

Like the smoke and the soap bubbles, Marcovaldo repeatedly discovers that the industrialization of the city and its natural beauty cannot coexist peacefully, and neither can his childlike disposition and his demands as a functioning adult in society. The two

ideals are at war up until the very last page, when Marcovaldo's tales conclude with an anecdote about a jack-hare and a wolf, each hiding in a space that camouflages its skin. The narration draws attention to the jack-hare's small size and its white fur, nearly invisible in the snow. In fact, throughout the entire novel, Calvino uses the motif of snow to play with the notion of space, just as he does with the trees in Cosimo's story. "Calvino's later writing combines and explores many different spaces … [He] was fascinated with patterns, sequences, repetitions, diagrams, and musical, mathematical or architectural structures, anything which serves to give shape to a fundamentally disorderly universe" (Caesar 594). But in the episode with the jack-hare and in *The city lost in snow*, snow becomes a device that blurs the boundaries of the city, and it becomes the *absence* of shape that puts Marcovaldo at ease:

> In the city all differences between sidewalk and street had vanished … There was no telling whether the city hidden under that mantel was still the same or whether, in the night, another had taken its place. Who could say if under those white mounds there were still gasoline pumps, news-stands, tram stops, or if there were only sack upon sack of snow? … Marcovaldo felt the snow was a friend, an element that erased the cage of walls which imprisoned his life. (Calvino, *Marcovaldo*, 16-17).[xxv]

This is the seemingly limitless space in which the jack-hare hides at the end of the novel, attempting to assure its safety from the wolf. The wolf, instead, blends into the "black darkness of the forest", waiting for the optimum moment to chase the hare. When the wolf comes out of the darkness and follows the hare's tracks into the snow, the hare eludes him, presumably beyond the conclusion of the story (Calvino, *Marcovaldo*, 120-121). This image concludes the final chapter of the novel, *Santa's Children*, in which industry and commerce become the dominant theme. In this episode, the "Society for the

Implementation of Christmas Consumption" advocates the sale of "the Destructive Gift": a large hammer, a slingshot, and a box of kitchen matches. This causes children to destroy their possessions and burn down houses, all to "speed up the pace of consumption and give the market a boost" (120).[xxvi] Meanwhile, Marcovaldo dresses up like Santa Claus as part of the campaign, but he finds himself surrounded by other Santas in the city, "absolutely identical with him, who were driving panel-trucks or delivery carts or opening the doors of shops for customers laden with packages or helping carry their purchases to the car. And all these Santas seemed concentrated, busy, as if they were responsible for the operation of the enormous machine of the Holiday Season"[xxvii] (116). The image of Marcovaldo blending into a group of Santas presents a sort of identity crisis in which he loses his individuality. As Weiss suggests, this identity crisis is potent throughout the entire novel, because "the city is not identified, Marcovaldo's job is not well-defined, and his place of work is not determined" (31). These symbols come together in one common theme: the destructive consequences of consumerism. Children lose their innocence, and the destruction of their houses marks that moment. Adults lose their individuality, as demonstrated by Marcovaldo blending into the group of identical Santas. The concluding image of the wolf and the hare announces a return to the theme of innocence previously explored in *Smoke, Wind, and Soap Bubbles*. The innocent jack-hare is in constant danger of being captured by the menacing wolf. Similarly, the natural beauty of the city faces the constant threat of consumerism and industrialization. These ideas pollute the natural beauty of the city and cannot peacefully coexist with it.

Meanwhile, Marcovaldo's boyishness is similarly threatened by the demands of adulthood: raising his sons, providing for his wife, and performing well at his job. His

childlike impulses often get him into trouble, as seen time and time again with episodes such as Marcovaldo cooking the poisonous mushrooms or having to face the situation of his sons polluting the river with Blancasol. Even so, he often dreams of escaping his adult responsibilities. A definitive example of his ambivalence toward responsibility can be found in *Park-bench vacation,* the novel's first summer episode. He daydreams on his way to work, and he talks to himself:

> "Oh, if I could wake just once at the twitter of birds and not the sound of the alarm and the crying of little Paolino and the yelling of my wife, Domitilla! … Oh, if I could sleep here, alone, in the midst of this cool green shade and not in my cramped, hot room; here amid the silence, not amid the snoring and sleep-talking of my whole family and the racing of trams down below in the street; here in the natural darkness of the night, not in the artificial darkness of closed blinds, streaked by the glare of headlights; oh, if I could see leaves and sky on opening my eyes!" (Calvino, *Marcovaldo*, 5).[xxviii]

Here, we see Marcovaldo's desire to evade the primary source of his responsibility: his family. As with Cosimo, this manifests in his desire to escape his cramped physical boundaries and move out into an open, infinite space. That night, he attempts to sleep on a bench at the local park. However, he is kept awake by elements of both nature and city, from the sound of bubbling water to the stink of a garbage truck, and by the time he is able to fall asleep, the sun has come up and he is late for work. Whether one reads this primarily as a parable of industrialization or as a tale of growing up, Marcovaldo's *scioltezza* prevents him from achieving a cohesive identity or role in his society. He "expresses our uneasiness in a constantly and rapidly changing society that makes us outcasts by marring our existence. He stands for the plight of the individual who, paradoxically, though repelled by this way of life, at the same time knows that he is an

integral part of the very system he so abhors." Ultimately, "he is too divided between the two worlds, ill-prepared and therefore victimized … He hasn't fully grown up and therefore, just like our contemporary consumer-oriented society so ready to abuse the environment and deplete our scarce natural resources, Marcovaldo too is incapable of measuring his actions or foreseeing their often dangerous consequences" (Weiss 30-31).

CONCLUSION

In *The Seasons of a Man's Life,* Daniel Levinson points out that "the process of entering into adulthood is … lengthy and complex". He attempts to outline a schema for the process of growing up, beginning with the Early Adult Transition at age 17, "Entering the Adult World" at age 22, and the Age Thirty Transition (Levinson 71). But as developmental theorists come to understand, maturation does not follow a rigid prescription. Seth Schwartz notes that some cultures produce different patterns entirely, stating that there is a "more amorphous and extended transition to adulthood in Italy – often lasting beyond age thirty" (Schwartz et al 99). This has become even more evident as we've taken a look at some of the iconic male protagonists in Calvino's work. Before us, Jan Kozma had already applied many of these principles to her study of the male protagonists in Grazia Deledda's literature, and these analyses may be appropriate to additional contexts. For example, one might apply this developmental framework to Palazzeschi's *Il codice di Perelà*, which (similarly to *Marcovaldo*) appears at face value to be a work for children, but is grounded in a profundity that would be much more accessible to adults.

Additionally, the "boy who never grew up" has become an increasingly popular archetype in pop culture as a whole. We see examples of him on American television,

such as *How I Met Your Mother's* Barney Stinson, who is portrayed as narcissistic, chauvinistic, and ultimately lonely. We also see the Peter Pan Syndrome in American cinema, such as Seth Rogen's portrayal of an unemployed and irresponsible father-to-be in *Knocked Up*. While these American characters share the Italian plight of having difficulty accepting adult roles, one could argue that there are differences in how they portray the "blank space" of emerging adulthood. In Pin, Cosimo, and Marcovaldo, we have seen that the line between boyhood and manhood is not rigidly defined, which is why these characters sometimes experience small crises of identity. Situational factors often have them questioning whether they are more of a boy, more of a man, or if they are both or neither. In these American characters, this "blank space" often seems smaller, if it even exists at all. There is less concern with national identity and the question of "*what/who am I*", and more concern with "*what am I going to do*" on an individual level. However, I suspect that developmental studies, such as what I am proposing, may give us a glimpse into the pivotal points of these characters' lives, and this will often reveal the larger implications of what it means to "grow up" in their society as a whole.

As Dan Kiley came to understand in his analyses, "a close examination of the fictional account of Peter Pan not only becomes an instructional allegory of youthful whims, but also gives modern-day professionals insight into a ghastly reality" (Kiley 23). Here, Kiley is referring to Peter's turbulent life and how it impacted his capacity to grow. Similarly, our analyses of Pin, Cosimo, and Marcovaldo have shed light on the consequences of some pivotal moments in Italian history. *The Path to the Spiders' Nests* places Pin in the center of conflict during World War II, in which Italy itself struggled to understand its place in the world. Pin's conflict makes it difficult to discern if he's a

child playing games in an adult's world, or if he's simply growing up too fast. Italy, just like Dritto and Pelle from Pin's brigade, was unsure of its identity and what it was truly fighting for, even becoming divided against itself at one point. We see the interaction of character and setting in Cosimo and Marcovaldo as well. Cosimo makes his home in the trees at a time when the Italian Riviera is experiencing destruction and deforestation. His space is seemingly infinite, but it dwindles to nothing at the end of the novel. This is reflected in his search for identity. He explores a vast space of possibilities, but does not commit to anything. He prefers isolation, but he also experiments with civic roles in society. Finally, Marcovaldo, a grown man, raises his kids in a rapidly changing economy and physical landscape. His turmoil springs from his inability to find a defined niche in any aspect of the landscape, except for perhaps the snow that erases his boundaries.

If we imagine Calvino as a modern-day Collodi, we might say that his characters (in addition to being "Peter Pans") are like Pinocchio. They remain static until their environment pulls them awkwardly in another direction, only for them to fall back to their natural positions, as Pinocchio so often does before making the final transformation from puppet to human boy. This is what Suzanne Stewart-Steinberg recognized in Italian identity, stating that "those who [understand] Pinocchio [understand] Italy … and the people and the nation that he represents" (Stewart-Steinberg 22). Thus, we might say that Calvino's texts show us the developmental journey of Italy itself, and its hope to grow up as a nation during some of its most pivotal moments in history. But is it truly appropriate to say that the country, as well as Calvino's characters, experienced the Peter Pan Syndrome as Dan Kiley defined it? While I have identified many of his characteristics in

these literary figures, the presence of the "blank space" between manhood and boyhood creates a slight deviation in what Kiley called the Peter Pan Syndrome. Therefore, I am proposing that *scioltezza*, as the term has evolved, is a unique condition that we might consider to be the Italian version of the Peter Pan Syndrome. The important "blank space" and the turning points of Italian history are what distinguish this condition from Kiley's. From its struggle to decide if it was an axis power or an allied nation in World War II, to its confused views on consumerism and industrialization, some moments of Italian history have been marked by *scioltezza*: a tension with significant consequences for the process of growing up.

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ENDNOTES

These endnotes show the Italian text of these works as originally written by Italo Calvino. All provided citations have been taken from Calvino's* Romanzi e racconti, *collected and published by Mondadori in 1991.

[i] "La mia storia era quella dell'adolescenza troppo a lungo, per il giovane che aveva preso la guerra come un alibi, nel senso proprio e in quello traslato. Nel giro di pochi anni, d'improvviso l'alibi era diventato un qui e ora. Troppo presto, per me; o troppo tardi: i sogni sognati troppo a lungo … Carico di volontà e tensione giovanili, m'era negate la spontanea grazia della giovinezza. Il maturare impetuoso dei tempi non aveva fatto che accentuare la mia immaturità. Il protagonist simbolico del mio libro fu dunque un'immagine di regressione: un bambino" (*Romanzi e racconti* 1199-1200).

[ii] "Pin ride fino alle lacrime, allegro ed eccitato: si trova nel suo, adesso, in mezzo ai grandi, gente insieme nemica e amica, gente da scherzarci insieme fino a sforgare quell'odio che ha contro di loro. Si sente spietato: li ferirà senza misericordia" (133).

[iii] "Si volta verso Pin: - Non sparano ancora, - ripete. – Che succederà laggiù?
Pin è contento quando gli si rivolge una domanda così, da pari a pari" (121).

[iv] "Pin è cattivo con le bestie: sono esseri mostruosi e incomprensibili come gli uomini; dev'essere brutto essere una piccolo bestia, cioè essere verde e fare la cacca a gocce, e aver sempre paura che venga un essere umano come lui, con una emore faccia piena d'efelidi rosse e nere e con dita capaci di fare a pezzi i grilli" (24).

[v] "Uno che ha una pistola vera può tutto, è come un uomo grande. Può far fare tutto quello che vuole alle donne e agli uomini minacciando d'ucciderli. Pin ora impugnerà la pistola e camminerà sempre con la pistola puntata: nessuno potrà togliergliela e tutti ne avranno paura. Invece ha sempre la pistola avvolta nel gomitolo del cinturone, sotto il maglione e non si decide a toccarla, spera quasi che quando la cercherà non ci sia più, si sia smarrita nel calore del suo corpo" (18).

[vi] "Ma a un certo punto Pin non resiste più alla tentazione e si punta la pistola contro la tempia: è una cosa che dà le vertigini… Ora si può mettere la canna in bocca e sentire il sapore sotto la lingua. Poi, cosa più paurosa di tutte, portarla agli occhi e guardarci dentro, nella canna buia che sembra fonda come un pozzo. Una volta Pin ha visto un ragazzo che s'era sparato in un occhio con un fucile da caccia, mentre lo portavano all'ospedale: aveva un gran grumo di sangue su mezza faccia, e l'altra mezza tutta puntini neri della polvere" (19).

[vii] "Pelle ha due passioni che lo divorano: le armi e le donne. Ha ottenuto l'ammirazione di Pin discutendo con competenza di tutte le prostitute della città e facendo degli apprezzamenti su sua sorella la Nera che lasciavano capire che conosceva bene anche lei. Pin ha una attrazione mista a repulsione per lui, così gracile e sempre raffreddato, che racconta sempre storie di ragazzine prese a tradimento per i capelli e coricate nei prati, o

storie d'armi nuove e complicate che ha in dotazione la brigata nera. Pelle è giovane ma ha girato tutta l'Italia con i campeggi e le marce degli avanguardisti e ha sempre maneggiato le armi ed è stato nelle case di tolleranza di tutte le città, pur senza avere l'età prescritta" (73).

[viii] "Pin è in mezzo a loro come tra gli uomini dell'osteria, ma in un mondo più colorato e più selvatico, con quelle notti passate sul fieno, e quelle barbe cariche d'insetti. C'è in loro qualcosa di nuovo che attrae e impaurisce Pin, oltre quella ridicola smania di donne commune a tutti i grandi" (78).

[ix] "Kim cammina solo per I sentieri, con appesa alla spalla quell'arma smilza che sembra una stampella rotta: lo sten. Tutto il resto non serve. I tronchi nel buio hanno strane forme umane. L'uomo porta dentro di sé le sue paure bambine per tutta la vita. <<Forse, - pensa Kim, - se non fossi commissario di brigata avrei paura. Arrivare a non aver più paura, questa è la meta ultima dell'uomo>>" (108).

[x] "Un giorno da bambino mi rinchiusi in camera per due giorni senza mangiare. Soffrii terribilmente ma non aprii e dovettero venire a prendermi con una scala dalla finestra. Avevo una voglia enorme d'essere compatito. Il Dritto fa lo stesso" (109).

[xi] "In fondo anche il Dritto è un bravo ragazzo, a parlarci insieme così, e quando spiega il funzionamento delle pistole s'appassiona ed ha solo pensieri buoni. E anche le pistole, a parlarne così studiandone il meccanismo, non solo più arnesi per uccidere, ma giocattoli strani e incantati" (90).

[xii] "Non potrà più ritornare con gli uomini del distaccamento, non potrà mai combattere con loro. È triste come lui, un bambino nel mondo dei grandi, sempre un bambino, trattato dai grandi come qualcosa di divertente e di noioso; e non poter usare quelle loro cose misteriose ed eccitanti, armi e donne, non potere far mai parte dei loro giochi. Ma Pin un giorno diventerà grande, e potrà essere cattivo con tutti, vendicarsi di quelli che non sono stati buoni con lui: Pin vorrebbe essere grande già adesso, o meglio, non grande, ma ammirato o temuto pur restando com'è, essere bambino e insieme capo dei grandi, per qualche impresa meravigliosa" (139).

[xiii] "A tavola con la famiglia, prendevano corpo i rancori familiari, capitolo triste dell'infanzia. Nostro padre, nostra madre sempre lì davanta, l'uso delle posate per il pollo, e sta' dritto, e via i gomiti dalla tavola, un continuo! … Cominciò una serie di sgridate, di ripicchi, di castighi, d'impuntature, fino al giorno in cui Cosimo … decise di separare la sua sorte dalla nostra. Di quest'accumularsi di risentimenti familiari mi resi conto solo in seguito: allora avevo otto anni, tutto mi pareva un gioco, la guerra di noi ragazzi contro i grandi era la solita di tutti i ragazzi, non capivo che l'ostinazione che ci metteva mio fratello celava qualcosa più fondo. Il Barone nostro padre era un uomo noioso, questo è certo, anche se non cattivo: noioso perché la sua vita era dominate da pensieri stonati, come spesso succede nelle epoche di trapasso" (551).

[xiv] "Era vestito e acconciato con grande proprietà, come nostro padre voleva venisse a tavola, nonostante i suoi dodici anni: capelli incipriati col nastro al codino, tricorno, cravatta di pizzo, marsina verde a code, calzonetti color malva, spadino, e lunghe ghette di pelle bianca a mezza coscia, unica concessione a un modo di vestirsi più intonato alla nostra vita campagnola" (558).

[xv] "Ecco che il Barone e la Generalessa, dopo il caffè, uscivano in giardino. Guardavano un rosaio, ostentavano di non badare a Cosimo. Si davano il braccio, ma poi subito staccavano per discutere e far gesti. Io venni sotto l'elce, invece, come giocando d'attirare l'attenzione di Cosimo; lui però mi serbava rancore e restava lassù a guardar lontano" (560).

[xvi] "Quelle prime giornate di Cosimo sugli alberi non avevano scopi o programmi ma erano dominate soltanto dal desiderio di conoscere e possedere quel suo regno" (594).

[xvii] "La gioventù va via presto sulla terra, figuratevi sugli alberi, donde tutto è destinato a cadere: foglie, frutti" (768).

[xviii] "Gli batteva forte il cuore. Ecco che era invitato dai D'Ondariva e D'Ombrosa, la famiglia più sussiegosa di quei posti, e l'umiliazione d'un momento prima si trasformava in rivincita e si vendicava di suo padre, venendo accolto da avversari che l'avevano sempre guardato dall'alto in basso, e Viola aveva interceduto per lui, e lui era ormai ufficialmente accettato come amico di Viola, e avrebbe giocato con lei in quel giardino diverso da tutti i giardini. Tutto questo provò Cosimo, ma, insieme, un sentiment opposto, se pur confuso: un sentimento fatto di timidezza, orgoglioso, solitudine, puntiglio; e in questo contrasto di sentimenti mio fratello s'afferrò al ramo sopra di sé, s'arrampicò, si sposto nella parte più frondosa, passò su di un altro albero, disparve" (570).

[xix] "Si conobbero. Lui conobbe lei e se stesso, perché in verità non s'era mai saputo. E lei conobbe lui e se stessa, perché pur essendosi saputa sempre, mai s'era potuta riconoscere così" (713).

[xx] "Ora, già non si riconoscono più, queste contrade. S'è cominciato quando vennero i Francesi, a tagliar boschi come fossero prati che si falciano tutti gli anni e poi ricrescono. Non sono ricresciuti. Pareva una cosa della guerra, di Napoleone, di quei tempi: invece non si smise più. I dossi sono nudi che a guardarli, noi che li conoscevamo da prima, fa impressione" (577).

[xxi] "Aveva questo Marcovaldo un occhio poco adatto alla vita di città: cartelli, semafori, vitrine, insegne luminose, manifesti, per studiati che fossero a colpire l'attenzione, mai fermavano il suo sguardo che pareva scorrere sulle sabbie del deserto. Invece, una foglia che ingiallisse su un ramo, una piuma che si impigliasse ad una tegola, non gli sfuggivano mai: non c'era tafano sul dorso d'un cavallo, pertugio di tarlo in una tavola, buccia di fico spiaccicata sul marciapiede che Marcovaldo non notasse, e non facesse

oggetto di ragionamento, scoprendo i mutamenti della stagione, i desideri sul suo animo, e le miserie della sua esistenza" (1067).

[xxii] "Per l'aria mattutina corse un filo di vento. Un grappolo di bolle si staccò dalla superficie dell'acqua, e volava volava via leggero. Era l'alba e le bolle si coloravano di rosa. I bambini le vedevano passare alte sopra il loro capo e gridavano: - Oooo…
Le bolle volavano seguendo gli invisibili binary delle correnti d'aria sulla città, inboccavano le vie all'altezza dei tetti, sempre salvandosi dallo sfiorare spigoli e grondaie. Ora la compattezza del grappolo s'era dissolta: le bolle una prima una poi erano volate per conto loro, e tenendo ognuna una rotta diversa per altitudine e speditezza e tracciato, vagavano a mezz'aria … E il vento, il vento levava in alto bave e gale e cumuli che s'allungavano in ghirlande iridate … e invadevano il cielo sopra i fili e le antenne" (1157).

[xxiii] "Il cielo era diviso tra correnti di fumo nero e correnti di schiuma iridata, e in qualche mulinello di vento pareva che lottassero, e per un momento, un momento solo, parve che la cima dei fumaioli fosse conquistata dalle bolle, ma presto ci fu una talle mescolanza – tra il fumo che imprigionava l'arcobaleno della schiuma e le sfere di saponata che imprigionavano un velo di granelli di fuliggine - , da non capirci più niente. Finché a un certo punto Marcovaldo cerca cerca nel cielo non riusciva a vedere più le bolle ma solo fumo fumo fumo" (1158).

[xxiv] "… una schiuma biancheggiante come la ciotola d'un barbiere rimestata dal pennello" (1156).

[xxv] "Nelle vie cittadine ogni differenza tra marciapiedi e carreggiata era scomparsa … Chissà se sotto quei monticelli bianchi c'erano ancora le pompe della benzina, le edicole, le fermate dei tram o se non c'erano che sacchi e sacchi di neve? … Marcovaldo sentiva la neve come amica, come un elemento che annullava la gabbia di muri in cui imprigionata la sua vita" (1083).

[xxvi] "… per accelerare il ritmo dei consume e ridare vivacità al mercato" (1181).

[xxvii] "… altri Babbi Natale rossi e bianchi, uguali identici a lui, che pilotavano camioncini o motofurgoncini o che aprivano a portare le compere fino all'automobile. E tutti questi Babbi Natale avevano un'aria concentrate e indaffarata, come fossero addetti al servizio di manutenzione dell'enorme macchinario delle Feste" (1178).

[xxviii] "Oh, potessi destarmi una volta al cinguettare degli uccelli e non al suono della sveglia e allo strillo del neonate Paolino e all'inveire di mia moglie Domitilla! … Oh, potessi dormire qui, solo in mezzo a questo fresco verde e non nella mia stanza bassa e calda; qui nel silenzio, non nel russare e parlare nel sonno di tutta la famiglia e correre di tram giù nella strada; qui nel buio natural della notte, non in quello artificiale delle persiane chiuse, zebrato dal riverbero dei fanali; oh, potessi vedere foglie e cielo aprendo gli occhi!" (1071).