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The Pinocchio Problem

What is Human?

A One-Act Comedy with Overtones
Playable for Teens or Adults

by Paul DiLella

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The Pinocchio Problem
A One Act Comedy by Paul DiLella
2 F / 1 M
Playing time: Approximately 30 minutes

Time: The Present

Setting: A specialty toy store in a mall

Characters:

ANNIE REDWIG; A Raggedy Ann doll.

JACK SPRINGER; A Jack-in-the-Box*  [Aka Jacques du Fleur]

GERTA ALPINE; A Swiss Miss doll/figurine

Etc.:

Simple Setting/Single Set

The character, "Jack", speaks with a French accent throughout. If an actor has difficulty with the French words, he can substitute with the indicated English equivalents as long as the French accent is maintained. With costuming/make-up, Jack may be played either Male or Female.

“The Pinocchio Problem” premiered as “What is Human?” at Pahrump Valley School on December 8, 2006 with the following cast:

Ann: Heather Gibeson
Jack: Stephanie Massimino
Gerta: Katie Joray

“The Pinocchio Problem” premiered in its present version at Pahrump Valley High School on April 25, 2008 with the following cast:

Ann: Heather Gibeson
Jack: Sierra Castro
Gerta: Paige Trifficana
The Pinocchio Problem  
A One Act Comedy by Paul DiLella

(AT RISE: A specialty store in a mall at Christmas. Various toys are scattered around the shop. Prominently displayed; a Jack-in-the-Box, a Raggedy Ann, and a Swiss ballerina doll. A counter/table up center. In the dark, Christmas decorations and lights add a festive flair to the store. Each character has his own flag: Ann, an American flag; Jack, a French one; Gerta, Swiss. THE LIGHTS FADE UP slowly as generic CHRISTMAS MUSIC wafts from the Mall without. As the Audience glimpses the toys, there is a BLACKOUT. LIGHTS RESTORE as we see full-size versions of Raggedy Ann, Jack-in-the-Box, and the Swiss ballerina doll in place of the toys, all asleep. ANN stirs.)

ANN  
Christmas. (To JACK) Did you hear me? Christmas.

JACK  
Music. Mais oui. C'est plaisant. [But yes. This is pleasant.]

I hate Christmas.

ANN

JACK

Moi aussi. [Me, too.]

No respect.

ANN

JACK

Les enfants. (ANN doesn't understand) Kids—

ANN

JACK

Paw you.

Shake you.

Drop you.

Tug you.

Poke eyes.
Break you.  

Hide you.  

*Je desteste* Christmas.  

I hate Christmas.  

‘Tis the season.  

For abuse.  

For death.  

I hate Christmas.  

*Je deteste* Christmas.  

They’re supposed to be on their best behavior.  

*Peuple.*  

People.  

*Oui.*  

Yes.  

Then why aren’t they?
I don’t know.

*Je ne sais pas.* [I don't know.]

How could we know? We’re toys.

How could we know? Just toys.

Pinocchio was a toy.

*Maintenant, il est un jeune garçon.* A boy. *Personne chanceuse.* Lucky, *mais oui?* [but yes?]

Yeah, he's human.

*A humain* boy.

Why didn't he want to be a toy?

Maybe, he was afraid he'd break.

Break. First step to firewood.

*(Shudder) Bois de chauffage?…fire…wood…ugh!* *Je comprende.* [I understand.]

Pinocchio had a—

a burning desire—

he was *enflamme*…on fire?

No, no, no. Pinocchio had a feeling, a strong feeling—
Moi aussi [Me, too], a feeling—

the same feeling—

the same feeling—

the same feeling as Pinocchio—

the same!

Yes!

(Jack) *Lequel qu'était?* [Which was what?]

Mon *ami* [My friend], Pinocchio had a feeling he could be human!

*Mais oui!* [But yes!] *Humain!*

That was his problem.

Pinocchio's problem?

The Pinocchio problem.

To be... *humain*, or not to be *humain*. A very good question, *ne vous pensez pas?* [don't you think?]

Yes.
Mais [But], Pinocchio ne comprenez pas qu’il est humain [didn't know what it was to be human.]

The problem again.

Oui.

What is human?

Je ne sais pas. [I don’t know.]

We see what they do.

We hear what they say.

We see how they feel.

We see others react—

to what they do—

to what they say—

to how they feel.

Le question answered?

No. I want to say what they say, do what they do, feel as they feel. I want to be human.

Humain?
Yes.

JACK

*Pourquoi? [Why?]*

ANN

I’m tired of being a toy. A play-thing. I want meaning. Humans have meaning.

JACK

*Qu'est-ce fait il moyens etre [what does it mean to be] “humain”?*

ANN

I talk. Therefore, I am human.

JACK

*(Points to ears) J'ecoute. Listen. Je suis humain? [Am I human?]*

ANN

Yes. Yes. We’re getting closer.

*(JACK tries to step over his box but can't easily get a leg over. He shrugs and nonchalantly opens a door and steps out. He moves to ANN.)*

JACK

Closer. Now I'm closer. Is that what you mean?

ANN

Not physically. Closer to discovering.

JACK

Oh.

ANN

I talk. I must be alive. That’s human.

JACK

What if it’s a program? We have computer chips.

ANN

Possibly. Then how do I know?

JACK

*'savoir que? [Know what?]*

ANN

Know that I know. Know that I am speaking?
JACK

Echo?

ANN

No. I know that I know because I’m…sentient. *(Taken aback)* Whoa. Where’d that come from?

JACK

What?

ANN

That word. Sentient.

JACK

From you. You said it.

ANN

I know I said it. Where’d it come from?

JACK

*Dans votre tete.* Inside your head.

ANN

My head is filled with stuffing. My stuffing tells me—

JACK

*(Beats her to the answer)* “Etre vivant.” To be “alive.” *(Startled)* How did I know that? *C’est alarmante.* Scary. *(Pause)* Am I alive?

ANN

So far.

JACK

*(Struts around. Each time with more gusto)* Je suis vivant… Je suis vivant… I'm alive… I'm alive!

ANN


JACK

I walk. Therefore I am.

ANN

No.
JACK
No?

ANN
No.

JACK
How do I know if I’m humain?

ANN
To speak. To think. That’s human.

JACK
I knew it!

ANN
There’s got to be more.

JACK
More what?

ANN
To human-ness.

JACK
I’m quite satisfied with what I’ve got.

ANN
Then you’re not human. Humans are never satisfied. Do they buy only one toy? No. They buy truckloads. After Christmas, the broken ones go to the dump.

JACK
Oh, my. Le [the] dump.

ANN
The graveyard.

JACK
Not satisfied. Not satisfied. Be humain! Be humain!

ANN
Greed is good. Greed is good.
JACK
Greed is good! Greed is good!  *(Pause)*  If greed is good, *pourquoi* [why] am I depressed?

ANN
Even better! To be human is to be depressed!

JACK
*J'ai besoin de* [I need] un *docteur* [doctor].

*(SCENE-WITHIN-A-SCENE: MUCIC, like a harp glissando.  ANN goes behind the counter, puts on glasses, flips over a sign which reads, "SICKO-ANALYSIS" and gets a clipboard and pen.)*

ANN
Welcome! You've picked the right place to kick your sickness.

JACK
How do you know I'm sick?

ANN
See the sign: "Sicko-analysis." If you're here, you must be a sicko. What's your problem?

JACK
I have a Pinocchio problem: I am a toy, but I want to be *humain* [human] I want to be *humain*, but I don't want to be sad. What should I do?

ANN
Hmm. Let me see. How about--get well.

JACK
*C'est votre* [that's your] answer?

ANN
The human mind is a dense network of neurotransmitters, and a toy's mind is denser than most. Like a block. A block-head. You can't expect psychiatry to be able to penetrate such thick layers quickly. The process could take years. Even then, there is no guarantee of success. You want a guarantee, go to Wal-Mart. So to save you time and money, we cut to the chase and tell you to get well.

JACK
That's the best you can do?

ANN
That'll be $300, please.
JACK
For five minutes work? You didn't even take my family history.

ANN
Toys don't have a family history. You're an orphan on the shelf.

JACK
*Mais* [But] $300.

ANN
If plumbers can charge $65 for a house call and be done in five minutes, then why can't doctors charge $300?

JACK
But you didn't tell me anything I didn't already know.

ANN
You can always get a second opinion.

JACK
*Non, merci.* [No thanks.] *Je ne suis pas payer* [I can't afford to get] more of nothing for something.

(Scène restores with Harp glissando MUSIC. ANN drops the psychiatrist persona and both characters return downstage.)

ANN
What did you learn?

JACK
To be *humain* is to spend money and not get answers.

ANN
Good. What else do humans do?

JACK
*Ils mangent.* They eat.

ANN
Why not? You have a mouth.

JACK
(Searches. Finds a candy bar on the counter. Takes a bite. Spits it out. ANN laughs.) Patooie! Yuck!
ANN
What’s the matter?

JACK
I have a mouth to take in food. But I have no stomach for it.

ANN
(Beat. Laughs)
You made a joke.

Moi? [Me?]

ANN
“No stomach for it.” Get it? You can’t stand it and you don’t have a stomach.

JACK
Mais oui. [But yes.] I forgot. It was funny, wasn’t it?

Very.

Good enough for stand-up?

JACK
You are standing up.

(Gets it) A joke. You made a joke! (They clasp arms and dance in a circle)

Dancing. Dancing is human.

JACK
We’re getting more humain every minute.

Every minute.

ANN
Wait! Wait! (They stop) A thought.

What?
JACK
Hyenas laugh, n'est-ce pas? [isn't that right?]

ANN
I think so.

JACK
Nous ne sommes pas humain. [we're not human.] Nous sommes [We're] hyenas! (ANN tickles JACK. He runs to avoid her. She follows.) Stop! Stop! You're making me laugh!

ANN
Laugh! (They laugh. Loud guffaws) See. We tickle and laugh. I'd like to see a hyena do that! (Congratulations laugh. High five. They dance in a circle again) Wait! Wait! (They stop) Let's wake up Gerta.

(With exaggerated movements, JACK and ANN tip-toe to the slumped GERTA.)

JACK
Gerta sleeps. Humains sleep. Therefore, she's humain.

ANN
Not until I wake her up.

(ANN flips a switch on GERTA's back. GERTA raises her head, eyes open)

JACK
If she's awake, she's not sleeping. If not sleeping, she's not humain. I'm confused.

GERTA
(Head slowly rises) I hear Christmas music.

JACK
Oui, that time again.

(ANN and JACK sigh)

GERTA
I love Christmas! (GERTA stretches and stands, smiles and begins a ballet then poses oh so prettily. JACK and ANN grossed out at her self-absorption.)

Show off. We should have let her sleep.

ANN
No. No. We need her for our experiment.
GERTA
Has someone bought me yet? I’ll look wonderful under a Christmas tree. I’m so pretty. Is that why you woke me up?

JACK
What’s humain?

GERTA
I beg your pardon.

ANN
We want to know what means to be human. Any ideas?

GERTA
I’m only a doll---a beautiful doll---but I think it means “to sing.”

JACK
Hadn’t thought of that. She could be right. Do you think she’s right?

GERTA
(Dancing, singing off-key) “Jingle Bells, jingle bells, jingle all the wa—aa—yy-y.”

JACK
Pain-ful.

ANN
Pitiful.

GERTA
“over fields we go, laughing all the w—a—a—y—y.”

(GERTA’S tonal trashing continues under the following dialogue)

ANN
Perfect. She’s so bad, she must be human.

JACK
(Covering ears) Hurts so bad I could cry.

ANN
Great idea!

JACK
Gerta, can you cry?

Gerta

Cry? Why would I want to cry? I’m happy all the time.

JACK

We noticed. But can you cry?

Gerta

No. I can’t. I don’t have tear ducts.

Ann

Neither do we. That’s out. (Beat) There must be something else that makes us human.

Gerta

Happiness. Human are happy. (Little dance) Happy—happy—happy!

JACK

Enough with the “happy dance” already. (Rubs stomach) Je me sens mal a l’estomac. [I am getting sick to my stomach.]

Gerta

You don’t have a stomach, remember?

JACK


(Gerta pirouettes around Jack, tucking him under his chin)

Gerta

Who says beautiful, blond, blue-eyed Swiss Miss ballet dancers aren’t smart? (Flirting) Would you like to dance with me? I think you’re very handsome.

JACK

(Flustered) Well… Je ne sais pas [I don’t know]… I’m not very good on my feet…

Ann

Give it a whirl, big guy.

(Gerta and Jack dance, he ever-so awkwardly, bumping into Gerta and stepping on her feet. Gerta grimaces and mouths an "Ouch.")

Ann

May I cut in?
Please do.

(ANN takes JACK's place)

Looks like you were in pain.

Pain? No pain. Although something is wrong with my left foot.

Too bad, no pain. To be human is to feel pain.

Je suis suppose pour danser [I’m supposed to dance] avec la fille! [with the girl!]

What if I want to dance with the girl?

Not you!

Why not me?

(JACK grabs ANN by the arm and pulls her into his arms. They dance a few steps.)

That's why.

Hey! I'm the pretty one!

(GERTA yanks JACK around and slaps his face.)

Courtroom!

(COURTROOM transition MUSIC. The scene morphs into a courtroom. ANN slips on a black robe as the judge and stands behind the toy counter. She turns over a sign that reads "Kangaroo Court." She picks up a huge gavel. GERTA is the plaintiff, JACK the defendant, each standing in front of the counter.)
ANN
(On a stool, banging her gavel) Hear ye, hear ye, the First Circus Court for the State of Catastrophe, County of Kangaroo, is now in session. The Right Honorable Judge R. Ann presiding. All rise!

JACK
Nous sommes standing, votre Honneur [your Honor].

ANN
Just want to be sure. In this court, we have to go through the motions. You may be seated.

GERTA
There are no chairs, your Honor.

ANN
There's no restroom either. Now, who's the plaintiff?

GERTA
I am, your Honor. I am asking a divorce from him.

ANN
From the papers filed with the court, your legal name is Jack Springer. Am I correct?

JACK
Oui. [Yes.]

ANN
You have an English name, but you speak French. How do you explain that?

JACK
My given name is Jacques du Fleur. Mais vous pouvez m'appeler [But you can call me] "Jack."

ANN
Jacques. Sounds foreign. Are you an American citizen?

JACK
Je ne sais pas. [I do not know.]

(Jack struggles, twisting his neck, to read the clothing tag which is on the back of his collar. Like a dog chasing his tail, he spins around and around to read it.)

GERTA
Let me help. (Gerda looks inside the back of Jack's shirt. If Jack wears bloomers, she pulls the waistband back, look, and then lets it snap back.) The label says, "made in China, assembled in Mexico." (She spins back to the other side) At least one of us is the genuine article. I'm 100% Swiss.
(To JACK) You're an illegal.

JACK

*Mon patron* [My owner], *Monsieur* [Mr.] McGready, imported me, so I must be "legal."

ANN

That's what they all say. Occupation?

JACK

Seasonal toy.

ANN

Ah, part-time employment. Poor provider written all over you.

JACK

*Votre Honneur* [Your Honor], *Je dois protester* [I must protest]. Divorce is news to me. We’re not even married.

ANN

What? Unmarried cohabitation? That’s illegal in this state.

JACK

*Je veux mon avocat.* [I want my lawyer]

GERTA

If he can have a lawyer, I want one, too.

ANN

There are no lawyers. They were all used up in the last presidential election.

JACK

I haven’t done anything. *Dire le juge* [Tell the judge], Gerta.

ANN

What do you have to say, young lady?

GERTA

I’m suing Jack for alienation of affection. He jilted me for another woman.

ANN

Who?

GERTA

You!
ANN

(Stands) Me? I’m the judge. I’ve never seen this toy before in my life.

JACK

Can you prove it?

ANN

I don’t have to prove it. These papers prove it. There are affidavits from twenty other toys who saw what you did. It’s so shocking I don’t want to read them. So I won’t. Besides, I don’t have my glasses. Twenty sworn oaths are good enough for me. Remember, I am the law. What I say in this court goes. And I say you, Jack, with malice of forethought, premeditation of action, and clumsy footwork, jilted this poor, defenseless, Swiss Miss. (Pounds gavel) This court finds you guilty, Jack. I sentence you to a fine of $20,000 or death. Take your pick. I call it “cash, or be carried.” Ha!

JACK

Votre Honneur [Your Honor], I wasn’t allowed to tell my side of the story or to provide witnesses.

Tough cookies.

JACK

Je veux un jury [I want a jury] of my peers.

ANN

It's Christmas. All your peers have gone for presents, every one.

JACK

Maintenant, je veux [Now I want] a change of venue.

ANN

(Pounds gavel) Denied.

JACK

Je veux un nouveau juge. [I want a new judge].

ANN

(Pounds gavel) Denied. (Pause) I love saying that.

JACK

Votre Honneur [Your Honor], you treat me like an animal.

ANN

What do you expect? This is a kangaroo court. So what’ll it be? Cash, or beheading?
Isn’t that a bit harsh, your Honor?

Yeah. So? What’ll it be—Moola or mayhem?

*Votre Honneur* [Your honor], I’m broke.

Oh goody. I get to pull the lever. *(Calls)* Bailiff, take him away!

Excuse me, your Honor.

Now what? I thought we were done.

If it pleases the Court, I will loan Jack the money.

You will? *Merci beaucoup!* [Thank you!]

*(JACK runs to GERTA, kissing her on both cheeks)*

No, it doesn’t please the Court, young lady. You’ve spoiled my fun.

You’ve made my day.

I say he dies.

Lives.

Dies.

Lives.

Rock, paper, scissors.
ANN
You’re on. Tell ya what, if you win, Jack goes free. Like that's gonna happen. On the count of three...one, two, three!

(ANN as The judge tosses “rock,” GERTA “paper” and JACK “scissors”)

ANN
(To JACK) You lose.

GERTA
(To JACK) Stay out of it! This is between the judge and me. Again! One, two, three!
(ANN does “paper,” GERTA "scissors."

GERTA
I win!

JACK
I live!

ANN
I will not have it in the legal record that a decision of mine has been overturned in such a frivolous manner. I don’t care if they did it in U.S. v. Gore. (She tears up the affidavits. Pounds gavel) Case dismissed for lack of evidence!

(SCENE RESTORES with music as before. All cheer. While ANN sheds her robe, JACK and GERTA return downstage. Back in the toy store, they dance. GERTA stops. Her foot is hurting.)

JACK
Incroyable! [Incredible!] I guess that’s what it means to be humain: a courtroom, a judge, lawyers—

ANNE and GERTA

No lawyers!

JACK
—affidavits, testimony, ruling, guilt or innocence, punishment—

ANN
—drama, conflict, human emotion, life or death, resolution.

JACK
Incroyable! [Incredible!] Humains experience all that.
GERTA
I have. That makes me human—almost. But at heart I’m still a beautiful doll. I wish someone would buy me. I’m too pretty to stay on the shelf. I want to be wrapped and unwrapped and pampered and played with.

(GERTA tries to dance, but she stumbles because her left foot is broken)

JACK
*Qu'est-ce le problème?* [What's the matter?]

GERTA
Something's wrong with my foot. I can't put any weight on it.

JACK
*Desole.* [Sorry.] It's my fault. I'm really sorry.

ANN
Let me look at it. *Examine foot* It's shattered.

JACK
Too bad. If you were Seabiscuit, they'd put a cast on it.

ANN
It's over, kid. No Christmas wrap for you. It's scrap city, baby.

GERTA
It can be fixed. I can be fixed!

ANN
You know the rules.

JACK
*Monsieur* [Mr.] McGready won't sell any defective merchandise.

ANN
He can't send you back to the factory for an inventory credit. That factory doesn't exist anymore. A band of Zetas tried to kill a drug informant, and all the Mexican workers were killed.

GERTA
Then cover for me. At least let me be someone's present. Let me be wanted if only for one day. Mom or dad can bring me back for a refund. But at least I will have had my moment. In shiny silver paper under a tree. Hearing a pretty girl squeal in delight as she rips the wrapping. Seeing my pretty, smiling face. I want that moment. Please.

JACK
You know the rules.

GERTA
Humans make and break rules all the time. What's so different about this? I am changing the rules. I say I stay!

JACK
We follow the rules.

GERTA
I have worth. I have value. I am somebody!

ANN
Humans are masters at discarding. We could build cities out what they throw away. If something isn't new, it's not worth saving. If it's not perfect, it's not worth fixing. Humans dump their couches, pouches, houses, blouses, spouses, and you think you have a leg to stand on? Get with it. If it's new, it's on view. If it sells, it stays. If it's defective, it's exterminated.

(JACK assists GERTA to her feet)

GERTA
At least send me to Goodwill.

JACK
Aller à la chambre! [Go to the room!]

GERTA
Salvation Army?

ANN
Go to the room!

GERTA
Give me to a crippled girl!

JACK
Aller! Aller vous à la chambre, maintenant! [Go to the room, now!]

GERTA
I won't! I won't! There's a little girl out there somewhere who wants me, you'll see. I won't cheat her of me!

(GERTA attempts to run but only hobbles)

ANN
Grab her!

(GERTA, hobbling, tries to fervently to escape. ANN and JACK catch her. GERTA struggles as they drag her offstage. For a moment...silence. A Christmas carol begins...and then a scream followed by a loud crunch from a machine. Silence again. ANN and JACK re-enter, JACK carrying GERTA's apron, ANN...something else.)

JACK

Forte petite ballerine [strong little ballerina], even with a game foot.

ANN

Souvenir?

(ANN tosses JACK what's left of GERTA's crushed leg.)

JACK

(Tosses limb back like “hot potato”) Cela est malade! [That's sick!]

ANN

(Laughs) Never know when you need a leg to stand on.

JACK

Nous la tuons. We killed Gerta.

ANN

That proves it. We're human. Experiment complete.

JACK

We killed Gerta. Comprenez-vous? [Don't you understand?]

ANN

I see you have a conscience, another human quality.

JACK

Nous avez [We have] blood on our hands!

ANN

Paint, maybe, but not blood.

JACK

Comment boite vous dites cela? [How can you say that?]

ANN

That was humor. Didn't you find that funny?

JACK

Soudain, j'ai perdu [I've suddenly lost] mon appetit [my appetite] for humor.
ANN

JACK
J'ai non appetite pour vous. [I have no appetite for you.]

(JACK crosses downstage and sits, arms crossed, head down. ANN moves to him)

ANN
Jack?

JACK
Je ne suis pas intelligent [I am not smart] comme vous [like you], but I…I…have—

ANN
Compassion. You have compassion. (ANN kneels and hugs JACK) That makes you more human than me.

(JACK pulls away, stands)

JACK
Choses [Things] auraient pu aller [could've gone] the other way. Mademoiselle Ann… vous termine dans le [you ended up in the] dumpster press. Tout pour quelque experiment stupide. [All for some stupid experiment.] Stupide! [Stupid!]

ANN
I see that now.

JACK
What will Monsieur [Mr.] McGready say when he can't find Gerta?

ANN
He'll look around and eventually find the pieces. Probably think his stock boy did it.

(ANN picks up GERTA's leg and gives it to JACK)

This is Not the End of the Play
Ending Intentionally Omitted for Security Purposes