





# **The School and Its Many Pasts**

## **III: Collective Memories of School**

edited by Juri Meda and Roberto Sani



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SECTION *The Representation of School between Press, Literature and  
Collective Imaginary*





# Iconographical Sources and History of Italian Schools in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries

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## 1. *History of education's pictorial turn*

After decades of debate dating back at least to Philippe Ariès's revolutionary and much debated *L'enfant et la vie familiale sous l'Ancien Régime* (1960)<sup>1</sup>, it can be said that historical research today, especially that into social history, fully categorises images as autonomous sources, on a par with traditional written sources<sup>2</sup>. Ariès, further expanding on the already wide ranging research perspectives brought in by the *Annales* School in his later work, *Essai sur l'histoire de la mort en Occident du Moyen Âge à nos jours*<sup>3</sup>, lucidly identifies the quality of historical sources produced by human creativity in its aesthetic orientation, like art and literature, seeing them with the most far reaching nonchalance in their fullest heterogeneity. In the 1975 *Preface* to this work, Ariès argues that:

this method is considered suspect today because it also uses noble materials and it is thought that this aesthetic quality, attributed to an elite, does not convey common feelings. A theological thought, an artistic or literary theme, namely everything that seems to rely on individualistic inspiration, can only take shape and style if it is simultaneously very close to an era's general feelings and a little different from it. If they were less close, it would not even be conceivable by its creators and understood by either the elite or the masses. On the contrary, in the absence of the difference, they would pass unobserved and would not cross the artistic threshold. Proximity gives us the vernacular, the era's common denominator. Diversity encompasses ambitions to "tomorrowness" or, by contrast, a prophetic trumpeting of future change. Historians must be able to distinguish between such proximities and diversities. On this certainly risky condition, historians are entitled to take good where they find it, from wide ranging and heterogeneous material, to compare documents of various kinds<sup>4</sup>.

\* Lorenzo Cantatore wrote sections 1 and 4; Luca Silvestri sections 2 and 3.

<sup>1</sup> P. Ariès, *L'enfant et la vie familiale sous l'Ancien Régime*, Paris, Seuil, 1960; *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, English translation by R. Baldick, London, Pimlico, 1996.

<sup>2</sup> C. Pavone, *Prima lezione di storia contemporanea*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2007, p. 107; P. Burke, *Eyewitnessing. The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence*, London, Reaktion Books, 2001, p. 9. One of the theoretical-methodological objectives of Aby Warburg's work, too, as Burke stressed, was to «create a cultural history based equally on images and texts» (*ibid.*, p. 14).

<sup>3</sup> P. Ariès, *Essai sur l'histoire de la mort en Occident du Moyen Âge à nos jours*, Paris, Seuil, 1975; *Western Attitudes Toward Death from the Middle Ages to the Present*, English translation by P.M. Ranum, Baltimore-London, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975.

<sup>4</sup> The *Preface* of 1975 is absent from the English edition of the work. The quoted translation refers to the French edition: Id., *Essai sur l'histoire de la mort en Occident du Moyen Âge à nos jours*, cit., pp. 11-12.

Shored up by a great deal of subsequent wide ranging international enquiry<sup>5</sup>, Ariès's approach undoubtedly allows us to talk of a pictorial turn in historical studies, too<sup>6</sup>. This was a full-blown watershed in both the way historical documents (testimony) are to be understood and historians' perceptual and critical elaboration attitudes. At the same time, it also involves radically casting doubt on the text-based perspective, which gave written documents (mainly institutional and official in nature) absolute pre-eminence over other sources. In fact even when these latter were taken into consideration (from the starting point of visual sources) their validity always needed to be confirmed by written words. Horst Bredekamp's consideration on *image acts* can be considered to be valid for historians too<sup>7</sup>. According to him, in parallel with linguistic acts, the difficulty behind image acts consists in identifying the power which enables images to make the leap from a state of latency to exterior efficacy in the perception, thought and behaviour fields via visual or tactile fruition. Bredekamp claims that, in this sense, the efficacy of the iconic act is to be understood on the perceptual, thought and behaviour planes as triggered by the power of the image itself as well as the interactive relationship of those looking, at, touching and listening to it<sup>8</sup>.

This realisation has led to a process of fundamentally important renewal and relaunching of interdisciplinary relations and the very language of historiography in addition, naturally, to scholarly interpreting, critiquing and writing creativity (now necessarily prompted to measure up to the emotional and aesthetic dimensions of the new type of sources too), as well as the packaging of the products of research increasingly encompassing iconographic frameworks to progressively greater efficacy<sup>9</sup>.

One of the problems on which the concrete effect of this pictorial turn in historical enquiry can be measured relates to what is known as the «apparent realism»<sup>10</sup> of the iconic sources and the consequent need to hone interpretative tools. Historians using testimony of this type have to be aware that they are dealing with “texts” which have, in turn, interpreted the contexts and circumstances in which they were produced. Naturally, rather than limiting the value of their testimony, this amplifies it, as long as the person using such sources is able to interpret the historical value of their iconographical, stylistic and technical meaning and the non-secondary role of the original target. However much it distorts reality, a work of art is still a product of it, documenting it also by turning it on its head or rejecting it. As Burke has aptly explained:

<sup>5</sup> See R.J. Rotberg, T.K. Rabb (edd.), *Art and History. Images and Their Meaning*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011.

<sup>6</sup> Burke, *Eyewitnessing*, cit., p. 12; cf. W.J.T. Mitchell, *The Pictorial Turn*, «Artforum», n. 30, 1992, pp. 89-94.

<sup>7</sup> H. Bredekamp, *Theorie des Bildakts*, Berlin, Suhrkamp, 2010; *Image Acts: A Systematic Approach to Visual Agency*, English translation by E. Clegg, Berlin-Boston, De Gruyter, 2018, pp. 33-35.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> In this respect I like to cite a recent attractive work by R. Sani, *La leggenda del santo educatore. Filippo Neri tra agiografia e rivitalizzazione della tradizione pedagogica nel passaggio dalla società di antico regime all'età borghese (secoli XVII-XX)*, Macerata, eum, 2021, in which an analysis of attitudes to the saint figure in subsequent centuries is based on a detailed analysis of iconographical documents and of both erudite and popular language.

<sup>10</sup> Burke, *Eyewitnessing*, cit., p. 115.

representational art is often less realistic than it seems and distorts social reality rather than reflecting it, so that historians who do not take account of the variety of the intentions of painters or photographers (not to mention their patrons and clients) can be seriously misled. However [...] the process of distortion is itself evidence of phenomena that many historians want to study: mentalities, ideologies and identities. The material or literal image is good evidence of the mental or metaphorical “image” of the self or of others<sup>11</sup>.

For this reason, too, historians wanting to try their hands at using visual sources need to be capable, either alone or with art scholars, of understanding how the language of art functions (in the same way as should happen with literary sources), taking account of the meaning of the technical-formal and social aspects of the artefact, aspects which are sometimes more decisive, in historical testimony terms, than the subjects portrayed in them. «The very way in which artists represent men and the world», suggest Rotberg and Rabb, «can be as meaningful as the objects they choose to represent. It is relatively easy to describe the stylistic differences in landscape paintings by Claude Gallée and Claude Monet, but to attribute these differences merely to technique, or to regard them as of secondary importance, is to minimize the value of art in understanding the past»<sup>12</sup>.

## 2. *The history of school in Mario Alighiero Manacorda's Storia illustrata dell'educazione: three possible methodologies*

Within the panorama of Italian studies on the relationship between history and images, Mario Alighiero Manacorda's 1992 *Storia illustrata dell'educazione*<sup>13</sup> constitutes the first example of an iconographical history of education<sup>14</sup>. Analysing the theme of the history of schooling from Italian Unification to the Fascist period from the starting point of this pioneering historiographical case study, which devoted two of its eleven chapters, the ninth and the tenth, to the “Kingdom of Italy” and “The Early Twentieth Century” respectively, was thus held to be of a certain interest<sup>15</sup>. However, prior to getting down to this by means of two specific case studies (dealt with in section 4), we must first place these within the work's more general methodological framework set out in its Premise.

Beginning by defining illustrated history, and in line with the most cutting-edge historic research on the subject<sup>16</sup>, Manacorda wrote:

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 35-36.

<sup>12</sup> Rotberg, Rabb, *Introduction*, in Rotberg, Rabb (edd.), *Art and History. Images and their Meaning*, cit., pp. 5-6.

<sup>13</sup> M.A. Manacorda, *Storia illustrata dell'educazione. Dall'antico Egitto ai giorni nostri*, Firenze, Giunti, 1992.

<sup>14</sup> I examined this theme on the occasion of the XVII Congresso Nazionale del CIRSE (Messina, 26-28 maggio 2022) with a paper entitled *La storia dell'educazione attraverso le immagini: Mario Alighiero Manacorda e l'uso delle fonti iconografiche come frontiera della ricerca storico-educativa in Italia*, which will be published in the conference proceedings by the journal «RSE» in 2023.

<sup>15</sup> These are, respectively, Manacorda, *Storia illustrata dell'educazione*, cit., pp. 186-207 and 208-229.

<sup>16</sup> Burke, *Eyewitnessing*, cit., p. 10.

For an illustrated story to be described as such it must not only have many illustrations, alongside its narrative (and its documents) but these must act as testimony of equal worth. [...] All this [iconographical] material, used to-date only for illustrative purposes, in a secondary role as compared to traditional history, can, we might say, also serve as primary narrative if it speaks primarily of what it represents and what is narrated elsewhere<sup>17</sup>.

For Manacorda this definition constituted an ideal that could be put into practice in three different ways in methodological terms. These are set out analytically here, both to understand the cultural backdrop Manacorda was measuring up to in choosing his historical iconographical method and with a view to examining recent work around the nexus between iconographical historiography and the history of Italian schooling more critically.

The first methodological option is described by Manacorda as a work of «pure documentation [...], namely a collection of documents which leaves all interpretation to readers»<sup>18</sup>. This option can be called iconographical research's bottom line, preferring «the objectivity of images» in juxtaposition to «inevitably subjective historical interpretation»<sup>19</sup>. It might reasonably be supposed that this theoretical possibility conceals a previous historian who is, by no means randomly, cited in the work's final bibliography<sup>20</sup>: *Album of Greek Education* by F.A.G. Beck<sup>21</sup>. This same author calls his own work a «source book»<sup>22</sup> because it is made up exclusively of 425 images accompanied by limited technical captions free of interpretative references. Whilst considering this a viable option, Manacorda declares his desire to produce a work in which images are also accompanied by interpretation in such a way as to give readers the twofold chance to take advantage of reading keys unknown to them and to look at images alone and autonomously to interpret them personally<sup>23</sup>.

The second methodological option consists of «starting precisely from these material and figurative documents and then commenting them in such a way as to clarify their contents, both in their details (frequently difficult to read) and as a whole and in their historical context»<sup>24</sup>. In this case, too, it can be assumed that Manacorda is referring to two real cases that he cites in his bibliography and which are now kept at his library at *Università degli Studi Roma Tre's* MuSEd: Robert Alt's *Bilderatlas zur Schul — und Erziehungsgeschichte*<sup>25</sup> and the fourth volume of the *Man Through His Art* series devoted to education<sup>26</sup>. In both these works, the image's objective data is summarised with subjective

<sup>17</sup> Manacorda, *Storia illustrata dell'educazione*, cit., p. 8.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 257.

<sup>21</sup> F.A.G. Beck, *Album of Greek Education. The Greeks at Schools and at Play*, Sydney, Cheiron press, 1975.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>23</sup> Manacorda, *Storia illustrata dell'educazione*, cit., p. 9.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>25</sup> R. Alt, *Bilderatlas zur Schul — und Erziehungsgeschichte*, 2 Bände, Berlin, Volk und Wissen Volkseigener Verlag, 1960-1964.

<sup>26</sup> A. De Silva, O. Von Simson, P. Troutman (edd.), *Man Through His Art*, Vol. 4: *Education*, London, Educational Productions Limited, 1966.

interpretation which, above all, in contrast to traditional historiographical custom, uses images as primary sources and as on a par with the others in historical reconstruction worth terms. Whilst Manacorda states that «my primary intention was precisely this, I admit»<sup>27</sup>, he nonetheless discards this option, having identified its limitation as generating a history characterised by «an inevitably fragmentary nature»<sup>28</sup>.

From the starting point of the considerations Manacorda makes on his first two methodological options, it is interesting to focus on two of the most innovative projects on the relationship between the history of Italian school and iconography to have been produced in Italy in recent years: *FotoEdu – Archivi fotografici per la storia della scuola e dell'educazione* of INDIRE<sup>29</sup> and the *Illustrazioni e opere d'arte* database on the *Memoria Scolastica* platform produced by PRIN “School Memories between Social Perception and Collective Representation (Italy, 1861-2001)”<sup>30</sup>. Whilst presenting themselves as iconographical databases, both projects differentiate themselves from the first methodological option examined by equipping the individual images with identification info encompassing not only technical data (subject, storage location, production date) but also an interpretative synopsis. On the other hand, however, they avert the risk of fragmentation inherent to the second methodological option by their claims to supplying not a historical narrative but a scientifically structured collection of sources to be used for future and more general reconstructions.

Lastly, the third methodological option, the one preferred by Manacorda, is described thus: «The figurative material can also be used [...] alongside the full-blown historical discourse (which performs a reconstruction of the matter of its own) in such a way as to corroborate it and make it concretely visible»<sup>31</sup>. Via an incisive metaphor it is argued that whilst the second methodological option gives us simply fragments, photograms, of educational history, by associating words and images as autonomous and reciprocally clarifying sources, the third option ensures that «the individual fragments move and take shape (like a film reel) in a sort of living painting»<sup>32</sup>. Although she makes no explicit reference to Manacorda's work in her 2002 *Scuola*, Ester De Fort reconstructs the Italian school parable precisely by associating words and images symmetrically, with the latter taken, in her case, from the Alinari Foundation's photographic collection<sup>33</sup>.

<sup>27</sup> Manacorda, *Storia illustrata dell'educazione*, cit., p. 8.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> <https://fotoedu.indire.it/> (last access: 06.12.2022).

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/> (last access: 06.12.2022).

<sup>31</sup> Manacorda, *Storia illustrata dell'educazione*, cit., p. 8.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>33</sup> E. De Fort, *Scuola*, in M. Firpo, P.G. Zunino (edd.), *La storia e le sue immagini. L'Italia dall'Unità a oggi*, vol. II, Milano, Garzanti, 2002, pp. 225-264.

### 3. *Two Italian school case studies in Mario Alighiero Manacorda's Storia illustrata dell'educazione*

It would be impossible to analyse all 91 images making up the Italian iconographical narrative from Unification to Fascism in *Storia illustrata dell'educazione*. We will thus focus on two specific case studies which are emblematic of the way in which Manacorda's work on the iconographical sources took concrete shape.

Manacorda's history of education in Italy begins with the Casati Law's frontispiece<sup>34</sup>, followed by certain images showing school as this law conceived of it<sup>35</sup>. In particular, an illustration drawn from a book, on which Manacorda supplies no further specific bibliographical data<sup>36</sup>, portrays school divided up into two classes by gender as required by the law (Legge Casati, art. 319). Furthermore, male teachers taught boys and female teachers taught girls, in this case too, as required by the law (Legge Casati, art. 324). Lastly, the pupils are shown sitting neatly at their desks and absorbed in their school work in a perfectly ordered classroom.

Whilst he conceived the illustrations as a powerful tool in finding out more about the real state of affairs, Manacorda cannot be called an image «positivist», as defined by Burke as those who ingenuously «consider that images» *sic et simpliciter* «transmit reliable information on the outside world»<sup>37</sup>. In fact, in this case, Manacorda does not see the image described as constituting proof that the Casati Law came to fruition but writes, in his caption: «this is how the *ideal* school was presented»<sup>38</sup>. On the other hand, he disagreed with the image «sceptics», Stephen Bann style<sup>39</sup>, demonstrating that it is via other images (and not via other types of sources) that testimony on a school other than ideal was to be had: the «boring school» of inattentive, forlorn children with their textbooks<sup>40</sup>; the dunce's corner<sup>41</sup> and the rod tradition<sup>42</sup>, which survived as a result of the absence of constraints on corporal punishment or humiliations by the Casati Law (articles 143-147, 229). We might conclude by saying that, for Manacorda, the pros and cons of images, like documentary sources, were that they are in themselves neither true nor false, but the expression of a historical period both in their ideal aspirations and their contradictory and multifaceted real implementation.

The second case examined is a photograph of the best twenty-four Rome pupils of the year 1924, which Manacorda uses as an insight into the selective and class-prejudiced nature of the school envisaged by the Gentile Reform<sup>43</sup>. This interpretation can be confirmed by the fact that the photograph's 'commendable' children are dressed in their

<sup>34</sup> Manacorda, *Storia illustrata dell'educazione*, cit., fig. 1, p. 188.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, figg. 1, 3, 4, pp. 194-195.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, fig. 3, p. 194.

<sup>37</sup> Burke, *Eyewitnessing*, cit. p. 184.

<sup>38</sup> Manacorda, *Storia illustrata dell'educazione*, cit., p. 195 (italics not present in the original).

<sup>39</sup> Burke, *Eyewitnessing*, cit. pp. 183-184.

<sup>40</sup> Manacorda, *Storia illustrata dell'educazione*, cit., fig. 1-2, p. 196.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, fig. 6, p. 197.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, fig. 2, p. 204.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, fig. 2, p. 218.

fashionable Sunday best, something which implies that they came from the wealthy classes the Gentile Reform targeted and contrasting, as Manacorda wrote, with the «cultural elevation of the masses»<sup>44</sup>. A more careful examination, however, shows that one child, fourth right on the front row, is wearing a long and severe black cloak, in contrast with the other pupils. Might this have been a high achieving pupil not from a wealthy family? The photo's caption gives no information on the subject, but an autobiographical account by Manacorda elsewhere is of considerable interest:

In 1924, at the end of my primary school education, I suffered one of the greatest humiliations of my life. I was recognised as one of the best twenty-four pupils in Rome. It was a small mark of Fascism's elitist, still Gentile-style, schooling policy. We were photographed in the courtyard of *Liceo Visconti* [...] right in front of the man himself [...]. The other twenty-three best pupils were dressed in their Sunday best: [...] I alone wore the pathetic uniform of my boarding school, which was a profound humiliation for me. There I am, stiff, disconsolate and haggard with my legs crossed, right over left, in an unnatural pose, symptomatic of my deep embarrassment<sup>45</sup>.

The identical date makes it likely that this child was none other than Manacorda himself. Two considerations can be drawn from this. From the point of view of the class-based nature of the Gentile Reform, Manacorda's presence in the photograph does not contradict this. Whilst it is true that, after the premature death of his father, Giuseppe Manacorda, the family experienced hardship and the children went into orphanages<sup>46</sup>, the Manacorda remained middle class and Giovanni Gentile himself kept the memory of the family alive<sup>47</sup>. In methodological terms, this is certainly an unusual use of an autobiographical type illustrated source for the purposes of general history reconstruction. It is an idea worthy of future study: systematically including images in the primarily documentary autobiographical sources used for education and schooling history, images that have the potential to link up micro and macro histories, private with public, on a par with the others, just as Manacorda envisaged:

[...] I have deliberately alternated macro and micro history data. *In minimis videtur deus*: it is little things which are most revealing of reality. It is up to the reader to judge whether this illustrated history is simply "little things" or whether these little things, which normally remain hidden, can help us to understand "big things" (or those generally considered such), of what should be, but isn't, the biggest of things, people's education<sup>48</sup>.

<sup>44</sup> Id., *Momenti di storia della pedagogia*, Torino, Loescher, 1977, p. 167.

<sup>45</sup> Id., *La mia scuola sotto il fascismo*, in G. Genovesi (ed.), *C'ero anch'io!: a scuola nel Ventennio, ricordi e riflessioni*, Napoli, Liguori, 2010, p. 28.

<sup>46</sup> *L'intervista*, edited by A. Semeraro, in A. Semeraro (ed.), *L'educazione dell'uomo completo. Scritti in onore di Mario Alighiero Manacorda*, Scandicci, La Nuova Italia, pp. 296-297.

<sup>47</sup> The unorganised part of Fondo Manacorda dealing with correspondence contains a number of letters from Gentile to the Manacorda family.

<sup>48</sup> Manacorda, *Storia illustrata dell'educazione*, cit., p. 9.



#### 4. *The images and history of Italian school. Two reading exercises*

In the field of the historical study of childhood, education, school and the educational institutions, the pictorial turn undoubtedly has great potential. Italian historiography has already shown wide-ranging awareness of the hermeneutic stimulus potential of the arts and iconic testimony, including that of folk origin, on the occasion of the great Venetian exhibition of 1999<sup>49</sup>. In particular, in reference to the chronological time frame examined here, a great range of documents is available in both the painting and sculpture and printed illustration fields with their specific but, at the same time, growing audiences, as in the case of children's literature. It is precisely from the starting point of the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in fact, that «art production for a general and not wealthy audience spread like wildfire into the general public, including the lower and middle bourgeoisie», reflecting «an evolving society turning inwards to examine itself and its historical context and showing an interest in subjects and issues to-date little considered»<sup>50</sup>. Childhood, education and school were among these.

For the purposes of performing a reading of iconographical sources as testimony to specific cultural, ideological and material aspects of the history of Italian schooling in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, we would like here to shine a spotlight on two extremely different artists of equal significance as regards the social impact of school institutions and the way they were perceived by the artists themselves and the audiences their work was designed for: Demetrio Cosola (1851-1895) and Leo Lionni (1910-1999).

Cosola, a Piedmontese painter, was a characteristic exponent of post-Romantic realism strongly influenced, in his choice of subject, by the values of a changing society and by themes such as the presence of children among adults, public health prevention and state education. There are three versions of the work *Il dettato*, an oil painting on canvas dating to 1890 (cm. 144 x 94), a pastel painting dating to 1891 (cm. 185 x 95, figure 1) and an undated and lost oil painting on canvas *L'asilo* (cm. 90 x 54)<sup>51</sup>. These were especially intense and significant years in terms of the political, cultural and social tensions the national identity building process was replete with. Many artists took part in this collective effort, on a par with the institutions. In this work Cosola, reflecting various aspects of the Casati Law (1859) and what Edmondo De Amicis had done a few years earlier with the novel *Cuore* (1886), decided to immortalise the great school “theatre” and within it, one of the symbol scenes of basic education: the dictation. We know neither who the work was painted for nor the circumstances it was painted in. What we do know, in light of its three versions, is that the subject must have been central to the artist's interest at length. Whilst the angle of the painting remained the same – from

<sup>49</sup> N.M. Filippini, T. Plebani (edd.), *La scoperta dell'infanzia: cura, educazione e rappresentazione. Venezia 1750-1930*, Venezia, Marsilio, 1999.

<sup>50</sup> R. Bossaglia, *L'immagine del bambino nell'arte italiana dall'Ottocento agli anni Venti*, in *Infanzie. Il bambino nell'arte tra '800 e '900*, Torino, Regione Piemonte, 2001, p. 8.

<sup>51</sup> *Demetrio Cosola* [exhibition catalogue (Chivasso 27 October-25 November 2001)], Milano, Electa, 2001, pp. 34, 35, 148, 149; V. Valecchi, *Il dettato*, in *Banca dati delle opere d'arte sulla scuola*, DOI: 10.53220/1243, published on: 31.01.2022 (last access: 12.12.2022).



above, vertical, narrow, modelled on the elongated form of the desk which, precisely as a result of the angle, is tangibly centre-stage and central to the whole painting, material and symbolic starting point of the very notion of education – the three versions differ in the presence of the teacher, who was absent in the 1890 oil painting, young stylish and distinguished in the 1891 pastel painting and dressed as a nun in the lost oil painting. Two great themes interweave throughout these alternative scenes, the secular nature of school (evident in the shift from the nun to the female teacher, a novel figure in many social contexts both urban and rural, but also a new artistic and literary subject<sup>52</sup>) and the gender issue. Women's education – female teachers, female pupils – the feminising of the teaching profession, pupil separation by gender. And the backdrop to all this is the geographical map of the Kingdom of Italy, the starting point and, at the same time, the ideological finishing post of that specific historic juncture, further material testimony – in addition to the desk – of the rhetorical framework revolving around the scene as a whole, emphatically oriented towards fostering the importance of school, its methods and its goals.

Seventy years later, in 1959, we come across the most «aggressively modern»<sup>53</sup> illustrated picture book of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, *Piccolo blu e piccolo giallo*, by the Italian-American Leo Lionni. A historic and cultural context (McCarthy-era USA and informal art, authoritarian policies, social issues, artistic research and experimentation) that was a world away from Cosola's and, above all, a new artistic subject in the language (simultaneously visual and verbal), technique (collage) and style (abstract) used and its target audience (primarily children), production ambit (children's book publishing) and, consequently, the product's degree of socialisation. This illustrated children's book published on the cusp of a decade, the 1960s, which was to see the authoritarianism of traditional schooling and its methods questioned across the West. The eighth picture focuses precisely on this subject (figure 2). It is only on this page that Lionni uses the cutting rather than tearing technique, at the cost of a «certain vitality»<sup>54</sup> which torn coloured paper gave him. And once again, this includes the entire book's only geometric figure, a rectangle with a black background to symbolise the school classroom, a rigid and bleak image. Geometry, in this case, is a limit which, Foucault style, conjures up a place, an idea, a constrictive and oppressive educational practice, a geometric mortification of children's vitality. Portrayed as torn coloured paper discs, in this image alone children are aligned symmetrically in three rows «still and composed»<sup>55</sup>. A situation exacerbated by the verb «must» below. The teacher's desk and the teacher are never visible but the area set aside for them is there and the observer can imagine them, which means that they are entirely absorbed by the black background, sign of a total uniformity between the authoritarianism of the school institution and that of the people and methods governing

<sup>52</sup> C. Covato, *Un'identità divisa. Diventare maestra in Italia fra Otto e Novecento*, Roma, Archivio Guido Izzi, 1996; A. Ascenzi, *Drammi privati e pubbliche virtù. La maestra italiana dell'Ottocento tra narrazione letteraria e cronaca giornalistica*, Macerata, eum, 2012.

<sup>53</sup> L. Lionni, *Tra i miei mondi. Un'autobiografia*, edited by M. Negri, F. Cappa, Roma, Donzelli, 2014, p. 252.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 235.

<sup>55</sup> *Id.*, *Piccolo Blu e Piccolo Giallo*, Milano, Babalibri, 2010.

them. Their exclusion-inclusion underlines their negative importance<sup>56</sup>. It should not be overlooked that the next picture, the ninth, conflicts tangibly with the eighth, depicting children outside school, against a white background, happily “messy” in the open space, free and self-directed.

Whilst it is true that «historian needs to read between the lines, noting the small but significant details – including significant absences – and using them as clues to information which the image-makers did not know they knew, or to assumptions they were not aware of holding»<sup>57</sup>, we must conclude that the two images analysed, however different the moments in the history of art they derive from, are both packed with details documenting practice, ideals, perhaps experience, aspirations, condemnation and stereotypes and also, lastly, a way of artists taking a stance as regards school “rules”, experienced by Cosola as an aspiration and by Lionni as a prison.

<sup>56</sup> Burke, *Eyewitnessing*, cit., pp. 173-174.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 188.

# Between History and Memory: the School Souvenir Portrait in Spain

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## *Introduction*<sup>1</sup>

As Antonio Rodríguez de las Heras stated, photography is a fragment of time and space, the result of a composition, of a look<sup>2</sup>. This enables the photograph to act, at the level of historical research, as a certificate of presence. It can be said that what appears in the photo – above all when old photographs are used (much more so than with current, digital ones, which may have been manipulated more easily) – is something that existed at the time the photograph was taken.

Hence, the photograph acts as a certificate of presence or of pre-existence of objects, spaces, persons, ecc. But this certificatory function is not what interests us, or at least is not our only interest; because although the photograph can verify the pre-existence of objects, spaces, or persons, it cannot verify what actually happened. Influenced by the need to believe only what “we see with our own eyes”, we tend to confer on the photograph properties it does not have. It does not show us the past, as the past does not exist; the photograph is always a representation of something through elements and choreographies. The photograph is not a historical testimony of what was, but rather of what was considered to be or what was made out to be.

In the words of Joan Fontcuberta,

Every photograph is a fiction with pretensions to truth. Despite everything that we have been inculcated, all that we believe, photography always lies; it lies instinctively, lies because its nature does not allow it to do anything else. But what is important is not that inevitable lie. What is important is how the photographer uses it, what interests it serves. What is important, in short, is the control exercised by the photographer to impose an ethical direction on their lie. The good photographer is the one who lies «the truth well»<sup>3</sup>.

Photography is, then, a way of seeing reality, a glance at what has happened, constructed by a historical subject with an imaginary, a culture, a sensitivity, and mental frameworks

<sup>1</sup> Work carried out in the framework of the project *PID2020-113677GB-I00*, funded by MCIN/AEI/10.13039/501100011033.

<sup>2</sup> A. Rodríguez de las Heras, *L'ús pedagògic de la fotografia històrica*. «Educació i Història: revista d'Història de l'Educació», n. 15, 2010, pp. 41-54.

<sup>3</sup> J. Fontcuberta, *El beso de Judas. Fotografía y verdad*, Barcelona, Gustavo Gili, 1997, p. 15.

that lead to reality being interpreted in a certain way. Like every image, the photograph is no neutral element, it always has a certain intention. As Peter Burke stated, «Anyone attempting to use the testimony of an image would be well advised to start by studying its author's intended purpose»<sup>4</sup>. Yet this mediated, subjective cut-out of reality is also found in written documents on which, occasionally with such confidence, historians base their conclusions. Through photography, historians may also reach, as they do with many texts, oral sources, or objects, an approximation – oftentimes complex and difficult – that can improve our knowledge as to how symbolic universes, imaginary referents, and collective mentalities were constructed.

Photography related to the world of school and education, interpreted critically and in parallel with other historical sources, can bring us closer to the idea of the ideal model of education and school that exists at each historical moment. School and educational photography in general has a lot to do with scenography at the service of the dissemination and spreading of a particular educational and school model, whether it is to capture the order and authority, to show what is innovative, or to justify a certain model of school or education. Moreover, when we observe an old school photograph, we do not see the past, but rather we make present again something that no longer exists; the image represents, makes what is absent, what is dead, imaginarily present, and even alive. Hence the evocative power of photography, and its momentous importance in the construction of school memory.

### 1. *The school souvenir portrait*

This type of photograph is easily recognisable to anyone, and even more so in the Spanish context, where most families have one of these portraits in their family album. These are the portraits of boys or girls who, albeit alone or accompanied by a sibling, appear in the photograph surrounded by one or more elements and symbols that are normally identified with school, although not necessarily always and not necessarily all of them. These are photographs taken by a professional, who either offered to do so or was commissioned by the school, with a commercial objective that is none other than the sale of the “print” to the families.

With great impact in Spain from the 1940s onwards, albeit not exclusively, as the practice of using this type of portrait as a school souvenir was also common in other countries, these photographs have formed an indisputable part of the collective imaginary, which is why we immediately identify them with the school. School souvenir portraits can end up being very different from each other, perhaps depending on the aesthetic guidelines of each period, the traditions of each place, the possibilities of each photographer. On some occasions a more classical style of portraiture is used, with few accessories and with simple backgrounds that are not necessarily associated with the

<sup>4</sup> P. Burke, *Visto y no visto*, Barcelona, Crítica, 2001, p. 22.



Fig. 1. School portrait of Andreu Comas, school year 1942/43. Author: Foto Martín. Owner: F. Comas



Fig. 2. School portrait of two sisters, 1942-43. Author: unknown. Owner: Agrupació Fotogràfica d'Algaida

school, but they are mounted on a piece of cardboard stating that it is a school souvenir. In others, use is made of numerous elements that are recognised socially and at specific times as typical of the school, creating symbolic scenarios (with maps, globes, books, fountain pens, teachers' desks, geometric shapes, ecc.) that end up being so stereotyped – and ideologized – that not only do they enable us to easily identify this portrait as a school photograph from the Franco regime, but they have even come to represent, in the collective imagination, the “official” image of the school at the historical level. Perhaps this is why many exhibitions on the history of the school in the 20<sup>th</sup> century contain this type of images, and even use them to head the exhibition or its advertising.

This type of photograph has been classified by some authors as a sub-genre within so-called school photographs, while they are also considered family photographs – as mentioned, they are part of the family album, not of the school archive – and it could be said that, due to their biographical ties, they are like those of weddings, communions, or military service<sup>5</sup>.

Each of the school souvenir portraits makes up part of the memory of the individual portrayed, but by being integrated in family albums, over the years, these pictures end up being depersonalised and turning into elements of the family memory. Meanwhile, the presence of the same photographs in most family albums shapes a social memory linked to common elements and collective identities. For this reason, in the collective imagination, school souvenir portraits form an unmistakable part of school memory. Society automatically identifies this type of photograph with the school, to the point of considering them to be the most representative of the collective imagination linked to the school institution, as demonstrated by the fact that they are resorted to in most of

<sup>5</sup> H. Velasco Maíllo, *Fotografías escolares, imágenes institucionales. Miradas retrospectivas a la fotografía en la escuela (1900-1970)*, in A. Bautista García-Vera, H. M. Velasco Maíllo, *Antropología audiovisual: medios e investigación en educación*, Madrid, Editorial Trotta, 2011.

the graphic representations of school memory (exhibitions, school museums, websites on school memory, ecc.).

Occasionally, this memory constructed with images determines what we think school was really like in the past. In fact, knowing the influence exerted by this school imaginary on school memory, and specifically the stereotypes it has generated, should make us rethink some questions as to how we conceive and interpret the past. It will be essential, in order to make history, to take into account the power of image in the construction of memory, and the power of memory in the creation of stereotypes that historical interpretation must overcome. Memory and history, therefore, should not be confused.

## *2. The school souvenir portrait: history, memory, and public uses*

For the history of education, the school souvenir portrait can be of great value, providing we are capable of analysing it properly; as we cannot expect the objective representation of school, of its materials, or of its dynamics from this type of photographs.

The fact that it is so socially accepted that the image represented in them, through its symbology, is that of the school leads us to the initial conviction that a simple observation of the elements and symbols it contains will turn out to be very useful for the historical knowledge of the school at a given time. Yet nothing could be further from the truth. This type of portrait was not usually made on the school's initiative, but rather on the professional photographers' who, seeing a business opportunity therein, went from school to school offering to take portraits which they then sold to the families. In many cases, they did not even use materials from the school itself to create the scene for the portrait, but rather those that the photographer considered would best fit the idea of school at each time. The children sat in front of enormous desks with large chairs that they never used in class. It was usually the teacher's desk. They were also surrounded by books they had not read, by stationery they did not use in their daily lives, or by artefacts, symbols, or materials that were alien to them. Even the way the children photographed were dressed might not have corresponded to reality. Parents dressed their children in their best clothes for the portrait. It is true that occasionally some of these portraits include identifying elements specific to a particular school (a religious image, the school's own smocks, ecc.), but many others create totally artificial scenes. In fact, as can be seen through the photographs, some of these portraits do not even use elements of the school imaginary. Consequently, the reading we can make of them as historical sources will have to be different from what might have been supposed at first sight, although this does not mean that they do not have their usefulness in historical-educational research.

If we consider these photographs a sub-genre of the portrait, and we focus on what Finol, Djukich & Finol call portrait discourse<sup>6</sup>, two main features can be discussed at

<sup>6</sup> D.E. Finol, D. De Nery, J.E. Finol. *Fotografía e identidad social: retrato, foto carné y tarjeta de visita*, «Quórum académico», vol. 9, n. 1, 2012, pp. 30-51.

the semiotic level that the school souvenir portrait shares with the other prime examples of portraiture: on the one hand, the identity trait: the portrait is intended to reflect facial features that are compatible to a specific person. On the other hand, the social recognition of specific moments or occasions related to the biography of the person portrayed (anniversaries, communions, weddings, ecc.) or which represent forms of dedication or social prestige of said person, and by extension of their family. The school souvenir photograph presents this discourse, on the one hand it seeks the identification of the individual, whereas on the other it is used as an instrument of social recognition. Depending on the period, school souvenir portraits are related to the culmination of levels of education such as graduations, end of studies, ecc.; in fact, nowadays the custom of children having school souvenir portraits taken throughout the schooling process continues and is widespread. Every year, schools hire professional photographers, or it is the photographers themselves who offer to photograph the schoolchildren, so that families have portraits of their children for each school year. Historically, however, the school souvenir portrait is more associated with the idea of dedication and prestige of the child as a schoolchild, with all the social implications of being at school during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This is why, and also possibly for economic reasons, the school souvenir photograph used to be unique to each stage of schooling. It did not, as such, represent a specific moment in relation to the child's school life, but rather the child's status as a schoolchild, providing a record of their schooling.

These photographs could be said to be a visual witness of belonging to a society that shares certain values (sometimes civic, other times ideological) and that considers the school as one of the main mechanisms of socialisation. From this perspective, school souvenir portraits can be a useful source for the history of the school, interested in the processes of schooling and in the social dimension that this institution acquires in contemporary times, but also in the history of family, of society, and even of mindsets. The presence of the same photographs in all family albums will shape a social memory tied to common elements which, at the same time, construct collective identities that other disciplines, beyond the history of education, are interested in studying.

Meanwhile, the school souvenir portrait – which is present, as mentioned, in almost all family albums, and which continues to be taken today – is, and will be in the future, one of the elements that will be most associated with school memory. Even without reflecting what really happened, or apparently showing any real, objective element of past school context, the evocative nature of these photographs, which all Spaniards remember seeing at home, makes them a recurrent element of identification with the school, possibly one of the elements that most clearly represent it at the social level. It is for this reason that their presence in spaces for memory recovery is very abundant, as well as in public history of education products, where we can best see how this type of portrait forms part of school memory whilst in turn conditioning it.



### 3. *The presence of the school souvenir portrait in photography collections created from citizen participation (crowdsourcing)*

In recent decades, the Internet and social networks have facilitated the formation of numerous collections of old photographs with specific sections on the school setting. These are projects that are generally based on so-called crowdsourcing or collective collaboration, such that most of the photographs collected by these projects come from private archives and family albums, not from the school institutions themselves. This fact, as explained above as to how and where school souvenir portraits have been kept, has made it easier for this genre of portraiture to have an important presence in these collections.

By way of example, and without intending to be exhaustive, we will take a look at some of these collections created in Spain. Many of these are the result of public initiatives, such as the *Legados de la Tierra* [Legacies from the Land] programme<sup>7</sup>. Promoted by the Regional Government of Castile-La Mancha, this programme was developed between 1998 and 2010, with the aim of promoting the recovery of the unknown Photographic Heritage of this community through the organisation of exhibitions and in some cases the publication of catalogues. The programme fomented the dissemination of regional photographic heritage from both local corporations and from the inhabitants of the municipalities. A selection of the photographs exhibited was also reproduced (first in analogue format and then digitally). Finally, close to 9.000 images – digitised and recovered through the programme – ended up forming the current Castile-La Mancha Image Archive.

Within the framework of this programme, grants were awarded to town councils, groupings of municipalities, and Sub-Municipality Organisations (*EATIM* from the initials in Spanish) in Castile-La Mancha, and with these around 1.000 exhibitions have been held. One of these exhibitions – entitled Education through Time and organised to mark the celebration of Education Day in Castile-La Mancha – selected a total of 52 photographs tracing the historical evolution of Education in this autonomous community from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the 1970s. It is remarkable that out of these 52 photographs, 10 are school souvenir portraits. In the presentation of the exhibition, the aim of the exhibition is claimed to pay «tribute to the work and effort made by our teachers over so many years to educate and train the different generations of Castile-La Mancha citizens»<sup>8</sup>; however, 20% of the images do not show this work, but rather the stereotypical image of school memory that many families keep in their family albums.

Another example of a photographic archive created with citizen help and collaboration is the *MadriLeños* [People from Madrid] collection in the Regional Archive of the Community of Madrid, which houses more than 25.000 photographs<sup>9</sup>. Among

<sup>7</sup> <https://cultura.castillalamancha.es/archivos/exposiciones-virtuales/los-legados-de-la-tierra-20-anos> (last access: 22.03.2023).

<sup>8</sup> <https://cultura.castillalamancha.es/archivos/exposiciones-virtuales/la-educacion-traves-del-tiempo#> (last access: 22.03.2023).

<sup>9</sup> [https://gestion.comunidad.madrid/archivos\\_atom/index.php/madrilenos-archivo-fotografico-de-la-](https://gestion.comunidad.madrid/archivos_atom/index.php/madrilenos-archivo-fotografico-de-la-)



these, there is an interesting collection of school souvenir portraits. Also the result of a crowdsourcing initiative, there is The *Cortes en el Recuerdo* [Cuts in Memory] collection, which can be visited on the website of the municipality of Cortes (Navarre) and which includes a sample of school images provided by residents in this municipality, amongst which there is a predominance of school souvenir portraits. This presence should be no surprise, since, as indicated above, these photographs belong to the family rather than to the school or institutional sphere<sup>10</sup>.

It is not only public institutions that resort to citizen collaboration to create interesting archives or image collections; we also find private initiatives, launched by newspapers, associations, and/or amateur groups that use social networks to collect thousands of photographs that could never be found in classical archives. One example would be *FAM (Fotos Antiguas de Mallorca)* [Old Photos of Majorca], which used Facebook not only to collect thousands of historical images thanks to citizen collaboration, but also to obtain information about them through the comments provided by both historians and first-hand accounts of people and/or episodes from the past recognised in the photograph<sup>11</sup>.

#### 4. *The school souvenir photograph as an inspiring iconic and advertising resource*

The power of the school souvenir image in the construction of the collective memory of the Spanish school is so important that not only is it the type of portrait most commonly associated with the history of the school by society, but it is also the one most used as an iconic and even advertising resource.

On the Internet we can find personal blogs with entries devoted to this type of photographs, and even recent initiatives in which the choreography of these portraits is used to reproduce this type of images with current pupils. In the *Blog de Ocurrís* of Manuel Cabello and Esperanza Izquierdo, for instance, mention is made of a particular initiative:

Over the last few weeks some of the parents of sixth form students at *Victor de la Serna School* have been very busy. With the inspiration of the Old School Souvenir Photographs, it was thought it would be a good idea to help finance part of the sixth form excursion by resuming the traditional custom of taking photographs of schoolchildren surrounded by books, maps and, now that it is fashionable,

comunidad-de-madrid (last access: 22.03.2023).

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.cortesenred.es/enelrecuerdo/la-escuela/> (last access: 22.03.2023).

<sup>11</sup> *FAM (Fotos Antiguas de Mallorca)* has an active blog (<https://fotosantiguasdemallorca.blogspot.com/>; last access: 25.03.2023) and Facebook account (<https://www.facebook.com/fotosantiguasdemallorca>; last access: 25.03.2023). Further, based on part of the photographic heritage collected, they have published an annotated book of images of Mallorca in the past: Ll. Miró, S. Bauzá, P. Llodrá, J.M. Martí Corbella, *Mallorca, otro tiempo...*, Palma, Dolmen Editorial, 2022.



Fig. 3. Pedagogy students at the UIB, 2018-2019 academic year. Exhibition *L'Escola, descobrir, fer i conviure* [The School, discovering, making and living together], Mallorca, November 2018

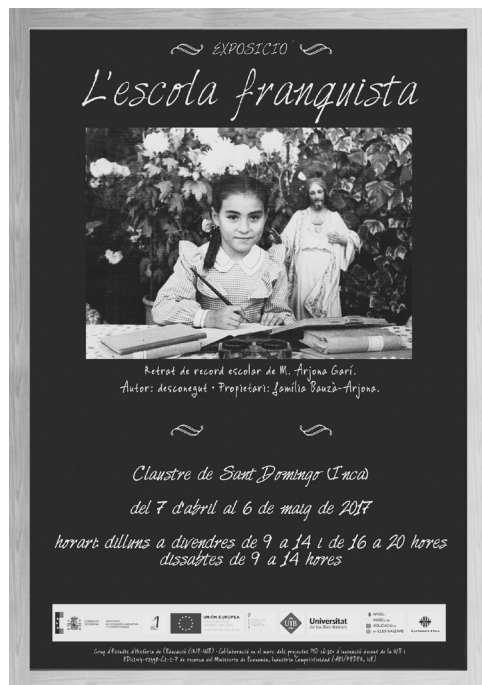


Fig. 4. Poster of the exhibition *L'Escola franquista* [The Francoist School], 2017

the minicomputer that has invaded the lives of kids. This very day, Benja thought that perhaps the photographs could also have been inspired by the old ones, those taken in the sixties and seventies with Gibraltar in the background, by way of claiming it back, and that is the result, although, definitely, this year's photos will be the modern ones, with the computer and in full colour<sup>12</sup>.

The use of the most stereotypical choreography of school souvenir portraits from the Franco era to set up these so-called photocalls is now very common in educational or school museums and in exhibitions regarding the school past. One only has to visit a few museums or access their social networks to see numerous photographs of visitors seated at the teacher's desk, with the map behind them, and the globe, some books, fountain pens, ecc. on the table<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>12</sup> <http://manuelcabelloyesperanzaizquierdo.blogspot.com/> (last access: 23.3.2023).

<sup>13</sup> For instance, we find this type of images in museums such as the *Museo Pedagógico de la Universidad de Sevilla* (<https://museosycolecciondelaus.wordpress.com/90-2/>; last access: 25.03.2023), or in the Facebook account of the *Museo de Historia de la Educación Manuel Bartolomé Cossío de la Universidad Complutense de Madrid* (<https://www.facebook.com/museo.historia.educacion.mbc>; last access: 25.03.2023).

Finally, the social identification of the school souvenir portrait with the social image of school history confirms the fact that such photographs are very often used to advertise exhibitions, plays, or films on school subjects, or as covers of books on subjects related to school history.

### *Conclusions*

It can be said that the school souvenir portrait is a special photographic genre found between school and family photography.

While as a historical source it offers limited information, its relationship to school memory, on the other hand, is much more complex: the school souvenir portrait has been key in the construction of the collective memory of the school in Spain; it is for this reason that greater public use is made of them than is the case with other photographs; as a result of the above, at times their importance within the sphere of memory is confused with their usefulness within the field of history. But here we must bear in mind the fact that history and memory are not synonymous, and that they operate in different registers.

As a consequence of all this, it is necessary to warn that school history, and above all the public history of education (made collaboratively with society, and sharing academic authority), is in danger of overusing this kind of photographs, and of ending up reproducing and feeding stereotypes that history ought to avoid.



# Female Teachers in Italy in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries. The Teacher Training Schools in Literary Narratives and Archive Papers: Destiny or Emancipation?

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## *Introduction*

Marianna! I'm going to whisper a great big sin in your ear! [...] If I were to have a pretty coffee coloured dress made? [...]. Without a crinoline, well maybe not! But a dress that isn't black, that I could run around and jump over walls in, that doesn't constantly remind me, as this habit does, that down there in Catania, when the cholera has passed, what awaits me is the convent<sup>1</sup>.

Giovanni Verga imbues this pretty coffee-coloured dress symbolically with the desire for freedom felt by the main character of his epistolary novel *Storia di una capinera*, Maria. The book was published in 1871. Maria is a convent girl destined to enter a convent. An outbreak of cholera in Catania leads to a visit to her father's country home where she falls suddenly in love with Nino, a local boy, an event that upsets her life. However Maria does not succeed in rebelling against a fate which she sees alternately as a choice and a punishment. The result of this inner conflict and self-sacrifice is first madness and then death. In 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century literature, especially that written by men, the choice-destiny alternative seemed to sum up the existential journeys of young women almost always obliged to give in to the inevitability of the confines set by the dominant social imperatives of the day.

Such references to literary realism will, in this paper, highlight the multi-faceted ambivalence surrounding the advent of female primary school teachers in late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century post-Italian unification history, focusing in particular on the institutional role and identity of the *scuole normali* set up to train a new teaching profession in an educational process that soon became almost exclusively female, and always hovering between destiny and emancipation.

This is confirmed in the restlessness that seems to cut through the life of Luigi Pirandello's school teacher Boccarmé, in his 1902 book of the same name. Victim of sexual and emotional abuse at a very young age and seeking to get away from the

<sup>1</sup> G. Verga, *Storia di una capinera*, Milano, Mondadori, 2017, p. 28.

place the violence took place, Boccarmé succeeds in winning a degree of personal and financial independence in her new life as a teacher, but fails to free herself of a state of social marginality and loneliness. Pirandello, too, uses clothing as the *fil rouge* of a truly polysemic tale of inexorable destiny.

Perennially dressed in black, gentle, patient and affectionate with the school's children, not simply because of her own memories of suffering at the hands of certain harsh teachers but also because, as girls, she considers them destined more for suffering than pleasure, living shuttered away in a part of the school far from everyone, in secret she makes up for all the afflictions and humiliations her shyness has foisted on her with imagination and reading<sup>2</sup>.

An examination of the literary sources is thus a way of giving voice to the underswell of emotions and identities implicit in concrete everyday school life, which would otherwise have been lost and forgotten. Over recent decades, historical research has made ample recourse to literature as a source, whilst not giving sufficient thought to the methodological and interpretational issues that arise from this, except as part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century's documentary revolution – now consigned, over a century on, to historiography – which has accorded all testimony of the past, «reluctant sources» as Marc Bloch aptly called them, great heuristic value even its lies and distortions. The purpose of literary source analysis is thus not solely to describe its textual contents but also, at the same time, to examine the way memory and recollections are constructed with a view to assessing the extent to which these express the class and social origin conflicts ever present in the history of Italian schooling or whether they were, by contrast, written with the intention of legitimising official educational methods and the educational aims implicit in them. It is, thus, a matter of undertaking a “reading” of the literary documents capable of making sense of the clues to, and signs of, the historical events featured in them<sup>3</sup>.

It is important to highlight that the austere clothing theme featured in both literature and real life.

In the case of the *scuola normale* students undertaking teacher training in post-unification Italy until the Gentile Reform of 1923, the girls put up in halls of residence because the small towns or rural areas they came from were without these, this dress code was regulated by specific norms set out in the statutes of the institutions themselves and consisted of black uniforms and extreme simplicity and modesty. It was the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This strictness, and frequent references to black and uniformity, are revealing of a type of clothing serving a model of conduct based on the modesty and discipline considered absolutely indispensable to future “virtuous women teachers”.

De Amicis' description of two very different teachers in *Cuore* (1886), a melancholic nun-like figure and a «cheery teacher with a red feather» is inspired precisely by clothing highlighting very different behaviours, but both based on simplicity all the same. The nun-like teacher

<sup>2</sup> L. Pirandello, *La maestrina Boccarmè*, in Id., *Novelle per un anno*, Roma, Newton Compton, 2004, p. 650.

<sup>3</sup> See A. Ascenzi, *Drammi privati e pubbliche virtù. La maestra italiana dell'Ottocento. Tra narrazione letteraria e cronaca giornalistica*, Pisa, Edizioni ETS, 2019.

[...] is always dressed in dark colours and wears a black apron. Her face is small and white, her hair always smooth, her eyes pale, pale and her thin voice seems always to be murmuring prayers [...]. But there's another one I like, too: the teacher of the first class of the lower school, class 3, that young woman with a pink face and two pretty dimples in her cheeks, wearing a great red feather in her hat and a yellow glass cross around her neck<sup>4</sup>.

Outside the world of literary fiction many autobiographical accounts testify to the gap between young teachers' aspirations and the harsh reality they faced. An account told by Marcello Dei, for example, reads:

It was 1<sup>st</sup> February 1924, I was twenty years old and setting off enthusiastically for my long awaited school, after the challenges of qualifications and exams, like a conquering warrior. I wore a pair of high heeled patent leather shoes, a pretty dress and broad brimmed velvet hat, as teachers wore them at the time [...]. My first great disappointment came when I saw an old mountain man waiting for me with two donkeys pointing the "way" to me, namely the riverbed, quite full of snow melt water. I wept then and didn't want to get onto the donkey but I had to do as I was told [...] and unsteadily and fearfully I flailed around crying out and calling for my mother<sup>5</sup>.

This stress on teachers' vocation for motherhood, a constant theme in the pedagogical literature of the day and in the ministerial instructions and primary and *normale* school *curricula* and parliamentary debates, returned to the clothing theme as one of the most symbolic elements in teachers' adherence to the day's ideals of modesty and decorum seen as even more essential to women who were the first to venture out of the confines of the home. Austere clothing was to protect them from the various forms of prejudice, hostility and gossip that awaited them.

In a pamphlet called *Considerazioni intorno al riordinamento delle scuole normali regie*, published in 1875, educationalist Domenico Failla argued: «In the teacher training schools of towns and cities we must take care to keep students away from the fashionable dress codes the newspapers are full of to protect women teachers from the whirlwind of frivolity which women so enjoy surrounding themselves with»<sup>6</sup>. Minister Coppino, in turn, expressed considerable worry regarding the risk that rural teachers training in the cities might lose their natural simplicity and gain from their companions the habit of scorning the places they come from and «take with them thoughts and customs out of step with those of the villages and which would make them less acceptable to villagers even than foreigners»<sup>7</sup>. During an inspection carried out on the teachers during the preparatory course at the *scuola normale* in Bari (1855), Antonio Labriola observed as follows:

<sup>4</sup> E. De Amicis, *Cuore*, Milano, Treves, 1934, p. 54.

<sup>5</sup> M. Dei, *Colletto bianco, grembiule nero. Gli insegnanti elementari italiani tra l'inizio del secolo e il secondo dopoguerra*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1984, p. 130.

<sup>6</sup> D. Failla, *Considerazioni intorno al riordinamento delle scuole normali regie*, Napoli, Tip. De Pascale, 1875, now in C. Covato, A.M. Sorge (edd.), *L'istruzione normale dalla legge Casati all'età giolittiana*, Roma, Ministero per i beni culturali e ambientali – Ufficio centrale per i beni archivistici, 1994, p. 261.

<sup>7</sup> See in G. Bini, *La maestra nella letteratura: uno specchio della realtà*, in S. Soldani (ed.), *L'educazione delle donne. Scuole e modelli di vita femminile nell'Italia dell'Ottocento*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 1989, p. 344.

The first is more effective and attentive, more authoritative. The second, while capable and cultured, is a bit careless and less teacherly in the real sense of the word. Colacicco has the personality of a lower class woman and all her teaching has something of the homespun about it but there is method there. The other one, Magrini, is more genteel, more affected. [And he added] The minister's idea of moving a young, rather fashionable teacher, a bit like this Magrini, from Girgenti to Bari, is a good idea<sup>8</sup>.

Even the differences between city and countryside that clothing symbolised thus configured as a way of consolidating a specific social order which was to remain unchanged.

Within the context of the rapid feminisation of primary education, even the teachers' fragile identity was a novelty for girls from the lower and middle bourgeoisie for whom it had, until then, been impossible to get past primary schooling, and which thus opened up novel opportunities for a career and financial independence. But this same fragile identity also thrust teachers into a new "gender" ghetto that took the form of deliberately simplified cultural training as compared to that taught at the lyceums, the impossibility of university study, wage discrimination, control over teachers' moral conduct and spirit of self-sacrifice for their vocation, understood as a social extension of the maternal role to a school designed to «train sufficiently and educate as much as possible». Neither an analysis of the pedagogical theories of the day, a history of school law nor a non-contextualised "gender" history are capable alone of fully contextualising the relationship between a set of apparently distinct phenomena such as educational destinies and the class and gender inequalities within them in the absence of contextualisation and without taking account of a series of interpretational cross currents. Identifying the meeting points is thus the most topical historical reading quandary. I will thus attempt here to establish where the sources interweave, a process which is indispensable to according fresh knowledge value to the historiographical narrative in order to bring out what lay beneath the contradictions of a school life in which everyday concrete educational practice was permeated by existential expectations, emotional states and de facto inequalities that were not to find a voice in reconstructions focusing exclusively on analysing the pedagogical, institutional and legal debates of those years.

It is an approach that also enables us to take stock of certain literary figures, such as the «teacher with the red pen» which, removed from its literary context, have breathed life into a collective imagination frequently unaware of the original textual genesis.

In this context it is, in my opinion, crucial to reflect, in a way which has only rarely happened, on the relationship between containment of the emancipatory urge implicit in the very figure of the teachers, their professional and cultural trajectory and the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century revival of a patriarchal symbolic order that was present in both the literary context and outside it, and frequently codified by a specific normative apparatus generally considered an antidote to the risk of social upheaval implicit in the earliest feminist claims, as one of the first female voices capable of self-portraying in Sibilla Aleramo's

<sup>8</sup> A. Labriola, *Relazione sull'ispezione compiuta nella scuola normale femminile di Bari* (1885), now in Covato, Sorge (edd.), *L'istruzione normale*, cit., p. 166.



novel *Una donna*<sup>9</sup>, in a narrative register which finally succeeded in getting away from male projections.

Starting in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century Italian society was torn apart by two conflicting drives represented, on one hand, by an ineluctable although contradictory advance in modernisation processes and, on the other, by a recurrent evocation of the immutability of a specific hierarchical social class and gender order in the collective imagination. The struggles of the early emancipation movements in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries were ultimately seen as extremely dangerous by the majority and prompted considerable alarmism. With a view to averting the much feared collapse of a patriarchal family revived in these same years in both Catholic and secular worlds as a bulwark against change, a new virility cult came to the fore together with a myth that might be called an “invented tradition” lasting centuries, to use an apt categorisation developed by Hobsbawm and Ranger<sup>10</sup>.

It was, in actual fact, the intangibility of the patriarchal order that was believed to be at risk from the first struggles for women’s rights, the vote and education, motherhood and the new women’s labour gains<sup>11</sup>. Feminism and a new emancipated woman model thus became dangers to be fought against and resisted. This unease is visible in many of the era’s cultural manifestations, from the complex and unsettling work of Luigi Pirandello, one of the most significant examples in novels and drama, to the prescriptive character of religious and pedagogical treatises, and to the endless Lombroso style anthropological debates on gender differences in relation to sexual issues. «The idea that “nature” had forged the male gender for leadership and excellence» – observed Sandro Bellassai in *L’invenzione della virilità* – «was certainly not new but it was reasserted forcefully at a specific historical juncture and presented as an eternal and indisputable truth precisely when it was being seriously disputed and threatened»<sup>12</sup>.

As testimony to the unease pervading the society of the day, the prestigious journal «Nuova Antologia’s» decision to publish an *Inchiesta sul femminismo (Enquiry into Feminism)* sponsored by a provincial women’s circle Circolo di Mesagne (Brindisi) in 1911 was certainly neither random nor insignificant. It was an enquiry founded on two questions put to many eminent exponents of the culture of the day and an extraordinary source of information on the fears of the day<sup>13</sup> including profoundly hostile contributions by Salvatore Di Giacomo, Vilfredo Pareto and Benedetto Croce who argued: «Feminism is a movement which I feel is condemned by its own name. A female idea in the bad sense of the word. Men have their own specific problems, too, but they have not yet invented maschilism»<sup>14</sup>. Other voices were cautiously positive, including Teresa Labriola

<sup>9</sup> S. Aleramo, *Una donna*, Firenze, Bemporad, 1906.

<sup>10</sup> E. Hobsbawm, T. Ranger (edd.), *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983.

<sup>11</sup> See S. Salvatici (ed.), *Storia delle donne nell’Italia contemporanea*, Roma, Carocci, 2022.

<sup>12</sup> S. Bellassai, *L’invenzione della virilità. Politica e immaginario maschile nell’Italia contemporanea*, Roma, Carocci, 2021, p. 11.

<sup>13</sup> The enquiry was published in «La Nuova Antologia di Lettere, Scienze ed Arti», vol. CLIV, July-August 1911, pp. 121-128.

<sup>14</sup> B. Croce, in *ibid.*, p. 123 (the author’s italics).

and Achille Loira. Fear of a threatening women's activism also explains women's failure to win certain fundamental rights such as the right to vote, for example, even prior to the shift towards authoritarianism.

### 1. *Women going into teaching*

The survival, even in the face of certain changes, of women's social and cultural subordination speaks volumes of the illusory and manipulative character of the extremely pervasive rhetoric revolving around the exaltation of the virtues of motherhood not only as regards motherhood itself but also what was viewed as the intrinsically altruistic identity of female teachers whose numbers were continuing to grow but were the victim of wage discrimination until the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and various forms of social and cultural prejudice.

In this sense, the issues raised by the development of the educational institutions was an interesting vantage point for the conflict between the advent, for an increasingly large number of people, of the new life, education and work choices typical of a modern society and a tendency to hem these into a rigidly hierarchical social relationship structure. An extremely significant case in point which we have already noted, embodying a twofold social class and gender theme, is the event characterising the development of the *scuola normale* teacher training colleges and their rapid feminisation<sup>15</sup>. But how did they work on an institutional structure level?

Founded, as we have seen, by the Casati Law of 13 December 1859 and promulgated in Piedmont before being extended after unification to the whole country, the *scuola normale* were to train male and female teachers, i.e. a teaching class that had, until then, been almost non-existent but was felt to be necessary to the effective functioning of primary schools and thus of the uphill task constituted by the struggle against post-unification Italy's high levels of lower class illiteracy. Until the Gentile Reform of 1923, despite various attempts at reform, the *scuola normale* had remained essentially unchanged in institutional structure and intrinsic educational objective terms, with the exception of certain partial reorganisation measures including a new regulation issued by Minister De Sanctis in a Royal Decree of 30 September 1880. The Casati Law set up 18 such teacher training colleges, nine for men and nine for women. Other *scuole normali* and *scuole magistrali* were then set up by town councils and provinces. School organisation was modelled on that of primary schools and was formally covered by the law under the same *Titolo V* heading as that dealing with primary schooling and the education of the

<sup>15</sup> The literature around the history of women's education is now ample, thanks to contributions by historians in recent years. For the Italian case see, amongst others, Soldani (ed.), *L'educazione delle donne*, cit. See also S. Ulivieri (ed.), *Le bambine nella storia dell'educazione*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1990; C. Covato, *Idoli di bontà. Il genere come norma nella storia dell'educazione*, Milano, Unicopli, 2014. On the use of the female teachers' story in literary sources, see Ascenzi, *Drammi privati e pubbliche virtù*, cit.; see also, *Banca dati delle opere letterarie e dei diari editi sulla scuola*, in <https://www.memoriascolastica.it> (last access: 20.04.2023).

lower classes. This type of school was, in fact, never viewed as on a par with other forms of secondary schooling, like the gymnasiums, lyceums or technical schools. Courses lasted three years but were carried out in such a way that students could sit exams qualifying them to teach in lower primary school after just two years and upper school exams after three. Admission to such schools was open to boys of 16 and over and girls of 15 and over. In addition to an entrance exam students were also required to submit good character certificates and documents attesting to their good health<sup>16</sup>.

Whilst the desire of certain middle-class and *petit bourgeois* girls to continue their studies past primary school had met with stiff resistance in institutions such as gymnasiums, lyceums and universities that trained for professions held to be the reserve of men, enrolment at the teacher training schools (at which, as we have seen, classes were divided up by gender) were tolerated and encouraged. It fit into a cultural training framework centred on professional training, for primary school teachers, considered, at least in the abstract, as not inconsistent with women's nature and identity. It was, however, precisely the potential for a change in status, the objective need for financial independence, linked to the effects of the modernisation and urbanisation then under way and, lastly, a desire to change their destiny that were behind the drive to study and work for girls whose experience of life had, until then, been tightly circumscribed by the family sphere<sup>17</sup>.

An especially interesting source for an understanding of the nexus between individual destinies and institutional changes is, as we have seen, a literary genre that came to the fore at the end of the century, stories and novels with female teachers or *scuola normale* students as their central characters and whose lives were described with stark realism. These are even more significant if told by women (think of Matilde Serao, Ada Negri or Elvira Mancuso) who were, to some extent, recounting their own stories, hopes and fears<sup>18</sup>.

The aspiration for new destinies and new freedoms, often with unhappy endings, was, in this type of literature, entrusted to women's chances going into teaching<sup>19</sup>. In general, however, their desire for independence and intellectual and professional challenge was destined to be harshly punished with gossip, illness and loneliness. As we have seen, the literary sources were not too wide of the real life mark. As Elvira Mancuso wrote in her

<sup>16</sup> Sorge, *L'evoluzione dell'istruzione normale e la documentazione conservata nell'Archivio centrale dello Stato*, in Covato, Sorge (edd.), *L'istruzione normale*, cit., p. 42.

<sup>17</sup> See, amongst others, on this subject, S. Soldani, *Nascita della maestra elementare*, in Soldani, G. Turi (edd.), *Fare gli italiani*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1993, pp. 67-130; C. Covato, *Un'identità divisa. Diventare maestra in Italia fra Otto e Novecento*, Roma, Archivio Guido Izzi, 1996.

<sup>18</sup> On late 19<sup>th</sup> century women's literature, see A. Briganti, *Protagoniste e vittime, le donne e la scrittura*, Milano, ESA, 1990; G. Morandini, *La voce che è in lei. Antologia della narrativa femminile italiana tra '800 e '900*, Milano, Bompiani, 1980; E. Rasy, *Le donne e la letteratura*, Roma, Editori Riuniti, 1984; A. Ascenzi, *Il Plutarco delle donne. Repertorio della pubblicistica educativa e scolastica e della letteratura amena destinate alle donne nell'Italia dell'Ottocento*, Macerata, eum, 2008.

<sup>19</sup> The most significant examples of female writers taking on the teacher theme in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century include Matilde Serao, Ada Negri, Elvira Mancuso, Anna Fusetti and Ida Baccini.

1906 novel *Annuzza la maestrina*, published later by the Sellerio publishing house under the title *Vecchia storia... inverosimile*<sup>20</sup>.

The great hope that gave mother and daughter courage was that Annuzza could become a teacher and, they believed, earn well without having to be subservient, like a servant, or do manual labour, like a factory worker [...] But neither of them could be certain that the dream would come true because the only school in the town was a primary school and obtaining a free place at the halls of residence in the provincial town meant knowing the right people and having money<sup>21</sup>.

The two characters lived in a small town in Caltanissetta province. The writer of the novel took her upper primary school exams, and achieved excellent marks, at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and graduated in Literature at the *Regia Università di Palermo*. She ranked sixth out of the eighty candidates for Italian teaching posts in the royal technical schools. Subsequently she began training teachers at her own home. Elvira Mancuso was born in Caltanissetta in 1867. Her family were upper middle class and her father was «an eminent criminal lawyer, a genuine patriot and a skilled orator»<sup>22</sup>. The novel's author and her main character are paradigmatic of different existential journeys but there are a great many analogies: the trajectories taken, from the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards, by a group of women belonging, in the first case (the teachers) to a middle class struggling economically but with intellectual aspirations and, in the second, to the working or lower middle classes. This is the almost exclusive subject of the frequently realist style literary narratives whose chilling portrayal of the female teachers' living conditions was almost never combined with any parallel ability on their part to assert their independence.

This is the case of Matilde Serao, a writer whose attitude to feminism was very wary and who was opposed to women's suffrage and women's equality. The teachers' living conditions she described in *Scuola normale femminile* (1885) are especially drastic, but the harshness of her condemnation of the situation seems implicitly to desire a future for women in the family with husbands and children to look after. In describing the destiny of *scuola normale* students, the situations Serao describes are almost unflinchingly desperate, as one example will suffice to demonstrate:

Cleofe Santaniello applies for the school and is one of the last in line to get in. She teaches the first class at the Montecalvario primary lower school. She is lacking in moral strength, entirely free of energy. She struggles with her girls and they almost always humiliate her in exams. She is always sickly and frequently absent in winter. One day she faints in the classroom. The school headmistress and her superiors are not happy with her. They have to give her a helper for a month at her own expense. They put up with her because of her gentleness and the desperate straits she finds herself in<sup>23</sup>.

<sup>20</sup> E. Mancuso, *Annuzza la maestrina*, Caltanissetta, Tip. Dell'Omnibus – Fratelli Amone, 1906, now in Ead., *Vecchia storia... inverosimile*, Palermo, Sellerio, 1990.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>22</sup> S. Nigro, *Prefazione. Una volpicina tra i villani*, in *ibid.*, p. 167.

<sup>23</sup> M. Serao, *Scuola normale femminile*, in Ead., *Il romanzo della fanciulla*, Milano, Treves, 1893, p. 180.

## 2. *Emancipated or excluded?*

As Anna Ascenzi has aptly noted in her references to those she calls the De Amicis-esque teachers featuring in *Il romanzo di un maestro*, *Cuore* and *Amore e ginnastica*<sup>24</sup>, the women concerned seem to have no ambition or choice. «The hard lives, sacrifices and accumulated burden of sad experiences of these De Amicis-esque teachers make them seem resigned to, or rather passively accepting of, the immobile culture and society they live in, a world they seem to have no chance for independent action in, or real chance of freedom»<sup>25</sup>.

In Luigi Pirandello's *L'esclusa* (1902)<sup>26</sup>, too, attendance at *scuola normale* and access to the teaching profession by the character Marta Ayala (and a secondary figure, Anna Veronica, a widowed and now alone former teacher) condemns her to marginalisation and misfortune, triggered by an unfounded suspicion of betrayal by Marta and inexorably condemnation by her family and local community. She is paradoxically forgiven only when the suspected adultery does actually take place: «Alone in her room she is amazed how calm she is, as if she had not forced herself to be so, amazed at her ability to pretend so well, and this amazement verged on satisfaction. She was cheerful that day, as her mother and sister had not seen her for some time»<sup>27</sup>.

This realist portrayal, then, did not encourage women's new individual and social consciousness.

Whilst financial motives no more than scratched the surface of a more complex problem also encompassing the relationship between destiny and freedom, the desire for change and the survival of asymmetrical social frameworks, it should also be remembered that, as we have seen, the salaries of female teachers were, for some time, a third less than those of their male colleagues and even lower when they taught in rural schools, which were mainly the preserve of female teachers. Their behaviour was hemmed in by rigid moral codes of behaviour, and if they failed to abide by these they risked losing the certificate of good conduct issued by the mayor required for teaching. Their ability to teach male children, above all at higher primary school, was the subject of lengthy debates cut through with male employment concerns and arguments implying women's unsuitability to pass on manly virtues like patriotism and the importance of hard work. These constraints notwithstanding, however, the figure of the female teacher was socially tolerated, while women's ambitions to what were seen as the higher professions were harshly stigmatised. In the years in which the terrible suicide of teacher Italia Donati (1886), unjustly accused of having an affair with the mayor of the town she taught in, Lamporecchio, triggered shock and compassion in the public, the Court of Cassation sentence (1884) that took away from Lydia Pöet, the first woman in Italy to graduate with a law degree, the right previously granted her to register as a lawyer, precisely on

<sup>24</sup> E. De Amicis, *Il romanzo di un maestro*, edited by A. Ascenzi and R. Sani, Pisa, Edizioni ETS, 2021; Id., *Cuore. Libro per ragazzi*, Torino, Einaudi, 2001; Id., *Amore e ginnastica*, Torino, Einaudi, 2010.

<sup>25</sup> Ascenzi, *Drammi privati e pubbliche virtù*, cit., p. 132.

<sup>26</sup> L. Pirandello, *L'esclusa*, Milano, Mondadori, 1992.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143.

the grounds of her gender and its fragility, was received favourably as averting what were considered to be excessive female claims.

It should, in fact, not be forgotten, that prior to what is known as the Morelli Law of 1877, women were not allowed to give testimony in public acts regulated by the Civil Code, on the grounds that any oath by them was considered meaningless and thus unreliable. The path by which women gained a voice, both private and public, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was truly fraught with trials and tribulations. The rhetorical emphasis which surrounded the female figure conflicted with the real conditions women, and thus female teachers, lived in, within a context in which the feminising of the teaching profession was soon becoming clear. The 1990-1901 school year saw a considerable leap forward in the already greater number of women than men in the profession, almost doubling female numbers to 21,178 men and 44,560 women).

The subject matter examined here highlights the fact that the expansion of schooling and the schooling processes managed by the nation state – both effect and driving force behind modernisation – took place within the context of a contradictory process involving a great many new features, but also the re-emergence of mindsets typical of rural and patriarchal societies.

This is confirmed by the frequent recourse, in the common sense of the day, to the notion of destiny, which acted as a bulwark as regards the uncontrolled expansion of women's and lower class education, with attempts being made to contain these within strictly circumscribed boundaries. In this sense, the development of the school institutions were a privileged vantage point in the conflict between modernisation and modernity, on one hand, and the survival, on the other, of cultural choices tending to revive the material and symbolic structures of a pre-industrial world still characterised by patriarchal traditions and specific class and gender hierarchies.

# The “Excellent Head Teacher” in Professional Manuals

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## *Introduction*

This paper intends to review the main stages in the construction of the role of the primary school head teacher and the main depictions there have been in professional manuals, from the moment the role was legally recognised (between the 1880s and 1890s) until the 1960s, that is, up to the threshold of its transformation initiated by the Decrees of 1973-1974. Over a period of about 70 years, this figure played an important role in school life for several reasons. First of all because it originated “from the bottom up”, i.e., as a response to a need widely felt by those who ran primary schools and those who worked within them: from municipal administrators, to state authorities, teachers, parents and service staff. The head teacher was called upon to play a central role in the life of the primary school: the action of the teachers, their relationship with the pupils and, in general, with the social, political and cultural context, were influenced to varying degrees by the head teacher’s presence and their guiding, supervisory and evaluative activities.

The professional role and duties of the head teacher were obviously embodied in legislation, which was a genuine expression of educational policy of the time and the attempt to make public education and its organisation more efficient. The growing importance of this role and the increasing number of teachers who faced competitive examinations to take up the managerial role also gave rise to an interesting body of publications that, in an attempt to prepare candidates, outlined the “ideal profile” of the head teacher, as a man and as a professional. Indeed, the various publications listed the intellectual, moral and psychophysical qualities of the “excellent” head teacher, as well as desirable cultural and professional skills. The authors were often head teachers (or former head teachers) with many years of work experience, sometimes even academics who were interested in real school life. The different profiles developed in these works reflect not only the experiences of the author, but also the cultural (or political-cultural) climate of the time. They are representations that were destined to change through the different seasons experienced by the Italian school system and are intended to highlight the different traits that characterised this protagonist of school life.

In this contribution, we intend to illustrate only a few portrayals of the figure of the head teacher, taken from the works of well-known education specialists and school professionals. These portrayals stem from an attempt to bring together theory (i.e., a



certain educational approach) and practice (the author's personal experiences or those of others collected by the author); individual memory (self-representations of oneself and one's professional experience) and collective memory (expressed in various testimonies intended to present the social image of the head teacher, or rather the most desirable image). The works and their portrayals were thus not only intended to meet the training needs of aspiring head teachers, but they also addressed a broader public in an attempt to construct a certain vision of the school and its organisation.

### 1. *An unknown role*

In 1893, a major publishing house in Florence published a volume of almost five hundred pages that offered an almost complete panorama of the trades and professions that existed in Italy at that time<sup>1</sup>. The editor, Giuseppe Marcotti (1850-1921), a journalist and writer of Friulian origin, had collected and presented about a thousand professions, both old and new. In order to produce the work, he had availed himself of the collaboration of numerous experts from the business world, the liberal professions, services and, of course, schools. Indeed, the reviewers included ministerial officials, inspectors, teachers and experts from the various levels of public and private education. In this sector, the panorama of professions presented could be said to be complete, as it ranged from university lecturers, to teachers, to gym instructors. In this wide-ranging and informative panorama, the primary school head teacher did not appear. This absence is not surprising because, at the date of publication, this role had not yet received any official recognition in legislation, even though by then many municipalities had begun to appoint head teachers in their schools. To explain this situation, it is necessary to take a step back and return to the Casati Law of 1859, which represents the birth of the Italian school system as it was gradually extended from the Kingdom of Sardinia to all the territories of the unified state.

Article 318 of the Casati Law stipulated that municipalities could manage and control primary schools by appointing «special supervisors or inspection commissions» (sometimes called supervisory committees). This provision was progressively modified not by subsequent legislative provisions (which would predictably have found strong opposition), but through a slow change in the actual organisation of schools, favoured above all by a series of administrative regulations. The regulations (R.D. 15.09.1860, no. 4336), issued to implement the Casati Law, did not explicitly envisage the role of the head teacher, but they did open up this possibility. After reaffirming that it was up to the municipalities to appoint superintendents or inspection commissions by mid-October of each school year, the regulation left it up to the municipalities to «entrust the direction of the teaching part to persons judged suitable for that office» (art. 19). The appointment

<sup>1</sup> G. Marcotti, *Mentore. Guida pratica per la scelta d'una professione*, compiled and edited by Prof. G. M., with the participation of special auditors for each subject, Firenze, Barbera, 1893.



of superintendents (and that of female inspectors for «women's work») did not therefore exclude the appointment of other roles to coordinate the teachers' activities. Gradually, especially in the big cities, a new role was created: the head teacher. Since it was not envisaged as being a compulsory post, it still held a very uncertain legal position. The head teacher's authority and prestige depended more on the skills he or she was able to demonstrate "in the field" rather than on precise legal authority. From an economic point of view, the salary did not differ much from that of the other teachers. Moreover, since he or she owed the position (a yearly contract, although renewable<sup>2</sup>) to the municipal administrators, he or she was often subjected to the same pressures and arbitrariness as teachers.

## 2. *First legal recognition*

The increasing use of the head teacher was greatly favoured by the Ministerial Regulations on Primary Education that replaced the 1860 regulation. Without entering into open conflict with the Casati Law (now in force throughout the country), they took note of the emergence of this new role and then, in an increasingly clear way, even went so far as to encourage its institution. At the central level, this solution was looked upon more and more favourably in order to address the difficulties caused by the poor (or non-existent) educational coordination of teachers. The creation of these posts seemed very useful, yet not easy, as it meant a significant increase in expenses for the municipalities.

Indeed, the new regulation (R.D. 16.02.1888, no. 5292) had prudently reaffirmed the current legislation and confirmed that the municipal schools were to be run in the usual twofold manner: for the general, organisational and supervisory part, through superintendents and inspection commissioners (compulsory), and for the more specifically educational part by appointing those who had demonstrated good teaching experience or recognised skills in school administration (the appointment remained purely optional). At that time, no qualification was prescribed for this appointment. In 1894, however, there was an important novelty: the decree that established the modalities of the examinations of suitability for the office of school inspector (R.D. 15.02.1894, no. 118) stipulated that the certificate of suitability for this office was also a qualification for the appointment as head teacher (art. 9). A subsequent ordinance (Ministerial Decree 15.01.1895), specifying the examination programmes, reiterated that those who aspired to obtain the qualification certificate solely in order to compete for the office of head teacher would also be admitted to the selection procedure. In this way, the tests for the

<sup>2</sup> A ministerial note, dated 26 June 1884, recalled that «appointments of head teachers are optional and as such can always be terminated. Ordinarily they are understood to be made per year and are confirmed by tacit consent».

school inspector's certificate and those for the head teacher's certificate became one and the same<sup>3</sup>.

These provisions were developed and incorporated in a new Regulation on Primary Education (R.D. 8.10.1895, no. 623). With it, the institution of the educational direction now appeared to be completely reformulated and regulated by precise rules. In the events we are reconstructing, this regulation represents a step of considerable importance because, by tacitly abolishing the figure of the municipal superintendent, it transferred part of their duties to the head teacher, whose professional profile it outlined. Among the head teacher's numerous duties, the regulations listed the following: to supervise the maintenance of discipline and observance of the school timetable; to give the teachers the necessary instructions on the development of the syllabus, the method of teaching and the keeping of records; to review the school work corrected by the teachers; to decide on the temporary suspension of pupils from school; to accompany the inspector on visits and to ensure that the instructions given to the teachers are carried out punctually. Head teachers could keep teaching or be exempted from it: this choice was always up to the municipalities.

The post of head teacher was to be assigned to school personnel with a higher grade licence, who had commendably taught in public primary schools for at least eight years, and preferably to those who possessed the certificate of suitability for the office of inspector or head teacher. One of the main problems (apart from the economic one) faced by municipalities wishing to appoint head teachers was the fact that very few teachers possessed the certificate of qualification or suitability required by the regulations. An attempt was made to remedy this immediately with a number of ordinances aimed at relaxing the requirements for access to the competitions and thus expanding the number of candidates<sup>4</sup>. Within a few years, the contingent of male and female head teachers, with or without a teaching role, gradually increased. In the school year 1895-1896, for example, 744 headmasters and 78 headmistresses (a total of 822) were in service, while in the following school year the number rose to 1445.

<sup>3</sup> Candidates had to be no older than 35 years of age and had to hold a higher grade licence issued by the Scuola normale. In addition, they had to certify that they had «always and in all respects maintained irreproachable conduct»; that they had taught in public schools for eight years, of which at least four in the higher grades; and that they possessed qualifications proving expertise in teaching, particularly in the pedagogical disciplines. The examination covered the following subjects: Italian literature; pedagogy and history of pedagogy; rudiments of mathematical, physical and natural sciences; natural history; legislation for primary schools. For literature and pedagogy the test was written and oral, while for the other subjects only oral.

<sup>4</sup> A first examination (30.10.1895), only for qualifications, awarded the qualification to as many as 1.130 candidates. A further examination (27.12.1897) turned out to be even more favourable because it abolished the minimum number of years of service (stipulated in the previous ordinance), due to which many precarious directors had not been able to graduate and were therefore in danger of losing their jobs. As a result of this competition, a further 835 candidates were qualified. New notices were published in the following years, in some cases with a return to more restrictive criteria for access.

### 3. *Pietro Pasquali: the “missionary” head teacher*

The launch in 1894 of public examinations for the qualification of head teacher did not go unnoticed, especially among insiders. Perhaps the first to grasp this novelty and attempt to provide an immediate response to the training needs of those who aspired to this position was Pietro Pasquali. A teacher, who was then head teacher in Monza with five years' experience, he was finally appointed Director General of the Primary and Infant Schools of the Municipality of Brescia in 1888. In this city he began his long association with the Agazzi sisters. His solid experience, the many posts he held, also at ministerial level, and his intense collaboration with the main school journals of the time favoured the dissemination of his manuals, which were intended for teachers and nursery school assistants. In 1894, in the journal series «Il Risveglio Educativo» (The Educational Reawakening) – to which he was an assiduous contributor – he published the *Guida del direttore didattico* (Guide of the head teacher). In the *Preface* he stated that the content of the work was drawn from his 30 years' experience with colleagues, «friends and acquaintances, worthy representatives of the head teachers of Italy». The aim was «that such a treasure trove of practice be collected in a volume and made the property of all, especially young people»<sup>5</sup>. Personal experiences and memories and those of colleagues were combined with the author's ideas and his educational eclecticism. He presented his position in very pragmatic terms: although the main theories of the time, i.e. spiritualism and positivism, were different and opposed, in his opinion they converged at the teaching level, particularly in the natural or intuitive method. He believed that: «the identity of practical application resulting from different theories is a fact that also frequently occurs in hygiene, agriculture, industry and trade». This idea was bound to have direct repercussions for those running a primary school. He therefore suggested that: «the director will bring it to his attention, and he will judge the teachers in terms of their teaching, regardless of their abstract opinions; because these may be diametrically opposed, and they have the same value»<sup>6</sup>.

Before outlining the qualities, both personal and professional, of the “model head teacher”, Pasquali warned that this professional «bears a disturbing responsibility: he is in charge of cures that can disrupt sleep, appetite and digestion». In his vision, being a head teacher means responding to a *vocation*, being aware of having a mission to fulfil in short, «one is born a director, as one is born a poet». By vocation he was referring to that set of «special talents», innate and developed through study and experience, which «make the head teacher» more than the legal title<sup>7</sup>.

According to Pasquali, the foremost attribute of the “exemplary” head teacher must be honesty, in public as well as in private life. In carrying out his work, he must prove himself to be precise, punctual, proper, sincere, loyal, impartial and courageous, even in «retreat», i.e. in recognising his mistakes. Honesty also comes before personal culture,

<sup>5</sup> P. Pasquali, *Guida del direttore didattico*, Milano, Risveglio Educativo, 1894, p. 4.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 167.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 19, 20 and 21.

because «science is useful, but virtue is necessary». The second fundamental attribute is good health, because «physical weakness is almost always the cause of moral weakness»<sup>8</sup>. In addition to being a gallant man, a good director must also be a gentleman: he must always display «gentle manners and courteous acts», which do not imply relinquishing seriousness and firmness. The “model” head teacher is therefore suited to a «calm and serene temperament» and behaviour inspired by prudence, moderation, respect and tolerance towards the positions of others. At the professional level, his main quality must be a love for the «educational disciplines», to be cultivated through the study of theories and critical reflection on his own and others’ educational experiences. He must also show love for his profession, his office and his country. Finally, he must beware of personal vanity: if his possible involvement in public life is legitimate, this must not lead him to do as so many «individuals aspiring to medals, crosses, conspicuous honours and other titles that gratify vanity». Concluding his ideal portrait, Pasquali asserted that «only those who enjoy the esteem of a head teacher and the esteem of a man can attain the highest degree of leadership authority»<sup>9</sup>.

In this portrayal of the “ideal head teacher” there are certainly many concessions to the rhetoric of mission and vocation that was widespread in those years. However, one cannot fail to recognise Pasquali’s sincerity and his profound knowledge of actual school life. His references to moral and relational qualities were perhaps intended to indicate the indispensable requisites for dealing with the many situations of abuse and injustice that affected teachers (and above all female head teachers) of the time and that often involved, in various capacities, male head teachers and school inspectors. Honest behaviour and a polite manner on the part of the head teacher might have represented a bulwark against the arrogance of the local authorities and a safeguard for the rights and dignity of many teachers.

#### 4. *Domenico Luigi Pardini: the head teacher as a “gallant man”*

In 1903, a new but relatively established publishing house in Abruzzo published the *Manuale del direttore didattico* (Manual of the head teacher). The author, Domenico Luigi Pardini, wrote that the work was the result of personal experience and that of many colleagues. The aim was very concrete, namely, to collect and order «what might be required, almost on a daily basis, by those who run primary schools»<sup>10</sup>. Indeed, the book illustrated all of the head teacher’s duties during the school year, commented on the current legal regulations and concluded with a series of forms to be used for administrative acts. The new publication was justified – also and above all – because a few weeks earlier, an important change had taken place. Law No. 45 of 19 February 1903 (known as the

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 23 and 25.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>10</sup> D.L. Pardini, *Manuale del direttore didattico*, Lanciano, Carabba, 1903, p. 3.

Nasi Law, after the name of the Minister who proposed it) stipulated the compulsory nature of the educational directorship in municipalities with a population of over 10,000 inhabitants, and the option – in the remaining municipalities – of establishing their own educational directorship, including by forming consortia with others. Forty-four years after the Casati Law, the measure marked a turning point: the role of the head teacher was legally recognised as an active external organ of the school administration, with functions of guidance and supervision over primary education and the work of the teachers.

In his work, Pardini draws an ideal portrait of the head teacher that in several respects recalls (even explicitly) that of Pasquali. The emphasis, however, no longer falls on vocation or innate talents, but on *mission* and ethical, social and educational aspects. In this perspective, the main concern of the head teacher must be the moral education of the pupils before formal education. Again, according to the author, favouring head over heart in teaching has left children as they were before, that is, full of vices and defects. The good head teacher, on the other hand, must exercise continuous, patient and strict vigilance «so that the employees always have the good word on their lips, which teaches respect and love for divinity, superiors, laws, opinions, neighbours and work»<sup>11</sup>.

Faithfully applying national laws and programmes, he must ensure that honest citizens and good workers are formed in his Institute. This is why the director must be and appear to the teachers to be an authentic human and professional model, endowed with solid culture, willing to make sacrifices and devoid of any selfish interests. His main qualities must be prudence, seriousness and modesty. As Pardini concludes, «without being a saint, he must deserve the name of a gallant man and a gentleman, in the highest sense of the word, in order to increase esteem and goodwill around him»<sup>12</sup>. Once the call to vocation is set aside, this ideal portrait considerably reinforces the ethical aspects of the leadership figure, even if it does not avoid the usual lapses into rhetoric. It is not difficult to discern in these statements the echo of the teaching programmes for primary schools issued in 1894. When presenting them, Minister Baccelli summarised the guiding principle as follows: «Instruct the people as much as is sufficient, educate them as much as you can». In this restorative and conservative political action, the head teacher – at least according to Pardini’s *Manual* – was to play a significant role.

##### 5. *Giuseppe Lombardo Radice: the head teacher as “teacher”*

In Italy, the representation of the head teacher as “a teacher of teachers” was the most widespread and also the most enduring. Formulated by Giuseppe Lombardo Radice, a pupil of Giovanni Gentile, an orthodox neo-idealist but with great sensitivity to the concrete aspects of education, it was revived and relaunched several times up to the years after the Second World War. The portrait of the “ideal head teacher” emerges above all in

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 234.

his masterpiece, *Lezioni di didattica e ricordi di esperienza magistrale* (Educational lessons and memories from teaching experience), intended for the training of teachers and which was to have numerous re-editions<sup>13</sup>. The double title fully reflects the author's educational vision, which always aimed to combine theory and practice, education and teaching, in an operational symbiosis. Indeed, the work was divided into *Lessons* (i.e., a systematic treatment) and *Memories* of experiences, directly encountered by Lombardo Radice and presented by him through concrete examples. In his opinion, they were "excellent" experiences of teaching life, encountered above all in the rural schools of the time such as in Montesca and Muzzano. The protagonists were extraordinary teachers and head teachers, such as Francesco Bettini, Angelo Colombo, Giancesare Pico and Angelo Patri, an Italian-American who ran a public school in the United States.

To develop a representation of the "ideal head teacher", Lombardo Radice therefore drew on two sources: a theoretical one, namely Gentile's neo-idealism, and a practical one, namely the concrete experiences of which he had personal memory. Following Gentile's reasoning, he considers the school as a «living spiritual unit», and the head teacher as the «organ of the educating Spirit», i.e., the embodiment of the universal Spirit. For his teachers, the director represents authority, but not so much for hierarchical reasons as for educational reasons: he has, in fact, reached a stage of greater understanding of that law of the Spirit that governs school education. Lombardo Radice does not mention supposed vocations or innate gifts, but more concretely states that the good head teacher should have an authentic mission, to which he dedicates all his time and all his energies of intelligence and will. Once again following in the footsteps of Gentile, he believes that the relationship between head teacher and teachers is analogous to the relationship between teacher and pupils, that is, between authority and freedom. The head teacher is an educator, a "teacher of teachers", and exercises an educational magisterium. The head teacher represents an exemplary figure, as a man and as an educator, and his authority is legitimised by the superior cultural awareness and self-fulfilment that he has developed.

According to Lombardo Radice, a good head teacher must possess the attitude of a *father* who looks after his children with love and confidence: a benevolent but serious authority, affectionate but impartial; gentle and severe, firm and authoritative, "inspiring and moderating". Father but even more *teacher* ("teacher of teachers"), the head teacher must know the teachers of his institute, stimulate and support their teaching action, encourage their spirit of cooperation. He must therefore be a coach, capable of promoting the unification of the educational forces in his institute, stimulating the teachers' harmony and cooperation.

This representation of the figure of the head teacher certainly appears dated and in any case it is linked to a philosophical-pedagogical approach of the past. The "charismatic" model that Lombardo Radice upholds, based on cultural training, mission, on the apostolate, on exemplarity, on total dedication to the school, has long since entered a crisis, just as the thesis of the training of "being a man" in order to become a teacher

<sup>13</sup> G. Lombardo Radice, *Lezioni di didattica e ricordi di esperienza magistrale*, Palermo, Sandron, 1913-1936<sup>16</sup>, in part. pp. 45-46.

and head teacher appears outdated: a magisterial preparation, that is, that excludes all non-humanistic disciplines, that neglects the sciences of education and that denies methodological-operational skills. Beyond the rhetoric typical of the period, Lombardo Radice’s call to reflect on the role of the head teacher, on his functions and on the need for him to be able to nurture that spirit of collaboration that is still, today as yesterday, the “secret” of a good school.

#### 6. *Giovacchino Petracchi and Ferdinando Montuschi: the head teacher as “coach”*

In this concise review, the last portrayal chosen appeared at the end of the 1960s and was devised by Giovacchino Petracchi, Central Inspector of the Ministry of Education, and Ferdinando Montuschi, then a young scholar specialised in psychology who later became a university lecturer in pedagogy. Before presenting this depiction, it seems opportune to recall that from a juridical-administrative point of view the role of the head teacher was reconfirmed and strengthened by the Gentile Reform and above all by the subsequent 1928 regulation that remained in force substantially until the issuing of the *Decreti Delegati* of 1973-1974. Moreover, it should not be forgotten that the gradual transition of primary schools from municipal to state management, completed in 1934, had also brought the head teacher into the direct employment of the state, thus becoming a civil servant. From the post-war period onwards, discussions on this school figure multiplied: at the centre of the various analyses was the head teacher-teacher relationship and the interpretation of managerial authority as a competence to be placed at the service of teachers and pupils and not as a power to be exercised in varying degrees. In the debates, the image coined by Lombardo Radice had been revived and relaunched above all through the interpretation given by the pedagogical culture of a Catholic matrix, but with the passing of time the idea of the head teacher as a “teacher of teachers” appeared increasingly ambiguous and inadequate.

It was in this same Catholic cultural and publishing environment that Montuschi and Petracchi’s volume was produced, presenting itself to readers not as «a manual or vademecum but as a study». Indeed, the authors specified that their intention was to adopt a new perspective of enquiry: the image of the head teacher could not be derived, as in the past, by deduction, that is, based on a pedagogical theory (or on the current legislation) in order to then deduce the “ideal profile”, that is, the “essentials” of the good head teacher. They attempted to replace this “static” profile with a “dynamic” profile, constructed inductively, i.e., starting from an analysis – conducted with scientific instruments – of the managerial role, considered in the context of concrete professional action, to identify then the personality traits that turned out to be most effective and productive. In other words, the focus of the study is on the relationship between the head teacher’s personality and his or her professional duties, i.e. between the personality traits examined in the performance of his or her duties and the skills, qualities and attitudes that have proved most effective according to research conducted using scientific methods.



Drawing on Italian and, above all, foreign studies on the subject, the authors write that the volume gathers «ideas and proposals considered beneficial to the fairest interpretation of the personality and role of the head teacher; and, on the other hand, professional experiences have been used in order to broaden the perspectives of the activity of the head teacher, whose task it is to inspire the work of the school in close communion with the teachers»<sup>14</sup>. The aim of the authors was therefore not to offer yet another “ideal profile”, but to study the professional behaviour of the head teacher in order to identify, on the one hand, the specificity of his action and, on the other, the characteristics of the «basic personality» that are most involved in the exercise of the profession. The profession is thus understood as an attribute of the personality that, in its concrete exercise, involves the entire human dimension of the head teacher.

The first part of the work, dedicated to the personality of the director in actual work situations, draws on a US experimental study that, in many respects, had analogies with the Italian situation. So, the head teacher's «basic personality» traits are examined, i.e., the qualities, skills, behaviours and attitudes that have proven to be most effective in dealing with teachers. In the second part, the focus is brought to the specific tasks of the head teacher – from leadership, to coaching, to monitoring, to evaluation – and the working methods deemed to be most effective. From the study it emerged that «the personality of the head teacher, even more than his or her knowledge, appears to be of great importance for the performance and effectiveness of his or her professional activity»<sup>15</sup>.

Again according to the authors, experimental research has confirmed that a good head teacher knows how to act above all as a *coach* in his or her institute: the main commitment is not so much to dictate solutions to teachers as to coach or encourage them to seek solutions to teaching problems themselves. Adopting this attitude appears to be the most productive approach because it discourages any oppositional will on the part of the teacher, stimulates personal growth and establishes a positive relationship with the head teacher. The head teacher's coaching action becomes effective with regard to all the components of the school community: from the teachers, because it reduces the possibility of authoritarian attitudes and isolation on the part of the head teacher himself; to the families, because it awakens the need for cooperation and involvement in the initiatives promoted by the school; and to the pupils, because it allows them to identify in collegial forms the most appropriate ways to support their daily commitment. In keeping with this perspective, the head teacher-coach must avoid any authoritarian and paternalistic attitude and exercise his powers in the form of advice, encouragement and help. To become a coach, the good head teacher must also plan a personal itinerary: «an itinerary that is then a method that moves from the basis of mutual esteem and trust between head teacher and teacher to arrive at consistent relationships of collaboration and understanding. Hence, assistance to the teachers in solving their personal and professional problems; but assistance that has roots below the superficial bureaucratic

<sup>14</sup> F. Montuschi, G. Petracchi, *Il direttore didattico: personalità di base e prospettive operative*, Brescia, La Scuola, 1968, pp. 5-6.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52



relationship. Because the head teacher must also, and above all, motivate the process of professional awakening»<sup>16</sup>.

### *Conclusions*

The portrayal of the head teacher as a coach can be said to mark a turning point: not only because of the year in which he appears, 1968, a year that launched a period of profound change in the Italian school system, but also because it marks the definitive abandonment of a tradition. Those who in the past had attempted to delineate the image of the head teacher had faced the ambivalence of his or her functions (controller-coach; superior-collaborator; judge-friend; guide-counsellor...) trying to reconcile them in an "ideal profile" (i.e., in human and cultural attributes) based on ethical and pedagogical values. At the end of the 1960s, the cultural climate appears to have changed: the roots of the ideal representation are derived from psycho-social analyses and prelude to new professional profiles (leader, manager, etc.). In essence, any charismatic image is abandoned and there is an increasing shift towards a functional vision: the management role is interpreted as that set of expert behaviours, carried out by a professionally trained figure, that enable the school community to achieve its goals. The winds of change in the school system did not spare the old head teacher, considered an expression of bureaucratic authoritarianism and a figure that was at odds with the principles of democracy and participation. With the Delegated Decrees, the image of the head teacher changed to that of the coordinator and promoter of the life of the school community. The attributes were reorganised and partly entrusted to the collegial bodies. Pedagogical, teaching and administrative skills were required to be integrated in a new and broader professionalism, centred on organisation as the intelligent use of all available resources to achieve the best results in terms of efficiency and effectiveness.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.



# Portrayals of the Head Teacher in Forty Years of the Journal “Scuola Italiana Moderna” (1946-1985)

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## *Introduction*

This paper is the result of research carried out on the portrayals of head teachers and, specifically, of female head teachers found in the journal «Scuola Italiana Moderna», one of Italy's most important and most popular teaching journals in the period from the end of the Second World War to the early 1980s.

«Scuola Italiana Moderna» is a journal with Catholic influences, which was clearly broadly representative and widespread among teachers, the expression of a precise pedagogical area and political wing in Italy where, at least in the first twenty years considered, the Christian Democrats were the majority party. The Communist Party was the second largest party in those Cold War years, and secular educational specialists wrote in other important journals, so in future research, it should be expanded by reviewing some of these journals with different leanings, such as, for example, «I Diritti della Scuola», comparing the results with those obtained in this research.

The two decades between the Second World War and the mid-1960s were a period of profound social and educational change. Starting in the 1970s and the *anni di piombo* (years of lead) which were marked by terrorism, the Italian political situation became more varied: the Christian Democratic Party was still a party of broad consensus, but, after the assassination of Aldo Moro in 1978, the conflict with the Communist Party faded and the Christian Democratic party was joined by other parties that contributed to the country's democratic debate. The school system also underwent reform: for example, in 1963 the middle school was established and in 1979 its New Programmes were issued; in 1968 the state nursery school was created; in 1985 the new primary school programmes were issued. In 1974 the *Decreti Delegati* came into force, marking a turning point for the Italian school: from being a state institution, it became an educating community integrated into the local community and all of its components took part in its governance. The role of the head teacher also changed to meet the new cultural, political and pedagogical-educational requirements.

Thus, we get to what was to be a new turning point for schools, namely the *Bassanini Law* no. 57 of 1997, followed by Presidential Decree no. 275 of 8 March 1999 “Regulation

on the organisational and didactic autonomy of educational institutions”, which would impose a new character on teachers and head teachers, in the context of a school system that had radically changed its structure, while still maintaining ministerial management on certain issues.

The quantitative aspect of the research can be traced back to the gathering of articles dedicated to the head teacher and the management role: these articles were very scarce until the 1950s (about one or two a year), although they became more frequent from the beginning of the 1960s. In 1971, in addition to articles written by well-known and prestigious figures, three *Dossiers* on the role and duties of the head teacher and the inspector appeared, foreshadowing the change that would happen in 1974. In the 1980s, the articles became less frequent. With a view to a new heuristic and a different hermeneutics, the obituaries, contained in the *Resurgent* column, where a portrait of the person and the professional is often drawn, were also examined. Obituaries were present in considerable quantity, approximately twenty or so each year until the 1960s, then they started to diminish, moreover the content and tone changed over time and in the late 1970s they began to be shorter and more standardised.

As far as the qualitative aspect is concerned, the articles were analysed to understand both what the real role of the head teacher was and, above all, the representation that was intended to be conveyed of that role. Particular attention was paid to the portrayal of the head teacher that the journal proposes to a predominantly female class: they contributed to developing a particular feeling of school authority in the teachers. In addition, by skimming the most interesting obituaries from a historiographical point of view, an attempt was made to determine the presence and nature of any gender differences in professionalism between male and female head teachers; the latter were certainly far fewer in number than their male colleagues. The research explored the collective memory of these women in relation to their colleagues, and the portrayal that was intended to be conveyed to all the head teachers reading the journal.

### 1. *A model that persists: the 1940s and 1950s*

In the first twenty years, the journal sketched a profile of the head teacher that is in continuity with the past, even if there were attempts in those decades to convey a representation that went from being a man who exercises a special “mission” as a guide, because he is the “teacher of teachers”, to being a head teacher who, as the Catholic area of Italian pedagogy in part hoped, would have a greater cultural and educational preparation. The problem being debated was what should be the preparation of those who wanted to become head teachers: the aspirants to this role were simple teachers, or teachers who had already exercised the leadership role as “appointees”, but what they had in common seems to be a lack of training.

The journal revealed the problem that lies at the heart of the competition process: was the fact of having been a teacher and knowing the school really the most important

qualification for a head teacher? The model still proposed in this period was Lombardo Radice's neo-idealistic one, although in reality there was a realisation that something different was needed as compared with the past: the head teacher's role remained purely educational and hierarchical, so much so that he or she undertook annual evaluations of the teachers and these affected the evaluation of titles in selection procedures.

The school, however, within a society that was a young democracy, was going in another direction, towards a managerial role that was destined to be more "technical" and administrative, but the journal did not immediately grasp this need. Thus, at the beginning of the 1950s, for example, Tersilio Valenti, a head teacher from Reggio Calabria, wrote about keeping the idea of the head teacher as a teaching guide and called for an increase in positions: in the real school there was a dissatisfaction to which the journal gave voice. There was a desire to keep the teaching role of the head teacher even while grasping an organisational "crisis" of the time: too many classes did not allow the traditional role of teachers as guides to be fulfilled:

How can a head teacher with jurisdiction over 150-200 and even more classes serenely and profitably fulfil his role of coordinating and then propelling the educational system? He can act as a bureaucrat and issue circulars that God knows how they will be applied, because he can only visit classes once a year and has no opportunity to follow the teachers in their difficult work, who are so much in need of guidance and enlightened help<sup>1</sup>.

In the following pages of the article *La funzione direttiva oggi* [The management role today], Pico<sup>2</sup> also held that it is not so much preparation as experience that is important. In accordance with Lombardo Radice's theories, he re-proposed the old model, although he eventually tried to integrate it by favouring collaboration with teachers and social forces close to the school:

we speak not of supervisory control in our sphere, but of guidance, stimulation and initiative. Teachers of teachers are to be considered the head teacher and the inspector; superior is truly the teacher colleague who takes the irresolute novice under his wings to help him solve the small and large problems that arise in this arduous job. [...] It must be remembered that the post of head teacher was given to teachers who did not have a diploma, but merits [...] why does the state not proceed with the same criterion? All schools would truly become sources of original and avant-garde work<sup>3</sup>.

Furthermore, Gian Carlo Sottili<sup>4</sup>, prestigious contributor to the journal, sought a solution to the problem of poorly trained head teachers participating in selection procedures by demanding better qualifications. In the articles dedicated to head teachers or inspectors, who were almost always teachers and professors, the journal nevertheless emphasised the nobility of spirit and tireless work on behalf of the school. The most sought-after public recognition, beyond medals, knighthoods and honours, remained –

<sup>1</sup> T. Valenti, *Sulla crisi della direzione didattica*, «Scuola Italiana Moderna», vol. XXII, n. 3, 1952, p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> L. Lombardi, *Pico Gian Cesare*, in G. Chiosso, R. Sani (edd.), *Dizionario Biografico dell'Educazione (1800-2000)*, Milano, Editrice Bibliografica, 2014, vol. II, pp. 336-227.

<sup>3</sup> G.C. Pico, *La funzione direttiva, oggi*, «Scuola Italiana Moderna», vol. XXII, n. 3, 1952, p. 13.

<sup>4</sup> Cfr. G.C. Sottili, *Sui concorsi direttivi*, «Scuola Italiana Moderna», vol. XXIII, n. 19, 1953, p. 56.

as we read in a short paragraph by Giovanni Modugno on Dante Lugo's retirement – «the gratitude of the countless pupils, the many teachers and head teachers, colleagues and admirers, who for half a century have received from him light, encouragement and an example of fervent and hard-working loyalty to the cause of education»<sup>5</sup>. The resulting portrayal of the head teacher was that of a man who devotes himself to the school with moral integrity and generosity: nobility of spirit and experience seem to be sufficient to carry out the management role.

The obituaries in the *Resurgent* column, which provide us with an insight into the collective memory, confirm this model of leadership that placed importance on hard work, goodness, duty performed in an exemplary manner, character, the work of building the state school and sometimes even a fighting spirit. This conveys a memory and representation of leadership that emphasised human qualities above professional ones, often summarised only in the concept of “dedication”.

In the obituary of head teacher Cornelio Borghiero, we read: «he had truly remarkable qualities of character, industriousness and devotion to duty. He was always the first to give an example of absolute dedication to the school»<sup>6</sup>, just as another obituary reads: «In Bucchianico (Chieti), his native town, Paolo Sinolli, former head teacher in Rome, died. He was a well-known figure in the capital's teaching environment, where he was deservedly esteemed and enjoyed the widest sympathy for his work as an educator, in which he had lavished the treasures of his intelligence, goodness and unparalleled rectitude»<sup>7</sup>. Again in 1967, head teacher Italo Raggi of Milan was remembered:

In Milan Dr. Italo Raggi was the head teacher in the municipality's primary schools, where he lavished his noble activity also on cultural and extracurricular works, to which he devoted paternal care until the very end. He was a fervent and brilliant friend to his teachers, who will never forget the cordial handshake he used to give them on leaving school. In this affectionate sign they felt his participation in their daily toil and drew encouragement and comfort from it. [...] We see him again at the distribution of the prizes as his emotion is communicated to all those present. The young teachers who had received awards had him as a diligent guide on their journeys, happy to be in the midst of their new colleagues, to whom he gave the gift of all that he had gained from his experience and wisdom<sup>8</sup>.

Female head teachers were very few in number, they did not have a specific place in articles dedicated to leadership but only appeared in obituaries. They too were part of this rather stereotypical memory that struggled to detach itself from the educational ideals that characterised the previous historical period.

In Alba, head teacher Maria Baudina was remembered as follows: «Her singular qualities, her constantly praiseworthy activity, her ever-ready spirit of initiative, her understanding of the value of the school in the preparation of a brighter tomorrow for

<sup>5</sup> G. Modugno, *Il cinquantenario educativo di Dante Lugo*, «Scuola Italiana Moderna», vol. XVII, n. 8, 1948, p. 13.

<sup>6</sup> *Resurgent*, «Scuola Italiana Moderna», vol. XVI, n. 2, 1947, p. 34.

<sup>7</sup> *Resurgent*, «Scuola Italiana Moderna», vol. XVII, n. 8, 1948, p. 57.

<sup>8</sup> *Resurgent*, «Scuola Italiana Moderna», vol. LXVI, n. 9, 1967, p. 98.

our country»<sup>9</sup>. Given the orientation of the journal, faith was also often mentioned as an additional value to human qualities.

The obituaries and articles dedicated to managers confirm, in the collective memory, the great importance given to educational work, conceived as a "mission" on a par with that of the teacher in the same historical period. In this early period, the model for head teachers remained that established by Lombardo Radice, who «Scuola Italiana Moderna» remembered and supported: the educated and religious man or woman, of good morals and proven faith, hierarchically superior, but capable of becoming "teachers of teachers".

From the mid-1950s onwards, the journal began to publish articles, which would become more and more frequent in the 1960s, which argued that the management role was in need of greater cultural and professional preparation. This sentiment also appeared in the pages that advertise management competitions and offer tools and bibliographical references to prepare for the selection procedures.

## 2. *The 1960s: change begins*

At the beginning of the 1960s the school hierarchy began to be questioned in the pages of the journal: it was necessary to demand greater competence from the head teacher in making judgements concerning the teachers. The role, however, was changing: in 1964 the need for a real management office with a separate teacher for bureaucratic-accounting roles and the need for a democratic collegiate body of self-government of the school alongside the head teacher were raised in the pages of «Scuola Italiana Moderna». However, this also entailed economic and legal claims on the part of the managerial class, which explains the participation of some managers in the trade union.

The new proposal, however, at least in the Catholic sphere, did not do away with tradition, but sought to integrate it and modify it in accordance with the new social, political, economic and cultural conditions. In 1965, «Scuola Italiana Moderna» reported on a conference on management studies, noting that almost all the participants were oriented towards a solution that met three requirements: the presence of teachers in school governance; the study of permanent forms of contact between the school, the family and the social and cultural environment; and the role of teams of medical experts, psychologists, social workers in supporting the teaching staff<sup>10</sup>. In order to respond to these needs, there was a call for the establishment of a Teachers' Board in each teaching district that could elect a Management Board chaired by the head teacher: these would be advisory and recommendatory bodies of the management that provide organisational and teaching guidelines to be implemented in the district.

Gradually the role, but also the public portrayal to the school staff, began to change and, albeit amidst divisions and different stances, the head teacher became a civil servant,

<sup>9</sup> *Resurgent*, «Scuola Italiana Moderna», vol. LXVII, n. 7, 1968, p. 94.

<sup>10</sup> *Convegno di studio sul Consiglio di direzione*, «Scuola Italiana Moderna», vol. LXXIV, n. 15, 1965, p. 91.

not only with culture, but also with organisational skills. The article did not contrast with the previous vision, indeed the *Foreword* states that the head teacher must focus on collaboration with the teachers to promote their preparation, choice, continuous “spiritual replenishment” and professional qualification.

In 1968, Angelo Liotta wrote *Il Rapporto maestro-direttore. In ordine alla libertà didattica* [The teacher-head teacher relationship. On educational freedom] in which the guiding role of the head teacher was reaffirmed, while respecting the teachers’ freedom to teach<sup>11</sup>. In issue 13 of the same year, Giovacchino Petracchi provided news of the new management selection procedure and in doing so drew up the boundaries of the head teacher’s operational capacity, once again in the traditional context:

it is expressed as an aptitude for establishing human relations with those who gravitate towards the school’s activities; then as the ability to animate the school and community environment; then, to be able to promote collaboration with and between teachers; again, to be able to exercise a supervisory role without demeaning, without pushing conformity, without compelling teachers’ initiatives; finally, to be able to evaluate fairly<sup>12</sup>.

From the mid-1960s, it became a priority to establish the roles of management: issue 18 of 1966 contained a supplement for school inspectors and head teachers in which an attempt was made to better define their role and duties.

Gino Bellagamba, head teacher in Opparo (near Ferrara), hoped that «head teachers and school inspectors will be increasingly urged and helped to intensify and improve their work of stimulating and animating teaching experimentation and the cultural and professional training of teachers»<sup>13</sup>.

The obituaries of the 1960s reflected the change that took place: they refer to the professional qualities of the head teachers rather than their human ones, they mention honours and merits due to the valuable work performed within the educational institution, and the talents highlighted are cultural, organisational and related to the many activities carried out.

In this sense, while nothing specific appeared in the articles about female head teachers who were treated in the same way as male colleagues in the exercise of school governance, there were a few obituaries of women whose multiple activities were emphasised. This is the case of the head teacher Giuseppina Tarditi Isaia in Dogliani (near Cuneo), remembered for her industriousness:

A moving collection of writings was published in her memory, testifying to her singular virtues, professional value, and the sympathy and affection she was surrounded by. We reproduce some parting words pronounced by Luigi Taricco, mayor of Dogliani, during the solemn and moving funeral honours

<sup>11</sup> A. Liotta, *Il Rapporto maestro-Direttore. In ordine alla libertà didattica*, «Scuola Italiana Moderna», vol. LXXVIII, n. 9, 1968, pp. 98-102.

<sup>12</sup> G. Petracchi, *Direttori didattici e concorsi direttivi*, «Scuola Italiana Moderna», vol. LXXVII, n. 13, 1968, p. 5.

<sup>13</sup> G. Bellagamba, *Una proposta da inquadrare in una più ampia prospettiva*, «Scuola Italiana Moderna», vol. LXXVI, n. 1, 1966, p. 9.



[...] «Dogliani is once more entirely here for her last farewell, she who spent her entire life, right up to her last industrious days, for the primary schools of this area, which she led with perfect dedication, solicitous care and effective work anxiously aimed at the education of children to prepare them for life as good men and good citizens for a better society in a better world»<sup>14</sup>.

The head teacher, Lidia Monteverde, on the other hand, was remembered for her dynamism: «in Rome, Dr Lidia Monteverde, head teacher of the schools “Principessa Jolanda” and “A. Beccarini”. The school system in Rome, which for so many years counted her among its most respected and dynamic head teachers, remembers her with unanimous fondness»<sup>15</sup>; while head teacher Maria Chiesa was remembered for her faith and for having received a medal:

The sudden death from a brain haemorrhage of Dr Maria Chiesa, school inspector of the Mortara district, Gold medal winner for public education, Knight of Merit of the Republic, has aroused widespread mourning. [...] For many years she was President of the city’s School Board, where she also held numerous positions in welfare organisations. Gifted with singular qualities of mind and heart, Inspector Chiesa was able to put to good use in her tireless work the natural reliability, affability and gentleness of manner that distinguished her in the always cordial way she related to others. In the school environment she also earned esteem and affection for her gentleness of spirit, which meant she never overreached her authority. [...] With a profoundly Christian spirit, she was able to bear witness to her faith, which she used to light up her path<sup>16</sup>.

Matilde Meda, another head teacher, was remembered for her talents and merits: «After twenty years of primary teaching, appointed head teacher of the Musocco school in Milan, she was appreciated by all for her high qualities of mind and heart. [...] For her merits, she was awarded the Gold medal of the municipality of Milan, that of the Ministry of Education and the honorary title of school inspector»<sup>17</sup>.

Male and female head teachers appeared in the pages of «Scuola Italiana Moderna» as people who did not abandon their roles of educational guidance and support for the teachers but set out to be cultural organisers and civil servants who wove broader relationships with all the school components and entities that existed in the area in which the school was located, while also drawing on the cooperation of the best teachers.

### 3. *The 1970s and 1980s: the renewal of the head teacher model*

In the 1970s, the management model began to change and the journal prepared the head teachers for what would be a change in role and duties with three dossiers published in 1971 in issues 7, 16 and 19. In all the articles, the change outlined a new role of the

<sup>14</sup> *Resurgent*, «Scuola Italiana Moderna», vol. LXXIII, n. 2, 1963, p. 91.

<sup>15</sup> *Resurgent*, «Scuola Italiana Moderna», vol. LXXV, n. 15, 1965, p. 97.

<sup>16</sup> *Resurgent*, «Scuola Italiana Moderna», vol. LXXV, n. 11, 1966, p. 90.

<sup>17</sup> *Resurgent*, «Scuola Italiana Moderna», vol. LXXVI, n. 11, 1967, p. 98.

head teacher, which had been challenged by the democratic conception of the school, but to which little support and few solutions were offered.

Petracchi acknowledged that «the increase in the number of inspectors and head teachers has led to a decisive reduction in the area of responsibility and, therefore, has contributed to a less burdensome and more effective operating condition»<sup>18</sup>. However, he wrote, a host of problems were looming: «Today the school must become a school of learning, that is, a school that does not aim to give the minimum of education to the nation's children, but that creates for each and every one the opportunities for the full development of young talents». If the school model was to change, then the leadership model would also have to change. However, inspectors and head teachers were in serious difficulty because they were overburdened by administrative and bureaucratic workloads that had not been matched by a progressive adjustment of administrative services.

Luigi Agazzi reiterated that the teaching aspect of the head teacher's work had taken a back seat, even though, since the 1928 Regulation, the head teacher had always been «not only didactic, but also didactic» because he had the task of visiting the schools and directing the work of the teachers, but he also had to attend to many other tasks with a prevalent or exclusive administrative content. And he added that in reality it was a single role with two aspects that were coexistent and inseparable. He ends the article with a new definition of the head teacher that accommodated new tasks which had not been contemplated in 1928 and which saw the appearance (unfortunately ill-conceived) of a secretary in every office: «One could therefore, for the sake of argument, say that – today – the head teacher is a technician whom the state hires to administer the school, or if you like, the head teacher is an administrator whom the state hires for his technical expertise»<sup>19</sup>.

The technical competence extended horizontally because the head teacher had to deal with primary schools, nursery schools, adult education, welfare activities, after-school activities, etc., and vertically because «they are required to promote and animate teaching-educational activities, to set up concrete initiatives suitable for a commitment to updating teachers and to create conditions conducive to the progressive and continuous methodological renewal of the schools entrusted to their competence»<sup>20</sup>. It was therefore time to address the issue of the head teacher's competence, which required «conditions of specific qualification»: it is the result of «a process of study and in-depth examination of issues that, in the context of direct experience, cannot have gone beyond mere intuition»<sup>21</sup>.

Even Bellagamba, while reiterating that the head teacher had to collaborate with the teachers, recognised the need for a courageous mentality of renewal.

It is interesting that in *Dossier no. 19* Petracchi gave an account of a comparative study on management and inspection roles in Europe and in some non-European countries: he

<sup>18</sup> G. Petracchi, *Ristrutturare gli organi direttivi per una scuola rinnovata*, «Scuola Italiana Moderna», Supplement to n. 7, 1971, p. 2.

<sup>19</sup> L. Agazzi, *Funzione didattica e amministrativa del direttore didattico*, «Scuola Italiana Moderna», Supplement to n. 7, 1971, p. 5.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

first dwelt on the validity of comparative studies and then analysed Argentina, Austria, Belgium, France, West Germany, England, Spain, the Soviet Union and the United States of America. The study, which is thorough and precise, merits a detailed account: suffice to say that the interpretations of the role are varied, but the duties noted were still the teaching and organisational-administrative ones, albeit with a very varied weight. However, no particular indications for the role of management in Italy seemed to emerge from the comparison.

From 1975 onwards, articles explaining and interpreting the new school reform law are encountered for a few years<sup>22</sup>, because the reality of school is quite different from the one outlined in the legislation. This is how the crisis in the school was described following the approval of the Delegated Decrees and the head teacher posts in particular:

after a year since the new legislation came into force, the unease of the head teachers has become more evident: the protests, even if composed, manifest the dissatisfaction of a category that finds itself having to bear the full weight of the innovation without having the tools and means. [...] The figure of the head teacher in a democratic school is miserably sinking in the great sea of organisational and structural deficiencies in primary schools. The head teacher [...] should become [...] the animator of the school's educational and teaching activity, the promoter of community participation through the collegiate bodies, the coordinator of the various initiatives to give the school necessary unity<sup>23</sup>.

In the face of all this, the head teacher was unable to perform his duties because he was often entrusted with the supervision of unfilled districts, had an excessive number of classes and teachers, had the burden of state nursery schools, no longer had the support of the District School Inspectorates that had been closed down, had to take charge of the establishment and operation of School Boards, and had a shortage of staff in the management offices and many other roles. Trade union activity was weak and the Ministry acted inconsistently: this caused insecurity and resignation in an already difficult historical moment. Thus, there was a twofold danger: «first, the head teacher is reduced to a mere executor of the resolutions of the school boards and of the provisions that come down from the higher offices; second, the head teacher is transformed into an organiser of school life and into a coordinator of the school boards, without being able to have a direct influence to make a specific contribution to various processes of renewal»<sup>24</sup>. In 1978, Luigi Silvestri revisited the need to eliminate temporary posts<sup>25</sup>, and the following year Remo Bernacchia emphasised the need to reform school boards that did not seem to function well<sup>26</sup>.

<sup>22</sup> "Legge Delega" n. 477 of 30 July 1973 and "Decreti Delegati" of the President of the Italian Republic nos. 416, 417, 418, 419, 420, 31 May 1974.

<sup>23</sup> P. Pasotti, *Sempre più grave lo stato di crisi delle direzioni didattiche*, «Scuola Italiana Moderna», vol. LXXXV, n. 6, 1975, pp. 102-103.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104.

<sup>25</sup> L. Silvestri, *Tra "reggenza" e "incarico direttivo"*, «Scuola Italiana Moderna», vol. LXXXVIII, n. 5, 1978, pp. 115-117.

<sup>26</sup> R. Bernacchia, *Saranno modificati gli organi collegiali*, «Scuola Italiana Moderna», vol. LXXXVIII, n. 6, 1979, pp. 12-13.

Pietro Pasotti reflected, in 1985, on the role of the deputy head teacher, created in 1974 by the Delegated Decrees to start the process of democratisation of the school, requesting more training for both head teacher and deputy head.

There was also the possibility of employing staff for collegiate direction, but the preparation, recruitment and relationships had to be well defined in order to achieve a true sharing of power and responsibility. Collegiality struggled to take off and undermined the role of the manager without offering appropriate solutions.

Female head teachers, apart from a few sporadic cases such as the well-known Pierina Boranga<sup>27</sup>, did not get any specific space in the journal. Even in obituaries, the celebration of public remembrance remained firmly tied to previous models that emphasised human rather than professional qualities. Thus, in the 1970s we read:

In Brescia, at the age of 80, head teacher Caterina Mottinelli (widow of Gagliardo). She had begun her career at a very young age in the Edolo circle, where she remained for about twenty years in charge of around 200 teachers, then moved to Bagnolo Mella and to Brescia (city) where she remained until her retirement. Colleagues and teachers remember her as intelligent and cultured, serene and smiling, but above all profoundly, motherly good. Highly esteemed and loved, she leaves a great sense of sorrow<sup>28</sup>.

In Giarre (Catania), the retired school inspector, Dr Michela Cali Marano. Colleagues, school managers and teachers remember her as intelligent and cultured, serene and smiling, but above all profoundly and motherly good<sup>29</sup>.

It was once again the maternal role, as for teachers, that was placed at the forefront. From the mid-1970s, obituaries became rarer and more neutral: «In Pisa, at the venerable age of 85, head teacher Dina Questa, widow of Clicci, former head teacher of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Circle»<sup>30</sup>.

### *Conclusions*

The analysis of the texts revealed that there were no specific professional traits attributed to the professional role of female head teachers, other than those referring to typically female human qualities such as care and gentleness in relationships. The picture that emerges is closer to that of fellow male head teachers rather than to that of female teachers, insofar as it evolved along the same lines as the image of men and long maintains characteristics that were no different from those required of male colleagues.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. F. Targhetta, *Pierina Boranga*, in Chiosso, Sani (edd.), *Dizionario Biografico dell'Educazione (1800-2000)*, Milano, Editrice Bibliografica, 2014, vol. I, pp. 195-196. A few interviews were devoted to Boranga, but always within a very traditional vision that presented her as the pupil from Pizzigoni who loved childhood and does her best for it.

<sup>28</sup> *Resurgent*, «Scuola Italiana Moderna», vol. LXXX, n. 13, 1976, p. 16.

<sup>29</sup> *Resurgent*, «Scuola Italiana Moderna», vol. LXXX, n. 7, 1976, p. 63.

<sup>30</sup> *Resurgent*, «Scuola Italiana Moderna», vol. LXXX, n. 17, 1976, p. 48.

Gender diversity in the profession did not appear, nor did it characterise female head teachers.

The work of the female head teacher was not conceived and proposed as a “mission”, like that of the teacher, and as for her male colleagues, the characteristic traits of the role changed over time, becoming increasingly similar to the semi-professional work that characterised the path of male head teachers without particular evolutions. Furthermore, given the orientation of the journal, the religious dimension remained as a component of managerial professionalism, but this also applied to male head teachers.

It can be said that the path towards a truly professional conception of the male and female head teacher was portrayed by the journal as being fraught with obstacles and particularly “lonely”, as this state official seems to have been left alone, with few prescriptions and few tools, to face the often radical changes in the school system.

It was only at the beginning of the 1990s that the head teacher became the manager that the law on autonomy outlined, but once again without providing sufficient operational tools. This was the third step in the evolution of a professionalism that has struggled to find its theoretical-practical dimension within the Italian school system and has lost, over time, the teaching name and role of its origins.



# A Memoir of How Italian Secondary Schools Changed in the Second Half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: Birth and Development of a Concept of Innovation and Experimentation in the Private Papers of the Principal Tranquillo Bertamini

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## 1. *The formative years*

Born on 28 October 1921 in Vignole, a small district of Arco in the province of Trento, Tranquillo Bertamini was the first of five children, and the only male. After primary school, he joined a religious congregation – the *Istituto della Carità*, better known as the *Rosminiani* – that enabled him to pursue a private high school education at the officially-recognized “Mellerio Rosmini” College in Domodossola<sup>1</sup>. In the summer of 1941, he sat his final exams as an external candidate at the “Alfieri” classical high school in Turin, then enrolled at the Faculty of Philosophy at the Catholic University in Milan, where he remained for two years<sup>2</sup>.

Soon after starting to attend university, he was entrusted with «all the literary teaching» for students in their second year at the “Rosmini” lower secondary school associated with the ENIMS in Stresa Borromeo<sup>3</sup>. A year later, for the 1942-1943 academic year, he

<sup>1</sup> On the origins of this institution, see *Atti del Consiglio Provinciale di Novara anno 1892*, Novara, Tipografia Novarese con Litografia, 1892, pp. 197-199.

<sup>2</sup> Fondo Bertamini, Faldone A, autograph Curriculum vitae for career reconstruction.

<sup>3</sup> Fondo Bertamini, Faldone A, certificate of services rendered in the academic year 1941-1942, signed by the priest Prof. Mario Zambrini, principal at the “Rosmini” lower secondary school in Stresa Borromeo, and dated 12 October 1946. Italy’s National Board for Middle School Teaching (ENIM) was established by Royal Decree n. 928 of 3 June 1938. With various amendments, it was converted into law n. 15 of 5 January 1939, and renamed ENIMS to cover lower and upper secondary school teaching. It monitored private schools and courses that led to qualifications at lower and upper secondary, teacher-training, technical and girls’ schools. It was suppressed by law (D. Lgs. Lgt. 24 May 1945, n. 412) and its responsibilities were transferred to the Ministry of Education.

returned to the “Mellerio Rosmini” College in Domodossola where he was appointed to teach letters to the first-year students<sup>4</sup>.

Having completed his supply teaching appointment, Bertamini returned to his native Arco, enrolling at Padua University to complete his further education<sup>5</sup>. He did not escape the war unscathed. Rounded up by the German troops of occupation in September 1944, he was forcibly moved to a work camp in Navene on Lake Garda, and from there to another camp in Re di Cola di Monte Baldo. «Eluding the surveillance of the Nazi police», he managed to escape in April 1945, and succeeded in «making himself scarce until the end of the war»<sup>6</sup>. As we can see from a CV dated 10 September 1953<sup>7</sup>, he nonetheless managed to complete his studies at the Faculty of Philosophy in Padua, where Luigi Stefanini and Umberto Antonio Padovani were teaching at the time. Bertamini found Padua University a stimulating cultural environment, which remained rightfully remote from the dominant directives of the period, and closer to his personal interests<sup>8</sup>. He was proclaimed doctor in philosophy on 13 November 1945<sup>9</sup>, by which time he had already come into contact with the sphere of Monsignor Filippin «as a supply teacher of literary subjects at the Filippin Certified Middle School private lower secondary school in Paderno del Grappa (Treviso)»<sup>10</sup>. He was appointed to teach history and philosophy at the Filippin Institute's private scientific high school, and remained in service there until 30 September 1957<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> Fondo Bertamini, Faldone A, Certificate of services rendered in the academic year 1942-43, signed by prof. Francesco Airandi, acting principal at the “Mellerio – Rosmini” high school in Domodossola, dated 23 October 1946.

<sup>5</sup> Fondo Bertamini, Faldone A, autograph Curriculum vitae for career reconstruction, cit.

<sup>6</sup> In relation to these events, the Commissariat of the Trento Provincial Government, in the person of A. Bianco, acknowledged his status as a «civilian veteran of deportation» on 4 September 1975. Later on, in accordance with the law of 16 March 1983, n. 75, based on a proposal advanced by the then Minister of Defense, Giovanni Spadolini, the President of the Republic, Sandro Pertini, awarded him the *Diploma d'onore al combattente per la Libertà d'Italia 1943-1945* on 25 April 1984. Fondo Bertamini, Faldone A, respectively minutes of the Commissariat of the Trento Provincial Government and letter accompanying the diploma, (unnumbered papers).

<sup>7</sup> Fondo Bertamini, Faldone A, typewritten Curriculum vitae for competition use, on letter-headed paper of the «Scuola Libera: rassegna trimestrale a cura del Centro Studi Problemi Scolastici», 10 September 1953 (unnumbered papers).

<sup>8</sup> Cf., F. Tassarolo, *A scuola di libertà. Figure di riferimento ed esperienze didattiche di Tranquillo Bertamini, preside coraggioso*, Bassano del Grappa, Attiliofraccaroeditore, 2019, pp. 38-39.

<sup>9</sup> With a sizable body of reflections entitled *Gnoseogenesi studio critico su Aristotele, S. Agostino, S. Tommaso s. Bonaventura e Rosmini*, that earned him a distinction. Cf. Fondo Bertamini, Faldone A, Certificate of the University of Padua, Faculty of Letters and Philosophy (unnumbered papers).

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Fondo Bertamini, Faldone A, typewritten Curriculum vitae of 10 September 1953, cit.

<sup>11</sup> Judging from the available documentation, he was assigned the teaching post about a month before the proclamation, on 16 October 1945. Cf. Fondo Bertamini, Faldone A (various unnumbered papers).



## 2. *The years at the Filippin Institute*

Tranquillo Bertamini found the environment in Paderno familiar, much like those he had experienced in Domodossola and Stresa, and for more than a decade he benefited from being close to two great personalities. One was Monsignor Erminio Filippin<sup>12</sup>, founder of the Institute – «great forerunner, great organizer, great educator»<sup>13</sup> – who wanted to reshape Catholic schooling, acknowledging freedom and persuasion as the cornerstones of a new educational action at a time when authoritarianism was rife. The core elements behind Filippin's thinking, wholeheartedly shared by Bertamini, were an attention to giving a person an all-round education, the need to use persuasive methods, the importance of mutual respect and cooperation between educators and students to ensure a rational and disciplined use of personal freedom – seen as the founding principle of a liberal education<sup>14</sup>. Alongside his convinced alignment with the educational principles behind Filippin's pedagogical model, it is also worth recalling Bertamini's lifelong friendship and cultural exchanges with Giovanni Gozzer<sup>15</sup>. Filippin had met Gozzer a few years earlier, at the time of an examination board in Rovereto, and had invited him to Paderno. He subsequently appointed him principal at the lower secondary school in Asolo, which was established in 1942.

As soon as Bertamini arrived in Paderno, he began to work with Gozzer, who did not restrict himself to simply directing the lower secondary school. On the strength of experience gained at the “valley school centers”<sup>16</sup>, and always stimulated and supported

<sup>12</sup> On this topic, see E. Filippin, *Controcorrente 1924-1934*, Bassano del Grappa, Vicenzi, 1934; M. Quadrio, *La scuola libera di mons. Filippin*, Bassano del Grappa, Tip. Minchio, 1971; T. Andreatta, T. Bertamini, G. Gozzer, G.P. Marotta (edd.), *Mons. Erminio Filippin. La vita, il pensiero e l'opera di un educatore. Per il centenario della nascita: 1899-1999*, [s.l.], Associazione ex allievi mons. Filippin, 1999.

<sup>13</sup> As Gozzer wrote to Bertamini on 31 December 1998, Fondo Bertamini, Faldone B (unnumbered correspondence).

<sup>14</sup> Much later, in 1985, Filippin wrote: «My very dear Dr. Prof. Tranquillo Bertamini, [...] I remember you with your children and wife in my recollections of an indelible past». Fondo Bertamini, Faldone B (unnumbered correspondence).

<sup>15</sup> On Giovanni Gozzer, see Q. Antonelli, R. G. Arcaini (edd.), *Giovanni Gozzer a 100 anni dalla nascita*, Trento, Provincia autonoma di Trento – Soprintendenza per i Beni culturali – Ufficio Beni archivistici, librari, 2016; A. Gaudio, *Comparative education discourse in Italy after WWII: the case of Giovanni Gozzer*, «Rivista di Storia dell'Educazione», vol. 5, n. 2, 2018, pp. 17-28; Id., *Giovanni Gozzer and the reform of secondary schools in Italy during the Seventies*, «Rivista di Storia dell'Educazione», vol. 8, n. 1, 2021, pp. 61-69.

<sup>16</sup> These centers «brought together students from different types of school (vocational, lower secondary schools, classical and scientific high schools, teacher-training and technical colleges). In a way, they were basically an early version of the unified system. Since every type of institute had some subjects in common (though the course content was not always identical), students from different classes came together for lessons on the subjects they shared, and had separate lessons on the subjects specific to each type of institute. This demanded a degree of adaptability, but also enabled innovations that later took years and years to be adopted by the Italian school system. It is not unity and uniformity that guarantee a good schooling. [...] An exceptional teaching experience [...], a great innovation, promptly set aside as soon as the Italian administration was restored». The innovation concerned both upper and lower secondary schools. In fact, «together with the two — and three-year courses at vocational colleges [...], these [centers] of the former also offered Latin as an option, and those of the latter could generally teach commercial subjects» (P. Tessadri, *Un professore scomodo. Intervista a Giovanni Gozzer*, «Didascalie. Rivista della scuola trentina», VI, n. 2, December 1997, pp. 2-51, in part. pp. 2-3 and 13).

by Monsignor Filippin, Gozzer embarked on a first teaching experiment at the lower secondary school, seeking to adopt the recommendations of Carleton W. Washburne.

Bertamini himself was to say on this topic,

the “Bridging” lower secondary school in Asolo was [...] supervised in all its phases with the utmost care, always proceeding with caution in its conception, design, implementation, testing and improvement. The obvious need to develop a lower secondary school connected to the primary school in the difficult period when the young need to be guided to make the most congenial choices, and helped to gradually orient themselves according to their aptitudes and real abilities, was possibly sometimes suggested to prof. Gozzer not only by the need to correct the backward Italian situation in this delicate sector of a person’s education, but also by his encounter with Carleton W. Washburne, creator of the “Winnetka Plan”, who spent a brief period of time in Trento with the Allied troops at the end of the war. The basic format of the experimentation conducted in Asolo was certainly not exotic or American. It was closely linked to profound local needs, although the Winnetka Plan could suggest many things as regards freedom of organization within the school, and especially as concerns psychological and environmental security, or in other words the consolidation of that “ground under your feet” that affords young people sincere and free expression<sup>17</sup>.

In 1946 Gozzer also became director of the new journal, «Scuola Libera»<sup>18</sup>, which included Giuseppe Pimazzoni, Tranquillo Bertamini and Ferruccio Ceselin on its editorial committee. «Scuola Libera»<sup>19</sup> was officially meant to replace the Filippin Institute’s earlier journal, «L’Aquila», which had stopped being published in 1941. In actual fact, it was closely related to the Filippin research center (Centro Studi Problemi Scolastici) in Asolo and, rather than documenting life within the Institute, it became a means for

<sup>17</sup> Fondo Bertamini, Faldone B, Filippin Gozzer, typed draft with notes in the margin of a contribution to the text commemorating Monsignor Filippin (handwritten page numbering, p. 22).

<sup>18</sup> Gozzer remained director of the journal, published in 36 issues from 1946 to 1955, even after he moved to Rome to work at the Ministry.

<sup>19</sup> More than 50 years later, in 1999, Gozzer wrote to Ferdinando Adornato, director of the «Liberal» weekly (official journal of the Foundation of the same name that organized a conference entitled *Scuola Libera*, to which Gozzer was not invited): «I had the idea of dealing with the topic of a Free School right from the time of the Resistance, and I kept it together with the idea of autonomy (it would be presumptuous of me to say of federalism too, as the time was not right) as president of the CLN [National Liberation Committee] in Trento in 1944-45, and then as head of the education offices under the city’s Allied administration. I was “thrown out” immediately when our administration returned, and “retrieved” a few years later by Gonnella’s DC [Christian Democrats]. With some merit, and what I might call obstinacy, we conducted the first national enquiry on the school system, using the newborn Doxa to conduct opinion polls for the first time in 1948, though this met with derision from the left-wing parties. Incidentally, I would appreciate it if you could unearth it again, now that the culture dominant at the time is in crisis. Once again in 1988, my pamphlet – which has been totally ignored to this day (only the current chairman of the State Attorney’s Office, Plinio Sacchetto was so kind as to ask me for it when it seemed that the issue of “parity” was becoming a hot topic) – on the history of statism in schools (*Senza oneri per lo stato – La vittoria sbagliata*, Roma, Anicia, 1986) was the last, fruitless attempt to draw attention to the topic that nobody wanted to think about. Now I see that you have all changed your tune and, if I’m not over-happy about it, that’s fine». Fondo Bertamini, Faldone B, Filippin Gozzer, copy of the fax sent to the director of «Liberal», dott. Adornato, by Giovanni Gozzer 1<sup>st</sup> July 1999 (unnumbered correspondence).

disseminating the free analysis of school-related problems, involving families, promoting research and investigations, organizing “referendums”; in a word, for creating an atmosphere in which school problems could be freely discussed: so that the school and its organization could stem from and really satisfy the needs of families and educators<sup>20</sup>.

As Bertamini himself claimed, the first issue did more than just outline the programmatic lines of the journal itself, and of the related research center. It also identified proposals for school reforms in the spheres of organization and teaching, «suggestions that anticipate by half a century problems that are highly topical today»<sup>21</sup>. The journal (on the theoretical plane, and as regards the open exchange of ideas in the field of education), and the research center (on the practical plane of delivering lessons and continually assessing the results) made a fundamental contribution to the first experimentation in post-war Italy: this concerned the so-called “bridging school”, followed by the arrival in 1956 of the modern language polytechnic high school<sup>22</sup>.

Drawing on the approaches of Monsignor Filippin and Giovanni Gozzer, Bertamini highlighted the importance of «free experimental schools» for the study and application of the various education systems correlated with the knowledge afforded by medical, biological and scientific advances regarding character development and psychology, as a necessary support for the teacher’s work. In particular, the “bridging school” was seen as a sort of “laboratory-workshop”. Moving away from any superficial experimentalism, the “bridging school” would enable a genuine interdependence of selection and orientation, with elements characterizing a school that would occupy a place in between the world of children and the world of adults. Hence Bertamini’s interest in the studies and research that sought psychological foundations and scientific education theories with a view to identifying the most suitable means for a school «made for school-goers», designed to suit the young people attending it, respecting their developmental age, and adapting to the various stages of their development and human life, in general and as single individuals in relation to that «strictly *personal* something»<sup>23</sup> characteristic of each individual<sup>24</sup>. A lower secondary school designed for students who «have yet to show any particular inclinations or sense of responsibility towards their future» should be distinctive in its focus on the essential, not on the accessory. It should «take care of the inner structure,

<sup>20</sup> A program revolving around seven points concerning freedom of organization, programs, school arrangements, initiative, and the creation of free experimental schools with the fundamental acknowledgement of their equal standing. E. Filippin, *Sette punti di libertà nella scuola*, «Scuola Libera», I, n. 1, October 1946, pp. 1-8.

<sup>21</sup> Fondo Bertamini, Faldone B, Filippin Gozzer, handwritten notes (unnumbered papers).

<sup>22</sup> On this issue, in addition to various articles in «Scuola Libera», see also G. Gozzer, *La scuola ponte. Osservazioni, esperienze, problemi della scuola media*, Trento, Saturnia, 1948.

<sup>23</sup> T. Bertamini, *Argomenti di psicologia in favore di una Scuola Media unica*, «Scuola Libera», IV, n. 3, 1949-1950, pp. 10-14 (in part. p. 10).

<sup>24</sup> So, although he retains a «strictly orthodox and Catholic» stance, Bertamini reveals «a rare equilibrium in his assessment when suggesting that Christian education principles are not disrupted [...] by psychoanalytical theories, but can instead be sustained and confirmed thereby». T. Bertamini, *I turbamenti psichici della pubertà*, «Scuola Libera», I, n. 3, 1946-1947, pp. 22-32 (in part. p. 22).

not [...] of premature professional differentiations»<sup>25</sup>. As the outcome of «a conscious personal self-determination slowly reached by young people», professional orientation is not the goal of lower secondary schools, which should instead be concerned with young people's personal solidity as an indispensable basis for their healthy development and valid organization of their own aptitudes<sup>26</sup>.

According to Bertamini, the school is rooted in the «psychological practical», and the method consequently derives its rules only from what has been tried and tested<sup>27</sup>. In this context, the educator can be seen as an

*instigator* of education, inasmuch as it is the students themselves who should take action *directly* in that sense. Hence the need for the master to be prepared scientifically to understand and guide the students' free initiative; and hence also the need to connect the teachers' preparation with scientific research institutes attuned to serious principles.

Education theory is a complex discipline that has two fundamental points of view: the first concerns how to look at the general principles that should inspire the relationship between master and pupil, and aspects of general education theory; the second focuses on the applied research into the most appropriate ways to put pupils' energies to good use, and this leads us to the method and didactics of teaching and education<sup>28</sup>.

The goal of the research center was to renew the Italian schooling and education systems. The center was conceived as «the most up-to-date source of information in the world on the problems of education and the organization of schools»<sup>29</sup>. It brought together teachers at the Filippin Institute and anyone else interested in the urgent and topical problems pertaining to education and schools. Tranquillo Bertamini served as the research center's secretary for more than a decade, acquiring an educational experience that was fundamental in shaping his future as a principal.

In 1955, the experience of the Institute's journal came to an end and, not long afterwards, its founder Monsignor Filippin was induced to leave the Institute, which had gradually passed entirely into the hands of the *Fratelli delle Scuole Cristiane*, and all the courses had consequently become aligned with the directives and pedagogical models of the state school system. At the same time, there were great changes underway for Bertamini too. He passed a selection process and qualified as a teacher of history and philosophy at high schools and teacher-training colleges. He was first appointed by a teacher-training college in Manfredonia (Foggia)<sup>30</sup>, then requested and obtained (1 October 1957) a transfer to the "C. Renier" Institute in Belluno «thanks to the

<sup>25</sup> Bertamini, *Argomenti di psicologia in favore di una Scuola Media unica*, cit., p. 12.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>27</sup> T. Bertamini, *Il metodo socratico e i suoi limiti*, «Scuola Libera», IV, n. 2, 1949-1950, pp. 3-6 (in part. p. 6).

<sup>28</sup> T. Bertamini, *La metodica e i suoi motivi fondamentali*, «Scuola Libera», IV, n. 1, 1949-1950, pp. 3-10 (in part. p. 3).

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Inside back cover of each issue of the journal «Scuola libera».

<sup>30</sup> Where he never actually takes up his post because he applies for and obtains unpaid leave for family reasons from 27 October 1956 to 30 September 1957. Fondo Bertamini, Faldone A, signed certificate of marital status of principal Bertamini (unnumbered).

direct involvement of the Centro Didattico Nazionale di Studi e Documentazione in Florence, that wishes to exploit the above-mentioned teacher's experience in the study of pedagogical problems at the "Gabelli" experimental school in Belluno»<sup>31</sup>. Two years later, Bertamini was full professor at the "Galilei" scientific high school in the same city.

The experience he had gained during his years of teaching and cooperation in Paderno were nonetheless to have a fundamental influence on Bertamini in his new role as principal at the high school, and on his efforts to promote the renewal of secondary schools. Much later, on 16 January 1998, Bertamini wrote to Gozzer:

I have always retained incisive and grateful memories of you because it was by working alongside you that I learned the ropes, albeit in cooperation "with that brave and loyal group of teachers that (at that time!) gave life and soul to the institutes in Paderno". And I can tell you that, along with your teachings, I have also carried with me in the state schools a clear and precise idea concerning the EXPERIMENTATION OF NEW WAYS (structural and, above all, methodological/didactic) better suited to the current education needs of our society. And the outcome has been (and continues to be) positive<sup>32</sup>.

### 3. *Representation of an innovative principal*

After an experience as principal at the "Castaldi" high school in Feltre in the academic years from 1960-61 to 1966-67, Bertamini was appointed principal at the "Brocchi" high school in Bassano del Grappa, where he was to remain until 31 August 1988.

When I arrived at the high school (in Bassano in 1967) it took my breath away. The atmosphere was suffocating, typical of an old-fashioned, highly-selective school. The experimentation aimed instead to keep the different subjects as balanced as possible during the two-year course in order to offer students the opportunity to "taste" various subject areas and thereby discover their own aptitudes before choosing their final course of studies<sup>33</sup>.

Bertamini thus set to work to obtain a different type of school, more attentive to the changing times and to the demands of its students. It was a time when the youth were in ferment, and Bertamini needed to find ways to deal with the student revolts.

As soon as he arrived in Bassano, he made high-school classrooms available for courses run by a school for working students (the Scuola Lavoratori-Studenti) established in 1965 thanks to the efforts of several university students who had made themselves available to help workers obtain a lower secondary school diploma. This scheme had begun on the quiet, but the organizers very soon found themselves having to cope with considerable numbers of workers wanting to complete their formal education. Bertamini's

<sup>31</sup> Giovanni Gozzer, then director of the Office for Teaching Centers at the Ministry of Education, also supported Bertamini's application to the *Istituto Nazionale per le Case degli Impiegati dello Stato* (INCIS) for a home so that he could settle in Belluno with his family. Fondo Bertamini, Faldone A, letter from Giovanni Gozzer dated 6 March 1958, to the I.N.C.I.S. management (unnumbered).

<sup>32</sup> Fondo Bertamini, Faldone B, Filippin Gozzer (unnumbered correspondence).

<sup>33</sup> E. Castellani, *La scelta del liceo rischia di diventare una trappola*, «Giornale di Vicenza», 3 March 2006, p. 28.

inclusion of these courses at the historical site of the classical high school was seen by some as “scandalous”, but he was on familiar ground. He could rely on the depth of his knowledge of pedagogical and didactic principles gained during his years in Paderno. To give an example, he referred to a program defined along general lines and subsequently implemented on the basis of the topics that emerged as interesting and useful from an assembly, as the principal organ of a possible democratic self-management<sup>34</sup>.

It is hard to summarize within the limits of the present contribution all the studies, personal reflections and notes to be found among Bertamini’s private papers, which reveal a picture of an exemplary case of school directorship at a time when great changes were underway.

Bertamini was convinced that renewing the school system demanded not only new programs but also a profound reform of the teaching methods. It needed to rely on new teachers capable of expressing a cultural approach that was not shuttered and notionist, but problematic, based on research and experimentation. These ideas emerge already from notes in the margin of a round table entitled “New techniques and novel teaching methods (with particular attention to the final school-leaving exams)” held at the Centro Didattico Nazionale for high schools in Padua on 4 and 5 October 1969, that Bertamini attended because he was president of an examination board<sup>35</sup>. The core idea of «renewing the school to renew the culture», clearly apparent on that occasion, was brought to the attention of the “Brocchi” high-school teachers:

Today more than ever, the school is trying to shrug off a lengthy LETHARGY that kept it rooted in a defunct STABILITY. We can no longer give our lessons the appearance of an absurd cultural IDYLL, where tranquility coincides with a spiritual passivity in our young people. But, while the school wishes to renew itself, it also fears the constant danger of a DISQUALIFICATION of CULTURE, with a dispersive sloppiness, a decline of logical discipline, of serious documentation, of a panoramic coordination of school subjects. [...] Culture is presented more and more as a crucial dialogue; as such, even in class, it should be acquired by means of inner conflicts and problems that are clearly motivated and discussed<sup>36</sup>.

In thinking about a new school for a new society, Bertamini’s gaze always turns to the young people dealing with a society dominated by situations that are extremely variable and, as such, they call for an effort on everyone’s part to employ intellectual processes shaped as a function of an adequate adaptation of school to reality. Bertamini emphasizes the need to promote:

on the plane of didactics too, an interdependence of group work (instead of traditional individual competition) and a consolidation of community systems that achieve a widespread participation (instead of the usual small, closed measures), so that the “temporary” and “provisional” always prevail

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Fondo Bertamini, Faldone X (unnumbered papers).

<sup>35</sup> Fondo Bertamini, Faldone C, Notes and conclusions of the round table at the *Centro Didattico Nazionale per i Licei* (unnumbered papers). On this occasion, the principal focused particularly on the new final school-leaving exams that came into effect with legislation (D.L. n. 9 of 15 February 1969, and L. n. 910 of 11 December 1969) on the deregulation of access to university faculties.

<sup>36</sup> Fondo Bertamini, Faldone C, Handwritten speech for the meeting on Tuesday 23.12.1969 (unnumbered papers).



over any duties, roles, models, and fixed arrangements. A rapid adaptation to transient and constantly varying criteria will help to: release our school system from its current vertical hierarchy, based on ranks, grades and roles; replace it with a lively dialectic, constructive contributions from all the various components (students, teachers, society) that, taking action from both inside and outside, are part of the school world; and nurture the development of every student's personal capabilities and social adaptability. Wherever it comes from, dissent will always be accepted at school as a basis for prompting an ongoing personal self-criticism and a shared progress. Having thus gained the impetus to overcome the current archaic institutional and ritualistic structures (lessons, marks, tests, exams, ecc.), we hope to create a type of school that always proceeds on the strength of homogeneous groups with processes that develop young people's capability levels, with mobile social interferences, inventive teaching methods and the so-called leisure-time schooling, the maturation of a critical spirit, the scientific approach to group research and, ultimately, the variety of opportunities to meet those socio-economic demands that correspond to young people's vocational choices<sup>37</sup>.

Bertamini was unable to take part in the general drive for renewal of the school system that first took concrete shape in the "Progetto 80"<sup>38</sup>, and in the proposals for reform outlined at the end of the conference in Frascati in 1970 on the new approaches to secondary-school education, held at the head office of the *Centro Europeo per l'Educazione (CEDE)*, of which Giovanni Gozzer was president.

When subsequent Italian legislation (DPR n. 419 of 31 May 1974) made experimentation possible, Bertamini succeeded in involving his team of teachers in a lengthy preparatory effort to embark on an ambitious experimental project that began in the academic year 1974-75:

[...] anticipating the results of the expected REFORM of upper secondary schools that, within a few years, will be enshrined in law and will modify the school system, a ministerial decree has already been put into effect at the "G.B. BROCCHI" state high school, where an EXPERIMENTAL UNIFIED TWO-YEAR PROGRAM ensures that students who enroll can complete their cycle of studies up to the threshold of their profession, or – at the end of the subsequent THREE-YEAR PROGRAM – up until the final school-leaving exams that enable access to the university<sup>39</sup>.

A core element of the new school organization was the module that could be defined as interdisciplinary (or, more realistically, cross-disciplinary) research activities, undertaken directly by students organized into groups, and monitored by their teachers. This was not to be confused with a normal group work activity. The goal was to enable students to acquire a more complex view of society, going beyond the traditional fragmentation of knowledge by taking an interdisciplinary approach as a habitual and necessary way to achieve personal growth.

<sup>37</sup> Fondo Bertamini, Faldone H, handwritten notes (pages numbered 1-3).

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Ministero del Bilancio e della Programmazione Economica, *Progetto 80. Rapporto preliminare al programma economico nazionale 1971-75*, Roma, 1969.

<sup>39</sup> Fondo Bertamini, Faldone D, pamphlet «Liceo Ginnasio Statale "G.B. Brocchi" con annessi Biennio + Triennio Sperimentali che prevedono "uscite laterali" dopo il Biennio e gli indirizzi: Linguistico Moderno Scientifico Socio-Psico-Pedagogico Classico (a condizione di almeno 15 aderenti) Via Verci n. 9 – Bassano Del Grappa (VI)» (unnumbered papers). See also the manuscript for a meeting of the Comitato di Coordinamento Sperimentazione 3 April 1978.

Bertamini put a great deal of effort into the project to reshape the new school and, even in 1989, starting from an examination of the statistical data in the recent CENSIS report, he produced an acute analysis of the situation as it stood, and of the possible solutions. The results obtained by projects supported by the Ministry of Education, and by experimental models based on art. 3, «virtually imposed from on high, taking a reductive, sectorial and antiquated view», and with a rigid definition of programs drawing on a now obsolete and corporative, discipline-oriented approach, had been translated into «reforms that are out-of-date, apparent rather than substantial, innovations managed in such a way that things change only to remain the same». Faced with this situation, and in the name of the founding principle that the focus should be on a school system genuinely capable of «giving to every student according to their needs», Bertamini called for:

the introduction, by law, of UNIFIED OPTIONAL TWO-YEAR SCHOOL COURSES that aim to “form” and “guide” – operating in close connection and interdependently for the purpose of facilitating internal and external “switches between options” by means of locally-based integration courses to be delivered especially during and at the end of the first year of the two-year program. These courses can be combined together and organized according to the size of the catchment area coming under the fulcrum-city of a single school district, or several districts in partnership<sup>40</sup>.

In a detailed example of a project for a unified two-year program with seven optional orientation areas<sup>41</sup>, the importance of a collegial programming activity and refresher courses for teachers becomes abundantly clear, as does the central role of methodological and didactic innovations. Bertamini’s working manifesto focused on the need to combine flexible timetables with efficient laboratories and working instruments, collegial exchanges to arrange teaching modules that help students to develop their own personal study and problem-solving methods, as well as providing for adequate assessments<sup>42</sup>. The greater freedom and operating autonomy combined with a willingness to take risks – especially on the methodological-didactic plane – that Bertamini had enjoyed in Paderno resurfaces clearly in this last of his plans for renewing the school system, bringing it into line with the times, and focused on forming citizens for a society in rapid transformation.

What emerges from Bertamini’s private papers is the figure of a man, school professor and principal who made renewing the school his mission. The changes he made were initially perceived as subversive, but soon gained the approval of the local community, and his works are still alive in public memory. Already a knight and official of the Order of Merit of the Italian Republic<sup>43</sup>, Bertamini was also awarded a silver medal for his work for the school system and the arts in 1989. In 2012, five years before his death, he was also acknowledged by the city of Bassano for his contribution to the town’s education system.

<sup>40</sup> Fondo Bertamini, Faldone F, *Biennio opzionale come scuola orientante*, 15 February 1989, handwritten notes (pages numbered 1-10, in part. 5).

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Fondo Bertamini, Faldone X, Programmazione e sperimentazione (unnumbered papers).

<sup>43</sup> In 1972 and 1975, cf. Fondo Bertamini, Faldone A (unnumbered papers).



# Portraits of Headmasters and Headmistresses. How is School Authority Depicted in Children's Literature?

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## 1. *About the origin of school stories and the representation of school authority*

Stories with major school settings or backdrops to the lives of characters are deeply intertwined with the history of children's literature and constitute a significant legacy. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, an interesting repertoire of boys' and girls' school stories began to emerge and received growing interest from the publishing market. For instance, in the 1800s and 1900s, thousands of British school stories were published<sup>1</sup>. These stories have «long suffered from critical dismissal and public derision and it is only recently that their influence and merits have begun to be re-evaluated»<sup>2</sup>. Even though many of these narratives were undoubtedly repetitive in plot structure, and had stereotyped characters and inauthentic adult-driving values, they also offered stimulating insights into the world of school, and played a significant role in the children's book literary, social, cultural, and political tradition<sup>3</sup>. The reason may be bound up with the fact that

[a] school story offers a setting in which young people are thrown together and in which relationships between older and younger children, between members of the peer group and between children and adults can be explored. Events and relationships can be imbued with an air of excitement and the possibilities for humour are never far away. Through reading an entertaining story, children can 'test the water', learn how people may react in specific situations and see what lies ahead<sup>4</sup>.

Remarkable traditional examples of these stories are Sarah Fielding's *The Governess* (1749), Charles and Mary Lamb's *Mrs Leicester's School* (1808), Harriet Martineau's *The*

<sup>1</sup> Historical, theoretical and thematic analysis of this genre is to be found in works: R.J. Kirkpatrick, *The Encyclopedia of Boys' School Stories*, Burlington (VT), Ashgate Publishing Company, 2000; S. Sims, H. Clare (edd.), *The Encyclopedia of Girls' School Stories*, Burlington (VT), Ashgate Publishing Company, 2000; U. Pesold, *The Other in the School Stories: A Phenomenon in British Children's Literature*, Leiden, Brill Rodopi, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> R. Auchmuty, *Preface*, in Sims, Clare, *The Encyclopedia of Girls' School Stories*, cit., p. VII.

<sup>3</sup> S. Ray, *School Stories*, in P. Hunt (ed.), *International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature*, London and New York, Routledge, 2004, vol. I, pp. 467-480; M. Reimer, *Traditions of the school story*, in M.O. Grenby, A. Immel (edd.), *The Cambridge Companion to Children's Literature*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009.

<sup>4</sup> Ray, *School Stories*, cit., p. 467.

*Crofton Boys* (1841) and Thomas Hughes's *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (1857), a novel that «helped to mark the transition from what has been called the Age of Didacticism to the Golden Age of children's literature in English»<sup>5</sup>. The impact of Tom Brown and his boys' boarding school on the children's school story tradition was enormous. The novel is about Tom, a student at Rugby School, who is mistreated by school bully Flashman before finally succeeding in overcoming his troubles and difficulties. In the novel, a crucial role is played by the headmaster of Rugby School, Thomas Arnold (1795-1842), a real educator whose tenure (1828-1842) saw Rugby become a top public school and profoundly influenced public school education in England. In the novel Hughes paid homage to Arnold by progressively pushing his protagonist, Tom, to adopt his headmaster's ideas and moral values. The novel is a milestone in the school story literary microcosm and influenced hundreds of successive children's books, both past and present, like J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter series, for instance. Interestingly, a number of scholars<sup>6</sup> have been attracted by the intriguing parallels between the school adventures of Tom Brown and those of Harry Potter, such as ideological and organizational structure (students' empowerment, older students as "prefects", intellectual skills linked to moral awareness, sport, ecc.) and on the role played by school relationships (friends and bullies). School authority has also been examined. A comparative analysis of the headmasters in the two school stories – Doctor Arnold at Rugby and Albus Dumbledore at Hogwarts – shows that the two headmasters have many characteristics in common:

Both Hughes and Rowling also stress the important ties between the hero and the headmaster, an adult mentor who helps the hero develop into a functioning, useful young man of good character. [...] both the Doctor and Albus Dumbledore are adults our heroes come to trust and value, and who in turn support, protect, and guide the boys. They are portrayed as moral, fair, kind, and unusual men who at times face criticism from within and without but always have the best interests of their school at heart. [...] These two boarding school novels do not simply dismiss all adults or see them as impediments, but emphasize the necessity of strong, wise adult mentoring to the development of the students<sup>7</sup>.

Similarities to the 19<sup>th</sup> English language school stories' portrayal of school authority is also to be found in some classic Italian children's novels, such as characters in *Cuore*, [The Heart of a Boy] (1886), by Edmondo de Amicis, a fictional school diary of a young boy attending a 19<sup>th</sup>-century Turin school which describes the achievements, setbacks, pleasures and pains of a year at school and its social and cultural community life, or in *Romanzo di un Maestro* [Novel by a Teacher], published in 1890 by the same author, which offers a representation of the miserable conditions in which Italian teachers lived

<sup>5</sup> B.L. Clark, *Regendering the School Story: Sassy Sissies and Tatling Tomboys*, New York-London, Routledge, 1996, p. 10.

<sup>6</sup> P. Pinsent, *The education of a Wizard: Harry Potter and His Predecessors*, in L.A. Whited (ed.), *The Ivory Tower and Harry Potter: Perspectives in a Literary Phenomenon*, Columbia, University of Missouri Press, 2002, pp. 27-50; D.K. Steege, *Harry Potter, Tom Brown and the British School Story. Lost in Transit?*, in L.A. Whited (ed.) *The Ivory Tower and Harry Potter: Perspectives in a Literary Phenomenon*, Columbia, University of Missouri Press, 2002, pp. 140-156.

<sup>7</sup> Steege, *Harry Potter, Tom Brown and the British School Story. Lost in Transit?*, cit., pp. 150-151.

at the time. These novels offer specific insights into the literary framework writers used to depict school authority and portrayed headmasters as strong, wise adult mentors, capable of understating, supporting, and fostering students' intellectual and moral development.

Representations of fictional school communities (peers, teachers, families) and the impact of these stories on the Italian historical, social and cultural contexts have been also enquired into. Research focusing on the representation of school in children's literature has paid considerable attention to portraits of teachers, the teaching process and its social, cultural and political implications, the role of schools settings, educational tools and the moral values and social norms of schooling<sup>8</sup>. However, little attention has been paid to the representation of school authority and to the figures embodying it, both male (headteachers and headmasters) and female (principals and headmistresses) characters.

My study aims to fill this gap. In this research<sup>9</sup>, I will analyse classic children's stories published in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in Italy and abroad. Then, I will compare extracts of these books, pinpointing some recurring representational characteristics – in terms of literary depictions – of headmasters and headmistresses. Finally, I will make some concluding remarks on the different, gender-biased representation of the concept of authority embodied by headmasters and headmistresses while exercising their role at school.

## 2. *Headteachers and headmasters: children's literature and the history of school*

In Italy, the head teacher role began to take shape in Italian children's literature in around the 1880s, namely when school management began to evolve, however confusedly. It would thus seem to be appropriate to start by looking at the children's books of those years. Whilst Carlo Collodi, the creator of Pinocchio, was more interested in town squares, hostelries and home interiors than in the school classroom in his educational stories, the opposite can be said of a contemporary writer, Edmondo De Amicis, who accorded school a hugely important role, making it responsible for educating children and bringing them into the social fold as responsible citizens, just like in Tom Brown. The lessons emerging from De Amicis' work are highly specific social and political messages.

<sup>8</sup> A. Antoniazzi, *La scuola tra le righe*, Pisa, ETS, 2014; Ead., *Da "Cuore" a "L'ultima possibilità". La scuola vista dai suoi protagonisti*, in M. Corsi (ed.), *La ricerca pedagogica in Italia. Tra innovazione e internazionalizzazione*, Lecce-Brescia, Pensa MultiMedia, 2014, pp. 365-372; S. Barsotti, *La scuola nella letteratura per l'infanzia di ieri e di oggi: l'immagine narrata di un luogo di educazione*, «Pedagogia Oggi», vol. 17, n. 1, 2019, pp. 143-158; P. Boero, G. Genovesi, *Cuore. De Amicis tra critica e utopia*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2009; F. Borruso, *La scuola nella letteratura per l'infanzia del secondo novecento. Spazio materiale e simbolico di una pedagogia eversiva*, «Pedagogia Oggi», vol. 17, n. 1, 2019, pp. 159-170; E. Catarsi, *I maestri e il «cuore». La figura del maestro elementare nella letteratura per l'infanzia tra Otto e Novecento*, Pisa, Del Cerro, 1996; I. Filograsso, *Bambini in trappola. Pedagogia nera e letteratura per l'infanzia*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2012; V. Spinazzola, *Pinocchio & c.*, Milano, Il Saggiatore, 1997.

<sup>9</sup> This is part of the research work I carried out at the University of Padova for the PRIN research project "School Memories between Social Perception and Collective Representation (Italy, 1861-2001)".

Speaking of school and life in the classroom, he dealt with important social and political elements such as the need to bring the social equality principle not only into the school community but also into the Italian nation: children were to be as equal at school as adults were to be in society in general. If schools were to be up to the task of such progressive changes, competent, well trained people were needed, people of high intellectual, moral and cultural calibre. This was true not only of teachers themselves but also of those tasked with training, shaping and managing teachers.

In Italy the Casati Law (1859) focused on just a few of the elements considered to be crucial to training school principals. In secondary schools such head teachers were, at the very least, to possess high moral stature and consolidated experience in “managing youth”. In primary schools, on the other hand, principals were as yet undefined figures and the situation was an extremely confused one. The characteristics and skills required of those responsible for managing or coordinating schools were not clear and in the midst of this chaos many of these were shown to be unsuited to the task.

De Amicis breathed literary life into many of these figures. I believe it to be useful, at the outset, to examine certain pages of the well-known novel *Romanzo d'un maestro*<sup>10</sup> (1890) in which a school headmaster is depicted. De Amicis depicts the latter as a cultured, educated, severe man, passionate about pedagogy studies, to the extent even of a belief in its omnipotence (i.e. of contents over methods), characterised by an austere, exacting but tolerant kindness and an extremely elevated notion of the teacher's role. He inspires spontaneous obedience, respect, gratitude and emulation, as an exemplary man. Megari, as he is called, is a head teacher (and also an excellent, cultured and well trained teacher) passionate about shaping a “new generation” of children and citizens of the world. The head teacher depicted by De Amicis is an educator who urges his students to take the cultural activism path (holding literary circles in his living room) with enormous pedagogical responsibility. He is an edifying model of the type of man best suited and equipped to manage a school<sup>11</sup>. It is a model of enlightened, progressive, exemplary school authority conjuring up the headmaster model depicted in Hughes's novel.

This depiction of male school authority is present not solely in novels set inside boarding schools but also in novels whose main setting is primary schools. Take Edmondo De Amicis' novel *Cuore* published in 1886, for example. The novel's structure is well known. It is a diary of a school year (1882) narrated by a third year primary school pupil, Enrico Bottini. This novel «more than any other reflects the longing for education and cultural and civil growth which was such a feature of Italy in the immediate post-unification period»<sup>12</sup>.

Against this literary backdrop, how did De Amicis depict the director? Whilst his description of his character is decidedly cursory, De Amicis' focus is the exemplary nature of the principal's behaviour by means of his actions and conversations with pupils and

<sup>10</sup> E. De Amicis, *Il romanzo d'un maestro*, edited by A. Ascenzi, P. Boero, R. Sani, Genova, De Ferrari, 2007.

<sup>11</sup> A. Gramiglia, *“Il romanzo di un maestro” di Edmondo De Amicis*, Scandicci, La Nuova Italia, 1996.

<sup>12</sup> A. Ascenzi, R. Sani, *Storia e antologia della letteratura per l'infanzia nell'Italia dell'Ottocento. Volume II*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2018, p. 171 (my translation).

family members. The novel's excessive moralism and sentimentalism notwithstanding the principal is portrayed in extremely positive terms. The novel tells of a melancholy but loving, sober, measured man with a generosity of spirit concerning children and education and a direct approach to school relationships, with both pupils and parents. His is a focus on dialogue and care [see, for example, his conversation with Enrico Bottini's father]. It depicts a principal who is occasionally verbose and melodramatic but also exceedingly modern and relevant: a principal who is open to dialogue, dedicated to education, willing to challenge himself fully, and attentive to the diverse needs of his students.

The same habitus, attitude and dedication accorded by De Amicis to Megari in *Romanzo d'un maestro* is present here too. Thus, the idea of a positive model to follow in both physical and psychological terms, in educational work with pupils and the general context is shown in the primary school, too.

Children's literature, both Italian and otherwise, also features another approach to the portrayal of school principals, however, a model hinging on a more negative characterisation of head teachers often depicted ironically as distant figures uninterested in pupils' needs whose priority is simply ensuring obedience to the rules with punitive methods and abuse of their power to personal ends.

An example is the principal in Vamba's (alias Luigi Bertelli) *Il giornalino di Gian Burrasca*. The story came out in 55 instalments in *Il Giornalino della Domenica* in 1907-1908, and was published as a complete book in 1912. In this case, too, the story is in diary form and told by a boy, Giannino, recounting his irresistible adventures at home and school. It is, however, a diary which turns the traditional school diary form on its head. Its author Vamba uses it to poke fun, with biting wit, at the facile conventions put forward by the adults inhabiting Giannino's world. The novel features both a headmaster and a headmistress, the latter of whom we will look at later on. It should be clarified right away that in *Gian Burrasca*, in contrast to *Cuore*, the headmaster's role is limited to a certain period of time, namely a period spent in a private boarding school to which Giannino has been taken by his father with the specific objective of correcting what the latter sees as his rebellious spirit. For Giannino the school is comparable with a prison and he stays there just one month before being expelled.

How does Vamba represent school authority? Mockingly. It is visible right away, in his physically caricatured headmaster, Signor Stanislao, who he describes as wearing a wig, «very very thin, very very tall, with a great greyish moustache which trembles all over when he gets angry»<sup>13</sup>. The principal is presented as ridiculous in numerous episodes. He is frequently subjected to insults and abuse by his wife who calls him «cretin» and «idiot»<sup>14</sup>. He is treated mercilessly by Vamba who uses Gian Burrasca's pranks to highlight the mean spiritedness of a man who abuses his authority for personal gain. Anything but a model, the headteacher is presented as pathetically bursting with vices and habits. Under the veneer of an apparently authoritative figure (an army type who speaks forcefully of

<sup>13</sup> Vamba, *Il giornalino di Gian Burrasca*, Milano, Bur ragazzi, 2012, p. 256 (my translation).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 299.

commands and glares at his pupils), underneath it all he is inept, abject and incapable of truly acting as an authoritative and credible guide and mentor.

This necessarily summary analysis brings out two male embodiments of school authority in children's literature. On one hand we have a model headmaster, a figure with great moral and intellectual stature, total dedication to his school and pupils, a pedagogical model to be admired and aspired to, present in both the novels of the past, from the school stories of Hughes and De Amicis to Rudyard Kipling's anti-school stories, such as *Stalky & Co.* (1897) and modern novels, of which Harry Potter is emblematic.

In the other, by contrast, this model is turned entirely on its head. It takes aim not only at the very idea of a "serious" school and boarding school but first and foremost at its headteachers, making use of parody to underline the latter's ambiguity and pettiness. This model is also present, in various forms, in a range of children's literature genres, including outside Italy. Examples are Anthony Horowitz's horror fantasy school stories, *Groosham Grange* (1988) and *Return to Groosham Grange*, first published as *The Unholy Grail* (1999), whose principal is portrayed as a two-headed being in a single body with a vampire deputy principal resembling Frankenstein to some extent.

### 3. *Principals and headmistresses in the exercise of authority: a problematic turning point*

As Nancy G. Rosoff and Stephanie Spencer highlighted in their study<sup>15</sup> of British and American school stories from 1910 to 1960, the depiction of female school authority in school stories is a multi-faceted and extremely complex subject. There is nothing random about the fact that whilst they highlight various cases in which a positive model of female leadership in the school context takes shape they also argue that «whereas sociability, responsibility, and domesticity might be easily recognised as markers of femininity, that of authority is more problematic»<sup>16</sup>. The traditional literary representation of the principal is an unmarried woman – and thus without a private life – all of whose attention is devoted to her pupils. Whilst in some ways this may have constituted an alternative lifestyle model for the women of the day – most of whom were expected to marry and have children – choosing to be a school principal offered «an example of a professional authority figure in contrast to the girls' mothers, none of whom engage in paid employment»<sup>17</sup>, it is equally true that such a choice implied a quasi-religious professional choice in which all energies went into the public dimension with no reference to any chance whatsoever for a satisfying private life.

The social and cultural terrain in which British girls' schools flourished was an extremely fertile one, from the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards. There are a great many cases of

<sup>15</sup> N.G. Rosoff, S. Spencer, *British and American School Stories, 1910-1960: Fiction, Femininity, and Friendship*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2019.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 165.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 175.



extraordinary school principals who left an important mark on the British school system, such as Frances Mary Buss and Dorothea Beale<sup>18</sup>. In fact an association was set up in Britain in 1874 whose purpose was to promote female school headships, the Association of Headmistresses (AHM)<sup>19</sup>. Its purpose was precisely to form coalitions, to encourage female principals to make common cause and increase their authority in the school world. This was to exert a certain influence in channelling the popular image of female school authority in school stories to the extent that the citations by female pupils used by Price and Glenday in *Reluctant Revolutionaries: A century of Headmistresses 1874-1974* would seem to have come precisely from girl pupils

who had attended some of the schools whose heads belonged to the AHM [Association of Headmistresses] in the later twentieth century reflected the characters of the headmistresses portrayed in both the American and British novels<sup>20</sup>.

What portrait of female principals emerges from these studies of British women's school stories? What emerges is a principal who is seldom angry, who is both patient and reasonable, who speaks with a soft voice and is caring about her pupils, highlighting that «authority was not exercised through raised voices, or harsh punishment, but through effective use of acceptable feminine skills of patience and collegial styles of leadership that maintained the accepted hierarchy of institutions established over a number of years»<sup>21</sup>. This principal profile seems to converge on a psychological characterisation and predisposition for the care dimension and the building of friendly relationships. In many cases the women's vulnerability and fragility in certain situations comes across, to the extent that in some of these school stories there is an emphasis on their «fallibility [...] the headmistress is seen as fallible»<sup>22</sup>. References to professional training, disciplinary and organisational skills and professional know-how as regards the management and headship of the school institution itself, the desire to innovate school life, are much less frequent. Even in the most effective and positive literary models, such principals are depicted in ways which do not sufficiently focus on their intellectual stature, authority and managerial skills. Take Angela Brazil's novel *A Harum-Scarum Schoolgirl* (1919), for example, a novel which contributed positively to developing contemporary female literary figures as regards agency, independence, determination and assertiveness in school stories<sup>23</sup>. However, her principal, whilst actively engaged in renewing her school, is extremely vaguely depicted.

<sup>18</sup> J. Kamm, *How Different From Us: A Biography of Miss Buss and Miss Beale*, London, The Bodley Head, 1958.

<sup>19</sup> M. Price, N. Glenday, *Reluctant Revolutionaries: A century of Headmistresses 1874-1974*, London, Pitman, 1974.

<sup>20</sup> Rosoff, Spencer, *British and American School Stories, 1910-1960*, cit., p. 171.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 190.

<sup>22</sup> Rosoff, Spencer, *British and American School Stories, 1910-1960*, cit., p. 177.

<sup>23</sup> B. Lyon Clark, L. Dhingra Shankar, *When Women Tell Tales about School*, «Studies in Popular Culture», vol. 17, n. 1, 1994, pp. 17-28.

When it comes to the admiration of the Head, we can detect a novelty, however. Although the new reign is eventually acknowledged to be much more interesting than the old one, we have no complete admiration of the headmistress. Unlike the pictures of the godlike headmaster Arnold or the “downy Bird” Bates, the description of Miss Todd is, as noted, ambiguous<sup>24</sup>.

Beyond this model, as in the boys’ school story tradition, an alternative, caricature depiction of female school authority exists in girls’ stories too. There are a great many examples of this. It may, in this case too, be worth comparing novels published in Italy and Britain.

Let us begin by comparing two Italian novels published in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The first of these is the headmistress depicted in De Amicis’s *Un dramma nella scuola*<sup>25</sup>, a story set in a girls’ school in Turin. The second is headmistress Geltrude, Signor Stanislao’s wife in the Vamba novel mentioned above. The extracts to be compared are shown below:

The headmistress, a large, approximately 45-year-old spinster, a sort of police inspector, a sort of bloated Juno clothed in a certain austere elegance, enclosed in a corset which held her up as stiffly as a suit of steel armour [...] She was much feared by her pupils, who she lined up by striking them with her umbrella, and whom she was never seen making the slightest kind gesture to and she was especially harsh with young, attractive mothers. [...] As regards her cultural stature, this was impossible for anyone to fathom as she concealed herself behind a veil of prudence and majesty. But the teachers said that she never read books because she was so full of herself that there was no space left for any new ideas or notions<sup>26</sup>.

This headmistress understands nothing [...] She is very very small and very very fat, with a very red nose and makes grandiose declarations all the time, making a great deal of insignificant matters and never stops talking, running around and talking to everyone about everything and everyone, finding something to criticise in everyone<sup>27</sup>.

These extracts shows that both authors focus in particular on the women’s physical and postural oddities as well as their relationships with others. Whether they are married women (very rare) or “old spinsters”, a term used disparagingly, the two principals are sour and repulsive physically and equally repugnant morally and educationally, embodying a model of headmistress which is ugly and brutish.

All this is also true of children’s novels published in Britain. Let us look at two cases. The first of these is Roald Dahl’s *Matilde*, published in Britain in 1988, which tells the story of a talented girl, a voracious reader, who does not identify with the habits, meanness and triviality of her family. A significant part of the novel is set at a school whose principal is Miss Trunchbull. Dahl describes her thus:

Now most head teachers are chosen because they possess a number of fine qualities. [...] Miss Trunchbull possessed none of these qualities and how she ever got her present job was a mystery. She was above all

<sup>24</sup> Pesold, *The Other in the School Stories: A Phenomenon in British Children’s Literature*, cit., p. 93.

<sup>25</sup> E. De Amicis, *Fra scuola e casa*, Milano, Treves, 1892.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 23-24 (my translation).

<sup>27</sup> Vamba, *Il giornalino di Gian Burrasca*, cit., p. 257 (my translation).



a most formidable female. She had once been a famous athlete, and even now the muscles were still clearly in evidence. You could see them in the bull neck, in the big shoulders, in the thick arms, in the sinewy wrists and in the powerful legs. Looking at her, you got the feeling that this was someone who could bend iron bars and tear telephone directories in half. Her face, I'm afraid, was neither a thing of beauty nor a joy for ever. She had an obstinate chin, a cruel mouth and small arrogant eyes. And as for her clothes...they were, to say the least, extremely odd.

She always had on a brown cotton smock which was pinched in around the waist with a wide leather belt. This belt was fastened in front with an enormous silver buckle. The massive thighs which emerged from out of the smock were encased in a pair of extraordinary breeches, bottle green in colour and made of coarse twill. These breeches reached to just below the knees and from there on down she sported green stockings with turn up tops, which displayed her calf muscles to perfection. On her feet she wore flat heeled brown brogues with leather flaps. She looked, in short, more like a rather eccentric and bloodthirsty follower of the staghounds than the headmistress of a nice school for children<sup>28</sup>.

The second is Harry Potter, the story of the famous magician with the scar on his forehead. The school's headmistress makes her appearance in the fifth book of the series, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (2003) with full power over the school. Her name is Dolores Umbridge, former teacher and supreme inquisitor, later principal of Hogwarts School. Rowling introduces her thus:

He thought she looked just like a large, pale toad. She was rather squat with a broad flabby face, as little neck as Uncle Vernon and a very wide, slack mouth. Her eyes were large, round and slightly bulging. Even the little black velvet bow perched on top of her short curly hair put him in mind of a large fly she was about to catch on a long sticky tongue<sup>29</sup>.

These descriptions show an image which has remained virtually unchanged over hundred years. Of the various elements in common, what stands out most is the headmistresses' physical oddities: Miss Trunchbull is a masculine-soldier-like aggressive woman (bull neck, stubborn chin, cruel mouth, powerful thighs); Dolores Umbridge is compared to a toad, an animal which, in the Western literary tradition, is both poisonous and symbolically emblematic of ugliness, awkwardness and impurity.

Of the four headmistress depictions, then, what emerges is an image of an aggressive, animalesque woman incapable of empathy, brutally cutthroat, unjust and garrulous, uninterested in culture and the educational value of teaching, unsuited to the principal's role. It is, overall, a model which may be even more derogatory and demeaning than the grotesque male model described above.

<sup>28</sup> R. Dahl, *Matilda*, New York, Penguin Random House, 2007, pp. 76-77.

<sup>29</sup> J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, London, Bloomsbury, 2003, p. 146.

### *Conclusions*

Traditionally, «the headteacher in the traditional school story, no matter how authoritarian or how kind and empathetic, embodies the rule of law and society at large. Power/knowledge resides in his/her person and leadership/management»<sup>30</sup>. This study has analysed the representation of power embodied in the power of the headteacher for the purposes of enquiring into the various ways in which school authority is depicted in children's literature historically. Two distinct models – present in portrayals of both headmasters and headmistresses have been identified: on one hand a model which highlights exemplary headteachers and, on the other, a model which mocks them and casts them as grotesquely inadequate.

A comparison of these literary models via the various novels analysed has highlighted the way in which these portrayal formulas have crystallised over time and tend to re-emerge in diverse school stories published in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, such as in British and Italian literary traditions, for example. Over one hundred years, these depictions have not substantially changed.

It is worth underlining that descriptions of headmistresses differ from headmaster models in one specific element: a greater focus on the women's physical oddities, and a lesser emphasis on intellectual stature, on the cultural, social and political know-how of the headmistresses.

I would argue that this latter element is more problematical than the former as it constitutes a female power relationship model marked by considerable gender bias. Beyond a significantly lesser presence of headmistresses in children's literature<sup>31</sup>, what stands out most is the choice of identity shaping elements by which such headmistresses are portrayed as exemplary figures. In fact, whilst the “exemplary” model depicts enlightened and erudite headmasters of great intellectual and moral stature, a model which hinges in particular on their extraordinary knowledge and leadership abilities and makes them an «almost godlike figure»<sup>32</sup>, there is no corresponding headmistress model. There are certainly headmistresses worthy of admiration but their stature hinges primarily on their caring natures, their ability to listen, be empathic, show compassion, on their moral stature. References to scientific and pedagogical know-how, cultural and intellectual resources, capacity to effectively and farsightedly manage their school authority are, by contrast with headmaster portrayals, very rare. In school stories, what is most absent would appear to be precisely a model of headmistresses who are intellectually and culturally talented, competent, innovative, capable of strong and authoritative leadership and of going beyond the literary kindness and care stereotype to take on the challenges of institutional roles professionally.

<sup>30</sup> P. Thomson, *The uses and abuses of power: teaching school leadership through children's literature*, «Journal of Educational Administration and History», vol. 46, n. 4, 2014, pp. 367-386.

<sup>31</sup> A. Trousdale, *Teacher as gatekeeper. Schoolteachers in picture books for young children*, in P.B. Joseph, G. Burnaford (edd.), *Images of Schoolteachers in Twentieth-Century America*, New York, St. Martins Press, 1994, pp. 195-214.

<sup>32</sup> Pesold, *The Other in the School Stories: A Phenomenon in British Children's Literature*, cit., p. 39.

# Illustrations and Cartoonists in the Collodi Conflict Context. Childhood at School and School-Less Childhood

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In the brief considerations in this paper, I have prioritised an interpretative analysis of visual sources, especially certain figures and illustrations revolving around evocations and depictions of school and the various forms of schoollessness in children's literature and school readings which have been published in a broad time frame ranging from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is, thus, a matter of observing the symptoms of cultural, social and educational turmoil shown in images depicting the childhoods of an era and designed for child readers.

School at school, the school children run away from for adventure, the school which disappears in the denial of a right to education that marginalised children cannot capitalise on.

The literary and artistic framework I am referring to focuses in particular on two Florentine cartoonists, Enrico Mazzanti and Carlo Chiostri, and one atypical intellectual writer, Carlo Collodi.

This specific thematic and perspective was, in fact, initially prompted by the ambivalence around the school of the day that emerges from *The Adventures of Pinocchio. Story of a Puppet*, published in volumes as a first edition by Florence Paggi publishing house in 1883 and illustrated by Enrico Mazzanti<sup>1</sup>.

In Carlo Collodi's great classic, school is the backdrop to the enigmatic landscape in which Pinocchio's adventures are played out, resembling a ghostly mirror image of the ordinary life the puppet escapes from in his repeatedly risky but attractive journey deviations.

Pinocchio, as literary figure, imagery icon, wooden hero of children's literature, as archaic as he is eternal, ideally embodies the role of the "school-less" from the point of view of those who cannot stand even the sight of school or the very word itself.

A metaphor for the inexhaustible desire for a free wandering childhood, the puppet is, however, put to the test by his own desire to belong to the social system his own surreal relationships and identity expectations conform to. Thus, conflict.

<sup>1</sup> Enrico Mazzanti (Florence, 5 April 1850-Florence, 3 September 1910).

The author repeatedly emphasises the role of school, sometimes in severe pedagogical, sometimes mildly pedantic tones, emphasising its educational value. But in so doing he hovers repeatedly between a desire to send the puppet to school and the opposite and ambiguous desire to offer him the chance to escape that claustrophobic classroom.

To the extent that skipping school, children's jaunts and quarrels, overshadow even the measured tones in which the novel makes its way into the state school Pinocchio attends, diligently, in the unusual and undefined literary time frame of a couple of chapters.

The next day Pinocchio went to the local school. Just imagine the reaction of those little rascals when they saw a puppet come to their school! The laughter was unstoppable. A joke here, a joke there, one lad pulled his cap from his hand, another pulled his jacket down at the back, another tried to ink a large moustache under his nose, another even tried to tie string around his hands and feet to make him dance<sup>2</sup>.

Enrico Mazzanti illustrated the first edition of the book, effectively conveying the combination of irony, mockery and tragedy in the puppet's dealings with his classmates. Rascals, hooligans, even a pack, as Collodi later referred to them in his favourite way of comparing children with animals.

The tragedy is clearly Pinocchio's experience, even if it is just for a few minutes. Flabbergasted and hurt by the cruel mockery inflicted on him by his classmates, the puppet defends himself with a good schoolboy air.

— Look lads. I haven't come here to be your buffoon. I respect others and expect respect back<sup>3</sup>.

School is an educational experience that can win our happy-go-lucky hero acceptance by respectable society. When did Pinocchio the puppet express himself with austerity on the subject of the moral right to respect, even prompting the author to floor readers with that "buffoon" expression, which both demotes to and, at the same time, elevates the puppet's identity from, compromise with those who lose their dignity? A puppet and/or marionette destined for a lesser, theatrical existence, of a town square entertainer, very different from all other childhoods, Pinocchio seems to have discovered his wound, in which the awareness of his ambiguity that defines him hurts. Goofy, a buffoon, a wooden toy in other people's hands, depicted by Mazzanti as straight-backed and severe, visibly contrasting with the flowery suit a real school bag is falling on.

Mazzanti shows him serious, compact and stiff, telling us of his belief in this new Pinocchio at school and in that part of him that suffers this different, marginalised identity.

In the meantime, the cartoonist does not set aside his satirical and inventive vein as an artist whose roots were in the otherness of popular visual culture, expressing the cruel and scornful side of the children surrounding Pinocchio, who are enjoying and subverting

<sup>2</sup> C. Collodi, *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, Torino, Einaudi, 1968, p. 98.

<sup>3</sup> Collodi, *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, cit., p. 99.

that call to order which school imposes on children and which Pinocchio also, incredibly, seems to claim to.

A plate in which Mazzanti illustrates an unusual role reversal: the adventurous puppet whose world is untidy, expects order and the children metaphorically summed up and embodied in his character overtake him in mischief-making and conceit. Until Pinocchio gets angry and breaks out into kicks under the desks, wisdom is set aside and the wood he is made of shows all its physical strength as he emerges as the winner.

A new power relationship shores him up at school.

This space-time dimension in which the classroom is the context of choice for a pungent and action-packed measuring up to good manners – the blackboard with its numbers and letters, the desks, the ragamuffins sitting obediently at their desks, in lively mocking poses, dressed in clothes messed up by play – lasts just a few sentences and a single illustration.

The puppet wins his good schoolboy image and keeps his “school buddies” (as the Fairy calls them, in expectation of trouble<sup>4</sup>) at bay until the challenge in which he, too, will be forced to show his hatred of school. Collodi shows extraordinary finesse in reawakening the temporarily and effortfully suspended appeal of adventure and transgression.

It is a suspension that takes place in Chapters 26 and 27, when Pinocchio experiences a fragment of ordinary life at school, an interval owning the extraordinary features of an elsewhere, a sort of break that the roguish puppet is granted as required by the adventure story tradition, in which he is judicious, polite, studious. An interval, a break, in which there are very few illustrations by either Mazzanti or Chiostri.

It is in this incarnation as a disciplined puppet that Pinocchio is immortalised by Carlo Chiostri<sup>5</sup>, the second great cartoonist to illustrate Collodi’s novel in the 1901 Bemporad edition. The figure is exemplary both for its interpretative concision and for the sophisticated mark of an artist who captured the deeper meaning of the image. The chronotope of the classroom time-space is once again used, and it is to the teacher that the puppet seems to be turning his attention with sacral awe. Attentive and, you would think silent pupils, to the extent that not even a whisper or breath is exuded by an illustration so expressive as to seem alive. An illustration which communicates composure and silence, although Pinocchio is portrayed standing up, with his unmistakable profile, as he gets ready to read, but the only hint of his voice is the expectation that he will begin. The other four school children are seen from the back, bent over their work, intent on studying under the watchful eye of the teacher.

By contrast, in the initial sequence to Chapter 26 cited above, Enrico Mazzanti depicts a ruckus, the sound of laughter, mockery and taunts. It is a different view of the alternating relations and dynamics historically characteristic of school.

Thus, Chiostri’s is a respectable classroom, one which perhaps reflects Pinocchio’s dream of becoming a respectable boy, although he is caught up in a climate in which it is the wise irreverence of boisterous childhood which reigns supreme.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

<sup>5</sup> Carlo Collodi (Florence, 5 May 1863-Florence, 9 July 1939).

The images and styles of the two cartoonists, their respective artistic traditions — amongst other things very close to the lower class districts their visual and narrative styles derived from — reveal and highlight the ambiguities of Collodi's poetic regarding the education of his day with semantic transparency. Despite writing a successful series of school books<sup>6</sup>, on more than one occasion Collodi expressed doubts regarding mandatory primary school, which was set into law on 15 July 1877 by will of Minister Coppino, «State Education Minister during the two De Pretis Governments, from 25 March 1876 to 23 March 1878»<sup>7</sup>.

Another vision of childhood and youth was, in fact, gaining ground in Collodi's work. It was one of romantic derivation and constituted an exception in the context of the predominance of a rigid pedagogy focusing primarily on educating and getting notions across. Renato Bertacchini has written as follows on this subject:

In other words Collodi does not fail to grasp the real importance of the school theme for children, or rather the importance of the conflict between the need for education and the simultaneous urge to play, an always open and possible clash between the three enemies school-lesson-teacher and the appeal of time-wasting adventure, the victorious call of fun, ruckus and the open air. From *Giannettino* to *Pinocchio*, Collodi tended to dramatise this inner conflict, this state of ambivalence replete with poetic and adventurous evocations in episodic and inventive narrative sequences<sup>8</sup>.

And it is equally true that it is the interpretative space offered by Collodi's conflict, the alternation between his stance on educational processes and, thus, the pedagogical ambivalence, which suffuses the novel – *Pinocchio* both puppet and respectable boy; duty and pleasure; school and adventure, ecc. – that took precedence in the rereadings put forward by the two cartoonists, both assiduous illustrators of fairy tales, *feuilletons*, novellas, novels and readers for children, all genres fed by the popular, lower class imagination underworld melding know-how, dreams and inventivity.

Oral culture, the coexistence in performance of legends, stories, myths, beliefs, the struggle for survival and religious traditions constituted a priceless baggage of deeply rooted archaic sources capable of being passed down by artists set apart – as the cartoonists were – who picked up knowledge around life's diversities, turning points of view on their heads, the legacy literature and popular visual images leaves for children's books and school readers.

This melding process was underlined by Faeti:

The first cartoonists, Enrico Mazzanti and Carlo Chiostri, above all came from a highly resonant publishing context: the popular iconography and the contents which this was capable of generating

<sup>6</sup> Collodi published two books of lessons for schools, ten text and reading books, one of which was *Minuzzolo* and nine from the *Giannettino* series. These illustrated works came out from 1877 to 1890, the year of Collodi's death.

<sup>7</sup> R. Bertacchini, *Collodi narratore*, Pisa, Lischi editore, 1961, pp. 213-214.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 217.

were the sources the two illustrators were constantly inspired by. In this sense the images they produced can be seen as characteristic expressions of a complex terrain in which contradictions were reconciled and diverse motifs were condensed. The fairy tale illustrations reworked symbols drawn from the Italian vernacular, the types designed allude to clearly well established and compact repertoires<sup>9</sup>.

Mazzanti, an engineer and Collodi's friend and companion on long Florentine afternoon walks, illustrated Collodi's *La lanterna magica di Giannettino* in the first Bemporad edition of 1890. The book's cover was characteristic of the artist in melding the precision of science and experimentation with the appeal of mystery and the unexpected. Other plates by Mazzanti in Collodi's school books, for *Minuzzolo* (Paggi, Firenze, 1882), *Il viaggio in Italia di Giannettino*, parts I, II, III, (Bemporad, Firenze, 1886), and similarly for Emma Perodi's book *I bambini delle diverse nazioni a casa loro*, (Bemporad, Firenze, 1890)<sup>10</sup> favoured an illusory, Gothic edge, a penetrating, almost rough narrative style in the profile of the Pinocchio illustrations.

The trickster tot who accompanied the very young wandering musician in Emma Perodi's book is an illuminating example of "schoolless" childhood in which the cartoonist Mazzanti focuses on the authenticity, the childish otherness of the street child with a vital energy, which bubbles out of Pinocchio's classmates as they torment him. It is a figurative style, which illuminates a childhood that seems to come from elsewhere, a divergent childhood tending to conflict with the more orthodox image of childhood (and school) prevailing in the society of the day. It is a conflict which Faeti<sup>11</sup> highlights as a fundamentally important and revealing clue to the metaphorical power of cartoonists, in an even more significant way when it stands out in the great deal of work which Mazzanti did for school books.

Through the figures in them, the books that ended up on school desks spoke unpredictable and new languages, bringing to childhood the legacy of parallels that cartoonists drew from their involvement in the popular culture imagination combined with their artistic expertise: the result was alternative aesthetics, specific references to the deviance of fairy tales, and surrealism which marked out the lower classes. Mazzanti's plates were followed by those of Chiostrì the cartoonist.

Younger than Collodi and Mazzanti, Chiostrì spent his days on his own in his workshop, at the flat he shared with his wife and two daughters; an invisible and untiring creator of figures meticulously designed for books by a range of authors and of diverse narrative genres. The great deal of work in Chiostrì's repertoire includes Vampa, Collodi Nipote, the voluminous work he did for Emma Perodi's novellas, «for Invernizio, Palau, Capuana, as well as the dense collections that the publisher Salani personally built up and published anonymously in a multi-coloured series, which included *Il libro verde delle fate*,

<sup>9</sup> A. Faeti, *Guardare le figure. Gli illustratori italiani nei libri per l'infanzia*, Torino, Einaudi, 1972, p. 6.

<sup>10</sup> Bibliographic source of the illustration referred to: fig. 26, *Suonatori ambulanti*. From E. Perodi, *I bambini delle diverse nazioni a casa loro*, Firenze, Bemporad & F., 1890, p. 10, illustrations by Enrico Mazzanti (in L. Luatti, *Adulti si nasceva. Immagini e metafore letterarie sull'emigrazione minorile girovaga e di lavoro dall'Ottocento ai giorni nostri*, Isernia, Cosmo Iannone Editore, 2016, p. 131).

<sup>11</sup> Faeti, *Guardare le figure*, cit., p. 7.



*Il libro rosa delle fate, Il libro arancio delle fate* and even *Il libro oliva* and a silver coloured one»<sup>12</sup>.

Chiostrì created representations from the fantastical, the magical and the improbable, which did not shy away from the vein of sophisticated realism that would also seem to have predominated, at first sight, in his work for Collodi. His style was open, like a secret window, to the unsayable and encompassed a vein of disquiet which the fairy tale figures exuded as did those for Pinocchio, for his school readers with *Minuzzolo* as an example.

His school teacher – captured by Chiostrì in elegant clothing with attention to the austere details characterising his role – was a player in the school imagery mosaic of an era in which Collodi himself staged both the school hated by Giannettino in the school books of the same name, and the wonderful Dr. Boccadoro, the allegorical and complex testament to the historical figure of the maieutics tutor.

Bertacchini wrote of him:

In *Giannettino*, Dr. Boccadoro, «a nice, thin, edgy old man with clean, tidy clothing and manners... very well known for his attractive way of speaking clearly and telling the whole truth, even at the cost of sometimes gaining a reputation for a quick tongue (p. 8)», a sort of mentor, then, armed with patient severity, who takes on the task of educating Giannettino, that ultra-ignorant urchin<sup>13</sup>.

We might go as far as to see the portrait of Dr. Boccadoro as resembling Pinocchio's teacher – about whom Collodi tells us nothing except that he praised his puppet pupil – in the image that the sophisticated Chiostrì gives us, paralleling him with the tradition of the teacher-mentor also in the exactitude and conviction he seem to put into his teaching role.

In the images which Chiostrì devotes to Pinocchio's school episode the artist's twofold view of the diligent schoolboys and the same boys magnetically attracted to the adventurous discovery of the Monster comes across right away. Their eyes shine and are far away, their nimble run and amazed gestures that barely keep their excitement at bay. It is a powerful illustration in which each child's face is a portrayal of a childhood wanting to explore the unknown, the terrifying, the fantastical summed up in the figure of the Monster, the Dogfish.

School thus takes on the absence dimension, evaporating behind the boys' backs and visible only in the fluttering school bags and the sophistication of the clothing unsuited to an escape through fields to the beach. The group, the pack, skives off the lesson. They are now "school-less" and Pinocchio precedes them in their unfettered rush to the unknown.

«With the starting bell now having sounded, this pack of rascals, with their books and exercise books under their arms, start running through the fields with Pinocchio always ahead of them. They seemed to have wings on their feet»<sup>14</sup>.

Those books were then to become bullets and the puppet's good schoolboy interval comes to a brusque end (at least in the plot's narrative time frame). The hand-to-hand

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.

<sup>13</sup> Bertacchini, *Collodi narratore*, cit., p. 212.

<sup>14</sup> Collodi, *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, cit., p. 100.



combat between Pinocchio and his school buddies offers Collodi the chance to stage his dilemma, the conflict between education, school and free childish adventure. «The *Sillabari*, *Grammatiche*, *Giannettini*, *Minuzzoli*, the tales of Thouar, *Pulcino* in Baccini and other school books were launched»<sup>15</sup>.

On closer examination, even the author's texts are bait and food for fish rejected, like the others, even by fish used to a very different diet. But we're past this now.

Chiostri anticipated all this in his depiction of the race, the enthusiasm, the light in the eyes of the schoolboys in flight. And further on in the *Adventures* he comes up with what is perhaps the boldest, most extreme and explicit of his illustrations. The apex of the smart aleck and transgressive alliance between Pinocchio and Candlewick.

«Candlewick was the naughtiness and most school-shy of the whole school but Pinocchio worshipped him»<sup>16</sup>.

That "but" sounds rather like an excuse by the author for his puppet, but it is anything but adversarial. It is as if he was saying: Pinocchio cannot but love the classmate who resembles him most, who most recalls his own transgressive self. In fact, giving in to a primal urge he never lost, the puppet follows in the footsteps of the friend the novel – and, it is implied, Chiostri's depiction – entrusts Pinocchio's doppelganger to. The loser doppelganger. In a shadowy illustration set at dusk, Chiostri gives the scene a suffused, dark aura. However, it is perfectly in line with the details describing the two boys' way of dressing and behaving and their mindset. On his side, Pinocchio, still in his flowery suit and pointed hat, harmoniously positioned alongside his friend, takes on the appearance of a grown-up boy, just a step away from the leap of faith that will drag him into the most dangerous of initiation adventures.

Sitting on a wall in the countryside next to each other, both seen in half profile, the two rascals are awaiting that fatal coach that will make donkeys of them. Candlewick is depicted by Chiostri as if he had just run away from home and school, dressed as all boys were in those days, and Pinocchio, sitting next to him but in the exact same pose, looks like or is his friend's alter ego, a wooden and metaphorical alter ego generated by Collodi's ambivalent writing and so intensely brought to life by Chiostri. And if they were a single boy and what we see here is the two bodies and faces that Collodi described? Not content with this, the author saves Pinocchio and kills off Candlewick, distressingly, as if as painful and implacable warning to "school-less" vagabonds.

The coach arrives at midnight, the fairy tale hour. In this image, the Tuscan countryside blending dream, nightmare and suspense, the cartoonist and the author combine their respective fairy tale literature legacies without either of them giving up the lifelike component always present in fairy tales and novels. It is thus the fantastic making its way in and surprising the reader. Midnight is the fairy tale hour and Collodi, together with Chiostri, starts thus:

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121.

In the meantime night had fallen. A dark night. When all of a sudden they see a flicker of light and hear bells and a trumpet sounding, so quiet and stifled that it felt like the whine of a mosquito.

“Here it is!” cried Candlewick, standing up straight.

“Who is it?” asked Pinocchio under his breath.

“It’s the coach coming to get me. So are you coming or aren’t you?”

“So it’s true”, asked the puppet, “that in that town boys are never forced to go to school?”

“Never, never, never!”

“What a wonderful town, wonderful town, wonderful town!”<sup>17</sup>.

In the distance a coach pulled by donkeys can just be made out. Lights, hazy figures of exhausted donkeys, the Coachman’s whip. Chiostrì’s is an off-putting, rural, sinister landscape.

Alongside Pinocchio, who wants a childhood free of even a thought of school, is the character who ultimately plays his alter ego, naughty Candlewick, the boy who chooses the road to ruin, a school drop-out as we would call him today, trusting to futile and dangerous enticements. Candlewick believes in the school-less vision as a means for freedom and rebellion, but we know that the land of milk and honey will turn out to be an illusion, punitive to the point of sadism, cruel and deadly.

The dilemma and what we might call the distance between childhood at school and school-less childhood is not simply a matter of the conflict between wisdom and duty and running away, of ideal and illusory freedom and carefreeness, of weeks of Thursdays and Sundays only.

Another category of school-less childhood and immature youth is added: the Italian school readers and children’s stories and novels of the day often featured images of little harp players, ultra-young *figurinai* – this is what the children who sold little statuettes and figurines were called – chimney sweeps, rose sellers and beggars sleeping rough and wearing rags. All inexorably school-less.

The figures which immortalise these street childhoods, the violence they suffered, trades created deliberately for children and young people sent to far off places, tell of a world of poverty and destitution in one of society’s most marginalised worlds, one in which the children of the poorest could not even imagine school. But the cartoonist told the stories of the school-less with fierce realism, exalting school precisely in its absence, in the real and symbolic vacuum left by the place par excellence from which to assert children’s rights to grow up and evolve.

On the subject of the definition of the art of the illustrators called *figurinai* in Italian, just like the children who sold figurines, statuettes, who were so close to the historical, social and cultural truth of harsh living conditions, Faeti wrote:

The explicit allusion to a socially scorned trade – the dictionary definition of the real *figurinai* was “travelling sellers of figurines and the like” – already encompasses an acknowledgement of one of the most significant components of the world of these illustrators. These latter benefited from a positive marginalisation which kept them constantly apart from the most elevated sectors of artistic officialdom and required them to seek out the contents with which they could compose an iconography with its

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 124-125.

own specific physiognomy within the spaces closest and most congenial to them. The first and most authentic *figurinai* – still featuring the characteristics to be attributed to this type of illustrators – were working within a publishing milieu still very close to that of the old popular *imagerie* sold on the streets by matchsellers for a few coins. The earliest *figurinai* could thus offer child readers fragments of an iconography with a lengthy past and frequently alluding to emblematic contents born in the town squares and very familiar to the Italian vernacular universe<sup>18</sup>.

One of the many excellent examples of this comes once again from Chiostrì's illustrations for *Il piccolo figurinaio italiano. Romanzo originale per ragazzi*, by E. Simonatti Spinelli and published by Salvatore Rotondo, Palermo, 1901. The image I am referring to depicts a boy holding a basket containing clay figurines which he is showing one by one to passers-by, elegant ladies and gentlemen who are hurrying past him on a rainy, snowy day. No-one buys his goods and the begging gesture Chiostrì accords the boy opens up the theme of sentimentality as a noble and not to be criticised theme within the analysis of illustrations and literature as an indispensable source for the history of childhood, of the intimacy of childhood in its socio-historical journey.

Chiostrì's watercolour, once again, miraculously succeeds in melding pathos with the pure cynicism of the real world. The writer of the novel thus tells the story of the children doing this thankless task in a glimpse into the real lives of these school-less children. «And in the nocturnal gloom little shadows are visible, walking slowly, dragging themselves onwards, burdened down with the weight of unsold goods, like aimless beings at the mercy of their fates»<sup>19</sup>.

“Little shadows”, the right metaphor for invisible childhoods, a long way away even from the school-less elbowing their way out of the schoolwork straitjacket. Another life entirely.

School and the way it has been depicted over the years, like all things which have ever existed, always involves a contrast between its absence and the awareness, even contemplation, of a potential absence to be identified as a clue with which to decipher, narrate, reveal. The absence, distance, from school is perceived in figures which tell of school-less childhoods and do not depict desks and exercise books or even touch on them but rather shows childhoods and youths exiled from a right denied which falls on deaf ears.

If school-less childhood is considered in terms of a serious privation deriving from pauperised socio-economic conditions forcing children into marginalisation from school, the result is an image of an institution which existed but was still well away from being sufficiently rooted in the socio-cultural fabric to the extent of being ignored or, perhaps, seen as something of a mirage.

Thus the school that the “school-less” conjure up is an educational institution still incapable of truly making space for deprived children from the poorer classes and the

<sup>18</sup> Faeti, *Guardare le figure*, cit., pp. 3-4.

<sup>19</sup> E. Simonatti Spinelli, *Il piccolo figurinaio italiano. Romanzo originale per ragazzi*, editore Salvatore Rotondo, Palermo, 1901, illustrations by Carlo Chiostrì, pp. 41-42 (in Luatti, *Adulti si nasceva*, cit., pp. 153-154).

agricultural world that still populated the nation in the period in which the Italian peninsula was moving towards a unitary identity.

Those classrooms were very often full of physically exhausted girls and boys weighed down by the hard work required of them, which they suffered and put up with at the expense of their ability to be schoolboys and girls. Their duty to contribute to family survival often obliged them to violent separation, migration across the oceans in pursuit of a destiny as childhoods bought and sold, forced onto boats taking them far away from school. The lowest of the low, exploited children, sold and stolen from themselves, who abandoned their homelands having themselves been abandoned, they embodied the utmost extreme of childhoods destined to lose all contact with education and for whom poverty remained as pervasive as their humiliating subordination to their masters.

Childhoods deprived of school, slaves of poverty, do not earn the freedom dreamt of by Collodi's rascals, including Giannettino and Minuzzolo to some extent, emblems of the contradiction that Collodi keeps alive in his school books and openly portrays in his great novel, the *Adventures*. It is a novel which school rejected at length, suspecting and fearing the ambivalence pervading its poetics, language, aesthetics and thought. And this resistance to the reading of Collodi's books at school in some way enhanced and deepened the author's sense of conflict.

School thus seemed to be walking the tightrope of an inner conflict which the visual did nothing to diminish. Quite the opposite. Minuzzolo riding Baffino the donkey at breakneck speed, illustrated by Mazzanti (publisher Paggi, Florence, 1882), is an ideal interpreter of that childish desire to throw oneself headlong into an adventure which turns out to be much more dangerous than foreseen. But his daring experiment falls within the sequence of episodes that Collodi expertly uses to break the monotony of school learning.

Accepting the valuable proximity of Dr. Boccadoro, Giannettino learns from his mistakes but Collodi allows him to break off from his studies now and then to roam free across other more enjoyable meadows. A writer whose dilemma his earliest illustrators, the great cartoonists of his day, renarrated, depicted and visually reworked with their poetics, the dilemma which prompted him to explore the much sought after otherness of childhood too. And Pinocchio was the result.

And lastly, the school of the school-less is that of its absence. Three possible interpretative categories which the visual element in late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century children's literature and school books chose to depict, in a circumscribed but paradigmatic writing, cartoonist, character and childhood framework.

# Dystopian Schools between Reality and Narrative Fiction

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## 1. “Educated words”

The massive educational-training apparatus set up in Italy during the Fascist period showed, with disconcerting and dramatic power, how the school, that is far from being a protected and safe’s place from the point of view of the transmission of educational models, could actually prove to be a very effective tool for anchoring propaganda and a vehicle for the spread of power and its ideas by totalitarian regimes.

Borrowing this awareness from the realities of twentieth-century dictatorships, science fiction-dystopian narratives<sup>1</sup>, both when they speak directly about schools and, more generally, educational institutions, and when they are silent about them, take it for granted that the protagonists of the stories have been formed within a particular system to which they are expected to conform<sup>2</sup>, but from which, contrary to the regime’s expectations, they often dissociate themselves. With outcomes that are not always positive.

Orwell in the novel *1984*<sup>3</sup>, first published in 1949, highlights already how the promotion of ignorance or, at the very least, the polarization of knowledge, can prove to be one of the educational priorities of authoritarian regimes, whatever their ideology of reference. In his need to reflect, and make people reflect, on the consequences of totalitarianism<sup>4</sup>, the author narrates about how the doctrine of Soving – the form of socialism that rules in the state of Oceania – requires that words also be “educated”<sup>5</sup> in order to prevent them from being misused. The process also involves revising the meaning of key words such as war, freedom, and ignorance, which in the context of the novel, take on an oxymoronic meaning, as opposed to the one conventionally used. The slogans that

<sup>1</sup> See, in this regard: A. Aldridge, *The Scientific World View in Dystopia*, Ann Arbor, UMI Research Press, 1984; M. Keith Booker, *The Dystopian Impulse in Modern Literature: Fiction as Social Criticism*. Westport, Greenwood Press, 1994; G. Claeys, *Dystopia: A Natural History*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016; W. Grandi, *Gli ingranaggi sognati. Scienza, fantasia e tecnologia nelle narrazioni per l’infanzia e l’adolescenza*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> M. Colin, *I bambini di Mussolini. Letteratura, libri, letture per l’infanzia sotto il fascismo*, Brescia, Editrice La Scuola, 2012.

<sup>3</sup> G. Orwell, *1984*, London, Martin Seeker & Warburg, 1949.

<sup>4</sup> M. Ceretta (ed.), *G. Orwell. Antistalinismo e critica del totalitarismo. L’utopia negativa*, Firenze, Olschki, 2006.

<sup>5</sup> D. Montino, *Le parole educate. Libri e quaderni tra fascismo e Repubblica*, Milano, Selene, 2005.

stand out on the facade of the Ministry of Truth (Miniver in Newspeak) – *War is Peace, Freedom is Slavery, Ignorance is Strength*<sup>6</sup> – represent the Party's actual manifesto.

While it is simple enough to understand, though terrifying, how subverting the concept of war and freedom means for the Socing to keep the population in a condition of closure and total subservience, it is through the third concept, ignorance, that the Party makes explicit and enforces its position of absolute supremacy over a population progressively stripped of basic human prerogatives.

To this end, even the school, that boys and girls left at age nine<sup>7</sup> and then took specific courses at different ages of their life, is called upon to deplete cultural resources.

All ambiguities and shades of meaning had been purged out of them. So far as it could be achieved, a Newspeak word of this class was simply a staccato sound expressing ONE clearly understood concept. It would have been quite impossible to use the A vocabulary for literary purposes or for political or philosophical discussion. It was intended only to express simple, purposive thoughts, usually involving concrete objects or physical actions<sup>8</sup>.

Even the vocabulary of Newspeak, therefore, is constituted in such a way as to make any form of thought other than that of the Party impossible. And from this point of view, the banning of metaphorical language represents the height of the repressive boycott against critical thought and any form of divergence. More insidious still, if possible, is the continuous process of revision and purging: from the texts of words and concepts deemed alien to Socing; from the history of actual events in favor of regime propaganda.

A few years after the publication of George Orwell's *1984*, Ray Bradbury reiterates in another novel, *Fahrenheit 451*<sup>9</sup>, the horror that dictatorial-dystopian regimes hold toward the past, and thus history, by telling of an unspecified future in which books are burned in the public squares and the population is "acculturated" through continuous, relentless and alienating television broadcasting. Yet even that dystopian world has a school system, articulated in the orders and grades we know, designed to provide power for the Government. A school system not intended to provide an adequate education for every citizen, but to ensure their homogenization and interchangeability. In a cynically lucid passage, Captain Beatty explains to Montag: «Not everyone born free and equal, as the Constitution says, but everyone made equal. Each man the image of every other; then all are happy»<sup>10</sup>. The ruthlessness of this statement is corroborated by the recognition that «Heredity and environment are funny things. You can't rid yourselves of all the odd ducks in just a few years. The home environment can undo a lot you try to do at school. That's why we've lowered the kindergarten age year after year until now we're almost snatching them from the cradle»<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> G. Orwell, *1984*, cit., p. 130.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 378.

<sup>9</sup> R. Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451*, New York, Ballantine Books, 1953.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

Once again, it is emphasized that schools are a necessary educational institution for totalitarian regimes because they are completely subservient to their needs and malleable in the face of their requirements. This circumstance, present in both narrative fiction and historical reality, should lead, at least democratic nations, or so-called democratic nations, to protect education from possible and deleterious incursions of power within the mechanisms that regulate educational institutions and the content they are supposed to convey. Yet we know well that those incursions, at different levels, operate, more or less deliberately and more or less blatantly, within the school, wherever it is located.

And so, returning to *Fahrenheit 451*, in Montag – the oxymoronic fireman that is trained to burn books – only needs to note with Commander Beatty that:

Discipline relaxed, philosophies, histories, languages dropped, English and spelling gradually neglected, finally almost completely ignored. Life is immediate, the job counts, pleasure lies all about after work. Why learn anything save pressing buttons, pulling switches, fitting nuts and bolts?<sup>12</sup>

And if anyone disagrees or appears interested in something as eccentric as reading, the strategies in place in the school need to be adopted even more vigorously. The captain, therefore, continues his harangue by showing what the government's own philosophy of education is:

Give the people contests they win by remembering the words to more popular songs or the names of state capitals or how much corn Iowa grew last year. Cram them full of noncombustible data, chock them so damned full of "facts" they feel stuffed, but absolutely "brilliant" with information. Then they'll feel they're thinking, they'll get a sense of motion without moving. And they'll be happy<sup>13</sup>.

People, Bradbury continues, have adapted to the new educational practices to such an extent that «the firemen are rarely necessary. The public itself stopped reading of its own accord<sup>14</sup>». This observation, so fitting even for a society such as that of modern-day Italy, in which people read less and less and worse, should lead one to reflect on how schools should be an antidote against the abandonment of reading and not, on the contrary, a poison for the pleasure of reading.

## 2. *Where Dystopia and Utopia converge*

The fear that reading will become obsolete and that schools can help make this a reality permeates other "dystopian" novels, primarily *The Telling* by Ursula K. Le Guin<sup>15</sup>.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53. See in this regard also M.C. Locchi, *Fahrenheit 451 e il dibattito sui limiti alla libertà di espressione*, «Anamorphosis: rivista internazionale de direito e literatura», vol. 2, n. 1, 2016, pp. 33-52.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

<sup>15</sup> U.K. Le Guin, *The Telling*, San Diego, Harcourt, 2000.



In the novel, the author narrates the events that occurred on Aka, a remote planet in time and space on which a despotic and obtuse technocratic<sup>16</sup> regime prevails.

The government of this world, to gain technological power and intellectual freedom, had outlawed the past. [...] To this government who had declared they would be free of tradition, custom, and history, all old habits, ways, modes, manners, ideas, pieties were sources of pestilence, rotten corpses to be burned or buried. The writing that had preserved them was to be erased<sup>17</sup>.

All texts written in the old fonts, in the name of Science, have been destroyed or, says Suttu, the protagonist, «if it exists, I don't know what it is, because the Ministry doesn't allow access to it. So all I was able to work on is modern aural literature. All written to Corporation specifications. It tends to be very standardised»<sup>18</sup>.

In Aka, therefore, there is a school system in which children «were educated as producer-consumers»<sup>19</sup>. Needless to say, that «Akan government was obsessive in its detestation of “deviance”»<sup>20</sup> and especially for those who secretly continued to practice the ancient cult of Narration. A cult that involves attending clandestine schools, learning the forbidden language and gaining access to a now-forgotten alphabet. All at the risk of one's freedom and sometimes one's existence.

Compared to Orwellian narratives<sup>21</sup>, *The Telling* seems to provide new life to the dystopian genre and point to original directions of meaning in adding to the plot the utopian twist that, already hinted at in Bradbury, becomes dominant in literature aimed at *Young Adults* in the first two decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Series such as Scott Westerfeld's *Uglies*<sup>22</sup>, James Dashner's *The Maze Runner*<sup>23</sup>, Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games*<sup>24</sup>, Veronica Roth's *Divergent*<sup>25</sup> and Lauren Oliver's *Delirium*<sup>26</sup>, to name few of the best-known examples, pick up the baton passed on by Le Guin and turn dystopian regimes into an opportunity, though a dramatic and terrible one, to establish a new civilization.

<sup>16</sup> For further study: A. Aldridge, *The Scientific World View in Dystopia*, cit.

<sup>17</sup> K. Le Guin, *The Telling*, cit., p. 57.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>21</sup> The Orwellian adjective is used here to define those dystopian narratives characterized by a negative, tragically unresolved ending.

<sup>22</sup> Scott Westerfeld's *Uglies* series consists of four volumes *Uglies*, *Pretties*, *Specials*, *Extras* published by Simon Pulse (New York) between 2005-2007.

<sup>23</sup> James Dashner's *The Maze Runner* series consists of three volumes *The Maze Runner*, *The Scorch Trials* and *The Death Cure* published by Delacorte Press (New York) between 2009-2011.

<sup>24</sup> Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* series consists of three volumes *The Hunger Games*, *Catching Fire* and *Mokingjay* published by Scholastic (New York) between 2008-2011.

<sup>25</sup> Veronica Roth's *The Divergent* series consists of three volumes *Divergent*, *Insurgent* and *Allegiant* published by Katherine Tegen Books (New York) between 2011-2013.

<sup>26</sup> Lauren Oliver's *The Delirium* series consists of three volumes *Delirium*, *Pandemonium* and *Requiem* published by HarperCollins (New York) between 2011-2013.



Suspended between science fiction and fantasy<sup>27</sup>, those series, in fact, advance the claim that only from the disruption of the status quo can a better world be born. And they do so by telling how the rebellious teenagers, that are considered “deviants” because they do not conform to the system and “different” because they do not conform to expectations, both physically and behaviorally, take it upon themselves to denounce, overturn, and subvert the rules imposed by an adult world fossilized in its own desire for self-preservation and self-reproduction.

In Scott Westfield’s *Uglies*<sup>28</sup> quadrilogy, for example, the story is told of a world in which boys and girls can be *Uglies*, or “normal”, until the age of fifteen; then they are subjected by law to extreme cosmetic surgery that corrects every flaw and makes them *Pretties*. Along with the physique, however, their minds are also manipulated, flattened, emptied of thoughts, feelings, desires.

The utopia manifested by the civilization of the New-Pretties in which all differences – physical and mental – are to be erased, hides under the veil of perfect equality, the dramatic dystopia of self-annihilation, homogenization, and stultification aimed at the anesthesia of all creative and critical capacity<sup>29</sup>.

The *Pretties* turn out, in fact, to be frozen in an eternal pursuit of pleasure and detached from any temptation of political and social participation. Leaving adults, who have discovered a way to stretch their existence almost to eternity, free field to continue to hold power, wealth, authority. To do so, however, they need an institution that educationally supports the choices of those who govern: schools.

Even in the world of the *Uglies*, as is the case in the other Young Adult dystopian novel series, the school remains at all times, an indispensable institution and a fundamental point of reference. The term school is used on an interminable series of occasions<sup>30</sup>, sometimes simply to mention that that institution also exists within the world the author is describing; others to emphasize characteristics peculiar to a particular educational system.

In the saga written by Scott Westerfield, the school has the overriding function of preparing schoolchildren for the future of perfection that society arranges for anyone who has turned sixteen<sup>31</sup> and to do so, it inevitably distorts history and alters its contents.

<sup>27</sup> For further study: S. Albertazzi, *La letteratura fantastica*, Bari, Laterza, 1993; W. Grandi, *Infanzia e mondi fantastici*, Bologna, BUP, 2007; R. Giovannoli, *La scienza della fantascienza*, Milano, Bompiani, 2015; G. De Turre, S. Fusco, *Le meraviglie dell'impossibile. Fantascienza: miti e simboli*, Milano-Udine, Mimesi Edizioni, 2016; W. Grandi, *Gli ingranaggi sognati*, cit..

<sup>28</sup> Interestingly, only the first three volumes have been translated in Italy and the series has been given the title: *Beauty* instead of *Uglies*.

<sup>29</sup> A. Antoniazzi, *Contaminazioni. Letteratura per ragazzi e crossmedialità*, Roma, Carocci, 2012, p. 134. My translation.

<sup>30</sup> In this regard, it would be interesting to prepare quantitative research on the presence of the word school within narrative dystopias and activate comparative and interpretive strategies to better understand the phenomenon.

<sup>31</sup> Interestingly, sixteen years of age represents a threshold that is chorally considered valid when taking into account that it also represents the end of compulsory schooling in Italy.

Thinking about the past of the society prior to the New-Pretties, Shay, a friend of the protagonist Tally, recites (recited) what she learned in school:

«Everyone judged everyone else based on their appearance. People who were taller got better jobs, and people even voted for some politicians just because they weren't quite as ugly as everybody else. Blah, blah, blah».

«Yeah, and people killed one another over stuff like having different skin color». Tally shook her head. No matter how many times they repeated it at school, she'd never really quite believed that one.

«So what if people look more alike now? It's the only way to make people equal»<sup>32</sup>.

Scholastic indoctrination is pervasive and obstinate, and its effectiveness manifests itself on many levels, including in terms of self-awareness and one's projection into a future that those in power have already planned. In this sense, another dialogue between Tally and Shay becomes as symptomatic as ever:

«I'm serious, Tally», Shay said once they were out in the water. «Your nose isn't ugly. I like your eyes, too».

«My eyes? Now you're totally crazy. They're way too close together».

«Who says?»

«Biology says».

Shay splashed a handful of water at her. «You don't believe all that crap, do you, that there's only one way to look, and everyone's programmed to agree on it?»

«It's not about believing, Shay. You just know it. You've seen pretties. They look... wonderful».

«They all look the same».

«I used to think that too. But when Peris and I would go into town, we'd see a lot of them, and we realized that pretties do look different. They look like themselves. It's just a lot more subtle, because they're not all freaks».

«We're not freaks, Tally. We're normal. We may not be gorgeous, but at least we're not hyped-up Barbie dolls»<sup>33</sup>.

The idea of the doll, or at least the idea of a society pushing young girls toward an ideal of aesthetic perfection, accompanied by the idea of subservience and powerlessness harkens back to another dystopian novel, Louise O'Neill's *Only Ever Yours*<sup>34</sup>.

Just as in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*<sup>35</sup>, from which it takes its cue, O'Neill's novel refers, inevitably, to dystopian narratives of a feminist matrix<sup>36</sup>. Mirella Billi, in this regard argues, that «Dystopian veins, always present in women's discourse, with the reassertion of repressive policies or even fundamentalist societies, turn into

<sup>32</sup> S. Westerfeld, *Uglies*, New York, Simon Pulse, 2005, p. 21.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p.36.

<sup>34</sup> Louise O'Neill, *Only Ever Yours*, London, Quercus Editions Ltd, 2014.

<sup>35</sup> M. Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*, Toronto, McClelland & Stewart, 1985.

<sup>36</sup> C.M. Adden, U.K. Le Guin, *Beyond Genre: Fiction for Children and Adults*, New York-London, Routledge, 2005; S. Bernardo (ed.), Ursula K. Le Guin: *A Critical Companion*, Westport, Greenwood Press, 2006; D.E. Robert, *Race, Gender, and Genetic Technologies: A New Reproductive Dystopia?*, «Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society», vol. 34, n. 4, 2009, pp. 783-804; R. Onnis, A.C. Palladino, M. Spinelli, *Fantascienza femminista: immaginare il genere nella cultura italiana contemporanea*, Firenze, Franco Cesati, 2022.

real dystopias, which describe realities that are concretely possible or even exist<sup>37</sup>». The choice to dwell, on this occasion, on Louise O'Neill's work relates to the fact that her protagonist, Isabel, spelled with a lowercase initial, is a teenager and is about to turn sixteen. The age of sixteen represents, as we have seen, a kind of age-threshold beyond which it becomes difficult, at least in young adult narratives, to be able to reprogram one's existence independently, without wearing the habitus of expectations that societies seem to pour on adults.

*Only Ever Yours* is set in a dystopian future in which, following a natural cataclysm, the survivors have established a highly hierarchical society in which women have been disenfranchised and enslaved. Even their names are written all in lowercase letters since capital letters are reserved for authorities and men.

Gender discrimination occurs at the very moment of birth when the girls are taken to the School. There, for sixteen years, the girls study with the goal to be part of one of the three categories provided for adult women: *companion*, *concubine* and *chastity* (a kind of lay nuns dedicated to the care and training of new Eve). Needless to say, that the School trains them to be pretty. The School trains them to be good. The School trains them to always be willing. All their lives, the Eves have been waiting. The Penelope short stories – devoted, submissive and perpetually expectant – are thus trained (not instructed or educated) for the exclusive “use and consumption” of men. And it is on the Eve of their 16<sup>th</sup> birthday that reveals to the pupils the School's true purpose:

«Your Ceremony is mere months away. It is imperative that the correct choices are made and that each of you is placed within the appropriate third. All the theoretical knowledge that you have been taught during your sixteen years in School must now be put into practice».

She pauses, knowing we are hanging on her every word.

«Another element is to be added to your timetable. You will be introduced to the ten Inheritants that were born the same year that you were designed, the very men for whom you were created»<sup>38</sup>.

At that point a real selection process begins – similar to a beauty contest, but much more degrading – in which the Eve must try to win the most coveted role, that of *companion* or, at least, that of achieving *concubine* status in some lord's harem. Of course, those who score the lowest are destined for the neglected role of *chastity*.

As in *Hughes*, however, in *Only Ever Yours* something in the educational process does not work out as society had planned, and Isabel tries to rebel against the status quo, aware that, perhaps for her, the happy ending is an unplanned option.

While O'Neill's novel focuses on denouncing the plight of women by shifting educational and social responsibilities to the repressive and possessive behaviors of a society ruled exclusively by male power, dystopian sagas aimed generally at young readers, placing emphasis on other aspects that do not concern gender discrimination. Or, at least, they do not focus only on those.

<sup>37</sup> M. Billi, *Utopia al femminile: eutopie, distopie e fantasie compensatorie*, in L. De Michelis, G. Iannaccaro, A. Vescovi (edd.), *Il fascino inquieto dell'utopia*, Milano, Ledizioni, 2014, pp. 143-159.

<sup>38</sup> O'Neill, *Only Ever Yours*, cit., p. 125.

In those sagas, in fact, discrimination occurs predominantly by social strata, religious affiliations and/or mere geographical location. And the various governments present in those narratives, all authoritarian and short-sighted in the face of the needs of the people, particularly of the younger generation, see the school as the best tool for the transmission and reiteration of their dictates. Thus, for example, in Suzanne Collins' *Hunger Games*, each of the Districts that make up Panem has its own school system suitably adapted to direct education toward specific models of society and to train schoolchildren for the life they will have to lead once they become adults.

As for District Twelve, it is the protagonist of the saga herself, Katniss Everdeen, who describes the programs that the school offers.

In school, they tell us the Capitol was built in a place once called the Rockies. District 12 was in a region known as Appalachia. Even hundreds of years ago, they mined coal here. Which is why our miners have to dig so deep. Somehow it all comes back to coal at school. Besides basic reading and math most of our instruction is coal-related. Except for the weekly lecture on the history of Panem. It's mostly a lot of blather about what we owe the Capitol. I know there must be more than they're telling us, an actual account of what happened during the rebellion. But I don't spend much time thinking about it. Whatever the truth is, I don't see how it will help me get food on the table<sup>39</sup>.

Different, but with the same expected outcomes, is the school system present in Veronica Roth's *Divergent* series. In that closed, asphyxiated world, always the same, children from the different factions – *Abnegation*, *Amity*, *Candor*, *Dauntless* and *Erudite* – are educated together and together they learn the general rules of society and the codes of behavior of each group. It is not until the students turn sixteen that they are tested to determine the faction best suited to them. It is the children, however, who decide which faction will be their destination during the Ceremony of Choice. Only then do the factions take charge of completing each new adept's education. Those who do not complete initiation become stateless and live outcasts in the peripheries.

### 3. *It's better to go to school*

The examples of novels, graphic-novels, films, video games and other dystopian narratives for young adults could go on and on. In most of those stories, school represents a coercive institution that aims to homogenize, standardize, and plagiarize students rather than set them free. Yet, upon closer inspection, perhaps it is through school that Tally, Isabel, Katniss, Beatrix, and the other protagonists of the dystopian narratives we are analyzing, learn to look at their own reality with a different gaze and can make subversive choices vis-à-vis an obtuse and self-referential authority.

School, then, even when enslaved to an authoritarian power, deprived of critical approach and imbued with propaganda and regime rhetoric, is preferable to mere lack of

<sup>39</sup> S. Collins, *Hunger Games*, New York, Scholastic, 2008, p. 71.

education. Indeed, that institution, even when it presents dystopian traits, provides the basic tools so that the protagonists can break free from the known, the usual and those educational cages that seek to repress their every personal drive. Sometimes all it takes is a dash of curiosity, the reading of a few forbidden texts or, simply the perception of a few out-of-tune elements within the proposed content to ignite the spark of change. Indeed, even the most obscurantist school offers its pupils the minimum tools so that they can cultivate secretly their own curiosities.

It is the protagonists of the novels, with their doubts, perplexities, and weaknesses, who show the way out of the impasse by revealing that, in order to save oneself, human beings need to identify the boundaries of the cage within which they are locked and, subsequently, if possible, to unhinge it. The sentence uttered by Beatrice Prior, the protagonist of the series written by Veronica Roth, «I am not Abnegation. I am not Dauntless. I am Divergent. And I can't be controlled»<sup>40</sup> then becomes a veritable manifesto for those who find the courage to rebel against the *status quo*, ready to suffer the consequences.

If the school represents, in spite of everything, an indispensable point of reference for attempting to break free from dystopias, it is because the silence of educational institutions, characteristic of so many narratives, that the interpretations become more interesting, and the questions more pressing. The existential situation of the protagonists, both in historical reality and in narrative fiction, is undoubtedly extremely more complex when power, or some catastrophe, prevents boys and girls from going to school. It is at that juncture that the young protagonists, in order to extricate themselves from the terrible situations in which they are immersed, must draw on all their resources and, in the best of cases, rely on the school memories of those who retain some reminiscence of them. Often, on these occasions, it is books that are the emancipating tool par excellence: hated by dictatorships, burned in public squares to preserve citizens from knowledge that could set them free and make them yearn for a better world, they are a fundamental presence in dystopian literature and particularly in that aimed at young adults.

If in Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* the book becomes a tale that is reiterated and preserved for posterity through the spoken word, it is in Beatrice Masini's *Bambini nel bosco*<sup>41</sup> (Children in the Woods) that that becomes a unique and unrepeatable opportunity for the little protagonists to recognize their humanity. Awakened without memory after an unspecified catastrophe, the boys and girls find themselves divided into bands within an impassable enclosure. From the loudspeaker, a voice continually repeats the rules to be followed, including, «Do not ask [...] things you cannot know»<sup>42</sup>.

The arrival of a new child triggers curiosity and distrust, especially because he always brings with him a very precious secret object that well hidden from the guardians' view. It is the most forbidden of all objects: a book. None of the children can read, or at least they do not remember being able to, so Tom, secretly, in the woods, reads to them. As if

<sup>40</sup> V. Roth, *Divergent*, New York, Katherine Tegen Books, 2011, p. 442.

<sup>41</sup> B. Masini, *Bambini nel bosco*, Milano, Fanucci, 2014.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

by magic, the stories awaken the children's memory. And with memory also awakened words, numbers, curiosity, the desire for freedom, and nothing can ever be the same again.

The book, therefore, does not represent for Tom and his friends a mere opportunity for knowledge, but a real tool for emancipation and intellectual awakening. In another dystopian novel, *Anna* by Nicolò Ammaniti<sup>43</sup>, the protagonist always carries with her an object intended to make up for the lack of school. This time it is not a book, but a pinned notebook.

A devastating pandemic – prophetically dated 2020 – has eradicated the adult population and with it the possibility of institutionally transmitting knowledge along with specific skills. Anna and little Astor's mother, aware that she had very little time, found in a simple notebook with a hard, brown cover the tool to deliver a future for her children. In that notebook are pinned, almost like a miniature school, "THE IMPORTANT THINGS". On the first page, under that almost shouted title, there is, written in round, precise handwriting, a kind of will whose bequest concerns, for the heirs, the very possibility of survival.

My beloved children, I love you so much. Before long your mother will be gone and you will have to fend for yourselves. You are good and smart and I am sure you will make it. I leave with you in this notebook directions that will help you cope with life and avoid dangers. Keep it carefully and every time you have a doubt open it and read it. Anna, you must teach Astor to read as well, so he can consult it on his own. Some of the advice you will find will not be useful in the world you will live in. The rules will change and I can only imagine them. You will be the ones to correct them and learn from mistakes. The important thing is that you always use your head. Your mother is leaving because of a virus that has spread all over the world. These are the things I know about the virus, and I tell them to you like this, without lies. Because you don't deserve them<sup>44</sup>.

The notebook contains instructions on how to use things, directions on how to prevent illness or, in case, to cure oneself, but also suggestions on how to pay attention to the world around us, to read and interpret its signs; to use creativity as an existential strategy.

The mother, then, leaves an implicit signal in the notebook: the last pages of the book are completely blank. Those blank pages are a real encouragement, representing a signal that the story continues and that Anna will write her own future from there on.

Anna [...] continued scrolling through the notebook and came to the last pages that were still empty. She stared at the horizon with the wind tousling her hair.

What if I wrote something in it too?

It was a kind of revelation. Before that moment she had never even dared to imagine such a thing. That was the notebook of Important Things that mother had given to her before she left. And that I will give to Astor<sup>45</sup>.

<sup>43</sup> N. Ammaniti, *Anna*, Torino, Einaudi, 2015 (ebook). My translation.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, pos. 342.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, pos. 2319.

The schoolbook has, therefore, achieved its primary goal: to transmit knowledge in such a way that generation after generation can spread, expand and, at best, propel towards a better future.

Ultimately, one cannot fail to consider how schooling, even within despotic systems—real or fictional—is a concept that can be developed in a multiplicity of different ways and forms. Sometimes it is constrictive, sometimes oppressive, sometimes seemingly useless, but in any case it remains a necessary tool for any possible change within human societies. It is no coincidence that Malala Yousafzai<sup>46</sup> who has experienced firsthand the devastating effects of real dystopian power, said in her speech at the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize:

This award is not just for me. It is for those forgotten children who want an education. It is for those frightened children who want peace. It is for those voiceless children who want change. I am here to stand up for their rights, to raise their voice... it is not time to pity them. It is time to take action so it becomes the last time that we see a child deprived of education<sup>47</sup>.

And the conclusion of her speech, delivered with the courage of one who knows what it means to lose the chance to continue cultivating one's dreams and desires through school, sounds like an ideal conclusion to this paper.

Though I appear as one girl, one person, who is 5 foot 2 inches tall, if you include my high heels (it means I am 5 foot only), I am not a lone voice, I am many.

I am Malala. But I am also Shazia.

I am Kainat.

I am Kainat Soomro.

I am Mezon.

I am Amina. I am those 66 million girls who are deprived of education. And today I am not raising my voice, it is the voice of those 66 million girl.

[...]

Dear sisters and brothers, dear fellow children, we must work... not wait.

Not just the politicians and the world leaders, we all need to contribute. Me. You.

We. It is our duty.

Let us become the first generation that decides to be the last that sees empty classrooms, lost childhoods and wasted potentials.

Let this be the last time that a girl or a boy spends their childhood in a factory.

Let this be the last time that a girl is forced into early child marriage.

Let this be the last time that a child loses life in war.

Let this be the last time that we see a child out of school.

Let this end with us.

Let's begin this ending... together... today... right here, right now. Let's begin this ending now<sup>48</sup>.

Starting with school.

<sup>46</sup> Pakistani activist attacked for advocating for women's right to school.

<sup>47</sup> M. Yousafzai, *Nobel Lecture, December 10, 2014*, [https://www.nobelprize.org/uploads/2018/06/yousafzai-lecture\\_en.pdf](https://www.nobelprize.org/uploads/2018/06/yousafzai-lecture_en.pdf) (last access: 10.02.2023).

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*





# Memories of Students and Yearbooks: the Religious Schools in Spain Twentieth Century<sup>1</sup>

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## 1. *Private Religious Schools and Educational Historiography*

Religious schools in Spain during the contemporary period have not been a privileged object of educational historiography. The number and consequent relevance of private schools at different moments in the history of education in Spain had not gone hand in hand with the interest that historians of education had shown in this institution as an object of study<sup>2</sup>. Despite the fact that their study has recently been gaining more interest, almost three decades later, the situation does not seem to have improved too much, as there are many authors who have continued to point out the inaccessibility of the documentary sources of these institutions. Most of them refer to private schools run by different religious orders and congregations<sup>3</sup> convinced that research on them is

<sup>1</sup> This contribution stems from a doctoral thesis being carried out within the Ikasgarai Research Group at the University of the Basque Country, funded by a pre-doctoral grant from the Basque Government since 2021.

<sup>2</sup> A. Tiana Ferrer, *La escuela Privada*, in J.L. Guereña, J. Ruiz Berrio, A. Tiana (edd.), *Historia de la Educación en la España contemporánea. Diez años de investigación*, Madrid, Centro de Publicaciones del Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia, 1994, pp. 117-139.

<sup>3</sup> I. Amunarriz, A. Rodríguez, L.M. Naya, P. Dávila, *Las memorias escolares de centros educativos religiosos: metodología de estudio*, in J.M. Hernández (ed.), *La prensa pedagógica de las confesiones religiosas y asociaciones filosóficas*, Salamanca, Ediciones Universidad Salamanca, 2022, pp. 369-382; E. Bernad, *La instrucción primaria a principios del siglo XX*, Zaragoza, IFC, 1984; P. Dávila, L.M. Naya, *Las escuelas de los Hermanos de La Salle en Gipuzkoa. Evolución y tendencias en el alumnado y profesorado (1904-2006)*, «Ikastaria», n. 16, 2008, pp. 271-315; P. Dávila, L.M. Naya, *Las memorias escolares como fuente para el estudio de los centros privados religiosos masculinos en España*, in A.M. Banadelli et alii (edd.), *XIX Coloquio Historia de la Educación. Imágenes, discursos y textos en Historia de la Educación. Retos metodológicos actuales*, Alcalá de Henares, Universidad de Alcalá de Henares – UNED – Universidad Complutense – SEDHE, 2017, pp. 349-352; P. Dávila, L.M. Naya, *Las memorias escolares, una forma de prensa escolar*, in J.M. Hernández (ed.), *Prensa pedagógica, mujeres, niños, sectores populares y otros*, Salamanca, Universidad de Salamanca, 2018, pp. 593-602; P. Dávila, L.M. Naya, I. Zabaleta, *Internados religiosos: marketing del espacio a través de las memorias escolares*, in P. Dávila, L.M. Naya (edd.), *Espacios y patrimonio histórico-educativo*, Donostia, Erein, 2016, pp. 183-207; M. Hijano del Río, *Un estudio de las memorias escolares: el Colegio agustino “Los Olivos” de Málaga (1968-1978)*, in C. Sanchidrián (ed.), *La modernización de la enseñanza tras la Ley General de Educación. Contextos y experiencias*, Valencia, Tirant lo Blanch, 2022, pp. 429-454; A. Llano, *La investigación en la historia de la educación del primer tercio del siglo XX*, in J.A. González de la Torre (ed.), *El patrimonio histórico-educativo: memorias de ayer y reflexiones de hoy*, Polanco, Centro de Recursos, Interpretación y Estudios de la Escuela – Consejería de Educación y Formación Profesional del Gobierno de Cantabria, 2021, pp. 181-198; S. Moll, B. Sureda, *Private religious schools for boys*

often unaffordable for most historians of education<sup>4</sup> due to the fact that it is the same congregations or religious orders themselves that, usually, have kept the documentation of the schools they run<sup>5</sup> in their own private archives<sup>6</sup>, so their consultation depends in many cases on the availability of time on the part of those in charge<sup>7</sup> or, rather, on their own will<sup>8</sup>.

That results in a type of history of poor quality and little historiographical value. In this sense, Sergi Moll and Bernat Sureda<sup>9</sup> denounce that the aversion shown by most religious congregations to allow outsiders to review their past, has given rise to a bibliography generally consisting of commemorative publications edited by people linked to the institutions in question. Like, for example, *Lourdes, Stella in Castilla. Historia del Colegio de Nuestra Señora de Lourdes de Valladolid (1884-2009)*<sup>10</sup> by Javier Burrieza on the occasion of the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the school, who, – like the mayor of the town council of the same locality that published this commemorative book – as well as being a former student was president of the Association of Former Students of the school. Or *La Salle, una presencia: medio siglo de servicio en San Sebastián (1946-1996)* by the Lasalian Brother Luis Garitano e Igarza and published by the school itself in 1997 as a result of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Both public and private powers and administrations protect, offer and/or shape certain official versions of the past<sup>11</sup>, such as, for example, through the institutional histories usually promoted and financed by the institution itself, through the commemorative histories of certain secondary schools, universities, private schools, and religious congregations or orders dedicated to teaching<sup>12</sup>. These official versions would control the story about themselves by privileging some themes over others, making possible

*in the Spanish post Civil War period: an analysis through triangulating historical sources*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. XV, n. 2, 2020, pp. 29-48; Tiana, *La escuela Privada*, cit., pp. 117-139.

<sup>4</sup> Amunarriz, Rodríguez, Naya, Dávila, *Las memorias escolares de centros educativos religiosos: metodología de estudio*, cit., pp. 369-382; Dávila, Naya, *Las memorias escolares, una forma de prensa escolar*, cit., pp. 593-602; Dávila, Naya, Zabaleta, *Internados religiosos: marketing del espacio a través de las memorias escolares*, cit., pp. 183-207; Hijano del Río, *Un estudio de las memorias escolares: el Colegio agustino "Los Olivos" de Málaga (1968-1978)*, cit., pp. 429-454.

<sup>5</sup> Llano, *La investigación en la historia de la educación del primer tercio del siglo XX*, cit., pp. 181-198.

<sup>6</sup> Moll, Sureda, *Private religious schools for boys in the Spanish post Civil War period: an analysis through triangulating historical sources*, cit., pp. 29-48; Tiana, *La escuela Privada*, cit., pp. 117-139.

<sup>7</sup> Llano, *La investigación en la historia de la educación del primer tercio del siglo XX*, cit., p. 188.

<sup>8</sup> Moll, Sureda, *Private religious schools for boys in the Spanish post Civil War period: an analysis through triangulating historical sources*, cit., pp. 29-48.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> J. Burrieza, *Lourdes, Stella in Castilla. Historia del Colegio de Nuestra Señora de Lourdes de Valladolid (1884-2009)*, Valladolid, Ayuntamiento de Valladolid, 2009. In addition to interviewing several members of the educational community, he had access to the archives of Lasalian Brothers in general, and to the archives of the school in particular. As we shall see later on, he also used the yearbooks we are dealing with as a source.

<sup>11</sup> A. Viñao, *La historia de la educación ante el siglo XXI: Tensiones, retos y audiencias*, in A. Jiménez et alii (edd.), *Etnohistoria de la escuela. XII Coloquio Nacional de Historia de la Educación, Burgos, 18-21 junio 2003*, Burgos, Servicio de Publicaciones Universidad de Burgos, 2003, pp. 1063-1074.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*; A. Viñao, *La Historia de la Educación ante el siglo XXI: tensiones, retos y audiencias*, in M. Ferraz (ed.), *Repensar la historia de la educación. Nuevos desafíos, nuevas propuestas*, Madrid, Biblioteca Nueva, 2005, pp. 147-165.

and/or promoting «interested uses»<sup>13</sup> of the (educational) past. In this situation, new sources are revalued and are necessary to carry out new research on the object of study in question<sup>14</sup>. Although it is true that the bibliography is mostly made up of commemorative publications edited and/or financed by the institution itself or by people linked to it, it is also true that more and more historians of education are approaching the study of the same object of research from new sources<sup>15</sup>, such as, for example, the reports of internship<sup>16</sup> written by teacher training students and the testimonies of former students of the same schools<sup>17</sup>, school magazines<sup>18</sup>, photographs published in different media, such as websites<sup>19</sup>, commemorative books<sup>20</sup>, or reports of the practical work carried out by the teacher training students mentioned above<sup>21</sup>.

## 2. *The yearbooks of the museum of education of the University of the Basque Country*

Yearbooks have also found their place among the set of new sources for the study of the history of education in general and of the private religious school in particular<sup>22</sup>. For

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 155.

<sup>14</sup> Tiana, *La escuela Privada*, cit., pp. 117-139.

<sup>15</sup> Moll, Sureda, *Private religious schools for boys in the Spanish post Civil War period: an analysis through triangulating historical sources*, cit., pp. 59.

<sup>16</sup> Reports that teacher training students wrote of the schools where interviewees were pupils.

<sup>17</sup> S. Moll Bagur, *L'educació masculina en els col·legis religiosos de la postguerra (1939-1945)*, Doctoral Thesis, Department of Pedagogy and Specific Didactics (Supervisor: B. Sureda Garcia and F. Comas Rubí), Palma de Mallorca, Universitat de les Illes Balears, a.a. 2022; Moll, Sureda, *Private religious schools for boys in the Spanish post Civil War period: an analysis through triangulating historical sources*, cit., pp. 29-48.

<sup>18</sup> S. Moll, B. Sureda, *La generación de capital social y la conformación de identidades en los colegios de la posguerra española (1939-1945): estudio de la revista escolar Montesión*, «Social and Education History», vol. 10, n. 3, 2021, pp. 238-361.

<sup>19</sup> F. Comas, B. Sureda, *Album photographique scolaire, histoire et configuration de l'identité des établissements scolaires: le cas du collège Sant Josep Obrer de Palma*, «Encounters in Theory & History of Education», n. 17, 2016, pp. 119-140.

<sup>20</sup> P. Fullana Puigserver, S. González Gómez, F. Comas Rubí, *La fotografia en els llibres commemoratius dels centres escolars (1939-1975)*, in F. Comas, S. González, X. Motilla, B. Sureda (edd.), *Imatges de l'escola, imatge de l'educació. Actes de les XXI Jornades d'Història de l'Educació. Palma, del 26 al 28 de novembre de 2014*, Palma, Universitat de les Illes Balears, 2014, pp. 147-157.

<sup>21</sup> S. Ramos, T. Rabazas, C. Colmenar, *Fotografía y representación de la escuela privada madrileña en el franquismo. Entre la propaganda y el relato*, «Historia y Memoria de la Educación», vol. 8, 2018, pp. 397-448.

<sup>22</sup> I. Amunarriz, A. Rodríguez, L.M. Naya, P. Dávila, *El valor interpretativo de las memorias escolares como fuente primaria en el ámbito de la Historia de la Educación*, in C. Pires, M.F. Martins, M. Figueiredo (edd.), *XIX Congresso da Sociedade Portuguesa de Ciências da Educação (SPCE). Educação e Cidades: Tempos, espaços, atores e culturas. 15, 16 e 17, Setembro, 2022/Lisboa & Online. Livro de Resumos*, EventQualia, 2022, p. 207; Amunarriz, Rodríguez, Naya, Dávila, *Las memorias escolares de centros educativos religiosos: metodología de estudio*, cit., pp. 369-382; Dávila, Naya, *Las memorias escolares como fuente para el estudio de los centros privados religiosos masculinos en España*, cit., pp. 349-352; Dávila, Naya, *Las memorias escolares, una forma de prensa escolar*, cit., pp. 593-602; P. Dávila, L.M. Naya, J. Miguelena, *Yearbooks as a source in researching school practices in private religious schools*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. XV, n. 2, 2020a, pp. 219-240; P. Dávila, L.M. Naya, J. Miguelena, *Les Annuaire Scolaires: la richesse d'une source pour l'histoire de l'école et des élèves*,

example, analysed as a tool for the construction and dissemination of a certain image or identity of the private religious educational establishments that issue them, some historians of education have focused their attention on the use of photography in the yearbooks issued during Franco's regime for the construction of the school register as if it were a traditional photographic album<sup>23</sup>. In a similar way, they have also been analysed as a tool to offer a representation of the school that makes students feel identified with it based on a feeling of belonging to the group<sup>24</sup>. Likewise, yearbooks have been studied as advertising brochures for the marketing of its premises, infrastructures, buildings, and so on, to give prestige to the educational establishment in question<sup>25</sup>. Their structure and evolution as a tool for conveying institutional representation has also been studied, making yearbooks a source for studying the representation of the shared universe between the school and its community – families, students, former students –<sup>26</sup>; and the student participation in certain yearbooks gives them the status of a pedagogical press created by the students themselves<sup>27</sup>. Finally, the characteristics that justify the use of this document as a primary source for the History of Education have been highlighted<sup>28</sup>, outlining possible future lines of research with this documentary source<sup>29</sup>, like, for example, as a source for studying the extra-curricular activities of such schools<sup>30</sup>.

In view of this situation, the Yearbooks Fund held by the Museum of Education of the University of the Basque Country, which is made up of an important documentary

«Encounters in Theory and History of Education», vol. 21, 2020b, pp. 253-273; Dávila, Naya, Zabaleta, *Internados religiosos: marketing del espacio a través de las memorias escolares*, cit., pp. 183-207; P. Dávila, L.M. Naya, I. Zabaleta, *Memory and Yearbooks: An Analysis of Their Structure and Evolution in Religious Schools in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Spain*, in C. Yanes-Cabrera, J. Meda, A. Viñao (edd.), *School Memories. New Trends in the History of Education*, Cham, Springer Publishing, 2017, pp. 65-79; Hijano del Río, *Un estudio de las memorias escolares: el Colegio agustino "Los Olivos" de Málaga (1968-1978)*, cit., pp. 429-454; S. González, F. Comas, P. Fullana, *La «construcción del record escolar a través de la fotografía: «deconstrucción» de dos anuaris col-legials*, in F. Comas, S. González, X. Motilla, B. Sureda (edd.), *Imatges de l'escola, imatge de l'educació. Actes de les XXI Jornades d'Història de l'Educació. Palma, del 26 al 28 de novembre de 2014*, Palma, Universitat de les Illes Balears, 2014, pp. 159-169.

<sup>23</sup> González, Comas, Fullana, *La «construcción del record escolar a través de la fotografía: «deconstrucción» de dos anuaris col-legials*, cit., pp. 159-169.

<sup>24</sup> Amunarriz, Rodríguez, Naya, Dávila, *Las memorias escolares de centros educativos religiosos: metodología de estudio*, cit., pp. 369-382; Amunarriz, Rodríguez, Naya, Dávila, *El valor interpretativo de las memorias escolares como fuente primaria en el ámbito de la Historia de la Educación*, cit., p. 207; Hijano del Río, *Un estudio de las memorias escolares: el Colegio agustino "Los Olivos" de Málaga (1968-1978)*, cit., pp. 429-454.

<sup>25</sup> Dávila, Naya, Zabaleta, *Internados religiosos: marketing del espacio a través de las memorias escolares*, cit., pp. 183-207.

<sup>26</sup> Dávila, Naya, Zabaleta, *Memory and Yearbooks: An Analysis of Their Structure and Evolution in Religious Schools in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Spain*, cit., pp. 65-79.

<sup>27</sup> Dávila, Naya, *Las memorias escolares, una forma de prensa escolar*, cit., pp. 593-602.

<sup>28</sup> Amunarriz, Rodríguez, Naya, Dávila, *El valor interpretativo de las memorias escolares como fuente primaria en el ámbito de la Historia de la Educación*, cit., p. 207; Dávila, Naya, Miguelena, *Yearbooks as a source in researching school practices in private religious schools*, cit., pp. 219-240.

<sup>29</sup> Amunarriz, Rodríguez, Naya, Dávila, *Las memorias escolares de centros educativos religiosos: metodología de estudio*, cit., pp. 369-382; Dávila, Naya, Miguelena, *Les Annuaire Scolaires: la richesse d'une soucre pour l'histoire de l'école et des élèves*, cit., pp. 253-273.

<sup>30</sup> Dávila, Naya, *Las memorias escolares como fuente para el estudio de los centros privados religiosos masculinos en España*, cit., pp. 349-352.

corpus of more than 2,000 documents, is of great value as a source. This documentary collection will be the basis of this contribution.

### 3. *Objective*

The starting point of this project is the consideration we give to yearbooks as a primary source, pointing out the features that make their use possible. However, the interest of this hypothesis lies in being able to know the limits that yearbooks may have as a document that can be used as a primary source in the historical construction of school institutions. Since, aware that any source elaborated by observers (e.g. diaries, memoirs, biographies, and so on) must be considered with certain caution<sup>31</sup>, it is the historian's responsibility to subject it to «historical-pedagogical» criticism<sup>32</sup>.

In our case, we cannot lose sight of the author of the yearbooks, or, in other words, the fact that they are a document edited by the very institution portrayed in the documents in question<sup>33</sup>; that is, they have the possibility of controlling the story about themselves by privileging some themes over others, which allows them to make «interested» uses of the story<sup>34</sup>. In addition, taking into account the various functions that can be attributed to the source in question, such as, for example, the construction of a collective memory that strengthens the common identity of its former students or a historical discourse that supports its current educational project<sup>35</sup>, that is, offering a representation of the school that makes students feel identified with it based on a sense of belonging to the group<sup>36</sup> for the generation of social capital through the construction and dissemination of a collective identity<sup>37</sup>; the construction of the school register as if it was a traditional photographic album<sup>38</sup> to project the portrait that the school wants to be engraved in the memory

<sup>31</sup> M. Poveda, T. Rabazas, *El fondo Romero Marín del Museo «Manuel B. Cossío». Análisis de las memorias de las prácticas de pedagogía*, in P.L. Moreno, A. Sebastián (edd.), *Patrimonio y Etnografía de la escuela en España y Portugal durante el siglo XX*, Murcia, Sociedad Española para el Estudio del Patrimonio Histórico-Educativo (SEPHE) – Centro de Estudios sobre la Memoria Educativa (CEME) de la Universidad de Murcia, 2012, pp. 323-336.

<sup>32</sup> P. Dávila, A. Rodríguez, J. Arpal, *Guía temática y bibliografía para la investigación de historia de la educación en el País Vasco*, San Sebastián, Caja de Ahorros Municipal de San Sebastián, 1986, p. 12.

<sup>33</sup> Moll, Sureda, *Private religious schools for boys in the Spanish post Civil War period: an analysis through triangulating historical sources*, cit., pp. 29-48; Viñao, *La historia de la educación ante el siglo XXI: Tensiones, retos y audiencias*, cit., pp. 1063-1074.

<sup>34</sup> Viñao, *La Historia de la Educación ante el siglo XXI: tensiones, retos y audiencias*, cit., pp. 155.

<sup>35</sup> Comas, Sureda, *Album photographique scolaire, histoire et configuration de l'identité des établissements scolaires: le cas du collège Sant Josep Obrer de Palma*, cit., pp. 119-140.

<sup>36</sup> Amunarriz, Rodríguez, Naya, Dávila, *El valor interpretativo de las memorias escolares como fuente primaria en el ámbito de la Historia de la Educación*, cit., p. 207; Amunarriz, Rodríguez, Naya, Dávila, *Las memorias escolares de centros educativos religiosos: metodología de estudio*, cit., pp. 369-382; Hijano del Río, *Un estudio de las memorias escolares: el Colegio agustino «Los Olivos» de Málaga (1968-1978)*, cit., pp. 429-454.

<sup>37</sup> Moll, Sureda, *La generación de capital social y la conformación de identidades en los colegios de la posguerra española (1939-1945): estudio de la revista escolar «Montesión»*, cit., pp. 238-361.

<sup>38</sup> González, Comas, Fullana, *La «construcción» del record escolar a través de la fotografía: «deconstrucción» de*

and school memories of its students<sup>39</sup>; building their own commercial brand through a narrative that distinguishes them from other schools of the same type, through identity characteristics that distinguish the schools of a certain order or congregation from the schools of other orders or congregations, through their distinguished extracurricular offer made up of certain religious, sporting and artistic-cultural activities<sup>40</sup>, or through the prestige that the advertising of its facilities gives the school<sup>41</sup> to give prestige and disseminate the school's identity in the social sphere of influence in which the educational establishment sought to consolidate itself; it is clear that the narrative offered by yearbooks is conditioned by the interests of the school, so there is a clear bias due to both the authors and the function they fulfil<sup>42</sup>.

However, it should be noted that «a biased or false document can be useful because it reveals ideological or material interests in adulterating information»<sup>43</sup>. That is why the aim of this collaboration is to contrast the contents of yearbooks – based on the hypothesis that they are a valid source – in order to find out the limits that this memoirs may have as a document that can be used as a primary source for the History of Education. To this end, the account of the yearbooks written by these schools and the memories of the students, expressed as oral testimonies, who attended the same schools in the period of time coinciding with the aforementioned yearbooks, have been compared.

#### 4. Contrast of yearbooks and former students' memories<sup>44</sup>

One discrepancy identified relates to the supposed fervour and faith of the students in the schools in question. We find numerous fragments in the yearbooks which boast of this, boasting not only of the fervent faith of their students, but also of their high level of participation in the various religious activities. However, the oral testimonies obtained through interviews reveal a very different reality.

The importance attached by the yearbooks to this type of religious activity is remarkable, when, for example, they consider that one of the indicators of the school's success is the religious activity of its students: «Considering that in Brother Leon, the

*dos anuaris col-legials*, cit., pp. 159-169.

<sup>39</sup> Amunarriz, Rodríguez, Naya, Dávila, *El valor interpretativo de las memorias escolares como fuente primaria en el ámbito de la Historia de la Educación*, cit., p. 207; Amunarriz, Rodríguez, Naya, Dávila, *Las memorias escolares de centros educativos religiosos: metodología de estudio*, cit., pp. 369-382.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Amunarriz, Rodríguez, Naya, Dávila, *Las memorias escolares de centros educativos religiosos: metodología de estudio*, cit., pp. 369-382; Dávila, Naya, Zabaleta, *Internados religiosos: marketing del espacio a través de las memorias escolares*, cit., pp. 183-207.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Dávila, Rodríguez, Arpal, *Guía temática y bibliografía para la investigación de historia de la educación en el País Vasco*, cit., p. 13.

<sup>44</sup> Although the yearbooks and interviews are in Spanish, the direct quotes have been translated into English to exemplify what we are saying.



circumstances of zeal and perseverance in the educational work are present, as witnessed by the.... Religious activity of the students in the pious Congregations in particular»<sup>45</sup>. This, together with the number of pages, images and references devoted to these activities in the yearbooks published by these schools, is a reflection of the importance of these activities for the schools run by various religious orders and congregations in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Spain. Moreover, the same document mentions and describes various specific activities of this type which took place during this period in the schools we are concerned about, to which, moreover, it attributes the merit of the religiosity of the students we have just mentioned: «the Magazine has spread throughout the five continents the high spiritual level reached through... the Eucharistic Crusade, Catholic Action, Catechism, the solemn and fervent 1<sup>st</sup> Communion»<sup>46</sup>.

However, if these fragments exemplify anything, they exemplify the importance given to these activities by the school, which, as we have seen in almost all the interviews, does not coincide with the importance given to them by the former students. They, for example, mention non-faith-based motives for such participation, such as, wanting to please the teachers:

*Interviewer:* And, was the Marian Congregation compulsory or optional?

*Participant 4:* The congregations were voluntary. All three. Both the Infant Jesus, the Eucharistic Crusade and the Marian Congregation.

*Interviewer:* Weren't all the students members of the congregation? Because in other schools we have seen that they were voluntary, but all the students were sodalists.

*Participant 4:* No, no, no... let's see, there were a lot of people who, in order to please the teachers, would sign up for whatever came up...<sup>47</sup>.

And certainly most of their testimonies do not attest to the supposed fervour and faith of the student body that the school boasts about:

The flowers month... we painted. Every day it was our turn to paint a flower on the blackboard, we went to the chapel for five minutes, which felt like a kick in the ass because it was five minutes less for playing football...<sup>48</sup>.

And although, both the yearbooks and various former students interviewed agreed that the participation in extracurricular activities (sports, artistic-cultural, and so on) in general and in religious activities in particular was voluntary, there are testimonies that cast doubt on the voluntariness of this participation, insinuating that they could not refuse it:

*Participant 5:* Escolanía meant that you missed break time because you had to go to rehearsal. So what I was looking forward to was going to recess and not rehearsing, of course, so I got myself kicked out,

<sup>45</sup> «Yearbook of Nuestra Señora de Lourdes School», Lasalian Brothers, Valladolid, 1951-1952, pp. 8-9.

<sup>46</sup> «Yearbook of Nuestra Señora de Lourdes School», Lasalian Brothers, Valladolid, 1951-1952, pp. 14-16.

<sup>47</sup> Participant 4. Former student of Nuestra Señora de Lourdes School, Lasalian Brothers, Valladolid.

<sup>48</sup> Participant 6. Former student of Nuestra Señora de Lourdes School, Lasalian Brothers, Valladolid.

after four years, I... the priest of... Brother Velasco, that's what Julián Velasco was called, they got in between... when someone sounded bad, he got in and listened. And then one day, when I didn't feel like continuing with the choir, I started to sing... out of tune (laughs) and I got "Get out". And that's when they kicked me out.

*Interviewer:* So you couldn't leave voluntarily? You had to get yourself kicked out?

*Participant 5:* No doubt about it<sup>49</sup>.

*Interviewer:* Now that you mention the games room, in the yearbooks it says that it was an initiative of the Marian Congregation and that you could enter with a congregation card. If you weren't congregants, you couldn't enter?

*Participant 2:* Was there anyone who was not a congregant? (Participant 1 and 3 laugh) I am not aware of that....

*Interviewer:* The Marian Congregation is classified as a voluntary, optional, non-compulsory activity, but from what you say it seems that you were all congregants?

*Participant 2:* I don't know of anyone who would have refused<sup>50</sup>.

Another noteworthy question concerns the reason for the choice of the school by the families of its students. While the yearbooks – as well as the commemorative books – convey a vision of the families' confidence in the Brothers' mission, as if it were a question of choosing a specific educational project:

We had finished BUP in another Lasalian Centre in the province which did not have COU, and we had to choose between several possibilities.... A few of us decided – despite the early mornings and the daily commute – to enrol in this school... above all, because of its religious character<sup>51</sup>.

In the interviews we have seen reasons far removed from it, more related to location among others: «Because it was close to home»<sup>52</sup>.

*Interviewer:* What reasons do you think the families of the students at that time might have had for choosing La Salle as their school? Not in your particular case, many of you have told me that it was because of the location, because you lived 5 minutes away, but...

*Participant 2:* I think that the main reason was proximity, because at that time transport had serious problems, and proximity, and if you are at the Hernani tramway junction and the mole... and on top of that the school had two buses, which are the ones that people from the centre of...

*Interviewer:* Don't you think it was because of religious reasons, that your parents said I...?

*Participant 3:* No, not at that time, because religion was present in everything and in all areas of life, so no, no... that problem didn't exist...

*Participant 2:* At that time there was no distinction or different way of thinking.

*Interviewer:* I mean, no, they didn't say "let's take him because we are religious and we want our son"...

*Participant 3:* No, no, no<sup>53</sup>.

<sup>49</sup> Participant 5. Former student of Nuestra Señora de Lourdes School, Lasalian Brothers, Valladolid.

<sup>50</sup> Participants 1, 2 and 3. Former students of La Salle School, Lasalian Brothers, Donostia-San Sebastián.

<sup>51</sup> Garitano e Igarza, *La Salle, una presencia: medio siglo de servicio en San Sebastián (1946-1996)*, cit., p. 14.

<sup>52</sup> Participant 2. Former student of La Salle School, Lasalian Brothers, Donostia-San Sebastián.

<sup>53</sup> Participants 1, 2 and 3. Former students of La Salle School, Lasalian Brothers, Donostia-San Sebastián.



Finally, the yearbooks provide numerous references to multiple forms of rewarding students (award ceremonies, honour rolls in yearbooks, good behaviour vouchers redeemable for discipline walks, weekly prizes together with report cards, and so on) as a strategy to stimulate certain activities and/or attitudes, such as getting good grades. The students, moreover, in the interviews told us about all of them, so there is a high degree of similarity in the account given in the yearbooks in relation to the prizes and the former students' memories of them.

*Participant 3:* For us, every week, I don't know if it was on Fridays or Saturdays... they gave us the grades.

*Participant 1:* Yes, every week.

*Participant 3:* And then according to the grades you were lined up...

*Participant 2:* In order of grades.

*Participant 3:* First the ones with the best marks and the last one with the worst...

*Participant 1:* They took the report cards to the teacher's desk. The teacher, at the end of the class, the Brother would read: "Peter, so many points..." and so everyone in line... from the teacher's desk to the end in order of marks... and the first ten were given – we were given – a ZARA liquorice bar<sup>54</sup>.

The first discipline walks. Despite the difficulty of completing the 60 vouchers, the classes contrived to invent reasons and merits<sup>55</sup>.

«TABLE OF HONOUR» (with the names, surnames and photographs of the distinguished students)<sup>56</sup>.

However, the yearbooks omit the other side of the coin. That is to say, they do not mention the disciplinary measures aimed at the opposite, at punishing those behaviours and/or activities that they want to make disappear. Nevertheless, despite the fact that we did not find any references to punishment in the yearbooks, the former students told us about it in each of the interviews we conducted. But, given the function of these documents, it is not surprising that it is not something that schools want to be remembered for, nor is it something that could be a publicity stunt, so the fact that the yearbooks do not include stories and/or images of school punishment is not surprising.

However, the commemorative book of the fiftieth anniversary of the school in question includes references to both strategies, rewards and punishments, explaining the reasons for their use and their disappearance:

In other times, they had the aim (and they certainly achieved it!) of cultivating and rewarding the schoolchildren's sense of duty and solidarity, and stimulating compliance with the internal regulations (more demanding than the current ones), in matters of punctuality, silence in the general movements of entrances and exits, and so on, punishing infractions and rewarding their observance with vouchers<sup>57</sup>.

The supposed – or real! – psycho-pedagogical advances led to the suppression of stimuli of a comparative nature between students in the same class or classes of the same year: places in weekly, termly and final

<sup>54</sup> Participants 1, 2 and 3. Former students of La Salle School, Lasalian Brothers, Donostia-San Sebastián.

<sup>55</sup> «Yearbook of La Salle School», Lasalian Brothers, San Sebastián, 1954-1955, 2<sup>nd</sup> term, p. 9.

<sup>56</sup> «Yearbook of La Salle School», Lasalian Brothers, San Sebastián, 1955-1956, 1<sup>st</sup> term, p. 14.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

marks; diplomas, in order of the marks achieved in the year; knowledge competitions in the various subjects... The aim of such suppressions was to avoid rivalries between students and the rise of some and the fall of others, taking into account, almost exclusively, their intellectual capacity. Of course, application and behaviour also played a role!<sup>58</sup>.

However, when referring to possible punishments, or what is the same, to the typology of punishments, they do not include physical punishment, mentioning only copying, or retentions in class outside school hours, unlike the former students interviewed who do:

Long copying or repetition of a sentence or interminable “potencies”, or retentions in class after the established timetable... were once commonplace; now all this has become much milder, just as prizes are rare.... The figure of the Prefect of discipline has disappeared...<sup>59</sup>.

### *Conclusions*

Given this evidence, it is clear that the account offered by the yearbooks is conditioned by the interests of the school, so that there is a clear bias due to the authors and the function they fulfil. However, the fact that this documentary source allows to study the history of school representation that this type of school has tried to disseminate, is reason enough to incorporate these documents into the field of the History of Education.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 28-30.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

# The Recovered Memory of the Students of Bordeaux

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## *Introduction*

The definition we have of memory is first of all the fact of storing data in our brain to be used again for learning purposes, but there are other meanings. Memory is linked to a whole range of uses, for example the memory that an individual, a community or a people may have retained of their past or of an event linked to that past. The past is often seen through a particular prism and therefore distorted, so that the term memory can be used in the plural.

In the world of education, there are several types of memory: that of the headmaster, the teacher, the pupil, the pupils' parents or the technical employees, and there is another memory, that of the war memorials, which shows the extent to which the teachers of the Third Republic have paid a heavy tribute to the Republic. The collection of this memory can take various forms: interviews, correspondence, private writings. Whether provoked or not, there are several ways of collecting it, just as there are several ways of having recourse to it.

A multitude of historians and philosophers from Pierre Nora to Paul Ricoeur and Marcel Gauchet have been interested in memorial questions in France. Many of them, while working on the French Revolution, the Shoah, the Algerian War and the slave trade, have tackled the question of the «suffering memories»<sup>1</sup>, but as far as the history of education is concerned, this question of memory or memories of the school is still fairly recent. In France, Jacques Ozouf was a pioneer in the 1950s when he carried out a major survey of the teachers of the Third Republic. His main objective was not to forget the trajectories, behaviour and ways of thinking of the «black hussars of the Republic»<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Expression used by C. Liauzu, *Mémoires souffrantes de la guerre d'Algérie*, «L'Histoire», n. 260, December 2001, p. 32.

<sup>2</sup> Expression by Charles Péguy in Charles Péguy, *L'Argent*, published by *Les Cahiers de la Quinzaine*, 1912 and 1913, where he writes: «Our young masters were as beautiful as black hussars. Slender; severe; strapped. Serious, and a little trembling from their precocious, sudden omnipotence. Long black trousers, but, I think, with a purple border. Purple is not only the colour of bishops, it is also the colour of primary education. A black waistcoat. A long black frock coat, straight and drooping, but with two crosses of purple palms on the lapels. A flat, black cap, but a cross of purple palms above the forehead. This civilian uniform was a kind of military uniform, even more severe, even more military, being a civic uniform. Something, I think, like the famous Cadre Noir of Saumur. There is nothing like a beautiful black uniform among military uniforms. It's the line

Using this model, Gérard Vincent, greatly influenced by Bourdieu and the new current of sociohistory, launched a survey of high school students before and after 1968. More recently, attempts have been made to see how the educational past can be reconstructed with the help of private writings<sup>3</sup>. There are still a multitude of sources that have yet to be exploited, and the student association newspapers are among them. Preserved by the *Bibliothèque Nationale de France* (French National Library), they are particularly interesting in Bordeaux for the period 1880 to 1930. But what can the historian gain from these small daily student newspapers, which were not always worth preserving? In what way do they constitute an object of memory today? To answer this question, we will see that they are a source that reveals all the ways of life of a society, then we will try to identify the need and the objectives of writing and we will then examine how the historian can use these traces of the past.

### 1. *The diaries of a community...*

#### 1.1 *The student press in Bordeaux under the Third Republic*

The end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was a period when the press was very important in all its forms<sup>4</sup>. While national and regional titles were expanding rapidly, the student press was developing rapidly and was read by everyone: teachers and their students, the general public, men and women. It is supported by the university, advertising, patrons and appeals to different currents of thought depending on ideological or religious affiliation. Laurence Corroy has shown the interest of this source, which she still finds underused and which nevertheless allows the student to speak by means of «sociability networks, relations with the adult press»<sup>5</sup>. Thus, at that time in Bordeaux, there was a magazine for Catholic students<sup>6</sup>, «La Gazette des Escholiers», which appeared from 1930 to 1948, and which provided information from the French Federation of Catholic Students as well as more local information, concerning, for example, the remit and influence of the new parish priest of Léognan. It also mentions new artistic trends such as Ray Ventura and hot jazz<sup>7</sup>. There is also «L'Escholier», a journal of the general association of Bordeaux

itself. And the severity. Worn by those kids who were really the children of the Republic. By these young hussars of the Republic. By these infants of the Republic. By these black hussars of severity. I think I said that they were very old. They were at least fifteen years old».

<sup>3</sup> P. Marchand, *Donnez-moi des nouvelles. Collèges et collégiens à travers les correspondances familiales, 1767-1787*, Villeneuve d'Ascq, Presses Universitaires du Septentrion and Archives Départementales du Nord, 2018.

<sup>4</sup> J.-C. Caron, *Une approche de la sociabilité de la jeunesse: la presse étudiante à Paris (1829-1850)*, «Revue d'histoire du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle», n. 8, 1992, <http://journals.openedition.org/rh19/63>; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/rh19.63> (last access : 15.02.2023).

<sup>5</sup> L. Corroy, *Une presse méconnue: la presse étudiante au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, «Semen: revue de sémio-linguistique des textes et discours», n. 25, 2008, <http://journals.openedition.org/semen/8140> (last access: 14.11.2022).

<sup>6</sup> It was published by the *Association catholique des étudiants de l'Université de Bordeaux*.

<sup>7</sup> «La Gazette des Escholiers: [puis grand organe estudiantin...], 1<sup>st</sup> January 1932, pp. 1-8.

students which appeared from 1892 to 1949. The use of the term is far from unique, as it exists for example in Limoges with «L'Escholier du Limousin», which was published from 1934 to 1965 throughout the region<sup>8</sup>. «Escholier» then appears to be a generic term, circulating from one university to another. At the time, students seemed to be very preoccupied with their annual ball. To this must be added «Bordeaux-Étudiant», the monthly organ of the Bordeaux students' association, which was published between 1921 and 1928<sup>9</sup>, along with an older bulletin: «L'Écho des Écoles: journal hebdomadaire illustré juridique, médical, littéraire et scientifique: organe des étudiants de l'Université de Bordeaux», published from 1894-1901<sup>10</sup>.

All these titles, which sometimes intersect with one another and were not necessarily published at the same time, cover the period 1892-1949 and accompany the university revival. From the Second Empire onwards, a current of thought developed which aimed to reform the university<sup>11</sup>. This state of mind, which permeated largely through the university, led to its transformation in 1901. Indeed, between 1885 and 1901, under the impetus of Jules Ferry, the Sorbonne was rebuilt. The new buildings were inaugurated on the occasion of the 1889 Universal Exhibition<sup>12</sup>. This was also the case in the provinces. The University of Bordeaux was caught up in a whirlwind of construction that began with the building of schools and lycées. In the space of a decade, from 1875 to 1885, at the time when the Republic was asserting itself, we witnessed the triumph of the university. In 1875, Bordeaux was chosen by the State to become the seat of a complete university (law, literature, theology, sciences, medicine, pharmacy). In 1880, the construction of the building for the faculties of theology, literature and science and the faculties of medicine and pharmacy began. These two «faculty buildings» were inaugurated in 1886 and 1888, with an extension in 1902<sup>13</sup>. It is therefore not surprising to see these journals being established in the 1890s. Beyond that, it was in this particular context that this student press was published, revealing a real sociability.

This student press is widely supported: by honorary members, the minister and the deans of the faculties, associated with great skill, benefactor members, the Bordeaux city council, the General Council of the Gironde, Lot-et-Garonne, Landes, Basses-Pyrénées, the Bordeaux Chamber of Commerce, but also Gustave Gounouilhou, the director of the «La Petite Gironde». Then there were the honorary members, all the teachers or former students or shopkeepers of the town such as the photographer Panajou<sup>14</sup>. The list

<sup>8</sup> The Limousin Schoolboy, official organ of the General Association of Students.

<sup>9</sup> The Bordeaux Student, organ [then monthly] of the General Association of Students.

<sup>10</sup> The Echo of Schools: a weekly illustrated legal, medical, literary and scientific journal: the organ of the students of the University of Bordeaux.

<sup>11</sup> G. Weisz, *Le corps professoral de l'enseignement supérieur et l'idéologie de la réforme universitaire en France, 1860-1885*, «Revue Française de Sociologie», vol. 18, n. 2, 1977, pp. 201-232.

<sup>12</sup> *La nouvelle Sorbonne*, in D. Alexandre-Bidon, M.-M. Compère, Y. Gaulipeau, J. Verger, G. Bodé, P. Ferté, P. Marchand (edd.), *Le patrimoine de l'éducation nationale*, Charenton-le-Pont, Éditions FLOHIC, 1999, p. 673.

<sup>13</sup> M. Figeac-Monthus, *Bordeaux 1880: des facultés dans la ville*, in M. Figeac-Monthus (ed.), *L'Université de Bordeaux, des lieux, des objets, des savoirs*, La Crèche, La Geste, 2022, pp. 22-26.

<sup>14</sup> «Bordeaux-Étudiant», n. 20, August 1926, pp. 5-7.

is long, but it is indicative of the interest that the population of a whole city shows for its university.

### 1.2 *Student sociability*

She began by describing the teachers: Mr. Despagnet, Professor of International Law at the Faculty of Law<sup>15</sup>, Mr. Perez, Professor of Zoology at the Faculty of Sciences<sup>16</sup>, Mr. Morache, Professor of Legal Medicine at the Faculty of Medicine<sup>17</sup>, Mr. Gayon, Professor of Organic Chemistry at the Faculty of Sciences<sup>18</sup>. Next to it, there is also that of Doctor Tissier who founded the Gironde league of physical education in Bordeaux<sup>19</sup>. The portrait of the teacher, in which his knowledge is highlighted, is accompanied by a caricature that occupies the front page of the newspaper. Signed with the name of the newspaper's director, Gabriel Roques, they are accompanied by an emblematic phrase. Thus, for Jean Perez: «a frog is worth the most charming flower to him»<sup>20</sup> or for Doctor Tissier «a man with strong biceps»<sup>21</sup>. Gabriel Roques was not a student but a well-known caricaturist in Bordeaux. In 1889 he created an illustrated republican weekly, «Le Martinet», and from 1892 onwards he mocked Bordeaux notables in «Silhouettes Bordelaises». On the other hand, the writing of articles for «L'Écho des Écoles» was done by students.

The articles, even if they can sometimes be critical, always remain very respectful of the teaching world and knowledge. Thus, at the launch of the first issue of «L'Écho des Écoles», one can read:

To our revered masters.

To the Professors of the University of Bordeaux.

As students, we thought, dear Masters, that you would welcome the new organ of the students of this University, which your science and your devotion have made one of the first in France. We hope that you will not refuse «L'Écho des Écoles» your moral support, which is so valuable to us that without it we would not be far from abandoning our task at its beginning<sup>22</sup>.

We have here a deep respect for the teaching world by the students. Beyond this text and these caricatures we find an osmosis between students and teachers and a deep respect for knowledge. Thus, the small notes in the margin are significant of this state of mind:

<sup>15</sup> «L'Écho des Écoles», n. 20, 1893, pp. 1-2.

<sup>16</sup> «L'Écho des Écoles», n. 7, 18 December 1892, pp. 1-2.

<sup>17</sup> «L'Écho des Écoles», n. 28, 14 May 1893, pp. 1-2.

<sup>18</sup> «L'Écho des Écoles», n. 32, 11 June 1893, pp. 1-2.

<sup>19</sup> «L'Écho des Écoles», n. 29, 21 May 1893, pp. 1-2.

<sup>20</sup> «L'Écho des Écoles», n. 7, 18 December 1892, p. 1.

<sup>21</sup> «L'Écho des Écoles», n. 29, 21 May 1893, p. 1.

<sup>22</sup> «L'Écho des Écoles», n. 1, 6 November 1892, p. 2.

The students of Bordeaux were happy to learn that two of their most beloved teachers. M. Imbart de Latour and M. Bourciez have been appointed: the first, holder of the chair of history of the Middle Ages which has just been created at the Faculty of Letters of Bordeaux; and the second, Professor of languages and literature of the South-West at the same Faculty. «L'Écho des Écoles» would like to ask these two professors, who have been friends of his since the beginning, to receive its most sincere congratulations<sup>23</sup>.

Students such as René Normand are also mentioned in this student press:

It is with the deepest amazement that we learned on Monday of the very serious condition of our comrade Normand. A few students (a very small number) knew that he was ill: none of them suspected the seriousness of the illness. There was hardly any talk of malignant fever, intermittent fever, malaria, or any other kind of temporary illness. And suddenly a terrifying dispatch arrived, telling us of the desperate state of our poor comrade! Neither the most eager help, nor the heroic vigils of all those around him could pull him out of the typhoid fever, whose grip was so strong and so cruel, that for twenty-one days he lay unconscious in his bed of pain<sup>24</sup>.

This text is very interesting because it shows the precariousness of students at that time. Indeed, typhoid is caused by a bacterium from contaminated food or water, so we can imagine that this student was living in poor conditions and that the hygiene, due to lack of financial means, could leave something to be desired in the place where he was living.

Alongside «L'Écho des Écoles», a single issue of a collection of artistic works was published at the time of the student ball, usually in January<sup>25</sup>, containing poems, es-

<b>BAL DES ÉTUDIANTS</b>	
<b>DE 1893</b>	
Voici les résultats du bal de cette année, qui ont dépassé de beaucoup ceux des années précédentes :	
Recettes .....	F. 21.035 45
Dépenses .....	9.521 50
Bénéfice net .....	<u>11.513 95</u>
Ces bénéfices ont été ainsi répartis :	
Aux hospices : Droit des pauvres, 1,570 fr. 10; Hôpital St-André, 200 fr.; Hôpital des Enfants, 200 fr ...	1.070 10
A la Société des auteurs et compositeurs .....	785 05
A la caisse des artistes .....	2.000 »
A l'Association générale des étudiants .....	500 »
A la caisse de réserve du bal .....	500 »
Au bureau de bienfaisance .....	400 »
Au bureau de mendicité .....	200 »
Aux enfants abandonnés de la Gironde .....	200 »
A la société protectrice de l'enfance .....	200 »
A l'Orphelinat de Gradignan .....	200 »
A l'Œuvre des prisonniers libérés .....	200 »
A l'Office central de charité .....	150 »
A la Crèche de La Bastide .....	150 »
Aux Ambulances urbaines .....	150 »
Au Sanatorium d'Arcachon .....	150 »
A l'Œuvre des malades pauvres .....	150 »
A la Maison de santé protestante .....	150 »
Aux Œuvres de bienfaisance israélites .....	150 »
Au Fourneau de charité du 7 <sup>e</sup> canton .....	150 »
A la Société de secours aux blessés militaires .....	100 »
A la Société de sauvetage du Sud-Ouest .....	100 »
Au Souvenir français .....	100 »
A l'Œuvre des bains à bon marché .....	100 »
Aux Fourneaux économiques ouvriers .....	100 »
Aux Sourdes-Muettes .....	100 »
Aux Ecoles françaises en Egypte .....	100 »
A la Fédération des Sociétés de patronage .....	100 »
A la Société de patronage des Chartrons .....	100 »
Au patronage des Ecoles du Mulet et Villeneuve .....	100 »
Au patronage des Ecoles des 4 <sup>e</sup> et 5 <sup>e</sup> cantons .....	100 »
Au patronage de l'École de la rue de Talence .....	100 »
A la Crèche de Saint-Michel-Saint-Eloi .....	100 »
A l'Hospice du Tondu .....	100 »
Au Refuge de Nazareth .....	100 »
A l'Orphelinat de St-Joseph .....	100 »
A la Société de secours mutuels des Alsaciens-Lorrains .....	100 »
A l'Œuvre des jeunes filles employées dans le commerce .....	100 »
A la Société de secours mutuels Sainte-Anne-Saint-Michel .....	100 »
A de nombreuses familles nécessiteuses .....	1.058 80
TOTAL .....	<u>F. 11.513 95</u>
Le Président du Comité du Bal, Raoul Dupuy.	

Fig. 1. Receipts and expenses of the student ball in 1893 («L'Écho des Écoles», n. 24, 16 April 1893, p. 2)

<sup>23</sup> «L'Écho des Écoles», n. 29, 21 May 1893, p. 3.

<sup>24</sup> «L'Écho des Écoles», n. 46, 7 December 1893, p. 3.

<sup>25</sup> «L'Escholier», 16 January 1892.



says, stories, fables, diary extracts and artistic drawings, many of which remained anonymous. The ball is indeed at the heart of this student sociability which is very present in the city. It was organised thanks to the sale of «L'Escholier de Bordeaux», but also to the payment of entrance fees and the purchase of drinks... funds collected by the organisers and redistributed. The 1893 accounts are significant in this respect, as they show the extent of the redistributions to various societies or associations such as the *Maison de santé des malades pauvres* (Health Centre for the Sick and Poor) and to the charitable associations of the three main religions in Bordeaux (Judaism, Protestantism and Catholicism)<sup>26</sup>. In this way, the students learn the principles of solidarity.

## 2. ... which reflect a society...

### 2.1 *Political issues and commitments*

From the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards, these student newspapers suggest either a politicisation or a Catholic commitment, depending on the sensibility. The students were imbued with a spirit of solidarity. Thus, in 1894, they organised a festival of charity in honour of Joan of Arc with the support of all the authorities: the Cardinal Archbishop of Bordeaux, the General Commander-in-Chief of the 18<sup>th</sup> Army, the First President of the Court of Appeal, the Prefect of Gironde, the Mayor of Bordeaux, the Rector of the Academy. The objective is as follows:

On Sunday 6 May at 2 a.m., a great historical Cavalcade will run through the main streets of Bordeaux. The Festivities Committee has charged two delegates with checking the orders for material placed in Paris by M. Maxime, the contractor of the Cavalcade. Our comrades Kahn and Périer have brought back from Paris a whole collection of models relating to the execution of the planned floats, as well as the models of historical costumes which will appear in the Cavalcade<sup>27</sup>.

Through the cavalcade, the student youth is put on display in the city. While showing respect for the established order, it contributes to building an identity in the city, while revealing, through charity, a spirit of generosity and solidarity. They learn about commitment and collective life through festive games. These young people also expressed themselves through drawings, as shown on the cover by Georges de Sonnevill in 1907<sup>28</sup>. This student at the Faculty of Law from 1906 to 1909 was already known for his talent as a caricaturist. His activity as a painter, draughtsman and engraver continued until 1958.

This student solidarity was expressed in the aftermath of the First World War, in a context of gathering and European solidarity between students from Bordeaux, France and abroad. Thus, in 1924, young people from Bordeaux took part in the second congress

<sup>26</sup> «L'Escholier», 16 April 1893.

<sup>27</sup> «L'Écho des Écoles», n. 66, 18 April 1894, p. 4.

<sup>28</sup> «L'Escholier», 1908, cover.



of the international student confederation held in Warsaw. In the atmosphere of the Roaring Twenties, when people were trying to forget the atrocities of the war, the scars of which were still visible in the streets, the objective was clear:

From 7 to 18 September, more than 300 students representing 21 nations met first in Warsaw and then in Krakow to discuss their interests, to develop intellectual relations between various countries, and finally to continue the world-wide work of student solidarity undertaken in the aftermath of the war<sup>29</sup>.

At that time, university cooperation and student exchanges were envisaged, including with Germany, which was still the university model in Europe at the time. In order to understand each other, some advocated the use of Esperanto<sup>30</sup>, a universal language created in 1887 by a Polish ophthalmologist.

This spirit of solidarity and the need for universality is reflected in the acceptance of the increase in tuition fees in 1926:

On the first of the year everyone gets a New Year's gift; the students got theirs. Indeed, when we went to take our second enrolment of the year, we learned with some astonishment that we had to pay twice as much as we were paying before.

The first movement of the students was a movement, I will not say of revolt, but at least of bad temper; then as the students, in spite of what some people think, are well-balanced and wise young people, they understood that in the present situation it was the duty of all Frenchmen to make sacrifices<sup>31</sup>.

Politicisation was initially manifested by a sort of fascination for some, and rejection for others, for socialism<sup>32</sup>. Although the Catholic students remained very respectful of the established order, from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Bordeaux students exchanged with the very active students of Geneva. Both boys and girls were represented. They also took part in the Congress of Socialist Students where French students gave their



Fig. 2. Cover page of «L'Escholier» (1908) signed by Georges Sonnevillle

<sup>29</sup> «Bordeaux-Étudiants», n. 1, November 1924, p. 10.

<sup>30</sup> «Bordeaux-Étudiants», n. 39, July 1928, p. 11.

<sup>31</sup> «Bordeaux-Étudiants», n. 13, January 1926, p. 3.

<sup>32</sup> J.-C. Caron, *Jeunes élites et processus de politisation. Le rôle des étudiants dans la France de notables*, in F. Attal et alii (edd.), *Les universités en Europe du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle à nos jours. Espaces, modèles et fonctions*, Paris, Éditions de la Sorbonne, 2021, pp. 63-75.

opinions<sup>33</sup> particularly on the question of the integration of women into the university, work and more generally society.

## 2.2 *The women's issue*

One of the key issues that appear in these student newspapers is that of female students in society. In most issues, in the cartoons, female students are seen as an object of male desire. Even though some of the drawings or articles should be used with caution as humour often appears to convey certain representations, the female student is often presented as an object of desire that should contribute to the affirmation of male sexuality<sup>34</sup>. The case of Russian female students is quite emblematic in this respect:

If bullying is odious when it is directed at young men, who can at least console themselves with the secret thought of later reprisals, it is even more odious when their victims are young girls.

I would like to say a word, in this connection, about the pitiful situation of the female students of our Faculties, and especially of the Russian students who attend the Medical School.

For them, the vexations do not last only for a few days; they last from one end of the year to the other. [...]

The student, for him, is the companion of the brewery and of the room which serves to spend his leisure hours cheerfully. She is the first mistress that one takes, that one leaves, that one passes on to one's friends, with whom one celebrates [...]

Here she is, the classic student, the one who doesn't study.

But a student who studies, who attends classes, who prepares for her exams, who does not go to breweries, who lives alone with other girls like her, who is an intern, who wants to be a doctor, remains an enigma for most students<sup>35</sup>.

This must of course be seen in the context of the time when, according to a report dating from 1894<sup>36</sup>, there were only 343 women out of 11.940 students at the University of Paris, 171 French and 172 foreign. Thus, female students represent barely 2.87% and French women only 1.43%. The questions students are asking are interesting and also concern female teachers:

In the last few days, a report on higher education has been published for the year just ended. It is some thirty years since women first ventured into lecture halls and lecture theatres in France. First of all, it is worth noting that in France this change in customs and morals was accomplished, by a

<sup>33</sup> «L'Écho des Écoles», n. 50, 4 January 1894, pp. 4-5.

<sup>34</sup> On these issues see Amélie Puche's thesis, *Les femmes à la conquête de l'université (1870-1940). Les implications sociales et universitaires de la poursuite du cursus scolaire dans l'enseignement supérieur par les femmes sous la Troisième République*, under the direction of Jean-François Condette, Université d'Artois, École doctorale Sciences de l'Homme et de la Société, Lille-Nord de France, laboratoire CREHS (EA 4027), 2020.

<sup>35</sup> «L'Écho des Écoles», n. 51, 11 January 1894, pp. 6-7.

<sup>36</sup> «L'Écho des Écoles», n. 59, 8 March 1894, p. 6.

rather rare phenomenon, without the intervention of the legislator. It took a law to create girls' lycées and collèges; but in higher education, courses are public<sup>37</sup>.

Cartoons of the inter-war period were often ambiguous about the position of female students at university, as shown by the one published in 1926 in the «*Escholier de Bordeaux*».

The University of Bordeaux is assimilated here to Paradise, Adam and Eve represent the male and female student. They are naked because they have no knowledge. In spite of this common state, their destiny is different. If the male student's journey is a long, quiet river where it is enough to fish for knowledge, the female student's one is more complicated. She arrives at university as an emancipated woman, recognisable here by her boyish haircut and androgynous body. She then finds herself obliged to sit in front of the tree of knowledge and to allow herself, although unwillingly, to be encircled by a snake with the caricatured face of a professor. This drawing, which is intended to be critical, denounces the image that the bourgeois society of the time may have of the student who abandons her family and her destiny as a woman, for studies that are deemed superfluous. This rare independence leads one to believe that her virtue and success can only be dubious. This drawing clearly shows that the place of women at the University of Bordeaux, as elsewhere in France, is not self-evident and still remains marginal in the 1920s, remaining for many a subject of mockery. Of course, this drawing must be placed in the context of the Roaring Twenties, which were characterised by a desire for female emancipation. Beyond that, we notice that students used both writing and drawing to express themselves.

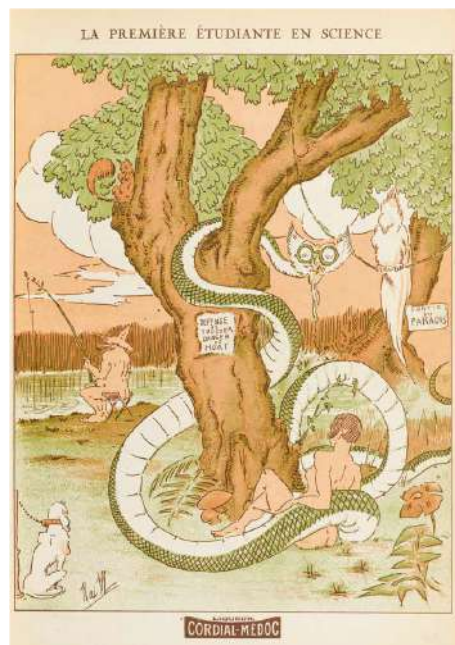


Fig. 3. Caricature of the first female Science student at the University of Bordeaux («*L'Escholier*», 1926)

<sup>37</sup> «*L'Écho des Écoles*», n. 59, 1 March 1894, supplement, p. 6.

### 3. ... *using a variety of means.*

#### 3.1 *The place of writing and the role of caricatures*

These journals, which are only a few pages long and appear fairly regularly, are characterised first and foremost by a way of writing. Poems, meeting reports, stories, philosophical, scientific, historical or literary reflections attest to a taste for writing, whether by lawyers, doctors or scientists.

Intellectual preoccupations are essential, they are present in all the Bordeaux journals at all times, and are revealing of the debates which could exist. The jurist will evoke «The hereditary seizure and its history»<sup>38</sup>, the «right to punish»<sup>39</sup>, the chemist «Chemistry and falsifications» with the example of chicory<sup>40</sup>. The literati tried their hand at writing, and presented their poetry, stories and essays. They also contacted the most popular authors of their time, such as Jean Balde, a writer from Bordeaux who was close to Jean Cocteau and François Mauriac and published under a male pseudonym. The students admired her. Thus, the first issue of «Bordeaux-Étudiants» in November 1924 reads:

Letters of encouragement.

We asked Mrs Jean Balde to take an interest in our Review. Our appeals did not go unheard, and, unworthy as we are of such an honour, the great writer generously gave us his support. We publish here the few lines by which the author of the *Vigne et la Maison*, the Chantre de la Gironde, shows us his precious sympathy; and we are happy to offer one of his poems to the admiration of our readers<sup>41</sup>.

The students, proud of the writer's response, did not hesitate to publish not only the poem but also the accompanying letter, which also showed that they all felt, beyond the genre, that they belonged to one and the same university community, and this is the generational support that prevails:

Sir,

I am very touched by your charming letter. The mark of sympathy given to me by your Association touches me all the more because I myself was enrolled for several years as a student at the Faculty of Letters of Bordeaux. I am therefore happy to know that enthusiasm and ardour continue to reign around Montaigne's sarcophagus in the wide and solemn hallway, which on certain days resembles a hive of life.

I wish your magazine a lot of friendship. It is a happy time when young people gather in this way, around the paper they have created, of which they are the animators, in a warm atmosphere of work and great hopes...<sup>42</sup>.

Some of them have a real talent for writing, like the law student who remembers the love affair he had with a young blonde girl who ended up preferring an older and,

<sup>38</sup> «L'Écho des Écoles», n. 18, 5 March 1893, p. 2.

<sup>39</sup> «L'Écho des Écoles», n. 20, 19 March 1893, p. 2.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>41</sup> «Bordeaux-Étudiants», n. 1, November 1924, p. 6.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

above all, richer man. The theme of adulterous love, neglected love, impossible love, often appears in the student press. In the ballad *Réminiscence*, René d'Argy combines talent with humour and offers his poem to one of his classmates:

Spring was just beginning,  
 From the gentle breeze, the breath  
 Caressed your fine golden hair  
 Where I had, from that beautiful morning,  
 Plunged my two hands, wound of intoxication.  
 Do you remember, blonde mistress?

Beautiful sunshine, countryside,  
 Made a land of milk and honey,  
 We were carefree and cheerful,  
 Never tired, never weary,  
 Giving caress for caress.  
 Do you remember it, mistress?

You used to wear earrings,  
 Made of two ruddy cherries,  
 A rose adorned your hair,  
 And in the blue of your big eyes,  
 I read all your tenderness.  
 Do you remember, blonde mistress?

Soon, in your burning fever,  
 You held your lip to my lip,  
 And, in our love for each other,  
 Crazy with desire, crazy with happiness,  
 We didn't care about wealth.  
 Do you remember, blonde mistress?

Of an old monk, with cheerful features,  
 You preferred the louis to me...  
 How sad you must be...  
 If you remember, blonde mistress?<sup>43</sup>

In 1930, the Catholic students organised a major literary and artistic competition with a prize of 600 francs, which was no small sum for the time<sup>44</sup>.

At the same time, there is a wealth of advice, such as this conference of 30 November 1926, in which Professor Lagrange gives advice on how to work<sup>45</sup>, and proposals for courses or assistance between students.

<sup>43</sup> «L'Écho des Écoles», n. 22, 2 April 1893, p. 4.

<sup>44</sup> «La Gazette des Escholiers», n. 1, November 1930, p. 6.

<sup>45</sup> «Bordeaux-Étudiant», January 1927, p. 9.



Fig. 4. Caricature of the Law professors at the University of Bordeaux by Framel («L'Escholier», 1924)

The drawings are done by talented students who are true artists, Georges de Sonnevile, Gaston Marc, Jehan Chappert, René Gaillard, Framel, A.R. Bault, Gabriel Roques, Henri Achille Zo, others prefer to remain anonymous. Most of the time they gently mock their teachers, especially the jurists.

#### 4. *The importance of advertisements*

In order to exist, these student newspapers were obliged to use advertising: first of all, «Cordial Médoc», which accompanied many of the drawings by Escholier. This is a liqueur that appeared during the phylloxera crisis and was created by G.A. Jourde. The name «Cordial Médoc» accompanies all the drawings. This liqueur contains 15 different fruits, spices and herbs. It was very popular and appreciated at the time, as were the Laroussie specialities such as Amer Picon. In addition, there are at least four pages of

advertisements that allow the student associations to have income and to subsist. If these advertisements are not evocative of student memory, they are evocative of social practices. There are photographers: Panajou, who was installed in the Cours de l'Intendance and Cours Vital Carles, but also Tépereau, to whom we owe a lot of photographs from this period, and the art photographer Alfred Naza in Rue du Loup. The advertisement gives a significant place to a whole series of restaurants, such as the Tourny restaurant where the students' ball takes place, but also the Grand Café, an unavoidable meeting place for a youth that is both reasonable and tumultuous. The Palais de Flore with its dance parties, the Jardin du Louvre, cours de l'Intendance, and its orchestra. Creauzan and Soulard who sell equipment for doctors, surgeons and hospitals. The Griffon cycles at Chastan's on Duffour-Dubergier street. The Mollat bookshop located in the Bordeaux galleries and then in rue Vital Carles. All these companies had their own advertising space, showing the interest they had in the university and its students in the city.

These student newspapers, which are likely to contribute to a feeling of belonging to a university, make it possible to examine how they have worked, while being forgotten by the educational community today, to build an urban identity, that of the city of Bordeaux. Thus, these documents, which the governance of higher education establishments does not always see the point of preserving, make it possible to analyse phenomena and



understand them better. They constitute, in a way, the database of a collective memory. Beyond that, they provide a multitude of elements to the historian: information on the teachers who were at the genesis of the new University of Bordeaux in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, data on the daily life of students. They also allow a better understanding of the place of the student in the world of knowledge, a better grasp of the sociability and mental universe of the students as well as the role of their associations in the construction of a university of belonging. Let us not forget the importance of advertising, which helps to understand urban activity and contributes to the development of the identity of the city of Bordeaux. Reflecting political and societal issues, student newspapers are today testimonies of the past, but also of practices and mentalities. They are the recovered memory of a lost identity likely to help us build the university of tomorrow by the birth or rebirth of a feeling of belonging.



Fig. 5. Page of advertisements («L'Escholier», 1925)





# Notes on School Photographs as Material Objects and Social Objects

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The event of photography is never over. It can only be suspended, caught in the anticipation of the next encounter that will allow for its actualization: an encounter that might allow a certain spectator to remark on the excess or lack inscribed in the photograph so as to re-articulate every detail including those that some believe to be fixed in place by the glossy emulsion of the photograph.

(A. Azoulay, *Photography: The Ontological Question*<sup>1</sup>)

Can photography render the complexity of schooling in images? Is it enough to rely on the conventional genre of school photography, the result of an idealised and even ideological interpretation of the school? Who is responsible for the gaze cast on the school? Can we consider that only the photographers are the authors of the image, or can we also regard the commissioners as such? Furthermore, we may wonder whether it is more advisable, in order to ensure a good school photograph, to rely on great masters of photography, who can provide an original and even critical interpretation of the school. Or, as happened in the majority of cases attested in history, whether it is sufficient to rely on professional photographers, from the town or village, who with their honest and pandering documentary photography merely show the school, remaining faithful to a dated canon of interpretation.

These questions perhaps appear legitimate but not central, since the crux of the significance of school photography lies neither in the authorship of the photographer nor in the relationship with the commissioner, but elsewhere. First of all, one might be forgiven for thinking that the significance of school photography lies in the image and its documentary content. Despite being a conventional and repetitive figurative genre, certain meanings can be retrieved from the periphery of the image. According to a number of studies in visual anthropology, history of photography and Cultural Visual Studies, which can be ascribed to the milieu of the Material Turn and New Materiality, analysing these other meanings requires considering the photograph not only as a flat image that provides facts and visual evidence, but as a material picture. In other words, as a real material object, with the aim of investigating its relevance as a social object that participates in and influences human relations<sup>2</sup>. On the basis of these assumptions,

<sup>1</sup> A. Azoulay, *Photography. The Ontological Question*, «Mafte'akh», n. 2, 2011, p. 77.

<sup>2</sup> A summary on the subject is offered by a leading author on studies on the materiality of photography: E. Edwards, *Photographs and the Practise of the History*, London-New York-Dublin, Bloomsbury, 2022, pp. 97-112.

broader lines of research have developed on photographic 'things', with the intention of scrutinising both their role in processes of identity and memory construction and their ability to crystallise emotions.

These studies thus converge in considering photographs as things, objects that matter to people in complex ways. Analysing these complexities challenges traditional methods of analysis conducted on photographs.

1. In the late 1990s, Nicholas Nixon, an undisputed figurehead of contemporary American photography for his work as a portraitist, and Robert Coles, a psychiatrist, teacher and writer, developed a photographic project to be carried out in three sixth-grade schools in the Boston (MA) area. These were the Tobin School, the Perkins School for the Blind and Boston Latin School. The outcome was an interesting photo-text resembling an exhibition catalogue<sup>3</sup>. It challenged the consolidated tradition of school photography, profoundly reinventing the genre. *School*, which avoids explicit reference to the three schools in its title in order to generalise on the subject, presents photographic portraits of the pupils together with texts that reproduce their testimonies or simply talk about them.

Nixon worked for an extended period in the school spaces, in close contact with the pupils. He was joined by his wife Bebe, armed with a tape recorder, and writers George Howe Colt and Coles. During this time, the pupils expressed and discussed their opinions on what it meant to be a student and on the educational institution, and had their portraits taken. This artistic and psychological fieldwork, which involved the collaboration of the teachers, was intended to render «the complexity of schooling»<sup>4</sup> through a precise strategy. It involved combining observations on the present with reflections on the past, as well as different views of the school alongside different textual and figurative representations. The strategy was emphasised by the layout of the book, in which the oral testimonies of the pupils are given greater prominence by the photographic portraits and, at the same time, the significance of the photographs is enhanced by the testimonies.

It is a distinctive piece of work, not only because of the involvement of such an important photographer as Nixon, but also because this combination of textual and figurative evidence offers an original source for the history of the school, which is not usually found in archives. Moreover, what emerges in *School* is the explicit role of agent assigned to photography. For these pupils, photography was the means to bring about awareness of the self, the group, the school institution and the community. To crystallise all this into figurative forms. Photography played a key role in involving the pupils in the project during school hours. And, potentially, to involve them in future remembrance processes about their school past, at that moment of transition from childhood to adolescence. In other words, Nixon and the group worked to enhance photography's capacity to provide agency, using it as a predominantly social object, around which the

<sup>3</sup> R. Coles, N. Nixon, *School*, Boston, Bulfinch Press, 1998.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

actions of at least two people, who recognise it as having meaning, are determined: the object matters to them, it has value.

2. We can assert that photographs, as symbolic artefacts, can be analysed using Alfred Gell's theory of agency<sup>5</sup>. He recognises in artefacts a kind of intentionality that we can, indeed, also recognise in photographs. They function not only as simple two-dimensional images, which merely provide facts and visual evidence, but rather as material objects that involve the actants in the process of creating their meaning, through the acts of possession, touching, showing, keeping and even speaking<sup>6</sup>.

In Elizabeth Edwards' view, the materiality approach to photography involves the historian taking a vantage point and looking for those minimal, seemingly unimportant signs in the body of the photograph. When properly scrutinised together with the image, these signs are capable of revealing the history of its uses and meanings over time. To do so, it is necessary to subordinate the value attributed to the image with respect to the event it depicts (even in the case of an end-of-year group portrait) in order to explore the body of the photograph (with its cardboard, its various inscriptions, and its insertion and montage in a series or album). «Thinking materially» is essential when analysing photographs, because it «removes photographs from being simply “visual sources” to being complex material objects that work over time and space and that transcend content»<sup>7</sup>.

The agency of the photograph thus participates in and conditions the very process of meaning-making. This can be the result of simply looking at what is shown in the image and formulating even just a weak opinion (I like/dislike) or a quick decision (I will/won't linger on it). It should be remembered, however, that these actions are always based on relationships with the body of the photograph (even if it a digital image which is visible through electronic devices).

We could argue that, roughly speaking, the agency of photography comes into play in two different moments. The first is during the prelude to its production, before the *acte photographique*, as defined by Philippe Dubois<sup>8</sup>. Let us consider this in portraiture: the subject prepares to assume a pose (which is always a social pose) to become, as Roland Barthes has described, an object<sup>9</sup>. The second moment concerns photography as a picture, as it exists as a social object that transcends time, participates in different relationships between people and becomes the object of different interpretations.

If we now turn to the subject of school photography and the genre of official portraits, we might argue that pupils and teachers assume a conventional pose, suited to expressing the solemn moment intended to highlight the values of school, education, group, the inclusion of pupils and the levelling out of social differences. In these photographs, the

<sup>5</sup> A. Gell, *Art and Agency: an Anthropological Theory*, Oxford-New York, Clarendon Press, 1998.

<sup>6</sup> T. Campt, *Listening to Images*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2017.

<sup>7</sup> Edwards, *Photographs and the Practise of the History*, cit., p. 110.

<sup>8</sup> F. Dubois, *L'acte photographique et autres essais*, Paris, Nathan, 1990.

<sup>9</sup> R. Barthes, *Camera Lucida. Reflections on photography*, New York, Hill and Wang, 2010, pp. 11-15.

transformation of individuals from subjects into objects would resemble a broader process in which pupils are transformed into objects of the school and the state: like «report cards, they measure time dryly, picturing linear progress from one school year to the next»<sup>10</sup>.

3. In any case, in contrast to the traditional school photographs we all keep (individual posed portraits with school furniture and symbols of schooling and/or class portraits taken indoors or outdoors), Nixon's pictures are not conventional school photographs. These are usually assigned to professional photographers. It might be a specialist in architectural photography called upon to depict functional school spaces for certain purposes. (I am thinking, for example, of the photographs required of vocational schools during the Fascist period in Italy and their instrumental use in the rhetoric of the regime<sup>11</sup>). Or it might be a portraitist, accustomed to documenting weddings or other rites of social passage (as described in the volume on photography edited by Pierre Bourdieu as «a middle-brow Art»<sup>12</sup>). Over the course of a few hours, the photographer takes images of the school and its pupils, individually or in groups around one or more adults. The commissioners are the schools themselves, directly or indirectly. In any case, they influence the form of the official memory of school life to deliver to the families a photographic souvenir that is not exclusively private. Indeed, for families, school photographs fulfil a special role because the identity of the individual is validated by belonging to the identity of the given community.

Moreover, the cultural traits of the community are represented in the school photographs themselves. They belong to a conventional and repetitive figurative genre and are found in various Western and non-Western national contexts, albeit with variations. These concern furniture, teaching aids, clothing, ecc., or the way the images themselves are conceived and staged through the choice of settings and people's poses, as well as unintentional cultural signs: people's posture, gestures and the distance or proximity between their bodies.

Several studies of school history have focused attention on the cultural values represented in school photographs, analysing them as documents in which to discover relevant details (such as the design of teaching aids and furniture) and clues about the relationships between teachers and pupils. These studies therefore analyse photographs in their singularity. We could, however, argue that what all school photographs have in common is that they are instrumental in shaping the identity of communities. We must consider that school photographs are transferred out of the social space of the school and into private homes. As Richard Chalfen would say, they move from one symbolic

<sup>10</sup> M. Hirsh, L. Spitzer, *School Photos in Liquid Time. Reframing difference*, Seattle, University of Washington Press, 2020, p. 22.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, I. Zoppi, *Gli album fotografici dell'Archivio storico Indire. Memorie scolastiche negli anni Quaranta fra esposizioni e archiviazione*, «RSE Rivista di studi di fotografia», n. 2, 2015, pp. 88-99.

<sup>12</sup> P. Bourdieu (ed.), *Photography: A Middle-Brow Art*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1990.

environment to another<sup>13</sup>. And in every symbolic environment, they promise memory and new meanings.

In a recent and important volume, Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer have emphasised the need to consider school photographs not only as school records, but as broader historical documents of social and political life. This broadening of the historian's scope is therefore determined by the ability to analyse pictures as visual sources, endowed with specific characteristics. They suggest moving beyond the analysis of the timeless documentary value of images, which makes them «seemingly flat and opaque»<sup>14</sup>, to fully recover their ability to emotionally engage their interpreters. We could argue that feeling is one of the ways in which photographs exert their agency. When confronted with a photograph, emotional involvement is triggered by the formal aspects typical of photographic language, from which numerous identity processes of the self and of one's community related to memory processes take shape. We can thus argue that one of the merits of *School Photos in Liquid Time* was that it highlighted the importance of feeling in the understanding and study of historical school photographs.

The theme of feeling in photography was first addressed in a series of publications in early 2010. I am referring in particular to the volume edited by Elspeth H. Brown and Thy Phu, which brought together a series of reflections on how the effect of feeling affects our experience and understanding of photography<sup>15</sup>. This new focus on feeling has prompted scholars to revisit areas of study, such as school photography and methodologies of analysis. These imply a transition from the analysis of the documentary aspect of an image, i.e. a logical analysis of its content at the pre-iconographic level (that classroom, those pupils, ecc.), to the scrutiny of the aspects related to emotion (and which concern identity and memory). This transition takes place through another intermediate step, in which the photograph is regarded as a material and social object, to be handled, to be kept close to the body, to the heart, to be shown off in frames or albums in the social spaces of the home, or through electronic devices. There has therefore been a shift from the elaboration of a meaning relative to the event in the fleeting moment that the photograph represents (more or less instantaneous) to the meanings that the photograph acquires over time as a material, pre-eminently social object.

While school photographs frame the space of the school and its actors, they also frame the value system of the educational institution. Indeed, they contain clues regarding the teachers' opinion of the school and the opinion of the children themselves. In these photographs, children often used to be portrayed as committed, studious, even thoughtful, in keeping with the role of photography in society during certain historical periods. It is a more recent habit, at least in Italy (over the last twenty years or so) to portray them in an informal pose, carefree and smiling. The photographer, together with the teachers, sets the scene by disguising the frontal pose and body rigidity, encouraging the pupils to express a more joyful (or more apparently joyful) concept of school. As Christina Kotchemidova

<sup>13</sup> R. Chalfen, *Snapshot Versions of Life*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 2008, *passim*.

<sup>14</sup> Hirsch, Spitzer, *School Photos in Liquid Time*, cit., p. 6.

<sup>15</sup> E. H. Brown, T. Phu (edd.), *Feeling photography*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2014.

wrote «the smile merits a critical communication analysis» because «Its widespread practice invites the Gramscian theory of “consent,” where individuals willingly subjugate themselves to ideologies when offered no alternatives»<sup>16</sup>. But whether serious or smiling, what were their real feelings? How, with the passing of time, will their opinions about themselves and the school be influenced by the format of the photographs?

This historiographical shift towards themes of feeling has enabled us to raise a number of other questions with regard to photographic objects. Among them, the main ones seem to me to be: which actors and what feelings are involved in the use of a school photograph? How does the photographic act legitimise a pupil’s school experience, solemnising their pose as a child and pupil and projecting it into a future full of promise? How much do these promises influence the private retention of school photographs, or, more rarely, institutional retention?

In their study on the role of photography in the early years of schooling, Hirsch and Spitzer have pointed out that children envision a future «full of hope» at the moment of posing<sup>17</sup>. This is undoubtedly an important and poignant assertion, which should be taken into account. On solemn occasions, school photography stages the school space and the school value system to project it into the future. The two authors, criticising a reading of the image as a mere document, argue that this staging can reveal signs that at first glance are unsuspected, such as «Childhood vulnerability, the social integrationist effects of schooling, the process of creating community and group identity, the promise of a future»<sup>18</sup>.

The question arises as to whether or not the documentary value of the school photographs, along with the promise of the future, determines their fate in the archive. It is quite surprising to note that these photographs are not usually retained according to established practice by educational institutions<sup>19</sup>. Rather, they seem to be destined for private archives, where their evocative and emotional power seems to be enhanced by the context. However, their emotional functioning occurs even in the absence of a precise memory of the photograph itself, for instance where the names of the people portrayed are missing. This does not make them weakened documents. That is to say, photographs are rather weak documents, if considered from the perspective of Maurizio Ferraris’ Documentality theory<sup>20</sup>, developed on the basis of Jacques Derrida’s theory of inscription<sup>21</sup>, but they act – through the leverage of feeling – as powerful documents when involved in social acts.

<sup>16</sup> C. Kotheimidova, *Why We Say “Cheese”: Producing the Smile in Snapshot Photography*, «Critical Studies in Media Communication», vol. 22, n. 1, 2005, p. 3.

<sup>17</sup> In particular, they discuss children who have suffered immeasurable losses (such as the children of the Shoah).

<sup>18</sup> Hirsh, Spitzer, *School Photos in Liquid Time*, cit., p. 15.

<sup>19</sup> This study considered, for example, two virtual archives in the absence of real archives: E. Margolis, *Class Pictures: Representations of Race, Gender, and Ability in a Century of School Photography*, «Visual Sociology», n. 14, 1999, pp. 7-38.

<sup>20</sup> M. Ferraris, *Documentality: Why is Necessary to Leave Traces*, New York, Fordham University Press, 2013.

<sup>21</sup> J. Derrida, *On Grammatology*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016.





Fig. 1. Unknown author, *Alunne della scuola elementare*, 1920 ca. Photograph, 12x16,5 cm. from the Photo Album of the *Istituto Magistrale Parificato di Ivrea* (Archivio storico INDIRE in Florence, Fondo fotografico, 1-091-031)

4. Photography promises a prêt-à-porter memory (literally ready-to-wear: a locution that is appropriate for an industrial product, such as a medium-sized suit, not fine tailoring adapted to personal needs), thus offering flattery that raises expectations. Photography, it must be remembered, has since its origins presented itself at the gates of modernity as an inseparable combination of art and technology, endowed with an extraordinary capacity to depict reality and substantiate its memory. A memory superior to that of individuals or groups of people, scientists, explorers or archaeologists. The photograph was the first form of image to be recognised for its ability to remember, and remember so much. A promise we all believe.

This photograph of a girls' primary school class from the 1920s belongs to a type that I suspect we all have in similar forms in our drawers or albums. Many of us will not have written down the names of our classmates, thinking that they would be etched on our memory for a lifetime. After all, the photograph captures their faces and promises everlasting memory. But then time steps in. And today, perhaps we'd like to know who the two shortest girls in the front row were – the only ones who could overcome the awe of the solemn moment, for which they'd prepared in their minds, by bringing their toys with them.

This promise of memory was, in the early days of the history of photography, an absolute novelty in the world of images. It revealed a glimpse of the direction of a new path in the world of the figurative arts, characterised by a relationship with the social sphere that was imbued with a subversive charge: a new persuasive capacity that won over the public. Think of the early portraits: this was a whole new market, which conquered the major European cities of photography within the space of a few years. The bourgeoisie mirrored itself in photography, finding it well suited to its own idea of realism and productivity, and exalting its value as a form of urban and industrial expression. It later discovered its potential as an area of capitalist investment and its possible connections with the world of institutions, including schools. And, not least, photography as an art/technique opened its doors to democratisation, to the depiction of the new social classes. This was a time when the development of the gelatine silver bromide market was accompanied by the production of new cameras, which were easier to handle and more affordable. I am referring to the photography of amateur photographers, the aristocratic and bourgeois kodakers who dabbled in vernacular photography<sup>22</sup>. We are now in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. In this period, photography was a common visual vocabulary, with many even labelling it a universal language; the periodical press market was revolutionised by the inclusion of photographs, journalists became reporter-photographers, and professions and knowledge in the visual field intermingled. And this period virtually marked the beginning of a new era in school photography: one that saw the educators themselves as the photographers with cameras. Their view of the school was, at last, an inside look.

Those who view the school environment to create testimonial images have a gaze that is subjective and not objective. The author's gaze focuses on a point in space, which is physical and calculable: that of the point of view. There are few histories of photography that radicalise criticism on the analysis of such a radically new aspect as the point of view. The photographer does not move in space and time when creating their image; they do not depict reality according to a process of synthesis. Such a procedure is instead typical of drawing and painting and is intended to reduce the complexity of a series of actions. On the one hand, it condenses theory and practice of composition and drawing, and on the other, it reduces the set of perceptions received from the painter's movement of observation in space. The photographer instead has a monolithic, cyclopean gaze, their fixedness in space determining not the synthesis but the analysis of a space/time fragment. Yet in historical investigation, their role is always in danger of being overshadowed by the testimonial importance of the photograph, unless the composition of the photograph is such as to demand attention to their observational stance. As in this case.

<sup>22</sup> G. Batchen, *Vernacular Photographies*, «History of Photography», vol. 24, n. 3, 2000, pp. 262-271.





Fig. 2. Unknown author, *Physical Education*, n.d. Photograph (Archivio storico INDIRE in Florence, Fondo fotografico, 2-048-021)

In this visual fragment, i.e. the photograph, which can be understood as the precipitate of the knowledge of the subject in view and its being in time, middlebrow culture will always grasp the distinctive and meaningful features of the surface of the image. That is, its being in the here and now, before our eyes, and its having been there at that precise moment. Taking into consideration the photographer's point of view, and the stance that this point of view interprets (which is always an ideological stance) is one of the necessary steps towards a deeper understanding of the photographic source. We need to consider the author of the photograph and their ability to meet the cultural and ideological needs of the commissioner.

By observing the photograph in its material and social aspects, and by identifying the photographer and the culture of which they are the interpreter, we will be able to debunk a popular misconception about school photography. Its realism (but not its truth) has been the standard-bearer for the uses of photography in institutional school settings, persuaded by the fact – as Jo Spence, a photographer and educator who has worked on the depiction of childhood in unofficial moments, would say – that photography never lies.



Fig. 3. Unknown author, *Regio Istituto Tecnico "Caio Cornelio Tacito" in Terni, Sala per il Disegno ornamentale ed architettonico*, 1899. Photographs, 17x23 cm. from the Photo Album of the *Regio Istituto Tecnico "Caio Cornelio Tacito"* in Terni, p. 18 (Archivio storico INDIRE in Florence, Fondo fotografico, 1-002-018)

### *Conclusions*

The considerations and working hypotheses presented in this paper can be summarised in a schema, which I trust may be useful in posing a series of questions to photographs, understood as material and social objects, in order to formulate various working hypotheses.

#### 1. Photographic object (source) area:

What is the relationship between the two-dimensional plane of the image and the photographic object in its complexity?

Is the source organised in a narrative (e.g. sequence, album)?

Is the visual text accompanied by a verbal text?

How does the material context (e.g. mounting on the page, media, captions, but also signs of wear, erasure, ecc.) influence the reading of the photographic source?

2. Author area:

Who is the author/photographer?

How is their gaze culturally structured?

What is their relationship with the commissioner?

How do they organise the narrative structure of their photographs?

3. Commissioner area:

Who is the commissioner?

What is their cultural background?

How do they influence the stance of the author/photographer?

How do they use (or not use) photographic sources?

4. Memory area:

What does the photographic source promise through its linguistic choices (e.g. composition, details, realism)?

What are the relationships with its symbolic environments?

How have these relationships been determined (and built over time)?



SECTION *The Representation of School in Mass Media*



# “Maria Montessori. Una Vita per i Bambini”: a Biopic That Blends Memory, Interpretation and Reality

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The TV movie *Maria Montessori. Una vita per i bambini* [Maria Montessori. A life for children], shot in 2006, was broadcast in two parts on 28 and 30 May 2007 by the Italian channel Canale 5, and became one of the most watched movies of the year, its audience share rising from 25% to 35% (6,059,000 and 8,184,000 viewers). The biopic follows Montessori's life from her entry to the Faculty of Medicine in Rome in 1893 up to 1934, when she left Italy. The title role was played by Paola Cortellesi, who received excellent reviews for her performance<sup>1</sup>.

The aim of this paper is to see what impression the biopic created of Montessori and how it did so. We will start by analysing the movie, identifying which elements are true and false, then reviewing newspaper articles and viewers' opinions, to find out the impression the movie created internationally.

## 1. *Which kind of biopic? A variety of judgments*

After the first part aired, the renowned TV critic Aldo Grasso published a review in the influential newspaper *Corriere della Sera* under the significant title: «A touching portrait». He praised the movie: «finally, a good biopic», «it sits among the best for narrative strength, its ability to elicit emotion, Paola Cortellesi's interpretation (brava!), and Giulia Lazzarini and Lisa Gastoni's historical reconstruction»<sup>2</sup>. By contrast, Grazia Honegger Fresco, a pupil of Montessori who was a leading figure in Montessori's movement and the author of various books, who died in 2020, felt the need to add to her preface to the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of her book on Montessori: «two really disappointing episodes [with]...too many fictional plots, a sickening sentimentality completely alien to Montessori, implausible relationships with Montesano's family or with Fascism, and lacking even one or two scenes to make

<sup>1</sup> E. Costantini, *Cortellesi, eroina da fiction fa rivivere Maria Montessori. L'attrice comica: svolta in TV nei panni di una vera femminista*, «Corriere della Sera», 24 June 2006, p. 41.

<sup>2</sup> A. Grasso, *A touching portrait*, «Corriere della Sera», 30 May 2007, p. 47.



people understand the value of her innovations. Indeed, it is a telenovela that could have had any woman of the beginning of the XX century as the main character»<sup>3</sup>.

This disparity of judgment already provides us with the key to understanding reactions to the movie. Grasso watched it as a movie critic: as a film it works, the historical setting and acting are good, and it is captivating and moving. Honegger Fresco knew Montessori well and disliked the fictional elements, contesting the entire reconstruction as historically incorrect. But the film enjoyed great success and was awarded three prizes at the 2007 Rome FictionFest: best Italian TV fiction, best Italian screenplay, and best Italian actress for Cortellesi<sup>4</sup>.

To understand this contrast of views, we have to remember that a TV biopic is not an academic biography and cannot be a complete reconstruction of somebody's life. Many important parts of Maria's life are simply not shown. The director, Gianluca Maria Tavarelli, and the screenwriters, Monica Zapelli and Gianmario Pagano (a priest and author of religious and educational fiction) concentrated on the so-called «dark side of her legend»<sup>5</sup>: her private life (her love affair with the psychiatrist Giuseppe Ferruccio Montesano, and her relationship with their son Mario and her parents). She is shown as a strong woman who faced many obstacles to affirming herself<sup>6</sup>.

Even taking into account that a biopic cannot show in detail 40 years of life, the problem of the falsification of facts remains. There are indeed too many inaccuracies. Montessori is presented as the first woman to graduate in medicine in Italy (a widely-held misconception). Women were allowed access to university and to graduate in 1875 under Minister Bonghi's regulations. The first woman graduate was Ernestina Paper, who indeed graduated in medicine in 1877<sup>7</sup>. Montessori was born in 1870. Having completed the physics/mathematics curriculum at the *Regio Istituto Tecnico* in Rome, as one of only two female students at an all-boys school, she decided, against her father's wishes, to study medicine. However, with the school-leaving certificate she had obtained, she was only eligible to enrol at the Faculty of Science. Montessori therefore attended the Faculty of Science for two years (1890-92) and privately studied Latin and Greek in order to gain admittance to the medical school at La Sapienza University in Rome (1893). Here she became the third woman to be awarded a degree in medicine, following Edvige Benigni (1890) and Viola Marcellina Corio (1894)<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> G. Honegger Fresco, *Maria Montessori, una storia attuale. La vita, il pensiero, le testimonianze*, Preface to the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, Torino, Il leone verde, 2018, p. 11.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.mymovies.it/film/2007/mariamontessoriunavitaperibambini/premi/> (last access: 05.12.2022).

<sup>5</sup> M. Schwegman, *Maria Montessori*, Bologna, il Mulino, 1999, p. 44.

<sup>6</sup> <https://ne-np.facebook.com/massimopoggiounofficial/videos/maria-montessori-una-vita-per-i-bambini-making-of-con-paola-cortellesi-e-massimo/634565760301943/> (last access: 05.12.2022).

<sup>7</sup> S. Polenghi, *Striving for recognition: the first five female professors in Italy (1887-1904)*, «Paedagogica Historica», vol. 56, n. 6, 2020, pp. 752-753.

<sup>8</sup> V. Ravà, *Le donne laureate in Italia*, «Bollettino Ufficiale della Pubblica Istruzione», n. 14, 1902, p. 651. On Montessori's education, see A. Matellicani, *La "Sapienza" di Maria Montessori. Dagli studi universitari alla docenza. 1890-1919*, Roma, Aracne, 2007, pp. 45-80.

There was no need to perpetuate this longstanding error: the falsification suggests an unnecessary wish to praise, or, more probably, stems from ignorance. Indeed, Cortellesi hailed Montessori as the first woman to have graduated in medicine in an interview in «Corriere della Sera» (an article full of historical errors)<sup>9</sup> and in publicity for the movie<sup>10</sup>. We find the same mistake in Grasso's article<sup>11</sup> and in the Wikipedia article about the movie<sup>12</sup>. The movie's website, on the other hand, corrected the error, defining Maria as «one of the first graduate women»<sup>13</sup>.

Maria's first anatomy lesson is depicted in a way that is historically inaccurate, portraying her as strong and without hesitation rather than showing her tensions and interior struggles<sup>14</sup>. These are, however, revealed in the following scene (the dialogue with her mother).

Giuseppe Ferruccio Montesano is introduced as her Professor, when he was not yet a Professor: this too is an unnecessary mistake (he became director of the Psychiatric Hospital S. Maria della Pietà in 1898). But Montesano's use of music is correct. The *Scuola Magistrale Ortofrenica* is missing, as is the whole «Rome school» of C. Bonfigli, E. Sciamanna, S. De Sanctis, Montesano and Montessori<sup>15</sup>. Montesano is presented as a leading figure, alongside an unnamed dean (who somehow represents both Bonfigli and Sciamanna). The minister of education Guido Baccelli, an eminent professor of medicine at La Sapienza University and a champion of Montessori also remains unnamed (the movie just mentions "the Minister" during these years, without identifying him).

Montesano's mother is described as fiercely hostile to their wedding, he is depicted as a coward, and events are speeded up: since we still know very little about this love story, much of the narrative is invented, serving to make the plot more interesting and emotionally involving. Montessori's trips to Paris and London, which were fundamental for her method, are missing, hence her meeting with D-M. Bourneville and her reading and studying Itard and Séguin's books, which were so important for the development of her pedagogy<sup>16</sup>, are omitted. Montessori is thus presented as the sole inventor of her method.

Her relationship with her child Mario is not completely true (the scene with Mario in the *Casa dei bambini*, for instance, is invented and totally implausible). Her journey to the USA (Nov.-Dec. 1913) is delayed until after Minister Credaro's Instructions on

<sup>9</sup> E. Costantini, *Cortellesi, eroina da fiction fa rivivere Maria Montessori. L'attrice comica: svolta in TV nei panni di una vera femminista*, «Corriere della Sera», 24 June 2006, p. 41.

<sup>10</sup> *Una Vita per i Bambini – Maria Montessori – Making Of*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0mFQxueEz-I> (last access: 05.01.2023).

<sup>11</sup> Grasso, *A touching portrait*, cit.

<sup>12</sup> [https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maria\\_Montessori\\_-\\_Una\\_vita\\_per\\_i\\_bambini](https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maria_Montessori_-_Una_vita_per_i_bambini) (last access: 05.01.2023).

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.fiction.mediaset.it/maria-montessori/stagione-1/> (last access: 05.01.2023).

<sup>14</sup> R. Kramer, *Maria Montessori. A Biography*, New York, Diversion books, 1976 (ed. 2017), pp. 36-41; Matellicani, *La "Sapienza" di Maria Montessori*, cit., pp. 56-62.

<sup>15</sup> See e.g. V.P. Babini, L.L. Lama, *Una «donna nuova». Il femminismo scientifico di Maria Montessori*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2000, pp. 46-49.

<sup>16</sup> See e.g. *ibid.*, p. 117; A. Scocchera, *Maria Montessori. Quasi un ritratto inedito*, Firenze, la Nuova Italia, 1990, p. 47. On her pedagogy see in particular P. Trabalzini, *Maria Montessori da "Il metodo" a "La scoperta del bambino"*, Roma, Aracne, 2003.

preschools, issued on 4 January 1914, which were in favour of Sisters Agazzi's method. Mario did not accompany Maria on this first journey, as shown in the film, but did so on her second one in 1915. The two journeys are conflated in the biopic. None of Montessori's other journeys, to France, the Netherlands, the UK, Belgium, Spain, and Argentina are mentioned<sup>17</sup>.

The entire issue of Montessori's spirituality<sup>18</sup> is not addressed, probably because it is too complex for a two-part movie. On the other hand, the complete silence about her engagement in feminist battles is quite astonishing and fails to do her justice<sup>19</sup>. Her teaching in the *Scuola Magistrale Ortofrenica*, her *libera docenza* (1904) and her subsequent academic teaching also go unmentioned<sup>20</sup>. Only one scene alludes to her teaching, but it is not clear whether it relates to the university or to one of Montessori's training courses<sup>21</sup>.

The founding of the *Casa dei bambini* in S. Lorenzo (1907) involves many invented episodes and the relationship with Fascism is squeezed into a few scenes, presenting Montessori as if she were against the regime from the beginning. Her «silence» speech took place in Milan in 1926, during the opening of the first international Montessori course<sup>22</sup>, but the movie shifts it to the opening of the *Regia Scuola Montessori* in Rome in 1929, which it moves to 1934, to link in with Montessori's self-imposed exile with her son Mario. This could be forgiven, since the scene expresses well her final clash with the *régime*. Nonetheless, the early years of Fascism saw a complex relationship between Mussolini and Montessori, which was effectively defined as «a marriage of convenience<sup>23</sup>». Aside from the many invented or altered facts, the movie presents other episodes accurately, even using Montessori's own words, such as the national education conference at Turin in 1898, the importance of the layout and of order in the *Casa dei bambini*, and the significance of learning material that allows self-correction. Other scenes, although invented, express Montessori's thought well, for instance the children in the rain (to show the importance of the senses); Maria's reaction when the children from the asylum she taught managed to pass the elementary school exam; the dialogue with her mother in front of the *Madonna della seggiola*, that shows the Madonna's universality as a mother; the character of Giovanni; and the final scene: although wholly invented,

<sup>17</sup> M. Gilsoul, *Maria Montessori. Una vita per i bambini*, Firenze, Giunti, 2022 (1<sup>st</sup> edition 2020), pp. 152-178.

<sup>18</sup> G. Cives, *Maria Montessori tra scienza, spiritualità e laicità*, «Studi sulla formazione», n. 2, 2014, pp. 119-147; F. De Giorgi, *Maria Montessori tra modernisti, antimodernisti e gesuiti*, «Annali di storia dell'educazione e delle istituzioni scolastiche», vol. 25, 2018, pp. 27-73; Id., *Postfazione*, in M. Montessori, *Il peccato originale*, edited by Id., Brescia, Scholé, 2019, pp. 97-197.

<sup>19</sup> Babini, Lama, *Una «donna nuova»*, cit; Gilsoul, *Maria Montessori*, cit., pp. 55-80; T. Pironi, *Percorsi di pedagogia al femminile*, Roma, Carocci, 2014, pp. 45-87.

<sup>20</sup> Babini, Lama, *Una «donna nuova»*, cit., pp. 119-164; Polenghi, *Striving for recognition*, cit., pp. 763-765; Matellicani, *La "Sapienza" di Maria Montessori*, cit., pp. 106-116.

<sup>21</sup> See S. Bucci, *Educazione dell'infanzia e pedagogia scientifica. Da Froebel a Montessori*, Roma, Bulzoni, 1990, pp. 103-192.

<sup>22</sup> A. Scocchera, *Maria Montessori*, cit., pp. 58-59.

<sup>23</sup> A. Scocchera, *Introduzione*, in Id. (ed.), *Introduzione a Mario M. Montessori*, Roma, Opera Nazionale Montessori, 1998, p. 45.

it expresses well the gulf between Montessori's education for freedom and peace and the Fascist ideology, showing the liberating power of education.

## 2. Audience reactions

To better understand audiences' reaction, we will turn to articles and web sources. As already stated, the authoritative *Corriere della Sera* praised the biopic, as did *La Stampa*<sup>24</sup> and *La Repubblica*, two other major national newspapers. *La Repubblica* hailed Cortellesi as «bravissima». The film's producer, Pietro Valsecchi, of TaoDue, explained that his aim was to give the public an important female character: «After judges, policemen, saints, in short, all men, we needed a film about a woman»<sup>25</sup>.

Giorgio Simonelli, professor of journalism and media, highlighted that a 35% audience share for the second part, two days after the first, was «a figure to dream of for Italian fiction [...] You have to imagine it reverberating like a gong, spreading from friend to friend, from colleague to colleague, from family to family» to increase the final figure to more than 8 million viewers. Simonelli considered this fiction, with a real woman as the main character, as different from traditional successes. Montessori is a well-known name in Italy, he remarked, but there are «chasms of ignorance» about her. Simonelli himself confessed his lack of knowledge. And according to him, this may be a key to its success: «here there are non-stop surprises, unusual environments [...], no stereotypical feminism, none of the usual hagiography». Instead there is «real information and knowledge». There is one defect, though: «the attention given to Montessori's life hinders the illustration of her pedagogical method»<sup>26</sup>.

Simonelli's opinion is relevant to our analysis. He admits being ignorant about Montessori, but at the same time considers the fiction historically soundly based. He sees that the pedagogical aspect suffers, but thinks the movie brings new knowledge about Maria, despite admitting his ignorance about her. This exact contradiction can be found in most of the audience reaction, if not always with this clarity.

Let us now move on to internet sources and see how the biopic was reviewed on Italian websites. On *Mymovies* it is rated 4.3/5. The following comments are typical of viewers' opinions: «an exceptional movie that linked private and professional life», Maria was a «strong woman», living in a «chauvinist society» as it is «still nowadays». «Moving film about motherhood and career», «about loving children», «unforgettable», «masterpiece [...] I did not know the story». «Montessori a forgotten myth, splendid

<sup>24</sup> [https://www.lastampa.it/blogs/2007/05/30/news/maria-montessori-la-rivoluzione-br-firmata-da-paola-cortellesi-1.37193177\\_30](https://www.lastampa.it/blogs/2007/05/30/news/maria-montessori-la-rivoluzione-br-firmata-da-paola-cortellesi-1.37193177_30) May 2007 (last access: 06.01.2023); [https://www.lastampa.it/spettacoli/2007/05/25/news/i-bimbi-salvati-dalla-cortellesi-1.37129041\\_25](https://www.lastampa.it/spettacoli/2007/05/25/news/i-bimbi-salvati-dalla-cortellesi-1.37129041_25) May 2007 (last access: 06.01.2023).

<sup>25</sup> [https://www.repubblica.it/2007/05/sezioni/spettacoli\\_e\\_cultura/cortellesi-montessori/cortellesi-montessori/cortellesi-montessori.html](https://www.repubblica.it/2007/05/sezioni/spettacoli_e_cultura/cortellesi-montessori/cortellesi-montessori/cortellesi-montessori.html) 24 May 2007 (last access: 06.01.2023).

<sup>26</sup> G. Simonelli, *Ci salvi chi può. Cronache della Tv italiana dal 2000 a oggi*, Cantalupa (TO), Effatà Editrice, 2009, pp. 270-274.

acting by Cortellesi», «fascinating and very moving», «ultimately a realistic, passionate, moving, illuminating film on the life of a little known and undervalued Italian woman. Cortellesi exceptional». «Fantastic, I hope they release it on DVD», «I was quivering with emotion», «really moving, I cried a lot». «I missed the second part, can anybody give it to me, please, please, please, please, please, please, please, please». It is worth noting that nearly all these viewers are women<sup>27</sup>. On the website *FilmTv* we find only one negative comment: the film presents Montessori as a pure heroine, without any ambiguities (e.g.: Fascism, her relationship with her son). «This does not diminish Montessori, but the film»<sup>28</sup>. The reviewer is a man.

In 2007 the movie was released on DVD in Italian. We can read the buyers' reviews on the IBS and Amazon websites. On IBS four women share their positive opinions: «fantastic film about a fantastic woman» (2019), «a really great and brave woman, strong and determined, the mother of pedagogy, who symbolises the courage of women who have had to fight for their rights» (2020), «very beautiful film, that allows us to discover the woman and not the character in textbooks. Masterful interpretation by Cortellesi» (2010). On Sept. 4, 2022: «I would like to buy it but it is not available. Pity since it is a wonderful story with a very beautiful ending»<sup>29</sup>.

On Amazon it is rated 4.3/5, with 33 reviews. Among those who rated it 5/5 are the following: «very beautiful, I recommend it to anyone who wants an overview of the character without having to read books» (2016); «very moving» (2018); «Montessori too often undervalued in Italy, exciting film» (2016); «a story everybody should know» (2019); «good scenography and historical reconstruction» (2016); «marvellous» (2018). Only one is rather negative, with a score of 3/5: «a love story rather than a documentary about Montessori's method and pedagogy». It is worth noting that the DVD was sought outside Italy: «Why isn't there a French or English edition?» (2020). A UK buyer (2011) wrote: «No subtitles in English, only Italian. Despite repeated mails to the seller, I never got a reply on this matter and in the end bought the DVD»<sup>30</sup>. From the USA (2019): «a wonderful and truthful story about Maria Montessori, it is all in Italian, without English subtitles [...] It tells the story of a real woman, no sugar coating, but I respect Maria Montessori 100% more now that I have seen her story». It is not possible to identify the gender of many of the writers, but where recorded, the names suggest men as well as women.

In 2016 a short official video on the making of the biopic was posted on YouTube. Up to the beginning of January 2023, it has had more than 40,000 views, with 12 positive comments (including in Spanish): «splendid», «fantastic», «really beautiful»,

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.mymovies.it/film/2007/mariamontessoriunavitaperibambini/forum/> (last access: 06.01.2023).

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.filmtv.it/film/59006/maria-montessori-una-vita-per-i-bambini/recensioni/949209/#fr:film-59006> (last access: 06.01.2023).

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.ibs.it/maria-montessori-vita-per-bambini-film-gianluca-maria-tavarelli/e/5050582490459> (last access: 06.01.2023).

<sup>30</sup> The first part has been subtitled on the Mediaset website <https://www.mediasetdistribution.com/format/teaching-the-future-the-true-story-of-maria-montessori-112/> (last access: 09.01.2023).

«marvellous». One viewer spots a mistake: «she was not the first woman to graduate in Medicine», but this does not diminish Maria: «she was an immortal genius»<sup>31</sup>. These positive comments that keep being posted testify to the prolonged success of the movie, which was rebroadcast on different Italian TV channels (at least in 2010, 2018, and 2022).

The movie also reached a wider audience. It was broadcast in France in 2008 and again in 2012. *Le Figaro TV* reported it, repeating the usual mistake: «La première femme diplômée de médecine de Rome»<sup>32</sup>. In 2021 the French edition DVD came out, with a shorter title: «Maria Montessori» (possibly to avoid confusion with the book by Martin Gilsoul, *Une vie au service de l'enfant*)<sup>33</sup>. Two buyers left enthusiastic opinions (5/5 ratings): «Mini-série magistrale» (2021), «Je ne connaissais pas du tout. Très beau et bon film. C'est une suite de saint Jean Bosco» (2021)<sup>34</sup>. In the same year, the movie was reviewed on the website *Allociné*. «Un chef-d'oeuvre! Magnifiquement interprété, particulièrement émouvant»<sup>35</sup>. Again, we find the film's power to move and prior ignorance of the story, which even leads to the glorification of Montessori as a secular saint. A negative review on a blog indicates knowledge of Montessori's life and pedagogy:

L'histoire douloureuse de la mère séparée de son enfant prend ici la plus large importance sur les théories éducatives de Maria Montessori. L'approche mélodramatique est certes touchante mais ne permettra pas aux néophytes de découvrir la spécificité de la pédagogie révolutionnaire de Montessori. De même, le contexte social et politique est souvent complètement gommé sauf quand il s'agit d'évoquer le régime fasciste pour accélérer et clore le récit<sup>36</sup>.

In 2011 (on 24 November and 1<sup>st</sup> December) the film was broadcast in the Czech Republic. Online it was rated 73/100, with 33 votes. Interestingly, the description of the movie starts with a comparison with Comenius: «The Czech Republic has its Jan Amos Comenius, Italy has its Maria Montessori [...] She was the first female student in the entire history of the faculty» (the usual mistake). The viewers' comments are a bit less positive than in the other countries. More viewers are informed about Montessori and therefore do not like there being so many fictional scenes: «Uhm, so the movie was just "inspired" by all those real characters and events!» (2/5 rating, 2011). «Tavarelli really didn't skimp on pathos and clichés» (4/5 rating, 2016).

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0mFQxueEz-I> (last access: 06.01.2023).

<sup>32</sup> <https://tvmag.lefigaro.fr/programme-tv/programme/maria-montessori-une-vie-au-service-des-enfants-f3296769> (last access: 06.01.2023).

<sup>33</sup> Paris, Desclée de Brouweur, 2020. Italian edition quoted above, footnote n.17.

<sup>34</sup> [https://www.amazon.it/Maria-Montessori-Gianluca-Tavarelli/dp/B096TN7G3F/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?crd=2R665LB2QJV56&keywords=maria+montessori&qid=1673037095&cs=dvd&srefix=maria+mon%2Cdvd%2C81&sr=1-1#customerReviews](https://www.amazon.it/Maria-Montessori-Gianluca-Tavarelli/dp/B096TN7G3F/ref=sr_1_1?crd=2R665LB2QJV56&keywords=maria+montessori&qid=1673037095&cs=dvd&srefix=maria+mon%2Cdvd%2C81&sr=1-1#customerReviews) (last access: 06.01.2023).

<sup>35</sup> [https://www.allocine.fr/film/fichefilm-293151/critiques/spectateurs/#review\\_1017409833](https://www.allocine.fr/film/fichefilm-293151/critiques/spectateurs/#review_1017409833) (last access: 06.01.2023).

<sup>36</sup> <https://blogs.mediapart.fr/cedric-lepine/blog/220721/maria-montessori-un-telefilm-de-gianluca-maria-tavarelli> (last access: 06.01.2023).



What makes me so sad about “biographical” films like this is that they are not really very biographical (they make up too many things) and therefore cannot be taken seriously. Apart from the names of certain characters and some key events, we can’t consider the film as something credible, so we can only enjoy it cheaply, rather than learn a lot of interesting things from it. It’s a great shame, because a truly realistic depiction of Maria Montessori’s life would be no less interesting and engaging than a fluffed-up pile of screenplay fiction. Nevertheless, I rate this film relatively positively. It does not lack strong and heartfelt moments, and through the character of Maria Montessori, it inspires and encourages non-conformist thinking and attitudes towards life and society (and of course towards children and their upbringing!) (3/5 rating, 2014)<sup>37</sup>.

On another Czech webpage, the film is rated 8.8/10<sup>38</sup>.

In 2017 a German dubbed version was released on DVD: «*Maria Montessori – Ein Leben für die Kinder*», which received a very high 4.7 rating on Amazon, with 207 votes. Among the reviews that gave it 5/5, the key words are «wonderful», «important for our time», «realistic», «thrilling», «emotional». Montessori is a «great and strong woman»<sup>39</sup>. Here again we find viewers emotionally involved in Maria’s previously unknown private life.

However, it is in Spanish-speaking countries that the film has enjoyed striking success. In 2015 a Spanish YouTuber uploaded the entire movie with Spanish subtitles. The movie has reached an astonishing 1.6 million viewers, with 499 comments and more than 17,500 likes. Many reviewers are women, many among them teachers. Recurring words are «moving» and «inspiring»: «Con esta película, una vez más, pude reafirmar mi vocación como futura educadora. Y no sólo eso, sino también recordar lo fuerte que podemos ser las mujeres» (2020); «Admiración total. Una historia de vida muy conmovedora» (2022); «Maria Montessori fue una gran impulsora del método pedagógico llamado Nueva escuela, mucho de lo que tenemos en nuestra educación actualmente, se lo debemos a ella. Una gran pedagoga y ejemplo a seguir para los futuros docentes!» (2018); «Mujer valiente y guerrera!!» (2019); «Me emocione todo el tiempo, que genia esta mujer!!!» (2017); «He llorado todas las 3 horas, la mejor película que he visto en mi vida. Absolutamente

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.csfd.cz/film/243694-maria-montessoriova/prehled/> (last access: 06.01.2023). English translations by the author.

<sup>38</sup> <http://www.7den.cz/film-maria-montessoriova/> (last access: 06.01.2023).

<sup>39</sup> «Sie war eine wirklich große Frau» (2017); «Toller Film über eine tolle Frau» (2022); «Wunderschöner Film über das Leben Maria Montessoris. Obwohl ich die Montessori Ausbildung habe und einen eigenen Montessori Kindergarten habe und alles schon mal gelesen habe, bringt dieser Film die private und emotionale Seite von Maria Montessori näher. Empfehlenswert!» (2019); «Das Thema und die Umsetzung sind für die heutige Zeit sehr wichtig» (2019); «Wunderbarer Film [...] Die Geschichte ist durchwegs spannend» (2017); «Sehr realistisch nachgestellt» (2018); «Dramaturgie hervorragend [...] Sehr empfehlenswert» (2017); «Emotionales Biopic. Jeder hat schon mal von Montessori Pädagogik gehört, aber nur die wenigsten wissen wer Maria Montessori war und was sie erlebt hat. Der Film erzählt die Geschichte einer intelligenten, starken und sturen Frau, die für ihr uneheliches Kind kämpft und gegen die herrschende Bildungsideologie. Tolle Schauspieler, sehr gut ausgestattet und nie langweilig» (2020); «Emotional und lehrreich» (2017). [https://www.amazon.it/Movie-Maria-Montessori-Ein-Edizione-Germania/dp/B01MRM8215/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?\\_\\_mk\\_it\\_IT=%C3%85M%C3%85%C5%BD%C3%95%C3%91&crd=7HOP6KGVDSM-V&keywords=maria+montessori+leben&qid=1673089182&s=dvd&csprefix=maria+montessori+leben%2Cdv%2C82&sr=1-1#customerReviews](https://www.amazon.it/Movie-Maria-Montessori-Ein-Edizione-Germania/dp/B01MRM8215/ref=sr_1_1?__mk_it_IT=%C3%85M%C3%85%C5%BD%C3%95%C3%91&crd=7HOP6KGVDSM-V&keywords=maria+montessori+leben&qid=1673089182&s=dvd&csprefix=maria+montessori+leben%2Cdv%2C82&sr=1-1#customerReviews) (last access: 06.01.2023).

inspiradora» (2017); «Un gran ejemplo de vida!» (2020); «Hermosa y conmovedora historia, pobre Dra Montessori, como sufrio, era admirable, decidida, fuerte y segura» (2021); «Mi admiración total para esta mujer» (2021); «WOW que maravilla de película» (2022); «El verla hizo que reafirmara más mi vocación como docente» 2021; «Excelente serie y extraordinaria actriz Paola Cortellesi» (2020); «La vida de esta dama es inspiradora» (2020); «Me ha emocionado mucho su historia» (2017); «Emoción profunda cada vez que la veo [...] admiración infinita que siento por esta mujer!» (2017); «Gracias a Dios por María Montessori» (2022); «Genia no se puede creer la fortaleza de esta mujer me conmovio totalmente mi mayor admiracion y respeto» (2017); «Pocas películas me han emocionado tanto» (2018); «Una historia de vida muy conmovedora» (2022). A number of reviews in Portuguese also ask for Portuguese subtitles<sup>40</sup>.

The sole criticism comes from a video posted on YouTube in June 2022, *Análisis de María Montessori: una vida dedicada a los niños (2007), de Gianluca Maria Tavarelli*, which in 6 months reached nearly 6,000 viewers. The 7 minute analysis demonstrates its author's sound pedagogical competence. His criticism is that the film depicts a chauvinist world but does not show Montessori's engagement in feminist battles. He then concentrates on the pedagogical and teaching scenes, underlining the importance of scientific observation, the respect for freedom, the value of every child, the democratic message, and the emancipating power of Montessori's pedagogy. It also makes an apt comparison with Truffaut's *L'enfant sauvage*<sup>41</sup>. The film is also recommended on many Spanish and South American websites, which is understandable in view of the spread of Montessori schools there (through her residence in Barcelona)<sup>42</sup>.

From analysing these sources, it appears that whereas the knowledgeable viewers (who are very few) are bothered by the inaccuracies, or made-up or missing parts, the great majority mistake the description of Montessori's life as true information (that they did not know). Since the story is well acted and credible, it is well-received and spreads an image of Montessori as a heroine. The viewers are won over by the story of a strong, clever, passionate and feminist woman whose impossible love story has a partially happy ending (Maria manages to keep her son and her relationship with him).

<sup>40</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BT248M49YgU> (last access: 07.01.2023). In January 2022 this video was linked to a Spanish webpage <https://wmcmf.com/video/pelicula-completa-de-maria-montessori-una-vida-dedicada-a-los-ninos/>, with four enthusiastic comments (last access: 07.01.2023). In July 2022 the subtitled video was posted on Facebook <https://m.facebook.com/montessori.red/videos/la-vida-de-mar%C3%ADa-montessori-una-vida-dedicada-a-los-ni%C3%B1os-pel%C3%ADcula-completa/221271556519480/> (last access: 07.01.2023).

<sup>41</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Yh4epckrOA> (last access: 07.01.2023).

<sup>42</sup> A description of the film in: <https://educomunicacion.es/cineyeducacion/temasmontessori.htm>; <https://www.peliculasfeministas.com/maria-montessori-una-vita-per-in-bambini/#>; <https://www.lavanguardia.com/peliculas-series/peliculas/maria-montessori-una-vida-dedicada-a-los-ninos-173483/actores>; <https://laescueladelarepublica.es/maria-montessori-una-vida-dedicada-a-los-ninos/>; [http://blue.northcentralus.cloudapp.azure.com/ecotics/ecotics/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=437&catid=33&Itemid=295&lang=es](http://blue.northcentralus.cloudapp.azure.com/ecotics/ecotics/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=437&catid=33&Itemid=295&lang=es) (Mexico), website of the Universidad Pedagógica Nacional. The film was broadcast by 8TV in Catalonia [https://www.elmundo.es/television/programacion-tv/peliculas/1462534\\_maria-montessori-una-vida-dedicada-a-los-ninos.html](https://www.elmundo.es/television/programacion-tv/peliculas/1462534_maria-montessori-una-vida-dedicada-a-los-ninos.html) (last access: 07.01.2023).



### 3. *Television, history and collective memory*

To conclude, we have to address the link between TV and history. «TV is the principal means by which most people learn about history today». Due to its immediacy, it is not «learning» history, it is «experiencing it»<sup>43</sup>, allowing greater emotional engagement. TV is «a facilitator of cultural history»: it creates «modes of interaction with the past. Although these models of interaction are subversive of many of the implicit goals of academic history, they play a significant role in cultural memory and the popular negotiation of the past»<sup>44</sup>. Astrid Erll states that «cultural memory is unthinkable without media»<sup>45</sup>. Memories of the past are reshaped and TV moulds popular culture: «Television histories today can be nonfictional, fictional, or somewhere in between», as G.R.Edgerton puts it<sup>46</sup>. He highlights that:

Collective memory is the site of mediation where professional history must ultimately share space with popular history [...] Memory studies are more concerned with how and why a remembered version has been constructed than whether a specific rendition of the past is historically correct and reliable above all else. Rather than think of professional and popular history as dramatically opposed traditions (with one more reliable and true, and the other unsophisticated and false), it is perhaps more helpful to consider them as two ends of the same continuum [...] In the final analysis, television histories enable unprecedentedly large audiences to become increasingly aware of and intrigued by the stories and figures of the past, spurring some viewers to pursue their newfound historical interests beyond the screen and into other forms of popular and professional history<sup>47</sup>.

I. Bondebjerg reminds us that «Fiction needs to be taken seriously as a factor influencing the human mind and our individual and collective memory»<sup>48</sup>. Finally, Rosenstone gives us the ultimate key to reaching a conclusion: «Fiction has by far the greatest emotional impact on viewers and is more popular because fiction bring history closer to the viewer»<sup>49</sup>.

Montessori's role as a strong, feminist woman and her dramatic personal love story seem to prevail in the viewers' opinions, while her pedagogical method remains in the background. This is the result of a screenplay that concentrates on particular aspects of Montessori's private life, triggering emotions in the viewers: the key for its success. We find many women among those making positive/moved comments, clearly identifying with the character, since children's education and women's difficulties in balancing career

<sup>43</sup> G.R. Edgerton, *Introduction. Television as Historian: A Different Kind of History Altogether*, in Id., P.C. Rollins (edd.), *Television Histories. Shaping Collective Memory in the Media Age*, Lexington, The University Press of Kentucky, 2001, p.3.

<sup>44</sup> S. Anderson, *History TV and Popular Memory*, in *ibid.*, pp. 20-21.

<sup>45</sup> A. Erll, *Memory in Culture*, Basingstoke, Palgrave MacMillan, 2011, p.113.

<sup>46</sup> G.R. Edgerton, *The Past Is Now Present Onscreen: Television, History, and Collective Memory*, in J. Wasko, E.R. Meehan (edd.), *A Companion to Television*, New York, John Wiley & Sons, 2020 (1<sup>st</sup> ed. 2008), pp. 84-85.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 92-93, p. 99.

<sup>48</sup> I. Bondebjerg, *Screening Twentieth Century Europe. Television, History, memory*, Cham, Palgrave European Film and Media Studies, 2020, p. 31.

<sup>49</sup> R. Rosenstone, *History on Film/Film on History*, London, Routledge, 2006 (4<sup>th</sup> ed. 2018), p. 47.

and love/motherhood are experienced as relevant topics today. Although accurate in its historical reconstruction of environments and costumes, the movie does not linger on pedagogical questions, which may prove difficult for a non-specialist audience. Nonetheless it succeeds in representing some key elements of her method, which seem to have been most noticed by Spanish audiences, where many teachers feel encouraged by Maria. Only a very small number of (particularly Czech) viewers spot the errors and missing elements.

The great majority of viewers were not aware of her private life and love story and believe the film description to be true. The size of the film's audience and positive comments lead us to suppose that Montessori is better known as a result of it, albeit, unbeknownst to the majority of viewers, in a partially fictional way. This movie contributes to strengthening the myth of Montessori (the first woman doctor in Italy, ecc.) in the popular collective transnational memory, but it also spreads some knowledge about her pedagogical work. Hence, from the point of view of popular collective memory, the judgement cannot be negative, even if it would have been more accurate to say: «This is a fiction based on real events».



# The Diverse Representations of Women Secondary Teachers in Selected Italian Films from the Past Fifty Years. A Case Study

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## *Introduction*

Over the past fifty years, the female secondary school teacher has been represented in several films in Italy, of different nature: sexy comedies, TV movies, teen movies. Such sources offer an in-depth knowledge about the «empirical culture» of school, in the form of glimpses into «school past», but also point up the counterposed reflection produced in the mind of spectators, in the past but also in the present<sup>1</sup>. According to the «visual turn» in the History of Education, audio-visual sources are «narrative practices» and they could offer also representations about the social and professional conditions of the teachers, their educational styles and other important indications, strictly connected to a process of collective imaginary<sup>2</sup>.

In this direction, it's important to underline that research on audio-visual sources promoted by recent advances in the History of Education can inform a process of semantic negotiation between personal memories and social memories, «experienced school pasts» (as recalled by direct participants) and «constructed school pasts»<sup>3</sup>, to dismantling the traditional image of school and, especially, of female secondary school teacher. According to Robert A. Rosenstone and Pierre Sorlin, we can say that audio-visual sources bear the potential to influence not only our knowledge of the past, but also our understanding

\* The entire contribution was conceived and shared by both authors; in particular, introduction and paragraph 1 are attributed to Evelina Scaglia, paragraph 2 and its subparagraphs to Alessandra Mazzini. Conclusions are written by both authors.

<sup>1</sup> P. Alfieri, *Introduzione*, in Id. (ed.), *Immagini dei nostri maestri. Memorie di scuola nel cinema e nella televisione dell'Italia repubblicana*, Roma, Armando, 2019, pp. 7-17.

<sup>2</sup> P. Alfieri, *Memoria collettiva, cinema e televisione: un nuovo sguardo euristico per la storiografia scolastica in Italia*, in S. Polenghi, F. Cereda, P. Zini (edd.), *La responsabilità della pedagogia nelle trasformazioni dei rapporti sociali. Storia, linee di ricerca e prospettive. Atti del Congresso nazionale SIPED, Milano 14-16 gennaio 2021*, Lecce-Brescia, Pensa Multimedia, 2021, pp. 741-743. The imaginary has been object of historical-educational studies in Italy since the end of the Nineties, as proved by: F. Cambi, *Immaginario e ricerca storico-educativa*, «Studi sulla formazione», vol. 1, n. 1, 1998, pp. 149-158.

<sup>3</sup> J. Meda, A. Viñao, *School Memory: Historiographical Balance and Heuristics Perspectives*, in C. Yanes-Cabrera, J. Meda, A. Viñao (edd.), *School Memories. New Trends in the History of Education*, Cham, Springer, 2017, p. 5.

of the present and our projects for the future<sup>4</sup>. In this sense, it is useful to focus the «heuristic function» of those sources in a complex and quite unknown field as that chosen for this intervention.

To date, few studies in the domain of pedagogical or historical-educational research have focused on women secondary teachers<sup>5</sup>, while even fewer have explored their images in cinematic history<sup>6</sup>. There is an absence of a historical memory about the women secondary teachers, and this is due to fact that only in the transition from the XIX to the XX century there was the explosion of a conflict between the traditional representation of woman, involved in the domestic environment, and the gradual affirmation of a new woman image as social subject, thanks especially for the possibility to attend a public school<sup>7</sup>. Engaging in the analysis of the figure of the woman teacher means making her a visible social subject with historical roots, to be brought to the surface from a forgotten past, and with a present made up of difficult situations<sup>8</sup>.

In this contribution, we want to explore how audio-visual sources could contribute to the implementation of the professionalisation of women secondary teachers, both during their initial training and their in-service training, according to recent epistemological and methodological developments of the History of Education<sup>9</sup>.

### 1. *A peculiar investigation on a topic insufficiently considered*

Starting from this awareness, the following contribution presents a qualitative investigation of different representations conveyed by filmic sources<sup>10</sup>, such as, for example, the sexy comedy *L'insegnante va in collegio* [*The Teacher goes to Boarding School*] (1978), the TV movie *Una vita in gioco* [*A Life in Play*] (1990), and the teen movie *Notte*

<sup>4</sup> R.A. Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of Film to Our Idea of History*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1996; P. Sorlin, *Introduction à une sociologie du cinéma*, Paris, Klincksieck, 2015.

<sup>5</sup> As explained in: C. Covato, *L'educazione e l'istruzione delle donne nella storiografia 1960-1990*, in S. Ulivieri (ed.), *Educazione e ruolo femminile: la condizione delle donne in Italia dal dopoguerra ad oggi*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1992, pp. 283-305; S. Ulivieri, *Educare al femminile*, Pisa, ETS, 1995, pp. 185-228; S. Polenghi, «*Missione naturale*», *istruzione «artificiale» ed emancipazione femminile. Le donne e l'università tra Otto e Novecento*, in C. Ghizzoni, S. Polenghi (edd.), *L'altra metà della scuola. Educazione e lavoro delle donne tra Otto e Novecento*, Torino, SEI, 2008, pp. 283-318; G. Di Bello, *La professionalizzazione delle insegnanti della secondaria*, in E. Becchi, M. Ferrari (edd.), *Formare alle professioni: sacerdoti, principi, educatori*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2009, pp. 492-499.

<sup>6</sup> F. Bocci, *Questi insegnanti: maestri e professori nel cinema*, Roma, Serarcangeli, 2002, pp. 91-92.

<sup>7</sup> T. Pironi, *La donna, l'istruzione superiore e l'accesso alle professioni in Italia tra Otto e Novecento*, in A. Ascenzi, R. Sani (edd.), *Inclusione e promozione sociale nel sistema formativo italiano dall'Unità ad oggi*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2020, p. 168.

<sup>8</sup> Ulivieri, *Educare al femminile*, cit., p. 186.

<sup>9</sup> S. Polenghi, G. Bandini, *The history of education in its own light: signs of crisis, potential for growth*, «Espacio, Tiempo y Educación», vol. 3, n. 1, 2016, pp. 3-20.

<sup>10</sup> For example, as in: S. Polenghi, *Film as a source for historical enquiry in education. Research methods and a case study*, «Educació i Història», vol. 31, n. 1, 2018, pp. 89-99.

*prima degli esami '82* [*The Night before the Exams: 1982*] (2011)<sup>11</sup>. The choice of filmic sources is due to the necessity of offering a well-defined and accurate analysis about a topic insufficiently considered, leaving to further wider studies the investigation of other kind of audio-visual sources. Moreover, it is due to overcome the stereotype of the female secondary teachers always gregarious, subordinate to the central male figure, and for whom the work is a tinsel, whose only role is to echo a life declined only on personal problems.

At the methodological level, the contribution draws on theoretical categories and tools from research domains such as *The Immaterial History of School*<sup>12</sup> and *The Black Box of Schooling*<sup>13</sup>, with a view to identifying the intrinsic dimensions of school settings and the educational practices adopted therein. At least three research questions are addressed: what imaginary surrounding the woman high school teacher is communicated by the school memories in the analysed filmic sources; do these memories reflect the actual conditions in the secondary schools of the period and if so in what way; what are the main thoughts, expectations, or doubts that these representations elicit in viewers.

Those questions are connected to two historiographical assumptions: firstly, in Italy the crisis of the authoritarian and selective school system in the Seventies was accompanied by a contextual implementation of the presence of women students in high schools and universities<sup>14</sup>; secondly, if initially women secondary teachers were inspired by a model of teaching as «vocation» (a calling to a life spent only in education), since the Seventies they preferred a model of teaching as «double presence» (the teaching was a professional activity that allowed women to be contemporary involved in the family care and work life)<sup>15</sup>. The development of a progressive «female presence» in teacher profession and the connected cultural and professional training are two problems that could be represented in the audio-visual sources analysed in this intervention, with all the possible implications, such as the lack of political visibility of women teachers, the complementary or substitute character of their work compared to male work and the connected difficulties to have the position of professionals involved in the transmission of intellectual knowledge<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> A synopsis of some of the filmic sources mentioned in this contribution can be found on the website <https://www.memoriascolastica.it> (last access: 30.03.2023).

<sup>12</sup> C. Yanes-Cabrera, *El patrimonio educativo intangible: un recurso emergente en la museología educativa*, «Cadernos de história da educação», vol. 6, 2007, pp. 71-85.

<sup>13</sup> S. Braster, I. Grosvenor, M. del Mar del Pozo Andrés (edd.), *The Black Box of Schooling. A Cultural History of the Classroom*, Brussels, Peter Lang, 2011.

<sup>14</sup> Ulivieri, *Educare al femminile*, cit., p. 192.

<sup>15</sup> See M. Barbagli, M. Dei, *Le vestali della classe media*, Bologna, il Mulino, 1969, p. 23; E. De Fort, *Gli insegnanti*, in G. Cives (ed.), *La scuola italiana dall'Unità ai giorni nostri*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1990, p. 238.

<sup>16</sup> A. Porcheddu, *La donna nell'insegnamento: storia e prospettive*, «Scuola & Città», vol. 29, n. 9, 1978, pp. 353-360. See also S. Ulivieri, *Essere donne insegnanti. Storia, professionalità e cultura di genere*, Torino, Rosenberg & Sellier, 1996.

For those reason, it's useful to recall that «collective memory is genetically descended from the collective imaginary, whose symbolic materials can either derive from the cultural heritage of a given community or be integrated and redefined by the culture or information industry»<sup>17</sup>. In this sense, a study of the *Collective School Memories* conveyed by the audio-visual sources analysed could offer new insights about the changes in the social perception of women secondary teachers in Italy in the last fifty years, the archetypes and also the stereotypes spread about women secondary teachers, the influence generated by common sense and the imaginary represented by the culture industry (such as cinema and TV) on the «ideal» profile of the woman secondary teacher.

Those remarks find a confirmation in what Simonetta Polenghi has underlined about the study of audio-visual sources promoted by the *Visual History*: «an adequate quantitative and qualitative analysis of the film allows the historian of education to approach a given period, grasping its collective mentality»<sup>18</sup>, in the meaning of its widespread educational sensibility, axiological categories, and pedagogical conceptions. All parameters, which will lead our qualitative investigation of the selected audio-visual resources, according to a peculiar attention on the personal access to them and the potential effects produced in the spectators of the past and of nowadays, also at level of educational reflections.

## 2. Preliminary results

Already in 1908 Enrico Thovez focused on the close relationship that cinema would have had with twentieth-century modernity, not only because it would have recorded most of the events that occurred in that period, but also because, by recording them, it would have defined the way in which the world had to be perceived<sup>19</sup>. Cinema, with its characteristics of immediacy and accessibility, has therefore built a type of gaze by working on the thrusts present from time to time in modernity, intercepting and sometimes revealing them, thus offering a key to interpretation.

This is what also happened for the figure of women secondary teachers, for whom cinema first and then television contributed to propose and sometimes even to impose certain imaginaries, helping to articulate the mental categories with which reality is faced and to offer schemes through which to observe the world of school, the female universe in the classrooms, and the educational and training relationship with the different generations of students.

<sup>17</sup> J. Meda, *Memoria Magistra. La memoria della scuola tra rappresentazione collettiva e uso pubblico del passato*, in G. Zago, S. Polenghi, L. Agostinetto (edd.), *Memoria ed Educazione. Identità, Narrazione, Diversità. Atti del Convegno nazionale SIPED, Padova 30 giugno-1 luglio 2020*, Lecce-Brescia, Pensa Multimedia, 2020, p. 29.

<sup>18</sup> S. Polenghi, *Immagini per la memoria: il cinema come fonte storico-educativa*, in P. Malavasi, S. Polenghi, P.C. Rivoltella (edd.), *Cinema, pratiche formative, educazione*, Milano, Vita & Pensiero, 2005, p. 41.

<sup>19</sup> E. Thovez, *L'arte di celluloido*, «La Stampa», vol. XLII, n. 209, 29 luglio 1908.



Since the 1970s, cinema, television, and then mobile devices with their possibility of cross-media and trans-media<sup>20</sup>, have not only contaminated the ways of telling and enjoying stories of the female secondary school teachers, but they have also become filters through which to read these figures, decipher them, interpret them.

Furthermore, since cinema by its very nature has the power to teach not only «to look at the world anew, but also in a new way»<sup>21</sup>, in defining a sample of teachers, the screens are not limited to a simple collection of lived, but have also contributed to communicating and spreading certain imaginaries of the female secondary teacher; sometimes through deformations born of deeply rooted clichés which then penetrated reality so much as to modify it. Cinema, as Walter Benjamin had highlighted, is not limited to a passive recording but reworks the surrounding ideas and returns them to current events<sup>22</sup>. One could then say that cinema (and by extension the screen) was not only the «eye of the twentieth century»<sup>23</sup>, but also in many ways its hand.

Therefore, films have been the witnesses, which have highlighted the internal tensions and the contradictions that over the years have gravitated around the world of Italian school system, the function of the teacher and the figure of the female teacher in the various moments of the History of Italian School, Education and Sociology. But films have also been guides, capable of articulating and recomposing these tensions.

### 2.1 *The sexy female secondary teacher in the comedies of the Seventies*

Starting from the reasons for the contestation of 1968 and sexual liberation, a sub-genre of the Italian comedy of the Seventies developed in Italy, which is the sexy Italian comedy, also embraces a sexy-scholastic trend. This line of unglued and trivial comedies, which will find its peak in the '80s with the various Pierinos<sup>24</sup> played by Alvaro Vitali, focus on the systematic demolition of the teaching function, seeking the consent of the more generalist, anti-institutional and goliardic public.

These are films that have contributed to a real dismantling of the education system and the authority of the role of female teachers in public opinion, through a caricatured repertoire of provocative female teachers caught in their provocative sexual attitudes towards pupils and colleagues.

Films such as *La supplente* [*The female Substitute*] (Guido Leoni, 1975), in which a high school student falls in love with the provocative female substitute teacher; *Classe*

<sup>20</sup> See H. Jenkins, *Cultura convergente*, Milano, Apogeo, 2007; A. Grasso, M. Scaglioni, (edd.), *Televisione convergente. La tv oltre il piccolo schermo*, Milano, Link Ricerca, 2010.

<sup>21</sup> F. Casetti, *Locchio del Novecento. Cinema, esperienza, modernità*, Milano, Bompiani, 2005, p. 21.

<sup>22</sup> W. Benjamin, *L'opera d'arte nell'epoca della sua riproducibilità tecnica*, in *Opere complete di Walter Benjamin. Scritti 1934-1937*, VI, Torino, Einaudi, 2004.

<sup>23</sup> Casetti, *Locchio del Novecento*, cit.,

<sup>24</sup> The young rascal Pierino is a traditional, humoristic character used as the protagonist of many Italian stories and jokes.

*mista* [*The mixed Class*] (Mariano Laurenti, 1976), which stars prof. Carla Moretti (Dagmar Lassander), a young and attractive teacher with whom students and adults fall infatuated; *La professoressa di scienze naturali* [*The Professor of Natural Sciences*] (Michele Massimo Tarantini, 1976), where a substitute teacher with her charm will wreak havoc among both the students and their parents; *L'insegnante va in collegio* [*The Teacher goes to Boarding School*] (Mariano Laurenti, 1978) where a father seduces his son's beautiful teacher, played by Edwige Fenech. These are films which become like distorted and deformed mirrors that, on the one hand, by placing female teachers at the centre, contribute to the progressive perception of the feminization of the teaching profession, on the other, as these women are examples of didactic sterility, they allow the image of the female teacher who is incompetent in terms of teaching and education and therefore on that level secondary and subordinate to her male colleague.

## 2.2 *Women secondary teachers as "mothers"*

Starting in the '90s some films and television series focus on female teachers who begin to get busy and take an active part in their work, but in which the educational and didactic functions intersect and in some cases overlap with stereotyped aspects of femininity: caring, motherhood, loving-kindness, empathic listening. These are teachers who, in the context of often degraded schools, collide with a selective, abstract school system, unable to listen, welcome and respond to the expectations, urgencies and needs of the adolescents who attend it and feel their own bewilderment in front of a disrupted social environment.

Faced with this environment, although moved by the best of intentions, the teachers become the protagonists of a mixture of functions and positions, letting themselves be involved in the attempt to recover the classic "hopeless case", only to be overwhelmed by the confusion between their role of teachers and the impossible one of friends, confidants, adoptive parents, thus abdicating the specificity of one's task.

This is what happens in the two-part drama *Una vita in gioco* [*A life in Play*] (Franco Giraldi, 1990) where Marianna (Mariangela Melato), who is in a personal crisis due to being away from her husband, pours her attentions on a "difficult" student, Samantha, who she hosts at home without her husband's approval, bonding to her with an emotional relationship that goes beyond the boundaries of teaching professionalism.

The same happens in the comedy *Ovosodo* (Paolo Virzì, 1997) where the secondary school teacher Giovanna, who, not only appreciates the writings of the young protagonist, makes him feel capable in studying and stimulates him to read, but becomes her emotional point of reference and to all intents and purposes substitute for the mother figure.

The resulting portraits are therefore those of teachers characterized by the typical stereotyped traits of femininity and who contribute to defining the progressive feminization of the Italian teaching profession.

The phenomenon also continues in the new millennium, with films such as *La scuola è finita* [*School is over*] (Valerio Jalongo, 2010), which has as protagonists two teachers engaged in “saving” the protagonist of the story, Alex Donadei, a boy who does not seem to be able to find ground solid under his feet and who sees in drugs the only way to escape from boredom, loneliness and the weight of a tormented family situation. The two teachers, who are interested in his fate and who offer him their help, deciding to make up for the absence of the boy’s parents by rebuilding a sort of family around him, are prof. Aldo Talarico (Vincenzo Amato) and Daria Quarenghi (Valeria Golino). However, both do not act because they are driven by a responsible educational action, but by mixing personal inner urgencies: the first, because, seeing the boy’s musical talent, he hopes to fill the frustrating void of a lack of personal fulfilment through him, and the second by maternal instinct.

The same happens in *Il rosso e il blu* [*The Red and the Blue*] (Giuseppe Piccioni, 2012), where three generations of teachers confront each other and with students who are unable to find stable points of reference within the family. The figure of the teacher is represented by an irreproachable school headmaster, played by Margherita Buy, who verbally states that «in the school there is an inside and an outside and we only deal with what happens inside», but takes to heart a particularly disadvantaged student, for whom she assumes more of a maternal function than an educational one, giving life to a relationship that will lead her to a profound existential crisis.

### 2.3 *The great “excluded”. Between subordinate and absent female secondary teachers*

With *Il maestro di Vigevano* [*The Teacher from Vigevano*] (Elio Petri, 1963), the character of the frustrated teacher takes shape, dissatisfied with his position and excluded from the pecuniary advantages of the economic boom. The film launches a line of films, which focus on the figure of the male teacher represented as a dramatic figure, first of all *La scuola* [*The School*] (Daniele Luchetti, 1995). These are films characterized by the presence of poor quality teachers who carry out pseudo clerical work, between homework to be corrected, an intrusive and useless bureaucracy, a grotesque collegiate comparisons, an innate lack of resources and difficult students, children of disengagement.

In a phase of severe crisis in the Italian school, with teachers grappling with chronic inefficiencies and dissatisfaction with the lack of consideration for their work, it is significant how the only teacher who seems to ask questions about his job is the male protagonist, played by Silvio Orlando, while the female figures are disinterested in what is happening to their role, they do not question their own existential and professional choices and are therefore wrapped in silence. From this film emerges a figure of female secondary school teachers who is always gregarious, subordinate to the central male figure, and for whom the work is not, as for the male figure, a meaningful experience, for better or for worse, but a tinsel, whose only role is to echo a life declined only on personal problems. This is what happens, for example, with the venal prof. Lidia Ostia,

who appears worried only about the costs of babysitting her little son, or with prof. Anna Rita Majello (Anna Galiena), represented more for her turbulent relationship with her husband and for her secret love with a colleague.

The role as teachers doesn't define these figures, it doesn't become decisive for their identity, nor does work become an opportunity for true self-fulfilment<sup>25</sup>.

The female teaching staff is extremely varied and made up of a group of colourful characters who are the receptacle of the various caricatures that gravitate around the teaching profession, such as for prof. Giorgia Lugo (Enrica Maria Modugno), an English teacher, insecure, careless and full of phobias, such as that for sharp objects, for which she suffers various jokes from students and colleagues.

These are figures whose fragility emerges above all and who are voluntarily not represented for their educational contribution in the school context, but above all for their role in the love dynamics of the school.

The same dynamic returns in *Auguri professore [Best wishes, Professor]* (Riccardo Milani, 1997), set in the winter of 1996 and taken from the novel *Solo se interrogato. Appunti sulla maleducazione di un insegnante volenteroso [Only if interrogated. Notes on the Rudeness of a willing Teacher]* (Domenico Starnone, 1995)<sup>26</sup>, which tells the story of a professor in crisis and of the intergenerational relationship between teachers and students, but also between generations of teachers. In fact, the professor meets Luisa (Claudia Pandolfi), who is outlined more for her educational role towards her colleague, who had also been her teacher, than towards the students. The young female teacher makes the protagonist rediscover his passion for teaching, through a relationship that winks at sentimentality, but she is once again a secondary figure, caught more as a support for her male colleague, by virtue of her young age, than for her actual skills.

These films were preceded in the '80s by two films in which the protagonist is a male figure and is once again the only one who gives rise to a self-reflection. The female figures act only as corollary, objects of attention only as protagonists of the sentimental relationship with the main character.

In *Una gita scolastica [A School Trip]* (Pupi Avati, 1983) the woman secondary school teacher is represented by Serena Stanzani (Tiziana Pini), who will lead the protagonist, prof. Balla, to rediscover his feelings and to meditate on his declared «fear of women». Serena intends to betray her adulterous husband on this occasion, out of spite; but after deluding Balla, she will have an adventure with one of the pupils. The same happens in *Bianca*, a 1984 film directed and interpreted by Nanni Moretti. In the story a teaching staff adapts, in order to solve the problems of the mass school, to the tastes of the students and offers "informative" lessons, thus renouncing the cultural and educative aspects of his own role. The protagonist is once again a male character, Michele Apicella, a young mathematics professor full of delusions and phobias. In the story, the figure of the

<sup>25</sup> G. Bertagna, *Luci e ombre sul valore formativo del lavoro. Una prospettiva pedagogica*, in G. Alessandrini (ed.), *Atlante di pedagogia del lavoro*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2017, pp. 49-89.

<sup>26</sup> D. Starnone, *Solo se interrogato. Appunti sulla maleducazione di un insegnante volenteroso*, Milano, Feltrinelli, 1995.

female secondary school teacher is represented by Bianca (Laura Morante), with whom Michele begins a relationship: in her portrait, however, only psychological dramas and sentimentality are intertwined.

From these films emerges the image of a stereotyped female figure, subordinated in the exercise of her profession to the various male colleagues, the only ones represented both for their didactic-educational skills and for their ability to make the profession of teacher an opportunity for maturation, self-realization and self-fulfilment. To the point that the male protagonists are the only ones to enter into crisis in the face of the awareness that the school from an experience of *scholè*<sup>27</sup>, a space of personal ascent to get self-realization and identity affirmation, is becoming a system of dry bureaucratic practices.

#### 2.4 *Women secondary teachers as “friends” and “lovers”*

In a similar way to the image of the mother-teacher created by some films of the '90s, in the new millennium some television series feature some female secondary school teachers, who contribute to accentuating the perception of a professional role in which the elements of friendship, empathy, and daily complicity with students become dominant and essential in this work.

It's about *Provaci ancora, Prof!* [*Try it again, Prof!*], aired on Rai1 from 2005 to 2017, where prof. Camilla Baudino (Veronica Pivetti) juggles between school, where she almost assumes more of a role as friend and confidant of her students, and the resolutions of some cases and crimes and *Fuoriclasse* [*The Champion*], broadcasted on Rai1 from 2011 to 2015, where the protagonist is Luciana Littizzetto. She plays Isa, a 50-year-old Greek and Latin teacher, divorced and with a teenage son and who often appears as overwhelmed by events, in which the role of friendship with the students often takes over.

On the same wavelength also runs the two-part miniseries *Notte prima degli esami '82* [*The Night before the Exams: 1982*] (Elisabetta Marchetti, 2011), a remake, revisited and adapted for TV, of the film *Notte prima degli esami* [*The Night before the Exams*] (Fausto Brizzi, 2006), which narrates the story of four friends and their last days of school before graduation. Inside a high school represented with the traditional image of a selective school, abstract and distant from the real needs of the boys, as well as a place of practice and customs in which injustice, recommendation, hypocrisy and prejudice predominate, the figure of the female professor Bianchi (Marina Massironi), the only one among the teachers who embodies an authentic educational relationship, but whose role often assumes the connotation of friendly adviser and confidant of her students.

Taking this progressive “friendliness” of the social image of the teaching profession to the extreme consequences, to the point of touching the boundaries of sexual and love

<sup>27</sup> G. Bertagna, *La pedagogia della scuola. Dimensioni storiche, epistemologiche ed ordinamentali*, in G. Bertagna, S. Ulivieri (edd.), *La ricerca pedagogica nell'Italia contemporanea. Problemi e prospettive*, Roma, Studium, 2017, pp. 46-74.

relationships, is the television series *I Cesaroni* [*The Cesaronis*], broadcasted on Canale 5 from 2006 to 2014 and in which pseudo-amorous ties between students and teachers, both caught in their fragility, intertwine. This is the case of Rachele Diotallevi (Martina Colombari), a charming and attractive teacher, desperate for the recent separation from her husband, who finds comfort in a troubled love story with one of the adolescent protagonists, who is one of her students.

### 2.5 *Women secondary teachers as “adolescents” and ultimately no longer needed*

With a deliberately, disenchanted and teasing representation of the bond between pupils and teachers, the film *Arrivano i prof* [*The Teachers arrive*] (Ivan Silvestrini, 2018), aims to uncover the distortions that the relationship between adults and adolescents has all assumed in the contemporary world. In fact, the film is presented as a thematic continuation of *Notte prima degli esami*, but, in this case, the high school troubles, first loves and eternal friendships remain on the sidelines, as well as the students themselves, to leave room only for adult teachers, who are actually more teenagers than those sitting among the desks.

Particularly significant are the “extreme” representations of two female secondary school teachers, unable to govern their impulses and who pose like two adolescents: the irascible and hysterical Sandra Melis, an English teacher who throws chalks at students who they say exactly what she wants to hear and the provocative and semi-naked prof. Amina Venturi, who overturns all the stereotypes and clichés related to the Italian language teacher, to take their opposite to extremes. She is in fact a teacher who appears in the classroom with provocative clothing and winks at her students.

Through the staging of teachers who are self-caricatures, the film therefore implements the ridiculing of a category, that of secondary teachers, who, in social perception, has abdicated their educational role and who no longer respect borders, nor roles. And the film does this to actually make fun of all adults, who have lost the role of educational guides.

Even more radical and pessimistic in its representation of the link between teachers and pupils is *Skam Italia*, a series distributed starting from 2018, created by Ludovico Bessegato for TIMvision, which deals with the daily life of some students, addressing typical social issues of adolescence. However, while revolving around a high school in Rome, the series features very few adult figures, mostly represented by some mothers of the students and the physical education teacher. Instead, female secondary school teachers are completely absent, replaced by the figure of a gynaecologist. As if to say that their pedagogical and educational role is no longer needed. As if to say that so much has never been needed.

### Conclusions

The research conducted confirms the thesis that filmic sources serve a «heuristic function»<sup>28</sup> in the transition from the screen to collective memory and, as such, may play a relevant role in fostering innovative approaches to secondary teacher education, helping to train practitioners habitually engage in reflexive practices with a specific attention to the peculiar character of female profession and life perspective.

As argued by Geoff Pingree in *History in what remains. Cinema's challenge to idea about the past*<sup>29</sup> (2007), the audio-visual sources bear at the richness of processes of representation of the past, with many possible theoretical and practical implications in the process of professionalisation. Moreover, as observed by Paolo Alfieri in some recent interventions<sup>30</sup>, the study of how films and TV programmes have described and interpreted teaching-learning processes in a given historical period offers insights into how such representations also acted to spread clichéd and specific images of teachers with the power to influence the *Collective School Memories* of the public for generations to follow. Cinema and television play a decisive role in this process for several reasons, such as their perceptual and affective impact with the consequence of an emotional involvement, and their contribution to build “imagined communities”<sup>31</sup>.

In particular, this study has highlighted how, starting from the success of the comedies of the Seventies and the diffusion of the image of the sexy female secondary teacher, Italian cinema has spread, on the one hand, the progressive perception of the feminization of the teaching profession, and on the other, the image of a female teacher who is frivolous, dedicated to emotional things, and so incompetent in terms of teaching and education and on that level secondary and subordinate to her male colleague.

Therefore, if in the Seventies the sexual revolution and the feminism processes led to the celebration of features typifying femininity and to the exposure of the female body, starting from the Eighties and then especially during the Nineties, precisely the “discovery”, the unveiling and the emphasis on typically feminine traits led first to an insistence and then to an exasperation of the representation of the female secondary teacher according to the stereotyped aspects of her femininity, consequently spreading a new imaginary about the female teacher. Up to the point that a figure of teacher, for whom life is declined only on personal problems, and for whom the work is not, as for the male figure, a significant experience, has therefore gradually emerged. A figure focused only on her own personal needs, a figure increasingly disinterested in the world of school

<sup>28</sup> I. Dussel, K. Priem, *The visual in histories of education: a reappraisal*, «Paedagogica Historica», vol. 53, n. 6, 2017, pp. 641-649.

<sup>29</sup> G. Pingree, *History in what remains. Cinema's challenge to ideas about the past*, in R. Francaviglia, J. Rodnitzky (edd.), *Lights, Camera, History: portraying the past in the film*, Arlington, University Press, 2007, pp. 37-38.

<sup>30</sup> Alfieri, *Introduzione*, in Id. (ed.), *Immagini dei nostri maestri. Memorie di scuola nel cinema e nella televisione dell'Italia repubblicana*, cit., p. 13.

<sup>31</sup> P. Alfieri, *Collective school memory, cinema and television: use of sources and interpretive perspectives*, in P. Alfieri, I. Garai (edd.), *Individual and Collective School Memories. Research perspectives and case studies in Italy and Hungary*, Roma, Armando, 2022, p. 100.



and in building true educational relationships. Whether she is represented as a mother, a lover, a friend of her students or as a frivolous teenager, the film sources examined have shown the gradual declining path experienced by this figure, perceived more and more as useless at an educational level, increasingly absent, increasingly subordinate to male colleagues, to the point of being completely eliminated in some recent series, significantly dedicated specifically to adolescents and enjoyed by them.



# *Il Giornalino di Gian Burrasca*: Trajectories of Memory from the Literary Text to Filmic Mediations

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In December 1964, a lingering aura of expectation surrounded the TV listing for Rai television, which included eight episodes of a TV series inspired by the Italian children's literature classic *Il Giornalino di Gian Burrasca*<sup>1</sup>. The festive Christmas period was certainly well suited to gather, on a steady basis, an audience of Italians of old and new generations in front of the "magic box". On Saturday night, they would have had the opportunity to relive, or experience for the first time, the adventures of the famous rascal created by Luigi Bertelli's pen, also known as Vamba, between 1907 and 1908<sup>2</sup>. The choice of prime time to broadcast the series seemed to address the national-popular objective of pulling together the original readers of *Il Giornalino di Gian Burrasca*, who may have well recalled their own childhood years, with a large portion of elderly people and adults with a low level of literacy that did not have any knowledge of Vamba's work, since in the first half of the twentieth century the book was not diffused at school due to its rebellious character, with a dangerous appeal for popular masses<sup>3</sup>. The *Giornalino* remained enclosed in the circle of the young children from the middle and high Italian bourgeoisie, who followed its development first in instalments in the magazine «Giornalino della Domenica» (between 1907 and 1908), and then in book form published in 1912<sup>4</sup>. On the contrary, for children in the 1960s the *Giornalino* was not among their favourite readings and the mediation of the TV series was indeed a novelty<sup>5</sup>. On such premises, in line with the state monopoly on television in Italy until the 1960s<sup>6</sup>, the new series aimed at educating while

<sup>1</sup> Rai Radiotelevisione italiana, *Relazione e bilancio esercizio 1964*, Roma, 29 aprile, 1965, p. 25; L. Zambotti, *Il giornalino di Gian Burrasca*, in «Banca dati degli audiovisivi sulla scuola e sugli insegnanti», DOI: 10.53164/352, published 25.10.2021 (last access: 07.03.2023).

<sup>2</sup> *Il giornalino di Gian Burrasca* by Vamba was published in the magazine «Giornalino della Domenica» from 17 February 1907 to 17 May 1908. Bemporad publishing house released the book in 1912.

<sup>3</sup> In the 1920s, after Gentile's Reform, the book was left out of the list of entertainment readings in school libraries. A. Ascenzi, R. Sani (edd.), *Il libro per la scuola tra idealismo e fascismo*, Milano, Vita e Pensiero, 2005.

<sup>4</sup> About reading and reader's education in «Giornalino della Domenica» see S. Fava, *Piccoli lettori del Novecento. I bambini di Paola Carrara Lombroso sui giornali per ragazzi*, Torino, SEI, 2015, pp. 28-31.

<sup>5</sup> About the characteristics of neorealism in children's literature after the Second World War see P. Boero, C. De Luca, *La letteratura per l'infanzia*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2012<sup>2</sup>, pp. 240-256.

<sup>6</sup> R. Farnè, *Buona maestra Tv. La Rai e l'educazione da Non è mai troppo tardi a Quark*, Roma, Carocci,

entertaining the audience, thus playing the role of school substitute that the Italian public broadcasting service (RAI) interpreted not only as news provider but also in entertainment as it drew inspiration from theatre, contemporary literature and literary classics<sup>7</sup>.

### 1. *The RAI miniseries torn between critics and audience*

RAI made a considerable economic investment in the series directed by Lina Wertmuller, who was then a young director of RAI variety shows like *Canzonissima* in 1959 and with previous theatrical experiences in cabaret and puppet shows<sup>8</sup>. Well-known theatre actors were part of the cast like Bice Valori and Sergio Tofano, playing the roles of principals in the Collegio Pierpaoli, but also Ivo Garrani, Giannino Stoppani's irascible father, and Valeria Valeri, the caring mother. The actress that really stood out with her surprising interpretation was Rita Pavone, not yet in her twenties, as the protagonist Gian Burrasca with a mysterious aura surrounding this dual role of boy and child, together with a very effective stage presence and a memorable singing performance.

The choice to include *Il Giornalino di Gian Burrasca* in prime time and not in the afternoon listing left critics sceptical and uncertain in their evaluation. Reading the «Entertainment» column in the newspaper «Corriere della Sera» of 15 December 1964, the TV critic Vincenzo Buonassisi wrote that this choice was due to the fact that Gian Burrasca belonged to another generation and was not interesting for young people.

Why was it appealing for the young then, but not today? The reason – we believe – is that in its time it described everyday life as it was, there was an inherent sense of humour in each situation that became the reason why people used to read it and be entertained. Today, that reference disappeared, young people cannot make any sense out of dead things, which may still move those who experienced or at least had a faint knowledge of them. Moreover, the weight of the written word can be different from that of the image, more or less of impact, depending on each case. In this series the image may negatively emphasize some actions, some tricks played by Gian Burrasca which, if played through the fantasy of the written word seem to acquire a fairy-tale shading of something impossible and therefore less real<sup>9</sup>.

Some sort of resistance, less evident but more effective, regarded the belief that the message amplified through the television medium would have given more emphasis to the satirical and transgressive message of Gian Burrasca, thus transforming him in a dangerous role model for the young audience watching the series without adult supervision. In the days following the airing of the first episode on 19 December, the critics were far from being enthusiastic.

2003, pp. 9-12 and 19-24.

<sup>7</sup> F. Colombo, *Storie di quelli che non hanno fatto il '68*, Milano, Rizzoli, 2008.

<sup>8</sup> A. Grasso, *Storia della televisione italiana*, Milano, Garzanti, 1996, p. 836.

<sup>9</sup> V. Buonassisi, *Gian Burrasca fustiga i costumi*, «Corriere della Sera», 15 December 1964, p. 12.

After having entertained three generations, *Gian Burrasca* landed on screen last Saturday evening, starring the unmistakable figure of Rita Pavone, in the form of a «contamination» between televised novel and musical comedy that may have left its original readers slightly disappointed. Translating the written word in pictures is always difficult<sup>10</sup>.

Journalistic criticism veered towards a comparison with the literary text, with a dismayed nostalgia for a screen rewriting that did not seem to maintain Vamba's narrative tension so often equalled to that of fairy-tales. The topic was discussed further even after the airing of the remaining episodes:

The world of the book has disappeared; the character, stepping away from the written page, is not convincing, absurd, lacking in fantasy: an empty message for young people today. The rewriting could have been more suitable for the former young generation, if only it succeeded<sup>11</sup>.

The reviews are not indulgent, Giannino is naughty, the «dull» tone is attributed to the boring, endlessly repetitive staging of his mischiefs.

Evidence suggests that critics' reviews are decidedly, almost excessively, negative and seem to move along a different path from the acceptance of the audience. Aldo Grasso mentioned that the miniseries reached an average audience rating of 13.6 million viewers and an approval rating of 64 points<sup>12</sup>. Within RAI TV listing, the show was categorised as «entertainment programme» because it mixed dialogue, music and singing<sup>13</sup>, and it should be noted the appreciation from the public of the music composed by Nino Rota and the songs performed mainly by Rita Pavone with the lyrics written by Lina Wertmüller. Among these stood out *Viva la pappa col pomodoro* [Hooray for tomato soup], still very much present in people's minds today, and a record bestseller back then as it persisted in the charts for a total of 15 weeks<sup>14</sup>. Success, as emerged by the quantitative data related to the audience appreciation, was confirmed by RAI which, in the occasion of Christmas holidays in 1965, aired the show in the early fringe time on the second RAI channel. RAI followed up with reruns in TV listings for a young audience, thus fostering the dissemination of the TV show across generations of viewers. Fausto Colombo may well provide a sound basis for a qualitative argument about the persistence of the programme on collective imagination. His sociological view ponders the value of the television medium on the formation of the imaginary for some generations born after the Second World War. They began their early literacy path through the parallel school medium of television for a young audience and fed their imagination with representations of school in stark contrast with the real one, but nonetheless accepted them because they were not old enough to take part in the cultural debate that led to the student movement in 1968.

<sup>10</sup> *Gian Burrasca alla Rita Pavone*, «Corriere della Sera», 21-22 December 1964, p. 15.

<sup>11</sup> *Gian Burrasca quinta puntata*, «Corriere della Sera», 17 January 1965, p. 12.

<sup>12</sup> Grasso, *Storia della televisione italiana*, cit., p. 301.

<sup>13</sup> Rai Radiotelevisione Italiana, *Relazione e bilancio esercizio 1964*, cit., p. 25.

<sup>14</sup> Grasso, *Storia della televisione italiana*, cit., p. 301.

Italian television took care of our education by making us have fun, starting from a representation of school that was satirical and very playful. *Il Giornalino di Gian Burrasca* (1964) is an entertaining musical programme directed by Lina Wertmuller, inspired by the book bearing the same name by Vamba (immortal figure embodying the Italian sense of humour) written in 1912.

Gian Burrasca is a naughty and prankster schoolboy and in the tv show was played by Rita Pavone, even naughtier than the naughtiest boy, younger than the youngest child, simply perfect for the part. The original score still rings in our ears and our memory, even more than that of *Chissà chi lo sà?: La pappa col pomodoro*, music composed by Nino Rota, the great composer for Federico Fellini's movies (the lyrics, by Wertmuller herself, sound like: «Viva la pappa pappa, col popopopopomodoro. Viva la pappa pappa, ch'è un capopopolavoro. Viva la pa pappapà col popopomodòr...»).

Vamba's book, and the musical comedy, satirised the hypocrisies of the society in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: frivolous girls, repressive teachers, unctuous politicians. Undoubtedly, for us as an audience dependent on the tv screen, the revolution brought about by Gian Burrasca in the school where he was exiled was destined to merge with other student movements, ours and – earlier in time – of elder brothers and sisters<sup>15</sup>.

Colombo's argument provides food for thought on the playful impact of the show on the audience, and the extent to which the dimension of education through entertainment resulted in an immediate appreciation and, on the long term, the sedimentation power on the collective imagination of several generations of Italians. This point of view illuminates the distance between the two worlds of audience and critics.

The marked conservative eye of television critics led on the one hand to favour the literary text and its originality against the TV show, on the other to rise in defence of childhood, which was not considered the natural addressee of the show, yet at risk of feeling dangerously attracted to the pranks set up by Gian Burrasca.

The audience, on the contrary, expressed their definite appreciation for the series in a process of positive empathy with that naive rascal, yet champion of justice that brought in the houses of Italians an old-fashioned representation of the school of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but somehow similar to the conservative and classist school that people wanted to change in the 1960s.

## 2. *The message reverberates through the young readers of «Corriere dei Piccoli»*

The interest of the young audience for the TV series grew stronger as the series progressed also thanks to the contribution of a genuinely ingenious idea from the Italian magazine for children «Corriere dei Piccoli». With a week's delay from the airing of each episode, the renowned magazine from Milan offered some of the most famous extracts from Vamba's work following a journalistic project characterised by a markedly modern communicative approach<sup>16</sup>. The editor-in-chief Carlo Triberti, who inherited from his

<sup>15</sup> Colombo, *Storie di quelli che non hanno fatto il '68*, cit., p. 63.

<sup>16</sup> The six episodes taken from *Giornalino di Gian Burrasca* were published in «Corriere dei Piccoli» between 27 December 1964 and 31 January 1965.

predecessor Guglielmo Zucconi an open-minded approach that included new multimedia languages<sup>17</sup>, brought together a literary style close to the original and the comic art by Giovanni Mosca with its satirical and caustic quality in order to present some frames from the TV series. This is an example of layered communication where there was no superposition of the various codes, on the contrary, it played on the possibility of an extended perspective offered by the different media languages. When, for example, in the second episode on the magazine the focus is on the story of Aunt Bettina's dittany plant<sup>18</sup>, Mosca's illustrations expand the perspective and sketch also the journey by train of the protagonist and the path he walks by to reach his aunt's house, but the frames from the series keep telling the story that words cannot describe. They evoke, in a more immediate way, the TV scenes related to Giannino's father called to fetch his rascal son, but also the organization of Luisa and Collalto's wedding and the scene of the firecrackers exploding on Collalto's dress suit<sup>19</sup>. This exchange resulted in a mutual emphasis between the messages offered by television and magazine, amplifying and consolidating the potential of the original story to feed the collective imagination of young readers, who continued to be the real addressees of Vamba's work thanks to the effort of the magazine.

A closer look at the choices adopted in the TV series and in «Corriere dei Piccoli», there seems to be a more cautious approach in the latter. In the selection of the episodes to be published, those that were left out had a marked satirical charge against the hypocrisy of adults or were most likely to result in a political fallout in view of their polemical tone. In the magazine, the editorial choice fell on Giannino's incursions to suggest a mixture of intemperance and innocence, and the verbal text is void of any hint of a direct connection with moral or ethical evaluations, or even political connections. In the fourth episode, for example, the action is on the escape by car of Giannino and Cecchino Bellucci, but the text does not linger on the political message inherent in the status of having an automobile, nor does it mention how Cecchino could have suffered from permanent disability after the car accident they got involved in<sup>20</sup>. What remains is the carefree – though disastrous – initiative of the two rascals that certainly elicits a good laugh and entertainment. Frames from the series simply tell the school story of Professor Muscolo, with his lanky gait and deformed profile, a severe – but completely ineffective – mask<sup>21</sup>. A mirroring structure between TV series and magazine can be found in Giannino's lucky trip to Rome accompanied by Signor Clodoveo Tyrynny, a travelling agent selling inks<sup>22</sup>. The famous ink splashing from the train window on the travellers on board another train

<sup>17</sup> Guglielmo Zucconi and Carlo Triberti managed to direct the magazine towards a structure open to the contamination of different codes, thanks to the journalistic experiences gained in RAI. They could seize the communicative opportunity offered by television to put on paper for a young audience the characters created on screen. Suffice it to mention Scaramacai and Topo Gigio, among the others.

<sup>18</sup> Vamba, *Il Giornalino di Gian Burrasca*, «Corriere dei Piccoli», 3 January 1965, pp. 6-7.

<sup>19</sup> The frames refer to the second episode of the series, called *La girandola sul frac* [The firecracker pinwheel on the dress suit] aired on 26 December 1964.

<sup>20</sup> Vamba, *Il Giornalino di Gian Burrasca*, «Corriere dei Piccoli», 17 January 1965, pp. 12-13.

<sup>21</sup> The frames refer to the fourth episode *I razzi nel camino* [Rockets in the chimney] aired on 9 January 1965.

<sup>22</sup> Vamba, *Il Giornalino di Gian Burrasca*, «Corriere dei Piccoli», 24 January 1965, pp. 12-13.

waiting at the station is narrated in an exhilarating tone by Mosca's illustrations showing the result of the prank, and by the series' frames showing how the scene unfolded<sup>23</sup>.

In the sixth and last episode published in «Corriere dei Piccoli»<sup>24</sup>, Giannino is staying with the Maralli family. The story is about Giannino swapping lenses between two pairs of glasses, one of which belonged to uncle Venanzio. The old uncle panics without his glasses, because he believes he is going to die. Nothing happens, and when Giannino swaps the lenses back, Venanzio feels immediately better, eternally grateful to Gian Burrasca. What is left out is Venanzio's testament, where he disinherits his nephew<sup>25</sup>. The last episode narrates the delightful story of Mr. and Mrs. Pierpaoli holding a séance. The whole thing is uncovered by Giannino at school, the scene is illustrated by Mosca but does not appear in the TV series frames, which emphasize the deformed profile of the two principals and Gian Burrasca as member of the *One for All, All for One* secret society. The magazine leaves the ending open, making a reference to a further séance two days later, and eliminates the part dedicated to the famous «Pappa col pomodoro». Therefore, the narration is left to the song sung by Rita Pavone – which was going to be published in the following issue<sup>26</sup> – consequently directing the attention of readers towards the language of music.

### 3. *A representation of school between television and magazine*

*Il Giornalino di Gian Burrasca* published in the «Corriere dei Piccoli» magazine shows the illuminating modernity and novelty of an initiative interweaving different communication codes, with a highly successful potential of reaching the young audience of that period. It should be mentioned that the magazine, in the same years, reached its peak circulation with 378.715 copies<sup>27</sup>, offering an editorial project already in line with the television programmes dedicated to a young audience through the characters of Topo Gigio and Scaramacai. Specifically for these, the magazine offered contents that – unlike those on TV – could be read countless times by the young public, thus ensuring their survival over a long period. Among the extracts published, the “great excluded” is precisely the school with its intergenerational conflicts set out in Gian Burrasca's narration. The magazine clearly defined its boundaries outside the school environment through an attentive selection of contents. Its purpose<sup>28</sup> abandoned any attempt to intervene in the

<sup>23</sup> The frames refer to the fifth episode *Giannino in casa Collalto* [Giannino at Collaltos' house] aired on 16 January 1965.

<sup>24</sup> Vamba, *Il Giornalino di Gian Burrasca*, «Corriere dei Piccoli», 31 January 1965, pp. 12-13.

<sup>25</sup> Id., *Il Giornalino di Gian Burrasca*, Milano, Feltrinelli, 1994, p. 252.

<sup>26</sup> R. Pavone, *Viva la pappa col pomodoro*, «Corriere dei Piccoli», 7 February 1965, pp. 12-13.

<sup>27</sup> M. Marvulli, *Il «Corriere dei Piccoli». Cronologia e dati storici*, in G. Ginex (ed.), *Corriere dei Piccoli. Storie, fumetto e illustrazione per ragazzi*, Milano, Skira, 2009, pp. 271-274.

<sup>28</sup> With reference to the extra-scholastic environment and the purpose of «Corriere dei Piccoli» aimed at a young audience reading the magazine in their spare time at home, see S. Fava, *Piccoli lettori del Novecento*, cit. pp. 27-45.



debate around the school that was slowly gaining the public's attention before reaching its peak with Don Lorenzo Milani's *Letter to a teacher* and Mario Lodi's work<sup>29</sup>.

The mockery of teachers like Muscolo or Principals Stanislao and Geltrude Pierpaoli, is a pivotal issue in the TV series.

In the fourth episode, aired on 9 January 1965, the well-known narrative passage related to Gian Burrasca is presented. The tango music and the lyrics performed by Rita Pavone amplify the boring, compulsory, authoritative character of school and Giannino's complete lack of interest, like «This school is so boring, such uncivilized habits», the teacher is a «tyrant», «melancholy geography» or «parents listen to your conscience... don't make us suffer this way at school»<sup>30</sup>. The school institution is a punishment for children, and the following scene seems to justify the rebellious actions of Giannino and his schoolmates. Wertmuller's direction strived to adhere to the reality of the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with pictures of the king and queen on the walls to emphasize the formal context, a map and a plant kingdom poster, the furniture with wooden double desks and the teacher desk. The caricatural appearance of Professor Muscolo is emphasized by Giannino's drawing in his diary. The modified picture (Muscolo is not bald as in Vamba's original story), together with the teacher's actions, clumsy and formal at the same time, amplify his lack of authority on the students. And the warning «Everybody freeze! Everybody silent! If Muscolo sees you, you're done for!» written on Nelli's shirt collar is a hilarious example of student prank that leaves the principal and the Professor speechless.

The school environment clearly stands out in the seventh episode *Giannino in collegio* (Giannino at boarding school), aired on 30 January 1965<sup>31</sup>. From the first frame, the audience can see a plain dorm room, its furniture being only a crucifix and a fresco by the founder Pierpaolo Pierpaoli. The scene appears artificially mystical, considering the contradictory messages against any religious message that is consequently derivative of the adult hypocrisy. Every detail points to a punitive place and in the series it is nicknamed «prison facility», where people «atone for their sins». This is not education, it is military discipline made of marches and uniforms that elicit verbal reactions such as: «down with tyrants» naming Frederick Barbarossa, the Visconti family and Count Radetzky, but hailing Silvio Pellico and his famous effort of domesticating a spider written in his account of his sufferings in *My Prisons*.

The characters of the Principals Stanislao and Geltrude are veritable icons of caricature, excess and an ideal link to the tradition of history and the literary text. The

<sup>29</sup> Don Milani's argument against an elitist and classist school that is traditionally led to share equal terms among unequal people, or Mario Lodi's thoughts that evolved by observing students smothered by a school system that did not offer them the conditions to authentically express themselves, are part of the cultural debate that shook the foundations of the educational dynamics at school between the end of the 1960s and the 1970s, bringing about a revolution in the field. M. Lodi, *C'è speranza se questo accade al Vho*, Milano, Edizioni Avanti, 1963; Scuola di Barbiana, *Lettera a una professoressa*, Firenze, Libreria Editrice Fiorentina, 1967.

<sup>30</sup> *Il Giornalino di Gian Burrasca*, TV series, 1964; <https://www.raiplay.it/video/2016/11/Il-giornalino-di-Gian-Burrasca---I-razzi-nel-caminetto-0809940f-1757-46b9-b1db-aaeca8d94d7b.html> (last access: 18.02.2023).

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.raiplay.it/video/2016/11/Il-giornalino-di-Gian-Burrasca---Giannino-in-collegio-ff33467e-21ce-496d-a4ae-13be7b9ef2ef.html> (last access: 18.02.2023)

actors interpreting the principals are two figures closely related to the loyal circle of «Giornalino»<sup>32</sup>. Stanislao is interpreted by an old Sergio Tofano, who saw the first release of the «Giornalino della Domenica» magazine, for which he drew splendid covers<sup>33</sup> and in 1943 he was also assistant director for the movie *Gian Burrasca*<sup>34</sup>. The actor worked on the character to fit him perfectly, emphasizing the clumsiness, the barely credible identity to the extent that he is nicknamed Calpurnio (with reference to the corrupted tribune of the plebs Lucius Calpurnius Bestia) for his subordinate behaviour to his wife. Geltrude is interpreted by Bice Valori<sup>35</sup>, a memorable theatrical comedian and for RAI, daughter of Aldo Valori, famous in Italy under the pseudonym of *Ceralacca* for Vamba's weekly magazine and pivotal member of the magazine's editorial staff. Both actors, either directly or indirectly, knew Vamba's work in depth and were able to give prominence to the smallest detail. To make the character of Geltrude credible, with her deformed aspect that made her look like a beignet, Bice Valori performed on her knees, and the make-up emphasized the caricature adding a mole on the cheek<sup>36</sup>. In terms of relations, her distinctive traits are her habit of chasing everyone with offensive words and violent acts that emphasized the lack of the most basic rules for respect. Disciplinary violence of adults against boarding school students is a distinctive trait also in other scenes: for example, when janitors hit on the head the students eating their lunch<sup>37</sup>. It seems that the TV series pushes the message of the literary text to the limit, creating a sharp opposition against students and a definite point of view siding with Gian Burrasca, always represented as an innocent victim of unspeakable violence, such as in the scene of the «pappa col pomodoro» that eventually marks the revenge of students on the principals' falsity. It seems apt here to recall Andersen's ending in *The Emperor's New Clothes*<sup>38</sup>. Children can surely make the truth emerge, but not necessarily can they scratch the surface of the political behaviour of adults, who – in the name of other plans – maintain a single-handed approach to education.

<sup>32</sup> The Italian term «giornalinesco» refers to a typical feature that characterized the readers of «Giornalino della Domenica». It is known that one of the objectives of the magazine was to grow a sense of loyalty among its readers, and ensure that they, together with collaborators, felt like a big family clustered around the magazine's values.

<sup>33</sup> About Sergio Tofano illustrator for Vamba's magazine, see P. Pallottino, *L'irripetibile stagione de «Il giornalino della domenica»*, Bologna, Bononia University Press, 2008.

<sup>34</sup> R. Chiti, E. Lancia (edd.), *Dizionario del cinema italiano*, vol. 1 *Tutti i film italiani dal 1930 al 1944*, Roma, Gremese Editore, 2005, p. 162 <https://www.cinematografo.it/film/gian-burrasca-h8cal8xq> (last access: 18.02.2023); <https://www.archiviodelcinemaitaliano.it/index.php/scheda.html?codice=SV286&jjj=1668413582519> (last access: 18.02.2023)

<sup>35</sup> E. Lancia, R. Poppi (edd.), *Dizionario del cinema italiano*, vol. 2 *Le attrici: dal 1930 ai giorni nostri*, Roma, Gremese Editore, 2005, p. 360.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.raiplay.it/video/2016/11/Il-giornalino-di-Gian-Burrasca---Giannino-in-collegio-ff33467e-21ce-496d-a4ae-13be7b9ef2ef.html> (last access: 18.02.2023)

<sup>38</sup> H. C. Andersen, *Quaranta novelle*, translated by M. Pezzè Pascolato, Milano, Hoepli, 1904, pp. 19-27.



#### 4. *Historical background of the text and collective memory*

The history of *Giornalino di Giamburrasca* is characterised by different phases that mark the new media development, and therefore of successive revisions of the original text thus fostering a diverse – and wider – circulation of contents as well as its sedimentation in the collective memory of the audience.

The first publishing phase focuses on the success of the magazine for young readers «Il Giornalino della Domenica», which between 1907 and 1908 gathered the first loyal readers. Thanks to the worn-out pages from the innumerable occasions for rereading, it built lasting friendships in the *Confederazione del Girotondo* that accompanied their growth and at the same time nurtured the future ruling class of Italy. Such elitist and solid relations clearly supported the definitive success of *Gian Burrasca* when it was published in book form in 1912<sup>39</sup>.

The second phase is characterized by the film production of *Gian Burrasca* in 1943, directed by Sergio Tofano, with the original score by Giuseppe Bertelli, Vamba's son<sup>40</sup>. At that time, the critics, especially Giorgio Almirante, a debuting cinema critic on the verge of a political career, were ruthless:

Tofano is stuck between the show for young children and older children: between fun and style. To be honest, it seems that he focused mainly on style. He lacks the ability (or the courage?) to master it properly; the result is a caricatural movie, [...] where hilarious scenes are still there, together with typical characters, even the tone is perfect here and there. But there is no continuity, no coherence, not even the intimate and irresistible comical character of truly, wholly intelligent works of art. The audience may laugh (or even better, the young audience may laugh), but bursts of laughter are intermittent, when a fun, unexpected figure suddenly appears, or when a diabolical prank is getting through. Most of the times, narration is jammed, it lingers on superfluous details, it gets lost in ineffective descriptions of the environment because they are basically unnecessary. It seems that Tofano lacks the rhythm of the director<sup>41</sup>.

The movie cannot distance itself from the literary text even if Tofano is both a high-profile director and actor, and he has the skills and knowledge to look beyond the text itself. The chance to match or even surpass Vamba's work on screen is only partly successful. Tofano ends the movie on a positive note. Giannino moves his father to tears by purchasing a comfortable armchair for him, and the father renounces the idea of sending Giannino to a youth detention centre. This solution is far from Vamba's intentions who, on the contrary, chose an open ending where Giannino does not correct his behaviour, but suggests more pranks on the way. Therefore, the movie seems stuck and even if it loses ground in comparison with the literary text, the presence of Tofano as director and

<sup>39</sup> Fava, *Piccoli lettori del Novecento*, cit., pp. 256-264.

<sup>40</sup> Chiti, Lancia (edd.), *Dizionario del cinema italiano*, vol. 1 *Tutti i film italiani dal 1930 al 1944*, cit., p. 162. L. Zambotti, *Gian Burrasca*, in «Banca dati degli audiovisivi sulla scuola e sugli insegnanti», DOI: 10.53164/1015, published on: 28.12.2021 (last access: 10.03.2023).

<sup>41</sup> G. Almirante, «Il Tevere», 11 June 1943.

actor, Mimmo Battaglia and Cesco Baseggio, leaves it in the hands of collective memory and contributes to keep alive the memory of middle-class imagined features of that time.

Moreover, in 1961, some loyal supporters of the «Giornalino della Domenica» family of long ago made their voice heard in defence of Giuseppe Bertelli, composer of the music for Gian Burrasca's film in 1943, and a child like many others who read the «Giornalino» at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. An article by Giovanni Mosca informing about the passing of Vamba's son mistakenly reported that he was the inspirational source of Giannino's character because he was just as naughty as him, and this oversight stirred discontent from a number of affectionate readers of «Giornalino»<sup>42</sup>.

Cesarina Lorenzoni, children's writer and former reader of Vamba's work, strongly states her position in defence of Giuseppe Bertelli.

«Not a naughty boy, Beppino Bertelli, but not even an exaggeratedly calm boy to the point that he seemed obtuse». This statement hurt me deeply. And I believe it hurt all those who, in their youth, followed Vamba in his unforgettable work and then followed and loved his son in his life as an artist. This life, despite your somewhat quick judgement, was known and held in high esteem by many, precisely in the world of musicians, of those that counted. Indeed, in a world led by sensational and profitable famous figures created by films and juke-boxes, the life of a man who silently, devotedly and truthfully served the Art he loved may look like a failure. But this is true only for those who forgot the real measure of things that does not change according to changing times and fashions<sup>43</sup>.

Lorenzoni's letter, among other things, emphasizes the socially elitist origin of the loyal readers of «Giornalino», and the difficulty of accepting some sort of cultural decadence caused by the consolidation of mass media occurred in the aftermath of the Second World War. Therefore, for those affectionate past readers, all that remains is their loyalty to the literary tradition of the original text, as it continues its sedimentation and feeding of memory in spite of all adaptations.

The third phase is characterised by the Rai TV series that accompanied Vamba's work towards its diffusion to the wide popular public, feeding the imagination of the new adults who reached literacy also through television itself. For them, Rita Pavone, interpreting Gian Burrasca, found her place in their hearts with memorable songs that became the soundtrack of their everyday lives. Giannino's message of freedom and justice conquered them all, leaving a smile on their face, guaranteeing fun for everyone<sup>44</sup>. There is a looming idea of a possible social change involving the young audience between television and «Corriere dei Piccoli», spreading the message of vitality and spontaneity of the protagonist from one generation to the next. What remained in the collective memory clearly had a lesser impact than the original author's intentions. The subversive change of Gian Burrasca lost its strength as time went by, as did the clear political message in Vamba. Through this process, Gian Burrasca's series protagonist fixed himself in the

<sup>42</sup> S. Fava, *Il progetto culturale avviato da Silvio Spaventa Filippi*, in R. Lollo (ed.), *Il «Corriere dei Piccoli» in un secolo di riviste per ragazzi*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano, 2009, pp. 67-71.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>44</sup> L. Zambotti, *Giamburrasca & Co*, in «Banca dati degli audiovisivi sulla scuola e sugli insegnanti», DOI: 10.53164/1681, published on: 27.04.2022 (last access: 08.03.2023).

popular imaginary as a character that was loved and supported. The analysis of the writing and re-writing process of the text<sup>45</sup>, from one communication code to the other, allowed to outline the construction of a space for imagination and collective memory<sup>46</sup> where the multifarious contaminations changed the knowledge of the past. They ensured that each generation passed on a dynamic representation that could undergo new interpretations of schools and the relations among students, teachers, and principals.

<sup>45</sup> Ead., *Gian Burrasca*, in «Banca dati degli audiovisivi sulla scuola e sugli insegnanti», DOI: 10.53164/345, published on: 25.10.2021 (last access: 08/03/2023).

<sup>46</sup> J. Meda, A. Viñao Frago, *School memory: historiographical balance and heuristic perspectives*, in C. Yanes Cabrera, J. Meda, A. Viñao, (edd.), *School memories. New trends in the history of education*, Cham, Springer, 2017; P. Alfieri (ed.), *Immagini dei nostri maestri*, Roma, Armando Editore, 2019.



# The Image of the Female Elementary School Teacher in the Works of Edmondo De Amicis across Literary and Visual Sources

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The late 1800s saw strong feminization of the elementary teaching profession, a phenomenon that would further intensify over the 1900s<sup>1</sup>. Female elementary school teachers began to populate the physical spaces of the classroom and the real-life spaces of press reports, as well as places of the imagination such as novels and novellas. The construction of the woman teacher cannot be properly analysed without considering the works of Edmondo De Amicis. This author, from his perspective as an investigative journalist even more so than as a novelist, offered his readers skilful depictions of a gallery of schoolmistresses: from the idealization of lady teachers who were rich in pathos and a spirit of self-sacrifice in *Cuore. Libro per i ragazzi* (1886), via the condemnation of the difficult working conditions inflicted upon teachers in *Il romanzo di un maestro* (1890), to more realistic and diverse representations of women teachers in *Fra scuola e casa* (1892), a collection of writings including *Amore e ginnastica* and *La maestra degli operai*. From the resolute and energetic Maria Pedani, admirer of the gymnastics coach Emilio Baumann and supporter of the De Sanctis Law – which in 1878 introduced physical education into the elementary school curriculum – to the more timorous Enrica Varetti, De Amicis portrayed a set of teachers who were variously embittered, neurotic, or eccentric<sup>2</sup>.

The present study, which falls within the domain of historical-educational research into school memory, examines *La maestra degli operai*, a television adaptation directed by Guglielmo Morandi (1970), *Amore e ginnastica* directed by Luigi Filippo D'Amico (1973) and filmic versions of *Cuore* directed by Duilio Coletti (1948), Luigi Comencini (1984), and Maurizio Zaccaro (2001), as well as the Japanese animated series *La scuola dell'amore: la storia di Cuore*, a 26-episodes rendering of *Cuore* produced in 1981 by Nippon Animation. The anime is of particular interest because it is the only adaptation of a work by De Amicis that specifically targets children. In general, the aim of my inquiry is

<sup>1</sup> A. Ascenzi, *Drammi privati e pubbliche virtù. La maestra italiana dell'Ottocento tra narrazione letteraria e cronaca giornalistica*, Macerata, eum, 2012, p. 134.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 133-156; G. Bini, La maestra nella letteratura: uno specchio della realtà, in S. Soldani (ed.), *L'educazione delle donne. Scuole e modelli di vita femminile nell'Italia dell'Ottocento*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 1989, pp. 331-362.

to compare traditional literary sources with visual sources<sup>3</sup>, in relation to reconstructions of the past, interpretations of collective memory, and the continuous need to adapt to changing historical and social conditions.

### 1. *Filmic reinterpretations of Cuore: “the little schoolmistress with the red feather”*

*Cuore. Libro per ragazzi* first appeared in the bookstores of the Kingdom of Italy on 15 October 1886; by the end of the same year, the book had already been through 41 editions and requests had been received to translate it into leading foreign languages. The publisher Emilio Treves basked in the popularity of *Cuore*, stating in «L'Illustrazione Italiana» that it was «the great success of the year»<sup>4</sup>. However, *Cuore* was not only a best seller, but also a long seller. By 1913, over one million copies had been printed, while on the eve of the Second World War this figure had gone up to over two million copies<sup>5</sup>. De Amicis' *Cuore* continued to be an integral part of the education of young Italians at least until the late 1950s<sup>6</sup>, but – judging by the numerous film and television adaptations – the shadow cast by the work stretches much further into the present. Although De Amicis described a rich assortment of teachers in his novel, the same cannot be said for the film and television remakes, which have focused almost exclusively on the character of the “little schoolmistress with the red feather”. Indeed, despite offering diverse reinterpretations of De Amicis' novel, the film versions share this reduction in variety among the schoolmistresses at the Sezione Baretta in Turin<sup>7</sup>, who all seem to be merged into one character, that of the teacher «who has two pretty dimples in her cheeks, and who wears a large red feather on her little bonnet»<sup>8</sup>. This choice is understandable if we compare the historical timing of the novel, which was written towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and that of its adaptations for cinema and TV, all of which span the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. Between these two periods, societal perspectives on women underwent substantial changes. It is not surprising, therefore, that in place of the consumptive «schoolmistress of the upper first» – described by Enrico Bottini in his fictitious diary account of the 1881-82 school year as «plainly dressed and

<sup>3</sup> For further background on the use of cinema as a historical source cf. S. Polenghi, *Immagini per la memoria: il cinema come fonte storico-educativa*, in P. Malavasi, S. Polenghi, P.C. Rivoltella, *Cinema, pratiche formative, educazione*, Milano, Vita e Pensiero, 2005, pp. 19-49.

<sup>4</sup> P. Boero, G. Genovesi, *Cuore. De Amicis tra critica e utopia*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2009, posizione 1702 (edizione Kindle).

<sup>5</sup> M. Mosso, *I tempi del Cuore. Vita e lettere di Edmondo De Amicis a Emilio Treves*, Milano, Mondadori, 1925, pp. 370-371.

<sup>6</sup> S. Polenghi, *La scuola di ieri “vista” oggi. Le trasposizioni filmiche del libro Cuore nell'Italia repubblicana (1948-2001)*, in P. Alfieri (ed.), *Immagini dei nostri maestri. Memorie di scuola nel cinema e nella televisione dell'Italia repubblicana*, Roma, Armando Editore, 2019, p. 25.

<sup>7</sup> It has now been established that the boys' elementary school in the city of Turin that De Amicis drew his inspiration from was the *Sezione Moncenisio* at via Doragrossa 51, which the writer's own sons had attended.

<sup>8</sup> E. De Amicis, *Cuore. Libro per ragazzi*, Torino, Einaudi, 2018, p. 71.

her hair carelessly arranged, [with] less colour than she had last year [...], and some white hair»<sup>9</sup>, and reported dead in the diary entry of 28 June – the adapted versions have favoured the «always happy»<sup>10</sup> little schoolmistress with the red feather. Especially given that in two out of the three films in our analysis (leaving the animated version aside for now), the teacher falls – back – in love with Perboni, Enrico's third grade teacher. The directors and screenwriters<sup>11</sup> of the 1948 and 2001 adaptations – who, not coincidentally, were all men – must have perceived as unappealing both the drab first grade teacher and the «little nun» who was always dressed in dark colours, and was meek and shy, with such a small voice that she always seemed to be «murmuring prayers»<sup>12</sup> by comparison with that cheeky and intriguing red feather. I do not believe it incidental that the only version of *Cuore* in which the “little schoolmistress” does not find self-affirmation in her relationship with Master Perboni is that of 1984, directed by Luigi Comencini but scripted by the director with two women screenwriters: his daughter Cristina, who has always been involved in the struggle for gender equality, and Suso (Giovanna) Cecchi D'Amico<sup>13</sup>.

In Duilio Coletti's 1948 interpretation of *Cuore*<sup>14</sup>, it is the schoolmistress with the red feather who recounts the salient episodes of De Amicis' novel by sharing her memories with Enrico Amici (a seeming blend of Enrico Bottini and Edmondo De Amicis), her former student who has looked her up again after reading about her in a newspaper. Here reality and fantasy meet, given that the “real-life” schoolmistress with the red feather, who taught De Amicis' son Ugo and was said to have inspired the author's brief portrait of her, did become somewhat famous thanks to her fictitious counterpart. Many articles were written about Eugenia Barruero, her real name, during her lifetime, and when she died, a tribute to her was published on the cover page of the «Domenica del Corriere»<sup>15</sup>. An article by Ugo Zatterin published in «La Stampa» described the arrival of «Miss Eugenia» in Cinecittà, where Coletti's *Cuore* was being filmed: «Actors and actresses surrounded her full of curiosity, and the old lady entertained them»<sup>16</sup>. Barruero, however, confessed that she could barely remember the famous bonnet and that the notorious red feather was actually brown<sup>17</sup>. Thus, Maria Mercader – who played the part of the “schoolmistress” – had the opportunity to “study” Barruero close up. In the film, the schoolmistress character is called Clotilde Serra. Like her counterpart in the novel, she displays motherly affection

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>11</sup> *Cuore* (1948): director Duilio Coletti, screenwriters Oreste Biancoli, Gaspare Cataldo, Adolfo Franci, Vittorio De Sica; *Cuore* (2001): director Maurizio Zaccaro, screenwriters Massimo De Rita, Mario Falcone.

<sup>12</sup> De Amicis, *Cuore*, cit., p. 71.

<sup>13</sup> For further background on this leading Italian screenwriter cf. S. Cecchi D'Amico, *Storie di cinema (e d'altro) raccontate a Margherita D'Amico*, Milano, Bompiani, 2002.

<sup>14</sup> Produced by S.A.F.I.R. (Società Anonima Film Italiani Roma), it was distributed by E.N.I.C. (Ente Nazionale Industrie Cinematografiche). For a more detailed presentation, see P. Mereghetti (ed.), *Dizionario dei film*, Milano, Baldini & Castoldi, 1995, p. 386; P. Boero, D. Boero, *La letteratura per l'infanzia in cento film*, Genova, Le Mani, 2008, pp. 77-79; Polenghi, *La scuola di ieri “vista” oggi*, cit., pp. 29-32.

<sup>15</sup> «La Domenica del Corriere», 28 aprile 1957, n.17, 59, p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> Ugo Zatterin, È arrivata a Roma la maestra di “Cuore”, «La Stampa», 11 novembre 1947, p. 3.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*



towards her pupils: she remembers their names years later, welcomes and consoles the children who are on their first day at school, and caresses the older ones. For the nineteenth-century bourgeois world, the woman's "essential function" was motherhood, and the maternal figure was universally exalted in literature, journalism, and pedagogical, moral, and religious treatises. The schoolmistress, the idealized, non-domestic continuation of the mother, had similar traits to her, such as sweetness, understanding, and patience, but also dimensions such as self-sacrifice and a vocational calling<sup>18</sup>. The female schoolteacher acted as a «link between the maternal and the civic dimensions»<sup>19</sup>. This view, however, lasted beyond the nineteenth century, transferring its moral codes to the first half of the twentieth, until the rebellions of 1968 and the feminist movement. Thus, Coletti's "little schoolmistress" reflects the historical condition of women teachers in the nineteenth century, but also – partly – in the early twentieth century, the period in which the film was made. To the lieutenant who courts her and seems to want to marry her, Clotilde declares that she is the mother of thirty-six children, her pupils. Meanwhile, on learning that the young woman is to be married, Vittorio De Sica in the role of Master Perboni is sad – not just because he is secretly in love with Clotilde – but also because the school will thereby lose a good teacher, in keeping with social norms dictating that women could not be both workers and homemakers. The film, like the book, devotes little or no attention to the educational methods used by the schoolmistress, apart from a good-natured remark by Perboni who jokingly reproaches her for teaching with stereotypes, setting essay titles such as «On a beautiful spring day» or «It is snowing heavily» or other weather-related clichés. However, the young woman displays resourcefulness in defending said schoolmaster, who is suspended from his teaching post on account of his socialist ideals. Specifically, she approaches the member of parliament Pestelli, the father of one of her pupils, complaining about the treatment received by her colleague, who is subsequently reinstated. The teacher with the red feather and Perboni get engaged but the marriage never comes to pass because the schoolmaster is conscripted to fight in the first war in Ethiopia, ultimately meeting his death in Africa<sup>20</sup>. The little schoolmistress with the red feather remains a spinster, like Eugenia Barruero, faithful to the memory of Master Perboni.

In 1984, the director Luigi Comencini, on the strength of his success with *Le avventure di Pinocchio* (1972), tackled the other classic of Italian children's literature, *Cuore*. The resulting series in six parts was co-produced by Rai 2, the French channel Antenne 2, and Swiss broadcaster RTSI. It was warmly received by audiences and critics alike<sup>21</sup>. Characterized by a high-quality screenplay and a historically accurate portrayal

<sup>18</sup> C. Covato, *Educata ad educare: ruolo materno ed itinerari formativi*, in Soldani (ed.), *L'educazione delle donne*, cit., p. 133.

<sup>19</sup> S. Soldani, *Maestre d'Italia*, in Groppi (ed.), *Il lavoro delle donne*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1996, p. 370.

<sup>20</sup> As observed by Simonetta Polenghi «the events in the book are shifted to a decade later, from 1881-82 to 1893-94, so as to incorporate the war in Abyssinia into the plot [...]. This modification meant that the contents of the book could be updated» (cit. in Polenghi, *La scuola di ieri "vista" oggi*, cit., pp. 30-31).

<sup>21</sup> For more in-depth background on the production, cf. *ibid.*, pp. 36-41; A. Grasso, *Storia della televisione italiana*, Milano, Garzanti, 1992, pp. 430-431; Boero, Boero, *La letteratura per l'infanzia in cento film*, cit., p.

of Turin, the series was set at a later period than was the novel, and specifically in the years 1898-99. This meant that the Great War, in which former students of the Sezione Baretti would participate as soldiers, could be included in the story. The series unfolds in tandem with the memories of Enrico who, while on his way to the front, meets some of his former classmates and – while home on leave – goes to visit Master Perboni, who has always been a socialist and supporter of neutralism. As earlier stated, the screenplay by the Comencini father and daughter and Suso Cecchi D'Amico is the only one that does not incorporate a love story between the little schoolmistress with the red feather, in this production played by Giuliana De Sio, and Master Perboni, played here by Johnny Dorelli. The young schoolmistress is portrayed in a more contemporary light than in the film by Coletti. After all, the public addressed by Comencini was no longer that of the post-war period but a public that had become more sophisticated as a result of the economic boom and the 1968 and civil rights movements. Nevertheless, there is little trace of feminism in the production, although this is the only film adaptation in which the schoolmistress manages to hold her own against Perboni in competing for the affection of the pupils, even though she features relatively little in the screenplay. From an educational point of view, this version of the “little schoolmistress” comes across as decidedly more modern, so much so that – when she is called to sub in Enrico’s class when Perboni is out sick – she uses games to teach mathematics and jokes with the children while reciting poetry, given that «study should also be fun». Unlike those of Coletti’s Clotilde, an essay assignment given by Comencini’s schoolmistress is designed to help her get to know her pupils and, significantly, is entitled “A description of myself”. The experiments of Gianni Rodari and Mario Lodi, both of whom were known to the film director, had not been in vain. Furthermore, the schoolmistress is the only one who is able to find the “key to getting good” of Franti, defined by De Amicis, in the manner of Lombroso, as a born criminal. Embracing the teaching of Umberto Eco, who in 1962 wrote *Elogio di Franti*<sup>22</sup>, Comencini’s little schoolmistress with the red feather encourages the young daredevil and tries to develop his sense of responsibility, even naming him class prefect. Franti still ends up in a reformatory but, in a departure from De Amicis’ original storyline, seeks to redeem himself by signing up to fight in the Great War, thus meeting his death. Comencini also involves the schoolmistress with the red feather in the episode with the elderly gentleman who is injured by a flying snowball. In the screenplay, it is the teacher, not Garrone, who takes Garoffi’s defense against the adults who are ragign against the boy. While the schoolmistress’ character in this series is in line with the sickly-sweet representation offered to us by De Amicis – especially in the episode with the young chimney sweep, when the teacher gets her face black by kissing the little boy – the youthful schoolmistress brought to the television screen by De Sio also displays new traits, thus offering a hint of a new imaginary.

78; M. Tortora, *Primi schermi di Cuore*, Soveria Mannelli, Rubbettino, 2007; A. Nobile, *Cuore in 120 anni di critica deamicisiana*, Roma, Aracne, 2009, pp. 71-76; A. Boschi, *De Amicis al cinema: la scuola di Cuore nella filmografia italiana*, in L. Bellatalla, G. Genovesi, E. Marescotti (edd.), *La scuola nell’Italia unita. 150 anni di storia*, Bologna, Cleup, 2012, pp. 97-105.

<sup>22</sup> U. Eco, *Elogio di Franti*, in De Amicis, *Cuore*, cit., pp. 355-364.

The six episodes in director Maurizio Zaccaro's reinterpretation of *Cuore*, aired in 2001, during prime time on Canale 5, depart even more radically from De Amicis' novel. The series was well received, although it was not as spectacular a success as Comencini's version<sup>23</sup>. The plot was truly a "free adaptation" of De Amicis' novel: in this remake, Master Giulio Perboni (played by Giulio Scarpati in this case) is married to a woman who is mentally ill. Following his wife's death, he initiates a romantic relationship with the schoolmistress with the red feather (played by Anna Valle), who has always been in love with him. Original additions to the plot include Perboni's opium addiction and his two suspensions from the school – one for having organized a football match between the boys of the *Sezione Moncenisio* and their peers at a private school, and the other for sheltering Garrone's father who was wanted by the law for organizing a railway workers' strike. Franti's character is also given a major overhaul and transformed from a rebel to a hero. Even the character of the schoolmistress – who features abundantly in the screenplay – takes on unprecedented facets. Margherita Capuano, the new fictitious name given to the female teacher, is independent by nature and unwilling to submit to social norms. She confides in Perboni that she came to Turin from Sicily. Her father, a cooper, had decided to marry her off to a man much older than her, a marriage the girl rejected, causing an irreparable rift between her and her parent. Margherita's large family had then emigrated to America, while she herself had chosen to stay in Italy and to support herself by working as a teacher. Capuano further asserts her independence by leaving her accommodation in a residence run by nuns to go and live alone. However, the screenplay waters down this decision by having her aunt live in the apartment above hers, in contrast with the real-life nineteenth-century conditions of many teachers who were forced to live alone because they had found work far away from their homeplaces. In any case, both the headteacher of the *Sezione Moncenisio* (Leo Gullotta) and Maestro Perboni warn Margherita that she may be targeted by gossips over this decision. Overall, however, the subversive impetus of Zaccaro's schoolmistress with the red feather is entirely channelled into the personal and romantic sphere, while at school she is portrayed as submissive and a loving mother towards her pupils, to the extent of entreating Perboni to be gentle with them. Again, the teacher's educational role is represented more in terms of feelings than in relation to the transmission of knowledge, thus remaining close to the nineteenth-century image conveyed by De Amicis. In short, while contemporary society requires female teachers to be more modern from a private and sentimental point of view, it does not demand such a big change in how they approach their professional role. Nevertheless, something has changed. The divide between Coletti's *Cuore* and that of Zaccaro is made evident by the ending of the 2001 series. While Perboni had thought that Clotilde would abandon school for home on becoming a wife, by the end of Zaccaro's series, the schoolmistress played by Anna Valle is married, pregnant, and sharing with her diary her hopes for the

<sup>23</sup> For a detailed treatment of the TV series, cf. S. Polenghi, *La scuola di ieri "vista" oggi*, cit., pp. 41-44; M. Buonanno (edd.), *Storie memorie. La fiction italiana, l'Italia nella fiction. Anno quattordicesimo*, Roma, Rai Eri, 2003, pp. 257-259; D.E. Viganò, *Cari maestri. Da Susanne Bier a Gianni Amelio i registi si interrogano sull'importanza dell'educazione*, Assisi, Cittadella Editrice, 2011, pp. 32-33.

future pupils – each with his or her own story – who will enter her life in the years to come. Evidently it had become difficult by 2001 for viewers to accept, even in relation to the past, that social norms might force women to choose between motherhood and working outside the home.

The animated version of De Amicis' *Cuore* is a different matter. The Japanese cartoon series, produced in 1981 by Nippon Animation was entitled *The Story of Cuore, School of Love* and ran for twenty-six episodes. Despite some poetic license, the series is relatively faithful to the novel, so much so that the teacher protagonist is actually Enrico's upper first school mistress, now given the surname Delcati. Always dressed in black, with a large nose and dark circles under her eyes, she is not beautiful but, like her counterpart in the novel, is capable of winning deep affection from the boys. The anime opens with Enrico, still on vacation, reading a letter sent to him by Miss Delcati. As he reads, an image of the woman appears in the background, with her hair tied up, and a tender, mournful gaze. In the initial sequences, the teacher is surrounded by "her" children who, jubilant, pull her along by arms. The same joy is reflected in the faces of the boys when Miss Delcati – who is never referred to as "Teacher" in the cartoon – is sent to Enrico's class to substitute Perboni. However, due to Franti's pranks, she is forced to confess to the headteacher that she is unable to manage the pupils, demonstrating – once again – the gap between the image of the female teacher and that of the male teacher. Thus, the traditional 19<sup>th</sup>-century notion of women as the "weaker sex" persisted in the anime by Nippon Animation and was still being conveyed to children in the 1980s.

## 2. *The schoolmistress prey to prejudice and sexual harassment: Il romanzo di un maestro and La maestra degli operai*

In 1959, the director Mario Landi was inspired by the novel *Il romanzo di un maestro* (1890) to make a five-part drama of the same title to be broadcast by *Programma Nazionale*, the broadcasting company today known as Rai<sup>24</sup>. The TV series, which represented the struggles of male teacher Emilio Ratti (Armando Francioli) as he grapples with his hopes and disappointments in both the personal and professional spheres, focused on three women elementary school teachers: Mrs. Falbrizio (Paola Borboni), who represents the category of unqualified schoolteachers, Felicita Ratti (Lucilla Morlacchi), a passionate and enterprising schoolmistress, and Faustina Galli (Cosetta Greco), a teacher who is persecuted by gossip and tormented by unwanted advances from the mayor of Altarana. The screenwriters, Anna Maria Rimoaldi and Grazia Dore, offered a masterly outline of the historical and social circumstances of teachers in the period in question, drawing on

<sup>24</sup> For further background, cf. E.C., *Il romanzo di un maestro di Edmondo De Amicis*, «Radiocorriere TV. Settimanale della radio e della televisione», n. 36, 12-18 April 1959, pp. 10 and 46; F. Targhetta, *Il romanzo di un maestro di Edmondo De Amicis: le ragioni della sua recente riscoperta*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. XI, n. 2, 2016, pp. 457-464.

representative female figures from De Amicis' *Cuore*. Mrs. Falbrizio, for example, was one of the teachers who had not complied with the new requirements introduced by the Ministry and – hence – were replaced by the “licensed” graduates of the *Scuola Normale*. Falbrizio, a forty-eight-year-old widow with three dependent children, is subjected, at the mayor's behest, to a visit from a ministerial inspector who reports that her pupils barely know how to read and spend most of their time at school sewing. Although she is much loved by her pupils, Falbrizio is removed from the school, returning at the end of the series to show her support for her colleague Galli in the context of her disgraceful treatment by the mayor.

Emilio's cousin, Felicita Ratti, portrays the enthusiastic teacher with a strong calling to the profession. Her conversations with her cousin, with whom she is secretly in love, reveal her story: she first taught in a small town in Sicily, then in a mountain village in Piedmont and, finally, in America among Italian emigrants. To reinforce the vocational nature of Felicita's choices, the young woman is not the daughter of a penniless violinist, as in De Amicis's novel, practically forcing her to become a teacher, but comes from a loving and stereotypically middle-class family.

The co-protagonist of the drama, however, is the teacher Faustina Galli who, having studied for a teacher's license out of personal interest, finds herself having to use it to earn a living. Her life has been ruined by her sister's running off with a man, an event that led to Faustina's engagement being broken off. This teacher, who is beautiful and elegant, was hired by the mayor of Altarana based on her photograph and not due to her qualifications, although “the license” was the official justification for employing her. Although she is discrete and keeps her distance from Master Ratti, who is in love with her, Faustina's attractiveness turns out to be a constant source of trouble for her: she attracts the attention of the mayor who attempts to kiss her, and – when she rejects him – threatens to make public the scandal caused by her sister. She also arouses the envy of the women of the town who start a petition to get her removed from her teaching post. Faustina, now looked down upon by the very pupils who previously adored her, is suspended. Displaying great dignity, the schoolmistress endures all privations and gossip, until, thanks to a letter published by Ratti in a teachers' journal and a meeting with the Superintendent to whom the young woman goes to plead her case, she is finally reinstated. In the case of this schoolmistress, her private life eclipses the dimension of her teaching and education, as happened in real life to Italia Donati, a case that De Amicis must have been familiar with.

*La maestrina degli operai* also features a main character who is forced to deal with harassment from a male world that struggles to respect not only the role of female teachers but also women in general. In 1970, this De Amicis novel was televised, under the direction of Guglielmo Morandi based on screenplay by Giuseppe Patroni Griffi<sup>25</sup>. Enrica Varetti (Mariella Zanetti), a teacher from an upper-class social background, is put in charge of teaching night classes for male students by the school where she works.

<sup>25</sup> For further background, cf. A. Bentoglio (ed.), *Giuseppe Patroni Griffi e il suo teatro. Settimana del teatro, 5-9 maggio 1997*, Roma, Bulzoni, 1998, p. 221.

The young woman experiences this task as a “nuisance” and a source of great distress. In particular, she is terrified of a man with a bad reputation, Muroi (Luciano Virgilio), who has been spying on her for some time. De Amicis describes the teacher as marked by a «childish grace» and a «dignified timidity»<sup>26</sup>, a characterization that was respected by the actress chosen to play Varetti in the television drama. The young woman, after a first lesson that gives her hope, is unable to stand up to the turbulent class, who, day after day, become increasingly disrespectful towards her, in a crescendo of sexual allusions that culminate in a text handed to her by Muroi to be corrected. The schoolteacher, shocked and offended, tears it up exclaiming: «Go back to your seat, please. And keep certain expressions for other women, who are worthy of you, who are equal to you. Remember that I am the teacher». Despite this attempt to reaffirm her role, Varetti lacks the necessary strength of character to win out in such a difficult situation. Among other issues, she is not even supported by her female colleagues who constantly reproach her for being high-born and for lacking empathy with the working class. The situation worsens when Muroi attempts to kiss the schoolmistress, with whom he has fallen in love. Paradoxically, in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century novel, the erotic tension is far more pronounced than in the 1970 drama; the fact that the series was aired on national television likely led to the toning down of De Amicis’ original portrayal. Muroi’s jealousy leads to a tragic ending. The man is killed by a group of classmates, but on his death bed he obtains the longed-for kiss from Varetti, who, called in by Muroi’s elderly mother, kisses him so that he may die in peace with God. The redeeming function of the woman, which was dear to the bourgeoisie of the nineteenth century, is also conveyed by Morandi’s screenplay, which drew very little from the 1970s.

### 3. Amore e ginnastica: *the manly schoolmistress*

De Amicis presented the female schoolteacher Maria Pedani, the protagonist of *Amore e ginnastica* (1892), as «a male character»<sup>27</sup>. In 1973, the novella was adapted for cinema by the film director Luigi Filippo D’Amico, who wrote the screenplay himself with the help of Suso Cecchi D’Amico and Tullio Pinelli<sup>28</sup>. «Stampa Sera» announced the film’s cinema debut, emphasizing that it had been shot on location in Turin and that *Amore e ginnastica* had been integrated with content from another of De Amicis’ novels, *La maestrina degli operai*<sup>29</sup>. This strange admixture featured two lady teachers who share an apartment, Maria Pedani (Senta Berger) – a great promoter of gymnastics – and Elena Zibelli (Adriana Asti), who in the book offers a dull counterpoint to her colleague, but in the film – while retaining this function – also takes on the role of the schoolmistress who

<sup>26</sup> E. De Amicis, *Amore e ginnastica e altri racconti*, Milano, BUR, 1986, p. 205.

<sup>27</sup> E. De Amicis, *Amore e ginnastica*, Bagno a Ripoli, Passigli Editore, 2009, p. 20.

<sup>28</sup> For further background, cf. Mereghetti (ed.), *Dizionario dei film*, cit., p. 79; R. Ubbidente, *L’officina del poeta. Studi su Edmondo De Amicis*, Berlin, Frank & Timme, 2013, pp. 272-276.

<sup>29</sup> *Cinema. Le prime*, «Stampa Sera», 6 September 1973, p. 7.



faces harassment from her worker students. Pedani, gymnastics lover and disciple of the gymnasiarch Emilio Baumann, who saw physical activity as crucial for girls as well as boys, fights – following the introduction of gymnastics in elementary schools under the De Sanctis law (1878) – for physical education to be viewed as equal to other school subjects, given its importance for health and its educational value. An awkward ex-seminarian Simone Celzani (Lino Capolicchio) who lives in the same building, falls in love with Pedani, who is an independent-minded and energetic young woman. The enterprising teacher is not afraid to adopt countercultural positions, for example she recommends her students not to wear a corset, at least in the gym. A gymnastics display that she organizes to demonstrate the benefits of movement “in anaemic young girls”, ends by causing great scandal. This is because – after performing traditional bodyweight and hoop exercises – in a final gymnastic sequence, the girls’ movements lead them to show their knickers under their bulky clothes. However, Pedani fights on, pushing back against criticism, to the extent that she makes a name for herself in the emergent gymnastics movement. In the film, even the Minister of Public Education comes to attend one of her lessons, congratulating her on defending “the new teaching post” to the bitter end. Pedani is asked to present a report at the First National Pedagogical Congress, where positions for and against gymnastics clash. The report is very well received. Moral strength and physical vigour go hand in hand in Schoolmistress Pedani. However, the adjectives that are used to characterize the young woman are “tomboyish” or “manly”, as though to deny that energy and power can be female characteristics. Her irrepressible physicality disturbs the men in her neighbourhood, but Pedani does not seem to notice, consumed as she is by her love for her sacred gymnastics. Celzani is ignored by the schoolmistress and mocked by other neighbours, who are convinced that Pedani, with her manly nature, is not interested in marriage but wishes to remain free «in body and soul». «Her mission» – a colleague says of her – «is not to have children, but to straighten up other people’s children». Once again, female teaching was viewed as an exclusive vocation that precluded women from marrying. After all, as Pedani’s colleague Zibelli also explains, the work of a teacher is a mission that must be put before all else. Save embarking on an all-out quest to find someone to marry her, and getting angry with Pedani who appears to steal all her potential suitors. However, Zibelli’s somewhat caricatured character takes on an extra dimension vis-à-vis the novella by being blended with the character of the workers’ schoolmistress. Unlike in De Amicis’ original work and Mario Landi’s film, the teacher in this case is enthusiastic about teaching adults, but she soon changes her mind when one of her pupils harasses her in class, even going so far as to kiss her. In *Amore e ginnastica*, however, the tension is tempered by a vein of irony that runs through the entire film. The film is also pervaded by a sort of voyeurism, such as in a scene where Pedani is demonstrating to her elderly neighbour how to breathe correctly, naively unbuttoning her jacket and eliciting a seductive effect on both the man and her suitor Celzani, who is spying on her through the keyhole. Indeed, Italo Calvino described this novel as the «richest in humour, malice, and sensuality»<sup>30</sup> among De Amicis’ writings. The film sets the seal upon this view via the very

<sup>30</sup> I. Calvino, *Nota introduttiva*, in E. De Amicis, *Amore e ginnastica*, Torino, Einaudi, 1971.



long final kiss that officialises the engagement between the schoolmistress Pedani and her suitor Simone Celzani. *Amore e ginnastica* offers us a taste of some of the characteristics of the sensual teacher in the Italian “commedia sexy” genre, which concomitantly – in the early 1970s – was beginning its ascent to popularity, reflecting an attempt to bring back the traditional male role then being challenged by feminism.



# Collective and Public School Memory: the Case of Professor Kosta Vujić<sup>1</sup>

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## *Introduction*

Professor Kosta Vujić's *Hat* is a story that has been adapted into a film (1972, 2012), a book (1983), and a television series (2012) by writer and playwright Milovan Vitezović. It follows the adventures of the class of high school graduates and their teacher, Kosta Vujić, based on true events and personalities from Serbian education in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. This paper explores the various forms of individual, collective, and public school memories associated with these events and individuals.

In this study, we examine school memories related to Professor Kosta Vujić, specifically «understanding what today's society knows, or thinks it knows, about the schools of the past, and how close this is to the truth or is the result of prejudices and stereotypes...»<sup>2</sup>. Halbwachs suggests that collective memory should be investigated as a unique representation of the past, grounded in present-day interests<sup>3</sup>. Furthermore, we attempt to determine the functions this memory achieves today in public discourse. To accomplish this, we argue that «the collective memory can only be studied as a “process”, since it consists of a social reconstruction of the past deriving from the fusion of the “experienced school past” (recalled by direct participants) and the “constructed school past” (recalled by observers, readers and spectators)»<sup>4</sup>.

Bearing in mind that «a historical analysis must take into account the question of the audience [...] if we want to check how the film interpreted the collective school memory or influenced it»<sup>5</sup>, we will examine the extent and content of online comments related to the film and series, of course, without neglecting other relevant sources. Comments represent a genre for expressing opinions, «creative thinking» which allows providing

<sup>1</sup> This research is financed by the Ministry of the science Republic of Serbia, agreement nr. 451-03-47/2023-01/200163 (Faculty of Philosophy – Belgrade University).

<sup>2</sup> J. Meda, A. Viñao, *School Memory: Historiographical Balance and Heuristics Perspectives*, in C. Yanes-Cabrera, J. Meda, A. Viñao (edd.), *School Memories: New Trends in the History of Education*, Cham, Springer, 2017, pp. 1-9.

<sup>3</sup> I. Žeželj, *Prošlost koje nije bilo: Kako ulepšavamo lična i kolektivna sećanja*, Beograd, Institut za Psihologiju, 2022, p. 16; M. Halbwachs, *On collective memory*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1992, p. 40.

<sup>4</sup> Meda, Viñao, *School Memory: Historiographical Balance and Heuristics Perspectives*, cit., p. 5.

<sup>5</sup> S. Polenghi, *Remembering School Through Movies: The Films of the Book Cuore (1886) in Republican Italy*, in C. Yanes-Cabrera, J. Meda, A. Viñao (edd.), *School Memories*, cit., p. 204.

information as well as explaining, promoting, or criticising<sup>6</sup>. The main characteristics of online comments are quick reactions, timeliness, specificity, and conciseness of the text. In this sense, we view comments as a reflection of the immediate connection between the individual and the collective. In the concluding part of the paper, we will consider how this memory can be interpreted.

### 1. *Professor Kosta Vujić: historical facts and individual school memories*

Kosta Vujić was born in 1829 in Zemun and started his teaching career in 1857 at the Belgrade Gymnasium<sup>7</sup>. He retired in 1889 as a professor at the Second Belgrade Gymnasium and passed away in 1909. At that time, the gymnasium in Serbia was a secondary school whose primary task was to prepare students for further education. During the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the profile of gymnasiums was still developing. Due to a lack of specialised pedagogical staff for certain subjects, teachers taught subjects for which they did not have adequate education. In addition, the place of service also depended on the school's needs, so teachers moved from one gymnasium to another. Kosta Vujić worked during his career in Belgrade, Kragujevac, Požarevac, Zaječar, Negotin, and Šabac. He taught German and Serbian language, Serbian history, history of Serbian literature, and church singing, and was a school choir conductor in Kragujevac.

The event that represented a turning point in Vujić's pedagogical attitude occurred in 1870 at the First Belgrade Gymnasium. It is possible to reconstruct that event based on archival sources and the memories of the then-student Sava Paunović. Until 1870, the German language was taught to sixth-grade students by Professor Aleksandar Čvarković – who was ill, old, and known for his lenient grading. After his retirement, Kosta Vujić came, who was strict in comparison to his predecessor and unjust in the students' opinion<sup>8</sup>. The further development of the situation is described in archival documents. The sixth-grade students rebelled by making noise by stomping their feet on the ground as soon as Professor Vujić entered the classroom. As a consequence, the school administration punished all the students in that class – seven were expelled from school, while the rest were punished with detention and deprivation of benefits. According to the student's assessment, the punishment was too severe and unfair, so they decided to raise the protest to a higher level – to boycott Professor Vujić's lectures and to send a written request to the Minister of Education and Church Affairs to remove all the unfairly imposed penalties. In the letter they sent to the minister, among other things, it is stated that their dignity did not allow them to «endure rude behaviour» towards themselves, and they all agreed

<sup>6</sup> J. Kleut, *Ja (ni)sam bot: Komentari čitalaca kao žanr participacije u digitalnom prostoru*, Novi Sad, Filozofski Fakultet – Univerzitet u Novom Sadu, 2020, p. 28.

<sup>7</sup> V. Grujić, *Gimnazijsko obrazovanje u Srbiji do Prvog Svetskog*, Beograd, SANU, 1997, p. 57.

<sup>8</sup> *Spomenica stogodišnjice Prve muške gimnazije u Beogradu, 1839-1939*, Beograd, Štamparija Drag. Gregorića, 1939, p. 176.

that they «only expressed dissatisfaction with the teacher»<sup>9</sup>. After that, Kosta Vujić calmed down and interested his students and fellow citizens with his bohemian tendencies<sup>10</sup>.

The most complete and vivid memory of this professor was left by Mihailo Petrović Alas, whom Professor Vujić taught the German language. He states that his students called the old professor Gida and that they listened to stories about him being friends with Branko Radičević. Petrović notes his pedagogical attitude:

The old and original teacher whom we all loved even though we didn't learn anything from him... we recognised that he is a good and soulful man who understands children and loves their mischief, even if there was exaggeration in them, and that he didn't worry too much about how much the students would learn in his classes<sup>11</sup>.

The students who wanted to learn German had to make an effort themselves, but they could always get support whenever they asked Professor Vujić for explanations.

Petrović also shares memories of other professors, but the part of those memories that pertain to Vujić served as the basis for a TV drama, book, and screenplay entitled *The Hat of Professor Kosta Vujić*, written by Milovan Vitezović.

## 2. *The Hat of Professor Kosta Vujić and the creation of the collective school memory*

*The Hat of Professor Kosta Vujić* is the title of the TV drama, book, and screenplay by Milovan Vitezović. The work began in 1969 when the editors of the Drama Program of Television Belgrade invited Vitezović to an internal competition for a TV drama, asking him to do something «where he could be himself»<sup>12</sup>. According to Vitezović, he thought about what to write for days. When he accidentally found a record book of the First Male Belgrade Gymnasium in an antiquarian bookstore, he was drawn to Mihailo Petrović Alas's memory of the unusual professor Vujić, and he decided to write about him. Thus, the TV drama directed by Vladimir Andrić was created and first aired in 1971<sup>13</sup>. The famous actor Pavle Vujisić played the role of Professor Kosta Vujić. Vitezović turned the drama into a novel in 1983, for which he received the *Politikin Zabavnik* award<sup>14</sup>. The novel has had seventeen editions in Serbian, two editions in Greek, and one in Hebrew to this date. A second version of the film was made based on Vitezović's screenplay in 2012, directed by Zdravko Šotra, with actor Aleksandar Berček playing the role of Kosta Vujić. In the same year, eight fifty-minute episodes were made from the filmed material.

<sup>9</sup> V. Tešić, *Moralno vaspitanje u školama Srbije (1830-1878)*, Beograd, ZUNS, 1974, p. 357.

<sup>10</sup> *Spomenica stogodišnjice Prve muške gimnazije u Beogradu*, cit., p. 176.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 298.

<sup>12</sup> *Svako ima svoga Kostu*, «Politikin Zabavnik», februar 1984, p. 16.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> This is award given for children's and youth literature since 1979, and it has been awarded 44 times to date.

The plot takes place in the spring of 1886. The story follows the adventures of one class of high school graduates and their class teacher, Kosta Vujić, who is about to retire. Vujić was educated in Vienna and was a good friend of the famous and beloved poet Branko Radičević. He is an original professor because his pedagogical attitude towards his students is based on love, his lifestyle, elegant hats, a special organisation of living space, a gourmet attitude, and great love for nature. His communication with students is sincere, open, tolerant, and full of understanding for students' pranks, love troubles, and artistic attempts. For example, as a disciplinary measure in cases of inappropriate behaviour by a student, he obliges the student to donate a book to the library.

He knew his students so well that he never knew exactly what awaited him in the class. For years, they persistently accustomed him to expect only the unexpected from them. Only if something is impossible, only then is it possible for them, but as a class teacher, he could not complain; they were good students. Everything was going well for them. Now they are high school graduates and know where the sky stands. The only thing is that they don't collapse the sky, he thought so many times, convinced they can do that too<sup>15</sup>.

In the following, we will take a closer look at the relationship between the facts relevant to our topic and the fiction in the studied phenomenon.

Professor Kosta Vujić was educated in Zemun, Sremski Karlovci, and Belgrade<sup>16</sup>. According to Vitezović's narrative, he also studied in Vienna. This detail is significant because his experiences in Vienna are emphasised in the series, and Vienna was a centre where the Serbian intellectual elite gathered and studied abroad. According to the book Vujić retired in 1886 as the professor of the First Belgrade Gymnasium; the fact is that he retired as the professor of the Second Belgrade Gymnasium in 1889.

In the novel and drama, Kosta Vujić is portrayed as a friend of the Serbian poet Branko Radičević, and this friendship is emphasised. However, this is inaccurate information that seems to have not been refuted by Vujić himself. Mihailo Petrović stated that his students had heard about this friendship. The recollection of Serbian writer Branislav Nušić of an accidental meeting with Professor Vujić confirms this<sup>17</sup>. Branko Radičević was a famous and beloved Serbian poet who died of tuberculosis in Vienna in 1853. One of this poet's friends was Kosta Vuić, born in Zemun and a medical student in Vienna. He later also fell ill with the same disease and passed away. Therefore, Professor Kosta Vujić could not have been a friend of Branko Radičević<sup>18</sup>.

The book «gathered» the most famous students of the First Belgrade Gymnasium who attended it in the 1880s but were not in the same class<sup>19</sup>. This fact can be determined

<sup>15</sup> M. Vitezović, *Šešir profesora Koste Vujića*, Beograd, Srpska književna zadruga, 1991, p. 154.

<sup>16</sup> Grujić, *Gimnazijsko obrazovanje u Srbiji do Prvog Svetskog*, cit., p. 57.

<sup>17</sup> Ц. Зузорић у Манежу, Ризница српска: «Причање Бранислава Нушића на Шантићевом вечеру», <http://www.riznicasrpska.net/> (last access: 12.12.2022).

<sup>18</sup> [https://digitalna.nb.rs/view/URN:NB:RS:SD\\_DBBF8191E59823DBD747FA1965AD240C-1900-02-B008](https://digitalna.nb.rs/view/URN:NB:RS:SD_DBBF8191E59823DBD747FA1965AD240C-1900-02-B008) (last access: 12.12.2022).

<sup>19</sup> Jovan Cvijić (1865-1927), geographer, scientist. Jaša Prodanović (1867-1948), politician, journalist, writer. Ljubomir Stojanović (1860-1930), philologist, politician. Mihailo Petrović Alas (1868-1943), mathematician, university professor. Pavle Popović (1868-1939), literary historian, professor and rector of

by examining the lists of students in the monograph of the school, which Vitezović used as his primary source for the story. This means that Vujić couldn't have been their class teacher.

The fact is that other professors were appreciated for the scientific knowledge they imparted and their pedagogical attitude towards students. In his recollections, Mihailo Petrović divides all of the professors he encountered into three groups: those who made exceptional contributions to their students' achievements, influencing their acquisition of knowledge and the development of their love for science through their pedagogical stance and work. Examples of such professors include Miloš Zečević, a historian, and Marko Leko, a chemist. The second group consists of professors not worth remembering, primarily those who behaved poorly towards their students. The third group is made up of professors from whom nothing could be learned but who were good people, and Vujić falls into this category<sup>20</sup>.

Vitezović notes that after the TV drama produced in 1971, he continued to research the life and times of Vujić. He highlights that he spent ten years gathering data and investigating biographies, records, memories, and other sources for the purposes of the book. He describes his book as «an attempt to convey his knowledge in one story that may not be true, but is believable in all respects so that the reader does not doubt its veracity for a moment»<sup>21</sup>.

### 3. *The key characteristics of collective memory in the case of Professor Kosta Vujić*

«To classify something as collective memory, it is not sufficient for it to be a mere story about the past of one's own group». Instead, collective memory is defined as a «shared set of representations of the past», with a «consensus among members of the group that these representations are mutually established and shared interpretations of the past»<sup>22</sup>. Essentially, collective memory is the understanding of the past shared among people. The extent and continuity of this sharing in the case of professor Vujić can be inferred from the following data: In the first week of its release in cinemas in 2012, the film *The Hat of Professor Kosta Vujić* was seen by about 100,000 viewers. Since 2016, free access has been granted to video works produced under the mentioned title<sup>23</sup>. The films combined have

the University of Belgrade. Milorad Mitrović (1867-1905), poet. Pera Todorović (1852-1907), journalist and writer.

<sup>20</sup> *Spomenica stogodišnjice Prve muške gimnazije u Beogradu*, cit., p. 297.

<sup>21</sup> *Svako ima svoga Kostu*, «Politikin Zabavnik», februar 1984, p. 17.

<sup>22</sup> Žeželj, *Prošlost koje nije bilo: Kako ulepšavamo lična i kolektivna sećanja*, cit.; L. Licata, O. Klein, *Regards croisés sur un passé commun: anciens colonisés et anciens coloniaux face à l'action belge au Congo*, in M. Sanchez-Mazas, L. Licata (edd.), *L'Autre: regards psychosociaux*, Grenoble, Presses Universitaires de Grenoble 2005, p. 243.

<sup>23</sup> TV drama (1971) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NWCZAMd1WL8&t=21s>; Film (2012) English subtitle [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i\\_K0Z3jeZL0&t=11s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i_K0Z3jeZL0&t=11s); Series (2018) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PpYBoXIYfc8&list=PLQHMDtzBxexuGOCzytrTZ2s1Zq4Pn54zG>. (last access: 24.03.2023).



about 11 million views, while each episode of the series averages around 600.000 views on YouTube<sup>24</sup>.

In the following text, we will pay closer attention to the qualitative aspects of collective memory, including its relationship to individual memory, centrality to identity, narrativity, and linearity<sup>25</sup>.

### 3.1 *Relations between individual and collective memory*

Žeželj considers the connection between personal and communal memory as either utilising memory-related artefacts or participating in cultural customs related to memory<sup>26</sup>. This pertains to how individuals interpret these practices and whether they influence their perspectives on the past. In our study, we can analyse the consumption of historical content in a video format by examining the comments left by viewers on the YouTube network. Under both versions of the film and series, there are 2.945 comments. The 2012 film has the most comments, with over 2.000, while each episode of the series has an average of about 110 comments. These comments mostly express a positive attitude towards the material viewed. Based on the form of expression, the comments can be roughly classified into five categories: those expressing emotions, comparisons between old and new, personal memories, questions, and discussions.

Many editions of the book, airing on TV channels, and providing open access on the internet can be considered memory practices that maintain continuity and thus influence the shaping of historical thinking across generations related to the era of Professor Vujić. «The more a film is seen, the more a book is read, throughout generations, the more that school memory is perceived as a shared memory of a group»<sup>27</sup>. How is this constant interaction between individual and collective achieved in the case of Vujić? The answer lies in the explanation of the decision of the «Politikin Zabavnik» jury: «Vitezović, in his work, which carries its own genre colour, easily established a harmony between the documentary and the poetic, building the character of a strange professor who is typical and unique, in whose image all teachers can somewhat recognise themselves»<sup>28</sup>. By creating such a character of the main protagonist, the author ensured a constant renewal of the relationship between individual and collective in collective memory. Each agent contributed their individual memories of schooling and teachers to the creation and revival of the character of Prof. Vujić<sup>29</sup>. They include their own individual school memories in the construction of Vujić's character. In this sense, the title of an interview

<sup>24</sup> Open access, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PpYBoXIYfc8> (last access: 24.03.2023).

<sup>25</sup> Žeželj, *Prošlost koje nije bilo: Kako ulepšavamo lična i kolektivna sećanja*, cit.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>27</sup> Polenghi, *Remembering School Through Movies*, cit., p. 204.

<sup>28</sup> *Svako ima svoga Kostu*, «Politikin Zabavnik», februar 1984, p. 17.

<sup>29</sup> The author of the work Vitezović, actor Pavle Vujisić, who starred in the first version of the film (1971), and Zdravko Šotra, the director of the film (2012).

with Vitezović regarding the aforementioned award is illustrative: «Everyone has their own Kosta». This connection is also evident in viewer comments, which even extend to the memories of the teachers about their practice in some cases, and in others, to the creation of alternative personal histories. For example:

1. I recognised myself in this professor, and unconsciously I also managed to connect with the high school graduates... I got chills at the part where he predicted their future... and I did the same thing in my last classes.
2. If I had professors like Vujić, I would have excellent grades and even willingly enrol in college. Unfortunately, there are none today; no one values a diploma or education as it was then.

### 3.2 *Central to identity, narrativity and linearity*

Collective memory is woven only with events significant to the group's image that fit the content of a shared group identity. Thus, only those events central to identity will be included<sup>30</sup>. In the case of remembering Professor Kosta Vujić, this attribute is also noticeable, but in an expanded form. The narrative about the professor points to the illustrious history of education as a potential new dimension of Serbian identity. The glorious past is mostly associated with rulers, the struggle for liberation, and great heroes in events related to it<sup>31</sup>.

Regarding the film and series screening in 2012, Vitezović made several statements to the media, indicating that he had questions about identity in mind. Through the story of «beautiful and irresistible generations who created the scientific, cultural, and political history of Serbia and conquered both readers and viewers because their story was about the romanticism of our people»<sup>32</sup>. He believed the film «would be for national pride», and that a good example from the past shown in the film would stimulate thinking in the following direction: «Well, we were like this; why don't we try again?»<sup>33</sup>. He expected the film and series to be «a balm for our souls, and on this occasion, they will awaken hope and even the desire for renewal»<sup>34</sup>.

Vitezović aimed to activate collective nostalgia in readers and viewers, believing that nostalgia for the group's past represents a «self-referential feeling – regulates the relationship towards the own group» and «contributes to the experience of the group's

<sup>30</sup> Žeželj, *Prošlost koje nije bilo: Kako ulepšavamo lična i kolektivna sećanja*, cit., p. 18; L. Licata, O. Klein, *Regards croisés sur un passé commun*, cit., p. 243.

<sup>31</sup> A. Ilić, *Udžbenici i nacionalno vaspitanje u Srbiji (1878-1918)*, Beograd, Filozofski Fakultet, 2010; A. Pavlović, A. Ilić Rajković, *National Romanticism in Serbian Education: Comparing Romantic-National and Recent Serbian History Textbooks*, in I. Cvejić, P. Krstić, N. Lacković, O. Nikolić (edd.), *Liberating Education: What from, What for?* Beograd, Institut za Filozofiju i Društvenu Teoriju, 2021, pp. 223-243.

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.danas.rs/vesti/drustvo/covek-intelektualne-vrline/> (last access: 24.03.2023).

<sup>33</sup> [https://www.glassrpske.com/cir/kultura/kultura\\_vijesti/milovan-vitezovic-film-sesir-za-nacionalni-ponos/68845](https://www.glassrpske.com/cir/kultura/kultura_vijesti/milovan-vitezovic-film-sesir-za-nacionalni-ponos/68845) (last access: 24.03.2023).

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.danas.rs/vesti/drustvo/covek-intelektualne-vrline/> (last access: 24.03.2023).

continuity»<sup>35</sup>. A significant number of comments left by viewers after watching both versions of the film and series are tinged with nostalgia. These comments express sadness for the past way of life, education and upbringing, culture, and relationships. Here are a few examples:

1. «The youth of that time had culture, knowledge, and ideals to change the world; today's youth does not have that».
2. «Versatile education, which has unfortunately disappeared. We could be an example of how a young man should live».
3. «I got goosebumps... Serbia will no longer have such a class, but this will never die».

Narrativity and linearity, defining characteristics of collective memory, are present, also in the phenomenon being studied. According to Bruner, collective memories are given in the narrative form, as stories that represent the construction of reality<sup>36</sup>. These are meaningful stories about the past, in which events are in a cause-and-effect relationship, and the actors have their roles. The convincingness of these stories depends on their «authenticity, significance, and coherence, which again depend on the correct use of narrative elements – time, plot, characters, intentions, and evaluations»<sup>37</sup>. In the case of Professor Kosta Vujić, the film director Zdravko Šotra explains these features in the following way:

First of all, there is a main character, and there is also a story that has a beginning, middle, and end. In addition to the character of Kosta Vujić, many other interesting characters, both professors and students, are clearly outlined. Furthermore, the story is full of events, which are coloured by poetic humour. All my efforts were directed towards bringing to life what Vitezović clearly told us in his written narrative through acting in those elements of the story<sup>38</sup>.

#### 4. *Public school memory: How professor Vujić became the paradigm of an ideal teacher*

After the release of the film in 2012, several memorial practices were established relating to Professor Kosta Vujić. In the explanations of these practices, by mass media, teachers, the film director, and even city services, all components of the narrative from the book and films were accepted as historical and truthful. That narrative was integrated into the current context of education in Serbia. The attitude towards facts is illustrated in the explanation of the naming of Professor Kosta Vujić Street in Belgrade. The «Official Gazette» states: «Kosta Vujić was a German language professor at the First Belgrade

<sup>35</sup> Žeželj, *Prošlost koje nije bilo: Kako ulepšavamo lična i kolektivna sećanja*, cit., p. 20; J.H. Liu, J. László, *A narrative theory of history and identity*, in G. Moloney, I. Walker (edd.), *Social representations and identity*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, pp. 85-107.

<sup>36</sup> Žeželj, *Prošlost koje nije bilo: Kako ulepšavamo lična i kolektivna sećanja*, cit., p. 18; J. Bruner, *The narrative construction of reality*, «Critical Inquiry», vol. 18, n. 1, 1991, pp. 1-21.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20; Liu, László, *A narrative theory of history and identity*, cit., p. 87.

<sup>38</sup> Zdravko Šotra in the conversation with the authors of this research (Belgrade, 3.12.2022).

Gymnasium and one of the notable figures of 19<sup>th</sup> century Serbia. Recognisable also by the last generation of his students, which is remembered for a pleiad of pupils who later became famous»<sup>39</sup>.

“Kosta Vujić” became a paradigm used in the media and everyday speech with the implied meaning of an ideal teacher. This paradigm was used as a reference point in the discussion regarding certain phenomena that were not considered desirable in the educational context. For example, in relation to situations in which teachers are under pressure from students and parents, an author of an article on children’s rights asks: «Would Professor Kosta Vujić lose his license and get fired today?»<sup>40</sup>. There was also a renewed interest in the history of the First Belgrade Gymnasium, written about under the title *What the Hat of Professor Kosta Vujić Hides?*<sup>41</sup>.

In July 2013, Rajna Dragičević, a professor at the Faculty of Philology at the University of Belgrade, gave an inspiring speech to graduates of that faculty – future professors, on the importance and role of their profession. Some students shared her speech on social networks, which sparked media interest in this professor. A headline in a widely circulated daily newspaper read: «Kosta Vujić of our time: Professor Rajna Dragičević gave students a speech they will remember for life!». The article states that the speech was «proof that true and dedicated professors like the legendary Kosta Vujić still exist today». It goes on to argue that today, when the education system is “in collapse” such teachers are needed who remind students «that true values have not died out and that it is up to them to preserve and strengthen them»<sup>42</sup>. Then the same newspaper became interested in how students perceive Professor Dragičević. One of the interviewed students stated that her lectures are «like a good theatre play that leaves no one indifferent” and that “she is, above all, a good person who taught us to be human»<sup>43</sup>.

The media interest continued with a search for teachers similar to Professor Dragičević and Professor Vujić. Soon after, an article was published under the title «Rajna Dragičević is not alone: 10 professors who inspire their students every day». The article begins with a quote from the film «“Something tells me that in the future, I will only be known for having taught brilliant future names”, is the sentence with which the legendary Kosta Vujić marked the end of his service. After more than a century, when Serbian education is sinking into despair, Rajna Dragičević shows that such teachers still exist. Little is known about them, but they only value the popularity they have among their students». The journalist then asks, «What makes an excellent teacher? Today’s successors of Kosta

<sup>39</sup> Formal decision about name of the streets: [http://demo.paragraf.rs/demo/combined/Old/t/t2019\\_07/t07\\_0241.htm](http://demo.paragraf.rs/demo/combined/Old/t/t2019_07/t07_0241.htm) (last access: 24.03.2023). There is a restaurant in Belgrade named “Šešir profesora Koste Vujića” <https://kf.rs/kafana/1270/sesir-profesora-koste-vujica>.

<sup>40</sup> Last updated: 09.01.2022. <https://www.srpskaistorija.com/bojanic-decija-prava-da-li-bi-danas-profesor-kosta-vujic-izgubio-licencu-i-dobio-otkaz/> (last access: 24.03.2023).

<sup>41</sup> Last updated: 25.10.2014. <https://www.novosti.rs/vesti/beograd.74.html:515808-Sta-krije-sesir-Koste-Vujica> (last access: 24.03.2023).

<sup>42</sup> Last updated: 09.7.2013. <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/drustvo/profesorka-rajna-dragicevic-odrerala-govor-koji-ce-studenti-pamtiti-celog-zivota/1fr7wg> (last access: 24.03.2023).

<sup>43</sup> Last updated: 12.7.2013. <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/drustvo/studenti-filoloskog-fakulteta-sramota-binas-bilo-da-odustanemo-posle-govora/nk4nd80> (last access: 24.03.2023).

Vujić have a simple answer – excellent pupils and students. ... They transfer knowledge and motivate them to progress. The only thing is that they do not tolerate lying and cheating»<sup>44</sup>.

In 2016, a private kindergarten and school named “Kosta Vujić” was founded and is still successfully operating today. The management of this institution justified its choice of name as follows: «Professor Kosta Vujić supported and encouraged informal education among his students, preparing them for life. From there comes our mission, by promoting critical thinking, and strengthening self-confidence, we create young people who will be able to fight for their place “under the sun” tomorrow»<sup>45</sup>.

If we compare the interpretations of Professor Kosta Vujić’s personality with historical data and individual memories, we can notice significant deviations, primarily regarding the attitude towards teaching and student achievements.

### 5. *Why did Kosta Vujić become the paradigm of the ideal teacher?*

The memorial practices in the case of Professor Kosta Vujić are based on symbolic interpretations that speak more about the context and aspirations of the creators of those practices than about Vujić himself. Polenghi arrives at a similar conclusion after analysing films based on literary works<sup>46</sup>. Representations of the past about Professor Vujić can therefore be interpreted in relation «contemporary school scene and situate the educational strategies it portrays within a broader theoretical framework»<sup>47</sup>. In this sense, Vujić is a symbolic carrier of the values that society strives for. In public memory, Kosta Vujić is seen as a light from the past in the tunnel of the general crisis of education in Serbia. Within the framework of post-critical pedagogy<sup>48</sup>, this paradigm can be interpreted as the application of the history of education in the search for ways out of the crisis. According to the advocates of post-critical pedagogy, the essence of education lies primarily in intergenerational communication, which implies a certain degree of principled consent of adults in terms of taking responsibility for the values of the existing world – education is a collective endeavour to preserve the continuity of the human world, i.e. rejuvenating the world.

<sup>44</sup> Last updated:14.7.2013. <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/drustvo/rajna-dragicevic-nije-usamljena-10-profesora-koji-svakog-dana-inspirisu-svoje-ucenike/vs2xvj3> (last access: 24.03.2023).

<sup>45</sup> The explanation is given by the school management for the purpose of this research, 24.03.2023.

<sup>46</sup> Polenghi, *Remembering School Through Movies*, cit., p. 214.

<sup>47</sup> A. Debè, *Constructing Memory: School in Italy in the 1970s as Narrated in the TV Drama “Diario di un Maestro”*, in C. Yanes-Cabrera, J. Meda, A. Viñao (edd.), *School Memories*, cit., p. 238.

<sup>48</sup> H. Arent, *Krizna u obrazovanju*, «Reč», vol. 86, n. 32, 2016, pp. 177-193; N. Hodgson, J. Vlieghe, P. Zamojski, *Manifesto for a Post-Critical Pedagogy*, Goleta (CA), Punctum books, 2017; B. Bodroški Spariosu, *Povratak obrazovanju kao pedagoški odgovor na korona krizu*, in Ž. Krnjaja, M. Senić Ružić, Z. Milošević (edd.), *Obrazovanje u vreme krize i kako dalje*, Beograd, Filozofski Fakultet – Institut za Pedagogiju i Andragogiju – Pedagoško Društvo Srbije, 2022, pp. 19-33.

In the narrative about Professor Vujić, several theses are recognisable that are advocated by post-critical pedagogy: education as intergenerational communication; the teacher as an educator; the teacher as a human being. Also prominent in the narrative is Vujić's extremely positive attitude towards young people and youth<sup>49</sup>. One of the lines in the film reads: «So they read, so they think, so they work. That is the generation for the future»<sup>50</sup>. Vujić encouraged rethinking the belief in youth: «Everything tells me that in the future we will only be known as their professors»<sup>51</sup>. For Vujić, education is a wonderful challenge of the uncertain<sup>52</sup>, which carries a message to the contemporary era that there was a teacher in the past who accepted the challenge of uncertainty, and nothing wrong happened, on the contrary... This message encourages rethinking on the freedom and creativity of the teacher and students.

Overall, the view from the past that the work of Professor Kosta Vujić brings to the public discourse instils optimism in times of crisis – education was valued in the past so that it could be again. In this case, the history of education is promoted as one of the directions that can be followed in solving contemporary problems.

<sup>49</sup> J. Jaranović, *The Development of Authentic Personality with Limitations of the Educational System (in the examples of films: "Professor Vujić's Hat", directed by Z. Šotra, and "Dead Poets Society", directed by P. Weir)*, «Journal of Education, Culture and Society», vol. 4, n. 2, 2020, pp. 79-87.

<sup>50</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i\\_K0Z3jeZL0&t=27s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i_K0Z3jeZL0&t=27s), 35:49 (last access: 24.03.2023).

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:47:15 (last access: 24.03.2023).

<sup>52</sup> G. Biesta, *The Beautiful Risk of Education*, London-New York, Routledge, 2013.





# The Janitor on Screen. A Proposed Study of the School Imaginary in Twentieth-Century Italy

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## 1. *A silence that may be filled*

The janitor (whose current title is school assistant) is undoubtedly among the figures in the world of Italian schooling that have been most overlooked by educational historiography. This is mainly down to the sources that even the most advanced history of education research has tended to rely upon. The two routes most frequently taken when examining the complex dynamics of past schooling – which entail analysis of official regulations and documentation on the internal life of schools, respectively – offer little information about the aspects of the janitor’s occupation that may be of interest to historians of education and schooling, and namely how janitors contributed to students’ informal education and what role they typically played within the broader system of the school. Indeed, while legislative sources only tell us how janitors were ranked in relation to other school staff and outline their logistical and support duties<sup>1</sup>, it is rare for even documentary sources to convey any sense of their real-life experience as they interacted with students within the organizational and educational framework of schools.

New routes to investigating the figure of the janitor from a historical-educational perspective are offered by the study of school memory, where “school memory” is understood, following Maurice Halbwachs and Jan and Aleida Assmann<sup>2</sup>, as «a practice of individual remembrance or collective and public commemoration of a common school past»<sup>3</sup>. The research hypothesis presented here concerns collective school memory,

<sup>1</sup> For further background on legislation regulating the role of janitors, see V. Piazza, *Per chi suona la campanella? Il ruolo del personale non docente nell'integrazione scolastica degli alunni disabili*, Gardolo (Trento), Erikson, 2022; S. Intravaia, *L'Italia che va a scuola*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2012, pp. 126-135.

<sup>2</sup> M. Halbwachs, *La mémoire collective*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1950; J. Assmann, *Das Kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und Politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen*, München, CH Beck, 1992; A. Assmann, *Erinnerungsräume. Formen und Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses*, Munich, C.H. Beck, 1999.

<sup>3</sup> J. Meda, A. Viñao, *School Memory: Historiographical Balance and Heuristics Perspectives*, in C. Yanes-Cabrera, J. Meda, A. Viñao (edd.), *School Memories. New Trends in the History of Education*, Cham, Springer, 2017, p. 2.

as it has been constructed and transmitted by the culture industry and information and communication outlets. Among the various sources that can inform this line of inquiry, filmic sources are certainly key, given their crucial influence on the construction of the shared imaginary. This influence has been demonstrated by pioneering historiographical research on the relationship between cinema and collective mindset<sup>4</sup> as well as by more recent methodological contributions on the use of filmic sources in history of education research<sup>5</sup> and more specifically in the study of school memories<sup>6</sup>.

Within the broader interpretative framework just outlined, the heuristic approach adopted in this study speaks to an article by António Nóvoa on the discursive value of images in historical-educational research surrounding the representation of teachers<sup>7</sup>. Although Nóvoa is only concerned with iconography, his observations also apply – gaining, indeed, even greater hermeneutic power – to audio-visual sources, which fall under the extended concept of image that has characterized the increasingly wide-ranging and sophisticated development of the so-called “visual turn”<sup>8</sup>.

First, Nóvoa invites us to view «the image as a means of expression». Thus, the portrayal of a janitor in a film should not be viewed as objective evidence of the historical role of janitors, but rather as a representation of this role. Although the film may well contain traces of historical fact concerning janitors, the janitor whom we see on the screen is the product of a particular reinterpretation of historical reality. Thus, «the image mark[s] the significance of the movement remembering-imagining for the historian’s work»<sup>9</sup>. In other words, films impact on the mutual influencing of history and memory and on the complex layering of meaning that is generated by this reciprocal process. Such a «mobilisation of meanings» is triggered – to draw on an interpretation offered by Geert Thyssen and Karin Priem – by the deployment of a «technology», via a «translocation» from the past of a media narrative to the present of its consumption by an audience, within an audio-visual experience based on «multimodal» social practices that give rise to a shared «heritage» of ideas, beliefs, and values<sup>10</sup>.

A second concept from Nóvoa’s article confirms and further enriches this interpretative perspective, namely his invitation to view «images as relationships»<sup>11</sup>. The on-screen

<sup>4</sup> M. Ferro, *Cinéma et Histoire*, Paris, Denoël-Gonthier, 1977; P. Sorlin, *Sociologie du cinéma*, Paris, Aubier Montaigne, 1977.

<sup>5</sup> See S. Polenghi, *Film as a source for historical enquiry in education. Research methods and a case study: film adaptations of “Pinocchio” and their reception in Italy*, «Educató i Història», vol. 31, 2018, pp. 89-111.

<sup>6</sup> For a recent historiographical overview, see P. Alfieri, *Collective school memory, cinema and television: use of sources and interpretive perspectives*, in P. Alfieri, I. Garai (edd.), *Individual and collective school memories. Research perspectives and case studies in Italy and Hungary*, Roma, Armando, 2022, pp. 97-114.

<sup>7</sup> A. Nóvoa, *Ways of Saying, Ways of Seeing Public Images of Teachers (19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> Centuries)*, «Paedagogica Historica», vol. 36, n. 1, 2000, pp. 20-52.

<sup>8</sup> See at least M.M. del Pozo Andrés, S. Braster, *The Visual Turn in the History of Education. Origins, Methodologies, and Examples*, in T. Fitzgerald (ed.), *Handbook of Historical Studies in Education. Debates, Tensions, and Directions*, Singapore, Springer, 2020, pp. 893-908.

<sup>9</sup> Nóvoa, *Ways of Saying*, cit., p. 28.

<sup>10</sup> G. Thyssen, K. Priem, *Mobilising meaning: multimodality, translocation, technology and heritage*, «Paedagogica Historica», vol. 49, n. 6, 2013, pp. 735-744.

<sup>11</sup> Nóvoa, *Ways of Saying*, cit., p. 28.

image of the janitor undoubtedly stems from the authorial intentions of directors and screenwriters, who, however, are not only driven by their own artistic and cultural preferences and potentially by commercial pressures from production companies, but also by the historical context in which they are immersed, the collective imaginary of their era, and the attitudes and tastes of their audiences. For this reason, the study of an audio-visual must consider all these aspects and their systemic interrelationships. In the case of audiences, however, a particular caveat applies: in evaluating the impact of a film on the shared imaginary – primarily via diachronic analysis of its audience data and of its reception by critics, the press, and other media platforms – it must be recalled that, because public sensibilities vary over time, viewers may interact with the contents of a media offering of the past from changing semantic perspectives, which may also be different to those that the offering was originally intended to convey. In short, when studying the on-screen representation of the janitor and its evolution within the collective imagination, we must take into account «not only the diverse communities of producers and consumers of images, but above all their relationship»<sup>12</sup>.

In the present study, I apply the methodological criteria just outlined to the analysis of the only film in the Italian cinematographic repertoire whose main character is a janitor: *Mio figlio professore* (1946). Then I also briefly examine the media representation of the janitor in relation to key socio-economic, political-educational, and cultural factors in the history of schooling in Italy. The heuristic evidence reported here illustrates the potential of this line of inquiry, laying the ground for further investigation.

## 2. *A unique instance within Italian cinema: the janitor protagonist of the film Mio figlio professore*

The only film in the Italian cinematographic repertoire with a janitor as its lead character is the 1946 production *Mio figlio professore*, directed by Renato Castellani and set in the period between 1919-20 and the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. The movie tells the story of Orazio Belli (played by the famous actor Aldo Fabrizi), the custodian-janitor of a classical studies secondary school in Rome. Following the death of his wife, Belli helps his son Orazio Jr. to work towards becoming a Latin teacher and to attain – thanks to a recommendation – a teaching post at the school where he himself works<sup>13</sup>.

The janitor's role in students' informal education is only minimally represented in the film, which is primarily focused on the protagonist's relationship with his son. In addressing the pupils, the janitor is brusque but resolute and authoritative: he supervises

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> For a more detailed summary of the plot, which focuses on how school more generally is represented in the film, see P. Alfieri, *Mio figlio professore*, «Banca dati degli audiovisivi sulla scuola e sugli insegnanti», DOI: 10.53164/505, last updated: 25.10.2021, <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-collettiva/audiovisivi/mio-figlio-professore> (last access: 03.11.2022).

the schoolboys as they enter the building, reprimands them if they are late or rowdy, and exhorts them to take their schoolwork seriously. On their part, the students interact little with the janitor and are informal but respectful in their encounters with him.

Towards the end of the film, however, the protagonist begins to lose his authority. When Orazio Sr. finally manages to land Orazio Jr. a permanent teaching post at the school, he is unable to accept that the young man has now achieved existential and professional independence. His concern for his son becomes increasingly invasive and so ill-concealed as to attract the derision of the students, who draw a caricature of the “two Orazios” on the blackboard, depicting the janitor, armed with a broom, as blocking the path of his son who is carrying a book. It is this prank that induces the janitor to leave the school once and for all, having «attained the definitive awareness that social codes require the sacrifice of affective ones»<sup>14</sup>.

With regard to the representation of the janitor’s role within the school from a systemic perspective, a first observation is that the high school where Orazio Sr. works is tied up with his personal identity. He inherited the post of janitor from his father and, like his father, lives in a modest apartment inside the school. Hence, the school has always been his home, the place of his family ties, which – following his wife’s death – he dreams of rebuilding by confining his son there too. However, another part of the janitor’s identity that he associates with the school is his strong commitment to his job and sense of duty. He sees to his organizational responsibilities with promptness and care, first and foremost that of going around the different classrooms at each change of class to announce the “*fnis*”, the word used to flag the end of a lesson.

Orazio Sr. is assisted by two other janitors who are his subordinates. Even more marked however is the inferior status that he attributes to the janitor at his son’s elementary school, from whom he demands special treatment for his child. This expectation is not based on Orazio Sr.’s personal merits, but rather on the fact that – as he explicitly states himself – the boy «is the son of the high school custodian and you have to respect the hierarchy». Thus, Orazio Sr. becomes the voice of the traditional hierarchy among schools of different levels within the Italian education system, a hierarchy that is topped by high schools, especially those that offer a classical studies curriculum. Indeed, the classical studies route is seen by Orazio Sr. himself as the only one that will allow his son to rise to a higher position in society. And not just his own son, but the youth in general. This attitude may also be deduced from the scant regard that Orazio Sr. displays for the working students who attend the night school classes that are held in the school building.

The janitor also holds a hierarchical view of the various subjects taught at his school. This is borne out by his great respect for the teachers of the humanities disciplines and his corresponding lack of regard for the gym teacher Giraldi. The latter, even before the rise of fascism, had sought the title of *professore* (secondary school teacher), while Orazio Sr. only viewed him as worthy of the title *maestro* (primary school teacher). Even when Giraldi becomes a senior official at the Fascist government’s Ministry of National

<sup>14</sup> G.P. Brunetta, *Storia del cinema italiano*, vol. III: *Dal neorealismo al miracolo economico. 1945-1959*, Roma, Editori Riuniti, 1993, p. 469.

Education, the janitor displays no respect for him, while he remains obsequious towards the principal and other school administration officers.

The film director uses Orazio Sr.'s reservations about Giraldi to advance a veiled criticism of fascism, which however is only slightly touched upon in the filmic narrative, without being thoroughly thematized. Indeed, as the media scholar Francesco Pitassio suggests, in this film, as in many others within the neorealist cinematographic genre, «whatever identifies with Fascism is tossed into an unspeakable past: Fascism is nothing but an unfortunate break in the spontaneous flow of national identity»<sup>15</sup>.

What Pitassio calls «lies of memory» also affect the representation of the janitor, who, even in this neorealist film, is presented in terms of an imagined reinterpretation of his historical characteristics. This is borne out by the context in which the idea of making *Mio figlio professore* took shape: produced at an economically straitened time for Italian cinema, the film's low budget did not allow the director to realize his greatest ambitions for the production. Hence, the decision to exploit Fabrizi's popularity as an actor, but also to base the film on a «little story in the style of De Amicis», thus situating it within a narrative and symbolic tradition whose romantic and emotionally-led vision of schooling was likely to appeal to audiences<sup>16</sup>.

And indeed, this goal was met in practice. If – to draw on the terminology coined by N6voa – we shift our focus from communities of producers to communities of consumers, the first observation to be made is that the film met with considerable success immediately upon its release<sup>17</sup>. Of further interest is how *Mio figlio professore* was received by critics, who noted the film's excellent box-office receipts in their reviews<sup>18</sup>, but were negative about its artistic value in some cases<sup>19</sup>. For example, while some critics emphasized Orazio Sr.'s «positive side, based on his confidence in himself and in life»<sup>20</sup>, others accused the director of not «realizing that times [had] changed» and thus of having brought forth «an apologism for the petty bourgeois» by telling «the simple tale of an easy-going and good-hearted janitor at a city grammar school»<sup>21</sup>.

<sup>15</sup> F. Pitassio, *Neorealist Film Culture, 1945-1954. Rome, Open Cinema*, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2019, p. 151. On the film's neo-realist underpinnings, see P.M. Bocchi, *Mio figlio professore: prima di Umberto D.*, in G. Carluccio, L. Malvasi, F. Villa (edd.), *Il cinema di Renato Castellani*, Roma, Carocci, 2015, pp. 142-146.

<sup>16</sup> S. Trasatti, *Renato Castellani*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1984, p. 40. On the symbolic tradition in the work of De Amicis, which featured first in his novel *Cuore* (1886) and later in Italian film and TV adaptations of the book during the second half of the Twentieth century, see S. Polenghi, *Remembering School Through Movies: The Films of the Book Cuore (1886) in Republican Italy*, in Yanes-Cabrera, Meda, Viñao (edd.), *School Memories*, cit., pp. 203-217.

<sup>17</sup> Between 1946 and 1952, the film earned box-office receipts of 93m lire, less than the most popular film of the 1945-1946 season (*Roma città aperta*, which came out in 1943 and netted box-office takings of 124.5m lire), but more than another extremely famous film (*Sciuscià*, which came out in 1946, and had box-office earnings of 55.8m lire): see O. Levi (ed.), *Catalogo Bolaffi del cinema italiano. Tutti i film italiani del dopoguerra*, directed by G. Rondolino, Torino, Bolaffi, 1967.

<sup>18</sup> V. Calvino, *Profili di registi. Renato Castellani*, «La Cinematografia Italiana», vol. 3, n. 4, 1947, p. 8.

<sup>19</sup> See G. Ferrara, *Renato Castellani*, «Bianco e Nero», vol. 16, n. 12, 1955, pp. 7-8.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>21</sup> F. Di Giammatteo, *Il gioco dello scetticismo in Renato Castellani*, «Bianco e Nero», vol. 18, n. 7, 1957, p. 2.

After the 1950s, the film was no longer widely or continuously circulated. It was broadcast on television for the first time in 1983<sup>22</sup>, coming out on videotape in 1986 and 1992 and as a DVD in 2008 and 2010<sup>23</sup>; since 2021, it has been available for viewing on YouTube<sup>24</sup> and RaiPlay, the digital streaming channel of the national radio and television broadcasting service, RAI<sup>25</sup>. Nevertheless, film historians have not omitted the film from their longer-term analyses. Again, they tend to see the janitor as the «voice of the petty bourgeoisie», framed as a class whose «non-involvement in fascism» implied that it could be acquitted from blame as the «historically defeated»<sup>26</sup>. In addition, worthy of note is the opinion of contemporary historian, Guido Crainz, who – interpreting the film as documenting the transition from the fascist regime to the dawn of democracy – has described it as «bitter in warning us of the continuation of social hierarchies»<sup>27</sup>.

The fact that the film was not widely broadcast from the 1950s onwards means that its contents have not been able to contribute over the longer term to the construction of Italians' collective school memory. We thus lack the means to reconstruct the relationship between our observations about the context in which the film was produced and the reactions of the public and critics of the time, and communities of consumers in subsequent periods. To date, only the comments of viewers on YouTube, where – as mentioned above – the film was recently posted, offer some small insight into the effects of the mobilization of *Mio figlio professore*'s meanings from past to present<sup>28</sup>. Most of the online viewers' observations about the janitor refer to Fabrizi's masterful performance in the role and, as the film's producers expected, to the emotional power of the character. Only a small number of comments allude to the janitor's humble social status within a school system and a society marked by inequality but also by sound moral values.

### 3. *Other lines of inquiry*

As stated at the outset, apart from *Mio figlio professore*, no other Italian films have a janitor as protagonist, but there are some in which a janitor plays a minor role or makes a brief appearance. Based on a review of films listed in the *Banca dati degli audiovisivi*

<sup>22</sup> This information was gleaned from RAI's weekly magazine, *Radiocorriere TV*, which continued to be published up to 1995.

<sup>23</sup> VHS: 1986 (Home Video) e 1992 (Laser Vision); DVD: 2008 (Hobby & Work Publishing) e 2010 (Cristaldi Film).

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MKN9uIip7g> (last access: 04.11.2022).

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.raiplay.it/video/2017/03/Mio-figlio-professore-549cd077-9541-4200-a198-008e9f6542c8.html> (last access: 04.11.2022).

<sup>26</sup> G.P. Brunetta, *Cen'anni di cinema italiano*, Vol. II: *Dal 1945 ai giorni nostri*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2004, p. 88. See also Id., *Storia del cinema italiano*, cit., pp. 313, 224, 468-469, and M. D'Amico, *La commedia all'italiana. Il cinema comico in Italia dal 1945 al 1975*, Milano, Il Saggiatore, 2008, pp. 56-62.

<sup>27</sup> G. Crainz, *Storia della repubblica. L'Italia dalla Liberazione ad oggi*, Roma, Donzelli, 2016, p. 20.

<sup>28</sup> Up to recently, the film had received 32,582 views on YouTube with 128 comments (last access: 06.11.2022).



*sulla scuola e sugli insegnanti* (Database of audio-visual materials on schools and teachers), which was created by a research team at the Catholic University of Milan in the context of the national research project *School memories between social perception and collective representation. Italy, 1861–2001*<sup>29</sup>, let us now introduce further potential lines of inquiry that examine the image of the janitor in relation to broader systematic themes within the history of Italian education.

An initial starting point concerns representations of janitors and their socio-economic status relative to that of teachers. This theme is clearly to the fore in Alberto Lattuada's *Scuola Elementare* (1954), the story of a primary school teacher, Trilli, who moves from a small town in Lazio to Milan. Here he is hosted by a fellow villager, the janitor Pilade, who supplements his own meagre salary by doing odd jobs and selling razor blades on the black market. The janitor, while recognizing his own lower status, immediately warns the teacher about the high cost of living in the city which is on the brink of an economic boom. At first, Trilli is sure of himself and of his position. Soon, however, he realizes that his income as a teacher does not enable him to keep up with the economic progress around him. So, he decides to take leave of absence from the school and join the business enterprise in which Pilade has invested all his savings. However, the project fails and the two now find themselves at the same level, having both met defeat in their attempt to climb the social ladder. Only at the end of the film does each succeed in recovering their initial position, in an epilogue that «confirms [...] the inevitability of a situation dominated by money and the de facto separation of the two worlds»<sup>30</sup>.

In this film, the representation of the janitor, who is nevertheless characterized in his own right, mainly serves to throw the image of the teacher more clearly into relief; specifically, the film director – following in the earlier-mention symbolic tradition of the «De Amicis-style school» – sets out to reaffirm the teacher's calling as an educator, attributing him with «a leading role in the life of the nation»<sup>31</sup>, at a time in Italian history when primary school teachers were losing social prestige, amongst other reasons because their paygrade dictated a lifestyle that fell short of the consumerist standards of the nascent capitalist society<sup>32</sup>. The famous film *Il maestro di Vigevano* (1963) by Elio Petri, based on the novel of the same title by Lucio Mastronardi (1962), focuses specifically on this issue. In this film, the janitor only makes a fleeting appearance, again serving mainly to shed light – in this case however a grotesque one – on the professional and existential crisis that the lead character, the teacher, is going through<sup>33</sup>. Indeed, the teacher treats the

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-collettiva/audiovisivi> (last access: 07.11.2022).

<sup>30</sup> C. Camerini, *Alberto Lattuada*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1982, p. 49.

<sup>31</sup> G. Fofi, *Com'era la scuola elementare italiana e com'è oggi*, «Internazionale», last updated: 26.09.2017, <https://www.internazionale.it/opinione/goffredo-fofi/2017/09/26/scuola-elementare-italiana> (last access: 07.11.2022).

<sup>32</sup> See at least A. Santoni Rugiu, *Maestre e maestri. La difficile storia degli insegnanti elementari*, Roma, Carocci, 2021, pp. 129-143; R. Sani, *Le associazioni degli insegnanti cattolici nel secondo dopoguerra*, Brescia, La Scuola, 1990.

<sup>33</sup> Concerning how the teacher is represented in the film, see E. Scaglia, *The counterposed representations of the Italian primary school teachers in the Sixties: some case studies from audio-visual sources*, in Alfieri, Garai (edd.), *Individual and collective school memories*, cit., pp. 115-131.

janitor with arrogance and does not return his salute, believing that this proves his own superiority.

In other Italian films, the janitor is represented in relation to the institutional role of the school, offering us a second potential line of inquiry. A prime example of an anti-system character is Angelo, the school janitor who features in the film *Luna e l'altra*, directed by Maurizio Nichetti in 1996 but set in the 1950s. Within a broader plot centred on the theme of doubleness that unfolds against a fantastical backdrop, upright and strict teacher Luna loses her shadow, which is embodied in Ombretta, a sunny and eccentric woman who goes to live in a brothel. It is Ombretta who convinces Angelo, after he is kicked out of the school for performing leftist songs with an amateur band, to pursue a circus career. In the film – which also contains a citation from *Zéro de conduite* (1933), a celebrated French film by Jean Vigo that conveyed a strongly anti-authoritarian political message<sup>34</sup> – the janitor, together with Ombretta, sends a clear signal of «otherness» with respect to the conformism of social and school norms<sup>35</sup>. It is not surprising therefore that this film has also been analysed from the perspective of postcolonial cinema studies, according to which the janitor Angelo «is neither a colonizer nor [...] a successfully colonized subject» especially in light of his joining the circus, which, interpreted as the opposite of school, «suggests intriguing alternatives to exclusionary party politics, nationalist geography and historiography, and binary constructions of self and other»<sup>36</sup>.

Another janitor film character represented as alternative to the institutional function of the school – no longer at the political level but rather at the socio-educational level – features in *Io speriamo che me la cavo* (1992) by Lina Wertmüller. In contrast to the teacher protagonist, who, having been mistakenly transferred from Liguria to a poor town in the province of Naples, strives to make the school a place of social redemption, the lazy janitor exploits the children's disadvantaged socio-economic status by selling them snacks, chalk, and even toilet paper, thus conniving with the criminal mentality that the teacher is trying to eradicate.

This emphasis on a janitor's prioritizing of personal gain over professional duty has illustrious antecedents in Italian cinematography. A leading example is *Maddalena... zero in condotta* (1940) directed by Vittorio De Sica, in which the janitor Bondani, although seen as trustworthy by the headmistress and teachers at the girls' school where he works, repeatedly violates regulations: to please the student protagonist, he delivers directly to her, instead of to her parents, a report card showing her poor marks, covers for the girl and her classmates when they are late for school, and is bribed by two young men with a romantic interest in some of the female students to do detective work on their behalf. Although his intentions are more benign than those of Wertmüller, De Sica also portrays a janitor who encourages the breaking of school rules.

<sup>34</sup> On this film, see I. Dussel, *Iconoclastic images in the history of education: another look at children in revolt in two children's films from the 1930s*, «Paedagogica Historica», vol. 53, n. 6, 2017, pp. 668-682.

<sup>35</sup> M. Pistoia, *Maurizio Nichetti*, Milano, Il Castoro, 1997, p. 88.

<sup>36</sup> M. Waller, *The postcolonial circus. Maurizio Nichetti's "Luna e l'altra"*, in S. Ponzanesi, M. Waller (edd.), *Postcolonial cinema studies*, London-New York, Routledge, 2012, pp. 157-171 (quotations from pp. 161, 164).



At the same time, however, Bondani expresses another, more social, kind of normativity, concerning gender, which is the third line of further inquiry that I propose here. The janitor's readiness to look after the cosmetics that the pupils are not allowed to use during school hours – he says: «After all, what's wrong with it? The poor coquettes, they are women after all! Women can do without history and mathematics, but they can't do without face powder and lipstick!» – makes him a «good fatherly custodian» of their «femininity», and a voice for the notion that «the transgressions are fun while they last, but at the end of the day they aren't allowed to violate the regulations of gender or to distract from the 'conjugal imperative' that the film forcefully delivers»<sup>37</sup>.

A typically Italian film genre that offers many salient insights into the theme of gender is the so-called "*commedia sexy*", which in the 1970s and 1980s especially, staged «risqué tales» imbued with «voyeurism» that reflected «all the dysfunctionality and negative aspects of post-economic miracle Italy»<sup>38</sup>. When these tales are set in schools, the janitor is represented as a sexually unprincipled man who, like all the other men in the film, is obsessively attracted by the sensual female characters who dominate the scene. In Mariano Laurenti's *La compagna di banco* (1977), for example, the janitor cheekily but unsuccessfully attempts to seduce a girl, because the students deliberately make a fool of him by implying that she is a woman of loose morals. Similarly in *La liceale seduce i professori* (1979), again directed by Laurenti, the janitor is the butt of many vulgar pranks by the students and is in constant rivalry with the principal. This rivalry, together with clumsy and ineffectual games of seduction, speaks to the crisis of traditional male identity and its social power, which began in Italy in the 1950s<sup>39</sup> and found in the highly successful "*commedia sexy*" genre an effective popular magnifier with the capacity to «objectivise the mechanisms through which [masculinity] exercised its dominion, thus making them largely ineffective»<sup>40</sup>, including in the world of school.

A more general point may also be made regarding the issue of gender. Specifically, in Italian film, the janitor has almost always been represented as a male figure, despite the fact that an increasingly high proportion of women took up this role in the course of the twentieth century.

This last line of inquiry and the others that have been touched upon in this section may be further pursued with a view to advancing, in relation to the collective imaginary surrounding schooling, our understanding of key issues that have historically concerned Italian schools. To this end, it could also be of value to extend our research to television dramas, especially those of more recent years, which – superficial scrutiny suggests – may offer additional insights to the present analysis. Significant examples include the figure of the sympathetic and affectionate janitor in the Mediaset TV series *Sei forte maestro*

<sup>37</sup> R. McGlazer, *Learning by Hart: Gender, Image, and Ideology in Vittorio De Sica's "Maddalena zero in condotta"*, «The Italianist», vol. 36, n. 2, 2016, p. 190.

<sup>38</sup> G.P. Brunetta, *Guida alla storia del cinema italiano. 1905-2003*, Torino, Einaudi, 2003, pp. 346, 349.

<sup>39</sup> S. Bellasai, *Mascolinità, mutamento, merce. Crisi dell'identità maschile nell'Italia del boom*, in P. Capuzzo (ed.), *Genere, generazione e consumi. L'Italia degli anni Sessanta*, Roma, Carocci, 2003, pp. 105-137.

<sup>40</sup> G. Manzoli, *Italians do it worse. La crisi della mascolinità nella commedia erotica degli anni Settanta*, «La Valle dell'Eden», vol. 9, n. 19, 2007, pp. 154-165 (quotation from p. 163).

(2000-2001)<sup>41</sup> and the appearance of a woman janitor in another Mediaset series *Caro Maestro* (1996-1997).

Both cinema and television may be drawn upon to pursue a more challenging but undoubtedly rewarding line of inquiry with a specific focus on media representations of janitors, which would involve applying the methodological criteria suggested here for the analysis of *Mio figlio professore* to a wider repertoire of audio-visual materials to be assessed from a comparative-diachronic perspective. More specifically, the aim would be to investigate these sources as agents with the power to reorganize what Halbwachs has referred to as «social frameworks of memory»<sup>42</sup>, and therefore to document the influence of both the big and the small screen on the evolving image of the janitor in the collective memory of Italians, as well as on janitors' own perceptions of themselves and of their professional identity. In this way, we may aspire to attaining, in relation to the figure of the school assistant or janitor, one of the loftiest goals of the earlier-mentioned interpretative hypothesis advanced by Nóvoa in relation to teachers, and namely: «to understand the role of images in the governing of the» janitor's «profession – i.e. the social and political definition of norms, rules, beliefs, convictions and “truths” about what it means to be a “good” and “reasonable”» janitor<sup>43</sup>.

<sup>41</sup> My thanks go to Carlotta Frigerio for drawing my attention to this production.

<sup>42</sup> M. Halbwachs, *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire*, Paris, Mouton, 1975.

<sup>43</sup> Nóvoa, *Ways of Saying*, cit., p. 23.

# Images of School Inclusion: Education for Persons with Disabilities in 1970s Italy across Big and Small Screens

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## *Introduction*

Within the rich and diversified domain of films produced in 20<sup>th</sup>-century Italy on the schools of the past, the theme of special education occupies a marginal place. In this study, a keyword search of the “Database of audiovisual materials on schools and teachers” – published on the website *memoriascolastica.it* as part of the National Research Project PRIN 2019 “School Memories between Social Perception and Collective Representation (Italy, 1961-2001)”<sup>1</sup> – was conducted, with a view to quantitatively analysing the over 90 records that currently comprise this electronic directory. On the topic of special education, the most frequently recurring terms were *disabilità* [*disability*] (four audiovisual productions), *classi differenziali* [*differential classes*] (three audiovisual productions), *disabilità mentale* [*mental disability*], *disabilità visiva* [*visual impairment*], *esclusione sociale* [*social exclusion*], and *integrazione scolastica* [*school integration*] (two audiovisual productions each)<sup>2</sup>. Overall, these terms are associated with a relatively small number of audiovisual productions, some of which, while touching upon the issue of special education, only represent it in a fragmentary fashion. Once the latter cases have been excluded, only four productions offer a representative image of the theme of disability in the schools of the past. Specifically, these are two documentary films (*La bicicletta* [*The bicycle*] directed by Luigi Comencini from 1970 and *I “diversi”* [*The “different”*] by Vittorio De Seta from 1978) and two drama films, one produced for the cinema (*Rosso come il cielo* [*Red like the sky*] directed by Cristiano Bortone from 2007) and the other for television (*La classe degli asini* [*The class of dunces*] by Andrea Porporati from 2016).

<sup>1</sup> The database was assembled by the research unit at the Catholic University of Milan, in collaboration with the University of Padua research unit.

<sup>2</sup> A further series of keywords were associated with one audiovisual production each, namely: *bambino difficile* (problem child), *educazione speciale* (special education), *esclusione scolastica* (exclusive education), *pedagogia speciale* (special pedagogy) and *scuola speciale* (special school).

It is not surprising that, in addition to their shared general theme, all four films were made or set in Italy in the 1970s. As is well known, this decade was a turning point for Italian schools, which were then encouraged to open their doors to those who had previously been excluded from them. More specifically, students with disabilities were the beneficiaries of a series of legislative measures, including the decisive laws No. 118/1971 and No. 517/1977, which provided for the design of individualized and inclusive educational pathways. The transition to school integration was certainly not without its challenges and complexities, given that it required both the system as a whole and individual teachers and pupils to revise their understanding of schooling<sup>3</sup>.

This controversial phase has been widely investigated by history of education scholars<sup>4</sup>. Still, there appears to be little awareness of it outside academia. Films produced for TV and cinema, as instruments that «reduce or eliminate the distance between the past and the present»<sup>5</sup>, can help to shed light on the theme and draw it to the attention of the wider public.

In this essay, I set out to analyse the four earlier-listed audiovisual productions, with a view to establishing how they recorded contemporary reality (in the case of the documentaries) or re-evoked and revisited a past historical period (in the case of the drama films). Following other studies of school memories<sup>6</sup>, I compare these media products, assessing whether and how their representations of an extremely important development for our country reflect changes in the collective mindset of Italians over time.

### 1. La bicicletta by L. Comencini

Over October and November 1970, the documentary series *I bambini e noi* [*The children and us*] was broadcast on Rai 2, the second national TV channel. The film director Luigi Comencini, who was already well-known at the time, used the series to denounce the marked rift in Italian society that divided wealthy and privileged children from their poor and exploited peers. The six-part series was mainly focused on schools, where social inequality was often amplified by a “one-size-fits-all” approach to teaching and by the fact that teachers generally lacked the tools required to bring about genuine

<sup>3</sup> Cf. A. Canevaro, L. De Anna, *The historical evolution of school integration in Italy: some witnesses and considerations*, «Alter», vol. 4, n. 3, 2010, pp. 203-216; S. D'Alessio, *Inclusive education in Italy. A critical analysis of the policy of integrazione scolastica*, Rotterdam, Sense Publishers, 2011.

<sup>4</sup> See F. Pruneri, *La politica scolastica dell'integrazione nel secondo dopoguerra*, in G.M. Cappai (ed.), *Percorsi dell'integrazione. Per una didattica delle diversità personali*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2003, pp. 55-80; S. Polenghi, *The History of Educational Inclusion of the Disabled in Italy*, «Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education», 28 June 2021, <https://oxfordre.com/education/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.001.0001/acrefore-9780190264093-e-1608> (last access: 04.01.2023).

<sup>5</sup> P. Alfieri, *Introduzione*, in Id. (ed.), *Immagini dei nostri maestri. Memorie di scuola nel cinema e nella televisione dell'Italia repubblicana*, Roma, Armando Editore, 2019, p. 12.

<sup>6</sup> C. Yanes-Cabrera, J. Meda, A. Viñao (edd.), *School Memories. New Trends in the History of Education*, Cham, Springer, 2017.

change<sup>7</sup>. Nevertheless, by the same token, schools could also represent children's best hope of social redemption, as borne out by testimonies presented during the final episode in the series.

«One of my finest works about children»<sup>8</sup>: such was assessment of the director himself, who had already made other films on the theme of childhood, beginning with his first popular success *Bambini in città* [*Children in city*] (1946), and would go on to make others, such as *Cuore* [*Heart*] (1984) and *Marcellino pane e vino* [*Marcellino bread and wine*] (1992), and of course *Le avventure di Pinocchio* [*The adventures of Pinocchio*] (1972)<sup>9</sup>. The aim of *I bambini e noi* was to tell the true stories of the many Pinocchios then living out their existences in Italy. In each episode, the part of Pinocchio was metaphorically played by a different child, chosen by Comencini as the puppet of the moment. The director did not audition children for these lead roles, but rather selected those who emerged as having a difficult life, because they were «the most beleaguered, the most unhappy, or the scoundrel»<sup>10</sup> of the situation.

The Pinocchio of the fourth episode, entitled *La bicicletta* and broadcast during prime time on 27 October 1970, is Maurizio Gualà, a 10-year-old schoolboy who lives with his family in the working-class district of Prima Porta, on the outskirts of Rome. Chosen by Comencini because he obstinately wears the ribbon on his school apron backwards, Maurizio, who is also stubborn in personality, attends a differential class of third-grade students at an elementary school that has been set up, due to a lack of alternative spaces, in a couple of apartments inside a residential building<sup>11</sup>. Comencini's documentary narrative draws out the complexity of life at this school, which is bound up with the personal and family history of the child protagonist. The Gualà family, which has immigrated to Rome from Abruzzo, is presented in all its «brutality», beginning with the father who guilelessly declares that he uses the whip to discipline his son. The child was assigned to a differential

<sup>7</sup> For further background on this documentary, see L. Agostini, *Una teleinchiesta a puntate sul mondo dell'infanzia*, «Radiocorriere TV», n. 38, 20-26 September 1970, pp. 32-34; S. Finetti, *I bambini e noi*, in P. Alfieri (ed.), *Banca dati degli audiovisivi sulla scuola e sugli insegnanti. Vol. 1*, Milano, EDUCatt, 2021, pp. 1-8.

<sup>8</sup> L. Comencini, *Davvero un bel mestiere! Infanzia, vocazione, esperienze di un regista*, Milano, Baldini&Castoldi, 2016, pp. 123-127.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. G. Gosetti, *Luigi Comencini*, Roma, La Nuova Italia, 1988, pp. 7-8. For Comencini's complete filmography, see D. Monetti, L. Pallanch (edd.), *Luigi Comencini: architetto dei sentimenti*, Roma, Centro Sperimentale Cinematografia, 2007. In relation to *Cuore*, a highly successful TV drama, cf. S. Polenghi, *Remembering School Through Movies: The Films of the Book Cuore (1886) in Republican Italy*, in Yanes-Cabrera, Meda, Viñao (edd.), *School Memories*, cit., pp. 203-217.

<sup>10</sup> Agostini, *Una teleinchiesta a puntate sul mondo dell'infanzia*, cit., p. 34.

<sup>11</sup> In Italy, differential classes were instituted in the early 1900s to accommodate children who were «late» developers or «deceptively abnormal», in other words who did not display obvious intellectual deficits but yet had difficulty learning, often because they were disadvantaged by an unfavourable social and familial context. For further background on how differential classes came to be introduced, cf. B. Di Pofi, *L'educazione dei minori "anormali" nell'opera di Giuseppe Ferruccio Montesano*, Roma, Nuova Cultura, 2008, pp. 50-52. On their rapid spread in the Scuola media unica (unified junior high school) introduced in 1962, see A. Zelioli, *1963-1978. Dalle classi differenziali all'integrazione scolastica degli handicappati*, «Scuola Italiana Moderna», n. 5, 1978, pp. 14-19. On the Scuola media unica programme itself, cf. E. Damiano, B. Orizio, E. Scaglia (edd.), *I due popoli. Vittorino Chizzolini e «Scuola Italiana Moderna» contro il dualismo scolastico*, Roma, Studium, 2019.

class due to his lack of familiarity with standard Italian and his aggressive behaviour, which the teachers – one of their number affirms – were unable to «solve».

Although Comencini avoids taking an explicitly controversial approach, he implicitly conveys his critique of this system in various ways, firstly by means of the pressing questions he puts to his interviewees. For example, when – during his conversation with Maurizio's teacher – he asks if she thinks that creating differential classes could negatively impact on the self-perceptions that children build up by comparing themselves with peers, she replies – with evident discomfiture – that the pupils in the regular classes are not meant to know which of their companions have been assigned to the special classes, which of course is a highly unlikely state of affairs. Similarly, when asked whether selecting for superior intellectual abilities is one of the functions of schooling, the teacher says she thinks it unfair that the «most advanced minds» should have to wait for the «less capable and more handicapped». Thus, the teacher's own words convey an image of differential classes as places where the rejects of the public school system may be received.

Only at the end of the film, citing a recent article in the *Corriere della Sera*, does Comencini explicitly point the finger at the segregative nature of these classes, which «isolate the weakest without providing them with the slightest means of redemption». Differential classes reflected the social inequalities then forcing large segments of the Italian population into difficult living conditions. Inequalities that are in plain sight in the footage of *La bicicletta*, which shows a socio-economically backward neighbourhood marred by illegal construction. Given the cultural climate of the period, which was even further exacerbated by the civic unrest of 1968, special educational pathways were meeting with increasing opposition. Thus, the purpose of the documentary film was not only to illustrate a contemporary problem, but also to make its audience more sympathetic to a change of course that would require universal support. Comencini himself attempts to do his bit by gifting Maurizio – who has declared himself ready to try harder at his schoolwork – with a bicycle, soon to be broken by his drunken father, and by openly condemning the miserable life that the child was forced to lead, both at home and at school.

## 2. I “diversi” by V. De Seta

In the 1970s, Vittorio De Seta – a director renowned especially for his films of social inquiry – turned his attention to the world of school. While in his docudrama *Diario di un maestro* [*Diary of an elementary school teacher*], which aired for the first time in 1973, he had placed a teacher-actor in charge of a class group put together ad hoc for the production, towards the close of the decade, he took a different approach with the four-part docuseries *Quando la scuola cambia* [*When the school changes*]<sup>12</sup>. Advised on

<sup>12</sup> On De Seta cf. A. Rais (ed.), *Il cinema di Vittorio De Seta*, Catania, Maimone, 1995; *Il mondo perduto: i cortometraggi di Vittorio De Seta, 1954-1959*, Milano, Feltrinelli, 2008; P. Nappi, *L'avventura del reale: il*

this second project, as on the first, by education specialist Francesco Tonucci, De Seta documented life at four schools, in different regions of Italy, which were then successfully experimenting with innovative teaching methods in response to the needs of an increasingly large and diverse student body.

*I “diversi”*, first broadcast on Rai1 – the national flagship TV channel – on 24 June 1978, is the closing episode in the series and explores a project implemented by the Italian Association for Assistance to Spastics (AIAS) at Cutrofiano Rehabilitation Centre in the province of Lecce<sup>13</sup>. The Centre’s initial far-sighted experimentation with including children with disabilities in ordinary school pathways only lasted a few years, however it subsequently remained in operation as an outpatient and administrative service<sup>14</sup>.

The episode is divided into three parts. In the first part, the narrative voice of actor and playwright Stefano Satta Flores, accompanied by a sequence of photographs and video clips of children in a range of unidentified educational settings, offers a harsh critique of contemporary educational and healthcare institutions for the “handicapped” as they were then labelled. Described as «places of concentration» and «segregation», these institutions stood accused of reducing children with disabilities to mere objects of care, with an exclusive focus on medical health. Indeed, it was their awareness of such limitations that had prompted the directors of the Cutrofiano Rehabilitation Centre to revisit the centre’s aims and structure, leading to a series of attempts in the early 1970s to include children with disabilities in regular school pathways, as presented in the second segment of the episode.

Specifically, the school-related experiences of four children with disabilities are shown to the viewer. Through the testimonies of practitioners involved in these children’s individual educational pathways (teachers, social workers, psychologists, and education specialists), together with the observations of parents and classmates, the many positive aspects of transferring pupils from the rehabilitation centre to ordinary schools are brought to light. Importantly, building up a network of friendships in a mainstream classroom allowed the children to break out of the social isolation they had previously been forced into. The same mechanism also extended to their parents, who thus no longer felt marginalized on account of their situation. While the film director does not hide the challenges that the teachers encountered in striving to appropriately adapt their teaching methods, his main focus is on their insights and experiments, which – although only mentioned in passing by the interviewees – proved key to drawing out the potential of the individual students. The third part of the episode reinforces this last point by interviewing a physical education teacher at an elementary school in Lecce. Based his

*cinema di Vittorio De Seta*, Soveria Mannelli, Rubbettino, 2015. For more in-depth background on *Diario di un maestro*, see A. Debè, *Constructing Memory: School in Italy in the 1970s as Narrated in the TV Drama «Diario di un Maestro»*, in Yanes-Cabrera, Meda, Viñao (edd.), *School Memories*, cit., pp. 231-244.

<sup>13</sup> On the broader project, see works by Damiano Felini, including *Una proposta pedagogica sullo schermo. La scuola in due produzioni televisive di Vittorio De Seta (1970-1979)*, «Orientamenti Pedagogici», vol. 62, n. 2, 2015, pp. 273-291; *Quando la scuola cambia*, in Alfieri (ed.), *Banca dati degli audiovisivi sulla scuola e sugli insegnanti. Vol. 1*, cit., pp. 1-6.

<sup>14</sup> S. Dinelli, *Al Centro di Cutrofiano*, «Riforma della Scuola», n. 1, 1974, pp. 24-29.



own experience, he believes that the presence in the classroom of children with disabilities is a stimulus not only for the other classmates, but also for teachers, who must acquire the competence required to fulfil the right to education of all students.

It is evident that De Seta's goal was to illustrate the feasibility of an inclusive education system, almost as though to support the legislation on school integration that had recently been introduced. He had also set out to promote inclusion, albeit not exclusively in relation to disability, in *Diario di un maestro*. In that docudrama however, his simulation of reality was viewed as unconvincing by some critics<sup>15</sup>. In *Quando la scuola cambia*, in contrast, De Seta presented real-life examples of innovation, recording replicable teaching practices and bringing to the television screen a sort of «in-service teacher training course»<sup>16</sup>.

However, *I "diversi"* is in a somewhat different style to the other three episodes in the series. The Cutrofiano project is presented without practical suggestions on how to include children with disabilities. In contrast, the other episodes place much more emphasis on the practical dimension. For example, in the first episode, entitled *Partire dal bambino* [*Begin with the child*], concerning the work of teacher Mario Lodi with his primary school class in Vho di Piadena, a small village in northern Italy, the teacher's educational approach is conveyed in great detail, being outlined and explained by the teacher himself<sup>17</sup>. In *I "diversi"*, on the other hand, the accent is on offering a positive message to encourage school inclusion rather than on indicating the concrete steps required to bring it about. The teachers interviewed in the episode discuss their experience, but rarely define their chosen educational practices in detail. It is likely that this reticence reflects the climate of uncertainty generated by the introduction in the 1970s of the previously mentioned legislation on including children with disabilities in public schools. Many teachers were unprepared for the speed with which the change was implemented and only gradually did school practices come to be revisited<sup>18</sup>.

### 3. Rosso come il cielo by C. Bortone

Directed by Cristiano Bortone, the drama film *Rosso come il cielo* was released in 2007. A considerably successful production, it was screened all over the world and won multiple awards<sup>19</sup>. Set in 1970, it tells the story of 10-year-old Mirco, who following an accident with a rifle, loses his sight, first partially and then completely. Leaving Pontedera, near

<sup>15</sup> Nappi, *L'avventura del reale*, cit., pp. 133-138 and A. Debè, *The Italian TV series «Diario di un maestro»: a new way of experiencing school in the 1970s*, in P. Alfieri, I. Garai (edd.), *Individual and collective school memories. Research perspectives and case studies in Italy and Hungary*, Roma, Armando editore, 2022, pp. 132-154.

<sup>16</sup> Felini, *Una proposta pedagogica sullo schermo*, cit., p. 289.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 277-279.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Pruneri, *La politica scolastica dell'integrazione nel secondo dopoguerra*, cit.

<sup>19</sup> For further background, see A. Debè, *Rosso come il cielo*, in P. Alfieri (ed.), *Banca dati degli audiovisivi sulla scuola e sugli insegnanti. Vol. 2*, Milano, EDUCatt, 2022, pp. 1-5.

Florence, where he lives, he moves to Genoa to attend the local institute for the blind. Being separated from his family, along with the strict rules imposed by the director and the nuns who run the school, and severe difficulty with learning because he does not know Braille alphabets, makes life at the institution unbearable for the child<sup>20</sup>.

From a history of education perspective, the film combines two key dimensions. First, there is the narration of Mirco's personal story. Although the situation in which he finds himself causes him great suffering, he gradually manages to attribute meaning to his new everyday existence, rediscovering through sound the world that he can no longer perceive with sight. At the same time, the film also tells the story of the institute, presenting its educational aims and teaching methods. The task of narrating everyday educational life at the institution is mainly entrusted to the visual dimension of the film, the soundtrack by Ezio Bosso, and brief remarks by the story characters. The resulting representation is that of an educationally functional school: the classroom is a well-equipped to meet the sensory and mobility requirements of the blind; the religious sisters who form the teaching staff are conscientious and well-trained; there is an emphasis on vocational education, with a view to teaching each individual students «an occupation suited to his needs». Alongside this apparent efficiency, however, everyday life at the school is drab, marked by cold, impersonal spaces and a rigid sequence of predefined activities. «We eat, we study, and we sleep», states one child in the film.

These two dimensions – that of the main character and that of the institute – are closely intertwined, and so, the change in Mirco catalyses the transformation of the entire institute, which – the viewer is left to infer – is ultimately destined to transcend its self-referential and marginalizing approach. However, as the plot unfolds, the dimension of life at the school becomes increasingly less prominent compared to the dimension of Mirco, the true protagonist. Bortone himself stated that the purpose of the film was to present «an extraordinary story that deserved to be told», referring specifically to the story of the child<sup>21</sup>. This choice is conducive to eliciting strong empathy on the part of the viewer. Indeed, comments from audiences typically allude to Mirco's tenacity and fortitude and also to the director's ability to portray the potential for personal redemption of persons with disabilities. «Touching» and «moving» are among the most frequently used terms in reviews, both in Italy and abroad<sup>22</sup>. Even a journalist with the daily newspaper *la Repubblica* described the film as «touching and poetic»<sup>23</sup>. The film's sentimental character

<sup>20</sup> The story is based on the life of Mirco Mencacci, today a well-known sound editor in the Italian film industry. For further background on the film, cf. C.Z. Baruffi, *Il cinema tra percorsi educativi e sentieri formativi*, Padova, Libreriauniversitaria.it edizioni, 2011, pp. 141-143; Laura, Luisa and Morando Morandini (edd.), *Il Morandini: dizionario dei film e delle serie televisive*, Bologna, Zanichelli, 2021, p. 1325.

<sup>21</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ve7W0juiXXo> (last access: 04.01.2023).

<sup>22</sup> The reviews analysed for this study were drawn from several different websites, both Italian and international (given that the film was also screened in other countries). The main platforms consulted include *amazon.it*, *mymovies.it*, and *rottentomatoes.com*.

<sup>23</sup> P. D'Agostini, *Quando il cinema è suono storia di un cieco di talent*, «La Repubblica», 9 March 2007 (<https://www.mymovies.it/film/2005/rosso-come-il-cielo/rassegnastampa/143577/>, last access: 04.01.2023).

is strongly to the fore then, so much so that it was described by a critic writing for the newspaper *Liberazione* as a «sweet tale about the blind»<sup>24</sup>.

Clearly, therefore, the film resonates with changes over time in public sensibilities surrounding the theme of disability. At the same time, however, the film director's efforts to describe the characteristics of the institute's educational program have mostly passed over spectators' heads. Only an attentive and expert eye can clearly discern the image of the school that is conveyed by the film, which encompasses both a directional and self-referential educational approach, and teaching methods that are partially effective in meeting the needs of the student. The one-sided perspective adopted by most of the film's audience is exemplified in the words of an anonymous reviewer, who merely describes the institute attended by Mirco as a «distant and unknown place, where all the children were marginalized from the outside world»<sup>25</sup>. While there is an undeniable grain of truth in this statement, it was certainly influenced by the commentator's emotional engagement with Mirco's heartbreaking story, which likely prevented him or her from fully apprehending the characteristics of the educational institution.

#### 4. La classe degli asini by A. Porporati

Directed by Andrea Porporati and first broadcast on Rai1 on 14 November 2016, the film *La classe degli asini* is set in Turin between 1970 and 1971 and presents part of the personal and professional life story of Mirella, a meticulous middle school teacher and champion of the “old-fashioned” method of knowledge transmission, who at a certain point finds herself questioning all of her strongest convictions. A colleague, a male teacher called Felice, opens her eyes to the limitations of a teaching method that excludes those who are different, marginalizing disabled and maladjusted students by relegating them to “dunce” classes, special schools and institutes, or differential classes. In response to this situation, Felice sets up an after-school program that is open to all those who have been rejected by the school system.

Mirella's change of heart is strongly influenced by the experience of Riccardo, one of her young students. The oldest child in a Southern Italian family that emigrated to the North and now lives in poverty on the outskirts of Turin, Riccardo has been abandoned by his father, and is restless and unruly, leading his teachers to mistakenly categorize him as of below average intelligence. The teachers decide to exclude him from mainstream schooling, assigning him to a differential class – although in the film, Riccardo is placed in a residential centre that deploys mainly coercive and violent methods. At the same time, Flavia, Mirella's daughter who has severe mental and physical disabilities, is also sent

<sup>24</sup> B. Sollazzo, *Gli altri occhi del piccolo Mirco*, «Liberazione», 9 March 2007 (<https://www.mymovies.it/film/2005/rosso-come-il-cielo/rassegnastampa/144255/>, last access: 04.01.2023).

<sup>25</sup> See <https://www.mymovies.it/film/2005/rosso-come-il-cielo/pubblico/> (last access: 04.01.2023).

home from the private school where she is enrolled, on the grounds that she is incapable of learning.

Seeking help for her family situation, Mirella contacts the Turin branch of the National Association of Families of Subnormal Children (ANFFAS). Thanks to her encounter with this group and spurred on by her colleague Felice's "revolutionary" drive to revisit educational practice, she comes to the conclusion that the public school system needs to be reformed so that it can cater for all different kinds of special needs. When she becomes headteacher of the school, Mirella allows Riccardo to re-enroll, and with him also Flavia and other previously excluded children, thus launching an experiment in school integration<sup>26</sup>.

In contrast with *Rosso come il cielo*, this TV drama was not primarily driven by the desire to tell the story of its main character, but rather by the goal of shedding light on the process of school integration that took place in Italy in the 1970s. In 2013, Antonio Nocchetti, president of the Neapolitan association "Tutti a Scuola", whose mission is to safeguard the rights of students with disabilities, had written a letter to Francesco Pinto, then head of Rai, to enquire «why the public [broadcasting] service had never attended to an important law such as that which, in 1977, abolished differential classes»<sup>27</sup>. Getting the message, Rai chose to televise the real-life experience of Mirella Casale Antonione, on whose story the drama is based, as an example of farsighted advocacy for educational inclusion<sup>28</sup>.

The film firmly condemns "special" institutions, whether they take the form of differential classes, special schools, or combined healthcare and education institutes, which in the film overlap and are confounded with one other. These institutions are critiqued because they act as a means of exclusion and are self-referential. The institute that takes in Mirella's student is in practice a containment centre, which offers little or no education and has nearly no teachers or educational staff. At the other end of the spectrum, there is the inclusive project that Mirella launches at the middle school where she is headmistress. Although the film does not touch on the educational details of this project, it presents Mirella's school as a place where all students can grow and develop.

It is thus very clear that the film director's position is one of full approval of school inclusion and condemnation of segregation processes. While we may be sympathetic to his support for inclusive education and admire the fact that he represented Italy's courageous change in special education policy on TV, nevertheless, the film omits some of the historical nuance surrounding that change. Specifically it overlooks the fact that

<sup>26</sup> C. Gumirato, *La classe degli asini*, in Alfieri (ed.), *Banca dati degli audiovisivi sulla scuola e sugli insegnanti*, Vol. 1, cit., pp. 1-4.

<sup>27</sup> M. Basile, *Disabili a scuola, il sogno di Insinna: un Paese che non lascia indietro nessuno*, «Corriere del Mezzogiorno. Campania», 12 November 2016, p. 11.

<sup>28</sup> A secondary school teacher, Casale was headteacher at the "Camillo Olivetti" middle school in Turin, where in the early 1970s, she launched some successful experiments in inclusion. A member of ANFFAS from 1964, she held various positions within the association over time, up to that of national vice president. For fuller biographical details, see M. Levita, *Mirella Antonione Casale: la battaglia per i minori con disabilità tra ieri e oggi*, «Quaderni di Intercultura», vol. XI, 2019, pp. 192-210.

the strength of traditional educational facilities for the disabled lay in their deployment of specialized teaching methods, and that, at the same time, the new pattern of “wild integration” of the disabled was not without its challenges<sup>29</sup>.

The director’s simplified portrayal of the process of school inclusion has not gone unnoticed outside the education sector. The journalist and television critic Aldo Grasso, for example, wrote that «The topic is beyond dispute [...]. The content is so important that the script inevitably becomes secondary», yet the film «reflects [...] a somewhat dated view [of the public service] that is strongly characterized by a pedagogical mission and a paternalistic tone. It doesn’t make it to the next level»<sup>30</sup>. Furthermore, the journalist Andrea Fagioli commented on the «many stereotypes» in the film, which «clearly divides the “good guys” from the “bad guys”... [it is] all somewhat simplified. But perhaps this is the way to reach a general public that is thirsty for simple and positive messages, and for characters who fight worthy battles and with whom they can identify»<sup>31</sup>.

It might be said that the purely historical dimension of this film is overshadowed by its educational dimension, in terms of educating the public to accept and include those who are different. This is confirmed by the words of Eleonora Andreatta, director of Rai fiction in 2016, who stated that «*La classe degli asini* is an integral part of the editorial line of the public [broadcasting] service, whose aim is to engage all viewers and to offer respectful [treatment] of themes, values, and civic dedication and effort»<sup>32</sup>. At the same time, however, it must be noted that this emphasis on inclusive practices and the values of solidarity and sharing, as well as on arousing spectators’ emotions rather than engaging their rational sphere, also fits with the need to please audiences. Certainly, the film won a large following. It attracted almost 6 million viewers and was the prime time offering with by far the highest ratings on the evening it was broadcasted.

### *Conclusions*

This comparative analysis of four filmic productions shows that each of these works reflects cultural aspects of the period in which it was produced. For example, the films directed by Comencini and De Seta offer insight into the anti-authoritarian and emancipatory current that characterized 1960s and 1970s Italy, a movement that we know to have had key repercussions on the educational system. In relation to the inclusion of students with disabilities, these two works focused on a process that had just been initiated and that still needed to be fully embraced by public opinion. Hence, both films support the principle of inclusion, and are less concerned with providing viewers,

<sup>29</sup> Polenghi, *The History of Educational Inclusion of the Disabled in Italy*, cit.; L. Cottini, *Didattica speciale e inclusione scolastica*, Roma, Carocci Editore, 2017.

<sup>30</sup> “*La classe degli asini*” e la missione educativa di Vanessa Incontrada, «Corriere della Sera», 15 November 2016, pp. 11-12.

<sup>31</sup> “*La classe degli asini*”, valori e stereotipi, «Avvenire», 16 November 2016, p. 27.

<sup>32</sup> *Incontrada e Insinna nella battaglia contro le classi differenziali*, «Il Tirreno», 10 November 2016, p. 36.

especially teachers, with educational guidance, than with pointing up the desirable and legitimate nature of the integration process. This means that the directors were aware that legislation alone would not be enough to bring about change in schools, but that a shift in the collective image of schooling was also required.

On the other hand, in the years in which the films by Bortone and Porporati were produced, the principles underlying inclusive education had become established. These works, therefore, were not aimed at promoting structural change in schooling, but rather at confirming the choices previously made and inviting the public to continue to support them, within a broader approach that extended from schools to the wider social context. To this end, the narratives of the two films – which are partly fictionalized – are designed to tug at the audience's heartstrings, in contrast with the documentaries, which by their nature offer a more objective perspective<sup>33</sup>.

What the four filmic productions have in common, however, is their condemnation of the differential pathways for disabled and maladapted children that characterized the Italian school system prior to the 1970s. In contrast, the opening of schools to all students is portrayed as a completely positive experience. In pursuing this line of thinking, all the films take a rather simplistic approach, which, for example, leads them to avoid illustrating the valuable characteristics of some special education formats, especially in terms of targeted teaching methods<sup>34</sup>. The outcome is a gap between the complex history of special education institutes and their representation in filmic sources, whereby the latter tend to perpetuate a stereotypical and univocal vision of the topic within the collective imagination, choosing to offer not a faithful historical picture but rather a set of values to be conserved over time.

<sup>33</sup> In relation to documentaries and how they go about capturing reality, cf. S. Bruzzi, *New Documentary: a critical introduction*, London, Routledge, 2000, p. 4; P. Warmington, A. Van Gorp, I. Grosvenor, *Education in motion: use of documentary film in education research*, «Paedagogica Historica», n. 4, 2011, pp. 457-472.

<sup>34</sup> See for example, the case of deaf people in Italy and the well-structured and specialized educational pathways that were offered to them from the late 1800s onwards. For background on this topic, cf. R. Sani (ed.), *L'educazione dei sordomuti nell'Italia dell'800: Istituzioni, metodi, proposte formative*, Torino, SEI, 2008; M.C. Morandini, *L'educazione dei sordomuti: Il lungo cammino verso l'inclusione*, in M. Gecchele, P. Dal Toso (edd.), *Educare alle diversità: Una prospettiva storica*, Siena, Edizioni ETS, 2019, pp. 137-159.





# The Traditional Jewish School and Its Many Pasts: History and Memories

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At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, most Jewish children in Europe attended school. In France, England, Italy, and Germany, where the emancipatory process moved quickly, Jewish children studied primarily in state schools with their non-Jewish fellow students. However, in Eastern Europe, where the emancipatory process evolved more slowly, many children continued studying in the *Heder*, the most widespread elementary educational framework in Eastern European Jewry that dated back to the Middle Ages<sup>1</sup>.

In the traditional *Heder*, classes took place in a room (*Heder*, in Hebrew) at one of the local synagogues or at times in the teacher (*Melamed*)'s home. Depending on era and region, the teacher's salary was paid by the Jewish community or directly by children's parents.

Typically, pupils, generally boys, attended classes until the age of four or five. After learning to read Hebrew, they immediately began studying the basic texts in the Jewish tradition: the *Torah* (Bible), and after a few years, the *Talmud*, the rules of the law of Jewish daily life. Instruction was based on rote repetition and learning by heart<sup>2</sup>. Study was seen as an integral part of the education and socialization process of the Jewish child. Education and literacy are considered a religious duty in Jewish tradition and have been so since Antiquity<sup>3</sup>. Thus in all the Jewish communities, and not only in Eastern Europe, education was considered primordial, and had major repercussions on the social, intellectual and economic life not only of the Jews but also their non-Jewish neighbors<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> For a general introduction to the *Heder*, see M. Zalkin, *Heder*, in G.D. Hundert (ed.), *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2008, pp. 708-710. In French: M. Toledano, *L'école juive de la Miséricorde: les cheders de l'Est européen*, Paris, Le Cerf, 2000; R. Ertel, *Les cheders: l'école juive traditionnelle en Europe de l'Est*, Paris, Le Cerf, 2002; R. Wallek, *Les cheders: l'école juive du Moyen Âge à nos jours*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2005. In Hebrew: D. Assaf, E. Etkes (edd.), *The Heder. Studies, Documents, Literature and Memoirs*, Tel-Aviv, Tel-Aviv University, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> For more on the traditional Jewish education of girls, and the integration of girls into the *Heder* model see S. Stampfer, *Gender Differentiation and Education of the Jewish Woman in Nineteenth-Century Eastern Europe*, «Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry Fifteen», vol. 7, 1992, pp. 63-87.

<sup>3</sup> L. Ginzberg, *Students, Scholars and Saints*, Lanham (MD), University Press of America, pp. 1-34. See also: J. Cooper, *The Child in Jewish History*, Lanham (MD), Jason Aronson Inc. Publishers, 1996.

<sup>4</sup> M. Botticini, Z. Eckstein, *The Chosen Few, How Education Shaped Jewish History*, Princetown, Princetown University Press, 2012.

Historical information on the *Heder* can be found in the hundreds if not thousands of documents carefully preserved to this day that include legal documents and official minutes of meetings, memoirs and narratives, photographs, drawings, and other media<sup>5</sup>. Nevertheless, historical analysis cannot plunge blindly into these sources without applying the critical lens needed for a true methodological approach. This type of approach is particularly important when dealing with historical themes related to childhood: the lapse of time between the actual event and its literary description can blur the fragile boundary between reality and embellished recollection. Historian Philippe Ariès commented that people's recollections of their childhood are so altered that the actual facts need to be constantly confirmed by other sources<sup>6</sup>.

Although there is an inherent difference between memory and history, this does not mean that the historians researching history should reject recollections. Rather, history is based on memory in that it can transform it into a source of knowledge.

This notion was perhaps best formulated by Pierre Nora in the introduction to his work, *Les lieux de mémoire*:

Memory is life, borne by living societies founded in its name. It remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting [...]. History, on the other hand, is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer. Memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present; history is a representation of the past. Memory, insofar as it is affective and magical, only accommodates those facts that suit it; it nourishes recollections that may be out of focus or telescopic, global or detached, particular or symbolic [...]. History, because it is an intellectual and secular production, calls for analysis and criticism [...]. Memory takes root in the concrete, in spaces, gestures, images and objects; history binds itself strictly to temporal continuities, to progressions and to relations between things<sup>7</sup>.

For scholars of the school of New History, a *lieu de mémoire* in the broad sense is not only a material or concrete object that can be situated geographically like a building, a museum, or archives, but also an abstract or intellectually defined object, such as a symbol, a motto, an event, or an institution. A *lieu de mémoire* is no less interesting than a historical location. It may be even more intriguing since memory has shaped the present. This is why the distinction between history and memory is so crucial to the historian studying social life and to a better understanding of intellectual trends.

<sup>5</sup> For more details, see D.K. Roskies, *Heder: Primary Education among East European Jews. A Selected and Annotated Bibliography of Published Sources*, «Working Papers in Yiddish and Eastern European Jewish Studies», vol. 25, 1977.

<sup>6</sup> «Le souvenir que nous avons de notre propre enfance est souvent si altéré, si amplifié, si transformé, qu'il est nécessaire de vérifier sans cesse, auprès d'autres témoins, les faits réels qui s'y rapportent», P. Ariès, *L'enfant et la vie familiale sous l'Ancien Régime*, Paris, Plon, 1960 (*Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, translated by R. Baldick, New York, Vintage, 1965). See also M. Augé, *Les formes de l'oubli*, Paris, Payot, 1998. P. Ricoeur, *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 2000; and in particular: A. Viñao Frago, *La memoria escolar: restos y huellas, recuerdos y olvidos*, «Annali di Storia dell'Educazione e delle Istituzioni Scolastiche», vol. 12, 2009, pp. 19-33.

<sup>7</sup> P. Nora, *Between Memory and History: Les lieux de mémoire*, «Représentations», vol. 26, 1989, pp. 7-24. For another approach to history and memory, see P. Caspard, *L'historiographie de l'éducation dans un contexte mémoriel. Réflexion sur quelques évolutions problématiques*, «Histoire de l'Éducation», vol. 121, 2009, pp. 67-82.

This article probes the historiographical sources of the *Heder*, the institution that characterized the intersection of social and intellectual life of Eastern European Jewry at the dawn of the modern era. It shed light on its potential and relevance but also its limitations.

### 1. *Literary Depictions*

The *Heder* is frequently mentioned in the literature and in memoirs. Numerous authors have described their childhoods and their positive and negative experiences in the *Heder*<sup>8</sup>. Some discuss the importance of studying the sacred texts and the transmission of Jewish traditions in the *Heder*. They also stress the friendships and bonds between students, and their memories of happy moments in the classroom. Others also mention the shortcomings of education in the *Heder*: the authoritarian teachers, the pressure to excel, and the complex and at times conflictual relationships between students and teachers:

If I committed some infraction of school conduct, he would hang his leather belt directly behind me on a bedpost and thus increase the intensity of my studying with the visible symbol of discipline<sup>9</sup>.

There is no doubt that there were instances of violence in the *Heder*:

Once, his father asked me if the *Melamed* [the teacher] whipped the children... It is not a simple thing to withdraw a youngster from a despotic *Melamed*. The *Heder*, even with its cat-o'-nine-tails, is a holy place. The children dare not tell of the punishments and the parents dare not interfere with the *Melamed's* authority. How can the authority be effective without slaps, pinches, and blows? To end punishment would be to end the discipline that ensures that a youngster will grow up with learning and self-control. It was not easy to differentiate between necessary discipline and sadism<sup>10</sup>.

It would be erroneous to see this passage as a simple description of the use of violence as a form of punishment in the *Heder*. These lines are much more informative because they testify to the relationship to violence as a punitive method. The text underscores how difficult it was for parents to confront the authority of the *Melamed*, who was seen as a powerful, respected figure but could also be perceived as a tyrant. Although the pupils were subjected to corporal punishment, the author acknowledges that discipline is a vital component for learning and acquiring self-control.

<sup>8</sup> Most of them are written in Hebrew. Translated in English, see for example L. Stein *et alii* (edd.), *The Education of Abraham Caban*, Philadelphia, Jewish Publication Society of America 1969; N. Marsden (ed.), *A Jewish Life under the Tsars: The Autobiography of Chaim Aronson 1825-1888*, New Jersey, Allanheld, 1983. See also M. Blaustein (ed.), *Memoirs of David Blaustein*, New York, McBride, Nast & Company, 1975; I. Cohen, *History of the Jews in Vilna*, Philadelphia, Jewish Publication Society of America 1992, p. 129; M.S. Shulzinger, *The Tale of a Litvak*, New York, Philosophical Library 1985, pp. 30-43; B. Wolsky, *My Life in Three Worlds*, Miami Beach (FL), Wolsky, 1979, pp. 9-10.

<sup>9</sup> Stein, *The Education of Abraham Caban*, cit., p. 7.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

The text also illustrates the complexities and ambiguities of traditional Jewish education, where discipline was seen as a cardinal virtue, but where physical punishment could be abusive. The writer goes beyond mere description and take a stance. He highlights the dialectic between maintaining discipline and the abuse of power. For the historian, the acknowledgment of these tensions is no less important than the narrative itself.

This complexity appears most clearly when he states «The *Heder*, even with its cat-o'-nine-tails, is a holy place», which lends itself to a number of interpretations. On the one hand, it affirms the sacredness of the traditional Jewish school, which is described as a holy place despite the punitive practices enacted there. Clearly the *Heder* was a locus of transmission of Jewish tradition and Torah study, which was seen as a sacred activity. In this sense, even though recourse to violence is hard to justify, the fact that learning indeed took place in this setting can be seen as positive. On the other, this sentence can be seen as ambiguous or ironic. The mention of the cat o' nine tails as characteristic of the *Heder* can be seen as an implicit criticism of corporal punishment. The use of the term “holy place” to describe the traditional Jewish school setting can also be seen as an ironic way to highlight the contradictions of this institution, which was simultaneously a sacred place and a place where violence was committed.

However, is it really possible to capture the author's position or his personal opinion? It is possible that his stance was ambivalent and that his personal judgment was not clearly expressed in the text. This issue is obviously pertinent for biographers but is equally so for the historian of the *Heder*. For historians, the importance of this ambiguity lies in the fact that it can reveal dilemmas and contradictions within traditional Jewish communities with respect to education and discipline. This suggests that the community could favor education and discipline while being aware of the abuses of power that could arise from it. For the historian of the *Heder*, this ambiguity can help clarify the norms and cultural values of the community as well as the challenges confronting parents, students and teachers. Passages such as these can also shed light on the factors that led to changes in educational practices, such as restrictions on the use of corporal punishment as a disciplinary measure in traditional Jewish schools. These narratives are designed to transmit recollections of the authors' lives, and thus often reflect the complexity of their experiences, which at times are purposely exaggerated, as shown below.

The next day I refused to go back to the *Heder*. The *Melamed's* son, Kasriel, a young man with a sharp, bobbing Adam's apple, came to fetch me. Mother tried to persuade Father to let me skip Heder for another day or two, but he insisted I be sent, by force if necessary.

«A boy must come to love *Heder*» he said, «the Torah is sweet». I did not taste this sweetness when Kasriel picked me up and slung me over his shoulder like a side of beef. I scratched him, kicked him, and shrieked, and the people again came outside to enjoy the spectacle.

«That's the way, Kasriel!» they shouted in encouragement. «Drag him in by his hair, the rabbi's pampered brat!». With one hand Kasriel held me firmly, while in the other he carried the box of bread slices for his father's pupils. This scene was repeated day after day. I resisted the despised *Heder* with all the determination of a three-year-old<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> I.J. Singer, *Of a World That Is No More*, New York, Vanguard Press, 1970, pp. 26-28.

This anecdote captures the traumatic experiences of a very young boy who refuses to go to the *Heder*. Despite attempts by his mother to let him stay at home for a few more days, his father insists on his going, even if this requires literally carrying him there. The scene is both touching and troubling since it depicts a child who needs to face a reality he is not willing to accept, despite the expectations of the community. More broadly, this story underscores the importance ascribed to religious education in Jewish culture and the social pressure on children to comply. Clearly the little boy has not tasted ‘the sweetness’ of the Torah evoked by his father. He resists the obligations imposed by his parents and society.

The narrative, told from the point of view of the little boy, is full of details and presents a range of emotions through its descriptions of the child’s resistance, which bolster the impression of physical strictures imposed on him. However, it is difficult to determine how much of the description corresponds to reality or to literary license. Although the author could have drawn on his own experience or those of others in his childhood community, it is also possible that he interjected fictional elements to enliven his characters and fashion a more dramatic situation. This points to the importance of reading this story with a grain of salt and not taking it as a fully accurate picture of social reality. Despite the fact that certain elements are fictitious, this story can be seen as a symbolic representation of social pressure and resistance to religious education in traditional Jewish communities. Thus, clearly historians must be aware of the limitations of these recollections, and the narrators’ potential biases. It is crucial to contextualize testimonies by comparing and contrasting them with other sources to obtain a fuller and more comprehensive picture of the history of the *Heder* and traditional Jewish education in particular.

Is this enough to differentiate history from memory? According to Nurit Govrin, criticism of the *Heder* was one of the leitmotifs of modern Hebrew literature throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>12</sup>. After collecting, comparing and analyzing hundreds of different stories, she identified several semantic categories spanning all of these narratives that depict the *Heder*. In each category, the descriptions can be situated on a spectrum, where most are negative and a few are positive.

- The *Melamed*: in general poor, old, cruel and prone to anger. He has little education and is often actually ignorant. A few texts describe the *Melamed* as paternal and protective of the students.
- Instruction: limited exclusively to the traditional texts, based on rote repetition without any real understanding of the material. Dreamers and less proficient students are left by the wayside. A few mentions a spirit of comradeship and individual development.
- The students: very young, spend their entire day at the *Heder* with no toys, no recreational activities and no vacations. They are often hit and humiliated, except sons of wealthy or leading families. Experiences at the *Heder* impacted students’ whole lives and could lead to a partial or total rejection of

<sup>12</sup> N. Govrin, “*Hedrey-Hederim*”: *Bikoret Sidrey ha-Limud ba-Heder be-Sifrut ha-Ivrit le-Dorotey’ha* [“At the *Heder*”: criticism of teaching methods in the *Heder* in Hebrew literature], *Moreshet Israel*, vol. 1, 2004, pp. 56-77. See also S. Werses, *Jewish Education in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Russia in the Eyes of Mendele Mokber Sefarim*, in G. Abramson, T. Parfitts (edd.), *Jewish Education and Learning*, Chur, Harwood Academic Publishers, 1994, pp. 243-260.

traditional Jewish cultural values. The ‘good’ students were often hypocrites, who aimed to be in the *Melamed’s* good graces and avoid punishment.

– The school environment: generally decrepit and dirty, not appropriate for teaching. The *Heder* was often located in the *Melamed’s* own home, in the main room where his wife and children continued to go about their daily lives, including household chores. The one glimmer of hope: the *Melamed’s* wife often took the youngest children under her wing to shield them from the toxic atmosphere of the *Heder*.

The features described so often in these narratives appear to be confirmed by this analysis. However, Govrin argues that drawing this type of conclusion would be erroneous: these stories are not realistic depictions but rather the output of a literary movement engaged in a cultural and social combat to modernize and secularize Jewish identity. The portrait of the *Heder* in these works is always negative, since it supports the goals of this movement. In addition, by focalizing on individual lives and destinies, these literary depictions elicit the readers’ identification with the characters and transforms the particular into the general such that it is no longer one child who suffered at the hands of one cruel *Melamed* but rather all children who suffered cruelly at the hands of all teachers in all traditional Jewish schools<sup>13</sup>.

However, historians dealing with both history and memory should not simply discard these stories. An analysis of the rationales motivating their criticism and their choice of literary style can lead to a better understanding of their cultural orientation and their actual impact. As Hayden White pointed out:

Narrative discourse, in short, is not only a way of “making sense” of things, of finding order in the universe; it is also a way of imposing order upon the universe, of organizing and mastering it through the use of language, which in turn is a means of legitimating the self and its activities in relation to others and to social and physical environments<sup>14</sup>.

## 2. Pictorial documentation

There is growing interest among researchers in the use of photographs to document the history of education<sup>15</sup>. Photographs are primary sources of invaluable information

<sup>13</sup> Govrin, *Hedrey-Hederim*, cit., p. 57 (translated by the author).

<sup>14</sup> H. White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987, p. 2.

<sup>15</sup> For example: M. Brunelli, *Las fotografías escolares como “objetos sociales”. Primeras reflexiones sobre el uso educativo y social del patrimonio fotográfico en el museo de la escuela*, in A. Badanelli Runio et alii (edd.), *Pedagogía museística*, Madrid, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 2014, pp. 203-217; C. Burke, *A picture of learning: Children’s experiences in the early years of formal education*, «Journal of Early Childhood Research», vol. 12, n. 2, 2014, pp. 135-149; J. Dubois, *L’image photographique dans les manuels scolaires français d’histoire-géographie du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, «Revue française de pédagogie», vol. 207, n. 3, 2019, pp. 73-92; J. Hardy, R. Bell, *Seeing and believing: Visual images, teachers and teacher education*, «Teaching and Teacher Education», vol. 24, n. 1, 2008, pp. 14-25; S. Wagnon, *La photographie de classe dans l’école française: une source sous-estimée de compréhension de l’histoire de l’école, interface entre sphères privée et publique (XIX<sup>e</sup>-XXI<sup>e</sup>)*, «Encounters in Theory and History of





Fig. 1. *Melamed* and students in a *Heder*, Lublin, Poland. Alter Kacyzne, 1920s. Gelatin silver print. YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, New York (Forward Association/YIVO)

on pedagogical practices, students' and teachers' daily routines, changes in education, the architecture of educational institutions, classroom settings, equipment, uniforms, ecc. Clearly the use of photographs in historical research can entail methodological difficulties, such as the reliability of the photos, the lack of context or appropriate captions, or biases in their selection. Nevertheless, the differentiation between fact and fiction may be easier to achieve with photographs than with literary works. Examining multiple photographs of *Heder* can shed light on the specifics of daily life in terms of the furniture, gestures, light, and even the facial expressions of the individuals in them as shown in Figure 1. This well-known photo was taken after 1920 in a *Heder* in Poland and is often used as an example of a *Heder* or of traditional Jewish life.

The picture shows 15 or so children sitting at a long wooden table that is clearly not adapted to their stature: their heads are at table height, which makes it difficult to read a book laid flat on the table. The *Melamed* is standing behind a student concentrated on a reading assignment and pointing to the place in the book with a pencil. These details confirm descriptions of the *Heder* in the literature. The novelty of this picture lies primarily in what it reveals about the children's behavior. Perhaps because they were disturbed or intimidated by the photographer, these children do not seem to be engaged in reading at all. Two or three are looking at the camera, another is looking at his fellow student, and yet another seems to be daydreaming. Another student, leaning on his classmate's shoulder, seems particularly uninterested in the *Melamed* and the photographer. In other



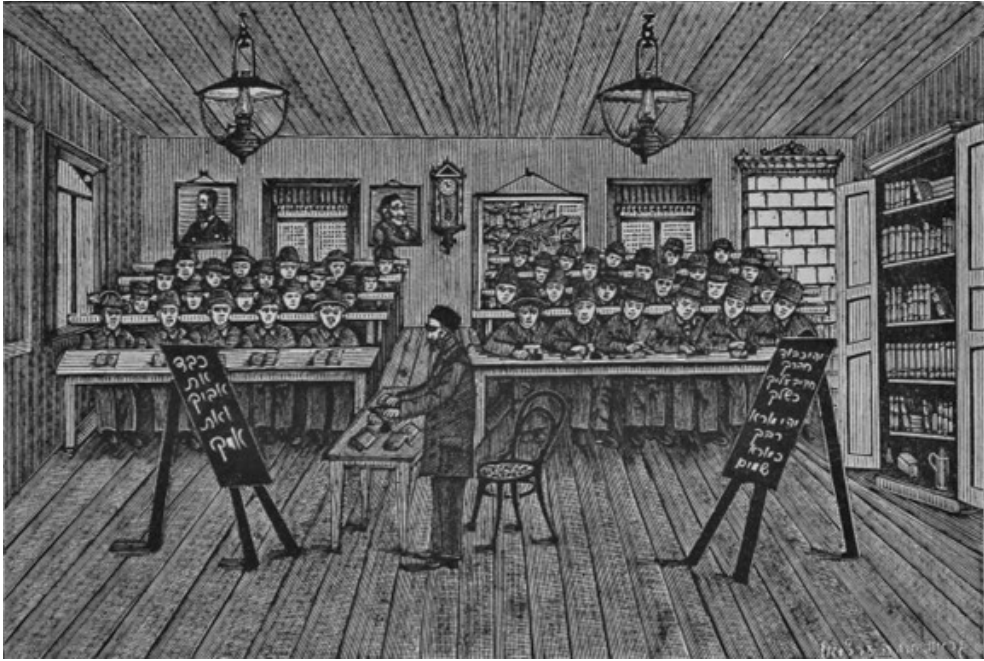


Fig. 2. *Melamed* and students in a “reformed” *Heder*. H.L. Herzman. Printed engraving in A.B. Temkin, *Ha-torah Ve-hasafah*, Vilnius, 1898 (The National Library of Israel)

words, this photograph captures the disconnect between the *Melamed* and his students for all eternity. Was this typical of all *Heders* or was this a unique circumstance? Obviously, this question cannot be answered without a quantitative, in-depth examination of other sources. However, this photo enables the historian to approach the issue of the effectiveness of traditional teaching in the *Heder*. By contrast to the written narratives where the *Heder* experience is conveyed through literary devices, a photograph provides documentation of reality. Other visual media, including drawings, also depict forms of reality, as shown in Figure 2.

This picture shows the cover page of a textbook published in Vilna entitled *Ha-Torah ve-hasafah* (Torah and Language). Its author, Abraham Baruch Temkin, designed the book to teach Biblical texts and the Hebrew language (as well as Russian) to Yiddish-speaking Jewish children. It departed from the curriculum of the traditional *Heder*, where the Hebrew biblical text was taught directly in Yiddish. This textbook was used in *Heder Metukan*, the “reformed” *Heder*, a new educational framework created on the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to respond to efforts by the *Maskilim* (the leaders of the Jewish Enlightenment movement) to modernize Jewish life and Jewish education in particular, to encourage the social integration of Jews into the local population<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>16</sup> For more on these changes in traditional Jewish education: S. Kraiz, *Russian-language Jewish schools*

The proponents of the “reformed” *Heder* wanted to combine the traditional *Heder* for children from religious families, where most of the daily study would continue to be traditional learning, with a reformed classroom, where instruction was based on modern pedagogical principles on teaching and learning. The picture shows a spacious, clean, well-laid out classroom with windows that can be opened for ventilation, oil lamps when there was not enough natural light, and a large woodburning stove for cold winter days. The students are wearing uniforms, are sitting on benches, with their books and notebooks placed neatly on their desks. The teacher has his own chair, writes on the blackboard, and keeps books arranged in an orderly fashion in a bookcase. The only clock in the room is located behind the students, and is thus only visible to the teacher, who uses it to decide when to end the lesson.

The staging is perfect. However, there are some particularities that make this idyllic classroom setting a little less believable. The teacher is not facing the students, and there are two blackboards in the room, unlike in modern classrooms that typically only have one. It appears that the class is divided into two groups, with one group facing the teacher and the other group completing a writing assignment since their hands are on the desk rather than under it as for the first group. The two blackboards enable the teacher to teach two different groups, as is done today when teaching large or multilevel classes. The difference between then and now is that modern teachers are trained to use this technique, whereas in the past, teachers drew on their own professional experience or shared experiences with colleagues. Any teacher who has attempted to teach a divided class knows that it is not always effective. Students who are assigned a writing task may become distracted by the lesson being taught to the other group and find it difficult to concentrate. However, the teacher in the picture seems to have found a solution to this challenge. By utilizing two separate blackboards, one for each group, the teacher gives each group their own distinct space and minimize distractions. While this technique may not have been foolproof, it was likely an effective way to manage a divided class in an era before modern teaching techniques and resources were available.

A closer look at the two blackboards in the classroom shows that the artist has oriented them so that the viewer can read different sentences on each, one of which is short (5 words), while the other is longer. The shorter one is from the Ten Commandments: Honor thy father and mother (*Exodus*, 20, 12). The second is a quote from the Ethics of the Fathers, a tractate of the Mishna that states: Let the honor of the other be as dear to you as your own, and the reverence for your master as the reverence for Heaven (*Ethics*

*in Tsarist Russia*, Doctoral Thesis, Department of Jewish History, Jerusalem The Hebrew University, 1990-1994; S.J. Zipperstein, *Transforming the Heder: Maskilic Politics in Imperial Russia*, in A. Rapoport-Albert, S.J. Zipperstein (edd.), *Jewish History. Essays in Honor of Chimen Abramsky*, London, P. Halban, 1988, pp. 87-109 and recently: S. Stampfer, *Traditional Education and the Appearance of New Types of Schools before the First World War*, in V. Sirutavičius, D. Staliūnas, J. Šiaučiūnaitė-Verbickienė (edd.), *The History of Jews in Lithuania. From the Middle Ages to the 1990s*, Leiden, Brill, 2019, pp. 202-2015. On the revised *Heder* specially: J. Pilch, *The Heder Metukan*, Doctoral Thesis, Department of Pedagogy, Philadelphia The Dropsie College, a.y. 1950-1952. See also E. Adler, *Educational Options for Jewish Girls in Nineteenth Century Eastern Europe*, «Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry Fifteen», vol. 15, 2002, pp. 301-310.

*of the Fathers*, 2, 10). Both deal with honor and respect. The teacher thus found a good solution to help his students focus on their tasks. Instead of teaching two completely different subjects, he taught two subjects that were closely related, despite the varying levels of knowledge. By doing so, the students who were writing were still exposed to ideas drawing on the same vocabulary and semantic field, thus minimizing potential distractions. This solution shows the teacher's pedagogical sensibility and ability to understand his students' difficulties while finding a creative and effective solution. Unlike modern teachers who have access to courses in pedagogy or education and teaching books, teachers in the "reformed" *Heder* did not have these resources. However, they had a good understanding of pedagogy and were able to use their own professional experiences and insights to develop effective teaching techniques.

These details thus appear to reflect a pedagogical reality rooted in the daily life of the "reformed" *Heder* and not staging. Although it is an engraving, it appears to capture reality.

Does this mean that the engraving only serves as a representation of reality, without conveying an ideological message? The artist intentionally oriented the engraving towards the viewer to convey a message. It is not simply a static depiction captured on paper, but rather a meaningful moment that is intended to be shared and disseminated. This indeed makes engraving an ideological affirmation linked to the theme chosen to represent the "reformed" *Heder*.

However, the topic of the lesson in the picture is not straightforward: while half of the students are studying the Bible, the other half are studying Talmud. Still, the title of the lesson could be *Honor and Respect*, with a focus on moral and social values such as respecting one's parents, teachers, and others. The lesson's true subject, for the two groups in the same class, is values as the foundation of an ethical society. This raises the more general question of whether honor and respect are Jewish or universal values. The principles of "reformed" *Heder* were that even universal values should be taught through Jewish sources, since Judaism has a privileged approach to universal values. The illustrator's decision to depict the striking atmosphere of this educational framework through the texts on the blackboard is intentional. Instead of writing the first sentence of the Bible to emphasize the traditional nature of the "reformed" *Heder*, or an arithmetic exercise to showcase its modern orientation, the artist represented the fusion of tradition and modernity. This image is not simply an illustration, but rather a deliberate statement, where each component was carefully planned to convey a specific message.

For the historian of education, the redrawn image of the classroom is as interesting as the actual classroom itself. This visual representation of a school setting in a specific era does not only reflect what schools looked like during this period but also the changes and the issues facing education characterizing this period. The methodological goal behind the analysis of pictorial material is not to reject a staged image of reality but rather to make a distinction between the two to better understand how they intersect. As Peter Burke commented: «The visual representation of a historical reality, as restored by images,

is often as important for historical analysis as the reality itself, because it reflects the values and ideals of the period in which it was created»<sup>17</sup>.

### 3. *Musical Sources*

In 1901, Max Warshavsky (1848-1907), a prominent figure in the world of Yiddish music and culture, published his seminal collection of Yiddish folk songs. Yiddish folk songs long served as an essential mode of cultural expression for Eastern European Jews and Warshavsky's collection provided a platform for preserving and disseminating these treasured musical traditions. One of the songs featured in this collection is *Oyfn Pripetsbik* (By the Fireside), a very moving song describing the teaching of the Hebrew alphabet by a *Melamed* to a group of children in a *Heder*.

The song's title, *Oyfn Pripetsbik*, is somewhat enigmatic and has been the subject of much scholarly inquiry<sup>18</sup>. While the title has come to be associated with a specific image of a child in the *Heder* sitting by the fire while studying Torah, there is little scholarly consensus about the origins and true meaning of the title. Nonetheless, it is plausible that the original title may have been *The Alphabet*, given that the refrain of the song contains a genuine grammar rule in Yiddish. Specifically, the song's refrain contains a reference to the Yiddish rule known as *komets alef*, which stipulates that the letter *alef* should be pronounced *o* as in *ore* when associated with the *komets* vowel sign. This rule is an essential component of Yiddish orthography, and the fact that it is referenced in a popular Yiddish folk song speaks to the centrality of language and literacy in Jewish culture<sup>19</sup>.

By capturing both a key moment of traditional Jewish education and a typical scene from the life of Eastern European Jews in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the song quickly found an audience. It sweetly and nostalgically evokes the first steps in learning to read and Torah learning through simple repetition. From an anthropological and sociological perspective, the acquisition of literacy skills is not only a key individual milestone, but also a significant factor in shaping social and cultural development. Literacy enables individuals to access and participate in various forms of knowledge and communication. In the context of traditional Jewish culture, the act of reading has even deeper significance, as it is intricately linked to the study of the sacred texts of Judaism. The process of learning to read Hebrew script and understanding its meaning are considered fundamental aspects of Jewish spiritual life, because they are believed to connect the individual to a divine source of wisdom and understanding. The acquisition of literacy skills is not only a personal

<sup>17</sup> P. Burke, *Eyewitnessing: The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence*, London, Reaktion Books, 2001, p. 3.

<sup>18</sup> R. Rubin, *Jewish Musical Traditions*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1991; M. Slobin, M. Kligman, *Yiddish Folk Songs from the Ruth Rubin Archive*, Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 2007.

<sup>19</sup> D.K. Roskies, *Alphabet Instruction in the East-European Heder: Some Creative and Historical Notes*, «YIVO Annual of Jewish Social Sciences», vol. 17, 1978, pp. 21-53.

achievement, but also a social and cultural phenomenon that reflects and shapes the values, beliefs, and practices of the society<sup>20</sup>.

In *Oyfn Pripetschik* education is not presented as an easy or streamlined process. Children are encouraged to overcome these difficulties and persevere to achieve their goals. The text emphasizes the importance of determination, patience, and learning. By overcoming obstacles, the child can acquire valuable skills for their future. The lyrics of this song, in one of the best-known English versions is as follows:

In the hearth, a fire burns,  
And in the house it is warm.  
And the rabbi is teaching little children,  
The alphabet.

*Refrain:*

*See, children, remember, dear ones,  
What you learn here;  
Repeat and repeat yet again,  
Komets-alef: o!*

Learn children, don't be afraid,  
Every beginning is hard;  
Lucky is the one has learned Torah,  
What more does a person need?

*Refrain:*

*See, children, remember, dear ones,  
What you learn here;  
Repeat and repeat yet again,  
Komets-alef: o!*

When you grow older, children,  
You will understand by yourselves,  
How many tears lie in these letters,  
And how much lament.

*Refrain:*

*See, children, remember, dear ones,  
What you learn here;  
Repeat and repeat yet again,  
Komets-alef: o!*

When you, children, will bear the Exile,  
And will be exhausted,  
May you derive strength from these letters, Look in at them!

<sup>20</sup> B.V. Street, *Social Literacies: Critical Approaches to Literacy in Development, Ethnography, and Education*, London, Longman Publishing Group, 1995.

The last stanzas of the song broaden the initial perspective of the *Heder* to address the Jewish condition in the Diaspora. The transition of the Jewish child to adulthood, symbolized by learning to read, is transformed into a brutal realization of the suffering and distress that characterize Jewish life. In this context, the study of sacred texts becomes the essential source of strength and resilience to overcome the trials of existence. During the Holocaust, *Oyfen Prifeshetik* was often sung by Jewish prisoners in concentration camps to express their resilience and to hold onto their cultural heritage in the face of extreme adversity. Some versions of the song included new stanzas that specifically addressed the horrific conditions of the camps and the hope for eventual liberation. Today, the song has become associated with the fate of the Jewish people during the Holocaust and is often performed as a tribute to the victims and as a symbol of Jewish survival and resilience<sup>21</sup>.

Despite Warshawsky's hints to the contrary, it is worth noting that *Oyfen Prifeshetik* is not an old traditional folk song whose author is unknown, but rather a poem that was composed by Warshawsky himself and subsequently set to music. For historian David Assaf, who drew attention to this little-known fact, the issue is not whether it is a folk song, but rather understanding why Warshawsky chose to depict the *Heder* in such a positive manner<sup>22</sup>. Warshawsky and the cultural and social milieu he was a part of represented a new facet of Jewish identity; namely, the generation that grew up in a traditional Jewish environment where religion was the center of daily life, but who chose to become secular. Although Warshawsky spent his childhood in a *Heder*, it was not the educational framework he would choose for his own children. This reflected a broader shift in Jewish society at the time, when more Jews were embracing secularism and seeking to integrate into the wider non-Jewish world.

The positive portrayal of the *Heder* in *Oyfen Prifeshetik* can be seen as an affirmation of Jewish cultural heritage and a celebration of the role that traditional education played in shaping Jewish identity, even as Jews were beginning to explore new forms of identity and expression. As Assaf noted, this presentation of the *Heder* contrasts sharply with the negative portrayal of the *Heder* as a place of violence and frustration, as depicted by the early *Maskilim*. They saw the *Heder* as the source of the precarity of Jewish existence and as a threat to its future on the eve of modernity. In contrast, Warshawsky saw the *Heder* as a symbol of the strength of Israel and the continuity of the Jewish people.

There are several explanations for these changes in attitudes toward traditional education. The early *Maskilim*'s battle against the *Heder* was a struggle to improve the conditions of Jews in Eastern Europe through modernization and secularization of both

<sup>21</sup> J. Rubin, *Yiddish folksong as cultural resistance: The Holocaust period*, in G.E. Pozzetta, J.V. D'Agostino (edd.), *Oral history and the Holocaust*, Westport, Greenwood Press, pp. 209-226. *Oyfen Prifeshetik* has also been featured in contemporary cultural productions that reflect on the Holocaust and its legacy. For example, the song is used in the soundtrack of the film "Schindler's List" (1993), directed by Steven Spielberg. The song underscores its significance as a cultural touchstone for Jewish identity and resilience, and its association with the Holocaust contributed to introducing the song to wider audiences.

<sup>22</sup> D. Assaf, "Katan ve-Hamim"? *Ha-Shir Oyfen Prifeshetik ve-ha-Shinoy be-Dimuyav shel ha-Heder* ["Small and Cozy"? The Song *Oyfen Prifeshetik* and the Transformation of the Image of the *Heder*] in D. Assaf, E. Erkes (edd.), *The Heder: Studies, Documents, Literature and Memoirs*, cit., pp. 111-130.



infrastructure and mentality. The *Heder* perpetuated traditional society, and thus needed to be condemned in order to be transformed<sup>23</sup>.

However, as of the 1870s, waves of Eastern European Jews began immigrating to the United States in search of a better world and a more equitable society. After the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881 and the waves of pogroms that followed, immigration became massive. This was further strengthened by the expulsion of Jews from Moscow in 1890, the Kishinev pogroms in 1903, and those that followed Russia's defeat in the Russo-Japanese War. The instability of the government and the failure of the 1905 Revolution further increased this immigration, which brought two million Jews to America before the outbreak of World War I.

Warshavsky's perspective on the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in Russia was not one of hope and progress for the Jewish community. Rather he saw it as a period of tragic loss, marking the end of the Jewish world he had known. The uncertain future, coupled with the rising tide of anti-Semitism, made it difficult for Warshavsky and others to envision what lay ahead. In Warshavsky's view, the disappearance of the traditional Jewish way of life was particularly poignant. He was nostalgic for the small Jewish village (*Shtetl*) and its *Heder*, while its slow demise was a painful reminder of the loss of Jewish heritage and perpetuity. The *tears* and *road of exile* mentioned *Oyfen Pripetshtik* were thus a reflection of the profound sadness and sense of displacement felt by the Jewish community as they were forced to leave their homes and seek refuge in America<sup>24</sup>. Thus, the *Heder* itself does not represent a *lieu de mémoire*, but rather the act of learning to read in the *Heder*. This suggests that learning to read is a formative experience that has universal symbolic significance.

### *Conclusion*

This article explored the historiographical sources of the traditional Jewish school known as the *Heder* through literary accounts, memoirs, photographs, and folk songs. It differentiated between the historical core of these documents and the imaginary constructs behind them. Rather than dismissing the historical image in favor of historical reality, this approach views the historical image as a reality in itself, which acts as a repository of human perceptions, values, and meanings. A considerable part of this the article was devoted to methodological issues related to the analysis of historical documents.

Overall, the *Heder* played a crucial role in the social and ethical framework of Eastern European Jews. However, as a theme that deals with childhood in general and educational

<sup>23</sup> S. Stampfer, *Heder Study, Knowledge of Torah, and the Maintenance of Social Stratification in Traditional East European Jewish Society*, «Studies in Jewish Education», vol. 3, 1988, pp. 271-289.

<sup>24</sup> As noted by C. Shaw and M. Chase: «Nostalgia can be seen as a means of preserving the continuity of a particular identity, in which memories of the past help to maintain a sense of connection to the present and the future» (C. Shaw, M. Chase (edd.), *The Imagined Past. History and Nostalgia*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1989, p. 3).



experiences in particular, the findings extend beyond the specific context of the *Heder* and the Jewish people. The messages of hope and perseverance conveyed by the images of the *Heder* have universal significance and can resonate with societies and cultures worldwide. Thus, the relevance of the *Heder* speaks to broader issues of the human condition, and in particular the importance of education and the role of childhood in shaping society.



# School as Seen by the Radio (1945-1975)

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## 1. *The first relations between radio and school*

In Italy, the first distance learning experiences were produced by state radio. The latter experienced its first development in the Fascist twenties, in particular from 1924, with the birth of the Ministry of Communications, entrusted to Costanzo Ciano<sup>1</sup>. The latter boasted relations with Guglielmo Marconi and with his advisor, Solari, one of the very earliest fascists. On 27 August 1924, the minister's mediation enabled the establishment of the *Unione Radiofonica Italiana* (URI), from the merger of the *Radiofono* of the Marconi group and the *Società Italiana Radio Audizioni Circolari* (SIRAC)<sup>2</sup>. From January 1925, the weekly "Radio Hour", the official organ of the URI, published all the hours of radio broadcasts receivable. From the summer of 1926, the URI was commissioned to produce short programmes for collective listening, to be broadcast in the venues of recreational societies and in the meeting places of the Opera Nazionale Balilla.

On 25 December 1926, Elisabetta Oddone, a primary school teacher, lent her voice for the first time to a radio programme for children, broadcast from the headquarters in Milan and entitled *Il cantuccio degli bambini*. The following year, the URI changed its acronym to EIAR, *Ente Italiano per le Audizioni Radiofoniche* (Italian Body for Radio Listening)<sup>3</sup>, and in 1930 it started the new official press organ called «Radiocorriere». In 1933, EIAR followed the message expressed explicitly by Mussolini: «Every village must have its own radio»; and if each city had to have its own radio listening apparatus, schools were immediately identified as particularly suitable venues for the purpose of spreading fascist ideology: these were places that were present in a large part of the territory and above all were the recognised bodies for the education of the younger generations.

In 1934, there were 900.000 radio listeners in Italy, the devices were present in very limited numbers and, based on the mandatory possession fee, there were 350.000 subscribers, with large disproportions in the presence of devices between the north and south of the country<sup>4</sup>. At the time of the 1936 census, the resident Italian population was estimated at about 42 million people<sup>5</sup>. The decision to spread economic models that were capable of entering the greatest number of places frequented by Italians, such as Radio

<sup>1</sup> C. Ciano, *Le comunicazioni nel primo decennio fascista*, Milano, Mondadori, 1932.

<sup>2</sup> F. Monteleone, *Storia della radio e della televisione in Italia*, Venezia, Marsilio, 1999.

<sup>3</sup> RAI, *Annuario RAI 1988/1989*, Torino, Nuova ERI, 1989.

<sup>4</sup> P. Ortoleva, B. Scaramucci (edd.), *Enciclopedia della Radio*, Milano, Garzanti, 2003.

<sup>5</sup> ISTAT, VIII Censimento generale della popolazione, Roma, 1937.

Rurale (produced since 1933) and Radio Balilla (produced in 1937), signalled the well-defined objective of using the new media as a propaganda tool. The device called Radio Rurale was intended for public bodies and for schools in particular, while Radio Balilla was later designed for the homes of private citizens. Consider that in 1939 the EIAR reached one million subscribers (0.4% of the population), but in the European context, the Italian data were far from the 13 million subscribers in Germany (9%) and the 9 million in Great Britain (4%). The diffusion of rural radio in a thorough way with respect to the orders received began in February 1934 and the recording of deliveries concerned in particular schools and institutions of the regime: the apparatuses were often delivered free of charge to primary schools, to the offices of the *Opera Nazionale Balilla* and those of the fascist party, the directors of educational institutions, school inspectors, rural parishes, rural offices of the national recreational centre, to the itinerant agriculture chairs, to the offices of the Fascist agricultural trade union confederation and to those of the farmers' confederation. The gifts were the result of the financial commitment of banks, insurers and private citizens who reported in this way their participation in the purposes indicated by the party. In 1934, there were 4.123 devices in operation: 1.405 at the organisations of the regime and 2.718 in primary schools. In 1938, the data indicated 16.418 devices delivered to the institutional headquarters of the regime and 23.945 to primary schools. The use of radio for educational purposes allowed schools to be exempted from paying the subscription fee.

In April 1934, the transmissions of the *Ente Radio Rurale* [Rural Radio Authority] began with the aim of spreading fascist culture widely within primary schools. This ambitious project with a strongly ideological focus was supported by the Rural Radio Authority, the Ministry of National Education, the Fascist Party and the Ministry of Communications. Francesco Ercole, the Minister of Education, had sought to assert his competences by setting up a committee for the preparation of the programmes which included the educational superintendent for the Lazio region, an Inspector of the Ministry of Education and the Director of the EIAR.

In a speech that Mussolini had given for the inauguration of the congress of the school corporation in 1925, the objectives that guided the activity of the Rural Radio Authority had already been expressed:

[It] is required that the whole school in all its classes and in all its teachings educate the Italian youth to understand Fascism, to renew themselves in Fascism and to live in the historical climate created by the Fascist revolution.

In 1934, radio became the chosen tool to spread the voice of the regime widely, especially in places of training and education that were located far from the main communication routes.

Listening to the broadcasts provided a rigid methodology: the teacher prepared the class to listen also thanks to «Radiocorriere», which provided the worksheets with the themes that would be covered on the various occasions of collective listening, then the group of students were prepared to listen passively to radio messages of thirty minutes'

duration composed of hymns, music and messages from Mussolini; finally, the activity ended with tasks to be carried out on the theme presented in the programme.

The final papers often consisted of comments written by the students and some of them were sent to the editorial staff of «Radiocorriere» to be published in the following weeks. Some of the first writings proposed by the official press organ of the EIAR date back to 1933, the year of the two experimental broadcasts carried out on 19 April and 30 May, with the obvious aim of underlining the ability of the radio to bring to peripheral places and those areas that were less connected with cities, the image of a kind of progress that in the broadcasts corresponded to insistent propaganda, linked to the words of the *Duce* «addressed to students, farmers and their children»:

Letter from the children of the rural school of Vidiana-Parma

We are few students of a small rural school located in the hills of Emilia. None of the beautiful and lively things that delight the children of Italy reach us up here, and we must make do with what the teacher tells us. Yesterday, however, we experienced a stroke of luck: without you knowing, you who do not even imagine our existence, we too rushed to the invitation you extended to all the children of Italy, to listen to your wonderful voice delivering all the most beautiful and dearest hymns. You can't imagine how much wonder and joy we felt for the first time<sup>6</sup>.

On the same occasion of the experimental broadcasts of 1933, «Radiocorriere» also included the evaluations of an educational director and also in this case the words insisted on the need to follow up on the experience of radio in school:

Letter from the educational director of Vigevano

An hour after the students of my school left the gyms, where I had set up the radio sets and where we listened to the transmission for the schools, commotion still dominated. I do not know: I felt tears in my eyes and I also saw some of my teachers who were trying to hide an emotion that was stronger than their will. The experiment was successful and we, school men, ask that you do not remain isolated. Radio in schools has many possibilities and a long way to go. In this hour, our children experienced the most pulsating feeling of the Homeland, they felt close to their brothers and their sisters in other schools, those in the small, remote schools of the mountains and the countryside: they felt united on the same path, almost as if they were all a part of the same family, and they were moved<sup>7</sup>.

In the following years of broadcasting for schools, the written accounts of the students continued to express the utmost enthusiasm for listening to rural radio broadcasts:

Today, we heard the last radio transmission of choral singing that closed the programme of the year 1938. The radio broadcaster told us that, at that time, more than 3 million schoolchildren were gathered around the Radio, and told us that the *Duce's* two children, Anna Maria and Romano Mussolini, were also among the children who were singing. At this revelation, applause broke out and waves of clapping engulfed the classroom where we were gathered and cheers were heard honouring the two illustrious schoolchildren. The radio broadcast began with the song of the Royal March and Youth and a new song entitled *Moschetto e vanga* [Musket and Spade]. Oh! If only I could sing like that<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> «Radiocorriere», n. 11, 1933, p. 14.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Written work by the student Elvina Manfreda of the fifth class of the Gorizia primary school, dated 30

Some pamphlets published by the Rural Radio Authority in 1938 clarified the connections perceived by fascism between schools and the agricultural world, considered essential for autarchy:

Our rural radio, unlike all the others, is inspired by a unitary conception that embraces both school and agricultural spheres, considering one as a complement and preparation for the other. Both school and agricultural radio are also not a summarily controlled initiative of private radio bodies, but the prerogative and responsibility of a state body, officially created, qualified and financed by the state and operating with eminently political purposes and responsibilities<sup>9</sup>.

It was precisely the attempt to connect instruction, education and agricultural work that appeared to be the most interesting aspect of the experiment described, on which, however, the push from ideology weighed at all costs.

Since 1935, the war in Ethiopia had meanwhile taken hold in all the programming for primary school and one of the tasks planned for the students in listening, had become that of constantly updating the Italian conquests in Africa by placing flags on the map. The experiences of war fought progressively on several fronts until Italy's entry into the war in June 1940 laid bare the shortcomings of Italian broadcasting. In the context of the war, the radio became an even more useful tool for information and the secretariat of the Duce began to be flooded with communications from rural headquarters of the party that complained of being totally cut off from broadcasting over the air. More than half of the Italian territory was without receivers and despite the attempt to produce more sophisticated and efficient models at low cost, from Radio Balilla to Radio Roma, many schools and institutions had not had the opportunity to receive them, because the industries had not detected any real interest in production: the costs remained high and the number of devices was inadequate<sup>10</sup>.

Between the end of 1942 and the beginning of 1943, Italian schools were finally forced to close due to the Second World War and Giuseppe Bottai, the Minister of National Education who was responsible for the educational programming of EIAR, advocated for the beginning of radio programming that was no longer to be understood as complementary to, but as a substitute for school:

Imagine a boat without oars. It would be tossed here and there by the waves or the wind. The teacher can build the boat, but you have to build the oars... Well, you have already understood, the oars are, precisely, attention. But there is no need to worry because the boys of 1942 are capable people: are you not, perhaps, the sons, brothers, relatives and friends of the soldiers who are fighting so bravely on various fronts?<sup>11</sup>

May 1938, housed in the "School Materials" fund of the historical archive of the INDIRE within which there are 18 copybooks with activities carried out in relation to listening to the programming of radio broadcasts for schools.

<sup>9</sup> *L'ora dell'agricoltura, strumento dell'autarchia*, Roma, Ente Radio Rurale, 1938, p.10.

<sup>10</sup> F. Monteleone, *La radio italiana nel periodo fascista. Studi e documenti: 1922-1945*, Venezia, Marsilio, 1976.

<sup>11</sup> G. Isola, *Abbassa la tua radio per favore*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1990, p. 56.

The radio broadcast was minimal and of course the supposed distance school was not met with any possibility for popular following. Meanwhile, the armistice of September 1943 also caused the transfer of the headquarters of the EIAR from Rome to Milan and its transformation into the radio of the Italian Social Republic.

## 2. *The new radio for schools*

On 22 October 1946, Guido Gonella, Minister of Public Education, announced on the radio the beginning of the new school year. It was also the sign of the recovery of social life after the world war and in his speech he emphasised the need to use radio broadcasts to combat illiteracy. By 1944, the EIAR had changed its acronym to Rai, *Radio Audizioni Italiane*. A programme called *La radio per le scuole* (Radio for Schools) was already broadcast and continued its broadcasts until the mid-1970s. Once again, state radio programming identified the training and education segment as a fundamental reference for public service and again the construction of student-oriented programming took place in close cooperation with the Ministry of Public Education. The broadcasts included the involvement of an advisory committee composed, as far as the Rai was concerned, of the president, the advisor, the delegate and the general director and, as far as the Ministry was concerned, of the heads of the student broadcasts, the general director for primary education, for classical, scientific and master's education, assisted by experts on school-related issues. If the radio of the fascist regime had been an instrument of ideological diffusion, the "Radio for Schools" assumed the traits of a path towards the reconstruction of democratic culture. The programmes could be listened to every 15 days inside the classrooms of the institutes (if equipped to do so) according to a schedule that was communicated to the schools and also broadcast on «Radiocorriere». The most innovative part of that experience of radio lessons was the direct relationship that the young primary students could establish with directors, authors and actors of the Rai. The many programmes made by *La Radio per le Scuole* were broadcast from Monday to Saturday, played again in the morning and afternoon, accompanied by interviews with actors and cultural figures and with the participation of the theatre companies of Rome, Turin, Milan, Florence and Trieste. These were stable theatrical companies constituted by the Rai made up of well-known actresses and actors, as well as young and promising talent gaining initial work experience.

The programmes were of various kinds: literary, musical, historical, geographical, religious, pedagogical, scientific and folkloric, and took place from early November to mid-May. Most of the fairy tales and stories that were offered through the radio programmes aimed at schools were works based on a model that was soon renamed "prose for radio" or "radio drama". This narrative choice enabled the creation of empathy in children when listening, but it also offered an introduction to theatrical language and was a useful pedagogical medium that was also enjoyed by adults. Alongside the theatre, space had been allocated for the radio transposition of literary works read by great actors or writers:





Fig. 1. Cover of the magazine «La radio per le scuole», n. 1-2, 1958



Fig. 2. Inauguration of the school-radio year in Catania («La radio per le scuole», n. 1, 1962, p. 5)

the radio format would inspire, a few years later, the first television experiments related to the cultural field. One aspect of particular interest is the group of experts who supported the Rai and the Ministry of Public Education in this radio education experience. In 1951, the teacher Alberto Manzi won a radio prize for a children's story presented on Rai. From that moment, he established a constant collaboration with the "Radio for Schools" which then translated into his best-known television programme *Non è mai troppo tardi* [It is never too late]. Alongside Manzi, there were other figures from the world of teaching who collaborated with this radio project connected to the school environment, such as Giacomo Cives and Bruno Munari. It was a first step for the renewal of Rai that would then take place in the subsequent experience of pedagogical television, linked to Rai's recruitment of personalities such as Umberto Eco, Furio Colombo, Gianni Vattimo, Enrico Vaime and Piero Angela, Tullio de Mauro and Sergio Zavoli, accompanied by young university professors such as Antonio Santoni Rugiu, Luigi Silori and Leone Piccioni. Each of them had previously had more or less ongoing collaborations with radio for schools<sup>12</sup>. Since July 2020, the Rai's *Teche* have made available 66 broadcasts of "Radio for Schools" and collected the testimonies of those who participated in that

<sup>12</sup> G. Gozzini, *La mutazione individualista*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2014.

era of culture. The transmission ended definitively in the mid-1970s<sup>13</sup>. In 1950, it was Antonio Santoni Rugiu, after numerous experiences of radio dramas prepared for Rai, who proposed a critical analysis of the school project through radio:

[School by radio] can work well, but only as a supplement to the teacher's work<sup>14</sup>.

This was the careful reflection of a scholar who had also trained himself through "doing radio" and was therefore aware that the teacher had to be "the conductor" of a teaching form that was in the process of renewal, and that they could not rely merely on the novelty of the media available. In any case, an opening to the outside was being established, mediated by high-quality radio that involved directors, authors, actors, teachers, pedagogues and psychologists and that brought a new communicative language to classrooms. This was also specified by Antonio Segni who, in a speech made in 1951, stated as Minister of Public Education:

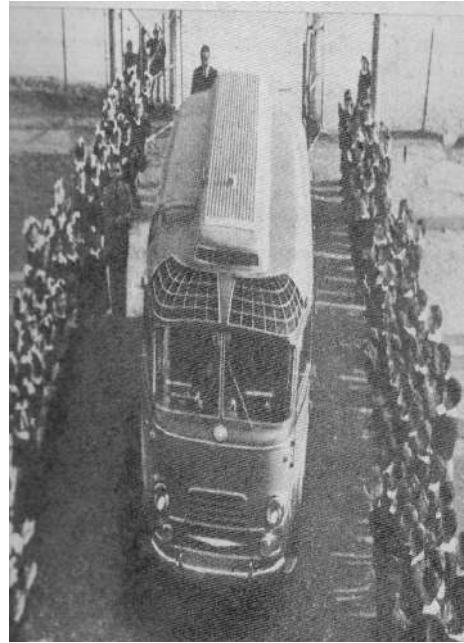


Fig. 3. The radio team arrives in schools («La radio per le scuole», n. 1, 1955, p. 6)

Radio broadcasts for schools are certainly of undeniable utility and are an excellent means of supporting the irreplaceable role of the teacher, especially in smaller town centres and isolated locations<sup>15</sup>.

The official nature of this remote experience was marked by the opening and closing ceremonies of each radio school year and, between these two dates, the broadcasts that were aired all opened remembering the saint of the day.

The post-war broadcasts were often focused on the construction of the new democratic identity of the country: "The songs of the tricolour" and "Visit to the Quirinale" were thus played, but the programming also included stories and fairy tales adapted to radio reading and addressed to the different ages of the students listening, such as "Brave men", "Friends of humanity", "Modern narrators" and "The wonderful rose tree". Santoni Rugiu himself added in a 2011 interview with Rodolfo Sacchetti:

<sup>13</sup> The 66 songs offered online by *Teche Rai* are available at the following link: <https://www.raisplayradio.it/playlist/2019/03/La-Radio-per-le-Scuole-5606135c-0058-4c77-a0de-0d7f99a9a1c4.html> (last access: 20.03.2021).

<sup>14</sup> A. Santoni Rugiu, *Si e no della Radioscuola*, «Radioquadrante», n. 1, 1950, p. 10.

<sup>15</sup> «La radio per le scuole», n. 1, 1950, p. 2.

Of that [radio] experience, I tried to bring something into the school environment as well. My belief was that the teacher had to also be, in a sense, a “theatrical director” in building relationships with students and with the contents of the teaching<sup>16</sup>.

In the mid-1970s, the “Radio for Schools” project ended, because the use of media had changed profoundly, but above all due to the appearance of television in the lifestyles and habits of Italians. Television has proved to be the medium that has most influenced and compelled the transition of Italy from a rural country to an industrialised society. The approach taken by the first educational television, aimed at defeating illiteracy, gradually also transformed the radio broadcasts of the sixties and seventies, but a social change was also underway that imposed new choices in the national media system<sup>17</sup>. Radio as a public service was not defeated by the rivalry that television represented, but rather was changed profoundly. In the first decade of state television, Rai radio had retained a greater circulation and daily use than that of television, but in 1968 Tullio De Mauro defined the Italian language used in radio at that stage as flat and removed from everyday language<sup>18</sup>. There is another interesting fact that the linguist highlighted: before the advent of television, despite the commitment to the dissemination of the Italian language through radio, two out of three Italians still used dialect for both public and private communication. The advent of television reversed this proportion within a few decades. The particular period in which the co-presence of television next to radio began and stabilised, between the sixties and seventies, saw the emergence of the reference figure of Leone Piccioni, who had been deputy general director of Rai since 1969, but responsible for radio programmes until that year. It was Piccioni, a man of deep literary culture, who represented the top figure of reference for the renewal of state radio programming. The choice for radio was to compile broadcasts aimed at a specific audience, while in those same years television was directed towards a more general and less sectoral audience. Cultural broadcasts did not disappear from radio, but instead became shorter. After 1975, the company’s interest in what we could define as pedagogical radio, understood in the strictest sense of the term, that is, that specifically addressed to didactic training and schools, ceased. The audience also changed, because the surrounding society changed, but the choices made for Radio Rai, which were more related to entertainment and music, did not prove to be a total *debacle* from a cultural point of view<sup>19</sup>. Rai radio, with its three channels, became a space in which to try to communicate outside the pre-established schemes, but in a way that was also more scholarly than what was offered by television: the singer Mina became the companion to a more highbrow approach to listening to music through the Sunday programme *Pomeriggio con Mina* [Afternoon with Mina], while *Il quarto d’ora del romanzo sceneggiato* [A fifteen-minute scripted novel] or *La commedia in trenta minuti* [A comedy in thirty minutes], were aimed in particular at

<sup>16</sup> R. Sacchetti, *Scrittori alla radio*, Firenze, FUP, 2018, p. 74.

<sup>17</sup> U. Eco, *Storia della televisione in Italia*, Roma, Carocci, 2014.

<sup>18</sup> T. De Mauro, *Lingua parlata e TV*, in F. Alberoni et alii, *Televisione e vita italiana*, Torino, ERI, 1968, pp. 245-294.

<sup>19</sup> Monteleone, *Storia della radio e della televisione in Italia*, cit.

housewives listening on weekday mornings, but still offered a clear reference to theatre and radio dramas. Consideration of young audiences was underlined by the success of programmes such as *Bandiera Gialla* [Yellow Flag] or *Per voi giovani* [For you young people] by Renzo Arbore. Certainly this was no longer the pedagogical radio that had been broadcast in schools, but it was precisely this more entertaining approach that allowed the radio medium to retain a specific role in the tastes of the new ruling class that was forming in those years and for whom radio still held attention for critical and informative functions, made even more compelling by the spread of portable radios and car radios that enabled that new entertainment medium to be brought along with listeners out of the home. The radio feature *La tribuna dei giovani* was an example of this new approach to the youth world: through music, the programme curved towards the discussion of generational themes in the present<sup>20</sup>.

Radio certainly ended up to a lesser extent under the critical lens of the protest movements of the late sixties that instead described television as the main tool to replicate the hegemony of the ruling class. Radio Rai was able to elaborate some proposals that marked a minimum break with respect to television, including *Chiamate Roma 3131*, presented by Gianni Boncompagni and Franco Moccagatta and broadcast for the first time in 1969. The broadcast was a great success for the audience: three hours of conversations with listeners, by telephone, about their own stories and personal problems. The public decreed the same success also through its *high approval* of Boncompagni himself alongside Renzo Arbore, as well as for the *Interviste impossibili* that paved the way for the interview formula, which involved the participation of leading intellectuals and writers such as Eco, Sanguineti, Sciascia, or Calvino, who agreed to invent miraculous dialogues with illustrious characters of the past, often overcoming a certain backwardness for the media. However, Radio Rai certainly could not guarantee the flexibility necessary to fully respond to the demand for alternative information and counter-information and full freedom that the young generations began to bring forcefully to the streets and public opinion. In that cultural context of '68, it is evident that although innovative and built through the direct participation of the public, broadcasts were still subject to the strict control of the editorial staff.

That role of free expression demanded loudly by young people was instead sought in free radios that opened to an exchange in which, at least initially, there were no top figures, but instead a microphone that was open to the world and to new trends. The radio did not return to interact officially with schools, but instead continued a path that also implied an informal education project.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*



# Cinema in Greece during the Interwar Period under the Lens of History of Education

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During the interwar period, the discussion in Greece in the field of education, was mainly related to the lingual-educational issue, as well as the illiteracy challenge, in a society deeply experiencing the results of the War. With no infrastructure in schools — sometimes meaning no desks, no books, and even no shoes or food — the discussion about producing and benefiting from the use of films for educational purposes probably seemed grotesque.

Concurrently, cinematography in Greece was rather poor. During that period, the production of films as well as the means used, were limited. Although a lot of cinema theatres were constructed all over the country, bureaucracy, rigid legislation and censorship prevented a critical mass of major productions. Financial difficulties impeded cinematographers from purchasing decent equipment essential for the synchronization of sound, thus leading to a decline in film production, alongside their projection and viewing.

Nevertheless, the discussion about the use of the moving image in education had already started, diffidently at the beginning – given the hostile environment – and mostly by people who were not directly related to education. The issue was mainly dealt in the light of the relationship between youth and cinema, not of the relationship between education and cinema. It meant, though, that the seeds towards a more serious discussion about the issue had been planted. Surprisingly, through the few identified texts regarding this subject, it becomes clear that relevant discussions on the international level had affected local understanding and perception.

## 1. *The present common knowledge was not always the case*

Nowadays, it seems to be common knowledge that films can focus attention on matters and concerns in the public sphere. More or less, they can mirror a certain society. Production, as well as acceptance or rejection of a certain film, represents an interactive process and this exact process embodies the power relations and cultural arguments of a greater society<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> J. von Moltke, K. Rawson (edd.), *Siegfried Kracauer's American Writings: Essays on Film and Popular Culture*, Oakland (CA), University of California Press, 2012.

Cinema can stand as a historical source that provides the complexity of human relationships far more clearly and multifaceted than other sources can, giving say to people who would otherwise remain overlooked<sup>2</sup>.

Until Mark Ferro succeeded in convincing his academic colleagues that it was worth including film production among the tools used by historians, films were not acknowledged as historical sources.

Various kinds of films can serve as sources for the historian. There was a tendency to legitimize documentaries and current affairs more easily than fiction films, but quite early Siegfried Kracauer (1947) had claimed that especially these films can capture the collective unconscious.

Shared understanding accepts that integration of cinema into dimensions of our present way of life (e.g. education) has been part of a long term and gradual process. Considering that film literacy – as a component of educational literacy<sup>3</sup> – has been argued within a period of more than a century now, cinematography was not positioned from the first instance as a «viable and valuable educational tool»<sup>4</sup>. Nor was it always acknowledged for its contribution in molding young people's characters by leaving a positive imprint or for its support to the objective understanding of social reality<sup>5</sup>. Though, educational movie dates from the infant days of the medium, emphasis on audio-visual education must be traced later on and it was after World War II when development of educational film began systematically in all branches of human activity.

Even the most successful case (“film”) has its boundaries. Films can serve as a historical document, but not a precise one. They are only an indicator of a historical period and are not professional witnesses. Moreover, as the distance between the release date of a film and the viewing of the film grows, understanding will shift and adjust because of the changing cultural values and norms<sup>6</sup>. Films can also offer a powerful force for shaping public memory, they can shape people and establish content and significance, but not

<sup>2</sup> Historians' preoccupation with “who speaks” each time through sources is one of the factors that have overturned the certainty of objective truth. The source has been associated with the social group it represents. The truth of the elites can be very different from the truth of the many, who as a rule have no way to make it public.

<sup>3</sup> H. Giroux, *Breaking into the Movies: public pedagogy and the politics of film*, «Policy Futures in Education», vol. 9, n. 6, 2011, p. 688, notes: «The powerful role that films now played within a visual culture employing new forms of pedagogy, signaling different forms of literacy».

<sup>4</sup> St. Groening, “*We Can See Ourselves as Others See Us*”: *Women Workers and Western Union's Training Films in the 1920s*, in Ch. Acland, H. Wasson (edd.), *Useful Cinema*, Durham (NC), Duke University Press, 2011, pp. 36-37.

<sup>5</sup> A growing dynamic international and interdisciplinary conversation (i.e. Georg Eckert Institute with the *The Journal for Educational Media, Memory and Society (JEMMS)* edited as of 2009, UCL Institute of Education with the *Film Educational Journal* edited as of 2018, Cinémathèque Française with the “Le Cinéma, Cent Ans de Jeunesse” Project) has contributed to investigating relevant connections, considering broader trends, understanding terminology, exploring approaches and new analytical tools, considering implications and consequences, providing insight on features (in terms of time and space), seeking for a more global perspective, as well as encouraging further and deeper research.

<sup>6</sup> M. Dalton, *The Hollywood curriculum: Teachers in the movies*, New York, Peter Lang, 1999, doi:10.1080/0965975950030102 (last access: 09.06.2023).



alone nor can they alter the condition of our society. According to Siegfried Kracauer, in fact, «films help change mass attitudes on condition that these attitudes have already begun to change»<sup>7</sup>.

## 2. *Why examine the interwar period?*

The interwar period is a distinctive part of history during which socio-cultural and sociopolitical discourse, as well as technological advancements: a. effected educational developments, b. determined the production, dissemination and use of cinematography in education and c. allowed (at least to some extent) for a number of social issues and values that provoke the public imaginary, to become mirrored in the cinematography of the time.

Cinema gained its own momentum as an educational medium during the interwar period, but it also reflected the whole socioeconomic landscape. Correspondingly, a chance to reflect upon different features of different cultures, allows for a wider perspective. For example, Anne Bruch portrayed educational films in Weimar Germany and examined how, as well as why these were introduced as a new medium in schools. While she examined interdisciplinary arguments (educationalists, teachers and film producers), she discussed the way these films were utilized to communicate new teaching contents in the field of civic education, she concluded that «the possibility to visualize controversial attitudes which could help the students to create an independent democratic opinion was rarely used» and noted their use a «propagandistic device»<sup>8</sup>. Also, drawing upon long-standing historical and cultural traditions (including during the interwar period), Bettina Henzler compared discourses and practices of film education in Germany and France and explained the existence of two different pedagogical strategies: film as a means of learning and film as a cultural object<sup>9</sup>.

Introducing films into the classroom was not an obvious action. Early cinema had already been marked as inexpensive entertainment and low-quality attraction<sup>10</sup>, while

<sup>7</sup> Moltke, Rawson (edd.), *Siegfried Kracauer's American Writings*, cit., p. 104 (see chapter *National Types as Hollywood Presents Them*).

<sup>8</sup> A. Bruch, *Educational Cinema in the Weimar Republic*, «Educatió i Història», n. 31, January-June 2018, p. 124: «A close analysis of educational films which were a reflection of the dominating political discourse reveal that educational media were an ambivalent instrument used often as a propagandistic device».

<sup>9</sup> B. Henzler, «*Education à l'image*» and «*Medienkompetenz*»: *On the discourses and practices of film education in France and Germany*, «Film Education Journal», vol. 1, n. 1, June 2018, pp. 16-17. She states that: «These paradigms reflect different political strategies and pedagogical approaches, as well as the different cultural traditions of which they are a product. [...] both the history and the current state of film education are connected to cultural traditions and, above all, to the different cinematic discourses in the two countries – a fact that demonstrates the important influence of cultural traditions on political and educational realities today».

<sup>10</sup> T. Gunning, *The Cinema of Attraction: Early Films, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde*, in Th. Elsaesser, A. Barker (edd.), *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative*, London, British Film Institute, 1990, pp. 56-62.

physical and moral side effects had caused additional considerations<sup>11</sup>. In her work, Bettina Henzler notes that cinema was addressed as a way of relaxation, while it was also «sharply criticised, and even fought against, in bourgeois and educational environments», thus leading to state censorship and as in the German case in the 1930's, it was linked to institutionalization of film education by the state. It was because of broad-minded educators that the two countries fostered a new educational paradigm, and began to use film as an instructional tool (*Nouvelle pédagogie* and *Reformpädagogik*, respectively)<sup>12</sup>.

This new educational medium was also related to an entire set of necessary “infrastructure” in order to be used as teaching material; this included not only equipment and sophisticated film technology, but also film institutes and film libraries, teachers' associations and journals supporting this newly suggested undertaking, institutions responsible for classifying and distributing educational films and venue for film screenings. However, this infrastructure was not available in all settings.

Whether conventional or not, educational film usage during the interwar period, paved the way for a “next big thing” in education for the years that followed by changing the process of teaching and learning, not by substituting old modes, but by accompanying existing<sup>13</sup>. However, film usage was neither at the same pace nor with similar features among various countries.

### 3. *Education in Greece during the interwar period: a constant inconsistency*

During the interwar period Greek society was expressed in a polarized way, trying to serve the formation of an imperfect, often contradictory collective ideal. Government changes, political unrest, poverty, reforms which did not prosper, social and political division produced an unfriendly environment against new ideas or new technological developments. Therefore, these were faced with reluctance and, at times, even with hostility.

Education seemed to be detached from both reality and the actual needs of the nation. The general educational framework was far from idyllic. The lack of schools, the downgrading of teacher training, the pseudo-classicism, along with illiteracy<sup>14</sup> and

<sup>11</sup> A. Killen, *Homo Cinematicus. Science, Motion Pictures and the Making of Modern Germany*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017 (see especially chapter 2: *Film Reform, Mental Hygiene, and the Campaign against “Trash”, 1912-34*, pp. 65-102).

<sup>12</sup> Henzler, “*Education à l’image*” and “*Medienkompetenz*”, cit., p. 19.

<sup>13</sup> E. Fuchs, A. Bruch, M. Annegarn-Gläß, *Introduction. Educational Films: A Historical Review of Media Innovation in Schools*, «Journal of Educational Media, Memory and Society», vol. 8, n. 1, 2016, p. 10.

<sup>14</sup> In 1913 only 12% of boys and 5% of girls aged between 6-12 attended state primary schools (see D. Glinos, *Ένας άταφος νεκρός. Μελέτες για το εκπαιδευτικό μας σύστημα* [An unburied dead. Studies on our Education System], Athens, Εκδ. Εταιρεία Αθηνά, 1925, p. 45), percentage which remains extremely high in the 1930's when illiteracy in the general population reaches 40% of men and 60% of women, according to the 1928 census.

elements of sexism, brought about the first attempt of reform<sup>15</sup> soon before the Great War. Nonetheless, while facing strong opposition, reform was abandoned. Later on, towards the end of the Great War, the second attempt took place in the years 1917-1918, aiming at solving the lingual-educational issue which had afflicted society as back as the 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>16</sup>. With the fall of Venizelos' government in 1920 everything was postponed and reform effort only started again in 1928-1929 with the enactment of a new policy which was faced with relief, while gathering many advocates. The modernist elements contained in that new policy were restricted to the teaching of ancient authors in translation, the approval of more books per subject, the use of companion books and free reading along with other such measures which might seem rather bourgeois. Still, these were radical in their perception and, if implemented, they would have changed the society as a whole. As prominent Greek education historian Alexis Dimaras claims, never before had there been such a radical reform of the educational system – a reform which was based upon, both, structural adjustments and functional novelties. The duration of the primary school changed again from four years to six. In addition, special attention was given to the subject of the so called *dimotiki* (the Modern Greek Language), the teaching of which was reinforced. Furthermore, the professional dimension of secondary education was upgraded. All these, followed by a broad program of school construction (funded by a particular loan from abroad) and the founding of a new University in Thessaloniki, constitute a reform which, presented –even in its most specific manifestations— great cohesion and consistency towards a uniform conception<sup>17</sup>.

After the resignation of Eleftherios Venizelos in 1932, the deconstruction of the attempted reform was only a matter of time. Thus, every legislation had been abolished by 4 August 1936, when Metaxas' authoritarian regime was established. The Educational Advisory Board<sup>18</sup> was abolished, the legislation about schoolbooks was altered and whichever innovative characteristics of the secondary school programme were modified. Educational life within the country went backwards, while reforming trends did not appear – at least at an institutional level – up until the late 60's<sup>19</sup>.

<sup>15</sup> Amongst other measures, this reform included: a) compulsory attendance at kindergartens – where they existed, b) six-year attendance at the primary school, c) two types of secondary school: the three-year Urban School (with technical and practical character) and the six-year secondary school which could lead to university, d) concern for the education of women and for linking school to the production process (A. Dimaras, *Παιδεία: Συντηρητική αντιμετώπιση* [Education: Conservative Counterattack], «Kathimerini», 31 October 1999 (special issue: *Greece in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, 1920-1930*), pp. 93-97.

<sup>16</sup> The language issue was about the conflict of two contradicting powers, both wishing to express the new-Greek collectivity and its ideals: the advocates of the puristic language (*katharevousa*) and the advocates of the demotic language (*dimotiki*). With the Laws n. 2585 of 1917 and n. 1332 of 1918 the use of the demotic language was established all through the primary school, with the parallel teaching of the puristic language (*katharevousa*) in the two last years.

<sup>17</sup> A. Dimaras, *Ιστορία της νεοελληνικής εκπαίδευσης. Το «ανακοπόμενο άλμα». Τάσεις και αντιστάσεις στην ελληνική εκπαίδευση, 1833-2000* [History of modern Greek education. The “interrupted jump”. Trends and resistances in Greek education, 1833-2000], Athens, Metehmio 2013, pp. 147-191 & 193-217.

<sup>18</sup> The Educational Advisory Board entrusted with the modernization of the Greek educational system.

<sup>19</sup> A. Dimaras, *Modernisation and Reaction in Greek Education during the Venizelos Era*, in P. Kitromilides (ed.), *Eleftherios Venizelos. The Trials of Statesmanship*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2006, pp. 325-

4. *Cinematography in Greece and the lens of education: a lot of pioneer ideas of the time were more heard than done*<sup>20</sup>

As regards to cinematography in Greece, the situation was no better than what the country experienced in other fields. Although the first film projection took place in Athens in 1896, and a lot of filming took place within the Greek territory<sup>21</sup>, it proved a really difficult task for the country to follow the development of the cinema in other countries. This was mainly due to the lack of technical means, combined with insufficient funding<sup>22</sup>. The first films had a lot of technical problems as they were filmed with one, usually cheap, camera, while one or two persons were engaged in multiple roles (i.e. director, actor, operator, scriptwriter and photographer). Filming in open spaces, documenting life and then mixing shots from the relevant scenes did not reach excellent results, thus causing many gaps in the plot, as well as discontinuity of the film<sup>23</sup>.

The first attempts of Greek cinematography were faltering between genres, mostly between documentaries and fiction. They will, therefore, be called “docufiction” as these were an attempt to capture reality and create fiction through their inflexible static photograph – just like frames. The first attempts for the creation of cinema literacy and criticism were fragmentary and restricted to some magazines, such as «Kinimatografikos Astir» [Cinematographic Star], one of the most popular ones. Iris Skaraveou, a known film critic of the time, tried to convince production companies to cooperate with foreign artists in order to initiate reliable productions<sup>24</sup>.

The interwar period of course brought the stabilization of the cinema in the entertainment sector. There was an increase in the cinema theatres throughout the country, around 71 in 1926<sup>25</sup>. The production companies, despite being family owned or extremely small, increased. Though, the import of films may not have been great but it was significant, yet the funding was not sufficient. An indicative example of this is the fact that, although the first talking film (Alan Grosland’s *The Jazz Singer*) was projected in 1927, only two film theatres projected films with sound in Greece as late as October 1929. Other problems, such as censorship, as well as a lot of restricting laws<sup>26</sup> and heavy

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<sup>20</sup> I owe thanks to my PhD candidate Ms. Kalliopi Kaklamani for her research contribution to this chapter.

<sup>21</sup> Mainly by French companies such as Pathé and Gaumont, which filmed scenes from the Greek–Turkish 1897 war.

<sup>22</sup> G. Soldatos, *Συνοπτική ιστορία του ελληνικού κινηματογράφου* [Brief history of Greek cinema], Athens, Aegokeros, 2015.

<sup>23</sup> V. Karalis, *A History of Greek Cinema*, New York-London, The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2012, p. 39.

<sup>24</sup> E. Delveroudi, *Film Criticism International: Women, Cinema and Modernity through the Eyes of a Greek Film Critic in the 1920s*, in *International Conference: Doing Women’s Film History*, Sunderland, 13-15 April 2011, <http://www.philology.uoc.gr/staff/delveroudi/> (last access: 09.06.2023).

<sup>25</sup> M. Arkolakis, *Greek Film Industry (1896-1939): Economic Structure and Representation*, presented in the *Symposium European Economic and Business development: National Historical Perspectives and European Osmosis, 19<sup>th</sup> & 20<sup>th</sup> centuries* (Athens, 28 November 2003), [https://www.academia.edu/3776020/Greek\\_Film\\_Industry\\_1896\\_1939\\_Economic\\_Structure\\_and\\_Representation](https://www.academia.edu/3776020/Greek_Film_Industry_1896_1939_Economic_Structure_and_Representation) (last access: 09.06.2023).

<sup>26</sup> For example, it was required for every film producer to get a special permission by the police in order to

taxation led the cinema to a noteworthy decrease. As Vrasidas Karalis poses it: «The lack of funding, of organized and technically equipped spaces, of trained screenwriters, actors and critics made early Greek cinema a heroic but doomed enterprise for those involved»<sup>27</sup>.

At the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there was a shift in the discussion regarding education. The child became the epicenter of the attention and at the same time the starting point of education. Pestalozzi, Decroly and Montessori theories attracted featured attention. Such notions were adopted mainly by advocates of the *dimotiki* language (such as Glinos, Delmouzos and Fotiadis) in an era during which development of psychology led to the acceptance of more child-centered practices. Several measures were taken aiming at improving school hygiene, student vaccination, summer camp participation and the changing of their books. Still, aforementioned ideas failed to prevail, due to the fact that Greek society, as a whole, was deeply conservative<sup>28</sup>.

Within this context, the discussion about the use of educational films in schools did not really take place, at least not officially. Difficulties related to such an attempt would have been many, while also seemingly unresolved. First of all, the missing and failing infrastructure is worth mentioning. School buildings were few and could not offer such potential. Poverty of rural areas was evident. A considerable proportion of children were underfed, families could not provide for other basic needs such as shoes, clothing and books, while book sharing was the most common reality. Electricity was not available in rural areas and tough living conditions — due to prolonged involvement in military operations — led to the outbreak of infectious diseases. As expected, aforesaid problems of such a critical nature were puzzling the authorities more than any other issue (i.e. the creation and introduction of educational films in schools).

Apart from these, the conservatism of the Greek society is another issue of serious consideration. Not only the thought of implementing such a practice was far from existent, but there were “voices” — usually those of the official state and its representatives — against the new medium. Suspicion against cinema was expressed through its denouncement «on the grounds of its promoting criminality, corruption, promiscuity and immortality»<sup>29</sup>.

A lot of ink was wasted in order to convince society about cinema’s catastrophic influence on the children’s soul. The lawyer Aristides Poulantzas wrote in 1930 an article claiming that the cinema relates directly to the increasing violence and criminality of the youngsters. For, he said, young people are flooded by the momentum and immaturity of youth, while the influence of the moving image is such that it removes any sort of obstacles towards the commitment of any kind of crime. He quoted examples of European origin to strengthen his thesis: France and Germany where the alleged criminals committed their crimes right after seeing a film. He strongly supported the establishment of the

film, after giving a detailed report on the materials, the scenes and the plot of the film. The permission was given only if these were judged as “appropriate”. There were guidelines as far as behavior or clothes were concerned.

<sup>27</sup> V. Karalis, *A History of Greek Cinema*, cit., p. 41.

<sup>28</sup> V. Foukas, S. Ziogou, P. Hatzibei, *Childhood and Pedagogical theory in Greece (19<sup>th</sup>-first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century): From “the little adult” to the “child’s psychology”*, in L. Hopkins, M. Macleod, W. C. Turgeon (edd.), *Negotiating Childhoods*, Oxford, Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2010, pp. 87-97.

<sup>29</sup> V. Karalis, *A History of Greek Cinema*, cit., p. 21.

preventive control over films, pointing out that they should not: a) put public order in danger, b) offend religious feelings or c) unsettle international relations, and compared the Greek case with restrictive measures taken in other countries such as Italy or Britain. He defended the censorship, as well as police intervention in order to grant permission for the making of a film. He also went further to propose parental escorting to the cinemas and the establishment of a committee for advice on such matters<sup>30</sup>.

A lot of other writers moved on the same wavelength. Georgios Paleologou analyzed the serious danger which derived from the cinema and went a step further so as to propose the banning of all youngsters under the age of 16 to visit cinema either without or with their parents<sup>31</sup>. A. Koutsoumaris, a lawyer and former police officer of the highest rank, unbanned all the cases of petty crimes, trying to prove that they were all caused by the fondness of youngsters for cinema and their admiration to stars in criminal roles<sup>32</sup>. It was a common practice to profile the petty criminals as frequenting popular cinemas. This could have an explanation which lies to the fact that authorities knew very little about the new medium and their confusion about it was such that led them to the imposition of censorship. Censorship which was broadened after the first anti-communist laws billed in 1929.

It was then that the pursuit of “authentic Greek images” was also becoming prevalent with the literacy generation of the 1930’s as a cultural project of self — reinvention after the Asia Minor Catastrophe<sup>33</sup>. But even the films which provided such images – bucolic dramas for example – did not entirely satisfy the authorities as they used the vernacular and were widely accepted by the audiences throughout the country. This caused quite another stir in the society and fears were raised by the most prominent intellectuals that the *dimotiki* would finally become the prevalent language. That constituted one more reason for fighting against the new medium, especially its talking version.

Nonetheless, there were advocates of the cinema in general and its use in the educational process more specifically. Nikos Kazantzakis, one of the most well — known and influential figures of Greek literature, who affected deeply by the Russian avant-garde films, expressed his admiration for the new “weapon” – as he characterized cinematography – and admitted that he wished to learn how to use it well.<sup>34</sup>

Furthermore, a few inspired people wrote about the use of educational films, sometimes openly, other times in a more indirect way. K. Saroglou, a pediatrician, in an

<sup>30</sup> A. Poulantzas, *Παιδική εγκληματικότητα και προληπτικός έλεγχος του κινηματογράφου*, «Το Παιδί» [The Child], n. 1, May-June 1930.

<sup>31</sup> G. Paleologou, *Η προστασία της εφηβικής ηλικίας από εκπαιδευτικο-κοινωνικής απόψεως*, «Το Παιδί», n. 4, November-December 1930.

<sup>32</sup> A. Koutsoumaris, *Ο κινηματογράφος και η επίδρασις αυτού στην αύξηση της εγκληματικότητας των νέων*, «Το Παιδί», n. 22, November-December 1933.

<sup>33</sup> V. Karalis, *A History of Greek Cinema*, cit., p. 22.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.



article written in 1930, characterized the educational system as a system which supported intelligence only by emotionless, stiff knowledge of mathematics, language, history or botanology, without depositing any kind of sentimental value to the child's soul. He tracked the problem in the training of teachers, while claiming that the system needed teachers able to use every available means so as to motivate students: «discourse, books and the image, moving or not, alike»<sup>35</sup>.

There were clearer voices which spoke about educational films cohesively and passionately. P. Zouvas enthusiastically supported the use of educational films in the classroom and proposed a series of measures that could be taken in order to overcome the problems of underfunding and lack of infrastructure. With great detail he presented what was taking place in other developed countries and suggested that students should be taught geography, botanology and other school subjects. He also went a step further in order to be noticed. He proposed the use of educational films so as on the one hand, to help even those less diligent to learn and on the other hand, to prevent children from going to the cinemas to see an entertaining film which could be harmful to their morals<sup>36</sup>.

Another article was translated and presented in the 30<sup>th</sup> issue of the magazine *To Pedi* [*The child*]. A. Roussopoulou translated an article by Dreyfus Barney titled “Cinema and Education” addressing educational film as a complement to teaching. In the same article, apart from presenting relevant issues in other countries, both at production and research level, especially in the USA, urgent need for teacher training was identified, more specifically regarding how to use the means both technically and in terms of potential. Readers were also informed about the studies conducted, especially of those studies proving the usefulness of the means. Moreover, this article included some suggestions on how to better use the means through a combination of books and film, a practice which was probably even beyond the imagination of the educational policy makers<sup>37</sup>.

An article by Dora Papakonstantinou informs about the existence of projection equipment in schools within the Greek territory and the decision of providing other schools with the necessary equipment in as early as 1931. With the initiative of the Macedonian Educational Society she wrote, all schools in Macedonia were provided with cinema projectors. She went on to propose that teachers should be trained on how to use educational films properly<sup>38</sup>. Unfortunately, it has so far been impossible to cross-check the information provided, as, due to lack of records, it has been an extremely arduous, interesting though task to be considered.

<sup>35</sup> K. Saroglou, *Ανάγκη μορφώσεως κοινωνικής συνειδήσεως*, «Το Παιδί», n. 2, July-August 1930.

<sup>36</sup> P. Zouvas, *Κινηματογράφος και Παιδαγωγική*, «Το Παιδί», n. 25, May-June 1934.

<sup>37</sup> Dreyfus Barney (translation: A. Roussopoulou), *Cinema and education*, «Το Παιδί», n. 30, March-April 1935.

<sup>38</sup> Dora Papakonstantinou, *Η σημασία του κινηματογράφου για την διανοητικήν και ηθική μόρφωσι των παιδιών*, «Το Παιδί», n. 9, September-October 1931.



### *Conclusion*

It seems that roughly around the 1930's, thus, later than in the rest of Europe, the discussion about the use of the moving image under the lens of education had already started, diffidently at the beginning – given the hostile environment – and mostly by people who were not directly related to education. The issue was mainly dealt in the light of the relationship between youth and cinema, not of the relationship between education and cinema.

A lot of peculiarities of the Greek case played an important role in the implementation of such an aspiring project. The political turbulence, the Balkan Wars, the Asia Minor Catastrophe, the influx of immigrants, the extremely low living standards of the population, the illiteracy and the prevalent conservatism of people and the intellectual community of the country were factors which hindered society from moving forward. On the other hand, the prevalence of Eleftherios Venizelos – a very prominent political figure, a visionary of his time – created a contradictory political scene in which a lot of reforms were attempted but went forth and back, according to who was in power.

It is worth mentioning that relevant international practice influenced the progressive forces of the country and some steps were taken while a lot of pioneer ideas were more heard than done.

Films must not be addressed through a narrow lens, but within the wider context in which they were created, generated, spread and renegotiated.

# Resist! Italy's Teachers and Students in the Face of Neoliberalism in Education

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## 1. *Neoliberalism and education: an unprecedented contamination*

There is a disconnect in the values, behaviours and educational styles traversing education systems at the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries: it is the long wave of neoliberalism that even in Italy, at a later time and with results as yet incomplete, has left many traces behind it. The aim of this essay is to highlight the transformative aspect of neoliberal ideology and its effects on education in Italy. These effects may be partial, but they still have two important and distinctive characteristics:

In the first place, they are shared more widely by the population and the political class than they are in the economic field, the preferred arena of neoliberalism and the main battlefield for the opposing factions. Secondly, although Italian education has traditionally been strongly anchored to other paradigms, both operational and idealistic, neoliberalism has brought about several major changes which have now entered the mainstream public debate on education. They have in essence “naturalised” the use of a general framework for interpreting educational phenomena that is different from the past. Even those who challenge these views (not only in Italy<sup>1</sup>) and who find themselves in a position of cultural resistance have had to discuss them within a set of questions and an agenda that was imposed from outside the world of education. However, as will be seen below, the feelings and perceptions of teachers and students do not appear to be engaged, except to a minimal degree, with the prevailing public debate or with the national (also in some cases regional) laws that have implemented certain ideas.

In this context we can refer to certain events that, through various changes in the law and a new public narrative, have on several occasions encouraged schools to cast off traditional educational ideas and practices, which are broadly shared even among different schools of thought and are essentially based on the primacy attributed to certain basic principles of education that can be summarised as follows:

1. the importance of collaboration between pupils;
2. a focus on the disadvantaged, with the objective of inclusion;

<sup>1</sup> See S. O'Brien, *Resisting neoliberal education: For freedom's sake*, in T. Rudd, I.F. Goodson (eds.), *Negotiating Neoliberalism: Developing alternative educational visions*, Rotterdam, Sense Publishers, 2017, pp. 149-166.

3. the role of schools as peer communities;
4. the devaluation of tests and of quantitative educational assessment practices in general;
5. the priority given to state schooling, in the light of two principles: 1) only state schools offer a secular education that is open to all cultural expressions; 2) the indicator of average cost per student is not helpful in assessing the state school/private school relationship (Article 33, paragraph 3, of the Italian Constitution: «Entities and private persons have the right to establish schools and institutions of education, at no cost to the State»);
6. the conceptualisation of the school as a cultural community not governed by market logic, maintaining the substantial difference between education and the systems used to produce tangible and intangible goods (so-called “services”).

Particularly since the first Berlusconi government (10 May 1994 to 17 January 1995, XII Legislature) the new neoliberal lexicon has emphasised:

1. the importance of competition among pupils as form of preparation, training and anticipation of a society based on this principle;
2. a focus on the merits of the best and brightest, in other words the percentage of the school population that is destined to play a leading role in society;
3. the world of education considered mainly as an organisation which, despite existing in a specific area, cannot escape the rules of efficacy and efficiency that apply to the world of economics, as seen in the corporate world;
4. absolute reliance on tests and other quantitative methods of assessing scholastic performance, as an objective way of giving an account to the general population of the money spent on public education;
5. a necessary balancing between state schools and private state-recognised schools, in the light of two concepts: 1) schools not run by the state are an expression of the educational freedom of the parents, the only ones who have the right to choose; 2) the lower cost per pupil of state-recognised schools is an indicator to be taken into account in order to regulate funding levels (Art. 33, paragraph 3, of the Constitution does not prohibit the granting of tax breaks and subsidies to families choosing state-recognised schools, almost always religious schools);
6. the conceptualisation of the school as an organisation with its own special characteristics that is part of a market of education service providers, in a competitive system. The issue (which also includes the cost of education, referred to above) must be framed within the broader concept of liberalising public utilities and privatising services which can be delivered better and more efficiently by the market than by the state.

As a preliminary point, it is also worth noting that the neoliberal agenda has been based on a new communicative model, aimed at emphasising that the needs for change have an objective value that can only be challenged by unionised teachers who are not open to dialogue. Think of the repeated references to the Europe that wants to impose a series of virtuous behaviours on its Member States; think, above all, of the use of quantitative research and assessment methods, touted as the only possible rational and scientific vision, and therefore not subject to the opinions of teachers.

## 2. *From collaboration to competition: the advent of a new public narrative on education.*

Going back quickly over the various points, we can start with the «school of the three I: English, Computer Science and Enterprise» (*Inglese, Informatica, Impresa*) according to the programmatic definition given by Silvio Berlusconi in 2000, when talking about the technological revolution and new literacy<sup>2</sup>. This is the most obvious evidence of a neoliberal agenda in the education sector, although clues can be found from much earlier, especially from the 1980s onwards.

Within a short time, Letizia Moratti, Minister of Education, University and Research, in explaining the plans of her department<sup>3</sup>, started by commenting on the dramatic situation in schools and by highlighting that reforms from within were impossible:

We are aware that we face a complex world and that time is running out if we want to ward off the risk of a gradual decline in our education and training system. The first sign of this decline is the growing distance between the efforts being made within the world of education and the results those efforts produce<sup>4</sup>.

Moratti went on to highlight very clearly some of the basic principles of the neoliberal approach, starting with the need for a competitive structure both in the economy and the world of education:

The gravity of the situation is therefore known, but I believe that the implications are becoming more and more serious. Worldwide, the level of scholarisation is rising and there is an increase in the number of people entering the world of education (I am of course referring to the developing nations but also to the inclusion of women and young people), and this has led to a widespread strengthening of earning capacity and the ability to participate in improving wellbeing. In this type of context, the meritocratic values typical of a competitive society will also tend to be strengthened.

The causes of the decline in schools can be identified in a system that cannot reform by itself and which is not adequate for a competitive society because it is still anchored to statist visions:

I believe that the crisis in the education system is due to insufficient quality and also to a lack of freedom of choice for families. We believe that the State cannot be the sole promoter of the value of human capital, nor the sole guardian of technical and scientific knowledge. [...] this is how we want to

<sup>2</sup> L. Lanna, *Lottimismo della libertà, interview with Silvio Berlusconi*, «Ideazione», 7 November 2000, [http://www.ideazione.com/www.ideazione.com/1.politica/05\\_07-11-2000/lanna.htm](http://www.ideazione.com/www.ideazione.com/1.politica/05_07-11-2000/lanna.htm), available at [https://web.archive.org/web/20010124070000/http://www.ideazione.com/www.ideazione.com/1.politica/05\\_07-11-2000/lanna.htm](https://web.archive.org/web/20010124070000/http://www.ideazione.com/www.ideazione.com/1.politica/05_07-11-2000/lanna.htm) (last access: 30.01.2023).

<sup>3</sup> Letizia Moratti, Minister in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Berlusconi Government (11 June 2001-23 April 2005) and in the 3<sup>rd</sup> (23 April 2005-17 May 2006).

<sup>4</sup> Hearing of Letizia Moratti, the Minister of Education, University and Research, at the Chamber of Deputies – 7<sup>th</sup> Committee on Culture, Science and Education (under Article 143, paragraph 2 of the Regulation), session held on Wednesday 18 July 2001, stenographic report, Ferdinando Adornato, President, [http://documenti.camera.it/\\_dati/leg14/lavori/stencomm/07/audiz2/2001/0718/s010.htm](http://documenti.camera.it/_dati/leg14/lavori/stencomm/07/audiz2/2001/0718/s010.htm) (last access: 30.01.2023).

interpret the role of schools and education. We imagine a modern system that is certainly competitive, innovative, democratic, open and transparent. [...] We believe that families should be guaranteed equal conditions with respect to their choices [...], in a system that integrates state and non-state components to create a school that genuinely belongs to the civil society.

The new narrative for education has thus introduced terms that are antithetical to those shared in the educational community, with great awareness that this is constructing a dialogue that opposes teacher sentiment, as Moratti states: «We strongly feel the responsibility of representing different opinions».

The plethora of official documents and interviews issued by the minister contain several which are particularly important when analysing the new language of education<sup>5</sup>. If we use as an example the hearing of Minister Moratti on the implementation of Law No. 62/2000, we realise that its reasoning is dotted with all the concepts (and their terminological variants) identified in the first paragraph: “competition”, “merit”, “meritocracy”, “INVALSI” (national assessment tests organised by INVALSI, the *National Institute for the Assessment of Education and Learning*), “freedom of choice”, “freedom of education” and “state-recognised schools”<sup>6</sup>.

Not only the political world but also some intellectuals and journalists lend strong support to the competitive and operational vision of education: examples include Angelo Panebianco, Luca Ricolfi, Ernesto Galli della Loggia, Roger Abravanel but also Luciano Canfora and Umberto Galimberti who have not missed an opportunity to chastise the state schools of today with nostalgic observations.

In the years that followed, we must mention a watershed reform, the one implemented by education minister Mariastella Gelmini<sup>7</sup> (Law 133/2008 and Law 169/2008; in effect from 1 September 2009 for primary and middle schools and from 2010 for secondary schools). At primary level, these reforms reintroduced the “single class teacher” (cancelling out more than thirty years of educational thinking) and introduced the 1-10 assessment scale (although this was mitigated by a teacher assessment of the pupil’s level of achievement). The 1-10 assessment system was also introduced for middle schools, while at high school the mark for behaviour (which in practice had never been abolished), was re-included in the range of grades used to decide the pupil’s final mark.

<sup>5</sup> For further information on the new language of political communication in Italy, see V. Bagolini, E. Lombardi Vallauri, *La comunicazione della nuova élite politica: novità e continuità*, «Parolechiave», n. 2, 2018, pp. 63-82; E. Lombardi Vallauri, *La lingua disonesta. Contenuti impliciti e strategie di persuasione*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2019. In the international context: J. Gray, J.P. O’Regan, C. Wallace, *Education and the discourse of global neoliberalism*, «Language and Intercultural Communication», vol. 18, n. 5, 2018, pp. 471-477; M. Sardoč (ed.), *The Language of neoliberal education: Problems, challenges and opportunities*, «Šolskopolje», vol. 29, n. 1-2, 2018 (see, in particular, the interview with Henry Giroux, pp. 97-106).

<sup>6</sup> Hearing of the Minister of Education, University and Research, Letizia Moratti, on the implementation of Law No. 62/2000, laying down rules for equal education and provisions on the right to study, Chamber of Deputies, 7<sup>th</sup> Committee on Culture, Science and Education, session held on Tuesday 4 May 2004, stenographic report, Ferdinando Adornato, President, [https://leg14.camera.it/\\_dati/leg14/lavori/bollet/200405/0504/html/07/|pagpro=\[all=off\]commis=07](https://leg14.camera.it/_dati/leg14/lavori/bollet/frsmcdin.asp?AD=1&perciboll=/_dati/leg14/lavori/bollet/200405/0504/html/07/|pagpro=[all=off]commis=07) (last access: 30.01.2023).

<sup>7</sup> Mariastella Gelmini, Minister in the 4<sup>th</sup> Berlusconi Government (8 May 2008-16 November 2011).

Again, it is easy to pinpoint the various sources in which the vision of the school as a “sick” institution has become consolidated, with an accentuation of the importance of merit, seen as the individual value of the more intelligent students and the result of better-managed schools. According to Maria Stella Gelmini:

High doses of meritocracy must be introduced at all levels. First of all, the best-performing students should be rewarded. Their talent should primarily be rewarded in terms of opportunities for their future. I am thinking, for example, of ways to enable them to enrol in universities and the best courses in the future. Secondly, create incentives for the better-organised schools which are best able to improve their pupils' learning, taking into account the starting points. We will give them more resources and the means to offer an ever better service<sup>8</sup>.

Moving further down the timeline, we must remember the self-definition of “good school” given by the President of the Council Matteo Renzi when presenting his reforms in 2015, continuing on from those illustrated above<sup>9</sup>.

Finally, the latest news is that the current Meloni government (in office since 22 October 2022) has changed the name of the Ministry of Education to “Ministry of Education and Merit”, in line with the thoughts expressed in the “League Manifesto for the government of Italy”, which connects merit to the need for solidarity:

Moving away from the idea of “exam factories” towards a model of education that favours the individualised development of talent and skills and which “leaves nobody behind”<sup>10</sup>.

Regarding the Ministry's name, I think a brief parenthesis might be helpful as it allows us to consider both the long duration of the “Ministry of Public Education” and also the periods in which education has lost its “public” status. From the Cavourian “Ministry of Public Education of the Kingdom of Italy” of 1861 we have to wait until 1929 to see the first name change, to the “Ministry of National Education” which remained until the 2<sup>nd</sup> Badoglio Government (22 April until 8 June 1944). The title of Ministry of Public Education was reinstated with the Royal Decree No. 142 of 29 May 1944 and was maintained by the subsequent 1<sup>st</sup> Bonomi Government (18 June-10 December 1944), remaining unchanged until the Dini Government (17 January-17 May 1996). In the Prodi Government that followed (17 May 1996-21 October 1998), the name was changed to “Public education, universities, scientific and technological research”, becoming “Education, universities and research” in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Berlusconi government (30 May 2001-27 April 2006).

<sup>8</sup> G. Vinciguerra, *Gelmini: “Ecco come introdurrò il merito”*. Interview with the Minister of Education given to the Director of «Tuttoscuola», 5 September 2009, <https://www.tuttoscuola.com/gelmini-ecco-come-introdurr-il-merito/> (last access: 30.01.2023).

<sup>9</sup> Law No. 107 of 13 July 2015 and subsequent implementing decrees; the education minister was Stefania Giannini (22 February 2014-12 December 2016).

<sup>10</sup> See G. Valditarà, A. Amadori, *È l'Italia che vogliamo. Il manifesto della Lega per governare il Paese*, Milano, Piemme, 2022 (chapter entitled: *Progetti concreti per un Paese che rinasce*).

Following the loss of the accent on the public nature of education<sup>11</sup> (which had been approved for 130 years in total), the last government of the Republic recently changed the name to “Ministry of Education and Merit” (Decree Law No. 173 of 11 November 2022 introducing urgent provisions on the reallocation of ministerial powers).

The sole exception to the terminological dyads examined so far, which contrast different visions of the school (collaboration/competition, inclusion/merit and so on) is represented by a particular definition: the “classist school”. This is a term that appeared in the Sixties and Seventies, in close connection with Marxist interpretations of society, as it identifies a relationship in which one social class is subordinate to another. It carries with it the idea of an opposition between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat and is complementary to the “bourgeois school”<sup>12</sup>.

Lorenzo Milani (in 1967) also defined it with this terse indictment:

We have read the law and the plans for the new school. We are happy with most of the things it says. And then there is the fact that the new middle school exists, it is the same for all, it is compulsory and is not popular with the right. That's a good thing. It's just sad to know it's in your hands. Are you going to make it *classist* like the other one?<sup>13</sup>

It is interesting to note the reply given by the new minister Giuseppe Valditara, in one of his first interviews, to the question «Why did you change the Ministry's name to include the noun “merit”?»:

Because today, schools are *classist*. Schools aren't places of equality and don't help pupils to fulfil their potential and build a satisfactory adult life. [...] As Ernesto Galli Della Loggia wrote in the *Corriere*, «it is not a school of equality because it is not a school of merit». This awareness gives rise to the challenge of merit, which gives substance to the word “education”<sup>14</sup>.

This is the most recent act in the chronology of the neoliberal wave, which not only introduces new terms into the narrative of education, but reinterprets and changes the meaning of the traditional terms. What we are witnessing is the removal of one of the symbolic words of progressive education and the pedagogy of emancipation and its replacement in a world of different meaning, in a complex discursive process that allows the new education of merit to artificially place itself inside and not outside the Italian educational tradition. The term “class” is taken away from its link to socio-economic

<sup>11</sup> The loss of this linguistic indicator is very important and obviously not accidental, as neoliberalism brings with it a devaluation of the character of the public asset of education: see M. Baltodano, *Neoliberalism and the demise of public education: the corporatization of schools of education*, «International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education», vol. 25, n. 4, 2012, pp. 487-507.

<sup>12</sup> See Google Books Ngram Viewer, <https://books.google.com/ngrams/>. Search using the following parameters: Data set “Italian (2019)”, period “1950-2019”, terms “bourgeois school, class school” (last access: 30.01.2023).

<sup>13</sup> Scuola di Barbiana, *Lettera a una professoressa*, Firenze, Libreria Editrice Fiorentina, 1967, p. 30.

<sup>14</sup> G. Fregonara, *Valditara: “La scuola di oggi è classista. Alleanza per il merito con studenti e insegnanti”*, «Corriere della Sera», 31 October 2022, [https://www.corriere.it/scuola/medie/22\\_ottobre\\_31/valditara-ministro-istruzione-scuola-oggi-classista-f6bdd48-5874-11ed-9e79-0ca6cc80307a.shtml](https://www.corriere.it/scuola/medie/22_ottobre_31/valditara-ministro-istruzione-scuola-oggi-classista-f6bdd48-5874-11ed-9e79-0ca6cc80307a.shtml); last access: 30.01.2023.



condition, just as in parallel with merit, it is given an individual meaning linked to capacities and motivation, separated from any ties to the family and social context. This is not merely a rejection of the lessons of emancipatory education but also of all the solid sociological theory – from Bell and Gintis to Passeron and Bourdieu, with its fundamental concept of cultural capital<sup>15</sup> – which has clearly shown the decisive role played by learning environments compared to individual characteristics, without failing to underline the difficulty that schools have in compensating for the socio-economic and cultural differences of the family<sup>16</sup>.

### 3. *The world of education, between indifference and resistance*

The communicative process, which I have described so far in summary terms, is located in particular in the world of digital communication, which is characterised by a progressive disintermediation between scientific culture and popular culture which culminates in the current condition of the “post truth era”<sup>17</sup>. This means that despite the huge increase in the ease of access to culture that has taken place in just a few years, scientific literature is barely understood and re-elaborated by the general public. We are witnessing a proliferation of simplifications and approximations, alternative visions and conspiracy theories, whose great pervasiveness and diffusion were seen during the Covid-19 pandemic.

It is easy to see how the process of branding and mediatisation of the narrative on education finds fertile ground in this new and unprecedented digital context, giving space for politics to establish a direct link with public opinion on an issue that apart from a brief period in the 1970s has never fired the debate in the political or the cultural arena. This is where Silvio Berlusconi’s “three I” (English, computer science and enterprise) and Matteo Renzi’s “good school” find common ground. In both cases, skipping over any mediation by experts, advertising slogans are used to define the validity, acceptability and desirability of the proposal.

It is no coincidence that those who have resisted this vision of education have tried to use the same communication tools, but without much success. There has been talk of “sheriff principals”, “chicken coop classes” or “INVALSI state scorecarding”. It is worth considering this last issue for a moment, as INVALSI, has become a symbol for the hostility of the whole educational community – students, teachers and unions – towards the neoliberal reforms.

<sup>15</sup> P. Bourdieu. *The forms of capital*, in J. Richardson (ed.), *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1986, pp. 241-258.

<sup>16</sup> By way of example, see: J. Vegard and T.B. Strømme, *Advantages of upper-class backgrounds: Forms of capital, school cultures and educational performance*, «The Sociological Review», vol. 70, n. 6, 2022, pp. 1199-1219.

<sup>17</sup> R. Keyes, *The post-truth era: Dishonesty and deception in contemporary life*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 2004.

The world of education has in general been extremely wary of all forms of standardised assessment, unlike a significant part of Italy's experimental pedagogy community, which since the Seventies and Eighties has allowed pupils to take part in basic comparative studies, from TIMMS to TALIS, from PIRLS to PISA (in particular we could mention the commitment of Benedetto Vertecchi and his school). As for the INVALSI national assessments themselves, which began in the 2005-2006 school year, they would not have attracted so much hostility had certain characteristics of these tests not made them so very different from the reference models used internationally. It is necessary to start with the consideration that these standardised assessments were intended as tools designed to improve the quality of learning, with the aim of providing – to political decision-makers in particular – measures to assess the overall performance of schools in order to support the strategic actions of government. At the same time, they represent a form of “public accountability” that gives society as broad and objective a picture as possible of how public funds are used, particularly at times of reform<sup>18</sup>.

However, concerns began to emerge from the moment the training courses on the INVALSI data were first rolled out for teaching staff, starting with the advice given to school principals on how to compare a school against others in the local area, within a competitive framework. This method of using the INVALSI data is based on increasingly detailed statistics, measurements and numerical evaluation of the teacher and pupil performance. The result is that schools are included in performance rankings, and this has taken the assessments away from the initial national objective and closer to a metric that measures quality at local level, school by school and class by class<sup>19</sup>.

During the years we are now discussing, the Agnelli Foundation launched the *Eduscopio* project<sup>20</sup>, which publishes the rankings of school achievements in an increasingly transparent and open way. The rankings are calculated retroactively based on the subsequent university results gained by the students (obviously without considering their social and cultural backgrounds, thus by attributing merit to the best results based on a combination of just two factors: the efforts of the students and those of the teachers)<sup>21</sup>.

The ministerial procedure for appointing the INVALSI president and board members has been a further area for criticism, as the assessment systems are set up to be independent administrative authorities and as such they should have «ownership of the power to

<sup>18</sup> See E. Hutt and M.S. Polikoff, *Toward a framework for public accountability in education reform*, «Educational Researcher», vol. 49, n. 7, 2020, pp. 503-511.

<sup>19</sup> On this effect of neoliberal policies, in particular the pressures exerted on individual teachers, see D. Attick, *Homo Economicus at School: Neoliberal Education and Teacher as Economic Being*, «Educational Studies», vol. 53, n. 1, 2017, pp. 37-48.

<sup>20</sup> The *Eduscopio* project. *Confronto, scelgo, studio* was launched in 2014, <https://www.eduscopio.it> (last access: 30.01.2023).

<sup>21</sup> On this subject, researchers are either highly in favour or heavily critical: see for example M. Bordignon, P. Carapella, G. Turati, *Information and quality of public services: The case of the Eduscopio internet portal of the Giovanni Agnelli Foundation*, «Stato e Mercato», n. 1, 2021, pp. 117-139; P. Landri, *To resist, or to align? The enactment of data-based school governance in Italy*, «Educational Assessment, Evaluation and Accountability», n. 33, 2021, pp. 563-580; M. Pitzalis, *Le domande inevase sul mercato scolastico e il “buono scuola”*, «Scuola democratica», vol. 9, n. 3, 2018, pp. 631-636.

appoint their management bodies [...], accentuating their detachment from political power»<sup>22</sup>. Not only that: over time the arrows launched by the teachers' unions, lecturers' associations and most of all by the students, have focused on additional aspects which are giving more weight to the idea that this is not about having strategic comprehensive assessment systems, but about systems of individual assessment and control for both teachers and pupils.

It must be remembered that the state exams have been significantly reformed, with the new obligation to take part in the INVALSI assessments introduced from the 2007-2008 school year (the introduction of the national test in the final exam for the third year of middle school)<sup>23</sup>. This mandatory participation is still a requirement for admission to the final exams. Between 2010 and 2017 it was included in the grade average and thus in the determination of the final mark<sup>24</sup>. The score on the INVALSI assessment has been converted into a 1-10 grade, using a standard conversion table which is the same for all Italian schools<sup>25</sup>. As required by Presidential Decree 122 of 2009 «the final assessment of the examination includes the result of the national written exam» and «the final grade comprises the average 1-10 grade obtained in each test and in the overall assessment, by rounding up to the higher number by a fraction equal to or higher than 0.5»<sup>26</sup>.

Even for the secondary school-leaving examinations, the INVALSI tests have been a mandatory requirement for admission since 2013; this was introduced on a trial basis but it is left to the schools to decide whether to use the results in assessing the students. The plans to include the INVALSI result as part of the school-leaving diploma, in the same way as for the final year of middle school, have been announced several times but always accompanied by strikes and protests. After the 2015 exams, pupils started using *social media* to create humorous memes about the new INVALSI assessments. To the question Q1 «Think about what studying means to you. For me studying is like...», the answers soon went viral: «opening the kitchen cupboard and not finding the Nutella», «renal colic», «Chinese water torture», «having a cold shower in Norway», «not having a social life», «combing a raccoon»<sup>27</sup>.

It is all too easy to dismiss these comments as “absurd” or “amusing”, “typical kids’ stuff” but in reality they are just one of the many examples of opposition and resistance, even boycotting, displayed towards the ministerial reforms over a very long period, as the

<sup>22</sup> L. Orlando, *Genesi delle autorità amministrative indipendenti: natura e funzioni principali*, «Il Diritto Amministrativo», vol. 14, n. 12, December 2022.

<sup>23</sup> See INVALSI, *Il Decennale delle Prove INVALSI. Esiti, strumenti e riflessioni verso il Sistema Nazionale di Valutazione* (Rome, 4-5 December 2014), [https://www.invalsi.it/invalsi/doc\\_eventi/12-2014/4/Documento\\_DecennaleProveINVALSI.pdf](https://www.invalsi.it/invalsi/doc_eventi/12-2014/4/Documento_DecennaleProveINVALSI.pdf) (last access: 30.01.2023).

<sup>24</sup> MIUR Press Office, *Scuola, esame terza media al via per quasi 580mila studenti. Più rigore nell'ammissione. Lode per meritevoli*, Roma, Press Release, 14 June 2010, <https://www.istruzione.it/archivio/web/ministero/cs140610.html> (last access: 30.01.2023).

<sup>25</sup> INVALSI, *Griglia per l'attribuzione del voto della prova nazionale*, [https://www.invalsi.it/snvpn2013/documenti/pn2011/Griglia-Correzione\\_PN1011.pdf](https://www.invalsi.it/snvpn2013/documenti/pn2011/Griglia-Correzione_PN1011.pdf) (last access: 30.01.2023).

<sup>26</sup> Presidential Decree No. 122 of 22/06/09 concerning the assessment of students, Art. 3, paragraphs 4 and 6, and subsequent ministerial circulars.

<sup>27</sup> V. Roscioni, *Test Invalsi 2015: le risposte più divertenti*, 12 May 2015, <https://www.studenti.it/test-invalsi-superiori-2015-foto-risposte-divertenti.html> (last access: 30.01.2023).

tone and purpose of the reforms date back to the tenure of Letizia Moratti (2<sup>nd</sup> Berlusconi government, 11 June-23 April 2005).

The object of the criticisms is the assessment, calculated according to a standardised national table, which means that a not inconsiderable part of the final assessment is left to the teachers (of Italian, Maths and English); this runs counter to the very principle of assessment, which by its nature should be contextualised and individualised.

The opinion of Giorgio Israel, an eminent and influential academic, is incisive and clearly delineates the crucial question posed by the INVALSI assessments:

What is the function of the INVALSI assessment? An attempt to provide – using a variety of qualitative tools – a picture of the state of Italy’s education system that might constitute a valid tool for its improvement? If this is the function of the INVALSI, there is nothing to object to. Actually, we can only look favourably on this type of activity, which can take various forms [...]. On the other hand, if the intention is to gradually replace the teacher’s role as an assessor of pupils – which in my view is an absolutely essential one – for reasons which are at the very least questionable, as we have seen, and by only using tests, and if the aim is to assess teachers and schools with those tests, then no, we really do not agree<sup>28</sup>.

But the criticism does not stop there, as there are other “perverse” effects created by a quantitative assessment being converted into a 1-10 grade:

Instead of simply trying to assess the achievements resulting from ordinary teaching, they bring in a test [...] which has two effects. The first is to disrupt the result of the exam: it’s as though a chemist who is asked to determine the components in a compound stirs the mixture not with a neutral stirring stick, but with one imbued with a reagent. The second effect is even worse: it stimulates teachers and students to teach and study a new subject, the INVALSI tests.

As we can see, these are not extremist reactions, disorderly reactions to the advent of “the new”, nor dogged adversity to ministerial reasoning. Instead, this is an articulate and precise statement of reasoned arguments that dismantle the argument that these assessments are objective and have nothing to do with preconceived ideologies. The lesson of Israel is all the more interesting because it allows a better evaluation of the strong criticisms coming from certain circles of the educational community, which are well-represented and summed up in a mural documenting the latest clash between teachers and the government (17 November 2022): «Giving a scorecard isn’t assessment. No INVALSI»<sup>29</sup>.

This is the reaction to another cause of friction with the world of education, in addition to all those mentioned above: the issuing to schools of codes to match the assessments with poor results with the students who completed them: these pupils are then labelled as “vulnerable students” and identified by name<sup>30</sup>. This is not the place

<sup>28</sup> G. Israel, Speech at the Convention *In classe ho un bambino che...* (Florence, 6 February 2015), *Dibattito a due voci sul tema: Sono utili le prove Invalsi?*, <https://youtu.be/7ZVmqGAAVC8> (last access: 30.01.2023).

<sup>29</sup> See <https://comune-info.net/la-schedatura-degli-studenti-fragili> (last access: 30.01.2023).

<sup>30</sup> Roars (Return On Academic Research and School), *Schedatura di Stato INVALSI: nomi e cognomi degli studenti ‘disagiati’*. *E adesso?*, 15 November 2022, <https://www.roars.it/online/schedatura-di-stato-invalsi-nomi>

to further investigate the condemnation of “scorecarding”, considered by the president of the INVALSI assessments, Prof. Roberto Ricci, as «another interpretation of things that favour obscurantism»<sup>31</sup>. However, it is worth noting that as we have seen, this is just the latest episode in a series, all of which are aimed at changing the international system of comparative assessments which provide data that are regularly aggregated and anonymous.

At this point we cannot say that the forms of rebellion mentioned here, concentrating on just a few exemplary cases, are merely the preserve of a small part of the education community. There is no doubt that the repeated calls to boycott the INVALSI assessments were supported by a minority of teachers and students. However, it would be wrong to think that these are only extremist movements, as the crude neoliberal invites us to think, relegating them to the ranks of those who do not understand innovation or reforms. In reality, much of the education community (perhaps in silence and resignation) agrees with the reasons for such resistance, even if they dislike some of its methods.

The long but necessary premise of historical contextualisation now gives us a better and deeper understanding of the teachers’ stories, just three of which are given here as examples. The words of primary school teacher Danilo Serafini (who began teaching in 1983) are emblematic<sup>32</sup>. When asked about the usefulness of the INVALSI assessments, he replies:

I hope they won't take my pension away now! I can't deny that I've called them “the Invalid assessments” [It's a play on words: Invalsi / Invalid; N.d.A.] more than once, because [...] I think it's crazy to assess [pupils] after doing something they aren't used to doing. [...] that's not meant as a criticism of how the INVALSI assessments are structured because there are some excellent ideas. Maybe it's the teachers' fault, maybe the ministerial plans are to blame, maybe it's whoever else's fault, I don't know, but it's clear that [...] the test given to the children has absolutely nothing to do with how they work day to day.

When asked about the areas in need of urgent reform to improve education, the primary school teacher Maria Grazia (who started teaching in 1972) questions the practical utility of national assessments:

e-cognomi-degli-studenti-disagiati-e-adesso (last access: 30.01.2023).

<sup>31</sup> V. Santarpia, *Invalsi, scoppia il caso del 'bollino di fragilità' agli studenti*. Ricci: “Solo uno strumento per distribuire i fondi”, «Corriere della Sera», 15 November 2022, [https://www.corriere.it/scuola/medie/22\\_novembre\\_15/invalsi-scoppia-caso-bollino-fragilita-studenti-ricci-solo-strumento-distribuire-fondi-fcbf8720-64b6-11ed-afef-649581263307.shtml](https://www.corriere.it/scuola/medie/22_novembre_15/invalsi-scoppia-caso-bollino-fragilita-studenti-ricci-solo-strumento-distribuire-fondi-fcbf8720-64b6-11ed-afef-649581263307.shtml) (last access: 30.01.2023). See also the reply from ROARS, *Invalsi conferma la schedatura di massa degli studenti fragili. Unbeknown to parents*, 16 November 2022, <https://www.roars.it/online/invalsi-conferma-la-schedatura-di-massa-degli-studenti-fragili-a-insaputa-dei-genitori> (last access: 30.01.2023).

<sup>32</sup> Interview given by Daria Isolani to Danilo Serafini (elementary school teacher since 1983) on 18 January 2020, available online at <https://youtu.be/ZN143580IG0> (as of minute 33:31) (last access: 30.01.2023). See the comment card by Monica Dati, *Avevo imparato a leggere prima di andare alle elementari grazie ad Alberto Manzi: i ricordi del maestro Serafini*, «Memorie Educative in Video», DOI: 10.53221/628, published on: 26.10.2021, <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-individuale/video-testimonianze/avevo-imparato-leggere-prima-di-andare-alle-elementari> (last access: 30.01.2023).

Who is in charge of teaching? just the poor teachers, left to themselves? teaching hasn't been given due recognition for many years now. Now we have the new INVALSI assessment system, but that's something else, it's out of context, it's a different thing. I think a lot of attention is needed [...]. I think it's up to the Minister to recognise the value of teaching<sup>33</sup>.

Other testimonies reveal some ambivalence, such as the primary school teacher Maria Galatolo (a primary school teacher since 1972), although she starts from a position of opposition to assessing [pupils] with grades and scores:

Personally I'm against grading, but on the other hand I was also against the summary opinion "good", "satisfactory", "excellent" because to me those are just labels given on the basis of personal opinion because it's not true there are really objective tests<sup>34</sup>.

However,

I tend to disagree with this kind of label. I am more in favour of a global judgement than one based on a report card [...] where a global opinion is given on all the various aspects of a child's personality. But [...] now we have the famous INVALSI tests and I have to say, while I'm opposed to them, I can tell you something positive: the last INVALSI tests I held with a fourth-year primary class, I did them in the second year. My class managed to beat the national average so even though I'm against this type of grade, but...

#### 4. *Epilogue*

Taken together, the testimonies of teachers, the statements made by students, the strikes and declarations made by teaching unions over a period of more than twenty years, are a tangible sign of an education system that despite having a number of different currents within it, does not want to be seen as an organisation, nor as part of a public administration to be guided towards destinations it does not want.

We have seen that there is a vibrant and well-documented dialectic between national (and ministerial) power and local institutions and also between the mass media and school culture. There is, in essence, a strong disconnect between the action of a government that sees the school as a dependent entity which can be shaped to its will (with constant changes between the administration in office and the next one) and the school which, as the study of the history of education has clearly shown us, expresses its own specific,

<sup>33</sup> Interview by Caterina Rinaldi with Maria Grazia (a primary school teacher since 1972), given on 29 March 2014 and available online at <https://youtu.be/jB29eWxlwM> (from minute 26:39) (last access: 30.01.2023).

<sup>34</sup> Interview given by Maria Galatolo to the primary school teacher Manuela Nepi (primary school teacher since 1972) on 1<sup>st</sup> February 2013, available online at <https://youtu.be/qq3rENHgShg> (starting at 16:12) (last access: 30.01.2023).

original and distinctive culture<sup>35</sup>. Teachers, in particular, cannot be relegated to the role of executors of reforms. They must be recognised as intellectual subjects of the learning they are committed to improving on a daily basis. In this sense, the reform of education, taking into account what its history tells us, necessarily means listening to what schools have to say<sup>36</sup>.

<sup>35</sup> See D. Julia, *La culture scolaire comme objet historique*, «Paedagogica Historica», 31, sup. 1, 1995, pp. 353-382.

<sup>36</sup> On these themes, for a broader historical excursus, starting from the Gentile Reformation, see G. Bandini, *The Italian debate about the role of teacher within teacher education, a long dialectic between two opposing concepts: educational intellectual or cultural employee*, in N. Mead (ed.), *Moral and Political Values in Teacher Education over Time. International Perspectives*, London, Routledge, 2022, pp. 49-71.





# The Role of Secondary Grammar School Traditions in Hungary under Communism

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(Hungary)

## 1. *Research design and position of the researcher*

The paper presents one of the school traditions which was a special day in a secondary grammar school. The initiators established it in the 1970s. Student Day played a key role in raising political awareness. The analysis of the history of schools in the communist period can significantly enrich the history of education. It is possible to reconstruct the inner world of school by analysing the documents and comparing them with the perspectives of the people who remember them. Alongside the official canon, we can discover motifs that took place only within the walls of individual schools or classrooms. But their impact and significance go far beyond the educational values and compulsory objectives of the time.

The paper aims are the following: a) to show living or transforming traditions which, in a hidden form, were able to strengthen an independent national consciousness alongside the obligatory Marxist-Leninist worldview; b) to give several examples about the democrat education and functioning of democratic student self-government; c) to compare of narratives and official canon of pedagogical history; d) to analyse the micro-historical level and underline special patterns.

School memory not only allows us to reconstruct the past but is also key to understanding what we know or believe about the past today. Among other things, they help us to understand the important context: what were the preconditions that made the “velvet revolutions” in the countries of Eastern Europe possible? The personal recollections of teachers and students help to reveal the feelings about schools that helped to define individual and collective identities. The so far unexplored documents provide evidence that, in addition to ideologically unified positions, there were significant differences of opinion among school actors. By recounting their lived experiences, the actors can open the ‘black box’ of the Hungarian school question<sup>1</sup>, and with their help, new social and cultural factors can be added to the official canon or allow it to be redefined<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> D. Julia, *La culture scolaire comme objet historique*, «Paedagogica Historica», vol. 31, n. 1, 1995, pp. 353-382.

<sup>2</sup> J. Assmann, *A kulturális emlékezet. Írás, emlékezés és politikai identitás a korai magas kultúrában*, Budapest, Atlantisz Kiadó, 2013; K. Hörschelmann, *The social consequences of transformation*, in M. Bradshaw, A. Stanning

The invention of tradition has contributed to the reinforcement of school identity (mythmaking)<sup>3</sup> but has also served as a hidden form of political education. Student traditions legitimised the institution and gave it prestige. The school yearbooks<sup>4</sup> and the memory of alumni associations allow us to define how we can look from the present to the past, and how we can reinterpret it or the future<sup>5</sup>.

The life history research<sup>6</sup>, the interview, is a renewed form of interpretative, qualitative research method, allowing the collector to construct and interpret the recollected social reality himself. The individual representations of teachers and students, their personal and group identities, we can reconstruct through the recollections<sup>7</sup>. It has particular importance in the states of Eastern Europe, where the transition between the pre-regime change (communist era, 1989) and the post-plural democracy is a sharp dividing line. School memory is not only a channel of the past, of the communist youth movement but also a key to understanding what we know or believe about the past today<sup>8</sup>.

The research methodology is qualitative, drawing on oral history and documentary analysis. Through a comparative analysis of documents from a secondary grammar school yearbooks, and the local press, and by comparing the opinions of teachers and former students who recall the events<sup>9</sup>, this case study reconstructs a student tradition that had (and still has) a significant impact on the development of young people's political and civic knowledge. The source material is relatively rich, which is because the school's administration has paid particular attention to research into school history for many years. There has been a remarkable amount of work on the history of the school's founding, its teachers, the impact of the First and Second World Wars and, more recently, the communist period.

The work on the student day was facilitated by the intellectual fatherhood of the school's former headmaster, who recalled in several interviews the script for the Student Day. The author's personal views are influenced by the fact that he himself was once a student at this secondary school. Thus, she herself was a witness and participant in the events of the former student days. Her own memories are inevitably part of the interpretation of the events, as she herself is one of the "invisible remembers".

(eds.), *East Central Europe and the Former Soviet Union*, Harlow, Pearson/Prentice Hall, 2004, pp. 219-246.

<sup>3</sup> R. Sani, *The Invention of Tradition in the Minor Universities of United Italy: The Case of the Thirteenth-Century Origins of the Studium Maceratense*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. VII, n. 1, 2012, pp. 485-504.

<sup>4</sup> P. Dávila, L. M. Naya, J. Miguelena, *Yearbooks as a source in researching school practices in private religious schools*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. XV, n. 2, 2020, pp. 219-240

<sup>5</sup> É. Szabolcs, Deduktív (analitikus) jellegű kutatások, in I. Falus (ed.), *Bevezetés a pedagógiai kutatás módszereibe*, Budapest, Műszaki Könyvkiadó, 2001, pp. 106-121.

<sup>6</sup> F. Schütze, *Biographieforschung und narratives Interview*, «Neue Praxis», n. 13, 1983, pp. 283-294.

<sup>7</sup> U. Bronfenbrenner, *The Ecology of Human Development*, Cambridge (MA), Harvard University Press, 1979.

<sup>8</sup> J. Mason, *Kvalitatív kutatás*, Budapest, József Műhely, 2005.

<sup>9</sup> Teacher's interviews (over 70-80 years) were recorded between 2014 and 2016. The interview with the former school headmaster was made in 2021 and 2022 in Cegléd (Hungary).

## 2. *Education and propaganda (historical context)*

The Soviet influence (Sovietisation) determined the history of Central and Eastern Europe after the Second World War. The state of Hungary was identified with the Soviet communist model. It was established as a monolith, one-party regime with the leadership of the communists. In contrast to other Eastern European countries, Hungarian political terminology labelled this period as “socialism”. After the World War II, the Hungarian history had three sub-periods. Officially, we had a transitional period between 1944 and 1949, the establishment of the communist dictatorship between 1949 and 1956 (direct representation of Stalinism), and the third period was the Kádár era between 1956 and 1988-1989. The following year was a turning point, as, after the change of regime, a pluralistic democracy began<sup>10</sup>.

From 1945 to 1948, the multiparty system may have been in place for a short period. Already then, the abolition of the bourgeois and then the social-democratic parties had started. After 1945 the aristocrats, factory owners (who were alive and not emigrated), bourgeois intellectuals and wealthy peasants were relocated. Their places were taken by the young people of worker and peasant families. The aim was to create a new elite.

János Kádár, the head secretary of the Hungarian Socialist Party, began new politics in the 1960s and the system functioned as a soft dictatorship, later named “goulash communism” or “fridge-socialism”. During this period, the people had a better standard of living. The party-state achieved the elimination of poverty and income equality. Kádár made a compromise with the elite. His famous motto was: «Those who are not against us, are with us».

The Russian language became compulsory at all levels of education in 1949. The Russian teaching focused obviously on the political education of citizens. The goal of teachers was to cultivate a new type of people: They had to build a Soviet political system that represents «the future of all humankind, and the new and true human morality»<sup>11</sup>. According to the educational policy guidelines of Rákosi regime, it was necessary to enforce the Marxist and Leninist worldview in the curriculum and in the work of educators... «to get over the reactionary and idealistic attitudes and to fight against nationalism and cosmopolitanism»<sup>12</sup>. The Russian language played a mediating role in the unification of the “socialist camp”, it connected the Soviet Union with its “friendly socialist countries”.

The party has taken great care to educate young people about the worldview. It had two organisations: the Hungarian Pioneers' Association, based on the model of the Soviet pioneer movement, was a grouping of primary school pupils. The organisation for the over-14s was the Association of Working Youth, which was transformed after the 1956 revolution and continued to exist under the name of the Hungarian Young Communist League. Under socialism, many schoolchildren were members of this pioneering

<sup>10</sup> M. Bihari, *A szocialista állam*, «Rubicon», n. 8, 1996, pp. 4-5; I. Romsics, *A Short Story of Hungary*, Budapest, Osiris Kiadó, 2016.

<sup>11</sup> G. Ortutay, *Művelődés és politika*, Budapest, Hungária Könyvkiadó, 1949, pp. 291-292.

<sup>12</sup> S. Nagy, L. Horváth, *Neveléstudomány*, Budapest, Tankönyvkiadó, 1976, pp. 88-89.

organisation (80%), in which communist ideological education played a decisive role. But it also aimed at sports and public education (drama festivals, theatre visits, camps), as well as technical education. Many motifs from the scout movement were used (patrols, flocks, troops, uniforms, camps, trials, ecc.). However the pioneer movement's main task was to spread communist ideology. Lower school children were called little drummers. The pioneer movement aimed to educate its members to love and loyalty to the Fatherland and the Party, to proletarian internationalism. This aim was expressed mainly in the slogans of school celebrations, in the speeches and in the content of literary works and poems. Their slogan was: Forward! The pioneering movement also included military education in the programmes of Defence Days. It is important to underline that teachers were also required to function as pioneer leaders. The movement involved most primary school pupils, but this did not mean an exclusive ideological commitment. The movement took into account the age characteristics of students and their need for romanticism. The children valued leisure activities such as games and sports, and even religious education, which was not much talked about in public<sup>13</sup>.

The Hungarian Young Communist League (KISZ)<sup>14</sup> was founded in 1957, following the break of the Hungarian Revolution 1956. It claimed to represent all the country's youth and to educate young people politically. The Young Communist League was the most important source of new members for the communist party. Its organizational framework paralleled that of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party and included a congress, central committee, secretariat, and regional and local committees. It worked as a grassroots organisation. Its membership was open to youth from the ages of fourteen to twenty-six years. From the 1960s the mission of the organisation was to mobilise youth and integrate the new generations into society. Actions focused on providing a sense of community and an experience of activity. In the 1960s, the KISZ organised building camps for draining work. The young people worked in forestry and agriculture. On Saturdays, on so-called Communist Saturdays, schoolchildren helped with harvesting work. Spectacular competitions and games provided a sense of community togetherness. A prominent one was the competition «Who knows more about the Soviet Union»? The League was both a "voluntary", i.e., state-organised mass organisation and a training ground for the formation of a leadership. For the cadres, it functioned as a pre-school of the party. In the school, university and regional organisations it worked as a competitive platform for the functionaries.

In the 1980s, the League had about 800,000 members. Membership was common among students (96% at universities, 75% in high schools) but was lower among young people already working (31%). The high membership of the organisation is also justified by the fact that it was compulsory for university admission. (Only in exceptional cases was KISZ membership renounced.) The Hungarian Young Communist League organised a lot of cultural and sports activities for the young people<sup>15</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> I. Romsics, *Magyarország története a XX. században*, Budapest, Osiris Kiadó, 1999, p. 363.

<sup>14</sup> KISZ is *Kommunista Ifjúsági Szervezet* in Hungarian language.

<sup>15</sup> *Magyar Kommunista Ifjúsági Szövetség (KISZ)*, «Magyar Haza», 20.02.2012, <https://magyarhaza>.

The Marxist-Leninist propaganda fundamentally determined the whole of cultural life, but the intellectuals (teachers) were searching for their own identity. Behind the scenes, many opportunities opened up to express their own convictions in the classroom. The teachers and former students (many of whom later became teachers) recalled the exciting and romantic events, camps and competitions offered by the youth movement. Even the former party members did not mention the importance of ideological education in their remembrances, but it is important to know that the constant presence of classroom decorations, coats of arms, flags and slogans had an involuntary influence on the young people. Every student of the communist era remembers the famous Leninist sentence that could be read in every Russian classroom: «To learn, to learn, to learn».

In the context of these changes, it is worth asking the following questions: How could teachers convey traditional and democratic values alongside official propaganda? What added pedagogical values could the youth movement transmit? How could teachers avoid the official propaganda?

### 3. *School rituals during the dictatorship*

The communist turn after 1945 only partially transformed the traditions. It added a significant political education element to youth life, with new celebrations and movement elements (e.g. Revolutionary Youth Days)<sup>16</sup>.

Rituals in class are recurring measures for organising teaching. As a rule, these rituals are determined and observed together by the teacher and the class. The repetitive aspect of rituals serves to structure the school routine and support established rules. Rituals structure the lessons and provide the pupils with security, orientation, and support. They positively affect the class community and can also strengthen the individual of children. In school pedagogy, the advantages and disadvantages of rituals are the subjects of debate, alongside the definitional diversity of rituals<sup>17</sup>. Meier emphasises among other things:

«Rituals are recurring, designed actions that take place in a familiar form and sequence of components. In many situations, our everyday life is characterised by actions that come close to rituals, even if they do not bear the distinctive character that is expected of rituals». In the spirit of this direction of definition, Meier continues: «Ritual lives from reality, repeatability, and forms of participation. It must be visible, audible, and experienceable, in other words, it must also be sensual. It needs special arrangements or even its own spaces (school chapel)»<sup>18</sup>.

In many cases, symbols, and procedures reminiscent of ecclesiastical practices were adopted. Rituals were created as a substitute for religion in a particular way in communist

wordpress.com/2012/02/20/magyar-kommunista-ifjusagi-szovetseg-kisz/ (last access: 25.03.2023)

<sup>16</sup> I. Romsics, *Magyarország története a XX. században*, cit., p. 364.

<sup>17</sup> E. Rauch, *Rituale in der Schulpädagogik? Ein Diskurs*, München/Ravensburg, Grin, 2003, p. 5.

<sup>18</sup> R. Meier, *Rituale rund um den Körper*, «Grundschule», vol. XXVI, n. 5, 1993, pp. 28-30.

dictatorships. The celebrations were intended to convey the collective desire to the party, and solidarity with the government and its ideology. Even for children, criticism was not welcome. In dictatorships the rituals aimed to manipulate. This also applied to school education. Rituals were above all a means of covering up the dominant situation and educating people to be uncritical<sup>19</sup>.

Despite the dictatorship, schools retained many rituals and traditions closely linked to school life. On the one hand, they ensured the continuation of school traditions, and, on the other hand, they were closely linked to the framework of school life, providing a sense of permanence.

The schools regularly held the closing and opening ceremonies of the school year in Hungary. It also preserved one of the special and unique school celebrations: the farewell procession and serenade of twelfth-grade students (with a carry-on bag with a shoulder strap). On the last day, the graduates will march singing and ceremony through the school building, which is decorated with flowers by the lower classes. The bag on their shoulders symbolises the start of their journey to a new life. The scones, wine and coins in their bags are a symbolic help for them. During the farewell, the students sing *De Brevitate Vitae (Gaudeamus Igitur)*.

Regarding the days of historical remembrance, the Arad Martyrs (Hungarian generals executed in 1849) were commemorated as always. Mostly, the school's name-giver was celebrated in the form of a competition or a wreath-laying ceremony. There was a long tradition of choir singing throughout the life of the school. Regular competitions for singing classes were organised from the early 1930s. The initiators were Zoltán Kodály and Lajos Bárdos the famous musicians. The secondary grammar schools followed this tradition today too. School life had and has always included Student Day<sup>20</sup>, class and staff excursions, and class and staff parties.

Many of the feasts have been heavily transformed by the revolutionary ideology of Marxism-Leninism. The communists gave special importance to the Revolutionary Youth Days. There is the Celebration of the 1848 Hungarian Revolution on 15 March, the Day of the Communist Revolution in 1919 on 21 March, and Celebrations of the liberation of the country on 4 April 1945. The celebration of the day of the Great October Socialist Revolution on 7 November was not part of the earlier tradition and thus served an explicitly ideological purpose. In all the countries of the Soviet bloc, the use of the Soviet flag and the organisation of celebrations of the October Revolution were compulsory at workplaces, schools, and towns. After the dogmatic period of the 1950s, the celebrations gradually lost their direct political character, and literature and the arts were given space and opportunities to perform the events in a more direct and enjoyable way<sup>21</sup>. It depended on the ingenuity, education, and ideological commitment of the

<sup>19</sup> C. Mohnhoff, *Rituale in der Grundschule. Eine ethnographische Fallstudie in einer jahrgangsübergreifenden Eingangsklasse*, Kassel, Universität Kassel – Zentrum für Lehrerbildung, 2007.

<sup>20</sup> This event, so-called “Reversed Day” (in Hungarian translation) was organised on 1<sup>st</sup> April (on Fool’s Day). Although this day provides an opportunity for jokes, it is essentially a day when students take full control of the school in an organised way. It is a day of student self-management.

<sup>21</sup> B. Vincze, *Tanári életutak a 20. század második felében*, Budapest, Eötvös Kiadó, 2018, pp. 99-100. Ms.



organisers of the celebrations to put together high-quality and meaningful programmes. The revolutionary heroes became historical figures with human faces during school celebrations<sup>22</sup>.

Teachers could have responsibility for the future generation. They could transmit traditional cultural values without the communist ideology of the party. How was it possible? Through a conscious selection of literary works, poetry, theatre visits and exhibitions, they were able to shape tastes and transmit values by skillfully but intentionally avoiding the obligatory canon. The teachers were able to form the new generation for the new beginning. Teachers taught their students to read between the lines, understand metaphors and encourage critical thinking<sup>23</sup>. Although the professionalisation of teachers was broken after the Second World War in Hungary, we can see that professional identity formation is a dynamic process, different identities are integrated during the years of dictatorship and both the individual and the context are key factors in this process<sup>24</sup>.

Most teachers considered this, informal but very important form of education important in protecting their identity, based on previous teacher models. We can share the idea of Welmond, who presents:

«Teacher identity as dynamic and contested, shaped by, and constructed within potentially contradictory interests and ideologies, competing conceptions of rights and responsibilities of teachers, and differing ways of understanding success or effectiveness». In this sense, we can talk about certain “cultural schemas”: [...] «culturally specific, historically grounded, competing perspectives of teacher identity that are coherent and shared by certain communities of teachers»<sup>25</sup>.

Limited freedom in cultural life began in the sixties in Hungary. The controlled culture flourished in special ways. The political regime divided the cultural works into three categories, and the initials of the words were used to talk about the 3Ts (supported, tolerated, forbidden)<sup>26</sup>.

In the first category were the works of art that were supported, that is, works of art that represented the spirit of the party, the socialist realism. In the second category were the tolerated works, which were non-Marxist but not openly polemical. The forbidden works were those that were openly anti-systemic, and anti-Marxist. Culture was the medium

Mészáros recalled with pride how, as a literature teacher, she was able to incorporate authors and themes from outside the canon in a creative and taste-forming way in the organisation of school celebrations and communist youth events (e.g., the performance of works by Transylvanian poets, the Holocaust as a theme from the 1960s and 1970s).

<sup>22</sup> L. Somogyvári, *Lenin as a Child. Visual Propaganda and Pedagogy*, «Acta Paedagogica Vilnensia», XLII, 2019, pp. 29-42.

<sup>23</sup> I. Szabó, *A pártállam gyermekei. Tanulmányok a magyar politikai szocializációról*, Budapest, Új Mandátum Könyvkiadó, 2000.

<sup>24</sup> D. Beijaard, P.C. Meijer, N. Verloop, *Reconsidering Research on Teachers' Professional Identity*, «Teaching and Teacher Education», vol. XX, n. 2, 2004, pp. 107-128.

<sup>25</sup> M. Welmond, M. *Globalization viewed from the periphery: The dynamics of teacher identity in the Republic of Benin*, «Comparative Education Review», vol. XLVI, n. 1, 2002, pp. 37-65 (quotes taken from pp. 42-43).

<sup>26</sup> The Ts are *támogatott* (supported), *tűrt* (tolerated) and *tiltott* (forbidden) in the Hungarian language.

of protest, of critique, of enlightenment, of education (cabaret, alternative theatre, dance house movement)<sup>27</sup>.

#### 4. *Student Day as the hidden form of exercising democracy under the communist dictatorship*

Education was highly ideologically politicised during the communist period in Hungary. The education of young people was also in the hands of the youth movement, and most school celebrations and rituals had to include the expected ideological content (pictures of Lenin, pictures of labour movement heroes, slogans, quotations, and flags). Reminiscences and practice show that behind the scenes it was possible to transmit non-ideological values. I would like to show an example that for many years has been a good example of how to prepare students for democracy in a hidden way. The local form of the student-teacher election can be seen as essentially a multi-party democratic election.

Dr. György Kürti was the initiator of the Student Day. He proposed to organise a special, so-called “Reserved Day” on which students lead the school. Dr. Kürti was a young teacher and studied as an excellent student in earlier years in the Kossuth Secondary Grammar School. He knew well the school traditions and teachers because his parents worked at school too.

The inhabitants of the city are immensely proud of this secondary grammar school. In 1899, the citizens of Cegléd founded the eighth-grade Gymnasium with their local resources. The two-storey Art Nouveau building, built according to the school type of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy at the time, was completed in 1903. It was the most modern two-storey house in a small rural town. The school’s equipment included electric lighting and bell, flush toilets, a gym, and gymnastic equipment. The school was attended mainly by the children of the wealthy middle classes, who found the modern but demanding school a cultural challenge. Since 1920, the gymnasium still bears the name of Lajos Kossuth, the leader of the 1848-1849 revolution and freedom fights<sup>28</sup>.

Kürti worked from 1973 to 1996 as vice director and as director from 1996 to 2011 at school<sup>29</sup>. He began to research school history<sup>30</sup>. Among them, he is the founder of the Society for Old Students<sup>31</sup>.

A lot of schools have traditional student leadership on 1 April on Fools’ Day. The form of School Day in Cegléd is a complex form of self-government and democratic voting process, which was a good example of civic education. Based on György Kürti’s

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 495.

<sup>28</sup> S. Gőz Sándor, *A ceglédi Kossuth Gimnázium építése és működése az alapítástól 1904-ig*, Cegléd, Apáti Nyomda, 1998.

<sup>29</sup> E. Volter, *120 év – 120 diák – Dr. Kürti György, Ceglédi Panoráma*, 2019, <https://ceglédipanorama.hu/2019-09-19/120-ev-120-diak-dr-kurti-gyorgy/> (last access: 25.03.2023).

<sup>30</sup> [http://www.cklg.hu/?t=centenariumi\\_fuzetek](http://www.cklg.hu/?t=centenariumi_fuzetek) (last access: 25.03.2023).

<sup>31</sup> <http://www.oregdiak.cklg.hu/> (last access: 25.03.2023).

idea, together with some KISZ members, they worked out the scenario of the Student Day, which was later documented. After the first successes, student day became a permanent tradition and is organised every year. Students form counties instead of parties and hold campaign events with their supporters. Instead of using the word party, they have chosen county because in the party-state it would have been conspicuous that a school was functioning as a multi-party democracy. The election and the ritual of the Student Day are ruled by the Constitution<sup>32</sup>. The constitution regulates the elections, the pre-election, the campaign, the election of the school director, the functioning of the parliament, the functions, the duties of the constitutional court, the awards, and the order of inauguration. The constitution also lays down precise conditions for student elections and self-government:

§ 2 (1) The leading force of the Reversed Day is the community of students. Preferably, all lessons are taught by student teachers. If 80% of the lessons are not taught by student teachers, the Reverse Day shall not take place.

(2) The student teachers must, at least two days before the Reverse Day, agree with the teacher who will be holding the lesson the lesson. In classes where there is no student teacher, a regular class will be held<sup>33</sup>.

It is noteworthy that the constitution also defines the duties of students.

§ 17 every citizen must: participate in the lessons; respect the teacher, obey him/her, fulfil his/her wishes; keep the laws enacted by the Parliament and the Board of Governors; behave according to the generally accepted standards of social and ethical norms; and promote the success of the Day by his/her behaviour; to refrain from counter-campaigning<sup>34</sup>.

The students choose a name, a flag, badges, and a programme for their victory. The election is held in two rounds. In round 1, votes are counted for the counties. In round 2, voting takes place after a 15-minute show by the three student director candidates with the most votes. Voting will take place after the speech of the three candidates. All students and staff of the school may vote. Each voter may cast only one vote on a stamped ballot card. Voting is supervised by designated poll workers at the ballot boxes. The person with the most votes became the student leader. The second and third runners-up will be awarded the title of Deputy Director. In the event of a tie for first place, the vote shall be repeated on the next school day without any information on the result being published. During this period, there shall be a complete campaign silence shall be in force<sup>35</sup>.

The director is inaugurated at a school event, where he formally receives the keys to the school, hands out the ranks of his ministers, swears the school oath and takes responsibility for the day's events. Since 1974, the throne chair and treasure chest

<sup>32</sup> [http://www.cklg.hu/html\\_oldalak/tiny\\_files/pdf/a\\_cegledi\\_kossuth\\_lajos\\_gimnazium\\_forditott\\_napjanak\\_tarsadalmi\\_rendje\\_2013.pdf](http://www.cklg.hu/html_oldalak/tiny_files/pdf/a_cegledi_kossuth_lajos_gimnazium_forditott_napjanak_tarsadalmi_rendje_2013.pdf) (last access: 25.03.2023).

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

symbolized the regularity of the event, and they are still in use on each occasion<sup>36</sup>. The Student Day has retained its popularity in today's pluralist democracy. It has evolved a lot in terms of the delivery of speeches and campaigns. Today, candidates are all preparing video campaigns. The changes have prompted new and old students to organise an exhibition of relics of old students' days<sup>37</sup>.

### *Conclusion*

In summary, if we return to the original questions, we can conclude that most teachers were able to transmit traditional and democratic values alongside official propaganda. They found ways and contents to transmit messages that they considered important beyond ideology. Behind the classroom doors or even on joint excursions, there was the opportunity to shape students' attitudes and develop critical thinking. The student day is a good example of this, as evidenced by the fact that in many years no one has complained that the school violates the obligatory Marxist-Leninist ethos.

The Student Day presented in this study, which was essentially a grassroots initiative from the youth movement, highlighted the fact that informal education (despite its binding ideological boundaries) could take independent initiatives. The results show (the enduring success of Student Day, unchanged) that the pedagogical added value depended on the willingness and ability of teachers to transform and develop their pedagogical reasoning and practice. The teachers were able to reinterpret their own roles, acting as supporters and mentors, giving space to the students' activity.

The educators had to learn how they could avoid the propaganda. This learning process depended on personal skills, willingness, and courage. Presumably, committed party members communicated differently and expressed their relationship to reality. It is also not uninteresting to consider the phenomenon that current remembers are reluctant to talk about their past in the movement. Many do not mention that they were party members or leaders in the youth movement<sup>38</sup>.

Although reform pedagogy schools use similar models of student self-government, they cannot be considered direct models. The recallers instinctively create the scenario of the student day from their own ideas and suggestions. In this case, we are dealing with a lasting innovation that reformed student life, which in its nature is befitting the reform pedagogical movement. The innovators belong to the 'unknown heroes' of pedagogy<sup>39</sup>.

<sup>36</sup> Fordított nap a Ceglédi Kossuth Lajos Gimnáziumban, Ceglédi Városi Televízió, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gh3zXj3aL3k> (last access: 25.03.2023).

<sup>37</sup> Fordított napi kiállítás a Ceglédi Kossuth Lajos Gimnáziumban, Ceglédi Városi Televízió, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=brhl1wRQEY4> (last access: 25.03.2023).

<sup>38</sup> B. Vincze, *Tanári életutak a 20. század második felében*, cit., p. 158.

<sup>39</sup> I. Hansen-Schaberg, B. Schonig, *Reformpädagogik. Geschichte und Rezeption*, Hohengehren, Schneider Verlag, 2007, pp. 1-13.

Regarding teacher professionalization, we can say that the changes in totalitarian or semi-totalitarian states in the 20<sup>th</sup> century usually led to the loss of the monopoly of professional (educational) institutions and teacher training<sup>40</sup>. Although the process of professionalization of teachers was interrupted by the socialist turn after 1945 in Hungary, the profession of secondary school teacher remained a possibility for social advancement<sup>41</sup>.

We can assume that teachers sought to compensate for the feeling of de-professionalization in their teaching activities. To preserve their identity, they felt it necessary to find affirmations that would strengthen their credibility.

In addition to the traditional, knowledge-conveying teacher image, a child-centred helping and supporting role has emerged and strengthened. Despite or in addition to the low esteem of teachers, they learned to be subordinate to the system as a coping life strategy and to use the superior position in their work (as knowledge mediators/educators) in a positive sense.

<sup>40</sup> K.H. Jarausch, *Higher Education and Social Change: Some Comparative Perspectives*, in K. Jarausch (ed.), *The Transformation of Higher Learning, 1860-1930. Expansion, Diversification, Social Opening and Professionalization in England, Germany, Russia and The United States*, Stuttgart, Klett-Cotta, 1983, pp. 9-36; E. Freidson, *Professionalism. The Third Logic*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2001.

<sup>41</sup> M. Fónai, Á.R. Dusa, *A tanárok presztizsének és társadalmi státuszának változásai a kilencvenes és kétezres években*, «Iskolakultúra», vol. XVII, n. 6, 2014, pp. 41-49.



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