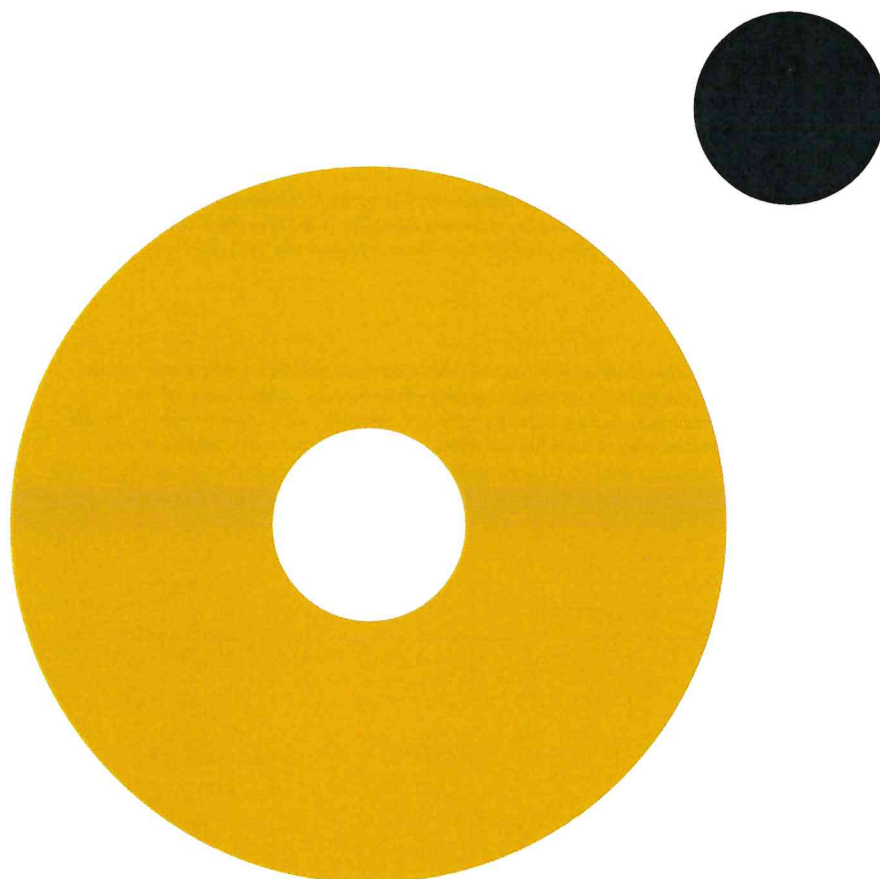


MEMORIA **SCOLASTICA**



The School and Its Many Pasts

edited by Juri Meda, Lucia Paciaroni and Roberto Sani



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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 present¹. 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 imaginary².

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»³, 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.

¹ 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.

² 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.

³ 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 future⁴. 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 teachers⁵, while even fewer have explored their images in cinematic history⁶. 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 school⁷. 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 situations⁸.

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 Education⁹.

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 sources¹⁰, 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*

⁴ 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.

⁵ 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.

⁶ F. Bocci, *Questi insegnanti: maestri e professori nel cinema*, Roma, Serarcangeli, 2002, pp. 91-92.

⁷ 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.

⁸ Ulivieri, *Educare al femminile*, cit., p. 186.

⁹ 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.

¹⁰ 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)¹¹. 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*¹² and *The Black Box of Schooling*¹³, 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 universities¹⁴; 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)¹⁵. 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 knowledge¹⁶.

¹¹ 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).

¹² 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.

¹³ 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.

¹⁴ Ulivieri, *Educare al femminile*, cit., p. 192.

¹⁵ 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.

¹⁶ 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»¹⁷. 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»¹⁸, 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 perceived¹⁹. 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.

¹⁷ 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.

¹⁸ 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.

¹⁹ 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-media²⁰, 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»²¹, 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 events²². One could then say that cinema (and by extension the screen) was not only the «eye of the twentieth century»²³, 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 Pierinos²⁴ 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*

²⁰ 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.

²¹ F. Casetti, *L'occhio del Novecento. Cinema, esperienza, modernità*, Milano, Bompiani, 2005, p. 21.

²² 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.

²³ Casetti, *L'occhio del Novecento*, cit.

²⁴ 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 Virzi, 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-fulfilment²⁵.

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)²⁶, 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

²⁵ 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.

²⁶ 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*²⁷, 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

²⁷ G. Bertagna, *La pedagogia della scuola. Dimensioni storiche, epistemologiche ed ordinamentali*, in G. Bertagna, S. Olivieri (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 Besegato 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»²⁸ 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*²⁹ (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 interventions³⁰, 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”³¹.

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

²⁸ I. Dussel, K. Priem, *The visual in histories of education: a reappraisal*, «Paedagogica Historica», vol. 53, n. 6, 2017, pp. 641-649.

²⁹ 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.

³⁰ Alfieri, *Introduzione*, in Id. (ed.), *Immagini dei nostri maestri. Memorie di scuola nel cinema e nella televisione dell'Italia repubblicana*, cit., p. 13.

³¹ 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.

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The School and Its Many Pasts

History is not memory; both, however, affect the way we perceive the past. In recent years, an increasing number of studies have focused on memory in order to critically analyze shared narratives of the past and their implications. Memory studies not only allow us to expand our knowledge about the past, but also help us to define the way in which today's people, social groups and public bodies look at it and interpret or re-interpret it. In this sense, school memory is not only of interest as a gateway to the school's past but also as a tool to understand what they know or believe they know about the school of the past and how much what they know corresponds to reality or is influenced by prejudices and stereotypes deeply rooted in common sense. These volumes aim to address these complex issues and broaden the perspective from which the schooling phenomenon is analyzed to better understand the school and its many pasts.

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