

## Chapter 2

# Exploring New Ways of Studying School Memories: The Engraving as a Blind Spot of the History of Education

María del Mar del Pozo Andrés and Sjaak Braster

### 2.1 Introduction

Soldiers raising the American flag on Iwo Jima. A naked girl fleeing from a napalm bombardment in Vietnam. A man standing in front of a column of tanks on Tiananmen Square in Beijing. These are a few examples of images that have become global icons of historical events known to different generations of people. Because a diverse group of people know them and attribute the same meaning to them, these images are also known as iconic photographs and have come to form part of a collective memory. Some iconic photographs have become famous because they reflected important historical events. But in other cases they may be related to the world of fashion, sport, music, movies, and so on. An intriguing question is whether there are iconic images representing education. Or, from the perspective of the history of education: are there images portraying school life that deserve the adjective “iconic”? This article is about an image that we believe is iconic, one that we found after browsing through public and private collections of paintings, engravings, etchings, and lithographs in the United States and in several European countries, covering a span of over two decennia. It depicts a group of children having a raucous time in a school classroom, unaware that their teacher, who can be seen in the doorway returning with a cane in his hand, can see what they are up to. We have provisionally labelled this picture as iconic because it was found, over the course of more than a century, in numerous collections, in several countries and in countless variations.

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M. del Mar del Pozo Andrés (✉)  
University of Alcalá, Madrid, Spain  
e-mail: mar.delpozoandres@gmail.com

S. Braster  
Erasmus University, Rotterdam, Netherlands  
e-mail: sjaak.braster@gmail.com

In order to examine the issue of iconic images more closely, we need to give a definition of an iconic photograph. Kleppe (2013) mentions two important points regarding their distribution: first of all, they have been reproduced many times, and secondly, that these are reproductions not only of the works in their original form, but also of their many variations. Some of the characteristics relating to their reception are that they can evoke emotions, and above all they have a symbolic meaning that for most observers is immediately obvious. But this meaning may change over time and ultimately depends upon the context in which the image is framed. Finally, iconic photographs refer to archetypes, have the potential to be archetypes themselves and thus represent more than what is being displayed. In this sense they are like religious icons that make the invisible visible.

Iconic images can obviously only exist in a time that Walter Benjamin has described as “an age of mechanical reproduction” (Benjamin 1935). If an image cannot be reproduced then it cannot, by definition, acquire an iconic status. The introduction of photographic techniques in particular has led to a situation in which, according to Benjamin, original and authentic works of art have lost their “aura” because of the fact that they can be reproduced in great quantities. But we mustn’t forget that long before the invention of photography, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, mechanical reproduction existed in the form of the mass production of prints. We should also mention the use of steel in place of copper or wood for the making of engravings, and the use of stone plates for printing lithographs. The print, predating the photograph, had already proved to be “the most democratic medium in the history of arts” because it entered “the homes of the poor and the rich, the ruler and the ruled” (Eichenberg 1976, p. 4). In this respect prints, i.e. engravings, etchings, and lithographs, deserve more attention from historians of education as a source for understanding education in general, and for analysing school memories in the nineteenth century in particular.

In this article we will try to give an answer to the question of whether or not one single image of the school can truly be defined as “iconic”. We will do this by first describing the indicators that define the reception, distribution and impact of this image, secondly by interpreting the symbolic meaning of the image in question, and finally, by analysing the reasons that made this work the iconic image of the school in the nineteenth century. The relevance of this exercise can be found in the connection between iconic images and the collective memory. By studying an image of a school that was frequently reproduced in different times and places we can tap into people’s memories and describe the features of a school as a globalized concept.

## **2.2 The Reproduction and Transnational Circulation of “The School in an Uproar”**

In the Spring of 1809 the recently constituted Associated Artists in Water Colours held one of its first exhibits in the galleries of Old Bond Street. The critics called attention to the works that had most impressed them, and among these was one

titled *Picture of Youth*, a name that may have been inspired by a book published the previous year (The Academy 1808).

Connoisseurs were not drawn to this work for its artistic merits; in fact they made mention of “the feebleness of the drawing” and considered that its use of light and shadows “detract greatly from its general merits”. As it turned out, the artist was awarded a respectable second place, behind the great English water colour masters such as Wilkie and Bird (Bond-Street Exhibition 1809, p. 493). What really caught the attention of the experts as well as the general public was the theme of *Picture of Youth* and its representation of an image that was considered “a Comedy”. The subject is a classroom in “a country school”, shown at a moment when the teacher has left and the children are behaving wildly. “And surely never before was picture so replete with those incidents of infantile fun and frolic upon which imagination dwells, as it looks back with fond regret” (Review of Works of Art 1809, p. 183). The work undoubtedly succeeded at evoking school day reminiscences among the observers, but even more so it seems to have stimulated their senses, as the execution allows you to practically hear the children laughing. The subjects and their expressions evoke a rich array of feelings and emotions, while it is hard not to imagine the punishments that will be dealt out when the teacher, who is on his way back to the classroom, finds his class having a rollicking, full-fledged party, with mirth and ridicule of the teacher included.

The author of this water colour is Henry James Richter (1772–1857). Richter’s embrace of the democratic conception of art was evident (Hemingway 1992, pp. 102–103); he believed in painting subjects and themes taken from modern life and in creating art that appealed “not to the learned antiquary, not to the curious amateur, nor to the technical admiration of mere professors, but to the general sense, to the feelings and understanding of the common people” (Richter 1817, p. 57). This conviction led him to choose scenes from domestic and daily life, creating works that found an increasing demand in the art market as well as ready buyers among the burgeoning middle class, which had taken to purchasing original artwork to decorate their homes. The water colour *Picture of Youth* was acquired immediately by William Chamberlayne (1760–1829), MP for Southampton. Pertaining to a private collection, *Picture of Youth* was as a result only very rarely shown to the general public. Unfortunately, the original version of the water colour was lost.

Studies in cultural transfer attempt to quantify the reception given to a literary or intellectual work by examining the way it has been interpreted, adapted, translated, cited, copied or imitated. In the case of an original art work, we would evaluate the degree of reception by determining whether and to what extent it was copied in other formats and reproduced by means of any of the engraving techniques used starting at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Engraving has been described as a “translation” of a painting, a process in which the engraver doesn’t attempt “to reproduce” the work as much as “to interpret” it; the engraver tries to convey the way he or she has perceived the work and to provide the viewer with an experience that resembles as much as possible a contact with the original (Michel 2007, p. 595). Our first criteria, therefore, for evaluating the reception of a work of art

should involve determining whether an attempt was made to turn it into a “classic” by reproducing it countless times with the aid of new copying techniques. A painter’s success, in fact, was measured in good part by the number of his or her works that were made into engravings: “a painter’s reputation was often decided by the popularity of the engraving rather than the success of the painting” (Engen 1975, p. 10). And the choice of the engraver was crucial; as the work’s “translator”, a good engraver could turn a mediocre work of art into something of great demand or, by the same token, convert a masterpiece into something banal, vapid and utterly unsellable.

With these considerations in mind we can trace the trajectory of the water colour *Picture of Youth*. In 1811 the Directors of the Liverpool Academy decided to publish, on an annual basis, “an engraving of a subject in history, or landscape”, choosing for that first year “Mr. Richter’s much admired picture called *A Picture of Youth* (Monthly Retrospect 1811, p. 57). The project was not carried out, leading some art critics to speculate in subsequent years as to why “Richter’s drawing of the School Boys [...] does not appear among our English subjects, as a print” (Anti-Jaundice 1820, p. 716); there seemed to be a consensus that the work would have been very well received by those who valued artwork based on everyday life.

Henry Richter, possibly in reaction to such commentaries, decided to do an engraving of the work himself, an unusual step for him and something which he doesn’t seem to have done with any other of his works. In July of 1822 the press announced that the painter had begun “the publication of Illustrations of his Works” (Intelligence, Literary, Scientific & c. 1822, p. 123). The first series consisted of a portfolio of four engravings drawn on stone by the artist himself along with a cover page. On this cover, the size of a small vignette, was an engraved copy of the original water colour owned by William Chamberlayne, to whom the entire collection was dedicated. The other four engravings, in large format, magnified specific scenes from the work, each scene—with no caption and identified only by a number—having its own entity. Here the artist expanded upon the work’s title, calling the series *A Picture of Youth, or The School in an Uproar*. The second part of the title was the name for which it would become famous and popular, which it did immediately. The reasons for this popularity are expressed best by critics of the time: the original work “has lived in our memory” ever since it was first shown in 1809, leaving a lasting impression on viewers thanks to its “comic familiarity”, because “the subject is so intimately connected with our early associations”, because virtually everyone was able to understand the iconic language so well, identifying with it and wanting to have it (Fine Arts 1822, p. 425).

The portfolio was published by Rudolph Ackermann (1764–1834), who in the first decades of the nineteenth century expanded his publishing business throughout the European and American markets. Richter’s work thus became known to an international public, and over the course of several decades his name and works appear in a number of different gallery catalogues. Two of the engravings from this portfolio, one depicting the unexpected arrival of the teacher and the other showing

a boy “riding” one of the classroom benches, were copied countless times in a much smaller format to be published as copper-plate etchings in medallion portraits or as part of engraving collections such as those published by Samuel Maunders around 1830. Numbers 13 and 14 from this collection, titled *The Angry Schoolmaster* and *The Idle Scholar*, were reduced versions of Richter’s original engravings, although the artist’s name is nowhere to be found on them. Many other editions—some undoubtedly pirated—would appear in subsequent years without copy or publication references. In an attempt to highlight the comic figure of the teacher, many of these copies sport the title *The Enraged Schoolmaster*.

Henry Richter does not seem to have worried much about pirated copies of his portfolio, in part because he was involved in a new project. In April of 1823, during the Nineteenth Exhibition of the Society of Painters in Water-Colours, Richter unveiled a new water colour titled *A Picture of Youth; or, the School in an Uproar, a second picture on the subject*. The author himself presented it as a copy of the original work owned by Chamberlayne, saying that it “has been made for the express purpose of its being engraved” (The Nineteenth Exhibition 1823, p. 539). This delighted the art critics, who were convinced that it was bound to become as popular as the first rendition, and who were certain of “its welcome reception by the public” (Water Colour 1823, p. 286). Again, they lauded the work’s success at evoking the emotions and sense of nostalgia in its viewers, who took great pleasure in reconnecting with the joy and innocence of childhood. Some of the reviewers continued to call the work by its original name, *A Picture of Youth* (Exhibition 1823, p. 379); others preferred using the full name; but the great majority opted for a name that was short and sweet, *The School in an Uproar*, the title by which it would be known during the years of its greatest popularity. Of this water colour we only have one image that was published, courtesy of Sotheby’s (Solkin 2008, p. 116). However we cannot rule out the possibility that the painter himself made more copies of his work, even in oil.

On April 11, 1825 a mezzotint engraving of Richter’s water colour appeared with a slightly modified title: *The Village School in an Uproar*. Its author, Charles Turner (1774–1857), was one of the most well-known artists in his field (Whitman 1907, p. 17). His fame owed in part to his work method, which involved using etched outlines as a foundation for his mezzotint plates. Using this, he achieved much greater nuance, which was especially useful for the conveyance of emotions. The critics certainly saw it this way, remarking that “all the humour of the scene is preserved”, “the unbroken circle of mischief is kept up”, “and the character of the countenances and uproar is very happily multiplied by these impressions from a sister Art” (Fine Arts 1825, p. 556).

*The Village School in an Uproar* as painted by Richter and engraved by Turner became wildly popular, and the best way to get an idea of the impact that it had is by resorting to productivity indicators. First of all, the technique, steel mezzotint, allowed for an initial edition of up to 1500 good impressions, but technical advances quickly increased this number. The original plates, once used, could be

restored or copied and then sold to other printers, who could then continue turning out more copies of the same work. The first edition of *The Village School in an Uproar* was published by Hurst & Co. (1825), but when this company folded all of its immense print stock was acquired by Moon, Boys and Graves. These print publishers did excellent business re-editing parts of their stock, including re-éditions of Richter and Turner, something they continued to do with each new phase and incarnation of their publishing venture, as Hodgson, Boys and Graves or as Thomas Boys by himself. The engraving also appears in the catalogues of Colnaghi and Puckle and of Edward Puckle, and it would seem that it continued to be published, judging from the evidence in a gazette from 1864 that describes it as a recent print.

The success of this print is representative of changing tendencies in the bourgeois and middle class of its time, when members of this class were no longer content to see such works in the setting of a gallery or collection. Decorating one's house with such artwork had become a feasible option. A study of the auctions in the U.K. between 1830 and 1890 show that *The Village School in an Uproar* could be found in the houses of many English gentlemen and that in at least half of the sales the print was framed and formed part of the furnishings of the house. One of the reasons for its use as a decorative element had to do with its familiarity; it had become a staple of print shops and of the print exhibits that flourished starting in the 1820s. One of the most exotic of these shows was that of the "black walnut tree", a unique exhibit space that was actually fashioned out of an enormous, hollowed out walnut trunk. It travelled to New York, Philadelphia and London in 1827 and 1828 and was seen by more than one hundred thousand people in the United States alone. Inside of the tree, which was decorated in the style of a Drawing Room, was space for some thirty people to admire the three hundred or so prints that were displayed. These included engravings of the world's principal cities, caricatures by Hogarth as well as portraits and works based on an array of subjects. The only print with an educational theme, not surprisingly, was "The Village School in an Uproar".

So far we have only taken into account only the original print by Richter/Turner, but it is impossible to calculate the number of pirated copies that may have been made over the course of the nineteenth century, to say nothing of the caricatures inspired by the composition. Some of these caricatures employed a modified style and depicted variations of the children's activities, as in the case of *The Village School in an Uproar*, published by John Bysh in the 1830s. The Turner version was even printed on objects for everyday use such as pocket handkerchiefs, prompting one of Richter's friends to pay the painter a back-handed complement: "Now your fame will be blown all over the world" (Store 1894, p. 30). From 1853 until at least 1907, numerous theatre companies and comical ballet troupes such as that of Harry Boleno incorporated into their performances a *tableau vivant* "representing the well-known picture of *The Village School in an Uproar*" (South London Palace 1871, p. 3), which the audiences seem to have found hilarious. The last reproduction of Richter's print for which we have evidence, executed with an especially

speedy copying system in 1900 (The Village School in an Uproar 1900, n.p.), was hailed as “a charming old picture” (The Daily Mail 1900, p. 5), emphasizing its classic or *vintage* character.

The print’s success was not limited to Great Britain, its international popularity attesting to the extraordinary impact that it had. To go no further, the U.K. enjoyed a fluid circulation of ideas with France, thanks to a robust market in printed images. The first appearance of Richter’s print in the U.K. in 1825 coincided with the publication in France of an engraving in aquatint titled *Le Vacarme dans l’École* (Fig. 2.1), made after Richter’s water colour by Jean Pierre Marie Jazet (1788–1871). All evidence points to this print being as popular in France as it was in England. In the first place, a number of different editions were published, beginning in 1825. Another French print from the time, *Le désordre dans l’École*, while constituting another variation on Richter’s work, makes no reference to Richter, Jazet or any other artist. The subject and inspiration of the work also lies behind other school images, such as *L’Ordre rétabli dans l’école*, “inventé” by Lemerancier and made into a lithograph by Esbrard. This work, in its composition and by virtue of the date of its publication—1825—is clearly modelled after Richter’s. Finally, we can find *Le Vacarme dans l’École* printed on decorative objects such as porcelain vases.



**Fig. 2.1** *Le Vacarme dans l’École* by Jean Pierre Marie Jazet, published in 1825, after Henry James Richter’s water colour. Private collection: S. Braster and M.M. del Pozo



Yet another indication of the print's international impact was its inclusion in various collections and portfolios published in London and Paris between 1828 and 1837 in French and English and which purported to show the most representative British and European art of the time. Each selected work was reproduced in a drawing “executed on steel in the first style of outline”, with a description in both languages, the collection being sold in collectible instalments which could eventually be assembled into complete volumes. The first of these volumes, consisting of 1071 masterpieces of European art etched by the French engraver Etienne Achille Réveil, contained only two works with education as a theme: the known work *The Schoolmaster* by Van Ostade and *The School in an Uproar* or *L'école en desordre*, by Richter (Fig. 2.2) (Réveil 1828–1834, p. 479). The next two volumes brought together 288 prints by the outstanding English artists of the previous one hundred years. Again, the only one with education as its theme was the print based on Richter's original. It carried the title *The village school in uproar* or *L'école en désordre*, and its engraving was attributed to the French architect and drawer Charles Pierre Joseph Normand (1765–1840) (Hamilton 1831–1832, 1837, p. 152).



**Fig. 2.2** *The School in an Uproar* or *L'école en desordre*, by Henry James Richter, published in Réveil 1828–1834, p. 479. Private collection: S. Braster and M.M. del Pozo



The print found its way into the United States through the work of a sole engraver, George B. Ellis. The medium chosen for its circulation was a special kind of booklet—an “annual”—that had become very popular as a Christmas gift. Annuals were “expressly designed to serve as tokens of remembrance, friendship, or affection” (Renier 1964, p. 5). In the United States, where the work was known as *The Village School in an Uproar*, these annuals were practically the only means by which the engraving circulated. Between 1829 and 1831 George B. Ellis published it, as far as we know, in *The Casket*, in *The Gift*, in *The Atlantic Souvenir* and in *The Lady’s Book*. It was very well received, with special praise given to the care taken with the drawing, which featured greater precision owing to the technique used. But what really spurred enthusiasm for the work was the subject: “We can look at this scene over and over. [...] No explanation is necessary; the whole story is before us” (The Annuals 1831, p. 177). It seems that the theme of the print even stimulated people’s literary imaginations; one article provided an elaborate narrative foretelling a hypothetical future for each and every one of the characters depicted in the print (The School 1831, pp. 57–58).

Most of the prints made of this work in the different countries where it became popular were intended for the bourgeoisie and middle-class consumers. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, however, an edition was made that was especially designed for buyers of more modest means. It was a German publisher, the Scholz House of Mainz, who included it in 1876 in its two-volume publication of *Vom Christ-Kind*, a collection of prints of animals, soldiers, theatrical scenes and rural scenes. The print numbered 145(n) was accompanied by a caption in four languages: *Der Dorfschullehrer*, *El maestro de escuela de un pueblo*, *Le maître d’école du village* and *Il maestro di scuola del villaggio*, denoting an interest in attracting potential buyers from Mediterranean countries in particular. And despite the fact that the title had been changed and that the children’s clothes were updated, once again the prototype was the same old watercolour, even if the name of Richter was nowhere to be found. Scholz was known for having lithograph machines that could turn out huge print runs on very cheap paper, allowing them to offer popular prints at prices that were much more affordable for the working class than the illustrated magazines. When Joe Scholz took over the business, and especially between 1871 and 1890, all of the publisher’s products—consisting of illustrations printed in a variety of formats, from children’s books to puzzles—were mass-produced and worldwide consumed. In line with this business philosophy, their decision to publish the print *The School in an Uproar* attests to the fact that it was still considered a *trending topic* for a vast, international public.



**Fig. 2.3** Drawing on stone by Henry James Richter. First series, number III of the portfolio *Illustrations of the works of Henry Richter*, published in 1822. Private collection: S. Braster and M. M. del Pozo

## 2.3 Interpretations of *the School in an Uproar*: Educational Objects and Symbolic Meanings

In order to define the iconic status of the *The School in an Uproar* we must study the image itself in depth. What do we see, and what does it all mean? The best starting point would be the five drawings on stone that Henry Richter made himself and that were part of the portfolio *Illustrations of the works of Henry Richter*,

published in 1822. The front page of the portfolio showed the complete, original water colour. Inside were four detailed lithographs of separate scenes from the work, from left to right:

- Litho. I: a boy sitting on a bench and swinging a switch (Fig. 2.3).
- Litho. II: a boy sitting on the teacher's chair wearing the teacher's robe, cap and spectacles and pretending to read a book, with two boys standing in front of him and two behind him.
- Litho. III: a boy upending a bench, causing two other boys to fall on the floor.
- Litho. IV: a boy trying to warn his classmates that the teacher is standing in the doorway while two other boys are engaged making a drawing on the other side of the door, accompanied by a fourth boy throwing a book in the air (Fig. 2.4).



**Fig. 2.4** Drawing on stone by Henry James Richter First series, number V of the portfolio *Illustrations of the works of Henry Richter*, published in 1822. Private collection: S. Braster and M. M. del Pozo

In all there are 13 boys in the school room, all about the same age. Most of them are obviously contravening school norms. There are indications of their defiance in all four lithographs:

- Litho. I: the switch that is meant to be used as an instrument for punishing pupils functions as a whip, while the bench where pupils normally do their reading is being used as a hobby-horse; a slate that is meant for writing exercises shows the results of a game of tic-tac-toe.
- Litho. II: the cap and the high chair that symbolize the teacher's status are being used to make fun of him; a flask of ink that is normally used together with a quill for learning how to write is being emptied on the head of the pupil that is impersonating the teacher; the boy spilling the ink does not have the quill in his hands, but in his mouth; one boy is challenging the "teacher" by standing in a defiant pose and laughing at him; another one mocks this "teacher" by sticking out his tongue; on the wall there is writing from another popular game called hangman or gallows;
- Litho. III: the boy that is falling on the floor (and losing his apple in the process) breaks another slate with his knee, while a hidden abacus (probably shielded from view by the falling boy) also appears to be broken, as its beads are scattered all over the floor;
- Litho. IV: a piece of chalk, meant for writing on a slate or a blackboard, is being used to draw a caricature of the teacher's angry face on the door, and finally, a book's purpose is clearly not to be tossed into the air.

In conclusion, the typical objects found in an ordinary school appear in the image, but with completely different functions in every instance. The same can be said about the books that appear in the image; two books are flying through the room with pages torn out while six more are lying on the floor. Only three books are being handled properly: one is in the hands of the boy pretending to be the teacher while the other two are lying on a shelf on the wall. Of the eleven books five are identifiable:

- Litho. I: a copy book for practicing calligraphy. On the first line we see the sentence "Zeno loved Silence", followed by five more lines, all of them copied incorrectly, indicating poor schoolwork;
- Litho. II: an alphabet book designed for very young children to teach them how to read and write;
- Litho. III: a book of Aesop's Fables; a "spelling-book" for learning grammar written by Thomas Dilworth, an English school master of the eighteenth century who produced several schoolbooks that became very popular in Great Britain and the United States; and a mathematics book.

On the basis of the list of books, and considering the variety of educational material that is present in the school room, we can conclude that at the beginning of the nineteenth century a school was about reading, writing, and arithmetic.

All relevant items for these subjects are systematically presented in the image. But there is more.

Moral education also seemed to be part of the curriculum: children were supposed to read the moralistic fables of Aesop. And they were also introduced to another ancient Greek: the philosopher Zeno of Elea, who loved silence above all other values, and “doubtless [was] one of the [school] master’s favourite maxims” (Solkin 2008, p. 117). In addition to encouraging silence, the school stood for order and discipline; the presence of the switch is proof of that. The cane carried by the teacher is another example. The importance of fulfilling one’s obligations is also expressed by the words written on the strap attached to the bench that is being used as a hobby-horse: “England expects every man to do his duty”. It was Nelson’s penultimate signal to the fleet before the battle of Trafalgar, and the affirmation was familiar to every Englishman. Nelson did his duty: the commander died in action, but the English won the battle. The English boy playing on the bench is obviously not carrying out his scholarly duty.

Another text in the image that calls for closer scrutiny is written on the wall as the term that is supposed to be guessed in the hangman game: “tuzzi muzzy”. Nowadays dictionaries define this term as meaning “a garland of flowers”, but in Victorian times the term had another meaning too: “the female pudend” (Partridge 2006, p. 5690). So, in our innocently titled *A Picture of Youth* we have a reference to the woman’s sexual organs, written on the wall like graffiti. Henry Richter must have thought that young children like the ones in the drawing would get a thrill out of using such an inappropriate word in a game.

Finally, we must also comment on two other types of symbols that appear in the image. The first is the apple that slips from the child that is falling to the floor, and that is about to disappear through a hole in the wooden floorboards. The apple represents the forbidden fruit of the Garden of Eden. It is a symbol of the fall into sin, or of the sin itself. While the children are about to be punished for their sins by the teacher, the apple is about to disappear through a hole in the floor.

The most peculiar symbol in this work however is the circled dot that is drawn twice on the wall under the hangman game, once on the bench that is being used as a hobby-horse and three times on the wooden writing desk. The point in a circle is a symbol of great importance in Freemasonry. In the so-called Monitors, written for apprentices entering the order, we are told that the point represents an individual brother, while the circle stands for the boundary line of his duty to God and man.

In conclusion, the main idea of the picture is the tension between the rebellion of children against the school on the one hand, and the need for silence, obedience, and discipline for teaching children how to read, write, and do math on the other. It also shows that at the beginning of the nineteenth century children were still taught the old way: the textbooks date from the eighteenth century, ancient Greek stories are still part of the curriculum and the teaching materials are the same as the ones used in the seventeenth century. The method for restoring order, i.e. by physically punishing the pupils, is even more old fashioned. People regarding these scenes were in a sense looking into the past. The image showed that there was a battle going on, between the old and the new. A battle symbolised also by the position of

the books in the scene: flying through the room and scattered all over the floor. It is not unlikely that Henry Richter found part of his inspiration for composing his picture in a woodcut from Jonathan Swift's *The Battle of the Books*, a short satire published in 1704 that depicted a literal battle between books in the King's Library. Swift's story came to represent the quarrel between the Ancients, who stressed the importance of ancient Greek culture, and the Moderns, who were inspired by new scientific discoveries.

## 2.4 *The School in an Uproar: The Making of an Iconic Image of the School*

In the last section of this paper we are going to discuss some of the underlying reasons that made an essentially whimsical, genre water colour depicting an everyday scene with caricatural traits come to be admired by a vast public, ultimately becoming the iconic image of the school for much of the nineteenth century.

It is quite likely that in the year of its creation, 1809, the symbolic significance of the work would have been very clear to its more educated viewers. The approach to education in Great Britain was dominated at the time by Bell and Lancaster's monitorial system, which undertook to educate the masses in the cheapest and most efficient way possible, by means of a method designed to discipline minds and spirits through a complicated system of instructors who relied on the students themselves. Richter provided a humorous contrast, an undisciplined classroom in which the students had taken control and were gleefully and creatively doing what they wanted. In our opinion, this image contained many signs that show a hidden criticism of the "new" monitorial system, that was still based on a disciplinary model and therefore awakening the wish for rebellion of the children. Even the central figure of the child pretending to be the schoolteacher can be interpreted as a caricature of the instructor-student. Richter's known admiration and passion for Kant and his hyper-modern naturalist mind, which led him to affirm that each work of art "is a history in itself, told in a peculiar language of its own" (Richter 1817, p. 33), support this interpretation.

Much of the bourgeoisie, in particular those more versed in the visual tradition of the interpretation of Hogarth's prints, would have perceived an additional symbolic significance in Richter's water colour. Satirical prints from the end of the eighteenth century had conferred a certain political dimension to the school, one in which "the schoolroom frequently signifies society or the state [...], with the pupils as a society or members of parliament, and the teachers as the legislature, executive or judiciary" (Müller 2009, p. 111). Given that politicians were often depicted with bodies of children, viewers would easily have seen in *The School in an Uproar* a group of rebellious members of parliament and would have been enthralled in anticipation of the thrashing that these rebels were going to receive from the returning school-master's cane. The image seems to have been as powerful in France as it was in



England, even creating a “mirror effect”, i.e. parliamentary sessions themselves came to be identified with the print. A French newspaper, describing the “joyeux chaos” that had taken hold of one particular parliamentary debate, compared it to “les écoliers de la célèbre gravure anglaise qui représente le vacarme dans l’école”, offering in the footnote its own English translation, “uproar in the school” (Nettement 1838, p. 109). Some years later an English newspaper would refresh its readers’ memories with scenes from the famous print, recalling how the returning teacher, “came in hand”, “have yielded delight and amusement to thousands”. The memory acquired additional significance when a similar scene actually occurred in the House of Commons; during a recess, and with the Speaker absent, an MP jumped out of his chair and then “he assumed the character of the first Commoner”. The laughter of those present grew into an uproar when suddenly the Speaker did return (Scene 1851, p. 6).

In the realm of pedagogical discourse, *The School in an Uproar* carried markedly negative connotations, as it contributed to a stereotype that made school teachers out to be objects of ridicule. There were even those who suggested that the logical interpretation for many viewers would be that if the teacher was absent and the children had been left on their own it was because he had been out drinking in the pub “Waggon and Horses” (Rhys 1868, pp. 4–5). This particular commentary was never elaborated on, and for the most part the speculation about the reasons for the teacher’s absence were rather discreet, suggesting that it was likely during recess and that he had only left momentarily. However, teachers’ unexplained absences from class did seem to be a part of the collective memory in late eighteenth-century England, owing in part to the fact that the meagre salaries offered in the profession gave many teachers no choice but to look for side jobs—“ancillary occupations”—after or even during class hours (McKendrick et al. 1982, p. 297). In the nineteenth century this absenteeism came to be identified exclusively with rural schools, presumably because secondary occupations would have been much closer at hand. This would explain the change in the title of the work after 1825.

What ultimately consecrated *The School in an Uproar* as a truly iconic image was its archetypal nature and the way that it showed a scene that was still fresh in people’s collective memory, namely, the chaos that ensued when a teacher left the classroom and the consequences that would come with his unexpected return. Richter’s merit lies in his having been the first person to create an image that not only aroused emotions and feelings in his audience but which appealed directly to their nostalgia for an episode of their lives that they remembered with the greatest affection. It thus became an archetype, the model on which countless variations—copied, imitated or caricatured—were based. We could even say that the work established a new category of its own within art work dealing with educational themes.

We may ask ourselves why nineteenth century society did not have a iconic image of the school corresponding to the choreography that we take to be characteristic of the school culture. Abraham Raimbach, a printer who was a schoolfellow of Richter’s in the Library School of St. Martin’s, offered some reflections on this period of his life: “Men are apt to look back on their school-days

as a period of unmingled enjoyment, or at least of great comparative happiness” (Raimbach 2011, p. 4). When we, historians of education, study the nineteenth century, we tend to focus above all on the discipline, order and punishment that dominated school life. In examining new documentary sources such as prints we are forced to modify some of our notions of a long-past childhood, one that preferred to shape its memory out of the joyous, gleeful moments prior to the inevitable punishment.

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