

Emotional Styles and the All Souls' Day in Bologna (Italy) 1896

by Gian Marco Vidor

Vanity and the thirst for réclame (publicity) – neither of which have respect for anything – have taken away a great part of the poetic flavour which inspires kind pity for the dead. Those who go to visit the tombs of their loved ones with their hearts swollen with sorrow and their eyelashes wet with tears take offense at the almost festive behaviour of people who crowd beneath the cloisters, stroll in the alleys, greet each other almost gaily, crumble candied fruits or eat roast meat or salty seeds as if they were in a public garden listening to music.[1]

Cheerful people crowd the cloisters of Bologna's monumental cemetery, known simply as *la Certosa*[2]. It is All Souls' Day, a Catholic holiday dedicated to the "commemoration of all the faithful departed". Along with other local or national daily, weekly or monthly publications, the most important local newspaper, *Il Resto del Carlino*, published articles on the commemorations. In the decades between the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, the Bolognese newspaper often chose to publish a long article, which almost always included what art historians call *ekphrasis*: a detailed description of a piece of art. The newspaper presented some of the funerary monuments and inscriptions that had been erected and incised during the year, often adding drawings and later on photographs (see PDF of the source at the end of the article). These monuments were regarded by our anonymous journalist as representations of the "noble sentiment of honour toward those who left a good memory of their name and a legacy of affects". From the perspective of the history of emotions, it is the text which preceded and/or followed the *ekphrasis* which is of greatest interest.



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In the article quoted, which was published on 2 November 1896, the anonymous journalist criticised the majority of the people visiting the cemetery for their behaviour during the commemorations. Their actions (eating), their body language ("greet[ing] each other almost gaily") and their general conduct were deemed to be too "cheerful" for "the house of the dead", which should have inspired a "kind pity" whose *genius loci* was sorrow (*dolore*). From a certain point of view, he seems to accuse them of not bringing their emotions into tune with the mood of the event and space. Their emotional style was considered inadequate; the visitors behaved as if they were in a public garden listening to music. I understand the concept of "emotional style" as a set of emotions which a certain group of people — in a certain moment, in a certain place, linked to a certain event — recognize as having a certain coherence.[3] The history of emotions approach allows us to see the ways in which body language, actions, and feelings (being "cheerful") are intertwined in the journalist's description: people behave in a certain way since they do not feel the "right" emotions, and at the same time they do not feel the "right" emotions because they behave in a certain way. By taking this analytical perspective further, this intertwining could be put in relationship with what recent historians of emotions have termed emotional practices, drawing from Bourdieu.[4] Moreover, the article shows how space and emotions reciprocally influence one another. In the journalist's opinion, people should not only adjust their emotional style to the cemetery. Rather, the space itself should also inspire a certain set of emotions in the visitors.

As we have seen, what were considered to be the right feelings were not felt by the majority of the visitors. In the journalist's opinion, this inappropriate behaviour was caused by vanity and by what he called "*the thirst for réclame*" (publicity); that is, the desire "*to look at and be looked*" at by other people[5]. The use of the word "*réclame*" has a long history in French, dictionaries of the 1870s indicating its acceptance as a neologism. The word signified an advertisement in a journal which, among other things, could laud the quality of a commodity[6]. It began to take on this meaning in Italian around the second half of the nineteenth century[7]. The use of the French term in the article quoted seems to give force to the idea that this inappropriate behaviour had something to do with contemporary Italian society, its economic changes, the developing marketing strategies and new forms of communication: they weakened the "poetic flavour" of the event, ultimately limiting the visitors' capacity to feel the right emotions like "sorrow" and "pity". Its use also seems to imply a vague nostalgia for something that had been lost amidst the change.

In the article discussed here, the journalist did not limit himself to condemning the inappropriate emotional style of most visitors. Rather, he chose to highlight how it offended those whose "hearts were swollen with sorrow" and whose "eyelashes were wet with tears". This small group of people demonstrated an appropriate set of emotions, fully in tune with the location and event. It should thus be pointed out that it was not a question of the sincerity, but rather the appropriateness of emotions.

Further light can be shed on this article by placing it in juxtaposition with other articles on All Souls' Days

published in *Il Resto del Carlino*. Analysed over a range of thirty years, from 1885 (the first year of the paper's publication) to 1915[8], the articles demonstrate the extent to which the description of two different emotional styles and their oft perceived collisions had become a common topic. The journalistic portrait of these clashing emotional styles was often composed against the backdrop of a vague and rhetorical humanitarianism. The commemorations were sometimes presented as being based on the "idea of fraternity", in which a reflection of the newspaper's ideological and political alignments could be seen, alignments which shifted somewhere between "reformist socialism" and "clerical moderatism" (until the first decade of the twentieth century)[9]: the journalists often speak of a "common autumn of affects"[10] between rich ladies and working class women[11], between the nobles who sent enormous funerary wreaths to their family chapel and those who adorned a simple wooden cross with a little posy. But alongside this unifying and rhetorical picture, the most common narrative printed by the Bolognese newspaper told the story of how there were only but a few visitors who seemed to be in touch with the emotions demanded by the occasion. The commemoration itself was seen as an event that reopened "emotional wounds", and the cemetery, with the "pagan sweetness" of its works of art and its vegetation, helped sensitive people to feel and show the appropriate sentiments[12]. But alongside this small group there was

a great crowd of layabouts, low-class women, female servants, old and young ladies who do not always keep the respectful and composed demeanour toward the tombs that the place should inspire.[13]

As mentioned earlier, the journalists' criticism often used harsh, vivid descriptions to focus on specific actions, behaviours and gestures that pointedly demonstrated the inappropriateness of the emotional style practiced by the majority of the visitors. In a space like the nineteenth century urban cemetery, where death was perceived as a sort of sleep[14], it is not surprising that "talking too loud", "laughing in a clumsy way", and "chatting sprightly" could be judged as disrespectful. To demonstrate this notion, it is worth quoting a journalist who recalled his encounter with a gravedigger in Genoa's cemetery who was merrily attending to his duties while singing a happy song. The dialogue between the two men, reported in *Il Resto del Carlino* in 1890, began with the journalist reproaching the gravedigger for his attitude, which he thought was too cheerful for the place and the task.[15]

In addition to their unsound attitude, the "tumultuous crowd" visiting the cemetery was negatively portrayed as "moving too quickly, pushing, pressing and rippling". Sometimes they even "stank" and made "irreverent comments" about the monuments. The list of behaviours, sometimes exaggerated as acts of profanation[16], often included the crumbling of candied fruits and the eating of chestnuts, roast meat or salty seeds. It must be remembered that eating specific things on All Souls' Day (chestnuts in particular) or cooking special food (especially cookies and sweets) was a common tradition in some places. For instance, the nineteenth century folklorist Giuseppe Pitrè documented such traditions in Sicily[17]. In 1899, *Il Resto del Carlino* reported with satisfaction that the local government had forbidden the sale of roast meat and sweets at cemetery entrances[18], a practice that had been permitted, or at least tolerated, for decades. The complaints made by the newspapers and the decision of the authorities to forbid acts viewed as disrespectful might serve as an indication of how attitudes towards the funerary space and death in general were changing.[19]

In portraying behaviours and emotional styles both as right and wrong, the journalists often referred generically to the *crowd (la folla)*[20] or to *those who visit* the cemetery, without making any social or class distinctions. However, the descriptions often seem to be gendered, the authors often practicing a sort of "anthropological zooming" that focused almost exclusively on women. For example, as we can see in the second long quotation, the journalist complained of women of all ages and all social status: ladies young and old (*signorine e signore*, i.e. those who belonged to the upper social strata), and women from lower social strata (*popolane*). Displaying the wrong or the right emotional style was not considered as a matter of class. When making positive comments on the visitors, both lower class and bourgeois (*borghesi*) women became a "symbol of gentle pity"[21]. When criticising the crowd for harbouring the wrong emotional style, the journalists accused women of being too chatty, of going to the cemetery just to show off their new clothes and hats for the autumn season, of lifting up their dresses to display their beautiful boots and their black stockings, eagerly attempting to please the gazes of the young male visitors.[22]

Let's now take a closer look at an interesting detail, namely the incongruity between the date the article was published and the date of the actual All Souls' Day celebrations. In 1896, All Souls' Day (2 November) fell on a Monday. It was thus a working day for many people who for that reason would not have been able to visit the cemetery. The article was published in the 2 November issue of the paper. Is it possible that the article's criticism was referring to the behaviour of those who were able to visit the Certosa on a Monday? It is highly unlikely. In 1896, the *Il Resto del Carlino* did not have an afternoon edition (it was launched in 1919). So the article did not refer to an event that took place on All Souls' Day itself, it was not the report of what the anonymous journalist had seen during that day. As the 2 November was a Monday, the Certosa cemetery would have opened all its cloisters, galleries and halls for the All Souls' Day celebrations again on the coming Sunday, in this case, 8 November 1896[23]. This is actually attested to by a very short article published the following Monday (9 November 1896), which reported on the good weather, the approximate number of visitors (around fifty thousand!), the public transport being "assaulted", etc. A short poem closes the report, and only one short sentence recalled the criticism expressed one week earlier. In the article from 2 November, the journalist thus judged what he seems to have considered a common behaviour, probably observed on other occasions, but he did not report on an actual event. For this reason, it is possible to extrapolate general attitudes towards what the author and many before and after him saw as a clash

between two opposing emotional styles, a viewpoint that clearly extends beyond mere descriptions. The critical comments could be interpreted as a sort of moralising exhortation directed towards fellow citizens. The journalists tried to get them to turn the feelings of "*dolore*" (sorrow), "*mestizia*" (general sadness) and "*pietà e amore*" (pity and love) for the deceased into an essential part of their emotional style when visiting the cemetery (especially during commemorations considered important for the entire urban community). The journalists seemed to believe in the pedagogical role of their work, they seemed to hope that their words would in some way help their fellow citizens to change their disrespectful attitudes. As we have mentioned, the reproach was a common *refrain* in the articles published in the *Il Resto del Carlino* on the occasion of All Souls' Day. In 1905, a journalist once again echoed the criticism towards some visitors' all too cheerful behaviour, but for the first time he also pointed out the futility of complaining about it every year, stressing that "the observations in the newspapers will not change and correct the habit".[24] Furthermore, he added that the newspapers themselves fostered the desire to acquire fame, to "be seen", annually describing the funerary monuments through which the dead are honoured by the living. One of his colleagues developed a different narrative, going even further by suggesting that it is not always the feeling of pity for the dead that leads one to the cemetery, but more often an insatiable curiosity about our own finitude. We should be aware, he stressed, that in the cult of the dead, sorrow and sense of duty, sentiments and vanities, art and business all come together.[25]

The newspaper article presented here could at most be seen as having an anecdotal value, but reading it through a history of emotions perspective it shows how the urban cemetery was a social place of paramount importance where visitors were supposed to adjust their emotions to fit the environment and where the environment influenced visitors' emotions. It must be pointed out that in the nineteenth century an important pedagogical role was attributed to the funerary space for the transmission of certain values[26]. In the case of post-unification Italy, civic values, alongside moral, familial and — more problematically — religious values, were central in the process of constructing local and national community. Aware of this role, some members of the elite — among whom journalists should be counted — seemed to make an effort to promote and evaluate the construction of what can be read as an emotional community, characterised by the supposed capacity and will of its members to adjust their feelings to specific public places and events in the appropriate manner.

[1] "Nella Casa dei Morti" (The house of the dead), *Il Resto del Carlino – Giornale di Bologna*, 2 November 1896. (See the PDF of the source at the end of the article). From now on *RdC*.

[2] Placed outside the city walls, the ancient Carthusian monastery from 1801 was progressively transformed into the municipal cemetery of Bologna. It was conceived and managed like an open air-museum of contemporary funerary art. Gian Marco Vidor, *Biografia di un cimitero italiano. La Certosa di Bologna* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2012), 161-76; 185-95.

[3] On the use of this concept in historiography see Peter N. Stearns, *American Cool: Constructing a Twentieth-Century Emotional Style* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1994); William Reddy, "Emotional Styles and Modern Forms of Life," in *Sexualized Brains*, N. Karafyllis and G. Ulshöfer, eds. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008), 81–100; Benno Gammerl, "Emotional Styles: Concepts and Challenges," *Rethinking History: The Journal of Theory and Practice*, 16, no. 2 (2012): 161–75.

[4] Scheer, Monique, "Are Emotions a Kind of Practice (And is That What Makes them Have a History?). A Bourdieuan Approach to Understanding Emotion," *History and Theory*, 51, no. 2 (2012), 193-220.

[5] "Nella Casa dei Morti," *RdC*, 2 November 1896. See also, for example, "Alla Certosa," *RdC*, 2 November 1895; "Alla Certosa," *RdC*, 2-3 November 1904; "Fra le tombe alla Certosa," *RdC*, 2-3 November 1907.

[6] See the entry "Réclame," Émile Littré, *Dictionnaire de la langue française (1872-77)*. Online version <http://artfl-project.uchicago.edu/content/dictionnaires-dautrefois>. Last accessed 25 December 2014.

[7] The Italian etymological dictionaries seem to register the first use in the 1870s or 1880s. See the entry "Réclame" in *Dizionario etimologico italiano*, Carlo Battisti and Giovanni Alessio, eds. (Firenze: Barbera, 1957); Angelico Prati, *Vocabolario etimologico italiano* (Roma: Multigrafica, 1969).

[8] The number of articles published in connection with the celebration of the dead in the month of November could vary from one to three. For the time period from 1885 up to 1915, I have analyzed around fifty articles.

[9] Maria Malatesta, *Il Resto del Carlino: potere politico ed economico a Bologna dal 1885 al 1922* (Milano: Guanda, 1978).

[10] "Due Novembre," *RdC*, 2 November 1889. The article is signed Fiamma. See also "Nel giorno dei morti," *Il RdC*, 2-3 November 1902.

[11] "Il giorno dei morti alla Certosa," *RdC*, 2 November 1894.

[12] On the role of space see also "Al cimitero monumentale," *RdC*, 2 November 1898; "Fra le tombe alla Certosa," *RdC*, 2-3 November 1907; "Fra le tombe e i crisantemi," *RdC*, 2 November 1908.

[13] "La commemorazione dei defunti richiama ogni anno alla Certosa una folla grande di sfacendati, di popolane, servette, signore e signorine le quali non sempre serbano il contegno serio e rispettoso verso le tombe che il luogo dovrebbe ispirare." "La commemorazione dei defunti," *RdC*, 2 November 1897.

[14] For Jean Dider Urbain the "metaphor of sleep" is a peculiar characteristic of the modern cemeteries. Jean Dider Urbain, *La société de conservation: étude sémiologique des cimetières d'Occident* (Payot, Paris, 1978), 341.

[15] A. Fiaschi, "I becchini," *RdC*, 3 November 1890.

[16] "La commemorazione dei defunti," *RdC*, 2 November 1897; "Al cimitero monumentale," *RdC*, 2 November 1898.

[17] Giuseppe Pitré, *Il giorno dei morti e le strenne per i bambini in Sicilia*. 2nd Edition (Palermo: Tipografia del Giornale di Sicilia, 1875). On the link between food and All souls' Day see also Bertrand Régis, "in *Mort et mémoire. Provence, XVIIIe-XXe siècles. Une approche d'historien*, Bertrand Régis (Marseille: La Thune, 2011), 157-69.

[18] "La visita alle Tombe," *RdC*, 6 November 1899.

[19] During the second half of the nineteenth century different practices concerning the treatment of corpses, the funerary spaces and the funerary professions began to be considered inadequate, disrespectful and uncivilized, and became the target of deep changes, suppressions and legal and administrative sanctions. See Vidor, *Biografia*.

[20] The term is used in the sources to indicate a great number of people and does not have any class connotation.

[21] "Il giorno dei morti alla Certosa," *RdC*, 2 November 1894.

[22] "Al cimitero monumentale," *RdC*, 3 November 1898.

[23] For a general overview of the Certosa cemetery as a "closed" universe see Vidor, *Biografia*, 29-43.

[24] "non saranno le osservazioni dei giornali che muteranno e correggeranno il costume." "Alla Certosa," *RdC*, 2-3 November 1905.

[25] Guido Leati, "I morti," *RdC*, 3-4 November 1902.

[26] Gian Marco Vidor, "Satisfying the Mind and Inflaming the Heart: Emotions and Funerary Epigraphy in Nineteenth-century Italy," *Mortality* 19, no. 4 (2014), 342-60. In particular 346.



Il Resto del Carlino, 2 November 1896



Il Resto del Carlino, 2 November 1896 (detail)

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