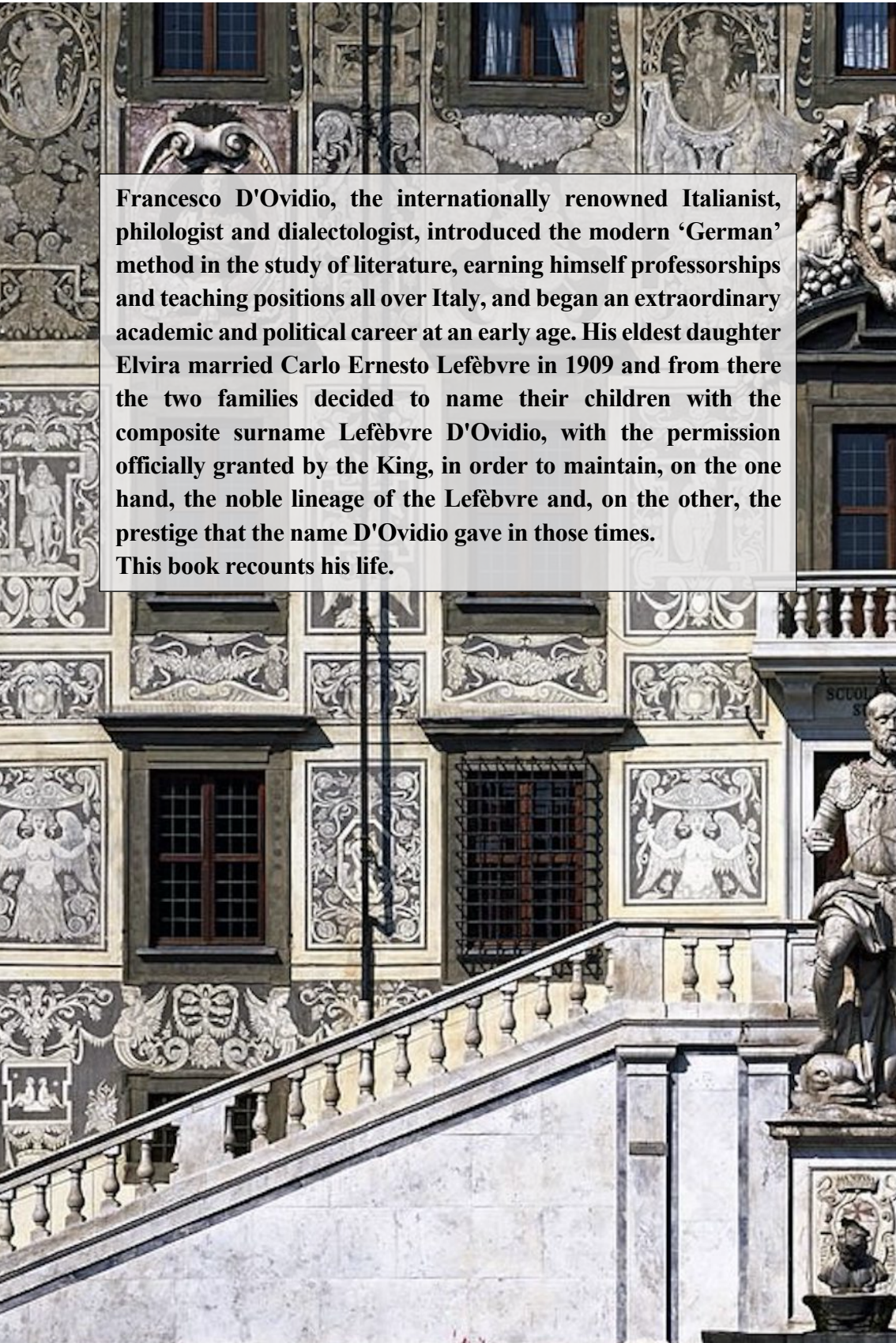
Mario A. Iannaccone

FRANCESCO D'OVIDIO
1849-1925

Culture, life, lineage



Francesco D'Ovidio, the internationally renowned Italianist, philologist and dialectologist, introduced the modern 'German' method in the study of literature, earning himself professorships and teaching positions all over Italy, and began an extraordinary academic and political career at an early age. His eldest daughter Elvira married Carlo Ernesto Lefèbvre in 1909 and from there the two families decided to name their children with the composite surname Lefèbvre D'Ovidio, with the permission officially granted by the King, in order to maintain, on the one hand, the noble lineage of the Lefèbvre and, on the other, the prestige that the name D'Ovidio gave in those times.
This book recounts his life.

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FRANCESCO D'OVIDIO (1849-1925)

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March 2020

Cover: Palazzo della Carovana (or Palazzo dei Cavalieri),
headquarters of the Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa.

Contents

Introduction

To the linguist, language historian, Italianist, philologist and dialectologist Francesco D'Ovidio have been named squares, important streets, and school stics institutes all over Italy, in Milan, Rome, Naples, Campobasso and elsewhere. Associations and awards bear his name. And yet, the man Francesco D'Ovidio, with his battles and passions, the personal esteem in which he was held by two generations of scholars of Italian literature, appears today almost forgotten outside the technical annotations and bibliographies concerning his activity as a linguist and specialist studies.

Born in Campobasso but lived for most of his life in Naples, so much so that he considered himself Neapolitan, he was a distinguished philologist and lecturer at the University of Naples where he taught between 1870 and 1925. He enjoyed a well-deserved fame for many years, especially as a scholar and teacher but also as a cultural journalist, political commentator and critic of customs in the main periodicals and newspapers of his time, both in southern and northern Italy. His lively, often polemical pieces, written with the Manzonian elegance that he theorised so much, ranged over the most diverse topics, read in Naples as in Milan, in Rome as in Palermo.

Fundamental was his role in offering philological reasons for the choice of authors to be included in the Italian canon of poets and prose writers, to the exclusion of others. For this he had controversies with purists such as Chiarini who immediately saw an enemy in him.

His name inevitably appears in studies and commentaries on the texts of Dante, Manzoni, Tasso, Leopardi, but also Pellico and ancient Italian literature and many other subjects, especially relating to Romance philology. Famous disputes pitted him against Francesco de Sanctis, but above all against Benedetto Croce. Important, and still highly regarded today, are the discussions concerning the language into which he was introduced by his teachers Graziadio Isaia Ascoli and Domenico Comparetti from an early age. He was also the teacher of at least two generations of Italianists, among whom we must remember, at least, some important philologists of his time, such as Francesco Torracca, Manfredi Porena and Nicola Zingarelli. With his masters, who taught in Pisa, he was the initiator of Romance Philology in Italy, of which he held one of the first chairs at the University of Naples for many years.

Yet, his fame and memory faded over time, as the 'German' method he used was modified and fell into disuse, at least in part, in literary studies. Methods have changed, the German-style historical school of which he was considered an important exponent has been replaced by other trends, even though his studies have remained in the body of philological disciplines. If, therefore, some of his work is still studied, where, above all, some essays on Dante, Manzoni or Tasso are still considered unsurpassed, in general D'Ovidio is considered a 'historical' figure, an exponent of the history of Italian criticism and should be evaluated as such.

It is not easy to find personal news about him. Apart from a few recollections, a few funeral orations, a few mentions in the epistolaries or memoirs of other writers, D'Ovidio appears forgotten. Such oblivion is often justified by fortuitous events: D'Ovidio was very stingy with personal news, he did not write a memoir of his own life, although he wrote a lot about others.

He wrote many letters, to colleagues, mostly, but in these he mostly discussed his discipline, university affairs, readings. These letters became, in some cases, full-fledged essays, sometimes taken up in printed works, but they had little autobiographical content. D'Ovidio was very shy about his family, personal or intimate life.

It was rather difficult for the writer of this biographical portrait to find reliable and verifiable information. In drawing the outlines of this biography, admittedly still incomplete, yet rich in unpublished news about the scholar's work, life and family, I made use of well-known printed writings, mostly introductions to the works, and occasional writings by D'Ovidio himself. Useful, in some cases, are the almost 1,000 pages of the two volumes *Rimpianti vecchi e nuovi*, part of the 14 volumes of the Opere complete, published between 1929 and 1930, which bring together many incidental writings and portraits published over 40 years. Initially published from 1902 onwards, the *Rimpianti* – which were originally intended to be *Ritratti di contemporanei* – recall the acquaintance of many personalities from the cultural, university, journalistic and political history of Risorgimento Italy and the so-called Italia Umbertina, the period under the reign of Umberto I and spanning from 1878 to 1900, D'Ovidio's most active years.

I also made use of unpublished or little-considered archive documents: letters, entire exchanges of correspondence especially with colleagues. This kind of documentation can be found in the D'Ovidio Fund or the Porena Fund at the Scuola Normale in Pisa, in the documents related to Graziadio Isaia Ascoli's Italian Glottological Archive, in the Giovanni Pascoli Archive in Castelvecchio, in the documents related to Costantino Nigra and a few others. I also made use of an uncatalogued and unstudied documentary deposit, only

minimally studied, which is the Lefèbvre D'Ovidio Private Archive in Rome, kept by D'Ovidio's last heirs. Here one can find letters, the minutes of almost all the books written by D'Ovidio, manuscripts of various kinds and contributions of a marked scientific nature. The Archive is currently not easy to access but could offer many surprises once it is arranged. It contains news and documents relating to Francesco D'Ovidio, Manfredi Porena, and D'Ovidio's grandson, Antonio Lefèbvre D'Ovidio, three important personalities in their respective fields. But those who were able to access them, like myself, were also able to see unpublished documents concerning *Edmondo de Amicis*, the writer of *Cuore*, who was a friend of D'Ovidio.

What can we say then? In the hope that this biography, which is still incomplete despite being the most complete to date, will be enriched in the future thanks to the contribution of further documentation, we can reflect briefly on the destiny of a man who had a remarkable intellect – such was his considered by his masters and colleagues, the founders and introducers of modern philology and glottology in Italian academic institutions – combined with a singular will to learn and excel, and a personal destiny that was both happy and unfortunate. While he had a career all downhill, a happy marriage, two daughters who loved him and numerous offspring, it is also true that he was long plagued by very poor health. In July 1884, when he was at the height of his activity and strength, he was struck by an eye disease, a progressive illness and certainly also a detachment of the retina, considering the suddenness of the illness, which led to his blindness after a few years. This unfortunate event, probably aggravated by the overwork to which his eyesight was forced

during long years of intense study, made his existence painful even though he managed to react.

In closing this brief *introduction,* it is worth mentioning that Francesco's brother, Enrico D'Ovidio, was also an important figure, in this case for the mathematical sciences as well as an academic with highly prestigious positions, such as organising the foundation of the Turin Polytechnic at Giovanni Giolitti's request. He, like other relatives, is remembered in this paper, which aims to compose a brief portrait of a family of intellectuals and academics in the Italy of Umberto I and Vittorio Emanuele III until the early years of Fascism.

Chapter 1

Culture in Naples in the late 19th and early 20th century

Naples, between the last decades of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, was still a city of great beauty, devoid of the industrial ugliness already evident elsewhere and still culturally active. In various fields it still had considerable weight, partly inherited from the Bourbon era, partly enriched during the Kingdom of Italy, which financed Neapolitan institutions also so as not to create discontent in the former capital. First of all, the city was the size of a metropolis; in the 1911 census it had about 730,000 inhabitants, a few more than Milan, which had 701,000 and not far from Rome, which had 843,000. It was thus Italy's second largest city and, unlike Milan, which was demolishing its oldest quarters, the Neapolitan capital maintained them, retaining that air of an ancient city and capital of the lost Kingdom of the Two Sicilies that made it unique. At the time of the Unification, the inhabitants numbered around 600,000.

Because of these characteristics of coexistence between the old and the new (a new that was nevertheless struggling to make its way), many of the first professional photographers, from Giorgio Sommer to the Fratelli Alinari and Alphonse Bernoud, among others, opened their studios there. Photography imposed itself with the image of picturesque Naples, an image typical of the painters of the Neapolitan schools of landscape painting that had developed during the 18th and 19th centuries, the last of which was the School of

Posillipo.

With the Unification, Naples suffered greatly: it lost many industries, especially in the nautical, printing, paper, textile and general manufacturing fields. Shipping companies, joint-stock companies, mechanical companies, even agricultural industries failed, were downsized or acquired. And this for a complex series of reasons that also included the central government's desire to weaken, at least initially, the city that had been the capital of a powerful Kingdom. Nevertheless, Naples managed to maintain prestige and institutions in the cultural, mathematical, applied sciences, literary and juridical as well as historical-literary fields. The new state invested heavily in the Federico II University in Naples, which was reorganised in the 1870s and where the major part of Francesco D'Ovidio's career took place.

In the decades following the Unification, the Savoy monarchy rewarded above all those intellectuals who showed attachment to the new State, which had found its definitive territorial arrangement in 1870, while the increasingly rare intellectuals nostalgic for the Bourbon monarchy were removed from positions of power and prestige, unless they took a cautious attitude. In time, according to Galasso, many of these would become Savoy legitimists, although this thesis, although so authoritatively expressed, has yet to be proven.[1] In any case, the promotion of so many Neapolitan intellectuals, historians and men of letters to the Senate is a sign of this phase.

At the end of the 1880s, the Neapolitan Society of Artists was founded in Palazzo Sirignano, animated by Prince

[1] Giovanni *Galasso*, *Galasso: Il paradiso corconico? È solo un'invenzione nostalgica*, 'Corriere del Mezzogiorno', 13 July 2015.

Giuseppe Caravita (1849-1920), an association that remained exclusive to landowners and aristocrats for a few years and finally opened up to journalists and writers from 1892. An Artistic Circle, later the Artistic-Political Circle, was also established, animated by the painter Domenico Morelli (1826-1901). After studying in the Bourbon period and receiving initial acclaim, he established himself in the Umbertine period as one of the greatest exponents of the 'antiquarian' and historical taste that was inspired by facts and atmospheres from antiquity in the wake of Lawrence Alma-Tadema, Mariano Fortuny and other artists active in Naples.

This strand found great nourishment in Naples thanks to the work of the archaeologist Giuseppe Fiorelli (1823-1896), who worked at the Royal site of the Pompeii excavations, introducing the technique of casts and reorganising an exceptionally important and vast archaeological area that had been discovered and cared for during the Bourbon period and received further attention from 1863 onwards. In 1866, he conceived the National Museum of San Martino, which in time would gather, among other things, an important picture gallery and, for a few years, directed the National Archaeological Museum. In 1878, the Filippo Palizzi Artistic-Industrial Museum was founded on the personal initiative of Gaetano Filangieri (1824-1892) and then established by state decree by Francesco de Sanctis, Minister of Culture, in February 1883. It is a museum rich in handicrafts and applied works of art in ceramics, bronze and other techniques, used for the education of students in goldsmith and craft schools.

To bind the new class of intellectuals, especially university teachers, to themselves, many of them were created senators. Above all, the generation that flourished in the 1870s and 1880s and that for the most part had been educated in Tuscany

or Lombardy. Some of the names that we will also find in our story can be recalled in this regard: Antonio Sogliano (1854-1942), archaeologist; Girolamo Vitelli (1849-1935), papyrologist; Michele Scherillo (1860-1930), man of letters and university teacher; the mathematicians Enrico D'Ovidio (1843-1933) and Achille Sannia (1822-1892), the latter two belonging to the same family and friendship circle; and Benedetto Croce (1866-1952), born in Abruzzo in 1866 and entrusted to Silvio Spaventa (1822-1893) who acted as his tutor. Croce in Naples cultivated first erudite and then philosophical and aesthetic studies. He, with Giustino Fortunato (1848-1932) and Francesco Saverio Nitti (1868-1953), was to become the true dictator of Neapolitan (and also Italian) culture, especially on his return to Naples from Perugia. He settled in 1907 in Palazzo Filomarino where he held a salon frequented by at least twenty prominent writers and university professors.

Apart from these novelties, Naples still counted on a great University, strong above all in academic literary, philological and juridical studies; very prestigious then were the Accademia Pontaniana (dating back to 1453), the Società di Storia Patria, the Circolo filologico (founded in 1876 on the model of those already existing in Turin, Milan, Genoa, Florence, Rome and Palermo), the prestigious and now old Istituto di Incoraggiamento (founded in 1806), and other academies and circles. Inherited from the previous period was the engineering school called Scuola di Ponti e Strade (School of Bridges and Roads) that later supplied the technical and mathematical faculties of the University of Naples with teachers. There were numerous cultural journals of national importance.

On the musical front, there was the legacy of a great

tradition that boasted important schools since the 17th century, first and foremost the Conservatorio di San Pietro a Majella, which inherited the tradition of institutions from previous centuries and was refounded in 1808. Of great importance was the foundation of the Naples Orchestral Society by Prince Francesco d'Ardore Milano (1699-1780) and continued under various directors. The concerts that were held in the early eighties won Naples over to the new Wagnerian vogue. Various musical and drama theatres were active, first and foremost the San Carlo, but also the Teatro Mercadante and others, with their companies, authors and artists. In general, as Francesco Barbagallo points out in his book *Napoli Bell'Èpoque. 1885-1915*, the city remained a culturally lively metropolis throughout the entire Umbertine and Bell'Èpoque period, and thus until 1915, and in some fields even well beyond. Not that this effervescence disappeared afterwards, but the difficulties became more pronounced.

It was, at the time, a modern European metropolis, with a bourgeois class of a high cultural level, where important experiences could be gained in the professions (in medicine, engineering, chemistry, mathematics) and in commerce. The foreigners who arrived during the Napoleonic and Bourbon periods had formed families, had reached the second and third generation and maintained links with their countries of origin.

Initially, as mentioned, the greatest prestige in Naples came from the reopening and reorganisation of university teaching.

In the Frederick II University, however, the previous class of teachers most loyal to the Bourbons was almost completely wiped out. Many, of course, swore allegiance to the new Kingdom, as happens in every regime change. At the same time, apart from questions of loyalty or disloyalty to the new and old rulers, what is important is that a serious

reorganisation of teaching was carried out according to the new ministerial programmes; and ordinary professors, almost all from the South, were added to the ranks. In this context, for fifty years, the protagonists were precisely the personalities who had trained at the Scuola Normale in Pisa as well as in Florence, Turin and Milan. It was they, in particular the Normalists, who brought the new scientific methods of studying texts or documents: what was called, vulgarly, the German school, in short.

Chapter 2

Studies in Naples

The family that Francesco D'Ovidio came from was originally from the large village of Trivento, near Campobasso. This family had an intellectual tradition of some significance, considering the provincial environment.

The earliest known member of the family is Don Francesco D'Ovidio (1734-1809), who bears an honorary title typical of the mayors of southern towns. If he is 'don', it is because he has property or a profession. He is probably a professional, a lawyer or a doctor. Thus, his wife Emanuela Ciampitti (1747-1839), a native of Frosolone (Isernia), is marked in documents as Donna Emanuela.[2] Among the many children of this couple, Amato D'Ovidio (1779-1830) stands out in particular. He studied medicine in all probability in Naples and married Donna Maria Rosa Colaneri (1780-1845), a native of the same village.[3] The two have five children, one of whom is Francesco D'Ovidio's great-grandfather, the lawyer Emidio D'Ovidio

[2]Other, more precise data from the registers show us that a Francesco D'Ovidio was born on 1 January 1734 in Trivento and died there on 16 November 1809. His wife, Donna Emanuela Ciampitti, was born in Frosolone on 1 January 1747, and died in Trivento on 25 May 1839.

[3] Dr Amato D'Ovidio was born and died in Trivento where he lived between 1 January 1779 and 15 December 1830. His wife, Donna Maria Rosa Colaneri was born in Trivento on 1 January 1780 and died there on 13 June 1845. The two had five children, including Emidio D'Ovidio. It appears that Amato also had a second wife, Giulia, whose surname is unknown.

(1801-1862), who married Donna Maria De Lellis known as Mariuccia (1803-1845), who died young, aged 42.[4]

Amato D'Ovidio

Amato D'Ovidio (1834-1931), the only one whose portrait we possess, is one of the many children of this couple. An educated man, he studied at the Real Collegio Sannitico in Trivento, where he held a teaching post for the rest of his life. Amato married Donna Giulia (whose surname is not known at the moment), who probably died young, and then Anna Maria. The two have 11 children, one of whom is Pasquale D'Ovidio (1808-post 1883).

Pasquale entered the locally renowned college in November 1819 and left in 1826. In 1824, after Nicola Delia, a

[4] The lawyer Emidio D'Ovidio married Donna Maria, called Mariuccia De Lellis. Daughter of Vincenzo de Lellis and a certain Nicolassa, whose surname is unknown. Emidio and Mariuccia had six children. On his second marriage, Emidio married a certain Annibalina, by whom he had 10 more children.

calligraphy and Italian language teacher, had resigned, the rector, who was his father Amato, proposed him as calligraphy teacher, the only case in the thirty-year period 1817-1848 of a student-teacher at the college, given that he had not yet graduated.

Pasquale married Francesca Scaroina from Campobasso (1815-post 1860) in the then Bourbon Kingdom and lived with her in Trivento for about 10 years before deciding to move.[5] Not only that, Pasquale D'Ovidio was also an excellent musician and first violinist and became conductor of the Campobasso theatre orchestra. He also wrote *Dilucidazioni sulla musica dello Stabat Mater di Rossini* (Campobasso, s.n., 1843) and was the author of musical compositions performed at official celebrations.[6] One of his sons, Francesco D'Ovidio, was born in Campobasso on 5 December 1849. Other children whose names we know, apart from Norina (third-born) are Angiolina (fourth-born) and Livia, the youngest.[7]

Pasquale worked as a teacher from 1824 to 1860 (end of 1859), then moved to Naples after being appointed as Calligraphy teacher by decree on 28 November 1860. He worked in the newly founded Scuola Normale Maschile in Naples, one of the many establishments set up to 'normalise' teaching in this case of elementary and high schools. He also practised the profession of calligrapher, i.e. a fine copy writer, at the courts (and also wrote a small manual on the subject: *Delle principali norme da tenersi nelle perizie calligrafiche giudiziarie*, Stampatore Filangieri, 1883).

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[5] Daughter of Francesco Paolo Scaroina and Maria Saveria Scaroina.

[6] I draw this news from the historical services of the Trivento Municipality. www.archiviomemo.it.

[7] Genealogy hand-drawn by Ferruccio Quintavalle, Lefèbvre D'Ovidio Private Archive, Rome.

Francesco was the penultimate of five children, and his older brother Enrico (1843-1933) was also destined for fame, becoming a famous mathematician and a Senator of the Kingdom like himself. The D'Ovidio children were born in a bourgeois house in what is now Corso Matteotti, in the centre of the city, now marked by a plaque.

The country of origin of the D'Ovidio family, Trivento.

In 1858 (according to other sources at the end of 1859), the family moved to Naples to a house on the Vomero hill, then a suburb detached from the city. In Naples, Pasquale found, as we know, a more remunerative job as a calligrapher at the Tribunale. Like his father, his son Francesco was noted for an early 'liberal faith' and 'Risorgimento'. It is possible that Pasquale D'Ovidio was involved in the Risorgimento uprisings and took the opportunity to move to Naples when the Kingdom

was about to fall. This would make it more likely that he moved at the end of the decade, i.e. in the last months of 1859 and early 1860. Francesco was 9 years old and of his early years in Campobasso he will always retain few memories: his city will always remain Naples. In Campobasso, during his early primary schools years, his first teacher was his maternal uncle Camillo de Luca, a 'professor of fine literature' and author of a book of historical memoirs, *Ricordanze patrie* (1856).[8]

View of Campobasso, late 19th century.

In Naples, the young Francesco completed his secondary studies at the 'Vittorio Emanuele' royal high school-gymnasium, which offered an excellent preparation. He would always remain 'il molisano' (the Molise man) even if his education and activities were concentrated in Naples and with Campobasso, as far as we know, he would have little to do

[8] Emilio Ciafardini, *Commemorazione di Francesco D'Ovidio*, in Atti dell'Accademia Pontaniana, LXI, sc. II, 1932, p. 534.

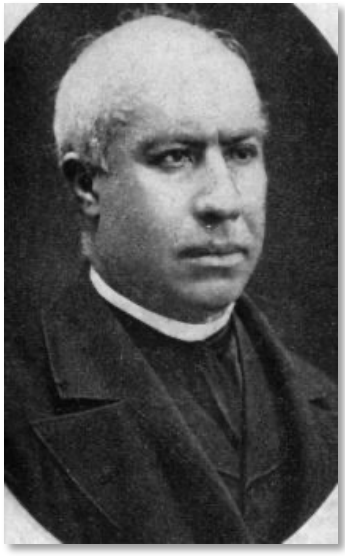
except for the occasional trip, visit to relatives, and of course affection for his place of origin.

His pupil Nicola Zingarelli recalls, in the typical poetic-Risorgimento tone: 'while in Naples, the Molise boy was attending grammar school, on the evening of 8 September 1860, he lingered ecstatically in the tide that was rushing from all sides towards the Spirito Santo to acclaim Garibaldi, became silent all of a sudden because Garibaldi wanted to sleep, and he made up for the shout of: *One Italy*'.[9] This seems to be a memory reported by D'Ovidio to Zingarelli himself, and it is probably an authentic memory because it corresponds with what D'Ovidio himself would have written about his passion for a united Italy.

The D'Ovidio family belonged to that intellectual and professional class that did not, or had not for some time, identified with the motives or traditions of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies and preferred liberalism or in any case had embraced the demands of the Risorgimento. In Zingarelli's account, the young man from Molise would have been forced to show off his enthusiasm (he could not speak, it was not allowed). Nevertheless, he witnessed Garibaldi's entry into Naples. This seems to be the first example of his ardent support for the Risorgimento cause.

[9] Nicola Zingarelli, *Francesco D'Ovidio,* 'The 20th Century', 1926.

The 'Vittorio Emanuele' grammar school in Naples, housed in a beautiful building, with large classrooms, attended by the *crème de la crème* of the Neapolitan bourgeoisie and nobility, was at that time directed by a friend of Francesco's father, Ippolito Amicarelli (1823-1889), a very learned clergyman of gigantic stature, born in Agnone, near Trivento. The friendship between Pasquale and Ippolito must have given the Trivento man some advantage: Amicarelli was a scholar but also a deputy in the VIII legislature of the Kingdom. He was a generous and ingenious man of whom Ippolito himself leaves a vivid portrait, collected in volume II of *Rimpianti vecchi e nuovi*, recalling his humble origins, his passion for studies, the legends that enveloped his childhood and youth, his energy and curiosity, and his ability to keep the boarding school and lyceum that had been left in a precarious condition by his predecessor, and of which he took over in 1865. He administered well, taught excellently, knew how to deal with pupils and parents, was gruff and paternal at the same time and was an important figure for D'Ovidio.[10] That's all D'Ovidio says about those early years in what is now Via Matteotti.



Father Ippolito Amicarelli

[10] *Ippolito Amicarelli,* in *Rimpianti Vecchi e nuovi*, v. II, Editrice Moderna, Caserta 1930, pp. 103-139. The portrait is included in the first edition of *Rimpianti* (Sandron, Milan 1903).

Particularly important among his teachers was the influence of Domenico Denicotti from Brescia (1829-1903), who taught for a few years in Naples before returning to Brescia, who ignited in him a passion for the study of Latin and Greek, for the language of which he used the Curtius *Skulgramatik* that Denicotti had procured for his two best students, Vitelli and D'Ovidio.

Having obtained his baccalaureate, in the autumn of 1866 he won the competition for admission to the Scuola Normale in Pisa. And he moved to Pisa as a boarding student, with a free scholarship, beginning a four-year course that included, at the time above all, very tough programmes. His intention was to 'come out a classical philologist and glottologist'.[11]

[11] G. Vitelli, *Ricordi lontani*, 'Il Marzocco', 6 December 1925.

The entrance to the Liceo 'Vittorio Emanuele' from Piazza Dante in a photograph by G. Brogi (1822-1881) c. 1870. It was here that Francesco D'Ovidio completed his high school studies.

Chapter 3

Studies at the Normale in Pisa

The Normale was already then a very prestigious school. Originally founded by Napoleon in 1810 on the model of similar French institutes, it had undergone various adaptations in its programmes and even changes of location during the Grand Ducal period, arriving at its new arrangement, which is still the current one, in 1862 in the premises of the Palazzo della Carovana in Piazza dei Cavalieri. In those years, the mathematician Enrico Betti (1823-1892), who had normalistic studies equalised with university studies, was the director. In the transitions between the various regimes, the Normale had not lost the quality of the preparation its students received. They were admitted after strict selection and examinations, and even then there were two courses, one linguistic-philological and one physical-mathematical.

Here, D'Ovidio was the pupil, among others, of two masters who were to have a decisive influence on his life: Alessandro D'Ancona (1835-1914) – very attentive to medieval texts, from a literary, cultural-historical and comparativistic point of view – and Domenico Comparetti (1835-1927), remarkable in the field of Italian linguistic studies.[12]

[12] For Comparetti, see at least *Gli anni giovanili di Domenico Comparetti, dai suoi taccuini e da altri inediti*, edited by E. Frontali Milani, Florence, Leo S. Olschki, 1969, excerpt from "Belfagor", vol. XXIV, no. 2. E *Domenico Comparetti, 1835-1927, Convegno internazionale di studi, Napoli - Santa Maria Capua Vetere 6-8 giugno*

He was also greatly influenced by Emilio Tèza (1831-1912) who taught a course in Comparative Languages and Literature with notions of 'Gothic, Old German, even Provençal' as well as Sanskrit.[13] Rajna recalled, however, that in the field of Romance Glottology, D'Ovidio only received 'impulses' and studied it almost self-taught because Tèza gave an inorganic teaching. He would, however, show himself to be so well prepared that he was continually asked for advice by colleagues. Instead, D'Ancona's course is more organic.

The academic year 1867-1868, for example, he dedicates it to *Poesia del primo secolo* from every point of view, metric, historical-erudite, aesthetic. In the year 1868-1869, he continued the topic, arriving at Dante. As for D'Ancona, 'although he lacked preparation and specific interests in the field of linguistics and textual criticism [...] thanks to his collaboration with Comparettti and Tèza and his assiduous correspondence with philologists such as Paris, Meyer, Köler [sic] and Mussafia, he was able to impart vital and up-to-date teaching to his pupils, also with regard to the developments of these new disciplines'.[14]

D'Ancona, therefore, through the network of acquaintances he kept with his dense correspondence, and especially with

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2002, edited by S. Cerasuolo, M. L. Chirico and T. Cirillo, Naples, Bibliopolis, 2006 March 1969, pp. 203-217. D'Ancona's biography is less well researched, for which we can at least recall the recollection published by D'Ovidio's close friend, Gerolamo Vitelli, who was his pupil: Gerolamo Vitelli, *Ricordi di un normalista*, in "Nuova Antologia", 1 April 1930.

[13] Pio Rajna, *Francesco D'Ovidio e la filologia neolatina*, Nuova Antologia CCCXXIV, March 1926, pp. 119-126. Ibid, p. 121.

[14] Francesca Nassi, *Tra manzonismo e glottologia: Francesco D'Ovidio e la questione della lingua, Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa*. Class of Letters and Philosophy, Series III, v. 23, no. 1 (1993), pp. 275-318. Ibid, p. 278.

Adolfo Mussafia (1835-1905), a distinguished glottologist with international experience, especially in teaching in Austria, could prepare his students at a very high level.

Francesco entered it as a 17-year-old in 1866 and would remain there until he was 21. Those who passed the entrance examinations had free board and lodging in the boarding school (from 1873 this possibility was also extended to the science section) and D'Ovidio was able to take advantage of this benefit by keeping up with the examinations and securing high marks with a very hard application to study. The following year, in 1867, he was joined by his lifelong friend Girolamo Vitelli (1849-1935), with whom he shared not only a passion for literature but also a political one for a united Italy in the spirit of the Risorgimento.

On their frequent journeys between Naples and Pisa, during holidays and family engagements, the two passed through the territories united to the Kingdom of Italy and through the territories of the Papal States. In the latter part of his life, D'Ovidio recounted that he and his friend were often subjected to searches by the Bourbon gendarmes, clichédly defined as 'occhiuti', who were meticulous but also inexperienced and searched the bags of the two young men for forbidden books rather than weapons, books that propagated liberal and Risorgimento doctrine, such as the texts by Silvio Pellico that D'Ovidio would later edit in the first important edition.

According to D'Ovidio, the greatest disappointment was inflicted on the two ardent students by travellers arriving from the Latium countries, and thus from the Church State, who did not seem to be in such a hurry to be 'liberated'. On the contrary, they seemed quite relaxed and satisfied with their papist rule. This, of course, clashed with the ardent Risorgimento faith of the two.

What he and his friend Vitelli thought of this season, D'Ovidio, in the memoirs he wrote many years later, manages to look at it with a certain smiling detachment, forgiving the apparent insensitivity of those people who evidently did not live badly and were not so oppressed in the Papal States as to expect to be saved. In the account he gives, D'Ovidio deliberately insinuates a self-ironic note.

They spoke calmly or gaily of their ordinary life, of the trivial affairs of their state, as if it were still solid and should last forever; while we in the Kingdom were always talking about the Roman question, sighing for the liberation of Rome and the fall of the temporal power, whether we wanted it or not our spirits were exalted, we crossed that area of the land not yet free with a rebellious spirit, with the expectation, natural though unreasonable, of finding there nothing but frowning, heartfelt, tearful faces, which could hardly conceal the eagerness for freedom. The contrast between our internal agitation and the serenity of those made us spiteful, suspicious, disheartened. It also reassured us a little, insinuating that perhaps it was not necessary for us to despair so much if they were so quiet after all.[15]

Pisa, a hotbed of Risorgimento spirits for many decades, and the Normale, even more so, nurtured that faith in a united Italy, in the non-religious version without being openly anticlerical, which D'Ovidio never repudiated. At the time, the warlike ardour in the two young men was burning and they sometimes thought of taking part in warlike ventures against the hated papal Rome. But they were too young, they had to study.

In Pisa, the young man from Campobasso studied with extreme profit, and Comparetti recognised in him an

[15] Francesco D'Ovidio, *Rimpianti vecchi e nuovi*, Caserta, Moderna 1930, pp. 383-384.

uncommon ability as a Greek scholar, as his friend and student Pio Rajna would testify many years later:

> He therefore brought to Pisa a rich store of doctrine, but above all he brought with him an intellect that I cannot better define with the epithet *luminous* [...] In D'Ovidio [...] a convinced appreciator of research and patient observation of the facts, there was, by natural aptitude and study, a beautiful combination of ideal visions and positivism, of sensitivity and reasoning.[16]

There were only a few dozen students, and they were closely followed by their teachers. In them, gathered in that elite school, where wit counted more than any recommendation or noble birth, was concentrated the hope of training the men of letters and professors of the New Italy and of bringing the German method, then the most modern, to the new nation. Pisa was a small city, so those years between 1866 and 1870 can be imagined as very intense, with close contact between students and professors. Besides studying philology, in which he intended to specialise, he was introduced to the study of Sanskrit, Germanic languages and Provençal under the guidance of Emilio Tèza, a polyglot philologist. This training would give him an uncommon depth in the philological sciences and a very solid linguistic sensitivity. Nor should it be forgotten that along with Greek, Latin, ancient Provençal and Sanskrit, D'Ovidio studied French, German and English. In particular, his command of German was excellent, which gave him access to the reservoir of untranslated philological works that were mainly written in that language at the time.

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[16] Pio Rajna, *Commemorazione di F. D'Ovidio* in 'Il Marzocco', 6 December 1925.

During his years as a normalist, he studied Dante and Dante's *De Vulgarie Eloquentiae* in depth, as well as the work of Alessandro Manzoni (1785-1873), not only for its literary merits but also for its linguistic proposals. This was crucial for his career as it allowed him to enter the debate on the national language on a par with much older masters and even before he had completed his studies. Manzoni proposed the promotion of Florentine as the national language and D'Ovidio was called upon to write about it in an authoritative forum during the work of the commission on language established by the minister Emilio Broglio (1814-1892).

Manzoni had for years introduced the subject of the language to be adopted in the documents of united Italy and chaired the Milanese section of the commission with Ruggero Bonghi and Giulio Carcano. It was Manzoni who wrote and circulated, on 14 January 1868, the first report *Dell'unità della lingua e dei mezzi per diffonderla.* The members of the Florentine commission (Raffaello Lambruschini, Niccolò Tommaseo, Giuseppe Bertoldi and Achille Mauri), engaged in a discussion with him as they disagreed with some of his conclusions.[17] An opportunity then arose for promising young scholars to make their opinions known, and Domenico Comparetti decided to propose to the young scholar from Campobasso, whom he considered up to the challenge of those important names, to expose himself and publish, as his first

[17] Manzoni wrote a first report *Dell'unità della lingua e dei mezzi per diffonderla, published* in Nuova *Antologia* (February 1868) and *Perseveranza* (March 1868), but the Tuscan section dissociated itself by sending its own report that was published in *Nuova Antologia.* At this point minister Broglio dissolved the commission and Manzoni reiterated his ideas and positions in his "Lettera intorno al *De Vulgari Eloquentia*" (21 March 1868).

important work, a critical review of the essay by the well-known German scholar Eduard Böhmer, *Ueber Dantes Schrift De vulgari eloquentia* (Halle, 1867), which discussed Dante's linguistic theses, also the subject of the parliamentary commission.[18]

The proposal was made in July 1868. It was not an easy task: one had to read a German text and argue one's own answer in German. D'Ovidio – it must be remembered – was only 19 years old, but he was already considered well prepared for such a task. He had just finished his exams to pass his third year of Literature at the Scuola Normale Superiore and had to return home, to Naples. He had also vowed not to publish anything before graduating, 'also so as not to waste a single hour of his high school and university years, which I believed and believe should all be spent in treasuring the lessons of the masters, in making severe studies', as he wrote in the biographical fragment *Il primo passo* (below). But he could not refuse Comparetti's proposal. About a year earlier, he had befriended Giuseppe Puccianti (1830-1913), a friend of Carducci and the Amici Pedanti who, in March 1868, influenced D'Ovidio with the pamphlet *Della unità della lingua italiana*. He influenced him by helping him correct Manzoni's 'harshness'.[19]

He would later write, in words collected by Zingarelli: 'the city in which I had lived for three years, belonging to the

[18] The work was introduced in Italy at the same time as the publication of the report *Dell'unità della lingua e dei mezzi per diffonderla* (Florence 1868).

[19] G. Puccianti, *Del Volgare Eloquio di Dante* (30 March 1868), in *Dell'unità di lingua in Italia,* Pisa 1868, pp. 33-44. For more technical discussions I refer to Francesca Nassi's cited essay, *Tra manzonismo e glottologia,* cit., pp. 282-287, with extensive bibliography.

privileged region, and collecting schoolchildren from every part of it, had given me a vivid feeling of Tuscanness in which I wallowed with the greatest joy, and with my soul always tending to absorb Tuscanism in every way'. And again. "It was an irresistible vocation to deal with modern literature, or rather literary criticism in general... I was driven to write about Manzoni by the enthusiasm and the example of supreme critics very dear to me and also by the horror of injustice and disproportion, of which Manzoni was then continually the objector; and then I was driven by the inevitable legacy of the love nurtured and the struggles sustained in my youth. I was never moved by a deliberate purpose, nor by the desire for a theme of study and research. I was as Manzonian as others had been Garibaldian'.[20] And indeed, Zingarelli himself writes:

> When the 21-year-old doctor first presented himself to the public, he showed that his heart was committed: and even for him, who brilliantly wrote about determinism and free will, free will did not exist.[21]

These phrases reported by D'Ovidio's pupil, Zingarelli, make us think that D'Ovidio, who *wallowed with the greatest delight in* Tuscanism and Tuscanism, probably spoke without an accent. It also makes us realise what his particular idea of man's destiny was, driven by an inexorable fate, a fateful destiny in the proper sense of the term for great geniuses, where free will has less importance. A kind of classical-pagan conception that was not uncommon among the classicists of the time.

And so, during the summer holidays in Naples, he wrote the

[20] Nicola Zingarelli, *Francesco D'Ovidio*, Il secolo XX, 1926.
[21] *Ibid.*

dissertation on language; back in Pisa, in September, he had it read by Comparetti and D'Ancona, who praised it and requested very few corrections. D'Ovidio thought of having the text printed in the '*Rivista Bolognese*' directed by Francesco Fiorentino (1834-1884).[22] Not daring to ask him directly, he had himself introduced to Domenico Denicotti, his former professor at the Liceo Vittorio Emanuele II in Naples, who had been transferred to teach in Bologna. Thus he made his first publication:

So Fiorentino granted me the most loving hospitality; and in the August '69 issue of the *Rivista* I had for the first time the consolation of speaking to the public through lead characters. Fiorentino wrote me great praise for my work, but confessed that he found it too dry as the work of a young man, a southerner to boot. Poor Fiorentino could not yet know the devils I had in my body, and his admonition made me rejoice: for he ascertained that I had succeeded, as the subject and the intention of myself and my masters wanted, in showing only one side of my character. The work had the good fortune to meet with the full approval of the scholars [...] At the time there was much less printing, knowledge of the German language was a rather rare prerogative, the attitude of Italian critics towards foreign doctrine was still humble; so that a young man arguing almost toe to toe with a German scholar made an impression.[23]

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[22] Francesco Fiorentino, a philosopher originally from Sambiase (Lamezia Terme), taught in Naples, Bologna and Pisa, was a freethinker, a scholar of Giordano Bruno and moral, theoretical philosophy, as well as the author of many books in which he expounded Masonic thought (being a member of the important Felsinea Lodge). More than by friendship, due to the age difference, he was bound by professional esteem with D'Ovidio, who admired his depth of thought and style of writing.

[23] Francesco D'Ovidio, *Il primo passo*, in *Rimpianti vecchi e nuovi,* II, Editrice Moderna, Caserta 1930, pp. 457-464.

Palazzo della Carovana,
seat of the Scuola Normale di Pisa (circa 1925).

The text was written in German, and this must be emphasised: Francesco D'Ovidio knew how to write dissertations in German when he was only 19 years old. In his text, he proposed ideas similar to those of Manzoni, but he also expounded a line of his own: it was the so-called 'conciliatory line' that avoided Manzoni's excesses of adopting Florentine. Engaging enthusiastically in the philological treatment of the subject matter, he received a flattering judgment from Niccolò Tommaseo and the compliments of Minister Emilio Broglio. If we consider his teachers – Comparetti and D'Ancona were linked to some powerful families connected to the Risorgimento and made prestigious careers – and friends, such as Vitelli, we can say that Francesco D'Ovidio was linked from a young age to very influential circles that favoured his career. These, moreover, bet on a young man who showed brilliant

ingenuity and a remarkable will.

D'Ancona was an Italianist, linguist and philologist, while Comparetti was a Greekist, antiquist and teacher of philology. In their collaboration, and that of their students, what is considered modern Romance Philology was being created, a 'German' science by import, which they wanted to establish in Italy as well in order to strengthen the studies on the origins of the Italian language necessary to consolidate the cultural foundations of a united Italy.[24] In any case, in July 1869 Francesco passed his exams to pass to the fourth year and in the following year he began writing his dissertation. Although he considered himself a 'Grecajo', the two theses were glottological.

As he himself recounts in his *Rimpianti* (*Regrets)*, during these years in Pisa he led a very withdrawn life, devoted to his studies, apart from the occasional visit to the osteria or restaurants that Pisa was rich in in the company of Vitelli and a few other friends. In earlier years, with Pietro Giordani and the visits of Giacomo Leopardi, Alessandro Manzoni and others, Pisa had been at the centre of Italian cultural interests for some time. At that time, it was a small, rather sleepy city, surrounded by countryside, which was mainly animated by the few dozen students of the Scuola Normale. Very disciplined and studious students, also selected for character. This is why, recalling those years, Francesco mentions a few episodes from

[24] As Luigi Russo taught in a text fundamental to the question of the origins of modern Romance philology in the Italian academy. *A. D'Ancona e la Scuola Storica pisana*, in Bollettino Storico Pisano. Per il centenario dell'Università di Pisa, Giardini, 1945, pp. 144-161. As for the validity of D'Ovidio's conclusions, read, after Francesco Bruni's *Introduzion*e, cit. pp. 12-19, the essay *Lingua e dialetto* di D'Ovidio, in the same volume, still very interesting today.

his youthful life: a few outings, discussions, gratitude to his teachers, a quiet life and his back always bent over his books. A loyalty to study that, according to friends and acquaintances, would be fatal to his eyes.

Domenico Comparetti, one of Francesco D'Ovidio's teachers. He wanted him as his heir to the *Italian Glottological Archives.*

Chapter 4

Beginning of a brilliant career

Along the lines of his first known text, D'Ovidio developed his dissertation entitled *Sull'origine dell'unica forma flessionale del nome italiano (On the origin of the unique inflectional form of the Italian name)*, discussed in July 1870 in Pisa. In it, the young D'Ovidio competently entered into the discussion of the glottological theories formulated by the German scholar Friedrich Christian Diez (1794-1876), considered the founder of Neo-Latin philology. Meanwhile, in 1872, his thesis was published by the Fratelli Nistri printer-publisher in Pisa. In 1871, an acquaintance of his, Giuseppe Puccianti, had *an Anthology of Modern Italian Prose* published by the publisher Le Monnier that was extremely successful. In reviewing it in the *Propugnatore*, D'Ovidio communicated his idea of the ideal Italian canon, which not only approved of the authors consecrated by the Risorgimento (Manzoni, Grossi, Guerrazzi, Pellico, Tommaseo, D'Azeglio, Leopardi), but also disapproved of the inclusion of antiquated authors such as Botta, Colletta and Giordani (who would later be given less and less space) and criticised the exclusion of Bonghi, Giorgianni, De Amicis, Gabelli and Fambri. Apart from the last two, the others would enter the anthologies – not this one by Puccianti.[25] In this way he consecrated the path that

[25] Francesco D'Ovidio, *Review of Puccianti*, Antologia, *Il Propugnatore,* V, 1, 1972, pp. 124-134.

distanced him from classical prose, even Leopardi's, to adhere to a moderate manzonism. At only 23 years of age, he was able to show a way and provoke reactions, on the one hand enthusiastic, on the other indignant, for example among the editors of *Il Propugnatore* who ended all collaboration with him. To those far removed from these discussions, these seem like sterile quarrels of literati, but they are not: the canon of authors to be studied by generations and generations of students was being definitively shaped, and D'Ovidio, not having yet completed his specialist studies at the Normale, could already make his opinion heard. In the same review he criticised, or perhaps it is better to say raged against, Francesco Domenico Guerrazzi – then a highly successful author – and Cesare Cantù.[26] His review provoked the indignant reaction of Giovanni Chiarini, a classicist, purist, anti-romantic, who had been part of the Amici Pedanti group, in the *Gazzetta livornese* (1849-1879) of 12 April 1872, who called D'Ovidio a 'boy'.

The great revolution has come such a long way that the new doctrines banned by it are already beginning to take root in the schools, from which Boccaccio and Macchiavelli are being beaten out to make way for Manzoni. I hope to see that shameful teaching of Latin and Greek removed from high schools and gymnasiums; to see the Anthology of Italian prose replace the boring writings of Botta, Colletta and Giordani with the amusing writings of Paulo Fambri, Lessona and Mantegazza, but what am I saying? This is still too aristocratic stuff: and my dear Mr. D'Ovidio is on the right path of reform, he has not yet walked far enough .... But D'Ovidio is young and will do. In fact, I expect that one day or another, turning

[26] Francesca Nassi, *Tra manzonismo e glottologia: Francesco D'Ovidio e la questione della lingua, Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa*. Class of Letters and Philosophy, Series III, v. 23, no. 1 (1993), pp. 275-318. Ibid, p. 29-294.

his thoughts to the needs of our poetry, as he now does to those of prose, he will jump out and propose some worthy friend of his to give us a poetic anthology, where the first place will be taken by the sonnets of neri tranfucioli, some of those of Belli, the canti monferrini collected by Erraro, those of the southern provinces collected by Caserri and the aforementioned Imbriani, and other stuff of this kind.[27]

It was an irreverent intervention that mocked the glottological and dialectological training and studies on folk texts that was being done at the Normale, and which showed that D'Ovidio was already identified as a new protagonist of the Italian literary scene. On 2 May, Chiarini, in the same newspaper, took issue 'with the boys just out of school, and what schools!'.

Giuseppe Chiarini

[27] *Gazzetta livornese* of 12 April 1872. See Nassi, op. cit., pp. 294-295.

Having completed his studies at the Normale, he went for a stay in Florence where he had met, and briefly frequented, Francesco De Sanctis (1817-1883), who at that time was writing *Storia della letteratura italiana* and who held a chair in Naples. A historian of Romanticism, a patriot who had also served a brief imprisonment at Castel dell'Ovo in Naples, a moderate, he was for D'Ovidio at that time a model for his political (he was twice Minister of Education), Risorgimento and cultural commitments. Between the 23-year-old graduate and the 45-year-old critic there seems to have been no friendship, only a formal esteem, after all, too much divided them: the very way they studied the greats of literature.

Then, except for brief sojourns in Naples, D'Ovidio continued his withdrawn life as a student in Pisa to prepare for his postgraduate course, his doctorate. After the four years as a normalist that had given him a university preparation, D'Ovidio stayed another three years in the Tuscan city to attend courses that were to qualify him infallibly for university teaching. The school he attended was considered very tough, and prepared him excellently even for academic teaching. Moreover, as the name itself said, the 'norm', the model of higher and university teaching, was taught there.

Before completing his doctorate, in the academic year 1873-1874, he was called upon to teach Latin and Greek at the Galvani Lycée in Bologna. High school teaching was considered preparatory to university teaching, a probationary period that could not be ignored. It was during this period that he met his future wife, the Mantuan Maria Bertolini, a 'suave and cultured young lady' from a good family and who lived in Bologna, where her father taught.[28] He certainly knew

[28] Emanuele Ciafardini, *Commemorazione di Francesco D'Ovidio*,

Bertolini, his father, as early as 1872.[29] In the spring of 1874, therefore, she graduated and at that time had many doors open to her: those who graduated from the Normale in Pisa had easy access to the professorships that were being established in many parts of Italy. In 1874-1876, before finding a suitable university seat, he taught Latin and Greek at the Ginnasio Classico Parini high school in Milan, then considered among the best in Italy and a training ground for many classicists. During these two years, he studied the Milanese dialect, never ceasing – as in the rest of his career – to be a scholar and scholar of dialectology. This meant that he could read the poems of Carlo Porta (1875-1881). The turning point in his career came in 1876, when he was just 27 years old and had already moved to Bologna, as we shall see.

The dissertation, which was also praised by the linguist Graziadio Isaia Ascoli, was then followed by a dissertation *on the treatise De vulgari eloquentia* (1874) to "determine the precise meaning of the doctrines understood by Dante", about the "illustrious vernacular" text that was well received and contributed to resolving the question of language in Italy.[30]

In 1876, Minister Ruggero Bonghi promoted the establishment of chairs of Romance philology in universities throughout Italy. Five names were selected as professors in the new discipline: Napoleon Caix (1845-1882) in Florence, Ugo

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Accademia Pontaniana, Naples 1931, p. 6.

[29] As a letter sent to Pio Rajna on 2 December 1872 shows.

[30] Archivio glottologico italiano, II [1874] pp. 416-438; and *Opere complete XII*: *Versificazione romanza*. *Poetica e poesia medioevale,* II, Naples 1932, pp. 59-100. For the complex issues surrounding the discussion of language I refer to the comprehensive Francesca Nessi, *Tra manzonismo e glottologia: Francesco D'Ovidio e la questione della lingua*, "Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa. Classe di Lettere e filosofia, Serie III, v. 23, n. 1 (1993), pp. 275-318.

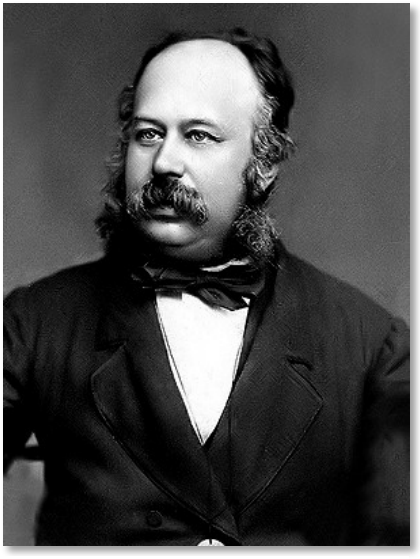
Angelo Canello (1848-1883) in Padua, Ernesto Monaci in Rome (1844-1918) and Pio Rajna (1847-1930) in Milan. D'Ovidio proposed his candidature to Minister Bonghi through the mathematician Enrico Betti (1823-1892), director of the Normale and secretary general of Public Education: a tradition that would allow normalists easier access to professorships.

This candidature was supported by D'Ancona, who wanted him as a teacher at the Normale. But Francesco D'Ovidio's plans were different. Engaged to a girl he had met in Bologna, the daughter of a university lecturer, he intended to marry. Bertolini was the daughter of Francesco, a lecturer at the city's Scuola Normale for women (before becoming professor extraordinary of Ancient History in Naples, 1875-1883). Having taken the necessary steps: official introductions, marriage proposal, screening of the young man's career possibilities, the two got married in the same city with the blessing of their respective families. The couple then moved to Milan for a year where D'Ovidio taught at the Regio Liceo Ginnasio Parini.[31]

During 1875, Ruggero Bonghi, a Neapolitan from Torre del Greco, arrived in Milan to attend a lecture by D'Ovidio at the Parini. The story is told in various ways, but basically, Bonghi, who before being Minister of Public Instruction (1874-1876),

[31] ACS, Rome, Ministero P.I., Fondo Personale (1860-1880), b. 242; Archivio storico dell'Università di Bologna, Fascicoli dei docenti, f. 14, pos. 4; Casa Carducci, Bologna, Corrispondenza, lettere di Francesco Bertolini. SPES, nos. 461 and 933; M. Rosi, *Dizionario del Risorgimento nazionale,* Milan, F., 1930, vol. II, p. 265; obituary in 'Annuario della Regia Università di Bologna', academic year 1911-1912, pp. 129-131. A. Ascenzi, *Tra educazione etico-civile e costruzione dell'identità nazionale. L'insegnamento della storia nelle scuole italiane dell'Ottocento*, Milan, Vita e pensiero, 2004, pp. 71-72, 175-177, 187 and *passim*.

animator of many cultural activities (and founder of the 'Stampa' in Turin), was a philologist, visited D'Ovidio, and was certainly impressed by his preparation, deciding to include him in the list of candidates to fill the newly established professorships. In the following weeks, he appointed him professor in Rome and then, at his request, in Naples at the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy, entrusting him with the new chair of Comparative History of Neo-Latin Languages and Literatures, the old name for the subject that would later be called Romance Philology.



Ruggero Bonghi

As we shall see, in those years Graziadio Isaia Ascoli, Italy's foremost glottologist and founder of the journal *Archivio glottologico italiano*, founded in Florence in 1873, hoped to make D'Ovidio his continuator and collaborator, and nurtured that hope for some years before giving up. Francesco was at first offered a professorship in Rome (he is registered there as a teacher in the 1875-1876 *Yearbook*) because Bonghi had initially intended him for the capital. But it was D'Ovidio himself who gave up the professorship to Enrico Monaci, accepting the alternative of Naples, which was more grateful to him for family reasons. From Naples, where he had finally landed officially, on 4 January 1876, D'Ovidio wrote to Bonghi thanking him for the "very great indulgence" used towards him.[32]

Time enough to find a home as the family was about to expand with the arrival of their first daughter, and the following year he began teaching in the new chair of Comparative History of Neo-Latin Languages and Literatures, a chair he would hold until his death. It was a triumphant return for the short-sighted student from Campobasso – who, moreover, felt himself to be fully Neapolitan – but in the end not entirely surprising.

For years, news of his successes in the scientific field had been reaching his parents at the D'Ovidio home. In the same University of Naples, he was also entrusted with the teaching of Greek Grammar and Latin Grammar, teachings that he held for many years. The reason for this accumulation was not simple favouritism: in those years there was a lack of prepared

[32] Stefano Miccolis, *Antonio Labriola intermediario per Arturo Graf*, Belfagor, v. 55, no. 1 (31 January 2000), Olschky, Florence, pp. 74-78. Ibid, p. 78.

lecturers, trained according to the method that was considered indispensable for the advancement of academic studies in Italy: the German Historical School to which D'Ovidio had been trained in Pisa. He also taught Dante's Literature and for two years Italian Literature. This variety of teaching, however, and the ability to hold them, testifies to an exceptional training. Apart from the powerful support he had at his disposal, it is also true that D'Ovidio had a great preparation in the German philological method.

It is more than likely that the strains to which he subjected his eyes during those years of intense study ruined his eyesight, making him very short-sighted and accentuating problems for which he was already predisposed. Although he was highly esteemed by his colleagues, D'Ovidio recalls in his autobiographical notes that in the Neapolitan university he began to encounter hostility and criticism, not least because he militated in the ranks of the historical Right, whereas in the Federico II in Naples the sympathies of most professors went to the Left or to Socialism. Moreover, one did not look favourably on an academic who had trained in Pisa. These were the words of D'Ovidio's friend and pupil, Michele Scherillo (1860-1930), a philologist and academic in Milan.

It must be borne in mind that in those years [...] between the North and the South of the Peninsula the ill-suppressed overtones of rivalry and jealousy surfaced from time to time, stimulated and exacerbated by the recent rise of the Left in the government of the State. D'Ovidio was held in suspicion there, since almost a refugee from his native university, he now came from a school that in part was, and in much greater part gave the impression of being antagonistic to the Neapolitan one. D'Ancona, it is true, aimed above all to strike at the strikers and simpletons who gave themselves the air of aping De Sanctis, but he did not spare the Maestro a little

scratch if necessary; and from Bologna, where D'Ovidio had also taught Latin and Greek for three years in a high school, Carducci delighted, refuting some of his statements, by calling him "Mr. De Sanctis". Added to this was the rivalry, accentuated especially in the inauspicious upheaval of political parties, between De Sanctis and Bonghi, or rather between the legion that followed the former and the small band that flanked the latter. D'Ovidio did not conceal his greater inclination towards the less popular of the two champions.[33]

Maria Bertolini, wife of Francesco D'Ovidio,
in the early years of their marriage.

[33] Michele Scherillo, *Il D'Ovidio nella vita e nella scuola*, in *Atti della R. Accademia dei Lincei,* CCCXX, III, vol. II, 1926, p. IV.

Apart from his beginnings, D'Ovidio always sided with less powerful university 'barons' or 'dictators of letters' later on. He sided with the powerful De Sanctis first, and the very powerful Croce later. Despite the attacks and hostility of those who criticised him from Pisa, Bologna or Naples, his academic career continued quietly for many years, also because those who knew him gave him credit for being a humanly open, curious and generous person, capable of creating a strong network of friends and disciples around him. Among his friends were also powerful figures in the political and cultural world of the time, such as Costantino Nigra, of whom we shall speak.

Scherillo himself would recall, many years later, the atmosphere of those early years, in 1878 and up to 1882, when he was among D'Ovidio's students. His recollection gives us a sketch of the atmosphere of those years. Scherillo had enrolled in Law but followed Literature courses more closely, and so one day one of his professors, Antonio Tari (1809-1884), an eclectic scholar of law, metaphysics and aesthetics, especially music, accompanied him home and advised him to follow the courses of a young professor who had recently come to the University of Naples, a teacher of Romance Philology and Dialectology. He told him that he had a vast intellect, doctrine and had gained a good reputation so young even outside Italy. D'Ovidio was admired by Tari and Scherillo followed his advice. Days later, he introduced himself 'to the shaggy young professor, with his gold spectacles and curly blond beard, already almost bald'. Tari had already told him about him and so welcomed him 'with benign regard' into the 'very small brigade of scholarly students of Romance philology, who gathered around an oval table covered with a threadbare green carpet, late in the afternoon in a remote lecture theatre of the now deserted and silent university'. It was a discipline that had

yet to win over many in the university lecture halls, despite the efforts of Comparetti and D'Ancona who wanted to limit Dantean, Tasso or Manzonian criticism from applying religious as well as aesthetic and philological criteria of judgement.

In its brevity, the one sketched by Scherillo is a fascinating sketch: a few students were deepening a still-young discipline in the silent hall, in the silent university, when the lectures were over, around an oval table with a 'worn green carpet', of those in use at the beginning of the 19th century. There were about ten in all: Giacinto Romano, Francesco Colagrosso, Enrico Cocchia, Nicola Zingarelli, Erasmo Pèrcopo, Luigi Ruberto and a few others. In that 1878, the 'almost contemporary' teacher read *La Chanson de Roland* and held a course on ancient Italian dialects and invited Scherillo to research the origins of the Punchinello mask and then a literary history, *La Commedia dell'arte italiana*. From then on, he joined the small group of pupils who frequented D'Ovidio's house, whose 'Manzonian goodness, sparkling with witticisms' he praised, even staying to eat often in the house or to drink coffee, to continue chatting in the professor's study, near the window.[34] Although such goodness should not sanctify him, and it was not always active, there are known episodes in which D'Ovidio made categorical and insulting judgments towards some unfortunate person, especially in the period of his greatest power such as the one reported by Bruzzone in *Corrado D'Avolio and Francesco D'Ovidio*.[35]

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[34] Michele Scherillo, *Per la Morte del S. C. Senatore prof. Francesco D'Ovidio*, Reale Istituto Lombardo di Scienze e Lettere, v. LVIII, fasc. XVI-XX, Milan 1925, p. 779.

[35] Gian Luigi Bruzzone, *Corrado D'Avolio e Francesco D'Ovidio* in 'Archivio storico siracusano', s. III, XVIII (2004), pp. 209-276. Ibid, p. 213.

He had a reputation, D'Ovidio, for being an upright person, little inclined to manipulate. He must have been able to do some university manoeuvring, however, if it is true that he became very influential in Naples where it was he who nominated new professors in his specialisations and got their appointments approved. It was he who proposed Bonaventura Zumbini (1836-1916), for example, and Francesco Torraca (1853-1938), and again Michele Kerbaker (1835-1914), Francesco Fiorentino (1834-1884) and Vittorio Imbriani (1840-1886), all new arrivals – but not all younger than D'Ovidio, some definitely older. These impressed new methodologies and new cultural interests on the Neapolitan world. In 1876, the annotated translation from the English of William Dwight Whitney's (1827-1894) *La vita e lo sviluppo del linguaggio*, a very important work for modern linguistics, was much appreciated. It was the first time this author had been translated into Italian.[36] The frequentation that D'Ovidio had had with Pisa, but also with Milan, had removed all provinciality from him: the breadth of his work, and certainly the method and rigour, were international. He had been taught by the best philologists then on the scene, and this showed.

His working methodology and the criterion on the basis of which he chose new professors for the increasingly prestigious University of Naples were expressed by him in the preface to *Saggi critici* of 1878:

> The ideal of whole and perfect criticism can only be this: that on the one hand, every literary fact, learned or researched or discovered, does not remain a brute fact, does not remain the learning or material ascertainment of pure news, but is understood

[36] W. D. Whitney, *La vita e lo sviluppo del linguaggio*, translated and annotated by Francesco D'Ovidio, Dumolard, Milan 1876.

and explained, and recognised in all its intimate relations to the human spirit and soul, that in short the fact is not only known, but understood; and, on the other hand, that the aesthetic judgement, the psychological observation, the synthetic concept, have the widest possible basis of facts and positive notions, and result not so much from such intuition or divination, which, if it can be felicitous and give the sign, can also succeed in mere blunders, as from a prudent meditation that is not less than ingenious, exercised over a mass of abundant and full facts. But this entire criticism, which on the one hand seeks out and collects the greatest number of literary facts, and on the other knows how to squeeze out the best literary juice, is not for everyone.[37]

This explains the synthetic method of aesthetic and cultural, linguistic and psychological analysis that has given us so many indispensable texts in the history of literature, but which, according to the critics, when it exceeded in purely linguistic and glottological aspects could lapse into a drier analysis and, for this reason, was criticised by Benedetto Croce, who nevertheless exaggerated in idealism to the detriment of technical analysis.

The work *Saggi critici* of 1878 (a collection of works written since 1871), opened with six essays on two contemporary authors, Leopardi and Manzoni. It was an unusual choice because the Historical School of the German method to which D'Ovidio (but also Zumbini) belonged took little interest in contemporary literature. But there was a reason: Manzoni always remained his model as a man of letters and Manzoni, with the *Promessi sposi*, had made a linguistic choice – as well as an artistic one by choosing the novel form – with very important results. His Manzonian essays were even

[37] Francesco D'Ovidio, *Saggi Critici,* Naples, Morano 1878, p. XIII.

praised by Manzoni's daughter, Vittoria Manzoni Giorgini (1822-1892) who complimented D'Ovidio for having perfectly understood her father's psychology. Moreover, Nicola Zingarelli makes it clear, he knew Manzoni's books, the places he had lived in Brusuglio and Milan, everything about his life, the people he lived with: he needed concreteness to understand the writer. Biographical data were important to him, and this was typical of the German method he had learnt.

On the other hand, D'Ovidio's curiosity and his openness also to the present of culture and language were one of the most appreciated traits at the time. Moreover, all his texts – in *Saggi critici* there are also works on Dante – are always linked to his interest in the question of language about which he had, as he himself wrote, 'smoothed out the points', i.e. avoided excessively rigorist applications. The *Saggis were* very successful, especially among young people such as Michele Scherillo, Manfredi Porena and others. The former saw in it 'the ideal of criticism as a whole' as a 'burning topical subject, while the vain and bloodless struggle between the so-called aesthetic school, or Neapolitan school, and the historical school, more especially the Pisan school, was being fought, disorderly and uncoordinated'.[38] At the time, these were really burning issues, because two or three currents among Italian critics were fighting. And the prevalence of one or the other was also a question of ranks, chairs, control of publishing houses. D'Ovidio was looked upon by the 'Pisans' who were in Naples from the start as a master, because he had a conciliatory tendency.

The two first editions of the *Saggis* soon sold out, earning

[38] Michele Scherillo, *Francesco D'Ovidio*, Nuova Antologia, Rome 1925, p. 6.

the young, calm and witty professor considerable fame, soon known for his witty banter and ability to play down. This was followed by the book *La lingua dei promessi sposi* (first edition, Morano, Naples 1880), perhaps the first important essay on the Lombard writer. Manzonian studies would also be followed six years later by the volume of *Discussioni manzoniane* (Lapi, Città di Castello 1886) in which he discussed the importance that the influences of Miguel de Cervantes and Walter Scott had on Manzoni. This demonstrates that 'unlike the scholars of his generation – Monaci, Canello, Caix and, of course, Rajna – D'Ovidio did not limit himself to investigations on the origins and contributions on the ancient phases of Italian culture [...] but pushed himself to authors and periods very close to his own time'; even if he did not have much sympathy for Verga or D'Annunzio or the Voceani.[39]

His detached respect for Giosuè Carducci will be mentioned later, but apart from Manzoni and Silvio Pellico – whom he loved very much – he also dealt with Giusti, Porta and wrote portraits of contemporary men of letters such as De Sanctis, Amicarelli – his teacher, a religious man later deputy with an elegant pen – and others. In the middle of the decade he moved to Piazza Latilla 6 where he would live for the rest of his life. The move came soon after he was struck down by eye disease and was probably inspired by the need for a comfortable house very close to the university. A then newly built house in a quiet area.

Even in these years, although he never participated in active politics (he would be appointed Senator of the Kingdom for

[39] Francesco Bruno, *Introduzione a Francesco D'Ovidio*, *Scritti Linguistici*, ed. Patricia Bianchi, Guida, Naples, pp. 7-29. Ibid, p. 10.

cultural merits, without participating much in the life of the Senate), he always manifested his moderate tendencies both in politics and in the religious sphere. He was never a churchgoer – but he did not refuse to attend ceremonies and celebrations – although he never quarrelled with the fervent faith of his wife Maria Bertolini and at least one of his daughters, Elvira, who was born in the late 1870s.

He considered it imperative to honour and consider the importance of the Catholic religion in the cultural life of European civilisation. Without such knowledge, Italian culture itself, he wrote, would be incomprehensible. He was in favour of a concordance between Church and State, rather than maintaining, as many wanted, a permanent disagreement. It was therefore, his, a tempered positivism that was also open to religion or, at least, to the civil and educational aspects of religion as practised in Italy – and his family was one in which religious practice was respected. He wrote to an admirer in 1883 'if I am no longer a believer, I have been one; therefore I am able to appreciate certain feelings and certain intellectual and moral needs'.[40] His position is expressed in a very thoughtful and lucid manner in *Rimpianti* of 1902:

Until 1860, and in a narrower sense until 1870, we old men had to fight, each in his own way, to win freedom of thought and to achieve the unity of the fatherland. And until then the polemical spirit and passionate acerbity against dogma and the Church was natural and irresistible. But after our victory was complete, and every danger of regression gradually faded away, all measured interests, all impartial minds, sooner or later ended up deploring the too many intolerances to which we abandoned ourselves, the too

[40] Nino Genovese, *Francesco D'Ovidio e il problema religioso religioso (lettere inedite)*, Casa Editrice Radio, Trapani, 1926, p. 14.

much one-sidedness of our historical concepts, the too much unintended consequences of certain of our acts and words. And today the statesman, if he wants to be worthy of the name, cannot disregard the effectiveness of religion as a brake on human passions, and as a consecration of domestic bonds and national sentiment. The statesman cannot forget that neither science nor the efforts of the state can soothe certain misfortunes and certain sorrows, nor replace the comforts and hopes of religion where human forces cannot. The thinker, if truly free, cannot deny that, regardless of any consideration of the ontological value of religion, it has an essentially human, social and civil psychological function. The cultured man, who knows the value if he knows the charm of Italian art and literature, and before our cathedrals, paintings, statues, our poetry, from the *Divine Comedy* to the *Promessi Sposi (The Betrothed)* and the sacred hymns, thinks with a certain horror that one day if the nation were to become an atheist or change its faith, it would also lose the sense of a large part of its culture and its glorious past, and would always have to strive to know the Christian religion scholastically, just as Latin and Greek mythology are studied today.[41]

These are singularly far-sighted words, even in the positive, naturalistic and one might say almost Machiavellian vision he had of Religion. Far-sighted especially when compared to that of so many contemporaries who, like him, were advocates of the Risorgimento without seeing the excesses, the massacres, the mourning and even the cultural contempt that was brought towards a part of the population that nurtured religious sentiment. And they are also singularly far-sighted when measured against our future.

He felt sympathy for Catholics, obviously for liberal Catholics such as Manzoni, Bonghi, Amicarelli, Tommaseo or

[41] Francesco D'Ovidio, *Rimpianti*, *Opere* XIII, pp. 256-257.

Luigi Tosti. He highly regarded the role of the provincial clergy in the cultural education of the people and did not subject them to the critical broadsides of the more bellicose positivists.[42] If he was a positivist, he was an attenuated type of positivist who did not disregard the reasons of the spirit and religion even if with the limitations specified. D'Ovidio was of a moderate temperament and this can also be seen in his journalistic and political interventions. He preferred moderate versions in the question of language, in that of stylistics and although he was not a Catholic, he never called for war against Catholics like many other intellectuals of his time. In Naples, for example, a Masonic school that drew on a 'Pythagorean' heritage was very influential. For Ciafardini, D'Ovidio was always a politically inclined liberal, but of those liberals who disapproved of legislation against religious schools or the teaching of religion in schools. The Roman pontificate was also part of the national glory, and he said this not as a believer but as a man of culture who knew history: 'what remains of true greatness to Italy? Two things: its artistic heritage and its universal religion'.[43]

In any case, he was never seen frequenting churches and sacristies but only ecclesiastics, especially the educated, scholars. In discussing the election of Pope Leo XIII (Gioacchino Pecci, 1810-1903) in 1878, whom he disapproved of, and of Pius X (Giuseppe Sarto, 1835-1914), who for some reason enjoyed his greatest sympathy, in 1903, he confessed to having lived a 'perfectly secular life' i.e. not practising, confirming the other statement of 20 years earlier, in 1883,

[42] Francesco D'Ovidio, *Rimpianti*, *Opere* XIII, pp. 20-27; 84; Idem, *Opere* XIV, pp. 92-93.
[43] Francesco D'Ovidio, *Giornale d'Italia*, 13 March 1906.

quoted above.[44] Wives and daughters, on the other hand, at least Elvira, were practising as were the two sons-in-law Lefèbvre and Porena.

On the other hand, his open and straightforward attitude, after all, despite his science, never made him approach even Freemasonry, which was widespread among his colleagues. Nor, like many of his colleagues of the time, was he interested in spiritualism, theosophy or esoteric practices of any kind: in this he remained a positivist. He declared this himself in his short text *La Massoneria (Freemasonry)* where, while declaring that he did not belong to it, he defended its basic principles and did not consider it negative or secret. He also declared that he did not believe in Masonic conspiracies.[45] Powerful people who were his friends or acquaintances were Freemasons or had been members of Freemasonry, as was the case with Nigra, who had joined under the urging of Count Cavour but had already left in 1861. Friends claimed that D'Ovidio shunned complications and had a fundamental – and sometimes even naive – faith in human beings, society and civil, social and scientific progress.

[44] Francesco D'Ovidio, *Conciliazione fra Stato e Chiesa* in *Rimpianti vecchi e nuovi*, I, Editrice Moderna, Caserta 1929, pp. 2-15. Ibid, p. 8.
[45] Francesco D'Ovidio, *La Massoneria* in *Rimpianti vecchi e nuovi*, II, Editrice Moderna, Caserta 1930, pp. 437-447.

Chapter 5

The illness of 1884

The first ten years of his academic activity, at high school and university, were very intense: publications followed one another at a rapid pace and D'Ovidio was able to impose himself in various fields. In the scattered memoirs and letters that have survived and will be quoted here, D'Ovidio gives us the impression that he maintained a very withdrawn lifestyle even during his university teaching years. In the mornings he taught, and in the afternoons, in his study, he wrote essays, studies, letters and articles that he began sending to newspapers all over Italy. Judging by the volume of his writings, he must have had no time to do anything else. An activity, that of writing, that kept him very busy, especially if one considers the number and length of the articles that dealt with theatre, literature, national and international politics, the Church, religion, philosophy and, occasionally, even local Neapolitan politics as well as issues concerning secondary and university education, topics that always interested him greatly. His presence is not reported in mundane events, but almost always in cultural ones.

The overwork to which he had subjected his eyesight since his youthful years and which had enabled him to learn Greek, Latin, French, German and English and to compile in-depth and innovative studies in glottology had a dramatic effect: in the autumn of 1884, he suffered a serious visual impairment. His eyesight dropped suddenly and dramatically. It was

probably a retinal detachment, partial, aggravating some other progressive eye disease. It then worsened, condemning him to severe blindness within a few years. He could walk, move around: what he was increasingly prevented from doing was writing, studying, working at length on texts. A portrait of him taken when he was 40 years old, in 1889, five years after the fact shows him wearing small glasses, glasses that then, evidently because they were useless – he had almost completely lost his sight – would no longer appear in the subsequent photographs that were taken of him.

As mentioned above, he had begun to suffer severe visual impairments at an early age, which suggests that he was suffering from a macular dystrophy-type disease, which causes damage even at a young age. Then the acute episode in the autumn of 1884, which left him almost blind. Whatever disease it was, at that time there was no cure and even the diagnoses were confusing, D'Ovidio had to resign himself to an inexorable worsening. In 1884, he was hospitalised, taken to a doctor, but despite the treatment he underwent (of which there is a dramatic trace in his letters), there was nothing to be done. He was forced, especially in his last years, to dictate all his books and articles without being able to read them. Nicola Zingarelli (1860-1935), an important linguist and author of one of the most highly regarded *Dizionari della lingua italiana*, who was also a friend of his, also gives news of this illness:

In the full bloom of his rare and vigorous genius, Francesco D'Ovidio was struck down in the autumn of 1884 by an eye ailment that was very troublesome for the rest of his life [...]. Nevertheless, he produced such a quantity of writings that it would seem unbelievable were it not for his extraordinary fibre and moral

strength, and the help brought to him by his beloved wife, Maria Bertolini, from Lombardy, and by his daughters, to whom he dedicated one of his volumes with the blessings of Oedipus at Colonus. However, from his own declarations and those of his friends, it would appear that this illness had turned him towards studies other than those for which, being very well prepared, he hoped for great results.[46]

He was particularly interested in music, both symphonic and opera, not least because, his pupil De Simone Brouwer explained, after 1884 it was the art that 'was most accessible to him and best suited his visual condition'.[47] Not only that, the father, Pasquale, as we have seen, was a musician, an amateur but appreciative musician, and was even a conductor in Campobasso, so passion for music was at home. Indeed, from the earliest years of his teaching, he passionately sought to divulge the results of his investigations in magazines or newspapers, or in the conferences he gave to selected audiences: in short, he was an excellent divulger like his father-in-law Bertolini. In addition to the public of scholars, he also cared a lot about the public of educated but non-specialist people, which explains his activism in magazines and newspapers.

When his failing eyesight became significant around 1890, a group of people, his pupils, his daughters Carolina and Elvira, began to help him. His daughters, Michele Scherillo, Manfredi Porena and Carlo Ernesto Lefèbvre took turns. Scherillo, who had spent many years in Milan where he had made a career for himself and married Teresa Negri, the daughter of Gaetano Negri (1838-1902), wrote: 'Gravely ill in

[46] Nicola Zingarelli, *Francesco D'Ovidio*, *Il Secolo XX*, April 1926.
[47] *Estremo saluto a Francesco D'Ovidio*, XXVI November 1925, p. 5.

the eyes as he was, I had the singular good fortune to be able to lend him my eyes and my hand, reading him the books and articles of others, writing under his dictation the books and articles he was composing. What an admirable school that was for me! Nothing was more instructive, more pleasing, more delightful than those discussions, those conversations that then found their expression and natural outlet in his essays'. He added, Scherillo, that the forced disuse of his eyes had further 'sharpened and invigorated his memory'. By sheer force of will he was able to 'prepare, in hours of solitary meditation, and finish, in all its parts, a chapter of a book or an article, and dictate it all out'. [48]

[48] *Per la Morte del S. C. senatore prof. Francesco D'Ovidio*, *Estratto Reale Istituto Lombardo di Scienze e Lettere*, v. LVIII, fasc. XVI-XX, Milan 1925, p. 779-780. Scherillo's life cases mainly concern his appointment as Professor of Italian Literature at the Milan Scientific-Literary Academy (27 October 1897) and then at the State University of Milan where he became Dean of the Faculty of Literature. When he died in 1930, Scherillo was remembered as a pupil of D'Ovidio by Gabriele Federzoni before the government headed by Mussolini: 'Neapolitan, he had trained in the Neapolitan Faculty of Literature and Philosophy under Francesco D'Ovidio, Bonaventura Zumbini and Michele Kerbaker. Having won the competition for the teaching of Italian literature in Milan, and having forged new family ties with Gaetano Negri, by whom he was loved as a son, he became a Milanese by choice, alternating the fruitful and severe studies on Dante, Petrarca, Machiavelli, Parini and Manzoni with the shrewd work he gave to public offices, in which he brought his ardent love of the country and his singular administrative expertise: qualities that then shone out even better when Michele Scherillo took part in the debates of this Assembly, and which, together with his frank and cordial character, won him the consideration and affection of his colleagues"[...]. Senate of the Kingdom, *Atti parlamentari. Discussioni,* 9 December 1930.

This adds a dramatic and interesting detail that also explains why D'Ovidio was admired and why his fortitude is so often spoken of by friends: he had learnt to form the topics of articles, essays, chapters in his head, establishing a method of mental composition and having disciples and relatives help him with the writing and reading itself. Francesco was however assiduous at openings, conferences, conventions, art exhibitions.

Various students and friends claimed that it was precisely his illness that had prevented him from devoting himself to classical studies as he would have wished. Among them Girolamo Vitelli alluded to a 'noble retreat'. Vitelli recalls that already around 1885, "modernistic impatience" had reduced the classicism of our highly cultured schools to a bad start, and that therefore D'Ovidio's severity, which went against the "easy-going" nature of certain classical scholars who taught in certain gymnasiums, made him fear the worst for the future. So much so that 'in a College of Secondary School Inspectors that lasted only a short time he tried to do his best to make up for it'. That fallback, therefore, made him suffer: he would have liked to devote himself to classical literature, to his beloved *Ovidio*, to engrave in gymnasiums with his authority, but his eyesight precluded him from doing so and he became above all a critic of modern literature.

To classical philology, Vitelli insists, he would have dedicated the best of his genius 'if from a very young age his own admirable gifts as a writer and literary critic, and later the material impossibility of assiduous and difficult reading, had not pushed him almost exclusively towards other noble studies, less incompatible with the pitiful condition of his eyes'. His philological-classical publications were therefore neither many nor of great volume, 'but they were, in any case,

such' that Vitelli missed them.[49] As a matter of fact, these publications declined more and more and others took his place.

Of D'Ovidio's Neapolitan life in the 1880s and 1890s, we have a lot of scattered information: we know that he was a regular at the San Carlo, that he attended many conferences and that he himself was an active lecturer on literature and language in the most diverse Neapolitan cultural venues. He held meetings and lunches at his home with friends, colleagues, disciples. Everyone agrees on this point: he loved to discuss at length with his guests. These meetings, in the afternoons or over dinner, seem to have been D'Ovidio's main pastime, an intellectual pastime, enriching and cohesive within a social group. They would drink coffee, have pastries, dine in the evening and then talk, at length. D'Ovidio always comes across as a generous and witty person, probably not for obligatory praise but because he really was, as all the testimonies agree.

Others describe him just as Carlo Pascal does, who recalled the 'pleasure of those intimate, discreet conversations in a circle of trusted friends: one hung on his mouth, from which flowed facetious mottos, sharp sentences, cherished memories, words of common sense: Sometimes the voice lowered, as if to confide something more secret and scabrous, sometimes it rose and coloured, while the lips rippled slightly to a smile: all a play of tints, of half-tints, of shadows of lights'. Here, these words perhaps give a description of the manner, the way of speaking of a man also known for his bonhomie and the cult of oral sociality. D'Ovidio's salon, less well known than those

[49] *Francesco D'Ovidio e la filologia classica*, from Nuova Antologia, 26 March 1926, Rome, p. 2.

of other Neapolitans (De Sanctis, Puoti, Croce), because it was less open to the outside world, more a coterie of initiates into the linguistic and literary sciences, may have had an unsuspected influence considering the calibre of the characters who frequented it, who were not very 'worldly'. Carlo Pascal (1866-1926) – of others we have said and will say – a distinguished Latinist and professor at the University of Pavia in November 1925, would die a few months after writing these words in 1926.[50]

D'Ovidio was also an assiduous member of the Royal Society of Naples, in the section of Archaeology, Letters and Fine Arts in Via Mezzocannone 8, which had splendid lecture rooms, a library, and rooms for conversations. Many were his speeches, communications, lectures. And here, as certainly in other institutions, he exercised his authority with a certain imperiousness. We also have reports that it was he who decided the list of lecturers invited to this place. For example, for the year 1903, Benedetto Croce, writing to a professor from an institute in Foggia who evidently asked if it was possible to give a paid lecture in Naples, warned that "Professor D'Ovidio is in charge of Dante's lectures and has already published the list of lecturers for the current year. Moreover, for economic reasons, one hardly wants to invite anyone from outside Naples, a dantologist by profession, and this year Parodi and Del Lungo have been invited'.[51] And it is not clear whether that *dantologist by profession* is not an ironic scornfulness, which in any case would have been typical of Croce.

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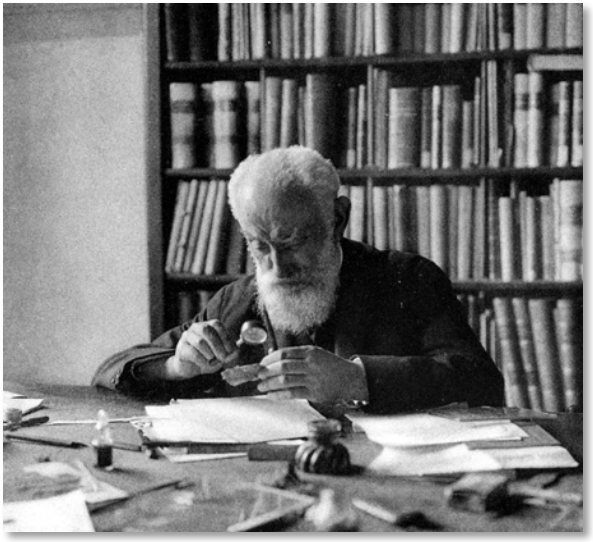
[50] Carlo Pascal, *Per la Morte del S. C. Senatore prof. Francesco D'Ovidio*, "*Reale Istituto Lombardo di Scienze e Lettere*", v. LVIII, fasc. XVI-XX, Milan 1925, p. 992.

[51] Giulio Natali, *Ricordi e profili di maestri e amici,* Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, Rome 1965, p. 239.



Girolamo Vitelli, a distinguished antiquarian and papyrologist was a lifelong best friend of Francesco D'Ovidio, his contemporary.

In addition to his strictly academic commitments, others were added. He became a member of the Consiglio Superiore dell'Istruzione pubblica, a member of the Circolo filologico di Napoli (of which he was also president) and then a member of the Accademia dei Lincei; these commitments obliged him to take the train very often from the new central station in Naples to Rome, a journey he made in the company of one or other of his brothers-in-law but especially with Carlo Ernesto Lefèbvre, the husband of his daughter Elvira. Of the Accademia dei Lincei, later in life, after having been vice-president of the Class of Moral Sciences (1905-16), he was president (1916-20), an active presidency that saw him often travel by train between Naples and Rome, accompanied by his brother-in-law Lefèbvre, when some important initiative

required his presence.

During his presidency at the Lincei, he ensured that the texts submitted for examination by the judging commissions were printed or typewritten and not just manuscripts, due to the problems of deciphering that handwriting entailed. During the First World War, he worked to ensure that the Academy's patrimony was not endangered not only by possible bombs (which fortunately never arrived), but by the aggression of other institutions. For example, when a request was made to transfer incunabula, codices and prints from the Biblioteca dei Lincei to Palazzo Venezia, a transfer that entailed the risk of losing ownership, he refused to authorise such transfers. During the years of the First World War, various government offices, in particular the Ministry of War and the Ministry of the Interior, physically occupied the premises of the Lincei, leading to the risk of the dispersion of the holdings. D'Ovidio devoted himself to preventing such dispersions, removals and thefts with a tireless activity that is evidenced by the number of letters, notices, and reports concerning the movable and immovable property of the Lincei.

Francesco D'Ovidio in 1888, at the age of 40 (source: Zanichelli). He wears glasses, which will no longer appear in later photographs with the loss of sight.

Despite declining health and blindness, he kept travelling (often in company of his brothers-in-law Lefèbvre and Porena) to meet ministers and personalities in Rome who could help him in this conservation work. He also did his utmost to defend the Corsiniana Library, both to guarantee its integrity but also to ensure that it could be open to consultation by scholars.[52]

[52] Raffaella Simili, *Humanists and Presidents: The Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei* (1900-1933).

A few words should also be spent on the Bertolini, the family with whom D'Ovidio became close. Francesco, born in Mantua on 15 June 1836, after completing his legal studies in Padua, went on to study in Vienna where he graduated in Philology following the methods of the German school. He taught for years in grammar schools in Milan, Bergamo, Sondrio, Piacenza and Bologna (from 1867 to 1875). From his wife Carolina he had two daughters, Maria and Giovanna, who married a certain Nuloni and had a daughter named Carolina like his cousin (the name already recurred in the D'Ovidio family in Trivento).

Francesco Bertolini

It was during his years in Bologna that Francesco D'Ovidio met his daughter, Maria Bertolini; he was welcomed into the house and appreciated as a young scholar who was already gaining fame in his discipline. And in Bologna, the two were married.[53]

Bertolini collaborated with the scholastic journal '*Effemeridi della pubblica istruzione*' in Turin, and then began publishing history books such as *Storia primitiva d'Italia* (1860), Storia *di Roma* (1864) and *Storia delle dominazioni barbariche* (1869), which were also very successful as school texts. He became in fact one of the most widely adopted authors in Italian schools: his *Compendio di storia italiana* (1871) was very popular. Over the following years, he wrote many other texts that led him to write the modern history of Italy up to the Risorgimento. The rigorous and colourful narrative style in his then much-appreciated Risorgimento rhetoric made him a popular author in schools of all levels. He published with leading Italian publishers such as Vallardi, Zanichelli, Bemporad, Hoepli, Morano and Paravia. Among popular school writers, even at a high level, he was probably the most successful author of the second half of the 19th century.

From 1870 to 1875 he taught Modern History at the University of Bologna; then Ancient History in Naples (1875-1883). In 1883 he was called (also at the behest of Giosuè Carducci) to the Faculty of Literature and Philosophy in Bologna where he taught Modern History and Philosophy of History until 1909, the date of his death (Bologna, 31

[53] *Filologia e Critica*, XXIII, Salerno, Rome 1998, p. 417.

December 1909). He was also dean of that faculty from 1904.[54] When he died, Giovanni Pascoli delivered a funeral oration at his funeral, calling him Maestro and reiterating his Mantuan origins several times. Pascoli was also bound in affection to his daughter Maria Bertolini, and was in correspondence with D'Ovidio and, above all, with Manfredi Porena (the consistency of the latter epistolary is very important).

Farewell! We will no longer see you among us, serene. And stern, affectionate and dignified. You were our headmaster for life, now your life has ceased. Now we search in vain, some for the old master, some for the old comrade![55]

[54] ACS, Rome, Ministero P.I., Fondo Personale (1860-1880), b. 242; Archivio storico dell'Università di Bologna, Fascicoli dei docenti, f. 14, pos. 4 a; Casa Carducci, Bologna, Corrispondenza, lettere di Francesco Bertolini. SPES, nos. 461 and 933; M. Rosi, *Dizionario del Risorgimento nazionale*, Milan, F. Vallardi, 1930, vol. II, p. 265; obituary in 'Annuario della Regia Università di Bologna', academic year 1911-1912, pp. 129-131. A. Ascenzi, *Tra educazione etico-civile e costruzione dell'identità nazionale. L'insegnamento della storia nelle scuole italiane dell'Ottocento*, Vita e pensiero, Milan 2004, pp. 71-72; 175-177, 187 and *passim*.

[55] The provenance of the newspaper clipping kept in the Pascoli Archive is not marked, but it is probably the *Giornale di Romagna* (segn. P. 6.3.156).

Chapter 6

Main works

As early as his university years, the strands of glottological, linguistic philological and critical interest on which D'Ovidio arranged his studies, which he pursued with constancy and prolificity throughout his academic life, were clearly delineated. On the glottological side, inaugurated by the work developed in his dissertation, he was prolific of works especially between his twenties and forties.

Much appreciated were the l'*Introduzione agli studi neo-latini*. *Spagnolo,* in collaboration with Enrico Monaci (published in Naples in 1879) and the l'*Introduzione agli studi neo-latini*. *Portoghese*, also in collaboration with Monaci (published in Imola in 1881). Apparently, he had also begun drafting a more complete and organic historical grammar, a work that was much needed in Italy. He had mentioned it in his correspondence with Ascoli but had to abandon the project due to the eyesight problems that afflicted him from 1884.[56] Around 1888, others attempted to write this work, Adolfo Mussafia, Giovanni Flechia and Pio Rajna, but the only one capable of tackling and realising this difficult task was D'Ovidio himself.[57] To give an idea of how far this kind of work was beyond the cultural horizon of most

[56] Sergio Lubello, *G. I. Ascoli e la lingua italiana: dal Carteggio con Francesco D'Ovidio*, in, *Il pensiero di Graziadio Isaia Ascoli a cent'anni dalla scomparsa*, Atti Convegno internazionale di Gorizia-Udine, 3-5 May 2007, pp. 235-248. Ibid. p. 242.

Italian scholars of the time, suffice it to say that it would not be completed until 1956 by the German linguist Heinrich Lausberg (1912-1992), *Romanische Sprachwissenschaft I-III*, translated into Italian in 1972.

D'Ovidio's passion for critical analysis combined with philological and linguistic investigation was therefore also applied to the works of Torquato Tasso, Francesco Petrarca, Giacomo Leopardi, Silvio Pellico, as well as Alessandro Manzoni and Dante Alighieri (whom he always read as a great hero of Italianism, less interested in allegorical and mystery aspects). Also unusual were his studies on Edmondo de Amicis (1846-1908), an author he advocated, a proponent of the 'civil religion' of the Risorgimento, but also an author who was absolutely contemporary, having died in 1908, to whom D'Ovidio had dedicated a study, albeit a brief one, as early as 1908. And this shows how the Molise scholar was one of the builders of the canon of Italian authors 'to be studied' at school both for their literary quality but also because they contributed to creating that civil religion of which Giuseppe Mazzini had already spoken. Among the 1800 letters to literary personalities preserved in the Scuola Normale di Pisa Archives, 43 are missives that D'Ovidio exchanged with De Amicis between 1876 and 1908.

Many medieval authors were studied, from Cielo d'Alcamo to Sordello da Goito. To 1879 dates *Il carattere*, *gli amori e le sventure di Torquato Tasso* (Milan, 1875), which includes an overview of the cultural and ideological environment that surrounded Tasso, recounted together with his biographical events. D'Ovidio thus attempts a synthesis of intellectual personality and ideal, psychology, environment, language and inspiration. As is well known, the judgement he gives of the

poet of *Gerusalemme liberata* is rather severe, even too much so, because he tended to project onto Tasso the civil commitment that was proper to the poets of his time and also his own, but which could not have been Tasso's as he was still living in the age of splendid but small courts:

> his soul was not great, he did not live for any great idea or feeling, he did not care or suffer for the triumph of any civil, poetic or moral, or scientific or religious idea.[58]

Beyond this moral judgement, the book is full of fine observations and insights that have been taken up by later scholars. The essays on Tasso and Petrarca were republished together under the title *Studi sul Petrarca e sul Tasso*.[59] A series of essays of different kinds are collected in *Varietà critiche*,[60] where one finds studies on Leopardi that repeat the pattern of many essays on Dante: studies on the relationship between historical data and elements of poetry. Also appearing in the volume are writings on De Amicis, because he appreciated his manzonism. One of the most interesting contributions is probably the one on De Sanctis, which offers a further demonstration of De Sanctis' connection with a method and a personality whose genius he appreciated and admired without, however, renouncing criticism of its limitations or reservations.

The two *Introduzioni s* of 1879 and 1889 have a very technical character and are very thorough on the glottological side (sounds, pronunciation, spelling). Over the years, D'Ovidio also wrote many studies of a philological, linguistic

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[58] *Ibid*, p. 289.
[59] Francesco D'Ovidio, *Opere complete,* Editrice Moderna, XI, Rome 1926.
[60] Francesco D'Ovidio, *Opere complete,* Editrice Moderna, XII, Caserta 1929.

and stylistic nature, especially on Dante and Manzoni, who were definitively included in the canon of the greatest writers. He called them 'the two most sublime peaks in the mountainous chain of national literature'. And it is well known in the critical literature of Italianism that with his works on Dante and Manzoni above all, D'Ovidio provided the model of the critical essay that must speak of content, style but also linguistic and phonological problems.

The contributions collected in *Varietà filologiche. Scritti di filologia classica e di lingua italiana* (Naples, 1874) and the linguistic contributions such as *La lingua dei Promessi sposi nella prima e nella seconda edizione* (Naples, 1880), *Le correzioni ai Promessi sposi e la questione della lingua* (Naples, 1882). With the latter he intervened in the debate that had developed between the linguistic theses of Alessandro Manzoni and those of Graziadio Isaia Ascoli.[61] Some of these works are still read and studied today, almost a century and a half later.

D'Ovidio's position on linguistic matters is moderate. Although he deeply admired Manzoni and his linguistic theories, and also understood Ascoli's remarks, he maintained that it was appropriate to adopt Florentine as the linguistic norm, as Manzoni indicated, but correcting it with the indications that came from the language of literary tradition:

> Florentine must therefore always be held as a living mirror of sincere and fresh Italianism, and only not to be taken as a standard whenever it diverges from literary usage, where this is firmly established; and to be taken as an often-valuable advisor, not as an absolute authority, wherever literary usage fluctuates or is completely lacking.[62]

[61] Found in vol. X of the *Opere complete*, Naples 1874.
[62] *La questione della lingua e Graziadio Ascoli*, in *Studi manzoniani,* in

This position was inspired by the 'practical common sense' that Benedetto Croce recognised in him, even amidst the many severe reservations he formulated about his critical and analytical methodology. D'Ovidio's aptitude for philological-linguistic enquiry was often combined with analyses of a more properly critical nature, and it was here that he garnered criticism of a method that focused, according to Croce, on many secondary aspects. Croce's irony is applied with particular attention and analyticity to D'Ovidio's major essays, those on Dante and Manzoni, both typical of his scientific approach, considered, from Croce onwards, emblematically a sort of condensation of the flaws of the historical school.

A first group of essays on Dante was collected by D'Ovidio in *Studii sulla Divina Commedia* (Milan-Palermo 1901), which is divided into chapters dedicated to the various characters in the poem: to Sordello and Ugolino, where he delves into the relationship between the historical characters and Dante's characters. Much space, for example, is dedicated to Guido da Montefeltro, to whom D'Ovidio focuses on the correct interpretation to be given to certain verses. The character of Guido Cavalcanti is also interpreted to explore, among other things, the reasons for his 'disdain' for Virgil. He studies allegorical and hermeneutical aspects regarding the punishments, the architecture of hell, the three fairs, the date of composition of the *Commedia e altro*. This book earned him the Gautieri Prize from the Academy of Turin and an invitation to teach in Rome, which he refused.

His other works include *Grammatik der italienischen Sprache*, in collaboration with W. Meyer Lübke (published in

Opere, VIII, Napoli-Caserta 1928, p. 333.

Strasbourg in 1905).[63] He also devoted himself to the history of literature, editing an extensive treatise on medieval versification, *Versificazione romanza. Poetica e poesia medioevale* (3 vols.), edited between 1910 and 1920, but combining older, significant studies in the philological and glottological fields.[64] The studies on the origin of Italian verse and metrical uses in medieval Italian poetry are very important and studied at length. Linked to these interests are also the studies on the metrics of Giosuè Carducci's *Odi barbare*, which combined versificatory admiration for the poet's work with a less flattering judgement of its poetic quality. The two knew and esteemed each other, but at a distance and with many mutual reservations. The combative Carducci opposed criticism of Dovidi's work that he considered more 'scientist' than scholar. As is well known, Carducci was, like D'Annunzio and before D'Annunzio, a 'vate' of Italian poetry, and he posed as such. Nothing could be further from D'Ovidio's much more reserved personality.

A new group of essays was published in two volumes under the title *Nuovi studi danteschi* (Milan 1906 and 1907; vols. II-IV of the *Opere complete*, Caserta 1926 and Naples 1932); the first collects contributions on Ugolino, Pier delle Vigne, and the simoniacs; the second is dedicated to *Purgatorio*, again with the attention considered, for example by Croce – but we will see that not everyone agrees with Croce's criticism –

[63] Trad. it. *Grammatica storica della lingua e dei dialetti italiani*, Milan 1906.

[64] Already appeared in the volumes *Versificazione e arte poetica medioevale* (Milan 1910), *Studi romanzi* (Rome 1912), *Sulla più antica versificazione francese* (Rome 1920). The three volumes are now contained in vols. XI-XII-XIII of the *Opere complete*, Naples 1932. Two essays are still considered very important today: *Il ritmo cassinese* (XIII, pp. 1-145) and *Il Contrasto di Cielo D'Alcamo* (*ibid.*, pp. 169-335).

typically dovidian to delve into the minute issues with the intention of:

> to find new things in a subject that has been trodden and rehashed; to choose, among so many opinions, the fairest; to pay homage to truth and to predecessors more or less disowned; to clear the ground of traditional or recent errors; to recognise the grandest or most delicate signs of an art so powerful and exquisite; to contemplate closely the splendour of an intellect so sublime; to feel within oneself the palpitations of so generous a heart; to anticipate the joy that every word about his work will be greeted almost by the universal interest that finds ready anyone who puts the discourse on a serious affair of state, on a fact that moves everyone or excites everyone's curiosity and conversation. (*Preface* to *Studii sulla Divina Commedia*, Milan-Palermo 1901, p. XIII).

When he began his work as lecturer and critic, as populariser and teacher of a new generation of teachers, D'Ovidio had to reckon with the prestige enjoyed by Francesco De Sanctis, his colleague at the university for a few years. From 1872, De Sanctis taught comparative literature at the University of Naples, and the courses he taught were entitled *Manzoni* (1872), *La Scuola cattolico-liberale* (1872-'74), *La scuola democratica* (1873-'74) and *Leopardi* (1875-1876). He had thus defined the perimeter of the canon of contemporary authors to be studied and adopted. He later resigned his professorship and became Minister of Education (1878-1880) in the historical Left and opposed until his death (in 1883) the positivist historical school of which D'Ovidio was the leading exponent at the time, even before Benedetto Croce did so.

De Sanctis was an influential figure, considered the founder of the Italian critical school, he followed a very different method from that of D'Ovidio: a more synthetic,

idealistic, impressionistic method, very attentive to aesthetic notes. D'Ovidio could not refrain from praising De Sanctis, in the first ten years of his activity, but he did not spare criticism of his method, which he judged unscientific, scarcely scrupulous, prone to impressionistic aesthetic analysis and not supported by scientific research. He preferred a solid education, especially in Greek and Latin, a condition for understanding Italian in its prose, grammar and versification, and therefore historical and philological preparation should never be replaced by impressionism. In the *Saggi critici* (1878) he also attempted to methodologically define his way of working by distancing himself from De Sanctis:

> The ideal of whole and perfect criticism can only be this: that on the one hand, every literary fact, learned or researched or discovered, does not remain a brute fact, does not remain the learning or material ascertainment of pure news, but is understood and explained, and recognised in all its intimate relations to the human spirit and soul, that in short the fact is not only known, but understood; and, on the other hand, that the aesthetic judgement, the psychological observation, the synthetic concept, have the widest possible basis of facts and positive notions, result not so much from such intuition or divination, which, if it can be fortunate and give the sign, can also succeed in mere blunders, as from a prudent meditation no less than genial, exercised over an abundant and full mass of facts.[65]

This ideal balance, which considers prudence, scrupulous research and intuition (divination genius), is most present in the early period of D'Ovid's work. In later studies, according to many critics, D'Ovidio struggled to find the synthesis

[65] Francesco D'Ovidio, *Opere complete,* XII, Naples. p. 332-333.

between history and ideology.

One criticism of D'Ovidio is that he loses himself in many minor issues even in his essays on Dante (*L'ultimo volume dantesco*, vol. V delle *Opere complete*, Roma 1926). Issues from which he wanted to derive useful elements for knowledge and understanding of Dante's poetry, sometimes he succeeds, sometimes less so. The same strengths and weaknesses are found in other works such as in *Manzoni e Cervantes* (Naples, 1885) and in *Discussioni manzoniane* (Città di Castello), where he discusses European and Italian influences on Manzoni, focusing on Walter Scott and Carlo Porta. In this volume, moreover, he advocates the adoption of *Promessi sposi* in school curricula, a role that was still debated in those years, and so it is to his credit, too, that the work was actually adopted a few years later officially. This was followed by *Le correzioni ai Promessi sposi e la questione della lingua* (Naples 1882),[66] and finally *Nuovi studi manzoniani* (Milan 1908),[67] which contains, among other things, an interesting philological study on the relationship between the first and second drafts of Manzoni's novel.

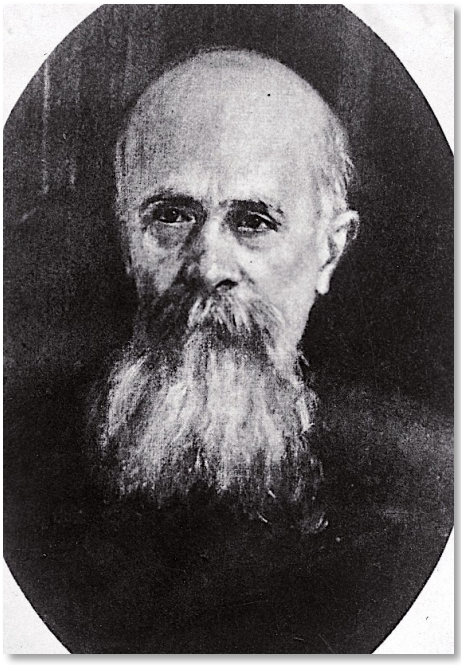
Lastly, in recent critical interventions, D'Ovidio's work, which had been devalued, especially under Croce's influence, at least until the last decades of the last century, is beginning to be re-evaluated. Above all, the first 20 years of his very long career and his dialectological contributions as well as his contributions to Italian philology are being re-evaluated. In examining the remarkable interest of the epistolary exchanges between D'Ovidio and Ascoli, the Italianist Sergio Lubello noted in a 2007 text

[66] Francesco D'Ovidio, *Opere complete,* VIII, Naples 1933.
[67] Francesco D'Ovidio, *Opere complete,* VII, Editrice Moderna, Caserta 1928.

Until the mid-1880s, D'Ovidio, a great hope during his years at the Normale in classical philology, a renowned Dante scholar, and a frequent visitor to Italian literature as an exegete and philologist, was in fact absorbed exclusively by his substantial work for the *Archivio Glottologico Italiano* and had to decline invitations for other collaborations, including the journal directed by Ernesto Monaci. The collaboration for the Archivio Glottologico Italiano is also demanding because of the continuous consultations requested by Ascoli in the field of central-southern dialects, in which D'Ovidio provides, with an important essay on the dialect of Campobasso, a solid work that conforms to Ascoli's canons. The correspondence also documents Ascoli's proposal to Molise, again for the pages of AGI, of a dialectological study on the Teramo dialect, to be eventually extended to all Abruzzi dialects. The 'greedy' work is insistently requested but is not completed [...].[68]

The correspondence was consolidated and the collaboration continued. In 1881, Ascoli thought about the future of his journal, going so far as to imagine entrusting it to the young scholar who had recently joined the academy, but whom he considered his only continuator. He would later confide to one of D'Ovidio's students, Michele Scherillo, that the young man from Campobasso was for him 'like a son of the house'.[69]

[68] Sergio Lubello, *G. I. Ascoli e la lingua italiana: dal Carteggio con Francesco D'Ovidio*, in, *Il pensiero di Graziadio Isaia Ascoli a cent'anni dalla scomparsa*, Atti Convegno internazionale di Gorizia-Udine, 3-5 May 2007, pp. 235-248. Ibid. p. 238.
[69] *Per la Morte del S. C. Senatore prof. Francesco D'Ovidio*, excerpt from Reale Istituto Lombardo di Scienze e Lettere, v. LVIII, fasc. XVI-XX, Milan 1925, p. 880.



Graziadio Isaia Ascoli

In a letter he sent to D'Ovidio with a proposal for the title page of the 10th volume of the Archivio glottologico, one finds the sentence: Archiv. Glottol. Ital. / fondato da G. I. A. or diretto da F. d'Ov. Ed E. M. aggiuntavi la Rivista di Filolog. Rom." (24 July 1881). These communications, Lubello noted, prove that Ascoli had pinned his hopes precisely on D'Ovidio. Ascoli was a scholar of the highest calibre, the inventor of the very term glottology. If the project failed, it was probably due to D'Ovidio's health problems that arose in July 1884, which led to a rarefaction of their relationship and then to a break-up around 1895. Ascoli was succeeded in the direction of the *Archivi* by Carlo Salvioni (1858-1920), who was not entirely

to Ascoli's liking precisely because he was excessively technical and scientific and therefore closed-minded, whereas he would have liked contributions in dialectology, glottology, philology and Romanistics.

Finally, Carlo Salvioni also broke with Ascoli and this lack of openness probably damaged the discipline that could have withstood the impact of Crocian idealism. This concludes what is considered by many to be the best phase of D'Ovidio's work, probably influenced by the serious eye disease that crippled, and not a little, a scholar who was forced to use his eyes as the main instrument of his work, to decipher ancient texts, manuscripts and incunabula: it was for this reason that he probably privileged literary and Dantean criticism over linguistic investigations.

This makes the Molise scholar's strength of character even more heroic. Alongside the most important works dedicated to Dante and Manzoni above all, D'Ovidio continued to study dialectology, curious to discover what Osco, Umbrian, Sabellian, Messapic, Celtic and even Etruscan was hidden in Italian dialects. He published a series of academic memoirs on this throughout the 1890s and into the first decade of the 20th century, along with full-fledged essays such as *Reliquie probabili e possibili degli antichi dialetti italici* (1902).[70]

[70] *Postilla sui nomi locali*, in *Rendiconti dei Lincei* (1994); *Talento negli Atti della regia Accademia di Napoli* (1997); *Il Giurì e il Vocabolario* in *Note etimologiche* 1899, *Due noterelle etimologiche*, 1911; il *Ritmo Cassinese* in *Studi Romanzi* by E. Monaci (1912); *Glossario del poema del Cid* (1904) and more.

A separate place in Dovidi's production is occupied by the volume *Rimpianti* (Milan-Palermo-Naples 1903), later doubled by a second volume and published under the general title of *Rimpianti vecchi e nuovi* (final edition 1929-1930), which effectively documents the fundamentally moderate and conservative inspiration of his socio-political and academic presence.[71]

The title *Rimpianti (Regrets) is* significant of a certain melancholy that runs throughout the work, which carries the pain of the passage of time and the loss of so many men and friends.

[71] Francesco D'Ovidio, *Opere complete*, *Rimpianti vecchi e nuovi,* XIV, Caserta 1929-1930.

These are portraits of contemporary personalities to whom he felt, for different reasons, close, such as Ruggero Bonghi, Achille Sannia, Silvio Spaventa, Francesco De Sanctis, Niccolò Tommaseo, Giosuè Carducci, Luigi Tosti, Ippolito Amicarelli, Eugenio Torelli Viollier, etc., whose significant traits he outlines in relation to the Risorgimento and post-unification period, in the wake of regret for a past more substantiated by idealistic reasons than the present. The volume also contains a series of occasional writings, already published in magazines and newspapers, on various political, cultural and social topics. It is significant that in the approximately 1,000 pages of the two volumes, there is no space for personal memoirs unless they are connected to work and studies.

Among the non-specialist publications that D'Ovidio was a contributor to, contributions that make up the bulk of the texts

poured into *Rimpianti*, we should mention, among others, *La Perseveranza*, *Corriere della sera*, *Il Giornale d'Italia*, *Nuova Antologia*, *Rassegna italiana*, *Fanfulla della domenica*, as evidence of his curiosity, his tendency to stay up-to-date on every cultural issue, and the breadth of his interests. His articles appealed to readers: his culture was profound, but he freed himself, in these types of pieces, from any academic seriousness, and they became lively although always with elegant, readable, profound prose, as in his major production. He became a very present figure in Italian cultural debates for over 40 years. He was considered a master of life and of the civil, cultural and moral formation of the consciences of young Italians in the newly united nation. These hundreds and hundreds of articles have never been collected in a volume, and may hold many surprises for curious readers.

Chapter 7

Enrico D'Ovidio

Very little is known about Angela, known as Angiolina D'Ovidio, Francesco's sister, while the biography of Enrico D'Ovidio is much better known. The latter was the eldest of the D'Ovidio brothers. Born in 1843 in Campobasso, he completed his lower education and high school at the Regio Collegio Sannitico. He completed his studies in Naples where he arrived at the age of 15, with his family, probably at the same high school as his brother. Being inclined towards scientific subjects and mathematics, he did not have many opportunities to study them in depth in Naples at that time. He decided to complete his high school studies at Achille Sannia's private Studio, with the intention of preparing himself for the competition for admission to the Scuola di Applicazione Ponti e Strade, the prestigious, ancient Neapolitan engineering school.[72] The Sannia Studio was located next to the premises of the *Società Partenopea*, at 33 Via dei Guantai, and was very well frequented. Sannia became related to the D'Ovidio family when he married Angiolina D'Ovidio in 1860, which makes us realise that Angela, this is her real name, must have been the eldest of the three siblings, born around 1840.[73] From the two were born Elvira (27 December

[72] Achille Sannia's degree of kinship as the uncle of Enrico and Francesco (also reported in the Treccani Institute's *Biographical Dictionary of Italians* under the entry *D'Ovidio Enrico*) is incorrect: the Sannia was both cousin and brother-in-law of the D'Ovidio, not nephew.

[73] His name is not present in the historical archives of the municipality of Trivento.

1860), Romilda (3 March 1863), and Achille (1875), a mathematician, of whom we shall speak, in the San Giuseppe district, which gives us an indication of where Francesco D'Ovidio also lived in the early years of his Neapolitan stay, given that the families were close.

Enrico attended courses for some time, but then preferred to devote himself to scientific research and pure mathematics, attracted by the lectures of Giuseppe Battaglini, Fortunato Padula and Emanuele Fergola. He pursued studies in Algebra and Geometry and published his first research in the *Giornale di matematiche ad uso degli studenti delle Università italiane*, edited by Giuseppe Battaglini (1826-1894) whom Enrico helped to found. This was an important organ of scientific information that soon saw the collaboration of important mathematicians and physicists. He held teaching positions at the Royal Liceo Principe Umberto in Naples and at the Naval School, then succeeded Sannia in the direction of his private studio. Of Sannia, who was related to the D'Ovidio family, his brother-in-law Francesco wrote a portrait when he died on 6 February 1892. In the short memorial text, he recalls that he was originally from Morcone, where he was born in 1822, and had moved to follow his brother Vincenzo. He had political problems when his opposition to the Bourbon Kingdom was clear, especially in 1848; despite this, he graduated from the Regia Scuola di Ponti e Strade where he came first among 40 students. He taught there for a few years and then, when public schools flourished in Naples, opened the Studio Sannia, which was very successful from 1855 to 1865, when its activities were absorbed by the Official Course of Applications of Descriptive Geometry in the School for Engineers.

In his studio and later in the academic institution in which he was placed, Achille Sannia taught all mathematical disciplines, algebra and geometry, and fascinated many pupils with the subject,

the most famous of whom was Enrico D'Ovidio. Generous, committed to the Historic Right party in Naples' City Hall, a senator since 1890, he refused the directorship of the Scuola di Ponti e Strade and left very few writings. When he died of pneumonia in 1892, his last word was... *The Parallels*![74] Until the last moment of his life, he had been thinking about mathematics and geometry.

In 1868, Enrico D'Ovidio was awarded an *honorary* degree by the Faculty of Science of the University of Naples with a dispensation from examinations permitted by a recently passed law. The new Italy needed teachers and, in those years, recruited them from among the best on merit without too much regard for the formalities of academic qualifications. This allowed Enrico to begin an academic career that was otherwise precluded. In 1872, he competed for the chair of Complementary Algebra and Analytical Geometry at the University of Turin and won. When he moved to the subalpine city, he did not plan to settle permanently, but he did when he added Higher Geometry and Higher Analysis to his first teaching post. In 1873, he married Maria Bonacossa in Turin. There he would livethe rest of his life teaching until 1918. Certainly in that year Francesco D'Ovidio, Angelina and Achille Sannia and Ernesto's parents attended the wedding party in Turin.

Bonacossa belonged to a family of doctors, a branch of the Lombard Bonacossa family of Sondrio, of the new nobility of the Kingdom. According to deciphered biographical facts, she appears to have been the daughter of the luminary of psychiatry, professor of psychiatry at the Subalpine University, director of the Turin Asylum and member of the Higher Council of Education,

[74] Francesco D'Ovidio, *Rimpianti vecchi e nuovi,* II, Editrice Moderna, Caserta 1930, pp. 185-192.

Giovanni Stefano Bonacossa (1804-1878).[75] He is considered one of the founders of modern psychiatry in Italy. From his wife Maria, Enrico had two daughters, Laura and Pia.

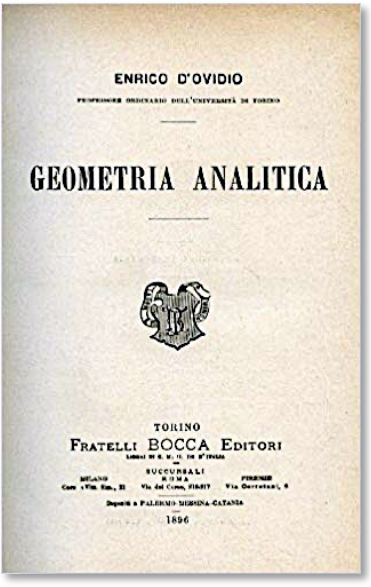
In 1879 Enrico was appointed Dean of the Faculty of Science (1879-1881 and 1893-1907) and then Rector of the University of Turin from 1880 to 1885. Among other merits, he is credited with founding an important Italian mathematical school, with many followings. His most important pupil was Corrado Segre (1863-1924), founder of the Italian school of algebraic geometry. His colleague and friend was the mathematician and engineer Francesco Faà di Bruno (1825-1888), later beatified, and considered one of Turin's most important social saints.

His scientific contributions mainly concerned the study of Euclidean and non-Euclidean projective metrics, with many works, crowned by *Le funzioni metriche fondamentali negli spazi di quante si vogliano dimensioni e di curvatura costante in Atti della Regia Accademia dei Lincei* (1876). In 1906, on the direct commission of Minister Giovanni Giolitti, he had an even more prestigious appointment: he organised and then founded the Politecnico di Torino, of which he became director, a position he held continuously from 1906 to 1922. His role in Turin is similar to that of his brother in Naples: both are directors and university 'barons' in the broadest sense of the term, because they recruit and condition careers and turnover. But they are considered above all masters by many of their pupils who, over the years, will not fail to give the one and the other even emotional memories.

Enrico D'Ovidio devoted himself to the study of algebraic forms, won prizes, wrote many contributions and formed an entire

[75] There was only one Bonacossa family in Turin at that time (today there are 6, all descendants of the one from Sondrio). Maria's family was connected to the academic world, so it is unlikely to be another family.

generation of mathematicians that would prove to be very important for future developments. When he retired in 1918, the volume *Scritti matematici offerti ad Enrico D'Ovidio in occasione del suo LXXV genetliaco* (Turin, Bocca, 1918) was dedicated to him. His pupils included some of the most brilliant Italian mathematicians of the time, such as the aforementioned Corrado Segre, Giuseppe Peano (1858-1932), Guido Castelnuovo (1865-1952), Francesco Severi (1879-1961), Francesco Gerbaldi (1858-1934), Gino Loria (1862-1954) and also Gustavo Sannia (1875-1930), D'Ovidio's nephew because he was the son of his sister Angiolina. These students would go on to found the main Italian mathematical schools.[76]


ENRICO D'OVIDIO

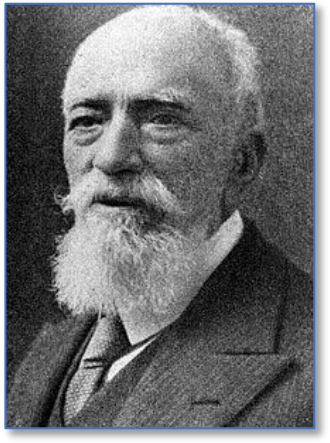
GEOMETRIA ANALITICA

TORINO
FRATELLI BOCCA EDITORI
1896

[76] Francesco Tricomi, S. v. *Sannia Gustavo*, Matematici italiani del primo secolo dello Stato unitario italiano, Accademia delle Scienze di Torino, Classe delle Scienze matematiche e naturali, IV v. I, Torino 1962.

Enrico was also director of the Special Library of Mathematics (1883-1906) and director of the Polytechnic (1906-1922), a member of the Turin Academy of Sciences and later its president (1902-1910). In 1892 he joined the Higher Council of Public Education and was appointed Senator of the Kingdom in 1905. He was also a member of the Accademia dei Lincei in Rome and the Accademia delle Arti e dei Mestieri in Naples.

Their daughter Laura (1880-1979) married Count Federico Petiva of Sordevolo (1855-1946) in 1909, from a wealthy family of nobles and industrialists who were benefactors of the Cottolengo and other Turin institutions. The marriage took place almost simultaneously with that of cousin Elvira but the ceremonies and celebrations did not coincide: it was difficult to reconcile Elvira's Neapolitan entourage with Laura's Biellese one. The cousins lived almost a thousand kilometres apart and knew each other little. Later on, Laura, who always called herself Petiva D'Ovidio, founded a famous training school for nurses, the Laura Petiva D'Ovidio School in Biella, initially a boarding school with a boarding school, endowing it with 200,000 lire in 1938. This became one of the largest and most important training schools for nurses in the country.



Enrico D'Ovidio

Shortly after Elvira's and her cousin Laura's marriage, Maria Bertolini's father, Francesco, who until the very end had edited a successful series of historical handouts for the publisher Vallardi, with illustrations by Lodovico Pogliaghi (1857-1950), died in Bologna on 31 December 1909.

The other daughter, Pia, was married a few months later, in 1910, to engineer Carlo Andreoni (1884-1970), active in the field of electricity production and distribution, manager of the Società Piemontese Anonima Centrale di Elettricità, partner in the Rimini Electricity Company, designer and director.[77]

Gustavo Sannia, mathematician,
grandson of the D'Ovidio brothers.

[77] *Ars et Labor, rivista mensile illustrata*, Turin 1910, p. 466. Carlo Andreoni lived at 35 Corso Peschiera in Turin.

Over the years, Enrico was many times in Biella, where he had a large house that belonged to his wife's family and where he participated in the social activities of the local Club Alpino Italiano. Enrico D'Ovidio died in his nineties in March 1933 and was buried in Biella (there is no record of him being buried in Turin or Naples). Federico Petiva and his wife Laura are buried in Biella's Pantheon, the Monumental Cemetery of the Sanctuary of Oropa, in the tomb built by Federico for his father Pietro who died in 1909.[78]

[78] *Rivista Biellese*, September-October 1953, V, p. 43. In 1929 a scholarship was named 'to the memory' of Petiva. In *Annuario degli istituti medi mediate pareggiati e privati del biellese* (1930). In Luisa Bocchietto - Mario Coda - Carlo Gavazzi, *L'altra Oropa. Guida al cimitero monumentale del Santuario,* Amministrazione del Santuario di Oropa, Oropa 2006.

Chapter 8

D'Ovidio House

The D'Ovidio family first lived in a house in Vomero, the location of which is indicated in the letters simply as 'Vomero, Naples'. In fact, until May 1885, when Mayor Nicola Amore laid the foundation stone for the construction of the Nuovo Rione Vomero, it was little more than a village, being referred to at the time as a 'rural village'. So, Francesco D'Ovidio did not need to write the name of a street in the letters he had sent: evidently there were few inhabitants and a postman could easily find his home. We know that Francesco's parents, Pasquale and Francesca, lived in the same place. Just as work began on the new neighbourhood, the couple, with their two daughters, moved to Largo, then Piazzale, Latilla.

And here they lived for 40 years. This house appears here and there in the memoirs of the time and in the lively network of correspondence that enveloped Francesco, Maria, Elvira, Carolina and their fiancés, later husbands. And then the nieces and nephews and the daughters of his brother Enrico, Pia and Laura who sometimes, but increasingly rarely after their marriages, took the steamer from Genoa to Naples.

Terrace of the D'Ovidio house.
The Nanny with her Grandchildren (1915).

It was a large house, in the city centre, where students, friends, and fellow professors were frequently received. Some glimpses appear in old photographs from the 1910s, where the D'Ovidio grandchildren are held in the arms of little girls, and large terraces can be seen, a kind of open pergola, a terrace overlooking the front of Largo Latilla (now D'Ovidio), named for being in the vicinity of Palazzo Latilla where opera composer Gaetano Latilla (1711-1788) had lived. Recent photographs show us that the conformation of that house, which must have been large, has remained the same.

Terrace of the D'Ovidio house overlooking Largo Latilla.

Crowded Sunday lunches were organised there, Christmas lunches, and every festivity became an occasion for Neapolitan conviviality, despite the fact that neither D'Ovidio – who had, according to his friends, taken something Tuscan – nor the lombard Maria were Neapolitans. A large nativity scene was set up with statuettes taken from the not too distant street of San Gregorio Armeno and New Year's Eve was celebrated with endless tables.

Very close to today's Piazza 7 September where the Palazzo Doria D'Angri stands, but located in a quiet little square, yesterday Largo Latilla today Piazza D'Ovidio, the doorway bears a plaque placed by the municipality on the four-storey building with its narrow balconies.

Every morning, supported by someone over the past 20

years, Francesco would walk to the nearby university or to Via Mezzocannone to the National Society. Not religious, although he had many friends among the religious, not practising, except for reasons of convenience, he was habitual in his rounds of cafés, newsagents, bookshops, friends in the area.

He had a quiet study, where he wrote and studied, always assisted by someone or alone, thinking. When he was not preparing lectures or writing scientific articles – always with the hand of others – he continued to collaborate with newspapers and news magazines, which were widely read at the time. These collaborations had expanded by the turn of the century. He wrote for the *Perseveranza*, the *Corriere della Sera* (he was a friend of the founder Eugenio Torelli Viollier), the *Giornale d'Italia*, the *Mattino* di Napoli and the *Nuova Antologia*, not to mention countless literary sheets and Molise newspapers that asked him for articles as a fellow citizen. In the transition between the end of the century and the beginning of the 20th century, his Neapolitan salon was, with that of Benedetto Croce – a real Circolo founded in 1876 – the main one in the former Bourbon capital.

D'Ovidio's contacts with the world of both culture and politics were at the highest level. A photograph shows him in friendly company, sitting at a coffee table, with Costantino Nigra (1828-1907), one of the most powerful agents of the Italian Revolution and Risorgimento as well as a university lecturer and politician. He had been a philologist and scholar of distinction, later devoting himself mainly to a diplomatic career. The photograph is taken in 1906 in San Pellegrino Terme and immortalises the last occasion on which the two men saw each other under normal circumstances; they were bound by a deep friendship and esteem, even though they

continued to call each other "lei".[79] Nigra, in fact, died the following year, in 1907, and D'Ovidio managed to reach him in Rapallo shortly before his death. He had visited him in the Ligurian town, where he was in bed with a heart ailment, and met him on 30 June, a day before his death on 1 July. Of his colleague and friend, D'Ovidio left a portrait in a text from November 1907 read at the Accademia dei Lincei.[80]

If the activities of the son-in-law Porena are known, more secret is that of the other son-in-law, Carlo Ernesto Lefèbvre, thanks to whose marriage to Elvira the dynasty – the Lefèbvre were a dynasty – continued (to the great sorrow of the parents, Carolina was unable to have children). Carlo Ernesto was the least educated of the family, and through no fault of his own: he had been practically abandoned by his father while the figure of his mother is hardly known except by name: Antoinette Candida. He tried through work and independent study to make up for the education he had not been given. From articles, or sketches, in the newspapers of the time, we discover that for a long time he and his wife Elvira were D'Ovidio's eyes on his walks along the nearby Via Toledo. The young man was active and involved, especially after his marriage, in the social life of the city and, together with his wife, as an assiduous spectator of theatrical performances and operas set to music.

As for Francesco and Maria's youngest daughter, Elvira, she was a graceful and cultured woman who breathed the

[79] The little-known photograph was provided by Professor Francesco D'Ovidio Lefèbvre.

[80] *Costantino Nigra*. *Commemorazione*, letta il 17 novembre 1907 alla R. Accademia dei Lincei, in *Rimpianti vecchi e nuovi*, I, Editrice Moderna, Caserta 1929, pp 305-316. The first volume was originally published in 1902.

culture of the home, perhaps taking it more from her mother, also a historian's daughter, than from her father's narrow positivism. Even the religious attitude was taken more from her than from her father. There are several photos of her from the period of her engagement, at first secret and then overt, to Carlo Ernesto. Assiduous was her frequentation of Matilde Serao (1856-1927), a friend of her mother and father (she was their age), and testified by numerous notes.

A photograph of 27-year-old Lefèbvre at the 'dearest' Porena is dated 10 June 1905: the contacts of this young man from a noble family with the D'Ovidio family were already close then, and probably dated back to the very first years of

his arrival in Naples after his father's recognition.[81] The *trait d'union* was certainly Flavia Lefèbvre, Marquise of Casafuerte (1852-1905) married to Marquis Pedro Aycuna y Toledo of Casafuerte (1847-1891) and friend of Matilde Serao and Maria Bertolini. We have evidence of continuous acquaintanceship between Flavia and one and the other of the other two women, but it is also probable that the three of them were all together. Moreover, Francesco D'Ovidio knew the two founders of *Il Mattino,* Serao, in turn, and also Edoardo Scarfoglio, her husband, as a contributor to the newspaper.

Dating from the time when Maria was still a young lady is the photograph in which she is portrayed dressed as a Geisha. The playful photograph dates from 1905, while the dedication written twenty years later is from 1925. A later annotation recalls those happy moments. He rededicated that evidently long-lost and then rediscovered photograph to his children who were now able to read. So says the 1925 dedication:

To my children, this playful portrait from twenty years ago, when I was still unaware of the anxieties and power of maternal love.
Mum.

The two daughters had very different temperaments: Elvira, more calm and poised, who was to have a happy married life, gladdened by three children; her sister Carolina, more restless, almost tormented, at first, called by the diminutive 'Lippina', but later quieter and closer to her husband.

[81] Lefèbvre D'Ovidio Private Archive, via del Nuoto-Roma. Uncatalogued.

Francesco D'Ovidio turning 40.

Chapter 9

Giosuè Carducci

Interesting, in order to have a complete picture of the very important role played by Francesco D'Ovidio in the Italian culture of the period around 1870-1920, also because of Manzoni's role in prose, is a reconnaissance of his relationship with Giosuè Carducci, the first 'vate' of modern Italian culture, who was to be succeeded, and not so ideally, first by Giovanni Pascoli and then Gabriele D'Annunzio, the former separated by 20 years from Carducci and the latter by 28. Carducci had had an ideological itinerary initially, only initially, similar to that of D'Ovidio but he was a passionate advocate of the unification of Italy, of an even republican Risorgimento. He was a defender of even the harshest and most violent aspects of it, especially in the anti-religious repressions; much *harsher* and more polemical than D'Ovidio: suffice it to recall *L'inno a satana* of 1863, and his positions as an intransigent Freemason, his sympathies for French socialists, even for the most revolutionary and maximalist among them. These were all positions that were never held by the milder D'Ovidio, a pure man of letters. Then, Carducci had passed through a moderatism that had also brought him closer to the Monarchy, starting from initial republican positions. D'Ovidio, on the other hand, had never been a republican or even a Mazzinian. His Risorgimento fervours, as a man of letters and not as a conspirator, were recounted by him and were milder and more reasonable.

Carducci began to moderate a few years later when, in 1860, he won the chair of Italian Eloquence, or as it would later be called, Italian Literature at the University of Bologna, a position he held until 1904. When D'Ovidio contacted him, the moderate phase in Carducci's life was already advanced. They first contacted each other by correspondence in 1872 when Carducci was already famous and an academic and they continued to write to each other until 1903. So, what was the relationship between the two?

On 17 February 1907, D'Ovidio had the task of commemorating the poet at the Accademia dei Lincei in Palazzo Corsini in Rome at a session in which his master Ascoli, who had recently died, was also celebrated. Carducci had died on 16 February, and Ascoli, his master, about three weeks earlier (21 January). Alberto Brambilla in his *Appunti sul carteggio Carducci-D'Ovidio* comments on the ambivalence of this celebration, which testifies to the cautious friendship, the guarded closeness, that had characterised his men's relationship. Here is part of D'Ovidio's commemoration:

Ascoli's death is a mourning for the great family of the world's scientists, Carducci's is more properly a mourning for the nation: which has lost its greatest living poet, the target of reverence and admiration, as luminous proofs of this are, even for foreigners.

And so, since his glory far transcends the boundaries that enclose men of science, I will not, at this solemn hour, speak to you about the poet: all the more so since his poetry, a most powerful expression of the most heated passions of recent times, still seems to be fleeing the serene judgement of history, the only one that is lawful in this courtroom.

To define his power as a critic and his place among the other critics of our age and abroad, to scrutinise the extent to which the impetus of his passion and his extraordinary originality as a poet

served him in his work as a critic, would not be appropriate here today.[82]

He points out, Brambilla, how this commemoration comes at the end of the one dedicated to Ascoli, which was therefore already considerably shorter in length, and furthermore contained a number of softeners cleverly inserted into a laudatory discourse. The poet Carducci was indeed the nation's greatest poet, but he had been the greatest 'living poet', according to D'Ovidio's diction, who could therefore yield to comparisons with other future poets; not only that, the final judgement on the value of Carducci's work was left to History, to the future. Not he, D'Ovidio, took the trouble to celebrate Carducci as an eternal poet, for all time. It was, in short, Carducci's work so imbued with the 'passions' of contemporary events that, in the end, 'the members of the Accademia Lincea, devoted to History and Science, could do nothing but bow to the laws of time'. Precisely because they were devoted to the laws of time, they could have changed their minds A masterpiece of the said and unsaid, then.

Not only that, D'Ovidio recalled, almost en passant, that Carducci had not been admitted to the Accademia dei Lincei. After all, the Molise man here separated the 'scientists' from the querulous poets who had their own academies. The figure of Carducci was therefore, it must be said, skilfully 'dimmed' or at least put in brackets, and even in the final part of the speech, where he is praised as a poet, D'Ovidio still resorts to forms that are 'obsequious on the surface, but in substance, if not limiting, at least still inviting a suspension of judgement'.[83]

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[82] Francesco D'Ovidio, *Commemorazione dei soci Graziadio Ascoli e Giosuè Carducci*, Regia Accademia dei Lincei, XVI, 1907, pp. 31-46.
[83] Alberto Brambilla, *Appunti sul carteggio Carducci-D'Ovidio*, "Annali di

He left the judgement to posterity who would shortly afterwards, even before the emergence of the avant-garde, criticise Carducci and his conception of poetry.

As for D'Ovidio, the appeal to await the judgement of history seems to Brambilla like an 'examination of conscience of the Molise critic and, at the same time, the synthesis of much of his work': the discovery of Manzoni to whose consecration as poet and prose writer he had successfully dedicated himself. And this was, beyond D'Ovidio's biographical data, 'concrete proof of the process of the foundation of a culture that was finally taking on national dimensions'.[84] His training in Pisa and his precocious Manzonism were making their mark abroad.[85] And already from his earliest trials, as we know, D'Ovidio was projected into an international dimension, as demonstrated by his critical analysis of Bömer's pamphlet, his interventions on the Italian language (1868) and the l'*Appendice alla relazione* (1869). This love culminated in an attempt to reach the great Lombard, who, however, did not respond. [86]

Already in 1871 he had contacted Carducci with a first obsequious letter (9 January 1871), then with a second but colder one and as equals. In the meantime it had happened that D'Ovidio had become a 'colleague', and he had learned that Carducci had tried to hinder his career, as he explained in a letter to Pio Rajna:

Storia della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa" - Classe di Lettere e Filosofia, Serie III, vo. 20, no. 1 (1990), pp. 287-317. Ibid, p. 288.

[84] *Ibid*, p. 289.

[85] Brambilla again recalls how Father Gaetano Bernardi (*Rimpianti vecchi e nuovi,* v. I, Caserta, 1929, pp. 63-87) may have been converted to Manzonism at the lyceum, but also Alfonso Casanova and the presence of various Manzonians in Naples, *Ibidem*, 3n.

[86] Braidense National Library, *Carteggio Manzoni*, B. XXV, 42/1.

I was prepared by Gandino and Bertolini to apply to the Faculty of Letters in Bologna for the comparative languages and literatures post that has been missing since Tèza went to Pisa. She declared herself benevolent to a good part of the faculty, the most serious and honest. I was more or less opposed by Rocchi, Pelliccioni, Regaldi, and above all Carducci and Siciliani. The rascalities committed by the latter two, the envy and malice they have explained, the infamies they have said about me are beyond belief.[87]

So, 'bricconate' and 'infamie' in 1872. Moreover, during the period of the quarrel between D'Ovidio and Chiarini over Puccianti's anthology, mentioned above, Carducci sided, albeit privately, with Chiarini and perhaps for this reason, out of this irritation, Carducci boycotted D'Ovidio's candidature as professor in Bologna.[88]

Incidentally, we can see that by this date, D'Ovidio already knew Bertolini and thus, certainly, his daughter. By the middle of the decade, in 1875, D'Ovidio had already been appointed lecturer in Comparative History of Neo-Latin Languages and Literatures, a discipline that could be shaped according to the teacher's interests and could therefore address Carducci as an equal. He also wanted to gain his support to make the acceptance of a discipline viewed as foreign, as 'German', more certain: Romance philology. The volume with the 'desanctisian' title *Saggi critici* of 1879 contains a *Preface* that we have already seen in part; here, we can add that D'Ovidio showed pride in practising a 'scientific' and 'Germanic' discipline that was viewed with suspicion precisely because of

[87] *Ibid*, p. 292.
[88] Nassi Francesca, *Tra manzonismo e glottologia: Francesco D'Ovidio e la questione della lingua,* "Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa. Classe di Lettere e Filosofia, Serie III, v. 23, n. 1 (1993), pp. 275-318. Ibid, pp. 296-296.

this. After all, Italy had literary traditions that were not inferior, indeed superior to German ones. Was it therefore subservience? No, wrote D'Ovidio in response to a concern that - Brambilla writes - "even if extended to scholars from all over Italy, was however, above all justified within the Neapolitan world [...] and had its polemical target in the worn-out literary patriotism of which Luigi Settembrini, who died in 1876, was perhaps the most authoritative representative. In 1875, Settembrini had targeted D'Ovidio himself: 'it is not necessary for the rest of us to be easy to accept everything that comes to us from foreigners, and to despise our own things as we have done so far, who first admired France and now Germany' (*Le origini, Dialogo tra Geppino e il Nonno*, in Giornale napoletano di filosofia e lettere, scienze morali e politiche, 1875). This tirade was criticised by D'Ovidio in a letter to the editor of the journal, Francesco Fiorentino: "Certainly our science has nothing to fear from the assaults of a man of such a small mind as the good Settembrini. But I think of the evil that those rants full of crass ignorance and wonderful levity can necessarily bring to the young".[89]

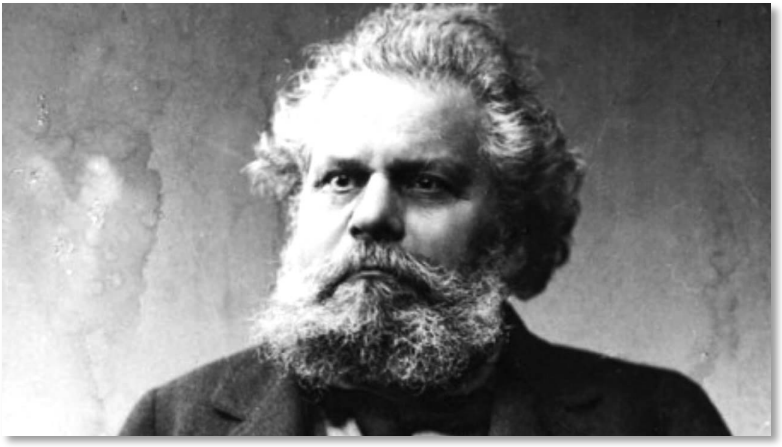
As for the defence of his science in the Preface to the essays, D'Ovidio, in search of a 'whole criticism' that would harmonise erudite research, history and philology, wrote

> The fear of Germanism, in every order of study, is increasingly giving way even in this last corner of Italy, where it is now understood that our great esteem and envy for the felicitous conditions of philological and historical studies in Germany is never accompanied by the hope and faith of being able to achieve, emulate, and even partly surpass, the people who make their mark where the

[89]Archivio Scuola Normale di Pisa, *Carteggio fiorentino,* Busta B 3, cited in Brambilla, p. 294.

antagonists, by proclaiming, for the last reason, that our youth cannot stand up to the work as well as foreign youth, implicitly prove the indefectible inferiority of our fatherland.[90]

Even southerners, Italians and Neapolitans, therefore, were able to hold their own with 'erudite and meticulous research' and not just 'aesthetic contemplations' and 'rapid synthetic flights'.[91] Here was D'Ovidio's 'whole criticism' capable of combining 'northern patience with southern genius, the erudition of a Muratori with Vico's philosophy'.[92] D'Ovidio's entire history shows this intention. The very titles of D'Ovidio's critical essays referred back to De Sanctis but contained purely 'Germanic' or Pisan studies, that is, full of the rigour of D'Ancona's school.



With Giosuè Carducci, D'Ovidio had a 30-year relationship, at first stormy and then cordial and of mutual collaboration.

[90] Francesco D'Ovidio, *Saggi critici*, Morano, Naples, p. IX.
[91] *Ibid*, p. XII.
[92] Alberto Brambilla, op. cit, p. 295.

Around 1878, relations between Carducci and D'Ovidio had become good, two cordial pen pals; they were colleagues, after all. They lived far apart, one in Bologna and the other in Naples and could not 'step on each other's toes' even though we can guess from the letters that they had occasion to meet during each other's travels. The letters are cordial, of a professional cordiality, of fruitful collaboration between two types of literati: the philologist and the master of language and style; but they also contain exchanges on methodology.[93] On 7 March 1881, he asked for a positive vote from Carducci to have Ernesto Monaci promoted to full professor, with whom D'Ovidio himself had inaugurated a series of manuals on the introduction to Neo-Latin studies, manuals that were much appreciated.[94]

The two also agreed on D'Ovidio's moderatism with respect to the Manzonian question, as evidenced by the postcard sent by Carducci to D'Ovidio on 10 March 1881.[95] Afterwards Carducci was accused of 'manzonicide' for having given little space to *Promessi sposi* in the Italian readings edited with Ugo Brilli, printed for Zanichelli in 1884. Carducci showed his approval of the compulsory reading of Manzoni's novel only in the last class of high schools on condition that it was not at the expense of other readings.[96] And D'Ovidio was conciliatory on the question of language, as in his youthful years, to build a bridge 'between the two opposing doctrines of Ascoli and Manzoni'. D'Ovidio, after all, agreed with Carducci

[93] *D'Ovidio a Carducci*, 24 January 1874; D'Ovidio *a Carducci*, 28 April 1878; *D'Ovidio a Carducci*, 18 August 1879. In Brambilla, *op. cit*. pp. 296-297.
[94] *Ibid*, p. 300.
[95] *Ibid*, p. 300-301.
[96] *Ibid*, pp. 302-303.

that Manzoni's text was more suitable for third classes.[97] When Carducci founded the Scholastic Library of Italian Classics he wanted D'Ovidio to do the commentary, which D'Ovidio could not do because of many commitments.[98]

In 1897, a letter from D'Ovidio to Carducci proves that the latter had offered Carducci to write a biography of Manzoni (15 June 1897), an invitation that D'Ovidio had to decline.[99] Carducci evidently, and the proof is in other writings, did not want to measure himself against Manzoni but would have liked to write a biography of Leopardi. The two would talk again in the following years, over matters of language, for advice Carducci requested from D'Ovidio on Leopardi. The last letter is dated 1903 and shows a certain 'defence' and 'deference' by Carducci towards the fierce master of the new philology.[100]

Also interesting is the different attitude of the two men towards the Italian army's adventures in Africa: Carducci dreamed of a rematch of Adua, D'Ovidio was more cautious. On 8 March 1896, he wrote an open letter to Carducci urging him to moderation: *Francesco D'Ovidio, Dopo Adua e Giosuè Carducci*, in *Il Mattino* (8 March 1896).[101] Between 1896 and 1897, the two move from 'she' to 'you'. The last one is even touching: Carducci could no longer use his own hand to write and, knowing D'Ovidio's blindness, wrote to him in response to one of D'Ovidio's about their respective ills:

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[97] *Ibid*, p. 305.
[98] *Ibid*, pp. 306-307.
[99] *Ibid*, pp. 308-309.
[100] Carducci Letters, 5 July 1903 cit. XXI, pp. 125-126.
[101] Francesco D'Ovidio, *Rimpianti vecchi* e *Nuovi*, cit., pp. 317-326.

Naples 29 December 1899

Dear D'Ovidio, I thank you from the bottom of my heart and embrace you. I am not yet master of myself, for I cannot dispose of my right hand and write, and it is convenient for me to use the hand of others. I hope you are well up there. Keep your benevolence for me. Farewell. Yours affectionately, Giosuè Carducci.

Dear Carducci,

I thank you for your loving postcard. I did not wish for it because I wished and wish that you would spare yourself as much as possible and not lose even a minute of your time because of me.

I am only writing to tell you that I too know too well, and you know it, the heartbreak of not being able (which is the same as not having to) use one's hand in writing. But I assure you that you get used to it, too, and I urge you not to grieve over it, all the more so as it will be entirely transitory for you. Happy New Year and heartfelt farewell. Yours affectionately, F. D'Ovidio.[102]

The last missive between the two is dated 5 July 1903, and is a courtesy letter, a thank you for a bibliographical entry.

On 3 December 1905, he was appointed senator, only a few months after the similar appointment conferred on his brother Enrico. In previous years he had been offered a candidacy in the Liberal Party, in Crispi's Destra (Right), but he always turned it down as he did not consider himself fit for politics.

In the Senate, he maintained a conservative political position, in keeping with the tradition of the historical Right that was his own, in a perspective, however, of adherence to a socio-cultural area rather than to a precise political or party line. It is significant that he never wanted to miss the work of the Senate, obviously in the voting sessions. In fact, he was

[102] Brambilla, cit. pp. 316-318.

'assiduous in the work of the high chamber' for 20 years from 1903 to 1923 when he made his last visit to the Senate. His stall was next to that of his old friend Girolamo Vitelli.[103] His abiding interest as a senator was education, of which there is also a partial account in a small volume from 1906: *L'ispettorato per le scuole medie nelle scuole del Regno*.[104] He was also a member of the Higher Council of Public Education and the Accademia dei Lincei (of which he was president between 1916 and 1920).

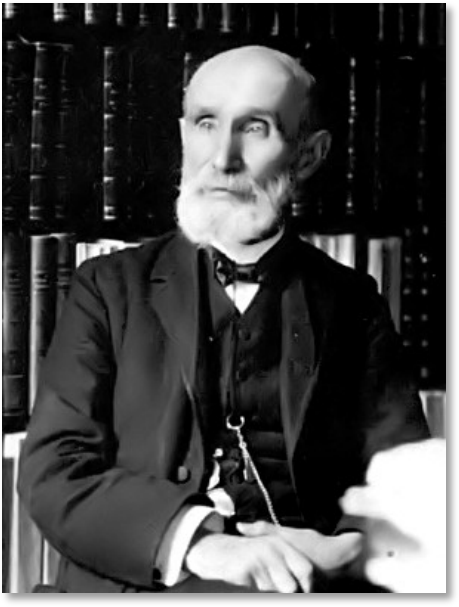
Another close friend of D'Ovidio's was Vittorio Scialoja (1856-1933), son of Antonio Scialoja (1817-1877), like his father a professor of law, several times minister, important figure in post-unification Italian politics, member of the Lincei. He was to be the teacher of Francesco's nephew, Antonio Lefèbvre D'Ovidio.[105]

About 10 years after the onset of the disease, his failing eyesight had continued to progress and had become profound blindness. This had not impeded his commitments but had slowed them down and, above all, modified them, with the help of daughters and students such as Scherillo and Porena, and then his son-in-law Carlo Ernesto Lefèbvre, the last of the Lefèbvre dynasty who had entered the house as Elvira's fiancé. Shortly before his death, when he had concluded his academic activities in July 1925, an honorary committee of intellectuals

[103] Michele Scherillo, *Per la Morte del S. C. Senatore prof. Francesco D'Ovidio*, "Reale Istituto Lombardo di Scienze e Lettere", v. LVIII, fasc. XVI-XX, Milan 1925, p. 886.
[104] *L'ispettorato per le scuole medie nelle scuole del Regno. Discussioni al senato dal 9 al 22 marzo 1906*, with a preface by L. Gamberale, Florence, Lapi 1906.
[105] Scuola Normale di Pisa, Vittorio Scialoja, 12 November 1928, MB-Cart 46.

and politicians and an executive committee of students were assembled. The two committees decided on the publication of D'Ovidio's opera omnia, including edited, out-of-print and unpublished volumes. The complete plan of the work is not known, but reading the cover pages of some volumes (not all) one learns that it was planned in 30 volumes with an unspecified number of tomes (in any case about 40).

Due to unspecified publishing difficulties, it was produced in 14 volumes with a total of 18 tomes. It is no coincidence that the work was published in different places (Caserta, Rome, at various publishers: Anonima per Edizioni, Casa Editrice Moderna and then in Naples at Guida, II, IX, VII, X).



Pio Rajna was D'Ovidio's best friend
along with Girolamo Vitelli.

In addition to Maria, Francesco D'Ovidio had the support and affection of his two daughters, Carolina and Elvira. Pio Rajna, in a commemorative article that appeared in *Il Marzocco* of Florence on 6 December 1925, gives an account of his friend's activities and also indirectly mentions other family members such as his daughter Elvira and her husband Ernesto, Carolina and Manfredi Porena: he defines them as 'admirable daughters all, by heart, mind and culture', who took turns for years at their desks and then at their father's bedside to read books, have essays dictated to them and corrected, and keep their correspondence in order.[106] In the *Nuova Antologia* of March 1926, the old friend Vitelli, now burdened with glories, remembers his friend and his family.

Vitelli had also made an important career for himself, becoming an illustrious classicist and later director of the Italian Papyrological Institute as well as a Senator of the Kingdom.

[106] Pio Rajna, *Francesco D'Ovidio*, 'Il Marzocco', 6 December 1925, p. 1.

Elvira D'Ovidio, about 1900.

Chapter 10

Costantino Nigra and Francesco D'Ovidio

Among the many friendship relationships that Francesco D'Ovidio cultivated over the years, one of the most significant for cultural history can be considered the one already mentioned with Costantino Nigra. Born in 1828 into a very wealthy family in Villa Castelnuovo (today Castelnuovo Nigra), not far from Turin, he studied law although he always cultivated literary and linguistic studies. He became secretary to Massimo d'Azeglio in 1851 and then to Camillo Benso who wanted him as Head of Cabinet at the Paris Congress of 1858. He then played decisive roles in secret missions to Paris where he negotiated the Treaty of Plombières with Napoleon III and planned the Second War of Independence together with Cavour against the Austrian Empire. Later, he played roles in guiding the foreign policy of the Kingdom of Italy while he was Italian ambassador: in Paris (1860), St Petersburg (1876), London (1882) and Vienna (1885). A sincere monarchist, he entered Freemasonry and was elected Grand Master of the Grand Orient of Italy in October 1861. Already in November of that year, however, he renounced his position, going 'into slumber', although at least for a few years he remained close to the institution, distancing himself, however, when it became more clearly republican.

From the mid-1870s he knew and was friends with Francesco D'Ovidio. Few studies have been devoted to this connection and the main one remains the one that appeared in

the journal *Lares* in 2008, by Gian Luigi Bruzzone, which allows us to form a more precise idea of what the ties – political, ideal, cultural – that bound the two men were. Nigra, in fact, cultivated many interests, including folk songs, poetry, philology, literature and, of course, politics. He was, among other things, a cultural anthropologist, a translator of the classics who was never an amateur. Although he published little, he was always recognised as a great scholar.

He had an important correspondence with Francesco D'Ovidio that dates from at least 1879 (probably even earlier) and until his death in 1907. In the *Commemorazione* of Costantino Nigra, written by Francesco D'Ovidio, he describes him as a Celtologist, novel philologist and dialectologist.[107] In the 28 years in which the two corresponded (we have the letters sent by Nigra to D'Ovidio and not those sent by the latter to Ambassador Nigra) the tone is varied, always friendly. They often speak of serious or scientific topics, sometimes of family occasions and matters of life. And, above all, Nigra always calls D'Ovidio a colleague: the two are colleagues because their linguistic interests are both broad and common. These letters are considered important for Nigra's biographers because they make up, in some areas, for the *Memorie* that he was planning to write in 1904 and that were never written or, as one may think, were started and then destroyed.

At the end of the century, when the events that had seen him as a protagonist in the 1860s and 1870s seemed distant, and the Kingdom of Italy had retreated into its so-called 'umbertine' phase, Nigra confided to his friend that he was pessimistic about the resilience of the Italian nation. We do not

[107] *Commemorazione* of Costantino Nigra in 'Archivio glottologico italiano', XVII, 1910, 13, pp. 21.28. Ibid, p. 25.

have the answers of D'Ovidio who, in this regard, however, was much more optimistic, as can be seen from his entire production, including his letters. With extreme, black, pessimism Nigra expressed himself: 'egra umanità' (the 'egra humanity') was badly ending the 'nineteenth Christian century'. In June 1900 he wrote: 'I am very distressed at the turn things are taking in Italy in every direction' (letter XVI), and after the assassination of King Umberto at Monza on 29 July 1900, his thoughts became even darker: he began to think of death after 'the horrible tragedy of Monza'. And even 'may God grant that I may not be preserved to see civil war and the shipwreck of our work', he wrote on that occasion, even fearing 'civil war' due to the 'decadence' of the 'Latin race'.[108]

Nigra feared that his sons would not take the inheritance left by their fathers. Corrado, called Lionello, son of Costantino Nigra and the noblewoman Emma Delfina Vegetti Ruscalla for example, was giving him bitterness. He had caused a scandal by his affair with the commoner Teresa Perolino, whom he had married for love. Within the family the quarrel had continued and would only end with the death of Constantino (followed a year later by Lionello himself). Perhaps he tended to generalise, but the crisis of the Italian political system in those years was evident, even if the inadequacy of sons to fathers was for him demonstrated by the events that touched him closely. In any case, post-Risorgimento hopes were fading.[109]

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[108] Gian Luigi Bruzzone, *Costantino Nigra e Francesco D'Ovidio*, 'Lares' v. 74, no. 3, Olshky Florence (September-December 2008), pp. 657-708. Ibid, pp. 661-662. The numbers refer to the Fondo Costantino Nigra at the Scuola Normale di Pisa Archives.

[109] Lionello Nigra (1856-1908) secretly married Teresa Martin Perolino, by whom he had two children. The first, a girl, died on the very day of her birth, 31 December 1903. The second, named Costantino after his grandfather, died when he was only 9 years old (1905-1914).

Both were friends of the Benedictine Luigi Tosti (1811-1897), and with him and D'Ovidio talked about the Conciliation between Church and State, which the three men saw in the same way. In the texts that D'Ovidio dedicated to the issue, in *Rimpianti vecchi e nuovi*, the same echoes of Nigra's thoughts seem to be discernible, both of whom admired Tosti; they thought that the anticlerical laws suppressing religious institutes were wrong, because these could help improve education in Italy, a subject they both considered severely. For example, the agricultural schools established by the Benedictines in Piedmont would have been very useful in Campania. At this point, "having established the usefulness of the religious, why not extend a hand to the pope and let him choose which religious to send away as sad and idle, in short delegating to him the execution of the suppression decreed by the new State?".[110] Tosti was a friend of Nigra as well as D'Ovidio, who had the same ideas and visited the abbot at Montecassino.[111] Later he also wrote a moving obituary of him.[112]

In addition to their common admiration for Tosti, the two were united by their admiration for Silvio Pellico (1789-1854), whom D'Ovidio had studied while preparing the first critical edition of *Francesca da Rimini* and also of *Le mie prigioni*. Singularly consonant are many other aspects of the thought of the two, who can be defined as friends and brotherly spirits: they were friends and admirers of Luigi Chiala and of course

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[110] *Luigi Tosti to Vieusseux*, 22 February 1861, cited in Gian Luigi Bruzzone, *Ibidem*, p. 663.
[111] Francesco D'Ovidio, *Una gita alla Badia di Montecassino*, in *Rimpianti Vecchi e nuovi*, I, Casa Editrice Moderna, Caserta 1929, pp. 49-61.
[112] *Ibid*, pp. 17-48.

of Graziadio Isaia Ascoli (D'Ovidio wrote portraits and commemorations on both of them when they died), while they both disliked Carducci and D'Annunzio. But there is also life in these letters, as the two would meet and converse when they could:

A handful of missives opens up an intimist glimmer: leaving aside the mutual lending of books and writings, gifts of the same, requests for news, confirmations of study hypotheses and the like, he recalls the pride of having written on the Cavour (Letter XXXIII), the holidays in Naples in 1896 (Letter IV), the impossibility of making a detour from Rome to Naples, having to leave for Vienna in 1898 (Letter XIII). The two even then exchanged articles and files written by one and the other, the regret of not basking in the sun on the Riviera di Chiaia in 1998 (Letter IV), the desire to treat themselves to a stay in Portici or Torre del Greco, if free of mosquitoes (Letter XXII), the hours spent together visiting the museum in Naples at the end of 1899 (Letter XV), the cordial company enjoyed in the same city (Letter XXXIII), the holidays spent together at San Pellegrino in the summer of 1906 (Letter XLVI), the news of I don't know what journalistic controversy on the Order of the SS. Annunziata (Letter XXI) of which Nigra was to be dean.[113]

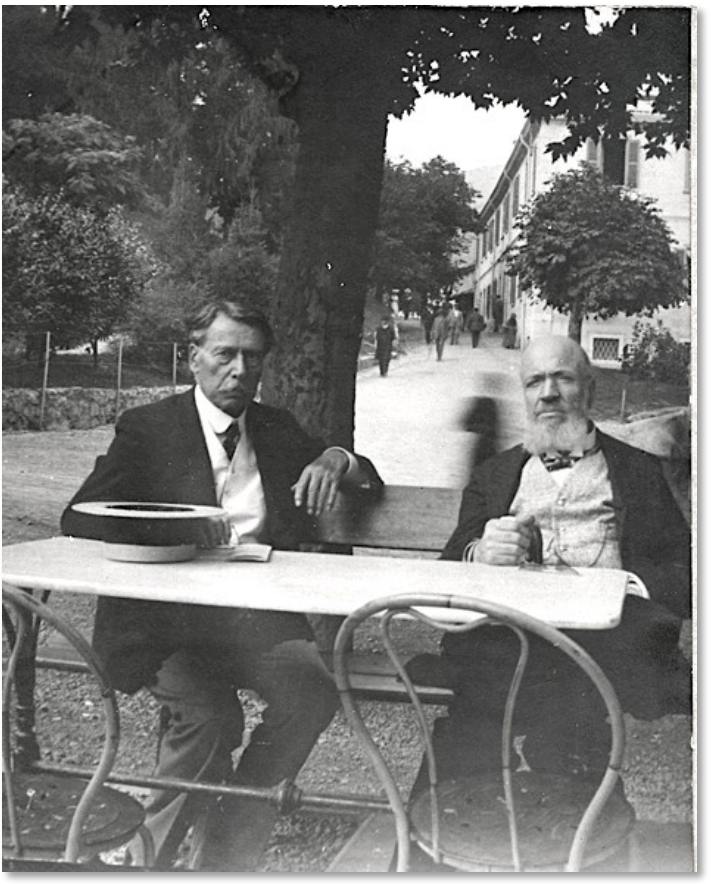
So, one mentions practically annual meetings in Naples and visits together to museums, parts of the city, to Torre del Greco, Chiaia, Portici. Probably days of discussions and readings, exchanges of books and opinions and invitations to D'Ovidio's house. The two were often in Rome at the Senate and Accademia dei Lincei meetings. For example, we learn from the letters that on 30 November 1896 Nigra arrived in

[113] Gian Luigi Bruzzone, op. cit., pp. 666-667.

Naples and learned that D'Ovidio was ill. He wished him a speedy recovery and in the meantime asked if he could have his latest publications delivered to him at the Albergo della Gran Bretagna in Chiaja. Nigra received the books on 5 December and returned them to the owner after a couple of days. The two probably saw each other again: Francesco D'Ovidio's was, it seems, a winter indisposition (Letters IV and V). The two saw each other again in early December 1897 (Letter VIII), and in those days the weather was very bad. 21 years older than D'Ovidio, in 1904 Nigra had retired entirely to private life and had prepared for himself a beautiful house in Rome in Trinità dei Monti, and one in Venice on the Grand Canal, but just then his health began to fail and his heart to fail. At the end of 1905, D'Ovidio, probably with Maria, had gone to visit him in Rome where he found that he was very weak and suffering. In the summer of 1906 Francesco D'Ovidio's family, with Maria and Elvira, spent a few weeks at San Pellegrino. We do not have the letter sent by Francesco but we do have one from Nigra dated 3 September 1906:

The departure of her and her lovely family greatly diminished the attractions of San Pellegrino for me. The weather turned fine, the Brembo was clearer than ever. The dust on the road, thanks to the little rain that had fallen, disappeared in appreciable proportions, the woods on the mountain began to mix the yellow gold of the chestnut trees with the still lingering green of the trees, but all this did not console me or compensate me for her lost company.

I am staying here until the last days of September. Then I will go to Piedmont for a short time. If you have to write to me after the 30th of the month, please direct your letter to me in Rome. Please remember me to all your friends and believe me to be your most affectionate and devoted friend.



Costantino Nigra and Francesco d'Ovidio in San Pellegrino, August 1906, on their holiday full of discussions on politics, literature, the future of Italy.

In the next letter, dated 9 October 1906 (XLVIII), Nigra informs him that he is unable to return to Villa Castelnuovo, his father's villa (Nigra was Count of Castelnuovo) in Canavese, and must retreat to Turin.

Then in December 1906 he had a heart attack and decided to retire to Rapallo, where once again D'Ovidio, who was in

great pain himself, visited him:

His intellect always remained lucid, his memory quick and trustful, his speech elegant, his heart open to the kindest affections; but he felt that living was for him nothing more than an arduous problem to be solved at every hour, at every moment. "She who, living for certain, we will always bear before our souls," he saw her sitting by his side, ready to seize him; and rarely in the place of that gloomy spectre was the larva of hope. At last, having detached himself from that Rome, which he was never to see again: sailing along the Tyrrhenian Sea, resplendent with its most beautiful summer colours, towards the pleasant Ligurian beach; speaking with patriotic tenderness to the crew of the royal ship that had brought him to that beach; setting his foot on it, he felt as if reborn, he seemed to have regained strength that he had believed to have been irreparably lost. But it was like the last flicker of the great flame being extinguished.[114]

He was therefore taken by a military ship to his last home, Rapallo, where – as already mentioned – his friend Francesco D'Ovidio paid him his last visits. The last one was at the end of June, apparently on 30 June 1907. The next day, 1 July, he died.

[114] Francesco D'Ovidio, *Commemorazione,* cit., p. 22.

Shortly after his admission to the Senate of the Republic in 1905, D'Ovidio, who gladly took part in the main votes but never felt political even though he wrote about politics, was involved in the Molise political elections of 1907, which were particularly turbulent with riots, threats and assemblies in which the opposing factions came to blows. Writing in the *Giornale del Molise* in January 1907, he recalled that he had taken an interest in his town and had travelled there in October 1906. The peculiar tone of this public appeal is that it does not touch on political issues at all, but only on moral and civil morality: the violent and sectarian behaviour of both sides was a source of grief for him. The newspaper had evidently called on him to make a public appeal after his visit, but he remained impartial, confirming his reputation as an impolitic all-turned-student. After all, this was a rather rare attitude in that era when men of culture, men of letters, took a position in the political arena sometimes violently, sometimes proudly: think of Marinetti, Carducci or Pascoli, D'Annunzio, Croce and many others.

You call me back to very painful thoughts with your kind invitation. The fierce struggle that is being fought in my native Campobasso and in the other towns that share a political representative with it, a struggle that has been going on for months and keeps all spirits agitated and suspended, deeply upsets me. As I have said many times now, being far from my native town since childhood, I do not know whether to embrace all my fellow countrymen and co-religionists in a single affection; and when they quarrel, I feel the urge to shout: peace, peace, peace, even if the cause of the quarrel is more or less necessary and inevitable. And since I believe that a certain meekness of character, equanimity of judgement and temperance of manners abounds in Molise more than elsewhere, I am all the more bitter to realise that these virtues can also be forgotten in my Molise in certain circumstances; and that when it comes to anger and spite and rancour, the whole world is a country. This October I was there to see what became of an entirely ideal and patriotic affair, and what slowdown the electoral distractions had inflicted on it: and one evening, finding myself alone in a square and suddenly being able to hear a crowd of children shouting hurrahs that implied downvotes, I had a heart attack. [...] It is superfluous to tell you how discouraged I was to see the discord between dear friends up close and not even find a way to discuss it with more than one of those with whom I would have been willing to do so. Now what do you think my fellow citizens should care about my opinion? I am not even a voter in my native constituency [...].[115]

And so he went on, calling for moderation. After all, the fears that Nigra had confided to him a few months earlier in San Pellegrino were confirmed there: the problem of *making Italians*.

[115] *Lettera dell'onorevole D'Ovidio*, 'Giornale del Molise', 7 December 1907.

Chapter 11

Carolina and Manfredi Porena

The engagement between Carolina D'Ovidio (ca. 1882 - ca. 1978) and Manfredi Porena was rather tormented at first, judging by the numerous letters written by Maria Bertolini around 1900 to her daughter, who seemed unconvinced of the step. And this was but the prodrome of a marriage that seems not to have been a happy one, at least at first. Finally, Carolina became a wife devoted to her husband's memory after his death and edited several of his posthumous works.

Before her marriage in 1900, Maria begged her daughter not to abandon her fiancé Manfredi Porena, her father's best pupil: doubts seemed to torment the girl. Before the marriage, the young woman seems to have sent a compromising letter to Michele Scherillo (1860-1930), a philologist and Italianist, another of her father's pupils, who revealed this passage to his friend Manfredi, to whom he gave the letter. However, this did not cause an irreversible crisis in the engagement. Maria's intervention was very decisive and a few years later Carolina and Manfredi were married:

Lippì mia, Scherillo telephoned Manfredi at the magisterium and they made an appointment at the Senate and showed him your letter but Manfredi did not tell me the thing [...]. I was able to leave all freedom to you, my daughters, as long as your soul was so pure and innocent that no temptation less than pure and innocent was possible, but now that unfortunately this is no longer the case, it is absolutely necessary to avoid all these manifestations of love. Let us

hope that God, when you are worthy of his help, will bring you to marriage [...]. He will then come on Wednesdays and Saturdays as a simple friend, more than this he would not want your father".[116]

A photograph of Carolina D'Ovidio and Manfredi Porena taken in Biella where Enrico D'Ovidio lived.

Did Francis therefore exercise his authority over his daughters' choices? More than likely. But Scherillo was married and so there was no room for love: any relationship between him and Carolina would have caused a scandal. If

[116] *Maria Bertolini a Lippì (Carolina) D'Ovidio*, undated, Naples. Lefèbvre D'Ovidio Private Archive, via del Nuoto-Roma. N. 43.

D'Ovidio had accepted Porena as a future brother-in-law, it was because Carolina had declared her sincere feelings for him. Doubts, swayings do not seem to have led to further problems: Manfredi and Carolina will appear to the outside world as a serene couple after their marriage in 1902, and probably will be. They will, however, have no children. The quarrels and doubts that continued are only proven by the mother's letters.

Manfredi Porena, born in Rome on 7 September 1873, was the son of the famous geographer Filippo Porena (1839-1910). He lived in Rome until 1892 where he obtained a physics-mathematics degree at a technical institute and attended the Institute of Fine Arts for a year. He left at the end of 1892 for Messina where his father had been called to teach Geography at the local university, then, called to Naples as a geography lecturer at the university, he moved with his family in 1895. Here Manfredi graduated in 1899 with Francesco D'Ovidio. Initially, Manfredi devoted himself to painting like his brother Amerigo, but due to problems with colour blindness, he decided to devote himself entirely to literature.

He became a distinguished and capable scholar, among D'Ovidio's best students, particularly in Dante studies. Giulio Natali defines Porena as D'Ovidio's 'beloved pupil', the most intimate at home, who derived from him the taste for 'manzonismo' in his writing.[117] He became intimate with the house of Largo Latilla, became engaged to and married Carolina. We know that the families of Carolina and Elvira (she would marry 7 years later) frequented each other

[117] Giulio Natali, *Ricordi e profili di maestri e amici*, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, Rome 1965, p. 289.

assiduously first in Naples and then in Rome. Manfredi and Ernesto were close friends and regarded each other as brothers. The two had known each other since the very early years of the century; we know this for certain from the dedication on the back of a photograph, in portrait format, taken in Lo Gatto's studio in Naples, which bears these words:

To the dearest Manfredi Porena, affectionately, 10 June 1905. Carlo Ernesto Lefèbvre.

It was the kind of cards and memories that friends exchanged, as a sign of affection, when photography was still expensive. Not surprisingly, one of Ernesto's sons, Antonio, who admired Porena, named one of his sons after him. Manfredi Porena would have a singular destiny: he was a favourite disciple of Francesco D'Ovidio – he graduated with him in 1899 – he had all the qualifications to become a full professor and published remarkable articles and studies on many authors.

In 1909, however, he wrote a volume, *Che cos'è il bello? Schema di un'estetica psicologica* (Hoepli, 1905), a text that was variously reviewed as a work of the highest erudition proposing a psychological and anti-metaphysical aesthetics. The work also had a certain following abroad and was reviewed, for instance, with a mixture of admiration and criticism, by Walther B. Pitkin, professor at Columbia University, in the pages of 'The Journal of Psychology' in 1905, in which he praised the ambition of Porena's project to found a total aesthetic (painting, sculpture, elocution, architecture, music and literature).[118]

[118] Pitkin Walther B., *The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and*

Apart from the book's own theses, which were also considered interesting by the American reviewer and other Italians, Porena had the bad idea of following up with an appendix in which he mocked Benedetto Croce, who was then the most influential man in Italy in the field of literary studies and especially in aesthetics and textual interpretation. This rather vicious mockery brought to a living monument of the literary culture of the time, but above all to a critic already hostile to the 'dovidians' in his approach, crushed Porena's ambitions and indirectly damaged D'Ovidio himself. A worse fate would befall, as we shall see, another pupil and frequenter of D'Ovidio's house, Francesco Colagrosso, also a friend of Porena.

Manfredi Porena, who also had what it took to become a university lecturer in the positivist and philological 'German-style' school that still counted in universities at the time, had to be content with teaching in secondary schools until 1909. That year he obtained a chair in Stylistics (later renamed Italian Language and Literature) at the Women's Higher Institute of Magisterium in Rome. It was in 1909 that Carolina and Manfredi moved from Naples to Rome, in via Monte Zebbio, to a rented flat. Of that faculty, which had become a university, she was dean until her retirement in 1943.

He had a brilliant career, however, if one considers that he was admitted to the Accademia dei Lincei and was president of the Centro Studi Leopardiani for a few years, and that his commentary on the *Divina commedia* was among the most appreciated, but far less than what would have awaited him had he not committed that act of youthful mockery against a

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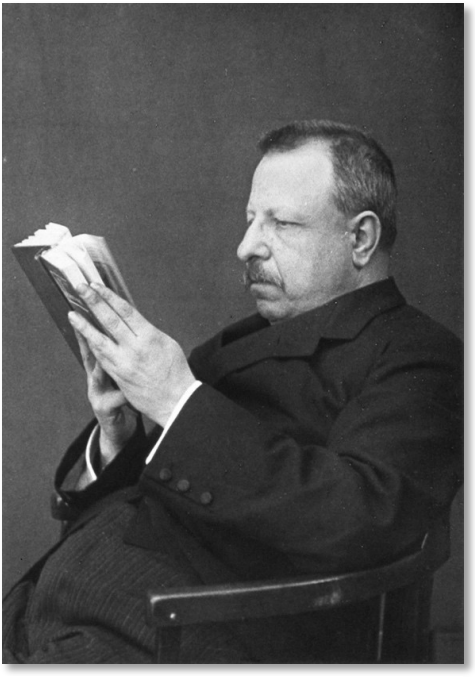
Scientific Methods, v. III, no. 16 (2 August, 1906), Columbia University Press, Columbia New York, pp. 442-444.

person who, in fact, damaged him and probably his father-in-law, at least in the esteem of some colleagues. As a matter of fact, Porena never managed to win competitions in the major Italian universities.

Croce focused his criticism by accusing D'Ovidio of being pedantic and vacuous, incapable of touching the secret of Dante's poetry. After criticising Porena, Croce could without hesitation turn on D'Ovidio of Dante's and Manzoni's essays, whom he considered appreciable for his merits in matters of language and erudition, but at the same time also a lagging exemplar of the critical conception of the German historical school, considered useless and harmful at that point in Italian cultural development.



Benedetto Croce
relentless enemy of the dovidians.

The neo-idealist Croce combated every critical manifestation of positivism, which in Naples he saw concentrated in D'Ovidio, a tendency he nevertheless considered more positively in D'Ancona. It is likely that Croce's fierce criticism of D'Ovidio was weighed down by the snub the philosopher felt he had received in the publication of D'Ovidio's main pupil and brother-in-law, Manfredi Porena.

But, as Francesco Bruno notes, those criticisms were unfair and poisonous and can also be read as a symptom of power struggles:

> In 1909, an article by Croce came out in *La critica* that resulted in a scathing critique of D'Ovidio, defined as a man of the old guard, capable of applying to Manzoni only the rhetorical cult traditionally dedicated to Boccaccio. This was not one of the broadsides with which Croce and the other idealists were dismantling the solid and vulnerable bastions of the historical school: in fact, D'Ovidio was not even recognised as an exponent of the historical method, which the Philosophy of the Spirit was about to submerge. It was a real personal attack, very venomous, tending to ridicule with the weapon of a continuous, scornful sarcasm an interlocutor who was active in Naples, and knew how to attract pupils in good numbers, forming future teachers of the various school orders. Croce's scathing critique can probably only be understood in terms of a no-holds-barred battle for cultural power. And it certainly did not help D'Ovidio's courageous propaganda for an author like Manzoni who did not arouse the sympathy of Croce.[119]

Italianists have continued to debate Croce's critique by contrasting an overall reassessment of Croce's proposals in criticism and language by Bruno Migliorini, a downgrading by

[119] Francesco Bruni, *Introduzione*, op. cit. p. 19.

Carlo Dionisotti, which was followed by a debate, and a subsequent overall reassessment of the work of the linguist from Campobasso.

Bruno, in turn, invites us to reconsider D'Ovidio himself, his linguistic standard, his observations, his precious indications even when considering minor figures such as Ippolito Amicarelli, Vito Fornari, Gaetano Bernardi, Luigi Tosti, Ruggero Bonghi but also Francesco de Sanctis.[120] And so, coming to the main criticism often levelled at D'Ovidio on his minute criticism:

> That D'Ovidio's taste for minute notation was not to be separated from a broader understanding of general linguistic evolution is demonstrated, finally, by a number of hints destined to be developed much later by linguistic historiography. Thus he emphasises, in the final part of the article that is the fourth in our selection [of the text edited by Bianchi], the renewal and streamlining of Italian, resulting from the parliamentary political debate.[121]

[120] Which it is not in our interest to touch on here, as far as the question of language is concerned, see *Ibid.* pp. 20-2l.
[121] *Ibid*, pp. 22-23.

A curious photograph of Manfredi Porena at his work table in Rome.

Chapter 12

An academic tragedy

The controversy over style also involved, as mentioned above, another pupil of D'Ovidio, Francesco Colagrosso (1858-1911), and more heavily than Porena and others, who were called 'D'Ovidians' or 'Dovidians' by Croce.[122]

Colagrosso also sought a definition of style that was different from the idealistic Croce style then in vogue, but also from that of the German Historical School. Like Porena, he was a frequent visitor to D'Ovidio's house and held long conversations with the master. He had tackled the study and practice of 'stylistics', the evaluation of writers' style as an autonomous subject and in that field, after the death of Francesco de Sanctis in 1883, the undisputed dictator had become Benedetto Croce. A strong, pugnacious character, Croce, perhaps precisely because he did not have a defined academic position but a very political attitude towards culture, possessed an impetuosity that the more cautious dovidians did not. He did not believe that the literary form was detached from its context; he did not want to bring back the teaching of rhetoric. He was also against the establishment of stylistics chairs because he considered them a trick to get unqualified high school teachers into the university. Colagrosso, on the other hand, was polemically committed to stylistics, opposing

[122] Diego Stefanelli, *Il problema dello stile fra linguistica e critica letteraria: Positivismo e Idealismo in Italia e Germania*, Frank & Timme, Berlin 2017, pp. 131-133.

Croce and for this reason, with Porena's agreement, he wrote various studies on the subject such as the book *Sulla stilistica* (1903) followed by *La teoria leopardiana della lingua* (1905), *Sulla collocazione delle parole* (1906) and *Stile, ritmo e rime (*1907), a text in which he criticised Karl Vossler (1872-1949); all books that were approved, perhaps indirectly, by Francesco D'Ovidio. The latter, however, had a very strong influence on the two disciples and a word from him to the contrary or a lack of approval could lead to the project being abandoned.

German idealist Karl Vossler responded to the criticism with an article in *La Critica*, edited by Benedetto Croce. In 1909, Colagrosso gathered together all his edited studies of stylistics in *Studi stilistici* (Raffaele Giusti, Livorno), advocating the adoption of the teaching of stylistics – a discipline that would teach rhythm and beauty of concordant sound and meaning – in the university. It was a sort of return to the *ars rhetorica* of a few centuries earlier. In turn, Croce turned to Colagrosso for criticism, ironic and even sarcastic remarks, defining Colagrosso's *Studi stilistici* as one of the "rambling and amateurish publications of some professorial procurers", an allusion that also seems to involve Porena, who that year was entering the faculty of Magistero after having tried to enter the University of Rome.[123]

In 1908, however, the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy at the University of Naples, with the evident agreement and direction of Francesco D'Ovidio, proposed that Colagrosso be appointed full professor of Stylistics not by competition but by deserved and clear fame.[124] This proposal was at first accepted. Consider that in a text published in 1907 by the publisher

[123] *Ibid*, p. 132.
[124] According to Article 69 of the Casati Law of November 1859.

Hoepli of Milan, *Nuovi studi danteschi, Ugolino, Pier delle Vigne e i simoniaci*, Francesco D'Ovidio gave Colagrosso's professorship as acquired and secure, because the book begins with the dedication:

To Francesco Colagrosso. To the old disciple to the new colleague, to the distinguished man of letters, the candid good man, the dear countryman who honours his native city.

Colagrosso was thus a new colleague and a long-awaited volume was dedicated to him. Immediately after this publication, we do not know whether as a result of this but certainly in response to D'Ovidio's requests, exceptions and legal quibbles were raised at the University of Naples by Croce's faction. It is thought that the disapproval of the influential philosopher at that point was instrumental in justifying the turnaround on the appointment. For Colagrosso it was a terrible blow: he fell into complete despondency and nothing Porena and D'Ovidio could do to help him. The hope he had pursued for years to become an academic was dashed and Colagrosso saw before him the prospect of returning to high school and also having less time to devote to his studies. The loss of his professorship is a real trauma that no one can get him through, not even the reassurances of D'Ovidio and Porena who try to help him. Colagrosso plunged into a deep depression and perhaps into something more serious when in 1911, evidently following a stroke, he became paralysed in the left side of his body. Undergoing treatment, he seems to partially recover. To help him, he was called back to the university as a collaborator (but not lecturer) and the Royal Academy of Naples let him in as an ordinary member.

Implacable, Croce wrote to Francesco Torraca – one of the

professors chosen by D'Ovidio – that these concessions were advised by reasons of piety and not merit (18 September 1911). The sentence leaked, became known to Colagrosso and was taken as a disgrace. On hearing of Croce's letter and his other mockery – Croce's circle was large and lively – he committed suicide on the evening of 16 December 1911 at only 53 years of age, throwing himself from a window at a time when he was left alone. He had just finished, even in his despondency, *Le dottrine stilistiche del Leopardi e la sua prosa* (1911).

According to friends, the reasons that led him to commit suicide were Croce's constant attacks, as well as various bereavements that had befallen him. The shock in the D'Ovidio household was great. His funeral was held at the expense of the Reale Accademia Pontaniana and two of its members, Francesco Jerace and Michele Kerbaker, commemorated him (19 December 1911). In January 1912, it was D'Ovidio who remembered him.

By striking him, Croce and Vossler also wanted to strike D'Ovidio. D'Ovidio, writing about his pupil, mentions that he had suffered from constant emotions, that he was pressurised (by criticism) that had worn down his soul to the point of death:

> What makes the pain of those of us who knew him intimately and loved him as much as he deserved all the more bitter is the disgusting thought that in the eyes of those far away and less intimate, his hasty end must have seemed like a suicide no different from the usual ones, and as such was even shouted in the streets of this city [Naples] that had been his home for a quarter of a century [...]. That dreadful end, so foreseen in one sense and so sudden in another, saddened all his friends and colleagues. The Academy took charge of the funeral,

and the number of those who attended with great emotion was such, despite the inconvenience of the distance of his home from the city centre, that it was evident how much of a legacy of affection he left behind. I was away from Naples due to my official duties, and in addition to the rest, I am saddened to have missed him, for I loved him like a son: I cherished in him the old diligent and wise disciple, and the fellow countryman who did honour to the common homeland. He had the best qualities of our Samnite stock and Campobasso must not forget this son of his, even though the vicissitudes of life had kept him far from his native region since his adolescence. His innate probity appeared not only in his conduct, but also in his literary production.[125]

Porena had a happier fate. After directing the Istituto Superiore di Magistero and then the Facoltà di Magistero (i.e. the Institute turned into a University), he was appointed a member of the Accademia d'Italia, president of the Centro Studi Leopardiani and finally a member of the Accademia dei Lincei from 1944 to 1947. In the latter part of his life he was assiduously attended by his friend Carlo Ernesto Lefèbvre who had moved to the same city. He died in 1955 in Rome. For years, over the next decade, his wife Carolina edited the editions of his writings that remained unpublished or went out of print, such as *Roma capitale nel decennio della sua letteratura* (Edizioni S. e L., Rome 1957) and *Scritti leopardiani* (Zanichelli, Bologna).

His friend Natali paints a portrait of him in one of his books. His colleague for 20 years from 1919 to 1939, he never had the slightest disagreement with him, he recounts. According to the Annals of the Magistero, his courses were mainly on Dante and Leopardi but also Petrarca, Parini, Alfieri, Foscolo, Monti and Manzoni. When he retired in 1939, he was shrouded in

[125] *Giornale del Molise*, 12 January 1912.

great melancholy and began to live secluded and shy, with a few friends and his wife. He continued to study, work and write.

In the last few years Porena had become a gaunt, thin, very melancholic man. And his wife Carolina was worried. He no longer had, wrote his friend Giulio Natali, the smiling vivacity of the past, and explained the reasons for this in a letter sent to him:

Dear Natali, this world, so marvellously advanced in the fields of science and technology, is morally rotten; and when I say morally, I understand the arts: 'I am destroyed, nor have I any screen of pain! I find no refuge except in family affections and work. I work impenitently; and I see that you resemble me (*Lettera a Giulio Natali*, 16 May 1953).[126]

Porena saw signs of decay in behaviour, in studies, in the abhorred ultra-modern architecture and a 'frightening regression in art and morality. Will mankind ever emerge from this dark forest, in which it has so terribly lost its way?", he wondered in his last book published when he was alive, *Bello d'arte e bello di natura* (1954).[127] In *Roma capitale*, he denounced building speculation, changing customs, the excesses of La Dolce Vita, the disappearance of ancient dignity, the general degradation of culture, the change of 'woman'. He felt himself a latecomer, a literary man of bygone times, the last witness of another era. Already on his return to Rome in 1909, he had observed signs of an irresistible decadence (the same one Nigra observed) that to us, living so many years later, witnessing so many other transformations,

[126] *Manfredi Porena, Roman scholar*, in 'Studi Romani', V, no. 6, 1957, p. 687.
[127] *Ibid* (cit.).

must seem strange.

An intimately religious soul, Porena had the triple cult – the cornerstone of every human civilisation – of family, homeland and God. Never unmindful of the glories of Italy, he left us commemorative evocations of Virgil, St Francis of Assisi, Dante, Michelangelo, Raphael, T. Boccalini, G. Parini, V. Monti and A. Manzoni.[128]

One aspect in common with D'Ovidio – with whom he was in correspondence until the latter's death, and then with Maria Bertolini and later with his brothers-in-law – was his linguistic versatility: he knew Swedish and Hungarian and in his later years worked on translations of texts by the Hungarian patriot poet Alessandro (Sándor) Petöfi (1823-1849). He was particularly adept at explaining points where Dante speaks of complex astronomical issues. The critical editions he edited and certain commentaries, such as the one on the *Divina commedia*, are still used and appreciated: the imprint of D'Ovidio can still be seen in his pupil for the care he devoted to philological aspects.

In the last year of his life he returned to the issue of the book *Che cos'è il bello?* which had earned him so many attacks against Colagrosso and D'Ovidio. It was, he wrote, 'the fruit of my observations and reflections of at least twenty years of life, exercised by me day by day, so in passionate and meditated contemplation of the products of all the beautiful arts'.[129] That book was mocked, but in the following years, having lost his

[128] Giulio Natali, *Ricordi e profili di maestri e amici*, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, Rome 1965, p. 281.

[129] *Ibidem*, p. 282. The evocation of that episode is contained in Manfredi Porena, *Bello d'arte e bello di natura*, in "Rendiconti della Classe di Scienze morali dell'Accademia dei Lincei", November-December 1954.

professorship in Naples, he nevertheless continued to write about those topics: "I believe that in a history of Italian aesthetics, which is not only the history of Croce's aesthetics, an honourable place should be given to Porena," Natali commented.[130] Moreover, Porena was always very close to the plastic arts, painting and music, and sought an aesthetic 'synthesis' to the end.

In his later years, he had a 'dignifiedly austere bearing, a dry, thin person, a wrinkled head, a clear, unruffled face, from which the smiling vivacity of yesteryear has disappeared to give way to a deep, slightly ironic melancholy'.[131]

Roma capitale is an interesting document for the historian of customs and contains the deplorations of a very old man towards modernity; it contains a lot of nostalgia, a lot of memories of minute events, the festivities, the markets, the theatres, the ballroom, the stroll along the corso, the behaviour of women very different from that of the years he was living. Not great history, he is interested in, but everyday life.

> Born in Rome and living there until 1892, I left that year and did not return until 1909; and during these seventeen years I made only a few short stays. As a result, the Rome of my first residence, [...] wholesale the penultimate decade of the century – is perfectly and distinctly isolated in my memory from the Rome of my second residence, [...] and I see it so immensely different from the Rome of the second period (that I feel like recalling the picture for those who have not recognised it).[132]

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[130] Giulio Natali, op. cit., p. 283. In this excerpt (pp. 283-286), the author reviews Porena's very rich bibliography, which was however compiled by Manfredi Porena himself in *Mezzo secolo di lavoro*, Naples 1949.
[131] Giulio Natali, op. cit., p. 277.
[132] Manfredi Porena, op. cit., pp. 3-4.

Remember the family customs, so changed:

One thing is certain: that the separations of spouses were very rare – in the circle of my more or less close relatives and friends, even simple acquaintances, I do not remember a single one –; and those very rare ones were talked about. Like those cases of diseases from other climates, which make countries appear where they are endemic. Young ladies from good families never went out alone in the street, neither to walk, nor to go to church, nor to school, nor to go shopping, nor to visit.[133]

Married women, he says, were going out alone at the time he wrote, whereas between 1880 and 1890 this was not the case. Even then, he noticed a considerable difference between northern Italy and Rome. He went on to observe that Roman women, and Italian women in general, were admired because they did not wear make-up, and in this they appeared more beautiful: 'today it is elegant to be openly, brazenly made up: hence the make-up that cannot in any way be mistaken for nature, culminating in the improbable colours of the manesque and pedestrian nails, and of the hair'.[134] He also noted 'the female desire to bring the life and customs of women as close as possible to those of men'.[135] But men who dye their hair also appeared ridiculous to him. As for modern art, and the function of modern academies, his judgement is harsh. In short, many observations on changing behaviour are interesting for those concerned with the history of society, which also show how Porena, by now, felt himself to be a survivor, out of his own time. It was at his work desk, the one portrayed in the

[133] Ibid, op. cit., p. 126.
[134] Manfredi Porena, op. cit., pp. 122-123.
[135] *Ibid*, p. 123.

photograph that we have included in this book, that he died suddenly on 2 October 1955: 'an essay was found on his desk, interrupted by death, intended to deny the authenticity of dell'*Epistola dantesca a Cangrande*'.[136]

Until the very end, he had frequented his friend and brother-in-law Carlo Ernesto Lefèbvre and his nephews Ovid, Mario and Antonio, who were growing up and studying in Rome. After Manfredi's and Carolina's death, which occurred when she was in her nineties, Porena's large amount of papers, books, manuscripts, notes and even unpublished works were taken to her brothers-in-law Elvira and Carlo Ernesto, and then left to her grandchildren.[137]

[136] Giulio Natali, op. cit., p. 281.

[137] Two recollections of Porena are due to the great Dante scholar Umberto Bosco, 'Giornale storico della letteratura italiana', 133, 1956; and to Giulio Natali, 'Studi romani', XI-XII, 1957.

Chapter 13

Elvira D'Ovidio and Carlo Ernesto Lefèbvre

At the time of his daughter Carolina's marriage in 1909, 48-year-old Francesco D'Ovidio was rich, though not extremely rich, as his wife pointed out in her letter to Queen Margherita when she asked her to help her daughter Elvira's fiancé, Carlo Ernesto, find a worthy job. If helping Manfredi, who was gifted and literate, had been relatively easy, doing the same with Ernesto was more difficult because he worked outside the professorial environment: he had no qualifications other than a diploma as an accountant, a bookkeeper. But he was considered a serious person, a necessary condition to be accepted in a demanding family like the D'Ovidio family.

Count Carlo Lefèbvre's natural son had lived in Balsorano throughout his early youth, in the castle bought by the family in Abruzzo in 1854, and was only recognised by his father in 1899, when he turned 21. After moving to Naples, to his father's house in the Port area, he got to know the D'Ovidio family, almost certainly thanks to Matilde Serao, a friend of Maria Bertolini and the Marquise Flavia Lefèbvre, Carlo Ernesto's aunt. After his engagement to Elvira D'Ovidio, which must have taken place around 1902-1903, he looked for a suitable job without finding it easily. Around 1905 Maria Bertolini wrote a heartfelt letter to Queen Margherita. She addressed the monarch by appealing to her maternal instinct and, after a preamble that it is not appropriate to quote, wrote

I have two daughters, very good and intelligent, who have since childhood devoted their lives to helping their father, who cannot use his eyes. One is married to Professor Manfredi Porena, a young man of great goodness and wit, who had the high honour of having some of his works accepted by Your Majesty. The other was much less fortunate than her sister. After having suffered much, through very noble sorrows, with which God wished to strengthen her soul, she came across a young man who also seemed placed by God in her path because he was an unfortunate to be comforted and also the abandoned son of the Count of Balsorano, who only at the age of 21 legitimised him, reminding him of his paternal duties at a moment's notice. He was forced, because his father, after having given him many of his millions, took away his support completely, to start working for a living; and in a few years, with our help, he performed miracles of industriousness, zeal and honesty. But as a consequence of this intimacy in our house, a deep affection was born between him and my daughter, an affection that is a misfortune only for his sad financial condition. My daughter would have a sufficient dowry, this would not be an obstacle, for in our house we are rather sick with too much ideality; so much so that my husband - who could easily have enriched himself with his work - has always wanted to work as a pure artist, nor have I ever distracted him from this aspiration. Now that it is impossible to separate these two young people, who have become accustomed to supporting each other morally, I would like to find a place for this young man that will enable him to start a family, albeit modestly, before I share this affection with my husband, which would cause him great concern (I am sparing him all the worries I can spare him because his life already has too many). He is now employed as an Accountant at the Castaldi Navigation Company, where they are very happy with him, but where the employees are very poorly paid; he was first cashier at the Palma Commercial Office, was much loved and esteemed there, and I take the liberty of presenting Your Majesty with the certificate they issued him when he left that office. He is, in short, a perfect gentleman, a perfect gentleman, intelligent and cultured, although

he has no diploma, because his father did not want him to have any. Hence the great difficulty of finding him employment, although he is perfectly worthy of it! In my painful nights of insomnia, [...] could he perhaps, with a word from him, as if with a fairy's wand, obtain for this unfortunate and good young man a modest but secure employment in Naples or Rome, (since my daughters cannot leave their father!) or in the royal palaces, or in some opera Pia, or in the Navigazione Generale Italiana, [...] since Lefèbvre is already employed in a shipping company, or in a Chamber of Commerce or wherever it is possible! [...] Maria D'Ovidio.[138]

Included with the letter is an attachment signed by Carlo Ernesto former boss, a certain Palma from a Neapolitan company:

Mr C. E. Lefèbvre of B. was employed in our House for more than a year, in charge of accounts and cash. At the first of February, he left voluntarily to take up a post which seemed to him more convenient and in keeping with the just and honest aspiration of a secure and rapid career. We, albeit with sorrow, are forced to accept his decision, ensuring that he reaches his goal as soon as possible. He is young, intelligent and willing and, what is more, scrupulous in his fulfilment.

Signed G. di Palma [139]

Carlo Ernesto, therefore, had literally been abandoned by his father Carlo 'who took his support away from him completely'. He had become truly penniless, and would only recover some money after the death of his brother, Count Francesco Lefèbvre, in October 1910. What is singular is Carlo Ernesto's familiarity with D'Ovidio. The young man

[138] Lefèbvre D'Ovidio Private Archive, *Maria Bertolini D'Ovidio alla Regina Margherita*, 1905, copy, Rome, not catalogued.
[139] *Ibid.*

frequented the house in Largo Latilla for years and it was this frequentation that made him fall in love with Elvira. So what was the link between the Lefèbvre and the D'Ovidio? They were two families from very different backgrounds. Carlo Ernesto had grown up away from Naples, in Abruzzo, for most of his youth.

The connection, as mentioned, could only be two women: Flavia Lefèbvre, Marquise de Casafuerte – Carlo Ernesto's aunt – and Matilde Serao, a well-known journalist and writer. Flavia, although a woman of the international jet set, rather detached from family affairs at home, lived in Paris, but was friends with Serao. She was at home with the D'Ovidio family. She attended the teas and dinners organised by Maria. Her daughters also knew the Italian-Greek writer since they were children, and treated her like an aunt. This is evidenced by the many cards and correspondence between the girls and the woman who explained to them the secrets of fashion and the Neapolitan high society of the time.

Dated 15 September 1893, for example, Matilde sends a letter to 'Miss' Maria, who was in fact already married.[140] There are numerous notes in the 1890s that show continuous frequentation.[141] Matilde was attracted to high society but at the same time to prominent cultural figures: D'Ovidio was a literary critic of contemporary authors as well and Serao was a writer for whom he felt appreciation, hence his fondness for her. Serao and Scarfoglio had always taken great care of literary and cultural reporting, in the newspapers they edited, and Francesco D'Ovidio, because of his activities, had

[140] *Matilde Serao a Maria Bertolini*, 15 September 1893. Lefèbvre D'Ovidio Private Archive. N. 72.
[141] *Matilde Serao a Maria Bertolini*, 25 May 1896. Lefèbvre D'Ovidio Private Archive.

appeared many times in their articles. One of the first accounts of a direct acquaintance was in 1893, when Maria Bertolini discovered that she was behind the pseudonym Gibus, under which Serao signed her fashionable pieces:

> You are right and Matilde Serao is also right because she thinks like you. Gibus, who thinks differently, is also wrong. Who is Gibus? He is a worldly chronicler, a chronicler of human lightness and frivolity, but a journalist who must follow society in its manifestations of luxury and light-heartedness, who must love these dazzling spectacles, even if they are made of [...] novelty and vulgar ignorance – Gibus obviously loves them, these spectacles, because they seduce his imagination [...]. Matilde Serao wears her little hat with her pernacles, so much abused in Gibus' grumblings! Unfortunately, Neapolitan ladies buy more hats than books: neither I nor you will correct them of this bad habit. My friend tries too hard to straighten out certain faults, to try to merge classes with charity [...] but it is not a pulpit, it is a chronicle, nothing else. [...] I hope you love me, which is important to me.[142]

The Neapolitan ladies, therefore, bought more hats than books, and of this Serao complained, but lightly. She had signed many fashion and society pieces under the pseudonym of Gibus, keeping it a secret, but her friend Maria Bertolini D'Ovidio understood her. D'Ovidio's wife, after all, was not intimidated by the literati: she came from a family of historians and men of letters and when necessary wrote to many of them, not for matters of study but to maintain good relations. So, he did with Giovanni Pascoli to whom he wrote in 1910.[143]

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[142] *Matilde Serao a Maria Bertolini*, 15 November 1893. Lefèbvre D'Ovidio Private Archive, no. 72.

[143] *Maria Bertolini D'Ovidio a Giovanni Pascoli*, s. l., 5 January 1910, g. 32.17.4. Giovanni Pascoli Archive,

Carlo Ernesto Lefèbvre had not studied because his father had not wanted him to. Evidently, he had worked hard anyway and had learned to be an accountant by taking a few courses. He had then been employed by Palma's Commercial Studio (which gave him a letter of reference) and the Castaldi Navigation Company, an important company based in Livorno whose activity continued into the 21st century.

He then worked for Costruzioni Meccaniche Meridionali, a company linked to several others including Birra Peroni, which had factories in various cities as well as Rome, Naples and Livorno. In the house long inhabited by his nephew Antonio Lefèbvre in Rome, there are bills, letterheads and stock sheets that explain the presence of someone who had worked in that factory founded in 1912. Later, perhaps a year or two later, Carlo Ernesto worked in a company in which his father had probably put his last money, Industrie Aviatorie Meridionali.[144]

This company received orders from the State and like all industries of that type also had a shareholding from the Kingdom: was that the employment that brought him serenity? It seems so because in 1925, some 20 years after Maria Bertolini's letter to Queen Margherita, we find him working in that company as an accounting clerk.

So, even if we do not know the exact circumstances, the acquaintance between Catlo Ernesto, nephew of the Marquise de Casafuerte, and Elvira the professor's daughter must have arisen during one of the frequent occasions of common

[144] It is difficult to know the details because the records of this company, kept in the Historical Archives of the Naples Chamber of Commerce, have been inaccessible to both the public and scholars for many years.

meetings, conferences, dancing parties, walks. Two other missives appear from the same period as the letter sent to Queen Margherita, one written by Maria Bertolini and one typed by her.

The first is addressed to a certain 'excellence', hence some Neapolitan authority, for the fate of the 'recommended' who can be none other than Carlo Ernesto, for whom she was seeking employment so that he could marry her daughter. The other is a letter sent from Paris on 28 May 1907 by a certain The New American Manufacturing, which, in response to a request from her, assured that the company was looking for agents to sell its products, special razors. This was a resale job, not actual employment, and was therefore not considered.[145]

Eventually, despite the difficulties surrounding Carlo Ernesto's position, the marriage between Elvira and her fiancé took place. The young man found a job that allowed him to start a family. He left the house in Via Loggia dei Pisani, where he lived hosted by his father Carlo Lefèbvre, and married on 15 July 1909. The *Giornale d'Italia* of Rome – curiously, not *Il Mattino* of Naples – also reported on the following day, 16 July:

Miss Elvira D'Ovidio, daughter of Senator Francesco D'Ovidio, was married yesterday to the young gentleman Carlo Ernesto Lefèbvre de Clunière, son of Count Carlo. The *Giornale d'Italia*, announcing the very happy event, sends fervent good wishes to the happy couple and, thinking then of the separation of the young bride from her much-loved and beloved parents, it is not without tears that it wishes to remind its friend and illustrious collaborator Francesco

[145] Lefèbvre D'Ovidio Private Archive not catalogued. Letter from Maria Bertolini to an unknown Excellency (1907?); Letter from New American Manufacturing to Maria Bertolini, 28 May 1907.

D'Ovidio of the melancholic and resigned sentence of his and our Manzoni that "there is pain, I am about to say, a little for everything".[146]

The newlyweds, young but not very young, set off on their honeymoon for Cava dei Tirreni and Telese for 10 days, returning the following 25 July to take possession of their flat in Via Latilla 6 (today the doorway bears 8), converted from their in-laws' flat. They lived in Professor D'Ovidio's large flat for a few years before becoming completely autonomous. The house, already mentioned in this writing, still exists. It is a stately home of two floors plus a service floor in what is now called Piazzale D'Ovidio, a side street of Via Toledo, strategically close to the University building.[147]

In October 1909, having returned from their honeymoon, they appear radiant in portraits by the photographer Lo Gatto of Naples. She appears in a long dress, a flowery hat; Carlo Ernesto is a distinguished gentleman, thin, with a moustache, straw hat and an elegant walking stick. In October 1910, the groom's uncle, Francesco Lefèbvre, died. He left no inheritance to his nephew, due to the reverses of fortune that were afflicting him, the collapse of the family business, and the fact that the bulk of what was left to him went to his wife, Countess Giselle von Waecbechter Lefèbvre.

The title of nobility passed to the deceased's brother, Carlo Lefèbvre (1878-1920), who would leave it to his son upon his death; five years before his death, D'Ovidio thus saw his daughter Elvira become 'Countess Elvira' to his and his wife Maria's satisfaction. The sign of this change can be read in his

[146] "Il Giornale d'Italia', Milan, 16 July 1909. Lefèbvre D'Ovidio Private Archive, No. 3.
[147] Tickets, Lefèbvre D'Ovidio Private Archive, No. 3.

notes and letters, such as those sent by his friend Michele Sciuti, director of the L. Bianchi Psychiatric Hospital in Naples and a family friend, who changed from calling Elvira 'Madam' to 'Countess Elvira' in letters before 1920.[148]

Of the rest of this couple's life, it can be said that it was quiet and entirely devoted to looking after their children. They had a villa at Posillipo, and were loved and pampered by their grandfather D'Ovidio, who often appears in the faded and almost obliterated photos taken in his house with his grandchildren in his arms.

As for Carlo Ernesto, who had not been able to study, he remained a modest clerk all his life even though he became a strong reader, stimulated by the intense cultural life of the D'Ovidio house.

[148] Lefèbvre D'Ovidio Private Archive, *Michele Sciuti a Maria D'Ovidio*, circa 1926.

The young couple: Carlo Ernesto and Elvira newly married.
Summer 1909.

Elvira D'Ovidio:
'To my children, this playful portrait of twenty years ago'.

Chapter 14

Grandchildren

From the happy marriage between Elvira and Carlo Ernesto was born Ovidio (1910-2006), who came into the world less than a year after the wedding, filling the D'Ovidio grandparents, who were suffering from a lack of grandchildren, with confidence, followed by Antonio (1913-2011) and Mario (1917-1983). The couple's children carried a double surname that would remain with their descendants, and they also carried a noble title as dowry. Antonio and Mario were names that came from the maternal side, while Ovidio was a tribute to Elvira's father, a passionate scholar of the Latin poet.

Here, we will focus on the figure of Antonio. Antonio was considered a man of uncommon preparation and intelligence, like uncle Enrico – founder of the Italian mathematical school and the Polytechnic of Turin – and like grandfather Francesco, with Comparetti and D'Ancona, founder or continuer of the Italian historical school and a great protagonist of the Neapolitan academic world. A few photographs exist of the early years of the Lefèbvre D'Ovidio brothers. One depicts seven people in a small walled garden in a country landscape. This photo may reveal an enigma that has always hovered over the figure of Ernesto: his mother, Antonietta Candida. The photo depicts a family group outdoors; behind the figures is a group of trees and a low wall. On the left, a barely visible relief can be glimpsed.

The photograph shows Carlo Ernesto holding the hand of the oldest child, Ovid, aged around 7 years, on the left we see the second oldest child, Antonio, aged around 3 years, and in the arms of a nursemaid, Mario, who is no more than 6 months old.

Carlo Ernesto Lefèbvre, Elvira D'Ovidio, with the three children who will take the surname Lefèbvre d'Ovidio.

The photograph was therefore taken in early 1918 at the latest. All the characters are identifiable except for the middle-aged woman standing to the side on the left.

Could the middle-aged woman be Carlo Ernesto's ‘ghost’ mother, i.e. Antoinette Candida?

It is certainly not Maria Bertolini. If the woman portrayed in a light-coloured dress and hat is not a relative of Campobasso (there is nothing to suggest this), the hypothesis might be valid, although it remains a hypothesis. Strangely enough, in fact, these photographs do not bear any wording in the original.

In another shot, taken at the same time, and perhaps on the same day (Carlo Ernesto and Elvira wear the same clothe), the children and the wet nurse appear again. But the mature female figure is not there. The landscape looks like that of Balsorano or nearby: meadows, hills.

A proud Elvira reappears in another shot taken on the same occasion as the first photo, the one of the walled garden, holding the youngest child of the three, namely Mario, born in 1917. The photograph is therefore to be placed about six months after the birth of the child.

In another photograph, taken at the same time, the father is dressed in dark clothes but the middle child is dressed in the same way, the landscape is clearly hilly. In another photograph, Carlo Ernesto appears a few years later when the children are older, at a holiday resort. Judging by the age of the children, we are in the early 1930s. There is a sense of well-being in the photos that suggests that the straits in which Lefèbvre struggled in the early part of his life are over. Carlo Ernesto, as mentioned above, had several jobs and certainly

worked at the I.A.M. until their closure. After 1920, the residue of the inheritance that had fallen to his father passed to him.[149] In Naples, in particular, despite the dispersal of part of the estate and the sale of buildings following Carlo's difficulties, the Lefèbvre family kept a portion of a palazzo at Riva di Chiaia 235, which had belonged to their grandfather Ernesto.

The social and cultural life of the new Lefèbvre couple between 1910 and the pre-war period was very active in Naples. In reports of social life published by *Il Mattino* di Napoli, the couple is sometimes mentioned. We know that at Christmas 1919 they attended a theatre première with little Ovidio and Antonio. If the first years of the couple's married life passed serenely and peacefully, what made the following years more troubled was the state of health of Elvira's father-in-law and father, Francesco, whose ailments, his eyes, the mucous membranes of his mouth and stomach, became increasingly serious.

At the time of Elvira's marriage, Francesco D'Ovidio was also blind in the other eye. However, his profound blindness was never absolute. Evidence of this can be found in the notes he wrote over the years, even in the later ones, such as the 8 December 1921 in which, being in Rome, he wrote to his wife: I want to 'see with my own eyes', the grandchildren, the 'three dear little ones'. If it is not a generic expression (but recurs) it means that he could see shadows.[150]

In his later years he was also bedridden (where he continued

[149] Later press articles call Antonio Lefèbvre by the nickname 'Tannò' and describe him as the son of the 'penniless Neapolitan nobleman', Carlo Lefèbvre. "L'Espresso', 1976, No. 22, p. 9.
[150] Lefèbvre D'Ovidio Private Archive, *Francesco D'Ovidio a Maria*, 12 December 1921.

to dictate articles and essays) paralysed or perhaps too weak to move except with extreme effort and help. There is a typewritten text of his from the autumn of 1924 that contains a *Autoanamnesi* of his ailments and attempted cures that is painful even to read: many are the ailments from which he suffered, even serious ones, of the mouth, skin, eyes, and the whole body (half-blindness, itching, pain, eczema, tremors). He tried to cure himself with a very long series of remedies ranging from radiation to injections of different substances to thermal baths, with no relief.[151] His condition in the months that followed worsened, forcing him to lie in bed, semi-paralysed, before his death on 25 November 1925.

Francesco d'Ovidio with a nephew. On the terrace of the house in Largo Latilla in Naples (circa 1915).

[151] *Autoanamnesi di Francesco Lefèbvre*, pp. 1-5. Typescript preserved in Via del Nuoto, Lefèbvre D'Ovidio Private Archive, Rome.

Again, the inheritance received from D'Ovidio must have allowed the new couple a certain serenity. According to scarcely verifiable literature, circulated in even the most recent press articles, the decision that Elvira's children should bear not only her husband's surname but also her own, D'Ovidio, would have matured after the death of the elderly professor. In fact, as already mentioned, the children were registered at the registry office with the double surname Lefèbvre D'Ovidio, a circumstance that suggests a sort of informal agreement prior to the marriage.[152]

In the year of her father's death, Elvira was 49 years old and Carlo Ernesto 47.[153] A little over a month later, Elvira wrote a letter to her deceased parent's colleague, Pio Rajna (1847-1930), informing him about various circumstances surrounding the death and the affection her father felt for his friend.

Ugo Ojetti wrote about it in *La Stampa*:

"Distinguished Disappeared: Francesco D'Ovidio" He had been missing for some time. The darkness that had descended upon him had removed him from the commerce of the world. His witticism fell melancholically on the small huddle of faithful who still used to gather around him. For long years reduced to dictating, his prose had taken on the gait of spoken discourse.[154]

Ugo Ojetti mentions a 'small huddle of the faithful who still used to gather around him', and in this melancholic note he certainly speaks the truth. When he died, D'Ovidio had gone out of fashion, if one can say so, his historical-German method, albeit

[152] Municipality of Naples, ASN, Civil Status Archives, year 1913.
[153] Gerolamo Vitelli - Pio Rajna, *Francesco D'Ovidio,* 'Nuova Antologia', 16 March 1926.
[154] Ugo Ojetti, *La Stampa*, 26 November 1926.

tempered, had been largely supplanted or corrected or replaced. However, the old disciples, now with white hair, who headed many important cultural institutions and held professorships in all parts of Italy did not fail to make themselves heard.

After Francesco's death, the now elderly Maria Bertolini donated 1264 rare and valuable books to the State, which are still part of a special fund preserved in the National Library in Rome. At the time, the oldest son, Ovidio, was 15 years old, Antonio 8.[155]

In the commemoration held in the Senate of the Republic on 8 December 1925, Vice-President Renato Zuppelli spoke of him as one of the men who had contributed to the education of the young nation:

I should not speak of Francesco D'Ovidio here where so many friends, admirers, study and work companions, and devoted disciples of the illustrious deceased sit. But allow me, as a schoolmaster, to remember him even more than his numerous writings, among which those of Manzoni and Dante stand out as being of broad and solid doctrine, of a limpid and flowing form, as we are accustomed to admiring in many Neapolitan writings, alive and sparkling with wit, his truly incomparable work of a master. Francesco D'Ovidio as well as [...], have with their tireless work contributed to giving the Italian School and Science that sense of dignity and seriousness for which one can speak in Europe with respect and admiration of an Italian philological science. They have been teachers in the noblest sense of the word; and in the love and search for truth, in the habit of work pursued with disinterest and religious abnegation, they have been educators of the national character.

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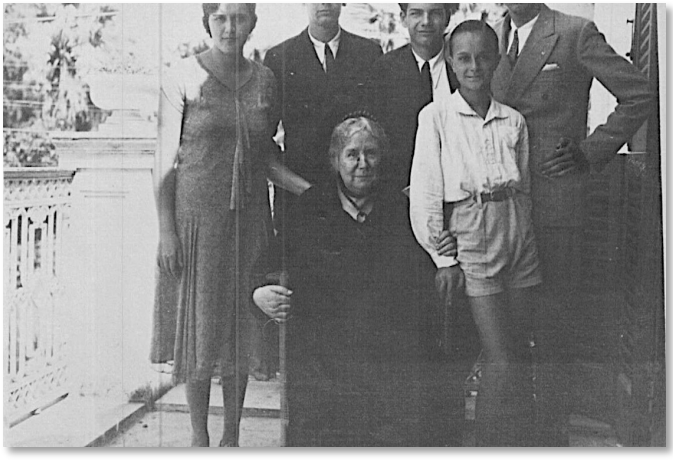
[155] *Lettera di Elvira Lefèbvre D'Ovidio a Pio Rajna*, 12 December 1925. Rajna Archive Library. Marucelliana Library. Rajna correspondence. Cart 15. Another "portrait" can be found in *La Stampa* of 26 November 1925 by U. O. (Ugo Ojetti?).

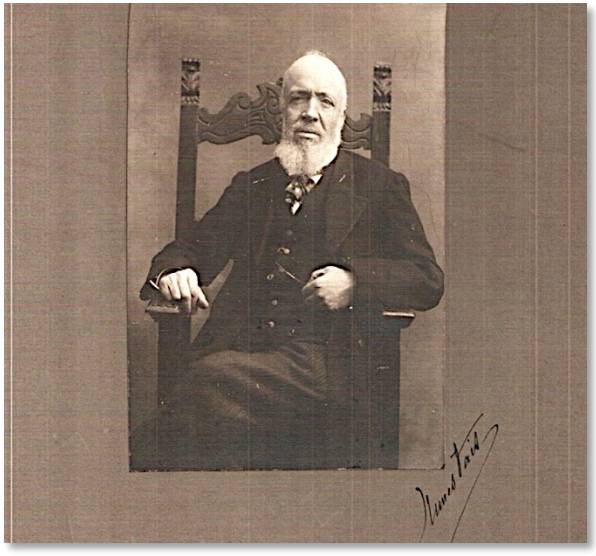
In fact, these men, who all lived modestly and whom the austerity of their studies seemed almost to separate like a barrier from the tumultuous life of politics, from the rampant superficiality that is sometimes derided or little appreciated, prepared and accustomed a whole host of young people to severe, patient, methodical work, tempering their character, offering them the example of a noble, disinterested life, fervently given to the study of teaching. For this respect, Francesco D'Ovidio can be held up as a high example to the young. From his indefatigable work, he asked for no other reward than the intimate joy that came from the persuasion that, in doing it, he was serving his country; and he died poor. Old, almost blind, with a very lucid mind and a clear awareness of the gradual and fatal decline of his strength and of the end that was rapidly approaching, he did not for a moment stop working, ordering, revising and correcting the drafts of the first two volumes of his works that were being reprinted.

Such was he throughout his life, as his beloved disciple, Senator Scherillo, recently recalled with heartfelt regret, ever since he rose to the chairs of the Licei in 1870 from which he then moved to the University of Naples, called there by Ruggero Bonghi in 1873 (*Atti Parlamentari*, 8 December 1925).



Maria Bertolini aged. The widow's clothing, the age and style of the other family members' clothes suggest that the photo was taken between 1926 and 1930.

Carlo Ernesto Lefèbvre and his three sons at the end of the 1930s, on holiday at Posillipo (where his father Carlo had spent his last years). Below, one of D'Ovidio's last photos, probably taken on the occasion of his retirement (summer 1924).



One of D'Ovidio's last public appearances outside the University took place in May 1923 when he accompanied his disciple Michele Scherillo, lecturer and author of many commentaries and essays on Italian literature and appointed Senator of the Kingdom that year, to the solemn oath in the Senate. Scherillo himself writes: 'although seriously afflicted by the illness that was to lead him to the grave, he did not want to miss the session in May 1921. He had promised his favourite disciple, who had remained filially devoted to him through so many vicissitudes, to accompany him into the senatorial chamber and to be his godfather in the oath [...] it was the last time that the revered and wise master made his beautiful, harmonious and ringing voice resound in the austere hall of Palazzo Madama".[156]

Concealed in Scherillo's winged and courtly words seems to be a dig at Manfredi Porena who officially held the position of D'Ovidio's closest pupil and was certainly 'filially devoted' to him, as well as being a son-in-law married to his daughter Carolina. Porena certainly did not have the honours of Scherillo, who ultimately also became Dean of the Faculty of Letters at the University of Milan (Università Statale), despite his extensive and well-deserved fame as a scholar and critic.

The two, evidently until the very end, competed for the title of favourite pupil of what was at the time a truly revered master.

[156] Michele Scherillo, *Francesco D'Ovidio*, 'Nuova Antologia', Rome 1925, p. 6.

Michelle Scherillo (1860-1930).

After Francesco's death, Maria lived in Naples until 1929 in Piazzetta Latilla, today Piazzetta D'Ovidio. She then moved to Carlo Ernesto and Elvira's house who, with the arrival of their three children and the enlargement of the family, had to find a new home in the Vomero.

After the second Nobel Prize in Literature, D'Ovidio was nominated four times for the highest literary honour between 1909 and 1912, never being elected by the Academicians of Sweden.[157] The committees of pupils and admirers were very active and managed to bring D'Ovidio within a hair's breadth of the prize: probably the fact that he had never written any fiction, that he was a literary scientist and not a literary artist weighed heavily on the final decisions. But this shows how the

[157] Enrico Tiozzo, *A un passo dal premio Nobel: il Nobel e i candidati italiani del Primo Novecento*, 'Belfagor', v. 59, no. 3 (31 May 2004), pp. 329-342.

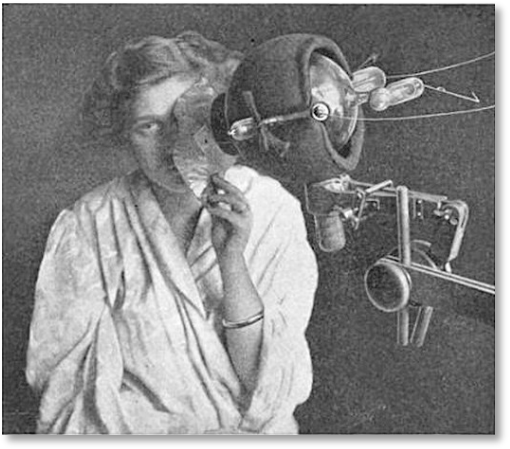
Italian academy at that time – and not only the Italian academy – was in agreement in considering him a person of absolute international standing.

The last period of D'Ovidio's life was particularly distressing as he himself testifies in an *Autoanamnesi* dated around the autumn of 1924.[158] The worsening of his condition had started in 1918, after a particularly strong flu (probably the Spanish flu that raged in those years, killing, it seems, hundreds of thousands of Italians). At that time he suffered from gingivitis, stomatitis and bronchitis. His mouth and lips were swollen and sore, his bronchi were constantly filling with mucus forcing him to expectorate constantly, even streaked with blood. He reduced his diet to liquid foods and still suffered. He stated that his nose was constantly blocked with blood. He had pains in his ears and continuous and recurrent stomatitis. Being the son of a gouty, it was thought to be podagra or gout or rheumatism. The problems and pains continued throughout 1920 without improvement even though he could 'speak with a certain freedom' and therefore teach. However, he continued his treatments: he took preparations that made him feel better, but 'as I had the cursed habit of sniffing tobacco, when I abstained from it for a few days, my mouth immediately improved'.

> But unfortunately I resumed my teaching, which was very harmful to me [...] during the 1922-1923 school year I had to give up causticatio ns of the mouth almost completely, as they produced too much irritation. [159]

[158] The inverted commas are from the *Autoanamnesi*, undated (but autumn 1924), Lefèbvre D'Ovidio Private Archive, uncatalogued.
[159] *Autoanamnesi*, undated (but autumn 1924). Lefèbvre D'Ovidio Private Archive.

He had new symptoms with sores, rashes and intestinal fevers. In January 1922, he began a cure with silver nitrate and arsenical preparations that made him feel better. In 1922, we know that Enrico D'Ovidio, with his family, came from Biella to visit Naples for the Easter holidays.[160] Despite these serious illnesses, we know that he travelled to Rome several times, especially for the Senate sessions, and for the most important sessions at the Lincei.



Advertisement of the Koch X-ray cure that Francesco D'Ovidio underwent (1923-1924).

The last years of teaching were very hard for him. He was already blind, had to be assisted and despite this he tried not to miss or to miss very little: to this dedication his pupils were always grateful.

In May and June 1924 he went to Bern to undergo treatment by a certain Dr Kocher. And here we find treatments typical of

[160] Lefèbvre D'Ovidio Private Archive, *Francesco D'Ovidio a Maria*, 1921 or 1922.

that time when the effects of exposure to X-rays were not yet known. The X-ray 'cures' worsened the situation, increasing his salivation abnormally, so much so that he never improved from then on. In the summer of 1924 he took sulphurous baths at Vico Equense, without any obvious benefit. Then he tried a new remedy that used low-intensity electric shocks to be passed through the body. These were the Clinosolenoid treatments from the United States, mainly from Nicola Tesla's studies, which gave him 'some benefit' in the general condition of his body.

He then resorted to autotransfusions of blood by taking about half a litre at a time and recasting it into the vein. In addition to other treatments such as auto-entero-vaccine-therapy with application of extracts of vaccine bacterial intestinal flora.

The *Autoanamnesi* contains other remedies, medicines, cures that generally demonstrate D'Ovidio's willingness to continue his mission as a teacher to the end despite the illnesses that finally led to his death in November 1925. Before the flu of 1918, his condition had been – apart from his blindness – good.

Some more information on the family comes to us from a relative named Quintavalle. As we know, in 1875 Francesco D'Ovidio married in Bologna the Mantuan (but born in Milan) Maria Bertolini (1850?-1943), daughter of the historian Francesco Bertolini (1836-1909) and Carolina Quintavalle (1840?-around 1872), by whom he had two daughters. The two lived first in Milan, for two years, then briefly in Bologna and finally in Naples, in the Vomero district. By marrying Bertolini, D'Ovidio became related to a very ramified and wealthy family, the Quintavalle family. These were originally from Venice and had several branches. They held the title of counts (Maria's mother was called 'noble Quintavalle'). The only member, as far as we know, who left evidence of association with the D'Ovidio was Ferruccio.

The Quintavalle branch had long since settled in Mantua. This included one Ferruccio (1873-1953), who was a professor of Italian history, author of many texts including a *Storia dell'unità italiana* (1814-1924) and other important publications on the Risorgimento and the Great War.[161] Carolina Quintavalle's father was Antonio Quintavalle (1817-1870), a notary by profession, who had four sons and a daughter, Carolina, Maria's mother and who died around 1872.

[161] *Storia dell'unità italiana*, Hoepli, Milan 1926. He had four sons: Umberto, Bruno Antonio, Noel and Oscar. The first three participated as officers in the Great War and were decorated with the Silver Medal for Military Valour.

Count Ferruccio Quintavalle,
tennis champion and founder of Autobianchi.

It is from a cousin of Carolina's, also named Ferruccio Quintavalle (1914-1998), that we owe further news about Francesco D'Ovidio and the Bertolini family. The latter was an important figure in Italian industrial history: a tennis champion in his youth, he was later the founder of Bianchi bicycles and the Autobianchi automobile brand.

In a 1943 letter to Maria Bertolini, he recalled the fact that Francesco D'Ovidio had almost completely lost his sight at the age of 35 in the autumn of 1884, and that this drama, after the first months of pain and bewilderment, was was faced with fortitude by the patient and his entire family, who gave him constant assistance. He emphasises that for the first few years he was 'almost completely' blind, but not quite. The letter, which recalls a fact we know, testifies to his first-hand knowledge of D'Ovidio's illness. Ferruccio had visited his cousin Maria

Bertolini and her husband several times over the years.

Ferruccio kept in touch with relatives in Naples during the war. In a letter dated 24 May 1943, he recalls that Maria was distressed about the long imprisonment of his nephew Mario held in India, an imprisonment that would only end in 1945.[162]

[162] Scuola Normale di Pisa, D'Ovidio Archive, Letter MB-CART, 39.

Chapter 15

The D'Ovidio Committee

Curiously enough, in addition to a committee of friends and students who had wanted to commemorate the figure of Francesco D'Ovidio during his lifetime, they had also set up a committee for the funeral honours for the maestro when he was still alive, namely when he retired at the end of the 1924-1925 academic year. A farewell party was held, speeches were made, after which D'Ovidio, who was ill, would be seen little or nothing in the following months. It is a fact that after his retirement in July 1925, he suddenly became worse, was seized by great physical pain and could no longer move from home.[163] He remained awake almost to the very end and the cause of death seems to have been, from the way he is told, an aggravation of an already compromised situation. We find writings by D'Ovidio not many months before his death, probably already dismissed earlier.

In any case, the committee met in Naples when he had retired from his professorship, so it appears to be a "shadow committee" of the former, which honoured him during his lifetime and published studies in his honour and edited his opera omnia. The main task was precisely the reprinting of all of Dovidian's works, which we have mentioned, the second was "the duty to place a marker on the place that would give peace to those tortured and weary bones, the first milestone on

[163] Emanuele Ciafardini, *Commemorazione di Francesco D'Ovidio*, Accademia Pontaniana, Naples 1931, p. 6.

the road that the immortal memory of Francesco D'Ovidio will travel in time", as Professor Antonio Sogliano (1854-1942), senator, archaeologist, the highest authority for many years on the excavations of Pompeii and the arrangement of areas in the area and Director of the Archaeological Museum of Naples, wrote. Sogliano had been a pupil of D'Ovidio. He recalls that, on the day of the funeral, which was held in solemn form in Naples, he asked his colleague Senator Enrico Cocchia (1859-1930), Latinist, professor of Latin literature and Rector of the University of Naples, and creator of the Virgilian Park, if the Royal Extraordinary Commissioner of the Municipality could grant a free area for the burial of illustrious men in the enclosure. A short time later, when the Solemn Commemoration took place, the concession was a done deal. It was necessary to proceed with the expenses and the sculptor Ennio Tomai came to the rescue. He made the sketch of the bust from photos and designed the entire monument. Approval was granted by a Royal Extraordinary Commissioner of the municipality. So the money was paid thanks to 'the High Commissioner, H.E. Michele Castelli, who despite his many occupations, never fails to honour the high priests of knowledge'.[164]

And here before you is the monument. On a pedestal with correct and elegant lines, which, while the dark hue of the stone is reminiscent of the severe Roman tombs of the Republican era, is well suited to the austerity of Francesco D'Ovidio's life, is the entire bronze bust. The artist has portrayed the master in a moment of recollection or mental concentration, which is perfectly justified by the book, which he holds in his right hand and which he has now

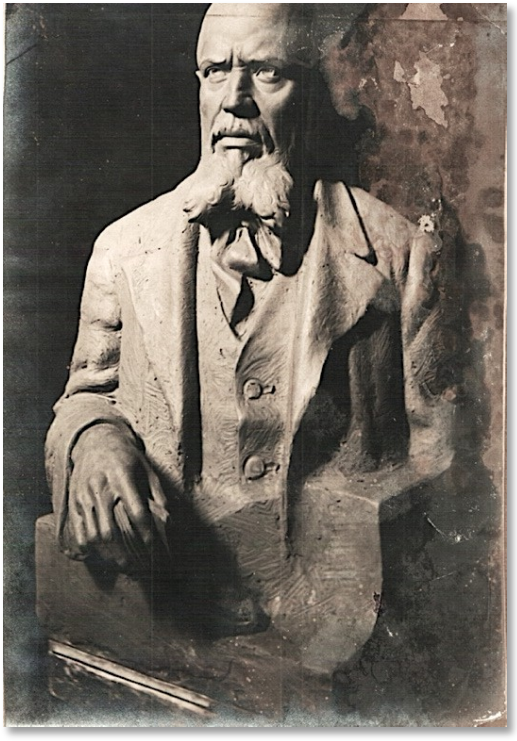
[164] *In memory of Francesco D'Ovidio*, 29 May 1927 in the Poggioreale Cemetery in Naples, Tipografia Moderna, Caserta 1927, p. 8.

opened, placing his middle finger in it as a sign: the thinker is characterised by the *volumen* in classical art, and yet our artist has very appropriately not deprived his creation of this attribute, and has thus harmonised the expression of the face with it. But which will it be, on which the Master meditates? Will it be his Dante or his Manzoni! By integrating and surrounding the artist's ghost, one could almost say that it is the Divine Comedy and that the place the Maestro marked with his finger is the tenth fifth canto of Paradise, the canto of Cacciaguida, which the great critic broods over to himself; the piety of his intellectual and affectionate consort Maria Bertolini, who shared the exertions of his long study and the pains of his ordeal at every hour, wanted the last verse of Cacciaguida's canto engraved on this monument:

And I came from martyrdom to this peace.[165]

The tomb is located in the section of the Monumental Cemetery known as the Quadrato degli Uomini Illustri (Square of Illustrious Men), a section that is not very large, containing 157 monuments, in which, a few metres away, also lie Carlo Ernesto Lefèbvre's father, Carlo (died 1920), his grandfather Ernesto (died 1891) and the progenitor of the Neapolitan branch Charles (died 1858) with his wives and children. Also Saverio Mercadante, Francesco de Sanctis, Benedetto Croce, Vincenzo Gemito, Luigi Settembrini, Nicola Zingarelli and others.

[165] *Ibid*, p. 8-9.



Sketch for the monument to Francesco d'Ovidio.

D'Ovidio's tomb at the "Recinto degli Uomini Illustri" in the Monumental Cemetery of Naples immediately after the installation.

The speeches showed affection for D'Ovidio and, indeed, his many students, many of whom became important men of Italian culture, did not fail to remember him with accents that seemed to go beyond the occasion. At the tomb's inauguration, the Podestà of Campobasso also appeared, who had made some timid attempts to host in his land this illustrious Molisian who had left when he was only nine years old and had lived his entire life in Naples.

On 2 January 1930, in a ceremony attended by the whole family, the City of Naples affixed a plaque to No. 6 Largo Latilla, since then Piazzale D'Ovidio, where he had lived on the first floor of the house, as it says.[166]

[166] *Bollettino del Comune di Napoli. Rassegna illustrata di storia, arte, topografia e statistica napoletana*, F. Giannini & figli, Naples 1930, p. 23.

The funeral monument is now the property of the State Property Office and is catalogued as a work of funerary art.

Chapter 16

Grandson Antonio

The studies of Antonio

Carlo Ernesto and Elvira's three children had an excellent education at the 'Vittorio Emanuele' high school, where their grandfather had already studied, and all three graduated in Naples. When Carlo Ernesto retired, the whole family moved to Rome (1938) to Via Paisiello 26. The capital, at that time, offered many career possibilities that Naples no longer did. In fact, they all had brilliant careers, although Antonio in particular emerged. The brilliant career of his nephew Antonio, who had become an important scholar in a few years, had made that transfer possible. And one can imagine with what sorrow the house in Largo Latilla was left after more than 60 years.

Antonio was admitted to the Scuola Normale in Pisa where he studied mathematics before choosing a course of study that he considered more suited to his ambitions. He could count on a wealth of relations that his family had maintained and preserved in the academy after the D'Ovidio's union with the Lefèbvre. The Lefèbvre D'Ovidio family retained the profile of an upper middle-class intellectual family while also possessing a noble title that, although no longer legal tender in Italy since 1946, retained it elsewhere.

The wealth of relationships that came, at that time, especially from his mother's side – both Francesco and Enrico

D'Ovidio were, as we have seen, respected but also powerful figures in Italian academia – could make all the difference. After initially considering mathematics, Antonio chose to study law in Naples. His course of study was exceptionally short: he graduated at the age of 20 in 1933 and in 1935 he also took a degree in Political Science. Some of the professors he studied with, who were notoriously full of praise for their students, immediately held him in high esteem. Among them was a prominent figure of the Italian academy: Antonio Scialoja (1879-1962), former MP and then senator from 1929, who held the chair of Maritime Law at the University of Naples from 1922 until the Second World War. Lefèbvre's friends also included Bernardo Scorza (1910-1937), Gabriele Pescatore (1916-2016) and Giovanni Leone (1908-2001).[167]

The latter two, like Antonio, began their careers in Naples and concluded them in Rome. Particularly important for their rise in the academic world in those years was their connection with Scialoja. It must be remembered that navigation law, considered as a unitary field of air and water navigation, was a novelty in Italy. It was only in 1927 that Rome had endowed itself with an Institute of Aviation Law thanks to the interest of Minister Guido del Vecchio, the Dean of the Faculty of Law Pietro De Francisci and Professor Torquato Giannini. As for the establishment of a chair in Maritime Law, this was not completed until 1934. It was initially taught free of charge by Giannini and then by Roberto Sandiford (from 1938 to 1942). On 6 October 1942 the teaching of Navigation Law was established, incorporating the chair of Aviation Law taught by Scialoja. The Institute of Navigation Law had as its subject

[167] Not to be confused with the mathematician of the same name Bernardino Scorza (1876-1939).

matter, according to its own statute, Navigation Law, Public and Aeronautical Law, History of Maritime Law, Maritime and Naval Legislation of the Main Countries, Maritime and Aeronautical Law of War. It can thus be said that Antonio Scialoja, deputy, senator, under-secretary, was the founder with his students of navigation law in Italy.

Scialoja's systematic work was based on the unitary consideration of aviation and maritime law and the autonomous characterisation of this discipline with respect to public and commercial law. This led to the subsequent drafting of a *Codice della navigazione* distinct from the other codes. Starting from the consideration of the basic unitary physiognomy of all forms of navigation (maritime, inland and air), Scialoja marked a precise direction for science and legislation, upholding the unity and autonomy of navigation law. He also argued that the study of this branch of law should not be limited to commercial relations but to all public and private aspects of navigation by sea, inland waters and air. His scholarly work, which began with commercial law and was founded on a historicist basis, left its most lasting imprint in the arrangement of maritime and aviation law.[168]

Of course, it is curious that Antonio's father, albeit as a clerk and accountant, worked at the Castaldi Company that was to become one of Italy's most important ship-owning companies, and then at Industrie Aviatorie Meridionali, a pioneering company in the navigation of the skies: Carlo Ernesto's stories to his son had probably provoked such a fascination in him that it became a reason for living.

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[168] This lesson was deepened by Antonio Lefèbvre D'Ovidio himself, who in his *Manuale di Diritto della Navigazione* writes historical notes on the various European navigation laws of the past.

A photograph from the 1940s shows an Antonio Lefèbvre probably close to 40 years old in the company of his wife Eugenia. Among other characters one seems to recognise, standing with his back to his right, his father Carlo Ernesto.

Antonio put himself forward for university competitions and was appointed to teach Maritime Law at the Faculty of Economics and Business at the University of Bari in 1936-1938 and Commercial Law in 1937-1939. In 1935 Bernardino Scorza founded the 'Rivista del diritto della navigazione' in Naples, of which 22-year-old Antonio was appointed editorial secretary. The journal was to welcome the best experts in the legal disciplines of Maritime Law and Commercial Law. According to historians, it had the merit of bringing the elaboration of navigation law 'to the same level as other areas of private law', giving rise to a 'Neapolitan school of navigation law'.[169]

[169] Biographical notes in *Studi in onore di Antonio Lefebvre D'Ovidio*,

In 1938, he won the first competition for a chair in Navigation Law, and from 1939 he became a tenured professor of this subject in Italian universities. That year he was also called as an extraordinary professor at the Faculty of Law in Bari, where he taught the subject until 1942. In the same year, he received his qualification as a lawyer as an advocate in the Court of Cassation. In the course of his long career he would become the owner of three important law firms based in Rome, Naples and Genoa, the last two dedicated to navigation law and legal and commercial assistance to shipping companies. By a twist of fate, Antonio Lefèbvre's official academic career began in the Puglia region where his ancestor Charles Lefèbvre had taken his first steps as an entrepreneur. Scialoja's support and the position he obtained made him love the subject to which he would devote the rest of his life.

At the end of 1939, the work of revising the codes and reforming navigation legislation was entrusted, at the behest of Benito Mussolini himself, to a committee chaired by Scialoja and Dino Grandi who prepared the draft for the writing of the new Navigation Code.[170] Antonio Lefèbvre was involved by his university professors in the committee that worked from 1939 to 1942. Antonio Lefèbvre's archive, kept for a long time in his house in Via del Nuoto in Rome, bears

cur. E. Turco Bulgherini, Giuffré, Milan 1995 p. XXII. After the interruption of publication, the journal was resumed in 1948 by Antonio until its suspension in 1972, and was based in his Roman law office, first in Via Barberini, then in Via del Nuoto (where the Fondazione Maruzza Onlus is now located). After another suspension, the journal resumed publication in 2010 for Aracne Editions, directed by one of Antonio's students, Elda Turco Bulgherini.

[170] The draft was approved by Royal Decree on 27 January 1941 and converted into law on 19 May 1941 (No. 501). The new text was then coordinated with the Civil Code (30 March 1942).

the trace, in hundreds of preparatory files and in an entire consulted library, of this great work. Among the legal disciplines, that dedicated to navigation was, at that time, the most suitable for talented and ambitious young men. A complete redefinition of the subject had been looming for some time. The process had been underway for decades but it was only after the end of the Second World War that important results were achieved. An important player in this respect was the Italian Association of Maritime Law (AIDIM), established in 1899 on the model of the Comité Maritime International (CMI). Already in that year there was an Italian presence in the London Conference and then in those of the following years. The protagonist of this period was Professor Francesco Berlingieri (1857-1939). In 1922 an important conference for the unification of maritime law was held in The Hague organised by the Maritime Law Committee of the International Law Association, where it was decided to adopt a Code to aid the unification of rules (Hague Rules). The work of adopting common rules continued with the new Italian code, the drafting of which, Scialoja told Grandi at the time, 'without Lefèbvre... cannot be done'.[171] These words are confirmed in Dino Grandi's autobiography:

> Senator Scialoja had founded an academy composed of his former students, teachers of maritime law. Prominent among them was a young professor of maritime law at the University of Bari named Antonio Lefèbvre, whom Scialoja suggested I temporarily transfer to the office of the minister of the Guardasigilli. So it was done. Lefèbvre immediately demonstrated exceptional ability, intelligence and experience. In a short time, he centralised the entire work on the code in his person and was also the author of the report

[171] Biographical Notes in *cit.,* p. XXIII.

that was to be presented to the Sovereign. Under the guidance of Senator Scialoja and the supervision of the Minister of the Seals, Antonio Lefèbvre must be considered the author of the Navigation Code, which became state law in 1942. [172]

The importance of Antonio Lefèbvre in the drafting of the Navigation Code was later confirmed by Giovanni Leone, President of the Italian Republic, who was to be linked to Lefèbvre by a long friendship. After 1942, Antonio enlisted in the Navy, in the Aeronautical Commissariat, reaching the rank of lieutenant colonel in the Harbour Offices. He then joined the Supermarina structure, the 'command room' of the Navy at war, inaugurated on 14 October 1938 by Mussolini on the Lungotevere Flaminia.[173] However, he managed to keep teaching first in Bari and then in Naples. It was during those years, and particularly in 1938, that the entire Lefèbvre D'Ovidio family moved to Rome from Naples, which by then, decayed, offered little to ambitious spirits. Antonio joined the Supermarina after his university discharge and remained there until the armistice of 8 September. After that date he managed to save himself by taking refuge in the Vatican, where he waited for the end of the war. By then the Italian army had been defeated. He was one of those millions of Italians who, when the regime changed and the Allies arrived, cut off from the areas of last resistance, surrendered to the new times. Not an idealistic strategy, perhaps, but one of survival.

Francesco D'Ovidio's descendants came from the children of Carlo Ernesto and Elvira, who, unless they escaped

[172] Dino Grandi, *Il mio paese. Ricordi autobiografici*, Bologna 1985, p. 488.
[173] Giorgio Giorgerini, *La guerra italiana sul mare - La Marina tra vittoria e sconfitta 1940-1943*, Milan, Mondadori, 2001, pp.113-115.

documentation, were not children of Carolina and Porena. The ploy of having Elvira's children given the double patronymic surname made it possible to preserve the D'Ovidio surname that would otherwise have been lost. Enrico had two daughters and his name was lost: the two daughters called themselves Petiva D'Ovidio one, while the other, Pia, used only her husband's name. But legally, their children did not keep the name D'Ovidio.

As for Antonio Lefèbvre D'Ovidio, he met his future wife, Eugenia Beck, born in Naples on 17 April 1917 to a German father and Italian mother, in Rome. They married in 1943. Over the next 10 years, the couple's four children were born: Maria, Francesco, Manfredi and Elvira Silvia.[174] Eugenia Beck Lefèbvre was one of the personalities who created the atmosphere of Via Margutta, the area of artists, painters and sculptors in Rome in those years; among her closest friends were Toti Scialoja (1914-1998) and Sergio Ruffolo (1916-1989), but also the architect Malavasi, the musician Rendano and the art critic Maria Torrente Foti. Shy and reserved, Eugenia did not seek notoriety to the extent that she never organised personal exhibitions.[175]

Mario Lefèbvre D'Ovidio worked in finance. After returning from the war – he was captured at El Alamein in 1942 and remained a prisoner of the British for four years – he married Januaria Capece Minutolo (1918-1949) on 24 October

[174] She grew up in the Neapolitan city, went through high school there and then moved to Rome where she graduated from the Faculty of Literature at La Sapienza University specialising in German literature. During her study trips she stayed in Germany, England and France. In 1940, she settled in Rome where she took a flat and also started a painting business.

[175] Antonio Amoroso, *Eugenia Beck Lefèbvre*, Maruzza Lefèbvre D'Ovidio Foundation, Rome 2007, p. 8.

1946. In 1964, he took over the direction of the Statistical Office of Assonime (Associazione fra le Società Italiane per Azioni) which edited the l'*Annuario statistico delle Società per Azioni italiane*. This became a very sophisticated analysis tool, with annual publication, compiled by experts in econometrics, statistics and economics, which he edited until his death in 1983.[176]

Ovidio (1911-2006), studied law like Antonio and opened a law firm in Rome. During the 1940s, he became a representative and consultant for the American aeronautical industries, in particular the Lockheed Aircraft Corporation.[177] He later lived many years abroad, especially in Mexico and Brazil, making contacts with British, American and South American politicians and businessmen.

In 1969, Ovid took the comital title, which he held for 37 years (1969 to 2006). He married twice, to Maria Noszter and Adele Korpits Gollner. When Ovid died in 2006, it was Mario (1917-1983) who took the comital title, which he then passed on to his eldest son Carlo Lefèbvre Capece Minutolo, who was related to one of the oldest families of the Neapolitan nobility.[178]

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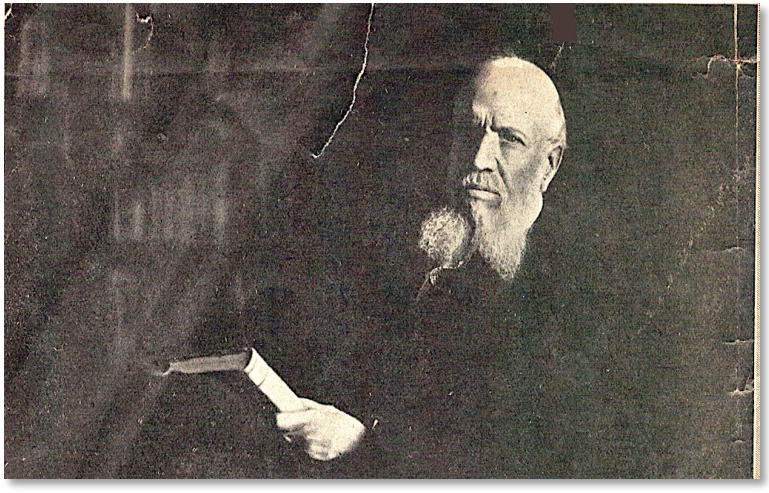
[176] It was later renamed *Repertorio delle società italiane per azioni*: Fulvio Coltorti, *Grandi Gruppi e informazioni finanziarie nel Novecento,* V, Archivio storico Centro Mediobanca, Milan s.d., pp. 10-11.

[177] Ovidio Lefèbvre D'Ovidio had important international connections. He dealt with the finalisation of contracts and arbitration in the aviation industry, feasibility studies and legal advice of various kinds for vessels, aircraft, cargo, personnel. It is not impossible that I.A.M. had some part in this specialisation, even though many years had passed. After all, I.A.M. had built 140 F.B.A. aircraft under licence, which, let us remember, was the initials of the Franco British Aviation consortium.

[178] It should be noted that this branch of the family lost its 'maternal patronymic', as it was somewhat improperly called, to take on that of

After he retired and the committee of students who wished to honour the master was formed, several portraits of D'Ovidio were made that would also serve as the basis for his funeral monument. The one that follows, solemn, made in the studio intends to honour the master holding a book. In the background, in the half-light, an imposing bookcase. At this point in his life, Francesco D'Ovidio was completely blind. The photo is from 1925, the year of his death.



Francesco d'Ovidio in his later years (ca. 1920).

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the Capece Minutolo.

Francesco d'Ovidio in his later years (ca. 1920).

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