

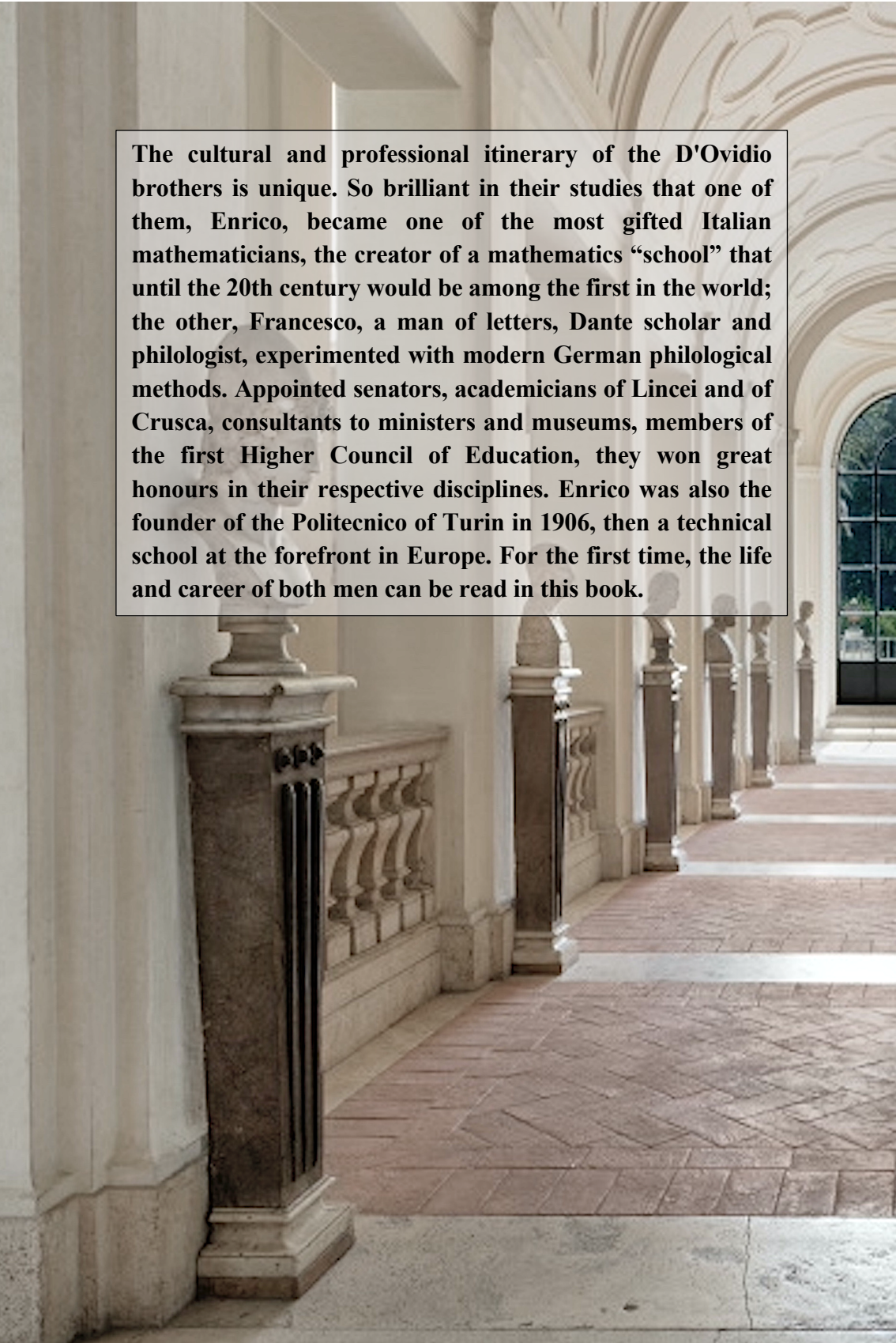


Mario A. Iannaccone

THE BROTHERS ENRICO AND FRANCESCO D'OVIDIO

**Leading lights of italian culture
between 19th and 20th Centuries**

The cultural and professional itinerary of the D'Ovidio brothers is unique. So brilliant in their studies that one of them, Enrico, became one of the most gifted Italian mathematicians, the creator of a mathematics “school” that until the 20th century would be among the first in the world; the other, Francesco, a man of letters, Dante scholar and philologist, experimented with modern German philological methods. Appointed senators, academicians of Lincei and of Crusca, consultants to ministers and museums, members of the first Higher Council of Education, they won great honours in their respective disciplines. Enrico was also the founder of the Politecnico of Turin in 1906, then a technical school at the forefront in Europe. For the first time, the life and career of both men can be read in this book.



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March 2025

Cover: Palazzo Corsini, Rome, headquarters of Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei.

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Introduction

The D'Ovidio Brothers

What is interesting in telling, and in parallel, the story of the Molise brothers Francesco and Enrico D'Ovidio, born into a middle-class family of professionals and teachers, is quickly said: their story contains numerous elements of exceptionality, more unique than rare, and at the same time allows us to see from a clear point of view some of the corollaries of the theses of sociologists Gaetano Mosca (1858-1941) and Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923) contained in *Elementi di scienza politica* (1896) by the former and in *Teoria delle Élite* by the latter; moreover, Gaetano Mosca was a good acquaintance of Francesco D'Ovidio and his academic colleague and senator.

The D'Ovidio family from Trivento and Campobasso did not belong to the economic elite of their area of origin, although there had been lawyers and at least one doctor among them, but their descendants, due to their merits of study, soon climbed the social ladder, becoming university professors and rectors of the most important Italian universities such as Naples – famous for its prestige and antiquity – and Turin, which, together with Milan, was a city at the forefront of technical studies and technology applied to industry. Considering the difference and distance of the disciplines in which their supremacy was recognised, mathematics, algebra, differential calculus and engineering calculations for Enrico, and literature and philology deepened with methods considered avant-garde for Francesco, the case is to be considered exceptional: two

brothers excelling simultaneously in such different fields, who came from a family that had no academic affiliations or relations. In such cases, besides certainly a dose of inevitable luck, one must admit the presence of genius and unusually strong, ambitious and determined characters.

Francesco had the good fortune to meet masters early on who got him interested in philology, so that Enrico was able to take advantage of the passion and teaching skills of his relative Achille Sannia, a mathematician and teacher, who matured him in his studies, leading him to become, in practice, the first mathematician in Italy in terms of importance and prestige in publications and the founder of a very important Italian school of mathematics that would lead to Enrico Fermi (1901-1954) and the so-called 'Ragazzi di Via Panisperna'.

Having achieved supremacy in their respective fields and become members and collaborators of multiple academies and institutes in various Italian cities, from Naples to Rome, to Milan, to Turin, within a few years, then at the Accademia Pontaniana, at the Accademia dei Lincei in Rome, at the Accademia della Crusca, attaining rectorships and professorships at the Universities of Naples and Turin, a further element must be added: that of matrimonial politics. This saw them 'ally themselves', their aristocrats of the intellect, a special form of elite according to Vilfredo Pareto, to noble families who possessed huge assets accumulated in the industrial sector: on Francesco's side, the French-Napolitan Lefèbvre, ennobled by a Bourbon in 1854; on Enrico's side, the Lombard and Piedmontese Bonacossa and Petiva, who were granted the title of Count by the Savoy in 1913.

Enrico D'Ovidio's marriage in 1877 to Maria Bonacossa, heir to a family of industrialists ennobled by the Savoy

family, and Francesco D'Ovidio's marriage to Maria Bertolini, daughter of a well-known History professor who could not help him in his career – Francesco did not teach History – but who was an esteemed professor and author of manuals adopted in many institutes, were advantageous alliances. Marriage unions, in these cases, are not just unions between individuals to generate children, but are true dynastic family alliances that carry values of prestige, titles or esteem; such unions increase the value of individual family groups and produce new value and unprecedented circumstances; these are axioms of Pareto's *Teoria delle Élite*: in the first cited case, the undoubted advantage of the Bonacossa family, a family of textile industrialists with no intellectual pedigree, was to ally themselves matrimonially with a professor in great social ascendancy, a lecturer in Mathematics and Algebra, who had been entrusted with a prestigious chair at the University of Turin, and previously the direction of the Bridges and Roads School and the Museum of Science in Turin; the same man to whom, as soon as the time was ripe, would be entrusted with the project to establish and organise a new type of university-level higher institute dedicated to technology and science, the Politecnico di Torino, whose only well-functioning example in Italy had been the Politecnico di Milano since 1863 and until then. Furthermore, in 1909, the marriage was celebrated between Laura, Enrico's daughter, and Count Federico Petiva, who, being a nobleman of recent lineage, would probably – according to the custom of the time – not have agreed to marry the daughter of a family lacking quarters of nobility (which he had on his mother's side).

The case of Francesco was different. Although he had received many academic honours and invitations to prestigious Neapolitan and national cultural institutions such as the Accademia Pontaniana and the Accademia dei Lincei, he had to wait longer for the alliance of his own family branch with that of a family of established wealth and prestigious, albeit relatively recent, nobility, the Lefèbvre. This happened when Francesco's 29-year-old daughter Elvira married Carlo Ernesto Lefèbvre, who was 31, on 25 May 1847. Carlo Ernesto belonged to a family of industrialists who had enjoyed extraordinary success in the first part of the 19th century, and who had been ennobled in 1854 for having brought prestige to the Kingdom's industrial sector, especially in the area of Sora, province of Terra di Lavoro. The matrimonial alliance – apart from the love between the two spouses, judging by their letters – was even more fortuitous if we consider that Francesco in 1909, 1910, 1911 and 1912 was nominated four times for the Nobel Prize for his merits in the fields of linguistics, Italianistics, glottology and dialectology:

Advancing his candidature ("il a traité en maître de glottologie, de philologie classique et romane, de critique historique, psychologique et esthétique, de politique, d'instruction") is Ernesto Monaci of the Accademia dei Lincei. To the Italian philologist, the Swedish Academy devoted a long and detailed judgment in the first year, demonstrating that it was well acquainted with his work, 'invaluable for doctrine and depth', on Dante and Manzoni, with particular attention to the comparison of the successive versions of *I Promessi Sposi* and the studies on Tasso. Despite admiration for the Italian scholar's gifts as a great stylist, however, the 1909 conclusion

was negative and would not be changed by the Academy in the following three years:

However, D'Ovidio did not give us a true organic work but only a collection of essays, which – admittedly – are excellent. However, it would have been easier to recommend his candidature for the Nobel Prize if he had published a major literary work as, for example, Taine did with his history of English literature. But it must be acknowledged that D'Ovidio as a researcher as well as a designer deserves to be kept in mind in any case.¹

D'Ovidio himself in 1908, together with Arturo Graf, had proposed Edmondo de Amicis, a friend of his, as a candidate for the prize; however, the Academy merely noted that the writer had passed away between the date of the nomination and that of the award. 1913 saw the beginning of the very long series of nominations of Grazia Deledda, for ten years, until the award in 1927, accompanied by those of a large and interesting patrol of Italian writers, consisting of Salvatore Farina, Dora Melegari, Matilde Serao, Roberto Bracco, Guglielmo Ferrero, Giovanni Schembari, Ada Negri and Cesare Pascarella. The overcrowding of Italian nominations (in 1925 there were five out of a total of twenty-one) in some of these years suggests that, almost two decades after the award to Carducci, it was felt that the prize should now fall to Italy again.

¹ Enrico Tiozzo, *A un passo dal Premio: il Nobel e i candidati italiani del primo Novecento*, "Belfagor", 31 May 2004, Vol. 59, No. 3 (Leo Olschki, Florence, 31 May 2004), pp. 329-342. Ibid, p. 333.

The Lefèbvre family was still part of the Neapolitan elite, related to the Naples branch of the Doria D'Angri (among others), the Saluzzo, the Caracciolo, the Álvarez de Toledo, and that the marriage alliance with the D'Ovidio family sealed with the marriage between Elvira D'Ovidio and Carlo Ernesto was a sort of pact to maintain or increase power and prestige between a family of the new intellectual nobility, as it was called, and a family of ancient wealth that maintained the prestige of the title.² The children born from the marriage in 1909 were named with the double *cognomen* of Lefèbvre D'Ovidio, so that they would maintain the memory of their academic grandparents and the comital title passed on to the first-born male child that other marriage alliances could not bestow.³ And thanks to the Lefèbvre, they were admitted to the Neapolitan patriciate. This is a classic example of the dynamics of maintaining privileges as contemplated in the theories of elites by Vilfredo Pareto and Gaetano Mosca.

The children of the new marriage would bear the double surname, thus giving rise to a new family, a rare case at the time but not unique; other similar cases were studied by Paolo Macry in his book *Ottocento. Famiglia, élites e patrimoni a Napoli* (Il Mulino, Bologna 2002, *passim*), which cites Neapolitan cases, although there is no lack of them in other parts of Italy.

² Although they had moved to Naples between 1808 and 1818, the Lefèbvre family had been enjoying considerable wealth since the previous century, if not earlier, and part of the large family had entered the high financial state bureaucracy in Versailles.

³ As in Lombardy, perhaps because of the common, albeit distant, Spanish heritage that allows children to adopt the name of their father and mother.

As for Enrico, married to a Countess Bonacossa from a dynasty of silk, wool and cotton producers who owned many wool and cotton mills in Piedmont, Lombardy, Emilia and as far as Friuli, he saw his eldest daughter Laura marry a Petiva of Sordevolo, Count Federico, whose patrimonial and aristocratic situation was not dissimilar to that of the Bonacossa and the Lefèbvre.

Thus, *parallel lives*, indeed, those of Francesco and Enrico and a singular concordance of achievements. Not to mention that their academic careers and admittance to prestigious institutions (Accademia Pontaniana in Naples, Accademia dei Lincei in Rome, Universities and others) took place in the same years, and that they were both elected senators in 1905 on the basis of cultural merit and probably also census. As was the custom, this honour was also conferred on those who had belonged to the Accademia dei Lincei for more than five years, and this was the case for both of them (at the time, Francesco was president of the prestigious institution while Enrico was a corresponding member).

In addition to the studies on the Lefèbvre family and its role in the history of France and industry in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies contained in the twenty or so volumes that came out before this one, it is therefore useful to add an in-depth study on the D'Ovidio family, a study that until now has been limited to the figure of the philologist Francesco and is here extended in detail to his brother Enrico, covering the entire span of his existence. In this way, it will be possible to tell the parallel story – exceptional in many ways as mentioned above – of these two academics and scholars who distinguished themselves in such different fields of knowledge.

As we have seen, the D'Ovidio family from which the two characters at the centre of this study descended, at the beginning of the 19th century belonged to the commercial class of Trivento, a small town in the historical region of Molise, not far from Campobasso. The two, born in the early part of the century, held prominent roles in Italian academic institutions until the third decade of the 20th century, roles that were continued by their grandson Antonio Lefèbvre D'Ovidio (1913-2011), son of a Lefèbvre, Carlo Ernesto, and Francesco D'Ovidio's heiress, Elvira D'Ovidio.

I have dedicated specific studies to the Lefèbvre family and its long history, so the present text will only deal with the two D'Ovidio brothers, whose descendants were linked to the Franco-Napolitan Lefèbvre family from 1909, when Carlo Ernesto Lefèbvre married Elvira D'Ovidio. The marriage was celebrated in the Lefèbvre castle in the Abruzzi village of Balsorano, inaugurating, by marriage agreement, a single-family line with a compound surname: Lefèbvre D'Ovidio, as was permitted in exceptional cases by the laws of the time and with the consent of the Ministry of the Interior.

Chapter 1

Enrico D'Ovidio, the mathematician

The Sannitico College, where the D'Ovidio brothers studied, was inaugurated on 16 November 1817 by King Ferdinand II of Bourbon, King of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. It took the title of *Real Collegio Sannitico* by royal decree on 25 January 1854 and was entrusted to the Barnabite Fathers; the title entailed the special care that the King would give to the college, the building, the quality of the teaching and the selection of the teaching staff in both historical-literary and scientific-mathematical disciplines.

If we consider the preparation of the D'Ovidio brothers who excelled in the Kingdom's culture for over fifty years, it is evident – notwithstanding personal merits – the *Real Collegio Sannitico* offered an excellent preparation to its students.

With the subsequent Royal Decree of 25 December 1854, the Barnabite Fathers were also entrusted with teaching, and in the space of a few years they carried out a project for the construction of a new building for the schools and boarding school. The boarding school remained closed until the beginning of 1857, when Canon Berardo Palombieri (1836-1905) was called to direct it. Under whose administration in that same year the boarding school was elevated to a *Real Liceo*, which prepared students for university entrance. In 1865, when the D'Ovidio brothers were students, another quantum leap was made: on 4 March, following a proposal by the Ministry of Public Education Giuseppe Natoli of the

La Marmora II government, with a decree signed in Milan by King Victor Emmanuel II, the college took the name Convitto Nazionale 'Mario Pagano' (National Boarding School 'Mario Pagano'), in honour of the Italian jurist, politician and patriot Mario Pagano. In the following decades, important philologists and philosophers such as Giovanni Gentile would teach at the institute. The boarding school is a state institution of particular prestige to which one gains access after winning a special competition, living together with other students.¹



Village of Trivento, central Molise:
place of origin of the D'Ovidio family.

Enrico and Francesco's parents were looking for the best education for their children, and Enrico around 1855 was enrolled in the most prestigious school in the area, the Collegio Sannitico, attached to the Franciscan monastery in

¹ S. v. Boarding School, Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana founded by Giovanni Treccani.

Campobasso, where some learned abbots from Montecassino also taught. Five years later, in 1860, the family moved to Naples to allow their two eldest sons to receive the best university education at the Federico II.

The D'Ovidios understood that, in that period of turbulent social and political change – the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies was now under attack and everything would soon change – an excellent education was the best way to foster or consolidate social ascendancy.

In fact, by studying profitably at the strict Barnabite college,² the D'Ovidio brothers, adding commitment and ingeniousness, were destined to become eminent members of a family of intellectuals and academics in the Italy of Umberto I and Victor Emmanuel III until after World War II.

The civil war for Italian independence in 1860-61 and against the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, which led to the defeat of Ferdinand II, caused Enrico, and many other young men, a temporary interruption of their studies. When the conflicts ended, Enrico followed Achille Sannia's courses and obtained a complete and solid education, indeed 'admirably complete and profound', according to the mathematician Giuseppe Battaglini (1826-1894), initiator of the so-called Italian School of Algebraic Geometry.³ The Studio Sannia was located next to the premises of the

² It is one of the oldest orders of clerics regular in the Catholic Church; it was born a few years before the Council of Trent, in 1530. Its name derives from the institute's motherhouse, at the church of San Barnaba in Milan. It was there that the general headquarters were established until 1662 before being transferred to Rome that year. The charism of the order, founded by St. Anthony Mary Zacharias, is also shared by the Angelic Sisters of St. Paul and the lay people of St. Paul, usually married.

³ School as a group of scholars united around a research project.

Compagnia della Navigazione a Vapore, at 33 Via dei Guantai, and was very well attended.

In 1860 – the year the family moved to Naples – Enrico completed his studies at the Convitto but did not stop studying and also wrote his first articles that he sent to mathematical journals and well-known mathematicians. He published his first research in the 'Giornale di matematiche ad uso degli studenti delle Università italiane' (Journal of mathematics for the use of students at Italian universities), directed by Battaglini and which Enrico himself helped to found, both from an organisational point of view and by lending a dozen of his articles and high-level studies in the first year of the periodical's existence.

In the first volume of the journal, published in 1863, there are five works by the Molise mathematician that are noted and quoted and that were written between 1861 and 1863: *Dimostrazione di un teorema del capitano Fauré*; *Due teoremi di determinanti*; *Nota sopra un problema di geometria*; *Alcuni locali*; *Altra dimostrazione dei teoremi provati a p. 160*.

In the second volume, published in 1864, he published three articles, two of which answered questions posed in the journal) and two articles in 1865, appeared in the third volume (again, one article answered a question posed to mathematicians). Within a few years, the 'Giornale delle Matematiche' became the leading scientific journal in southern Italy, with publications also in demand abroad. In the same years in which he was studying at the Liceo where the professors found him, as his brother would, very much inclined to literary subjects, Enrico was instilled by Achille Sannia (1822-1892), to mathematics where his intelligence shone.

To the Sannia, Enrico said he owed much for his career. In period commemorations, it is reported that, after 1848, the

Sannia family was under surveillance by the Bourbon government as subversives: their father Liberantonio (1820ca-1893), who had reached the rank of councillor of the Supreme Court of Justice, was dismissed for refusing to vote on the conviction of some young liberals and died shortly afterwards; Achille himself was reported to the police 'as a man of republican inclination and capable of becoming a tribune of the people'.⁴



Via Chiarizia of Campobasso:
the building in the centre is where the D'Ovidio family lived.

⁴ Anonymous, *In memoria di Achille Sannia*, (undated but probably 1893), p. 32.

At his home, a house located in the village of Morcone and now converted into a museum house, Sannia studied and then taught for a number of years, giving private lessons to his students, who were never lacking. In 1853, he was appointed at the Scuola di Applicazioni di Ponti e Strade (School of Applications for Bridges and Roads) to teach the three-coordinate geometry course and in 1854 he succeeded Francesco Paolo Tucci (1790-1875), who had retired, in teaching descriptive geometry. Later, when public schools with the permission of the authorities flourished in Naples, i.e. in 1855, Achille opened his 'Studio Sannia' at 33 Via dei Guantai, next to the headquarters of the *Steam Navigation Administration* and the Royal Navy School.

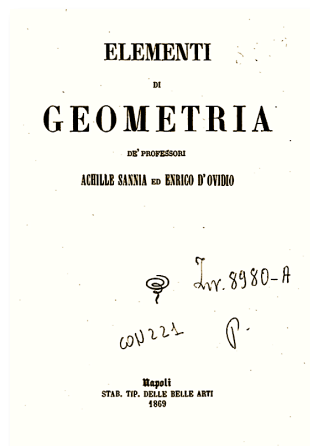
The Studio was very successful, especially during the decade of crisis of the Bourbon Kingdom and the disorganisation of the university, and this phase lasted until 1865. During this period, his teaching of Applications of Descriptive Geometry was also required by the Officers' Course of the School for Engineers, and Sannia divided his time between his Studio and the Officers' Course until he enlisted the help of his best students, including Enrico D'Ovidio, who took over as director while simultaneously teaching at the Royal Liceo Umberto I and in private practice.

In 1856, he obtained a sovereign rescript authorising him to keep the already established private mathematics studio open.

The school became increasingly popular, with around 200 paying pupils to whom Sannia, D'Ovidio and Dino personally gave lessons in Arithmetic, Algebra and Complementary Algebra, Trigonometry, two and three-coordinate analytical Geometry, Infinitesimal Calculus, Descriptive Geometry, Rational Mechanics and Mathematical Analysis.

In December 1863, Sannia was called to the Faculty of Mathematics at the Royal University of Naples to teach Descriptive Geometry Drawing and, at the same time, left his private practice, which was continued for a few years by D'Ovidio and another student, Salvatore Dino. From 1861 to 1865, Sannia was an extraordinary member of the Higher Council of Education.

Sannia published *Elementi di geometria*, published in Naples in 1869 by the Stabilimento tipografico delle belle arti. Written with Enrico D'Ovidio, it was a great success and went through fourteen editions (the third edition was published in 1876, the eighth in 1891 and the fourteenth in 1918).



Sannia's second important publication is *Lezioni di geometria proiettiva dettate nella R. Università di Napoli* (Naples 1891; Naples 1895), initially conceived as a collection of lithographs of his lectures on projective geometry, given from his personal reworking of the theories contained in Luigi

Cremona's text, *Elementi di geometria proiettiva*, which was to continue with a second volume that was not completed due to a change of programme.⁵

The new edition was completed in 1895 by Enrico D'Ovidio, also thanks to the participation of Ernesto Ascione, a professor at the Technical Institute in Caserta. After such an industrious and achievement-rich life, Sannia died of pneumonia in Naples on 8 February 1892 after imprudently exposing himself to a cold wind. When he died, his last word was... *parallels*!⁶ Until the last moment of his life he had thought about mathematics and geometry.

After graduating from high school at Umberto I, Enrico obtained a chair teaching mathematics at the same institute (established by Royal Decree in 1862 and fully active since 1864) and, at the same time, when he left high school, Achille Sannia called on him to help him with his lessons.

He also taught at the Regia Accademia di Marina in Naples, formerly the Scuola di Applicazione Ponti e Strade (Bridges and Roads Application School), which inherited the best tradition of the Neapolitan shipyards. It had been founded on 4 December 1735 by Charles of Bourbon under the name *Academia de los Guardia Estendardes de las Galeras*, the highest training institute for officers of the Armata di Mare of the Kingdom of Naples and therefore of the Two Sicilies. The institute offered courses for the design of sailing and steam-propelled ships that required adequate technical and

⁵ Sannia had agreed to compile a publication in two volumes, the first of which was to be Cremona's *Geometria proiettiva*, and the second Sannia's *Geometry*.

⁶ Francesco D'Ovidio, *Rimpianti vecchi e nuovi*, II, Editrice Moderna, Caserta 1930, pp. 185-192.

mathematical training, physics, materials science and above all hydraulics, all fields that the mathematician Enrico D'Ovidio had studied in depth.

From 1861 to 1868, that institute trained the trainee officers of the Royal Italian Navy and is still considered the oldest naval academy in Italy, as well as the ancestor, together with its counterpart in Genoa, of the Livorno Naval Academy. Following the Unification of Italy and the establishment of the Regia Marina, the institute, then located in Borgo Santa Lucia in the San Ferdinando district, continued to train naval officer cadets until 1868, when the Royal Naval Academy was merged with the Royal Naval School of Genoa, formerly of the Navy of the Kingdom of Sardinia, to create a single institute, by decree of 20 September 1868, the Royal Naval School.

The then Minister of the Navy, Admiral Augusto Riboty (1816-1888), unified the two schools into a single unit with several locations in Italian cities of seafaring tradition, Genoa, Naples and Livorno; from the point of view of chain of command he divided them into two Commands, called Divisions. From then on, the trainees followed the first two years of the course at the headquarters in Naples and the last two in Genoa.⁷ There, for almost ten years, the young professor Enrico held the chair of Mathematics, although not as a full professor because he had not yet graduated.

⁷ *Raccolta degli atti del governo di S.M. il Re di Sardegna dall'anno 1814 a tutto il 1832, 3° dal 1° gennaio a tutto giugno 1816*, Torino, 1843, pp. 410-445.

Chapter 2

Enrico D'Ovidio and Achille Sannia (1855-1870)



Achille Sannia.

In 1865 and up to 1870, D'Ovidio divided his teaching between the Umberto I Lycée and the Sannia Studio, but in 1868 his career took a major turn, due certainly to his mathematical genius but also thanks to Achille Sannia and other mathematicians who admired the young man from Campobasso who was already known for his studies in pure mathematics. In 1868, in fact, 24-year-old Enrico D'Ovidio, whom Sannia considered to be his most brilliant pupil in the speeches and letters he wrote, was awarded an *honorary* degree with a dispensation from examinations by the Faculty of Science at the University of Naples, an act permitted by a

recently passed law. The new Italy needed teachers and, in those years, recruited them from among the best on merit without regard to the formalities of academic qualifications. The commission that gave him his degree considered that D'Ovidio had already demonstrated his mathematical abilities with scientific articles published, but not only, in the pages of Battaglini's 'Giornale di Matematiche', *which* had become one of the most important mathematical periodicals in Italy. This allowed Enrico to begin his academic career, otherwise precluded to non-graduates.



Third volume of the 'Giornale delle matematiche'
by Battaglini in 1864.

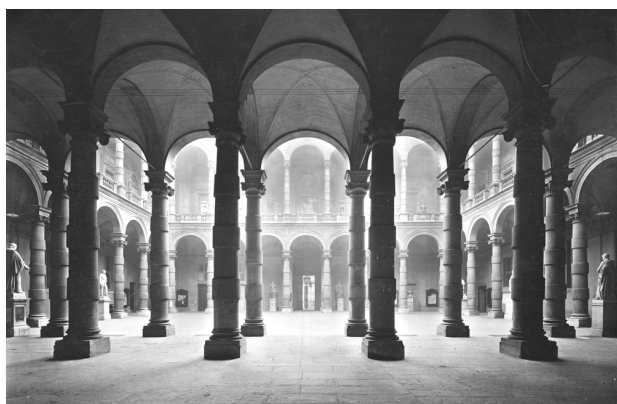
In 1871, when Giuseppe Battaglini – Sannia's and D'Ovidio's collaborator and friend – moved from Naples to Rome, Sannia was given the chair of Superior Geometry. In 1877, he left this teaching for that of Projective Geometry, which he held as full professor in the first two years of the faculty. His assistants in this chair were Ernesto Isè, Alfonso Del Re and Federico Amodeo. He also held the position of dean of the Faculty of Mathematics at the University of Naples in the 1885-1886 academic year, still finding Enrico D'Ovidio among his collaborators on the teaching staff of the Federico II.

Sannia ruled the Scuola di Applicazione Ponti e Strade from 1887 to 1890 as royal commissioner. During his tenures, he had the merit of repeatedly obtaining extraordinary subsidies from the government and the Naples City Hall that made it possible to purchase machines and scientific material and to set up and expand experimental cabinets to improve teaching. He was also president of the College of Engineers and Architects of Naples.

Between 1861 and 1871, he was a municipal councillor in Naples and then councillor for Public Education, actively supporting the development of public education and the foundation of lower and higher education colleges such as the Convitti Municipali Domenico Cirillo in Bari and Francesco Caracciolo in Naples, organised on the model of the Real Convitto Nazionale Mario Pagano. In November 1876, Sannia, who had presented himself in the party of the historical Right, was elected deputy to the national parliament for the Morcone constituency, and remained in office, with some interruptions, from 1881 to 1887, when the head of the government Agostino Depretis died, of whom he had been a close collaborator in the field of education. He was a militant in the same party of the Historic Right in

which Francesco Lefèvre was elected MP and Enrico and Francesco D'Ovidio were elected senators.

On 4 February 1890, Achille Sannia was appointed Senator of the Kingdom for cultural and political merits. He was a non-resident member of the Circolo matematico in Palermo, a member of the Accademia delle scienze and of the Accademia Pontaniana in Naples, of which he held the presidency between 1888 and 1891; he was also a member of the Reale Istituto d'incoraggiamento from 1888. In his studio and then in the academic institution in which he was placed, Sannia taught all the mathematical disciplines, Algebra and Geometry, and fascinated many pupils with the subject.



Turin, Royal University, atrium.

In a letter to his brother Francesco, Professor of Romance Philology in Naples, Enrico mentions the portico of the University in Turin where he 'strolled with students and relaxed thinking about the unknown fields of mathematics'.⁸

⁸ Enrico a Francesco D'Ovidio, in Archivio Storico della Scuola Normale di Pisa, Fondo D'Ovidio, 1879.

Chapter 3

In Turin. 1873



Palace in Viale Peschiera, inhabited by Enrico D'Ovidio, hit by an Allied bombing raid in July 1944, when many documents were destroyed.

In 1872, the Cremonese mathematician and physicist Eugenio Beltrami (1835-1900), who had known D'Ovidio at the Studio Sannia when he was a student, and who had become his friend, convinced him to take part in the competition for the chair of Algebra and Analytical Geometry at the University of Turin. A chair that he won and that was assigned to him by decree on 17 November of the same year.

At that point, he was asked to leave Naples and move to Turin, which he was reluctant to do as he was very attached to his family; his parents, who were still alive, lived in the

Vomero area, an area hit by major works and projects. In addition, his brother Francesco, who was engaged to a rich young noblewoman, had no intention of leaving the city. In addition to them, there were his friends, his teachers, his fellow students: but the opportunity was unique and all his teachers and mentors spurred him on. It was a time of great change for the city of Turin, which had been the capital of united Italy since 1861 before Rome, the capital since 1870.

When he moved to the subalpine city he did not think he would stay there permanently but when he added Higher Geometry and Higher Analysis to his first teaching, he changed his mind and decided to stay; for his ambition and training, this was a unique opportunity. Meanwhile, as a professor of mathematics, he was beginning to be introduced into the good society of Savoy, including the local aristocracy. He was considered up to the mark as in Naples he had learnt good, indeed the best manners and did not disfigure himself in front of the discerning members of the subalpine aristocracy; this facilitated his acquaintance, then his frequentation of and then his request for the hand of the young Maria Bonacossa (about 1850-1915) whom he had met during the first months of his tenure as professor of mathematics.

In 1873, after a short engagement, the two were married in Turin's Mother Church and left for a reception in Biella, then for their honeymoon in Paris.

Brother Francesco, his parents Pasquale and Francesca together with Angiolina and Achille Sannia attended the wedding party in Turin organised at the Grand Hotel Sitea, with important guests such as Minister Quintino Sella, some members of the royal family as well as professors from the

University of Turin and the Scuola di Applicazione Ponti e Strade at the Valentino Castle.⁹

In Turin, the couple went to live at Corso Peschiera 30, in a newly built building in the new district that had developed near the Politecnico and the city centre. The building was elegant, with stone balconies; soon the area would be enriched with Art Nouveau buildings typical of the city.



Turin as it appeared in 1873 from the Colle dei Cappuccini in a postcard designed to commemorate the visit of the Shah of Persia.

The young Maria belonged to the Bonacossa family of industrialists from Vigevano, a family that was elevated to the rank of Count in 1913 by King Savoy.

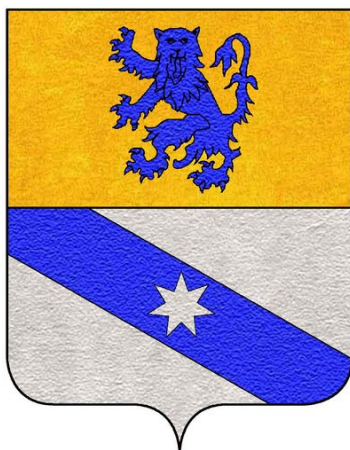
⁹ At that time there was only one Bonacossa family in Turin (today there are 6, all descendants of the one from Sondrio). Maria's family was connected to the academic world. The family nucleus of origin appears to be the same.

The Bonacossa family stemmed from the progenitor Vincenzo (1810-1892) who, together with his sons, Luigi, Pietro, Giuseppe (1841-1909) and Cesare (1850-1919), built an empire with spinning mills starting with the cultivation of silkworms from their original village, Dorno (a village south-east of Pavia) and then in Vigevano, until they managed and owned dozens of spinning mills in the Lombard-Venetian Plain, as can be seen from this testimony taken from the account of a historical re-enactment of the Bonacossa family:¹⁰

The Bonacossa family were the protagonists of the industrial revolution in Lomellina. The family of silk entrepreneurs from Dorno built and managed dozens of spinning mills in Lomellina and throughout northern Italy at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, employing tens of thousands of men, women and children. An authentic dynasty of entrepreneurs, philanthropists and sportsmen, re-evoked in Vigevano, in the foyer of the Cagnoni theatre, by the writer Antonella Moroni Trevisan, the journalist Sergio Calabrese and the director of the Historical Archive Pier Luigi Muggiati. "I was carrying out research for one of my novels, 'Destini imperfetti'," explains Moroni Trevisan, "when I came across this family linked to Vigevano several times by their spinning mills, the glorious cascarnificio, the Santissimo Sacramento hospital and even sport. So I suggested that this dynasty, complete in so many respects and linked by a silk thread, be presented to the city."¹¹

¹⁰ S. v. Bonacossa in Spreti Vittorio, *Enciclopedia storico-nobiliare italiana*, Milan, 1928-32, vol. II, p. 112; To Cesare Bonacossa (b. 1850), Member of the National Parliament, was granted by Royal Decree *motu proprio* on 20 July 1913 the title of Count with transmission to his firstborn male children.

¹¹ Museum of Industry and Entrepreneurship in Vigevano. See the documentary at <https://youtu.be/JusgcvCttG>



Comital coat of arms of the Bonacossa family.

The Bonacossa family were friends of the Sella industrialists – also of Savoy nobility – who became bankers and in particular of Quintino Sella (1827-1884). Sella was also a mathematician. He graduated from Turin with a degree in mathematics and hydraulic engineering in 1847 under Professor Carlo Ignazio Giulio (1803-1859), then specialised in mineralogy and, in particular, crystallography. Shortly afterwards, he accepted a proposal to go to Paris to the École des Mines to further his studies in the field of mining, a sector that was then central to the economy of the small Kingdom of Savoy. In Paris, thanks to the teaching of Professor Henri Hureau Sénarmont (1808-1862), he became interested in the crystallographic aspects of mineralogy closely related to the disciplines cultivated by Enrico D'Ovidio, linear algebra and differential calculus. Returning to his homeland, Sella,

although engaged in mining and other administrative and political assignments by the Savoy government, in December 1852 was appointed professor of Geometry applied to the arts at the Royal Technical Institute in Turin, which, at his instigation, was to become the School of Application for Engineers in 1859, the forerunner of the Turin Polytechnic. The friendship between Sella and D'Ovidio at the university was immediate and proved to be long-lasting, and shortly afterwards both were charged with laying the foundations of the Turin Polytechnic, a task carried out mainly by the professor from Molise but with Sella's collaboration.

Moreover, the Bonacossa family, who would distinguish themselves at the turn of the century in various sports such as skiing and tennis, were related to a luminary of psychiatry, professor of psychiatry at the Subalpine University as well as a member of the Consiglio Superiore dell'Istruzione, Giovanni Stefano Bonacossa (1804-1878). That Bonacossa is considered one of the founders of modern psychiatry in Italy.

Maria and Enrico had two daughters, Laura (1880-1979), Pia Maria (1885-post 1933?) and a son, Eugenio (November 1882-March 1907), who graduated early in engineering in Turin but died tragically at the age of 24.

Fifteen years after his arrival in Turin, Enrico was appointed Dean of the Faculty of Science (1879-1881 and 1893-1906) and then Rector of the University of Turin, a position he held from 1880 to 1885.

Among other merits, he is credited with founding an important Italian mathematical 'school' with a large following. His most important pupil was Corrado Segre (1863-1924), founder of the Italian School of Algebraic Geometry. Another 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.

Enrico D'Ovidio's second mentor, after Sannia, as mentioned above, was Giuseppe Battaglini, born in 1826 in Martina Franca (Lecce) was 23 years older than him, old enough to act as a teacher to his pupil and young enough to understand his doubts (about abandoning law) and ambitions. Battaglini had begun his studies with his paternal grandfather who was passionate about mathematics. After his first studies in Martina Franca, he continued privately in Naples, where he had moved: among his various teachers was Achille Sannia, an acquaintance that enabled him to meet Enrico D'Ovidio and admire his mathematical genius. In 1844, he entered the Scuola di Applicazione Ponti e Strade – in practice the Polytechnic of the time, founded by Joachim Murat in 1811 – and emerged as an engineer in 1848. However, instead of devoting himself to the practice of engineering, he preferred a position as an assistant at the Capodimonte Astronomical Observatory (Naples), offered to him by the director Ernesto Capocci di Belmonte (1798-1864). A few months later, following the Bourbon reaction against the uprisings and liberal orders, having refused to sign a request to King Ferdinand II to abolish the Constitution he had just sworn to because he considered it still too close to the absolutist conception, he resigned rather than submit to the order and abjure his own ideas.¹²

¹² He resigned voluntarily or was dismissed: biographers do not exclude both possibilities. S. V. *Battaglini Giuseppe*, by Nicola Virgopia, in *Dizionario Bibliografico degli Italiani*, v. VII, Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana Treccani, Rome 1970.



Giuseppe Battaglini.

For twelve years, left without a government post, he continued to study mathematics, English and German languages privately to keep up with the progress of science in those countries and gave private lessons for a living. After the fall of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies in 1860, he was appointed by the Italian government as Councillor for Public Education and Professor of Higher Geometry at the University of Naples, where he remained until 1872, when he was called to teach at the University of Rome. In Rome, Battaglini professed various disciplines, including infinitesimal calculus and some of the most important higher mathematics; he was also Dean of the Faculty of Physical and Mathematical Sciences and Rector for the year 1873-74. In 1885, he returned to Naples for health reasons and the need to breathe sea air and resumed his old teaching. In Naples, he had the opportunity to meet again in person with Enrico D'Ovidio when the latter came down from Turin by train to rejoin his brother and family.¹³

¹³ A complete portrait of the complex character can be found in the book: Mario Castellana - Franco Palladino, *Giuseppe Battaglini*.

Chapter 4

The foundation of the Politecnico of Turin

After teaching for years at the University of Turin, Enrico dedicated himself, in 1906, at the request of Prime Minister Giovanni Giolitti and King Victor Emmanuel III of Savoy, to the foundation of the Politecnico of Turin with managerial and scientific duties at the Regio Museo Industriale Italiano, the associated Industrial Museum and the Italian Museum. For the Politecnico, with the help of colleagues such as Quintino Sella, he chose the location, teaching, equipment and lecturers. The Regio Politecnico, based at Castello Valentino, was founded in 1906, but inherited programmes and lecturers from the Scuola Ponti e Strade in Naples and other academic institutions selected by the Casati Law in 1859. It also took its example from the Milan Polytechnic, the oldest in Italy, whose foundation dates back to forty years earlier, 1863.

The Scuola di Applicazione per gli Ingegneri (School of Application for Engineers), established within the University, opened up research and higher education to technical studies; the Museo Industriale Italiano, on the other hand, looked more directly at the context of a country that was facing the new industrial reality: it was a museum but also included teaching programmes. In different ways and with complementary personalities, illustrious teachers and researchers were able to give a statute to new disciplinary

Raccolta di lettere (1854-1891) di un matematico al tempo del Risorgimento d'Italia, Bari, Levante Editore, 1996.

areas, such as Electrotechnics and Construction Science, and had anticipatory visions towards a School attentive to the problems of man and society.



The Valentino Castle after restoration, seat of the Scuola di Applicazione and the first nucleus of the Politecnico founded by Enrico D'Ovidio from 1906.



The Valentino Castle before the 1876 restoration in a photo by Venanzio Sella.

Enrico D'Ovidio became an internationally prominent figure in the field of mathematics and, as a result, often acted as referee for nominating contests. In 1890 he was referee for

a post at the Politecnico of Turin that was being contested by 24 candidates. Federico Amodeo was chosen for the post while Mario Pieri came second. Together with Eugenio Bertini and Giuseppe Veronese he was then referee for the appointment of the chair of Analytic and Projective Geometry at the University of Rome in 1891: Guido Castelnuovo who was D'Ovidio's assistant at the time was appointed to the chair. In 1893 he was the referee for the appointment of the chair of projective and descriptive geometry at his own University of Turin to which Luigi Berzolari was appointed.

Euclidean and non-Euclidean geometry were Enrico D'Ovidio's areas of special interest, and he published twenty-two works between 1863 and 1872 proposing solutions, demonstrations and new problems. Among these, during his Neapolitan period and studies, are: *Dimostrazione di alcuni teoremi sulle superfici sviluppabili di 5° ordine enunciati dal professor Cremona* (1865); *Nuova dimostrazione di una formula di Abel* (1868); e *Nota sui punti, piani e rette in coordinate omogenee* (1870).

However, his most intense period of research occurred after his appointment as professor in Turin. It was a very significant period for research in geometry: the work of Nikolai Ivanovich Lobachevsky, János Bolyai and Bernhard Riemann on non-Euclidean geometry had become very well known and Felix Klein had proposed the general view of Euclidean and non-Euclidean geometries as invariants for transformation groups in the 'Erlanger Programme' of 1872.

D'Ovidio, unique in Italy at the time, built on the geometric ideas introduced by these mathematicians, raising esteem and admiration. His most important work came out when he was already teaching in Turin: *Le funzioni metriche*

fondamentali negli spazi di quante si vogliano dimensioni e di curvatura costante (Ed. Salviucci, Rome 1877). In this work, he used the concepts and methods of projective geometry to derive metric functions in non-Euclidean spaces of n dimensions, paving the way for later work by Giuseppe Veronese, Corrado Segre and his other students.

He dealt systematically in the 1870s with binary, conical and quadric forms through his own, pure research and teaching. The importance of his work in this area is demonstrated by the fact that one of his papers from 1880, *Studio sulle cubiche gobbe mediante la notazione simbolica delle forme binari*, was awarded the gold medal by the Accademia Nazionale delle scienze d'Italia 'l'Accademia dei Quaranta' (because no more than 40 scholars were admitted).

He published a long series of important studies in book form in Turin, Milan and also in Naples where he often visited family members. Among the books and studies that built his fame are: *Le proprietà fondamentali delle curve di second ordine studiate sulla equazione generale di secondo grado in coordinate cartesiane* (Lessons held at the Royal University of Turin, Editori Fratelli Bocca, Milano: first edition 1876, second edition 1883, third edition 1896); *Teoria analitica delle forme geometriche fondamentali* (1885); *Geometria analitica* (first edition 1885, fourth edition 1912); *Il libro I° di Euclide esposto da Enrico D'Ovidio* (first edition 1887, third edition 1894); and *Il libro II° di Euclide esposto da Enrico D'Ovidio* (Pellerano, Naples 1889). He had two distinguished mathematicians as assistants: Giuseppe Peano and Corrado Segre (who was his assistant professor in 1883 and 1884).

In addition to Giuseppe Peano, Corrado Segre and Filiberto Castellano (1860-1919), who became D'Ovidio's assistant in 1881, mention must also be made of Guido

Castelnuovo (his assistant from 1888-1891), Gino Fano (his assistant in 1892-93), Beppo Levi (his student in 1892-96) and Gino Loria, who graduated in 1883 under D'Ovidio's supervision and was his assistant in 1884-1886. When D'Ovidio retired in 1918, Italy had just overcome the trauma of the First World War. Coinciding with his retirement, the collectaneo volume of homage was published: *Scritti matematici offerti ad Enrico D'Ovidio nel suo LXXV genetliaco, 11 agosto 1918*. The preface, written by the editors Francesco Gerbaldi (also a pupil of D'Ovidio and later his assistant after 1879) and Gino Loria begins as follows: 'As we approach the day on which Enrico D'Ovidio's birthday is celebrated, his first day of life was the day of his death'.

As the day approached on which an inflexible law would have retired Senator Enrico D'Ovidio from his university professorship, the pleasant idea arose in the minds of many students he had in his long and glorious teaching career to choose this occasion – which coincides with his 75th birthday – to show him their feelings of unalterable affection and, at the same time, to present him with their sincere good wishes *ad multos annos*. ... And we are certain that for the beloved maestro, our publication will be doubly gratifying as it also serves to demonstrate how Italy, in the tragic times in which we live – no less than in the most serious and decisive periods of its previous struggles for redemption – has not ceased to fan the sacred flame of science.¹⁴

¹⁴ Francesco Gerbaldi-Gino Loria, *Dedica*, Fratelli Bocca, Milan, p. 5, undated.

The author of contribution No. 8 writes:

It is a rather Italian custom to mark an epoch in the life of a great scholar by presenting him with a series of scientific notes written by his friends in his honour. On the occasion of Professor D'Ovidio's retirement from his professorship in Turin, at the age of 75 and after 46 years of service, this volume was produced by an illustrious company of nine former assistants, ten former students and another friend of the veteran.¹⁵

L. Wayland Dowling writes:¹⁶

Of the 103 people who contributed to the publication costs and whose names appear immediately after the preface, 47 were actual students of Professor D'Ovidio and 20 were, at one time or another, directly associated with him as assistants at the University of Turin. The list contains many names known to students of mathematics throughout the world and testifies to the great influence Professor D'Ovidio has had on the growth of mathematics and the teaching of mathematics, not only in Italy, but, perhaps especially through his disciples, throughout the civilised world. This influence was exerted by the University of Turin for more than forty years. ... Professor D'Ovidio's great influence came about more through personal contact as a teacher than through published writings, and it shows that there is creative teaching as well as creative erudition – a remarkable fact in an age when so much emphasis is placed on the latter and so little thought is apparently given to the former. ... We feel a feeling of deep

¹⁵ H P H, *Review: Scritti matematici offerti ad Enrico D'Ovidio*, 'The Mathematical Gazette', no. 9 (1919), p. 390.

¹⁶ Dowling Linnaeus Wayland, *Review: Scritti matematici offerti ad Enrico D'Ovidio*, 'Bulletin American Mathematics Society' p. 25 (no. 9), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge US 1919, pp. 417-422.

admiration for the scholars who made this book possible, especially at a time when the tension of war is still strong. ... The total is an epitome of scholarly activity even in normal times. It must be a source of great satisfaction for Professor D'Ovidio to have such clear evidence of the esteem in which his many students, collaborators and friends regard his long service and his personal qualities as an inspiring teacher.



Youthful photo of Enrico D'Ovidio, about 1872.

D'Ovidio received many honours in Turin and in the city where he grew up, Naples. On 12 February 1881, he became a corresponding member of the Royal Society of Naples, becoming a full member on 12 June 1909 and a corresponding member of the Accademia dei Lincei in Rome on 31 December 1883 and then a full member on 7 November 1893. In December 1884, he was elected a member of the Accademia Nazionale delle Scienze d'Italia or Accademia dei Quaranta;¹⁷ in the same month, he was accepted into the

¹⁷ Based in Verona and Rome, in Villa Torlonia, it was founded in

Accademia delle Scienze in Naples. The following year, in 1885, he was elected to the National Academy of Sciences, Letters and Arts in Modena. These were honorary recognitions in prestigious institutes also devoted to research for which he wrote original contributions and which earned him the extension of acquaintances and friendships with mathematicians, academics and men of culture.



Enrico D'Ovidio in the year he was accepted into the Accademia dei Lincei, 1883.

D'Ovidio also had a career in parliament. When he was appointed senator in March 1905, it was rumoured – without any proof – that this was due to a misunderstanding and that the appointment was intended for his brother Francesco, the well-known philologist, who was appointed senator a few months later.¹⁸ It is not credible – as we sometimes read in

1782 for the advancement of science by the 40 leading Italian scientists of the time.

¹⁸ Hubert C., Kennedy, *Life and Works of Giuseppe Peano*, Reidel Publishing Company, Dordrecht, 1980.

the biographical files dedicated to D'Ovidio – that the office of senator was conferred on him by mistake because it was intended for his brother: the two had distinct cultural and academic profiles and lived in different cities. The procedure for appointment to the senatorial seat was complicated and there could be no mistake, not to mention that Enrico had the qualifications to enter the Senate: academic qualifications and membership of the Accademia dei Lincei. Therefore, this detail, which can still be found in articles and magazines online or in print, must be relegated to the realm of legends, which we know die hard.

Other colleagues or friends of the D'Ovidio brothers who received the title of senator for merit include: Antonio Sogliano (1854-1942), archaeologist; Girolamo Vitelli (1849-1935), papyrologist and antiquarian; Michele Scherillo (1860-1930), man of letters and university teacher; Achille Sanna (1822-1892), mathematician and university teacher from the same family circle as the D'Ovidio brothers; Benedetto Croce (1866-1952) who cultivated first erudite and then philosophical-aesthetic studies in Naples.

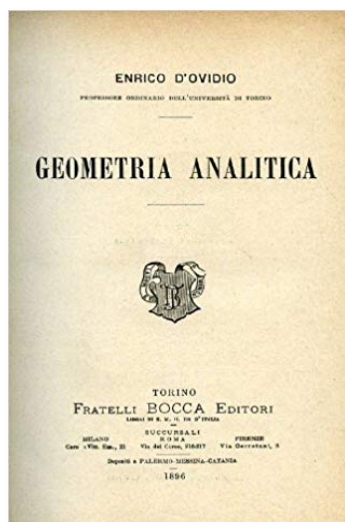
Croce, along with Giustino Fortunato (1848-1932) and Francesco Saverio Nitti (1868-1953), was to become a 'dictator' of Italian culture, especially on his return to Naples after a long stay in Perugia. He settled in 1907 in Palazzo Filomarino where he lived until 1952, the year of his death, and held a salon popular with intellectuals, writers and university professors.

Enrico took the oath of office on 7 April 1905 and, although he did not make a significant contribution to Parliament, he did make some important speeches on education and participated in the discussions on the law establishing the Royal Politecnico of Turin in 1906, a project

he had been working on for some years at the behest of the Italian monarch and the Minister of Education, in collaboration with Quintino Sella at least in the initial stages.



Enrico D'Ovidio at the age of about 50, a few years before he was appointed Senator of the Kingdom (1905).



Chapter 5

The Accademia dei Lincei

Both D'Ovidio brothers were appointed members of the Accademia dei Lincei in their respective disciplinary classes, for manifest merit and after a rich academic and scientific career. The Accademia, which dated back to the 17th century, was reconstituted after a long period of decline by Maurizio Sella (Quintino's father), Minister of Finance of the Kingdom, in 1871. What is exceptional is that the two brothers, members at the same time, belonged to very different scientific, disciplinary and cultural backgrounds: one a linguist and man of letters, the other a mathematician, an academic of calculus and algebra.

His brother Francesco, in publishing *Saggi critici* (*Critical Essays*) in 1887, one of his most significant works, which was later republished by the Accademia, attempted to outline an appropriate definition of literary criticism, emphasising that it arose where the completeness of the reconstruction of 'facts' – and for this reason was afferent to the sciences, – He also distinguished between 'critics who are able to ascertain the facts but mediocre in their aesthetic and philosophical judgements about them, and acute critics whose judgements all too often need to be revised, verified, corrected, but enlighten minds'. In short, the squaring of the circle could only be found by combining historical-philological excavation and verification with sincere analytical skill, supported by a strong philosophical framework.

Quintino Sella, in one of his texts, explained at length the project for the re-foundation of the Accademia after the Unification of Italy. This project is also part of a more general one concerning the history of scientific institutions after the Unification of Italy, a history in which the Accademia was largely protagonist from 1874 to 1933.¹⁹

As is often the case, behind research projects, books and publications there are events and occasions that foster their birth or development. In this case, it was the celebrations for the 4th centenary of the foundation of the Accademia in 2004 that attracted special attention to episodes and circumstances concerning the Lincei in united Italy. By analysing unpublished materials, minutes and correspondence, it was possible to produce interesting and evocative documentation that, among other things, was in addition to that already found during partially similar initiatives in the past. A further event was to take place shortly afterwards when the 150th anniversary of the Unification of Italy was to be celebrated. The scientists Quintino Sella, Francesco Brioschi, Eugenio Beltrami, Pietro Blaserna and Vito Volterra stood out against this backdrop and, by virtue of their presidencies from 1874 to 1926, left an indelible mark on the life of the Lyncean association and post-Risorgimento Italy.

An incisive imprint was also left by the humanist presidents: Angelo Messedaglia, Pasquale Villari, Francesco D'Ovidio and Vittorio Scialoja, who found themselves at the helm of the Accademia in difficult years, from 1900 to 1933, i.e. during the Great War, the post-war period and Fascism, which, as we know, led first to its receivership and then to its

¹⁹ Raffaella Simili, cur., *Scienziati, patrioti, presidenti. L'Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei (1874-1926)*, Laterza, Rome-Bari 2012.

suppression. An imprint that it has not been easy to trace within the intricate adventures experienced by the Accademia inside and outside its walls, starting from the 'official' traces, abundant yes, but rarely accompanied by 'informal' writings; from the complex picture of the political and economic episodes in which all these presidents personally participated; the enmity shown by the local academies fearful of an excessive centralisation of the Lynceum; the fraught relationship with the rival par excellence, the Italian Society of Sciences, known as the Society of the XL; the frequent not always silent animosity.

All of the presidents of the Accademia dei Lincei were appointed senators with different institutional responsibilities, mostly working in the fields of education and research like the D'Ovidio brothers, who were included in the Consiglio Superiore dell'Istruzione: the purpose entrusted to them was arduous, that is, to prepare the new programmes of united and monarchical Italy that would shape the preparation and education of the young people of New Italy.

First Enrico and then Francesco had to learn to deal, almost like politicians, with the reserved attitude of the Administrative Councils and the not always friendly atmosphere created between members, secretaries and presidents; clashes between classes and subclasses were the order of the day, especially in view of the election of new members, not to mention the internal rivalry within the disciplinary groups over the awarding of the coveted Royal Prizes that were handed out directly by the monarchs. In the annals of the Accademia, the patience and calmness with which Francesco D'Ovidio knew how to divide the disputants and make pacifying speeches, using his faculties

and oratory that he often borrowed from his beloved Cicero, has gone down in history. Thus, both the volcanic philologist Francesco, with his ardent character and close ties to "that genius of his elder brother", and Enrico – of milder temperament – were involved in the awarding of the Lincei prizes.

It was not until 1905, after several dissenting opinions to which the Council of State even intervened, that the prize in question was finally awarded to Guido Castelnuovo (Linceo since 1901) and Cesare Arzelà (Linceo since 1904). Federigo Enriques was not declared the winner but was elected corresponding member that same year. He nevertheless won the Royal Prize in 1907, ex aequo with Tullio Levi Civita (1873-1941). At that point, the prizes of the Lincei's Mathematics Class largely had a common father and a single master: Enrico D'Ovidio.

Enrico polemicized on matters of merit with Angelo Messedaglia (1820-1901) in overwhelmingly supporting the candidature of the Englishman Alfred Marshall of the Class of Moral Sciences against that of the economists and mathematicians Léon Walras (1834-1910) and Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923). Disagreements and polemics between classes and merits for the Lyncean prize caused the break-up of the long friendship between D'Ovidio and Ernesto Monaci. Not to mention the indignation of Pasquale Villari, who never forgave the scientific community for not electing him in the first round of the Moral Sciences in the Accademia in 1875, as he himself had to complain to the president Quintino Sella and Francesco D'Ovidio (who had little or nothing to do with the Villari affair and defended himself in two impassioned letters contained in an appendix of *Rimpianti*).

If, on the one hand, petty "workshop" diatribes even touched the presidents, on the other, a common thread culturally bound their work, a thread substantially due to the positivist climate of the second half of the 19th century that drew on John Stuart Mill's teaching on a methodological level and embraced all the sciences, thus producing a general critical cognitive attitude as well as a unitary conception of knowledge. What differentiated them was, on the other hand, the behaviour of the presidents towards the Accademia, since, while for the scientists (with the exception of Beltrami) lynx policy was to be placed 'within' their respective civil and intellectual activities, that of the humanists, despite some efforts by Messedaglia and D'Ovidio, took place predominantly 'outside' the Academy itself or in their cultural circles.

One could almost say, using a sort of metaphor, that for scientists – again with the due exception of Beltrami – being at the helm of the Lincei was the fruit of a passion, while for humanists it was a duty, albeit a lofty one. Despite all the hassle that the politics of the Accademia dei Lincei gave and the time it consumed, as well as the travel it entailed, Francesco and Enrico always said they were honoured to be part of this institution and realised that what was being discussed in those fora was changing the culture of Italy. Enrico felt honoured to be part of that difficult but necessary process.

Naples at that time 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), founded by Murat and with great tradition, which later supplied the technical and mathematical faculties of the University of Naples with teachers. There were numerous cultural magazines that stood out in the national field.

In 1892, he joined the Higher Council of Public Education and in 1905, as already mentioned, he was appointed Senator of the Kingdom for cultural merits and census. Appointment as a senator was also a norm at the time for academics of the Lincei and for important academics.

He also received a large number of honours from his country, Campobasso. He was appointed:

on 28 May 1876, Knight of the Order of the Crown of Italy;
on 15 January 1882, Officer of the Order of the Crown of Italy,
and on 2 June 1882, Knight of the Order of Saints Maurice and Lazarus (Savoy-Piedmontese honour);
on 16 January 1883, Commander of the Order of the Crown of Italy;
5 June 1892, Officer of the Order of Saints Maurice and Lazarus;
on 11 July 1918, Grand Officer of the Order of the Crown of Italy.

At the direct wish of the Minister of Culture and Education, he was also appointed Commander of the Order of Saints Maurice and Lazarus on 3 June 1909 and Grand Officer of the Order of Saints Maurice and Lazarus on 2 July 1922.



Aerial view of the current Nunziatella building that housed the Scuola di Applicazione Ponti e Strade and the Real Accademia Marina.



(Testo)

NACQUE IN QUESTA CASA
IL V DICEMBRE MDCCCII
FRANCESCO D'OVIDIO
CHE ASCESO ALLE ALTEZZE DELL'UNIVERSITÀ DEL SENATO
DELLE PIÙ INSIGNE ACCADEMIE
E A FAMA PIÙ CHE EUROPEA
NELLA GLOTTOLOGIA NELLA FILOLOGIA NELLA CRITICA
SERBÒ PER QUESTA SUA TERRA UN PROFONDO NOSTALGICO AFFETTO
E IL CALDO ZELO DI COSTANTEMENTE GIOVARLE
CON LA PAROLA E CON L'OPERA

NEL CENTENARIO D'UNA DATA COSÌ FAUSTA
CAMPOBASSO GRATA ED ORGOGLIOSA
QUESTO RICORDO CONSA CRA

foto Zatini

Chapter 6

The Regia Scuola di Applicazione per gli Ingegneri

The Regia Scuola di Applicazione per gli Ingegneri of Turin was established in 1859, and in 1906, on the instructions of Enrico D'Ovidio, it became the Regio Politecnico. Thus, was born in Turin the first 'polytechnic' university institution for the complete training of civil, military and later hydraulic, electronic and vehicle engineers. The need for a spacious seat with large water flows available for the hydraulics courses led to the institution being assigned, thanks to Quintino Sella's interventions, the Valentino Castle, Royal School of Application from the autumn of 1861 after extensive renovation work on the now dilapidated building.

The assignment led D'Ovidio to an acquaintance with the Sella family, Quintino in particular, that would be cultivated over the years. Even today, the logo of the Politecnico of Turin features a stylised figure of the Valentino Castle.



The current logo of the Politecnico of Turin shows a stylised drawing of the first site, the Castello del Valentino, the seat decided upon by Enrico D'Ovidio and Quintino Sella.

As mentioned, at the beginning of 1906, he was appointed Royal Commissioner at the Scuola d'Applicazione per Ingegneri (School of Application for Engineers), the school that was supposed to help students transfer the theories of Statics and Dynamics or Construction or Materials Science into concrete projects, to build bridges, roads, tunnels and give a further boost to hydroelectric and railway construction. D'Ovidio was certainly the ideal person for this task, according to the Royal Commission, because he had worked as a lecturer at the prestigious Scuola di Applicazione Ponti e Strade in Naples; this appointment was prodromal to the foundation of Politecnico, which was in the plans of the Kingdom's experts. D'Ovidio's appointment came after a long series of attempts and measures that began in 1847 when, by issuing the "*Lettere patenti*" of 30 November 1847, Charles Albert of Savoy abolished the various bodies that in Turin, Genoa and Sardinia supervised higher education by creating a unitary "Secretary of State for Public Education", which soon became the "Ministry of Public Education"; this was the beginning of an organic and central approach to higher education in the Kingdom of Sardinia and later Italy, which was confirmed by the Casati Law of 13 November 1859. This, also taking advantage of the full powers enjoyed by the government due to the war, succeeded in providing an overall discipline to the entire subject of education, which was passed unchanged to the next Kingdom of Italy.

Despite a discrete succession of reform proposals, the Casati Law remained the basis of the Italian university system for more than half a century, only to be organically replaced by the Gentile Law of 1923 and above all by the Consolidation Act of 1933, superseded after another fifty years by Law 382 of 11 July 1980, and on 9 May 1989 by

Law 168 establishing the new 'Ministry of Universities and Scientific and Technological Research'.

Over the course of a century and a half, the organisation of higher education has not undergone major reforms. And yet, the university environment has almost always lived with the prospect of imminent change: numerous projects – including legislative ones – have failed to come to fruition, as a powerful volume by Floriana Colao has also indicated.

The Casati Law prefigured a simple and linear system under strict ministerial control: this rigid approach had to be softened in many cases to take into account the various Italian situations – for example, Milan had a well-functioning Polytechnic since 1863 – but also to recognise new realities that were developing. In Paola Procacci's book, *La 'Scuola d'applicazione per gl'ingegneri' e il 'Reale Museo Industriale Italiano'. Raccolta di Leggi e Reali Decreti dal 1859 al 1906*, recounts the debates and hopes of the reforms that, starting with Quintino Sella and passing through Ruggiero Bonghi and others were designed to modernise and articulate the Italian university system and specialisation schools, complete with founding texts.²⁰

In those years, Enrico D'Ovidio, while engaged in these important assignments that included restructuring the architecture of the technical and also scientific teaching of pure and theoretical mathematics, occupied himself with the study of algebraic forms, won prizes, wrote many contributions and formed, in his teaching activities, an entire

²⁰ Paola Procacci, *La 'Scuola d'applicazione per gl'ingegneri' e il 'Reale Museo Industriale Italiano'. Raccolta di Leggi e Reali Decreti dal 1859 al 1906*. Politecnico of Turin, 1998, pp. 5-6.

generation of mathematicians who would also be very important for the future development of the subject. His pupils included some of the most brilliant Italian mathematicians of the time, such as the aforementioned Corrado Segre, as well as Giuseppe Peano (1858-1932), Guido Castelnuovo (1865-1952), Francesco Severi (1879-1961), Francesco Gerbaldi (1858-1934), Gino Loria (1862-1954) and also his nephew Gustavo Sannia (1875-1930), son of his sister Angiolina. These students would go on to found Italy's leading mathematical schools.²¹ 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.

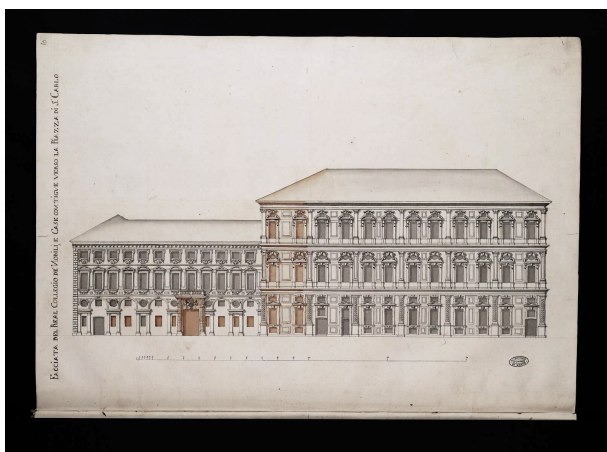
While the project to build the School of Application, the first nucleus of the Politecnico of Turin, was developing due to the work of Enrico D'Ovidio, Udalrico Masoni, professor of Theoretical and Practical Hydraulics, praised and supported his ideas:

On the development of higher technical education, the importance of training industrial engineers in Naples as well was reiterated [24]. In support of his ideas, Masoni illustrated what had been achieved or was being achieved in other countries, starting with Germany where the training effectiveness of industrial education practised in the polytechnics of Brunswick, Dresden, Hannover, Darmstadt, Karlsruhe and Berlin had enabled it to catch up with and surpass English technology. For Italy, she recalled the success of the industrial sections in Milan and Turin. In the latter,

²¹ 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, Turin 1962.

while, at the end of the first course in 1881, there had been 14 graduates, by 1898 the number had risen to 55. In Milan, in the same year, out of 75 diplomas, 53 had been from industrial engineers, 21 from civil engineers and 1 from architects. 'And we must agree,' Masoni added, 'that if the government's action had been more prompt in assisting the efforts and initiatives taken by local administrations and private individuals in other parts of Italy as well, we would have achieved that development in higher studies that was noted above for Milan and Turin'. Instead, in Naples, 'despite the broad consensus of the administrations, it was not possible to overcome the obstacles placed in the way by the central government' [25]. Among the obstacles was the draft law, which tended to give Italian universities a unitary and autonomous order, which endangered the autonomy of the application schools [26]. In the end, the tenacity of the school management and the local authorities, who secured the financial means, made it possible to overcome the resistance of the Higher Council of Public Education. On 14 and 24 October 1901, decrees were issued establishing the Industrial Section of the School of Application for Engineers in Naples as of 1 November and starting the first course. At the end of the first three-year period, there were five industrial engineers graduated from the School, but the number was set to almost quadruple the following year. A qualified contribution to the final arrangement of this section was made by the Royal Commission for Industrial Expansion in Naples, which collected the fruit of its studies and the formulation of its conclusions in a dense and documented report. With regard to the Neapolitan School for the training of engineers, the Commission, after a thorough investigation, had come to the conclusion that 'Naples too has very noble traditions in the field of scientific disciplines, and in order to follow the modern movement, which involves so much transformation of productive forces, it must put itself in a position to provide not only its own, but also the children of all the southern lands, with complete higher technical education: Only at this price will they become truly capable and willing to tackle, with

courage and success, the resolution of the serious problems that most directly relate to the desired economic direction. A few industrial engineers, educated here, and truly attached to their country, will be enough to put themselves at the head of new industries, or redeem those that are in danger, from the flourishing of which hundreds of families will be honoured, and all the wealth of these provinces will benefit incalculably'.²²



Drawing of the Palace of the Academy of Sciences in Turin, whose members collaborated with D'Ovidio on the didactic construction of the Politecnico.

²² R. *Scuola di Applicazione per gl'ingegneri in Napoli*, Pubblicazione deliberata dal Consiglio Direttivo in occasione della Esposizione Nazionale di Torino, Tipografia Reale delle Scienze, Naples 1898 e 1901, passim.

Chapter 7

A forgotten tragedy: the death of Eugenio D'Ovidio at the age of 25

The Biellese D'Ovidio family placed a lot of hope in their son Eugenio, born in 1882, for studies and family activities.

At the beginning of 1907, a tragedy shook the lives of entire families, friends and relatives, when a group of young people, among whom were several members of Naples' first football club, the Naples, decided on an excursion to the Lattari Mountains and in particular to the summit of S. Angelo a Tre Pizzi in the Campania Antiappennines, 1444 metres high, from which there is a magnificent view of the Gulf of Naples. Angelo a Tre Pizzi of the Campania Apennines, 1444 metres high, offering a magnificent view of the Gulf of Naples: the slippery ground and probably a carelessness on the part of one of the boys, Arturo Kernot, captain of Naples, caused the tragedy that cost two lives.

A Club Alpino Italiano publication, dedicated to the centenary of 1871-1971, recalls the disaster that cut short the life of young Eugenio, who had already graduated as an engineer, as well as his friend, also an engineer, Arturo Kernot.

The Naples Foot-Ball Club, a football club founded in Naples in 1905, in which Eugenio D'Ovidio played, was also known as Naples (pronounced in English). In 1922, for financial reasons, it merged with Internazionale Napoli to form the 'Foot-Ball Club Internazionale-Naples', better known as FBC Internaples.

It is evident that Enrico was very interested in sport, as was his son, since members of the Bonacossa family were skaters and several times Italian champions, founders of the Hockey Club of Milan, while the Sella family were hikers and mountaineers: Quintino Sella was one of the mountaineers who contended for the summit of Mont Blanc from the 1870s. Noteworthy are the photographs taken at altitude, between 1700 and 2000 and beyond by Venanzio and Vittorio Sella.

A detail of the Monti Lattari disaster is given in a piece published in the 'Rivista Alpina del Club Alpino Italiano' of 31 March 1907, under the heading 'Cronaca alpina' (pp. 125-126):²³

Youngsters D'Ovidio and Kernot perished on Monte Sant'Angelo at Tre Pizzi above Castellammare di Stabia

- On Sunday, 3 March, a very serious misfortune struck with sudden and cruel mourning two distinguished families, one of which was very honourably represented in the National Parliament by Senators and Professors Enrico and Francesco D'Ovidio, and in our Alpine Club by the aforementioned Senator Comm. Enrico, senior member and delegate of the Naples Section and for many years Councillor-Director of the Headquarters.

²³ Arturo Kernot (1877-1907) was, at the time, the captain of the Naples Italian national *football* team and his death mourned the sporting world also because he was considered a gifted player. In 1922, due to financial difficulties, Naples merged with Internazionale Napoli to form the Foot-Ball Club Internazionale-Naples, better known as the F.B.C. Internaples.

At dawn on that day, a group of eleven young people, members of the 'Italia' rowing club of Naples, including engineer Eugenio D'Ovidio, son and grandson respectively of the aforementioned honourable senators, and engineer Arturo Kernot, the first 25 years old, the other 30, left with two guides from a villa above Castellammare di Stabia, where he had spent the night, to climb Monte Sant'Angelo a Tre Pizzi, which rises to a height of 1443 metres between the gulfs of Naples and Salerno. It is a classic mountain frequently climbed for the grandiose panorama it offers over the two gulfs and the enchanting region of Campania. On the last stretch, a small path leads easily to the supreme peak, Punta Molare, which is a craggy tower of rock, as are the neighbouring peaks forming a jagged ridge with precipitous cliffs. Especially steep is the northern slope, where the said path unfolds on the top of a very deep and dark valley. In winter, the mountain is covered with snow on this side, sometimes in thick layers, and then the ascent can be dangerous because the path is hidden under steep snowy slopes, and if there is fog, it masks the precipices below.

Because of the snow and fog, the group, having reached the terminal rocks, prudently gave up on reaching the summit and set off downhill. During a stop, D'Ovidio noticed that Kernot, seated, was sliding rapidly towards the abyss hidden by the fog. He was heard to shout: 'Stop, Arturo, grab hold: I'm coming'; and he was seen rushing quickly to his friend's aid. Having been accustomed to the mountains since childhood, he suddenly measured the seriousness of the danger, and, confident, prudent and agile as he was on ice and rock, he wanted to snatch his friend, who was inexperienced in mountaineering, from it. He went so far as to grab him by the jacket, but he was swept away with him, and in an instant they both disappeared embraced into the precipice.

The remaining companions were already about to launch themselves after them, when the guides and one of them held them back so as not to run to certain ruin. With death in their hearts, they wandered through the valley searching in vain for the missing, until, having arrived at the bottom, they ran, some to look for

people, ropes and tools, some to warn the Carabinieri of the nearest station. With these and a few peasants from the mountains, while the authorities were notified and a canoeist brought the news to Naples, the others returned to the site of the catastrophe; but as night fell, they had to wait until dawn to continue the search for the fallen, for whom hope of finding them only wounded was not lost. But when they discovered them at the bottom of the ravine, they saw that everything was over for them. With great difficulty and effort, tying themselves to long ropes, the peasants managed to extract the two inanimate bodies, which were soon transported to Naples, where the mournful news had shocked the townspeople and brought consternation to the families of the two victims.

To receive the body of the young D'Ovidio, his desolate parents had flocked from Turin to accompany him to this city, where on the morning of 8 March, the funeral accompaniment to the cemetery took place with the participation of a select group of citizens, including a good number of Alpine Club members. In his two volumes of *Rimpianti*, Francesco D'Ovidio, acknowledged as an affectionate father and uncle, does not mention the disaster, which was certainly the subject of correspondence exchanged in the letters that were destroyed with D'Ovidio's house in Turin on 24 July 1944.

To the illustrious Senator Prof. Enrico D'Ovidio, who enjoys the friendship and sympathy of many colleagues in the Alpine Club, and to his very kind family, to whom cruel fate has brought such intense grief, we express here our deepest and most heartfelt condolences, certain that we interpret the sentiments of all members. To ease the acerbity of grief for the tragic death of our beloved Eugenio, may his anguished family be comforted by the thought that he died nobly in the act of wanting to save a comrade who was in imminent danger of a fatal fall.

From the newspaper La Stampa, 8 March 1907:

The arrival of Ing. D'Ovidio's body.

- This morning, on the first train from Rome, the body of the young engineer D'Ovidio, who died dramatically in the unfortunate adventure on Mount Faito, arrived from Naples. Several relatives accompanied the coffin. Shortly after 9 a.m., a crowd of colleagues and disciples of Senator D'Ovidio, the unfortunate father of the lamented deceased, and numerous friends of the family, went to the Porta Nuova station to pay their last respects to the body. The hearse was followed by four other wagons laden with wreaths. The long and sad procession reached the Cemetery at around 9.30 a.m., where short funeral prayers were said in memory of the unfortunate young man.



The rock descent where Arturo Kernot and the almost 25-year-old engineer Eugenio D'Ovidio died on 3 March 1907.

Chapter 8

Friendships: the Petiva of Sordevolo and the Sella

As already mentioned, Enrico's eldest daughter Laura (1880-1979) married Count Federico Petiva of Sordevolo (1855-1946) in 1909. He came from a rich family of nobles and industrialists from Biella, benefactors of many local institutions and of a very similar profile to the Lefèbvre with whom Elvira, Francesco's eldest daughter, was related, in Naples in the same year. Attending the wedding party in Turin, Francesco with his family, his sister Angela with Achille Sannia, his aunt and uncle Ernesto and Teresa Doria Lefèbvre and various other family members.

The Petiva family had originally been weaving industrialists, like their friends Sella and Bonacossa; they were involved in the construction of the first modern aqueducts in the water-rich Biella area, using the expertise they had acquired over many years of running mills for milling textiles and spinning cotton, silk and wool. They had considerable land and real estate, especially in Biella and



Family coat of arms
Petiva of Sordevolo

Sordevolo, about ten kilometres northwest of the capital, where they owned land, palaces and flats.

In 1938 Laura D'Ovidio Petiva founded a famous training school for nurses, the renowned 'Scuola Laura Petiva D'Ovidio' in Biella, with an endowment of 200.000 lire; the school – a real boarding school with a boarding school – was adjacent to Biella's hospital, which was then helped financially with another donation from the Petiva family: there is documentation of a continuous and conspicuous series of donations from the Petiva family who became, for this reason, well-deserving of the city, which until then had an inadequate accommodation structure to its size. In this, Laura D'Ovidio Petiva seems to continue the tradition of charity that had been implemented in Naples by Ernesto Lefèbvre and Teresa Doria. In any case, the Laura Petiva school became one of the most organised and modern training schools for nurses in the nation before the advent of new generations of training institutes and then dedicated university courses.

Maria Bertolini's father, Francesco, had also, until the very end, edited a successful series of historical handouts for the publisher Vallardi in Milan, the *Storia generale d'Italia*, in 3000 pages and 5 volumes, with around 400 illustrations edited by Lodovico Pogliaghi (1857-1950). Francesco D'Ovidio, even though it was not a work that possessed the chrism of science but was a work of rigorous popularisation, made his praise known for his father-in-law's 'magnificent achievement'.

From the Historical Archive of the University of Bologna, I take this profile of Bertolini mistakenly called 'Bettolini' in some passages, a university professor and colleague of Carducci and later Pascoli:

Abandoning his legal studies, which he had cultivated for a year at the University of Padua, he turned to philology and went to Vienna, where he completed his studies. On 9 March 1858, he began his hard-working and noble life as a teacher at the Upper Secondary School of Porta Nova in Milan. [...] earning himself a reputation as a highly effective teacher. In the meantime, in his early twenties, Bettolini (sic) published his first essays on himself as a writer in the Viennese "Rivista ginnasiale"; then, in 1859, he began to collaborate with the *Effemeridi della pubblica Istruzione di Torino*. In 1860, he published the *Storia primitiva d'Italia* and, four years later, the *Storia di Roma* and, in 1866, the *Storia del Medio Evo*. In the two years of his first stay in Bologna, he wrote and Vallardi divulged (1869) the *Storia delle dominazioni barbariche in Italia*. With these printed works, one intended for secondary school students and the other, especially the last, for those eager for a more modern historical culture, Francesco Bertolini, together with the results of his direct examination of the sources, disseminated among us and made us appreciate those of German criticism, of which he was a profound connoisseur and not a blind admirer. He thus satisfied a universally felt desire, that Italian historical studies were then, as they say, lagging behind; and he opened for himself the doors of higher education. He was first commanded to profess Ancient and Modern History at the Florentine Institute of Higher and Further Studies for the academic year 1869-70. Having completed his mission and returned to Bologna to head the *Scuola normale femminile* (Normal School for Women), on 18 October of the same year 1870 he was appointed to teach Modern History at this University. [...] the following year he was promoted to extraordinary professor. He held the chair until 1875, when he was appointed Extraordinary Professor of Ancient History at the University of Naples, where, shortly afterwards, he was appointed to a full professorship and remained for eight years. At the request of the Bolognese Faculty, which was illustrated at the time by the names and lofty work of

Giosuè Carducci and Giovan Battista Gandino, he was [...] returned to the Bolognese Faculty by decree of 7 June 1883.

Which shows how, between the D'Ovidio, the Sella, the Sannia and the Bertolini and Porena – of whom we shall speak – a close and prestigious family and intellectual community had formed.

After Laura, the other daughter, Pia, was married in 1910 to engineer Carlo Andreoni

(1884-1970), active in the field of designing plants for the production and distribution of electricity and a senior manager of the Società Piemontese Anonima Centrale di Eletticità, director as well as shareholder of the Rimini Electricity Company, a solid character somewhere between technician and manager, of those who were trained in the schools where Enrico taught.²⁴ Carlo Andreoni and his wife Pia took up residence in Turin at Corso Peschiera 35 opposite the home of his father-in-law who lived, as we know, at number 30.

During Fascism Enrico did not, according to his friends, participate in party activities or propaganda. He was not among the 12 professors out of 1225 who refused to swear allegiance to Fascism in 1931, and he did not have the opportunity to say anything about the racial laws because death caught him a few years earlier: he was, however, surrounded by Jewish students, such as Volterra, Luzzatto, Levi de la Vida and others. He did not have time to enrol in the Fascist Party, a long-delayed enrolment invited by Achille Starace, because he sent in the enrolment forms

²⁴ *Ars et Labor*, *monthly illustrated magazine*, Ricordi, Milan 1910, p. 466.

(which were two, Form 1 and Form 2) in 1933 and died before the investigation was completed. Although he could not be listed as a party member, his funeral was carefully observed by envoys from the Questore and the Party and his figure could still be presented as a glory of Italic genius.²⁵

Almost certainly, but this is a hypothesis, having so many brilliant Jewish students in his retinue, he would not have signed the *Manifesto della Razza*: Enrico D'Ovidio, like his brother Francesco, knew how to take courageous and isolated positions when necessary, he had done so many times during his professional and academic life.

So quiet years passed between teaching, honours, an increasingly brilliant career and family visits. Enrico never forgot his relatives in Naples and often, usually in winter, went to visit them in Largo Latilla where his niece Elvira and nephew-in-law Carlo Ernesto Lefèvre had expanded the family to three children, one of whom, Antonio, almost immediately proved equal to his academic uncles' brilliance and fame. Then came the grief of 1907 with the death of Eugenio, which saw the emotional participation of the whole family who gathered in Naples on 7 March 1907, and on the 8th the body was transported by train to Turin.

Quintino Sella

Sella was said to have belonged to the Masonic fraternal association and evidence, it is said, is his pyramid-shaped tomb. The tomb alluded to is located in the 'Cimitero Bosco'

²⁵ Caterina Montagnani, *Spigolando nell'Archivio Storico del Senato*, p. 12, n83, In 'Dirittifondamentali.it'.

section of the Monumental Cemetery of Oropa, at an altitude of 1,200 metres, and is a marble-covered pyramid reminiscent of the Cestia Pyramid in Rome. The desire to be buried in a pyramid is generally attributed to Sella's Masonic affiliation, which, although probable (considering the Piedmontese environment and his acquaintances), has never been proven but is limited to clues, albeit conspicuous ones, such as this.²⁶ Moreover, the pyramid tomb was also in the funerary fashion of the time.

Even Benigno Crespi, manager of the large Crespi d'Adda factory and creator of the ideal village that bears his own name, the Village of Crespi d'Adda, although not a Freemason, had himself buried under a large pyramid-shaped mausoleum, although dissimilar to the Sella pyramid.

Would Enrico then have joined out of friendly solidarity? But in his case the evidence is even more shaky: mere suggestions, really.²⁷

According to a note contained in the *Diario 1888-1889* of the acquired relative Manfredi Porena, Enrico D'Ovidio was never initiated into Freemasonry either by Quintino Sella or anyone else, nor was his brother Francesco – by his own

²⁶ Affiliation questioned by historians of Freemasonry such as Luigi Polo Friz and Augusto Comba, professor of History of the Risorgimento at the University of Turin and Aldo A. Mola in his *Storia della Massoneria in Italia*, Bompiani, Milan 2018. Enrico D'Ovidio is also never mentioned in historical studies on Freemasonry: Luigi Polo Friz, *La massoneria italiana nel decennio post-unitario*. Lodovico Frapolli, Franco Angeli, Milan 1998, p. 315; Augusto Comba, *Quintino Sella e la massoneria*, in "Quintino Sella tra politica e cultura 1827-1884, Atti del convegno nazionale di studi" (Turin, October 1984), edited by Cristina Invernizzi, pp. 309-313. Turin, 1986.

²⁷ Manfredi Porena, *Diario, marzo 1888-novembre 1890*, photographed manuscript at the Lefèvre D'Ovidio Archive, Via del Nuoto Rome (2016), p. 134.

written admission –. Moreover, Enrico asked for the sacrament of Extreme Unction, which was not normally requested by Freemasons and was certainly not granted by priests to known or suspected Freemasons; this is another element that confirms what has been said above. If the D'Ovidio family was ideally liberal and anti-Bourbon and apparently not linked to Catholicism, the behaviour also shows otherwise from what can be deduced from the remnants of the correspondence preserved at the Scuola Normale di Pisa, in the D'Ovidio Fund; as for the Lefèbvre family, this is clearly shown, for several generations, to be of Catholic observance in its behaviour and declarations, as it will be – at least in appearance, as must always be made clear – in the next generation when Francesco D'Ovidio's grandson, Antonio Lefèbvre D'Ovidio, will set up a non-profit organisation for palliative care under the aegis of pontifical law.

The Masonic fraternity at that time kept its affiliation papers very confidential, if not secret, unless a 'brother' wanted to make his membership known, which happened quite frequently. In other cases, also considering the period of strong dissension between Church and Freemasonry, others preferred to keep the initiation confidential.



Maurizio Sella's tomb at the Monumental Cemetery of Oropa (Cimitero Bosco).

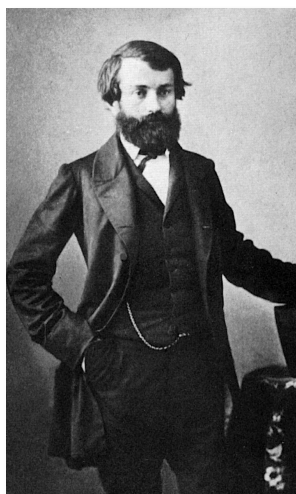
Enrico and Quintino Sella frequented each other at the Castello del Valentino, the site of the Ponti e Strade school where the mathematician had been called by the politician. In the same Valentino Castle, on 23 October 1863, D'Ovidio – who was not a mountaineer unlike Sella – took part in the founding of the Italian Alpine Club, which had its first headquarters in the rooms of the castle; Bettino Ricasoli and the scientist Giovanni Battista Schiapparelli, among many others, were also present. At Valentino, the two friends shared leadership, teaching and passions but, in the largely new Turin and capital of Italy, they also saw each other in the elegant headquarters of the Club Alpino Italiano and in the initiatives it organised in Turin and Naples.

In Naples, since the C.A.I. was founded, excursions and climbs were organised on the Monti Lattari, on the Campania Antiappennines, rocky peaks reaching up to around 1400 metres.²⁸ Both D'Ovidio and Sella took part in organising the conquest of Mont Blanc, a feat considered exceptional for the time, winning over French and English competitors. While Sella was a mountaineer, D'Ovidio limited himself to organising the feat, however, as he did not consider himself prepared enough to tackle the rock faces.

Having become close friends with Quintino Sella, with whom he shared many passions, including mathematics, mountaineering and teaching, Enrico began to frequent him

²⁸ The C.A.I. was founded in a room of the Valentino Castle on 23 October 1863 by Quintino Sella, Bartolomeo Gastaldi and Ferdinando Perrone di San Martino as well as 72 other members including Enrico D'Ovidio. Over the next two years, the headquarters were moved to 10 Via Bogino, and under the Mole Antonelliana the activity continued apace with the opening of many branches in Italian cities.

in the family's city palace in Biella. The son of Maurizio, Minister and Banker of the Kingdom – and heir to a dynasty of wool industrialists who had started their business in the 17th century – D'Ovidio made a habit of conversing with him while walking around Turin during the period when the city was the capital of Italy (1861-1865).



Quintino Sella.

The Petiva, Sella and D'Ovidio families bonded through friendship and common acquaintances, and this closeness, in a certain sense, lasted beyond death, as is testified by the Petiva Tomb or Chapel in the Monumental Cemetery of Oropa, which is located above the gallery that leads from the Campo Aperto to the central part of the 'Cimitero Bosco'.

The remains of Laura D'Ovidio Petiva, who was not related to the Sella family, are buried in the Sella shrine-chapel divided inside into two parts by a wall and a bronze door in front of which is a bust of patriarch Pietro Petiva.

In the same partition, on overlapping burials are the remains of: Clotilde Petiva Perrucchiatti, who died on an unspecified (illegible) day in February 1904; Federico Petiva, born in Sordevolo, buried on 5 February 1946; and finally his wife, Laura D'Ovidio. The Chapel's last guest was Ludovico Sella, who died in 2016 at the age of 87. A CAI academic, he was a notable mountaineer and president of the Biella section of the Club Alpino Italiano from 1971 to 1977 and from 1983 to 1986: under his management the famous 1971 expedition with Guido Machetto to the Himalayan peak of the Hindu Kush (7708 metres) was organised. In 1987, Ludovico was one of the founders, in Biella, with Reinhold Messner, of Mountain Wilderness, a non-profit organisation with dozens of offices around the world that has as its social purpose the defence of mountains and their environment

The Petiva chapel, on the other hand, houses the burials of some members of the Sella family in its outer part, an open-air semicircle, behind the building. Why this exchange of graves took place is not entirely clear, although there is a document testifying to the transfer of burial places, with a regular sales contract, from the D'Ovidio to the Sella and vice versa. Probably, the Sella tomb had turned out to be small; it had been occupied by deceased persons such as Laura D'Ovidio and there was a need for the Petiva to give up some places to the Sella.



Bust of Pietro Petiva, Count of Sordevolo, in the Sella Chapel, behind the artefact can be seen the partition dedicated to the burial of Laura D'Ovidio (1979) and her husband, Federico Petiva, Count of Sordevolo, who died in 1946. *Monumental Cemetery of the Sanctuary of Oropa. Bosco Cemetery Section.*

Chapter 9

Angela D'Ovidio and Achille Sannia

The Sannia Studio between 1855 and 1865 was located next to the premises of the *Società Partenopea*, at 33 Via dei Guantai, and was very well frequented. Achille Sannia became related to the D'Ovidio family when he married Angiolina in 1860, which makes us realise that Angela, this was her real name, must have been the eldest of the three siblings, born around 1840. Unfortunately, no photographs of Angela and her sister can be found, photos that are known to have existed but were probably destroyed in the American daylight bombing of 24 July 1944, which destroyed the house of Enrico D'Ovidio and family in Via Peschiera 30 and cost 122 lives. To the Sannia couple were born Elvira (27 December 1860), Romilda (3 March 1863), and Gustavo (1875), a mathematician.

Enrico's role in Turin is similar to his brother's in Naples: both are directors and university 'barons' in the broadest sense of the term, because they recruit and condition careers and alternations. But they are above all considered masters by many of their pupils who, over the years, will not fail to bring back memories, even emotional ones, of one and the other.

As we know – a brief repetition is in order here – Enrico D'Ovidio occupied himself with the study of algebraic forms, won prizes, wrote many contributions and formed an entire generation of mathematicians that would be very important for future developments. When he retired in 1918, the

volume *Scritti matematici offerto ad Enrico D'Ovidio in occasione del suo LXXV genetliaco* (Turin, Bocca, 1918) was dedicated to him.

Shortly after Elvira's and her cousin Laura's marriage, Maria Bertolini's father, Francesco, who until the 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. In 1915, on a date not known at the time, Enrico's wife Maria died. According to her niece Carolina D'Ovidio, she was 'between 45 and 50 years old', evidently not knowing her exact age.²⁹ Because of the Casamicciola earthquake that had devastated Abruzzo, part of Campania and Lazio, causing bridges to collapse and paralysing rail traffic, Francesco D'Ovidio and his family and relatives were probably unable to attend the funeral in Turin.

Over the years, there were many appearances by Enrico in Biella, where he had a large house belonging to his wife's family and where he participated in the social activities of the local Club Alpino Italiano.

Enrico D'Ovidio, a widower for almost 20 years, died in his nineties on 21 March 1933 and was buried in Turin near his wife. News of his death was reported and commented on in national newspapers such as "La Stampa" and "Il Corriere della Sera"; the blurbs show us that, despite the belief to the contrary, he was not a Freemason, as his brother was not, because he asked for a religious marriage and the sacraments,

²⁹ Carolina D'Ovidio a Elvira Lefèbvre D'Ovidio, 30 December 1912, 'Fondo D'Ovidio' in Archivio Storico Scuola Normale di Pisa, fascio 34.

which a well-known Freemason would not have been granted in those years. The funeral procession was attended by many hundreds of people, mainly students but also colleagues and university staff.³⁰

Federico Petiva and his wife Laura D'Ovidio are buried in Biella's Pantheon, the Monumental Cemetery of Oropa Sanctuary, in the tomb built by Federico for his father Pietro who died in 1909.³¹ In particular, due to an agreement made with the Sella family, as mentioned above, the burial of Laura D'Ovidio Petiva took place in the Sella Chapel located in the section known as the "bosco" (wood) section of the Monumental Cemetery of Oropa.

³⁰ "La Stampa", 21 March 1933.

³¹ *Rivista Biellese*, September-October 1953, V, p. 43. In 1929 a scholarship was dedicated 'to the memory' of Petiva, in *Annuario degli istituti medi 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.

Appendix

Transcribed documents

Transcript of the Communication Professor Ruffini to the Prefect about the funeral by Professor Enrico D'Ovidio commented by Federico Patetta.

Turin, 30 March 1933.

To His Excellency the Minister of National Education.

In response to a question referred to me on behalf of Your Excellency, I am duty-bound to report faithfully and accurately what is within my knowledge concerning the funeral of the late Sen. D'Ovidio. I was called to the University on the afternoon of Tuesday 21, and the Director of the Secretariat gave me news of the Senator's death and the funeral that would take place on the afternoon of the following day (22 March), advising me that according to constant custom and at the express wish of the family, the body would be brought to the University courtyard [from the house in Corso Peschiera 30], and that I, as senior dean, had been delegated by the indisposed Rector to represent him.

The next morning the same Mr DIRECTOR (sic, capital letters) sent me the telegram sent by E[ccellency] V[ostra] so that I could communicate it to the family and read it out in the short speech I was to give in the presence of the body.

When I went to the deceased's home [in Turin] in the afternoon, I found Senator Ruffini among his family, who told me that he had come to represent the Senate at following a telephone call that morning from the Prefecture (if I remember

correctly from His Excellency the Prefect himself). I will not conceal from Your Excellency that I was at first somewhat astonished by this, but I thought immediately afterwards and I think now that Senator Ruffini's appointment came from the Senate Presidency, and that H.E. the Prefect naturally informed the person concerned.

When the body was brought to the University, I said a few words on behalf of Your Excellency, the Rector and the Colleagues in Turin's artistic and literary circles, alongside such distinguished personalities as Fontanesi, D'Affondo, D'Andrade, the Calandra brothers, De Amicis and Giacosa.

No mention of a political nature was made by Sen. Ruffini, and no remarks, to the best of my knowledge, were made, publicly or privately, by the speakers about Sen. Ruffini's presence and his speech, either then or later.

Closing the series of speeches was Professor Arturo Foà, who, unannounced, spoke on behalf of Turin artists, extolling the artistic qualities of Sen. D'Ovidio and his patriotic merits.

All speakers responded by thanking a relative of Senator D'Ovidio.³²

This was my duty to report to Your Excellency for the truth. With devoted observance. Federico Patetta.

³² He was Carlo Ernesto Lefèvre, who was present at the ceremony. As for the writer Federico Patetta (1867-1945) from Cairo Montenotte, he was an Italian historian and philologist, a pupil of Francesco D'Ovidio. Francesco Ruffini (1864-1936), on the other hand, was a senator from 1915 to 1934 who was an anti-fascist and opponent of Mussolini.

From 'La Stampa della sera' of 21-22 March 1933
Front page article

The death of Senator Enrico D'Ovidio

This morning, in a clinic in our city where he had been in hospital for about a month, Senator Prof. Enrico D'Ovidio passed away.

The news of the passing of the venerable Senator D'Ovidio, which spread through the city this morning, aroused a general sense of sorrow throughout the city. The condolences are particularly felt in university circles, as the illustrious deceased was the holder of the mathematics chair at our university for many years, then twice Rector Magnifico, and finally Director of the Royal Polytechnic for sixteen consecutive years.

Enrico D'Ovidio was born in Campobasso in 1843 (he had therefore just turned 90), but by then he was to be considered a Turinese by choice, having resided in our city for no less than 62 years. Of these, he had spent 46 years as a professor of mathematics at the Royal University, and many remember the solemn honours that the academic staff and students of the University of Turin bestowed on their professor when he retired from teaching in 1918, having reached the age limit.

Twice, as mentioned above – from 1881 to 1885 – he held the position of Rector Magnifico, during which time he successfully promoted the construction of the Experimental Institutes at Valentino.

In 1906, when the R. Museo Industriale and the Scuola del Valentino merged into the R. Politecnico, Senator D'Ovidio was

called upon to hold the direction of the new and very important Higher Institute, which under his leadership – which lasted until 1922 – was able to flourish and establish itself so well that it was reputed, even abroad, as the first Italian school of engineering.

The distinguished mathematician was a member of the Accademia dei Lincei, the Accademia delle Scienze (of which he was also President), and for a long time was also a member of the Consiglio Superiore della Pubblica Istruzione.

His European reputation as a scholar of exact sciences earned him membership in even the most important foreign scientific academies.

Among his many publications, the treatise on Analytical Geometry that bears his name remains a fundamental text in that discipline.

Among his countless disciples, many rose to the highest ranks of science and teaching. Among them was also HRH the Duke of the Abruzzi, whose painful and untimely loss the nation also mourns today by a fatal coincidence.

He was a close friend of Giuseppe Giacosa, Edmondo De Amicis, Pio Rajna, Eugenio Torelli-Viollier (founder of the *Corriere della sera*) and the most distinguished spirits of his youth: the eclecticism of his mind made him cultivate wide friendships even outside the scientific field.

He was the brother of Sen. Francesco D'Ovidio, professor of literature at the Royal University of Naples, who died a few years ago.

A Senator of the Kingdom since 1905, Enrico D'Ovidio had long belonged to the national liberal ranks, but he had not been slow to give his sincere support to Fascism and the Regime when the Mussolini idea emerged as the only salvation and the only possibility of a glorious rebirth for the Fatherland. He had recently obtained a party membership card.

In favour of intervention, one remembers how – at the call of the first youth classes – he himself wanted to accompany his students to the barracks where they were enlisted, leading the enthusiastic procession.

Always serene in his long life, he was struck by great sorrow in 1907, when he lost his only son Eugenio, who died during a generous attempt to save a friend who had fallen in the mountains during a winter hike.

Sen. D'Ovidio also loved the mountains, and was for many years on the central council of the C.A.I. He was also president of the ancient Gymnastics Society of Turin.

This morning he passed away as peacefully as he lived, overcome by his grave age, against whose ills the family doctor Dr Enrico Vecchia, Professor Demetrio Bargellini and his assistants fought in vain with loving and tenacious care.

Today, not only his daughters, relatives and friends mourn the great loss, but also entire generations of students who remembered him with sincere affection and who had in the illustrious deceased a great teacher of science and life.

**Obituary for Enrico D'Ovidio
in 'La Stampa' of Turin of 21 March 1933**

With the comfort of the last sacrament, Enrico D'Ovidio's hard-working, upright and serene activity came to an end.

Senator of the Kingdom.

Emeritus Professor at the Royal University of Turin.

It is with deep sorrow that his daughters Laura with her husband Commendator Federico Petiva, Pia with her husband engineer Carlo Andreoni and his daughter Maria Antonietta announce his passing.

His sister Eleonora, widow Vigliarolo.

Sister-in-law Maria Bertolini, widow of Senator Francesco D'Ovidio and family.

The Sannia, Bettini, Bortoldo families, and relatives all.

Turin 21 March 1933-XI E. F.

The funeral will take place on Wednesday 22 corr. at 2.30 p.m. from the home of the deceased, Corso Peschiera 30, to the Parish of Madonna delle Grazie (Crocetta).

At 3.30 p.m. the body will stand in the courtyard of the Royal University. Please do not send flowers.

Transcript of an excerpt of 28 March 1933 in 'La Stampa' of Turin

On 28 March 1933, Enrico D'Ovidio's relatives thanked from the pages of the Turin newspaper 'La Stampa' all those who had taken part in their relative's funeral procession from the house to the Politecnico and from there to the cemetery.

The daughters and sons-in-law of Sen. Prof. Enrico D'Ovidio, profoundly moved by the unforgettable demonstration of esteem and regret shown to their dear Estinto, thank H.E. the Minister of National Education, H.E. the Prefect, the Representative of the Senate of the Kingdom, the Federal Secretary, the Representatives of the Royal University of Studies, the Royal School of Engineering, the Academies and Scientific Bodies; the Representatives of the Army, the Militia, the Fascio di Turin and the Women's Federations; the Representative of Molise and all the Bodies and Associations present; the LL. EE. Academicians of Italy; the Honourable Senators and Deputies, the Authorities, Professors and Colleagues of the Estinto; the former disciples, friends and all the kind people who wished to bring comfort with their presence. They extend their special thanks to the most illustrious Podestà, who, with a profoundly kind thought, wished that the extreme honours be rendered to E-stinto in the most solemn form by his beloved adoptive City; to the Magnificent Rector and the Director of the Royal School of Engineering, who wished to suspend lectures as a sign of mourning, and to the illustrious Professors who nobly said of him, paying their last respects to him in the Royal University.

They ask pardon for omissions, involuntary, since their gratitude is profound and indelible.

Notes on the Sella family³³

A few brief notes on the Sella family, taken from an official source of the Sella Group, may also be of interest in understanding the similarities between the past fortunes of the Biella family, the Bonacossa family of Vigevano and the French-Napolitan Lefèbvre family.

The entrepreneurship of the Sella family has ancient origins that can be traced back to the second half of the 16th century. Bartolomeo Sella and his son Comino operated as entrepreneurs in the textile field by having wool craftsmen produce fabrics and financing entrepreneurs in the Biella community. In the following centuries, their descendants distinguished themselves within the community of Valle Mosso for various textile initiatives and also in the field of agriculture for the cultivation of vines from which the production of Lessona and Bramaterra wines (fine wines produced only in Vercelli and Biella) was born

The first steps of industrialisation in the textile sector took place first in the area of origin and later in the mid 19th century in Biella. In this regard, we recall that in 1817 Pietro Sella introduced the so-called Old Machine, one of the first mechanical spinning machines imported from Belgium, into the family wool mill in Valle Mosso.

Those familiar with the history of the Lefèbvre family can appreciate the concomitance in time of the introduction of this type of machine driven by hydraulic energy in both the wool and textile industries – industries linked by similar

³³ Reproduction, partially edited, of a presentation of the Sella family from the Banca Sella institutional website.

technologies – in the same years, the second half of the 1910s (1818 in the case of the Lefèbvre family). A few years later, his brother Giovanni Battista would introduce the New Machine, similar but more powerful. These innovations would lead in the 1870s to the introduction of mechanical looms in Biella in the factory along the Cervo torrent, the Lanificio Maurizio Sella, the largest wool mill in the Kingdom, where Maurizio had moved his business since 1835 and where the Group's modern Data Processing Centre is located today.

In more recent years, the Sella family contributed to the founding of the Idroelettrica Italiana company, the Filatura di Tollegno (Lana Gatto) and founded the Sella & Mosca winery in Sardinia. The common thread running through these various activities was certainly the passion for work, a strong sense of responsibility for the local community and also for the education of the new generations, as well as the need to diversify assets.

The origins of Banca Sella

Quintino Sella (1827-1884), Minister of Finance to Victor Emmanuel II, leader of the historical Right, founder of the CAI in 1863, promoter with Alessandro Rossi of the Italian Wool Association in 1877, creator in Italy of the Casse Postali di Risparmio (Savings Banks), reconstitutor of the Accademia dei Lincei in the 1870s, can be considered the inspirer of the credit institution that bears the family name and that still has its headquarters in Biella. A town councillor (1874-1879), from 1874 president of the Accademia dei Lincei, deputy and minister of finance, his activities in

politics, the promotion of sport and the Biella economy, as well as the study of geology and crystallography in particular, were incessant.

Also decisive was the contribution of Giuseppe Venanzio, Quintino's brother, who pointed the way for the Sella family to open a family bank and was the promoter and first president of the Banca Biellese established in 1869. He believed that it was essential to facilitate the flow of savings, provided they were prudent, towards industrial investments.

And it was precisely this objective that his third-born son, Gaudenzio, would later pursue, who together with six other brothers and cousins set up in 1886 the credit institute that is at the origins of today's Banca Sella Group. On 23 August 1886, the constitution of the limited partnership 'Gaudenzio Sella & C.' was registered at the notary Ramella in Biella, with the aim of 'carrying out banking business such as discounts, advances, current accounts, buying and selling of valuables, etc.', as the memorandum of association stated. The bank's capital was 550,000 lire and remained so until 1937 when it was transformed into a limited partnership for shares.

At the operational head of the newly founded bank was Gaudenzio Sella (1860-1934), son of Giuseppe Venanzio (Quintino's brother). He remained at the helm of the institute until his death.

A few years ago, the asset management section of Banca Sella was taken over by Private Banking of Banca Rothschild.³⁴

³⁴ <https://www.ticinonews.ch/economia/fusione-rothschild-sella-nessun-licenziamento-136613>

With regard to the family life of Enrico D'Ovidio and relatives, it is useful at this point to include the Transcription of the Minutes of the filing of the "holographic will of the late Petiva Federico fu Pietro", drawn up on 9 February 1946 after his death. The transcription was made at Palazzo Petiva in Biella in the presence of a notary, the widow and trusted witnesses.

Minutes of deposit and publication of the holographic will of the late Petiva Federico fu Pietro

*Umberto di Savoia Prince of Piedmont, Lieutenant
General of the Kingdom*

The year 1946, on the ninth day of the month of February (9.2.1946), in a room on the first floor of Palazzo Petiva, located at 64 Via Umberto I; before me Craveja Dr Cesare, Notary, registered with the College of Notaries of Biella, my city of residence; and in the presence of Messrs:

Rossatti Alfredo fu Simone, photographer, born and resident in Biella;

Bider Enrico fu Federico, accountant, born in Gaglianico and resident in Biella;

requested, known and suitable witnesses, Mrs: D'Ovidio Laura fu senatore Enrico, born in Turin, resident in Biella, wealthy, widow of Signor comm. Federico Petiva [deceased on the 4th of the same month]; of whose personal identity and legal capacity I, the Notary, am certain, declare

that she has an interest in the succession of the late Petiva comm. Federico fu Pietro who died in Biella on 4 February 1946, as attested by the extract shown to me of the death certificate issued by the civil registrar of the said municipality, I hereby petition to deposit in my records the holographic will of the deceased so that it may be deemed to have been made for all legal purposes.

To this end, the testamentary form is delivered, which consists of a sheet of paper for forced commercial use, lined lengthwise and horizontally, the will is written in black ink, it is laid out on the first two sides of the sheet, on the first side note the third line in white and on the second the first; on the eighteenth line of the first side the word Cottolengo is slightly retouched even in the repetition in brackets.

The first side begins with the word *testament* and ends with the other *enjoyed*; the second with the word *in common* and ends with the signature Petiva Federico; it has no erasures or abrasions; it appears written, dated and signed by an identical hand and is of the following tenor: ³⁵

**Holographic will of me undersigned
Federico Petiva was Pietro**

I revoke any other will or writing of mine and while I am sound in body and mind I dispose of my substance in the following manner.

³⁵ This is a will referring only to his wife because missing here are his daughters Laura and Pia who, although married, were entitled to the 'legitimate'.

I bequeath to my cousin Maria Petiva fu avvocato Delfino, wife of the lawyer Luigi Olliveri-Petiva of Turin, the part of house that I own undivided with her in Turin via Cernaia 27 and those sums of money or interest-bearing securities that may be in the hands of my cousin or her husband;

Plus I bind to said Maria Olliveri-Petiva all my property that I own in Sordevolo and part in Occhieppo Superiore called Pradvall, or Pratovalle, as well as the shares that I own in the drinking water of Sordevolo.³⁶

I bequeath to the Ospizio di Carità di Biella Vernato, the Ricovero di Mendicità Belletti-Bona, the Ospedale degli Infermi di Biella and the Opera denominated Cottolengo operating in Biella, in equal parts between the aforementioned four charities my house located in Piazza San Cassiano n. 6, Vicolo Galeazzo 10 and 12, having as boundaries the Piazza San Cassiano, Vicolo Galeazzo, the heirs Rainero Antonio, the garden of Comm.re avv.to Paolo Amosso, the property Squindo Pietro, and then another house of mine, and at night the property of the Opera Pia dei Reverendi Salesiani, and the Parish of San Cassiano.³⁷

Said building of mine is donated to the said four charities on the express condition and bond that it be enjoyed in common and in equal parts for ten consecutive years from

³⁶ Considering the indices of the Municipality of Sordevolo present in copies in the State Archives of Biella (and in the original in Sordevolo), the properties were substantial, in the form of meadows and cultivated land and buildings for living and working purposes and a large part of the municipality's hydraulic systems. In Pradvall di Occhieppo the properties were vast meadows for haymaking and grazing.

³⁷ It should also be considered that next to the Ospedale degli Infermi and in premises inside the building stood the Scuola per Infermi (School for Nurses) founded by Laura D'Ovidio Petiva.

the day of my death, unless during said ten years the planned Dante Street, which should lap the garden of said house, is actually opened to the public; therefore said legatees may not divide, sell or exchange, or in any other way distract said building until the expiration of ten years or the opening of the planned street, now called Dante Street, has taken place.

Should this clause be breached, my cousin Maria Ollivari Petiva or her heirs shall be entitled to claim ownership of the building in her favour. Since this building has openings towards my other house on via Vittorio Emanuele 51, it will be the obligation of the legatees to close them with a solid wall within three years and this wall will be common and divisive with my heirs.



Cultivated land in Pradvall di Occhieppo (Biella), formerly owned by Count Federico Petiva and his wife Laura D'Ovidio.



Piazza San Cassiano, Biella: left near the church, a building owned by Petiva that was the residence of Laura D'Ovidio when she became a widow in February 1946.

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1888-1889 - *Francesco Faà di Bruno*, estratto dagli “Atti della Reale Accademia di Torino”, anno 1888-89, Stamperia G.B. Paravia e comp., Turin 1888.

1889 - *Uno sguardo alle origini ed allo sviluppo della matematica pura : discorso letto il 4 novembre 1889 in occasione della solenne apertura degli studi nella R. Università di Torino*, Stamperia Reale della ditta G.B. Paravia e comp., Turin 1889.

1892 - *Discorso in commemorazione di Angelo Genocchi*, pronunciato da D. nella inaugurazione di un busto marmoreo presso la Reale Accademia delle scienze di Torino il 26-6-1892, estratto dagli “Atti della Reale Accademia delle scienze di Torino”, vol. XXVII ad. 19-6-1892, Carlo Clausen, Turin 1892.

1893 - *Applicazioni di un teorema sulle forme algebriche alle binarie di quinto ordine*, “Rendiconti del circolo matematico di Palermo”, estratto VII, adunanza del 22-1-1893, Palermo 1893.

1893 - *Di alcuni invarianti simultanei e in particolare del risultante di due forme binarie degli ordini 6° e 3°*, estratto dagli “Atti della Reale Accademia delle scienze di Torino”, vol. XXVIII, adunanza del 20-11-1892, Carlo Clausen, Turin 1893.

1893 - *Nuove sinergie per la forma ordinaria del sest'ordine ottenute con l'operazione di tronhold*, Turin 1893.

1893 - *Nuove sizigie per la forma binaria del sest'ordine ottenute con l'operazione di Arnhold*, estratto dagli “Atti della Reale Accademia delle scienze di Torino”, vol. XXVIII, adunanza del 4-12-1892, Carlo Clausen, Turin 1893.

1893 - *Sopra alcune classi di sizigie binarie*, estr. dagli “Atti della Reale Accademia delle scienze di Torino”, vol. XXVIII, adunanza del 19-3-1893, Carlo Clausen, Turin 1893.

1894 - *Sulle funzioni theta fuchsiane*, estratto dal “Rendiconto della Reale Accademia di Torino”, vol. XXIX, adunanza del 17-6-1894, Carlo Clausen, Turin 1894.

1895 - *Commemorazione di Giuseppe Battaglini*, Rome 1895.

1896-1897 - *Carlo Weierstrass e Giacomo Giuseppe Sylvester, brevi parole di commemorazione*, estratto dagli “Atti della Reale accademia di Torino”, anno 1896-97, Carlo Clausen, Turin 1897.

1897 - *Francesco Brioschi, brevi parole di commemorazione*, estratto dagli “Atti della Reale Accademia delle scienze di Torino”, anno 1897-98, Carlo Clausen, Turin 1897.

1900 - *Eugenio Beltrami*, commemorazione letta il 25-2-1900, estratto dagli “Atti dell'Accademia delle scienze di Torino” 1899-900, Carlo Clausen, Turin 1900.

1903 - *Geometria analitica*, E. Loescher, Torino 1885, III^a ristampa rivista e corretta, Bocca, Turin 1903.

1903 - *Luigi Cremona: cenno necrologico*, estratto dagli “Atti della Reale Accademia delle scienze di Torino” vol. 38, adunanza del 14 giugno 1903, Carlo Clausen, Turin 1903.

e altri suoi interventi:

1904 - *Relazione del comitato per un busto in memoria di Alfonso Cossa*, Vincenzo Bona, Turin 1904.

1914 - *Placido Tardy, cenno necrologico*, estratto dagli “Atti della R. Accademia delle scienze di Torino”, vol. 50, 1914-15, adunanza del 15 novembre 1914.

1915 - *Per Emanuele Fergola*, parole lette l’11-4-1915, estratto dagli “Atti della Reale Accademia delle scienze di Torino”, F.lli Bocca, Turin 1915.

FRANCESCO D'OVIDIO
the scholar and philologist

Francesco D'Ovidio

Literary scholar and Philologist

Introduction

The linguist, language historian, Italianist, philologist and dialectologist Francesco D'Ovidio has had squares, important streets and schools named after him all over Italy, in Milan, Rome, Naples, Campobasso and elsewhere. Associations and awards bear his name along with those of other exponents of his field of study. Yet little or nothing has been written about the man Francesco D'Ovidio, with his battles and passions, the personal esteem in which he was held by two generations of Italian literature scholars, his relatives and the difficulties he had to overcome. He appears almost forgotten today; he is present in bibliographical references in Romance philology, in treatises on the history of the Italian language and the 'language question', or in technical annotations and bibliographies concerning his work in specialised studies.

Born in Campobasso but lived for most of his life in Naples, so much so that he considered himself a Neapolitan, he was, as anticipated, a distinguished philologist and lecturer at the University of Naples, where he was a tenured professor from 1870 to 1925, the year of his death. In his field, he enjoyed a well-deserved reputation 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 so much

theorised and defended, ranged over the most diverse topics, read in Naples as in Milan, in Rome as in Palermo and dealing with politics, customs and social criticism.

His role in offering philological and serious reasons for the choice of authors to be included in the Italian canon was fundamental, indeed unique. It was he who proposed the inclusion of poets and novelists such as Manzoni or Pellico and who sought the exclusion of others whom he considered lagging behind. For this reason he intertwined polemics, even furious ones, with the current of the Purists and the Tuscan-Romagna group of *Amici Pedanti*, such as Giuseppe Chiarini – advocates of the 'pure' and ancient language of Ugo Foscolo and Pietro Giordani – the group led by Giosuè Carducci who identified D'Ovidio as an enemy far removed from their conceptions.

Beyond the polemics with the purists, which will be summarised below for the importance they had, D'Ovidio's name inevitably appears in studies and commentaries on the texts of Dante, Manzoni, Tasso, Leopardi, but also Pellico, Settembrini and ancient Italian literature, especially those relating to Romance philology. Famous disputes pitted him against Francesco de Sanctis and Benedetto Croce, who were more theorists than proponents of the *bello stile* (stylistics) to which D'Ovidio was instead attached.

Important, and still fundamental to the line of Italian literature 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.

D'Ovidio was also the teacher of at least two generations of Italianists, among whom we must at least mention some important philologists such as Francesco Torraca, Manfredi Porena and Nicola Zingarelli. His contemporaries instead

were Ernesto Monaci and Giacomo Vitelli as well as the philologist and politician Ruggiero Bonghi. But news of all these will be given in due course. It should be remembered first of all that, with his teachers, who taught at the Normale di Pisa, he was the initiator of Romance Philology in Italy, of which he held one of the first chairs established 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 tendencies, although 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 is evaluated as such.

It must be said that it is not easy to find personal news about him, since much of it is probably still buried in private or public archives that are not fully available, such as that of the Scuola Normale di Pisa, or the Lefèbvre D'Ovidio Private Archive, which belonged to his nephew Antonio, or the D'Ovidio Fund of the Sella Foundation in Biella. Apart from a few recollections, a few funeral orations, a few quotations in epistolaries or memoirs by other writers, D'Ovidio appears forgotten. And unjustly, we would add, if we consider the weight that his articles had when they appeared in major Italian newspapers, when they aroused applause, debate, and sometimes criticism.

Such oblivion is often justified by fortuitous events: D'Ovidio was very stingy with personal news, he did not

write a memoir of his life and even the two volumes of his *Rimpianti*, which contain memories of a lifetime of studies and professional and intellectual relationships, are stingy with personal news; of others, however, he wrote a great deal and it is thanks to him that some scholars, even deserving ones, did not fall into absolute oblivion.

D'Ovidio produced a remarkable epistolary, dialoguing with colleagues (unlike his brother, of equally prestigious career) through letters, mainly, but in these he mostly discusses his discipline, university affairs, and readings. These letters become, in some cases, full-fledged essays, sometimes taken up in printed works, but they have 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 certain and verifiable information, considering the errors in dates and places, although less complicated than the reconstruction of the life of his brother Enrico. In drawing the outlines of this biography, admittedly still incomplete, yet already rich in unpublished information on the scholar's work, life, and family, I have made use of well-known printed writings, mostly introductions to 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*, which are part of the 14 volumes of the *Opere complete*, published in Caserta between 1929 and 1930, and which collect 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 Umbertine Italy – the period under the reign of Umberto I – spanning from 1878 to 1900, the most active years of D'Ovidio's life.

I also made use of unpublished or little considered archive documents: letters, epistolary exchanges especially with colleagues. This kind of documentation can be found in the D'Ovidio Fund or the Porena Fund at the Scuola Normale di Pisa, in the documents related to Graziadio Isaia Ascoli's Italian Glottological Archive, in the Giovanni Pascoli Archive in Castelveccchio, 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 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 Francesco, 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 and catalogued. It contains news and documents relating to Francesco D'Ovidio, Manfredi Porena, and D'Ovidio's grandson, Antonio Lefèbvre D'Ovidio, three very 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 close friend of D'Ovidio's, as well as correspondences with Giosuè Carducci, Giovanni Pascoli and Costantino Nigra.

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 difficult health conditions. In July 1884, when he was at the height of his activity and strength, he was struck down by an eye disease, a progressive disease with a detached 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, as has been written in the general introduction to the lives of the two brothers, in this case for the mathematical sciences as well as an academic with highly prestigious assignments, such as organising the foundation of the Politecnico in Turin at the request of Giovanni Giolitti. He too, like other relatives, is remembered in this paper, which aims to compose a brief portrait of an important family of intellectuals and academics in the Italy of Umberto I and Victor Emmanuel III until the early years of Fascism.

The long *Commemorazione funebre* written and read at the Accademia Pontaniana during the session of 22 November 1931 by Emanuele Ciarfardini – Italianist, classicist, philosopher and academic colleague of Francesco D'Ovidio – is a useful addition to the story of Francesco's life because it presents first-hand information and a clear history of his literary career, a useful document to complement this

biography of the D'Ovidio brothers. For this reason, it was decided to transcribe the text published the same year in a 28-page pamphlet and in the Acts of the Accademia Pontaniana in vol. LXI.

Chapter 1

Culture in Naples and Italy between the end 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 retained 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, there were about 600,000 inhabitants.

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 field, in mathematics, applied sciences, literature and law, and even history and literature. The new State invested heavily in the Federico II University in Naples, which was reorganised in the 1970s 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 with the taking of Rome, while the increasingly rare intellectuals nostalgic for the Bourbon monarchy (unless they took a cautious stance) were removed from positions of power and prestige such as universities and newspapers, in a slow and still little-studied process of purging. In time, according to Galasso, many of these would have become Savoy legitimists, although the thesis, although so authoritatively expressed, has yet to be proven.³⁸

³⁸ Giuseppe Galasso, *Galasso: Il paradiso borbonico? È solo un'invenzione nostalgica*, 'Corriere del Mezzogiorno', 13 July 2015.

In any case, the promotion of so many Neapolitan intellectuals, historians and men of letters to the Senate of the Kingdom or their appointment to the subalpine patriciate is a clear sign of this phase.

At the end of the 1880s, the Neapolitan Society of Artists was founded in Palazzo Sirignano, animated by Prince 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 (1823-1901). 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. The names of a dozen or so southern intellectuals, mostly Neapolitans, Molisians and Sicilians have already been mentioned in Enrico D'Ovidio's biography and it is useless to recall them.

Naples in 1870 still counted on a great university, the Federico II, strong above all in academic literary, philological and juridical studies, a university to which, as we know, Francesco was recruited while Enrico, who had valuable technical-mathematical skills, was called to strengthen the kingdom's heritage in Turin; Also very prestigious 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 music 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'Époque. 1885-1915*, the city remained a culturally lively metropolis throughout the entire Umberto and Bell'Époque period, and thus until 1915, and in some fields even well beyond. Not that this effervescence disappeared afterwards, but the difficulties became more noticeable.

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.

At the University of Federico II, 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.

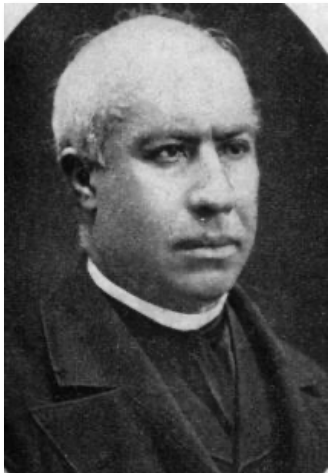
In this context, for fifty years, the protagonists were precisely the personalities who had trained at the Scuola Normale di Pisa as well as in Florence, Turin and Milan. It was they, in particular the Normalists, who brought the new scientific methods of studying texts or documents: what was called, vulgarly, the German school, in short.

Apart from the Neapolitan institutions, the D'Ovidio brothers would have founded or participated in the foundation of, or been invited as members of, many other institutions of United Italy such as the Accademia della Crusca, the Royal Marine Academy, the Accademia del Lincei, the universities of Florence, Rome and Turin, the Institutes for Encouraging Arts and Crafts and philological or scientific societies or museums in a dozen Italian cities. And this is without counting the twenty or so journals, often foreign, to which they sent contributions.

Chapter 2

Francesco D'Ovidio at the Normale di Pisa

Francesco studied at the Classical High School where his brother Enrico had finished his studies and then at 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, and at that time directed by a friend of Francesco's father, Ippolito Amicarelli (1823-1889), a very learned



Father Ippolito Amicarelli.

clergyman of gigantic stature, born in Agnone, near Trivento. The friendship between Pasquale, father of Enrico and Francesco, and Ippolito must have given some advantage to the Triventese: Amicarelli was a scholar but also a deputy in the 8th legislature of the Kingdom. He was a generous and ingenious man of whom Francesco 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.³⁹

Of those early years living in what is now Vomero and then Via Matteotti, D'Ovidio says no more. Among his teachers, the influence of the Brescian Domenico Denicotti (1829-1903), who taught in Naples for a few years before returning to Brescia, was particularly important. He ignited in him a passion for the study of Latin and Greek, for the language of which he used Curtius's *Skulgramatik*, which he had procured for his two best pupils, Vitelli and D'Ovidio

Having obtained his baccalaureate, in the autumn of 1866 he won the competition for admission to the Scuola Normale di 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'.⁴⁰

We know from the sources of the normal schools, which were considered insufficient in number and also in student attendance, that the first girls were admitted in 1866, but not in Pisa. So says a published source:

In 1865-'66, of 76 who applied for the first class, 50 were admitted and 41 attended school regularly, to which, by adding the pupils of the third and second classes, 85 young girls attended school. In 1866-'67, 88 girls took the examination for the first class, 58 were admitted and 50 attended assiduously, which together with the pupils of the higher classes gives a total of 108 pupils.

³⁹ 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).

⁴⁰ G. Vitelli, *Ricordi lontani*, 'Il Marzocco', 6 December 1925.

In 1867-'68, 94 young girls took the examination, of whom 60 were admitted, and the school had, putting together those of the second and third classes, 116 pupils.

In the year 1868-69, 120 girls applied for the first class, of whom 86 were admitted and 74 attended. If we add the students from the other two classes, the school had 150 students. However, the teachers unanimously pointed out in their final reports that if they wanted to take the entrance exam, as Article 11 of the regulations of 9 November 1861 prescribes, they could not have pupils who would be able to learn the new disciplines that the same regulations prescribe for normal schools. Therefore, in agreement with them and with the favourable opinion of the Board of Governors, I proposed in the general report to the School Board to prescribe, as a condition for admission to the first class, the presentation of the certificate of having studied all the elementary classes, as had already been established for aspirants to the first technical class.⁴¹



Palazzo della Carovana,
headquarters of the Scuola Normale di Pisa.

⁴¹ "Pubblicazioni degli Archivi di Stato" fonti XVII - Archivio Centrale dello Stato, fonti per la storia della scuola, *L'istruzione normale dalla legge Casati all'età giolittiana*, curr. Carmela Covato and Anna Maria Sorge, Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali - Ufficio Centrale per i beni Archivistici, Rome 1994, p. 69.



The entrance to the Liceo 'Vittorio Emanuele' from Piazza Dante in a photograph by G. Brogi (1822-1881) c. 1870. Here and at Umberto I Francesco D'Ovidio completed his high school studies.

So there were no female pupils at the Normale di Pisa in 1866 and this, in later years, was judged by a mature Vitelli to be a good thing because 'those creatures are distracting because of the beauty and gentleness that many of them possess and that can make one lose their wits, in some cases, by wasting time and concentration: for this reason it has never caused me nostalgia and so, I believe, it is for you',⁴² and those who were admitted were accommodated so that they did not have to sleep in the boarding schools; slowly, they increased and the situation changed. At that time, the Normale did not allow the amusements of youth or contact between the sexes: the school, besides being prestigious, was very strict according to the Mamiani (1859) Matteucci (1862) Regulations, which regulated admission requirements, life, exams, grades and study times. One could enter but could also incur punishments up to expulsion.

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, to arrive at its new arrangement, which is still the one we have today, in 1862 in the premises of the Palazzo della Carovana in Piazza dei Cavalieri in the centre of historic Pisa. In those years, the director was the mathematician Enrico Betti, who had normalistic studies equalised with university studies: a graduate from the Normale was like a university graduate, with extra prestige. In the transitions between the various regimes, the Normale had not lost the quality of the preparation its students received. They were admitted after

⁴² *Girolamo Vitelli to Francesco D'Ovidio*, 7 April 1890. Lefèbvre D'Ovidio Private Archive, Via del Nuoto, viewed in 2016.

strict selection and examinations, and even then there were two courses, one linguistic-philological and one physical-mathematical.

Here, the assiduous and passionate D'Ovidio was the pupil, among others, of two masters, who had 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), a master in the field of Italian linguistic studies.⁴³

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.⁴⁴ 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. D'Ancona's course, on the other hand, was more organic.

⁴³ For Comparetti, one may consult 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, extract from "Belfagor", vol. XXIV, no. 2. E *Domenico Comparetti, 1835-1927, International Conference of Studies, Naples - Santa Maria Capua Vetere 6-8 June 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.

⁴⁴ Pio Rajna, *Francesco D'Ovidio e la filologia neolatina*, Nuova Antologia CCCXXIV, March 1926, pp. 119-126. Ibid, p. 121.

The academic year 1867-1868, for example, 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 Comparetti 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'.⁴⁵

D'Ancona, therefore, through the network of acquaintances he kept with his dense correspondence, and especially with 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 as a 17-year-old in 1866 and remained 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.

⁴⁵ 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.

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 Bourbon gendarmes, clichédly defined as 'eyed', 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 the Church state, who did not seem to be in such a hurry to be 'liberated'. On the contrary, they were 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, that we would find only 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.⁴⁶

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 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 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 a natural aptitude and study for a beautiful combination of ideal visions and positivism, sensitivity and reasoning.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Francesco D'Ovidio, *Rimpianti vecchi e nuovi*, Caserta, Moderna 1930, pp. 383-384.

⁴⁷ Pio Rajna, *Commemorazione di F. D'Ovidio* in 'Il Marzocco', 6 December 1925.



Chapter 3

The Normalists, a cohesive group

The Normalist students formed a cohesive and collaborative group even in later years and some of them wrote memoirs about their years of study. After all, there were only a few dozen of them, very closely followed by their teachers, which led to a sense of intimacy and unity that was impossible in other schools at university level, let alone in the university, unless there were professors who followed particular paths such as Francesco D'Ovidio who formed exclusive classes for the best students, after classes were over

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. In addition to studying philology, in which he intended to specialise, Francesco 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 sensibility. Nor should it be forgotten that along with Greek, Latin, ancient Provençal and Sanskrit, D'Ovidio studied French, German and English. In particular, his mastery 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.

During his years as a normalist, he studied Dante and his *De Vulgarie Eloquentiae* in depth, as well as the work of Alessandro Manzoni, 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 introduced the subject of the language to be adopted in the documents of united Italy years ago and chaired the Milanese section of the commission with Ruggiero Bonghi and Giulio Carcano.⁴⁸ The members of the Florentine commission (Raffaello Lambruschini, Niccolò Tommaseo, Giuseppe Bertoldi and Achille Mauri), engaged in an argument with him as they disagreed with some of his conclusions. As is well known, Manzoni wrote an initial report *Dell'unità della lingua e dei mezzi per diffonderla*, published in 'Nuova Antologia' (February 1868) and 'Perseveranza' (March 1868), which started the debate, but the Tuscan section dissociated itself by sending its own report that was published in 'Nuova Antologia'. At that point Minister Broglio dissolved the commission and Manzoni reiterated his own ideas and

⁴⁸ D'Ovidio's gratitude to Bonghi is also evident in the actual intellectual biography he writes about him in the first volume of *Rimpianti vecchi e nuovi*, pp. 126-303.

positions in his *Lettera intorno al "De Vulgari Eloquentia"* (21 March 1868).

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 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 precisely Dante's linguistic theses, also the subject of the parliamentary commission.⁴⁹

The proposal was made in July 1868. It was not an easy undertaking: one had to read a German text and argue one's own answer, again in German (or Latin). D'Ovidio said he was ready to take up the challenge and it should be remembered that he 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 promised himself that he would not publish anything before graduating, 'also so as not to waste a single hour of his high school and university years, which I believed and still 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*. 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

⁴⁹ 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).

Amici Pedanti who, in March 1868, influenced D'Ovidio with the pamphlet *Dell'unità di lingua in Italia*. He influenced him by helping him to correct Manzoni's 'harshness'.⁵⁰

He would later write, in words collected by Zingarelli: 'The city in which I had lived for three years, belonging to the 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 dear to me, and also by the horror of injustice and impropriety, of which Manzoni was then continually the object of objection; and then I was driven by the inevitable legacy of the love I nurtured and the struggles I 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'.⁵¹ 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.⁵²

⁵⁰ 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.

⁵¹ Nicola Zingarelli, *Francesco D'Ovidio*, The 20th Century, 1926.

⁵² *Ibid.*

These phrases reported by D'Ovidio's pupil, Zingarelli, make us think that the D'Ovidio who *wallowed with the greatest joy* in Tuscanism and Tuscanism, probably spoke without a Molise accent. Moreover, it 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 minds, where free will is of 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 dissertation on language; back in Pisa, in September, he had it read to Comparetti and D'Ancona who praised it and requested very few corrections. D'Ovidio considered printing the text in the '*Rivista Bolognese*' edited by Francesco Fiorentino (1834-1884).⁵³ 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

⁵³ Francesco Fiorentino, a philosopher originally from Sambiasi (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.

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 fairly 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.⁵⁴



Palazzo della Carovana,
headquarters of the Scuola Normale di Pisa (about 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 put forward ideas similar to those of Manzoni, but also set out a line of his own: it was the so-called 'conciliatory

⁵⁴ Francesco D'Ovidio, *Il primo passo*, in *Rimpianti vecchi e nuovi*, II, Editrice Moderna, Caserta 1930, pp. 457-464.

line' that avoided Manzoni's excesses of adopting Florentine. Engaging with enthusiasm 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.⁵⁵ 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

⁵⁵ As Luigi Russo taught in a text fundamental to the question of the origins of modern Romance philology in the Italian academy. *A. 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 Introduction, cit. pp. 12-19, the essay *Lingua e dialetto* di D'Ovidio, in the same volume, still very interesting today.

his studies, apart from the occasional visit to the taverns or restaurants that Pisa was rich with 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 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 whom he wanted as his heir and continuator in the direction of the *Archivio glottologico italiano*.

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 *Antologia della prosa italiana moderna* 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 that not only approved the authors consecrated by the Risorgimento and modern taste (Manzoni, Grossi, Guerrazzi, Pellico, Tommaseo, D'Azeglio, Leopardi, Nievo), 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. His programmes intended to merge Dante's purist linguistic tradition with Manzoni's modern Tuscan tradition, via Pietro Bembo.

Apart from Gabelli and Fambri, the others would enter the anthologies – not in this one by Puccianti.⁵⁶ Thus he consecrated the path that distanced him from classical prose, even Leopardi's, to adhere to a moderate manzonism. At only 24 years of age, he was able to point out 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 as they disagreed with his proposals: tempers were still flaring over the recent wars of the Risorgimento and the choice of authors who were to make the language of Italy, after Italy was still heating up (waiting to 'make the Italians' as D'Azeglio or Garibaldi would have said: still not happening). But the Guerrazzi question was not yet closed: the Tuscan's last novels, with their popular and colourful style, did not convince him and he wanted to write them at the cost of being criticised. They seem, to those who are far from these discussions, to be sterile quarrels of *litterati*, but they are not: the canon of authors to be studied by generations and generations of students was being definitively modelled, and thus the language that would be used in the spoken language, in theatre, in literature, in the days.

D'Ovidio, having not 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 and Cesare Cantù – then highly successful authors.⁵⁷ His review provoked the

⁵⁶ Francesco D'Ovidio, *Recensione a Puccianti, Antologia*, 'Il Propugnatore', V, 1, Bologna 1972, pp. 124-134.

⁵⁷ 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,

indignant reaction of Giuseppe 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 Machiavelli are being beaten out to make way for Manzoni. I hope to see the disgraceful teaching of Latin and Greek removed from high schools and gymnasiums; to see the boring writings of Botta, Colletta and Giordani replaced by the amusing writings of Paulo Fambri, Lessona and Mantegazza in the Anthology of Italian Prose, 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 he will do. In fact, I expect that one day or another, turning 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 tranfuciolli, 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.⁵⁸

It was an irreverent and subversive intervention, considering what had also been done by D'Ovidio in favour of the thesis that the purity of the classical Italian language had to be defended, but Chiarini often did not know how to moderate his tone. He – endowed with a less rich education than D'Ovidio – mocked his glottological and dialectological training and his studies on folkloristic texts that he was doing

no. 1 (1993), pp. 275-318.

⁵⁸ "Gazzetta livornese" of 12 April 1872. See Nassi, op. cit., pp. 294-295

at the Normale; this showed that D'Ovidio at only 23 years old – Chiarini had just turned 24 – was already identified as a new protagonist of the Italian literary and academic scene.



Giuseppe Chiarini.

Having completed his studies at the Normale, he went for a stay in Florence, where he met, having briefly frequented it, Francesco De Sanctis (1817-1883), former Minister of Public Education in the Ricasoli and Cavour cabinets, but above all a historian of literature and militant critic, who at that time – in addition to lecturing in the Literature chair at the University of Naples – was writing the *Storia della letteratura italiana*. A historian of Romanticism, a patriot who had also done a brief imprisonment in 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 still 23-year-old graduate and the

45-year-old critic there does not seem to have been a friendship but more of a formal esteem; after all, too much divided them: the very way of studying the greats of literature and these differences would become open controversy a few years later.

Then, except for brief sojourns in Naples, D'Ovidio continued his withdrawn life as a student in Pisa to prepare for his postgraduate or doctorate course in Romance philology. The school he had attended, which was very tough, prepared him excellently for theory, but pedagogy and didactics were another matter, even though his professors immediately pointed him out as being very capable of teaching and even enthusing the young people who presented themselves in front of his chair. After all, as the name itself said, at the Normale he taught the 'norm', the excellent model of higher and university teaching. After the four years as a normalist that had given him an excellent philological and literary preparation, D'Ovidio stayed another three years in the Tuscan city to attend courses that were to qualify him for university teaching.

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 woman' from a very good family who lived in Bologna, where her father taught history at the

university.⁵⁹ He certainly knew Bertolini, his father, as early as 1872.⁶⁰

In the spring of 1874, therefore, he graduated at only 24 years of age and at that time found many doors open to him: those who graduated from the Normale di 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 Liceo Ginnasio Classico Parini in Milan, then considered among the best in Italy and the training ground for many classicists such as Pio Rajna and, more recently, Dario del Corno. During these two years he studied the Milanese dialect, never ceasing – as in the rest of his career – to be a devotee of dialectology. This meant that he, a native of Molise who had spent his youth between Campobasso and Naples, knew how to read and comment on the poems of Carlo Porta (1775-1821) written in strict Milanese.

The turning point in his career came in 1876, when, at the age of 27, he had moved to Bologna, as we shall see. His degree thesis, which had already been praised by linguist Graziadio Isaia Ascoli, the dean of scholars of this discipline in Italy, was followed by an advanced thesis entitled *Sul trattato De vulgari eloquentia* (1874) that aimed to "determine the precise meaning of the doctrines understood by Dante" about the "illustrious vernacular". The thesis, judged so useful for studies that it was decided to publish it, had a considerable echo and contributed to resolving the question of language in Italy and deciding the canon, as

⁵⁹ Emanuele Ciafardini, *Commemorazione di Francesco D'Ovidio*, Accademia Pontaniana, Naples 22 November 1931, p. 6. Reprinted in the appendix to this book in full transcription.

⁶⁰ As a letter sent to Pio Rajna on 2 December 1872 shows.

Ruggiero Bonghi was to demonstrate. For some years – precisely since 1869 – he had been trying to determine the canon of authors to be studied in high schools and the Italian language to be transmitted, with the collaboration of Alessandro Manzoni, who had dedicated himself to resolving the same problem: D'Ovidio's thesis was appreciated by the writer and the minister and led to subsequent decisions. In 1876, Bonghi promoted the establishment of chairs of Romance philology in universities in every part of Italy and fixed the canon that contained, in addition to the 'three crowns' (Dante, Petrarca, Boccaccio), also authors that pleased the purists of the *Amici Pedanti* and Romantic authors – who had D'Ovidio's approval –, such as Manzoni, Ippolito Nievo (1831-1861) with his *Memorie di un ottuagenario* (1858, published in 1867) and Francesco Domenico Guerrazzi (1804-1873) author of around twenty novels and narrative works, which D'Ovidio recommended to be included in the canon of studies with the aim of modernising Italian literature that was very much centred on ancient authors.⁶¹

Five established names were selected as lecturers in the new discipline for the universities of five cities: Napoleone Caix (1845-1882) in Florence, Ugo Angelo Canello (1848-1883) in Padua, Ernesto Monaci in Rome (1844-1918) and Pio Rajna (1847-1930) in Milan. D'Ovidio proposed his candidature for the University of Naples to Minister Bonghi through the mathematician Enrico Betti (1823-1892), director of the Normale and secretary general of Public Education as well as a

⁶¹ It was one of the cases in which D'Ovidio agreed with Carducci, who was a close friend of Guerrazzi.

friend of Enrico D'Ovidio: a tradition that would allow normalists easier access to professorships.⁶²

This candidature was supported by D'Ancona, who asked D'Ovidio to accept a teaching post at the Normale di Pisa.



Ruggiero Bonghi.

⁶²Archivio 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 Nassi, *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.

As we shall see, in those years Graziadio Isaia Ascoli, Italy's leading glottologist with Comparetti and founder with the latter of the journal *Archivio glottologico italiano*, (Florence 1873), hoped to make D'Ovidio his continuator and collaborator, and nurtured that hope for some years before giving up. At first Francesco was offered the chair in Rome (where he was registered as a teacher in the 1875-1876 *Annuario*) because that was where Bonghi had initially assigned him, but it was D'Ovidio himself who gave up the chair 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.⁶³

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, at D'Ovidio's home, his parents received news of his successes in the scientific field, filling Pasquale and Francesca with gratitude and pride, still incredulous at Enrico's successes in Turin and Francesco's successes in Naples, Pisa and Rome.

⁶³ Stefano Miccolis, *Antonio Labriola intermediario per Arturo Graf*, Belfagor, v. 55, no. 1 (31 January 2000), Olschky, Florence, pp. 74-78. Ibid, p. 78.

In the same University of Naples, D'Ovidio was also entrusted with the teaching of Greek Grammar and Latin Grammar, chairs that he held for many years without competition. The reason for this accumulation of appointments was not simple favouritism: in those years there was a lack of prepared 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 – beyond any other consideration – to an exceptional education. Beyond the support he had at his disposal and which was in any case earned, it is also true that D'Ovidio had a great preparation in philological method and knowledge of languages, as well as an uncommon polyglot instinct.

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 when 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 the 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.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Michele Scherillo, *Il D'Ovidio nella vita e nella scuola*, in *Atti della R. Accademia dei Lincei*, CCCXX, III, vol. II, 1926, p. IV.



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

Apart from his early days, D'Ovidio later always sided with university 'barons' or less powerful 'dictators of letters'. He cooled De Sanctis first, and Benedetto 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 room of the now deserted and silent university'. It was a discipline that had not yet won over many in the university lecture halls, despite Comparetti and D'Ancona's efforts to restrict 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 at 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 was reading *La Chanson de Roland* and giving 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.⁶⁵ 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*.⁶⁶

He had a reputation, D'Ovidio, for being an upright person, little inclined to manipulate. However, he must have been able to do some university maneuvering, if it is true that he became very influential in Naples where it was he who nominated new professors in his specialisations and had 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 newcomers – but not all younger

⁶⁵ 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.

⁶⁶ Gian Luigi Bruzzone, *Corrado D'Avolio and Francesco D'Ovidio* in 'Archivio storico siracusano', s. III, XVIII (2004), pp. 209-276. Ibid, p. 213

than D'Ovidio, some definitely older. These impressed new methodologies and new cultural interests on the Neapolitan world. In 1876, the annotated translation from 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.⁶⁷ 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 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 prudent as well as ingenious meditation, exercised over a mass of abundant and full facts. But this entire criticism, which on

⁶⁷ W. D. Whitney, *The Life and Development of Language*, translated and annotated by Francesco D'Ovidio, Dumolard, Milan 1876.

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.

Chapter 5

The *Saggi Critici* period

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 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 *Saggi* 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'.⁶⁸ 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 outset as a master, because he was of a conciliatory tendency between the radical purists and the uncritical Romantics. *Saggi critici* 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 dry analysis and, for this reason, was criticised by Benedetto Croce, who nevertheless exaggerated in idealism to the detriment of technical analysis. The two first editions of the *Saggi* soon sold out, earning the young, calm and witty professor considerable fame. He was soon known for his witty quips, often expressed in Neapolitan, and his 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

⁶⁸ Michele Scherillo, *Francesco D'Ovidio*, Nuova Antologia, Rome 1925, p. 6.

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 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.⁶⁹

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.

This was followed by other publications in the 1880s and 1890s, less and less oriented towards the study of glottology, and more and more towards criticism and the language of contemporaries and classics as well as the method expounded in *Saggi critici*.

⁶⁹ Francesco Bruni, *Introduction to Francesco D'Ovidio, Scritti Linguistici*, ed. Patricia Bianchi, Guida, Naples, pp. 7-29. Ibid, p. 10.

Even in these years, although he never participated in active politics (he would be appointed Senator of the Kingdom for 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 who had been born in the late 1870s, Elvira, born in 1877.

On this point, as we shall see in more detail, 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 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, when he received a letter in which the unknown admirer asked him questions about religion: 'If I am no longer a believer, I have been; therefore, I am able to appreciate certain feelings and certain intellectual and moral needs'.⁷⁰ His position is expressed in a thoughtful and lucid manner in *Rimpianti* of 1902:

⁷⁰ Nino Genovese, *Francesco D'Ovidio e il problema religioso (unpublished letters)*, Casa Editrice Radio, Trapani, 1926, p. 14.

Until 1860, and in a narrower sense until 1870, we old men had to fight, each in our own way, to win freedom of thought and 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 came to deplore the too many intolerances to which we indulged, the too one-sidedness of our historical concepts, the too many 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 *Divina commedia* 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.⁷¹

These are singularly far-sighted words, even in the positive, naturalistic and one might say almost Machiavellian vision he had of religion. Far-sighted and moderate, especially when compared to that of so many contemporaries – not excluding

⁷¹ Francesco D'Ovidio, *Rimpianti*, *Opere* XIII, pp. 256-257.

Carducci, but often also De Sanctis – who, like him, were supporters 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 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.⁷² 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 his pupil Ciarardini, his admirer even many years after the end of his studies, D'Ovidio was always a politically inclined liberal but of the kind who disapproved of legislative measures 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

⁷² Francesco D'Ovidio, *Rimpianti*, *Opere* XIII, pp. 20-27; 84; Idem, *Opere* XIV, pp. 92-93.

who knew history: 'what remains of true greatness to Italy? Two things: its artistic heritage and its universal religion'.⁷³

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, quoted above.⁷⁴ 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* (read the text in the appendix to this volume) 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.⁷⁵ 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.

⁷³ Francesco D'Ovidio, *Giornale d'Italia*, 13 March 1906.

⁷⁴ Francesco D'Ovidio, *Conciliazione fra Stato e Chiesa* in *Rimpianti vecchi e nuovi*, I, Editrice Moderna, Caserta 1929, pp. 2-15. Ibid, p. 8.

⁷⁵ Francesco D'Ovidio, *La Massoneria* in *Rimpianti vecchi e nuovi*, II, Editrice Moderna, Caserta 1930, pp. 437-447.

Chapter 6

The disease in 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, in the afternoons, in his study, he wrote essays, studies, letters and articles that he began to send 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 eyesight disorder.

This dropped suddenly and dramatically on him. 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



Francesco D'Ovidio in 1888,
to 40 years of age (source: Zanichelli).

As mentioned above, he had begun to suffer severe visual impairment 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, 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 to him for the rest of his life [...]. Nevertheless, he produced such a quantity of writings that it would seem unbelievable if it were not for his extraordinary fibre and moral strength, and the help brought to him by his beloved wife, Maria Bertolini, from Lombardy, and his daughters, to whom he dedicated one of his volumes with the blessings of *Edipo a Colono*. 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.⁷⁶

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 more accessible to him and more suited his visual conditions'.⁷⁷ Not only that, his father, Pasquale, as we have seen, was a musician, an

⁷⁶ Nicola Zingarelli, *Francesco D'Ovidio, Il Secolo XX*, April 1926.

⁷⁷ *Estremo saluto a Francesco D'Ovidio*, XXVI November 1925, p. 5.

amateur but appreciated musician, and was even a conductor in Campobasso, so the 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 a magazine or newspaper, or in the lectures 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 great deal 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. The 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, daughter of Gaetano Negri (1838-1902), wrote: 'seriously ill in 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.'⁷⁸

⁷⁸ *Per la Morte del S. C. Senatore prof. Francesco D'Ovidio, Estratto Reale Istituto Lombardo di Scienze e Lettere*, v. LVIII, fasc. XVI-XX,

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 *Ovid*, 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

Milan 1925, p. 779-780. Senato del Regno, *Atti parlamentari. Discussioni*, 9 December 1930.

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.⁷⁹ 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 did, who recalled the 'pleasure of those intimate conversations, discreet, in a circle of trusted friends: one hung on his mouth, from which flowed facetious sayings, sharp sentences, cherished memories, words of common sense: sometimes the voice lowered, as if to confide

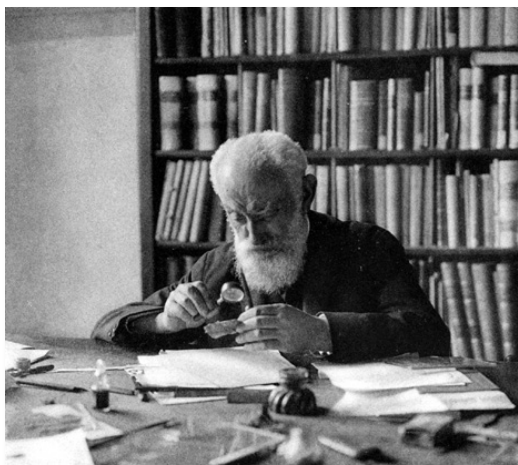
⁷⁹ *Francesco D'Ovidio e la filologia classica*, from *Nuova Antologia*, 26 March 1926, Rome, p. 2.

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 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 1926.⁸⁰

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

⁸⁰ 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.

dantologist by profession, and this year Parodi and Del Lungo have been invited'.⁸¹ 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.



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

⁸¹ Giulio Natali, *Ricordi e profili di maestri e amici*, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, Rome 1965, p. 239.

Chapter 7

1887, Francesco D'Ovidio at the Accademia dei Lincei: sign of a profound cultural transformation

As we will see as we follow the story of the D'Ovidio brothers' lives and careers, they were invited as members, associates, correspondents, directors or founders of important institutions in post-Risorgimento Italian cultural life as well as museums, circles, academies, prizes and publications and we could. Naturally, Enrico was invited to take part in the life of the educational and teaching institutions – as well as the journals – that were important for the sciences and mathematics and Francesco, the same for the literary and philological institutions, journals and circles. But there is an important exception, which must be noted because it demonstrates, once again, the unusual career of the two and the changes in the period in which they became protagonists in their respective fields.

The exception is the Accademia del Lincei, housed in Palazzo Corsini in Rome and relaunched by the unified Italian government at the hands of Quintino Sella, a friend of Enrico D'Ovidio. The Accademia dei Lincei needs no introduction, but a brief historical note will help here:

The academy was founded in 1603 by the Umbrian-Roman patrician Federico Cesi (1586-1630), a passionate scholar of natural sciences, especially botany. In order to promote and cultivate these naturalistic studies, in 1603 he founded an association in Rome with three young friends, the Dutchman Giovanni Heckius (Italianised as

'Ecchio'), the Marche-born Francesco Stelluti and the Umbrian Anastasio de Filiis, and the association became, as it was known at the time, the Accademia dei Lincei, for 'the exceptional sharpness of eye attributed to the lynx, a feline of a still not extinct species, taken as a symbol of the learned company of scholars'. The object of its study, in Cesi's design, was all the sciences of nature, to be investigated by free experimental observation, beyond all constraints of tradition and authority.⁸²

This is the great novelty that characterises the Lincei, among the many Academies of which late Renaissance Italian civilisation was rich: it was born with an explicit interest in the natural sciences (most of the other Academies were literary), and an attitude of respect but not constraint towards the previous Aristotelian-Tolemaic tradition, which the new experimental science sometimes called into question. The admission and invitation of Enrico D'Ovidio, already an internationally renowned mathematician, in 1883, was therefore a foregone conclusion.

For years, however, there had been debate as to whether, in addition to the Class of Sciences, which admitted scientists of all kinds, the already existing Class of Moral Sciences, which admitted philosophers, economists and logicians, could also admit literary scholars or philologists. Until then, the answer had been no, and the heated debates in the histories of the Accademia dei Lincei as to what could be admitted and what could not are well known.

The formation of a class for historical, philological and social legal disciplines was a topic of discussion between the president and re-founder Quintino Sella, Minister of Education, and Pasquale Villari. The two men, one a scientist

⁸² Institutional presentation Accademia dei Lincei.

and geologist and the other a historian-economist of positivist method, were in agreement on many points, although the latter above all – but, less decisively, Sella too – feared that the admission of literati would distort the Lincei's mission. Sella asked himself: how many political moral sciences do not proceed today like the natural ones? The answer for them was obvious: many, because history was now done using quantitative and statistical methods: "how many sciences of the two fields that seemed separated by abysses, and now with the progress of observations are joined by firm rings! Who would have said a few years ago that archaeologists, geologists and palaeontologists would have found a common field in troglodytes?"

The historical and philological sciences had undergone a profound methodological transformation, and Francesco D'Ovidio, a rigorous philologist and dialectologist trained in the German school, was an example of this: he had done so with particularly relevant results for research on antiquity and the Middle Ages. From that point of view, it was a time of exciting discoveries about ancient civilisations. It was the time when research reports were being published using previously non-existent archaeological, stratigraphic, photographic and linguistic methods.

Thus, the election as a member of Francesco D'Ovidio, a man of letters and critic, in 1887, was a sign of remarkable transformation noted by many and approved by Minister Quintino Sella himself, as well as by Pasquale Villari who was convinced that the institution needed to be renewed and its fields of investigation extended. Even Francesco D'Ovidio himself, resoundingly, was elected president of the Lincei between 1916 and 1920, in the years when he was being retired. That a man of letters, philologist but also critic, Dante

scholar, manzonist, should become a Lyncean, sitting where Federico Cesi and Galileo Galilei had spoken, still seemed, to some, something unheard of, which did not accord with the wishes of previous generations of Lyncean scholars, not because of the scholar's value, which no one doubted, but because of his field of study; the controversy soon died down, however. Refining philological methods with the use of renewed palaeography and diplomatics, a modern study of linguistics and supplemented with studies in phonetics, D'Ovidio was considered a 'scientist of the word'.⁸³

The integration with the Moral Sciences thus constituted a stance against those who claimed an irreducible diversity, if not ontological enmity between the humanities and the sciences – an idea not entirely isolated in the period of triumphant Positivism.

Before his election as lynchpin in 1887 – Sella died in 1884 but left provisions in his favour that were also communicated to Enrico D'Ovidio – Francesco D'Ovidio had published *Saggi critici (Critical Essays)* that very year with the publisher Morano in Naples, one of his most significant works that made him suitable for election

As he had already done on other occasions, Francesco outlined an appropriate definition of literary criticism, emphasising how it arose where the 'scientific' completeness of the reconstruction of facts, for which the historical school fought, was combined with a solid interpretative capacity,

⁸³ Raffaella Simili, *Umanisti e presidenti: l'Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei (1900-1933)*, Laterza Editions, Bologna-Bari 2017, p. 73. See also *Discorso del Presidente Sella*. Sessione Straordinaria tenuta dal Comitato segreto 24 e 25 gennaio 1875, Rome "Atti della Reale Accademia dei Lincei", series 2, vol. II, 1874-1875, p. XX-XXI ff.

'distinguishing between able critics and the ascertainment of facts, but mediocre and aesthetic and philosophical judges around them. Acute critics whose judgement too often needs to be revised, verified, corrected, but enlighten minds closed'.⁸⁴ In short: the squaring of the circle could only be found by combining historical philological and scientific excavation and verification with sincere analytical skill supported by a strong philosophical framework. Here, D'Ovidio explained the ideal of criticism in more detail, also referring to Immanuel Kant and the *Critique of Pure Reason*.

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 important initiatives required his presence.

During his time as president of the Lyncean Academy, he took steps to ensure that the texts submitted for examination by the boards of judges were printed or typewritten and not just handwritten, as had been the case until then. He had realised that, due to the decipherment problems that

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

handwriting entailed, some important information had been lost over time

During the First World War, he did his utmost to ensure that the Academy's holdings were not put at risk not only by bombs (which fortunately never arrived), but by the aggression of other institutions. For example, when he was asked 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. At that time, 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.

Despite his declining health and blindness, he made a point of travelling (often in the company of his brothers-in-law Lefèbvre and Porena) to meet ministers and personalities in Rome who could help him in this work of conservation. 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.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Raffaella Simili, *Umanisti e Presidenti: l'accademia nazionale dei Lincei* (1900-1933).



Palazzo Corsini, Rome, home of the Accademia dei Lincei.

Chapter 8

Francesco at the Accademia della Crusca

The Accademia della Crusca (often also just La Crusca) is one of the greatest institutes for the study and dissemination of linguistics and philology of the Italian language. Francesco was admitted to the Accademia as a correspondent member – his texts were accepted and not rejected as was the case with others – immediately after he was appointed by the minister in 1875 to the chair of Romance Philology at the University of Naples but did not become a full member until 1894. The appointment was ratified by a royal decree on 11 January 1894, late in his career.

The Crusca derives its name from the playful encounters of its founders, who used to gather on merry convivial occasions to play 'cruscate'. These meetings were characterised by educated and serious discourse but the tone that was maintained was playful; the term 'crusca' was chosen to represent the metaphor of the separation between the 'bran' (the coarse and less noble part of the cereal) and the 'flour' (the more refined and precious part). This metaphor symbolises the work of the Accademia, which aims to 'cleanse' the Italian language, separating the correct and pure forms from the impure or inappropriate ones. The leader of this informal group of friends, called the 'brigade of the crusconi', all writers and connoisseurs of the language, was Lionardo Salviati (1539-1589), and the headquarters were at the Villa Medicea al Castello, in the hilly area near the 'Castello', which still houses the institution today.

Its six founding members began to think about the possibility of organising themselves around a statute as early as the meeting of 25 January 1583, but the actual foundation took place more than two years later, on 25 March 1585, with a sort of feast or ceremonial, of those in use in the Florentine academies in Rome, with the invention of a semi-serious rituality and the official choice of the name *Crusca*, which followed a playful tone (the '*cruscate*') together with seriousness of intent. The *cruscantes* organised their style in opposition to the pedantry and seriousness of the Florentine Academy, founded in 1540.



Villa Medicea Il Castello,
seat of the Accademia della Crusca since 1585.

The Crusca is the oldest linguistic academy in the world and its main purpose, in addition to publishing studies and promoting conferences whose speeches are included in the Acts of the Accademia, is to publish grammars and above all to renew and update the *Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca*, the greatest reference for the Italian language. In its more than four centuries, the Accademia has always distinguished itself for its commitment to keeping the Italian

language 'pure', publishing, as early as 1612, the first edition of the *Vocabolario*, recording neologisms, forestisms, balancing a serious vigilance of the language with a certain elasticity in accepting novelties. The *Vocabolario* also served as a lexicographic example for the French, German and English languages. In 1636, Cardinal Richelieu created the Académie française on the model of the Accademia della Crusca. D'Ovidio regularly sent contributions on lexicography, pronunciation, correct spelling and also observations on grammar and historical linguistics to the Crusca, which he attended little in person, living and teaching in Naples.

In 1919, the Accademia, under the presidency of Isidoro del Lungo (1841-1927), a Germanist with whom D'Ovidio corresponded for a long time and who held him in high esteem, published a *Grammatica storica della lingua e dei dialetti italiani* (Hoepli, Milan).⁸⁶

In the course of his career as a member and even earlier as a correspondent, D'Ovidio gave hundreds of opinions on the use and inflections of many words such as this one, for example, on the Accademia website and in the *Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca*, which has had five editions: the first in 1612, the last in 1923:

maggiordòma, sf. governante di una casa nobile. – in partic.: cameriera al servizio di una principessa o di una regina.

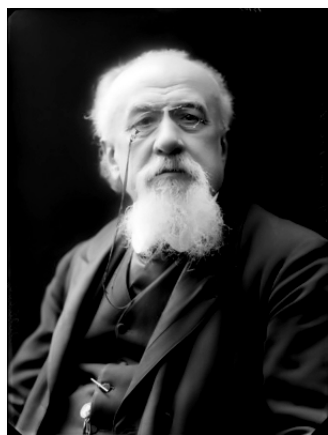
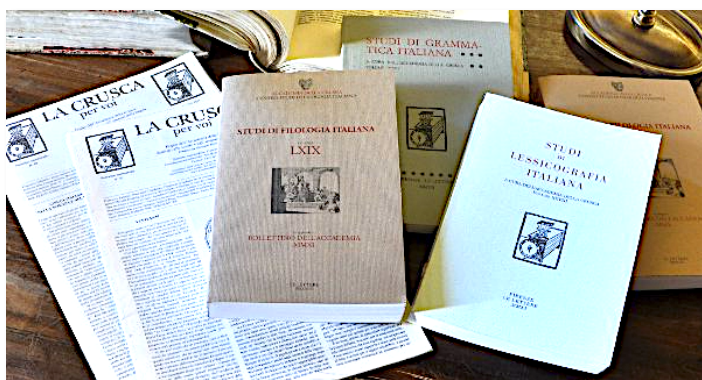
⁸⁶ D'Ovidio Fund in the Historical Archive of Scuola Normale di Pisa, accessed 2016. The letters in the Archive have been in the process of cataloguing and study for years, as far as D'Ovidio is concerned there is a "*Carteggio D'Ovidio*", vol. 1 "*D'Ovidio - D'Ancona*", edited by F. NASSI, Scuola Normale Superiore, Pisa 2003: the letters between D'Ovidio and D'Ancona alone number about 20,000 and cover an entire lifetime.

Baldini, 10-94: un saggio di Francesco D'Ovidio... inteso a identificare chi fosse l'innominata maggiordoma della casa milanese di Don Ferrante. Crusca [s. v.]: maggiordoma: quella dama che in certe corti soprintende alle addette ai servigi di una principessa.

2 consorte di un maggiordomo; dama di corte.

Rovani, 13: poche città ebbero, come Verona, l'onore... di essere, in uno stesso momento, la residenza di tanti imperatori e re, di tanti ministri plenipotenziari, di tanti ambasciatori e gran maggiordomi e maggiordome e cancellieri di stato.

Some of the Academy's publications, which, during the years of his participation as a member, saw many contributions from D'Ovidio.



The Germanist Isidoro del Lungo, president of the Accademia della Crusca (1916-1923) who wanted D'Ovidio to publish a historical grammar of the Italian language and dialects.

Chapter 9

Historian Francesco Bertolini

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 the cousin and grandmother (the name already recurred in the D'Ovidio family in Trivento).

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.⁸⁷ Francesco D'Ovidio's plans focused on Maria, postponing all other decisions for the time being: the two became engaged; the couple was formed under the best auspices also because D'Ovidio was already well known in his field and Maria was the daughter of a lecturer at the city's Scuola Normale for women and later extraordinary lecturer in Ancient History in Naples, 1875-1883. Having taken the necessary steps: official introductions, marriage proposal, screening of the young 's

⁸⁷ 'Filologia e Critica', XXIII, Salerno, Rome 1998, p. 417.

career possibilities, the two were 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.⁸⁸ During 1875, Ruggiero Bonghi, a Neapolitan from Torre del Greco, arrived in Milan to attend a lecture by D'Ovidio at Parini. The story is told in various ways, but basically, Bonghi, who before being Minister of Public Education (1874-1876) and animator of many cultural activities (he was one of the founders of the 'Stampa' in Turin), was a philologist. He thus visited D'Ovidio at Parini, was impressed by his preparation and decided 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.

As for Bertolini, who was less interested in philology but appreciated as a teacher of general history, he collaborated with the school magazine *'Effemeridi della pubblica istruzione'* in Turin, then began publishing history books such as *Storia primitiva d'Italia* (1860), *Storia di Roma*

⁸⁸ 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*, Vita e pensiero, Milan 2004, pp. 71-72, 175-177, 187 and *passim*.

(1864) and *Storia delle dominazioni barbariche* (1869), texts that were also very successful as school books. In fact, he became one of the most widely adopted authors in Italian schools and in fact his *Compendio di storia italiana* (1871), which in an enlarged and illustrated version was published until 1934-1935, was very popular for several decades. 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 highly 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, Treves 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 December 1909). He was also dean of that faculty from 1904.⁸⁹ When he died, Giovanni Pascoli delivered a funeral

⁸⁹ 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*.

oration at his funeral, calling him Maestro, 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!⁹⁰



Francesco Bertolini,
father-in-law of Francesco D'Ovidio.

⁹⁰ The provenance of the newspaper clipping in the Pascoli Archive is not marked, but it is probably the *Giornale di Romagna* (segn. P. 6.3.156).

Chapter 10

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 *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 1884.⁹¹ 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.⁹² To give an idea of how far this kind of work was beyond the cultural horizon of most of the Italian scholars of the time,

⁹¹ 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.

suffice it to say that it was only completed in 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, an advocate 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, narrated 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 the *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 that could not be Tasso's as he was still living in the era 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.⁹³

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*.⁹⁴ A series of essays of different kinds are collected in *Varietà critiche*,⁹⁵ 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* of 1879 and 1889 have a very technical character and are very thorough on the glottological side (sounds, pronunciation, spelling). Over the years,

⁹³ *Ibid*, p. 289.

⁹⁴ Francesco D'Ovidio, *Opere complete*, Editrice Moderna, XI, Rome 1926.

⁹⁵ Francesco D'Ovidio, *Opere complete*, Editrice Moderna, XII, Caserta 1929.

D'Ovidio also wrote many studies of a philological, linguistic 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.⁹⁶ 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:

the florentine must therefore always be held as a living mirror of sincere and fresh Italianism, and only not to take it as a standard whenever it diverges from literary usage, where this is firmly established; and to take it as an often-valuable advisor, not as an

⁹⁶ Found in vol. X of the *Opere complete*, Naples 1874.

absolute authority, wherever literary usage sways or is completely lacking.⁹⁷

This position was inspired by the 'practical common sense' that Benedetto Croce recognised in him, even among 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 devoted 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

⁹⁷ *La questione della lingua e Graziadio Ascoli*, in *Studi manzoniani*, in *Opere*, VIII, Naples-Caserta 1928, p. 333.

earned him the Gautieri Prize from the Academy of Turin and an invitation to teach in Rome, which he refused.

He also devoted himself to the history of literature, editing a vast 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.⁹⁸ The studies on the origin of Italian verse and metrical uses in medieval Italian poetry are very important and studied at length. Connected to these interests are also 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 Dovidì'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

⁹⁸ 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).

Purgatorio, again with the attention considered, for example by Croce – but we will see that not everyone agrees with Croce's criticism – *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, from 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. Afterwards, he resigned from 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.⁹⁹

⁹⁹ Francesco D'Ovidio, *Opere complete*, XII, Naples, pp. 332-333.

This ideal balance, which considers prudence, scrupulous research and intuition (divination genius), is most present in the early period of D'Ovidio's work. In later studies, according to many critics, D'Ovidio struggled to find the synthesis 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),¹⁰⁰ and finally *Nuovi studi manzoniani* (Milan 1908),¹⁰¹ 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 was devalued, mainly due to Croce's influence, at least until the last decades of the last century, is beginning to be

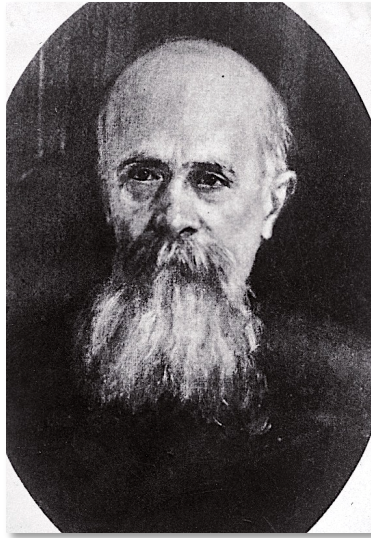
¹⁰⁰ Francesco D'Ovidio, *Opere complete*, VIII, Naples 1933.

¹⁰¹ Francesco D'Ovidio, *Opere complete*, VII, Editrice Moderna, Caserta 1928.

re-evaluated. Above all, the first 20 years of his very long career and his dialectological contributions as well as Italian philology are being re-evaluated. In examining the remarkable interest of the correspondence between D'Ovidio and Ascoli, the Italianist Sergio Lubello noted in a 2007 text

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 [...].¹⁰²

¹⁰² 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.



Graziadio Isaia Ascoli.

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'.¹⁰³

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. / founded by G. I. A.

¹⁰³ *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.

or directed by F. d'Ov. Ed E. M. adding to it the *Rivista di Filolog. Rom.*" (24th 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. On this, he published a series of academic memoirs throughout the 1890s and into the first decade of the

20th century, along with genuine essays such as *Reliquie probabili e possibili degli antichi dialetti italiani* (1902).¹⁰⁴



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.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ *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.

¹⁰⁵ Francesco D'Ovidio, *Opere complete, Rimpianti vecchi e nuovi*, XIV, Caserta 1929-1930.

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



These are portraits of contemporary figures to whom he felt, for different reasons, close, such as Ruggiero Bonghi, Achille Sannia, Silvio Spaventa, Francesco De Sanctis, Niccolò Tommaseo, Giosuè Carducci, Luigi Tosti, Ippolito Amicarelli, Eugenio Torelli Viollier, etc., whose significant features 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. Significantly, in the approximately 1,000 pages of the two volumes, there is no room for personal memoirs unless they are related 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*, mention must be made, among others, of *La Perseveranza*, *Corriere della sera*, *Il Giornale d'Italia*, *Nuova Antologia*, *Rassegna italiana*, and *il Fanfulla della domenica*, as evidence of his curiosity, his tendency to keep 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 11

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 that time as a 'rural village'



The former rural suburban village of Vomero after having undergone redevelopment and road construction with the centre, making it one of the new districts of the city.

Thus, Francesco 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 in that same place lived Francesco's parents, Pasquale and

Francesca. Just when work began on the new neighbourhood, the couple, with their two daughters, moved to Largo, then Piazzale, Latilla.



Via Luca Giordano. Another view of the Nuovo Vomero wanted by Mayor Nicola Amore.

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 daughters of his brother Enrico, Pia, Laura and their son Eugenio, who sometimes, but increasingly rarely after marriages, took the steamer from Genoa to Naples.



Terrace of the D'Ovidio house.
The Nanny with her Grandchildren (about 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 Settembre where the Palazzo Doria D'Angri stands, but located in a quiet little square, yesterday Largo Latilla today Piazza D'Ovidio, the

main door 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, to think. Some days, according to his friend Vitelli, he devoted them to solitude, to 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, seated at a coffee table, with Costantino Nigra, one of the most powerful agents of the Italian Revolution and Risorgimento as well as a university lecturer and politician.



Palace in Largo Latilla where Francesco D'Ovidio's family lived for many decades until they moved to Rome in 1940.

Nigra 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 in normal circumstances; they were bound by a deep friendship and esteem, although they continued to call each other "lei".¹⁰⁶ 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

¹⁰⁶ The little-known photograph was provided by Professor Francesco D'Ovidio Lefèbvre.

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.¹⁰⁷

If the activities of his son-in-law Porena are well known, more secret is that of his other son-in-law, Carlo Ernesto Lefèbvre, who we know became an aeronautical company manager and director of the Bollettino Aerotecnico Italiano. Thanks to his marriage to his daughter, Elvira, the dynasty continued with the birth of three sons (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: Antonietta 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 culture of the home, perhaps taken 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 various photos of her

¹⁰⁷ *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.

dating 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 Lefèvre (above) 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.¹⁰⁸ The *trait d'union* was certainly Flavia Lefèbvre, Marquise de Casafuerte (1850-1905) married to Marquis Pedro Álvarez de Toledo y Acuña of Casafuerte (1847-1890) 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 motherly love. Mum.

The two daughters had very different temperaments: Elvira, calmer and more 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.

¹⁰⁸ Lefèbvre D'Ovidio Private Archive, via del Nuoto-Rome. Uncatalogued. Accessed in the year 2016.



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

Chapter 12

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 due to 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 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.

Defining his power as a critic and his place among the other critics of our age and abroad, scrutinising the extent to which the impetus of

passion and his extraordinary originality as a poet helped him in his work, would not be appropriate here today.¹⁰⁹

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 until then been the 'greatest living poet', according to D'Ovidio's diction, who could therefore yield to comparisons with other poets of the past; 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 times. 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: he was a man of letters but did not have the rigour of philology as a science of which he was a master, a science that Carducci had so much criticised, too. 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

¹⁰⁹ Francesco D'Ovidio, *Commemorazione dei soci Graziadio Ascoli e Giosuè Carducci*, Regia Accademia dei Lincei, XVI, 1907, pp. 31-46.

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'.¹¹⁰ He left the judgement to posterity who would shortly thereafter, even before the emergence of the avant-garde, criticise Carducci and his emphatic, celebratory and rhetorical 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'.¹¹¹

His training in Pisa and his precocious Manzoniism were making their mark abroad.¹¹² And already from his earliest trials, as we know, D'Ovidio was projected into an international dimension, as demonstrated by his critical analysis of Böhmer's pamphlet, his interventions on the Italian language (1868) and the *Appendice alla relazione*

¹¹⁰ Alberto Brambilla, *Appunti sul carteggio Carducci-D'Ovidio*, "Annali di 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.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 289.

¹¹² Brambilla again recalls how Father Gaetano Bernardi (*Rimpianti vecchi e nuovi*, v. I, Caserta, 1929, pp. 63-87) but also Alfonso Casanova and the presence of various Manzoni or Manzoni in Naples, *Ibidem*, 3n.

(1869). This love culminated in an attempt to reach the great Lombard, who, however, did not respond.¹¹³

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:

I was prepared by Gandino and Bertolini to apply to the Faculty of Letters in Bologna for the comparative languages and literatures position 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.¹¹⁴

So, 'bricconate' and 'infamie' in 1872. Moreover, during the period of the querelle 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.¹¹⁵

Incidentally, we can see that by this date D'Ovidio already knew Bertolini and thus, certainly, his daughter. By the

¹¹³ Braidense National Library, *Carteggio Manzoni*, B. XXV, 42/1.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 292.

¹¹⁵ 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.*, pp. 296-296.

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 looked upon as foreign, as 'German', more certain: Romance philology. The volume entitled 'Desanctisian' *Saggi critici* of 1879 contains a *Prefazione* 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 this. After all, Italy had literary traditions that were not inferior, indeed superior to those of Germany. Was it therefore subservience? No, wrote D'Ovidio in response to a concern that – Brambilla writes – "even if extended to scholars from the whole of 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 young people'.¹¹⁶

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 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.¹¹⁷

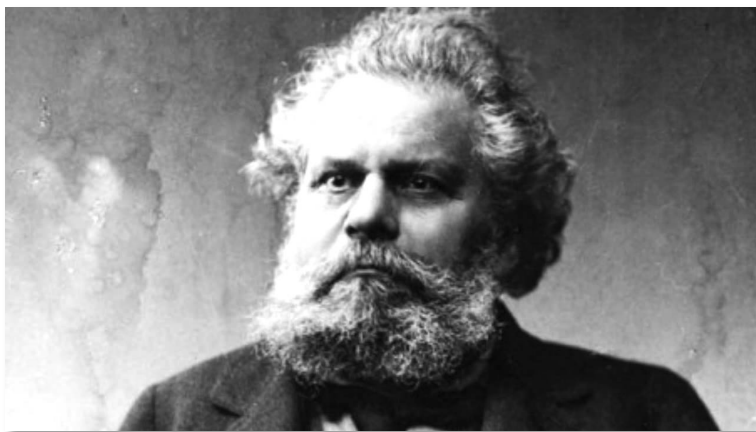
Even southerners, Italians and Neapolitans, therefore, were able to hold their own with 'erudite and meticulous research' and not just 'aesthetic contemplations' and 'rapid synthetic flights'.¹¹⁸ Here was D'Ovidio's 'whole criticism' capable of combining 'northern patience with southern genius, the erudition of a Muratori with Vichiana philosophy'.¹¹⁹ 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.

¹¹⁶ Archivio Scuola Normale di Pisa, *Carteggio fiorentino*, Busta B 3, cited in Brambilla, p. 294.

¹¹⁷ Francesco D'Ovidio, *Saggi critici*, Morano, Naples, p. IX.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. XII.

¹¹⁹ Alberto Brambilla, *op. cit.*, p. 295.



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

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.¹²⁰ 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

¹²⁰ *D'Ovidio to Carducci*, 24 January 1874; *D'Ovidio to Carducci*, 28 April 1878; *D'Ovidio to Carducci*, 18 August 1879. In Brambilla, *op. cit.*, pp. 296-297.

series of manuals on introduction to Neo-Latin studies, manuals that were much appreciated.¹²¹

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 1881.¹²² 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.¹²³ 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 that Manzoni's text was more suitable for third classes.¹²⁴ When Carducci founded the Scholastic Library of Italian Classics, he wanted D'Ovidio to do the commentary, which D'Ovidio was unable to do due to many commitments.¹²⁵

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.¹²⁶ 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 later years, over language issues, for advice requested by Carducci from D'Ovidio on Leopardi. The last

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 300.

¹²² *Ibid.*, pp. 300-301.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 302-303.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 305.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 306-307.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 308-309.

letter is dated 1903 and shows a certain 'defence' and 'deference' of Carducci towards the fierce master of the new philology.¹²⁷

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).¹²⁸ 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:

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. Goodbye.

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 even at you get used to it, and I urge you not to grieve over it, all the more

¹²⁷ Carducci Letters, 5 July 1903 cit. XXI, pp. 125-126.

¹²⁸ Francesco D'Ovidio, *Rimpianti vecchi e Nuovi*, cit., pp. 317-326.

so since it will be entirely transitory in you. Happy New Year and goodbye from the bottom of my heart.

Yours affectionately F. D'Ovidio.¹²⁹

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 a similar appointment was made to 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 '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.¹³⁰ 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*.¹³¹ He was also a member of the Higher Council of Public Education, the Higher Council of Public Education and the

¹²⁹ Brambilla, cit. pp. 316-318.

¹³⁰ 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.

¹³¹ *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, Lapi, Florence 1906.

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.¹³²

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 his daughters and pupils 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 already finished his academic work, in July 1925, an honorary committee of intellectuals 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 no less than 40).

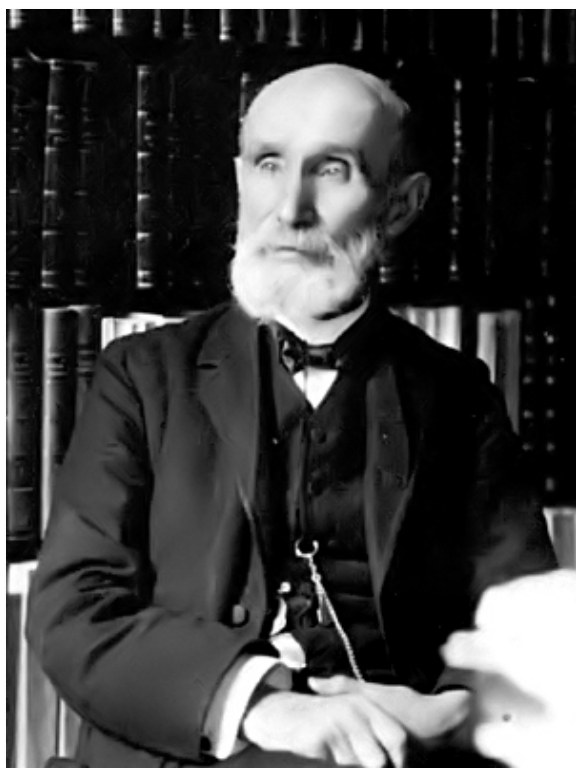
Due to unspecified publishing difficulties, it was produced in 14 volumes with 18 tomes in total. It is no coincidence that the work was published in different places (Caserta, Rome, at various publishers: Anonima per Edizioni, Casa Editrice

¹³² Scuola Normale di Pisa, Vittorio Scialoja, 12 November 1928, MB-Cart 46.

Moderna and then in Naples at Guida Editore (for the volumes II, IX, VII, X).

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* di Firenze 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.¹³³ In the *Nuova Antologia* of March 1926, the old friend Girolamo Vitelli, now burdened with glories, remembers his friend and his family. Vitelli too had made an important career of his own, becoming an illustrious classicist and later director of the Italian Papyrological Institute as well as a Senator of the Kingdom.

¹³³ Pio Rajna, *Francesco D'Ovidio*, 'Il Marzocco', 6 Dec. 1925, p. 1.



Girolamo Vitelli.



Elvira D'Ovidio, about 1900.

Chapter 13

Constantine 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 and a never-amateur translator of the classics. 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, he describes him as a Celtologist, novel philologist and dialectologist.¹³⁴ 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 matters, 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 might 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

¹³⁴ *Commemorazione* of Costantino Nigra in 'Archivio glottologico italiano', XVII, 1910, 13, pp. 21-28. Ibid, p. 25.

'umbertine' phase, Nigra confided to his friend that he was pessimistic about the resilience of the Italian nation. We do not have the answers of D'Ovidio who, however, was much more optimistic in this regard, as can be seen from his production, also in 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 by 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'.¹³⁵

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 Constantine (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

¹³⁵ Gian Luigi Bruzzone, *Costantino Nigra e Francesco D'Ovidio*, 'Lares' v. 74, no. 3, Olshky Firenze (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.

the events that touched him closely. In any case, post-Risorgimento hopes were fading.¹³⁶

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?"¹³⁷ Tosti was a friend of Nigra as well as D'Ovidio, who had the same ideas and visited the abbot at Montecassino.¹³⁸ Later he also wrote a moving obituary of him.¹³⁹

¹³⁶ 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).

¹³⁷ *Luigi Tosti to Vieusseux*, 22 February 1861, cited in Gian Luigi Bruzzone, *Ibidem*, p. 663.

¹³⁸ Francesco D'Ovidio, *Una gita alla Badia di Montecassino*, in *Rimpianti Vecchi e nuovi*, I, Casa Editrice Moderna, Caserta 1929, pp. 49-61.

¹³⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 17-48.

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 of Graziadio Isaia Ascoli (D'Ovidio drew 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 of them met in conversation 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 1898 (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.¹⁴⁰

¹⁴⁰ Gian Luigi Bruzzone, *op. cit.*, pp. 666-667.

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 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 at the Albergo 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: 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 his 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 the Canavese area, and must return 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 ante, his heart open to the kindest of 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 at his side, ready to seize him; and rarely in the place of that dreary 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; placing 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.¹⁴¹

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.

¹⁴¹ Francesco D'Ovidio, *Commemorazione*, cit., p. 22.

In 1905, he was admitted to the Senate of the Republic, but D'Ovidio, who gladly participated in the main votes and assemblies, never felt like a politician even though he wrote about politics, and a lot of it.

He was involved in the Molise local elections of 1907, which were particularly turbulent with riots, threats and assemblies in which 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 singular tone of this public appeal is that it does not touch on political issues at all, but only on moral and civil morality issues: the violent and sectarian behaviour of both sides as 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 mildness of temperament and equanimity of judgement and temperance of manners abound in Molise more than

elsewhere, I find it all the more bitter to realise that these virtues can also be forgotten in my Molise in certain circumstances; and that in matters of anger and spite and rancour all the 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 a, finding myself alone in a square and being able to hear and hear all of a sudden 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 [...].¹⁴²

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*.

¹⁴² *Lettera dell'onorevole D'Ovidio, 'Giornale del Molise', 7 December 1907.*

Chapter 14

Carolina and Manfredi Porena

If it were not for the fact that Manfredi Porena, D'Ovidio's son-in-law, was himself acknowledged as one of Italy's most distinguished Dante writers, this chapter could have been avoided; but Porena was a great Dante scholar and scholar of the language of the fourteenth century, so the fact of the engagement between Carolina D'Ovidio and Manfredi Porena is reported, a rather tormented engagement at first, judging by the 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 in the beginning. Finally, Carolina became a wife devoted to her husband's memory after his death and edited several posthumous works about him.

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 Carolina's passage to his friend Manfredi, to whom she 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:

Lippi 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 that he would not want your father.¹⁴³



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

¹⁴³ *Maria Bertolini to Lippi (Carolina) D'Ovidio*, undated, Naples. Lefèvre D'Ovidio Private Archive, via del Nuoto-Rome. N. 43.

Did Francesco, therefore, exercise his authority in 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 D'Ovidio had accepted Porena as a future son-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.¹⁴⁴ He became intimate with the

¹⁴⁴ Giulio Natali, *Ricordi e profili di maestri e amici*, Edizioni di

house in 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 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 sure 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 giugno 1905. Carlo Ernesto Lefèbvre.

It was the kind of cards and memoirs that friends exchanged, as a sign of affection, when photography was still expensive. It was no coincidence that one of Carlo Ernesto's sons, Antonio, who admired Porena, would name 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 example, with a mixture of admiration and criticism, by Walther B. Pitkin, professor at Columbia University, in the pages of 'The Journal of Psychology' in

Storia e Letteratura, Rome 1965, p. 289.

1905, in which he praised the ambition of Porena's project to found a total aesthetic (painting, sculpture, elocution, architecture, music and literature).¹⁴⁵

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 it 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. Worse fate would befall, as we shall see, another pupil and frequenter of the D'Ovidio house, Francesco Colagrosso, also a friend of Porena.

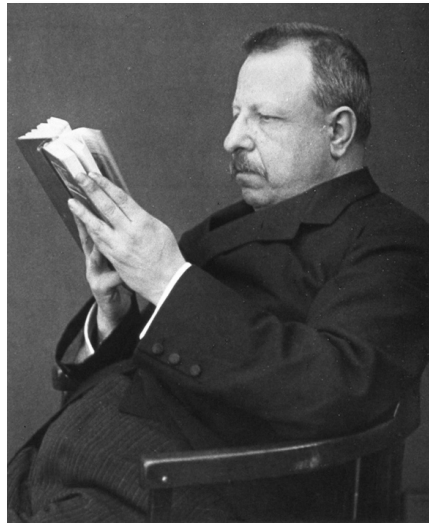
Manfredi Porena, who also had what it took to become a university lecturer in the positivist and philological 'German-style' school that still counted in universities at the time, had to be content with teaching in secondary schools until 1909. That year he obtained a chair in Stylistics (later renamed 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.

His career was nonetheless brilliant, if one considers that he was admitted to the Accademia dei Lincei and was

¹⁴⁵ Walther B. Pitkin, *The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods*, v. III, no. 16 (2 August, 1906), Columbia University Press, Columbia New York, pp. 442-444.

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 inferior to what would have awaited him had he not committed that act of youthful mockery against a 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 Bruni notes, those criticisms were unfair and venomous and can also be read as a symptom of power struggles:

In 1909, an article by Croce was published 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.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁶ Francesco Bruni, *Introduzione*, *op. cit.* p. 19.

Italianists have continued to debate Croce's critique by contrasting an overall reassessment of Croce's proposals in critica and language by Bruno Migliorini, a downgrading by Carlo Dionisotti, which was followed by a debate, and a subsequent overall reassessment of the work of the linguist from Campobasso.

Bruni, 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, Ruggiero Bonghi but also Francesco de Sanctis.¹⁴⁷ 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 that followed the parliamentary political debate.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁷ Which it is not in our interest to touch on here, as far as the question of language is concerned, see *Ibid.* pp. 20-21.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 22-23.



A curious photograph of Manfredi Porena at his worktable in Rome.

Chapter 15

An academic tragedy

The controversy over style also involved, as mentioned, 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.¹⁴⁹

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 independent 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 have. 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, argued polemically in favour of stylistics, opposing Croce and for

¹⁴⁹ 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.

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.¹⁵⁰

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 merit and clear fame.¹⁵¹ This proposal was at first

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p. 132.

¹⁵¹ According to Article 69 of the Casati Law of November 1859.

accepted. Consider that in a text published in 1907 by the publisher 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, to the candid good man, to the dear countryman who honours his native city.

Colagrosso was therefore 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 name. For Colagrosso 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 recover part. 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. Having heard of Croce's letter and his other taunts – 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 out of 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 should have been seen as 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 predictable in one respect 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, despite the inconvenience of the distance of his home from the centre of the city, was such 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 I am saddened to have missed him so much, as I loved him like a son, and I also recognised in him the diligent and wise old disciple and 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.¹⁵²

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.

¹⁵² *Giornale del Molise*, 12 January 1912.

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 enveloped in a great melancholy and began to live app artful and shy, with 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).¹⁵³

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 wood, 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).¹⁵⁴ In *Roma capitale* he denounced building speculation, changing customs, the excesses of Dolce Vita, the disappearance of ancient dignity, the general degradation of culture, and the change of 'woman'. He felt like a latecomer, a literary man of bygone times, the

¹⁵³ *Manfredi Porena, letterato romano*, in 'Studi Romani', V, no. 6, 1957, p. 687.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid* (cit.).

last witness of another era. Already on his return to Rome in 1909, he had observed signs of an irresistible decadence (the same that Nigra observed) that to us, living so many years later, witnessing at three transformations, must seem singular.

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, Francis of Assisi, Dante, Michelangelo, Raffaello T. Boccalini, G. Parini, V. Monti and A. Manzoni.¹⁵⁵

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 Alexander (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

¹⁵⁵ Giulio Natali, *Ricordi e profili di maestri e amici*, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, Rome 1965, p. 281.

beautiful arts'.¹⁵⁶ That book was mocked, but in the following years, having lost his professorship in Naples, he nevertheless continued to write on 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.¹⁵⁷ 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'.¹⁵⁸

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 walks, the behaviour of women very different from that of the years he was living. Not great history, he was 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 those seventeen years I only made a few brief sojourns. Hence it happened that the Rome of my first residence, [...] wholesale the penultimate decade of the century – is

¹⁵⁶ *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.

¹⁵⁷ 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.

¹⁵⁸ Giulio Natali, *op. cit.*, p. 277.

perfectly and distinctly isolated in my memory from the Rome of my second residence, [...] and I see it so immensely different from that of the second period (that I feel like recalling the picture to those who did not recognise it).¹⁵⁹

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 went out alone in the street, neither to walk, nor to go to church, nor to school, nor to go shopping, nor to visit.¹⁶⁰

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'.¹⁶¹ He also noted 'the female desire to bring the life and customs of women as close as possible to those of men'.¹⁶² But men who dye their hair also appeared ridiculous to him. As for modern

¹⁵⁹ Manfredi Porena, *op. cit.*, pp. 3-4.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid*, *op. cit.*, p. 126.

¹⁶¹ Manfredi Porena, *op. cit.*, pp. 122-123.

¹⁶² *Ibid*, p. 123.

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 time. It was at his work desk, the one portrayed in the photograph we have included in this book, that he died suddenly on 2 October 1955: 'an essay intended to deny the authenticity of *Epistola dantesca a Cangrande* was found on his desk, interrupted by death'.¹⁶³

Until the very end, he had frequented his friend and brother-in-law Carlo Ernesto Lefèbvre and his nephews Ovidio, 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 nephews.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶³ Giulio Natali, *op. cit.*, p. 281.

¹⁶⁴ 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 16

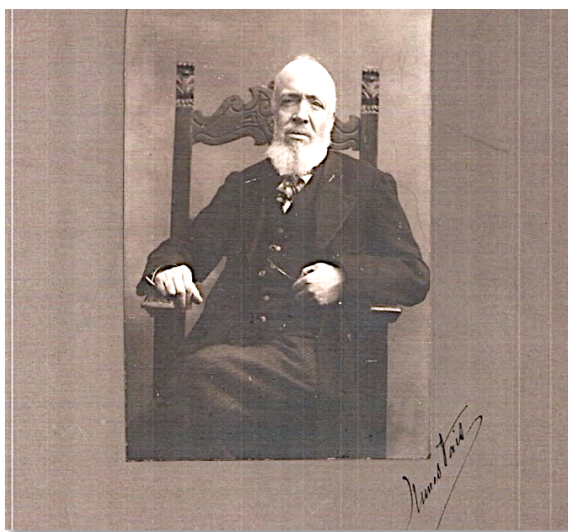
The last years of life

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 in 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'.¹⁶⁵

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.

¹⁶⁵ Michele Scherillo, *Francesco D'Ovidio*, 'Nuova Antologia', Rome 1925, p. 6.

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



One of D'Ovidio's last photos (summer 1924).



Michele Scherillo.

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.¹⁶⁶ 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 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 1924.¹⁶⁷ The worsening of his condition had begun 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. He had since then a swollen and sore mouth and lips, his bronchi filled with mucus continuously forcing him to expectorate continuously, even streaked with blood. He reduced his diet to liquid foods and still suffered. He claimed that his nose was constantly blocked with blood. He had ear pains 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

¹⁶⁶ 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.

¹⁶⁷ The inverted commas are taken from the *Autoanamnesi*, undated (but autumn 1924), Lefèbvre D'Ovidio Private Archive, uncatalogued.

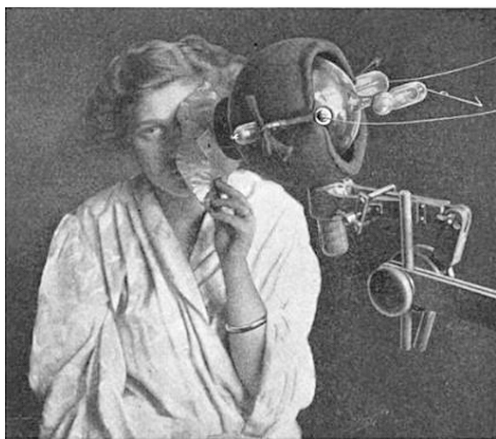
certain freedom' and therefore teach. However, he continued his treatments: he took preparations that made him feel better, but 'as I had the cursed habit of sniffing tobacco, when I abstained from it for a few days, my mouth immediately improved'.

But unfortunately I resumed my teaching, which was very harmful to me [...] during the 1922-1923 school year I had to give up caustications of the mouth almost completely, as they produced too much irritation.¹⁶⁸

He had new symptoms with sores, rashes and intestinal fevers. In January 1922, he began a cure based on silver nitrate and arsenical preparations that made him feel better, at least for a few weeks. In 1922, we know that Enrico D'Ovidio, with his family, came from Biella to visit Naples for the Easter holidays with his wife Maria and daughters Laura, Count Federico Petiva, her husband, and Pia with her husband Carlo Andreoni; as we know, the eldest son, engineer Eugenio, had been dead for 15 years at that time.¹⁶⁹ Despite his ailments, Francesco D'Ovidio did not rest and we know that he travelled to Rome several times, especially for Senate sessions and the most important sessions of the Accademia dei Lincei, the presidency of which he had left for health reasons in 1920.

¹⁶⁸ *Self-anamnesis*, undated (but autumn 1924). Lefèbvre D'Ovidio Private Archive.

¹⁶⁹ Lefèbvre D'Ovidio Private Archive, *Francesco D'Ovidio to Maria*, 1921 or 1922.



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

The last years of teaching, between 1920 and 1925, were very hard for him. He was already blind, had to be assisted and yet he rarely took time off work: to this dedication his pupils were always grateful.

In May and June 1924, he went to Berne to undergo treatment by a certain Dr Kocher. And here we find a cure typical of that time when the effects of X-ray exposure were not yet known. X-ray 'treatments' 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 in 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 Clinosolenoid treatments, which came from the United States, mainly from the studies of Nicola Tesla, which nevertheless gave him 'some benefit' in the general condition of the organism.

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.

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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 – quite good.

Some more information about the family comes to us from a relative named Quintavalle. As we know, in 1875 Francesco D'Ovidio married in Bologna the Mantuan (family but born in Milan) Maria Bertolini, daughter of the historian Francesco Bertolini and Carolina Quintavalle. The D'Ovidio family had two daughters: Carolina and Elvira; they lived first in Milan, for two years, then briefly in Bologna and finally in Naples, in the newly built Vomero district.

By marrying Bertolini, D'Ovidio was related to a very ramified and very rich family, the Quintavalle family of Padua. 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 family was Ferruccio Quintavalle (1873-1953).

It is from a cousin of Carolina's, also named Ferruccio Quintavalle (1914-1998), who was in correspondence with Maria Bertolini for a long time, that we owe further news about Francesco D'Ovidio and the Bertolini family.¹⁷⁰ Ferruccio became a prominent figure in Italian industrial history: a tennis champion in his youth, he was later the founder of Bianchi bicycles and the Autobianchi car brand. The fact that some Bonacossa, the family of Enrico D'Ovidio's wife, were also tennis champions in national and international competitions is explained by the extreme popularity of the sport in the first decades of the 20th century, especially among the upper classes.

In a letter of 1943, he recalled the fact that Francesco D'Ovidio had almost completely lost his sight at the age of

¹⁷⁰ Maria Bertolini's date of birth is extracted from the birth records of a daughter, Elvira, born in 1878; her date of death, on the other hand, is *post quem*, as there is a letter written by her in 1943.

35 in the autumn of 1884 and that this drama, after the first months of pain and bewilderment, had been faced with fortitude by the sick man and his entire family, who gave him constant assistance.¹⁷¹ He emphasised that for the first few years he was 'almost completely' blind, but 'not quite'. Ferruccio kept in touch with relatives in Naples during the war. In a letter dated 24 May 1943, he wrote that Maria was distressed by the long imprisonment of his nephew Mario held in India, an imprisonment that would only end in 1945, with no permanent consequences for his health.¹⁷²

¹⁷¹ We also know these details of Francis' life from several letters and from Ciafardini's Funeral *Commemorazione*, which is transcribed at the end of this book.

¹⁷² Scuola Normale di Pisa, D'Ovidio Archive, Letter MB-CART, 39.

Chapter 17

The Committee for the Publication of the Works of Francesco D'Ovidio

Friends and students set up a committee for the funeral honouring the teacher while he was still alive, namely when he retired at the end of the 1924-1925 academic year, after fifty years of teaching.

On that occasion, a farewell party was organised, speeches and eulogies were delivered, after which D'Ovidio – who was very ill (he would be seen little or not at all in the following months), suddenly worsened in July 1925, was seized by severe physical pain and from then on could not move from home, except rarely and for very special occasions.¹⁷³ He remained awake almost to the very end, and the cause of death seems to have been, as 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.

The Committee's main task was precisely the reprinting of all of D'Ovidius' works, which we have mentioned, the second was 'the duty to place a sign on the place that would give peace to those tortured and tired bones, the first milestone on the road that the immortal memory of Francesco D'Ovidio will tread in time', as Antonio Sogliano (1854-

¹⁷³ Emanuele Ciafardini, *Commemoration of Francesco D'Ovidio*, Accademia Pontaniana, Naples 1931, p. 6. Ciafardini (1886-1956), who was later given the task of writing a long funeral commemoration of D'Ovidio was one of his last pupils, and among his favourites.

1942), senator, archaeologist, leading authority for many years on the excavations of Pompeii and Herculaneum and the settlement 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 to this the sculptor Ennio Tomai came to the rescue. He sketched 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'.¹⁷⁴

And here before you is the monument. On a pedestal with correct and elegant lines that, 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 disclosed o, placing his middle finger in it as a sign: the thinker is characterised by the *volumen* in classical art, and yet

¹⁷⁴ *In memoria di Francesco D'Ovidio*, 29 May 1927 in the Poggioreale Cemetery in Naples, Tipografia Moderna, Caserta 1927, p. 8.

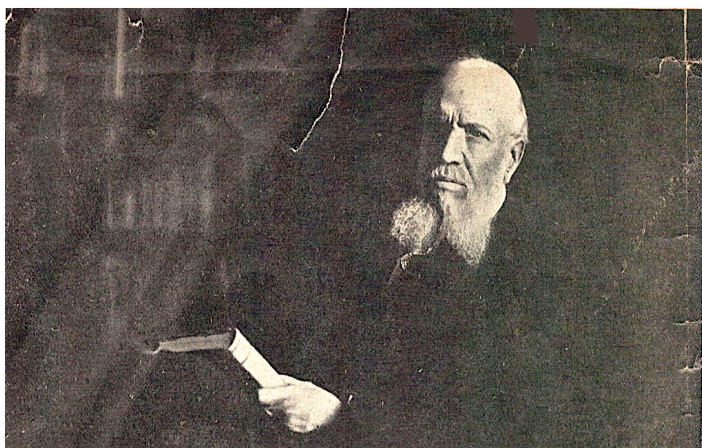
quite appropriately our artist has not deprived his creation of this attribute, and has thus harmonised the expression of the face with it. But which will it be, on which the Master meditates? Will it be his Dante or his Manzoni! Integrating and surrounding the artist's ghost, one could almost say that it is the Divine Comedy and that the place marked by the Master 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 labours 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:

*E venni dal martirio a questa pace.*¹⁷⁵

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.

Various portraits were also made of Francesco D'Ovidio that would serve as the basis for his funeral monument. The following one, solemn, made in the studio, is intended 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.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 8-9.



Francesco D'Ovidio in the last year of his life (1925).



Sketch for the monument to Francesco D'Ovidio.



Tomb of D'Ovidio at the 'Quadrato degli Uomini Illustri' (Square of Illustrious Men), at the Monumental Cemetery in 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 seem to go beyond the occasion.

Also present at the tomb's inauguration was the Podestà of Campobasso, 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.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁶*Bollettino del Comune di Napoli. Rassegna illustrata di storia, arte, topografia e statistica napoletana*, F. Giannini & figli, Naples 1930, p. 23.



Today, the funeral monument is owned by the State and catalogued as a work of funerary art.

APPENDIX

Francesco D'Ovidio's views on Freemasonry

Author's note. This article was published on 13 October 1913 in the periodical 'Idea nazionale' in response to a referendum asking the following three questions:

- 1) Do you believe that survival in a secret association such as Freemasonry is compatible with the conditions of modern public life?
- 2) Do you believe that the materialistic Rationalism and the humanitarian and internationalist ideology, which Freemasonry in its manifestations is inspired by, correspond to the most vibrant trends of contemporary thought?
- 3) Do you believe that the covert action [...] of Freemasonry in Italian life, and particularly in military establishments, in the judiciary, in schools, in public administrations, results in benefit or harm to the country?

Interviewed by a journalist, D'Ovidio replies:

I could, like others, answer the three questions dryly: No, No, Huge Damage.

I could also certainly agree with all the remarks made by those valiant men who responded dryly. But, for many reasons, it is repugnant to me to be so blunt with . And since it is appropriate to be fair with everyone, even with Freemasonry, I feel first of all the duty to declare that I have known men of the noblest spirit, of the most upright

intentions, of the most generous heart, of whom I knew that they belonged, or I know that they belong, to Freemasonry: I knew or I know it, either because it is well known, or because they themselves confessed it to me. And I believe that many others have a similar experience to mine. Well, it is true that here it is a question of evaluating things and not people: but, since it is people who make things, it is only fair to reflect that Freemasonry cannot be entirely evil if essentially good or beneficent men have participated and are participating in it.

On the other hand, I must also remind myself that I have met many intriguers, sectarians and subversives who have made their way, very far in the Italian world, without having anything to do with Freemasonry. It is useful and honest to bear this in mind in order to guard against an exaggeration to which many people today are inclined: to see the influence of Freemasonry in every ailment of public life, as if Freemasonry had truly become the *power that, hidden, reigns to the common detriment*. Leo XIII, if I am not mistaken, attributed the collapse of temporal power, and all the other miracles of our Risorgimento, to the work of Freemasonry: and with this he did it too much honour! Let us free ourselves from such priestly simplism, that is, from ascribing too much wrong or power to it, naively ascribing to it every vice or wrong of free and united Italy. Let us recognise, as the honourable Gaetano Mosca has done, that since only the extreme parties are organised among us [...], we liberals and moderates [...] are disorganised and weak, and therefore some useful service can be rendered by the Masonic nucleus, sometimes putting its disciplined action in favour of a good cause. And allow me to give an example: was the agitation caused by the wrong done to poor Dreyfus, agitation first French, then European, then

even worldwide, malignant? Was it also for those who wanted to see in it a Masonic machination? I think so no. In such cases, such agitation is welcome! There is no wish whatsoever that could ever arouse such universal, such enthusiastic, such human emotion! And yet who can doubt that, in the Dreyfus *affair*, an initial impetus, a powerful leaven, a constant help, was given precisely by the French Masonic impetus, then national? Would the pure feeling of justice and pity have ignited such a great fire without that spark and that attitude have justice been done against that innocent soldier? No, probably, I answer. All these and similar things, I could say, to comfort myself and others, to judge the Masonic work with equanimity, to shun all excesses of thought and speech, to repress every violent outburst of antipathy, even if essentially just; but at this point I have given enough vent to my scruples and move on to answer the questions.

Ad primum, if I have to say whether it is incompatible, Freemasonry, just incompatible, with the conditions of public and modern life with the survival of a secret association I would not say so. Today, one can say and do anything one wants publicly, perhaps with great imprudence, with incredible recklessness and impudence, as my honourable friend Carafa d'Andria wittily pointed out; and that therefore the secret is not necessary. But if we are in a square where everyone can shout as he pleases, should it not then be just as lawful, or all the more lawful, to huddle in a corner and murmur or talk to each other by the ear? [...]. Rather than incompatible, the secret will perhaps be, better said, dissimilar to modern life, old-fashioned, superfluous or even suspicious, and this is enough: there will be no place for further subtlety.

Rather, it will help to recognise that secrecy, all the more so because today it is an archaism, has its own naïve attraction, which a sect can hardly renounce, and that secrecy, therefore, does not in itself imply a conspiracy of unmentionable things. Once, my master Tèza, who was close as he was to his colleague Carducci in Bologna, secretary of the Bolognese Freemasonry, asked him to let him read the minutes of those Masonic dominions in confidence. Professor Tèza, who had expected to find God knows how many mysterious things and perverse machinations in them, was astonished by the perfect innocence of the Freemasons' discussions and deliberations. And it is indeed true that secrecy is a bit of an end in itself. But this does not detract from the fact that it can, if need be, disguise things that are more or less unjust, and that in any case all men who do not participate in that secrecy, especially if they are far from everything that has the nature of a conspiracy, live in constant suspicion of what can be plotted in occult conspiracies. Many noble spirits abhor taking part in secret societies and understand it [...].

To the second question I would not know what to answer. Certainly, there is much that is backward and utopian in Masonic philosophy, but many other philosophies that are even more backward and utopian continue to have their place among the various currents of modern thought, and there would be no reason to hold it against Masonic ideas in particular. Besides, to criticise them properly one would have to either have been a Freemason, or have studied them with special attention and curiosity; and both of these conditions are not mine. What displeases me most is the anti-clerical attitude that Freemasonry inculcates, which ends up making the thinking and language of many people factious, polemical

and hyperbolic with respect to Christianity, Catholicism and the Church; and not only with respect to their present state or value, but with respect to their historical process and value. Up to 1860 and, in a narrower sense, up to 1870, we old men would fight, each in our own way, to win freedom of thought and achieve the unity of the fatherland. And finally, then the polemical spirit against dogma and the Church was natural, just, irresistible. But after our victory was complete, after every danger of regression had gradually vanished, all measured intellects, all impartial men, sooner or later came to deplore the too many ruins that we had to accumulate out of necessity and the too many intolerances to which we abandoned ourselves against the Church, which had done so much good; and the too much one-sidedness of our historical concepts, the too much lack of foresight of unintended consequences of our acts and words. And today the statesman, if he wants to be worthy of the name, cannot disown the efficacy of religion as a brake on human passions, and as a consecration of domestic bonds and national sentiment. The man of heart cannot forget that neither science nor the efforts of the State can soothe certain adventures, certain sorrows, certain inevitable cases of life and death. Then in substitution he comforts the hopes of religion, where human forces can do nothing. Thus the thinker, if truly free, cannot deny that, regardless of any question about the ontological value of religion, it possesses an essentially human, social and civil psychological function. The historian, if he is dispassionate and clairvoyant, does not ignore how much the Christian and Catholic religions helped the n other times to act as a dam against barbarism, to prevent ancient civilisation from being overwhelmed after the collapse of Roman power. The educated man, who knows the

value and feels the charm of the art of literature, sees well how much the Christian and Catholic faith is the foundation of art, of Italian literature; in front of our cathedrals, our paintings, our statues, our poetry, from the *Divina Commedia* to *I promessi sposi* (*The Betrothed*) to the *Inni sacri*, he thinks with a certain horror that one day, if the Italian nation became atheist or lacked 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 Greek and Latin mythology is studied today! The Italian political patronage, if it has political sense enlightened by historical awareness, realises that the Roman pontificate, with its worldwide authority, is also a consequence, a metamorphosis, of ancient Roman imperialism; and it is also a last remnant of Italian primacy, in short, a prerogative of our homeland; so that to continue to fight it unnecessarily is for me a huge mistake, an anti-national work, a blind service to foreign envy. All this can be clearly seen, highly proclaimed even by a man in whom reason has spe cured religious beliefs irreparably. Instead, it is becoming increasingly fashionable to flaunt hatred for religion, Catholicism in particular, for the Church, for the Papacy. And to falsify even its history in the most poisonous, most superficial way. And since the present conditions of European and Italian thought are not such as to provoke such fury, the Church no longer threatens any of our conquests, indeed it has recognised them through the mouths of its political and religious representatives and has taken a purely defensive stance. It seems clear and manifest to me that anti-clericalism is now a buzzword and airwaves, a cold agitation, a certainly damaging hoot. It is indeed worth mentioning, as someone has already done in this paper, the *Idea Nazionale*,

which other groups push towards this affected anticlericalism; but Masonry also contributes to it in no small measure.

The third question is much easier to answer, and I actually see above it that the consensus of responses was full. Naturally, the public exaggerates the power of Freemasonry and the evil use made of it. It exaggerates in two ways: now, by believing that a Freemason always owes to the sect what he may have achieved, either by his own true merit or by his personal ability; now, because it ascribes braindly, absurdly, sometimes, and slanderously, the quality of Freemason to every gentleman who by his merits, or supposed merits, or by the favour of fate, has attained degrees and honours. Indeed, it has become a new way of venting envy or discrediting those in high places, that of persuading oneself or others that such and such is a Freemason. But even with all these faults, we are unfortunately left with a good number of cases in which an immediate or undeserved promotion, a disproportionate appointment, an unworthy rescue, a scandalous favour, is manifestly Masonic. And sometimes the promotion cannot really be said to be undeserved, but there is that tinge of preference to the detriment of competitors who are somewhat more deserving but lacking in any sectarian aid, which preference in the long run with slow selection is regressive, that is, harmful. What is worse is that the preference, whether slight or serious, intangible or scandalous, matters that today's favourite will have to return some favour tomorrow to other sectarians and members just because they are members. One cannot think without error of the magistrate, for example, who is promoted without merit and therefore the smith of new injustices; one cannot fail to

think of the Army or Navy officer who may be confused and fractious in discipline by his sectarian ties. Nor can we overlook the professor who, as an examiner of colleagues or pupils, may be forced by such secret Masonic ties into unfair and unfair judgments, and as an educator, take accustoming the minds of his pupils to partisan thoughts and attitudes. Alas, gentlemen colleagues of all levels of education, be reluctant at least to this last part and think of the damage that sectarianism could cause! [...].

Commemoration of Francesco D'Ovidio

**Letta at the Accademia Pontaniana
at the part-session of 22 November 1931
by member Prof. Emanuele Ciafardini**

I am grateful for the task assigned to me to commemorate Francesco D'Ovidio today.

In truth, my unforgettable master would be worthy of a different word; but the illustrious President may have thought that his spirit, who loved his school and his native land so much, might, however, be pleased that he is remembered here by one who came to his glorious school from his beloved Molise. It is not that I do not feel how arduous it is to revoke before you 'one of the magnificent spirits in the new Italy', as Giovanni Pascoli had to call Francesco D'Ovidio, but my admiration and devotion for the Maestro's work is worth it: a feeling in which I do not believe I am surpassed by many. D'Ovidio's ancestors and father were from Trivento, one of the oldest towns in Molise, on the border of Abruzzo Chietino: just where the winding Trigno begins to divide the two regions and from afar you can glimpse, at the end of a picturesque valley, the blue Adriatic Sea. Trivento, in the last century, did not lack a good patriotic and cultural tradition: Trivento was home to Nazario Colaneri, who in 1820 Molise sent as a deputy to the Neapolitan Parliament, together with Gabriele Pepe, and in the Triventine seminary, where cultured and liberal priests taught, young Molise citizens who later honoured science and culture, such as Amicarelli, Labanca and Antonio Cardarelli, received their first education.

The action in that small study centre was not without effect for the middle-class families of the town, in whom there was always a love of books and freedom, and one of these Triventine families was Pasquale D'Ovidio. He went to study in Campobasso, stayed and started a family there. From him and Francesca Scaroina, from Campobasso, Francesco D'Ovidio was born in Campobasso on 5 December 1849; he was the second last of five children and the second of the sons: the first, Enrico, born in 1843, with a great aptitude for literature but established himself in the scientific disciplines, we still have the pleasure of greeting the Nestor of Italian mathematicians, and the first of our corresponding members: therefore, today, when the Academy commemorates his great younger brother, it is only right that it addresses its thoughts and wishes to him.

D'Ovidio did not find wealth in his family, but only the example of hard work and uprightness: his mother was a woman wholly dedicated to the care of her children; and his father, if he was a man of genius, more artistically inclined than literary, was anything but devoid of classical culture: from him or his son, before Domenico Denicotti, he learned and explained exactly how Latin verse was written in Germany. But D'Ovidio's first real teacher, in Campobasso, was a maternal uncle: Camillo De Luca, who was not too enthusiastic at the time about his pupil, who appeared taciturn and distracted, and who one day told his father, no less, that his Francesco was not born for studies. D'Ovidio described in a few autobiographical pages the anguish of that moment when the stern words reached his ears, but he also said how the teacher, moved by his tears, took him at his word and ended up allowing him to begin, despite the fact that he was only 8 years old, the study of Latin. "I felt reborn",

writes D'Ovidio, 'I cannot tell you the good that I found in the study of Latin: the rapid progress that the spirit did not have, the new vigour that I felt in my brain. Latin was precisely the food of which I had instinctively had the need and craving for'.

At the age of nine, D'Ovidio, following his family moved to Naples, and it was 'en gran cordoglio' for him to leave his native city and it also pained him greatly to leave his uncle De Luca's school. Here at first, as I heard from him, he studied reluctantly: and because of the nostalgia for his mounts and the dislike he felt for the schools he attended and for the effects that the revolution produced in everyone, even in children, if they were especially initiated into patriotic sentiments at home; and in D'Ovidio as a child, the interest in all liberal manifestations was already alive, as can be deduced from some of his memories. On the evening of 8 September 1860, while Garibaldi was resting in the D'Angri palace, the little Molise boy was in Toledo, taking part in that sort of face-to-face demonstration, as he called it: 'he lifted a finger to signify *one* and muttered in return *one Italy*'. With this fever on him there could not be too much of a head for study; but in February 1861, when the *Vittorio Emanuele* Lyceum opened, he abandoned the school he had attended up to then and went to enrol there, in the third gymnasium, and began with great fervour the study of Greek and turned with a new love to that of French. He never left Vittorio Emanuele, until he graduated from high school, and he was infinitely grateful to some of his teachers, such as Denicotti, as he was to others, such as the headmaster Amicarelli and Gaetano Bernardi, when he became a very tender friend, and I recall their figures in high and moving pages. What an exceptional young man D'Ovidio was as a pupil at the Liceo, another

great Master, also a pupil at *Vittorio Emanuele*, said: Girolamo Vitelli. "The grammar of Curtius", wrote Vitelli, "was an admirable revelation for us, in the light of which we reorganised our very empirical knowledge of Greek morphology; or rather, D'Ovidio reorganised it, who then had in me the first and willing disciple, enthusiastic about that clarity and propriety of exposition, which was then the pride, contested by no one, of his teaching, whether at high school or university".

There is no need to say that the young D'Ovidio did not lack praise and awards: I saw one of them in the Maestro's study, which he still jealously preserved: the Fraticellian edition of Dante's works, given to him, not a false hope, when he was a fifth-year pupil in 1863, and I know that in 1866 he participated with complete success in the competition for third-year pupils.

After obtaining his licence in July 1866, D'Ovidio went to Pisa in November of that year to compete for a free position at the Scuola Normale Superiore and was immediately admitted.

There he was joined the following year by Vitelli and there he immediately met, enrolled in the third year, his Pio Rajna.

Rajna tells us about D'Ovidio's entry into the noble gymnasium of Pisa, where young people were then attracted by the names of Comparetti and Ancona: "Francesco D'Ovidio", writes Rajna, "had completed his secondary studies, acquiring there, under the discipline of Domenico Denicotti, educated in Vienna, a classical culture, especially Greek, which was at usual for its confidence and modernity. He therefore brought to Pisa a rich store of learning, but above all he brought with him an intellect that I cannot better define

with the epithet '*luminous*'. Had he not also brought there the consequences (for the eyes in particular) of a too assiduous precocious application, for which one is led to think of Giacomo Leopardi'. And from then on, it seemed to Rajna that the various talents that were to shine so brightly in his friend or brother in studies were clear and distinct. 'In D'Ovidio, a constant admirer of Francesco De Sanctis', writes Rajna, 'and a convinced appreciator of research and patient observation of facts, there was, by natural aptitude and study, a fine blend of ideal visions and positivism, sensitivity and reasoning. Vigorous, as a consequence, was also his critical sense'.

No wonder that it was to D'Ovidio, who had just become a second-year student in 1868, that Comparetti handed over a pamphlet by Böhmer on *De Vulgari eloquentia*, proposing to him to make a critical analysis of it. And the analysis was done and was first met with the full approval of Comparetti and D'Ancona and then the praise of the public who read the work in the *Rivista Bolognese* directed by Fiorentino. Tommaseo then wrote a long letter to D'Ovidio, later published in the "Propugnatore", and the German Romanist agreed with the young man on almost every point where he was contradicted. This was the first step of the critical D'Ovidio, still a university student, and it was a sure and promising one.

He left the school in Pisa in July 1870. He spent a few months in Florence and it was then that he was finally able to meet in person 'the man whom he had so much admired in his writings': Francesco De Sanctis. In December, he was appointed Regent Professor of Greek and Latin at the Galvani University in Bologna, where he had pupils including Severino Ferrari, Cavazza and Luigi Lodi, who wrote so well about his teaching the day after the Master's death and who

was able to read the young professor's soul and see in it, along with a fever for classical literature, a passion for Italian literature.¹⁷⁷ D'Ovidio kept grateful memories of his first teaching, but other sentimental reasons must have tied his stay in Bologna to his memory. In Bologna, D'Ovidio got to know the gentle and cultured young girl, Maria Bertolini, whom God had destined to be his life companion, who was worthy of the Master for the subtlety of her intellect and nobility of sentiment, and who, transformed into a true nun of charity, worked, assisted by her good and intelligent daughters, to ensure that the scientific and literary activities of her great husband would not be interrupted. The gratitude of all scholars cannot and must not fail her, and at this moment the wish that Providence may preserve her for a long time, as vigilant guardian of the Master's memories and writings, because to those who knew and loved Francesco D'Ovidio, it seems that something of him still lives on in the chosen soul and in the words of his worthy companion.

In February 1874, D'Ovidio was promoted to the chair at the Parini University in Milan, the very chair that Pio Rajna had held until then, called to the Scientific-Literary Academy; and there one day his class had an unexpected visit: Ruggiero Bonghi, Minister, entered and attended the lecture. And Bonghi did not lose the pleasant impression of that visit if, as he had to provide for the newly established chairs of Romance philology in Pisa, Rome and Naples, he assigned the young professor from the Liceo Parini first to Rome and then to Naples. Thus, D'Ovidio came to Naples in December 1875 to establish the chair of Neo-Latin languages. He was preceded by a good reputation and the

¹⁷⁷ In an article in 'Il Giornale D'Italia', 27 November 1925.

first lecture confirmed the expectation. I heard from someone who listened to him say that one could immediately see what a broad vision of science and philology the young Romanist had and how his words were those that opened new horizons and sowed fertile seeds. He was the youngest member of the Faculty (he was only twenty-six years old) and found distinguished colleagues there: among others, Francesco de Sanctis, Bertrando Spaventa, Antonio Tari, and the esteem in which he was already held is demonstrated by the words that Tari said to Michele Scherillo in November 1878, referring to D'Ovidio. 'You should follow the courses of a young professor who has recently come here. He teaches Romance Philology and dialectology, new sciences among us. He has a lot of talent, a vast doctrine, a great desire to do well and has already gained a good reputation, even outside Italy'.¹⁷⁸

From the University of Naples, and from the chair he had previously held, D'Ovidio never wanted to detach himself, even though he had received invitations from Rome, first for Dantean Literature, then, on De Gubernatis' death, for Italian Literature. Too many dear memories now bound him to Naples and the Neapolitan school; where, indeed, he also taught other subjects: for two years Italian literature, when Torraca had not yet succeeded at the Zumbini, and for many years Greek and Latin grammar, first, and then Dante's literature; all of which corresponded well with the versatility and richness of the Master's intellect. D'Ovidio held the chair of Neo-Latin for fifty years, that is, until July 1925: only four months later, now in his sixth year, in the midst of

¹⁷⁸ This sentence can be found in 'Rendiconti del Regio Istituto Lombardo di Scienze e lettere', vol. LVIII, fasc. XVI-XX, 1925, p.778.

unspeakable physical pain, with his eyes, alas, already closed for some time, but with his spirit always open to the visions of poetry and always alert to scientific research, Master closed his laborious and honest day, almost reclining his head on the pages of Dante's last volume. Michelangelo Schipa said well over the body of Francesco D'Ovidio: 'God, who created him Maestro, when human law forbade him to teach, wanted to call him to himself'.

Half a century of high university magisterium could not pass by in silence, and the great Master was also comforted, in the last year of his life, by that large movement of adhesions and consensus for his honours that Antonio Sogliano, assisted by a group of illustrious colleagues, instigated with unprecedented ardour. The list of adherents was long and included the highest names from the worlds of school, academia, science, politics, art and criticism. And one should read what words accompanied the adhesions of so many distinguished men. Never were honours paid more legitimately and dutifully, since Francesco D'Ovidio was not only the light and glory of the Neapolitan school for fifty years, he was not only one of the straightest and purest consciences, but he was also one of the sovereign intellects, one of the sharpest and most fertile minds of the last sixty years. To follow the Master's entire oeuvre here is not possible; I will only have to comment on how to look at the stages of his glorious journey and note the main aspects and the informing spirit of his personality.

Francesco D'Ovidio was appointed university professor without a faculty vote and without a competition, and I will not say that there were no competitions then and that, considering what he produced after 1875, the Minister had a happy intuition: what I will say is that in all times, and with

any Minister, D'Ovidio, even and being so young, could not have failed to have the satisfaction that Ruggiero Bonghi gave him. Already the major periodicals of the time, such as the *Rivista Bolognese*, *Il Propugnatore* and the *Rivista di Filologia Classica*, welcomed articles by the new scholar, in which it was clear that he followed the transalpine scientific movement with anything but a slavish attitude: among which, however, I would like to mention a fine examination of Inama's Greek Grammar and Tamagni's continuation of the History of Roman Literature, because in that one could see what knowledge I arga and profound knowledge D'Ovidio already had of Greek and how he discussed linguistic laws and theories, and in this, especially in the preface, he revealed a personal vision of Latin literature and claimed, against foreign claims, its importance and national value. However, D'Ovidio had already published works that seemed to be written not by a young man, but by a critic and philologist consumed in the meditation of problems that were now psychological and now historical and linguistic. It is true that D'Ovidio had also read and studied a great deal in his early youth, but he would not have gleaned such excellent results from such intense application without an uncommon ingenuity, a singular penetration, and a truly rare assimilating capacity. In his early twenties, D'Ovidio published *Il carattere, gli amori e le sventure di Torquato Tasso* (*The character, loves and misfortunes of Torquato Tasso*), and there is no even mediocely educated person who has not read or heard this essay recalled. In it, one can sense the brilliant critic, who, through the works and the environment, thoroughly scrutinises the poet's soul and reconstructs his inner life. Perhaps at some points the analysis is slightly excessive and D'Ovidio himself acknowledges this in a note,

which came out posthumously, but the essay remained fundamental in later studies. In an article in April 1895, Benedetto Croce, speaking of Solerti's taxonomic work, emphasised how he did not believe he 'had to change in anything the conclusions already expressed in D'Ovidio's essay acutissimo'. And Donadoni, who wrote on the author of *Gerusalemme* fifty years later, judged D'Ovidio's ancient essay: "one of the richest writings of psychological penetration that have appeared on Tasso".

At the time, D'Ovidio had already published *Lingua e Dialetto*, with which essay he entered the debate following Manzoni's famous report as a Master. The paper is not a simple act of faith in Manzoni, nor is it only the germ of broader later studies, but it is a lucid and valuable clarification of the intriguing problem, which is thus placed in its proper terms, with a clear distinction between the historical and the practical question, and D'Ovidio showed a preparation well suited to the importance of the subject, and throughout the work he gave a luminous example of that combination of the finest qualities of philologist and critic that was then the characteristic of his mind. But even if D'Ovidio had produced nothing else, his studies on the *De Vulgari Eloquentia* and on the origin of the unique inflectional form of the Italian name would have been sufficient to merit him a professorship.

With the first essay, D'Ovidio created, almost, in Italy, the exegesis of Dante's treatise in relation to modern philology and the question of language, giving it a broad scope and opening up new horizons. Manzoni, in a letter to Bonghi, had alluded to the *De Vulgari Eloquentia* and noted its fate of being "quoted by many and read by almost no one" and perhaps this too should have encouraged D'Ovidio to study

Dante's treatise in full. The occasion, we have said, came to him from Böhmer's pamphlet, and two articles that he wrote around it became the nucleus of the masterful work that appeared in Ascoli's "Archivio Glottologico". D'Ovidio shed light where there was darkness and confusion, greatly facilitated the understanding of the not a few questions that are hidden in the *Trattato*, and did not only stop at the informing ideas of the two books, which he showed in all their fullness, but also descended to particular discussions, thus making his contribution to the criticism and examination of the text. And in all or brought such felicity of insight and equilibrium of judgement and certainty of doctrine; such knowledge of Latin and neo-Latin, of medieval and Romance poetry and of the fate of the treatise through the centuries and the history of the question of language closely connected with the exegesis of the treatise, that he had to change almost nothing of his thought in the two subsequent reprints of the work: one in 1878, the other in 1910, when Rajna's masterly studies on Dante's book had already come out. In the intelligence of which D'Ovidio's work even today, some sixty years later, remains fundamental. Pio Rajna himself, alluding to the latest reprint of D'Ovidio's work, wrote: "time had not offended him".

D'Ovidio's second study, published in the *Annals of the Pisan School* in 1872, immediately attracted the attention of scholars on both sides of the Alps, as is usual for the work not of a young, albeit exceptional, scholar, but of an accomplished scholar. It was a question of challenging a theory supported by Federico Diez and reigning supreme in the field of Neo-Latin philology. D'Ovidio, strong in his knowledge of classical and Romance linguistics, and guided by a lively sense of historical penetration of the question, succeeded in his investigation to

the thesis that it is not possible that the only form of the Italian noun, for each case of the singular of the plural, goes back to the Latin accusative alone.

It seemed a test of audacity, but D'Ovidio, in his otherwise respectful criticism of a master like Diez, was not driven by that sentiment that sometimes leads young people to assault the great: the eagerness, that is, to make some noise about themselves and thus begin to take their first steps towards easy glory without too much effort. An ardent admirer of German culture in every period of his life, D'Ovidio never felt, neither young nor old, enslaved to any feeling other than the uninvolved and pure feeling of truth. His thesis initially found resistance among philologists of great authority, such as Tobler, Mussafia, and Flechia, but all admired the young author's wit and doctrine.

Flechia, in fact, wrote: "We recognise that D'Ovidio has given good proof of that historical criterion of languages that unfortunately in Italy is still a very rare gift even among those who are professors of literature and philology, and we are therefore pleased that linguistics will have in this eminent professor a talented scholar who, with his wit and writings, will certainly be of great help in promoting this type of study in our country". But despite the objections of such distinguished scholars, it was not long before the prince of Italian philologists of the time joined in, and a long article by Graziadio Ascoli was a fine confirmation of Dovidian research. Of that article, here, more than anything else, the principle comes in handy today. D'Ovidio belongs, wrote Ascoli, to that select band of Neapolitans who, admirably uniting and combining the ready and lively perspicacity of the man from the Mezzodì with the stubbornly acute penetration of the northerner, symbolise the true and

beautiful unity of the future Italy in thought and style. Young too, he has now far surpassed, in terms of abundance and refinement of studies, the already very happy conditions in which he appeared to us with the witty first that is now remembered here. In the meantime, it has been worthy of the critics' insistence and has been represented by the most valiant champions.

But the debate did not end with Ascoli's writing; and from D'Ovidio and Ascoli came Clemente Merlo, first in his *Studi Romanzi*, (Vol. VI, p. 693), then in Rajna's *Miscellanea* (1911). D'Ovidio then addressed a long letter to his friend in which, among other things, he said: 'About the conclusion I confess I cannot agree. If Ascoli were still among us, I believe he would have something to say in reply; in any case, I have something to say in reply, and although I am very willing to make any adjustments to my youthful theory, I cannot see without dismay this too cheerful return to the theory of the accusative. It is also necessary that one day or another I resolve to reprint my old thesis and make a critique of my excesses and the excesses of others in the opposite sense... You have done us a great service in making a clear and strong demonstration of a fact in Central-Southern dialects that Flechia was the first to object to me, moving from Sardinian alone, but I, recognising this wholeheartedly, must oppose any extreme interpretation that you want to give of that fact: oppose it not out of obstinacy but for the sake of truth'.

D'Ovidio's declaration to hold to the ancient thesis is of great value and must leave philologists who do not follow him thoughtful, since he was not one of those who shy away from bowing before the truth when it is demonstrated by others. Today, yes, it seems that Diez's theory has many followers, but I do not wish to conceal the fact that Pio Rajna, after

D'Ovidio's death, expressed regret that his great friend had not revived his ancient memory. It would have been, writes Rajna, still very opportune, since the dissent around this capital point persists, and appearances, in my opinion fallacious, continue to veil from the eyes of most what seems to me to be substantially the truth. Now I know that Rajna's desire will soon become a reality, since the school in Pisa, which considers it one of its finest glories to have had Francesco D'Ovidio as a pupil, under the auspices of Giovanni Gentile and the care of Clemente Merlo, considers it an honour to reprint this ancient work. This will also be a fine tribute to the genius of the young Francesco D'Ovidio.

He then took up his university professorship with such auspicious auspices and amidst the acclaim of the philologists, and continued to work with ever new ardour, competing fraternally with the other Romanists and emerging for richness of doctrine, breadth of outlook, and a secure historical knowledge of the classical Romance languages and especially of Italian and the Gallic and Iberian languages, a mastery of the history of Italian dialects, an exquisite ability to go back to the origins of the word, to follow it through the centuries on the lips of speakers and in the work of writers, to see the action of those and those in relation to the environment, tastes, traditions, literature and of the word to grasp the slightest nuances and the most distant spiritual resonances. And in this above all, Francesco D'Ovidio distinguishes himself from the other philologists of his age. You may find, yes, those who possess modern languages more than him, or who have read codices more than him, or researched in libraries, or published or illustrated texts: those who have looked outside the classical world proper or the novel world more than him; but there is no one

who has shown a nobler, more aristocratic concept of philology, no one who has been able to benefit more from factual data, no one who has possessed the historical sense of language better than him and has given philology a broader content. Because for D'Ovidio, it is not only the study of the word in and of itself, detached from the spirit of the environment and literature, but philology is the study of the word through history in a very broad sense that includes all manifestations of the spirit. In D'Ovidio's philology, the word is seen to be born, developed, enriched in content, illuminated by the light of poetry. And so much richness, so much sense of art without the slightest offence to what are the fundamental laws of philological disciplines: the ascertainment of facts and circumspection in deducing, the consequences. I am reminded of a sentence that Isidoro Del Lungo wrote to D'Ovidio when he had elected his volume on *Versificazione*. In thanking him for the gift, he said: 'But who can stand before you in Italy with this fine and learned philology of yours? And I would also like to recall the words with which Ezio Levi recalled Francesco D'Ovidio here, in Naples, as he ascended the chair that he had founded: "A tenacious walker along the roads of history, a sturdy climber of the most rugged spiritual peaks, D'Ovidio loved the expanses of landscape that offer the labours of those who walk and ascend. In his school and in his works he knew how to transfuse the sense of those expanses and make the light of vast horizons shine".¹⁷⁹

It is not possible here to retrace, with the supreme Master, the path he took in the field of science, and I can only hint at it.

¹⁷⁹ Ezio Levi, *L'unità del mondo latino*, Publications of the Cristoforo Colombo Institute, Treves Brothers, Rome, p. 16.

D'Ovidio's philological investigation goes from the ancient to the modern and leads us into the Greek world and the Latin world, between the ancient Italic dialects and the Romance field. The knowledge of Greek in him not only reveals itself continuously in many works of Romance philology, but sometimes leads him to particular investigations; and here he reasoned about a place of Plato, adduced as proof of the antiquity of Ithacism, and dwells at length on translations from Thyreotius, from Hesiod, from Aristophanes and discusses at length foreign works of Greek linguistics. And since a true Romanist must also be a Latinist, D'Ovidio often dedicated his labours to Latin language and literature, and here is an article, which is a true study on Quintilian by Zambaldi, and another on a very ancient Latin inscription, here is an essay on verbal criticism of classical texts with a Plautin note, and then the studies on Cicero's homeland with an essay on the translation of *De Legibus*, which is a real gem, and the study on the quantity by nature of Latin vowels in position, which remedied, writes Rajna, a serious defect in *dieziana* phonetics, here is the commentary on Ovid's *Metamorfosi*, with the beautiful preface that is all a critical essay on the spirit and value of the Sulmonese poem, a commentary that Vitelli says is "one of the few, if not the only one, that can be proposed as a model in all or in all responsive to the design that is sketched with a master's hand in the preface".¹⁸⁰

From the breadth and depth of his classical doctrine, D'Ovidio is also driven to the study of the ancient Italic dialects, and he focuses his attention on the Oscan table of

¹⁸⁰ In the new anthology of 16 March 1926. See also what Sogliano happily said about this commentary in his *Francesco D'Ovidio, filologo classico*. Monge Monzese Leon, year III, fasc. 1926. P. 43.

Agnone, and in an article entitled *Italica* he discusses consonantal groups of Umbro, Osco, and in a long memoir, dedicated to Schucardt, he discusses the probable or possible relics of ancient Italic dialects in modern Italian dialects and in Romance idioms in general, and in the *Miscellanea De Petra* he offers a note on an Oscan grammatical relic in the Neo-Latin vernacular of modern Sannio.

With this broad and firm classical foundation, it is easy to understand how and why D'Ovidio has emerged so much in the field of Romance philology. Numerous works, sure results. The dovidian studies on the *Contrasto di Cielo* [D'Alcamo] and on the *Ritmo cassinese* are among the best things we have on the language and poetry of the thirteenth century and are the fullest illustrations of those two ancient monuments of our literature; the research on the personal possessive pronouns, neo-Latin, one of the many dovidian works that appeared in Ascoli's "Archive", constitutes a magnificent chapter of historical grammar, where he looks with absolute mastery at the vast Romance territory; a fine essay on dialectology is the study on the phonetics of the Campobasso dialect, and of great interest are the *Spigolature romanze sulle pagine di un latinista* (*Romance gleanings on the pages of a Latinist*), which confirm D'Ovidio's great classical knowledge, placed at the service of Romance philology. To which the Master also benefited greatly with Portuguese grammar, with the admirable study on Italian vocalism, published in Gustav Gröber's *Grundriss der Romanischen Philologie* (1888)¹⁸¹ and with countless other studies: where, alongside the philologist, one always admires

¹⁸¹ This is one of the monuments of German philology applied to classical and Romance languages that owed much to D'Ovidio.

the writer, the man of taste, with his limpid wit and witty speech: studies that are always conclusive and can also serve as a model of method, such as, to quote one, the one on the word *talent*, which is a polite polemic with Ascoli. In truth, there is no philologist who can compete with D'Ovidio in this, that is, in being able to make the most abstruse and arid things clear and attractive, and even his writings on the *zeta* and its history in Italian poetry are attractive. As are all of Dovidi's studies on versification, which constitute another great merit of D'Ovidio as a philologist, and for the results in themselves and for the impetus that he gave to scholars in those works, as in all of them.

From the oldest of them, which is dated 1889 (*Dieresi e sineresi nella poesia italiana*) to the last, that on the oldest French versification, which is dated 1920, it is all a wealth of contribution and a certainty and precision of results, a marvellous example of a beautiful fusion of philological and literary qualities. Dovidi's history of Italian metres, up to the versification of the *Odi barbare* (Carducci, having read D'Ovidio's article, wrote to him "You are always right") is also a history of taste and style, it is the history of poetry and one can feel the breath of a broad-minded philologist. Which wide-eyedness can also be felt in other works by the supreme philologist. I cannot be silent about the essay *Determinismo e Linguistica*. Zingarelli says it has an eloquence and conciseness of reasoning that enchants and makes one believe one is before a professional philosopher.¹⁸²

And in fact *Determinismo e Linguistica*, which dates back to 1892 but retains all its importance today, is a fine example of philosophical penetration, of a clear vision of research into

¹⁸² In *Studi danteschi* directed by Barbi, Vol. XII, page 109.

language, of an aptitude for the rapid reconstruction of methods and systems, an example of limpidity down to the highest concepts. By the time D'Ovidio wrote this essay, he had already, for years, nurtured his spirit of philological science in the broadest meaning of the word and had also given proof of this with the translation enriched with beautiful notes of Whitney's classic book, *La vita e lo sviluppo del linguaggio* (Trad. Fratelli Dumolard, Milan 1876). In *Determinismo e Linguistica* D'Ovidio says that he wants to give an essay "of the intimate bond that ties philosophical speculation also with a discipline that has risen to the dignity of science in our century" but, in reality, he deals with the more complex problems of the science of language.

And what D'Ovidio's concept of philosophy was says some of the introductory passages of this essay, and it does no harm to read some of them. "If the researchers devoted only to the minutiae presume to proceed on their own account and deny that inspiration has come to them from higher spheres, it is because they have learned second-hand the method they possess, and are unaware that scientists of greater stature have looked farther and higher, have more or less consciously attended to the connections of their particular studies with the knowledge of the universe; have, in short, philosophised, participating from time to time, as hard-working disciples or as authoritative teachers, in the work of those more properly called philosophers. If, disgusted by any of the necessary aberrations of the syntheses and the sanctimony of vulgar philosophers, any scientist can have moments of superb annoyance; if, mindful perhaps of Heine's joke that called the words of love "monetized air", he may be tempted to say that even speculative reasoning is

nothing but syllogised air, immediately he thinks again, he will have to agree that it is also the air we all breathe. And is this the anti-philosophical spirit that one wanted to see in D'Ovidio? If, then, with all seriousness, he also deals with similar things and teaches us, for example, whether we should say *micròbio* or *mìcrobo*, *tunnel* or *traforo* we must not forget that his philology is not here, that, in any case, of very small things is formed that marvel that is called language, that even the great ones, from Dante to Manzoni, dealt with these small things, and that finally in D'Ovidio, love for language was a cult that honoured him and to which Italy is indebted for another of his admirable volumes: *Le correzioni ai promessi sposi e la questione della lingua*. Croce cited the beautiful analysis that D'Ovidio had made of the language of Manzoni's masterpiece as an example of what philological study can do "if it takes into consideration the physiognomy of the language used in a given work, contributing to the exposition, evaluation and history of the work of which the language is one of the elements".¹⁸³

And in facts, D'Ovidio with the volume of *Correzioni* conquered a first-class place in the history of the Italian language and helped more than Ascoli to resolve the issue. Goidanich wrote, in a note on the language question: "Anyone who considers the literary phase outlined here with serenity and without unjust oblivion, will necessarily have to agree that D'Ovidio closed, as a historian of the language and a critical artist, the controversy raised by Manzoni, not Ascoli".¹⁸⁴

But D'Ovidio, o colleagues, is not all that. A Master of philology, he was also a powerfully critical genius, and to

¹⁸³ Benedetto Croce. *La critica letteraria*, Loescher, Rome, 1895, p. 41

¹⁸⁴ In the Italian Glottological Archives, vol. XVII, Rome 1910, p. 20.

literary criticism he dedicated much of his activity, though not forced into it, as we have said, by extrinsic and painful circumstances of life. Zingarelli opportunely noted this against those who claimed that D'Ovidio's serious eye disease in the autumn of 1884 had turned him 'to studies other than those from which, being very well prepared, he hoped for great results'.¹⁸⁵ I am not saying that this illness did not have repercussions on the scholar's life, but it is certain that even before 1884 the D'Ovidio critic coexisted with the D'Ovidio philologist, even before his vocation had revealed itself. And if, looking at the Master's activity, we see that after that year his essays on literary criticism are numerous, we also see that no less numerous are his strictly philological works, and it would suffice to recall that the mighty volume on *Versificazione italiana* dates back to 1910, the study on the *Ritmo cassinese* is later, and the one on the metres of ancient French poems is even from the last and most painful years of his life. The competent know well that those works are not written without patient and minute investigations, and it almost seems that D'Ovidio, with a singularly heroic effort of will, was able to overcome physical infirmity. On the other hand, the volume of critical essays is from 1878, and it does not take much to recognise that there is more of the critic than the philologist, and the critic with a full and confident agenda and awareness. Guerrazzi, who spoke of that volume in the *Corriere della Sera*, entitled his review: *Un nuovo critico* (*A New Critic*), and emphasised the novelty, certainty and excellence of Dovidian method. Although D'Ovidio had not been to the school of De Sanctis, his spirit had been well nourished by his admirable pages, which, however, had not

¹⁸⁵ Francesco D'Ovidio, *Il secolo XX*, April 1926.

remained indifferent to the method of his Maestro Alessandro d'Ancona; and he beat a path of his own. On the strength of his philological and classical doctrine, guided by a singular acumen, illuminated by a very fine sense of art, he arrived at a criticism in which the visions of aesthetic criticism and the demands and precision of historical, positive criticism entered, albeit with a slight accentuation of the analysis at times. In the 1878 volume, the Master wrote: 'It seems to me that the usual antinomy between northern erudition and southern perspicacity still persists. And reading the serious works of Guasti, Bartoli, d'Ancona, and Rajna, I think with desire of the flashes (that reveal such broad horizons) that flash from the witty mind of De Sanctis, of this Vico of criticism, and reading the latter's nonchalant essays, I think with no less desire of the solid and full doctrine of those others'. But when faced with dovidiani's essays, it was said that the antithesis no longer existed, and it was rightly affirmed that precisely with D'Ovidio, 'that happy agreement of full and solid doctrine and brilliant meditation, of good logical sense, of good artistic taste, of historical criticism, in short, and of aesthetic criticism' had now been reached. D'Ovidio had and implemented a new and precise programme of literary criticism, and not in antithesis to De Sanctis, but integrating and completing it. Rules, norms of criticism are in many places in the *Saggi* of 1878, for example, in the essay on Zumbini, where De Sanctis' method is discussed at length by him. D'Ovidio, it is true, did not give us a book of theory, but the fact that he had an understanding of aesthetics, that he had meditated on the various critical methods, and had assimilated what suited his spirit and what seemed to him to respond to the new times and the real needs of literary criticism is stated in many of his pages, and even

Croce, in the cited volume on page 21, noted how even in the writings of D'Ovidio, on the subject of method, there were "many valuable observations" as in those of De Sanctis and Carducci. However, the dovidian ideal of 'whole and perfect' criticism is in the preface to the *Saggi critici*. That preface, where the whole of the new criticism is to be found, made a great impression, and was recalled several times in Francesco Fiorentino's *Napoletano* newspaper. He immediately quoted many passages from it to give an idea of the new programme of D'Ovidio, Antonio Salandra, who had recently come out of the school of De Sanctis [p. 18].

[P. 22] In the D'Ovidio Dantean there is a profound thought, a full and sure possession of classical literature a happy mastery of language, a rare aptitude for great syntheses as well as for minute analyses, and an ever-living sensitivity to the beauty of poetry, so that we can say that he created a method that has taken Dante's criticism a very long way, understood in the highest sense, and his work could only be said to be surpassed or surmountable by hasty reasoning and moved by a partial vision of criticism or by preconceptions. We can always discuss this or that intuition of D'Ovidio's, we can even disagree with him, but we cannot deny, without offending the most elementary sense of justice, that his work is those that remain. His five mighty volumes on Dante are so rich in doctrine, acumen, reveal such genius, such finesse of taste and aristocracy of thought and method and freshness and vivacity and decorum of writer that they represent a true monument. When I consider the complex Dantesque work of Francesco D'Ovidio, I think back to the words that his Manzoni wrote for Ludovico Antonio Muratori: "he resolved so many questions, posed so many more, evicted so many useless and foolish ones and made

way for so many others that his name, like his blankets, can be found and must be found at every step of the later writings that deal with that subject". [...].

The highest praise, the finest recognition of the rare didactic qualities of Francesco D'Ovidio is the living memory left in the disciples who felt and still feel the nostalgia for his word, is the great number of them, with their labours not spent in vain on behalf of science and the school: from the oldest, most esteemed teachers, now in their turn, to the youngest.

Many, unfortunately, are no more, but their work honoured themselves and D'Ovidio. And at this moment my heartfelt thoughts turn to the figure of Francesco Colagrosso, who first spoke to me of the greatness of Francesco D'Ovidio and who was a professor at this University of Italian Stylistics. A scholar of fine intellect and broad culture, open to the currents of modern thought, he did not have the smiles of fortune, but he well defended and demonstrated the contrasting autonomy of that discipline to which he ultimately dedicated long and noble labours. To his memory, in the commemoration of Francesco D'Ovidio, go my reverent and grateful greetings.

I would like to repeat at least some of the names of his students, some more, some less fortunate, such as Francesco Colagrosso, Enrico Cocchia, Michele Scherillo, Erasmo Percopo and Paolo Fossataro because it is my duty. In this line-up are dozens of scholars who now form the backbone of Italianism, of Romance philology, of the glory of our language and literature! And all of them were trained and led to the enthusiasm of their mission by that great Master, with the 'M uppercase' that was Francesco D'Ovidio; they all, as I said, take pride in having been his disciples, and not just because he demonstrated the ability to move confidently

even in fields he did not usually tread (for example, his speech on the centenary of Molise is a magnificent reconstruction of the entire history of that region), or because his words and writings were, for them, sometimes suggestive, but because they all acquired from him the method of investigation of criticism and science. The Master's vivid light shines in his school, where more or less, it is true, but all of D'Ovidio's disciples, as of the Neapolitan school in general, are distinguished by seriousness and honesty in their research, by restraint in their judgements, and, above all, they flee without stifling their individuality from all forms of ridiculous audacity and irreverent impudence. They can always look up to their Master, who, if he was a convinced advocate of his ideas and a vigorous polemicist to old age, never disrespected his adversary, whom he always treated chivalrously, great or small. And the disciples not only admired Francesco D'Ovidio's wit, but also the height of feeling. With the Master came the honest citizen, the pure patriot, the man with a soul ready to be moved by every manifestation of social and national life. He was an exemplary husband and father, he loved his Campobasso with the tenderness of a son, he dealt with school problems throughout his life and contributed in many ways to the dissemination of culture: with conferences, pamphlets and newspaper articles. But he did not remain closed within the circle of his studies, and politics interested him keenly.

He was never a politician in the common sense of the word, and never accepted a parliamentary candidacy, which his native Molise offered him. He once said that he was a contemplative in politics, but in reality he was an acute, serene scrutiniser of national problems, oblivious of success,

always guided by a great love for Italy and the dynasty, and any national event always had a vivid echo in his soul. The outbreak of the European guerra moved him, left him somewhat perplexed at first, and he revealed his perplexity in a famous speech at Termoli, but then he adhered to it, stating his reasons. However, at the bottom of his perplexity there was no harmful ideology, and that Francesco D'Ovidio knew how to reconcile the highest humanitarian ideas with the most jealous sense of national pride speaks well of the fervour that, in times not unknown, he brought to honouring the memory of a heroic soldier of our lineage, and in a square in Campobasso a statue of Gabriele Pepe was erected, which, having come out of the safe hands of Francesco Jerace, still seems to threaten his wrath at foreign offender of Italy. Firm in his pure patriotism, Francesco D'Ovidio was also firm and constant in his political principles. He saw many heads turning around him, he said in 1915, but he kept faith with liberalism throughout his life: with the liberalism of Camillo Cavour and the glorious Right. However, Francesco D'Ovidio's liberalism was of such purity and uprightness, it had such a rich moral and national content, that even the proudest of Italians can always confidently take warning and inspiration from it.

Some of his votes in the Senate and many of his members are the best proof of this. He was a liberal, but he wanted Italy free of sects, and what he thought of Freemasonry can be seen in the long and clear answers given to *L'Idea Nazionale* on 13 October 1913 (see the article transcribed in the Appendix of this volume); Francesco D'Ovidio wanted strong government and nothing, in his later years, afflicted him more than frequent changes of ministry, he wanted the moral elevation of the people, but when the Senate debated

the universal suffrage law, which he believed was detrimental to the salvation of the State, he voted against it: and his *no* stemmed from deep convictions. Years earlier he had written: 'The sovereignty of the people is an empty word of doctrinaires, no less than the much-vaunted divine right of kings'. And again: 'Knowledge and virtue have the sole right to rule the world and every authority has the first obligation to promote the selection of the best, to prevent regressive selection'. And this he said, while others who had precise responsibilities were perhaps only preparing to patronise the masses for contingent selfish reasons.

Francesco D'Ovidio was a liberal, but of those who were disgusted by the anti-religious fight that liberalism, deviating from its true doctrine, sometimes made in the land of the Pontiff. Nor was he indifferent to the religious problem. His thought can be summarised in the full harmony between State and Church, in the recognition of the great value of religion, in the exaltation, as national glory, of the Roman Pontificate. I do not know what he would have said before the Lateran Pact, but it is certain that he longed for conciliation and he saw the light that comes from being the seat of the Catholic religion well reflected on our homeland. He once wrote: 'what remains of true greatness to Italy? Two things: its artistic heritage and its universal religion'.¹⁸⁶

But D'Ovidio also felt religion as something more than a national light or an instrument of political cohesion; and now expressions come to mind from the Master's lips that would reveal a new aspect of him, but I leave them, at least for now, in the secret of my mind. However, there are judgements that everyone can read, which show what effect the religion of his

¹⁸⁶ 13 October 1913, now in *Rimpianti*, vol. II, Caserta 1930, p. 444.

fathers, the faith of Dante and Manzoni had on his noble spirit. I read in a page of *Rimpianti*: 'the man of heart cannot forget that neither science nor the efforts of the State can soothe certain misfortunes and certain sorrows, nor substitute the comforts and hopes of religion, where human forces can do nothing'. And elsewhere: 'Happy certainly is that people in whom the disagreement between science and faith may be imperceptible, and in the practical order between Church and State full concord; happy the individual who may not experience the anguished struggle between the intellect that denies and the heart that believes'.¹⁸⁷

Here there is not the full harmony between Science and Faith, but there is something that is also of great spiritual value, there is the aspiration for that harmony, there is the fascination of faith.

And this says c that Francesco D'Ovidio was not only a Master, a critic, a scholar, a philologist, a writer, but his entire intellectual life was integrated and warmed by a profound and very noble sense of humanity.

Dedicating an academic note to Angelo Camillo De Meis, he wrote two verses from a song by Petrarca. Today, as I have seen the figure of my Master rise up before me, in all its spiritual height, those two verses come back to my mind and I address them to him, as if in homage:

*Anima che di nostra umanitate,
Vestita vai, non come l'altre carca*

22 November 1931 Emanuele Ciafardini

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

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