

Chapter 2

Negotiation: The Wedding in Naples

On 1 November 1472, at the *Castelnuovo* in Naples, the contract for the marriage *per verba de presenti* of Eleonora d'Aragona and Ercole d'Este was signed on their behalf by Ferrante and Ugolotto Facino.¹ The bride and groom's agreement to the marriage had already been received by the bishop of Aversa, Ferrante's chaplain, Pietro Brusca, and discussions had also begun to determine the size of the bride's dowry and the provisions for her new household in Ferrara, although these arrangements would only be finalised when Ercole's brother, Sigismondo, arrived in Naples for the proxy marriage on 16 May 1473.

In this chapter I will use a collection of diplomatic documents in the Estense archive in Modena to follow the progress of the marriage negotiations in Naples, from the arrival of Facino in August 1472 with a mandate from Ercole to arrange a marriage with Eleonora, until the moment when Sigismondo d'Este slipped his brother's ring onto the bride's finger. Among these documents are Facino's reports of his tortuous dealings with Ferrante's team of negotiators and the acrimonious letters in which Diomede Carafa, acting on Ferrante's behalf, demanded certain minimum standards for Eleonora's household in Ferrara. It is an added bonus that these letters, together with a small collection of what may only loosely be referred to as love letters from Ercole to his bride, give occasional glimpses of Eleonora as a real person, by no means a

¹ A marriage *per verba de presenti* implied that the couple were actually man and wife from that time on. Eleonora could therefore be correctly addressed as Ercole's wife and as the duchess of Ferrara after 1 November 1472. For the texts of marriage documents of 1 November 1472; see Olivi, 49–55.

voiceless pawn in a dynastic marriage, but rather a warm and articulate young woman, resilient and good humoured, who will be missed when she leaves her father's court. As the weeks of their betrothal stretched into months, it also became clear that the couple were looking forward to their union with great anticipation and not a little impatience. Eleonora had been waiting a long time for her future to be settled and Ercole was in urgent need of a male heir to confirm his position in Ferrara.

While Ercole's protestations of love and yearning remained stylized and formal in his first letters to Eleonora, in those which her brothers, Alfonso and Federico, wrote to their sister before her departure from Naples, there are suggestions of the close, affectionate relationship which Ferrante's three eldest children had shared. Indeed, the image of Eleonora that emerges during the months of her betrothal is remarkably similar to that described by the young Sforza dukes on the eve of her earlier marriage some seven years before. Facino's observations of the young princess's warmth and enthusiasm appear in his reports to Ercole, while Teofilo Calcagnini's appreciation of Eleonora's charms inspire him "ralegrare et consolare jubilare et festegiare Vostra Celsitudine de cussi facta dea et de tanto excellentissimo acquisto" [to cheer and delight, rejoice and celebrate the fact that Your Excellency has such a goddess and such an excellent acquisition].² While the observations of a loyal courtier should not be accepted uncritically, his sentiments appear to have been shared by members of Eleonora's family and her friends, none of whom relished her imminent departure.

The Alliance with Ferrara

The signing of the marriage contract little more than two weeks after the annulment of the Eleonora's first marriage signalled Ferrante's determination to use all his children to

² ASMo, Cancelleria ducale, Estero, Ambasciatori, agenti, corrispondenti estensi, Naples, busta 1, letter from Teofilo Calcagnini to Ercole d'Este, Naples, 17? May 1473.

good political effect.³ That he chose Ercole d'Este, the recently-elected duke of Ferrara, as Eleonora's life partner was in no small way influenced by the strategic location of Ercole's small state, sharing borders with Venice and Milan to the north, and Florence and the principalities of the Romagna to the south.

While Ferrante's relationship with Milan had been troubled since the death of Francesco Sforza in 1466, his ties with Venice were of a more complex nature. Ilardi describes the separate alliances entered into by all the Italian states between January 1467 and December 1470, when, somewhat paradoxically, Sforza's *Lega generale* was re-confirmed for a further twenty-five years.⁴ That agreement had however failed to give sufficient guarantees to either Naples or Venice, both of whom were faced with further Turkish successes in the East. In January 1471, they contracted a strictly defensive alliance for a period of fifteen years, although Jacoviello suggests that his alliance with Venice was for Ferrante "un opportuno antidoto agli intrighi sforzeschi" [a timely antidote to Sforza intrigues], especially in Catalonia and Burgundy, rather than an answer to the Turkish menace.⁵ Ilardi agrees with this assessment, describing the meeting between Ferrante and the new Venetian ambassador, Zaccaria Barbaro, in November 1471, when the king made no secret of his growing feud with Galeazzo Sforza, while to Ercole's ambassador, Giacomo Trotti, Ferrante described the duke of Milan as "suo capital inimico" [his capital enemy], and that "era inimico di tuti quelli a cui el Ducha de Milano volea bene" [he considered as enemies all of the duke's friends].⁶

Although the alliance between Naples and Venice lasted until November 1473,

³ Eleonora's brother, Federico, would set out for France in October 1474 to seek the hand of the daughter of Charles, duke of Burgundy, while her sister, Beatrice, was betrothed to Matthias Corvinus, king of Hungary, in June 1475; see Notar Giacomo, 128–30.

⁴ Ilardi, "Towards the *Tragedia d'Italia*," 97–100.

⁵ Michele Jacoviello, *Venezia e Napoli nel Quattrocento: rapporti fra i due Stati ed altri saggi* (Naples: Liguori Editore, 1992), 56.

⁶ Ilardi, "Towards the *Tragedia d'Italia*," 106–07.

it was already showing signs of strain when the marriage alliance with Ferrara was contracted. While the cause for their final break was ostensibly Ferrante's attempt to claim for his eleven-year-old natural son, Alfonso, the island of Cyprus, considered by Venice as part of her own domain, Pontieri suggests that it was Ferrante's new sense of "suo prestigio in Italia e fuori" [his prestige within Italy and beyond], which ultimately drove the king to seek alliances and marriages with states who also opposed the power of Venice.⁷

The Ferrarese Connection

Ercole d'Este was born in 1431, the first of two sons from the marriage of Niccolò III d'Este, marquis of Ferrara, and his third wife, Ricciarda da Saluzzo. Although, as Niccolò's eldest legitimate male heir, Ercole should by rights have inherited his father's title, Niccolò had nominated his natural son by Stella dei Tolomei, Leonello (born 1407), as his successor.⁸ When Niccolò died in November 1441 at the age of fifty-eight, Ricciarda remained with her two sons at Leonello's court until 1443, when she returned to Saluzzo, taking her personal possessions, but leaving her two sons in Leonello's care. In 1435, Leonello had married Margherita Gonzaga, sister of the marquis of Mantua, the union producing one son, Ercole's future opponent, Niccolò di Leonello. Leonello's second marriage in 1444 to Maria d'Aragona, the natural daughter of Alfonso I of Naples, while it produced no children, laid the foundations for the relationship between Ferrara and Naples that would culminate in the marriage of Ercole and Eleonora some thirty years later.⁹

In Spring 1444, Borso d'Este had visited Naples to act as proxy for his brother,

⁷ Pontieri 1963, 130 and 133; Ilardi, "Towards the *Tragedia d'Italia*," 116.

⁸ Also known as Stella dell'Assassino; see Chiappini, *Gli estensi*, 734.

⁹ For a description of the marriage celebrations of Maria d'Aragona and Leonello d'Este; see *Diario ferrarese*, 27–28.

Leonello, in his marriage to Maria d’Aragona and to escort her to Ferrara. While in Naples, Borso had gathered information on conditions in the kingdom, including details of both the distribution of offices and the state’s finances, and also prepared a topographical description of the city.¹⁰ In October of the same year, Borso had returned to Naples, this time at the invitation of Alfonso, remaining there until the following April. During that time, he gave advice to the king on both the organization of the *Regno* and the implementation of a foreign policy which would enable Alfonso to be “Re de Italia in curto tempo” [king of all Italy in a short time], a reference to the king’s current designs on the duchy of Milan. The resulting *Memoriale*, addressed to Alfonso by Borso on behalf of his brother, Leonello, contained recommendations on all aspects of the internal organisation of the *Regno*, including tight fiscal controls and the creation of a standing army of Italian *gente d’arme*, “le quale hozidì sum le fiore dele gente d’arme” [because today they are the flower of soldiers].¹¹

Leonello’s marriage to Maria d’Aragona and Borso’s subsequent return visit to Naples were doubtless the inspiration for Leonello’s decision to send his young half-brothers, Ercole and Sigismondo, aged fourteen and twelve respectively, to the Aragonese court in 1445. They remained in Naples for fifteen years, ostensibly to learn the arts of war, but clearly to remove any possibility that they might challenge Leonello’s legitimacy to rule.¹² In 1452, two years after Leonello’s death at the age

¹⁰ Cesare Foucard, “Descrizione della città di Napoli e statistica del Regno 1444,” *Archivio storico delle provincie napoletane* 2 (1877): 725–57.

¹¹ Tina Matarrese, “Sulla lingua volgare dela diplomazia estense. Un *Memoriale* ad Alfonso d’Aragona” *Schifanoia* 5 (1988), 51–77. For the original document; see ASMo, Cancelleria Ducale, Stati e Città, busta 85.

¹² Antonioli suggests that the two young boys constituted “presenze politicamente scomode” [awkward political presences] at Leonello’s court in Ferrara because of his own illegitimacy, and consequently their time in Naples was an exile in everything but name. Antonioli describes several other instances where aristocratic boys, other than the nominated heir, were sent to other courts for their “addestramento militare” [military training]. He points out that Leonello never sent his own son, Niccolò, far from Ferrara; see Guido Antonioli, “«Secundo il modo cortisano»: esperienze di viaggi d’educazione presso le famiglie signorili italiane (XIV–XV secolo),” unpublished paper made available by the author 1 May 2007.

of forty-three, Ercole returned, “improvvisamente” [unexpectedly], to Ferrara to pay homage to his successor, Borso de’Este, suggesting that the new ruler of Ferrara was not as concerned about the threat caused by his two young half-brothers.¹³ Little is known about the brothers’ time in Naples, although the anonymous diarist suggests that they had gone there “per compagni de dom Ferrante, figliolo del Re” [as companions of Don Ferrante, the king’s son].¹⁴ Although considerably younger than Ferrante, they shared Ferrante’s love for jousts and tournaments, despite their danger. In a letter to Borso d’Este, dated 14 October 1455, having heard that her sons had been injured in a joust, their mother, Ricciarda da Saluzzo, suggested that “vogliadi mandare ali dicti vostri fradelli che non applicano cossi l’animo a queste pericolose iostre” [you should send a message to your brothers, telling them not to apply themselves so enthusiastically to these dangerous jousts].¹⁵

Given the time he had spent with Ferrante at the court in Naples, it has always been considered extraordinary that Ercole so openly betrayed him by defecting to his opponents in the war which Ferrante was forced to fight to establish his succession after Alfonso I’s death in 1458. While there have been several attempts to explain the motivation for Ercole’s action, the most plausible is that made by Ilardi, based on his reading of the *Commentaries* of Pius II. He suggests that Ercole was acting on secret orders from Borso d’Este, who had decided to follow Venice in her support for Ferrante’s Angevin opponents.¹⁶ In explaining his own support for Ferrante during a

¹³ Chiappini, *Eleonora d’Aragona, prima duchessa di Ferrara*, 10. I have been unable to verify this statement, although it may be explained by the visit to Ferrara, in January and May 1452, of the Holy Roman Emperor, Frederick III, en route to and from Rome; see *Diario ferrarese*, 34–37.

¹⁴ *Diario ferrarese*, 29.

¹⁵ ASMo, Casa e Stato, Carteggio tra principi estensi, busta 130, letter from Ricciarda da Saluzzo to Borso d’Este, Saluzzo, 13 October 1455. Antonioli writes that these events, which marked the second stage of a young noble’s military training, gave him the chance to make known his own military capabilities]; see Antonioli, 2.

¹⁶ Ilardi, “The Italian League,” 154, n. 91. Ilardi adds that, in October 1458, Pius II had agreed to invest Ferrante with the kingdom of Naples and that, in the following year, during the Congress of Mantua, he and Francesco Sforza had made a secret agreement “to share equally the burden of defending Ferrante

late-night meeting with Cosimo de' Medici in Florence in 1459, Pius II had described Borso's sympathies as "more French than the French themselves."¹⁷ Despite this realisation, Pius was still surprised by Ercole's defection to the enemy, since "aveva condiviso con Ferdinando non solo la caccia ma anche i più riposti segreti" [he had shared with Ferrante not only the hunt but also the most confidential secrets]. He added, however, that this treachery had occurred "non senza infamia per suo fratello Borso, del quale Ercole disse più tardi di avere eseguito gli ordini" [happened not without infamy for his brother Borso, of whom Ercole spoke later as having given the orders].¹⁸ The Ferrarese historians, Pandolfo Collenuccio and Giovambattista Giraldi [Cinzio], both suggest that Ercole betrayed Ferrante because he felt that he had been slighted by the king after Alfonso's death, because the king had been jealous of the favour which Alfonso I had shown Ercole in his lifetime. Collenuccio writes of this:

Era stato Ercole gratissimo ad Alfonso Re morto sì per la eccellente nobiltà della casa antichissima sopra le altre d'Italia e per essere stato legitimo figliuolo di Nicolò marchese da Este e Signore di Ferrara ... ma poi la morte d'Alfonso, si come accade nelle corti, e pare sia commune stile dei successori, Fernando in molte occorrentie haveva dimostrato non haverlo in quella estimatione che meritava e nella quale da Alfonso suo padre era tenuto, trattandolo male di danari e suoi stipendij, né gli osservando cosa che gli avesse promesso, e tra l'altre cose sopportando che Alfonso Davalos, overo Don Alonso, molto inequale di conditione a lui, volesse non equipararsi, ma tentasse di volere esser superiore" [Ercole had found great favour with the late King Alfonso, both for the excellent nobility of his most ancient house over the others of Italy, and for having been the legitimate son of the Este and the Lord of Ferrara ...but after the death of Alfonso, as it happens in the courts, and as it appears is common among successors, in many situations Ferrante had shown himself not to hold him in such esteem as had Alfonso, his father treating him badly with

against the then imminent Angevin invasion of the kingdom"; see Ilardi, "The Italian League," 150. The Congress of Mantua was a meeting of all Christian powers, called by Pius II in 1459 to launch a crusade against the Turks.

¹⁷ Pius II (Eneas Silvius Piccolomini), *I Commentarii*, ed. Luigi Totaro 2 vols. (Milan: Adelphi, 1984), 1: 659–61.

¹⁸ Pius II, *Commentarii*, 1: 645.

money and with his allowances, not respecting his promises to him, and, among other things, putting up with the fact that Alfonso d'Avalos, or Lord Alonso, although much inferior in status to him, should not just want to be equal to him but try to be superior to him].¹⁹

Whatever the truth of the matter, it must be remembered that both Collenuccio and Cinzio were devoted servants of the Estensi and therefore most likely biased in Ercole's favour.

Having taken part in the rout of the Aragonese army at Sarno in 1460, when he personally attempted to capture Ferrante, Ercole's last engagement in the war was at the battle of Troia in Puglia in 1462. This proved to be the turning point in the war, when Neapolitan and Milanese forces decisively defeated Jean d'Anjou, and Ercole himself just escaped death.²⁰ The following year Borso recalled the brothers, making Ercole governor of Modena, while Sigismondo became governor of Reggio.²¹ Bestor suggests that Borso had already secretly selected Ercole as his successor as early as 1461, defying his father's commitment to Niccolò di Leonello, and that it was he who negotiated Ercole's advantageous military command with Venice in 1467.²² In the war that followed that same year, the forces of Venice, Ferrara and some of the Romagna principalities, led by Bartolomeo Colleoni, faced those of Medicean Florence, Milan and Naples, under the baton of Federigo da Montefeltro. It was at the battle of Molinella in July 1467 that Ercole received the injury to his right heel which troubled him for the

¹⁹ Pandolfo Collenuccio (1444–1504), *Compendio dell'istoria del Regno di Napoli di Pandolfo Collenuccio da Pesaro, di Membrino Roseo da Fabriano, et di Tomaso Costo napolitan, diviso in tre parti, con le annotationi del Costo poste novamente a' suoi luoghi, da lui con diligenza, e fedeltà rivedute, e ampliate, le quali suppliscono a molte cose del Regno, da essi autori tralasciate* (Venice: Giunti, 1613), 1: 277; Giovambattista Giraldi [Cinzio] (1504–1573), *Commentario delle cose di Ferrara et de' principi de Este* (Florence: Lorenzo Torrentino, 1556), 100–03.

²⁰ Chiappini, *Eleonora d'Aragona*, 11–12; Bentley, 25.

²¹ *Diario ferrarese*, 45.

²² Bestor, "Bastardy and Legitimacy," 574. It was during this campaign, at the battle of Molinella, that Ercole suffered the injury to the heel of his right foot, which left him lame for the rest of his life (see Fig. 2 below).

rest of his life, and caused him to increasingly walk with a cane.²³ (Fig. 2)



Figure 2: Ercole d'Este receiving a book from an unknown author. Biblioteca Comunale Ariostea, Ferrara, MS, CI.1,306, *Vita B. Ioannis a Tauxignano Episcopi Ferrariae*, f. 1r.

Borso neither married nor produced illegitimate offspring, with the result that, when he died in 1471, there were four possible legitimate contenders for his ducal crown: Ercole, his younger brother, Sigismondo, their younger half-brother, Alberto, and Leonello's son, Niccolò. The support given by Ferrara's neighbours to one or other of these candidates was an indication of the state's strategic importance in the region. Galeazzo Sforza refused to support Niccolò because of his Gonzaga kinship and put his weight behind Alberto d'Este.²⁴ The candidacy of Niccolò was supported by his half-brother, Francesco, one of Leonello's natural sons, born in 1430, who had been sent to the court of Philip the Good, duke of Burgundy at the age of fourteen. He had hurried to Ferrara on Borso's death, but was sent back to Burgundy by Ercole, suitably laden with gifts.²⁵ It soon became apparent that Niccolò di Leonello was the most serious threat to Ercole's succession, his candidacy supported by Mantua, and later by Milan after the withdrawal of Alberto from the contest.²⁶ The Venetians made a great show of their support for Ercole, sending a fleet of warships up the River Po, apparently in the hope

²³ Gardner, *Dukes and Poets*, 101; Chiappini, *Gli Estensi*, 144.

²⁴ Bestor, "Bastardy and Legitimacy," 574, n. 62.

²⁵ Antonioli, 5–6; Chiappini, *Gli Estensi*, 165–66.

²⁶ The duke of Milan had dispatched "bene quindecim milia cavalli et fanti a pedi" [as many as 15,000 cavalry and infantry] to a position south of Parma; see *Diario ferrarese*, 68.

that he, as duke, would continue his predecessor's policy of favouring Venice at the expense of Milan, Florence and Bologna.²⁷

All along the route of Borso's funeral cortège on 22 August 1471, there were clear signs that Ercole was taking no chances with his personal safety. The anonymous diarist reported that "per tutto la Via de li Angeli erano sparti li provisionati di Sua Excellentia, tutti armati et bene in ordine da fare ogni grande faccenda" [all along Via degli Angeli, His Excellency's hired soldiers were placed at intervals, all of them armed and prepared for any major eventuality].²⁸ The diarist, Caleffini, who begins his chronicle when Ercole "deliberò assumere il Stato in sì" [decided to take over the state for himself], albeit "cum consentimento del populo ferrarese" [with the consent of the Ferrares people], also describes the huge show of military strength which accompanied his appearance on horseback, surrounded by his family and household, together with those of the late duke:

vestito a modo de duca <con> uno manto longo in terra foderato de varota de brocato d'oro; una bereta de brocato d'oro cum le orecchie in testa foderata de varo; una bacheta d'oro in mane; una colana de pietre pretiose al colo et altri ornamenti degni [dressed like a duke (with) a long cloak to the ground of gold brocade, lined with ermine; a *berretta* with ear pieces in gold brocade, lined with ermine on his head; a gold staff in his hand; a necklace of precious stones around his neck and other worthy decorations].²⁹

The sign that a *rapprochement* with Ferrante was imminent was the arrival in Ferrara in December 1471 of the Neapolitan ambassador, Fabrizio Carafa, together with the representatives of Sixtus IV, Milan, Bologna, Siena and Burgundy, who came to pay

²⁷ The anonymous diarist recorded the presence on the Po of a Venetian fleet of "tre galee, due fuste et da 70 barche armate, tute fornite de homini et arme degnamente" [three galleys, two smaller galleys and about 70 armed boats, all well supplied with men and weapons]; see *Diario ferrarese*, 69. Bestor writes that Giovanni Bentivoglio, ruler of Bologna, also opposed Ercole because he (Bentivoglio) was an ally and *condottiere* of Milan; see Bestor, *Kinship*, 178 and n. 3.

²⁸ *Diario ferrarese*, 71.

²⁹ Caleffini, 1–2.

their respects to the new duke.³⁰ Fabrizio Carafa and Ercole then travelled together to Venice in March 1472 to pay their respects to the new Doge, Nicolò Trono.³¹

In June 1472, Ercole welcomed his mother, Ricciarda da Saluzzo, back to Ferrara after her self-imposed exile of twenty-eight years.³² At least one contemporary source claims that it was Ricciarda who suggested that Ercole should make the choice of a suitable wife a priority.³³ Although, Ercole had already sent his exploratory mission to Naples by the time Ricciarda re-entered his life, she was well qualified to advise him on the problems created by illegitimacy. It is important to note that after Ercole's accession "no bastard prince ever again took office in the House of Este."³⁴

Ercole d'Este Chooses a Bride

Ercole's choice of bride was a sensitive issue, particularly for Milan and Venice. Only days before Borso's death, Galeazzo Sforza had attempted to influence that choice,

³⁰ *Diario ferrarese*, 78. Fabrizio Carafa was a member of the distinguished Neapolitan family, whose forebear, Antonio, nicknamed "Malizia" (the crafty), then in the employ of Giovanna II of Naples, had encouraged Alfonso I's initial campaign for the throne of Naples (1416–23); see Ryder, *Alfonso the Magnanimous*, 79. Diomedes Carafa was the last child of Antonio, who sent him to Spain with Alfonso when the king's relationship with Giovanna II soured. Carafa remained with Alfonso in Spain for the next eleven years, before the king set out on his second attempt to conquer the *Regno* in 1432, this time using Sicily as his base; see Ferdinando Cavalli, *La scienza politica in Italia* (Venice; Reale Istituto nel Palazzo Ducale, 1865), 395.

³¹ Ondedio, *Cronaca*, 143; Caleffini, 12.

³² *Diario ferrarese*, 80.

³³ "Delberatassi tratanto Rizzarda madre di Ercole di tornare indietro e godere della allegrezze del figlio, partita da Saluzzo gionse l'8 di Giugno in Ferrara dalla qual città dopo che Leonello si diede a tirranegiarla sino ad hora per non patir di privationi, doventar serva, si era tolta a volontario esilio, fu cum grandissime pompe introdotta in essa. Questa poscia dattasi a consigliar Ercole a pigliar moglie per avere una sponda da potter ricorere ne' suoi bisogni fece sì che il quattro di 8bre stabili il matrimonio di Leonora figlia di Ferdinando re di Napoli [In the meantime Ricciarda, mother of Ercole, having decided to come back and enjoy the happiness of her son, left Saluzzo and on 8 June she reached Ferrara, from which city she had taken herself into voluntary exile, from the time when Leonello began his tyrannous reign until now, in order to escape hardship and becoming a slave; she was with the greatest ceremony led into the city. Afterwards, this lady began to advise Ercole to take a wife in order in order that he might have some safe haven in case of need, so that on 4 October he negotiated his marriage with Eleonora, daughter of Ferdinand, king of Naples]; see Luigi Olivi, "Delle nozze di Ercole d'Este con Eleonora d'Aragona," *Memorie della Regia Accademia di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti in Modena*, ser. 2, 5 (1887): 16 and n. 1, citing Fulvio Azzari, *Croniche di Reggio Lepido originale secondo le vite de' suoi vescovi*, Modena, Biblioteca Estense, no further details; a seventeenth-century copy is in Reggio, Biblioteca Panizzi, MSS. Reggiani C 44.

³⁴ Bestor, "Bastardy and Legitimacy," 550.

instructing his ambassador in Ferrara, Ieronymo Maletta, to urge Ercole to agree not to “take any of the daughters of His Majesty King Ferrante but promise and obligate himself to take ... for a wife Madonna Barbara, daughter of the illustrious signor marquis of Mantua, who is young ... pretty, galant and all for good.”³⁵ This was possibly spite on Galeazzo’s part, brought on by the problems he was having with his brother’s marriage to Eleonora, and it may even have put the idea into Ercole’s mind. Given the presence of Milanese informants at the Neapolitan court, Galeazzo Sforza would have been among the first to know that Ercole has ignored his marital advice.³⁶

The envoy who arrived in Naples in March 1472 bearing portraits of the duke and his natural daughter, Lucrezia, was Ugolotto Facino, a man well qualified to conduct the most complex negotiations, having been most recently Borso d’Este’s ambassador in Milan.³⁷ On 20 March 1472, the Milanese ambassador in Naples, Francesco Maletta, wrote peevishly to Galeazzo Sforza that Ercole had given himself “in anima et in corpore et misso el stato in protectione” [body and soul <to Ferrante> and placed his state under his protection].³⁸ His mood was the same when he wrote again on 24 April 1472 to say that Ferrante was speaking “tanto bene et in comendatione de messer

³⁵ Bestor, *Kinship*, 176. Galeazzo Maria’s suggestion that Ercole marry a Gonzaga daughter was particularly cynical as he himself had previously broken contracts to marry first Susanna Gonzaga and then her sister Dorotea in 1463, citing their tendency to “gibositade” [curvature of the spine] and choosing instead the more advantageous bride, Bona of Savoy, sister of the queen of France: see Luca Beltrami, “L’annullamento del contratto di matrimonio fra Galeazzo M. Sforza e Dorotea Gonzaga (1463),” *Archivio storico lombardo*, 6 (1889): 126–32 and Stefano Davari, “Il matrimonio di Dorotea Gonzaga con Galeazzo Maria Sforza,” *Giornale ligustico* 17 (1890): 3–43. Their sister, Paola, who married a German count, was also slightly deformed; see Christina Antenhofer, “Letters Across the Borders: Strategies of Communication in an Italian–German Renaissance Correspondence,” in *Women’s Letters Across Europe*, 105, n. 5.

³⁶ In May 1470, Giovanni Andrea Cagnola, then recently appointed as Milanese ambassador, had been instructed to allow Cavalchino Guidoboni, a royal secretary with avowed mixed loyalties to both Milan and Naples, to use his cipher and trusted couriers “for secret and direct communications with Milan especially in matters relating to Ferrante’s intentions.” After Cagnola’s recall in November 1471, Antonio Maletta was able to access secret information through a scheme devised by Ippolita Maria who, in exchange for being kept up to date about Milanese affairs, would divulge confidential information gleaned by Count Broccardo Persico, a Milanese exile in Naples, and Guidoboni Cavalcanti, until his repatriation to Milan in August 1472; see Ilardi, “Towards the *Tragedia d’Italia*,” 109.

³⁷ Folin, “Gli oratori estensi,” 72.

³⁸ Ferorelli, 430.

Hercule che più non se poria dire de uno Dio” [so well and in such praise of Messer Ercole that more could not be said of a god], and that, “al presente nulla cosa più desidera che disolvere questo matrimonio per parergli de locare sua figlia in loco et in stato che gli meta ad tanto proposito cum le altre amicitie che ha, che poi forse possi fare d’Italia quello che vuole” [now he wants nothing more than to dissolve this marriage as it seems to him that by placing his daughter in a state which fits in with his other friendships, that then perhaps he can do with Italy what he wishes].³⁹ Ercole’s marriage suit was formalised on 17 August 1472 with a mandate nominating Facino as his ambassador and procurator with Ferrante.⁴⁰ Even before that date, a letter now conserved in the *Archivio di Stato* in Modena suggests that Ercole was doing all the right things to ingratiate himself with the king. Knowing Ferrante’s passion for the hunt, particularly falconry, and being a devotee of the sport himself, Ercole had sent him a number of live pheasants to improve his hunting stock.⁴¹ On 4 May 1472, Alberico Carafa acknowledged the safe arrival of the birds, informing Ercole that his messenger “li ha condutti tanto bene et acconzamente” [has transported them very well and in good condition], and beginning a correspondence in which the exchange of both falcons and their prey would be a frequent topic.⁴² Facino’s first letter to Ercole d’Este,

³⁹ Ferorelli, 430.

⁴⁰ For the full text of this mandate, see Olivi, 49–51.

⁴¹ “In questo tempo el duca ogni matina per tempo audiva in canto la messa et vespero et poi montava a cavallo et andava a fare volare li suoi falconi in lo Barcho insino a le xvi hore” [In this period (30 March 1476), early every morning the duke heard Sung Mass and Vespers and then mounted his horse and went to fly his falcons in the Barco until mid morning], Caleffini, 164; and again, “In questo pur tempo ogni zorno il duca cavalcava in lo suo Barcho cum tuti li suoi occellatori, fameglia et tuti li suoi balestreri da cavallo” [Also in this period, (January 1486), every day the duke rode in his Barco with all his bird-catchers, servants and all his mounted archers], Caleffini, 666.

⁴² ASMo, Cancelleria ducale, Estero, Ambasciatori, agenti, corrispondenti estensi, Napoli, busta 1, letter from Alberico Carafa to Ercole d’Este, Naples, 4 May 1472. Alberico Carafa was Diomede Carafa’s nephew; see Tommaso Persico, *Diomede Carafa: uomo di stato e scrittore del secolo XV* (Naples: Luigi Pierro, 1899), 110. The exchange of gifts associated with hunting had become established diplomatic practice between rulers, in whose letters a discussion of the attributes of a particular hawk or falcon could easily be inserted among more serious matters of state; see Jeremy Kruse, “Hunting, Magnificence and the Court of Leo X,” *Renaissance Studies* 7 (1993): 252–53. Lupis describes two treatises on falconry by Ferrante’s *camerlengo*, the Spanish nobleman, Ynnico d’Avalos; see Antonio Lupis, “La sezione venatoria della Biblioteca Aragonesa di Napoli e due sconosciuti trattati di Ynnico

written from 15 to 16 August 1472, is in very bad condition, although it is possible to detect that it concerns Eleonora's divorce and that Galeazzo is demanding that Ercole sign a non-aggression pact with Milan.⁴³ On 25 August 1472, Facino acknowledged the arrival of Ercole's mandate, but stressed the need for haste as the onset of winter would mean that Eleonora's journey to Ferrara could only be undertaken "cum tropo gran discunzo" [with extreme discomfort].⁴⁴ However, he was able to assure Ercole that Eleonora was looking forward to their marriage, and that, although she had already asked him a thousand times to send her love to Ercole, he (Facino) would be sending to him "certe zentilezze" [certain kindnesses], which she and the duchess of Sora, had made for him with their own hands.⁴⁵ Then, alluding to the delights which awaited him when Eleonora reached Ferrara, in the process resorting to a little gentle sexual innuendo, Facino suggested that Ercole can look forward to "le aque et le polvere qual goderete per suo amore, fin che porete haver el maestro in vostro dominio et stillar cum el suo lambicco più dolce aque" [the waters and the powders which you will enjoy for the love of her, until you can have the master in your own domain and distil with her alembic even sweeter waters]. The erotic metaphors continued as Facino described Ferrante's nostalgia for the "molti contrabandi haveti facti insieme" [many escapades you have had together], even using an allusion to the Ferrante's passion for falconry to suggest that such japes were not yet over for the king:

anchora se exercita volentiera per non star in ocio, advisando Vostra Signoria che se 'l suo sparaviero è bene un pocho piccolo va animosamente ale starne grosse

d'Avalos, Conte Camerlengo," *Annali della Facoltà di Lingue e Letterature Straniere* [Bari] 6 (1975): 5–95.

⁴³ ASMo, Cancelleria ducale, Estero, Ambasciatori, agenti, corrispondenti estensi, Napoli, busta 1, letter from Ugolotto Facino to Ercole d'Este, Naples, 15–16 August 1472.

⁴⁴ ASMo, Cancelleria ducale, Estero, Ambasciatori, agenti, corrispondenti estensi, Napoli, busta 1, Ugolotto Facino to Ercole d'Este, Naples, 25 August 1472.

⁴⁵ The duchess of Sora was Giovanna d'Aragona, a natural daughter of Ferrante and his mistress, Diana Guardato, who married Leonardo della Rovere, nephew of Sixtus IV in 1472. The fiefs of Sora and Arpino were conferred upon the couple by Ferrante; see Ludwig Pastor, *The History of the Popes*, trans. F. I. Antrobus, 40 v. (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1894) 4: 245.

et che habiano fornito la rosa. Ma a Sua Maestà è licito per esser soluto et libero cacciatore; a Vostra Eccellenza *autem* da qui inanti non, perché bisognerà attender de casa et restaurare li perduti tempi [he still takes pleasure in exercise so as not to sit about in idleness, letting Your Lordship know that his sparrow hawk, even if it is a bit on the small side, goes bravely after the plump partridges that are past their first bloom. But for His Majesty it is right to be an unattached and free hunter; for Your Excellency, on the other hand, from henceforth it is not, since you must look to your house and make up for lost time].⁴⁶

While Ferrante's allusions to his own sexual prowess may seem inappropriate during talks about his daughter's marriage, they must be seen in relation to the purpose of that marriage – the speedy production of children, preferably a male heir, which will depend on Ercole's sexual capacities and his successful wooing of his bride.

On 31 August 1472, Facino wrote that Ferrante had told Eleonora that he would “[fare] prestissimo expedir le cosse sue perché inanti venga lo inverno delibera la sia a Ferrara” [expedite her affairs as quickly as possible because he is resolved that before the winter she will be in Ferrara].⁴⁷ However, he had suggested that she might have to travel by sea, and it was well known that “Madama teme el mare” [Madama fears the sea].

Ferorelli writes that, on the evening of 26 September 1472, at the Castel Capuano in Naples, the Milanese representatives, Giovanni Andrea Cagnola and Francesco Maletta, attended the signing of the document which confirmed the dissolution of Eleonora's first marriage and its replacement by one between Isabella d'Aragona and Gian Galeazzo Sforza, as well as Sforza Maria Sforza's rights and privileges as duke of Bari.⁴⁸ On 4 October 1472, another hurdle was removed when Ercole signed a

⁴⁶ One of the metaphorical meanings of the rose is “virginity,” suggesting that the king is no longer chasing milkmaids, he is happy with older, heavier, more experienced women. Ferrante's sexual appetites are betrayed by a number of illegitimate children by several mistresses. It is difficult to find an authoritative reference to these children, except through their marriages to significant people, for example Maria d'Aragona who married Antonio Todeschini Piccolomini, nephew of Pius II and brother of Pius III; see Williams, *Papal Genealogy*, 50.

⁴⁷ ASMo, Cancelleria ducale, Estero, Ambasciatori, agenti, corrispondenti estensi, Naples, busta 1, Ugolotto Facino to Ercole d'Este, Naples, 31 August 1472.

⁴⁸ Ferorelli, 433.

non-aggression pact with Milan, which stated that, as the duke of Milan and Ferrante were about to petition the Pope for a dissolution of Eleonora's marriage to Sforza Maria Sforza, so that the new marriage could take place, "His Royal Majesty promises and undertakes to take real and effective measures, that the said Most Illustrious Duke of Ferrara promises and undertakes to hold and regard the aforementioned Most Illustrious Lord Duke of Milan as friend and kinsman, and to wage and declare no war upon him under any condition without prior provocation."⁴⁹ Sforza's signed agreement to the divorce on 12 October 1472 removed the final obstacle, and three days later Sixtus IV issued a bull formally dissolving the marriage.⁵⁰

On 2 October 1472, a man referred to only as Santo da Ferrara, wrote to Ercole, congratulating him on his coming marriage to Eleonora.⁵¹ Although it is unclear on whose behalf he was writing, Santo assured the duke that, "tuta la brigata de qua stanno consolati e de bona voglia quanto se possa dire per questa nostra Madama la quale deve venire a Ferrara" [everyone here is delighted and extremely pleased that our Madama is to go to Ferrara]. He was then able to disclose what Eleonora's brother, Alfonso, duke of Calabria, had said to him about the marriage:

In questi zorni passati lo Illustrissimo Duca de Calabria mi disse festezando, "Sancto, io perdo la più cara cosa che io havesse ma', pur sum più contento che ela habia el Duca de Ferrara che ela havesse el Re de Franza" [In recent days, the most illustrious Duke of Calabria said to me joyfully, "Santo, I am losing the most precious thing that I ever had, but I am happier that she has the duke of Ferrara than if she were to have the king of France"].

⁴⁹ "Quod ipsa Regia Majestas ex nunc promittat, et se obliget operare et facere realiter et cum effectu, quod dictus Illustrissimus Dux Ferrariae promittat et se obliget praenominatum Illustrissimum Dominum Ducem Mediolani pro Amico et Affine tenere et reputare, et contra cum bellum aut guerram aliquo pacto non facere aut movere, nisi praecedente provocatione"; see ASMo, Casa e Stato, Documenti, Serie generale, membranacei, cassetta 25, item 69, Ercole d'Este's edict promising not to wage war on Milan, Ferrara, 4 October 1472.

⁵⁰ Ferorelli, 433.

⁵¹ ASMo, Cancelleria ducale, Estero, Ambasciatori, agenti, corrispondenti estensi, Naples, busta 1, letter from Santo da Ferrara to Ercole d'Este, Naples, 2 October 1472.

Alfonso's unsolicited admission of brotherly affection is all the more significant coming from a man with a reputation for being a hard and uncaring husband. It is also a clear endorsement of Ercole's suit for Eleonora, suggesting, although her family will miss her greatly, they are happy that she will be going to him. However, Alfonso's slight barb is unmistakable, with the implication that Eleonora could have done better!

On 1 November 1472, two weeks after the dissolution of Eleonora's marriage to Sforza Maria Sforza, the documents ratifying her marriage to Ercole *per parola de presente* were signed in Naples by Ferrante and Facino.⁵² The contract was sealed by the swearing of a sacred oath, while the king's chaplain, Pietro Brusca, Bishop of Aversa, received from the bride and Ercole's procurator their consent to the marriage. When news of the marriage reached Ferrara on 9 November 1472, the celebrations that followed were described by the diarist, Ondedio da Vitale as "come lo di de Pasqua" [just like those on Easter Day].⁵³ The following week, on 16 November 1472, Ferrante's ambassador, Fabrizio Carafa, who had been in Ferrara for almost a year, where he had been, "alozato cum 16 famegli et artanti cavali in corte del duca, a spese de sua ducal signore dignissime et cum grandissimo honore" [accommodated at the ducal court, together with sixteen servants and as many horses, at the expense of the most worthy Lord Duke and with the greatest honour], left Ferrara laden with gifts.⁵⁴

The wedding would not take place for another six months, the period of waiting an opportunity for Ercole to introduce himself to his bride through a series of autograph letters. While these are not exactly the passionate letters of a man in love, as they would not be expected to be, they are an interesting example of their *genre* – dignified and formal communications from a man to young woman who has just become his wife, and

⁵² For the text of the marriage contract signed in Naples on 1 November 1472; see Olivi, 51–56.

⁵³ Caleffini, 25; Ondedio, *Cronaca*, 144

⁵⁴ Caleffini, 26.

who, because of circumstances, he must continue to court through letters that are strictly bound by the conventions of the *ars dictaminis*.⁵⁵ They are also kind and considerate letters, indications of the treatment Eleonora can expect from her husband when they are finally united. Ercole may have been intuitively aware of the value of friendship and trust within the limitations of such politically-motivated marriages, of which Carolyn James writes:

Men who tried to oppress their well-educated wives and excluded them from important aspects of their lives, even treating them as little more than breeding machines while maintaining their lovers, inflicted not only considerable unhappiness but undermined very quickly the potential benefits of a dynastic marriage alliance.⁵⁶

Eleonora would have been no less sensitive to this kindness. James uses the example of the marriage between Eleonora's brother, Alfonso, and Ippolita Maria Sforza to illustrate "the failure of friendship in a relationship between two people who shared a common cultural and political formation but differed profoundly in their approach to wedlock."⁵⁷ James also draws on the marriage of Eleonora's daughter, Isabella d'Este, to Francesco Gonzaga to illustrate the other side of the coin. She writes that Gonzaga was "delighted to have an intelligent, efficient wife to whom he could delegate some of his political duties," and – alluding to what is a distinct similarity between Isabella's marriage and her mother's – that he had reassured her that "he had delegated the everyday running of the state to her during his absence and trusted her decisions 'since everything between them was in common.'"⁵⁸ That the marriage of Eleonora and Ercole

⁵⁵ For the *ars dictaminis*, see Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages*, 194–268. Antenhofer suggests that such formality was highly normal, and that "personal letters of the Renaissance cannot be read as a direct expression of the writer's thoughts and feelings," since "correspondence between courts, even at its most confidential moments, followed highly ceremonious communication patterns"; see Christina Antenhofer, "Letters Across the Borders: Strategies of Communication in an Italian–German Renaissance Correspondence," in *Women's Letters across Europe, 1400–1700*, ed. Jane Couchman and Ann Crabb (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 103.

⁵⁶ Carolyn James, "Friendship and Dynastic Marriage in Renaissance Italy," *Literature and History* 17 (2008): 4–18 (8).

⁵⁷ James, "Friendship," 9.

⁵⁸ James, "Friendship," 13.

was in fact a prototype for that of Isabella d'Este, and that it in no way resembled that of the duke and duchess of Calabria, will be demonstrated through the analysis of the warm and affectionate letters which peppered their later extensive correspondence. However, for the moment, Eleonora had to be content with Ercole's more conventional expressions of conjugal affection.

Eleonora and Ercole: impatience and intimacy

Ercole's first letter to Eleonora was written just two days after news of the signing of the marriage contracts had reached in Ferrara.⁵⁹ His mode of address was at once formal and affectionate, "Illustrissima amantissima mia consorte" [My most illustrious, most beloved wife], and he followed it with expressions of pleasure that their marriage was at last a *fait accompli*, "cosa che veramente ho aspectata intendere longamente con grande desiderio" [something I have indeed long and earnestly waited to hear]. He was clearly irritated with Ferrante's refusal to allow his daughter to leave for Ferrara until after the winter, although he would contain his impatience, "aspecterò con desiderio che questo tempo passi, el quale poteria essere più curto" [I will wait and wish for this to time pass, and it could be the shorter].

Four days later, he wrote a brief note, "venendo el dicto Messer Fabricio al quale la Signoria Vostra darà fede de quanto le dirà da mia parte como faria a mi proprio" [as Messer Fabrizio is coming there, and Your Ladyship will trust for what he says on my behalf as if it were I myself saying it].⁶⁰ On 18 November 1472, Ferrante sent Ercole a letter full of assurances of his goodwill towards him and the marriage, those feelings

⁵⁹ ASMo, Carteggio dei principi, Casa e Stato, 1652, busta 67, autograph letter from Ercole d'Este to Eleonora d'Aragona, Ferrara, 11 November 1472.

⁶⁰ ASMo, Carteggio dei principi, Casa e Stato, 1652, busta 67, autograph letter from Ercole d'Este to Eleonora d'Aragona, Ferrara, 15 November 1472. Fabrizio Carafa left Ferrara on 16 November 1472; see Caleffini, 26.

objectified by his gift of “nove falconi sacri” [nine sacred falcons], which Ferrante assured Ercole were “de li migliori et più belli de quanti ne siano stati mandati questo anno” [among the best and most beautiful of those sent this year].⁶¹ Given his passion for falconry and the diplomatic significance of such gestures, Ferrante’s presentation to Ercole of some of his best falcons may be seen as symbolic of the hopes he was placing in his daughter’s marriage as a future source of political support.

When Ercole next wrote to Eleonora on 7 December 1472, it was to express his annoyance that “la Sua Maestà non abia ateso ali recordj li faceva Ugolotto” [His Majesty has not considered the advice given to him by Ugolotto], that is, that Eleonora should be allowed to set out for Ferrara sooner.⁶² Then he alluded to his impatience for her arrival with a little romantic innuendo: “non potro dire alla Signoria Vostra quanto me hè stata cara la sua venuta per più respecti li quali non curo scrivere al presente” [I could not tell Your Ladyship how pleased I am that you are coming for various reasons that I do not intend to write about at the moment].

A month and a half had elapsed before Ercole next wrote to Eleonora. That letter, dated 27 January 1473, was to accompany a gift of some fish for the duchess of Calabria, like that “che solevo mandare io io Madama sua matre a Milano” [which I used to send to Madama, her mother, in Milan], and, annoyed that he had not heard from Eleonora for some time, “arecordarlj che l’è multi dì che non se hè sentito niente de quella” [to remind you that it has been many days since there has been any word from you].⁶³

⁶¹ ASMo, Cancelleria estense, Estero, Carteggio di principi e signorie, Naples-Sicily, busta 1, letter from Ferrante I to Ercole d’Este, Naples, 18 November [1472]. The birds were specified as *falconi sacri*. The *falcone sacro* = “specie di falco detto anche falco cherrug, usato per la caccia (dall’arabo *saqr*) see <http://tlio.ovi.cnr.it/voci/018239.htm> accessed 1.3.2009.

⁶² ASMo, Carteggio dei principi, Casa e Stato, 1652, busta 67, autograph letter from Ercole d’Este to Eleonora d’Aragona, Ferrara, 7 December 1472.

⁶³ ASMo, Carteggio dei principi, Casa e Stato, 1652, busta 67, autograph letter from Ercole d’Este to Eleonora d’Aragona, Ferrara, 27 January 1473. This is the first mention of many such gifts of foodstuffs which would be sent from Ferrara to Naples in the following years. This gap in their correspondence

It was to be another six weeks before Ercole wrote again, his excuse being that he had been preoccupied with the festivities of *Carnivale*.⁶⁴ Although he was still unhappy with the continuing delays to Eleonora's departure, he was about to send Facino a list containing the names of the members of the party which would accompany her from Naples, and the date they would arrive, suggesting that she, "me avisi per simele modo del dì dela partita de li e del viaggio aciò intendo qual dì aveniti ad essere qui" [advise me similarly of the day of your departure and journey, so that I know what day you will be here].

Ercole wrote on 19 March 1473 to acknowledge two letters from Eleonora in her own hand and also, "le cose zentile che la me ha mandato che me sono state tanto care quanto se possi dire, he usaròlle per modo che Vostra Signoria intenderà che le me piac(i)ano grandemente" [the delicate things which you sent me which have been dearer to me than I could possibly say (and) I will use them so that Your Ladyship will know that I like them a lot].⁶⁵ He ended on an affectionate note, assuring her that as "avenga che continuamente abia quella nel core, pure vedendole me fano ricordo de quella he golderòmele per amore dela Signoria Vostra" [it happens that I have you in my heart all the time, just seeing them reminds me of you and I will enjoy them for the love of Your Ladyship].

Writing again just a week later, to take advantage of a messenger leaving for Naples, he assured her that "la hè aspetata con grandissimo desiderio" [you are expected with the greatest eagerness], his professions of affection becoming more profuse as the

happened at the same time as a similar silence between Diomede Carafa and Ercole, possibly the result of a difference of opinion over Ercole's provisions for Eleonora's household: see ASMo, Estero, Carteggio di principi e signorie, Naples-Sicily, busta 4, 31 October 1472 and 24 January 1473.

⁶⁴ ASMo, Carteggio dei principi, Casa e Stato, 1652, busta 67, autograph letter from Ercole d'Este to Eleonora d'Aragona, Ferrara, 4 March 1473. In 1473, *Carnevale* lasted from Epiphany until 2 March, on which day Ercole had held a grand banquet and a ball; see Caleffini, 34–35.

⁶⁵ ASMo, Carteggio dei principi, Casa e Stato, 1652, busta 67, autograph letter from Ercole d'Este to Eleonora d'Aragona, Ferrara, 19 March 1473.

date of Eleonora's departure from Naples drew nearer: "parme mille anni <che> passi questi pochi di aciò che la Signoria Vostra sia presto qui" [these few days until Your Ladyship is here seem to me like a thousand years].⁶⁶ Again, in what proved to be his last letter before their marriage, he insisted that: "parme una hora mille anni che la Signoria Vostra sia qui" [every hour seems a thousand years to me until Your Ladyship is here].⁶⁷ Although there are contextual references to the letters which Eleonora wrote to Ercole during the months of their betrothal, none appear to have been conserved.⁶⁸

Diomede Carafa, "il viceré": Ferrante's negotiator

Diomede Carafa (1406–87), had served the House of Aragon in a variety of military and administrative positions from his youth, being rewarded with the title and privileges of count of Maddaloni (sometimes written as Matelone or Matelune), in 1465.⁶⁹ By the time that Eleonora's marriage to Ercole was under consideration, Carafa had become one of Ferrante's most trusted and experienced advisors, having already been one of the chief negotiators of Eleonora's release from her previous marriage.⁷⁰ His name appeared as one of the signatories of the marriage contract of 1 November 1472, but it was Carafa's involvement in determining the conditions of that marriage which brought him to the fore as Ferrante's spokesman.⁷¹ At times referred to as Eleonora's former tutor, Carafa was clearly very fond of her and ferocious in his determination that she

⁶⁶ ASMo, Carteggio dei principi, Casa e Stato, 1652, busta 67, autograph letter from Ercole d'Este to Eleonora d'Aragona, Ferrara, 26 March 1473.

⁶⁷ ASMo, Carteggio dei principi, Casa e Stato, 1652, busta 67, autograph letter from Ercole d'Este to Eleonora d'Aragona, Ferrara, 10 April 1473.

⁶⁸ In his letter to Eleonora, which, although undated, I have placed in 1473, Alfonso referred to her being busy writing letters to Ercole; see ASMo, Estero, Principi e Signorie, Naples-Sicily, busta 2, autograph letter from Alfonso, duke of Calabria, to Eleonora d'Aragona, Cosenza, [21? 1473?].

⁶⁹ Persico, 85–86.

⁷⁰ Ferorelli, 430–31.

⁷¹ For Carafa's involvement with the contract; see Olivi, 56, 63 and 66.

should continue to be treated with all due respect when she left Naples.⁷² Carafa's feelings for Eleonora appear to have been paternal, even grandfatherly (he would have been about seventy at this time), although malicious gossip, apparently emanating from the Milanese ambassador in Naples, Francesco Maletta, reached Galeazzo Sforza in November 1473, suggesting that Carafa had been "debaccato antiquamente de l'amore de Madama Eleonora" [infatuated with Madama Eleonora in the past].⁷³ What is obvious is that Carafa, like many fathers and grandfathers, did not think that Ercole was "good enough" for Eleonora, and this comes through very clearly in his letters to the duke about Eleonora's household in Ferrara.

A close reading of Carafa's letters to Ercole points to the possibility that disagreements over the allowance and household which Ercole had suggested for Eleonora in Ferrara were largely responsible for the continual delays to her departure from Naples. While the size of Eleonora's dowry, a low 60,000 ducats, would continue to be a major bone of contention for Facino, Carafa had been equally unimpressed with the amount of money allocated by Ercole for his wife's domestic arrangements in Ferrara.⁷⁴

Carafa wrote his first letter to Ercole on the eve of the signing of the marriage contract in Naples.⁷⁵ After assuring the duke of his intention to serve him well, he stressed that it was not because of Ercole's merits that he was doing this, but:

⁷² For Carafa's role as Eleonora's tutor; see Persico, 101 and 148, and Moores, "New Light," 5. Battista Guarino wrote that Carafa had been fundamentally important in Eleonora's formation. Dedicating his Latin translation of Carafa's *I doveri del principe* to him, Guarino wrote, on Eleonora's behalf, "in patria iuvenilem aetatem meam erudire et ad bonorum morum disciplinam te mihi duces consiliatorumque et rectorem praebere numquam destiteris" [in my native city you never ceased to instruct my juvenile age, and, for an education in good manners, to offer yourself to me as the leader and chief of counsellors], Biblioteca Estense, MS Est. Lat. DCLXXIX. Translation by David Fairservice.

⁷³ Moores, "New Light," 14.

⁷⁴ For Facino's complaints about the low amount Eleonora's dowry; see ASMo, Cancelleria ducale, Estero, Ambasciatori, agenti, corrispondenti estensi, Napoli, busta 1, letter from Ugolotto Facino to Ercole d'Este, Naples, 17 May 1473.

⁷⁵ Moores, "Diomede Carafa," 373–78. I have checked my transcriptions of Carafa's letters against those of Moores and I have followed his practice of interpolating <che> where required to clarify meaning.

per amore et respecto de questa mia Illustrissima Madama vostra moglyere la quale amo e per amore de so patre et anco per soe vertù, quale in vero so· de natura che non solo à poco pare al mundo, ma la Vostra Illustrissima Signoria se nde deve tenere per più contento che de qualsevoglya gracia et grandeza che da Idio aiate avuta” [out of love and respect for my Most Illustrious Lady, your wife, whom I love, both for love of her father and also for her virtuous qualities, which in truth are of such a nature that, not only are there few that equal her in the world, but Your Most Illustrious Lordship should consider yourself more than fortunate for that than for any other grace or greatness which you have been given by God].

Right from the start of his verbal tussle with Ercole, Carafa was unambiguous about his feelings for Eleonora. Despite his formal style, there can be no question of whose side he has taken in the contest. Now that he had made Ercole aware of his feelings, he was not to take offence at Carafa’s tone. Of the celebration of the marriage in Naples he had quite specific views. Ercole would know from the time he had spent in Naples that certain “iostre et feste” [jousts and celebrations] would have to be observed as part of the marriage process, while the signing of the contract the following day would be a festive occasion. In keeping with this, he had taken it upon himself to tell Facino that on no account should he wear black, as Ercole had suggested, but that “se faza vesta alegra” [he should wear colourful clothes], and that “madama vesterà quella di broccate et cose dengnye, per quello acto s’ à facte veste tucte bianche como alegra et devota” [Madama that day will wear brocades and appropriate things, (and) for that ceremony all-white garments have been made because such are both cheerful and devout]. Then, advising Ercole on Neapolitan letter-writing etiquette, he told him that, “la osanza èy con queste nostre s<ignore> che primo à de scrivere lo marito” [the custom with our ladies here is that husband has to write first] and that “passata domenica, ve suplico che subito le voglia scrivere con propria mano et cossi anco essa con soa mano ve responderà” [once Sunday is over, I beg that you write to her immediately in your own hand, and thus she will reply to you in hers]. If Ercole were to use a dictated letter,

that would be how Eleonora would reply. Ercole's letters to Eleonora reveal that he heeded the good count's advice.

Carafa then resorted to flattering Ercole, suggesting that he had been one of those who had supported the marriage, and that this was because:

“sempre m' aio figurato in la Signoria Vostra essere quello animo che qua compresi <che> avissivo, del quale ve iuro che aio facto stimo in questo caso de matrimonio più che de lo stato che Vostra Illustrissima Signoria ave” [I always thought that in Your Lordship there is that spirit which I saw in you when you were here and which I liked, which is why, I swear to you, that I have put a value on this marriage which is more than that of Your Illustrious Lordship's state].

After that long preamble, Carafa came to the real purpose of his letter, which was to chide Ercole for his tardiness in letting Facino know his decisions about Eleonora's household. They particularly needed to know the number of personal staff he had allocated to her and the size of her allowance. Complaining that, because of Ercole's inaction, “io de sto mezo impigito” [I am stuck in the middle], he insisted that it was he, not Eleonora, who was concerned, since she “prima veria in stremminio che domandasse mai cosa al mundo” [would rather die than ask for anything in the world], such was her undemanding nature, and although, “sapia la Signoria Vostra che la Maiestà de Re ave amata tanto Madama quanto mai patre amar potesse figlya, che mai ley li domandò per essa cosa veruna, per altro si bene [Your Lordship knows that His Majesty the king has loved Madama as much as any father could love a daughter, but she has never asked him for anything other than what is good].

When he next wrote on 24 January 1473, it was to acknowledge the receipt of an autograph letter from Ercole containing “l' ordene de la casa de Madama vostra moglyere” [the arrangements for the household of Madama, your wife].⁷⁶ After rejecting Ercole's suggestion that he (Carafa) “ionga et conze ad mio modo” [should

⁷⁶ Moores, “Diomedes Carafa,” 378–82.

add to and change [it] to my liking], he set about doing just that. Firstly, neither the number nor the quality of the servants allocated to Eleonora was suitable, while Ercole had not allowed sufficient funds to maintain “l’ordine de la vita et speza de la casa et persone” [the living and household expenses]. Hinting at future disagreements, he insisted that “farò sempre l’oficio del servo fedele de dire el parere mio” [I will always act as a faithful servant by speaking my mind], he queried the number of women allocated to Eleonora, sixteen in all, which compared poorly with the forty women she shared with her sister in Naples. Of even greater concern, however, was the paltry sum of three thousand ducats a year which Ercole had allocated for Eleonora’s discretionary spending. Carafa’s indignation was palpable as he protested, “faza per Dio la Signoria Vostra in modo che io possa dire con bon vultu al Signor Re <che> la Signoria Vostra stime questa facenda et onne uno aia de stare contento” [do something, Your Lordship, for God’s sake, so that I can honestly say to the king that Your Lordship values this affair and everyone can be happy].

In Carafa’s final letter to Ercole, on 27 March 1473, his tone changed, hoping that, “non me tenissimo averme spento prosencione, quale ey assai fora de mia natura” [you did not regard me as driven by presumptuousness, which is completely outside my nature].⁷⁷ Insisting that he would not interfere again, and that “farò fine de non fare altro che silencio, né in dicta facenda né semeglyante, et farò lo officio de servetore et non de consiglyere” [I will conclude with nothing but silence, in this matter or in any like it, and I will perform the role of servant and not of advisor], apologising for any offence he had given Ercole:

si che avendo ofiso la mente vostra, ve nde domando perdono, che amore et volentà (che) ò in vostro servizio et a zò (che) la Maiestà conosca (che) vuy estimate sua figlyola me ’l fece scrivere” [if I have offended you, I ask you to pardon me, because the affection

⁷⁷ Moores, “Diomedes Carafa,” 382–84.

and the goodwill I have in serving you and in order that His Majesty should know that you value his daughter, all caused me write this way to you].

It would seem that Ercole had emerged the victor in his first battle of words with Carafa.

The marriage in Naples: three reports for Ercole

The diarist, Caleffini, lists the party which left Ferrara on 26 April 1473.⁷⁸ Led by Ercole's brother, Sigismondo, and his half-brother, Alberto, it included some of the most renowned names in Ferrara, many Ercole's most senior advisors, together with medical and legal doctors, poets and musicians, their combined presence ensuring that Ercole would be most honourably represented in Naples and that Eleonora would be most worthily escorted to Ferrara.⁷⁹ Fifty members of the party were specifically designated as "la fameglia de madama" [Madama's household], at the head of which were, as her companions, Niccolò Strozzi, described by Zambotti as "cavalere splendidissimo e sapientissimo" [a most splendid and wise knight],⁸⁰ and Luchino Marocello, "capitaneo de Modena" [captain of the guard in Modena].⁸¹

Three letters conserved in the Archivio di Stato in Modena contain eye-witness descriptions of much that happened in Naples to celebrate the marriage of the king's daughter to the duke of Ferrara, beginning with the arrival of Sigismondo's party on 16 May 1473. While each of the writers describes the week of wedding festivities from a slightly different perspective, almost as if they had conferred before putting pen to

⁷⁸ Caleffini, 70–72.

⁷⁹ For a list of the members of the Ferrarese party and their lodgings in Naples; see *I diari di Cicco Simonetta*, ed. Alfio Rosario Natale (Milan: Antonino Giuffrè, 1962), 21–24, hereafter referred to as Simonetta, *I diari*. Simonetta was the Milanese ducal secretary, serving Francesco Sforza and his son, Galeazzo. Simonetta reveals that Teofilo Calcagnini was lodged with Francesco Caracciolo, while Niccolò de' Contrari (who was travelling with his brother Ambrogio de' Contrari) was lodged with Messer Dragonoto; see Simonetta, *I diari*, 21. On Ambrogio de' Contrari, see *Dizionario biografico degli italiani* (M. E. Mallett); on Teofilo Calcagnini, *Dizionario biografico degli italiani* (T. Ascari).

⁸⁰ Zambotti, 31.

⁸¹ Caleffini, 28. Marocello died later in 1473, while Strozzi died in 1477, suggesting that they were both senior members of Ercole's court at the time of his marriage.

paper, they are unanimous in their admiration for the magnificent displays of pomp and ceremony staged by Ferrante in honour of the occasion and in their appreciation for his apparently warm and sincere hospitality. Above all, having observed the king's public displays of affection for Eleonora and his happiness about the marriage, all three men were able to assure Ercole of the king's goodwill towards both the marriage and his son-in-law.

Ugolotto Facino, Ercole's chief negotiator

In his letters to Ercole, Diomede Carafa had often referred to that fact that Facino had remained in Naples after the signing of the marriage contract in November 1472, apparently to represent the duke in ongoing discussions over Eleonora's dowry and the provisions for her household in Ferrara.⁸² He was therefore a member of the welcoming party which met Sigismondo d'Este and the Ferrarese *comitiva* on the outskirts of Naples early on 16 May 1473, and the following day he wrote to Ercole with his impressions.⁸³

Facino spared no detail in describing the first encounter, two miles outside the city, between Sigismondo's *comitiva* and a Neapolitan party led Eleonora's two youngest brothers, the seventeen-year-old cleric, Giovanni, and the twelve-year-old Don Francesco, accompanied by a large contingent of nobles. A mile further on, they were met by Federico d'Aragona, who had with him, "quasi da tutti li baroni de questo reame cum infiniti zentilhomini" [almost all the barons of this kingdom together with masses of gentlemen]. Thus accompanied, they had entered Naples, "cum grandissimo

⁸² Carafa specifically mentioned conferring with Facino in all three of his letters to Ercole, 31 October 1472, 24 January and 27 March 1473.

⁸³ ASMo, Cancelleria ducale, Estero, Ambasciatori, agenti, corrispondenti estensi, Naples, busta 1, letter from Ugolotto Facino to Ercole d'Este, Naples, 17 May 1473.

triumpho e cum gran numero de trombeti e tamburini e simile zente” [with the greatest triumph and with a large number of trumpeters and drummers and similar people].

Later that day, in the company of the duke of Calabria, Sigismondo had gone to the Great Hall of the Castelnuovo (see Fig. 2 below), to be welcomed by Ferrante “cum tanta dolceza che’l non se poria dire” [with such warmth that it cannot be expressed].



Figure 3: The Castelnuovo, Naples from the port: Tavola Strozzi (detail), attrib. Francesco RosSELLI, c.1472, Museo di San Martino, Naples (Giulio Pane, *La Tavola Strozzi tra Napoli e Firenze: un immagine della città nel quattrocento*. Naples: Grimaldi, 2009, 34)

Eleonora had then been summoned, appearing before them, “ornata de una corona d’oro fornita de perle e zoie” [resplendent in a gold crown decorated with pearls and jewels], greeting the Ferrarese party, “cum tanta zentileza e cum tanta degna maniera che molte persone indusse de tenereza a lacrimare” [with such sweetness and in such a lovely way that many were brought to tears of affection]. Even taking account of Facino’s courtly hyperbole, he appears to have been genuinely impressed by the warmth of Ferrante’s welcome to the Ferrarese party and by Eleonora’s gentle and dignified bearing.

Facino then went on to describe to Ercole, in minute detail, the meeting in which the details of Eleonora’s dowry were finalised. Together with Sigismondo d’Este and

Manfredo Maldente, Facino had withdrawn to a nearby room for discussions with Ferrante's representatives. These were his secretary, Antonello Petrucci, Pasquale Diaz Garlon, the governor of *Castelnuovo*, Antonio d'Alessandria, and Diomede Carafa, a formidable mix of the king's top advisors.⁸⁴ Facino reported that Sigismondo had accepted Ferrante's determination that Eleonora would have a dowry of only 60,000 ducats, which would include the jewels, clothing and accessories that she would take with her to Ferrara, saying that Ercole had agreed to it only out of goodwill towards the king and in order to have Eleonora for his wife, "nella quale faceva più conto che de quanta roba era al mondo per la virtude et eccellente conditione dela persona sua" [whose personal virtue and high status counted for more to him than all the wealth in the world].⁸⁵ Facino had not been happy with this outcome, reporting to Ercole that he had been moved to intervene, since "ad un tanto Re quanto era questo che mostrava havere tanto amore a questa figliola me pareva per certo questa esser molto pocho dote" [for such a king as this who showed himself to have such love for this daughter, this certainly seemed to me to be a very poor dowry].⁸⁶ He compared Eleonora's dowry with that which "el Duca Francesco havea dato a Madama Hipolita lxxx mille ducati che non era Re né Signor d'un tanto stato quanto è questo" [Duke Francesco [Sforza], who was neither king nor lord of such a state as this, had given to the Lady Ippolita, 80,000

⁸⁴ In the 1473 list of court officials in Ferrara, Maldente is described as a "consegliere de iustitia" [legal advisor]; see Caleffini, 28. Antonello Petrucci was Ferrante's private secretary; see *Cronica napoletana figurata*, 49. Pasquale or Pascasio Diaz Garlon, Count of Alife, "castellano" [governor] of Castel Nuovo, a Catalan who remained loyal to Ferrante all his life; see *Cronica napoletana figurata*, 50, n. 16; Volpicella, *Regis Ferdinandi Primi Instructionum Liber*, 328–9; *Dizionario biografico degli italiani* (F. De Negri). Dover describes Antonio d'Alessandro as "a skilled lawyer who had taught at the university in Naples and was a former president of the Sacred Royal Council." He represented Ferrante in Rome in various capacities from 1485 until 1489; see Dover, 75.

⁸⁵ These are itemized in Olivi, 26–27.

⁸⁶ Bestor suggests that the small dowry was a reflection of Ercole's lower rank and wealth"; see Jane Fair Bestor, "Marriage Transactions in Renaissance Italy and Mauss's Essay on the Gift" *Past and Present*, 164 (1999): 40.

ducats],⁸⁷ suggesting that the amount should be raised to at least 100,000 ducats.

Ferrante did raise the dowry from 60,000 to 80,000 ducats, payable over eight years, but not without inserting a clause to the effect that Ercole would promise never to ask for the residual 20,000 ducats. Recognizing the manoeuvre for what it was, Facino had to admit to Ercole that the dowry had effectively remained at 60,000 ducats, even after he had pointed out “le grandissime spese che Vostra Eccellenza havea novamente facto et facea per honorare questa Illustrissima Madama [the very large expenses which Your Excellency has recently incurred and continues to incur to do honour to this Most Illustrious Lady], citing the jewels and precious fabrics, the building renovations in Ferrara and the cost of the wedding itself, which have amounted to at least 200,000 ducats.⁸⁸

Clearly embarrassed at being so comprehensively out-manoeuvred, Facino quickly turned to the marriage ceremony, before which Sigismondo had presented Eleonora with the jewels and luxurious fabrics sent by Ercole. He was happy to be able to describe her delightful reaction to one particular necklace: “subito Madama se fece meter al collo quella cannaca bella de balassi e de rubinj la qualevi premeto che le sta così bene e dalli così zentil vista chel non se poteria dir meglio” [straightaway My Lady had that beautiful necklace of garnets and rubies placed around her neck, and I promise you it suits her so well and gives her such a lovely appearance that I could not speak better of it]. Despite Ludovico Carbone’s inability to present his wedding oration due to the crush of people, it had all gone very well, and Facino could assure Ercole that “ogni cosa passa cum

⁸⁷ In 1488, Ferrante gave his grand-daughter, Isabella d’Aragona, a dowry of 80,000 ducats for her marriage to Gian Galeazzo Sforza, plus a further 20,000 ducats to be paid within a year. In 1491, Anna Sforza brought a dowry of 150,000 ducats, plus another 205,000 ducats’ worth of gold and silver to her marriage with Alfonso d’Este; see Caterina Santoro, “Un registro di doti sforzesche,” *Archivio storico lombardo*, ser. 8, 4 (1953): 147 and 161.

⁸⁸ The dowry documents are reproduced in Olivi, 64–68. Olivi calculates that, having subtracted the amount of 24,500 ducats for the goods which Eleonora took with her to Ferrara, only 35,500 remained to be paid by Ferrante in eight annual instalments of 4,437 ducats; see Olivi, 27.

grandissimo honore e gloria sua e cum gran satisfacione de la Maestà del Re e d'ogniuno universalmente" [everything that happens here is to your greater honour and glory and to the great satisfaction of His Majesty the King and everyone else].⁸⁹

Teofilo Calcagnini, "vostro minimo servitore"

A second letter written to Ercole during the week of festivities lacks its final page and the signature of the writer, although in-text references reveal that the writer is Teofilo Calcagnini.⁹⁰ Although his description of their welcome to Naples echoes that of Facino, he is effusive about its warmth, writing that, "qui racolseno lo Illustrissimo vostro fratello cum tanto amore basci et solaci et piaceri quanto per lo più pensare si potesse" [here they greeted your Most Illustrious brother with as much love, kissing, pleasure and delight as you could possibly imagine]. He described their meeting with Ferrante in the same vein, particularly the king's affectionate and warm response to Sigismondo's initial act of obeisance:

Sua Sublimità el basciò cum una ciera de uno dio et cum mille suave dolce et amorevele parole cussì fece al Illustrissimo Messer Alberto et a multi altri de vostri castellanj et zentilhomini ne tocchete la mano cum demonstratione de grandissima consolatione et piacere [His Sublime Majesty kissed him with an appearance of a god and with a thousand gentle, sweet and loving words, and he did the same to Messer Alberto and to many other of your courtiers and gentlemen, touching their hands in a demonstration of the greatest delight and pleasure].

⁸⁹ Ludovico Carbone, *Epithalamium Neapolis Actum in Divam Lianoram Aragonensem et Divum Herculem Estensem*, British Library MSS Add. 20, 794. Carbone had travelled with Sigismondo's party to Naples, en route delivering an oration to Sixtus IV, praising both Ercole and the new marriage. This is also contained in the British Librray manuscript.

⁹⁰ ASMo, Cancelleria ducale, Estero, Ambasciatori, agenti, corrispondenti estensi, Naples, busta 1, letter from Teofilo Calcagnini to Ercole d'Este, Naples, 17? May 1473; see Appendix, Document 2. The writer, who refers to himself in the text as "vostro minimo servitore Teofilo" [your most unworthy servant, Teofilo], is clearly Teofilo Calcagnini, described by Pardi as "uno dei principali cortigiani estensi, specie al tempo di Borso" [one of the leading Estense courtiers, especially in the time of Borso]. His wife, Marietta Strozzi, accompanied Eleonora on her first visit to Venice in February 1476; see Zambotti, 5, n. 14.

Calcagnini was quite overwhelmed by his first sight of Eleonora. Even allowing for the excesses of courtly hyperbole, Calcagnini's reaction was somewhat excessive:

La quale subito che l'ebbej vista in verità, Signore mio, tuto rimasi stupefacto et fuori de mi de dolceza, de suavità et de letitia, considerando questa dea tanto adorna, zentile, gratiosa, humana, piacevole, riverente, ridente, peregrina, tuta apta, bene proportionata, cum due ochij radianti in vixio che vengono dall'umbilico del paradiso et le sue parole tanto suave et dolce quanto possa essere in corpo humano, et cussi pexate et cum tanto scientia et gravità che ogni sua parola si potria cum ragione scrivere per legie [As soon as I saw her in the flesh, My Lord, I was totally amazed and beside myself with pleasure, light-headedness and delight, observing this goddess, so adorned, noble, gracious, humane, pleasing, respectful, charming, rare, completely perfect, well-proportioned, two sparkling eyes in her face seeming to come from the navel of paradise and her words as gentle and sweet as may be in a human body, so precious and full of such wisdom and *gravitas* that every one of her words could by rights be written down as law].

Having placed Eleonora comfortably among the ranks of goddesses, Calcagnini could only assure Ercole of his good fortune for having, "cussi facta dea" [a goddess like this] for a wife, adding that she was all in all, "tanto excellentissimo acquisto" [such an excellent acquisition], predicting that, "certo questo non serà arboro da stare senza fructo et da non incalmare presto" [surely this will not be a tree which remains without fruit or be slow to produce new shoots].

Calcagnini then gave Ercole a delightful word picture of the wedding ceremony. Accompanied by the duchess of Calabria and "più de cinquanta zentildone zentile et belle et bene adornate" [more than fifty sweet and lovely ladies, well arrayed], Ferrante and Eleonora had mounted a platform, "bene adornato cum uno Hercule che teniva l'arma del re in mano in cima" [beautifully adorned with a representation of Hercules surmounted by the coat of arms of the king]. Ferrante had seated himself on a throne in the middle of this stage, with Eleonora and the other ladies of the court on his right, Sigismondo, Alberto and the other nobles on his left, while stands around the square were filled with more than 20,000 spectators. The duke of Calabria had begun the

dancing with Eleonora, “vestita de una veste de panno d’oro caudata fuorsi octo bracia a lhor guixa” [dressed in gown of cloth of gold with a train perhaps eight *braccia* long as they do here]. Then the marriage ceremony proceeded:

Et col nome de lo Altissimo Dio per uno vescovo solennemente et cum belle cerimonie fu benedetta la Illustrissima nostra Madama et doppo la benedictione publicato lo instrumento de la dote per il Secretario del Signore Re cum le parole convenienti a questo solennissimo acto fu desponsata per lo Illustrissimo Signore Messer Sigismundo in nome vostro. [And, in the name of the Most High God, our Most Illustrious Madama was solemnly and with beautiful ceremony blessed by a bishop and, after the blessing, the dowry document having been made public by the Lord King’s secretary, in words appropriate to this most solemn act, she was married by the Most Illustrious Lord Messer Sigismondo in your name.]

After this ceremony, Ferrante presented to the crowd the knights who would take part in the next day’s tournament, an event for which Calcagnini clearly held high hopes, “per quanto sento serà dele bele et meravigliose cosse ch’io vedessi mai” [from what I hear, it will be as fine and marvellous a thing as I have ever seen].⁹¹ Sadly, Calcagnini can only leave a tantalizing glimpse of Ferrante’s largesse at the wedding banquet before the letter is cut short:

Doppo questa monstra il vene del castello del re circha doxento persone del re cum le trombe inanti tuti l’uno dietro l’altro cum uno piatello de marzapan et confetioni de più sorte in mane et sopra cadauna confectione erano diverse fantasie depinte più de confecti cum bandirole ala insigna del re che erano cosse et belleze troppo meravigliose da vedere [After this display, from the king’s castle came about two hundred of his men with trumpeters preceding them, one behind the other, every one holding in his hand a plate of marzipan and sweetmeats of many kinds, and over every confection there were different painted fantasies, made of sugar, and banderols bearing the insignia of the king, and they were beautiful things which were too marvellous to see].

The impression that Calcagnini was a man of great sensitivity and passion and also a

⁹¹ Ferrante’s passion for jousting was well known, both for the sport and for the opportunity it offered for the display of his own magnificence; see Pontieri 1963, 76.

great wordsmith will be confirmed in a second letter, in which he described Eleonora's visit to Rome in exquisite detail.⁹²

Niccolò de' Contrari: "tutti soto sopra"

A third letter describing the events in Naples was sent to Ercole a few days later by another of his senior advisors, Niccolò de' Contrari.⁹³ This is a much shorter letter, in which, after a passing reference to previous day's joust, Contrari described a huge banquet, presided over by Ferrante and Eleonora, at which thirty-six courses were served under the direction of the Great Seneschal who was on horseback.⁹⁴ The Ferrarese nobles were then entertained at a more intimate and informal dinner, hosted by the duke of Calabria, "dove cenassimo tuti soto sopra" [where we dined all in disarray]. Contrari claimed that he had been so relaxed and comfortable on this occasion that "quasi me pareva esser cum Vostra Celsitudine, ma pur guardando per tuto et non vedendo Quella videva pur che era a Napuli" [it almost seemed to me that I was with Your Excellency, but since I looked everywhere and didn't see you, I realized I was in Naples].

Even within the limitations of his brief letter, Contrari made particular mention of Ferrante's show of affection towards Eleonora, writing that, "la Maiestà del Re fa una

⁹² From Tristano's descriptions of Calcagnini, these impressions are fairly accurate. Although the precise nature of his relationship with Borso is never articulated, Tristano describes him as the duke's favourite, pointing out that he is always shown by Borso's side in the Schifanoia frescos. These portraits "reveal a handsome face, an affable personality ... Teofilo was the quintessential courtier, exhibiting good taste and grace"; see Richard M. Tristano, *Ferrara in the Fifteenth Century: Borso d'Este and the Development of a New Nobility*, PhD diss., New York University, 1983.

⁹³ ASMo, Cancelleria ducale, Estero, Ambasciatori, agenti, estensi, Naples, busta 1, letter from Niccolò de' Contrari to Ercole d'Este, Naples, 21 May 1473.

⁹⁴ Matteo di Capua was the Grand Seneschal of Naples in 1473, "il personaggio più importante di una schiera di collaboratori a lui sottoposti e si occupa del problema organizzativo di una corte ed è il supervisore e il regista dei banchetti solenni" [the most important person in a team of associates subordinate to him, he deals with the organisation details of the court and he is the supervisor and director of formal banquets]; see Clelia Falletti, "Le feste per Eleanora d'Aragona da Napoli a Ferrara (1473)," in *Spettacoli conviviali dall'antichità classica alle corti italiani del '400: atti del VII Convegno di Studio, Viterbo 27-30 May, 1982* (Viterbo: Centro di Studi sul Teatro Medioevale e Rinascimentale, 1983), 273, n. 7.

gran demonstration de l'amor che'l porta a questa sua fiolla Duchesa de Ferara ad miracion a tuti" [His Majesty the King makes a great show of the love he bears towards his daughter, the Duchess of Ferrara, to the admiration of all]. As confirmation of this affection, and as a sign of his goodwill towards the marriage, "e'l lunedì dela festa, Sua Maiestà se vestì de brocado d'oro che né per la festa de la Duchessa di Calabria, ognuno dice, mai vestì altro che bruno" [on the Monday of the celebration, His Majesty wore gold brocade, although everyone says that he never wore anything but brown, even for the Duchess of Calabria's birthday].⁹⁵

With their accounts of the wedding festivities in Naples, the writers of these three letters have provided a rare glimpse of the Aragonese court in celebratory mode, with Ferrante sparing no expense in honouring his daughter's marriage. During those last few days in Naples before beginning the long journey to Ferrara, Eleonora had appeared happy and excited at the prospect of her life in Ferrara as the wife of Ercole d'Este, despite having taken no part in the decision that determined her future. Ferrante's show of affection for her during the wedding celebrations have suggested that he has not made the decision lightly and that, like her brother, he is "più contento che ela habia el Duca de Ferrara che ela havesse el Re de Franza" [happier that she has the duke of Ferrara <for a husband> than if she had the king of France].⁹⁶

Two brotherly letters

Letters from Eleonora's two brothers reveal that her father was not the only one who loved her. The first of these was written by her younger brother, Federico. Dated 29

⁹⁵ In his diary, the Milanese ducal secretary, Cicco Simonetta, lists the expenses for the wedding among the *Intrata del re Fernando*: "spese ne la festa et corredo de madonna Eleonora, ducati xlmila"[expenses for the celebration and outfitting of Lady Eleonora, 40,000 ducats.]; "ha pagata la dote de Madonna Eleonora, ducati lxxxmila" [dowry of lady Eleonora paid, 80,000 ducats]; see Simonetta, *I diari*, 87.

⁹⁶ See above, 105.

May 1473, it appears to have been written after he returned to Naples from escorting her party on the first part of their journey to Rome.⁹⁷ Federico d' Aragona was less than two years younger than Eleonora, and is described as being popular because of, "suo carattere mite e prudente, del suo tratto raffinato, del suo amore alle lettere" [his gentle and wise nature, his refined manners, his love of learning].⁹⁸ His letter to Eleonora reflects this sensitivity, as he described his mixed emotions about her departure. While he was happy that her life was moving on, that she now had a husband and that she would now be playing the role for which she had been preparing all her life, he could not help feeling sad that he, and all those who loved her, would be deprived of her presence. In this short and touching letter, in his own hand, Federico describes his feelings:

Per ben che gran tempo e' abia desiderato veder, per contentamente dell'animo vostro, quello giorno si aspectato de chi teneramente ve amava, non de meno la misera carne, unita prima con l'amore fraterno e poi asuefacta in la continua compangn<i>a, non pò far che venta dal dolore con lacrime non se lamenti de sì longa asencia qual per le virtù de Vostra Signoria non solo a me ma a tuta Napolj da tristicia e dispiacer grandissimo [Although for a long time, for the sake of your happiness, I have longed for the day which has been so anticipated by those who have loved you dearly, nonetheless, this miserable flesh first combined with brotherly love, and then being accustomed to your constant company, is overcome by sorrow and cannot help tearfully lamenting such a long absence which, on account of Your Ladyship's virtues, affects not only me but the whole of Naples with the greatest sadness and displeasure].

Federico's love of learning is so apparent in the poetry of his letter of farewell to an older sister, who has always been a part of his life. He also appears to be speaking from the heart. As a boy of thirteen, he had witnessed Eleonora's excitement when it seemed that she would be marrying Sforza Maria Sforza, and presumably had been around when her hopes foundered on the rocks of Galeazzo Sforza's instability. Recently, he

⁹⁷ ASMo, Cancelleria estense, Carteggio de' principi esteri, Naples-Sicily, busta 1247, autograph letter from Federico d' Aragona to Eleonora d' Aragona, Naples, 29 May 1473.

⁹⁸ Pontieri 1945, 59.

had watched her growing excitement as this new marriage became a reality, although it would be taking her far away from Naples – but, nonetheless, he was happy for her. He begged her to write often, as her letters would be a solace for her absence: “carissima sorella, ve prego volliate e con l’animo e con le lettere satisfare al dolor dela asencia come anche jo per satisfacione dell’animo de Vostra Signoria e mio continuamente farrò” [dearest sister, I beg you that you should both in spirit and with letters dispel the pain of your absence as even I, for Your Ladyship’s gratification, and my own, will do constantly]. With a note of finality, he referred to Ferrara as the place “dove ancor tucti speramo serrà l’ultimo e prospero riposo de Vostra Signoria” [where we still hope that Your Ladyship will find your final, propitious resting place]. Melodramatic, maybe, but it is easy to see why this letter survived when so many did not. It surely occupied a very safe place among Eleonora’s most cherished possessions.

A letter from her elder brother, Alfonso, like so many others from Naples, bears no year, although textual references to the letters which she was busy writing to Ercole suggest that it belongs in 1473, just before Eleonora left Naples.⁹⁹ It is a very different letter from his brother’s because Alfonso was a very different man, a career soldier whom Pontieri described as, “fiero e baldanzoso, era stato temprato alla vita del soldato” [bold and daring, toughened by life as a soldier].¹⁰⁰ Even though in October 1472 he had said that he was losing “la più cara cosa che io havesse” [the most precious thing that I ever had], the tone of Alfonso’s letter to Eleonora was not sentimental, but intensely practical, as he offered her his advice on how best to write to her new

⁹⁹ ASMo, Cancelleria estense, Estero, Principi e signorie, Naples–Sicily, busta 2, letter from Alfonso, duke of Calabria, to Eleonora d’Aragona, Cosenza, 21? [1473] There is no way of conclusively dating this letter, although both the Modena Archive and Moores have placed it in 1477; see Moores, “New Light,” 14. It cannot, however, belong in 1477 because of a reference to Beatrice still being in Naples, and she left there in 1476. Because of the textual references to love letters, I have placed it in the first half of 1473, when Eleonora was writing to Ercole d’Este in the months before she left Naples. Although none of the letters which she wrote to Ercole in this period have survived, on 19 March 1473, he acknowledges two letters from her, together with certain “cose zentile”; see above, 109.

¹⁰⁰ Pontieri 1945, 59. He fought his first battle in 1462 at the age of fourteen; see Hersey, 2.

husband.¹⁰¹ Insisting that he did not expect a reply from her, because he knew that she is “*assai fatigata in lecterezarve con lo Signor duca vostro marito et fatigar et alienar la Vostra mente in altro scrivere che ad quello connectere amore*” [too exhausted from corresponding with the Lord Duke, your husband, to tire and turn your mind to any writing other than to commit your love to him], he had some good tips to share with her on how to write to one’s betrothed, based no doubt on personal experience. His seven-year marriage to Ippolita Maria Sforza had rarely been happy because she had shown herself early to be unwilling to accept his sexual infidelities.¹⁰² He went on to suggest that: “*le lettere de li spusi vogliono essere como de innamorati con una poca più de onesta pur se alcun pocho de tempo ve assoperchia*” [the letters of the betrothed should be like those of lovers (but) with a little more honesty, even if on some rare occasions it goes over the top]. There was a slight barb in his tone when he suggested that, “*havendo apresso el Conte de Matalune non ve bisogna altro consiglio tanto che haveria dicto alcuna cosa bona.*” [having the Count of Mataloni with you, you won’t need any other advice, inasmuch as he will have given you a few good tips]. Alfonso’s reference to Carafa in this context suggests that the good count’s penchant for giving advice on every conceivable subject may not always been appreciated by all of Ferrante’s children! However, at the age of twenty-five, Alfonso clearly considered himself better equipped than Carafa to advise his sister in matters of love, “*sono più recente in le cose d’amore che non ipso*” [I am more up-to-date in matters of love than he is].

Alfonso’s concern for Eleonora and the tone of the letters she was writing to Ercole shows him very much in the guise of an older brother, possibly a little too keen to pass on to his sister his own experience in the ways of love. While its tone may be

¹⁰¹ See above, 112.

¹⁰² Welch, “Ippolita Maria Sforza,” 128. 135

somewhat patronising, it can be seen to be an affectionate letter, and the fact that it is an autograph reinforces that belief.

Although these two letters from Eleonora's brothers are very different in content and tone, both men are attempting to convey, in their own particular way, their brotherly concern and their affection for her, as she embarks on this new stage of her life. These two young men are the closest to Eleonora in age, one slightly older, the other a little younger, and their letters reflect both their positions in the family, their careers and their life experiences. Alfonso was writing from the perspective of a seasoned soldier and a man of the world, while Federico at this stage was still unmarried.

Their letters, along with the observations of Ercole's courtiers, suggest that Eleonora was a much loved member of her family, and that her departure would leave a great void in their lives. Even her normally undemonstrative father had made public his affection for her. They also appeared to be universally happy that she was married at last, and that Ercole d'Este was to be her husband. While Eleonora's marriage might simply be seen as an extension of Ferrante's foreign policy, it can also be argued that Ferrante was happy to commit his daughter to a man whose character he already knew, a man who had spent many of his formative years within the ambience of Eleonora's own world.

When Eleonora left Naples on 24 May 1473 she carried with her two sets of instructions, one prepared for her by father, the other by Diomedes Carafa, both intended to guide her through the political and diplomatic minefields that she would have to cross during her long journey to Ferrara. In the following chapter, these documents will be analysed to reveal not only the political imperatives underlying Eleonora's odyssey but also the strictures of protocol which would govern every aspect of her life. Despite the youth and experience which predicate these instructions, Eleonora's demeanour

throughout her journey revealed her to be an extraordinarily self-possessed, dignified young woman. Teofilo Calcagnini continued to reassure Ercole about the wondrous qualities of his young bride, his account of her visit to Rome a particular bonus of this research, having lain untouched in the University Library in Padua for over four hundred years. The contemporary chroniclers will be left to complete the story of Eleonora's transformation from Aragonese princess to Estense consort, following her triumphal progress through the streets of Ferrara until she dismounted from her white palfrey before her husband's palace and entered the pages of history.