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The Correggio Code: In Search of the Nepenthes Lady*

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The *Portrait of a Lady* attributed to Correggio (St Petersburg, State Hermitage, inv. no. 5555) was witnessed as signed with the Latin pseudonym *Antonius Laetus*. The inscription was still legible in the 70s, and the analysis of parallels confirms authenticity of the painting while also indicating the time of its creation — most likely in the winter 1518–1519. The identification of the sitter as Ginevra Rangoni accepted by the majority should not be disputed. The idea expressed by Riccardo Finzi more than half a century ago can moreover be supported by new arguments: not only the scapular and the Franciscan knot, but also the laurel, ivy, myrtle, the general expression of the widow bride, the full cup of charming wit as a cure for the bitterness of losses, and the reference to Helen of Troy — all this perfectly fits in with Ginevra's life circumstances. Contrary to the authoritative opinion of Claudio Franzoni, the inscription on the cup cannot be reduced to a single word: besides νηπενθές it includes ἄχολο[ν], explaining the uncommon epithet, a hapax, and [ἐπίληθον ἁπά]ντων, marking the end of verse *Od*. 4. 221. Correggio reflected on the feast scene in Menelaus' palace, visualized it in his creative imagination, and the viewer should turn to it to understand the artist's intention. Its central character, Helen, appears to act very differently in the two stories told at its end. She sympathizes with the Achaeans, longs for the husband she left behind, and at the same time wants to destroy the warriors hidden in the belly of the wooden horse, among them this deserted husband of hers. Abnormal details of the second story aroused suspicion; it might well have been an interpolation originally belonging to Iliupersis or Little Iliad. However, to Correggio's mind the text was, of course, authentic, and he perceived the contradictory behavior of Helen as truly homeric. Inspired by Homer, he thus created an ethically ambivalent female image, feasible in its duality.

Keywords: Correggio, Portrait of a Lady, Homer, Renaissance painting, Greek pinacograms.

1. The attribution

The direct visual experience though fundamentally important when interpreting a work of art can hardly claim objectivity thus creating a problem in itself for anyone who

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"Latin and Greek inscriptions on Hermitage paintings", is the result of a team effort. On matters of art history, the author was consulted by Dr Alexander V. Korolev, with whom the present contribution was discussed at all stages of emergence. The archival and bibliographic search was largely carried out by Darya A. Stupnikova, while Olga I. Barysheva provided valuable insights into the source material. The project participants wish to express their thanks and appreciation to Zoya V. Kuptsova, Curator of Italian Art of the 13th–16th cent. at the Hermitage, through whose efforts the painting under study was re-examined technically and the history of its restorations in the past decades has been highlighted (see below, n. 14). Special thanks for necessary references are due to Grigory M. Vorobyev. Last, not least: we owe a great debt of gratitude to Darya A. Sesina (Milan), without whose selfless help in various kinds of research this contribution could have never been concluded.

attempts an analysis of such objects. Regarding the masterpiece we are about to revisit, an art connoisseur of our day would never dare to characterize it as follows:

> *Un Portrait de femme grandeur nature, à mi-corps, qui donne les plus hautes espérances en voyant la reproduction, ne tient pas ce qu'il promet. La vue de l'original est une déception. Ce tableau doit être une copie ancienne d'un original disparu, de quelque maître de premier ordre. La conception est digne du Palma ou même du Giorgione, mais l'exécution, ou plutôt ce que l'on en voit maintenant, surtout des mains, est bien faible. Ce tableau a beaucoup souffert d'un nettoyage maladroit. Le coloris est en froid, il manque comme un plan dans le modelé des chairs un peu "blanc et noir". La dernière couche, toutes les demi-pâtes ou peut-être des glacis qui devaient terminer l'œuvre, ont disparu et c'est cette dernière couche qui seule compte en peinture, comme on sait*.[1]

Ernst Friedrich von Liphart, the learned curator of paintings at the Hermitage Museum, and a talented portrait painter himself, wrote this in 1909, some half a century before the *Portrait of a Lady* (see below, Fig. 1) was unanimously recognized as the work of Correggio. It is along with this attribution which we owe to Roberto Longhi that an aesthetic reevaluation took place. The poor copy of a nameless masterpiece further marred by inept cleaning turns out to be "*un ritratto che, fra quelli del primo ventennio in Italia non trova paragoni convenienti (e sia pure per opposizione) fuori che nella Gioconda, nella Donna velata o nella Violante; Leonardo, Raffaello, Tiziano, niente di meno*".[2]

Doubt arises, as to whether Longhi has seen the original painting. Anyway, both assessments are perfectly valid for the unbiased spectator of the Hermitage portrait. The overall arrangement as well as the rendering of individual segments is quite worthy of a Renaissance genius, but still the left hand holding up a puffy sleeve so that it does not sink into the bowl is unnaturally shaped and the coloring is indeed somewhat cold, missing "light and shade" in the flesh modeling. This and the absence of a "final layer" makes the portrait very different from the *Gioconda* which it resembles most.[3] The *Portrait of a Man with a Book* (Milan, Pinacoteca del Castello Sforzesco) compositionally identical to the artwork in question ("*una struttura <…> svolta in una diagonale mobile, che dal paesaggio balza alla quinta arborea e da questa si propaga e fluttua nella figura*") and thus justly par-

[1] Liphart 1910, 36. The portrait was one of the exhibits at the scandalously famous 1908 exhibition of paintings from private collections organized by the magazine "Old Years", the only visitors of which were the Tsar and his cronies; only the catalog was available to the public: Savinskaya 2013 [Коллекция живописи князей Юсуповых — феномен художественной культуры России второй половины XVIII — начала XX века: пополнение и функционирование], 260. Tatiana Kustodieva (2011, 154), whose catalog is still the most complete and for the most part reliable reference work on the Italian Renaissance painting in the Hermitage, deduces from these words that Liphart considered the portrait "a copy of a work by Palma the Elder or Giorgione".

[2] Longhi 1958, 43. The essay "*Le fasi del Correggio giovine e l'esigenza del suo viaggio romano*" was reprinted several times, with ill. in: Barocelli 1988, 98–108. Longhi voiced his criticism and related observations as early as 1935, at a *Convegno Nationale dei Critici e Strorici dell'Arte* held in conjunction with the closing of a large Correggio exhibition in Parma (Apr.–Oct. that year): his "*breve communicazione ricordata a pag. 38 del volume relativo*" (we do not know what volume he is referring to, since we were unable to find it in the proceedings of the conference, published in *Crisopoli* 1935, 5) is confirmed by R. Finzi (1962, 5), who was a participant in that memorable congress, reflected in Italian newsreels of the mid-1930s. For whatever reason, Longhi did not publish his findings and arguments until more than twenty years later, and that only in connection with A. E. Popham's critical remarks on his 1956 book "*Il Correggio e la Camera di San Paolo a Parma*" and in the context of discussing another topic, i. e. Correggio's alleged visit to Rome.

[3] Lundahl 2017, 240: "The *Hermitage Portrait* also constitutes a wonderful homage to Leonardo — who died in 1519, probably the same year as Correggio's execution of the portrait — and to his immortal *La Gioconda*." On the resemblance to *Mona Lisa* see the detailed description in: Brown 1981, 88–89, cited *in extenso* by Lundahl.

Fig. 1. The Portrait of a Lady, Kustodieva 2011, 154.

alleled with it to additionally verify its attribution,[4] is likewise devoid of these shortcomings. Hence, although perhaps not so remarkable in design and drawing, the male portrait gives the impression of a more definitive, more masterful work. Contrary to Liphart, bad copying cannot possibly be the reason for the unskilled shaping of hands (actually, only of the left one: the right hand which holds the bowl is absolutely natural, though also a bit blurry), for in most other details, even in the finest ones, it is difficult to detect any flaw. The unfinished hand is a well-known evidence of haste, an indicator that the artist did not have time to bring his work to absolute perfection.

Liphart's report of the restoration which affected the painting is either conjectural (an experienced museum professional like him has seen quite a few "washed up" paintings), or relies on information we do not currently have. Who performed it and when, can only be guessed at. It could have been ordered by Nikolai Borisovich Yusupov Jr (1827–1891), in whose gallery in Arkhangelskoye estate near Moscow it was kept before entering the State Hermitage Museum in 1924.[5] Even more likely a barbaric renovation was carried out by the assistants of a well-known Venetian art dealer Pietro Concolo before he traveled to St Petersburg in 1800 to sell this painting among others to the imperial court.[6] Fritz Harck, who saw

[4] Longhi 1958, 52.

[5] Finzi 1962, 8, n. 5, relying on the reference of M. I. Artamonov and V. F. Loewinson-Lessing. Of what might have been done with the painting in the 20s and 30s, we have not the slightest idea.

[6] Concolo hoped to sell a batch of paintings to the Emperor's court, but was refused (*Russkaya Starina [Russian antiquities]* 1887, 56/10, 204). Yusupov acquired 12 paintings, among which were Tiepolo, Guercino, Guido Reni, Claude Lorrain: Savinskaya 2012 [Коллекция живописи князей Юсуповых — феномен художественной культуры России второй половины XVIII — начала XIX века: от истоков формирования до издания каталога], 454.

the portrait in the Yusupovs' palace in St Petersburg about 1895–1896, reported that it was "so scribbled and painted over that it's maker can only be guessed at".[7] The square letters on the trunk of the tree, now indiscernible even at close inspection (see n. 14 below; the painting appears to be in excellent state of preservation),[8] were, in all likelihood, clearly visible before the said cleaning. But they were, strangely enough, perfectly legible after it as well. To cite Liphart again: « *Les lettres soulighées se trouvent sur la coupe. Dans le fond, à gauche, en lettres cubitales latins : ANTON..LÆT. Qui est cet Antoine dont la dame fait la joie ?* »

Longhi quotes the last phrase with a touch of irony.[9] Indeed, how could an expert on Italian art mistake the artist's signature for the expression of the painting customer's joy over the reciprocity of his feelings? For as it seems Liphart supposed *Antonius laetus* to mean "Anton is happy", forgetting besides that *felix* would be a much better fit. Of course, Longhi's reading is exactly right: *ANTON LAET* stands for Antonio Allegri, known as Correggio. Yet, there is one fact (of which Longhi was, presumably, unaware) that makes it particularly difficult to explain Liphart's wish to interpret the inscription like that. It is now definitely established that the portrait was listed in the Yusupovs' collection as a work by Correggio, and was also purchased as such.[10] An exhibitor of paintings from private collections would have known about this circumstance. He nevertheless does not mention it even as a possibility, referring only to A. N. Benois' tentative attribution to Lotto based on a purely aesthetic concept, apparently the same as his own.[11] If Liphart's view were not predominantly aesthetic, he

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[7] Harck 1896, cited below, n. 10.å

[8] From the words of R. Finzi (1962, 8), who received a color slide from the Hermitage, it is not clear whether the inscription was visible on it, but this is what those who sent him the slide along with a detailed description of the painting — Artamonov and Loewinson-Lessing (above, n. 5) — apparently asserted: "*Il grosso tronco della pianta, a cui sono avvinte foglie d'edera <…>, è d'un bruno rossiccio, in parte ombrato di scuro. E' su di esso che si legge — come inciso nella corteccia — il nome del pittore.*"

[9] Longhi 1958, 43: "*il Barone di Liphart <…> svagava nell'interpretazione romantica*".

[10] Savinskaya 2012, 454; Krasnobaeva 2009a, 54, and 2009b, the extended Russian version [Краснобаева М. Д. *Бумажный музеум* Н. Б. Юсупова], 56. The reproduction shows a drawing in Yusupov's album (vol. I, p. 149), with the artist's name "Alleg. dit Correge" inscribed above; cf. ib. 61, no. 14, an entry in "The List of Paintings from *Museum du Prince Yousoupoff*". The name *Alleg*[*ri*] (= *LAET*?) catches the eye: the painter's signature could well have served as a 'sale argument'. Benois was well aware of the fact that the painting was attributed to Correggio, but he recklessly denies the attribution. A few years before the painting was included in the "Old Years" exhibition, describing the Yusupovs' collection, he noted (1900 [Юсуповская галерея], 140): «Картину эту когда-то приписывали Корреджо, но это уже совершенно неверно. Теперь ее приписывают Лоренцо Лотто, однако с таким же правом ее можно приписать и Себастиано дель Пиомбо. Больше всего смущает исследователей то, что посадка, костюм, даже тип — чисто венецианские, похожие на Пальму Старшего (на фотографии этот портрет даже знатоки принимают за произведение Пальмы), а живопись, колорит — холодные, сдержанные — имеют гораздо больше общего с произведениями римлян и даже позднейших флорентинцев, нежели с картинами соотечественников Джорджоне и Тициана». Benois published a very high-quality black-and-white photograph of the painting (ib. 137) which shows that despite the restorations carried out by the Hermitage Museum in the 20th century, the face of the sitter, her costume, the bowl with the inscription, the landscape etc. — all this 120 years ago was exactly the same. The artist's signature is not visible on this photo either, although to the right of the face near the ivy branch one can, perhaps, if one tries hard enough, distinguish some scribbles.

[11] Liphart 1910, 37: « *De l'avis de M. Alexandre Benois, c'est un Lorenzo Lotto, ce Protée tantôt faible, repoussant quelquefois, mais toujours intéressant*. » Benois reproduced Harck's opinion (1896, 433): "*Am interessantesten von allen dort [sc. in der Sammlung Yussoupoff] befindlichen italienischen Bildern erschien mir ein Frauenportrait, das freilich so stark ausgetupft und übermalt ist, dass sein Schöpfer nur noch zu ahnen ist. Der ganzen Auffassung nach scheint es mir auf Lotto zurückzugehen*." Other early attributions: Giulio Campi (Berenson 1907, 187: „Portrait of Lady holding Bowl of 'Nepenthe'"); Sebastiano del Piombo, in his Roman period, as indicated by the "*etliche klassisch-kühle Züge der Modellierung*" (Schmidt 1909, 167: "*In Venedigs*

might have recalled the parallel inscription *ANTONIUS* (or *ANTONUS*, a wrong allograph on the Parma copy) *LAETUS FACIEBAT* signing the *Madonna of Albinea* (finished in autumn 1519) for which Correggio's authorship is sufficiently proven. But we will note something else: the fact that Liphart is so caught up in interpreting the painting as a love message (interestingly, Benois took a different view which we will abstract in its place indicates that it actually can be read this way, and it is hard to deny that a slightly frivolous look of the model, her ruddy cheeks and bared shoulders, as well as an association with Helen of Troy suggested by the Greek inscription on the bowl, might support this reading.

There are a few ambiguities about the signature. The *Madonna of Albinea* is not preserved in the original. Presumably, it perished in the fire or was damaged in transit and then cut up into parts which went to various places circa 1670.[12] Four copies remain of which two, from the Galleria Nationale in Parma and the Pinacoteca Capitolina, bear the inscription (Fig. 2 below). These are thought to be made about Correggio's lifetime.[13] Yet the room for doubt remains, since, to repeat, not a trace of the nine-letter signature on the *Portrait of a Lady* is now visible, and Concolo had a questionable reputation.[14] No signed Correggio's paintings are known apart from these two, while the copyists could have considered it important to indicate his authorship. At the same time, *Antonus* instead of *Antonius* on the stone by St Lucy's foot (on the Roman copy the letters are inscribed not on the boulder, but on the rock bordering the right edge of the landscape) is most likely the slipup of the talented artisan who made the Parma copy, which means that the signature was part of the original. During the last restoration of the *Por-*

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klassische Zeit gehörte auch das rätselhafte Bild einer weißgekleideten sitzenden Frau, die eine Schale in der Hand hält, halb Portrait, halb Allegorie. Die Landschaft ist total übermalt und die Figur arg durch Putzen und Retuschen misshandelt worden…"; cf. Benois, as above, n. 10); Moretto da Brescia (Schubring 1926, 595: the *Portrait of a Lady* is pregnantly bynamed "*Der Glaube*", "Trust"; Banti, Boschetto, 1953, 107); see also Kustodieva 2011, 154. In Modena, in the Este Gallery, there is a drawing made from our painting and dating from the 17th or early 18th century, the signature of which indicates Giorgione as the author of the portrait (cf. above, n. 1). For high quality reproduction and detailed annotation see: URL: https://catalogo.beniculturali.it/detail/HistoricOrArtisticProperty/0800436934 (6.11. 2023), with reference to Castellani Tarabini 1854, no. 208.

[12] Ligabue 2009, 6: "*E' verosimile che la firma del pittore* (Antonius Laetus)*, posta in basso a sinistra, ai piedi di S. Lucia, firma che sappiamo doveva esserci in quanto appare nelle fedeli copie d'epoca del dipinto sia andata distrutta dai traversi oppure, nel sezionamento della tela, il frammento contenente la firma risultò non utilizzabile, e quindi buttato. Infatti non è possibile ipotizzare che, di un'opera così importante, anche se ridotta in frammento, ma con la firma del Correggio, non se ne conosca l'esistenza*."

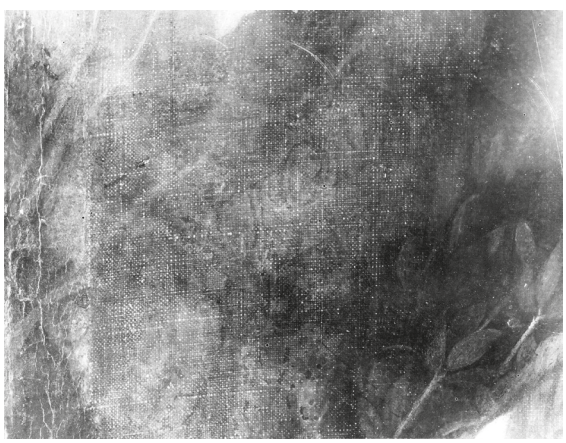
[13] See catalog description on the Correggio Foundation website. URL: https://www.fondazioneilcorreggio.it/opera/madonna-col-bambino-con-santa-maria-maddalena-e-lucia-madonna-di-albinea/. For the most detailed study of the painting and its copies see Cadoppi 2013 and 2022.

[14] Primarily because of the Veronese's altarpiece story. He was accused of cutting the altarpiece for more successful sale by the Scottish artist and art dealer Gavin Hamilton: Cassidy 2007, 483–484. An examination of the Portrait of a Lady by the Hermitage tech lab (infrared imaging, illumination by strong directional light and microscopy) made for the present study failed to reveal any signature. The last document of its availability is the above mentioned restoration protocol from the 1970s. On the other hand, the new examination has clearly shown that the author's painting had been badly worn and washed long before the '70s, which corresponds to the descriptions of those who saw the portrait in the Yusupov's collection. The signature on the photo (Fig. 2, c) is, however, very clear and lies on the previously scrubbed surface. Thus, the Hermitage experts, who were involved in the research headed by Zoya V. Kuptsova, came to the conclusion that the signature was induced, probably on a layer of original varnish. Since it is unlikely that any of the personalities known to us who somehow participated in the fate of the painting after its creation forged such a signature, we have to assume that Correggio's original sphragis inscribed, perhaps, in a hurry, has been refreshed, either by someone hired by the Yusupovs, or by Concolo, if not by those from whom he bought the painting.

a

b

c



d

Fig. 2. Madonna di Albinea, inscription, Periti 2004, 460: *a* — Parma copy; *b* — Roman copy; *c* — Portrait of a Lady, State Hermitage, detail before restoration with signature; *d* — detail in infrared light

trait of a Lady done in the Hermitage in the mid-70s photographs of the signature were taken. They are preserved in the restoration protocol (see Fig. 2, *c, d*). One of them (Figs 2, *c*) is in contrast, and the letters are kind of underdrawn, so it probably does not reflect the original painting. However, in all the photographs it is noticeable that there were more letters after *ANTON*: *I* and part of *V* are visible. It is also possible to distinguish *V* after *LÆT*. The *Portrait of a Lady* was thus sighned *ANTONIV<S> LÆTV<S>*. In this form it fully corresponds to Correggio's signature on the *Madonna of Albinea*, except for the *verbum faciendi*. The signature surrounds the trunk, disappearing into the foliage. This form of inscription surrounding a circular object with parts of letters becoming invisible is repeated on the bowl.

Besides, even more importantly for us, the *Portrait of a Lady* has a resemblance to the *Madonna of Albinea* very obvious to an attentive eye. "*Un acuto svolgersi nel ritmo in tralice per una composizione mobile*"[15] — Longhi's lapidary account of the former work fits also the latter. In both, the central image is presented against the background of a tree. In both, the viewer's gaze is drawn to the metal vessel with an object or inscription on it. The *nepenthes* medicine bowl is shaped with exceptional skill, and the thin bronze (or perhaps silver) plate on which St Lucy's eyes rest is executed "*con quel particolare virtuosismo che il Correggio cominciava proprio in questi anni a riservare alla rappresentazione delle superfici lucide e curve degli oggetti metallici*" (Maddalena Spagnolo).[16]

Finally, a certain similarity can be found in the appearance of the model. The vast majority of female faces in Correggio's paintings are of much the same type: Danae, Leda, Io, Virtue (*Allegoria della Virtù*), St Catherine, St Flavia, Mary Magdalene and a number of Madonnas (*Madonna del Latte*, *Madonna della cesta*, *Adorazione degli pastori*, *Madonna in adorazione del Bambino*, to mention just the few widely famous ones)[17] look like twins: neat nose, round cheeks and chin, gently sloping forehead. A pretty round face, very young and very cheerful. About 1520, however, a different face appears on his canvases — oval, with a high forehead, somewhat lengthy nose, the expression subdued and pensive, the smile somewhat reserved. The Madonna's face in *Rest during the flight to Egypt* (Florence, The Uffizi Gallery) is almost austere.[18] Being of the same type, the sitter in the *Portrait of a Lady* and the central image of the *Madonna of Albinea* — as far as we can tell from the copy — have a more softened look. Their similarity is quite noticeable and it should be pointed out that creating this type of face influenced the artist's later work: the *Madonna della scodella* (also holding a bowl, as reflected in the title)[19] and, remarkably, *Venus with Mercury and Cupid*, known also as *L'educazione di Cupido* (National Gallery),[20] are reminiscent of the lady on the Hermitage portrait.

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[15] Longhi 1958, 43.

[16] See her paper on "Correggio Art Home": https://web.archive.org/web/20201101134107/, http://www.correggioarthome.it/SchedaOpera.jsp?idDocumentoArchivio=2509, with reference to Ekserdjian 1997, 66–67.

[17] See e. g. Zamboni 2004, 165; 167; 171; 163; 141; 129; 123; 127; 139; 119; 137. We refer to this well-known album, released in *I Classici del Arte* series only for the convenience of the reader. On the Correggio Foundation's website led by Claudio Franzoni one can just as easily find high quality reproductions of all the mentioned works, accompanied by informative annotations.

[18] Zamboni 2004, 103.

[19] Ib. 155.

[20] Ib. 56.

The aforesaid resemblance confirms that the artist, surprisingly enough, chose to sign just these two paintings latinizing his signature *Lieto* which is present on a couple of documents.[21] But it also implies that the *Portrait of a Lady* was painted at the same time as the *Madonna of Albinea*, that is in 1518–1519, either in Parma or in the city of the painter, and soon after his return from a visit to Rome which, as Longhi has envisioned,[22] must have taken place in the summer and fall of 1518. There are reasons to believe that the work on the portrait cut into the work on the altarpiece for the Albinean church of San Prospero, and the Madonna was completed a few months after the Lady. In this period Correggio is also working on the frescoes of the Abbess's chamber of the Parmesan convent of San Paolo and befriends the Paduan humanist, scholarly mystic and classicizing poet Giorgio Anselmi, from whom he probably got the idea to Latinize his surname.[23] This is when the artist's fascination with antiquity reaches its peak. It results not only in the mass of antique imagery, but even more so in the desire to follow the antique sources more diligently.[24] For the frescoes in San Paolo he chose a rare subject from Homer (*Il.* 15. 18–22). The imperfect *faciebat* instead of the generally more common perfect is likely to be a considered detail: the emergence of this form in signatures from the second half of the 15th century onwards is largely due to the lasting impression made on the learned artists of the Renaissance by a passage from Pliny the Elder (*NH* pr. 26–27), according to which the great Greek painters and sculptors signed their masterpieces with the provisional title (*Apelles aut Polyclitus faciebat*) the imperfect indicating willingness to respond readily to criticism, as well as of the fundamental incompleteness of any object of art (*tamquam inchoata semper arte et inperfecta, ut contra iudiciorum varietates superesset artifici regressus*), while the perfect *fecit* was seen as a sign of presumptuousness and arrogance (*apparuit summam artis securitatem auctori placuisse, et ob id magna invidia fuere omnia ea*).[25]

2. The inscription

The inscription on the Lady's bowl was the subject of much learned interest and speculation in the last years, since it came to the scholarly attention of Nigel Wilson and was catalogued by him among other Greek inscriptions on Renaissance paintings (which are rare indeed, literary ones being altogether sparse). He describes it as follows:

> There are three Greek words on the bowl. In the centre *nepenthes* is clear, in good capitals. To the right one can see parts of five Greek letters which may be read without any doubt as ΑΧΟΛΟ, i. e. ἄχολον from the Homeric text. On the left parts of four letters are visible, and though the First is very incomplete, the word can again be completed without doubt as

[21] Periti 2004, 459.

[22] See Longhi 1958, esp. 44–45. As far as we can tell, Longhi's conclusion is not disputed; see for instance Spagnolo 2008 (b) 32. Correggio's stay in Rome sparked a desire to create his own image of antiquity. This meant, *inter alia*, interpreting rare subjects that others had not yet interpreted, drawing from the ancient authors what others have not yet drawn. Thus, for example, from Ovid, *Met*. 1. 568 *eqs*, he chooses to depict not the transformation of Io into a cow, but her seduction by Zeus in form of a cloud, cf. Valladares 2015, 137–139.

[23] Lundahl 2017, 228; 230; 243.

[24] On his erudition see Pannofsky 1961, 35.

[25] Matthew 1998, 638–640. Impf. ἐποίει is hardly usable in the kind of signatures Pliny describes; he might have meant the aorist, or indefinite past ἐποίησε.

φυτόν, plant. But this is not in Homer; we must suppose the artist's patron chose to vary the text of the quotation.[26]

The scholar is relying on a photograph of the painting specially taken for him. However, as we have already realized, the *Portrait of a Lady* must be observed in the original, and preferably more than once. There are small but significant details in it intended for a very careful viewer. This whole picture is full of hints, or clues, that are downright eye-catching: the monastic cord with a knot on the Lady's knee, a scapular on her neck, ivy and laurel above, small white and black flowers in the bottom right, round tower and fortress wall near the hill in the background — each element has been thought out to contribute to the message the artist wants to convey. All the more telling should be the words whose fragments are visible on the edges of the bowl. The desire to depict next to or in the middle of Homeric verse the gloss-like substantive "plant" (νηπενθές is an adjective defining φάρμακον[27]), trivial to the point of irrelevance, would be extremely strange should it come from the artist's patron or the artist himself. A close look would reveal (as can be seen in a high-quality modern photograph also) that the word which Nigel Wilson "without doubt" identifies as φυτόν[28] is in fact taken from the same line of the Odyssey. On the left edge of the bowl, the upper parts of four letters are visible, of which the last three can be read unmistakably as T, O/Ω and N. The rim closest to the viewer hides the bottom of T and O/Ω, and the curve of the bowl makes the first letter merge into small u-shaped tick, so it could actually have been read as Υ thus suggesting [Φ]ΥΤΟΝ. Still, as Kalle Lundahl has stressed, it could just as easily be read as N. The letters on the left must then be ΝΤΩΝ, the last letters of [ΑΠΑ]ΝΤΩΝ (ἁπάντων, "of all"), the word that ends the verse that begins with νηπενθές.[29] This almost certainly is true, because the upper half of the penultimate letter looks barrel-shaped and as if it were open at the bottom, i. e. much more like an omega than an omicron (Fig. 3 below).

The Homeric verse, *Od.* 4. 221, runs as follows: νηπενθές ἄχολον τε κακῶν ἐπιλήθον ἁπάντων, "chasing away sorrow and soothing worry, bringing oblivion to all troubles". From this Correggio transcribes in full the first word, which opens up a series of three definitions to φάρμακον, "medicine", "drug", from the previous verse (4. 220: αὐτίκ' ἄρ' εἰς οἶνον βάλε [sc. Ἑλένη] φάρμακον, ἔνθεν ἔπινον, "immediately she [Helen] threw the medicine into their wine, from which they drank"), the other two being ἄχολον and ἐπίληθον κακῶν. Of course, *nepenthes* is central and dominant, the viewer's eye falls on it first, and large spaces are left on both sides between it and the other two words. Yet it would be hasty to think, following Claudio Franzoni, that the bordering words hinted at are completely unimportant and virtually meaningless, making up only its background. The choice of these words is likely to be deliberate. Ἄχολον, "anxiety-relieving",

[26] Wilson 1992, 243.

[27] Although it has since come to be used independently, detached from the word being defined and turned to a substantive, as in "The Raven" by Edgar Allan Poe: Rojcewicz 2019, 264–265.

[28] Liphart (1910, 37) read the second word as ἔπι]νον which is completely implausible, but is quoted by Franzoni (2020, 338) first. Citing then the readings of Lundahl and Wilson, the scholar implicitly ascertains that the lateral words actually cannot be read, as if they were deliberately confused.

[29] Lundahl 2017, 234. Lundahl's comments on the supposed remnants of the inscription: "Correggio avoided the related term "φάρμακον" probably because it was too ambiguous, with the double connotation of "poison" and "medicament"" (235); "the artist omitted the adjective "ἐπίληθον" because he did not want to allow an opening for any *negative* skepticism ("forgetful")" (244) etc. — are irrelevant. We just can't see the rest of the verse from over the rim of the bowl.

Fig. 3. The Portrait of a Lady (as on Fig. 1), fragment 1: bowl

"soothing" (verb. "bile-free") along with κακῶν ἐπιλήθον in v. 221 should be read as clarification of the little-understood νηπενθές which is introduced first. Such clarifications in Homer refer precisely to the adjective qualifiers. Throwing in an obscure characterization, in our case probably a neologism, the epic further comments on itself by attaching a synonym or an expanded description.[30] Here this is done with special skill, since ἄ-χολον is not only semantically but also morphologically identical to νη-πενθές, both adjectives consisting of a privative prefix and a root with the meaning of "sorrow" or "worry". Nothing prevents us from thinking that Correggio and his humanist friends, them too, took the word as explanatory, though it is no less possible that they thought ἄχολον to mean "curing anger", as a parallel to νηπενθές meaning "curing grief". This sense was actually drawn by some Cinquecento Homer readers from Eustathius' comment on the line.[31] Ἀπάντων is important because it marks the end of the verse, part of which is meant to be written on the nearer inner rim of the bowl (τε κακῶν ἐπιλήθον — there is quite enough space for this), and so invites the viewer to recall it. Hence pace Franzoni[32] Homer's locus was important for the painter as a whole, not just one word, whatever its meaning, taken out of context.

This context, that is the wedding feast scene in Menelaus' palace, or to be more precise, the part of it that follows after the two so far unrecognized guests have entered into conversation with their host, is in itself remarkable and deserves here a detailed treatment. For it is Lundahl's merit to have shown that Correggio not only could but most probably did delve into it.[33] The silver vessel in the painting makes us think not

[30] This peculiarity of Homeric style, present already in the first verses of the Iliad and Odyssey, was pointed out by Rudolf Pfeiffer (1968, 4).

[31] Franzoni (2020, 345) cites Celio Rodigino, on which see below.

[32] Ib. 344. Surprisingly, Franzoni does not discuss Lundahl's conclusions, limiting himself to a brief mention of them, along with those of Wilson, although the assumption that on the bowl's surface the line of the Odyssey is in fact literally quoted, appears to undermine the credibility of his overall interpretation. He strongly emphasizes the opposite, p. 346: "It is important at this point to reiterate that the inscription on the vessel in Correggio's portrait is not a direct quotation of the Homeric verse. Rather, it is an easily recognizable reference to a well-known passage, focusing on a single word."

[33] Lundahl 2017, 242–243. To sum up his arguments: 1) Luigi Pungileoni (1817–1818, I, 6–7) names the humanist scholars who, according to his data, were Correggio's teachers, gave him knowledge of antiquity and instilled in him a taste for it — Giovanni Berni from Piacenza and Battista Marastoni from Modena; Correggio's third teacher probably was Gian Battista Lombardi. 2) There is not a single error in his Greek, which is relatively rare for the painters of his time. 3) Vasari called Correggio a "melancholic" which implies

only of the Helen's bowl, which the poet does not describe, but also of the crater that Menelaus gives to Telemachus in *Od*. 4, 615–619 (= 15, 115–119), "a beautifully crafted mixing bowl, all silver, with rims of gold, Hephaestus' work", a gift of Phaedimus, the Sidonian king. "A beautifully crafted Phoenician silver crater with a capacity of six measures" Odysseus also received as a reward from Achilles in *Il.* 23, 740–779. Correggio read Homer, and he read him carefully. We should thus follow the whole scene, *Od.* 4, 78–295, in order to understand as best we can which of the motifs played in it might have been embodied in the master's work. To be sure, we are dealing with a very subtle, almost elusive, thing. Correggio must have learned a lot from what he read, and reforged what he had learned in the crucible of his creative imagination. How exactly — we cannot say for certain. But still, by emphasizing the most prominent features of the text and without losing sight of the painting, we will perhaps be able to draw some conclusions.

Menelaus is full of memories of his dear war buddy, the thought of Odysseus brings tears to the eyes of those present, and they tell stories about war adventures of the capturer of Troy. The chief figure, however, the one who particularly occupies the bard, and on whom, one might say, the entire pathos of the scene is centered, is neither Odysseus nor the friendly host Menelaus, but his gorgeous spouse Helen. Her appearance is furnished with a mass of detail: she enters "like Artemis with a golden distaff" (4. 122); as befits a virtuous lady, she is busy with needlework, and so one of the three maids who accompany her, puts a chair for her mistress, another carries wool, and the third brings a yarn basket — a gift from Alcandre, queen of Thebes in Egypt, "where tremendous riches lie in people's homes" (127). Thus, the Egyptian theme is introduced, to be developed later when it comes to the *nepenthes* drug. Immediately upon her entrance Helen points out the guest's resemblance to Odysseus, voicing Menelaus' own conjecture which is then confirmed by Peisistratus (who, though the son of Menelaus' neighbor Nestor, is unfamiliar to him as well: the detail is a little odd, but not unbelievable). The host finally knows for sure that it is really Telemachus, who came to Sparta in search of news about his long-absent father. At the thought of Odysseus, whose companionship the characters present are deprived of, "in all them a yearning after tears is raised" (183: τοῖσι δὲ πᾶσιν ὑφ' ἵμερον ὦρσε γόοιο; cf. the same formulaic expression in 113). Now everyone, starting with Helen, weeps. The skillful use of anaphora makes us almost hear this lament: "Cried Argive Helen, offspring of Zeus, / Cried Telemachus and Menelaus, Atreus' son, too…" Pisistratus has his own reason to cry: he remembers his older brother Antilochus, who died by the hand of Memnon. Memnon's expedition to Troy was thought to have taken place not long after the death and burial of Hector. In the Odyssey there are a lot of passing references to events that occurred between the beginning of the poem and the end of the Iliad (but, remarkably, never to the events of the Iliad itself); we will soon hear accounts of some such incidents from Helen and Menelaus.

There is excessively much weeping in all our scene. This, too, is typical of Homer. Homeric laughter has become proverbial, Homeric lament might also have entered the saying. With a primitive naivety the epic narrator seeks to touch his listener by depicting the manifestations of emotion in a hyperbolized manner. If there's a thirst, there will be

intellectualism and diligence. 4) Correggio's friend and adviser must have been Giorgio Anselmi. 5) The painter used Homeric poems as a source of inspiration in the Camera di San Paolo.

a pleasant quenching of it. Hence the seemingly oxymoronic formula φρένα τέρπεσθαι γόοιο, "to please (or rather, to saturate) the mind by crying", as e. g. the king of Sparta speaks of himself yearning for his treacherously killed brother and those who perished at Troy (103). This time, however, satiation does not come, the insatiable crying continues until Menelaus tells them to stop and take up the feast again (212–214). Yet it seems that even this is not enough, so the poet comes up with a new move: Helen has got a special remedy for grief,[34] and an exceptionally strong one at that: "whoever takes a sip of it spiked in a crater with wine, will not let a tear fall on his cheek, not even if his mother and his father dies, or if his brother or his son is stabbed to death in his own presence" (222–226). This remedy the heroine received as a gift from another Egyptian woman, one "Polydamna, wife of Thon". It hardly matters who and what these two are, because in Egypt "everyone is a physician whose knowledge (viz. of medicinal and poisonous plants) surpasses that of all humans, for they trace their lineage back to Paieon" (229–232). Helen drops her medicine into a bowl for mixing wine and water, orders the drink to be served (she herself does not seem to drink from this cup, her crying is stopped at Menelaus' request), and promptly starts to recount one of Odysseus' Trojan adventures where she played the main role. The impression is that the drink should work during and with her story. This story is immediately followed by another, told by Menelaus, in which she also participates. Afterwards, at Telemachus' request, everyone goes to bed, so with these two tales the scene reaches its climax.

Each story is bizarre, on the verge of believable and especially striking as to how Helen appears in them. Still, hers is less weird. Odysseus, disguised as a beggar, sneaks into the besieged city. Helen is the only one who recognizes the cunning scout. She takes him to her house, washes away his disguise, forces him to reveal himself and tell her all about the Achaeans' plans. He then returns from recon with the intelligence he needed having slaughtered many on the way back. "The other Trojan women wailed loudly," — she utters at the end — "but my heart rejoiced, since by then it had changed, wanting to go home, and I bemoaned the madness Aphrodite brought, when she led me there, far from my own land, abandoning my child, my bridal chamber, and my husband, who lacked nothing both in wisdom and appearance" (259–264). One might comment that by this time Paris must be long dead, but it is worth noting that, contrary to the popular view, for the poet of the Iliad Helen and Paris are by no means a pair of lovers. In fact, Helen hates her seducer (3.427– 436), as she also hates Aphrodite who made her come to Troy (*Il.* 3.396–409); she goes to Paris because the goddess forces her (3. 413–420). It must be emphasized that Homer always treats Helen with reverence. Hence, her remorse and longing for her quondam spouse convinces his attentive modern readers as it must have convinced most of his ancient audience.

Yet, a public more knowledgeable might have had a different attitude. Echoing the memories of Odysseus' exploits, Menelaus picks up the tale and relates an episode of the Trojan Horse story which must have taken place soon after Odysseus' reconnaissance tour described above.[35] The Achaean heroes are sitting in the belly of the horse already driven

[34] Stephen Rojcewicz (2019, 264) aptly notes that in Homer "there seems to be a tendency for women to be in charge of *pharmaka* and potions" (cf. Circe in *Od*. 10. 235–240, Nicomede and Agamede in *Il.* 11. 619–643; 740–741).

[35] Ameis, Hentze, Cauer 1920, 114: „*Alles was Helena von sich selber gesagt hat, übergeht er mit Stillschweigen*."

into the city. While they wait for their moment to come out, Helen approaches, "commanded by will of a deity who wished to bring glory to the Trojans." The latter means plainly that she came with hostile intentions. The reference to the will of a deity should not deceive: in the early Greek epics an "unidentifiable divine operator" (H. S. Versnel, in *OCD*, s. v. *theos*) causes action that the poet can or will not explain.[36] Helen will be trying to ruin those she has just claimed to love dearly, and to help those she claimed to hate. It is hard to think that this change comes from love and respect for Deiphobus, who took command of the Trojan forces after the death of Hector and whose wife she became after the death of Paris (*Od*. 8. 517 and Schol., for the Little Iliad it is also attested in the "Chrestomathy" of Proclus). Nevertheless, the author finds it necessary to say, through the mouth of his hero, that she approached the horse "accompanied by noble Deiphobus" (4. 276). This is done to satisfy the learned curiosity of those who know of Helen's new marriage. She begins to call by name the Achaean heroes, imitating the voices of their wives (278–279).[37] The absurdity of this ruse does not seem to embarrass anyone. What is even more absurd, Menelaus himself, along with Diomedes, are the most eager to answer her call, but — "Odysseus restrained us and held us back, even though we really wanted to do it" (284). Yet, Anticlus (this is the only mention of this character in Homer, and it was athetized by Aristarchus[38]) was already about to respond, and would have given everyone away, had Odysseus not clamped his mouth with his hand, "keeping his grip, until Pallas Athena led you back away" (289).

This strange story contrasting strongly to the previous one is very likely to be a rhapsodic insertion transferred from either Iliupersis or the Little Iliad. The post-Homeric poets had a different attitude to Helen. They were more inclined to condemn, so that later she found herself in need of protection, and her crime became subject to rhetorical dispute.[39] However, Correggio read the scene as a monolithic whole, and thus perceived its central character as paradoxical, if not enigmatic. A woman around whom warriors fight and die. She sympathizes with some and she wants to ruin them for the sake of others. She's beautiful, of course, but that's beside the point, her beauty plays no part in the plot. What really matters is that she is exceptionally smart, surpassing not only women's intelligence but men's as well. One cannot help thinking that this (Pseudo-?) Homeric character of Helen of Troy is somehow reflected in the Nepenthes Lady. Actually, one of the little "clues" surrounding like a wreath the central figure, does hint that in order to understand

[36] An "imperceptible intervention", see Lampe 2013, 409, n. 55.

[37] Ameis, Hentze, Cauer, *op. cit.*, 115: „*Ein seltsamer Gedanke und seltsam ausgedruckt, zumal wenn man ihn so verstehen will, dass Helena die Frauen der einzelnen Hauptheldеn mit der Stimme nachgemacht habe. Aristarch hatte wohl Recht, den Vers zu verwerfen*."

[38] Wagner 1894, 2426: „*Nach dem Scholion stammte die Geschichte aus dem epischen Cyklus, und zwar wahrscheinlich nicht, wie man bisher annahm* (Welcker 1835, 244–245) *aus der kleinen Ilias, sondern aus der Iliupersis des Arktinos*." On the athetesis of v. 276 and 285–289 see *app. crit*. in: West 2017, 74.

[39] Cf. Ameis, Hentze, Cauer 1920, 114: „*Scheinbar wird Helena entschuldigt; der Eindruck der ganzen Erzählung bleibt doch für sie ungünstig, ein Widerspruch gegen ihre Behauptung 260f*." The commentators try *en passant* to 'save' Helen by assuming that Deiphobus was following her secretly ("*heimlich*"), as if thinking to use her quite harmless intentions for his own ends. But that would make him an important character of the story implying that he — like Laocoon — suspects what the horse is hiding. It is possible, perhaps, to imagine that Menelaus' story aims at undermining the credibility of Helen's repentance, even if this hint is not indicated in any way and the whole scene smacks then rather of a marital scandal. However, too many alien details, in no way explained, suggest that this story, should rather be athetized as belonging to another epic and inserted here by some rhapsodist for a concert performance of the episode, than to think that the author of the Odyssey chose thus to demonstrate his psychological flair.

Fig. 4. The Portrait of a Lady (as on Fig. 1), fragment 2: fortress

the artist's intent, we must turn back to the images of the ancient Trojan epics: in the background the road is seen (Fig. 4, quite similar to that running behind *La Gioconda*) leading to the fortress at a distance (in Leonardo's painting it leads to the sea).

3. The sitter

Quite naturally, the main issue debated in scholarship is the sitter's identity. Who did Correggio portray? A set of hypotheses claiming at least some plausibility is conveniently found in a recent article by Franzoni;[40] the scholar rejects them all with a view to further "widen the range of possibilities", if not to abandon any attempt at identification altogether. His own theory is characteristic of our case, where the solutions multiply the riddles. Since it is not our intention to challenge the more or less prevailing view, namely, that the model was Ginevra Rangoni (or Rangone), and even on the contrary, we want to reinforce it, the existing interpretations are dealt with below briefly, starting with the most exotic ones. Benois' assumption that the portrait could represent either Lucrezia Borgia[41] or Sa-

[40] Franzoni 2020, 338–339; see also Kustodieva 2011, 154; Ghidini 2007, 17.

[41] Benois 1900 (as above, n. 10) 140–141. He perceives Lucrezia Borgia not as her contemporaries, including Correggio, might have perceived her, but through the prism of the villain lady image created by 19th-century literature and art: «Кто бы ни была эта красавица, ее тонкая, коварная усмешка, боковой взгляд, величавая осанка, пышный, но несколько траурный наряд, также как и холодный, северный, безжалостно-синий пейзаж позади, поражают и врезываются в память. Хотелось бы видеть в ней легендарную, "не реабилитированную" Лукрецию Борджиа, богиню ринасшименто, а в простой серебряной чаше с непонятной [!] греческой надписью сосуд, в котором красавица только что приготовила отраву». Strangely enough, Benoit does not take into account the complete lack of external

lome[42] is noteworthy only in the respect that the first art historian to attempt the interpretation of the Lady's persona evidently perceived it as treacherous thus making her cup a symbol of wickedness. Half a century after Benois, this perception resurfaces and is again so strong that it forces the interpreter to ignore the apparent hint of *nepenthes*: Germain Bazin saw in the Lady the sorceress Circe.[43]

More indicative of the tendencies in reading the image is the idea that the painting depicts Artemisia ready to drink the ashes of Mausolus.[44] Marcin Fabiański suggested this in 2003, when the notion that Correggio had portrayed a certain *widow* was already firmly established in scholarship, and the painting was even sometimes referred to as a "portrait of a widow". On the other hand, modern art historians have realized the importance of pregnant little details, especially in a *pictor doctus* like Correggio, who is commonly regarded as an immediate forerunner of the Baroque with its love of symbols.[45] Fabiański noticed the road leading to the tower and, not unreasonably, bestowed on it a special meaning. This tower he perceived as a tomb, i. e. of Mausolus, having overlooked — perhaps, because he was relying on reproductions — that beside the tower a fortress wall stretches and in the shaded distance one can even discern another tower. Surely, Artemisia is an archetypal widow and her drinking of her husband's ashes is a very popular subject with painters. But first, in this context she always looks extremely sad (that is why the subject in Rembrandt's famous painting from Prado was suspected and, as further research found out, rightly so: the artist depicted not Artemisia, but Judith), which is obviously not the case with our sitter. And then, the Lady is not likely to be about to drink from the bowl herself, but rather to offer it to others. Most of all it looks like she is just holding it in her hands, as if to say: "this is what I have and what I could share with you if you want to."

Helen the Fair, no doubt, was also considered a suitable candidate and after all we know about the Homeric background "*Ritratto di Gentildonna come Elena*", as Maddalena Spagnolo delicately puts it, might seem suitable.[46] Still, this also raises too many questions (why the monk's knot? what do ivy and laurel have to do with Helen?) and actually is not a good fit. All 'hyper-antiquing' concepts must be denied plausibility a priori. Correggio was perfectly able and also very inclined to depict mythological characters in antique settings and costumes, if not nude. Besides, to think that he portrayed Helen or anyone "as Helen" (diplomatic wording does not alter the case) would be to belittle his artistic ambition and his talent. If there is somewhat, even a lot of Helen in the sitter, it does not at all mean that she is portrayed in Helen's guise. The Lady is not absolutely, flawlessly beautiful,

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resemblance of the Lady to Lucretia, who is known from several portraits: to begin with, she was blonde (same is true of Isabella d'Este, as noted by Lundahl 2017, 230, n. 230, though to our knowledge she has never been thought of as a model for Correggio's *Gentildonna*).

[42] Benois 1910 [Путеводитель по картинной галерее Императорского Эрмитажа], 67: «Красивый загадочный портрет молодой женщины (в образе Саломеи?), вполне характерный для Лотто».

[43] Basin 1958, 59, quoting Anna Banti (as above, n. 11), who asserts that in Yusupov's collection the painting was listed as Salome and attributed to Lotto — which is hardly true.

[44] Fabiański 2003, 267–268. Fabiański's interpretation was strongly criticized by Lundahl (2017, 233, n. 47), but it was supported by Ghidini (2007, 18–21), who, however, believed that Correggio depicted Ginevra Rangoni as Artemisia.

[45] The *opinio communis* is problematized in: Spagnolo 2010b, 31. On Correggio's learned symbolism in relation to the portrait under study see esp. Periti 2004, 466–468. As concerns Periti's generally very informative work, which in contrast to many others was highly appreciated by Franzoni, it should be noted that she still reads the Greek inscription with an error:]NTON instead of]NTΩN.

[46] Spagnolo 2008a, 10.

she does not fully correspond to the antique (as far as Correggio could perceive it) or to the specifically Renaissance idea of female beauty. There is no noticeable desire to idealize in this image. Instead, there are easily discernible portrait features in it, so it most probably depicts a real person, a contemporary.

The first, and very reasonable, guess as to who this contemporary might have been was made by Roberto Longhi in the article quoted above. Attributing the portrait to Correggio he notes that one of the painter's most renown patrons, the noble Veronica Gambara lost her husband Giberto, Count of Correggio, at the end of August, 1518, and took his place as sovereign of the city, after which our artist got his name. Allegri was probably in Rome when this happened, but on his arrival, in the winter of 1518–1519, he may well have executed Gambara's portrait.[47] Longhi has a keen eye for telling details: the brown raiment, the cup that gives the oblivion of sorrow, the golden chain probably holding a scapular, and a cord of the Franciscan tertiary — thus emerges the influential concept of a "widow Lady".[48] A few more clues may be added to this. The laurel indicates a poetic gift, and Veronica Gambara wrote poetry which became famous among the connoisseurs of Renaissance gendered literature. Her name sounds like that of a flower, and the veronica-like florets can be seen in the picture in the lower right, although their white color is disconcerting: veronica flowers are rosy purple. But for all these correspondences, there is an insurmountable contradiction. It is not very clear why Gambara, who had just been widowed, would have commissioned Correggio to paint her portrait, and even if she did, it is completely unbelievable that this portrait would depict her in this particular way — pensive perhaps, but in no way grieving. Of course, Giberto was much older than his wife, but still their marriage was a happy one, blessed by the birth of two sons. She mourned his death deeply, became ill, wrapped herself in black. Her letters written during these months are full of despair; her poems from that moment on are filled with sincere grief. She might very well have wanted to resemble Artemisia, but hardly Helen. And this attitude of hers did not change much afterwards. Above the door to her chambers, she had a quote from the Aeneid inscribed: *ille meos, primus qui me sibi iunxit, amores* / *Abstulit, ille habeat secum servetque sepulcro* ("he who first had tied me to himself, took my love with him; so, let him keep it to himself and guard it in his grave": 4. 28–29, the words of Dido).[49] Several portraits of her are known, in all she wears mourning, black being the dominant color. Nothing like these open shoulders, these blushing cheeks, this cunning smile and almost inviting gaze. And there is another, though perhaps not so fundamental, obstacle. All portraits of Veronica Gambara depict the same person, albeit at different times. The resemblance is perceptible, we know more or less what she looked like.[50] The *Portrait of a Lady* shows a different person, bearing very little likeness to the image we know.

It is now appropriate to cite Franzoni's interpretation, not just because it belongs to the leading expert on the subject, is the latest in time, and surpasses in plausibility

[47] Longhi 1958, 44. On Veronica Gambara see Lundahl 2017, 225–226, with ample bibliography.

[48] Longhi, *op. cit.* 44: "la dama sia in panni bruni e rega la tazza di nepente che dà l'oblio del dolore, dalla catenella d'oro penda non un gioiello ma uno scapolare, e che sulla veste trascorra ondulando un cordiglio della terziaria francescana".

[49] On her widowhood and life attitude see the essay by Ellen Moody (2014), with detailed references. A romanticized biography is supplied by Antonia Chimenti 1994.

[50] See in e. g. Chimeni, *op. cit*.: the best known and earliest portrait is reproduced on the title page. A graphic copy from another portrait adorns the first edition of Gambara's poems and letters (Rizzardi 1759, XXIV verso). Others are late but still represent the same image.

most of the previous ones, but because it entirely abandons the idea of widowhood. The central word in the inscription testifies only to the fact that what we have before us is a distinguished female intellectual. Already in late antiquity *nepenthes* receives a symbolic meaning picked up and developed by Renaissance thinkers. It becomes an allegory of immersion in intellectual labor, philosophy, literature, art. This is the substance the Lady is offering us to 'drink', so we could feel "serenity and joy given by humanist studies".[51] The strengths of this theory are obvious: neither the Lady's attire nor her general expression implies sadness, let alone mourning, and *nepenthes* wants to be read allegorically. It would seem that the search for a widow can be finished. At the same time, the scholar admits a certain shift of emphasis. Let's say *nepenthes* is a code. But still this code is related to the oblivion of pain. It may have ceased to be a chemical cure, but a cure it still is. We cannot part ways with this idea that easily, especially since the ancient authors cited by Franzoni, as well as those he does not cite, all somehow express it. Plutarch, for one, from whom this whole trend of interpretation seems to come, *Quaest. conv.* 614b–c: τοῦτο γὰρ ἦν ὡς ἔοικε τὸ νηπενθὲς φάρμακον καὶ ἀνώδυνον, λόγος ἔχων καιρὸν ἁρμόζοντα τοῖς ὑποκειμένοις πάθεσι καὶ πράγμασιν ("that is what the *nepenthes* and pain-relieving medicine apparently was, namely a narrative which corresponded to the sentiments and deeds at hand"). Note that Plutarch, like many others, keeps the Homeric scene in mind and considers, not so unreasonably, that the role of *nepenthes* medicine in it is played by the two stories we abstracted above. Cf. Macrob. *Sat.* 8. 1. 18 echoing Plutarch's words: *si Homeri latentem prudentiam scruteris altius, delinimentum illud quod Helena vino miscuit,* νηπενθές τ' ἄχολόν τε κακῶν ἐπίληθον ἁπάντων*, non herba fuit sed narrandi oportunitas* [= λόγος ἔχων καιρὸν ἁρμόζοντα κτλ. — here Macrobius is paraphrasing Plutarch], *quae hospitem maeroris oblitum flexit ad gaudium* ("if you examine Homer's hidden wisdom more closely, [you will find that] the emollient Helen has put into the wine [Greek quotation follows], was not a herb, but a convenient opportunity for storytelling, which made the guest forget his sorrow, changing it to joy"). There is no need to go through other ancient and Byzantine sources, since the two ideas — φάρμακον νηπενθές in Homer means amusing narration (1), and it should alleviate suffering (2) — are found in all who tend to read allegorically (Dio *Or.* 12. 52; Himer. *Or.* 16, 7; Iulian. *Cons.* [*Or*. 8] 240b; Clem. *Protr.* 1. 2. 4; Schol. Lond. in Dion. Trac. *GG* I. 3, p. 564 Hilgard).

For the late 15th — early 16th century thinkers, the second notion seems to prevail. In Beroaldo's humorous work *Declamatio ebriosi, scortatoris et aleatoris* (1499) the medicine means simply wine (but still as a cure for sorrow) which, as he states following the Elder Pliny (*NH* 25. 12), "every mortal should drink". In the far more serious *Symbola Pythagorica* (1503) exactly the same is asserted of *humanitatis studia* which as a perfect *nepenthes* drug appear a substitute for wine. In the same spirit the remedy is mentioned a few years later in Erasmus's *Moriae encomium* (1509): at the appearance of the Folly, the audience, which until then had been sitting gloomily, immediately brightened up, as if they "had drunk themselves tipsy on the nectar of Homeric gods, and even with *nepenthes*" (*pariter deorum Homericorum nectare, non sine nepenthes, temulenti*). Franzoni quotes these texts adding to them an excerpt from *Antiquae lectiones* by Celio Rodigino (1516). The last evidence, chronologically closest to the painting in issue, is especially valuable to his inter-

[51] Franzoni 2020, 344.

pretation,[52] so we have to dwell on it for a short while. Actually, Rodigino's small chapter is a commentary on a passage by Flavius Philostratus, in whose preface to *Vitae sophistarum* (*epistula ad Antoninum*, p. 480 Olear.) "the crater of Helen" is used in a proverbial sense *de iis quae nobis aestuationem mentis leniunt, solicitudinem sedant molliuntque et disserenato animo, ac fronte erugata exporrectaque curarum oblivionem inducunt* ("of that which softens the heat of our minds, removes anxiety, and, by enlightening the soul and smoothing and removing wrinkles from the forehead, produces forgetfulness of cares"). All of this, of course, is very much in Franzoni's favor. There is no retelling of Homer and, seemingly, no cure of grief is meant, just a distraction from the cares of life. As Rodigino develops his commentary, it turns out that he understands *nepenthes* in the spirit of physiologists, citing Pliny and Galen. Returning to the metaphorical meaning, which he again finds in Philostratus, namely in the passage of the "Lifes of the Sophists" where the lectures of Antiphon are referred to as νηπενθεῖς ἀκροάσεις (*Vit. soph*. I. 15, p. 498 Olear.), once more without any mention of the Homeric context, but this time with particular emphasis on pain (δεινὸν ἄχος) to be alleviated, he concludes:

> *Antiphontem illum, qui a persuadendi potentia Nestor est cognominatus, nepenthes auscultationes promittere solitum, quando nullus tam atrox est infestusque dolor, cuius vellicationes civili eloquentia non lenire modo, sed excutere etiam quiret. Ex quo arbitror Plutarchum scribere ab Antiphonte excogitatam* ἀλυπίας τέχνην*, id est artem alypiae, quae vox tristitiae carentiam indicat.*
>
> The famed Antiphon, who from his art of persuasion was nicknamed Nestor, claimed to deliver *nepenthes* lectures, as if there were no grief so cruel and furious, whose attacks he would not be able not only to mitigate, but even to shake off completely by means of public eloquence. That is why, I think, Plutarch [*Vit. X or.* 833C8] writes that Antiphon invented the art of *alypia*, which word means the lack of sorrow.

If Correggio or his learned friends involved in his work read this, they could not help but deduce from it that the *crater Helenae* is meant to alleviate grief. Although contrary to Franzoni there is not a word about *humanitatis studia* in Rodigino's commentary,[53] the conjecture that *nepenthes* on the Lady's bowl should be read metaphorically, perhaps as a symbol of learning, or eloquence in general and female eloquence in particular, is wholly believable and consistent with the Homeric background. Yet, this does not exclude widowhood. There is nothing morally reprehensible in the widow's desire to cure herself of mental grief,[54] since the oblivion of pain in no way means forgetting her husband — as Helen (whom the anonymous commentator of the posthumous edition of *Encomium Moriae* tellingly confuses with Penelope[55]) and her guests do not forget Odysseus, but are eager to remember and recall him endlessly. The *nepenthes* drug makes one forget suffer-

[52] Franzoni (*op. cit.* 345) exaggerates its importance, noting that Celio "was active in Northern Italy and in the areas around Emilia" and that he dedicated to *crater Helenae* "the entirety of chapter XLIII of his *Antiquae lectiones*". In the second corrected and augmented edition this chapter occupies less than a column of a more than 1700-page volume (Celio 1546, 1050).

[53] Franzoni *op. cit.* 345: "…Celio Rodigino (Ludovico Ricchieri, 1469–1525) <…> proposed again this idea of *nepenthes* as an allegory of the *studia humanitatis*".

[54] Cf. ib. 340: "…why would a widow, who is keen to show herself as such, suggest that she has *forgotten* the pain of her husband's death?"

[55] Erasmus 1540, 18.

ing. Suppose the cure is not for herself. But if she offers the cup to someone else, then to whom? Why should the Lady offer it to "every mortal", is not entirely clear.

Franzoni invites us to continue searching and, especially, to look more closely at the society gathered around another of Correggio's famous patronesses, Giovanna Piacenza, Abbess of San Paolo whose chamber he decorated with famous frescoes. But in fact, he does nothing to help us, because most of the women, who could have been the artists' patronesses, belonged to educated society and were most able "to join in with *intertenie-menti* ('entertainments') of cultured man".[56] On the other hand, it does not seem plausible that Correggio worked on such a portrait without having been commissioned, but merely wishing to portray a certain type, a female humanist. Distinct personality traits and a set of — so far unexplained — keys suggest otherwise. The anecdotes related by Vasari sufficiently witness that the painter was working mostly on commission and fees were vital to him.[57] Still, in one respect a closer look at Correggio's acquaintances at Parma is certainly worthwhile. As noted above, a member of this circle was Giorgio Anselmi, who dedicated three epigrams to Homer, and is believed to have advised Correggio on the subjects of the frescoes in San Paolo.[58] One of those subjects interprets the little-known legend touched on briefly in the Iliad 15. 18–22 of how Zeus suspended Hera between heaven and earth chained with gold chains with anvils attached to her feet, for the reason that she had secretly tried to kill Heracles. It was probably Anselmi who drew the artist's attention to the Odyssey and the image of Helen in book four. The idea of putting *crater Helenae* in the Lady's hand might have belonged to Correggio himself, but it was probably that scholar who made sure that the inscription on it was written flawlessly. Anselmi dedicated his poems to his two daughters, one of whom entered the Convent of San Paolo, and if anything beside that fact was known about her, she too would surely have been suggested as the model for the Nepenthes Lady.

Franzoni soundly refuses to believe that Correggio presented a symbolic image of the Abbess herself (he thinks that it can hardly be a real portrait of her, as in 1519 she turned forty). Elisabetta Fadda, who put forth this hypothesis, supposes that the two inscriptions on the painting encrypt the witty allusion at Giovanna Piacenza: "*PIA (che) Laet Anton ON NEPENTE SA CHI* cioè *Piacela e tanto, non ne pente sa chi*", which is supposed to mean something like "I give it to Correggio with wine, and he who does not know it, might regret it" ("*lo do a Correggio col vino: piacela e tanto, chi non sa, ne pente*"). The name of the master is read out of the cord: "*il cordoncino che in italiano, come il laccio e il cordone, si può definire 'correggiolo'*".[59] The fact that already Wilson correctly read ΑΧΟΛΟΝ, and an attentive eye of Lundahl plausibly distinguished ΑΠΑΝΤΩΝ, completely paralyses this curious reading deserved to be cited here mostly for the sake of completeness. It is, however, thought-pro-

[56] Franzoni 2020, 346, citing Baltassare Castiglione. The type spread quickly and is present in several late Renaissance literary works written in the form of a dialogue, but still among the participants of *Il Cortegiano* ladies are absent. Apparently, the visual arts were ahead of literature here as well.

[57] Vasari's account is related in Franzoni's essay "Giorgio Vasari e la biografia di Antonio Allegri". URL: https://www.fondazioneilcorreggio.it/il-correggio/giorgio-vasari-biografia-antonio-allegri/ (accessed: 06.11.2023): "*Era continuamente indaffarato e affaticato per sopperire alle necessità familiari; era talmente «aggravato» dalla famiglia, da dover «di continuo risparmiare» e da esser costretto a vivere miseramente. A quest'ultimo aspetto si lega il famoso aneddoto della morte dell'artista, recatosi a Parma per riscuotere del denaro in un giorno estivo, tanto che «scalmanato dal sole» sarebbe stato preda di febbri mortali*."

[58] See Pannofsky 1961, 28, n. 1, citing Anselmi's Latin poems addressed to pagan gods; cf. Lundahl 2017, 228–230.

[59] Fadda 2017, 161–163.

voking that an interpreter could imagine the Abbess, who, as it seems, must have had more of a nun than a knotted rope and a devotional scapular (which is definitely non-monastic), portrayed in so a jovial manner, even if Giovanna pretended to be kind of a society lady and, in contrast to Veronica, would like to see herself like this. Fadda goes even further, suggesting that Liphart (whom she confuses with Benois) was perhaps not so wrong interpreting the painting as declaration of love by a certain Anton, since this Anton, "*dont la dame fait la joie*", could be Antonio Allegri himself! The sitter, Fadda supposes, is not a real Giovanna Piacenza but an ideal image of her for whom Correggio had tender feelings.

We willingly admit the Petrarchan motif, but would the Abbess really have recognized herself in such a marvelous form? Suppose the Lady has something to do with nunhood. The knotted cord clearly implies belonging to monasticism, even if only spiritual. But if she is meant to be Giovanna, why the laurel? The tower? The Helen's theme? Why the cup that seems to tell: "if you're in grief, this will help"? An object hanging round the Lady's neck is certainly most like a scapular: if it were a jewel, it would hardly be hidden under her clothes. And what, if not a vow of chastity, say, after the death of a spouse, or until marriage, could this object mean? The laurel, at the top of the canvas, is almost black in color and obscures the sun. Could this be a hint at death? After all, it is probably worth revisiting the "widow Lady" concept, keeping in mind that the widow we are looking for should not be a model widow, an Artemisia-type widow, simply put, she should not be a mourning or exceptionally sad widow. Noble and educated young widows in the towns of Emilia, who could have commissioned Correggio to paint their portrait about 1518–1520, were quite numerous, for the men of the famous families almost all were involved in wars, and often died violent deaths. Jacoba Laura Pallavicini Sanvitale (1491, Zibello, — 1575, Reggio Emilia) whom Mariangela Giusto claimed to be the artist's patroness,[60] had married Count Giovanni Francesco Sanvitale of Fontanellato in 1510, and was widowed in 1519, then in Parma, where Correggio mainly worked at that time. We do not know how much she grieved for her husband during her early widowhood, but she had three sons and was pregnant with her fourth child when Galeazzo died[61] — which already makes Giusto's idea a lot less plausible. Like Veronica, Laura never remarried and was vigorously employed in diplomatic and administrative affairs playing an important part in the political life of Mid-Cinquecento Parma. She has had sufficient education, but nothing is known about her creative or cultural activities, so the laurel in Correggio's painting can only be explained as a hint on her second name. Laura gained renown at a more advanced age, and if the portrait was also painted later, still she also would hardly have been represented in such a manner. Her sister-in-law, Paola Gonzaga, patroness of the arts, whose court in Fontanellato became one of the centers of humanistic culture, would be a much more suitable candidate — if her appearance wasn't known from Parmigianino frescoes.[62]

Finally, we come to the person that we, along with the majority, find most acceptable. As early as 1962, in a polemic against the identification proposed by Longhi four years earlier, Riccardo Finzi suggested that the role for which Longhi had cast Veronica Gambara might just as well have been played by another noblewoman of the town of

[60] Giusto 2008, 360.

[61] McIver 2017, 35; see also her brief biography by Parma art historian Pier Paolo Mendogni at: http://www.pierpaolomendogni.com/pdf/StoriaParmaPallavicino.pdf (06.11.2023).

[62] On Paola Gonzaga and the frescoes see McIver 1997, esp. 104, with ill., and 106.

Correggio, Ginevra Rangoni (1487–1540), who became widow in 1517.[63] Finzi articulated enough arguments against Veronica (for example, that she was described as a woman of unattractive appearance and corpulent physique[64]), and in favor of Ginevra noticed that she was a Franciscan tertiary, and possessed talents admired, among others, by Julius Caesar Scaliger and Ariosto.[65] This appeared to suffice, and the identification of the Lady with Ginevra Rangoni became firmly established in the scholarly tradition, successfully competing with that of Veronica Gambara. To Finzi's assumption it was objected that a knotted cord was not compulsory for a tertiary,[66] and normally there are three knots on a Franciscan cord. However, the Lady's cord could not be interpreted better than as a hint at her membership in the Order and the other two knots were possibly meant to be hidden beneath the drooping sleeves of her dress.

Ginevra's candidacy seems to have never been seriously tested for plausibility, though sufficient data have been obtained concerning her life and personality and no less valuable observations made on the portrait under study. Now, looking at the Nepenthes Lady against the background of these data we will find that the conjecture of the art historian from Correggio best solves most of our difficulties. To start with, all her life Ginevra was surrounded by professional military men. The daughter of a famous condottiere Niccolò Maria Rangoni,[67] whose four sons, her brothers, were likewise condottiere, she spent her early life mostly in Modena, where her and her brother Guido's teacher was a humanist scholar Anton Maria Visdomini, so she could write Latin[68] and possibly read Greek. She was married in 1503, at the age of 16, to Giangaleazzo da Correggio Visconti to whom she brought a huge dowry. This man was remarkable for nothing except that he was the son of another famous condottiere and wanted to dispose of his property partly in favor of his relatives, so that after his death in 1517 there was a scandal over the division of inheritance. Their marriage was childless and she probably did not grieve much. At any rate, already in the summer of 1519 she entered a new marriage, with the illustrious condottiere Luigi (alias Aloisio) Alessandro Gonzaga (1494–1549), marquis of Castel Goffredo. Their pompous wedding took place in Mantua, in the presence of the humanist Pope Leo X.[69] By this time, she had already made a name for herself as an educated and literarily gifted lady and, being a frequent guest at the Este court, had even become a lady-in-waiting to Lucrezia Borgia (who, was also a tertiary). Her life in second marriage, as a mistress of Castel Goffredo, is of little interest

[63] Finzi 1962, 6. Exceptionally knowledgeable about the history of the town of Correggio, Finzi lists all its noble women with whom the painter could have socialized in that period. There are eight of them, and only Ginevra fits the role of the Lady.

[64] Ib. 5: "…*la Poetessa non era bella di volto, secondo quanto afferma Rinaldo Corso, il dotto Umanista che fu suo fedel segretario , quanto amabile apologista*", with reference to Corso (7, n. 2), who cites from the contemporary description of Gambara's appearance addressed to her future biographers: "*erat magni corporis et uti discunt corrigunentes, qui eam noverunt, grande et grossa, vestibus nigris utebatur et velata incedebat, et velum cooperiebat, et celabat stomachum, pectus et gulam*."

[65] Ib. 7. Rangoni was celebrated by Ariosto in the 46th Canto of *Orlando Furioso* together with Gambara. Scaliger's epigram is also cited by Tiraboschi (1784, 90–91) with many compliments to Ginevra and indications of her acquaintance with literary celebrities: *Cum gemino excellens proles Rangonia sexu / Exaequet magni semina cuncta Dei : / Incertum est , ingens diva frater ne sorore , / An fiat magno maxima fratre soror*.

[66] Franzoni 2020, 341.

[67] See e. g. Periti 2004, 465.

[68] This is testified by an epigram she addressed to her mother, Bianca Bentivoglio: Finzi 1962, 7. On the lessons of Visdomini see also Ghidini 2007, 23.

[69] Marocchi 1990, 131; Ghidini *op. cit.* 24.

to us, but it is worth noting that in spite of her husband's absences on military expeditions, this marriage was happy, though also childless.[70]

The image of the Lady with a bowl entirely aligns with such a biography. Not only her entire expression, her wistful half-smile, but also her attire combining bridal white with widow's and monastic brown, a scapular along with luxurious headdress and rouged cheeks makes it highly likely that the portrait was commissioned by Ginevra Rangoni to be sent to her intended spouse. The laurel crown hiding the sun might indicate that she finds solace in poetry. At any rate, the laurel designates her poetic talent, and, even more clearly, her literacy and knowledge of letters, ancient and modern. The ivy may imply the same, unless it is a symbol of fidelity.[71] Ginevra is told to have been a great admirer of Petrarch,[72] and surely would be pleased to see herself represented as an ideal object of distant love. And there was also a more worldly reason for asking the artist to depict her in a more 'generalizing' manner. Ginevra was intelligent and beautiful in her sixteenth year, as a letter from her first father-in-law, Niccolo II of Correggio (not just a condottiere but a literary man as well) attests.[73] She was undoubtedly even more intelligent in her early 30s, but could no longer be beautiful with the same youthful beauty. Her fiancé was seven years younger. Introducing herself to him as a charming and accomplished lady would be highly appropriate. Franzoni astutely points out the absence of a wedding ring on the Lady's finger.[74] But if that particular widow wanted to wear a ring at all (there is no rule for that, and seemingly she wanted to emphasize her widowhood even less than her nunhood), she would probably have it on her *right* hand which is hidden under the bowl. This, by the way, could be a very explainable reason for the emergence of *crater Helenae* in the composition. Much in this painting the viewer has to 'fill in': the ending of the artist's signature, the rest of the Homeric verse, the wine in the cup, the scapular and perhaps the third knot on the cord.

Helen of the Odyssey was so perfectly suited for the image the sitter desired that if Correggio had not employed it independently, or on Anselmi's advice, it might well have been suggested by Ginevra herself — an experienced woman, who briefly in love with another, dreams of finally returning to a true home with a "true spouse not inferior to anyone in his qualities or appearance" (*Od*. 4.264, sounding utterly like a dating site ad). There is no point in guessing whether she herself drinks from the cup of oblivion. The remedy she keeps, i. e. her wit and her eloquence, she offers to the one for whom they will become the cure for sorrow. For the life of a warrior is full of losses and she knows better than anyone how hard it is to lose dear friends. Luigi Gonzaga began his military career in 1515 fighting at Azola on the Emperor's side. He was, moreover, quite capable of appreciating Ginevra's innuendos, being educated in the spirit of the times and himself an author of comedies.[75] Living in Castel Goffredo after their marriage he became famous as patron of the arts.[76] Hence, we have every reason to believe Alberto Ghidini that the por-

[70] So after her death in 1540 (she was buried in Mantua in the habit of a Franciscan tertiary) Aloisio almost immediately remarried, and by his new wife had three sons: Marocchi 1990, 174.

[71] Ghidini 2007, 35.

[72] Periti 2004, 465; Finzi 1962, 6.

[73] Cited by Finzi ib.: "*la più delicata figlioletta <…> bona per naturale e bona per accidentale forma conveniente a moglie da essere amata*."

[74] Franzoni 2020, 340.

[75] Marocchi 1990, 114–115.

[76] On his various activities see Gozzi 2000.

trait which in the inventory of Gonzaga's property was listed as "*La vidoua* (sic) — *ritratto nella salitta*" once hung in Luigi's palace showing his guests the image of his wife created by Correggio a few months before their wedding.[77]

4. The message

In 1518 Correggio worked on the altarpiece of the church of San Prospero in Albinea, and in the fall of that year began to work on the frescoes in San Paolo convent. He received the commission for the portrait at a time when he was heavily loaded with other work, and took it on supposedly because Rangoni promised him a handsome fee. But not only because of that. The subject fascinated him, he conceived a painting of exceptional size (103 x 87,5 cm — it is the largest female portrait of the period[78]), began enthusiastically and worked with effort. A number of details, especially in the upper part of the painting are executed with great care. He painted out the laurel, the clouded sky, the headdress, then the bowl, the chain, the knot so diligently and tried so hard to give the Lady the desired expression (she must have posed for a long time — they were both interested in that), that he did not have enough time to finish the work properly. He was late for the deadline which in this case was highly undesirable. This explains the unfinished hand. A couple of background elements also look blurry. The fortress could have been painted out more clearly. The outermost words on the bowl follow its curve, he worked them out masterfully, perhaps trying, in this way too, to draw attention to the source. In contrast to the two fragments, ΝΗΠΕΝΘΕΣ looks as if it has been transferred from one flat sheet to another. Probably, it was put in at the end. And then the flowers. Ginevra would associate with juniper (cf. Leonardo's Ginevra Benci), and indeed one can faintly see something like a thorny bush beyond the Lady's elbow. However, white flowers are most reminiscent of myrtle, symbolic of love and beauty, as we see it in abundance around the head of Dossi's Lucrezia Borgia.

The shrub is not visible, though, the flowers are placed in the midst of fern-like leaves and dense grasses (Fig. 5). There is no clarity here, and it seems that Correggio's plan remained unshaped. Why the artist made one flower black we can only wonder, but this whole painting is full of symbolism, so there ought to be an intent behind it as well.

The contrast of white and black is not altogether peculiar to the portrait, which, one might say, is made up of antagonisms. It is both perfect and imperfect. An unskilled restorer might have washed away the glaze layer making the colors seem too simple, without valeurs. But this does not explain the lack of clarity, of certainty in the drawing. There probably was a conceptual ill-conceivedness already at the *disegno* stage. And it's easy to imagine why. The model is both a widow and a bride, an ascetic and a socialite, a devout

[77] Ghidini 2007, 25. In fact, we are now able to trace the entire history of the painting from its creation right up to the present day. After Ginevra's death and Aloisio's remarriage, it spent about a century and a half in one of the Gonzaga family houses, where the first drawing was made from it by an unprofessional copyist; about 1790 it was bought by Concolo, presumably at one of the auctions in Venice or Vienna, restored for the first time, and brought to Russia, where it was bought by Yusupov. For more than a hundred years the painting was kept by the Yusupovs, first in Arkhangelskoye, where the second, more precise drawing from it was made, and then in their palace in St Petersburg, where it was possibly restored again. During its hundred years stay in the Hermitage museum it underwent several more restorations, as a result of which the artist's signature became invisible.

[78] See Spagnolo 2008a, 10, with further references.

Fig. 5. The Portrait of a Lady (as on Fig. 1), fragment 3: flowers

Christian and a heroine of pagan poetry. Of course, such a subject could not but fascinate the humanist painter. Yet, the deep duality of the image conceals another, more general contradiction very familiar to Correggio's time, and not so easy to reconcile. The mundane, even intimate quality rooted in biography confronts the scholarly, symbolic and mythological element more integral to this than to other works by Correggio. The Lady is delightful, her rosy cheeks, naked shoulders, delicate neck look very much alive. And yet, the turn of her face, her squinting gaze (cf. the same seductive gaze of Venus in *Educazione di Cupido*), pale forehead, the constrained smile of her thin lips as if masking some hint, are kind of frozen. The nature against which she is shown seems to be full of fluttering life: leaves, grass and flowers, road in the hills, distant blues and greens — a typical Renaissance landscape. And yet, this landscape is cold and taciturn; through the laurel branches, tar black against the bright white of the clouds, the sun casts a dim light plunging the world into shadows; the grass and flowers are sketchy, and the blues and greens in far background gloomy, as if immersed in twilight. This mysterious bipolarity arises from the artist's dual approach to the issue. The point is that under the pressure of his subject-matter he attempted to turn a representational portrait into a symbolic one, a message portrait, "*halb Portrait, halb Allegorie*" (J. Schmidt[79]), pregnant with profound meaning. Concluding, we would like to grasp what this meaning might be.

The answer is not as difficult, as it may seem, since we know, primarily from the inscription clue, what imagery Correggio was under the influence of at that moment. Helen of Troy, as she appears in book four of the Odyssey, gave him cause for reflection on the very nature of the feminine. Note that many of his appeals to antiquity are united by a gender theme: *The Abduction of Ganymede*, *The Education of Cupid*, *The Seduction of Io*, etc. Reading about a lady over whom the nations feuded with each other, he thought, perhaps, of the deadly threat posed by love, which he later personified in the *Venus and Cupid with*

[79] As above, n. 11. The painting is so markedly filled with allegorical content that Hérica Valladares (2015, 146) has even thought it is the viewer to whom the Lady offers her drink: "…this beautiful young lady is shown in a seductive three-quarter view. Her alluring, sidelong gaze is directed toward the viewer, to whom she proffers a large silver vessel. She thus entices the beholder to enter into a dialogue with the image." Cf. similar assertions by Lundahl 2017, 240: "Leonardo *jokes* with the viewer: the sitter's name obviously refers to "gioconda" = "cheerful," but also to "giocare" = "to joke". Correggio makes a comparable joke within his portrait, where the smile of the lady refers to the name of the painter: "ANTONIUS LAETUS", "Antonius the Happy One"." If this is right, what should the same signature express in the *Albinea Madonna*? Or are we to think that the Virgin, Her too, smiles at LAETUS carved on the rock? The Nepenthes Lady looks at the viewer, she is not meant to behold the words written on a tree behind her.

a Satyr (1528, now in Louvre), an image of great, almost grotesque expressiveness.[80] However, his genius was mostly occupied with another challenge. As we remember, he must have perceived both stories told at the end of the feast scene as parts of an organic whole. His contemporaries were far from Aristarchus' corrosive criticism; they were equally alien to the analytical approach of F.-A. Wolf and his followers. To him Menelaus' tale was in no way foreign, but a true Homeric one, created by the first and best of poets. The ambiguity of Helen's image, resulting from the juxtaposition of this tale with a previous one, told by herself, was envisioned as genuine and demanding an explanation.

This the artist provided with his own means. Correggio represents his Lady, quite naturally, as virtuous, serious character, σπουδαῖος — in the Aristotelian sense of the word. She is not that ravishingly sensuous as his Venus, but certainly cunning and eloquent, very capable of "telling suitable stories". This talent of hers is at one with her peculiar beauty — the beauty of an intellectual woman. But her peculiarities do not end there. Benois and Bazin rightly felt a touch of guile in her eyes and in that ambiguous smile of hers.[81] She might be earnest in her duty of a good wife, but that does not prevent her from completely forgetting about her marriage for the sake of a new love. She is, in one word, believable in all her gender roles. The 16th-century artist cannot have considered these roles ethically indifferent. For him, life-giving sincerity is antithetical to insidious, deadening evil. The black flower might well have been meant to hint just at that, and for this very reason the Lady and the nature around her are alive and dead at the same time. Thus, the reading of Odyssey 4 as monolith and truly Homeric turned to be a productive error through which emerged the image of a *femme fatale*, highly individual and first of its kind, convincing in its duality.[82] And this is what makes the Nepenthes Lady perhaps the most remarkable representation of femininity in all Renaissance painting.

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[80] On the ancient sources of this image see the detailed essay by Franzoni (2008).

[81] Alexandre Benois with his subtle understanding of eroticism, very characteristic of a "Mir iskusstva" artist, notes the same "bipolarity" and "a morbid tinge" in Leonardo's *La Gioconda*, an image so visibly close to Correggio's Lady. For Benois, Gioconda's gaze is "snaky, slippery and insanely enticing", he even regards Leonardo's masterpiece as a "terrible indictment of women in general": Benois 1910, 50–51.

[82] The painting is commissioned by a certain lady, and, being inspired by Homer, is given an allegorical meaning in the representation of a lady 'as such'. We must therefore side with Franzoni (2020, 341, n. 41) in rejecting a fortiori the opinion expressed by Valladares (2015, 148) and reiterated by Lundahl (2017, 240) that by "sorrow relieving medicine" Antonio Allegri means his own art, as "joyful", as his name.

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Код Корреджо: в поисках Дамы с ΝΗΠΕΝΘΕΣ*

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«Портрет дамы», атрибуируемый Корреджо (ГЭ, инв. № 5555), был, по всей видимости, подписан латинским псевдонимом Antonius Laetus: надпись на стволе лавра слева от сидящей наблюдал и пытался истолковать в 1909 г. Э.-Ф. Липгарт. Сегодня подпись не видна, однако ее присутствие подтверждается реставрационным протоколом (1974–

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1976 гг.), равно как и анализом художественных источников. Последний упраздняет сомнения в подлинности, заодно определяя время создания картины: пересечения с подписанной тем же псевдонимом «Альбинейской Мадонной», увлеченность Корреджо сюжетами гомеровского эпоса, причем не самыми известными, запечатленными в фресках аббатства Сан-Паоло, доказывают, что дама с *кратером Елены* в руке, на котором выведена по-гречески цитата из «Одиссеи», создана автором «Похищения Ганимеда», «Воспитания Амура», «Соблазнения Ио» и т. д., вероятнее всего, зимой 1518–1519 гг. Оспаривать принятое большинством отождествление модели с Джиневрой Рангони, видимо, не следует. Идею, высказанную Риккардо Финци более полувека назад, можно, напротив, подкрепить новыми аргументами: не только скапулярий и узелок францисканки, но и лавр, плющ, мирт, и общее выражение вдовы-невесты, и полная чаша прелестного остроумия как лекарство от горечи утрат, и отсылка к Елене Троянской — все это идеально соответствует жизненным обстоятельствам Джиневры. Вопреки авторитетному мнению Клаудио Франчони, надпись на чаше не сводится к одному слову, но кроме νηπενθές включает ἄχολο[ν], поясняющее необычный эпитет, и [ἐπίληθον ἁπά]ντων, маркирующее конец стиха *Od*. 4, 221. Корреджо воспринял творческим воображением сцену пира во дворце Менелая, и, чтобы понять замысел художника, зрителю стоит обратиться к ней. Центральный персонаж сцены — Елена — выступает героиней двух рассказанных под занавес историй. В ее собственной она сочувствует ахейцам, тяготится жизнью в Трое и грустит о покинутом муже, в рассказе же Менелая старается, наоборот, погубить воинов, засевших в чреве деревянного коня. Необычные детали второго рассказа вызвали подозрение; скорее всего, он перенесен из поэмы о гибели Трои. В восприятии живописца XVI века текст был, разумеется, монолитным, созданным первым из поэтов, и противоречивость Елены требовала осмысления. Вдохновленный своим Гомером, Корреджо создал этически амбивалентный женский образ, правдивый в своей двойственности.

Ключевые слова: Корреджо, Портрет дамы, Гомер, живопись Ренессанса, греческие пинакограммы.

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