Penelope's Web: Francesco Primaticcio's *Epic Revision at Fontainebleau*^{*}

by GIANCARLO FIORENZA

Francesco Primaticcio designed his celebrated Galerie d'Ulysse at Fontainebleau (now destroyed) at a time when the epic genre was being updated and redefined. One of the most popular scenes from the gallery, Ulysses and Penelope recounting their adventures to one another in bed (from book 23 of the Odyssey), was adapted and revised in an independent composition by Primaticcio himself: Ulysses and Penelope (Toledo Museum of Art, ca. 1560). In contrast to the Fontainebleau mural, the artist's self-conscious, refined pictorial language for his canvas converts epic energy into lyric sentimentality. As a result, Penelope becomes the central focus of the new composition. Through the language of gesture the painting stresses such themes as beauty and desire, and further employs such prized poetic devices as reversal (peripeteia) and recognition (anagnorisis). By responding to the formal prescriptions of both the epic and romance genres, Primaticcio exploits the expressive and visual potential of the Homeric episode in an utterly novel way. The painting opens up questions into ways of reading, viewing, and interpreting mythic subject matter in sixteenth-century France.

When Marguerite de Navarre (1492–1549), sister of King Francis I (1494–1547), visited the royal chateau of Fontainebleau in 1542, she remarked that the absence of the king during her stay dulled the charm of her experience: “because to see your buildings without you, it is a dead body, and to look at your buildings without hearing your intention about them, it is like reading Hebrew.”¹ Given the highly allusive character of Fontainebleau, with its distinctive language of interior decoration that emphasized myth and classicizing ornament realized in a variety of media, it is not surprising that Marguerite would desire princely illumination. While her comments have been seen to characterize an “impenetrable” program requiring “initiation” — especially regarding the recondite decoration in the Galerie François I — or “a royal imperative . . . to execute a complexly symbolic décor celebrating the monarch,” they can also be taken

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¹Zerner, 91: “car voir édifices sans vous, c'est ung corps morts, et regarder vos bastiments sans ouïr sur cela votre intencion, c'est lire en esbreu.” Zerner notes that the letter is tinged with hyperbole.

at face value.² However remote and indecipherable, the innovative formal language of Fontainebleau's decoration not only invited, but seems to have prompted, discussion in order to enliven viewing experience. Marguerite's emphasis on reading and her desire for intimate exchange more readily speaks to the fundamental connection between art and letters, between visual and verbal modes of address whose shared goal, eloquence, permeates the courtly imagination and provides the opportunity for intelligent inquiry and discovery.

One of the main artists responsible for the development of Fontainebleau was Francesco Primaticcio, who was born in Bologna in 1503 and died in France in 1570.³ Primaticcio is a fascinating individual whose career as a whole has attracted heightened attention in recent years.⁴ A versatile artist who excelled as a draftsman, painter, architect, and stuccoist, throughout his life Primaticcio worked simultaneously as a merchant of antiquities. Although his artistic training is obscure, documents place him in Venice from 1524 to 1525, selecting for Federico II Gonzaga of Mantua precious objects from galleys returning from the East.⁵ In 1527 Primaticcio was in Mantua, working alongside Giulio Romano on the decoration of the Palazzo Te.⁶ According to Giorgio Vasari (1511–74), when King Francis I sought an artist expert in painting and stucco, Federico recommended Primaticcio, who subsequently moved to France in 1532 and immediately engaged himself with the decorations at Fontainebleau.⁷ There he collaborated with another Italian artist, the Florentine Rosso Fiorentino (1494–1540), who had arrived two years earlier. Together, Rosso and Primaticcio had a tremendous impact on French artistic culture, combining the achievements of Italian painting, elaborate stucco relief, and sumptuous ornament for the royal residence. When Rosso died in 1540, Primaticcio assumed artistic control over all royal

²Ibid.; Vickers, 95.

³Primaticcio's date of birth is often given as 1504, but there is considerable confusion owing to conflicting date styles in French and Italian documents. According to the research of Frati, 334, however, Primaticcio was born in 1503, and this is confirmed by the baptismal records compiled by Carrati, 30: this manuscript notes that "Francesco di ser Giovanni Primadicci" was born on 30 April 1503, and baptized on 5 May of the same year.

⁴See the essays and entries in *Primatice*, which also contains a comprehensive bibliography. For a thematic study of Primaticcio's role in the development of French Renaissance art, see Zerner, 106–21.

⁵Gozzi.

⁶The earliest document of Primaticcio's work in Mantua places him there by 27 September 1527: Ferrari, 1:229–30.

⁷Vasari, 144.

commissions and went on to earn coveted titles at court. In 1544 he was honored as Abbé de Saint-Martin-ès-Ayres à Troyes, and in 1562 was appointed *Conseiller du Roy*.⁸ The artist traveled extensively throughout his career, returning to Italy on numerous occasions, not only for personal matters but, significantly, in order to make bronze reproductions of antique sculpture found in Rome for the French king.⁹ As a result, he possessed one of the most sophisticated visual vocabularies of any artist of his day.

Despite detailed records of Primaticcio's activity at Fontainebleau, most of his decorations have unfortunately perished. An extraordinary work to have survived from this period is his *Ulysses and Penelope* (fig. 1), with its captivating portrayal of epic personalities from Homer's *Odyssey*.¹⁰ Now in the Toledo Museum of Art, the painting measures $44\frac{3}{4} \times 48\frac{3}{4}$ inches, and dates to about 1560. The quality of the painting is exceptional and, notwithstanding some compromised areas, the relatively good condition of the canvas enables viewers to appreciate its original visual impact.¹¹ Celebrated today as an extremely rare easel painting from Primaticcio's hand, it has curiously — when compared to other independent mythological works for the French court — received sparse critical analysis outside of

⁸In his testament dated 20 February 1562, Primaticcio refers to himself as “abate, comendattario de Santo Martino di Troia di Franza, consigliere, elimossinario, et commissario generale de tutte le fabriche del Re di Franza”: Gaye, 552.

⁹For the history of these casts at Fontainebleau and the dispersal of their moulds to various centers in Europe, see Cox-Rearick, 319–61; Boucher; *Primatice*, 143–44. Primaticcio avidly purchased antique objects for his own collection, as his letter of 28 October 1549 to Antoine Perrenot, later the Cardinal of Granvelle, attests: Ferrarino, 59.

¹⁰See the entries on the picture by Dominique Cordellier in *Primatice*, 336–37; and Sylvie Béguin in *The Age of Correggio*, 186. See Lorandi, 399–413, for an overview of the myth of Ulysses and Penelope in Italian art and literature.

¹¹The linen canvas has been lined, but there is no indication that the image itself has been cut down. The artist applied thin layers of oil paint over a reddish-colored ground in order to model his figures and fill in the composition. Supple brushwork is used to blend flesh tones and define facial features. There are very few signs of revisions, or *pentimenti*. In general, the hues have lost some of their value with age, and the lining of the canvas has flattened any traces of *impasto* used for the highlights or for the embroidery on the fabrics. The green curtain framing the two figures has also darkened, while the pinks of Penelope's blanket have grayed slightly. Nevertheless, it is clear that none of the colors was ever intended to be vivid, vibrant, or strongly contrasting with another. In its stripped state (photograph in the document files at the Toledo Museum of Art, acc. no. 1964.60), the painting reveals areas of loss and abrasion, most notably on Penelope's cheek. Other paint losses appear just below Ulysses' ear, below Penelope's hands and on her right bicep, as well as around her nose and on the back of her head. Some minor losses and abrasions also appear on the draperies, all of which are consistent with a painting of this age.

FIGURE 1. Francesco Primaticcio. *Ulysses and Penelope*, ca. 1560. Toledo, Toledo Museum of Art. Purchased with funds from the Libbey Endowment, Gift of Edward Drummond Libbey.

questions of attribution and chronology.¹² Still, the very subject of the painting, coupled with its consummate mastery of forms, entertains broader interpretive questions concerning the role of myth at Fontainebleau and the relationship between literary and visual genres, namely the epic, lyric, and romance. This essay considers Primaticcio's *Ulysses and Penelope* as a prime example of pictorial invention (*inventio*). Treatises on art from Leon Battista Alberti's *De pictura* (1435) to Paolo Pino's *Dialogo di pittura* (1548) defined the exercise of pictorial invention not as the mere illustration of a subject, but as an imaginative process of discovery: the search for

¹²Béguin, 2005, 243, questions the attribution of the work to Primaticcio and suggests that the artist is Nicolò dell'Abate. As this essay explores, the originality and technical ingenuity of the Toledo canvas argue strongly for Primaticcio's authorship. Béguin is correct in dating the canvas after the fresco from the Galerie d'Ulysse, and not, as Dominique Cordellier suggests, ca. 1541–45.

a theme or argument found within ancient fable.¹³ According to Giovanni Boccaccio's *Genealogie deorum gentilium* (first published in 1472 with an Italian translation appearing in 1547), poetry "is a sort of fervid and exquisite invention [*inventio*]," and it is in such original discovery that painters and poets find their identity.¹⁴ The appeal to poetics is not so much iconographic, but hermeneutic, seeing it as a generative and interpretive tool that is united with pictorial discourse. Rather than considering the painting's classical literary model as a source in the conventional sense, the foregoing interpretation searches for meaning in the differences between image and text. Much in the way Titian (ca. 1485–1576) defined his own mythic representations for Philip II of Spain as *favole* or *poesie*, Primaticcio's work does not borrow its invention expressly from another source, but makes imaginative use of fictions established in ancient poetry for novel expressive purposes. By tracing how the artist conceives his imagery according to rhetorical principles of genre and poetic ornament, by which motifs from past texts and works of art — especially the language of gesture — are imitated and updated according to the demands of a new situation, a better understanding of the ideas, expectations, and even sentiments that a literate beholder could bring to the work will become available. The focus on Primaticcio's inventive and imitative strategies, especially seen in light of sixteenth-century commentaries on Aristotle's *Poetics*, should also expose the relatively limited access to his art provided by more traditional iconographic approaches.

The composition draws from the imagery of the forty-eighth wall fresco of the Galerie d'Ulysse at Fontainebleau, Primaticcio's crowning achievement that originally included sixty scenes (*storie*) taken from Homer's *Odyssey*, together with other related imagery.¹⁵ The decoration of the vaults and lateral walls of the gallery date roughly from 1541 to 1560 (with modifications in the following decade), and came primarily under the patronage of King Francis I and his successor Henri II (1519–59). Tragically, the entire gallery was demolished in 1739 after years of neglect and

¹³For example, Pino, 115, explicitly states "painting is properly poetry, that is, invention" ("la pittura è propria poesia, cioè invenzione"). See further Kemp; Dempsey, 1992, 24–30, who offers a philologically-precise discussion of the process of invention in Renaissance poetry and painting, especially with regard to mythological subject matter.

¹⁴Boccaccio, 1956, 39; Boccaccio, 1951, 2:699. The Latin verb *invenire* literally means "to find" or "to discover."

¹⁵On the Galerie d'Ulysse, see Dimier, 91–108, 289–300; Béguin, Guillaume, and Ray; Mignot; Zerner, 112–14; *Primatice*, 292–357.

FIGURE 2. Théodore van Thulden (after Francesco Primaticcio). *Ulysses and Penelope Recount Their Adventures*, seventeenth century. Vienna, Albertina.

decay. Preparatory drawings by Primaticcio, along with drawings and engravings after the *Galerie d'Ulysse*, provide a good indication of the decorations' original appearance.

Because the Toledo canvas relates closely to the lost fresco at Fontainebleau, it is helpful to begin with a drawing (fig. 2) by the Flemish artist Théodore van Thulden (1606–69) that records the mural. The image represents an episode from book 23 of the *Odyssey*, in which the Greek hero Ulysses returns home to his wife, the faithful Penelope, after battling the Trojans and enduring ten years of subsequent tribulations. During his absence, Penelope kept her arrogant suitors at bay by promising her hand in marriage to the most prominent of the Achaeans, but only after she had finished “weaving a web” — actually a funerary shroud for her aged father-in-law Laertes.¹⁶ However, with characteristic cunning, for three long years she secretly unraveled at night what she wove by day. When Ulysses finally does return home after a period of twenty years, he slaughters the suitors and reunites with his wife. In the words of the *Odyssey*:

¹⁶Homer, 41 (2.94–95).

When Penelope and [Ulysses] had enjoyed their lovemaking, they took their pleasure in talking, each one telling his story, She, shining among women, told of all she had endured in the palace, as she watched the suitors, a ravening company, who on her account were slaughtering many oxen and fat sheep, and much wine was being drawn from the wine jars. But shining [Ulysses] told of all the cares he inflicted on other men, and told too of all that in his misery he toiled through. She listened to him with delight, nor did any sleep fall upon her eyes until he had told everything.¹⁷

This endearing episode, an unusual, if not unprecedented, subject in the history of art, was brilliantly interpreted by Primaticcio, as van Thulden's drawing after the lost fresco testifies. The image shows the lovers in bed, recounting their adventures to one another deep into the prolonged-by-Minerva night. While Ulysses motions toward Penelope as if he were speaking, Penelope enumerates with her fingers the suitors she deceived. Behind them, in the right background, maidens are shown dancing in celebration of their reunion, as the *Odyssey* relates.¹⁸ Based on the surviving drawings and engravings, the lost mural appears to have been exceptionally attentive to the Homeric epic and, as with all of the accompanying scenes that once existed in the gallery, showed a strong narrative emphasis. As a whole, the imagery of the lost cycle displayed continuity and clarity, variety and energy (*enargeia*), privileging content and subject matter appropriate to the plot.¹⁹

The strikingly muted tones of the Toledo canvas — which tend toward superimposed hues of ivory, ocher, brown, pink, and pale green and yellow — seem to have intentionally approximated the original appearance of the frescoes. Vasari, who met Primaticcio in Bologna in 1563, received precise details about the gallery. He states that the decoration was designed by Primaticcio but painted by his assistant Nicolò dell'Abate of Modena (ca. 1509–71), “but with a coloring much darker than the pictures in the Ballroom. This came about because he used no other colors but the earths in their pure state, as nature produced, without mixing them with any white, and so heavily loaded with darks [*terribilmente di scuro*] in the deep parts, that these have extraordinary force and relief. What is more he achieved a singular unity [*una sì fatta unione*] for the whole, which seems

¹⁷Ibid., 343 (23.300–09).

¹⁸Ibid. (23.298–99).

¹⁹Cave, 1979, 27–28, defines literary *enargeia* as “the evocation of a visual scene, in all its details and colors, as if the reader were present as spectator.” On the concept of pictorial energy, see Shearman, 192–226.

as if all the scenes were done in one day.”²⁰ Such an illusion of high relief — one approaching sculptural or stucco relief — appears in the Toledo canvas because the artist applied pure hues and cold shadows to make the figures stand out boldly against a dark background. Just as the Toledo canvas approximates the scale of the original Fontainebleau *storia*, its pronounced *di sotto in su* (low) viewpoint suggests that even in its truncated format the composition was displayed in a comparable elevated position, perhaps as an overdoor. Also relevant is Vasari’s comment that Primaticcio produced plaster casts of ancient statues whose “flesh” appeared so soft and smooth that they required hardly any polishing.²¹ Like the surface quality of Primaticcio’s casts after the antique, or even the smooth, creamy textures of his stucco works, part of the appeal of his painted figures lies in their near-tactile allure. The work showcases Primaticcio’s carefully controlled brush, which translates into paint the soft gradations of tone complemented by the pronounced contours realized in his colored drawings.

Unlike the original fresco, however, the artist’s self-conscious, refined pictorial language stresses linearity and geometric planes. Not only does the Toledo composition confine the couple much more drastically, but the diminutive scale of the conversing figures in the background also creates a dramatic perspective, physically pushing the two lovers to the forefront of the picture plane and making them appear monumental. Primaticcio exaggerates this optical effect to such a degree that we have two distinct planes and two sets of silhouettes. When compared to the lost mural, the easel painting offers a new way of thinking about the relationship between image and text. It is clearly designed as a response to the completed frescoes, and therefore datable to ca. 1560.

In the first place, it is Penelope, and not Ulysses, who is in the act of narration. She occupies the central axis of the composition and, together with her elegant profile and noticeably reddened hands, is afforded a privileged status. Here Primaticcio shows Ulysses spellbound by the beauty and virtue of his wife, thereby revising Homer’s description of the scene as well as the protagonist’s symbolic centrality. The hero interrupts her speech as he turns her head and lovingly cradles her chin in a gesture of compassion and affection. Ulysses’ touch is a fresh invention that calls attention to itself because in the original fresco he is clearly motioning toward his wife while speaking. On the one hand, his gesture denotes reversal (*peripeteia*) and recognition (*anagnorisis*), which, according to Aristotle’s *Poetics*, are “the

²⁰Vasari, 145: my translation.

²¹Ibid, 144: “non pure sottile, ma con una pelle così gentile che non bisognò quasi rinettarle.”

most powerful elements of attraction in Tragedy.”²² The *Odyssey* — and the episodes involving Ulysses and Penelope in particular — has been long appreciated for employing a complex combination of disguise, deception, and discovery. On the other hand, Ulysses’ “chin-chuck” was a codified gesture in both sacred and secular contexts, visual and literary. It served as a formal sign of entreaty or of erotic solicitation in ancient Greece, because the chin was considered sacred, an extension of the immortal part of the soul — hence the touching of the chin or beard was viewed as an act of supplication.²³ Perhaps the most famous occurrence of this gesture is found in the first book of Homer’s *Iliad*, when Thetis visits Zeus and cups his chin and knees “in supplication” before she makes her appeal on Achilles’ behalf.²⁴ For his part, Primaticcio substitutes the celebratory atmosphere of the original fresco, which shows the couple chatting and maidens dancing in the background, with a tranquil, nostalgic mood that permeates the endearing union between husband and wife. Such reformulations of the Homeric text indicate other interests and concerns that an interpretation of the canvas based solely on the lost fresco cannot obtain. This is clearly an independent work of art, one that imitates epic material from the Fontainebleau murals, and one that revises its heroic action by amplifying such lyric themes as beauty, desire, and subjectivity.

Because the patron of Primaticcio’s *Ulysses and Penelope* is unknown, any attempt to recover personal or even political meaning under the work can only be speculative. Still, seeing the canvas as merely derivative of the original fresco restricts the context in which to interpret Primaticcio’s efforts. The choice of subject matter in the gallery has been seen as a product of the intense study and translation of Greek literature at the French court in the sixteenth century.²⁵ Just one year after the publication of Guillaume Budé’s *Commentarii Linguae Graecae* in 1529 — indeed, at the author’s urging — Francis I founded the Collège royal and appointed two *lecteurs royaux* in Greek. The result of the king’s effort to promote the study of Greek was that by the time of his death in 1547 the royal collection contained between 500 and 600 Greek texts, with Homer’s epics chief among them.²⁶ Homeric commentaries circulating at court by and

²²Aristotle, 232 (1450a).

²³Steinberg, 3–11, 110–18; Dimier, 106.

²⁴Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres’s *Jupiter and Thetis* of 1811, now in the Musée Granet, Aix-en-Provence, showcases Thetis’s gesture most eloquently.

²⁵See Béguin, Guillaume, and Ray, 98–100.

²⁶Sandy, 75. Omont published the collection of Greek texts housed at Fontainebleau. Mignot, 18, n. 50, notes that Homer’s *Odyssey* was first published in Greek in 1488 and translated into Latin in 1497. The first complete Greek text of the *Odyssey* was published in France in 1541, with a complete Latin translation around 1546–47. Only in 1604 was the first full translation of the *Odyssey* in French published.

large read persons and events in the epic as allegorical parallels to Christian belief.²⁷ Central to nearly every study of Primaticcio's work is Budé's *De transitu Hellenisimi ad Christianismum*, published in 1535. Budé interprets the etymology of the name *Odysseus* to mean "traveler-philosopher," a man "who took great care in his travels of his own salvation and that of his crewmen."²⁸ Another literary figure important to this discussion is Jean Dorat (1508–88), who was Professor of Greek at the Collège royal from 1556 until 1567. As royal poet and interpreter, his views on mythology had a broad impact in both humanist and court circles.²⁹ According to the second edition of Guillaume Canter's *Novarum lectionum libri septum* (1566), Dorat offered an overarching, moralized gloss on the figure of Ulysses: "Homer presents [Ulysses] less as a model of the wise or happy man, than as a man who desires true wisdom and happiness (for one is Penelope, the other Ithaca). To gain them, he undergoes many labors and uncertainties on the sea, in other words, in the world. Now, if anybody asks from which genius these ideas originated, I will give credit to Jean Dorat, certainly the greatest of men, the unique and best interpreter of Homer."³⁰ More recent interpreters also read the Fontainebleau decoration as broadly allegorical and with less moral zeal. According to Henri Zerner, the portrayal of the male hero — such as the scenes from the life of Alexander in the Chambre de la Duchesse d'Etampes — alludes to the figurative identity of the king, his military prowess, and his magnificence.³¹

Certainly the impetus behind the Galerie d'Ulysse was the desire to compare France and its monarchs to the greatness of antiquity, and to the virtue and might of Ulysses. As David Quint explains, the epic genre fueled ambitions of imperial power for rulers throughout history.³² Ulysses' power had political consequences for the Renaissance prince, whereby the sovereign could align himself with the linear teleology of the hero's adventure, triumphs, and ultimate preservation of his kingdom during an unstable period brought about by war and shifting alliances throughout Europe. The Galerie d'Ulysse can be seen as a pictorial manifestation of epic

²⁷For various interpretive models regarding myth in Renaissance France, see Ford; Demerson; Moss, 6–16.

²⁸Ford, 338–39.

²⁹Ibid., 341.

³⁰Ibid., 338. See also Béguin, Guillaume, and Ray, 98–100; Demerson, 30–31.

³¹Zerner, 78. See also Béguin, Guillaume, and Ray, 95–105, who discuss related allegorical dimensions of the Galerie d'Ulysse. Mignot, 16, endorses the idea that a single program governed and unified the entire decoration, the meaning of which is now lost.

³²Quint, 3–18.

continuity, or a combined artistic and political ideology centered on the repetition of such Homeric or Virgilian themes as dominance and nationalism. But this was not the only way to assimilate myth and poetry at court. Boccaccio's *Genealogie deorum gentilium* considers the resurrection of the ancient gods and heroes discovered in classical poetry as a cultural endeavor that could lead to knowledge of nature (*physiologia*) and knowledge of human character (*ethologia*).³³ Boccaccio states in his dedicatory preface to Hugo IV, King of Cyprus and Jerusalem, that his own interpretation of ancient heroes and pagan divinities "will enable you to see not only the art of the ancient poets . . . but certain natural truths, hidden with an art that will surprise you."³⁴ In addition, Conrad Gesner's defense of Homer, appearing in his exegesis of Proclus's *In libros Platonis de Repub. Apologiae quaedam pro Homero* (1542), promotes the shock value of ancient fable, seeing it as full of divine frenzy (*furore divino*) and more concerned with universal nature (*universam naturam*).³⁵ Even though the subject of Primaticcio's *Ulysses and Penelope* is relatively clear, its novel formal qualities merit closer analysis with regard to poetic artistry and the more subtle revelations of human nature and character derived from myth.

The distinctiveness of the Toledo canvas can be best demonstrated through a comparison with Nicolò dell'Abate's slightly later *Amor and Venus*, also known as *Cupid and Psyche* (39^{1/4} × 36^{1/4} inches), an oil painting on canvas now in the Detroit Institute of Arts (fig. 3). Primaticcio was responsible for bringing Nicolò dell'Abate to Fontainebleau in 1552, primarily on account of his experience in portraying epic subject matter in large-scale fresco.³⁶ The Detroit painting closely relates to the Toledo composition, except that dell'Abate's palette is much brighter. The artist also changes the identity of the protagonists for his own purposes: he substitutes the figure of Amor for Ulysses, and Venus (or Psyche) for Penelope — whose beauty is compared to that of the goddess of love at *Odyssey* 19.54. As William McAllister Johnson observes regarding these two canvases, "the suppression of the receding areas [of the original Fontainebleau mural] can only be regarded as a gain for the compositions. The choice of the forty-eighth composition for this purpose is explained by the highly adaptable

³³Boccaccio, 1956, 122–23; Boccaccio, 1951, 2:768. Hyde provides a succinct overview of Boccaccio's approach to myth and poetry.

³⁴Boccaccio, 1956, 12; Boccaccio, 1951, 1:8.

³⁵Ford, 335. For the reception of mythographic texts in France, see Demerson, 28–42.

³⁶For example, around 1540 dell'Abate painted a series of frescoes (possibly twelve in all) based on Virgil's *Aeneid*. The decoration, now in fragments but recorded in engravings, was designed for a study in the Boiardo family castle in Scandino, near Modena.

FIGURE 3. Nicolò dell'Abate. *Amor and Venus* (or *Cupid and Psyche*), ca. 1560–65. Detroit, Detroit Institute of Arts. Founders Society Purchase, Robert H. Tannahill Foundation Fund. © 2001 The Detroit Institute of Art.

nature of the scene.”³⁷ Notwithstanding the change in subject matter, what is important to note is how dell’Abate preserves the original gestures and key narrative and architectural features of Primaticcio’s Fontainebleau mural. There is much to be said about dell’Abate’s painting, but primarily it illustrates Primaticcio’s *Ulysses and Penelope* to be something other than a static image, or an abridged version of the Homeric text. Primaticcio manipulates one of the most prized *storia* from Fontainebleau to such a

³⁷McAllister Johnson, 32. See also Dominique Cordellier, her entry in *Primatice*, 337. The identification of the female figure as Psyche is problematic because, according to Apuleius’s *Metamorphoses*, Psyche never saw Cupid awake, nor does the female figure bear Psyche’s traditional attributes.

degree that it is altogether different in form and tone from dell'Abate's canvas — and, furthermore, from the relatively faithful copies of the palace frescoes supplied by the Office of the Concierge at Fontainebleau.³⁸

Primaticcio's *Ulysses and Penelope* signals a dramatic change: Ulysses' gesture of reaching for his wife's head and turning it around toward him as she attempts to speak reverses the narrative action of the *Odyssey* and shifts the focus of the scene to Penelope. The artist aligns his image with the poetic technique of *peripeteia*, which is defined by Aristotle in his *Poetics* as a reversal of the characters' intention, or events occurring against expectation. According to Aristotle, the best plots turn on surprise and lead to recognition (*anagnorisis*), following the change from ignorance to knowledge.³⁹ It occurs, for example, in book 19 of the *Odyssey*, when the maid Eurycleia, while washing Ulysses' feet, unexpectedly recognizes her long-lost master by his scar, and with tear-filled eyes reaches out to touch his chin. Epic *anagnorisis* is regarded in the Aristotelian tradition as diverse, complex, and cunningly wrought. As Terence Cave notes, Renaissance commentaries on Aristotle's poetic theory, especially Francisco Robortello's *In librum Aristotelis de arte poetica explicationes* (1548), understood *peripeteia* and *anagnorisis* as paradigms of poetic epistemology and commended such literary skills to poets in order to elicit *ammirazione* and *maraviglia*, or a heightened degree of wonderment.⁴⁰ Commentators praised the role of the poet's *ingegno* in interweaving the reversal of expectations and recognition — not only on the part of the characters but, moreover, on the part of the audience — thereby creating marvelous effects.⁴¹ Primaticcio thus presents the viewer with an unexpected moment of recognition as Ulysses both submits to and marvels at his wife.

Several episodes in the *Odyssey* spring to mind in which Ulysses is impressed beyond his expectations with his wife's wisdom and wit. In book 19, for instance, Ulysses (disguised as a beggar) encounters Penelope, who relates how she tricked her suitors with her loom and her tales. Although

³⁸Records indicate that Cardinal Ippolito II d'Este commissioned for his Salles des baines in his celebrated small palace at Fontainebleau paintings "similar to those in the vault of the Gallery of Ulysses" ("pareilles à celles de la voûte de la Galerie d'Ulysse") and which represented the pagan gods in allegorical or astrological guises: Guilbert, 2:140: In 1569 the Bolognese artist Ruggiero de' Ruggieri, an assistant of Primaticcio, made ten canvases after scenes from the Galerie d'Ulysse for Nicolas Legendre, Seigneur de Villeroy. Ruggieri's surviving canvases are faithful copies of the lost murals, maintaining the original appearance of scale, proportion, and viewpoint: *Primatice*, 296–98, and the subsequent entries for Ruggieri's copies.

³⁹Aristotle, 236–38 (1452a–b), 241–44 (1454b–1455a).

⁴⁰Cave, 1988, 57–63; Robortello, 102–16.

⁴¹Cave, 1988, 60.

it is Ulysses' intention to deceive Penelope with his obscured identity into believing that he has met her real husband, he unexpectedly discovers that the wife he left behind actually served as a surrogate king, stating: "Lady . . . your fame goes up into the wide heaven, as of some king who, as a blameless man and god-fearing, upholds the way of good government."⁴² Moreover, while book 23 of the *Odyssey* is structured primarily on Penelope's recognition of her husband, Primaticcio's Toledo canvas emphasizes, instead, Ulysses' reaction to his wife. Ever skeptical, Penelope makes her husband describe their marvelous marital bed, known only to the couple, in order to prove his true identity. Ulysses, who ultimately passes the test, exclaims in exasperation to his wife: "You are so strange."⁴³ This is the moment Primaticcio captures: Ulysses' recognition after years of absence of Penelope's "stubborn," yet kingly, nature; or better, the apotheosis of Penelope as the master strategizer.⁴⁴ In effect, the adjectives and epithets traditionally associated with Ulysses — unwavering in deceit and full of guile and falsehood — are transferred to "circumspect" Penelope.⁴⁵ Penelope assumes regal status as Ulysses' gesture calls to mind Thetis's supplication to Zeus. Even though the scene of the forty-eighth mural at Fontainebleau entailed the sweet recollection of past events, Primaticcio alters through gesture and gaze the effect produced on the part of Ulysses. Recognition comes not through external or physical signs, such as the various episodes involving Ulysses' scar or the hero's description of his marital bed, but through memory. For Aristotle, recognition by memory in the Homeric epic is especially dramatic because the "great surprise" often produces a more intense emotional impact: pity, fear, and wonder.⁴⁶

Throughout the sixteenth century, there was an increasing awareness of how visual strategies corresponded to generic selection and poetic style. For example, Titian's lost *Saint Peter Martyr* and Michelangelo's Sistine ceiling were equally admired by contemporary critics as examples of heroic painting (*picture heroica*), which, as John Shearman observes, is based on analogies to literary theory regarding poetic ornament, or the ability to describe vivid, energetic action (*enargeia*) appropriate to the epic.⁴⁷ Also relevant is Giovanni Andrea Gilio's *Dialogue on the Abuse of History Painters*

⁴²Homer, 285 (19.107).

⁴³Ibid., 339 (23.166).

⁴⁴Ibid. (23.167).

⁴⁵Ibid., 335 (23.10).

⁴⁶Aristotle, 245 (1455a); see also Richardson, 223. For an outline of Aristotle's taxonomy of recognitions, see Cave, 1988, 37–40.

⁴⁷Shearman, 207–12. Puttfarcken appeared after this article was in its final stages, and I therefore could not engage satisfactorily with its relevant observations.

of 1564, which criticizes Michelangelo for a breach of genre decorum: polluting the truth of biblical history with the fabulous of poetic fiction in his *Last Judgment*.⁴⁸ Gilio's counter-reformatory text actually defines the mixture of history and fable as painting in the epic genre. Every age produces viewers sensitive to different types of perceptual and interpretive skills — what Michael Baxandall calls the “period eye” — and in the sixteenth century the ability to distinguish between genres and the visual character of poetic ornament coincided with the heightened analysis of Aristotle's *Poetics* with regard to heroic poetry.⁴⁹ What makes the Toledo canvas so compelling is Primaticcio's use of poetic ornament for unexpected purposes.

The “recognition” of Penelope provides what is absent from the Galerie d'Ulysse: the celebration of the female protagonist. Throughout the Fontainebleau cycle the centrality of Ulysses visually reinforces Aristotle's main prescription for the epic genre: unity of action and consistency of character. It is primarily for this reason that the episodes involving Penelope working the loom, and her testing of Ulysses' memory of their marital bed, are absent from the gallery.⁵⁰ Even Pellegrino Tibaldi's *Odyssey* cycle in the Palazzo Poggi, Bologna (ca. 1554–56), focuses exclusively on the virtue of the male hero and omits the part of Penelope.⁵¹ Although there were five scenes — murals forty-six to fifty — representing Penelope at Fontainebleau, she always appears in the context of her husband, introduced by her role at Ulysses' side as the couple is reunited, with Penelope notably caressing his chin (fig. 4). Moving from left to right in narrative progression, the walls of the gallery originally showed Ulysses leading Penelope to bed (fig. 5), their bedtime conversation (fig. 2), Ulysses asleep while Penelope keeps vigil (fig. 6), and, finally, Minerva rousing Ulysses from sleep and speaking directly to Penelope (fig. 7, a scene not specifically mentioned in the

⁴⁸Dempsey, 1982, traces the evolution and reception of generic forms in the art of Michelangelo, Francesco Salviati, and Annibale Carracci. With his frescoes in the Farnese Gallery, Carracci successfully achieved an epic entirely of poetic adornment, or an epic expressive of lyric sentiment. On the mixing of epic and chivalric modes by the Carracci in Bologna, and the relation of their pictorial enterprise to literary genres, see Campbell.

⁴⁹Baxandall, 29–108.

⁵⁰An engraving after Primaticcio attributed to Girolamo Fagioli shows Penelope at her loom. The inscription indicates that it came from Fontainebleau, but it was definitely not in the Galerie d'Ulysse: see the entry by Susan Boorsch in *The French Renaissance in Prints*, 341–43.

⁵¹On the stylistic and thematic relationship between Primaticcio's Galerie d'Ulysse and Pellegrino Tibaldi's mock-heroic frescoes from the *Odyssey* in the Palazzo Poggi of Bologna (about 1554–56), see Romani; Béguin, 1986. Hansen discusses Tibaldi's pictorial enterprise in broader cultural and poetic terms.

FIGURE 4. Francesco Primaticcio. *The Reunion of Ulysses and Penelope*, ca. 1555–60. Stockholm, Nationalmuseum.

FIGURE 5. Théodore van Thulden (after Francesco Primaticcio). *Ulysses Leads Penelope to Bed*, seventeenth century. Vienna, Albertina.

FIGURE 6. Théodore van Thulden (after Francesco Primaticcio). *Ulysses Asleep next to Penelope*, seventeenth century. Vienna, Albertina.

Odyssey). Penelope's appearance in the gallery signaled the end of conflict while her demonstration of faithfulness maintains her husband's dignity and his state.⁵²

Arguably the most popular scene in the history of art involving Penelope involves her working of the loom. A highly relevant pictorial example is found in the apartments of Eleanora of Toledo (1519–62), wife

⁵² Wilson-Chevalier, 43, has interpreted Primaticcio's portrayal of women in various spaces at Fontainebleau, such as the appearance of the goddess Hera at the Porte Dorée, as "profoundly malevolent forces when allowed to assume an active role." According to her study — which notably does not take into account the role of Penelope in the Galerie d'Ulysse — King Francis I, as an alter-Zeus, designated the plotting female as the enemy threatening male sovereignty and rule. Primaticcio's portrayals of Penelope at Fontainebleau and in the Toledo picture may serve as foils against this overarching view. Furthermore, with the publication in 1549 of his *Recueil de poésie*, dedicated to Marguerite de France, sister of Henri II, Joachim Du Bellay employs the figure of Penelope as a symbol of France awaiting the return of his cousin, Cardinal Jean Du Bellay (1492–1560), who was in Rome from July 1547 until September 1549. In Ode 7 of the collection, "L'avantretour en France de Monseigneur Reverendiss. Cardinal Du Bellay," Joachim compares Penelope, "Sa chaste epouze," to France, filled with happiness at the return of Ulysses. For Du Bellay's allegory of a French homecoming, see Demerson, 155–56. See also Boccaccio, 2001, 158–63, for a Renaissance reception of Penelope's virtuous character.

FIGURE 7. Théodore van Thulden (after Francesco Primaticcio). *Minerva Visits Ulysses and Penelope*, seventeenth century. Vienna, Albertina.

of Duke Cosimo I, in the Palazzo Vecchio of Florence, that celebrates exemplary women from Greek mythology, the Old Testament, and Roman and Florentine history. From 1561 to 1562, the Flemish artist known as Giovanni Stradano executed the decoration for the Sala di Penelope, the central tondo of which shows Penelope at her loom (fig. 8). Instead of illustrating any one particular episode from the *Odyssey*, Stradano visualizes Penelope's industry to underscore her virtue and fidelity, her most renowned traits. Boccaccio's *De mulieribus claris*, which was translated into French and published in three different editions (1493, 1538, and 1551), praises her as follows: "Penelope, daughter of King Icarius, was the wife of Ulysses, a man of great activity: for married women she is the most sacred and lasting example of untarnished honor and undefiled purity."⁵³ Penelope also represents fortitude and temperance for having resisted the suitors' incessant flattery and for having endured her husband's absence.⁵⁴ As the wife of the lord of Ithaca she provides a perfect model for Eleanora's nobility.

Instead of highlighting her industry, temperance, and chastity in the service of her husband, Primaticcio's Toledo canvas allows his audience to

⁵³Boccaccio, 2001, 158–59.

⁵⁴These observations are made by Scorza, 434; see also Lorandi, 408–10.

FIGURE 8. Giovanni Stradano. *Penelope at Her Loom*. Florence, Palazzo Vecchio.

read into the figure of Penelope a series of metaphors or categories of artistic performance: artifice, deception, *ingenium*, and narration. The artist carefully applies rosy tints to Penelope's hands and fingers, still sore from working the loom, suggestively referring to both weaving and narration as arts of deceit. Her hands are as central to the Toledo canvas as they are to the Homeric text, as she spins her loom and simultaneously spins a tale to deceive her suitors. Homer labels the loom Penelope's divinely inspired stratagem: "I weave my own wiles," she exclaims.⁵⁵ Traditionally, Ulysses, the master of ruse, disguise, and verbal trickery whose stories fool his own wife, serves as a model of the poet's own craft.⁵⁶ While Minerva helps Ulysses weave his wiles throughout the epic, she equally protects Penelope, who, through her literal weaving, enjoys the masculine ability to weave stratagems.⁵⁷ Weaving, in fact, had long been equated with intellectual as

⁵⁵Homer, 285 (19.137).

⁵⁶Richardson, 222; Cave, 1988, 146–47.

⁵⁷See Snyder. Boccaccio, 2001, 160–61, describes Penelope's ruse with the loom as characteristic of her "feminine cunning."

well as poetic activity.⁵⁸ Penelope's web also served as a metaphor for narrative discourse in the writings of Mario Equicola and Pietro Bembo.⁵⁹

At the same time, through gesture and gaze, the artist converts epic energy into lyric sentimentality, amplifying the warm emotional response of the lovers to one another with a naturalness and force equal to Homer's diction. Viewers familiar with the Galerie d'Ulysse could contemplate how the artist cleverly reverses Penelope's recognition of and subsequent loving submission to her husband, actions found in the forty-sixth mural and recorded in the preparatory drawing in Stockholm (fig. 4). Ulysses' chin-chuck equally invites a comparison with a number of visual prototypes expressing love (secular or sacred) and tenderness. The gesture, for example, is found in Leonardo's *Burlington House Cartoon* (fig. 9), which shows the Christ Child tenderly caressing the chin of the infant John the Baptist as he blesses him.⁶⁰ What Primaticcio offers is a unique meditation on the form and character of epic pictorial language, a revision of his earlier Fontainebleau cycle whereby the economy of the narrative format allows for a wide range of literary and visual associations.

Central to this discussion is Joachim Du Bellay's (ca. 1522–60) *La Deffence, et illustration de la langue françoise* of 1549, a polemical treatise published in Paris with royal privileges. In its effort to demonstrate that French could rival ancient Latin and Greek in poetic excellence, the text questions whether the heroic spirit of antiquity could be revived in contemporary vernacular writing. Du Bellay equates ancient languages with

⁵⁸For example, Boccaccio, 1956, 39 (Boccaccio, 1951, 699), observes the etymological bond between *textile* and *text* when he speaks about poetry being the ability to "veil truth in a fair and fitting garment of fiction." See also Scorza, 434, who notes that in the Sala dei Mesi in the Palazzo Schifanoia in Ferrara (painted ca. 1470), the upper register of the month of March shows the Triumph of Minerva, with male poets and female weavers on either side of her ceremonial float. Minerva stands as the goddess of human wit and ingenuity who favors all the arts.

⁵⁹The relevant text is Mario Equicola's treatise on love, *Libro de natura de amore*, which was first published in 1525. Equicola served as a humanist advisor and diplomat for Isabella d'Este at the court of Mantua, where Primaticcio himself worked early in his career. In his discussion of *voluptas*, Equicola argues that numerous writers on the subject mistakenly pull words and ideas out of context from ancient authorities. In order to find the proper definition of *voluptas*, Equicola alerts his readers that he will unravel and reweave the loom of his argument in the manner of Penelope: "se retexerò la tela ià facta come fece Penelope" (511). In this way, he can fabricate a new argument on *voluptas*: that is, create a new web of discourse that he claims will rival the fabrications of Arachne or Minerva. Penelope thus serves as a metonymy for narrative exegesis. She also plays such a role in Pietro Bembo's *Gli Asolani* (Bembo, 138), which was translated into French in 1545.

⁶⁰For the possible French provenance of this drawing, or a version thereof, see Cox-Rearick, 131–32.

FIGURE 9. Leonardo da Vinci. *Virgin and Child with Saint Anne and John the Baptist* (*The Burlington House Cartoon*), ca. 1508. London, The National Gallery. © The National Gallery, London.

ruined edifices and dilapidated remains; there was no hope of the reintegration or reconstitution of their original glory.⁶¹ As a result, he encourages authors to devour the writings of ancient authors, digest them, and “convert them into blood and nourishment.” By “grafting” the exquisite qualities of foreign literary models onto modern vernacular forms of expression, one arrives at independent, eloquent verse.⁶² According to François Rigolot, “what Du Bellay really advocates is an art of active mistranslation, one that shall deny exemplary foreign models their claim to a timeless, monopolistic, and unchanging plentitude.”⁶³ Rigolot argues that Du Bellay’s imitation theory endorses not just linguistic distance, but an epistemological distance reflected in deliberate mistranslation. Notably, in his chapter “Du long poëme francoys,” which expresses the desire for an epic composed in French, Du Bellay’s models are, of course, Homer and Virgil; but he also cites the Ferrarese poet Ludovico Ariosto (1474–1533), whose vernacular romance epic *Orlando furioso* (final edition 1532, French translation 1544) served as an Italian example of what could be achieved in France.⁶⁴ Ariosto’s poem is important for reading Primaticcio’s *Ulysses and Penelope*, especially for the way it revises the continuity and generic unity of the epic with abrupt transitions and lengthy digressions involving love and private passions.⁶⁵ The *Orlando furioso* features prominently in the treatise *Discorso intorno al comporre dei romanzi* (Venice, 1554), published by the Ferrarese literary theorist Giovanbattista Giraldi Cinzio, whose express aim was to define the romance as a distinct modern genre. Giraldi Cinzio states that digressions often comprise the most marvelous events and display the author’s expressive energies outside the formal confines of an epic narrative sequence revolving around a single action or hero.⁶⁶ Isolated episodes or the errant wanderings of protagonists could also lend beauty

⁶¹ *Poetry & Language in 16th-Century France*, 60–61; Du Bellay, 43–44. See Cave, 1979, 35–77, on imitation theory in France.

⁶² *Poetry & Language in 16th-Century France*, 50–51; Du Bellay, 30.

⁶³ Rigolot, 1227–28.

⁶⁴ *Poetry & Language in 16th-Century France*, 72–74; Du Bellay, 56–59. For Du Bellay’s project in relation to the development of the epic genre in France, see Demerson, 70–79; Maskell; Braybrook.

⁶⁵ On the critical reception of *Orlando furioso* in the sixteenth century, see Javitch.

⁶⁶ Giraldi Cinzio, 1968, 37–39; Giraldi Cinzio, 1973, 68–69. On Giraldi Cinzio and the debate over the romance and the epic in the sixteenth century, see Weinberg, 2:954–1073; Quint, 31–41; Bouchard. Braybrook, 351–53, notes that sixteenth-century literary theorists in France concentrated on the study and publication of isolated episodes from classical epics as a way to compete with the ancients without succumbing to their influence. In essence, they promoted the epic fragment.

and understanding to the whole. Significantly, Giraldi Cinzio commends the *Odyssey* because it introduces episodes of love that ornament the poem.⁶⁷

Looking at Primaticcio's *Ulysses and Penelope* through the literary lens of a Du Bellay or Giraldi Cinzio, viewers can admire how the artist exploits one of the most tender and endearing episodes of the *Odyssey* and transforms it into an image of courtly love. In an ethical move, the painting rebuffs narrative triumph characteristic of epic history. Mythology is shown here in familiar terms, neither moralized nor licentious (the latter characteristic of Giulio Romano's voyeuristic *Lovers* of ca. 1525, now in the Hermitage).⁶⁸ The silent admiration of the protagonists in the Toledo canvas is an expansion on "the emotional effect on those who have returned home, and the sympathy which unites them."⁶⁹ Du Bellay and Giraldi Cinzio equally insisted that the aim of poetry is to stir the reader's emotions.⁷⁰ It is also highly relevant that Alexandrian scholars considered *Odyssey* 23.296 — when the couple retires to bed — as the original "happy ending" of the epic.⁷¹ In the Toledo canvas, Ulysses derails Penelope's narrative as if to say *Stop talking*. The artist introduces his own version of epic closure with a composition exemplary of poetic brevity.⁷² The painting is emblematic of Primaticcio's efforts to develop a new pictorial language that emphasizes the eloquence of images, and one that transforms textual materials — ancient or vernacular — by magnifying their most pictorial components.

It is significant that Robert Strange, who provides the earliest mention

⁶⁷Giraldi Cinzio, 1968, 57; Giraldi Cinzio, 1973, 81. It was only with the publication of Pierre de Ronsard's unfinished *La Franciade* in 1572 that France finally had its first, though somewhat unsuccessful, vernacular epic in print; see Maskell, 67–101. For broader and thematic questions of a national style of French art, see Zorach, 2004; Chastel; Zerner.

⁶⁸Talvacchia, 41, 43–45.

⁶⁹Richardson, 225.

⁷⁰The exploration of the sentimental appears in a number of lyric or elegiac works based on ancient fable and composed by sixteenth-century French authors, including Melin de Saint-Gelais's *Chant triste, de Medée, abandonnée de son aymé Jason* (1548), a text which concentrates not on Medea's magic arts and wicked intentions, but on her abandonment and suffering — in other words, her human and emotional side: see Braybrook, 364. See also McAllister Johnson, 32, for a discussion of the sentimental value of the paintings by Primaticcio and Nicolò dell'Abate. Barocchi, 215, n. 5, notes a connection between the monumental and psychologically united figures of Ulysses and Penelope and the paired figures designed for the ballroom at Fontainebleau.

⁷¹Richardson, 227.

⁷²Pino, 115, in defining painting as poetry, recommends brevity (*brevità*) when devising pictorial inventions.

of Primaticcio's *Ulysses and Penelope* in his 1772 auction catalogue for Christie's, aptly called this "a studied picture" that "unites the characters of Michel Angelo and Parmigianino."⁷³ Despite outstanding examples of Raphael's work in France, Michelangelo and Parmigianino constituted the two poles of art for Primaticcio. Clearly the artist was deeply affected by the art of Parmigianino (1503–40), his Emilian contemporary.⁷⁴ The elongated fingers, cold flesh tones, and elaborate hairstyle of Penelope echo the features of Saint Catherine in Parmigianino's *Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine* of about 1528 (fig. 10). But it would be a mistake to characterize this affinity solely in terms of influence. In his discussion of the poetics of attraction, Ludovico Dolce famously praised the (decidedly Petrarchan) paintings of Parmigianino for their charm and elusive quality that kindle love in the beholder.⁷⁵ Accordingly, Primaticcio assimilates the alluring qualities inherent in the art of Parmigianino and applies them to his own ideal of female loveliness. Beauty, of course, applies to both figures in the *Odyssey*. Not only does Penelope make a show of herself, becoming all the more "precious" for her husband, but Minerva artfully "suffused great beauty" over Ulysses, making him "bolder and thicker" (and here with flesh tones warmed by love) as he prepares to court his own wife.⁷⁶ The artist's stylistic borrowings therefore correspond to modes of poetic ornamentation, balancing the heroic scale of his figures with the qualities of grace (*grazia*) and charm (*vaghezza*) appropriate to their respective characters. Striking, too, is the relationship between Primaticcio's image and Michelangelo's *Leda*, a painting, now lost, which most likely entered the collection of Francis I by 1533.⁷⁷ Rosso produced a highly refined interpretation of the work in a drawing several years later, which emphasizes its pronounced contours, so important to Primaticcio's rendering of the

⁷³Christie's, 20–22 February 1772, lot 111; cited in *Primatice*, 337, n. 29. In his sixth *Discourse* delivered at the Royal Academy in 1774, Joshua Reynolds considered Primaticcio an artist who "adopted a more liberal style of imitation" (105). Reynolds was arguing against the slavish imitation of a single model, stating "that artist who can unite in himself the excellencies of the various great painters, will approach nearer to perfection than any one of his masters" (103).

⁷⁴Béguin, 1986.

⁷⁵Roskill, 182–83: "Diede costui certa vaghezza alle cose sue, che fanno innamorar chiunque le riguarda." Dolce's *Dialogo della pittura intitolato L'Aretino* was published in Venice in 1557. For Parmigianino's visual interpretation of Petrarchan metaphors, see Cropper, 1976.

⁷⁶Homer, 274 (18.158–62), 339 (23.156–62). See Ahl and Roisman, 215–38, for the issue of beauty and Ulysses' courtship.

⁷⁷For the reception of Michelangelo's *Leda* in France, see Cox-Rearick, 237–41; Romani, 37–38.

FIGURE 10. Parmigianino. *Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine*, ca. 1528. London, The National Gallery. © The National Gallery, London.

FIGURE 11. Rosso Fiorentino (after Michelangelo). *Leda and the Swan*, ca. 1535. London, Royal Academy of Arts. © Royal Academy of Arts, London.

body (fig. 11).⁷⁸ The lost *Leda* was an outstanding demonstration of Michelangelo's *disegno*. In fact, the *Leda* (not to mention Michelangelo's allegorical figure of Night in the Medici Chapel) proved to be a paradigm for a number of artistic works at Fontainebleau — from Benvenuto Cellini's *Saltcellar* to Rosso's *Nymph of Fontainebleau* (fig. 12), with Primaticcio's *Ulysses and Penelope* being the definitive summation — that featured elegant profiles of the female body.⁷⁹ Whereas Michelangelo's *Leda* shows explicit physical contact, and hence the confluence of sexual

⁷⁸Cox-Rearick, 277. The drawing has been attributed either to Rosso, which seems correct, or to a close follower of his at the French court.

⁷⁹In addition to the various works by Michelangelo that reached the French court, Primaticcio was also making casts after his sculpture in Rome: see *Primatice*, 31–37; Cox-Rearick, 76, 294–97, 302–17. Pope-Hennessy, 101, rightly considers Rosso's art a “stylistic paragon” at Fontainebleau, especially for the way the artist interpreted the works of Michelangelo for the Galerie François I: “Figure after figure based on the allegories in the Medici Chapel and on other familiar sources had found their way onto the walls of the Gallery, and a prevailing interest in the work of Michelangelo was stimulated by the presence of an early sculpture, the Hercules, by the Leda in the king's collection, and by drawings which Antonio Mini had brought eight years earlier to France.”

FIGURE 12. Pierre Milan and René Boyvin (after Rosso Fiorentino). *The Nymph of Fontainebleau*, before 1553. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France.

and aesthetic arousal, Primaticcio's *Ulysses and Penelope* plays with implication and innuendo through the protagonists' reciprocal gaze. Instead of carnal appeal, the audience is presented with the affective qualities of Primaticcio's artifice.

Regardless who commissioned the work, the experience of Primaticcio's *Ulysses and Penelope* corresponds to what Elizabeth Cropper defines as the emergence of the "affective beholder" in the sixteenth century. Coinciding with this phenomenon were images of beautiful women that functioned as "synecdoches" for beautiful painting, whereby the beholder conflated his desire for one with the desire for the other.⁸⁰ Penelope is portrayed as an

⁸⁰Cropper, 1995, 190–205. As *ibid.*, 178–79, further explains, Primaticcio's *Apelles Painting Alexander and Campaspe*, executed between 1541 and 1544 in the Chambre de la Duchesse d'Etampes at Fontainebleau, is central to this discussion. The image's classical source is Pliny's *Natural History* (36.35.85–87), retold by Ludovico Dolce in his discussion of beauty, and by Castiglione in his *Book of the Courtier*, first published in 1528 with a French translation in 1537. One of Castiglione's speakers — Count Ludovico of Canossa, who takes up the defense of painting — interprets the story as follows: "So we read that Alexander loved Apelles of Ephesus dearly — so much so that once, when he had him paint one of his favorite women and heard that the worthy painter had conceived a most passionate love for her because of her great beauty, he made an outright gift of she: a generosity truly worthy of Alexander." This passage is also discussed in terms of patron-artist relations by Vickers, 97–99.

object of such desire, appealing to the convention of the Petrarchan lyric as it was developed in France.⁸¹ Notably, Joachim Du Bellay and his close friend Pierre de Ronsard (1524–85), two of the seven lyric poets belonging to the Pléiade, promoted their own version of Petrarchan sonnets.⁸² A relevant piece comes from Du Bellay's collection *XIII Sonnets de l'honneste amour* of 1552, less a seductive fantasy than an ennobling experience:

Neither is that comely golden hair,
 Nor that fair forehead, honor's honored prize;
 Neither is it the brows that arch those eyes
 That scores of eyes adore in earnest prayer;

 Neither is it that bud, that tender pair
 Of coral lips, those lips I idolize,
 Nor that complexion, drawn from Dawn's pink skies,
 Nor all such things the lover's heart finds fair;

 Neither is it the lilies nor the roses,
 Nor all those perfect pearls her smile discloses:
 Rather it is that mind the heavens impart,

 Whose beauty graces by the score enhance —
 Rare gift — that pierces my eyes, my soul, my heart,
 Darts that transfix me with her every glance.⁸³

What Du Bellay describes is not just the superficial features of his beloved — with natural metaphors so evocative of Penelope's own idealized

⁸¹On women as collectable commodities within the economy of erotic imagery at the French court, see Zorach, 2001; and Minta for the development of love poetry in France.

⁸²Among other texts, the publication of Du Bellay's *L'Olive* (1549), the first *canzoniere* made up of sonnets in French, and Ronsard's *Amours de Cassandre* (1552), amplified such Petrarchan conceits regarding the poet-lover's burning obsession with the mental image of his lady, a poetic ideal of beauty whereby the spirits of love enter through the eyes like arrows and figure themselves in the imagination (*fantasia*). See Glidden; Castor. For an explanation of the pneumatic mechanism of the spirits of love (*spiritelli d'amore*), see Agamben, 102–10.

⁸³*Lyrics of the French Renaissance*, 180–81 (Du Bellay, *XIII Sonnets de l'honneste amour* 2): "Ce ne sont pas ces beaux cheveux dorez, / Ny ce beau front, qui l'honneur mesme honnore, / Ce ne sont pas les deux archets encore' / De ces beaux yeux de cent yeux adoret: // Ce ne sont pas les deux brins colorez / De ce coral, ces levres que j'adore, / Ce n'est ce teinct emprunté de l'Aurore, / Ny autre object des coeurs enamourez: // Ce ne sont pas ny ces lyz, ny ces rozes, / Ny ces deux rancz de perles si bien closes, / C'est cet esprit, rare present des cieux, // Dont la beauté de cent graces pourvëue / Perce mon ame & mon Coeur & mes yeux / Par les rayons de sa poignante vëue."

features — but the impression of the lady's virtuous image on the lover's imagination. So, too, in Primaticcio's *Ulysses and Penelope* the hero is transfixed by the beauty that adorns his wife's noble character. The combination of epic poetic ornament with lyrical sentiments animates the spirits of its protagonists and, more importantly, of its audience. Ulysses' interruption underscores the inherent sexual agenda of the episode as much as it places focus on lyrical subjectivity and desire and binds the viewer to the work.

Ultimately, the focus of the painting, both from within and without, is Penelope's head. Ulysses' delicate caress frames her head as if it were a precious object: it is the most ornamental part of the composition, with its woven and artificial braids. What is more, her head projects forward and is almost disassociated from her body; it seems to float within a space all its own.⁸⁴ The hero is wholly absorbed in contemplating her beauty. The isolation of Penelope's beautiful parts corresponds to the French *blason*, a descriptive poem that praises (or mocks) individual body parts: eyebrows, teeth, cheeks, ears, hair, and so on.⁸⁵ So distinctive is the character of Penelope's head that it rivals the famous *teste divine* (or "divine heads," so called by Vasari) produced by Michelangelo and Rosso, among other artists (fig. 13).⁸⁶ Michael Hirst associates Michelangelo's drawings in particular with "love poetry, above all sonnets, actuated by profound personal feeling."⁸⁷ The head of Penelope displays Primaticcio's own epitome of *buon disegno* accompanied by pictorial embellishment. Her beauty actuates profound personal feeling on the part of Ulysses, whose reaction permits quiet contemplation of her ideal loveliness.

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⁸⁴Barocchi, 215. So finished are Penelope's features they flirt with affectation. Dolce warned against painters "who make their figures so supremely finished that they look prettified [*sbellezzate*], with their hair styles so diligently arranged that not even a single lock is out of place": Roskill, 156–57.

⁸⁵The poet Clément Marot (1496–1544) was especially gifted in this genre. His epigram *Of the Fair Breast (Du beau Tetin)*, written in 1535 while he was in exile at the court of Ferrara and published the following year, quickly achieved immense popularity throughout France, initiating the genre of the *blason*. See *Lyrics of the French Renaissance*, 98–99.

⁸⁶Vasari, 1009, 113. For Rosso's Metropolitan drawing, see Bean, 227.

⁸⁷Hirst, 107. See also Cropper, 1995, 195–97.

FIGURE 13. Rosso Fiorentino. *Ideal Head*, ca. 1530. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1952. All rights reserved, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

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