

The Italian 'Training' of Catherine de Medici: Portraits as Dynastic Narrative¹

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In memoriam Martha McCrory

Early modern royal marriage customarily entailed the exchange of women across national borders. Many future queen consorts left home in their teens to take up residence in a foreign country.² Most never saw parents or siblings again and documents occasionally reveal their separation anxiety. Their welcome often involved lavish expense and demonstrations of deference, but remained a double-edged sword because many marriages resulted from treaties concluding wars.³ Nowhere is the transition more dramatic than the experience of fifteen-year old Marie Antoinette on her arrival in France for her 1770 marriage to the future Louis XVI. In the words of Dena Goodman: 'As she crossed the river that marked the boundary of French territory, she was stripped of her 'Austrian' clothes and, thus, symbolically, of her attachment to the family and nation of her birth.'⁴ The ritual continued with her recloning and coifing *à la française*.

Factors specific to each alliance always impinged, but in general such a public transformation of outside appearances simultaneously signaled to the dauphine her body's reinscription as a vessel worthy to bear the royal patriline and reassured the French of her assumption of new loyalties. Such a rite of passage does acknowledge that, even at age fifteen, she possessed something requiring erasure. Catherine de Medici was fourteen when she wed the Duc d'Orléans, second

¹ For their assistance with this paper, I would like to thank the other participants at the Massachusetts Center for the Renaissance conference on Queens and Dynastic Culture, the editors of this collection, and Anne Alexander Marshall, Sheryl Reiss and Kathleen Wilson-Chevalier.

² Caroline Hibbard has addressed some of these issues with regard to Henriette Marie de Bourbon, aged fourteen when she married Charles I of England in 1625, in 'Translating Royalty: Henrietta Maria and the Transition from Princess to Queen', *The Court Historian*, 5 (2000), pp. 15-29. Among other sixteenth- and seventeenth-century princesses who married early are: Jeanne d'Albret (1529-72), twelve when she married for the first time; Elisabeth de Bourbon (1603-44), who married Philip IV of Spain at the same age; Isabella of Portugal (1503-39), thirteen when she married Charles V Habsburg, as was Christine de Bourbon (1606-63), who married the Duke of Savoy; Isabella Habsburg (1501-26), who married Christian of Denmark at fourteen; Claude d'Orléans, who was fifteen when she married François, duc d'Angoulême (the future Francis I of France); Catherine of Aragon (1485-1536) who at sixteen married Arthur, prince of Wales; Beatrice d'Este (1475-97) who married the Duke of Milan when she was sixteen, the same age that her sister Isabella (1474-1539) was when she married the Marquis of Mantua; her daughter Eleonora (1493-70), who married the Duke of Urbino at seventeen; and Mary of Austria (1505-58), also seventeen when she married the King of Hungary.

³ Sheila ffolliott, 'Make Love not War: Images of Peace through Marriage in Renaissance France', in *Peace, Negotiation, and Reciprocity: Strategies of Co-Existence in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. Diane Wolfthal (Brussels, 2000), pp. 213-32.

⁴ Dena Goodman, 'Introduction', in *Writings on the Body of a Queen*, ed. Dena Goodman (London, 2003), p. 3.

son of Francis I of France, in 1533. At the time of her marriage, she was not destined for the throne, but the death of her husband's elder brother in 1536 made her Dauphine and eventually Queen of France. Despite such ritual deletion, political discourse and aspects of their subsequent treatment indicate continued French fears that the native would reassert itself in these queens. The brides engaged in a never-ending process of legitimising their status in their new land.

In this essay, I explore how Catherine de Medici and, by implication, girls like her prepared for what lay ahead. Marie Antoinette's ritual reclading reinforced the notion that her birth identity conflicted with her marital one. Were these, in fact, two mutually exclusive identities, invariably at odds? What sense did these girls have about who they were and how did they acquire it? What did they learn about dynastic culture generally? What forms of cultural expression participated in their education? What did such girls retain from their own formation and how might it have informed their practice of their queenly roles?

Although both were queens of France, Catherine de Medici's arrival does not precisely parallel that of Marie Antoinette, for she had wed not the dauphin but his younger brother. A ritual change of clothes did not greet her, but other actions asserted her outsider status. Take, for example, Mary Stuart's branding her mother-in-law a '*marchande Florentine*', insinuating that she came from a much lower status family than the Stuarts or Valois.⁵ This pronouncement may have been effective courtly posturing on Mary Stuart's part, suggesting as well that Catherine's prior experience would in and of itself be irrelevant. The insult depends, however, upon a selective look at kinship. True, Catherine's father was a Medici and she was the first of her family to be born to an ennobled male; but she was not royal and the dukedom was of recent creation. Her mother, however, was a French princess, descended on the Bourbon line from Louis IX, and Mary Stuart was, in fact, related to her mother-in-law.⁶

Catherine's extraordinarily unsettled early life has compounded the view that she arrived in France a virtual *tabula rasa*. She was orphaned within two weeks of her birth and, while under the official guardianship of highly placed male relatives, raised in Rome and Florence by a series of female relatives and nuns. Catherine would have been aware of her bilateral descent from an early age. Motivated more by concern for her property than her welfare, Francis I proposed that she be reared at the French court; Leo X's refusal acknowledged her potential importance to the Medici. Her childhood coincided with her family's rise to papal status and nobility, with concomitant mythmaking via various cultural forms. While we usually consider the primary audience for images of power to be those who need to be impressed, I contend that, in part,

⁵ Leonie Frieda, *Catherine de' Medici* (London, 2003), p. 15, states that, 'in private' Francis I himself denigrated Lorenzo, Duke of Urbino, as 'only a tradesman'. François I's parents were not king and queen of France; rather he emerged, like Henry IV would later, from a collateral branch.

⁶ Catherine and Mary Stuart were second cousins once removed; in addition, Catherine's great aunt, Anne de la Tour d'Auvergne, married Alexander Stuart, Duke of Albany, Mary Stuart's first cousin twice removed. Catherine's ancestry also included Beatrice Plantagenêt, daughter of the English King Richard III. Interestingly, a bit of scandal attached to Catherine's highborn grandmother, Jeanne de Bourbon: she made a *mésalliance*, marrying in 1503 her Maître d'hôtel (Ivan Cloulas, *Catherine de Médicis* [Paris, 1979], p. 676). This occurred, however, after her second widowhood (the marriage that produced Catherine's mother), so it did not affect Catherine's bloodline.

Catherine learned about who she was from precisely those materials manufactured expressly to create ‘identity’. New dynasties may have more work to do in affirming legitimacy, but, in fact, every ruler must affix his or her person to his or her position and many young royals experienced challenging childhoods and flexible notions of family. Death in childbirth meant that they often grew up with stepmothers; many were removed entirely from parents, placed under the care of official guardians and reared in the company of half siblings, royal bastards, future spouses and cousins (some of whom might be foreign). Given these conditions, it was extremely important for the young members of ruling families to learn their dynastic identities at an early age.

Many situations that Catherine would face in France over her fifty-six years there had, in fact, occurred to her in Italy by age fourteen. She had exposure to courtly life and ceremony, to composite families (including the presence and promotion of illegitimate children), to widows looking out for the interests of their sons, to objections to female rule, to factional strife, to the problem of having only young boys representing the family’s future and to dynastic worries. At the end of her life, in fact, Catherine watched a rerun of the Medici experience of her childhood. Valois hopes for dynastic survival diminished when no legitimate grandsons survived Catherine and the crown seemed destined to shift to a collateral branch. As each new situation presented itself, Catherine improvised, as had her relatives during her childhood.

To speculate on how she processed information about her family and herself, it is necessary to reconsider Catherine’s status vis-à-vis the Medici. Because of elite marriage practice, girls do not remain with the patriline into which they were born. Thus, Catherine often disappears from linear narratives on the rise of Medici control over sixteenth-century Florence.⁷ She was not the centre of attention but, I maintain, she was nevertheless important to Medici identity in this crucial period: the first legitimate issue of an ennobled Medici male, the last remaining legitimate Medici from the senior line and the first to marry legitimate royalty. Although at times she must have doubted that she mattered, many forces communicated her significance to her. In this brief essay, I shall describe a few experiences that Catherine had and speculate on how she might have learned about who she was, in particular via the ‘Medici myth’ that written and visual histories propagated at that time in Florence and Rome, as Janet Cox-Rearick and others have argued.⁸

First a brief reminder about the family situation. Many scholars have chronicled the Medici rise to influence in Florence and beyond in the century beginning with their return from exile in 1434 to the appointment of the first ruling Medici duke of Florence, Alessandro, in 1532 and Catherine’s marriage in 1533. Understanding Catherine’s circumstances and her import to her natal family begins with the generation of her great-grandfather, Lorenzo ‘the Magnificent.’ Although not the first to marry nobility, Lorenzo by marrying Clarice Orsini allied the family to

⁷ J.R. Hale, *Florence and the Medici: The Pattern of Control* (London, 1977), p. 166, provides a good example. He confirms the presumed irrelevance of females to their ruling natal families, stating that the two Medici queens ‘are of no importance to an understanding of the fortunes of Florence’. Nevertheless, he includes them in his study because they are ‘interesting’ and to see how ‘female members of the family comported themselves in positions of power’.

⁸ Janet Cox-Rearick, *Dynasty and Destiny in Medici Art: Pontormo, Leo X, and the Two Cosimos* (Princeton, 1984), pp. 87-115.

a powerful house from outside Tuscany. The couple produced three sons and three daughters and maximised their potential for raising the family's stature through clerical and ducal appointments and advantageous marriages, arranged with the help of Europe's most powerful, primarily the King of France and the Pope. The eldest son, Piero, married his mother's cousin, Alfonsina, from a Neapolitan branch of the Orsini and a daughter, Maddalena, married Pope Innocent VIII's illegitimate son, Francescetto Cibo. The next son, Giovanni, was made a cardinal at fourteen and became Pope Leo X (1513-21), while Giuliano, the youngest, became Duke of Nemours (arranged by Francis I, whose aunt he married). Of those bearing the Medici name, only Piero produced a legitimate son, Lorenzo.

Then there were those born on the wrong side of the blanket. Duke Giuliano produced an illegitimate son, Ippolito, before dying in 1516.⁹ Lorenzo's brother Giuliano, killed in the Pazzi Conspiracy, had an illegitimate son, Giulio, who became a Cardinal and eventually Pope Clement VII (1523-34). He, in turn, almost certainly produced his own illegitimate son, Alessandro. Similarly Catherine and her husband, who would become King Henri II, had four sons and three daughters (surviving infancy) and, as a widow, Catherine worked tirelessly for their advancement, again seeking positions and marriages. Mothers' fierce loyalty to their sons is not a 'foreign' quality: it is an essential component of dynastic culture that Catherine observed at close range in her childhood. Three of her sons, Francis II, Charles IX and Henry III ruled France (the last was also the elected King of Poland) and they married a Stuart ruling queen, an Austrian Habsburg archduchess and a princess from the House of Lorraine, respectively; two daughters, Elizabeth and Marguerite, were queens (of Spain and France respectively), while the other, Claude, was Duchess of Lorraine. Henri II had an illegitimate daughter, Diane, who, in a strategy resembling that resulting in Catherine's own marriage, married Orazio Farnese, of the family of Clement VII's successor, Pope Paul III.

When the Medici reasserted control over Florence during Leo's papacy, Catherine's father Lorenzo accepted the role of Florentine titular ruler, taking over from his uncle, Giuliano. To reinforce his position, he became Captain General of the Florentine Republic on 6 June 1515 and the following year, Duke of Urbino. Expectations were high on all sides: Machiavelli dedicated *Il Principe* to him in 1513 in hopes that Italy would be freed from foreign influence and united under Florentine rule and the Medici expected a ruling dynasty to issue from him. In 1518, the Duke travelled to France to represent his papal uncle as proxy godfather at the baptism of the dauphin François. At the same time he married, again through the agency of Francis I, Madeleine de la Tour d'Auvergne, bringing her back to Florence in August of that year. The marriage was celebrated with a lavish banquet at Palazzo Medici and other festivities at his grandfather's villa just outside, at Poggio a Caiano.

Catherine was born at the venerable Florentine family palace in April 1519: her mother and father both died shortly thereafter dashing thereby all hopes for a Medici ducal dynasty from the legitimate offspring of this branch. With foresight, as it turns out, her godparents at her baptism, which took place at the Medici church of San Lorenzo, included important male and female

⁹ Annabel Thomas, 'Giuliano de' Medici, Duke of Nemours', Grove Art Online. Oxford University Press, 10/10/2004, <http://www.groveart.com>.

Florentine religious, among them Sporrans de Signorini, Abbess of the Benedictine Convent known as the ‘*Murate*’.¹⁰ Close relatives assumed Catherine’s care, first her grandmother, the formidable Alfonsina Orsini, who took the infant to Rome. Catherine herself would later take her own granddaughter, Christine of Lorraine, under her wing after her mother Claude’s early death; she brought Christine to Paris and arranged her marriage to Ferdinando I, Grand Duke of Tuscany. However, Alfonsina, a tireless advocate for her children, was unable to do something similar for Catherine, as she died in 1520.¹¹ After that, Catherine’s male cousins—Pope Leo, who died the next year, and then Cardinal Giulio, later Pope Clement VII—served as her official guardians.¹² Females, however, actually assumed her care, first her father’s sister, Clarice Strozzi, then in Rome. Catherine joined a made-up ‘family’ comprising the three orphaned offspring of the senior Medici line, two illegitimate males, Ippolito and Alessandro and herself, while the elder members, clerics unable to father legitimate offspring, determined their futures.¹³ Later, in France, Catherine didn’t just grudgingly accept her husband’s illegitimate daughter Diane—born before the royal couple produced children of their own—as well as her own illegitimate grandson, Charles de Valois, the Grand Prieur: she actually left the latter property.¹⁴ It was Diane, in fact, who, after the queen mother’s death at Blois in 1589, made arrangements for her body to be transported to the Valois Chapel at St. Denis, which, as sign of dynastic identity, had been a major focus of Catherine’s architectural patronage. Catherine’s idea of what constitutes ‘family’ must have been elastic and included several models of women who played active roles, especially when widows, in furthering their children’s interests. She clearly absorbed the significance of the family strategy of putting the young males on exhibit in Rome and Florence. Later, as widowed queen mother and regent for Charles IX, she planned and executed a multi-year tour of France to display the King, when he reached his majority at age fourteen.

¹⁰ Cloulas, *Catherine de Médicis*, p. 31 and Sharon Strocchia, ‘Taken into custody: girls and convent guardianship in Renaissance Florence’, *Renaissance Studies*, 17 (2003), pp. 177-200; here p. 187. The abbess would sense the expectations that powerful families like the Medici had for those convents they helped support, having, in 1509, accepted a substantial sum to house Argentina Malaspina, wife of Florentine gonfaloniere Piero Soderini, during his absence from the city.

¹¹ See Sheryl E. Reiss, ‘Widow, Mother, Patron of Art: Alfonsina Orsini de’ Medici’, in *Beyond Isabella: Secular Women Patrons of Art in Renaissance Italy*, ed. Sheryl E. Reiss and David G. Wilkins (Kirksville, MO, 2001), pp. 125-58. See also Natalie Tomas, ‘Alfonsina Orsini de’ Medici and the ‘problem’ of a female ruler in early sixteenth century Florence’, *Renaissance Studies*, 14 (2000), pp. 70-90. According to what Tomas has discovered, the young Catherine could have learned a great deal about objections to female authority if she knew about reactions to her own grandmother’s conduct in Florentine affairs.

¹² J.N. Stephens, ‘L’infanzia fiorentina di Caterina de’ Medici, Regina di Francia’, *Archivio Storico Italiano* 142 (1984), pp. 421-36; here p. 425. Stephens discusses the legal difficulties over Catherine’s guardianship after her parents and grandparents all died.

¹³ Frieda, *Catherine de’ Medici*, p. 23, notes also how close Catherine became to her Strozzi cousins.

¹⁴ Charles de Valois (1573-1650), son of Charles IX and his mistress Marie Touchet, was slated for a career in the Knights of Malta, becoming Grand Prior of France. He inherited large estates from Catherine de’ Medici, including the title of the Count d’Auvergne from her mother’s family.

Returning to the Medici family, c. 1520, Lorenzo ‘il Magnifico’s’ youngest daughter, Lucrezia Salviati, still lived, as did her daughter, Maria, married to a cousin from the cadet branch of the family, Giovanni, called ‘*delle Bande Nere*’. Their son Cosimo, born just two months after Catherine but with a mother still living, did not join this curious band. Notwithstanding ‘the Magnificent’s strategy, by 1531 the family was, as the Venetian ambassador put it, ‘*ridotta in bastardi*’, obscuring their plan for future rule in Florence.¹⁵ The three young Medici returned to Florence, Catherine probably in 1523. During the crisis occasioned by the Sack of Rome in 1527 and the subsequent Siege of Florence, the senior Medici made gender-based decisions about the younger generation. They removed the two boys, potential carriers of dynastic ambition, to safekeeping outside Florence, but Catherine remained, separated from her family and deposited in convents.¹⁶ As Sharon Strocchia has demonstrated, it was a common practice (called *serbanza*) to place adolescent girls in convents for a time to ‘learn the rudiments of civilised female behaviour’ but also to ‘preserve both personal and family honour during moments of household disintegration, social crisis, or at other vulnerable points in a girl’s life cycle’.¹⁷ Catherine could reside, presumably in safety, but nevertheless remained a virtual hostage and a vulnerable family presence in Florence. Convents were not autonomous, occasionally conflicted with civic authorities, and did not always get their way. A 1529 Florentine ordinance, for example, prohibited any ‘*forestiero*’ from speaking with Catherine de Medici.¹⁸ In this period of ambiguity, Francis I reasserted his interests, and his ambassador seems to have had more influence than her Medici relatives did in finding out about her status during these years.¹⁹

Convent chronicler Giustina Niccolini informs us about Catherine’s longest stay (two years and seven and one-half months) at the convent known as the ‘Murate’, whose abbess had been Catherine’s godmother.²⁰ As Kate Lowe delineates, the Murate was frequently the site for *serbanza* placements and the order regarded the practice as a means to build future patronage.²¹ Niccolini recounts that Catherine was ‘small and eight years old, graceful in style and by her own doing made herself beloved by everyone’.²² Although it may seem surprising, Catherine learned a great deal about her family here in direct and subtle ways. The nuns found ways to demonstrate their allegiance in code by delivering baskets filled with round loaves of bread

¹⁵ Antonio Suriano, ‘Relazione di Firenze, 1529’, in *Relazioni degli ambasciatori veneti al senato*, ed. Eugenio Albèri (Florence, 1846), p. 410.

¹⁶ Maria Salviati also removed young Cosimo from Florence, taking him to Venice.

¹⁷ Sharon Strocchia, ‘Learning the Virtues’, in *Women’s Education in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Barbara Whitehead (New York and London, 1999), p. 8, and ‘Taken into custody’, p. 180. Strocchia observes (p. 186) that Florentine convent placements accelerated significantly precisely in the crisis years 1527-31.

¹⁸ Stephens, ‘Infanzia’, p. 433.

¹⁹ Stephens, ‘Infanzia’, p. 435.

²⁰ K. J. P. Lowe, *Chronicles and Convent Culture in Renaissance and Counter-Reformation Italy* (Cambridge, 2003).

²¹ Lowe, *Chronicles*, p. 175.

²² Lowe, *Chronicles*, p. 182.

arranged like the Medici *palle*.²³ Lorenzo, his brother Giuliano and their allies the Benci supported the convent in the fifteenth century.²⁴ An ex-voto sculpted portrait of Lorenzo once hung in the convent church, frequented by important Florentines, but it had been removed before Catherine's arrival.²⁵ Florentine historian Benedetto Varchi has observed that the composition of the Murate sisters replicated the populist and Medici factions outside.²⁶ As Lowe puts it more specifically: 'Many of the most high-profile inmates of Le Murate were near or distant relatives of the Medici'.²⁷ Before Catherine's time, prominent Medici women resided there: Maria, '*il Magnifico*'s' sister, in the 1470s, and Caterina Sforza, wife of Giovanni de Medici, from the cadet branch of the family, in the first decade of the sixteenth century.²⁸ Her son Giovanni, bearing the sobriquet '*delle bande Nere*' mentioned above, fathered Cosimo, Catherine's contemporary, who would become the second Duke of Florence.

Widowed for the third time, this legendary virago valiantly defended her fiefdom at Forlì against Cesare Borgia in 1499. She sent her daughters, stepdaughters and valuables to the Murate for safekeeping; because convents were regarded as safe places, they also occasionally served as repositories for valuable property.²⁹ Nevertheless, Borgia prevailed and imprisoned her in the Castel Sant'Angelo. Freed in 1501, she returned to Florence, where she spent her final eight years. When conditions threatened her son, she had him hidden at the Annalena, another Florentine convent, while she herself retired to the Murate for a time.³⁰ Although Catherine never had to hide her sons, here was a poignant example of the lengths to which a mother in her own family would go to safeguard her children's interests.

Scholars have demonstrated how the patronage of convents provided noble and royal women the means to demonstrate their piety as well as establish their own space—by commissioning private cells—away from the palace, especially when widowed. A prime example is the Descalzes Reales in Madrid, founded by Charles V's daughter, Juana, from a palace she inhabited. Such

²³ J. H. Mariéjol, *Catherine de Médicis* (Paris, 1926), p. 13.

²⁴ F. W. Kent, *Lorenzo de' Medici and The Art of Magnificence* (Baltimore, 2004), p. 64.

²⁵ Kent, *Lorenzo de' Medici*, p. 67, who informs us that Piero Soderini removed it during his tenure as Gonfaloniere for life.

²⁶ Lowe, *Chronicles*, p. 238.

²⁷ Lowe, *Chronicles*, p. 175. Frieda, *Catherine de' Medici*, p. 27, describes the Medici support given to the convent in the mid 1520's, while Catherine resided there.

²⁸ Strocchia, 'Taken into custody', p. 183. Maria had earlier been placed at the convent of Sant'Apollonia.

²⁹ Strocchia, 'Taken into custody', p. 184, states that not just the architectural security of their physical enclosure but 'social and religious taboos against violating their privileged spaces, sanctified reputations, and consecrated bodies' were nuns' main defence. Frieda, *Catherine de' Medici*, p. 24, provides the example of Cardinal Giulio de Medici's depositing a jewel-encrusted crown in a Roman convent as pledge for a debt incurred for Leo X's funeral expenses.

³⁰ Strocchia, 'Taken into custody', p. 179, states that this seems to be the lone example of the placing of a boy in a female community.

convents represented, moreover, a home away from home, an alternative female palace bearing its own dynastic resonances, not just for widows, but also for young females. Caterina Sforza was an important patron of the Murate and she provided for her own room there.³¹ Thus, while removed from her family Catherine de Medici nevertheless lived in her illustrious kinswoman's cell. When the young Catherine arrived at the Murate, therefore, it was as much 'home' as any other of her relatives' palaces or villas.

Indicative of the female dynastic associations such convent patronage permitted, Caterina Sforza had, moreover, arranged with the Murate to house her son's illegitimate daughter Cornelia until her own marriage.³² Eleonora Cibo, moreover, granddaughter of Maddalena de Medici, resided at the Murate at several different periods in the sixteenth century.³³ An unwilling denizen was Camilla Martelli, second wife of Duke Cosimo I, whose son placed his stepmother at the convent.³⁴ The Murate served, therefore, as an alternative multigenerational female Medici house. Catherine later repeated the practice of providing lodging for female relatives in her own Paris house, known as the Hôtel de la Reine, built on land acquired from an order of nuns to provide her own secure place away from the Louvre. It contained apartments for her daughter-in-law, the reigning queen Louise de Lorraine, and for her granddaughter Christine of Lorraine.

Perhaps the most significant public statement of dynasty is the funerary chapel. Royal and aristocratic family funerary chapels do not always acknowledge or represent female family members, even when they are buried there and have contributed financial support.³⁵ Convent churches offered alternative burial places for such women, especially those not having borne the heir who carried on the dynasty, and marked their tombs.³⁶ Catherine's French grandmother, Jeanne de Bourbon, for example, was buried in the convent of the Cordeliers at Vic-Le Comte.³⁷ Juana of Austria's tomb lies in a special chapel in the Descalzes Reales; it includes a portrait statue by Pompeo Leoni. Significantly, Caterina Sforza obtained permission to be buried at the

³¹ Lowe, *Chronicles*, p. 176.

³² Caterina in her will, May 1509 left a legacy of 2000 gold florins to her granddaughter, Cornelia, illegitimate daughter of her son Ottaviano Riario, to use as a dowry (Pasolini, *Caterina Sforza*, iii, p. 539).

³³ Lowe, *Chronicles*, p. 181.

³⁴ Lowe, *Chronicles*, p. 182.

³⁵ Rona Goffen, *Piety and Patronage in Renaissance Venice: Bellini, Titian, and the Franciscans* (New Haven and London, 1986), p. 125, mentions the desire of Pesaro wives to be buried at that family's chapel at Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari in Venice; their portraits, however, do not appear. Carolyn Valone, 'Matrons and Motives: Why Women Built in Early Modern Rome', in *Beyond Isabella*, p. 322, provides the exceptional example of Vittoria della Tolfa, who arranged for a portrait bust of herself to appear in the chapel she commissioned in the church of Santa Maria in Aracoeli in Rome in 1585.

³⁶ Some medieval French queens requested burial in convents they founded; see Sheila Ffolliott, 'The Ideal Queenly Patron of the Renaissance: Catherine de' Medici Defining Herself or Defined by Others?' in *Women and Art in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Cynthia Lawrence (University Park, PA, 1997), pp. 99-110.

³⁷ Cloulas, *Catherine de' Médicis*, p. 676.

Murate and her interment took place shortly after her death on 28 May 1509.³⁸ Her grave eventually disappeared but her grandson Cosimo I ordered the transcription of the engraving on her tomb slab: it referred to her Sforza and Medici connections and her titles of possession to Imola and Forlì. The second Duke of Florence saw the advantage in acknowledging his female ancestry. The practice of Medici female interments continued as Eleonora Cibo also chose the Murate as her burial place.³⁹

A major emphasis of Medici family patronage in the 1520's and 30's was the family funerary chapel Michelangelo designed as the New Sacristy attached to San Lorenzo in Florence. It was a dynastic chapel built to hold several tombs, including that of Catherine's father. We have no evidence of her having visited it, but work on the chapel proceeded, on and off, throughout her Italian childhood. Certainly one of Catherine's own major patronage projects in France was the Valois Chapel, intended to hold her and her husband's tomb surrounded by those of their children. It was the first independent dynastic chapel appended to the Abbey church of St. Denis, the traditional French royal mausoleum.⁴⁰ In addition, Catherine returned the favour with the Murate, supporting the convent, as other Medici women had done, and arranging for the placement of her own portrait in the convent church.⁴¹ Kate Lowe has traced its genesis and the vicissitudes of its completion via Catherine's negotiations with her Medici relatives in Florence.⁴² Hoping originally for a sculpted likeness to be sent from France, she specified its materials and full-length format—her kneeling—and her desired placement for it in a niche near the altar. Michelangelo's statue of Catherine's father in the Medici Chapel in Florence does not kneel, but her ex-voto conception is similar to that achieved by Pompeo Leoni in the 1590s for the Church at the Escorial. There gilded bronze statues of Charles V and Philip II kneel with representations of their families in the vicinity of the high altar. Accompanying Philip II is Catherine's daughter Elisabeth, his second wife. Eventually, however, Catherine settled for a painted portrait, which arrived at the convent only after her death. The Murate chronicle records her expectations—like those of Lorenzo before her and Cosimo I after, whose portraits also appeared in the convent church—that the nuns would pray for her.⁴³

If, during Catherine's residence at the Murate, nuns were still alive who had known the Countess of Forlì and could describe her character and exploits, no further example is needed to explain

³⁸ According to Gaetano Pieraccini, *La stirpe de' Medici di Cafaggiolo: saggio di ricerche sulla trasmissione ereditaria dei caratteri biologici* (Florence, 1924), i, p. 282, Catherine's mother was buried in the Medici Chapel in San Lorenzo, next to the Duke of Nemours. Catherine's grandmother, Alfonsina, was buried in Rome at Santa Maria del Popolo; see Reiss, 'Widow, Mother, Patron of Art', p. 138, and Pierraccini, *La Stirpe*, i, p. 187. The burial place of her aunt, Clarice Medici Strozzi, is unknown.

³⁹ Lowe, *Chronicles*, p. 182, notes that her 25 February 1594 funeral was a big event in Florence.

⁴⁰ Michele Bassett, 'The Funerary Patronage of Catherine de' Medici: The Tomb of Henri II, Heart Monuments, and the Valois Chapel', Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1998.

⁴¹ Lowe, *Chronicles*, p. 177.

⁴² Lowe, *Chronicles*, p. 374.

⁴³ Lowe, *Chronicles*, p. 277.

Catherine's own later tenacity in the face of adversity. Perhaps indicative of her familiarity with the Countess's brinkmanship is the story in the Murate *Cronica* in which the young Catherine, who shared her name, stands firm when authorities arrive to remove her.⁴⁴ The Murate's reputation for having Medici adherents amongst its community alarmed the Republican *Signoria*. When the agent arrived to remove her to a more strictly Savonarolan Dominican house, Catherine bought time, convincing him to return the next day. When he did, she appeared wearing a habit, having cut her hair, and she expressed her intent to take final vows. She was, in fact, transferred elsewhere (under cover of night), but the Siege of Florence lifted shortly thereafter and she returned to the Murate.⁴⁵

The conclusion of the Siege in 1530 returned Clement VII to full power and Florence definitively to Medici control. The Pope now took notice of his young cousin, Catherine, aged 11. Rather he interested himself in her alliance-forming potential as a bride, so he brought her to Rome and the papal court. After considering a range of possibilities, he settled on the second son of the King of France and sent her back to Florence to prepare for her new life. It is at this point that I expect she received a further education in who she was. I am tempted to use as model for her presumed instruction a later text that the Florentine artist and historian Giorgio Vasari wrote.⁴⁶ Called the *Ragionamenti*, it is a fictional dialogue in which the painter accompanies the young prince Francesco, son of the second Duke of Florence and first Grand Duke of Tuscany, Cosimo I de Medici, on a tour of the decorations he and his assistants prepared for the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence in the 1550's and 1560's.⁴⁷ To consolidate their hold, the Medici took over Florence's old Republican city hall and made it their own, starting with the appointment of the first ruling Medici duke of Florence.⁴⁸ Most of the new decorations chronicle people and events in Medici history. In the *Ragionamenti*, Vasari, as interlocutor, responds to young Francesco's questions about who and what is represented, explaining how each event and personage figured in Medici history. Nicola Courtright has convincingly demonstrated how the Palazzo Vecchio's decorations served as a prototype for imagery devised for Marie de Medici, Catherine's cousin and subsequent queen of France in the seventeenth century.⁴⁹ Marie's sense of appropriate dynastic imagery drew from her Medici experience. Catherine could not have seen Vasari's extensive treatment of her family; there were, however, other representations of her illustrious

⁴⁴ Stephens, 'Infanzia', p. 422 confirms that Catherine de Medici was named for her highest-ranking female relative at the time of her birth, Caterina Sanseverino Orsini, her grandmother on her mother's side.

⁴⁵ Pieraccini, *La stripe*, iii, p. 124.

⁴⁶ The text was only published in 1588, and then served, like the *livrets* accompanying triumphal entries or court fêtes, to make the imagery and its message reach a wider audience than could actually attend an event in the palace or view its interior.

⁴⁷ Giorgio Vasari, *Le opere di Giorgio* viii; 'I ragionamenti', ed. Gaetano Milanesi (Florence, 1906), pp. 9-223; Alessandro Cecchi *Palazzo Vecchio, Firenze* (Rome, 1995).

⁴⁸ Paola Tinagli, 'The Identity of the prince: Cosimo de' Medici, Giorgio Vasari and the *Ragionamenti*', in *Vasari's Florence: Artists and Literati at the Medicean Court*, ed. Philip Jacks (Cambridge, 1998), p. 192.

⁴⁹ Paper delivered at the Prerogatives of Rule Conference, Amherst College, 1999.

relatives around Florence and Rome that she could easily have encountered before leaving for France.

Although the dialogue is a well-established Renaissance literary form, did Vasari's idea for this one derive from a Medici practice—or a courtly custom more broadly—through which palace decorations and portraits serve, among other things, to instruct the young about their family identity? Catherine went to Rome as nubile papal niece: surely she spent time at the Vatican palace—diplomats refer to her in their *Relazioni* and her female relatives had been frequent guests of the Medici popes.⁵⁰ In the Vatican Stanze, she could see the features of her great uncle, Leo X, historicised in Raphael's *Repulse of Attila* (twice, in fact) and enthroned in the guise of an earlier Pope in the Sala di Costantino. Did courtiers inform her about them? Did she observe Pope Clement VII officiating at events in these rooms bearing representations of his kinsman and predecessor? Subsequently, when Catherine returned to Florence in a new capacity as fiancée of the duc d'Orléans, she could see her family imaged in a number of public and private places. In the Medici palace itself Benozzo Gozzoli's fifteenth-century *Journey of the Magi* frescoes decorating the chapel figured earlier Medici as elaborately attired Magi. Additionally, the votive cloister of Santissima Annunziata contained the largest concentration of family portraits in a variety of media, including some of women, but none of these statues remains.⁵¹

The Florentine palace that held the greatest personal associations for Catherine was possibly the villa at Poggio a Caiano outside Florence, designed for Lorenzo 'the Magnificent' by Giuliano da Sangallo and begun in 1485. Catherine stayed there on several occasions and there is every reason to believe that it resonated for her. Her father Lorenzo, Duke of Urbino, used it for diplomatic occasions and family festivities, including some of his wedding celebrations. He also died there, just after Catherine's birth. The villa was, moreover, Catherine's last Florentine stop before her departure for France in 1533. What decorations were visible by then and what implications might they have had for Catherine? Following Cox-Rearick's analysis of the building at this time, we may deduce that the portico frieze, dating from 'il Magnifico's' time, concerns the inevitability of Medici rule, using metaphors derived from the regenerative force of nature to suggest the eternal return.⁵² Underscored by his personal motto, *Le temps revient*, in French—Catherine's future language—the ensemble implied that no matter what, the Medici always return.

Dynastic concerns dominate the interior decorative program, planned in 1520 by Paolo Giovio, humanist and historian, in the service of Leo X in Rome. The Gran Salone featured a vaulted ceiling bearing Medici *impresae*, thus establishing their proprietorship, while other elements in the program stressed the continuity of succession from Cosimo, 'Pater Patriae', to the present.⁵³

⁵⁰ Armand Baschet, *La jeunesse de Catherine de Médicis* (Paris, 1966), p. v.

⁵¹ Hugo Van der Velden, 'Medici Votive Images and the Scope and Limits of Likeness', in *The Image of the Individual: Portraits in the Renaissance*, ed. Nicolas Mann and Luke Syson (London, 1998), pp. 126-35.

⁵² Cox-Rearick, *Dynasty and Destiny*, p. 77.

⁵³ Cox-Rearick, *Dynasty and Destiny*, p. 67

Two large wall frescoes illustrating episodes from antiquity existed at that time (others came later). Both have assumed aggrandising Medicean superimpositions, although no inscriptions make the connections explicit. Andrea del Sarto's *Tribute to Caesar* pays homage to both Lorenzo 'the Magnificent', who received gifts of exotic animals in 1487, and Leo X, who received similar tribute from the King of Portugal in 1514. Franciabigio's *Triumph of Cicero* connects the ancient orator's ascendancy on the Capitoline with Cosimo 'il Vecchio's' return from exile in 1434. As Cox-Rearick has pointed out, this episode underscores the fact that the Medici always return, an important component of the myth that Giovio and others manufactured at this time.⁵⁴

The Caesar makes its point without a specific likeness, but Cicero figures Giuliano, future Duke of Nemours and the first Medici to return to Florence in 1512, after yet another period of exile. Catherine thus acquired her idea of her nascent dynasty not only via encomia that could be read or heard but also by flattering images in monumental form suspended outside of time, without the complication of actually having known most of them firsthand. What Catherine may have learned from viewing family portraits in Rome and Florence depends not only upon who accompanied her and did the telling—impossible to pin down—but also on the Renaissance ideology of portraiture. As Joanna Woodall has described, in this period the portrait was theorised as likeness, while it simultaneously embodied status and character. As Woodall writes, 'An understanding of portraits as direct substitutes for their sitters meant that the circulation of portraits could mirror and expand the system of personal patronage whereby power, privilege and wealth were distributed. Because of these crucial functions, portraiture had to be theorised as unmediated realism. Yet although explicit invention of idealisation was problematic, the *raison d'être* of these images was actually to represent sitters as worthy of love, honour, respect and authority. It was not just that the real was confused with the ideal, but that divine virtue was the ultimate, permanent reality'.⁵⁵

Probably the most important source of information on Catherine's family and its imaging was her distant cousin Ottaviano, the family curator.⁵⁶ He had served as guardian of Ippolito and Alessandro—and also as agent for Cardinal Giulio concerning Catherine.⁵⁷ In the 1520's he supervised the decoration at Poggio a Caiano discussed above, and he was custodian of Medici property, especially their expanding collection of portraits, including: Pontormo's posthumous *Portrait of Cosimo Pater Patriae*, c. 1519; Vasari's *Lorenzo il Magnifico*, c. 1534; Raphael's *Leo X with Two Cardinals*, 1518 (all Florence, Uffizi); as well as others by the same artists depicting Ippolito, Giuliano and Alessandro. At the wedding of Lorenzo and Clarice Orsini in 1469, and thereafter, the Medici displayed portraits of illustrious forebears in the loggia of the Palazzo

⁵⁴ Cox-Rearick, *Dynasty and Destiny*, pp. 76-80.

⁵⁵ *Portraiture: Facing the Subject*, ed. and intro. Joanna Woodall (Manchester and New York, 1997), p. 3.

⁵⁶ Janet Southron, 'Ottaviano de' Medici', *Grove Art Online*. Oxford University Press, 10/10/2004, <http://www.groveart.com>. He was a distant Medici relative but married a cousin, Francesca Salviati, sister of Maria and therefore aunt of the future Cosimo I, repositioning himself thereby more closely to the family's power centre.

⁵⁷ Stephens, 'Infanzia', p. 426.

Medici courtyard. Perhaps Ottaviano recounted to Catherine how Raphael's new portrait of Leo X with his cardinal cousins was rushed to Florence to grace her parents' wedding banquet, joining those of other important ancestors. It was Catherine's grandmother, Alfonsina Orsini, who described the impact of the portrait at that celebration.⁵⁸ In a world where one could so easily lose parents, siblings, children and other relatives, portraits assumed an almost talismanic function. Placed at the head of the table, the Raphael served as surrogate for its sitters, representing the Medici's projected ecclesiastical dynasty, intended to parallel the expected ducal one. Ottaviano kept the family memory and with the portrait project initiated by Pontormo and extended by Vasari and Bronzino, many posthumous portraits of earlier Medici appeared in these years. Portraits helped to make one's ancestors palpable, to establish the idea of a dynasty and to keep that dynasty apparent.

Catherine would, therefore, have been well prepared to encounter the antique-inspired allegories and portraits awaiting her in France. These included works at Fontainebleau produced for her father-in-law by Rosso Fiorentino, a Florentine painter closely associated, in fact, with those artists who worked at Poggio a Caiano. Further complicating the notion that clear boundaries existed between things domestic and foreign, the increasingly international idiom for delivering messages about rule and dynasty would have been analogous in her native Florence and her marital France, both being the products of Florentine artists.⁵⁹ While some may have challenged the Medici's upstart status, the same visual language imaged them and the more established French monarchy.

In France Catherine collected portraits avidly: many of the Clouet pencil drawings depicting the Valois and people attached to the French court bear identifying inscriptions in her own hand.⁶⁰ These *crayons* served as models for replica portraits painted on demand. After 1572, when Catherine had her own Paris dower house, the Hôtel de la Reine, inventories indicate that she furnished it extensively with painted and sculpted portraits.⁶¹ Rooms figured multiple genealogies and alliances in patterns resembling that seen at Mechelen, residence of Margaret of Austria, regent of the Netherlands.⁶² One can surmise that both women displayed portraits to enhance their authority: pronouncing, in effect, 'Here is my lineage and my network: don't mess with me.' Additionally, because portraits were regarded as surrogates for their sitters, evidenced

⁵⁸ Reiss, 'Alfonsina', p. 137.

⁵⁹ Charles Dempsey, *The Portrayal of Love: Botticelli's 'Primavera' and Humanist Culture at the Time of Lorenzo the Magnificent* (Princeton, 1992), p. 72, argues for Catherine's importation to France of ideas emerging ultimately from Lorenzo's fifteenth-century *mascherate* and the development of them in representational forms associated with her.

⁶⁰ Alexandra Zvereva, *Les Clouets de Catherine de Médicis: Chefs-d'Oeuvres Graphiques du Musée Condé* (Paris and Chantilly, 2002).

⁶¹ Kerrie-rue Michalhelles, 'Catherine de Medici's 1589 Inventory at the Hôtel de la Reine in Paris', *Furniture History*, 38 (2002), pp. 1-39.

⁶² Dagmar Eichelberger and Lisa Beaven, 'Family Members and Political Allies: The Portrait Gallery of Margaret of Austria in Mechelen', *Art Bulletin*, 77 (1995), pp. 225-48.

by the Raphael's position at Catherine's parents' wedding, they occasionally elicited responses from observers desiring to score points.⁶³

We know that Catherine's father-in-law, Francis I, kept the key to his Galerie at Fontainebleau and enjoyed making a point of opening it himself to show people around, presumably with his own commentary.⁶⁴ We have an account of an evening party that took place at Catherine's Paris house in 1580, written by the wife of the British ambassador, Lady Cobham. Catherine was unwell and did not attend the party honouring her son, Henri III. It featured dancing, eating and a masque, but Lady Cobham reports at one point being asked to accompany the King around the Hôtel. He had probably been well schooled by both parents on how to use objects on display to underscore political points. Here is a portion of her account:

Then the king departed and commanded us to follow. He led us up into a godly [goodly] gallery, himself keeping the door until all those were entered whom he liked to have present. Then showing the pictures to the ladies, he called me to him ... the king showed me there the picture of his father, which he said was very like him when he lived. I said it seemed by his picture that he was a wise and valiant gentleman, which the king said was true.⁶⁵

Their stop, before a portrait of Henri II, doubtless had dynastic implications. The King, a logical eyewitness, corroborated its 'likeness', while his guest commented on its proof of the subject's character, which the king affirmed. The exchange illustrates precisely Woodall's articulation of the dual expectations concerning portraits in the Renaissance. Its unstated conclusion is that from this stock derive both the King and his younger brother—at that time a prospective groom for Lady Cobham's queen—and that they therefore embody similar qualities. Portraits on display in these spaces offer the possibility of individual contemplation and connection, but they also combine into a narrative, representing a family's history over time and the quality and distinction of the dynasty enriched by its connections. It is important to remember in this context that Rubens's cycle of paintings illustrating episodes from the life of Marie de Medici, made for display in a gallery at her Parisian dower house the Palais du Luxembourg, begins with portraits of her parents: Grand Duke Francesco de Medici and Joanna of Austria.⁶⁶

⁶³ I have addressed elsewhere the ramifications of the public scrutiny of some portraits at court: see Sheila ffolliott, 'Portraying Queens: the International Language of Court Portraiture in the Sixteenth Century', in *Elizabeth I: Then and Now*, ed. Georgianna Ziegler (Washington, DC, 2003), pp. 164-75, and in conference papers presented at the Renaissance Society of America annual meetings: 'Catherine de' Medici's Granddaughter: Isabella Clara Eugenia', Chicago, 2001; 'Family Pictures: Portraits in Catherine de' Medici's Parisian Hotel', Scottsdale, Arizona, 2002; and 'What Represents Catherine de' Medici or What does Catherine de' Medici Represent?' New York, 2004.

⁶⁴ R. J. Knecht, *Renaissance Warrior and Patron: The Reign of Francis I* (Cambridge, 1994), p. 416; *idem* 'Francis I and Fontainebleau', in *The Court Historian* 4 (1999), pp. 93-119.

⁶⁵ *Calendar of State Papers Foreign, Series of the Reign of Elizabeth, 1579-1580*, ed. Arthur John Butler (London, 1904), pp. 174-6.

⁶⁶ Ronald Forsyth Millen and Robert Erich Wolf, *Heroic Deeds and Mystic Figures: A New Reading of Rubens' 'Life of Maria de' Medici'* (Princeton, 1989), p. 23.

Lineage starts with parents and, when lacking, appropriate ancestry could be invented. It was widely rumoured that the illegitimate Duke Alessandro de' Medici's father was Cardinal Giulio/Clement VII.⁶⁷ For dynastic reasons, however, he and Catherine were presented as siblings, for her father, the Duke of Urbino, was part of the senior Medici branch, had a title and had held authoritative positions in Florence.⁶⁸ This fiction endured even after she was in France. After Alessandro's assassination Catherine wrote to Duke Cosimo and mentioned her 'brother' of *buona memoria*; she also had his cameo portrait in her possession, which returned to Florence later on in her granddaughter's Christina's trousseau.⁶⁹ Using the pretext of 'bad air', Clement VII sent Catherine to Florence in April of 1532. She was in residence, therefore, in her new status as fiancée of the Duc d'Orléans, when her 'brother' was declared Duke of Florence the following month. Not only was her father invoked to cover Alessandro, but Catherine too, I would argue, bolstered his status.

In 1533, near her birthday on 13 April, Catherine undertook an official duty, welcoming to the city Margaret of Austria, the fiancée of her cousin Alessandro now Duke of Florence. Their engagement came about in 1529, as part of the treaty that restored the Medici to power in Florence, and their marriage would occur in 1536. The Emperor's natural daughter, now age eleven, was enroute to Naples, where she would stay at the Vice-regal court until she reached marriageable age.⁷⁰ Although her processional route once inside the city gates duplicated that of her father three years prior, it differed from other Florentine official welcomes in that it started at the Medici villa at Cafaggiolo.⁷¹ The choice of that venerable house, built by Michelozzo on order of Cosimo il Vecchio, instead of the more stylish and modern, classically inspired Poggio a Caiano, product of Lorenzo 'il Magnifico', might simply have been practical. Its fortress-like design offered more security and its location was more directly on her itinerary.⁷² Nevertheless, the choice emphasises the family's origins as landowners, for it was here, in the region of the Mugello River, that the Medici had been living before they left in the thirteenth century to move into Florence.⁷³

⁶⁷ Julia Gaisser, 'Seeking Patronage under the Medici Popes: A Tale of Two Humanists', in *The Pontificate of Clement VII: History, Politics, Culture*, ed. Kenneth Gouwens and Sheryl Reiss (Aldershot, 2005), p. 297. Significantly, perhaps, the attribution of this extra child seems not to predate the Duke's death.

⁶⁸ Stephens, 'Infanzia', p. 429.

⁶⁹ For an early surviving letter (1538) see *Lettres de Catherine de Médicis*, ed. Hector de la Ferrière (Paris, 1880-85), i, p. 35.

⁷⁰ Manuela Belardini, 'Margherita d'Austria, sposa e vedova del Duca Alessandro de' Medici', in *Margherita d'Austria (1522-86): costruzioni politiche e diplomazia fra corte Farnese e monarchia Spagnola*, ed. Silvia Mantini (Rome, 2003), p. 27, suggests that the reason for her transfer to Naples from her native Flanders was to learn about the customs of her future country.

⁷¹ Giovanni Cambi Importuni, 'Istorie de Giovanni Cambi', in *Delizie degli Eruditi Toscani* (Florence, 1770-89), xxiii, pp. 84-7.

⁷² Harold Acton, *Great Houses of Italy: The Tuscan Villas* (New York, 1973), p. 41. Dale V. Kent, *Cosimo de' Medici and The Florentine Renaissance: The Patron's Oeuvre* (New Haven, 2000), pp. 300-2.

⁷³ As Acton has pointed out (*Great Houses*, p. 41), Pieraccini emphasised this connection by entitling his study of Medici family pathology *La Stirpe de' Medici di Cafaggiolo*.

At this early age, Catherine participated in the kind of public display of power, through ceremony, that would later become such an important strategy for her as queen mother of young kings. This particular display had a party of appropriately high-ranking city officials and family members proceeding along a carefully planned route through Florence.⁷⁴

In this survey of some aspects of Catherine de Medici's life in Italy, I have tried to demonstrate how her experience—what I am calling her education—formed her and prepared her for what lay ahead. Catherine grew up at the centre of a Medici dynastic crisis and would have been keenly aware of dynasty as a significant concept. She learned about who she was from a variety of ceremonies and representational forms, especially portraiture, broadly construed. Her education took place in a number of different settings, including the convents—not in itself unusual for females. But the convent too imparted a sense of family and in particular of female lineage and role models. Like other princesses, she learned a lot by an early age.

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⁷⁴ Silvia Mantini, 'Ceremonie, Ingressi, Funerali: Simboli e Potere di Margherita d' Austria', in *Margherita d'Austria*, pp. 227-37.