DIVINITY & DESTINY:

MARIAN IMAGERY IN RUBENS' *LIFE OF MARIE DE' MEDICI*

by

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A THESIS

Presented to the Department of the History of Art and Architecture
and the Graduate School of the University of Oregon
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Arts

June 2015

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Title: Divinity & Destiny: Marian Imagery in Rubens' *Life of Marie de' Medici*

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Degree awarded June 2015

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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In 1622, the Dowager Queen of France, Marie de' Medici, had recently returned to Paris after a period of exile imposed by her son, Louis XIII, and commissioned a monumental cycle of images from Peter Paul Rubens to decorate the gallery of her freshly constructed Luxembourg Palace. The contract for the commission tasked Rubens with painting the "illustrious life and heroic deeds" of Marie de' Medici. This thesis argues that alongside the classical and the historical, Rubens employed a specifically Catholic visual language to create a painted panegyric of a heroic female sovereign. In doing so, Rubens linked Marie de' Medici with the Virgin Mary through compositional resonances and a personal iconography developed for the queen throughout her life in popular images and literary tributes. In the *Medici Cycle,* the maternal, virginal, and heroic virtues embodied by the Virgin served as justification for Marie de' Medici's sovereignty and her reconciliation with Louis.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to express sincere appreciation to Dr. James Harper, Dr. Joyce Cheng, and Dr. Corinne Bayerl, who have all been instrumental in the development of this thesis. I would also like to thank my cohort in the Department of the History of Art and Architecture, especially Stephanie Dunn and Meredith Lancaster, for their thoughtful criticisms and loving encouragement. In addition, special thanks are due to the Department of the History of Art and Architecture and the Marian C. Donnelly Travel Fund for making possible my research abroad.

To my parents, for their unfailing love and support in all that I endeavor.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION:

THE FELICITY OF MARIAN IMAGERY IN THE *MEDICI CYCLE*

In 1622, the Dowager Queen of France, Marie de' Medici, commissioned two monumental cycles of images from Peter Paul Rubens—arguably the most celebrated painter of his day—to decorate the galleries of her freshly constructed Luxembourg Palace with scenes from her life and that of her late husband, Henri IV. She had just returned to Paris after a period of exile imposed by her son, Louis XIII, and had been newly reappointed to his council. Rubens had by this time established a reputation as an international artist and as a diplomat; as both a person and as an artist, Rubens united scholarly erudition and courtly sophistication, making him an ideal candidate for the monumental and politically touchy task set before him by Marie de' Medici.

In February 1625, Rubens arrived in Paris to deliver the final images for the *Medici Cycle,* three months before they were to be unveiled to the public at the celebrations surrounding the proxy marriage of Marie de' Medici's daughter, Henrietta Maria and Charles I of England. Though Rubens' agent in Paris, Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc, had reported Marie de' Medici's immense satisfaction with the progress of the cycle in 1623, she accorded one of the final images a much cooler welcome.[1] The Dowager Queen, at the urging of her advisor Cardinal Richelieu, rejected the canvas for *The Expulsion from Paris* because its subject matter was deemed too controversial for the

[1] Jacques Thuillier and Jacques Foucart, *Rubens' Life of Marie de' Medici (*New York: H.N. Abrams, 1970), 119.

[2]This decision is documented in a letter from Rubens to Peiresc, dated May 13, 1625.

gallery (**fig.1**; see the Appendix for all figures).[2] The offending canvas was presumably destroyed, and replaced with another, more abstract image. *The Felicity of the Regency* was painted within the three-month period between Rubens' arrival and the wedding festivities and supplanted *The Expulsion from Paris* in the *Medici Cycle.*

The Felicity of the Regency is not just the most abstract image in the *Medici Cycle*, it is also the most Marian image in the *Medici Cycle* (**fig.2**). By suppressing the more controversial and less flattering scene and replacing it with one that emphasized the parallel between Marie de' Medici and her biblical namesake, Rubens picked up a theme he had been developing throughout his painting for the *Medici Cycle.* This deliberate choice on Rubens' part calls attention to the prevalence of Marian imagery in the *Medici Cycle.* Scholars have long been aware of this theme, even if they have not acknowledged its pervasiveness in the cycle. Some art historians have struggled with the theme because of its perceived audacity or indecorousness, but in fact the thematic choice of paralleling Marie de' Medici with the Virgin Mary was entirely conventional.

Geraldine Johnson and Katherine Crawford have engaged with the *Medici Cycle's* Marian imagery, and, similarly to this thesis, view the topos as an expression of Marie de' Medici's femininity in positive terms. Johnson and Crawford both consider the *Medici Cycle* a failure of propaganda on the basis of Marie's gender performance, which at times, for these scholars, breaks away from the submissive, humble femininity of the

[2]This decision is documented in a letter from Rubens to Peiresc, dated May 13, 1625. Max Rooses and Charles Reulens, *Correspondance de Rubens et documents épistolaires concernant sa vie et ses oeuvres,* vol. 3 (Antwerp: Veuve de Backer, 1887-1909), 244.

Virgin Mary.[3] However, the *Medici Cycle's* Marian imagery is, as a whole, not humble or submissive; it draws primarily on the iconography of Mary, Queen of Heaven—a powerful and heroic incarnation of the Virgin. In the *Medici Cycle,* a combination of maternal, virginal, and heroic virtues embodied by the Virgin served as justification for Marie de' Medici's sovereignty and her reconciliation with Louis. This thesis investigates the function of Marian imagery in the *Medici Cycle* and its reflection of Marie de' Medici's sovereign identity. While the combination of demure femininity and powerful authority present in the *Medici Cycle* may seem contradictory, they allowed Marie de' Medici to enact the complicated and contradictory gender performance required of female rulers.

As a painted panegyric, the *Medici Cycle* lauded Marie at every opportunity. This thesis is not concerned with the *Medici Cycle's* success or failure as propaganda, but rather with how it propagandized Marie de' Medici's tenure as regent. The largely misogynist historiography on Marie de' Medici revels in her perceived failure as a patron, but this thesis avoids that imbroglio. Feminist interpretations of the *Medici Cycle* have exaggerated the transgressiveness of Marie de' Medici's iconography, but this thesis finds that Marie de' Medici did not transgress gender norms in the *Medici Cycle* because there existed already a model for powerful femininity: the Virgin Mary.

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[3] Katherine Crawford, *Perilous Performances: Gender and Regency in Early Modern France* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 88, and Geraldine Johnson, "Pictures Fit for a Queen: Peter Paul Rubens and the Marie de' Medici Cycle," *Art History* Vol. 16, No. 3 (1993): 450. Johnson cites *The Felicity of the Regency* in particular as an example of Marie de' Medici associating herself with masculine attributes of rulership— an iconography that overrides the artist's intent to portray her femininity in positive terms through Marian imagery.

Marie de' Medici's patronage outside of the *Medici Cycle* elucidates the conventionality of her gender performance in Rubens' images. Marie de' Medici was a politically astute patroness who carefully crafted her public image to fit within gendered boundaries. An illustration from the 1605 edition of Pierre Matthieu's *Histoire de France,* on which *The Felicity of the Regency* is based, demonstrates that the parallel between Marie de' Medici and the Virgin was established prior to the *Medici Cycle* (**fig.3**). This popular image, which brings to mind a scene of the Virgin Enthroned, asserts Marie de' Medici's sovereign authority at a time when Henri IV was still alive, thus demonstrating that this type of imagery was sanctioned, if not encouraged, by the King. The relationship between image and text is noteworthy as well: why illustrate "The History of the King" with an image of the Queen? The royal couple was preparing the public for the possibility of Marie's regency, combatting the negative public opinion of the queen through a language of propaganda that drew on positive representations of female power.

The Felicity of the Regency also proved a prudent choice of subject matter; it is a wholly laudatory depiction of Marie de' Medici, which, as described by Rubens, "does not touch on the particular state matters of this reign or apply to any specific individual."[4] This provided a marked departure from *The Expulsion from Paris,* in which Marie is shown in disgrace, defeated and humiliated by her son. It would have been an idiosyncratic image in a cycle where Marie otherwise retains sovereign dignity throughout, even in the images reflecting her period of exile (1617-1622), such as *The*

[4] Rubens to Peiresc, quoted in Ronald Millen and Robert Wolf, *Heroic Deeds and Mystic Figures: A New Reading of Rubens' Life of Maria de' Medici* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 174.

Flight from Blois and *The Treaty at Angouleme*. *The Expulsion from Paris* did not convey a flattering depiction of the Dowager Queen; instead it presented a vulnerable, victimized version of Marie de' Medici. And, if the image encouraged the audience to sympathize with Marie, then Louis XIII became the story's villain—a casting of roles that would have been downright dangerous given the tentative reconciliation between mother and son.

Though the canvas for *The Expulsion from Paris* no longer exists, the painting's subject matter is documented in the early contract for the *Medici Cycle,* known as the Baluze Memorandum.[5] A preliminary oil sketch of the subject has also survived, providing historians with a glimpse into Rubens' intentions for *The Expulsion from Paris* as well as allowing scholars to attain a point of comparison for the *Felicity of the Regency.* One contemporary account had described Marie's departure from Paris in a fashion similar to Rubens' design in his oil sketch: "She quit the Louvre dressed simply, accompanied by all her domestics who wore sadness painted on their faces; and there were scarcely any with so little sentiment of human matters who were not moved to compassion by this almost funereal display."[6]

In addition to displaying Marie's mournful female attendants, Rubens accompanied the Dowager Queen with a nude figure carrying a torch, identified as Calumny in the Baluze Memorandum. Another figure, identified as Innocence by her attribute of the lamb, leads Marie toward a waiting carriage. Two winged monsters—one

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[5] Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Ms.Baluze 323, fol. 54-57.

[6] Francois de Mézeray, *Histoire de la Regence de la reine Marie de Médicis* in *Heroic Deeds and Mystic Figures: A New Reading of Rubens' Life of Maria de Medici* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 177.

of which is identified as Lies—flap overhead. Marie anxiously looks over her shoulder, a gesture relaying the very real (and justifiable) fear she felt toward her son at the time. Her worried expression is noteworthy; in every other painting from the *Medici Cycle*, Marie is shown with the utmost composure, maintaining absolute serenity even during her escape from Blois. Had the canvas for *The Expulsion from Paris* been remotely faithful to its preliminary sketch, the message conveyed to Louis XIII and his circle of loyalists would have been a pointed (not to mention critical) one.

The Felicity of the Regency, the canvas that replaced *The Expulsion from Paris,* depicts Marie de' Medici with the expression of stately composure found throughout the *Medici Cycle.* The expression of certainty worn by Marie in this image, and in the cycle as a whole, reflects her assurance in her destiny as a great sovereign and mother. The transformation in approach represented by *The Felicity of the Regency* appears quite dramatic; working in Paris under a short deadline, Rubens drew on the visual strategies he had already developed in his *Life of Marie de' Medici.* The result was an image that, in many ways, embodied the major goals and themes of the *Medici Cycle* and collapsed them into a singular, non-narrative moment. Marian imagery—one of these themes and the focus of this thesis—assumed striking appearance in *The Felicity of the Regency* and its presence proves revelatory of the deliberateness with which Rubens layered this meaning into the rest of the cycle. *The Felicity of the Regency* draws on multiple traditions from Marian iconography: the Virgin Enthroned, the Madonna Lactans, and the *sacra conversazione*. The compositional similarities between the Queen Regent in *The Felicity* and representations of Mary, Queen of Heaven in Catholic art make apparent the

significance of Marian imagery in the *Medici Cycle*.[7] This Marian type is highly appropriate for the *Medici Cycle,* not only because of its obvious implications of divine sovereignty, but also for its message of female authority. Marie de' Medici's performance of gender in the *Medici Cycle* reflects the Virgin's identity as a powerful intercessor and as a vessel of motherly devotion, which appear distinctly "feminine"[8] despite being an assertion of her political power.

This thesis initially explicates why Rubens' use of Marian imagery was conventional and then turns to establishing the pervasiveness of this theme in Rubens' *Life of Marie de' Medici*—a strategy so obvious to the artist that he relied on it when searching for a solution to the problem of replacing, at relatively short notice, *The Expulsion from Paris.* While the *Life of Marie de' Medici* incorporates visual sources from both classical antiquity and its patron's biography, it clearly layers in allusions to standard scenes from *Life of the Virgin* pictorial cycles. The *Medici Cycle* and its pendant series, *The Life of Henri IV,* depict the French monarchs as representatives of divine law on earth.

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[7] Rubens was not only a learned art historian, but he was also a prolific painter of Marian images. The Virgin was the patron saint of Antwerp, where Rubens lived, and her image could be found everywhere from public sculptures to the altarpiece he painted for the Antwerp Cathedral in 1611.

[8] For further reading on gender performance in *The Medici Cycle,* see Geraldine's "Pictures Fit for a Queen" and Katherine Crawford's *Perilous Performances.*

CHAPTER II

THE DECORUM OF DIVINITY: INVESTIGATING THE APPROPRIATENESS OF MARIAN IMAGERY IN RUBENS' *MEDICI CYCLE*

Rubens painted his magnum opus, *The Life of Marie de' Medici,* nearly four centuries ago, yet it continues to fascinate and challenge those who have made it an object of study. The aim of this thesis is to create a more nuanced understanding of the Medici Cycle's complex and multi-layered iconography. One of the major goals of this project is to synthesize and further develop the existing discourse about Marie de' Medici as a Catholic queen and to demonstrate the way in which Rubens reflected her identity and sovereignty through the use of Marian imagery. This thesis argues that alongside the classical and the historical, Rubens employed a specifically Catholic visual language to create a panegyrical link between Marie de' Medici and the Virgin Mary.

This thesis picks up and develops a thread that Jacques Thuillier and Jacques Foucart mentioned but left unexplored in their seminal study, *Rubens' Life of Marie de' Medici.* Jacques Thuillier proposed that Rubens drew on a wealth of pre-existing iconography to glorify Marie de' Medici, combining historical events with elements of allegory to create a painted panegyric of female sovereign-as-hero. This study finds that in asserting Marie de' Medici's sovereignty, Rubens also made reference to the Virgin Mary through compositional resonances and a personal iconography developed for the queen throughout her life in popular images and literary tributes. Ronald Millen and Robert Wolf's detailed readings of the images from the *Medici Cycle* in *Heroic Deeds and Mystic Figures: A New Reading of Rubens' Life of Maria de Medici* have been

immensely helpful in highlighting opportunities for elaboration on the topic of Marian imagery. So too have Fanny Cosandey's *La Reine de France: Symbole et Pouvoir, XVe-XVIIIe siècle* and Deborah Marrow's *The Art Patronage of Maria de' Medici*, write their concise but thought-provoking engagement with the parallel between Marie de' Medici and the Virgin Mary.[9] Robert Berger has suggested that Rubens treated the cycle's Marian imagery with discretion because the queen had no claims to actual religious sanctity.[10] However, the compositional parallels between Marie de' Medici and the Virgin are conspicuous, even if secondary to the proliferation of classical iconography. And furthermore, to compare a French queen to the Virgin Mary was decidedly appropriate and even conventional in the early seventeenth century; the Virgin was the ideal maternal figure, and one whose status as a powerful intercessor derived from her son. This parallel is especially pertinent in light of Salic law, which in France at the time barred women from autonomous rule.

Ernst Kantorowicz's political theology of *The King's Two Bodies* identifies the two bodies of the king: the body natural and the body politic. The body natural is the mortal body, while the body politic is immortal: when the body natural dies, the body politic lives on through the succession of the next king. The duality inherent to this theory lends itself to understanding the coalescence of earthly and divine rule that occurs in the *Medici Cycle.* In conducting an iconographical analysis of selected images from the *Medici Cycle*, this thesis will not only identify those elements that parallel Marie de'

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[9] Fanny Cosandey, *La reine de France: symbole et pouvoir XVe-XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000), 278-284, and Deborah Marrow, *The Art Patronage of Maria de' Medici* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press 1982), 74.

[10] Robert W. Berger, "Rubens and Caravaggio: A Source for a Painting from the Medici Cycle," *The Art Bulletin,* Vol. 54, No. 4 (1972), 476.

Medici with the Virgin Mary, but also demonstrate how that connection served as justification for the queen's sovereignty.

Though many scholars acknowledge the presence of Marian imagery in Peter Paul Rubens' *Life of Marie de' Medici*, most have chosen not to engage the topic in a thorough or comprehensive manner—reading it (as Jacques Thuillier does)[11] as merely the artistic play and free expression of a master artist, or dismissing it (as does Susan Saward)[12] on the grounds of decorum—that it would have been blasphemous to present a queen in the guise of the Virgin Mary. Even Robert Berger, who has identified Caravaggio's *Madonna of the Rosary* as a likely source for *The Proclamation of the Regency,* mirrors Saward's perspective on the subject, suggesting that Rubens was subtle and indirect with his use of Marian iconography because the queen had no claim to religious sanctity.[13] However, the compositional parallels between Marie de' Medici and the Virgin are conspicuous, even if secondary to those between the queen and classical figures. And, in fact, to compare a Queen to the Virgin Mary was decidedly appropriate in early modern Europe, particularly in France, where the iconography of pious French queens had enjoyed a symbiotic relationship with that of Mary Queen of Heaven since the Middle Ages (**fig. 4**).

Abbot Suger, the prolific and seminal patron of Gothic architecture, has been credited with establishing the theme of the Coronation of the Virgin in tympanum

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[11] Jacques Thuillier and Jacques Foucart, *Rubens' Life of Marie de' Medici (*New York: H.N. Abrams, 1970), 48.

[12] Susan Saward, *The Golden Age of Marie de' Medici* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1982), 13.

[13] Robert W. Berger, "Rubens and Caravaggio,"476.

sculpture of French churches during the twelfth century, and it was not long until a queen regent seeking to express her piety, virtue, and sovereignty appropriated this triumphal incarnation of the Virgin. [14] During her regency, Blanche de Castile commissioned a moralized bible in which she and her son Louis IX assume the gestures and poses similar to that of the Virgin and Christ enthroned in contemporary tympanum sculpture (**fig. 5**).[15] Popular piety in the Middle Ages spawned a period of ever-increasing fervor for Marian veneration, and during this time the genre of Marian poetry emerged alongside the construction of cathedrals dedicated to the Virgin. Poetry dedicated to and honoring the Virgin remained a popular literary genre through the Renaissance, with authors like Guillaume Cretin exalting Mary's power and her combination of such seemingly disparate qualities as humility and authority. Such poems posit the Virgin as the ideal noble lady through her kindness and courtesy, and as the very incarnation of moral and Christian virtue. At the outset of the sixteenth century, Anne de Bretagne, Queen of France (1491-1514), commissioned a book of hours in which her donor portrait recalls contemporary images of the Virgin learning scripture (**fig. 6**). The pose assumed by Anne de Bretagne is one of humility and piety, as she kneels before the book with her hands clasped in a gesture of prayer. The *Education of the Virgin* was a standard subject matter taken from the life of the Virgin; prominent early modern artists, Peter Paul Rubens among them, painted varying interpretations of the scene. Rubens' *Education of*

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[14] Philippe Verdier, "Suger a-t-il été en France le créateur du thème iconographique du couronnement de la Vierge?," *Gesta,* Vol. 15 (1976), 227-236.

[15] Pierre Matthieu, *Histoire de la mort déplorable de Henri IV, ensemble un poème, un panégyrique, et un discours funèbre (*Paris: 1612), 2. Henri and Marie de' Medici's biographer, Pierre Matthieu, likens Marie de' Medici's regency to that of Blanche de Castile; he writes that, in terms of piety, Marie is to Louis XIII as Blanche was to Louis IX.

the Virgin bears striking similarity to his *Education of the Princess,* and both these images participate in the same iconographic tradition as Anne de Bretagne's donor portrait. Like Blanche de Castile before her, Anne de Bretagne encouraged an association between her own persona and the Virgin's to convey the legitimacy of her authority and her moral correctness. This suggested a reversal of the iconographic tradition of depicting the Virgin in the image of a queen, with French queens now adopting the image of the Virgin.

The appropriation of Marian iconography by French queens served as a means of borrowing the qualities of absolute and heavenly majesty from the Virgin, but it also functioned to emphasize their femininity in positive terms in an age when women were understood to be weak and easily tempted into sin. Of all the Marian attributes, the maternal quality resonated most forcefully for early modern queen regents like Marie de' Medici. Especially in light of Salic law, which barred women from exercising autonomous rule, the maternal role was of utmost importance in a French queen's maintenance of political control.[16] In the sixteenth century, the popular opinion on ordinary women was largely derogatory. A number of texts on the subject of the female sex were published, such as Pierre de Changy's *Livre de l'institution de la femme chretienne* (1542), in which women were described as ignorant, capricious, given to gossip and indiscretion, and easily seduced by flatterers.[17] Not surprisingly, much of the criticism directed toward women in general found reflection in the criticism leveled

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[16] Fanny Cosandey, *La reine de France: symbole et pouvoir XVe-XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000), 278-284.

[17] Martine Vasselin, "Histoires déformées, miroirs déformants: l'image artistique des héroïnes au XVIe siècle," *Nouvelle Revue du XVIe Siècle,* Vol. 12 (1994), 33-39.

against Marie de' Medici's leadership—that the queen regent was taken away from her duties to the kingdom by bad counselors who used flattery to sway and distract her. Marie's perceived faults lay not so much in encouraging the corruption of the government, but in weakening its authority by ceding too many responsibilities to her favorite advisors.[18]

Marie de' Medici would have been acutely aware of the expectation to provide her husband with an heir; Henri had divorced his first wife, Marguerite de Valois, on the basis of her inability to bear him children. Marie's contribution to Henri's kingdom, or her value as a bride, was threefold: she brought with her the wealth of the Medici family, who were Henri's most important financial backers; she provided Henri with his long-awaited and much-desired legitimate heir; and, finally, as a staunch Catholic, she helped to assuage fears that Henri (a former Huguenot who had converted to Catholicism in order to claim his throne) would revert to Protestantism.[19] Through the birth of a Catholic heir, Marie de' Medici provided France with political as well as confessional stability during a time when the wounds from the Wars of Religion (1562-1598) were still raw.

Jacques Thuillier has proposed that Rubens drew on a range of pre-existing iconography to glorify Marie de' Medici, combining historical events with elements of allegory to create a modern panegyric of sovereign-as-hero. Thuillier's analysis is concerned with the parallels between Marie de' Medici and figures from classical mythology such as Juno and Minerva, but this thesis finds that the Marian iconography

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[18] Ulrich, *La persona de la princesse*, 443.

[19] Leonie Freida, *Catherine de Medici* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson), 2003.

present in the *Medici Cycle* also proved another layer, and is a major and recurring theme in Marie's artistic patronage. Rubens' *Medici Cycle* is not the only instance of Marie de' Medici encouraging an affinity between herself and the Virgin; to assert ideas about Marie de' Medici's sovereignty, Rubens made reference to the Virgin Mary through a set of poses and gestures and a personal iconography developed for the queen throughout her life. To view the cycle's Marian imagery as merely artistic play,[20] or as a nod to Marie de' Medici's biblical namesake, is to divorce the images from their most fundamental historical context. This thesis hopes to serve as a bridge between the *Medici Cycle* and that historical context of Marie de' Medici as a Catholic queen, one who brought a multi-faceted stability to France through her marriage to Henri and her production of a male heir.

Marie de' Medici's patronage of the arts developed most prolifically during her tenure as queen regent, due to the greater autonomy she experienced as a widow. Prior to Henri IV's assassination, Marie de' Medici had less of a platform (and less of a reason) to craft a public image. Though several Queen Mothers had preceded Marie de' Medici informally as regent, hers was the first regency that was legally sanctioned. Immediately following Henri's assassination, the deceased king's ministers quickly maneuvered Marie de' Medici into a position of power. The regency bestowed on her by Henri was legitimized by Parliament and by a *lit de justice* ceremony mere hours after the assassination. In order to achieve this new and official status for Marie de' Medici, Henri's ministers held up the examples of strong and decisive Queen Mothers like

[20] Ronald Millen and Robert Wolf, *Heroic Deeds and Mystic Figures: A New Reading of Rubens' Life of Maria de Medici* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989).

Blanche of Castile and Catherine de' Medici as proof of Marie's ability to govern.[21] In popular culture and contemporary political theory, women were, generally, seen as unfit for rule; Laurens Bouchel's 1615 compendium of French Law describes women as "imbecilic, inconstant, foolish, savage, ambitious, [and] deceitful."[22] To combat this negative view of the female gender, Marie de' Medici and Henri's ministers cited a mother's "natural affection" for her son as justification for her regency.[23] Because women could not truly rule under Salic law, they posed no real threat of usurpation; male relatives, however, *could* benefit from the death of a young king and therefore could not be trusted with his safety.[24] Thus, in crafting a personal iconography that bolstered the legitimacy garnered for her by Henri's ministers, Marie de' Medici took every opportunity to stress her maternal qualities in the printed and painted works she commissioned. In order to understand the many-layered iconography of the *Medici Cycle,* it is necessary to examine the evolution of Marie's personal iconography from the time of her betrothal through her time as Dowager Queen.

Marie de' Medici's platform and reason for crafting a public persona grew through the various stages of her life. Her betrothal to Henri IV elevated her status and necessitated more deliberate self-fashioning on the part of a would-be queen. Marie de' Medici's identification with her namesake goes back to an unusual Annunciation scene by Cigoli, interpreted by Charles Carman as an allegory for the marriage of Marie de'

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[21] Crawford, *Perilous Performances,* 65.

[22] Crawford, *Perilous Performances,* 64.

[23] Crawford, *Perilous Performances,* 3.

[24] Ibid.

Medici to Henri IV of France (**fig. 7**). Cigoli's *Annunciation* at Montughi was commissioned in 1600, the same year as Marie de' Medici's marriage by proxy to Henri IV of France. Carman points to the substitution of a crown for the traditional lily presented to the Virgin by the angel Gabriel. The crown's lily-like spikes bring to mind the symbols of both Florence and France, while also making reference to the Trinity. The prominent, eight-pointed stars are a symbol associated with Cardinal Pietro Aldobrandini, who performed the marriage by proxy in 1600 (**fig. 8**). Gabriel is dressed in ecclesiastical garb, suggesting that he is not just an angel but also a priest, perhaps the Cardinal himself. The Medici acted as longtime patrons of the Montughi Church and Capuchin Convent where the painting was installed, the most generous of the dynasty being Marie's father, the Grand Duke Francesco de' Medici. Though the donor for the *Annunciation* is recorded as "anonymous," the strong ties between the Medici and the church at Montughi strongly hint that a family member or a close friend made the commission and that it referred to Marie's marriage. Carman speculates that Marie herself could have sponsored the commission; she had a special connection to the Capuchins, having been told by a nun named *La Passitea* in the same convent that she would one day become Queen of France.

When the prophecy proved true, and Marie de' Medici became Queen of France, she came into her own as a patroness of the arts. Having learned the art of self-fashioning from her Medici forebears, the queen aimed to shape public opinion through the commissioning and disseminating of both fine art and popular images. While Henri was alive, she commissioned works that asserted her sovereignty and stressed her potential as regent. In several of these images, Marie de' Medici assumes the guise of

Justice, or Astraea, who brings peace and prosperity to France. In mythology, Astraea, significantly, ushers in a new golden age (**fig. 1**).[25] Justice, explained by Ernst Kantorowicz as "the power intermediate between God and the World," bears strong parallels to the Virgin and her powers of intercession.[26] The Virgin is also referenced through these popular images' similarity to a scene of the Virgin Enthroned.

As a foreigner, and a woman, Marie de' Medici was constantly questioned and criticized in France. Pamphlets denoting the happy government of her regency, and the peace that flourished under her reign, proved typical of the propaganda that Marie and Henri put forth to counter the public phobia of a new Medici Queen.[27] That Henri approved of these images and encouraged their propagation suggests that the paralleling of Marie de' Medici with Marian archetypes was a deliberate strategy developed by the couple to prepare Marie for a time when she might have to rule without him. After Henri's death, she continued her visual campaign, portraying herself as a bereaved widow. In doing so, she continued to fashion herself as a devoted wife, both immediately following and long after her husband's death. Marie de' Medici consistently commissioned images of herself in mourning garb, and oftentimes crying, that recall the Mater Lacrimosa, or Lady of Sorrows. Though the source of Mary's power as Queen of Heaven is her relationship as earthly mother and heavenly Bride to Christ, the underlying basis for that power is her freedom from original sin and her perpetual virginity (**figs. 9-**

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[25] Susan Saward, *The Golden Age of Marie de' Medici*, 142-157.

[26] Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Political Theology* (Princeton:Princeton University Press, 1957), 143.

[27] The brutality of Catherine de' Medici's regency had a lasting and polarizing effect on the French imagination.

11).[28] A 1611 almanac composed by David Origan, Henri's chief astrologer, featured an image of the young Louis XIII presenting an offering to the Madonna and child, while Marie stands in the foreground, so close to the Virgin that the figures overlap and suggest to viewers (though not demanding it of them), that in this proximity a sort of comparison be made between the two mothers (**fig. 12**).[29] Such imagery is intimately related to the theme of maternal counsel and the idyllic representation of the Virgin Mary as mother to all of God's children.[30]

Aside from its connection to the Virgin Mary, virginity was an exalted, sanctifying attribute. For early modern widows, who were urged to practice sexual abstinence, chastity became an almost heroic ideal to attain. A discourse even circulated that encouraged widows and victims of sexual assault to reclaim in the mind the lost physical state of their virginity.[31] This is not to say that pious, chaste widows were understood as literal virgins, but rather that they had regained the internal, spiritual purity of their virginal state.[32] Similarly, the *Medici Cycle's* Marian imagery suggests that

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[28] Ulrich, *La persona de la princesse,* 29-32.

[29] Crawford, *Perilous Performances,* 74.

[30] Claudie Martin-Ulrich, *La persona de la princesse au xvie siècle: personnage littéraire et personnage politique* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2004), 443.

[31] Clarissa Atkinson, "Precious Basalm in a Fragile Glass: The Ideology of Virginity in the Latter Middle Ages," in *Art, Gender and Religious Devotion in Grand Ducal Tuscany*, ed. Alice Sanger, 135 (Burlington: Ashgate, 2014), citing St Augustine's assertion that a virgin who had been raped retained her purity, despite the violation to her physical body. In the *Summa Theologica,* Thomas Aquinas echoes Augustine's view on the subject, noting that chastity is an internal conviction—the physical body merely facilitates chaste actions.

[32] Alice Sanger, *Art, Gender, and Religious Devotion in Grand Ducal Tuscany* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2014), 135.

Marie de' Medici is *like* the Virgin in terms of her virtue, and not the Virgin incarnate. Early modern treatise writers held widowhood in even higher esteem than the married state; this conviction originated with theologians like St. Jerome and St. Augustine, but Renaissance authors expounded on the topic. Unmarried women—maidens and widows—were better able to focus their attentions on loving God because they lacked the distraction of a husband.

Lodovico Dolce wrote on the subject of widowhood in *The Most Praiseworthy Instruction of the Honorable and Virtuous Life of the Widow* (1547).[33] Breaking with the tradition of a hierarchy of chastity in which virgins held the place of primacy, Dolce asserted that widowhood was a more pleasing state in God's eyes than even that of virginity or marriage. Dolce cites the knowledge and experience acquired by a widow as the reason for her spiritual superiority.[34] He also advocated that widows with children should remain unmarried so as to best preserve their husbands' memories and to look after their children. He suggested that widows emulate the faithfulness of the dog in their devotion to their husbands. The motif of the loyal dog appears at crucial moments in the *Medici Cycle,* such as in the *Marriage by Proxy* and the *Birth of the Dauphin,* where small spaniels are visible near Marie's feet, denoting her fidelity. Dolce also encouraged widows to lead a pious and modest life in which they focused their efforts on prayer and charitable acts.[35] The prints of Marie de' Medici issued immediately following Henri's

[33] A French edition of this treatise was published in 1578 under the title *Discours de la Beauté des Dames.*

[34] Catherine King, *Renaissance Women Patrons: Wives and Widows in Italy (c.1300-1550)* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 36.

[35] Catherine King, *Renaissance Women Patrons,* 37.

death, as well as those published later in her life, depict her in solemn, restrained costumes. In *Marie de Médicis assise sous un dais (1636-38),* the queen mother wears modest mourning garb, while the crown of France sits beside her. She does not take ownership of the crown, but instead acts as its guardian **(fig. 13).** Pierre Matthieu, Marie de' Medici's biographer, described the queen mother's piety and charitable nature—qualities that were exemplary of a "good" widow. He wrote, "Sa piete n'est pas une plante sterile, ses fruits se resplendent abondamment sur les églises, les monastères, les collèges, les hôspitaux, et les pauvres filles."[36] He had also lauded the queen mother for maintaining the peace crafted by Henri IV, calling her "heroic" for doing so.[37]

Martine Vasselin notes that the female form had, since antiquity, been suited to allegorical figures and moral emblems, but that the re-affirmation of the cult of the Virgin during the Catholic Reformation, combined with new modes of representing women, multiplied the opportunities for the depiction of Christian heroines. Accordingly, there was a significant degree of ambiguity and overlap between classical and Catholic traditions, as demonstrated in the *Medici Cycle*. For Marie de' Medici's male contemporaries, the concept of "hero" was defined by a rupture with ordinary existence. To be a hero required actions of extraordinary valor, as well as actions that fit within archetypes that reflected not just the goals and values of the individual but those of the public. Heroic traits often depended on acts of self-sacrifice or martyrdom. In a similar fashion, heroines gained definition through their opposition to normal women.

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[36] Pierre Matthieu, *Éloge historial sur la vie, les vertus, la fortune, les plus mémorables actions et l'heureuse régence de la reyne, mère du Roy Marie de Médicis* (Paris: G. Loyson, 1626), 43.

[37] Matthieu, *Éloge,* 19.

As a counterpoint to texts bemoaning the inadequacies of the female sex, a literary tradition developed in which sixteenth-century authors detailed examples of heroines and ideal women from both biblical and pagan sources; one example is *Le Miroir des dames* (1528-30). Heroines were exemplars of chastity and fidelity, dignity and authority, and piety and charity. The Virgin Mary held a place of primacy in these texts as the ultimate female role model in every sense.

Books about great women were often dedicated to French noblewomen. An early sixteenth-century portrait of Anne de Bretagne, in which the composition is similar to that of a *sacra conversazione* or Virgin enthroned, depicts the queen being presented with a book of exemplary women (**fig. 14**). Marie's other predecessors, Henri IV's first wife Marguerite de Valois and Henri II's Queen Catherine de' Medici, both had books dedicated to them as well.[38] Images of the heroines represented in those texts appeared in other examples of Medici art, including decorations for the Villa Medici at Poggio a Caiano and at the palace of Fontainebleau where Catherine de' Medici once resided.[39]

The *Ulysses Gallery* at Fontainebleau (now destroyed), designed by Francesco Primaticcio and commissioned by Henri II's queen Catherine de' Medici, participates in a tradition of biography-by-analogy that is not dissimilar from Rubens' monumental allegorical-biographical cycle for Marie de' Medici. One prevalent theme among "great women" was that of the "exemplary wife," which characterizes the subject matter of the *Ulysses Gallery*. Five of the murals in Primaticcio's cycle featured Penelope, Odysseus' wife, who remained faithful for ten years and kept suitors at bay while she awaited

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[38] Vasselin, "Histoires déformées," 39.

[39] Ibid.

Ulysses' return to Ithaca. The softness and sensuality of these scenes contrast with the violence of the other murals featuring Odysseus. The cunning caution exercised by Penelope, as well as her fidelity and chastity, can be read as an allusion to Catherine de' Medici's virtue and political sophistication. Images of women as intercessors and exemplars of chastity can be understood as types of the Virgin Mary, much in the same way that seductresses were likened to Eve in the Christian imagination. With its scenes of marital devotion, maternal guidance, and harmonious succession, the *Medici Cycle* should certainly be read as an expression of Marie as an exemplary wife; the inclusion of Marian iconography highlights her worth using a laudatory language that would have been widely understood by an elite, educated audience.[40]

As both were Medici-born queens of France, Marie was often compared to Catherine; this was done explicitly at the festivities orchestrated for Marie de' Medici's wedding by proxy in 1600, when the decorations juxtaposed nearly identical compositions of the two queens' marriage ceremonies, inviting comparison between them. The pose that both brides assume in these images is traditional, with the joining of the brides and grooms' hands representing their union. Rubens' *The Marriage by Proxy* uses the same composition, and all three images recall standard representations of the marriage of the Virgin by artists such as Albrecht Dürer (**figs. 15-16**).

These antecedents in images of heroic women and the Virgin set the continuing pattern for an association between Mary and Marie in Rubens' *Medici Cycle*. Rubens' *Life of Marie de' Medici,* while drawing on visual sources from classical antiquity and

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[40] Vasselin, "Histoires déformées,"43-51.

events from Marie’s life, clearly makes reference to scenes standard to a *Life of the Virgin* pictorial cycle.

CHAPTER III

THE PIOUS MONARCH: POSTHUMOUS DEPICTIONS OF HENRI IV

In iconography, composition, and overall structure, the *Medici Cycle* and its pendant series, *The Life of Henri IV,* depict the French monarchs as representatives of divine law on earth. *The Life of Marie de' Medici* was commissioned and conceived in conjunction with the never-completed *Life of Henri IV,* and the two cycles are best read in relation to one another. Shaw Smith argues that both cycles represent the stability and prosperity achieved through the union of Marie de' Medici and Henri IV.[41] Both cycles illustrate peace in a multi-faceted manner; the images argue that the peace hard-won by Henri through earthly means was fostered and maintained under Marie de Medici's divinely given wisdom and grace. Unlike Henri IV, whose numerous military victories and political triumphs established him as a hero, Marie de' Medici's greatest and most marked accomplishments were as a wife and mother. And yet, through a heavy use of allegory, Rubens posited Marie as a heroine on the basis of her virtue.

The themes of peace and prosperity that characterize the *Life of Marie de' Medici* and *The Life of Henri IV* have a precedent in the images commissioned by the Medici in Florence for Henri's funeral rites. The twenty-six canvases produced for the event made up one of the largest biographical cycles produced in Florence prior to 1610.[42] The cycle of images that decorated San Lorenzo for Henri's obsequies in Florence was

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[41] Shaw Smith, "Rubens and the *Grand Camée de France:* The *Consecratio* in the Medici Galleries of the Luxembourg Palace," *Gazelle des Beaux-Arts* 120 (1992): 128.

[42] Francesco I de' Medici's obsequies had twelve canvases while Phillip II's had twenty-four. Eve Borsook, "Funeral Décor for Henri IV of France," *Art and Politics at the Medici Court* IV (1969): 210.

similar, in the emphasis on Henri's military prowess, to those commissioned for Francesco I grand Duke of Tuscany and Phillip II of Spain. More so than those earlier biographical cycles, however, the Henri cycle balanced images of the king's valor and virility with those demonstrating his mercy and piety. Images of Henri's military victories stood alongside those that depicted his conversion to Catholicism, his marriage to Marie, and the peace they brought to France.

Contemporary accounts of Henri's death and the obituaries written later made comparisons, both implicit and explicit, with the Passion of Christ. Some even suggested that Henri submitted, fully aware, to martyrdom.[43] After Henri's death, rumors spread that the king had experienced premonitions of his demise—and would spend moments lost in melancholy, seemingly broken in spirit, but later would resign himself to the will of God, believing that what He had ordained was inevitable.

Another story concerned Henri's reluctance to leave Marie on the day of his assassination but also his compulsion to do so despite her pleading. One particularly extravagant chronicler wrote that "Henri joined his hands and raised his eyes to Heaven. His soul, bathed entire in the blood of the innocent lamb which was slain before the commencement of the world, escaped gently from that body streaming with blood from a wound received in innocence."[44]

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[43] Ronald Millen and Robert Erich Wolf, *Heroic Deeds and Mystic Figures: A New Reading of Rubens' Life of Maria de Medici* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 61.

[44] Pierre Matthieu, *Histoire,* 516-17.

The importance of piety in Henri's image cannot be stressed enough. Praised in life and in death as the "most Christian king,"[45] Henri was credited with restoring religious peace to France and bringing an end to the wars of religion. The cycle of images from Henri's funeral emphasize this aspect of his life, with several scenes devoted to the subject.

The image of *Henri's Return to the Church* (**fig. 17**) depicts a pivotal event in Henri's political career. In 1589, Henri of Navarre was named King of France when his childless uncle Henri III died. At that time, however, Henri was a Protestant, and the Catholic League had enough strength through its alliance with Spain to force Henri out of Paris and to prevent him from claiming the throne. He set about winning his kingdom by conquest, emerging victorious at the battles of Arques and Ivry, both represented at his obsequies, (**figs. 18-19**), but he ultimately proved unable to win the city of Paris by the same means. In order to enter the city and truly become King of France, Henri IV officially had to renounce his Protestant faith in 1593, which is depicted in *Henri's Return to the Church*.

By embracing Roman Catholicism, Henri was accepted by the Catholic League and allowed into Paris. He was crowned there in 1594. 1595 marked yet another important moment for Henri, depicted in Rubens' scene *Henri Signing His Peace with the Church* (**fig. 20**). He was finally granted a papal absolution, which reversed his excommunication and cemented his legitimacy as King of France. In 1598, Henri ended the Wars of Religion by issuing the Edict of Nantes, which granted relative religious freedom to Protestants in France. Though his conversion to Catholicism had won him

[45] This is a title long associated with the Kings of France, dating back to the reign of Louis IX.

many allies, his tolerance of Protestantism led some to suspect that he was not sincere in his Catholic faith. Thus, Henri's marriage to Marie de' Medici was not only financially advantageous for the king, but also helped to create a sense of confessional stability that Henri could not create on his own. By marrying a member of a prominent Catholic family and producing a legitimate Catholic heir, Henri ensured that the future ruler of France would continue to champion Roman Catholicism. For this reason, as well as to underline the legitimacy of their son Louis XIII and of Marie's regency, Henri's funeral decorations included scenes such as *The Meeting at Lyons*, *Marie and Henri declaring Catholicism the State Religion*, and the *Coronation of Marie de' Medici* (**figs. 21-23).**

The unfinished canvases and oil sketches that constitute the unfinished *Life of Henri IV* stressed the confessional stability achieved by the king through images of his victories in the Wars of Religion, his legitimacy as Henri III's chosen heir, and his marriage to Marie de' Medici. *The Battle of Ivry* is, with the exception of the two goddesses of victory presiding over the fray, a documentarian representation of Henri's most famous military engagement (**fig. 24**). *The Reconciliation of King Henri III and Henri of Navarre* represents the meeting of the two kings on April 30, 1589 (**fig. 25**). Rubens took liberties in his depiction of the setting, placing the meeting of the reigning and future kings inside rather than outdoors as it occurred in life; still, the interaction of the figure of Henri III with the figure of Henri IV is in accordance with contemporary descriptions of the meeting. Hardouin (de Beaumont) de Péréfixe's *Histoire du Roy Henri le Grand* (1662) describes Henri of Navarre throwing himself at the feet of Henri III, who lifted him up and embraced him tenderly. In Rubens' interpretation of the event,

the two kings jointly grasp the scepter of France, as a putto holding the French crown over the head of Henri III symbolically looks in the direction of Henri of Navarre.

The *Triumph of Henri IV* combines historical fact with artistic license, depicting Henri's entry into Paris in the form of an ancient Roman triumphal procession (**fig. 26**). Here Henri holds a palm branch denoting victory, which is replaced by the symbol of peace, an olive branch, in the final image of the Henri cycle. *The Union of Marie de' Medici and Henri IV (Henri IV as Prince of Peace)* was intended to hang in the last position of the gallery, opposite the canvas depicting Henri's birth (**fig. 27**).[46] As the culmination of Henri's cycle, *The Union of Marie de' Medici* reinforces Marie de' Medici's central role in establishing peace in France. Rather than the actual event of marriage, this image represents the benefits bestowed on Henri and his country through his union with Marie de' Medici. The inclusion of the olive branch is likely an indicator of the pacifying influence of Marie on Henri, which offers a point of contrast to the image of Henri's birth, in which the young king receives a sword from Mars, god of war.[47] Depicting Henri as the "Prince of Peace" also conjures up associations with Christ, recalling the parallel established by seventeenth-century chroniclers between the death of the French king and that of the Christian messiah.

Returning to Rubens' *Life of Marie de' Medici* and reading it in light of the themes elucidated in the *Life of Henri IV*, it is easy to understand how, if Henri were perceived in the popular imagination as a Christ-like martyr for his faith, Marie might likewise be equated with the Virgin Mary. Just as the *Medici Cycle* was intended as a

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[46] Julius Held, *The Oil Sketches of Peter Paul Rubens: A Critical Catalogue,* (*Princeton*, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 123-36.

[47] Held, "*Oil Sketches,"* 135.

pendant to the cycle of Henri IV, images of Christ's passions were often complemented by *Life of the Virgin* cycles. The panegyric theme of religious peace and prosperity that ran through Henri's obsequies also characterized Rubens' biographical imagery of Henri IV. When viewed autonomously, *The Life of Marie de' Medici* functions as an assertion of the queen's virtue and political astuteness, the latter of which was often interpreted in the Early Modern period in the key of a dangerous and powerful female sexuality. As in the *Ulysses and Penelope Gallery* at Fontainebleau, however, the images of Henri's cycle, had they been completed, would have further stressed Marie's femininity in positive terms as a wife and mother, and highlighted her politics as a continuation of Henri's own policies.[48]

[48] For further reading on the joint reading of the *Life of Marie de' Medici* and the *Life of Henri IV,* see Tania Shamy, "Rubens' *Medici Cycle*: Justification for a Heroine Queen" (M.A. Thesis, McGill University, 2000).

CHAPTER IV

HEROIC VIRTUE IN RUBENS' *LIFE OF MARIE DE' MEDICI*

There is a tension underlying Rubens' tribute to Marie de' Medici, and it lies in the seemingly contradictory messages embodied in the cycle. How can the queen be both demure and powerful? Why include Marian imagery in a cycle so heavily laden with classicism? Seventeenth-century viewers of the *Medici Cycle* such as Andre Felibien criticized the image program:

> All the painters [said Pymandre] at this point are much in the habit of treating non-religious subjects that few can be found, however learned and judicious they may be, who do not introduce Fables into the most serious histories and Christian actions….For, I beg you, just what do Cupid, Hymen, Mercury, the Graces, Tritons, Nereids have to do with the history of Henri IV and Marie de Medici? And what connection can there be between the gods of Fable and the ceremonies of the Church and our customs, that they should be joined together and confused in such a fashion as was done by the painter of whose works you have been speaking?[49]

Modern scholars of the cycle continue to probe for a single, fixed meaning in a series of images that defies such a reading. Sara Galletti, however, has compellingly argued that Rubens intentionally created a layered and dissimulating image program—that the information in the paintings was carefully controlled by Marie de' Medici and its meaning was adaptable depending on the audience. One of Marie's trusted favorites, the abbé de St-Ambroise, Claude Maugis, was charged with interpreting the *Medici Cycle* for visitors to the Luxembourg Gallery. Rubens reported in his personal correspondence that the abbé had successfully framed the meaning of the images through selective emphasis

[49] André Felibien, "Entriens sur les vies et sure les ouvrages des plus excellens peintres anciens et modernes," in Jacques Thuillier and Jacques Foucart, *Rubens' Life of Marie de' Medici* (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1970), 134.

when showing them to Louis XIII, and that the King was pleased with paintings.[50] Not only was access to the information in the *Medici Cycle* controlled by Marie's interpreter, access to the paintings themselves was also restricted. Many of the aforementioned scholars have remarked on the public function of the paintings, but it may be more accurate to describe them as semi-public. Access to the gallery was reserved for distinguished guests of the queen regent—a courtly and educated public.

Apart from the notion of leaving space for dissimulation on the part of Rubens (which goes a long way toward explaining the contradictions inherent to the cycle), one must also consider the opposing expectations placed on women in Marie de' Medici's station. As historian Katherine Crawford has astutely argued, the expectation of appropriate gender performance for a female regent was a perilous one: a traditionally feminine performance might lead to criticism for weakness of will, while a performance that asserted political control risked transgressing gendered boundaries. As the first female regent officially sanctioned by her husband's command, a coronation ceremony, and a *lit de justice* ceremony, Marie held a unique position; the way in which she represented herself in images proved novel as well.[51]

From the moment of her birth, Marie de' Medici embodied lofty expectations. Despite having hoped for a legitimate male heir, Francesco de' Medici believed that his daughter would one day join the ranks of other great women in history. Catherine de' Medici, the first Medici queen of France, was at the height of her power as Dowager Queen, and the future possibilities for Medici women never appeared brighter. Marie's

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[50] Sara Galletti, "Rubens's Life of Maria de'Medici: Dissimulation and the Politics of Art in Early Seventeenth-Century France," *Renaissance Quarterly* 67 (2014): 878-916.

[51] Katherine Crawford, *Perilous Performances*, 74-94.

father was not alone in his assurance that the princess would achieve greatness; his conviction was shared by the Capuchin nun Passitea (the source of the aforementioned prophecy regarding Marie's queenly destiny) as well as by contemporary panegyrists who remarked on the curious circumstances of Marie's young life. The princess survived a near drowning, a massive earthquake that rocked her childhood home of the Palazzo Pitti, and, most curiously of all, three successive lightning strikes to her bedroom.[52] It seemed that heaven and earth had conspired to assert Marie's exceptionalness.

Rubens' scene of *The Birth of the Princess* encapsulates the sense of expectation that surrounded Marie's delivery and foreshadowed her auspicious destiny as Queen of France (**fig. 28**). Numerous scholars have remarked on the conspicuous halo crowning the infant Marie, which stands out as Christian iconography among the predominantly classical images. The Baluze Manuscript, the early contract for the *Medici Cycle,* identifies the halo as a sign of Marie de' Medici's greatness.[53] Traditionally a marker of sainthood, the halo included by Rubens lays the foundation for the rest of the cycle's imagery, in which Marie de' Medici stands apart from ordinary women. In this vein, the halo identifies Marie de' Medici with her saintly namesake—in more than just name, but also in terms of sovereignty and virtue.

While the Medici Cycle begins with portraits of the Queen's parents, Marie de' Medici is portrayed in *The Birth of the Princess* as a daughter of Florence itself. The bare-breasted personification of the city plays the role of Marie's mother, while the river Arno, personified in the composition's right-hand corner, attends the birth. Two putti

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[52] Millen and Wolf, *Heroic Deeds,* 28.

[53] Millen and Wolf, *Heroic Deeds,* 33.

bear a shield adorned with the fleur-de-lys, a reference to the red lily of Florence, but a motif that also resonates with a fitting duality as the symbol of France. The fleur-de-lys, for the lily is a symbol of the virgin, also subtly signals a Marian association with Marie de' Medici as a daughter of Florence. Furthermore, the symbol brings to mind the Virgin Mary's role as protectress of the Florence.[54]

Rubens identified the three winged figures that preside over Marie's birth as the Horae, a classical trio comprised of Good Government, Justice, and Peace—the hallmarks of Marie's political policy. Two of the Horae bestow flowers on the princess; more flora are scattered on the ground. The floral motif is repeated throughout the Medici Cycle as a signifier of Marie's fertility, but it also draws on Marian iconography as the Virgin is often pictured with flowers and fruit (**fig. 29**). Some identifiable flowers from *The Birth of the Princess* are pansies and lilies, floral attributes of the Virgin that appear in Jan Breughel the Elder and Peter Paul Rubens' *Madonna in a Garland of Flowers*, and in many other Marian images. This shared floral imagery suggests Marie de' Medici, like the Virgin Mary, as the paragon of femininity and fecundity. The cornucopia borne by the third winged figure is full of the trappings of sovereignty—items whose meaning are much more transparent, though no less significant in foretelling Marie's destiny.

The affinity between flowers, the Virgin Mary, and Marie de' Medici's sovereignty continues throughout the cycle. Young Marie receives a crown of roses from the triad of nude Graces in *The Education of the Princess* (**fig**. **30**). Geraldine Johnson, in an analysis of female sexuality in the *Medici Cycle*, suggests that Marie has "turned her

[54] Similarly, the figure of Florence is garbed in blue and red, colors most commonly used to identify the Virgin Mary in Catholic painting.

back" on the feminine Graces in favor of the more masculine, militant wisdom of Minerva. Johnson reads Marie's performance in the *Medici Cycle* as one in which the queen triumphs over her female gender so as to demonstrate her ability to govern France successfully.[55] Though it is true that the figure of Marie de' Medici constructed by Rubens vacillates between the heroic *femme forte* and a more submissive feminine identity throughout the *Medici Cycle*, in *The Education of the Princess* Marie presents the very picture of demure modesty. The pose she adopts, in which she bends over her lesson, kneeling, is difficult to read as anything other than a gesture of supplication. This is underscored by the princess' diminutive size, which may be attributed in part to Marie's youth, but more likely to the greatness of the divine company she keeps. Marie's pose is also a familiar one in Marian iconography; it is the pose commonly adopted by Mary for *Education of the Virgin* images. In this Marian tradition, the Virgin's diminutive size offsets her preternaturally adult carriage. Rubens painted his own rendition of the subject at roughly the same time he was completing the *Medici Cycle* (**fig. 31**).

The compositional parallel between the two images is striking. Mary and Marie's adult-like poses are nearly identical, though unlike the figure of Marie, Rubens' Madonna meets the viewers' gaze. Each woman is awarded crowns of roses, a symbol of divine sovereignty and an attribute of the Virgin Mary. The Graces replace a pair of cherubs from the Marian image, and Minerva takes the place of Saint Anne as instructor. In life, the young Marie de' Medici grew up without her mother, looking instead to her

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[55] Geraldine Johnson, "Imagining Images of Powerful Women," in *Women and Art in Early Modern Europe: Patrons, Collectors, and Connoisseurs,* edited by Cynthia Lawrence (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 149.

stepmother, her aunt, her governess, and most of all to the nun La Passitea as surrogate maternal figures.[56] In Rubens' allegory, Minerva acts as a poetic stand-in for the figure of female guidance, a role filled by Mary's mother in *The Education of the Virgin.* While Minerva is a distinctly classicizing figure, she offers a further suggestive layer of meaning parallel with Mary as a virgin goddess.

Minerva is not the only Roman goddess present in the *Medici Cycle*; Juno is one of many in the cycle who makes an appearance in the *Presentation of the Portrait* (**fig. 32**). Jupiter and Juno, who are conceptually linked with the royal couple throughout the *Medici Cycle*, watch approvingly as Hymen and Cupid present Henri with Marie's portrait. From the picture within a picture, Marie gazes out at the viewer. Through this device, Rubens has transformed Marie de' Medici into an icon, with important implications for the rest of the cycle. Geraldine Johnson has identified Rubens' *Madonna della Valicella* as a source for *The Presentation of the Portrait* (**fig. 33**). Johnson notes that, like the image from the *Medici Cycle*, the *Madonna della Vallicella* is a "painting about a painting," in which the image of the Virgin is presented for the adoration of both the viewer outside the picture plane and the putti within.[57] This manner of representation provides a clear departure from the way Marie is portrayed in the other images from the cycle, and it suggests to the viewer the highly constructed nature of the queen's appearance. By transforming Marie de Medici into an icon in *The Presentation of the Portrait*, Rubens signals the iconic nature of the other scenes presented in the *Medici Cycle,* many of which were adapted from the life of the Virgin.

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[56] Millen and Wolf, *Heroic Deeds,* 41.

[57] Geraldine Johnson, "Pictures Fit for a Queen: Peter Paul Rubens and the Marie de' Medici Cycle," *Art History* Vol. 16, No. 3 (1993): 458.

The Presentation of the Portrait, understandably, presents an idealized view of the relationship between Marie de Medici and Henri IV. In reality, both Marie and Henri were reticent about the match—Henri was enamored of his new mistress, and Marie was unhappy at the thought of marrying a man twenty years her senior. Henri had celebrated his first marriage months before Marie's birth. Both Marie and Henri married for the greater good—Marie, for the betterment of her family and her own station in life, and Henri for the good of France. The *Medici Cycle* glosses over the unsavory details of the royal couple's relationship, as a painted panegyric must, but it nevertheless emphasizes the sense of duty that Marie de' Medici exhibited toward her husband and to her adoptive country.

The union between Marie de' Medici and Henri IV is commemorated in *The Marriage by Proxy* (**fig. 15**). The *Medici Cycle* is an amalgamation of historical fact and poetic devices, and *The Marriage by Proxy* contains fanciful details that deviate from the reality of the ceremony. Cardinal Pietro Aldobrandini officiates, blessing the marriage and legitimizing the union through his authority as papal legate and nephew to Pope Clement VIII. His red cardinal's hat is on display behind Marie's uncle Ferdinando, who served as proxy groom, as if to remind viewers of his spiritual jurisdiction. [58] In the painting, as it was in life, the marriage ceremony is a public performance of sanctity and "Catholicness." Not simply a reminder of the cardinal's authority, the red hat also signifies God's authority and the authority of the Roman Catholic Church, confirming that the marriage had the endorsement of the official religion of France. Though Marie

[58] Millen and Wolf, *Heroic Deeds,* 53.

de' Medici brought to France an enormous dowry, her Catholic identity arguably had more enduring value to Henri.

Henri's detractors found his conversion to Catholicism suspect, and viewed his relative tolerance of Protestants as evidence that he remained a Huguenot at heart. These suspicions fueled the multiple attempts on Henri's life and proved to be the ultimate impetus behind his assassination. The aforementioned accounts of Henri's death encouraged a comparison between the king and Christ, in that both figures struggled with their mortality, only to ultimately submit to the will of God.

Though Henri is not overtly present in *The Marriage by Proxy,* Millen and Wolf have argued that the king is represented in the fictive Pietà sculpture, which Rubens locates on the altar of the imagined Florentine Cathedral. Millen and Wolf use the term "Pietà" to describe the sculpture, but in fact it participates in the *Gnadenstuhl* tradition from Northern Europe in which God the Father, instead of the more conventional Mary, holds the dead Christ, either while still on the cross or cradled in his arms and against his chest (**fig**. **34**).[59] Millen and Wolf note that the figure of Christ bears an eerie similarity to Henri IV, especially in his style of facial hair. Rubens made good use of existing literary panegyrics about Marie in designing the *Medici Cycle,* and it is therefore not surprising that he would have included facets from Henri's eulogies in which the king was compared to Christian martyrs and even to Christ. As the Florentine Duomo did not, in reality, have a statue such as this one on its altar, this detail is a decidedly deliberate inclusion on the artist's part, and one that must hold some symbolic significance. In a scene depicting a proxy marriage, Rubens made the absent groom present through this

[59] Millen and Wolf, *Heroic Deeds,* 59.

detail. The statue is not the only aspect of the Cathedral where Rubens deviated from fact; the drapery that would have been white or gold for a Florentine marriage ceremony is blood-red, the color used for the funerals of martyrs.[60]

The statue's somber subject matter contrasts with the otherwise happy scene of marriage, alluding to the future tragedy. As a widow, Marie borrowed from the iconography of the Madonna Lacrimosa, commissioning and disseminating prints where she is shown weeping.[61] The suffering that Marie endured in losing Henri, and the suffering she experienced later in life through her difficult relationship with her son, encouraged comparisons with the Virgin's own suffering. Rubens' choice of the *Gnudenstuhl* rather than a more traditional pieta can be understood in light of the comparison between Marie de' Medici and her biblical namesake; if the Virgin is present by analogy in the *Medici Cycle* and in *The Marriage by Proxy,* as this thesis argues, then her presence in the sculpture would have been redundant and rendered the Marian parallel less comprehensible.

The Marriage by Proxy makes an implicit comparison between Marie and the Virgin through a compositional reference to conventional depictions of the marriage of the Virgin. One of the most famous examples of *The Marriage of the Virgin* is that of Albrecht Dürer, though Rubens' contemporaries were also well acquainted with that mode of representation (**figs.16 & 35**). As a Catholic artist and a scholar of art history, Rubens would not have made this comparison lightly or accidentally. Furthermore, the

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[60] Millen and Wolf, *Heroic Deeds,* 60-61.

[61] Elizabeth McCartney, "A Widow's Tears, A Queen's Ambition: The Variable History of Marie de Médicis' Bereavement," in *Widowhood and Visual Culture,* edited by Allison Levy (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 93-107.

foregrounds of both Schelte Bolswert's engraving of Rubens' *The Marriage of the Virgin* and *The Marriage by Proxy* are littered with flowers associated with the Virgin Mary, as exemplified by the rose directly beneath Marie's hand in the image from the *Medici Cycle*. The spaniel that shares the foreground with the floral motif is not a direct reference to the Virgin, but it does participate in the *Medici Cycle's* assertion of Marie's loyalty to Henri and her steadfast dedication to the continuation of his political policies. Here too is an example of Rubens making an art historical reference on the subject of marriage, implying Marie's fidelity through the established trope of the faithful dog. Dogs appear repeatedly throughout the cycle, which recalls Dolce's advice to pious widows to maintain devotion to their husbands—to be as constant as a dog.

The spaniel makes another appearance in *The Birth of the Dauphin,* where its function as a reminder of Marie's loyalty seems especially significant given the strained relationship that would develop between Marie and the adult Louis (**fig. 36**). Accordingly, the dog's odd gaze (not to mention his active body language) is aimed at the dauphin; almost as if on the verge of growling, the dog looks at the Dauphin anxiously—perhaps foreshadowing the test of Marie's loyalty that would occur when Louis XIII reached his majority. From the dynastic point of view, the moment represented by *The Birth of the Dauphin* is one of the greatest—if not the foremost—of the accomplishments in Marie's life and her political career. By giving birth to a legitimate Catholic heir, Marie had fulfilled her purpose (and destiny) as a bride of France. Louis' birth ensured a Catholic succession and the endurance of the body politic.

Millen and Wolf have suggested that the star at the very top of the composition for *The Birth of the Dauphin* echoes the star above Henri in *The Meeting at Lyons*, the

scene from the *Medici Cycle* which allegorically depicts the consummation of Henri and Marie's marriage and the conception of the Dauphin (**fig. 37**).[62] Louis was the vessel through which the body politic survived after Henri's assassination; however, this allusion to the continuity between the two kings in *The Birth of the Dauphin* is noteworthy for its indirectness. Indeed, there is little direct interaction between father and son in the *Medici Cycle,* and Marie de' Medici acts as intermediary even in this small allusion. The star in *The Meeting at Lyons* appears directly above Henri, yet in *The Birth of the Dauphin* the star is positioned above Marie, not Louis, as might be expected if one were reading the parallel as a reference to the succession. Though Marie's right to rule as regent derived entirely from her position as Louis' mother, Rubens demonstrates in this image that the succession and the security of France were dependent on her fecundity. Emphasizing this point is the figure of Fecundity, who presents Marie with a lush arrangement of fruit and flowers among which are visible the faces of five small children, who represent Marie's yet-to-be-born progeny.

The Birth of the Dauphin offers a romanticized, classicized vision of royal childbirth. Though the figures attending Marie are distinctly classical, the grouping of divine personages and the composition in which Rubens arranges them brings to mind the Christian tradition of the *sacra conversazione* (**fig. 38**).[63] Millen and Wolf are quick to refute the notion that Rubens borrowed from the iconography of Holy Family or Adoration scenes, pointing to the physical distance between the Queen and the

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[62] Millen and Wolf, *Heroic Deeds,* 90.

[63] Cosandey, *La reine de France*, 342.

Dauphin.[64] Millen and Wolf furthermore look to the Genius of Health who holds the infant Louis XIII as evidence that Rubens did not stress the parallel between Marie de' Medici and the Virgin.[65] It is true, as they argue, that no one would confuse the Genius with St. Joseph, who is often pictured holding the Christ-child in nativity or adoration scenes. Yet it seems illogical to insist on such a literal depiction in an image program that relies so heavily on allegory. Neither would a viewer confuse the figure of Cybele with St. Anne, yet the arrangement of these figures in *The Birth of the Dauphin* does bear resemblance to Christian depictions of the Holy Family just as the arrangement of Minerva and Marie de' Medici in *The Education of the Princess* resembles that of St. Anne and Mary in *The Education of the Virgin*. [66] Rubens was an artist of sufficient subtlety of intellect to recognize that compositions carry meaning.

Another possible explanation for the physical distance between Marie de' Medici and the Dauphin is the circumstance of a royal birth in the seventeenth century. Royal births were not intimate, private affairs but were public (though privileged) events, attended by members of the French court. This tradition was born from the need to prove the infant's legitimacy—to ensure that another child hadn't been substituted for the

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[64] Millen and Wolf also point to the outdoor setting of *The Birth of the Dauphin* as a departure from Christian birthing scenes, yet in looking to Rubens' own oeuvre, and to his many images of the Holy Family, it becomes apparent that the artist had a tendency to include views of the landscape in this subject matter, oftentimes showing the Holy Family in an ambiguous architectural setting.

[65] Millen and Wolf, *Heroic Deeds,* 91.

[66] Karl Grossman has described *The Birth of the Dauphin* as resembling a *Holy Family* or *Madonna and Saints*, with Cybele filling in for St. Anne and the Genius of Health playing the role of St. Joseph. For further reading, see Karl Grossman, *Die Gemäldezyklus der Galerie der Maria von Medici von Peter Paul Rubens*.

Dauphin—which was verified by a noble audience.[67] Henri's relatives sat under a large pavilion in Fontainebleau's Oval Room, directly across from Marie de' Medici, and she gave birth seated, rather than in bed, as she is shown in *The Birth of the Dauphin*. Rubens' image, in its theatricality, alludes to this performative legitimacy.

The painting also reflects the reality of the physical distance between Marie de' Medici and the Dauphin immediately after the birth. The Dauphin was taken from Marie, passed to Henri to confirm his sex, fed a spoonful of wine, and then given over to the care of a wet nurse,[68] who would have performed the more prosaic tasks of childrearing such as breastfeeding and swaddling.[69] Though there is a physical distance between mother and child in *The Birth of the Dauphin,* Marie looks lovingly toward Louis, alluding to the affection she felt toward him and creating a sense of intimacy between mother and son through her maternal gaze.

While the theatrical quality of the image reflects the reality of Marie's labor, the tone and setting of *The Birth of the Dauphin* are decidedly ethereal. There are no identifiable architectural features or historical figures apart from the royal family to place the image in space and time. If the *Medici Cycle* as a whole represents a coalescence of earthly and divine rule, as this thesis argues it does, then *The Birth of the Dauphin* could

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[67] Millen and Wolf, *Heroic Deeds,* 93.

[68] Marie de' Medici, after weeping tears of joy (and exhaustion) reportedly fell into a swoon as the Dauphin was being passed around and displayed for the attendees of the birth; there was not much of an opportunity for her to have held the child immediately after giving birth.

[69] Millen and Wolf, *Heroic Deeds,* 93, and David Hunt, *Parents and Children in History: The Psychology of Family Life in Early Modern France* (New York: Basic Books, 1970), 6.

plot on a spectrum between heavenly and earthly representations of Marie de' Medici, and it would land firmly on the side of the divine. In contrast, *The Consignment of the Regency* falls on the opposite end of this spectrum (**fig. 39**).

The Consignment of the Regency is almost underwhelming in the face of the cycle's other fantastic images; there are no obviously allegorical figures, no gods or goddesses, and no supernatural details that provide the element of imagination that characterizes the cycle as a whole. The costuming of the female figures to the right of Marie suggests that they are, in fact, allegorical in nature. The bare feet of the woman in blue, her relaxed hairstyle, and the nearly bared breasts of the woman behind her deviate from contemporary norms and thus signify the exceptionalness of these figures, but there are no clear markers or attributes that reveal their meaning. The Baluze Memorandum identifies the figures as Prudence and Generosity, and in Rubens' preparatory oil sketch the woman in blue does hold a snake to identify her as Prudence.[70] Clearly, the omission of Prudence's standard attribute was a deliberate one on the part of the artist, but his reasons for doing so remain opaque. Millen and Wolf propose that the snake could have been too contentious given its ominous associations and the suspicious timing of the consignment of the regency, Marie's coronation, and Henri's assassination, which all took place in 1610 (not to mention the physical proximity of the events in the *Medici Cycle*).

Millen and Wolf admit that their justification for the snake's absence could be stronger, but that no other satisfactory explanation has been offered. [71] It does seem

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[70] BNF MS Baluze 323 fol.55v; Thuillier and Foucart, *Rubens,* 85.

[71] Millen and Wofl, *Heroic Deeds,* 98.

probable given the climate of distrust that surrounded Marie de Medici, especially during the time Rubens was painting the cycle, that the snake was best left out so as not to conjure notions of evil and death. Given that the comparison between Marie de' Medici and the Virgin Mary had been well-established in the preceding images, and is reiterated in *The Consignment of the Regency* through a composition similar to that of *The Marriage by Proxy* and *The Marriage of the Virgin,* the snake would have been further problematized as a force of evil. The snake is the quintessential villain in the story of the Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden; because she redeemed Eve's original sin through her own Immaculate Conception, the Virgin Mary was oftentimes cast as a "New Eve" in early modern typologies. Furthermore, the Book of Revelation's struggle between the Woman and the dragon is often pictured in Catholic images as Mary trampling a serpent, and thus the inclusion of the snake in *The Consignment of the Regency* would have made the association of Marie-as-Mary with the snake awkward, if not unintelligible or controversial. Rubens is practicing an expedient selection of attributes, editing to hone meaning.

Perhaps the artist's reason for excluding the snake is even more practical than that, however. Rubens could have made a stylistic decision to omit the identifying attributes of the allegorical figures. The male figures that accompany Henri on the left side of the painting are obviously earthly soldiers[72] and, even with the inclusion of the snake, the image would have remained the least fantastic in the series. Rubens may have chosen this pared down approach in an effort to be consistent with the overall tone of *The*

[72] The soldiers and the weapons in the image's foreground are references to Henri's military prowess, yet the position of the guns near Henri's feet seems to suggest disuse; the detail implies the pacifying affect that Marie had on Henri's reign, and in doing so, recalls the oil sketch of Henri as the Prince of Peace discussed earlier in this thesis.

Consignment of the Regency, but he may also have intended to emphasize a pivotal moment in Marie's political career. *The Consignment of the Regency* offers a unique opportunity within the *Medici Cycle* to examine Henri, Marie, and Louis in the same image without the distractions of mythological figures and apotheosis.

Contemporary viewers of the *Medici Cycle* identified the setting of *The Consignment of the Regency* as the Luxembourg Palace, an anachronistic location for the subject matter but one that reminds the viewer of Marie's authority as regent and her magnificence as a patron and creates an additional layer of self-reference given that the *Medici Cycle* was intended to decorate the palace. The portico arch frames Louis the Dauphin, on whom the entire composition hinges, and he links Henri physically and symbolically with Marie. A small dog paws at Marie's skirts in yet another reminder of her fidelity, and it serves as an important reiteration given the sensitivity of the subject matter and the promises that Marie would be loyal to Henri's policies during her regency (as she was). The dog's presence also recalls *The Marriage by Proxy,* as does the image's composition. Lacking the more flamboyant aspects of the other images in cycle, *The Consignment of the Regency* encourages the viewer to meditate on the poses of the royal family. Henri hands Marie the fleur-de-lys-covered orb of state in a gesture that brings to mind the proxy-wedding portrait, creating a conceptual link between their union and Marie's right to rule in Henri's stead. This compositional choice also links *The Consignment of the Regency* with the aforementioned *Marriage of the Virgin* scenes, reasserting Marie de' Medici's virtue and motherly devotion through a comparison with her namesake, at a critical moment in the cycle. Each parent also simultaneously touches Louis, asserting once more the legitimacy of Marie's regency on the basis of royal

motherhood. The message is clear: Henri's power flows to Marie through Louis. Louis is himself positioned directly beneath the orb of state, signifying his destiny to inherit control of France.

In *The Felicity of the Regency,* the fullest expression of Marie de' Medici's divinely ordained sovereignty, Louis is notably absent (**fig. 2**). This image extolls Marie's achievements as a queen regent and as a patroness of the arts. *The Felicity of the Regency* mimics images that Marie commissioned prior to Henri's death in which she is similarly enthroned (**fig. 40**).[73] As previously noted, having learned the art of self-fashioning from her Florentine forebears, the queen continually attempted to influence public opinion through the commissioning and dissemination of both fine and popular art. While Henry was alive, she commissioned works that asserted her sovereignty and stressed her potential as regent. In these images, Marie de' Medici assumes the identity of Justice, or Astraea, who brings peace and prosperity to France—as Susan Saward argues, she ushers in a new golden age. Of note here is Kantorovicz's description of the figure of Justice as "the power intermediate between God and the World," an identity that recalls the Virgin's powers of intercession.[74] Marian references are present in the pose assumed by Marie, mirroring scenes of the Virgin enthroned, and the profusion of adoring figures also suggests a kind of *sacra conversazione,* if one comprised of allegorical figures rather than Christian ones (**fig. 41**).[75] Marie's bare breast, though

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[73] It appears likely that Rubens drew inspiration from two 1609 prints, in one of which Marie is pictured as an allegory of Peace and as an allegory of Justice in the other.

[74] Ernst Kantorovicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Political Theology (*Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 142-144.

[75] Cosandey, *La reine,* 343.

perhaps openly displayed in an antiquated statement of imperial authority, also alludes to her charity and maternal virtues. Rather than appearing as an assertion of an aggressive and dangerous female sexuality (which would make little sense in the context of a biographical cycle that stresses wifely devotion and motherhood), exposed breasts symbolized the virtue of Charity in a Catholic context—an interpretation that fits more readily within the thematic content of the *Medici Cycle* and this image in particular (**fig. 42**). The festoon of fruit above Marie's head can also be read as a reference to Marie's fertility and as such is a device similar to the scattered flowers seen in earlier images from the cycle. If *The Felicity of the Regency* contains the most antique references in the cycle, it also represents the most thorough exchange between the three major readings of Marie in the cycle as hero, Virgin, and royal.[76]

The Full Reconciliation is another image in which the comparison between Marie de' Medici and the Virgin Mary is made explicit (**fig. 43**). Marie, dressed in white to denote her purity, joins her son Louis in the Heavens. The caduceus held by Marie de' Medici, echoing the one presented to her at the beginning of the cycle in *The Education of the Princess,* is a signifier of peaceful resolution (since Mercury is also the god of diplomacy). As Millen and Wolf have elucidated, the caduceus is a joining of two warring snakes of opposite sexes. Marie was responsible for maintaining the peace so hard-won by Henri IV, yet in the context of her recent (and temporary) reconciliation with Louis, the caduceus and the image as whole must be read as a statement about their relationship. *The Full Reconciliation* draws on conventional interpretations of the Assumption, the Coronation of the Virgin, and images of the Virgin as Woman of the

[76] Ibid.

Apocalypse—all of which were often collapsed into a single pictorial narrative in the Catholic tradition (**figs. 44-45**). Though in the *Medici Cycle's* version the figure of Providence, or Fate, replaces that of the archangel Michael, the message remains the same: that virtue triumphs over vice, leading to the peaceful and divinely sanctioned reunion between mother and son**.** In a form of iconographic blending fitting for the *Medici Cycle,* the monster defeated by Marie and Louis (with a little help from their friends) can be read as both the seven-headed beast from the Book of Revelation, or as the multi-headed hydra from classical mythology.

Writing in 1638 on behalf of the freshly exiled dowager queen (and one of the few to do so), Louis XIII's minister of finance, Claude de Bullion, had stressed two reasons for the king to consider reconciling with his mother: that Marie de' Medici was a pious, good Catholic who bolstered Louis' God-given authority, and simply, that Marie was Louis' mother, and he could not be happy without his mother's company.[77] Bullion's letter was written more than a decade after the completion of the *Medici Cycle,* but *The Full Reconciliation* promotes the impression that Marie felt similarly.

[77] BNF MS Dupuy 590, fol. 258, 111.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION: THE DIVINE DESTINY OF MARIE IN THE *MEDICI CYCLE*

Though this study of Marian imagery in the *Medici Cycle* is far from exhaustive, it has offered an attempt to contextualize Rubens' images more securely within early seventeenth-century France and to provide a sharper lens through which to view Marie de' Medici's patronage.

When tasked with painting the "illustrious life and heroic deeds" of Marie de' Medici, Rubens had to employ a strategy different from what he would have used to depict Henri's military victories.[78] Marie de' Medici's panegyrists extolled her piety, her virtue, and above all, her devotion to family and country. Reading the visual panegyric of the *Medici Cycle* with a Marian gloss illuminates the images' close relationship to their texts. Eulogies like those written for the queen by Pierre Matthieu and Mathieu de Morgues are particularly revelatory of the images' thematic content. Morgues' funeral oration explicitly compared Marie de' Medici with the Virgin, among other exceptional "Maries," through the queen's divinely given virtue and the suffering she endured throughout her life.[79] Though the circumstances were different, Marie, like the Virgin, also endured the loss of her son. It may have been a loss of his affection, rather than his life, but the Dowager Queen's apologists saw a poetic and exploitable parallel between both women's maternal sacrifice.

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[78] Jacques Thuillier and Jacques Foucart, *Rubens' Life of Marie de' Medici* (New York, 1970), 97.

[79] Mathieu de Morgues, *Les deux faces de la vie et de la mort de Marie de Médici, reine de France, veuve de Henri IV* (Antwerp: Plantin, 1643).

Rubens' comparison between the two women was not blasphemous; rather, comparing Marie to the archetype of female goodness was an entirely conventional means of lauding a Queen. If there are moments in the *Medici Cycle* when the tensions between Marie's authority and her demure femininity seem at odds, it is because of the complicated gender performance required of French queen regents. The expectations for female rulers were oftentimes contradictory—and were doubly so for Marie as the first legally-sanctioned regent of France.

The application of Kantorowicz's theory *The King's Two Bodies* is a standard reference for how we think of pre-modern rulership, but its application to Marie de' Medici—or any queen regent, for that matter—is complicated by the fact that she was not literally "of her husband's body." Indeed, only the issue of Henri's body, Louis XIII, could inherit the throne. It was in Louis XIII that (to paraphrase Kantorowicz) the body politic survived; the nine-year-old was crowned on the same day his father died. Yet Louis could not, in practical terms, rule: he was a child, and his ineligibility to govern revealed the fallacy of the immortal body politic. Thus, while the body politic remained latent in the body natural's minority, a third body was needed—that of the regent.

Marie's exclusion from the body politic was mirrored by Salic law, which excluded women from succession. Marie de' Medici's ability to rule, then, was restricted to regency and derived entirely from her position as Henry's widow and most importantly from her position as Queen Mother. In this context, the reason behind Rubens' decision to parallel Marie de' Medici with the Virgin in a multivalent image program is straightforward: the Virgin was the ultimate hero to Catholic women, and was heroic on the basis of her virtue and motherhood. In the Catholic tradition, the Virgin could be

queenly in her strength and authority yet remain a paragon of femininity. The gendered expectations for female rulers were oftentimes contradictory—and were doubly so for Marie as the first regent crowned, anointed, and recognized by parliament.

Marie de' Medici's coronation ceremony, which was ordered by Henri and happened to occur the day before his assassination, set a new precedent for French queens, who were generally not crowned in their own right. The *lit de justice* ceremony, held the day after Henri's death, confirmed her regency. These ceremonies of state, both of which had sacred aspects, paralleled those that sanctified Louis as the vessel for the body politic, and suggested through their similar functions that the regent acted as a temporary vessel for the body politic. If the immortal body is always the king, could the body natural, under the right circumstances, belong to the regent? Ceremonies proved a vital component in the transference of the body politic from one body natural to the next; those afforded to Marie de' Medici carried not just legal but symbolic meaning. Marie de' Medici's regency provided a unique moment in history during which it was possible to speak of the King's three bodies. This is idea is illustrated in Rubens' *The Consignment of the Regency*, where Marie acts, in her role as regent, as intermediary between the two kings (**fig.45**). The notion of a "third body," however, violated sanctified tradition; it was the system-altering claim of Marie de' Medici's regency, rather than her depiction in the *Medici Cycle,* was the true transgression of gendered boundaries.

The Marian imagery in the *Medici Cycle* comes close to constructing the divine body of the regent. Monarchs, in their dual capacity, were simultaneously above and below the law; they were subject to divine directives but superseded earthly ones.

Kantorowicz cites the Virgin Mary as an example of "certain self-contradictions which would not easily be accommodated to the definitions of any customary law of inheritance."[80] The 1605 print of *Marie de Médicis as Justicar of Henri IV* (**fig.3**) exemplifies this concept. Like the closely related *Felicity of the Regency,* this popular image recalls a scene of the Virgin Enthroned, and its text also makes explicit the uniqueness of Marie's regency. Published during his lifetime and thus implicitly sanctioned by Henri, the decision to illustrate the "History of the King" with an image of Marie de' Medici suggests that even early on the queen was considered a viable substitute for a male ruler. The parallels between Marie de' Medici and the Virgin Mary drawn upon in this image, and throughout the *Medici Cycle,* further sanctioned her claim to authority.

Rather than simply employing a baroque poetic device, Rubens evoked a comparison of Marie de' Medici with her biblical namesake as a deliberate strategy to emphasize her sovereign qualities and to legitimize her position within the political sphere. While secondary to the abundance of classicism in the *Medici Cycle,* Marian imagery is a prevalent theme in Rubens' paintings. The eight images from Rubens' *Life of Marie de' Medici* investigated most closely in this thesis (*The Birth of the Princess, The Education of the Princess, The Presentation of the Portrait, The Marriage by Proxy, The Birth of the Dauphin, The Consignment of the Regency, The Felicity of the Regency, and The Full Reconciliation*) are those that demonstrate not only the prevalence of Marian imagery but also represent significant moments in Marie's *Life* through compositions, poses, and gestures that draw on the *Life of the Virgin.* The comparison

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[80] Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 144.

between Marie de' Medici and her biblical namesake elucidates significant aspects of Marie's biography—her Florentine, Catholic heritage, her maternal devotion, and her assurance in her destiny as a Queen of France. This thesis has striven to demonstrate how a fuller understanding of Marian imagery in the *Medici Cycle* reveals a more nuanced perspective of Marie de' Medici's life, Rubens' ability to layer and blend systems of ideas, and the historical context of early seventeenth-century France.

APPENDIX

FIGURES

Figure 1. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Expulsion from Paris,* 1622-25, from Ronald Millen and Robert Wolf. *Heroic Deeds and Mystic Figures: A New Reading of Rubens' Life of Maria de' Medici* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989).

Figure 2. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Felicity of the Regency,* 1625, from Jacques Thuillier and Jacques Foucart, *Rubens' Life of Marie de' Medici (*New York: H.N. Abrams, 1970).

Figure 3. *Marie de Médicis as Justicar of Henri IV and Benefactor of Her Subjects*, from Pierre Matthieu's *Histoire de France*, 1605, in Katherine Crawford, *Perilous Performances: Gender and Regency in Early Modern France* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

Figure 4. *Virgin and Child*, Notre Dame de Paris, early 14th Century, from Helen Gardner, Fred. S. Kleiner, and Christin J. Mamiya (*Gardner's Art through the Ages*. Belmont, CA: Thomson/Wadsworth, 2005).

Figure 5. Blanche de Castile (upper left) and Louis IX, *Moralized Bible*, France, c. 1230, from Helen Gardner, Fred. S. Kleiner, and Christin J. Mamiya. *Gardner's Art through the Ages* (Belmont, CA: Thomson/Wadsworth, 2005).

Figure 6. Jean Bourdichon, *Donor Portrait of Anne de Bretagne with Saints,* from *Les Grands Heures d'Anne de Bretagne,* 1503-08, Biblothèque Nationale de France.

Figure 7. Cigoli, *Annunciation* at Montughi, c.1600-1601, image from Robert W. Berger, "Rubens and Caravaggio: A Source for a Painting from the Medici Cycle," *The Art Bulletin,* Vol. 54, No. 4 (1972).

Figure 8. Cigoli, *Annunciation* at Montughi, detail, c.1600-1601, image from Robert W. Berger, "Rubens and Caravaggio: A Source for a Painting from the Medici Cycle," *The Art Bulletin,* Vol. 54, No. 4 (1972).

Figure 9. *The Queen's Affliction at the News of His Death,* May 1610, from from Elizabeth McCartney, "A Widow's Tears, A Queen's Ambition: The Variable History of Marie de Médicis' Bereavement," in *Widowhood and Visual Culture,* edited by Allison Levy (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003).

Figure 10. *Portrait of Marie de Médicis,* 1610, from Elizabeth McCartney, "A Widow's Tears, A Queen's Ambition: The Variable History of Marie de Médicis' Bereavement," in *Widowhood and Visual Culture,* edited by Allison Levy (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003).

Figure 11. Frans Pourbus the Younger, *Marie de Médicis,* 1616, from the Art Institute of Chicago. http://www.artic.edu/aic/collections/artwork/78591

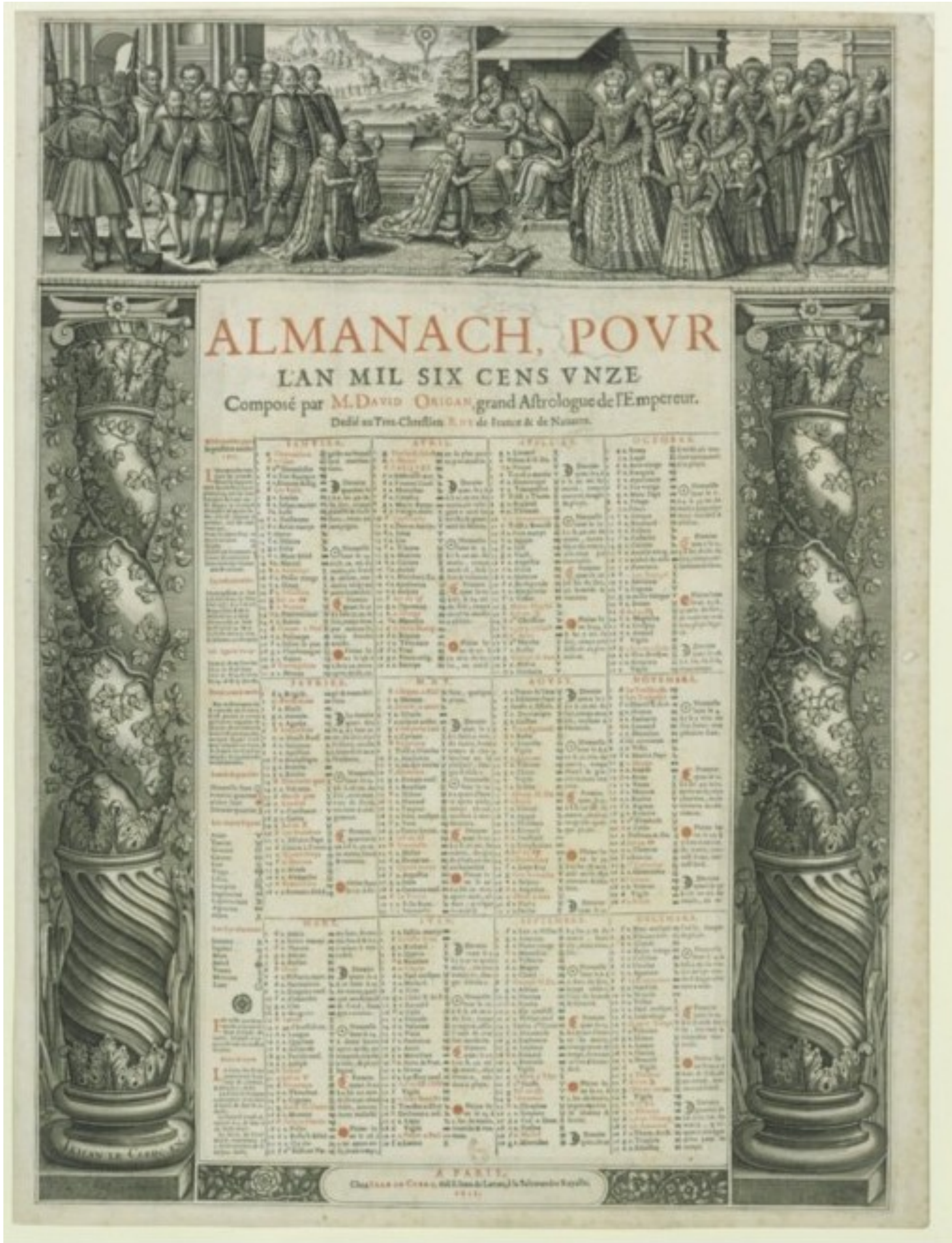

Figure 12. David Origan, *Almanac for the Year 1611,* Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

Figure 13. *Marie de Médicis assise sous un dais,* 1636-38, Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

Figure 14. Jean Perreal, *Portrait of Anne de Bretagne Receiving a Book of Famous Women*, 1508, from Antoine Dufour, Les Vies des femmes célèbres, Nantes, Musée Dobrée, MS. 17, fol. 1r, in Cynthia Brown, *The Queen's Library: Image-Making at the Court of Anne of Brittany, 1477-1514* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

Figure 15. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Marriage by Proxy,* 1622-25, from from Jacques Thuillier and Jacques Foucart, *Rubens' Life of Marie de' Medici (*New York: H.N. Abrams, 1970).

Figure 16. Albrecht Dürer, *The Marriage of the Virgin,* 1504, image from the Metropolitan Museum of Art. http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/387735

Figure 17. Alovisio Rosaccio, *Henry's Return to the Church,* after Giraldi, c. 1610-11, image from Eve Borsook, "Funeral Décor for Henri IV of France," *Art and Politics at the Medici Court* IV (1969): 201-234.

Figure 18. Matteo Rosselli, Drawing of the Battle of Arques, Uffizi, Florence, image from Eve Borsook, "Funeral Décor for Henri IV of France," *Art and Politics at the Medici Court* IV (1969): 201-234.

Figure 19. Anonymous Florentine, *The Battle of Ivry, c.* 1610, Palazzo Montecitorio, Rome, image from Eve Borsook, “Funeral Décor for Henri IV of France,” *Art and Politics at the Medici Court* IV (1969): 201-234.

Figure 20. After Jacopo da Empoli, *Henry Signing his Peace with the Church*, c. 1610, Uffizi, image from Eve Borsook, “Funeral Décor for Henri IV of France,” *Art and Politics at the Medici Court* IV (1969): 201-234.

Figure 21. Alovisio Rosaccio, *The Meeting at Lyons,* After Giraldi, 1610-11, image from Eve Borsook, "Funeral Décor for Henri IV of France," *Art and Politics at the Medici Court* IV (1969): 201-234.

Figure 22. Alovisio Rosaccio, *Henry and Marie Declaring Catholicism the State Religion,* After Girladi, 1610-11, image from Eve Borsook, "Funeral Décor for Henri IV of France," *Art and Politics at the Medici Court* IV (1969): 201-234.

Figure 23. Rosaccio, *Coronation of Marie de' Medici*, After Giraldi, 1610-11, image from Eve Borsook, "Funeral Décor for Henri IV of France," *Art and Politics at the Medici Court* IV (1969): 201-234.

Figure 24. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Battle of Ivry,* 1628, Rubenshuis, Antwerp, photograph by Alexandra Ziegler.

Figure 25. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Reconciliation of King Henry III and Henry of Navarre,* 1628, image from Julius Held, *The Oil Sketches of Peter Paul Rubens: A Critical Catalogue* (Princeton, NJ:Princeton University Press, 1980).

Figure 26. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Triumph of Henri IV,* 1628, from The Metropolitan Museum of Art. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/42.187

Figure 27. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Union of Marie de' Medici and Henri IV (Henri IV as Prince of Peace),* 1628, image from Julius Held, *The Oil Sketches of Peter Paul Rubens: A Critical Catalogue* (Princeton, NJ:Princeton University Press, 1980).

Figure 28. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Birth of the Princess,* 1622-25, image from Jacques Thuillier and Jacques Foucart, *Rubens' Life of Marie de' Medici (*New York: H.N. Abrams, 1970).

Figure 29. Jan Breughel the Elder and Peter Paul Rubens, *Madonna in a Garland of Flowers,* 1616-18, Alte Pinakothek, Munich. http://www.pinakothek.de/en/node/35972

Figure 30. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Education of the Princess,* 1622-25, image from Jacques Thuillier and Jacques Foucart, *Rubens' Life of Marie de' Medici (*New York: H.N. Abrams, 1970).

Figure 31. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Education of the Virgin,* 1625-26, image from the Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal. https://expositionvirtuelle.ca/oeuvre-artwork/1982_8-fra

Figure 32. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Presentation of the Portrait,* 1622-25, image from Jacques Thuillier and Jacques Foucart, *Rubens' Life of Marie de' Medici (*New York: H.N. Abrams, 1970).

Figure 33. Peter Paul Rubens, *Madonna della Valicella,* 1608, image from Geraldine Johnson, “Pictures Fit for a Queen: Peter Paul Rubens and the Marie de’ Medici Cycle,” *Art History* Vol. 16, No. 3 (1993): 447-469.

Figure 34. Albrecht Dürer, *Die Heilige Dreifaltigkeit,* 1511, image from Museum Kloster Abach, Ostbayern. http://www.museum-asbach.eu/duerer/html/raum_3.html

Figure 35. Schelte Bolswert (1576-1659) after Rubens, *The Marriage of the Virgin,* image from the Art Institute of Chicago. http://www.artic.edu/aic/collections/artwork/33?search_no=1&index=4

Figure 36. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Birth of the Dauphin,* 1622-25, image from Jacques Thuillier and Jacques Foucart, *Rubens' Life of Marie de' Medici (*New York: H.N. Abrams, 1970).

Figure 37. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Meeting at Lyons,* 1622-25, image from Jacques Thuillier and Jacques Foucart, *Rubens' Life of Marie de' Medici (*New York: H.N. Abrams, 1970).

Figure 38. Peter Paul Rubens, *Holy Family,* c. 1630, image from the Metropolitan Museum of Art. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/02.24

Figure 39. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Consignment of the Regency,* 1622-25, image from Jacques Thuillier and Jacques Foucart, *Rubens' Life of Marie de' Medici (*New York: H.N. Abrams, 1970).

Figure 40. Thomas de Leu after Isaïe Fournier, *Maria de' Medici as an Allegory of Justice,* 1609, image from Katherine Crawford, *Perilous Performances: Gender and Regency in Early Modern France* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

Figure 41. Giotto, *Ognissanti Madonna,* 1310, image from Helen Gardner, Fred. S. Kleiner, and Christin J. Mamiya, *Gardner's Art through the Ages* (Belmont, CA: Thomson/Wadsworth, 2005).

Figure 42. Guido Reni, *Charity,* early seventeenth century, image from the Metropolitan Museum of Art. http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/437422

Figure 43. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Full Reconciliation,* 1622-25, from Jacques Thuillier and Jacques Foucart, *Rubens' Life of Marie de' Medici (*New York: H.N. Abrams, 1970).

Figure 44. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Virgin as the Woman of the Apocalypse,* 1623-24, image from the J. Paul Getty Museum.
http://www.getty.edu/art/collection/objects/762/peter-paul-rubens-the-virgin-as-the-woman-of-the-apocalypse-flemish-about-1623-1624/

Figure 45. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Coronation of the Virgin,* c.1633, image from the Museum of Fine Arts, Brussels. http://www.fine-arts-museum.be/fr/la-collection/peter-paul-rubens-et-atelier-le-couronnement-de-la-vierge?artist=rubens-peter-paul-1

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