Textual Practice
Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713721880

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Online Publication Date: 01 June 1998

To cite this Article Fisher, Will(1998)'Gabrielle's new clothes: Cultural valuations and evaluations',Textual Practice,12:2,251 — 267
To link to this Article: DOI: 10.1080/09502369808582308
URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09502369808582308

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Gabrielle's new clothes: cultural valuations and evaluations

The curtains part to reveal the scene: two women sit together in their bathtub facing the spectator. On the left, one of the women reaches out and firmly but delicately pinches the nipple of her partner between thumb and forefinger; on the right, the second woman holds a ring in exactly the same manner. The gesture is as enigmatic as the smile of the Mona Lisa. Its mysteriousness, and indeed the mysteriousness of the painting in general, is increased by the fact that very little is actually 'known' about the picture: we do not know, for example, who painted it, nor the original title (or if it even had one), nor the exact date of composition. Even the identity of the bathers has been the source of much debate among art historians.

This dearth of concrete information about the portrait usually entitled *Gabrielle D'Estrées and One of her Sisters* has never stopped anyone from deciphering it. On the contrary, it might even be said to have facilitated the process. I want to begin by looking at several recent 'texts' in which the painting has appeared in order to show some of the different meanings that have been attributed to it. In 1991, for example, *Gabrielle* appeared on the cover of *L'Evenement du Jeudi* (the French equivalent of *Newsweek*) as an illustration for an article on lesbian chic in France[1] (see Figure 2). The headline announced an 'Inquest about Homosexuality among Women' and proclaimed that lesbianism had 'become a social phenomenon'. While it may seem somewhat incongruous to use a Renaissance painting to illustrate a mode of sexual practice which – if we are to believe the editors – had only become 'a social phenomenon' in 1991, we can nevertheless see that the decision to reproduce the image in conjunction with the article clearly implied that the portrait ought to be seen as homoerotic.

The *Gabrielle* portrait was similarly encoded when a reproduction was offered for sale in the *Shocking Gray* catalogue.[2] *Shocking Gray* is an

Textual Practice 12(2), 1998, 251–267 0950–236X

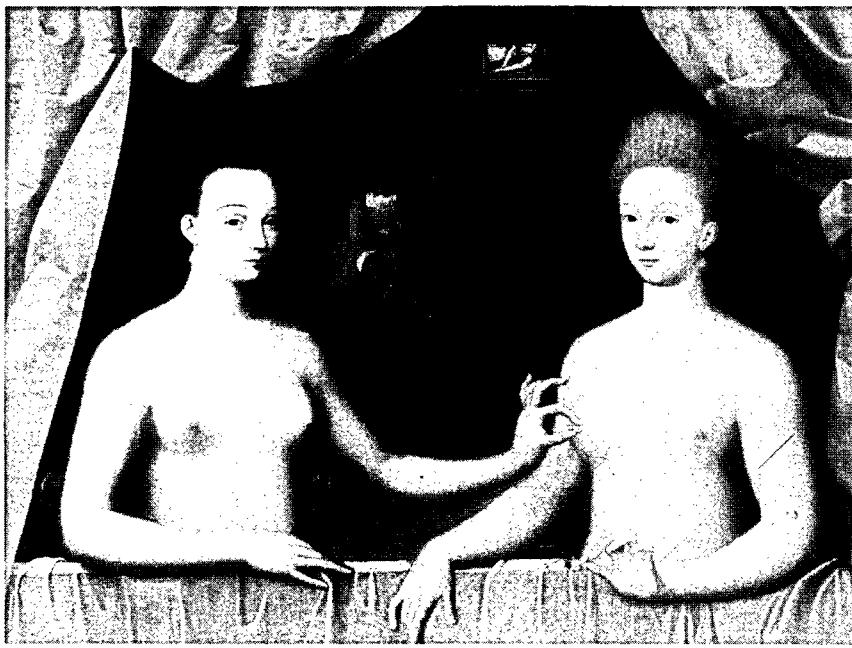

Figure 1 *Gabrielle D'Estrées and One of her Sisters.* © RMN

American mail order catalogue peddling gifts and knick-knacks to gays and lesbians; they sell everything from rainbow bumper stickers to 'same-sexmas' greeting cards. In the catalogue, the poster was placed on the same page as a poster of a 'sensual' photograph by David Morgan entitled *The Embrace* (see Figure 3). The layout sets up a symbolic equivalence between the two images and suggests that the interaction of the two women in the bathtub might culminate in something like the scene in *The Embrace.* At the very least, the *Shocking Gray* catalogue announces that the *Gabrielle* portrait is available for consumption as a queer icon. Finally, it is worth noting that the inferred lesbian erotic content may not be the only reason for the image's popularity: it may also be appropriated as an artefact of lesbian history, as a lesbian artistic 'masterpiece', or even perhaps as a kind of lesbian camp.

If we traverse the ideological distance from queer culture to high culture – from Lesbos to the Louvre – the meanings attributed to *Gabrielle D'Estrées and One of her Sisters* change radically. A placard placed beside the actual picture in the Louvre provides the following information: 'The ostentatious gesture may allude to the maternity of Gabrielle and to the birth, in 1594, of César de Vendôme, Henry IV's illegitimate son.'[3] A recent guidebook for the Louvre is much less hesitant in its explanation

Figure 2 Cover of *L'Evenement du Jeudi*, 3–9 October 1991.
© *L'Evenement du Jeudi*

Figure 3 David Morgan, *The Embrace*. © David Morgan

of the 'ostentatious gesture': 'in the opinion of most art historians, the mistress of Henry IV [i.e. Gabrielle D'Estrées – the woman on the right-hand side of the painting] would seem to be represented with one of her sisters, whose intimate gesture signifies the approaching maternity of the royal favourite, pregnant with the monarch's natural son, the future Duc de Vendôme.'[4] Both of these descriptions suggest that the painting should be understood as a kind of allegory in which the 'intimate gesture' indicates that Gabrielle – the woman whose nipple is being squeezed – is pregnant with Henry IV's son. Read accordingly, the portrait becomes a document of monarchical history, and, as such, is located firmly within the tradition that the Louvre as a cultural institution seeks to celebrate and preserve.[5]

But although the guidebook purports to offer the definitive explanation of the painting (authorized by 'most art historians'), its analysis is by no means self-evident. Rather, it is the product of a complex and often speculative process. The procedures used to generate information about the image become evident when we ask even the most rudimentary questions, such as 'How do we know who the women in the bathtub are?' The identification of the bathers is derived primarily from a second version of the painting (currently at Fontainebleau) in which the name 'GABRIELLE D'ESTRÉES, DUCHESS DE BEAUFORT' is painted above the woman on the right and 'JULIENNE HIPPOLITE D'ESTRÉES, DVCHESS DE VILLARS' is painted above the woman on the left[6] (see Figure 4). I would argue that this Fontainebleau version of the painting is not only the source of the

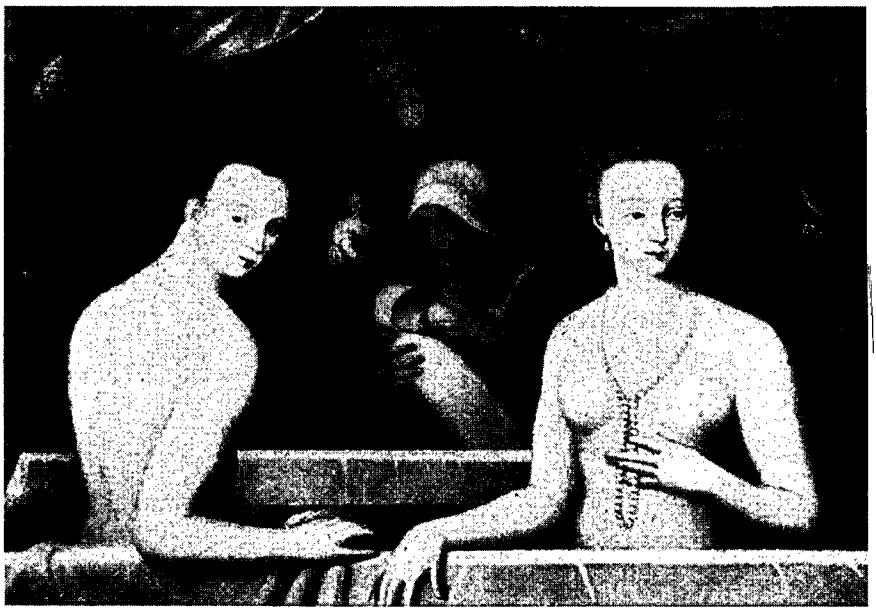

Figure 4 *Gabrielle D'Estrées and One of her Sisters* (Fontainebleau version). © RMN

identifications, but also one of the reasons that the painting at the Louvre has been understood as a political allegory. In the background of this second tableau, there is a child suckling the breast of a wet-nurse with the name 'CESAR DUC DE VENDÔME' painted above him. This figure may have led art historians to see the 'intimate gesture' in the version at the Louvre as a reference to Gabrielle's maternity, and more specifically as a reference to the birth of 'the future duc du Vendôme'.

It is important to note, however, that the names on the Fontainebleau image almost certainly date from a different period than the image at the Louvre. Although Julienne's title is listed as 'DVCHESSE DE VILLARS' on the painting, her husband was not given the title of Duke until 1627, almost thirty years after the supposed date of composition of the painting at the Louvre.[7] Thus it would appear that either the entire Fontainebleau composition was painted long after the one at the Louvre or the names were added to it years after it had been painted. In either case, the identifications were clearly not painted at the same time as the image at the Louvre. While they (and the interpretation based on them) may nevertheless be correct, they certainly stand in a more highly mediated relation to the picture at the Louvre than the entry from the guidebook would imply.

The significance of other elements in the composition are equally difficult to establish. Take, for example, the ring held by Gabrielle. When the image is read as a political allegory, this ring is understood as a visual allusion to Henry's promise to marry Gabrielle. Art historians note that Henry had publicly given Gabrielle his coronation ring as a symbol of his matrimonial intentions.[8] The problem, however, is that the ring depicted in the painting is clearly *not* Henry's coronation ring, and hence not the ring he had given Gabrielle. Whereas the coronation ring was set with a large diamond, the ring in the picture is set with a sapphire.[9]

I want to stress at the outset that in showing how the meanings of the *Gabrielle* portrait are produced – and some of the difficulties with the procedure – I do not mean to imply that they are simply 'wrong'. The point of this discussion is not to adjudicate between the various, often conflicting explications of the painting and determine once and for all what it is 'really' about. Instead, I want to look at the interpretations themselves from a social and historical perspective. In particular, I want to understand how they have been produced and how they have effected the *cultural valuation* of the image – that is to say the process by which it has come to be consecrated as an icon and bearer of cultural capital (to use Pierre Bourdieu's terms).[10] In order to do this, I will situate the assorted readings in relation to the individuals and institutions that create, value and disseminate them: critics, art dealers, museums, patrons, collectors, and even, as we have seen, popular magazines and mail order catalogues.

Although I will attempt to maintain a productive tension between the competing interpretations throughout this article, I will be concentrating primarily on the 'queer' responses to the painting. My interest in this tradition of 'queer' reception is twofold. First of all, I believe that the 'lesbian' accounts have played a crucial role in the process of cultural valuation. This will become clearer if we look – briefly – at the only full-length article written about the painting in the last thirty years: Roger Trinquet's 'L'allégorie politique dans la peinture Française au XVIe siècle: Les Dames au Bain' (1968).[11] Trinquet's article is of interest here not so much for the specifics of the interpretation that it proposes, but for the way in which that interpretation is positioned rhetorically *vis-à-vis* the 'lesbian' interpretation.[12]

At the end of Trinquet's essay, he explicitly rejects the readings that 'appeal to a perverse eroticism', stating that 'some recent articles have identified – incorrectly to my mind – sapphic overtones in the painting'.[13] But if Trinquet eventually renounces the 'sapphic' reading, he does so only after having invoked it on several occasions. For example, he claims that the bathers are 'joined in the most equivocal kind of promiscuity' and that 'it must be acknowledged' that the painting has 'an insolent aspect'.[14]

Trinquet's invocation of the 'lesbian' interpretation is largely rhetorical: he attempts to arouse anxiety (or perhaps interest) by repeatedly raising the possibility of a homoerotic interpretation, only to later repudiate the very possibility that he has entertained. It is, in fact, clear that Trinquet's disavowal is strategic: immediately after he explicitly acknowledges and rejects the analysis which 'appeal[s] to a perverse erotics', he provides his own explanation of the gesture. In short, Trinquet establishes his own reading in contradistinction to, and as a disavowal of, the sapphic reading.

Trinquet's strategic use of the interpretations that 'appeal to a perverse erotics' illustrates – in miniature – how the more general cultural evaluation of the *Gabrielle* portrait might have been shaped by a history of 'queer' interpretation. But I believe that there is yet another reason to reclaim the tradition of 'lesbian' reading: it can help to fill the persistent silence around female homoeroticism, at least insofar as it provides some insight into the way in which people at different historical junctures understood and dealt with a representation of a 'sexual' encounter between women. We need, I think, to explore more fully the border between the history of art and the history of sexuality.

Sweet waters

The first recorded homoerotic reading of the *Gabrielle* portrait dates from the beginning of the seventeenth century. Interestingly, this occurs at about the same time that the political allegory was being invoked through the names painted on the second version of the image. In Brantôme's *Lives of Gallant Ladies*, he tells a story about a group of women viewing the picture:

> A group of ladies and their servants had gone to view this beautiful house, when their gaze fell upon some lovely and rare paintings in the gallery. In one of the paintings which they looked at, two extremely beautiful women were represented in their bath, touching, feeling, rubbing, fingering, groping each other, and what's more, touching the breast so gently and delicately that even a cold recluse or hermit would get hot and excited. This is the reason why one of these great ladies – whom I even know and have talked to – lost herself in this painting and, turning to her [male] servant as if inflamed by a lustful passion, said: 'We've stayed too long, let's get into [or literally "mount"] my carriage quickly and go to my dwelling, because I can't contain my ardor any longer; I must quench it. It's burning!' Thus departing, she went with her servant to partake

> of that good-water that is so sweet without sugar, and that her servant will give to her little vase [burette].[15]

In this passage, Brantôme clearly – even excessively – imagines the interaction of two women in the painting to be sexual: he says that they are 'touching, feeling, rubbing, fingering, groping each other'.

In addition, Brantôme claims that the portrait induces 'a great lady' to have sex with her male servant. The language that Brantôme uses to describe this encounter indicates that he considers it to be both elicited by, and coextensive with, the homoerotic activity of the bathers in the painting. He explicitly uses a bathing image to indicate that the woman and her servant have sex: he writes that they go to 'partake of that good-water that is so sweet without sugar'. We should remember that, in the early modern period, sugar was often used to 'perfume' bath water, along with wine, milk or oil.[16]

But even if Brantôme likens the heteroerotic 'bathing' of the female viewer and her servant to the homoerotic 'bathing' of the women in their bathtub, he is also anxious to distinguish between the two. When he insists that the 'bathing' of the woman and her servant will be 'sweet' *without* any additives such as 'sugar', he implies that the two women would need a supplement to sweeten their 'bathing'. Trinquet's assumptions here are consistent with other early modern responses to female homoeroticism as they have been described by contemporary critics like Valerie Traub and Judith Brown. According to Traub and Brown, most of the historical records about female sodomy in the Renaissance focus upon the use of prosthetic devices for penetration.[17]

Even if Brantôme is thus clearly capable of imagining female homoeroticism (albeit in a limited way), it is worth noting that he does so for a predominantly male audience. According to its stated purpose, the *Lives of Gallant Ladies* is meant to inform (and no doubt titillate) male courtiers about their female counterparts. Thus it is hardly surprising to find that even though Brantôme imagines the interaction between the two bathers to be homoerotic, and even though he imagines a female viewer being aroused by that interaction, he ultimately suggests that the viewer will have her 'burning' desire quenched by a man. Brantôme, then, only acknowledges sapphic desire or energy within a heterosexualizing narrative in which the passion aroused by the homoerotic image would be satisfied through an encounter with a man.

But in spite of these projections, Brantôme's story does seem to mime elements of the painting itself. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that his narrative does the work of rearticulating certain elements within the painting and thus shaping how the image will be seen. For example, Brantôme stages his story as a revelation of events that take place within

the domestic sphere. He invites the reader to watch the group of women as they go about their daily activities. When viewed in this context, the painting itself could be said to offer a comparable revelation. It is as if the heavy red curtains in the composition are drawn back to disclose a private scene.

If we were to pursue the parallels between Brantôme's account and the *Gabrielle* portrait further, we might say that in both of these instances the domestic space is the *mis-en-scène* for the presentation of female sexuality. Furthermore, in both cases, this eroticized vision of the domestic is juxtaposed with a vision of the domestic as the place where female desire is *constrained.* In Brantôme's account, he envisions two different spaces with two different relationships to female sexuality: the space of the gallery is associated with the repression of the female spectator's desire (she says she must leave there because she is inflamed) and her home is associated with its expression (she says she must go to her dwelling in order to 'quench' her burning desire). Analogously, the painting itself is divided into two spaces – foreground and background. Whereas the foreground scene presents the two women's eroticized interaction, the background scene is constructed as the space where feminine desire is restrained: in this part of the picture, the female servant is screened from the heat of the fire by a large object, and thus prevented from 'getting hot'. In each of these texts, the eroticized domestic space is dislocated from its repressive counterpart. Consequently, we might say that if both of these 'texts' reveal women's sexuality within the domestic space, they simultaneously gesture towards a fantasy of the domestic as imagined within Renaissance patriarchal theories.[18]

But the distinctions between these two spaces are also constantly threatening to break down. In the painting, the foreground scene is, of course, as much a part of the domestic scene as the background. Similarly, in Brantôme's story, the gallery space is itself a domestic space (it is in a 'beautiful house'). Moreover, despite Brantôme's construction of the events, female desire is not entirely absent from the gallery space. It appears both in the form of the painting itself and in the form of the female viewer's reaction to it: the viewer performatively expresses her desire in that space, even as she claims that it can only be expressed within the confines of her home.

Brantôme's story, then, is not as straightforward as it might seem (despite its apparent audience and aims). Indeed, there are a number of possible ways of understanding the erotics of his narrative. It is possible, for example, to see the cross-class encounter between the 'great lady' and her servant as being partially equivalent to the homoerotic encounter of the bathers. Similarly, it is possible that the female viewer identifies with the male gaze of the servant, and perhaps desires him homoerotically. Or

finally, it is possible that she identifies with the male gaze of the servant and therefore with his appropriation of the aristocratic female body (in the painting, her own). I make these suggestions in order to foreground some of the disparate ways in which desire might circulate in this narrative.

So whatever its limitations, Brantôme's text does provide some insight into the ways in which sexuality may have been conceptualized before the emergence of any absolute homosexual/heterosexual binary. As we have seen, space and location seem to be pivotal erotic categories both in the anecdote and in the painting itself (or at least in the painting as produced by Brantôme's account).[19] In Brantôme's story, the only stipulations that the female viewer makes about her desire have to do with the space in which they can be expressed (as opposed to the manner in which she will satisfy herself, or to the gender of the partner needed to satisfy her, or even to the need for a partner at all). She simply says that she must 'go to [her] dwelling' and that she has 'stayed too long' in the gallery space.

Brantôme's narrative therefore reveals the historicity of the eroticized readings of the Gabrielle portrait. While some aspects of this story may look quite familiar to modern readers (for example, the idea of female homoeroticism as a prelude for heteroeroticism), there are others which will seem much less so (the centrality of space, the preoccupation with the use of prosthetic devices). Moreover, Brantôme's 'reading' clearly demonstrates that the political allegory is not the only historical interpretation of the image, meaning that it is not the only one rooted in the Renaissance, nor is it the only one which Renaissance viewers could have imagined. Indeed, Trinquet's distinction between the 'historical' interpretation of the painting as a political allegory and the 'ahistorical' interpretation of it as sexually 'perverse' is itself ahistorical.

The painting and the police

After Brantôme's account, the *Gabrielle* portrait does not seem to have attracted much attention – at least in terms of written commentary – until the beginning of the nineteenth century. Dr Ver Heyden de Lancey provides some insight into the painting's whereabouts at that time in his article 'A picture of Gabrielle D'Estrées attributed to François Pourbus Le Jeune' (1935):

> In the first half of the nineteenth century [the painting] was hanging in the Prefecture of Police in Paris. Nobody knew why or how it came there; [it was] placed above a door in one of the halls to which the public had access.[20]

Ver Heyden de Lancey goes on to explain that one day a 'pusillanimous high official' noticed the painting and 'conceived [of] the idea to screen [sic] the picture . . . from the curious public gaze, by drawing a green curtain in front of it'.[21]

Although it was conventional to hang curtains around paintings in the nineteenth century, the practice does not adequately explain the decision to veil this particular painting at this particular moment. It might be argued that the official simply wanted to repress the image either on account of the nude figures or on account of its sexual nature. But certainly *that* could have been accomplished more effectively either by removing the picture from the wall or by destroying it altogether.

Instead, the official has the image veiled, *visibly marking it as that which cannot be seen.*[22] So even though the image may appear publicly, it can do so only under the veil of secrecy.[23] The covered image could be seen as a material equivalent of the open secret (that is to say, a secret that is always already known, and in some obscure sense known to be known). As such, it would have occupied a space which was analogous to the social space occupied by homosexuality in the nineteenth century, as described by D.A. Miller and Eve Sedgwick. According to Sedgwick, 'by the end of the nineteenth century, when it had become fully current . . . that knowledge meant sexual knowledge and secrets sexual secrets, there had in fact developed one particular sexuality [i.e. homosexuality] which was distinctively constituted *as secrecy*'.[24] When seen from this perspective, it appears that the official places the portrait in a position which corresponds to the position occupied by homosexuality itself.

Cultural consecration

If for much of the nineteenth century the portrait was considered unfit for public consumption, then, we might ask, how did it come to be consecrated as a great work of art? In other words, how did the painting get from the prefecture to the Louvre? One of the first steps in this process was the removal of the picture from the police station, and hence its dislocation from the 'illicit'. Ver Heyden de Lancey describes how this transition occurred:

> Somebody had the happy inspiration to expose [the veiled image] to the artistic and art-trained eyes of those called upon to take part in [a] civic function [at the police station]. . . . In preparation [for this] special function . . . a thorough cleaning of the picture itself was ordered. . . . [But u]pon drawing the curtain, [they found only] an empty picture frame.[25]

Ironically, the theft of the painting from the police office seems to have precipitated a more general cultural valuation of the image. Lost, the picture could be culturally relocated.

The *Gabrielle* portrait finally reappeared in Auxerre in the South of France where it was purchased by the Baron Jerôme Pinchon for 450 francs. Six years later, in 1897, he auctioned it off. In the auction catalogue, the painting is described as follows:

> Gabrielle sits on the right, wearing pearl ear-rings and holds a golden ring set with a sapphire, whilst the Duchess de Villars, on the left . . . touches her sister's breast with her left hand, in allusion to the birth of the Duc de Vendôme. In the background a nurse is sitting occupied with the baby's outfit.[26]

While purporting to be a neutral description of the painting, this passage ushers in a particular interpretation: it describes the 'intimate gesture' as an 'allusion to' Gabrielle's pregnancy and 'describes' the woman in the background as a 'nurse' who is sewing a 'baby's outfit'.

The catalogue thus (re)articulates the painting as a politicized allegory and for the first time attaches such a reading to the painting in an institutional context. At the auction, the portrait was sold for 2,050 francs, almost five times the original buying price. This substantial increase in the monetary value of the image may be partially understood in relation to the interpretive intervention of the catalogue. The increase in symbolic capital helped to produce a corresponding increase in monetary valuation.[27] Moreover, the symbolic value of this particular reading was undoubtedly augmented by the fact that it provided a way of 'explaining' the interaction of the two women. And finally, by (re)framing the image as political allegory, the catalogue makes way for the more general cultural valuation of the image – a project which would find its eventual consummation in the picture being acquired by the Louvre.

The painting stripped bare

The process of consecration, however, is never complete; the 'lesbian' reading continues to circulate alongside the authorized reading. While hermeneutic conflict might be said to be inherent in the process of interpretation itself, it is particularly evident in the case of the *Gabrielle* portrait. Indeed, the painting itself seems to mark its ambivalence about how it is to be read by not specifying any particular, or ideal, spectator. The spectator's place, as it is represented in the painting, is at the exact centre of the composition. There is a mirror on the wall of the background scene, midway between the faces of the two women. This mirror is positioned

directly opposite the space of the viewer as determined by the gazes of the two bathers. But if the viewer tries to apprehend his place in the painting, he finds that he can apprehend nothing. The looking-glass is a lusterless black. It reveals nothing; it refuses to assign the space of spectatorship to anyone.

I have deliberately echoed Foucault's reading of Velazquez's *Las Meninas* in the preceding paragraph because I want to emphasize the differences between the two paintings.[28] Velazquez includes a reflection of the king and queen in the mirror at the back of his painting, thus providing a material trace of the ideal spectator. For Foucault, this trace acts as a nodal point around which a whole constellation of meanings can cohere. By contrast, the *Gabrielle* portrait's refusal to ascribe the space of the spectator to anyone suggests that there is no privileged viewer of the painting. In fact, not only does the painting not specify an ideal spectator, it *actively marks this absence* by including the mirror in the first place.

If this refusal ultimately opens up the painting to a range of divergent interpretations, this does not imply a radical (and ultimately utopic) indeterminacy of meaning. Throughout this article, I have tried to show the way in which the interpretive interventions are always constrained both by elements within the composition itself and by the specific historical and cultural milieu in which those interpretations are produced and valued. While the idea of viewing the *Gabrielle* portrait *au naturel* remains a powerful cultural fantasy, the 'naked' body of the painting can never be fully visible as such since there is no view of it which is not framed by a historically determined horizon of preunderstanding. In fact, we might even say that it is precisely *because* the meanings and values that clothe the image can never be completely stripped away that these things must be continually fought for. When critics imagine a consensus about the evaluation of a work of art (as is succinctly demonstrated by the guide's formulation 'in the opinion of most art historians'), they are forced to deny not so much the reality of interpretive conflict as the constitutive nature of that conflict. As Pierre Bourdieu puts it, 'it is not sufficient to say that the history of the field [of reception] is the history of the struggle for the monopolistic power to impose the legitimate categories [and, I would add, narratives] of perception and appreciation. [Instead, t]he *struggle itself* creates the history of the field'.[29]

Notes

This article began as a postcard which I sent Valerie Traub while I was living in France, and grew out of the ensuing dialogue with her. In the early stages, my

neighbour David Romàn was a paradigm of 'critical generosity', giving me fabulous feedback as well as uncovering useful material. Finally, Peter Stallybrass has guided me throughout the entire writing process. Not only did he point me in the right direction theoretically, but he read numerous drafts and never ceased to provide brilliant advice.

I would also like to thank the people who have commented on the article: Rebecca Bach, Stephen Best, Sheila ffolliot, Ann Jones, Bill MacGreggor, Jeff Masten, Kerry Moore, Karen Newman, Phyllis Rackin, Nancy Vickers, and the anonymous reader at *Textual Practice*. Not to be forgotten is Sophie Carter, who helped to put the finishing touches to the article.

1 'Homosexualité féminine: le monde du silence', *L'Evenement du Jeudi*, 3–9 October 1991, Number 361, pp. 82–96.
2 I am grateful to David Romàn for giving me a copy of this catalogue.
3 The French reads: 'Le geste ostentatoire pourrait faire allusion à la maternité de Gabrielle et à la naissance, en 1594, de César de Vendôme, bâtard d'Henri IV.'
4 Jean Clay and Josetta Contreras, *The Louvre* (Paris: Chartwell Books, Inc, 1980), p. 188. Similarly, Charles Sterling and Hélène Adhémar claim that 'le tableau et généralment considéré comme une allégorie à la naissance de l'un des enfants naturels de Henri IV', in *Peintures: École Française, XIV^e, XV^e et XVI^e Siècles* (Paris: Éditions de Musées Nationaux, 1965), pp. 33–4. Some version of this interpretation is mentioned in many discussions of the painting. For example, see Christiane Deroy and Corrine Laporte, *Au Louvre: Un Voyage au Coeur de la Peinture*, Preface by Pierre Rosenburg (Paris: Fleurs Idées, 1989), p. 18, *Louvre, Paris* (New York: Newsweek/Great Museums of the World, 1967), p. 79, *L'École de Fountainebleau* (Paris: Éditions de Musées Nationaux, 1972), p. 214, and S. Reinarch, 'Diane de Poitiers et Gabrielle D'Estrées', *Gazette des Beaux Artes*, Series 5, Vol. 2, August to September 1920, p. 172.
5 On how the universal survey museum works to legitimize the state, see Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach, 'The universal survey museum', *Art History*, 3(4), 1980, pp. 457–61. On the more general ideological underpinnings of museums, see *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, ed. Ivan Karp and Stephen D. Lavine (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991).
6 The painting with the names inscribed upon it has been acquired by the Louvre (RF1970–47) and is currently at Fontainebleau. Roger Trinquet discusses how the bathers are identified in his article, 'L'allégorie politique dans la peinture Francaise au XVI^e siècle: Les Dames au Bain', *Social Histoire Art Français*, 1968, p. 14.
7 Anseleme, P., *Histoire généalogique . . .*, Tome V, pp. 270–2.
8 Hélèn Adhémar claims that the painting may have been executed in 1599 when Gabrielle received 'la bague avec la-quelle [Henri IV] avait éposé la France le jour de son sacré'. *Portraits du XVIe Siècle du Louvre*, no. 23. This anecdote is also told by Adrien Desclozeaux in his biography of Gabrielle: he says that when Henri 'fixed the day of the marriage [with Gabrielle], he placed upon her finger the ring with which he himself had wed France on the day of his coronation' (p. 291), *Gabrielle D'Estrées*, translated from the French by the author (London: Arthur Humphreys, 1907), p. 291. The French version is *Gabrielle D'Estrées, marquise de Monceaux, duchesse de Beaufort* (Paris: H. Champion, 1889).

9 The coronation ring that Henry gave Gabrielle is described in an inventory by Desclozeaux in his biography of Gabrielle.

10 On the concepts of cultural production and valuation and the more general notion of cultural capital, see especially Pierre Bourdieu's *The Field of Cultural Production*, edited and introduced by Randall Johnson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), especially 'Part I: The field of cultural production' and the section 'Outline for a sociological theory of art perception'. See also his *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans Richard Nice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), and *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, trans Richard Nice (London: Sage Publications, 1977).

For discussions of these and related topics, see John Guillory's *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1993), and Jean Baudrillard's *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, trans with an Introduction by Charles Levin (New York: Telos Press, 1981).

11 In fact, this appears to be the only extended commentary on the painting since the 1930s. 'L'allégorie politique dans la peinture Francaise au XVI^{e} siècle: Les Dames au Bain', *Bulletin de la Société de l'Histoire de l'art Français*, 1967, pp. 7–25.

12 Trinquet argues that the figure on the left is Henriette d'Entragues, the woman who became Henri IV's mistress shortly after Gabrielle died, and thus that the picture commemorates this 'changing of the guard'. Furthermore, he suggests that the 'intimate gesture' is meant to call attention to the beautiful breasts of Gabrielle. According to Trinquet, this kind of allusion was typical of a court not known for its refinement. He even goes so far as to cite one of the court poets to support his point. The poet describes Gabrielle as follows: 'Une gorge de lys sur un beau sein d'alabâtre / Oú deux fermes tétins sont assis et plantés.' Having assembled this evidence, Trinquet claims that the 'allusion appears perfectly transparent'.

While I am not particularly interested in contesting Trinquet's reading, it must be noted that seeing the gesture as a celebration of Gabrielle's corporeal beauty may seem somewhat problematic given the highly stylized appearance of the female bodies in the portrait, not to mention the similarities between them. In addition, I would point out that the emphatic insistence on the incontrovertibility of the allusion might in fact be taken as an index of the amount of cultural work needed to substantiate it. The court poet Triquet cites it in J. de Nesme, *Le Miracle de la Paix* (Paris, 1598), p. 32.

13 The French reads: 'certaines critiques récents ont subordoré – à tort, je le crois – des relents de saphisme' (p. 13). It is worth noting, however, that the 'critiques' to which Trinquet refers are in fact simply a single line in a single book.

14 Ibid., p. 11.

15 The French reads:

> une troupe de dames avec leurs serviteurs estant allé voir cette belle maison, leur veue s'adressa sur de beux et rares tableaux qui estoyent en ladicte gallerie. A elles se présenta un tableau fort beau, ou estoyent représentées force belles dames nues qui estoyent aux bains, qui s'entre-touchoient, se palpoyent, se manioyent, et frottoyent, s'entre-mesloyent, se tastonnoyent, et, qui plus est, se faisoyent le poil tant gentiment et si proprement en monstrant tout, qu'une froide recluse ou hermite s'en fust eschauffée

> et esmeue; et c'est pourquoy une dame grande, dont j'ay ouy parler et cogneue, se perdant en ce tableau, dit à son serviteur, en se tournant vers luy comme enragée de cette rage d'amour: 'C'est trop demeuré icy: montons en carosse promptement, et allons en mon logis, car je ne puis plus contenir cette ardeur; il la faut aller esteindre: c'est trop bruslé.' Et ainsi partit, et alla avec son serviteur prendre de cette bonne-eau qui est si douce sans sucre, et que son serviteur luy donna de sa petite burette.

Brantôme, Pierre de Bordeille, *Ouvres Completes de Pierre de Bordeille, Seigneur de Brantôme* (Paris: J. Renuard, 1864–82), Vol. IX, pp. 49–50. The description is part of the work entitled *Les Vies des Dames Gallantes*, published for the first time in 1665–6, but written near the end of Brantôme's life some fifty years earlier (he died in 1614).

16 According to Salomon Reinarch, baths were often perfumed in the Renaissance. Reinarch also claims that it was therefore not unusual for women to bathe together for economic reasons. He even provides an example, from 1467, in which the king and queen were received at a nobleman's house and the women bathed together.

Reinarch uses this information to 'explain' the painting. But even if women did frequently bathe together at the time, this would not explain the decision to depict one of these communal baths, nor would it explain what the two women are doing in their bath. See 'Diane de Poitiers et Gabrielle d'Estrées', *Gazette des Beaux Artes*, Series 5, Vol. 3, August to September 1920, p. 173.

17 Valerie Traub notes that sodomy between women in France by definition entailed penetration, 'The (in)significance of lesbian desire in early modern England', in *Erotic Politics: Desire on the Renaissance Stage*, ed. Susan Zimmerman (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 153. See also Laura Brown's 'Lesbian sexuality in medieval and early modern Europe', in *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past*, ed. Martin Duberman, Martha Vicinius and George Chauncy Jr. (New York: Meridian Books, 1990), pp. 67–76.

18 The domestic is here imagined as the site of feminine servitude and labour. Moreover, this female production (which takes the form of the 'properly' feminine activity of sewing) is contrasted with the non-(re)productive activity of the foreground scene.

19 On the relationship between women's space and women's sexuality, see Georgianna Ziegler's 'My lady's chamber: female space, female chastity in Shakespeare', *Textual Practice*, 4(1), 1990, and Peter Stallybrass, 'Patriarchal territories: the body enclosed', in *Rewriting the Renaissance*, ed. Margaret W. Ferguson *et al.* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1986).

20 Ver Heyden de Lancey, 'A picture of Gabrielle d'Estrées attributed to François Pourbus le Jeune', *Connoisseur*, Vol. 96, July to December 1935, pp. 137–8. This story is corroborated by Desclozeaux in his biography of Gabrielle d'Estrées. He identifies the 'high official' as Louis-Phillipe. He cites oral sources. Adrian Desclozeaux, *Gabrielle d'Estrées, Marquise de Monceaux, Duchess de Beaufort* (Paris: H. Champion, 1889); p. 436.

21 Ibid., p. 138.

22 In a certain sense, this contradictory gesture simply reiterates the already contradictory position of the painting: it was housed in the police office, but displayed 'in one of the halls to which the public had access'. It is different, however, insofar as it implies that the image must be concealed and can no longer be immediately visible to 'the curious public gaze'.

23 With regard to the ways in which dominant cultures not only fail to subdue subversive elements, but in fact require their production, see Jonathan Dollimore's *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), esp pp. 103–30.

24 *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), p. 73. See also D.A. Miller's chapter 'Open secrets/secret subjects' in *The Novel and the Police* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

Homosexuality was, as Lord Alfred Douglas put it in his epochal public declaration, 'the love that dare not speak its name'. From 'Two loves', in *The Chameleon* 1 (1894), p. 28.

25 Ver Heyden de Lancey, p. 137. Again Desclozeaux makes a similar statement: '*quelques années apres, quand le voile fut ecarté, le tableau n'y était plus.*'

26 This description is included in the *Catalogue des Objects de Curiosité et D'Ameublement des XVI^e, XVII^e, et XVIII^e Siècles*, available at the documentation centre of the Louvre. The catalogue covers the period 29 March to 10 April 1897. The *Gabrielle* portrait is included as No. 1340, p. 141.

27 In other words, the painting came to be the bearer of – or vehicle for – symbolic capital. John Guillory defines symbolic capital as 'a kind of knowledge-capital whose possession can be displayed upon request and which thereby entitles its possessor to the cultural and material rewards of a well-educated person' (p. ix), in *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

28 Foucault's essay serves as the Introduction for *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Random House, 1970).

29 While Bourdieu's remarks refer primarily to the field of cultural production, they also hold true for the field of cultural reception. Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, edited and introduced by Randall Johnson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), p. 106.