

Sample P2

Analytic Essay P2: *Portrait of Dora* (748-770) [note: these are line numbers of a play]

- As Freud instructs Dora to tell him about her dream, the scene shifts into a dialogue between Dora and Mrs. K. Based on Freud's prompt, I will assume the following exchange occurs in a dream (although the play deliberately does not make clear what is a dream and what is reality). Cixous draws from Freud's original case study the belief that dreams are significant in that they reveal hidden desires of the unconscious – feelings people typically do not admit or even are aware about.
- From the outset, Dora adopts a pleading tone as she asks Mrs. K, "Can't you love me a little? Just a little bit?" (753). Throughout most of the conversation, Dora appears desperate for attention from Mrs. K. as she continues a succession of similar questions seeking affirmation of Mrs. K.'s affection. Seemingly out of nowhere, Dora breaks the series of questions: "One day, I would like to be lying against you. Not sitting – Lying against you... There would be blood all over. I would have blood on my face" (764-765).
 - In these lines the power dynamics between Mrs. K. and Dora switch. Suddenly Dora is no longer humbly vying for Mrs. K.'s love but instead is asserting her own sexual desire to "lie against" Mrs. K. Within a line, Dora's intense desire escalates further to the point of violence as Dora fantasizes "blood all over" – over both Mrs. K. and herself.
- Dora's sudden outburst of desire to kill Mrs. K. may startle and bewilder readers at first. After all, Dora has just expressed intense love for her dear friend. Mrs. K. herself seems to challenge Dora's love: "But what does that mean? To love?" (753). Although this line

sounds rhetorical and an attempt to deflect Dora's plea to be loved, it begs a question central to the understanding of Dora's conflicting emotions. The self-reflexive nature of the line calls attention to the ambiguity of the meaning of "love" itself. Perhaps, Cixous hints, love and aggression, erotic desire and murderous desire are not as contradictory as they seem. That these strong, primal emotions are explored in juxtaposition in the dream suggests that they are all connected within the unconscious.

- If love is singular devotion to a certain person, as Dora demonstrates toward Mrs. K., then violent obsession may just be the darker side of the same coin. Dora explains her reasoning for wanting to see Mrs. K. dead directly to her: "So that no one could touch you. Or see you" (766). Despite the extreme gory conclusion, Dora's motives are feelings of jealousy and possessiveness typically associated with passionate desire.
- Mrs. K. could be cryptically answering her own question of the meaning of love at the closing of the scene: "The most desirable the most dreadful" (769). The parallel structure and the alliteration, as well as the lack of punctuation breaking up the phrase, suggest that "desirable" and "dreadful," despite seeming incompatible, can exist concurrently in equal measure.
- In this conversation, Dora reveals her complex mix of feelings toward Mrs. K. including jealousy, betrayal, reverence, and lust. Dora's feelings toward Mrs. K. could reflect her conflicting feelings of love and hatred toward every other major player in her life: Mr. K., Freud, and her father. In an earlier exchange between Dora and Freud, Freud asks, "But who takes whose place in this story?" to which Dora gives an ambiguous non-answer:

“Yes. Everyone. Except me” (659-660). Cixous plays with the idea of most of the characters being interchangeable, at least in Dora’s unconscious.

- By blurring the lines between dream and reality, love and violence, and even Freud and Mrs. K., Cixous provides no easy answer to any questions about the unconscious. Perhaps by building ambiguities, she points out a fundamental flaw in Freud’s original case. Freud presumed he could cure Dora by finding coherent meaning within her unconscious desires, whereas Cixous recognizes that nothing can be so clearly defined.