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CIXOUS'S *PORTRAIT DE DORA*: THE PLAY OF WHOSE VOICE?

Hélène Cixous's *Portrait de Dora* is perhaps the best known of the author's early non-'theoretical' works. The play is a rewriting of Freud's renowned 'Dora' case history: Cixous later explained that she was so affected by Freud's account that she was impelled to write a play about it, and remained preoccupied with the questions it raises over a considerable period of time.[1] Although what most distinguishes *Portrait* from the other works the author produced dealing with Dora's case is that it is a play, Cixous's choice of a theatrical form has received relatively little attention, her subversion of that form even less. The play was first staged by Simone Benmussa in 1976, and a version based on her production, and incorporating her stage directions, was then published. However, for the second edition, and again when the play was republished in 1986, Cixous chose to come back to her original text.[2] The most significant difference between the two editions was that the 'Voice of the Play', which introduces and comments on the action in the original, had been replaced for the most part by 'Freud's Voice' in the Benmussa version.[3] This article aims to show that Cixous's invention of the 'Voice of the Play' is intricately bound up with her concern to present a version of Dora's story that is different in *genre* (in both senses of the French word: genre and gender) from Freud's version. To develop the importance of this differential aspect of the play, it will be necessary first to present Freud's text in some detail.

It is particularly interesting that there should be two published versions of *Portrait de Dora*, given that a crucial difference between Freud and Cixous concerns their willingness to accept that their account of Dora is precisely a *version*, one of a number of possible accounts. Dora's story itself revolves around the question of whether the scene by the lake actually happened: that is, whose version of events is correct. When Dora was analysed, she was an eighteen-year old girl, with a variety of hysterical symptoms, some of which had recurred over a number of years. Her father, whom Freud had treated for syphilis, had first brought her to see him two years previously, but she had not then entered analysis. The reason she later came to Freud for treatment was that her parents had found a suicide note, and were alarmed to the point of insisting that she seek help. Dora had been especially depressed for two years, ever since a particular incident, the 'scene by the lake', which had occurred while she and her father, B, were visiting friends of theirs, the Ks. According to her, while on a walk down to the lake, the husband had propositioned her. She had slapped him and run away, but said nothing about it to

[1] Catherine Clément and Hélène Cixous, *La Jeune née* (Paris: 10/18, 1975), p. 271.

[2] *Portrait de Dora* (Paris: Éditions des femmes, 1976); reprinted in *Théâtre* (Paris: Éditions des femmes, 1986). Unless otherwise stated, page-references are to the 1986 edition of this work. Paradoxically, the English translation by Anita Barrows available in Benmussa's *Benmussa Directs: Portrait of Dora and The Singular Life of Albert Nobbs* (London: Calder; Dallas, TX: Riverrun Press, 1979) is based on the original text, whereas Sarah Burd's translation in *Diacritics*, 13.1 (Spring 1983), 2–32, is based on the Benmussa version. The most valuable discussion to date of Cixous's choice of a theatrical form is that of Sharon Willis, 'Hélène Cixous's *Portrait de Dora*: The Unseen and the Un-scene', *Theatre Journal*, 37 (1985), 287–301, which unfortunately considers only the Benmussa version.

[3] The lines of the Play's Voice are given to Madame K in two out of its six interventions (1976 edition, pp. 86, 92).

anybody until she told her mother two weeks later, who then told her father. However, when taxed by her father and uncle with her allegations, K denied it all, saying that she had imagined the whole incident, doubtless because she was obsessed with sexual matters: he understood from his wife that she read improper books, and claimed that she was not entitled to any man's respect. Since then, Dora had done everything in her power to induce her father to break off relations with the Ks, which he refused to do: he took K's side in the dispute, and was hoping that Freud would manage to 'bring Dora to reason'[4] and have her accept K's version of events.

It soon became clear to Freud, however, principally because of Dora's 'pitilessly sharp' analysis (Freud, p. 63), that her father had a very strong interest in having K's version accepted. Not only she and her mother but also Herr K were aware that Dora's father and Frau K had been having an affair for many years. Her bitterness was particularly due to the idea that she had been the price of K's tolerating the affair: if he said nothing about her father's affair with his wife, her father would say nothing about his continued attentions to his daughter. In other words, Dora's only role was as the object of an exchange between men, an exchange that would be threatened if the tacit agreement that founded it became explicit. By insisting on her version of events, Dora was rocking a boat that served everybody's interest but her own.

Nevertheless, although Freud never seems to have doubted Dora's version, instead of displaying any sympathy for his vulnerable patient, he was to declare himself 'embarrassed' (Freud, p. 66) because her sharpness had no need of him to make sense of her situation, and to devote himself to proving, with extraordinary virtuosity, that the boat she was rocking in fact served her own interest as well: that she really still loved K. The most obvious example of Freud's tunnel vision is his interpretation of a scene that had taken place when Dora was only fourteen. K, who was then approaching middle-age, had arranged to find himself alone with her, clasped her to him, and kissed her. Dora had torn herself away and fled. According to Freud, 'the reaction of this child of fourteen was already entirely and completely hysterical' (Freud, p. 59); he goes on to propose that her various hysterical symptoms, such as her throat problems, were in reality displacements of the pleasure she had felt. Such manifest projection on Freud's part has occasioned all the more comment since the Dora case history was path-breaking in that it was the first to assert the importance of transference. Freud himself acknowledged that his own blindness was the reason the analysis failed, when Dora ended it after only three months. He attributed the failure to the fact that he had not realized that Dora was transferring the negative affect she felt for K onto him; only subsequently did he admit, though only in the margins of his text, in a footnote, that the main mistake consisted in his failing to realize the importance of Dora's homosexual love for Frau K. Freud considered this an intellectual failing on his part, not a symptom of his unconscious; it was Jacques Lacan who first pointed out the counter-transference at work in his analysis of Dora. Discussing Freud's case history, he stressed that psychoanalysis is essentially 'une expérience dialectique' and claimed: 'Dans une psychanalyse en effet, le sujet, à proprement parler, se constitue par un discours où

[4] Sigmund Freud, *Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria*, in *Case Histories 1*, The Pelican Freud Library, 8, trans. by Alix and James Strachey, ed. by Angela Richards (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), 29–164 (p. 57). Subsequent references in square brackets are to the German text, *Bruchstück einer Hysterie-Analyse* in *Gesammelte Werke* v (London: Imago, 1942), 161–286.

la seule présence du psychanalyste apporte, avant toute intervention, la dimension du dialogue.'[5]

Dialectic and dialogue have the same Greek etymology, *διά-* ('through', 'across', originally deriving from *δύο*, 'two') and *λέγεσθαι* ('to speak'), suggesting a conversation between two. According to Lacan, the role of the analyst is 'un non-agir positif en vue de l'orthodramatisation de la subjectivité du patient' (Lacan, p. 226). But Freud's desire to be the active agent, not the passive patient, can easily be distinguished in his hermeneutic approach. The bulk of the case history deals with the interpretation of two dreams. For Freud, there is no question but that the aim of the interpretation is to make the dream coherent, intelligible:

> Now, in a line of associations ambiguous words (or, as we may call them, 'switch-words') act like points at a junction. If the points are switched across the position in which they appear to lie in the dream, then we find ourselves on another set of rails; and along this second track run the thoughts which we are in search of but which still lie concealed behind the dream. (Freud, p. 100n)

Freud has, literally, a 'one-track' mind. His desire is to reduce the parallel lines of association to the single track of concealed (sexual) thoughts that for him constitute the truth of the dream. In line with this homogenizing desire for clarity, the metaphors that recur most commonly are those of 'filling in the gaps', 'finding the key' that will solve the enigma. Freud's desire for completeness has been linked to a phallocentric epistemology that was sexually normalizing in that it left no room for female sexuality to be considered as an active, independent force.[6] At this juncture, let me signal that his hermeneutics are also linguistically normalizing, in that his objective is to replace an ambiguous, open form by a linear narrative, to close down semantic multiplicity in favour of one meaning. Thus he writes, for example, 'Dora's reticule [. . .] was *nothing but* a representation of the genitals' or again 'The box, like the reticule and the jewel-case, was once again *only a substitute* for the shell of Venus, the female genitals' (Freud, pp. 113–14 [239–40]; my emphasis). For Freud, the conversion of hysteria into sexual normality goes hand in hand with converting poetry into prose.

The case history shows clearly that Freud reserved for himself the active role in the analysis, without really bothering whether his interpretations convinced Dora. Given Lacan's remark that the analyst's presence makes the analysis a dialogue, it is interesting to note the amount of the text in direct speech. Moreover, it is evident that he has much more of the lines than she does. To take a typical example, in a two-page section of the interpretation of the first dream consisting of dialogue except for five words, it is obvious who is doing the talking in this 'talking cure'.[7] At the beginning, as Freud elicits responses from Dora to a number of questions, the conversation is reasonably balanced, if shifting in the doctor's favour, but Freud then proceeds to explain Dora's answers in an extremely long paragraph, without any interruption, before adding: 'Naturally Dora would not follow me in this part

[5] Jacques Lacan, 'Intervention sur le transfert', in *Écrits* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1966), 215–26 (p. 216).

[6] See Toril Moi, 'Representation of Patriarchy: Sexuality and Epistemology in Freud's Dora', in *In Dora's Case: Freud–Hysteria–Feminism*, ed. by Charles Bernheimer and Claire Kahane (London: Virago Press; New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), pp. 181–99 (especially p. 196).

[7] The sequence in the passage in question, 'What is this about the jewel-case [. . .] how deeply you loved him' (Freud, pp. 104–06 [230–32]), is as follows: Freud says 12 words [11 in German], Dora 15 [11], Freud 2 [2], Dora 99 [87], Freud 13 [10], Dora 25 [21], Freud 33 [27], Dora 16 [14], Freud 44 [33], Dora 6 [7], Freud 407 [341], giving him a total of 511 [424] words to her 161 [140].

of the interpretation.'[8] Incidentally, this dismissal of Dora's objections can be contrasted with the pains he takes to defend himself to the reader against the idea that he is being unprofessional by daring to discuss sexual matters openly with a young woman (Freud, pp. 81–82). The mention of a 'medical reader' is followed shortly by that of a 'medical man' (p. 83). As for the others, Dora is mainly of importance to Freud as an (epistemological) object, which he intends to exchange with other medical men.

Freud's text, then, clearly invites the decentred reading Cixous describes in *La Jeune née*, claiming to have read it 'comme une fiction' (Clément and Cixous, p. 272). Rather than a sexually obsessed girl out to thwart her avuncular doctor of the pleasure of solving her problems, she comes across as a vulnerable young woman whose only avenue of help, Freud, is someone determined to see her, rather than the situation in which she finds herself, as the problem, the abnormality: someone, moreover, who, far from being a neutral observer, is part of the system repressing her, not only in that his sympathies lie explicitly with the person, K, whom she considers responsible for her suffering,[9] but in that, just as the others see her only as a means to their sexual gratification, Freud uses her as a means to his intellectual gratification. Like the other characters in Dora's life, Freud is not interested in her version of events: he wants to impose his own.[10]

If Cixous read the case history as a 'fiction', what is the significance of the fact that she rewrote it as a play? A clue to her choice of genre may be found on the back cover of the 1986 *Théâtre* edition of the play, where she calls psychoanalysis the 'parente déguisée du Théâtre'. Psychoanalysis, like theatre, is a space in which scenes that affect us, scenes of affect, are played out, in the fullest sense of the word: the repetition, the representation, plays an active role in the drama, affects the outcome. Cixous's comment furthermore recalls Lacan's insights that an analysis always has the dimension of dialogue (the stuff of theatre), and that its objective is to achieve the 'orthodramatisation' of the patient's subjectivity. Perhaps the reason for writing this play is to stage dialogue itself, to dramatize different modes of relations? The prefix *ortho-*, from the Greek, means 'right, correct, proper'. *Le propre*, the proper, is a key concept in Cixous's theoretical writings. Might the point of her drama be that the right, correct, proper form of dialogue is precisely not one based

[8] The dynamics of the analysis are superbly encapsulated in a short exchange in Cixous's play: 'DORA: Qu'est-ce que vous voulez me faire dire? FREUD: . . . Vous faire entendre' (pp. 57–58). Given that the ostensible aim of the treatment is to 'hear' the desire the patient is unable to articulate, the first meaning of Freud's reply seems 'to get you heard', in which case 'vous', the pronoun referring to Dora, is in the place of the direct object. But 'vous faire entendre' can also be translated as 'to get you to understand', in which case Freud's desire is to get *himself* heard. In both cases, Freud is in the position of (implied) subject.

[9] Cixous highlights Freud's partisanship by having him address to Dora the words of a footnote in the original text relating to K (Freud, p. 60n), together with a positive appraisal of B: 'FREUD: Je connais par hasard monsieur K. C'est un homme jeune encore, d'un extérieur avenant. Le père monsieur B. était un homme fortuné, aux manières douces, un père tendre et un mari patient. Je n'ai pas connu la mère de Dora' (p. 15). Dora's next line, 'Ma mère n'est rien pour lui', implicates Freud in the system of relations oppressing her by underlining the doctor's identification with her father both in that he accepts her father's estimate of himself and in that he disregards her mother.

[10] In her play Cixous brings out Freud's lack of interest in the reality of Dora's suffering, in sharp contrast with the eloquence to which his own hermeneutic prowess leads him, in passages such as this: 'DORA: Mon père tousse aussi. FREUD: Voyez-vous la "maladie" vient de votre père, mais elle se déplace de haut en bas ou de bas en haut, suivant qu'il s'agit de vous ou de votre maman. Par le symptôme de la toux, vous proclamez la responsabilité de votre père dans ce que vous appelez "votre maladie". DORA: Mais je tousse vraiment! FREUD: Oui' (pp. 60–61).

on protecting 'le propre', but one in which parties make space for the other's point of view?

At the opening of the play, the importance given to the 'Voix de la Pièce' immediately introduces the question of point of view. The fact that the place has a 'Voice' independent of the characters emphasizes the play's theatricality: that is, the fact that the scenes the spectator is about to witness are not a direct transposition of reality, but a particular version of reality, told from a specific perspective. By dramatizing the play's place of enunciation, Cixous avoids the universalizing effect of the narrative standpoint adopted by Freud in his text. Although he complains in his 'Prefatory Remarks' about those who choose to read it 'not as a contribution to the psycho-pathology of the neuroses, but as a *roman à clef*' (Freud, p. 37),[11] paradoxically his claims to scientific neutrality indicate a desire to assume the classic position of the omniscient narrator, the all-knowing impersonal teller of events in which the telling seems to play no part.

Moreover, presenting itself as a viewpoint from which events will be narrated, and therefore not the only viewpoint possible, is only one way in which the 'Voix de la Pièce' presents its portrayal of Dora as problematical. The play opens:

LA VOIX DE LA PIÈCE '. . . *Ces événements s'annoncent, comme une ombre, dans les rêves, ils deviennent souvent si distincts qu'on croit les saisir d'une façon palpable, mais, malgré cela, ils échappent à un éclaircissement définitif, et si l'on procède sans habileté ni prudence particulière, on ne peut arriver à décider si une pareille scène a réellement eu lieu*'. (p. 9)

The same lack of an 'éclaircissement définitif', a definitive clarification, that the Voice declares will surround the events of the play (*'on ne peut arriver à décider si une pareille scène a réellement eu lieu'*), characterizes its own first utterance. While the inverted commas, the three dots, and the italics signal that this utterance is a quotation, it origin is uncertain, unlike the next intervention by the 'Voix de la Pièce' a few pages on, similarly in inverted commas and italicized, which is a direct quotation from Freud's text.[12] The play thus calls attention to itself from the beginning as a version of reality whose origin escapes definitive clarification. This focus on the unreliability of its account of events contrasts once more with Freud's insistence in his 'Prefatory Remarks' that his case history, in spite of its fragmentary nature, 'can claim to possess a high degree of trustworthiness' (Freud, p. 38).

In addition, the pronounced 'untrustworthiness' of the play's voice is immediately relayed by Dora's:

DORA (*une voix qui déchire un silence — ton entre la menace et la demande — s'écoute*) Si vous osez m'embrasser, je vous donnerai une gifle! (*infléchi vers la câlinerie*)
DORA (*d'un coup proche de l'oreille*) Osez m'embrasser, je vous donnerai une gifle! (p. 9)

Dora is presented in her contradictions, both in that the didascalia invest the two practically identical lines with very different meanings (the first suggests that both kiss and slap would be received as slaps, whereas the second suggests both kiss and slap are kisses?) and even more strikingly in that the text doubles her, as though she were two different people, repeating her name although no other character has

[11] For an excellent discussion of the literary aspects of the case history, see Steven Marcus, 'Freud and Dora: Story, History, Case History', in Bernheimer and Kahane, pp. 56–91.

[12] '*Ce premier récit est comparable à un courant qui ne serait pas navigable, à un courant dont le lit serait tantôt obstrué par des rochers, tantôt divisé par des bancs de sable*' (p. 15; Freud, p. 45). This is the only one of the six interventions by the 'Voix de la Pièce' to derive from Freud.

spoken. This makes it impossible to privilege one desire as Dora's 'true' desire. For anyone familiar with the Freud case, these lines refer to the scene by the lake, and are presumably addressed to Monsieur K. The response by Freud: 'Oui, vous me raconterez. Dans tous les détails', both leads us to recognize a prurient curiosity in Freud's professedly professional desire for details and establishes a similarity between Dora's relationship with K and her relationship with Freud.[13] Not only, then, does the Play's Voice offer marked similarities with Dora, but Freud is demoted to the rank of a manifestly unsympathetic character, in comparison with his status as both narrator and (privileged) character in the case history. This whole dimension of distancing by the play's enunciation is lost in the Benmussa version by the replacement of the 'Voice of the Play' with 'Freud's Voice', in my opinion profoundly reducing the impact of the play. In the original version, *Portrait de Dora* literally speaks from the beginning with a voice explicitly different from Freud's,[14] a voice whose sympathies lie with Dora rather than with the doctor.

Equally, the Play's Voice is different from Dora's. This raises the fundamental question of the project of the play, beyond the feminist criticism (of Freud, of psychoanalysis, and so on) on which, to date, most discussion of it has concentrated. The fact that *Portrait de Dora* is evidently not the play that Dora herself might have written had led a number of feminist critics to accuse Cixous of replicating Dora's victimization by not changing more of the analysis, especially by not imagining Dora as an unequivocal heroine whom women could take as a positive role model.[15] Cixous's famous statement, 'je suis ce que Dora aurait été, si l'histoire des femmes avait commencé' (Clément and Cixous, p. 184), led many to posit a simple identification on her part with Dora; one critic, for example, sees in *Portrait de Dora* 'an hysterical play' whose project is 'to show what it might have been like to be the Dora Freud wrote about'.[16] Jane Gallop, however, has argued compellingly that the fact that the identification between Cixous and Dora attains symbolic inscription by being published (that is, circulated) is the determining question, enabling Cixous to challenge the symbolic order in a much more powerful way than Dora ever could.[17] The crucial difference between Dora and Cixous is that Dora does not write. Dora's final line, 'Écrire? . . . Ce n'est pas mon affaire' (p. 103) does not end the play; it is followed by a short epilogue by the 'Voix de la Pièce', the juxtaposition bringing out that unlike Dora, whose principal hysterical symptom is aphonia, the Play has a

[13] This similarity is expressed with great economy in the play's final pages by a single syllable, the prefix that is a sign of repetition, when Freud interprets Dora's decision to leave the analysis as 'un meurtre que vous commettez là. Contre un autre que je re . . .' (p. 100).

[14] Furthermore, the original version contains a number of instances featuring 'Freud's Voice' as opposed to 'Freud' (pp. 47, 48, 56, 70, 98), inscribing a difference between Freud's voice and that of the play, a difference lost in the Benmussa version. Significantly, none of these is a quotation from Freud's original text. The only other character whose 'Voice' appears independently is Monsieur K. Whereas hysteria has been traditionally seen as a female disorder, the fact that these are both men suggests that it is rather they who are unaware of their desires. The last intervention by 'Freud's Voice' seems to confirm this reading: 'Voulut-il ou ne voulut-il pas la guérir, à son heure, ou le voulut-il seulement ce 1er janvier 1900, il ne saura jamais et moi non plus et elle non plus' (p. 98).

[15] See, for example, Jeannette L. Savona, '*Portrait de Dora* d'Hélène Cixous: à la recherche d'un théâtre féministe', in *Hélène Cixous, chemins d'une écriture*, ed. by Françoise van Rossum-Guyon and Myriam Díaz-Diocaretz (Paris: Presses Universitaires de Vincennes; Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1990), pp. 166–75.

[16] Martha Noel Evans, '*Portrait of Dora*: Freud's Case History as Reviewed by Hélène Cixous', *SubStance*, 11.36 (1982), 64–71 (p. 65).

[17] Jane Gallop, 'Keys to Dora', in *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: The Daughter's Seduction* (London and Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1982), 132–50.

voice, is in a position to gain a hearing for its version of events. The Play's Voice is different from that of those whose desire is to silence Dora in that it expresses a different desire; it is different from Dora's in so far as it is a linguistic, not a bodily, expression of desire: one, however, that is not divorced from the body. Hysteria is an illness where body and voice are cut off from each other. I would suggest that Cixous's primary project in this play is to express, through language, what Dora could express only through her body, but without normalizing it, as Freud wanted to do. The play is an attempt to find a verbal, that is, a non-hysterical, equivalent for Dora's hysteria.

In Cixous's version of her story, Dora represents a different approach to property. In the author's theory of libidinal economies, the question of property is bound up with that of the gift: 'Toute la différence qui aura déterminé le mouvement de l'histoire comme mouvement de la propriété, s'articule entre deux économies qui se définissent dans un rapport à la problématique du don' (Clément and Cixous, p. 147). Dora's name derives from the Greek word for gift. As I have said, she is introduced in relation to the verb donner: 'Je vous *donnerai* une gifle'; other key signifiers in the play are 'par*donner*', 'or*donner*'. How you give is a central issue in the play. The male characters systematically give to receive, as Monsieur K shows explicitly when he takes his presents back: 'Tu me connais. J'aurais tout donné. Ce que j'avais donné je le reprends' (p. 72). Freud also shares the assumption that a gift obliges the recipient to make a return: 'N'avez-vous jamais eu envie de faire un cadeau à monsieur K. en retour? Cela n'aurait pas été déplacé' (p. 49). Dora's ironic description of her father's generosity similarly points out an ulterior motive behind his presents: 'Mon père est très généreux. Il aime faire plaisir à la pauvre madame K. En même temps, il est généreux envers sa femme et envers sa fille. Mon père n'achète jamais un bijou pour moi sans en acheter un pour ma mère et un pour madame K' (p. 12). Dora, on the other hand, figures for Cixous as somebody intensely generous towards those she loves. She seeks repeatedly to give: 'Laissez-moi vous donner cet amour' (p. 37), 'Je ne peux rien vous donner?' (p. 75). It is especially important that these lines are addressed to Madame K. The magnanimity that Freud acknowledges only in the footnote where he admits that Dora's love for Madame K was the strongest unconscious current in her mental life is highlighted in Cixous's text in the form of a question: 'Comment expliquer que vous avez toujours si généreusement épargné madame K., votre calomniatrice, pourtant . . .?' (p. 94). Whereas both K and B use the word 'nothing' in relation to their wives, Dora repeatedly calls Madame K 'everything': 'Vous êtes absolument tout' (p. 34), 'Vous savez que vous êtes tout pour moi' (p. 64). She thus represents the only character prepared to put the other before herself. Her name suits her well: she alone is willing to adore.[18]

Dora also blurs boundaries on an intrasubjective level, as is most obvious in her extraordinary capacity for identification. She identifies with Madame K to the point of adopting her name when phoning her (p. 95); she also identifies with men, to the

[18] This is in no way to suggest that Dora's relationship with Madame K is represented as ideal, or even positive. On the contrary, Madame K's complicity in Dora's repression is made clear on a number of occasions. She closes ranks against Dora with her husband and lover (see especially pages 32–33); she perversely encourages Dora's feelings towards her but silences her as soon as their (verbal) expression reaches the bounds of propriety (p. 38). The biological divide is thus not the determining one for Cixous; the difference Dora represents is libidinal.

point of wondering sometimes 'si elle n'était pas elle-même monsieur K' (p. 64). It is true that the other characters also frequently contradict themselves.[19] Dora's father's first lines, for example, incriminate K in an attempt to defend him, and thereby to safeguard his own self-interest:

> Monsieur K s'est toujours montré aimable envers ma fille [. .] Lorsqu'il était là, monsieur K. se promenait avec elle. Avec une affection presque paternelle. Bien qu'elle ne fût qu'une enfant. Il lui faisait de petits cadeaux et veillait sur elle avec une affection presque paternelle. De son côté, Dora s'occupait avec une merveilleuse sollicitude des deux petits enfants de mes amis. Elle aurait pu leur tenir lieu de mère. (p. 11)

By describing Dora as a woman who could replace K's wife, B contradicts his own declaration that she is only a child, just as the adverb 'presque' betrays his awareness that K's affection for her is not paternal. In B's speech, as in his daughter's, the unconscious will out; the difference is the desire to maintain the repression. It is plain in Dora's opening lines that she is open to her contradictions in such a way as to undermine rather than reinforce the stability of the self. As other critics have shown, Cixous exploits the image of the door on many levels to suggest Dora's plurality, the fact that she can be both open and shut.[20]

What is most remarkable is the extent to which Dora carries this other, fluid relation to property through into her practice of language. From another text it is clear that Cixous admires Dora in so far as she signifies her contradictions: 'C'est toi, Dora, toi, indomptable le corps poétique, la vraie "maîtresse" du Signifiant' (Clément and Cixous, p. 176). This 'mastery' translates in the *Portrait* as the opposite of a mastery, as a capacity to exploit the play of the signifier, rather than seek to dominate it. Dora and the 'Voice of the Play' both have a number of longish, poetic monologues which in no way derive from Freud's text. One such passage emphasizes Dora's threshold, transitional position:

> DORA Il y a une porte dans Vienne par où tout le monde peut passer sauf moi. Souvent je rêve que j'arrive devant cette porte, elle s'ouvre, je pourrais entrer. Des jeunes hommes et des jeunes femmes s'y déversent, je pourrais me glisser parmi le flot, mais je ne le fais pas, cependant je ne puis m'éloigner à jamais de cette porte, je passe devant, je m'attarde mais je ne le fais pas, je n'y parviens pas, je suis pleine de mémoire et de désespoir, ce qui est étrange, c'est que je pourrais passer mais je suis retenue, je crains, je suis au-delà de toute crainte, mais je n'entre pas, si je n'entre pas je meurs, si j'entrais, si je voulais voir monsieur K. mais si papa me voyait mais je ne veux pas le voir, mais si papa me voyait le voir il me tuerait je pourrais le voir une fois. Ce serait la dernière. Ensuite. (p. 14)

Everything in this paragraph is in flux, including sexual identity. Dora keeps contradicting herself: 'je passe devant, je m'attarde, [. . .] je crains, je suis au-delà de toute crainte'. Notably, her language reflects and prolongs the indeterminacy it asserts: at the very point where she relates the possibility of slipping into the flood of young men and women, her syntax becomes extremely fluid, with a number of examples of paratax leading up to the final disappearance of punctuation.

Dora's speech embraces uncertainty as much at the level of the word as the level of the sentence. This is emphasized in Cixous's treatment of Freud's analogy

[19] They also contradict each other continually in accordance with their own interest. Thus, for example, B's declaration that 'un homme comme monsieur K. ne pouvait être dangereux pour elle' is immediately followed by Madame K's assertion: 'C'est un homme aux appétits grossiers' (p. 33).

[20] See especially Gallop, pp. 136–37, and Noel Evans, p. 69.

between ambiguous words and points at a junction. In French, the word for points, '*aiguilles*', is itself ambiguous, also meaning needles:

FREUD Les mots équivoques sont, dans la voie des associations, comme des aiguilles.
DORA Piqué, percé, cousu, décousu. (p. 52)

Dora's taking Freud up in a way he did not intend manifests the futility of his desire to assign a fixed meaning to words. In contrast, she exploits their very slipperiness, as in her use of the verb 'sentir' in her account of K's having kissed her when she was fourteen: 'Il y avait une odeur . . . connue [. . .]. Je ressentis alors un dégoût si intense, je le détestai de toute mon âme, j'étais dégoûtée, je m'arrachai violemment à lui, je le sens encore aujourd'hui, en cet instant, je le sens, si intense' (p. 19). 'Je le sens encore' can mean both 'I can still smell him' and 'I can still feel him': the verb resonates in both directions, without clarifying which meaning Dora had in mind.

The similarities between Dora's poetic speeches and those of the 'Voice of the Play' invite consideration of the *Portrait de Dora* as a whole as an extension of the practice of language Cixous attributes to Dora within the play. Indeed, the lack of hierarchy so evident in Dora's speech permeates every aspect of the text. It must be stressed that the long paragraph above is Dora's account of a dream. Neither of the dreams whose interpretation makes up most of the case history is reproduced in Cixous's play, but all the poetic passages that punctuate the play either recount a dream or are dreamlike in form. It was Freud who first claimed that dreams are expressions of desire. By changing the dreams, Cixous is exploring different desires,[21] her text notably proposes a very different attitude towards dreaming. Whereas Freud's response to dreams was to interpret them, to explain them in 'normal' (that is, prosaic) speech, not only are the dreams in the *Portrait* left uninterpreted in their irreducible ambiguity, in their otherness, but even 'normal' speech is affected with a dreamlike quality. Moreover, the play itself has an oneiric structure. It is not divided into acts and scenes, but comprises a series of scenes that dissolve into each other with no formal indication, just as Freud said a dream keeps switching between various lines of association. As is clear at the opening of the play, these sudden switches have the effect of establishing connections between the characters, emphasizing their interchangeability. By subverting the hierarchy of plot and subplot, they also make it impossible for the spectator to 'master' the action; the scenes relating to the analysis are neither more nor less important than those dealing with the other characters.

Portrait de Dora reflects its heroine's openness both in that as a play it gives voice to a plurality of characters and in that it comprises different kinds of speech. But perhaps the most fundamental way in which it echoes Dora's challenge to property is in relation to quotation. The fact that the vast majority of the play is a huge quotation from the case history raises the question of whose property it is, Freud's or Cixous's. The uncertainty is compounded within the text by the fact that Cixous never explicitly differentiates between the borrowings from Freud and the rest, in

[21] An excellent example is the passage by the 'Voix de la Pièce' beginning 'Le docteur Freud aurait pu faire ce rêve' (pp. 62–63), which presents Dora as superbly adventurous, accepting no limits on her powers. Although Freud is fascinated by her, he holds back from imitating her; the final sentence is 'Quelque chose empêche Freud d'en faire autant'. The point is not that Freud *cannot* but that he *will* not dare to be different; the passage signals clearly the erotic cost involved in choosing obedience to the superego. The attribution of this passage to Freud's Voice in the Benmussa version totally effaces the amusedly tolerant, if slightly disdainful, effect of the external enunciatory position.

contrast with Freud's punctilious concern in his narration to specify in each case 'where the authentic parts end and my constructions begin' (Freud, p. 41). Furthermore, Freud's case history is by no means the only intertext. For example, the paragraph about the door has strong echoes of Kafka's *Devant la loi*, the short story taken from the end of *The Trial* where the protagonist's name is also K. This story, which Cixous quotes in its near entirety in *La Jeune née*, is about a man from the country who arrives before the Law, and spends his life waiting before the door to be allowed in, only to discover just before his death that the door was reserved for him alone. According to Cixous's reading, he wastes his life because he does not query the terms of his exclusion, does not realize that the Law is an absence, a prohibition on exploring the inside (Clément and Cixous, pp. 187–91). This intertext suggests that while Dora may not succeed in breaking free from the powerless position in which she finds herself, she represents for Cixous a new space of possibility in so far as she is not content to leave it to others, to the Law's representatives, to dictate her desire to her.[22]

Similarly, an outburst expressing the tragedy of Dora's situation, the total absence of any Other with whom to dialogue, is all the more poignant for the echoes it carries of other texts:

DORA (*âpre, sifflante.*) Vous m'avez tuée! Vous m'avez trahie. Vous m'avez trompée!
'Qui' m'abandonne
Ne t'ai-je pas écrit d'innombrables lettres?
N'ai-je pas adoré tes pas?
N'ai-je pas ouvert mes portes?
N'ai-je pas décomposé mon cœur pour toi?
Rien de beau que j'aie omis de faire vers toi. Je t'ai suivi.
[. . .]
Et maintenant, à qui adresser cette lettre?
A qui me taire? A qui me tuer? (p. 42)

Although Dora seems initially to address the last speaker, Madame K, the masculine past participle 'suivi' makes it impossible to identify her interlocutor. Dora's drama *is* the absence of an interlocutor. The agrammatical use of an indirect object with the verbs 'se taire' and 'se tuer' powerfully conveys the degree of her isolation, suggesting that even the most extreme action on her part will excite no concern; inscribed in a series of unanswered questions, it insistently evokes the suffering of Rimbaud's *Une Saison en enfer*: 'A qui me louer? Quelle bête faut-il adorer? Quelle sainte image attaque-t-on? Quels cœurs briserai-je? Quel mensonge dois-je tenir? — Dans quel sang marcher?'[23] These words come just a few lines after the celebrated 'On ne part pas' beginning the fourth section of 'Mauvais Sang'. Dora expresses her desire to 'partir', to leave or break away, on three separate occasions (pp. 11, 66, 68). Significantly, the only other person in relation to whom the verb appears is the governess: 'DORA: Et deux heures plus tard, elle était partie, sans dire un mot'

[22] In his analysis of *Devant la loi*, Jacques Derrida argues that the approach to the door of the Law is analogous to the approach to the text, indeed, to textuality itself. The man from the country, who has a problem when the Law that should have been universal turns out to be singular, is someone who has difficulty with literature ('Préjugés, devant la loi', in *La Faculté de Juger*, ed. by Jean-François Lyotard (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1985), 87–139 (especially p. 131)). In the light of this reading, a structure such as that of Dora, who is not afraid to question the Law, is particularly suited to the exigencies, and the possibilities, of the text.

[23] Arthur Rimbaud, *Œuvres*, ed. by S. Bernard and A. Guyard (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 1991), 'Mauvais Sang' p. 215.

(p. 84), and again: 'Je sais seulement qu'elle est partie' (p. 86). At the end of the play (that is, two hours later) Dora herself leaves (the analysis). Unlike Rimbaud's narrator, she does manage to extricate herself to some extent from the devil she knows, even if there is no guarantee she will find dialogue elsewhere.

Finally, it is impossible to consider *Portrait de Dora* as a work complete within itself, given that even the poetic passages are not original to it, all having first appeared in an earlier book by Cixous, *Portrait du soleil*.[24] The fact that the text is nearly entirely borrowed makes it impossible to decide the limits of the play. Cixous's writing effectively blurs the boundaries between different pieces of writing, bringing out that texts no more exist in isolation than people do, that all texts are informed by, in dialogue with, other texts.

I stated earlier that *le propre*, the proper, has been a key concept in Cixous's theoretical writings. It is in fact the concept around which she articulated her theory of sexual difference, roughly at the time she was writing *Portrait de Dora*:

> Et on s'aperçoit que l'Empire du Propre s'érige à partir d'une peur qui est en effet typiquement masculine: peur de l'expropriation; de la séparation; de la perte de l'attribut. Autrement dit, impact de la menace de castration. Qu'il y ait une relation entre la problématique du non-propre (donc du désir, et de l'urgence de la réappropriation) et la constitution d'une subjectivité qui ne s'éprouve qu'à faire éprouver sa loi, sa force, sa maîtrise, cela se comprend à partir de la masculinité, dans la mesure où c'est depuis la perte qu'elle se structure. Ce qui n'est pas le cas de la féminité. (Clement and Cixous, p. 147)

For Cixous, then, the ability to tolerate and indeed to welcome the 'non-propre' is an index of femininity. When Dora reports 'Piqué, percé, cousu, décousu' to Freud's comparison of words to 'aiguilles', she adds: 'C'est un travail de femmes' (p. 52). Then, in contrast with her earlier lack of confidence about her ability to acquire the traditional 'savoir', or expertise, of women,[25] she answers Freud's question as to what she can do [*savoir faire*] by saying: 'Faire monter les rêves, les souffler, les faire cuire, les rouler, les prendre dans ma bouche' (p. 52). The culinary metaphors stress that dreaming is a material activity, a sensuous rather than an abstract process. They also suggest it is feminine.

Cixous's play plays with language in the way Dora plays with dreams. As a dramatic character, Dora literally acquires a voice that is further reflected and amplified by the very form of the play. *Portrait de Dora* differs from Freud's version of Dora's story more in that it acts as she does than because it represents her in positive terms. The focus on the difference reminds us that there is no such thing as an impersonal, ungendered voice. Perhaps the most crucial decision to be taken by anybody wishing to stage the play would be what sex to choose for the Play's Voice. The text seems to indicate it ought to be a woman's.[26]

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[24] Hélène Cixous, *Portrait du soleil* (Paris: Éditions Denoël, 1973).

[25] There is a pronounced ironic dimension to the speech in which she expresses her uncertainty: 'Toutes les choses que savent les femmes; faire de la confiture, faire l'amour, faire le maquillage, faire de la pâtisserie, adopter des petits bébés, faire cuire la viande, trousser les volailles. J'ai regardé mes grands-mères faire ces choses quand j'étais petite. Mais moi, sais-je les faire? Il faudrait savoir' (p. 40). At issue is not the intrinsic value of these particular 'knowledges' but the value of an epistemological mode that privileges categorical certainty, and which Dora in the same speech designates as masculine: 'Je ne sais pas. De quel côté. Mais si j'étais un homme je saurais.'

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