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Claire Marrone

Sacred Heart University, marronec@sacredheart.edu

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The Limits of Writing in Marie Cardinal's *Amour... amours...*

Claire Marrone

In Marie Cardinal's last text, *Amour... amours...*, published in 1998, the author's attempt to express her nostalgia for her birthplace, Algeria, includes searching beyond the confines of writing in order to "speak" her past.¹ In *Amour... amours...*, Cardinal's emphasis on the imperfect nature of writing seems to call into question the possibility of comprehending or communicating completely one's past via the written word. Writing is depicted as an activity insufficient for the heroine's growth and satisfaction. Through her protagonist, Cardinal explores the limits of writing and faces the fear of its collapse, a breakdown that threatens the loss of what had characteristically been a significant vehicle of self-understanding for the author. The restraints of writing lead to the prominence of orality in *Amour... amours...* and its importance for Cardinal in coming to grips with her Algerian past.

Amour... amours... enters into a body of literature in French, particularly in the postcolonial period, that deals with the bilingual and bicultural aspects of selfhood. In focusing on the France–Algeria connection, the text illustrates the challenges of negotiating between conflicting allegiances. Salient issues in self-definition emerge, including the significance of one's birthplace and the loss of one's homeland. What is interesting in *Amour... amours...* is the way in which Cardinal conjures up remembrances of Algeria, including stylistic experimentation, intertextual echoes, and the thematization of love evoked in the title. With her protagonist, Lola Lavoie, the author evokes both *la voix*, or the importance of orality in the work, and *la voie*, or the means by which she endeavors to express her homeland.

In *Amour... amours...*, a third-person narrator recounts the sixty-five-year-old Lola's story. The protagonist resembles Cardinal in many ways. Like the author, Lola was born to a *pied-noir* family in Algiers, she currently lives in the South of France (toward the end of her life, Cardinal divided her time between southern France and Canada), and, importantly, she writes. Unlike the prolific Cardinal, however, Lola has waited until her retirement to begin writing. In addition, she is currently experiencing writer's block. Cardinal embeds an italicized excerpt of Lola's tale, "Loterie," into the larger narrative of *Amours... amours...*, a story-within-a-story technique that the author frequently employed in such earlier texts as *Une vie pour deux* (1978) and *Comme si de rien n'était* (1990). As such, the internal narrative echoes and comments on the larger text.

Amour... amours... unfolds in the span of one morning and afternoon during which Lola sits on her terrace, under an aging bower, and recalls her past—her childhood in Algeria, various love relationships, a troubled marriage, and writing. In her review of *Amour... amours...*, Patrice J. Proulx explains that the bower is "a timeworn structure [...] emblematic of [Lola's] own need for physical and psychological healing" (1005). Indeed, Lola seeks solace through the act of remembering, the prime motor of the work. Because of the author's practice of what Carolyn Durham calls "autocitation"²—the recurrence of characters, scenes, and even specific passages from one text to the next—readers familiar with the Cardinalian universe have already read in earlier works, both autobiographical and fictional, of a woman's love for Algeria, her battles with

1. This article is based, in part, on my conference presentation entitled "Expressing Algeria in Marie Cardinal," International Colloquium in Twentieth-Century French Studies, Philadelphia, March 2000.
2. Durham includes an extended analysis of Cardinal's use of "autocitation" in *The Contexture of Feminism*.

mental illness, her mother complex, her affair with a professor, her three children, and her husband's adultery. Several of these components are taken up in *Amour... amours...*, and the heroine Lola functions, to a large extent, as a spokesperson for the author. The fact that Cardinal returned to familiar themes in autobiographical or autofictional works suggests that she continually grappled with her past and its impact on her sense of self.

Cardinal long tried to articulate her bicultural origins. In *Les Pieds-Noirs* (1988), for example, she expresses the influence of both France and Algeria on her sense of identity—"Deux pays, deux cœurs, deux têtes" (54). However, she frequently reveals a stronger emotional attachment to her native land—"mon pays, je veux dire l'Algérie" (*Les Pieds-Noirs* 54)—and a complicated relationship to her origins. In *Les mots pour le dire* (1975), Cardinal stages a dramatic separation from two maternal figures—the mother and the "motherland," Algeria. Although the protagonist favors Algerian independence, separation from the motherland she loves leaves her feeling conflicted. Marguerite Le Clézio explains that in *Les mots pour le dire* "[t]he mother's body and the land, Algeria, are metaphorically conjoined as symbols of origins from which the daughter is drastically severed" (385). In the travel diary *Au pays de mes racines* (1980), Cardinal again expresses her visceral connection to Algeria. When she returns to her birthplace after twenty-four years, her emotions overflow: "Quelle joie de te revoir, quelle joie profonde ! Bonjour ma mère, ma sœur, mon amie" (122). Through writing of this reunion with the homeland, Cardinal tries to understand her dual origins: "[P]ourquoi écrire ces pages sinon pour essayer de comprendre l'équilibre ou le déséquilibre que créent en moi l'alliance ou la guerre de deux cultures ?" (20). In fact, in several of Cardinal's texts, including *Les mots pour le dire*, *Une vie pour deux*, and *Les grands désordres* (1987), talking about a trauma—of loss, displacement, or interpersonal strife—either parallels or incites writing of it, and this helps a troubled protagonist to heal. Yet in *Amour... amours...*, writing no longer provides such therapeutic benefits. It becomes apparent that understanding one's past within the complicated history of the French occupation of Algeria requires attention to the orality that is so much a part of Algerian culture.

Attention to the *parole* has been integral to Cardinal's writings for many years. First, the title *Les mots pour le dire* recalls not only Boileau's *L'art poétique* ("Ce que l'on conçoit bien s'énonce clairement, / Et les mots pour le dire arrivent aisément" [160]), but also Sartre's autobiography by a similar title: *Les mots*. Sartre's work, like Cardinal's, inscribes the birth of a writer. However, Cardinal builds on the two sections of Sartre's personal narrative—*lire* and *écrire*—with *dire* in her *Les mots pour le dire*. With the evocation of speech in her title, Cardinal's autobiography appeals to a community of women, in particular, for the oral tradition reflects the only "language" to which many women have had access in the past. The *parole* is again important in Cardinal's *Autrement dit*, an innovative text published in 1977 and written as a "response" to readers' letters, appreciation, and questions about *Les mots pour le dire*. Interestingly, in *Autrement dit*, Cardinal incorporates prose meditations on her past, her writing, language, and feminism alongside a transcription of an interview that Annie Leclerc conducted with her. Hence, the work constitutes a *mélange* of written and spoken texts. Early in *Autrement dit*, Cardinal explains her desire to communicate with the many readers who have expressed their love for *Les mots pour le dire*. She writes: "[J]'ai envie de parler avec eux, envie d'échanger des paroles, envie de dire, pas tellement envie d'écrire" (6). Cardinal again thematizes the spoken word in her *Jeudis de Charles et de Lula* (1993). In this text, Cardinal's main characters, the unconventional husband and wife Charles and Lula, choose to meet once per week, on Thursdays, to discuss a topic chosen in advance, to debate, to "converse." Finally, *Amour... amours...* again places emphasis on the *parole*. In this text, however, Cardinal challenges the limits of writing to a more marked

degree than in her earlier pieces. Instead of the birth of the writer that we see in *Les mots pour le dire*, *Amour... amours...* portrays the would-be writer, the incapable writer, the amateur who seemingly will never find satisfaction in her own literary production. Further, her failure to write well stems from the fact that she cannot capture the spoken word in written form.

How does Cardinal thematize orality in *Amour... amours...*? First, she tackles the notion of stretching the limits of everyday vocabulary. Lola remembers her grandmother, for example, this elder *pied-noir* who is part of the granddaughter's Algerian universe, a woman who did not merely tell stories but rather spun tales: "[E]lle contait" (39). She did so because there was "une si longue distance, tant de jours accumulés entre l'instant présent [...] et les événements évoqués qu'une adaptation était nécessaire" (39). This adaptation implies the creative zone that the true storyteller must enter in order to stir and communicate memories. The grandmother calls up dated terms, "un 'macfarlane'" for "un imperméable," "des 'bottines'" for "certaines chaussures hautes" (34), terms that are foreign to the granddaughter. The latter delights in "ce vocabulaire qui jaillissait parfois, portant un sens fané" (40). The "faded meanings" of these old-fashioned terms bring the past to life. We recall that in several of Cardinal's previous works she described a grandmother who knitted, lamenting: "Ah ! si nos tricots pouvaient parler !" ³ This is, of course, linked to Cardinal's admiration for craftsmanship—knitting, embroidery, cooking—which often constitutes women's ways of "speaking." For the author, storytelling, too, is a kind of craft, one that she always associated with her past. In fact, the grandmother's tales evoke the Arab oral tradition. For Cardinal, that heritage is associated, to a large extent, with the feminine.

Orality is once again significant in Cardinal's endeavor to express Algeria through her employment of specific literary techniques and her attempts to theorize about language itself. She depicts Lola as struggling to portray the scents and sounds of her Algerian youth. We read: "Il faudrait qu'elle s'exprime, qu'elle écrive, qu'elle dise. Ecrire que la Méditerranée est proche [...]. Écrire les cigales. [...] Écrire le thym. [...] Écrire, écrire, écrire. [...] Dire, dire, dire, dire" (99). We note the obvious consideration of writing versus saying, but also the more subtle oral quality of the passage—the use of repetition, anaphora, and rhythmic cadences in order to convey memories. The excerpt continues: "Pour entendre des sons, pour entendre des mots, pour les sentir rouler dans les joues, pour que la langue les suce" (99-100). Lola wishes not only to describe sensual sensations, but to sensualize language itself; one should not only hear words, but suck them, feel them rolling in one's mouth in order to experience better Algeria.

Whether trying to articulate her past verbally or in writing, Cardinal always had to negotiate between the two languages of her youth, French and Arabic, and the two cultures that contributed toward her formation. In her works, Cardinal represents this duality in various ways. In *Au pays de mes racines*, Cardinal recalls a trip to Egypt during which she is frustrated to realize that she can no longer converse in Arabic—a language she spoke fluently as a girl (84-85). In *Amour... amours...*, Cardinal incorporates Arabic expressions, a frequent technique in her texts. In the realist mode, she interjects these phrases into her anecdotes to capture a certain atmosphere, albeit from her own perspective. For example, Lola recalls a celebration to commemorate the end of a grape harvest season when she was young. As an adolescent she danced for the workers, her friends, what she calls her Algerian "family." In this episode, the laborers chant and clap their hands yelling "Ya Lola zina ! Ya Lola zina !" meaning "Lola jolie, Lola jolie" (75).

3. We find this quotation in *Autrement dit* (162), for instance. Similar examples can be found in *Une vie pour deux* (25) and *Comme si de rien n'était* (118).

I shall elaborate later on the fact that the *pied-noir* girl is the object of the gaze, while the Arabic men are relegated to the position of *voyeurs*. A markedly similar scene appears in *Les Pieds-Noirs* (50-51) as part of an autobiographical evocation in which Cardinal describes the youthful pleasure of dancing at her family's farm. The repetition of this autobiographical episode in *Amour... amours...* attests to Cardinal's connection with her heroine Lola. Another way in which Cardinal explores her bicultural origins is to emphasize that in the Algiers of her youth, France was always present. In *Amour... amours...*, her protagonist Lola reflects: "Sa ville, un amoncellement de cubes blancs. [...] Elle était de la Méditerranée [...]. [S]on âme, la casbah, [...] était très ancienne" (11). But Algiers had a French identity as well—"ça se voyait aux inscriptions gravées sur les frontons des édifices publics et des monuments, ça se voyait aux drapeaux bleu blanc rouge" (12).

Other writers and critics depict similar sentiments of instability between two (or more) linguistic and cultural worlds. The Moroccan writer and critic Abdelkébir Khatibi describes an uneasy existence "between" French and Arabic in the lyrical *Amour bilingue* (1983): "A chaque instant, la langue étrangère peut — pouvoir sans limite — se retirer en elle, au-delà de toute traduction. Je suis, se disait-il, un milieu entre deux langues : plus je vais au milieu, plus je m'en éloigne" (10-11). And yet it is this "middle ground" that is desirable. Khatibi evokes the difficulty of living out the bilingual and bicultural divide as well as the insatiable desire for linguistic unity: "[F]aire muter une langue dans une autre est impossible. Et je désire cet impossible" (35). In a recent essay entitled "Un étranger professionnel," Khatibi describes his need to differentiate between languages when he writes. He finds that working within two or several languages can create confusion on the level of identity: "[L]a pratique de plusieurs langues est un grand risque, parfois même elle est un lieu infernal, une sorte de rage de désidentification" (126).

In the polyphonic, collective autobiography *L'amour, la fantasia* (1985), the Algerian author Assia Djebar also relates issues of linguistic tension. She explains that her use of French, the language of the colonizer, constitutes a type of exile: "Parler de soi-même hors de la langue des aïeules, c'est se dévoiler certes, mais pas seulement pour sortir de l'enfance, pour s'en exiler définitivement" (178). Because of the gap between the mother language and imposed language, Djebar claims that "[l]'autobiographie pratiquée dans la langue adverse se tisse comme une fiction" (243). Writing an "authentic" autobiography, then, in a second, learned language, particularly that of the oppressor, is impossible—the result must be partly fictional.⁴ In reference to her writings in French, Djebar has discussed the distinction between "francophone" and "francograph."⁵ She prefers the latter appellation, claiming that rather than producing straightforward texts in French, her writing constitutes a type of "translation" of Arabic terms and concepts relevant to life in North Africa but not Europe. In her comparison of Djebar's *L'amour, la fantasia* and Cardinal's *Les mots pour le dire*, Laurie Corbin discusses these authors' anxieties stemming from the varied allegiances that characterized their youths. Corbin finds that "[t]hese texts show that the oppressed can both identify with and reject the cultures that oppress them, lacking a language that might permit them to speak their sense of themselves without struggle" (142). In Cardinal's case, although the protagonist of *Les mots pour le dire* is a member of the dominant culture, it is that colonial, bourgeois mentality, embodied by her mother, that contributes to her mental illness. Again, in *Amour... amours...*, we find that Cardinal, like Djebar, needs to imbue her text with the bilingual/bicultural world she experienced and to search for that "in-

4. The fictional aspect of all autobiography has, of course, been widely debated in literature and criticism.

5. I draw this information from Djebar's presentation, "Fictions et frictions francophones." See also Gauvin's discussion of these terms in "Littératures visibles et invisibles."

between" language that she lacks. Lise Gauvin's comments on the particular nature of the Francophone writer are relevant concerning Cardinal's search for an adequate language to express her personal history: "[L]a langue d'écriture est un espace à inventer et à conquérir à partir des multiples possibles que lui offre la proximité d'autres langues, dont certaines, liées aux cultures de l'oralité, font partie de son propre patrimoine langagier" (111). Indeed, Cardinal explores various possible avenues to illustrate her heritage in *Amours... amours...*, many of which are linked to the Arab oral tradition.

The France–Algeria duality is clearly symbolized in the dance scene of *Amour... amours...*, an episode that appears halfway through the text and that underscores Cardinal's complex, contradictory relationship to her native land. At the beginning of this scene, we are told that the young Lola is in a place of transgression, and her presence is frowned upon by the servant Yamina: "Lola sait que Yamina n'aime pas qu'elle soit sortie avec son oncle, seule au milieu de tous ces hommes. Tant pis" (73). Thus, here, Lola is portrayed as different from the Algerian women; she possesses her own set of values, her own adventurous spirit. However, we shall see that her similarity to other women is also apparent. Lola is at the center of this scene, with the Arab men forming a circle around her. They occupy, as mentioned previously, the role of *voyeurs*. Marie-Paule Ha discusses Cardinal's perplexing relationship to Algerians and Algeria. She posits that although the author seems to have a genuine affection for Algerians, they are consistently depicted as servants, domestics, and workers. In the previous scene, it is the family employees and farm hands who exhort Lola to dance. Ha finds that Cardinal's Algeria is "unrelated [...] to that of millions of Algerians" (322). She explains that "the freedom enjoyed by white settlers like [Cardinal was] bought at the cost of the enslavement of an entire people" (322). We realize that the pleasure young Lola enjoys with the chauffeur Kader on the farm or the servant Yamina in the kitchen is not gratuitous. Returning to the dance scene, we note that the male spectators are drawn to Lola's sensuality, and she revels in her own voluptuousness: she dances "[u]ne danse d'amour pour tous les visages attentifs" (77), emphasizing her pleasure at being the object of their gaze. The rhythm of her dance is determined by "[s]on ventre [...] le centre de la danse" (76), evoking women's sexuality and life-giving potential. Therefore, as opposed to her difference from Yamina, who scorns her presence as a girl alone among men, here Lola actually communes with Algerian women; they are all women, all capable of being desired for their femininity. But another distinction remains: Lola removes her sandals, spreads her arms, and sways to the rhythm of the music. She becomes, in a sense, uninhibited among the viewers, unveiled. Rather than concealing her sensuality, Lola accepts the "foulard à longues franges" (75) offered to her. Instead of the traditional headscarf, her "foulard" is wrapped around her swaying hips, and it is meant to attract, rather than repel, attention. Interestingly, Lola does not only dance for the admiring workers, however. She also moves for Algeria herself, "pour les vallonnements rouges, pour la terre fertile. Sa danse est une action de grâces pour le goût des figues mûres [...]. Sa danse est une prière : que chaque soir l'eau arrose ce pays" (77). She is the archetypal woman praying for fertility and riches for this land. But does this mean that she is a part of Algerian culture, that she belongs to it, or is she an outsider?

In an episode that illustrates the loss of the homeland, Lola recalls her departure from Algeria for France as a young woman. Here, it is Algiers that symbolizes woman. Gazing upon the city from her steamer, Lola sees "une sultane allongée au bord de l'eau"—her head is the "casbah," her hips the vineyards, her bare feet covered by the greenery of the carob trees (10). But in this scene, Algiers is veiled, partially hidden from Lola's longing eyes: "Il est dix heures du matin, Alger porte déjà le voile blanc des brumes de l'été" (10). We know that Cardinal and her family left Algeria when the war

broke out. Similarly, as Lola leaves “sa ville” (10)⁶ to be sent back to France, she can only glimpse as this lost lover, this alluring woman, Algiers, through a veil. The obscured city also alludes to the difficulty Lola will experience later in life in trying to express her past. In leaving Algeria, Lola is, indeed, losing her home, losing the land that nurtured her growth. We read: “Elle ne sait pas, ce jour-là, qu’elle ne sera plus jamais chez elle ici” (11). She became a woman there—“dans ces rues, dans ces jardins, où s’est composée son âme, où s’est constitué son esprit, où s’est formé son corps” (11). We understand that in losing her motherland—that nurturing maternal figure—she will be condemned to wandering, to searching for that lost dwelling in the future. Will she ever be able to create a new home or communicate her complicated selfhood?

The protagonist’s struggle to feel at home and rooted in a particular land, in fact, permeates the text and brings us back to the distinction between written and spoken expressions of her past. As mentioned previously, Lola had tried to write a story. We learn that Lola first conceived of her tale, “Loterie,” because she had longed to flee her family, her children then in their twenties, and create an independent life for herself. Because Lola could never actually accomplish this flight from her loved ones, she decided to write of it. Although the story reflects Lola’s fantasy, it also incorporates issues of border-crossing and exile that have, in fact, characterized her life far from Algeria. The narrative stages the experiences of a woman named Eliane, a heroine much like Lola herself (and hence much like Cardinal) and her unexpected lottery success. With her winnings, Eliane buys a large home in America “avec l’idée d’y finir sa vie” (25). This act is mirrored in the extended narrative of *Amour... amours...*. Toward the end of that text, Lola reflects on her own purchase of a spacious abode in Avignon, the home whose weathered bower is the locus of her repose throughout the story, the place where she engages in remembering. Lola asks herself why she bought this home. We read: “Pourquoi cette maison ? Pour y reconstituer l’Algérie ? [...] Lola se disait qu’elle s’était offert un bout d’Algérie, que l’Algérie lui manquait moins depuis qu’elle avait acquis cette terre” (135). Because she can no longer live in Algeria, and because she has always been divided between cultures, lands, and languages, Lola tries to establish herself in a warm, green place that blends France and Algeria, the present and the past.⁷ Just as Lola’s heroine Eliane asks herself why she brought furniture from France to her new home in America, so does Cardinal’s protagonist Lola, recognizing the autobiographical component of her story “Loterie,” gaze at her own heavy Louis XV-style furnishings and reflect: “[E]lle les a traînés partout avec elle” (31). Can pieces of a past life, a former home, blend with the new one? Can the new abode reflect a dual identity? According to Proulx, Cardinal the author has dealt with her complex bicultural heritage through writing of her past in Algeria and her exile from it (1996:244). Proulx maintains that with no real home, “[c]’est donc à travers l’écriture [que Cardinal se crée] un nouveau lieu d’origine” (1996:247). And yet, although she frequently sought an understanding of her past through the written word, Cardinal also illustrates in *Amour... amours...* that writing can break down. Lola’s “Loterie,” for example, is never completed. By thematizing the limits of writing in this text, Cardinal, via her protagonist, deals with the possibility either that writing may fail to communicate personal experiences, or that one will no longer be able to write.

For Cardinal’s fictional author Lola, writing alone does not succeed in offering the necessary rootedness. Interestingly, although Lola had looked forward to retirement in

6. See Ha on Cardinal’s use of pronouns: they sometimes reflect an allegiance to France, sometimes to Algeria.

7. In response to this study (see note 1), Michèle Bacholle noted the significance of Avignon as Lola’s new home. The city’s famous “pont d’Avignon” may symbolize the bridge between France and Algeria that Lola desires.

order to have time to write, she is currently unable to do so: "En ce moment elle n'écrit pas. Elle est devant un mur" (17). Her writer's block is accompanied by a sense of regret. For example, she has visions of a character in a novel "qu'elle avait voulu écrire" (23). *Amour... amours...* not only deals with fears about writing that Cardinal had perhaps experienced, but it also suggests, through Lola, that the aging Cardinal realized that certain stories would never be written, or never be completely expressed through writing. By extension, the self-understanding that Cardinal had so long pursued in her texts was in peril.

In *Amour... amours...*, Cardinal expresses dissatisfaction with writing in specific instances. Although Lola had wanted to write her passions, she finds her writing stilted—"[passé] au peigne fin, architectur[é], déguis[é] [...]. Au lieu de s'ouvrir, [Lola] se bâillonnait" (17). Interestingly, Cardinal uses similar terminology in *Au pays de mes racines* in describing the regularity of France—a scripted orderliness that she contrasts to the unruliness of Algeria. She portrays France as a country that flaunts an orderly History⁸: "Il y a son Histoire partout qui fait de l'œil [...] qui parade. [...] C'est une histoire de gens [...] habitués à la riche harmonie née du disparate des régions, habitués à avoir des voisins différents. [...] [L]a terre est divisée en lopins et [...] depuis des siècles, les voies sont indiquées avec autorité" (27-28). Algeria, on the other hand, is a country whose past is a tumultuous adventure: "L'Histoire se raconte, elle ne s'architecture pas [...] elle est pleine de chevauchées, de razzias [...] elle se règle en coupant le phallus des vaincus ou en leur ouvrant la gorge" (28, emphasis added). Thus, according to Cardinal, the Algerian past "tells itself" like a fantastic tale. Its events and customs evoke an oral tradition that cannot be regulated, written down, or tamed. It is precisely that which is "architecturé" that Lola dislikes about her tale. After rereading the excerpt from "Loterie," Lola concludes that the story is a failure. She finds her "cinquantaine de pages [...] correctes, insignifiantes, nulles" (17). Does her writing resemble too closely the proper, structured, rational France that Cardinal discusses in *Au pays de mes racines*? Does she seek a language that reflects her homeland, something less rigid and fixed, something with the quality of a conversation?⁹

In his essay "Écrire en français, penser dans sa langue maternelle," Ahmadou Kourouma, from the Ivory Coast, claims similar challenges in trying to render the spirituality of his homeland and the nuances of his native African tongue into the "constructed" and "linear" French language. Kourouma finds that the distinctions between French and his native language derive, in part, from differing religious philosophies: "Le français est une langue disciplinée, policée par l'écriture, dont le substrat est la chrétienté. Ma langue maternelle, la langue dans laquelle je conçois, n'a connu que la grande liberté de l'oralité ; elle est assise sur une culture de base animiste" (115). Interestingly, Cardinal's creative *Amour... amours...* touches on prominent issues of the dichotomy between writing and speech that Kourouma, Khatibi, and others raise not only in their novels, but in their literary criticism as well. Indeed, Cardinal, who had written extensively on orality in the 1970s, emerges as progressive in anticipating today's critical debates.

8. See Marrone 1997 for a discussion of Cardinal's distinction between official History—"L'Histoire" with a capital H—and the histories/stories—"les histoires"—of numerous individuals.

9. Although Cardinal never advocated an *écriture féminine*, she did encourage a broadening of language in order to articulate all types of experiences, particularly those of women. Kourouma expresses similar notions of inclusiveness in his discussion of *la francophonie*: "Écrire en français en continuant à penser dans sa langue maternelle [...] permet de réaliser une francophonie ouverte, une francophonie multiculturelle qui peut rassembler des peuples égaux qui considéreront en définitive le français comme un bien commun" (118). See my chapter, "Creativity and Community in Marie Cardinal's *Les mots pour le dire*" in Marrone 2000, as well as my interview with Cardinal (Marrone 1996), for discussions of her theories on language and writing.

In *Autrement dit*, for example, Cardinal outlines the connection between writing and speaking, and the importance of orality in her sense of identity. In that text, she details the difficulty she experienced in completing *Les mots pour le dire*. We read: “Des heures à tourner autour de quelques mots ! C’était pourtant si facile à dire ce que j’avais à dire. À dire. Mais pas à écrire” (71). Whereas speech flows effortlessly, rendering speech into writing is a painfully slow process, a problem again portrayed in *Amour... amours...* Annie Leclerc responds to Cardinal’s previous comments, concluding: “Tu es une conteuse” (*Autrement dit* 71). Cardinal’s reaction affirms the link between orality and her homeland:

Oui, c’est lié à mon enfance, c’est méditerranéen. Tu sais que les Arabes sont des conteurs formidables et aussi des auditeurs formidables. [...] Quand j’étais petite il y avait une femme comme ça à la ferme. Elle nous racontait des histoires, moitié arabe, moitié français. [...] Je n’oublierai jamais ces mots, mais aussi ces gestes, ses yeux, les odeurs qui venaient de son canoun. (71-72)

Cardinal’s recollection of the gestures of this Algerian *conteuse* echoes a similar comment by Kourouma regarding the complexity of orality: “L’oralité n’est pas que la parole parlée, mais aussi la parole retenue, le silence. Elle n’est pas seulement la parole et le silence, mais aussi le geste” (116). As Cardinal continues her commentary in *Autrement dit* on the Arab storyteller, she further develops her ideas on the magic of the spoken word: “J’aime ça, parler, séduire les gens [...]. La chaleur des mots dans ces cas-là ! Leur poids ! leur jus, leurs secrets !” (72). Certainly, Cardinal wished to “seduce” with her own “stories,” to imbue them with the bilingual, bicultural atmosphere of her youth and the conversational quality that characterized the storytelling she so enjoyed. In *Amour... amours...*, Lola strives for a kind of writing that is more fluid, that embodies the sensuality of speech, an ambition she is unable to fulfill.

Writing’s collapse becomes apparent through the thematization of love evoked in the title. As Lola reflects on her youth in Algeria and her past in general, she recalls the many different kinds of love that characterize her life—first love, love of family and community, love of land, and love of language. These relationships highlight the dichotomy between writing and speech and Lola’s unfulfilled desire to bring orality to writing. As a young woman, before the Algerian struggle for independence, for instance, Lola fell in love with “Jacques à la belle voix” (87). Lola’s virginity symbolizes the perceived innocence of her life prior to the war. When their sexual relationship begins, Jacques’ voice continues to attract her—“[une] voix [...] belle, pleine, grave, et douce” (85). While Jacques sings in the bathroom, Lola disrobes: “Elle était nue. [...] Elle écoutait la voix de Jacques” (86). Whereas Jacques’ voice gives Lola such pleasure, his writing will disappoint her. After Jacques leaves for France promising to come back for her, the love declared in his letters proves false: “[I]l y a eu une lettre, la dernière, dans laquelle il disait qu’il allait se marier avec une jeune fille qu’il adorait” (88). Therefore, writing is portrayed negatively—it has the power to deceive and to hurt. Eventually, Lola would marry François Lavoie, “un jeune professeur de lettres” (93). Despite the evocation of voice in his surname, François is described as “silencieux. [...] [I]l parlait peu” (93-94). Although he desires to make films, his interest in the written word is characterized by his serious literary pursuits, in keeping with his bourgeois family’s expectations of him: “Il enseignait la littérature française. Il préparait une agrégation de lettres pures” (93). This teacher of French—the choice of language being significant—is far removed from the Algerian world Lola treasures. Whereas when Jacques and Lola traveled together, she reveled in his voice, when François and Lola live together, she falls asleep to “le bruit mou que faisaient les pages des gros dictionnaires de grec et de latin

quand [François] les manipulait" (96). Whereas the relationship with "Jacques of the beautiful voice" reflects a period of innocence, intimacy with the bookish François leads to a period of disaster for Lola, both personally and politically. Shortly after they begin living together, Lola becomes pregnant. A few years and three children later, Lola has regrets over the turmoil in her own life and the devastation of the war: "Les Français avaient perdu la guerre d'Algérie. Lola aussi était perdue. Elle ressemblait à ces îles d'algues [...] flottantes, sans racines" (98). Her exile from Algeria clearly parallels the deterioration of both her own stability and her relationship with François—an unhealthy rapport with a man of the written word.¹⁰

Lola wonders if in the learned François she saw a father, her own having died when she was just a girl. We read: "Il n'y a pas eu d'hommes dans la jeunesse de Lola [...] elle vivait entre deux femmes" (71)—her mother and her grandmother. Like François, Lola's father, too, was intellectual—"un brillant ingénieur" (44). However, she has no sense of the affective aspect of a father: she can only imagine it. For example, regarding Lola's success as a young woman in attaining her teaching degree, we discover: "*Elle invente la voix de son père* qui lui dit gentiment : « Calme-toi. Je sais que tu l'as ton diplôme, j'en suis fier »" (69-70, emphasis added). Significantly, not only does Lola imagine a father's tenderness, but that affection is linked to his "invented voice" and, initially, to all that is positive in the text (the voice of her grandmother telling tales, the voices of Arab workers chanting as they watch Lola dance, the voice of Jacques). But this affirming paternal figure is just a fiction; the real father remains a mystery and thus troubling for Lola. Interestingly, it is precisely Lola's ignorance concerning that primary relationship with a man that contributes to her writer's block: "Elle ne veut pas parler du père, du mari, de l'homme. Elle refuse d'écrire sur ce sujet. Pourquoi ?" (17). Perhaps as a means to fill the paternal void, Lola has surrounded herself with books. Her mother's family, after all, was not interested in her studies. We read: "Les livres partout autour d'elle [...] elle ne connaît pas de meilleure protection" (71). Yet the books on her shelves are "bien rangés" (71), recalling the orderliness of France and the type of regularity that stifles Lola's own writing. Therefore, the author hints that the "protection" provided by the written word is superficial and incomplete. Similarly, true paternal security in Lola's life is lacking. Cardinal frequently grappled with the absent father in her autobiographical and autofictional writings, in particular in *Le passé empiété* (1983), in which she invented a creative biography of her father from the meager morsels she possessed. With *Amour... amours...*, Cardinal evokes the father once again, but here she makes a troubling connection between the absent paternal figure and the incapacity to write. Lola is wary of the father/of men: "Les hommes attiraient Lola, mais elle ne les connaissait pas, elle s'en méfiait" (71). Because it is painful for her to broach the paternal void and ultimately impossible to write the "unknown father," writing itself becomes suspect.

Anchored in the paternal and detached from the oral tradition in which she was raised, writing cannot completely reflect the protagonist's reality or capture memories of the motherland. Lola clearly expresses her disappointment with her literary attempt. Regarding "Loterie," we read: "[Lola] constate à voix haute : « Ça n'a aucun intérêt »" (31, emphasis added). Lola articulates, she speaks out loud, the limits of writing. Instead, it is necessary to move beyond writing—to endeavor to "speak Algeria." In *Amour...*

10. The fact that François reappears at the end of *Amour... amours...*, thereby signaling that his relationship with Lola has endured in a different form despite separation, may allude to the fact that they have both changed as they have grown older and that Lola is trying to come to terms with her distance from François and from her homeland. When he calls to tell her of his arrival in France, we read: "Elle admet qu'elle a eu du plaisir à entendre la voix de François" (144-45, emphasis added). She seems to see him in a new light—not as the one-dimensional man she knew when they married.

amours.... Cardinal interrogates the limits of writing and challenges the written word to embody orality. By probing the significance of speech, she expands her means of understanding her origins.

As Lola contemplates the purchase of her home in Avignon—that concrete attempt to create a space that she can call her own—she reflects on her need for solitude and its association with the abandonment she has experienced in her life. She realizes that she has contradictory impulses: “[E]lle admet qu’elle aime être solitaire et qu’elle déteste être seule. Ce qu’elle déteste c’est l’abandon...” (141). Did she abandon Algeria or vice-versa? She asks the same question about her relationship with François: “[L]equel a abandonné l’autre ?” (145). Either way, such fundamental losses—of her homeland, her great love (*Amour*), and of the various loves (*amours*) in her life—incite Lola, as they did Cardinal, constantly to remember, continually to try to articulate her geographical and emotional displacement, to seek the words to say it.

Sacred Heart University

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