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Pretense and Possibility: The Tomorrows of Charles, Lula and Marie Cardinal

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Claire Marrone (essay date fall 1997)

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[In the following essay, Marrone discusses the relationship between the dual protagonists in *Les Jeudis de Charles et de Lula* and notes their gender-based differences in thought, language, and desires.]

Marie Cardinal has enjoyed international notoriety for over two decades, particularly since the publication of her most celebrated text, *Les Mots pour le dire* (1975). Autobiography has always been at the center of Cardinal's production, and her search for self-knowledge has taken various forms. Her corpus, which includes over fifteen works of fiction, autobiography, and criticism, has been especially relevant for contemporary feminist critics, for her writing highlights such issues as: the fusion and non-fictional elements; historical, mythical and political constructions of female identity; the mother-daughter relationship; and exilic writing.

Many of Cardinal's text trace her nomadic existence. Born in Algeria 1929 to a French colonial family, she currently resides a portion of the year in Malacène, in the South of France, and part of the year in Montreal. Some twelve years ago, Cardinal became a Canadian citizen. She feels at home amidst the Quebeckers who, because of their history of colonization, remind her of the *pieds-noirs*.¹ Her texts often thematize geographical wandering as analogous to the psychological journey of self-discovery.

In Marie Cardinal's latest text, *Les Jeudis de Charles et de Lula* (1993)², words and writing provide once again space for self-exploration. As in so many of Cardinal's previous texts, personal experience constitutes the impetus for the story. The relationship between the two lifelong lovers, Charles and Lula, resembles Marie Cardinal's relationship with her own husband—a relationship which endures change and separation, but also allows personal and sexual freedom to both partners.³ Like Cardinal, Lula is over sixty years old, lives in Provence and is native of Algeria. Like Jean-Pierre Ronfard, Cardinal's husband, Charles is from the north of France, a researcher, and an avid theater lover. There are also differences between the real and the imaginary couple, however. In an interview with me, Cardinal explains that she is "bouffée par (sa) famille", by the comings and goings of children, grandchildren and in-laws . . . by the commotion of meals, demands, responsibilities. . . .⁴ Lula, on the other hand, has devoted her life mainly to her profession, journalism. When questioned about the autobiographical inspiration for the character Lula, Cardinal explains: "Peut-être que j'aurais aimé être Lula. Peut-être que j'aurais aimé passer ma vie à écrire" (author's interview). The significance of these remarks is not whether or not there is any "truth" to the characters of Charles and Lula, but rather how the play of autobiography and fiction in *Jeudis* creates a space for the writer to imaginatively explore potential selves. I shall argue in this paper that just as Cardinal communicates with her readers through posturing and pretense in the various autobiographical personae she creates, Charles and Lula analogously communicate in *Jeudis* through a series of masks, dramatizations and pretexts. In the above-cited inter-

view, Cardinal continues: "Les Grecs étaient de très bons psychologues. Ils savaient que dans un être humain, il y avait 36 facettes, 36 possibilités." Cardinal indeed suggests such a myriad of possible identities in her numerous self portraits. Although we can never be certain that the real Cardinal actually wishes to communicate through her characters, we can infer a connection between the author and those characters who resemble her through Cardinal's constant preoccupation with the self and autobiographical expression in her writings. States Cardinal: "J'ai besoin d'être la femme de chacun de mes livres" (*Autrement dit* 85). I will first illustrate Cardinal's use of personae. Then, I shall exemplify Cardinal's posturing vis-a-vis her public—readers who, in response to the author, assume many roles. Next, I will demonstrate how this paradigm of pretense parallels Charles and Lula's similar use of masks. Finally, I shall relate the performative art of writing to storytelling in general, and consider the creative process of narrative, and the fabulation it entails, in terms of gender.

Cardinal postulates a multitude of conceivable selves, autobiographical to a greater or lesser degree, in her numerous works—the woman haunted by *la chose* in *Les Mots pour le dire*, the suicidal Camille in *La Souricière*, Simone threatened by a rival in *Une Vie pour deux*, Simone the teacher and devoted mother in *Comme si de rien n'était* (we recall that Cardinal's given name is Simone), Elsa, who struggles with her daughter's drug addiction in *Les Grands Désordres*—all of which can be read as variations on a central theme, that of the author's life. Toward the end of Cardinal's renowned *Les Mots pour le dire*, the narrator decides that she will one day write her own life story. Yet the product will be a *roman*: "je raconterais . . . la guérison d'une femme qui me ressemblerait" (269, emphasis mine). Such narrative play with fictive and autobiographical elements, quite common in contemporary writing by women, opens the space for reconsideration of the self with each new portrait. Colette T. Hall affirms: "Cardinal who uses own life experiences as a starting point for her creation, establishes her own identity when she projects on her female protagonists her possible selves" ("She Is Me More than I" 63). Lucille Cairns concurs that Cardinal "write(s) principally of her own experience and would seem to be incarnating herself, or certain facets of herself, under diverse guises in each new protagonist" (281).

Cardinal also seeks self-understanding through relationships with others. In her various autobiographical portraits, protagonists enact Cardinal's significant connections with her parents, her husband, her children. Several critics such as Nancy Chodorow have emphasized the fact that women define themselves and experience themselves relationally, whereas men feel more autonomous. Hall concurs that in many of Cardinal's

autobiographical texts, whether they be written in the first person or the third person, "the narrator—the author's double—searches for her identity in connection to others" ("*She Is Me More than I*" 60). She explains that Cardinal explores her relationship with her mother in *Les Mots pour le dire*, with her husband in *Une Vie pour deux*, with her father in *Le Passé empiété* and with her daughter in *Les Grands Désordres* ("*She Is Me More than I*" 60). We notice that Cardinal continues the search for self-definition through association with others in her recent texts. In *Comme si de rien n'était*, she explores her relationship to a community of women in a polyvocal narrative, and in *Jeudis* she again explores the bond with her husband.

Might we extend this paradigm even further and postulate that relation to others exists in the imagination as well, and that it is in fact an inspiration for writing? I shall argue that Cardinal in essence dialogues with numerous potential selves through the writing process. For example, certain characters reappear in several texts, and with each refabricated portrait, the author understands better her own identity. Carolyn Durham has written extensively on the techniques of repetition and rewriting in Cardinal's corpus, and documents the reappearance of several characters in various guises in Cardinal's works: the young virgin who experiences sexual awakening despite the conventional mores of her family (*Autrement dit*, *Les Mots pour le dire*, *Une Vie pour deux*, etc.); the suicidal mad woman (*Écoutez la mer*, *Les Mots pour le dire*, *Une Vie pour deux*, etc.); the middle-aged artist, spiritually reborn through her newfound identity (*La Souricière*, *Écoutez la mer*, etc.) (Durham 59-60). Durham also points out the frequency of "autocitation," or the repetition of significant passages, sometimes verbatim, from one work to the next. For example, the scene in which a young mother tells her teenage daughter of attempts to abort her is found in *La Clé sur la porte*, and later, in a different context and through another narrator, in *Les Mots pour le dire*, and once again in *Au Pays de mes racines* (Durham 59). Cardinal's corpus, then, essentially becomes a "pre-text" for each new literary project upon which she embarks. Such repetition and rewriting attests to an intertextual dialogue between Cardinal and the personages she creates—characters who come back to her and who are refashioned in the author's imagination. The link between all of Cardinal's writings is the obsessive return to characters who become interlocutors with the writer, and who help her consider the complexities of the self. Cardinal emphasizes this association from one text to the next:

J'ai trouvé que c'était une chaîne, l'écriture. . . . C'est toujours le même livre qu'on approfondit, qu'on élargit, qu'on agrandit, qu'on voudrait améliorer, qu'on voudrait perfectionner, etc. Je pense qu'après, quand on est mort, l'ensemble des livres, ça fait un livre.

(author's interview)

Anne Donaday adds that Cardinal develops her sense of selfhood through relationships with her female characters from one text to the next:

Toutes ces femmes dont elle se réclame de livre en livre, sa mère, sa sœur morte, sa fille, Mary, les héroïnes tragiques méditerranéennes (Médée, Clytemnestre, Electre, Iphigénie), 'sont des miroirs dans lesquels je me reflète' (Cardinal, *Le Passé empiété*, 258), miroirs à double face représentant l'angoisse de la mort tout en servant de moyens de la renaissance.

(573)

I posit that the internal dialogue between Cardinal and her own characters is also extended outward, as the author reinvents herself and re-presents herself for her public with each new text. Writing becomes a narrative performance for the public, and reading and criticism—by writers, by scholars, by women who have been so moved by Cardinal's works—allow us to enter into "conversation" with the author. Through the responses and reactions of her public, Cardinal is able to grow and develop as a writer. Central to Cardinal's perception of self is indeed her identity as an author. She states: "C'est sûr que ce qui me fait le plus exister, bien plus que les enfants, les petits-enfants et le reste, c'est l'écriture. Si on m'enlève l'écriture, je ne suis plus rien" (personal interview). This is echoed in the autobiographical *Les Mots pour le dire*, where the main character's self-understanding is closely linked to her success as a writer; writing becomes, in fact, integral to the cure for her mental problems. Furthermore, Cardinal has stated on several occasions that she writes for women, for those, in particular, who: "ne savent pas traduire en mots ce que leur corps sait: la lenteur des gestations, la viscosité féconde . . . le poids du temps . . . L'archaïsme de nos vies de femmes . . ." (*Autrement dit* 81). Sophie Godin confirms: "Cardinal est de ces écrivains qui parlent de nous, de notre vie, de nos malaises, avec des mots quotidiens. Ses romans sont ceux dans lesquels l'on se reconnaît." Pierre Maury ponders the pressure Cardinal must undoubtedly experience, in particular after the success of *Les Mots pour le dire*: "Comment, en effet, penser que l'on va continuer de répondre à l'attente de femmes dont la vie a parfois changé après la lecture (*des Mots pour le dire*), sinon en continuant à suivre son propre chemin?" We, the readers, in particular women readers who constitute the majority of Cardinal's reading public⁵, respond, demand, expect, await new texts. We, too, wear various hats as we approach each narrative—we are women, sisters, mothers, daughters, critics, writers, friends. We may respond to her texts differently depending on the role we assume at the moment. In the case of *Jeudis*, the critic in us wonders if the dialogue between Charles and Lula is contrived. We prefer Cardinal's poetic meditations. Consider, for example, the following description of Lula:

Elle n'a pas envie de parler. Elle est plongée dans une torpeur où elle se plaît. Elle flotte dans le magma rassurant des devinettes et des clefs de son passé. . . . Elle est dans ce berceau, dans cet œuf, elle n'a pas le désir d'en sortir.

(8)

We prefer her insertion of past events which slowly illuminate Charles and Lula's relationship. A letter from Charles dated March 26, 1955: "Lula, ma douce-dure . . . je vais me marier avec Françoise, une amie d'enfance . . ." (140-41), followed by "La veille, Lula avait appris qu'elle était enciente . . . Elle n'aurait pas de mari, et alors? Et puis, si elle avait un fils elle l'appellerait Charles et si elle avait une fille elle l'appellerait Charlotte" (143-46). The feminist in us cheers Lula's independence, her ability to juggle career and family life, and her questioning of traditional roles. Lula indeed has a daughter, Charlotte, yet Charlotte confides in her father when she becomes pregnant, and it is he, rather than the mother, who arranges for an abortion—a secret never revealed to Lula. Finally, the mothers and daughters in us marvel at Cardinal's humility ("Je ne me prends pas du tout pour un grand écrivain," personal interview), and her capacity to convey the affective aspect of women's lives in *Jeudis* and in her other texts:

Si j'ai un talent, ce n'est pas un talent d'écrivain. Je crois que j'ai le talent de savoir ce que j'ai en commun avec les autres. Et au fond . . . pourquoi (mes) livres ont de tels succès? Parce que c'est la vie de toutes les femmes. Moi, je suis une femme parmi d'autres.

(author's interview)

Our interpretations and criticisms become part of an ongoing conversation between author and public. Cardinal's relationship with her women readers can also be extended to her rapport with the public at large when issues such as deadlines for new manuscripts, revenue from sales, and challenges by the Parisian writers' elite to participate in new trends (many of which Cardinal refuses) are considered. The "autobiographical pact" (Lejeune) becomes one not so much of veracity and intention, but of a continuation of writing and production by the author, and an amplification of desire and expectation by the reading public.

A brief analysis of the two main characters will help elucidate the parallel between the performative nature of Cardinal's writing and the masquerade in which Charles and Lula engage in *Jeudis*. The two main characters are in many ways polar opposites. Lula is attached to nature, to individuals and to humanity. She seeks to understand the patterns and tendencies of her character. Charles is fashionable and flirtatious. He flees commitment, strong emotional bonds and self-interrogation. Each finds the personality of the other incomprehensible, and at times frustrating, yet they

engage in a game of seduction and restraint which creates mutual desire. Uncertainty and fear of loss of the beloved partner furthermore heighten Charles and Lula's attraction to one another.

Despite differences and geographical distance, Charles and Lula's desire to relate, communicate and love in their own way inspires them. Hence when Charles finds himself in Avignon near Lula's home for three months, he proposes a strict agenda of meetings once per week so that he and Lula can debate, philosophize about various subjects, and take stock of their lives. He suggests: "Pendant que je serai à Avignon, nous rencontrer régulièrement, à date fixe, à heure fixe, pour faire le point . . . Se rencontrer avec un but précis: débattre sur un sujet choisi d'avance" (21). Their Thursday meetings to follow will revolve around such topics as le nouveau, les nomades, liberté-égalité-fraternité. We hear echoes of the romans d'idées of the eighteenth century, where fragments of philosophical conversation, otherwise common to the essay, were integrated into a novelistic structure (Enthoven and Scarpetta 153).⁴ Lula marvels at Charles' proposal which responds to her innermost yearnings: "parler, faire le point, y voir clair, mettre de l'ordre dans ses pensées . . ." (22). Regular Thursday meetings are in fact a contrived arrangement which allows the couple to fulfill their mutual desire to be together. At the same time, it allows them to repress any overt and conventional commitment, much in keeping with the unconventional relationship they have lived for over forty years. Why does the couple need such a structure in order to be together and relate on a profound level? What impact does such an artificial arrangement have on their exchanges? Will they communicate differently due to personality and gender over the course of their meetings?

Several scenes in *Jeudis* exemplify Charles and Lula's communication with one another through various masks, dramatizations and pretexts. When Charles surprises Lula at her country home, for example, she is overjoyed, but she will only reveal limited pleasure: "Elle sait qui est là, c'est Charles . . . Déjà, son dispositif de défense se met en place et pourtant la joie frétille en elle . . . Lula ne laissera pas paraître l'essentiel de son plaisir" (9). When Lula cannot reach Charles by telephone to propose a topic for their first session, she reflects: "Tant pis . . . Après tout, ces conversations hebdomadaires ne sont qu'un prétexte. C'est toujours comme ça: quand ils ne se sont pas vus depuis longtemps ils déguisent l'excitation de se retrouver en conduite prudente" (28). Charles, too, is careful to restrain his true emotions: "Il sait qu'il doit mesurer ses réactions, ne pas prendre les choses trop à la rigolade, ou trop au sérieux" (13). In some cases, the performative nature of language serves as a tool of manipulation and power—discourse is organized in order to receive a desired response. For example, when Charles discloses that his greatest

cowardice (the topic of their first debate) is in love relationships, his exposé becomes a dramatization through which he solicits Lula's pardon. We read: "Afin de prouver sa sincérité, Charles se jette avec emphase dans la confession" (30). After recounting how he abandoned a lover and her sick child who had become attached to him, Charles breathes a sigh of relief: "En fait . . . il est soulagé, Lula vient de lui donner l'absolution: il croyait avoir parlé de sa plus grande lâcheté et elle dit qu'ils n'ont pas commencé à parler de la lâcheté . . . Ouf!" (34). I would argue that their lack of direct communication allows Charles and Lula not only to prolong their game of seduction, but that such pretense also grants them greater creativity in revealing who they are or who they would like to be.

The role-playing thematic also accentuates the complex nature of the self in philosophical terms. At one of their sessions, for example, Charles invents a fable. Lula muses: "Le ton de la voix de Charles a changé. Il joue un rôle. C'est peut-être lorsque, délibérément, il joue un rôle qu'elle le trouve le vrai et qu'elle le préfère" (88). Do Charles and Lula flee their "true selves" as they reach beyond direct, straightforward exchange? In fact, the opposite becomes clear—such role-playing, such extension of the boundaries of the self which enables the couple to communicate in an imaginative and hypothetical fashion, leads to greater self-understanding.⁷ Similarly, the role-playing with which Cardinal experiments in her personal narratives, and the various autobiographical personae she creates, provide the structure through which she can dialogue internally in an ongoing quest for self-definition. She accentuates or suppresses (consciously or not) aspects of her own character, and the fiction of fantasy colors her personal portraits. In turn, the various roles we the readers assume allow us to become players in the drama of literary production. Finally, Cardinal's creative performances for her readers, like Charles and Lula's game of pretense and possibility in their exchanges, are echoed in *Jeudis* in the author's treatment of storytelling in general. Just as personal history can be told from various subject positions, and modified with each new narrator and every new text, so can the "story" of collective "History" vary according to she/he who tells the tale. Cardinal states:

Mon idée c'est toujours de mettre l'Histoire avec un grand H en cause, parce que je trouve que l'Histoire nous est mal enseignée et nous est mal racontée. C'est vrai qu'en grande partie c'est parce qu'il n'y a pas de femmes dans l'Histoire ou très peu, et que je trouve ça pas juste parce que l'Histoire ne pourrait pas exister si les femmes n'existaient pas.

(author's interview)

During Charles and Lula's debate on L'Histoire (the double entendre resonates effectively in French), for example, another of their Thursday topics, fabrication

and falsification are once again at issue. Charles digresses into a discussion of the theater, and soon realizes a similarity: "L'Histoire comme le théâtre est une façon mensongère de raconter les choses, de les corrompre en leur donnant une forme séduisante et impure" (84). Lula agrees: "L'Histoire est du théâtre . . . puisque l'Histoire fait 'comme si' les femmes n'existaient pas" (84), (recalling the title of her previous text, *Comme si de rien n'était*, where the absence of women from History was precisely a major thematic). Charles concludes that "tout art, toute façon de raconter la vie est falsification" (85). Not only does this statement remind us of the performances staged by Charles and Lula, but Charles' exposé draws our attention to the "art" we are in the midst of reading. *Jeudis*, this "façon de raconter la vie" . . . de Cardinal, is, like all of her autobiographical attempts, a fabrication, another version of her life story.

The presence of typical female protagonists in Cardinal's corpus—women who revel in artisanal activity and handicrafts (the embroiderer in *Le Passé empiété*, for example), women who are attached to nature and cultivation of the soil (Lula in *Jeudis*)—is germane to the activity of fabrication. The craft of writing is linked to other organic, creative expressions. Furthermore, Cardinal dismisses Western hierarchies that dictate: "écrire, c'est mieux que faire la cuisine" (author's interview). Rather, the chemistry of cooking, like the wonder of weaving, is an art. Durham explains that the natural, social and aesthetic dimensions of culture are intertwined in Cardinal's texts (46). As such:

Cardinal restores the female text to its original definition as an artisanal activity: *text*, 'woven thing,' from the Latin *texere*, to weave, fabricate. Moreover, this connection to *fabricate*, 'to construct by putting together finished parts,' . . . reminds us that 'fabrications' or 'fictions' (*fictio*, a making, fashioning) did not begin as falsehoods but, like Cardinal's fusion of autobiography and novel, as carefully crafted construction.

(46-47)*

Yet what does such fabrication mask? Lula's remarks on subjective History are telling. For Lula, the writing of History is not merely a linguistic game. She states: "Si l'Histoire est une falsification, elle altère donc une apparence, quelque chose qui existe" (82). Hence History, including personal histories, represents a certain reality for Lula. Similarly, there exists a reality behind Cardinal's various versions of her own (hi)story. Her semi-fictional/semi-autobiographical representations do not veil inner absence. Rather, they point to a *sujet en procès* (Kristeva), a self which exists, but which can constantly be redefined. Feminist critics adhere to the necessity of affirming a female self—a self which has in fact eluded them through centuries of male constructions of female identity. They do not, however, posit the

self as stable and unchanging, but rather point to the constructed nature of selfhood according to such elements as race, ethnicity, history, public perceptions, and, of course, gender.

Cardinal's numerous autobiographical creations tell "her story" as it is intimately linked to "herstory." Through her various fabrications, she also participates in women writers' efforts to articulate female subjectivity. In her endeavor to write female experiences, Cardinal has long been an advocate of the need for women to manipulate male language rather than to create a separate *écriture féminine*. She encourages women to shock, to speak frankly, but to use this language to speak their own experiences. Through the use of a "transformed, traditional language (which gives) visibility to women's experiences," (Hall, "L'Écriture féminine" 237) women will be able to demand freedom and change. Trinh Minh-ha explains that though Cardinal is opposed to an *écriture féminine* or masculine, she affirms the presence of an autre discours. Cardinal seeks, "à travers l'emploi inchangé du matériel, dénoncer les manques du langage existant et son échec à traduire les vérités de femme. Il faut pour cela, dit (Cardinal), 'nous mettre au ras de notre corps . . . exprimer l'inexprimé' (52). Cardinal's desire to give language to the hitherto silenced others and to break down linguistic barriers, constitutes a contemporary female strategy to express what is "forbidden" in female discourse. It is also an effort to subvert women's traditionally submissive role. In order to express female experiences, Minh-ha concludes that many women refuse "cette perte de substance des mots, cette division entre le Sensible et l'Intelligible" (53). The fullness of language that Cardinal seeks, along with many contemporary women writers and critics, is necessary if women are to encapsulate their experiences, write the body, and have the persuasive power their words must carry.

We in fact observe early on in *Jeudis* that Charles and Lula speak differently. During their debate on L'Histoire, we have an example of two subjective (hi)stories, one from the male and one from the female point of view. Cardinal thus illustrates stereotypical distinctions between male and female discourses. One critic explains: "Charles construit des discours autour (des) sujets. Lula, elle, renvoie le plus souvent possible au concret, aux souvenirs, à leur expérience commune et à leur fille Charlotte . . . L'esprit d'abstraction, réputé philosophique et masculin, s'oppose ainsi celui qui celui qui sans arrêt 'retourne à du vécu, de l'identifiable'" (A. A., 66). Charles and Lula fabricate, for example, possible legends explaining the history of truffles, a vegetable known to be "sauvage (et) imprévisible" (87), characteristics which recall classical definitions of women. Charles begins with the typical patriarchal formula: "Il était une fois" and tells the story of a "un homme bourru qui avait douze femmes

noires" (88). Whereas Charles embarks on a story of polygamy, Lula picks up his tale and retells it in her own fashion. She spins the story of a lumberjack and his beautiful sow who, through a series of substitutions of younger sows for the original, seems never to die—*l'éternelle truie* similar to *l'éternel féminin*. The sow digs holes where delicious truffles grow. The lumberjack is the envy of the town when he markets his truffles known as *dames noires*. Both Charles and Lula move from specific terminology: *les douze dames noires*, to different significations. Each invent different stories of the *dames noires/truffles noires* through their own imaginative and narrative preferences. The difference of their stories is based on gender.¹⁰ Charles, becoming uncomfortable, protests, "On est parti des mêmes faits. Mais de quoi parlons-nous? Toi de l'éternel féminin et moi de la polygamie historique. Finalement c'est en jouant au jeu du vrai et du faux qu'on se définit, qu'on se raconte, qu'on s'affirme" (92, emphasis mine). Fabrication then, of stories and History, refers back to the speaker, back to the self; it is this fictional process which leads to self-learning. Likewise, the fabulation of self-portraits—the jeu in *Jeudis* where "I speak" (*je dis*), where Cardinal speaks in part through Lula and where Lula pretends to speak herself—is ultimately a therapeutic process.

Toward the end of *Jeudis*, Lula receives a letter from Charles proposing scores of possible topics for their future encounters. The potential for their communion is boundless. Through mutual desire, play and sharing they will come together, but never completely merge. We read: "On ne sait jamais qui sont les autres. On peut tout juste superposer des images" (61), a phrase which resonates Cardinal's continual superimposition of her own concerns onto her characters. Cardinal hints that no one—not even she—can ever entirely understand herself or himself, for one will constantly continue to discover multiple sides of one's own nature and of others.¹¹ We recall the narrator of *Le Passé empiété* who questions: "Qu'est-ce que c'est. ce que j'appelle 'mon histoire'? C'est le mouvant, le multiple à l'intérieur de moi. C'est ce qui est à la fois caché et présent dans mes gestes, mes paroles, ma tête. Ce sont mes naissances successives dans mon unique vie" (27). Importantly, however, the discovery of the multiplicity of selfhood does not lead to post-modern alienation and solitude. Rather, self-exploration, communication and writing affirm a joy of living, of process, of encountering the self anew, of sharing oneself with others. Through writing, Cardinal finds a structure through which she can take stock of herself, debate internally and philosophize. Through a similar desire for structure, Charles and Lula debate, play, and philosophize . . . on Thursdays. We, the readers, are enchanted by the creative discourse of the Other, the author. We anticipate Cardinal's future

literary pursuits and subsequent occasions for the encounters with her. Her texts respond to our many needs, and our many selves.

In conclusion, Cardinal also affirms her desire to look to the future in *Jeudis*. The final passages of the text emphasize the thematic of discovery and union. Lula returns to Provence—a return home after a voyage to Egypt, a voyage into the past—and to a letter from Charles. As Lula wanders throughout her house, organizes her belongings and readies herself for a bath, she realizes that she has been clinging to Charles' letter the entire time. The last line of the text reads: "Elle l'appellera plus tard, demain probablement" (251). This open-ended conclusion creates the space for future encounters—conversations which would undoubtedly provide mental nourishment to take Charles, Lula, Marie Cardinal and her readers well into the weekend.

Notes

1. See Hall's discussion of Cardinal's decision to become a Canadian citizen. She cites an interview with the author conducted by Héliane Pedneault where Cardinal comments on the similarities between the *pieds-noirs* and *Quebeckers*: "J'ai toujours senti dans leur discours quelque chose de très proche de moi, c'est un discours de colonisés, pas souvent politique mais passionnel, affectif" (Hall on Pedneault 8).
2. All quotations shall be taken from the edition listed in the Works Cited, and indicated by page number.
3. See, for example, Cardinal's discussion of her relationship with her husband in *Autrement dit*.
4. Excerpts of this interview, "Un Entretien avec Marie Cardinal," have been published in *Women in French Studies* 4 (Fall, 1996): 119-131.
5. See Cardinal's remarks in an interview published in *L'Est Républicain*: "Les vertus Cardinal" (15 September, 1993). She states: "A 90% lors de mes débuts, ce sont les femmes qui me lisaient." She notes that her public is evolving, however, and that young men between 20 and 25 years old, in particular, are beginning to read her works.
6. Indeed, Cardinal has repeatedly stated in interviews that when she began this project she intended to write an essay. As she was not pleased with the results, she opted to embed philosophical ideas into a fictional format. See, for example, Chauvin, "Toujours les mots pour le dire . . ."
7. We as language teachers encourage our students to role-play in order to liberate themselves from linguistic restraints. When they become "different people," they express themselves more freely, are often less afraid, and allow fantasy to rule their discourse. We witness similar reactions in the characters of Charles and Lula. As they "pretend" for

one another, their communication is enhanced. At the same time, they learn of their own strengths and weaknesses, needs and desires.

8. As Durham has argued, Cardinal's writing does not consist of mere social documentation or direct exposition of personal events—criticisms, for that matter, attributed to many women writers who prefer the autobiographical mode. Rather, the fabric woven by the blend of autobiography and fiction in Cardinal's texts constitutes a serious literary endeavor.
9. Cardinal illustrates fluctuating subject positions in *Jeudis* through her two characters: Charles is for Lula "son amant, son enfant, son ami, son frère, quelqu'un de qui elle est indissociable, son ennemi aussi" (9). We find past versions/hear past voices of Charles in his letters written to Lula over more than forty years and embedded in the narrative. Lula is "elle, la journaliste, la retraitée, la femme, la mère de Charlotte, la grand-mère de John" (132). Further, Lula falls into several categories: "Elle se considère comme une bâtarde, ses papiers sont français, sa terre est algérienne, elle se sent européenne avec passion" (139). History has indeed assigned her many roles to play.
10. Charles and Lula's different stories also illustrate feminine revisionist History and mythology, a reconsideration of historical and mythical figures from a feminist perspective, which Cardinal herself has practiced in previous works. Consider, for example, the feminine rewriting of the mythological character of Clytemnestre in *Le Passé impiété*.
11. When questioned about the failed attempt of Charles and Lula to come to a clear understanding of their lives and their love for one another in *Jeudis*, Cardinal responds: "Heureusement: Si on arrivait au bout des choses et des gens, il n'y aurait plus de raison de vivre et d'espérer. Toutes les assurances sont vaines et stérilisantes. Cette constatation est le moteur de l'action. A part la mort, quoi de vraiment sûr?" (Contrucci).

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