




2001

A Tribute to Marie Cardinal

Claire Marrone

Sacred Heart University, marronec@sacredheart.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.sacredheart.edu/lang_fac

 Part of the [French and Francophone Language and Literature Commons](#), and the [Women's Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Claire Marrone. "A Tribute to Marie Cardinal." *Women in French Studies*, vol. 9, 2001, pp.14-15. <http://muse.jhu.edu/article/497394/pdf>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Foreign Languages and Cultures at DigitalCommons@SHU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Languages Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@SHU. For more information, please contact ferribyp@sacredheart.edu, lysobeyb@sacredheart.edu.

Editorial Board

Grace Armstrong	Bryn Mawr College
Elissa Gelfand	Mount Holyoke College
Susan Ireland	Grinnell College
Barbara Klaw	Northern Kentucky University
Marie-Christine Koop	University of North Texas
Donna Kuizenga	University of Vermont
Claire Marrone	Sacred Heart University
Bénédicte Marie-Christine Monicat	Pennsylvania State University
Elisabeth-Christine Muelsch	Angelo State University
Patrice Proulx	University of Nebraska, Omaha
Samia Spencer	Auburn University
Felicia Sturzer	University of Tennessee, Chattanooga
Raynalle Udris	Middlesex University, England
Colette Winn	Washington University, St. Louis

Advisory Board

Christine Delphy	I.R.E.S.C.O.
Gita May	Columbia University
Toril Moi	Duke University
Jerry Nash	University of North Texas
Michelle Perrot	Université de Paris VII
Christine Planté	Université Lumière Lyon II
Domna Stanton	University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

Subscriptions

WIF Studies (ISSN 1077-825X) is a publication of **WOMEN IN FRENCH (WIF)** and is published once a year. To become a member of WIF or to purchase an individual copy of **WIF Studies**, see forms at the end of the volume.

Copyright 2001 by Women in French Studies

Women in French is a member of the Council of Editors of Learned Journals and an Allied Organization of the Modern Language Association of America.

WOMEN IN FRENCH STUDIES

Volume 9, 2001

CONTENTS

Foreword : Paradoxes de l'éditeur/rédactrice <i>Frédérique Chevillot</i>	10
A Tribute to Janis Glasgow <i>Annabelle M. Rea</i>	12
A Tribute to Marie Cardinal <i>Claire Marrone</i>	14
Introducing Vénus Khoury-Ghata <i>Marilyn Hacker</i>	16
Pourquoi j'écris en Français <i>Vénus Khoury-Ghata</i>	18
"Pour Pierre Brunel/For Pierre Brunel" <i>Vénus Khoury-Ghata</i>	22
"À Jean-Guy Pilon/For Jean-Guy Pilon" <i>Vénus Khoury-Ghata</i>	24

SPECIAL SECTION

Introduction : Auteures méconnues... mais connues <i>Frédérique Chevillot</i>	26
A Voice of Her Own: Gérard d'Houville's Thread and Literary Tradition <i>Tama Lea Engelking</i>	28

The novelist and poet Gérard d'Houville was one of the most decorated women writers of the early twentieth century, although she is primarily remembered today as the daughter of José-Maria de Heredia. This relationship shaped her critical reception and contributed to the current neglect of her work. Contemporary readers, however, will appreciate how, despite her status as a literary daughter, she was able to define her own poetic identity by taking a penname and seeking out connections with a female tradition. D'Houville's woman-centered poetry offers an alternative to the male-authored literary tradition represented by her father. She finds a voice of her own by speaking to and for her forgotten Creole grand-

A Tribute to Marie Cardinal

Claire Marrone

We were all saddened by the death of Marie Cardinal in May of 2001 at the age of seventy-two. She inspired so many of us with her prolific corpus, beginning with *Ecoutez la mer* (1962). She moved us by bringing personal experiences into her texts. She touched us with her humble and sensitive demeanor. Cardinal reveals her humility, for example, when she writes: "Je suis toujours étonnée que tant de gens dans le monde s'intéressent à ce que j'écris. J'ai toujours envie de dire 'ce n'est pas de ma faute, je ne l'ai pas fait exprès....' [L]es écrivains, souvent, ne sont pas à la hauteur de leurs livres. En tout cas c'est ce qui m'arrive" (letter to the author). In her bold treatment of such issues as women's bodies, the mother-daughter relationship, female subjectivity, and gender oppression, Cardinal expressed many of the fears and repressed desires of her contemporaries, particularly women. The majority of Cardinal's work was inspired by her life experiences. She is best known for her celebrated autobiographical novel, *Les Mots pour le dire* (1975), a text that highlights the healing benefits of writing and the community that artistic production anticipates, from family, to colleagues, to the society of readers.¹ Cardinal's popularity among women from varied walks of life is fitting for the author who expressed a preference for communicating with "real" women rather than following literary trends. She often said that she wrote for women like those she met during her years struggling to raise a family, those who "ne savent pas traduire en mots ce que leur corps sait: la lenteur des gestations, la viscosité féconde, l'épaisseur nourrissante. . . L'archaïsme de nos vies de femmes" (*Autrement dit* 81). She wished to give these women "des mots qui seront des armes" (*Autrement dit* 81). Colette Hall remarks that "l'oeuvre de Cardinal est ancrée dans le quotidien, dans le concret de la vie des femmes. Elle parle au nom de toutes celles qui n'ont pas droit à la parole" (10). In attributing to her literary projects this political significance, Cardinal communed with other women in a way that allowed her to heal her own pain. In *Les Mots pour le dire*, she outlined her traumatic relationship with her mother and her battle with mental illness. The text maps out the protagonist's progress toward overcoming her emotional disorder by highlighting the interpretive work of psychoanalysis and the cathartic benefits of communication. According to Lyn Thomas and Emma Webb, *Les Mots pour le dire* "seems to have inspired in its women readers a belief in their ability to bring about change in their own lives" (41). Cardinal continually reached out to her readers and shared her personal struggles with them. In her last work, *Amour... amours...* (1998), she expressed her nostalgia for her birthplace, Algeria. Born to a French colonial family, Cardinal was forced to leave her beloved homeland because of the French-Algerian War. She had long tried to articulate her bicultural origins. In *Les Pieds-Noirs* (1988), for instance, we read of the influence of both France and Algeria on her sense of identity: "Deux pays, deux coeurs, deux têtes..." (54). Instead of the birth of the writer portrayed in *Les Mots pour le dire*, however, *Amour... amours...* depicts the would-be writer,

the incapable writer, the aging amateur who seemingly will never find satisfaction in her own literary production. The text emphasizes the significance of orality in the heroine's self-understanding—the importance of the spoken word so vital to Algerian culture.

Cardinal's nomadic existence took her to many lands. She became a Canadian citizen in 1960, and toward the end of her life she divided her time between southern France and Canada. I had the pleasure of meeting Cardinal and her family in Montreal in 1994. There, I experienced her warmth and intellectual generosity as we discussed such topics as autobiography, feminism, women's writing, and women's lives.² I also saw a side of Cardinal that is very difficult to know through books and interviews. I witnessed her love for her family, a love that endured despite marital strife and filial difficulties. I spoke to her son Benoît, obviously very devoted to his famous mother, about the challenges of a childhood spent between France and Canada, mother and father. During the weekend I spent with Cardinal, I met not only the writer, but the wife, the mother, and the woman very happy to be a grandmother.

For the scholars among us who anticipated each of Cardinal's new texts, her passing marks a shift in a nurturing relationship between author and reader, writer and critic. For those of us touched by her humanity and compassion, we feel that we have lost a friend. And for women, in particular, who appreciated Cardinal's feminism and who were inspired by her frank portrayals of female journeys, we must continue the struggle for expression that she so eloquently exposed in her life and works—the search for the words to articulate our painful and pleasurable realities as women.

Sacred Heart University

Notes

¹ See my discussion of this text, "Creativity and Community in Marie Cardinal's *Les Mots pour le dire*," in *Female Journeys*.

² Portions of our conversation have been published in *Women In French Studies* as "Un Entretien avec Marie Cardinal."

Selected Works by and about Marie Cardinal

- Cardinal, Marie. *Amour... amours...* Paris: Grasset, 1998.
 _____. *Autrement dit*. Paris: Grasset (Livre de poche), 1977.
 _____. *Ecoutez la mer*. Paris: Julliard, 1962.
 _____. Letter to the author. 30 August 1993.
 _____. *Les Mots pour le dire*. Paris: Grasset, 1975.
 _____. *Les Pieds-Noirs*. Tours: Belfond, 1988.
 Hall, Colette. *Marie Cardinal*. Atlanta: Rodopi, 1994.
 Thomas, Lyn and Emma Webb. "Writing from Experience: The Place of the Personal in French Feminist Writing." *Feminist Review* 61 (1999): 27-48.
 Marrone, Claire. "Un Entretien avec Marie Cardinal." *Women In French Studies* 4 (1996): 119-31.
 _____. *Female Journeys: Autobiographical Expressions by French and Italian Women*. Westport, CT: Greenwood P, 2000.