

*The Reader as a Private Eye:  
Rediscovering the Author in Helen  
Weinzweig's "Basic Black with Pearls"*

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Poets would either profit or delight;  
Or mixing sweet and fit, teach life the right.

HORACE, *Ars Poetica* (trans. Ben Jonson)

POST-MODERNIST LITERARY criticism foregrounds the centrality of the reader. Critics speak about the "Actual Reader," the "Super-reader," the "Ideal Reader," the "Model Reader," the "Implied Reader" (Rimmon-Kenan 118), and even about the "Amazing Reader" (Rogers 31). The extensive typology of the reader signals critical preoccupation with the reader's interaction with the text. The emphasis on the reader's role brings forth a perception whereby, in Umberto Eco's terms, texts are "produced" by the "addressee" while the "sender" as a creative individual practically disappears. "The author," claims Eco, is "nothing else but a textual strategy . . . activating the Model Reader," whereas the text is "the production of its own Model Reader" (4 ff.). Wolfgang Iser concurs with the notion of organic relationship between the reader and the text and the exclusion of the author. He submits that "a text can only come to life when it is read, and if it is to be examined, it must . . . be studied through the eyes of the reader" (2-3).

Modern literary trends seem to have transformed the critical approach to both the author and the reader vis-à-vis the text. While the modernist literary evaluation focuses on the impact of the work upon the reader, the post-modernist approach seems to predicate the significance of the text on the act of reading. The apparent withdrawal of a powerful authorial voice in a typical post-modern-

ist text strengthens the position of the reader: the reader's consciousness, informed by his or her particular literary and non-literary intertextual experience, "rewrites" the work; the subjective reading act "refictionalizes" the fiction at hand.

The critical perspective which theoretically eliminates the author and places the reader at the centre of the creative process seems to generate from the particular orientation of post-modernist fiction. Brian McHale's differentiation between the "epistemological dominant" of modernist fiction and the "ontological dominant" of the post-modernist text helps explicate the prevalence of the reader-oriented critical approach. McHale maintains that while modernist fiction focuses on "the problems of *knowing*," post-modernist fiction deals with "the problems of *modes of being*." The post-modernist ontological perception thus reacts to the attempt to assess life's inconclusivity, indefiniteness, and mystery through "epistemological processes of weighing evidence and making deductions" (10). Rather than struggle towards cognitive interpretation of the world, the character in post-modernist fiction focuses on his or her experience of the world, projected through the ever-shifting circumference of individual modes of existence. Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* is a case in point. McHale shows how the characters in the novel exemplify the shift from the epistemological to the ontological when "abandoning the intractable problems of attaining to reliable knowledge of *our* world, they improvise a *possible world*; they *fictionalize*" (10).

The critical view of post-modernist representations of the world as subjective speculations projected by individual consciousness presupposes intense readerly engagement. The protagonist who experiences the world as refractions of his or her imagination obliterates the boundaries between the fictional and the real. The reflexive mode of the text draws the reader in, compelling him or her to rely upon intuitive conjecture rather than strive toward logically reached conclusions. The fictional world thus does not represent a reality separate from the reader's world; as it affects and stimulates the reader's imagination, the text penetrates the reader's consciousness which, in turn, imprints the text with its particular signature.

The objective of the post-modernist trend to reflect subjectivity rather than assess reality, however uncertain and unreliable it may be, accounts for the persistent critical endeavour to perceive the reader as the principal contributor to the creative process. The extremity of the tendency, however, to see the reader as the "producer" of the text and the author as "an absence, a blank space" (Kristeva 74) requires further clarification.

The critical emphasis on textual reflexivity, which allows for the reader's intertextual input but eliminates the author as the creator of the text, implies, in effect, a measure of critical reflexivity. As a reader, the critic reads the author out of the text, asserting that reading, not writing, constitutes productive literary process. Thus, by ruling out the author the critic/reader posits himself or herself as the creative force in the text. Paradoxically, the elimination of the author and the shift to reader-oriented criticism indicates the critic's perception of himself or herself as authorial presence.

The critic's tendency to assume authorial position vis-à-vis the text evokes a dialectical response aimed at the reinstatement of the author as a conscious initiator of the creative process. The definition of post-modernist poetics as an exploration of the relative rather than the investigation of the absolute contradicts the critical unequivocalness regarding the author's disappearance. Propounding the view of life as constantly shifting sets of subjective projections and speculations, the post-modernist text represents, by definition, a possible, but not exclusive perception of the world; it is, in view of the all-pervasive relativity it promotes, an avenue to probe the mysterious encounter between the world and consciousness. Paradoxically, the construct of the author who as "the writing subject endlessly disappears" (Foucault 116) attests to the writer's conscious search for strategies to present his or her vision; the disappearance of the author displays, in fact, an authorial strategy which effects the desired interaction between the reader and the post-modernist text.

Helen Weinzwieg's novel *Basic Black with Pearls* demonstrates authorial manipulation of the text to generate a participatory act of reading. Intentionally selected strategies cast the reader as a private eye in search of the authorial vision. The consciously orchestrated role of the reader writes him or her into the text as a

component in the world picture that the author wishes to communicate. As a private eye, the reader subscribes to the notion of reality as fiction and perpetuates, in a sense, the creative act initiated by the author. Discussing her novel in an interview, Helen Weinzwieg clearly states her objectives regarding the reader:

Someone said that he manipulates the reader's unconscious. I try to do the same. I disturb the reader. He's not quite sure what's going on, and he wants to feel adequate to the situation so he will turn the page to find out. But by this time, I have led him down another garden path . . . Not knowing is very disturbing, but at the same time there is a residue when you work this way, a residue in the reader's mind . . . the reader goes on thinking about what he has read and can begin to invent some of the material . . . The reader participates in the writing process. And he gets a sense of elation — uh-uh, now I know what's what, what the writer is trying to tell me, and the sense of discovery is the reader's as well as the writer's. (Bauer 13-14)

Weinzwieg reveals her strategies to elicit the reader's participation. The reader invents that which the author consciously left unsaid and interprets that which she purposely left unexplained. Thus the reader is confronted with the challenge of exercising authorial power, a challenge set by the author herself. By accepting the challenge, the reader fictionalizes himself or herself as an author, and therefore, actualizes the mode of reflexivity that the post-modernist text wishes to establish. Reflexivity obliterates the demarcations between the external world and the inner landscape of the mind, between the factual and the imaginary. Hence, it encompasses the process of writing as well as the process of reading. The process of reading as a creative act communicates willingness to collaborate with the author. To ensure the reader's collaboration, Weinzwieg engages him or her in a discovery game; the relevance of her artistic vision is predicated upon successful enticement of the reader into the text.

The reader's role consists in discovering a "garden path" which will lead towards an understanding of "what's what." While the author presents the reader with a series of seemingly unrelated signs and clues, it is up to the reader to recreate it in a meaningful fashion. Ross Chambers seems to corroborate Weinzwieg's view of

the readerly role in his discussion of commentary in post-modernist writing. He begins by differentiating between "meaning" (*le sens*), the object of semantic analysis, and "meaningfulness" (*la signification*), the meaning arrived at by an act of interpretation. Commentary explicates the "meaning" against the context, thus rendering the text "meaningful" (105). Chambers observes that

One obvious characteristic of "modern" literature is precisely its elusiveness with regard to interpretation, and one major strategy by which such elusiveness is obtained is the "denial" of commentary (cf. Roussel or Robbe-Grillet) . . . If [commentary] is not supplied, there is in the text a kind of *degré zéro* of "commentary" — or perhaps an "appel de commentaire" . . . since clearly the receiver of the message is then under a strong compulsion . . . to replace the absent "commentary" in the text by an act of "interpretation" of his own. This final case thus throws some clear light not only on the nature and function of interpretation, but also on the way texts may *solicit* the interpretative involvement of their reader. (106ff.)

Chambers insists on active readerly participation in the post-modernist text. Weinzwieg is clearly responsive in that respect; indeed, she "solicits" her readers' involvement by casting them as private eyes in search of the "commentary" in her text.

The need for the reader's involvement is by no means new; patterns of relationships between writer and reader have always preoccupied the literary critic. Sir Philip Sidney, drawing upon Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian, presents a model of author-reader interaction which helps elucidate some of the issues in the post-modernist concept of the author vis-à-vis the reader. In his *Apology*, Sidney does not dwell on the "artificer" (111), that is, the individual who writes poetry; his poet is a representative of great poetic tradition and follows in the footsteps of outstanding teachers, philosophers, and orators. The poet thus embodies a system of social contexts and conventions. In that sense, Sidney prefigures critical notions of the author working within the parameters of social reality. Jonathan Culler, for instance, claims that the author "can write poetry, or history, or criticism only within the context of a system of enabling conventions which constitute and delimit the varieties of discourse" (30).

Sidney's poet is the teacher of virtue; his task consists in "feigning notable images . . . with delightful teaching" (103). While the content of his teaching draws upon representations of the ideal in former texts, the uniqueness of the poet's particular presentation determines the reader's response. It is significant that Sidney emphasizes the aspect of delight in the act of reading: the element of pleasure ensures the effectiveness of the poet's teaching. The poet-reader/teacher-pupil relationship is predicated upon the poet's ingenuity to entice the reader. If the purpose of poetry is to present "a speaking picture" (101) as an imitation of the ideal state of being, then the reader's interest in the picture of the "golden" world (100) is indispensable; his or her delighted attention actualizes the moral purpose of the poetic work.

In that sense, the objective of the Renaissance poet to attract his reader does not differ from the post-modernist objective to "solicit" readerly involvement. The difference emerges, however, in terms of the nature of readerly involvement. In the Renaissance poetry, the object of study is the ideal state of being which constitutes a world apart, an inaccessible world designated ironically by the palpable imperfections of human life. The distinction between the fictional world of ideal existence and the "real" world of experience emerges as the "commentary" that the text seeks to communicate. The post-modernist text, however, aims at obliteration of such boundaries. The reader is compelled, due to the absence of "commentary," to enter the world of fiction. The search for hidden meaningfulness of the work implicates the reader in the artistic process.

Weinzweig's initial step towards engaging the reader implies authorial control of the act of reading. The commanding, though not conspicuous, authorial presence is manifest in the consistent effort to appropriate the reader's attention. Weinzweig's strategy consistently discourages the impulse to reach outside the novel in search of commentary; as it consistently discards and invalidates "borrowed" points of reference, the novel narcissistically requires the reader's undivided attention.

The texts that accompany the body of Weinzweig's fiction — the title, the synopsis and the epigraph — foreshadow the text's self-centredness. Options of intertextual reading are hinted at only

to be promptly withdrawn. The synopsis, aiming at an explication of the title, brings forth the conjecture that the novel presents yet another intriguing, comic case of "a middle-aged, middle-class woman in . . . a basic black dress and a strand of real pearls . . . searching for her lover . . . a man connected with 'The Agency' . . . in the Spadina-Dundas area of Toronto." Though probably not authored by Weinzweig, this summary of the novel introduces the lesson in deception that the novel presents. Interestingly, the commercial ploy to sell *Basic Black with Pearls* as a popular novel complements the author's ploy to immerse the reader into an unfamiliar world with a promise of familiar plots and settings of unrequited love stories and spy novels. In this sense, the novel is everything its plot summary promises.

The epigraph, a quote from Ann Quinn's post-modernist novel, *Passages*, strikes a different chord; it introduces the notion that the masks we assume in our encounters with the world are the sole identity that we possess. An unidentified woman asks her lover to take off his mask. "But this is all I have," he replies. When he takes it off, she says: "It's no use I still cannot recognize you — put the mask on — there that's better now that I know I don't know you . . ." To know the other is to know the mask; hence, ultimate truth amounts to the recognition of the absence of truth.

The configuration of the synopsis and the epigraph suggests a parodic view of generic classifications. The perception of the novel as romance or thriller is no longer reliable if the reality of deception constitutes the only existent invariable. "Parody," maintains McHale, "is a form of self-reflection about itself" (145). Parodic treatment of literary classification conveys the notion of constant textual self-modification; as the fiction transforms itself, it resists attempts of a reading guided by fixed differentiations. The external texts which accompany *Basic Black with Pearls* constitute a prolepsis to the reader's further parodic relationships with the novel: they present the first of the masks which mirror the reader's own mask of gullibility and expose intertextual frames of reference as yet another misleading disguise. Unsuspecting, the reader is lured into a world whose inherent state of deception will guide him or her to come to terms with self-deception.

As the external texts foreshadow, the author in *Basic Black with Pearls* disclaims the notion of the immutable in today's world. Weinzwieg presents our need for the absolute as a childlike, unfounded delusion, a mask which hides our deeply embedded fear of alienation and despair. At the very beginning of the novel, Shirley, the protagonist and first-person narrator, explains her notion of love: "When I see that stance of Coenraad's all fears disappear: babies don't die, cars don't collide, planes fly on course, muzak is silenced, certitude reigns. That is how I always recognize my love: the way he stands, the way I feel" (8). At the very end of the novel, Shirley reaches a fateful decision: "I will continue to walk . . . But I won't be trying to recognize my lover" (134). Shirley's conclusion which echoes the discourse in the novel's epigraph manifests her transforming world view: the renunciation of the hopeful quest for love signals acceptance of life governed by deception, coincidence, and brutality.

Acceptance of an unprincipled, amoral vision of life is both emotionally and intellectually unsettling: it refutes the notion of an orderly world guided by rationality and affected by compassion. Such vision is pessimistic and hard to accept; the author, therefore, must ensure that the reader's pleasure in discovering the concealed commentary outweighs the sense of anxiety that the text evokes.

The structure of the novel aims at liberating the reader from binding conventions that the recognizable is necessarily true and, therefore, credible. The rhetorical fabric of the text obliterates the demarcations between reality and illusion immersing the reader in a mazelike literary construction. So long as the reader clings to the recognizable, he or she will remain imprisoned in the incomprehensible textual web. The realization that the author intentionally employs organizational principles other than causal inference and time sequence effects modification in the readerly approach; comprehension of the authorial ploy reveals the commentary layer in the text, a discovery which becomes a source of intellectual delight.

As the reading act progresses, both the reader and the protagonist move toward independence and maturity. The particular presentation of Shirley's story of growth and painfully gained inde-



pendence complements the reader's own liberation from the constricting notion of the ever-accommodating author.

Shirley has isolated herself from society; her obsessive search for love, security, and certitude has set her apart from the world. Her story, told in first-person narrative, seems to fit the definition of a confessional autobiographical account. In this context, the reader is assigned the role of a patient and sympathetic listener. Shirley's story seems to call for this readerly response since confession is, as Terence Doody defines it, "the deliberate, self-conscious attempt of an individual to identify himself, to explain his nature to the audience who represents the kind of community he needs to exist in and to confirm him" (185). In that respect, Shirley's distress and disorientation seem to account for the incoherent form of her confession, while her intention to tell the story signals the wish to renew contact with the world and evoke sympathy in her audience. Shirley's unfitnes to confront the world may, to some extent, provide a plausible explanation for her occasional withdrawals into the fantasy world. The reader may ascribe her inaptitude to immaturity and naïveté. Even Shirley ponders her own gullibility, asking herself at one point: "Am I a child, always confusing hope with facts?" (35).

The reader's role of a confessor is delineated by the convention of confessional narrative. The convention, however, is confuted by the confessing narrator herself who systematically invalidates her own credibility. The pieces of narrative which parody Shirley's confession establish a discourse which forewarns the reader against both classification of the novel as a confession and self-appointment as a confessor.

On page 16 Shirley tells her audience that after a quarrel with Coenraad, she decided to "put to memory only stories of impersonal nature. If he had met me in Tikal I would have repeated a story told by the priest of the village. . . ." As the conditional mode indicates, Shirley never met her lover in Tikal and, therefore, could not tell him the story she heard from the priest. On page 39, however, she admits that none of the stories she did tell him was authentic: "I saved stories to entertain him with, and what didn't actually happen, I invented . . . most of my characters were imagined, and the rest speculated upon." On page 106 she remem-

bers her walks with Coenraad: "In his company on this street I would tell him stories about my early life. On the other hand . . . I might say nothing at all: he is quickly bored." The constant repetition of the noun "stories" and the free admission that all the stories are either untold or invented undermine the element of truthfulness of whatever Shirley is telling. The cumulative effect of the notion of story-telling enhances the deliberate contrivance of the text which was initially presented as a truthful, though somewhat incoherent, confession. Moreover, the narrator's deliberations about taking up fiction writing compound the sense of distrust and confusion. Shirley informs her readers that she does not have "the necessary objectivity . . . to weave . . . anyone else's story," and so she concludes: "I might have to tell my own. For that I must rely entirely on memory" (40).

At this point, the reader must realize that the novel itself is indeed Shirley's story based on memories of her affair with Coenraad. If, however, as Shirley says, everything she told Coenraad, including her "earlier life," was invented, then the reader must question the affair itself and Coenraad's very existence. Such doubts undermine the reliability of the narrator as well as the story's credibility in terms of its generic classification. The parodic treatment of the confession by the confessing character actualizes the dissolution of generic guidelines adumbrated in the epigraph; the motif of life's relativity and deception is dramatized in the fictional confession made up by a fictional narrator. Even when the narrator removes one of her masks, so to speak, truth remains inaccessible and undefinable. The emerging consciousness that the narrator has invented herself in a subjective version of her life-story brings forth a sense of entrapment in a maze of self-reflecting mirrors.

The emerging mistrust and confusion are bound to affect the relationship between the reader as a confessor and the narrator as a confessing persona. The narrator's effortless transformation from a naïve victim of male chauvinism to an astute writer of a fictionalized story about herself as a victim is manifest in her own attempt to capture the elusiveness of her identity. When mistakenly identified as a music critic, Shirley writes to herself: "I am a person of artistic sensibilities; in order to wear the mantle of an

artist one has only to put one's arms through the sleeves" (91). The self-acknowledged mutable identity, that of a deceived, exploited woman and that of an artist inventing herself as this woman, accounts for the growing sense of estrangement between the reader and the narrator.

The "schizophrenic" characterization of the narrator parodies intertextual referents in the novel. For instance, the popular scenario of a woman mistreated in her childhood and reified as a sex object by the stereotypically ruthless and self-centred characters of husband and lover seems to lose its ideological impact when identified as a product of imagination. Such parodic reduction of the feminist issue undermines the novel's veracity as a story of growing female consciousness. The referential framework of the social theme appears to be of secondary importance; its topicality may sustain the reader's interest, but the context in which the theme is presented belies it in terms of the novel's meaningfulness.

The employment of parody also undermines emotional identification with the heroine. At the emotional level, curiosity and empathy induce the reader to undertake a complex task: keep track of the lonely, disoriented woman wandering in the carefully mapped out downtown Toronto in search of the "right" Elm Street; follow Shirley's fantastic encounters with survivors, opera singers, abducted maidens; sift the factual from the fantastic in her erratic childhood recollections and her woeful love affair with Coenraad. It would seem that Shirley's predicament embodies the formula of a Harlequin romance. The realization, however, that the romantically disposed, desperate for love heroine is also the maker of her own story invalidates the novel as a sentimental picaresque romance.

It would appear that the author takes special care to disqualify what Eco calls "inferences by intertextual frames" (21) as reliable tools of textual interpretation. The narrator's recurrent references to her story as the product of her imagination parody the reader's attempt to decode the situation in terms of its relatedness to other texts. By conferring some of her authorial powers on the narrator, Weinzwieg communicates that the search for the "commentary" does not lead toward other texts, but rather focuses on the text itself.

Yet the text itself, if perceived as an idealized reflection of reality — idealized in that it creates an illusion of truth — is also parodied through the dual identity of the narrator. The surreal effect of such technique dismantles the illusion of truth and presents the text as an artifact. By stripping away the formative principle of plausibility, the narrator, when acting as an author, provides a “commentary” which reveals the process of making, or rather, the process of faking that telling a story entails.

This “commentary” which illuminates the organizational concept of the fiction, exposes the seams in the textual fabric which traditionally are artfully concealed. Intertextuality works in the framework of such concealment, when the reader’s disbelief is suspended, and the experience of other texts and situations consolidates and reconfirms the reader’s faith in the credibility of the unfolding story. In his discussion of the interaction between the audience and a reflexive work of art, Bruce Kavin submits that “story telling has been with us for so long that the willing suspension of disbelief has become almost automatic, and a self-conscious work must induce its audience to suspend that suspension — in short, to suspend belief” (15). The tactic of suspended disbelief capitalizes on the previous knowledge of texts that the reader possesses. The illusion of authenticity that the story imparts induces the reader to trust the story. In the game of make-believe that the author plays with the reader, the consciousness of fictional artifice is an unwanted element. In a work which strives toward suspension of belief, however, the consciousness of the text as an artifact is practically thrust upon the reader. Raising the reader’s consciousness is predicated upon the author’s conscious creation of fiction which displays its own fictionality. In Weinzwieg’s novel, the narrator’s recurring references to her story as an invention drive a wedge of distrust between the story and the reader; the post-modernist author creates a distance which the author of a traditional text wishes to eliminate.

The post-modernist intent to divest the text of its power to create a comforting belief in fictional reality contradicts critics such as Sidney who talked about the poetic task to create a fictional imitation of the inaccessible ideal of perfection. Instead of creating a vision which promises a temporary respite from the world’s im-

perfection, the reader of the post-modernist text is forced to face deception even in the world of fiction. Paradoxically, the emphasis on the artifice in the text becomes a lesson in existential relativity; the text thus becomes an extension of life's unreliability.

The consciousness of the text as an artful structure motivates the quest for "meaning" which will eventually lead to "meaningfulness." The reader asserts his or her independence by assuming the role of a private eye, the outsider invited to unravel the hidden "commentary." As a private eye, the reader plays the role of a detective who knows that the story has been fabricated, but wishes to investigate the motives behind the lie. And like the sleuth, who does not trust the suspects he watches, the forewarned and therefore skeptical reader learns not to trust the unreliable narrator.

Ironically, the reader proves to be a better Secret Agent than Coenraad, unlike Coenraad, who "is quickly bored" (106) with Shirley's stories, the reader has been a better listener. The reader's tenacity in sustaining a hundred and six pages of the narrator's confidentiality is rewarded on page 107. Here the reader is given a clue to the fiction's compositional principle which, in turn, leads to the discovery of meaningfulness in the seemingly incoherent structure. In front of Andy's house on the corner of Elm and D'Arcy Streets, Shirley is stricken with sudden apprehension: "Finding myself on this corner was a coincidence, I told myself, that augured well for the future and not, as I feared in a momentary panic, of a fateful return to the past." While the narrator is unwilling to go back into the past, the reader, as an emotionally unaffected private eye, is free to move back and forth in the text. Shirley's association of the geographic landmark with an emotional experience puts the private eye on the track of rediscovery. The Elm Street clue presents no mystery — it is a reference to Shirley's painful experience with her lover: her submissive waiting, searching and dependence on this arrogant, self-centred individual. The other side of the street corner, however, leads back to a traumatic childhood event related on page 52.

On D'Arcy Street, Shirley, as a little girl, "lay in fever" following eviction. She still recalls waiting for her mother in front of locked doors. "I walked so long I came full circle. It is the law of the lost," she remembers. The sudden loss of home combined with

mother's absence has generated a lifelong sense of abandonment and betrayal. The ease with which she opens Andy's door so many years later (107) signifies breaking out of the vicious circle which imprisons the abandoned and the rejected. The confluence of these two episodes highlights the thematic significance of other seemingly unrelated motifs in the narrative: Shirley's search for Coenraad in the streets of Toronto is, in a sense, a re-enactment of her lonely search for mother as a little girl. The occurrences of betrayal, abandonment, loneliness in her memories and fantasies are, in fact, refractions of the traumatic loss of mother. Consequently, Shirley's odyssey, marked by fragmented consciousness and thematic incoherence, foregrounds the emotional state of the uprooted individual in a desultory search for the lost sense of safety and affection.

The private eye, who has rediscovered the abandoned girl in Shirley, cannot but feel that behind Andy's door on that particular street corner the resolution of the protagonist's predicament is at hand. The open door, the bright stairs, the room full of light — all these seem to indicate that the man waiting there for Shirley can restore her trust and confidence. Such expectation seems plausible in terms of intertextual inference. If fulfilled, it would confirm the feminist concept of supportive and egalitarian relationships between men and women and, at the same time, acknowledge the reader's sentimental hope for a happy ending. A good end of the story would compensate Shirley for her suffering and thus prove the existence of providential justice.

The open-ended conclusion of the novel belies the expectation of a definite resolution of the protagonist's childhood trauma; inculcated social norms and literary conventions have again proven misleading. The process of learning or, rather, unlearning the old patterns of thinking and replacing them with newly acquired knowledge is predicated on trial and error, as Shirley observes at the end of her visit at Andy's: "... discovery often depends on something going wrong" (111).

The task of reconstructing the meaningfulness of the text has not yet been completed; while focusing on the psychological-emotional aspect of the protagonist's personality, the reader has not taken into account the authorial properties of the narrator. This time, the guidelines emerge from Andy who proposes that axiomatic,

unmovable tenets or ideals do not exist: "Nuance is everything" (109). From this standpoint, Shirley's personal experience of betrayal and deception seems to lose its uniqueness: it is subsumed in a larger scheme whereby deception is an integral and indispensable part of life. Nature uses the art of semblance and resemblance for procreation. As Andy demonstrates scientifically, the blossoms of the orchid resemble a female wasp to deceive the male wasp and thus effect pollination. Continuity of life depends on such deception, and in the art of love making, which is also an act of procreation, illusion interfuses with reality. "Music is not the only perfect art," comments Shirley after having made love to Andy to the rhythm of Liszt's dance (110). The element of artifice and illusion is inherent in the very moment of conception; its presence is indispensable for life to come into being.

Shirley's childhood experience, therefore, needs to be re-examined not only in terms of emotional injury, but also as brutal yet necessary introduction to relativity. Shirley, the abandoned little girl, learns as a grown-up woman that it is the subjectivity of perspective, not the belief in idealized norms and values, that determines our reality. We are, in a sense, products of life's relativity and, therefore, subjected to it. The ability to understand this position predicates a sense of freedom. Thus, the reader, subjected time and again to the deceit in the text, can become a participant only by endorsing its lesson in relativity.

The realization that deception shapes life precludes any clear differentiation between art and reality. The textual manipulation in the novel demonstrates the extent to which nature and art are indistinguishable; the blurred boundaries between reality and illusion illustrate the "ontological dominant" which typifies post-modernist fiction. Andy's observation of the element of art in nature associates with an episode which exposes the function of nature in art.

It was practically at the same corner of D'Arcy Street where she discusses deception with Andy that Shirley acted as a confessor to the girl in Pierre Bonnard's painting exhibited in the Art Gallery (55-58). Thematically, the painted girl's confession highlights the motif of parental betrayal in the novel. Yet the discourse in the episode, which superimposes one kind of fiction upon another, dis-

pels the illusion of reality and insists on the importance of the “nuance.” Shirley, enthralled by the colourful painting, crosses the boundaries of art and reality; she advances into the dining room in the painting where “I eat fruit from white-stemmed golden bowls; I drink from a white pitcher.” There she meets the girl — a figure “painted into the background” — who struggles to escape the dining room and seek refuge from the confinement of art in the “real” world. The world, however, as represented by Shirley, is but another refraction of artistic illusion. Art can only mirror itself: while looking for reality outside its confines, all it discovers is art.

The painted girl — a component in the artful structure of the painting — is given the opportunity to address a fictional narrator of a fictional text. When she speaks, she parodies herself as artistic representation of the world; the painted character warns the fictional narrator not to trust art: “The fruit in the bowl? It is made of wax. No, there is nothing in the pitcher. It has been all created for effect.” The seams of artistic fabric are exposed and ridiculed by art itself.

Sidney views poetry as imitation, “a speaking picture,” which aspires to approach the ideal world of truth. In an ironic reversal of Sidney’s notion of art, the picture in Weinzweig’s fiction speaks against the artist accusing him or her of deception:

Oh these artists and their tricks! They deal in illusion: everything is a matter of perspective . . . It’s not only what he paints in — all those green trees and the lovely blue sky — it’s what he leaves out — that’s part of deception too. (56)

Ironically, the outspoken accusation of the picture against its own creator testifies to the artist’s undisputable control of the artistic process and affirms the artist’s freedom to manipulate materials. The protagonist’s rebellious speech against the artist attests to the presence of the artist in the work: the “speaking picture” asserts the presence of the “writing subject.” The invented character’s accusation of her inventor is but a delightful strategy to direct the reader to authorial “commentary” in the text.

The Renaissance poet and the post-modernist author represent contrastive views of the relationship between the “real” world and



the world of fiction; consequently, they charge their readers with differing tasks: while Sidney insists on the reader's attention, Weinzweig requires participation. Yet there seems to be no contradiction in their notion of the writer as the ultimate authority who stages and orchestrates the relationships between the reader and the text. As the constructor of the text, the author guides the reader either through "delightful teaching" or through the right "garden path" towards the discovery of the meaningfulness in the text.

By allowing the reader to participate in the work through the act of reading, the author of the post-modernist text promulgates the notion of a creatively potent individual who focuses upon the world's imperfections to assess the constantly shifting modes of being. In that sense, the post-modernist author assumes, like the Renaissance poet, the function of teacher and guide: he or she uncovers untouched reservoirs of creativity and imagination by illuminating the mutable and the uncertain components in human existence. Sidney submits that "to teach and delight" the poet should focus on the consideration of the ideal, of "what may be and should be" (103). I have tried to show that Helen Weinzweig, a post-modernist author, also delights her reader in her work. Yet in light of her complex lesson of relativity, now the vision focuses on that which Sidney admonishes the poet to avoid, namely "what is, hath been, or shall be" (103). Paradoxically, the self-conscious exploration of the finality of the world's imperfection and man's inherent fallibility presents a challenge no less complex than the existence of the ideal model. That Weinzweig meets this challenge cannot be denied; cast as private eyes we, the readers, have discovered her authorial presence alive and active in the text.

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## Errata

We regret that the title of the poem by Lala Heine-Koehn on page 40 of our January 1989 number (20:1), "One World Only," was misspelled as "One Word Only."