

# A "Sense of Loss": A Profile of Helen Weinzweig

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## ABSTRACT

This paper provides an overview of the life and work of fiction writer Helen Weinzweig. Weinzweig's writing has been overlooked by critics and readers who have been challenged by her narrative style and vision. Here, the relevance of her oeuvre is confirmed through a reexamination of her subject matter, narrative technique, and literary influences.

## RÉSUMÉ

Cet article fait le survol de la vie et de l'oeuvre de la romancière Helen Weinzweig. Les écrits de Weinzweig ont été négligés par les critiques et par les lecteurs pour qui son style narratif et sa vision donnait un défi à relever. Ici, la pertinence de son oeuvre est confirmée en étudiant de nouveau le fond de son sujet, sa technique narrative, et ses influences littéraires.

Helen Weinzweig's interests and career as a fiction writer recall those of George Eliot. The works of both describe contemporary women's struggles as wives, mothers, and daughters, and adapt existing narrative conventions to suit their subjects. Further, Eliot published her first novel, *Adam Bede*, in 1859, when she was 40, and Weinzweig began writing a century later, at the age of 45. Despite a delayed beginning, the first works of both writers reveal their originality as well as their artistic maturity. There the similarities end, however, for unlike Eliot, who enjoyed critical recognition during her lifetime, Weinzweig is one of Canada's marginalized writers of fiction.

To date, Helen Weinzweig has published two novels and a collection of short stories. Her marginalization is not so much the result of a relatively small oeuvre but is due largely to the surreal, often bleak vision that informs her writing, a combination that has challenged critics and alienated some readers. The briefest look at Weinzweig's work explains why this is so. Her work betrays an interest in modern painting, music, and, in particular, the French *nouveau roman*. Like the French novelists whom she admires -- Alain Robbe-Grillet and Nathalie Sarraute foremost among them -- Weinzweig eschews traditional elements such as plot, characterization, and setting as sources of context in her own fiction. Instead, she creates highly

visual and fragmented worlds akin to abstract paintings that require the active participation of the reader in assembling the various parts of her literary canvases and interpreting their significance.

Born on 21 May 1915 to Lily (nee Wekselman) and Joseph Tenenbaum in the Polish ghetto of Radom -- "a life lived in constant terror of pogroms" (Cowan 31) -- Helen Weinzweig emigrated to Canada at the age of nine with her divorced mother. She did not know her father until she was an adult. Weinzweig grew up impoverished and neglected in the Jewish immigrant district of Toronto -- now the fashionable "Annex" neighbourhood -- and deliberately abandoned her native Polish and Yiddish languages: "[t]he associations of both were very traumatic for me" (Kirchhoff A14). In Toronto, she attended school for the first time and was taught "by wonderful, selfless Presbyterian and Methodist schoolteachers, who knew right from wrong, and who passed on to me the accepted rules of a (then) homogeneous society which offered certain rewards if..." (Weinzweig, "Interrupted" 299). In fact, Weinzweig's indigent childhood and adolescence are articulated in her writing as the compelling need to escape the tyranny of poverty and working-class oppression. Her mother, who remained a single parent and was sole provider at a time when women rarely found

themselves in such circumstances, experienced her share of ill fortune. Weinzweig has described her as "a totally independent woman, who always earned her own living [as a hairdresser], married three times, had live-in male companionship between marriages, had had a number of abortions because she had to support herself and me and her sisters and her father..." ("Interrupted" 297). As a result of her behaviour, mother and daughter were ostracized as non-conformists. Weinzweig's short story "My Mother's Luck" (later staged as a one-act play and included in the collection *A View from the Roof*), records the difficult life and dynamic character of her mother.

During her adolescence, Weinzweig spent two years at a sanatorium while recuperating from tuberculosis. It was during this period that she developed the love of reading which has continued throughout her life. After completing her junior matriculation at Harbord Collegiate Institute in Toronto, Weinzweig was forced by the Depression to seek employment. She worked as a stenographer, receptionist, and retail sales clerk before marrying the composer John Weinzweig, whom she had met in high school, on 19 July 1940. The couple has been married for 56 years.

Weinzweig explains her decision to marry as follows:

I grew up without a sense of family. Other people had families. So when I married and had my own family, I think I tried to create a family life out of my head. I feel I failed. I still don't know, in other than an intellectual way, what makes a family. So the "sense" of family creeps into my work in a negative way, i.e., what is wrong with this or that family....

I chose the traditional route of marriage and motherhood because I wanted to be accepted by the world around me. Why that was so had a lot to do with my mother. She refused to follow the path of other women....I decided I would be respectable, and became more so than Caesar's wife. (Jenoff 7-8)

Until the age of 45 Weinzweig was homemaker and mother to two sons, Paul and Daniel. In addition, she served as chaperone for the National Youth Orchestra of Canada and was an organizer, teacher, and supervisor of a cooperative nursery school in Toronto. Foremost, however, she helped foster her husband's profession; as she said herself in 1976, three years following the publication of her first novel, "[b]oth John and I lived his career" ("Weinzweig" 2).

When her children became teenagers and Weinzweig was faced with free time, she suddenly felt unable to read. At the urging of her psychiatrist, who suggested that she begin "to examine things on paper instead of in my head" (Kirchhoff A14), she took up writing as a hobby and felt as though she had been "granted a second life" (Corbeil 19). She attended a writing course at Ryerson Polytechnical Institute (now Ryerson Polytechnic University) in Toronto and another at Columbia University in New York. She soon began to take her work seriously, however, particularly when her first story "Surprise!" was published in 1968 in the *Canadian Forum*. In fact, Weinzweig's work has never been rejected. Without exception, her stories and novels have been accepted for publication, a significant achievement for one who entered the profession of authorship so late.

Her first novel, *Passing Ceremony*, appeared in 1973 when she was 58. It was followed by *Basic Black with Pearls* in 1980, Weinzweig's best-known work which won the City of Toronto Book Award. The novel was published in the United States in 1981. *A View from the Roof*, a collection of 13 stories written over 21 years, was issued in 1989 and was also nominated for the Governor General's Award. Her fiction has been translated into French, German, and Italian. Weinzweig has commented that the painstaking process of writing and rewriting a novel takes her five to six years, which may account for the slim output of a writing career that, despite its late start, now spans thirty years.

A founding member of the Writers' Union of Canada, today Weinzweig is a professional who has held Ontario Arts Council and Canada Council Senior Arts grants. In 1978 she received third prize

in the CBC Literary Competition for her short story "The Homecoming," and she was awarded first prize by Alberta Theatre Productions for "A Classical Education," an unfinished play about her father. In addition, she has participated in several writing workshops at the University of New Brunswick, Fredericton and St. Lawrence College, Kingston. In 1984-85 she was Playwright-in-Residence at Toronto's Tarragon Theatre, and in 1988-89 she was Writer-in-Residence at the University of New Brunswick, Fredericton. While she embraces her Jewish background, Weinzweig practices Zen Buddhism. She also describes herself as a feminist who has been able, through writing, to integrate the conflicting facets of her life.

*Passing Ceremony* introduced Weinzweig's original style and narrative perspective to Canadian readers. The novel is highly experimental in form and presents a sombre, ironic picture of the ritual of marriage, the "passing ceremony" of its title. In its episodic shifts from scene to scene, this brief work draws on cinematic technique. Further, its abstract, visual quality evokes some modern painting. In fact, a painting by the structuralist Eli Bornstein that hung in a friend's home -- a stark depiction of white, geometrically shaped blocks in seeming random arrangement, yet contained within and unified by the frame -- provided the form for *Passing Ceremony*. The novel also adopts the fragmented structure that often characterizes a piece of modern music. Most notably, Weinzweig's fiction reveals the influence of her composer husband's music, which is marked by a "clarity of texture; economy of material; rhythmic energy; tight motivic organization...; short melodic outbursts contrasted with long flowing lines; and harmonies which, though often harsh, never fully lose their tonal orientation" (Henninger 1392).

*Passing Ceremony* adopts strategies of ellipsis and compression in order to defer continually any possible unity of plot. Weinzweig herself has noted her "short sense of time. I find I use one sentence and try and make it tell everything" (Bauer 13). By interspersing third person commentary, dialogue, and interior monologue -- without identifying the speaker in each instance -- Weinzweig's presentation of

character is deliberately fractured. The reader is forced to suspend her judgment of events and individuals until the conclusion of the novel.

As epigraph, the author cites a passage from Ivy Compton-Burnett's *A Father and His Fate* to set the tone for her work:

"Now what an odd thing the marriage service is!" said Miles, leaning back and using an almost confidential tone. "I have been reading it. And I can hardly believe that I have heard it pronounced over myself. I mean I had forgotten that part of things. It is only a passing ceremony."  
(119)

Weinzweig treats the marriage ceremony as an absurdity. It no longer signifies the communal sanctioning of two individuals who join together in a vow to sustain and respect one another through life. Instead, we are presented with a hollow ceremony and a wedding celebration attended by a cast of characters who border on the grotesque and who gather, it would seem, only to inflict suffering on one another and themselves.

The conventions of marriage and monogamy are parodied in this black comedy of betrayal. The bride has had a miscarriage and has invited several of her former lovers to the wedding; the groom laments the absence of his former homosexual lover and mourns his sister's suicide. The two marry in an effort to dull the pain of their lives, the result of their desperate seeking after love. The father of the bride brings along his new wife, an eighteen-year-old Mexican woman, and their baby. In doing so, he provokes the bride's mother, now an angry older woman whom he deserted years earlier. There is little action here; instead, individuals whisper among themselves and privately remember the infidelities that have shaped their own and the lives of everyone present. As Peter Buitenhuis has noted, the wedding guests are "bored with the ceremony and trapped in various isolations of ennui, hatred, sickness, fantasy, or self-disgust" (826).

Whatever unity there is in the novel is provided by event, setting, and time. The wedding ceremony is held in a damp chapel and the

celebration that follows takes place in "a gray stone mansion" that resembles "a miniature castle with a turret and spires and a red tiled roof" (Weinzweig, *Passing* 14). The events occupy one day. The reader uses these constants as a foundation on which to build her understanding of ever-changing scenes. Weinzweig's spare prose moves the events along quickly and builds momentarily toward an ambiguous but inevitable conclusion:

Daylight is still feeble at the window when husband and wife stir in wakefulness. They appear to sense one another's intention, for they simultaneously leave the bed, put on their greatcoats and go out from the room. In the shadows of the little hall (someone has turned out the electric light) they whisper:

- Ready?
- Ready. (*Passing* 119-20)

There is no redemption here for either the characters or the reader. As the newly married couple leaves the mansion and enters an emerging dawn and an uncharted future, the ending is grim, abrupt, and ironically unsettling.

As an expressionistic work that dispenses with traditional fictional elements, *Passing Ceremony* employs strategies from other genres--film, painting, and music--to bring unity and meaning to an otherwise broken and senseless world. Weinzweig's nightmarish cynicism remains unique, however, and communicates her belief in the paradox that tragedy always lurks beneath the comfortable and conventional surface of everyday life. For the author, that paradox can only be illuminated by a narrative style that blends the surreal and the gothic, a strong mixture for most readers. Weinzweig herself tells the following anecdote: "After reading my first novel, a man said to me at a party, 'If I were your husband I would hit you'" ("Interrupted" 300). For those who do relish her work, however, *Passing Ceremony* unquestionably is "a *tour de force* on an unattractive subject" (Buitenhuis 826) -- the failure of human relationships.

*Basic Black with Pearls*, seven years later, is also an ingenious work of puzzles that exposes the vacuousness of traditional marriage, but it is at once more complex and more unified than the earlier novel. Like its predecessor, *Basic Black with Pearls* obliges the reader to work her way through several layers of textual significance. Three central concerns of Weinzweig's second novel, which add "a zany sense of humour to her considerable talents for surrealism" (Klovan 136), are the restricted and subservient lives of women, the weight of the past on the present, and, as she says, "the crazy...house of appearance and illusion" ("Personal" 363). Its protagonist is the respectable Shirley Kaszenbowski, nee Silverberg, alias Lola Montez; <sup>1</sup> a middle-class, middle-aged, married woman in a basic black dress and pearls who travels the world to meet her elusive lover, Coenraad, an alleged spy for an unidentified "Agency."

Begun when she was in her sixties, Weinzweig was seeking a female-gendered narrative form that would articulate the feelings of depersonalization and fragmentation that women, particularly of her generation, experience. Written as a highly subjective interior monologue, the author's experimentation with narrative voice in the novel gave her unexpected difficulty.<sup>2</sup> She had set out to create:

one of those "search" adventures towards self-realization, written in the first person. The hardest part of the writing was learning to use the first person singular. It was then that I was shocked into admitting that I rarely said "I" except in apology or explanation. I, the writer, had to decide what the fictional "I" knew; what did the "I" feel; what did the "I" think; how did the "I" respond...? ("Interrupted" 299)

Well into the novel the reader learns that Shirley--the "I" of the text -- is either schizophrenic or has suffered a nervous breakdown. This revelation raises the possibility of madness and calls into question the authenticity of Shirley's narrative -- is it real or imagined?

The epigraph from Ann Quin's *Passages* signals the novel's interest in the relationship between reality and illusion: "I asked him to take off his mask, but this is all I have, he replied. Take it off I commanded. He did so. It's no use I still cannot recognise you -- put the mask back on -- there that's better now that I know I don't know you we can talk more easily" (105). Disguise is at the heart of *Basic Black with Pearls*. Shirley Kaszenbowski dons the alias of Lola Montez to protect her own and Coenraad's identities. Her tailored tweed coat, black dress, and pearls are the costume of middle-class respectability and falsely suggest prosperity, stability, and status. Francesca, the woman who replaces Shirley in her own household, wears the latter's "black jersey dress...held up by bony shoulders and pulled together at the waist by a man's brown leather belt" (Weinzweig, *Basic* 122). As wife and stepmother, Francesca is uncannily familiar as Shirley's double; prior to her flight from conformity, Shirley lived according to the same code of conventional behaviour that now regulates Francesca's existence. Further, Shirley does not know what Coenraad looks like since he always meets her in disguise and their time together is brief. As she says:

It was true that officially I did not exist. My passport bore a false name. No one but Coenraad knew my whereabouts. Since I was no longer domiciled I did not appear on voters' lists. I was a stranger in the midst of strangers. Not for me the comfort of being recognized by the company I keep. Yet this solitary life had its advantages: if no one cared about me, I need please no one. Except my lover. (Weinzweig, *Basic* 80)

Shirley's chameleon-like transformations, the ease with which Francesca adopts the part of Shirley, and Coenraad's apparently endless number of disguises imply that all behaviour is mere acting. The author's innovative use of the mask motif heightens the interplay of reality and illusion that is at the heart of this text.

Weinzweig's novel is a complex

interlacing of three narrative layers and an overt attempt to displace narrative continuity. First, as Lola Montez, the narrator tells of her long-time affair with Coenraad and their numerous rendezvous around the globe. Second, the narrative moves back in time as Shirley Silverberg describes her youth spent in the poor, Jewish immigrant district of Toronto. Finally, Shirley Kaszenbowski recounts the circumstances of her everyday life as the wife of her Polish husband, Zbigniew, and the mother of their children, Anton and Dina. Connecting these narrative layers is Shirley's present search for Coenraad, which returns her to Toronto and several of the city's Elm Streets.

*Basic Black with Pearls* also adopts the scenic structure of Weinzweig's first novel. Unlike the earlier work, however, in which scenic presentation fractures the narrative and defers coherence, in the later text five scenes unify events, which follow a cyclical rather than a sequential pattern. In his study of the novel, critic Bernard Selinger identifies its principal scenes as (1) Silk Factory (pp. 32-9); (2) Bakery (pp. 43-50); (3) Art Gallery (pp. 54-9); (4) Elsie's Mother (pp. 80-4); and (5) Bluebeard (pp. 43-50). Selinger shows that each scene "contains at least one flight to the past" (41). Although each main scene leads to another, the text evades the cause and effect pattern that plot traditionally provides. Instead, a cyclical narrative structure parallels Shirley's wandering from one Elm Street to another, the novel's governing action. In fact, structurally the work operates as small cyclical narratives framed by a large cyclical action of flight. The form suggests the cycle of the female body, by which women are defined in the text.

Shirley seeks to escape the past of her childhood and youth, her marriage to Zbigniew, and finally, her relationship with Coenraad. In the end, however, the novel asserts the stranglehold of the past on the present and Shirley is "free," only to begin another affair. Whether or not the final flight to Andy, Shirley's latest lover, represents a turning point in her life remains deliberately ambiguous. Like *Passing Ceremony*, which concludes uncertainly, *Basic Black with Pearls* does not presume to map its protagonist's future.

The text ends not in resolution but in flight which, by 1980, was already a Weinzwieg trademark.

Moreover, the question of veracity -- whether Shirley's story is authentic or fabricated -- is not answered by the novel. Instead, the approximation of reality and illusion remains a concern of the work to the end. Structurally, the author blurs the boundaries of perception in an attempt to subvert novelistic conventions. Thematically, she does so to reveal the interplay of appearance and illusion in women's lives. In the end, whether Shirley has told the "truth" or has imagined her story out of madness is not the reader's primary concern. Rather, one is impressed with the work's technical precision and its examination of women's enforced passivity in a patriarchal world. Shirley escapes from a hollow, un-lived life only to begin a relationship with Andy, yet another stranger in a series of estranged partners. That Weinzwieg could not offer her protagonist a different script is troubling to readers and author alike:

The ending was a problem that held me up for almost a year. I could find no solution for this woman who leaves home -- whether she leaves home physically or mentally is not the point. But she does leave her occupation, which is wife and mother, and goes out into the big world. And I couldn't find anything for her to do out in that big world. That question has disturbed me as a person and as a writer. (Bauer 15)

*Basic Black with Pearls* is a provoking work that challenges readers' assumptions about women's roles as well as narrative conventions. The text invites a range of responses: some appreciate its dark humour, while others regard it as a psychotic account.<sup>3</sup> However one reads *Basic Black with Pearls*, it is a skillful and powerful novel that brought Weinzwieg critical acclaim, a wider audience for her distinctive style and haunting vision, and confirmed her as a master of surrealist fiction.

Following the publication of her second novel, the author turned briefly from writing to

theatrical work. In May 1983, "My Mother's Luck," a story that first appeared in *Jewish Dialog* in 1977, was staged in Toronto as a one-act play. Part of Factory Theatre Lab's Brave New Works series, it featured Pol Pelletier in an extended monologue of an indomitable, unsentimental woman -- a character based on Weinzwieg's mother -- who "was battered by the forces of European history and shaped by a disproportionate amount of 'bad luck with weak men'" (Corbeil 19). Addressing her silent daughter, Weinzwieg's character speaks an idiosyncratic English, redolent of Yiddish syntax, colloquialisms, and expressions, which makes the text particularly adaptable to an oral and visual medium. This was Weinzwieg's first story to be dramatized, and seeing Pelletier's performance proved cathartic for the writer. A testimony to her mother's suffering, the daughter found her own work difficult to witness as theatre. The story later formed part of "A View from the Roof," a theatrical piece based on three of Weinzwieg's stories and adapted for the stage by Dave Carley. It was performed at Toronto's Tarragon Theatre in June 1996.

"My Mother's Luck" was included in the collection of short stories, *A View from the Roof*. In fact, all of the stories in the volume were published previously. "The Homecoming," for example, appeared as the final pages of *Basic Black with Pearls* and "Causation," one of the finest stories in the collection, appears here for the sixth time. As reviewer Kenneth Radu states, however, the repetition does not detract from the value of the collection, which he regards as equal in many respects to the writing of Mavis Gallant (80).

The stories are grouped thematically rather than chronologically, an appropriate arrangement since the material was written over 21 years. The first eight stories record the clash of Jews and Gentiles, while the latter five stories are more obviously experimental. Many of the concerns in this collection are familiar from the novels. A controlling theme is the power of memory and how it shapes -- and often distorts -- one's present and future life. Many of Weinzwieg's protagonists are of European Jewish background and their personal histories are burdened with

memories of Hitler and his reign of terror. A preoccupation with marriage is evident in the number of stories about couples who are locked in stultifying relationships. Women are victims in these marriages, but Weinzweig's male characters do not fare much better in narratives that detail the agonizing "business of living" (Sullivan 24). The author reveals an abiding interest in art and music, recurring motifs in the stories. Moreover, narrative experiment and an impersonal tone, punctuated by flashes of humour, are characteristic of the collection and recognizable to readers of the novels.

Memory is a common thread in these stories. In "The Means," the narrator Margaret uses a stranger she meets in an Arlesian restaurant to help exorcise the painful memories of her father, who abandoned his daughter and his Jewish wife at the start of the Second World War, and of Raoul, a passing acquaintance whom she had met 25 years earlier in Marseilles. Here, memory is the justification for the narrator's ruthless seduction of an innocent, accommodating man. Similarly, in "L'Envoi," the narrator's memory of her mother's traumatic separation from her family at the age of nine influences our reading of the daughter's own story, which forms the larger part of the text. The neglected wife of an artist, she seeks refuge in a relationship with her husband's best friend. As she claims, "my entire life has been spent trying to forge one human tie with one person in this whole wide world who would want me" (Weinzweig, *View* 116). Throughout the volume, the reader encounters desolate characters whose lives have been misshapen by their memories and who are absorbed by the unnerving power of recollection: "Memory...can be disturbing, since memory and emotion often go together, sometimes to no apparent purpose, so why permit memories to intrude on one's life...?" (Weinzweig, *View* 112). In Weinzweig's fictional world, the intrusion of memory into one's daily life is inevitable.

Relationships between men and women are scrutinized in these stories that expose love as false and pretentious. "Causation" records the loveless connections between one woman and two men, the first her former husband, the second a fascist gigolo. In this tale of mutual abuse, the

characters are motivated by selfish needs. By paying alimony and allowing her to live in his house, Oswald controls his ex-wife; in the hope of eventually inheriting her wealth, Gyorgi seduces the older woman; and, formerly an opera star, she now depends economically and sexually on both men. "A View from the Roof" also tells of a woman's sterile relationship with two men. While she and her husband, Bernard, are attending an academic conference in San Juan, Betty Adelman has a fleeting affair with Mauricio Sulano, a painter. Betty's ordinary existence as a faculty wife is disrupted temporarily by her liaison with Sulano, who, despite his artistic posturing, proves as self-interested and facile as the husband she finds so tedious. Betty's rage at the conclusion of the story is symptomatic of Weinzweig's female characters who are forced to repress their memories and their emotions, often at the cost of their sanity.

Weinzweig's fascination with art and music is evident throughout the collection. Her artist figures are all male and they are relentless in their pursuit of artistic material. Many of her female characters are either married to or romantically involved with artists whose love of self is paramount and who attribute little value to their personal relationships. In "Journey to Porquis," for example, a writer flees the demands of his wife and children and takes fictional refuge aboard a train that never reaches a final destination. "What Happened to Ravel's Bolero?" subverts the conventions of romantic love that *Bolero* celebrates. The story repeats the same sentences with slight variations and builds in intensity, much like the musical composition. In fact, it adapts the twelve-tone serialism of John Weinzweig, the first Canadian composer to employ the technique. Weinzweig's serialism explores the same twelve notes through an arrangement of intervals and rhythmic irregularities, in order to achieve an aesthetic and emotional effect. In Helen Weinzweig's similarly pioneering prose style, serial technique heightens the reader's experience and comprehension of a love affair between a middle-aged, married man and a young, single woman.<sup>4</sup>

The second number of *Parchment*, a

journal devoted to contemporary Canadian Jewish writing, includes a recent story by Weinzwieg, entitled "The Sea at Bar." Like her other short fiction, it continues to explore the torturous effects of memory and the toll it takes on one's life. The Jewish male protagonist of this tale describes the experience of having been hidden in the home of a Gentile during the Second World War, when he was an adolescent. Sheltered by a one-time princess, he was required to repay her generosity by impregnating her. Despite the kind treatment he received, the story illuminates the emotional and psychological harm that results when one is torn from one's roots, forced to deny one's true self, obliged to submit to another's demands, and used as a pawn to secure one's life.

Like the novels, Weinzwieg's stories lack resolution. Their inconclusive endings always surprise, often shock the reader and that effect is deliberate. The author aims to shatter the notion that literature ought to affirm and reflect life as her readers conceive it. She draws a scalpel across each page and makes careful incisions into the lives of her characters. In doing so, she lays bare the suffering and "sense of loss" (Jenoff 12) that has shaped them, and attains a closer correlation between life and art than realistic fiction could

ever achieve -- for her readers recognize as their own the faces of her characters and the pain of their lives.

Weinzwieg's accomplishment as an author of great skill and insight is no small achievement, especially for one who turned to writing at the age of 45. She quickly perfected her craft as an avant-garde writer whose work in English is modeled after the French *nouveau roman*. The spareness of her style camouflages the intensity, drama, and depth of her fictional worlds, peopled, as they often are, with broken, dispossessed characters who desperately seek meaning in their lives. As a writer, two of Weinzwieg's greatest contributions have been to explore the frightening impact of the Holocaust on contemporary Jewry, and to expose and condemn the constrained lives of women of her generation. Having begun her career late, the author is not hampered by the demands of a publisher since, as she has said, "all I've got is time" (Bauer 17). In fact, hers is a fiction of process and integrity that does not presume to offer solutions. Rather, Weinzwieg remains faithful to her belief that writing is a "voyage of discovery that takes a long time" (Bauer 17). One can only patiently await her next offering.

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### ENDNOTES

1. Lola Montez (1818-61) was the pseudonym of the Irish-born actress Maria Dolores Eliza Rosanna Gilbert. She was involved in an early scandalous divorce, following which she toured the Continent as a dancer. In 1847 she became the official mistress of Ludwig I of Bavaria but her liberal sympathies led to his abdication and her banishment. Later she toured the United States as a ballet dancer and actress. In California she acted in a sketch of her own life, "Lola Montez in Bavaria." She was famous for her beauty and as "the international bad girl of the mid-Victorians." See James D. Hart, *The Oxford Companion to American Literature*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford UP, 1965), 559.

2. A number of critics have noted the metafictional aspects of *Basic Black with Pearls*. Rachel Feldhay Brenner, for example, reads the novel as "indeed Shirley's [own] story based on memories of her affair with Coenraad." And Weinzweig herself has said, "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...The reader participates in the writing process." See Rachel Feldhay Brenner, "The Reader as a Private Eye: Rediscovering the Author in Helen Weinzweig's 'Basic Black with Pearls,'" *Ariel* 20.2 (Apr. 1989): 30; and Bauer, 13-14.

3. S. R. MacGillivray and Noreen Ivancic, for example, comment as follows on Weinzweig's novels: "The quite bizarre wedding that serves as the focal point of *Passing Ceremony* gradually reveals itself as the grotesquerie of an asylum where all are inmates. Shirley Kaszenbowski's on-going world-wide quest for the ever-elusive Coenraad in *Basic Black with Pearls* may be, for all the credible anchoring detail of each 'episode,' only the imaginative flights of fancy of a woman confined to a mental hospital." See S. R. MacGillivray and Noreen Ivancic, "'What Happened to Ravel's Bolero?': Weinzweig's Serialism," *English Studies in Canada* 17.2 (June 1991): 227.

4. For an analysis of Weinzweig's use of serialism in "What Happened to Ravel's Bolero?" see MacGillivray and Ivancic, 225-34.

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