

Christopher also brings that is new and important into the arena of inquiry, however, is the contextualizing power of two prefatory discussions. The first is on Vietnamese exile narratives—themselves an important new body of work. It includes such fairly well known texts as Nguyen Ngoc Ngan's *The Will of Heaven* (1982) and Le Le Hayslip's *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places* (1989) but also introduces numerous others that ought to be known to a general readership. The second, further contextualizing the first, dwells on a preceding tradition of works about US wars in Asia and the representations of Asians. As a result, in two radically different ways, we thus have charted out for us the domain of the bicultural other in which Euro-American texts, both known and unfamiliar, might profitably be read with new eyes.

To this degree, the work's conclusion, concerning texts on the subject of "going back"—itself a new area of literary endeavor—may claim a certain propriety. On the other hand, as to current textual producers—mainly US war veterans, civilian participants, and returning Vietnamese exiles—an analysis of motive in the narrative of return as it relates to new developments of cultural consciousness may for the present at least fall short of Christopher's claims—that the "phenomenon" itself "may be *cach mang*," revolution, literally "a change of mandate" (297). I think we must reserve judgment on that. At the same time, I hope that it will be the subject of Christopher's further writing. I, for one, will eagerly look forward to what she has to say; and when she makes her further inquiry, as I hope she will, I will surely, as here, learn deeply from it.

Lou Tafler

*Fair New World*

Vancouver: Backlash Books, 1994. Pp. 236. \$19.99

Reviewed by William Walker

Therry Grosspherdaughter has peed standing up. In Feminania, one of the principal nations of the world in the year 2084, this means he has committed gendercrime, for women can't pee that way, and like almost all cases of gendercrime in Feminania, this one has been detected by the Gequapo (Gender Equality Police). Since he knows he can only plead guilty or guilty with explanatory feelings, he knows he will suffer an act of political fairness (punishment), but he is still hoping this fairness won't leave him "gonadotropically challenged"—the fate of many perpetrators of gendercrime. Sandi Scuttlebut, on the other hand, is suing the computer software company, FemiSoft, for she claims that during a virtual reality date with a virtual man she had on a FemiSoft program, she was virtually raped. Since it is clear to her that "virtually no!" means virtually no, she claims to be the victim of a gendercrime, and, as all citizens of Feminania, but especially the Radical Femininnies, know: "where there's a victim, there's a gendercrime" (47). Given how things work in

the Great Hall of Fairness in the Age of Fairness in Feminania, the outlook is grim for Therry, but Scuttlebut's case looks good.

Things are entirely different in the nation of Bruteland. John Buck, the firearms dealer, has a good chance of defending himself against Acme Rent-a-Kunta even though he returned the "kunta" he rented from this company before the agreed term was up. After all, his case is being heard by Justice Hogg, himself an avid "kunta" renter and lover of "KFC's" (kuntas-for-cash), and the "kunta" Buck rented was clearly dysfunctional—she did not cook his breakfast the way he liked it. But she was dysfunctional because there is a conspiracy afoot to infect with feminist principles the women who are bred by Feminania and secretly exported as "kuntas" to Bruteland. Tensions build—what is the third and only sane nation of the world, Melior, to do?

If you are neither bored by this scenario, nor mortally offended and already filing a complaint with the Human Rights Commission, you may be entertained by this satirical novel by one of those white, heterosexual, Canadian male academics who thinks (how could he?) he has been unable to get a decent university job because he is a white, heterosexual male (his real name is Louis Marinoff, and it seems The City College of New York has just hired him in spite of his ungainly features). This novel is certainly not in the league of *1984* and *Brave New World*. Because Tafler presents three societies in the space Orwell and Huxley present one, his world is thinner and much less palpable than theirs. Though they have some strength in themselves, the scenes, plots, and characters of this novel really serve simply as occasions to get digs in on the excesses of contemporary feminism and macho-men. Had Tafler limited himself to delineating the fabric of Feminanian society, his fair new world would have been much more concrete. He would also have been able to reveal more about promising characters, such as Hardy Orbs, the doomed Socrates of Feminania, and Leslie, the lawyer, whose virtual sex with Raoul leads to a virtual pregnancy.

However, the novel still scores some good hits. One is against universities that condemn discrimination and then practice it under nice names such as "affirmative action" and "equal opportunity": at the University of Ovaria in Feminania, discrimination on the grounds of race, sex, and gender orientation is of course forbidden. But not really, for, in the nonsexist language of Feminania, "evhery qualified victim of political unfairness shall have especially equal opphertunity of employwombent. And evhery unqualified victim shall have extra-specially equal opphertunity of employwombent, if the lack of qualification is adjudged to be a consequence of political unfairness" (49-50). This is almost as good as the actual wording of many university hiring policy statements. In Melior, on the other hand, university hiring is done by those who are not made privy to the gender, race, and sexual preference of the job candidates. But this does not necessarily mean that the Meliorites always end up with white heterosexual males in their universities: the philosophy department in Melior

ends up hiring “an albino bulimic bisexual genetically challenged troll of corpuscularity and whiteness, with twelve toes and apparently limitless dandruff” (167). The enlightened Meliorite hiring committee, however, is “delighted, for it had hired the best-qualified philosopher it could find to suit its needs, which lay primarily in metaphysics and epistemology” (167).

In spite of its allegiances with the great satires of the West, this novel, like most of those satires, will not change its target. For radical feminists, especially those at the university, tend to regard the criticism that comes their way simply as further evidence of, as the Ovarian professors put it, “the enslavewombent, exploitation and oppression of all womben evherywhere by men” (54). The best Tafler can hope for from them is that they do not gonadtropically challenge him. But like those great satires, this one may well entertain some readers and remain as a significant testimony to the forms of resentment, fanaticism, corruption, and idiocy of which we are capable.

David Weir

*Decadence and the Making of Modernism*

Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995. Pp. 232. \$50.00 \$17.95

Reviewed by Leon Surette

It is a great pleasure to review a book so well written, and so full of well-presented and well-argued analysis. Weir’s argument is that modernity takes shape at least partly in response to nineteenth-century decadence. Specifically, he maintains that “narrative discontinuity, heightened description, [and] erudite allusiveness” were elements of novelistic rhetoric that “had already had their day in France in the form of *le style de décadence*” (149). To advance his thesis, Weir begins with a masterful twenty-page survey of the uses and definitions of “decadence”—including recent feminist assessments—that leaves the term its polyvalence while articulating its range of reference.

In some respects, Weir’s thesis coincides with early assessments of modernism—notably Edmund Wilson’s *Axel’s Castle* (1933). But, until recently, the New Critical formalist take on Modernism had relegated the argument for continuity heretical. Weir resuscitates this view through a detailed and lucid analysis of the phenomenon of decadence itself. Weir notes that decadence, admittedly a rather nebulous category, highlights transition, especially endings, but also beginnings. Modernism, for example, is seen as substituting the sense of ending found in decadence for a sense of beginning. Similarly, decadence may refer to style or to content. Once again, Weir argues that Modernism adopts realistic canons for its content, but decadent canons for its style and rhetoric.