problematically, the way in which female behavior is read illustrates how the application of Darwinian principles can so easily lead to socially regressive forms of social Darwinism. The categories for female behavior are stereotypical at best. Women can only be "fast" (if they respond to philanderers) or "coy" (55) (if they respond to faithful males) or both. Furthermore, interpreting Popeye and Temple Drake in terms of sexual selection and "evolutionary fitness" (60) ends in an implicit analysis whereby a rape victim selects her rapist and implies the kind of choice that a rape victim does not have. When Wainwright describes Temple in the Luxembourg Gardens at the end of the novel and asks, "How could sociobiological evolution have produced this state of affairs?" (67), we are tempted to answer "Exactly."

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Catherine Morley. *The Quest for Epic in Contemporary American Fiction: John Updike, Philip Roth and Don DeLillo*. New York: Routledge, 2009. viii + 218 pp.

For *The Quest for Epic*, Catherine Morley selected three American novelists who were born in the Depression and came of age in the 1950s, a decade of (as she says) profound national "myth-making" (144). John Updike was born in 1932, Philip Roth in 1933, and Don DeLillo in 1936. Their lives' work attracted Morley because it covers the last half century of American history, from the beginning of the Cold War to millennial reflections. Midcentury mythmakers asserted the nation's autonomy and uniformity, with the white male as its representative figure, its hero. By century's close, however, America could not ignore its pluralist and global aspects. Above all, Morley is looking for "an evolving rather than static national consciousness" (75).

While Updike, Roth, and (to a much lesser extent) DeLillo put their backs to the national border and documented everyday American life, they also, Morley argues, gave their work a transnational identity. There are nine texts under consideration, five by Updike—the Harry "Rabbit" Angstrom series (published in 1960, 1971, 1981, 1990, and 2000)—a Roth trilogy with Nathan Zuckerman as narrator—*American Pastoral* (1997), *I Married a Communist* (1998), and *The Human Stain* (2000)—and DeLillo's *Underworld* (1997). The series, trilogy,

and novel ultimately have transnational identities because they follow the epic tradition of Homer, Virgil, Dante, Milton, and Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922). Morley recognizes the "home-grown influences on their work," Emerson's in particular, but she focuses on how they "transformed the American epic by imbibing and re-working aspects of the Joycean epic" (33). "Genre transcends the national," she says (32).

Morley's argument hinges on showing this Joycean influence and the extent to which these novels are rightly called prose epics, and in this regard she succeeds. As the "genre most associated with the national" (36), she writes, the epic enables "the nation to recognise itself" (44). However, while the epic is "locally and nationally specific," it also "includes remnants and textures of other cultural edifices" (18). The epic remains what it was centuries ago, "the 'book of the tribe', a chronicle rooted in communal experience" (54), but it now also includes "those forbidden 'true stories' which have been systematically suppressed and omitted from the official, homogenous histories of nations" (47). Whether in poetry or prose, the epic is a "palimpsest" with allusions to a diversity of sources, from old plays and poems to recent newspapers and songs (150).

The prose epic in Morley's definition is thus a paradox, its inclusiveness making it both a "means of nation-building" (126) and an ideal genre for "destabilising" the nation-state (17). This genre not only transcends the national "on the strength of the number and sophistication of its generic crosscurrents" (29), it pluralizes national identity by telling a "popular history" (47). And although the modern epic continues to be "a predominantly masculine genre," its hero is presented ironically (6). With Leopold Bloom in *Ulysses* as exemplar, the questing hero is mired in unexalted, domestic realities and is unknown in the public arena (67). Time ticks on without redemption or enlightenment in the conclusion. Moreover, the hero-protagonist is not a true-blood citizen: Bloom is Hungarian-Irish, Zuckerman is Jewish-American, and Nick Shay in *Underworld* is Italian-American. From this perspective "he writes himself into the larger world," as DeLillo has said (qtd. in Morley 137). In short, the hyphenated identity of the epics' heroes echo the mixed identity of the genre and the nation.

American novelists are therefore drawn to the prose epic because of its "democratic sensibilities" and because it demands full reflection on the state of the nation (4). The writer's historicizing abilities are tested. Morley asks whether, as their careers evolved, Updike and Roth were able to transcend the 1950s, that time when a "distinctly American canon as a response to matters of foreign policy" was formulated (22). Both authors sometimes fell into the tautology that the novel is American if it is great, and great if it is American. Yet every

decade Updike updated his eponymous character, and while in the early texts Rabbit was "symbolic of the spirit of white America" (73), Updike did finally acknowledge "race as a crucial issue at the heart of the American multicultural dream" (79). Similarly, Roth's early work was "criticised for the way in which women are represented," but in *The Human Stain* he was at least setting the issue of race "at the heart of American literary culture" (111). Unfortunately, Morley overlooks an irony in comparing 1950s with 1990s America and the early with the later work: as she tells it, even if the characters never experience redemption, their authors and their country did.

The opening pages of *Underworld* alert us to DeLillo's method of challenging "the idiom of nationalism with a transnational consciousness" (122). Alluding to twin headlines in the 4 October 1951 edition of the *New York Times*, he begins with news of the Soviet Union's second atomic bomb test reaching America just as a home run gives the New York Giants the National League Pennant (on 3 October). Juxtaposing the home run and bomb blasts, DeLillo has the bits of paper tossed by fans in the ballpark, "the detritus of American consumerism," resemble the "nuclear fallout descending on Kazakhstan" (123). *Underworld* thrives on such parallels as it moves from the early 1950s to the early 1990s, yet its author understands that the Emersonian "mission to reveal the nation to itself" was a creative act, not merely a borrowing from newspapers (39). DeLillo writes what he calls "counterhistory," which accords with Morley's definition of the prose epic; the writer of counterhistory, he says, "will engineer a swerve from the usual arrangements that bind a figure in history to what has been reported, rumored, confirmed or solemnly chanted. It is fiction's role to imagine deeply" (qtd. in Morley 127). The novelist of counterhistory will define, and undefine, the national identity through "acts of questioning" and "linguistic enquiry" (125).

The Quest for Epic does offer a few disappointments. Its critical language is often recursive to a fault. For instance, in a passage that begins "By examining generic aspects," a numbing repetition appears in quick parade: interplay, interaction, intersection, interdependent, co-dependent, mutually intertwined, enmeshed and transnational (19). Repeating it does not make it so. As well, she situates her project in relation to such scholars of postnationalist American Studies as Paul Giles, John Carlos Rowe, Donald Pease, and Amy Kaplan and wants to celebrate 1990s multiculturalism, yet she relies on critics with canons (Northrop Frye and his archetypes, Harold Bloom and his male anxieties). And Morley never sufficiently complicates the dichotomous shift from a uniform America to a pluralist one.

That said, the book is well researched and incisively explores the issue of genre and national identity: what are the forms, narratives,

and voices that represent America? Moreover, how effectively do its writers engage the temporal contingency that to represent America one must imagine its future? Once the staged simplicity of the 1950s had collapsed, these novelists returned to the Transcendentalist idea that the nation was forever in "the process of self-discovery" and thus in a "disoriented state" (43). Always incipient, America as a whole shares in the African American situation of having "no recoverable prelapsarian moment" in its history (115). Its Eden is ahead, if at all. The prose epic is an exceptional genre for the American writer who builds a vision of the nation in one novel, then builds again in the next.

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Rod Rosenquist. *Modernism, the Market and the Institution of the New*. New York: Cambridge UP, 2009. ix + 210 pp.

Rod Rosenquist's *Modernism, the Market and the Institution of the New* proposes that the familiar cast of canonical modernists whose monumental works appeared in the early 1920s—T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and James Joyce—disrupted the normal progression of literary generations. He proceeds from a relatively simple observation about modernism, one so obvious that its ramifications sometimes go unrecognized: modernism aspired to be simultaneously new and enduring. Pound's well-known maxim, "Literature is news that STAYS news," is the epigraph to Rosenquist's introduction and captures the paradoxical nature of modernism as a literary movement devoted both to being new and to establishing its particular form of innovation as a permanent cultural institution. This radically limited the strategies available to artists who wanted to make their mark in the Anglo American literary scene during the late 1920s and 1930s.

The uniquely difficult problem of arriving to modernism late is the focus of Rosenquist's valuable contribution to the study of late modernism. He analyzes a group of writers that he terms "modernist latecomers," which includes Wyndham Lewis, Laura Riding, Henry Miller, and three Objectivist poets working in the so-called Pound tradition, Louis Zukofsky, Basil Bunting, and Lorine Niedecker. Rosenquist is interested in these writers' relationship with the high modernists that preceded them more than their individual bodies of work. He uses literary criticism, correspondence, and memoirs to