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Review of *Troubling minds: the cultural politics of genius in the United States, 1840-1890* by Gustavus Stadler

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Stadler, Gustavus. **Troubling minds: the cultural politics of genius in the United States, 1840-1890.** Minnesota, 2006. 217p bibl index afp ISBN 0816642257, $70.50; ISBN 0816642265 pbk, $23.50: ISBN 9780816642250, $70.50; ISBN 9780816642267 pbk, $23.50

Though the title suggests it is, this book is not a cultural history of genius in the 19th-century US. Working in a high cultural-studies mode, Stadler (Haverford College) addresses questions like those addressed in a special issue of *American Literature*, "Aesthetics and the End(s) of Cultural Studies" (ed. by Christopher Castiglia and Russ Castronovo, v. 76, no. 3, September 2004). He uses an oddly assorted group of figures to map out a grand narrative of how the genius works to accommodate ordinary individuals to "the troubling, potentially shattering phenomena associated with modernity." In the first three chapters Stadler focuses on genius as a mediating figure in the context of race and the sectional conflict, using Ralph Waldo Emerson, Margaret Fuller, Frederick Douglass, Jenny Lind, and William Wells Brown as his primary figures. In the two chapters on the postbellum era, he focuses on sexuality and Louisa May Alcott and Henry James as "queer geniuses." Stadler's prose is so dense and his argument so abstract and engaged with specialized questions of cultural theory that this book will be incomprehensible to all but the most sophisticated readers (most undergraduates not among them). **Summing Up:** Recommended. Graduate students, researchers, and faculty.—*M. J. Homestead, University of Nebraska—Lincoln*

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