

The other side of this paradox, as Boyden elaborates in a series of four substantial chapters (on lingering Anglocentrism, the exclusion of contemporary literature, preoccupations with the nature of an American language, and the cult of genealogy), concerns the way that the apparently reactionary moves characteristic of American literary history in fact can be understood in terms of utopian – and sometimes radically utopian – motives. Boyden’s teasing out of these motives is often both fascinating and persuasive.

The strengths of Boyden’s work include first of all a comprehensive knowledge not only of American literature, but also of its primary theorists and historiographers, from the Duyckinck brothers to Sacvan Bercovitch, David Shumway, Werner Sollors, and Elizabeth Renker. Boyden adds to this an expert negotiation of vexed matters of literary value, in this case not to privilege the status of value or establish literary hierarchies, but to further a discussion about how the question of value functions within larger intellectual debates. Part of this negotiation involves an impressive series of micro-historical investigations associated with hotly debated critical issues such as the right way to frame Emily Dickinson or confessional poetry.

It must be said, though, that Boyden’s openness has its limits. For one thing, his rhetoric sometimes veers from nuanced sociological language that attempts to discriminate an argument’s function within a larger context to something less discriminating. (As, for example, “My larger aim in documenting these shifts in appreciation has been to show that the ‘confessional school’ of American poetry was not institutionalized through some ulterior design but as it were by default” (144).) For another, his laudable revisionary tolerance, which usually absorbs generational skirmishing as grist for the sociologist’s mill, does not always exclude some of the academy’s current shibboleths, as for example its reflexive contempt for modernism and/or new criticism (such as, “Rosenthal’s universalization of the ‘confessional’ mode may have served to disaffiliate it from an overpowering Eliotic modernism” (140).)

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Günter Leypoldt, *Cultural Authority in the Age of Whitman: A Transatlantic Perspective* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009. £65.00). Pp. vi + 302.

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Why did Walt Whitman promote the concept that liberated, autonomous citizens could find political vigour in the “lawless music” of free verse? And in what ways has this concept been finessed by the modernist manipulators of Whitman’s poetic bequest? Günter Leypoldt’s new book addresses these key questions with theoretical rigour and emphatic assurance. While myriad critics have canvassed how Whitman’s stylistic and generic experiments injected his poetry with political gravitas, Leypoldt’s project also shows that Whitman’s writing lent aesthetic prestige to vital political actions, such as his support for the development of democratic institutions. Leypoldt’s early chapters gauge Whitman’s cultural kudos from four standpoints: its links to transatlantic contexts; its searching engagement with Emersonian

transcendentalism; its position within the conceptual fields of music, nature and democracy; and finally its refashioning during Whitman's "retrospective canonization" between the 1870s and the 1940s (247).

Whitman's richly textured fusion of poetic radicalism with the cultural nationalism of the Young American movement gave him "exceptional relevance" (viii) according to Leypoldt. This deeply pondered sociological thesis is sharpened by insights into a diverse array of nineteenth-century aesthetic credos. One of the most telling and trenchant sections calibrates Whitman's keen fascination with the grammar and syntax of classical music as a means of converting "cultural pluralism into beautiful song" (5). In this section Leypoldt demonstrates a subtle awareness of American transcendentalist music discourse and how it melds a "millenarian concern with social perfectionism" (138). Through this approach Leypoldt greatly amplifies both the chronological and the philosophical remit of scholarly enquiry into the transatlantic enterprise.

Leypoldt's signal achievement is to throw into bolder relief the modernist re-invention of Whitman's corpus as the triumphant distillation of a native avant-garde tradition. Chapter 9, "Whitman among the Moderns," does a fine job of assessing, for instance, William Carlos Williams's canny repackaging of Whitman as the originator of a "new measure" that confronted and processed a distinctively American modernity. Leypoldt's discerning analysis permits us to view the similarities between Carlos Williams's impatient disavowal of T. S. Eliot's ethical or political vocabularies, and Whitman's rejection of Tennyson. Carlos Williams carefully situates his admired predecessor Whitman into a narrative where free verse is lauded as the technical innovation which proclaims radical democracy, the inspiring and ebullient "Music of America." By such repackaging Carlos Williams suggests that his own refinement of the "variable foot" in *Paterson* pays tribute to, even extends, Whitman's dissident difference and "lawless music," thus making Eliot's *The Waste Land* seem like a "remnant of premodern times" (252) in comparison. Against Eliot's "failed courage" (252) as a poet and cultural commentator, Whitman emerges, in Carlos Williams's account, as both a historical happening of seismic significance and a complex retrospective construction, and it is this notion which lends Leypoldt's closing chapters a compelling momentum.

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John T. Matthews, *William Faulkner: Seeing through the South* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, \$79.95). Pp. x + 309. ISBN 978 1 4051 2481 2.

John T. Matthews's *William Faulkner: Seeing through the South* is the rare book that will prove vital and engaging both for readers new to Faulkner's writing and for scholars long devoted to it. To strike such a balance is no small task, for the fiction is difficult and the exegeses plentiful. Nonetheless, Matthews manages to guide readers through *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936), for example, with clarity and conciseness yet without sacrificing the nuances that researchers value in this most complicated novel. Throughout, his discussion incorporates insights from the full history of Faulkner