far from a witty turn of phrase (“the Georgian yadda yadda yadda” [p. 87]), humorous observation (that Burkean conservatism is “a categorical imperative that, for some reason, needs its daughter to love it” [p. 65]), or genuine LOL-worthy paraphrase (“Every time you let a weird boy just up and kiss your hand while you’re in the middle of a discussion about ‘the character of Richard the Third’... England gets a little worse” [p. 61]). Moments like these are disarmingly honest in their silliness—they restore, at least to this reader, a sense of the occasional absurdity and weirdness of reading literature of the nineteenth century. Stout’s humor, in other words, does not distract from the seriousness of his project but, like his other more traditional scholarly virtues, has the effect of inviting the reader to look at complex issues closely, and with patience, and to feel as if they are a part of an ongoing conversation.

Nick Bujak
Oglethorpe University


Daniel Hack’s ambitious and elegantly written Reaping Something New: African American Transformations of Victorian Literature joins a rich and growing body of work focused on nineteenth-century African American print culture. Building upon foundational studies by scholars such as Frances Smith Foster, Carla Peterson, and Elizabeth McHenry, recent books by Eric Gardner, Nazera Sadiq Wright, and Britt Rusert (to name just a few) have recovered and explored the vast archive of African American literature that appeared in forms besides the bound book. With chapters on essays, poems, and novels published in nineteenth-century black newspapers and magazines, Hack makes an important contribution to this field. Taking up one of the key insights of Black Print Culture Studies, Hack focuses on the intertextual nature of nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century African American literature. Specifically, Reaping Something New recovers and explores the varied ways in which African American writers took up and made use of Victorian literature. Providing overwhelming evidence that “nineteenth-century British literature was woven deeply into the fabric of nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century African American literature and print culture”
Hack offers an essential account of how African American writers such as Frederick Douglass, James McCune Smith, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, Charles Chesnutt, Pauline Hopkins, and W.E.B. Du Bois engaged with Victorian giants like Alfred Tennyson, Charles Dickens, and George Eliot, as well as a host of less-canonical British writers.

Throughout his study, Hack develops and employs a method he terms “close reading at a distance.” This method, he explains, “combines detailed, granular textual analysis with consideration of a work’s geographical dispersal and uptake, especially by readerships not envisioned or addressed by the work itself” (p. 3). *Reaping Something New* is filled with stunning close readings that draw out the connections between British and African American works at the level of “specific language, tropes, and narrative structures,” and I am thoroughly convinced by Hack’s argument that it “is at this level of granularity that many African Americanizations of Victorian literature take place and become legible” (p. 10). Yet Hack also makes a claim for “close reading at a distance” that his book does not fully develop. Hack contends that “the methods of close reading and formal analysis, on the one hand, and of book history and reception studies, on the other, need to be combined if we are to grasp as fully as possible either a text’s intrinsic features or its cultural impact, let alone the relationship between the two,” and he claims that “close reading at a distance” accomplishes that combination (pp. 23–24, emphasis in original). But *Reaping Something New* devotes little attention to questions of physical form, production, distribution, and circulation, all of which are central concerns of book history. Taking such issues seriously would only have enhanced Hack’s readings of works published in newspapers (like Charles Dickens’s *Bleak House*) and magazines (like Pauline Hopkins’s *Of One Blood*) and made the book’s methodological intervention even more powerful. That Hack chose not to focus on these areas does not diminish the importance of his insights regarding the interconnectedness of African American and Victorian literature, but there remains a need for work that combines close reading with the methods of book history and print culture studies.

Hack divides *Reaping Something New* into two parts. The first section contains three chapters, each of which focuses on the ways in which a range of African American writers engaged with the works of a single Victorian author. Chapter 1 traces African American engagements with Charles Dickens in general, and his novel *Bleak House* in particular. Focusing on the serialization of Dickens’s novel in *Frederick Douglass’s Paper* and its “rewriting” by Hannah Crafts in her *Bonds-woman’s Narrative* (p. 16), Hack reveals how antebellum African
American editors and writers creatively enlisted Dickens and *Bleak House* in the antislavery cause (p. 33). Chapter 2 largely remains in the 1850s and 1860s, as Hack looks closely at deployments of Tennyson’s “Charge of the Light Brigade” in African American print. Again reading the pages of *Frederick Douglass’s Paper*, Hack devotes most of this chapter to unpacking a radical reading of Tennyson’s poem by the African American writer, doctor, and activist James McCune Smith. In a letter to Douglass’s paper, Smith charges the British poet laureate with stealing the sense and rhythm of his immediately famous poem from an African war chant that helped spark the Haitian Revolution. Performing a superlative reading of Smith’s reading, Hack explores the relevance of Tennyson’s poetry to issues such as artistic originality and imitativeness, topics that continue to occupy a central place in African American literary studies. Chapter 3 turns to the later decades of the nineteenth century and explores the importance of George Eliot’s lengthy poem *The Spanish Gypsy* to African American literature broadly, and especially to the novels of Frances Ellen Watkins Harper. Pointing to the parallels between plots of “unwitting passing and voluntary racial affiliation” in Eliot’s poem and two of Harper’s novels (*Minnie’s Sacrifice* and *Iola Leroy*), as well as to convincing examples of Harper borrowing and adapting Eliot’s language and phrasing in her own work, Hack explores the transatlantic routes of the passing novel (p. 80).

The second section of *Reaping Something New* flips the organizational logic of the first, with each of the book’s final three chapters focusing on how a single African American author employed a range of Victorian works. Chapter 4 looks closely at the writings of Charles Chesnutt, with specific attention paid to his short story “The Wife of His Youth” and novels *The House Behind the Cedars* and *The Quarry* (posthumously published in 1999). In these works, Hack traces Chesnutt’s engagements with Tennyson, Dickens, and Eliot, as well as with the novels of Thomas Hardy and Charlotte Brontë. Chesnutt “homes in with remarkable precision on texts that invoke not black but rather mixed-race identities,” and in doing so “helps construct and make visible a transatlantic, interracial lineage in which the novelistic treatment of scandals of fallenness and mixed-race ancestry (interracial lineage) are mutually informed and illuminating” (pp. 118, 126). Chapter 5 moves to Chesnutt’s contemporary Pauline Hopkins, whose novels *Contending Forces* and *Of One Blood* borrowed from and engaged with the works of Tennyson, Eliot, and the British novelist Edward Bulwer Lytton. Teasing out these connections, Hack argues that “Hopkins uses Victorian literature in ways that amplify the
counternormative, even transgressive currents of her work, with regard to her treatment of gender and sexuality as well as race” (p. 139). The book’s final chapter turns to W.E.B. Du Bois, and the epigraphs of poetry that begin each chapter of his Souls of Black Folks. Hack looks closely at Du Bois’s use of nineteenth-century British poets such as Byron, Tennyson, and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, but also explores the importance of Du Bois’s use of contemporary British writers. Souls of Black Folks thus marks a shift, Hack concludes, in African American engagements with British literature: “when later African American writers engage with Victorian literature, they will not be engaging with it as contemporary, and when they engage with contemporary literature, they will not be engaging with Victorian literature” (p. 177).

In his book’s first section, Hack spends most of his energy teasing out the lessons that African American engagements with Victorian literature can teach us about three canonical nineteenth-century British writers. We “find that the African Americanization of Bleak House makes newly visible and meaningful certain aspects of the novel,” realize that “Smith’s reframing of ‘The Charge of the Light Brigade’ sheds new light on the poem’s place in Tennyson’s oeuvre,” and see how “the ways in which African American writers took up The Spanish Gypsy illuminate and potentially recuperate aspects of Eliot’s work many critics have found troubling” (pp. 24, 64, 93). In these chapters, nineteenth-century African American writers emerge as critical readers of Victorian literature, and Hack powerfully shows how their insights not only supplement but also challenge much of the field’s current work.

The second section of Reaping Something New flips this lens and focuses instead on what engagements with Victorian literature can teach us about three of the most taught and studied nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century African American writers. Chesnutt’s House Behind the Cedars, Hack contends, is “in dialogue with a series of Victorian novels, and it is through this dialogue that the novel’s literary-historical intervention emerges most fully” (p. 120). Hopkins’s substantial engagement with Victorian literature not only “informs those aspects of her work critics have deemed central to her achievement,” but also illuminates the relationship between two of the most important authors of the African American literary canon, since the British writers she uses most frequently “matter to Hopkins in part... because they matter to Chesnutt, and her engagement with them is at the same time and thereby an engagement with Chesnutt as well” (p. 139). And finally, not only do Du Bois’s epigraphs in Souls of
Black Folks “contribute to and intervene in a tradition of African American citation and intertextuality,” but paying close attention to the particular writers that Du Bois selected for citation also “leads us to reconsider a seemingly settled question in the scholarship on Souls: the role Du Bois assigns culture in the fight for racial equality” (p. 177). By revealing the deep entanglement between two literary traditions that are often treated in isolation, and linking his superb readings to key concerns of African American and Victorian literary studies, Daniel Hack has written the rare book sure to make a lasting impression across multiple fields.

Benjamin Fagan
Auburn University


Katherine Mullin’s Working Girls: Fiction, Sexuality, and Modernity is as smart and savvy as her titular heroines. Tracing the history of the working girl as a “key sexual persona” from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries, Mullin attends to three categories or types of working girls, in descending class order: typists and telegraphists, shop-girls, and barmaids. Each category occupies a section of her book, and within each section Mullin devotes one chapter to the broad cultural frame within which each type emerges and develops and one chapter to this same type within the literary fiction of its day. Mullin recognizes that this division of her material risks “‘quarantin[ing] culture from literature, and canonical from popular fiction’” (p. 9), but she opts for this organization in order to “assist readability” as she reconstructs the “intricate dialogue” between the music hall and Mudie’s lending library, popular journalism and James Joyce’s Ulysses, and, in the process, unsettles what Andreas Huyssen famously termed the “great divide” between mass culture and high art.

Mullin achieves this goal—and more—as she seamlessly and compellingly mirrors the fluidity she argues for between different forms of cultural production in her own analysis. Each section touches on an impressive range of sources and materials including popular songs, dances, and comic skits; advertisements, postcards, and throwaway journalism; the debates among canonical writers such