In 1939, Virginia Woolf summed up the frustrations of any scholar who took on the task of answering how Charles Dodgson became Lewis Carroll. "We ought to be able to grasp him whole and entire," Woolf wrote; "But we fail—once more we fail. . . . The book breaks in two in our hands" (Woolf, "Lewis Carroll," in her *Collected Essays, Volume I* [New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1967], p. 254). For Beer, this fracture is not the mark of failure but the herald of new interpretive prospects. In *Alice in Space, Wonderland* and *Looking-Glass* break into twos, fours, and sixteens, as Beer leads us down a multitude of alternate yet simultaneously possible rabbit holes. The effect is an exhilarating form of literary scholarship, but one that longtime readers of the *Alice* books will recognize as curiously and delightfully familiar. In its meticulous research, its exquisite interweaving of coincident contexts, and its embrace of the intellectual play that permeated Victorian culture and reached its highest expression in Carroll's texts, *Alice in Space* offers us an unconventional criticism worthy of its subject. Like its inspiration, Beer's latest book lets us wander through the many reflective and refractive surfaces of the agile and comprehensive mind behind the *Alice* books.

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DANIEL M. STOUT, *Corporate Romanticism: Liberalism, Justice, and the Novel.* New York: Fordham University Press, 2017. Pp. viii + 254. $115 cloth; $30 paper.

From John Stuart Mill's famous claim that "all poetry is the nature of soliloquy," to Percy Shelley's celebration of the radical power of Prometheus's single-handed defiance of the tyrant Jupiter; and from the popularity of brooding, infinitely complex Byronic heroes, to the proliferation of theories of originality and creativity that emphasize the vital power of an artist's singular imagination in the act of composition, the Romantic period can seem to be obsessed with individuals. By wrapping Romanticism into a broader history of the rise of liberal modernity, it is tempting to see the early nineteenth century as a moment in which older forms of collective life were displaced (however gradually) by a newly modern focus on individuality that is still with us today.

But, as Daniel M. Stout argues in *Corporate Romanticism: Liberalism, Justice, and the Novel,* this view of the history of liberalism is only

one part of the story—because both Romanticism in particular, and liberal modernity in general, were always complexly structured by "the impossibility of drawing a bright line between individuals and collectivities" (p. 172). This is not simply to claim that the vestiges of collectivity continue to haunt the peripheries of what was otherwise a triumphant march of liberalism. Rather, as Stout shows repeatedly throughout his thought-provoking book, there was, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, "a persistent uncertainty about how to put individualism into practice" (p. 8) because the kinds of practices that would seem to define individualism—contractual agreements, owning private property, personal accountability—are themselves insufficiently sensitive to the complexities of social life. The "individualist assumptions of justice" (p. 40) cannot adequately evaluate harms that seem to have been perpetrated not by an individual but by a corporate body (crowds, nations, corporations); "the increasing density of modern life" (p. 33) made it all but impossible to freely use one's personal property without inadvertently limiting someone else from freely using their property; and, indeed, the Romantic artists themselves (or at least the novelists) register this tension by producing works in which there is "a surprising scarcity of individuals" (p. 2). In chapters on *Mansfield Park*, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, *Caleb Williams*, and *Frankenstein*, Stout argues originally that the Romantic-era novel "does not act as a mouthpiece for liberal ideology" (p. 11) but rather that it reflects the same complex concerns about the possibility of justice in a world of corporate bodies and collective action that were at the heart of some of the most pressing legal and philosophical questions of the period.

Stout's argument is structured by a formal method that is capable of grasping common structures of thought at work in the core of what might otherwise appear to be unrelated materials. In this regard, his first, and only exclusively theoretical, chapter is the most impressive. Here he argues convincingly that the history of the corporation, developments in nineteenth-century case law about the nature and reach of (individual, corporate) action, and romantic-era aesthetics and philosophies of language all fundamentally partake of, and contribute to, a "rift within liberalism" (p. 25) where it is both necessary and impossible to choose between abandoning the goals of justice and subscribing to the fiction that corporate bodies are legally equivalent to individuals. One of Stout's well-chosen techniques, borrowed from some of the legal casework he consults, is to map the messy details of the surfaces of his examples onto schematic formulations ("what X means for Y, or what A did to B" [p. 175]) to help clarify

similarities of underlying structures. This allows him, for example, to show how "the romantic symbol, in its insistence on the identity of part and whole" (p. 41), depends on the very same logic of corporate personhood—which "rules out the possibility of being able to say that X *in particular* is responsible for Y *in particular*" (p. 49)—that, elsewhere during the nineteenth century, was posing difficulties for the administration of justice. What begins as an attempt to perceive wholes where empiricism only saw atoms ends up reproducing a logic that "does not merely leave the question of justice unanswered but actively dissolves the grounds on which we might ask it in the first place" (p. 49).

Stout continues to employ this formal method, though with less centrality, in his chapters on the romantic novel. One of the best examples is his chapter on *Caleb Williams*, which avoids offering the kind of interpretation you might expect—that it is a novel about the impossibility of justice in a world of class stratification—and instead argues that it is a dystopia about a world without a theory of easement. "Easements deal with rights we have in land we don't own . . . and to things (like the wind) that seem beyond owning" (pp. 150–51), and thus function as an *ad hoc* legal technique for negotiating between private and public ownership. This negotiation is increasingly necessary in the densely populated spaces of modernity, but, as Stout points out, "the problems of togetherness are formal—built into the structure of things—rather than historical" (p. 169). Because easement is an "equal-opportunity embarrassment to any theory of property as categorically private or constitutively public" (p. 155), it is an important formal problem for Stout's project of restoring the importance of the collective and public to the liberal regime of individuals and private ownership. It also allows Stout to claim a space for debates about ownership in the Romantic period that does not depend on anti-property radicals fighting quixotically against the inevitable march of modernity. In ways both original and convincing, Stout shows that *Caleb Williams* presents a world of gothic horror in which "little more than the sheer fact of sharing a space with someone else is sufficient to make us plagues and monsters to each other" (p. 159). Without a theory of easement, always clunky in its practical, case-by-case application, a "general good" is but "a theoretical ideal beyond the math of any imminent actor" (p. 158).

Though the chapters on the novel are filled with many excellent moments of practical criticism, I found them, on the whole, to be less compelling than the opening theoretical chapter (and occasional set pieces in later chapters) dealing with nascent or uneven developments

in legal theory and practice. While the discussion of the novels will be of interest to anyone whose work intersects with questions of liberalism, justice, and the romantic novel, their role in the structure of *Corporate Romanticism* is mostly to serve as a *reflection* or *instantiation* of the "internal struggle" (p. 9) that Stout sees at work in liberalism and modernity. This way of incorporating literature into historical arguments is, of course, a well-worn method of literary criticism, but, as my remarks above suggest, I think the real strength of Stout's book is in his attention to form. Had he, for example, substituted the word "form" for "the novel" in the focus of his book, it may have allowed him—as paradoxical as it may sound—to elevate the novel to a higher level of importance by thinking of it as a coequal *contributor* to the formal patterns he notices and weaves together in his more theoretical discussions. Furthermore, emphasizing "form" over "the novel" would have allowed for a wider range of literary texts to enter the discussion. Stout wants to claim "at least one source of formal consistency" for the romantic novel against the kind of commonplace assumptions about its irreducible "thematic pluralism" (p. 5) that prevent studying it as a distinct object—which is fair enough. The romantic novel as a legitimate object of scholarly inquiry could certainly use a bump in esteem, and Stout's study seems poised to play a role in bringing that future about. But I could not help but wonder whether this book could offer a fuller account of "corporate romanticism" if it were to include a poem like George Crabbe's *The Borough* (1810), which surveys in heroic couplets the complexities of life in a borough, a social formation that Stout notes played a role in the history of the early corporation (p. 27). Lord Byron's representation of the Siege of Ismail in Cantos 7 and 8 of *Don Juan* (1823) would have also been relevant, not only because it analyzes the ways in which individuals get absorbed by (brutal, warmongering) collectives, but also because it develops this analysis to formulate a critique of imperialism, a topic that is otherwise absent from Stout's account.

Despite this, *Corporate Romanticism* remains an engaging and original study that turns familiar notions about the rise of liberal modernity on their head. I have attempted to do justice to the main thrust of its central arguments, but this is a book packed to the brim with striking observations and arguments that are assimilable to the main argument while not being entirely contained by it. I can only encourage readers to open the book themselves to experience its many pleasures. Among those pleasures, and in closing, let me praise Stout's writing style, which is not only admirably clear, but also refreshingly funny. He certainly doesn't overdo it, but one is never

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.

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Daniel Hack, *Reaping Something New: African American Transformations of Victorian Literature*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017. Pp. xvi + 284. $35.

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"