While this collection is innovative in a number of ways, it does possess a number of limitations and weaknesses. The lack of a chapter devoted to Coleridge is notable and presents an incomplete narrative of the connection between Romanticism and Decadence. The complexities of these movements make foregrounding their intricacies in such a small and varied collection difficult and problematic. Moreover, the breadth of the ideas under consideration here, are, in places, limited and underdeveloped. As a result, this is not an introductory text and is more suited to scholars with knowledge of both Romanticism and Decadence. These issues aside, this is a collection that makes a number of valuable contributions to the development of literature and culture in the long nineteenth century.

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DOI: 10.3366/vic.2017.0270


Throughout *Changing Hands: Industry, Evolution, and the Reconfiguration of the Victorian Body*, Peter Capuano alters figures of speech that refer to hands and, more generally, the corporeal form. He, for instance, states that Victor in *Frankenstein* is not overreaching as much as ‘*over-grasping*’ (34; italics in original) when the scientist uses his hands to make a monster that, in turn, kills with its grip. Similarly, Becky Sharp is not engaged in a *tête-à-tête* when she speaks with a string looped around a man’s hands and held in her own in an illustration in *Vanity Fair*; instead, she is participating in a ‘*main-à-main*’ (114). Through these variations, Capuano shows how the hand is so familiar in language that even when phrases that refer to the extremity are dramatically altered or unusually employed, their basic shape and function can remain recognizable.

What is not so familiar, Capuano argues, are critical examinations of ‘embodied handiness’ (3) in nineteenth-century literature. This handiness is located in the flesh-and-blood body part that, within a novel’s pages, can write documents, suffer amputation, work machines, gesture, kill, and create. Capuano sets out to show how this literal hand, along with the symbolic one, appear in nineteenth-century fiction with a frequency that reveals a notable interest in the body part,
which was, among the working-class, at increased risk for injury in factory accidents and, among the middle- and upper-classes, one of the few body parts publicly exposed. The other parts bared in the drawing room, the head and the face, have received much more critical attention, asserts Capuano, who cites large-scale database searches when addressing the significance of this discrepancy; these searches reveal a sharp increase in references to the hand in nineteenth-century literature. The critical oversight of this body part arises from an inability to perceive the century’s interest in it. As Capuano explains: ‘Taking the nineteenth-century novel’s fascination with hands seriously, which is to say taking them in some senses literally, brings into relief a crucial moment in the history of embodiment that has remained largely unrecognizable to us’ (3).

Capuano shows how this lack of recognition in scholarly studies has operated in his chapter on Daniel Deronda, which offers the kind of reading found throughout this fascinating book: clearly written, with a focus not only on the literal hand present in the text but also on the historical context of the fiction being analysed. He looks at Garrett Stewart’s analysis of a rare physical description of the hero of Daniel Deronda in which Eliot’s narrator instructs the reader: ‘Look at his hands’ (Eliot 155).1 Stewart imagines the reader encountering this line and envisioning Deronda’s face (Capuano 162). Capuano, following the text’s instruction, examines Deronda’s hands in light of the kabala, which sees this body part as channelling divine energy (172), and in terms of Victorian anti-Semitic stereotypes which portrayed Jewish fingers as long and suited to thievery (158). Bringing the two analyses together, he speculates that Eliot could safely gamble that her ending – that Deronda is Jewish – would not be given away by her beginning in which a gambler who has ‘bony, yellow, crab-like’ hands would, most likely, be seen as the sole Jew at the gaming table even though Deronda, whose hands are not denigrated and later are even praised, is present too (158).

Other readings are equally surprising in this study, which examines primarily realist novels with a few exceptions taken from Gothic and sensation genres. Capuano explains how Molly’s hands in Great Expectations reflect evolutionary theories, popular at the time of the novel’s appearance, that characterized Irish fingers and palms as both naturally suited for manual labour and more animalistic. Capuano also argues that David Copperfield’s narration about counting his income on his own hands until he reaches the middle joint of his fourth finger speaks to Dickens’s anxieties about labour. The novelist, who saw his own occupation with its high output as being
not unlike factory work, was concerned about the prevalence of workers losing fingers in industrial machines.

Capuano’s argument, at points, strains when his generalisations become too broad for his sound particulars, as happens in the opening. Stating the book’s claims using the language of tactile manipulation, he writes: ‘major changes unique to the nineteenth century made hands newly relevant, and [...] this new relevance reconfigured the hand’s relationship to the body in ways that shaped just about every contour of the Victorian novel’ (1). While the book touches upon every contour a novel formally offers – for example, the marionette metaphor in Vanity Fair is shown to shape the narrative’s overall structure – Changing Hands largely focuses on elements such as character, plot, and symbol, which, as Capuano’s presents them, are not determining the novel’s form as a whole in any direct way. He also overstates Victorian interest in the hand when contributing to the debate about whether or not Daniel Deronda was circumcised. He argues that the scholarly discourse on the subject ‘for far too long has focused on body parts that have preoccupied contemporary critics (as opposed to those that mattered most to Victorians)’ (155). Other body parts may have preoccupied Victorians as much, and these parts may have been the focus of much interest and anxiety, as K. M. Newton’s analysis of the Christian Victorian practice of circumcision to inhibit masturbation and promote hygiene implies; however, they may not have been acceptable material for overt description in fiction.

Ultimately, Capuano does not need such claims, given his success in supporting his ambitious central one: that changes in industry and the emergence of evolutionary theory in the nineteenth century made the hand a location of exceptional interest and that this body part’s corresponding frequent appearance in fiction has received little critical attention. He succeeds by bringing to light the hands that keep showing up in canonical novels from the century; and in one instance, he supports his claim by examining a hand that, notably and hauntingly, does not show up in the given text. Capuano looks at how Dickens excised a factory accident involving the hand from the manuscript of Hard Times. According to an article published in Dickens’ Household Words in 1854 when Hard Times was published, 1,287 fingers had been lost in the previous twelve years to factory machines (Capuano 64), making it hard not to wonder how disturbing such accidents were not only to Dickens but to the readers who did not have to confront one in Hard Times. Here, Capuano’s focus on the embodied hand lets him suggest the power of an excised, absent one.
A pervasive thread of feminist George Eliot criticism, from Florence Nightingale via Kate Millett, has long been angry that Eliot fails to give her heroines the courage of her own convictions. June Skye Szirotny, however, offers a counter argument to this strain in *George Eliot’s Feminism: The Right to Rebellion*. Szirotny’s central argument is that ‘however ambivalent George Eliot was about practical matters, she strongly accepted most of the ideals of contemporary feminists’, including the prevention of wife and child abuse and the support of companionate marriage (32). Szirotny devotes one chapter to each of Eliot’s novels, beginning with a chapter on ‘Janet’s Repentance’ from *Scenes of Clerical Life* and inserting a chapter on *The Spanish Gypsy* between those on *Romola* and *Felix Holt: The Radical*, and traces Eliot’s gradual acceptance of the possibility for protagonists to rebel against the strictures of patriarchy.

While the main chapters of the book are largely convincing, the introduction is less so because a large portion of it is given over to diagnosing Eliot as having suffered ‘a narcissistic disturbance’ when she was a child and to explaining the impact of this disturbance on her career (1). This claim is unconvincing for two reasons: first, as Szirotny acknowledges, we know very little about Mary Ann Evans’ childhood; and second, the claim is based in part on questionable readings of the little evidence we do have. For example, in discussing the well-known passage from John Cross’s 1885 biography of Eliot in which she recalls playing the piano at the age of four ‘to impress the servant with a proper notion of her acquirements and generally distinguished position’ (3), Szirotny misreads Eliot’s tone. She sees Eliot’s statement as early evidence of her ambition, rather than recognising the older Eliot’s playful, self-deprecating tone. The discussion of the effects of this disturbance resurfaces occasionally throughout the book.

In the chapters on three of Eliot’s early works Szirotny demonstrates how each addresses feminist issues. She argues that