

***Wilkie Collins: The Complete Fiction*, by Stephen Knight.
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Stephen Knight's monograph, *Wilkie Collins: The Complete Fiction* (2023, Routledge) is a detailed study of Wilkie Collins' life and career as a complex and accomplished author; ultimately, it presents a call for more scholarly attention and interest in his works. The study engages Collins' complete fiction by grounding his texts in historical and biographical context. Knight offers extensive background about events, politics, anecdotes, and interactions as Collins built his writing career. Moreover, the study presents details about Collins' life, his engagement with the publishing industry, and his interaction with other authors at the time. By this approach, the book explores Collins' literary production considering the influence of consumption, and the criticism of his works to better understand and position him as a complex and successful author. Knight's monograph also offers historical context and recent scholarly criticism of Collins studies. While this exploration sheds light on Collins' development as a successful author, producer of novelty, and a political voice, the study repeats the argument that Collins' works have not received the scholarly attention they deserve. While the existing scholarship allows Knight to explore Collins' complete fiction with biographical and historical depth and context, he argues that most Collins studies "tend ... to focus on his personal life and contacts, especially Dickens, who dominates Collins studies as much as he sought to control the man personally" (p. 2). Throughout the monograph, Collins appears as an author who deserves the spotlight but never really had the chance to enjoy the position because reviewers, critics, and academics have focused on more popular names. As a writer who is often compared to more popular and canonized literary figures, Collins deserves a unique place within the critical and academic sphere as an author who often interacted with other texts and authors of his time to produce unique works. Some negative reception and the criticism Collins received usually owe to his tendency to problematize many norms of his time. Therefore, the condition Knight's work portrays for Collins brings us to his main aim: "This book deals in some detail with all the short stories, as well as all the novels and novellas, and places considerable emphasis on the narratives themselves – looking closely at plot and characterization is the way into seeing Collins' often subtle representation through story of the values and conflicts of his mostly British mid-nineteenth-century context" (p. 2). Collins' longer works have received some academic attention and even some of his shorter works have been the focus of many studies. Nevertheless, Knight's study foregrounds Collins' short stories in hoping that new ground can be cleared for further studies to emerge. The book includes detailed contextual analyses of Collins' novels, but a great deal of attention and interest are directed to his short stories. Some of his plays are mentioned as well but not as many in detail. Nevertheless, Collins' fascination with the stage is discussed because some of his longer works are adapted to the stage and

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adequate background is given to some of his fiction that starts as a play but develops into prose. From Knight's research we clearly understand that the whole of Collins' writing career is a series of interconnected, dialogic, and networked processes. Among many other aspects of Collins' narratives, Knight's focus is seen in the plots and characters; by charting the changes, patterns, or irregularities between Collins' narratives in terms of form, plot and characters, the study explores the inspirations, influences, and decisions that affected Collins' fiction to better understand him as a substantial and complex author who deserves further attention.

Focusing on a wide range of texts by the same author necessarily requires a repeating organizing scheme. The organization is consistent with what I call a "tag" which offers the first publication date and place information of each Collins text. Then, the study offers a detailed summary of the narratives. Following the summary, Knight situates each text in a critical context. How a new story is received at the time, what the reading public thought about the characters or the events, and what the press wrote about the new publication, are discussed in detail. This is followed by recent criticism of the text as well. This organization is consistent throughout the book. The book is comprised of five chapters and texts appear chronologically. In the first chapter, Collins' early career is explored by foregrounding his short stories. In this period of his life, Collins experiments and develops his topics, plots, characters, and themes. The short story form allows him to produce, publish, receive criticism, and adapt to the public tastes and trends. Chapter Two focuses on Collins' novels up to the year 1860. His successful novel *The Woman in White* is a milestone; therefore, Knight begins a new chapter at this point because Collins is an author with more experience. Chapter Three is dedicated to Collins' life between the years 1861 and 1874. During this period, he did not write any short stories and focused on longer narratives exploring social and political issues. Collins' short stories which appeared between 1874 and 1887 are discussed in detail in chapter Four. Chapter Five looks at Collins' publications from 1887 to the end of his writing career. In total, the last chapter looks at eleven texts.

The book is a substantial study about Wilkie Collins' career as an author in 19th century Britain and the USA. Ordered chronologically, Knight's research about Collins' texts reveals an underappreciated literary figure. Knight offers thematic and topical definitions and classifications; for example, he presents his take on a certain text about whether it is a story about the uncertainties of British marital law and/or coincidence and fate. Therefore, the study neatly categorizes Collins' texts in terms of genre, topic, and theme considering recent criticism and Knight's own analyses. Knight's analyses challenge some existing scholarship that considers Collins as a secondary figure; his research presents more attention to Collins' texts to reveal nuances and adds to the existing interpretations of the texts to better situate them as complex narratives. Furthermore, Knight offers analyses of characterization, plot, and topics in Collins' texts. Some short stories can be seen as preparatory work for longer narratives and some shorter texts can be considered as condensed forms of longer works. Some earlier characters may echo into later works in which characters may make the reader remember personas from older publications. From this study, we also get a sense of how Collins is in close contact with the publishing industry and his readers. From Knight's research and organization of Collins' literary career, we obtain a sense of a dialogic space in which literary production cannot be viewed as an isolated activity. Within the dialogic space, Collins knows very well how to titillate the public opinion, shake existing biases, or strengthen the ideas he wants to see in society. Strong women often appear as complex characters in his fiction to raise issues concerning women's status in society. As most of Collins' readers were women,

characterization was particularly important because the women readers often identified with some characters or detested them. Historical realities allow us to see Collins trying to balance many aspects in his fiction at the same time. While appealing to a certain reader base, he also attempts to reinforce or undermine opinions as well.

Knight's valuable research allows us to understand a writer working within a network in dialogue and not someone who writes in isolation. We learn that while some of Collins' works are purely appealing to sensation and the others are intentionally political. For instance, animals occupy significant volume in some of his fiction because at the time debates on vivisection were a contested topic. Knight's work is a bold attempt at collecting, categorizing, analyzing, and contextualizing a substantial amount of text. We find analyses of the texts in terms of form, theme, plot, and character to better situate Collins as a major literary figure. In conclusion, *Wilkie Collins: The Complete Fiction* provides readers with a comprehensive critical source on this author and his work.