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## ABSTRACT

The Value of Storytelling:  
Charles Dickens, Wilkie Collins, George Eliot, and  
the Business of Novel-writing in the Nineteenth Century

by Jon Michael Varese

“The Value of Storytelling” explores the lives and works of three major nineteenth-century British authors—Charles Dickens, Wilkie Collins, and George Eliot—and in each case asks questions about the relationships among story, author, and marketplace in the Victorian period. My investigation of those intertwined relationships raises three critical questions: What is the story, both fictional and historical, that emerges from the production of a novel? Who is ultimately telling that story? And what are the artistic, professional, and financial incentives for telling it? Looking closely at Dickens’s *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838-39), Collins’s *The Woman in White* (1859-60), and Eliot’s *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), “The Value of Storytelling” tries to address these questions by examining both the business practices and narrative strategies of very different authors during pivotal moments in their careers. *Nicholas Nickleby*, *The Woman in White*, and *The Mill on the Floss* were chosen as the texts for this study because they represent better than any other novel in each author’s oeuvre the work that transformed these writers from journalists and published storytellers into professionals and celebrities. Ultimately, this project seeks to demonstrate that we cannot separate the business of storytelling from the telling of the stories themselves,

and that the novels so important to each author's professionalization thematize and reflect the complex, often vexed histories of their own publications.

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