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# The Prima Donna, Opera Chorus and Amateur Violinist: Music as 'Event' in Wilkie Collins's *Man and Wife*

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## Abstract

Collins's *Man and Wife* (1869–70) develops a complex sense of 'opera' and 'music' as 'events' rather than 'works'. This essay shows how the narrative

is underpinned by changing public perceptions of the 'impure' female singing star. It next turns to innovative scenes where dialogic exchange is presented like 'the chorus in an opera', which creates suspense and fits Collins's intention to 'mix Comedy and Drama together'. The essay then traces how the nail-biting conclusion of Volume II relies for its suspense on the counter-rhythms created between elements of plot and the performance of Mozart's measured Sonata No. 15 for violin and piano. Ultimately, the novel suggests that Britain will become civilized as it appreciates the aesthetic, cultural and moral value of producing music, an idea aligning with Matthew Arnold's contemporary theories of literature and culture, and pre-dating the British movement for a national school of composition in the 1880s.

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