Ezra to the Rescue:  
Three Facets of *The Moonstone*

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Abstract

In his preface to *The Moonstone*, Wilkie Collins declares that his object with the novel has been “to trace the influence of character on circumstances”, referring mainly to the conduct of the novel’s heroine, Rachel. In view of the other characters’ similar function in this symbol-laden novel, this essay looks closer at the one character with whom Collins brings his extensive tapestry to a close, Ezra Jennings, thereby exposing the deeper significance of this ‘detective novel’.

Ezra’s added function in this novel, is to be the physical focal point, within the plot, for three crucial themes within the novel: ‘Opium’, ‘Empire’ and ‘Sacrifice’. Of course, the other characters incorporate these themes as well, but it is always Ezra who has the ultimate representational power. He is, literally, the sum of the others’ hopes and fears, and Collins’s metaphorical ‘third eye’ of *The Moonstone*, presenting an alternative aspect of events.

**Key words:** Wilkie Collins, *The Moonstone*, (early) detective novel, opium, empire, sacrifice, literary symbolism
In *The Moonstone*’s Ezra Jennings, a mystery-solving, doomed doctor from the British colonies, the reader is encountering the novel’s most symbolic and, at the same time, most human character. This contradictory character is an unlikely ‘blend’, a caricature-like nexus, if you will, of three major interrelated issues that are thematic in the novel *The Moonstone*. The Moonstone itself, a diamond, originally stolen from the forehead of an Indian idol of the Hindu god Vishnu, is closely associated with the concepts of ‘Opium’, ‘Empire’ and ‘Sacrifice’ in nineteenth-century England, and Jennings is the novel’s most powerful character representation of these three concepts. Lewis Roberts writes: “[T]he most scientific and mysterious figure in the novel, [Jennings] represents the larger tendency of *The Moonstone* to use scientific and realistic discourses and paradigms to confute objectivity, resulting in a sense of the [...] incomprehensible, the realms of knowledge outside of conventional understanding” (Roberts 176). That is to say, Jennings provides the imperially-minded Victorians with an alternative to their established ‘truth’, while at the same time he is one of them, and works within their framework of science. His physical difference to his fellow Victorians, has accentuated the fact that he is working almost beyond the pale of this scientific framework. That is to say, his strange appearance alone is provoking to people, and, thus, has given speed to evil tongues and empty rumour, further stigmatising the man, and making his actual nature and occupations irrelevant in the social context he occupies, or, rather, finds himself marooned in. In the eyes of people like the butler Betteredge, whatever Jennings does, is
mostly ‘bad’. The reality is that Jennings is the novel’s true paragon of ‘Crusoean’ excellence and virtue, rather than Betteredge, whose own personal ‘bible’ is *Robinson Crusoe*. But if we return to the scientific aspect of Jennings, and allow ourselves to picture the Moonstone itself as an ‘alien Hindu sun’ around which the events and characters of the novel spin like more or less solid ‘planets’, Jennings is part of the spectrum of strange, revealing light radiating from it onto the planets. We can, if we like, further picture the reality of *The Moonstone* as a dream of the dreaming Hindu god Vishnu, emanating from behind his third eye (which to Hindus is ‘the eye of explanation’): the Moonstone, and Ezra Jennings as Vishnu’s revelatory and somewhat disconcerting gaze. True, in Hinduism it is primarily the god Shiva who is represented with a third eye, placed in his forehead, but together with the gods Brahma and Vishnu, Shiva is part of a divine, supreme trinity, and therefore one with the other two gods. We will therefore allow ourselves to enjoy this (not entirely untruthful) poetic license of Collins’s, and suspend our religiously informed disbelief regarding the Hindu god’s ‘third eye’. On a side note: ‘informed disbelief’ is yet another concept (indirectly related to the concept of ‘Opium’) that Jennings could be said to represent; a point which hopefully shall become clearer further on in this essay.

In addition, in the context of *The Moonstone* as a whole, which is a particularly symbolic novel, Jennings (in his symbolic way) also makes a fine starting-point for exploring the ‘concept-triumvirate’ mentioned above: ‘Opium’, ‘Empire’, ‘Sacrifice’, which he seems to embody. And, as Mark Mossman notes: [Jennings] has the ultimate detective ability, [and] is the character most likely to discover the ‘truth’ or the reality” (Mossman 493). I call the three concepts a ‘triumvirate’ because they are the three literally dominating, imbricated factors represented in the novel, i.e. a British, Christian empire producing, dealing and often gratuitously using opium, a drug which ends up dominating its user, and which has its origin in the colonies of the ‘Empire’. Granted, the concept of ‘Sacrifice’ may not be too obvious in this constellation (as I present it), but where there is ‘Empire’, there is always involuntary/ unavoidable compromise, and this, in its turn, inevitably leads to ‘Sacrifice’. And where there is a ‘factor’ such as a powerful drug,
‘Opium’, there is the slavery of addiction and, always, the potential for chaos and violence. Ian Duncan calls “[o]pium the Moonstone’s familiar spirit” (Duncan 315), and the same could be said about the actual novel, and the character Jennings. Furthermore, in the Victorian British context of Wilkie Collins’s nineteenth-century novel *The Moonstone*, ‘Christian’ is that which deals with ‘Sacrifice’, be it true sacrifice or not, and Ezra Jennings is a Christian. The sacrifice of caste performed by the three noble Brahmins, is obviously the greatest (seen objectively), but in the novel’s Victorian context, it functions as an almost ‘demonic’ act, and is not supposed to represent sacrifice as ‘we’ understand it. This may seem odd, but in *The Moonstone*, which ostensibly can be seen as a ‘sensation novel’, the Hindu Brahmins have to function as agents of what Krishna Manavalli calls “[Collins’s] Gothic vision of a ‘prehistoric’ Hindu religion” (67). Keeping Manavalli’s observation in mind, we continue by looking at Duncan’s observation that the India represented by Collins in *The Moonstone* is “an alien nexus of value: a positivity of evil” (Duncan 305), concluding that Collins’s Indians are, in his novel, not the villains, but still the ‘enemy’. Therefore, I will use Jennings, the contradictory *hybrid* Jennings, and his function in the novel, as the ‘light’ with which to illuminate my point. When I call Jennings a ‘contradictory hybrid’, I mean that he represents, in the context of the novel, a binary of two irreconcilable opposites: ‘dark’ light in the ‘bright’ darkness, of England in India.

Let us begin by taking a look at Ezra Jennings through the eyes of the novel's more traditional hero, Franklin Blake:

“[T]here entered to us, quietly, the most remarkable-looking man that I had ever seen. [...] He was still young. [...] Comparing him with Betteredge [a man in his seventies] he looked the elder of the two. His complexion was of a gipsy darkness; his fleshless cheeks had fallen into deep hollows, over which the nose projected like a penthouse. [...] From this strange face, eyes, stranger still, [...] eyes dreamy and mournful, and deeply sunk in their orbits-looked out at you and [...] took your attention captive at their will. [...] Add to this a quantity of thick closely-curling hair, which by some freak of Nature had lost its colour in the most startlingly partial and capricious manner. [...] At one place, the white hair ran into the black; at another, the black hair ran down into the white.” (Collins 319)

This is the first time the reader meets with Jennings, and we are nearing the end of the novel, just
as Ezra is nearing the end of his life. The appearance of this almost grotesque character at this point in the novel, followed closely by his ‘key to the mystery’ and method of ‘opium re-enactment’, becomes almost like a *deus ex machina*, a point which I shall return to later. (If we take the term *deus* literally, we can again connect him to the Hindu god Vishnu, and liken him to this deity’s dark-skinned avatar, Krishna, in an alternative, very worn-out, British shape.) As to Jennings’s physical appearance, it is, so to speak, an ‘embodiment’ of the three central concepts mentioned above. He is, literally, full of ‘Opium’ and obviously consumed by it: the signs of premature aging: “innumerable marks and wrinkles”, and the ‘wasting-away’ of his face, combined with the strange “dreamy” look of his eyes, are proof of this (Collins 319). His strange hair, almost ‘suddenly collapsing’, here and there, from black into white, could also be a consequence of his opium-addiction, while being at the same time symbolic of the actual globe of the earth, and the spread of opium and chaos across it. Jennings’s “dreamy” eyes, “deeply sunk in their orbits”, that look out and take “your attention captive at their will”, further suggest the authority of the character Jennings, and remind us of our earlier image of the ‘planetary system and the divine Vishnu’s gaze’.

The concept of ‘Sacrifice’, though, may not be too evident in Blake’s description of Jennings, but the image of the opium-ravaged man does present us with a kind of victim, and this is a victim of both a willing and an unwilling sacrifice. The willing, direct self-sacrifice, is one, truly selflessly, performed for the welfare of others, (ironically made possible by opium). The unwilling, indirect sacrifice, is one (indirectly) forced upon Jennings by his father, the coloniser, and his addiction to opium, the colonial-imperial (by)product.

And where the coloniser is the father, the colonised becomes the mother. At least in the case of Ezra Jennings, whose mother is most likely Indian. Thus, we have the (British) ‘Empire’, Jennings’s hair also being symbolic of the actual globe of earth, with its opposites ‘intruding’ upon one another, and his “complexion [...] of a gipsy darkness” accentuating his foreign maternal ancestry and contrasting it with his ‘entirely British’, Judeo-Christian name. When it comes to
Jennings’s father, this man could, theoretically (perhaps even literally), be the ‘wicked Colonel’ John Herncastle: the (storm)bringer of the Moonstone to England. Jennings means ‘son of Little John’, and Little John could be the wicked Colonel John Herncastle, Great John, or ‘Honourable John’, The East India Company\(^2\). So, perhaps Jennings is a ‘lost’ cousin come to the rescue. Or perhaps, he is the son of the Colonel’s unknown cousin who narrates the bloody prologue of the novel, which would make him more distant, but still related. The spilling of blood could also be symbolic of the ‘mingling’ of blood. In blood, we all are born. In an India bloodied, Jennings, the ‘bastard’ child of ‘Empire’, is symbolically born.

Returning to England, we also have to take into consideration the fact that almost immediately after Jennings’s ‘apparition-like’ appearance to Blake, Blake seems, on several occasions, almost haunted by the image of ‘Ezra Jennings – (the figure of ‘Help’)/ the key to the mystery’, as if by a pressing memory of a dream or something half-forgotten, demanding to be defined by an already obsessive brain: “There was Mr Candy's remarkable-looking assistant again, speaking to the keeper of the stall! [emphasis added]” (Collins 331) and a little later, “[I]t suddenly occurred to me [Blake] that here was the irrepressible Ezra Jennings getting in my way again!” (356). Here Blake’s earlier description of Jennings’s physical appearance, combined with Jennings’s ‘sudden’ appearance and ‘irrepressibility’, and exclamation-marks at the end of the sentences, contribute to the image of the ‘ghost (in the machine)’. At this point in the novel, things are looking quite bleak for Blake (and, indeed, for Rachel, his lover and his cousin, the heroine): they are both facing a lifetime of disgrace and loneliness. All this brings us to Ezra Jennings’s function as the novel’s *deus ex machina*. Jennings does indeed ‘save the day, just in time’, but what sort of salvation does he represent? Apart from his ‘divine’ intervention-function, bringing the plot’s misery and mystery to an end, he symbolises an alternative to the Victorian status quo of ‘Opium’, ‘Empire’ and ‘Sacrifice’, a point which I shall return to further on.

Now, let us look at how Jennings perceives himself. We find him referring to himself as one of the British Empire’s loyal subjects: “I was born, and partly brought up, in one of our

colonies. My father was an Englishman; but my mother--- We are straying away from our subject [...] ; and it is my fault” (366). The fact that Jennings, in spite of his pariah-status in English society/ (the Empire), refers to the British colonies as ‘our’ colonies, could understandably be construed as a bit self-contradictory. There is, of course, the quite real, military, example of the contemporary Gurkha regiment in the British army, to point to, in order to find an example of foreign, loyal subjects (who did not mutiny) of forceful, imperial ‘Britishness’, but these Nepalese men were, (and still are), paid ‘direct employees’ of Britain, and certainly not as ostracized and isolated from their fellow men, as Ezra Jennings.

Early in the novel, Betteredge sums Jennings up, and dismisses him from consideration as follows: ”[A] certain Mr Ezra Jennings-was at our disposal, to be sure. But nobody knew much about him in our parts. He had been engaged by Mr Candy, under rather peculiar circumstances; and, right or wrong, we none of us liked or trusted him” (Collins 146). Later in the novel, he tells Blake that “[Jennings’s] appearance is against him” and that “there’s a story that Mr Candy took him with a very doubtful character” (Collins 320). Also, when Blake has seen Jennings a second time, he assures us that “[i]t was impossible to dispute Betteredge’s observation that the appearance of Ezra Jennings, speaking from a popular point of view, was against him” (Collins 364). Still, it is Blake who open-mindedly informs us that “the little [Jennings] had said, thus far, had been sufficient to convince me that I was speaking to a gentleman. He had […] the unsought self-possession, which is a sure sign of good breeding, not in England only, but everywhere else in the civilized world” (Collins 365, 366, original emphasis). And England (being the British Empire), is most likely the closest thing Jennings has to a homeland. Still, if we are to view India as the ‘timeless, radiant darkness’ described by Duncan, a “new dark vision […] defined by racialist fantasies of oriental barbarism […] a devilish India” (Duncan 305), then certainly that is what the English despise in Ezra, their savior and, ironically, fellow countryman. Duncan’s words about India refer to what Manavalli calls ‘Hindu Gothic’, i.e. India is an ‘entity’, immortal and independent of Western linear time, with its own view on humanity and ‘reality’, a dark fantasy
land. And, indeed, that is how Collins represents it.

Returning to Jennings, we can see, in his statement above, that he blames himself in an almost compulsive way, which shows us his willingness to be the scapegoat or ‘sacrificial lamb’, and, thus, fit into the world, or rather, ‘reality’, which he has throughout his life tried to occupy. Ironically, it is especially in his Victorian context, that Jennings is as British as the ‘distinctly British’, butler-like Betteredge; he has just had the ‘misfortune’ of a visible miscegenation, and (probably as a consequence of his mixed parentage) is singled out as a focal point for the most tragic of all human impulses: evil. (What Edgar Allan Poe called “the spirit of perverseness”). This leads us to the fact that, although Jennings physical appearance is that of a caricature, and, indeed, functions as a caricature, Jennings himself is not. When hearing him speak, and when reading his diary, the reader, like Blake, finds out that he is quite human, and highly sensitive. This true humanity of his, is what makes Jennings fate a truly horrible one, and probably most readers truly sympathise with him, and pity him.

There is indeed little enough sympathy for Jennings in the novel, and unfortunately what sympathy a person like Jennings would experience in a real Victorian context, would probably (and ironically) be more adequately (even if not entirely) represented Rachel’s paternal aunt, the hypocritical Miss Drusilla Clack, who declares to herself after learning of her sister-in-law’s terminal and ‘secret’ disease: “Sorrow and sympathy! Oh, what Pagan emotions to expect from a Christian Englishwoman anchored firmly on her faith! [emphasis added]” (Collins 213) Clack is (like the physical figure of Jennings) a caricature, to be sure, but like many (not all) caricatures, she unflatteringly represents the essence of the greater reality.

Returning to Jennings, it is not an exaggeration to compare him with the historical man Joseph Merrick: the ‘Elephant Man’ of Victorian times, both in body and fate. Worth reproducing here is a poem adapted by Merrick from the hymn-writer and theologian Isaac Watts’s “False Greatness”, and allegedly used by Merrick at the end of all his letters:
Tis true my form is something odd
But blaming me is blaming God
Could I create myself anew
I would not fail in pleasing you.
If I could reach from pole to pole
Or grasp the ocean with a span,
I would be measured by the soul;
The mind’s the standard of the man.

These are words that could, just as fittingly, have been spoken by Jennings as when they were written by Merrick. Especially when considering Jennings’s studies regarding patients’ loss of speech: “I found the superior faculty of thinking going on, more or less connectedly, in my patient’s mind, while the inferior faculty of expression was in a state of almost complete incapacity” (Collins 370). Merrick had difficulties speaking because of his cranial deformities. Also, in Merrick’s poetic adaption, we are reminded of the fact that for the faithful there is only one possible form of righteous ‘Empire’: that of God, and not one of a powerful nation (such as England), or one of a powerful individual (such as Herncastle).

But let us return to the sentiments of sympathy and pity for Jennings. It is with these sentiments that Collins makes a change of the imperial status quo possible. Audrey Fisch points out that: “[Collins’s] use of mixed race characters working within the framework of Victorian society [...] is an opportunity to detoxify a contaminated past of slavery and colonialism [and] allows Collins to restore Victorian values” (Fisch, quoted by Mark Mossman 494). Candy’s, Blake’s and Rachel’s feeling of sympathy for their fellow Englishman Jennings, as a man of mixed racial heritage, and as a child of the coloniser and the colonised, allows him to become the symbolic catalyst effecting their rescue, and the cathartic agent of their peace of mind, allowing them, in their turn, to continue with their (Victorian) lives.

Mossman writes: “Collins’s abnormal bodies fracture the binary” of ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’ (Mossman 487), which is true. Besides Jennings, there is the slightly deformed
Rosanna Spearman, who, in her role as a housemaid, is almost like an ex-princess of thieves, annoying the other servant-girls with her “airs” (Collins 22), giving herself the right to be romantically ambitious, i.e. she tries to make herself available to Blake, even though this may be considered hopeless. (Again, ‘abnormal bodies’ remind us of the so-called ‘Elephant Man’, and Rosanna’s ‘body-defying’ proud mind reminds us of his poetic adaption.) In the case of Jennings, it can also be said that his ‘body’ fractures the binary of coloniser and colonised. We can assume that Jennings came to England at a relatively early age, and that his father cared enough for him to give him the education of an Englishman. Therefore, our hero and heroine find themselves presented with intelligent, sensitive and educated salvation in ‘mulatto’ shape. If we are to go by Blake’s somewhat peculiar description of him, his mother was probably Indian: “His nose presented the fine shape and modelling so often found among the ancient people of the East, so seldom visible among the newer races of the West” (Collins 319). And, indeed, in the novel’s Indian context, she is most likely meant to have been Indian. But, English or Indian, Jennings is only ‘visiting’, and as he will die, the British empire over India will on day ‘die’. His mixed origin, as described by Blake in his physical appearance, seems almost to be a symptom of the mysterious disease that is killing him. He is the unstable, temporary, diplomatic compound of mainly British rationalism and Indian esotericism, who manages the immediate urgency caused in England by the Indian gem and its Hindu devotees, effectively bringing the whole affair to a close, and metaphorically allowing Blake and Rachel Verinder to close the door on India. It would seem that Jennings thus solidifies Kipling’s poetic divide between East and West, which he ostensibly does, but his deeper symbolic function, is to end mankind’s empire over mankind.

Let us look at Duncan’s observation, that “[Jennings] is the novel’s garish but honorable personification of racial and sexual adulterations [emphasis added]” (308), keeping in mind an observation made by Tamar Heller regarding Jennings: “Collins use of piebald hair as a symbol of miscegenation is striking” (Heller3, quoted in The Moonstone’s explanatory notes). Here we find both the decency, the honour, of the character Jennings, and his ‘unstableness’, i.e. his black and

3 From Tamar Heller’s Dead Secrets: Wilkie Collins and the Female Gothic.
his white sides do not blend well, and only temporarily, if at all. It is with this strange, but honourable and forgiving, character, Jennings, that Collins is able to symbolically ‘divorce’ India from England, in an ‘honourable’ way. When the good man Jennings is put in an unmarked grave, ‘all’ imperial wrongs are put unmarked, and ‘sufficiently’ atoned for, in the ground as well, i.e. at least as far as Blake and Rachel are concerned. To sum up: Ezra Jennings is the honourable beginning of the end of British empire over India embodied, a human embodiment which is literally and quietly put in the ground, allowing a new dawn to settle on the Verinder estate: an England in miniature, and a future for Franklin and Rachel: its new king and queen. That is, the Empire (which intrinsically is a bad thing: certainly in the novel, and almost always in reality) survives and continues, which, for the Empire, obviously is a triumph, but the prediction after the events is inevitable: end of empire (over India). That is to say, the villain (and very Anglo-Saxon) Ablewhite is dead, at the hands of the Brahmins, and the Diamond has returned to the Hindu god’s forehead. Also, on the same estate is still to be found the Shivering Sands with its fluid interior (symbolically ‘boiling’ with dead people: Indians, English working class, trying to get up) and its brown face: a reminder of the fluidity of truth (Verinder), a reminder of the dead Jennings (possibly a relative of Blake and Rachel’s, literally or in the sense of being part of humanity), and a reminder that some things are perhaps not so easily buried. In the words of Rosanna Spearman:

“Something draws me to it [...] I try to keep away from it, and I can’t. Sometimes, [...] I think that my grave is waiting for me here. [...] [T]he place has laid a spell on me. I dream of it night after night [...] Isn’t it wonderful? isn’t it terrible? [...] It looks as if it had hundreds of suffocating people under it – all struggling to get to the surface [...] Throw a stone in, and let’s see the sand suck it down!” (Collins 25)

Rosannas words about “throwing a stone in” could be seen as slightly ‘prophetic’ in the light of the following events. And later, when Rosanna lies, literally restless, in the Sands, Blake has “[a] horrible fancy that the dead woman might appear on the scene of her suicide, [...] an unutterable dread of seeing her rise through the heaving surface of the sand and point to the place” (Collins 305).
That which truly triumphs in Collins’s novel *The Moonstone*, viewed within its own Gothic context, is Hindu India. But, of course, this triumph, according to Duncan’s analysis, is not a greater force of good, but a greater force of ‘dehumanizing humanization’ (Duncan 317), i.e. further unholliness of an outré, ‘alien’ kind. Duncan suggests that Collins’s image of an “India triumphant in its darkness” (Duncan 305), is an India where the individual human life is an expendable ‘no-thing’, where the ‘alien’, piously homogeneous mass of humanity is the only thing, covering everything. If we look at Murthwaite, the explorer’s, statement from India, at the very end of the novel, this is true. Indeed, it is with this episode of Collins’s novel that Duncan proves his point. We will look at it again here:

“[The three noble Brahmins] descended separately among the people. The people made way for them in dead silence. In three different directions I saw the crowd part, at one and the same moment. Slowly the grand white mass of people closed together again. The track of the doomed men through the ranks of their fellow mortals was obliterated. We saw them no more” (Collins 466).

There are no cheers or tears for the Brahmins, only “dead silence”. Their truly great sacrifice is not regarded as such; they have only performed their duty to the god, and will continue to do so, which they (and the crowd) unquestioningly regard as a privilege: the god is everything, even when in the guise of a stone idol. These truly great men, are “doomed men”, and soon to be forgotten, as signified by their tracks being “obliterated” by their “fellow mortals” while the ceremony is still going on. The Hindu ending of the novel, is the novel’s literal, main ‘truth’, symbolised by the ‘buried’ interior of the Shivering Sands. That is to say: an England diminishing, a restless global humanity ready to rebel against Pax Brittanica, instability of concepts (such as truth and British imperial superiority), social change, a fading past, a fading memory of the past, and historical repetition (or should we call it ‘regurgitation’, as Collins is using the Shivering Sands as a metaphor), i.e. the almost forgotten, buried past suddenly returning, (‘thrown up’ by the mud, as it were).

Buried truth, or the nature of ‘truth’, brings us to ‘Opium’ and the role it plays in the novel.
Just like Jennings is an ‘unstable compound’ of England and India, revealing the truth, so laudanum, or ‘Tincture of Opium’, is a potent compound of alcohol and opium, and in the novel also an agent of truth. The ‘wicked Colonel’, Rachel’s uncle John Herncastle, who, through murder and theft, brings the Moonstone to England in the first place, smokes opium and dabbles in alchemy, while watching out for vengeful Hindu Indians and surrounding himself with animals and isolating himself from humanity. He is the first user of opium in the novel, that we are acquainted with, and the ominous image Blake leaves us with, of this sinister soldier, is a foreboding of things to come: “[T]hey said he was given up to smoking opium and collecting old books; sometimes he was reported to be trying strange things in chemistry […] [A] solitary, vicious, underground life was the life the Colonel led” (Collins 31). “[H]e had lived alone, ever since he had left India. He had dogs, cats, and birds to keep him company; but no human being near him” (Collins 36). We can infer from Blake’s statement a suggestion of chaos such as comes of paranoia, and the cacaphony of barking dogs, miaowing cats, squawking, screeching birds, and fever-minded experiments, and madness: a bad opium dream become real. In this sense, Herncastle naturally represents the negative side of opium.

Mr. Candy, a somewhat clumsy doctor and Jennings kind-hearted employer and benefactor, is, like Jennings, a fervent believer in the beneficient, healing, properties of opium: “Mr Candy […] told [Blake] that his nerves were all out of order; and that he ought to go through a course of medicine immediately” (Collins 69). Here, Candy is most likely referring to opium, especially considering his following actions, and Candy represents the view of the contemporary medical profession. The dying Jennings himself states as follows: “The one effectual palliative in my case is-opium. To that all-potent and all-merciful drug I am indebted for a respite […] from my sentence of death” (Collins 376). Here we find the ‘condemned’ man praising one of two ‘executioners’, as it were, and a good example of a typically nineteenth-century ‘lauding view of laudanum’. Shepard Siegel quotes V. Berridge: “At that time many opium mixtures, including laudanum, were freely available and prescribed for a variety of afflictions” (Siegel 165). Siegel
himself points out: “The generally cavalier attitude towards the drug is illustrated by the incident in *The Moonstone* where the physician, Candy, surreptitiously administers laudanum to Blake as a prank” (165). And, of course, clown-like Candy’s opium prank is the main factor in setting off the whole chain of the novel’s events. Still, Candy’s role as the outcast Jennings’s one and only benefactor, and his unusual generosity and kindness towards this character, become the means for him to repair the damage he has caused, with his opium drops, as he himself becomes struck down the very night of the theft by a fall of rain drops that causes him pneumonia, meningitis, brain damage and amnesia. Worth mentioning is a fact about Collins’s name for the cynical agent (and the novel’s two-faced villain) that Candy innocently employs to adminster the drops to the innocent Blake: Godfrey Ablewhite. The brand name of a Victorian opium mixture used to quieten children, was ‘Godfrey’s Cordial’⁴. (Perhaps Collins, an opium user himself, had a bad experience with this particular brand of opium.)

Ezra Jennings, the agent of esoteric rationalism through opium, comes to the rescue almost a year after the theft and Sergeant Cuff’s failure to solve the mystery surrounding it. I call Jennings ‘the esoteric rationalism through opium’ because of his unusual take on the case of the missing Diamond, and his use of studies and theories that go against the grain of the more generally accepted ideas regarding opium within the novel, e.g. Candy’s view of opium as a soporific drug: “Mr Candy [...] said that Mr Franklin [...] was, constitutionally speaking, groping in the dark after sleep, and that nothing but medicine could help him find it” (Collins 69). Jennings himself suggests that Franklin Blake read passages from De Quincey’s *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*, in which a sense of heightened reality is described in connection with opium use. Jennings informs Blake: “[W]hen De Quincey had commited what he calls “a debauch of opium”, he either went to the Opera to enjoy the music, or he wandered about the London markets [...] observing all the little shifts and bargainings [...] So much for the capacity of a man to occupy himself actively [...] under the influence of opium” (Collins 387) It is also correct to speak of Jennings as the ‘esoteric rationalism’ in a wider, more philosophical, context, as he makes us

⁴ From Anthony S. Wohl’s *Endangered Lives: Public Health in Victorian Britain*.
realise that ‘reality’ is infinitely complex and mysterious.

Considering Jennings’s function as a *deus ex machina*, he is nevertheless anticipated, (albeit briefly), quite early in the novel, when the housemaid Rosanna Spearman is depressed (which is an indirect consequence of the theft of the Moonstone), and this works as a brief ‘premonition’, an early recall of the rescuing ‘demon’’s name, and the beginning of an unconscious ‘summoning’. Speaking philosophically: even a common mirror image, could be called a ‘warped’ image of reality, and that which lies on the other side of the looking-glass, intrinsically ‘perverted’, or a ‘mockery of creation’. When I call Jennings a ‘demon’, I mean that Jennings is the mirror image (or rather the true image) of the cost of the Verinder-Victorian status quo/ ‘the thematic concept triumvirate’ (as seen by the Victorians, who do not understand its significance, i.e. they do not know what it is that they see) moving steadily, driven ‘back(wards)’ by fate, from the end of the novel to meet and merge with the beginning, giving, through his death, new (albeit diminished) life to the hollow, imperial image, and ‘improving’ it ever so slightly. This model of opposites approaching each other, face to face, is also representative of English/ British, imperial identity as time: past and future ‘meeting and merging’ in the present to recreate England. (Of course, in this philosophical context one could speculate about which of the characters, or time-spaces, represent the mirror image, and in whose eyes.) Looking semiotically at *The Moonstone*, in its shape as a physical, printed book, marking out the indirect and direct appearances (or manifestations) of Jennings, one can also discern the pattern of meeting thematic, mirror image opposites : mainly the meeting of Blake with Jennings, building up from beginning and ending in this kaleidoscopic novel, *The Moonstone*, which is named after a cut diamond with all the literal facets of such an item. Blake and Ezra meet in the mirror, in the Moonstone (in the kaleidoscope) and heal the symbolic flaw within it. Lewis Roberts convincingly discusses the relationship between the “unknown and unknowable” and the “commonplace” as “necessary components of realism” and calls Jennings “a dark fore-shadow of Franklin’s potential future” (Roberts 178). Either way, Collins had originally thought to call Jennings: *Ezra Harlock*, which
sounds like ‘warlock’/ witch (The Moonstone’s explanatory notes). In addition, there is the similarity between ‘Jinn’ and ‘Jenn’, hinting that Jennings is the son of a ‘Jinn’, a devil, the irony being that this devil-father is English, possibly the ‘wicked Colonel’. Of course, ‘Jenn’ also sounds almost like ‘gem’, and, as we know, the gem is the Moonstone. There is also a suggestion, here, that if an investigator takes into consideration the human, emotional aspect of events, not just the facts, and ‘takes a step back’, as it were, allowing him/herself the use of his/her (moral) instinct, he/she is more likely to arrive at the ‘true’ conclusion. That is to say, looking at the state of the housemaid’s emotional life, her motivations in that context, and why she is depressed, and not only going through people’s drawers and money matters, you may find the Diamond. But, either way, the idea of bringing in Ezra Jennings is summarily dismissed and a year of misery sets in for all, until Blake encounters him by chance at the ‘beginning of the end’, eventually daring to approach him as a fellow man seeking his advice. (On a side note here: it could be said that Franklin – (which means ‘little Frenchman’) - Blake’s multi-faceted personality and ‘Continental’ education contribute to the dissolving of British supremacy, in the sense that he keeps his mind open to ‘un-British’ solutions.) But returning to Jennings and opium: he represents the benefits of opium in a scientific, medical context. His method is one of controlled chaos, or rather a controlled return to chaos, through opium, to find the ‘verity of the truth’ at face value. This ‘method’ is what I refer to when I call Jennings ‘the agent of esoteric rationalism through opium’.

This brings us to the unrealities and unreliability of opium as the defining factor for reality, the ‘truth’, as represented by Jennings. The way Jennings himself is described, could just as well be the description of an opium hallucination: the chaotic swirling mists briefly coalescing, like a genie (a ‘Jenn’) to form the image of Ezra Jennings. And just like Jennings is displeasing to the eyes of his fellow Englishmen, laudanum is displeasing to people’s taste and smell. He is the, often unwelcome, genie in the opium bottle, metaphorically speaking. Probably ‘truth’ itself, as presented in The Moonstone, is meant to be metaphorically ‘displeasing to people’s taste and smell’. Jennings offers the possibility of the ‘truth’, asking only for Blake’s trust. Blake has only

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5 One of the side effects of opium abuse is visual distortion and hallucinations.
to reveal his own, (albeit somewhat embarrassing), motive; and since Jennings does not keep this knowledge as a ‘security’, but instead insists on Blake knowing the full ‘facts’ of his own personal and embarrassing circumstances first, there is no ‘price’ to be paid for the assistance of Ezra. Blake has, after all, been in Rachel’s bedroom and, to all appearances, stolen the Diamond, but before he tells Jennings this, Jennings tells him that many believe him to be a criminal, and a person not to be trusted. Blake is obviously already aware of people’s low opinion of Jennings, but clearly a criminally minded person might blackmail him. However, he decides to trust Jennings, and is instantly rewarded with complete honesty: in the form of a caution before he tells his story. Jennings later tells Blake: “You, and such as you, show me the sunny side of human life, and reconcile me with the world that I am leaving […] However this talk between us may end, I shall not forget that you have done me a kindness in doing that” (Collins 376). In order to learn the truth, we must risk the darkness, be it ever so ‘displeasing to our taste and smell’, or, as in the case of Blake, ‘the tastes and smells’ of those close to us.

Ezra Jennings could be called a spectral image, in Britain, of the Indian opium fields with his ‘innumerable marks and wrinkles’. The white of his hair and how it is dispersed over his head could be an image of the milky fluid that erupts from a cut in the opium seed pod, which gives us both a traditional metaphor and a literal metaphor for the ‘chaos’ aspect of opium. Beginning with the traditional one: Jennings’s head is a ’planet’ of darkness spattered with an ocean of opium-milk originating in the more ‘equatorial’, Indian regions (the sides of his head), the cutting dagger (Herncastle’s, ‘the father’s’, dagger) being England’s ‘Empire’, bringing Oriental ’Chaos’ in its wake. Continuing with the literal metaphor: in physics’ chaos theory, you look at how the unseen constantly influences expected patterns of event development, such as how identical drops of an identical liquid falling in the exact same way, in the exact same spot, on the surface of a spherical shape, disperse themselves over it differently. This literal example of moving fluids and spheres is also symbolic of every individual’s unique pattern of brain activity, and the unpredictability of most minds. Also, the image of the opium seed pod reminds us of the ‘distinctly British’
Betteredge’s remark that Jennings is “a person whose head is full of maggots” (Collins 401). In Jennings’s case, the black and white parti-colouring of his hair is also likely to be symbolic of sharply contrasting darker and brighter thoughts ‘frozen in relief’, as it were, on the head of this ‘ghostly’ character. Jennings’s ‘spirit’ is at the bottom of a ‘very black hole’, occasionally glimpsing ‘very bright things’. In his diary, we can read about the dominating, hellish darkness of his life: “Rose late, after a dreadful night; the vengeance of yesterday’s opium, pursuing me through a series of frightful dreams. At one time I was whirling through empty space with the phantoms of the dead, friends and enemies together. At another, the one beloved face which I shall never see again rose at my bedside, hideously phosphorescent in the darkness, and glared and grinned at me. A slight return of the old pain, at the usual time […], was welcome as a change. It dispelled the visions-and it was bearable because it did that” (Collins 392). When pain is “welcome” as a banisher of looming madness, we are close to ‘hell’ indeed.

Now, let us look at the ‘hope’, the bright thoughts, of the character Jennings: he is a man who has known love, and in spite of his utter fall from grace, he still cherishes the memory of that love. Whether it is the woman he loved, or a child born of a liaison with this woman, he lives to provide for this person, which indeed is a powerful motivation, born of a pure and strong instinct of hope and integrity, leaving, in its turn, ‘room for surprises’: “She [Rachel] looked at my ugly, wrinkled face, with a bright gratitude so new to me in my experience of my fellow-creatures […] Nothing had prepared me for her kindness and her beauty. The misery of many years has not hardened my heart […]. I was as awkward and as shy with her, as if I had been a lad in my teens” (Collins 410, 411). As symbolized by his strangely coloured hair, the hope will not be dispelled from his mind, and he wears it like a pain-warped, white gold coronet.

Regarding Jennings’s hope and quite selfless sacrifice, he declares: “I should have let the agony of it kill me long since, but for one interest in life, […] I want to provide for a person-very dear to me-whom I shall never see again. The hope has impelled me to resist the disease by such palliative means as I could devise” (Collins 376). It is unclear how the person dear to Ezra copes
with his death and the inheritance of a sum of money that is supposed to provide the beneficiary with an interest to cover to cost of living. (Unfortunately, we can only assume the worst.) However, before his untimely end, Jennings’s takes upon himself to vindicate Blake, who (entirely to Blake’s own benefit) has shown him friendship and trust, and thus reunite him with his beloved, Rachel Verinder. This brings us back to Ezra Jennings, the Englishman, and the question of Christian charity, sacrifice, and Jennings as a 'Christ figure’, or, rather, a ‘Krishna figure for the British’, (there are actual similarities between the two, apart from their names). Jennings’s sacrifice is the novel’s truest representation of a free gift. Again, there is the sacrifice of the three Brahmins (belonging to a priestly caste), who give up everything they have and are for the sake of their talisman. Their sacrifice is undeniably as true as Jennings’s, (and greater still). However, their sacrifice (as mentioned earlier), in the context of Collins’s nineteenth-century novel *The Moonstone*, is, like the Moonstone itself, of an ‘alien’ realm. Ezra’s sacrifice, is that of the ‘Christian Englishman’.

This brings us to the sacrifices of the other English characters. Rosanna Spearman’s sacrifice for the sake of Franklin is no small affair, but she makes it vainly hoping for Franklin to appreciate her as a woman, i.e. a woman for him, which seems unlikely. Then, not least, there is Rachel Verinder’s sacrifice for the sake of Franklin. It could be argued that Rachel’s sacrifice is as great as Ezra’s. She is very young, and with her silence and protection of Franklin, she is staking her life-long reputation for a man she has rejected ‘forever’, but still loves. However, she is redeemed, thanks to Jennings, while for Jennings himself, there can be no redemption. Jennings prolongs his quite acute suffering only to provide for someone very dear to him, and later, as mentioned, also for the sake of Franklin’s and Rachel’s love. Of course, when it comes to the young lovers, there is a reward in Jennings’s mind for helping them: he wants the pleasure of being reminded of ‘that kind of happiness’. Ilana Blumberg points to “the paradox of Christianity, [which] is that in giving away, whether through personal suffering, charity, or general acts of

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6 Krishna, like Christ, is supposed to have been immaculately conceived, and, like Christ, he is a supreme ‘herder’ of mankind, coming repeatedly to its salvation.
kindness, The Christian amasses ‘credit’ [in Heaven]” (Blumberg 172), so the motive for giving is really ‘selfish’. (This paradox is to be found within Hinduism as well, and therefore the Brahmins’ motives could be called selfish as well, but then again, they are, in The Moonstone, the ‘enemy’.) If looked at strictly, using Blumberg’s logic, the ‘selfishness’ is a fact. In the case of Ezra Jennings (a Christian), though, one wonders if the logic is applicable. He only wants a reminder of that which is ‘good on earth’, as a satisfaction while still on earth. The happiness that his help to others provides him with is at no cost to anyone but himself, and in the end he rests in his grave unknown, as is his wish. (If Jennings serves as a religious example to the darkly Gothic Hindus, he probably does so to his fellow ‘Miss Clackian’ Christians as well.) If the darkly beautiful Rachel - (which means ‘ewe’) - Verinder is the black sheep (sacrificial lamb/ scapegoat) of the family, ugly Ezra Jennings is the black sheep (sacrificial lamb/ scapegoat) of (the British) ‘Empire’. Ross C. Murfin discusses both Ezra Jennings’s function as a ‘scapegoat’ and the word ‘scapegoat’ itself, “which in Greek was, (pharmakos), a close etymological relative of the words for poison and medicine, perfume and dye, doctor and witch” (Murfin 664): (pharmakon). He paraphrases and rightly supports the ideas of Rene Girard, writing:

“In fact but a mirror or double of society, the scapegoat is differentiated from ‘respectable’ or legitimate members of society by a myth of difference suggesting that all men are not doubles of each other for there are the good and the bad, the blameless and the guilty. [...] Ezra Jennings - as scapegoat and physician at the same time - is at once society’s banished malefactor and one who heals. He makes effective his curative powers by returning to society and reasserting both the essential sameness between people and the falseness of the myths that would absolutely differentiate them [emphases added]” (Murfin 664).

This brings us back to the earlier image of Jennings as the mirror image of the Victorian, imperial status quo, approaching the other characters, and the reader (particularly the Victorian reader), thematically in reverse from the end of the novel, to set things ‘right’.

Ezra: the righteous Christian, Ezra: ‘Robinson Crusoe/ Christ/ Krishna’, (Ezra, the deus ex machina). Is it not ironic to find Betteredge lecturing Jennings on Robinson Crusoe, as if Jennings were a figure of ‘Crusoean’ ignorance, when he is The Moonstone’s Crusoe, marooned
on the island of England, surrounded by people who, to him, are menacing, or like phantoms. Just as Jennings might seem unreal to people around him (the novel’s other characters, the Victorian reader of the novel), these same people seem unreal to Jennings. The ‘sun’ (its blinding light in the window/ in the ‘mirror’) which Jennings beholds at the moment of his death, could be allegorical for his metaphysical vision of the reader, after which he perishes (like a creature of the night turned to ashes by sunlight). “A few minutes before the end came he asked [...] to see the sun rise through the window.” (Collins 457) This strengthens our view of The Moonstone as a mirror, which we, in our reading of the novel, slowly approach from afar, only to be met with our strange, true (Victorian) selves in the shape of the distorted Ezra-‘the Help’ Jennings, indirectly telling us: ‘Ultimately, God only helps those who help themselves.’ What, at this point, happens to the mirror, we can only guess. In the words of the explorer of India, Murthwaite: “Who can tell?” (Collins 466)

This ‘binary of the lying truth’, i.e. ‘Miss Clackian’ hypocrisy, being exposed in the allegorical mirror of ‘true verity’, presenting us (and in particular the British Victorians) with Ezra Jennings (the true face of the triumvirate: ‘Opium’, ‘Empire and ‘Sacrifice’), most likely shattering the mirror, is certainly worth examining further. The work of the scholars that I have quoted in this essay certainly strengthen this claim. I (a lesser scholar) have, in this attempt at a longer essay, tried to write inspiredly about this fascinating and exciting character of Wilkie Collins’s, in order to discern a significant symbolism contained within him, hopefully not stamping him with it. It is likely that this is something Collins never consciously intended the reader to do. However, I hope that I have had some small success in my own personal endeavour to do so. Furthermore, not necessarily regarding the ideas that I have presented, Collins’s novel The Moonstone, as a whole, is obviously still important in the twenty-first century, partly because of its fine quality as entertainment, but mainly in its intelligent function as a window into nineteenth-century England, which was a crucial time for England, and the rest of the world in its relation to England.
T.S. Eliot rightly called *The Moonstone* “the first, the longest and the best of modern English detective novels”, and, of course, when the reader is literally hundreds of pages into his entertainment, and still finds poor Franklin and Rachel suffering from the several aspects of the crime committed, it is, after all, Ezra Jennings who neatly comes to our rescue as well as Franklin’s and Rachel’s; and, as brave and patient readers of this essay probably have noticed by now, the name Ezra literally means “Help”.

**Works Cited**


