

**Racing Desire and the New Man of the House in Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone***

By **Sharleen Mondal**, University of Washington

Add to this a quantity of thick and closely-curling hair which, by some freak of Nature, had lost its color in the most startlingly partial and capricious manner. Over the top of his head it was still of the deep black which was its natural color. Round the sides of his head—without the slightest gradation of grey to break the force of the extraordinary contrast—it had turned completely white. The line between the two colors preserved no sort of regularity. At one place, the white hair ran up into the black; at another, the black hair ran down into the white. I looked at the man with a curiosity which, I am ashamed to say, I found it quite impossible to control.

-Franklin Blake describing Ezra Jennings, *The Moonstone* (1868)

“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. The truth is, I have associations with these modest little hedgeside flowers—It doesn't matter...”

-Ezra Jennings, *The Moonstone* (1868)

<1>Late Victorian sensation fiction restructured nineteenth-century gender norms in significant ways, often through rather intricate plot twists—among them unsavory crimes, illegitimate children, and secretly polygamous wives with a penchant for shoving unsympathetic husbands down a dark well. The work of Wilkie Collins in particular has garnered much scholarly interest, with both his novels and his own unusual domestic arrangements marking him as a somewhat radical figure.<sup>(1)</sup> Tamar Heller, author of *Dead Secrets*, a foundational book on the work of Wilkie Collins, provides a captivating account of her initial fascination with Collins's *The Moonstone* (1868). Seduced by *Masterpiece Theatre*'s on-screen portrayal of *The Moonstone*'s strange, socially outcast doctor's assistant, Ezra Jennings, and his “uncensored Gothic presence,” Heller grew more intrigued when she read the novel and encountered a feature absent from the television adaptation: Ezra's “mixed racial background” and “amazing hair” (*RDL* 362). So strong an impression did Ezra's unusual hair—and the duality it projects—produce in Heller's imagination that she reads Ezra's hair “as a symbol of the new directions in Collins studies,” an area of criticism increasingly concerned with various forms of hybridity (*RDL* 362-363).

<2>Certainly Ezra's hair, and the racial hybridity that it encodes, has prompted significant contributions to Collins scholarship.<sup>(2)</sup> Yet the question of why Ezra's erratic hair is so arresting to us (readers and critics) to begin with is a provocative one. For alongside the earnest scholarly interest that Ezra has elicited, he has also generated a good deal of confusion for critics determined to articulate his origins. Thus Ezra has been described alternately as "biracial" (Willey 229), "Eurasian" (Mehta 630), "a racial 'half-caste'" (Mehta 628), "an exile from India" (Thomas 241), "obviously" Caribbean, and "the bastard child of the British Empire" (Thomas 242).<sup>(3)</sup> The novel supplies only that Ezra was "born, and partly brought up, in one of our colonies" (Collins 371). He specifies his father's Englishness, yet leaves his mother's identity unspoken. The disparity in critics' descriptions of Ezra's origins reveals a persistent grasping for meaning around the identity—and specifically, the parentage—of the mysterious, piebald-haired outcast.

<3>Because it is Ezra's mother's origin upon which the roulette of possible identifiers turns, critics seem reluctant to allow her background to remain ambiguous gestures toward a fascination with what is encoded by the traces she leaves in Ezra's unusual appearance. The question of how to identify Ezra's colonial parentage necessarily carries with it a tracing of colonial desire, and alongside it, a fascination with, as Robert Young puts it, "people having sex—interminable, adulterating, aleatory, illicit, inter-racial sex" (181). For if Ezra's hair marks him as a "hybrid," the product of an interracial sexual union between an Englishman and a colonial other, his hair also perpetually acts as a visible reminder of the illicit and unsavory colonial desires of which he is the product. Sensation fiction's characteristic appeal to the reader's excitement, so often through plots driven by female desire, is in *The Moonstone* rendered distinct due to both the novel's explicit imperial context, and Ezra's role as a feminized, mixed-race male. The figure of Ezra's mother—and the mystery marked by her unspoken origins—works together with Ezra's own incompletely articulated, even homosexual yearnings to offer a remarkably "sensational" range of desires.

<4>What Ezra offers in the way of complex racial and gendered lines of desire provides, in turn, *new* possibilities for desire in restructuring ways of reading and knowing in mid-Victorian sensation fiction. Lynn Pykett observes that sensation novels evoked questions of gender identity and gender stereotypes, including "the feminized male who lacks a clear role" (*SN* 10). In Ezra's case, he not only confesses to having a "female" constitution (373), but he also shares a relationship, marked by homosexual desire, with *The Moonstone*'s protagonist, Franklin Blake, also identified by Pykett as a feminized male.<sup>(4)</sup> In the novel Ezra and Franklin's desiring relationship grants Ezra access to the English home, where he stages an experimental re-enactment in order to uncover what happened to the moonstone, the valuable English diamond taken from the bedroom of the female protagonist—Franklin's cousin and love interest Rachel Verinder—the night of her eighteenth birthday. Ezra's entrance into the Verinder home grants him complete control of the house's organization and the behavior of its inhabitants; it is the occasion not only of a scientific "experiment," but of an experimental reorganization of the Victorian home.

<5>In light of the way in which Ezra's body bears the secret of illicit and wayward colonial desire, both his relationship of homosexual desire with the novel's male protagonist, and his

assumption of the role of new “man of the house,” offer a radical restructuring of the arrangement of the Victorian home and the structure of the Victorian family. The several generic distinctions that *The Moonstone* simultaneously inhabits—domestic fiction, sensation fiction, and detective fiction—offer a series of valence points through which notions of home and family are articulated and that Ezra ultimately disrupts. I argue that in addition to the radical restructuring of domestic and familial organization that Ezra offers, his embodiment of illicit desire, and his simultaneous role as executor of a scientific experiment in the service of solving a mystery, redefine the terms of “truth-telling” and “detection” in terms of a method of investigation and discovery *through the experience of desire*. Desire thus operates not only as a destabilizing force that exposes the precariousness of English domestic stability, its typical role in sensation fiction, but in *The Moonstone*, interracial, homosexual desire acts as the guiding factor in uncovering what is “real” about the deceptively “safe” English family.

<6>This reading of desire considers “questions of homo- and heterosexual arrangements and identities not as the seedy underside of imperial history”—as Britain’s “dirty secret exported to the colonies—but as a charged site of its tensions” (Stoler 10). What Mrinalini Sinha calls “the ‘normal’ sexuality of respectable men and women of the nation” was constructed in opposition to non-European homosexuality (189), shoring up the “patriarchal family form that was naturalized in the context of empire and imperialism” (190). This trope of the family in turn made national and colonial hierarchies appear “natural,” erasing the history of the formation of hierarchies across gender, race, class, and other terrains (191). By examining not only the way Ezra’s mutual homosexual desire with Franklin operates in *The Moonstone*, but also how his institution as “the new man of the house” restructures the Victorian home and family, I hope to uncover the novel’s unique theorizing of desire, one that is not completely restricted toward reproducing the imperial nation. Rather, Ezra’s desire, as it becomes a form of truth-telling and even scientific experiment, destabilizes the imperial separation of desire and reason so central to the construction of public and private realms. The separation between desire and rationality, crucial for the continuation of colonial violence through the disciplinary mechanisms designed to retain the illusion of public and private realms as civilized and distinctly British, becomes muddled by Ezra, who offers a different trajectory for desire, reason, and the Victorian home.(5)

<7>*The Moonstone* begins with an extract from a family paper penned by a soldier who wishes to confess a dark secret. Writing from India, where he has taken part in the 1799 storming of Seringapatam, the soldier confesses that during the “excesses” committed by British soldiers during the defeat of Tippoo Sultan, his cousin John Herncastle murdered three Indians guarding the legendary diamond, the moonstone, in order to pocket the diamond for himself. The Indians were Brahmins charged with a divine command to watch over the moonstone until it could be retrieved from Muslim hands, the stone having been taken from a sacred Hindu temple during Muslim conquest.(6) When Herncastle returns to England with the diamond, he is followed by three new Brahmins who continue to keep watch over the diamond, waiting for the chance to reclaim it. Herncastle bequeaths the diamond to his niece, Rachel Verinder, upon his death, perhaps with the intention of passing on the gem’s curse in revenge for Lady Verinder’s shunning him after his return from India.

<8>Franklin, Rachel's cousin and suitor, gives her the diamond on her eighteenth birthday according to Herncastle's wishes. That night, despite loyal family servant Gabriel Betteredge's extra careful securing of the house, the diamond is taken from Rachel's bedroom in the middle of the night, removed from the Indian cabinet where she had placed it before going to bed. The next morning when it is discovered that the diamond has disappeared, the three Indian Brahmins who have been lurking about the house in the guise of "jugglers" immediately fall under suspicion. But with no sign of forced entry, the house's inhabitants become suspects, as well. Franklin asks a number of those present at the birthday dinner to narrate what they observed in relation to loss of the moonstone; the novel is comprised of their collected narratives, bookended by prologue and epilogue that narrate the diamond's extraction from and return to India.

<9>Franklin remains at the Verinder house after the diamond's disappearance to help with the investigation, undertaken by the infamous Sergeant Cuff. Franklin is perplexed to find that Rachel's previous devotion to him has turned into vehement hatred; we learn that Rachel witnessed Franklin take the diamond from her bedroom. Franklin, bearing no memory of his own actions, later learns of his involvement through a letter from Rosanna Spearman, a servant in the house who falls in love with him only to despair at his lack of interest. Her love for Franklin prompts Rosanna to keep his role in the theft secret, yet his indifference drives her to commit suicide by throwing herself into the Shivering Sand, a quaking mass of quicksand located nearby the Verinder house. Yet Rosanna leaves one central clue in her wake: Franklin's nightgown, smeared with paint from the door of Rachel's boudoir, an article that proves that Franklin entered Rachel's bedroom during the late hours of the night when the paint was still wet. Rosanna's suicide letter provides directions to the nightgown's precise location—in a box lowered into the Shivering Sand and moored to solid ground by a chain. After reading Rosanna's letter and finding the nightgown, Franklin remains baffled by the evidence against him until he enlists the help of Ezra Jennings.

<10>Ezra helps Franklin to prove that he took the diamond from Rachel's bedroom under the influence of laudanum. The night of the birthday dinner, the doctor Mr. Candy, wishing to prove a point after quarreling with Franklin over the validity of the medical profession, spikes Franklin's drink with laudanum to treat Franklin's insomnia. Fully intending to confess his mischief to Franklin the next morning, Mr. Candy falls ill on the way home from the party and loses his memory. Ezra treats Mr. Candy during his illness, scribbling down the doctor's delirious utterances to piece together a coherent (albeit tentative) narrative of how Franklin came under the influence of laudanum that night. Ezra subsequently stages a re-enactment of the birthday evening, complete with a laudanum-spiked nightcap for Franklin. Ezra's experiment satisfactorily proves to Rachel and others associated with the family that Franklin took the diamond under the laudanum's influence, motivated by his fear of the three Indian jugglers and left with no memory of his actions the next morning.(7)

<11>After Ezra absolves Franklin of wrong intention, Sergeant Cuff re-enters the narrative, and we learn that Rachel's other cousin and suitor, the Christian philanthropist Godfrey Ablewhite, encountered Franklin after the removal of the diamond from Rachel's room and simply took the diamond from Franklin, hoping to use it to pay off his debts. Before his grand unmasking, Godfrey disguises himself as a dark-complexioned sailor and retrieves the diamond from the

bank where he has pledged it; he is tracked down and unmasked after the three Brahmins have killed him by suffocating him in his room in a boarding house. The novel ends with an epilogue in which the eminent orientalist traveler, Mr. Murthwaite, witnesses the return of the diamond to its rightful place in India, in the forehead of the moon god.

### **“Some Freak of Nature”: The Sexual Subtext of the Shivering Sand**

<12>That the novel is comprised of a series of narratives set in England, bookended by a prologue and epilogue that take place in India, suggests a movement of objects, bodies, and narratives between colony and metropole. The novel’s prologue moors these crossings in an act of colonial violence, the Storming of Seringapatam, yet the 1799 clash would have evoked for Victorian readers a more recent moment—the 1857 Sepoy Uprising.(8) The Uprising elicited a set of sexual tropes, including a mythologizing that held as its most treasured figure the English woman in need of protection from violent and sexually depraved Indian men.(9) Despite this trope of Indian criminality, Rachel’s enthusiastically stores the diamond in her Indian cabinet where the two Indian objects can “admire each other” (Collins 88), delighting in the penetration of exotic colonial objects into her most intimate domestic space. Yet Rachel’s enjoyment as playful colonial fantasy is marked distinct from the “real” colonial context. Thus the celebrated orientalist traveler Mr. Murthwaite cautions Rachel, “If you ever go to India, Miss Verinder, don’t take your uncle’s birthday gift with you...I know a certain city, and a certain temple in that city, where, dressed as you are now [with the diamond in the bosom of her dress], your life would not be worth five minutes’ purchase” (78). We are told that Rachel, “safe in England, was quite delighted to hear of her danger in India” (78). Despite such “safe” separations between colony and metropole, the fact that Indian bodies entreat onto English territory—indeed, that they show up as jugglers at the Verinder home—hints that the separation between “home” and colony is illusory.(10) The sexual subtext of the diamond’s intimate penetration into Rachel’s bedroom when she turns eighteen suggests that English “self” and colonial “other” cannot be separated as easily as the Verinder family would like.(11)

<13>The blurring of boundaries between colony and metropole—or the English “home” and “other,” “foreign” spaces—is dramatically signified in the Shivering Sand, its “broad brown face” evoking both colonial and working-class struggle with “hundreds of suffocating people under it—all struggling to get to the surface, and all sinking lower and lower in the dreadful deeps!” (Collins 39).(12) When Franklin penetrates the Sand’s depths in order to find the secret that Rosanna has hidden there, the process of detection, Heller argues, is cast in “eroticized terms,” with Franklin’s “phallic stick penetrating the sand’s *vagina dentata*” (*Dead Secrets* 150). (13) Franklin’s penetration of the Sand to uncover the stained nightgown, symbolic of his violation of Rachel’s bedroom inspired by the diamond’s previous entrance into that space, links illicit desire with truth-finding. His sexualized process of detection is also linked to the movement and appearance of the Sand itself, “glittering with a golden brightness” yet “hid[ing] the horror of its false brown face under a passing smile” (312). This description is reminiscent of Godfrey Ablewhite’s long golden locks and Christian philanthropist smile hiding the deception that he wears with his “false brown face” at the end of the novel, yet it also gestures toward another “brown” face with its own set of secrets. The layers of sand mixing together as they slide past and into one another conjure up an image of uncontrollable and unpredictable mixture.

## **“A Curiosity...Quite Impossible to Control”: Ezra and Franklin’s Homosexual Desire**

<14>The Shivering Sand resembles in its curling waves, irregular lines, and unpredictable boundaries another strangely haphazard and fascinating surface, one that has its own secret of desires to tell: Ezra Jennings’ hair. With black running up into white and white running up into black, absent any rationale to guide its shifts, Ezra’s hair captures Franklin’s awe and offers him yet another mystery to penetrate. The “curiosity” that Franklin “found it quite impossible to control” is shot through with an inexplicable interest in Ezra, and it is only through exploring this interest that Franklin can discover the “truth” of what happened inside the English home and within the Verinder family. Gabriel dismisses Ezra as “the man with the piebald hair, and the gipsy complexion” (327), yet Franklin is captivated by Ezra’s “soft brown eyes” looking “gently” at him, eyes that “took your attention captive at their will” (326). Even though Gabriel tells Franklin that Ezra’s “appearance is against him,” “nobody knows who he is,” and “he hasn’t a friend in the place” (327), Franklin finds Ezra to be “the most remarkable looking man that I had ever seen” (326). He reveals that Ezra “had produced too strong an impression on me to be immediately dismissed from my thoughts” (327), despite the immediate urgency of focusing on Rachel, Franklin’s estranged lover.

<15>Ezra begins popping up in Franklin’s life at unexpected times, his curious appearance continually producing a striking effect on Franklin that Franklin is at a loss to explain. When Franklin is to board the train to London to see Mr. Bruff, the family lawyer, “There was Mr. Candy’s remarkable-looking assistant again, speaking to the keeper of the stall!” (337). Once in London, Franklin receives a letter from Gabriel in which “the everlasting Ezra Jennings appeared again!” (343). The seemingly happenstance way that Ezra enters Franklin’s thoughts, and the sense of pleasure apparent in the surprise of encountering Ezra unexpectedly, differentiates Franklin’s connection with Ezra from his relationship with every other character in the novel save Rachel, his heterosexual love interest. Not only are the lines of desire that draw Franklin to Ezra described with anticipation and pleasure; fascination with Ezra also captures Franklin’s imagination at will. As Franklin sits down to answer a letter he has received from Gabriel,

I sat idly drawing likenesses from memory of Mr. Candy’s remarkable-looking assistant, on the sheet of paper which I had vowed to dedicate to Betteredge—until it suddenly occurred to me that here was the irrepressible Ezra Jennings getting in my way again! I threw a dozen portraits, at least, of the man with the piebald hair (the hair in every case, remarkably like), into the waste-paper basket. (361)

The drawings that Franklin produces of Ezra hold a double secret: the first is the mystery of Franklin’s attraction to a man who is poorly regarded by everyone else.<sup>(14)</sup> The second is encapsulated in Ezra’s hair, a curious interweaving of black and white that testifies to a transgressive racial and sexual secret in Ezra’s parentage.

<16>The sense of something wild and wayward—yet strangely compelling—in Ezra as a result of his racially mixed (and ambiguous) status is most vividly captured in the first conversation Franklin and Ezra have together after a series of chance meetings. Franklin is about to leave Mr. Candy’s house, finding the doctor’s memory sadly deteriorated. He encounters Ezra on his way

out and finds himself once more transfixed by Ezra's piebald hair, soft brown eyes, and remarkable features. As the two depart together, Ezra picks "some wild flowers from the hedge by the roadside" and remarks, "How beautiful they are!...And how few people in England seem to admire them as they deserve!" (371). Franklin asks if Ezra has "not always been in England," upon which Ezra reveals—retaining the mystery of his mother's country of origin—his racially mixed background.(371). Franklin is struck by the sense that Ezra "had suffered as few men suffer; and there was the mixture of some foreign race in his English blood" (371). The "beautiful" "modest little hedgeside flowers" (371), so deserving of admiration, yet so readily spurned, possess an allure that Franklin cannot resist.

<17>Franklin's reference to a "foreign" element mixed into Ezra's "English blood" not only points to Ezra's strange appearance, but also would have marked for mid-Victorian readers a set of assumptions about Ezra's character. The significance of "mixed" blood can be mapped across a set of racial debates that took place in the 1860s. The decade witnessed the proliferation of theories around hybridity and racial mixing, among them Paul Broca's notion of "proximate" "types" which, when interbred, could create a strong, hybrid nation (McBratney 80).(15) Within the logic of racial typology, Ezra's mother, as a woman from one of Britain's colonies, would not provide a "proximate" match for an Englishman.(16) Such a union could only result in an offspring subject to "regression," also called "reversion"—in short, the propensity to revert back to the "lesser" of the two racial types that produced it, revealing the more "savage" qualities of the type that resided lower on the racial hierarchy.

<18>These "lower" racial types were linked, by the emerging pseudo-sciences of phrenology and criminal anthropology, to latent criminality.(17) Such racial logics crafted the context in which Ezra would be read, for he is not only the product of an interracial union (and thus of an unsavory colonial blood "mixture"); his very presence in Yorkshire is initially occasioned by his attempt to flee from a terrible "accusation," a "vile slander" (379) that continued to lap at his heels at every turn. This suggestion of a potentially criminal past, in addition to the distaste and distrust with which the people in Yorkshire regard Ezra's appearance, reveal the degree to which Franklin's attraction to Ezra is a transgressive one. It is transgressive in part because, as Catherine Hall explains, "Those of mixed race could challenge the distinction between colonizer and colonized and act as sources of subversion, threats to white privilege" ("Of Gender" 50). Franklin's desire for Ezra transgresses not only in terms of race, but simultaneously in terms of sexuality. As Philippa Levine observes, "Many a Briton regarded same-sex liaisons as another example of non-British perversity" ("Sexuality, Gender" 152). As "homosexuality was frequently seen as foreign or colonial in origin," as "both a metaphor for weakness and the sign of racial unfitness" (Levine, *Sexuality and Empire* 139), sexuality itself "was a deep measure for the British of colonial otherness" (125). Franklin's desire for Ezra simultaneously violates gendered, sexual, and racial imperial boundaries. Franklin overcomes any initial reluctance to pursue his attraction for the mixed-race outcast, his "first impulsive interest" in Ezra "intensified" (376), to confide in him his own "crime" of taking the moonstone from Rachel's bedroom. By pursuing his attraction to Ezra, Franklin puts himself in league with someone who is not only socially unpopular, but also marked in Victorian cultural understanding as inferior and prone to "savage" behavior at any moment.(18)

<19>The danger of the colonial sexual union of the past—that which produced Ezra and his stunning hair—is coupled with an illicit desire in the present: the homosexual, mutually desiring relationship between Franklin and Ezra. Franklin’s attraction to Ezra, expressed as pleasure at unexpected encounters and uncontrollable fascination, is mirrored in Ezra’s narrative, extracted from his diary. As Franklin and Ezra begin to meet regularly to prepare their experiment, Ezra reflects on the effect “even...[a] short interview” with Franklin has on him, causing him to feel “the better and the happier” as he performs his regular visits to patients (398). Ezra ponders this newfound happiness, wondering “What is the secret of the attraction that there is for me in this man? Does it only mean that I feel the contrast between the frankly kind manner in which he has allowed me to become acquainted with him, and the merciless dislike and distrust with which I am met by other people?” (398). Implicit in Ezra’s question is that his attraction to Franklin *might* result “only” from his hitherto friendless state...or from some other sentiment.

<20>Ezra wonders if his attraction is due to there being “really something in him [Franklin] which answers to the yearning that I have for a little human sympathy—the yearning, which has survived the solitude and persecution of many years; which seems to grow keener and keener, as the time comes nearer and nearer when I shall feel no more?” (398). Ezra’s desire is marked as falling outside the boundaries of what would be socially permissible on two levels: first, “solitude and persecution” have normalized Ezra’s treatment by others as an abject being undeserving of “sympathy,” a solitude and persecution ostensibly tied to his family story. For when Ezra supplies an account of how others treat him, his narrative begins with “the merciless treatment of me by my own family” and is immediately followed, in the same sentence, by “the merciless enmity to which I have fallen a victim” (379). It is unclear what the “scandal” is that follows him to England, but it is clear that his troubles do not start in England. The scandal that follows him—that Franklin befriends him in spite of—is thus associated with illicit secrets and a colonial past.

<21>Ezra’s desire for Franklin is illicit in the sense that it continues to “grow keener and keener,” despite the fact that it has no socially “productive “end, for Ezra admits that his illness brings him nearer daily to death’s door (380). Despite the lack of discernible “productive” ends to their homosexual desire, Ezra and Franklin continue to pursue it, contrasting starkly from the kind of desire that Franklin and Rachel share—one that results in heterosexual, marital, reproductive union. Neither can Ezra and Franklin’s connection be sustained by social sanction, nor by the production of an acceptable Victorian familial (or even homosexual) relation. It cannot even be sustained by the expectation that Ezra will live long enough to enjoy it. In short, there is no rational reason to follow up on this desire, and even the yearning for human sympathy is one that could have yielded no real relation between Ezra and Franklin. Yet it is precisely *this* desire that becomes the grounds for planning the experiment and “detecting” what happened the night of the birthday.

<22>The initial conversation between Ezra and Franklin that makes way for their collaboration in Ezra’s experiment is driven by a trust between the two men forged by Ezra’s confession of his strong interest in Franklin. As the two talk by the hedgese flowers, Ezra confesses,

“There is no disguising, Mr. Blake, that you interest me. I have attempted to make my poor friend’s loss of memory the means of bettering my acquaintance with you. I have speculated on the chance of your feeling a passing curiosity about what he wanted to say, and of my being able to satisfy it. Is there no excuse for my intruding myself on you?” (380-381).

This interest, one that sought an excuse to become closer to Franklin, ultimately culminates in Ezra recording excitedly in his diary that “Mr. Blake has given me a new interest in life. Let it be enough, without seeking to know what the new interest is” (398). Ezra leaves the parameters of his desire undefined, open, and ambiguous; it is this desire that informs an experiment which offers “knowledge” in a form other kinds of rationality in the novel—Sergeant Cuff’s, for instance—simply cannot.

<23>Instances of “private” confession—Franklin’s narration of the impression Ezra makes on him, or the excerpts from Ezra’s journal—convey desire between the two men in a manner that despite its intensity, remains contained. Indeed, in spite of Ezra’s desire and fascination for Franklin, upon their initial conversation by the hedgeside flowers, Franklin observes that Ezra’s “tone and manner, from beginning to end, showed him to be especially, almost morbidly, anxious not to set himself up as an object of interest to me” (374). Yet the private articulations of desire that appear in the novel are augmented by a disruption of gender norms that functions to unite Ezra and Franklin in the narrative. Ezra and Franklin both inhabit the role of “the feminized male” (Pykett, *SN* 10) in stark contrast to other male characters, such as Godfrey, Sergeant Cuff, or even Gabriel, drawing a likeness between the two that falls outside the boundaries of a recognizable English masculinity.

<24>Like Godfrey, who keeps “a villa in the suburbs which was not taken in his own name, and...a lady in the villa, who was not taken in his own name, either” (452)—apparently “familiar objects in London life” (453)—both Franklin and Ezra have their manly indiscretions. Yet their indiscretions have the unique quality of having followed the two men, both identified as not-quite-English in their behaviors or appearance, to England from elsewhere. Thus Franklin, with his German, French, and Italian sides—and to Gabriel’s dismay, short with “curly brown beard and mustachios” (40)—gets into various romantic tussles with “some unmentionable woman” on the Continent before his return to England (29). Even after his return, Franklin and Rachel have a brief lover’s quarrel resulting from “some imprudence of Mr. Franklin’s on the Continent,” possibly “with a woman...at the bottom of it” that “had followed him to England” (68-69). Likewise, as a result of the scandal that follows Ezra to England, Ezra tells Franklin that he, too, was compelled to part with the woman he loved (379). The sense of hidden scandal and interrupted heterosexual union joins Ezra and Franklin, as does the fact that neither of them can quite pull off the performance of a proper Englishman.

<25>Perhaps most dramatic among the aspects that draw Ezra and Franklin together outside the limits of a properly English masculinity is a sudden outburst of emotion in the form of tears. Ezra confesses to Franklin that he is overcome when, after treating Mr. Candy’s illness against the advice of the town’s two other physicians, Mr. Candy shows the first signs of recovery. “...I own I broke down. I laid the poor fellow’s wasted hand back on the bed, and burst out crying. An hysterical relief, Mr. Blake—nothing more! Physiology says, and says truly, that some men

are born with female constitutions—and I am one of them!” (373). Tears link Ezra to the only intimate emotional relationship he has with someone in Yorkshire, Mr. Candy, who hired him despite his reputation and the scandal that resulted in the termination of Ezra’s heterosexual romantic relationship. In this way, tears signal not only the feminine, but also male-male connection that is occasioned in part by a failed heterosexual bond. A few pages later, as Ezra asserts his innocence to Franklin without disclosing the accusation against him, he proclaims that he can only give his oath of innocence as a Christian; “It is useless,” he says, “to appeal to my honor as a man” (379). Ezra is not only feminine, but he is also by his own description perpetually unmanned.

<26>Ezra’s tears and his unmanning, implicated as they are in failed heterosexual union, recall Franklin’s own tears shed not much earlier in the narrative. Franklin arranges to surprise Rachel (who at this point in the novel refuses to speak to him) at Mr. Bruff’s house, hoping she will share what she knows about his role in the diamond’s disappearance. Franklin’s encounter with Rachel is bookended by his inexplicable attraction to Ezra; he sees Ezra at the train station as he is on his way to surprise Rachel, and then meets with him again afterward. These encounters situate his conversation with Rachel as an instance of failed heterosexual bonding framed by his persistent attraction to Ezra. Franklin narrates his interaction with Rachel by offering a running commentary not only on Rachel’s responses to him, but also on the status of his masculinity at particular moments. Thus he writes that before he enters the room in which Rachel sits, unsuspecting, “I roused my manhood, and opened the door” (344). After the couple succumbs to a flurry of kissing enabled by Rachel’s momentary surprise, she speaks her first words: “You coward! [...] You mean, miserable, heartless coward!” (345). It is, as Franklin reflects, “the most unendurable reproach that a woman can address to a man” (345). Rachel challenges him, asking if it is “a manly action” to surprise her so (345). She apologizes not for her words, but that Franklin, as a man, could not take the “woman’s view” that “It seems a cowardly surprise, to surprise me into letting you kiss me”—an apology by which, Franklin bemoans, “the most degraded man living would have felt humiliated” (345).

<27>Despite indications that Franklin’s masculinity might be beyond revival at this point, as the conversation continues, Franklin realizes that while Rachel’s hand remains in his, “I was her master still” (347). Rachel confesses that the night of the birthday, before Franklin took the diamond from her room, she spent the night thinking of him the night he took her diamond from her bedroom had been lying in bed thinking of him—a confession that “almost unmanned” him (349). But when “The hysterical passion swelled in her bosom”—when Rachel demands of Franklin why he has come—she begins to cry. Franklin cannot reply to her entreaty for forgiveness; he waves his hand “and saw her dimly, as in a vision, through the tears that had conquered me at last” (356). The reference to hysteria connects the crying in this scene to both the language that Ezra uses to describe his own “hysteria,” and to the failure to maintain a heterosexual bond. It is after his encounter with Rachel that Franklin finds that “accident came to my rescue”; he discovers the letter from Gabriel and begins to draw “a dozen portraits” of Ezra. The two “feminized” men are drawn together by the parallel stories of their tears, awakened though potential loss of an object of desire as their desire is reoriented toward each other in the moment of their meeting.

## **“The Force of the Extraordinary Contrast”: Ezra Jennings as the New Man of the House**

<28>The interest Ezra takes in Franklin, and Franklin’s reciprocal attraction to Ezra, enables a bond of trust between the two men that drives forward plans for Ezra’s experiment. Among these plans is the refurbishing of the Verinder house such that it resembles, as closely as possible, its appearance and organization on the night of the ill-fated birthday dinner. It is at Ezra’s command that such arrangements must be made, but before he can issue his instructions, certain people must accept the piebald-haired outcast as a legitimate authority on all household matters, from the decoration of the house to the “company” who will be invited to witness the experiment. The process by which Ezra ascertains authority over the Verinder household attests to his new positioning as temporary head of household. It is significant that Lady Verinder is deceased as the arrangements for the experiment are being made, and that there is no family member directly related to Rachel who serves as head of the household.<sup>(19)</sup> After Lady Verinder’s death, there are two people in authority at the Yorkshire house: Rachel and Gabriel.

<29>In preparation for the experiment, Ezra writes Rachel to inform her of the plan and to secure her cooperation. Rachel, having forgiven Franklin and still quite smitten with him, asks Ezra if she might tell Franklin of her feelings before the experiment so as to demonstrate her faith in him regardless of the experiment’s outcome. Anticipating that such a conversation will excite Franklin too much and interfere with the outcome of the experiment, Ezra refuses, offering instead to show Franklin the correspondence between himself and Rachel afterward to prove her faithfulness to Franklin, an offer that Rachel accepts (401). Ezra’s intervention is of course a practical one, guided by his scientific sensibilities as a doctor’s assistant, and yet his intervention is also of a quite personal nature. He is the guiding authority as to what communication is appropriate between the two lovers who will be in the house at the same time, a responsibility that is reminiscent of what Lady Verinder might have assumed. Scientific authority thus spills over into domestic authority as questions of propriety straddle the “experiment” of detection at the same time that they saturate an “experiment” of desires.

<30>Ezra’s account of his correspondence with Rachel supplies a sense of the new hierarchy of authority that develops as preparations for the experiment take root. For instance, Rachel asks Ezra to reassure Franklin that she “willingly consents to put her house at [Ezra and Franklin’s] disposal” (399), to some degree relinquishing her own power as mistress of the house. She also places Ezra in authority over Gabriel, “having written to Mr. Betteredge...instructing him to carry out whatever directions” Ezra has for him (399). Yet Rachel is not content to grant Ezra control in these ways only; she is eager to put herself at Ezra’s service, “personally superintending the restoration of her own sitting-room” and “only wait[ing] a word of reply” from Ezra before she makes the journey to Yorkshire. Rachel essentially places Ezra at the head of the household, his orders to be followed by everyone—including Rachel herself.

<31>Perhaps Rachel’s acquiescence to Ezra’s requests can be read as the result of the passion and desperation of a nineteen-year-old woman in love—and significantly, one who has never met Ezra in person. Others in the house who are familiar with Ezra’s curiously black and white hair, wrinkled face, and overall stunning appearance prove more resistant. Collins’s comic description of Gabriel’s response to Ezra’s requests for refurbishing the Verinder house captures the intense

dislike Gabriel harbors for the mixed-race outcast, but it also serves another function: to convey the transfer of authority over the Verinder house from faithful servant to new man of the house. Insisting that he is a “blind agent” in the preparations, Gabriel invites Ezra to issue his orders, reassuring him that “I’m determined not to be behind ’em, or before ’em, by so much as a hair’s-breadth” (403). It is, he asserts, “not a matter of agreement” but “of obedience” (403). Gabriel makes clear before he writes down a single instruction what *his* obedience means, having been “’nigh on fifty years in the service of my late lady” and “’page-boy before that, in the service of the old lord, her father” (402). For Ezra to gain the obedience of Gabriel, Gabriel makes clear, is a momentous feat indeed.

<32>The subsequent conversation between Gabriel and Ezra provides a sense of the scope of the work involved in preparing the house so that it resembles its state the night the moonstone went missing. Bedrooms, corridors, stairs, and various household objects must be arranged with precision, even though some items cannot be restored to their original state. Gabriel makes careful note of each deviation, waiting for Ezra’s explicit permission for broken items to be excepted from the arrangements (items it would be impossible, in any case, to restore). Gabriel also refuses to listen to anything that Franklin says, intent on demonstrating his “obedience” as “blind agent” to Ezra alone. He repeats Ezra’s orders back to check their accuracy, followed by this parting shot:

“Speaking as a servant, I am deeply indebted to you. Speaking as a man, I consider you to be a person whose head is full of maggots, and I take up my testimony against your experiment as a delusion and a snare. Don’t be afraid, on that account, of my feelings as a man getting in the way of my duty as a servant! You shall be obeyed. The maggots notwithstanding, sir, you shall be obeyed. If it ends in your setting the house on fire, Damme if I send for the engines, unless you ring the bell and order them first!” (405)

Humor aside, Gabriel’s personal opinion of Ezra, counterposed against the extent of his obedience, captures the degree to which Ezra has been granted control over the household. Gabriel’s reference to the house itself burning down as an occurrence that cannot interrupt Ezra’s command captures Pykett’s notion of sensation fiction’s “devil in the house” (*Authors in Context* 89) who will shortly take up residence, even as it emphasizes that the authority over the house—its corridors, its decoration, who will inhabit it, even its very survival—belongs to Ezra, and Ezra alone.

<33>Gabriel validates his acquiescence to Ezra’s authority by citing his own trustworthiness as a servant. Thus he explains that as long as he gets orders “’from my master or mistress, as the case may be, I obey it” (403). Ezra, though his head is “full of maggots,” is thrust into the role of “master” as Gabriel hangs on to his every word and makes note of his every command. The circuit of connections by which Ezra gains such authority is a complex one, for while it relies on Rachel’s admonishment to Gabriel that Ezra must be obeyed, it rests also on the bond that Ezra shares with Franklin. Queer as it is, that Ezra and Franklin are objects of one another’s desire prompts a bond between them that ultimately grants Ezra the role of man of the house. Ezra’s assumption of authority over matters related to Franklin and Rachel’s courtship is clearly

concerned with heterosexual union, yet it also interrupts heterosexual norms around family propriety.

<34>Indeed, the “master” of the house would be the guiding authority for matters of propriety, and it is in this role that Ezra receives a letter from Mrs. Merridew, the woman whose role is to look after Rachel. Mrs. Merridew points out that Rachel’s presence—without a chaperone—in a house filled with men performing a “medical experiment” (406) cannot be allowed. Mrs. Merridew offers to be the chaperone, though she stresses that surely neither her presence nor Rachel’s can possibly be necessary for such an experiment. Ezra derides Mrs. Merridew’s “mortal fear of the opinion of the world,” noting that he is “the very last man in existence who has any reason to regard that opinion with respect.” Additionally, “two young people who love each other, and who have been parted too long already” spur him on to inform Mrs. Merridew that he simply cannot interfere in the matter by discouraging Rachel to attend. That Mrs. Merridew appeals to Ezra’s authority in the matter clearly places him in a position such that he is the final appeal in matters of propriety, a position that Lady Verinder previously held before him. (20) Ezra’s invitation to Sergeant Cuff to come and witness the experiment is further evidence of his new position; Lady Verinder dismisses Cuff earlier in the novel, rendering Ezra’s re-invitation a mediation of who can enter and exit the house.(21)

<35>Ezra’s command over issues of propriety (even his lack of concern for the “opinion of the world”) can be read as being very much in line with the ultimate goal of heterosexual union, rather than disrupting heterosexual desire or rearranging the English home and family. Indeed, Heller argues that Ezra’s role amounts to “engineer[ing] [a] happy ending” (160)—that is, the heterosexual reunion of Franklin and Rachel. Margery Sabin, who recognizes the possibility of “some homosexual issue” (108) that structures a desiring relationship between Ezra and Franklin, nevertheless observes that Franklin does not remain interested in Ezra “once the doctor has served the purpose of solving his problem.”; once Franklin and Rachel leave Yorkshire for London, she writes, “Franklin never mentions Jennings again” (109). Sabin is correct that Ezra’s presence is not sustained through the end of the novel. In fact, he dies, consistent with the narrative he gives Franklin around his debilitating—and ultimately fatal—illness which must be treated with large doses of opium. Yet the duration of Ezra’s presence is less important, I suggest, than the kind of restructuring of desire that his presence offers in the text.

<36>This restructuring operates through the control Ezra exerts in facilitating Franklin and Rachel’s reunion. It is possible for Ezra to take on this role due to his desiring relationship with Franklin, which gives him entry into the Verinder house, yet even in his role as conduit for the lovers’ reconciliation, Ezra refigures the very terms of desire. In the privacy of his journal, he expresses his wonder that “I, of all men in the world, am chosen to be the means” of bringing Franklin and Rachel back together (399). He reflects on his own shattered chances at love, marveling that he might now “live to see a happiness of others, which is of my making—a love renewed, which is of my bringing back” (399). One might read Ezra’s feelings as indicative of an investment in heterosexual reunion, yet his words betray traces of a different kind of investment in the lovers’ reconciliation, one that places *him* in a position of power and control over the lines of desire that join Franklin and Rachel together. Thus it is happiness of *his* making, of *his* “bringing back,” that holds a fascination for him, rather than the simple notion of two estranged lovers finding their way back to one another.

<37>In short, Ezra restructures the heterosexual desiring relationship between Franklin and Rachel by placing himself in its midst, creating a sort of triangulation of desires.(22) On the night of the experiment, Ezra is wedged within articulations of Franklin's and Rachel's desire from the outset. Although taken aback when she first sees Ezra, Rachel immediately warms up to him and bombards him with a flurry of questions, ending with "Do you wonder at the interest I take in this?" (415). Ezra responds: "No...I venture to think that I thoroughly understand it" (415). He remarks that Rachel "was far above the paltry affectation of being confused," implying that his understanding of Rachel's interest holds a complexity that might not be understood easily (415). It becomes clear as the experiment proceeds that Ezra's understanding of Rachel's "interest" does not come simply from his personal experience with failed heterosexual union; rather, it stems from his own interest in Franklin and, consequently, his ability to *identify* with Rachel as someone who desires Franklin, complicating how heterosexual desire is rendered in the text.

<38>Sabin recognizes this triangulation of desire in its most salient moment, when Franklin has taken the makeshift diamond from Rachel's Indian cabinet (for the second time) under the influence of laudanum and, under the drug's spell, falls into a deep sleep in Rachel's sitting-room. Rachel wishes to keep Ezra company in watching Franklin as he sleeps off his laudanum-laced nightcap. Ezra hesitates, yet Rachel insists, pleading "Oh, Mr. Jennings, if you were me, only think how you would long to sit and look at him. Say yes, do!" Ezra writes, "Is it necessary to mention that I gave way? Surely not!" (429). Sabin remarks that "If Rachel didn't seem so close to the mark in imagining how Jennings would like to be in her place, loving and being loved by Franklin, her rapt self-absorption would be less unnerving" (109). Indeed, Rachel appeals to Ezra a second time, when he returns after leaving the room during one of his attacks of severe pain. Ezra catches her kissing Franklin's forehead and "soberly" directs her back to her seat, upon which she whispers, "You would have done it...in my place!" (430). That Ezra decides to leave Rachel and Franklin alone together when Franklin wakes, the moment that clinches their ultimate reunion (culminating in marriage), captures the last in a chain of instances in which Rachel's appeal to *Ezra's identification with her desire* is the enabling factor in the actualization of Franklin and Rachel's heterosexual desire. Ezra, as new man of the house, grants his approval to Rachel's expressions of heterosexual desire, enabling them only because he can conceive of them through his own homosexual desire for Franklin. It is through this chain of desires that the novel's end—with Rachel and Franklin's marriage—can come to pass.

<39>Although Franklin and Rachel ultimately unite in heterosexual, reproductive marriage, Ezra as the "new man of the house" restructures the "critical separation of passion and reason, of the sexual and the rational, [that] made colonial sexualities always something to be feared and to be leashed" (Levine, "Sexuality and empire" 127). Typically, the narrative of the imperial "'family romance' glosses over relations of domination within the family as much as within the nation," with the colonized "often represented as 'children,' needing the benevolent and natural protection" of European fathers and sometimes mothers due to their own lack of "requisite political maturity" (Sinha 191-192). Ezra assumes a much different role, made possible through a desiring relationship that blurs the line between passion and reason, a blurring seemingly embodied in the irregularity of his intriguing hair. Heller's reading of Ezra's hair "as a symbol of the new directions in Collins studies" gestures toward the multiple and complex meanings encoded by Ezra's strange appearance. He is at once the embodiment of illicit desire and the

installment of British colonialism's "dark other" as the man of the house, not as the house's dark secret but as the force that reorders its internal logic. Ezra's hair marks the underlying racial and sexual logics that inform not only his role in the text, but also the appeal his hair holds for critics seeking to understand the secrets it encodes. While sensation fiction of the mid to late Victorian period complicated notions of the Victorian home premised on an imperial "English" identity, *The Moonstone* offers a restructuring of desire through the novel's extraordinary contrasts and curiosities.

### Endnotes

(1)Tamar Heller argues that Collins tempered his radical outlook in his fiction as a means of negotiating his position in the literary marketplace (see *Dead Secrets*). For more on Collins's two households (one kept with Martha Rudd, the other with Caroline Graves), see Catherine Peters' *The King of Inventors: A Life of Wilkie Collins*.(^)

(2)Lillian Nayder and Timothy Carens have written particularly insightful analyses around racial hybridity in *The Moonstone*.(^)

(3)Dierdre McMahon argues that Ezra's Caribbean origin is "obvious," though the lack of consensus among critics and the ambiguity of the text suggest that his background cannot be identified with such certainty. (^)

(4)I use the word "homosexual" to describe the mutual desire and affection between Ezra and Franklin, despite the absence of physically sexual contact between them. Like Philippa Levine, I think of sexuality "not as a biological category, but a social and cultural one, a set of infinitely flexible practices for making sense of desire" (*Sexuality and Empire* 123). My reading strategy is influenced also by Philip Holden and Richard Ruppel, who argue for a strategy of "queer reading" that can unpack "the binarism of gender," a binarism that "clearly does not map easily onto that of colonization" (xi). The task of reading the interstices of gender, sexuality, race, and imperialism through "queer reading" requires defining what is "queer" not only in terms of the homoerotic, but beyond that, an interrogation of areas either not normally understood as sexual, or of ostensibly "heterosexual" or "nonsexual" texts (xi). Holden and Ruppel note the dependence of the very definition of "heterosexuality" upon the term "homosexuality" (which appears in the English language first) to argue for reading the two together as part of a critical queer reading practice. Apart from this methodological point around queer reading, other terms that might be used to describe non-physical sexual relations between men simply do not provide a suitable description of Ezra and Franklin's connection. "Homosocial" as Philippa Levine defines it, for instance, is comprised of "social activities or relationships amongst similar persons" and "for feminist and gender scholarship...exhibiting or endorsing behaviors or characteristics more readily associated—certainly historically—with men" (Preface ix). This term does not get at the persistent (at times, obsessive) desire between Ezra and Franklin, with its erotic undercurrents. "Homoerotic" neglects the aspects of critical reading that Holden and

Ruppel elucidate. My thanks are due to Kellie Holzer and Jane Lee for challenging me to rethink my use of terminology.(^)

(5)See Levine's "Sexuality and empire" for more on the separation between desire and passion (123, 127). See also Stoler, who writes that in addition to race, "the colonial measure of what it took to be classified as 'European' depended on "tenuously balanced assessments of who was judged to act with reason, affective appropriateness, and a sense of morality" (2-6).(^)

(6)See Krishna Manavalli on the "Brahmin sublime" and depictions of Hindus and Muslims in *The Moonstone*.(^)

(7)Franklin's imagination of the Indian jugglers as bodies to discipline—indeed, they are imprisoned without cause due to Franklin's suspicion of them—is fraught by the fact that Franklin's uncle stole the diamond from India in the first place. As Hall and Rose write, the "sense of being in control" in the metropole "is persistently haunted by the consequences of the violence upon which that control is based" (25).(^)

(8)Among scholars who have examined *The Moonstone* in the context of the 1857 Uprising, Vicki Corkran Willey, Ashish Roy, and Jaya Mehta offer particularly useful analyses.(^)

(9)See Jenny Sharpe and Angela Woollacott for more on the racial, gendered, and sexual dynamics of the trope of Indian men waiting to violate English women in British cultural memory post-1857.(^)

(10)Catherine Hall and Sonya Rose urge us to think of the British metropole as "an *imperial* 'home,'" the boundary between it and its "outside" an illusion and thus the associations of "home" with "comfort and ease or security and protection" that must be defended a "fantasy" (25).(^)

(11)Such a blurring should be read in the context of the 1860s, a period in which, Ian Duncan writes, "the empire appeared on the brink of disintegration, held precariously together by force," and "a new, dark vision of India emerged..." (Duncan 15).(^)

(12)Heller reads the Sand as evocative of working-class struggle (*Dead Secrets* 149), as does Jaya Mehta (625), who also reminds us that 1848, the year in which *The Moonstone* is set, was quite significant for working-class uprisings. With regard to colonial struggle, Mehta argues that the Sand evokes both the Black Hole of Calcutta and Cawnpore (623).(^)

(13)Heller reads the quaking of the quicksand as evocative also of female orgasm in its dramatic shaking (*Dead Secrets* 149).(^)

(14)The inclination to read Ezra's desire for Franklin as homosexual has not gone unnoticed by scholars, as I discuss in more detail below. Perhaps one of the most interesting recent expressions of this inclination appears in Dan Simmons' 2009 novel *Drood*, a novel that follows

the friendship between Wilkie Collins and Charles Dickens. At one point, Dickens tells Collins (the narrator of *Drood*) that “Your Ezra Jennings, of all the diseased and unnatural characters you have created in your quest for the sensational, is the most repellant and disturbing” (545). “Ezra Jennings,” he says “shows every sign of inversion.” By inversion, he means that “it is obvious to everyone reading *The Moonstone* that Ezra Jennings is a sodomite.”(^)

(15)Broca’s *On the Phenomena of Hybridity in the Genus Homo* (1860) declared that “modern France was all the stronger for being a hybrid nation”—because the “affinity” between the “types” that had mixed was considered “proximate” (McBratney 80).( ^)

(16)Ezra’s nose is described as reminiscent of “the fine shape and modeling so often found among the ancient people of the East, so seldom visible among the newer races of the West” (326). He is thus associated with an “eastern” racial “type” that gives a general sense of where he might fall in a racial hierarchy.( ^)

(17)“Racialism” was, as Nancy Leys Stepan puts it, “part of the very modernity of science” (66). James Hunt’s initiation of the Anthropological Society in 1863, five years before the publication of *The Moonstone*, provided a space for members eager to advance the notion that race determined a people’s cultural and racial attributes. The establishment of the Society also resulted in printed venues for articles in physical anthropology—relying on anatomical/craniological measurement—and for praise of Governor Eyre, who violently suppressed the Jamaican Rebellion of 1865 (Rainger 62-63).( ^)

(18)Apart from Ezra and Franklin’s personal relationship, there is a larger power relationship at stake here, one that is framed in this 1868 novel by the cultural memory of the 1857 Indian Uprising. As Antoinette Burton writes, “...the Mutiny brought images of empire home to Britons like no other event of the century—thereby revealing the fragility of British imperial rule to a generation of Victorians for whom the power of the Raj had appeared untouchable” (215). Ezra’s embodiment of colonial otherness—and the response others have to him—marks this fragility.( ^)

(19)Lady Verinder appoints Mr. Ablewhite (Godfrey’s father) as Rachel’s legal guardian in her will; however, once Rachel breaks off her engagement with Godfrey, Mr. Ablewhite relinquishes this responsibility, leaving the family lawyer Mr. Bruff as Rachel’s guardian (268-269).( ^)

(20)During the actual experiment, there are further signs that Ezra has taken over as master of the house. The gardener’s wife, for instance, does not know what to do with herself, expressing “an excessive civility which is plainly the offspring of downright terror. She stares, trembles, and curtsies” when Ezra speaks to her (414). The excessive curtsying satirizes a form of Victorian reverence, making transparent the strangeness of the act when the servant is given a new master. (^)

(21)Ezra instructs Franklin to invite Mr. Bruff, as well (410). That Ezra orchestrates the invitation of Rachel’s legal guardian also suggests the degree of authority he has over the household. Jenny Bourne Taylor points out the theatrical dimension to the experiment, yet

Ezra's mediation of who will be in the house, and of the kind of reunion that can take place between Rachel and Franklin, surpasses theatricality to suggest domestic control.(^)

(22)Eve Sedgwick introduces the triangle as a schema within which “in any erotic rivalry, the bond that links the two rivals is as intense and potent as the bond that links either of the rivals to the beloved: that the bonds of ‘rivalry’ and ‘love,’ differently as they are experienced, are equally powerful and in many senses equivalent” (21). My use of “triangulation” is not the same as Sedgwick's. While Rachel and Ezra can perhaps be seen as rivals for Franklin's “love,” this is not how I am reading them; my sense of the triangulation of desires is that Ezra radically reconfigures the terms according to which “love” between Rachel and Franklin can be realized, even as he simultaneously experiences a desiring relationship with Franklin himself. Ezra enables Rachel and Franklin's love through his own participatory role, rather than engaging in a rivalry with Rachel. Ezra and Franklin are not contending for Rachel's heart, despite some attraction to Rachel on Ezra's part, so the triangulation model that Sedgwick outlines is different from my use of triangulation in any case.(^)

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