

Mediating between the Private and the Political

Melancholy and Imperialism in *The Light That Failed*

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Introduction

As the author of novels such as *The Jungle Book* (1894) and *Kim* (1901), Rudyard Kipling is often regarded as a mediator between East and West. Yet *The Light That Failed* (1891), his first novel, offers little celebration of cross-cultural interaction, and has long been considered a failure. Pierre Coustillas summarizes the book concisely: “brilliant though the story might be in some respects, it was not quite a novel in the usual sense of the term, but rather a series of scenes about the lives of Dick Helder and his ladylove Maisie” (Coustillas 127). Likewise, Edward Said describes this novel as one of Kipling’s “deeply flawed longer works” (Said 132). These criticisms stem, in part, from Kipling’s characterizations. The novel starts with Dick and Maisie’s childhoods and, even after they become adults, Dick’s unrequited love story continues to the end. The self-centered nature of this protagonist makes it difficult for the reader to empathize with, or maintain an interest in, his life.

Nevertheless, this ostensibly melodramatic and melancholic story does not merely depict the love relationship between Maisie and Dick. In fact, the narrative of imperialism is deeply implicated within the story. Imperialism is closely associated with masculine thinking and power and, thus, seems to stand far away from the idea of melancholy. However, in this novel, imperialism and melancholy turn out to be closely connected with each other.

To begin with, I will give a summary of the storyline. It starts with the childhood scenes in which Dick and Maisie are raised in the same home by their unfairly severe guardian. Dick falls in love with Maisie as they go through the harsh environment together. From a young age, Maisie is fond of painting and before she is sent to France to be educated, she encourages Dick to paint for his living, too. He subsequently becomes a war artist and paints pictures at various battlefields. When working in the Sudan, he is involved in combat and gets a sword cut to his head, which will ultimately lead to his blindness. As adults, Dick and Maisie accidentally meet each other again in London. Dick has been successful in his painting career whereas Maisie has not, despite her long-standing efforts. Because of that, he begins to visit Maisie's house on Sundays, where she lives with a red-haired girl, so that she can improve her paintings. One day, Dick finds that Maisie is working on a new piece called "Melancholia." Maisie challenges Dick by saying that he could not produce such a work because he can only paint "blood and bones" (118). Feeling irritated by the remark, he is determined to paint his interpretation of Melancholia in order to best her. In the process of creating the picture, Dick's eyesight starts to fail due to the wound he received in the Sudan. As soon as Dick completes his Melancholia, which astonishes his longstanding companion, Torpenhow, he completely loses his eyesight. However, soon afterwards, the painting is destroyed by Bessie, the model for it, who was treated terribly by Dick. Owing to his blindness, Dick remains unaware of this fact for some time, until Bessie eventually tells him. In the end, Dick, longing to be reunited with Torpenhow, who has returned to the Sudan to fight once again, heads recklessly to the battlefield. He is killed almost immediately by a bullet from the enemy, and dies in Torpenhow's arms.

Dick's outstanding immaturity deserves attention as it is closely connected with imperialism, which binds this novel by means of an

invisible but absolute power. Also, his childish behavior leads to a rise in the status of the imperial authority. The imperialism that can be discerned in this book seems to be strengthened by Dick's actions, which create his own version of imperialism. Dick is completely indifferent to the goals and consequences of the British Empire as long as he can work freely and he is bold enough to seek to conquer the world by himself. His frame of mind is articulated at a critical point in the novel when he confesses his love to Maisie in the first chapter: "And I—love you, Maisie" he said, in a whisper that seemed to him to ring across the world,—the world that he would tomorrow or the next day set out to conquer" (18). Yet, Dick's self-assertive idea is ultimately crushed under the silent pressure of the British Empire. All in all, the tone of the narrative is far from delightful. Comparing the novel with *Kim* (1901), Kim works as a spy for the Empire. Although he appears to waver between staying with the lama and working for the Empire, he enjoys his role and serving as a subject, working on the frontier. Said observes that "[Kim's boyish pleasures] do not contradict the overall political purpose of British control over India and Britain's other overseas dominions: on the contrary, *pleasure* whose steady presence in many forms of imperial-colonial writing as well as figurative and musical art is often left undiscussed, is an undeniable component of *Kim*" (137). He further states that "Kim, Creighton, Mahbub, the Babu, and even the lama see India as Kipling saw it, as a part of the empire. And . . . Kipling minutely preserves the traces of this vision when he had Kim — a humble Irish boy, lower on the hierarchical scale than full-blooded Englishmen — reassert his British priorities well before the lama comes along to bless them" (145). As Kipling portrayed Kim happily serving the aims of imperialism, he has Dick suffer from not serving the purposes of the British Empire. Both ways of dealing with the protagonists seem to be two sides of the same coin. By reading *The Light That Failed* closely, I will investigate how

its characters, created out of Kipling's experience of the British Empire, suffer, which consequently strengthens the power of imperialism.

With regard to melancholia, Sigmund Freud writes, with some reservation, in "Mourning and Melancholia":

[T]he object [of the loss] has not perhaps actually died, but has become lost as an object of love. . . . In yet other cases, one feels justified in concluding that a loss of the kind has been experienced, but one cannot see clearly what has been lost, and may the more readily suppose that the patient too cannot consciously perceive what it is he has lost. This, indeed, might be even so when the patient was aware of the loss giving rise to the melancholia, that is, when he knows whom he has lost but not what it is he has lost in them. This would suggest that melancholia is in some way related to an unconscious loss of a love-object (155)

This idea is applicable to the descriptions of Dick's melancholia. Dick is unwilling to work hand in hand with people from England; in fact, he holds hatred towards them. This implies that Dick cannot fully identify himself as a member of the British Empire. For Dick, the British Empire seems to be lost as an object of love. Although his apparent love is directed to Maisie, his hidden love appears to be directed to the British Empire in a form of melancholy. Indeed, images of the Empire are always lurking against images of Maisie. That is to say, the British Empire is his unconscious object of love, which is lost for Dick. This causes his distress throughout the novel.

Conquering the World and Imperialism

Dick's determination to conquer the world appears personal because this ambition first appears in the context of confessing his love to

Maisie. The dream Dick had on that day reveals that he wants to conquer the world for the sake of Maisie: “That night he dreamed a wild dream. He had won all the world and brought it to Maisie in a cartridge-box” (18). However, Dick’s private thoughts of conquering the world are always accompanied by thinly veiled imagery of the British Empire at the back of his mind.

The warfare scenes described in the novel are founded upon a historically significant event, namely the death of Charles Gordon. It must have brought great impact to the British in those days. In the following section, I will specify the contemporary conditions on which the story is based and consider the scenes of armed conflict. In these, Dick’s private matters are foregrounded but, at the same time, the magnitude of the historical incident can be sensed through the voice of an indigenous person from afar. By so doing, I would like to delineate the imperialistic idea this novel holds.

British Empire

Throughout the novel, the relationship between Dick and Maisie takes the center stage but the figure of the British Empire is always behind them. The political background of the story is barely mentioned since Dick does not show interest in political matters. However, political issues still play an important role; for example, the battles which lead first to Dick’s blindness and later his death are the result of British political decision-making. Hence, the historical background is worth exploring to find the connection between political issues and Dick’s private stories.

Considering the scene of the expedition in the Sudan, the main setting can be surmised as 1884-85 and thereafter. In Chapter 2 of the novel, the description of the Sudan reveals the period: “[The British] were moving somewhere, they did not know why, to do something, they did not what. Before them lay the Nile, and at the other end of it

was one Gordon, fighting for the dear life, in a town called Khartoum” (20). Likewise, the implication that the Charles Gordon has died sets the time-period as January 26th 1885 (29).¹ Therefore, it is safe to say that the background of the story would be 1884-85 and thereafter.

The significance at that time of retaining Khartoum cannot be overestimated. If the empire was to lose Khartoum, it could mean the Mahdi might extend his power into other highly important territories. Dominic Green observes that “[if] the Mahdi took Khartoum, the Nile Valley was open all the way to the Mediterranean. If he took the Red Sea ports, his army could reach Arabia. The provinces of the Ottoman Empire would tumble like dominoes, and their fall would block the India Route” (149). Thus, defending Khartoum was essential for maintaining British imperial power.

Furthermore, the loss of Gordon resulted in a devastating impact on the public. In fact, Gilbert and Reynolds register the following sentence in the entry of “Gordon, Charles” in *Historical Dictionary of the Sudan* (2013): “[this event dealt] the British one of the most famous defeats in colonial history” (216). Likewise, Jad Adams observes that “[t]he slaughter of Gordon and the loss of the Sudan to what were considered savages was a burning political issue which was to continue through most of the decade” (22). Green describes the atmosphere after the event as follows: “A wave of sorrow, sentiment, guilt, patriotism surged through the press, and met another wave of spontaneous public distress and outrage. The loss of Khartoum was a humiliation for British arms at the hands of ‘Dervish’ savages; an embarrassment to ethnic dignity at the hands of half-naked ‘Fuzzy-Wuzzies’ . . . a hammer blow to Britain’s imperial prestige” (199). Even Queen Victoria could not tolerate the incident. Green goes on to quote her words: “‘Our power in the East will be ruined,’ raged the queen, whose patriotism and pride in forward policy embodied the national mood. ‘We shall never be able to hold up our heads again’” (199).

Consequently, “the death of Gordon set off a wave of popular protest against the Gladstone government in England, joined by Queen Victoria herself” (Kramer 183). Although the impact of this historical event upon the public was huge, Kipling did not relate the atmosphere directly in the novel.

Ambition of Dick and the Empire

As mentioned above, the narrator suggests that Dick wishes to conquer the world. Nevertheless, he is reluctant to become a member of the imperial system that aspires to expand its territory by invading other countries and ruling them systematically. He prefers to pursue his own way of conquering the world. Here, I try to clarify the position in which Dick places himself and what “conquering the world” means for him.

Firstly, he refuses to be subordinated by anyone. Immediately after Dick thinks of “the world that he would tomorrow or the next day set out to conquer” (18), he rebels against his extremely domineering guardian and the sudden change of his behavior stuns her. When he makes excuses for his gunpowder-stained face — a result of Maisie’s carelessness with a loaded pistol — he shows his strong defiance against Mrs Jennett:

‘I was playing with it, and it went off by itself, . . . but if you think you’re going to lick me you’re wrong. You are never going to touch me again. Sit down and give me my tea. You can’t cheat us out of that, anyhow.’ Mrs Jennett gasped and became livid. (18)

Furthermore, Dick strongly fights against being incorporated by the Central Southern Syndicate, asking Torpenhow whether they will allow him to paint in his own way (23). When the representative of the company was about to appropriate many of his sketches, Dick prevents

it from happening by intimidating the man in a very violent manner (39). Like these, he rejects being subject to his superiors, whether it be his guardian or his boss.

Although Dick distances himself from British metropolitan authority, he shares the same idea of conquering the world. The world he experiences in real life reveals itself in his excited imagination. According to Dick's interpretation of the world, "you order an ivory-white servant to sling you a long yellow hammock with tassels on it like ripe maize, and you put up your feet and hear the bees hum and the water fall till you go to sleep" (83). Said observes that "[struggle over geography] is complex and interesting because it is not only about soldiers and cannons but also about ideas, about forms, about images and imaginings" (7). Given that Dick's portrayal of foreign lands is extremely glorified, his descriptions of the world appear to be created out of his "images and imaginings" of foreign lands. The congruence between Dick's imaginings and the idea of the Empire is remarkable. All these things considered, his idea of dominating the world and that of Empire are not very different from each other.

However, his ambition of dominating the world is not straightforward. There is an important passage in examining the meaning of conquering the world for Dick. After an excursion with Maisie, the narration reveals Dick's inner turmoil over the values and costs of empire-building: "Dick was settling a question with himself—and the question was whether all the world, and all that was therein, and a burning desire to exploit both, was worth one threepenny piece thrown into the Thames" (115). Maisie gave Dick the "threepenny piece" to encourage him to spend time painting what he wanted, rather than having to turn his talent into a labor commodity and take commissioned work. Dick's attempts to earn money from his painting has a negative impact on him but the "threepenny piece" from Maisie only causes him further agony: "'And she understood at once,' he said,

looking at the water. ‘She found out my pet besetting sin on the spot, and paid it off. My God, how she understood!’” (95). For Dick, exploiting all the globe and everything in it means that he paints his pictures all over the world to attract the public’s attention. Dick’s ambition, however, starts to waver once the void he has been trying to fill in by himself was finally filled by Maisie. Dick’s ambition therefore contains some uncertainty.

On the whole, Dick’s version of conquering the world is carried out by way of his profession, namely to capture on canvas the world and the things that lie within it. Although he is not willing to espouse the ideas of the British Empire, the romanticized images of the colonial world entice him to cross the ocean. In this way, the differences between Dick’s imperialism and that of the British Empire are effaced, even if Dick’s ideological motivations still contain some indeterminacy.

The Juxtaposition of Political Issues and Dick’s Private Stories

The war scene in Chapter 2 brings old memories back to Dick. Recollections from his private life seem to take over the scene in a form of delirium. At the end of the battle, the sight of the revolver and the red light reminds Dick of when, as children, he and Maisie practised firing a gun:

There was the revolver and the red light . . . and the voice of some one scaring something away, exactly as had fallen somewhere before, —probably in a past life. Dick waited for what should happen afterwards. Something seems to crack inside his head, and for an instant he stood in the dark, —a darkness across the desert as he muttered, “Spoilt my aim. There aren’t any more cartridges. We shall have to run home.” He put his hand to his head and brought it away covered with

blood. (28)

The sight of the revolver and the red light triggers his past memory and the cut to his head starts his delirium, which seems to make its presence felt more against the death of Gordon.

The death of Gordon follows the above-mentioned scene. Here, the clear contrast between the names of Gordon and Maisie can be seen and this appears to increase the importance of Dick's private story. On top of that, considering the huge impact upon the British public caused by the death, this contrast should be immensely meaningful. In the novel, the implication that Gordon died is made by an African after the battle:

All that night, when the troops were encamped by the whale-boats, a black figure danced in the strong moonlight on the sand-bar and shouted that Gordon the accursed one was dead,—was dead, was dead,—that two steamers were rock-staked on the Nile outside the city, and that of all their crews there remained not one; and Gordon was dead, —was dead, —was dead! (29)

As mentioned earlier, this defeat was a humiliation for the British Empire. The description that follows in the novel, however, shows that Torpenhow does not pay attention to it as he observes Dick, still stuck in his delirium:

But Torpenhow took no heed. He was watching Dick, who was calling aloud to the restless Nile for Maisie,—and again Maisie! “Behold a phenomenon,” said Torpenhow, rearranging the blanket. “Here is a man, presumably human, who mentions the name of one woman only. And I’ve seen a good deal of

delirium, too.—Dick, here's some fizzy drink.” “Thank you Maisie,” said Dick. (29)

In the last chapter, Maisie's name is once more invoked on the battle field: “‘What luck! What stupendous and imperial luck!’ said Dick. ‘It's “just before the battle, mother.” Oh, God has been most good to me! Only’—the agony of the thought made him screw up his eyes for an instant—‘Maisie...’ (219). It is understandable that a person remembers someone very dear to him at his last moment but his repetitive calling of her name, and the vivid contrast with the name of Gordon, undermines the significance of the critical issues the British government faced at the time. Considering the magnitude of Gordon's death for the British public and British Empire, the calling of the Maisie's name lessens the presence of the historical incident. Also, the resulting responses from Torpenhow and Dick's continuous ravings also seem to accentuate the story of Dick.

Pitting his private stories against the more politically significant event contributes to the excessively self-assertive nature of the novel. The above-mentioned scenes show that Dick's life is the primary focus and seems to be more valued. To put another way, Dick's own story is foregrounded against the British Empire, as if his struggles are more important. This is how Dick's character undermines the importance of the British Empire.

Dick's viewpoint of the world is bound by a negative sense of fate, which suggests he will end up in failure as an artist. Binat, who was once a painter, too, and has “a blue-white face” with a shaking voice, announces Dick's fate “from a cot in the inner room”: “‘We all know Monsieur is an artist, as I have been.’ Dick nodded. ‘In the end,’ said Binat, with gravity, ‘Monsieur will descend alive into Hell, as I have descended.’ And he laughed” (31). It is worth taking note of this pronouncement from Binat because he was once a talented artist like

Dick. The great art teacher Kami, who was Maisie's teacher and whom Dick formerly worked under, always told his students at the end of his classes: "'Of the so many I have taught,'—here students would begin to unfix drawing-pins or get their tubes together, —'the very so many that I have taught, the best was Binat'" (163). Kami went on to say that Binat did not have much success because he lacked conviction (163). Furthermore, Dick's most reliable companion, Torpenhow, suggests a similar fate awaits Dick because he has neglected his work since his success: "'It's no business of mine, of course, but it's comforting to think that somewhere under the stars there's saving up for you a tremendous thrashing. Whether it'll come from Heaven or Earth I don't know, but it's bound to come and break you up a little. You want hammering'" (63). Dick also recognizes the existence of his fate, such as after the excursion with Maisie: "Dick made his prayer to Fate disjointedly after the manner of the heathen If any evil were to befall, let him bear the burden and let Maisie go unscathed" (95). These quotations indicate that Dick's fate will not be a positive one, implying his failure as an artist.

As Peter Havholm remarks, "Dick sees his blindness as a punishment visited upon him by a 'very just Providence'" (93). Dick is to be punished for his unacceptable behaviour, such as harboring malice towards the English. When Torpenhow admonishes Dick for producing art for the sake of money, Dick admits the Torpenhow's criticism is valid:

"You will get drunk—you're half drunk already—on easily acquired money. For that money and your own infernal vanity you are willing to deliberately turn out bad work. . . . Dickie, as I love you and as I know you love me, I am not going to let you cut off your nose to spite your face for all the gold in England. That's settled. Now swear." "Don't know," said Dick. "I've

been trying to make myself angry, but I can't; you're so abominably reasonable. . . ." (45)

Dick understands what Torpenhow tells him but he still cannot entirely agree because “[Torpenhow has] no notion what the certainty of cash means to a man who has always wanted it badly” (45-46). Certainly, Dick fears poverty and that is why he paints pictures that appeal to the public, but even when he has money coming in, he is still not satisfied. This discontent is linked with Dick's thoughts on the “threepenny piece” discussed above, and his financial concerns are entangled with his perceptions of the bleak landscape in London (33) and his animosity towards people in England. His hostility towards his fellow citizens in London is described as follows: “[Dick] saw that one of his shoes was burst at the side. As he stooped to make investigations, a man jostled him into the gutter. ‘All right,’ [Dick] said. ‘That’s another nick in the score. I’ll jostle you later on’” (33). As another example, Dick also says, “now I’ve got [a lot of money] I am going to make the most of it while it lasts. Let [the English] pay—they’ve no knowledge” (46). Right after that, Torpenhow reminds Dick of how the British people should behave, and his lecture starts with the sentence “‘What does Your Majesty please to want?’” (46). In short, turning out bad works and decrying the English ultimately leads to the punishment he suffers as his fate.

To sum up, Dick's fate is intertwined with that of the British Empire and his punishment comes from his rejection of its ideals. Although Dick boldly attempts to control his own destiny, he struggles to evade the restrictions imposed by the British Empire. Even though the focus is shifted by the novel's foregrounding of Dick's private story, British authority has inescapable influence over Dick as it still binds him and, finally, mortally, provides his punishment.

Melancholy and Imperialism

Next, I will illustrate that Dick's melancholy is tinted by imperialism and explore how the British Empire makes an impact upon Dick's imperialistic way of thinking. To begin with, I will describe how Dick's melancholic feeling is connected with his memories of colonial experiences. After Dick goes blind, Torpenhow takes him out for a walk. Dick looks pensive when he hears the music being played by a passing military troop:

“What’s the matter?” said Torpenhow, as he saw Dick’s head fall when the last of the regiment had departed. “Nothing. I feel a little bit out of the running, —that’s all. Torp, take me back. Why did you bring me out?” (150)

Later on, following a gathering at Torpenhow’s apartment of war correspondents Dick previously worked with, he experiences a similar feeling of distress:

The excitement of the talk had died away. Dick was sitting by the studio table, with his head on his arms, when the men came in. He did not change his position. “It hurts,” he moaned. “God forgive me, but it hurts cruelly; and yet, y’know, the world has a knack of spinning round all by itself. Shall I see Torp before he goes?” “Oh yes. You’ll see him,” said the Nilghai. (158)

Considering these descriptions, it is reasonable to say that the source of Dick’s melancholy is derived from his own experience gained in the colonial space.

Moreover, his disconnection from British imperial power is also an essential factor to create such feelings. The first quotation reveals that not being able to join the group which serves under the Empire

provokes his melancholic feeling. Eric Solomon draws on the same scene and observes that:

The melodramatic tragedy of Dick's blindness (caused by his war wound) is underscored by a poignancy that comes not from the loss of love or ability to paint, but from the loss of the ability to go to war. Dick's disaster is that he cannot join in the bustling excitement of the writer's preparations for new adventure. The most intensely sentimental moment of the novel comes when the blind Dick hears the Guards marching through the park. (Solomon 33)

The idea that his melancholy is caused by his inability to join the military group implies that if he were not visually disabled he would be most likely to be headed toward the frontier. According to Freud's idea of melancholy, "an unconscious loss of a love-object" is relevant to creating melancholic feelings (155). For Dick, the love-object he unconsciously thinks is lost is his connection with the British Empire. This is why Dick feels intense melancholy when he encounters the British regiment or people who work for the Empire. In other words, Dick's smoldering desire to work for the Empire is revealed in a form of melancholy. Thus, it is not until he is severed from the power entirely that his melancholy is vividly actuated.

Through the descriptions of the novel, the Empire cannot be accessed except by the male characters and, therefore, Maisie is not interested in Dick's explication of life in Africa. For instance, Dick's over-exaggerated recollections of the African landscape have little effect on her. Dick begins: "Maisie, come with me and I'll show you something of the size of the world," and almost two full pages are allocated to his speech. Maisie's comments, however, are only five short responses: "'Who is afraid? —you, or the sun?', 'Can one work

there?', 'I don't like that place. It sounds lazy. Tell me another,' 'Is all that true?', 'Why?'" (82-84). It is clear that Maisie, unlike Dick, is not fascinated by the foreign land. On the other side, the fact that he enjoyed the overseas landscapes plays a vital role in Dick's artistic career.

On the contrary, the novel suggests that Maisie cannot become successful because she has never been to, or had any interest in, the far reaches of the British Empire. This creates a distinct difference between their artistic output and Maisie's unsuccessful career causes her melancholy. Zainab Ayoub astutely criticizes Dick's patriarchal attitudes, and she notes the advantage to Dick's career provided by his travel overseas. This is connected, in no small way, to the greater opportunities available to men in the Victorian period: "Maisie's art suffers as a direct result of not seeing what Dick has seen of the world . . . Maisie does not seem to understand that her failure as an artist has nothing to do with how hard she works, but everything to do with the content of it" (55). Needless to say, Dick is in a privileged, male position to gather frontline experiences of war. In short, his artistic success is, to a large extent, dependent upon his exotic experiences.

References to Maisie come up frequently with the word "queen," such as the repeated phrase, "The queen can do no wrong." Therefore, Maisie can be interpreted as a character associated with British imperial authority. This notion recurs throughout the novel: "Moreover, the Queen can do no wrong" (59), "ye lead the Faery Queen 'Twill burst your heart in twain'" (64) and "he is bound by hand and foot to the Queen o' Faery-land" (64), "This . . . is evidently the thrashing that Torp meant. It hurts more than I expected; but the Queen can do no wrong" (64), "he came very near to being disgusted with his Queen who could do no wrong" (116), "He arrived at the proposition that the Queen could do no wrong" (119), "putting aside all Melancholias and

false humours, it is of obvious notoriety . . . that Queen can do no wrong” (146), “through all his ravings he bade Heaven and Earth witness that the Queen could do no wrong” (147), “The Queen could do no wrong, but . . . so far as it served her work, she had wounded her one subject more than his own brain would let him know” (171). These somewhat excessive repetitions of the expression encourage the reader to challenge the assumption that Dick is too much in love with Maisie to criticize her. To put it clearly, those repetitive expressions seem to be inexorably linked with the Queen, who metonymically stands for the British metropolitan authority. This indicates the complicated relationship Dick has with British authority and also suggests the power imbalance in his relationship with Maisie that keeps them apart. Although J.E. Monro postulates that Maisie’s inability to have a deeper relationship with Dick is caused by the cruel treatment she underwent in her childhood, she is also figured as the British metropolitan institution, remote from the private lives of ordinary men.

Finally, an imperial framework dominates Dick’s way of thinking, as his sense of self-worth depends on his utility to the Empire. He never searches for other means to regain his energy again after he becomes sightless and he becomes separate from the masculine world that continues its engagement in the tasks of Empire. David Bolt indicates the possibility that Dick might find value other than in vision, mentioning the scene where “he is presented with some modelling wax” (Bolt 101). In the novel, Nilghai brings this material to Dick: “The Nilghai entered with a gift, - a piece of red modelling-wax. He fancied that Dick might find interest in using his hands” (155). However, Dick is not interested in it: “Dick poked and patted the stuff for a few minutes, and, ‘Is it like anything in the world?’ he said drearily. ‘Take it away. I may get the touch of the blind in fifty years’” (155). Bolt subsequently observes, drawing on Georgina Kleege’s “Dialogues with the Blind,” that Dick “rejects the tacit suggestion that he might switch from

painting to sculpture because he is certain that switching from vision to touch will take too long” (Kleege cited by Bolt 102).

Although Dick attempts to be free from British authority and dominate the world in his own way, the powerful system of Empire does not let him behave as he wishes. Dick is not described as a member who willingly works for the Empire but his melancholy attests that he unconsciously loves the British Empire against his own apparent will.

Conclusion

Although this novel revolves around the private stories of Dick and Maisie, wider connections with the British Empire can be discerned through careful analysis. The unrelenting activities of the British Empire form the backdrop against which the characters’ lives play out, and its presence looms ever large over their lives. Melancholy and imperialism may sound incompatible with each other but function as materials to connect Dick’s private stories and the narrative of the Empire. This paper has shown how both themes are closely connected to each other.

Dick’s melancholic feelings arise when he is reminded of his colonial memories. On the face of it, he dislikes England, and the English people at its center, but his melancholic moments indicate that, deep down, he loves the Empire. Separated from the British Empire after he goes blind, his love for it is revealed by his melancholy.

Notes

1. “Refusing surrender and even an offer from the Mahdi of safe conduct out of Sudan, Gordon was killed on 26 January 1885” (Kramer, et al., 183).

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