

A Variable Study of Kipling's the Light That Failed

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ABSTRACT: *For the most part held as the mouthpiece of Empire, Kipling's reactions to the equivalent are regularly loaded with duality and anxiety. The hero Dick Helder's push to beat his encounters of debased adolescence and build up himself as craftsman meets stunning and sudden end. In his expert and individual life he just got carelessness and antagonism in home and abroad. The overall Empire of Britain, as well, faces twofold hostility— note of disagreement from Liberal government officials at home and the ascent of against provincial development in settlements supported by more youthful radical countries like Germany and United States. The torment and loss of Dick estimates the unavoidable destruction of the magnificent endeavor whose brilliance is progressively blurred by the substantial value it lays upon its developers.*

Keyword: *Crush of the masterful desire portends the pulverize of magnificent experience*

Widely regarded as an artistic failure, *The Light That Failed* first made its debut in Lovell's Westminster Series in 1890 and reappeared in Lippincott's Monthly Magazine in the next year. The standard version is also dated 1891 containing fifteen chapters. As this is a less familiar novel of Kipling it would not be very impertinent to give a sketch of the happenings before concentrating on the hidden motif of the failure of imperial enterprise. The novel revolves around Dick Helder and his childhood playmate Maisie— both being English children living under the care of Mrs. Jennett, a stern, puritanical and frustrated woman. The autobiographical note is unmistakable as in his childhood Kipling himself was under the supervision of Mrs. Holloway in Lorne Lodge, his first residence in England and recollected as 'House of Desolation' in his memoirs. Grown up, both Maisie and Dick took art as profession and the latter became famous by means of his illustrations based on Britain's 1885 Sudan campaign. It is in Sudan that Dick came to be acquainted with Gilbert Torpenhow, a fellow war correspondent who played a significant part in determining Dick's career. It is also in Sudan where Dick is wounded on the forehead by the spear of an Arab. Although the wound is outwardly healed his optic nerve gets severely impaired. Already established as an artist, Dick returns to London and meets Maisie all on a sudden. But Maisie, a thinly veiled portrait of Florence Garrard who rejected Kipling's suit, is moulded in the cult of 'New Woman' and is entirely devoted to her own career. Her cold response to Dick's ardent passion is encouraged by her anonymous companion— a red-haired girl who is secretly in love with Dick. The red-haired girl, again a portrayal of the real life Mabel Price, makes a drawing of Dick's head and out of petty jealousy let it fall into the ashes of the stove to get smudged.

Although Dick put up with these psychological torments, he could not reconcile with Maisie's decision to go to France to finish 'Melancholia'— a would be portrait based upon James Thompson's poem "The City of Dreadful Night". Outraged, Dick begins to draw his own version of 'Melancholia' intending to show Maisie her lack of inspiration and zeal. But his long dormant wound wakes up and begins to severely trouble his eyesight. Just after the completion of his masterpiece under the influence of liquor Dick goes blind. Taking advantage of this situation his model Bessie Broke completely defaced the picture for sheer vindictiveness as Dick put an abrupt end to her affair with Torpenhow. Hearing Dick's raving in blindness Torpenhow came to know about Maisie, tracked her in France and returned with her to Dick. But Maisie, although immensely sorry for Dick, was "not sorry enough" to sacrifice her career and ambition by tying up with a man "down and done for" (Kipling 174). At this point Maisie departs from the story never to return again. Torpenhow too heads for Egypt. Bessie re-enters and Dick seems on the verge of taking her as a concubine. But knowing the truth about his 'Melancholia', Dick gives her up and goes to the battlefield of Sudan. He finds Torpenhow again and dies in his arms struck by a stray bullet.

A cursory glance upon Dick's life and career would make any critic assume that he was a powerful weapon to champion the idea— "Britannia rule the waves"¹ (qtd. in Faulkner 9). Adhering to the dictum of dominance, Dick is allowed to parade courage, gallantry, deceit and even cruelty in home and abroad. One can never forget the implication of Torpenhow's act of blinding an Arab in the battlefield of Egypt as recollected by Dick: "D'you remember that nigger you gouged in the square? Pity you didn't keep the odd eye" (Kipling 151). The jubilant attitude at the carnage and excitement of war becomes vividly manifest in one of his conversations with Maisie presumably upon the nature of art:

Once when I was out in the Sudan I went over some ground that we had been fighting on for three days. Therewere twelve hundred dead; and we hadn't time to bury them...The sight of that field taught me a good deal. It looked just like a bed of horrible toadstools in all colours, and — I'd never seen men in bulk go back to their beginnings before. So I began to understand that men and women were only material to work with, and that what they said or did was of no consequence (Kipling 85-86, Cited also in Pafford 114).

Little wonder that the idea of artistic inspiration out of these things which smell of "tobacco and blood" would baffle Maisie who is wholly concerned with immediate success (66). Thus according to Dick's guidance Maisie should concentrate on real life objects and must not pay too much heed to fame as it would mar the spontaneity and impulse necessary for any artistic output. But J.

M. S. Tompkins is careful to point out the colonizer's dubious attitude towards life and art: he [Dick] insists that to think of success is to produce bad work, but admits remorsefully to pleasure in the praise that even bad work brings him. He considers the ignorance of his audience, which yet it is suicidal to cheat or despise, and offsets his perception of the infinitesimal proportion of the world's population that cares for art as art by the pleasure of the untaught admirers...The sarcasticdefinitionofart— "findoutwhat the public likes and give it them again"— which marks the nadir of Dick's wilful debasement of his work for money, shows that Kipling had already accepted the clause in his contract with hisDaemon,...(10).

This unscrupulous attitude towards art and life is again visible in Dick's affair with a non-White woman during his voyage from Lima to Auckland. In Dick's memoir the woman appears as "Negroid- Jewess-Cuban with morals to match" (Kipling 104). It also appears that the woman is deprived of the skills of reading or writing thereby becoming a perfect bodily domain ready to be possessed by any White. In explaining the submissiveness of a non-White female to a representative of the Whites, Edward Said in his pioneering text *Orientalism* (1978)writes:

...Flaubert's encounter with an Egyptian courtesan produced a widely influential model of the Oriental woman; she never spoke of herself, she never represented her emotions, presence, or history. He spoke for and represented her. He was foreign, comparatively wealthy, male and these were historical facts of domination that allowed him not only to possess Kuchuk Hanem physically but to speak for her and tell his readers in what way she was "typically Oriental" (6).

Apart from the derogatory racial epithet and illiteracy the only other identity which Dick's one time mistress is allowed to have is that she is the woman of the captain. Thus in accordance with Said's critique of the popular Western conception of Oriental female she is rendered speechless. It is Dick who speaks for her. It is Dick's stature as an independent, White male in a colonial period which empowers him to possess the body of a female of non-White world. The jealousy of her former ward only fans the popular Western imagination of the effete Oriental male. Just as for Flaubert Kuchuk Hanem "is a disturbing symbol of fecundity, peculiarly Oriental in her luxuriant and seemingly unbounded sexuality", Kipling's Dick simply squeezed every moment of the opportunity to "unlimited love-making" inside the cabin (Said 187, Kipling 105). When their love is consummated physically Kuchuk Hanem, to resort to Said again, becomes Flaubert's "prototype of Salammbô and Salomé" (187). Likewise Dick's mistress, notesRobert

F. Moss, "supplies Dick with the inspiration and conviction he needs to light up and make meaningful his craftsmanlike rigours" (104). On the metaphorical level the process of colonization comes a full circle when the opulence of the colonized enriches the colonizer but most importantly it is done with the consent of the colonized people. Besides catering to the Western imperial hegemony the other subtle purpose served by Kipling is to confer an ethical and moral right upon the Occidental domination of the Orient.

When we concentrate upon Dick's encounter with his fellow men at home we find that he does not fall short of betraying courage when the need arises. Like his creator, Dick too, nurtured a lifelong aversion to the Decadent society of the late nineteenth century London. "Half a dozen epicene young pagans", the expression with which Dick gives vent to his rage against the Decadent artists, were not just ready to accept Dick's painting as works of art (Kipling 38). Kipling's biographer David Gilmour informs the reader that the attack was aimed at the pioneer of 'art for art's sake' movement— "the late Mr. Oscar Wilde" (94). As expected, the inability to payback the snobbery, deceit, hypocrisy of the London society in its own coin makes Dick resort to primitive measures. In the third chapter of the novel when the head of the Central Southern Syndicate (the farm for which Dick works) claims Dick's paintings as the property of the Syndicate, Dick chose to elicit justice for himself by means of threat to physical violence. Thus piercing the Syndicate man with his gaze Dick runs his rough hand over the sleek body of the former:

This thing's soft all over— like a woman...The head of the syndicate began to breathe heavily. Dick walked round him, pawing him, as a cat paws a soft hearth-rug. Then he traced with his forefinger the leaden pouches underneath the eyes, and shook his head. 'You were going to steal my things— mine, mine, mine!— you, who don't know when you may die...this will be a lesson to you; and if you worry me when I have settled down to work with any nonsense about actions for assault, believe me, I'll catch you and manhandle you, and you'll die. You haven't very long to live, anyhow. Go! Imshi, Voosak— get out!' (Kipling33-34)

Evidently Dick's treatment of this unfortunate rogue endows both of them with the roles of the colonizer and the colonized. Invested with the power of imperial gaze Dick assigns this new role to his butt of attack. The humiliation of Dick's prey becomes more poignant because Dick does not challenge him as an equal but rescued all the pictures before the very eyes of his one time employer treating the same as an abject, subhuman creature. The changing identity of Dick as a master/colonizer is reinforced by his using, observes Robert Hampson, Arabic and African imperatives apart from the English ones (Booth 13). The same logic explains how Dick champions the traditional male/female binary in treating his adversary in terms of the other sex. To cast light upon this more than unusual behaviour we have to recourse to double colonization of women and Dick's behaviour with them—White and non-White alike. In explaining 'the double colonization of women' in a colonized society John McLeod writes that this fact refers "to the ways in which women have simultaneously experienced the oppression of colonialism and patriarchy. . . women are twice colonised— by colonialist realities and representations, and by patriarchal ones too" (175). When we keep in mind Dick's relationship with women the appropriateness of this analogy strikes us at once. The text itself tells us that except for Maisie the only other woman who really cared for Dick with an almost maternal touch is Madame Binat. In her role as a governess to Dick and Maisie Mrs. Jennett is a total failure because of her priggishness and tyranny. Bessie Broke, "a dissolute little scarecrow— a gutter-snippet" in Dick's jibe, gave Dick physical intimacy in lieu of money (Kipling 126-127). Like Kipling, Dick too, never felt at ease with women of his own class. His experience with the women in Cairo, Alexandria, Ismailia and Port Said taught him that like the land of the non-Whites their females deserve and await possession by White men. The vices that Dick faces at home made him identify them as Oriental and deserve suppression by righteous Occidental domination. This explains Dick's manhandling of the Syndicate man and his initial derogatory remarks at Bessie Broke. Andrew Hagiioannu informs the readers that like the Syndicate in Dick's case, the London literary society expressed poor critical opinion of the novel which came to be known as 'The Book That Failed' and like his protagonist, Kipling too, "needed to escape London to recapture the essence of the frontier"(66).

Again in keeping parity with the egotistic masculinity of his hero Kipling gives Dick reason to believe, albeit momentarily, that his suit of Maisie will meet a successful end. Indeed in the alternative Lippincott version of the text, informs Geoffrey Annis, Kipling provided a tragicomedy by bringing Dick and Maisie happily together (n.p.). Even as a child a least encouragement from Maisie, either to defy Mrs. Jennett or an escape to the seashore, used to make Dick build castle in the air. After their chance meeting in London when Dick accompanies Maisie to their childhood place at Fort Keeling the reader is almost tempted to believe that a happy union is awaiting both of them. Dick is not cured of his illusions even after the blatant confession of Maisie of her inability to enter into a conjugal life:

I know what you want perfectly well, but I can't give it you, Dick. It isn't my fault, indeed it isn't. If I felt that I could care for anyone— But I don't feel that I care. I simply don't understand what the feeling means (Kipling 77).

What Maisie really does care for is her mediocre stature as an artist and she will go on her own way. She will neither come in Dick's life to help him through his career nor has she the potentiality to excel Dick. All the attempts of Dick to portray the world beyond the English Channel in lowing terms

— as source of artistic inspiration— came to no avail. An exact reflection of this can be traced back in real life when we consider that Kipling's career as a Nobel Laureate far outshines that of the moderately successful Florence Garrard. It is true that during her sojourn at Vitry-sur-Marne Maisie thought of Dick as "mine-mine-mine" (166) and again the readers are supposed to have faith upon their tender attachment. But this seemingly passionate avowal of love emanates from a mind obsessed with possession and success. One can see through the grotesqueness of the situation when as a child Maisie spoke of Amomma, their pet goat, as "mine, mine, mine"! (3) Yet Dick gets so enamoured that he forgets to pursue his own career by virtually stopping painting and indulging in day-dream. It is only after Maisie's desertion of him after his blindness that Dick could be cured of his illusions.

But if Kipling allows Dick to taste the bliss of being a White man with all desirable possessions the subsequent events of his life and their outcomes certainly put all his achievements in question. Himself travelled widely and being in Egypt and Sudan Kipling was well aware of the fate of the British soldiers slain on foreign soil. Speaking in the context of Indian subcontinent Kipling emphasizes the sacrifice of the English in a letter to Margaret Burne-Jones on 28 November, 1885:

There is no such thing as the natives of India, any more than there is the "People of India"...if we didn't hold the land in six months it would be one big cock pit of conflicting princelets...the English as a rule feel the welfare of the natives much at heart...For what else do the best men of the Commission die from overwork, and disease, if not to keep the people alive in the first place and healthy in the second. We spend our best men on the country like water and if ever a foreign country was made better through "the blood of the martyrs" India is that country (qtd. in Pinney 98).

Behind this façade of self-tribulation lurks a stark reality— the Whites have to pay a heavy price to

keep an unwilling people under control. The price namely losing the lives of many yet-to-bloom youths like Dick would severely affect the mother country's economy and human resource. It is easy to praise the exploits of these hapless youths effusively. But a glance upon their sheer number is enough to dawn upon the reader that they would probably do far better work had they been allowed to live. In this context James K. Lyon reminds us that Dick, otherwise all praise for army life, could not produce his 'Melancholia' during wartime: "...*The Light That Failed+", notes Lyon "can also be read as a powerful argument that great art, which in some cases arises out of human suffering, cannot emerge from the senseless slaughter of modern war"(115).

It is in this excruciating physical and psychological torment— pain in ailing eyes and the trauma by Maisie's wounding indifference— that Dick accomplished his masterpiece 'Melancholia'. Like his falling eyesight the work itself is doomed to the petty spite of Bessie. On the surface level the very act of completion of the work may embody the motto of the work itself

...Baffled and beaten back she works on still, Weary and sick of soul she works the more, Sustained by her indomitable will: ...

Till Death the friend-foe piercing with his sabre

That mighty heart of hearts ends bitter war (qtd. in Annis n.p.)

As Thompson's poem, writes Annis, is about a woman, a reversal of gender is necessary to understand the heroic aspect of Dick's work (n.p.). But taking it as a metaphor of the imperial enterprise one can see through the hardship required to build up an Empire. But this enterprise remains in the danger of getting dismantled by the degenerate elements—enemies within and outside. It is a well known fact that Kipling had a lifelong aversion to the Liberal politicians, much like he detested the aesthetes in literary field. It is this temper which makes Kipling defend the Empire from the attack of the Liberals in the lines: "And what should they know of England who only England know? (Kipling, Complete Verse 221) In keeping with this imperialistic fervour Kipling allows Dick warmth, success, victory on foreign soil. But the scenario alters when Dick confronts the self-centred, snobbish, hypocritical London society. Thus to Kipling it is not the belligerent subjects who pose the real threat to the Empire. But the danger lies within the heart of the Empire, in her own unworthy children who can drain the vitality and moral of the Empire builder so much that they may fall easy victim to their enemies.

The act of sapping the Empire builder of his strength is done almost by every Londoner— the Syndicate man, Bessie Broke, Mr. Beeton, even the insignificant side character, who according to Dick's version did not pay his due, a sum of meagre threepence to Dick. But none of them could make so deep a gush as Maisie. It is true that she does not covet Dick's financial security or let him give reason to believe that she is going to be his mistress in order to play upon his love thereby securing her artistic career and finance. But "her depredations", explains Robert F. Moss "are at once subtler and more devastating, for they are emotional, spiritual and aesthetic" (99). She is even frank to state her syphoning of Dick: "...there is so much in my work that you could help me in. You know things and the ways of doing things. You must" (Kipling 55). True to her nature Maisie could not make up her mind as what to do after hearing the news of Dick's blindness. Although persuaded to come to see Dick by the insistence of the anonymous 'red-haired' girl, Maisie finally shrinks from the responsibilities expected of her—namely nursing Dick back to health and become his wife. For her present inconvenience—a rush from Vitry-sur-Marne to London with a stranger—aptly she blames Dick in the words: "It was all Dick's fault for being so stupid as to go blind" (Kipling 172). Kipling's perhaps, too harsh censure of Maisie is excusable when the readers are reminded of Florence Garrard's icy unresponsiveness towards young Rudyard. Noticing her brother's failing health and emotional breakdown Trix, Kipling's sister, charged Florence as "naturally cold" and as one obsessed with "her very ineffective little pictures" (qtd. in Wilson 154). What Kipling and hence Dick could not accept is the repeated failure in his attempt to assign a stereotyped role of fiancé upon Florence/Maisie. The moment Maisie breaks away from all her attachment to Dick, she becomes 'destructive' in Kipling's favoured pattern of homosocial world where men and women must abide by their respective roles. Maisie's transgression of her predestined sphere, can be traced back to her early childhood, when she accidentally injures Dick with pistol. This incident, to cite Hampson, "ironically foreshadows what the novel presents as Maisie's ultimate role in Dick's life: Dick's final journey to the battlefield can be read as suicide, but it is also the suicide to which Maisie has driven him" (qtd. in Booth 18).

The fact which makes Dick's agony prolong and intensely acute is that he tries to cling upon hopes one after another before his final exodus from English soil. The company of Torpenhow which Dick valued next only to Maisie was to terminate as the former was shortly rejoining the army. Just when Dick was considering Bessie as a future mistress from whom any gratification is purchasable the latter confessed her terrible retribution leaving Dick virtually alone in the hand of Providence. Bessie is unforgivable because according to Kipling's ethical code, "a man may forgive those who ruin the love of his life, but he will never forgive the destruction of his work (Kipling 200). Along with this human complicity in dispossessing Dick of all that he craves for, the impenetrable gloom and inertia of London life is a fitting background for shattering his dream— to be lionized in the field of painting with Maisie as lifelong companion. A newly arrived from Sudan and

beaming with boyish enthusiasm, Dick takes London as won over, casts glimpses upon a row of semi-detached residential quarters triumphantly: "Oh, you rabbit-hutches!... Do you know what you've got to do later on? You have to supply me with men-servants and maid-servants— here he smacked his lips—'and the peculiar treasure of kings'"(27). Even the first Reunion with Maisie is not without its accompanying unreality and transitory bliss:

The fog was driven apart for a moment, and the sun shone, a blood-red wafer, on the water. Dick watched the spot till he heard the voice of the tide between the piers die down like the wash of the sea at low tide... a shift of the same wind that had opened the fog drove across Dick's face... He was blinded for the moment, then spun round and found himself face to face with— Maisie (44-45).

Little did it occur to Dick that the tiny "rabbit-hutches" bore the potential to impose upon him "the damnation of the 'cheque-book'" (40). On the other hand, the adorable vision of the beloved emerging out of the fog would ultimately melt away in the fog deserting him powerless to prosper in either course— building up a successful career which he was quite capable of and securing her forever.

It is in this context that the reader may resort to Freudian interpretation of melancholia resulting in the sufferer's diminishing capacity for love. In his seminal essay "Mourning And Melancholia" (1917) Freud argues:

The distinguishing mental features of melancholia are a profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment (244).

Citing Freud David Bolt points out that Dick's complete dejection is manifest in Maisie's thought about him after his blindness (276). For Maisie, no matter how sorry she feels for him, Dick is now "down and done for— masterful no longer, but rather a little abject; neither an artist stronger than she, nor a man to be looked up to— only some blind one that sat in a chair and seemed on the point of crying" (Kipling 174). But Dick's melancholia is not just a consequence of his blindness. It started even before his blindness and continues long after Maisie's desertion of him. The root of this melancholia lies embedded in the reason narrated by Freud:

...melancholia... may be the reaction to the loss of a loved object. Where the existing causes are different one can recognize that there is a loss of a more ideal kind. The object has not perhaps actually died, but has been lost as an object of love (e.g. in the case of a betrothed girl who has been jilted)(245).

Once again a change of gender in the abovementioned example will help the reader to understand how after being jilted by Maisie just before her journey to Vitry-sur-Marne, Dick is doomed to be cast into the pitfalls of melancholia. It is only on the verge of the completion of his masterpiece that Dick is allowed, albeit for a brief span of time, to overcome melancholia only to be trapped by 'mania'. A complete reversal of melancholia a person possessed by mania, explains Freud, "finds such delight in movement and action because he is so 'cheerful'" (254). Just before his blindness there is no mistaking the note of the 'purgatory' through which Dick passed. His frantic attempt to complete the picture under the impulse of whisky which let loose his pent up energy is also imbued with Freudian assumption. At last he is the possessor of something higher than 'blood and bone' which can elevate his stature in the eyes of Maisie. No matter how cruel the irony of fate is, Dick attempted to present himself agreeable to Maisie until the last. His bid to Maisie to leave him alone does not merit more than wounded pride of a lover. Had Maisie been moulded into the traditional clay of beloved the readers would perhaps see that all the agony and pain of Dick was worth bearing. But himself a sufferer from the apathy amounting to unnatural cruelty, Kipling reserves more torture and degradation for Dick.

Dick's abjection— both physical and psychological— reaches its apogee when even Bessie was moved to pity:

There were droppings of food all down the front of his coat; the mouth, under the ragged ill-grown beard, drooped sullenly; the forehead was lined and contracted; and on the lean temples the hair was a dusty, indeterminate colour that might or might not have been called grey. The utter misery and self-abandonment of the man appealed to her,... (Kipling 193-194).

In explaining the inseparable link between the vision and masculine role, which Dick is now unable to perform, David Bolt brings forth the notion of Bentham's Panopticon as propounded by Foucault (277). In his seminal text *Discipline and Punish* (1975) Foucault defines the nature and function of Panopticon thus:

The Panopticon is a machine for dissociating the see/being seen dyad: in the peripheric ring, one is totally seen, without ever seeing; in the central tower, one sees everything without ever being seen. It is an important mechanism, for it automatizes and disindividualizes power. Power has its principle not so much in a person as in a certain concerted distribution of bodies, surfaces, lights, gazes;... Consequently, it does not matter who exercises power (201- 202).

In absence of the 'male gaze' by which Bessie could be rendered passive, it is now Bessie who is allowed to exercise authority upon Dick; a reversal of the role of which she was acutely aware: "... at the bottom of her heart lay the wicked feeling that he was humbled and brought low who had once humbled her" (Kipling 194). Confined to the peripheric ring before the female gaze of Bessie, Dick is now forced to act, to quote

Foucault again, as an “object of information”, a little better than his former mistress, the Negroid-Jewess-Cuban woman (200). Symbolically this loss of authority is analogous to castration as in his blindness Dick thinks of Maisie “being won by another man, stronger than himself” (Kipling 152). In keeping parity with his gradual loss of potency, notices David Bolt, Dick betrays an increasing dependency upon Bessie to accomplish his daily affairs until his final journey to Sudan (281). Famished and worn out in body and soul Dick makes a final campaign to Sudan to receive “the crowning mercy of a kindly bullet through his head” (Kipling 227). Oscillating between hope and despair and finally rendered as destitute at home, Dick is allowed to enjoy the bliss of life once again on foreign soil. Arriving first at Port Said, he chose to put himself in the loving care of Madame Binat, who, as had been mentioned before, nurtured a motherly feeling for Dick. The very entrance to Madame Binat’s “filled

*Dick’s+ nostrils with the well-remembered smell of the East” and he almost made a peremptory claim upon her:

They have forgotten me across the water by this time. Madame, I want a long talk with you when you’re at liberty. It is good to be back again (210-211).

It is Madame Binat who cheered Dick’s gloomy heart a little, promised a safe passage to the front and on that night literally lulled him to sleep as if she was there to ward off any trouble that might torment his soul. In this connection one may agree with Kaori Nagai’s opinion that “There is something essentially egotistical about *Dick’s+ attitude to women— the egoism of a spoiled and needy child, who needs to keep all the maternal care and attention for himself” (qtd. in Booth 69). Denied love and care throughout his life Dick remains a needy child and his exposure to meanness at home and opulence and brutality abroad had made him corrupt. The much needed care and consolation arrived at last to grace the last moments of the defeated child of the Empire. In the dedicatory verse to the novel Kipling writes, “If I were damned of body and soul,/ I know whose prayers would make me whole,/ Mother o’ mine, O mother o’ mine”! (Kipling n.p.). Speaking about this Philip Mallett states that when Torpenhow holds the corpse of Dick, he actually performs the role of mother: “the story ends with Torpenhow on his knees, holding Dick’s body in his arms, in a presumably unintended parody of the Pietà” (58). Shed of all the inessential layers of self, when the eternal craving— a return to the womb in the form of soul is achieved— the body ceased to exist.

Fulfilling all the criteria of a personal tragedy, *The Light That Failed* literally failed to court the favourable opinion of the critics, a majority of whom were reluctant to bestow more than an honour like “a book with a backbone” or “novel of the year” upon it (qtd. in Falls 152). But in his major fictional works— novels and shorter fictions alike— Kipling’s Empire builders, the men with backbone, are usually left alone in the warmer part of the globe to accomplish the duty assigned to them by the imperial ideals. While the hostility from outside world is expected and even desired to mythologize the enterprise, resistance and deprivation from within may implant the seed of perdition in distant future. Nearly five decades afterwards Dick’s personal suffering and loss turns to be a national catastrophe when the trauma of the aftermath of the Second World War made a wearied Britain keep her Empire within the domain of English Channel.

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