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## AMBIVALENCE IN SIDNEY OWENSON'S *THE MISSIONARY*: A POSTCOLONIAL READING

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### ABSTRACT

This article examines Sidney Owenson's *The Missionary* (1811), in light of the theoretical ideas in Edward Said's *Orientalism*, and Homi K. Bhabha's *Location of Culture*, and *Signs Taken for Wonders*, with a particular focus on the novel's controversial representation of India during the colonial days. The paper argues that despite the presence of imperialist and anti-imperialist elements, *The Missionary* embodies the indeterminacy of in-betweenness brought about by a cultural encounter between the east and the west, the ruler and the ruled, the male and the female, and the colonizer and the colonized. Refusing to offer any clear-cut resolution, the text moves beyond the hegemonic binaries of Edward Said, in which the allegedly superior west almost always rules over the allegedly inferior east, to exemplify post-colonial ambivalence by not only dramatizing the mutual impact incurred by the colonizer and the colonized on one another, but also by granting voice and agency to the colonized. The novel presents itself as a site of cultural contact where civilizations meet and clash, and contest and negotiate meanings and identities to enter what Homi Bhabha calls a third space of hybridity.

**Key Words:** ambivalence, binaries, colonial, hegemonic, hybridity

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### INTRODUCTION

Variously interpreted as a colonial or an anticolonial text, Sidney Owenson's<sup>1</sup> *The Missionary* (1811), has consistently raised critical controversy

<sup>1</sup> Sidney Owenson, also known as Lady Morgan (1781-1859), wrote novels, travelogues, essays and poetry to become one of the most successful writers of her times-able to win admiration of and imitation from great literary figures such as Byron, Shelley, Lamb, and Scott. Her works include *The Wild Irish Girl* (1806), *Patriotic Sketches of Ireland* (1807), *Woman, or Ida of Athens* (1809), *The Missionary: An Indian Tale* (1811), and *O'Donnell* (1814). *The Missionary* was revised as *Luxima, the Prophetess* in 1859.

about its representation of India. The novel has been read by Balachandra Rajan as an Orientalizing text that espouses British imperialism by suggesting "feminine submission [of India] to Western lordship."<sup>2</sup> Siraj Ahmed corroborates by saying that the text "promotes the civilizing mission more wholeheartedly than the British colonial government itself did."<sup>3</sup> In contrast, if Maureen O'Connor finds the

<sup>2</sup> Balachandra Rajan in, "Feminizing the Feminine: Early Women Writers on India," 165.

<sup>3</sup> Siraj Ahmed, "'An Unlimited Intercourse': Historical Contradictions and Imperial Romance in the Early Nineteenth Century" (<http://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/containment/ahmed/ahmed.html>).

novel confronting “the brutalities of British colonialism,”<sup>4</sup> Barbara Judson discovers in it an “eloquent plea against empire.”<sup>5</sup> Although occasional intrusions of imperial or anti-imperial elements in *The Missionary* leavesome room for such interpretations, deeper textual exploration reveals that the novel goes beyond the hegemonic binaries of Edward Said to enter what HomiBhabha calls a third space of hybridity. Lacking any clear cut resolution, the text embodies the indeterminacy of in-betweenness brought about by thecultural encounter of the east and west, and thus exemplifies post-colonial ambivalenceby not only dramatizing the mutual impact incurred by the colonizer and the colonized but also by granting agency to the colonized.

In *Orientalism* (1978), Said looks at the colonial/imperial situation as one of oppression of the colonized by the colonizer, either through active political violence, or through the production of texts about the east. One of Said’s definitions of Orientalism reads: “Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient – dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the orient.”<sup>6</sup> The definition shows that said uses the term “orientalism” to denominate the projection of power by the west to create a set of discourses of Orientalism in order to know and control, or define and dominate the east.

Accordingly, orientalist scholars developed discourses to serve imperial and colonial power, assuming a radical distinction between the east and the west--an allegedly superior western self in relation to an allegedly inferior non-western other. The European scholars represented the Orient solely through the discourses they produced/created about the east, depriving the Orientals of their self and identity. As Said declares, “because of

Orientalism the Orient was not (and is not) a free subject of thought or action,”<sup>7</sup> the orientalists granted no agency/voice to the Orientals. Said views the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized, between Occident and Orient as a binary of unequal power and status, or as he puts it, the “relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of complex hegemony.”<sup>8</sup>

Homi K. Bhabha disagrees with Said’s rather simplistic binary description of the colonial condition because he finds the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized to be much more complex. Unlike Said, Bhabha claims that all forms of culture undergo a process of hybridity, and influence each other. In *The Location of Culture* (1994), Bhabha locates hybridity as a space for the confrontation of two cultures, which transforms the identity of the colonized to produce something familiar but new--“not quite not white” as Bhabha puts it.<sup>9</sup> From the clash of the two parties, Bhabha says, new hybrid identities or subject-positions emerge as various elements of the colonizers and the colonized combine.

Bhabha claims that the cultural contact between the east and the west produces an interdependent relationship between the two, creating a “third space” of ambivalence,<sup>10</sup> a hybrid subject, which is separate yet similar to the colonizer and the colonized.<sup>11</sup> This subject, which is different from both the colonizer and the colonized, can contest the terms and territories of both by occupying the space of compromise and mutual dependence. For Bhabha, hybridity is however, no “third term that resolves the tension between two cultures.”<sup>12</sup> It is the in-between space that functions as a strategy of subversion to turn “the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power.”<sup>13</sup> Hybridity enables the colonized subject not only to gaze back at the colonizer but also to terrorize and control its authority to some extent “with the *ruse*

<sup>4</sup> Maureen O’Connor, “Sydney Owenson’s *Wild Indian Girl*,” 21.

<sup>5</sup> Barbara Judson, “Under the Influence: Owenson, Shelley, and the Religion of Dreams,” 202.

<sup>6</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism*, 3.

<sup>7</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 3.

<sup>8</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 5.

<sup>9</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 92.

<sup>10</sup> Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 90.

<sup>11</sup> Bhabha, “Signs Taken for Wonders,” 1181.

<sup>12</sup> Bhabha, “Signs Taken for Wonders,” 1176.

<sup>13</sup> Bhabha, “Signs Taken for Wonders,” 1175.

of recognition, its mimicry, its mockery.”<sup>14</sup> Bhabha defines mimicry as “the affect of hybridity,” that functions as a means of appropriation and resistance. Its perspective “repeats rather than re-presents” the colonial condition, while disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse and disrupting its authority.<sup>15</sup> That is, the colonial hybridity, as a cultural form, produces ambivalence in the colonial masters and alters the authority of power. Bhabha states that colonial and postcolonial theorists including Said have overlooked this ambivalent space of mimicry, or colonial hybridity, which serves as a site of resistance from which the orient interrogates the western discourses.

In “Signs Taken for Wonders” (1985), Bhabha discovers a kind of resistance shown by the natives in their demand of the Hindi *Bible* and their response to Christianity. They are willing to receive baptism but unwilling to take the sacrament. The demand for the Hindi *Bible* is their way of resistance to “put the project of conversion in an impossible position,” because they cannot digest the concept that God’s wisdom can come out from the meat-eating English mouth. Once translated into Hindi, the English book becomes a work of difference, a work of repetition—less than one and double. This sameness with difference of the book is the emblem of colonial hybridity, which the power of subversion produces. According to Bhabha, hybridity produces “new forms of knowledge, new modes of differentiation, new sites of power,”<sup>16</sup> and “breaks down the symmetry and duality of self/other, inside/outside” and the colonizer and the colonized.<sup>17</sup> Accordingly, hybrid site equips the natives with the knowledge of difference between the eastern and western religion as well as the strategy to resist the master’s acts and dictates. As Bhabha explains, the book, rather than granting power and authority to the colonizer, empowers the colonized by becoming a site of resistance. Like the Hindi *Bible*, Sidney Owenson’s *The Missionary* serves as a Bhabhaian ambivalent space where cultures clash to produce new forms of knowledge and

power by challenging the categories of colonial, or anti-colonial tale.

*The Missionary* recounts the tragic love story of a western missionary, Hilarion and an Indian priestess, Luxima during the days of British colonialism. Hilarion, a Franciscan monk, and a descendant of the Portuguese noble blood who resisted Spanish domination, lands in the south Indian state of Goa, as an Apostolic Nuncio of colonial India. Enthusiastic Hilarion is instigated by an Indian pundit to convert Luxima, a high priestess from Cashmire (Kashmir, a north Indian state), into Christianity, so that the religion of thousands of her followers could be changed *en masse*. Luxima is a highly evolved soul, who as a young widow, instead of offering herself on the funeral pyre of her husband, has chosen to lead a spiritual and devotional life. The Missionary moves to Kashmir, where he meets the priestess who adopts the lover’s religion soon to be excommunicated by her people. Luxima joins her lot with Hilarion, and together they travel from Kashmir to Goa enduring much suffering and hardship. In Goa, Hilarion is tried by the Inquisition for heresy, and charged not only for seducing his young neophyte, but also of losing his missionary zeal to convert the natives to his religion. He too is excommunicated by his religious community. When the Goan Inquisition sentences him to burn at the stake, Luxima attempts to perform the act of *sati*<sup>18</sup> by burning herself with the body of Hilarion. The horrified crowd of Hindu locals revolt against the cruel act of Inquisition and help the lovers to flee but Luxima gets fatally wounded in the process. Hilarion returns to the beautiful valley of Kashmir and turns a recluse before he finally disappears from the scene.

Set in seventeenth-century independent Kashmir and Spanish-controlled Portuguese Goa, *The Missionary* covers a twenty year time span, concluding roughly four years after Portugal’s successful revolution against Spain.<sup>19</sup> It is informed by the imperial mission of the European powers

<sup>14</sup> Bhabha, “Signs Taken for Wonders,” 1178.

<sup>15</sup> Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 88.

<sup>16</sup> Bhabha, “Signs Taken for Wonders,” 1181.

<sup>17</sup> Bhabha, “Signs Taken for Wonders,” 1178.

<sup>18</sup> *Sati* is a Hindu practice in which a widow immolates herself on the funeral pyre of her husband.

<sup>19</sup> Frances Botkin, “Burning Down the [Big] House: Sati in Owenson’s *The Missionary*,” 36-37.

such as the British and the Portuguese, and occasionally partakes of the colonial discourse of the empire. According to Siraj Ahmed, "The retrospective placement of the imperial relationship in seventeenth-century Goa enables Morgan, more specifically, to gesture toward the present realities not only of British imperialism in India, but also of British imperialism in Ireland *and* of the Napoleonic Empire on the European continent."<sup>20</sup> Michael Franklin also avers that the setting allows Owenson to "simultaneously address questions of European imperialism and issues of 'internal colonialism' which have a direct bearing on the situation in Ireland."<sup>21</sup> However, as it is written by an Irish national (colonized by the British as well as Portuguese power), noted for her "anti-imperialistic ideology,"<sup>22</sup> the novel critiques both imperial and patriarchal ideology of the contemporary society, befitting its ambivalent status.

*The Missionary* achieves hybridity in terms of its characterization and subversive treatment of the patriarchal and colonial norms. To a great extent, its identity derives from the enactment of the influence exerted by its major characters, namely Luxima and Hilarion, on one another. Critics like Rajan view Luxima as the representative of India, and comment that Owenson has portrayed her as a passive and languid character in order to make a negative statement of India's effeminacy. The novel does not support this claim because closer examination of Luxima's portrayal suggests that her character confers strength, rather than weakness to India, granting her creator a status above blame. The author has not only represented Luxima as the central character with agency and authority capable of interrogating the norms created by western discourses, but also as one who has the ability to deconstruct the role of the male and female, the east and west, the colonizer and colonized, and the rescuer and rescued.

<sup>20</sup> Siraj Ahmed, "An Unlimited Intercourse" (para 20).

<sup>21</sup> Franklin, "Passion's Empire: Sydney Owenson's Indian Venture," 190. Franklin also asserts that "Ireland was not only Britain's first colony, but also her first Oriental colony" (182).

<sup>22</sup> Joseph W. Lew, "Sidney Owenson and the Fate of Empire," 41.

Regular interaction with the western lover invests Luxima with a hybrid identity, which is enacted mostly in religious front. An ardent follower of Hinduism, the priestess is attracted by Christianity, and despite her firm belief in the Hindu idea of non-dualism,<sup>23</sup> she has some feeling for Christian dualism/deism,<sup>24</sup> too. Because of her love for Hilarion, she converts herself formally into Christianity but is unable to become a Christian from her heart and soul. Externally a Christian, she remains a Hindu deep inside. In fact, she is not attracted as much toward Christianity as to Hilarion, the Christian, and thus becomes only a partial Christian. Apart from the Brahmin lady's love for Hilarion, his personality, his reciprocation of love, and his religious zeal account for Luxima's partial conversion. In her act of imitation or willingness to imitate or follow the wishes of her lover and his religion, she embodies Bhabha's concept of mimicry or hybridity, and becomes the female version of a mimic man—"a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite."<sup>25</sup> Luxima's attitude towards the colonizer's religion can be compared with that of the Indians in Bhabha's "Signs Taken for Wonders" who can accept baptism but not sacrament. In other words, her situation resembles that of a colonized, who can neither retain his/her colonized self, nor is able, or willing to fully assimilate with the colonizer.

Luxima treads on the third space of in-betweenness, neither remaining a pure Hindu, nor becoming a complete Christian. For instance, even after conversion to Christianity, Luxima carries with her the Hindu idol of Camdeo, the god of love: "Her arm was encircled with the muntra, the Brahmanical rosary, from which the image of Camdeo was suspended" (Owenson 193). Actually, she has not converted into a Christian internally; in her soul or spirit, she has always remained a Hindu. Since Luxima has not become a Christian "in form as in

<sup>23</sup> Non-dualism, (literally not-two) is a Vedic philosophy that believes in oneness, and not the separateness of the creator and creation.

<sup>24</sup> Deism is a western belief that separates the creator from his creation. It rejects supernatural aspects of religion, and believes that the universe functions through natural laws.

<sup>25</sup> Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 86.

faith" as Hilarion expects from her (193), he admits that despite his success in seducing "the woman's heart," he has failed to convert her "heathen" mind (220). She has abandoned her religion "less from conviction than from love" (218). At one place, Luxima herself tells Hilarion that though a descendant of Brahma, she will follow him to the Church and kiss the Christian Cross "less in faith than love; not for my sake, but for thine," emphasizing the fact that she has accepted baptism for the sake of his love more than for anything else (231).

Luxima's incomplete conversion becomes further clear at the end of the novel when we find her chanting "gayatra"<sup>26</sup> and invoking the Supreme Hindu God, Brahma to unite her with her Christian lover: "My beloved, I come!—Brahma receive and eternally unite our spirits!" (Owenson 249). She shrieks and calls upon Brahma again when she receives in her bosom the dagger aimed by a fanatic at the heart of her lover (249). Thus, Luxima presents a most complicated case by sacrificing her life for the Christian lover and praying to Brahma for eternal union with her hero. Additionally, Luxima's hybrid identity becomes evident when she indubitably articulates her feelings: "I die as Brahmin women die, a Hindu in my feelings and my faith—dying for him I loved, and believing as my fathers have believed" (257). Externally yet a Christian, she dies with her inherited Hindu faith in heart.

Luxima's location in the ambivalent space—being neither a pure Hindu nor a Christian—also becomes visible when we look at her enactment of *sati*. In some provinces of India a widow would burn herself at her will on the funeral pyre of her husband, mainly for spiritual reason of ascending to heaven. The practice was given a distorted picture of forced burning by many western travel writers, and Indian society was condemned for the brutal and irrational act, especially during colonial days. Owenson's text dismantles the Orientalists' discourse on *sati* by rendering it in a slightly different manner. First of all, Luxima is not a

<sup>26</sup> Gayatra (Gayatri), is considered to be one of the most potent mantras, or incantations, in Hinduism. It is addressed to the supreme Lord for the removal of ignorance, and for bestowing true knowledge, or spiritual illumination.

married wife of Hilarion for whom she is immolating herself. Secondly, it is not a forced *sati* (as described by orientalist scholars) at all—Luxima climbs the pyre of her lover voluntarily. Thirdly, she does not die because of burning but rather by the dagger of a colonial soldier. By deconstructing the system of *sati*, Owenson not only critiques the western [mis]representations of *sati* and tries to show the practice in a truer and better light by underscoring its real nature and religious or spiritual significance, but also grants the text a hybrid identity through the heroine's act, which challenges the traditional practice while still engaged in it.

Owenson also reverses the role of the rescuer and the rescued and thus deconstructs orientalist model of the colonized and the colonizer, in which the civilized colonizer is supposed to undertake a rescuing mission to the uncivilized, barbaric natives either to deliver them from their ignorance or liberate them from the hands of cruel tyrants. Contrarily, however, in this novel, we see an oriental lady rescuing an occidental missionary from his plight. Luxima, whom Hilarion considers to be "the object of [his] protection," ironically protects him from his death as she rescues him from *auto da fe* at the risk of her own life (Owenson 213). The act reverts also the process what Spivak describes as white men saving brown women from brown men because in this context a brown woman saves a white man from white men.<sup>27</sup> This act not only empowers a brown woman, a subaltern to speak and interrogate the colonial category of the master and the slave, but also destabilizes the patriarchal gender roles. Unlike what Rajan and Ahmed claim, the rescue of Hilarion by Luxima suggests at once the triumph of the subaltern and the failure of the civilizing mission of the British Empire.

The novel certainly acquires its hybrid characteristics through Luxima's empowerment. Not only a colonized subject but also a woman marginalized by both western and eastern society at the time, Luxima is given an elevated status in the text. She is described as: "a brilliant planet, shining

<sup>27</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" 93.



in lone and distant glory, illuminating by her rays, a sphere of harmony and peace" (Owenson 254). She represents the syncretic culture of India, itself a symbol of imagination, and peaceful existence.<sup>28</sup> Presented as an angelic being, Owenson also grants Luxima a vision of the Divine Brahma: "the God whom thou didst teach me to abandon, has this night appeared on earth to reclaim his apostate" (177). Having represented as an emblem of Indian imagination,<sup>29</sup> the author contrasts her with the more rational and violent west/England. For the representation of Luxima as an ideal "Hindu woman and an icon of India,"<sup>30</sup> we certainly must appreciate the author for her positive depiction of the land and its people unlike many colonial writers who have maligned the natives.

As an enlightened human being, Luxima not only goes against patriarchal dictates and traditional religious codes, but also successfully resists her full conversion, bringing instead effective changes in Hilarion. Botkin rightly remarks that she "challenges social, political and cultural norms expected of her as a woman, a Hindu, and a Priestess."<sup>31</sup> Owenson provides Luxima the "moral leadership" of India when she climbs the funeral pyre of Hilarion to commit *sati*, which becomes instrumental for protest from the local Hindus and others, and which "blazon[s] forth a liberal agenda of rights and freedom."<sup>32</sup> By granting Luxima an agency to resist Hilarion's conversion, to transgress the code of a *Brachmachira*, to abandon her family and community to save Hilarion, and to climb on the funeral pyre--all rare phenomena in a colonial novel--Owenson takes both the heroine and her text to the other realm--much beyond Said's Orientalizing texts.

Hilarion's portrayal as a character of the third space offers yet another instance of

ambivalence in *The Missionary*. A Franciscan missionary from the west, Hilarion comes to India with a zealous mission of converting the Hindus to his religion. Although he has no direct political role to play, initially he exhibits colonial traits of superiority vis-à-vis the Indians and their religion. But, after his contact with Luxima, the colonized, he undergoes a gradual change, and demonstrates the marks of a colonizer turned hybrid by sharing her qualities and discarding superior aura and attitude the occidentals.

To begin with, the missionary extols his religion while degrading Hinduism and Islam. For him, Christianity is the only "true faith," whereas Hinduism is a "superstition," Luxima "a false prophethess," and Muhammad "the Impostor of Mecca." He is so full of passion that he considers himself no less capable than Timur or Muhammad (Owenson 81). Proud, self-righteousness, and energetic, he comes to India "to correct the abuses of the church and to pursue the task of conversion, by means more attuned to the evangelical principles of a mild and pure religion" (81). He never tires to call his religion as pure and truthful in contrast to Hinduism, which is for him a "brilliant error" (109), a "false religion," (197) or, a "bigoted error" (225). Therefore, "with an insatiable thirst for the conversion," Hilarion sets his foot in the birthplace of Brahma in order to attack the "vital soul" of Hinduism, and undertakes the task of conversion to bring people to the right religion, (77). Prompted by a Brahmin priest, he decides to convert Luxima so that he can redeem "a whole nation" (97). Following the footsteps of some colonial administrators and orientalist scholars who wanted to understand Indian life and culture so as to rule over them effectively, Hilarion familiarizes himself with Indian topography, learns to read Sanskrit texts, and speaks Indian language fluently like an educated Indian (Owenson 101). Though his motive is not to gain administrative power but to convert the heathens [here the Hindus] into the white men's religion, he soon realizes the futility of his effort.

With her tender grace, infinite love, and immense spiritual power derived from her faith in the eternal Brahma, Luxima greatly influences the mental, spiritual and physical life of Hilarion. Her

<sup>28</sup> Kathryn Freeman, in "'Eternally disunited': Gender, Empire, and Epistemology in Sydney Owenson's *The Missionary*," describes Luxima as "a signifier for India" (25).

<sup>29</sup> In "Under the Influence," Judson observes that India a symbol of imagination is given "a local habitation in Luxima" (206).

<sup>30</sup> Freeman, "Eternally disunited," 26.

<sup>31</sup> Botkin, "Burning Down the [Big] House," 46.

<sup>32</sup> Judson, "Under the Influence," 212.

constant contact, effects in him a kind of reverse acculturation, which eventually makes him recognize both the greatness of the Hindus and Hinduism, and the limitation of his own religious outlook. He realizes that "his doctrine was too exclusive" and even starts professing Hindu philosophy (Owenson 141). When his beloved Luxima is in anxiety, Hilarion consoles her by quoting Vedantic words: "God in all, and all in God" (208). He no longer believes in the superiority of his religion and the inferiority of the other--he has risen above the binary opposition of Hinduism and Christianity, and by extension, the east and west.

The newfound knowledge and understanding makes Hilarion indifferent toward his mission of bringing the "heathens" into the fold of "right religion." Instead of converting others, he turns a partial Hindu himself. He is reported to have lived a reclusive life in the *Grotto of congelation* among the hills of Srinagar: he led a lonely and innocent existence, avoided human company, and sought no intercourse with anybody. Although the religion of this melancholic man was unknown, he prayed at sunrise and sunset at the confluence of rivers (Owenson 260). This description suggests that he had turned a Hindu *yogi/sanyasi* in his last days. According to the report of a *goala*, Indian shepherd, the sage [Hilarion] had died at the foot of the simple altar in the cave. An urn with the name of Luxima engraved on it beside the dead body of the recluse contained ashes, a blood-stained cross and the *dsandum*, sacred thread of an Indian Brahmin (261). It is clear from the description above that he is/was no longer an enthusiastic Christian burdened with the task of guiding the superstitious heathens into the right religion. The details surrounding Hilarion's life and death at the end, with the paraphernalia of Hinduism, once again point to the character's or the text's hybrid characteristics. In fact, both of the central characters in the novel, who have eventually embraced each other's faith, become like Bhabha's Indians with the Hindi *Bible* in hand, and establish their hybrid identity.

Besides the mutual impact of the chief characters, *The Missionary* attains its ambivalent status also by virtue of its blurring of the distinction between the colonizer and the colonized

represented by Hilarion and Luxima. In *Location of Culture*, Bhabha categorically mentions that cultural contact produces an interdependent relationship between the two, which greatly influence each other by performing the role of the other.<sup>33</sup> Luxima and Hilarion influence each other so much that it becomes difficult to decide who governs whom. In many cases, we see that it is Luxima, representative of the colonized subject who rules over Hilarion, representative of the colonizing master.

In "Feminizing the Feminine: Early Women Writers on India," Balachandra Rajan argues that *The Missionary* is both fissured and enriched by its participation in two discourses--a literary discourse of world humanism for which William Jones provides an Indian scholarly foundation and an imperial discourse gendered so as to offer India the enlightenment of feminine submission to Western lordship.<sup>34</sup> It is Rajan's contention that, Owenson writes in the interest of the imperialists because the two discourses above prepare the ground for colonial dominance by degrading Indian religion as an error and Indians as incapable of self-rule. While it is true that the text embodies certain religious ideas of Hinduism as represented by Sir William Jones,<sup>35</sup> it does not subject the feminine India to the colonial dominance of the British raj. Owenson's use of William Jones's representation of Indian religion may not warrant enough reason to blame her for colonizing desire because Sir Jones cannot merely be considered as a supporter of the colonizing mission. Despite his relation with the colonial government, especially governor Warren Hastings,<sup>36</sup> the scholar's lofty idea of cultural

<sup>33</sup> Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 90.

<sup>34</sup> Rajan, "Feminizing the Feminine," 165.

<sup>35</sup> Sir William Jones (1746-1794), was an Anglo-Welsh philologist, and a great scholar of ancient Indian language and literature. He discovered similarities between Sanskrit and European languages. Sometimes criticized as an Orientalist scholar, he translated many Indian books, including *The Bhagvat-Geeta*, into English. He was one of the founding members of Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1784.

<sup>36</sup> Warren Hastings (1732-1818) was the first Governor General of Bengal from 1773 to 1785.

exchange should command more respect than censure. Sir Jones have substantially contributed in translating Hindu scriptures, if not with an aim to glorify them, but at least to grant recognition to Indian religion, spirituality, culture and literature.

Hastings's role as an administrator cannot either be dismissed as that of a heartless colonizer. Although Hastings as the servant of East India Company worked in the interest of Britain, he respected Indian culture evidenced by his preface to Charles Wilkins's translation of the *Bhagawad Gita* (1785) in which he equates the Hindu text with the holy *Bible*. He even makes a prophetic statement in favor of India saying that the Hindu writings "will survive when the British dominion in India shall have long ceased to exist."<sup>37</sup> His position certainly is more complicated than that of Thomas Babington Macaulay or James Mill who clearly insulted Indian culture and literature. Unlike them, Hastings's encounters and interactions with the Indians qualify him as a hybrid character having mutual impact on each other. Therefore, instead of viewing the cultural work of Sir Jones and Hastings as a rouse for colonizing mission, and turning suspicious eyes toward Owenson as a participant in the mission, we can appreciate them as people who share common admiration for the great religious and cultural heritage of India, and in light of the influence of Indian culture on them, and their service in its dissemination, all three of them may be regarded as hybrid characters occupying the third space of intercultural exploration.

Further, Rajan appears to have an obsessive concern over the feminizing of India in *The Missionary*. A few questions in this context may not be out of place: Does femininity always entail negative qualities? Does softness in a female always mean weakness and evil? Can't we see the positive aspects of femininity? The text represents feminine quality as a source of strength as evinced by its treatment of the heroine, Luxima. Besides, Owenson complicates her text by feminizing the western

male, too. By the end of the novel, we find Hilarion completely divested of his earlier masculinity, and acting like an effeminate being. Even if feminization is viewed as weakness, Rajan seems to miss the irony of the writer because in the concluding pages it is Hilarion, who is represented as a passive character leading a kind of lethargic life whereas Luxima, an active agent, has already met her heroic death, performing a great task of love and sacrifice, and thereby effectively dismantling the traditional gender roles. Additionally, Owenson deconstructs the myth of cruelty of the Hindu rite of *sati* by foregrounding the act of Christian *auto da fe*. She shows clearly the irony involved in the colonizer's claim of superiority in terms of a rational, intellectual and moral religion. The Inquisition's act of trying to burn Hilarion alive exposes the absurd practice of the so-called civilized people because *auto da fe* is no less barbaric than the much vilified Hindu practice of *sati*. All the subversive acts just discussed, mix elements of both colonial and anti-colonial discourse and give hybrid color to *The Missionary*.

Also, the textual evidences of *The Missionary* do not provide convincing reason to agree with Rajan/Ahmed, who accuse Owenson of disparaging Hindus as intolerant people. Actually, the author shows the Hindus to be a most tolerant people open to "the innovative tenets of the Christians" (Owenson 87). Owenson does not present Luxima alone as a tolerant Hindu, capable of considering the *Bible* "worthy to be ranked with the sacred *Veidam*," she represents all Hindus as capable of deep religious understanding (139). At one place, Owenson quotes about the general belief of the Hindus: "God has appointed to each tribe its own faith and, to each sect its own religion: let each obey the appointment of God, and live in peace with his neighbor" (106). Hilarion finds "human tenderness," in the followers of Brama, and "the true region of hospitality" in India (102). Owenson could do no better than this to express her respect for the Hindus in India: she not only describes the deference Hinduism shows to other faiths but also communicates the universal message of tolerance, harmony and goodwill its followers advocate.

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Because of charges of corruption in his administration, he was impeached in 1787, and after a long trial acquitted in 1795.

<sup>37</sup> Hastings, "Preface," *The Bhagvat-Geeta, or Dialogues of Kreeshna and Arjoon*, 13.



In her admiration of Hinduism, Owenson does not forget the others, as her respect extends beyond the children of Brahma to embrace the people belonging to Islamic faith, too. She shows them leading a very peaceful co-existence with the Muslims in the serene valley of Kashmir before the intervention of the British. This is an important aspect that differentiates Owenson from most western writers including her contemporary Elizabeth Hamilton, who looks hatefully at the Muslims and calls their prophet as the "impostor of Mecca."<sup>38</sup> According to Pamela Perkins and Shannon Russell, Hamilton was "vehemently anti-Muslim" as she carried European prejudice against the Muslims, which was "as old as Islam itself."<sup>39</sup> In contrast, Owenson portrays despotic Aurangzeb's brother, Daara Secko in a positive light by epitomizing him as an agent of religious syncretism. Daara's son, Sulaiman Sheikh is represented as a man who respects all religions and loves entire humanity. Himself an aspirant of Luxima's love, Sheikh promises "protection and defence" to Hilarion once he comes to know about her devotion to the missionary (168).

However, this is not to say that Owenson always admires the colonized. There are some instances in the text when readers find the author sharing the discourse of the colonialists and representing the eastern people in the most stereotypical manner. A notorious example is the frequently quoted passage:

Silently gazing, in wonder upon each other, they stood, finely opposed, the noblest specimens of the human species as it appears in the most opposite regions of the earth: She like the East, lovely and luxuriant: he, like the West, lofty and commanding: the one radiant in all the luster, attractive in all the softness which distinguishes her native regions: the other, towering in all the energy, imposing in all the vigour, which marks his ruder latitudes:

<sup>38</sup> Elizabeth Hamilton, *Translations of the Letters of a Hindoo Rajah*, 67.

<sup>39</sup> Pamela Perkins and Shannon Russell in their "Introduction" to *Translations of the Letters of a Hindoo Rajah*, 24.

she, looking like a creature formed to feel and to submit; he like a being created to resist and to command: while both appeared as the ministers and representatives of the two most powerful religions of the earth; the one no less enthusiastic in her brilliant errors, than the other confident in his immutable truth. (Owenson 109)

The quoted lines describe the first meeting of Hilarion and Luxima in the Elysian valley of Kashmir. The description, without any doubt, uses epithets to show the superiority of the western Missionary and the inferiority of the Indian priestess. It also pits the masculinity of the west against India and grants qualities of rationality, energy, vigor, confidence, resistance and truth to the western character as against the irrationalism and emotionalism of the eastern one so eloquently described by Edward Said in *Orientalism*.

Owenson describes Hilarion as someone born to dominate and command whereas she represents Luxima as one made to be governed, to submit to people such as Hilarion. Rajan rightly points out that Owenson here participates in the orientalist discourse and denigrates India while implying the right of the imperial power to rule over India.<sup>40</sup> And, although to some extent, the "Christian missionary's imperialist desire to dominate the feminized minds, bodies, and lands of the Orient is starkly sexualized in this cultural confrontation,"<sup>41</sup> it does not hold till the end. As observed by Julia Wright, remarks such as these certainly make Owenson a product of colonial times, but not necessarily an imperialist writer because she does not share consistently the so-called male oriental discourse.<sup>42</sup> Actually, at several places in the novel, Owenson criticizes the west more than its eastern counterpart.

The writer definitely opposes the missionary project during the colonial times through the harm it causes to all parties involved. The novel shows the travails of both Hilarion and Luxima

<sup>40</sup> Rajan, "Feminizing the Feminine," 149-172.

<sup>41</sup> Franklin, "Passion's Empire," 186.

<sup>42</sup> Julia Wright, "Introduction" to *The Missionary*, 9-58.

caused by conversion. The Inquisition punishes Hilarion for "Heresy, and the seduction of a Neophyte," as a result of which he loses his religion, his love, his enthusiasm, his vigor and his mission of life (Owenson 238). Luxima suffers more than Hilarion because she loses everything including her life. Before her death, she is doubly victimized--in addition to losing her caste by Brahmanical excommunication, she is also shunned by her new religious community as a "relapsed Christian" (244). However, notwithstanding the extreme travails of the heroine, the novel ultimately shows the failure of the missionary project by reducing the western Apostle to a non-entity and making him fade into oblivion.<sup>43</sup>

The pattern of the plot, the characters, the ending, as well as the treatment of the patriarchal and colonial norms show that *The Missionary* does better than mimic the colonial discourse of the male writers. It provides enough evidence in favor of the east to prove that it does not fit into a colonizing text as argued by Rajan and Ahmed. It is neither an outright anti-imperial text because it contains at places positive depiction of the imperial west. Engaging and challenging such easy categories of colonial, or an anti-colonial discourse at numerous points, the text deconstructs the binaries of rescuer-rescued, male-female, stronger-weak, civilized-barbaric, and so on. By transgressing the traditional gender norms and colonial stereotypes, it empowers the female characters including the author who enters into the male pursuit of writing a scholarly book and engaging in Saidian male adventure of colonial politics. Despite its occasional "sexist and imperialist claims,"<sup>44</sup> the text does not indulge in appropriation and misrepresentation of the easterners by the westerners, but rather enters a new site for acquisition of knowledge and negotiation of power/authority. Through mimicry, the text works mutual influence on the opposing parties, leads them from contestation to

<sup>43</sup> In "Eternally disunited," Freeman reads the situation in a little different manner: "That Luxima dies while Hilarion survives underscores Owenson's message that it is the Hindu woman who suffers the consequences of imperial dominance" (24).

<sup>44</sup> Wright, "Introduction," 37.

reconciliation, and happily occupies an ambivalent, hybrid space of inter-cultural exploration.

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