Interrogating Orientalism

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Chapter 8

Representing India in Drawing-Room and Classroom;

or, Miss Owenson and “Those Gay Gentlemen, Brahma, Vishnu, and Co.”

Michael J. Franklin

The taste for this kind of reading is so various, that what pleases one, another will throw away in disgust. The lady, who would delight in the description of a masked ball, given by the Lady Ann, So and So, or the elegant and fashionable attentions of my Lord—, will find but little interest in the account of traversing a burning waste where the dry and hot air parches the lip and the feet tread, as in a channel of burning lava, or in perusing the horrors of an auto da fé.¹

No one will deny Miss Owenson the praise of a lively fancy, and most prolific invention, but surely every reader must agree that this lady has still to cultivate the sober qualities of judgment, without which, alas! her productions will pass in rapid succession from the shelves of the circulating library, to far less agreeable places and purposes.²

Sidney Owenson’s The Missionary: An Indian Tale (1811) was an influential text; receiving four London editions and a New York edition in its year of publication, it became an important source for some of the great “Oriental” poetry of both Byron and Shelley.³ The novel has a major claim on critical attention now: it deserves to be read and it repays close study in university classrooms, especially in the context of its historical significance for Orientalism and Romanticism; and in the specific climate of current debate over issues of women’s writing, race, colonialism, and nationhood.

It is as a mediating text that The Missionary is profoundly useful in today’s classroom, introducing a very wide range of issues central to the study of literature and its history, including: the complexities of social and political alignments in the Romantic period literature and criticism; the conception of female genius and the function of the female artist within constricting gender ideologies; questions of canon-construction and genre status; the urgent need for post-Saidian analysis to discriminate between

159
differing Orientalisms; the colonial debate between Anglicists and Orientalists; the continuing relevance of syncreticism and pluralism; and the attempt
to identify similitude rather than difference in the “otherness” of Ireland or India.

Had dust jackets or publisher’s blurbs been in vogue, subsequent editions of The Missionary would doubtlessly have borne this Shelleyan sound bite: “Since I have read this book I have read no other—but I have thought strangely.” Unsurprisingly, however, the initial reception of the novel which simultaneously arrested Percy Shelley’s reading, liberated his poetic imagination, and inspired his version of the Indian sublime was predictably marked by that blend of gentle head patting and ironic condescension which characterized the appearance of her earlier “productions.”

In the extracts cited above we can note the somewhat dismissive tone and the attempt to impugn the intellectual capacities of “lady” author and “lady” readers by recourse to the binaries of pleasure and disgust; of imagination and reason; of “agreeable places” and unsavory destinations—both in terms of reader (firmly gendered as female) expectations (the celebrity of a fashionable rout or the burning deserts of Lahore), and textual teleology (its leaves serving as pie-wrappings or suffering an excremental fate). Indeed, The Missionary might be introduced into the classroom as an exemplary case study in Rezeptionsaesthetik, and a paramount concern must be to consider exactly how earlier generations of critics and readers have shaped our conceptions of this text and its author.

In this novel Sydney Owenson was making a timely political intervention in a current debate concerning the nature of imperial government, and it is instructive to examine the imaginative demands made of its readers in the second decade of the nineteenth century or in the opening decade of the twenty-first century with its specter of resurgent neo-imperialism. To read with or against the grain of this text’s particular agenda is to create some species of dialogue between past and present postcolonials in which anxieties of authorship and reception are dwarfed by anxieties of empire. We must first contextualize the “masculine” authority implicit in the discursive strategies of the critics of these two Tory periodicals in their de/dif/fusing of a “feminine” polemic of colonialism, by considering Owenson’s reputation as a heroine of colonized Ireland.

This was a role that she wrote herself into and performed with a loving and self-publicizing attention to detail; certainly her originality is not to be questioned. Before Walter Scott took the credit for establishing the genre of the historical novel, or indeed the publishing sensation of Germaine de Staël’s Corinne, or Italy (1807), Sydney Owenson’s construction of national identities pioneered apowerfully political Irish-based historical fiction. In
The Wild Irish Girl: A National Tale (1806), an intelligent romantic heroine figures a conquered nation, focusing a people’s pride in national culture and autonomy.\(^5\)

Owenson created in The Wild Irish Girl a romanticized and feminized Ireland united in its past and present. Owenson wrote herself into the literary, philosophical, and political public sphere, utilizing an eighteenth-century discourse of sentiment to develop emergent nineteenth-century concepts of the nation. Simultaneously addressing questions of European imperialism and issues of “internal colonialism” with a direct bearing upon Ireland, she “internalizes” the Otherness of the subaltern. She was acutely aware that the subjugated race, like the subjugated sex, must compensate by means of subtler or more subversive means of representation for its lack of political representation.\(^6\)

Anticipating a critical reaction that would marginalize her contribution to the political debate, she defiantly asserts that what might, in the estimation of a largely male public sphere, seem to devalue her representation of Irish history—her gender and her choice of genre—were in fact validating and authorizing elements. Predictably, the Monthly Review, though sympathetic to her cause, disagreed: “the best friend of that gallant nation would not quote a novel as authority.” Exasperated by the blend of truth and fiction in The Wild Irish Girl, the reviewer asserted:

\>[O]ne good memorial is worth twenty romances. It must be the statistical man who will essentially benefit Ireland, and not the professed writer of fiction. The latter may reach to the private drawing-room, but the former will obtain attention in senates and councils.\(^7\)

Despite his anxiousness to shape and guide the taste of middle-class readers, the reviewer fails fully to appreciate the affective capacity of public opinion that might be swayed even—or especially—by a work of fiction. “The appeal to public opinion,” wrote Owenson, “belongs to the age in which we live,” and she used her national tales to air the politics of empire in the public domain of the reviews and the domestic sphere of the drawing room.\(^8\)

Although in announcing: “Politics can never be a woman’s science; but patriotism must naturally be a woman’s sentiment”\(^9\) she seemed to produce a gendered distinction between the spheres of politics and patriotism, actually her novels blurred that distinction, confirming that both patriotism and politics could be a woman’s art:

I shall be accused of unfeminine presumption in “meddling with politics”; but while so many of my countrywomen “meddle” with subjects of much
higher importance;—while missionary misses and proselyting peeresses affect to “stand instead of God, amongst the children of men,” may I not be permitted, under the influence of merely human sympathies, to interest myself for human wrongs; to preach in my way on the “evil that hath come upon my people,” and to “fight with gentle words, till time brings friends,” in that cause, which made Esther eloquent, and Judith brave? For love of country is of no sex.\textsuperscript{10}

Few writers, however, have used sex so effectively in reflecting and initiating “love of country” through producing texts of eroticized nationalism.\textsuperscript{11} Having textualized and distanced in the “national, natural character” of Glorvina her own erotic, auto-erotic, and (to borrow Leerssen’s useful term) “auto-exotic” desires of self-representation, she effectively merged her authorial Self with the textual Other.\textsuperscript{12} Though bluestocking in her footnotes, her theatrical self-fashioning continued with the purchase of an Irish harp and a romantic black cloak, under which she naturally assumed the diaphanous mantle of Glorvina. Ireland, Glorvina, and Owenson thus became a triune heroine of sensibility. Her readers were encouraged to engage if not in sexual tourism then in a heavily eroticized cultural tourism, and the appeal of this formula might be extended far beyond colonial Ireland to colonized Greece in\textit{Woman: or, Ida of Athens} (1809), a novel that ought to be essential reading for students of Byron; or further east to colonized India.\textsuperscript{13} While dismissive of “missionary misses,” this miss’s Missionary was to produce a heroine who was to play a key role in the romantic representation of India. Owenson effectively eroticized Romantic nationalism, for if \textit{The Wild Irish Girl} had “made Ireland romantic,” \textit{The Missionary} made a major contribution toward the romancing of India.\textsuperscript{14}

Having accommodated the strangeness of Ireland to Regency British drawing rooms, introducing the Otherness of India might have seemed a more difficult task. Hinduism could present a substantial challenge for Owenson’s cultural relativism, but if the Irish had Oriental Phoenician roots (as Father John, Glorvina’s preceptor in \textit{The Wild Irish Girl}, maintains), she contemplated an “Indian Tale” in a spirit of Indo-European, or even Indo-Hibernian, solidarity.\textsuperscript{15} Furthermore, she had considerable help: firstly and most importantly in the shape of that most respectable Celtic forerunner, Sir William Jones, whose series of hymns to Indian deities and translations of Sanskrit classics had first domesticated Hinduism in metropolitan drawing rooms of the 1780s and 1790s; second, she was writing out of her own experience of sentimentalizing the subcontinent in aristocratic drawing rooms.\textsuperscript{16}

It is in this context that we must consider the interrelated questions of
the specific circumstances of the textual production of *The Missionary* and the social circumstances of Sydney Owenson as its author. Since early 1809 she had been a fashionable cultural accessory, a sort of Glorvina in residence, to the influential household of the high-Tory John Hamilton, Marquis of Abercorn. In a contemptuous review of *Woman: or, Ida of Athens* (1809), the bilious satirist John Wilson Croker had described the situation with a certain perceptiveness; “This young lady . . . is the enfant gâté of a particular circle, who see, in her constitutional sprightliness, marks of genius, and encourage her dangerous propensity to publication.”

*The Missionary* was composed during lengthy stays with the Abercorn household at their secluded Northern Ireland mansion of Baron’s Court and their imposing residence of Stanmore Priory near London. When the *Critical* reviewer had opined that the “lady” reader “would delight in the description of a masked ball, given by the Lady Ann, so and so,” he was making a knowing reference to Lady Anne Jane Gore Hamilton, Marchioness of Abercorn, the dedicatee of *The Missionary*. But Owenson’s dramatic skills were not limited to masquerade on the dance floor; the protective and collaborative ambience of the Abercorm’s drawing room provided a captive and captivated audience in which she could imaginatively extend her autoerotic and “auto-exotic” repertoire to include the radiant Otherness of Luxima. Between the culturally produced poles of a self-deprecation and self-celebration, Owenson performs and manipulates a subversive celebrity feminism wherein the author becomes not Glorvina with harp, but a version of □akuntal□ with fawn. At Baron’s Court her day’s writing, relayed in almost Shahrazad fashion, would be subjected to postprandial dissection:

[S]he used to read aloud, after dinner, to the Marquis and Marchioness, what she had written in the morning. She said . . . that the Marquis used to quiz her most unmercifully, declaring that the story was “the greatest nonsense he had ever heard in his life,” which did not, however, prevent him from listening to it with great amusement.

In Stanmore Priory, where the company included celebrities of both parties and aristocrats such as the Duke of Devonshire, Lord Aberdeen, Lord Castlereagh, Lord Ripon, the Princess of Wales, the Duc de Berri, and the ex-king of Sweden, the level of audience participation was even greater: “not a few grave statesmen, disenthralled for a few weeks, from the cares and turmoils of office, loungingly abandoned themselves to the luxury of listening to Miss Owenson, as she read aloud her exciting and wildly romantic story.” Indeed, accordingly to Fitzpatrick, many narrative improbabilities and stylistic excesses might well be laid at the door of her beau-monde auditors:
The Missionary is open to objection, but is so improbable that it can hardly be deemed a dangerous novel. It is, in many parts, very rhapsodical; but the fault is, to some degree, attributable to the motley suggestions which the distinguished guests at Stanmore urged, and many of which the authoress, in compliment to her influential friends, laughingly adopted.  

Such insights help situate the author between the scholarly demands of her Indological studies and the performative expectations of her aristocratic audience. Whatever the extent of audience-inspired interpolation, the novel was composed in the library to provide luxurious listening in the drawing room, confirming Owenson’s characteristic blend of the creative and the theatrical, and aiming ultimately at a drawing-room readership for whom Orientalism might prove congenial amusement.

That The Missionary was not “a dangerous novel” had less to do with its implausibility than with its exposure of Iberian rather than British imperialism and its seventeenth-century setting in Kashmir, beyond the territorial acquisitions of the East India Company. Its topical resonance, however, was indisputable, and, if we remember that politicians were beginning to recognize the power of narrative fiction in the shaping of public opinion, we can begin to appreciate some of the reasons why at least one of her statesman listeners was anxious that the novel should be published.

Of course, Lord Castlereagh’s interest in the novel might well have been inspired simply by his fascination with its author.  

As Fitzpatrick asserts: “The good nature of this distinguished statesman was the more remarkable as Lady Morgan had repeatedly, and forcibly, denounced the Legislative Union, of which he was the chief director, as corrupt and calamitous, atrocious in its principle, and abominable in its means.” Like many powerful men, he had a practiced line in disarming comments, evaporating her initial hostility with his reported remark: “No one cares for Ireland but Miss Owenson and I,” and he presumably made much of their mutual concern for India. Ultimately the politician whom Byron was to label an “intellectual eunuch” was delighted at Sydney Owenson’s apparent willingness to accompany him in his tuneless renditions of airs from his favorite The Beggar’s Opera.

Castlereagh’s interest in India was a long-standing one. His years as President of the Board of Control had taught him the difficulties of handling the complexities of his government’s relationships with both the East India Company and the Governor-General in India. In supporting the Marquess Wellesley’s establishment of Fort William College for the training of writers sent out to India, Castlereagh had indicated his position in the Orientalist-Anglicist controversy. This debate concerning how and to what extent India
should be modernized became heated in the years up to the renewal of the
company’s charter in 1813. The Orientalists, on the one hand, who respected
Indian traditions and argued for an acculturated civil service, were opposed
by the Westernizing tendencies of the Anglicists and evangelicals, brought
into an uneasy alliance through their fear that cultural pluralism might lead
to the “Indianization” of British youth.  

The participation of Viscount Castlereagh, architect of the 1800 Act
of Union by which Ireland’s Parliament had voted itself out of existence,
in the negotiations for the publication of The Missionary is replete with
political ironies. Ten years later Percy Bysshe Shelley was to depict Murder
masked like Castlereagh and accompanied by seven bloodhounds, but in
late 1809 the viscount drove this Jacobin novelist, wild Irish patriot, repub-
lican sympathizer, and “radical slut” to a meeting with her publisher John
Joseph Stockdale at his Cabinet Office, where Owenson sold her manuscript
for four hundred pounds.  

What the Secretary of State for War and the
Colonies and the author of The Missionary had in common was a belief
in the East India Company’s policy of noninterference with the religious
“prejudices” of the Indian races.  

Castlereagh, having witnessed Sydney
Owenson’s performances in the private sphere of the Abercorns’ drawing
room, shrewdly realized how the romancing of India and the comparative
and sympathetic representation of Hinduism might prove useful in the
manipulation of public opinion. Certainly, the editor of Owenson’s mem-
oirs thought Castlereagh “perhaps, the greatest admirer the Missionary ever
found,” and early in 1810 its author, with a characteristic interweaving of the
political, the professional, and the personal, was writing to her patron Alicia
Lefanu, the well-connected Bluestocking sister of Sheridan:

What will please you more than anything is that I have sold my book, The
Missionary, famously. That I am now correcting the proof sheets, and that I
have sat to the celebrated Sir Thomas Lawrence for my picture, from which
an engraving is done for my work. (original emphasis)

Having considered the social circumstances of its production, it is instruc-
tive to return to the critical reception of The Missionary, first advertised
in the Morning Chronicle of January 21, 1811. As we have seen, reviewers,
earnest in their attempts to police the British public sphere by regulating its
tastes and reading habits, irritated by the generic hybridity of the national
tale and its complex negotiation between fiction and history, dismissed her
productions as “romantic” novels of sensibility. Despite a somewhat play-
fully patronizing tone, however, the representative of the Critical Review
emerged as something of a fan: “Miss Owenson has such a fanciful and happy facility in her comparisons, her descriptions of persons, &c. as often makes us stare with amaze.”

Surprisingly, considering Owenson’s political reputation, the *Anti-Jacobin Review* was even more positive about her talents as an author. There has been a notable improvement; *The Missionary* contains “nothing of that grossness for which her *Ida of Athens* was justly censured,” but the same emphasis is placed upon the need for restraint. The reviewer stresses the heat of Owenson’s performance: her “too ardent feelings,” “warm imagination,” “glowing language,” “her descriptions are traced with a pencil of fire.” These sentimental excesses and superheated desires are dictated by her reliance upon “the language of passion, the rude offspring of nature, unregulated by prudence, unchastened by duty.” In this way her lack of stylistic restraint is made to imply a corresponding lack of moral restraint as if she displayed an inherently Celtic subjectivity or Oriental sensibility that required a greater familiarity with British moral discipline and English grammar.

What annoyed the *Anti-Jacobin* reviewer was the outpouring of an “Orientalized” profuseness and the unleashing of a feminine subjectivity. Western women should be subject to control and especially to self-control; where the novel proved “defective in point of taste,” “offensive to modesty,” or lacking in “that sensitive delicacy, which is the eminent characteristic, and the best ornament, of the female mind,” the reviewer announces: “[W]e were tempted to refer to the title-page to convince ourselves that the pages before us are really the production of a female and a spinster” (378).

The response of these workaday, and presumably male, critics to *The Missionary* perfectly illustrates Terry Eagleton’s characterization of the reception of her Irish tales:

[Romance, however strained and febrile, always bears such a utopian impulse within it; and if the visions it generates seem idle it is because the workaday world fashioned by men have rendered them so. [. . .] The very forms of her fiction, with their scandalously flaunted play of fantasy, are thus an implicit rebuke to the mean-spirited jobbers and brokers of the male Ascendancy.] 30

In an important article, Ina Ferris has shown that Owenson’s extravagant and romantic theatricality “functioned in large part parodically and polemically as a form of cover or critique, allowing intervention in areas generally outside the feminine sphere and enabling her to write herself as an author in the public realm.”31 Significantly, the *Anti-Jacobin* reviewer refers to Owenson not only as “an experienced novel writer,” but also as “a public writer.”
and she must have valued such an acknowledgment. An endorsement of her cultural and religious relativism had also come from the *Critical Review*, which recognized, if rather archly, her success in representing the Hindu pantheon in a sympathetic light: “And, what is more, she makes us as familiar and sociable with those gay gentlemen, Brahma, Vishnu, and Co. as if we had been brought up under the same firm all our lives; as well as with Monsieur Camdeo, the god of mystic love, and a long et cetera of personages which make up the Indian mythology.”

This had been the task of cultural translation which Jones had set himself thirty years earlier by means of scholarly articles in *Asiatick Researches*, such as “On the Gods of Greece, Italy, and India” (1784), or through the syncretic poetic of his “Hymns to Hindu Deities” (1784–88). Where Jones had used Pindaric and Miltonic resonances to lend a classical dignity and respectability to his subjects in the minds of his drawing-room readers, Owenson used a hybridized genre of romance/historical tale to cater to a more extensive novel-reading public. Sydney Owenson, in her concern to use sentimental fiction to dispel prejudice, had observed how effectively the literary and linguistic researches of Sir William Jones had succeeded in adjusting metropolitan stereotypes of India. Jones had introduced to Occidental drawing rooms the beautiful daughter of a Brahman sage and a heavenly courtesan, an Indian heroine with whom the West promptly fell in love. Blending a perfumed exoticism and a divine eroticism, Sakuntala embodied the earthly and vegetal paradise of the India of the imagination. Jones had published his translation of Kalidasa’s *Sacontalā* in Calcutta in 1789, and Mary Wollstonecraft, reviewing the London edition of 1790, discovered delicacy, refinement, and a pure morality in *Sacontalā*, the very qualities Jones was anxious to stress in his representation of Hindu culture. Here was a sentimental heroine who immediately appealed, in Wollstonecraft’s words, to both “the man of taste” and “the philosopher,” and here was a complete model for Owenson’s Luxima.

If reviewers in Britain fell under her spell, in Germany she caused a sensation. The play was for Herder his *indische Blume*; Schiller rhapsodized about Sacontalā as the ideal of feminine beauty; Novalis loving addressed his fiancée as “Sakontala”; Friedrich Schlegel pronounced India as the source of all human wisdom; and Goethe captured the essence of *Sacontalā* fever in the line: “Nenn ich, Sakontala, dich, und so ist Alles gesagt” (“When I name you, Sakuntalā, everything is said”).

This enraptured European response to the blend of the divine and the erotic in the narrative which Kalidasa had adapted from the *Mahabharata*, mediated by Jones in his dual roles of translator and interpreter of Asian culture, established *Sacontalā* as not merely evidence, but as the representational icon, of Indian civilization. The plot concerns the aesthetic and
erotic entrancement of King Dushmanta by the beauty of Śakuntalā and the enthrallment of these German men of letters not only represented a remarkable level of Western audience identification with this Indian king, but even more surprisingly, marked a response completely in accord with classical Indian aesthetics in the shape of rasa theory.\textsuperscript{35}

What made Owenson’s commercial and political achievement even time-lier was that The Missionary was published within a year of Robert Southey’s The Curse of Kehama (1810), which portrayed Hinduism as a cesspool of monstrous gods and demonic devotees.\textsuperscript{36} The politics of Southey’s poem aligned him with the evangelical lobby, and the delightful horror of its Oriental Gothic impressed the young Percy Shelley. Ultimately, however, it was not a poem designed to Gothicize India in support of missionary activity, but a novel that Romanticized India, opposing interventionist cultural and religious policies that reignited Shelley’s poetic imagination. Reading and rereading The Missionary proved a revelation for Shelley. While the periodical critics were suggesting that Owenson should “curb her imagination, discipline her feelings, and regulate her language,” the imaginative power of The Missionary, “a book,” according to William Fitzpatrick, “worthy only of the Minerva Press,” was operating upon the superior genius of Shelley.\textsuperscript{37} Shelley reacted to Luxima with the same rapture as the German romantics had idolized Śakuntalā. His desire to bring Luxima to life is never totally achieved, but etherealized versions of this Indian Maid reappear in his poetry from Alastor onward:

Will you read it, it is really a divine thing. Luxima the Indian is an Angel. What a pity that we cannot incorporate these creatures of Fancy; the very thought of them thrills the soul. Since I have read this book I have read no other—but I have thought strangely.\textsuperscript{38}

What particularly fascinated Shelley was the way in which Owenson “uses Kashmir as a paradisal image for that ideal interior landscape of the fulfilled psyche.”\textsuperscript{39} Furthermore, the skeptical immaterialism of Vedantic philosophy that she had absorbed from Jones and sympathetically handled in The Missionary clearly had some influence upon the growth of the poet’s mind. The immediate effect of the poet’s reading may be traced in the Indian Gothic of “Zeinab and Kathema,” but the enduring and more central influence of the novel is demonstrated when, in spite of Shelley’s immersion in the classics, it is in the Vale of Kashmir that the young poet in Alastor experiences his vision of the epipsyche. Shelley’s voluptuous veiled maiden sings the European revolutionary themes of liberty and virtue rather than Hindu hymns to Camdeo, but she is a vision and version of the seraphic Luxima.
For Shelley, Owenson’s domestication of the Indian sublime was sufficiently effective to produce a preoccupation with India that lasted throughout his poetic career. He ordered Jones’s complete *Works* in December 1812, and John Drew’s detailed critique of Shelley’s image of India, which reads *Prometheus Unbound* (1820) in terms of Kashmiri mythology, has convincingly demonstrated that Jones and Owenson were the mediating figures for his imagination.

Luxima the ethereal and entrancing Vedanta priestess, in her nature worship and exquisite sensibility, and with her pet fawn, her wreath of delicate buchampaca flowers, and her hymns to Camdeo, represents Owenson’s attempt to reheat *Sacontalā* fever. Her name is based on the beautiful wife of Vishnu, the Hindu goddess Lakshmi, whom Jones had portrayed as an Indian Venus emerging Botticelli-like from an ocean of milk. The Latinized version mingles suggestions of Eastern luxuriance and luxury with a sense of ex Orient lux. Her hero, Hilarion, the energetic Portuguese aristocrat and Franciscan missionary, bears the name of one of the most austere of the desert fathers, whose delicate frame endured both the physical extremes of heat and cold and the burning fires of lust. Hilarion, like his sainted namesake, will endure both cave dwelling and climatic extremes, but his sensual trials are undergone in the spiced air of the Edenic Vale of Kashmir. The encounter of Brahman priestess and Catholic missionary mingles Miltonic and imperialistic resonances, figured as it is in the oppositional binaries of geography, race, and gender:

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 lustre, 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: she, looking like a creature formed to feel and 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.

This static tableau would seem to show Owenson as complicit in colonialist gendering, using the hypermasculinity of imperialist discourse that conventionally gendered the Hindu as lethargic, soft, and feminine. Luxima figures the perfumed allure of the subcontinent if not the forbidden attractions of miscegenation. Owenson’s representation of Hinduism, however, contrasts with this portrayal of yielding submission, for Luxima’s religion “unites the
most boundless toleration to the most obstinate faith; the most perfect indifference to proselytism, to the most unvanquishable conviction of its own supreme excellence” (125). Hilarion’s self-confident powers of command and resistance are seen to be undermined not solely through the agency of romantic love, but via the Enlightenment processes, derived from Jones’s scholarly Orientalism, of comparative religion and ideological relativism. The mutual sympathy of Hindu and Christian, which Owenson proceeds to illustrate within a Kashmiri frame, has the power to disconcert and disorientate the reader, and it derives that power from Jones’s discoveries of similitude.

Europe sat up and paid attention when Jones, in his “Third Anniversary Discourse” (1786), found in Sanskrit a “more refined” sister of Greek and Latin. This introduced alarming ideas of linguistic and familial relationship between the colonial rulers and their “black” subjects. In the same discourse, he concluded that it is not possible “to read the Védânta, or the many fine compositions in illustration of it, without believing, that PYTHAGORAS and PLATO derived their sublime theories from the same fountain with the sages of India.” Indian philosophy possessed the reassuring familiarity of Platonic thought and each might be apprehended equally by the twice-born Brahman or the Enlightened rationalist, by Vedanta priestess or Franciscan monk.

Owenson, well versed in the didactic functions of enlightened sentimentalism, refined her Orientalism by means of a close reading of Jones’s important essay “On the Mystical Poetry of the Persians and Hindus” (1791). Here Jones had quoted from Isaac Barrow, the teacher of Newton and “deepest theologian of his age,” to demonstrate that Barrow’s conception of divine love “differs only from the mystical theology of the Súfis and Yógis, as the flowers and fruit of Europe differ in scent and flavour from those of Asia.” In characteristic popularizing and performative mode, Sydney Owenson ventriloquizes Barrow’s words by placing them on the fragrant lips of Luxima. Delighted to find common ground between Vedantic and Christian concepts of mystic love, she exclaims enthusiastically: “We cannot cling to the hope of infinite felicity, without rejoicing in the first daughter of love to God, which is charity towards man” (140). Similarly, Hilarion’s native informant, a Kashmiri Brahman pandit, when expounding the tenets of Luxima’s religion, sounds remarkably like Sri William Jones: “That matter has no essence, independent of mental perception; and that external sensation would vanish into nothing, if the divine energy for a moment subsided” (89). In this way the pandit—in his “confirmed deism” (88)—is literally rendered a mouthpiece of Jonesian syncretism as Owenson artfully deconstructs the binarisms of colonialist prejudice.
Representing India in Drawing-Room and Classroom / 171

Focusing and dramatizing such syncretic reflection for European readers of romance Owenson successfully dissolves the Otherness of Hinduism, “mak[ing] us as familiar and sociable with those gay gentlemen, Brahma, Vishnu, and Co. as if we had been brought up under the same firm all our lives.” When students, having been exposed to the dramatic sensuality of Śakuntalā and the romantic radiance of Luxima, become aware of exactly what Owenson is about, many opportunities for heuristic investigations are made available and such possibilities are increased exponentially by the availability of digital resources. It thus becomes possible to track Owenson’s antiquarian footsteps through the Oriental library of her friend and former lover, the Dublin barrister Sir Charles Ormsby.

At least seventeen Orientalist tomes are cited in Owenson’s footnotes, but frequent unacknowledged borrowings from Jones and other authorities ensure the authenticity of Kashmiri “costume.” Students can discover that on a single page of Owenson’s text (121), interspersed between dignifying quotations from Paradise Lost, and colorful references from Jones’s “Hymn to Camdeo” (Kāma: the Hindu god of love), two scented descriptions are drawn from facing pages of Jones’s “Botanical Observations on Select Indian Plants.” The lattices of Luxima’s pavilion “were composed of the aromatic verani, whose property it is, to allay a feverish heat; and which, by being dashed by the waters of an artificial fountain, bestowed a fragrant coolness on the air.” The following paragraph depicts the priestess offering as incense to Camdeo “leaves of the sacred sami-tree.”

In this way students can appreciate the detailed attention given by Owenson both to matters of theology and cultural distinctiveness, and begin to comprehend exactly how the Enlightenment blend of sentimentalism and scholarship she made very much her own might well have irritated male critical preconceptions of gender and genre, even while the popularity of this novel reinforced, disseminated, and made assimilable the political and pluralistic significance of syncretism.

That Sydney Owenson, despite her celebrity posturing, was no “air-head” becomes clearly apparent through detailed consideration of some recent secondary criticism, especially in its underestimation of the thoroughness of her research. Julia Wright, in her useful edition of The Missionary, fails to disguise condescension toward both the scholarship of “Romantic-era Orientalists” and the use Owenson made of their research. When Luxima wishes she had thrown herself on her husband’s pyre, thereby to “have enjoyed the bliss of Heaven while fourteen Indras reign” (150), this reference is not erroneous, as Wright asserts, but a most apposite quotation from Henry Colebrooke’s paper on sati. Balachandra Rajan, in a valuable consideration of The Missionary, emphasizes Owenson’s thoughtful remembering
of Milton, but Luxima’s use of the phrase “a dark-spotted flower in the garden of love” (275, n.102; original emphasis) in her dying words does not recall Comus, but is a most apt borrowing from the narrative of Mejnūn and Lailī: “He had seen the depredations of Grief through absence from his beloved object: he had plucked many a black-spotted flower from the garden of love,” which again she had found in Jones.¹⁵¹

Rajan also asserts that when Luxima “accepts Christianity and prefers a platonic life with Hilarion to a fuller one with Suleiman Sheikh (with whom she would not have done any better) she surrenders herself to victimization.”¹⁵² Arguably Luxima never does “accept Christianity,” for the repeated name of “Brahma!” (258–59) is on her dying lips. Furthermore Rajan’s parenthetical remark presumably refers to the fact that the handsome young Islamic prince, who also falls under Luxima’s spell and offers her “to become the empress of thine own people” (167), was shortly to share his father Dārā Shikūh’s fate, murdered at the hands of Dārā Shikūh’s brother Aurangzeb. What Rajan fails to consider is that the introduction of the Mughal prince Suleiman Shikūh to establish a love triangle reconfigures the binaries of imperialism in a most subtle fashion. On the simplest level it reminds the reader that India had successfully absorbed and assimilated a series of imperial conquests. On the subtler level of Owenson’s Orientalism, however, it can be seen that introducing an Islamic hero of Suleiman’s parentage represented a significant Jonesian touch. His father, the scholar-prince Dārā Shikūh, had inherited the syncretic mantle of his great-grandfather, Akbar; had translated some of the Upanishads; and composed a Persian text entitled Majma ‘al-bahrayn or “The Mingling of the Two Oceans,” which maintained that the fundamental tenets of Hinduism were essentially monotheistic and stressed the connections between Sufism and Vedantic thought. Jones had recommended this “pleasing essay . . . by that amiable and unfortunate prince,” and Owenson was similarly alert to the pluralistic prospects of ultimate harmony between the two (or indeed three) great religions of India.¹⁵³

The dimensions of her antiquarian “Indian venture” reveal just how deeply Sydney Owenson had “waded through” Ormsby’s Orientalist library. Whereas many contemporary literati considered the Hastings circle and the Asiatick Society to be exclusively interested in Sanskrit literature, Owenson underscores Jones’s commitment to the liberal syncretic tradition developed by Dārā Shikūh. A certain fascination with metaphysics may be discerned in her consideration of the religious discussion in the Hindu temple where a disciple considers “the fifth element, or subtle spirit, which causes universal attraction” (93), an element that interconnects the theology and metaphysics of Newton, Vedic thought, and Sufism.¹⁵⁴

Moving from this metaphysical fifth element to the third element of
the Hindu trinity or *trimurti* (the “& Co.” of the *Critical* reviewer’s enterprising “firm” of “Brahma Vishnu & Co.”), namely Śiva, the terrible Lord of Sleep, Time, and Destruction, the difficulties of introducing Hinduism into either drawing room or classroom become all too apparent; Śiva is no “gay gentleman.” A classic study of Śiva by Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty is subtitled *The Erotic Ascetic*, chapter 9 of which contains successive sections titled “The Dangers of Śiva’s Excessive Chastity,” and “The Dangers of Śiva’s Excessive Sexuality”; self-evidently “The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom.”

The problem in pedagogical terms is where to start on this dangerous road of excess, always assuming, of course, that one’s students are not already halfway along it! Whereas Shelley came to Jones via Southey’s *Curse of Kehama* and *The Missionary*, my students, proceeding chronologically through a module shamelessly entitled “The Erotics and Exotics of Romantic Orientalism,” come to Owenson’s representation of Hinduism in the same way as Owenson herself did, by means of the more demanding path of Jones’s translations and hymns. There are, however, advantages to this route. A consideration of Jones’s “Hymn to Camdeo” and “Hymn to Durgá” introduces students to the strained relationship between Śiva and his erotic alter ego Kāma, which culminates in the latter’s being reduced to “silver ashes” by the fire-flashing third eye of Siva for daring to rouse the ascetic god from his profoundly dangerous meditation to make him fall in love with Durgá in her aspect of Pārvati, the beautiful daughter of Himalaya.

In Hinduism there coexist two forms of heat, apparently mutually opposed, but actually profoundly interwoven: *kāma*, the heat of sexual desire, and *tapas*, the heat generated by deep meditation and ascetic practices, especially chastity. The interaction of these two forces represented by Śiva and Kāma is fundamental in Hindu culture; the gods can feel threatened by the spiritual power generated through devoted asceticism. This idea is at the heart of the tale of *Śakuntalā*; the gods sent the beautiful nymph Menakā to seduce the ascetic rishi Visvamitra; Menaka diffused his heat and subsequently gave birth to Sakuntala. The notion of *tapas*, as productive of God-defying powers, is also the originary idea of *The Curse of Kehama*, but whereas Southey was concerned only to display the monstrosity of Hinduism in its potential to produce the “Man-Almighty,” Owenson’s more subtle treatment of the interrelationship between *kāma* and *tapas* demonstrated an informed and empathic participation in the multivalent nature of Hindu mythology.

While we have seen the contemporary critics commenting upon the heat of Owenson’s “pencil of fire,” what they fail to understand is that the “superheated” tensions between *kāma* and *tapas* provide an ideal sentimentalist
and Indocentric medium for depicting the sensual encounter between the austerities of “brachmachira” (*brahmacārin*: devoted to chastity) and the Franciscan monk. Like his sainted namesake, the young Hilarion, “sighed to retire to some boundless desert, to live superior to nature, and to nature’s laws, beyond the power of temptation, and the possibility of error; to subdue, alike, the human weakness and the human passion” (73). Hilarion is described as a “soul of fire” (81), and associated with the enlightening power of the sun. In India, “the Christian wanderer” is frequently taken for “a sanaissee, or pilgrim, of some distant nation, performing *tupesya* [i.e., *tapas*] in a strange land” (106). The novel thus provides an Indian “take” upon the dangers inherent in the restraint of huge energies, and students can come to appreciate how the binaries of climate, culture, gender, and religion are reconfigured by means of detailed study of Owenson’s treatment of the heats of passion and of self-restraint.

Students can also investigate the gothic use Owenson makes of the “blue light of the subterraneous fire (burning naphtha) flashed on an image of Camdeo her tutelary deity” (191), which both reflects Kāma being reduced to “silver ashes” by the fire-flashing third eye of Śiva, and anticipates the ultimate fiery immolation of the Inquisition’s auto-da-fé. The sources of Owenson’s description of the burning wastes can be traced in François Bernier; the significant variations made to the incident in the *Mahābhārata* narrative of Rajah Nala separated from his beloved Damayanti by a bamboo forest fire may also be placed under scrutiny, as may the related details of the natural asbestos and naphtha bandage. By using the Internet students can discover that Owenson’s “grotto of congelations” (named “from the splendour of the stalactites that hung like glittering icicles from its shining roof”), the cave in which Hilarion constructs a rude altar with his golden crucifix, does not necessarily represent a cooling respite; it is actually the sacred Kashmiri shrine at Amarnāth where pilgrims to this day assemble to witness an impressive ice stalagmite in the phallic shape of a Śivalinga.

Whereas Southey’s evangelical bias opens *The Curse of Kehama* with the widow-burning ritual of *sati*, Owenson’s climacteric features the auto-da-fé of the Christian Inquisition; thus she subjects the crude despotisms of Oriental and Occidental superstitions to a species of Enlightenment relativism. Throughout the novel Luxima is cast in the role of active ministrant and savior as she tends and heals the injured missionary. By contrast Hilarion, although he had earlier rescued Luxima’s fawn from the jaws of a wolf, proves unable to “save” either her body or her soul. Her distracted and dramatic intervention in the Goan Inquisition saves Hilarion’s life at the cost of her own—a case, *pace* Gayatri Spivak, of a brown woman saving a white man from white men—and sparks off a native insurrection. Rela-
tivity here is again underscored by an informed awareness of the tenets of Hinduism, for while the Christians, fixing their eyes upon the cross which Hilarion had placed upon her breast, see in Luxima a miraculous savior, the Hindus, observing the Brahminical mark on her forehead, “beheld the fancied herald of the tenth Avatar, announcing vengeance to the enemies of their religion” (249; original emphasis). While Luxima brandishes no blazing sword (indeed, she interposes her body between Hilarion and the knife of one of the Inquisition guards, or “officers of the bow-string” [249] as Owenson, undermining the stereotypes of Asiatic despotism, terms them), her intervention disrupts the gendered passivity of the Oriental female while representing a profoundly nonviolent Hindu intervention.

Following Luxima’s death, Hilarion, formerly “lofty and commanding” and confident in the “immutable truth of his mission, returns to Śiva’s grotto of congelations” in the hills of Srinagar, effectively “feminized” as a Hindu sannyāsin (ascetic devotee of Śiva), for though “his religion was unknown,” at dawn and dusk he “prayed at the confluence of rivers” (260) (tirtha: an especially sacred place, often where rivers meet). So the seducer (in the final sentence of the novel Hilarion is described as having “seduced [Luxima] from the altar of the god she served”) is ultimately seduced if not by “those gay gentlemen, Brahma, Vishnu, and Co.,” then by the enlightened lessons in devotional syncretism that Luxima had taught. As recent events confirm with painful clarity, there is still much room in today’s world for such pluralism.

NOTES

3. A French translation followed in 1812, and a German one in 1825.
5. Thirty years later Owenson reflected: “At the moment The Wild Irish Girl appeared it was dangerous to write on Ireland, hazardous to praise her, and difficult to find a publisher for an Irish tale which had a political tendency. For even ballads sung in the streets of Dublin had been denounced by government spies, and hushed by the Castle “sibirri” because the old Irish refrain of Erin go bragh awakened the cheers of the ragged, starving audience” (preface to the 1836 edition).
6. “I came to the self-devoted task with a diffidence proportioned to the ardour which instigated me to the attempt; for as a woman, a young woman, and an Irishwoman, I felt all the delicacy of undertaking a work which had for its professed theme of its discussion, circumstances of national import, and national interest.” (original emphasis). Lady
Chapter


10. Preface to *The O’Briens and the O’Flahertys; A National Tale*, vi.
11. In some respects the eroticizing of Owenson’s discourse might be seen as complicating in what Edward Said saw as Orientalism’s predilection for exoticizing and eroticizing the Other, but far from the colonialist (male) fantasy of passive sexual availability legitimizing Western imperial control; she eroticizes individual rational women empowered by their cultural claim to authority and agency within their own societies.
13. In a lively article Malcolm Kelsall indicates that “Byron’s put down of Owenson [in the notes to *Childe Harold* II] is a snub to a competitor. [. . .] One may reasonably conclude that Byron had no need to endure the fatigues of travel to write his romances, but might have drawn all he needed from Sydney Owenson. Indeed, the parallels [with *Ida of Athens*] in some respects are so close that it may be said that he ravished the text without compunction.” This having been said, Kelsall, with all the patriarchal gusto of a British Critic contributor, puts down Owenson’s Orientalist novels as “superheated female pulp fiction fit only for Catherine Morland in a tedious spell of rainy weather.” See “Reading Orientalism: Woman: or *Ida of Athens*,” 12–14. Cf. n. 28 below.
16. It is uncertain whether Owenson knew Phebe Gibbes’s *Hartly House, Calcutta*, which used the affective potential of the sentimental letter to introduce Hinduism in a sympathetic fashion to the drawing rooms of the novel-reading public. Gibbes foregrounds a developing love affair between the novel’s English heroine and her Brahman tutor. Bored by the dominating masculine discourse of the colonizer, Sophia embraces what she views as the gentle and sensitive religion of the subject Hindu. This sympathetic reaction to Hinduism is intensified by her irritation at the boorish attentions of European suitors to the extent that only the author’s apparent belief that Brahmans are necessarily celibate, and more conclusively the Brahman’s death of a fever, save metropolitan sensibilities from the specter of miscegenation.
17. *Quarterly Review* 1 (1809): 52. Croker, of course, was later to savage “Cockney” Keats.
20. The Marchioness of Abercorn, for example, wrote to Owenson: “Have you sent the *Luxima* to England yet? Pray tell me, for though I never wished to hear it read ten pages at a time, I am very impatient to see it all together, and sincerely anxious for its success” (undated letter), *Memoirs*, 1:410.
22. See David Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance: The Dynamics of Indian Modernization 1773–1835*, 43–64. Governor-General Wellesley, in the tradition of
the Orientalist regime established by Hastings, had discouraged missionary activity in Bengal, and this was largely Castlereagh’s position. According to Ainslie Embree: “Lord Castlereagh, who was handling the Charter Bill for the Government, thought that while this would satisfy the enthusiasts, it would do no harm, since he was convinced that despite the number of petitions, very few Englishmen were really anxious to go out to India as missionaries” (Charles Grant and British Rule in India, 272). For a consideration of Owenson’s friend Thomas Moore’s satire on the making of “Company’s Christians” in India, see my “The Building of Empire and the Building of Babel: Sir William Jones, Lord Byron, and Their Productions of the Orient,” in Byron East and West, ed. Martin Prochazka, 74–75.

23. In response to the “Peterloo massacre” of August 16, 1819, Shelley was to write: “I met Murder on the way— / He had a mask like Castlereagh— / Very smooth he looked, yet grim; / Seven blood-hounds followed him” (The Mask of Anarchy, ll. 5–8. It was Owenson’s own sister, Olivia, who in a satirical verse described Sydney as “an elegant artist, a radical slut, and a right Bonapartist”; see Mary Campbell, Lady Morgan: The Life and Times of Sydney Owenson, 150. Jane Austen was pleased to receive profits of 140 pounds from her Sense and Sensibility, published in the same year as The Missionary.

24. In the final analysis, perhaps the most significant circumstance of the publication negotiations for The Missionary was her choice of J. J. Stockdale. John Drew has asserted that “The Missionary may be read as a perfectly extraordinary fictionalization of the psyche of William Jones” (India and the Romantic Imagination, 242), and it is interesting to note that Stockdale had been the joint publisher of Lady Anna Maria Jones’s thirteen-volume edition of her husband’s complete works three years earlier, The Works of Sir William Jones, ed. Anna Maria Jones, 13 vols., henceforth cited as Works.


27. “The author has displayed strong marks of genius in this production, and has convinced us, that, if she will consent to curb her imagination, to discipline her feelings, and to regulate her language; she is very competent to produce works which will place her high indeed, on the list of the best novel-writers of the present day,” Anti-Jacobin Review 38 (April 1811): 384.

28. “If the warmth of her language could affect the Body it [Ida of Athens] might be worth reading in this weather,” wrote Jane Austen to Cassandra on a chilly January 17, 1809; see Jane Austen’s Letters, ed. R. W. Chapman, 251.

29. In this grammatical emphasis the critics were, of course, following the lead of Croker, whose review of Ida of Athens suggested its author should purchase a spelling book and a pocket dictionary; Quarterly Review 1 (1809): 52.

30. Terry Eagleton, Heathcliff and the Great Hunger: Studies in Irish Culture, 184. Two modern critics, whom I would hesitate to label either “mean-spirited” or part of a critical “male Ascendancy,” have experienced even greater difficulties in coming to terms with The Missionary: Martin Jarrett-Kerr describes it as “a farrago of extravagant nonsense,” “Indian Religion in English Literature 1675–1967,” 94, and James Newcomer sees the novel as one in which “she went totally astray,” Lady Morgan the Novelist, 22.

31. Ina Ferris, “Writing on the Border: The National Tale, Female Writing, and the Public Sphere,” in Rajan and Wright, 86–106, 86.

32. Critical Review 23 (June 1811): 183. Jones’s A Discourse on the Institution of a Society, together with his “First Charge to the Grand Jury at Calcutta” and his “Hymn to Camdeo” [note the three separate genres of scholarly article, legal discourse, and Pindaric ode], was published in London in 1784, whetting metropolitan appetites for what was to
come from Calcutta. The inclusion of his hymn to the Hindu god of love signals not so much his affirmation of the power of knowledge as his commitment to the knowledge of power, and to the sources of power in Indian culture. One reviewer commented: "How grand and stupendous is the following plan! [ . . . ] We may reasonably expect to enlarge our stock of poetical imagery, as well as of history, from the labors of the Asiatic Society . . . to combine the useful and the pleasing" (Critical Review 59 [1785]: 19–21).


35. I have argued elsewhere that the European cult of Sensibility rendered European Romanticism particularly susceptible to the Sanskrit literary concept of rasa, with its emphasis upon the cultivation of the emotions, as displayed par excellence in Sakuntalā (see my The European Discovery of India: Key Indological Sources of Romanticism, 3: xiv–xvi). In this context it is important to remember the symbiotic relationship between popular and academic Orientalisms. Jones had learned Arabic with a Syrian named Mirza who had helped him translate the Arabian Nights back into its original tongue; his Persian Grammar had proved popular through its incorporation of substantial selections from Hāfiz; and he showed little reluctance to employ the language of sensibility in communicating the revelation of Sanskrit literature: “I am in love with the Gopia, charmed with Crishen, an enthusiastic admirer of Rām, and a devout adorer of Brimha-bishen-mehais: not to mention that Judishteir, Arjen, Corno, and the other warriours of the M’hab’harat appear greater in my eyes than Agamemnon, Ajax, and Achilles appeared, when I first read the Iliad” (letter of June 22, 1784 to Charles Wilkins, The Letters of Sir William Jones, ed. Garland Cannon, 2:652).

36. “[T]he religion of the Hindoos, which of all false religions is the most monstrous in its fables, and the most fatal in its effects,” preface to The Curse of Kehama: The Poetical Works of Robert Southey, 8:xxiii.


38. Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley, 1:107. In another letter to Thomas Jefferson Hogg, apparently of the following day, June 20, 1811, Shelley reiterates: “Have you read a new novel, the Missionary by Miss Owenson. It is a divine thing, Luxima the Indian Princess, were it possible to embody such a character, is perfect. The Missionary has been my companion for some time. I advise you to read it” (ibid., 1:112). In a third letter to Hogg [July 28, 1811?], Shelley again questions: “Have you read the Missionary. It is a beautiful thing. It is here & I cd not help reading it again—or do you not read novels” (ibid., 1:130).


41. The Missionary: An Indian Tale, ed. Julia M. Wright, 109; subsequent references will appear parenthetically in the text.

42. Selected Works, 361–63.


44. “[W]e cannot cleave to infinite felicity, without also perpetually rejoicing in the first daughter of Love to GOD, Charity toward men,” “On the Mystical Poetry of the Persians and Hindus,” Works, 4:215. These are not isolated examples; what they reveal on
Owenson’s part is a commendable commitment to syncretic method, if not to scholarly discipline. On Owenson’s assimilation of Jones, see Drew, *India and the Romantic Imagination*, 241–42.

45. “[T]hat it [matter] has no essence independent of mental perception, [. . . ] that external appearances and sensations are illusory, and would vanish into nothing, if the divine energy, which alone sustains them, were suspended but for a moment” (*Works*, 3:239). In her edition, Julia Wright seriously underplays the influence of Jones; despite Owenson’s use of key French texts, her representation of India is certainly not “de(angelo)centered” as Wright claims (51). Apart from footnoted references, and, of course, the facilitating inspiration of the *Sacontalá*, unacknowledged but inherently relevant borrowings from Sir William Jones’s essays are extremely frequent.

46. My teaching of *The Missionary* last semester adventitiously coincided with a library trial of the invaluable resource “Eighteenth-Century Collections Online.”

47. “I have at last, waded through your *Oriental Library*, and it is impossible you can ever feel the weight of the obligation I owe you, except you turn author, and some kind friend supplies you with rare books that give the sanction of authority to your own wild and improbable visions. Your Indian histories place me upon the fairy ground you know I love to tread, ‘where nothing is but what is not,’ and you have contributed so largely and efficiently to my Indian venture, that you have a right to share in the profits, and a claim to be considered a silent partner in the firm,” undated letter to Ormsby, *Memoirs*, 2:388.

48. “68. VIRANI [. . . ] implies a power of allaying feverish heat; [. . . ] among the innocent luxuries of this climate, we may assign the first rank to the coolness and fragrance, which the large hurdles or screens in which they are interwoven, impart to the hottest air, by the means of water dashed through them; while the strong southern wind spreads the scent before it, and the quick evaporation contributes to cool the atmosphere. [. . . ] 69. ŠAMI [. . . ] used by the Brāhmens to kindle their sacred fire” (*Works*, 5:154–55). The following page of *The Missionary* has Hilarion, while pondering the similarities between Oriental and Occidental traditions of mysticism, involuntarily repeating “The true object of soul and mind is the glory of a union with our beloved” (122). Cf. Jones’s illustration of Sufi doctrine from Ḥāfiz: “The true object of heart and soul is the glory of a union with our beloved” (*On the Mystical Poetry of the Persians and Hindus*, *Works*, 3:225).

49. “Readers should keep in mind that Orientalist materials of Owenson’s day are often contradictory, and tend to fall rather short of the standards of twentieth-century scholarship” (Wright, ed., *The Missionary*, 263).


52. Rajan, 133.

53. Aurangzeb, an austere orthodox Sunni, effectively ended such syncretic investigation. Akbar S. Ahmed has argued that dominion over the Muslims of South Asia has always moved between the contrasting leadership styles of Dārā Shikhū’s Sufi-inspired syncretism and Aurangzeb’s fundamentalism, this polarity being reflected in Zulfiār Ali Bhutto and General Zia respectively (see *Pakistan Society: Islam, Ethnicity and Leadership in South Asia*).

54. “That most subtil spirit, which he suspected to pervade natural bodies, and lying
concealed in them, to cause attraction and repulsion; the emission, reflection, and refraction of light; electricity, calefaction, sensation, and muscular motion, is described by the *Hindus as a fifth element* (“Eleventh Anniversary Discourse: On the Philosophy of the Asiatics,” *Works*, 3:246; original emphasis).

55. Wendy Doniger, *Asceticism and Eroticism in the Mythology of Śiva*. Blake had read Charles Wilkins’s *Bhāgavat-Gētā* (1785) and, fascinated by the Brahmans as guardians of hermetic wisdom, completed a drawing, now sadly lost, listed as No. X in *A Descriptive Catalogue*, titled “The Bramins”: “The subject is Mr. Wilkin[s] translating the Geeta; an ideal design, suggested by the first publication of that party of Hindu Scriptures translated by Mr. Wilkin[s]. I understand that my Costume is incorrect, but in this I plead the authority of the ancients, who often deviated from the Habits, to preserve the Manners, as in the instance of Laocoon, who, though a priest, is represented naked” (*William Blake: Complete Writings*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes, 583).

56. “But, when thy daring arm untam’d / at Mahadeo [Śiva] a loveshaft aim’d, / Heav’n shook, and, smit with stony wonder, / Told his deep dread in bursts of thunder, / Whilst on thy beauteous limbs an azure fire / Blaz’d forth, which never must expire” (“a hymn to Camdeo,” ll. 65–70, *Selected Works*, 103; cf. “hymn to Durgá,” *Selected Works*, 168–78; esp. 2.3–3.3, 103, 171–72. On the difficulties of introducing Durgá into the drawing room, see my “Cultural Possession, Imperial Control, and Comparative Religion: The Calcutta Perspectives of Sir William Jones and Nathaniel Brassey Halhed.”)

57. I have marshaled evidence for this reading in “Passion’s Empire” (see n. 15 above).

58. It is instructive to compare the Occidental example of the legend of St. Keiven which Owenson inserted into the 1812 third edition of *St Clair*. The saint unsuccessfully attempts to seek “an asylum against the power of woman” in the scenic “Glendilough, or the Valley of Two Lakes”; the beautiful chieftain’s daughter finds his cave, and the saint, in trying to drive her away, accidentally pushes her to her death in the lake far below; *St Clair*, reprinted in *The Romantics: Women Novelists*, ed. Caroline Franklin and Peter Garside, 12; 1:32–47.

59. This is imaged in terms anticipatory of the syncretism which he is ultimately to espouse: “He pursued, with an eagle glance, the sun’s majestic course: ‘Today,’ he said, ‘it rose upon the Pagoda of Brahma; it hastens to gild, with equal rays, the temple once dedicated to its own divinity, in the deserts of Palmyra; to illumine the Caaba of Mecca; and to shine upon the tabernacle of Jerusalem!’” (81).

60. Jonathan Duncan considers “*Tupisya* or modes of devotional discipline,” in “An Account of Two Fakeers, with Their Portraits,” 38.

61 Owenson could have read of naphtha springs in *Asiatick Researches* 3 (1792): 297; vol. 4 (1795): 378; 5 (1798): 41. Significantly she describes Hilarion’s self-sacrificial vow to renounce his physical love for Luxima as “the great immolation” (182).


63. Owenson had stressed the contemporary relevance of her historical analogue by
glossing this passage with a footnote concerning the 1806 Sepoy Revolt at Vellore. This aligns Sydney Owenson with the (substantially) Whig opposition to missionary activity in India as illustrated by the Reverend Sydney Smith’s weighty *Edinburgh Review* article of 1808 contextualizing the mutiny. Smith warned that the inevitable loss of caste among Indian converts to Christianity would destabilize Hindu society, threatening economic and political control in the subcontinent: “Brother Ringletaube may write home that he makes a Christian, when, in reality, he ought only to state that he has destroyed a Hindoo” (*Edinburgh Review* 12 [April 1808]: 177).

64. The tenth *avatar* of Vishnu, Kalki, will appear riding a white horse and brandishing a blazing sword to destroy the universal depravity of the Kali Yug (Age of Kali), an all-too-familiar world in which, according to the seventh-century (or earlier) *Vishnu Purāṇa*, “monarchs will be ever addicted to falsehood and wickedness [. . . ] property alone will confer rank; wealth will be the only source of devotion; [. . . ] women will be objects merely of sensual gratification. Earth will be venerated [not for its tiṭhas or sacred places] but for its mineral treasures,” *European Discovery of India*, 5:482–83. Thomas Campbell depicts the tenth Avatar as follows: “Heaven’s fiery horse, beneath his warrior form, / Paws the light clouds, and gallops on the storm! / Wide waves his flickering sword; his bright arms glow / Like summer suns, and light the world below! [. . . ] To pour redress on India’s injured realm, / The oppressor to dethrone, the proud to whelm; / To chase destruction from her plundered shore / With arts and arms that triumphed once before, / The tenth Avatar comes!” *The Pleasures of Hope*, ll. 589–92, 595–99).