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## “The Sabbath of the Heart”: Transgressive Love in Lady Morgan’s India

Laura Susan Dabundo

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*The Missionary: An Indian Tale* (1811) by Sidney Owenson (Lady Morgan after her marriage in 1812), presents a tragic love story between a Western cleric and an Indian princess, fraught with all the tensions and pressures that contraries of culture bring to bear on forbidden love. *The Missionary* was a *Romeo and Juliet* in religious garb, crossing sacred boundaries in a climate hostile to both of them. Such transgressive love is a powerful metaphor for cultural conflict, which Owenson uses to represent the crisis faced by a non-European woman in love with a celibate Christian and Western missionary. Much of it is set in the valley of Kashmir, India, during a time of political conflict and religious tempest when idealism, nationalism, patriotism, and radicalism collided with an oppressive European hegemony over an ancient people from a civilization alien to Western understanding.

Percy Bysshe Shelley called *The Missionary* “a beautiful thing” (qtd. in Wright 43), and the Indian setting and themes probably influenced *Alastor*. From the example of Shelley, one can see that India held a powerful allure for British writers of this time as its exotic world clashed with the West.

India, as Julia Wright observes, “in *The Missionary* is . . . a contrivance for addressing colonialism and the attendant issue of religious intolerance while apparently dislocating them from Owenson’s main sphere of influence, nineteenth-century Ireland . . .” (19). Joseph Lennon, however, sees Ireland and India culturally connected, identifies an Irish Orientalism and Celtic roots in the East. By the time Owenson wrote *The Missionary*, India presented special problems for Westerners and epitomized similar problems closer to home. Lady Morgan uses the religiously inscribed transgressive love experience as the crucible to examine the effects of colonialism. *The Missionary* provides a distorting mirror of conflicting religious practice and custom, those of the imperialists against native beliefs and patterns of behavior.

Lady Morgan writes in her *Dramatic Scenes*, “Those who would live by the world, must live in it, and with it: and adapt themselves to its form and pressure’ (v)” (qtd. in Canuel 123), an appeal of religious tolerance by those who live in a secular world. Referring to Lady Morgan’s *The Wild Irish Girl*, Mark Canuel argues that religious intolerance in this period served writers as a way of exploring and understanding “a feeling of separation with community—a separation from communal feeling that is itself communal. . .” (268). In *The Missionary*, community is a vexed issue, and the religiously oriented characters of the novel, Princess Luxima and Hilarion the Missionary, seek to define themselves and their worlds and find their mediating communities and a

means to validate their relationship in a maelstrom of challenge and threat. Thus, Lady Morgan scrutinizes in her novels topical, politically charged religion as a means of creating fictions that resonated for her readers then and now when scholars and critics are challenged by the representation of non-European people, places, and cultures in British Romantic literature.

Transgression has a special meaning in a novel published in 1811, a novel that deliberately poses several different worlds and circumscribed communities, which have unique and often conflicting patterns of mores and codes of behavior and sanction. Sydney Owenson had never been to India, though she was reputed to have been diligent in the research to substantiate her novels, and the authorial footnotes in *The Missionary* exemplify her scholarship, particularly her sympathetic portrayal of Hinduism, as Michael J. Franklin has argued (“General Introduction,” 25).

*The Missionary* opens in Portugal, under the despotic rule of Spain, then relocates to India, in the province now called Kashmir, as ideologically tense between Muslims and Hindus two hundred years ago as it is in the modern world. For Owenson, as John Drew has noted, “the Kashmir landscape is so charged metaphysically that it is itself a critical factor in the development of the platonic relationship between an idealistic Christian missionary and Kashmiri Brahmin girl” (241). Kashmir becomes, Drew argues, “a paradisaic image for that ideal interior landscape of the fulfilled psyche” (254), the two lovers of the story enact their passion interiorly and spiritually, and if it were to succeed, they would unite sundered parts of themselves.

Early on, the narrator notes the landing of protagonist Hilarion, relative of the ousted Portuguese ruling family, a Roman Catholic priest, Franciscan monk, and Indian missionary, on the Asian subcontinent at Goa. He has traveled by sea from his Iberian homeland, where “The places under the civil and ecclesiastical government of Goa, were filled by Spaniards, but the Portuguese constituted the mass of the people. They groaned under the tyranny of the Spanish Jesuits.” Owenson appends a footnote citing a source that notes “the misfortune of Portugal being united to the kingdom of Spain” (81). In short order, therefore, the narrator encapsulates European hegemonic and Christian strife, political and religious discord. This example would have suggested to the contemporary readers of *The Missionary* the similar plight of the Irish, especially after the Unification Act of 1800 officially absorbed Ireland into imperial Britain, and its suppression of any deviant local politics and flavor of colonized Christianity.

But the ambitions of *The Missionary* extend beyond the bounds of Christendom to encompass Asia and its religions in a time of chaotic crises as Hilarion travels to Kashmir and back to Goa. In other words, the worlds of this novel are Spain and Portugal, Christian Jesuits and Franciscans, Hinduism and Islam, with even a whisper of Judaism and the respective political interests of most of these sectarians, as well as Ireland and England, by implication. A tall order, needless to say, for each has its own set of ethical rubrics and proportionate penalties for variance, and so a transgression, that is to say, an infringement, an offense, a violation, must be defined for and by the authority of each unique community. And in *The Missionary*, there is no reluctance to judge, to condemn, and to punish perceived transgressions.

Hilarion comes to India from a divided homeland, an orphan of a family that has lost the dynastic struggle in Portugal's wars of succession. The narrator observes: "Even Religion forfeited her dove-like character of peace, and enrolled herself beneath the banners of civil discord and factious commotion. The Jesuits governed with the Spaniards; the Franciscans resisted with the Portuguese; and each accused the other of promulgating heretical tenets. . ." (71). This conflict also existed in Ireland in Owenson's day, too, and in India generally in the seventeenth century, when the novel takes place. It also foreshadows the dramatic climax of *The Missionary*: religion and peace have parted ways.

The boy Hilarion had been educated by the Franciscans in Portugal, the order into which he enters at his maturity to dedicate his life and work, who are enemies of the Spanish Jesuits:

. . . the young Hilarion, impressed by the grand solemnity of the images by which he was surrounded; inflamed by the visionary nature of his religious studies; borne away by the complexional enthusiasm of his character, and influenced by the eloquence and example of his preceptor, emulated the ascetic life of his patron saint, 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 weaknesses and the human passion, and, wholly devoted to Heaven, to give himself up to such spiritual communions and celestial visions, as visit the souls of the pure in spirit, even during their probation on earth, until, his unregulated mind becoming the victim of his ardent imagination, he lost sight of the true object of human existence, a life acceptable to the Creator by being serviceable to his creatures. (73)

This passage summarizes the thesis of the novel. Hilarion, like a true Romantic solitary and visionary, powerfully influenced by a single mentor, becomes also a victim of his overheated imagination, what Kathryn Freeman terms "an amalgam of the Romantic poet, imperialist, and Orientalist" (21). He determines to undertake a pilgrimage to escape a vexing world, which he does not understand and which has

been nothing but pain and conflict for him, in exchange for an idealized realm of separation and purity, ala the Celtic *disert* of the early Irish saints with whom Owenson would have been familiar (Rees 21-22ff). Her use of the word "desert" in this context here of a spiritual retreat suggests a Celtic Orientalism. These Celtic saints sought retreat in a desert when the world was too much with them. The unworldly, mystic Hilarion wants to embrace the numinous by transcending nature and escaping temptation, in the narrator's diction. For temptation, as the Christian Owenson would also have remembered from Biblical Genesis onward, is ever allied to transgression. Thus, in the moment of his supreme renunciation of the world and what his mindset terms "nature," identifying it as his foe, his path is fixed inexorably for his confrontation with nature; it will become his trial, his test. That which he seeks to abjure he crashes headlong into, for he does not understand or appreciate the values and merits of Hindu civilization, even to the extent that his author does.

Hilarion determines to serve the world by converting all of India to Christianity. The narrator describes his vocation: ". . . to pass that boundary, which the hallowed footsteps of Christianity had never yet consecrated; to preach the doctrine of a self-denying faith, in the land of perpetual enjoyment; and, amidst the luxurious shades, which the Indian fancy contemplates as the model of its own heavenly Indra, to attack, in the birthplace of Brahma, the vital soul of a religion, . . ." (83). And this vocation sets up the first of the several conflicts which the novel will trace. Hilarion is a study in stark oppositions—worldly vs. unworldly, passion vs. purity, sin vs. abstinence, engagement vs. rejection—and the value of his Indian mission for the *Missionary* is that, to his mind, he is bringing his ascetic Western ways to the origin of Eastern indulgence and carnality, that same storied, mysterious East that puts Coleridge in the mind of "the stately pleasure-dome" of "Kubla Khan" (written in 1797, published in 1816). It is important for the *The Missionary* to contrast West and East in this way. Owenson herself overlooks the severe self-discipline implicit in Eastern religions, often leading to suicide, as *The Missionary* itself later concedes, as Franklin and Frances Botkin have shown ("Radically Feminizing" 169), but nonetheless, here it confronts the difficulty, even impossibility of achieving Hilarion's cause.

For Hilarion is, in short, a failure. All the Indians in Kashmir and elsewhere listen politely to his sermons; they are hospitable and charitable, frequently providing him with food, but they are unmoved by his discourses, by his example, by his religion, as the narrator relates, ". . . the truths, so bright and new, now offered to their reason, were not sufficient in their effects to vanquish prejudices so dark and old, as those by which the Indian mind was held in thralldom" (94). In this passage, the narrator, while commending Hindu virtue betrays Western biases, toward, at least, the foundation of what he preaches, that is a Christian charity, if not the larger message, which is the mission to proselytize.

Hilarion is susceptible to a Kashmir Pundit, his first mentor since the death of the one that led him to the Franciscans, who is a Hindu scholar, yet “equally indifferent to all religions” (87). He befriends Hilarion whom he sees as personally good and worthy and will save Hilarion’s life at the end of the novel. The Pundit concocts a scheme whereby Hilarion must Christianize Luxima, orphan granddaughter of the Guru of Kashmir; who is, he says, “the Brachmachira, *the Priestess of Cashmire* [italics in original], whose conversion, if once effected, might prove the redemption of her whole nation” (96), thus, religious procuring. Get Luxima, get India.

Lady Morgan was clearly fascinated by her creation, Luxima, for she revisits her novel at the very end of her life, revising it for what became a posthumous publication, re-titled *Luxima, the Prophetess: A Tale of India*, thereby shifting the focus from the Western Romeo to the Eastern Juliet. But even unrevised, *The Missionary*, declares Drew, “belongs to Luxima” (252), while Kathryn O’Connor finds that Luxima is Owenson’s “wild Indian Girl” (21). In *The Missionary*, before the novel opens, Luxima had been engaged to a superior Brahman who has died on pilgrimage before they can wed. Says the Pundit to Hilarion about her, “Tender, pious, and ambitious, Luxima would have ascended the funeral pile [sic]. . .” but her grandfather persuaded her to live, and she became a virginal, consecrated prophet. She lives in seclusion, generally, at a shrine to which, the Pundit adds, “multitudes from every part of India come to consult. . .” (97), making her a Far Eastern Delphic oracle. Thus, her religious vocation and her “ambition,” the Pundit’s word, is a worthy and fair match Hilarion’s. Owenson mostly treats her with respect and dignity, though she frequently calls her a “heathen.” Still, Franklin argues that, for the novel, “Owenson’s achievement lies in contributing to a Romantic image of India which was to reflect India’s own self-image” (“Radically Feminizing” 168). That is, India plays the feminine to the Western masculine, although in Freeman’s exposition this enables Luxima’s “direct communion with God” at a deeper level than the rational and masculine Roman Catholicism of the missionary (24). But *The Missionary* shows, the burdens of a marriage of equals, as either metaphor or realized geopolitical entity, collapse and are crushed under the weight of imperial colonization.

And, in providential, isolated, moonlit encounters in the magical, metaphysical Kashmir, Luxima and Hilarion fall in love. Symbolically, he is the masculine West, Christian, stern, implacable, rational, and knowing, while she is the exotic, alluring, soft, and feminine East, and in the judgment of their respective communities, their love is transgressive. For him, it represents a considerable fall from his otherworldly celibacy, but Luxima, too, is drawn from her principles: “The touch of the stranger was sacrilege; He had seized a hand, which the royal cast[e] of her country would have trembled to have approached . . . and violated the sacred character and holy office of the Priestess” (112). Thus, they

cross the limits of both nation and faith, and at this point, early on, Luxima is offended. But like the two transgressively involved cowboys in “Brokeback Mountain,” according to their own and their social mores, Luxima and Hilarion cannot extricate themselves from each other. This test of their identities as defined by their communities, this temptation, dissolves who they think they are without revealing what they might have been. For her, “the feeling of the woman, and the pride of the Prophetess, seemed to struggle in her bosom” (139), while for him, “he struggled religiously against himself” (165), for in his soul his vocation and his faith are opposed to his natural manhood, which he has ever sought until now to abnegate. And she is equally at odds with herself.

They are, hence, two divided beings, their very identities riven, indicating how divergent, tragically, their worlds are, and as they struggle with the temptation to transgress against the laws of their religious, secular, and internalized versions of these authorities, they are frozen in their struggles. The narrator interposes outsiders to bring them even to a declaration much less action. First, when a Muslim prince, who does not care about their religious transgressions except to condemn a bond between the Christian and Hindu, appears to claim Luxima, Hilarion, out of jealousy, is able to enunciate his love. Luxima responds, “And have I also sinned against thee, for whose sake I have dared the wrath of the gods of my fathers; and, in declaring the existence of that divine love, enchanting and sublime, which thou hast taught me to feel, that mysterious pledge for the assurance of heavenly bliss. . .” (169). Luxima understands what Hilarion does not, which is that their love can lift them higher, can transcend religious and political barriers, and she locates it within the purview of charitable, universal Christianity, but Hilarion will not hear of it, though at times he comes very close. The narrator notes “the sabbath of the heart” (147) when he can surmount his internal divisions for “a sense of a sacred communion, which identified the soul of another with his own, possessed . . . of his whole being” (171). In those moments out of time, a truce between the factions of his warring self, when he has at last openly acknowledged his love, he is reborn as a man “loving and being loved” (171). But these are stolen moments for both of them, interposed between their larger identities and roles.

The interposition of the Muslim here triangulates the relationship and offers what Franklin sees as a religious “syncretism,” at heart in Owenson’s vision but which she cannot acknowledge in *The Missionary* (“Radical Feminizing,” 171), while Freeman notes that the Muslim prince perceives that the force of the Christian proselytizing has jeopardized any religious depths for Luxima at all (25). Still, for the most part, the novel works in polarities, which are finally diametrical, and the possibility of a third possibility pulls things off center. And, in any case, as Drew waxes of “the mystical passion of Hilarion and Luxima [,] . . . every order and state of

society will use all in its power to destroy it" (250). That is to be their fate.

And, there can be no acting upon Hilarion's new self-understanding, for the suit of the Muslim Prince, though denied, has been witnessed by agents of Luxima's grandfather (*The Missionary* is at times overwhelmed by spies and stalkers), and the sanctions are severe. Luxima, pledged as a virginal priestess, is, in Owenson's own self-admittedly Western terms, excommunicated and banished as an outcast (188-189). She and Hilarion, who willingly accepts the task of being her protector and guardian since he has failed as a missionary, flee from Kashmir, back to Goa, he to announce his failures and she, now baptized, to retreat and take the monastic veil in a Franciscan convent. At least, that is Hilarion's plan. Luxima is silent on this score.

Their pilgrimage follows the Fall and exile from Edenic Kashmir. The text establishes the Biblical and Miltonic antecedents, through the desert, jungle, storm, and near fatal encounter with a serpent. Considering their only and unlikely options to be together, Hilarion speculates, "we might together fly to the pathless wilds of these delicious regions, and live in sinful bliss, the commoners of nature. . . ." (232), Luxima, on the other hand, offers an alternative of which monasticism is a metaphor: "wherefore should we not die?" (232). Thus, sin or suicide, that is the question. It is interesting and pertinent that for Hilarion, to sin is to revel in nature. His words show what he himself refuses to accept, that it would well be natural, in harmony with nature, for them to be together, "in common" with nature, no longer priest or priestess, agents of a religious oppression or colonizer.

But they don't have to choose because outsiders intervene, again. They are arrested by the Jesuit officers of the Spanish Inquisition in India, foes of Hilarion's nation and faith, and this time it is Hilarion's excommunication that is literally at stake, at stake since the Inquisition burns its convicts. He is charged with heresy and "seduction of a Neophyte" (247), while Luxima is rescued to asylum with the return of Hilarion's Pundit, who stows her with his Jewish mistress. In a way, the Pundit's earlier scheme has worked: Luxima does capitulate to Hilarion, but she is his only convert, and her conversion is only partial. Partial, that is, in the terms of the demands of the character of the Missionary, but perhaps total and universal in the terms of the vision of the novel.

*The Missionary* has shown that the strict and rigid religions of European and Eastern worlds alike may speak of peace and service and love and human and universal nature, but their true objects are identifying transgressors and punishing them, by exile or execution. There is no middle way, no acceptance, no tolerance, no compassion, and no forgiveness. There never is any Sabbath of the heart, any ceasefire of the hostilities for the sake of connection and unity. The com-

munities are polarized since the Imperial West cannot acknowledge or respect the Other.

At the close, as Hilarion is led to the stake, the Pundit comes thundering in like a the cavalry in a bad movie, causing a riot ignited by the simmering Indian and Portuguese resentments against the Spanish overlords, perhaps figuring what might inspire Irish rebels. Luxima escapes from the Jewish household and attaches herself closely enough to her Hilarion that she takes a fatal arrow aimed at him; and the three flee in a boat secured by the Pundit, the only savior in the novel—paradoxically since he is an apostate. They find refuge in a cave where she dies in Hilarion's arms. Hilarion eulogizes, "Together we have loved, together we have resisted, together we have erred, and together we have suffered; lost alike to the glory and fame, which our virtues, and the conquest of our passions, once obtained for us; alike condemned by our religions and our countries, there now remains nothing on *earth* [italics in original] for us, but each together!" (255). So he gets it, at last, while, she declares, ". . . now *I die* as Brahmin women die, a *Hindu* in my feelings and my faith—dying for him I loved, and believing as my fathers believed" [italics in original] (257), and she dies for the beloved she had sought, dying for him, not his religion, thereby in effect renouncing her baptism and fully embracing her Indian identity. Hilarion goes to live in a *disert*, suffering Luxima's final fate, death in a cave in Kashmir, though he is alone at the end, as he had wished at the start of his life. Botkin has argued that Luxima has sought and achieves a kind of sati-like death, returning her to her Asian roots so that while her death has saved Hilarion, he is finally "brought into relief. . . as a colonized other and emasculated victim" ((47).

Hence, while Owenson offers a vision of a universal and unifying love, her characters are ultimately denied its solace and peace. The world remains violently partitioned, East vs. West. For every world the lovers encompass declares their passion as a transgression. The narrator holds out another hope, but her characters cannot reach it. "A Sabbath of the heart," a ceasefire of hostilities for the sake of peace and love, is deemed a transgression by all who witness it and is isolated and then destroyed. For Non-European and European peoples alike in this desolation, it seems, Sydney Owenson, Lady Morgan, is not sanguine.

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## The Bodhisattva of Romanticism: Alexander Csoma de Körös and the British 'Discovery' of Buddhism

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"Skandar Beg," as he was known in Tibet and across the Himalayan region, was born Alexander Csoma in 1784, a Hungarian scholar-adventurer, linguist, philologist, author of the first English/Tibetan dictionary and grammar, and considered the "Father of Tibetology." After over a century of confusion and misunderstanding, his publications led to the emergence of Buddhism itself into European consciousness and its subsequent establishment by the end of the 19th century as a world religion within the western sociology of knowledge (Masuzawa 121-44). Csoma's work was primarily linguistic, and during the twenty years he spent in Tibet and India, he codified and published works establishing the Tibetan canon of Buddhist texts (Lussier 1110-20).

Remarkably, Csoma remained disengaged from colonial entanglements across the sub-continent (Mukerjee 9), unlike Brian Houghton Hodgson who also, through the transmission of crucial manuscripts and texts (from his official post in Katmandu, Nepal), was a catalyst for the codification of the Buddhist canon in Europe (Lopez 54-7). As reported by several colonial functionaries, Csoma never sealed a single letter during his long residence in monasteries or during his ten-year stay within the basement of the Asiatic Society of Bengal (where he served as occasional librarian and cataloguer for the rapidly growing flow of books and manuscripts arriving in Calcutta). For this reason, he has been revered among the indigenous scholars of the region and their European compatriots alike, which led to a singular honor bestowed upon him long after his death in 1933.

Born in the small village of Körös in what is now the Transylvanian region of Romania, into an impoverished family, Csoma's linguistic training began at Bethlenianum College in Nagyenyed (200 miles from his native village), where he spent the next sixteen years (from age 15-31). As Edward Fox suggests, the College (which admitted students solely on their academic merits) was "strikingly similar in many ways to

the Himalayan Buddhist monasteries in which Csoma would later spend eight years learning the Tibetan language" (14). The austere academy was hierarchically organized and competitive, where younger students literally battled for food and knowledge alike. The elementary curriculum of Greek, Latin, and mathematics, formed the foundation of Csoma's linguistic accomplishments, and by the time he died, Csoma had mastered seventeen primary languages and most of the sub-dialects (Fox 18-21). Five years older than his peers, Csoma was an oddity at the College, but after his first year students and instructors alike recognized his unique combination of drive and intelligence. However, his primary qualities, those that brought him through the College and propelled him, subsequently, through the University of Göttingen and across the world, were a photographic memory and an iron will. The former allowed him to master early on Greek, Latin, and Hebrew—as well as modern French, German, Romanian and Turkish; the latter rendered him impervious to almost any physical hardship, leading most biographers to assert that Csoma, while still a young man, has "conquered his own human nature" (Fox 17).

During Csoma's Nagyenyed years, discernible Romantic influences swept across Hungary where radical thinkers, inspired by the American and French revolutions, began to push for independence from Austria (Mukerjee 12). In typical Romantic fashion, the longing for independence "expressed itself [through] a revival of Hungarian culture and language" (Fox 19), leading inevitably to unresolved questions regarding origins. To 19th philologists, Hungarian resembled no other European language, showed only a few direct connections to Finnish and Russian, and seemed better connected to the languages of Asia, including Sanskrit. This linguistic isolation from immediate neighbors fired the imagination of cultural nationalists, Csoma included, and they turned eastward to seek the "origins of the Hungarian people in the vast spaces of Central Asia" (Mishra 139). In his