

# Unifying Misnomers: Unca Eliza Winkfield's *The Female American*

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In the first issue of *American Literature* in 1929, Tremaine McDowell notes that the anonymous novel *The Female American; or the Adventures of Unca Eliza Winkfield* (1767) is a "poor imitation of" *Robinson Crusoe*. He argues that the novel lacks originality; has "incidents ... so preposterous that the book has little intrinsic worth; but it does introduce the South American Indian into the North American novel, and is written in a prose style of "unparalleled simplicity and directness."<sup>1</sup> In 2001, the Broadview Press reprinted the first British edition of the novel published in London in 1767. There were two later American editions of the novel published in 1790 and 1814. The novel has not been discussed in much detail either by historians of the eighteenth-century novel or by historians of depictions of European-Indian contact. But within the last five years the importance of the text has been recognized.<sup>2</sup> The novel is now seen as

1. Tremaine McDowell, "An American Robinson Crusoe," *American Literature* 1 (1929-30): 307.

2. Two recent critics of the novel, Michelle Burnham, ed., *The Female American* (Broadview Press, 2001), 9-28, and Betty Joseph, "Re(Playing) Crusoe/Pocahontas: Circum-Atlantic Stagings in *The Female American*," *Criticism* 42.3 (2000): 317-35 have contributed significant analyses of the text. My essay is indebted to their work but it places the novel more centrally in a historical/material context of Eighteenth-Century British colonialism and within the later history of missionary colonialism in North America. Burnham's introduction to the novel focuses on the novel's intertexts and the place of the text in the development of the Anglo-American novel. Joseph's essay focuses extensively on "resituating" the novel "within a postcolonial critical matrix" and thus does not develop an analysis of the emergent forms of historical colonialism at work within the text itself, as I do here. Additionally, I will suggest a more contradictory gender politics than either of these critics find in the text. I hope, however, while our approaches differ they can be seen as complimentary, not antagonistic. Further references to Burnham's edition of *The Female American* will be cited as page numbers in the text of the essay.

an intertextual mosaic of earlier texts by Aphra Behn, Daniel Defoe, and Peter Longueville with references to seventeenth-century voyage narratives and American popular culture. Betty Joseph has also suggested that the text offers a commentary on British missionary Christianity in the America colonies in the seventeenth century, especially the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG).<sup>3</sup> The novel, its defenders argue, is “a fascinating, complex, and important text that adds a great deal to our understanding of the cross-articulation of gender, empire, and race in the early Anglo-American novel.”<sup>4</sup>

My reading of the novel problematizes the literary/political consequences of the narrator’s intertextual referencing within the novel and, by clarifying the text’s contextual place in a historical dialogue about the role of captivity and freedom, will show how this text is doubly articulated within the spaces of colonial representation. In fact, the novel uses so many different conventions of colonial representation that its much-touted ambiguity is in fact a study of ideological evasion. I will argue that the narrator takes on a series of provisionally constructed identities within the space of colonial representation: as daughter to an Indian Princess or “Pocahontas”; as the exotic “other” in British society; as a female Crusoe; as a missionary teacher, and finally as an author. However this is complicated by the author/narrator’s own self-consciousness about the textual/historical identities colonial discourse may impose upon her. Michelle Burnham states: “Winkfield’s story engages ... in fantasies of a feminist utopianism and cross-racial community, both of which are enabled, however, by a specifically religious form of imperialism.”<sup>5</sup> In this essay, I read these fantasies as an enactment of the narrator’s problematic staging of her hybridity. The narrator’s provisional identities and her centralized narrative authority cannot be reconciled, and this creates an occlusion. The subject as well as the object of colonial enunciation will not always assume a fixed position within the narrative.

My argument will be divided into two parts. Part I will concentrate on the historical and material conditions surrounding the text in an attempt to clarify the ways in which the novel engages in mixture of colonial and literary discourses from 1740-1770 in both Britain and the United States.

3. Joseph 9-10 and Burnham 26.

4. Burnham 10.

5. Burnham 11.

My desire here is to move commentary on the novel away from an exclusive concern with uncovering literary and historical intertexts in the novel to an account of the material conditions which may have created a much more ambiguous presentation of these texts within the rhetoric of "virtuous empire." The second part of the essay will show how plot details and narrative strategies work in contradiction with each other, making the occlusions in the text more challenging to a stable view of colonialism in the novel. I will show that this text presents us **not** with a rejection/criticism of colonialist practices among the Indians of North American but instead presents a colonial/religious refashioning of British hegemony after the Seven Years War.

### Part I

It is a truth universally acknowledged in literary theory that there are overlaps and distinctions between social and literary texts, textual and discursive formations, and between representation and reality, and that in colonial and postcolonial studies these problematic areas have recently become even more problematic. One way to respond, as Ania Loomba in *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* has suggested, is to acknowledge the importance of discourse analysis – to examine the social and historical conditions within which specific representations are generated.<sup>6</sup> This becomes especially interesting if we work with a text where competing or overlapping discourses and narrative strategies are embedded. In the case of *The Female American*, the novel begins using motifs and narrative strategies from the captivity tale, and then changes to an island survival narrative mixed with hints of spiritual autobiography. But at the center of the novel are dramatized scenes of religious conversion: we have a presentation of missionary Christianity working within literary romance and forms of romantic primitivism. Additionally, *The Female American* is further complicated by the text's publication history: its authorship is unknown. The current editor of the Broadview Press edition of the text, Michelle Burnham, suggests the pseudonym Unca Eliza

6. Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/PostColonialism* (London: Routledge, 1998) 96.

Winkfield directly refers to the family name "Wingfield," and this directly refers to Edward Maria Wingfield, the first President of the Virginia Colony.<sup>7</sup> Edward-Maria Winkfield is mentioned in the first pages of the text as the narrator's "grandfather." However, while this fact might help locate the text within the referential world of American colonial history, I think, the Wingfield or Winkfield name in 1776 would have carried very few historical associations for readers of the novel. In fact, Wingfield did not have a distinguished record of leadership of the Virginia colony but by situating the text squarely in the history of the Virginia Colony, the narrator has an opportunity to establish a sense of historical veracity. The narrator's first name, Unca, suggests her Native American ancestry, and her middle name Eliza may be a foreshortening of Elizabeth.<sup>8</sup> The pseudonymous creation of the author on the title page is the first sign of her hybridity, and establishes the "Female American" as a figure with multiple inscriptions in the text.

Linda Colley's book *Captives* details a change, after 1750, in the transatlantic traffic in persons, cultural representations and creations, and in attitudes toward Native Americans in Britain and in the United States. The Seven Years War (1756-1763) proved transforming for Britain: "They wrenched Florida from the Spanish, and Canada from the French, as well as Cape Breton Island, strategic key to control of the Gulf of St. Lawrence, plus new territories in the Caribbean and West Africa, Grenada, Tobago, St. Vincent and Senegal, and their first major administrative enclave in India, the rich province of Bengal."<sup>9</sup> The British Empire, as Britons now called all the lands they laid claim to, was five times larger than it had been a century earlier. C.A. Bayly argues that the territorial expansion of the Seven Years' War imposed a wholly new set

7. Burnham 11. Edward-Maria Wingfield was the first president of the Virginia Colony and was one of the chief financial contributors to the Virginia Company. He stayed in the colony less than a year, and was accused of mismanaging the colony's resources. See Carl Bridenbaugh, *Jamestown, 1544-1699* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

8. Betty Joseph suggests that Unca refers to "Uncas," the chief of the Mohicans, whose tribe joined British settlers in a war against the Pequots in the 1630s (Joseph 5-6). While I think this comment is very useful, I disagree with Joseph's assumption that the whole of the novel is set in the seventeenth century. The novel begins with reference to that period but moves forward in time rather rapidly after the death of Unca's grandfather, and father. I also think we need to pay much more careful attention to the changing historical conditions from 1740-1760 in Britain and the North American colonies during the period of the novel's composition.

9. Linda Colley, *Captives* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2002) 171.

of conditions on the majority of non-European populations worldwide: the age of imperialism had begun.<sup>10</sup> Kathleen Wilson states “the ultimately spectacular string of British victories and conquests in 1758-62 both soothed and reconstituted national masculinity and power, while also celebrating the war and the newly extended British Empire for saving the world from French tyranny, Spanish cruelty, and Amerindian barbarity alike.”<sup>11</sup> America was now part of a protracted “duel for primacy between France and Britain” and the position of many Native American tribes changed too as they had fought alongside the French against the British and Americans.

There was also much more exchange between American and Britain during this period: visitors, prisoners, missionaries, merchants, and sailors (some of these were slaves and ex-slaves). There was an explosion of information about America within Britain in the form of letters, newspaper articles, official reports, etc.<sup>12</sup> Kathleen Wilson has demonstrated that by the 1740s and 1750s in Britain, provincial papers frequently included sections on “American Affairs” or “British Plantations” that provided “news” of politics and trade, and national periodicals discussed settlement patterns of individual colonies accompanied by maps.<sup>13</sup> More was written about America in Britain and in turn the British had to know more about America for military, financial, and strategic reasons. C.A. Bayley argues that the military and strategic nature of the empire, during this period, meant that there was dependence upon large numbers of native guides, indigenous soldiers: “disparagement of non-European customs, languages, and mores had to be restrained.”<sup>14</sup>

But most importantly, by placing American affairs within the context of British colonial aspirations for a “virtuous empire” there was a wedding of national and imperial interests to a larger destiny: that of spreading British goods, rights or liberties across the globe whether

10. C.A. Bayly, “The British and Indigenous Peoples, 1760-1860: Power, Perception and Identity.” In *Empire and Others: British Encounters with Indigenous Peoples, 1600-1850*, ed. Martin Dauntun and Rick Halpern (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999) 21.

11. Kathleen Wilson, “Citizenship, Empire, and Modernity in the English Provinces, c.1720-1790.” In *Cultures of Empire, Colonizers in Britain and the Empire in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, ed. Catherine Hall (New York: Routledge, 2000) 174-5.

12. Colley 171-74.

13. Wilson 160-61.

14. Bayley 32.

through trade, war, missionary Christianity, colonial administration or education.

As each group negotiated each other's geography and difference, there was a greater emphasis on accounts of captivity and on Native American encounters generally. These became an integral part of a wider reportage on captives: both Americans taken captive by Native Americans and British soldiers taken captive by Native Americans.<sup>15</sup> The captivity narrative, as defined by Gordon Sayre, is an account of encounters between unfamiliar peoples, generally as a result of European imperialism in the Americas and Africa. The Indian captivity narrative was especially popular in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries in the colonies and stressed colonists taken captive by raiding parties of Indians. It was not until the 1750s that the captivity narrative began to sell well in Britain. But in all forms of this narrative, two cultures are brought into conflict and are so different from one another that the narrator, who has been forced into the midst of the "other" community, regards the new life as a kind of imprisonment. The narrator is deprived of all the familiar patterns and experiences from her own environment. The "otherness" or difference experienced by the captive is usually described in binary oppositions centering on "racial, religious, and cultural" distance from "home." The most famous earlier narratives, from the Seventeenth century, were those of Mary Rowlandson and a collection created by Cotton Matter.<sup>16</sup> In the eighteenth century, these oppositions of civilization and savagery, Christianity and Paganism, and "home" and wilderness were becoming tinged with ambiguity. For example, there is no fear in the *Female American* of the narrator being coerced or coaxed into becoming something else; in fact, she takes great pride in her ability to "pass" between the Native American and colonial communities, and between the margin and the center.

While many of the captivity narratives and reportage, after 1758, sought to portray Native Americans as brutes, cowards, and violent "savages" who attacked women and children, this was usually part of war propaganda and was based upon hostility to Native American tribes who had assisted the French.<sup>17</sup> However, there were also a number of reports

15. Colley 174-202.

16. Gordon Sayre, ed., *American Captivity Narratives* (New York: New Riverside Editions, 2000) iv-v.

17. Colley 185.

by British officials that explained the violence of Native Americans as provoked by colonists who tried to make inroads on indigenous lands. Linda Colley argues that, in a number of captivity narratives published between 1758-1766, individual whites might sometimes choose to live with Native Americans and were made welcome by them, and that this proved “a revelation” to British and American readers alike.<sup>18</sup> In *The Female American*, for example, the narrator chooses, at the end of the text “to live and die amongst my dear Indians” (137). The text can be seen within the context of 1760s captivity narratives in which crossing over and living with Native Americans takes on significance, not just for the narrator, but also for the Native American tribe that comes under her power. There is also a romanticism of the noble savage in this text in which the Indians are gentle, natural, and generous. A romantic woodland people whose idolatry needs disciplining and who can be “educated out of” their savagery and ignorance through the firm hand of missionary Christianity under the leadership of white settlers.<sup>19</sup>

Other critics have argued that the text seems to move retrospectively in its uses of literary allusion and intertextual reference, but I think that the text is a formulation of the emerging British empire of the 1760s.<sup>20</sup> The setting of the narrative moves freely between Britain and the North American colonies demonstrating the new circulation of capital, people, and goods which came into being after the middle of the eighteenth century. The text needs to be read within the framework of the colonial exchanges of economic and cultural capital in which the British colonial project was being mapped and given a hegemonic rhetorical structure linking both sides of the Atlantic through an “empire of goods.”<sup>21</sup> For example, there is a consistent trans-Atlantic movement of people and goods in the text: characters move between America and Britain for purposes of education;

18. Colley 196.

19. See *Female American* 117-120.

20. For an informative presentation of the case for a dramatic change in the material conditions of world-wide colonialism and the Eurocentric discourses describing indigenous peoples from 1740-1760 see the collection of essays, *Empire and Others, British Encounters with Indigenous Peoples, 1600-1850*, ed. Martin Daunton and Rick Halpern (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999). British historians have also redefined the interconnections between nationalism and colonialism during this period. See Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press), and Susan Kingsley Kent, *Gender and Power in Britain, 1640-1990* (London: Routledge, 1999).

21. Wilson 161-4.

Unca's father moves his wealth between the Virginia colony and Britain; and after the death of Unca's father she attempts to move her inherited capital in slaves, physical possessions, and money back to Britain. While in the second part of the text, much of the plot is confined to an island survival narrative set off the coast of either the Carolinas or Florida, the plot still depends upon shipping. In the final pages of the text we have more shipping news: Unca decides to send her manuscript to Britain for publication. The passage of the manuscript from margin to center is an embodiment of an economic process of exchange discussed earlier. The movements of people, goods, and texts are concrete forms of mercantile capital that depended upon shipping as the lifeblood of Empire.

## Part II

The novel begins with a transatlantic crossing by the narrator's ancestors to the Virginia colony. The plantation of her grandfather prospers and after many years passes "in a flourishing state to my father" (36). The narrator's grandfather is then killed in an Indian massacre and her father taken captive. After some time in captivity, Unca's father's life is saved by a Native American princess: "Though a complexion so different, as that of the princess from an European, cannot but at first disgust, yet by degrees my father grew insensible to the difference, and in other respects her person was not inferior to that of the Greatest European beauty" (41). Here the captivity narrative begins and for the next two chapters we have a detailed repetition, with slight variations, of the popular tale of Pocahontas, a native princess who saves the life of an American colonialist officer.<sup>22</sup> They spend some months among her "tribe" and then marry.

22. See Joseph 1-7. In Mary Dearborn's *Pocahontas's Daughters*, the interpretation of the incident is that "the story of Pocahontas's acquisition of an American or a non-ethnic identity is, for the ethnic woman, an important feature of the common language of America" (72), but the historical accuracy of Dearborn's interpretation is questionable. On the contrary, it seems more likely that Pocahontas was exercising her prerogative as daughter of a sachem to decide the fate of a captive than that she was rejecting her identity. In thus performing the role of what Smith and his men would have defined as "princess," Pocahontas would have been reaffirming – not rejecting – her "ethnic and familial identity." See Sandra Baringer's article, "'Captive Woman?': The Re-writing of Pocahontas in Three Contemporary Native American Novels," *Studies in American Indian Literatures* (SAIL) 11,3 (Fall 1999): 42-3.



William Winkfield seeks to move back to his plantation in Virginia, but first wants to convert his wife to Christianity. Unca's mother, who believed "the sun was God," is easily converted because "as we readily believe those whom we love, [my father] was more successful than he expected, and in little time the princess became convinced of her errors, and her good understanding helped to forward her conversion" (41). In this section of the text, we can see the author using commonplaces from the Pocahontas story in which Indian women are cast as "seductresses, playthings, or beautiful and virtuous allies of Europeans."<sup>23</sup> This section also establishes the ease of conversion from "paganism" to Christianity. A rival in this section of the text kills Unca's mother.

The story then focuses on the narrator's childhood with her father in the Virginia colony where his estates prosper and he uses the wealth from his wife's dowry to invest in property in England. When the narrator comes of age her father wants to provide her with an English/Christian education, therefore she and her father move to Britain. They leave their American plantation under the management of overseers. In speaking of her visit to Britain, Unca presents her hybridity as a sign of difference: "My tawny complexion, and the oddity of my dress, attracted everyone's attention" and a few pages later my "uncommon complexion, singular dress, and the grand manner in which I appeared, always attended by two female and two male slaves, could not fail of making me much taken notice of" (49). Neighboring gentry treat her "in a degree little inferior to that of a princess." Her Father's brother, a kindly clergyman, educates her. She learns Latin, Greek, and has a grounding in Christianity.

In these early chapters of the novel, the narrator's identity is marked by a self-conscious hybridity carefully constructed in a series of multiple inscriptions. While the references to the "Indian Princess" and to the Pocahontas story authenticate both her mother and herself, it is also implied that the "truth" of her story fits into another story. The narrator's use of her own gender and self-dramatizing abilities make her readable as an exotic object within the class and colonial system in Britain. She speaks Indian languages, she keeps her mother's ceremonial bow and arrow with her as a symbol of her Indian past but her manners, class position with

23. Kathleen Brown, "Native Americans and Early Modern Concepts of Race." In *Empire and Others: British Encounters with Indigenous Peoples, 1600-1850*, ed. Martin Daunton and Rick Halpern (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999) 91-2.

servants and slaves, and her education define her as European. Unca creates herself within the domestic gender expectations of an emerging exchange economy. And her circulation between Britain and the colonies is a trope for the new social and economic exchange that connected Britain with its colonies.

Her father becomes restless in Britain and returns to the plantation where he made his fortune. He soon dies. Unca returns to the colony to settle his affairs and prepares to return to England with her "slaves," his possessions, and the money from the plantations the family controlled. On the return voyage, an unscrupulous Captain who tries to bribe her to marry his son holds Unca hostage. She rejects the captain's attempts at blackmail and is abandoned on an island off the Southern coast of the American colonies.

In the second part of Book I, Unca's narrative turns the tale toward the intertext of *Robinson Crusoe* as the narrator discovers her "disconsolate" alienation and doubts her purpose: "strangely divided between hope and fear" (56-7). In these chapters Unca's physical condition is marked, as in *Crusoe*, by an intense fever:

As my thirst was great, I drank freely of it; but as the fever continued three days, I was reduced to my last shell-full of water. I had at this time an interval of sense, when I found I was too weak to out of my cell to fetch more, yet my thirst forced me to drink this, which I did supposing it would be my last and that death must be my next potion (66).

The narrator lies down with much "resignation" to die but then "I determined, if possible to attempt going to the river to drink. Though I died in the way; for death itself was more eligible than the thirst I suffered." The narrator crawls to a river to drink: "Surely deliverance itself could not have given me greater pleasure than the sight of the water." She drinks and then washes herself on the river's edge. She slips and falls into the river barely "escaping" with her life. Thus the mere circumstance of being immersed in water "might have proved instant death" but it does not as she lifts "up my heart unto God and unfeignedly thanked him for his mercy" (66-7). This is a "woe is me scene," common in eighteenth-century travel and colonialist literature, in which a narrator pauses to access their misfortune, surveys the exterior landscape, and connects it to their personal condition of despair and hopelessness, but then an event or

hopeful thought rescues the narrator from despondency. Mary Louise Pratt has analyzed this pattern in a number of fictional and travel narratives from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries in her important article "Conventions of Representation."<sup>24</sup> The colonial protagonist suffers but is able to generate a new beginning: physically, psychologically, and spiritually. The double baptism, developed over the next two chapters in the novel, follows this pattern, marking the beginning of the narrator's sense of "mission" on the island. Overt Christian symbolism and political authority are established along intersecting lines, as Unca's perceptions are mediated by the texts of European literature and her more immediate sensual impressions.

Unlike the uninhabited island in *Crusoe*, this island has had one permanent resident: an English hermit. He has left a rudimentary dwelling for shelter and a manuscript. His text is an interpretation of island life, detailing natural history and the behavior of a group of Indians who come to visit the island yearly. The journal warns Unca against interfering with their visit to worship at "the idol of the sun" they have built on the island. The hermit's manuscript conflates historical patterns of seasonal migration pursued by Native Americans with religious ritual and custom but the book does enable Unca to establish a technology of social control on the island without directly learning from the indigenous peoples themselves.

Much of Chapters Seven, Eight, and Nine of the novel detail Unca's discovery of the Indians' sun idol and her use of it to convert the Indians to Christianity. The huge statue is described as "resembling a man clad in a long robe or vest but which was girt about the waist as with a girdle, and on each breast gathered to a point, fastened as it were, with a button; the neck and bosom quite bare like the manner of a women" (78). The statue's description is androgynous; its size and the discovery that it amplifies the sound of her voice create a "more than female resolution" in the narrator. The statue is a literal and figurative representation of the narrator's anonymity and power: it embodies her narrative persona. Using the statue as a place from which she can mask herself and control her audience, Unca develops "the consciousness of the purity of my

24. Mary Louise Pratt, "Conventions of Representation: Where Discourse and Ideology Meet." In *The Taming of the Text: Explorations in Language, Literature and Culture*, ed. Willie van Peer (London: Routledge, 1988) 15-34.

intention and the goodness of my design" (78). Then follows a detailed description of the narrator's attempts to use the statue to convert the tribe "from their idolatry," by adapting "my discourse to their own way of reasoning and avoided all such terms and modes of speech, as are intelligible only to Europeans" (107). Unca tells the reader that she does not seek to substitute herself for God or "to impose myself upon them as God," but all her words and actions suggest otherwise. The Indians are to trust her and in her absolute authority (95).

In Book Two, Unca reveals her intention to "live among the Indians" and to take control of their education and spiritual salvation. From behind cover of the statue she predicts her own second coming:

A person shall come to you, like yourselves, and that you may be the less fearful or suspicious, that person shall be a woman, who shall live among you as you do. She shall bring with her the holy writings I have been speaking of, and shall teach all of you, especially your priests, who shall instruct you after her departure, the knowledge of the true God, and the way to be happy forever. (111)

She also tells them that they must show great respect for this leader by not visiting the island without her permission. She then reveals herself in front of the statue in a lavish costume made from gold. To gain authority over the indigenous peoples of the area the narrator has to control the rules of her own recognition – she is the woman who would be queen. In contrast to other captivity and encounter narratives of this period in which there seems to be some kind of permeability to the Anglo-Indian divide there is none here.<sup>25</sup> The narrator is invested in reproducing and naturalizing structures of power and she does this by creating a series of intertextual/provisional identities that demand subordination to her voice. "How greatly was my situation changed! From a solitary being, obliged to seek my own food from day to day, I was attended by a whole nation, all ready to serve me; and not care upon me but how to discharge the important business of an apostle, which I had now taken upon me" (118). She does not analyze the terms of her own "acceptance" into the tribe, and while she knows their language, not one of the Indians speaks in the text.

25. See Pratt 16-26 for examples of the metaphoric and literal division in colonialist texts between inside and outside, self and other.

Unca's hybridity is established both by means of intertextual reference and through evocation of her indigenous past. The narrator essentializes her own authority and dramatizes her own reception by building upon existing ritual. She does not so much stage the past as use the tropes of the past to change the present based upon a "higher purpose." Betty Joseph's comment is useful here: "Unca's proximity to the natives, enabled by her own hybridity, annihilates the Other as difference but saves it as a Christian soul" (8).

I found the manner of introducing myself among them was highly serviceable to me: for though, in every respect, they could not but observe that I was like them; yet it was easy to discover, that they conceived me more than a mere mortal. However, I did not think it my duty, any more than my interest, to undeceive them, as this opinion secured to me that respect and authority which were necessary for me to preserve, in order to carry on the great work among them, in which I was engaged. (119)

After their conversion, she moves to the mainland with her "Indians." This community on the mainland is very carefully separated from the island where she converted the Indians. The physical separation of the Indians from "their island," where they had worshiped the sun, is a metaphoric embodiment of their "otherness" in the text. On the mainland, Unca can create a community in which the values of missionary Christianity are tied to manual labor in a pastoral setting. It is a model of self-sustaining authority through community.

For two years the narrator lives happily among the Indians but then decides to revisit the island upon which she was first abandoned. Again the narrator ascends the statue to gain a "vantage point" from which to view the island. She notices some men approaching who are clearly European and she is at first uncertain as to what she ought to do. How is she to return "home" to the mainland? "My next fear was for the poor Indians, who would come in the evening, and not finding me by the shore, as usual, would no doubt come upon the island, in search of me, and be taken for slaves. Nor might the evil stop thus; their country might be discovered, and probably invaded, and numbers of the people be carried away into slavery, and other injuries committed. Thus did my busy imagination create, as in a moment, evils that happily never came into existence ..." (121). In a melodramatic use of coincidence, one of these men is her British cousin, John Winkfield. She again disguises her

voice/self and has the oracle announce "Winkfield stay." She then proceeds to inquire after her relations in England. In this awkward dialogue she is able to tease out the intentions of the sailors accompanying him. She is, as before, using the oracle to create a dramatic scene. She intensifies her own power over the men of the landing party by setting up an instrument in the oracle to play strange, unidentifiable music, which "no doubt could not but give [her] visitor's a new alarm" (125). She then descends the oracle in order to reveal herself: the repetition of the earlier scene of conversion is crucial. Throughout the text, Unca has become an object of veneration through the dramatic presentation of her ever-changing identity using subterfuge, impersonation, and displacement. Once again she uses the oracle/statue to gain power over her male counterparts by controlling the terms of her own recognition. Betty Joseph has made the important point that the narrator is appropriating traditional forms of male power and authority through both self-dramatization/ self-presentation. Her oratorical skills allow her to control her "new converts" and her colonial rivals.<sup>26</sup> The assumption is that the speaking voice can contain all discourse, can command all languages and situations within both the colonial and indigenous community: the authoritative measure of knowledge is European.

Peter Pels suggests, "all colonial relationships require a language of command, and often its dictionary and grammar were proved by missionaries."<sup>27</sup> One of Unca's multiple identities in the text is that of the Christian missionary, and her knowledge of Indian languages enables her to communicate to potential converts. Unca's missionary intervention is an embodiment of two processes. First is the process of making a version of the imperial project that can efface the harshness of "trade," plantation economies, and colonialism itself by converting it into a fantasy of spreading Christianity and education. Second is the act of assuming that a single voice can articulate "other" subjectivities within it and embody the new community within itself. Not to put too fine a point on it, the novel inscribes the tensions in colonial discourse between colonialist as demi-God and as semi-Native. Philip Morgan puts this tension into an historical perspective in his essay "Encounters between British and

26. Joseph 6.

27. Peter Pels, "The Anthropology of Colonialism: Culture, History, and the Emergence of Western Governmentality," *Annual Review of Anthropology* (1997): 171.

Indigenous Peoples, c.1500-1800" in which "identities are, above all, invented and imagined in a complex and ever changing process of interaction. Identities depend on imagined communities, on constructed associations, on invented traditions, on manufactured myths."<sup>28</sup>

But the text also makes reference to the practical program of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (active in the American Colonies from 1701-1785), which urged its missionaries to learn the language of the Indians and preach to them on revealed religion in their own language. The documents of the Society also engage in a romantic primitivism that focuses on how "the natural simplicity and purity of the Indian manners" would greatly "accelerate" the creation of a Christian community.<sup>29</sup> Some of the SPG's literature even suggested preserving the new converts in "bounded communities" of converts – "islands" in the midst of colonies. These were called "praying communities." Unca's attempts to convert the Indians in their own language is a direct reference to the SPG commitment for each missionary to "understand the great variety of Languages of those Countries in order to be able to Converse with the Natives, and Preach the Gospel to them ..."<sup>30</sup> but I think the text needs to be placed in the context of difficulties the Society faced in the American colonies in the eighteenth century.

In the eighteenth century many missionaries in the SPG expressed frustration with attempts to convert "the Indians" to Christianity. "In the conversion of Indians many difficulties and impediments will occur, which European [*sic*] Missionaries will never be able to remove. Their customs and manner of living are so opposite to the genius and constitution of our people, that they could never become familiar to them."<sup>31</sup> To many of the SPG missionaries, Native Americans had no settled place of habitation, and their "savage knife" was always posed to threaten and endanger settlers as well as missionaries. Generally the society's efforts were in the larger cities of the Northern and New England colonies and in larger rural settlements in the South. The Charter of the Society states

28. Phillip D. Morgan, "Encounters Between British and 'Indigenous' Peoples, c. 1500-c.1800." In *Empire and Others: British Encounters with Indigenous Peoples, 1600-1850*, 45.

29. *Female American* 107, 140-41.

30. C.F. Pascoe, *Two Hundred Years of the S.P.G.: An Historical Account of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, 1701-1900* (London: Published by SPG, 1901) 7-8.

31. Pascoe 38.

that its purpose was to manage a charity for “maintenance for an orthodox Clergy in the plantations, colonies, and factories of Great Britain,” and “for propagation of the gospel in those parts.”<sup>32</sup> Much of their work among Native Americans was in New York area among the Mohawk.<sup>33</sup> The missionaries employed by the Society were all men. Women only played a part in the Society if the missionaries were already married or if teachers were needed in local schools founded by the Society. Unca does follow the general plan of the SPG by teaching the children and young people in her community the Church of England’s catechism, in “the Indian tongue.” For example, in the final chapters of the text the narrator has “not only finished the translation of the Bible, as well as that of the Catechism, but indeed of most of the prayers in the Common Prayer-Book” (119). The Society’s most successful translations in the early part of the eighteenth century were the Bible, Prayer Book, Short Catechism, and Reading Primer into Mohawk. But much of the research on the SPG suggests that after 1740 the SPG found conversion of slaves easier than Native Americans and the Society decided to focus much of its attention on the “hatred of the clergy and contempt of the sacraments” among the general white population of the colonies.<sup>34</sup>

The novel ends with both Unca and her cousin, soon to be husband, committed to missionary work among the Indians. Her power and authority is “turned over to her husband” and they agree to stay among the native peoples: “we never intended to have any more to do with Europe.” The colonist crossings of the Atlantic stop. But first they have determined to go “upon my island, to collect all the gold treasure there,” and to blow up the oracle/statue so “that the Indians might never be tempted to their former idolatry” (154). The narrator’s husband takes one last voyage to England – he carries with him her manuscript and the determination to renounce his fortune. England is the recipient or addressee of Unca’s text, but the text also ends with a promise of no further communication with the metropolis. It is a statement of both affilia-

32. Pascoe 7.

33. Pascoe 57-78.

34. See C.E. Pierre, *The Work of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts among the Negroes in the Colonies: Electronic Edition*. The Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, Inc. 1916. Reproduced in electronic form by University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. <<http://docsouth.unc.edu/church/Pierre/Pierre/html>>; see also Pascoe 9-12.



tion and separation. But this journey to England is not simply one taken by a manuscript – there is gold, from the island in the hold of the ship.

Most readers of the novel find the final pages of the text unsatisfactory. They are disjointed, a series of “dialogues within a dialogue,” and speakers are seldom distinguished by diction, register, or narrative focus. The convoluted story within a story is unclear and the editor of the recent Broadview edition needs detailed footnotes to help the reader sort out who is speaking and what they are speaking about (141-155). One way to explain the text’s incoherence is that with the arrival of her cousin and other characters, Unca’s model of self-sustaining authority begins to breakup. The regulation of spaces and places on the island and the mainland has been achieved through a persona that assigned a differential sense of order, and now that the narrator has abandoned her authority she is at a loss for words. The text literally runs out of confidence – narrative drive, allusions, intertextual diction are nowhere to be found. Unca has made herself a place but the narrative has no place left to go. We are faced with silence. At the heart of one kind of authoritarian discourse is the desire to abolish dialogue (particularly the language of Others), to use words strictly in the imperative mode calling forth acts of heroism and devotion. This was one possibility for missionary Christianity and colonialism in the eighteenth and nineteenth century.<sup>35</sup> But in this case, at the end of this novel, the desire is domesticated and then repressed.

On the one hand *The Female American* rings very few changes in a series of stereotypical depictions of Indian peoples and Indian women in particular. In one sense the novel perpetuates descriptions from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries of Indians as “changeable people who were like unfinished furniture, capable of taking the imprint of those that finished them, in this case the Christian Europeans who would enable them to shake off their barbarous ways.”<sup>36</sup> However, as I have shown, if we focus on the implications of the narrator’s changeable persona, then the text sustains a more complex analysis. Additionally, the difficulties of her narrative voicing of colonialism and missionary Christianity create a complicated picture of the period 1740-1760. The narrator of the novel

35. See Patrick Brantlinger’s *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1900* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988) 19-70, especially 56-7.

36. Brown 87-88.

can only take power in a space established by missionary Christianity, and a kind of authoritarian idealism. The text sings the praises of the Indians' "natural simplicity" and "purity of manners" before the advent of "European curiosities," but this involves a displacement in which the Indian community must be kept in another place (the island) only to be entered through a self-conscious journey backward and then at the end of the text destroyed. To retain and attain authority, "the rules of recognition" of that authority have to be articulated and visible in unmediated ways. Her anonymous text means living with a permanent hold on pseudonymous power.

In a sense, this text moves metaphorically from an economy in which the name of the Father controls all wealth, education, and development through family relationships (whether in the Native American community detailed at the beginning of the text or within the settler community of Virginia itself) to an economy in which the object is to control populations through the technologies of education and missionary Christianity. The narrator's evangelical enthusiasm is a pretext for intervening in an indigenous society as well as formulating a colonial ideology that disciplines new populations and territories.