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# The Duality of Unca's Identity: The Use of the Idol in Colonial and Religious Subjugation

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# The Duality of Unca's Identity: The Use of the Idol in Colonial and Religious Subjugation

## **Abstract**

*The Female American* follows the life of Unca Winkfield, the product of a bi-racial marriage in eighteenth-century America. Unca's hybridity creates tension within the novel as she seems to alternate between a predominantly Christian worldview and a pagan one. Throughout the first part of the novel, Unca displays Christian values, praying after she is abandoned on an island. However, as she spends more time there, she begins to act like a pagan, using an abandoned oracle to communicate with the natives. Most scholars believe that Unca changes her beliefs in order to utilize whichever heritage is most beneficial at the time. I argue, however, that she must enact both of these lineages at once because together they compose her individuality. Through Unca's initial use of the island's pagan statue, readers see how she employs both of her heritages simultaneously: she preaches Christianity by speaking through a pagan idol. Later, she utilizes the idol to scare the Europeans with whom she is actually trying to reconnect. In my analysis of these scenes, I argue that, while one side of Unca's dual identity may possess control in certain environments, the other is always present. The subordinated worldview may recede but it cannot go away without being subjugated by a powerful outside force. When viewed in this light, Unca's subjugation at the end of the novel can be understood as a function of a new colonial encounter that strips Unca of her individuality, placing her within the European domestic structure once more.

## **Keywords**

Identity, Transatlantic, Post-colonial, Religion, religious subjugation, Colonial period, *The Female American*

## **Disciplines**

Other English Language and Literature

The Duality of Unca's Identity:  
The Use of the Idol in Colonial and Religious Subjugation

*The Female American*, written by an unknown author and first published in 1767, is largely ignored by scholars and academics. In the approximately two hundred and fifty years since it was first published, it has only seen four editions, with a gap of nearly two hundred years between its third and fourth publications (Burnham 23). Because of this, few have contributed to the critical scholarship on this text. Those who have written about *The Female American* generally critique it by comparison with *Robinson Crusoe*—Laura Stevens, Betty Joseph, and Michelle Burnham in particular take this view of the novel. Nearly all of the scholars who have analyzed this book, whether or not they discuss its relation to *Crusoe*, agree that it is a feminist text in which Unca “creates spaces” where she can have power over herself and others (Vaccaro 133).

Betty Joseph and Michelle Burnham occupy the most important place in the body of scholarship on *The Female American*. Both discuss Unca’s hybridity and the power that this gives her. Joseph focuses on the new identity that Unca creates for herself—she is neither female nor male, American nor British—and how she is able to develop a utopic Christian settlement of praying Indians through this uniqueness. Burnham’s analysis is similar but it covers more ground. She explores some of the issues that Unca’s hybridity creates, specifically the religious and imperialist implications of her actions.

The pattern set forth by Joseph and Burnham is followed by many of the other scholars who discuss *The Female American*, including Kristianne Kalata Vaccaro and Stephen Wolfe. Both of these critics are concerned with the identities that Unca constructs for herself in various situations. There is one article, though, that does not follow this pattern. Janina Nordius’s article, “‘Thus might I reason with a heathen...’: The Gothic Moment in *The Female American*”

agrees that Unca changes her identity whenever it is “socially convenient” (7) but probes more deeply into this issue, discussing the religious struggles that Unca undergoes as a result of her hybridity. Nordius argues that, when Unca is trapped in the idol, she experiences a period of “terror” because she realizes that her Christianity is not secure and that her pagan ancestry may still occupy a place in her psyche (15).

All of these arguments are provocative, for often it seems as if Unca is simply choosing which role will be most useful in her pursuit of prestige and power. I would argue, however, that they do not take into account the fact that these roles are an integral part of who she is. Unca is not *choosing* what she wants to be but is displaying the effects of a colonial encounter; she does not have the option to be fully native or fully European because she is not. Therefore, she must act in a way that incorporates both of these identities until she, the hybrid colonial product, is re-subjugated by another colonial force. While I agree with Nordius that Unca is conflicted as to her true beliefs and that her time in the idol is key to understanding this struggle, I do not believe that Nordius takes her argument far enough—she fails to explain the implications of this tension for Unca’s interactions with the natives and the British search party. In this essay, I argue that she has a dual identity rather than a hybrid identity; this view of Unca suggests that she has two sides to her identity (a pagan<sup>1</sup> and Christian side)<sup>2</sup> and that control of her actions can move back and forth between these sides. While feminist readings are useful for understanding *The Female American*, I would argue that a study of colonialism, specifically through the lens of

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<sup>1</sup> When I refer to Unca’s paganism, I speak of it as it appears in *The Female American*. When Unca explores the idol, finds that it is hollow and that it amplifies sound. She believes that it was used to “to give out oracles” (80). It seems obvious from the lamentations of the priests when the Indians arrive that they did not know the voice that used to come from the idol was a human and not a messenger from god. This means that the priests of old used to manipulate the people into believing that their voices were the voices of deities (or their messengers); this provided a method of self-glorification for the priests as they turned themselves into gods.

<sup>2</sup> Nordius uses the terms pagan and Christian to describe Unca’s religious background; I believe that these are useful terms and so I have adopted them.

religion, is an effective way to read this text while Freudianism proves helpful in understanding Unca's first experience within the idol.

In this essay, I will argue that there are three major colonial encounters in *The Female American*. The first (and most important) is the representation of the physical encounter between Unca's parents that is continuously repeated within her identity. She is constantly encountering different parts of her heritage, causing her identity to become unstable. Many shifts occur between native paganism and European Christianity as the environments in which she resides allow her to recognize the difference within herself. For example, her experience with the idol is what causes her to recognize and reconnect with her pagan roots. Through this, she is able to effect the second colonial encounter—the conversion of the Indians to Christianity. She does this by employing deceptive tactics and using elements of the natives' former beliefs to create a foundation that sets her up as “holy” (Nordius 14; Winkfield 111). However, although the statue brings her to power, it eventually strips her of control, as well. When Unca decides to use the idol in order to communicate with her cousin and the Europeans, she begins the third colonial encounter. In this final colonial episode, the sailors believe that she is a devil and, because of this, her cousin must re-convert and re-colonize her, thereby eradicating almost all of her paganism. After this, Unca returns to the role of the good Christian; her environment and her new subjugation dictate that this must be so. Therefore, while Unca's duality still exists, the proportions have changed forever and she is no longer a threat to the Europeans. The colonial encounters have ended, and these islands can exist under the security of British control.

#### Unca's Identity

Unca's identity intrigues scholars and students alike. In Laura Steven's discussion of the novel, she says that her “students have been fascinated with [Unca] Winkfield's biracial identity

and hybrid acculturation—truly unusual qualities in the protagonists of eighteenth-century English novels” (141). Unca’s difference from normal characters interests those who read *The Female American* and causes them to question what her hybrid identity means for the novel as a whole. Stephen Wolfe argues that Unca “takes on a series of provisionally constructed identities within the space of colonial representation” (18). His view is representative of the common scholarly thought on Unca’s identity. Literary critics believe that she is in control of which identity she displays. I agree that this shift between the Christian and pagan worlds comes from her multifaceted. Unca is a product of the colonial encounter, and this encounter constantly replays itself within her. However, I believe that she cannot choose which role to enact. Rather, since her heritage is comprised of both the Old World and the New World, she must always be both at once. Unca’s identity is similar to the monument that she has built in honor of her mother. The mausoleum is erected in an English

church-yard....It is a lofty building, supported by Indians as big as life, ornamented with coronets, and other regalia, suitable to [Princess Unca’s] dignity....on one side is cut an inscription in the Indian language, containing a short account of her life and death. This [Unca Eliza] drew up and translated into Latin and English, which fills up the other two sides; on the top is an urn, on which an Indian leans, and looks on it in a mournful posture. (Winkfield 50-51)

This structure is a symbol of native heritage built on the grounds of European religion. Yet, while it contains markers of both civilizations, it is neither fully one nor the other—it is the hybrid product of an architectural encounter of two civilizations. Similarly, Unca is a combination of Indian and British heritage. While she has been trained primarily in European

ideas and religion, she has not lost all vestiges of her mother's culture.<sup>3</sup> Her identity demonstrates what occurs after a colonial encounter—the colonized and their descendents absorb some of the new ideas and retain some of the old but, like true hybrids, are neither fully one nor the other, but something in between. By using the mausoleum example one more time, we can understand these shifts in Unca's identity which most scholars believe are a product of her choice. While viewing the monument from one side would cause the observer to assume that it is a native structure, looking at it from the other side would signal a European design. However, neither one of these assumptions is correct—the mausoleum is something unto itself; it is neither fully British nor fully Indian. Rather, it is a result of an encounter between these two cultures. It cannot choose when to be Indian and when to be European—it is always both and neither at the same time; it has its own distinct identity. I agree with Joseph and Vaccaro when they say that Unca resides in a new space in society created because of her interracial heritage (Joseph 330; Vaccaro 133); however, I do not agree with them when they say that this is a product of Unca's agency. Unca does not create new areas for herself when most convenient—this space that scholars talk about was created when she was born. Her difference and duality are not a product of her choice, they are the result of a colonial encounter. Because of this, portions of Unca's heritage are more prominent at some times than others, but she is still always enacting the same dual identity.

This is not to say, however, that Unca's pagan and Christian heritage do not each control her at various time—the movement of her identity depends upon the environment in which she resides. When Unca lives with the colonial settlers and in England, she identifies with her Christian beliefs. She is brought up by her father and her uncle, strong Christian men who are

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<sup>3</sup> She dresses like an Indian and refuses to marry someone who “could not use a bow and arrow as well as [she] could” (Winkfield 51)

sure to instruct her in the tenets of the Church of England, and she eventually marries her cousin, who becomes a missionary to the Indians. In these places, Unca's religious identity is secure because her pagan heritage is not given the opportunity to come to the surface. While she is on the island, however, there is no strong Christian presence to keep the native side of her identity in check. As she spends more time near the symbols of the Indian religion, pagan ideas begin to penetrate her thoughts and skew her Christian beliefs. Unca's malleable identity is similar to what Peter Hulme describes in relation to Pocahontas and the early settlers. He compares the Indian princess to interpreters who submerged themselves within Indian nations so that they could fully understand the native languages. Because of this, "their very identity as Englishmen ... became suspect. They became, as it were, cultural half-breeds inhabiting that dangerous no-man's-land between identifiable cultural positions" (Hulme 142). Pocahontas, on the other hand, was not viewed as a threat because she spent so much time with the British from a young age; her identity was shaped by her colonizers and, therefore, her Indianness is not problematic.<sup>4</sup> At first, Unca occupies a position that is similar to that of Pocahontas—she is not a threat when she is near the Europeans. However, as soon as she is out of their control and living in native territory by herself, she becomes like the interpreters and is immediately in danger of, as Nordius puts it, "going-native" (Nordius 9). This is problematic for Unca—her family has always portrayed Europeanness as the safe identity and implied that anything else is dangerous.

Unca's duality becomes evident when she explores the temples and the idol. During these investigations, she begins to pay more attention to materialism than to spirituality—she writes at length about the riches that she finds in the temple chambers and the idol. In fact, she does not shy away from these sites that represent the glorification of a pagan deity but, rather,

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<sup>4</sup>Cultural interactions are bad for the translators and good for Pocahontas because the translators are submerging themselves in an uncivilized society while Pocahontas is, through her relations with the Europeans, becomes civilized.



she is attracted to “gold rings ... as [she] supposed the high-priests wore; this [she] put[s] on one of [her] fingers, and two of the richest bracelets, beset with precious stones, on each of [her] arms” (Winkfield 80). She clothes herself in the costumes of a high priest, preparing the reader to believe that, as Vaccaro says, she will soon take on this role, abandoning her old beliefs for new ones (145).

The light tone of this episode does not last for long: soon after Unca leaves the idol for the day, there is a large storm, and she feels “as if every particle of light had been annihilated, and primitive chaos had once more resumed its reign ... [she] again sought [her] cell, and there trembling waited the dissolution of all things, as [she] indeed then expected” (Winkfield 81). Through this description, Unca implies that her interest in the idol and the pagan religion is placing her on dangerous ground. When she engages with the beliefs of her mother’s people, she begins to open up a part of her heritage that she had tried to “repress” (Noridus 4). This is signaled through the return to “primitive chaos”—an animistic pagan system of belief—and her fears of a pending apocalypse (Winkfield 81). Unca’s explorations of the temple and idol bring out the native part of her identity, and, although she is not aware of it yet, this facet of her persona will determine her actions for the next two years of her life. Her pagan side is beginning to hint at its potential power, creating Unca’s anxiety during the storm. However, while this makes her uncomfortable, she does not yet realize that this part of her identity can and will take over her thoughts and actions.

The shift in Unca’s thought processes from a dominant Christian view to a dominant pagan view becomes apparent soon after the storm has subsided. After noting all of the damage that the deluge has caused, her first reaction is to worry about whether or not the idol is still standing. She “trembled for the statue of the sun, though [she] knew not why; for what it was to

[her] whether it stood or fell? As soon as [she] came near enough, [she] saw it was safe; and was far from being displeased that it was so” (82). Unca cannot understand why the idol has become important to her, but she recognizes that it now occupies an important place in her life. Her concern for the statue is a function of her emerging allegiance to her native heritage, yet she is able to push aside these fears. Unca does this by deluding herself into believing that she is acting like a good Christian. While conversing to herself about her anxieties, she says that she wants to show that her “saving faith...produces good works” and that she can “commit [herself] to [God] by a patient continuance in well-doing” (70). However, since her pagan roots have already begun to take hold, she decides to do these good works (through converting the Indians) using a pagan tool. Therefore, she uses the sign of paganism to do what Christians should do. She believes that by converting the Indians she will be showing her devotion to the Christian God by fulfilling His commands. However, the manner in which she goes about this—she uses a strategy that is built around deifying herself and that utilizes pagan symbolism—does not come from Christian thought but from paganism and materialism.

The final shift in Unca’s identity before she encounters the natives occurs when she is in the idol, preparing for their arrival. During this scene, it becomes obvious that her pagan side has taken control and that she desires glory and praise from others. Janina Nordius’s analysis of this scene is useful in understanding what occurs. She believes that, during this time, Unca’s split identity becomes apparent because of the gothic setting in which she is placed (Nordius 6-7, 15).<sup>5</sup> However, she begins her analysis of Unca’s split identity at the moment when the earthquake begins; I believe it is useful to start just before this point when Unca begins to rethink her plans to convert the Indians. It is her point that her duality discloses itself to her, and she

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<sup>5</sup> As Nordius points out, the island is covered with the ancient ruins of temples which contain tombs, mummies, and treasures (4).

notices her conflicting motives for wanting to Christianize the natives. She says that she “imagined hundreds of Indians prostrate before [her]” (Winkfield 86), drinking in her every word. She is not hopeful that they will bow down before God as the only holy one but, rather, that they will bow down before her, too. She wants to be “a law-giver ... utter[ing] precepts, and, like an orator, inculcat[ing] them with a voice magnified almost to the loudness of thunder” (86). This powerful voice of thunder signifies the authority of a deity inhabiting her speech; she believes that she can speak the words of God, that her words can be his words. She thinks that she will become a godlike figure who will turn the Indians from their wickedness to a place where they will worship her.

Unca’s desires concern her: she realizes that she has slipped into a form of paganism—self-worship—and that her thoughts are opposed to standard Christian beliefs (Nordius 12). She tries to reason with herself, saying that “[t]he consciousness of the purity of [her] intention, and the goodness of [her] design, prevailed over every other thought” (Winkfield 87). Through this rationalization, Unca attempts to Christianize her pagan ideas, but she cannot take back the heretical words that she has spoken. Even if she *is* able to convince herself that the power the idol gives her is a sign of God’s blessing on her endeavors, Unca is not certain on either level (pagan or Christian) that her plan is viable. She fears that they will “burn [her] in [the idol]” because of how angry they are at her words (86). Unca’s pagan side warns that the Indians may realize she is a fraud who simply wants to be viewed as holy. This fire, then, is not only literal, but also metaphorical—it represents the hellfire that Unca will face as punishment for pretending to be a god. As a Christian, however, she sees this immolation as the death of a martyr, dying for her beliefs. Although she does not wish for it, in this light, her death would be worth the risk she takes when speaking to the Indians. Because of this fear of death, Unca “changed her mind,

perhaps, as many times as there are hours in [three days]" (86). Her desire to convert the natives, however, whether for noble or selfish reasons, is stronger than her fear of death, and so she proceeds with her plan.

As soon as Unca recognizes the duality of her beliefs, an earthquake begins. She is terrified during this time, expecting the idol to fall down and crush her. This cataclysmic event is where Nordius's argument begins—she calls this the “gothic moment” (Nordius 4) of *The Female American*. She says that “the narrator’s fear of being buried alive in the heart of paganism, as it were, translates here into a gothic metaphor encoding her anxiety about her Christian identity” (12). While Nordius’s argument is valid, I would take it farther and claim that this moment is actually uncanny. Although Freud does not write his essay “Uncanny” until nearly two hundred and fifty years after *The Female American* was published, his ideas fit perfectly with what Unca experiences in the idol. These ideas open up the psychological issues that Unca experiences and provides a link to the other that appears in this novel.<sup>6</sup> Freud says that something which is *unheimlich*, or uncanny, is either “*everything that ought to have remained...hidden and secret and has become visible*” (qtd. in Freud 27; ellipses and italics original to quote) or the “primitive beliefs we have surmounted [that] seem once more to be confirmed” (Freud 55). Unca experiences both of these forms of the uncanny at once while she is in the idol: the primitive beliefs of her mother, which she thought she had effectively repressed, return to her in the form of self-worship and materialism. This self-worship, or “narcissism” as Freud calls it (42), is at the center of the internal conflict that Nordius so aptly describes.

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<sup>6</sup> As to Freud’s psychology leading to the other, Françoise Meltzer says Lacan agreed with Freud’s ideas when it came to the ideas of conscious and unconscious (156-157). Meltzer moves from Lacan’s relation to Freud directly to ideas of the other. He says that “[f]or Lacan, therefore, the notion ‘unconscious’ lends itself at once, and in turn, to the idea of *otherness*” and “[t]hat what is unconscious for the Subject is that which is unknown, alien (although fundamental) to him or her” (157). Therefore, what is uncanny to leads to the idea of the other.

During this struggle, the primary colonial conflict in *The Female American* resurfaces. Unca's feelings of "terror" (Nordius 7) are a sign of a fear of the other (her mother's paganism) that exists within her—the emergence of her "unbounded self-love" signals a parallel between her self-idolatry (and desire for others to worship her) and the idol in which she is trapped, thus creating her in mind a "double" (Freud 40). The double is the statue because it becomes emblematic of her paganism; it is a sign of native pagan beliefs and self-glorification, beliefs that are an inherent part of her identity and the praise that she desires. Therefore, the statue has become the double, or mirror image, of her paganism. However, although the idol should become the other in Unca's mind,<sup>7</sup> it does not. Instead, she embraces it and the power that it gives her. This action causes the reader to view her pagan identity as the colonial other; we have been expecting her to continue in her Christianity but, when we encounter her identification with the native religion, we can see the difference that exists within her. The colonial encounter has been replayed inside of Unca but in such a way that the native has conquered the European, at least for the time being.

This new other—Unca's pagan side—takes over the next portion of Unca's life. This is simply another effect of the colonial encounter constantly occurring within Unca. Christianity and paganism battle against each other for the dominant position in Unca's identity. However, any progress that Christianity makes is simply the product of an allowance made by paganism. Just as in real colonial situations where colonists would often allow the natives to retain some measure of control in order to make them feel powerful, so Unca's pagan side allows her Christian side to make some advances so that it will be satisfied. As I will discuss in the following section, however, all of these advances serve to bolster Unca's power and self-

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<sup>7</sup>Lacan's article "The Mirror Stage as Formative" suggests that the mirror image we see of ourselves in children is our "double" (3) which, it would seem, eventually becomes the other.

worship, demonstrating that her pagan side, not her Christianity, is directing the events of the conversion scene.

### The First Use of the Idol – The Conversion Scene

The general scholarly consensus on the conversion scene is that Unca preaches to the Indians as a way to gain power and to secure a new home with them. Burnham argues that Unca raises her status by converting the Indians while Wolfe claims that she wants to step into the role of a god (Burnham 19; Wolfe 28). April London uses strong rhetoric to explain that Unca claims to be a god and that she moves away from “European notions of decorum and self-effacement...to secure veneration” (100). Vacarro’s argument is particularly strong on this point. She says that Unca not only becomes a god but that “[d]uring her final dramatic oration from the figure of the sun god, she sets herself up as the amalgam of a resurrected Christ figure and a Pagan priest, instructing the Indians” (145). Therefore, she is a pagan god, a high priest, and Christ at the same time. I agree with all of these arguments—they are useful for reading this scene. However, I believe that they are missing a few important points. To begin with, Unca’s duality is still an issue in this scene. Her paganism is controlling her Christianity in a strategic way so that she will gain honor and glory along with God. She is able to fool herself into thinking that she is doing God’s will when, in actuality, she is exalting herself into an idol which will come to earth in the form of a god-woman. In this last role, Unca replays what Christ did for the world through his ministry and saving power but in a more effective, uncontroversial way. Finally, she constantly reaffirms these roles through deception and manipulation.

Unca’s actions throughout this section seem to point to a deep devotion to God and a desire to do good works for His name’s sake. She is able to explain God’s love to the Indians and convert them to Christianity without using force. However, as previously discussed, Unca’s

complex identity will not allow for such a simple reading of this scene. She accomplishes many tasks that appear to be driven by her Christian heritage when, in fact, they are controlled by her pagan heritage. Unca attempts to rationalize all of these self-serving actions so that they appear to be glorifying to God but she fails miserably. She also tries to cover her paganism by saying one thing—something that is condoned by Christianity—and doing something else. Her identity cannot be completely split; rather, both parts need to be in action at once even if one is simply being used as an “expedient” by the other (Winkfield 112). It is through this manipulation that her pagan side is able to manipulate her Christian side into beginning the second colonial moment in the novel.

Before Unca begins speaking to the Indians, her language hints that there is some confusion as to whether God is of utmost importance or if Unca’s plans reign supreme. She says that she is “first commending [her]self to God, and [her] intention” (92). This phrasing creates confusion—it is unclear whether she is commending herself to her intention or her intention to God. Her lack of specificity reinforces the duality that exists within her. The reader cannot decipher her words and, therefore, remains confused about where Unca’s allegiance lies. I would argue that this is a tactic put into place by her paganism—no one can condemn her for these words because it is not certain that they are heretical. However, if she is commending herself to her intention, she affirms that, in her mind, her plans have the same level of power and authority that God has.<sup>8</sup>

This is not the only place where Unca’s prayers are problematic. She often becomes nervous about converting the Indians and so she uses prayers as a means of “consolation” or comfort (110). However, she never turns to the Bible to see what God says about her endeavors.

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<sup>8</sup> The parallelism here implies that there is a connection between the two objects. Therefore, Unca equates her plan for self-glorification with God.

Perhaps she takes her uncle's words too literally when he warns her not to randomly open the Bible and apply the words that she finds there (59). While he means to keep her from misinterpreting God's word, it appears as if she is unwilling to search for any indication that her plans to convert the Indians are correct. On the other hand, she completely disregards his advice to be like the "Christian who by a prudent and rational use of the scriptures procures comfort to his soul" (59). Unca decides to use prayer as her tool, instead. The issue is that, unless God speaks to her directly, the only answer that she receives back comes from her own corrupted mind. It is as if she is praying to herself and finding the answers that she wants.

She employs the same tactic when reasoning through theological and personal struggles, as she "used to talk to [her]self ... and that with all the force of argument, vehemence, and energy of expression [she] could, or as the nature of the subject required. Upon these occasions [she was] ... frequently surprised to find how [her] understanding has been convinced, [her] affections moved, and [her] will determined" (69). Again, Unca reasons with herself and fails to look to outside sources such as the Bible which she seems to revere. Without an external guide, she finds answers in her paganism and continues forward with a plan that, Biblically, does not seem viable. Yet, her Christianity is satisfied because, to an extent, she is following the words of her uncle, the great spiritual leader. She believes that, as long as she follows him, her actions are correct. Therefore, she fools herself into believing that she is being a devout Christian when, in fact, she is pursuing her own road to self-glorification.

This path leads her straight to the idol. Her use of this pagan monument is problematic throughout the entirety of the conversion scene. To begin with, directly after "the high-priest [and other priests] ... very pathetically lamented the long silence of the oracle, and, in a kind of agony, intreated that answers might be again given to them" (93), Unca speaks from the idol.



The Indians believe that their prayers have been answered and that the statue is speaking to them. Her pagan side has staged this scene so that she is speaking Christian words through a mask of paganism; therefore, the Indians believe she is a representative of their god. Here, again, is a complex example of how Unca's dual identity is functioning. As previously discussed, her desire to convert the Indians comes from her paganistic motives; yet, converting the Indians is a Christian action. To further complicate the situation, she is performing this Christian activity through a pagan medium. This serves as a distraction for Unca's Christianity. She must focus on the obvious issue—her use of the idol—and, therefore, does not notice that her paganism is at work within her.

Unca's duality has not only confused the reader, it has confused her, as well. She realizes that she is wrong in using the idol, in fact, she "trembled when [she] had done, and was even sorry [she] had spoken, though truly and properly" (94), but this does not stop her. However, she does not know why she has done this and later exclaims "would I had never engaged!" (109). Her pagan side has coaxed her into using the idol, even though she knows it is wrong, but Unca does not seem to recognize this. I believe that this is because she does not realize her pagan side is in control. She *thinks* she is doing what a good Christian should do and is not aware that her desire for power is as strong as it is.

When Unca finally encounters the Indians, they also are confused by her identity. At first, the high priest believes that Unca is the Christian God of whom she speaks and then he thinks that she is the sun. But, she says that she is neither. When asked who she is, she tells them not to inquire. Unca insists that "[she] did not mean to impose [her]self upon them as God, and had declared [she] was not God, yet [she] thought it necessary to check this question, judging it as yet too soon to declare [her]self" (95). This dishonesty, again, reflects her

conflicted motives: while her Christian side does not want to lie, her pagan side insists that she must keep her identity hidden so that she can gain power and security. The Indians recognize that something is not right about this situation—if the voice speaking to them is doing so for the correct motives, she should willingly share her identity with them. Therefore, since they believe that there are two beings, one good and one bad (96), and this voice clearly does not have good intentions, they believe that Unca is the devil: they see that her motives are not correct and that she is preaching for her own gain rather than for their benefit. She is only able to stop their retreat when she exclaims “return and provoke me not, to destroy you, before you can reach your own shore” (96). Because they are “docile” (84), and since Unca claims to have the power to destroy them, they return and listen. She has intimidated them into listening to what she says. Yet, although they recognize that Unca is catering to self-serving motives, she does not; she believes that she is doing God’s will. This manipulation of the Indians is an important part of this colonial encounter: without it, the Indians would have no reason to believe what Unca tells them. This is similar to normal colonial encounters—if one white man came to the Indians unarmed, they would not be subjugated by him but, when he comes with powerful weapons, they cannot escape him. Therefore, through Unca’s claim to have power, she is able to colonize the Indians.

Unca also thinks that she is being a good Christian in the Christ-like persona that she exhibits throughout the conversion scene. As Burnham points out, after the earthquake, “Winkfield’s earlier reminder of herself to ‘imitate Jesus’...becomes at this point almost literally realized, for following this experience she ultimately takes up a position among the Indians of a female apostle whose gender, racial, and class identity all facilitate their acceptance of her and her spiritual teachings” (18). I find this reading useful in understand Unca’s actions with the

Indians; however, I do not think that Burnham takes it far enough. While this desire to imitate Christ is Biblically accurate, Unca takes this idea to the extreme—she represents herself as a new Christ who will conduct her earthly ministry in the *correct* way. In her paganism, she uses the model of the God-man presented in the Bible and turns herself into the god-woman who will rescue the natives from their ignorance.<sup>9</sup> She tells the natives that “[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). Through this description, it becomes obvious that Unca is replaying Christ’s visit to earth—she is an emissary from God who comes to save the Indians from their sinfulness. She is “more than mortal” (116) and, as I will discuss momentarily, she seems to perform miracles. She comes in the shape of a woman just as Christ came in the form of a man so that he would experience what humans experience. In imitation of Christ, she brings the word of God and teaches the people. However, she plans to be more successful than Christ—unlike Jesus, she will be able to win over the priests. Unca’s disciples will not be the lowest members of society but the priests themselves because, instead of crucifying her, they will love and reverence her. In her paganism, she believes that she can be the new, successful Christ who will be glorified through her work with the natives.

Unca’s work also parallels Christ in that, as Vaccaro points out, she plays the role of High Priest (145), just as Christ is the highest of high priests “in the order of Melchizadek” (Heb. 7:17). As previously mentioned, Unca dresses herself like a priest and she will soon take on the

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<sup>9</sup> I would like to thank Professor Joanne Myers for helping me to develop this section. Her input helped to further my understanding Unca’s actions as she imitates Christ.

role of High Priest, teaching the other religious leaders about Christianity. Jesus is like Melchizedek in that he is “did not trace his descent from Levi” (Heb. 7:7); in other words, he is high above the other priests because he comes from another lineage. Similarly, Unca is superior to the natives because she comes from another place with new knowledge and customs. Therefore, she replays the role of Christ as High Priest through her difference from the Indians and the supremacy that comes from this.

Unca begins to act in her role as the god-woman and the true High Priest when she first prays with the Indians. This is another instance in which her pagan side fools her Christian side into believing that she is doing what is right. She says “that they might not think I prayed to the statue, I got up to the top of the steps, and there kneeled down, with my back to the statue, and my face towards to the people” who were “kneel[ing] down” towards her (117). Unca’s paganism is able to trick her Christianity into believing that she is honoring God when, in fact, she causes the people to kneel down and pray to *her* because they are facing her. Although she affirmed to them earlier that they “must pray to God only” (97), her actions render this impossible because she makes herself the object of their worship. Telling the Indians what a good Christian should say, though, relieves Unca’s conscience. In her Christianity, she believes that she has done the correct thing by not bowing to the statue, but, she is simply fooled by her paganistic desire for glory and honor.

Unca perpetuates this “more than mortal” persona when she lives among the Indians (Winkfield 116). Her pagan side attempts to hold onto its control and so it causes her to engage in deceptive behavior. Her Christian side, however, is satisfied because she teaches the people and the priests, baptizes them, and translates the Bible (118-120). Because of these good works, she ignores the devious activities of her paganism. However, ignoring them does not make them

go away. By looking at her relations with the Indians, it is evident that her pagan side has been dictating her words and actions the entire time, deceiving them and setting Unca up as holy.

Soon after moving to the Indians' island

“[she] found the manner of introducing [her]self among them was highly serviceable to [her]: for though, in every respect, they could not but observe that [she] was like them; yet it was easy to discover that they conceived me more than a mere mortal. However, [she] 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)

Therefore, her work (which she claims is a part of God's will) is more important than being honest. She refuses to acknowledge that setting herself up as a “demi-God” as Stephen Wolfe puts it (30), is problematic and that it undermines her Christianity.

Unca's paganism continues to mystify the Indians when she offers them rings as gifts. They cannot be sure whether she is human or something more because of the fake miracles that she performs with these pieces of jewelry. She “brought them from the island, [but she] never gave them any on [her] return to them; but always a few days before [she] intended a visit to [her] old habitation” (120). She does this so “that they might have no suspicion” and, although “[she] suppose[d] they wondered how [she] came by them, [they] never asked [her]” (120). This must look like miraculous activity to the Indians, proving that Unca is more than human. Interestingly, Unca does not attempt to hide her motives from herself in this instance. Both pagan and Christian sides agree that she engages in this activity so as to maintain her security and place in society. Because her missionary endeavor has been successful thus far, Unca believes that she must do whatever necessary to keep it going and, therefore, her Christian side is

willing to lie to the Indians. This is never a direct lie, though, because the Indians do not *ask* her where she gets the rings. However, Unca knows that this is deceptive behavior and she does not desist. I would argue that this is because Unca's Christian side has lost strength during her time with the Indians. She has effectively set herself up as the god-woman who teaches the natives and she is happy and fulfilled in this role. In addition, since her environment is almost completely pagan, this side of her identity has been strengthened, and her Christianity has slowly lost strength.

Throughout Unca's time with the Indians, she has become more like them (her mother's heritage) and has moved away from her Christianity (her father's heritage). While she has converted hundreds of people to Christianity, she has done so in a way that brings her more power. Her pagan side is able to trick her Christian side into believing that she is doing the right thing when, in fact, she is glorifying herself. After an extended period of time with the Indians, though, Unca's Christian side no longer needs to be tricked—it has become hardened to the situation and no longer sees her actions as problematic. Living among the Indians has effectively un-colonized and un-converted Unca; she has returned to her mother's pagan ways and, while she lives in a Christian society, she does so as the pagan god come to earth. So, while Unca fits comfortably into pagan society, she is a threat to any Europeans with whom she may come into contact.

### The Second Use of the Idol

Most scholars spend very little time discussing Unca's use of the idol when the Europeans arrive, and they spend even less time explaining the implications of this event. Wolfe and London believe that Unca gains power during this second time in the idol (Wolfe 30; London 100-101). However, Wolfe later argues that Unca relinquishes her power to Winkfield

(32); this argument is similar to Burnham's (21). Vaccaro argues that Unca loses her power when the Europeans arrive because she is a woman playing a man's role (147). Much of Vaccaro's argument is valid—Unca does lose power as a result of the Europeans' arrival—but I disagree with her reasoning as to why this occurs. I believe it is a result of Unca's paganism. The Europeans see that this strong, pagan god-woman is dangerous and that she needs to be placed under their control. Winkfield is able to use her status as the other and his power as a British colonist to subjugate Unca and force her to marry him. Through this, he effectively erases any opportunity for Unca's pagan side to have control over her. Because her paganism only constituted half of her dual identity to begin with, it is easier for Winkfield to subjugate it and cultivate her Christian side, leaving behind a fully colonized subject.

Unca, as usual, has mixed feelings when the Europeans arrive on the island. At first, she fears that the men will conquer the Indians and turn them into slaves (121). Unca may feel this way for two reasons: either she is worried about losing her power or she has truly come to love the Indians. No doubt she regards them highly—she has lived with them for two years and communed with no other beings aside from God. However, it would not be surprising if her fear stems from her pagan side's concerns about being overthrown. In addition to living with the natives, she has enjoyed constant praise and obedience and, most likely, she does not want to forfeit these **benefits**. All of these considerations disappear, however, when Unca realizes that one of the men is her cousin. She is so elated that she calls out to him from within the statue. This proves that her Christianity has not completely died within her; she still feels a connection to the Old World and her relations—in fact, later, when she fears Winkfield may have to leave, she exclaims, “if I see him no more, I shall have laid a fresh cause for uneasiness...and drag out

the remainder of my life in misery” (131). Unca’s former life is still important to her identity and, therefore, she is happy when she sees Winkfield.

In Unca’s excitement, therefore, her Christian side breaks free from her pagan side and she calls out to her cousin without remembering that her voice will be amplified to a supernatural level. The Europeans are terrified when they hear her—they know that nothing human could speak that loudly. Instead of disclosing herself to them, though, to clarify that she is mortal, Unca “determined to indulge an adventure which promised much pleasure” (122). She attempts to recreate the entertainment that converting the Indians provided<sup>10</sup> and begins to play with their minds. But, the Europeans are not amused; rather, they are terrified. One of the sailors warns Winkfield that “you know not with whom you may be conversing, it may be an evil spirit, and may hurt us” (123). They recognize that the voice speaking from the idol is a pagan being who has ill intentions. Even though she sings Christian songs, they cannot believe that the voice belongs to a Christian. The sailors recognize that the being in the idol is evil; in effect, they see (without seeing her or knowing her identity) that Unca has become a pagan and that she has relinquished much of her Christianity to the desire for self-glorification and becoming a strong spiritual being. They are so traumatized by this event that, even when Unca shows herself to them, they are convinced that she is evil. When Captain Shore wants them to take Winkfield onto the ship, they refuse, saying that Unca is a “she-devil” or, perhaps, “the devil’s wife” (129). Eventually, they get their way, and Winkfield is left with his cousin.

Winkfield’s reaction to Unca is different from that of the sailors. He is excited to see her and, though disturbed by what occurs, he asks few questions. From the beginning of their

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<sup>10</sup> Right before Unca tells her reader what occurs when the Indians visited the island for the second time, she notices that “nature...[is] teeming with subjects well adapted for [her] contemplation, happily prepared for [her] entertainment” (105). This creates a strange connection between converting the natives and finding entertainment in this event.



strange encounter, he is inclined to believe that the voice coming from the idol is not that of a demon. He “own[s] these appearances are very extraordinary: but they may portend good as well as evil. Must every supernatural event terminate in evil?” (125-126). While he cannot explain the strange music that comes from the idol, he does not run away from Unca in her priestly garb but, rather, pursues her as a lover. This is not to say that Unca does not surprise and confuse him, though. In fact, when Unca says she can only stay with him for a time, he exclaims “[y]ou talk strangely; and once more make me almost doubt the reality of what I see and hear” (128) as if, when she speaks, he hears the discourse of the other. Winkfield, however, is so intent on his mission to marry Unca that he is willing to ignore her strange behavior for a time.

But, Winkfield’s unquestioning faith in Unca cannot last forever. Although not clearly stated in the text, it is obvious from the events that another colonial encounter is taking place. After Unca realizes that Winkfield wants to stay, she attempts to dissuade him, saying “my manner of living, length of time hath rendered agreeable to me; but it would be very disgusting to you. Rather may you soon return to your native country, be happy and leave me” (132). Unca sees that her cousin poses a threat to her way of life and her power over the Indians. Her Christian side has faded into the background again, and her pagan side is attempting to keep itself in control. The idea of relinquishing her power causes her to ardently desire that this man be removed from her islands. When Winkfield is marooned, Unca affirms that “had the ship arrived [she] would not have gone away in it, being determined to live and die amongst [her] dear Indians” and that she is only “concern[ed]...upon [her] cousin’s account” (137). She is upset that Winkfield is attempting to conquer her through marriage and, because of this, her pagan side tries to convince him that he will not be happy in a wild, untamed land.

Winkfield, like a true colonist, is not deterred by the pressure that Unca places on him. In fact, he is excited about the challenges he faces—through living with Unca and the Indians he can colonize both and place himself in a role of power. He finds it much easier to conquer the Indians, however, than he does to subjugate Unca. The natives accept him immediately and soon there was “raised in them an high opinion of [Unca’s] cousin” (140). Unca, however, “most strongly opposed” his advances (137); although she is happy to have him there, she “had never considered him as a lover” (139). Winkfield is *too* British for her taste—after all, he cannot shoot “a bow and arrow as well as [she] could” (51), Unca’s one qualification for a husband; he does not compliment her duality but threatens to squelch it.

But, Unca’s efforts are not strong enough and, after spending only two months with her, Winkfield is able to subjugate his cousin. He can do this because of her paganism; just as the Indians’ docility and simplicity allowed Unca to conquer them, so her hybrid-based inferiority to Winkfield allows him to conquer her. Although Unca does put up a fight, as mentioned above, he manipulates her into believing that they must be married in order to spend time together; in other words, he forces her to accept his ways. Unca claims to be happy that she has “the constant company of a religious and sensible companion” (141) but, almost in the same breath, she lets slip that she was “obliged to give him [her] hand” (141). This is the language of obligation, not the rhetoric of mutual love and respect. Unca has undergone a complete transformation during Winkfield’s time with her; she no longer worries about gaining power or how she can deceive the Indians into believing that she is more than human. She is no longer the god-woman but, rather, the married woman who must listen to her colonist husband instead of her own desires. Winkfield has negated the threat that Unca posed as the pagan she-devil who wanted power and has turned her into a good colonial subject. This is why she marries him even

though he does not live up to her standards in archery—she has no choice because her will has been subjugated to his own. Therefore, through their marriage, Unca has been re-colonized and re-converted to Christianity.

Unca's descriptions of her marriage ceremonies demonstrate what has occurred within her identity. First, she and Winkfield are wedded in a Christian ceremony conducted by the high priest and, second, they are married according to the Indian custom "that [the natives] might the more perfectly be satisfied" (141). Therefore, the primary marriage is representative of Christianity, and the second one occurs simply to appease the pagans. This is the same for Unca's identity: Christianity becomes her focus after her paganism has been subjugated to her colonizing husband's will. The duality still exists but not in the same proportions as before; after Unca's marriage, her pagan side all but disappears. She still shows her mother's heritage through her complexion and her thorough understanding of the Indian language, but she no longer seeks to enact the role of a pagan demi-god. Instead of focusing on how to gain glory, she aids her husband in declaring the gospel and leading the natives through the various holy rites. Because of her environment, her Christianity has taken control, and Unca once again fits into the role of a European.

### Conclusion

*The Female American* shows the various facets of colonialism from different perspectives (although all come from the same character). Unca begins the novel as a colonial byproduct, living a confused life as a semi-pagan in a Christian world. Once she reaches the island, her paganism gains dominance but in such a way that she is enacting the role of other and conqueror at the same time. After Europeans appear on her island, though, she is re-subjugated and forced to return to a normal Christian lifestyle. After this, her paganism fades into the background, losing all of its power. It is easy for Winkfield to effect this change in his wife because, as

Wheeler points out, “Indian birth was less of a problem (in legal term) than African origin...Virginia’s statutory definition of mulattos ‘extended the taint of Negro ancestry through three generations and of Indian ancestry through only one’” (170). Therefore, Unca’s threat as the other is greatly diminished because she is only half Indian; once she is re-colonized, her identity is no longer problematic for Europeans.

Unca is now, in effect, a fully European Christian, retaining only small vestiges of her paganism. This is why Winkfield does not insist that they return to England—the island’s native environment is not dangerous to Unca anymore because she is barely native. The island is also safe because Winkfield has fully Christianized it, as now the “Indians were properly baptized, married, and many of them, at their earnest desire, admitted to the Lord’s supper” (Winkfield 141). As one final measure to ensure that Unca does not attempt to regain power, the Europeans “collect all the gold treasure [on her island], to blow up the subterraneous passage, and the statue, that the Indians might never be tempted to their former idolatry” (154). Although she does not say so, it is obvious that the monument was removed for her benefit, as well. It is interesting to note how Winkfield deals with the treasure as this perpetuates the dissolution of Unca’s pagan side. He not only takes the gold without the natives’ permission but spends it on European goods; all of the paganism has been turned into Christianity or, in other words, the natives (and Unca) have been colonized and turned into pseudo-Europeans. Through these events, and after two conversions (or colonializations), Unca’s paganism` is eradicated and the Christian imperialist is in complete control.

In the end, all of the natives have been colonized. Although some scholars argue that this is not true and that Unca has created a “Christian utopia” (Burnham 20) where “the island can escape colonialism” and a host of other European evils (Joseph 325), I disagree. The natives *have* been colonized—while it may be through “colonization of [their] soul” (Vaccaro 137), it is

a form of subjugation, nonetheless—and they are now under the power of the Europeans. Winkfield and Captain Shore become the dominant forces in the colony, and Unca plays a subservient role, helping the men in their colonial and religious endeavors. She has lost all of her power and is now a good Christian woman once again. In taking on her husband's identity, as civilized society assumes she should, her soul has been re-colonized and her paganism has faded; therefore, she is no longer a threat, and the islands can live in peace under British rule.

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