

## Reading for Friday in *The Female American* (1767)

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### *Abstract*

While styled on *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), *The Female American* (1767) differs considerably from Defoe's text. In the novel, Unca Eliza, a mixed-race heroine, finds safety in an Indigenous tribe using an 'othered' body. While marooned, the protagonist climbs inside an oracle, a statue of a sun god. Through it, she speaks with the tribe, thereby converting them to Christianity, or at least a version of it. 'Friday' exists in multiple configurations across *The Female American*, in terms of indigenous groups and individuals who are converted, violently oppressed and threatened, and, as will be demonstrated in this essay, as an extension of the narrator's identity. This article contends that the combination of the castaway Unca Eliza and the idol of the sun god explores the ambivalence of colonial rhetoric and represents a new configuration of the Friday/Crusoe relationship.

Keywords: Gothic; colonial identities; trickster mimetics; mimicry; female Robinsonade; eighteenth century

Published in 1767, *The Female American* is a Gothic castaway novel which blurs distinctions Daniel Defoe established in *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) between the titular marooned European and his companion, Friday (Nordius 2008: 1–2; Owen 2010: 167). It follows the life of the attributed author, Unca Eliza, a young woman raised between Virginia and England by her father and uncle following the untimely death of her Indigenous mother. By the end of the novel, Unca Eliza chooses to live as a missionary in the Americas with a native tribe, her British husband, and a reformed pirate. The novel unsettlingly combines several popular eighteenth-century genres (Gothic, castaway narrative, travel writing) and subject/resistor discourses. The Gothic is a malleable mode which David

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Punter defines in the following terms: ‘Gothic frequently chooses the side of the outlaw, the exile—indeed, this attraction to the maligned and the refugee has recently come to be seen as a natural correlation between Gothic and certain kinds of postcolonial discourse’ (Punter 2019: 2). Once marooned, Unca Eliza is a ‘refugee’, caught in the Atlantic, isolated from the tribal community of her mother, and far from the (Christian) domestic spaces established by her father and uncle. This article continues efforts to explore possible anti-colonial impulses, while unpicking the ambivalent use of indigenous identities to further colonial messaging in *The Female American*.

#### *Finding Friday in The Female American*

Who or what might constitute the companion figure in *The Female American*? Across the novel, there are five potential representations of Friday: figures who experience a forced conversion, represent the colonised body, or are explicitly set apart from the colonising (patriarchal) force of settlers or the (female) castaway. The first is Princess Unca, a woman who marries an early settler in Virginia, William Winkfield. Their first wedding ceremony is conducted according to the conventions of the princess’ tribe. However, their union is reconfirmed on Winkfield’s plantation, where they marry ‘according to the rights of the church of England, by an English chaplain belonging to one of the men of war that then lay in the harbour’ (*The Female American*, 55). The implied acceptance of the tribal tradition is undercut by the affirmation that the wedding must be repeated under the supervision of a Christian chaplain, whose presence and religion come from the outside (across the sea) and from a vessel designed to carry soldiers (coercive colonial forces). It is not just their marriage that is revised in the settler community and under the scrutiny of other English colonists, as the princess is also ‘persuaded’ to ‘conform to the European dress’ (*The Female American*, 55). It is important to note, however, that the text makes some effort to emphasise the agency of the princess, as the couple agree that Virginia is the most suitable place for them to establish their home. The princess finds the idea of ‘removal’, presumably to England, ‘disgusting’ (*The Female American*, 55).

The second possible Friday figures are the ‘slaves’ accompanying Unca Eliza on her return to England following her father’s death, who are murdered or tortured on the journey. These enslaved men and women are

first displaced from their ancestral home by William Winkfield's capitalist colonisation of Virginia and, second, by Unca Eliza's desire to reside with her uncle, therefore requiring companions for the journey across the Atlantic. During the mutiny of their mistress, the men and women are attacked while 'unarmed' by an English Captain and his crew, becoming victims of an explicit example of colonial coercion in the novel. These scenes are inherently Gothic: they confront the reader with questions of mortality, exile, criminality, and the inversion of order. While the narrator tries to protect them, her entreaties are useless, and she 'could [...] only pity, but not relieve' (*The Female American*, 64). Unca frames her companions as brave but pitiable, which is not dissimilar to Crusoe's treatment of Friday, whose 'Affections were ty'd to me [Crusoe], like those of a Child to a Father; and I dare say he would have sacrific'd his Life for the saving mine' (Defoe 2020: 175).

The third example of Friday figures are the tribespeople Unca Eliza converts to Christianity after being marooned. While they function as colonised 'others', they perhaps do not fit with the intimacy of 'companions'. This is because Unca Eliza's account imposes a distance between herself as the isolated castaway and the community she lives with. The tribe accepts Unca Eliza as a religious leader because of her 'manipulation of their religious structures and practices' (Joseph 2000: 323).

The final possible Friday in the novel, and this makes the core of the argument here, is the narrator herself and her employment of the sun deity. As a mixed-race woman whose colonial identity and, ultimately, connection to England arguably become more distant through her exile and life with the tribe, Unca Eliza befits the role of Friday despite being the castaway. This article contends that the sun deity on the island is an 'indigenous body' with which the castaway can interact. The oracle functions as a companion figure used to protect the body of the marooned half-English woman inside it, who is spreading her Christian message. Considering the idol and Unca Eliza as a Friday offers a new way of reading the companion as integral to the castaway identity.

#### *(Anti)colonial frameworks*

The anti-colonial agenda at play in the novel is deeply ambiguous. The opening of the story centres on establishing the Winkfield plantation in Virginia in the early seventeenth century, a process of exploiting the native

land, which leads to conflict. The original settlers are ‘massacred’, and William Winkfield is ‘taken prisoner[] by the Indians’ (*The Female American*, 47). William is spared, nurtured, and protected by the Native princess Unca, whom, as previously mentioned, he marries. The rest of the novel centres on how their daughter negotiates her national and racial identities and manages her wealth in different socio-political contexts (Virginia, England, and an undisclosed island). At the end of the novel, Unca Eliza chooses her ‘self-fashion[ed]’ identity (Joseph 2000: 318) as a religious leader, alienated from both her father’s plantation and her uncle’s parish. She, therefore, rejects her identity as the heiress of a British settler. Returning to England, after her father’s death, she is betrayed, robbed, and abandoned on an ‘uninhabited island’ (*The Female American*, 63). On the island, she encounters a pagan ‘religion’ and converts a visiting tribe to her version of Christianity. This is accomplished by lending her ‘voice’ to an oracle of the sun. Ironically, as Joe Conway puts it, ‘Unca Eliza takes on the face and voice of the god in the idol she would destroy’ (2016: 681). The heroine’s performance through the statue of the sun deity, both for a congregation of Native visitors to the island and European sailors searching for her, is an example of manipulating indigenous identities.

As noted in the discussion of possible Fridays in the novel, as a woman of mixed racial and national backgrounds, the narrator moves between Friday (the body of the colonial other) and Crusoe (the castaway). While exiled, Unca Eliza effectively recreates a home outside the guardianship of the Winkfield family (Owen 2010: 167), emblematically outside of England and the interests of the emerging British Empire. Her hybridity and malleability are central to the subversive capacity of the novel, and perhaps the key distinction to be made between this eighteenth-century text and its precursor, *Robinson Crusoe*. The original white male castaway is ideologically unable to adapt to different political and cultural contexts, and thus must assert his European values (Fleck 1998: 74–75; Weaver-Hightower 2007: 91–93). Unca Eliza Winkfield, born in a colony and from a socio-culturally mixed environment, finds new ways to navigate colonial ambivalence by embodying it. Michelle Burnham and James Freitas consider this an act of ‘narrative ventriloquism’ across the novel, where the narrator ‘might be seen to speak, quite strategically, through the mouths of others’ (2014: 24). Rather than read Unca Eliza as speaking through the ‘mouths of others’, particularly male figures as Burnham and Freitas contend, this article explores the way donning the indigenous body

through the idol can be seen as an extension and development of *Robinson Crusoe*, which renders the seemingly absent companion figure a part of the castaway.

Management of boundaries is essential to *Robinson Crusoe* (Weaver-Hightower 2007: 137) and contested in *The Female American*. As Rebecca Weaver-Hightower has convincingly argued, Crusoe is forced to ‘defend his body and his island from [... the ‘savages’], chasing them off and instead “incorporating” what they would consume: their prisoner/dinner, Friday’ (2007: 93). Crusoe’s colonial aggression is bound up in his attempts to defend his position as a European. Hence, he is intolerant of any perceived transgression of his island, ethics, and the law (symbolically the body itself). Defoe’s hero never intends to join the tribe but instead maintains a discrete body/island. This is not granted to Friday as a colonised figure whose limited options are to be removed or ‘incorporated’ (Weaver-Hightower 2007: 94). Although *The Female American* employs similar tropes to *Robinson Crusoe* regarding conversion and ‘incorporation’, Unca Eliza’s hybrid identity means that the discrete body is always questionable (Joseph 2000: 322; Kvande 2016: 684–685; Nordius 2008: 7; Wolfe 2004: 30). Such boundaries are threatened further by her willingness to resemble the Indigenous other (or even a supernatural other) through the idol of the sun god. The ‘incorporation’ of Unca Eliza into the statue and the deity into Christian rhetoric suggests that the interaction between the protagonist and the idol can be read as a manifestation of the Crusoe-Friday dynamic, whose boundaries are continually transgressed rather than defended. *The Female American* plays with the mutually unstable body of castaway and companion through a network: narrator-within-oracle. Unca Eliza uses the immobile form of the statue to disseminate her Christian message and make space for herself in the tribe. By speaking through the statue, the would-be hybrid coloniser is indigenised while becoming a supernatural deity.

#### *The body and voice of the idol*

Sermons through the idol represent the crucial moment where colonial, colonised, and gendered bodies intersect. Once exiled on the island, it is Unca Eliza’s Native American identity that is crucial to her survival, and her Europeanness must be, to some extent, concealed. This is first realised through the statue. Marta Kvande suggests that Unca Eliza’s discourses on Christianity using the Oracle of the Sun can be read as a version of

‘trickster mimetics’, which do not concede power to the coloniser. Unca Eliza, despite her father’s role as a plantation owner, is a subject of empire, ‘a woman and a half-breed’ (Kvande 2016: 692). Hence, while her European, Christian ideology problematically resonates with the colonial agenda, it is undercut by her Indigenous identity. Dee Horne suggests that in contemporary Indigenous writing, authors engage in a ‘dialogue’ with, and employing the discourses of, the coloniser, and where they can ‘present multiple positions while still addressing the power imbalance evident in the colonial relationship’ (1999: 16). While the context of Horne’s references differs from the eighteenth-century novel, it is possible to read a similar ‘[d]ialogic narrative strateg[y]’ (1999: 16) in *The Female American*, as Unca Eliza speaks from multiple positions, within and outside of English and Indigenous cultures, as well as inside and outside of the body of the idol.

The narrator’s first interactions with the idol’s body are mediated by the writings of a hermit stranded on the island decades earlier. In this way, Unca Eliza, like Defoe’s readers, must engage with the ‘other’ (Friday) through the fixed and fixated narrations of the white European male. As Betty Joseph has noted, the parallel between the hermit and Robinson Crusoe is undeniable. However, Joseph contends, *The Female American* ‘reduces Defoe’s *Crusoe* to a survival manual’ (2000: 321). Including a male castaway emphasises the dissimilarity of the actions taken by the protagonists in these novels. The hermit describes the idol as ‘a very large statue, or image’ surrounded by a ruined temple and ‘sacred to the sun, which the Indians adored’ (*The Female American*, 81). Emphasising the unsophistication and potential threat of the tribe, the hermit terms the Indigenous people ‘savages’ despite having never engaged with them himself (*The Female American*, 67). In Gothic terms, the statue is part of the ruinous setting, introducing the sacred and superstitious to Unca Eliza’s experience of the island (Blaim 2014: 52–53; Nordius 2008: 12), in much the same way that the footprint invites speculation in *Robinson Crusoe* (Weaver-Hightower 2007: 93). For the hermit, the idol acts as a beacon, calling the Native tribe to the island each year, yet for Unca Eliza, this religion is readable to her as she ‘understood the Indian languages perfectly’ (*The Female American*, 81; see also Kvande 2016: 690). Even if, as a Protestant Christian, she believes the deity to be a ‘false idol’, the temple and statue are spectacles that interrupt her study of the hermit’s papers. ‘I had not patience to go through the whole history, till I had seen

this extraordinary idol' (*The Female American*, 81). The extraordinariness of pagan idolatry motivates the narrator to engage empirically with the island outside of the hermit's (white male) rhetoric. As a result, the idol literally and metaphorically extends Unca Eliza's vision, by encouraging exploration and allowing a panoramic view of the island (Joseph 2000: 323; *The Female American*, 95).

The apparently objective yet politically charged descriptions of the idol and tribe in the hermit's papers, in many ways, parallel Crusoe's construction of his companion in *Robinson Crusoe*. Friday is 'comely', 'handsome', and 'perfectly well made, with straight strong Limbs, not too large; tall and well shap'd' (Defoe 2020: 171). Friday's body is a surface to be evaluated and objectified, not self-defined but rather 'made' visible through Crusoe's voice. The companion appears static, defined by the coloniser who is intent on 'incorporating' him (Weaver-Hightower 2007: 93). Crusoe's description continues by reflecting on Friday's 'Countenance', a blend of manliness, the 'Sweetness and Softness of an *European*', and a 'sparkling Sharpness in his Eyes' (Defoe 2020: 171). Friday is attractive, 'sweet', and 'soft', yet 'manly' and, to some extent, even 'European'. Referencing Homi Bhabha's concepts of mimicry and colonial fetishisation, Andrew Fleck suggests that Crusoe's description exemplifies colonial ambivalence. The castaway marks Friday's 'sameness' (Fleck 1998: 78) while emphasising the companion's moral, religious, and even gendered distance to maintain 'his [Crusoe's] sense of a stable identity' (Fleck 1998: 74).

### *Slipping identities*

One significant difference between *Robinson Crusoe* and *The Female American* is the slippage of the protagonist's identity. In fact, Stephen Wolfe suggests that the idol in the novel 'is a representation of the narrator's anonymity and power: it embodies her narrative persona' (2004: 27). Indeed, the slippage between castaway and colonial other in the novel is most obvious while Unca Eliza is hidden within the statue:

Round it was an ascent of twenty stone steps. The image itself, of gold, greatly exceeded human size: it resembled a man clad in a long robe or vest; which reached quite down to the pedestal-stone or foundation on which it stood, and lay in folds upon it. This image 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 bear like the manner of women; on the head was a curiously wrought crown, and between the two

breasts an image of the sun carved in gold, as was all the rest of it. (*The Female American*, 86)

After finding her way through the tombs filled with the remains of priests and worshippers, Unca Eliza finally engages with the idol's timeless (undead) body. The statue is tactile, as the metal has been wrought to imitate fabric, 'fold[ed]', 'gathered' and 'fastened' around the deity. Peter Weise argues that the androgynous body of the statue and Unca's liminal position between identities seem to articulate 'the possibility of moving from a limited to an exceptional singularity, the latter as the basis for controlling a totality' (2016: 668). Donning the shroud of the androgynous statue obscures the narrator. In terms of Robinsonade conventions, Unca Eliza becomes more than the castaway (Crusoe) as she enters the space of the indigenous body (a Friday form). From this statue, she can project a new vision, which offers the mixed-race woman discursive authority (Owen 2010: 169) while problematically championing the soft power of empire (Joseph 2000: 327; Simon 2016: 656–657). Punter's articulation of the Gothic is applicable here, as the reader is aligned with the perspective of the 'exile' (Punter 2019: 2) and the uncertainties of the island which encourage Unca Eliza's linguistic, gendered, and religious boundary crossing.

On the other hand, by rejecting the hermit's advice (symbolically a colonial authority) to avoid the so-called savages (*The Female American*, 91; Joseph 2000: 321), Unca Eliza finds a way to join the indigenous community. This marks a step away from the false empiricism associated with male accounts of the colonies, such as the hermit's papers, Crusoe's story, or even, as Edward Simon highlights, the writings of Columbus (2016: 655–656), as Unca Eliza chooses to experience and draw her own conclusions about the island and pilgrims:

I had no sooner made my fixed determination to retire to this place, but a very strange thought arose in my mind. It was nothing less than this, to ascend into the hollow idol, speak to the Indians from thence, and endeavour to convert them from their idolatry. A bold attempt! not rashly to be undertaken. (*The Female American*, 91)

Becoming incorporated into the body of the other, first through the statue and then the tribe, or rather, integrating with Friday figures, represents an inversion of *Robinson Crusoe*. While Unca Eliza's account does not glorify the oracle and explicitly suggests that she would use the statue to counter 'idolatry', a 'strange thought arose' in the castaway woman's mind



that she should ‘ascend’ the steps and ‘boldly’ communicate her faith to the tribe. Hence, animating this body becomes an act of bravery and ‘ascension’. Victoria Barnett-Woods states that the narrator’s ‘ventriloquizing through the empty statue marks a religious threshold she crosses, inhabiting an “American” body while also internally possessing unadulterated European moral values’ (2016: 617). However, the difficulty in distinguishing between the idol as a shroud and the narrator speaking through the image implies that Unca Eliza’s European values are not ‘unadulterated’. Unca Eliza already possesses an ‘American body’, as she was born in Virginia to an Indigenous mother. In many ways, the statue can be read as an extension of Unca Eliza’s Indigenous characteristics; features which render her as much a Friday as she is a Crusoe.

There is a constant back and forth between the Friday and Crusoe of Unca Eliza’s identity: her Protestantism on the one hand, and her decision ‘never [...] to have any more to do with Europe’ (*The Female American*, 162) on the other. Joseph has pointed to the inherent danger of Unca Eliza’s communications through the idol as her ‘disembodied but female voice’ is far more effective ‘than Crusoe’s musket or the book wielded by the male missionary’ (2000: 324). In fact, Janina Nordius has gone as far as to term Unca Eliza’s relationship with the tribe as a ‘crusade’ and a ‘disavowal’ of the ‘implicitly “savage” parts of her own heritage’ (2008: 9). There is room, however, to consider the interaction as a layering rather than a complete commitment to Unca Eliza’s Christian identity. It is through her othered characteristics as a mixed-race Indigenous woman, under the guise of a deity, and then as a multilingual religious leader, that conversion becomes a possibility:

In Unca’s bisexual crossover, she not only inhabits the statue of the natives’ oracle and sermonizes to them in their own language but subsequently also uses the markers of her marginality (skin, gender) in order to penetrate the natives’ everyday life. (Joseph 2000: 324).

For Joseph, the novel creates a ‘crisis’ for feminist approaches and understandings of ‘nation as a way of organizing knowledge production’ (2000: 327). What is particularly interesting is that while Unca Eliza attempts to ‘penetrate’ and ‘inhabit’, she chooses the form of the other. This is not a simple conversion agenda and results in her integration into ‘a third space: an imagined community, where the founding father has been displaced by the not-quite-white mother, and where Christianity

becomes a female fantasy' (2000: 326). The ways in which Unca Eliza eventually distances herself from her English identity and, importantly, abstracts Christian teachings through translation confuses colonising impulses as she becomes part of the tribe (Kvande 2016: 693). As Simon posits, '[c]onversions in *The Female American* are always depicted as an issue of rational consideration and acceptance where souls are won through explanation and proper demonstration rather than through either revelation or coercion' (2016: 653). There is an implied denial of the (cultural) violence in the encounter because the introduction of Christianity is willingly accepted. The tribe might be depicted as 'willing', but they are deceived by the Unca Eliza's concealment (Conway 2016: 682) using the indigenous (Friday's) form.

*The work of translation*

The role of Friday as a convert and then a disseminator of information is alluded to in *Robinson Crusoe* and extended in *The Female American*. Joseph notes that 'Crusoe's musket' is ineffective (2000: 324), but his tactics do not stop at coercion and extend to conversion. The castaway begins by teaching Friday 'YES, and NO' and 'Master' before starting a religious education (Defoe 2020: 172). Importantly, this is not an exchange; Crusoe has no intention of understanding or acquiring the 'Language of the Savages' or their religious practices (Defoe 2020: 201). Friday becomes a translator for Crusoe in discussions with newly 'incorporated' exiles on the island (Weaver-Hightower 2007: 93): 'Friday being my Interpreter, especially to his Father, and indeed to the Spaniard too; for the Spaniard spoke the Language of the Savages pretty well' (Defoe 2020: 201). By contrast, Unca Eliza is more sophisticated than Crusoe, as she does not resort to gesturing or looking for interpreters in England, on her island, or in Virginia. Possessing elements of Crusoe's and Friday's identities, Unca Eliza is articulate in multiple languages and can use them to disseminate her (Christian) message. Hence, she becomes a minister capable of answering existential questions posed by the tribe (*The Female American*, 101). In fact, this is also seen much earlier in the novel as she reshapes elements of religious practice in England, given the iconographic mausoleum her uncle constructs on her behalf, to commemorate her mother, Princess Unca (*The Female American*, 59; see also Kvande 2016: 689).

Through translation, Unca Eliza develops a new version of Christianity contingent on her linguistic skill. C. M. Owen's contention that '[u]nlike Crusoe, Unca does not convert the Indians but imbues their religion with her feminine, moral influence' (2010: 169) downplays the narrator's intention 'to teach the knowledge of the true God to those who know him not' (*The Female American*, 92) and by extension, her equivocal position concerning colonial activities in America. According to Horne, translation is crucial for Indigenous writers publishing in English: '[b]y infiltrating their [Indigenous] rules of recognition into the colonizer's discourse, they estrange the authority of that discourse' (Horne 1999: 19). Throughout the novel, Unca Eliza revises the Bible and prayer books for her new community, introducing new 'rules of recognition'. Concealment in the idol allows her to speak to the tribe and begin a culturally violent conversion. However, employing Christian discourses allows Unca Eliza to re-examine if not usurp that colonial framework (Wolfe 2004: 30). Horne suggests that the 'trickster' figure in Indigenous storytelling reworks Homi Bhabha's mimicry in a different (post-)colonial context. Such a mimic 'delights in differences and strategically displays them by turning the gaze of the colonizers back on themselves' (Horne 1999: 13). The role of such a character is to 'remind[] listeners and readers of the mutability of life and the importance of adaptability for cultural and personal survival' (Horne 1999: 127). *The Female American* is Unca Eliza's story of survival in which she slips between Friday and Crusoe's identities. The novel is framed as a collection of papers returned to England to explain her adventure and choices to her Protestant family. Ultimately, it is intended for her English relatives. Both on the island and in her records, Unca Eliza plays with dualisms in gender, natural and supernatural identities, and (self-interested) survival. Kvande notes that when Unca Eliza intends to use the oracle as a tool for 'imperial[ism]', 'her illusions of power are shattered by the simultaneous hurricane and earthquake that destroy her shelter and temporarily imprison her beneath the statue' (2016: 692). After this event, Unca Eliza becomes far more adept at walking the boundaries of her identity and perhaps distancing herself from colonial ambitions. Diffusing power is essential to the narrative. Concealment in the idol initiates this translation and, by extension, a transformation of colonial discourses.

Such a role requires Unca Eliza's unique combination of Friday- and Crusoe-like characteristics. The body of the oracle is 'luckily suited' to Unca Eliza's form:

The image was very well contrived to favour my purpose; there was in it a convenient seat, and sure footing for my feet and which also luckily suited my stature, so that when I sat, my face was directly upon a level with the holes; by which means I could, without changing my posture, see every thing that was to be seen through them. (*The Female American*, 93)

Arguably, the oracle is the 'seat' for a woman to survey and to speak, uniquely designed perhaps for a female priestess (such as the narrator) or originally the 'virgins of the sun' (*The Female American*, 82). The 'holes' that allow Unca Eliza to see the worshippers and the island while remaining unnaturally still, like the metal statue itself, work in one direction. The narrator observes the safety of her position in the idol, as it 'was too high for any person to bring, his eyes, or even his hands, near to the openings' (*The Female American*, 93). The way the statue can project sound is also essential to the protagonist's 'trickster' storytelling which is usually directed to groups of listeners (Horne 1999: 111–118), as it enables Unca Eliza to address a community of worshippers.

The narrator uses sound projection through the statue on both the tribe and European sailors who land on the island on the commission of Unca Eliza's cousin, to different ends. During the sailors' visit, her aim is not religious conversion but a game and an explicit act of trickery:

As I found the wind sat full against the statue, I placed the instrument [i.e. an Aeolian harp she has found] before it, and heard it play with a loudness that I could not have borne long. This no doubt could not but give my visitors a new alarm, yet, from the nature of it, was less terrifying than my speaking had been, with such a magnifying voice, as the mechanism of the statue occasioned: and indeed they were greatly alarmed [...] (*The Female American*, 133)

Peter Weise observes that the sailors listen to the voice and the music emanating from the statue with 'uncertainty' and 'fear' (2016: 668). Unca Eliza herself, as the life within the statue and then seen outside of the idol in the traditional dress of the priestesses, is the colonial other to be feared, not embraced as a long-lost castaway. Like Friday in *Robinson Crusoe*, she is regarded by the sailors as 'the other who can approach but never attain the European standard of Christianity' (Fleck 1998: 74) despite the assurances of her cousin that she is a Christian woman. The 'mechanism

of the statue' seems to leave an indelible mark on the protagonist, preventing her from returning to her European identity and community once she has been found. Although Unca Eliza chooses not to return to England, the sailors reject her, making that possibility distant. After the narrator has used the supernatural (indigenous) body, she is associated with the 'religion' of the tribe, which is unrecognisable and unpalatable to the Christian sailors.

### *Conclusion*

This article has pointed to how the narrator and her concealment in the Oracle are configurations of Friday. Exile on the island ultimately draws Unca Eliza closer to her identity as a mixed-race colonial other, even if she maintains her Christian identity, symbolic of her Englishness. The conclusion of the novel only heightens this confusion. Unca Eliza, assisted by her husband, explodes the statue, a tool which has enabled her to 'revis[e] her limited position in relation to God, [...and] to alter her position in various cultural and political systems among the natives' (Weise 2016: 667). Removing the statue is perhaps symbolic of a conversion narrative fully realised: 'we first determined to go upon my island, to collect all the gold treasure there, to blow up the subterraneous passage, and the statue, that the Indians might never be tempted to their former idolatry' (*The Female American*, 162). After her cousin's arrival, Unca Eliza destroys the statue and lives with the Christianised locals, her husband and Captain Shore. Conway reads the statue's destruction as a method of overcoming the implicit contradictions in Unca Eliza's ascendance and position within the now-Christian tribe, during which she employed gold and 'false idols' (2016: 681). Rather than reading this as the confirmation of Christian conversion, it can also be taken as Unca Eliza no longer requiring the shroud of an indigenous figure because she has become part of the tribe and left Europe, never to return. Arguably, she has accepted her position as Friday, and she is no longer abandoned on the island but choosing it as her home. The final explosion also serves a Gothic function, as it reminds the reader of the ruins which opened Unca Eliza's island experience (Nordius 2008: 6; Blaim 2014: 53–54). Punter notes that the Gothic and its ruins engage with 'the recapture of history' (2013: 4). The explosion at close of *The Female American* alters and extends the original ruins, rendering the statue historical rather than present and animate. Even without the idol, the protagonist remains a 'trickster mimic'

(Kvande 2016: 693–694) as the translator between written religion, her English husband, now learning the local language, and her new Indigenous community learning English.

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