The Female American *and its Liminal Spaces* (Article)

JONAHS KNEITLY
Texas A&M University

The Female American; or, the Adventures of Unca Eliza Winkfield is a narrative of self-discovery which relies on liminality, or the power of between spaces, to highlight the journey of its alleged author and titular character, Unca Eliza Winkfield. Published anonymously in London in 1767, *The Female American*, like many thematically similar texts, capitalized on the popularity of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* published in 1719.[1] These castaway tales are so numerous that they form their own genre, the Robinsonades. The Robinsonade stranger-in-a-strange-land trope lends itself to liminal journeys since the trope and this type of journey both require an individual to "leave the familiar and known to experience a time of transition characterized by uncertainty and unfamiliarity."[2] *The Female American* and other female Robinsonades "provide opportunities [to] examine the tension between fulfilling conventional feminine roles and developing individual potential."[3] Many Robinsonade women, including Winkfield, once free from their normal surroundings and patriarchy's disciplinary gaze, step outside of traditional ideologies and embrace their own power. *The Female American* follows its protagonist, Winkfield, as she explores race, religion, and gender after being castaway in the wilds of North America.

The Female American and *Robinson Crusoe*

Though they share some commonalities, Winkfield's story differs from Crusoe's. Crusoe willingly departs England to escape the banality of a British middle-class existence. However, after he is shipwrecked and marooned alone on a deserted island in the Americas, he spends his time replicating British crafts, crop methods, and Indigenous subjugation. His handiworks include extra homes, extra garden plots, extra herds of goat, and extra walls and fortifications. Other than personal enjoyment, these redundant improvements offer Crusoe modest reciprocal value.[4] Thomas Fair notes that, while the Robinsonade men are concerned with mastering their physical world and justifying British imperialism, Robinsonade "women occupy and dominate social and emotional territory."[5] Winkfield is female, bicultural, and biracial and actively engages with social issues.

Unlike Crusoe, Winkfield does not seek adventure. Denise Mary MacNeil notes that adventure is thrust upon Winkfield "unlooked for, unavoidable, and unwelcome."[6] After she refuses a forced marriage, Winkfield is abandoned on an island off the coast of North America, where she works to convert a nearby Indigenous group to Christianity. Her efforts

1. Rochelle Raineri Zuck's "Who Wrote *The Female American*?: The Noble Brothers, Circulating Libraries, and the Eighteenth-Century Novel," *ELH* 89, no. 32 (Fall 2022): 661–88, explores the link between publication, implied authorship, and capitalizing on the success of other published works.

2. Anne Franks and John Meteyard, "Liminality: The Transforming Grace of In-between Places," *The Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling* 61, no. 3 (Fall 2007): 215–22; 219.

3. Thomas Fair, "19th-Century English Girls' Adventure Stories: Domestic Imperialism, Agency and the Female Robinsonades," *Rock Mountain Review* 68, no. 2 (Fall 2014): 142–58; 142.

4. Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 320.

5. Fair, "Adventure Stories," 144.

6. Denise Mary MacNeil, *Emergence of the American Frontier Hero, 1682–1826* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), 83.

Studies in Religion and the Enlightenment 3, no. 1 (fall 2023)
ISSN: 2661-3336 | doi: 10.32655/srej.2023.3.1.3

are not completely altruistic and exhibit a problematic imperialism.[7] *The Female American* advances European views of Indigenous peoples in what Emelia Abbé characterizes as the exotic over the real.[8] While in Britain, Winkfield plays the role of "curious plaything" by capitalizing on her mix of Indigenous and British heritages.[9] Winkfield highlights her foreignness by accentuating her tawny skin and black hair and by dressing outside the norm for white Britons. She believes herself superior to the Indigenous and the British because she is bicultural. She assumes she is "extra-cultural in terms of any one culture."[10] Her biased understanding and reductive opinions of the Indigenous come from interacting with her Indigenous slaves rather than from living within any Indigenous society. Though she presents herself as sensitive, Winkfield reduces the Indigenous living in America to a single, homogenous culture. For these reasons, she believes making decisions for these peoples and their future is reasonable, just, and divinely sanctified. This belief is bolstered by her time spent within the liminal spaces of her island.

Liminality

As noted, liminality is characterized by uncertainty and unfamiliarity and occurs when an individual enters an ambiguous, transitional space in which their identity is disposed from their past existence and re-created within a new role. Spaces are defined here as any force, moment, mode, or location that lacks fixed, cultural definition. Anne Franks and John Meteyard note, "Liminality, from the Latin word for threshold [limen], is the state of being betwixt and between where the old world has been left behind, but we have not yet arrived at what is to come."[11] Liminal spaces lie at the boundaries of places, which are areas or states with attached, fixed cultural definitions and expectations. Movement from one well-defined place to another often requires passage through an ambiguous interval; these transitional areas are called liminal spaces. Crossing these "neither-this-nor-that" spaces, an individual leaves behind fixed, conventional configurations and beliefs in order to fit within a new paradigm.[12] These dynamic, ill-defined spaces allow an individual to adapt from one set role to another. For example, as individuals move between well-defined states, such as between adolescence and adulthood, they reach a point where they are not really one or the other. This space outside of adolescence and adulthood, but connecting both, is the liminal space between the two. Adjusting from one mode into a newer one often includes spiritual evolution as an individual must let go of old habits and beliefs in order to embrace their new life.[13] Liminal change may be part of the normal social order, such as when a single individual becomes part of a married couple, but it can also be unexpected and unprecedented.

In liminal spaces, individuals face a reality where rules, norms, and expectations are dynamic. Existing within these ill-defined boundary spaces can be uncomfortable and stressful until one adjusts to their new life. Therefore, individuals try to re-create themselves as quickly as possible to move into a new paradigm.[14] However, journeys that involve significant spiritual and religious evolution are often highly personal and therefore lack social

7. Emilia Abbé, "Collecting and Collected: Native American Subjectivity and Transatlantic Transactions in *The Female American*," *Early American Literature* 54, no. 1 (2019): 37–67; 38.

8. Abbé, "Collecting and Collected," 42.

9. Abbé, "Collecting and Collected," 50.

10. MacNeil, *American Frontier Hero*, 97.

11. Franks and Meteyard, "Liminality," 215.

12. Juha Pentikäinen, "The Symbolism of Liminality," *Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis* 10 (January 1979): 154–66; 156.

13. Bianca Teodorescu and Răzvan Alexandru Călin, "The Base Articulations of the Liminality Concept," *Review of European Studies* 7, no. 12 (2015): 97–102; 98.

14. Teodorescu and Călin, "Base Articulations," 97.

mitigation. In these journeys of self-discovery, individuals struggle with finding the path forward and with understanding the changes they are experiencing since the new rules and modes to be adopted are unclear. This type of uncertain experience within liminality can leave one without insight into the future and with no way back to their former status. Winkfield experiences this type of liminal journey. She is driven to evolve as quickly as possible without a clear idea of who she is becoming. Alone on her island, Winkfield relies on prophetic signs and logic to guide her evolution. While liminality is an important aspect of Winkfield's personal evolution, scholars have focused on *The Female American*'s liminality as a work of literature.

The Female American lies in a liminal, vague space as a published work. The novel is anonymous but situates itself as Winkfield's personal journal. The true author may be either male or female, but "scholars generally agree . . . that person was likely not an Indigenous."[15] The novel defies easy designation as a British or American work.[16] The story plays out in the same universe as *Robinson Crusoe,* but it may have preceded *Crusoe* in time or may have followed it.[17] Edward Simon notes that *The Female American* "exists in a liminal ideological space [as it] generates a new space for a specifically American identity."[18] In other words, *The Female American* exists outside of other literature within a space where it is creating and defining a place for itself. *The Female American* is a frontier novel, but while the typical American frontier heroes are gendered male, Winkfield is a female American hero.[19] Despite the scholarly emphasis on the text's liminal placement within literature, little work has focused on liminality in relation to Winkfield's experience on her island. For this article, the novel will be examined as Winkfield's personal narrative incorporating places and states which intersect in an island's liminal spaces.

An island is liminal because it exists between the mainland and the open ocean. Winkfield's island lies somewhere between Britain and America and outside either's control. Juha Pentikäinen notes that individuals experiencing evolution within liminal spaces "are outside society, and society has no power over them, especially since they are actually sacred and holy, and therefore untouchable and dangerous, just as gods would be."[20] Just like gods, these individuals, such as Winkfield, are re-creating themselves within liminal spaces. The feeling of being lost, but with the power of self-creation, adds to Winkfield's feelings of anxiety and stress. Powerful moments of liminal existence, such as Winkfield's, require trust.

Newly abandoned on the beach, a liminal space between land and sea, Winkfield prays that she should "fall into the hand of the Lord, for his mercies are great, and let me not fall into the hands of man."[21] Winkfield prays to leave the dangerous world of man for a more spiritual existence, and she is quickly answered. Determined to endure, she abandons the beach and finds a hut. Caught between fear and hope, she pauses at the entrance, literally a limen. Crossing a threshold represents making a conscious decision to change and to unite oneself with a new world.[22] As Winkfield hesitates on the verge of a new life, she hears a

15. Zuck, "*Female American*," 661.

16. Edward Simon, "Unca Eliza Winkfield and the Fantasy of Non-Colonial Conversion in *The Female American*," *Women's Studies* 45 (2016): 649–59; 649.

17. See Betty Joseph's "Re(playing) Crusoe/Pocahontas: Circum-Atlantic Stagings in 'The Female American,'" *Criticism* 42, no. 3 (2000): 317–35, for *The Female American*'s proposed surrogacy of *Robinson Crusoe*.

18. Simon, "Non-Colonial Conversion," 649.

19. MacNeil, *American Frontier Hero*, 84.

20. Pentikäinen, "Symbolism of Liminality," 157.

21. *The Female American; or, The Adventures of Unca Eliza Winkfield*, 2nd ed., ed. Michelle Burnham and James Freitas (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Editions, 2014), 65.

22. Pentikäinen, "Symbolism of Liminality," 155.

mysterious voice calling, and she flees into the hut's dark security.[23] Each time she faces a moment of decision or a pause in her journey, occurrences such as this drive her to act. Notably, when one path closes, another always opens. To Winkfield's thinking, these moments are divinely directed.

These liminal moments are meaningful and portentous for Winkfield. Franks and Meteyard note that exile is a metaphor for liminality figured as the loss of one home and being obliged to accept another.[24] In essence, these individuals are between homes, and Winkfield loses many homes within the novel. When she is abandoned on the shore, Winkfield is caught without a home but locates the hut. The death of the island's hermit, in whose hut she resides, forces her to move into an abandoned palace. The palace's destruction during a combined storm and earthquake forces Winkfield to move into an underground chamber attached to a large pagan idol. In a subsequent earthquake, Winkfield is buried in this chamber and must struggle to reach the surface.[25] Entombments and burial articulate the passing of the old self to make room for the new, and in this moment, Winkfield is buried in darkness but rises self-resurrected into a new world. These transitional moments carry Winkfield forward without lessening the changes she is experiencing. During her time on the island, change is the only constant. Winkfield has no moments of complete security within the island's liminal space. In her anxiety and drive to move forward toward a fixed reality, she begins to believe these experiences are directing her to convert the Indigenous to Christianity.

The Indigenous

Though she is half Indigenous, Winkfield's ideas concerning Indigenous peoples are reductive. They indicate western European and colonial biases similar to those expressed in Benjamin Franklin's "Remarks concerning the Savages of North America." Franklin's "Remarks" was written in 1784, and *The Female American* was published in 1767, which is a likely indication of authorship date.[26] This publication date is shortly before the American Revolution and just seventeen years before Franklin wrote his "Remarks." Franklin's ideas, though suspect, indicate contemporaneous beliefs about Indigenous peoples. Comparing these works permits interesting correlations between *The Female American* and colonial ideas at the end of the eighteenth century.

Franklin observes that indigenous women, or "Indian Women" as he terms them, "preserve & hand down to Posterity the Memory of Public Transactions."[27] According to this statement, a female acting as a source of knowledge would seem natural to Indigenous peoples. Franklin assumes this role to be traditional, which offers context for Winkfield's plan to voice God's teachings since she would be relying on this purported female role to reinforce her message. Franklin notes that the "Indian Men" are hunters and warriors and later become counselors trained in rhetoric and oratory and that "the best Speaker [has] the most Influence."[28] To achieve the Indigenous religious conversion, Winkfield combines these two alleged gender roles: historian and sage/orator. By occupying a liminal space between these gender roles, she increases her chance of success as a religious teacher by appropriating the cultural power of both genders. She imagines her teachings will make the Indigenous

23. *The Female American*, 66.

24. Franks and Meteyard, "Liminality," 219.

25. *The Female American*, 96–97.

26. Betty Joseph offers interesting analysis of the liminal space that *The Female American* creates for itself outside of known dates and published texts. See Joseph, "Re(playing) Crusoe/Pocahontas," 317–35.

27. Benjamin Franklin, "Remarks concerning the Savages of North America, [before 7 January 1784]," Founders Online, National Historical Publications & Records Commission, accessed April 15, 2023, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-41-02-0280.

28. Franklin, "Remarks."

independent of Europeans rather than lead to their subjugation. However, Winkfield kept Indigenous slaves during her early life in America and while living in Europe. Therefore, in this tale, she is both the colonized and the colonizer. Ignoring this problematic situation, Winkfield strategizes each interaction with the Indigenous to foster their belief and acquiescence.

Winkfield adjusts her teachings so that her message appeals to what she considers to be innate Indigenous logic. She is confident that once convinced "that [her] intentions towards them are friendly, no people are more grateful; nor are there any in whom [she] can, safely, place a greater confidence."[29] In other words, Winkfield reduces the Indigenous to a noble savage ideal who possess natural, though simple, reason. Franklin enacts a similar mode when he notes that the colonists call the natives "Savages," though they use "no Force, there are no Prisons, no Officers to compel Obedience, or inflict Punishment."[30] Winkfield and Franklin assume the Indigenous live an idyllic life of peace and reason. Winkfield seemingly relies on a culturally codified politeness, which Franklin notes "does not permit [the Indigenous] to contradict, or deny the Truth of what is asserted in their Presence."[31] Franklin reports that missionaries are often frustrated because the Indigenous act is if they believe Christian teachings, while they are, in fact, merely being polite. Winkfield, however, assumes that this submissive behavior will, and does, represent belief, because God's truth is undeniable. While Winkfield and Franklin attribute all Indigenous with a charming innocence, Winkfield is not above using threats, fear, and theatrics to accomplish her goals.[32]

Winkfield has faith in the power of reason but admits she may be partaking in sophistry. Nonetheless, she rationalizes her qualms: "I know not whether the casuists may justify this artifice from sin; but to me it appeared expedient, and was successfully adapted to their fears, for they immediately halted [their departure]."[33] Once assured of their docility and conversion, she announces: "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 will bring with her the holy writings . . . and shall teach all of you, especially the priests who shall instruct you after her departure."[34] Winkfield assumes a female would cause less suspicion and believes that holy *written* texts are more valuable to the Indigenous than *oral* wisdom. Her enactment of gender is again in line with Franklin's postulated role of females as historical repositories. However, she also reifies the power of the Indigenous male priests, though originally, she wished to remove their power, which is just one adjustment she makes to increase the appeal of Christianity. Winkfield plays with gender as part of her strategy for successful conversion, although this tactic is often outside of Western religious ideals.

Religion

Patriarchal religious dogma plays a significant role in *The Female American*. When she arrives on the island, Winkfield has unwavering confidence in religious knowledge. Winkfield is well read in the Bible and the Common Prayer books. She reads Greek texts, which might be the Apocrypha, while on the island and even writes in Greek "Άφορωγτες εις τηγ Ιησουγ" (Imitation of Jesus) within her manuscript.[35] Her uncle, a minor religious official in England, prepared Winkfield to take on a religious life. She notes that he was "as

29. *The Female American*, 92.
30. Franklin, "Remarks."
31. Franklin, "Remarks."
32. *The Female American*, 101–3.
33. *The Female American*, 103.
34. *The Female American*, 119.
35. *The Female American*, 78.

methodical and exact as though [she] had been to be a divine; nor did he inculcate religion as a mere science; but in such a warm and affecting manner, that whilst his lectures convinced the understanding, they converted the heart, and made [her] love and know religion at the same time."[36] Despite his training and her desire for religious work, most official religious service during the time she lived was reserved for men. Her options for religious service depended on her particular faith.

Though not explicitly stated within the text, Winkfield is likely a member of the Church of England and the Anglican faith. Though her uncle's teachings have afforded her religious proficiency, the Church of England limits Winkfield's options since women were not allowed ordination until the twentieth century.[37] If she were Quaker, her desire to proselytize for Christ would be less problematic because Quaker women were allowed more religious freedom. Catholic women, including converted Indigenous women, actively worked within the Americas to fuse "their cultural identity with the new expectations of the Church, redefining themselves and becoming not only active in religious matters, but on occasion even models to be followed."[38] If Winkfield was born later in the nineteenth century, she might have been part of the "Faith missions" movement which Norman Etherington and David Maxwell note "returned to ideals of pared-down itinerant preaching, and emphasized personal holiness rather than educational attainments."[39] However, Winkfield did not have access to these more permissive options. She was a citizen of her time and a member of the Church of England, which did offer slightly more freedom than Puritanism. Neither option was ideal for Winkfield's proposed goal of Indigenous conversion. These limitations can be seen by comparing Mary Rowlandson's memoirs with Winkfield's narrative. Both women, Winkfield and Rowlandson, "are more at home in the wilderness, and more adventurous there, than men."[40] Despite their similar spirit, Winkfield and Rowlandson exhibit different religious views.

In her chronicle, Rowlandson narrates her 1675 capture by Indigenous peoples. The introduction to Rowlandson's account notes, "Puritans generally thought it inappropriate for writings by women to appear in print unless under the auspices of male authority; in its published form Rowlandson's narrative was preceded by a male-authored preface and followed by the text of her husband's final sermon."[41] Puritan women were expected to avoid public performances and were possibly judged negatively even if religiously motivated. Unlike Rowlandson, Winkfield shows little reticence concerning public attention or for recording her story. Additionally, Winkfield and Rowlandson exhibit differences in their religious practices.

Winkfield and Rowlandson have quite different interactions with biblical texts. Winkfield's uncle issues strict injunctions against using the Bible for anything other than comfort.[42] He states, "Beware . . . of the practice of some enthusiasts of our times, who make

36. *The Female American*, 60.

37. "Factsheet: Women Priests in the Church of England," Religion Media Centre, March 12, 2019, https://religionmediacentre.org.uk/factsheets/25-years-of-women-as-priests-in-the-church-of-england/.

38. Mónica Díaz, "Native American Women and Religion in The American Colonies: Textual and Visual Traces of an Imagined Community," in "Women and Early America," special issue, *Legacy* 28, no. 2 (2011): 205–31; 206.

39. Norman Etherington and David Maxwell, "Missions and Empire," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 34, fasc. 1/2 (February–May 2004): 194–99; 195.

40. MacNeil, *American Frontier Hero*, 89.

41. "Mary Rowlandson: 1637–1711," in *The Broadview Anthology of British Literature*, vol. 3, *The Restoration and The Eighteenth Century*, 2nd ed., ed. Don LePan and Laura Buzzard (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2012), 1–32; 2, online website version, accessed April 15, 2023.

42. *The Female American*, 68.

the word of God literally an oracle."[43] This practice, known as bibliomancy, is often performed by Rowlandson. Bibliomancy relies on supplicants reading random biblical passages which are thought prescriptive of their life. In this manner, Mary Rowlandson uses the Bible to uncover God's will. For example, while discouraging another captive from running away, Rowlandson writes: "I had my Bible with me, I pulled it out, and asked her whether she would read; we opened the Bible and lighted on Psalm 27, in which Psalm we especially took notice of that, *ver. ult., Wait on the Lord, Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine Heart, wait I say on the Lord*."[44] After this reading, the other captive and Rowlandson are convinced to remain rather than risk recapture and death. Winkfield's decisions do not rely on the Bible's prescriptive power but on her own rational understanding. Winkfield's truth is determined through reason.

Winkfield sees divine portents in the world and discerns truth by engaging in mental dialogues using a self-directed Socratic method. Winkfield writes, "On these occasions, it was always my custom to imagine to myself that my uncle was speaking to me. . . . I have sometimes indulged this reverie to such a degree that I have really imagined, at last, that my uncle was speaking to me."[45] Her reliance on rational thought and internal dialogues, rather than the Bible, reveals that Winkfield does not exhibit faith in the same manner as Rowlandson. Since her reliance on the biblical texts is less strict and prescriptive, Winkfield can alter religious dogma to suit her, as long as she can rationally support her decisions. Castaway in the Americas, church dogma and its patriarchal gender norms do not keep her from answering her religious calling.

As noted, once she becomes a castaway, Winkfield discovers the hermit's hut. This hut contains a diary which is filled with survival instructions along with a hermit's religious reflections.[46] Winkfield, well versed in religious thought, concentrates on the diary's survival information: dangers, weather, edibles, location of necessities, notes on Indigenous visitations, and so forth. After a brief time, the absent hermit reappears. He states he has been sick, delirious, and wandering aimlessly in the island's wilderness spaces. Spiritual journeys often involve testing in wildernesses.[47] Both the hermit and Winkfield undergo trials such as this while on the island.

Despite living in the hermit's hut and exploring widely, before this meeting, Winkfield saw no trace of the hermit and presumed him dead. The hermit dies the day of their meeting, thus removing him as a possible warden over Winkfield's actions. The absence of the hermit and his patriarchal disciplinary gaze allows Winkfield to convert the Indigenous as she wishes. Winkfield leaves the hermit entombed in his hut.[48] Tombs speak "of grief and pain that is often involved with dying to old forms of identity."[49] They also mark the liminal division of the physical world and the spiritual afterlife. Tombs and entombment figure prominently as liminal moments within *The Female American*.

Winkfield leaves the hermit lying in state similar to that of the ancient pagan mummies on the island. In an abandoned complex, thousand-year-old mummies identified as "priests of the sun" lie near entombed, desiccated virgins.[50] This ancient religion has a similar gender separation as the Catholic faith: male priests and dedicated, chaste females. The remnants of this dead religion with separate gender roles lie near the hermit, who

43. *The Female American*, 68.
44. "Mary Rowlandson," 11.
45. *The Female American*, 77.
46. Betty Joseph's discusses how *The Female American* situates itself as the progenitor of the castaway genre and casts Robinson Crusoe as Winkfield's hermit. See Joseph, "Re(playing) Crusoe/Pocahontas," 317–35.
47. Franks and Meteyard, "Liminality," 220.
48. *The Female American*, 85.
49. Franks and Meteyard, "Liminality," 220.
50. *The Female American*, 81–82.

represents religion with official roles taken by male believers. The close proximity of these interred religious figures highlights Winkfield's journey past these restrictive gender options to a path that is similar to the Church of England's *via media* philosophy.

The liminality of Winkfield's journey is explicitly evoked by *via media.* The term *via media* means "middle way" and implies locating a harmonious middle path between diverse positions. The *via media* philosophy of the Anglican faith offered a liminal, middle ground between Puritanism and Catholicism.[51] Winkfield's idea of Indigenous conversion mirrors Britain's developing movement from "military conqueror to spiritual director."[52] Anglican missionaries, according to Bowen, "were hampered by funding, Anglocentrism, and a basic disdain for 'roughing it,' as few Anglican missionaries were willing to live among Native American Tribes or learn their language and customs."[53] Winkfield is free from all of these limitations, but her gender remains a hindrance. Her conversion of the Indigenous requires that she move past religious gender norms and roles. This process is not easy, and her faith is not always adamant.

Each turn on Winkfield's path strengthens her belief that she is meant to convert the Indigenous to Christianity. As in Crusoe's experience, Winkfield's Indigenous peoples visit the island only once per year. Both Robinson Crusoe and *The Female American*'s hermit maintained their distance from non-whites out of fear. However, Winkfield sees this yearly visit as an opportunity. Winkfield is steadfast in her surety that Indigenous people are "generally of a docile disposition."[54] In other words, they will be easily led by Winkfield. Still, Winkfield sometimes loses faith.

Letting go of previous beliefs and setting one's life on a new path is not easy, and Winkfield sometimes despairs during her solitary existence.[55] In her misery, she becomes ill and experiences a violent, delirious fever. She notes, "I raved, I cried, I laughed by turns. I soon became so weak that I was scarce able to crawl from my bed to get some water."[56] This illness is similar to that experienced by the hermit before his death, and their individual illnesses derive from their struggles to accept a new existence. Leaving behind old modes is a form of death, and physical illness often accompanies this type of spiritual growth. Liminal stages in life are "abnormal and anti-structural . . . [and] people at that phase are considered to be more apt to the influence of the supernatural than usually."[57] Individuals experiencing growth within liminal spaces are more open to liminal influences in many forms. Sometimes, these individuals are "forcibly expelled from the old ascendant forms of self-definition."[58] This violent expulsion of previous modes from the spirit sometimes causes similar expulsions from the body, which are manifested as physical illnesses. The hermit did not survive the illness manifested from his spiritual self-discovery. Winkfield is more successful.

Winkfield connects her illness directly to her faith. She writes, "I owed my late sickness to my giving way to those anxious corroding cares that had arisen in my mind concerning my future subsistence; and I could not but condemn my folly, and mourn for the sinfulness of it, and of which I hope, I heartily repented."[59] *The Female American* often makes use of Christian metaphors to explain Winkfield's journey. For example, in her tormented enfevered state, Winkfield crawls to a nearby river. While washing her fever-hot

51. Scarlet Bowen, "'Via Media': Transatlantic Anglicanism in 'The Female American,'" *The Eighteenth Century* 53, no. 2 (Summer 2012): 189–207; 189.
52. Bowen, "'Via Media,'" 190.
53. Bowen, "'Via Media,'" 191.
54. *The Female American*, 92.
55. *The Female American*, 74.
56. *The Female American*, 74.
57. Pentikäinen, "Symbolism of Liminality," 161.
58. Franks and Meteyard, "Liminality," 220.
59. *The Female American*, 77.

feet, she slips and becomes submerged in the water. The cool water revives her, and she pulls herself onto the shore.[60] Teodorescu and Călin note that "in liminality, an individual is reborn spiritually," and Winkfield is submerged and rises renewed from the river, suggesting a baptism and subsequent rebirth.[61]

Baptism is a form of liminal experience—being suspended within the cleansing embrace of water, floating between earth and air and between sin and forgiveness. After this experience, Winkfield falls into a deep sleep and awakens with a great thirst. A she-goat rests nearby, who, though wild, happily allows Winkfield to suckle milk directly from her. Winkfield becomes violently ill, but the milk purges the sickness from her body.[62] Tropes such as these—the rebirth through baptism and the gentled wild animal—give this passage a pastoral feel which highlights its transcendent "not-all-one-state-or-another" moments. Winkfield believes these experiences indicate God's will. Transformed by her trials, she resolves to "receive then the instructions of a higher school, and learn of a better master. Remember him who through sufferings was made perfect, and that the disciple is not to be above the master."[63] Convinced of God's desire and disregarding patriarchal religious dogma, Winkfield self-identifies as a religious teacher and moves forward toward a fixed place and role for her future.

Despite her best intentions, however, Winkfield has difficulty moving past her ego. In one moment, she notes: "The consciousness of the purity of my intention, and the goodness of my design, prevailed over every other thought, and I became calm and determined."[64] In the next moment, she "imagined hundreds of Indians prostrate before [her] with reverence and attention, whilst like a law-giver, [she] uttered precepts, and like an orator, inculcated them with a voice magnified almost to the loudness of thunder."[65] She grapples with her moral dilemma, and the island's powerful spirituality offers a pair of visions.

Winkfield discovers an ethereally beautiful peacock-like bird with a rainbow tail. She also encounters a dog-sized lionlike animal with legs that barely support it. To feed, this animal rests on the ground and feigns death. Mice climb on its body and become stuck to its fur. When the creature rises, it grazes on the hanging, hopeless, and helpless mice. Winkfield perceives these two creatures as messages: Will she be the beautiful and gentle bird, or will she be like the dog-sized animal, a death-shrouded despot ruling and devouring helpless victims through divine right? Winkfield chooses the path of the bird since she believes she is freeing the Indigenous from British colonialism. Once decided, Winkfield considers how to use available resources to accomplish her goal. She makes significant use of one tool available to her: gender.

Gender

Bolstered by her logical verification of God's will, Winkfield begins to create a defined role for herself. Alone on her island, her gender is not a great issue, and she can easily adapt it to fit her needs. Through her mother, Winkfield is born into an Indigenous culture that empowers females as well as males. Her mother, also named Unca, rescued her father, William (Bill) Winkfield, in a scene that evokes the fictionalized escapades of Rebecca Rolfe née Pocahontas and John Smith. After her tribe captures William, Unca, the

60. *The Female American*, 74–75.

61. Bianca Teodorescu and Răzvan Alexandru Călin, "The Base Articulations of the Liminality Concept," *Review of European Studies* 7, no. 12 (2015): 97–102; 99.

62. *The Female American*, 75.

63. *The Female American*, 78.

64. *The Female American*, 95.

65. *The Female American*, 95.

elder, pleads for Bill's life, and the king, her father, grants it to her.[66] The couple fall in love, and eventually, Bill is able to convert her to Christianity. Their resulting union begins in a liminal space since the couple originally marries in an Indigenous rite, which Bill considers a civil ceremony, and they later take Christian vows in a religious ceremony.[67] This leveling of the two cultures is common throughout the novel, and Winkfield, as noted, believes herself culturally superior as a result.

While Unca, the elder, and Bill are falling in love, he is also pursued by Unca's sister, Alluca. Alluca, who later becomes queen of their people, states: "[For women] it is our custom to be silent, or to speak what we think; we are of opinion that nature has given us the same right to declare love as it has to [the male] sex."[68] For Alluca and Unca's people, women are permitted to rule themselves by stating and pursuing their own preferences. Enlightenment ideals such as freedom of choice, individualism, and natural reason bolster Winkfield's belief in her right to convert the Indigenous peoples living near her island. Though she ignores their freedom of choice, Winkfield believes she is acting in good faith because religious conversion free of imperialism was considered a matter of natural reason rather than political ideology.[69] Winkfield genuinely believes that their innate reason ensures the Indigenous peoples' conversion to Christianity. [70] Being exiled from one's culture, family, and community allows an individual to divorce their ego from its traditional sources.[71] Separated from society's disciplinary gaze, Winkfield can accept her missionary role, acting without official church sanction. Free from patriarchal mores within the island's liminal space, Winkfield consciously adjusts her self-image.

Winkfield explores her freedom to choose and to determine who she will be. After Winkfield's birth, Alluca gifts her with a bow and arrow set.[72] This hunting set forms part of Winkfield's identity and symbolizes her empowerment. By taking the power associated with bows, arrows, and hunting in general, Winkfield places herself in a traditionally masculine gender space. [73] Additionally, the image of Winkfield as archer associates her with the goddess Artemis who chose a nontraditional female role. By retaining her virginity and her autonomy, Artemis avoided society's patriarchal expectations associated with marriage and the role of mother. Winkfield enacted a similar strategy during her youth. To avoid marriage and motherhood, Winkfield played with gender norms to cultivate personal agency.

Winkfield assumes most suitors pursue her to gain control of her wealth through marriage. She gains autonomy by stating she will only marry someone who can outshoot her with a bow. Her desire to remain unwed is strong enough to resist marrying, even though her refusal directly causes the deaths of her Indigenous slaves and her abandonment on the island.[74] Despite her reluctance to marry, her British first cousin, John, insistently pursues her. She states, "As he continued in his suit, I always laughed at him, and answered in the Indian language, of which he was entirely ignorant; and so by degrees wearied him into

66. *The Female American*, 52.

67. *The Female American*, 54.

68. *The Female American*, 52.

69. Simon, "Non-Colonial Conversion," 649.

70. Edward Simon notes, however, that ideological free conversion is a myth. Separating imperialism from religious conversion is difficult or impossible despite Winkfield's belief. See Simon, "Non-Colonial Conversion."

71. Franks and Meteyard, "Liminality," 220.

72. *The Female American*, 57.

73. As noted, Franklin remarked that native men were first warriors and later orators; an idea which exhibits a western European bias concerning evolving male roles (see "Remarks").

74. Though Winkfield speaks about the Indigenous fondly and describes them as companions, she also designates them as *slaves.* They are killed to make her submit to marriage. However, their deaths do not force her acquiescence. See *The Female American*, 63.

silence."[75] Winkfield has no interest in John or in marriage and actively uses language to maintain the autonomy that her mother's culture would have afforded her. Her language proficiency and her predilection to blur gender lines become critical tools when she begins proselytizing in America.

To realize her plan to convert the Indigenous, Winkfield makes use of an idol on the island. The idol is hollow and can accommodate a person inside. It is prominently placed and offers a clear view of the entire island. The idol is marked "THE ORACLE OF THE SUN" in a language easily read by Winkfield.[76] The idol resides in the liminal space between male and female since it is physically male but wears a gown bound under the chest, creating a feminine appearance. As noted, Winkfield has a predilection to inhabit the margins between gender binaries when it suits her, such as when it helped her avoid marriage. She continues this practice on the island. While the statue is male with female attire, Winkfield takes on a mirrored appearance with a female body and male attire. Winkfield chooses the highest priest's dress and crown and takes two rich, ornate bracelets for her arms and "the largest [ring] . . . sprinkled over with precious stones, and here and there a large diamond."[77] Winkfield actively creates a liminal, gender-hybrid character. By placing herself within the male statue, she joins her female mind, will, and voice with a male visage. Winkfield's voice issuing from the male idol creates a powerful presence that defies traditional gender classification that Winkfield can exploit to convert the Indigenous. The idol resides between clearly defined genders, and it occupies a similar space between natural and supernatural.

The idol moderates sight and sound in ways that defy the laws of nature. From within the idol, one can see the entire island while remaining completely invisible from the outside. One can also easily hear anything said on the island and anything spoken within the idol is broadcast clearly over the entire island. Observing the idol's nature-defying phenomena, Winkfield exclaims: "What wonders are here!"[78] In answer to her thunderously amplified exclamation, a storm rises which is so violent that it annihilates light, and primitive chaos reigns over the island.[79] Fearing the end is coming, Winkfield composes her mind, stating: "Thunder . . . raises [my mind] above the things of sense, and fills my mind with noble and exalted ideas of God; whose presence I think it, as it were, bespeaks. I bow and reverence: for though sensible that both it and lightening are the effects of natural causes, yet I consider them as under the direction of God; and doubt not that they are sometimes directed to answer some particular ends of providence."[80] Winkfield hides from the storm in the idol's underground chamber. However, the violence of the storm causes the chamber to collapse, and she is trapped. Winkfield claws her way to the surface. When she rises from this living entombment, she finds a world torn asunder; buildings are damaged, trees are uprooted, foam and dead fish cover the shore, and rocks are broken into frightening forms.[81] Shaken by this transformed world, she states: "I must confess I trembled for the statue of the sun, though I knew not why; for what was it to me whether it stood or fell? As soon as I came near enough, I saw it was safe; and was far from being displeased that it was so."[82] Awed by this

75. *The Female American*, 60.

76. See Mary Helen McMurran's "Realism and the Unreal in 'The Female American,'" in "The Drift of Fiction: Reconsidering the Eighteenth Century Novel," special issue, *The Eighteenth Century* 52, no. 3/4 (Fall/Winter 2011): 323–42, which highlights problematic conceptions of Indigenous peoples, their beliefs, and their cultures in *The Female American*.

77. *The Female American*, 88.

78. *The Female American*, 88.

79. *The Female American*, 90.

80. *The Female American*, 88–89.

81. *The Female American*, 89.

82. *The Female American*, 90.

exhibition of power, Winkfield acknowledges God's hand in her and the idol's survival. Winkfield sees this protection as God's approval of her mission.

Winkfield often contextualizes moments of her island life as God using nature to guide her. This scene, to her thinking, confirms the appropriateness of her plan and her use of the idol. Though unnoted by her, this scene authenticates the power of her hybridized gender role since it is her voice within the male idol that brings down this destructive storm. To her thinking, these occurrences sanctify her apostolic calling, and she moves from her liminal existence into her new role as religious leader. Once she is assured of the Indigenous peoples' docility and conversion, she meets them in her human form. Carrying her holy texts as well as gold rings and jewels to give as gifts to the Indigenous, though historically these ornaments already belong to them, and wearing her gender-hybrid vestments over virginal white robes, Winkfield leaves the island to live among the Indigenous.

The Conclusion

Removed from her island's catalytic liminality, Winkfield's life becomes rote. Though her role is self-realized, she will not perform baptisms, marriages, or administer the sacraments as she is not ordained.[83] Winkfield will not completely abandon church dogma to perform these services. Winkfield makes periodic trips to the island to replenish her gold and jewels from the island ruins. During one such trip, she discovers her cousin John and a group of sailors. Winkfield meets them in her priestly finery, and the superstitious Englishmen assume she is a she-devil, an empowered woman.[84] The sailors flee, but John recognizes Winkfield as his missing cousin, and lost for a time in wild transports, he rapturously embraces and kisses her.[85] John immediately inserts himself into her life and asserts dominance over her narrative. John is eager to "end [his] days in carrying on the great work [she has] so wonderfully begun among [the Indigenous]."[86] Despite her efforts, John believes this work has only *begun* and will, of course, be turned over to him.[87] John sees the truth in the situation: Winkfield is a wealthy heiress, but she is even more valuable as a tool of imperialistic patriarchy. In hegemonic male fashion, John smiles and proclaims: "Let us then be united in the glorious work you have begun, teach me the Indian language and I will join the glorious task you have commenced. . . . One motive for my seeking you was, that, if we should meet, we might be united. Consider one thing more, that if you refuse me, we cannot enjoy those hours of privacy together, I at least shall wish for, without offence to those around us; at least I know your delicacy will be hurt by them."[88] Though her reputation was not a consideration before his arrival, within patriarchy and to John, her virtue is a treasured commodity. John is not above manipulation, and he will achieve his goal by any means. She agrees to a union and rationalizes her decision by noting John, as an ordained minister, can perform the religious services she will not. She admits her decision is due to "his constant importunity, [and she] was at last obliged to give [her] hand, about two months after his arrival."[89] After only two months, John's needling wears her down and ends her agency. With Winkfield's assistance, John is able to overcome the Anglican reticence for missionary work noted earlier. By binding Winkfield to him, John, braced with patriarchal power, takes over her successful works and reclaims the roles that she has taken for herself.

83. *The Female American*, 127.
84. *The Female American*, 134.
85. *The Female American*, 135.
86. *The Female American*, 143.
87. *The Female American*, 146.
88. *The Female American*, 146.
89. *The Female American*, 148.

In the end, after John's arrival, her tale becomes *his* tale: the tale of patriarchy. Fair notes that the masculine Robinsonade "excludes or marginalizes women and the domestic within hegemonic delineations."[90] Winkfield and John each act in traditional, gender appropriate ways. He instructs the boys, and she tutors the girls. John is lord and leader, and she gives John her wifely obedience. Her role as translator will end when, through her tutelage, John becomes proficient in the local language. When this happens, her edited religious texts, teachings, and future will be completely under John's control. Patriarchy is established and guaranteed when John, Winkfield, and the sea captain raze all remnants of the past civilization from the island.

Within the island's liminal spaces, Winkfield determines her path forward. However her experiments with gender do not survive patriarchy's disciplinary gaze. Twice in *The Female American,* Winkfield's journey is completely dictated by men: when she is abandoned on the island and when the island's structures, including the idol, are destroyed. Winkfield alleges that the island's destruction is conducted to prohibit the Indigenous people from backsliding into their pagan ways. However, this cleansing ensures that Winkfield cannot regain power or autonomy. The island now lacks its liminal spaces, and, without recourse to her oracular persona, she is confined to socially dictated gender roles. Though she was able to actively explore her personal power and to enact a self-actualized gender for a while, in the end, Winkfield returns to the path set by patriarchy and her husband, John.

90. Fair, "Adventure Stories," 143.