Patrick Santarsia

Colonize me Happy: Redefining the English conception of felicity through land dispossession in *The Female American* by Unca Eliza Winkfield

Historian Joanna Innes argues that the eighteenth-century marked the formation of a polite lexicon: words which could hold complex meanings but could still be used colloquially and were neither too formal nor too slangy (Innes, "Happiness Contested" 92). 'Happiness,' furthers Innes, is a part of the eighteenth-century European polite lexicon because the word could be used in a variety of contexts with variable meaning: "connoting a mundane conception of the good life, the goal of spiritual striving, or (by definition) what any good government must seek for the nation and its people" (Innes, "Happiness Contested" 88). Despite happiness being a major focus for Europeans in the period, historian Rebecca Earle notes that colonies were excluded from any attempt to measure a nation's happiness, since colonies were seen merely as points of resource-extraction for the metropolis (Earle 185). Differing from this contemporarily agreed upon view of happiness is *The Female American* by Unca Eliza Winkfield which reserves happiness for descriptions of European ideals and identity within Indigenous land. Contrary to Innes and Earle, *The Female American* expands and intertwines happiness from individual, religious, and governmental levels, suggesting that the novel's all-encompassing definition of felicity can only be achieved through the dispossession of Indigenous land. Despite framing happiness as attainable only outside of England, *The Female American* stresses only British people and culture are capable of achieving felicity. By denying that emotion to Indigenous people, *The Female American* ultimately attempts to homogenize the varied interests of different

institutions and social values into happiness, wherein Indigenous land is a container into which European values and structures should be inserted for the primary benefit of English identity.

The first use of the term 'happiness' in *The Female American* is when it is used as a synonym for Unica Eliza's grandfather's plantation: "But the happy prospect, with which the new-comers flattered themselves, was unhappily obscured by the native Indians, who came unexpectedly upon them, and massacred three hundred of them" (Winkfield, "Broadview" 46). The term 'prospect' is most associated with one's personal future, opportunity, and commerce, thereby associating the plantation—colonized land turned to industry—with happiness. In positioning a physical space as a source of pleasure, *The Female American* deviates from John Locke's "pursuit of happiness" which centres pleasure as an internal force which drives individuals (McMahon 14); happiness is no longer rooted within the self, but from an external point which individuals must contribute to—even as the colonists are "massacred," their emotional state is undefined, and the event is described very quickly and plainly, reserving emotion for the physical space. Furthermore, when the Natives revolt against the plantation that happiness is only obscured, framing the plantation as a fixed source of joy and Indigenous people as an antithesis to pleasure, reinforced by the word 'unhappiness' starting the subject change in the sentence to focus on Indigenous people. In turn, Indigenous resistance to colonial ambitions immediately introduces indigeneity as a threat to happiness, and all of the attached values as a whole—that this land must be stolen or the land will be unhappy. Crucially, happiness being tied to the plantation exemplifies what feminist theorist Sara Ahmed defines as conditional happiness: where an individual's happiness is tied to that of another, and theirs is rooted in an outside object (Ahmed 578-579). Happiness in the narrative is dependent on the colonist's happiness, and theirs is dependent on the economic success of the plantation. Ultimately, the plantation

being the initial source of happiness suggests that profitable colonialism is the ideal colonialism, not because it serves the nation or reaches an individual's internal pleasure, but because colonialism in and of itself is the source of joy.

Ahmed continues that a fundamental issue with conditional happiness is that the outside object is an uneasy source of joy because that object isn't inherently mutually shared (Ahmed 579). To reconcile with that unease, happiness expands out from but remains dependent upon colonialism: "The unhappy captives flood amidst this assembly a considerable time, whilst a venerable old man seemed to address them in a pathetic manner, for tears accompanied his words. He was, as my father afterwards learned, their king," (Winkfield, "Broadview" 48). Despite being captured, what first defines the colonists in this moment is their unhappiness, further stressing the importance of the emotion and that happiness itself is an integral part of their identity, suggesting that being European is about being happy. Even the tears—which would indicate sadness—aren't of clear origins because they're only described as accompanying the king's word and not coming from a specific individual. In addition to perpetuating the notion of Natives as obscurers of happiness, the tears being connected to the King emphasises the influences power structures have over an individual's joy—British happiness was understood to be a product of local "social structures and economic relationships" (Innes, "Inferior Politics" 174). The terms 'assembly' and 'address' mirror the language of British governance, framing that structure and, by extension, the need to produce happiness as universal. In turn, happiness has become the framework of all social organizations—even if a community doesn't recognize that need—suggesting that colonialism isn't just for the benefit of the metropolis, but for all those within and excluded from an empire.

Earle argues that a motivator for controlling the diets of colonized peoples was because the British believed that native populations were under-consuming starchy food,

and by increasing the starch in their diets they would be more appreciative and effective slaves (Earle 175). *The Female American* moves the concern that Indigenous people were misappropriating their physical resources to cultural ones through happiness, and thereby frames the British understanding of felicity as a universal pursuit: "If you will not love me, you shall die; my sister shall never enjoy an happiness that I aspire to; nor shall my vengeance be long delayed; this instant shall put a period to your life" (Winkfield, "Broadview" 52). The phrase 'an happiness' is only grammatically correct if the letter H is not pronounced, and while this is appropriate in some dialects, for eighteenth-century Britain failing to pronounce the letter H was seen as the origin of vulgar speech (Beal 103). While that understanding may not apply to every reader, the princesses' threat is calling attention to grammatical function: with 'put a period' being a reference to how sentences are formed. At the same time, her threat is rooted in wanting: she aspires to be happy and to be happy she has to marry Mr. Winkfield—ensuring that she and her people are subservient to an Englishman, adhering to heteronormativity while defying patriarchy as the initiator. From a British colonial perspective, the princess has the socially correct wants but lacks the understanding to properly fulfil her desire, suggesting that she and, by extension, Indigenous people want to be colonized but cannot articulate that desire and thereby need correcting.

In contrast to the Princess' grammar is Unca Eliza, who consistently pronounces the letter H: "... A happy couple" (Winkfield, "Broadview" 56), "... A heap of stones" (Winkfield, "Broadview" 66) and "... A heavy stone" (Winkfield, "Broadview" 67).[1] While both characters are indigenous, Unca Eliza having a British education ensures that she understands the importance of pronouncing the letter H and the corresponding English cultural values. Their differences aren't just underlined in their grammar but in the context

[1] The differences in their grammar is consistent between the Broadview and an early edition of *The Female American*: "an happiness" (Winkfield, "Noble" 24) and "a happy couple" (Winkfield, "Noble" 31).

surrounding their use of ‘happiness’: the phrase “an happiness” is the first use of the term in Chapter Two to describe a marriage being arranged by a woman, whereas “a happy couple” concludes the chapter by describing a union organized by men. The chapter begins with incorrect grammar in a social degression, and concludes with the opposite. In turn, the grammar of happiness functions like a narrative: beginning in discordance and ending in resolution; implying that happiness and colonization are an inevitable ending. The inevitability is mirrored in Unca Eliza herself: she is the next generation of her family and before the chapter begins the reader knows Unca Eliza will be born, suggesting that Indigenous people will come to understand and adopt the British conception of happiness. Another key distinction between their use of happiness is that the Princess is referring to her own happiness, whereas Unca Eliza is referring to a heterosexual marriage. By positioning Unca Eliza’s use of happiness as the correct version, the implication is that while Indigenous people may want, support, and understand happiness, that emotion can only be experienced by British men.

While *The Female American* initially presents colonialism as the source of and only means for attaining happiness, that happiness is centred in North America—an ongoing colonized territory outside of England. Once Unca Eliza’s family leaves North America for Britain, the language of happiness shifts from redefining the term to focusing on how colonialism fulfils other European ideals:

> In this manner we lived near a year, happy I should say all of us, but my father, who, as he had no business to do, grew more melancholy: he therefore resolved to revisit the country … My father, before his departure, made great preparations for the improvement of his plantation, rather for his amusement, than from a desire of gain. (Winkfield, “Broadview” 59)

Where the colonists in North America were defined by happiness, the phrase "happy I should say all of us" emphasizes the expectation of happiness over the emotion being an intrinsic part of their identity; the family *should* all be happy in England. Instead, the father is described directly as melancholic—an important contrast to the "unhappy" colonists before their execution—because of the lack of business opportunities. The term melancholy follows the phrase "no business to do" which suggests that the lack of opportunity upsets the father more than his dead wife, implying a disposability of Indigenous bodies and affirming that happiness is only for the British. Importantly, her father's emotional state is tied to an eighteenth-century question as to whether or not doing good led to one feeling happy (McMahon 15); he is unable to do good—colonialism and business—and so he's depressed. His unease frames Britain as a place of stagnation: the nation is complete, there's no more good to do, and so the nation is unable to produce happiness. Additionally, her father's motivations for returning are tied to Christianity. Amusement is a kind of happiness, and the denial that he sought profits separates him from any notion of greed. Mr. Winkfield's lack of happiness presents colonialism as the intersection of British ideals which the nation itself cannot satisfy: colonialism pleases the individual, it furthers Christianity, which benefits the nation, and is fueled by the underlying rise of capitalism.

The Female American's framing of Britain may seem as if it undermines the country, but it's important to consider that its stagnation is centred in the perception of England as an ideal. Just as land dispossession is positioned as the source of happiness, *The Female American* frames white masculinity and, by extension, England as the foundation of colonialism by attributing Unca Eliza's knowledge and actions to a former European settler:

> This happiness I owed to the misfortunes of another; for had not the hermit made these discoveries, and left the means of my coming at the knowledge of them, how miserable must have been the state of a lonely woman! Doubtless

> I should soon have perished with hunger! How graciously does the goodness of providence often raise help to the distressed from the misfortunes of others! (Winkfield, "Broadview" 72-73)

Despite Unca Eliza's discovery of the hermit's journal beginning with happiness, the remainder of the paragraph subverts her own emotion—it's not her happiness, it's "this" happiness—and places her in a kind of debt towards the hermit—with "owed" and "must have been"—which is rooted in her race and gender. Unca Eliza is half Indigenous and was raised by her Indigenous mother, but her understanding of the environment is entirely dependent upon the writing of a white British man. Her inability to survive is rooted in starvation, echoing the concern that Indigenous people were unable to maintain their resources and needed to be better nourished by colonists (Earle 175). Additionally, the phrase "lonely woman" stresses that she would be failing to fulfil her gender role—women are expected to remain at home and socialize—and so Unca Eliza becomes miserable, positioned as out of place. In contrast, the hermit—despite his own misfortune—is who grants her happiness and is equated to the workings of God with "the goodness of providence." Despite the hermit's misfortunes being described as acts of generosity, happiness functions as a limited resource, where one party must willingly suffer for the happiness of another. Ultimately, just as colonialism is presented as a fixed source of joy, white English men are presented as the only arbiters of colonialism, and that any imitation is indebted to and defined by them.

While Unca Eliza is disconnected from white masculinity, both as an identity and in terms of proximity, the justifications and incentives to colonize on behalf of England continue to emerge through happiness in different structures:

> I was fearful to have recourse to the river, lest I should fall into it again, when observing a shegoat asleep, very near me, I made shift to creep softly to

> her, and sucked her dugs, which she happily permitted. This was at first a comfortable relief; but I soon after grew very sick, and vomited violently. But I found that my fever was quite gone off, and that I was no longer thirsty. (Winkfield, "Broadview" 75)

Unca Eliza's drinking of the goat's milk is exemplary of what Mathilde Cohen defines as animal colonialism: the imposition of "foreign legal norms and practices of human-animal relations upon communities and their environments" (Cohen 268); Unca Eliza is foreign to the island and is the first to drink animal milk. A mammal's milk is a byproduct of reproduction meant to nourish their young, positioning Unca Eliza's action as a theft—emphasized by the word "creep" which is often associated with crime. Despite alluding to wrongdoing, the word "happily" suggests that Unca Eliza's actions were justified because the goat consented. However, the word follows her actions and the goat is never described as waking up. In turn, the goat mirrors how Indigenous people have been defined throughout the novel: a resource is stolen from them, a dismissable happiness is assigned to them—the subject of the sentence is Unca Eliza—and that happiness only serves to justify colonial ambitions, equating Indigenous people to animals and assigning a voicelessness to human beings. Additionally, Unca Eliza's illness and recovery from drinking the goats milk mirrors inoculation[2]: her body consumes a foreign product, she gets sick, and then becomes stronger. As a European, consuming a part of the island allows her to engage with the land while retaining her English culture. As an Indigenous person, by consuming a symbol of colonialism, Englishness has become a part of her, and thereby creating a better colonist. Despite Unca Eliza being an active participant in colonialism, she only describes herself as

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[2] My reading here is inspired by Srinivas Aravamudan's *Tropicopolitans: Colonialism and Agency, 1688–1804*, where he argues that inoculation symbolically allows Lady Mary Montagu to retrench her English cultural identity while in the Ottoman Empire (Aravamudan 184).

vaguely getting better; suggesting that happiness is only projected onto Indigenous people to further reaffirm British Identity and relieve colonial anxieties.

Once Unca Eliza begins communicating with and attempting to indoctrinate the indigenous people of the island, happiness is largely defined through a Christian perspective. While she is engaging in a form of imperialism, happiness and colonialism aren't reunited definitionally until Unca Eliza herself describes her actions: “Whilst I took some refreshment myself, I reflected very deliberately upon this important business I had undertaken, and prayed to God that I might be the means of instructing them in the truth, and bring them, happily, to the knowledge of Christianity” (Winkfield, “Broadview” 104). Unca Eliza first defines her introduction of the island’s natives through the language of commerce. The phrase “important business" refers to personal endeavours by equating them to a commodity further associating religion and colonialism with capitalism. The terms “deliberation,” “truth,” and “knowledge” comprise the language of empiricism, further stressing the English correction of Indigenous populations and presenting colonialism as a logical pursuit. Despite Unca Eliza adhering to the principles of happiness and the Indigenous population of the island willingly accepting Christianity, whose happiness this passage describes is left ambiguous. The passage is composed of ‘I’ statements and is about Unca Eliza’s actions, but the word ‘happily’ follows the word ‘them.’ Regardless of whose happiness it is, that joy is a part of a non-restrictive clause which is buried within the importance of missionary work, suggesting that whoever’s happiness is ultimately dismissable in a passage where Indigenous people are accepting and adopting British practices and values. While this may seem contradictory to how the novel frames happiness, the correction of Indigenous practices was about creating more appreciative and effective slaves (Earle 175), and here Indigenous people are grateful for Christainty but that gratitude does not bring any value back to Britain. The purpose of correction is thereby incomplete,

mirroring how ‘happily’ as an adverb is left unattributed—that it too needs to be completed by being properly attributed to someone. In turn, happiness is very rigid: either Britain gains total economic and cultural dominance or the empire gains nothing.

The Female American reshapes the British understanding of happiness and what the novel wants to do with that understanding culminates in Captain Shore’s letter to Unca Eliza’s husband: “If I am so happy as to live to come again, I will set up an high pole, in some conspicuous part of the island with a streamer; so that if you come from time to time to look for me, you will be sure to know when I am arrived…” (Winkfield, “Broadview” 146). The phrase “so happy as to live to come again” works to analogize the Captain to Christ: with immense happiness being associated with spiritual fulfilment in the period and living to then come again is the resurrection of Christ—Christ lived as a mortal to then return for humanity’s salvation. From this Christian image, Captain Shore moves onto how he would transform the island by inserting a pole—a phallic symbol—with a banner into an obvious spot; mirroring flag planting and thereby introducing patriarchy and nationalism onto the island. Captain Shore’s wants create a very conventional image of happiness grounded in colonialism: happiness centres the individual—with the captain’s repeated I statements—, brings forth spiritual fulfillment, and empowers the nation, all because a colonizable space can satisfy each of those ambitions. At the same time, the phrase ‘an high’ is another instance of the letter H not being produced—signalling that something is wrong and thereby needs correction. With the focus of the passage being on the captain’s actions and sight, the wrongness implies that the captain isn’t doing enough, and that his efforts need to be more than just seen—mirroring how the novel is writing back against the unconsidered happiness of the colonies. Captain Shore and, by extension, other colonists need to do more than what’s conventional in Indigenous land, just as *The Female American* expands and redefines happiness.

Ahmed concludes her essay "Killing Joy: Feminism and the History of Happiness" by arguing that marginalised positionalities need to look towards unhappiness as a point of resistance: "In sharing our alienation from happiness, we might also claim the free-dom to be unhappy … We might claim the freedom to be unhappy, perhaps even retrospectively, as the freedom to deviate from the paths of happiness … We might claim the freedom to be unhappy in the sense of the freedom to cause unhappiness by acts of deviation (Ahmed 592). For Ahmed, happiness embodies a complicity in the varied interests of the dominant hegemonies, and in turn argues for the importance of turning away from the rhetoric and history of joy. Both Ahmed and *The Female American* use happiness' simplicity and ability to maintain complex meaning as a tool to homogenize the interests of different social institutions, with *The Female American* supporting this union and Ahmed opposing it. While Ahmed argues for a moving away from the term and its burdens, it's important to consider that *The Female American* underlines how happiness can be redefined to create an end-goal for various communities and their interests. That potential is why marginalised positionalities have been denied happiness: if they have access to a framework for organization, then they can work to defy what happiness is meant to prosecute. Instead of being able to see and identify unhappiness, the more crucial activity for the marginalised is to use the ambiguity of happiness to create and work towards their own.

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